VIOLENCE AGAINST JUDAH AND JERUSALEM:
THE RHETORIC OF DESTRUCTION WITHIN JEREMIAH 1–6

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Abstract
This article argues that for an appropriate understanding of the rhetoric of destruction in Jeremiah two points are crucial. First, to pay attention to the placement of the units containing such rhetoric. Secondly, to distinguish between the pre-exilic addressees of the prophet in the intern world of the book on the one hand, and the intended book readers, who live after the catastrophe of 586 BCE, on the other. As test cases Jer. 4.5-15 and Jer. 6.9-15 are examined.

Introduction

The main theme of the book of Jeremiah is the conflict between Babylon and Judah which finally lead to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE and to the exile of the people. Therefore, it is by no means astonishing that the book contains many images of and statements about war, violence and destruction. Three 'voices' in the book may serve as examples for this:[1]

a. Jer. 6.5: Warriors to each other against Jerusalem:

'Rise up, and let us attack at night
and let us destroy her (i.e., Jerusalem's) palaces!'

b. Jer. 6.11aβ.b: Yhwh to Jeremiah:

'Pour it (i.e., the wrath of God) out on (the) suckling in the street
and on (the) gathering of young men together'.

c. Jer. 6.29-30: Narrator to book readers:

A bellow snorted from strong fire,
(but) lead in vain he (i.e., the refiner) refined, refined
and the wicked were not separated out.
'Rejected silver', they (i.e., the nations) called them,
for Yhwh has rejected them.

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1. The translations of the biblical texts in this article are my own.

Such statements are of course not exclusively found in the book of Jeremiah. For example, the motive of the killing of a suckling—the most innocent and weak member of society—occurs several times in the Hebrew Bible and other works of the ancient Near East.[2] However, the occurrence of such rhetoric in Jeremiah as well as in other biblical canonical texts undoubtedly presents a problem: as history has demonstrated, violent statements within sacred texts have encouraged their readers to act violently. Therefore, it is necessary to learn how to read those texts and how they should not be understood.[3]

For an appropriate understanding of the rhetoric of destruction in Jeremiah I consider two points to be crucial. First, to pay attention to the placement of the units containing such rhetoric. Secondly, to distinguish between the pre-exilic addressees of the prophet in the intern world of the book on the one hand, and the intended book readers, who already live beyond the catastrophe of 586 BCE, on the other. In this study I will concentrate on the first part of (the masoretic book[4] of) Jeremiah (Jer. 1–6). I will demonstrate that there is a turning point in Jer. 4.5 with a dramatic increase of rhetoric of destruction. Then I will examine as a test case two units in which Yhwh appears as God of destruction (Jer. 4.5-15 and Jer. 6.9-15) focusing on the functions of the rhetoric of destruction. Finally, I will point to some critical positions concerning the image of Yhwh as God of destruction within the book of Jeremiah.

2.   Cf. Rüdiger Lux, 'Die Kinder auf der Gasse. Ein Kindheitsmotiv in der prophetischen Gerichts- und Heilsverkündigung', in *'Schaffe mir Kinder...' Beiträge zur Kindheit im alten Israel und in seinen Nachbarkulturen* (ed. A. Kunz-Lübcke and R. Lux; Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte, 21; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), pp. 197-221 (p. 205 n. 41).

3.   Cf. Gerlinde Baumann, *Gottesbilder der Gewalt im Alten Testament verstehen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), pp. 72-83.

4.   MT-Jer. and LXX-Jer. impose a significantly different structure; see, with respect to the first units, Karin Finsterbusch, 'MT-Jer 1.1–3.5 und LXX-Jer 1.1–3.5. Kommunikationsebenen und rhetorische Strukturen', *BZ* 56 (2012), pp. 247-63. The question of how the masoretic text of the book of Jeremiah and its Greek translation relate to each other is extensively debated; see Georg Fischer, *Jeremia. Der Stand der theologischen Diskussion* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007), pp. 31-45; Armin Lange, *Handbuch der Textfunde biblischer Bücher von Qumran und den anderen Fundorten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), pp. 304-314; Emanuel Tov, 'The Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah in Light of Its Textual History', in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible. Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (ed. E. Tov; VT.S, 72; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), pp. 363-84; Rüdiger Liwak, 'Vierzig Jahre Forschung zum Jeremiabuch. I. Grundlagen', *ThR* 76 (2011), pp. 131-79 (163-73).

1. *The Structure of Jeremiah 1–6 according to the Different Levels of Communication*

The difficulty in finding a coherent order in the book of Jeremiah is frequently observed. There is no consensus with respect to the criteria of arrangement and of demarcation of units (as a cursory look at the commentaries shows). To my mind, not enough attention was paid to the fact that the book as a whole is a narrative.[5] Therefore, it should be first and foremost analyzed as a narrative. The book of Jeremiah is in some respects comparable to Deuteronomy: in both cases, we have a book narrator that tells his readers a story by mainly reporting long speeches. The speakers are Moses and Jeremiah, respectively, both speaking on behalf of God. Unlike Moses, however, Jeremiah in the intern world of the book quotes alongside God's words frequently himself (cf. 1.6) and other persons such as the inhabitants of the north (cf. 3.22b-25), the personified Jerusalem (cf. 4.19-21[6]) and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah (cf. 6.19-21). In most cases, I believe, the voices can be identified with a high degree of probability by introduction formulas[7] and/or other rhetorical devices.[8]

With help of the two main levels of communication the structure of Jeremiah 1–6 can be described as follows:

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5. Usually, prophetic works are not regarded as 'narratives'; cf. Jean-Pierre Sonnet, *The Book within the Book. Writing in Deuteronomy* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), p. 11. For the analysis of narratives in the Hebrew Bible see especially Jean-Louis Ska, *'Our Fathers Have Told Us'. Introduction to the Analysis of the Hebrew Narratives* (Rome: Bible Institute, 2000).

6. The 'I' refers to Jerusalem; cf. Frederick W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, o Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (BibOr, 44; Rome: Bible Institute, 1993), p. 139.

7. Cf. Jer. 3.6.

8. Due to the constraints of this article only three examples can be given here: First, in the case of Jer. 4.5-15 (quoted below) the authors and redactors, immediately before the shift of speakers, introduce a keyword that indicates who is going to speak: end of v. 7: 'inhabitants', v. 8: inhabitants speak; end of v. 9: 'prophets', v. 10: Jeremiah speaks; end of v. 12: 'them' (people of Judah/Jerusalem), v. 13: people speak. Second, Jer. 10.17-25 contains a sequence of speakers (Jeremiah–Judah–Jeremiah–Judah); with help of the keywords, the speakers can be easily identified: end of v. 18: 'they' (i.e., the Judaeans), vv. 19-20: Judah speaks; end of v. 22: 'cities of Judah', vv. 23-25: Judah speaks. Third, in Jer. 10.1-16 a second voice is interwoven four times into the oracle of God (vv. 6-8, 10, 12-13, 16). It is the voice of Israel, who is immediately addressed before Jeremiah quotes this second voice (v. 5). Cf. Karin Finsterbusch, 'Gegen die Furcht vor den Göttern der Welt: Eine Art "Psalm" Jeremias für Israel in MT-Jer 10,1-16', in *'Ich will Dir danken unter den Völkern' (Ps 57,10). Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Gebetsliteratur* (ed. A. Grund *et al.*; Festschrift B. Janowski; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2013), pp. 356-72.

(I) 1.1-3: Narrator to the book readers: introduction to the book Time the narrator refers to: 13th year of Josiah–Exile of Jerusalem (586 BCE)
(II) 1.4–6.28: Jeremiah to the people of Judah Time/perspective: pre-exilic (cf. 3.6)
(I) 6.29-30: Narrator[9] to book readers: concluding remarks Time of the alluded event: destruction of Judah/Jerusalem (586 BCE)

The table shows the crucial difference between level I and level II in Jeremiah 1–6: for the narrator and the book readers the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem and the exile are already *past events* (cf. Jer. 1.3). In contrast, for Jeremiah and his Judaean addressees in the intern world of the book[10] there is a possibility that these events may take place in their *future*.

9.   Most commentators understand Jer. 6.27-30 as a dialogue between Yhwh and Jeremiah; see, e.g., Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 447-48; Georg Fischer, *Jeremiah 1-25* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2005), p. 282. The 'I' in v. 27 refers undoubtedly to Yhwh, speaking to 'you', who is his prophet (it is Jeremiah's task to assay the way of the people). Verse 28 is best understood as Jeremiah's response to Yhwh, presenting the result of his assay regarding the *present* people ('they are all stubborn'). However, vv. 29-30 is in my view not part of the dialogue, but a distant narrative of the rejection of the people by Yhwh that *already happened* (3. pers. sing.!). The speaker alludes to the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah in 586 BCE (cf. the metaphor 'fire' in v. 29 according to *qere*). These observations point to the narrator as speaker.

10.   The book readers must know who the addressees of the *dramatis personae* are (cf. the case of Deuteronomy: the narrator gives this information in his introduction, Deut. 1.1-5). The book readers can conclude that in the *intern world of Jeremiah*, most *oracles* collected in Jer. 1–6 were proclaimed during the reign of King Josiah (because of the explicit references to the time of Josiah, cf. Jer. 1.2 and 3.6). The question remains who, in the intern world of the book, the addressees of the *whole units* in Jer. 1–6 are, including not only the divine oracles but also Jeremiah's call, his comments etc. The narrator gives the answer in Jer. 36. Jeremiah 36 is certainly not a historical report, even if it may contain valuable historically true information about the production of the prophetic collections; cf. Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 184-88. Rather, the account is to be taken first and foremost as a hermeneutical key to understanding *the intern organisation of the book*; see esp. Hermann-Josef Stipp, 'Baruchs Erben. Die Schriftprophetie im Spiegel von Jer 36', in '*Wer darf heraufziehen zum Berg JHWHs?'. Beiträge zu Prophetie und Poesie des Alten Testaments* (ed. H. Irsigler; Festschrift Ö. Steingrimsson; St. Ottilien: EOS; 2002), pp. 145-70 (166-67), and Eckart Otto, 'Jeremia und die Tora. Ein nachexilischer Diskurs', in R. Achenbach *et al.*, *Tora in der Hebräischen Bibel. Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte und synchronen Logik diachroner Transformationen* (BZAR, 7; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), pp. 134-82 (146-47). According to Jer. 36, Jeremiah was ordered at a certain moment in history, namely in the fourth year

In the first units of the book on the second level of communication, we do not find a *massive* rhetoric of destruction. Rather, the first units have a kind of 'introductory' function, containing Jeremiah's report of his call and commission (1.4-19), as well as a most critical divine analysis of the unfaithful behaviour of present Judah (2.1–3.5[11]), and a call for repentance to the north with the perspective of a peaceful life for Israel and Judah in the future (3.6–4.4). If Judah and Israel had obeyed and returned to Yhwh at that point after hearing these divine words, proclaimed by Jeremiah, all would have been well. However, this is not the case, as the continuation of the book shows. With Jer. 4.5 the tone changes significantly.[12] The rhetoric of destruction now dominates, because the *focus* in the following units lies almost completely on the foe from the north and on the details of the pronounced devastation of Judah and Jerusalem in the future.[13] These units have a 'dramatic' function: they illustrate the dimensions of the destruction in all its callousness.

The sequence of these units is arranged as follows (and represents my own suggestion as to a possible structure):

of King Jehoiakim (605 BCE), to write down the *already promulgated divine oracles* for public reading to Judaean addressees in Jerusalem in order to cause the people to return. After the first scroll was burned by the king, Jeremiah dictated the text of the first scroll all over again to the scribe Baruch, who produced thus a second scroll. Jeremiah 36.32 concludes with the sentence 'and many (words) like these were added to them'. It is most meaningful that the subject is not specified; the act of adding words is not limited to Jeremiah or Baruch; cf. Otto, 'Jeremia', pp. 147-48. In light of this account, the book readers must conclude that alongside the material *about* Jeremiah and the material relating to the time *beyond* the lifetime of the prophet (Jer. 52), material was added and revised *by the prophet himself* between 605 BCE and 586 BCE (cf. Jer. 1.3). Consequently, in the intern world of the book, Jeremiah is to be seen as responsible for beginning his words with the report on his call or for adding the interwoven voices of different speakers into the divine oracles (for example Jer. 4.8, 10, 13; 6.10-15). On a diachronic level, however, Jeremiah is to be treated 'as the creature of its author or authors, who intend to convey meaning to us, as readers, through their portrayal of him' (Stuart Weeks, 'Jeremiah as a Prophetic Book', in *Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* [ed. H.M. Barstad and R.G. Kratz; BZAW, 388; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 265-74 (272).

11. For the structure of this unit see Finsterbusch,'Kommunikationsebenen'.

12. Cf. Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25*, p. 145. The change in Jer. 4.5 is also underscored by the orders of Yhwh to a *group* of prophets in the following units, whereas in the first units God's prophetic addressee was Jeremiah *alone*.

13. Cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Daughter of Zion*, pp. 137-142; John Hill, *Fried or Foe? The Figure of Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah* MT (Biblical Interpretation Series, 40; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), pp. 64-65.

4.5-31: Jeremiah quotes and comments God's words to a group of prophets
4.5-15:   directive to proclaim:
announcement of the coming enemy (end: *appeal to repentance*)
4.16-31:   directive to proclaim:
announcement of the coming war (end: '*death*')
5.1-19: Jeremiah illustrates a process (investigation in Jerusalem—exile of the people) by quoting different voices
5.20–6.23: Jeremiah quotes and comments God's words to a group of prophets
5.20 (introduction):
Declare this in the house of Jacob, and make it heard in Judah, saying:
5.21–6.8: directive to listen:
announcement of the coming war (end: *appeal to repentance*)
6.9-15:   messenger formula:
announcement of the advancing enemy (end: '*fall*')
6.16-21:   messenger formula:
announcement of divine judgement (end: '*perish*')
6.22-23:   messenger formula:
announcement of the advancing enemy (end: '*against you*')
6.24-28: Jeremiah illustrates different perspectives of the announced devastation of Judah and of his role as prophet by quoting different voices

The unit Jer. 4.5-31 contains two oracles, the unit Jer. 5.20-6.23 four. The *first* oracle in both units ends up with an urgent warning: Lady Jerusalem should wash her heart from evil 'now' (4.14-15), and she should correct herself 'now' (6.8). The following oracles announce what will happen in case the people do not return: the end will be destruction and death. The perspectives of the devastation and its consequences are further underlined and intensified by the two collages of different voices (Jer. 5.1-19; 6.24-28). I will now analyze the rhetoric of destruction in Jer. 4.5-15, the first subunit within Jer. 4.5-31; and in Jer. 6.9-15, the second subunit within Jer. 5.20–6.23.

2. *Jeremiah 4.5-15: Rhetoric of Destruction alongside the Call to Return*

Jeremiah 4.5 opens with a directive of Yhwh to a largely anonymous prophetic group ('you')[14] which Jeremiah belongs to.[15] Alternating voices are used in the structure of the subunit Jer. 4.5-15.[16] The divine oracle which

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14. Jeremiah quotes God's order to the group to pronounce his oracle. Therefore, this group must be a group of prophets, and not merely messengers or heralds; *pace* William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1. A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 149.

15. Jeremiah's reaction in v. 10a indicates that he himself belongs to the prophetic group (cf. 6.9, 10 and see below).

16. Jeremiah 4.16 contains a new directive for the prophetic group, marking the beginning of a new subunit (4.16-31). Cf. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1 25*, p. 133: 'The most

the group must proclaim begins in v. 5aβ and continues through v. 15. Interwoven are the voices of the people (vv. 8[17] and 13[18]) and the voice of Jeremiah (v. 10).[19] Within the intern world of the book, all voices are quoted by Jeremiah.

> [*Jeremiah quotes Yhwh's words to a group of prophets:*]
> 5aα 'Declare in Judah, and in Jerusalem make hear and say: [20]
> 5aβ "Now[21] blow the trumpet in the land!
> 5bα Cry out, fill (i.e., cry out with full voice) and say (to each other):

satisfactory procedure, it appears, is to find in the clusters of imperatives or prohibitions the beginning of respective units'. However, Holladay fails to see in 4.16 the beginning of a new unit.

17. The speakers ('we') *react* to the announced events which in their perspective *have already happened*. Therefore, the speakers should be considered as the suffering inhabitants; cf. Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25*, p. 211. According to Holladay, *Jeremiah 1 25*, p. 146, and Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 20*, p. 334, Jeremiah is speaking to the people (v. 8a) and on their behalf (v. 8b). However, v. 8 is one single sentence. The imperatives in v. 8a can be easily interpreted as directives among the people to each other, cf. v. 5bβ.

18. As in v. 8, the 'we' *react* to the announced events which in their perspective *have already happened*; cf. Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25*, p. 211. According to Holladay, *Jeremiah 1–25*, p. 147, v. 13a continues the war news and is thus spoken by Yhwh, whereas v. 13b is spoken by the people. However, in vv. 11-12 Yhwh speaks *about* the people and his judgement; in v. 13 the tone changes with the הנה.

19. The interwoven voices are not heard by the 'original' addressees of the prophets. Verse 8 (as v. 13) is not part of the divine oracle, because it contains a statement *about* Yhwh. Thus, v. 9 is not the continuation of v. 8, but of v. 7; v. 11 does clearly not continue v. 10, but v. 9 (vv. 9 and 11 are introduced by time indicators). In the intern world of the book, the interwoven voices should be ascribed to Jeremiah, who inserted them 'secondarily' (cf. Jeremiah's own comment in v. 10). See also above, n. 10.

The systematic interchange of speakers is certainly one of the most striking features in the book of Jeremiah; cf. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1–25*, p. 137. Holladay notes that there is a similar quantum jump in the Greek drama. An interesting look at the phenomenon of the participant-reference shifts in the book of Jeremiah is provided by Oliver Glanz, 'Who is Speaking—Who is Listening? How Information Technology Can Confirm the Integrity of the Text', in *Tradition and Innovation in Biblical Interpretation. Studies Presented to Professor Eep Talstra on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. W.T. van Peursen and J.W. Dyk; Studia Semitica Neerlandica, 57; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2011), pp. 337-59. Concerning the phenomenon of the intervowen voices see also Finsterbusch, *Furcht*.

20. The Imperative ואמרו is to be understood in the sense of לאמר, cf. Jer. 5.20, and further 31.10; 46.14; 50.2; and see Taro Odashima, 'Zu einem verborgenen "Weitblick" im Jeremiabuch. Beobachtungen zu Jer 4,5aα-β', in *Prophetie und geschichtliche Wirklichkeit im alten Israel* (ed. R. Liwak and S. Wagner; Festschrift S. Herrmann; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991), pp. 270-89 (278). Odashima, however, fails to recognize that the divine oracle follows immediately after v. 5aα and not only after v. 5bα.

21. Many commentators read תקעו with *qere*; see, e.g., Holladay, *Jeremiah 1–25*, p. 140; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, p. 332. However, it is not impossible that the sentence begins with ו, cf. Jer. 9.21.

5bβ <Gather together and let us[22] go into the fortified cities!>
6 Set up a flag, to Zion take refuge, don't just stand there!
For I (i.e., Yhwh) am bringing evil from the north and a great shatter.
7 A lion has come up from his thicket and a destroyer of nations set out,
he has gone forth from his place to make your land a desolation,
your cities will be ruined[23] without inhabitant.

> [*Inhabitants to each other in view of the lion:*]
> 8 'Because of this put on sackcloth, lament and wail,
> for the burning anger of Yhwh has not turned away from us'.

9 And it will happen on that day—oracle of Yhwh:
The heart of the king will fail and the heart of the officials,
and the priests will be appalled and the prophets astounded.

> [*Jeremiah to Yhwh:*]
> 10 And I said: 'Ah, my Lord Yhwh,
> really you have deceived, deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying:
> "Peace will be with you!", but the sword has reached the soul'.

11 At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem:
<A harsh wind (from) the bare heights in the desert
(is coming) toward the daughter-my-people,
a wind not to winnow and not to swift out,
12 a wind stronger than these (winds) will come on my behalf.[24]
Now, indeed I will speak judgments against them.> [25]

> [*The people at that time to each other:*]
> 13 'Look! Like clouds he comes up,
> and like a whirlwind (are) his chariots,
> swifter than eagles are his horses,
> woe to us, for we are devastated!'

14 Wash your heart from evil, Jerusalem, that you may be saved!
How long will it (i.e., the evil) lodge within you (as) your schemes for harm?
15 For a voice declares (harm) from Dan and makes hear harm from Mount
Ephraim"'.

Jeremiah's addressees hear or read God's directives to the prophetic group
(v. 5aα). Subsequently, they hear or read the divine oracle, which at the
beginning breathes a sense of utmost urgency (v. 5bα and 6a: twice three
imperatives!). According to the first part of the oracle (until v. 12), Yhwh is

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22. The 'us' are clearly the Judaeans. Therefore, the ואמרו in v. 5bα must refer to
the Judaeans.

23. MT תצינה is probably a scribal error (read: תנצינה, cf. Eduard König, *Hebräisches
und aramäisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* [Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlags-
buchhandlung, 7th edn, 1936], p. 285).

24. Cf. Isa. 6.8; König, *Wörterbuch*, p. 192.

25. Cf. Jer. 1.16.

going to cause vast destruction of land and people: שֶׁבֶר גָּדוֹל (v. 6b).[26] The dimension of the danger is illustrated by several metaphors from nature: the lion is a metaphor for cruelty and power of the enemy (v. 7), the strong wind from the desert (the scirocco) a metaphor for intensity and uncontrollable speed of destruction (v. 11).[27]

The last aspect is echoed in the cry of the people in v. 13 by the metaphors of cloud, whirlwind and eagle.[28] In the people's cry in v. 8, there is a highly emotional tone; the vast destruction is described as an expression of God's *burning anger* (חֲרוֹן אַף יְהוָה). Also Jeremiah's response to God's announced censure of the kings, princes, priests and prophets (v. 9) is highly emotional: it is an expression of shock and critique.[29]

With the help of the artfully interwoven voices, Jeremiah[30] intensifies the horror of the future destruction found in the first part of the oracle. However, the aim of the oracle is expressed in the second part, in vv. 14-15: Lady Jerusalem should clean herself. Therefore, in light of those two verses, the Judaean addressees within the world of the book should understand the preceding rhetoric of destruction undoubtedly as a *warning*. The dramatic message is quite clear: it is still not too late. If they return now, Yhwh will not destroy them (cf. Jer. 36.2-3). Or as Kathleen M. O'Connor puts it, Jeremiah's dystopian rhetoric 'acts as a kind of shock therapy to frighten the community into altering its idolatrous ways and, thereby, averting the impending catastrophe'.[31]

The book readers, or in historical terms, the intended Jewish addressees, living in the postexilic (supposedly Persian and/or Hellenistic) period knew of course that the images of the vast destruction had become reality. In terms of the text: God *did* repay evil (רָעָה; v. 14) with evil (רָעָה; vv. 6, 14). For them, Jer. 4.5-15 provides mainly an *explanation* for the catastrophe.

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26. Cf. Jer. 6.1; 14.17; 48.3; 50.22; 51.54.

27. Cf. Job Y. Jindo, *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered. A Cognitive Approach to Poetic Prophecy in Jeremiah 1–24* (HSM, 64; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), pp. 190-91.

28. Cf. Jindo, *Metaphor*, p. 192.

29. Jeremiah quotes a shalom-oracle (cf. Jer. 14.13; 23.17). Obviously, at the time of the proclamation of the shalom-oracle in Jeremiah's represented world, the prophet himself trusted it. Otherwise, his first massive opposition to Yhwh in the book would not have been understandable. In the Jeremianic tradition, 'only here is it admitted that the prophets were themselves deceived rather than the deceivers' (Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah. A Commentary* [Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986], p. 161).

30. See above, n. 19.

31. Kathleen M. O'Connor, 'Jeremiah's Two Visions of the Future', in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature* (ed. E. Ben Zvi; Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society, 92; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), pp. 86-104 (102).

Guilty Judah refused to return. Jerusalem listened neither to Jeremiah nor to other prophets.

There is another point. In contrast for example to Deuteronomy, I believe the authors or redactors of Jeremiah did not intend their addressees to *identify* themselves with the addressees in the intern world of the book.[32] However, *after* the catastrophe is in some respect a bit like *before* the catastrophe. Therefore, the intention of texts like Jer. 4.5-15 can be described not only as *explanatory* but as *paraenetic* as well: the addressees, after reading or hearing such texts, may analyze *their* 'status quo'. They may ask themselves if there is need for a return (in order to prevent another catastrophe like the one that took place in 586 BCE).

3. *Jeremiah 6.9-15: Rhetoric of Destruction and the Explanation of its Radicalism*

The first verse of the unit Jer. 5.20–6.23 serves as a general introduction:

> [*Jeremiah quotes Yhwh's words to a group of prophets:*]
> 'Declare this in the house of Jacob, und make it heard in Judah, saying: "...."'

The first oracle Jer. 5.21–6.8, which the group of prophets is to proclaim to the Judaeans,[33] contains vivid images of the coming war against Jerusalem. However, it ends with an appeal to repentance: Jerusalem should correct herself (6.8). Each of the next three oracles begins with the messenger formula (6.9a; 6.16a; 6.22a);[34] in each oracle the destruction of city, land and inhabitants plays a central role. I turn now to the oracle Jer. 6.9 and the added voices of Jeremiah and Yhwh:

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32. Within the world of Deuteronomy, Moses, on his last day, hands over the last part of God's law, which is valid for all generations to come, to Israel ('you'). The reader should identify himself with the 'you' Moses speaks to. Concerning this 'rhetoric of identification' see Karin Finsterbusch, *Deuteronomium. Eine Einführung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), p. 213. Within the world of Jeremiah, the prophet proclaims divine oracles directed at and limited to a specific generation in a specific historical period.

33. In Jer. 6.1, the Judaeans are called 'sons of Benjamin'; cf. Jan Joosten, 'Les Benjaminites au milieu de Jérusalem. Jérémie VI 1ss et Juges XIX-XX', *VT* 49 (1999), pp. 65-72 (71-72): 'Nous avons soutenu que le vocative "Benjaminites" en Jer vi 1 ne doit pas être pris au pied de la lettre—les destinataires de la prophétie sont Judéens—mais qu'il s'agit d'un trope renvoyant au récit du crime de Guivéa (Jg xix-xx). Ainsi, le texte laisse sous-entendre que ceux qui se sont retranchés à Jérusalem aux jours de Jérémie sont comparables, moralement, aux Benjaminites criminels des jours d'antan, et que le sort qui a touché ces derniers les menace eux aussi'.

34. If the messenger formula in Jer. 1–6 comes at midpoint, it is explicitly connected with the context, e.g. Jer. 6.6: כי כה אמר יהוה צבאות; Jer. 6.21: לכן כה אמר יהוה.

6.9 'Thus Yhwh of hosts has said:
<They shall glean, glean as the vine, the remnant of Israel!
"Bring again your hand like a grape-picker over the shoots!">'

> 10 [*Jeremiah's comment:*]
> To whom shall I speak and give testimony that they may listen?
> Look! Uncircumcised (is) their ear, and they cannot listen.
> Look! The word of Yhwh has been to them an (object) of scorn, [35]
> they take no pleasure in it.
> 11aα And with the wrath of Yhwh I am filled,
> I am weary of holding (it).[36]

> [*Yhwh to Jeremiah:*]
> 11aβ 'Pour out (the wrath) on (the) suckling in the street,
> 11aγ and on (the) gathering of young men together.
> 11b For even husband and wife will be taken, the old with the one full
> of years.
> 12 And their houses will be turned over to others, fields and wives
> together,
> for I will stretch out my hand against the inhabitants of the land—
> oracle of Yhwh.
> 13 For from the least of them to the greatest of them,
> everyone is greedy for unjust gain,
> and from prophet to priest everyone deals falsely.
> 14 They wanted to heal the shatter of my people lightly,
> saying <Shalom, shalom!>,
> but there (was/is/will be) no shalom.
> 15 They were put to shame, for they have committed abomination.
> Indeed they are not at all ashamed, indeed they do not know how to
> blush.[37]
> Therefore they shall fall among those falling,
> at the time I reckon with them, they will stumble—has said Yhwh'.

How would Jeremiah's addressees in the intern world of the book under-
stand the 'remnant of Israel' in the oracle in v. 9?[38] In their perspective,
the remnant may designate the surviving Israelite inhabitants of the north-
ern kingdom, and/or the inhabitants of the small vassal state Judah during
the reign of Assyria, and/or the surviving inhabitants after the attack of
the foreign army, described in the preceding oracle (cf. Jer. 6.1-6). How-
ever, the decisive point is that the subject in the oracle, 'they', will utterly

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35. Cf. Ps. 31.12.
36. Contra Lux, 'Kinder', p. 205, who translates 'zurückhalten'.
37. The infinitive can be better understood as niphal (instead of hiphil; cf. Jer. 8.12).
Niphal is 'the usual parallel with בוש, *Qal*, elsewhere in the book of Jeremiah' (Geof-
frey H. Parke-Taylor, *The Formation of the Book of Jeremiah. Doublets and Recurring
Phrases* (SBLMS, 51; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2000), p. 95.
38. In the book of Jeremiah, the expression 'remnant of Israel' occurs only in 6.9.

destroy the remnant. The 'they' are supposedly the warriors mentioned in Jer. 6.3.[39] The gleaning metaphor 'conveys extreme judgement'.[40] In 6.9b Yhwh identifies himself as the cause of destruction: he himself will command the foreign emperor ('you') to complete his work.[41]

In the added comment of Jeremiah (vv. 10 and 11aα) and the reaction of Yhwh (vv. 11aβ-15),[42] the *radicalism* of the announced catastrophe is explained. *Every adult member* in society is guilty: from the least to the highest (cf. v. 13a), from priest to prophet (cf. v. 13b-15).[43] Their guilt is *constant* and *severe*, which is expressed by the metaphor of the uncircumcised ears (v. 10). Consequently, the divine judgement will be comprehensive. It will fall on everyone, even on the suckling playing in the streets (v. 11aβ). Although the preceding oracle ended with an appeal to return (cf. 6.8), Jeremiah's addressees learn now that is it *nearly* too late to return. Yhwh has already given his prophet the order to pour out his wrath (v. 11aβ).

For book readers living in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, Jer. 6.9-16 rescues above all the idea of a just God: in spite of *continuous* intensive prophetic warnings, as is demonstrated in the units in Jer. 4.5–6.28, the Judaeans did not return. Thus, the vast destruction at the beginning of the 6th century BCE is to be understood as a just and understandable divine *reaction*.

39. Another possibility is to refer the 'they' to the 'Foe from the North'; see Jindo, *Metaphor*, p. 200.

40. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, p. 424.

41. Contra Jindo, who maintains (*Metaphor*, p. 200): 'It is not explicitly stated to whom 6.9b is addressed; however, because Jeremiah responds to this utterance in the next verse, we can understand 6.9b to be addressed to him. God asks Jeremiah to act like a grape gatherer toward the "branches" of the vine before the arrival of the enemy'. In my view, it is not reasonable to assume that God commands first to destroy (9a, cf. 11aβ-15) and immediately afterwards to preserve (9b). For divine warfare in ancient Near Eastern texts see especially Reinhard Achenbach, 'Divine Warfare and Yhwh's Wars: Religious Ideologies of War in the Ancient Near East and in the Old Testament', in *The Ancient Near East in the 12th–10th Centuries BCE: Culture and History* (ed. G. Galil and A. Gilboa; AOAT, 312; Münster: Ugarit, 2012), pp. 1-27.

42. Cf. Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25*, p. 260; v. 11aβ is not to be understood as an isolated appeal of the prophet to the deity or the enemy (v. 12 continues v. 11aβ-b); *pace* Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 196.

43. As Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, 'The Priests and the Temple Cult in the Book of Jeremiah', in *Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (ed. H.M. Barstad and R.G. Kratz; BZAW, 388; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 233-64 (237-38), has convincingly shown, the priests and prophets remain subject in vv. 14 and 15. The word 'abomination' (v. 15) refers most likely 'to the failure of the religious leadership to bring the people's sins to their attention. We may therefore conclude that, as in Jer. 5.31, the priests, as well as the prophets, are accused of being irresponsible religious leaders rather than of failings within the cultic realm'.

4. *Other Perspectives on the Destruction and the Justice of God within the Book of Jeremiah*

The analysed texts are genuine 'theological' literature. Their postexilic authors and redactors tried very hard to associate the God of Israel with the destruction experienced at the beginning of the 6th century BCE. They tried to exonerate their God and to explain this disaster with the help of a sin-punishment-cycle. Although this is the dominant pattern in the book of Jeremiah (as well as in other literature in the Second Temple period),[44] it is not the only one.

First, we find some surprising elements of hope alongside the rhetoric of destruction. I quote Jeremiah's interwoven comment in the second oracle, Jer. 4.16-31 (within the unit Jer. 4.5-31):

> 23 I saw the earth, and look! *tohuwabohu*,
> and (I saw) the heavens, and their light was not there.
> 24 I saw the mountains, and look! They were quaking
> and all the hills were tossing about.
> 25 I saw, and look! The human was not there
> and all the birds of the skies had fled.
> 26 I saw, and look! The *karmel* was a desert
> and all its cities were ruined before Yhwh, before his burning anger.
> 27 For thus had said Yhwh (and thus it came to pass):
> 'All the land will be desolate,
> yet I will not[45] annihilate (it) completely.
> 28 On account of this the earth will mourn and the heavens above be dark,
> for I have spoken, (and) I have laid plans
> and (finally) I have not repented and I will not turn away from it (i.e., the land)'.

44. The sin-punishment-cycle is a dominant pattern in Deuteronomy and was often used in literature of the Second Temple period; cf. Karin Finsterbusch, 'The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Deuteronomistic Movement', in N. Dávid *et al.*, *The Hebrew Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (FRLANT, 239; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), pp. 143-54. For a discussion of the sin-punishment-cycle in some prose sermons in Jeremiah (7.16-20; 8.18-23; 11.17; 25.1-11; 32.26-35; 44.1-14), see Samantha Joo, *Provocation and Punishment. The Anger of God in the Book of Jeremiah and Deuteronomistic Theology* (BZAW, 361; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2006), pp. 155-222.

45. Some scholars omit the לא (in my view without text-critical evidence, because MT has the support of the versions); see, e.g., Helga Weippert, *Schöpfer des Himmels und der Erde. Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Jeremiabuches* (SBS, 102; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981), p. 54; Bernd Janowski, 'Eine Welt ohne Licht: Zur Chaostopik von Jer 4,23-38 und verwandten Texten', in *Katastrophen und ihre Bewältigung* (ed. A. Berlejung; FAT, 81; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), pp. 119-41 (126). On the other hand, the MT is followed by, among others, Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 20*, p. 356, and Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25*, p. 226.

Most astonishing is the statement in v. 27b: Yhwh will not annihilate the
land of Judah completely.[46] In the context of Jeremiah's vision this state-
ment it inconsistent. There are a few more similar cases in the following
unit Jer. 5.1-18 (cf. 5.3; 5.10; 5.18b). The Judaean addressees in the world
of the book must recognize those statements alongside the vision of the cre-
ation returning to chaos (4.23-26)[47] and the images of destruction as a quite
irrational element of hope or at least as an irrational element of divine hesi-
tation or reluctance to act. For the postexilic readers of the book, such state-
ments indicate that the God of Israel is not to be reduced to justice. The *just*
God of Israel would have destroyed his unfaithful people *completely* and
without mercy. Justice and destruction, however, did not have the last word:
the readers of the book themselves belong to the surviving part of Israel.

Secondly, we find an implicit critique of the position that the destruction
of 586 BCE was a *legitimate* act of a just God. I quote Jer. 31.31-34:

> 31 'Look! Days are coming—oracle of Yhwh,
> when I will cut with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new
> covenant.
> 32 Not like the covenant that I cut with their fathers on the day
> I took them by hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt,
> my covenant, that they, they broke, though I, I was their master—oracle of
> Yhwh.
> 33 For this is the covenant that I will cut with the house of Israel
> after those days—oracle of Yhwh:
> I gave[48] my torah in their midst (once), but upon their hearts I will write it
> (then).
> And I will be God to them and they, they will be people to me.
> 34 And they shall not again teach each person his fellow
> and each person his brother saying:

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46. *Karmel* in v. 26 points to the land of Judah, cf. Jer. 2.7; and see Weippert, *Schöp-
fung*, p. 51 n. 97. However, the catastrophe is described in cosmic terms; cf. Janowski,
'Welt', p. 125.

47. This 'world-turned-on-its-head scenario' is not unique in ancient Near East-
ern literature. For further examples see especially the Balaam Text from Deir 'Allā
(8th century BCE); cf. Erhard Blum, 'Die Kombination I der Wandschrift vom Tell
Deir 'Alla. Vorschläge zur Rekonstruktion mit historisch-kritischen Anmerkungen',
in *Berührungspunkte. Studien zur Sozial- und Religionsgeschichte Israels und seiner
Umwelt* (ed. I Kottsieper; Festschrift R. Albertz; AOAT, 350; Münster: Ugarit Verlag,
2008), pp. 573-601; Janowski, 'Welt', and Paul A. Kruger, 'A World Turned on its
Head in ancient Near Eastern Prophetic Literature: A Powerful Strategy to Depict Cha-
otic Scenarios', *VT* 62 (2012), pp. 58-76.

48. The Hebrew perfect is not to be rendered as future; see Karin Finsterbusch, 'Ich
habe meine Tora in ihre Mitte gegeben. Bemerkungen zu Jer 31,33', *BZ* 49 (2005), pp.
86-92, and Hermann-Josef Stipp, 'Die Perikope vom "Neuen Bund" (Jer 31,31-34) im
Masoretischen und Alexandrinischen Jeremiabuch. Zu Adrian Schenkers These von
der "Theologie der drei Bundesschlüsse"', *JNWSL* 35 (2009), pp. 1-25 (11).

"Know Yhwh", for they, all of them, shall know me,
from the least of them to the greatest of them—oracle of Yhwh,
for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will not remember again'.

This oracle implies a severe critique of the sin-punishment-cycle. It illustrates that the present people in the intern world of the book are by no means able to abide by the Torah. In light of this oracle, Jeremiah's addressees must conclude that the announced destruction is not avoidable through repentance, but only if God himself changes their hearts (which means changing the human constitution).[49] And the readers of the book must doubt that the catastrophe of 586 BCE can be explained as a *just* reaction of a just God.

The different positions on violence and destruction within the book may lead modern readers to an important insight: Jeremiah is to be taken as a complex specific Jewish Second Temple period book, in which different authors and redactors referred to one of the worst catastrophes for ancient Israel. The book finally became 'Scripture':[50] Jeremiah as Scripture may be regarded as an instrument to treat the catastrophe from several viewpoints and above all to inspire and warn the contemporary readers. The book may also help to broach the issue of violence and destruction in terms of 'integrating' the catastrophe as a genuine part of Israel's postexilic identity. This identity is based on the experience of destruction as well as on the experience of survival and restoration.

49. Cf. the similar statement in Deut. 30.6; see Finsterbusch, *Deuteronomium*, p. 181.

50. Cf. especially Roland Deines, 'The Term and Concept of Scripture', in *What is Bible?* (ed. K. Finsterbusch and A. Lange; Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology, 67; Leuven: Peeters, 2012), pp. 235-81.