

# Don't Forget Jerusalem's Destruction!

## The Perspective of the Book of Jeremiah

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The theme of our conference<sup>1</sup> is very intriguing. It establishes a connection between what was probably the most catastrophic event in the early history of "Israel", the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, and presumably the most valuable and important contribution of this community to mankind, namely the gift of the Torah, as a foundation for the Jewish and, later, Christian and other religions, and as inspiration for countless people ever since throughout the millennia. How does it come about that such a terrifying, traumatic experience results in such an overwhelmingly positive outcome?

The Book of Jeremiah does not directly answer this question. However, it furnishes some background to it. Jer arose out of the desire to deal more explicitly with Jerusalem's fall, and in this respect it is not only different from its peers, the other prophetic books, but also unmatched elsewhere in the Bible. I would like to exhibit Jer's uniqueness in three ways, and then reflect on its contribution to the topic of our conference and, more specifically, to the question raised above.

### 1. A Comparison with 2 Kings, Jer's Source

#### *1.1 The Presentation in 2 Kings*

The two Books of Kings offer an overview of Israel's history from the last moments of David's reign, in approximately 965 BCE,<sup>2</sup> to the favour shown to King Jehoiachin after 37 years as prisoner in exile, probably in 561 BCE.<sup>3</sup> They thus cover a time span of about four centuries, with a *dynamic towards*

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<sup>1</sup> I thank the organizers for having invited me to this conference. It is an honour for me to come back to the Pontifical Biblical Institute, my "Alma Mater" in Biblical studies, and to present some ideas from my studies on Jeremiah and his book. I am also grateful to Mrs Felicity Stephens for having corrected the English of this article.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kgs 1–2 reports David's enthronement of Solomon as his successor, and his death. For the dating, I follow the outline of Israelite history in KEEL *et al.*, *Orte*, 521; for more details on the events around Samaria's and Jerusalem's falls see BECKING, *Fall*, and LIPSCHITS, *Fall*.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Kgs 25:27–30; for the date see KEEL *et al.*, *Orte*, 576.

a “negative” ending – the fall of Jerusalem – narrated at length in the final chapter, 2 Kgs 25. The presentation consists of a mostly chronological report of the events, sometimes mixed with theological remarks.<sup>4</sup>

Jer 25:1–7 narrates the siege of Jerusalem, its fall and Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment upon King Zedekiah. The introduction to it, 2 Kgs 24:18–20, gives the latter’s rebellion against the Babylonian king as one reason for the former’s assault. The other reason is God’s wrath, also caused by the evil deeds of the Judean king.<sup>5</sup> These “theological” reasons do not differ from what has already been mentioned several times before. They are simply the final attestations of a long-established pattern of behaviour.

However, the outcome this time is more disastrous and depicted at much greater length than anywhere else, with the exception of 2 Kgs 17 (see below). 2 Kgs 25:8–17 goes on, after the capture of the city, to narrate the burning and destruction of both the city and the temple, the deportation of parts of the population into exile and the removal of the valuables taken from the temple to Babylon. Finally, vv. 18–21 mention the transportation of several officials, from various ranks,<sup>6</sup> and their killing in Riblah by King Nebuchadnezzar. The extent of the presentation, covering more than twenty verses, corresponds to its importance.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, in the whole of chapter 25, God only appears four times, always in connection with his temple,<sup>8</sup> never elsewhere or in another context. The description remains sober and reports facts without any interpretation, and seemingly without any sign of involvement.<sup>9</sup>

The account in 2 Kgs 17 of the fall of Northern Israel’s capital Samaria in 722–720 BCE is quite different. Here, vv. 1–6 narrate the historical event; a long, mainly *theological interpretation* of it follows in vv. 7–23; and its consequences, in the aftermath, are described at length in vv. 24–41.

The contrast between the two parallel texts recounting the destruction of capitals, Samaria and Jerusalem, in 2 Kgs 17 and 25 is astonishing. Although the emphasis and the sympathy of the (implicit) author of Kings stay with Judah,<sup>10</sup> he dedicates more space and reflective energy to the fall of Samaria, while completely bypassing the significance of the demolition of Jerusalem

<sup>4</sup> E.g. God giving King Solomon wisdom, 1 Kgs 5:9, or the evaluation formulae “do what is good / bad in the eyes of YHWH”, 1 Kgs 15:11, 26, and often, the last time in 2 Kgs 24:19 for King Zedekiah.

<sup>5</sup> These are common theological motifs (cf. the previous note); for YHWH’s wrath see also 1 Kgs 11:9; 16:7, 26, etc.

<sup>6</sup> For their numbers see ZIEMER, “Jahr”, esp. 198–199.

<sup>7</sup> One might even add to the length of the description the two following small units: the episode with the governor Gedaliah, vv. 22–26, and the grace given to King Jehoiachin already mentioned above, vv. 27–30.

<sup>8</sup> The references are 2 Kgs 25:9, 13 (twice), 16, always “the house of YHWH”.

<sup>9</sup> MARKL, “No Future”, 725.

<sup>10</sup> This is evident, for example, in the way he evaluates the separation of the northern kingdom in 1 Kgs 12, and in the continual negative remarks about its kings.

and even of the temple. As a result, the meaning and the impact of the most important fact, and also of the climax of the Books of Kings, are largely missing and are not reflected as elaborately as for the fall of Samaria.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.2 Jer as a Continuation and Deepening of the End of 2 Kings

It is against this background that Jer can be understood as *filling in* what is absent in 2 Kings. At first glance, Jer 52 simply seems to pick up at its end, repeating, almost *verbatim*, major portions of 2 Kgs 24:18–25:30.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, it is often regarded as an “appendix” to Jer,<sup>13</sup> and the differences are mostly neglected.

Yet Jer 52 is a *necessary conclusion* to the book,<sup>14</sup> aimed at from the beginning. The indication of the exile of Jerusalem's population “in the fifth month” of King Zedekiah's eleventh year, given as the final date in Jer 1:3, is only realized in Jer 52:12–15 and nowhere else within Jer. It serves as a frame for the book, and stimulates the reader to go on reading until this fulfilment in the final chapter. In a similar way, the removal of the temple's columns, basin (the “sea”), stands and remaining vessels to Babylon (Jer 27:19–22), announced through Jeremiah, awaits a realization; it is only reported in Jer 52:17–23.

This latter passage shows *significant differences* with respect to its source, 2 Kgs 25:13–17. It is substantially longer and lists more vessels. To this end, it picks up rare expressions from the sanctuary texts in the Book of Exodus and from King Solomon's building of the temple in 1 Kgs 7.<sup>15</sup> Special emphasis is given to the description of the columns in Jer 52:21–23; their beauty and preciousness are stressed much more than in its parallel and source 2 Kgs 25:17, showing a deliberate desire in Jer to *reshape the presentation*, and not simply to repeat what had been said before.

There are still *more differences* between 2 Kgs 25 and Jer 52; here are some of them:<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The comparison with the parallel account in 2 Chr 36:11–21 further confirms this impression. Therein motifs of evaluation and reflection (esp. vv. 12–16 and 21) are dominant with respect to the narration of the events (in vv. 11 and 17–20). Nevertheless, there are many links between the descriptions of Samaria's and Jerusalem's falls in 2 Kings; cf. Peter Dubovsky's article in this volume, “Suspicious Similarities”.

<sup>12</sup> The dependence of Jer 52 on 2 Kings is commonly assumed. There are only a few who do not accept it, e.g. HOBBS, *2 Kings*, 360. The longest missing part in Jer 52 concerns 2 Kgs 25:22–26; this Gedaliah episode, however, can be found, extremely extended, in Jer 40:7–43:7, or even beyond (for this see below 2.4).

<sup>13</sup> Thus still, recently, SCHMIDT, *Jeremia*, 338: “Geschichtlicher Anhang”. Cf. also LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 511: “Postscript”.

<sup>14</sup> For the function of Jer 52 within the book and also for its relationship with 2 Kings see FISCHER, “Jeremia 52 – ein Schlüssel”; a shorter English version appeared as: *idem*, “Jeremiah 52: A Test Case”.

<sup>15</sup> Examples are המנורות “the lamp stands”, הספנות “the basins” and המנקיות “the bowls”; for the references and further expressions see FISCHER, “Jeremia 52 – ein Schlüssel”, 53–55.

<sup>16</sup> “+” indicates additional text in Jer 52.

2 Kgs 25:3 “on the ninth day”	Jer 52:6 + “in the fourth month ...”
v. 4 no verb for the soldiers	v. 7 + “they fled and went out”
v. 5 “the king ... him”	v. 8 “the king ... Zedekiah”
v. 6 “in Ribla”	v. 9 + “in the land Hamat”
v. 7 no officials	v. 10 + “he killed also all officials ...”
no mention of length of imprisonment v. 11	+ “until the day of his death” (also v. 34)
v. 11 “the rest of the people”	v. 15 + “from the poor of the people ...”
v. 19 “five men”	v. 25 “seven men”

Several of these additional or different expressions are attested in the Hebrew as well as in the Greek version of Jer 52.<sup>17</sup> This clearly indicates the *expanding tendency* of Jer with respect to its source text. The punishment seems to be more severe in Jer (52:10, 11, 25), and the cowardly escape of the military is highlighted (v. 7); they do not face up to their responsibility for resistance to the Babylonians, but ultimately leave the civilians alone, without protection.<sup>18</sup>

Jer 52 is “out of place” within Jer. The “right position”, chronologically, is in Jer 39, between the last “interview” between King Zedekiah and Jeremiah in Jer 38 and the assembly camp for the deportation at Ramah in Jer 40. Jer 39:1–10 presents another account of Jerusalem’s fall. It is an *abbreviated version* of Jer 52, and different from it in several respects.<sup>19</sup> Jer 39:3 can be seen as a fulfilment of God’s announcement in Jer 1:15 that foreigners will come and set up their thrones at the gates of Jerusalem, as there is no other passage closer to it.<sup>20</sup> The repeated description of Jerusalem’s fall, in two variants, places great emphasis on it and produces a “*stereo*” *vision* of this important and traumatic event.

The existence of a parallel account in the right place raises the question of the *function of Jer 52* in its position. One hint is given immediately before the start, at the end of Jer 51: “thus far the words of Jeremiah” (51:64). This makes

<sup>17</sup> This is not the case for the longest addition, the list of three exiles in 52:28–30, which is only to be found in Hebrew.

<sup>18</sup> These two features, of a severe judgment and of irresponsible leaders, are typical for Jer. These alterations in Jer 52 thus confirm a trait present in the entire book.

<sup>19</sup> For the distinctive traits of Jer 39 and its relationship with Jer 52 see FISCHER, *Jeremia* 26–52, 349–357.

<sup>20</sup> This means that Jer 1:15 needs the specific description of Jer 39, just as Jer 1:3 requires 52:12. Jer 52 cannot be regarded as the realization of 1:15. These observations may indicate that the author, right from the beginning, deliberately devised this double description of Jerusalem’s fall in Jer 39 and 52.

clear that the words reported subsequently are not his. So Jer 52, being an *external testimony*, bears witness to the truth of the prophet's proclamation, showing that what he said became real in the course of time.<sup>21</sup>

It seems clear that the author of Jer deliberately picked up 2 Kgs 25, shaped it in his own way in chapter 52, adding to it and varying it, and intended, right from the beginning (1:3), that it should be the final culmination of his book.<sup>22</sup> He, too, brought in "anticipation", yet at the right time, in a shortened, quite distinct version in Jer 39.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, he focused almost his entire book on this crucial event (for this see below 2.4), so that the disastrous outcome<sup>24</sup> appears well prepared for throughout Jer, and God's judgment, understood as enacted in the fall of Jerusalem, seems more than justified. The intensive use of 2 Kgs 24:18–25:30 is striking; however, Jer also picks up other texts and elements of the Books of Kings,<sup>25</sup> which, as a whole, serve as a foundation.

## 2. A Comparison with Other Prophetic Books

It is common opinion that the final shape of all the prophetic books is not preexilic, but stems from a later time. This implies that *all of them* "knew" about the fall of Jerusalem. Therefore it is interesting how this crucial event is mirrored in them. I won't treat them in detail or systematically here; my intention is only to give an impression of the various approaches in them.

### 2.1 The Books of the Twelve

There are enormous differences among these books. The Books of Hosea, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Haggai *do not even mention* "Jerusalem".<sup>26</sup> This is not

<sup>21</sup> Jer 52 also has other functions: see FISCHER, *Jeremia: Prophet*, 29–32.

<sup>22</sup> The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, threatened / announced by God in Jer 7:14, is never reported before Jer 52:13. As in the cases mentioned before (see above p. 293, and n. 20), Jer 52 is "needed" as fulfilment. For various aspects of the temple's destruction see HAHN (ed.), *Zerstörungen*.

<sup>23</sup> Jer 39 differs from 52 also in the attention given to the fate of Jeremiah and the promise made to the Cushite Ebed-Melech (39:11–18).

<sup>24</sup> WÖHRLE, "Rehabilitierung", interprets the grace shown to King Jehoiachin positively; yet the preponderance of Jer 52 is negative, and the final verse seems to emphasize this by the addition of "until the day of his death", equivalent to the end of the Davidic dynasty.

<sup>25</sup> The names and dates, and the portrayal of the last Judean kings in Jer are mainly based on the narratives in 2 Kings. King Jehoiachin's exile (2 Kgs 24:8–17) is alluded to in Jer 24 and 29. King Josiah's reform (2 Kgs 22–23) remains in the background of Jer 11:2 and Jer 36, which are like negative reversals of it. King Manasseh (2 Kgs 21) is explicitly referred to in Jer 15:4. The connections between 2 Kgs 17, the fall of Samaria and Jer are also especially noteworthy: see FISCHER, "Relationship".

<sup>26</sup> This is explicable for Hosea, a prophet of the eighth century BCE in the northern kingdom. Jonah and Nahum, dealing with the Assyrian capital Nineveh, have another focus. So there are

to say that they don't know about its fate. Hab, for example, probably alludes to it with "the Chaldeans" in 1:6 who come for "judgment" and take people away in their net (1:12, 15). But all these five books were written down after 587 BCE, and they do not address this catastrophe, at least not directly.

Other Books of the Twelve *allow the reader to perceive the traumatic event* of Jerusalem's fall. The "Day of YHWH" in Joel 2:1–11 is connected with his "holy mountain" (v. 1); later on, *Joel* mentions that God will "turn around the fate of Judah and Jerusalem" (4:1 [Engl. 3:1]), supposing that they have had to suffer before, and that their children have been sold (v. 6). In *Amos* God announces that he will set ablaze the "palaces of Jerusalem" (2:4–5). *Amos* 9:1–10 describes destruction and deportation, but without clear references to buildings or dates. These verses may have in mind Jerusalem's fall, but it is difficult to prove.

*Obadiah* (v. 11) states: "they have cast lots over Jerusalem", and *Obad* 20 has the phrase "the exile of Jerusalem". *Micah* knows about the calamity approaching Jerusalem (1:9, 12) and about the deportation (1:16). *Mic* 3:12 announces that the city will be in ruins, and in 6:9–13 that God will strike it because of the iniquities of its population.<sup>27</sup> In *Zephaniah* God himself says that he will stretch out his hand against Jerusalem (1:4), and the rest of the first chapter describes symbolically this judgment as קָרַב, "sacrifice" on the "day of YHWH" (1:7–8), referring later on to specific places such as the "Fish Gate", the "Second Quarter" and the "Mortar" (1:10–11).<sup>28</sup>

The 28 occurrences of "Jerusalem" in *Zechariah* stand out and indicate the special emphasis of this prophetic book on the capital.<sup>29</sup> The first two passages, *Zech* 1:12, 16, already point in this direction, indicating divine compassion for Jerusalem through the question they ask and God's response to it. *Zech* knows about other nations waging war against Jerusalem (e.g. 12:3, 9), but only in one instance does it describe what really happened: "... the city will be taken, and the houses will be plundered, and the women will be slept with; and half of the city will go out into exile, but the rest of the people will not be wiped out from the city" (*Zech* 14:2). Immediately afterwards, in the next verse, God fights against those who do this (14:3).<sup>30</sup>

The last book of the Twelve, *Malachi*, mentions Jerusalem twice. *Mal* 2:11 ascribes guilt to it, specifically for the desecration of YHWH's sanctuary; in

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reasons why the name "Jerusalem" does not appear; it is like the expression "Zion", which only occurs in *Joel*, *Obadiah*, *Micah*, *Zephaniah* and *Zechariah* within the Twelve. Strangely, *Haggai*, although concentrating on the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, never mentions the name of the city. For the role of Jerusalem in the Books of the Twelve see BILIĆ, *Jerusalem*, 184–196.

<sup>27</sup> DECORZANT, *Gericht*, 96 and n. 215, discusses the possible identifications of the "city" in *Mic* 6:9 and opts for Jerusalem.

<sup>28</sup> Towards the end of the book, in *Zeph* 3:14–16, the city's fate is changed for good.

<sup>29</sup> See BILIĆ, *Jerusalem*, 282–308.

<sup>30</sup> Such divine protection is already indicated early in the book by God's unique promise for Jerusalem "... to be a wall of fire around (it)" (*Zech* 2:9); cf. FISCHER, *Theologien*, 129–130.

Mal 3:4 God will again accept favourably “the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem”. There is no clear indication of Jerusalem’s destruction anywhere in the book.

*To sum up:* Seven of the twelve “minor” prophets bring in the name of Jerusalem, whereas five of the Twelve never mention it. There is not one concrete reference to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, giving, for example, the names of the respective kings or specific events leading up to it. Some books describe judgment in a general way (Joel 2; Amos 9), others look back at it (Obad; Hab 1; Zech). Overall, most descriptions of this catastrophe are veiled or symbolically loaded (Zeph 1). There is also a clear *tendency to downplay* it by various means: many reports are very brief; the enormous losses and the brutality of warfare rarely enter the picture; and sometimes the focus changes to divine rescue very soon afterwards – Zech 14:2–3 offers a good illustration.

## 2.2 Jerusalem's Fall in the Book of Isaiah

The beginning of the Book of Isaiah establishes an Assyrian setting, dating the prophet’s career into the late eighth century BCE (Isa 1:1). This would exclude references to the events of 587 BCE. However, as commonly accepted, Isa also contains material from later, even postexilic, times. As a result, the book in its canonical shape *clearly shows familiarity* with what happened at the Babylonian assault and destruction of Jerusalem.

There are *several hints at Jerusalem’s fate* in the book, starting as early as Isa 1:7 “your cities are burnt with fire”.<sup>31</sup> Isa 1:21 levels an accusation of infidelity against the “faithful city” and, later on, Isa 1:25 introduces God’s judgment in a metaphorical way with “I will smelt your dross as with lye”. Similarly, other passages in Isa refer to a catastrophe, for example Isa 3:1–3, with the removal of any support for the city and its responsible citizens, and 3:8, with the statements “for Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen”. Isa 22:1–14 is one of the most outspoken texts, which might also refer to the Babylonian conquest.<sup>32</sup> Isa 22:3 mentions the flight of all commanders. This is the closest parallel to what is described in 2 Kgs 25:4–7. Further on, Isa 49:14–26 alludes several times to devastation. Towards the end of the book, Isa 64:9–10 explicitly mentions Zion’s and Jerusalem’s desolation and the burning of the temple.<sup>33</sup>

These references to Jerusalem’s fall in Isa are sporadic, mostly short and only occasionally identifiable. By contrast there is a *long and very precise report*

<sup>31</sup> BEUKEN, *Jesaja 1–12*, 69, understands Isa 1 against a postexilic background, and therefore also as able to refer to Jerusalem’s and Judah’s destruction by the Babylonians. ECK, *Jesaja 1*, 331–352, however, considers Isa 1:5–7a, 8 as relating to the Neo-assyrian period.

<sup>32</sup> BEUKEN, *Jesaja 13–27*, 248, sees connections with the siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE as well as with the Babylonian capture in 587/6. For Isa 22:5 he opts for a translation of מִקְרָקֶרֶקֶר as “von gewaltigem Krach”; it could also be rendered as “the wall breaks”, for the breaching of the city wall in 587.

<sup>33</sup> There are also other hints at the disaster that befell Jerusalem and Judah, e.g. in Isa 44:28; 52:2, 4–5, 9; 54:3.

of what supposedly happened at the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib in 701 BCE. Isa 36–39 has taken 2 Kgs 18:17–20:21 as a source,<sup>34</sup> in a way comparable to what is seen in Jer 52 with respect to 2 Kgs 24:18–25:30. It shows slight changes and also additions, the main one being King Hezekiah's prayer in Isa 38:9–20. Isa 36–38 describes Jerusalem being saved by God's intervention.<sup>35</sup> This idealized version presents an image of an "invulnerable Zion" in opposition to the facts.<sup>36</sup> Jerusalem does not fall to its assailants.

At the end of this long insertion from 2 Kings, in Isa 39 we find a description of a delegation from the Babylonian king Merodach-Baladan<sup>37</sup> to congratulate King Hezekiah on recovering from his illness, and Isaiah's dialogue with Hezekiah in reaction to it (vv. 3–8). The narrated time is situated chronologically at the *end of the eighth century BCE*.

The next verse is Isa 40:1, God's double exhortation of comfort to his people. It is generally seen as referring to the time of restoration after the exile,<sup>38</sup> dated to the *late sixth century BCE* or even later. All the intervening time is missing. The Book of Isaiah thus makes a jump of approximately two hundred years at this crucial juncture from Isa 39 to 40, obviously *deliberately omitting the most important event* in Israel's history in the first millennium BCE.

As a consequence, there is a *huge gap*. Isa gives no record of the last Judean monarchs and the events at the beginning of the sixth century: of King Jehoiakim, who rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar; of the subsequent first siege of Jerusalem in 597 BCE, leading to the deportation of King Jehoiachin and of thousands of the city's population; of King Zedekiah's renewed rebellion against Babylon, which caused the final siege of Jerusalem, lasting for eighteen months and ending in July 587 with the capture of the city, its destruction and the exile of many people;<sup>39</sup> of the aftermath of the destruction, with Gedaliah appointed as governor and Judeans going down to Egypt to escape Babylonian rule.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> BERGES, *Book*, 245–256, with a lengthy discussion.

<sup>35</sup> What really took place is narrated, with all verisimilitude, in 2 Kgs 18:13–16, corresponding also to Assyrian annals. King Hezekiah had to pay a high tribute to make the Assyrian troops withdraw from Jerusalem and lost great parts of the territory of Judah. Isa does not mention this.

<sup>36</sup> HARDMEIER, *Prophetie*, introduces yet another aspect. According to him, the historical background of these narrations in 2 Kgs 18–20 // Isa 36–38 is to be found in the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 588 BCE, more precisely the time of the *Belagerungspause*, the interval in the Assyrian siege caused by the dispatch of Egyptian troops (see Jer 37:5; *Prophetie*, 283–299 and 336–338). He sees the narrations as propaganda aimed at encouraging Israel to continue to resist the assault.

<sup>37</sup> He reportedly reigned from 721 to 710 and from 704 to 703 BCE; cf. BEUKEN, *Jesaja* 28–39, 451. For an interpretation of Isa 39 on the background of the promise to David in 2 Sam 7 see JANTHIAL, *L'oracle*, 256–263.

<sup>38</sup> BERGES, *Jesaja* 40–48, 98–100.

<sup>39</sup> For this date, see HARDMEIER, *Prophetie*, 247–251.

<sup>40</sup> In order to fill in this 'void', SCHMID, *Buchgestalten*, 249–50 and 315–319, has suggested, following ideas of E. Bosshard-Nepustil, R. G. Kratz and O. H. Steck, combining the books



As a result, Isa presents a very *idealistic, embellished view* of Jerusalem and its fate. The omission of the catastrophic events of 587 and their terrible consequences must have been conscious, as the author(s) of the book certainly knew about them. To make a comparison: it is like describing the history of the twentieth century, passing silently over the two world wars.

### 2.3 Ezekiel's Perception of Jerusalem's Fall

The Book of Ezekiel has a *twofold setting*. As the prophet is among those deported with King Jehoiachin in 597 BCE, he lives in Mesopotamia with the exiles.<sup>41</sup> But Ezekiel is lifted by the spirit and brought to Jerusalem for some time before the fall of Jerusalem (Ezek 8:3), and once again fourteen years later (Ezek 40:1).<sup>42</sup> Although contemporary with Jeremiah and with these events at the beginning of the sixth century BCE, Ezekiel thus has *no direct experience* of what happened in Jerusalem in 587.

This is mirrored in his book. Ezek 24:1–2 mentions the beginning of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, equivalent to the date given in 2 Kgs 25:1. Ezek 24:3–14 continues with a *משל*, an *allegory of a pot placed on the fire*, symbolizing the city which cannot be purified and therefore is judged relentlessly. The next small unit, 24:15–17, announces the death of the prophet's wife and forbids him to mourn. This is interpreted in vv. 18–24 as a sign for the “death” of God's sanctuary and the “pride of your power”,<sup>43</sup> which likewise will not be mourned. In the final passage, vv. 25–27, God tells Ezekiel that he will be informed about it by a *פליט* “escapee, fugitive”, here to be understood as meaning a deportee.<sup>44</sup>

This happens in Ezek 33:21. With a delay of nearly half a year,<sup>45</sup> the message “the city has been taken” arrives with those who had already been exiled to Babylonia. The *spatial and temporal distance* does not permit Ezekiel to be an “eye-witness”; the prophet hears about this crucial event only from afar and later, and it becomes a turning point for him. His mouth is opened again (v. 22),

of Isaiah and Jeremiah in the following way: after “First Isaiah” (Isa 1–39) Jer. and as a continuation Isa 40–66. This would, at least partially, result in a kind of ‘logical’ sequence; the transmitted forms of these books, however, keep them apart and display different profiles.

<sup>41</sup> Ezek 1:1 mentions the river Kebar, probably a channel of the Euphrates; Ezek 3:15 refers to Tel-Aviv as the name of one settlement there.

<sup>42</sup> Ezek 11:24–25 describes his return to the Golah in Mesopotamia. Later on, in Ezek 40:1–2, in a similar way as before in Ezek 8, God brings him to the “city” in *אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל*, which has to be understood as a reference to Jerusalem: see SEDLMEIER, *Ezekiel*, 271.

<sup>43</sup> Ezek 24:21, probably also referring to the temple, cf. GREENBERG, *Ezekiel*, 510–511. The text does not explicitly mention the destruction of the city, yet the context, with the death of sons and daughters by the sword, suggests it.

<sup>44</sup> SEDLMEIER, *Ezekiel*, 150.

<sup>45</sup> Jer 52:6 dates the city's fall to the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year, probably corresponding to the “twelfth year of our exile” in Ezek 33:21, in which the message reaches Ezekiel “on the fifth day of the tenth month”.

and in the following chapters his proclamation will be full of good tidings,<sup>46</sup> more than ever before in the book. It is as if the fall of Jerusalem triggers a new era, blessed by God's undeserved, unexpected grace.

Between Ezekiel's "journey" to Jerusalem in Ezek 8–11 and the allegory in Ezek 24, two passages *allude symbolically to the final days* of Jerusalem as Judah's capital. Ezek 17:13–21 talks about the last king, Zedekiah, without mentioning his name; yet the context,<sup>47</sup> and v. 20 with "I will bring him to Babylon", make it clear that this is connected to the capture of the city. Two chapters later, the simile of a young lion being caught or trapped and brought to the Babylonian king also depicts King Zedekiah's fate (Ezek 19:5–9).

The Book of Ezekiel testifies thus, in various instances, to Jerusalem's fall. It does it in a way that may be compared to *looking through binoculars*: the event is far away, viewed like a night sky in which the light of distant stars arrives delayed, much later – the stars observed may not even exist any longer. Ezek's presentation of 587 is predominantly figurative,<sup>48</sup> and the catastrophe is regarded as a watershed in Israel's history with God.

#### 2.4 The Presentation in the Book of Jeremiah

Jer stands in *marked contrast*, if not opposition, to the ways in which its "kindred" prophetic books, Isa and Ezek, deal with Jerusalem's fall. Jer is different in many respects:

##### (a) Frequency

The name of the city is mentioned 102 times in Jer,<sup>49</sup> much more often than in most other scrolls of the Hebrew Bible, a sign of the special attention given to it in this book.

##### (b) Extension

The many occurrences of the name go together with the continuing attention that Jer pays to Jerusalem's fate. From the beginning of the book (Jer 1:3, 15; 2:2) to its very end (Jer 52), most of the book deals with Judah's capital.<sup>50</sup> If one

<sup>46</sup> Ezek 34–48 contain many messages of hope for Israel.

<sup>47</sup> Ezek 17:12 had already mentioned the deportation of another Judean king to Babylon – King Jehoiachin – and v. 17 contains two expressions for besiegement.

<sup>48</sup> One might still add Ezek 9, which contains a divine command to slay the evildoers in the city, to the texts already mentioned. For further aspects of Ezekiel's presentation of Jerusalem's fall see DASCHKE, *City*, 61–102.

<sup>49</sup> This is equivalent to an average of nearly two instances per chapter. The statistics follow the count of *TDOT* 6 (1990) 348 (from which BibleWorks differs). "Jerusalem" has 660 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. Jer lies in second place for frequency after 2 Chron, with more than 120 mentions. To compare: Isa mentions Jerusalem 49 times, Ezek 26 times, 1 and 2 Kings together 90 times.

<sup>50</sup> The name "Jerusalem" is missing only in the chapters 10, 12, 16, 20–21, 28, 30–31, 41, 43, 45–50. However, even in these chapters, Jerusalem is often in view, e.g. in Jer 10:17

includes indirect references to Jerusalem as “Zion” or by mentioning God’s temple,<sup>51</sup> there are only six chapters which do not have it in view: Jer 43 and 45–49. This can easily be explained by their different orientation: Jer 43 describes the flight of the rest of the Judeans to Egypt, Jer 45 contains an oracle for Baruch and the following chapters consist of oracles against foreign nations. Jer is concentrated almost entirely on Jerusalem.

### (c) Focalization

Within this emphasis on the city, Jer chooses the forty final years of the Davidic monarchy in Judah, apparently establishing a negative contrast with its beginnings under King David and King Solomon.<sup>52</sup> The chronological indications are more prominent in the second half of the book and mainly accentuate two very limited periods of time – King Jehoiakim’s fourth year, used as a structural device<sup>53</sup> and, predominating, the final phase of King Zedekiah’s reign.<sup>54</sup> For the latter period, Jer describes many events in detail, in a kind of “close-up”,<sup>55</sup> so that the impression of what happened becomes vivid and involving to the readers. This is very far from Isa’s avoidance and Ezek’s symbolic presentation of Jerusalem’s fall.

### (d) Point of View

After Isa 39, Isa started a *journey through time* from the end of the eighth century BCE, only “touching down” 200 years later, long after the catastrophe was over. Only a brief remark in Isa 40:2 looks back at the past judgment of Jerusalem. Ezek employs a kind of “helicopter” experience, with the prophet temporarily being “flown” into Jerusalem and its temple (Ezek 8:3); apart from this it looks on the city’s fate from afar, depending on information from others.

It is very different with Jer. Although it was written long after the catastrophe, approximately three-quarters of Jer treats the time before it.<sup>56</sup> Jer presents these last years before the fall of Jerusalem from a *contemporaneous and eye-witness perspective*. The main human figure – the prophet Jeremiah – functions like a camera lens, describing in a true-to-life way what is happening to him and in the society around him.<sup>57</sup>

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with the exhortation to prepare luggage for the exile; in Jer 12:7 with God talking about “my house”, that is his temple in Jerusalem; in Jer 16:2, 9 in “at this place”, referring to the city (cf. Jer 7:3–7 [3 times]), etc.

<sup>51</sup> Some indications for the chapters where “Jerusalem” is not mentioned: “Zion” is used for example in Jer 30:17; 50:5, the “house of YHWH” in Jer 28:1; 41:5.

<sup>52</sup> FISCHER, *Jeremia 1–25*, 128–129.

<sup>53</sup> Jer 25:1; 36:1; 45:1; 46:2: three times for the opening of larger sections, and once (in 45:1) as a kind of frame (for Jer 36–45).

<sup>54</sup> Passages in Jer 21, 24, 27–29, 32–34, 37–39, and 52 are dated to this period.

<sup>55</sup> See the similar title of the collection of articles of LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah Closer Up*.

<sup>56</sup> The fall of the city is only narrated in Jer 39, leaving thirteen chapters (up to Jer 52) for the events afterwards.

<sup>57</sup> Other metaphorical descriptions of the specific manner of Jer’s presentation might say that Jer analyses this period around 587 BCE with a magnifying glass; or investigates it

*(e) Confrontations*

Conflicts shape vast sections of Jer. God starts to accuse the community and its leaders in Jer 2, and continues to do so for many chapters.<sup>58</sup> Jeremiah has lively encounters with King Zedekiah (Jer 34:1–7; 37:17–21; 38:14–26), officials (Jer 26:12–19; 37:11–16; 38:27), priests (Jer 20:1–6; 26:7–11; 27:16–22; 29:29) and other prophets (Jer 26:7–11; 28:1–16).<sup>59</sup> Arguments are put forward in a precise and concrete way so that the audience – the listeners of Jeremiah and readers of Jer – can partake in the clashes and the conflicting interpretations like spectators at a drama.<sup>60</sup>

Such a presentation enables the reader to focus in detail on the various groups and their positions: for example, the factions in Jer 26; the efforts made to avoid the catastrophe, starting with God in Jer 2; immediate reactions, as in Jer 4:10, 19, 30–31 and elsewhere. The *extent, intensity and acuteness* of these descriptions leading up to Jerusalem's fall are unparalleled in the Bible.<sup>61</sup> They produce a vibrant and colourful impression and heighten further the involvement of the addressees of the book.

*(f) Effect*

This kind of presentation serves yet another function. It *lays bare guilt*. In this respect, Jer is unequalled, as it emphasizes this aspect more than any other biblical scroll and distributes guilt to nearly everybody.<sup>62</sup> From the “low” to the “high” ones (Jer 5:1–5), entire families (Jer 7:16–20), all influential groups (e.g. Jer 1:18; 2:8) and even past generations (Jer 16:11; King Manasseh in 15:4) are to blame for the catastrophe. They are all responsible for the fall of Jerusalem.

*(g) Mixtures*

For a long time Jer *oscillates* between threats of a disaster which could still be avoided and announcements of inevitable destruction. Jer 15–19 may be an

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with a microscope, making sections and slides of attitudes and important events. Some photographic “shots” are “stills” (e.g. Jer 32:1–2; 33:1; 34:1), and they may be combined with a kind of video “clip” (Jer 32:3–5; 34:2–7).

<sup>58</sup> Jer 2–9, 11–19, 22–27 and other chapters are full of reproaches.

<sup>59</sup> Jer 29 indirectly reflects Jeremiah's opposition to prophets in Babylon, by means of a “letter” and a reaction to another letter (v. 29) in vv. 24–32. These are not direct encounters.

<sup>60</sup> This “dialogical” form of presentation, as a struggle between various positions, challenges the addressees of Jer. They are confronted with a choice and with having to decide for themselves which path to follow.

<sup>61</sup> The attacks of the foe are described as brutal and cruel; see e.g. 5:16–17; 6:23; 9:20–21; 12:12 ... 52:10–11. To quote some of the language used: “open grave ... they eat your sons and your daughters” (5:16–17); “cruel ... no mercy” (6:23); “the slain of the daughter my people” (8:23); “corpses like manure on the surface of the field” (9:21), etc.

<sup>62</sup> Among the rare exceptions are Ahikam (Jer 26:24), Ebed-Melech (Jer 38:7–13; 39:15–18) and Baruch (e.g. in Jer 36 and 45). To a large extent responsibility is laid on the “false prophets”, a theme more developed in Jer than anywhere else.

example: 15:1–4 and, similarly, 16:1–9 leave no hope. Yet 17:7–8 blesses the one confiding in YHWH; 17:19–27 promises a future to those keeping the Sabbath; and, in 18:1–8, Jeremiah's visit to the potter and its divine interpretation leave the impression that conversion could lead to a "reshaping" by God without destruction. The people's rejection in 18:12 can then be seen as a turning point, unleashing God's command to shatter the pot as a symbol of the city's fate (19:10–11).<sup>63</sup>

Jer employs interesting techniques to draw attention to its presentation. It mixes prosaic narrations (Jer 1; 7; 11 etc.) with poetic passages full of images (e.g. Jer 2–6; 8–10), thus creating a *blend* of interpretative frames and rich symbolic fillings,<sup>64</sup> and a kaleidoscopic impression.

Similarly, the *structure of Jer and its chronology*<sup>65</sup> also contribute to conveying an impression of the chaos caused by Jerusalem's fall, depicted for the first time, in an incomplete way, in Jer 39.<sup>66</sup> There is a dynamic, going even beyond this date in Jer 42–44, showing the continued disobedience of the Judeans who are fleeing to Egypt.<sup>67</sup> This further extends the people's rejection of YHWH through time towards the readers of Jer; this message is possibly a central aim of the book. But the overall development of Jer reaches its final point only in chapter 52, with the repeated, prolonged and intensified version of Jerusalem's fall as a kind of "last word".

### To Sum Up

Jer's presentation of the events around 587 BCE is very different, not only from the other prophetic scrolls, but from all other biblical books. Jer contains the *longest, sharpest and most detailed depiction* of Jerusalem's fall and the events leading to it.<sup>68</sup> This focus, its intensity and the manner of its elaboration, testify to important objectives. The author behind Jer must have had special interests in mind; in my view he wanted to counterbalance or complement the uneven or unsatisfactory presentations of some of his prophetic colleagues, or rather their books, and to emphasize the importance of Jerusalem's fall and

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<sup>63</sup> Even this passage is not decisive. Jer 26:3 offers yet another chance for conversion later on in the book, and this goes on to the very last moment before the capture of the city: Jeremiah offers King Zedekiah the chance to save his life and Jerusalem in Jer 38:17.

<sup>64</sup> STULMAN, *Order*, has contributed considerably to the understanding of the intertwining of poetry and prose in Jer.

<sup>65</sup> For a short outline, see e.g. FISCHER, *Jeremia 1–25*, 81.

<sup>66</sup> The most important *lacuna* in Jer 39 is its failure to describe what happened to the temple.

<sup>67</sup> Even in the wake of the catastrophe, the people of Judah did not change; so there is a correspondence between their failure to listen before Jerusalem's destruction and after it.

<sup>68</sup> Intertextual allusions in Jer 6 connect to accusations against other cities, such as Gibeah and Samaria, which are here in Jer summarized and applied to Jerusalem: FISCHER, *Jeremia 1–25*, 285. Cf. also the use of Nah 3:19, the final verse on Nineveh's fate, in Jer 30:12 for Jerusalem.

the necessity of reflecting on it adequately, in order to learn for the future, so as to avoid similar catastrophes.

### 3. The Relationship between Deuteronomy and Jer

To understand Jer and its extended description of Jerusalem's fall properly, it is necessary to turn to the Book of Deuteronomy as the *main source*, and especially to Deut 28.<sup>69</sup> The proximity of Jer to Deut and Deuteronomistic literature has often been observed; no other biblical book is closer to Jer than Deut. For the scope of our investigation, two texts deserve special attention: the threats of Deut 28, and the law about an apostate city in Deut 13.

#### 3.1 A Realization of the Curses of Deut 28

Deut 28 is the *chapter most referenced in Jer*, and no other biblical book refers to it more than Jer does. This already underlines its special importance. I will mention here only some "exclusive links"<sup>70</sup> and central findings for the relationship between Deut 28 and Jer that are relevant for our topic.<sup>71</sup>

"And their corpse / the corpse of this people will be food for (all) the birds of heaven and the animals of the earth, and nobody will disturb (them)" is only to be found in Deut 28:26 and Jer 7:33. Jer 7 talks about *Jerusalem's apostasy*, in the context of the Topheth immediately before in v. 32, and applies Deuteronomy's threat to the city.

The phrase "to put an iron yoke on the neck" exclusively connects Deut 28:48 and Jer 28:14 – Jeremiah's confrontation of Hananiah about the *subjugation to Babylon*.

That "a nation from afar" will come, "a nation whose tongue you cannot hear" is a curse in Deut 28:49. Jer 5:15 picks it up and extends it, describing a nation: "whose tongue you do not know, and you cannot hear what it speaks". Jer obviously *clarifies* an obscure expression, שמע לשון, "to hear the tongue",<sup>72</sup> by expanding it. Jer 5:16–18 develops further the disastrous impact of this foreign nation.

The phrase "all the words of this Torah / which I spoke ... written in this scroll" occurs only in Deut 28:58 and Jer 25:13. As Moses emphasized the relevance of written words, so God does in Jer 25 with respect to his judgment set down in Jeremiah's book.

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<sup>69</sup> For Jer's general dependence on Deut, see FISCHER, "Einfluss", with references to earlier studies. For the extraordinary significance of Deut 28 for Jer, see *idem*, "Fulfilment".

<sup>70</sup> This term designates expressions only to be found in two literary *corpora*, in this case Deut 28 and Jer.

<sup>71</sup> For further aspects see FISCHER, "Fulfilment".

<sup>72</sup> The probable meaning seems to be "to understand the language".

That God finds “pleasure” (verb **שׂוּעַ**) in “doing good”, with the verb **טוּב** in the Hiphil, to his people forms an exclusive link between Deut 28:63 and Jer 32:41.<sup>73</sup> In Deut 28 this refers back to past times, and for the future the opposite is announced: that God will rejoice in harming them. On the contrary, in Jer 32, God *promises to rejoice in doing good* to his people for some time to come.

There are, in addition, more than twenty close connections between Deut 28 and Jer, nearly all from the section containing the curses.<sup>74</sup> This indicates that the author of Jer apparently saw the curses of Deut 28 as being realized in the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, and used them many times throughout his book to indicate that *what Moses had foretold had been fulfilled in this catastrophe*.<sup>75</sup> The curses of Deut 28 served him as a welcome source for depicting adequately the downfall of Jerusalem in the Babylonian conquest.

Jer displays *several differences* from Deut 28. In Deuteronomy Moses is the speaker, whereas in most passages in Jer it is God who speaks. This gives it a higher authority, especially relevant in the case of the reversal mentioned above (Jer 32:41, in opposition to Deut 28:63). One may conclude from this that God is free to change what Moses had announced, an aspect that will show up again below in section 3.2. The connections with Deut 28:48–49 tend to be expanded in Jer, literarily in Jer 5:15 and dramatically in Jer 28, where the whole chapter plays on the image of the yoke. They may be interpreted as a confirmation of the direction of dependence, from Deut to Jer, the latter picking up and developing the former. Jer is beyond Deut, going further in a number of ways.

### 3.2 The Law about an Apostate City in Deut 13

Deut 13:13–19 contains the last and worst of three cases of apostasy, in which a whole city is seduced by wicked men who “have gone out ... from your midst” (**מִקְרַבְךָ ... יֵצְאוּ**, v. 14) to instigate defection from YHWH. This city shall be smitten and burned (v. 16), and it shall become a “tel / heap of ruins forever” and it “will not be built up again” (**תֵּל עוֹלָם לֹא תִבְנֶה עוֹד**, v. 17). There is a broad consensus that this command, in a veiled form, talks also about the *fate of Jerusalem*.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> However, there is already a similar expression in Deut 30:9 (with **לְטוֹב**, “for good”): see EHRENREICH, *Wähle*, 193–194, who understands it as “Auflösung des Fluches” of Deut 28:63.

<sup>74</sup> Deut 28:1–14, the section containing the blessings, is significantly less present in Jer. Here some examples from it: **דֶּרֶךְ אֶחָד**, “one way”, is found in Deut 28:7, 25 and Jer 32:39; **קָרָא** in the niphal + **שָׁם** + **עַל**, “(God’s) name is called upon ...”, links Deut 28:10 and Jer 14:9; the combination of the verbs **שָׁמַר**, **שָׁמַר** and **עָשָׂה**, “listen”, “preserve”, “do”, in the context of commandments, is a unique connection between Deut 28:13 and Jer 35:18, where they relate to the Rechabites.

<sup>75</sup> There is an interesting aspect concerning the dating of Deut 28. In the view of many scholars this chapter is no announcement for the future, but – at least in part – a description of what has already happened at the fall of Jerusalem. In this case what is literarily presented as a realization (of Moses’ curses) in Jer actually is a confirmation and deepening.

<sup>76</sup> See e.g. CHRISTENSEN, *Deuteronomy*, 281.

In Jer 30:18–21, the first part of the second poem of the “scroll or booklet of consolation” (Jer 30–31), there are two exclusive links to this law in Deut 13. “To go out from the midst” there relates to the ruler of the community, whom God allows to come close to him (Jer 30:21). The same phrase which, in Deuteronomy, introduced the people seducing the city to venerate other gods, in Jer pictures a *leader being an exemplary model* for extraordinary closeness to God.

The city as “eternal tel”, “never to be rebuilt”, is the second exclusive connection, this time with Jer 30:18: “... the city will be built upon its tel”. As in the previous example, Jer changes the meaning, this time even more contradictorily. *God revokes the law* that Moses had given in his name in Deut 13.<sup>77</sup> Instead of being eternally in ruins, the city – intended to be Jerusalem – is promised rebuilding and renewed splendour. The reversal of Deut 13 in Jer 30 is all the more astonishing as other phrases from that chapter retain the same sense in Jer.<sup>78</sup>

The Book of Jeremiah thus *dares to challenge laws of the Torah*,<sup>79</sup> and to show that God can grant mercy beyond what is stated therein. The reversals of Deut 28:63 and of Deut 13:13–19 in Jer 32:41 and Jer 30:18–21 are signs not only of a process of literary reworking but, even more, of a different message and, probably, a distinct theological way of thinking in some respects.

### Summing Up

Deuteronomy, especially Deut 13 and 28, contains *veiled references*<sup>80</sup> to Jerusalem and its fall. It uses specific expressions that occur again in Jer, distributed over the entire book.<sup>81</sup> The author of Jer seems to have often and deliberately chosen these phrases, and even developed them further. Doing so, he indicated that

<sup>77</sup> OTTO, “Deuteronomium und Pentateuch”, esp. 171–172, interprets Jer 30 as “abrogating” Deut 13. Jer 3:1–4:4, symbolically allowing the woman who has become another man’s wife to return to her former husband, is a similar case of divine revocation of a law of Deuteronomy, in this instance of Deut 24:1–4. See also 2 Kgs 17:20, God’s rejection of “the whole seed of Israel”, which is annulled by YHWH’s conditional oath in Jer 31:37.

<sup>78</sup> The first law, directed against seductive prophets, uses the expression דבר סרה (Deut 13:6), literally “to speak rebellion”, and is only encountered again in Jer 28:16 and 29:32, referring there to the false prophets Hananiah and Shemaiah. The second law, dealing with seduction by a family member, encourages lack of mercy in such a case by the two verbs חוט, “to pity” and חמל, “to be compassionate” (Deut 13:9). In Jer 13:14 God himself declares that he will act in this way towards the inhabitants of the country, adding more emphasis with a third verb, רחם, “to have mercy”. Cf. FISCHER, “Einfluss”, 260–261.

<sup>79</sup> This raises the question of its legitimization for doing so. The call of the prophet Jeremiah, especially in Jer 1:7, 9 which refer to Deut 18:18 (God’s promise of a prophet like Moses), is part of the answer. Jeremiah, right from the start, is presented as equal to Moses and as his announced successor.

<sup>80</sup> As Jerusalem is never mentioned in the Torah, the identification remains open. The distinctive expressions, the respective comparisons and the connections with similar passages in the prophets allow for the supposition that Jerusalem was in view in these particular texts of Deuteronomy.

<sup>81</sup> FISCHER, “Fulfilment”, 46.



Moses' announced curses (Deut 28) had become reality and that Jerusalem had received its deserved punishment according to the law of Deut 13. Yet he did not stop there, but went on to testify to a changed time when *this judgment had been overcome*, when God was gracious once again, annulling his harsh law and rejoicing in doing good to his people. The fall of Jerusalem is not Jer's last word, although the book ends with it.

## 4. Jer and the Rise of the Torah

### 4.1 Jer "after" the Torah

As I understand it, the Torah was written, for the most part, in the two centuries after the fall of Jerusalem. Jer is apparently even later. Its author knows all the books from Genesis to Deuteronomy in their final form, quotes important texts from them and further develops some of their ideas.<sup>82</sup> The remark of the final chapter of the Torah, "No prophet has risen again in Israel like Moses" (Deut 34:10), is superseded and *overruled by God's call* of Jeremiah in Jer 1, which deliberately portrays him as Moses' successor. Jer thus cannot contribute to the first phase of the rise of the Torah, namely its origins.

However Jer does testify to the *next stage*, the growing appreciation of the Torah. Most of Jer's quotations of or allusions to its texts show a profound esteem for their message and values, and presuppose their validity and authority. God's promise in Jer 31:33, to "give my Torah"<sup>83</sup> in their interior, and I will write it upon their heart", indicates the value of divine instruction in these books and their lasting function as an indispensable base for a good relationship with God.

### 4.2 Jer Supporting the Torah

Jer presupposes the books of the Torah and uses them extensively. In many instances, it *runs parallel* to the Torah, and especially to the Book of Deuteronomy. The combination of Deut 1:1 "These are the words which Moses spoke ..." with Deut 1:3 "Moses spoke ... according to everything which YHWH had commanded him on their behalf" is mirrored in the *Incipit* of Jer. Jer 1:1 "The words of Jeremiah ..." is complemented, in a way unique for prophetic books, in Jer 1:2 by "to whom the word of YHWH came". The beginnings of both books thus introduce two levels of speech as belonging together: an initial address by God is passed on to the people by the prophet, and both dimensions belong together.

Looking at the *dynamic* of the people's relationship with God, there is a high degree of similarity between Deuteronomy and Jer. God has ordered the people

<sup>82</sup> FISCHER, *Stand der theologischen Diskussion*, 134–136.

<sup>83</sup> תּוֹרָתִי, "my torah", could also simply mean "my instruction"; however, the parallelism with the verb "write" and the overall use of תּוֹרָה in the Book of Jeremiah suggests an interpretation as referring to the five books. Cf. FISCHER, "ותפשי התורה לא ידעוני".

to listen to his voice and to obey his commandments; this has generally not been done.<sup>84</sup> As a consequence, the people have to leave the country and go into exile. If, while they are there, they return to God, he will show mercy once more and bring them back to their homeland.<sup>85</sup> Jer thus shares fundamental theological concepts with the Torah.

#### 4.3 Jer in Tension with the Torah

The general acceptance of the Torah in Jer is only one side of the story. There are also instances where Jer advocates other positions, or even *runs counter* to some of its concepts. Two such cases became obvious above, when dealing with Deut 28:63 and Deut 13. Another indication that Jer moves beyond the Torah<sup>86</sup> is the oath in Jer 16:14–15 // 23:7–8. Its new formula no longer invokes the God of the exodus out of Egypt, but YHWH who leads the people out of the countries of the exile.

Two passages in Jer *critique groups connected with the Torah*. Jer 2:8 וְתַפְּשֵׁי הַתּוֹרָה לֹא יֵדְעוּנִי, “and (those) grasping / handling the Torah do not know me”, reproaches these people for having no personal relationship with God. And Jer 8:8 responds to a group convinced that they are in possession of YHWH’s Torah: אֲכַן הִנֵּה לְשִׁקְרַת עֵשׂה עַל שִׁקְרַת סֹפְרִים, “Indeed, behold, for / to deceit the pen of deceit of scribes has made (it?)”. In this text, scribes are connected with the Torah, and they are accused of distorting it in a systematic way.

Jer 2:8 and 8:8 reveal a *deeper problem* with the Torah: the humans who are in charge of writing and interpreting it. The mediation of God’s revelation is a crucial issue in biblical faith, and Deut and Jer represent two different options. Compared with its source, Exod 20:18–21, Deut 5:23–33 elevates Moses’ role as mediator, sanctioning it by a divine response and approval (vv. 28–31).<sup>87</sup> Against this background, Jer 31:34 has special significance: “No longer will a man teach his friend ...: ‘Know YHWH!’”, because they all will know me, from their low to their high ones ...”. The intimate communion of the whole community with God dispenses with the need for mediators.<sup>88</sup>

#### 4.4 Different Perspectives

While both the Torah and the prophetic books take their canonical shape after the fall of Jerusalem, they deal with this key event very differently. The books of

<sup>84</sup> For the notable exception of Deut 34:9 see SONNET, “Redefining”.

<sup>85</sup> Partially in Deut 4:25–31, more developed in Deut 29:17–30:5; all the elements mentioned can be found many times in Jer.

<sup>86</sup> Other instances of Jer’s difference from the Torah include the “New Covenant” in Jer 31:31–34, the attitude towards the “ark of the covenant” in Jer 3:16 and the critique of sacrifices in Jer 7:21–22.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. OTTO, *Deuteronomium* 4,44–11,32, 758–762.

<sup>88</sup> This forms a contrast with the insistence of Deuteronomy on teaching and learning, see BRAULIK, “Deuteronomium”.

the Torah choose a *perspective* “from before”, looking occasionally at the “future” with veiled, covert glances (Deut 4:25–28; 29:18–27, etc.) and trying to lay a religious and legal foundation for the community of survivors of this catastrophe.<sup>89</sup>

Most prophetic books, on the other hand, opt for another perspective, mainly *looking back* at Jerusalem’s destruction in the past. They do it occasionally, often *en passant*, and move on to other concerns. Exceptions are the books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah: they both deal at length with Jerusalem’s fall and from a perspective that actually presents this time as personal experience. However, Jer is still different from Ezek, with its distanced view. It stands out in its immediate, involved manner of presentation, with the prophet observing the events from close by and focusing on them at length.

#### 4.5 Scope

Jer directly focuses on this the downfall of Jerusalem, with the immense losses, the internal struggles within the society, and the continued rejection of God’s word as the main reason for the that fall. In doing so, *Jer penetrates deeper into the paradoxical divine plans* to discover that God intends to bring new life and a still greater salvation after the disaster. Jer 29–33 shows this, drawing also on ideas from the Book of Isaiah.

The “prophetic” perspective of Jer, and also of other prophets, thus complements the Torah, in bearing witness more directly to the restoration after the fall, fostering hope and developing new paths to follow in order to avoid what had happened in 587 BCE. These prophetic books, and Jer preeminently,<sup>90</sup> testify to the apparent contrast between this traumatic catastrophe and its *extremely fruitful impact* in the following centuries.

“Don’t forget Jerusalem’s destruction!” is an intense exhortation not to repeat former mistakes and is essential for survival. Jer is a *constant reminder* not to forget the darkest era of the history of Israel and Judah. It confronts its audience with past guilt and failure in order to allow it to grow spiritually through the analysis of this disaster and, by not bypassing it, to discover the divine gift of true life.

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<sup>89</sup> MARKL, “No Future”, 727, shows how the Moab covenant offers a solution, being hinted at by the references to it in 2 Kgs 22–23.

<sup>90</sup> See especially the questions in Jer 8:4–5.

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