

## THE JUDEAN REMNANT IN THE CONTEXT OF JUDGMENT IN JEREMIANIC THOUGHT

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The remnant motif is quite widespread in the book of Jeremiah. There are about sixty-eight explicit references to remnant terminology in the book, not to mention the numerous places where the motif is implicit.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the majority of these passages underscore judgment.<sup>2</sup> They highlight God's punitive actions against Judah because of the people's iniquities. The present examination focuses on four consecutive passages that use the technical term *š<sup>e</sup>ʿirit*, in order to determine how the prophet described the phenomenon of judgment, specifically as it relates to the remnant motif.

### Jer 6:9-15

#### Translation and Textual Considerations

Thus says the Lord of Hosts:

“Like a vine, they shall thoroughly glean Israel's remnant (*š<sup>e</sup>ʿirit*).<sup>3</sup>”

<sup>1</sup>Surprisingly, few studies have focused on this important aspect. For further details, see my study, “The Remnant Motif in the Context of Judgment and Salvation in the Book of Jeremiah” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1995; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1996), 34-76.

<sup>2</sup>We must not overlook the fact, however, that the prophet also held out hope for salvation and a bright future. *Ibid.*, 287-365.

<sup>3</sup>Several commentators, following the LXX, emend the Masoretic text (MT) *ôlâ ye' ôlâ*, “they shall thoroughly glean” to *ôlâ 'ôlâ* (infinitive and imperative) “glean, glean!” See John Bright, *Jeremiah*, AB, vol. 21 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 44; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 255; Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster 1986), 194.

However, it is better to accept the MT, as explained by Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25*, WBC, vol. 26 (Waco, TX: Word, 1991), 102: “The comparison, basic to the poetic structure, changes from an object (‘the vine’) to a person (the ‘grape-cutter’).” Hereafter cited as CKD.

Like a vintager, pass your hand over the tendrils.”<sup>4</sup>

(10) To whom shall I speak and give solemn warning that they may listen?

Indeed, their ear is uncircumcised,<sup>5</sup> so that they are unable to pay attention.

Indeed, the word of the Lord has become a reproach so<sup>6</sup> that they take no pleasure in:

(11) But I am filled with the wrath of the Lord.<sup>7</sup> I am weary of holding it in.

“Pour (it) out<sup>8</sup> on the children in the streets and on the bands of young men together; for both husband along with wife<sup>9</sup> will be taken; the old with (those) filled with age.<sup>10</sup>

(12)<sup>11</sup>And their homes will be turned over to others, their fields and wives alike. For I will stretch out my hand against the inhabitants of the land,” says the Lord.

(13)“For from the least to the greatest of them, all are greedy for gain; from the prophet to the priest, all practice falsehood.

<sup>4</sup>MT *salsillôt*, “tendrils,” is a *hapax legomenon*, the sense being understood from the context.

<sup>5</sup>MT <sup>ʿ</sup>*rēlāh ʿoznām*, literally, “their ears have a foreskin.”

<sup>6</sup>Many Mss, Syr. and Vg. read *w<sup>ʿ</sup>lō̄* before the final phrase instead of MT *lō̄*. MT suggests a relative clause, “in which they take no pleasure.” The reading here allows for a parallel with the resulting clause above, “so that they are unable to pay attention.”

<sup>7</sup>MT *w<sup>ʿ</sup>ēh<sup>ʿ</sup>ma ʿdōnāy mālēʿi*, literally, “with the wrath of Yahweh, I (Jeremiah) am full.” *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) proposes reading *wa<sup>ʿ</sup>nī* (cf. Mic 3:8), “but as for me,” instead of *w<sup>ʿ</sup>ē*. Following the LXX, *ton thumon mou*, “my wrath” (which equals *h<sup>ʿ</sup>māʿi*), Yahweh, and not Jeremiah is the speaker. It will then read, “But as for me, my wrath is full.”

<sup>8</sup>MT reads *šepōk*, “pour out,” while LXX reads *ekcheō*, “I will pour it out,” which equals BHS’ proposed reading *šāpōk*.

<sup>9</sup>MT reads *gam-ʿiš- im- ʿiššāh*, literally, “both husband with wife.” It is possible to read, “both man and wife.”

<sup>10</sup>BHS proposes inserting *lō̄* before “filled with age” (haplography). A contrast is then made between the old and those *not* filled with age. As Carroll, 194, comments, “This is unnecessary in view of the grouping ‘man and wife . . . old and aged’ ascending from children and youths.”

<sup>11</sup>Verses 12-15a are parallel to 8:10-12 with some slight variations and omissions. In v. 12, houses, fields, and wives are given to others, and Yahweh stretches out His hand against the inhabitants of the land, while in 8:10 wives and fields are given away, but nothing is said of houses or of Yahweh’s opposition against the inhabitants of the land.

(14) They have healed the wound of my people<sup>12</sup> superficially, saying, 'Peace! Peace!' But there is no peace.<sup>13</sup>

(15) They should have been ashamed because they did detestable things; but they were not ashamed; they do not know how to be ashamed.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, they shall fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them,"<sup>15</sup> says the Lord.

### Structure

The expression  $\text{׃mar ׃dōnāy}$ , "says the Lord," forms an inclusio for the unit, vv. 9–15.<sup>16</sup> The same expression starts a new section in v. 16.

The internal structure is that of a dialogue between the Lord and the prophet:

1. The Lord speaks of judgment (v. 9)
2. Jeremiah responds with a question and a complaint (vv. 10–11a)
3. The Lord answers, commenting on the nation's evil and impending judgment (vv. 11b–15).<sup>17</sup>

### Historical Background

Since there are no specific datelines for developing the historical milieu behind this passage, commentators have seized on certain "hints" in an attempt to establish the setting. The expressions "gleaning" and "pass your hand once more" imply a prophecy of a two-stage judgment. W. L. Holladay believes that this

<sup>12</sup>Many MSS read *ba-ammī*, literally, "daughter of my people," meaning "poor people."

<sup>13</sup>MT  $w^{\text{e}}\text{ēn } \text{šālôm}$ , "but there is no peace," is read by the LXX as *kai pou estin eirēnē*, "and where is peace?" This equals  $w^{\text{e}}\text{ayēh}$  that BHS suggests inserting. The declarative statement of MT seems stronger than the interrogative.

<sup>14</sup>MT reads the hiphil infinitive construct *halīm*. Cf. the preferable niphil (passive) form in 8:12, *hikkālēm*.

<sup>15</sup>MT  $p^{\text{e}}\text{qatīm}$ , "I punish them," is understood by the LXX as *episkopēs autōn*, "their visitation," which equals  $p^{\text{e}}\text{quddāām}$ , as in 8:12. This latter reading renders, "They will be brought down at the time of their visitation/reckoning."

<sup>16</sup>Leading commentators see this as a unit: Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 3d ed., HAT 12 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), 38-39; Albert Condamin, *Le Livre de Jérémie*, 3d ed., Etudes Biblique (Paris: Lecoffre, 1936), 54; Bright, 49-50. Paul Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, KAT 10 (Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922), 73-79, sees a complicated unit: vv. 9-11a; 8:8-9; 6:11b-15 = 8:10b-12; idem, *Studien zum Text des Jeremia*, BWANT 25 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1920), 47-49.

<sup>17</sup>CDK, 102; W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 211.

suggests the fall of Samaria and the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup> John Bright tentatively suggests the death of Josiah in 609 B.C.E. or sometime after the deportation from Jerusalem in 597 B.C.E.<sup>19</sup>

Since Jer 9:6-15 is a segment of a larger block (Jer 4:5-6:30),<sup>20</sup> which predicts divine judgment against Jerusalem using the agent of the "foe from the north," a designation for Babylon,<sup>21</sup> it appears that the setting here is one immediately preceding Babylonian actions in 597 B.C.E.

### Interpretation

The expression of divine judgment uses the image of a grape-picker or gleaner to indicate thorough-going, punitive action against the people. Enemy hosts who have already been summoned as instruments of judgments (5:10; 6:1) are the gleaners.<sup>22</sup> As the remnant of the Israelite nation (that is, the combined kingdoms), Judah is likened to the vineyard and its forthcoming judgment is like the excision of the fruit from the vine. Even the remnant, that which is left over, will not escape the deserved punishment. There is no guarantee that it will remain and even faces the possibility of total destruction. Indeed, "the use of the word 'glean' and the reference to 'remnant' implies the totally comprehensive nature of the judgment."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Holladay, 213. He dates the setting to December 601 or early in 602. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, 75 and Rudolph, 45, opt for the fall of Samaria and suggest a date sometime between 625-622 B.C.E.

<sup>19</sup>Bright, 51.

<sup>20</sup>For linkages between this and other parts of the block, fusing it as a single unit, see W. L. Holladay, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20* (London: Associated University Press, 1976), 91, 92.

<sup>21</sup>James H. Gailey, "The Sword and the Heart: Evil from the North and Within, An Exposition of Jeremiah 4:5-6:30," *Interpretation* 9 (1955): 298; John Bright, "The Book of Jeremiah: Its Structure, Its Problems, and Their Significance for the Interpreter," *Interpretation* 9 (1955): 276; J. P. Hyatt, "The Peril from the North in Jeremiah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 59 (1940): 509; Brevard S. Childs, "The Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78 (1959): 187-98.

<sup>22</sup>CDK, 103. Some exegetes assign the task of gleaning to Jeremiah, claiming that his "prophetic ministry, however fruitless it seemed, was a kind of grape harvesting, a gleaning of the vine of Israel." Thompson, 257. Cf. J. P. Hyatt, "Jeremiah: Introduction and Exegesis," *Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1951-57), 5:589; and Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 213.

<sup>23</sup>CDK, 103; B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, KHAT 11 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1901), 67, sees the reference to the remnant as an eschatological gloss. He also relates the search for remaining grapes to Abraham's question regarding the fate of Sodom.

Although some exegetes insists that the idea of gleaning here is a positive image,<sup>24</sup> it is clear that the tone of the passage is wholly negative.<sup>25</sup> The imagery of “harvest” elsewhere is negative. Further, the action of passing the hand over the branches again (*hasēḥ yāḏkā*, “return your hand”) highlights a “mopping-up operation,”<sup>26</sup> where the harvesters/gleaners run their hands over the vine once again to pick any small clusters of remaining fruit. A note of finality is struck “because the harvesting of the grapes is the final stage of the summer’s work when the late fruit and vintage are gathered. It is also the final act for what is here gleaned is what’s left of Israel, *š<sup>e</sup> ʿīṭ yīsrāʾēl*.”<sup>27</sup>

The objective of the gleaning of the remnant is that nobody escapes the deserved punishment. Indeed, “the utter destruction of Israel is envisaged by the image of the thoroughly gleaned vine.”<sup>28</sup>

Jeremiah’s rhetorical query (v. 10a) concerns his listener: to whom should he speak? The remnant of v. 9? He protests that no one will listen to this word because their ears are uncircumcised. This may be a veiled way of speaking of the unfaithfulness of the people to the covenant, of which circumcision was the sign. Hence, uncircumcised ears may indicate bold refusal to listen to, and obey Yahweh’s word.

Jeremiah was so full of the Lord’s wrath that he was about to explode. Yahweh’s reply (vv. 11b–12) insists that Jeremiah must proclaim the word of judgment to all strata of society, for they were all equally guilty, clergy and people alike, of greed and unjust gain. Lulled into a sense of false security they had become morally blind (vv. 13–15). Hence, the divine oracle concludes, given the widespread nature of the nation’s practice of evil, that all will fall in the impending day of judgment. Even the remnant will be ravaged in the judgment. It is a situation of hopelessness.

<sup>24</sup>John M. Berridge, *Prophet, People and the Hand of Yahweh: An Examination of Form and Content in the Proclamation of the Prophet Jeremiah*, Basel Studies of Theology 4 (Zürich: EVZ Verlag, 1970), 79. He claims that Jeremiah is to search for a “possible point of connection for Yahweh’s essential will of salvation for Judah.” See also Josef Schreiner, *Jeremia 1–25, 14*, Die Neue Echter Bibel (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1981), 50.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Judg 20:45 and Isa 17:4–6 where the same root (*ll*) is used as in Jer 6:9.

<sup>26</sup>Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 213. He believes that it is possible to see *š<sup>e</sup> ʿīṭ*, “remnant,” as the reversal of *rē ʿīṭ*, “first fruits,” of Jer 2:3 where Israel was the firstfruits of Yahweh’s harvest. This harvest is then related to the vineyard. “It would be a temptation then to translate ‘remnant of Israel’ here as ‘first fruits’ of Israel.” *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>Carroll, 195.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.* This is the equivalent of the destruction rendered to the terraces and the stripping of the branches of the vineyard in 5:10.

## Jer 8:1-3

## Translation and Textual Considerations

(1) "At that time," says the Lord, "They shall bring forth the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of its princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem from their graves. (2) And they shall spread them out before the sun and the moon and the whole host of heaven whom they loved and served and followed and consulted and worshiped. They will not be gathered up or buried, but will be like dung on the face of the earth. And death will be preferred to life by all the remnant (*hašš<sup>2</sup>ērîl*) which remain (*hanniš<sup>2</sup>ārîm*) from this evil family, in all the remaining (*hanniš<sup>2</sup>ārîm*)<sup>29</sup> places where I have driven them," says the Lord.

## Structure

Jer 8:1-3 forms a unit, the expression *ne<sup>2</sup>um<sup>2</sup>dōnāy*, "says the Lord," forming an inclusio (vv. 1,3). It is the concluding unit to a series of units extending from 7:1 to 8:3.<sup>30</sup> The entire section may be divided as follows:

1. God's command to Jeremiah to speak His word (7:1-2)
2. Jeremiah's response: The Temple Sermon (7:3-15)
3. God's command to Jeremiah not to pray for the people and His denunciation of their idolatry (7:16-20)
4. First oracle by Yahweh (7:21-28)
5. Second oracle by Yahweh (7:29-34)
6. Third oracle by Yahweh (8:1-3).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup>BHS, following the LXX and Syr. suggest deleting *hanniš<sup>2</sup>ārîm*, "remaining," on dittographic grounds since two forms of the word are already present. But as CKD, 116, point out, "The duplicative style may be a further example of the prophet's prose style (cf. 7:4)."

<sup>30</sup>Holladay, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20*, 102-5, regards Jer 8:1-3 as a concluding appendix to the prose section 7:1-8:3. The key word *mākōm*, "place," is a literary thread linking the entire unit: 7:4,6,12,14,20,32, and 8:3. CKD, 120, say that the conjunction of "place(s)" and "Lord of Hosts" (7:3: 8:3) may constitute an inclusio for the narrative as a whole.

<sup>31</sup>It has been suggested that 7:29-8:3 is one unit: Rudolph, 55; H. L. Ellison, "The Prophecy of Jeremiah, Part XIII: The Shame of Judah," *Evangelical Quarterly* 34 (1962): 98. However, the inclusio in 8:1-3 is convincing enough to have separate units. Cf. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 58.

### Historical Background

It is generally agreed that the material of 7:1-8:3 has a unity of theme that deals with the inviolability of the temple<sup>32</sup> and the pursuit of heinous idolatrous practices such as child sacrifice and astral worship. These suggest a period shortly after 609 B.C.E. after Jehoiakim had assumed the throne and permitted such practices to return.<sup>33</sup>

### Interpretation

The entire block sounds an ominous note. Yahweh initially commands the prophet to stand in the temple gate and speak (vv. 1-2). In the Temple Sermon (vv. 3-15) Jeremiah attempts to persuade the people not to put their trust in the presence of the temple to protect them, and warns that Yahweh will destroy both temple and nation if they refuse to change their conduct. In vv. 16-20 Yahweh tells Jeremiah not to intercede on the behalf of the people and calls attention to their worship of the Queen of Heaven. Since this is a breach of covenant loyalty, it is not surprising that oracles of doom follow. The first oracle condemns the people for the attitude that the offering to sacrifice was a substitute for obedience. The second oracle condemns child sacrifice and other evils. The third oracle, which concerns us, is a condemnation of astral worship. While this oracle proclaims a future judgment ("at that time," vs. 1),<sup>34</sup> "the urgency of the prophet's message as a whole suggests the future is not too far distant."<sup>35</sup>

The horror of the judgment is seen in the disinterment of the bones of the dead.<sup>36</sup> This exhumation is comprehensive in scope: the bones of the nobility and religious leaders, as well as ordinary citizens, will have no guarantee against

<sup>32</sup>For the treatment of this theme, see J. Bright, *Covenant and Promise* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 49-77; and R. E. Clements, *Abraham and David: Genesis 15 and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition*, Studies in Biblical theology, 2d series, 5 (Naperville, IN: Allenson, 1967), 76-80.

<sup>33</sup>Thompson, 274; Bright, *Jeremiah*, 58.

<sup>34</sup>This has prompted some to see these verses as coming after the fall of Jerusalem. See Carroll, 225. Holladay, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1- 20*, 271, regards it as an exotic insertion.

<sup>35</sup>CKD, 126.

<sup>36</sup>This desecration of graves was common in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, both in terms of robbery and in ritual dishonoring. Ashurbanipal gives record of such action in his campaign against Susa, the capital of Elam. See Morton Cogan, "A Note on Disinterment in Jeremiah," in *Gratz College, Anniversary Volume*, ed. Isidore David Possaw and Samuel Tobias Lachs (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 30. R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, TOTC (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 88, suggests that the disinterment may be incidental in the process of constructing a siege ramp for the assault on Jerusalem.

abuse.<sup>37</sup> Further, the irony of the scene is highlighted in that the astral deities to which Judah gave so much devotion would look upon the exposed bones without being able to help.

The judgment also holds a note of finality and absoluteness. These exposed bones become like dung, useless and grotesque, with no possibility of reburial.<sup>38</sup> The force of the message now comes home in v. 3, that despite the desecration of the dead, the remnant would prefer death to life. This shows the enormity of the coming judgment. The exile would be so difficult that the remnant from "this evil family,"<sup>39</sup> those who survived the catastrophe of the invasion, would deem death preferable to life. Thompson sums it up correctly, "The lot of the survivors would be even more miserable than the fate of those who perished."<sup>40</sup>

### Jer 11:18-23

#### Translation and Textual Considerations

(18) The Lord made it known to me, so I knew; then you caused me to see their evil deeds. (19) But I was like a trusting lamb led to slaughter. I had not known that they had devised plots against me: "Let us destroy the tree with its sap in it,<sup>41</sup> and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more."

(20)" O Lord of Hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart<sup>42</sup> and the mind,<sup>43</sup> let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I

<sup>37</sup>See further B. Lorenz, "Bemerkungen zum Totenkult im alten Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 32 (1982): 229-34.

<sup>38</sup>In 7:32 all of Topheth becomes one huge burial ground; in v. 33 there is no burial; and now in 8:3 there is unburial.

<sup>39</sup>Thompson, 296, n. 3, correctly says that the "evil family" points to Judah, who at this stage represented all that remained of the former Israel.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. Jutta Hausmann, *Israels Rest: Studien zum Selbstverständnis der nachexilischen Gemeinde*, BWANT 7 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1987), 97, claims that the remnant here is positive. However, she fails to support her position.

<sup>41</sup>MT *našhitāh ʿēs b'lahmō*, "let us destroy the tree with its flesh." BHS; Thompson, 347; and CDK, 175, suggest *b'l ʿhō* for *b'lahmō* and read "in its sap." Cf. Deut 34:7. M. Dahood, "Ugaritic Studies and the Bible," *Gregorianum* 43 (1962): 66, agrees but treats the *mem* between the noun and the suffix as enclitic.

The LXX reads *deute kai embalōmon xulon eis ton arton autou*, "come and let us put wood into his bread." The words "wood" and "bread" led early Christians, notably Justin Martyr, to see the cross and body of Christ as being in view here. See F.C. Burkitt, "Justin Martyr and Jeremiah xi 19," *Journal of Theological Studies* 33 (1932): 371-73.

<sup>42</sup>MT *k'lāyōt*, literally, "kidney."

<sup>43</sup>MT *leb*, literally "heart."

have committed<sup>44</sup> my case/lawsuit.” (21) Therefore, thus said the Lord concerning the men of Anathoth who seek my life<sup>45</sup> saying, “Do not prophecy in the name of the Lord that you do not die by our hand.” (22) Therefore, thus says the Lord of Hosts, “Indeed, I will punish them; the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine. (23) And there shall be no remnant (*š<sup>e</sup>-ʿivī*) of them. For I will bring evil on the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment.”

### Structure

Jer 11:18-12:6 is a dialogue between the prophet and Yahweh. It may be divided into four distinct sections: (1) Jeremiah’s complaint (11:18-20); (2) Yahweh’s answer (11:21-23); (3) Jeremiah’s complaint (12:1-4); and (4) Yahweh’s answer (12:5-6).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup>MT *gillitī*, “I have revealed,” is understood by BHS as *gallōfi*, “I have rolled upon,” that is, “entrusted” or “committed.” Cf. Ps 22:9 (Eng. v. 8); 37:5. See also Thompson, 347; CDK, 175; and Carroll, 275.

<sup>45</sup>MT has “your life” but the LXX has “my life” fitting the context more smoothly.

<sup>46</sup>Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 365, claims that originally 11:18-23 and 12:1-6 formed separate units and were only secondarily brought together. He is followed by CKD, 177, who give an outline of the components of the two units.

There is considerable debate regarding “assumed dislocations” in the text. Several rearrangements have been proposed: Bright, *Jeremiah*, 89-90, indicate the following: 12:1-6; 11:18-23; H. H. Rowley, “The Text and Interpretation of Jeremiah 11:18-12:6,” *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature* 42 (1926): 217-27, suggests 11:18; 12:6; 11:19-20; 12:1-3; 11:21-23; 12:4-5; W. Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1-25*, WMANT 41 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 159 points out the following: 11:18; 12:6; 11:19-23; 12:1-5. For further discussion see, Kathleen M. O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Interpretation and Role in Chapters 1-25*, SBL Dissertation Series 94 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1984), 7-26.

The question of structure is complicated by attempting to determine which verses are poetry and which are prose. See Walter Theophilus Woldemar Cloete, *Versification and Syntax in Jeremiah 2-25: Syntactical Constraints in Hebrew Colometry*, SBL Dissertation Series, 117 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 166.

While scholars are divided on the form of the passage,<sup>47</sup> it may be construed as a lament, the basic components of which may be outlined as shown in Table 1.<sup>48</sup>

<i>Formal Lament</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> Lament</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Lament</i>
Invocation	11:18	12:1a
Complaint	11:19	2:1b, 2
Prayer	11:20	12:3-4
Divine Response	11:21-23	12:5-6

This discussion is restricted to the first lament which deals specifically with the remnant motif.

### Historical Background

This lament is born out of a plot against Jeremiah's life instigated by his own relatives and fellow townspeople of Anathoth.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot

<sup>47</sup>The passage is generally seen as constituting one of the prophet's laments. O'Connor, 24, sees it as a creative adaptation of a psalm of individual lament that serves a particular theological purpose. Cf. Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, OTL, trans. Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 69; Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 55-56. Carroll, 275-79, argues for a communal lament on the strength of the tree motif (11:19; 12:2) which was used in 11:16 for the destruction of the entire community, the nation. Henning Graf Reventlow, *Liturgie and prophetisches Ich bei Jeremiah* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1963), 253-54, argues that vv. 18-20 constitute a segment from a thanksgiving psalm. Others argue for a classification of a lawsuit based on the presence of legal language: Sheldon H. Blank, "The Confessions of Jeremiah and the Meaning of Prayer," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 21 (1948): 332; Franz D. Hubmann, *Untersuchen zu den Konfessionen Jer. 11.18-12.6 und Jer. 15.10-21*, *Forschung zur Bibel* 30 (Stuttgart: Echter Verlag, 1978), 162-63. A. R. Pete Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context: Scenes of Prophetic Drama*, JSOT Supplement Series 45 (Sheffield: JSOT 1987), 23-24, regards it as a borderline case between lament and thanksgiving. G. von Rad, "The Confessions of Jeremiah," trans. Anne Winston and G. L. Johnson, in *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacs (Winoma Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns), 341, sees it as a riddle. The latter was originally published as "Die Konfessionen Jeremias," *Evangelische Theologie* 3 (1936): 265-76.

<sup>48</sup>CDK, 177. These elements have also been outlined by S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:229-39; 2:9-11.

<sup>49</sup>Rowley, 218, interprets "the men of Anathoth" as the local priesthood, members of the same priestly family as Jeremiah. They resented the Deuteronomic reformation since it exalted the Jerusalem priesthood but marginalized the provincial priesthood. Rowley adds that Josiah's reform exalted the House of Zadok while the House of Abiathar, to which the priests of Anathoth belonged, was degraded and displaced. Since Jeremiah supported the reform, he was considered a traitor.

determine with certainty when this occurred and what specific provocation is in view, although it has been guardedly suggested that the plot of Hananiah during the reign of Zedekiah (chap. 37) may be in the background. It appears, however, that the prophet was so disturbed that he fled to God in great despair and pain. Thompson aptly comments, "The village, which gave him his basic social and psychological security, turned against him; and he was alone, cut off from those with whom he grew up and unable to count on the support which was normally available to a villager."<sup>50</sup>

### Interpretation

Jeremiah begins the lament abruptly, invoking that it was Yahweh who had revealed the malicious plot. However, neither the nature of the revelation nor the intricacies of the plot are revealed. Perhaps the abruptness reflects his initial lack of awareness regarding the hideous cabal.<sup>51</sup>

In his complaint (v. 19) Jeremiah compared himself to a sheep being led to slaughter; he is unaware of the threat of death. He is also described as a tree about to be cut down in the spring of life. His picture from an earlier proclamation of judgment against the people, that although they were like a tree of good foliage they will be destroyed (11:16), is mirrored here in that these same people are threatening to cut him down like a green tree. The prophet who had revealed to the people their fate at the hand of God (11:1-17) now has his fate at the hand of the people revealed to him by God. Hence, "the prophet's fate and the people's fate are intertwined."<sup>52</sup>

In the prayer section of the lament Jeremiah asks God to intervene. The enormity of the situation was so overwhelming that he cries out for divine vengeance (*n<sup>e</sup>qāmāh*) to settle his lawsuit (*rīb*). The implication of the verse is that God, as righteous tester, will find Jeremiah innocent and his adversaries guilty and deserving of punishment.

The divine response provides for exactly such judgment. Yahweh reveals that it was Jeremiah's steadfast denunciations of evil in the name of Yahweh why the men of Anothoth desired the prophet's life (v. 19), that is, the obliteration of

E. W. Nicholson, *Jeremiah 1-25* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 115, believes that the plot was perpetrated because Jeremiah was perceived as a traitor for his advocacy of surrender to Babylon, preaching that God had delivered the nation to the Chaldeans. The people of Anothoth would not harbor such a traitor.

<sup>50</sup>Thompson, 350.

<sup>51</sup>CDK, 177.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 278.

his name.<sup>53</sup> The motif of the “name” (*šēm*) is significant here. In v. 19 the prophet’s name is to be erased from memory, while in v. 21 he is to be destroyed because of prophesying in Yahweh’s name. “In effect, the obliteration of the prophet’s name also means the obliteration of Yahweh’s name from Israel.”<sup>54</sup> Not so, says Yahweh. He declares unprecedented judgment against the antagonists: they will be overtaken by sword and famine until no one survives. Yahweh intends to destroy these adversaries so that they will have no one, no remnant, to carry on their posterity. Their evil plotting will be reserved so that their name will be forgotten and they will have no progeny to carry on their legacy.

Franz D. Hubmann has demonstrated the relationship between Jeremiah’s speech (vv. 18-20) and God’s response (vv. 21-23).<sup>55</sup> He shows how both sections have a tricolon at their midpoint that are parallel:

*Plotters:* Let us destroy the tree with its fruit  
Let us cut him off from the land of the living  
Let his name be remembered no more (v. 19b).

*Yahweh:* The young men shall die by the sword  
Their sons and daughters shall die by famine  
They shall have no remnant (vv. 22b-23a).

Further, the root *pqd*, “to deal with,” “to punish” (v. 22), answers Jeremiah’s prayer for vengeance or recompense in v. 20 (the root *nqm*). This pronouncement of judgment has a sense of finality. Collectively, the offspring, young men,<sup>56</sup> sons and daughters, will be annihilated. Therefore, no one, no remnant, will survive the catastrophe of famine and the sword.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the consequences for opposing Jeremiah’s prophesying is destruction: *and a remnant shall not be left to them.*

<sup>53</sup>Thompson, 350, explains: “Jeremiah’s enemies intended to destroy him so that he had no one left, no remnant to carry on his name. His early death would ensure that there was no progeny like him being born. His name would be forgotten, a tragic end for a man of Israel, for whom descendants demonstrated the divine blessing on his life.”

<sup>54</sup>O’Connor, 19.

<sup>55</sup>Hubmann, 79-81.

<sup>56</sup>BHS suggests that *bahūrīm*, “young men,” is dittographic and should be deleted. Whereas the expression does break the poetic pattern, it is better to see it as an alliteration with *hereb*, “sword.”

<sup>57</sup>Famine, sword, and pestilence are common in the book of Jeremiah. See 4:13, 15, 16; 15:2, 3; 21:7, 9; 24:10; 27:18, 13; 29:17, 18. They refer to destruction due possibly to military invasion.

This calamity comes “in the year of their punishment.”<sup>58</sup> This phrase occurs elsewhere only in Jer 23:12 in an oracle against the prophets, and in Jer 48:44 in an oracle against Moab. In short, the impending judgment against the prophet’s personal enemies is described in the same terms as used in the wider context of the nation and a foreign entity.

### Jer 15:5-9

#### Translation and Textual Considerations

- (5) “For who will take pity on you, O Jerusalem?  
And who will mourn for you?  
And who will turn aside to ask about you welfare?  
(6) You, you rejected me,” says the Lord.  
“You kept going backward so I stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you; I was weary of relenting.<sup>59</sup>  
(7) And I have winnowed them with a winnowing fork  
in the gates of the land. I made (them) childless: I destroyed my people: they did not turn from their ways.<sup>60</sup>  
(8) I have made their widows<sup>61</sup> more numerous than the sand of the sea.<sup>62</sup> I have brought to them, upon the mother of the youth<sup>63</sup> a destroyer at noonday: I let fall upon her suddenly, anguish and terror.  
(9) She wastes away who has borne seven;  
she breathed out her life, her sun has gone down while yet day;  
she was ashamed and humiliated;  
and their remnant (*š<sup>ʿ</sup> ʿrīlām*) I shall give to the sword before their enemies,” says the Lord.

<sup>58</sup>As Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 375, explains, this phrase is in parallelism with *rā āh*, “disaster,” “evil,” in the previous line. Therefore, “year” is a parallel object of “bring” in the previous line. Hence, there is balance.

<sup>59</sup>The LXX reads *kai ouketi anēsō autous* which is the equivalent to BHS’ suggested reading, *niḏēi hannihām*, “and I will no longer spare them.”

<sup>60</sup>The LXX reads, *dia tas kakias autōn*, “because of their iniquities.”

<sup>61</sup>Reading *ʾlm<sup>ʿ</sup>nōlām* with BHS. Cf. LXX, Syr., and Tg. CKD, 199, indicate that the *mem* dropped out by haplography.

<sup>62</sup>BHS suggests placing this phrase at the end of the verse.

<sup>63</sup>This is the literal translation of MT. BHS proposes “a destroying people” in place of “upon the mothers of the young men.” For further discussion on the problems here, see CKD, 199; Carroll, 322; G. R. Driver, “Linguistic and Textual Problems: Jeremiah,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* (New Series) 28 (1937), 113.

## Structure

Verse 9 is the final statement of a lament<sup>64</sup> constituting 15:5-9.<sup>65</sup> It may be divided into two sections:

1. A brief word of lament by Jeremiah, introduced by the interrogative particle *mî*, “who?” (v. 5).<sup>66</sup>

2. The divine oracle (vv. 6-9). The formulaic expression, “thus says the Lord,” forms an inclusio. The first-person pronominal form dominates, being used eight times in reference to God.<sup>67</sup>

## Historical Background

The reference to Manasseh (v. 4) seems to point to 2 Kgs 21:1-17 and the abominable acts of that king.<sup>68</sup> However, the imagery in Jer 15 points to the ravages of invasion and war. Scholarly opinion is divided with regard to the exact historical

<sup>64</sup>W. A. M. Beuken and H. W. M. van Grol, “Jeremiah 14.1-15, 9: A Situation of Distress and Its Hermeneutics, Unity and Diversity of Form-Dramatic Development,” in *Le Livre de Jérémie: le Prophète et son milieu, les oracles et leur transmission*, BETL, 54, ed. P. -M. Bogaert (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1981), 314. Deep distress characterizes the person addressed and the subject matter.

<sup>65</sup>Many commentators regard this as part of the larger section 14:1-15:9. See CDK, 195-200; Holladay, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20*, 145-46; Reventlow, 150-53; Condamin, 123-30. Others like Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P.R. Ackroyd (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 355-56; Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, 158-68 (who calls it, “The Great Drought); and G. R. Castellino, “Some Observations on the Literary Structure of Some Passages in Jeremiah,” *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (1980): 407. assume a unity for 14:1-15:4. Some, however, dispute this claim: John Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 128, calls it “a mixed collection of oracles.”

<sup>66</sup>The *qinah* form is communicated throughout the section. It is quite pronounced in Jeremiah’s three rhetorical question of v. 5: “Who will pity you, O Jerusalem?” “Who will mourn for you?” “Who will stop to ask about you?” In all cases, the answer is an implied negative. On this stylistic element, see Walter Brueggemann, “Jeremiah’s Use of Rhetorical Questions,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973): 358-74.

<sup>67</sup>C. F. Keil, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 2 vols. in one, Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 8 (n.p., n.d.: reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 1:256.

<sup>68</sup>Clements, 95, sees the mention of Manasseh as the deliberate cross-referencing of a scribe. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 427, dates it to November/December 601 B.C.E.

point.<sup>69</sup> I am inclined to agree with J. P. Hyatt that the details are not sufficiently clear for a definite decision to be made.<sup>70</sup>

### Interpretation

This poem describes the fate of Jerusalem. The theme of terrible judgment depicted in 15:1-4 is continued, for the particle *kī* in v. 5 connects both sections. God denotes that even great intercessors like Moses and Samuel cannot deter the divine punishment that is coming on the people of Jerusalem (v. 1).<sup>71</sup> The terrible measures of judgment in vv. 1-3 are now mirrored in the divine action in vv. 6-9.

The questions in v. 5 expect a resounding negative reply: no one will pity, console, or inquire of Jerusalem's *šālôm*.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, a loss of *šālôm* is implied. This signals a reversal of prosperity and well-being in the cultic community, and more importantly, the claim of Zion's inviolability.<sup>73</sup>

The judgments expressed in vv. 6-9 are also overwhelmingly negative. The repetition "you, you" places emphasis on the rebellious action of Jerusalem against God in v. 6a. This is compounded by the expression <sup>2</sup>*āhōr tēl'ēki*, "You keep going backwards," which is indicative of taking "the initiative to sever an existing relationship."<sup>74</sup> In short, this is a breach of covenant. Therefore, in vv. 6b-9 emphasis is placed on God's punitive actions against Jerusalem. This is well summarized: "Through the litany of judgment, the Lord described the horrible

<sup>69</sup>Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, 169, places it as the invasion of 602 B.C.E. as recorded in 2 Kgs 24:2. Rudolph, 89, assigns it to 598 B.C.E. while Thompson, 389, holds to the Babylonian invasion of 587 B.C.E. Skinner, 270, claims that the passage "depicts the desolation of Jerusalem as already accomplished, and in such terms that even if its language be only the language of prophetic anticipation, it must express the feelings with which he looked back on the history which had culminated in this immeasurable tragedy."

<sup>70</sup>Hyatt, "Jeremiah: Introduction and Exegesis," 937.

<sup>71</sup>On this matter, see W. L. Holladay, "The Background of Jeremiah's Self-Understanding: Moses, Samuel and Psalms 22," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 (1964): 153-64; reprinted in *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacs (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 313-37.

<sup>72</sup>Beuken and van Grol, 316, indicate that such an inquiry marks the absence of every kind of help in situations of distress.

<sup>73</sup>Jonathan Paige Sisson, "Jeremiah and the Jerusalem Conception of Peace," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986): 437, 438. He adds that the loss of peace meant the upstaging of Jerusalem as the center of the created order, the disruption of the natural and social spheres of life, the deterioration of the political situation and increased hostilities against the city. In short, it describes a state of disorder and desolation especially since the loss of *šālôm* from Jerusalem coincided with the abandonment of Zion as the divine residence.

<sup>74</sup>Beuken and van Grol, 318.

deeds forced upon him by the people's action. The people had rejected him for the last time; the time of judgment had come."<sup>75</sup>

The judgment is described in terms of destruction (v. 6), winnowing<sup>76</sup> and bereavement caused by childlessness (v. 7), widowhood (v. 8),<sup>77</sup> and the shameful languishing and death of the remnant (v. 9). This is inevitable since the people are charged with rejecting God to the point where the divine declaration is, "I am weary of relenting." The irony is biting for the Lord had grown "'weary' of relenting or leaving off his judgment on the people who had grown 'weary' of repenting (9:4)."<sup>78</sup>

The expression "mother of seven" is a proverbial description of the fulfilled or satisfied mother (cf. Ruth 4:15; 1 Sam 2:5). But here she is filled with dissatisfaction and dismay comparable to that of the nobles and farmers of Jer 14:3-4, who are suffering in the midst of drought. Therefore, Judah languishes or wastes away. Further, the expression "her sun is set while it is yet day" is balanced by the reference to the devastator at noon in v. 8. This reflects on the loss of young men in battle while still in their noonday, that is, their strength and vigor of manhood. This is a curse for she is left with no future heir.<sup>79</sup> Despite all this anguish and suffering a word of finality is added: Yahweh will bring the enemies' sword against those who are remaining, the remnant, who survived the brutality of the invaders. Nothing less than absolute annihilation is in view here. Even the remnant will eventually become fatalities. The end result of the judgment will be the destruction of even the remnant. Jerusalem, the mother-city of Judah, has no positive future, no hope.<sup>80</sup> The totality of destruction, enveloping even the remnant, is forcefully emphasized by Beuken and van Grol:

No one is interested in Jerusalem's fate, because God made her childless (vs. 7b). There are only widows left, without any protection, because not only the

<sup>75</sup>CDK, 205.

<sup>76</sup>The act of winnowing is one of separation and reduction. It implies the presence of a remnant as that which has been left behind.

<sup>77</sup>This is a negation or reversal of the promise given to Abraham that his offspring will be like the sands by the sea, too numerous to be counted (Gen 15:5; 22:17). Now the people are childless and their widows outnumber the sands.

<sup>78</sup>CDK, 204. Beuken and van Grol, 317, see this as an announcement of the inevitability of judgment for "God no longer regrets the execution of judgment."

<sup>79</sup>Thompson, 390.

<sup>80</sup>Hausmann, 98. This comes as the conclusion to the several judgments in the entire pericope. This heightens the intensity: drought (14:2-6); lament of the people (vv. 7-9); God's judgments against them even prohibiting the prophet to pray on their behalf (vv. 10-16). In short, lament (vv. 17-8) follows lament (vv. 19-22). Again God prohibits intercession (15:1) and threatens powerful judgments (vv. 2-4). Without pity or compassion, more scathing judgments befall the people (vv. 5-9) until death becomes inevitable. See also Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, 163.

mother who leans on a young son, but even the very prolific and therefore unimpeachable woman stands alone. And so the figures in which beaten Jerusalem appears, already show . . . the tragic effect of the judgment, which not only hits the leaders—the oracle does not mention them—but also those who need protection, the women and mothers, on whom the progress of life rests.<sup>81</sup>

Tragically, the distress of the city and the cutting off of its remnant, is that she brought this on herself. God stands there, grieved but powerless.<sup>82</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The evidence indicates that judgment against the remnant of Judah was decisive and that God was behind it. Evidently the people had violated the covenant ideals and had become disobedient. As such, Yahweh moved against them, employing even their enemies to execute the fatal blow. No protection could be found in the temple or in any religious activity. The finality of the judgment is sounded throughout.

<sup>81</sup>Beuken and van Grol, 320.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 324.