# Part Four: The Calamity and the Aftermath (37:1 – 45:5 [LXX 44:1 – 51:35])

Part Four comprises a semi-continuous series of stories relating to a crucial period of four or five years between 589/588 and 585, from just before the fall of Jerusalem through the disaster itself to the aftermath in Judah and in Egypt – though there are no dates attached to the last events narrated and maybe the period was longer. While it alludes to the fate of the Judahites who went to Babylon or stayed in Judah or took refuge in places such as Ammon, it gives no direct account of this fate. It focuses on how Jeremiah himself first goes to stay in Mizpah and then goes with a group of Judahites to Egypt, where he delivers a final message. Whereas the Jeremiah scroll has previously put its stories in a dramatic order, with backwards and forwards chronological movement, it now makes a transition to something more like continuous narrative order as it narrates the last stages of its interwoven story of Judah’s fate and Jeremiah’s ministry. A series of themes run through the narrative:

* People ask Jeremiah for a message from Yahweh, but ignore it when they get it
* They impose constraints on Jeremiah, but he survives (and so will his allies)
* He continues to deliver Yahweh’s message, and it comes true
* Babylon is Yahweh’s agent in bringing calamity but is merciful when people cooperate with it
* The disobedience of the Judahite community in Egypt means there is no hope for it
* Events reflect the interweaving of “choice and destiny”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The narrative’s ending with Jeremiah in Egypt reflects the scroll’s general focus on Yahweh’s speaking to the Judahites through Jeremiah; Egypt is where he continues that ministry after the fall of Jerusalem and the Mizpah debacle. We might guess that a storyteller developed the narrative in Egypt as things began to settle down there. The Jeremiah scroll never tells us about Jeremiah’s later years and his death as it does not tell us about his birth and early years. Its focus lies on the message and the ministry not on the man, and from this angle Jer 44 makes an appropriate end to his story. The narrative then found its way into the Jeremiah scroll there or wherever else the scroll came into existence, and this process would be part of the background to there coming to be the two versions of the scroll lying behind LXX and MT.[[2]](#footnote-2) The narrative has practical implications for Judahites in Judah and Babylon as well as in Egypt, such as:

* Accept your position as a people that deserved the calamity that came upon you
* If you are the messenger, stay firm and trust Yahweh
* Be responsive to Yahweh’s message when it comes
* Pay attention to the message that Jeremiah brought
* Submit to the imperial authority rather than rebelling against it

Were there more specific reasons for composing a narrative dismissive of the Judahite community in Egypt? A few decades later there was tension between different groups within Judah,[[3]](#footnote-3) but the account of these tensions does not refer to Judahites from Egypt. And from papyri discovered at Elephantine in Upper Egypt we know of Judahites whose theology would have horrified Jeremiah, but these papyri come from a century or two later from another place, and anyway their authors seem to have got on okay with the establishment in Judah.[[4]](#footnote-4) So it requires considerable connecting of dots to suppose that (e.g.) Judahites who had been in Babylon composed this narrative to discredit Judahites in Egypt. While the narrative portrays Jeremiah taking a confrontational stance to Judahites in Egypt, he earlier took a confrontational stance to the community in Judah itself. Maybe Judahites in Egypt could write self-critically, as Judahites in Judah and in Babylon could. The story of the community’s origins was then generated within that community, and it urged that if it carried on the way it was, death was its destiny. In fact, the Judahite community came to thrive over the years. The Septuagint is usually assumed to have had its origin in the flourishing Jewish community in Alexandria. Egyptian Jews were among the Jews at Pentecost in Acts 2, and an Egyptian was a key leader among Jews who came to believe in Jesus, Apollos (Acts 18:24; 1 Cor 3:6).[[5]](#footnote-5) It would be nice to imagine that the community had heeded Yahweh’s challenge, though Josephus implies that its later thriving reflects forced migration after the dissolution of Alexander’s empire.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Part Four outlines:

37:1-21 Zedekiah consulting Jeremiah; Jeremiah locked up

38:1-28a Jeremiah locked up; Zedekiah consulting Jeremiah

38:28b – 39:14 The city falls, and the fates that follow

39:15-18 A promise of safety for Ebed-melech

40:1-12 A new start at Mizpah, The Watchtower

40:13 – 41:18 Things begin to fall apart

42:1 – 43:13 Yahweh’s direction given and rejected

44:1-30 A final confrontation, exhortation, and warning

45:1-5 A promise of safety for Baruch

# Part 4(a): Last Chances, Calamity, and a Footnote for Ebed-melech (37:1 – 39:18 [LXX 44:1 – 46:18])

Jer 37 – 45 divides into two, with the first three chapters covering the story up to the fall of Jerusalem itself. While the narrative as a whole is mostly chronological, some chronological overlap between the end of Jer 39 and the beginning of Jer 40 marks a key transition moment. Jer 39 ends with Jeremiah entrusted to Gemariah and with a message for Ebed-melech relating to his action narrated in Jer 38; Jer 40 backtracks in order to give a longer account of how Jeremiah comes to be with Gemariah, which leads into what then follows. Thus Jer 37 – 39 and 40 – 45 form the two parts of the narrative as a whole.

# Zedekiah Consulting Jeremiah; Jeremiah Locked Up (37:1-21 [LXX 44:1-21])

The first of the stories in Jer 37 – 45 is actually a triple one, an account of three confrontations between the administration and the prophet.

vv. 1-2 An introduction making a link with Jer 36, summarizing the first of the themes outlined above, and setting up the question that this first story will begin to handle

vv. 3-10 Zedekiah sends aides to get Jeremiah to pray; Jeremiah gives them a discouraging message

vv. 11-16a Jeremiah tries to go to Anathoth; Irijah arrests him and puts him in a tough form of detention

vv. 16b-21 Zedekiah asks Jeremiah if there is a word from Yahweh; Jeremiah gives him a confrontational response but Zedekiah does ease his conditions

Vv. 1-2 are an introduction to 37:3 – 39:17; they will have been added when a curator brought together the stories in 37:3 – 39:17. Within 37:3-21, the stories in vv. 3-10 and 11-21 look independent of each other in origin, and within vv. 3-10 the parenthetical background information in vv. 4-5 looks like a bit of clarification added when the curator compiled the chapter. In this chapter “the times are… desperate”[[7]](#footnote-7) and “fear dominates each scene”;[[8]](#footnote-8) the stories reflects how it is possible to be “frozen by fear.”[[9]](#footnote-9) In this context they have in common a less definitive or more sympathetic stance in relation to the people involved in events.

* Zedekiah asks Jeremiah to pray for the city; it’s not explicit how one should evaluate this plea
* Yahweh responds to Jeremiah’s “inquiring” of him; it’s not explicit whether Jeremiah’s inquiring counts as “praying” despite being forbidden to pray[[10]](#footnote-10) and there is no report of Zedekiah’s reaction
* After the temporary relief of the city, Jeremiah seeks to venture out to Anathoth; it’s not clear exactly what he is going to do there and whether he is coming back
* Irijah suspects he is defecting, and one can hardly blame him for this inference
* The officials angrily put Jeremiah into detention, which is also an understandable reaction
* Zedekiah again asks Jeremiah if there is a word from Yahweh; is it significant that there is no account of Jeremiah consulting Yahweh or of the word that follows being a word from Yahweh?
* Again there is no account of Zedekiah’s reaction
* Jeremiah’s subsequent complaint is understandably testy
* Zedekiah’s response is reasonably gracious and generous

The chapter thus reflects the tension that sometimes obtains between the clarity with which one can look back on events with hindsight (vv. 1-2) and their ambiguity as people live through them (vv. 3-17). Something of this ambiguity will continue through Jer 37 – 45 and will thus encourage reflection by the audience of this sequence of stories in the situation after 587 – perhaps initially in Mizpah, then in Egypt.

1Zedekiah ben Josiah came to reign as king instead of Coniah bena Jehoiakim; Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon made him king in the country of Judah. 2But he, his servants, and the people of the countryb did not listen to the words of Yahweh that he spoke by means of Jeremiah the prophet.

3King Zedekiah sent Jehucal ben Shelemiah and Zephaniah ben Maaseiah, the priest, to Jeremiah the prophet, saying “Please plead on our behalf with Yahweh our God” 4(when Jeremiah was coming in and going out among the peoplec and they had not put him in a house of confinement, 5and when Pharaoh’s force had gone out from Egypt, the Chaldeans who were blockading Jerusalemd had heard the news of them, and had withdrawn from Jerusalem).e 6Yahweh’s word came to Jeremiah the prophet. 7Yahweh the God of Israel has said this: This is what you are to sayf to the king of Judah who is sending you to me to inquire of me. There, Pharaoh’s force that is going out to you as a support will return to its country, Egypt,g 8and the Chaldeans will return and do battle against this city, and they will capture it and consume it with fire.h 9Yahweh has said this. Don’t deceive yourselves and say “The Chaldeans will definitely goi from against us,” because they will not go. 10Even ifj you had struck down the entire force of the Chaldeans who are doing battle with you, and people who have been skewered remain among them, each one in his tent, they will set to and consume this city with fire.

11Whenk the Chaldean force had withdrawn from against Jerusalem in the face of Pharaoh’s force,l 12Jeremiah went out from Jerusalem to go to the region of Benjamin to undertake a sharingm from there among the people. 13He was at the Benjamin Gateway, and the man in chargen was there; his name was Irijah ben Shelemiah, son of Hananiah. He seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying “You’re falling away to the Chaldeans.” 14Jeremiah said, “Lies!o I’m not falling away to the Chaldeans.” But he didn’t listen to him. Irijah seized Jeremiah and made him come to the officials. 15The officials were incensed at Jeremiah: they struck him down and put himp in a confinement house,q the house of Jonathan the secretary, because they made it intor a detention house 16when Jeremiah came to the cistern house, to the cellars.s

Jeremiaht lived there for a long time.u 17Then King Zedekiah sent and got him. The king asked him in his house, in secret, “Is there a word from Yahweh?” Jeremiah said, “There is,” and said, “Into the hand of the king of Babylon you will be given over.”v

18Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, What have I done wrong to you, to your servants, and to this people, that you have putw me into a house of confinement? 19Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, “The king of Babylon will not come against you and against this country?” 20So now listen, please, my lord king. Please may my prayer for grace fall before you. Don’t send me back to the house of Jonathan the secretary, so I don’t die there. 21So King Zedekiah gave an order, and they appointed Jeremiah to the court of the guard, and to give himx a round of bread daily from the bakers’ street until all the bread from the city came to an end.

So Jeremiah lived in the courtyard of the guard.y

LXX lacks *Coniah ben*; a straight transition from Jehoiakim to Zedekiah suggests that 36:30 is literally fulfilled(Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 670). On the form of the name Coniah, see the note on 22:24.

On *the people of the country*, see the note on 1:18.

For MT *hā‘ām* LXX implies *hā‘îr* “the city.”

LXX lacks *who were blockading Jerusalem*.

MT has a unit marker here.

The verb is plural, so it is addressed to the aides.

The double expression is odd, and may reflect a conflate text (Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:265).

MT has a marker here.

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the point.

On the use of *kî ’im*, see *TTH* 143.

The verse begins *wәhāyâ* “and it happened,” whereas one would have expected *wayyәhî*; see the note on 3:9.

MT has a section marker here.

The hiphil of *ḥālaq* I (*ḥālaq* II in *HALOT*)comes only here. LXX has “buy,” which would imply acquiring a share (*HUB* sees the influence of 32:8, 44), but one would then expect the qal; Aq, Sym, Th convey the same implication. But Vg, Tg have “divide up,” a more plausible understanding of the hiphil. An audience might hear resonances of the other *ḥālaq*,which would suggest that Jeremiah was slipping off (cf. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage) – as Irijah thought.

Literally “the master of charge/appointment.” *Pәqidut* is a hapax, with the same potential range of meanings as *pәquddâ* (cf. BDB); thus Tg has ”the man appointed.” LXX “with whom he stayed” perhaps reflects *pāqad’*s meaning ”visit” (*HUB*).

*Šeqer,* one of Jeremiah’s signature expressions, meaning “deception.”

The two simple *waw* verbs suggest a spelling out of their being incensed as opposed to a consequent action (Volz, *Jeremia*, 336-37). Sebirin (alternative readings that had been proposed but that the Masoretes do not accept) have the expected *waw*-consecutives.

LXX lacks *a confinement house*.

Vg has “he had been placed over.”

*Ḥānût* comes only here. In later Hebrew it means a tent or shop (*DTT*); Aq has workshop (cf. Vg; see further the notes in F. Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1867], on the passage). BDB suggests a vaulted room, which a cistern might be. Perhaps *cistern house* (cf. Exod 12:29) is an anticipatory clarifier of the unusual word (*cistern* will recur in Jer 38) and/or perhaps the cellars led to the cistern.

LXX lacks *Jeremiah*, which in MT is an indication that a new section begins here.

L has a unit marker here.

L has a section marker here.

The verb is plural (singular in LXX, Vg).

LXX takes the infinitive as continuing the finite verbs (cf. GK 113z); it would then seem to imply a once-for-all giving (JM 123x), though there are comparable unusual simple *waw-*verbs in vv. 11 and 15. Conversely, Vg translates the previous waw-consecutive *wayyapqidü* (*they appointed*)as if it were also subordinate to “he ordered” (see BDB, 845b; *HALOT*, 1011a).

MT’s The lack of any marker at the end of Jer 37 is noteworthy, especially as markers will multiply through Jer 38; see the comment on 38:1.

**1-2** From Jer 36 there is a chronological jump from 604 to 597, from Jehoiakim’s fourth year to his death, the first fall of Jerusalem, the first exile, and the banishment of Jehoiakim’s successor. But dramatically and substantially there is some continuity. These opening verses make a link with Jehoiakim as one of Zedekiah’s predecessors (and brother), and begin not only with the king but with his *servants* and *the people* who had listened to the 604 scroll (36:6-14, 24, 31). They go on to note that in Zedekiah’s day these Judahites did not listen to Jeremiah, which is almost where the previous chapter finished (36:31); it also thereby looks forward to the chapters that will follow, with their theme of people’s unwillingness to listen to the prophet. So the introduction gives us a clue to reading the narrative as a whole, which will provide an answer the question, “So how did they fail to listen?” Nebuchadrezzar has put yet another of Josiah’s sons on the throne in Judah in place of his nephew Coniah/Jehoiachin. He has perhaps assumed that Jehoiachin would continue the policies of Jehoiakim his father, who was inclined to assert Judahite independence from Babylon, and he would hope that his own appointee would be more subservient. The overloaded expression *reigned as king* underscores the replacement of that younger Davidide whom some people would doubtless still see as the real king, now the king in exile. But the expression also conveys an irony: “the last days of Judah are ostensibly ruled over by Zedekiah,” but “his rule… is of little importance, given the larger events of international politics” in which Babylon and Egypt battle for sovereignty in the region, and about which Jeremiah can speak because he knows what Yahweh is doing – though Zedekiah’s deeper problem is not his relative powerlessness but that unwillingness to *listen*.[[11]](#footnote-11) Nebuchadrezzar might also hope that the presence of a hostage Judahite community including the ex-king in Babylon (along with the articles taken from the temple) would be a disincentive to assertions of independence. For different reasons Jeremiah will urge the Jerusalem community in that direction. But the instinct to insist on one’s freedom is too strong. Zedekiah’s regime “floundered and self-destructed through its opposition to and rejection of the Jeremianic mission,” which was willing to be in service to “the success of Babylonian imperial designs.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

**3-5** The chapter fast forwards from 597 to 589/588. Nebuchadrezzar has been campaigning in the Levant and blockading Jerusalem, but then Pharaoh Hophra (cf. 44:30)[[13]](#footnote-13) has emerged from Egypt to contest Nebuchadrezzar’s attempt to assert sovereignty in the area that historically and logically belongs in Egypt’s sphere of influence. Judah can see the Egyptian action as a help to it (v. 7), without asking whether being under Egypt’s heel is better than being under Babylon’s. The scenario presupposed here may also be the background to Lachish Ostracon 3, which refers to a Judahite commander apparently on a mission to Egypt.[[14]](#footnote-14) So Nebuchadrezzar has had to give up his blockade in order to pay attention to Pharaoh. This development is good news for Judah, but how good? Zedekiah sends aides to consult Jeremiah over the question; Jeremiah is not under house arrest, as he will be shortly. Jehucal ben Shelemiah is another name that occurs on a seal from this period, as does Shelemiah’s name itself.[[15]](#footnote-15) Zephaniah took part in the mission related in 21:1-2 and in the exchanges between Jeremiah and the 597 exiles reported in 29:29-32, while Maaseiah appeared in 35:4. To be more precise, Zedekiah sends them to get Jeremiah to pray. Prayer that the relief may be more than temporary would be appropriate, and it is a prophet’s job to pray. But references to prophets praying can imply praying for guidance (32:16; 42:2-4, 20), and Yahweh understands Zedekiah to have sent the men “to inquire of me” (v. 7).[[16]](#footnote-16) The parallel with Hezekiah sending aides to get Isaiah to pray (2 Kgs 19) draws attention to the difference between the two stories[[17]](#footnote-17) – almost the only similarity is the verb *plead* (*hitpallēl*) which compares with the noun *plea* (*tәpillâ*) in the Hezekiah story, where the king and his aides are distraught at the attackers’ blasphemy, their appearance matches their agitation, and the prophet’s response is a promise rather than a threat. But we know from v. 2 that Zedekiah won’t take any notice of what Yahweh says.

**6-10**. Perhaps wisely, Zedekiah has not asked for message from Yahweh, but he gets one. The Egyptian venture will be short-lived. The Egyptians will return to Egypt and the Babylonians will return to… Jerusalem, to take the city. Zedekiah presupposes that the Egyptians are concerned to bolster Judahite autonomy in relation to Babylon; Ezek 17:15 relates how he asked for such help. But the Egyptians wouldn’t want Judah to have too much autonomy in relation to Egypt itself. While Jeremiah does assume that the Egyptians will be no match for the Babylonians, it would be misleading to describe him as pro-Babylonian and anti-Egyptian; the basis for his advice to Zedekiah is theological rather than political or military. He knows that Yahweh has designated Nebuchadrezzar as his servant. While his message is all about what the Egyptians and the Babylonians will do, not about what Yahweh will do (contrast the formulation in 21:3-7),[[18]](#footnote-18) the basis for his declarations is the fact that *Yahweh has said this*. The words about what will happen are all Yahweh’s words (vv. 6, 7, 9). Jeremiah undergirds the point by his closing comment: even if the Babylonian army was reduced to a battered remnant (the related verb *remain* occurs), they would still summon up the energy to fulfill Yahweh’s declarations. If Yahweh is going to bring about a miracle, it will be to ensure that the city falls, not that it gets saved.[[19]](#footnote-19) Again the prospects thus contrast with events at the time of Sennacherib and Hezekiah. The future will resemble the occasion when Yahweh delivered a large Judahite force into the hand of a small Aramean one (2 Chr 24:24) rather than when he delivered a large Midianite force into the hand of a small Israelite one (Judg 7).[[20]](#footnote-20) As often happens, the scroll does not record Jeremiah’s delivery of the message to the aides or to Zedekiah; it appears in the scroll for the benefit of the audience that knows it came true.

**11-12** The withdrawal of the Babylonian blockade means that people can go in and out of the city. The action Jeremiah is consequently trying to take could be related in some way to the events described in Jer 32. His supervising some sharing out in the family fits with the position Hanamel gives him there. Perhaps Jeremiah is the senior member of the family in which his father Hilkiah and Hanamel’s father Shallum were brothers,[[21]](#footnote-21) and some sorting out of the estate needs doing. *The people* will refer to the people of Anathoth in the midst of whom the business needs to be conducted, or to Jeremiah and Hanamel’s more immediate family.

**13** But the story is not very interested in clarifying what Jeremiah is going to do. His undertaking just happens to be the reason why he is off to Anathoth through the Benjamin Gateway (which will have been in the area of the Damascus Gate in the medieval city), the gateway that leads straight into Benjaminite territory. He gets apprehended there by the *man in charge*, the officer with senior authority in the area, on the reasonable suspicion that he intends (at least in due course) to follow his own advice that people should surrender to the Babylonians; they had been encamped north of the city and perhaps have a rump position there. The officer offended by Jeremiah’s suspected “defeatism”[[22]](#footnote-22) is apparently the brother of Jehucal in v. 3 (and 38:1) and perhaps uncle of Jehudi, if his grandfather is the same Shelemiah (36:14). It’s too much to think that Hananiah might be the prophet of Jer 28;[[23]](#footnote-23) Shelemiah and Hananiah are both common names.

**14-16a** It would be understandable if someone like Irijah thought of Jeremiah as pro-Babylonian, and if that description were fitting, going over to the Babylonians could be quite appropriate. Actually Jeremiah’s stance is more subtle. But evidently Jeremiah did not convince Irijah or *the officials* in the palace who were less sympathetic to him than the officials in Jehoiakim’s day (see Jer 26; 36) and were the victims of his tongue in the present context (32:32; 34:19, 21; 38:4, 25). Apparently the authorities have commandeered (part of?) the house belonging to a secretary (perhaps a secretary of state); perhaps Jonathan and his family had been among the people taken off into exile in 597.[[24]](#footnote-24) The house had a convenient subterranean facility[[25]](#footnote-25) (“a kind of ultimate black hole”)[[26]](#footnote-26) that they could turn into a place of detention.

**16b-17** It looks as if Jeremiah would have been in his place of confinement for longer had Zedekiah not wanted to consult him; perhaps the Babylonians are on their way back, in fulfillment of Jeremiah’s earlier warning. The Jeremiah scroll portrays Zedekiah as a weak character compared with his father and his brothers, and 2 Kgs 24 – 25 is compatible with that picture. His chief characteristic is that he keeps asking Jeremiah the same question but not taking any notice of the answer; he also has difficulty making a decision and sticking to it, or standing up to his staff (Jer 21; 34; 38). So here he asks his standard question but keeps it a secret. Does his secrecy imply he is open to accepting whatever Jeremiah may say?[[27]](#footnote-27) Further, “in the question ‘Is there?’ something characteristic comes to expression”: you can’t assume there will be a word from God. God’s word is not at human disposal.[[28]](#footnote-28) But the narrative implicitly contrasts Zedekiah with Jeremiah, who does not give up straight talking when he escapes from the dungeon for what may be only a moment.

**18-21** Zedekiah’s irresolution works in Jeremiah’s favor. The *cellars* in Jonathan’s house (and perhaps especially the *cistern*) were evidently no more fun than the one in Malchiah’s house of which Jer 38 will speak; perhaps the officials really left Jeremiah there to starve.[[29]](#footnote-29)

# Jeremiah Locked Up; Zedekiah Consulting Jeremiah (38:1-28a [LXX 45:1-28a])

The twofold plot sequence of this unit corresponds to that of Jer 37:

vv. 1-13a Some officials put Jeremiah in a cistern in the prison courtyard

vv. 1-6 The officials take their action because of his message

vv. 7-13a Ebed-melech the Sudanese overseer gets him rescued

vv. 13b-27 Zedekiah secretly quizzes Jeremiah about what is going to happen now

vv. 13b-18 Jeremiah hesitates to speak because he is afraid of Zedekiah

vv. 19-23 Zedekiah expresses his fear of the Judahites

vv. 24-27 Zedekiah swears Jeremiah to secrecy

v. 28a A concluding link to what follows.

In a variety of ways, in the manner of parallelism, this second story does heighten the first and complement it.[[30]](#footnote-30)

* The officials exercise their own initiative and make their own speech
* Zedekiah is now more the central figure
* He is in more of a state of indecision and fear
* Jeremiah is likewise in a greater state of fear and hesitancy
* In place of Irijah as accuser and assailant, Ebed-melech emerges as Jeremiah’s ally and rescuer

Jer 37 – 38 thus exemplify how the Scriptures can include more than one version of a story that has overlapping motifs, such as the accounts of creation, Yahweh’s self-revelation to Moses, the emergence of Saul as king, the emergence of David as king, the deliverance of Judah from Sennacherib, Jesus’s miraculous feeding of several thousand people, and the bestowing of the Holy Spirit on his followers. In such stories it may be hard to know whether the stories relate to different events or are varying accounts of the same event. In the latter case, the dissimilarities will reflect how authors have been inspired to generate different vivid and instructive narratives on the basis of some basic facts that the stories have in common, of some complementary theological insights, and of some imagination. It may not matter too much; in this case, either way, “the art of story-telling” is a key feature of the two chapters,[[31]](#footnote-31) and the Jeremiah scroll evidently wants the audience to pay attention to both versions. The inclusion of both draws attention to the key themes that they have in common and to their individual features.

1Shephatiah ben Mattan, Gedaliah ben Pashhur, Jucal ben Shelemiah, and Pashhur ben Malchiaha heard the words that Jeremiah was speaking to the entire people:b 2Yahweh has said this. The person who stays in this city will die by sword, by hunger, and by epidemic,c but the person who goes out to the Chaldeans will live. His life will be his as loot.d He will live.e 3Yahweh has said this. This city will definitely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon’s force. He will capture it. 4The officials said to the king, He should please be put to death, this man,f because as a result he is weakening the hands of the people engaged in the battle, the people who remain in this city, and the hands of the entire people, by speaking to them in accordance with these words. Because this man is not inquiring after the well-being of this people – rather about something dire. 5King Zedekiah said, There, he is in your hand, because the king cannot overcome you in a thing.g 6So they got Jeremiahh and threw him into the cistern (of Malchiah, the king’s son),i which was in the prison courtyard. They put Jeremiah in with ropes.j There was no water in the cistern, but mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud.k

7Ebed-melech the Sudanese, a man who was an overseerl (he was in the king’s house), heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern; the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gateway. 8Ebed-melech went out from the king’s house and spoke to the king. 9My lord king,m these men have acted in a dire way in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, in that they have thrown him into the cistern. He’s deadn in his situationo because of hunger (because there was no more bread in the city). 10So the king ordered Ebed-melech the Sudanese: Get thirtyp people into your charge from here, and get Jeremiah the prophet up from the cistern before he dies. 11So Ebed-melech got the people into his chargeq and came to the king’s house to below the store. From there he got worn clothes and worn rags and put them into the cistern to Jeremiah, with ropes.r 12Ebed-melech the Sudanese said to Jeremiah, Put the worn clothes and rags under your armpits, please, under the ropes. Jeremiah did so, 13and they drew Jeremiah up with the ropes and got him up from the cistern.

So Jeremiah lived in the prison courtyard,s 14and King Zedekiah sent and got Jeremiah the prophet to him at the third entrance that was in Yahweh’s house. The king said to Jeremiah, I’m going to ask you something. Don’t hide anything from me. 15Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, When I tell you, you will actually put me to death,t won’t you, and when I counsel you, you will not listen to me. 16So King Zedekiah promised Jeremiah in secret:u Yahweh is alive,v who made this life for us: if I put you to death or if I give you over into the hand of these people who are seeking your life….w

17So Jeremiah said to Zedekiah:x Yahweh, the God of Armies, the God of Israel, has said this. If you do go outy to the officers of the king of Babylon, you yourself will live and this city – it will not be consumed with fire. You and your household will live. 18But if you do not go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, they will consume it with fire, and you will not escape from their hand.z

19King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, I am anxious about the Judahites who have fallen away to the Chaldeans, in case they give me over into their hand and they assault me.aa 20Jeremiah said, They will not give you over. Listen to Yahweh’s voice, please, regarding what I am going to say to you, so that things will be good for you, and you yourself may live. 21But if you are going to refuse to go out, this is the thing that Yahweh has enabled me to see: 22there, all the women who remain in the house of the king of Judah being made to go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, and there, the women saying:bb

They have seduced you and overcome you,

the men who were your allies.

Your feet were stuck in a swamp –

they turned away back.

23And they are making all your wives and your children go out to the Chaldeans, and you yourself will not escape from their hand.cc Because by the hand of the king of Babylon you will be taken, and this city you will consumedd with fire.ee

24Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, No one must know of these words, and you will not die. 25So when the officials hear that I have spoken with you and they come to you and say to you, Tell us, please, what you spoke to the kingff – do not conceal it from us, and we will not put you to death. So what did the king say to you? 26you will say to them, I was submitting my prayer for grace before the king so as not to make me return to the house of Jonathan to die there.gg 27And all the officials came to Jeremiah and asked him, and he told them, in accordance with all these words that the king ordered. So they left off from him, because the thing had not made itself heard.hh

28aSo Jeremiah lived in the courtyard of the guard, until the day when Jerusalem was captured.ii

LXX lacks the reference toPashhur ben Malchiah.

MT having had no marker before 38:1, L has a section marker here. LXX lacks *entire*.

LXX lacks the reference toepidemic.

See 21:9 and the comment.

MT has a section marker here.

*This man* has the sign of the object: see the note on 35:14.

For the construction, cf. Ps 13:4 [5]. Vg rather takes *dābār* as the verb’s object, suggesting “cannot attain a thing with you” (cf. *DCH*), but one would then expect the pointing *’ittәkem* rather than MT’s *’etkem* (perhaps also implied by LXX; cf. BDB). The word order also works against this understanding.

LXX lacks *so they got Jeremiah*.

On nouns with the article followed by a proper noun, see GK 127f.

LXX lacks *with ropes*.

MT has a section marker here.

See the note on 29:2, and T. Parker, “Ebed-melech as Exemplar,” in J. Goldingay (ed.), *Uprooting and Planting* (L. Allen Festschrift; London: Clark 2007), 253-59. LXX lacks the reference to anoverseer.

LXX lacks *my lord king* and then has Ebed-melech accusing the king – “you have acted….”

The *wayyiqtol* is anomalous (*IBHS* 33.3.1f); perhaps the implication is, “he’s as good as dead” (cf. Tg; and *TTH* 79).

Literally, “in his place.”

One medieval ms has “three,” which is more the kind of number that one would expect, but the text-critical substitution “ranks as one of the least supportable emendations in the entire book of Jeremiah [no small accolade] and betrays a painfully unimaginative reading of the text” (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 72).

LXX lacks *into his charge*.

LXX lacks *with ropes*.

MT has a section marker here.

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the point.

LXX lacks *in secret*.

See the note and comment on 4:2.

MT has a section marker here. LXX lacks *who are seeking your life*. On the if-clause, see the note on 15:11.

A has a section marker here.

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the point.

MT has a section marker here. LXX lacks *from their hand*.

L has a unit marker here. LXX, Vg, Tg have “mock,” but *‘ālal* denotes something more physically painful.

I translate the participles as present, as representing what Jeremiah saw in his vision (cf. LXX; and Duhm, *Jeremia*, 306).

LXX lacks *from their hand*.

For MT *tiśrōp*, LXX, Tg “will be consumed” implies the more predictable *tiśśārēp* (cf. v. 17), whose unimaginative nature as an emendation ranks with “three” for “thirty” in v. 10. Vg “he will burn” (cf. 21:10) implies *yiśrōp*.

MT has a marker here.

LXX has “what the king said to you.”

MT has a unit marker here.

L has a unit marker here.

L has a section marker here.

This unit is actually a third one involving Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and some of his officials during the siege of Jerusalem. They manifest overlapping motifs:

* Zedekiah sends officials to ask Jeremiah to approach Yahweh on the city’s behalf (21:1-2; 37:3-5)
* Jeremiah passes on Yahweh’s message that the Babylonians will capture the city and that people should surrender to them now if they want to live (21:3-10; 37:6-10; 38:2-4, 17-18)
* Believing Jeremiah is a traitor, some officials put him into life-threatening detention in a cistern (37:11-16; 38:4-6)
* Zedekiah agrees to rescue Jeremiah from the cistern (37:18-21a; 38:7-13)
* Zedekiah consults Jeremiah in secret (37:17; 38:14-27)
* Jeremiah ends up in the prison courtyard instead of the cistern (37:21; 38:28)

A comparison of the three stories also draws attention to their distinctive features. While 21:1-10 focuses on the message to Zedekiah and 37:1-21 focuses on developments in the context of the Egyptians’ intervention and the Babylonians’ consequent temporary withdrawal, 38:1-28 focuses on its four characters, on the dilemmas or challenges they face, and on the way they deal with them:

* The first character is actually a group, the four officials. They correctly perceive that Jeremiah is expecting disaster not well-being for Jerusalem and that his message has a negative affect on people who are trying to defend the city. Their problem would be solved if they accepted Jeremiah’s message, but as long as they reject it, their action makes sense. And how are they to be sure that he is a prophet who tells the truth rather than one whose word is deceptive?[[32]](#footnote-32)
* Second, there is Zedekiah. He is king, but his words and actions reflect how monarchy has its checks and balances, like democracy. He is dependent on the collaboration of other leaders and on consensus over how to deal with issues. It might be the more true if many people maintain an allegiance to your deposed predecessor.[[33]](#footnote-33) So he is torn between doing what the officials say and doing what he knows is right. As well as being in a tricky position in relation to the nation’s officials, he is in a vulnerable position in relation to ordinary members of his own people who find fault with his policy (his position as originally a Babylonian appointee could again be a complication). And he is in a more vulnerable position than anyone in relation to the attacking military forces in case of the failure of the city’s attempts to survive their assault. Further, he is subject to a frightening account from Jeremiah of what the future holds if he maintains his current policy, and of the responsibility he will have for the disaster Jeremiah says is coming (*you will consume this city with fire*). The chapters thus portray Zedekiah with more sympathy than critique.[[34]](#footnote-34) He is “a desperate king living in desperate times.”[[35]](#footnote-35)
* Third, there is Ebed-melech. He is the one new character in the story, the kind of unambiguous hero who appears from time to time to play a bit part in the scroll’s drama, like Ahikam or Baruch. He is a foreigner, like Rahab or Ruth or Uriah; the brief story about him draws attention to his ethnicity three times, twice more than is strictly necessary[[36]](#footnote-36) (compare the way the Ruth story keeps noting that she is a Moabite). He shines a negative light on the Israelite characters in the story by the unambiguous way he perceives a challenge and responds to it. While he might be a foreign diplomat based in the palace, the way he knows his way around it (v. 11) may rather suggest that he is simply a member of the king’s household staff. Either way, he shines a light on the way the Judahites with political power go about exercising it.
* Fourth, there is Jeremiah himself. On one hand, the officials’ account and later his dialog with Zedekiah indicate that he continues to fulfill his commission with resolution. But fulfilling his commission imperils his life. It makes him hesitant to continue to do so, especially when it is quite ineffective – why risk his life for nothing? He is then put on the spot by Zedekiah who wants him to be economical with the truth in what he says to the officials about their conversation, and he does as instructed. One might make three other observations about this last point. First, being economical with the truth means not saying everything; It doesn’t mean lying. Second, the Scriptures don’t disapprove of vulnerable people lying to people with power over them (e.g., Exod 1:15-21; James 2:25). But third, the story offers no moral evaluation of Jeremiah any more than of the other characters in the unit, either positive or negative. It is not concerned with a moral question. Its focus lies on the toughness of the situation that Jeremiah faces and of the way things work out.

What applies to Jeremiah in this connection applies to the other characters. The unit offers no negative evaluation of Zedekiah, the officials, or Jeremiah, nor any explicit positive evaluation of Ebed-melech (who will get his commendation in 39:15-18). Like 37:3-21, in its openness and obliqueness it thus stands in tension with the judgment in 37:1-2 and it functions to give further resources to the story’s audience in Mizpah or in Egypt as people reflect on what they have gone through and what they are going through.

**1-3** The story starts without introduction, which suggests that it carries on chronologically from Jer 37. At first the implication would apparently be that Jeremiah continued preaching to the entire people even when he was in the prison courtyard (LXX’s lack of the word *entire* hardly resolves that difficulty). More likely, either this story is separate from and parallel to the one that precedes, or the opening sentence refers to what these officials (as they will be called in v. 4) had heard before his confinement. It would have been entirely plausible for them to have heard it: the account of his message virtually repeats words from the parallel passage in 21:7-10 and from 32:3-4 (cf. also e.g., 27:8, 12-13; 34:17-22). Jehucal (with the longer spelling) appeared in 37:3, and maybe Gedaliah’s father is the Pashhur of 20:1-6, while Pashhur ben Malchiah appeared in a similar connection in 21:1. The names of Gedaliah ben Pashhur and Jucal/Jehucal ben Shelemiah have appeared on Jerusalem seals.[[37]](#footnote-37) Shephatiah ben Mattan is otherwise unknown.

**4-6** Again, it is easier to assume that the officials’ worry relates to a situation when Jeremiah is free to cause trouble in the city than a situation when he is already in custody; the officials’ concern parallels Irijah’s which led to his bringing Jeremiah to “the officials” earlier (37:13-14). But “the nearer the catastrophe approaches, so much more critical does the position of the imprisoned prophet also become.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Talk of executing Jeremiah first came in Jer 26, at the beginning of Jehoiakim’s reign. So he has been living with this threat for twenty years. And in vv. 1-13 as a whole “death is the grim leitmotif”:[[39]](#footnote-39) the threatened death of the city and the threatened death of the prophet, which would be designed to avert it but would be more likely to ensure it. “When the leadership opposes the prophetic mission, they reveal the depth of national religious decay.”[[40]](#footnote-40) But the leaders are not so wrong in their account of Jeremiah’s preaching. He does keep talking about *something dire* as opposed to *well-being* as the city’s destined and proper fate. And his preaching would indeed discourage the city’s defenders. The king’s comment shows that an Israelite monarch does not have absolute power; like a president or prime minister, he cannot always get his way. Naturally, the prison courtyard also had a cistern, and apparently a more unpleasant one than Jonathan’s. “As Jeremiah reaches his nadir, the drama in the plot reached its peak: what will happen to Jeremiah now?”[[41]](#footnote-41) Second Kings 24:18 suggests that Zedekiah is too young for this Malchiah to be his son. He might be Zedekiah’s nephew (if he is a different Malchiah from the father of Pashhur in v. 1, who would again be too old) or Zedekiah’s half-brother, or maybe “king’s son” is a title.[[42]](#footnote-42)

**7-8** The First Testament refers to a number of Africans and other foreigners serving in the Israelite army or in other capacities; 2 Sam 18:21-32 tells of another impressive Sudanese. Foreigners might immigrate as escaped slaves, and might be welcome because they could be less tempted to disloyalty.[[43]](#footnote-43) Somehow, maybe Ebed-melech’s ethnicity enabled him to see the barbarism of the officials’ action in a way that Judahites could not.[[44]](#footnote-44) In these chapters, “the foreigners frame the offenses of the native people.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Ironically, the king is presumably sitting *in the Benjamin Gateway* deciding on cases that are brought to him, and Ebed-melech has one for him to consider. A town gateway is the regular places where disputes and questions are sorted out by the community’s senior members (e.g., Ruth 4; Isa 59:21; Amos 5:10, 12, 15), and in Jerusalem the king with his responsibility for the faithful exercise of authority (*mišpāṭ ûṣәdāqâ*)would have some responsibility for such procedures. With further irony, it is a foreigner who embodies what an Israelite king, a faithful shoot for David is supposed to be in this connection.[[46]](#footnote-46) Second Samuel 15:2-6 perhaps implies that in normal times the king would oversee the procedures rather than personally implement them, though these are not normal times. But the Benjamin Gateway in particular is also a “symbolic space”: it is where Irijah arrested Jeremiah (37:13).[[47]](#footnote-47)

**9-13a** There is an ellipse somewhere in the logic in the reference to bread (so it is unlikely to be a gloss,[[48]](#footnote-48) because glosses should smooth things, not complicate them): if there is no more bread, everyone is going to die of starvation. Maybe Ebed-melech is exaggerating the dimensions of a food shortage that makes people ignore Jeremiah’s needs, or maybe Ebed-melech hopes that Zedekiah won’t notice the illogic in his argument[[49]](#footnote-49) – and he doesn’t. Thirty people is way more than is needed for the task, but it could be a wise size of gang if the officials are going to oppose the project.[[50]](#footnote-50) Apparently the palace has a junk room beneath the storeroom, and it is from here that Elimelech gets the padding to protect Jeremiah from rope burn.

**13b-16** As happened in Jer 37, Jeremiah does not now gain his freedom, but he does live in less unpleasant confinement. In due course Zedekiah surreptitiously arranges to see him. *The third entrance in Yahweh’s house* was presumably a private way into the temple from the palace. Jeremiah guesses that Zedekiah’s question, which sounds as if it ought to be novel if it is the topic for a secret meeting, is actually the same old question, in response to which Jeremiah will have to make something like the same old statement that got him into the cistern and in danger of death before. Further, in response to it Zedekiah will presumably take the same amount of notice as he usually does. Distinctive to Jeremiah’s objection is his describing his potential response as giving *counsel* (*yā‘aṣ*: Jeremiah otherwise uses the verb only in 49:20, 30; 50:45). Counsel is usually the business of the king’s advisers (18:18). The use of this verb indeed reflects the political and/or military implications of any advice Jeremiah will give.

**17-18** Jeremiah does restate the message that got him sinking into the mud: see vv. 2-3 and compare 21:9-10; 32:3-4; 34:2-3. But the possible results of Zedekiah’s turning have changed. There is no promise here that the city can avoid surrendering to Nebuchadrezzar, as Jeremiah has earlier implied. Yahweh’s message yesterday may not be his message today. Circumstances change and the message changes. Yahweh’s word works in dialog with historical and political factors. The change in Yahweh’s word is a sign that the fall of the city is now inevitable. The verses “drive the foregone conclusion even more sharply towards its completion.”[[51]](#footnote-51) But Zedekiah can hope to avert the worst consequences of conquest by a voluntary submission.

**19-20** Zedekiah therefore has a different question. What if the Chaldeans hand him over to the Judahites who have already surrendered? The existence of such a group is quite a revelation. Are they people who did as Jeremiah said, people who have followed Jeremiah’s exhortation to go out and submit to the Babylonians? Or have just done so because the situation seemed hopeless? Either way, they almost sound like a kind-of alternative Judahite government, a government in (nearby) exile.[[52]](#footnote-52) Maybe they will want to punish Zedekiah for not having done the same himself earlier, and maybe saved some suffering. Jeremiah’s response is quite a promise. If it’s too late for Yahweh to deliver the city, it is not too late for him to look after people to turn to him and do as he says.

**21-23** Jeremiah also nuances his promise that surrender will be the best thing for Zedekiah himself. He has heard women chanting some lines by way of a taunt song.[[53]](#footnote-53) The contemptuous lines of verse also give more precision to the basis for the assault that Zedekiah is anxious about. In real time the women have not begun chanting yet, but in his awareness of what Yahweh is going to bring about, Jeremiah has heard them. Formally the lines are a lament in 3-2 rhythm, but in substance they are indeed a taunt, like Isa 14:4b-21.[[54]](#footnote-54) Zedekiah should surely not have been so stupid, the women imply. The king is going to be shamed by what happens to the city, by what happens to the women, and further shamed by the women themselves.[[55]](#footnote-55) He needs to remember how women pay a terrible price when their men get defeated in war, a fact that is also a further cause of shame to the men themselves. Zedekiah has let himself be deceived by his *allies* (“the men of your *šālôm*”); *they have overcome you, the men who were your allies* corresponds to Obadiah 7. The Egyptians let him down in the end as Jeremiah said they would, and he has also been overcome by his own officials (v. 5). He really is somewhat pathetic. While the word for *swamp* come only here, sinking in a quagmire is an image elsewhere for being overwhelmed by a potentially fatal predicament from which one cannot extricate oneself (Pss 40:2 [3]; 69:14 [15]).[[56]](#footnote-56) Such a plight had engulfed Zedekiah. It was supposed to be a mess that one’s friends helped one to get out of; Zedekiah’s friends had hightailed it out, instead (cf. 37:9). He is just as sunk in the mud as Jeremiah – or rather, whereas Jeremiah has just escaped from the mud, Zedekiah is still in it and will never escape it.[[57]](#footnote-57) In his summary prose description of the humiliating calamity that is imminent, Jeremiah makes no reference to Yahweh’s activity. While Yahweh reveals what will happen, the agency is human. Jeremiah’s warning comes a devastating conclusion in this connection: you Zedekiah, not Yahweh, not the Chaldeans, *you will consume this city with fire*. “The torch was not applied by Zedekiah,”[[58]](#footnote-58) but he was responsible for the torching.

**24-28a** Zedekiah oddly is more concerned about his officials than about the Babylonians. The story shifts from focusing on Jeremiah’s fears to focusing on Zedekiah’s, expressed in the spoken words that carry most of the freight through Jer 37 – 38.[[59]](#footnote-59) Ironically, the king is now seeking Jeremiah’s protection from the officials. Further, to protect himself Jeremiah must not repeat the message that the officials know he consistently preaches.[[60]](#footnote-60) The narrative half-implies that Zedekiah recognizes the truth in the message, but he is “politically incapable of doing what he knows to be theologically correct.”[[61]](#footnote-61) He is “sympathetic to Jeremiah and Yahweh's word but unable to obey.”[[62]](#footnote-62) In the response he suggests to Jeremiah’s potential cross-examiners, the prospect of the cistern at Jonathan’s house returns, and if we take into account the fact that he actually does do what v. 26 says (cf. 37:20), Jeremiah tells no lies; he just doesn’t tell the officials everything.[[63]](#footnote-63)

# The City Falls, and the Fates That Follow (38:28b – 39:14 [LXX 45:28b – 46:14])

As the sequence of narratives continues, this unit begins in the same context as Jer 37 – 38, the Babylonian blockade and siege of Jerusalem that started in 589/588, and seamlessly moves on chronologically to the city’s actual fall in 587. It compares and contrasts with the accounts of the event in in Jer 52 and 2 Kgs 25.[[64]](#footnote-64) Here the city’s fall is just one further stage in a story that will continue in Jer 40 – 44. Coming in the middle of things, it takes rather matter-of-fact form after all the “metaphor, cosmic imagery, prose commentary, poetic utterance, symbolic acts, foreshadowing, and hyperbole” that has been used to prepare readers far an event that would shake the heavens and the earth,[[65]](#footnote-65) “the primary horror galvanizing all the mythopoetic energy of the scroll.”[[66]](#footnote-66) Only the incidental references to “that day” (vv. 10, 16, 17) might hint at something more. The narrative relates the dreadful nature of what happens to Zedekiah without comment, letting it speak for itself; we view the event through Zedekiah’s own eyes, not the narrator’s.[[67]](#footnote-67)

38:28bWhen Jerusalem was captured:a 39:1in the ninth year of Zedekiah King of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon came with his entire force to Jerusalem and blockaded it.b 2In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourthc month, on the ninth of the month, the city was broken open.d 3All the officials of the king of Babylon came in and sat in the middle gateway: Nergal-sarezere (samgar),f Nebu Sarsechimg (rab-saris),h Nergal-sarezer (rab-mag),i and all the remainder of the officers of the king of Babylon.j

4When Zedekiah King of Judah saw them, he and all the people who had been engaged in the battle, they fled. They went out by night from the city by the road to the king’s garden through the gateway between the double walls. He went out by the road to the Steppe, 5but the Babylonian force pursued them, and they overtook Zedekiah in the Jericho steppes. So they got him and made him go up to Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon at Riblah in the region of Hamath, and he spoke out authoritative decisions with him.k 6The king of Babylon slaughtered Zedekiah’s sons at Riblah before his eyes; and all the gentry from Judah, the king of Babylon slaughtered. 7Zedekiah’s eyes he blinded, and he shackled him with bronze chainsl to make him come to Babylon.

8The king’s house and the housing of the peoplem the Chaldeans consumed with fire, and the walls of Jerusalem they pulled down. 9The restn of the people who remained in the city and the people who had fallen away, who had fallen away to him – the rest of the people who remained,o Nebuzaradanp the chief of the guardsq took into exile in Babylon. 10But some of the people who were poor, who had nothing, Nebuzaradan the chief of the guards allowed to remain in the country of Judah; he gave them vineyards and tillage,r on that day.

11Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon gave orders concerning Jeremiah by means of Nebuzaradant the chief of the guards: 12”Get him and keep your eyes on him, and don’t do anything dire to him. Rather, as he speaks to you, so act with him.” 13So Nebuzaradan the chief of the guards sent, he and Nebushazbanu (rab-saris), Nergal-sarezar (ram-mag), and all the senior officers of the king of Babylon – 14they sent and got Jeremiah from the prison courtyard and gave him over to Gedaliah ben Ahikam, son of Shaphan, to let him go out to his house.v So he livedw among the people.x

MT has a unit marker here, but 38:28b looks more an introduction to Jer 39 than a postscript to Jer 38.

L has a section marker here.

Vg has “fifth” (and lacks the reference to the ninth of the month), assimilating to 2 Kgs 25:8.

Whereas 2 Kgs 25:4 has the niphal verb *wattibāqa‘*,which could imply the city opening the gates, the verb here is hophal *hobqә‘â*, which suggests the Babylonians forcing them open: see the discussion in Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 244.

A Hebraized version of the name appearing in the list of “The Court of Nebuchadnezzar” in *ANET*, 308.

In MT’s punctuation this word is the beginning of another name, but the Babylonian word *simmagir* suggests a duty carried out by an officer of Nebuchadrezzar (*HALOT*, 759).

MT links the name *nәbû* with *samgar*, but either of the possibilities in the previous note suggests that LXX is right to link it with *śarsәkîm*; the resultant name is then a compound noun like Nebuchadrezzar (R. Hendel and J. Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible?* [New Haven: Yale University, 2018], 114, and their references).

In Hebrew this title suggests “chief officer,” but it is apparently a Hebraized version of a similar Akkadian title (see BDB, 913b; *HALOT*, 769b-770a, 1172-73).

Another title for a senior officer (*HALOT*, 543a, 1172-73), distinguishing this Nergal-sarezer from the one mentioned earlier. A Nergal-sarezer (Neriglissar) eventually succeeded Nebuchadrezzar as king of Babylon.

LXX lacks vv. 4-13.

See the note on 1:16.

The dual *nәḥuštayim* commonly means *bronze chains* (BDB) holding together the two legs and feet.

Literally “the house of the people.” The expression comes only here; it is equivalent to *all the houses in Jerusalem and every important person’s house* in 52:13.

*Yeter* is a synonym of words such as *šә’ērît* but it never makes the transition to becoming a word with positive connotations (K. D. Mulzac, “*Ytr* as a Remnant Term in the Book of Jeremiah,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 19 [2008]: 3-17).

For *the rest of the people who remained*,52:13 has an unusual expression for *the rest of the craftsmen* (see the comment) which the curator might have understood to mean “the rest of the horde” (as Vg does, there and here) and thus paraphrased here.

A Hebraized version of a name meaning “Nabu has given offspring” (cf. BDB, *HALOT*).

Literally, executioners or butchers.

For the MT hapax *yәgēbîm*, Vg, Th “cisterns” implies *gēbîm*.

The *waw-*consecutive is used loosely, as this action must precede that in v. 10.

This name also appears in the list of “The Court of Nebuchadnezzar” in *ANET*, 308, as Nabuzeribni.

A Hebraized version of a name meaning “May Nabu deliver me” (cf. BDB, *HALOT*).

Literally, “to the house,” which can simply “home” (Vg; cf. Hagg 1:9).

Vg takes the *waw*-consecutive clause as continuing the infinitive.

MT has a section marker here.

The setting of 38:28b – 39:18 within Jer 37 – 44 suggests at least part of the reason for the distinctive nature of this version of the story of the city’s fall. Like 38:1-28a, it focuses on the fate of four figures – the same three individuals, but a different group of people. It thus works as follows:

38:28b – 39:3 Background: the city’s fall

39:4-7 The fate of Zedekiah

39:8-10 The fate of ordinary people

39:11-14 The fate of Jeremiah

39:15-18 The fate of Ebed-melech

The account of the four key figures again manifests a series of ambiguities, which in part derive from the unit’s not beginning from an explicit judgment on Zedekiah and on the city, equivalent to 52:1-3 and 2 Kgs 24:18 – 25:3. While Jer 39 does stand under the shadow of 37:1-2 with its implicit provision of a key to understanding the unit, Jer 39 itself makes no reference to Yahweh until its closing paragraph with its message for Ebed-melech, and the distance from 37:1-2 increases the tension between that judgment and the ambiguities of this unit. Jer 39 thus raises the following questions.

* How are we to evaluate the flight of Zedekiah and his forces (and their implied abandonment of him, explicit in 52:8)? And how are we to understand Zedekiah’s meeting with Nebuchadrezzar, and the brutal actions of Nebuchadrezzar, which contrast with Jeremiah’s promises to Zedekiah in 32:3-5, a few months previously (which referred to no conditions)? And how are we to relate the meeting and the actions with the further promises (containing no conditions) a few months previously in 34:2-5? A few years previously, 27:20 had also issued a warning about the fate of the gentry (in the only other reference to them in Jeremiah) which was less gloomy than their actual fate here.
* What is the implication of the further difference from Jer 52, the absence of any reference to the fate of the temple? And how are we to understand the forced migration of people who had surrendered along with the people who had stayed in the city, notwithstanding Jeremiah’s promise to people who surrendered? Are these people who “fell” involuntarily (cf. 6:15; 8:12; Lev 26:7-8, 36)? On the other hand, what is the implication of the further difference from Jer 52, that here the poor people who had not surrendered are allowed to remain in Judah and are *given* vineyards and fields rather than left as vinedressers and farmhands (presumably to work for the Babylonians)? These events link with the promise in 27:11; but how do they link to the distinction between good and bad figs in Jer 24?
* Why does Nebuchadrezzar give a special order concerning Jeremiah? Since Nebuchadrezzar is Yahweh’s servant, it’s quite appropriate that he should look after another of Yahweh’s servants.[[68]](#footnote-68) And maybe Nebuchadrezzar knows that Jeremiah has been urging the city to surrender. This bit of the story increases our sympathy for Irijah and the officials who saw Jeremiah as a traitor. The passing on of Jeremiah to Gedaliah is difficult to understand; we will need to read on in Jer 40 to understand the sequence of events, as Jer 39 – 40 again proceed in dramatic rather than chronological order.
* (We consider Ebed-melech in Part 4D which follows.)

**38:28b – 39:3** The account of the city’s fall in 52:4-6 (virtually identical with 2 Kgs 25:1-3) will overlap with this account and will provide some additional information concerning Nebuchadrezzar’s blockade of the city his eventual active siege. The tenth month will imply December 589 or January 588; the city’s fall took place in July 587. In place of some of the information in 52:4-6, this version provides information relating to the fate of Jeremiah: see v. 13. While it’s likely that Nebuchadrezzar showed up at Jerusalem for the initiation of the blockade, v. 5 shows that he didn’t stay. The Babylonians were presumably besieging the city from the north, the side not protected by valleys, and made the breach in the city’s walls on that side, where the middle gateway will likewise be located. Coming in and sitting down there would signify taking up a position of authority. It’s not quite a fulfillment of the declaration in 1:15, but it’s something similar.[[69]](#footnote-69) Jeremiah has referred to *the officials* in 38:17,22; now the key ones are named. *Samgar*, *rab-saris*, and *rab-mag* all seem to be terms for Babylonian officers, equivalent to expressions such as commandant, general, and senior officer, but we don’t know their precise meaning, and neither would the audience.

**4-5a** Presumably what issued in the flight was not specifically the sight of the Babylonian leaders sitting there after the Babylonian forces have broken through the walls, but the more general sight of the Babylonian forces themselves, perhaps the previous night when the city’s collapse was evidently imminent. The expression *the double wall* would suggest the north side of the city, where a later tradition came to identify the quarry just east of the modern Damascus Gate as “Zedekiah’s Cave,” his secret escape route.[[70]](#footnote-70) More likely, however, as the Babylonians prepared to enter on the north and sit in a gateway there, Zedekiah and his troops prepared to leave through a gateway on the southeast that led into the steep slopes of the Kidron Ravine which might be less guarded and would lead towards Jericho. The description of the location fits the references in Neh 3:15 to a wall and a pool at the king’s garden, in 2 Chr 32:5 to Hezekiah building an extra wall outside the old city wall in connection with safeguarding the city’s water supply, and in Isa 22:11 to a double wall and a pool resulting from construction in Hezekiah’s time.[[71]](#footnote-71) While the Babylonians were surrounding the city (cf. 52:7), they were perhaps focusing on the push to enter the city from the north and not paying attention on other sides, and/or perhaps *all the people who had been engaged in the battle* who accompanied Zedekiah were able to evade or overcome any Babylonian lookout posts on that southeast side. The Steppe, the *‘Ărābâ*, strictly refers to the desert area south of the Dead Sea, but here may take in the region north of the Dead Sea, including the area around Jericho. Presumably Zedekiah was aiming to get across the Jordan to take refuge in Ammon, Moab or Edom (cf. 40:11; 41:15). But maybe the Babylonian forces would be fitter than the Judahites, who would be weakened by fighting and by shortage of food.

**5b-7** Zedekiah“ran for his life, but not fast enough.”[[72]](#footnote-72) The king would be a main focus of the Babylonians’ interest. He had led the rebellion and Nebuchadrezzar would want him to pay for it – again to act as a deterrent to other people’s leaders. Riblah is on the main route from Egypt or Canaan to Mesopotamia, a convenient location for a Babylonian king to have his base in an area less isolated than Jerusalem. It is two hundred miles from Jericho, a straight shot up the Jordan Valley into the Bekaa Valley if the Babylonian forces chose to go that way. Nebuchadrezzar’s *authoritative decisions* or judgments (*mišpāṭîm*) would be his decisions about Zedekiah’s punishment for his rebellion (52:3, 9). But the audience might recall that authoritative decisions was a subject that Yahweh talk about way back (4:12), and Jeremiah too (12:1). Nebuchadrezzar is making his own decisions, but without realizing it, he is implementing Yahweh’s decisions. Slaughtering Zedekiah’s sons would ensure that no one could think of putting them on the throne. Blinding Zedekiah would incapacitate him; it was a known action taken against people such as slaves or war captives.[[73]](#footnote-73) Jer 52:11 adds that Nebuchadrezzar put Zedekiah in prison in Babylon until his death. The *gentry* (*ḥôrîm*; cf. 27:20) had apparently accompanied the fighters, mistakenly thinking they would do better than they would by waiting for the city’s fall. Perhaps we are to infer that Zedekiah and the gentry forfeited the fulfillment of a less grim fate by attempting to run rather than staying when the city was about to fall.

**8-9** The scroll continues to offer its distinctive account of the fall. *Pulled down* has extra resonance: the story is recording the fulfillment of Yahweh’s threat about pulling down that goes back to Jeremiah’s commission (1:10). Something similar applies to the account of how the Babylonians *consumed* the city *with* *fire* (e.g., 37:8, 10; 38:18) and *took* people *into* *exile* (e.g., 13:19; 20:4). The account first summarizes the destruction more briefly than Jer 52 and 2 Kings 25, omitting reference to the burning of the temple. In contrast, the summary relating to the people taken into exile then contains some redundancy; the second occurrence of *the rest of the people who remained* functions as a summary of the group taken off. According to 52:28-30, this group was relatively small, but here the scroll encourages the impression that the entire people is transported and the city left empty. The calamity was as great as Yahweh said it was going to be (though people who went into exile in Babylon might also suggest the implication that the future lies with them).[[74]](#footnote-74)

**10** In a further distinctive formulation compared with 52:16, the scroll goes on to a delicious irony. Only in 5:4 has Jeremiah referred to *the poor* (*dallîm*), people who don’t have land and therefore have no way of being self-sufficient; there he initially professed to think that they were distinctively people who didn’t acknowledge Yahweh. The passage then incorporated its own irony as he came to recognize that the same applied to the important people. One expression of the latter’s failure to acknowledge Yahweh is their treatment of needy people (2:34; 5:28), while the protection of the powerless and needy was a special responsibility of a king such as Zedekiah (22:16). So who brings about the fulfillment of that obligation? A foreigner![[75]](#footnote-75) The Babylonians become “almost benevolent overlords.”[[76]](#footnote-76) A great reversal of destinies takes place, going beyond the aborted move in 34:8-16 and effecting a fulfillment of 6:12.[[77]](#footnote-77) The poor are not merely conscript labor for the Babylonians, as in isolation 52:16 might imply;[[78]](#footnote-78) Nebuzaradan *gave* *them* *vineyards* and *tillage*. By implication and with further irony, these might be vineyards and land that had really belonged to them but had been taken away from them over the years. It would not have been a topic for rejoicing among the landholders who were being taken off into exile.[[79]](#footnote-79) The poor will feature further as part of Gedaliah’s responsibility (40:7). In association with vineyards, the unique word *tillage* (*yāgēb*; a related participle comes in 52:16) might refer to the terraces on which olives and other fruit were cultivated. In light of earlier links, the closing expression *on* *that* *day* would also carry some resonance. It can denote the epoch-making day when Yahweh acts to effect the fulfillment of his purpose, in bringing about catastrophe and new creation, which will also be the implication in the reference to the day of Jerusalem’s fall in vv. 16 and 17 (cf. 4:9; 25:32; 30:7-8; 48:41; 49:22, 26; 50:30). Nebuzaradan did not merely take his action at that chronological time. Giving landless people vineyards and tillage is an aspect of the restoration of Jerusalem and Judah.

**11-14** Like everybody else, Jeremiah is simply the object of Babylonian actions; he does nothing.[[80]](#footnote-80) While it wouldn’t be surprising if Nebuchadrezzar’s intelligence-gathering procedures discovered that Jeremiah had been encouraging Zedekiah and his people to surrender to him, it would be unlikely that he would be dealing with this matter personally. But the story hints at another point about the fulfillment of Yahweh’s word (e.g., 1:18-19; 15:20-21). The names of the officers overlap with but differ from the ones that appeared in vv. 3, 11, and 13.[[81]](#footnote-81) The next chapter will tell us more about Nebuzaradan’s dealings with Jeremiah and about Gedaliah (a different Gedaliah from the one in 38:1), who evidently did not flee with Zedekiah and escaped the fate of other people who surrendered or stayed in the city. It will also imply that Jeremiah *lived among the people* in Gedaliah’s house (*with him*; 40:6)rather than returning to his own house in (nearby) Anathoth.

# D. A Footnote Message for Ebed-melech (39:15-18 [LXX 46:15-18])

Like the preceding paragraph about Jeremiah’s joining Gedaliah, the message for Ebed-melech comes out of chronological order. But whereas that paragraph relates to what follows, this message relates chronologically to what has preceded. Here it brings Jer 39 to an edifying climax. As a promise to Baruch will come in in Jer 45 and not where we might have expected it at the end of Jer 36 (or even here), a promise to Ebed-melech comes here and not in Jer 38 where we might have expected it – especially as Yahweh apparently gave it to Jeremiah then. The message’s location here contributes to bringing the first part of the Jer 37 – 45 narrative to a close, as the location of the message for Baruch will contribute to bringing the entire narrative to a close. And it fits here as an aspect of the story’s account of what happened to the key players in Jer 37 – 38.[[82]](#footnote-82)

15Yahweh’s word had come to Jeremiaha when he was confinedb in the prison courtyard. 16Goc and say to Ebed-melech the Sudanese: Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, has said this. Here am I, causing my words to come about for this city, for something dire, not for something good. They will happen before you on that day.d 17But I will rescue you on that day (Yahweh’s affirmation). You will not be given over into the hand of the people before whom you are fearful, 18because I will definitely enable you to escape.e By the sword you will not fall. Your life will be yours as loot,f because you’ve relied on me (Yahweh’s affirmation).g

The word order (“to Jeremiah had come…”) avoids a *waw*-consecutive in a context where the meaning required is pluperfect (Allen, *Jeremiah*, 418).

LXX lacks *when he was confined*.

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

LXX lacks this sentence.

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the point.

See 21:9 and the comment.

MT has a marker here.

Evidently being *confined in the prison courtyard* didn’t stop Jeremiah paying visits outside, as his earlier detention would have done (unless we should not press the meaning of “go” and it could cover sending a message); the courtyard was a kind of open prison.[[83]](#footnote-83) Placed here, the report of Jeremiah’s message follows the account of the events that have fulfilled the first part of the declaration. Ebed-melech will have seen the city’s *dire* rather than *good* fate come about. By implication he also will have seen the promise fulfilled. *That* *day* has arrived.[[84]](#footnote-84) As often happens, the story gives no account of Jeremiah’s delivering the promise to him. For the audience, it is enough to include the promise; the audience also knows that the day arrived, and that threat and promise have been fulfilled. There was no reference to fear in 38:7-9, but if Ebed-melech didn’t have any fear, there would have been something odd; the reference also recalls 1:8 and the promises that follow there. The encouragement and promise that applied to Jeremiah applied to Ebed-melech, too. Nor was there any statement that Ebed-melech *relied on me* in 38:7-9, but it would explain the courage presupposed by 38:7-9. The message’s closing declaration is thus a double surprise: this foreigner was someone who trusted in Yahweh even though he was scared – which would be quite reasonable, whether he was scared of the Babylonians or of the king and his officials. “Such trust rules out fear” (17:7-8).[[85]](#footnote-85) In both respects this paragraph thus provides an informative footnote to 38:7-13.

The blessings of the one whose help is the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in Yahweh his God! (Ps 146:5)

The blessings of the people whose God is Yahweh! (Ps 144:15)[[86]](#footnote-86)

# Part Four (b) The Aftermath, and Missed Chances (40:1 – 44:30 [LXX 47:1 – 51:30])

Jer 39 is one of several points where the Jeremiah scroll could have come to a satisfactory end. Jeremiah’s warnings have been fulfilled, he is safe, and the chapter closes with an encouraging word for the person who trusts in Yahweh. But actually, the narrative occupying Jer 37 – 45 is only half over. It now tells of the arrangements made for the administration of the ongoing community in Judah implied by 39:10-14, then of how there is no end to the willingness of some people to make things worse in Judah. Their action takes Jeremiah to Egypt, where he ends up berating them for their further demonstration of stupidity, which threatens the end of their community.

# A New Start at Mizpah, The Watchtower (40:1-12 [LXX 47:1-12])

Although Jer 39 might have made a satisfactory end for the Jeremiah scroll, like any ending it would leave readers wondering what followed. What happened to Zedekiah and the exile community in Babylon and the city of Jerusalem? The scroll never answers these questions. Who is this Gedaliah, and where is his house, and what is Jeremiah doing staying with his people, and is there a future for Judah? These questions it does take up, while also in due course taking the story in a new direction that one would not have guessed. If the original audience of the story in Jer 37 – 44 was in Egypt, then the chapters that follow provide the answer to the question “How did we get here?” and 40:1-12 forms a crucial hinge in that story. In answering these questions, once again the story backtracks slightly. While 39:11-14 summarized Jeremiah’s fate following on the fall of Jerusalem, as an aspect of bringing that facet of the narrative to an end, 40:1-6 now tells us more about how things worked out for him in this connection, as an aspect of opening up where the narrative will now go. In turn 40:7-12 broadens the focus as the narrative becomes the story of the remainder community centered on Mizpah. Through 40:7 – 41:18 Jeremiah gets no mention and we do not discover the nature of *the word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh* (40:1) until 42:1-22. Jer 40 – 41 thus gives us the background to that message and to the events involving Jeremiah that will follow. This first section outlines:

v. 1 An introduction, setting up expectations that will not be realized until Jer 42

vv. 2-6 How Jeremiah got from Jerusalem via The Height to The Watchtower

vv. 7-12 How Judahite fugitives came to make a new start under Gedaliah at The Watchtower

1The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh after Nebuzaradan the chief of the guards sent him off from The Heighta when he got him; he was shackledb in chains among the entire exile group from Jerusalem and Judah who were being taken into exile to Babylon.

2So the chief of the guards got Jeremiahc and said to him, “Yahweh your God – he spoke of this dire thing for this place, 3and he has made it come about.d Yahweh has acted as he spoke,e because youf did wrong in relation to Yahweh and did not listen to his voice, and this thing has happenedg to you. 4So now, here, I am releasing youh today from the chains that are on your hand. If it is good in your eyes to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will keep my eye on you. But if it is dire in your eyes to come with me to Babylon, hold back – look at the entire country before you – regarding what is good, and regarding the thing that’s right in your eyes to go there, go.”i 5But he did not yet respond.j “Or go backk to Gedaliah ben Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the townsl of Judah – go back with him among the people, or anywhere it is right in your eyes to go – go.” So the chief of the guards gave him provisions andm supplies and sent him off, 6and Jeremiah came to Gedaliah ben Ahikam at The Watchtowern and lived with him among the people who remained in the country.o

7All the officers from the forces that were in the open country, and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah ben Ahikam over the country and that he had appointed with him men and women and little ones, somep of the poor of the country, of the people who had not been taken into exile to Babylon. 8They came to Gedaliah at The Watchtower: Ishmael ben Netaniah, Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah,q Seraiah ben Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephair the Netophethite, Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite, they and their men. 9Gedaliah ben Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, promised them and their men, “Don’t be afraid of servings the Chaldeans – stay in the country and serve the king of Babylon, and things will be good for you. 10Me, here am I, staying at The Watchtower to take up my positiont before the Chaldeans who will come to us. You, gather wine and summer fruit and oil and put it in your containers and stay in your towns that you have taken over.” 11All the Judahites who were in Moab and among the Ammonites and in Edom and in all the countries also heard that the king of Babylon had given Judah a remainder group, and that he had appointed Gedaliah ben Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, over them. 12So all the Judahites came back from all the places where they had scattered, and came to the country of Judah to Gedaliah at The Watchtower, and gathered very much wine and summer fruit.u

See the note on 31:15.

LXX lacks *shackled*.

On the Aramaic-style use of *lә* to mark the object, see GK 117n; DG 94, remark 8.

Tg “came” not “has made it come about,” understanding the verb as qal.

LXX lacks *and he has made it come about* and *as he spoke.*

The *you* is plural through v. 3.

On the simple *waw* construction, see the note on 37:15; here the verb restates *Yahweh has acted*.

The qatal verb is declarative/performative, a speech act (see 1:5 and the note). The *you* is now singular.

LXX lacks *But if… go*.

Cf. Prov 1:23 for this meaning of *šûb* (*DCH* 8:283a; and McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1000-1). The yiqtol compares with the use after *ṭeren* (GK 107c).

For MT *šubâ* Vg implies *šәbâ* “live.”

LXX has “country.”

LXX lacks *provisions and*.

Like *hārāmâ* in v. 1, *hammiṣpâ* is a place name with the article.

MT has a marker here.

I take the *wә* as explicative – that is, the men, women, and children are the poor people.

LXX has simply Johanan ben Kareah

K, LXX, Aq, Vg imply Ophai.

For MT *‘ăbôd* LXX implies *‘abdê* “the servants of” (as 2 Kgs 25:24).

Literally, “stand.”

MT has a marker here.

Whereas vv. 1-6 is an independent unit in the story, vv. 7-12 are a variant on part of the last chapter of 2 Kings (it does not come in Jer 52):[[87]](#footnote-87)

Jer 40:7-12 2 Kgs 25:22-24

22The people that remained in the country of Judah whom Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon allowed to remain: he appointed over them Gedaliah ben Ahikam son of Shaphan.

7All the officers of the forces 23All the officers of the forces

who were in the open country

they and their men they and their men

heard that the king of Babylon had appointed heard that the king of Babylon had appointed

Gedaliah ben Ahikam over the country Gedaliah.

and that he had appointed with him

men and women and little ones,

some of the poor of the country, of the people

who had not been taken into exile to Babylon.

8They came to Gedaliah at The Watchtower They came to Gedaliah at The Watchtower:

Ishmael ben Netanyah, Johanan and Jonathan Ishmael ben Netanyah, Johanan

the sons of Kareah, Seraiah ben Tanhumeth ben Kareah, Seraiah ben Tanhumeth

the sons of Ephai the Netophathite the Netophathite

and Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite, and Jaazaniah the son of the Maacathite,

and their men. 9Gedaliah promised them and their men. 24Gedaliah promised them

and their men, saying, Don’t be afraid and their men and said to them, Don’t be afraid

of serving the Chaldeans. of the servants of the Chaldeans.

Stay in the country. Serve the king of Babylon Stay in the country. Serve the king of Babylon.

Things will be good for you. Things will be good for you.

**1** The opening phrase *the word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh* functions in part to advertise that we are beginning a new section within the scroll, and it is quite usual for this phrase to be qualified by a time reference such as follows here (32:1; 34:1, 8; 35:1). But this time reference is distinctively lengthy and turns out to gain a significance of its own, as background not to a message that follows (because the message will not come until 42:1-22) but to a narrative that will follow. By way of expansion on 39:11-15, we learn that Nebuzaradan and his colleagues did not send Jeremiah off straight from the prison courtyard to Gedaliah’s house. Initially he was just one of the Jerusalem captives who were on their way to Babylon but were encamped at a way-station. *The Height*, Ramah, is five miles north of Jerusalem on the main road towards Riblah and Babylon, within Benjamin and just past Anathoth, and only a mile or two from The Watchtower, Mizpah, of which more in a moment.

**2-3** The audience might infer that what follows is indeed *the word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh* announced by v. 1 as the storyteller now has Nebuzaradan preaching an impeccable Jeremianic sermon to Jeremiah.

A strange speech to come from an Heathen man, but God used his tongue to say thus, the more to confound the Jews that were guilty of that which he charged them withal, that now at the least in their misery they might be moved to repent, which they would not do in their prosperity, as *Balaams* Asse sometime rebuked his foolishness.[[88]](#footnote-88)

Put another way, Nebuzaradan functions as a servant of Yahweh, like his master.[[89]](#footnote-89) Dramatically, Jeremiah’s thinking is confirmed through the mouth of the Babylonian.[[90]](#footnote-90) It would be wooden to focus on the plausibility or implausibility of Nebuzaradan preaching in this way; the point is the content of his words and the dramatic and rhetorical impact of portraying them coming from the mouth of a foreigner (cf. 22:8-9).[[91]](#footnote-91) He recalls the virtuous foreign kings in Chronicles who acknowledges Yahweh’s power and justice and even speaks like a disciple of Jeremiah.[[92]](#footnote-92)

**4-5** Nebuzaradan’s *so now* follows logically: Jeremiah had been the one through whom Yahweh spoke the message that Jeremiah’s people ignored, and therefore he should not be in chains as they should. Jeremiah can choose where he goes. Nebuzaradan’s laying out of the options is more discursive than his sermon. He seems to offer Jeremiah three alternatives. He can go to Babylon. Or he can go anywhere in Judah, which would presumably include retirement in Anathoth, taking up his family land holding of which we have heard in Jer 32 and 37. Apparently Jeremiah does not warm to either of these possibilities. Or thirdly, he can *go back to Gedaliah ben Ahikam*, *the son of Shaphan*, whichrecalls Jeremiah’s debt to Gedaliah’s father (see 26:24), while the reference to Gedaliah’s grandfather draws attention to the leadership role of the Shaphan family in Jerusalem over some decades (see especially 2 Kgs 22:3-14; Jer 36:10-12). The accounts indicate that their attitudes were closer to those of Josiah and Jeremiah than to those of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, an implication that might lie behind Gedaliah’s being someone the Babylonians believed they could work with.

**6** Jeremiah chooses the third option. We do not discover his reasons, but it would imply staying in public life with the man who is the de facto governor of Judah[[93]](#footnote-93) – though actually calling him “governor” would be anachronistic.[[94]](#footnote-94) His decision is another indication that we should not read too much into his having spoken ten years previously of the exiles as the good figs and the community with which the future lies. There is a future at *The Watchtower*, Mizpah; Jeremiah’s choice might imply a validation of an ongoing community there.[[95]](#footnote-95) The site of Mizpah might be Nebi Samwil[[96]](#footnote-96) or might be Tell en-Nasbeh.[[97]](#footnote-97) Both are north of Jerusalem, two or three miles from Ramah, *The Height*. Both are claimed to make better sense geographically in light of the story as it will unfold. Nebi Samwil (the traditional site of Samuel’s tomb) has a more impressive location to be called a watchtower. Archeological investigations of Tell en-Nasbeh have produced more concrete results, including the indications that the site suffered no sixth-century destruction, which would make it a convenient location for a political headquarters,[[98]](#footnote-98) and also that it was the nearest to a flourishing (or at least functioning) location within the Judahite “post-collapse” society.[[99]](#footnote-99)

**7-8** The story begins to unfold in a way suggesting good prospects for the Judahite community making a new start in Judah.[[100]](#footnote-100) The reference to putting Gedaliah in charge of the ordinary people who were not taken into exile, including people who had lost their land, takes up the note in 39:10, as the account of Nebuzaradan and Jeremiah took up 39:11-14. If a relatively small number of people has been taken off to join the 597 exiles in Babylon (52:29), a significant number now feel safe about returning from places where they have taken refuge. The officers and their men are presumably members of the army that had been defending Jerusalem, serving under the command of Zedekiah, “each one a potential warlord.”[[101]](#footnote-101) They are also people who cut and run from Zedekiah when he fled (52:8) and who have been keeping out of the way around Judah as weeks have passed since the city’s fall. They might take a number of attitudes to the new situation, even if for practical purposes they can see what public stance they need to take. Of Ishmael ben Netaniah and Johanan ben Kareah we shall hear much more in 40:13 – 43:6, but no more of Johanan’s brother Jonathan or of Seraiah ben Tanhumeth. The sons of Ephai come from a village near Bethlehem and thus not too far from Jerusalem (Ezra 2:21-22; Neh 7:26; 12:28-29). The name of Jezaniah comes in 2 Kgs 25:23 as Jaazaniah and appears in that form with the title “servant of the king” on a seal from Tell en-Nasbeh,[[102]](#footnote-102) though the name (“Yahweh listens”) is common (e.g., Jer 35:3; 42:1; Ezek 8:11; 11:1). Maacah was a small Aramaean kingdom east of the Jordan in the area that technically belonged to Manasseh (Josh 13:11-13; see also 2 Sam 10:6-8); presumably his family had moved to Judah, perhaps after the Assyrian conquest, but like Ebed-melech or Uriah the Hittite, he is known as a foreigner even while being accepted within Judah.

**9-12** Gedaliah urges them all to take the stance that Jeremiah had urged earlier: submit to Babylon’s authority. Jeremiah’s promise from before 587 (27:11) may still apply. They should trust Gedaliah to mediate between them and the Babylonians; he will “stand before” the Babylonians like Moses and Samuel standing before Yahweh (15:1),[[103]](#footnote-103) or like Jeremiah himself standing there (15:19; 18:20). Most tellingly, he will be like Nebuzaradan himself standing before Nebuchadrezzar (52:12). A person can stand before a king only on the basis of having been commissioned to do so, but people who have been so commissioned can do so with confidence as they fulfill their responsibility. The Babylonians trust Gedaliah to oversee the Judahites; the Judahites can trust him as one of them, to look after their interests. “Although much has been uprooted and demolished, the oath of Gedaliah represents a time to build and to plant.”[[104]](#footnote-104) The city fell in about July, so the months that follow would see a natural harvest, notwithstanding the country’s devastation by war. The Judahite military and the landless families returning from *all the countries* (quite a hyperbole) can therefore profit from the land that people have abandoned, in preparation for the winter that will follow. It will be a different gathering from the grim one that Jeremiah commissioned in 10:17. “There is a comparative calm after the storm.”[[105]](#footnote-105) Thus they *gathered very much wine and summer fruit*. “Is the crop not a blessing,… a sign of a new beginning?”[[106]](#footnote-106) Maybe they themselves do not count as bad figs?[[107]](#footnote-107) It looks like a great new start, the beginning of a fulfilment of the promises in Jer 30 – 31; “a new age is beginning.”[[108]](#footnote-108) On the other hand, there is no talk of turning back to Yahweh, and Ezek 33:23-29 suggests a gloomy understanding of the Judahites’ stance in relation to Yahweh.[[109]](#footnote-109) Neither is there any talk of Yahweh turning to them.

# Things Begin to Fall Apart (40:13 – 41:18 [LXX 47:13 – 48:18])

Gedaliah had appeared like a bright star in the night for the grieving Judahites.[[110]](#footnote-110) But it turns out that the hopeful picture presented by 40:1-12 was a false dawn. Gedaliah is assassinated and the rest of the community focused on Mizpah flees, so that arguably “these two chapters are the saddest in the whole book of Jeremiah.”[[111]](#footnote-111) Three distinctively human figures and two unfortunate groups of people dominate this next episode of the story.

* Gedaliah turns out to be less wise than we thought, and pays with his life for being too trusting.
* As a man with a claim to be in a position to exercise power, Ishmael is ambitious and ruthless in disposing of Gedaliah, but not far-seeing enough.
* Johanan knows things and knows what action to take and acts decisively, but in the end he is not sure what to do next.
* Some worshipers from Ephraim find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, though some of them know how to talk themselves out of trouble.
* The Judahites at The Watchtower switch between being the protected charges of Gedaliah, then of Ishmael, then of Johanan, but are never in a position to shape their own destiny.
* Jeremiah must have been around (see 40:6; 42:1-3), but he does not feature in the story. We cannot answer the question of where he was; the effect in the story is to underline how events unfold without his or Yahweh’s involvement in this “world… of shattering of dreams, of lost potential, of blood and violence.”[[112]](#footnote-112) Thus “what remains to be told of the history of Jeremiah seems to set the seal of failure on the work of his life.”[[113]](#footnote-113)

The unit is another where MT is much longer than LXX and where some differences may indicate MT expansion of an earlier version,[[114]](#footnote-114) while some may reflect LXX’s rationalization of a version that it judged prolix.[[115]](#footnote-115)

13Now Johanan ben Kareah and all the officers from the forces that were in the open country came to Gedaliah at The Watchtower 14and said to him, “Do you actually acknowledgea that Baalis King of the Ammonites – he has sent Ishmael ben Nethaniah to strike you down dead?”b But Gedaliah ben Ahikam didn’t believe them. 15So Johanan ben Kareah – he said to Gedaliah in secret at The Watchtower, “Please, I will go and strike down Ishmael ben Nethaniah and no one will know – why should he strike you down dead, and all Judah that have gathered to you scatter, and the remainder of Judah perish? 16But Gedaliah ben Ahikam said to Johanan ben Kareah, “Don’t do this thing, because you’re speaking lies about Ishmael.”c

41:1Then in the seventh month Ishmael ben Nethaniah, son of Elishama, who was of royal descent, came, he and the king’s senior people,d he and ten men with him, to Gedaliah ben Ahikam at The Watchtower, and they ate a meal there together at The Watchtower. 2But Ishmael ben Nethaniah got up, he and the ten men who were with him, and struck down Gedaliah ben Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword and put him to death,e the one whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the country. 3And all the Judahites who were with him (with Gedaliah)f at The Watchtower, and the Chaldeans who were present there (the men of battle), Ishmael struck down.

4On the second day after the putting of Gedaliah to death, when no one knew, 5men from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria came, eighty men, trimmed of beard, torn of clothes, having gashed themselves, with grain offering and incense in their hand to bring to Yahweh’s house. 6Ishmael ben Nethaniah went out to meet them from The Watchtower, crying as he was going.g As he encountered them,h he said to them, “Come to Gedaliah ben Ahikam.”i 7Then, as they came into the middle of the town, Ishmael ben Nethaniah slaughtered them, into the middle of the cistern,j he and the men who were with him.k 8But ten men who were present among them – they said to Ishmael, “Don’t put us to death, because we have stores in the open country – wheat, barley, oil, and syrup.” So he held back, and didn’t put them to death among their brothers. 9Now the cistern where Ishmael threw all the corpses of the men whom he struck down by means of Gedaliahl was the one that King Asa made on account of Baasha King of Israel. It was the one that Ishmael ben Nethaniah filled with skewered men.

10Ishmael took captive all the remainder of the company that was at The Watchtower, with the king’s daughters and all the people who remained at The Watchtowerm for whom Nabuzaradan the head of the guards had appointed Gedaliah ben Ahikam. Ishmael ben Nethaniah took them captiven and went to cross over to the Ammonites.o 11But Johanan ben Kareah heard, he and all the officers in the forces who were with him, the entire dire thing that Ishmael ben Nethaniah had done, 12and they got all the men and went to do battle with Ishmael ben Nethaniah. They found him at the great waters that are at Gibeon. 13Then, when the entire company that was with Ishmael saw Johanan ben Kareah and all the officers in the forces who were with him, they were glad. 14The entire company that Ishmael had taken captive from The Watchtower turned aroundp and went back againq to Johanan ben Kareah. 15But Ishmael ben Nethaniah – he escaped with eight men from before Johanan, and went to the Ammonites.r

16Johanan ben Kareah and all the officers in the forces who were with him got all the remainder of the company that he had taken back from Ishmael ben Nethaniah from The Watchtower after he had struck down Gedaliah ben Ahikams – men, men of battle, women, little ones, and eunuchs,t whom he took back from Gibeon. 17They went, and stayed at Chimham’su Field,v which was near Bethlehem, on the way to coming to Egypt, 18in the face of the Chaldeans, because they were afraid in the face of them because Ishmael ben Nethaniah had struck down Gedaliah ben Ahikam whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the country.w

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the question.

More literally, “to strike you down as a self/life.”

MT has a section marker here.

LXX lacks *he and the king’s senior people*.

LXX lacks *ben Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword and put him to death*.

LXX lacks *with Gedaliah*.

Literally, “going, to go, and crying” (see GK 113u; DG 101 remark 3). LXX has the men crying as they went, which makes more straightforward sense.

LXX lacks *as he encountered them*.

L has a section marker here.

On the elliptical construction, see GK 119gg.

LXX lacks *he and the men who were with him*.

Literally, “by the hand of Gedaliah”: cf. the extended usage of *bәyad* in 37:2; 39:11; 50:1. LXX implies *bôr gādōl* “[was] a large cistern,” which is easier.

LXX lacks *and all the people who remained at The Watchtower*; MT may be a conflate text (J. G. Janzen, “Double Readings in the Text of Jeremiah,” *HTR* 60 [1967]: 433-47 [440]).

LXX lacks *Ishmael ben Nethaniah took them captive*.

MT has a section marker here.

LXX lacks *they were glad. The entire people that Ishmael had taken captive from The Watchtower turned around*.

Literally, “they repeated and went”: that is, I take *wayyāšubû* as an auxiliary verb (Volz, *Jeremia*, 353; see GK 120d).

MT has a section marker here.

LXX lacks *ben Netanyah from The Watchtower after he had struck down Gedaliah ben Ahikam*.

In this context, *sārîsîm* will be eunuchs (contrast 29:2; 34:19; Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 252).

K *kmwhm*, apparently a slip.

LXX takes *gērût* as a place name, but Vg, Sym rather derive it from *gûr*, suggesting a place where people might camp temporarily(see BDB, 158b; *DCH* 2:375), while Aq “sheepfolds” might link with David’s grant of land to Chimham (2 Sam 19:31-40; cf. Tg; and *HALOT*).

1. MT has a marker here.

**40:13-16** The opening of the story makes for a transition between 40:1-12 and 41:1-18. In linking to 40:1-12, it forms one unit in A and in the medieval chapter divisions in printed Bibles, and so makes for a worrying contrast with the near-idyllic[[116]](#footnote-116) picture of the new community that has preceded. In relation to what follows, with which it forms a new unit in L, it provides vital background. But it leaves unanswered as many questions as it raises.

* Is Johanan offering Gedaliah intelligence (does he ask “do you know?”), in which case how did he get this piece of intelligence? Or is he asking why Gedaliah isn’t taking account of what he knows (“do you acknowledge?”)
* Why does the Ammonite king want to kill Gedaliah? Is it simply because Gedaliah represents Babylon’s assertion of authority in the area, for which Baalis would have no more enthusiasm than Zedekiah? Ezek 21:18-32 portrayed Ammon as one of Nebuchadrezzar’s potential targets[[117]](#footnote-117) and Zedekiah had likely been on the way to Ammon when he fled.[[118]](#footnote-118) Or maybe Baalis would like to take over Judah with Ishmael as his puppet.[[119]](#footnote-119) A seal from what would have been ancient Ammon that may refer to Baalis suggests that his name is an Ammonite equivalent to Isaiah (that is, it comprises the name of the deity combined with the verb meaning “save”).[[120]](#footnote-120)
* Why would Ishmael be willing to kill Gedaliah? That question will find some clarification in 41:1. Maybe he would say he didn’t think Judah should submit to Babylonian government in the hands of someone who had given up on Yahweh’s promise to David.[[121]](#footnote-121)
* What is the link between Baalis and Ishmael? Perhaps 27:2-3 points towards an answer: Ammon, Moab, and Edom have made common cause with Judah in relation to the Babylonians.
* Why didn’t Gedaliah believe Johanan, especially on the assumption that he knew of Ishmael’s royal connections? His father knew the danger a leader could be in (26:24). Did he have suspicions about Johanan himself, which may be justified by subsequent events (40:15; 41:16-17)?[[122]](#footnote-122) Was he trusting Yahweh because a story like that of his father and Jeremiah (and the one involving his uncle Gemariah in Jer 36) showed that Yahweh could be trusted? Or did he think that the Judahite survivors were now united? Why didn’t he consult Yahweh, as one can imagine even Zedekiah doing (21:1; 37:3; 38:14), and as Johanan eventually will (42:1)?
* Where is Jeremiah when all this is going on? Why didn’t Yahweh reach out to Gedaliah by means of Jeremiah? Jeremiah’s silence and absence mirrors God’s silence and absence.[[123]](#footnote-123) Both have no explanation in the story.

The action and inaction of each of the characters in the story promotes reflection for the audience, not least by declining to answer those questions.

**41:1-3** The time of year is background in two ways to the events that follow. First, the seventh month (September-October) is marked by the Feast of Sukkot at the end of the harvest season; it is also thus the beginning of the new year on another way of working the calendar. A reference to the harvest season fits the encouragement to gather the fruits of the harvest in 40:10. It would be nice to know what year it was: has the Judahite community had a year to settle down under Gedaliah’s administration, or more? If Jerusalem fell in 587, is this 586? Apparently the information that follows about Ishmael and Nethaniah is more significant. A secretary called Elishama appeared in 36:12, where he might easily count as one of Jehoiakim’s *senior people* (*rabbîm*). Further, David had a son called Elishama (2 Sam 5:16), so maybe his line is the one whereby Ishmael counted as someone *of royal descent* (a list of David’s sons such as the one in 2 Sam 5 reminds us that there were hordes of such people). Anyway, “the royal genealogy forms a segue to murder.”[[124]](#footnote-124) The meal in which Ishmael takes part may then be a combination of a harvest festival and a celebration of the exodus (Sukkot combined those two) and also a state dinner, a kind of diplomatic occasion, which might somehow explain why Jeremiah was not there. The expression *came… to Gedaliah ben Ahikam at The Watchtower* (cf. also 40:13) is a “grim parody” of 40:6.[[125]](#footnote-125)

**2-3** Gedaliah’s father had played a part in ensuring that Jeremiah did not share the fate of Uriah (26:27); no Ahikam preserves Gedaliah himself. One aspect of the Jeremiah scroll’s significance (like that of 1 and 2 Kings) is to help people make sense of the fall of Jerusalem by showing how it issued from Israel’s turning away from Yahweh. As the point is often put, it’s about theodicy.[[126]](#footnote-126) But like 1 and 2 Kings, the scroll also recognizes that this explanation is only partial. “Jeremiah’s silence in the face of Gedaliah’s assassination is akin to the narrative silence over the death of Josiah in 2 Kings.”[[127]](#footnote-127) This story ensures that the Jeremiah scroll deconstructs, in a good way. It assures its readers that things make sense, but it also recognizes that sometimes they don’t. “The Gedaliah fiasco” bears witness to human brutality and gratuitous suffering. Its “counter-theodicy” recognizes how the world and the life of the people of God are “a fissured and broken place… that seems at times to be morally irrational and expressly evil” and one from which God is absent. God is not engaged in the violence (as the participants likely believed he was) but he allows the voice of the violated to be heard.[[128]](#footnote-128) The story suggests the ruthlessness and enormity of Ishmael’s act of terror or terrorism[[129]](#footnote-129) by noting how first he and his men joined in this meal, then killed Gedaliah and the rest of the Judahite and Babylonian administration who were there for the dinner. It illustrates how banquets are dangerous occasions (e.g., Gen 21; Esth 1; Dan 5; Judith 12 – 13). It also adds further to the rationale for the action by Ishmael and his co-conspirators: excuse me, Gedaliah was appointed by the Babylonians, and his household is full of Babylonian military and Judahite collaborators! The *all* is a hyperbole; there were evidently Judahites at Mizpah who were not at the dinner (see v. 10). Second Kings 25:25-26 has a much briefer equivalent to vv. 1-3 and then summarizes the rest of the story in Jeremiah.

**4-5** *The second day* will mean the next day, so no one yet knows what happened late the previous night when other people had gone to bed. People arrive from Ephraim, not from any old Ephraimite towns but from the place where Israel confirmed the covenant back in Moses’ day, the place where the covenant chest had been, and the town that had been Ephraim’s long-time capital and now gave the province its name.[[130]](#footnote-130) In other circumstances, their arrival would be a further sign of the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s promises (see 31:2-22), as well as of the continuing effectiveness of Josiah’s reformation (2 Kgs 23:19-20). The fulfillment would be noteworthy, even miraculous, even though the sad state of the temple would moderation any rejoicing over it. The pilgrims embody both encouragement and the grimness. In this Sukkot season they bring grain offerings and frankincense to offer. Is there a sanctuary at Mizpah where they will make their offerings? We know of none.[[131]](#footnote-131) Rather, they are on their way to the temple in Jerusalem. The account in Ezra 1 of returning Judahites initiating the restoration of the temple indicates both that its devastation terminated the regular round of sacrifice and that devastation does not mean destruction, as if the walls have been pulled down. Some form of prayer and offering could continue – as Lamentations may also presuppose. The devastation does mean that the pilgrims come bearing the marks of grief, which also suggests that they are coming to Yahweh in an attitude of penitence (cf. Zech 7:5; 8:19); the seventh month also includes the Day of Atonement. They are turning to Yahweh, not just in their hearts, but in their appearance and with their offerings and their pilgrimage. Trimming one’s beard or trimming one’s hair and gashing oneself are generally forbidden, especially to priests, in Lev 21:1-5; Deut 14:1, but Jer 16:6 is not against gashing in principle, and the rules in the Torah likely relate to these being practices associated with praying to other gods. The story does not imply disapproval of the pilgrims in this connection.

**6-9** Their turning to Yahweh contrasts with the further enormity of Ishmael’s conscience-less meeting that pretends to identify with their grief and then kills them. Did he hope to frame them for the massacre and kill them on that basis?[[132]](#footnote-132) Or was their execution another aspect of his commitment as a Judahite and a Davidide? Or did he want to appropriate the stores and offerings they were carrying? For some of them, their turning gets compromised – though one could hardly blame them for their way of evading death. Maybe the further supplies were hidden on the way, or maybe the surviving pilgrims refer to more extensive stores laid by for the coming winter back in places like Shiloh, only a day’s journey away. The Judahite murderer throws the corpses of the Ephraimites who wanted to worship in Jerusalem into a cistern dug by a Judahite king who was faithful to Yahweh and needed to resist an Ephraimite king who was not (1 Kgs 15).

**10-14** IsIshmael’s strategy to lead a resistance movement in exile from east of the Jordan? With some irony, people who had escaped being taken captive into exile by Nebuchadrezzar now find themselves taken captive into exile by a prince of their own. The irony might be especially apparent to the king’s daughters, an interesting feature in the story’s cast; presumably they are not just Zedekiah’s daughters; one might think of them more broadly as “the women of the court.”[[133]](#footnote-133) Apparently Johanan and the other army officers did not live in The Watchtower – Gedaliah had bidden them to settle in the towns that they were able to occupy because the inhabitants had gone (40:10). But news reaches them before Ishmael can get far. On either theory of The Watchtower’s location,[[134]](#footnote-134) Gibeon, on the mountain ridge before one descends down into the Jordan Valley to get to Ammon, is only a couple of hours away. Whatever Ishmael’s rationale for being at that location, his caravan seems still to be preparing for the journey ahead, by the well-known pool at Gibeon – another ironic reference (see 2 Sam 2). While a Mizpah at Tell en-Nasbeh is more obviously on the route for travelers from Ephraim to Jerusalem, it is not the obvious way to flee from Tell en-Nasbeh to Ammon. But the narrative may not be very interested in the geographical location of The Watchtower or in Ishmael’s reasons for taking the route he took; it is more interested in that ironic link with 2 Sam 2.

**15** From there, Ishmael makes his escape. Relentlessly and point by point the story has built up a portrait of him as a villain without principle, boundary, or shame. He became the agent of the king of one of Israel’s traditional foes, he took part in a plot to murder a fellow-Judahite who had been appointed by the imperial authority that Yahweh had placed over Judah, he ignored the likely implications for the surviving Judahite community, he joined in a celebratory meal with Gedaliah as if they were friends and brothers, he struck him down along with other fellow-Judahites and Babylonians, he presented himself in the guise of someone grieving over such an event and inveigled some pilgrims into unwittingly surrendering their lives to him, he let some of the pilgrims escape with their lives because he could get some stores from them, he filled with his victims’ corpses a cistern dug for very different reasons, and he attempted to take off as his captives the Judahites who had escaped his sword. The story does not seek to understand him or understand his motives or suggest how he lived with himself; “surely there are few more murky villains in the Hebrew Bible.”[[135]](#footnote-135) Ishmael is just a villain. Furthermore, it might seem that “Ishmael has effectively killed off any positive future in the homeland,”[[136]](#footnote-136) so that Judahites hearing the story in Babylon could later say to themselves, “Aha, the future belongs to us, not to those people that Jeremiah called the bad figs.” Yet the story does not make that point[[137]](#footnote-137) and it is a more wide-ranging, suggestive, and far-reaching narrative than merely a tale designed to support one group by putting another group down.[[138]](#footnote-138)

**16** As the story has built up its portrait of the villainous Ishmael, it has also built up point upon point a portrait of Johanan as its hero,[[139]](#footnote-139) though also without suggesting an understanding of the man; and this portrait deconstructs over the next chapter or two. But Johanan is so far a man of insight and worth and honor, who has sought to get Gedaliah to safeguard his own position, has shown that he cares about the future of the community and not just about Gedaliah (41:15),[[140]](#footnote-140) has been prepared to take preemptive action in order to save Gedaliah and the community, is then prepared to take ex post facto action when Gedaliah forbade the preemptive action, and has won the rejoicing, welcome, and commitment of Ismael’s captives. But after his successful rescue mission, what on earth is he to do now to see to the future of the Judahite community?

**17-18** Is there some illogic about his fears of the Babylonians when he has taken action against the perpetrator of the killing of the Babylonians’ appointee and their military?[[141]](#footnote-141) Yet Gedaliah had been the one to “stand before” the Babylonians on their behalf; they have lost their representative with the Babylonians.[[142]](#footnote-142) One can hardly blame Johanan for guessing that the Babylonians may not be too discriminating in their reprisals against anybody who looks like Judahite leadership. His immediate action is to move the company’s base from Mizpah where the Babylonians will know where to find them to somewhere obscure where they may not. By the time of the fall of Jerusalem, Judah had likely lost control of the Negeb (cf. 13:19) to the Edomites, who are now at the “zenith” of their power[[143]](#footnote-143) (hence the promises in Obadiah as well as Jer 49). So Bethlehem is effectively Judah’s southern boundary, and *Chimham’s Field*, only a ten-mile journey from Gibeon,would make as safe a place to take refuge as could be found. The location would be *on the way to coming to Egypt*, and fleeing to Egypt would take the company in the only direction that was outside Babylonian imperial control,[[144]](#footnote-144) though v. 17 need not imply that the company was yet set on making that move. For the immediate future, it has simply *stayed* in the Bethlehem area. But will that refuge do if the Babylonians start looking for them? Can they assume the right to stay in Chimham’s Field?[[145]](#footnote-145)

# Yahweh’s Direction Given and Rejected (42:1 – 43:13 [LXX 49:1 – 50:13])

The end of Jer 41 has hinted where the story will go from here, but the process whereby people now make their next move is convoluted as well as tragic After Ishmael’s acts of assassination and massacre, the company led by Johanan has taken refuge as far south within Judah as it could go, in the direction of Egypt, but there is nothing fixed about a move there. Once again the community faces a decision.[[146]](#footnote-146) The unit outlines as follows:

42:1-6 The Judahites ask for direction

42:7-18 Yahweh gives them direction, promises, and warnings

42:19-22 Yahweh gives them a rebuke

43:1-3 The Judahites reject the message

43:4-13 They move to Egypt

There are again many detailed differences between MT and LXX, usually involving MT being more wordy. Maybe sometimes MT has introduced more wordiness into an earlier version, sometimes LXX has deliberately reduced wordiness or omitted phrases by accident.

## The Judahites Ask for Direction (42:1-6)

1All the officers in the forces, witha Johanan ben Kareahb and Jezaniahc ben Hoshaiah,d and the entire company, small and big, came up 2and said to Jeremiah the prophet, “Please, may our prayer for grace fall before you: plead on our behalf with Yahweh your God on behalf of this entire remainder, because we remain as a little thing from being much (as your eyes see us), 3so that Yahweh your God may tell us the path that we should go on and the thing that we should do.” 4Jeremiah the prophet said to them, “I have listened. Here am I, I am going to plead with Yahweh your Gode in accordance with your words. Every word that Yahweh answers you, I will tell you – I will not withhold anything from you.” 5So those people – they said to Jeremiah, “May Yahweh be against us a true and trustworthy witness, if in accordance with everything that Yahweh your God sends you for us, so we do not act. 6Whether it is good or dire, to the voice of Yahweh our God to whom wef are sending you, we will listen, in order that things may be good for us, because we listen to the voice of Yahweh our God.”g

Explicative *waw*.

LXX lacks *ben Kareah* (so also in v. 8).

LXX implies Azariah as in 43:2, where MT implies that Azariah is Jezaniah’s brother.

This Jezaniah is thus a different person from Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite in 40:8; we noted in the comment there that Jezaniah/Jaazaniah is a common name. LXX implies Maaseiah (whom it also has in 43:2); cf. 21:1; 29:21, 25; 35:4; 37:3, and elsewhere – it seems also to be a common name, sometimes with spelling variation. Perhaps there were three names in an earlier version of this text and these have become “telescoped” in MT (Allen, *Jeremiah*, 427; cf. *CTAT* 2:746-47).

LXX has “our God” (*NETS* has “your God”), a suggestive difference, though it loses something of the “vigor of the exchange” (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 130).

K *’ănû* is a Postbiblical Hebrew equivalent to the regular *’ănaḥnû* (Q) (BDB, 59a).

MT has a marker here.

In the trickiness of their situation, with the prospect of reprisals from the Babylonians, the company know what they must do; they must ask for Yahweh’s instructions. The unit thus unfolds:

vv. 1-3 The company ask Jeremiah to inquire of Yahweh for them

v. 4 Jeremiah agrees

vv. 5-6 They promise to do whatever Yahweh says

**1** The rescue of the captives had solved one problem and the company has found somewhere to stay for a while, but it has to ask the question what it should do in the medium and longer term. So the entire company (!) *came up* to Jeremiah. Presumably he was among the people whom Ishmael took captive, whom Johanan rescued, and who moved on to the Bethlehem area. Etymologically, *came up* (*nāgaš*) denotes drawing near: the verb suggests approaching someone or something when there is reason not to take for granted the right to do so. Its one preceding occurrence in Jeremiah (30:21) expresses the point vividly. It carries some irony, given where the story is going to lead, suggesting a deference to Jeremiah that will not be forthcoming. It is only the first such irony in vv. 1-6. But “the leadership of the community… seems to have run out of options,” and “after 587 as before 587 Jeremiah is consulted when the community knows nowhere else to turn,” though in both contexts it doesn’t like his response.[[147]](#footnote-147)

**2-3** The company’s approach to Jeremiah with a petition to *plead on our behalf to Yahweh your God* thus takes up the appeal that Zedekiah made in 37:3 – though at least he said “our God” – which did not issue in taking any notice of the message that then came from Yahweh. “Behind the narrative of the simple request lie many innuendoes,”[[148]](#footnote-148) one of which is that “intercession is wasted on people who promise to obey Yahweh’s word and then end up not obeying it.”[[149]](#footnote-149) Repeating the familiar noun *remainder* and the related verb *remain*, Johanan and company add the expression *a little thing* (*mә‘at*), which indicates a contrasts with the *much* (*harbēh*)that Judah once was. Deut 28:62-63 had warned people that this diminution could happen, using the same words. It’s not obvious that the speakers have made the link with that threat, but the audience might be expected to make it. And the verbal link helps explain the hyperbole. The audience will recognize that *this entire remainder* which will go off to Egypt does not comprise everyone still residing in Judah as a whole.[[150]](#footnote-150) The exile in 587 did not empty the land, and neither will the departure of the present group; Nebuchadrezzar will exile more in a couple of years (52:29-30). Anyway, the company needs to ask, what is the *path* we should now go on? They are not asking about the best route to Egypt. Their question presupposes that they don’t know what to do next, but they will know that going to Egypt is one option.

**4-6** Jeremiah responds in the way they would hope, and the company makes a commitment of the kind it should. Is Jeremiah now free to pray for them?[[151]](#footnote-151) Unfortunately, it’s often the case that the record of a commitment of this kind is but preliminary to an account of how people fail to keep their word (e.g., Exod 24: 3-7). The people’s reference to Yahweh’s witness (!) will turn out to be ironic: see v. 19.

## Yahweh Gives Them Direction, Promises, and Warnings (42:7-18)

7Then, at the end of ten days, Yahweh’s word came to Jeremiah. 8So he called to Johanan ben Kareah and to all the officers in the forces who were with him, and to the entire company, small and big, 9and said to them, Yahweh the God of Israel to whom you sent me to let your prayer for grace fall before him,a has said this.

10If you againb stay in this country, then I will build you up and not smash, I will plant you and not pull up, because I have relented over the dire thing that I did to you. 11Don’t be afraid before the king of Babylon, before whom you are afraid – don’t be afraid of him (Yahweh’s affirmation), because I am with you to deliver you and to rescue you from his hand. 12I will give you compassion, and he will have compassionc on you and will let you go backd to your land.

13But if you’re going to say “We will not stay in this country,” in order not to listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, 14saying “No,e because to the country of Egypt we will come, wheref we will not see battle, and the sound of the horn we will not hear, and for food we will not be hungry, and we will stay there,” 15so now therefore listen to Yahweh’s word, remainder of Judah. Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel,g has said this. If you actually seth your faces towards coming to Egypt and you come to reside there, 16then it will happen: the sword that you are afraid of – it will there overtake you in the country of Egypt, and the hunger that you are anxious about – it will there stick after you in Egypt, and there you will die. 17And theni all the peoplej who have set their faces to come to Egypt to reside there will die by sword, by hunger, and by epidemic.k They will have no one surviving orl escaping before the dire thing that I am going to let come upon them.m 18Because Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israeln has said this. As my anger ando my fury poured on the people who lived in Jerusalem, so my wrath will pour on you when you come to Egypt. You will become an oath, a desolation, a form of slighting and an object of reviling, and you will not again see this place.

LXX lacks *Yahweh the God of Israel to whom you sent me to let your prayer for grace fall before him*.

For MT *šôb*, LXX, Vg imply *yāšôb*, “if you do [stay]” (infinitive preceding the finite verb, underlining the point); the double use of the same verb is what one would more usually expect.

For *wәriḥam* LXX, Vg imply *wәriḥamtî* “I will have compassion.”

For MT *wәhēšîb* LXX implies *wahăšibōtî* “I will let you go back” as in 23:3; 29:14; Aq, Vg imply *wәhōšabtî* “and I will let you live.”

LXX lacks *saying No*.

For *’ăšer* meaning “where,” see BDB, 82b; cf. Vg.

LXX lacks *remainder of Judah* and *of Armies the God of Israel*.

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the point.

Plural *wәyihyû* is assimilated to the plural subject (DG 72 remark 2; GK 112y).

LXX also has “and all the resident aliens,” implying *zārîm*, perhaps derived from *zēdîm* in 43:2 (Duhm, *Jeremia*, 323) – though *HUB* notes that LXX does not have *zēdîm* there.

LXX lacks *and by epidemic* here and in v. 22.

LXX lacks *surviving or*.

L has a section marker here.

LXX lacks *of Armies the God of Israel*.

1. LXX lacks *my anger and*.

The account of Yahweh’s response to their request for direction outlines:

vv. 7-8 Yahweh gives Jeremiah a message, and Jeremiah summons them to hear it.

vv. 9-18 The message

v. 9 introduction

vv. 10-12 if they stay in Judah, Yahweh will build them up and protect them

vv. 13-14 but if they decide to go to Egypt…

v. 15abα resumptive introduction

vv. 15bβ-17 … they will die

v. 18aα resumptive introduction

v. 18aβb wrath will fall on them as it did before

**7-9** The story again shows how a prophet may have to wait to discover what Yahweh has to say (cf. 28:12). It is a striking necessity given that the basic message when it comes might seem predictable and mostly expresses itself in quite predictable terms.[[152]](#footnote-152) But a promise of deliverance with an encouragement not to be afraid is a common response to somebody’s prayer[[153]](#footnote-153) (and the kind of message a false prophet might bring), which could make a prophet especially concerned to listen carefully in a meeting of the cabinet (23:18) to what Yahweh had to say.[[154]](#footnote-154) And maybe it would be good for the people to be kept on tenterhooks, too, and not take responses for granted.[[155]](#footnote-155)

**10** The message puts some if-then alternatives before the company, a short version of the kind of if-then alternatives that appear in Deut 28. As there, first there is a positive one, which thus also compares with the way Jesus talks to his disciples: “if you forgive people their offences, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matt 6:14).[[156]](#footnote-156) Whereas Jeremiah had once told people *not* to stay where they are if they want to have a future (38:2), now he tells the remaining Judahites to *stay* where they are, if they want to have a future. But like the earlier bidding, it challenges people to do the thing that looks implausible. As with the earlier bidding, Jeremiah attaches implausible divine undertakings to it. Here they pick up some standard yet therefore important promises. In 1:10 the verbs came with a double stress on the negative: there were twice as many negative verbs, and they all came first and threatened to drown out the positive verbs, as was not inappropriate in that setting. Here the stress is on the positive. All six verbs also came in 31:28 in a more positive context. But the recurrence of the four verbs from 24:6 in the version we have here is especially noteworthy. It indicates that they apply not only to people who were taken off to Babylon as the “good figs” but also to these people who would seem to count among the “dire figs.” To the statement about building and planting, Yahweh adds an even more striking declaration, *I have relented over the dire thing that I did to you*, the destroying of Jerusalem. Relenting (*nāḥam* niphal) could have various implications. It could mean regretting an action and therefore refraining from taking it if one could have the time over again. It could mean being consoled or comforted by virtue of having taken the redress that needed taking.[[157]](#footnote-157) It could suggest regretting what happened because Nebuchadrezzar’s tough action was excessive – though Yahweh speaks of what he did not of what Nebuchadrezzar did.[[158]](#footnote-158) It could suggest regretting the necessity to do it – but it was a necessity. The context here suggests that the point lies in Yahweh’s intention not to act that way again.[[159]](#footnote-159) Arguably the key characteristic of relenting is that one gives up one form of action to take on another[[160]](#footnote-160) – usually by giving up action that brings trouble and thus showing mercy. Relenting is “the language of possibility and renewal.”[[161]](#footnote-161) Yahweh is affirming that he will not have the Judahite community suffer more. He is committed to its future. But the company need to listen on to vv. 13-18, where they will discover that Yahweh is not unconditionally turning his back on doing something *dire*. They would be unwise to assume that he has unequivocally relented as opposed to declaring that he will relent if they stay.

**11-12** Yahweh’s intention renders unnecessary the understandable fear to which 41:18 referred. The fear’s seriousness is underlined by the three references to it. Yahweh again picks up familiar promises, *to deliver you and to rescue you from his hand*, applying to the company undertakings that started off as promises to Jeremiah (15:20). *I will give you compassion* is less of a stock expression (but see 33:26), and just as exciting in its own right. The promise *he will have compassion on you* is revolutionary. Jeremiah has otherwise spoken in such terms in the negative (6:23; 21:7). It is now another way of indicating that Yahweh has relented. Yahweh can make the empire the agent of compassion.[[162]](#footnote-162) It was a favor for which Solomon asked in his prayer for the exiles at the temple dedication (1 Kgs 8:50); once again, such favors apply not just to exiles (as they do in that prayer) but to people who stay in Judah. People who have had to take refuge in Chimham’s Field will not have to stay there forever; Nebuchadrezzar will make it possible for them to return to their own stretch of land.

**13-16 “**This all *seems* so simple.”[[163]](#footnote-163)But there is the alternative possibility, expressed as a negative if-then, which also corresponds to the way Jesus talks; “if you do not forgive people, neither will your Father forgive your offences” (Matt 6:15). Like Moses in Deut 28, Jeremiah accompanies the promises with correlative warnings, which take more space. In effect he sets two paths before them as he did before Zedekiah, the path to life and the path to death (21:8; cf. Deut 30:19). But he makes the point in his own way; they are partly distinctive to this passage, partly corresponding to earlier passages in the scroll. The if-clause is actually a double one, which relates to the possibility that was flagged 41:17. Yahweh can imagine that people don’t want to *see battle* and or *hear the sound of the horn* announcing the approach of an attacking army (4:19, 21). They don’t want any more of the correlative experience of being *hungry*, to whichJeremiah has often referred (e.g., 5:12; 14:12-18). Actually, ignoring Yahweh’s message will mean experiencing exactly the perils of which Jeremiah has often spoken: sword and hunger will follow the people. In the terms of metonymy, the sword will *overtake* them as the Babylonian army overtook Zedekiah (39:5) and hunger will *stick after* them like a pursuing army (e.g., Judg 20:42, 45), as Deut 28:21, 60 warned of illness and epidemic sticking to them. Deut 17:16 had declared that they were never to go back to Egypt, and Jeremiah has hinted at lots of reasons (2:6, 18, 36; 9:26 [25]; 24:8; 25:19; 26:21-23).[[164]](#footnote-164)

**17-18** To fit even more closely with Jeremiah’s regular warnings, the people will *die by sword, by hunger, and by epidemic*. No one will survive or escape the further *dire thing* that will follow the dire thing that Yahweh relents of (v. 10). It is a “stinging” judgment.[[165]](#footnote-165) Wrathful anger will pour out again (cf. 7:20; 21:5; 32:31, 37; 33:5). They will again become *an oath, a desolation, a form of slighting and an object of reviling* (cf. 29:18; 24:9). If they turn their backs on Judah, Yahweh will ratify their action.

## Yahweh Gives Them a Rebuke (42:19-22)

19Yahweh has spokena against you, remainder of Judah – do not come to Egypt – acknowledge definitivelyb that I am bearing witnessc against you todayd 20that you deceived, at the cost of your lives,e when you yourselves sent me to Yahweh your God,f saying “Plead on our behalf with Yahweh our God, and in accordance with everything that Yahweh our God says, so tell us and we will act.” 21I have told you todayg and you haven’t listened to the voice of Yahweh your God, even concerning anything with which he sent me to you. 22So now, you should acknowledge definitively that by sword, by hunger, and by epidemici you will dieh in the place where you want to come to reside.i

Tg, Vg, Th imply *dәbar* “[Yahweh’s] word” for MT *dibber*.

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the point; cf. also v. 22.

The qatal is declarative/performative, a speech act (see 1:5 and the note).

LXX lacks *that I am bearing witness against you today*.

The hiphil of *tā‘â* ought to be transitive, but who are the company deceiving – Jeremiah? Yahweh? Perhaps we should see the verb as “Inwardly transitive” (cf. GK 53def; *DCH* 8:657-58). Vg has the people deceiving themselves, which in a sense they were, but the preposition on *bәnapšôtêkem* makes that understanding of the construction unlikely. LXX has “in yourselves” is a bit insipid. For “at the cost of” or “against,” cf. 2 Sam 23:17; 1 Kgs 2:23.

LXX lacks *to Yahweh your God*, and *our God* later in the verse.

LXX lacks *I have told you today*, and *your God even concerning anything* later in the verse.

LXX simply has “so now by sword and by hunger you will die.”

MT has a section marker here.

After Jeremiah’s passing on the message about direction for the future, there is a jump to these verses in which he testifies to the company, upbraids them, and challenges them. One would have thought that something has to happen between Jeremiah’s passing on the message and his critiquing the company for ignoring it. That oddity puts the scroll’s audience on the track of seeing that at this point the sequence in Jer 42 – 43 may be dramatic rather than chronological. To put it another way, vv. 19-22 raise the question, how did Jeremiah know they had rejected his message? In due course 43:1-3 will tell us the answer.

**19-22** So Jeremiah’s rebuke presupposes that the company have given a negative response to his message which will be given concrete expression in its setting out for Egypt. He speaks as someone who stands in court *bearing witness against* the company. They had summoned Yahweh as a witness in v. 5; Yahweh makes Yahweh a witness against them.[[166]](#footnote-166) He stands in the gathering of Yahweh and his aides where he is supposed to speak on behalf of Yahweh’s people, but now has to give a report that works against them. They had asked him to pray and to inquire, but their action shows they never really intended to take any notice. Maybe they didn’t know it; human beings are complicated creatures. The threats he has issued will therefore be fulfilled. *You have deceived* (him? Yahweh? themselves?) and you have done so *at the cost of your lives*, because it’s going to mean that *by sword, by hunger, and by epidemic you will die in the place where you want to come to reside*. Two chapters remain in the story in Jer 37 – 44 but Jeremiah’s message in vv. 19-22 “essentially seals the fate of the survivors from Judah.”[[167]](#footnote-167)

## The Judahites Reject the Message (43:1-3)

1Then, when Jeremiah had finished speaking to the entire company all the words of Yahweh their Goda with which Yahweh their God had sent him to them, all these words,b 2Azariah ben Hoshiah said, with Johanan ben Kareah and all the arrogantc people saying to Jeremiah, “It’s lies that you are speakingd – Yahweh our God did not send you to say “You will not come to Egypt to reside there.” 3Because Baruch ben Neraiah is inciting you against us in order to give us into the hand of the Chaldeans, to put us to death or to take us into exile in Babylon.”

LXX lacks *their God* here and again later in the verse.

MT’s section marker here implies reading v. 1 as a self-contained sentence: “It happened when Jeremiah finished... all these words.

LXX lacks *arrogant*.

1. LXX lacks *that you are speaking*.

**1-2** If this account of the company’s response provides the background to 42:19-22, then *all the words* refers to the message in 42:7-18. Either way, maybe it’s significant that someone other than hero Johanan takes the lead in rejecting Jeremiah’s message. But he does evidently tag along, as do a collection of *arrogant* people. The word (*zēd*) impliesbeing willful or presumptuous. It’s not a common word; nearly half its occurrences come in Ps 119, where it denotes “an attitude that is not compatible with submission to God’s word” and also “carries with it a propensity for slander,” both of which implications fit the occurrence here.[[168]](#footnote-168) Further, there are two suggestive occurrences of the verb “act arrogantly,” in connection with the Israelites wanting to go back to Egypt (!) when they are disturbed by the report of their spies (Neh 9:16-17), and with their then going up into Judah to attempt to take the country when Yahweh has told them not to (Deut 1:43). The people here accuse Jeremiah of telling lies (*šeqer*), which is their implicit critique of Moses in that context. With some irony it is also explicitly Jeremiah’s favorite insult, and in addition it was his recent response to Irijah, and Gedaliah’s response to Johanan (37:14; 40:16). Each time, the word suggests no mere ordinary untruth but something deceptive and false that carries deep peril. The point is underscored by the declaration *Yahweh did not send you*. There is no more fundamental claim that Jeremiah makes than that Yahweh sent him (e.g., 1:7; 25:4; 26:5, 12, 15; 29:19) and no more fundamental critique that he makes of other prophets (e.g., 23:21, 32; 27:15; 28:15; 29:9). The company are categorizing Jeremiah as a prophet like Hananiah.

**3** Explaining Jeremiah’s prophecies in terms of his secretary’s influence rather than Yahweh’s sending is further a class one insult. It is the first we know about Baruch being part of the company. The accusation now carries irony because for more than a century scholars have attributed to Baruch a key creative role in the generation of the Jeremiah scroll, despite the fact that the only role the scroll attributes to him is looking after a document and taking Jeremiah’s dictation (Jer 32; 36; 45).[[169]](#footnote-169) Nor does the scroll give any indication that Baruch (or Jeremiah) supports the Judahite community in Babylon as opposed to the community in Judah or in Egypt, or that the narrative wants us to understand him that way.[[170]](#footnote-170) The desperate accusation does go on to underline the depth of the community’s realistic anxiety. If the Babylonians identified it with the assassination of the Babylonian administrator, then the two possibilities open up before the community, either death or transportation, that people have so far managed one way or another to avoid in the way that many Judahites have not.

## They Move to Egypt (43:4-13)

4So Johanan ben Kareah,a with all the officers in the forces and the entire company, did not listen to the voice of Yahweh, by staying in the country of Judah. 5Johanan ben Kareah and all the officers in the forces got the entire remainder of Judah who had come back from all the countries whereb they had scattered, to reside in the country of Judah,c 6men, women, and little ones, and the king’s daughters, and every individual that Nebuzaradan the chief of the guardsd had left with Gedaliah ben Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch ben Neraiah. 7And they came to the country of Egypt, because they did not listen to Yahweh’s voice; they came to Tahpanhes.e

8Then the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes. 9Get big stones in your hand and bury them in mortarf in the brickworkg that’s at the entrance to Pharaoh’s house in Tahpanhes before the eyes of Judahite people. 10You will say to them, Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israelh has said this. Here am I sending and getting Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon, my servant,i and I will setj his throne upon these stones that I have buried.k He will extend his scepterl over them. 11He will come and strike down the country of Egypt:

People who are for death, to death,

people who are for captivity, to captivity,

people who are for sword, to sword.

12I will setm fire to the houses of the gods of Egypt;n he will consume them and take them captive. He will graspo the country of Egypt as a shepherd grasps his coat, and go out from there with things being well. 13He will break up the columns of the sun house which is in the country of Egypt,p and the houses of the gods of Egyptq he will consume in fire.r

LXX lacks *ben Karaeh* here and in the next verse.

LXX lacks *from all the countries where*.

LXX lacks *of Judah*.

LXX lacks *the chief of the guards*.

MT has a section marker here.

For MT’s hapax *bammeleṭ* Aq, Th, Vg may imply *ballāṭ* “in secret/under cover,” though covering/frame/casing is the meaning of *malṭēṭ* itself in postbiblical Hebrew (*DTT*, 789).

*Malbēn* is also a hapax in whatever is its precise meaning here (in its one other occurrence in 2 Sam 12:31 it relates to brick manufacture). LXX lacks *in mortar in the brickwork that’s*.

LXX lacks *of Armies, the God of Israel*.

LXX lacks *my servant*.

LXX implies *wәśām* “and he will set.”

LXX implies *ṭāmāntā* “you have buried.”

I understand the hapax *šaprîr* (K *šaprûr*) in light of Akkadian *šippiru* (see *HALOT*, *DCH*). Tg has “palace” or “armory,” LXX “weapons,” Vg another word for “throne.” These translations seem to be guessing from the context and/or from the word’s similarity to the root *šāpar*, which suggests splendor.

LXX, Vg imply *wәhiṣṣîl* “He will set.”

LXX has “of their gods.”

Vg, Tg have “wrap on/cover oneself” on the assumption that the verb is BDB’s *‘āṭâ* I. LXX “delouse” here and later in the verse apparently assumes *‘āṭâ* II and presupposes that specifically he is grabbing at lice: see *DCH*, ande.g., J. A. Emerton, “Lice or a Veil in the Song of Songs 1.7,” in A. G. Auld (ed.), *Understanding Poets and Prophets* (G. W. Anderson Festschrift; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 127-40. This understanding seems more “ingenious” than plausible (J. van Doorslaer, “Sicut amicitur pastor pallio suo…,” *CBQ* 13 [1951]: 314-25 [319]).

For *which is in the country of Egypt* LXX has “in Heliopolis.”

LXX has “and their houses.”

1. MT has a marker here.

The account of how the company comes to Egypt comprises two elements:

vv. 4-7 The move to Tahpanhes

vv. 8-13 A message from Yahweh for the people at Tahpanhes

v. 8 Introduction

vv. 9-13 The message

v. 9 An instruction: get some stones and embed them

v. 10aα A resumptive introduction

vv. 10aβb-13 A declaration of intent relating to the stones:

v. 10aβb Nebuchadrezzar will come

vv. 11-13 He will strike down Egypt

v. 11 He will strike down the people

v. 12a He will destroy its temples

v. 12b He will grasp the country

v. 13 He will destroy its temples

**4-6** Whatever Johanan’s degree of initiative in connection with the rejection of Jeremiah’s message, he retains responsibility for the company’s leadership. The story then emphasizes the significance of the company that he led, not so much in connection with its size but in connection with its comprehensiveness: *all the officers, the entire company, the entire remainder, from all the countries, men, women, and little ones, king’s daughters*, and in case we have forgotten anyone, *every individual* – plus Jeremiah and Baruch. It is ironic that the people who had scattered are described as having returned in order to *reside* (*gûr*)as temporary residents (cf. 42:15, 17, 22; 43:2); one imagines they thought they were returning to stay (*yāšab*), to live permanently in Judah (cf. 42:10, 13, 14). While the narrative does emphasize the company’s comprehensiveness, it need not imply that all Judahites had returned to Judah from their scattering nor that all Judahites who had returned had been put under Gedaliah’s charge by Nebuzaradan.[[171]](#footnote-171) It’s talking about everyone who had returned and who had been among the ones under Gedaliah’s oversight. The mention of Jeremiah and Baruch raises questions on both sides. Why did they take them? Did they compel them? Why would they? Would the two of them have preferred not to go? (“Jeremiah went knowing that this would not have God’s blessing”).[[172]](#footnote-172) Perhaps the story simply assumes that both sides would assume that this community just is a community. Whatever the community does or whatever happens to it, Jeremiah and Baruch are part of it and part of its destiny. And one can perceive God’s merciful providence at work in their taking Jeremiah: it meant that through Jeremiah God kept offering mercy to them even through reproaching them with their rebelliousness.[[173]](#footnote-173)

**7** Tahpanhes (see 2:16) was near Egypt’s northeastern border, a kind of twin for Bethlehem on Judah’s southern border with a two hundred-mile journey in between. It would be a natural place for the Judahites to stop with a sense of safety at the end of their trek.

**8-9** Yahweh commissions from Jeremiah one last symbolic act (that we know of). Like some other such acts, this sign is to have witnesses. But as with some other such acts, the scroll does not recount how Jeremiah did as he was told. And as with some other such acts, the narrative’s point is to convey something to the people listening to this story, as they imagine the scene. Would they be wondering what the Egyptians would have thought? Did the palace have no guards?[[174]](#footnote-174) Maybe it was not occupied at the time.[[175]](#footnote-175) It would not be Pharaoh’s only palace, and “palace” may be a misleading expression. It was more like a government building or frontier fortress, though also an official residence for Pharaoh when he was visiting. There was a similar building at the other end of Egypt, on the southern border, at Elephantine, and in interpreting texts from there A. E. Cowley suggests that “government house” is a more appropriate way to think of it.[[176]](#footnote-176) But anyway, maybe the enacted parable was enacted in a parabolic way, like Ezekiel’s equivalent acts.[[177]](#footnote-177) *Bury* (*ṭāman*) often suggests hiding something (cf. 18:22); it recurred in connection with the symbolic act when Jeremiah had to hide some shorts (13:4, 5, 6, 7), and the idea here is likely similar. The stones are not being buried so as to be kept from view but deposited somewhere secure and out of sight until the time comes for them to be brought out into the open. They are a kind of guarantee that Nebuchadrezzar will come and set his throne here. This building on the Egyptian border symbolized Egyptian power and the security it could give to a crowd of Judahite refugees, but Nebuchadrezzar’s arrival will put Egyptian power in its place and terminate the security that seemed to come from taking refuge there.[[178]](#footnote-178)

**10-11** The act is a sign that anticipates Yahweh’s fulfilling an intention he has formulated. Back in 25:9 and 27:6 he spoke of sending (for) and getting kin-groups from the north, and specifically *Nebuchadrezzar* *King of Babylon, my servant*, to exercise authority and bring catastrophe upon Judah and upon other nations. Nebuchadrezzar is unwittingly Yahweh’s agent in doing so. It’s the first reference to his being Yahweh’s servant since 25:9 and 27:6; he has the same role as there. First, he is going to exercise authority. Then he is going to being calamity. Johanan and company think they have evaded such further catastrophe by moving to Egypt, but they have not done so. Yahweh will act in the same way again, setting up thrones again before a conquered people (cf. 1:15). Jeremiah goes on to express that point by reformulating phrases from 15:2:

15:2 43:11

people who are for death, to death people who are for death, to death

people who are sword, to sword people who are for captivity, to captivity

people who are for hunger, to hunger people who are for sword, to sword

people who are for captivity, to captivity

One way or another, there is no escape. People will be a little like someone fleeing from a lion and being met by a bear (Amos 5:19).[[179]](#footnote-179)

**12** In the way Yahweh speaks in vv. 11-12, he moves in a disorienting fashion between referring to what he himself will do and what Nebuchadrezzar will do, and LXX sometimes has “he” or “you” when MT has “I.” The switching and variation may reflect text-critical issues and/or difference between the two editions of the scroll. It may reflect the way a prophet moves easily between talking of Yahweh as “I” or as “he.”[[180]](#footnote-180) It also points to two sets of theological assumptions and convictions, both of which have something to be said for them. What happens issues from Yahweh and his decisions; it also issues from (e.g.) Nebuchadrezzar and his decisions. Yahweh’s decisions are implemented through Nebuchadrezzar. The link between the two emerges in another way in the juxtaposed references to Yahweh showing compassion and Nebuchadrezzar showing compassion (42:12). In the present text, “the alternatives have arisen, in part, because of the convergence of human and divine agency that is at the heart of this story. The politics of the nations is the politics of God; the divine sovereignty is manifest over and through human sovereigns.”[[181]](#footnote-181)

**13** The final verse of the chapter completes a second sequence in the portrayal of calamity in vv. 11-13:

v. 11 country and people v. 12a religious institutions

v. 12b country and people v. 13 religious institutions

If one assumes some continuity between these verses, Yahweh could be referring to further structures in Tahpanhes.[[182]](#footnote-182) Columns or obelisks are a key feature of Egyptian religious architecture, and one would expect there to be examples at Tahpanhes, where the sun god Re would be worshiped. But LXX plausibly assume that the expression *sun house* refers to Heliopolis, Sun City, on the Nile a hundred miles to the southwest, on the northeastern side of modern Cairo. A broadening of horizon here at the end of Jer 43 would fit the further broadening of horizon in 44:1. Either way, the expression *which is in the country of Egypt* distinguishes this sun house from Beth Shemesh in Judah. Heliopolis, then, takes its name from being the sanctuary of the sun god, though its local name was “The Pillars.” There is still a seventy-foot high obelisk there, which had been there for over a thousand years by Jeremiah’s day (two other obelisks from there were taken to London and New York where each is known as Cleopatra’s Needle). While vv. 11-13 talk about catastrophe coming on Egypt, in the context the point about the proclamation is its significance for Judahites who have been so foolish as to take refuge there. The lines are a working out of 42:16-18. Yahweh is giving expression to his inclination to snatch away from his people the things in which they trust more than they should, so that they learn to put all hope and trust in him. The Judahites thought they could escape from the Babylonians by going to Egypt, but Yahweh warned them that the Egyptians were going to be caught by the same calamities. “There is no sufficiently secure defense against impending calamities, apart from true repentance.”[[183]](#footnote-183) As usual, Jeremiah’s declaration saw a form of fulfillment, but not one that exactly or fully corresponded to the picture he gave. In the 37th year of his reign (568/567) Nebuchadrezzar invaded Egypt and engaged with Pharaoh Amasis,[[184]](#footnote-184) though according to what seems to be the Egyptian version of events Amasis won a crucial battle against the “Asiatics.”[[185]](#footnote-185) It was a raid not an occupation,[[186]](#footnote-186) which fits the prophecy. In a more radical way Sun House ”was demolished, destroyed, and stopped when the Lord Christ was incarnated and came to this world.”[[187]](#footnote-187)

# A Final Confrontation, Exhortation, and Warning (44:1-30 [LXX 51:1-30])

“Jeremiah 44 comes at the very nadir of Judaean political fortunes, with the last gasp of life in Judah squeezed out by the assassination of Gedaliah and the subsequent flight from the anticipated

Babylonian reprisals. Now in Egypt, the fugitive community receives an oracle of judgment from Jeremiah.”[[188]](#footnote-188) And in this final message, the horizon broadens as Jeremiah addresses the entire Judahite community in Egypt, spread over a much broader area than merely Tanpanhes; indeed, the focus lies on Upper Egypt, the far south. The chapter offers no indication of how much later the message came in relation to the arrival of Johanan’s group in Tahpanhes. Jer 24:8 referred to the presence of other Judahites in Egypt before Jeremiah’s arrival, and we know from the Elephantine Papyri about a Judahite community in Upper Egypt a couple of centuries later.[[189]](#footnote-189) But the background to and chronology of such Judahite presence in Egypt is a matter of guesswork. What is definite is that “Egypt is portrayed as a place of despair for Israel” in Jer 37 – 44."[[190]](#footnote-190)

The main body of the message twice follows a threefold sequence similar to the outline structure of Jer 2 – 6, which comprised confrontation in terms of what has been happening, exhortation to change, and warning of the calamity that will otherwise follow. Over against Jer 2 – 6, this chapter is distinctive for incorporating a response by the community in between the threefold formulations, and then a closing sign. The chapter thus outlines

vv. 1 the curator’s introduction

vv. 2-6 confrontation: Jeremiah rehearses the story of the Judahite community’s unfaithfulness and the price it paid

vv. 7-10 exhortation (*so now*): Jeremiah urges people therefore to stop being unfaithful in the same way

vv. 11-14 warning (*therefore*): Jeremiah threatens people with disaster

vv. 15-19 the men and the women of Pathros retort that they did better when they were serving the Queen of the Heavens, so they are not going to stop

vv. 20-23 confrontation: Jeremiah repeats his rehearsing of the story

vv. 24-25 exhortation: Jeremiah sarcastically urges people to carry on being unfaithful

vv. 26-28 warning (*therefore*): Jeremiah reformulates his threat of disaster

vv. 29-30 Jeremiah promises a sign that Yahweh will be taking action

While one can conceive of Yahweh giving Jeremiah a message addressed (at least rhetorically) to the entire Judahite community in Egypt, it seems implausible that Jeremiah made the journey of several weeks to have a meeting with the Pathros community as described in this chapter or that they came to Tahpanhes to meet him. More likely Yahweh later inspired one of the curators of Jeremiah’s work to compose this imaginative account that expresses Yahweh’s challenge to the Pathros community and to the Judahite community in Egypt in general, conveying what a “difficult and hopeless task” Jeremiah had in Egypt.[[191]](#footnote-191) The report’s including no account of Jeremiah delivering the message in vv. 2-14 fits with its being an imaginative and rhetorical account. The chapter thus forms a first coda to Jer 37 – 43; Jer 45 will form a second coda. In the context of the Jeremiah scroll as a whole, the two chapters pair with Jer 1: as the curators composed that opening chapter to introduce Jeremiah’s work, so they composed Jer 44 – 45 to close it, and Jer 44 sums up Yahweh’s critique of Judah over the decades as well as critiquing the Pathros community.

The chapter is repetitive in MT’s version, which is not an indication that it has been expanded.[[192]](#footnote-192) Some writers repeat themselves, saying the same thing twice in slightly different words, or even in the same words – the same words. “It may be that by shortening the text… we shall arrive at a slimmer and better narrative” but the disparity between different scholars’ attempts at shortening raises questions about whether a slimmer version would be a more original one;[[193]](#footnote-193) it might be “better” only in matching expectations that come from a different cultural context. LXX’s text is as usual shorter, perhaps because of being based on a shorter version and/or because of deliberately cutting down some of the wordiness and/or because of accidental omission; in the notes, as usual I draw attention to many of the points where LXX is shorter, though by no means to all of them.

1The word that came to Jeremiah regarding all the Judahites who were living in the country of Egypt, living in Migdol, in Tanpanhes, in Memphis,a and in the country of Pathros.b

2Yahweh of Armies,c the God of Israel, has said this. You yourselves have seen the dire thing that I let come on Jerusalem and on all the towns of Judah. There they are, a ruin this day, and there is no one living in them, 3in the face of the dire thing that people did to irk me by going to burn offeringsd so as to servee other gods that they had not acknowledged – they and you and your ancestors. 4I sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending assiduously,f saying “Please do not do this offensive thing that I repudiate.”g 5But they didn’t listen, they didn’t bend their ear, so as to turn from their dire action, in order not to burn offerings to other gods. 6So my wrath, my anger, poured and blazed against the towns of Judah and against the streets of Jerusalem, and they have become a ruin, a desolation, this very day.h

7So now Yahweh, the God of Armies, the God of Israel,i has said this. Why are you doing such a dire thing to yourselves, to cut off for yourselves man and woman, child and baby, from within Judah, in order not to leave yourselves a remainder,j 8by irking me with the actions of your hands by burning offerings to other gods in the country of Egypt where you are coming to reside, in order to cut it off for yourselves and in order to become a form of slighting and an object of reviling among all the nations on earth? 9Have you put out of mind the dire actions of your ancestors, the dire actions of the kings of Judah, the dire actions of its wives,k your own dire actions,l and the dire actions of your wives, which they took in the country of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? 10They have not been crushedm until this day and they have not been in awe.n They have not walked by my instruction oro by my decrees that I put before you and before your ancestors.p

11Therefore Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel,q has said this. Here am I, setting my face against you in respect of something dire, to cut off all Judah. 12I will get the remainder of Judah who set their faces to come to the country of Egypt to reside there, and they will entirely come to an end in the country of Egypt – they will fall by the sword, and by hunger they will come to an end – little and big, by sword and famine they will die. They will become an oath, a desolation, a form of slighting, and an object of reviling.r 13I will attend to the people who live in the country of Egypt as I attended to Jerusalem by sword, by hunger, and by epidemic. 14There will not be one who escapes or survives of the remainder of Judah, the people who have come to reside there in the country of Egypt but to turn back to the country of Judah, people who are lifting ups their spirits to turn back to livet there, because they will not turn back, except people who escape.u

15All the men who knew that their wives were burning offerings to other gods, and all the women who were standing by, a big assembly, and the entire company that were living in the country of Egypt in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, 16The word that you have spoken to us in Yahweh’s name: we are not listening to you. 17Because we will definitely act onv every word that has gone out from our mouth, in burning offerings to the Queenw of the Heavens and pouring libations to her, as we did, we ourselves, our ancestors, our kings, and our officials, in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and we were full of food, we were doing well, and nothing dire did we see. 18But since the time we stopped burning offerings to the Queen of the Heavens and pouring libations to her,x we have lacked everything, and by sword and by hunger we have come to an end. 19And when we are burning offerings to the Queen of the Heavens and pouring libations to her,y it’s not apart from our husbands that we have made loaves to image herz and to pour libations to her, is it.aa

20Jeremiah said to the entire company, against the men, against the women, and against the entire company who were answering him with a word: 21The incense that you burned in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you, your ancestors, your kings, your officials, and the people of the country: of them Yahweh has been mindful and he has brought them to mind, hasn’t he. 22And Yahweh couldbb no longer carry it in the face of the direness of your practices, in the face of the offensive things that you did. So your country became a ruin, a desolation, and a form of slighting, without anyone living therecc this very day. 23In the face of the fact that you burned offerings and that you did wrong in relation to Yahweh and did not listen to Yahweh’s voice, and by his instruction and by his decrees and by his declarations you did not walk: that’s why this dire thing has befallen you this very day.dd

24Jeremiah said to the entire company and to all the women: Listen to Yahweh’s word, all Judah that is in the country of Egypt.ee 25Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, has said this. You and your wives,ff you have both spoken with your mouths and with your hands you have fulfilled it: “We will definitely act on our promises that we have made to burn offerings to the Queen of the Heavens and to pour libations to her.” You may definitely implement your promises, you may definitely act on your promises.gg

26Therefore listen to Yahweh’s word, all Judah who are living in the country of Egypt. Here am I, I am swearinghh by my great name (Yahweh has said): If my name is any more proclaimed in the mouth of any individual in Judah, saying “The Lord Yahweh is alive,”ii in the entire country of Egypt….jj 27Here am I, watching over them in respect of something dire and not of something good. Every individual from Judah who is in the country of Egypt will come to an end by sword and by famine until they are finished off. 28The people who survive the sword – they will return from the country of Egypt to the country of Judah, few in number. But the entire remainder of Judah who are coming to the country of Egypt to reside there will acknowledge whose word gets implemented, mine or theirs.kk

29This will be the sign for you (Yahweh’s affirmation)ll that I am going to attend to you in this place, in order that you may acknowledge that my words against you will definitely get implemented,mm in respect of something dire.nn 30Yahweh has said this. Here am I, I am giving Pharaohoo Hophra King of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, into the hand of the people who are seeking his life, as I gave Zedekiah King of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon his enemy, the one seeking his life.pp

LXX lacks *in Memphis*.

L has a section marker here.

LXX lacks *of Armies* and *this day* later in the verse.

See the note and comment on 1:16.

LXX lacks *so as to serve*, later in the verse implies *yәda‘tem* “you had not acknowledged” for MT *yәdā‘ûm*, and lacks *they and you and your ancestors.*

See the note and comment on 7:13.

See the note on 12:8.

On *this very day* (which recurs in vv. 22 and 23), see the comment on 11:5a. MT has a section marker here.

LXX lacks *the God of Israel*.

See the 6:9 and the comment.

Elsewhere *nāšāyw* denotes “his wives,” but there is no antecedent for “his”; rather Judah is the antecedent. Aq implies *śārāyw* “its officials” (Allen, *Jeremiah*, 443;cf. 8:1),LXX *śārêkem* “your officials,” assimilating to vv. 17, 21.

LXX lacks *your own dire actions*.

Th understands *dākā’* pual metaphorically, “made contrite”: see the comment. LXX, Tg have “they have not stopped [their dire behavior],” which is perhaps a loose translation. Vg, Aq, Sym “been cleansed” link the verb with the Aramaic equivalent of Hebrew *zākâ*.

LXX lacks *and they have not been in awe*.

LXX lacks *by my instruction or*.

MT has a section marker here.

LXX lacks *of Armies, the God of Israel*.

LXX has a particularly shorter version of vv. 11-12.

Tg nicely has “deceive themselves,” implying a form of *nâšā’* (cf. 37:9) rather than *nāśā’*.

LXX lacks *to live*.

MT has a marker here.

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the point – three times more in v. 25 and in v. 29.

On the word’s form, see the note on 7:18.

LXX lacks *and pouring libations to her*.

The finite verb continues the participial construction.

LXX lacks *to image her*.

MT has a marker here.

Yiqtol *yûkal* implies an ongoing inability (Volz, *Jeremia*, 367, comparing GK 107b) rather than indicating that the line containsa waw-consecutive whose *waw* is separated from its verb (Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 262; see *TTH* 85).

LXX lacks *without anyone living there*.

LXX lacks *this very day*. MT has a section marker here.

LXX lacks *all Judah that is in the country of Egypt*. L has a section marker here.

For MT *’attem ûnәšêkem* LXX implies *’attēnâ hannāšîm* “you wives,” which better fits the feminine verbs that follow.

MT has a marker here.

The qatal verb is declarative/performative, a speech act (see 1:5 and the note); and on Yahweh’s swearing, see the comment on 22:5.

See the note and comment on 4:2.

On the if-clause, see the note on 15:11. M. Leuchter suggests a link between Jeremiah’s declaration and the clash between different groups who all saw themselves as Jewish in Ezra (“The Exegesis of Jeremiah in and beyond Ezra 9 – 10,” *VT* 65 [2015]: 62-80).

LXX lacks *mine or theirs*.

LXX lacks *(Yahweh’s affirmation*).

LXX lacks *in this place… implemented*.

MT has a marker here.

LXX lacks *Pharaoh*.

MT has a section marker here.

**1** So Yahweh has a message for *all the Judahites in Egypt*, not simply the people in Tanpanhes with whom Jeremiah came, who were the immediate focus in the previous chapter. Migdol was a name of some significance for Judahites because of its connection with the exodus (Exod 14:2; Num 33:7), though there may have been more than one Migdol. The word’s etymology suggests it was a tower or fortified place (cf. 2 Sam 22:51 and the more common *migdāl*, e.g., Jer 31:38); the word was apparently adopted into Egyptian usage from a Semitic background. But the mention in the exodus story suggests a place in northeast Egypt, and in Ezek 29:10; 30:6 Migdol stands for the far north of Egypt. It was thus not far from Tahpanhes, but even nearer the Egyptian border.[[194]](#footnote-194) Migdol to Syene is the Egyptian equivalent of Dan to Beersheba, and places are here listed from northeast to south. Memphis[[195]](#footnote-195) had once been Egypt’s capital and it remained an important city whose location in Lower Egypt gave it importance when Egypt was subject to invasion by Assyria, Babylon, or Persia. Migdol, Memphis, and Tanpanhes will recur together in 46:14. Pathros complements Memphis, as a name for Upper Egypt (hence the expression *the country* or region *of Pathros*; the name comes from an Egyptian term meaning southland.[[196]](#footnote-196) So Migdol/Tahpanhes suggests the far north/northeast, Memphis suggests Lower Egypt, and Pathros suggests Upper Egypt. The message indeed addresses Judahites in the entire country.

**2-6** Whereas some Egyptian Judahites had experienced the fall of Jerusalem but others had taken refuge in Egypt earlier, they have all in some sense *seen* it. They all know about it. And broadly, they have all been involved in the kind of religious commitment that generated the calamity, even if they escaped before the ax fell. Jeremiah’s confrontation takes up and summarizes his confrontation of people throughout the scroll, not least way back at the beginning, where he threatened “dire trouble” to come on them (see 1:16).[[197]](#footnote-197) The arraignment also recalls Huldah’s indictment in 1 Kgs 22:16-17.[[198]](#footnote-198) The section works chiastically:

v. 2 Yahweh brought dire trouble, ruin, to Jerusalem and Judah

v. 3 it issued from Judah’s dire action

v. 4 Yahweh sent prophets to obviate this development

v. 5 but they didn’t turn from their dire action

v. 6 Yahweh brought ruin to Jerusalem and Judah

Thus “the prophets are not a threat against Israel. not a negative force, but are God’s gracious gift through which repentance and forgiveness might occur.”[[199]](#footnote-199) Yet how odd that the Judahites took the truculent Jeremiah with them; what trouble they brought on themselves by doing so! “They undermine their own plans of muting and skirting the voice of God.” But in Jeremiah “Yahweh follows the people to Egypt and is not about to cave in to their prodigal stance.”[[200]](#footnote-200) *The towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem* omits reference to Yahweh’s house: the chapter will later make explicit that it is attacking religious observances that characterize family and personal spirituality rather than the temple. Although Jeremiah has occasionally referred to wrongs within the society, the focus of the scroll’s concern thus continues to be the community’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh rather than people’s unfaithfulness to one another. It’s said that inequality increases during peace time and reduces during war and other such crises (though Jer 34 may testify to an exception). Maybe there is less mutual faithlessness to critique in the aftermath of 587. Conversely, catastrophe and loss may test people’s commitment to God and issue in their turning in other directions from the conviction they professed when times were easier – as the Job story presupposes.

**7-10** While confrontation continues, it merges into exhortation. He repeats much of the sequence of vv. 2-6, now as present reality and danger: a dire thing (v. 7), irking Yahweh by burning offerings (v. 8), refusing to take any notice of Yahweh (vv. 9-10). The implicit exhortation is dominated by rhetorical questions that express bewilderment and invite people to look at themselves from outside so that they see the inexplicable nature of their actions. A *why* question runs through vv. 7aβ-8 and then a simply incredulous *have you* question runs through v. 9. They reuse familiar Jeremianic formulations but introduce some innovative notes. The danger of their dire behavior is to *cut off* *for yourselves* (*karat* hiphil) the entire family of Judah, including people of both sexes and the children on whom the future depends. You will thus not *leave yourselves* a remainder. The dire behavior consists in continuing to burn offerings to other gods in the same way as they did in Judah in the years that led up to the catastrophe. Will they never learn? *Slighting* and *reviling* tellingly takes up the warning in 24:8-9, which included reference to people who would go to Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem, and the double reference to wives trailers critique that will be developed in vv. 24-28. To say that people *have not been crushed* is surprising, as actually they obviously have been, but evidently not enough, or they haven’t recognized the fact. “The remnant has learned nothing from their national crushing at the hands of the Babylonians.”[[201]](#footnote-201) They haven’t internalized it. It’s the only First Testament passage where the verb (*dākā’/dākâ*) clearly suggests something happening to people’s attitudes, which issues in awe and thus in responsiveness.

**11-14** The warning again recycles previous warnings, but updates them with the contextual threat that Judahites in Egypt will not be able to return to Judah when they want to. The entire community is going to be terminated in Egypt. They ought not to have set their faces to go there; Yahweh will set his face against them so that they will not be able to go back when they *are lifting up their spirits to turn back to live there* (cf. 42:17). In that connection a further parallel with Jer 2 – 6 appears: warnings of total destruction get qualified (cf. 4:27; 5:10, 18). *There will not be one who escapes or survives* is unequivocal. But Jeremiah adds *except people who escape*. Is this phrase a later addition, to take the edge off the talk of total annihilation? What understanding of the resultant text as a whole was in the mind of the person who added the phrase? The jolting clash between the opening of the verse and its closing still stands. Maybe that jolting is the point, whether the phrase is original or is a later addition. The opening declaration is designed to have a traumatic effect on the audience; the closing phrase can minister to people who have been appropriately traumatized by the declaration. It opens up the possibility of hope to people who respond in the appropriate way to Jeremiah’s warning. As usual, the point about declaring inevitable calamity is to forestall it.[[202]](#footnote-202)

**15-18** Whether or not Jeremiah had ever been to Migdol or Memphis, the scroll here portrays him as being far away from Tahpanhes in the south, in Pathros. The reference to a big assembly of people living in Pathros makes it more likely that the chapter portrays the meeting happening there than that it portrays a company from there coming all the way to Tahpanhes. The Pathros community respond forthrightly in declining to accept Jeremiah’s confrontation (they don’t see the history the way he does), his exhortation (they don’t intend to change), or his warning (which doesn’t match their experience in the past). Their religious stance identifies with that described in 7:16-20[[203]](#footnote-203) and coheres with our knowledge of the later Elephantine community whose location could count as Pathros, which was not very orthodox by the standards of the Torah. Whereas the group who brought Jeremiah with them at least went through the motions of acknowledging Jeremiah and being open to Yahweh’s message to them (42:1-6), the Pathrosites do not. Life had worked out well for them until they changed their religious practice, and they intend to continue with it. Perhaps Josiah’s reformation would have stopped offerings to the Queen of the Heavens after 622, but 609 and the following years saw a series of reversals and problems, and if this sequence of developments is the background, some plausibility attaches to their analysis,[[204]](#footnote-204) to which a twenty-first century gender-based reading may also be sympathetic.[[205]](#footnote-205) The disagreement between women and prophet illustrates how “using experiences and ‘facts’ to explain ideological positions” doesn’t work. One’s “prevenient theology” is what makes it possible to interpret an event such as what happened in 587: people could share the same experience but disagree about its meaning.[[206]](#footnote-206) Jeremiah’s approach to discerning the difference between prophets (23:9-40) made a parallel assumption: his theology and ethic underlay his evaluation of the other prophets.

**19** Although the passage refers to the same religious commitment as 7:16-20, its angle on that commitment is different. There it was described as a family observance, here the women speak of it as especially theirs.[[207]](#footnote-207) They do associate their husbands with it. The necessity to do so coheres with the requirements about vows in Num 30: the male head of the household was responsible for its financial viability, so women could not make commitments that had economic implications without their husbands’ agreement.[[208]](#footnote-208) Whereas Jeremiah thinks there is a problem about adding gods to their religious service; they think the problem is subtraction.[[209]](#footnote-209) Perhaps they worshiped Yahweh and saw no clash with also worshiping his consort.[[210]](#footnote-210) Or perhaps their not mentioning Yahweh means they have eliminated him from their religious world, so that Yahweh will answer in kind, “essentially disowning the community.”[[211]](#footnote-211)

**20-23** In response, Jeremiah reaffirms his message with its three elements. In keeping with the nature of parallelism, the second version takes the first further at each point. In his confrontation, he adds that Yahweh *could not longer carry* the people’s wrongdoing. He could no longer bear it. He is able to carry people’s wrongdoing for a long time and not make them pay the price for it, but there comes a time when he is going to much against his own moral nature. *C*arry (*nāśā*’) is the First Testament’s regular word for “forgive” (that is, “forgive” in English translations usually represents that Hebrew word). This passage is the only time the Jeremiah scroll uses the verb *carry* in this connection: it prefers the word often translated “pardon” (*sālaḥ*; 5:1, 7; 31:34; 33:8; 36:3; 50:20).[[212]](#footnote-212) The implication is that Yahweh had been continually forgiving Judah, continually carrying its wrongdoing and not making Judah carry responsibility for it and therefore not bringing calamity upon it. He had been turning a blind eye to it. But there had come a time when he said “That’s it.”

**24-25** The distinctive note in the exhortation is the irony or sarcasm with which it closes. The community had done as it said it would, and it may continue to do so. *You may definitely implement your promises, you may definitely act on your promises*. Yahweh takes up the biting sarcasm of 7:21, following on his critique of people making offerings to the Queen of the Heavens in that context, and gives expression to it in a new way.[[213]](#footnote-213)

**26-27** The third element in the pattern is the warning. The declaration that no one will take Yahweh’s name on their lips in making an oath follows in two ways from what has preceded. To put it sardonically, they won’t do so because they won’t be doing anything; they will have been consumed by sword, panic, and epidemic. But their not taking Yahweh’s name on their lips is also a devastating description of their loss of identity. More specifically (in a way that follows directly from what preceded), they won’t be taking Yahweh’s name on their lips in making solemn promises. It is an expression of poetic justice in light of earlier references to promises in the name of the Queen of the Heavens and offerings to the Queen of the Heavens (vv. 17, 25). They have chosen the name to put on their lips in connection with their promises; Yahweh confirms it. The warning further takes up Yahweh’s talk of watchfulness, which will revert again from being good news (see 31:28) to being bad news. Yahweh has described himself as collecting the Judahites “from all the countries where I have driven them” (32:37). He has specifically spoken in these terms to the 597 exiles in Babylon (29:14). Does the waywardness of the Egyptian community exclude it from this promise? Is that waywardness such that “annuls any such hope”?[[214]](#footnote-214)

**28** But once again the declaration of total annihilation is compromised by an unexpected qualification (*the people who survive the sword – they will return from the country of Egypt to the country of Judah, few in number*). Likewise, whereas v. 14 declared that there would be no remainder, here *the entire remainder of Judah who are coming to the country of Egypt to reside there will acknowledge whose word gets implemented, mine or theirs*. They cannot do that acknowledging if they have simply been annihilated. Clashes within these verses put us on the track of the need not to be literalistic or wooden in understanding the text. The prophecy’s author was not stupid, and neither was the audience (well, except that they were theologically and morally stupid). The author was engaged in persuasion, which worked by setting possible scenarios before the audience – the audience for whom Jer 44 was composed as well as the audience within the scene it describes.

**29** The promise of a sign is another respect in which vv. 20-30 go beyond vv. 2-14. And it implies a more explicit recognition that the debate between Jeremiah and his audience (or the chapter’s author and its audience) cannot be resolved by appeal to empirical experience. As well as depending on a theology and an ethic, Jeremiah’s argument depends on a hope Yahweh gives people – not in the subjective sense of hopefulness but in the objective sense of something that is going to happen (one might say it is subject to eschatological verification). It depends on a promise that coheres with the theology and the ethic and forms an aspect of the total perspective within which Yahweh wants people to live. At the end of Jeremiah’s final message directly addressed to Judah, for the first time Yahweh promises the Judahites a sign. It is a sign like the one he gave Moses (Exod 3:12) not the ones he gave the Israelites and the Egyptians (e.g., Exod 4:8-9, 17, 28, 30): that is, there is nothing to see now, but a statement about the future that will be fulfilled. It is the combination of word and event that constitutes the sign. As with that sign for Moses, only afterwards will it be empirically clear that Yahweh is now doing something. And as with the Exodus signs, the sign’s object is the acknowledgment of Yahweh that will or should follow when the declaration has been implemented. The promise of a sign is another indication that one should not be literalistic in interpreting the prophecy’s declarations about the entire community being annihilated, because the promise presupposes there will be Judahites in Egypt to see the sign.

**30** The sign is the equivalent of the death knell for Hananiah in 28:16.[[215]](#footnote-215) As was the case there, Jeremiah could not prove his interpretation was correct; it does depend on later verification. Perhaps the lack of any note concerning the sign’s implementing, which contrasts with the Hananiah story, indicates that (far from being a prophecy given after the event)[[216]](#footnote-216) this chapter derives from before the implementing. The declaration concerns the destiny of Pharaoh Hophra, the king of Egypt (the Greek version of the name was Apries), who reigned from about 589 to 570. In a way, it picks up the one in 43:10-13, though without making a link with an invasion by Nebuchadrezzar (on which see further 46:13-24). Indeed the comparison with Zedekiah’s fate implicitly excludes such a link. Herodotus (2:169) and Diodorus Siculus (1:68) relate the death of Hophra, who was father-in-law of Amasis.[[217]](#footnote-217) They give different accounts of his end, but both relate how he met his death at the hands of Amasis’s agents.

# A Footnote Message for Baruch (45:1-5 [LXX 51:31-35])

A message for Baruch forms a second coda to the narrative in Jer 37 – 43. It has several points of connection with what has preceded.

* The date in v. 1 makes a link with Jer 36. Whereas one would not have been surprised if a message for Baruch had appeared in association with that chapter, like Jer 36 it appears in an odd chronological place, following material relating to later events.
* Located here, however, vv. 2-3 suggests a link with the nearer narrative at 43:3. Baruch had to hide when he associated himself with Jeremiah the first time; now he is being blamed for Jeremiah’s message!
* Located here, likewise, v. 4 makes a link with the message about building up, tearing down, planting, and pulling up in 42:10, which led into that accusation against him, as well as with 1:10 and other passages that use this language.
* Further, located here, v. 5 suggests a link with 39:15-18, where Yahweh gave Jeremiah a message for his other supporter Ebed-melech, to whom he also spoke of the dire fate coming on Judah and to whom he promised that he will keep his life as spoil.
* The last phrase in v. 5, referring to places where Baruch might have to go, is now illumined by the fact that he is in Egypt. Yahweh has kept his word for twenty years, so far.

Once more there is no account of Jeremiah’s delivering the message, which is again included in the scroll not merely as a personal word for Baruch but as a message with something to say to the audience. Like Jeremiah’s recounting of his protests to Yahweh (his “confessions”), this account of the message that speaks to Baruch’s anguish testifies to the price that secretary as well as messenger pay for doing their work, and thus to their listeners treatment of them and of the message they bring from God. And it indirectly draws attention in a new way to the nature of the message that disturbs Baruch, and should have disturbed the audience.[[218]](#footnote-218) Reading on into Jer 46 – 51 will indicate that it also looks forward to what follows – like Jer 25 and Jer 36, it is both an end and a beginning. It faces both ways.

1The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch ben Neraiah when he wrote these words on a document from Jeremiah’s dictation in the fourth year of Jehoiakim ben Josiah King of Judah.a

2Yahweh the God of Israel has said this to you, Baruch. 3You have said,

Oh, please, me,

because Yahweh has added suffering to my pain.b

I am weary with my groaning;

relief I have not found.c

4You are to say this to him.d Yahweh has said this.

Here, what I built up, I am smashing,

and what I planted, I am pulling up (that is, the entire country).e

5So whereas you for yourself,f you seekg big things – don’t seek them, because here am I, letting something dire come upon all flesh (Yahweh’s affirmation). But I am giving you your life as loot in all the places that you go to.h

L has a section marker here.

Vg translates “added suffering to my suffering,” which gives the right impression: see the comment.

The 2-2 line thus takes abb’a’ form. For *relief* (*mәnûḥâ*)Tg has “prophecy,” which presupposes the idea of Yahweh’s spirit resting (*nûaḥ*) on people so that they prophesy (Num 11:25-26) and implies that Baruch’s complaint concerns not being able to be a prophet (cf. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage).

Yahweh is now addressing Jeremiah, whereas in v. 3 he spoke as if addressing Baruch, but even there he was actually doing so by telling Jeremiah the message to give Baruch; one should not make heavy weather of the “convoluted nature of the exchange” (Keown, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 272).

LXX lacks *(that is, the entire country)*. Tg adds “of Israel”: see the comment.

“You seek big things for yourself” would give a misleading impression (cf. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 450; JM 133d); see the comment.

GK 150a, JM 161a take as a question.

1. MT has a marker here.

**1** What are *these words*? In light of the date that follows, they cannot be the preceding words in Jer 44. And in light of the big gap since Jer 36, they can hardly be the words that Baruch took down that year whose story came in Jer 36. The answer to the question will emerge only in 46:1-2.[[219]](#footnote-219) The verse again presupposes the quite humble (though vital) role that Baruch fulfilled: it does not suggests that he or scribes like him were the kind of people who generated the content of a prophetic scroll.[[220]](#footnote-220)

**2-3** What v. 2 calls something that *Yahweh the God of Israel has said* begins by quoting Baruch’s own words. The dynamic parallels 14:1-12, though here Yahweh’s making explicit that he is quoting Baruch makes it not quite as dramatic. But it does raise a little suspense, as we await Yahweh’s actual message.[[221]](#footnote-221) The protest attributed to Baruch comprises two psalm-like lines, like Jeremiah’s protests in Jer 11 – 20. One should therefore not be literalistic about the language. But while psalmic language often speaks in three directions, in terms of I (the protester), you (Yahweh), and he/they (human attackers), Baruch speaks only of I and he (Yahweh). Psalms can also include reference to Yahweh in the third person, but one wonders whether this protest which compares with (e.g.) Isa 40:27 is a little worrying in not addressing Yahweh at all. Baruch’s point about *suffering* and *pain* is not that he first felt pain and then felt suffering; his innovative form of expression is a kind of hendiadys suggesting that Yahweh has been piling suffering and pain onto him.[[222]](#footnote-222) While we have heard about Baruch being in danger (Jer 36) and subject to denunciation (Jer 43), his extravagant language suggests he is not simply talking about his own pain but praying as Jeremiah does, out of his people’s anguish and/or on the basis of his identification with them. In the 604 context (see Jer 25; 36), he would be anticipatorily grieving about the suffering that is coming to them. In the context of the prayer’s placement in the scroll, he would be grieving about the suffering they have now experienced, and also about the further suffering of which Jer 44 has spoken.

**4** As was the case with Jeremiah’s protests, Yahweh’s response indicates that a protest prayer cannot assume a positive response. Indeed, as was the case with Jeremiah’s protests, Yahweh’s response takes a form that is quite complex in content.[[223]](#footnote-223) It neither simply sympathizes nor simply negates but presses Baruch to look at matters within a different framework, and it does so in a way that twists and turns. Actually Baruch gets three responses. The first is to say, “Tough.” Baruch is right about Yahweh’s intentions. Only here does Jeremiah have Yahweh refer to his past building and planting, to be replaced by tearing down and pulling up, as opposed to promising or implying that there is building and planting to come. In addition, Yahweh adds the solemn footnote referring to *the entire country*.

**5** The second response makes things worse: Yahweh forbids Baruch from praying, as he more than once forbade Jeremiah. Don’t ask Yahweh to do *big things*. *Seek* (*biqqēš*) suggest prayer (e.g., Ezra 8:21), like “inquire after” (*dāraš*: notably, 29:7). The context suggests praying for big things not for himself in some way (what would they be?) but for Judah, big things such that Yahweh earlier promised (33:3; cf. Pss 71:19; 106:21). There are no great promises of restoration in Part Four of the Jeremiah scroll, like the ones in Part Three.[[224]](#footnote-224) It’s not going to happen. *Something dire* is what is going to happen. But then comes the point where Yahweh’s word becomes typically oblique. Usually he speaks of something dire for Judah, but he can speak of dire things coming upon other peoples (e.g., 25:32), and here the calamity is to come *upon all flesh*, which need not simply imply Judah. It even makes one reconsider that expression *the entire country* (*kol hā’āreṣ*), which could mean “the entire world.”[[225]](#footnote-225) In isolation one might not think too much about that broader understanding of the phases in vv. 4 and 5, but the next verse (46:1) and what it introduces could make think further. What will now follow will add to the significance of locating Jer 45 at this point and of locating the messages about other nations here and not following Jer 25, where they appear in LXX. So the double possibility raised by vv. 4 and 5 is both of more trouble for Judah (which fits the time since 604 and fits Jer 44) and of trouble for the nations that have brought trouble to her (which Jer 46 – 51 will go on to declare). In the meantime, however, and thirdly, Baruch does get an unequivocal promise for himself, something by way of the positive answer to a protest for which people hope when they dare to pray. At least, don’t worry about your own fate, says Yahweh. He will make sure that Baruch is safe, as he more than once said in different terms to Jeremiah (1:19; 15:20-21). Yahweh’s promise compares more precisely with his undertaking to Ebed-melech, which he kept; to Baruch he had added *in all the places that you go to*, and Baruch is doing okay in Egypt.[[226]](#footnote-226) As usual, a promise about *loot* should not be undervalued, as if it were a small thing. For soldiers, loot is a big thing.[[227]](#footnote-227)

# Part Five: Messages about Other Peoples (46:1 – 51:64 [LXX 26:1 – 31:44])

# Introduction (46:1 [LXX 26:1])

1What came as Yahweh’s worda to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations.

On the jerky form of words, see the note on 14:1.

Many Western readers might prefer the prophetic scrolls without the prophecies about God bringing disaster to other nations, but Jer 46 – 51 especially reflects Jeremiah’s fulfillment of his commission to be a prophet regarding the nations. His words to Hananiah would make an appropriate epigraph to the chapters: *the prophets who were before me and before you from of old: they prophesied regarding many countries and concerning big kingdoms, about battle and about dire fortune and about epidemic* (28:8). There are several aspects to the logic of their being present and several questions to which the messages about other nations might be the answer. Historically they are integral to prophecy in Israel’s world, where a major function of prophecy was to assure a people and its monarch that their god is going to protect them, give them victory, and put down their enemies. Such prophecies may be the oldest prophetic material that there is.[[228]](#footnote-228) While the structure of the Jeremiah scroll may present “the judgment of Judah as a paradigm for the rest of the nations,”[[229]](#footnote-229) the history of prophecy that lies behind the presence of these messages in the various prophetic scrolls may mean that the prophecies about Israel apply to it a way of thinking and speaking that had its origin in a way of thinking and speaking about the nations, not the opposite. It fits that a number of verses, lines, and phrases recur between the messages about different peoples within Jer 46 – 51 and between Jeremiah and other prophetic scrolls; different prophets perhaps used a shared store of such messages in articulating what Yahweh had to say about them. Related to this phenomenon, little in the descriptions of the different nations’ destinies and faults applies distinctively to particular peoples or appears in distinctive forms in different prophets.

Given the nature of prophecy among other peoples, then, one would expect a prophet to have things to say about other nations, and it wouldn’t be surprising if Yahweh wanted Israel to be aware that he was involved in their affairs and not just in Israel’s, even when their lives did not impact on Israel’s. He was not just Israel’s local God. Whereas Christians may be content not to think about their God being involved in the results of (say) the two World Wars, the Korean War, the Algerian War, the India-Pakistan war, the Vietnam War, the Falklands War, and the Iraq War, the First Testament suggests that Yahweh wanted Israel to think about such events. There are many ways of understanding wars. They may (for instance) be a people’s way of seeking independence, of extending power, of gaining wealth, of resisting an aggressor, or of resolving disputes over territory. They may seem just to be meaningless. Prophecies concerning the nations declare that in some cases, at least, there was a supernatural aspect or significance to them.

In what context might Jeremiah have delivered messages such as the ones in Jer 46 – 51? There is an unusual concentration of the dating of messages in Jer 46 – 51 (46:2; 47:1; 49:34; 51:59),[[230]](#footnote-230) which suggests that they belong in concrete historical and political contexts. An indication within the scroll is the visit of the envoys from countries such as Ammon, Moab, and Edom in the context of a possible rebellion against Babylon (Jer 27). One can imagine a prophet like Hananiah or Jeremiah uttering a message in a political setting in the narrow sense (that is, a meeting of kings and their staffs) or in the temple courts in an attempt to influence public opinion. The subsequent involvement of these peoples in attacking and conquering Jerusalem would provide another natural context for a prophet to have something to say about Yahweh’s intentions concerning them.

Jer 27 does not suggest that Jeremiah’s message is designed to suggest good news for Judah, and Jer 46 – 49 gives little indication that its messages are somehow good news for Judah, though Jer 50 – 51 is different. Some concern distant peoples that do not impinge on Judah (49:23-39), and these messages give no reason for the calamity that is coming on their subjects, which raises the question whether “prophecies of judgment” is at all the right way to describe the messages about other nations. Like the messages about other peoples in Amos, the messages in Jer 46 – 51 include virtually no indications that the nations are being punished for what they have done to Israel. This motif does appear in the message about Ammon and at one or two points in the gargantuan message about Babylon, but not at all in the messages about Egypt, Moab, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, and Elam. The focus throughout is much more on the fact of calamity rather than the reasons. The point about the chapters thus compares and contrasts with the argument of Rom 1 – 3. There, Paul’s argument is that the gentile world is wayward, so is the Jewish people, and thus both deserve judgment. Here, the background of the argument is that Israel is wayward and deserves judgment, and these chapters move from Israel to the world. The combination is thus the same but the order is the reverse. Here, the focus lies on the fact of judgment rather than the reasons, whereas Romans pays as much attention to the reasons as to the judgment.

Whereas the same calamity comes on these peoples as comes on Judah, Jeremiah emphasizes the justification of Yahweh’s action against Judah, but says little about the justification of Yahweh’s acts against the other nations: “the use of accusation and indictment” is “extremely laconic.”[[231]](#footnote-231)

* Redress 46:10; 50:15, 28; 51:6, 11, 36.
* Trust in defensive resources 48:7, 29; 49:4, 16
* Expansionist ambitions 46:8
* Vindication of Yahweh as the only real God. 48:7
* Shame
* Yahweh is sovereign in the entire world of nations.
* little reference to wrath or anger (49:37; 51:45)
* promises of restoration rule out chauvinism
* they come as the last word: this restoration not judgment is God’s last word[[232]](#footnote-232)

Indeed, this lack further highlights how the really guilty party in Jeremiah is the people of Yahweh. Israelite prophecy focuses on critique of the prophets’ own people; with prophecy, then, Yahweh takes something from Israel’s world (as he does with priests, kings, and scribes) and adapts it to his purpose. Further, the prophecies are not just about putting other nations down, and a title such as “Oracles against the Nations” also gives a misleading impression. The nations are the recipients of promises (46:26; 48:47; 49:6; 49:39) and of sympathy (47; 48). Jeremiah was, after all, commissioned “to build and to plant” as well as “to pull up and pull down” (1:10), for them as well as for Judah.[[233]](#footnote-233) For them, unlike Judah, there is no exhortation to repentance or promise that judgment can be escaped.[[234]](#footnote-234) But that characteristic reminds us that these messages were not addressed to the nations themselves, but to Judah; it also reminds us of the point implicit in Jonah, that the lack of explicit exhortation to repentance may accompany an implied challenge to repentance rather than preclude it.

Unlike the messages directly addressed to Judah, these messages do not focus on serving other gods as a reason for calamity threatening, nor on unfaithfulness within the community. With regard to imperial powers such as Egypt and Babylon, if they have a focus it lies on these nations’ preoccupation with their own grandeur. Yahweh is declaring that he will see that imperial powers with their confidence and expansive aims do not stay in position forever. With some irony, Babylon is the agent of calamity in Jer 46 – 49, the victim of it in Jer 50 – 51. But the logic of including other powers, Judah’s neighbors and the representative eastern ones, is simply that they become illustrations of Yahweh’s being sovereign everywhere.

Given the general point that declarations about the fate of other nations are a characteristic of prophecy, it is not surprising that they are a regular feature of prophetic scrolls, though the role of a collection of messages about the nations varies in the different scrolls. In Amos they soften up Ephraim for the prophet’s confrontation of Ephraim itself. In Isaiah 1 – 39 they underscore a concern that Judah should neither rely on other nations nor be afraid of them, and they form part of a movement from Judah itself being the focus (Isa 1 – 12) to the world becoming the horizon (Isa 24 – 27). In Ezekiel they form part of the transition from confrontation and threat (Ezek 1 – 24) to promise and hope (Ezek 33 – 48). In LXX Jeremiah they spell out the declaration of calamity for the nations in Jer 25. In relation to Judah they then contribute to an alternating of confrontation (2:1 – 25:13) – promise (25:14 – 32:24) – confrontation (33:1 – 36:32) – promise (37:1 – 40:13) – confrontation (41:1 – 51:35). In MT Jeremiah they finally signify a transition from bad news for Judah to good news for Judah, after the false dawn in Jer 30 – 33). The order of the messages further underlines the transition; whereas LXX has the message about Babylon in the middle of the sequence, MT has it at the end. The sequence also means that in the first half “Babylonian imperial predation still furthers Yahweh’s own imperial designs” while in the second half “the Babylonian beast… goes to the ground as its Yahwistic master treats it to the same fate as the rest of the world,”[[235]](#footnote-235) though the scroll then actually closes with the account of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem.

The placing together of these messages might seem to imply that they are similar, but they manifest a variety of tone, form, and approach; they are “in no way standardized.”[[236]](#footnote-236) They do have in common:

* an army experiences defeat
* the calamity comes from the north
* it comes as Yahweh’s day
* the result is shame

Whereas this collection of prophecies about the nations appears almost at the end of the Jeremiah scroll in the MT, in the LXX it appears in the middle, following on Jer 25. We do not know whether either order is more original or whether they represent ways in which different curators assembled Jeremianic material. Either position makes sense. In LXX they spell out 25:1-13. In MT, they do not form an interruption in Jeremiah’s material relating to Judah in that Jer 26 – 45 follows on Jer 25. Instead they follow on Jer 45, and come with other material focusing on events following on 587, in Jer 37 – 45 and 52. They make the Jeremiah scroll (almost) close with a worldwide horizon and with a hint of hope for Judah itself in the putting down of the great agent of destruction and exile.

But they vary in length, in complexity, in unity, in chronological specificity, in rationale, and in relationship to Judah. Their order in the MT and the LXX again differs:

MT LXX

46:2-28 Egypt 25:14-19 Elam

47:1-7 Philistia 26:1-28 Egypt

48:1-47 Moab 27:1 – 28:64 Babylon

49:1-6 Ammon 29:1-7 Philistia

49:7-22 Edom 29:8-23 Edom

49:23-27 Damascus 30:1-5 Ammon

49:28-33 Kedar and Hazor 30:6-11 Kedar and Hazor

49:34-39 Elam 30:12-16 Damascus

50:1 – 51:64 Babylon 31:1-44 Moab

Whereas the location of these messages within the scroll as a whole looks more logical in LXX than in MT,[[237]](#footnote-237) within the set of messages LXX’s order looks random whereas there is a broad geographical and theological logic about the MT order. Neither of these facts indicates whether one version of the broad locations or one version of the detailed orders is older than the other, and opinions differ on that question. In MT the order:

* begins from the south and west, with Egypt (the nearest regional superpower Judah’s recurrent resource of military support, and the geographical location of Jer 43 – 44) and Philistia
* goes on to Judah’s neighbors to the east, beginning with the most substantial set of messages concerning Moab and then moving to Ammon and Edom
* moves to peoples further away that were of no significance for Judah but point to Yahweh’s lordship over all the nations not just great powers and neighbors of Judah: Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, and Elam
* finally comes to Babylon, much the most substantial collection, and much the most important nation for Judah, and the agent of its downfall which Jer 52 will go on to relate.

# Part Five (a)

# Egypt (46:2-28 [LXX 26:2-28])

Following on Jer 43 – 45, a unit about Egypt make an apposite beginning to the messages about different nations. The unit comprises two substantial poems followed by two brief but important footnotes:

vv. 2-12 a message about Egypt on the eve of the battle between Egypt and Babylon at Carchemish, declaring that Egypt will lose

vv. 13-24 a message about Egypt concerning an invasion by Nebuchadrezzar which will issue in disaster, exile, and shame

vv. 25-26 a summary declaration that Yahweh will give Egypt over to Nebuchadrezzar but will subsequently restore the country

vv. 27-28 a summary promise to Israel that he will likewise take action against it and scatter it, but will subsequently bring it back

Like other messages about the nations, the unit offers little insight on the rationale for bringing calamity on Egypt. As an act of redress (v. 10) it might be a belated act of redress for Egypt’s treatment of the Israelites back at the beginning of their story, or a redress for the recent killing of Neco and its related interference in Judah’s life; its imposition of Jehoiakim as king was not exactly a favor (2 Kgs 23:31-37). Yet there is no indication that the message attacks Egypt because it is Judah’s enemy. Might it relate to Egypt’s opposing Nebuchadrezzar as Yahweh’s servant? Perhaps Yahweh attacks it because of its self-confident, arrogant pretensions. It had imperial designs, and Yahweh is inclined to be against empires. Hearing such a message proclaimed in the temple courts, Judahites in Jehoiakim’s day might be given food for thought about the folly of treating Egypt as a potential resource and support. After 587 Judahites might be encouraged about the prospects of their own eventual freedom, restoration, and independence.

## Before the Battle of Carchemish (46:2-12)

2Regarding Egypt.

About the force of Pharaoh Neco,a king of Egypt, which was at the River Euphrates at Carchemish, which Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon struck down in the fourth year of Jehoiakim ben Josiahb King of Judah.c

3Get ready breastplate and shield,

advance for battle!

4Harness the horses,

set to, cavalry!

Take your stand in helmets,

polish the lances,

put on the armor!

5Why have I seend –

they are shattered,

they are falling back.

Their strong men – they were being struck down,e

they have fled, fled.f

They didn’t turn round –

all around was terror (Yahweh’s affirmation).

6The quick is not to flee,

the strong man is not to escape.

To the north, by the side of the River Euphrates,

they have collapsed, fallen.

7Who is this who goes up like the Nile,

like the rivers whose water surges?

8Egypt that that goes up like the Nile,

like the rivers whose water surges.g

It said, I will get myself uph – I will cover earth;

I will obliterate town andi people who live in it.

9Go up, horses,

dash, chariot.

the strong men are to go out,

Sudan and Put,

who grasp breastplate,

Ludites, who grasp,

who directj bow.

10That day

will belong to the Lord Yahweh of Armies,k

A day of redress,

for taking redress from his adversaries.l

Sword will consume and be full,

will soak in their blood.

Because the Lord Yahweh of Armiesm

will have a sacrificen

in a northern country at the River Euphrates.

11Go up to Gilead and get ointment,

young girl,o Miss Egypt!

It is to no effect that you have done muchp –

means of healing, new growth, there is none for you.

12Nations have heard your humiliation;q

of your shout the earth is full.r

Because strong man has collapsed on strong man –

together the two of them have fallen.s

For MT *nәkô* Tg suggests a connection with *nākeh* “lame,” perhaps a snide reinterpretation rather than an indication that Tg read the text differently.

LXX lacks *ben Josiah*.

Rudolph (*Jeremia*, 268) interestingly suggests that this time reference applies to 46:2 – 49:33 as a whole, but the suggestion involves him in some emendations of the text.

LXX lacks *have I seen*.

I take the yiqtol verb as past imperfect in significance.

Literally, “[in] flight they fled”; the combination of two forms of the root is “a signature Jeremiah construction (cf. 11:18; 14:17; 15:19; 17:14; 20:7; 30:16; 31:4, 18)” (J. R. Lundbom, “Language and Rhetoric in Jeremiah’s Foreign Nation Oracles,” in J. R. Lundbom et al. [eds.], *The Book of Jeremiah* [Leiden: Brill, 2018], 211-29 [214]).

LXX lacks this colon.

The form *’a‘ăleh* has to be an inwardly transitive hiphil (the qal would be *’e‘ĕleh*): cf. the note at 2:26. It might “magnify the arrogance of the boast” (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 197).

LXX lacks *town and*.

*Dārak* suggests treading on the bow to increase its tension and thus its reach (Altschuler, “Meṣudat David,” on the passage); J. A. Emerton argues rather for “string” (“Treading the Bow,” *VT* 53 [2003]: 465-86).

LXX has “to the Lord our God.”

Tg has “from his people’s adversaries.”

LXX has simply “the Lord.”

Tg has an ordinary word for “killing.”

See the note on 18:13.

Q reads *hirbêt*; K implies *hirbêtî*. The parallel in 30:13 suggests that the following colon makes a clause in itself (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 204); for the absolute use of the verb, cf. Exod 30:15; Prov 13:11; 1 Chr 4:27.

LXX implies *qôlēk* “your voice” for MT *qәlônēk* (cf. Vg, Aq, Sym), which works well with the parallelism but may be assimilated to it (C. J. Sharp, “‘Take Another Scroll and Write,’” *VT* 47 [1997]: 487-516 [493]).

The genders are all masculine in the first colon and all feminine in the second, perhaps underscoring the “global picture” (*CHP*, 125).

MT has a unit marker here.

The first message comprises two parallel parts, both relating to Egypt’s involvement in a battle; the second half goes over the same ground as the first, in the manner of the parallelism within a poetic line. Each half starts from the situation before the battle, and in imagination bids the Egyptian army to get ready or watches it getting ready (vv. 3-4, 7-9), then leaps forward chronologically to give an imaginative account of the Egyptian army in a state of utter and hopeless defeat (vv. 5-6, 10-12). Neither half describes the battle itself; the message focuses on the preparation and the aftermath. There would be more point in the message if it preceded the event rather than describing it afterwards, and one can imagine Jeremiah delivering it in the temple courts, perhaps as rumors circulated about an expected battle. It outlines:

v. 2 introduction in prose

vv. 3-6 part one

vv. 3-4 the bidding to the army to get ready: two bicola and a closing tricolon, every colon parallel, every colon two stresses after the first, communicating a breathless haste that corresponds to the contents of the section

vv. 5-6 the portrait of the army’s state after the battle: an opening tricolon and four bicola, every colon again two stresses except for the next to last; there is again thus a breathless anxiety about the section that conveys a sense of panic

vv. 7-12 part two

vv. 7-9 a report of the army’s going up for the battle, followed by a further bidding; three more usual bicola, then for the bidding another tricolon and two bicola in which every colon is two stresses, with that breathless affect

vv. 10-12 a declaration about the significance and the nature of the day of battle: three bicola and a tricolon, then another portrait of the state of things after the battle in four bicola

The message’s poetry and content both compare with the messages with which the Jeremiah scroll begins: Jeremiah’s vision of calamity coming on Egypt parallels his vision of calamity coming on Judah. The Egyptian army is making ready for battle like the northern army making ready to invade Judah as Jeremiah portrayed it. But it is now operating not against Judah but against Egypt, the nation that Judah sometimes hoped would be its protector in such situations. When the message urges the Egyptians to get ready for battle, it does so ironically; it portrays its military preparations as actually useless. Rhetorically, the message makes the point dramatically by the way each of its halves leaps from preparations to the aftermath of cataclysmic defeat. Terror is all around, as it was for Judah.

Babylon’s defeat of Egypt at Carchemish in 605 initiated an era in which it was the great power in the Middle East (albeit for only a few decades). It may mislead modern readers into seeing its victory as predictable and inevitable. It wasn’t. Egypt was a bigger nation than Babylon; the message emphasizes its army’s size. Humanly speaking, Judah wasn’t stupid in seeing it as an ally and protector Judah could rely on. The message assumes that there are sometimes occasions that Yahweh decides to treat as his occasion. Some days he decides to treat as his day (v. 10). It is one consideration that makes history unpredictable.

**2** *Regarding Egypt* introduces the unit as a whole (48:1 fulfills the same function for its unit). The continuing introduction then relates what will follow in vv. 3-12 to the time when *the force of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt was at the River Euphrates at Carchemish* near Aleppo, on the Syrian-Turkish border, which had been a key city in the Assyrian empire. It was encamped there as part of an attempt in association with the Assyrians to thwart a Babylonian takeover as the big Middle Eastern power, and specifically the big power west of the Euphrates – and thus as Judah’s overlord. The year and the occasion is the decisive one to which Jer 25, 36, and 45 refer.[[238]](#footnote-238) While the message belongs to the time before the battle, the curator’s introduction belongs to the time after *Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon* (as he would become a year later) *struck down* that force. The Babylonian version of events during the twenty-first year of his father Nabopolassar’s reign relates:

The king of Akkad stayed home (while) Nebuchadnezzar (II), his eldest son (and) the crown prince, mustered [the army of Akkad]. He took his army’s lead and marched to Carchemish which is on the bank of the Euphrates. He crossed the river [*to encounter* *the army of Egypt*] which was encamped at Carchemish. [. . .] They did battle together. The army of Egypt retreated before him. He inflicted a [defeat] upon them (and) finished them off completely. In the district of Hamath the army of Akkad overtook the remainder of the army of [Egypt which] managed to escape [from] the defeat and which was not overcome. They [the army of Akkad] inflicted a defeat upon them (so that) a single (Egyptian) man [did not return] home. At that time Nebuchadnezzar (II) conquered all of Ha[ma]th.[[239]](#footnote-239)

No doubt the Babylonian Chronicle speaks hyperbolically in speaks of total annihilation, as Jeremiah does. But perhaps not surprisingly, we don’t have Neco’s version to check it by.[[240]](#footnote-240)

**3-4** The provision of the introduction means anyone reading the scroll can know what the message is about. Judahites listening to Jeremiah in the temple courtyards might initially have no idea, or might be aware that this decisive event was imminent and might know that its result would be decisively important for them. Yahweh gives them insight about it. Jeremiah does not indicate who is commissioning the warriors – he or their commander or Yahweh. The point is the actual commission. Nor does Jeremiah make clear whose warriors are being commissioned or whose warriors are running for their lives – e.g., Babylon’s or Egypt’s. Which way the listeners understood it would make a difference to their potential response. Some would be glad to hear of the comeuppance of the Egyptian army and king that had defeated and killed Josiah. But the Egyptians had put Jehoiakim on the throne in place of his brother Jehoahaz, and official Judahite policy was likely pro-Egyptian, and people who saw the Egyptians as potential allies and supporters would not welcome the idea of an Egyptian defeat. So the message works with the allusiveness that often characterizes prophecy expressed in poetry. It makes people listen, and requires them to listen on if they are to get the point. The exhortation compares with the exhortations to Judah in 4:5-6; 6:1-6, which were ironic in a different direction as they urged Judah to prepare to be attacked.

**5** Jeremiah has a further vision (perhaps in the strict sense, but perhaps not) of the battle’s results. The message leaps forward, and jumps throughout v. 5 in a sequence of two-beat cola. First, Yahweh or Jeremiah ironically asks *why have I seen* what I have seen. God or prophet has seen four stages in disaster. First, those brave fighters who were commissioned: *they are shattered* , demoralized, traumatized by the engagement. As a result *they are falling back*, retreating, letting the other side push them back. But not fast enough: *their strong men*, their supposed tough warriors, *were being struck down*. Not surprisingly, finally, they simply *fled.* One would like one’s brave warriors then to regroup, but *they didn’t turn round* and reengage with the enemy. They simply attempted to hightail it. In this chapter, ridicule is Jeremiah’s “chief weapon.”[[241]](#footnote-241) But one can hardly blame these soldiers: *all around was terror*. Again there is a parallel with the way things are or threaten to be for Judah (6:25; see also 20:3, 10; 49:29). They were surrounded by terrifying forces and a terrifying fate.

**6** Whereas they hoped to take flight and get away, the enemy is not going to let them or Yahweh is not going to let them. Jeremiah expresses this determination in a two neat parallel cola and then in two internally parallel cola:

the quick is not to flee

the strong man is not to escape

to the north, by the side of the River Euphrates

they have collapsed, fallen

The legendary *north* elsewhere stands not merely for a place in terms of literal geography where certain nations lived, but for the home of fabled forces that could consume anyone’s world (cf. 1:14).[[242]](#footnote-242) Yet the reference to an enemy coming from the north is often down-to-earth, too,[[243]](#footnote-243) and here the confrontation happens all too literally *to the north by the side of the River Euphrates.* There the warriors *have collapsed, fallen*. In anticipation Jeremiah has seen it with mock incredulity. He invites Judah to see it with real incredulity but as a reality that confronts Judahite commitments and Judahite policy. The mockery of Egypt would not only imply Egypt’s disgrace but also disgrace people in Judah who were counting on Egypt as a counterbalance to Babylon.[[244]](#footnote-244)

**7-9** Only with the second version of the story is it explicit who is fighting; Jeremiah initially makes the point in three neatly parallel lines in vv. 7-8 and follows it with seven more cola in “two-beat ‘battle’ rhythm.”[[245]](#footnote-245) It was the Egyptians who had been routed and humiliated. The imaginary portrait now collapses the process that led to the battle; it was four years ago that Neco headed out of Egypt to assert himself at the Euphrates, on the march that Josiah tried to forestall. Having swatted that fly, Neco had established his semi-permanent position at Carchemish and dared Nebuchadrezzar to dispute it. Nebuchadrezzar has done so, to great effect. If Jeremiah’s listeners are not convinced (or even if they are), let them think about it and use their imaginations again. Let them picture the Pharaoh’s magnificent army advancing northeast from Egypt to Mesopotamia, as tumultuous a flood as the Nile itself, and in the manner of the Assyrian flood that Jeremiah and his audience would more likely know about.[[246]](#footnote-246) It had advanced with such confidence, as Judah is in a position ruefully to recall. The Babylonians and Medes: how are they going to resist the might of Egypt and Assyria? Once again an unidentified commander-in-chief urges on the forces, which come not merely from Egypt itself but from Sudan (that is, the country south of the First Cataract) and Put (perhaps Libya, perhaps Somalia – which fits its mention alongside Sudan) and Lud (for which the same two possibilities apply).[[247]](#footnote-247) Yet with the formulation’s irony Yahweh also hints at why Egypt must be put down, its pretension to *cover earth* and its intention to *obliterate town and people who live in it*. Carchemish did finally put an end to Egypt’s ambition to *cover earth*;it determined who was going to rule the Levant, and therefore who was going to be Judah’s nemesis.

**10** So far Jeremiah has simply portrayed the earthly dynamics of the coming battle. Only with the second stanza of the second half of the message does the prophet/poet name the agent behind what happens. He thus now “identifies the real enemy of Egypt,” both in the sense of the one against whom Egypt is asserting itself and the one who will defeat Egypt; and he identifies the one whose plan is being fulfilled in this engagement. It is neither Egypt’s nor Babylon’s plan.[[248]](#footnote-248) It is Yahweh who commissions the Egyptian army. Or perhaps Yahweh jumps on the engagement and takes charge of it. Initially Jeremiah resumes the perspective of someone for whom the event is still future, his perspective when he delivers this message. The day that is coming is *that day*. There is no antecedent “that day” for Jeremiah to be referring back to; *that day* is Yahweh’s day. Putting down Egypt will be an aspect of the implementing of Yahweh’s final purpose, which is associated with *that day* and can become reality from time to time in history. Thus the day that is coming *will belong to the Lord Yahweh of Armies*, an apposite title in this war context. *That day* threatens Egypt as it threatens Judah, and *a day of redress* threatens Egypt as redress threatens Judah(cf. 5:9)*.*[[249]](#footnote-249) *Sword will consume and be full, be drunk with their blood*: is an implication that Yahweh’s adversaries are more the military and the administration than the ordinary Egyptians people? It will be as if *the Lord Yahweh of Armies* is having *a sacrifice*. That is how bloody it will be. Typically, Ezekiel turns Jeremiah’s one word image into an allegory (Ezek 39:17-20; cf. also Zeph 1:7-8).

**11-12** Jeremiah reverts to the rhetoric of vv. 5-6, whereby Yahweh in imagination jumps to the aftermath of the engagement, to the situation beyond the flight and the striking down of which vv. 5-6 spoke. There are all those bodies. Maybe some of them are not dead yet. In theory, the Egyptians could send first responders for medicines; we know Gilead is the direction to look (see 8:22). But its ointment will be no more use to Egypt than to Judah.[[250]](#footnote-250) There are no effective *means of healing* and *no new growth for you* (cf. 30:13).[[251]](#footnote-251) Once again Egypt’s destiny is the same as Judah’s. The same principle applies to Egypt’s *humiliation* (cf. 13:26). For Judah it was to be visible like a woman’s exposure, for Egypt it will be audible in its demoralized warriors’ panicked *shout*, whichmakes for another parallel with Judah, though in a different connection (14:2). There is yet another parallel in the picture of the way the warriors have *collapsed* on one another*,* *together* (6:21).

## Before Nebuchadrezzar’s Invasion of Egypt (46:13-24)

13The word that Yahweh spoke to Jeremiah the prophet regarding the coming of Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon to strike down the country of Egypt.

14Tell it in Egypt, make it hearda in Migdol,

make it heard in Memphis and in Tahpanhes!

Say, “Take your stand, get yourself ready,

because the sword has consumed around you!”

15Why has your great championb bowed down?c

– he has not stood, because Yahweh has thrust him down.

16He has done much collapsingd –

yes, one individual has fallen on his neighbor.”

People said, “Set to,

we’ll go back to our people,

To the country of our birth,

in the face of the sword of the oppressor.”e

17There they gavef Pharaohg the king of Egypt the name,

“A noise who let the appointed time pass.”

18I am alive:h an affirmation of the King,

Yahweh of Armies his name,i

That,j like Tabor with the mountains,

and like Carmel with the sea, one will come.

19Things for exile – make them for yourself,

you who sit as Miss Egypt.

Because Memphis – it will become a desolation;

it will fall in ruins,k with no one living there.l

20A lovely, lovely heifer, Egypt –

a horseflym from the north has come, come.n

21Its mercenaries within it, too,

like bullocks from the stall,o

Because they – they too have turned round –

they have fled altogether – they have not stood.

Because their day of disaster has come upon them,

the time of their being attended to.

22Its sound like a snakep as it goes,

when they go in force:q

With axes they have come to it,

like fellers of trees.

23They have cut down its forest (Yahweh’s affirmation),

when it could not be explored,

When they were more than locust,

and there was no counting of them.

24Miss Egypt has been shamed,

given into the hand of the northern people.

LXX lacks *in Egypt, make it heard*, and later in the verse lacks *and in Tahpanhes*.

The two singular verbs and the singular suffix on *thrust him down* suggest that *’abbîreykā* is plural of majesty.

LXX “has Apis fled” suggests *nās ḥap* for MT *nisḥap* (*HALOT*, 339), with *’abbîreykā* then the subject of the second colon.

One would expect an infinitive not a participle for *collapsing*; but on the construction, see *CTAT* 2:613-17. Vg, Aq give the hiphil verb its more usual causative significance, “he has multiplied the collapsing one[s]”; but singular *kôšēl* is difficult. For MT *hirbâ* (*much*)LXX implies *hămônkā* “your crowd [is collapsing].”

The phrase is more likely construct than anarthrous noun qualified by a participle with the article (GK 126w); the phrase recurs in 50:16, and the participle came in a related expression in 25:38 (see the note). LXX implies *hayyәwāniyyâ* “the Greek.”

Literally, “called.” For MT *qārә’û* LXX, Vg imply imperative *qirә’û*.

LXX adds “Neco,” indicating a link with the same event as vv. 2-12.

See the note and comment on 4:2.

For *the King, Yahweh of Armies his name*, LXX has simply “the Lord God.”

The *kî*-clause indicates the content of the oath implied by v. 18a.

See the note on 2:15.

MT has a section marker here.

Etymologically, a stinger; behind the metaphor may be the Greek myth of the goddess Io who can take the form of a heifer, gets pursued by a horsefly, and takes refuge in Egypt (D. E. Gershenson, “A Greek Myth in Jeremiah,” *ZAW* 108 [1996]: 192-2000).

LXX lacks the repetition of *lovely* and for the closing repetition implies *bā’ bāh* “has come upon it” for MT *bā’ bā’*.

Literally, “of the stall,” where they were fattened up.

Vg derives *nāḥāš* from *nḥš* III “copper, bronze.”

LXX suggests *bәḥûl* “in sand” for MT *bәḥîl*, which links neatly with the reference to a snake.

The Egyptians are now engaged with Nebuchadrezzar not in a battle a long way from home but within Egypt, as victims of invasion. The curator again provides an introduction (v. 13) and the message again moves imaginatively between the prospect and the actuality of the crisis, but in a different order from that in vv. 3-12. Here, Yahweh first ironically urges the Egyptians to get ready for a last stand, in the context of an invasion already under way (vv. 14-17), then asserts his guarantee that he is taking action, and urges the Egyptians to get ready for exile (vv. 18-19). In the second half he once more starts from the picture of an invasion that is under way (vv. 20-21), and finally speaks as if defeat has overwhelmed the nation (vv. 22-24). The message might link with events just after the battle at Carchemish or with Nebuchadnezzar’s campaigns in 588 that ultimately led to the fall of Jerusalem, or with his campaign in 601 – though it did not bring an Egyptian defeat.[[252]](#footnote-252) Qatal and yiqtol verbs again alternate in vv. 14-24 suggesting that the perspective switches between a portrayal of an attack that has begun and an announcement of an attack that is going to happen; it is sometimes difficult to tell which perspective applies. My understanding is:

vv. 14-17 the invasion has begun and the mercenaries have fled

vv. 18-19 the invasion is certain, because Yahweh says so

vv. 20-21 the invasion has begun and the mercenaries have fled

vv. 22-24 the invasion has taken place and Egypt is shamed

Like vv. 2-12, the message rhetorically urges warriors to get on with their responsibilities, and in doing so makes use of irony and sarcasm. Over against vv. 2-12, it brings its message home by means of a series of metaphors that add to its allusiveness: Egypt the heifer, its mercenaries as bullocks, its army slithering off like a snake, another army as tree-fellers. An army and the nation it represents may not only be vulnerable when it goes a long way from home on a campaign; it may not even be safe after it slinks back home. The message adds to the first one the fact that Yahweh is capable of defeating the gods that allegedly protected a nation such as Egypt, as well as seeing that the nation itself gets defeated. One point about the message’s metaphors is that they form part of a sarcastic portrayal of these deities – the champion that collapses because Yahweh puts him down (in v. 15 LXX is more specific),[[253]](#footnote-253) the heifer that is vulnerable to the horsefly, the snake that slithers away at the arrival of the foresters. The message may also point to further human factors in Babylon’s becoming the great empire and Egypt’s failing to fulfill expectations: certainly Nebuchadrezzar was a great leader, and Jeremiah puts a scathing indictment on the lips of Pharaoh’s mercenaries. Whichever Pharaoh it is, the message’s Judahite audience might be inclined to take him seriously as king, but they and he need to come to terms with the fact that there is another King (vv. 17-18).

**13** Whereas v. 2 connected vv. 3-12 with a specific occasion that it is easy to link with known historical events, v. 13 gives no such date and we cannot be sure which possible Babylonian invasion of Egypt this message presupposes, such as the aftermath of the Carchemish battle, or Nebuchadnezzar’s campaigns that led to the fall of Jerusalem, or the events referred to in connection with 44:29-30[[254]](#footnote-254) - so that it would initially be a message for the Judahite community in Egypt. But the introduction’s lack of specificity supports the possibility that the message does not relate to a specific expected invasion, any more than a number of the other messages in Jer 46 – 51. In other words, Yahweh gives Jeremiah a vision of a projected invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadrezzar. Like many prophecies, it is then not a kind of advance video of an actual invasion but an imaginary and imaginative picture of what calamity could mean for Egypt. Its following on vv. 2-12 perhaps implies that the fulfillment of that vision and the factuality of that defeat provides grounds for taking this vision seriously and holding onto it whether or not it saw anything like a fulfillment.

**14** The message begins with an ironic exhortation to towns in Lower Egypt with which we are familiar from 44:1 (there is no mention of Pathros). After the move of Johanan’s group, the message would have particular force for them. *Memphis* as the key city in Lower Egypt pairs with the name of *Egypt* itself, and the line also pairs Migdol and Tahpanhes as two fortress towns in northeastern Egypt that would be early affected by an invasion. Memphis was the location of a temple devoted to Apis (Herodotus 2:153);[[255]](#footnote-255) see v. 15. The assumption may be that Yahweh is addressing his aides, though they will perhaps work via local lookouts who would exhort the towns to get ready for the attack that is coming, though the imperatives are singular and suggest an exhortation to the nation as a whole. But the exhortation jumps forward and speaks as if the invasion has already begun and the invader has already engaged with Egyptian forces. One reason why the exhortation is ironic is that the engagement and the defeat (*the sword has consumed around you*) mean that the towns’ fate is sealed. As in vv. 2-12, only the prose introduction identifies the Egyptians’ foe as Babylon and specifically Nebuchadrezzar (in due course vv. 20 and 24 will refer to the northern people), though there is no one else to invade Egypt in Jeremiah’s day.

**15** It is apparently Jeremiah who asks the rhetorical question. LXX convincingly implies that the *great champion* is the Egyptian god Apis, symbolized by a live bull and/or a bull image.[[256]](#footnote-256) Perhaps the bull had been brought into battle, like the Israelite covenant chest in 1 Sam 4. The problem for the Egyptians, as for the Israelites on that occasion, is that this stratagem has failed. The army has collapsed; the bull has collapsed. The Babylonians and Egyptians would assume that the battle was being fought under the patronage of their respective gods; Jeremiah perhaps implies that the messengers are to explain to the people in the three towns that there is another deity involved.

**16-17** Because it is Yahweh who has brought about the Egyptian army’s collapse. The description again suggests that it included many foreigners (cf. v. 9), who fled in the midst of the battle. Like modern migrants, they likely came to Egypt looking for food and work from countries where famine common. Why should they stand firm when death threatened them here too? They might as well be at home.[[257]](#footnote-257) *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*?[[258]](#footnote-258) Even if it is true, it doesn’t apply to dying for someone else’s country. The mercenaries actually brought even more shame on Egypt, and specifically on Pharaoh. Their cry is, “Pharaoh the king of Egypt is a king of confusion.”[[259]](#footnote-259) That is his *name.* If the invasion dates to the time of Apries, Jeremiah might be putting a fair assessment on their lips.[[260]](#footnote-260) But it may not imply a judgment specific to him; it recalls Isaiah’s taunt about Egyptians whose assistance is useless and who are just Rahab[[261]](#footnote-261) sitting around instead of flailing and thrashing as Rahab the monster was supposed to (Isa 30:7).

**18** Their imagined comment leads neatly into Yahweh’s claim for himself. He sets his *name* as the real *King* against the snide *name* given to *Pharaoh the king*;[[262]](#footnote-262) nothing more needs be said about the so-called king of Egypt. The real King who now speaks is the one who will bring to Egypt the leader of the invasion and the battle, the also so-called (but not named) king of Babylon.[[263]](#footnote-263) The chronological perspective changes back to the time when the invasion has not yet happened. Nebuchadrezzar will march southwest from Mesopotamia past Mount Tabor and past Mount Carmel, as impressive as those hills that stand out in the context of the mountains and plain around, and the sea at Carmel’s foot.

**19** So get ready, Egypt. Once more Jeremiah portrays Egypt’s fate by analogy with Judah’s – actually it’s unlikely that Nebuchadrezzar would be taking Egyptians into exile. With further irony that would not be known even to Jeremiah, Egypt’s description as a queen enthroned but about to lose her throne anticipates the portrayal of Babylon itself in Isa 47. *A desolation*, a citythat *will fall in ruins, with no one living there,* again recalls Judah’s prospective fate (2:15).

**20-21** The *heifer* (*‘eglâ*)might make one think again of Apis, in a snide way, since Apis was a bull not a heifer; the masculine form of the word (*‘ēgel*)is also a word for an animal image as worshiped in Israel (a heifer might rather represent Hathor or Isis).[[264]](#footnote-264) What follows suggests that the heifer represents Egypt; but the heifer is going to be stung to death by the northern *horsefly* which has already arrived. Jeremiah retains the metaphor in referring again to Egypt’s mercenaries (cf. v. 9) as like fatted calves. He repeats the point from v. 16 about these warriors, who (in the manner of mercenaries) have *fled* and not *stood* – just like Apis (v. 15). Repeating the last verb retrospectively adds to the insulting of Apis. He’s no better than Egypt’s mercenaries.

**22-23** The last unit is the most allusive, both because of the interweaving of verb tenses and because of the combining of metaphors – the snake, the tree-fellers, the locusts. *It* is feminine and refers again to Miss Egypt, the heifer, now a snake that is apparently trying to slither off silently. But the snake can be a figure for divinity in Egypt as in Canaan, specifically in Thebes (see v. 25), and this simile could remind some people of that link. So like the heifer, the snake could stand for Egypt and its divinities. But the snake *goes* off in slithery fashion; the parallel colon then describes the contrasting Babylonian army whose soldiers *go* *in force*. The snake’s slithering away contrasts with the army’s forceful march. Otherwise put, its slithering away responds to the arrival of a corps of metaphorical foresters (perhaps the snake is seeking to escape through the forest undergrowth). The woodcutters *have cut down* the Egyptian *forest* which *could not be explored* (that is, could not be quantified); the forest might stand for literal woodland, or for the Egyptian army, or for wooden-paneled monumental buildings. The Babylonian army could cut it down even though it was as numerous as a horde of locust. The synagogue lectionary sets this Jeremiah passage alongside a reading from Exodus that includes Exod 10:3-20, with which it makes a neat link.[[265]](#footnote-265)

**24** The message closes with another horrifying image. Miss Egypt *has been shamed* by her ignominious defeat and surrender and has been *given into the hand of the northern people*, in both respects like Judah, but also in a corporate equivalent to something like the experience of a woman becoming the sexual victim of a conquering force.[[266]](#footnote-266) The implied agent lying behind the niphal participle in the last colon is Yahweh himself, who is the great giver in a bad way as well as in a good way (the niphal came in this connection in e.g., 21:10; 32:24-25; 38:3, 18; see also 44:30). Yes, Egypt is as vulnerable as Judah to his surrendering it to the northern people (e.g., 1:13-15; 3:18; 4:6; 6:1, 22).

## Two Encouraging Footnotes (46:25-28)

25Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel has said:a Here am I, attending to Amonb of Thebes,c and upon Pharaoh, upon Egypt, upon its gods, upon its kings, upon Pharaoh,d and upon all who rely on him, 26and I will give theme into the hand of the people who seek their life, into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon, and into the hand of his servants. But afterwards it will dwell as in former days (Yahweh’s affirmation).f

27But you, don’t be afraid, my servant Jacob,

don’t panic, Israel.

Because here am I, delivering you from far away,

and your offspring from their country of captivity.

Jacob will return and be quiet,

will relax, with no one making him tremble.g

28You, don’t be afraid, my servant Jacob (Yahweh’s affirmation)

because I will be with you.

Because I will make an end among all the nations

where I have driven you.

But of you I will not make an end,

but I will restrain you through the exercise of authority,

and I will certainly not treat you as free of guilt.h

LXX lacks *Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel has said*.

Vg, Tg have “noise,” as if the Hebrew were *hāmôn*.

For MT *minnō’* LXX implies *bәnāh* “her son.” Syr has “Amon of the water” (cf. the description of Thebes in Nah 3:8). Vg, Tg have Alexandria, which fits the later historical situation.

LXX lacks *upon Egypt, upon its gods, upon its kings, upon Pharaoh*.

LXX lacks *and I will give them*.

MT has a marker here.

MT has a marker here.

Vv. 27-28 repeat 30:10-11 in a slightly variant form; see the notes there. MT has a section marker here.

Two separate footnotes thus close off the Egypt unit. The first reaffirms that Nebuchadrezzar will take action against Egypt, but then promises Egypt’s restoration. The second repeats an earlier promise of Israel’s restoration to its homeland. The juxtaposition is suggestive. Destruction is not Yahweh’s last word for Egypt, and banishment is not Yahweh’s last word for Israel.

**25-26** Yahweh’s affirmation makes a comprehensive declaration of intend with regard to Egypt, summing up the prosaic implications of vv. 2-24. It begins with another assertion of authority in relation to an Egyptian deity, this time Amon, once the top god of Egypt, though not as prominent in Jeremiah’s time. The reference to Thebes (a key city in Upper Egypt) and its deity complements the earlier reference to Memphis (a key city in Lower Egypt) and its deity. Whereas vv. 2-12 and 13-24 focused on the empirical reality of battle and invasion while also affirming Yahweh’s involvement, vv. 25-26 focus on Yahweh’s initiative and action. Nebuchadrezzar is simply Yahweh’s unwitting beneficiary. It is the first time that he is named within the actual messages in the unit, but the name comes in a message that itself takes prose form; so far, the name has never come in the poetry in the Jeremiah scroll (though it will come in the poetry in Jer 48 – 51). Such names are prosaic; metaphors communicate more, though they may leave the audience guessing more. The prose and poetry in the scroll thus complement each other. The message in vv. 13-24 implied that it would be stupid people who *rely on Pharaoh*; this message makes the point explicit. In the years running up to 587, the people relying on Pharaoh would include the Judahite administration; subsequently, they would include Johanan’s group.[[267]](#footnote-267) The unexpected feature of the message is the closing promise, though it fits Jeremiah’s original commission. As a prophet concerning nations and kingdoms, Jeremiah was commissioned to build and plant as well as pull down and pull up. While nations and kingdoms could just have been background to building and planting for Israel, in retrospect, at least, Yahweh’s worldwide lordship makes it not surprising to find a promise to restore Egypt. The message does not spell out the promise’s cash value, in the variegated way that Isa 19:18-25 does. It does suggest a freedom for Egypt to be itself, but with the possible implication that it will not be a great empire again and thus be either resource or threat to Judah (cf. Ezek 29:13-16).[[268]](#footnote-268)

**27-28** The second footnote restates 30:10-11. A notable difference is the verb *driven* (instead of “scattered”), as in (e.g.) 32:37. The promise that Yahweh is *delivering you from far away* gains extra resonance, following on the chapters relating how Judahites ended up in Egypt. It stands in some creative tension with the threat that no Judahites will ever return from Egypt and adds beef to the qualification on that threat in 44:28. One might see it as contrasting with, correcting, complementing, or clarifying what precedes, or as strengthening the message of deliverance and judgment implicit in Jer 46 – 51 as a whole.[[269]](#footnote-269)

The oracle of Yahweh against Egypt has made the world a safe place for Israel…. Both the great power and the beloved community are given futures, and the two futures are not incompatible. It is as though the poem witnesses to and sanctions a moment in geopolitics which is chaotic and disruptive, when power is turned loose against all established normalcies. The poem in the end, envisions a settled normalcy when all the powers are back in their proper places and proper perspectives. When that happens, Jacob can resume its life.[[270]](#footnote-270)

# Part Five (b) Neighbors and Distant Peoples

There now come four messages (or collections of messages) relating to Judah’s neighbors on the west (Philistia) and on the east (Moab, Ammon, and Edom), the four that appear together in 25:20b-21 and appear as a group in Ezek 25. They will be followed by two messages about far away peoples, Kedar/Hazor and Elam.

# Philistia (47:1-7 [LXX 29:1-7])

At first sight, the introduction to the Philistia poem would imply that Egypt brought calamity to the Philistines, but the poem itself speaks of trouble from the north, and the Babylonian Chronicle records Nebuchadrezzar’s taking Ashkelon a year after defeating Neco at Carchemish:

In the first year of Nebuchadrezzar in the month of Sivan he mustered his army

and went to the Ḫatti-territory, he marched about unopposed in the Ḫatti-territory until the month of Kislev.

All the kings of the Ḫatti-land came before him and he received their heavy tribute.

He marched to the city of Askelon and captured it in the month of Kislev.

He captured its king and plundered it and carried off [spoil from it….]

He turned the city into a mound and heaps of ruins and then in the month of Sebat he marched back to Babylon.[[271]](#footnote-271)

Chronologically, then, Jer 47 follows at least on 46:2-12. The attack from the south might have happened some time before the northern one; Herodotus (2:159) has Neco conquering Gaza, possibly in 609 on the expedition that included his victory over Josiah. Or it may relate to an Egyptian campaign following Nebuchadrezzar’s action in about 601. That year Nebuchadrezzar marched on Egypt itself but was apparently repulsed by Neco, so that Nebuchadrezzar needed to go home and regroup. The Chronicle thus goes on:

In the fourth year the king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to the Ḫatti-land. In the Ḫatti-land they marched unopposed.

In the month of Kislev he took the lead of his army and marched to Egypt. The king of Egypt heard (it) and mustered his army.

In open battle they smote the breast (of) each other and inflicted great havoc on each other. The king of Akkad and his troops turned back and returned to Babylon.

In the fifth year the king of Akkad (stayed) in his own land and gathered together his chariots and horses in great numbers.[[272]](#footnote-272)

Like Judah, then, one way or another Gaza came under attack more than once over a relatively short period, but its location in an area fought over by the two great powers (unlike Judah, which brought trouble on itself) made it vulnerable.[[273]](#footnote-273)

Like 46:14-24, the poem can be ambiguous about whether it is describing something that is happening or will happen or has happened, but makes sense understood as describing something that has begun to happen in the poet’s imagination. It parallels 46:3-12 in starting from a portrait of events as purely humanly-caused (vv. 2-4a) then seguing into an emphasis on Yahweh’s causation (vv. 4b-7). It gives even less hint of the reasoning behind Yahweh’s action or regarding his reasons for telling Judah of his intention. It simply asserts that the worldly event of which a northern adversary is the human agent is something that Yahweh wills. It does not describe the attack as an act of judgment; it does not suggest that the Philistines have done anything to deserve what happens except be in the wrong place at the wrong time. It simply asserts once more that an event that one might see as a random event within world history (like the events in Dan 11) is one in which Yahweh’s sovereignty is at work. One might perceive the event as implicitly an implementing of Nebuchadrezzar’s commission to be Yahweh’s servant in exercising authority over the world in which Israel lives (25:19-21). Centuries ago Israel and Philistia were serious independent forces that could therefore fit serious battles with each other, but now they are just “pawns of the great powers.”[[274]](#footnote-274) But even over matters that are nothing to do with Israel, Yahweh is sovereign and may be taking action for reasons that human beings do not know.

If one were to ask further what reflection the poem might generate in wise Judahites, then they might see it as a warning about resisting Nebuchadrezzar.[[275]](#footnote-275) If we are to guess further about Yahweh’s reasons for giving Judah this message, it might have a background in Yahweh’s relationship with the Philistines and about Judah’s relationship with them: it was Yahweh who brought the Philistines to the Levant from Caphtor (Amos 9:7), yet they came to occupy land that Yahweh had designated to Israel. Perhaps the LXX translation of Philistines as “foreigners,” more literally “other tribe people,” reflects a sense that they were “foreigners living within the borders of Israel.”[[276]](#footnote-276) While their location on the coastal route from the north and northeast to the south and southwest would make them vulnerable to the interest of the powers on either side, they would also be of interest to Judah because the obvious line of access to Jerusalem lay from their direction, as it still does. It was presumably in that connection that Hezekiah had invaded Philistia and taken control of the area (2 Kgs 18:8). But in a tit for tat action, in the course of putting down Hezekiah’s rebellion against Assyria Sennacherib had given over swathes of Judahite territory to the kings of the Philistine towns.[[277]](#footnote-277) Yahweh’s promises about the Philistines in Ezek 25:15-17 (also 16:27) suggest that these events may still rankle in Jeremiah’s day and indicate that Yahweh does intend to take redress from the Philistines on Judah’s behalf. The undertaking in Ezekiel comes in the context of similar statements about Judah’s other neighbors Moab, Ammon , and Edom, as it does in Jer 47 – 49. To connect the dots, then, this present vision parallels the visions in Ezekiel as a reaffirmation of Yahweh’s commitment to take redress on Philistia. For Judah in the fifth century, a promise about Philistia being put in its place would be good news (e.g., Neh 4:7). There seems no reason to see the poem as eschatological or apocalyptic.[[278]](#footnote-278)

1What came as Yahweh’s worda to Jeremiah the prophet about the Philistines, before Pharaoh struck down Gaza.b

2Yahweh has said this.

Here, water is rising from the north

and becomingc a flooding wadi

It floods the country and what fills it,

the town and the people who live in it.

Humanity cries out,

and all the people who live in the country howl.

3At the sound of the pounding of the hooves of his mighty steeds,

at the noise of his chariotry, the din of its wheels,d

Fathers have not turned their faces to children

because of the slackening of hands,

4On account of the day that has come

for destroying all the Philistines,

For cutting off from Tyre and Sidon

every surviving helper.

Because Yahweh is destroying the Philistines,

the remainder of Caphtor’s shore.e

5Clipping has come to Gaza,

Ashkelon has been rendered still.f

You remainder of their vale,g

how long will you gash yourself? h

6Oh, sword of Yahweh,

how much longer will you not be quiet?

Gather yourself intoi your sheath,

rest, be still!

7How can you be quiet?j –

when Yahweh has given it an order?

For Ashkelon and for the sea coast –

there he has appointed it.k

On the jerky form of words, see the note on 14:1. For v. 1, LXX simply has “regarding the foreigners.”

MT has a section marker here.

The *waw­*-consecutive continues the participial construction.

The 4-4 cola (unique in the poem) convey the relentless thundering. I follow MT’s versification in seeing v. 3a as the beginning of a new sentence.

LXX lacks *the Philistines* and *Caphtor’s*.

LXX has “thrown out”: on this verb here and in v. 6, see the notes on 6:2; 8:14.

For MT *‘imqām*, LXX implies *‘ănāqîm* (cf. Josh 11:22).

L has a section marker here.

In L *’al* is a slip for *’el*.

LXX, Vg have a third-person verb, which matches the parallel colon.

MT has a marker here.

The unit outlines:

v. 1 introduction

vv. 2-5 a portrayal of the attack

v. 2 more metaphorically: the flood, and the wailing

vv. 3-4 more literally: the invasion, and the destruction

v. 5 the aftermath: the grieving

v. 6-7 a protest and a response

v. 6 the protest

v. 7 the response

After the introduction, the poem comprises fourteen neat bicola, most of them illustrating various forms of parallelism. They are thus tighter than Jeremiah’s usual poetry, but they compare with his usual poetry in their use of imagery, of rhetorical questions, of apostrophe (the addressing of a non-human subject), and of the imaginative portrayal of a catastrophe in a way that brings home its horror. They use expressions appearing elsewhere in Jeremiah, though also elsewhere: the flooding forces (v. 2, cf. 46:7-8); the trouble from the north (v. 2; see e.g., 1:13-15; 4:6; 6:1, 22); the drooping hands (v. 3, cf. 6:24; 38:4). Like some other Jeremianic poems, this one starts abruptly, in the middle of things, without indicating speaker or audience (neither of which are ever identified) or subject, and with an unidentified “he” playing a key role.

**1** The information in this opening verse, relating to and making a link with trouble from the south on a different occasion from that implied by the poem itself, might add to the pressure on Judah not to think that Neco’s capture of Gaza heralded a serious reassertion of Egyptian power, which could work in Judah’s favor.[[279]](#footnote-279)

**2** With a little irony in the context, Jeremiah pictures an invader flooding from the north as 46:7-8 pictured the Egyptian army flooding from the south (but Isa 8:7-8 also already portrayed the Assyrians flooding through Judah). As the flood in 46:7-8 suggested the Nile, this one suggests the Euphrates. And in contrast to that flood, this one succeeds in overwhelming its victims. Indeed, it resembles the frightening and overwhelming reality of a flash flood that can turn an empty wadi into a raging torrent, as if the country and the town(s) are an encampment in the dry river bed that get unexpectedly engulfed and made to cry out in panic.

**3-5** Jeremiah goes on to give a more literal but still imaginary account of the invasion and its results, which include men being so paralyzed that they cannot even scoop up their children so as to take them to safety. Their failing to do so is “inconceivably unnatural” though the description has a near parallel in the behavior of animals in 14:5[[280]](#footnote-280) – which if anything adds to the horror – and anticipates the reference to women eating their babies in Lam 2:20. The reference of *his* is not identified (presumably it is Nebuchadrezzar) and only in v. 4 is Philistia identified as his victim. The Philistines on the southwest coast are associated with the Phoenicians of Tyre and Sidon on the northwest coast, who follow Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Ammon in 25:20-22; the implication here is that the Philistines could be allies to the Phoenicians, who have therefore lost their potential allies. Amos 9:7 refers to the Philistines as from Caphtor, which counts as a foreign shore and may denote Crete. While as usual the poem speaks hyperbolically when it refers to *destroying all the Philistines*, it is noteworthy that kings of Tyre, Gaza, Sidon, and Ashdod came to be members of Nebuchadrezzar’s court, in their exile.[[281]](#footnote-281) And the wasting of Philistia is portrayed as sufficiently devastating to warrant Jeremiah seeing Gaza as simply characterized by *clipping*, the cutting of the hair that was a mark of mourning (cf. 16:6; 41:5), and Ashkelon as being *rendered still* by the devastation that has come to it. Further, Jeremiah can inquire rhetorically of the rest of the Philistine plain in the terms of another rite that signifies mourning, *how long will you gash yourself?* (cf. 16:6; 41:5).

**6-7** The protest that follows is an implicit exhortation to the slaughtering sword to get itself back into its sheath – more literally, to the swordsman to put it back there. Is the protester Jeremiah, or an imaginary someone from Philistia? The *oh* is an expression of horror;[[282]](#footnote-282) any normal person would want to see an end to this slaughter. The bidding comes a close with a repetition of a verb from v. 5: Ashkelen has been rendered still or is being rendered still, so please, the sword must now be still. Enough already! But as usual the *how long* question is rhetorical, though not for the usual reason. The protesting question is simply the deceptive lead in to the devastating reply in v. 7. It was Yahweh who gave the order for the slaughter, and it must continue until he says “Enough.”

# Moab (48:1-47 [LXX 31:1-44])

Moab forms a mirror image of Judah on the other side of the Jordan, between Ammon and Edom. Like Judah, on one side it extends alongside the Dead Sea a thousand feet below sea level. Its territory then climbs steeply to three thousand feet above sea level, like Judah’s, to country that is quite fertile, and it then climbs higher. Judah on the west gives way to the Mediterranean Sea, and Moab on the east gives way to the Arabian Desert.[[283]](#footnote-283)

The Moab chapter is the most substantial collection of messages about other nations in Jer 46 – 49. The subsequent messages about Babylon in Jer 50 – 51 are much more substantial, in keeping with its significance in Jeremiah’s day. The extensive treatment of Moab fits the broader prominence of Moab in the First Testament. It appears more often than Ammon or Edom (less often than Philistia, but Philistia’s references cluster more in the Saul and David stories), so it is not odd that the Jeremiah scroll should give it much attention. The messages’ theme, in line with that of the messages about other nations, is Yahweh’s bringing calamity on Moab, though they close with a line promising subsequent restoration. Like Jer 46 – 47, the chapter’s rhetoric works with an alternation between the literal and the metaphorical, and also with an alternation between the general and the specific and concrete (it names many individual places). These two reinforce each other. But it does not give dates or incorporate information that would enable one to guess at their context, like much of Jer 46 – 47. In line with the messages about other nations, some might relate to an imminent invasion or defeat or one that happening now; some might relate to an invasion or defeat that has already happened; some might issue simply issue from the prophet’s insight regarding what Yahweh is going to do at some time. The curator has collected the messages in a way that does not enable readers to reconstruct possible references. Within Jeremiah’s lifetime, one can imagine messages about Moab functioning to discourage Judah from continuing in forms of worship influenced by Moabite religion (2 Kgs 23:13), from joining with Moab in rebelling against Babylon (Jer 27:3), and from thinking that Yahweh was going to do nothing about Moab’s involvement in attacks on Judah in the decades leading up to 587 (2 Kgs 24:2). But the distinctive length of the chapter suggests that there is more to its significance than those links that also apply to other peoples.

The poems refer to many places in Moab, a number of which appear in an inscription or stele commissioned two centuries previously by Mesha, King of Moab, which illumines the Moabite perspective on Chemosh and also issues that arise in Jer 48. The Mesha inscription reads:

(1) I am Mesha, son of Kemosh[-yatti], the king of Moab, the Dibonite. (2) My father was king over Moab for thirty years, and I, I was king after my father. And I made this high place for Kemosh in Karchoh *as h*[*eight of deliverance*], (3) because he delivered me from all *kings* and because he has made me look down on all my enemies. Omri, (5) the king Israel, oppressed Moab for many days, for Kemosh was angry with his land. (6) And his son succeeded him. and he said – he too – I will oppress Moab. In my days he did [so]. (7) But I looked down on him and on his house, and Israel has gone to ruin, yes has gone to ruin for ever! Omri had taken possession of the wh[ole la]nd (8) Medeba. And he lived there in his days and half the days of his son, forty year. (9) But Kemosh [resto]red it in my days. And I built Baal Meon and I made in it a water reservoir. And I bui[lt] (10) Kiriathaim. And the men of Gad lived in the land of Ataroth from ancient times and the king of (11) Israel built Ataroth for himself. And I fought against the city and I captured it, and I killed all the people [ *from*] (12) the city as a *sacrifice* for Kemosh and for Moab. And I brought back the *fire-hearth of* DWDH and I ha[ul]ed (13) it before the face of Kemosh in Kerioth. And I made the men of Sharon live there, as well as the men of (14) Maharith. And Kemosh said to me: Go, take Nebo from Israel!. And I (15) went in the night and I fought against it from the break of dawn until noon. And I (16) took it, and I killed [its] whole population: seven thousand [ma]le citizens and aliens, females citizens and [aliens] (17) and servant girls. For I had put it to the ban for Ashtar Kemosh. And from there I took the [ves-] (18) sels of YHWH. And I hauled them before the face of Kemosh. The king of Israel had built Jahaz (19) and he stayed there during his campaigns against me. And Kemosh drove him away before [my] face. (20) [And] I took from two hundred men of Moab, all its *division* and I led it up to Jahaz and I have taken it (21) in order to add it to Dibon. I was the one who built Karchoh, the wall of the wood and the wall of (22) the citadel. And I was the one who built its gates. And I was the one who built its towers. And (23) I was the one who built the house of the king. And I was the one who made the *double* reser[voir for the spri]ng in the innermost part (24) of the city. Now, there was no cistern in the innermost part of the city, in Karchoh, but I said to all the people: Make, (25) each one of you, a cistern in his house. And I was the one who cut out the moat for Karchoh by means of Israelite (26) prisoners. And I was the one who built Aroer. And I was the one who made the military road in the Arnon. (27) I was the one who built Beth Bamoth, for it was destroyed. And I was the one who built Bezer, for [it lay in] ruins. (28) [And the me]n of Dibon stood in battle-order, for all Dibon, they are in subjection. And I was the one who became (29) ki[ng over] hundred in the cities which I added to the land. And I was the one who built (30) [Beth Mede]ba and Beth Diblathaim and Beth Baal Meon and I brought there (31) [. . .] flocks of the land. (32) [. . . And] Kemosh said to me: Go down, fight against Horonaim! And I went down. (33) [. . . And] Kemosh [resto]red it in my days [. . .] from there [. . .].[[284]](#footnote-284)

Mesha’s understanding of Chemosh parallels Jeremiah’s understanding of Yahweh.[[285]](#footnote-285) Illustrating the “close affinity between Israelite and Moabite beliefs,”[[286]](#footnote-286) Mesha believes that Chemosh is a god involved in history and in relationships between different nations and is committed to Moab. He is a god who gets angry at aggression towards his people and merciful towards his people. He has guided Mesha about when to attack aggressors and delivered Mesha from his attackers and thus given him honor rather than shame. In light of this act of deliverance Mesha built Chemosh a sanctuary at Karchah. He dedicated the spoil of the battle to Chemosh, while also killing the men in the battle but devoting the women and girls to Ashtar Chemosh, which might be another designation for Chemosh or might denote a partner goddess.[[287]](#footnote-287) There was presumably more to Mesha’s theology than appears in the inscription as there was more to Jeremiah’s theology than appears in Jer 48, but these elements are similar. The question at issue would not be the correct way to understand deity but the truth about whether Chemosh actually was God or whether Yahweh was.

Much of Jer 48 shows marked similarity to Moab material relating in Isaiah and Numbers:[[288]](#footnote-288)

5because at the ascent to Luhith because at the ascent to Luhith

with crying they go up crying with crying they go up it[[289]](#footnote-289)

because on the Horonaim descent because on[[290]](#footnote-290) the Horonaim road

people have heard outcry-distresses at the breaking people raise an outcry at the breaking (Isa 15:5b)

29we have heard Moab’s majesty we have heard Moab’s majesty

very majestic very majestic[[291]](#footnote-291)

his loftiness and his majesty his exaltedness and his majesty

his majestic nature and the exaltedness of his mind

30I… acknowledged (Yahweh’s affirmation) his excess and his excess

but his empty talk was not right his empty talk was not right

not right have they acted

31as a result over Moab I will howl therefore Moab will howl

for Moab, all of it, I will cry out for Moab, all of it will howl[[292]](#footnote-292)

about the people of Kir-heres for the raisin-blocks of[[293]](#footnote-293) Kir-hareseth

one will murmur you will murmur, stricken indeed (Isa 16:6)

32with more than the crying of Jazer I will cry for you as a result I will cry with crying for Jazer

Sibmah vine Sibmah vine (Isa 16:9)[[294]](#footnote-294)

your extensions crossed the sea, its shoots extended, crossed the sea

as far as Jazer Sea they reached as far as Jazer they reached (Isa 16:8)[[295]](#footnote-295)

upon your summer fruit and upon your cut grapes upon your summer fruit and upon your grain[[296]](#footnote-296)

a destroyer has fallen a shout has fallen

33rejoicing and gladness gather themselves up rejoicing and gladness gather themselves up[[297]](#footnote-297)

from orchard from the country of Moab from the orchard

in the vineyards they are not chanted, shouted

and wine from the presses I have made to cease wine in the presses

no one treads with a shout – no treader treads

the shout is not a shout I have made the shout to cease (Isa 16:9-10)

34from the outcry of Heshbon as far as Elealeh Heshbon and Elealeh cry out

as far as Jahaz they have given their voice as far as Jahaz their voice has made itself heard

(Isa 15:4)

from Zoar as far as Horonaim his fugitives as far as Zoar,

Eglath-shelishiyah Eglath-shelishiyah (Isa 15:5)

because the water of Nimrim, too – because the water of Nimrim –

it will become desolation it will become desolation[[298]](#footnote-298) (Isa 15:6)

35I will make cease for Moab (Yahweh’s affirmation) Moab has wearied himself at the shrine

any ascent to a shrine (Isa 16:12)

and burning an offering to his god

36as a result my heart for Moab – as a result my insides for Moab –

like pipes it moans like a guitar it moans

my heart for the people of Kir-heres my soul for Kir-heres (Isa 16:11)

like pipes it moans

as a result the surplus he made, they have perished

37because every head, clipping on all his heads, clipping

and every beard, cutting every beard, cutting

on all hands, gashes

and on hips, sack on his hips they have bound sack

38on all the roofs of Moab and in its squares on its roofs and in its squares

all of him, lamenting all of him howls (Isa 15:2-3)

43terror and pit and trap terror and pit and trap

against you who live in Moab (Yahweh’s affirmation) against you who live in the earth – it will happen

44the person who flees in the face of the terror the person who flees at the sound of the terror

will fall into the pit will fall into the pit

and the person who climbs out of the middle of the pit and the person who climbs out of the pit

will be caught in the trap will be caught in the trap (Isa 24:17-18)

45because fire has gone out from Heshbon because fire has gone out[[299]](#footnote-299) from Heshbon

a flame from within Sihon a flame from the town of Sihon

it has consumed the brow of Moab it has consumed Ar of Moab[[300]](#footnote-300)

the scalp of the people of Shaon the lords of the shrines at the Arnon[[301]](#footnote-301)

46oh, for you, Moab oh, for you, Moab

the people of Chemosh has perished people of Chemosh, you have perished

because your sons have been taken into captivity he made your sons fugitives

and your daughters into captivity and your daughters into captivity[[302]](#footnote-302)

(Num 21:28-29)

The existence of several related versions of prophecies about Moab fate draws further attention to Moab’s importance for Israel. Once the Canaanites could be discounted, Moab was the most important of Israel’s neighbors until Jeremiah’s day, though Edom then inherited this position. Related to this fact was an ongoing dispute over territory throughout Israel’s history from its beginnings at least until the eighth century, as is reflected in the Mesha stele as well as in the First Testament. It makes explicit the longstanding conflict between Moab and Israel over the territory north of the Arnon, a conflict sharper and longer than conflicts between Israel and its other neighbors, which may underlie the greater prominence of Moab in Isaiah and Jeremiah and the general absence of explicit links between the messages and specific historical contexts; they constitute general promises that Yahweh will eventually deal with Moab.

These geographical consideration suggest another aspect to the rationale behind Moab’s prominence in Jeremiah’s messages about the nations. Yahweh is promising to take back the land in formerly Amorite territory north of Moab, which he claimed at the time of Israel’s arrival in the area and allocated to Reuben and Gad. The same logic lies behind the focus on Edom in Obadiah and elsewhere, since the Babylonian period saw Edom taking over considerable Judahite land. While we cannot locate all the places mentioned by Mesha or by Jeremiah, the places that are due for devastation about whose location we are reasonably sure lie north of the Arnon, in the territory that Yahweh claims but that Moab has moved into. It is therefore not surprising that Yahweh repeats a number of times that Moab would be removed from this territory he claimed. The arrival of the Assyrians and than of the Babylonians changed the dynamics of the tensions between Moab and Israel, but did not abolish them. Yahweh does not take action against Moabite territory south of the Arnon, which he had given to Moab (Deut 2:9). The references to Aroer on the Arnon in this connection are significant; it marks the northern boundary of Moab proper and the distinction between north and south. Where Jer 48 mentions places south of the Arnon, in Moab proper, it mentions them as places where Moabites are naturally grieving over what has happened in the north, but not as places that have themselves been devastated.

There is thus also nothing surprising if versions of Yahweh’s declarations about Moab were recycled in different contexts. There are different views on whether Isa 15 – 16 reflects reworking of Jer 48, or whether Isa 15 – 16 (and Isa 24 and Num 21 – 24) and Jer 48 both reflect reworking of an earlier version of these declarations that did not survive (as I take to be so with the two versions of a similar declaration in Isa 2:2-4 and Mic 4:1-3, and with Matthew and Luke’s independent use of a collection of Jesus’s sayings commonly referred to as Q). It is simplest to assume that Jeremiah is using Isa 15 – 16; 24 and Num 21 – 24 in something like the form we have them. The dating of all this material is uncertain,[[303]](#footnote-303) though it points to another possibility. If it still seems odd that Yahweh would have given Jeremiah so much to say about Moab compared with Judah’s other neighbors, possibly the curator has brought together messages from Yahweh about Moab from before Jeremiah’s day as well as material from other prophets and theologians in Jeremiah’s day and in subsequent decades. But again, we cannot distinguish between material that came from Jeremiah and material that came from elsewhere.

One effect of the chapter’s approach is to indicate that Yahweh is here reaffirming old promises; their not having been finally fulfilled was a reason for holding onto them not for abandoning them. Calvin’s prayer fits:

Grant Almighty God, that we may learn, not only to consider thy judgments when they appear before our eyes, but also to fear them whenever they are announced, so that we may implore thy mercy, and also repent of our sins and patiently bear thy paternal chastisements, and never murmur when thou sparest for a time the ungodly.[[304]](#footnote-304)

The allusions to the promises in Numbers and Isaiah are sometimes serendipitous, which may suggest they emerge from an acquaintance with the promises as proclaimed from time to time orally rather than from consultation of a written scroll. Elements in these promises stuck, and sometimes substantial phrases and lines reappear in a form that reflects conscious or unconscious modification. It would be inappropriate to assimilate the Jeremiah text to Isaiah and Numbers or vice versa, unless there seemed reason to think that one version or another had become corrupted. The phenomenon parallels the way in which as usual LXX Jeremiah here is different in detail from MT Jeremiah here. As elsewhere each version is valid in its own right; I comment on Jeremiah MT while documenting in the notes some differences from LXX and from the material in Isaiah and Numbers.[[305]](#footnote-305)

While the frequent transitions in the chapter suggest that it does comprise a collection of messages rather than one long message, and one certainly cannot get a picture of an enemy fighting one battle against Moab,[[306]](#footnote-306) the dividing lines between the units are often difficult to identify, and different commentators offer varying analyses of the chapter’s structure. The chapter thus parallels Jer 2 in the way it brings together a collection of prophecies,[[307]](#footnote-307) often juxtaposing units that complement each other. Their sequence is thus not random, but personal impressions are involved in dividing the chapter into meaningful units.[[308]](#footnote-308) In addition, while most of the messages are in verse, they incorporate some prose footnotes, and it is sometimes hard to discern whether we are reading prosaic verse or poetic prose. Their language contains many expressions and rhetorical figures that recur through the Jeremiah scroll; they seem no less and no more likely to be of the same authorship as other material in it.[[309]](#footnote-309)

The chapter’s main theme is to affirm that Yahweh will act against Moab and that the effect on Moab will be devastating. It manifests considerable sympathy towards Moab in this connection, but the expressions of sympathy seem ironic; they are a way of underlining the depth of the catastrophe.[[310]](#footnote-310) No doubt Yahweh really does grieve at the need to bring such calamity to Moab, as he grieves at the need to bring calamity to Judah. And the chapter does close with a reverse irony. Yahweh promises Moab’s restoration in the same terms as he promises Judah’s restoration. Any Judahite celebrating of Moab’s comeuppance must give way finally to celebrating its restoration.

## Moab Broken (48:1-10)

1Regarding Moab

Yahweh of Armies the God of Israel has said this.

Oh, on account of Nebo, that it has been destroyed,

Kiriathaim has been shamed,a captured.

The fortress has been shamed, shattered –

2there is no glory about Moab any more.

In Heshbon people intended something dire against it:

“Get going, let’s cut it off from being a nation.

Madmen, too, you will be rendered stillb –

after you the sword will go.”

3The sound of an outcry from Horonaim:

“Destruction, a great breaking!”

4Moab has been broken,

its little onesc have let their outcry be heard.

5Because at the ascent to Luhithd

with crying, crying goes up.e

Because on the Horonaim descent

the great distress of the outcry at the breaking, people have heard.

6Flee, save your life,

and becomef like Aroerg in the wilderness!

7Because on account of your relying on what you have made and on your stores,h

you too will be captured.

And Chemoshi will go out to exile,

his priests and his officials together.

8The destroyer will come to every town,

no townj will escape.

The vale will perish,

the flatland will be laid waste (what Yahweh has said).

9Give a rosettek to Moab

because it is to go out ruined.l

Its towns – they will become desolate,

from having no one living in them.

10Cursed the one who does Yahweh’s work treacherously,

cursedm the one who holds back his sword from blood.

LXX lacks this verb.

And/or “made to weep”: see the notes on 6:2; 8:14.

For *ṣә‘îreyhā* LXX implies *ṣô‘ărâ* “as far as Zoar”; cf. Isa 15:5.

For Q *luḥit* (cf. Isa 15:5) K implies *luḥô*t.

The expression is perhaps a synecdoche for “people go up crying” or “people cry as they go up.”

The verbs and suffix in the first colon were masculine plural; this verb looks feminine plural, but it might been understood as masculine with an energic ending (see Bright, *Jeremiah*, 314; on the general notion of energic forms, see GK 48bc; JM 61f).

Aq, Vg take *‘ărô‘ēr* to denote a desert shrub (see BDB), and MT may invite readers to see both meanings here (cf. *CTAT* 2:778-80). LXX implies *‘ārôd* “a wild donkey.”

For MT’s double expression LXX simply has “fortifications”; the presence of just one word would make for a more plausible colon (four stresses instead of five), but what that one word would be is a matter of guesswork. The suffixes in this line are feminine singular.

K *kmyš* corresponds to the Ebla spelling (*IBHS* 1.6.3l; cf. Müller, “Chemosh,” 186-87); and cf. the name of the city Carchemish.

LXX lacks *town*.

Rashi (in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage) takes *ṣîṣ* to mean wings, an extension of its meaning a lock of hair or a tassel in Aramaic (*DTT*,1279), *ṣîṣit* in Hebrew, which would fit if *nāṣā’* in the next colon means “fly” (see BDB); but see the next note. W. L. Moran suggests “salt” on the basis of a similar Ugaritic word meaning “salt field” (“Ugaritic *ṣîṣûma* and Hebrew *ṣîṣ*,” *Biblica* 39 [1958]: 69-71). LXX implies *ṣiyyôn* “marker” (cf. 31:21), here suggesting a gravestone (see BDB). Aq, Sym have flower or shoot.

The phrase *nāṣō’ tēṣē’* parallels 8:13 and 23:39 (see the notes) in combining the idiom whereby an infinitive precedes a finite verb with paronomasia: *nāṣā’* is a byform of *nāṣâ* “fall in ruins” (see the note on 2:15), chosen (or invented) for the similarity to *yāṣā’* “go out.”

LXX lacks the repeated *cursed*.

This first sequence comprises an imaginary lament, perhaps a funeral lament, at a calamity that is coming or has come upon Moab; it goes on to include imaginary exhortations to people therefore to flee from the disaster area. The disaster issues from people’s trust in their humanly-made religion focused on Chemosh, who will be going into exile. The sequence comes to an end with a curse on the devastation’s agents if they do not do their work properly. It outlines:

v. 1aαβ a double introduction

vv. 1aγ-2 a grieved portrayal of the destruction of northern towns as if it has already happened; four bicola

vv. 3-5 an account of the horrified and grieved reaction to this event in the south

four bicola

vv. 6-9 an exhortation to people in the south to flee from the calamity that is coming

seven bicola

v. 10 a curse on people who do not do this destructive work thoroughly

one 5-4 bicolon

**1-2** *Regarding Moab* signals the subject of Jer 48 as a whole, while *Yahweh of Armies the God of Israel has said this* then introduces the first in the collection of messages. The beginning of the actual message, *oh*, can be the beginning a lament at someone’s death; it is “the ominous death knell that sounds for Moab.”[[311]](#footnote-311) *Nebo* is near the top of the mountain ridge in the north of northern Moab, one of whose peaks is the Mount Nebo of Deut 34. *Kiriathaim* is another town in the same area. *The fortress* is likely a term to describe Kiriathaim, one that suggests some irony – Kiriathaim has turned out not to have the strength that *fortress* suggests. The parallel colon makes a parallel point about *Moab* in general, the reference to its *glory* linking with the double reference to being *shamed*. *Heshbon* is also quite far north, northeast of Nebo. The reference to the unnamed invaders then introduces a paronomasia, since *intended* is *ḥāšәbû*: Heshbon was the “appropriate” place for people to be implementing an intention to *cut off* Moab’s life as *a nation*. *Madmen* may be the site now known as Dimneh, further north again, near Rabbah. Whatever its location, its fate again links with its name; it may do so in more than one way. “Be still” is *dāmam/dāmâ* whose meaning overlaps with the idea of devastation;[[312]](#footnote-312) in addition, *dōmen* is dung and *madmēnâ* is a dung pit. So this first description of devastation refers to a series of places quite far north in northern Moab, the part of Moab that Yahweh had allocated to Israel, including a place near that mountain where Moses surveyed the promised land and then died.

**3-5** In contrast but complementing that description, four lines report the turmoil the news of it brings in southern Moab, from what Judahites might see as Moab proper.The country as a whole is riven by a series of canyons running down to the Dead Sea from the peak of Moab’s eastern ridge. *Horonaim* was on one of these descents. V. 34 suggests it was in the far southeast, near the southern end of the Dead Sea. So we move from the fairly far north in vv. 1-2 to the far south here. The mention of *Luhith* inside the double mention of Horonaim suggests that Luhith is at the top of the Horonaim ascent.[[313]](#footnote-313) The comment on the *destruction* in the north picks up the verb *destroyed* from v. 1, while the general comment about Moab that follows likewise picks up the reference to Moab in v. 2. The message underlines things with its double reference to the *outcry* that has been *heard* and to *breaking/being broken*. To make the portrayal worse, it is the outcry of *the little ones* that the prophet hears and reports. Then the final colon adds *great distress* (more literally, “distresses”) to the doubled reference to *outcry* and *breaking* (and *heard*) so that the account gains force both from the repetition and from this new element that contributes to an unusual triple noun expression (distresses of the outcry of the breaking – with a third reference to breaking). The lines are a carefully-wrought piece using poetic form to bring home their point to the Judahites.

**6** Although the disaster has so far affected only northern Moab, those horrified mourners in southern Moab would be unwise to assume that they will be exempt from the same experience. The exhortation to *flee* thus follows from what precedes. It does not constitute the content of the outcry (which would be a protest rather than a piece of advice) but an exhortation addressing the people who have voicedthe outcryand need to take action for themselves in light of it. *Aroer* is a town on the Arnon, a river flowing into the Dead Sea from the east that can be seen as the northern boundary of Moab proper (Num 21:13; Deut 2:36; 3:12; 4:48). It would be the place though which news of the troubles in the north would come in order to reach the south. It is a going concern in v. 19, so the threat of becoming like Aroer is puzzling. But it appears in another prophecy about a foreign nation in a comment about its being destroyed and abandoned and just an abode for flocks (Isa 17:2), so here becoming like Aroer might be another snide idea. It would link with *‘ărô‘ēr* also being a word for a desert shrub. But *wilderness* commonly does not imply lifeless desert but pasturage, and the idea here might be that at least being an abode for flocks would be something. One way or another, though, the towns in the south need to take action if they are to avoid the fate of the towns in the north.

**7** Whereas *you* in v. 6 was plural, now it is feminine singular. The prophecy speaks to Moab corporately (it referred to Moab in the feminine singular in v. 4). For the first time a reason is given for the dire fate that is coming on Moab. *Relying* on the wrong thing is an important theme in Jeremiah. Judah’s problem is that it has relied on deception one way or another (7:4; 13:25; 28:15; 29:31). It turns out that mistaken reliance is key to life and death for other peoples, not just for Israel. Moab’s false reliance is the same as Judah’s. The expression *what you have made* (*ma‘aśeh*) regularly refers to divine images (e.g., 1:16; 10:3, 9; 25:6, 7). In association with that word, *stores* might be the valuable accoutrements of a shrine (e.g., 2 Kgs 24:13). The next line with its reference to Chemosh makes more explicit the reference to religious reliance. It might seem more excusable for Moab to rely on its religion and its religious artefacts than it is for Judah, but here the prophecy cuts it no slack (and perhaps the prophet would like to imagine the Judahites listening to this prophecy working out for themselves that, if Moab is guilty and in deep trouble in this connection, *a fortiori* they are more guilty and in deeper trouble). As the Mesha inscription presupposes, *Chemosh* is Moab’s deity as Yahweh is Israel’s. But in reality, Chemosh does not have the power to save his people; rather, he and his ministers inevitably share their fate. The formulation of this point overlaps with a comment in Amos 1:15 concerning Ammon: “their king will go to exile, he and his officials together.” The prophet may also hint at another point. Chemosh going into exile means Moab’s conquerors taking his image back home with them. Relying on *what you have made* and on *your stores* also gives people a false sense of security: these things may actually make them vulnerable to attackers who would like to appropriate them. Such reliance is tactically unwise as well as religiously and theologically wrong.

**8-10** The prophet goes on to generalize the account of the coming destruction. The *destroyer*, the destruction’s agent, is not identified, like the northern enemy earlier in Jeremiah. In 604 and the following decades it could be assumed that Nebuchadrezzar is this agent, but as usual the prophecy’s lack of specificity means it is not limited to this reference, and in origin it might be somewhat earlier or later. Either way, every *town* will experience his coming, as will both *vale* and *flatland* – the Jordan Valley and the high plateau. Sardonically, then, the prophet urges unnamed hearers (Yahweh’s aides, if we should attempt to identify them) to give Moab a coronet to compensate for its ruined state as it goes off into exile. It is perhaps the same unnamed agents whom v. 10 indirectly urges to do their destructive work thoroughly, though the exhortation has been “claimed” by various subsequent readers.[[314]](#footnote-314) It may presuppose that Yahweh doesn’t enjoy commissioning such work; it is alien to him (Isa 28:21) and doesn’t come form his heart (Lam 3:33). He knows that no normal person wants to engage in killing, so sometimes his agents have to be spurred on.

## Retrospect and Prospect (48:11-17)

11Moab at rest from his youth,

quiet on his lees:

He has not been emptied from vessel to vessel;

into exile he has not gone.a

As a result his taste has stood in him,

and his aroma – it hasn’t changed.b

12Therefore, there, days are coming (Yahweh’s affirmation):

I will send off tippers for him and they will tip him out;

his vessels they will empty,c

their jars they will break up.

13And Moab will be shamed because of Chemosh

as the household of Israel was shamed

because of Beth El, their reliance.

14How could you say,d

“We are strong men,

forceful men for the battle?”

15Moab has been destroyed,

into its towns people have gone up.

The choicest of its young men –

they have gone down to the slaughter.

(An affirmation of the King,

Yahweh of Armies his name).e

16Moab’s disasterf near coming,

its dire fate – it hurried fast.

17Condole with him,g all you who are around him,

all who acknowledge his name.

Say, “How the vigorous scepter has been broken,

the splendid mace.”

The line works abb’a’, so that *into exile* makes for a shocking beginning to the parallel second colon.

MT has a section marker here. This line too works abb’a’, but the parallelism contains no shocks.

For MT *yārîqû* LXX implies *yādēqqû* “they will crush” (*BHS*), which makes for good parallelism.

The next verse with its past reference suggests that this yiqtol does not have simple future reference.

LXX lacks this line.

LXX has “day,” not inappropriately (46:21 had *day of disaster*).

Moab becomes masculine singular, as in vv. 11-13, after being feminine singular in vv. 14-15.

The second sequence starts again from Moab’s current state and its past, then issues a warning of how the future will contrast with the past, its four subsections again working with the contrast and movement between past, present, and imminent, imagined future:

v. 11 A retrospective

three bicola

vv. 12-13 Yahweh’s declaration of intent

an introduction and two tricola

vv. 14-15 An alternative imaginary retrospective

a tricolon, two bicola, and an extra bicolon affirming that Yahweh speaks

vv. 16-17 Another alternative imaginary retrospective

three bicola

**11** The first retrospective takes the long view. Later sections of the chapter will pick up the theme of vines, grapes, and wine, in recognition of Moab’s being wine country, and this sequence starts from the same aspect of its reputation. Moab is like a bottle of good wine, which has been allowed to sit and mature in its vat. *Lees* are the remains of the yeast from grape skins. Leaving the wine on the lees for too long spoils it (cf. Zeph 1:12),[[315]](#footnote-315) but leaving it undisturbed for a while enables it to develop flavor and aroma. This wine has not been poured from one vessel to another: Moab has not been “disturbed” by being taken into exile (like Ephraim, say, if the prophecy dates from around 604, or like Judah, if it dates from later). But including that word *exile* sets up a worry. And in any period, for Judahites this retrospective raise the question “Why?” It half implies a protest like the ones that lie in the background of Pss 49 and 73.

**12-13** Actually things are not going to stay that way. In itself, the arrival of *tippers* would not be bad news; the word could suggest people who decant the wine from vats into individual bottles. But these tippers are more like vandals who deliberately pour away the contents of the vat. They not only *empty the vessels*; they *break* them. The poem goes on to interpret the allegory, which spells out the implications of that brief reference to exile in v. 11. Once again it critiques Moab’s false *reliance* and derides *Chemosh*, both as in v. 7. Here the critique is more specific. Chemosh, the supernatural object of their reliance, cannot protect his people; therefore they *will be shamed*. With another snide note, addressed to the poem’s actual audience, it adds a comparison with Ephraim and its reliance on Beth El. Some Middle Eastern texts refer to a god called Beth El, the name apparently shortened from a form such as El of the house of El. This allusion is the First Testament’s only clear reference to Israelite worship of a god with this name, though passages such as Amos 3:14 may have the same implication.[[316]](#footnote-316) Beth El will be a title for the senior god that people worshiped – Ephraimites might have seen it as “really” an alternative way of worshiping Yahweh when they worshiped at Bethel. But the fall of Ephraim was an exposure of their reliance which actually constituted recourse to another deity. The reference to Ephraim and its fall would again fit a time such as 604 and the context of Jeremiah’s critique of Ephraim as he seeks to get Judah not to go the same way. Indeed, parallels in Jeremiah’s language to describe Moab and its fate and Judah and its fate could bring home to Judah that it could be “at risk of becoming an outsider, becoming ‘Moabite,’” and that “the only hope for the weeping Rachel and the boasting Judean ‘Moab’ alike is to yield to the God who alone is capable of inscribing the covenant directly on the human heart.”[[317]](#footnote-317)

**14-15** In light of what is going to happen and has already happened in the vision’s imagination as v. 15 will describe it, this further snide question relates to what the Moabites thought they were – in effect it is another critique of their false reliance. They have always seen themselves as a strong collection of fighters. But events will belie the claim that v. 14 would once have implied. The content of the question comes in parallel 2-2 cola in v. 14, and they lead into parallel 2-2 bicola in v. 15a that breathlessly describe the grimness of what has happened (what will have happened), then yet another 2-2 bicolon in v. 15b where the statement of visionary imagination is underlined by a particularly strong variation on the common “affirmation of Yahweh.” The “report” that *Moab has been destroyed* is thus amplified by the explanation that unnamed enemy fighters *have gone up into its towns*. “Going up” commonly implies an invasion or attack; towns are regularly located on hills, and in Israel invaders commonly have to “go up” into its highland country. Here, that verb opens the way for an unhappy contrast: the defeat means *the choicest of its young men*, the people on whom Moab’s future military viability depends, *have gone down ­*– down *to the slaughter*.

**16-17** In another imaginary retrospective, the first colon in isolation would seem to be referring to the present, but the parallel colon makes clear that the line referrs to the sudden way the *disaster* fell on Moab. In this imagined future, then, its neighbors are urged to *condole* with Moab. They are people who *acknowledge his name*, who know and respect him and are shocked by what has happened, especially as Moab’s *dire fate* is here specified as its loss of independence. The *scepter* or *mace* stood for a nation possessing leadership that could act with power in its world. Moab’s symbol of power could be seen as not only as *vigorous* but also *splendid*, like impressive bejeweled ceremonial insignia carried in a procession. In the imagined future it is metaphorically *broken*. The recurrence of that verb overlaps in significance and resonances with occurrences such as the ones in invv. 4, 25, 38. The breaking of the scepter symbolizes the breaking of the nation. In reality Moab’s breaking would hardly be an eventuality that its neighbors would regret much, so the figure rather suggests to Moab what it will itself need to regret. To the poem’s Judahite audience its is a reality over which it might in theory console Moab – but more realistically it might need to see the event as another warning against allying with Moab.

## What Has Happened? (48:18-25)

18Go down from honor, sit in thirsty ground,a

you who sit as Miss Dibon.

Because the destroyer of Moab has gone up to you –

he has devastated your fortresses.

19By the road, stand and look out,

you who sit as Aroer.

Ask the man fleeing and the woman escaping,

say “What has happened?”

20Moab is shamed because it has shattered –

howl, cry out.

Announce at the Arnon

that Moab has been destroyed.

21A decision has come to the flatlandb region,

to Holon, to Jahzah,

Upon Mephaath, upon Dibon, upon Nebo,

upon Beth-diblathaim, 23upon Kiriathaim,

Upon Beth-gamul, upon Beth-meon,

24upon Kerioth, upon Bozrah,

Upon all the towns in the country of Moab,

far and near.

25Moab’s horn has been cut off,

his arm – it has been broken (Yahweh’s affirmation).c

Literally, “in the thirst”; cf. the use of the related adjective in Isa 44:3.

*Mišpāṭ* has come to *mîšōr*.

LXX lacks *(Yahweh’s affirmation)*.

The sequence manifests a similar dynamic to vv. 1-10, presupposing the same realities of theological geography. Once again it starts in the middle of things, presupposing that the ax has fallen in northern Moab and issuing two exhortations relating to the need to face that fact. It then goes on to catalog the towns that have been devastated. It outlines:

vv. 18-20 Biddings to Dibon and Aroer, with parallel descriptions in the biddings

six bicola in three pairs

vv. 21-25 A report of what has happened that explains and responds to the biddings

four linked bicola making one sentence, and one more summarizing bicolon

**18** Once again we are in medias res. Whereas vv. 1-2 started from devastation in the far north of northern Moab, vv. 18-20 focus on two key towns at the southern end of that region. *Dibon* is five miles north of Aroer; both are not far north of the Arnon and located on the King’s Highway, a main international north-south route up the Rift Valley. Dibon was where the Mesha Stele was found, and in that ninth-century inscription Mesha describes himself as a Dibonite. Although it was north of the Arnon, at this time, at least, it was the Moabite capital. The poetic apostrophe addresses this key Moabite city to urge it to recognize its reduction from a position of *honor* to a position described elsewhere as sitting in the dirt or reduced to wilderness, and here described as sitting in dry, *thirsty ground*. The poem again juxtaposes how the Moabite city must *go down* as *the* *destroyer* *of Moab* (again unidentified)[[318]](#footnote-318) *has gone up* to conquer it.

**19-20** Like Dibon, Aroer is personified as a woman; it is a place that southbound fugitives from Dibon would immediately pass as they fled towards southern Moab, a little like Ephraimites fleeing south to Judah after the Assyrian invasion. The poem imagines people asking the fugitives *what has happened*. Interpreted literalistically, it is a foolish question, especially in a town from where people would be able to see and hear things. Its rhetorical point is to draw attention to something horrific having happened. What follows in v. 20 is the answer to the question; perhaps we are to think of it as the fugitives’ own answer. Its implication is, “if Dibon has fallen, the entire tableland has been overrun.”[[319]](#footnote-319)

**21-24** These prosaic lines come in the midst of a poetic account of the imagined past devastation of Moab, and they can be laid out as rhythmic lines. As the destroyer is unnamed but the audience likely know who he is, so the agent of decision-making is unspecified but the audience definitely know (or are supposed to know) that Yahweh is the one who makes an authoritative decision (*mišpāṭ*)[[320]](#footnote-320) of this kind. We cannot locate most of the places named in the list, but it is clear enough that they are intended to convey the impression of an event affecting the entire country, as the last phrases in v. 24 make clear. In particular *flatland* or plateau suggests the entire northern region (cf. v. 8), and the locations we can identify are all north of the Arnon.

**25** The anticipatory description of calamity on Moab which closes this sequence takes up different imagery from v. 17, but makes the same point. The devastation in Moab has an effect like that of cutting off an animal’s horn, which is key to its aggressive action and therefore a symbol of its power. Or it has an effect like that of breaking a human being’s arm, which is also key to the person’s aggressive action and therefore a symbol of their power. This visionary sequence again portrays Moab as totally broken.

## Wine and Arrogance (48:26-32)

26Get him drunk, because against Yahweh he got big; Moab will overflow with his vomit,a and he too will become an object of fun. 27Hasn’t Israel been the object of fun for you?b Has he been found among thieves, that at all your wordsc against him you shake your head?d

28Abandon towns, dwell in the cliff,

you who live in Moab.

Be like a pigeon that nests

in the sides of the mouth of a gorge.e

29We have heard of Moab’s majesty,

very majestic,

His exaltedness andf his majesty,

his majestic nature and the loftiness of his mind.

30I myself have acknowledged (Yahweh’s affirmation) his excess,g

but his oraclesh were not right – not right have they acted.

31As a result over Moab I will howl,

for Moab, all of it, I will cry out,

About the people of Kir-heresi one could murmur,j

32with more than the crying for Jazer.k

I will cry for you, Sibmah vine,

you whose tendrils passed to the sea.

While as far as the sea, Jazerl they reached,

upon your summer fruit and upon your cut grapes a destroyer has fallen.

*Sāpaq* usually means clap (cf. 31:19; and LXX “with his hand”) but this meaning makes poor sense here; I take the verb as *DCH*’s *sāpaq* V, *HALOT*’s *sāpaq* II.

The absence of an apodosis following the *’im* clause suggests that *’im* is an interrogative – and again in the next clause (JM 161d).

See the note on 20:8, though here *middê* introduces a noun rather than a verb. LXX lacks *at all your words*.

While it’s possible to lay out v. 26 as a tricolon, it’s virtually impossible to read v. 27 as poetry, and v. 27 does continue from v. 26: so I treat both verses as prose. For MT *titnôdād* LXX “made war” suggests *titgôdēd* (*BHS*).

LXX has past tense verbs through this verse.

LXX lacks *his exaltedness and*.

*‘Ebrâ* and related words usually denote anger, but can refer to other forms of “overflowing” or unrestrained self-expression. LXX, Tg imply *‘ăbōdātô* “his work.”

*Baddîm* can refer to the words that someone speaks, or to the people who speak the words. As they are here the subject of “act,” the latter is more likely (see the comment).

LXX “Kiradas” might imply that its real name was *Kir-ḥādāš*, “New city.”

LXX has imperative verbs in v. 31.

Cf. Blayney, *Jeramiah*, 419.

Tg, Aq, Sym have “sea of Jazer,” which would presumably refer to the Dead Sea: but how could it be given that name?

This sequence is jumpier than the previous two; it more evidently combines material of diverse origin. The curator has collated material interweaving two motifs, wine and majesty. The prose sentences with which the sequence begins introduce these two motifs that the poetry then takes up. In this introduction the prophecy return to the present, the trouble being explicitly in the future. It issues exhortations to Moab’s potential destroyers and recalls the rationale for the trouble. In vv. 28-30 the prophecy issues an exhortation to Moab itself in light of the calamity that is portrayed as imminent, and elaborates on the rationale that necessitates it. Then in vv. 31-32 it reacts to what indeed happens to Moab as a consequence. Much of vv. 29-32 reworks messages about Moab in Isa 15 – 16.[[321]](#footnote-321) The sequence outlines:

vv. 26-27 Moab must be made to get drunk, because Moab got big

prose

vv. 28-30 Moab must flee, because it its majesty will mean its downfall

five bicola

vv. 31-32 Moab’s wine production is ruined and Moab cries from north to south

a tricolon and four bicola

**26-27** The bidding starts from the real present, and an unnamed voice (perhaps Jeremiah’s) urges unnamed actors (in a late-seventh or early-sixth century context, it would be the Babylonians) to take a form of action that recalls the chalice in 25:15-29. In this chapter’s context it links with the wine motif in vv. 11-13, to which vv. 31-32 will return. The problem is that Moab *got big*; in theory there is nothing wrong with getting big, but it tends to imply a rivalry towards Yahweh’s importance (cf. Ezek 35:13), as is explicit here: Moab got big *against Yahweh*, “asserted autonomy from Yahweh.”[[322]](#footnote-322) The advantage of getting him drunk is that it will turn him into something pathetic. It will be an act of poetic justice. How did Moab get too bigfor its boots and treat Israel as *an object of fun*, something to laugh at, something to scorn? The context we have suggested for this chaptersuggests Moab’s casual and contemptuous occupation of land that Yahweh claimed and had allocated to Israel. Given that the Torah makes the Arnon the boundary between Israel and Moab, places such as Aroer and Dibon (as well as the many other places in the north that have been mentioned) were located in areas that Moab had taken over. These lines are thus a further rare example of a prophecy providing a rationale for Yahweh’s bringing calamity to a foreign people, and a rare reference to the foreign nation’s relationship with Israel in this connection. The development of the rationale involves suggesting that Moab was without excuse. It had treated Israel cynically and scornfully, hadn’t it? Israel hadn’t done anything that made it deserve Moab’s encroachment, had it? It hadn’t stolen land from Moab, had it? – the land to the north that the Torah saw as Israel’s had not belonged to Moab but to some Amorites who unwisely took on Israel. Moab just threw out its scornful words, shook its head in further scorn (“pathetic Israel can’t stand up to me!”) and took what it wanted.

**28-29** The poetic lines that follow look separate in origin, but juxtaposed with what now precedes in the context, they eventually elaborate on the point about Moab’s getting big. Yahweh’s agents’ job is to get Moab drunk – metaphorically. Moab will therefore be wise to get out of town to avoid having to drink the spiked chalice. To be more literal, if an invader is coming and there is no chance of defeating him, it’s sensible to hide. When a bird is scared, it takes refuge in a cleft in a cliff, where most threats can’t reach it, and human beings sometimes do the same (4:29). Moab needs to, as it literally could in the clefts of a canyon such as the Arnon. As if it were feasible, as if there were such a place, a place where one can escape Yahweh’s reach! It’s an ignominious thing to have to run for your life in this way, and it thus contrasts with the *majesty* and *loftiness* to which Moab aspires, with Moab’s getting big. Majesty and loftiness *of mind* or of attitude are further terms that don’t have to imply arrogance (Moab’s territory, towering up from the Jordan Valley, was physically impressive). But they easily do so (e.g., Lev 26:19: of Israel!). Isa 2 has already spoken at some length about hiding in the rocks when Yahweh’s majesty confronts Judahite majesty.

**30** *Excess* makes explicit the pejorative implications of Moab’s majesty, exaltedness, and loftiness. The excess expresses itself in *his oracles* which were *not right* and did not do right. *Oracles* (*baddîm*)thus here refers to people who bring oracles and mislead Moab into the action it takes. While the word is the Hebrew version of an Amorite word for such diviners, it is also (nicely) a homonym of a Hebrew word for babblers or babblings,[[323]](#footnote-323) and Jeremiah’s audience would be aware of that fact. Is the babblingwhat Moab said about Israel and/or about Yahweh? (again see vv. 26-27). If so, its excess also expresses itself in how Moab *acted*, in relation to Israel and Yahweh, which also *was not right*. Like Judah, Moab manifested that “pride in the form of the self-help which is forbidden to man,”[[324]](#footnote-324) and “this pride is a disaster waiting to happen.”[[325]](#footnote-325) Yahweh got to know about it and recognized its reality, and determined to do something about it.

**31a** Therefore there will be reason for lamenting what will now happen. Like the leap between preparation for battle and aftermath of defeat in 46:2-12, there is here a leap between facts requiring action and grief over the consequences of the events that follow, but no immediate description of what those events will be. The poem jumps straight to the words of someone speaking like a friend of Moab who will be overcome by the horror of what is going to happen to it, who will condole with it in the way v. 17 said. It will make him *howl* and *cry out* (vv. 31b-32 will add *murmur* and *cry* in the sense of weep). So who speaks? Who is the *I*?Back in v. 30 Yahweh was the *I* and in v. 33 Yahweh must be the *I*. So Yahweh must be the *I* here. He is both the one who takes action against Moab and the one who declares his grief over the consequences. Theologically one can perceive a profundity here, though rhetorically it seems likely that Yahweh’s declarations of grief at what happens to Moab are designed to underline its horror; it is an event to which the natural response would be horror.

**31b-32** *Kir-heres* is traditionally identified with modern Kerak, on the King’s Highway. It appears as Kir-hareseth in 2 Kgs 3:25, where is apparently the Moabite capital, and this identification would here make it stand appropriately for Moab as a whole, or for southern Moab as a whole.[[326]](#footnote-326) Etymologically the nameshould mean “Pottery/potsherd wall/city,” which might generate a grin in Hebrew. Jazer stands for the northern region of Moab in Num 32:1-3 and may do so here. Evidently *Sibmah* can be associated with viniculture, and the poem pictures vines from Sibmah stretching across to *the sea* – presumably the Dead Sea, the sea that begins below Jazer. Their stretching across to the sea is a sign of their flourishing. A destroyer falling on vineyards is a horrifying idea at the best of times, but Sibmah is “a metonymic expression for the wine country and cultivated land of Moab,”[[327]](#footnote-327) as is suggested by the subsequent reference to *summer fruit* and *cut grapes*. The threat suggests the invader devastating the land’s entire produce.

## Worship Replaced by Wailing (48:33-39)

33Rejoicing and gladness gather themselves up

from the orchard,a from the country of Moab –

I have made wine ceaseb from the presses.c

No one treads with a shout –

the shout is not a shout.

34From the outcry of Heshbon as far as Elealeh,

as far as Jahaz they have given their voice.

From Zoar as far as Horonaim,

Eglath-shelishiyah.

Because the water of Nimrim –

it also becomes desolation.

35I will make cease for Moab (Yahweh’s affirmation) anyone making an offering at a shrine,

and burning a sacrifice to his god.

36As a result, my heart for Moab –

like pipes it will moan.

My heart for the people of Kir-heres –

like pipes it will moan.

As a result, the surplusd he made –

they have perished,e 37because every head, clipping,

and every beard, cutting.

On all hands, gashes,

and on hips, sack.

38On all the roofs of Moab and in its squares,

all of it, lamenting.f

Because I have broken Moab,

like an object no one wants (Yahweh’s affirmation).

39Oh, how it has shattered – wail;

oh, how Moab has turned his back in shame.

Moab will become an object of fun,

something shattering to all the people around him.g

LXX lacks *from the orchard*.

LXX lacks *I have made cease*.

The asyndeton and the word order with the object preceding the verb suggests that this colon is subordinate to the what precedes.

*Yitrâ* comes only here and in Isa 15:7; but masculine *yeter* is common. It denotes what is left over, in a negative sense (39:9) or a positive one (Isa 56:12). In the context here the positive sense is appropriate (cf. vv. 32-33).

While the move from feminine singular to masculine plural is jerky, it is possible with a collective (DG 25). But the construction is less harsh if this colon and in particular this verb is treated as the lead in to v. 37.

LXX lacks this colon.

MT has a section marker here.

In sequence five, celebration and sacrifice give way to outcry and wailing. Much of the material reworks verses from Isa 15 – 16.[[328]](#footnote-328) The sequence outlines:

vv. 33-34 Moab loses any reason to celebrate

an opening tricolon and four bicola

vv. 35-36a Moab’s desolation and outcry in response to Yahweh’s stopping its worship

three bicola

vv. 36b-39 Moab’s grief and lament in response to Yahweh’s breaking it

an opening tricolon and five bicola

**33-34** The poem links with what precedes in taking up the motif of harvest. The grape harvest is an occasion of great celebration, but the catastrophe this poem envisages will mean there is no celebration. *I have made wine cease from the presses* means there will not be enough grapes for them to get as far as sitting on the lees (v. 11). So *rejoicing and gladness gather themselves up* like someone dying (e.g., Deut 32:50). There will be no celebratory *shout*, no shout at all really, nothing to shout about in a positive way. Put otherwise, the shout will be an *outcry*, a protest that sounds throughout the country – *all of it*, as v. 31 said; the three lines of v. 34 spell out the point once more in terms of some geographical specifics. Even if it is the northern region that chiefly experiences the devastation, the *outcry* comes not only from there, from Heshbon, Elealah, and Jahaz in the distant north, but also in the far south from Zoar, Horonaim, and *the water of Nimrim* (which was evidently one of the perennial rivers that flow down from the ridge to the Dead Sea, not just a wadi). Perhaps the average Judahites would have no more clue about Moabite geography than modern Western readers, but they might know those basics, and even if they lacked that degree of knowledge, it would not prevent their appreciating the force of this poem’s account of the outcry that sounds out from the entire country because of its desolation.

**35-36a** Their juxtaposition with vv. 33-34 suggests one or two possible point of connection in these lines. The failure of a harvest would make sacrifice impossible: there is nothing to bring. The failure of a harvest makes it especially necessary to pray, but one result of the desolation is that there is no one to go and pray. Given that the *I* of v. 35 must be Yahweh, it is also Yahweh who is doing the moaning in v. 36. As was the case in v. 31, there is presumably some irony in the grief Yahweh expresses. Moab’s being unable to offer sacrifice is a horrific aspect of the disaster that has come upon it, a horror that would make anyone grieve. *Kir-heres* stands in parallelism with Moab within the two lines of v. 36a, which fits the assumption that it is the Moabite capital, as in v. 31.

**36b-37** Every year, farmers hope for a *surplus* in their harvest. They need it for bartering so they can get hold of things they need but cannot produce, for saving in case next year’s harvest fails, for being generous to people like Elimelech and Naomi who show up because there is trouble the other side of the Jordan (one should hardly leave Jer 48 without remembering Ruth).[[329]](#footnote-329) Moab has good agricultural land and vv. 32-33 have implied that there have been good harvests. They have now ceased. Thus (in the poet’s imagination) the good things that Moab enjoyed *have perished*. The evidence is the way its people are mourning the disaster. Cutting one’s hair short instead of letting it flow, trimming one’s beard that is otherwise a sign of seniority and honor, gashing one’s hands (still a sign of distress in a Western context), dressing in an undignified manner: they are all signs of the grief one feels and expresses when someone has died.

**38-39** While one obvious response to disaster is to have recourse to the shrine (v. 35), Moabites knew that their gods could also be accessible at home and in the city. *Lamenting on all the* *roofs* thus suggests not merely the roof as a place where people gather socially, like the backyard. It is a place where one reaches out to the gods (cf. 19:13; 32:29). Lamenting in the *squares* also suggests gatherings that involve prayer and offerings, as Jeremiah speaks of Judahites making offerings in the streets of the city (44:17, 21). In the prophet’s vision, the nation’s distraught prayer reflects the fact that Yahweh has *broken Moab*. The image of Moab as broken recalls vv. 3, 4, 5, 17, and 25, as well as the threat to Judah in 19:11, while the image of *an object no one wants* recalls Jehoiachin in 22:28. Yes, broken Moab will become *an object of fun*, something to laugh at with scorn: cf. vv. 26-27. Yet the laughter will be a kind of schadenfreude, a rejoicing in someone else’s misfortune that semi-conceals a fear that one will have the same experience. Moab’s *shattering* (cf. vv. 1, 20) will have a shattering affect on anyone who sees it (cf. 1:17; 8:9; 17:18; 23:4; 30:10; 46:27 – this verb comes more often in the Jeremiah scroll than in any other book). Perhaps Jeremiah’s portrayal of it might have a shattering affect on people who seek to imagine it with him. The exclamation *how* (*’êk*)is another of Jeremiah’s signature expressions; it can be an explanation “of lamentation… or of satisfaction,”[[330]](#footnote-330) and both could apply here (cf. 50:23; 51:41).

## An Eagle, a Trap, a Fire (48:40-46)

40Because Yahweh has said this.

There, like an eagle one will sweep,

and spread his wings towards Moab.a

41The townsb are being captured,

the strongholds – they are being seized.c

The heart of Moab’s strong men will become

on that day

like the heart of a woman in labor.d

42Moab will be laid waste as a people,e

because against Yahweh he got big.

43Terror and pit and trapf

against you who live in Moab (Yahweh’s affirmation).g

44The person who flees in the face of the terror

will fall into the pit.

And the person who climbs out of the pit

will be caught in the trap.

Because I will bring to it, to Moab,

the year of their being attended to (Yahweh’s affirmation).

45In the shelter of Heshbon

people fleeing have halted, out of energy.

Because fire – it has gone out from Heshbon,

a flame from within Sihon.h

It has consumed Moab’s brow,

the skull of the people destined for tumult.i

46Oh, for you, Moab,

the people of Chemosh has perished!

Because your sons have been take as captives

and your daughters into captivity.j

LXX lacks this line.

LXX, Vg take *haqqәriyyôt* as the name of a specific town, as in v. 24, but here it has the article.

A neat abb’a’ line, with the second colon going beyond the first (see the comment).

LXX lacks v. 41b.

Literally, “from [being] a people.”

*Paḥad, paḥat*, *paḥ*.

LXX lacks *(Yahweh’s affirmation).*

2QJer has “from Sihon’s town,” assimilating to Num 21:28.

Literally, “people of tumult.”

Vv. 45b-46 correspond to Num 21:28-29; LXX lacks vv. 45-46.

The imagery changes again for the final sequence, which also reverts to more explicit talk of invasion and conquest, and segues from taking up the warnings from Isa 15 – 16 in the previous two sequences to taking up warnings from Isa 24 and Num 21.[[331]](#footnote-331) The compilation of messages in this chapter opened its warnings with *hôy*; it closes them with *’ôy*. Further, the intermingling of images with which it closes, along with its reworking prophetic warnings from elsewhere, combine to take the chapter to a forceful near-conclusion. The three units within this last sequence begin from three images:

vv. 40-42 an eagle

a prose introduction, two bicola, a tricolon, and another bicolon

vv. 43-44 a trap

four bicola

vv. 45-46 a fire

five bicola

**40-42** If one is to identify the *eagle*, it denotes Nebuchadrezzar (cf. Ezek 17), but Jeremiah is more interested in the eagle- or vulture-like nature of the conqueror than its identity (cf. Deut 28:49). The point is the conqueror’s swoop, which will issue in the capture of *towns*, even fortified *strongholds*. It will terrify Moab’s alleged *strong men*, its warriors, with the kind of fear that properly possesses a woman who is having a baby and knows it may be the death of her. The first two lines are thus neatly parallel in different ways. The first is an example of staircase parallelism in which the second colon presupposes some elements in the opening colon but then takes things further.

there like an eagle one will sweep

and will spread his wings towards Moab.

The Hebrew word order makes the aural link between the two middle words, *like an eagle* (*kanneššer*) and *his wings* (*kәnāpāyw*). The next line is another abb’a’ bicolon:

they are being captured the towns

the strongholds they are being seized.

In v. 41b the extra middle colon in the tricolon adds a further note of significance to what happens. This day is no ordinary day, and this battle is no ordinary battle. It is *that day*, Yahweh’s day, a day when Yahweh is implementing his ultimate purpose.[[332]](#footnote-332) Only here, as the chapter draws to its close, is the catastrophe that comes on Moab given this significance (cf. 46:10, 21 for Egypt; 47:4 for Philistia; 49:22 for Edom, when the complete formulation recurs; 49:26 for Damascus; perhaps a little less explicitly, 50:27-31 for Babylon). The threat of being *laid waste* corresponds to v. 8; and the reasoning corresponds to v. 26.

**43-44** The second metaphor works with an image that directly applies to an animal or an individual human being. It applies literally to an animal that someone wants to catch, and metaphorically to a person whom upon some unscrupulous plotter has designs (18:22; Pss 119:110; 140:5 [6]). A *trap* for an animal could mean a *pit* disguised by brushwood that the animal fell into, and traps for human beings would also benefit from disguise, though Jeremiah works the imagery in a different way. Imagine with a sigh of relief you climb out of the pit: then you get caught in a trap. There is no escape (cf. Amos 5:18-19). Jeremiah may, then, be affirming that no individual Moabites will escape when *the year of their being attended to* arrives; and/or he may be applying to the nation as a corporate entity the image that applies directly to the individual. Either way, there is nowhere to run, nowhere to hide.

**45a** The sequence in due course makes a transition to a third image. Like a trap, fire is a significant literal reality, not least in the context of invasion and war. While towns get set on fire accidentally in peace time, attacking and defending them in war often means playing with fire. Here, the literal reality again becomes a metaphor. So the first line describes one result of the invasion of Moab by a foreign army, by the eagle. An invasion sometimes results in people from rural areas taking refuge in towns, and Heshbon would be a natural refuge for people from the northern region. As happens a number of times in the chapter, the logic in v. 45 is then elliptical – the *because* does not provide a clear link. The deficit relates to the role of v. 45a as the prophet’s introduction to a reworking of Num 21:28-29, which occupies vv. 45b-46. The *because* is part of the text as it appears in Num 21:28, where it makes a different link.

**45b-46** The quotation from Numbers contains several levels of irony. In their context in Numbers the lines refer directly to the conquest of northern Moab by Sihon, whose capital was in the northern city of Heshbon. It was by virtue of defeating Sihon that Israel then came to be in control of this territory that once belonged to Moab. In this context the lines mock Moab for that earlier defeat, but also speak anticipatorily of a further defeat threatening Moab. Only in an indirect sense will it have its origin in Heshbon. One could perhaps think in terms of a northern invader first taking this key northern city which then becomes the starting point for bringing devastation to Moab as a whole, devastation that in a sense repeats that of Sihon. In describing it in the last line of v. 45, Jeremiah’s words deviate from the words in Num 21:28 and 24:17. One deviation introduces a mixed metaphor: *consumed* fits the reference to fire that precedes, but not so much the reference to Moab’s head (*brow* and *skull*)that follows. In that connection in Num 24:17 the verb is *shattered*. But he verb also corresponds to a message about Moab in Amos 2:1-2, which speaks of fire devouring Moab, and adds that it will die “in tumult,” which is also Jeremiah’s image here. Once, then, Moab’s offspring became captives to Sihon; now they will be captives to another invader.

## But Disaster Is Not the End (48:47)

47But I will bring about the restorationa of Moab in the aftermath of the time (Yahweh’s affirmation).

As far as this is the decision about Moab.b

See the note on 29:14.

MT has a section marker here. LXX lacks vv. 45-47.

The entire series of messages about Moab has been unfailingly bleak (if you are Moabites) or encouraging (if you are Judahites looking for Moab to be put down). the last bicolon puts things in reverse. Even if Yahweh’s expressions of grief through the chapter were designed to add to the impression that a horrific fate was coming on Moab, this last line affirms that taking redress is not Yahweh’s last word. Yahweh applies to Moab the same promise he applies to Israel. Applied to Moab in this context, it generates a neat contrast with v. 46 as *šebî* and *šibyâ* (captives, captivity) give way to *šabtî šәbût* (bring about restoration).[[333]](#footnote-333)

# Ammon (49:1-6 [LXX 30:1-5 or 17-21, in different editions])

As another of Israel’s neighbors, it is not surprising that Ammon should appear in the messages about other nations. The Israelites knew they were related to the Ammonites as to the Moabites (Gen 19) and that they were not to have designs on their land, which Yahweh had given them (Deut 2). And as the Israelites knew that Ammon and Moab were related (again see Gen 19), it is not surprising that Ammon should follow Moab in these messages. Like Moab, Ammon was involved in the political discussions related in Jer 27; like Moab, Ammon was a people Yahweh and Nebuchadrezzar used to seek to bring Judah to heel (2 Kgs 24:2); and like Moab, Ammon was a refuge for Judahites when Nebuchadrezzar invaded Judah (Jer 40:11; 41:10). Unlike Moab, Ammon was (allegedly) involved in intrigue in Judah after the invasion (Jer 40:14), but Israel’s relationship with Ammon had not been not fraught in an ongoing way like its relationship with Moab, which both makes the focus of this message surprising and helps explain its specifics.

1Regarding the Ammonites

Yahweh has said this.

Did Israel have no sons,

had he no one entering into possession?

Why did their King Milcoma dispossess Gad,b

and his people – come to live in its towns?

2Therefore, there, days are coming (Yahweh’s affirmation):

I will make the battle shout heard

against Rabbah of the Ammonites.c

It will become a desolate tell,

its daughter-villagesd – they will be set on fire,

and Israel will dispossess its dispossessors (Yahweh has said).e

3Howl, Heshbon, because Ai has been destroyed;

cry out, daughter-villages of Rabbah.

Put sack around you and lament,

run to and fro in the fences.f

Because their King Milcomg – he will go into exile,

his priests and his officials together.

4Why do you glory in the vales

(flowing your vale)? –

You, miss, one who is turning,h one who relies on her stores:

“Who will come against me?”

5Here am I, letting there come against you

terror (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh of Armies)i from all the people around you.

You will scatter,j each in his own direction,

with no one collecting a wanderer.k

6But afterwards I will bring about the restorationl of the Ammonites (Yahweh’s affirmation).m

*Their* *King* *Milcom* represents simply *malkām* in MT, while LXX, Vg have Melkom; see the comment.

Some LXX mss have Gilead (the geographical term) instead of Gad (the clan that lived there)

LXX lacks *of the Ammonites*.

For MT *bәnôteyhā* LXX implies *bāmôteyhā* “its shrines.”

LXX lacks this colon.

LXX lacks this colon. For MT *gәdērôt* Tg, Syr imply a form from *gādad* meaning “companies.”

See the note on v. 1.

For MT *šôbēbâ* Sym implies *šәbûyâ* “exiled,” Vg has “charming” as in 6:2 (*HUB*).

LXX has simply “said the Lord.”

The *you* is now plural.

LXX lacks *a wanderer.*

See the note on 29:14.

MT has a marker here. LXX lacks v. 6.

The message has four sections:

v. 1 a double introduction, and an accusatory question

two bicola

v. 2 an introduction, and a declaration of intent

a bicolon and a tricolon

vv. 3-5 an exhortation to Ammon presupposing that the disaster is on its way

three bicola, a double bicolon, and two more bicola

v. 6 a promise of restoration

prose

Vv. 1-2 and 3-5 could stand on their own and might be of separate origin, with v. 6 an added footnote.

**1** After the curator’s introduction to the message as a whole and the prophet’s own introduction, the prophet asks a double rhetorical question. It is a device Jeremiah often uses to drive the addressees to think and to acknowledge they are at fault (e.g., 8:4-5, 19, 22), but in a context such as this one it operates indirectly. In effect it invites the Judahites who are the actual audience to ask what answer the Ammonites might give to these questions. The answer is less obvious than it might seem, and it might seem painful.[[334]](#footnote-334) Gad’s area as an Israelite clan was across the Jordan, between the Jordan and Ammon itself. It included much of the area that had been subject to dispute between Moab and Israel. We have no information on when Ammon took the action described in v. 1b, but it would be plausible to link it with the Assyrian invasion of Ephraim in 734 (see 2 Kgs 15:29), which involved transporting people from the area east of the Jordan. This event would have given the Ammonites chance to horn in on former Israelite territory, even before the more catastrophic events of 722.[[335]](#footnote-335) After all, once the Gadites had been taken off by the Assyrians, as later happened to Ephraim as a whole, who are the *sons* who might be *entering into possession*? The implication of the first rhetorical question in this verse is then ironic: it would be quite a statement of faith to think of Israel having sons who would again live in the Gad area. Is the further suggestion that Ammon ought have left it empty for when some Israelites come back? On the assumption that there are no valid answers to his questions, however, Yahweh has reason to take action against Ammon – which would (for instance) be a challenge to Judahites who were being invited to join in an alliance with the Ammonites. The language of possession and dispossession is the language regularly used of Israel’s original arrival in the land, and the implication of the language is that Ammon is reversing that process. *Milcom* the god of Ammon, was equivalent to Chemosh for the Moabites and Yahweh for the Israelites.[[336]](#footnote-336) We may assume that he was thought of in similar terms to Chemosh; while we have some artefacts that refer to Milcom, we do not have any material analogous to the Mesha inscription that tells us how the Ammonites understood him. Etymologically, the name Milcom is presumably related to the Semitic word for king. While the First Testament sometimes has the proper spelling Milcom (e.g., 2 Kgs 23:13) and sometimes uses the pejorative form Molech (with vowels suggesting “shameful”), here the name is vocalized *malkām,* which generates the meaning *their King*.

**2** In redress for the Ammonites’ taking over Gad’s territory, then, Yahweh will bring about the destruction of the Ammonite capital and its *daughter-villages*, and with “poetic justice”[[337]](#footnote-337) Israel will take over its territory. The capital is Rabbah, which will be in Greek and Roman times the site of Philadelphia, one of the ten cities of the Decapolis, and in modern times the location of the Jordanian capital, Amman. The daughter-villages would be the communities not far away from the capital that lived in symbiotic relationship with it. The relatively small size of Ammon would mean that there were not as many self-contained towns spread over the country as there were in Moab; Ammon was more like Judah in its last decades with its one city. Jeremiah does not name the agent of Ammon’s promised destruction, we have no record of such an event, and the Israelites never repossessed the area. Calvin notes that this prophecy was not fulfilled “except under the kingdom of Christ”;[[338]](#footnote-338) it is neat to observe that crowds from the Decapolis followed Jesus (Matt 4:25).

**3** We have already come across *Heshbon* as located in the far north of the area that had belonged to the Amorites and was then disputed between Moab and Israel; apparently it could also sometimes count as Ammonite territory.[[339]](#footnote-339) We do not know the location of *Ai*, whose name is the same as that of the town whose story is told in Josh 7 – 8, but it is always *hā‘ay*, with the article. The name resembles the Hebrew word for a ruin (*‘î*), so perhaps some town’s actual name has been reworked into this noun that promises its destiny, or perhaps the word refers to Rabbah itself. The survivors of its destruction are sardonically invited to *run to and fro* in panic *in the fences* or little stone walls of the villages – or the sheep pens. The reason is the same one as applied to Chemosh in 49:7. Jeremiah thus “demonstrated the idols’ feebleness, because they too with the worshipers went away captive.”[[340]](#footnote-340)

**4** The chiding and threatening of Ammon compares and contrasts with the chiding and threatening of Moab. Ammon has reason to be proud of its *vales* which are *flowing* with milk and syrup like Israel’s (e.g., 11:5; 32:22), as Moab has reason to be proud of its vineyards and orchards, but taking them for granted will turn out to be unwise. Ammon is like Israel, a *miss who is turning* (31:22). In some sense she is guilty for turning away from Yahweh and *relying on her stores* like Moab (48:7). Following on the brio of the implication that Ammon has turned away from Yahweh, it makes sense to assume that the treasures are again the artefacts associated with her faith. So the question *who will come against me?* is a statement of her confidence in Milcom.

**5** Yahweh has an answer to her rhetorical question, an answer that sardonically takes up her own words. “*Who will come against me*?” I’ll show you who or what will come against you. Again Yahweh talks about *terror* (cf. 48:43-44). He semi-articulates who are the agents he will use in bringing calamity – people like the Moabites themselves to the south, the Arameans to the north, and the desert peoples to the east, of whom this chapter will go on to speak. The Ammonites too will *scatter* in all directions, like Judah (40:12; 43:5). But whereas Yahweh will *collect* the Judahites (23:3; 29:14; 31:8,10; 32:37), no one will collect the Ammonite *wanderer*.

**6** Which would be a devastating conclusion were it not for the actual conclusion, similar to Moab’s (48:47). “Both Ammon’s immediate fate (devastation) and Ammon’s long-term destiny (well-being)… are in the hands of Yahweh.”[[341]](#footnote-341) In the message about Ammon, Jeremiah sounds especially like Hananiah,[[342]](#footnote-342) but this footnote subverts that impression. Addressed to the Judahites, it reminds them not to get proud, as if they will be the only ones who get to be restored.[[343]](#footnote-343)

# Edom (49:7-22 [LXX 29:8-23 or 30:1-16, in different editions])

A message about Edom completes the treatment of Judah’s eastern neighbors; as Ammon lies north of Moab, Edom lies south, and thus south and southeast of the Dead Sea and of Judah. The greater length of the Edom unit compared with the Ammon unit reflects Edom’s greater importance to Judah, especially in the context of its moving in on land in southern Judah from the sixth century. Further, Israel knew the Edomites as even closer relatives than Moabites and Ammon – their descent goes back to Jacob’s brother Esau (v. 8).[[344]](#footnote-344) And Edom had sometimes been allied with or under Israel’s sovereignty (see 2 Sam 8; 2 Kgs 3; 8). Like Moab and Ammon, Edom appears in the consultations in Jer 27 and becomes a refuge for Judahites at the time of the Babylonian invasion. Like the Moab chapter, the Edom unit has close points of contact with another prophetic text – in this case the Edom prophecy in Obadiah. Again it may be that one is dependent on the other or that they are mutually dependent on an earlier scroll or on oral material.

Jer 49 Obadiah

9If grape-pickers came to you, 5If robbers came to you,

they wouldn’t let gleanings remain if plunderers in the night

if robbers in the night how you are silenced

they’d devastate what they needed they’d rob what they needed, wouldn’t they

6if grape-pickers came to you,

they wouldn’t let gleanings remain, would they.[[345]](#footnote-345)

14a message – I have heard from Yahweh 1a message – we have heard from Yahweh

and an envoy sent among the nations and an envoy sent among the nations

collect together and come against it set off, let us set off against it for battle

set off for battle

15because there, least among the nations 2because there, least among the nations

I am making you I am making you

most despised among humanity you will be most despised among humanity

16you dreadfulness, it has deceived you the arrogance of your mind

the arrogance of your mind it has deceived you

you who stay in clefts in the cliff you who stay in clefts in the cliff

who seize the height of the hill the height of the hill

saying inside, who can get me down to earth

because you have put your nest high 4if you make it high like the eagle

like the eagle if your nest is set among the stars

from there I will get you down from there I will get you down

(Yahweh’s declaration) (Yahweh’s declaration)[[346]](#footnote-346)

Alongside the detailed differences, the major dissimilarity is that Obadiah emphasizes the guilt of Edom for its violence to Israel, for which Yahweh’s will take redress, whereas Jer 49 makes no mention of this motif. Insofar as there is a basis for Yahweh’s action in Jer 49, it is simply Edom’s self-confidence. This difference suggests that Jer 49 might come from before 587 whereas Obadiah comes from after 587. If Jer 49 is dependent on Obadiah, then, either it was an earlier version of Obadiah that lacked the motif of redress, or Jer 49 has removed this element.

7 Regarding Edom

Yahweh of Armies has said this.

Is there no good sense in Teman any more,

has counsel perished from insightful people,a

has their good sense gone bad?b

8Take flight, be turned back, go deep to live,c

people who live in Dedan.

Because the doom of Esaud

I am letting comee upon him, the time when I am attending to him.f

9If grape-pickers came to you,

they wouldn’t let gleanings remain.

If robbers in the night –

they’d devastate what they needed.g

10Because I myself am stripping Esau,

exposing his hiding places,

and should he hide,h he will not be able to.

His offspring is being destroyed,

his relatives and his neighbors – and there will be none of him.

11Abandon your orphans, I will keep them alive,

and your widows – they can rely on me.i

12Because Yahweh has said this:

There, people for whom there has been no decision that they should drink the chalice will actually drink it. And you are one who will actually be free of guilt? You will not be free of guilt. Rather you will actually drink.j 13Because by myself I am swearingk (Yahweh’s affirmation) that a desolation, an object of reviling, a desert,l and a form of slighting is what Bozrah will become. And all its towns – they will become ruins for all time.

14A message from Yahweh I have heard,

and an envoy sent among the nations:

Collect together and come against it,

set to for battle!

15Because there, least among the nations I am making you,

most despised among humanity.

16Your dreadfulness! – it has deceived you,

the arrogance of your mind.

You who stay in the hides in the cliff,

who seize the height of the hill:

Because you have put your nest high, like the eagle –

from there I will get you down (Yahweh’s affirmation).m

17So Edom will become a desolation –

everyone who passes by it will be desolate.

He will whistle at all its wounds,n

18as at the overturning of Sodom and Gomorrah and its neighbors (Yahweh has said).

No one will live there,

no human being will reside in it.o

19There, it will be as when a lion that goes up

from the Jordan swell into a permanent habitat.

Because I intend to hustle himp out of it,

and whoever is chosen for it I will appoint.

Because who is like me,

who can summons me ?

Who on earth is the shepherd

who can stand before me?q

20Therefore listen to Yahweh’s counsel,

which he has determined for Edom,

His intentions, which he has devisedr

for the people who live in Teman.

If the flock’s kids don’t drag them away,s

if their habitat isn’t desolate at them….t

21At the sound of their fall, the earth will shake,

an outcry – at the Sea of Reeds its sound will make itself heard.u

22There, like an eagle one will go up,

he will soar and spread his wings against Bozrah.v

The heart of Edom’s strong men will become

on that day

like the heart of a woman in labor.w

Vg, Tg, Aq, Sym “sons” understandably derives *bānîm* from *bēn* rather than from *bîn*. No doubt Judahite children were “subjected to endless moralistic injunctions employing this word-play” (Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:375).

The line’s opening interrogative also applies to the second and third cola.

For MT’s imperative verbs, Aq implies qatal (cf. also Sym for the third).

For *‘ēśāw* LXX “he made” implies *‘āśâ*.

The qatal verb is declarative/performative, a speech act (see 1:5 and the note); so also in vv. 10, 13, 15.

The further declarative/performative verb depends on the construct noun (GK 130d).

For MT *hišḥîtû dayyām* LXX “they will place their hand” implies *yāšîtû yādām*.

I take *wәneḥbâ* as qatal and as hypothetical (see the general discussion in *TTH* 136-55, especially 155); or it might be a participle (“hiding, he will not be able”).

MT has a section marker here. Tg has Yahweh addressing Israel in this line.

LXX has a shorter version of this verse; three times an infinitive precedes a finite verb, underlining the point.

See the note on v. 8; and on Yahweh’s swearing, see the comment on 22:5.

LXX lacks *a desert*.

LXX lacks *(Yahweh’s affirmation)*.

V. 17b repeats from 19:8; v. 18a will repeat in a variant form in 50:40.

V. 18 overlaps with Isa 13:19-20.

Literally, “I intend to be speedy, run him” (the first verb is cohortative).

L has a section marker here.

*Counsel* is *‘ēṣâ* and *determined* is *yā‘aṣ*; then *intention* is *maḥăšābâ* and *devised* is *ḥāšab*.

LXX suggests taking the verb impersonally, “if people do not drag them away, the little ones of the flock”; contrast Vg.

On this form of oath, see the note on 15:11.

Vv. 19-21 will reappear in a slightly different form as 50:44-46; for the comparison, see the comment there.

For *boṣrâ* LXX “its fortresses” implies *mibṣārehā*.

MT has a marker here.

The unit outlines:

v. 7aα introduction

vv. 7aβ-11 an exhortation to Edom to have the good sense to run for its life

an introduction; a tricolon and four bicola; a resumptive tricolon and two bicola

vv. 12-13 an introduction, and an oath to make Edom drink the chalice

prose

vv. 14-16 a testimony to having heard Yahweh commissioning Edom’s attackers

two linked bicola, two self-contained bicola, and two more linked bicola

vv. 17-19 Yahweh’s declaration about how he will act against Edom

seven bicola

vv. 20-22 an exhortation to unnamed listeners to listen to Yahweh’s plans

two linked bicola, then three self-contained bicola, then a closing tricolon

All five sections could have been messages delivered in Jerusalem on different occasions, though the waw­-consecutiveopening vv. 17-19 makes a link with vv. 14-16 that might be original link, and the *therefore* opening vv. 20-22 makes a link with vv. 17-19 that might be original.

**7-8** After the curator’s introduction to the unit as a whole and the prophet’s introduction to vv. 7-11, Jeremiah again begins with a rhetorical question – a triple question, and one that piques the audience’s curiosity. It perhaps presupposes that the Edomites had a reputation for being smart (Job and his friends came from there), Teman “happily being a kinde of University, but now there were none wise enough to save their City.”[[347]](#footnote-347) Their insight is “soon to be conspicuous by its absence.”[[348]](#footnote-348) The insight that would be appropriate in the context is the political and diplomatic kind that is the object of critique elsewhere in the Prophets and will prove useless in a context where Yahweh is deciding what is going to happen.[[349]](#footnote-349) So how do the Edomites give the impression of having lost their senses? Because they ought to be running for their lives, and they are not. Three more-or-less synonymous imperatives match the three more-or-less synonymous questions. The third has a hint of irony – going deep suggests having insight.[[350]](#footnote-350) The three verbs raise more questions for the audience. Why will good sense mean taking flight? Because there is disaster on the way for Edom, brought about by Yahweh and constituting the moment when Yahweh will *attend to him*; it will not be friendly attention. *Teman* is an area within Edom (Job’s friend Eliphaz was a Temanite); we do not know its exact location, though the parallelism in Amos 1:12 with Bozrah, in the north of Edom, may imply that Teman was in the north. *Dedan* was to the south, and could thus pair with Teman (Ezek 25:13), symbolizing Edom’s southern extent. It was actually in Arabia (Isa 21:13), and here the reference may be to Dedanite caravans that would be wise to get back home.[[351]](#footnote-351)

**9-11** Imagine a couple of forms of theft. Imagine people stealing your grape harvest. When people harvest their grapes, they are supposed to leave some for needy people; thieving grape-pickers don’t operate that way. Robbers will devastate everything to get what they want. Yahweh intends to operate the same way towards Edom. With the self-contradiction that doesn’t bother Jeremiah’s rhetoric, after urging the Edomites to flee, Yahweh tells them it will be no use. With further self-contradiction, he tells them he will annihilate the entire people, including their offspring, so there will be no future for the nation; then he notes that there will therefore be no relatives and neighbors to look after children and widows, but it’s okay, because he will look after them. God is, after all, the father of orphans and defender of widows (Ps 68:5 [6]).[[352]](#footnote-352) Possibly the offer is snide, but if so, he leaves himself open to being taken seriously; it will be no use his saying “I didn’t mean it.”

**12-13** In many contexts, peoples that don’t deserve calamity do experience it. Among them would be some of Nebuchadrezzar’s victims (Judah is of course not one of them: they deserve it, all right). While some of Nebuchadrezzar’s actions linked with his being Yahweh’s servant and meant he was unconsciously implementing Yahweh’s will, some of them are solely him implementing his own decisions and they are simply tolerated by Yahweh. History is not fair. *A fortiori*, Edom cannot expect to escape scot-free. By implication, it deserves the calamity coming to it, though for Edom there is even less indication of the reasons than there was for Moab or Ammon, and much less indication than in Obadiah with its stress on the wrong Edom has done to Judah. The *chalice* is the symbol from 25:15-29, and the threat of being made into *a desolation, an object of reviling, a ruin, and a form of slighting* is a variant on threats that apply there to other nations and to Judah (25:9, 18) and elsewhere simply to Judah (29:18; 42:18; 44:12). *Bozrah*, just southeast of the Dead Sea (to be distinguished from the Moabite Bozrah in 48:24), was the Edomite capital.

**14-16** The *message* Jeremiah hears is not one addressed to him but one he overhears, a message to unnamed warriors – either supernatural or human. The subsection’s point is again to announce a threat to Edom that Judah thereby hears about. It is another threat to reduce Edom to nothing. Here alone there comes a hint of the reason for the action. Edom’s *dreadfulness*, its frightening, horrific nature, consists in the *arrogance* of its mind, which has *deceived* it. It thought it had so much insight and good sense and could determine its own destiny. It thought it was safe. Its physical location encouraged that assumption. It’s not so. The fault Yahweh finds is similar to the one found in Moab.

**17-18** Actually, Edom will experience a desolation matched by the desolation it brings into the minds of people appalled by the sight of it. The horrified *whistle* of these people passing by is again an aspect of the general fate of the nations and of other peoples (25:9, 18) and a match for the whistle at Judah’s fate (19:8; 29:18). Edom will end up like *Sodom and Gomorrah*:[[353]](#footnote-353)it will have been so devastated that no one can live there. Sodom and Gomorrah are on the edge of Edomite territory, or even within the area Edom now occupies, so geographically the location of. the comparison is especially apposite.[[354]](#footnote-354)

**19** There were few permanent settlements within striking distance of the *Jordan swell*,[[355]](#footnote-355) so the image of a raid by a *lion* is a nightmare one, a picture of something people could believe would never happen. The *habitat* (*nāweh*)might be the place where sheep lived, the place where shepherds lived, or the place where human beings lived:[[356]](#footnote-356) on any understanding the image is scary. A lionis a recurrent image for a devastating, irresistible attacker, and Tg assumes it stands for a military commander here. Only rarely is it a straight image for Yahweh. But what follows suggests that reference here. To be more literal, Yahweh will *hustle* Edom out of its homestead and give it to anyone he cares to. It will be another expression of poetic justice and a comforting image for Judahites whom the Edomites were hustling out of their land in southern Judah. And after he takes action, no one can *summons* him (*yā‘ad* hiphil): that is, no one can issue him with a date for a court appearance to explain himself. And – to revert to the lion image – no *shepherd* is going to be able to stop *me* have my way with the sheep.

**20-21** The *therefore* is not the link that commonly marks the transition from an indictment to a sentence but the introduction to an alternative spelling out of the threats that have preceded. Again and again in the message about Edom Yahweh keeps repeating his threat of violent destruction. “Jeremiah’s prophecy against the Edomites is filled with repetition: of images, of antagonists, of forms of destruction, even of the wording of entire verses” which it shares with Jer 50 and Obadiah, in a way that generates the opposite of pleasure – “counterpleasure.”[[357]](#footnote-357) In substance, indeed, this final subsection connects with the opening one in picking up the word *counsel*. These two references form a frame around vv. 7-22. All that we have been reading in vv. 7-22 has been the counsel or plan that Yahweh has *determined* for Edom – or against Edom. After that statement about Yahweh’s counsel and his *intentions*, Jeremiah reverts to the shepherd imagery of v. 19, though he takes it in a new direction. It will require only the most junior of shepherd boys to drag away the corpses of the Edomite “sheep,” whose *habitat* will be appalled at what has happened to them at the “hands” of the lion. One might then think that it will be the “land” of Edom that will *shake at the sound of their fall*, but the parallelism suggests that it is *the earth* (*hā’āreṣ*)that will do so. The *sound* will be heard as far away as Egypt.

**22** Thus Edom’s fate will parallel Moab’s: see 48:40-41. In the context of vv. 17-19 one might take Yahweh to be the eagle, but in that previous application of this image it was the unnamed human attacker. Is it significant that Yahweh promises no restoration for Edom, as he did for Moab and Ammon?[[358]](#footnote-358) The pattern runs through the First Testaments threats about Edom (Ezek 25:12-14; 35; Joel 3:19; Amos 1:11-12; Obad). It is therefore neat to recall the promise about the widows and orphans, and to recall that the Idumeans converted to Judaism[[359]](#footnote-359) and that crowds of them came to Jesus (Mark 3:7-8).

# Damascus (49:23-27 [LXX 30:12-16 or 29-33, in different editions])

Damascus was the capital of Aram (Syria). Capital and nation were significant neighbors of Ephraim but not of Judah. Among the subjects of the messages in Jer 49 – 51, they alone did not appear in Jer 25, 35:11 referred to the Rechabites’ observation that Aramean forces joined with the Babylonian forces putting pressure on Judah in about 600 (cf. 2 Kgs 24:2).

23Regarding Damascus

Hamath is shamed, and Arpad,

because it is bad news that they have heard.

They have dissolved – in the seaa there is anxiety,

it cannot be quiet.

24Damascus has become weak,

it has turned its face to flee.

Panic – it has grasped hold of it,

pressure and contractions – it has seized her like a woman giving birth.b

25How has the praiseworthy city notc been abandoned,

the town I have celebrated?d

26Therefore its young men will fall in its squares,

all its men of battle will be stille

on that dayf (an affirmation of Yahweh of Armies).g

27I will set fire to the walls of Damascush

and it will consume the fortresses of Ben-hadad.i

LXX lacks *in the sea*. Tg “like people who go down to the sea” implies *ka* for MT *ba*, an easier reading.

LXX lacks this colon.

Vg lacks *not*.

Literally, “the town of my celebration”; LXX, Aq, Sym, Th, Tg, Vg lack “my.”

See the note on 6:2.

LXX lacks *on that day*.

LXX lacks *of Armies*.This verse recurs in a slightly variant form in 50:30.

This colon corresponds to Amos 1:14aα except for the change in the city’s name.

MT has a marker here. This colon corresponds to Amos 1:4b.

After the introduction, the message comprises five bicola, then a resumptive tricolon and one more bicolon.

**23** Hamath is a major city-state in northern Syria and Arpad one in the far north; the two come as a pair elsewhere (e.g., Isa 10:9). The picture of these northern cities hearing bad news raises suspense as we wait to hear what the bad news is and thus to discover how they are *shamed.* It is evidently really bad news: the two cities have *dissolved* or melted or gone soft. The verb is usually a metaphor; literally it can refer to the softening of the ground by rain. In the terms of a contradictory metaphor, the cities are churned up like the sea and there is no quieting of its (their) disturbed state.

**24** It transpires that the same is true of the Aramean capital in the southwest of the country. Mention of Hamath and Arpad simply prepares the way for the message’s real subject.[[360]](#footnote-360) It actually concerns Damascus, as was indicated by the introduction, but the introduction perhaps comes from the curator, and people in Jerusalem hearing the prophet declaim the message would have to wait to discover its reference. The alarm in Damascus is the cause of the northern cities’ shame; it is because “Damascus has lost its nerve” that “Hamad and Arpad are demoralized.”[[361]](#footnote-361) The capital (and thus by implication the nation as a whole) *has* *become* *weak* and therefore incapable of resisting an attacker, and it is inclined to *flee*. Its people are inclined to abandon it. They are in that state of panic that can overcome a woman who is about to have a baby and who knows it may be the death of her. In Jeremiah’s imagination, at least, the three cities’ inhabitants know that invasion and disaster are imminent. If we read the prophecy in light of the reference in v. 28a, we might guess that it relates to Nebuchadrezzar’s attack on Aram just before his invasion of Judah in 597.

**25** It is extraordinary that they have *abandoned* the city. Is the descriptions of it part of the explanation? It is *the praiseworthy city*, one that has been a source of admiration, “the chief city of Syria, so pleasantly situated, so rich and luxurious, that one compareth it to Corinth or Ephesus.”[[362]](#footnote-362) It was “a fruitful oasis on the edges of the Syrian wilderness.”[[363]](#footnote-363) It’s the kind of description that Judahites might give of Jerusalem.[[364]](#footnote-364) Who is the *I* who so admires the city? The surprising clarification will come in v. 27; it might mean that Yahweh is here being compassionate or being sarcastic, so that the line is a “taunt”;[[365]](#footnote-365) the line raises similar questions to the ones raised by v. 11.[[366]](#footnote-366)

**26-27** It would have been wise to abandon the city, because staying is going to mean that its defenders will lose their lives when the calamity overtakes it. The message gives no hint regarding the human agent of any siege or of the setting fire to the city, which is the frequent concomitant of siege and capture. Its focus is that behind any human agent will be Yahweh, which matches the additional note that turns v. 26 into a tricolon by declaring that the event will take place *on that day* (cf. 46:10).[[367]](#footnote-367) The dynamic parallels the pattern in the Moab and Edom messages (48:41; 49:22) whereby that extra phrase forms part of the lines that bring the message to a close. Yahweh gives no hint of the reasons for his action. The message thus compares and contrasts with Amos 1:4 and 14. While the wording in v. 27 corresponds to those verses, their context does give reasons for Yahweh’s action. As is characteristic of Jer 46 – 51, this announcement focuses on the fact, not the explanation. The name *Ben-hadad* designates the king as a son of the god Hadad. It is the name or title of a number of Syrian kings in the First Testament (it was a different Syrian king in Amos’s day).The reference here is not to a particular individual king but to whoever is king at the time, to “the ruling house in Damascus.”[[368]](#footnote-368)

# Kedar and Hazor (49:28-33 [LXX 30:6-11 or 23-28, in different editions])

As Damascus was the capital of a fairly major power (an entity much more significant than Judah), Kedar was a major group of tribes in the north Arabian desert, to the east of Judah, Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Aram. Kedar and its desert neighbors feature in Assyrian and Babylonian sources, “quite often, in fact, because they were attacked and despoiled by a succession of Assyrian and Babylonian armies.”[[369]](#footnote-369) Here the message about them focuses on “the idiosyncracies of the tribes’ seminomadic lifestyle.”[[370]](#footnote-370) Once again Yahweh does not say why he issues the destructive commission.

28Regarding Kedar and regarding the Hazor kingdoms,a which Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon struck down.

Yahweh has said this.

Set to, go up to Kedar,

destroy the Easterners!b

29Their tents and their flock they will get,

their tent cloths and all their things.

Their camels they will take off for themselves,

and they will call out about them,

“All around is terror!”

30Take flight, flee,c

go deep to live, you who live in Hazor (Yahweh’s affirmation).

Because Nebuchadrezzard King of Babylon

has determined counsel against you;

he has devised an intention against them.e

31Set to, go up, to a nation at peace,

living in confidence (Yahweh’s declaration).f

It has no gateways and no bars –

alone they dwell.

32Their camels will become plunder,

their horde of livestock, spoil.

I will scatter to every wind the people clipped at the forehead,

from all its sides I will let their disaster come (Yahweh’s affirmation).

33Hazor will become an abode of jackals,

a desolation for all time.

No individual will live there,

no human being will reside in it.g

For MT *mamlәkôt ḥāṣôr*, LXX “courtyard queen” implies *malkat ḥāṣēr*; “courtyard” recurs in LXX in vv. 30, 33.

The verbs are plural.

LXX lacks *flee*.

LXX lacks *Nebuchadrezzar*.

Q *‘ălêkem* “against you” looks an easier reading than the *‘ălêhem* implied by K.

LXX lacks *(Yahweh’s declaration)*.

MT has a section marker here.

After the double introduction, the unit about Kedar comprises two parallel messages, perhaps originally separate:

vv. 28-29 a commission to attack Kedar, and an anticipation of its reaction

two bicola and a tricolon

v. 30 an exhortation to the Kedarites to flee

a bicolon and a tricolon

vv. 31-32 another commission to the attackers and another anticipation

four bicola

v. 33 a declaration about what will result

two bicola

Both messages (or both parts of the message) thus begin with a bidding to unnamed agents to *set to* and *go up* against a people, and both then identify the initiator of the action – Nebuchadrezzar in the first, Yahweh in the second. In combination the two units suggest the two levels of decision-making and initiative involved in what happens.[[371]](#footnote-371)

**28a** While Kedar is familiar as the name of a group of tribes, *Hazor kingdoms* is more puzzling. There are several places called Hazor in Canaan; the background to the multiplicity is the name’s link with *ḥāṣēr* meaning enclosure, courtyard, or settlement. Perhaps, then, the Hazor kingdoms are a collection of more settled Arabian tribes associated with Kedar, or a subset of it, each with its own king. The Babylonian Chronicle records Nebuchadrezzar’s attack on Arab tribes and taking plunder during the year before his invasion of Judah in 597.[[372]](#footnote-372)

**28b-29** The message begins by commission some people to undertake such an attack; without the curator’s introduction, once again a Judahite audience would not know who is addressed. *Easterners* is a general-purpose First Testament name for the peoples east (and northeast and southeast) of Canaan, peoples in Arabia and Mesopotamia, so it works in the parallelism. All Kedarites are easterners, though not all easterners are Kedarites. While one can imagine the attackers making off with the things mentioned in v. 29, if that were its point one might expect v. 29 to continue to address them, as “you.” It is more straightforward to take the “they” to refer the attackers’ victims. As in the Damascus message, Jeremiah imagines them aware of their danger and needing to take evasive action. They are in a state of panic: Jeremiah puts the familiar cry *all around is terror* onto their lips (see 6:25; 20:3, 10; 46:5). But they are not pictured as paralyzed like the Arameans. Hearing of an invading force’s approach, they will pack up their homes and hightail it, perhaps thinking they have more chance of escaping Nebuchadrezzar than more settled peoples have.

**30** The second part of this poetic unit encourages them to do so. The explanation reuses the formulations of vv. 8, 20, applying them now to Nebuchadrezzar’s counsel and intentions rather than Yahweh’s. Metaphorically, the Hazorites need to dig deep to find a hiding place. There is again some contradiction in Yahweh’s commissioning attackers and also bidding their potential victims to flee, but as usual the tension works rhetorically to underline the point to the audience – both commands draw attention to the calamity that threatens.

**31** Yahweh’s second commission takes rather cynical form. The nomadic Kedarites aren’t the kind of peoples that fight to develop a significant empire, like Assyrians or Babylonians. They keep themselves to themselves, live away from the habitat of the great civilizations, and expect to be able to take their security for granted. They don’t live in towns with gates and with bars with which the gates can be kept firmly shut. The description has to presuppose that they have forgotten the number of occasions when imperial forces have attacked them and plundered them.

**32-33** Their undefended settlements will be a pushover. Unless they do manage to take the evasive action of which v. 29 spoke, they, their camels, and their livestock will be easy prey. But there will be some poetic justice in what happens if they gained much of their livestock from plundering (Judg 6:1-6).[[373]](#footnote-373) The description *clipped at the forehead* recurs from 9:26 [25]; 25:23. Dramatically, almost at the end of the message, suddenly Yahweh’s *I* makes an appearance, as happened at the end of the Damascus message. Yahweh is not only the distanced commissioner of this action but the scatterer of unprotected nomads, as there he was the one who set on fire the fortifications of city-dwellers. The description of the consequences again applies to this other people the fate that hangs over Judah (e.g., 10:22; 34:22) as well as over Edom (49:18) and Babylon (50:39-40).

# Elam (49:34-39 [LXX 25:14-20])

Before coming to Babylon, Jeremiah refers in a prose message to a third further-away power, to make a trio with Aram and Kedar that parallels the Moab-Ammon-Edom trio. Elam was beyond even Babylon, east of the Persian Gulf, between Babylon and Persia, in the southwestern part of modern Iran. It was thus much the furthest away of the peoples covered by Jer 46 – 51. It had been an important civilization in earlier millennia, though its great days were past. Like the Kedarites, the Elamites were often in conflict with the Assyrians, and they sometimes allied with Babylon in resisting Assyrian power, but the decline of Assyria saw them falling under Median hegemony.

But there are no specifics in this message about Elam, and once again Yahweh gives no reasons for his action. Elam “stands at the remotest edge of the prophet’s knowledge”;[[374]](#footnote-374) all he can do is use its name (five times). But the geographical dynamic suggests an assertion that Yahweh is lord of the nations, even ones so far away and unrelated to Judah.[[375]](#footnote-375) The Kedar/Hazor and Elam messages are the clearest indications that these messages do not concern matters that Judah might be interested in. Yahweh is a bigger God with a bigger horizon than Judahites might think. The messages parallel the challenges to the heavens and the earth to worship Yahweh: he claims a universal authority whether or not people recognize it. And “the claim that is inherent in these oracles concerning other nations, oracles that are often addressed quite directly to them, is all the more radical if they were not spoken in their presence.”[[376]](#footnote-376)

34What came as Yahweh’s worda to Jeremiah the prophet regarding Elam at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah King of Judah.b

35Yahweh of Armies has said this.

Here am I, breaking the bow of Elam, the kernel of its strength. 36I will let come to Elam four winds from the four corners of the heavens. I will scatter them to all these winds; the nation will not exist where Elam’s fugitives do not come. 37I will break Elam down before their enemies, before the people who seek their life, and I will let a dire fate comes upon them, my angry blazing (Yahweh’s affirmation).c I will send off the sword after them until I have finished them off.d 38And I will put my throne in Elam and obliterate from there king and officials (Yahweh’s affirmation). 39But in the aftermath of the time I will bring about the restoration of Elam (Yahweh’s affirmation).e

On this jerky form of words, see the note on 14:1.

LXX has the phrase about Zedekiah in the last line of the Elam unit.

LXX lacks *(Yahweh’s affirmation)* here and in the next verse.

One might read LXX here as more benign in its understanding of God: see H-.J. Stipp’s discussion of the possible difference between the concept of God in MT and LXX in Jeremiah (“Gottesbildfragen in den Lesartendifferenzen zwischen dem masoretischen und dem alexandrinischen Text des Jeremiabuches,” in J. Cook and H.-J. Stipp [eds.], *Text-Critical and Hermeneutical Studies in the Septuagint* [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 237-74 [242]).

MT has a marker here.

**34** The introduction locates the message in the same general period as vv. 28-33, though slightly later. The Babylonian Chronicle tells of a campaign by Nebuchadrezzar in about 595 in which an attack on Elam would fit. [[377]](#footnote-377)

**35-39** The Elamites reputation as bowmen recurs from Isa 22:6. But the distinctive feature of the message is the focus on Yahweh’s action, expressed in a sequence of series of I-verbs:

* I am breaking (v. 35): Elam’s bow is strong, but not strong enough
* I will let come (v. 36): the four winds will do their work, but they are Yahweh’s agents
* I will scatter (v. 36): the destinations cannot be calculated or limited
* I will break down (v. 37): their enemies will do their work, but they implement Yahweh’s will
* I will let come (v. 37): a dire fate accompanied by Yahweh’s angry blazing
* I will send off (v. 37): even the reference to the sword mentions no human warrior
* I will put (v. 38): the phrase otherwise applies only to Nebuchadrezzar, in 43:10 (but see 52:32)
* I will obliterate (v. 38): this action makes it possible for Yahweh to take charge
* But I will being about (v. 39): suddenly the *I* goes from negative to positive

Grant, Almighty God, that as thou settest before our eyes memorable judgments which ought to benefit us at this day, so that we may be kept under thy yoke and under the fear of thy law, — O grant, that we may not grow hard at such threatenings, but anticipate thy wrath, and so submit to thee, that whatever thou denouncest on the ungodly may turn to our comfort, and for a cause of joy, when we know that the salvation of thy church is thus promoted, of which thou hast been pleased to regard and acknowledge us as members in thy Son our Lord.[[378]](#footnote-378)

# Part 5(c)

# Babylon (50:1 – 51:64 [27:1 – 28:64])

As it is not surprising that the Jeremiah scroll eventually includes a set of messages concerning other nations, so it is not surprising that this set of messages comes to a climax with Babylon, the great power in Jeremiah’s time that brought about the fall of Jerusalem. The messages come in two chapters of announcements concerning Babylon’s own fall and associated announcements promising restoration for Israel. [[379]](#footnote-379) Nor is it surprising that the Babylon material is so substantial, comprising a compilation of such material that is almost as extensive as the messages relating to all the rest of the nations that are covered by Jer 46 – 49. With these messages about Babylon the Jeremiah scroll comes to a climax with its assertion of the preeminence of Yahweh over the world power.[[380]](#footnote-380) “The very size of this collection shows the special nature of Babylon among the nations. This is *the* empire; it cannot be treated like just another nation.”[[381]](#footnote-381) Commentators belonging to imperial nations such as Britain or the United States may dislike what might seem the chapters’ “obsessional antagonism towards the national enemy.”[[382]](#footnote-382) But the chapters may seem different when read through the eyes of people from Kenya in the 1950s or Nicaragua in the 1980s. “Revenge fantasies” – in this case, imagining Yahweh taking redress – can be a strategy for survival.[[383]](#footnote-383)

## Introduction (50:1 [LXX 27:1])

1The word that Yahweh spoke regarding Babylon, regarding the country of Chaldea,a by means of Jeremiah the prophet.b

*Kaśdîm* can refer both to Chaldeans and to Chaldea; in phrases such as “the country of” and “the people who live in” I take it to refer to Chaldea (cf. expressions such as “country of Judah,” “country of Egypt”). See further the note and comment on 21:4.

LXX has a much shorter version of the verse.

This opening to the chapters rather implies that they come from Jeremiah himself, an impression confirmed and developed in their closing paragraph (51:59-64). As is the case with the Jeremiah scroll as a whole, one might interpret this impression in several ways.

* Is it a piece of fiction, whereas actually the entirety of the material came from prophets and scribes other than and later than Jeremiah?[[384]](#footnote-384) I have no theological objection to this suggestion, given that God can inspire fiction, but I find it somehow implausible.
* Does it indicate that every message in the chapters came from Jeremiah himself? It may be so, but we have noted that it is not the way the Scriptures usually work: for instance: the Gospels give us different adapted versions of Jesus’s teaching in Matt 5 – 7 and Luke 6 (and teaching that is different again in John) rather than transcripts.
* The mainstream scholarly view is that Jeremiah’s curators, too, are providing adapted versions of his teaching. These chapters then provide both actual words of Jeremiah, words of Jeremiah that the curators have supplemented, and words that have been developed by the curators themselves and by other prophets. Being the mainstream scholarly view does not mean this assumption is right, but I take as my own working assumption. Here as elsewhere, then, the scroll presents us with such an adapted version that the curators have been inspired to formulate.

A further mainstream scholarly assumption is that we can go on to work out which elements within the chapters actually came from Jeremiah and which came from his curators or other prophets. I do not work with this assumption, since the criteria for making such distinctions seem questionable. For instance,

* If the content or style or vocabulary of a message matches that of other messages from Jeremiah, it need not mean it comes from Jeremiah.
* If the content or style or vocabulary of a message does not match that of other messages from Jeremiah, it need not mean it does not come from Jeremiah.
* A passage’s looking like a later insertion into the message in which it appears need not mean that the insertion did not come from Jeremiah or that someone other than Jeremiah made the insertion.
* A passage’s being poetry rather than prose need not indicate that it comes from Jeremiah, and its being prose rather than poetry need not preclude its coming from Jeremiah.
* A passage’s being a reworking of a passage from earlier in the scroll neither indicates nor precludes its coming from Jeremiah.
* A passage’s being a reworking of a passage from another prophetic scroll need not preclude its coming from Jeremiah
* When the prophecies in Isa 40 – 55 talk to their audience about Cyrus the Great as a figure of the present, it is one of the indications that the authorship of Isa 40 – 55 can be distinguished from the work of Isaiah ben Amoz and that the chapters comes from a later century. There are no parallel concrete indications in Jer 50 – 51 (or elsewhere in the Jeremiah scroll).

The chapters’ not suggesting criteria for distinguishing between Jeremiah’s words and the words of his curators is one reason why scholars come to different conclusions about which are which. Fortunately, the messages’ authorship need not make a difference to their meaning and they are intelligible without our being able to identify their author. I am therefore agnostic on the question of authorship, here as elsewhere in this commentary, and in referring to “Jeremiah,” I conflate the actual Jeremiah and whoever may be channeling him.

One lack that generates the uncertainty about the messages’ origin is that Jer 50 - 51 does not have dates or other historical references, unlike the preceding messages to Kedar/Hazor and Elam. This feature raises the question whether “Babylon comes to represent more than the historical Babylon and becomes here the ultimate enemy of YHWH, the entity that stands under an almost cosmic judgment,”[[385]](#footnote-385) which could then be a factor in the development of awareness of and study of the problem of evil in the Hebrew Bible.[[386]](#footnote-386) This fact might link with the absence of any prospect for Babylon’s restoration, parallel to the promise of restoration for (e.g.) Egypt and Moab.

On the other hand, the chapters do refer concretely to the Medes and related peoples (51:11, 27-28), and Babylon’s coming to represent more than the historical Babylon may be more an aspect of the chapters’ reception over the centuries than part of the meaning they would have had for Jeremiah, his curators, and the people who first heard the scroll read. This reception includes the influence of Jeremiah in the New Testament, with its references to Babylon, and in particular its expectation that God will put down Rome. That contemporary Babylon will drink from the chalice full of Yahweh’s anger, will fall cataclysmically, and will be turned into a place where demons dwell and into one haunted by all kinds of unclean birds (Rev 18:2). “The event so dramatically portrayed in chapters 50 – 51 was the necessary prelude to the historical future for Judah that had been promised in chapters 30 – 33. And similarly, the event portrayed in Revelation 18, in language richly borrowed from Jeremiah, is the necessary prelude to the eternal future for the whole creation that we glimpse in Revelation 21 – 22.”[[387]](#footnote-387)

In the dynamic of the first half of the Jeremiah scroll, the prophet speaks initially of an unidentified aggressor from the north who will bring Jerusalem’s downfall (e.g., 1:13-15; 3:18; 4:6; 6:1, 22), and only later names Babylon as the aggressor (20:1-6). Jer 50 – 51 manifests a parallel dynamic. Initially the chapters speak solely of an aggressor from the north who will bring Babylon’s own downfall (50:3, 9, 41); only later do they name names (51:11, 27-28). The Medes had arisen to great power status in the region during the same period as the Babylonians and the two powers had worked together to encourage the downfall of Assyria. From the late seventh century they then coexisted, with the Median empire extending in an arc northwest, north, northeast, and east of the Babylonian empire. During any time from the period when Babylon became Judah’s de facto overlord (say, from Nebuchadrezzar’s victory in the battle of Carchemish in 605) it would thus take no great political acumen or divine revelation to work out that if anyone was going to put down the Babylonians, it could be the Medes. In the event, in the mid-sixth century Cyrus the Great was able to combine the Median and Persian empires, and it was they that in due course put paid to Babylon. While some of the messages in Jer 50 – 51 may then derive from prophets who were channeling Jeremiah, their referring only to the Medes and not to the Persians is one pointer suggesting that these poems come from the period before the Medo-Persian empire became a reality. The references to Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz (51:27) also make sense in the context of the early or mid-sixth century and not later.[[388]](#footnote-388)

The coda to the chapters in 51:59-64 does specifically date Jeremiah’s original Babylon scroll in 594, three years after the first plundering of the temple and the first exile of Judahites to Babylon. Although Jeremiah wrote this scroll in order to have it thrown into the Euphrates, the reference to *all these words* (51:60), words that still exist, implies that he produced a second copy, as he did of the 604 scroll. The story of his writing the scroll implies that he had been speaking about the destiny of Babylon, and about the significance of that destiny in connection the future of Judah, for some years up until 594. This statement fits with the unsurprising fact that Jer 25 has him speaking of these questions in 604 when Babylon had just become the key Middle Eastern power and Nebuchadrezzar had just become its king. Over the next twenty years until we lose track of Jeremiah in Egypt, it would be surprising if he did not have further things to say about these questions, and not surprising if he and/or his curators added them to any scroll he compiled in 594. Indeed, a number of the messages in Jer 50 – 51 imply that the fall of Jerusalem has happened, though the interpretation of these statements may be tricky and they may be anticipatory reference to that event. This latter possibility is supported by the messages’ ability also to speak as if the fall of Babylon has happened. Such messages seem to be anticipatory references to a future event. They speak in vividly-imagined terms that suggest no knowledge of what actually happened in 539, as they show no awareness of Persia being on the horizon and do not compare with the passages about Cyrus in Isa 44 – 45. The final dated event to which the Jeremiah scroll refers is the release of Jehoiachin in 562, but it does then refer to “all the days of his life” after that release, which might imply some passage of time (it also refers in 52:11 to the day of Zedekiah’s death but gives no indication of whether it had happened). One might then hypothesize that the 550s or 540s are the period in which Jer 50 – 51 reached its final form.[[389]](#footnote-389)

The question of dates links with another aspect of the scroll’s contents. There is a contrast between Jeremiah’s message about Babylon and Nebuchadrezzar in Jer 50 – 51, and elsewhere his seeing Nebuchadrezzar as Yahweh’s servant and requiring Judah to submit to Babylon (e.g., Jer 27 – 29). This contrast is a wide-canvas version of his combining the two attitudes in the same context in Jer 25. There, too, he speaks of Nebuchadrezzar as Yahweh’s servant, but also of Yahweh as planning in due course to “attend to” the Babylonians, make them drink a chalice full of divine wrath, and turn their country into a wasteland. Yahweh’s double attitude corresponds to the two sides he expresses in connection with Assyria in Isa 10:5-19.[[390]](#footnote-390) In Jer 27 – 29, too, he “repeatedly anticipates that city’s demise.”[[391]](#footnote-391) Theologically, there is no tension between Jeremiah’s urging a policy of submission to Babylon in Jer 25 and promising that Yahweh will take redress on Babylon in Jer 50 – 51. And whereas 29:10 has Jeremiah saying that Babylon would fall after seventy years while 51:33 has him say that it will happen in *yet a little while*, one cannot press the significance of that latter phrase (compare Isa 10:25; 26:20; 29:17; Hagg 2:6-7; and similar tensions within the New Testament), or for that matter of the former.

Pragmatically, however, there is a tension between the two aspects of the message attributed to Jeremiah, a tension that itself has two aspects. It is misleading to speak of Jeremiah’s stance in that other context as pro-Babylonian, even if pro-Babylonian politicians in Jerusalem could claim his support for their policies. It “reduces the whole issue to a shallow and simplistic level of political alignment, as if Jeremiah was simply the pawn of one of the squabbling factions in Jerusalem.”[[392]](#footnote-392) On the other hand, the public proclamation of prophecies such as the ones in Jer 50 – 51 would hardly have issued in “honourable treatment under the patronage of the empire” (39:12-14; 40:4-6).[[393]](#footnote-393) But maybe we should not assume that Babylon took that much notice of the rantings of a small-time prophet whom Judah itself did not take seriously. It is perhaps more problematic that these messages’ proclamation to the Judahite communities in Jerusalem or Babylon in the years leading up to 587 would surely compromise the effectiveness of the message that Jeremiah otherwise preaches in Jer 27 – 29 and elsewhere.[[394]](#footnote-394) It would make him sound like Hananiah.[[395]](#footnote-395) This consideration may support the assumption that 51:59-64 does not imply a public reading of this scroll.[[396]](#footnote-396) The series of messages might have been chanted as a form of prayer, or as something like a curse, that might be Yahweh’s means of implementing the calamity of which they speak. This understanding fits 51:59-64.[[397]](#footnote-397) If we should not assume that Jer 50 – 51 reflects Jeremiah’s public preaching in the decades up to 587, the chapters do suggest the aim of communicating with Judahites, perhaps in congregational meetings in Judah or Egypt or Babylon after 587 (50:5 pictures Jeremiah in Jerusalem in delivering that message).

The Prophet adopts various modes of speaking, and not without reason, because he had to thunder rather than to speak; and then as he spoke of a thing incredible, there was need of no common confirmation; the faithful also, almost pining away in their miseries, could hardly entertain any hope. This is the reason why the Prophet dwells so long and so diffusely on a subject in itself not obscure, for there was not only need of amplifying, but also of great vehemence.[[398]](#footnote-398)

Behind Jeremiah’s various modes of speaking one can perceive a number of modes of speaking from the community’s everyday life, with which the audience would be familiar. There will be varying relationships between the way these forms of speech worked in everyday life and the way the prophet has adapted and transformed them. A message may thus adopt and adapt a form such as:

* an announcement by a messenger bringing news of distant events (e.g., 50:2)
* an announcement or warning by a prophet about coming political events, with advice about the necessary action (e.g., 50:3, 8-10, 41-46; 51:6-10, 45-58)
* a promise given by a priest or prophet in response to a plea from their people (e.g., 50:4-7, 17-20, 33-34; 51:34-44)
* a confrontation or warning by a prophet or priest, given in connection with people’s wrongdoing (50:11-13)
* a commission by a commander-in-chief to his army (50:14-16, 21-32; 51:1-5, 11-14, 20-28)
* a curse uttered by a priest or prophet (50:35-40)
* a praise song (51:15-19).

The messages thus cover topics such as threats to Babylon, commissions of attackers, and promises to Israel, but as with the rest of the Jeremiah scroll, the arrangement is not very systematic. The curators do not put together all the threats or all the promises or all the treatments of a particular theme. While on occasions they juxtapose messages that speak in similar ways, at other points the arrangement seems random. In this respect the unit compares with chapters such as Jer 2 and Jer 48. I infer that the curators sometimes juxtaposed messages that went well together and were mutually illumining but sometimes simply fitted things in where they could and/or worked with already existent smaller collocations. One can discern some points at which the chapters bring together related material:

* 50:2-20 give prominent attention to the restoration of Ephraim and Judah, and interweave this theme with the provision of reasons for Yahweh’s action against Babylon
* 50:21-32 comprise three commissions to Babylon’s attackers and provide a number of reasons for Yahweh’s action that relate to Yahweh himself rather than to Israel’s needs or destiny
* 50:33-46 comprise threats of Babylon’s fall that work especially by restating prophetic messages appearing elsewhere in the Jeremiah scroll or in other prophetic scrolls
* 51:1-33 is a more miscellaneous collection, perhaps framed by the introductory and closing “Yahweh has said this” statements; I have treated it as two compilations, with the song of praise in vv. 15-19 forming a climax to the first and the dramatic apostrophe in vv. 20-23 opening the second
* 51:34-44 is a protest by Zion about Nebuchadrezzar’s treatment of it, and a response by Yahweh
* 51:45-58a comprises two exhortations to leave Babylon and two sets of reasons based on the fact that “days are coming….”[[399]](#footnote-399)

The emphases of the chapters are:[[400]](#footnote-400)

* Yahweh intends himself to put Babylon down; he assures the Judahites that imperial power and oppression will not last forever (50:2-3, 23, 39-40; 51:25-26, 41-43, 54-58)
* He will thereby show who is really God and expose the powerlessness of the Babylonian gods and the images that represent them (50:2, 34, 44; 51:17, 47)
* Given that he works in the world and works through human agencies, he will act by military means using the nations and armies of the region (50:3, 9, 41-43; 51:1-3, 11-12, 27-28)
* He will take redress on Babylon for its wrongdoing in relation to him (50:11, 14-15, 24, 28, 29-32; 51:11, 24)
* As one who “acts on behalf of those who cannot defend themselves,”[[401]](#footnote-401) he will treat Babylon the way Babylon treated Israel and other nations – and the way he himself treated Israel (50:15, 22-23; 51:35-36, 49)
* He intends to enable Ephraim and Judah to return to Yahweh, to Zion, and to their land (50:4-7, 17-20, 33-34; 51:10)
* Given that “there is a time to settle and a time to flee,”[[402]](#footnote-402) Jer 29 represents the first “time,” but Judahites now need to be willing and ready to leave Babylon (50:8; 51:6, 45, 50)

Near the end of the two chapters comes a protest prayer of Judah’s and a response from Yahweh promising action (51:34-44).

But even when it is implicit, both compositions are a series of impassioned responses to equally impassioned grievances. The whole is a testimony that “God heard their groaning… and God took notice of them” (Exod 2:24–25). It was to be heard by those who pleaded for the punishment of their oppressors, as in Ps 83:9–17 (10–18). The promises of homecoming in ch. 50 correspond to the petitions, “Do good to Zion *in* your good pleasure*;* rebuild thewalls of Jerusalem,” in Ps 51:18 (20). The promises of the people’s vindication in ch. 51 correspond to the wish in Ps 79:10, “Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes” (cf. Ps 58:10 [11] and esp. 137:8 concerning Babylon). And the promises of Yahweh’s own vindication, also in ch. 51, implicitly answer laments that Judah’s God, too, had suffered loss amid Judah's suffering, as Pss 74:4-8 and 79:1 protest…. A host of grief-stricken prayers find their divine amen in chs. 50–51.[[403]](#footnote-403)

Indeed, “a good liturgy of the events of the sixth century would read 50 – 51 *after* the reading of the book of Lamentations.”[[404]](#footnote-404)

## The Fate of Flock, Lions, and Shepherds (50:2-20 [LXX 27:2-20])

2Tell among the nations and make it heard;

lift up a banner and make it heard.a

Do not conceal, say:

“Babylon has been captured.

Bel has been shamed, Merodach shattered,

its idols shamed, its fetishes shattered.”b

3Because a northern nation is going upc against it –

that one will make its country into a desolation.d

There will be no one living in it –

human being and animal alikee are fleeing, going.f

4In those days and at that time (Yahweh’s affirmation):g

The Israelites will come,

they and the Judahites together.

Crying as they go,h they will go,

and Yahweh their God they will have recourse to.

5To Zion they will ask the way,

their faces towards here: “Come!”i

They will join themselves to Yahweh in a pact for all time

that will not be put out of mind.j

6A flock that were lost, my people becamek –

their shepherds led them astray.

On the mountains they turned them backl –

from mountain to hill they went.

They put their resting-place out of mind –

7all the people who found them consumed them.

Their adversaries said:

We will not incur liability,m

on account of the fact that they did wrong towards Yahweh,

the faithful habitat, their ancestors’ hope,n Yahweh.o

8Fleep from inside Babylon,

from the country of Chaldea, get out,q

be like the he-goats before the flock.

9Because there, I am stirring,

getting to go upr against Babylon,

An assembly of bigs nations

from a northern country.

They will line up in relation to it –

from there it will be captured.

Its arrows will be like those of a bereavingt strong man –

they will not turn back empty.

10Chaldea will become spoil –

all its spoilers will be full (Yahweh’s affirmation).u

11Because you celebrate, because you are merry,v

you plunderers of my domain,

Because you jump like a heifer threshing,w

bellow like stallions,x

12Your mother is being greatly shamed,

the one who gave birth to you is being confounded.y

There, the end of the nations:

wilderness, desert, and steppe.z

13Because of Yahweh’s fury it will not live;aa

it will become a desolation, all of it.

Everyone passing by Babylon will be desolate

and will whistle at all its wounds.

14Line up against Babylon all around,

all you who directbb the bow.

Shoot at it, don’t spare an arrow,

because it has done wrong in relation to Yahweh.cc

15Shout against it all around,dd

it is giving its hand.

Its towers are falling, its walls are smashing ,

because it is Yahweh’s redress.ee

Take redress upon it;

as it did, do to it.

16Cut off sowerff from Babylon,

and the one who seizes the sickle at harvest time.

In the face of the oppressor’sgg sword,

an individual to his people, they will turn their face;

an individual to his country, they will flee.hh

17Israel is a sheep that was detached,

that lions have driven away.

First the king of Assyria devoured it,

and this was the end –

Nebuchadrezzarii king of Babylon boned it.jj

18Therefore Yahweh of Armies the God of Israelkk has said this:

Here am I, attending

to the king of Babylon and to his country

as I attended to the king of Assyria.

19And I will return Israel to its habitat,

and it will pasture in the Carmel and the Bashan.ll

In the highland of Ephraim and the Gileadmm

its appetite will be full.

20In those days and at that time (Yahweh’s affirmation):nn

It will be sought, the waywardness of Israel,oo but there will be none,

and the wrongdoings of Judah, but they will not be found,

because I will pardon whomever I let remain.pp

LXX lacks this colon.

LXX has a distinctive version of this line; D. J. Reimer notes it as one where MT may manifest a hardening attitude towards Babylon (*The Oracles against Babylon in Jeremiah 50 – 51* [San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1993], 135-36, 152).

The qatal verb is now anticipatory, a usage related to the declarative/performative (see the introductory comment in 13:18-22, and 1:5 and the note). The usage recurs in vv. 12 and 15.

The asyndeton and the word order with the subject preceding the verbs suggest that this colon is subordinate to the previous one. So also in vv. 3b, 6-7 (three times), 9, 10.

Literally, “from human being even to animal.”

On this verb, see the note on v. 8. LXX lacks *fleeing, going.*

LXX lacks *(Yahweh’s affirmation)*.

Literally, “going and crying” (two infinitives).

For MT *bō’û* LXX, Vg, Aq, Tg imply varying easier readings.

L has a section marker here.

Q has plural, K singular.

Q has a qatal verb, *šôbәbûm*, K implies the adjective *šôbābîm* “turning back,” as in 3:14, 22.

LXX “we will not forgive them” suggests the verb *nāśā’* rather than *’āšam*.

And/or their well: P. J. P. Van Hecke, “Metaphorical Shifts in the Oracle against Babylon,” *SJOT* 17 (2003): 68-88 (71-73).

LXX lacks *Yahweh*. MT has a section marker here.

Whereas would expect *nudû* (from *nûd*) to mean “wander,” that meaning does not lead well into the decisiveness implied by the next two cola; some occurrences of *nûd* seem to treat it as a byform of *nādad*, which makes better sense here (9:9 [10] has *nādad*).

The verbs come at either end of v. 8a, which works abb’a’. For Q’s imperative *ṣē’û* K implies jussive *yēṣә’û* “they are to get out.”

LXX lacks *getting to go up*.

LXX lacks *big*.

For MT’s *maškîl* (cf. Vg, Aq), LXX, Sym imply *maśkîl* “insightful.”

LXX lacks *(Yahweh’s affirmation)*.

K has feminine singular verbs through v. 11.

For MT *dāšâ* from the verb *dûš*,LXX, Vg imply *deše’* “[on] grass.”

The simple *waw* suggests two simultaneous actions.

LXX’s “your mother for good” is a puzzle; *HUB* considers approaches.

LXX lacks *desert and steppe*.

See the note on 17:25.

See the note on 46:9.

LXX lacks this colon.

LXX lacks *all around*.

Tg has “Yahweh’s people’s redress,” and it might indeed give Judah some satisfaction to see that Babylon goes through the experience of destruction that Jerusalem went through, but Jeremiah does not think in these terms, and neither does Judah take the redress. Yahweh takes the redress (through the northern army) for what Babylon did in relation to him.

For MT *zôrēa‘* (cf. Aq, Sym), LXX “seed” implies *zera‘*.

For MT *yônâ* LXX has “Greek,” implying *yәwāniyyâ* (cf. 46:16).

MT has a section marker here.

LXX lacks *Nebuchadrezzar*.

MT has a marker here.

LXX lacks *of Armies the God of Israel*.

Tg appropriately paraphrases “a fruitful and fat land.” LXX lacks *and the Bashan*.

For Tg’s rendering “the sanctuary,” 22:6 provides the background (Hayward, *Targum of Jeremiah*, 181).

LXX lacks *(Yahweh’s affirmation)*.

The phrase has the object-marker as if it were the object of the passive verb.

LXX continues “in the country, says the Lord.” A has a unit marker here.

Vv. 2-20 comprises a sequence of six messages that were originally independent. Two features are distinctive of this first sequence. One is the prominence it gives to the restoration of Ephraim and Judah, which it does not directly link with the fate of Babylon, but which does implicitly link with it. That restoration means something physical, material, and geographical; it also means a restoration of the people’s relationship with Yahweh and with each other. The other is Yahweh’s reasons for bringing calamity on Babylon. It will mean the exposure of their idols’ powerlessness; it will also be an act of redress for their plundering Yahweh’s own domain in Canaan, and enjoying doing so. The sequence outlines:

vv. 2-3 Yahweh commissions an announcement of Babylon’s fall

five bicola

vv. 4-7 Yahweh promises that Israel will return to him and to its country

an introduction, seven bicola, a resumptive introduction, and a closing tricolon

vv. 8-13 Yahweh urges people to leave Babylon in light of its coming capture, and confronts Babylon itself

an introductory tricolon, two linked bicola, three bicola, three linked bicola and three bicola (three being linked)

vv. 14-16 Yahweh commissions Babylon’s attackers

six bicola and a closing tricolon

vv. 17-19 the background, and Yahweh’s declaration of intent

a bicolon and a tricolon; then a resumptive introduction, an opening tricolon, and two bicola.

v. 20 a promise that Israel’s waywardness will not be a problem in the future

an introduction and a tricolon

**2a** The opening lines summarize the main point of Jer 50 – 51. As is often the case in Jer 46 – 51, the prophet issues a commission whose speaker and addressees are unnamed, though the curator’s introduction in v. 1 implies that we should assume Yahweh to be the speaker. The addressees are not military figures who are to implement Yahweh’s intention, as they were in 49:28 and 31, but messengers who are to announce that this decision has been implemented. So Yahweh invites Jeremiah’s actual hearers to imagine that the fall of Babylon has happened. These actual hearers are presumably Judahites in Jerusalem or Egypt, or in Babylon itself. These listeners are to imagine the messengers hastening from Babylon around its empire to tell them the news. Whereas lifting up a *banner* or standard would be a literal reality in connection with commissioning an army, here it is a figure of speech – messengers do not literally lift up a banner. It is an image for making the news publicly available, in a context where Babylon itself might like to *conceal* it; that verb is a litotes. There is another level to the figure of speech. In reality the fall has not yet happened, so the talk of lifting a banner and making something heard and not concealing it suggests both the image of actual messengers who will one day announce Babylon’s fall when it has actually happened, and the paradoxical idea that the certainty of Babylon’s fall needs to be proclaimed now, among the Judahites; it needs to be believed in by the message’s actual audience. “Let all take notice of the good news; there shall be a general jail delivery.”[[405]](#footnote-405)

**2b** There are two aspects to the news that will eventually be announced. First there is the news that *Babylon* itself *has been captured* – which raises the question “how, by whom?” But before we get a sort-of answer to that question, Yahweh moves on to a corollary that is at least as important: *Bel has been shamed, Merodach shattered*. Bel is named in the First Testament only here and in 51:44; Isa 46:1, each time in similar context (Bel appears further in the Septuagint in its version of Daniel and in the Letter of Jeremiah). *Merodach* appears only here, though his name features in compound names (e.g., 52:31); it forms an alternative way of pronouncing the god conventionally referred to in English as Marduk. Both *Merodach* and *Bel* refer to the supreme Babylonian god, the supreme god of the Babylonian world by virtue of being the supreme god of the imperial capital. Strictly speaking, Merodach is a name, while Bel is a title related to *ba‘al*; it also means “master.”[[406]](#footnote-406) When Jerusalem fell, Yahweh seemed to have been defeated and shamed. The fall of Babylon will mean that Marduk has been defeated, *shamed*, and *shattered*. He will not have been able to defend his city. The three verbs *captured*, *shamed*, and *shattered* come together in regard to Moab in 48:1; the latter two verbs come together in 8:9; 48:20, 39. These two apply both to the god himself and to the images that represented him. *Idols* and *fetishes* come only here in Jeremiah. *Idols* (*‘āṣāb*) is a word Hosea likes; *fetishes* (*gillûlîm*) comes mostly in Ezekiel. Both are potentially mean words: etymologically *idols* suggests at best something manufactured, at worst something causing pain and toil; *fetishes* at best suggests mere blocks of wood, at worst lumps of feces. In Hebrew as in English, *shattered* (*ḥātat*) can nicely refer both to a physical shattering (e.g., 14:4) and to an inner shattering (e.g., 1:17; 17:18). Likewise *shamed* can denote both a public shaming by events and an inner shaming that internalizes the public shaming. And there is a mutual interplay between what happens to the god and to his images. The god is emotionally or mentally shattered, or should be, as his image is physically shattered; and the idol is shamed as the god whom it allegedly represents is shown to have no reality that corresponds to his reputation.

**3** Jeremiah makes a transition to speaking overtly about the future[[407]](#footnote-407) and at last there comes some sort of explanation of who will have captured Babylon and will have thereby shamed and shattered it and its god. It is only a sort-of explanation because it names no names, as 51:11, 27-28 will eventually do. With some irony the conqueror is simply designated as someone from the north, which was Jeremiah’s description of Jerusalem’s conqueror until he eventually named Babylon. As the dynamic in Jer 50 – 51 parallels that in Jer 2 – 20, Babylon becomes Judah’s *Doppelgänger*.[[408]](#footnote-408) Its coming devastation will correspond to that of Judah and other threatened peoples (see e.g., 2:15; 33:10; 49:13, 33).[[409]](#footnote-409) Now “the new ‘foe from the north’ makes the old ‘foe from the north’ helpless, wretched, and devastated.”[[410]](#footnote-410) Geographically, it would be even clearer and more literal that Babylon’s attackers would come from the north, if they were the Medes than was the case with Judah and the Babylonians. But as was the case earlier, designating the conqueror as a northern nation speaks symbolically as much as geographically.[[411]](#footnote-411)

**4** Chronologically associated with the fall of Babylon, Ephraimites and Judahites will come to Zion. Indeed, when vv. 4-5 are heard “in tandem” with vv. 2-3, for Jer 50 – 51 “two main themes are put in bold relief.”[[412]](#footnote-412) One might say that “the entire ‘message’ of this literature is given in a nutshell in the first five verses.”[[413]](#footnote-413) Implicitly, there might be need for a causal link between these events; for various reasons, a Judahite return from Babylon presupposes Babylon’s fall. But even more than the description of Babylon falling to an attack from the north, the description in vv. 4-7 is not just talking in down-to-earth terms about a return from exile. It works in a different framework – indeed, a series of different frameworks. First, it is talking about Ephraimites and Judahites together, like Jer 30 – 33. The background to Yahweh’s promise, then, is a vision of the destiny of the entire people of Israel, and of a return of Ephraimites who had been transported by Assyria as well as Judahites who had been transported by Babylon. And *together* goes behind not only the exile that followed 722 but the split between the two peoples that happened two centuries previously. *Crying* also picks up from 31:9. In this context as in that one, crying does not denote simply sadness (cf. 22:10; 31:15; 48:32), though it may imply contrition (cf. Ezra 10:1), but a crying that expresses a more mixed emotion, a response to something deeply moving and so marvelous that it seems too good to be true. People can have recourse to Yahweh in exile (29:13), but Jeremiah here speaks of a recourse to Yahweh associated with returning from exile.

**5** One reason is that Zion remains the place to which he made a special commitment (3:14; 8:19; 31:6, 12; four more references will follow in Jer 50 – 51). People are not going merely to Jerusalem, the city and the place where people live; they are going to Zion, the place where the temple is. Human beings like having special places where they can be sure of meeting with God, and Yahweh mercifully made Zion such a place. Actually, people are coming *here*: this way of speaking implies that Jeremiah and his audience are in Jerusalem.[[414]](#footnote-414) Another reason for referring to a *recourse* to Yahweh in this connection is implicit in the prediction in v. 5b, which presupposes the collapse of the pact that once obtained between Israel and Yahweh (see 11:1-17).[[415]](#footnote-415) It’s really rather scandalous to think that they will need to *join themselves* *to Yahweh* – that verb elsewhere refers to foreigners becoming worshipers of Yahweh (Isa 14:1; 56:3, 6; Zech 2:11 [15]). But they will indeed need to. Jeremiah underlines the point by speaking of *a pact for all time* (picking up from 32:40), unlike the pact that Israel annulled. And he adds that it is one *that will not be put out of mind*, so that this phrase is attached to something much more pleasant than was previously the case (20:11; 23:40). It will not be put out of mind by Yahweh or by them? Either way, the rebellion that lead to disaster and the disaster itself are not going to recur, ever.

**6** How did they come to be far away and how did that pact get annulled and how did they cease to be joined to Yahweh and to become like foreigners? Israel, *my people*, are a flock, but they became *a flock that were lost*. How could it have happened? Because *their shepherds*, the kings, priests, and prophets, *led them astray.* They took them over *mountain and hill*, which ought to be no problem, because the hillsides are where the pasture is, but here the mountains stand for the shrines, the “high places,” which were often on elevated positions on hills and mountains. Thus the flock *put out of mind* (that verb again) *their resting-place*. The term denotes the abode where (for instance) sheep can sleep safely (e.g., Isa 65:10), which in the allegory denotes the Zion to which they are now returning.

**7** The consequence of the sheep abandoning their safe resting-place is that they can be caught, killed, and eaten. To be less allegorical, Israel was vulnerable to adversaries (Assyria, Babylon…). Jeremiah invites his audience to imagine these adversaries defending their action with complete plausibility. To use Jeremiah’s expression, they were acting as Yahweh’s servants. No guilt can attach to their action. The guilt is Israel’s for abandoning Yahweh, whom Jeremiah imagines the adversaries describing in two telling images. Yahweh is their *faithful habitat*, another expression taken up from Jer 30 – 31 (see 31:23),[[416]](#footnote-416) which Jeremiah transfers from Zion to Yahweh himself. And he adds that Yahweh is the people’s *hope* (cf. 14:8; 17:13) – *their ancestors’ hope* and therefore one whom they know can be taken as their hope, if they think about their ancestors’ story. Jeremiah portrays the Babylonians as understanding things that Israel has not yet understood – both the reality of their wrongdoing and the reality and nature of their God.[[417]](#footnote-417)

**8** Placed here, this exhortation takes up from vv. 2-7 in several ways: it issues some urgent imperatives to some unnamed addressees, like v. 2, it does so in connection with the coming fall of Babylon to a force from the north, it speaks of Babylon’s shame, and it takes up the image of a flock. Out of its context in the scroll, the addresses might be any people (at least, any foreign people) in Babylon – its function then would be simply to underline the magnitude and the certainty of the city’s fall. In its context in the scroll, it puts pressure on Judahites who are quite settled and happy in Babylon (cf. Isa 48:20). Yahweh urges them to leave, as his agents once urged Lot and his family to leave Sodom (Gen 19).[[418]](#footnote-418) Perhaps the macho he-goats are the first to push their way forward when the shepherd lets the flock out from its pen. Perhaps the idea is that people should not be looking over their shoulder to see if someone else is on the move.[[419]](#footnote-419) Tg takes the exhortation to imply that they should be like officers at the head of the people, “strutting without fear or fright.”[[420]](#footnote-420)

**9-10** *Stirring* (*‘ûr* hiphil) is the First Testament’s common verb for the arousing of a major power to take action against Babylon (e.g., Isa 13:17; 45:13). It will actually be *an assembly of big nations,* a collaboration of peoples (Medes, Persians), who will put Babylon down. Here Yahweh describes how they will *line up* as an army so that the city will be *captured* (cf. v. 2). In a grisly image, the archers are like hunters whose arrows will certainly hit their target. So will warriors turn wives into widows and children into orphans. Thus thepeople of *Chaldea*, the former spoilers, *will become spoil*.

**11-12a** The change to *you* suggests that these clauses are the protasis leading into v. 12a, though following on v. 10 they also suggest a further instance of poetic justice. The people who become spoil (v. 10) are the people who currently celebrate being *plunderers of my domain* (*naḥălâ*),[[421]](#footnote-421) even while they claim they are only doing what their victims deserved (v. 7). Jeremiah’s vivid imagery for their celebratory plundering (v. 11b) is his way of making the point that Isa 47:6 makes in the context of a different vivid image. Yes, when their mother city is defeated, it will be *shamed* and *confounded*.

**12b-13** The unique expression *the end of the nations* links by contrast with Babylon’s being *the head of the nations* (31:7). Hebrew has no word for “empire,” and *nations* sometimes does in place of such a word; this connotation makes sense here. Jeremiah is proclaiming the end of the Babylonian empire in *wilderness, desert, and steppe*, the kind of grim landscape that Yahweh once had to bring Israel through (2:6). As in v. 3, the development of this description in v. 13 reuses standard descriptions of disaster that have already applied to Judah (e.g., 4:27; 19:8).[[422]](#footnote-422)

**14-15** Another originally separate message begins again with imperatives, this time the kind addressed to unnamed warriors; eventually Jeremiah will tell us that the implementers of these commands will be the Median army, but at the moment they are anonymous. He develops the figure of the commissioning of attackers in a sustained way through six of the seven lines that comprise the message, and in doing so broadens the nature of the exhortations. Three cola urging on the bowmen dominate v. 14, but the fourth colon repeats the charge from v. 7 (where it was an excuse). The next verse has overlapping dynamic. First, three cola issue an exhortation to fighters generally; the second and third describe the victory that is unfolding. G*iving its hand* is elsewhere a term for committing oneself or making a pact, like “shaking hands” in English, though from a position of weakness (e.g., Ezek 17:18; Lam 5:6).[[423]](#footnote-423) Jeremiah is imagining Babylon making alliances to defend itself against the coalition of attackers that previous verses have described – as (ironically) Assyria made alliances when the Babylonians and Medes (!) were attacking it. The fourth colon is then another *because* clause, a corollary of the preceding *because* colon. Babylon has done wrong in relation to Yahweh (v. 14); so Yahweh will take *redress*.[[424]](#footnote-424) Redress involves more poetic justice. The punishment is to fit the crime.

**16** A further bidding expresses vividly though more abstractly an aspect of the recurrent threat regarding the devastation of cultivated land (e.g., v. 12). In keeping with the rhetoric of vv. 14-15, Yahweh again issues a commission to Babylon’s attackers, this time to *cut off* the people involved in agriculture. The first line covers the two ends of their work, sowing and harvesting, and thus implicitly everything that happens in between. Cutting off could imply killing, but the second line implies that wise farmworkers will evade slaughter. Much agricultural work in Babylonia was undertaken by foreigners whom Babylon had transported, Judahites included, and they will be able to recognize the moment when it is wise and possible to *flee* home.

**17** The message in vv. 17-20 again picks up the sheep image from vv. 6-7 and 8-10, but once more takes it in a different direction. Israel is now not the victim of its own shepherds nor the flock hightailing it out of Babylon, but the single victim of Assyrian and Babylonian *lions*. The double identification of the attackers underlines how *Israel* here refers to the one nation, notwithstanding its division into Ephraim and Judah. The point is further underscored by its being called a single *sheep* – or goat; the word (*śeh*) can refer to either. Either way, in the First Testament and in material reality, a single sheep suggests vulnerability. Here the single sheep had got *detached* from the flock and come to be at the mercy of several lions.[[425]](#footnote-425) One cannot press the metaphor to establish what is the flock here, though the implication may be that the Israelites thought they had been treated harder than people such as Edom, Moab, and Ammon. The point Jeremiah makes is rather the grizzly picture of its first being vulnerable to Assyria, who essentially *devoured* it, and then to Nebuchadrezzar, who chewed its bones.

**18-19** Yahweh has already *attended to the king of Assyria*; he will do the same to *the king of Babylon and his country*. Once again the country that benefits from its leader’s actions also pays the price for them. But the point about the threat is that it will make enable *Israel* (again Jeremiah refers to the entire nation) to *return to its* *habitat*. This term regains its more literal reference (contrast v. 7), one especially appropriate in the context of the sheep image. The reference is spelled out in the parallel cola with their allusion to *pasture*. Metaphor also returns in the naming of the four great fertile regions, which are not especially literal pasture, but for literal Israel they will be indeed places where *its appetite can be full*.

**20** Again picking up the dynamic of Jer 30 – 31, a further promise adds relational provision to material provision, in keeping with the principle that both in relation with each other are required in connection with human need and divine care. The messages in vv. 2-19 have made clear that Israel’s sufferings stem from its *waywardness.* There is some subtle ambiguity about the promise. Is there no waywardness to be found because all waywardness will be pardoned? Or is the promise that no waywardness will be manifested, as a result of the creative potential of being pardoned and restored? The latter logic might fit 31:31-34.

## Challenges that Yahweh Accepts (50:21-32 [LXX 27:21-32])

21Against the country – Double Bitterness:a

go up against it,

and towards the people who live in Attention.b

Put to the sword and devotec after themd (Yahweh’s affirmation);

act in accordance with all that I have ordered you.e

22The sound of battle in the country,f

a great breaking!

23Howg ith is splitting and breaking,i

the hammer of the entire earth!

How it is becoming a desolation,

Babylon among the nations!

24I am trapping you,j yes, you are being captured, Babylon,

but you yourself do not acknowledge it.

You are being found, yes, you are being seized,

because against Yahweh you issued a challenge.

25Yahweh is opening his store

and getting out his instruments of condemnation.

Because that is the work of the Lord Yahweh of Armiesk

in the country of Chaldea.

26Come to it from end to end,l

open up its granaries.

Pile it up like heapsm and devote it –

there is not to be a remainder of it.

27Put all its bullocksn to the sword –

they are to go down to the slaughter!

Oh, them, because their day is coming,

the time of their being attended to!o

28The sound of people fleeing and escaping

from the country of Babylon,

To tell in Zion of the redress of Yahweh our God,

redress for his palace.p

29Make it heard towards Babylon to archers,q

all who direct a bow!

Camp against it all around –

there must not ber people who escape.

Recompense it in accordance with its deed –

in accordance with all that it did, do to it.

Because it was arrogant in relation to Yahweh,s

to Israel’s sacred one.

30Therefore its young men will fall in its squares;

all its men of battle will become stillt

on that dayu (Yahweh’s affirmation).v

31Here am I towards you, arrogance (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh of Armies),w

because your day has come,

the time when I am attending to you.x

32Arrogance will collapse and fall,

with no one to lift it up.

I will set fire to its townsy

and it will consume everything around it.z

The article on *hā’āreṣ* precludes the translation “the country of Double Bitterness” (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 402).

LXX understands *mәrāthaim* adverbially, “bitterly” and then takes *pәqôd* to mean “attend to.”

On this verb, see the comment on 25:9b.

The elliptical expression generates a triple assonance, *ḥarōb wәhaḥărēm ’aḥărêhem* (*CTAT* 2:829).

MT has a section marker here.

LXX also has “of the Chaldeans.”

See the comment on 48:39.

Tg interprets as “the king”; but this requires some inference; its gender may rather derive from the masculine word for *hammer*, *paṭṭîš*.

The qatal verbs are again anticipatory (see the note on v. 2); there are further examples in vv. 23b-25 and 31.

LXX has a third-person plural verb.

LXX lacks *of Armies*.

*Miqqēṣ* (literally “from end”) elsewhere refers to time, but *miqqāṣâ* has this broader meaning. Sym understands “all of you” (cf. Gen 47:2; Ezek 33:2); but cf. *miqqāṣâ* in 51:31. On the text of the colon, see *CTAT* 2:829-31.

For MT *kәmô* *‘ărēmîm* LXX “like a cave” implies *kәmô mә‘ārāb*; Vg “in heaps” implies *bәmô* *‘ărēmîm*.

For MT *pāreykā* LXX “its fruit” implies *piryāh* (LXX then derives the verb from *ḥārēb* “be dry”). Tg appropriately paraphrases “its strong men.”

MT has a section marker here.

LXX lacks this colon.

While LXX, Vg, Tg give *rabbîm* its usual meaning, “many,” the parallel colon suggests “archers” (cf. Job 16:13).

Q presupposes also *lāh* “of it” as in v. 26.

Tg has “against the people of the Lord”; cf. the note on v. 15.

See the note on 6:2.

LXX lacks *on that day*.

MT has a marker here. The verse is a slight variant on 49:26.

LXX has simply “of the Lord.”

The (anticipatory) qatal verb (see the note on v. 2) depends on the construct noun (GK 130d).

For MT *‘ārāyw* (cf. Aq), LXX has “its forest” (implying *ya‘ărô*) as in 21:14b, of which this line is a slight variant.

MT has a section marker here.

This second section of messages comprises three further commissions to Babylon’s attackers. The commissions thus compare with vv. 14-20, but they have two linked characteristics over against vv. 1-20. The section more or less gives up making any references to Israel; its focus lies simply on the catastrophe Yahweh intends to bring to Babylon. And it incorporates a number of reasons for this action on Yahweh’s part, whose rationale does not relate to Israel’s needs or destiny. The sequence outlines:

vv. 21-25 Yahweh’s commission is a response to Babylon’s challenge to him

an opening tricolon and eight self-contained bicola

vv. 26-28 Yahweh’s commission concerns an act of redress in connection with his palace

six bicola, the last two being linked

vv. 29-32 Yahweh’s commission initiates a rebuke to Babylon’s arrogance

four bicola and a semi-closing tricolon; then a resumptive tricolon and two bicola

**21** Yet again Yahweh commissions an attacker against Babylon (this time the verbs are singular). It is the first occasion when Babylon is given a substitute name, Merathaim. The name recalls the Babylonian place name Marratu which suggests bitter water, but Jeremiah turns it into a Hebrew word that makes a comment on Babylon as a place characterized by double bitterness, like Judah’s: *how dire and bitter* (*mar*)had Judah’s behavior been (2:19). The name could also make people think in terms of Double Rebellion(“rebel” is *mārâ*); the words “rebel” and “bitter” came close together when Yahweh said that Judah “has rebelled against me…. This is your direness, because it’s bitter” (4:17, 18). As we know already from v. 18, Babylon is therefore about to receive *Attention* (*pәqôd*)of an unwelcome sort. Here, too, Jeremiah takes up a Babylonian name, that of a tribe called Puqudu (which also appears in Ezek 23:23). So the doubly bitter/rebellious people is about to be attended to. The second line puts great emphasis on total annihilation: (a) *put to the sword*, (b) *devote*, which suggests elimination, and (c) in case there is any doubt make sure you go *after them* and get the last of them. Don’t let there be any survivors. And in this connection *act in accordance with all that I have ordered you*.

**22-25** Yet again Jeremiah imagines things happening, in fulfillment of that commission, and seeks to get the audience to imagine it. Babylon has been *the hammer of the entire earth*, but the hammer itself is now *splitting and breaking*. Then rhetorically Yahweh addresses Babylon itself, which brings the point home to Jeremiah’s Judahite audience in a new way: Yahweh has laid a trap for Babylon and it is *being captured*, and like an animal that walks into a trap, it doesn’t realize. As is the case with the Judahite leadership, “Something is happening here but you don’t know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones” (Bob Dylan). How encouraged Judahites could now be by this “mock lament”![[426]](#footnote-426) Jeremiah adds one of the occasional pieces of rationale that characterize this section: *because against Yahweh you issued a challenge*. Babylon thought it could assert itself against Yahweh – for instance, by invading his palace (v. 28). It is about to find that it was mistaken. Yahweh is *getting out* the weapons whereby he will give practical expression to his *condemnation*.[[427]](#footnote-427) Such *work* does not come naturally to him; it is strange or alien (Isa 28:21). But in circumstances such as the present ones, it is the necessary *work of the Lord Yahweh of Armies*.

**26-27** In that connection, once again Jeremiah or Yahweh reverts to commissioning destroyers. The prophecy seems at first to be speaking once more in terms of the country’s food supplies, with the commission leaping over the military attack to the aftermath; while an invading army commonly scoops up a country’s food supplies to feed itself, here the victors are commissioned to engage in pointless total destruction that will make ongoing life impossible. But the subsequent instruction to *pile it up like heaps and devote it* then suggests that the talk of *granaries* was a metaphor. It is Babylon itself that is to be piled up like grain and destroyed. Likewise the *bullocks* stand for the nation’s warriors (cf. Isa 34:7; Ezek 39:18 – which also talk about slaughter). *Their day* is a distinctive expression, but having a day of their own is not good news. It is *the time of their being attended to*. As the exclamation *how* (v. 23) can suggest either lamentation or satisfaction or both (it is “an ironic lament”),[[428]](#footnote-428) the exclamation *oh* (*hôy*) can signify either protest (22:13) or grief (22:18) but in this context may also suggest both.[[429]](#footnote-429)

**28** One again has to be wary of literalism in interpreting Jeremiah’s hyperbole. If the northern army has annihilated the entire people, there are no fugitives escaping to Zion. But Jeremiah allows for such escapees, presumably Judahites, who are the means of again articulating that Yahweh’s action against Babylon counts as redress and here make concrete the reason for the redress and the nature of that challenge that Jeremiah referred to in v. 25. People cannot expect to attack the king’s or the King’s palace[[430]](#footnote-430) and get away with it. While it is to be expected that the redress will be a comfort to the Judahites, Jeremiah wants them to see it as a proper response to the Babylonians’ treating Yahweh with contempt. The assault on the temple might be that of 597 or 587, and might relate to the assault having actually happened or to the event that Jeremiah knows will happen.

**29-30** A third commission follows. Logically it goes behind the preceding one and it has a particular focus. It begins with a commission to commissioners: that is, Yahweh bids his aides to go and tell the northern army’s *archers* to get on with their job of to firing arrows at the city’s defenders to provide cover for the engineers building ramps and undermining gates and walls.[[431]](#footnote-431) Both archers and engineers will *camp against it all around*, but the focus lies on the archers, who are to form a vast company to surround Babylon in order that they can also make sure that no one escapes. Everyone will be shot. The commission’s burden thus parallels and amplifies vv. 26-27. It will be appropriate *recompense* for what the city did, which is now expressed in terms of being *arrogant*.[[432]](#footnote-432) Its self-confident assertiveness clashes with Yahweh’s being *Israel’s sacred one*. Jeremiah uses the title conventionally translated “the holy one of Israel” that is characteristic of the book of Isaiah but also occurs in Pss 71:22; 78:41; 89:18 [19]. You cannot mess with someone who is sacred; it provokes a response. In addition, Yahweh’s being *Israel’s* sacred one makes attacking Israel unwise, like invading his domain or palace. Underestimating him is unwise. Like Israel, Babylon has made this mistake and will pay the price.

**31-32** The scroll juxtaposes another message taking up the theme of *arrogance* which becomes a kind of title for Babylon.[[433]](#footnote-433) Babylon is arrogance incarnate and yes, it is about to pay the price. “Arrogance typically has a short life.”[[434]](#footnote-434) Likewise the message picks up the idea of people having their day, in the bad sense that it is *the time when I am attending to* *you* (cf. v. 27).

## Threats That Yahweh Repeats (50:33-46 [LXX 27:33-46])

33Yahweh of Armiesa has said this.

The Israelites are oppressed,

and the Judahites, together.

All their captors took strong hold of them –b

they refused to send them off.

34Their restorerc is strong –

Yahweh of Armies his name.

He will definitely argued their case

in order to give rest to the earth

and to give unrest e to the people who live in Babylon.

35A sword against Chaldea (Yahweh’s affirmation)f

towards the people who live in Babylon,

towards its officials and towards its experts!

36A sword towards the oracles,g and they will become fools;h

a sword towards its strong men, and they will shatter!

37A sword towards his horses and towards his chariotry,i

and towards the entire foreign group that’s within it,

and they will become women!

A sword towards its stores, and they will be plundered –

38a desertj towards its water, and it will dry up.k

Because it is a country of images,

and because of their dreadful objectsl they will go crazy.m

39Therefore creatures from the desert will live with creatures from foreign shores,n

and ostriches will live in it.

It will not liveo again, ever;

it will not dwell for generation after generation.p

40Like God’s overthrowing of Sodom,

and of Gomorrah and of its neighbors (Yahweh’s affirmation),

No one will live there,

no human being will reside in it.q

41There, a people is coming from the north,

a big nation and many kings –

they stir themselves from the furthest parts of the earth.

42Bow and sabre they grasp hold of,

they are 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 individual for battle,

against you, Miss Babylon.

43The king of Babylon has heard the news of them

and his hands have drooped.

Distress has grasped hold of him,

writhing like a woman giving birth.r

44There, it will be as when a lion goes up

from the Jordan swell into a permanent habitat.

Because I intend to hustle him out of it,

and whoever is chosen for it I will appoint.

Because who is like me,

who can summons me ?

Who on earth is the shepherd

who can stand before me?

45Therefore listen to Yahweh’s counsel

that he has determined for Babylon,

His intentions that he has devised

for the country of Chaldea.

If the flock’s kids don’t drag them away,

if the habitat isn’t desolate at them….

46At the sound when Babylon is being seized,s

the earth is shaking,

and an outcry among the nations – it is making itself heard.t

LXX lacks “of Armies.”

The asyndeton and the word order with the object preceding the verb suggests that this colon is subordinate to the next.

Aq, Sym nicely render “the one who is near them.”

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the point; it is formed like an infinitive construct rather than absolute (which is usual), enhancing the assonance of *rîb yārîb ’et-rîbâ* (JM 123q).

The verbs *hirgîa‘* and *hirgîz* (give rest/unrest) are nicely alliterative while contradictory in meaning; both look like qatals but are actually infinitives (see GK 53l).

LXX lacks *(Yahweh’s affirmation)*.

See the note and comment on 48:30.

LXX lacks this colon.

LXX additionally repeats “a sword towards its strong men.”

*Sword* is *ḥereb*; *desert* is *ḥōreb*.

LXX “will be shamed” suggests *yēbōšû* rather than *yābēšû*.

For MT *’êmîm* LXX “islands” implies *’iyyîm*, which comes in the next colon.

For MT’s hitpoel *yithōlālû*, LXX, Vg, Tg “glory” implies hitpael *yithallālû* (4:2).

*Ṣiyyîm* and *‘iyyîm* (*creatures*, *foreign shores*) rhyme, like *tōhû* and *bōhû* in 4:23 and Gen 1:2 (Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:420), with similar implications.

See the note on 17:25.

LXX lacks this colon.

V. 40 repeats 49:18 (where see the notes and comment) in a slightly different form.

Vv. 41-43 repeat 6:22-24 (where see the notes and comment) in a slightly variant form. See E. Peels, “‘Against You, Daughter of Babylon,’” in W. T. van Peursen and J. Dyk (eds.), *Tradition and Innovation* *in Biblical Interpretation* (E. Talstra Festschrift; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 31-44.

LXX, Vg translate loosely “at the sound of the seizing”; *niḥpәšâ* is actually a finite verb dependent on the construct noun (cf. JM 129p).

MT has a section marker here. Vv. 44-46 repeat 49:19-21 (see the notes and comment) in a slightly different form.

The last section of Jer 50 is dominated by a sequence of threats that continue to declare the coming fall of Babylon and do so especially by restating older prophetic messages.[[435]](#footnote-435) An implication of this feature is the assumption that a message from Yahweh may not be “done” when it has applied in one context or one people. It is almost to be expected that it would apply in others and to others.[[436]](#footnote-436) The sequence outlines:

vv. 33-34 Yahweh will act as he did in the exodus story, as Israel’s restorer and advocate

an introduction, three bicola, and a closing tricolon

vv. 35-40 Yahweh charges a sword, which leads into a reworking from Isa 13 and Jer 49

a bicolon framed by two tricola, then six bicola, the last two being linked

vv. 41-43 a people coming from the north, described in by reworking 6:22-24

an opening tricolon, a bicolon, two linked bicola, then two bicola

vv. 44-46 Yahweh intends to hustle Babylon like a lion, a reworking from 49:19-21

four bicola, two linked bicola, a bicolon, and a closing tricolon

The four messages thus complement each other in the background they presuppose:

* in the exodus story
* in the message about Babylon in Isaiah
* in a message about Judah from much earlier in the Jeremiah scroll
* in a message about Edom from the immediately previous chapter in Jeremiah

**33** Initially, this sequence returns to the logic of Yahweh’s action. Whereas vv. 21-32 described it as redress and recompense in response to Babylon’s action and stance towards Yahweh himself, now it becomes a response to Babylon’s action in relation to Israel. *Oppressed* (*‘āšaq*) more precisely means treated fraudulently (7:6; 21:12), and vv. 33b-34 suggest an awareness of this connotation. Jeremiah takes the reality of fraudulence and oppression within a community, whereby the powerful cheat the needy out of their rights, and make it an image for the way Assyria and Babylon have treated Israel as a whole. Ephraim and Judah had simply insisted on their independence, on being in control of their own destinies, but Assyria and Babylon first took them captive and then *refused to send them off*: the phraserecalls a much earlier experience (Exod 4:23; 7:14).[[437]](#footnote-437) Actually, the Judahites will turn out to be happy in Babylon and not enthusiastic about returning to Judah when they have the chance, but perhaps this irony does not change the wrong involved in the imperial powers’ domination of the region.

**34** What Israel had needed in Egypt was someone to act as its *restorer*,[[438]](#footnote-438) and fortunately it had someone (Exod 6:6; 15:13), and someone with a *strong* hand (Exod 3:19; 6:1; 13:3, 9, 14, 16). And fortunately Israel again has one, who is indeed *strong*; the adjective (*ḥāzāq*)links with the verb in v. 33b (*ḥāzaq* hiphil). *Yahweh of Armies is his name* underlines the point. The task of a restorer may involve taking up someone’s case in a meeting of the elders at the town gate; the account of Boaz in Ruth 4 provides an example. Yahweh will fulfill this moral obligation, too (Ps 74 also brings together talk of Yahweh restoring and of his taking up Israel’s case).[[439]](#footnote-439) If we may press the image, Yahweh is appearing in a meeting of the heavenly powers and arguing Israel’s case there – the prophecy sets aside any thought of Israel’s having deserved what happened to it. The broader context is that the neat byproduct of Yahweh’s action against Babylon is also to *give rest to the earth* as a whole that is Babylon’s victim, because it will *give unrest to the people who live in Babylon* itself. The promise stimulates a prayer:

Grant, Almighty God, that, as thou hast deigned once to take us under thy protection, we may always raise up our eyes to thine infinite power, and that when we see all things not only confounded, but also trodden under foot by the world, we may not yet doubt but that thy power is sufficient to deliver us, so that we may perpetually call on thy name, and with firm constancy so fight against all temptations, that we may at length enjoy in thy celestial kingdom the fruit of our victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. — Amen.[[440]](#footnote-440)

**35-37a** One might see this next declaration of Babylon’s doomas a response to vv. 33-34.[[441]](#footnote-441) It begins as a kind of curse, a little like Mercutio’s “a plague o’ both your houses,”[[442]](#footnote-442) except that when Yahweh utters a curse, it is certain to come true. A *sword* will fall. Jeremiah has spoken many times of a sword as the means of bringing death. Here it is to come on the people as a whole, then on the people who make its political decisions and formulate its political policies, then on its *oracles* in the sense of the ministers who bring messages from a god about what is going to happen and what should therefore be done to avoid it (if it is bad news); Yahweh will see to the frustrating of their revelations, so that *they will become fools*. Then it is to come on the supposed *strong men* who defend the city, so that *they will shatter*, physically but perhaps also in morale, like their deities (v. 2).[[443]](#footnote-443) It will come on *his* (the king’s?) *horses* and *chariotry* and *the entire foreign group that’s within it* – which in this context suggests a force of foreign mercenaries. They *will become women*, like Egypt’s mercenaries who cannot be relied on to stand firm when things get overwhelmingly dangerous (46:16, 21).

**37b-38a** The content of the curse has already suggested that we should not be literalistic in interpreting the *sword*, as if it wielded itself. The point now becomes clearer: the sword stands for the fighter bearing the sword, who will plunder Babylon’s armory and resources. A final toggling of the language abandons the sword image for the image of desert or drought that will come upon Babylon’s water supply, which is also the key to its being able to irrigate its fields. It is an ironic and devastating threat, because Babylon straddled the Euphrates, and water was the last thing it thought it needed to worry about.

**38b** In adding a reason for the curse, the message comes to have a similar shape to that of vv. 33-34. There the argument was that Babylon will fall because Yahweh is strong; here the argument is that Babylon will fall because it is *a country of images* andits images are weak, inadequate to the challenge lying before them. They will not be able to protect Babylon from sword or drought. Indeed, the Babylonians’ devotion to them will issue in sword and drought. Yahweh declared earlier that the nations *will go crazy* because of the sword he sends among them (25:16); the same logic applies here. It is because the Babylonians’ reliance on them will have this dreadful result that the images are *dreadful objects.* There is no reason to think that the Babylonians were afraid of their images or the gods they represented, though in reality they should be afraid.

**39-40** The message in vv. 35-40 closes with a development of the point about desert and drought. It begins with a reference to creatures whose names to not correspond to actual species but rather link with desert and foreign shores and thus suggest creatures that are alien, eerie, and frightening. Ostriches appear elsewhere in the company of such creatures of the wild or of the desert (e.g., Isa 34:13-15; 43:20; Lam 4:3).. The message makes its point by adopting phrases that appear elsewhere in prophecy. One can compare vv. 39-40 with declarations about Babylon in Isa 13:19-22 and about Edom in Jer 49:18 (also see 49:33):

Isa 13:19-22 Jer 50:39

as at God’s overturning of Sodom and of Gomorrah

therefore creatures from the desert will

live with creatures from foreign shores

and ostriches will live in it

it will not live ever it will not be live again, ever

it will not dwell for generation after generation… it will not dwell for generation after generation

creatures from the desert will lie down there…

ostriches will dwell there…

jackals in its castles

Jer 49:18 Jer 50:40

as at the overturning of Sodom as at God’s overturning of Sodom

and of Gomorrah and of its neighbors and of Gomorrah and of its neighbors

Yahweh has said Yahweh’s affirmation

no one will live there no one will live there

no human being will reside in it no human being will reside in it

Though we cannot be sure about the direction of the adopting, the parallels indicate how prophecies interact with each other. If Yahweh has spoken once in a particular way, it will not be just a random once-off revelation but an expression of his typical or ongoing purpose, and one will not be surprised to find it illuminating in a different context, as happens with the Moab prophecy in Jer 48. Thus prophecies may come in wholly fresh words or may come in familiar words, and both processes can produce compelling and frightening results.

**41-43** The dynamic continues with a message that applies to Babylon the message to Judah in 6:22-24:

6:22there a people is coming from a northern country 41there a people is coming from the north

a big nation a big nation and many kings

stirs itself from the furthest parts of the earth stir themselves from the furthest parts of the earth

23bow and sabre they grasp hold of 42bow and sabre they grasp hold of

it’s fierce, and they have no compassion they are fierce, and they have no compassion

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

and on horses they ride and on horses they ride

drawn up like an individual for battle drawn up like an individual for battle

against you Miss Zion against you Miss Babylon

24we have heard the news of it 43the king of Babylon has heard the news of them

our hands have drooped his hands have drooped

distress has grasped hold of us distress has grasped hold of him

writhing like a woman giving birth writhing like a woman giving birth

The impact of the message would be enhanced for anyone who had heard the version in 6:22-24. It offers the reassurance that the grimness of what Yahweh intends for Judah will also overwhelm Babylon,[[444]](#footnote-444) and in particular its king.[[445]](#footnote-445) Conversely, anyone in Judah who first heard the message about Babylon and rejoiced in it could be devastated by the realization that the same fate hangs over Judah. One could see 6:22-24 as in effect one of the prophecies about a foreign nation applied to Judah.[[446]](#footnote-446)

**44-46** The section dominated by the reworking of earlier prophecies closes with a restatement of the threat concerning Edom in 49:19-21, which thus continues from the reworking of 49:18 in v. 40:

49:19there, it will be as when a lion goes up 50:44there, it will be as when a lion goes up

from the Jordan swell into a permanent habitat from the Jordan swell into a permanent habitat

because I intend to hustle him out of it because I intend to hustle him out of it

and whoever is chosen for it I will appoint and whoever is chosen for it I will appoint

because who is like me because who is like me

who can summons me who can summons me[[447]](#footnote-447)

who on earth is the shepherd who on earth is the shepherd

who can stand before me who can stand before me

20therefore listen to Yahweh’s counsel 45therefore listen to Yahweh’s counsel

that he has determined for Edom that he has determined for Babylon

his intentions that he has devised his intentions that he has devised

for the people who live in Teman for the country of Chaldea

if the flock’s kids don’t drag them away if the flock’s kids don’t drag them away

if their habitat isn’t desolate at them if the habitat isn’t desolate at them

21at the sound of their downfall 46at the sound of Babylon’s seizing

the earth is shaking the earth is shaking[[448]](#footnote-448)

an outcry at the Reed Sea an outcry among the nations

its sound is making itself heard is making itself heard

Once again Jeremiah’s reworking of earlier messages indicates that there is system in Yahweh’s operating, and that his hearers would be unwise to assume that he is simply predicting what they will read in the newspapers about Edom or about Babylon. The fall of Jerusalem was not the kind of event that prophets pictured; nor were the fall of Babylon, the fall of Edom, the fall of Antiochus Epiphanes, the coming of the Messiah, or the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Prophecies are not predictions inspired by God but imaginative and imaginary scenarios inspired by God so that they have the capacity to give a true impression of the significance of the event to which they refer and thus to provoke an appropriate response whereby people turn to God.

## The Faithful and Powerful God (51:1-19 [LXX 28:1-19])

1Yahweh has said this.

Here am I, stirring against Babylon

and towards the people who live in “The midst of those who rise against me,”a

a devastating wind.

2I will send off aliensb against Babylon and they will winnow it,

and strip its country,

When they have beenc against itd all around

on the day of dire fortune.

3Towards [the one who] will direct, the one who will direct his bow,e

towards [the one who] will get himself up in his armor:f

Do not spare the young men –

devote its entire army.

4They will fall, run through, in the country of Chaldea,

thrust through in its streets.

5Because Israel and Judah has not been widowed

through its God, through Yahweh of Armies,

Because their country – it was full of liability

through Israel’s sacred one.g

6Flee from inside Babylon –

save, each individual, his life.

Don’t become stillh through its waywardness,

because it is a time of redress.

For Yahweh it is a remuneration

with which he is recompensing it.

7Babylon was a gold chalice in Yahweh’s hand,

getting the entire earth drunk.

In that nations drank of its wine –i

as a result, nationsj are crazy.

8Suddenly Babylon is falling and breaking –k

howl over it!

Get ointment for its wounds –

perhaps it may heal.

9We are healing Babylon,

but it has not healed.

Abandon it, let’s go,

each to his country.

Because the decision about it has reached to the heavens,

it has risen to the skies.

10Yahweh has made great faithfulness go out for us –l

come, let us recount in Zion

the action of Yahweh our God.m

11Polish the arrows,

fill the quivers!

(Yahweh is stirring the spirit of the kings of Media,

because against Babylon his intention is to devastate it.

Because that will be Yahweh’s redress,

redress for his palace.)n

12Towards the walls of Babylon lift up a standard,

establish a strong watch.

Set up watchmen,

prepare ambushes.

Because Yahweh is both intending and acting on

that of which he spoke towards the people who live in Babylon.

13You who dwello by abundant water,

abundant in stores:

Your end is coming,

the measure forp your cutting off.q

14Yahweh of Armies has sworn by his life:

Though I have filled you with humanity like locust,r

they will chant a shout against you.s

15Maker of earth by his energy,

establisher of the world by his smartness,

who by his insight stretched the heavens:

16With the sound of his giving a roar of water in the heavens,

and his causing billows to go up from the end of the earth,

Lightnings with the rain he makes

and he causes wind to go out from his stores.

17Every human being shows himself stupid through his knowledge,

every goldsmith is put to shame through his image.

Because his model is deception;

there is no spirit in them.

18They are empty, a work for mockery –

at the time of their being attended to, they will perish.

19Not like these is Jacob’s share,

because he is the shaper of everything.

And it is the clan that is his domain:

Yahweh of Armies is his name.t

For MT *lēb-qāmāy* LXX has “the Chaldeans” (cf. Tg); “the other ancient versions seem greatly perplexed, and differ in their interpretation of this passage” (Blayney, *Jeremiah*, 139).MT’s expression comes from substituting the Hebrew equivalent of ABC by ZYX; thus *ksdym* (Chaldeans) becomes *lbqmy* (cf. v. 41, and the note on 25:26). Jeremiah then provides these consonants with some vowels, generating a phrase that makes a point about Babylon; see the comment.

For MT *zārîm* Aq, Sym, Vg imply *zōrîm* “winnowers,” LXX *zēdîm* “arrogant people” (with a related different reading of the subsequent verb: cf. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1296).

For MT *hā’û* LXX “woe” implies *hôy*.

LXX has “Babylon.”

On the verb, see the note on 46:9.

MT involves an ellipse in each colon. For *wә’el* each time, Vg implies *wә’al* “he is not to direct… not to take a stand” (Tg has a negative in the first clause), a grammatically easier reading which would be an instruction relating to Babylonian defenders. On the complexity of the textual tradition, see *CTAT* 2:839-41.

LXX has “sacred things.”

On this verb, see the note on 6:2.

The asyndeton and the word order with the object preceding the verb suggests that this colon is subordinate to the next.

LXX, Vg lack this second *nations*.

The qatal and wayyiqtol verbs are anticipatory (see the note on 50:3); there are further examples in vv. 11-13

Like Hebrew *ṣidqōtênû*, Tg’s *zkwtn’* could be numerical plural or intensive/abstract plural (see *DTT*).On the assumption of abstract/intensive, LXX has not inappropriately “his judgment,” repeating *krima* from v. 9, while Aq’s *tēn dikaiosunēn autou* spells out the word’s implications, though Vg’s *iustitia nostra* (cf. Sym) is misleading (see the comment).

A has a section marker here.

LXX “his people” is an inner-LXX slip for *naou* *autou*.

The feminine singular *šōkant* looks like a cross between qatal *šākant* and participle *šōkenet*, while K implies the archaic *šākantî* (see the notes on 2:19, 20).

Literally, “the cubit of,” a unique use of *’ammat*; LXX “truly” implies *’ĕmet* (cf. Aq).

Cf. Vg; *HALOT*.For MT *biṣ‘ēk* LXX “into your guts” implies *bәmē‘ayik*. Aq, Sym assume the regular meaning of *beṣa‘*, “what can be grabbed” (6:13; 8:10; 22:17).

LXX, Vg “because I will fill” imply that the colon refers to the huge attacking army (cf. Tg), but one would then expect *’im lō’* (cf. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 308)rather than simply *’im*. The construction is illustrated by a parallel in 2 Kgs 5:20 (Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 754), though here it is clearer that *kî* and *’im* are separate rather than being a compound expression. *Kî* (literally, “that”) introduces the content of the oath. The *if* clause then indicates something Yahweh intends to do, but it is qatal because it is the condition for the apodosis in the next colon, which constitutes the point of the oath.

MT has a section marker here.

MT has a marker here. Vv. 15-19 repeat from 10:12-16, where see the comment and notes; the only noteworthy difference is that 10:16 has *Israel* in the penultimate colon.

Yahweh formulates in new ways his intentions regarding Babylon and again urges people to be ready to abandon the city for their own safety, and Jeremiah buttresses his affirmations and his exhortation with reminders of Yahweh’s unparalleled power as creator and his commitment to Israel. “Each of the three first sections emphasizes that the annihilation of Babylon is Yahweh’s will; the fourth adds to it that he has the power for that.”[[449]](#footnote-449) The section outlines:

vv. 1-5 Yahweh’s declaration of intent about an attack on Babylon

after an introduction, an opening tricolon, and seven bicola – six being in pairs

vv. 6-10 an exhortation to flee from Babylon in light of Yahweh’s coming action

ten bicola, then a closing tricolon

vv. 11-14 an exhortation to Babylon’s attackers, with an disclosure of their identity

a bicolon, two in parenthesis, three bicola, two linked bicola, then a resumptive introduction and a bicolon

vv. 15-19 a song of praise concerning Yahweh as the creator whose domain is Israel

an opening tricolon, two linked bicola, then five bicola

**1-2** The introduction *Yahweh has said this* corresponds to the beginning of the messages about Philistia, Ammon, and Kedar (47:2; 49:1, 28), and it will have encouraged the medieval provision of a chapter break at this point, but there is no marked new beginning here in relation to what precedes.[[450]](#footnote-450) Once again Yahweh speaks of *stirring up* attackers on *Babylon* (cf. 50:9). But the further description of the calamity to come then glosses Babylon with the phrase *the midst* (literally, the heart or mind) *of those who rise against me*. The letters of that phrase (*lbqmy*) are a reverse paronomasia on the name Chaldeans,[[451]](#footnote-451) but in addition “by a kind of bonus”[[452]](#footnote-452) the letters can be vocalized so that *those who rise against me* makes another comment on Babylon’s offensiveness and on the reason for bringing catastrophe upon it, another way of describing the Chaldeans as people who do wrong in relation to Yahweh or issue a challenge to Yahweh or invade Yahweh’s palace or act arrogantly towards Yahweh (50:14, 24, 28, 29). In describing the calamity Yahweh takes up the image of *a devastating wind* and indicates the nature of its devastating work as he develops the image, with a further paronomasia.[[453]](#footnote-453) *Aliens* (*zārîm*) will devastate Babylon, but in terms of the image in v. 2 they will be winnowers (*zōrîm*).[[454]](#footnote-454) For winnowing, one needs a breeze, but this wind will be a gale that blows away wheat as well as chaff. Yahweh’s declaration about Babylon again corresponds to his threat about Judah (4:11-12). V. 11 will shortly identify the alien winnowers, while 2 Chr 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1-2 in referring to Jeremiah will describe how Yahweh “stirred the spirit (*rûaḥ*) of Cyrus” (whom one could indeed call a devastator) to commission Judahites to go and rebuild the temple.

**3-4** Jeremiah reverts to speaking literally, though with some allusiveness.[[455]](#footnote-455) The people who fulfill the function of the wind are the foreign archers in their armor. They are no more to *spare* the young Babylonian fighters than they are to spare their arrows (50:14) but to *devote* the Babylonian forces. After *devote*, one hardly needs the word *entire*, which thus underscores the grisly reality that the verb presupposes; each time Jeremiah uses this verb in connection with Babylon (cf. 50:21, 26), he adds some such expression to underline the point. If the audience wants to imagine the implications in even more down-to-earth gruesome terms, v. 4 outlines them.

**5** The *because* perhaps makes a contrast between the coming fate of Babylon and the past fate of Israel. One might think that Israel has indeed been *widowed* in the sense of abandoned by its husband.[[456]](#footnote-456) Whereas being widowed in a Western context may be chiefly a cause of grief and sorrow, in a traditional society the male head of a family is key to its security and livelihood, and widowhood threatens vulnerability and/or starvation. The second *because* might then indicate why Babylon is going to be widowed,[[457]](#footnote-457) but the sequence of clauses more likely suggests that it indicates why such abandonment of Israel would have been justifiable: Israel’s land was full of wrongdoing, and thus of guilt, and thus of *liability* (*’āšām*). Jeremiah uses this noun only here, though with some irony it follows up an occurrence of the related verb (50:7), where Israel’s attackers were imagined reassuring themselves that they would incur no liability because Israel deserved the chastisement of which they were the executors. They were right: Israel *was* *full* of such guilt through following other deities, *through* (that is, in relation to) *Israel’s sacred one*. There is further irony, since Jeremiah’s earlier reference to Yahweh as Israel’s sacred one (50:29), also the only other occurrence in Jeremiah, related to Babylon’s arrogance towards Yahweh as Israel’s sacred one. Israel is just as guilty, but this guilt has not issued in Yahweh’s turning it into a widow.

**6** In the context, this new message that begins with another exhortation to leave Babylon because of the coming calamity will be addressing the Judahites there, but (rhetorically at least) it might also address other foreigners such as merchants doing business in Babylon.[[458]](#footnote-458) Yet again the wording links ironically with what precedes: when the Babylonians *become* *still* (50:30), you don’t want to join them, do you? You don’t want to be present when Yahweh takes *redress* upon Babylon (cf. 50:28) for its waywardness, when he gives Babylon its *remuneration*,when he is *recompensing* Babylon (cf. 50:29). There might have seemed nowhere safer than Babylon![[459]](#footnote-459) Actually there was nowhere more dangerous.

**7** Jeremiah returns to the imagery of 25:15-29, where the chalice wentfrom *Yahweh’s hand* to Jeremiah’s hand for the nations to drink from, though here Jeremiah uses the image in a different way. This *chalice* is *gold*, which would make *the entire earth* feel even more honored to drink from it. It stands for an empire “politically powerful and culturally dazzling.”[[460]](#footnote-460) The chalice not only gets them drunk; it makes them *crazy* (cf. 50:38).

**8-10** But now is the moment of the great reversal. Babylon is “the butler who got sick.”[[461]](#footnote-461) If we are to be literalistic, the people urged to dress Babylon’s wounds are foreigners in its midst, which will again mean not least the Judahites, exercising a ministry like Jonah’s to Nineveh – or Daniel’s to Nebuchadrezzar and Belshazzar![[462]](#footnote-462) But their task is hopeless, and anyway the exhortation is perhaps sarcastic.[[463]](#footnote-463) The wounds are fatal, because the *decision* (*mišpāṭ*)[[464]](#footnote-464)Yahweh has made about Babylon *has reached to the heavens, it has risen to the skies*. The next line clarifies this declaration. Yahweh’s steadfast commitment and faithful decisions, which reach the heavens and the sky, the high mountains and the great deep, issue in deliverance for his people (Ps 36:5-6 [6-7]; cf. Pss 57:10 [11]; 108:4 [5]). Yahweh’s decision about Babylon is such a decision, one whereby *Yahweh has made great faithfulness go out for us*. Therefore our obligation as Judahites is to get back to *recount in Zion the action of Yahweh our God*. Jeremiah invites people to imagine chanting a thanksgiving psalm.[[465]](#footnote-465) As usual, the faithfulnessto which Jeremiah refers is thus not Israel’s faithfulness (of which it had shown little) or its vindication (of which it had deserved little) but Yahweh’s faithfulness that emerged from his commitment, the great faithfulness or faithful acts proclaimed in Judg 5:11; 1 Sam 12:7; Ps 103:6; Dan 9:16; Mic 6:5.

**11** Another new message begins. Jeremiah once again addresses Babylon’s imagined attackers, specifically its archers. Here, they have not left home yet; they are to start making preparation for a march. The exhortation gives way to a background comment that looks like a later insertion into the exhortation, but an important insertion because it reveals these attackers’ identity. The dynamic of Jer 50 – 51 follows that of Jer 2 – 6, where first there was mention of an attacker from the north, then the identification of the attacker, though it may again promote the reflection “Well, yes, who else could it be?” *Stirring* (*‘ûr* hiphil) was the verb used of the coalition of unnamed nations in 50:9 and of the unidentified wind (*rûaḥ*) in 51:1; it was the language used in Isa 10:26 of Assyria (though there it was polel) and in Isa 13:17 of the Medes. The reworking of Isa 13:19-22 in 50:39-40 makes it plausible to think of Jeremiah here alluding to Isa 13:17. To speak of stirring up the *spirit* (*rûaḥ*,as in v. 1) suggests both arousing the energy and awakening something inside a person that might surprise them, which fits the language in 2 Chr 36:22 and Ezra 1:1. The plural *kings* suggests a recognition that the Median empire is a coalition, like the Babylonian empire. These kings will be the means of exacting *Yahweh’s redress for his palace*, of which 50:28 spoke.

**12** The leadership of the attacking army is to *lift up a* *standard* to muster the troops for an advance on Babylon, initially simply to blockade the city and prevent anyone going in to bring provisions or getting out to escape – hence the *ambushes*. As Yahweh formulated an intention and acted against Jerusalem (Lam 2:17), so he is *intending and acting* against Babylon.[[466]](#footnote-466)

**13** Jeremiah turns to address Babylon itself. It might think it could last out a long blockade. It doesn’t have to worry about its water supply, like most cities; it apparently has a substantial grain supply. But it is deceiving itself. Etymologically, the *end* of something (*qēṣ*)is the point at which it is “cut off” (*qāṣaṣ*), and maybe Jeremiah plays with that fact when he glosses his reference to the *end* with an apparent metaphor in the expression that refers more literally to “‘the cubit [at which] you are cut off,’” a different verb for cutting off (*bāṣa‘*) and a more technical expression suggesting that “the cutting of the web from the loom is a figure for death” (cf. Isa 38:12).[[467]](#footnote-467)

**14** Yahweh’s oath (cf. Am 6:8) backs up Jeremiah’s declaration. Yahweh’s words could signify that he intends to send a huge army to Babylon, but the construction more likely refers to his already having made Babylon the monumentally huge city that it was.[[468]](#footnote-468) Either way, he will see that a shout issues within it and against it that will echo his own shout in 25:30 (cf. also 48:33).

**15-19** The announcement of Babylon’s end underscored by Yahweh’s oath issues in an appropriate song of praise.[[469]](#footnote-469) Its description of Yahweh reiterates from 10:12-16[[470]](#footnote-470) the fact that he is the creator[[471]](#footnote-471) and backs up the claims he has been making in vv. 11-14. “To confess the Holy One in such circumstances as the maker of everything… must have seemed to many, even many Israelites, as whistling in the dark.”[[472]](#footnote-472) But here these lines assert that he has the capacity to do as he says, and has the motivation to do so, given the fact that Jacob is *his domain.*

## The Shatterer Shattered (51:20-33 [LXX 28:20-33])

20You,a a shatterer for me –

of battle instruments:b

I used to shatter nations with you,c

and devastate kingdoms with you.

I used to shatter horse and its charioteer with you,

and shatter chariot and its charioteer with you.

22I used to shatter man and woman with you,

and shatter elder and youth with you.d

I used to shatter young man and young girle with you,

23and shatter shepherd and his flock with you.

I used to shatter plowman and his pair with you,

and shatter governors and overseers with you.

24But I will pay back Babylon

and all the people who live in Chaldea,

For all their dire dealing,

which they did in Zion before yourf eyes (Yahweh’s affirmation).g

25Here am I in relation to you,

devastator mountain (Yahweh’s affirmation),h

the devastator of the entire earth.

I will extend my hand against you

and roll you from the cliffs

and make you a burnt mountain.

26They will not get from you

a cornerstone or foundation stone

because you will be a total destruction for all time (Yahweh’s affirmation).

27Lift up a standard in the earth,

sound a horn among the nations.

sanctify nations against it.

Make it heard to kingdomsi against it:

Ararat, Minni, Ashkenaz.

Appoint a marshalj against it,

get horse to go up like bristlingk locust.

28Sanctify nations against it,

the kingsl of Media,

Its governors and all its overseers,

and every country that it rules.

29The earth is quaking and writhing,m

because Yahweh’s intentions are being implemented against Babylon,n

To make the country of Babylon

a desolation, without anyone living there.

30The strong men of Babylon are ceasing to do battle –

they are sitting in the fortresses.

Their strength is drying up –

they are becoming women.

People are setting fire to its dwellings,

its bars are breaking.

31Runner runs to meet runner,

messenger to meet messenger.

To give the message to the king of Babylon

that his city has been captured from end to end.o

32The fords – they have been seized,

the marshesp – people have set them on fire,

the men of battle – they are panicking.q

33Because Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel,r has said this:

Misss Babylon is like a threshing floor

at the time of its treading.

Yet a little while

and the time of harvest will come for it.

*You* is again masculine singular, and Qimchi (in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage) assumes that Yahweh addresses the king of Babylon, but the gender may again derive from the associated noun – here *mappēṣ* – and the *you*  may continue to be Babylon itself.

This phrase is the object of *shatterer* (cf. LXX, Vg, Tg) in a broken construct chain (cf. Isa 19:8).

LXX, Vg give the sequence of *waw*-consecutives their usual future time reference; *you* would then need to be the Medes or their king (cf. v. 28 LXX). But the role described is not elsewhere theirs but Babylon’s past role, so more likely the verbs are past imperfect in significance.

LXX lacks this colon.

See the note on 18:13.

The *your* is plural.

MT has a section marker here.

LXX lacks *(Yahweh’s affirmation)*.

Sym has “kings.”

*Ṭipsār* apparently derives from an Akkadian word for a scribe ; Vg simply transliterates it, LXX has “siege engines,” Tg “people who make war.” BDB, 381, compares *šōṭēr* which also implies the “military function of those skilled in writing.”

Likewise the versions imply puzzlement on this rare word, for which see Job 4:15.

LXX has singular “king.”

Tg “be sick” derives *tāḥōl* from *ḥālâ* rather than from *ḥûl*.

The qatal and wayyiqtol verbs are anticipatory (see the note on 50:2); there are further examples in vv. 30 and 32.

See BDB and the note on 50:26. But LXX attaches this phrase to the next line.

LXX has “communities,” *HALOT* “forts,” which seem more plausible than the usual meaning of *’ăgammîm*.

MT has a section marker here.

LXX lacks *of Armies, the God of Israel*.

For MT *bat*, LXX “the houses of the king of” implies *bottê melek*.

Vv. 20-33 is a further miscellaneous collocation of messages, with a strong beginning in Yahweh’s confrontation of his erstwhile agent of shattering and devastation.

vv. 20-24 a warning to Babylon the shatterer

six bicola then two further linked bicola

vv. 25-26 a warning to Babylon the devastator

three tricola

vv. 27-33 a commission to Babylon’s attackers

two tricola framing eleven bicola including four in two pairs

then a resumptive introduction and two bicola

**20-23** Yahweh again speaks to Babylon and recalls the role he has given it in the past. In this poem “of astonishing intensity and discipline,”[[473]](#footnote-473) the image of the shatterer compares with the more concrete image of the club, applied to Assyria (Isa 10:5) and to Moab (Jer 48:17). The hammer song also matches the sword song of 50:35-38.[[474]](#footnote-474) Here the unique term *shatterer* links with the verb that will be repeated; suggesting someone who would break things to pieces (cf. 13:14; 22:28; 48:12), it is a more fearful image for Babylon’s role in 25:8-29. “In a way, this little poem summarizes the whole message of Jeremiah,”[[475]](#footnote-475) except that here “Yahweh… presents no argument, no indictment, no reasons – giving only a single-minded judgment via some unspecified agent to the nations and kingdoms of the world.”[[476]](#footnote-476)

**24** ButYahweh’s using Babylon in this way has now come to an end and the experience is to be directed onto Babylon itself. In making this point, Yahweh turns to addressing the Judahites about Babylon, in a side comment, rather than continuing to speak to Babylon. The dynamic compares with that in v. 11; here as there the side comment looks like an insertion into the context of the address to Babylon, yet one that plays an important role as “the window through which the rest of the subsection is meant to be viewed.”[[477]](#footnote-477) The actual audience for Jeremiah’s entire message are Judahites, so rhetorically the change is a move from letting them “overhear” Yahweh addressing Babylon, to directly addressing them about Babylon. There is a power about the indirect address; there is another sort of power about the direct address, and if they should be unsure whether the message about Babylon is really a piece of good news that is actually meant for them, then the switch makes the point explicit. The reference to what the Babylonians did *in Zion before your eyes* conveys particular poignancy. Judahites exiled to Babylon in 587 or slouching off to Egypt two or three years later and Judahites who never left or who fled across the Jordan: they all saw it.

**25-26** But it was simply a side comment, and there follows a further message addressing Babylon, with a declaration that the years of its being the devastator and the shatterer (cf. v. 21) are indeed over. While it’s clear that Babylon is a means of devastation, and that *of the entire earth*, the address to a *mountain* is more surprising. It might simply be a metaphor for Babylon as huge, strong, and domineering. But *devastator mountain* (*har hammašḥît*: more literally “mountain of devastation” or “mountain of the devastator”)comes in 2 Kgs 23:13 in connection with Josiah’s reformation, referring to the mountain ridge opposite Jerusalem, or part of it, where Solomon built shrines for his wives’ deities. Its familiar name is the Mount of Olives, though that term comes in the First Testament only in Zech 14:4. The area is covered in olive trees. Its alternative name is then “mountain of anointing” (*har hammišḥâ*: e.g., *m. Rosh Hashanah* 2:4).[[478]](#footnote-478) The title in 2 Kgs 23:13 is a pejorative variant of this name, denoting the mountain as a place that had been devastated by the rites conducted there and/or that would bring devastation on Judah and/or that would be devastated by Yahweh’s action against it. In taking up this designation, Jeremiah passes a similar verdict on Babylon. While Babylon is not literally a mountain, metaphorically it is a place equivalent to the devastator mountain that Judahites knew. It is a place devastated by the service of gods such as Bel and due to be devastated for its service of Bel, and (as the next colon notes) a place that had caused devastation all over its world. Yahweh goes on to let the metaphor be triply mixed. The mountain comes to be located on *cliffs*. Momentarily we should perhaps forget the picture of Babylon *as* a mountain and think of it sitting *on* a height, from which it is thrown off and turned into a burnt-out mountain – which will suggest the destructive conflagration of the city, so complete that there will be nothing to recycle. Gen 11:3 shows an awareness that in literal terms there was no stone in Babylon.[[479]](#footnote-479)

**27-28** In a further message related in substance through not in imagery, Yahweh once again commissions aides to charge an army to march against Babylon, with a dramatic series of imperatives: *lift up, sound, sanctify, make it heard, appoint, get to go up*, and *sanctify* again – this last significant repeated verb frames the entire enterprise.There is no doubt that the northern attacker is doing Yahweh’s work. There is another sacred engagement to be undertaken, like the one Yahweh commissioned against Judah (cf. 6:4; 22:7). Whereas such commissions have previously implied a single nation’s army, against Babylon something more substantial is perhaps needed or appropriate. It has been the sacred army; now it is to be the victim of a sacred army. *Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz* (Urarṭu, Mannai, and Ašguzas or Scythia)[[480]](#footnote-480) are peoples north of Assyria (eastern Turkey and Iran) and thus appropriate referents for talk of a northern army. They are within the broad parameters of the sixth-century Median empire; it is their kings who are *the kings of Media*.

**29-32** *The* *earth* (or the land, of Chaldea) *is quaking* in anticipation of this army’s arrival, and its military are paralyzed; at least, such a reaction will be appropriate. The account in these verses operates like a camera spotting different things going on and presenting them in an appropriately jumbled montage. Breaking down of the city’s gateway bars, for instance, would precede the invaders setting fire to its houses. The account of the runners or messengers parodies the commitment and efficiency of the imperial communication system. The arrival of intelligence would be expected to have the affect noted in 50:43. *Fords* and *marshes* are features of the Euphrates outside the city; their capture would precede the breaking down of bars and burning of houses. It would be the reeds in the marshes that the army would set on fire, perhaps “to cut off escape and to burn out fugitives who might have sought refuge there.”[[481]](#footnote-481) The montage conveys an impression of chaos, confusion, and turmoil. According to Herodotus 1.191, Cyrus’s actual capture of Babylon did involve the Persians taking its people unawares, and because of the city’s great size the outer parts of it were overcome while the inhabitants of the middle part knew nothing of it.[[482]](#footnote-482)

**33** Once more, Jeremiah and Yahweh stand back and return to the present. The introduction to v. 33 perhaps close off vv. 1-33 (see v. 1). You can tell when harvest is due: the threshing floor has been prepared by being cleared and trodden down, and it sits waiting for the threshers to arrive. Babylon’s time really is coming, as surely as harvest time comes.

## Zion’s Lament (51:34-44 [LXX 28:34-44])

34He consumed me, confounded me,a

did Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon –

he rendered me an empty dish.

He swallowed me like a monster,

filled his belly with my treats, rinsed me off.b

35The violence done to me, and my body,c be on Babylon,

says the girl who lives in Zion.

My blood be towards the people who live in Chaldea,

says Jerusalem.d

36Therefore Yahweh has said this.

Here am I, arguing the case for you,

and taking redress for you.e

I will wither its sea,

and dry up its fountain.

37Babylon will become heaps,

the abode of jackals, a desolation, something to whistle at,

with no one living there.f

38Together, like cougarsg they roarh –

they have growledi like lion cubs.

39When they get hot, I will set out their drink

and get them drunk, in order that they may be merry.j

But they will sleep an everlasting sleep

and not wake up (Yahweh’s affirmation).

40I will take them down like lambs for slaughtering,

like rams along with goats.

41How Sheshach is being captured,

the praise of the entire earth is being seized!

How it is becoming a desolation –

Babylon among the nations!k

42The sea is going up over Babylon –

with the noise of its waves it is being covered!

43Its towns are becoming a desolation,

a country – desert and steppe,

A countryl where no individual lives in them,

and no human being passes through them.

44So I will attend to Bel in Babylon,m

and make what he has swallowed come out of his mouth.n

Nations will no longer stream to him –

yes, Babylon’s wall is falling.o

Tg appropriately prefaces v. 34 with “Jerusalem said.”

K has “us” through v. 34. LXX lacks *rinsed me off*, while Tg “banished”(cf. Vg) derives *hĕdîḥānî* from the more common *nādaḥ* (cf. 50:17) rather than *dûaḥ/dîaḥ*,or from a homonym; either way, the translation suggests a paronomasia.

Literally, “my violence and my flesh.”

MT has a section marker here.

The *waw*-consecutive continues the participial construction, and in both cola Yahweh emphasizes the point by following the verb with its related noun: “arguing your argument and redressing your redress” (cf. 50:15, 34).

The verse reworks 9:11 [10] (see the notes and comment); LXX lacks the middle colon.

Strictly, “lions”; Jeremiah uses two different words for lions in the two cola.

LXX lacks *they* *roar*. The asyndeton and word order (the verb at the end of the colon) suggests that the first colon is subordinate to the second; the reverse applies in vv. 41b and 44b.

For MT *nā‘ărû* LXX “they were aroused” implies *nē‘ōrû*.

LXX “be stupefied” (*NETS*; cf. Vg) for MT *ya‘ălōzû* translates in light of the context (cf. *CTAT* 2:849-50).

The qatal and wayyiqtol verbs are again anticipatory (see the note on 50:2); there are further examples in vv. 42-44.

LXX lacks *a country*.

LXX has simply “to Babylon”; Tg has “to the people who serve Bel in Babylon.”

Bel, Babel, and *bil‘ô* constitute a triple assonance.

LXX lacks vv. 44b-49a.

This new message takes the form of a protest psalm:

v. 34 Ms. Zion protests at Nebuchadrezzar’s treatment of her

an opening tricolon and a bicolon

v. 35 She calls for a corresponding redress to be exacted on Babylon

two self-contained bicola

vv. 36-44 Yahweh responds

vv. 36-37 an initial commitment to take up Zion’s case

after an introduction, two self-contained bicola and a tricolon

vv. 38-40 a promise to take the animals down

four self-contained bicola

vv. 41-43 an anticipatory description of the city’s fall

five bicola, the last two linked

v. 44 a closing commitment taking up the terms of the protest

one bicolon

**34** The message begins, then, with a protest such as might appear in a psalm remonstrating at an enemy invasion. Like many such psalms, it takes first-person singular form, but speaks on behalf of the community, as v. 35 will make explicit. Again like such psalms, it indicates that “the darkness of trouble” has overwhelmed the community’s spirit.[[483]](#footnote-483) *Confounded* suggests as much, being the verb used of occasions when Yahweh confused and bewildered Israel’s attackers (Exod 14:24; Josh 10:10; Judg 4:15; 1 Sam 7:10): now the people of God has been on the receiving end of this experience. Those occasions show that being confounded is not just a problem in the minds of its victims. Here, Ms. Jerusalem begins with the protest *he consumed me* (*’ākal*), a familiar way to describe a devastating defeat (e.g., 10:25; 50:32). Jeremiah recently used it with more reference to its literal meaning: other peoples consumed Yahweh’s people like sheep (50:7). And he made clear that he meant the image by adding a reference to crunching their bones (50:17). Here he takes it further in more vivid and grisly fashion. Nebuchadrezzar ate up every bit of his victim; to mix the metaphors, he thus turned Jerusalem into an *empty dish*. He embodied the *monster* (*tannin*)standing for supernatural forces of violent and anarchic power that can threaten to overwhelm stability and overwhelm life itself (e.g., Isa 27:1; 51:9).[[484]](#footnote-484) The *treats* with which Nebuchadrezzar thus *filled his belly* were more literally the fine artefacts of the temple. Nebuchadrezzar took off some in 597 and more in 587, when he really thus *rinsed me off*, though one can imagine Jeremiah using that hyperbole even in 597. In either context, it’s neat that the verb also suggests a paronomasia with another verb meaning sent off into exile.[[485]](#footnote-485)

**35** The prayer continues, like a protest psalm, by urging that the attackers be held responsible for their action. Wrong done to another person generates something objective and solid that sits there disrupting and disturbing reality until something is done about it. Even time and the passing of generations may not dissolve it. If the world’s proper life is to continue, something has to be done to restore its order and harmony. In the West, people speak of a need to bring closure, often a euphemism for retribution. In the First Testament, a standard picture of this need starts from a sense that someone’s shed blood sits there crying out about the wrong done to the person (e.g., Gen 4:10; Job 16:18). This blood is against or on the perpetrator or their head (e.g., Lev 20:9; Judg 9:24; 2 Sam 1:16; Ezek 18:13; Jonah 1:14). In her distinctive formulation of this awareness, Ms. Jerusalem starts from an alternative picture: the *violence* done to her is on the perpetrator, as Sarah puts it with some irony in Gen 16:5[[486]](#footnote-486) (cf. again Judg 9:24; also Ps 7:16 [17]). Abraham (Sarah implies) is responsible for the violence or violation and responsible to do something about it. Here, the formulation of *the girl who lives in Zion* speaking in a hendiadys of *the violence done to me and my body*, of the bodily violence done to me, suggests rape, a common reality of war and a recurrent image for the assault of an attacker on a community. The Babylonians raped me, Ms. Jerusalem says. You must make them pay for it.

**36-37** A protest psalm hopes to receive a response from Yahweh, and this one does. Yahweh might reasonably have replied in snorting fashion to Jerusalem (as he did to some of Jeremiah’s own protests) that Jerusalem deserved what happened to it. But the point of the message is to proclaim that calamity is coming on Babylon, and the form of a protest psalm is a way of doing so. Thus Yahweh works with that form, though in due course he will leave it behind. The psalm’s form is related to the appeal of an ordinary person to a king, who is in a position to take action about the matter that the suppliant raises. Here Yahweh agrees to set about *arguing the case for you and taking redress for you*, the model he assumed in (e.g.) 50:15, 28, 34. He pictures himself as prosecuting a case in the heavenly cabinet, and/or determining from the chair what the decision must be. He then he moves to the traditional imagery of withering and drying up, though this familiar imagery has distinctive resonances in connection with Babylon. Babylon sits distinctively astride a major river, surrounded by irrigation canals and streams, as if the vast resources of water lying under the earth’s surface bubble up like a fountain. So Yahweh’s resolution paints a devastating picture. Following up that threat, he moves on to a familiar hyperbolic description of Babylon’s destruction, whose wording makes clear that Jeremiah is again applying to Babylon the threats that Yahweh had made to Jerusalem.[[487]](#footnote-487)

**38-40** He reverts to Ms. Zion’s image of the ravenous beast and runs with it. Babylon is like a pride of hungry lions. They have been out on the prowl and got hot. They need a refreshing drink, which Yahweh will provide. But he is segueing into the drink imagery of 25:15-29; the Babylonians are now a company of banqueters. Yahweh gets them dead drunk and fast asleep, which makes them easy victims for killing, like lambs or rams. “Babylonian lions… end up as slaughtered lambs.”[[488]](#footnote-488)

**41** In another transition Yahweh returns to a form of speech that can be associated with a lament, though it can also suggest amazement. Here any suggestion of lament is ironic,[[489]](#footnote-489) but amazement is palpable. Babylon is a city at which the surrounding world marvels. Yet that very fact suggests the danger of its position. It rivals Yahweh in people’s eyes and in its own eyes. Yahweh once more describes its fall as if it has already happened – that is, the verbs speak of the event as though it is now past; Babylon is again Sheshach, as in 25:26.[[490]](#footnote-490)

**42-43** Yahweh goes on to reverse the significance of water imagery. Babylon did know what an excess of water could be like – it knew what flooding could mean. Judahites were also familiar with the image of the sea as a repository of dynamic but turbulent and riotous energy, like the monster figure of v. 34. And they were familiar with that figure as an image for armies on the rampage overwhelming a country they invaded (e.g., Pss 46; 93; Isa 8:7-8). Yet again Judah’s prospective destiny (e.g., 2:15; 4:7) is also Babylon’s.

**44** Finally Yahweh returns once more to Ms. Zion’s original protest. Behind Nebuchadrezzar is Bel, whose name hints at his being a swallower (*bāla‘*); he swallowed the artefacts of Jerusalem by virtue of the fact that Nebuchadrezzar took the temple artefacts back to Babylon and put them in Bel’s temple. It implied that Bel had defeated Yahweh. Yahweh will now reassert himself[[491]](#footnote-491) and ensure that the artefacts return to Jerusalem. Bel’s temple now seems like the center of the world, but the world is going to *stream* in a different direction (Isa 2:2). Given the impressive nature of Babylon’s wall, it is quite a statement to say that this wall is falling.[[492]](#footnote-492)

## So Be Mindful of Jerusalem and of Babylon (51:45-58a [LXX 28:45-58a])

45Get out from inside it, my people,

save, each individual, his life,

from Yahweh’s angry blazing!

46Beware that your mind doesn’t become soft or that you become afraid

at the report that makes itself heard in the country.

The report will come in the year

and after it in the second year:

Violence in the country

and ruler against ruler.

47Therefore, there, days are coming

when I will attend to Babylon’s images.

Its entire country – it will be shamed,a

and all its people who are run through – they will fall within it.

48Heavens and earth and all that is in them

will chant over Babylon.

Because from the north the destroyers will come to it (Yahweh’s affirmation):

49yes, Babylon – regarding the fall of people in Israel who have been run through;

yes, regarding Babylon – people in the entire earth who have been run through have fallen.

50Survivors of the sword, go,

don’t stand there!

Be mindful of Yahweh from afar,

and Jerusalem – it is to go up into your mind.

51We were shamed, because we heard reviling –

disgrace covered our faces.

Because strangers came

to the sacred places in Yahweh’s house.b

52Therefore, there, days are coming (Yahweh’s affirmation)

when I will attend to its images

and in its entire country the person who has been run through will groan.

53When Babylon goes up to the heavens,c

and when it fortifies its strong height,

from me destroyers will come to it (Yahweh’s affirmation).d

54The sound of an outcry from Babylon,

and a great breaking from the country of Chaldea!

55Because Yahweh is destroying Babylon,

and eliminating a loud sound from it.

Their wavese will roar like much water –

the din of their sound will give out.

56Because he is coming upon it,

upon Babylon a destroyer.

Its strong men will be captured –

it will have shatteredf their bows.

Because Yahweh is a God of great requital –

he does deal retribution.g

57I will get its officials and its experts drunk,

its governors and overseers and strong men.

And they will sleep an everlasting sleep

and will not wake up.

(An affirmation of the King,

Yahweh of Armies his name).h

58Yahweh of Armies has said this.

The great walli of Babylon, broad –

it will be totally levelled.j

Its high gateways –

they will be set on fire.

For *tēbôš*,Tg “be dried up” derives the verb from *yābēš* rather than *bûš*.

MT has a marker here.

Tg refers this colon concretely to building structures with their top in the heavens, in anticipation of the parallel colon and with closer parallel to Gen 11:1-9.

MT has a section marker here.

Aq, Sym have “its waves,” an easier reading.

LXX, Vg, Tg implicitly see *ḥittәtâ* as intransitive piel (cf. GK 52k), which seems implausible. More likely the verb is impersonal; the implicit subject is the event (Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage, sees Babylon as the subject).

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the point. The idiom recurs in v. 58.

MT has a section marker here.

Since the subsequent adjective *broad* more naturally applies to the wall than to the city, and the verb that follows is singular, plural *ḥōmôt* is more likely intensive than numerical (Volz, *Jeremia*, 439).

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the point.

The form of this new message differs from that of vv. 34-44 but its theme links with it. It Implies that the preceding protest is one Judahites need to make, as opposed to one they are actually making. They then need to listen to Yahweh’s response. They are too settled in Babylon. They are not praying that way. Thus this section of exhortation to Judahites outlines:

vv. 45-46 an exhortation to be mindful and be prepared to leave

a tricolon, a bicolon, and two linked bicola

vv. 47-49 a declaration that days are coming, for Babylon’s images and people

three bicola and a tricolon

vv. 50-51 another exhortation to be mindful and be prepared to leave

four bicola in two pairs

vv. 52-53 another declaration that days are coming, for Babylon’s images and fortification

two tricola

vv. 54-58a Jeremiah’s closing vision of Babylon’s fall

nine bicola, then a resumptive introduction and two further bicola

**45** A tricolon thus introduces a recurrent exhortation, beginning from similar words to 50:8; 51:6, though adding the appeal to *my people*, and the further motivation that they need to escape the threat of *Yahweh’s angry blazing*. That phrase again indicates that Yahweh intends to treat Babylon as he threatened to treat Judah (e.g., 4:8, 26). This time Yahweh will not be angry with Judah, but the expression of his anger will risk anyone in Babylon being victim of collateral damage. The way things work out in the world is that “innocent people” in the wrong place at the wrong time get swallowed up with the guilty. But on this occasion (as at Sodom) Yahweh tries to get them out of the place before events overwhelm them.

**46** Having a *soft* *mind* can be a virtue (2 Kgs 22:19), but it can mean getting paralyzed by fear (Deut 20:3, 8). “The Jews must not lose their nerve.”[[493]](#footnote-493) In the mid-sixth century, the annual reports that Jeremiah speaks of could make knowledgeable people think of Babylonian politics, when Nebuchadrezzar’s death in 562 was followed over the next six years by a sequence of kings and assassinations. Josephus quotes Berosus:

Nabuchodonosor fell sick and died, after a reign of forty-three years, and the realm passed to his son Evilmaraduch. This prince, whose government was arbitrary and licentious, fell a victim to a plot, being assassinated by his sister’s husband, Neriglisar, after a reign of two years. On his death Neriglisar, his murderer, succeeded to the throne, and reigned four years. His son, Laborosoardoch, a mere boy, occupied it for nine months, when, owing to the depraved disposition which he showed, a conspiracy was formed against him, and he was beaten to death by his friends. After his murder the conspirators held a meeting, and by common consent conferred the kingdom on Nabonnedos, a Babylonian and one of their gang. In his reign the walls of Babylon abutting the river were magnificently built with baked brick and bitumen.[[494]](#footnote-494)

A later and more imaginative reader might see here the sequence of kingdoms that appear in Daniel, which makes this verse the most interesting in the entire long prophecy about Babylon.[[495]](#footnote-495) But Yahweh may just be commenting more generally on the way “wars and rumors of wars” (Matt 24; Luke 21) characterize human history.[[496]](#footnote-496)

**47-49** It’s a loose *therefore*, perhaps implying “in light of those facts, pay attention to this message.” Attending to Babylon’s images suggests attending to the gods they allegedly represent. The vulnerability of the images implies the powerlessness of the gods, and the disaster that comes on both images and gods means the country will be *shamed* by the failure of what it has trusted in. As usual, shame refers not merely to a feeling of being exposed but to the outward results of that exposure. Put crudely, shame means death, whose agent Yahweh reaffirms to be the northern destroyers. The universal *chant over Babylon* then could have varying implications, including horror and satisfaction. The syntax in v. 49 is elliptical, but the meaning is reasonably clear. Babylon will fall because it has caused so many deaths in Israel. And it will fall because it has caused so many deaths among other nations, too. “Oppressed people sigh, requesting a judgment from God, when tyrants and blasphemers seem to themselves to be glorious and think themselves to be highly esteemed. But this judgment of God will speak to everything.” Indeed, the tyrants and blasphemers “have been condemned, I say, by the sighs and prayers of people even before the judgment of God is seen and understood.”[[497]](#footnote-497)

**50** A second sequence of exhortation and promise parallels vv. 45-49. Following the reference to people having *fallen*, those who are rhetorically *survivors of the sword* are the survivors of Babylon’s own carnage in 597 and/or 587. Jeremiah encouraged them to settle down in Babylon, and once Babylon fell, understandably not many wanted to return to Jerusalem. Vv. 45-49 have given one reason why Judahites in Babylon must resist the temptation just to *stand there*, but Jeremiah now gives what one might see as a deeper reason. *From afar* there in Babylon, they are to *be mindful of Yahweh* rather than putting Yahweh and Jerusalem out of mind. The exhortation raises new possibilities about the significance of Ps 137, which refuses to forget Jerusalem and makes a commitment to keep the city in mind and to let it “go up” above any other joy. *Be mindful* and *go up* are the same verbs as in Ps 137:6. While Jer 29 indicates that it’s possible to think about Jerusalem too much and not settle down in Babylon, Jer 51 indicates that it’s possible not to think about Jerusalem enough and not to be ready to leave.

**51** The *we* statements may indicate why people might not want to think about Jerusalem. They are traumatized. Shame, reviling, and disgrace that Yahweh threatened and then imposed (e.g., 24:9) are things people want to forget. In this context they are distraught at strangers defiling Yahweh’s sanctuary not for Yahweh’s sake but because of the shame it brought to them.[[498]](#footnote-498) Babylon’s destruction will shame Babylon and raise questions about its gods. Jerusalem has already gone through that experience.

**52-53** This *therefore* is more straightforward than the one in v. 47, even if the Judahites’ concern in v. 51 focused more on themselves than on Yahweh. Yahweh again speaks of attending to the images. Perhaps the order of events in v. 52b is the reverse of the chronological: first they groan, then (having been run through) they die. But Jeremiah’s vivid imagination may have the Babylonians continuing to groan over the fate of their city after they die.[[499]](#footnote-499) The subsequent description of Babylon as going up to the heavens parallels Isa 14:13 and suggests overreach in thinking and self-understanding, though it also recalls the story of Babel in Gen 11:1-9; the parallel colon speaking of *when it fortifies its strong height* recalls the building project of which that story speaks.

**54-55** Once more Jeremiah starts again with another anticipatory description of the destruction of the city. The poet-prophet “is the one who hears before others hear.”[[500]](#footnote-500) *Sound* is the key word here.[[501]](#footnote-501) First there is *the sound of an outcry*, the cry of pain and protest that will issue from the city when the *great breaking* comes upon it. Its background is that in *destroying Babylon* Yahweh will be *eliminating a loud sound from it*, the sound (for instance) of its battle forces (4:29) that roar like the sea (6:23) or the sound of community merrymaking and celebration (7:34). Instead, there is the *sound* of the roaring of the destroyers’ *waves*, whose ocean-like breakers with their *din* has overwhelmed the Babylonian ocean. “When Yahweh despoils Babylon (v. 55), the stir and noise associated with the life of a great city will yield to a stillness which is the silence of death.”[[502]](#footnote-502)

**56-57** And once again, behind the destroyers is the Destroyer. *Captured* and *shattered* recur from 50:2 and in a small way suggest a frame around 50:2 – 51:58, though the verbs are common – they come also in 50:9, 24; 51:31, 41; 50:10, 36. More significant are further points of connection with Ps 137:

Ms. Babylon, to be destroyed,

the blessings of the one who deals retribution to you,

the requital that you have dealt to us!

The blessings of the one who seizes hold

and shatters your babies towards the cliff!

Destroy, retribution, requital, shatter, cliff: all are words in common between the psalm and the context in Jeremiah. The prophecy declares that the wish and prayer of the psalm will be fulfilled, and/or the psalm voices the wish and prayer that the prophecy encourages. The promise about sleep recurs from v. 39, and the verses’ promise as a whole is undergirded by the unusually long reassurance about Yahweh’s *affirmation*. After the ten references to human kings in Jer 50 – 51, the chapters almost close with a reminder that Yahweh is the real king.

**58** One might have expected the reassurance regarding Yahweh’s affirmation to mark the end of the messages about Babylon, but actually it is not characteristic for such reassurances to close off a message; while occasionally they do (e.g., 50:30; 51:24, 26), more often they come in the middle of a message (e.g., 50:10, 21, 35, 40; 51:39). And there is no particular reason to see the final pair of bicola as a message on its own. Rather, it is they that bring vv. 54- 58a to a close, with another bold assertion,[[503]](#footnote-503) that the city’s *great wall will be totally levelled* and its *high gateways* destroyed.

# Conclusion (51:58b [LXX 28:58b])

The move to anonymous plural for the last line in 46:1 – 51:58 suggests that it closes off the sequence of messages about foreign nations.[[504]](#footnote-504)

Peoples will toila for emptiness,

countries – for fireb they will get weary.c

LXX has “will not toil”: that is, the nations’ work in attacking Babylon will not be wasted (Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 853).

For MT *bā’ēš*,LXX “in rule” implies *bәrō’š*, a slip (*CTAT* 2:851-53).

MT has a section marker here.

The line almost corresponds to Hab 2:13:

Peoples will toil[[505]](#footnote-505) for fire,

countries – for emptiness they will get weary.[[506]](#footnote-506)

As usual, opinions differ over whether Jeremiah is quoting Habakkuk or Habakkuk is quoting Jeremiah or both have a common source, perhaps a proverbial saying[[507]](#footnote-507) worthy of Ecclesiastes that is here applied to a particular context. Either way, the line makes a telling general comment on Babylon in particular and on nations in general. Jeremiah incorporates no suggestion that Judah should take up arms against Babylon or any other nation. He has no thought of Judah taking redress for wrongs that other peoples have done to it. But his framework for thinking about such questions differs from the concern about non-violence that has become prevalent in some Western thinking over the past century, and he has no instinct towards friendly attitudes to other religions.

The worshiping community would publicly re-enact God’s involvement in history, God’s victory over oppressive regimes, and God’s reign on earth. Through ridicule, revel, and affirmation, the worshiping congregation would envision God subverting and disassembling pretentious world powers as a way to carry out divine justice and sovereignty…. [The messages’] weapons are rhetoric and imagination not military hardware. They represent the liturgical literature of refugees who find themselves on the margins of society without power, temple, land, or hope.

In this context, the messages declare that Yahweh reigns, is involved in contemporary events on the political and military stage, and that he is putting paid to its power structures.[[508]](#footnote-508) They suggest the prayer:

Grant, Almighty God, that since we see that the most opulent kingdoms have not escaped thy hand, we may learn to recumb only on thine aid, and to submit ourselves to thee, with due humility, so that we may be protected by thy hand, and that this only true confidence may sustain us in all perils, that thou hast undertaken the care of our salvation; and that we may, in the meantime, fight under thy banner with sincerity and uprightness of life, until we shall at length enjoy the fruit of our victory, in the celestial kingdom, through Christ our Lord. — Amen.[[509]](#footnote-509)

# The Story of the Scroll (51:59-64 [LXX 28:59-64])

Following the messages about different nations, and specifically the messages about Babylon, is a story about how Jeremiah sends the messages about Babylon to Babylon.

59The word that Jeremiah the prophet ordereda Seraiah ben Neriah, son of Mahseiah, when he went withb Zedekiah King of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign, when Sereiah was accommodation official.c 60Jeremiah wrote down the entire dire fate that would come to Babylon in one document, all these things that are written for Babylon. 61And Jeremiah said to Seraiah: When you come to Babylon, see that you read outd all these things, 62and say, Yahweh, you yourself spoke regarding this place, about cutting it off so that there will not be in it human being or animal, because it will be a great desolation for all time. 63And when you have finished reading out this document, you are to tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, 64and say, So will Babylon sink and not get up in the face of the dire fatee that I am letting come upon it. So they will get weary.

As far as this are Jeremiah’s words.f

LXX has “the word that the Lord ordered Jeremiah the prophet to speak to”: the action is undertaken on Yahweh’s initiative not on Jeremiah’s (see comment), perhaps because it is what one would expect theologically (McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1350).

For *’et*, Vg, Aq, Sym have “with,” but LXX has “from,” implying *mē’ēt*;Tg “in/with the commission of” is ambiguous.

Literally, “official of rest.” For MT *mәnûḥâ*, LXX, Tg “gift[s]” suggests *mәnāḥôt*/*mәnāḥâ*, “official in charge of the tribute”; Vg “prophecy” suggests *hammaśśā’* as in 1 Chr 15:27 (*BHS*) and/or suggests that *mәnûḥâ* implies the spirit of God “resting” on him as in Num 11:25 (*HUB*).

Literally, “see and read out”: for this idiom, cf. Exod 25:40.

For MT *hārā‘â* LXXB “the Chaldeans” implies *kaśdîm*.

MT has a marker here. LXX lacks *So they will get weary. As far as this are Jeremiah’s words*.

While the story might be “just a story,”[[510]](#footnote-510) it threatens to deconstruct if it tells of something that never happened. It relates that Jeremiah took action to see that Yahweh implemented his intentions about Babylon; if he did not, the story backfires. Given that many of the messages in Jer 50 – 51 seem likely to have come from after 587, however, a 594 document would not have contained *all these things that are written for Babylon* – if *all these things* implies the entirety of Jer 50 – 51. Like other stories in Jeremiah, then, vv. 59-64 seem likely to be dramatized fact, a story based on fact, rather than simply history. The story will illustrate how a document can become an independent actor in a narrative. Documents can communicate across geographical and temporal distances, they are both fragile and durable, and they exist in both mundane and divine realms. In Jeremiah, texts are rarely devoid of some sense of their performative, effective capacity. They are the stuff of normal, everyday interactions, but they also have the capacity to be serve higher purposes. “This mysterious aspect of the written word… comes, not from some abstract notion of magical power, but from the power inherent in Yhwh’s involvement in that written word.”[[511]](#footnote-511)

**59** The story refers to something that happened in 594. Zedekiah’s going to Babylon that year was perhaps an expression of his loyalty to Nebuchadrezzar, who had put him on the throne in place of Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 24:17), perhaps in the aftermath of the plotting hinted at in Jer 27 – 28 and/or in the broader context of Babylon being in difficulty with the southwestern corner of its empire, near Egypt.[[512]](#footnote-512) LXX plausibly implies that Zedekiah was delivering Judah’s taxes; it would be one concrete expression of loyalty. MT likely implies that Seraiah’s role involved arranging lodgings for the king and his entourage on the journey, which would take a number of weeks. A seal from Jerusalem bears Seraiah’s name;[[513]](#footnote-513) 32:12 invites the inference that he was Baruch’s brother and that the Mahseiah family might have been a family of scribes.[[514]](#footnote-514)

**60** The story concerns a symbolic act, comparable to earlier such acts on Jeremiah’s part but with distinctive features. It is an act of some complexity; its several aspects have similar implications but work in different ways. First, writing the document puts Yahweh’s words into writing and contributes to ensuring that they come about. The commission heightens the contrast between the document’s contents and Jeremiah’s insistence that Zedekiah must submit to Nebuchadrezzar. It hardly follows that “the dating of this anti-Babylon sign-act to the fourth year of Zedekiah (51:59) clearly indicates that the ‘serve Babylon and live’ philosophy had met with strong opposition in the years immediately following 597.”[[515]](#footnote-515) Setting the oracles against Babylon in this particular year suggests that different perspectives on Babylon are not to be explained merely by attributing them to different people or to the same person at different times. Both the present submission to Babylon and the ultimate doom of Babylon are Yahweh’s will.[[516]](#footnote-516) Jeremiah’s entrusting Seraiah with his commission does carry massive irony, given that the document that he sends is full of declarations that Babylon is going to fall. “How ironic that the diplomatic bag which carried such wealth also contained the book of curses!”[[517]](#footnote-517)

**61-62** Reading the document aloud adds to the effectiveness of writing: it becomes something out there in the world, the world where it needs to be implemented. While Seraiah would perhaps read the document in the hearing of the Judahites in Babylon or of the Babylonians themselves (which would be brave, given its contents),[[518]](#footnote-518) the story does not say so, and the reading is not a political act. It’s not like the public reading of in Jer 36. This reading happens in order for Yahweh to hear it, with an implicit challenge to Yahweh to do as he has said in these messages. This feature of the commission fits with one distinctive aspect of the story, that the commission happens on Jeremiah’s initiative not Yahweh’s (again, possibly Yahweh bade Jeremiah initiate this action, but the story does not say so). The reading is an acted prayer, which makes a link with 51:34-44; Seraiah is to wave the document in Yahweh’s face.[[519]](#footnote-519) Whereas Jeremiah’s words addressed to Babylon were a speech act, in his commission to Seraiah “Jeremiah effectually creates a new illocution for Seraiah to perform” as “the audience changes from the hearers of the oracle to God himself when Seraiah prays.”[[520]](#footnote-520) Jeremiah refers to Babylon as *this place*, a key phrase in the Jeremiah scroll, which moves from Jerusalem as “this place” (Jer 7) to all the places where Baruch may go (45:5) to Babylon as *this place*.[[521]](#footnote-521) As Jerusalem has been compromised as a sacred space, Babylon has been a kind of interim sacred space.[[522]](#footnote-522) But using the phrase *this place* also links ironically with the transfer of curses in Jeremiah from Jerusalem to Babylon.[[523]](#footnote-523)

**63** Seraiah’s action is not like the depositing of a document. Nor does it constitute “text destruction” like that in Jer 36.[[524]](#footnote-524) Throwing the document into the river so that it sinks will prevent its destruction, add yet further to the implementing of its declarations, and further guarantee their fulfillment. The city’s fate is sealed by the drowning of all the messages that speak about it. “Nothing can now prevent Babylon’s defeat.”[[525]](#footnote-525)

**64** The story compares with other accounts of symbolic acts in Jeremiah that include no account of the act’s happening; formally, the story is like a colophon.[[526]](#footnote-526) It exists for the sake of the people who read it, who thereby receive the assurance that Yahweh will fulfill the messages in Jer 50 – 51. Although the story refers to an event in 594, it carries no implication for when the story was told. It might have been after 587. Within the Jeremiah scroll, it speaks to people living after 587. The last words within the story, *so they will get weary*, make explicit that the closing line in Jeremiah’s own words in v. 58 indeed applies to the Babylonians. “In the slaughter of Babylon as well as of the rest of the nations in chs. 46 – 49, Yahweh is able to display the futility of the world’s imperial intentions.”[[527]](#footnote-527) The closing sentence might be the colophon originally applied just to Jer 50 – 51 or to Jer 46 – 51,[[528]](#footnote-528) but within the Jeremiah scroll they note the fact that we are actually at the end of Jeremiah’s words; there are none in Jer 52.

# Epilogue (52:1-34)

The Jeremiah scroll could have seemed to come to a satisfactory end with 51:64 (which read like an end) as was the case with 45:5 and 36:32; perhaps the it “resists closure” as an aspect of its links with disaster and trauma.[[529]](#footnote-529) The scroll contains another chapter is thus a surprise. Readers of the scroll would not expect a repetition of the account of Jerusalem’s fall that appeared in Jer 39, though they might have noticed that the scroll sometimes contains more than one account of an event – at least, contains a story about Jeremiah delivering a message and elsewhere a precis of his words on that occasion. The chapter would be even more surprising to readers who knew the 2 Kings narrative. They would approach the chapter with a sense of déjà vu, wondering what they were expected to take from it.

But Jer 52 with Jer 1 forms a frame around the Jeremiah scroll. With it the scroll reaches its goal and there is no reason to see it as a later addition to it, as if Jer 1 – 51 once existed without it.[[530]](#footnote-530) Matching the opening chapter and matching the nature of the scroll as a whole, it tells a solemn story of Judah’s waywardness and of the calamity that followed, while also affirming that calamity is not Yahweh’s last word.

Initially, the chapter reinforces the gloomy tone of the scroll as a whole. Pull up, pull down, wipe out, smash: “never were four words more fully realized.”[[531]](#footnote-531) The chapter “highlights the ultimate tragic irony that the authors face: it vindicates Jeremiah as a true prophet, while at the same time it shows how ineffective all forms of human mediation were in preventing disaster.”[[532]](#footnote-532) Following on 51:64b, it answers the question, “What happened, then? Did those words of Jeremiah come true?” In taking up that question, it does not need to make mention of Jeremiah himself. The answer it implies is that Jeremiah’s words indeed found some measure of fulfillment, both horribly and encouragingly. Horrifying things happened to the monarchy, to the city, to the temple, and to the people. But in the course of giving account of these horrors, the chapter incorporates notes of possible encouragement.[[533]](#footnote-533) Not only did the Babylonians leave some people behind in Jerusalem; the number they took to Babylon was minute. The men of battle (which really means all the men) scattered; but the implication is that they did not die. The temple accoutrements and the bronze of items such as the temple pillars went off to Babylon; but they didn’t get lost. And finally, the Davidic king who had been taken to Babylon in 597 was released there. So anyone yielding to the temptation to leave the movie theatre during the credits would miss something vital and encouraging. The story forms an apposite closure for the scroll insofar as its balance reflects that of Jeremiah’s message: much waywardness, much consequential trouble, but a glimmer of hope. Both calamity and reestablishment fall way short of Yahweh’s threats and promises, in keeping with the usual pattern. There was no actual annihilation and no genuine renewal. There was frightful calamity but also a hint of extraordinary restoration. There was something, not nothing.

1Zedekiah was a man of twenty-one years when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Hamutala bat Jeremiah, from Libnah.b 2He did what was dire in Yahweh’s eyes in accordance with all that Jehoiakim had done, 3because it was directed towardsc Yahweh’s anger against Jerusalem and Judah, until he threw them out from his presence.

Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. 4Then in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenthd month, on the tenth of the month, Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon came, he and his entire force, against Jerusalem. They campede against it and built a blockade against it all around. 5The city came under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. 6In the fourth month,f on the ninth of the month, the famine was heavy in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the country. 7The city broke open and all the men of battle were fleeing. They went out from the cityg at night by way of the gateway between the double wall which was opposite the king’s garden, with the Chaldeans against the city all around, and they went by the steppes road. 8But the Chaldean force chased after the king and caught up with Zedekiahh in the Jericho steppes; all his force had scattered from him. 9They captured the king and made him go up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the region of Hamath,i and he spoke out authoritative decisionsj with him. 10The king of Babylon slaughtered Zedekiah’s sonsk before his eyes. All the Judahite officials he also slaughtered at Riblah.l 11Zedekiah’s eyes he blinded, and he shackled him with bronze chains. The king of Babylon made him come to Babylon and put him in a house of custodym until the day of his death.n

12In the fifth month, on the tentho of the month (it was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon),p Nebuzaradan the chief of the guards, came – he stood as the king of Babylon’s representativeq – to Jerusalem, 13and burned Yahweh’s house, the king’s house, and all the houses in Jerusalem. Every house of a big personr he burned in fire. 14All the walls of Jerusalem, all around, the entire Chaldean force which was with the chief of the guards pulled down. 15Some of the poorest elements of the peoples and the rest of the people who remained in the city, and the people who had submitted (who had submitted to the king of Babylon) and the rest of the crowd,t Nebuzaradan the chief of the guards made go into exile. 16Some of the poorest elementsu in the country Nebuzaradanv the chief of the guards let remain as vinedressers and farmworkers.

17The bronze pillars that belonged to Yahweh’s house, the stands, and the bronze sea that was in Yahweh’s house, the Chaldeans broke up. They carried all their bronze to Babylon. 18The buckets, the shovels, the trimmers, the throwers, the ladles, and all the bronze articles with which people ministered, they got. 19The bowls, the firepans, the containers, the pots, the lamps, the ladles, and the chalices, what was gold, [as] gold, and what was silver, [as] silver, the chief of the guards got.w 20The two pillars, the one sea, and the twelve bronze cattle that were underneath, the stands,x which King Solomon made for Yahweh’s house – there was no weighing their bronze, all these articles. 21The pillars – eighteen cubitsy the height of one pillar, and a line of twelve cubits would go around it; its thickness – four fingers, hollow;z 22with a bronze capital on it – the height of one capital fiveaa cubits, and lattice work with pomegranates on the capital all around, the whole bronze, and like these for the second pillar with pomegranates.bb 23There were ninety-six pomegranates windward;cc all the pomegranates – a hundred on the lattice work all around.dd

24The chief of the guards got Seraiah the head priest, Zephaniahee the second priest, and the three keepers of the threshold, 25and from the city he gotff an overseergg who was appointee over the men of battle, sevenhh people from the heads who were beforeii the king, who were present in the city, the scribe of the army officerjj who mustered the people of the country, and sixty individuals from the people of the country who were present inside the city. 26Nebuzaradan the chief of the guards got them and made them go to the king of Babylon at Riblah, 27and the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to deathkk at Riblah in the region of Hamath.

So Judah went into exile from upon its land.ll 28This is the company that Nebuchadrezzar made go into exile: in the seventh year: 3,023 Judahites; 29in Nebuchadrezzar’s eighteenth year, from Jerusalem 832 individuals; 30in Nebuchadrezzar’s twenty-third year, Nebuzaradan the chief of the guards made 745 individual Judahites go into exile; all the individuals, 4,600.mm

31Then in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachinnn King of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifthoo of the month, Evil-merodachpp King of Babylon, in the year he began to reign, lifted the head of Jehoiachin King of Judah, let him go from the house of confinement, 32and spoke of good things with him. He put his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon,33so he would change his confinement clothes and eat a meal before him regularly all the days of his life.qq 34His provision was given to him as a regular provision from the king of Babylon, a day’s allocation on its day, until the day of his death,rr all the days of his life.ss

So Q, which corresponds to 2 Kgs 23:31; K implies Hamital (cf. LXX, Vg).

A town in the Shephelah: see Josh 10:28-32; 15:42.

The expression compares with 32:31 (Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 772); see the note there.

Some LXX mss have eighth or ninth.

2 Kgs 25:1 has “he camped.”

LXX and 2 Kgs 25:3 lack *in the fourth month*.

LXX, 2 Kgs 25:4 lack *were fleeing* and *from the city*; 2 Kgs 25:4 also lacks *they went out*.

For *Zedekiah*, LXX, 2 Kgs 25:6 have simply “him.”

LXX has “Diblah” here and elsewhere, and it lacks *in the region of Hamath* (as does 2 Kgs 25:6).

2 Kgs 25:6 has “they spoke out an authoritative decision.”

2 Kgs 25:7 has “Zedekiah’s sons they slaughtered.”

2 Kgs 25:7 lacks this sentence.

Literally, “attention house” – that is, punishment house. LXX has “grinding house,” with the implication that grinding grain was the prisoners’ chief occupation (cf. Judg 16:21); perhaps MT has substituted a more general expression with more obvious meaning.

For this sentence 2 Kgs 25:7 simple has “He made him come to Babylon.”

2 Kgs 25:8 has “seventh.”

LXX lacks *(it was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon)*. In the Babylonian Chronicle’s method of counting years, it was the eighteenth year (v. 29) (Allen, *Jeremiah*, 540).

Literally, “stood before the king of Babylon”; MT’s construction is asyndetic or implies an unmarked relative clause. For *‘āmad* LXX “standing” implies *‘ōmēd*, while 2 Kgs 25:8 has “servant of the king of Babylon.”

For MT’s *bêt haggādôl* (cf. Tg), LXX, Vg “every big house” implies absolute *bayit* or the idiom whereby an adjective is added in the genitive rather than as an attribute (GK 128w) – cf. *bêt gādôl* in 2 Kgs 25:9.

2 Kgs 25:11 lacks *some of the poorest elements of the people*.

Taking *’āmôn* as an alternative to *hāmôn* (cf. 2 Kgs 25:11), with Vg, Tg, Syr (LXX lacks v. 15).It otherwise occurs only in Prov 8:30, where its meaning is unclear though one possibility is craftsman or builder – which would fit here.

V. 16 thus begins in the same way as v. 15, which may explain LXX’s lack of v. 15 as homoioarkton.

LXX, 2 Kgs 25:12 lack *Nabuzaradan*.

LXX and 2 Kgs 25:14-17 have shorter lists compared with vv. 18-23; on the textual problems, see Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:437.

The more obvious translation “under the stands” (Vg, Aq) makes poor sense; LXX has “under the sea.” For the adverbial use of *taḥat*,cf. Gen 49:25 (see *CTAT* 2:857-59).

LXX has “thirty-five cubits.” A cubit is roughly half a yard or half a meter.

For MT *nābûb* LXX “around” implies *sābîb*.

Cf. 1 Kgs 7:16; but 2 Kgs 25:17 says “three.”

LXX reads “eight pomegranates to the cubit for the twelve cubits.”

For MT’s puzzling *rûḥâ* LXX has “the one side.”

A has a section marker here.

LXX lacks *Seraiah* and *Zephaniah*.

LXX lacks *from the city he got*.

See the note on 29:2.

2 Kgs 25:19 has five.

Literally, “who saw the face of.”

LXX lacks *officer*.

The double expression adds emphasis (cf. 41:2); LXX lacks *and put them to death*.

LXX lacks *so Judah went into exile from upon its land.* A has a section marker here.

MT has a marker here.

LXX has “Jehoiakim” each time in this verse.

LXX has “twenty-fourth,” while 2 Kgs 25:27 has “twenty-seventh.”

More precisely, *’ĕwîl-mәrōdak* – that is, his name does not include the English word *evil*. In Akkadian the name would be an alternative to the more familiar Amel-Marduk (see R. H. Sack, *Amel-Marduk* [Kevelaer: Butzon, 1972). Either name would mean “man of Marduk,” but a Judahite might rejoice that in Hebrew *’ĕwîl-mәrōdak* would mean “fool of Marduk” or “Marduk is foolish.”

While the two simple *waw* clauses may be simply anomalous (cf. GK 112pp; Duhm *Jeremia*, 382), they may indicate the logical connection with what precedes. The subject of the second verb must be Jehoiachin and probably he is therefore the subject of the first verb. Likewise *all the days of his life* refers to Jehoiachin’s life (cf. v. 34); a reference to Evil-merodach’s life would carry some irony as he was assassinated after a year or two (see the comment on 51:46).

2 Kgs 25:30 lacks *until the day of his death*.

LXX lacks *all the days of his life*.

The chapter is one of five First Testament accounts of the fall of Jerusalem and its aftermath. In outline, synoptically, they compare as follows:

Jer 52 MT Jer 52 LXX Jer 37 – 43 2 Kgs 2 Chr

Zedekiah comes to the throne 52:1-3 52:1 37:1-2 24:18-20 36:11-14

Nebuchadrezzar takes the city 52:4-11 52:4-11 39:1-7 25:1-7 36:15-17

Nebuzaradan destroys the city 52:12-16 52:12-16 39:8-10 25:8-12 36:18-19

The temple pillaged 52:17-23 52:17-23 25:13-18 36:19

Judahite leaders taken to Riblah 52:24-27 52:24-27 39:11-18 25:19-21

Gedaliah appointed by Nebuzaradan 40:1 – 43:7 25:22-26

Numbers of people taken to Babylon 52:28-30 36:20-21

Amel-marduk releases Jehoiachin 52:31-34 52:31-34 25:27-30

Cyrus commissions temple building 36:22-23

First Esdras 1:46 – 2:7 is another version building on 2 Chr 36 and Ezra 1.[[534]](#footnote-534)

After going different ways for some time, MT and LXX agree that 52:1-34 brings the Jeremiah scroll to a close. Beyond the more significant differences noted by the chart, both MT and LXX versions of the chapter mostly correspond to the account of the fall of Jerusalem in 2 Kgs 24:18 – 25:30.[[535]](#footnote-535) “How intertextual can you get?”[[536]](#footnote-536) They also overlap with the narrative in Jer 37 – 43 (MT and LXX broadly correspond in those chapters, with the usual differences of detail), with significant correspondence in 52:4-16 compared with 39:1-10. While these phenomena must be clues to aspects of the development of the scroll, there is the usual room for disagreement over which version came first, though a comparison of the different versions can draw attention to their respective features.[[537]](#footnote-537) The most noticeable distinctive features of Jer 52 MT are its lack of reference to Gedaliah, its inclusion of the numbers of Judahites taken to Babylon, and its lack of reference to Cyrus’s commission to Judahites to return to rebuild the temple – which Chronicles can see as fulfilling Yahweh’s word to Jeremiah. Related is the fact that Jer 52 and 2 Kgs 25 record the fate of Judahite priestly and military leaders but make no mention of Jeremiah and his fate. The chapter makes no reference to its significance in relation to the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s message or his vindication. Like Jer 50 – 51, it hardly postdates 539; in light of vv. 31-34, a date in the 550s or 540s makes sense, as it does for Jer 50 – 51.

**1** It seems odd that the chapter begins with Zedekiah’s accession rather than his rebellion that led to the fall of Jerusalem, or Jehoiakim’s reign, or Jehoiachin’s accession and deposing (since the chapter closes with Jehoiachin). Jehoiakim had died in 597 and Jehoiachin his son had succeeded him. The likely background to the Babylonians’ putting Zedekiah in his place is that Jehoiachin followed (or was assumed to follow) Jehoiakim’s policy of courting alliance with Egypt. The Babylonians expected Zedekiah to accept subordination to Babylon, which was also Jeremiah’s exhortation.[[538]](#footnote-538) There is a double irony in the Babylonians’ changing his name from Mattaniah (Yah’s gift!; 2 Kgs 24:17) to Zedekiah (Yah my faithfulness). It was surely not “the intention of the Babylonian ruler… in this way to ‘show that he was fulfilling the will of the native God of Jerusalem and Judah, both in salvation and judgment’? This is what he actually did…. In this situation the prophet saw that another opportunity had been given by God to the people…. But Zedekiah did not live up to his name.”[[539]](#footnote-539)

**2-3a** The presence of vv. 2-3 in MT makes for a contrast over against LXX, which lacks them. Zedekiah’s doing *what was dire in Yahweh’s eyes* will have included resistance to Babylon, though Jeremiah’s messages have implied that it also involved other forms of unfaithfulness to Yahweh. The explanation that things happened *because it was a cause of Yahweh’s anger in Jerusalem and Judah, until he threw them out from his presence* is laconic. It makes links between Zedekiah’s action, Yahweh’s anger, and Jerusalem’s fall, but it leaves their relationship obscure. Did Zedekiah’s policies cause Yahweh to act in anger? Or was Jehoiakim’s waywardness the cause and Zedekiah’s accession and moral or religious stupidity an expression of that anger, and then the immediate cause of the city’s fall?[[540]](#footnote-540) The narrative’s unclarity leaves the questions unresolved; often such questions cannot be answered, only noted. MT simply sets alongside each other on one hand the way Zedekiah is acting in relation to Yahweh and the way Yahweh will act in the story that follows (there will be no more references to Yahweh except the expression “Yahweh’s house”), and on the other hand the actions of Zedekiah towards Nebuchadrezzar and the actions of Nebuchadrezzar towards Judah, without commenting on the relationship between them. In isolation, one might universalize the first way of looking at events and affirm a universal supernaturalism, or absolutize the second and affirm and reduce history to power. The Jeremiah scroll relativizes each of these perspectives by juxtaposing them with each other and presupposing “intrusion, surprise, discontinuity, gifts, judgment, newness, and ambiguity.”[[541]](#footnote-541) Prophets such as Jeremiah

thought and spoke in a way which was supremely true theologically and supremely realistic politically. But they and their word were a foreign body in their environment. Apart from the fact that they spoke the Word of God, the only point in their favour was that events actually proved them right: that history passed devastatingly over Israel; that first the state of Israel and then that of Judah was completely eliminated; that nothing was left to the men of Israel but the God against whom they had sinned to the last in resisting His judgment, but whose hard hand they could not finally withstand – the covenant God, the Lord of the world, their Judge even as their strength, but as the strength which they had despised… [in] their repudiation of their helplessness in face of God, their stubbornness against the only One who could help them.[[542]](#footnote-542)

**3b-6** The king’s decision to rebel against Yahweh and against Nebuchadrezzar brings calamity on Jerusalem. As usual, the people pay a price for their leadership’s action, as in other contexts they benefit from it. In principle, one can hardly fault Judah’s desire for independence and/or for making its own political policies (e.g., to look to Egypt rather than to Babylon). But in this context, in light of events over recent decades, Yahweh has decided that submission to Babylon is an expression of submission to him. Though Nebuchadrezzar is thus unwittingly acting as Yahweh’s servant, his own concern lies elsewhere. Keeping control of Judah is one aspect of keeping control of the Levant and its trade routes that he had taken over from the Assyrians,[[543]](#footnote-543) and of exercising some authority in relation to Egypt in this connection. And rebels need to be put in their place to make sure that no other people gets fancy ideas. In itself, a blockade means not attempting to take the city by force but preventing supplies reaching it. It might seem odd for the Babylonians to need to blockade the city for as long as eighteen months, and for Jerusalem to be able to survive such a blockade would imply impressive preparation by way of the bringing in of grain and other supplies. But we know from 37:5 that the siege was not continuous; the Babylonians had to interrupt it to pursue other business.

**7-11** *The city broke open*[[544]](#footnote-544) sounds more like a breaking from inside than a breaking from outside, and the subsequent account of *all the men of battle fleeing* may suggest that they were the people who finally gave in to the inevitable; they would know that they in particular would get slaughtered if they didn’t run for it. The grimmest scene in the First Testament follows, an account that reformulates the one in 39:4-7.[[545]](#footnote-545) The death of Zedekiah’s sons means that his line will not continue, so that in this context this note initiates the contrast between Zedekiah and Jehoiachin: see vv. 31-34. Likewise *until the day of his death*, distinctive to Jer 52 compared with 2 Kgs 25:7 as well as Jer 39:7, will make for a contrast with the closing words about Jehoiachin in v. 34: he will be sustained by Babylonian kings *until the day of his death, all the days of his life*.[[546]](#footnote-546) But in the meantime, for Zedekiah *house of custody* might mean house arrest rather than prison.[[547]](#footnote-547)

**12-16** Another month has passed; perhaps the Babylonians were sorting out the people and the plunder before setting about the destruction of the city.[[548]](#footnote-548) Judahites might view what now follows as the grimmest scene in the First Testament. While Nebuchadrezzar could be expressing his wrath towards Jerusalem because its people have wasted his army’s energy over the past two years, more importantly he is seeking to ensure that this capital city never counts again. So Nebuzaradan *burned* it *in fire*: so often Jeremiah has talked about burning in fire. The army *pulled* it *down*: Yahweh used the verb in commissioning Jeremiah, and it has recurred since. Some very ordinary people Nebuzaradan *made go into exile*: they could work in Nebuchadrezzar’s fields, and he could recoup some of his investment. But some of them he *let remain as vinedressers and tillers*. It is less explicit here than it was at 39:10[[549]](#footnote-549) that it is for their own sake that they are tending vines and other trees rather than providing for the needs of an occupying force, but the repetition in v. 16 over against v. 15 suggests that this note is the first of a series of notes of hope running through the chapter. While some ordinary people were subject to forced migration, some were allowed to stay.

**17-23** Yet another scene competes for the title as the First Testament’s grimmest scene. The account of the temple building in 1 Kgs 7:15-37 helps to identify the objects v. 17 refers to. The catalog in v. 18 covers *buckets* (*sîr*), in this context containers for ashes (Exod 27:3), *shovels* (*yā‘*)for sweeping away (*yā‘â*)burnt logs and ashes, *trimmers* (*mәzammeret*) for tending the wicks of lamps, *throwers* (*mizrāq*)from which the blood was tossed (*zāraq*)against the altar, and *ladles* (*kap*) in the shape of the palm of a hand (*kap*), perhaps for burning incense. The catalog goes on in v. 19 to cover *bowls* (*sap*), *firepans* (*maḥtâ*)that would be capable of taking hold (*ḥātâ*) of burning wood, *lamps* (*mәnôrâ*), *flagons* (*mәnaqqît*) used in connection with libations (Exod 25:29), and repeats *throwers*, *pots*, and *ladles* from v. 18. *Pomegranates* were a decorative feature of the temple (1 Kgs 7:18, 20, 42), possibly symbolizing fruitfulness.[[550]](#footnote-550) The lists of temple articles and the account of what happened to them witness to the pain of the community that watched them be destroyed or stolen; it contrasts with the much briefer account in 2 Chr 36:19 whose brevity reflects its origin in a later time when the temple has been rebuilt and is functioning again. Given the plundering in 597, it is surprising that there should be so much to plunder now. It is hard to imagine the Judahite community having had the energy and resources to restore the accoutrements of the temple after 597. So it seems likely that this chapter conflates the various pillagings of the temple as we come to its demise. This possibility may also fit with the overlaps in the lists in vv. 18-19.

**24-27** Dramatically, the narrative about the fate of further Judahite leaders (also missing from 2 Chr 36) first lists people who get arrested, then eventually in the last clause relates their fate. This head priest is Seraiah ben Azariah, grandson of Hilkiah (1 Chr 6:13-14 [5:39-40]), for whom see 2 Kgs 22, a different Seraiah from the ones in 40:8 and 51:59. Zephaniah featured in 29:24-29. Priests exercising oversight at the threshold of the temple would be responsible for safeguarding its sanctity in various ways, but *the* *keepers of the threshold* stood at the temple door receiving offerings in 2 Kgs 22:4; they were treasurers. The people *present inside the city* will be people from elsewhere who took refuge there. *People of the country* sometimes suggests people with power or influence, which here would fit with the fate that overtakes them.[[551]](#footnote-551)

**28-30** Jer 52 lacks the account of Gedaliah’s appointment that appears in 2 Kgs 25:22-26 (it has already treated this development at length in 40:1 – 43:7) and in its place has a unique list of the numbers of people taken to Babylon in 597, 587, and 582. The numbers are puzzling. Second Kings 24:14 and 16 give figures of 10,000 and 8,000 for 597; maybe 3,023 covers only the men and those larger figures are guestimates that include the women and children.[[552]](#footnote-552) Whatever the numbers’ historical significance, in this context they convey the impression that the number of people transported to Babylon was small. Jeremiah has often spoken as if “the exile” would mean a wholesale forced migration of the Judahite people analogous to the one presented in 2 Kgs 17 in connection with Ephraim, which is how Western convention has thought of it. In this connection, vv. 28-30 have several significances. They indicate that as usual Yahweh’s action is softer than his threats. They issue the reminder that 587 was not the beginning of exile[[553]](#footnote-553) and they suggest that the 597 exile was more significant; it was indeed an important break.[[554]](#footnote-554) And they indicate that the exile of 587 was not the last. We know of an exile in 582 only from this passage; the usual guess is that it was a reprisal for the events related in Jer 41, but attempts to answer that question “are rather like a game of blind man’s bluff.”[[555]](#footnote-555) As a whole, the small numbers support the notion that the myth of an empty land is indeed a myth – the land was no means emptied.[[556]](#footnote-556) In addition to the people transported, no doubt many people had died in the siege. Others had fled, but they could come back, as Jer 40 has indicated. The Babylonians will have intended to put an end to the life of the capital city, but they had no reason to terminate life in what would become the province of Judah. Although “the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the kingdom of Judah brought about the gravest demographic crisis in the history of the kingdom of Judah,”[[557]](#footnote-557) it did not mean that there was no significant community in Judah after 587, or after 582. Jer 24 in its context could call people left in Jerusalem just bad figs, figs with little potential, and after 587 they are indeed just poor people. But Jer 40 gives a less gloomy picture of the prospects of a community in Judah, they generated the prayers in Lamentations, and archeological discoveries confirm how they kept life going there.[[558]](#footnote-558) The Jeremiah scroll speaks with more than one voice about the various Judahite communities after 587. According to Jer 24, the Babylonian exiles are good figs, figs with potential, and Jehoiachin is among them; but there aren’t many of them, and Ezekiel doesn’t give the impression that they are so insightful or committed. Jer 44 threatens the Egyptian exiles with annihilation, but Jeremiah and Baruch are there, this community made it possible for us to be reading much of Jeremiah’s story, and an Egyptian community flourished over the centuries. “Authors from the first generation after the destruction of Jerusalem who lived in Judah, Egypt, and Babylon perceived Babylonian rule, the destruction, the exile, the remnant in Judah, and the status of the House of David in different ways.”[[559]](#footnote-559) Indeed, the situation would have been more complicated than that observation necessarily implies. Within Judah, Egypt, and Babylon, authors and ordinary people would have different views on these matters, as the Ezekiel scroll and Lamentations as well as the Jeremiah scroll make clear. Judahites in Babylon and some Judahites in Egypt were not in those places because they chose to go there and saw the future as lying there; they were there because they had been frog-marched to those locations. Differences of perspective on (e.g.) acceptance of Babylonian authority or the future of the Davidic line would not be simply geographically based.

**31** We hear nothing of what happened over the next twenty years. What we do get is a final hopeful coda to the story. Kings such as Evil-merodach sometimes granted an amnesty on their accession, partly to encourage the loyalty of the beneficiaries.[[560]](#footnote-560) The expression *lifted the head* comes only here and in a similar context in Gen 40:13. Bowing the head is a sign of submission or humiliation or shame; you cannot look the other person in the eye. Having one’s head lifted is a sign of being restored to acceptability, even to honor. Thus “the sense of an ending offered by ch. 52 is also tinged with the sense of a new beginning.”[[561]](#footnote-561) Here, too, Yahweh’s bark is worse than his bite; the release and elevation of Jehoiachin is not what one would have expected on the basis of 22:24-30 (nor is there any indication of a change of heart on Jehoiachin’s part). It is a sign that Yahweh may not be finished with Judah and specifically with the line of David – his grandson Zerubbabel (2 Chr 3:17-19) will be a leader in Judah half a century later (Ezra 3), even though not a king. The very dating of events by Jehoiachin’s exile rather than by the reign of a Babylonian king is suggestive.

**32-34** Whereas 22:30 spoke negatively about Jehoiachin’s throne, v. 32 now speaks positively. As (e.g.) 32:42 spoke of the good Yahweh intended for Judah on the other side of disaster, Evil-merodach now *spoke of good things with* *him*. The mention of *the kings who were with him in Babylon* is illumined by a record from Nebuchadrezzar’s court (thus from somewhat earlier) that mentions the kings of Tyre, Gaza, Sidon, Arvad, and Ashdod.[[562]](#footnote-562) Eating *regularly* with the king would not imply three meals a day every day, and *regular provision* would cover ordinary life for him and his family. Babylonian administrative records from Nebuchadrezzar’s time (thus again from somewhat earlier) record on stone tablets deliveries of oil to various foreigners; the deliveries are quantified by the *sila* (something less than two pints) and they include supplies delivered to Jehoiachin king of Judah and his sons:

10 to … [Ia]-’-kin, king of Ia…

2½ sila to […so]ns of the king of Ia-a-ḫu-du

10 to Ia-ku-ú-ki-nu, the son of the king of Ia-ku-du

2½ sila for the 5 sons of the king of Ia-ku-du[[563]](#footnote-563)

Even at this stage, then, we should not think of Jehoiachin as in prison, even if he is under house arrest. And even these records regard him as king of Judah. But Evil-Merodach’s action would relate in some way to his strategy for exercising authority over Judah.[[564]](#footnote-564) Finally, whereas Zedekiah was to be *in* *a house of custody* *until the day of his death* (v. 11), Jehoiachin is to be in his reestablished position *until the day of his death.*[[565]](#footnote-565) We have noted that Chronicles lacks an account of Jehoiachin’s elevation and instead tells of Yahweh stirring the spirit of Cyrus the Great to commission the rebuilding of the temple in fulfillment of Jeremiah’s promise, which it thus sees as the sign that Yahweh has not finished with Judah. It is an indication that Chronicles is written with more hindsight than Jer 52, and that Jer 52 dates from before 539.

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Grant, Almighty God, that as thou hast not only provided for thine ancient Church, by choosing Jeremiah as thy servant, but hast also designed that the fruit of his labors should continue to our age, O grant that we may not be unthankful to thee, but that we may so avail ourselves of so great a benefit, that the fruit of it may appear in us to the glory of thy name; may we learn so entirely to devote ourselves to thy service, and each of us be so attentive to the work of his calling, that we may strive with united hearts to promote the honor of thy name, and also the kingdom of thine only-begotten Son, until we finish our warfare, and come at length into that celestial rest, which has been obtained for us by the blood of thine only Son.[[566]](#footnote-566)

1. J. G. McConville, *Judgment and Promise* (Leicester: Apollos, 1993), 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. On the two versions of Zedekiah’s story in Jer 37 – 40 MT and 44 – 47 LXX, see S. L. Birdsong, *The Last King(s) of Judah* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2017); and on the first two chapters, R. D. Weis, “The Textual Situation in the Book of Jeremiah,” in Y. A. P. Goldman et al. (eds.), *Sôfer Mahîr* (A. Schenker Festschrift; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 269-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See the comments on “Unity of Composition” in the Introduction to this commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See e.g., *ANET*, 491-92; W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger (eds.), *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) III:116-217; B. Porten, *Archives from Elephantine* (Berkeley: University of California, 1968); “The Jews in Egypt,” in W. D. Davies and L. Finkelstein (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), 372-400; B. Becking, “Yehudite Identity in Elephantine,” in O. Lipschits et al. (eds.), *Judah and the Judaeans in the Achaemenid Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 403-19; G. Granerød, *Dimensions of Yahwism in the Persian Period* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016); C. Cornell, “The Forgotten Female Figurines of Elephantine, “ *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 18 (2018): 111-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Wright, *Jeremiah*, 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Antiquities* XII.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 512. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Dearman, *Jeremiah*, in his comments on Jer 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. M. Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem* (New York: Clark, 2005), 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 138, 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 598. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Aka Apries, the equivalent Greek attempt to render his Egyptian name (Herodotus 2:161; Diodorus Siculus 1:68). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See *ANET*, 322, and the comment on 34:6-7 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See the comment on 36:11-14a. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See 21:1-2 and the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. A. R. P. Diamond, “Portraying Prophecy,” *JSOT* 57 (1993): 99-119 (111-14). C. Hardmeier (*Prophetie im Streit vor dem Untergang Judas* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990]) sees the Hezekiah narrative as composed in Jeremiah’s day and as in dialogue with this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 514. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 599. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 406. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See the comment on 32:6-8a. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. So Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Duhm, *Jeremia*,300. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:929. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem*, 53-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Schmidt, *Jeremia* 2:208. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Fischer, *Jeremia* 2:329. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 683. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Jones, *Jeremiah*, 459-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 638. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. M. C. Calloway, “Telling the Truth and Telling Stories,” *USQR* 44 (1991): 253-65 (256); cf. H.-J. Stipp, “Zedekiah in the Book of Jeremiah,” *CBQ* 58 (1996): 627-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. M. Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26 – 45* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. R. D. Weis, “The Textual Situation in the Book of Jeremiah,” in Y. A. P. Goldman et al. (eds.), *Sôfer Mahîr* (A. Schenker Festschrift; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 269-93 (278); though one should note that the First Testament often “unnecessarily” repeats epithets – Jeremiah is three times called “the prophet” in this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See the comment on 36:11-14a. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Weiser, *Jeremia* 2:346. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 412. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 600. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. M. Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem* (New York: Clark, 2005), 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See the comment on 36:24-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See further Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Mayer, *Commentary*, 446. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. E. K. Holt, “The Potent Word of God,” in A. R. P Diamond et al. (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 161-70 (167). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. W. L. Widder, “Thematic Correspondences between the Zedekiah Texts of Jeremiah (Jer 21–24; 37–38),” *OTE* 26 (2013): 491-503. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem*, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Volz, *Jeremia*, 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 640. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 524. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. See O. Lipschitz, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 93-97, who sees here the background to Gedaliah’s Mizpah community and administrative center. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Volz, *Jeremia*, 345. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:290. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem*, 107-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. On the question of dependence either way, see B. Ego, “‘In meinem Herzen berge ich dein Wort,’” *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 12 (1997) 277-289; B. Gosse, “Le Psaume 40 et le livre de Jérémie,” *ZAW* 117 (2005): 395-404. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. B. Green, “Sunk in the Mud,” in E. K. Holt and C. J. Sharp (eds.), *Jeremiah Invented* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 34-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 4:449. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. T. M. Willis, “ ‘They Did Not Listen to the Voice of the Lord,’” *Restoration Quarterly* 42 (2000):65-84 (71). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 689. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. J. Applegate “The Fate of Zedekiah,” *VT* 48 (1998): 137-60, 301-8 (307). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 519. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. The comment on Jer 52 tabulates the similarities and differences between the three accounts. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 319. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. A. R. P. Diamond, “Interlocutions,” *Interpretation* 62 (2008): 48-65 (55). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Cf. M. Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem* (New York: Clark, 2005), 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 532. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Rosenberg, *Jeremiah* 2:312. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. See H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 13 – 27* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 367-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 88-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Bruuggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Wright, *Jeremiah*, 389. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. M. E. Biddle, “The Redaction of Jeremiah 39 – 41 [46 – 48 LXX],” *ZAW* 126 (2014): 228-42 (232). [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Weiser, *Jeremia*, 2:356. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. J. N. Graham, “‘Vinedressers and Plowmen,’” *BA* 47 (1984): 55-58 (cf. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 420); “vinedressers and plowmen [more literally tillers]” is the text at 52:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 4:69. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. M. Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem* (New York: Clark, 2005), 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. See e.g., P.-M. Bogaert, “Les généraux **babyloniens** selon Jérémie (LXX 46,3; TM 39,3 et 13) et selon Flavius Josèphe (Ant. Jud. X,135),” *RB* 123 (2016): 519-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. K. D. Mulzac, “Is Jeremiah 39:15-18 out of Order?” *AUSS* 45 (2007): 69-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Jones, *Jeremiah*, 466. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. See the comment on v. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 697. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Theodoret, *Ermeneia*, 693. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. McKane (*Jeremiah* 1:994-96) also analyzes the similarities and differences of the LXX text of the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Mayer, *Commentary*, 450. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Keown, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Weiser, *Jeremia* 2:358. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Carroll, *Jeremiah*,699. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. E. Ben Zvi, “The Voice and Role of a Counterfactual Memory in the Construction of Exile and Return,” in E. Ben Zvi and C. Levin (eds.), *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and its Historical Contexts* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 169-88 (181-82). [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. It’s therefore hard to see Jeremiah as embracing his marginal position as a means of resisting the dominant power of the empire (S. V. Davidson, “Chosen Marginality as Resistance in Jeremiah 40:1-6,” in A. R. P. Diamond and L. Stulman [eds.], *Jeremiah (Dis)placed* [New York: Clark, 2011], 150-61; cf. Davidson, *Empire and Exile* [New York: Clark, 2011], 88-129). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. E. Peels, “The Assassination of Gedaliah,” in B. Becking and D. Human (eds.), *Exile and Suffering* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 83-103 (87). On Gedaliah’s position, see further O. Lipschitz, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 88-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. J. Hill, “Jeremiah 40:1-6,” in M. A. O’Brien and H. N. Wallace (eds.),. *Seeing Signals, Reading Signs* (A. F. Campbell Festschrift; London: Clark, 2004), 130-41 (137). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:294-95; Y. Magen, “Nebi Samwil,” *BAR* 34/3 (2008): 36-45, 78-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. J. R. Zorn, “Mizpah,” in B. T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005),701-5; J. R. Zorn, “Jeremiah at Mizpah of Benjamin,” in J. R. Lundbom et al. (eds.), *The Book of Jeremiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 69-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Boadt, *Jeremiah 26 – 52,* 103*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. See the survey in K. Valkama, “What Do Archaeological Remains Reveal of the Settlements in Judah during the Mid-Sixth Century BCE?” in E. Ben Zvi and C. Levin (eds.), *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and its Historical Contexts* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 39-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. C. R. Seitz, “The Crisis of Interpretation over the Meaning and Purpose of the Exile,“ *VT* 35 (1985): 78-97; P. R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration* (London: SCM, 1968), 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 432. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. There is a picture in J. R. Zorn, “Mizpah,” *BAR* 23/5 (1997): 28-38 (35). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. K. Bodner, *After the Invasion* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Bodner, *After the Invasion*, 14: rather surprisingly, he is referring to Jer 40 – 44 as a whole. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Schmidt, *Jeremia* 2:241. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. M. Leuchter, “Group Identity and Scribal Tradition In Jeremiah,” *JHS* 18/1 (2018): 49-56 (54-55). [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 705 [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 536. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Volz, *Jeremia*, 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Dearman, *Jeremiah*, on Jer 41 – 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. E. Ben Zvi, “The Voice and Role of a Counterfactual Memory in the Construction of Exile and Return,” in E. Ben Zvi and C. Levin (eds.), *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and its Historical Contexts* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 169-88 (184). [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion* (Cambridge: CUP, 1922), 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. See R. D. Wells, “The Amplification of the Expectations of the Exiles in the MT Revision of Jeremiah,” in A. R. P. Diamond et al. (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 272-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. See further the discussion in McKane, *Jeremiah* 2: 1013-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Carroll, *Jeremiah*,705. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Jones, *Jeremiah*, 471. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. So Abravanel, *pyrwš ‘al nby’ym ’ḥrwnym*, on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. See L. G. Herr, “The Servant of Baalis,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 48 (1985): 169-72.

     B. Becking, “Inscribed Seals as Evidence for Biblical Israel?” in L. L. Grabbe (ed.), *Can a “History of Israel” Be Written?* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 65-83 (80-82) [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Boadt, *Jeremiah 26 – 42*, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 114-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 322; cf. L. Stulman, “Jeremiah as a Polyphonic Response to Suffering,” in in J. Kaltner and L. Stulman (eds.), *Inspired Speech* (H. Huffmon Festschrift; London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 302-18 (311- [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. K. Bodner, *After the Invasion* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 433. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. See e.g. the paragraphs on “The Curators’ Work” in the Introduction to this commentary, Section 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 609. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 327-28. Stulman adds that the story “refutes the theodicy argument in the book,” but this formulation seems an oversimplification that is the obverse of the idea that the book exists to assure people that everything makes sense. Stulman himself elsewhere discusses “Jeremiah as a Polyphonic Response to Suffering” (J. Kaltner and L. Stulman (eds.), *Inspired Speech* [H. Huffmon Festschrift; London: Bloomsbury, 2004], 302-18). [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Fischer, *Jeremia* 2:379. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 252-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Cf. Mayer, *Commentary*, 452. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. M. L. Wisser (“the Malbim”) in his “Commentary on Biblical Literature” (c. 1874), on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Jones, *Jeremiah*, 471. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. See the comment on 40:4-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Bodner, *After the Invasion*, 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 713. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Cf. W. Oswald, “Jeremiah and Moses,” in M. Augustin and H. M. Niemann (eds.), *“My Spirit at Rest in the North Country”* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2011), 265-72 (267). [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Cf. M. E. Biddle’s argument that it is designed to support a lay governor such as Nehemiah over against the necessity for rule to be Davidic (“The Redaction of Jeremiah 39 – 41,” *ZAW* 126 (2014): 228-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 711. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1004-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. M. Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26 – 45* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 125-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Qara in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. A. Lemaire, “Edom and the Edomites,” in A. Lemaire and B. Halpern (eds.), *The Books of Kings* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 225-43 (240). [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 661. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. See the note, which implies that the word for *Field* may hint at a place where people could reside temporarily. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Fischer, *Jeremia* 2:399. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:298. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. But H.-J. Stipp warns against underestimating their statement, as if “the myth of the empty land” was devised only much later (“The Concept of the Empty Land in Jeremiah 37 – 43,” in E. Ben Zvi and C. Levin [eds.], *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and its Historical Contexts* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010], 103-54. See also A. Faust, “Deportation and Demography in Sixth-Century B.C.E. Judah,” in B. E. Kelle et al. (eds.), *Interpreting Exile* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 91-103; O. Lipschits, “Shedding New Light on the Dark Years of the ‘Exilic Period,” in the same volume, 57-90; and for the myth of the empty land, R. P. Carroll, “The Myth of an Empty Land,” in D. Jobling and T. Pippin [eds.] *Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1992], 79-93; H. M. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land* [Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996]). The origin of the phrase lies in the image of southern Africa that nineteenth-century European settlers liked to convey. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. B. Rossi, *L'intercessione nel tempo della fine* (Rome: Gregorian, 2013), 346-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 605. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Miller, “Jeremiah,” on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 665. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Theodoret, *Ermeneia*, 695. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. See the comments on 7:13-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. So Vg, Sym, Th. LXX’s *anapepaumai* may have the same implication or may simply mean desisting. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. M. E. Biddle, “Contingency, God, and the Babylonians,” *RevExp* 101 (2004): 247-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Cf. Tg “turned.” [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. See H.-J. Fabry, *TDOT* 9:340-55 (342). It’s like taking redress, as opposed to revenge (e.g., 11:20), in being at least as much an action word as a feelings word (Volz, *Jeremia*, 360). [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 716. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. W. Brueggemann, “At the Mercy of Babylon,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 3-22 (6). [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. And see G. Yates, “New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45,” *TynB* 57 (2006): 1-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. K. D. Mulzac, “*Śrd* as a Remnant Term in the Context of Judgment in the Book of Jeremiah,” *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 7 (2004): 39-58 (46). [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Volz, *Jeremia*, 361. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Keown, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. K. Bodner, *After the Invasion* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Cf. Bodner, *After the Invasion*, 113-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1064; for such a view, see e.g., Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 183-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 669. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Boadt, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 110. See further H.-J. Stipp, “Die Verschleppung Jeremias nach Ägypten,” *VT* 64 (2014): 654-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Oecolampadius, *In Hieremiam*, on the passage (cf. Tyler, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 389). [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 326. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century* *B. C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. See the comment on 13:3-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 440. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Miller, “Jeremiah,” on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Cf. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Miller, “Jeremiah,” on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Cf. Holladay. *Jeremiah* 2:302. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Pappus, *In Omnes Prophetas*, 117 (cf. Tyler, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 388). [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. See the text in *ANET*, 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. See K. Jansen-Winklein, “Die Siegesstele des Amasis,” *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 14 (2014): 132-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. From Ephrem’s Commentary on Jeremiah on the passage, as quoted in Wenthe, *Jeremiah*, 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. D. J. Reimer, “Redeeming Politics in Jeremiah,” in H. M. Barstad and R. G. Kratz (eds.). *Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 121-36 (125). [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. See the introductory notes to Part Four, above. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. G. Galvin, *Egypt as a Place of Refuge* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2011), 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Weiser, *Jeremia*, 377. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1085. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. See E. D. Oren, “Migdol,” *BASOR* 256 (1984): 7-44; J. K. Hoffmeier, “The Search for Migdol of the New Kingdom and Exodus 14:2,” *Buried History* 44 (2008): 3-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. On the name, see the note on 2:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. See BDB. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Wright, *Jeremiah*, 402-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:287. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 194, 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Stulman, *Jeremiah*,345. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. K. Bodner, *After the Invasion* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. R. R. Hutton, “Slogans in the Midst of Crisis,” *WW* 10 (1990): 229-36 (234). [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Cf. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 261. On the link with Josiah’s reform, see Y. Hoffman, “History and Ideology,” *JANES* 28 (2001), 43-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Cf. C. J. Sharp, “Gender and Subjectivity in Jeremiah 44,” in K. E. Southwood and M. A. Halvorsen-Taylor (eds.), *Women and Exilic Identity in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 67-78 (75). [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 739 (in this context, “ideological” is not so different from “theological”; but on “ideological” in this connection, see further W. Brueggemann, “The ‘Baruch Connection,’” *JBL* 113 [1994]: 405-20). [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. At last we get a woman’s voice, S. V. Davidson comments in “‘Every Green Tree and the Streets of Jerusalem,’” M. K. George (ed.), *Constructions of Space IV* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 111-31 (121-27). [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Blayney, *Jeremiah*,406. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 607. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. See e.g., J. E. Harding, “The Silent Goddess and the Gendering of Divine Speech in Jeremiah 44,” in C. M. Maier and C. J. Sharp (eds.), *Prophecy and Power* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 208-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. M. Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26 – 45* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 132 (he infers that Jeremiah leaves no scope for the community to turn and that the chapter presupposes that the future lies only with the Babylonian community). [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. See the comment on 5:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:304. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. So Keown, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 607. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. So e.g., Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. See the comment on 43:10-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. See further M. A. Taylor, "Jeremiah 45." JSOT 37 (1987), 79-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. This logic works only for MT, since Jer 46 – 51 come earlier in LXX; there Jer 45 (in LXX 51:31-35) leads straight into Jer 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. P. House, “Investing in the Ruins,” *JETS* 56 (2013): 5-15 (12). [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. See the comment on 14:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1097. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. See P. J. Scalise, “Baruch as First Reader,” in J. Goldingay (ed.), *Uprooting and Planting* (L. Allen Festschrift; London: Clark 2007), 291-307. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. G. E. Yates, “Narrative Parallelism and the ‘Jehoiakim Frame,” *JETS* 48 (2005): 263-81 (280). [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Cf. C. R. Seitz, “The Prophet Moses and the Canonical Shape of Jeremiah,” *ZAW* 101 [1989]: 3-27 [21-25]; B. Gosse, “Jérémie **xlv** et la place du recueil d'oracles contre les nations dans le livre de Jérémie,” *VT* 40 [1990]: 145-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 571. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. See 21:9 and the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 751. See e.g., J. H. Hayes, “The Usage of Oracles against Foreign Nations in Ancient Israel,” *JBL* 87 (1968): [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. J. Hwang, “The *Missio* *Dei* as an Integrative Motif in the Book of Jeremiah,” *BBR* 23 (2013): 481-508 (500). [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. P. R. Raabe, “What is Israel’s God Up To among the Nations?” in J. R. Lundbom et al. [eds.], *The Book of Jeremiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 230-52 (233). [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 611. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. See Miller, “Jeremiah,” for his “Reflections” on Jer 46 – 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 575, 577. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. J. G. Amesz, “A God of Vengeance?” in M. Kessler (ed.), *Reading the Book of Jeremiah* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 99-116. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 610. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:313. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. But contrast M. Haran, “The Place of the Prophecies against the Nations in the Book of Jeremiah,” in S. M. Paul et al. (eds.), *Emanuel* (E. Tov Festschrift; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 699-706; and see H.-J. Stipp, “Das eschatologische Schema im alexandrinischen Jeremiabuch,” *VT* 64 (2014): 484-501; J. W. Watts, “Text and Redaction in Jeremiah's Oracles against the Nations,” *CBQ* 54 (1992): 432-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. See the comment on 25:1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, NY: Augustin, 1975), 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. On the thinness of data on Neco, see H. M. Barstad, “Jeremiah the Historian,” in G. Khan and D. Lipton (eds.), *Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible* (R. P. Gordon Festschrift; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 87-98 (91-94). [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. J. J. Jackson, “Jeremiah 46,” ***HBT* 15 (1993): 136-44 (141).** [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Jones, *Jeremiah*, 493. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:318. See further C. de Jong, “Deux oracles contre les nations,” in P.-M. Bogaert (ed.), *Le livre de Jérémie* (2nd ed. Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 369-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. *CHP*, 382. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. J. R. Huddlestun, J. R. “‘Who is This That Rises Like the Nile?’”, in A. B. Beck et al.(eds.), *Fortunate* *the Eyes That See* (D. N. Freedman Festschrift; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995) 338-63 (360-63). [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. See D. T. Adamo, “The Portrayal of Africa and Africans in the Book of Jeremiah,” *In die Skriflig* 52/1 (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Pixley, *Jeremiah*, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. See the introductory comment on 47:1-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. See ANET, 308; D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings* (London: British Museum, 1956), 94-95; and for the other possibilities, Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 287-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. M. Jones, The Temple of Apis in Memphis,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 76 (1990): 141-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Cf. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. “It is sweet and proper to die for one’s country” (Horace, *Odes* III.2.13). Cf. Berrigan, *Jeremiah*, 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 4:650. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. J. K. Hoffmeier, “A New Insight on Pharaoh Apries from Herodotus, Diodorus and Jeremiah 46:17,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 11 (1981): 165-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. *Rahab*, not the *rāḥāb* of Josh 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. J. Goldingay, “Jeremiah and the Superpower,” in J. Goldingay (ed.), *Uprooting and Planting* (L. Allen Festschrift; London: Clark 2007), 59-77 (65-67). [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Cf. Fischer, *Jeremia* 2:489-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. G. Galvin, *Egypt as a Place of Refuge* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2011), 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. M. A. Fishbane, *Haftarot* (The JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia: JPS, 2002), 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 771. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Weiser, *Jeremia* 2:395. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. E. Peels, “‘But Fear Not, O Jacob My Servant,’” in K. van Bekkum et al. (eds.), *Biblical Hebrew in Context* (J. P. Lettinga Festschrift; Leiden: Brill 2018), 114-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 229, 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings* (London: British Museum, 1956), 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Wiseman, *Chronicles*, 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. See McKane’s discussion, *Jeremiah* 2:1153-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1141. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. See the Sennacherib Annals, *ANET*, 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Against Duhm, *Jeremia*, 342-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. H. J. Katzenstein, “‘Before Pharaoh Conquered Gaza,’” *VT* 33 (1983): 249-251; E. Peels, “‘Before Pharaoh Seized Gaza,’” *VT* 63 (2013): 308-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:338. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. *ANET*, 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. See the comment on 22:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. See e.g., J. M. Miller, “Moab and the Moabites,” in [J.] A. Dearman (ed.), *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 1-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. From A. R. van der Deijl, *Protest or Propaganda* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 304-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. See further G. L. Mattingly, “Moabite Religion and the Mesha‘ Inscription,” in Dearman (ed.), *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*, 211-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 795. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. See H.-P. Müller, “Chemosh,” *DDD*, 186-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. H. Wildberger (*Isaiah 13 – 27* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997], 127-29) lays out the parallels in Hebrew; Woods (*Jeremiah 48*, 67-98) analyzes the differences and the characteristics of the distinctively Jeremianic material. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Where Jer 48:5 has *bekî*, Isa 15:5 has *bô* [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Isa 15:5 lacks the explicit preposition *bә* [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Isa 16:6 has the hapax *gē’*, Jer 48:29 has the usual *gē’eh*. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Isa 15:5 also has “my heart cries out for Moab.” [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Isa 16:7 has *la’ăšîšê*, Jer 48:31 *’el ’anšê*, “a milder reading” (Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:343). [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. Isa 16:9 has *gepen*, Jer 48:32 *haggepen*. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Isa 16:8 has these cola in a different order. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Isa 16:9 has *qәṣîrēk*, Jer 48:32 *bәṣîrēk*. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Isa 16:10 has a masculine verb, Jer 48:32 a feminine. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Isa 15:6 has simply *mәšammôt*, Jer 48:34 *limәšammôt*, [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Num 21:28 has a masculine verb, Jer 48:45 a feminine. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Num 21:18 has a qatal verb, Jer 48:45 a *waw*-consecutive. Num 24:17 has “it will smash the brow of Moab.” [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Num 24:17 has “the foundation [*qarqar*]of all the people of Seth” (if “foundation” is the meaning of *qarqar* and if *śēt* denotes Seth), while *scalp* in Jer 48:45 is *qodqōd*. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. In Num 21:29 *captivity* is *šәbît*; in Jer 48:46 it is *šebî* then *šibyâ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. See e.g., Bright, *Jeremiah*, 322; Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:346-49; H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 13 – 27* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 124-25; J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1 – 39* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 297-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. *Jeremiah*, 5:33. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. J. I. Woods (*Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture* [Cambridge: Clarke, 2011], 25-66) lays out Jer 48 MT and LXX synoptically, then comments on the differences between the two. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 345: he calls the chapter a “strange anthology.” [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Lundbom (*Jeremiah 37 – 52*, viii-ix) counts seventeen. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Thus my divisions hardly ever correspond to Lundbom’s (see previous note) or Allen’s (*Jeremiah*, 477-78) or Holladay’s (*Jeremiah* 2:349-53). [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. J. R. Lundbom, “Language and Rhetoric in Jeremiah’s Foreign Nation Oracles,” in J. R. Lundbom et al. (eds.), *The Book of Jeremiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 211-29 (212-19). [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. See the discussion of Isa 15 – 16 in this connection in B. C. Jones, *Howling over Moab* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), 113-61, 231-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Woods, *Jeremiah 48*, 227, and see the comment on 22:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. See C. Ben-David, “The ‘Ascent of Luhith’ and the ‘Road to Horonaim,’” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 133 (2001): 136-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Woods, *Jeremiah 48*,188-216. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. See W. D. Barker, “Wine Production in Ancient Israel and the Meaning of *šәmārîm* in the Hebrew Bible,” in D. A. Baer and R. P. Gordon (eds.), *Leshon* Limmudim (A. A. Macintosh Festschrift; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 268-74; he thinks v. 11aαβ implies the spoiling has happened, but v. 11b suggests it hasn’t. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. See W. Röllig, “Bethel,” *DDD*, 173-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. C. J. Sharp, “Embodying Moab,” in E. K. Holt et al. (eds.), *Concerning the Nations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 95-108 (108). [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. See v. 8 and the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. See e.g. the comments on 1:16; 4:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. See the comparison in the introduction to the commentary on this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 240.v [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. See *HALOT*. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Barth, *CD* IV,1: 473. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. But K. A. D. Smelik questions these assumptions and argues for the north (*Converting the Past* [Leiden: Brill, 1992], 85-89). [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Volz, *Jeremia*, 414. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. See the comparison in the introduction to the commentary on this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Oecolampadius, *In Hieremiam*, on the passage (cf. Tyler, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 421). [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. BDB, 32. *’Ȇkâ* in v. 17 was more unequivocally doleful (cf. Lam 1:1; 2:1; 4:1, 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. See the comparison in the introduction to the commentary on this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. See the comment on 46:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 315. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. C. W. Tyson (*The Ammonites* [London: Bloomsbury, 2014], 120-21) suggests alternatively a link with events between 597 and 587. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. E. Puech, “Milcom,” *DDD*, 575-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Miller,”Jeremiah,” on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. *Jeremiah* 5:70. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. It is one indication that vv. 1-5 might be in origin a Moab prophecy: see E. A. Knauf, “Jeremia xlix 1-5,” *VT* 42 (1992): 124-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Theodoret, *Ermeneia*, 728. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Schmidt, *Jeremia* 2:305. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Theodoret, *Ermeneia*, 728. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. See L. Haney, “Yhwh the God of Israel… and of Edom?” in J. Goldingay (ed.), *Uprooting and Planting* (L. Allen Festschrift; London: Clark 2007), 78-115. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. The Obadiah version is thus longer than the Jeremiah version, and it has two of the cola as rhetorical questions instead of statements, but the substance is the same. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. The two versions differ slightly but the substance is the same. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Mayer, *Commentary*, 446. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 496. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1215. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. E. Assis, *Identity in Conflict* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 95-96. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:375. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Bugenhagen, *In Ieremiam*, on the passage (cf. Tyler, *Jeremiah*, 426). [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. See the comment on 23:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Boadt, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 134-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. See the comment on 12:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. See the comments on 10:25; 25:30. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. R. Graybill, “Jeremiah, Sade, and Repetition as Counterpleasure in the Oracle against Edom,” in E. K. Holt et al. (eds.), *Concerning the Nations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 128-44 (128-29). [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. So Calvin, *Jeremiah* 5:112-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Josephus’s account (*Ant* XIII, 9:1) suggests forced conversion; but see e.g., the discussion in A. Kasher, *Jews, Idumaeans, and Ancient Arabs* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988), 44-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Weiser, *Jeremia*, 2:419. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1230, 1231. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Trapp, *Commentary*, on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Miller, “Jeremiah,” on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1234. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. *CTAT* 2:812. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:381. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 353; he refers to *ANET*, 284, 286, 291-92, 297-301, which record Assyrian campaigns against and plundering of tribes in Arabia. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 500. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. So Miller, “Jeremiah,” on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, NY: Augustin, 1975), 101; *ANET* 564. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:387. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. Cf. H. G. L. Peels, “God’s Throne in Elam,” *OTS* 44 (2000): 216-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. Miller, “Jeremiah,” in his reflections on Jer 46 – 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, NY: Augustin, 1975), 102. See further Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 362. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 5:117. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. M. K. Chae (“Redactional Intentions of MT Jeremiah Concerning the Oracles against the Nations,” *JBL* 134 [2015]: 577-93) emphasizes the hopeful aspect to the arrangement. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Fischer, *Jeremia* 2:630. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Pixley, *Jeremiah*, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 814. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. A. Kalmanofsky,”‘As She Did, Do to Her,’” in E. K. Holt et al. (eds.), *Concerning the Nations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 109-27. But H. S. Pyper critiques the chapters’ implicitly quietist stance (“Postcolonialism and Propaganda in Jeremiah’s Oracles against the Nations,” in the same volume, 145-57). [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. See e.g., Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 297-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. R. I. Thelle, “Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah (MT),” in H. M. Barstad and R. G. Kratz (eds.), *Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 187-232 (216-17). Cf. J. Hill’s thesis that the notion of metaphor is key to understanding Babylon in Jeremiah (*Friend or Foe?* [Leiden: Brill, 1999]). [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Y. Hoffman, "Jeremiah 50-51 and the Concept of Evil in the Hebrew Bible," in H. G. Reventlow and Y. Hoffman (eds.), *The Problem of Evil and Its Symbols in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (London: Clark, 2004), 14-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. Wright, *Jeremiah*, 436. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. See Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 363-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. See further sections 2 and 3 of the Introduction to this commentary. S. Frolov (“Evil-Merodach and the Deuteronomist,” *Biblical* 88 [2007]: 174-90) argues that 52:31-34 in their 2 Kings version must date from within Evil-merodach’s (two-year) reign and thus that 2 Kings reached its final form by that date; the same argument would suggest that the Jeremiah scroll reached its final form by that date. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. Boadt, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 139. Carroll questions this analogy on the grounds that Isa 10:5-19 accuses Assyria of excessive zeal (Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 843), but actually its argument seems to concern arrogance – as is the case in Jer 50 – 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. M. Leuchter, “Sacred Space and Communal Legitimacy in Exile,” in M. J. Boda et al. (eds.), *The* *Prophets Speak on Forced Migration* (Atlanta: SBL, 2015), 77-99 (84). [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Cf. Wright, *Jeremiah*, 438-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 816. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. K. A. D. Smelik, “The Function of Jeremiah 50 and 51 in the Book of Jeremiah,” in M. Kessler (ed.), *Reading the Book of Jeremiah* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 87-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. See M. Köszeghy, *Der Streit um Babel in den Büchern Jesaja und Jeremia* (Stuttart: Kohlhammer, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. See further the comments on 51:59-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. Cf. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 842, 847, 855. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 4:197. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. My understanding of the chapters’ structure thus compares with those of K. T. Aitken, “The Oracles against Babylon in Jeremiah 50 – 51,” *TynB* 35 (1984): 25-63, and A. O. Bellis, *The Structure and Composition of Jeremiah 50:2 – 51:58* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. Cf. Wright, *Jeremiah*, 433-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 385. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. Wright, *Jeremiah*, 440. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 509. Cf. B. Gosse, “L’enracinement du livre de Jérémie dans le Psautier: Teil 1,” *BN* 158 (2013): 39-50 (41-44). [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 834; cf. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 509. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. Trapp, *Commentary*, on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. See T. Abusch, “Marduk,” *DDD*, 543-49; Abusch notes that there various ways of vocalizing the name, and the Hebrew version does not seem to be pejorative, analogous to Molech (see the comment on 32:35). [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. R. Thelle, “Babylon as Judah’s *Doppelgänger*,” in E. K. Holt et al. (eds.), *Concerning the Nations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 77-94; cf. Reimer’s concluding comments to his study of forms and imagery in Jer 50 – 51, *The Oracles against Babylon in Jeremiah 50 – 51*, 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. See the comments. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52,* 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. See 1:14 and the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 376. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. M. Kessler, *Battle of the Gods* (Assen: van Gorcum, 2003), 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 375. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. On the image of a *pact*, see the introductory comment on 11:1-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52,* 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 513. [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. H. Bullinger in his sermon on this passage, as quoted in Tyler, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 438. [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage, as paraphrased by Rosenberg (*Jeremiah* 2:383). [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. See the comment on 2:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. Cf. B. Gosse, “The Masoretic Redaction of Jeremiah,” *JSOT* 77 (1998): 75-80 (79). [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 366. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. See the comment on 5:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. B. A. Foreman, *Animal Metaphors and the People of Israel in the Book of Jeremiah* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2011), 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. Kessler, *Battle of the Gods*, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. See the comment on 10:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Weiser, *Jeremia* 2:438. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. See the comment on 22:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. On this word, see the comment on 7:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 742-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. See the comment on 43:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. *You* is masculine singular, and Abravanel (*pyrwš ‘al nby’ym ’ḥrwnym*, on the passage) neatly identifies Belshazzar as the embodiment of arrogance, though the pronoun may simply reflect the gender and number of *zādôn*. [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 413. [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. A. O. Bellis, “Poetic Structure and Intertextual Logic in Jeremiah 50,” in A. R. P. Diamond et al. (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 179-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. Cf. Cf. P. R. Ackroyd, “The Vitality of the Word of God in the Old Testament,” in Ackroyd, *Studies in the Religious Tradition of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1987), 61-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 743-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. See the comment on 31:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. B. Gosse, “Jérémie 50,33-40, en relation avec les psaumes d’Asaph et deutéro-Asaphites et le livre d’Isaïe,” *BN* 158 (2013): 3-10 (4-6). [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 4: 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. So A. O. Bellis, “The New Exodus in Jeremiah 50:33-38,” in L. Boadt and M. S. Smith (eds.), *Imagery and Imagination in Biblical Literature* A. Fitzgerald Festschrift; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 2001), 157-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. W. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, Scene 1(cf. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 419). [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. W. Brueggemann, “At the Mercy of Babylon,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 3-22 (7-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. Qimchi (in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage) again finds Belshazzar here. [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. Cf. E. K. Holt, “The Meaning of an *Inclusio*,” *SJOT* 17 (2013): 181-205. [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. Whereas 49:19 has the spelling *yō‘îdennî* 50:44 has *yô‘idennî*. [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. Whereas 49:21 has the usual qal verb, 50:46 has niphal. [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 366. [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1295. [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
454. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
455. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-455)
456. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 838. [↑](#footnote-ref-456)
457. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-457)
458. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-458)
459. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 4: 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-459)
460. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1300. [↑](#footnote-ref-460)
461. Kessler, *Battle of the Gods*, 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-461)
462. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 368. [↑](#footnote-ref-462)
463. Abravanel, *pyrwš ‘al nby’ym ’ḥrwnym*, on the passage, as paraphrased by Rosenberg (*Jeremiah* 2:396). [↑](#footnote-ref-463)
464. See 1:16; 4:2; and the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-464)
465. Cf. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 368. [↑](#footnote-ref-465)
466. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 839. [↑](#footnote-ref-466)
467. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 356. [↑](#footnote-ref-467)
468. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-468)
469. Kessler, *Battle of the Gods*, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-469)
470. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-470)
471. W. Brueggemann, “Jeremiah,”in W. P. Brown and S. D. McBride (eds.), *God Who Creates* (W. S. Towner Festschrift; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 152-70 (163). [↑](#footnote-ref-471)
472. Pixley, *Jeremiah*, 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-472)
473. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-473)
474. Boadt, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-474)
475. Pixley, *Jeremiah*, 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-475)
476. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 456.. [↑](#footnote-ref-476)
477. Allen *Jeremiah*, 528. [↑](#footnote-ref-477)
478. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2: 425. English translations of the Mishnah render the name loosely as “Mount of Olives.” [↑](#footnote-ref-478)
479. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 370. Tg interprets the stones metaphorically of kings and rulers. [↑](#footnote-ref-479)
480. See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 463-64. The application of the name Ashkenaz to an area within Europe and of the term Ashkenazi to European Jews came about in the medieval period. [↑](#footnote-ref-480)
481. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 357. [↑](#footnote-ref-481)
482. Blayney, *Jeremiah*, 442. See further D. S. Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1999), 188-202. [↑](#footnote-ref-482)
483. Theodoret, *Ermeneia*, 752. [↑](#footnote-ref-483)
484. R. P. Carroll, “The Discombobulations of Time and the Diversities of Text,” in R. P. Carroll (ed.), *Text as Pretext* (R. Davidson Festschrift; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 61-85 (77-78) reports that Saddam Hussein was seen in the context of the Gulf War as an embodiment of the Babylonian monster. [↑](#footnote-ref-484)
485. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-485)
486. Kessler, *Battle of the Gods*, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-486)
487. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-487)
488. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 530. [↑](#footnote-ref-488)
489. Weiser, *Jeremia* 1:445. [↑](#footnote-ref-489)
490. See the note and the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-490)
491. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 848. [↑](#footnote-ref-491)
492. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 765. [↑](#footnote-ref-492)
493. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1336. [↑](#footnote-ref-493)
494. *Against Apion* I.20. [↑](#footnote-ref-494)
495. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 373. [↑](#footnote-ref-495)
496. Mayer, *Commentary*, 476. [↑](#footnote-ref-496)
497. Bugenhagen, *In Ieremiam*, 447 (cf. Tyler, *Jeremiah*, 448). [↑](#footnote-ref-497)
498. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-498)
499. It might be tempting here to understand *ḥālāl* to mean traumatized (LXX has *traumatiai*! – see D. G. Garber, “A Vocabulary of Trauma in the Exilic Writings,” in B. E. Kelle et al. [eds.], *Interpreting Exile* [Leiden: Brill, 2011], 309-22). [↑](#footnote-ref-499)
500. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-500)
501. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 372. [↑](#footnote-ref-501)
502. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1344. [↑](#footnote-ref-502)
503. See the description in Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 499. [↑](#footnote-ref-503)
504. Volz, *Jeremia*, 441. [↑](#footnote-ref-504)
505. Hab 2:13 has the spelling *wәyîgә‘û* over against *wәyigә‘û* in Jer 51:58. [↑](#footnote-ref-505)
506. Hab 2:13 has straightforward yiqtol *yi‘āpû* over against the *waw*-consecutive *wәyā‘ēpû* in Jer 51:58, where the subject is extraposed (casus pendens; *TTH* 123a). [↑](#footnote-ref-506)
507. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 769. [↑](#footnote-ref-507)
508. Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 384, 385. [↑](#footnote-ref-508)
509. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 4:165. [↑](#footnote-ref-509)
510. So W. McKane, “Jeremiah’s Instructions to Seraiah,” in D. P. Wright et al. (eds.), *Pomegranates and Golden Bells* (J. Milgrom Festschrift; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 697-706. [↑](#footnote-ref-510)
511. C. L. Eggleston, *“See and Read All These Words”* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 94, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-511)
512. See O. Lipschitz, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 62-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-512)
513. See the comment on 36:11-14a. [↑](#footnote-ref-513)
514. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 506. [↑](#footnote-ref-514)
515. C. J. Sharp, “The Call of Jeremiah and Diaspora Politics,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 421-38 (432) [↑](#footnote-ref-515)
516. Miller, “Jeremiah,” on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-516)
517. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 856. [↑](#footnote-ref-517)
518. K. G. Friebel (*Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999], 154-69) assumes he would. [↑](#footnote-ref-518)
519. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-519)
520. K. D. Holroyd, “Multiple Speech Act Layers, Jeremiah, and the Future of Studies in Structural Theology,” in S. Riecker and J. Steinberg (eds.), *Das heilige Herz der Tora* (H. Koorevaar Festschrift; Aachen: Shaker, 2011), 79-94 (90). [↑](#footnote-ref-520)
521. B. Gosse, “Trois étapes de la rédaction du livre de Jérémie,” *ZAW* 111 (1999): 508-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-521)
522. M. Leuchter, “Sacred Space and Communal Legitimacy in Exile,” in M. J. Boda et al. (eds.), *The* *Prophets Speak on Forced Migration* (Atlanta: SBL, 2015), 77-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-522)
523. B. Gosse, “La malédiction contre Babylone de Jérémie 51,59-64 et les rédactions du livre de Jérémie,” *ZAW* 98 (1986): 383-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-523)
524. N. B. Levtow, “Text Production and Destruction in Ancient Israel,” in S. M. Olyan (ed.), *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion* (Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 111-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-524)
525. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 856. [↑](#footnote-ref-525)
526. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 502-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-526)
527. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 611. [↑](#footnote-ref-527)
528. See J. R. Lundbom, “Baruch, Seraiah, and Expanded Colophons in the Book of Jeremiah,” *JSOT* 36 (1986): 89-114 (96). [↑](#footnote-ref-528)
529. Cf. K. M. O’Connor, “Terror All Around,” in A. R. P. Diamond and L. Stulman (eds.), *Jeremiah (Dis)placed* (New York: Clark, 2011), 67-79 (78). [↑](#footnote-ref-529)
530. J. Smith argues this point on the basis of the nature of the Greek translation in “Jeremiah 52,” *Bulletin of the International Organization for* *Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 35 (2002): 55-96. [↑](#footnote-ref-530)
531. Wright, *Jeremiah*, 442. [↑](#footnote-ref-531)
532. C. Patton, “Layers of Meaning,” in A. O. Bellis and L. L. Grabbe (eds.), *The Priests in the Prophets* (London: Clark, 2004), 149-76 (167). [↑](#footnote-ref-532)
533. Clements, *Jeremiah*, 268-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-533)
534. R. F. Person, “II Kings 24,18 - 25,30 and Jeremiah 52,” *ZAW* 105 (1993): 174-205, provides a Hebrew synopsis of these texts and a retroversion of the Greek texts and compares them; see also R. F. Person, *The Kings-Isaiah and Kings-Jeremiah Recensions* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-534)
535. See the notes for detailed differences. P.-M. Bogaert (“Les trois forms de Jérémie 52,” in G. J. Norton and S. Pisano [eds.], *Tradition of the Text* [D. Barthélemy Festschrift; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1991], 1-7), A. Rofé (“Not Exile but Annihilation for Zedekiah’s People,” in L. Greenspoon and O. Munnich [eds.], *VIII Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1995], 165-70) and G. Fischer (“Jeremiah 52,” in B. A. Taylor [ed.], *X Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies* [Atlanta: SBL, 2001], 37-48) consider their implications for theories about the relationship of MT and LXX. [↑](#footnote-ref-535)
536. R. P. Carroll, “Intertextuality and the Book of Jeremiah,” inJ. C. Exum and D. J. A. Clines (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 55-78 (63); cf. “The Book of J,” in A. R. P. Diamond et al. (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 220-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-536)
537. G. Fischer, “Jeremía 52 — ein Schlüssel zum Jeremiabuch,” *Biblica* 79 (1998): 333-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-537)
538. See e.g., O. Lipschitz, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 49-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-538)
539. Barth, *CD* IV,1: 469, quoting from W. Vischer, *Das Christuszeugnis des Alten Testament* (Munich: Kaiser, 1935-42) 2:535. [↑](#footnote-ref-539)
540. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 859. [↑](#footnote-ref-540)
541. W. Brueggemann, “The Prophetic Word of God and History,” *Interpretation* 48 (1994): 239-52 (241). [↑](#footnote-ref-541)
542. Barth, *CD* IV,1: 468-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-542)
543. H. M. Barstad, “The City State of Jerusalem in the Neo-Babylonian Empire,” inJ. J. Ahn (ed.), *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 34-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-543)
544. The verb is niphal not pual or hophal as in 39:2, where see the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-544)
545. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-545)
546. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 538. [↑](#footnote-ref-546)
547. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1365. [↑](#footnote-ref-547)
548. O. Lipschitz, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-548)
549. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-549)
550. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, 528. [↑](#footnote-ref-550)
551. See the note on 1:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-551)
552. On different possibilities, see O. Lipschitz, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 59-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-552)
553. Cf. J. J. Ahn. “Forced Migrations Guiding the Exile,” inJ. J. Ahn (ed.), *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 173-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-553)
554. C. R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 101, 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-554)
555. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:1384. [↑](#footnote-ref-555)
556. See the comment on 42:2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-556)
557. Lipschitz, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*, 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-557)
558. See Lipschitz, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*, 102-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-558)
559. Lipschitz, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*, 349. [↑](#footnote-ref-559)
560. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 784. [↑](#footnote-ref-560)
561. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 613. [↑](#footnote-ref-561)
562. *ANET*, 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-562)
563. *ANET*, 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-563)
564. H. M. Barstad, “Empire,” in M. C. A. Korpel and L. L. Grabbe (eds.), *Open-Mindedness in the Bible and Beyond* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 11-24 (11-13). [↑](#footnote-ref-564)
565. M. H. Patton, *Hope for a Tender Sprig* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 81-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-565)
566. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 1:33. [↑](#footnote-ref-566)