

# A PROPHET TO THE NATIONS: DIACHRONIC AND SYNCHRONIC READINGS OF JEREMIAH 1

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Few passages in the Bible have received more attention in recent years than the opening chapter of the book of Jeremiah. Its account of the call (or commissioning) of the prophet has been the subject of many studies, ranging from the psychological to the form-critical.<sup>1</sup> Most recently, attention has focused on the question of the chapter's tradition history, and there have been several detailed attempts to trace the passage's historical development.

Almost without exception, these modern tradition-historical studies follow the early work of Duhm in their recognition of the composite nature of this chapter.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, despite their agreement on this point, these studies have sought to explain the chapter's different levels in a wide variety of ways. A brief look at some of the different approaches will help to bring out the issues involved.

One group of scholars consists of those who have attributed the chapter's different levels to Jeremiah's own retrospective reflection on his life and ministry. Even within this group, however, there are divergent views as to the priority of the various parts of the chapter and the purpose of the final redaction. Thus, for example, Yost (1975, pp. 215–216, 351) sees vv. 11–19 as Jeremiah's primary call experience, with

1. Most form-critical analyses of the prophetic call narrative discuss Jeremiah 1 as an important example of the genre. See Holladay (1986) for an extensive bibliography of form-critical and other studies of this chapter. Carroll (1986, p. 101) sees this chapter as a commissioning rather than a call.

2. See Duhm (1901, pp. 1–15). Berridge (1970, p. 30) argues that the events in vv. 4–19 were experienced in close succession, though still not on the same occasion. Even Holladay (1986, pp. 23–31), who accepts most of the chapter as stemming from Jeremiah's call, sees some further reflection by Jeremiah in the addition of vv. 17–19 and the reshaping of the vision of evil from the north.

vv. 4–10 being the prophet's later "stylized" reflection on this experience in the light of his subsequent prophetic ministry. Jüngling (1973, pp. 21–23) on the other hand sees vv. 4–10 as primary, arguing that it was originally connected with a separate personal collection of Jeremiah's confessions. For both scholars, the chapter served as a means of either certifying or defending the prophet at the beginning of the so-called *Urrolle*, though for Jüngling the latter part of the chapter only came into play with the second edition of that document (cf. Jer 36:32).<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to such scholars who explain ch. 1 with reference to events or stages in the life of the prophet himself, others have looked beyond the prophet to later editorial circles as the chapter's proper frame of reference. These scholars usually see the most recent levels of this chapter as an attempt to come to grips with the exilic and post-exilic situation of Judah among the nations, though some also see evidence of later inner-Judean struggles as well. Such scholars often disagree over both the priority of the various parts of the chapter and the identity of the groups responsible for them.<sup>4</sup>

Because of their disagreement over such tradition-historical details, these scholars ultimately differ over what the chapter means. To take but one example of this, one may compare the differing analyses of Vermeulen (1982) and Carroll (1981, 1986). Both of these scholars see the chapter as having a long redactional history which extends into the later post-exilic period. Vermeulen, however, sees the movement of the chapter as one in which an original Jeremianic oracle of judgment against Judah has been shaped so as first of all to provide comfort to an exiled nation and then to reassure a faithful post-exilic remnant engaged in various inner-Judean struggles. Carroll also sees evidence of such inner-Judean struggles here, though for him the bulk of the chapter is an original oracle of judgment against the nations (meant to comfort Judah during the time of the exile) which has been transformed into a "more parochial" judgment against Jerusalem.

3. For Yost, the Babylonian victory at Carchemish provided Jeremiah with the opportunity to defend himself and the truth of his prophecies in terms of Deut 18:19, with which Yost assumes both the prophet and his audience were familiar.

4. Thus, for example, Thiel (1973, pp. 62–79) sees a Deuteronomian provenance here on the basis of the reference to the nations in v. 10, while Renaud (1981, p. 196) disagrees precisely because of the universal emphasis of that and similar verses. Schreiner (1973, p. 18) agrees somewhat with Thiel in this respect, though he is more inclined to see this chapter's editing in the hands of a community of Jeremiah's disciples in the land, a group concerned here and elsewhere in the book to make the point that God's activity now included the nations in a new way.

Even these few examples provide an illustration of the diachronic approach of such tradition-historical studies. It is clear that there are real differences as to how scholars see the priority of various parts of this chapter and the historical dynamics of its development. Generally speaking, however, those who attribute the redactional process to the prophet himself tend to see this chapter as part of Jeremiah's defense against his opponents in Judah. Often such a view tends to minimize Jeremiah's unusual designation as a prophet to the nations.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, those who see a more extended redactional process often do so because they argue that this designation only makes sense as part of a later generation's reflection on its exilic or post-exilic situation.

What all such scholars have in common is the attempt to correlate the various editorial levels of the text to the corresponding historical and theological concerns of the individual or individuals responsible for these levels. The diversity of these studies is indicative of the somewhat speculative nature of such an approach. Such speculation is unavoidable in the historical task of reconstructing the development of this text and its role in exilic and post-exilic Judah. What needs to be looked at more closely, however, is how well this approach has contributed to our understanding of the final form of this chapter and its present role at the beginning of the book of Jeremiah.

The question is really one of context. The scholars discussed above all attempt to furnish the historical contexts in which to understand this chapter in its various stages of development. Nevertheless, the chapter also has a literary context which is not identical with its various historical contexts—least of all, with the final historical context of its latest redaction. Instead of focusing on how various parts of the chapter might be read in the light of the later stages of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry or various exilic and post-exilic situations, a reading which takes seriously the chapter's literary context insists that it also needs to be understood as it now stands. Whatever the origins of the various parts of this chapter, they now work together as the beginning to Jeremiah's ministry, and this affects how one understands the rest of the book that goes by his name. That is to say, the chapter must at some point be read as

5. Yost (1975, pp. 131–162) is something of an exception to this, since he is concerned to spell out the implications of this image. In this, he is following up on a suggestion of Berridge (1970, p. 43) concerning the close connection of Israel's election to Jeremiah's international mission. Yost does not, however, tie his conclusions about this image to his arguments about the way this chapter is supposed to function as a defense of the prophet and his message.

making sense both in its present form and in its present literary context as an introduction to the book of Jeremiah.

To insist upon this context is, however, to raise anew the problem which has either elicited or complicated most of the above tradition-historical treatments—namely, Jeremiah's designation as a prophet to the nations. As has often been noted, this designation is both unique to Jeremiah among the prophets and somewhat at variance with Jeremiah's historical mission and much of what follows in the book.<sup>6</sup> It is precisely because of this crux that many scholars from Duhm on have looked to the historical circumstances of textual development to explain the text as it now stands.<sup>7</sup>

To put this another way, it has been the inability to understand this chapter synchronically which has led to its being looked at diachronically in the various tradition-historical studies cited above.<sup>8</sup> While such diachronic readings are often illuminating about the text's pre-history, they still tend to leave open the inevitable synchronic question of how the final form of the chapter functions both on its own terms and within the book as a whole.<sup>9</sup> It is this question to which the rest of this essay is devoted.

*A Prophet to the Nations: A Synchronic Reading of Jeremiah I  
Verses 1–10: The Question of Reference*

In contrast to the diachronic attempt to isolate the earliest level of the chapter, a synchronic approach is content to begin at its literary beginning. In this case, one begins with the superscription and chronology in vv. 1–3. These are important in that they set forth a proposed

6. See Schreiner (1973, p. 16; 1975, p. 132) and Carroll (1981, p. 47). The attempt of Michaud (1960) to explain this designation in purely historical terms does not seem to do justice to either the prominence or the uniqueness of this title. For specific problems with Michaud's reading, see note 10 below.

7. An alternate attempt to deal with this crux is that of Stade (1906) who emends *laggōyim* to *lēgoyî*, thus arriving at a more "suitable" Israelite reference.

8. For a rare but important attempt to deal with the book of Jeremiah along more synchronic lines, see Polk (1984). Unfortunately, Polk has not treated Jeremiah I in any extended way, though a number of his more general points may be seen to be relevant in the discussion which follows.

9. Thus, for example, the tendency to relate the different parts of this chapter to other parts of the book which are seen to be from the same chronological level means that the chapter does not function in its natural literary role as an introduction to the book as a whole.

“historical” setting in which to read the oracles which follow. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that these verses do not specify the nature of Jeremiah’s ministry in any way. Thus, when Jeremiah is appointed a prophet to the nations in v. 5 and set over nations and kingdoms in v. 10, such an appointment is not to be understood as something in addition to an already explicit mission to Judah. There is, in fact, no such mission to Judah anywhere in the first ten verses of this chapter.<sup>10</sup>

While this has often been noted and indeed forms part of the crux which scholars have attempted to address in their tradition-historical analyses, its significance for the interpretation of this chapter has, if anything, been underestimated. Thus, for example, in v. 7 Jeremiah is told to go *‘al-kol-āšer ʿešlāḥākā*. God’s sending of the prophets is a common motif in the book of Jeremiah, more so than in any other prophetic book. Most of the parallels, of course, concern various prophetic missions to the nation of Judah, and it is that reference which is usually assumed here.<sup>11</sup> However, this domestic interpretation would seem to be ruled out by the expressly international reference in v. 5. In such a way, the context argues for an international reference along the lines of 25:15 MT where Jeremiah is again sent to the nations.<sup>12</sup>

10. Holladay (1986, p. 23) explicitly raises the question of this incongruity. Nevertheless, he still comments (p. 34) that while Jeremiah may be destined to speak largely to the local necessities of Judah, this will be no limitation on the effectiveness of the word he speaks. He also notes that this constitutes a “true internationalizing” of the prophetic office.

Michaud (1960) assumes that *laggōyim* here refers to both the pagan nations and Israel who are all mixed together at this particular moment of history. As he himself admits, however, such an understanding contrasts with the normal dichotomy between Israel and the nations common in the pre-exilic period. As such, Michaud’s reading, while historically plausible, would seem to require some more specific textual support to be likely here. A similar case could be made against the views of Volz (1928, p. 4) and Rudolph (1968, p. 6) who also see “nations” as inclusive of Israel. While Judah is eventually to be included among the nations to whom Jeremiah is sent, this is an inclusion which has important theological implications. It is not merely a matter of specifying Judah as one of Jeremiah’s addressees. The nature of Judah’s inclusion among the nations will be considered later in this paper.

For an emphasis on the non-Israelite implications of this term, see Berridge (1970, pp. 42–43, 56–57), Carroll (1981, p. 47; cf. 1986, pp. 105–108) and Schmidt (1975–1976, pp. 197–198). Schmidt also sees Jeremiah’s role with respect to the nations as part of a wider reference in vv. 4–10 to the Davidic rule over the nations on God’s behalf. For Schmidt, this allusion is the work of an exilic redactor who sees in the “royal” commissioning of the prophet a substitute for the lost Davidic lordship over the nations.

11. Cf. 7:25; 35:15; 44:4. For such a sending in other prophetic books, see Isa 6:8 and Ezek 2:3–4.

12. It is significant that the more international 1:7 and 25:15 MT refer specifically to Jeremiah, whereas the more exclusively Israelite references cited in the previous note refer

The same reference needs to be seen in v. 8 where Jeremiah is urged not to be afraid before “them.” There is no contextual justification for reading a specifically Judean reference here, despite the naturalness of such a reading in view of the persecution of Jeremiah at the hands of his countrymen which one finds later in the book. In the present context, there is no antecedent for the “them” other than the nations of v. 5.<sup>13</sup>

This international concern is repeated and emphasized in v. 10 where Jeremiah is set over nations for both judgment and salvation. Once again, the language used in this verse (“pluck up,” etc.) is applied to the nations later in the book as well as to Judah itself.<sup>14</sup> In the present passage, however, the context seems to indicate only an “international” reference, at least to this point.

### *The Ambiguous Reference of Verses 11–16*

It is only with the visions that one finds any reference to the Judean aspect of Jeremiah’s message. Yet, even here, as many scholars have pointed out, a closer look reveals several unexpected ambiguities.

The first vision in vv. 11–12 is a general statement about God’s word which does not explicitly mention Judah. The second vision in vv. 13–14, on the other hand, does seem to be related to Jeremiah’s primary message of judgment to Judah. This is especially the case since the poetic oracles in the chapters which follow often refer to the evil which will come out of the north against a sinful Judah (see especially 4:6, 6:1).

It is, however, significant that the object of this evil is not specified in v. 14 as Judah *per se* but as *kol-yōšēbē hā’āreš*. This phrase could have either a national or an international reference, and both usages are to be found elsewhere in the book.<sup>15</sup> If, however, one reads this phrase in accord with everything which has gone before, the more likely reading is not the usually assumed Judean one but rather one in which it is again the nations as a whole who are the object of the evil.<sup>16</sup>

only to the prophets in general. One should, however, also note that in the case of 25:15 MT, the nations explicitly include Judah (cf. 25:18). The question of why ch. 1 at first appears to exclude Judah from Jeremiah’s mission and his message of judgment will be considered further below.

13. So, for example, Carroll (1981, p. 50; 1986, p. 107).

14. See 18:7–10; 12:14–17. For a more specifically Judean reference, see 24:6; 42:10. For the background of the phrase, see Bach (1961).

15. For “all the inhabitants of the land,” see 6:12, 10:18, 13:13, 25:9. For “all the inhabitants of the earth,” see 25:29, 30 MT. That this phrase cannot simply be assumed to refer to Judah, see Carroll (1981, p. 50; 1986, pp. 105–108).

16. That such a judgment of God against at least one foreign nation could be seen as coming from the north, see Jer 50:9, 41; 51:48. It is even possible that in passages like

The further interpretation of the vision in vv. 15–16 clarifies matters somewhat.<sup>17</sup> More specifically, the Israelite character of the catalogue of offenses at the end of v. 16 clearly seems to identify the preceding verses as an oracle of judgment against that nation.<sup>18</sup> In accord with the interpretation mandated by v. 16b, the object of the evil from the north seems to be the Jerusalem which is surrounded by “all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north” in v. 15. The destruction of Jerusalem because of its offenses against God is, of course, a key element throughout Jeremiah’s preaching.<sup>19</sup>

There are, however, certain anomalies here which call into question any overly easy identification of these verses with the judgment against Judah to be found elsewhere in the book. Primary among these is the description of the adversary as *kol-mišpēḥôt mamlēkôt šāpônā*. The idea that all the national entities of the north will have a role in the judgment of Judah is at some variance with the description of the threat from the north in the poetic oracles. In these latter oracles, the threat is usually described in general terms as the “evil from the north,” as in the original vision of v. 14. However, in those cases where the text provides a more explicit description, the threat from the north is usually seen in terms of a single nation. Thus, in 6:22, one finds this threat specified as an *am* and a *gôy* in the singular.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast, the present passage clearly envisions an adversary which is both general and all-inclusive in terms of the nations involved. Such a

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these, one should see the evil against the nations as originating in Jerusalem itself, since Jerusalem can be said to be located in the north (cf. Ps 48:3). This would fit the perspective of the second half of chapter 25 in the MT, where evil begun at Jerusalem will spread out to “all the inhabitants of the earth” (v. 29), a phrase which parallels v. 14 in the present chapter. (Note also the use of *qr*<sup>2</sup> in both 1:15 and 25:29–31 MT.)

Vermeylen (1982, p. 262) notes the return to an ancient mythological perspective here, as does Carroll (1986, pp. 106–107). See also Childs (1959) who notes the “mythologizing” of the “enemy from the north” motif which took place in the exilic and post-exilic period. Childs seems to accept Jer 1:13–15 as genuinely Jeremianic and so non-mythological (pp. 190–191). Although this may indeed have originally been the case, at least for vv. 13–14, these verses have now taken on wider overtones because of their position in the present chapter.

17. Lundbom (1975, p. 96–99) sees these verses as belonging structurally to vv. 17–19 as part of a larger salvation oracle. Whatever the merits of this suggestion, it is still the case that these verses interpret that which has come before.

18. Cf. 2 Kgs 22:17 for the best parallel to these offenses. 2 Kgs 22:16 also refers to “evil upon this place and its inhabitants.”

19. For the most exact parallel to the situation described here, see 39:3 and the next to last section of this article.

20. Without the immediate reference to its northern provenance, one may also cite 5:15 as an example of a single nation as the adversary of Judah in the poetry.

description of the enemy seems to go beyond the simple historical awareness that Babylon had allies who were only too willing to take part in the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>21</sup> Rather, the extension from one nation to all the nations of the north seems to be a move to another level altogether. With such inclusiveness, one taps into the dynamics of the theological relationship between Israel and the nations.

One sees a similar move from the historical to the symbolic in ch. 25 of the MT. In this chapter, the text moves from the single national adversary of the earlier poetic oracles to an adversary of many nations in the oracles against the nations (cf. 46:1). Thus, 25:12 refers only to the single nation Babylon, while 25:14–15 MT sees all the nations as Judah's adversary.<sup>22</sup> According to this chapter, the judgment of Judah is simply the prelude to the subsequent judgment of Babylon and all the nations (v. 26: *kol-hammamlēkôt hā'āreṣ*). Verse 29 is quite explicit in this respect, and its language echoes that of the present passage (*kol-yošēbē hā'āreṣ*). The point seems to be that just as all nations are included in the destruction of Jerusalem, so all nations will receive the judgment of God.

In ch. 1, the original interpretation of the vision in v. 14 has clear parallels in the poetic oracles which refer to a single foe from the north, while vv. 15–16 move against identifying this evil in such a way and broaden the reference to a more general theological level. Along these lines, the “tribes of the kingdoms of the north” are not to be identified with Babylon or any other historical nations but are rather indicative of a more general hostility of the nations against Israel.<sup>23</sup> The classic pre-apocalyptic expression of such hostility is to be found in the genre of the *Völkersturm*.<sup>24</sup> In this genre, the nations band together to threaten Jerusalem, only to find that they themselves are in danger before the God who protects the chosen city. This genre may be found in a number

21. See, for example, 2 Kgs 24:2. Also compare the realistic list of Babylon's allies in this Kings passage with the all-inclusive reference of Jer 34:2. The latter seems to be meant to provide an exact fulfillment of the present passage.

22. It is significant that the bridge between these two references is v. 13 which speaks of “everything written in this book which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.”

23. *Contra* Holladay (1986, p. 668). Holladay is possibly right about 25:9 MT, where the context seems to argue for an identification of *kol-mišpēhôt šāpôn* with the single nation of Babylon. Such an identification might even be appropriate for an earlier form of 1:15. Nevertheless, in the present form of the passage, both the context and the additional word *mamlēkôt* (cf. 25:26 MT) seems to indicate a wider reference. Significantly, Holladay (p. 22) deletes the *mamlēkôt* in 1:15.

24. Cf. von Rad (1965, pp. 156–157) and Clements (1980, pp. 72–89).



of places, including the royal psalms, the psalms of Zion, and elsewhere in the prophetic literature.

It seems likely that elements of this genre are to be found here, especially in vv. 15–16a. As in the *Völkersturm*, there is an assembling of nations against Jerusalem which results in God's judgment. But again the question is the object of this judgment. In a traditional *Völkersturm*, God's judgments are directed against the nations who have assembled against Jerusalem. In the present case, the object of God's judgments is the antecedent of the masculine suffix *ʾōtām*. The most natural antecedent is the occupants of the thrones set up against Jerusalem in v. 15.<sup>25</sup> The only other grammatical possibility is the *kol-yōšēbê hāʾāreš* of v. 14, which seems rather distant at this point. ("Cities" would, of course, require a feminine suffix.) While the end of v. 16 shows that *kol-yōšēbê hāʾāreš* is in fact the antecedent, the moment of ambiguity is real and possibly quite important.<sup>26</sup>

To what end is the genre of the *Völkersturm* invoked here only to be so quickly cut off? Part of the answer to this question may be found in a rhetoric of the reversal of expectations.<sup>27</sup> At God's initiative, "all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north" will gather together against Jerusalem and its dependencies. The scene is set for a divine intervention before the gates of Jerusalem, an intervention on behalf of that city apparently expected by Jeremiah's contemporaries.<sup>28</sup>

For the reader of ch. 1 who has not yet been exposed to Jeremiah's Judean mission, it is just such an expectation which was raised by Jeremiah's role as a prophet to the nations, one who has been appointed at least in part to pluck up and break down, to destroy and overthrow

25. So Renaud (1981, p. 183, 188); also Vermeulen (1982, pp. 260–261).

26. On this, cf. again Carroll (1986, pp. 105–108) who sees a similar judgment against the nations here in the opening verses of this oracle. For Carroll, however, the present text only makes sense as two parts of a diachronic process in which this original oracle against the nations has been made into a "more parochial" oracle of judgment against Jerusalem. In tradition-historical terms, Carroll's account of the development of this chapter seems problematic, since one would rather expect that the oracle of judgment against Jerusalem would be historically prior to the oracle of salvation. (So Vermeulen [1982], though there are tradition-historical difficulties with Vermeulen's treatment as well). From the point of view of the present essay, however, the primary problem with Carroll's interpretation lies in the fact that it fails to make sense of the present form of the text. This is the synchronic task with which the present essay is concerned.

27. This rhetorical device is quite common in the prophetic material. See, for example, Amos 3:2, where a salvation formula is invoked only to lead into an unexpected judgment.

28. Jeremiah's argument in the temple sermon (cf. ch. 7 and 26) presupposes just this sort of expectation on the part of his contemporaries. See Clements (1980, p. 86).

nations and kingdoms.<sup>29</sup> This expectation seems in fact to be fulfilled in v. 16a where God utters judgments against “them.” However, the latter part of v. 16 reverses these expectations and makes it clear that the summoning of the nations to Jerusalem is not part of a *Völkersturm* after all, but rather the means of God’s judgment upon that city.

With this, we finally arrive at something in ch. 1 which fits Jeremiah’s primary message of judgment against Judah. We also come to some appreciation of how *Völkersturm* motifs have been appropriated to serve that message of judgment. What is not yet clear, however, is how such a message fits Jeremiah’s status as a prophet to the nations. After all, the more the *Völkersturm* can be seen as a part of Jeremiah’s message against Judah, the less it can help to explain Jeremiah’s unusual role as a prophet to the nations.

What then is the point of emphasizing Jeremiah’s international ministry in vv. 5 and 10? What also is the point of the ambiguities in reference which run throughout vv. 13–16a? Can such features really be explained entirely in terms of a rhetoric of expectation and reversal? Such a possibility seems quite unlikely, considering the distinctive nature of Jeremiah’s international role in this chapter. It is perhaps also significant that reference is made to this role elsewhere in the book, particularly in certain summary statements concerned with Jeremiah’s written work. Along these lines, the judgment against Babylon in 25:13 is seen to be according to “everything written in this book which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.” And even the *Urrolle* is specifically seen in 36:2 to contain not only words against Israel and Judah but also against all the nations.

All of this would seem to indicate that there is something more at work here than simply a rhetorical device of reversal of expectations. How then does this emphasis on Jeremiah’s international ministry function in this chapter and as an introduction to the rest of the book?

### *Jeremiah and Jerusalem: A Tale of Two Cities*

The answer to these questions is to be found in the concluding section of Jeremiah’s call, vv. 17–19. The standard approach to these verses is to note the return to the themes and language of vv. 4–10, especially with regard to God’s protection of Jeremiah against those in Judah who seek to harm him (cf. Jüngling, 1973, pp. 11–17). As was pointed out above,

29. In such a way, Renaud (1981, p. 189) sees v. 10 as contributing to the grammatical ambiguity of v. 16.

however, vv. 4–10 do not speak of Jeremiah's role in Judah but only about his role with respect to the nations. It is only in v. 16b that any Judean mission is mentioned.

Accordingly, it is only in vv. 17–19 that one finds an oracle of assurance with a Judean reference. Indeed, v. 18 provides a striking contrast to the ambiguity of reference noted above. There is, of course, still some ambiguity as to whether the *kol-hā'āreṣ* refers to the whole earth or to the whole land of Judah. Nevertheless, the detailed enumeration of this verse leaves no doubt as to the identities of Jeremiah's domestic opponents. It can even be said to introduce a cast of characters who will make their appearance later in the book.

Yet the question that remains is how the domestic specificity of these verses now works in a chapter whose tone has been set by international concerns. One can certainly see a two step process of assurance here, with Jeremiah first being given divine assurance for a general international task (v. 8) and then being given similar assurance for a more specific domestic task (vv. 17–19).<sup>30</sup> But this still does not solve the problem of why Jeremiah needs protection over against other nations. In what sense is he an international prophet?

It is the new imagery of vv. 17–19 which finally answers this question, especially the image of Jeremiah as a fortified city. Contrary to the view of many of the commentators, this is not simply a general image of Jeremiah's ability to withstand outside pressure with God's help. Rather, there is a specific contrast here with what has gone before in vv. 15–16.<sup>31</sup>

In both vv. 15–16 and vv. 17–19, a city is besieged by its enemies. In the former verses, the unexpected happens. Jerusalem is the object of judgment rather than salvation. Jeremiah, on the other hand, is described as a city of salvation. His walls are of bronze, in contrast to the walls of Jerusalem which are soon to be broken down (see Jer 39:8; 52:14). He is a pillar of iron, in contrast to the pillars of bronze in the temple which are soon to be taken away to Babylon (see Jer 52:17). He is, in short, a city whom God is with in the way that God used to be with Jerusalem and its temple. As such, the outcome of the *Völkersturm* which is to

30. Along the lines of Schmidt (1975–1976, pp. 201–202) who sees the judgment against Judah as a concrete working out of Jeremiah's international mission.

31. Cf. Lewin (1985, p. 110) who sees an "ironic" parallel here without, however, working out its significance for the chapter as a whole. The same is true of Carroll (1986, p. 109) who also wonders whether there is irony here, but does not work out its larger significance.

surround him will be radically different than the outcome of the *Völkersturm* which is to surround Jerusalem.

The implications of this contrast of cities are evident in another difference between these verses and vv. 4–10. The command not to be afraid, which in v. 8 was part of an oracle of assurance, is here joined with a threat (“lest I dismay you”). The reason for the threat lies in the nature of the promise. Jeremiah is the new fortified city, replacing, at least for a time, the judged city of vv. 15–16. As such, he must have confidence in the promises by which he is protected. The verb *hit* is particularly appropriate in this respect. While it does appear elsewhere in commissioning contexts, it is even more at home in the context of the holy war, where faith in what God is about to do is the necessary precondition for victory.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the verb is also used to refer to the “dismaying” of nations at the hands of God.<sup>33</sup> The point is not really that Judah is here conducting a misguided holy war against the prophet, as argued by Yost (1975, pp. 240, 245). Rather, it is that Judah has joined the nations who fight against God’s new chosen city, Jeremiah himself.<sup>34</sup>

In such a scenario, Jeremiah must be a prophet to the nations. Only as such a prophet can he be a prophet to a Judah which has become like the nations. This is the force of the accusations of v. 16b, all of which have the effect of making Judah no different from other nations.<sup>35</sup> Despite the apparent political realities of the day, Judah is really at one with its national enemies in its opposition to God. This identification with the nations is further demonstrated by Judah’s opposition to the prophet himself, an opposition which has been seen to characterize the nations in the first half of the chapter. As such, Jeremiah can be depicted as a new Jerusalem surrounded by its foes.

The point is not simply that Jeremiah is identified with the people, as Yost maintains, but rather that he, at least for a time, also substitutes

32. For its use in commissioning contexts, see Jos 1:9; 2 Chr 22:13; 28:20; Ezek 2:6; 3:9. For its use in the holy war, see Deut 1:21; 31:8; Jos 8:1; 10:25; 2 Chr 20:15, 17; 32:7, as well as Yost (1975, pp. 164–177).

33. Cf. Isa 8:9, where *hit* is used in parallel to *ʔzr*, as in the present passage. See also Jer 10:2, where Israel is warned not to be dismayed by what dismays the nations, and Jer 17:17–18, where Jeremiah asks God to dismay others but not to dismay him.

34. Yost (1975) comes closer to this on pp. 198, 352.

35. See also such passages as Jer 10:2 which specifically warn of this danger to Judah’s special identity. On God’s judgment of Judah as part of God’s judgment of all the nations, see Jer 18:7–10. On this issue, see further Schreiner (1973) and Schmidt (1975–1976, pp. 198–201).

for the people, as Mottu has argued.<sup>36</sup> That this is not a permanent substitution is clear from such passages as 33:1–12, which envision a return of Judah and Jerusalem to their correct relationship to God.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, during the time encompassed by the book of Jeremiah, it is Jeremiah, not Jerusalem, who more closely approximates such a relationship with God and who has become for a time the means of God's relating to humanity. This means first of all that the prophet is now secure in God's promises—at least as long as he trusts in those promises. The forces opposing the prophet will be humbled—even as the nations are humbled before Jerusalem in a *Völkersturm*.

Jeremiah's role as the new Jerusalem also means that he has a mission which extends beyond the present apostate Judah to the whole world. And despite the setting of the *Völkersturm*, this mission includes more than simply judgment. As was the case with the old Jerusalem, the new city, Jeremiah, is the locus for salvation as well.<sup>38</sup> This is why he is not only a prophet over or against (*al*) the nations but also a prophet to or for (*lě*) the nations, why he is told both to pluck up and to plant, to destroy and to build.

This certainly does not mean that the judgment is for some and the salvation is for others, as some have argued.<sup>39</sup> Rather, it means that, as

36. So Yost (1975, pp. 123, 140–141); Mottu (1982, p. 119); though neither of these authors works out the implications of this for the dynamics of this chapter, especially with respect to the *Völkersturm*. If Schmidt (1975–1976) is correct in his assessment of Jeremiah's royal qualities in vv. 4–10, it may be that Jeremiah is also meant to substitute for the king as well as the city. Both of these substitutions would fit quite well Jeremiah's role as a prophet to the nations. According to Clements (1980, pp. 72–89), the international role of Jerusalem is dependent on royal ideology.

On the question of Jeremiah's identification with the people, see also Polk (1984) who in a number of places sees Jeremiah as being what the people should have been and eventually will be again (cf., for example, pp. 52, 90–91, 101–102, 136–137). Neither Polk nor the present author want to deny the prophet's continuing identification with the people. It is precisely this identification with the people which causes Jeremiah so much pain throughout the book. Nevertheless, there are differences between Jeremiah and the people in terms of their relationships with God, differences which result in a different fate for each and which make Jeremiah a paradigm for the restored people.

37. So Polk (1984, pp. 136–137) who sees Jer 17:14 as a contrast to the rebellion of the people in 13:11 and the "foreshadowing" of a future restoration of a proper relationship between God and Judah in 33:9.

38. On salvation which is centered on Jerusalem, see Jer 3:17; Isa 2:1–4 = Micah 4:1–4; cf. Jer 16:19; 33:9; also Wildberger (1957) and Schreiner (1973, pp. 30–31).

39. See, for example, Vermeylen (1982, p. 275) who argues that the negative verbs refer to the impious Jews of the post-exilic period, while the positive verbs refer to the righteous whom they are oppressing. Vermeylen admits that this distinction is not to be found

in the case of Jerusalem, both judgment and salvation are intimately connected to one's relationship with the prophet himself. As the new Jerusalem, Jeremiah is to perform the special mission to the nations which Judah and Jerusalem have in Jeremiah's time failed to perform. In other words, it is Jeremiah's status as the new Jerusalem which finally explains his status as a prophet to the nations. As was previously the case with Jerusalem, God's promises to Israel now center on God's relationship to Jeremiah. And it is this same relationship which, like the previous relationship to Israel and Jerusalem, now makes possible the salvation of the nations.

*Jeremiah 1 as an Introduction to the Book of Jeremiah*

It remains to offer some observations on the way that the contrast between Jerusalem and Jeremiah described here provides a context in which to read the rest of the book. Obviously, a full treatment of this subject is not possible here. Nevertheless, it might be helpful to offer at least a couple of examples of how the themes discussed above are worked out elsewhere in the book.

The first example is that of Jeremiah 26, a chapter which offers a reprise of the temple sermon of ch. 7. As has often been noted, the emphasis in ch. 26 really lies less on the sermon and more on the prophet himself. Here one finds a detailed example of the kind of opposition Jeremiah received from his countrymen. This, of course, fits the oppositional nature of Jeremiah's ministry as described in the first chapter.

There is, however, more here than simply general opposition to a word of judgment. Here, as in ch. 1, one really has a contrast between two cities, each of which is under siege. In this respect, it is significant that the temple sermon of ch. 7 has become in ch. 26 a sermon against both the temple and the city.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Jeremiah's opponents seem to hear this speech as primarily against the city (cf. v. 11). As a result, they gather against Jeremiah, and the princes set up seats in order to judge him.

On the one hand, this scene looks back to ch. 1 with its pictures of Jerusalem and Jeremiah as cities under siege. On the other, it looks ahead to the siege and capture of Jerusalem at the hand of the

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explicitly in the text. Similarly, Bardtke (1935, p. 215) sees here a reference to judgment against the nations and salvation for Judah, a proclamation which he argues characterized the first phase of Jeremiah's prophetic activity.

40. According to Carroll (1981, p. 86), ch. 26 really focuses on the city.

Babylonians in ch. 39. The taking of seats in judgment against Jeremiah looks both back to 1:15 and ahead to 39:3, where all the princes of the king of Babylon come and sit in the middle gate of Jerusalem.<sup>41</sup> The result of the siege of Jeremiah is, of course, different from that of Jerusalem, as already specified in ch. 1.

One further point needs to be brought out here. Whereas before it was the relationship to Jerusalem which determined judgment and salvation, here the latter depend on the response to Jeremiah and the word that he bears (cf. vv. 12–15). Thus, the family of the Ahikam who protects Jeremiah here is later spared when the Babylonians take the city (cf. 40:5). Conversely, the judgment of Judah may be seen as the result of its failure to respond to Jeremiah properly. It does not realize that, at least for the present, Jeremiah, and not Jerusalem, is the locus of salvation.

Another passage later in the book which is illuminated by Jeremiah 1 is that of 39:15–18. Here Ebed-melech's actions toward Jeremiah in 38:7–13 are equated with putting his trust (*bṯh*) in God, and as such they result in his deliverance. This trust of Ebed-melech compares favorably with that of the people who trust (*bṯh*) in fortified cities (5:17)<sup>42</sup> or in the Jerusalem temple (7:4, 8, 14). In the light of ch. 1, the point is clear. Jeremiah has replaced Jerusalem as the repository of God's promises and the means of God's salvation. The fact that Ebed-melech is an Ethiopian only underscores further the international significance of Jeremiah's status as the alternate Jerusalem.

This international significance of Jeremiah's status is worked out at length throughout the book, even though it cannot be worked out at length here. Both the oracles against the nations in ch. 46–51 and the more salvific additions to be found throughout are illustrative of this side of Jeremiah's mission.<sup>43</sup> What ch. 1 provides is the symbolic context in which these later international aspects of the book are to be understood.

41. It is significant that the parallel in 1 Kings 25 does not have this detail of the Babylonian princes sitting in the gate. Its significance in Jer 39:3 depends on Jer 1:15 and 26:10. One should also note how in 39:5 Nebuchadnezzar "spoke judgments" with Zedekiah in a way similar to what one finds in 1:15. The prose narrative often seems concerned to show the fulfillment of the prophecy made at the very beginning of the book. In such a way, 34:1 even uses the more inclusive "many nations" language of ch. 1 to describe the final assault on the city. (Note especially the phrase, *kol-mamlēkôt ʔres.*)

42. Significantly, this passage uses the word *mibṣār* which is the same word used to describe Jeremiah's new role in 1:18. Along these lines, compare 4:5 and 8:14 with 6:27.

43. For a redaction-historical treatment of this motif, see Schreiner (1973).

### Conclusions

The reluctance of the present study to follow its predecessors in focusing primarily on the way Jeremiah's role as a prophet to the nations may have functioned as a response to the historical conditions of the exile does not imply that it might not have originally been such a response. Certainly, the present shape of the chapter and the book would be very different had they been rooted in different historical circumstances. The point is rather to emphasize that the present chapter is the result of Israel's wrestling with the significance of the words and figure of Jeremiah as well as with its ongoing historical situation. As such, any exploration of this chapter's various historical settings must be complemented by an awareness of the literary setting in which its central image now functions. It is, after all, in that literary setting that one enters into the continued struggle of Israel to understand Jeremiah's witness.

In the context of the present book, God appointed Jeremiah as a temporary substitute for Jerusalem from the very start of his ministry. What takes place throughout this ministry is thus presented as a conflict between two cities, one destined, at least for a time, for judgment and the other assured of salvation. The events of the book take place in the context of this confrontation between God's past and present dwelling places. It is in the context of this confrontation that issues such as what it means to trust in God are to be decided. And it is also in the context of this confrontation that Jeremiah is to be seen throughout the book as fulfilling his role as a prophet to the nations.

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