A common way of interpreting the book of Jeremiah is to read it against the backdrop of events in Judah leading up to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, and in the years immediately following. Events such as the reform of Josiah (622 BCE), the battle of Carchemish (605 BCE), the meeting of the Judahite and neighbouring kings (592 BCE), and the siege of Jerusalem (587 BCE) become the backdrop against which Jeremian texts are interpreted. The focus is on how events around 587 — either immediately before or after — have helped shape the book. Reading the text in this way helps us understand the prophet and his ministry against the background of the original events which generated the Jeremiah tradition.¹

However, there is another approach to the interpretation of the book which has received less attention from Jeremian scholars, and which I will take up in this essay. The approach takes into account the book’s long compositional history which extends well into the second temple period, possibly down into the third or fourth centuries.² It recognises that book’s

¹ For this approach, see the standard commentaries such as Bright 1965; Holladay 1986; 1989; Lundbom 1999; 2004; Thompson 1980.

² The third and fourth centuries are the period in which Stipp believes that JerMT reached its final form (Stipp 1994: 142–143). Goldman proposes the period between 515 and 445, the period between the consecration of the temple and the era of Nehemiah and Ezra (Goldman 1992: 143–147). For less precise conclusions about a the second temple period date for the MTJer’s final form, see Janzen 1973: 131–135; McKane 1996: clxxii-clxxiv;.
composition was influenced not only by events which led up to and include 587 BCE, but that the book’s composition also reflects events from the second temple period. In this essay, I will focus on the MT recension, and will explore what issues in the early second temple period might have contributed to its present shape. By “early second temple period” I refer to the Persian period.

My method will be to use the Alexandrian LXX recension (LXXJer) as a point of comparison. In the first part of the paper, I will examine the significant differences between the two recensions to highlight what is distinctive in MTJer. I will take up three distinct features of MTJer: its representation of Babylon, its elevation of the figure of Jeremiah over that of Baruch, and the vision of the future found in Jer 33.14-16, a text completely absent from the LXXJer. In the second section, I will explain the relationship between MTJer’s views and their relationship to the situation in the Yehud of the early second temple period.

1. Significant Differences between MTJer and LXXJer

There are three significant differences which I will take up: JerMT’s particular focus on Babylon; its elevation of the figure of Jeremiah over that of Baruch; the promise of a future Davidic ruler and a re-established ritual and worship in 33.14-26, a text not found in LXXJer. In this section of the paper I want to articulate the MT’s particular view on each of these three points.

1.1. JerMT’s Representation of Babylon

The MT has its own distinctive view of Babylon. Although it reached its final form in the second temple period, well after the demise of Babylon, MTJer displays a greater interest in the figure of Babylon than does LXXJer. The former portrays Babylon as a figure which transcends

3 In doing this, I am following a line of investigation done on the books of Haggai and Hosea against an early second temple period backdrop by Kessler 2002 and Trotter 2001.
history and becomes the archetypal enemy of Yhwh. As chap. 25 clearly shows, in MT Jer
Babylon is still dominant and not yet conquered, while Judah remains still subjugated and not
yet liberated.4

In chap. 25 MT Babylon is portrayed as a paradigmatic figure, which transcends history.
Its identity cannot be confined to any one nation or any one historical era.5 In the first section of
chap. 25 MT (vv. 1-14), Babylon is first portrayed as a figure corresponding to the Babylon of
the sixth century BCE, which invaded Judah (25.1, 9), and whose domination is to last 70 years
(vv. 9, 11, 12). It is the instrument of Yhwh in his judgment against a sinful Judah. Up to the end
of v. 14, Babylon is portrayed as a historical figure, but in vv. 15-29 a shift occurs.

In vv. 15-29 Jeremiah is commanded to administer the cup of Yhwh’s judgment against
the nations. The passage consists of the following elements: Yhwh’s command to perform the
act (v. 15), the consequences of the act (v. 16), the performance of the act (v. 17), a list of those
who will drink the cup (vv. 18-26), and a prediction of disaster for those who refuse (vv. 27-29).6
It is in the list of the nations that the shift from geographical and historical specificity happens.
The list begins with Judah:

So I took the cup from the LORD’s hand,
and made all the nations

to whom the LORD sent me drink it:
Jerusalem and the towns of Judah,
its kings and officials (vv. 17-18a).

4 In examining the MT’s interest in Babylon, I am not meaning to say that the LXX has no
interest in the figure of Babylon. After all, like the MT, it also contains an oracle against Babylon.
So, the difference is one of degree, but is nonetheless important.


6 For the elements of this genre, see Hals 1989: 354–355; March 1977: 172; Sweeney
1996: 536–537.
Next are the foreign nations, the first of which is Egypt. The list continues with groups who are geographically identifiable entities until v. 23: “Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who have shaven temples”. While the first three names are all identifiable places, the expression “all who have shaven temples” is a generic term referring to people who live in the desert (McKane 1986: 639). From this point on, the list’s names are more generic and geographically less specific. The list concludes with v. 26:

all the kings of the north, far and near,
one after another,
and all the kingdoms of the world
that are on the face of the earth.
And after them the king of Sheshach shall drink.

Between vv. 18 and 26a the list has expanded from specifically named places (“Judah and Jerusalem”) to the generic and all-embracing (“all the kingdoms on the face of the earth”).

At this point, however, Yhwh’s judgment is not complete because one more king has yet to submit: “and after them the king of Sheshach shall drink” (v. 26b). As the structure of v. 26 indicates, he is not included amongst “all the kingdoms on the face of the earth”. There are two signals in v. 26b which indicate that the king of Sheshach is different from the others in the list of nations in vv. 18-26. The first is the syntax of v. 26b: מֶלֶךְ שֶׁשֶׁאֵךְ שֶׁיּוֹתָה אַחֶרִיהָ ("and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them"). The expression מֶלֶךְ שֶׁשֶׁאֵךְ ("the king of Sheshach") is the subject of the verb שֶׁיּוֹתָה and has the place of emphasis in the clause. All the other kings listed in vv. 18-26 are designated by the marker אֲשֶׁר as the object of the verb שֶׁיּוֹתָה hifil in v. 17: אֲשֶׁר שֶׁיּוֹתָה ("and I made all the nations drink" – translation mine). In v. 26b there is an emphasis on the king of Sheshach which is not given to the others kings in what precedes.

7 On the various opinions about the meaning of such terms as “Arabia” (v. 24) and “Zimri” (v. 25), see Hill 1999b: 121, n.62.
The second feature of v. 26b to consider is the presence of the *athbash* רַשָּׁ֨ו ("Sheshach"). Its function is to hide the identity of the figure it represents, thereby giving it an air of mystery. To the reader who understands how the *athbash* works, the word רַשָּׁ֨ו refers at one level to the Babylon of the 6th century BCE, the conqueror of Judah. However, the structuring of the list of nations in vv. 18-26 suggests another level of meaning, where רַשָּׁ֨ו is to be understood as a figure which transcends time and place, and is not within the ordinary parameters of geography and history. In this way it represents an opaque and impenetrable figure, essentially opposed to Yhwh, one whose submission marks the climax of Yhwh’s judgment on the world, which has already begun with Judah and Jerusalem (v. 18).

Jeremiah MT also emphasises that Babylonian dominance has not yet come to an end. According to 25.18 MT, the desolation of Jerusalem and Judah are a present reality, and the judgment speeches in vv. 30-38 refer to a future, as yet unrealised divine judgment against Judah and the nations. Also, at the end of the oracles against the nations, Babylon’s demise lies in the future. In 51.59-64 MT Jeremiah sends Seraiah there to announce all the disasters that would happen to it. When he finishes, Seraiah must tie a stone to the scroll on which the oracles were written, throw it into the river Euphrates, and say: “Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more...” (v. 64). Any suggestion that Babylon’s destruction is imminent is removed by what follows in chap. 52. It describes the events which led to the siege of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, and the destruction and deportations which followed. Its final verses (vv. 31-34) tell how the Babylonian king Evil-merodach released Jeconiah from prison, and allowed him to dine at the royal table in Babylon. While this passage has been interpreted as a sign that Judah will have a future, it is at best a muted expression of hope. The book concludes with the Judean king still in exile, and Babylon still dominant.

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An *athbash* is a particular form of a code “in which the letters of a name counted from the beginning of the alphabet are exchanged for letters counted from the end” (Thompson 1980: 518, n.13).
MTJer’s portrait of Babylon raises intriguing and important questions. If MTJer did not reach its final form until the late Persian or early Hellenistic period, why does it represent Babylon as not yet conquered? Furthermore, if it is derived from a Vorlage which is more recent than that of LXXJer, why does the later recension show a more intense interest in the figure of Babylon than in the earlier one? It seems that the further in time we move away from the period of Babylonian dominance, the more interest there is in Babylon. Can we establish what were the factors at work in the second temple period that can account for Jeremiah MT’s portrait of Babylon? These questions will be addressed in the second part of this essay.

1.2. JerMT and LXXJer’s Representation of Jeremiah

The two recensions contain different representations of the figure of Jeremiah. The MT gives the figure of Jeremiah a greater prominence than does LXXJer, and elevates him at the expense of Baruch. The MT puts its emphasis on the figure of Jeremiah the prophet as the bearer of the tradition, whereas in LXXJer this role belongs to Baruch the scribe.9

The prominence given to Jeremiah by the MT is foreshadowed at the very beginning of the book, where the superscription introduces its contents as “the words of Jeremiah...to whom the word of the LORD came” (1.1, 2 MT). At the corresponding place in the superscription of LXXJer the text reads "the word of God which came to Jeremiah" (1.1). In LXXJer “the word of God” is put in the foreground; in the MT it is “the words of Jeremiah”. A heightened emphasis on the figure of Jeremiah in the MT is also brought about by its frequent designation of him as “Jeremiah the prophet”. At corresponding places in LXXJer he is simply “Jeremiah”.10 Another example of the MT’s emphasis is its account of Jeremiah’s release from prison in 39.11-13,

9 For a fuller treatment of what follows, see Hill 2002.

10 This MT plus is found in: 20.2; 25.2; 28.5, 6, 10, 12, 15; 29.1, 29; 32.2; 34.6; 36.8, 26; 37.2, 3, 6, 13; 38.9, 10; 46.13; 47.1; 49.34; 50.1. This compares with the four instances in which both textual traditions refer to Jeremiah as "the prophet": 42.2 MT (= 49.1 LXX); 43.6 MT (= 50.6 LXX); 45.1 MT (= 51.31 LXX) 51.59 MT (=29.59 LXX).
which together with vv. 4-11 are not found in LXXJer. In the latter Jeremiah is freed by order of the commanders of the Babylonian army (46.14 LXX), but in the former he is freed by that of the Babylonian king himself (39.11 MT). Privileged treatment is also given him as Nebuchadnezzar orders Nebuzaradan his commander: “Deal with him as he may ask you” (v. 12). The Jeremiah of the MT is obviously a more important person than his LXXJer counterpart.

Further prominence is given to Jeremiah by the MT’s portrayal of his role vis-a-vis that of Baruch (see also Bogaert 1981; Wright 2003: 34–39). In LXXJer Baruch is the custodian of the Jeremiah tradition. Near the end of the book, the baton - so to speak - is passed on from Jeremiah to him. After this we hear no more of Jeremiah. Baruch’s commission is followed by the book’s concluding chapter (chap. 52) with its accounts of the capture of Jerusalem in 597 and 587. However in the MT the commissioning comes in a different place (chap. 45). It is followed by the oracles against the nations (chaps. 46—51), in which Jeremiah has a key role as the proclaimer of Yhwh’s word.(46.1; 50.1; 51.59-64). Important differences between the recensions are also found in the narrative about the burning of the scroll and its rewriting (chap. 36 MT; chap. 51 LXX). Here the MT downplays the role of Baruch. 36.6 MTJer reads: “Read from the scroll that which you have written at my dictation”. At the corresponding place in the LXXJer, there is no reference to Jeremiah’s dictation: “Read from this scroll in the hearing of the people” (43.6 LXX). After the scroll has been destroyed by Jehoiakim, the new and enlarged scroll is written, according to the LXXJer, at the initiative of Baruch: “And Baruch took another scroll and wrote on it at Jeremiah’s dictation all the words of the book which Jehoiakim had burnt up” (43.22 LXX). However, according to the MT the initiative is from Jeremiah: “Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the secretary Baruch son of Neriah, who wrote on it at Jeremiah’s dictation all the words of the scroll” (36.32 MT).

Like its representation of Babylon, the MT’s elevation of Jeremiah poses another set of interesting questions. Why does the MT elevate the figure of Jeremiah the prophet over that of Baruch the scribe? Furthermore, if the MT is the more recent recension and is further distanced
from the time of the prophet than the LXXJer's Vorlage, why the interest in the prophet? If the second temple period was characterised by the rise of the scribe and the importance of the written word, why is Baruch downgraded in favour of Jeremiah? These are issues for consideration in the second part of the paper.

1.3. Jer 33.14-26MT and the Vision of the Future

Jer 33.14-26 MT is the largest section of the book which has no parallel in LXXJer. Its broader context is a section of Jeremiah MT (chaps. 30—34) whose central theme is the promise of a new future, embracing the return of the exiles and the renewal of the community's life in Judah. According to 33.14-26 in the future there will be a Davidic figure, who will rule in a restored Jerusalem and who will have a central role in its reconstituted worship. The passage divides into four units: vv. 14-16, 17-18, 19-22, 23-26. The material in the units is triggered by passages found in earlier parts of the book, such as 23.5-6; 29.10; 30.9, 21, which also contain predictions of Judah's new future (Goldman 1992: 38–63).

According to 33.14-16 Yhwh will “cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David” (v. 15). These verses are triggered by 23.5-6, which contain a similar but more explicit promise: “I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely”. The promise of a “righteous branch” (ץמצת צדוק) in 23.5 links back to chaps. 21—22 and their denunciation of the kings of Judah. 22.3 calls on the king to act “with justice and righteousness (צדק). 22.13-17 is a denunciation of Josiah’s son Shallum, because unlike his father, he did not do “justice and righteousness” (vv. 13, 15). With some changes in diction, the promise of a

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12 For a detailed discussion on the meaning of צמצת, צמצת צדוק (Jer 23.5) and צמצת צדוקה (33.15), see Rose 2000: 91–120.
“righteous branch” in 23.5 is then repeated in 33.15. In both passages the initiative of Yhwh is stressed, as the use of hifil indicates: אָדָמִית לֹא דָמַת דָּמָה. Unlike in other texts which guarantee the future of the Davidic dynasty, there is no reference in v. 15 to the action of any human being. The “righteous Branch” will not be raised up from David, but for David. The emphasis on the divine initiative is necessary in light of the announcement in 22.30 that none of Jehoiachin’s descendants will inherit the throne of Judah. If there is to be a successor “for David”, his appearance will happen only because of Yhwh’s initiative.

Another element of the vision of 33.14-26 concerns Jerusalem: “In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: The LORD is our righteousness” (v. 16). The focus on Judah and Jerusalem links 33.14-26 with what precedes in chap. 32. The vision of the future in 32.42-44 is built around the people’s objection “Fields shall be bought in this land of which you are saying: it is a desolation” (v. 43). A similar construction is also found in chap. 33: “in this place of which you say ‘It is a waste without human beings and animals,’ in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem” (vv. 10, 12). The city will also be given a new name: “the Lord is our Righteousness” (33.16). Similar names are given to Jerusalem in Isa 1.26 and Ezek 48.35 to reflect its purified and renewed character (Lundbom 2004: 540). In Ezek 48.35 the renewed Jerusalem, which Yhwh had previously abandoned, is now named “Yhwh is there”. In Isa 1.26 the purified city, formerly full of violence and called a whore (1.21), is now to be known as “the city of righteousness, the faithful city”. In Jer 33.16 the use of a new name differs from that in 23.6. In the latter it is the future Davidic ruler who is given the name. In 33.16 it is given to Jerusalem.

13 For an analysis of the Hebrew grammar of v. 15 and its significance, see Rose 2000: 117–120. See also the comments of McKane 1996: 862.

14 Contrast the promise in 2 Sam 7.12: הַקָּרוֹת אֲתֵדָרַע אַחֲרוֹנִים אֲשֶׁר יְאַשְׁר יְאַשְׁר מַעְרִי (‘I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body’). So Rose 2000: 119,.

15 For the links between 33.14-26 and chaps. 30—32, see Parke-Taylor 2000: 61, n.25.
A further element in the vision of 33.14-26 is the re-establishment of worship in the Jerusalem temple. V. 18 is about the worship of the new order, but is preceded by another reference to the promised Davidic ruler:

David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to make grain offerings, and to make sacrifices for all time.

(33.17-18)

The language here is similar to promises made to Solomon about the succession of the Davidic dynasty in 1 Kings 2.4; 8.25; 9.5; 2 Chron 6.16; 7.18. Apart from 1 Kings 2.4, the other instances of the expression “[David] shall never lack a man to sit on the throne” all occur in the context of Solomon’s temple dedication.

The re-established worship (v. 18) will be in the hands of the “levitical priests”. Although the meaning of this expression has been much debated, certain text signals in Jeremiah MT, which add some clarity to the question, have generally been ignored. The grammar of 33.18 focusses on the identity of the priests of the new order, giving them the place of emphasis in the clause: “the levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence”). In contrast, the usual word order is used in v. 17 about the Davidic successor: “David shall never lack a man”). We have in v. 18 then a signal, alerting us to the fact that there is a particular significance in the term לכהנים עלים לא יקרת יי אש מפלנו (“the levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence”). 33.18 is the only place in Jeremiah MT which has the word “levite” (Stipp 1994: 135). The word “priest” however occurs approximately forty times, and is usually used in an adversarial sense.

What the expression “levitical priests” in 33.18 does is to add some precision to 31.14, and signal that the priests to be favoured by Yhwh in the new dispensation are not the same as those who were prophet’s adversaries — i.e., the priests of the pre-587 Jerusalem temple. The Jeremian opposition to the pre-587 temple priesthood is a constant theme throughout the book, and signalled in the superscription, which connects Jeremiah to the “priests who were in
Anathoth‖ (1.1). At the beginning of Solomon’s reign Abiathar and his family were banished to Anathoth, and the Jerusalem priesthood ended up in the hands of the Zadokite family. As Carroll has noted, “from the place to which Abiathar was banished in the days before the temple was built comes a man who will speak the word against Solomon’s edifice and preside over the destruction of Jerusalem” (Carroll 1986: 91). In the future new order the Jeremiah tradition puts worship in the hands of a different group of priests.

In its view of the future Jer 33.17-18 links three elements: a Davidic ruler, the levites as priests, and reconstituted worship. An examination of the significance of these elements in the early second temple period belongs in the next section of this essay.

2. Interpreting Jeremiah MT against the Backdrop of the Persian Period

To this point I have explored three important features of the MT recension of Jeremiah: its representation of Babylon, its elevation of the figure of Jeremiah over that of Baruch, and the vision of the future expressed in Jer 33.14-26 MT. It is now necessary to situate these three features and explore their significance in the Persian period.

2.1. The Figure of Babylon

In the MT Babylon is portrayed as still dominant and yet to be subdued. Although Yhwh’s judgment against Babylon (25.15-26; chaps. 50—51), and the vision of a new future (chaps. 30—34) have been announced, these events still lay in the future. In effect, the exile is not yet ended, as the book’s framing indicates (Hill 1999b: 212–217; also Hill 2004). 1.1-3 identifies the contents of the book as the words of Jeremiah over a 40 year period which concluded in 587. The book’s conclusion leaves us with a people still in exile, and an extremely muted hope for the future symbolised by the Babylonian king’s “release” of Jehoiachin (52.31-34). We begin and end the book still in exile.

Unlike in some other second temple literature, the exile in MTJer does not end with the demise of the Babylon of the sixth century BCE. This idea puts it at odds with what we find in
Chronicles and Ezra. For Chronicles the seventy years of Babylon’s domination and Judah’s subjugation, predicted in Jer 25.12; 29.10, has been brought to and end by the rise of Cyrus: “In fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia ....” (2 Chron 36.22). Ezra 1.1-4 then uses the concluding verses of Chronicles (36.22-23) as the introduction to the story of the return from exile and rebuilding of the temple. However, further into the second temple period, a similar view to that of MTJer emerges.

Daniel 9 takes the seventy year prediction of Jeremiah and interprets quite differently from Chronicles and Ezra. The young man Daniel, disturbed by the events of his times, ponders over the meaning of the Jeremian prediction, “the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem” (9.2). In vv. 20-27 it is revealed to him that the meaning of the Jeremian seventy years is actually 490 years, and has not yet happened. What is particularly interesting about the book of Daniel in this regard is that, although it is a third and fourth century composition, it situates itself in the Babylon of the sixth century: “In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and laid siege to it” (Dan 1.1). Among those he deports to work in his palace in Babylon is the young man Daniel. So, by the time of the composition of the book of Daniel, the exile to Babylon had become a metaphor which the composers of Daniel used to interpret the situation of their own time. In Jeremiah MT, the figure of Babylon undergoes a change from a historically conditioned figure — the Babylon of sixth century BCE — to a metaphorical figure, which represents oppression and disintegration. The book of Daniel takes up the understanding of Babylon found in Jeremiah MT.

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16 2 Chron 36.20-21 draws on two different sources for its predictive statements about the exile. One is the Jeremian references to the seventy year domination of Babylon. The other is Lev 26.34-35 which interprets the exile as a sabbath for the land. For further on this see Fishbane 1991: 480–482; Japhet 1993: 1075–1076; Wolff 1976: 103–105.

As for the redactors of Jeremiah MT, so those of Daniel, exile to Babylon did not end with the rise of Cyrus, but still continues.

2.2. JerMT’s Represenation of Jeremiah

The MT’s portrayal of Jeremiah and Baruch elevates the figure of the prophet over that of the scribe. Its emphasis on the figure of the prophet and attitude towards prophecy puts it at odds with some other early second temple literature. Zech 13.2-6 is a text which originates in the late Persian or early Hellenistic period, and which has clear links to MTJer.\(^{18}\) According to Zech 13.2-6, prophets are no better than idols and unclean spirits, and will be removed from the land (v. 2). Anyone who claims to be a prophet should be either killed off by their parents (v. 3) or repudiate their prophetic role (vv. 4-6). While prophets are unacceptable to the authors of Zech 13.2-6, for the redactors of Jeremiah MT their hero is a prophet. Clearly the two traditions have different views about the place of the prophet in life of the community.

The use of the word קֶרֶשׁ (“oracle”, “burden”) also indicates significant differences between MTJer and other second temple prophetic literature. In Zechariah and other prophetic literature from the second temple era, קֶרֶשׁ is commonly used to either new oracles or new sections of a prophetic book (e.g., Isa 13.1; 14.28; 15.1; 17.1; 19.1; Zech 9.1; 12.1; Mal 1.1).\(^{19}\) However, Jer 23.33-40, a passage composed in the Persian period, reflects a very different attitude towards the use of the word קֶרֶשׁ.:\(^{20}\)

When this people, or a prophet, or a priest asks you,

\(^{18}\) For the links between Zech 13.2-6 and Jeremiah MT, see Hill 2002: 35–36. For its late Persian or early Hellenistic dating, see Larkin 1994: 45. For the fifth century BCE as the background for Zechariah 9—14, see Hanson 1979: 280–401; Meyers and Meyers 1993: 22–29; Redditt 1994: 664–678; Petersen 1995: 3–6.

\(^{19}\) On קֶרֶשׁ as a standard term to introduce prophetic material, see e.g Meyers, et al. 1993: 467; Wildberger 1997: 12;.

\(^{20}\) On Jer 23.33-40 as a second temple composition, see McKane 1986: 603–604; Thiel 1973: 253;.
"What is the אֱלֹהִים (oracle) of the LORD?" you shall say to them,

"You are the אָסָף (burden), and I will cast you off, says the LORD."²¹

(Jer 23.33)

Here אָסָף is regarded as a completely unacceptable term, denoting contempt for the prophet and his oracles. So, what is a perfectly acceptable term in other second temple prophetic literature, is completely unacceptable for the composers of Jeremiah MT.

In regard to prophets and prophecy, then, Jeremiah MT has a point of view which puts it at odds with other second temple literature. The polemical nature of texts like Jer 23.33-40 and Zech 13.2-6 point to a situation of conflict. Exactly what the conflict is about is unclear, but it relates to the place of prophets and prophecy in the early second temple period. Earlier passages in the book of Zechariah shed some light on the matter. Zech 10.1-3 condemns certain practices connected with contemporary prophecy, such as divination and the interpretation of dreams, while earlier in the book (1.4, 6; 7.7, 12; 8.9) the pronouncements and activity of “the former prophets” are regarded with approval.²² The book of Zechariah also begins with an appeal to the people to heed the message of the great prophets of an earlier era (Mason 1976: 234–235). Authentic prophets and prophecy are now belong to the past, not the present. Although the book of Zechariah forms part of the prophetic collection of the OT, it exhibits some clear differences to earlier prophetic material. Unlike those prophets of the past to whom Yhwh spoke directly, Zechariah requires a mediator who interprets the meaning of his visions (1.9; 2.2; 4.5, 14; 5.3, 6; 6.5). Where in Jer 24.3 Yhwh asks the prophet “What do you see?”, in the book of Zechariah that question is put by the mediator. Zechariah does not have the immediate relationship with Yhwh experienced by the great prophets of former times. In


²² Although it does not refer specifically to prophets, 10.1-3 condemns the activities of “teraphim”, “diviners” and “dreamers”. As texts like Ezek 13.6-9; 22.28 indicate, activities such as divining and dreaming were associated with prophecy (so Blenkinsopp 1996: 152–153,).
regard then to prophets and prophecy, the past is canonised and the present is regarded with suspicion, if not total hostility (Zech 13.2-6).

The book of Zechariah reflects a process at work in the second temple era whereby the prophets of the past and their message were revered. The era of the great prophets was over, and their words were being committed to writing. The new task at hand was the interpretation and application of their preaching to the contemporary situation (Blenkinsopp 1996: 158-160, 234–235). The focus was on the prophetic tradition of the past, and not on contemporary figures who might call themselves prophets. The reasons for the shift are not clear. Perhaps one factor was the community’s experience of conflicts between prophets peddling contradictory messages. Texts such as 1 Kings 13 and 22, together with the account of Jeremiah’s conflict with Hananiah, point to the difficulties associated with discerning the validity of a prophetic message. The deuteronomistic criterion of verification (Deut 18.15-22) could only work post-factum, and even in the aftermath of disaster, the validity of the prophetic message was not always obvious. In Jer 44.15-19 those who escaped from Judah into Egypt complain that it was their neglect of the queen of heaven that led to the disaster of 587 (Blenkinsopp 1996: 155–158).

Prophets then were judged to be neither trustworthy or useful, and so the community needed some other medium by which they could discern the will of Yhwh. This was provided by the written text, particularly the texts of those prophets whom the collectors and redactors believed were verified by the events of 587. The focus moves onto the message in written form, and away from the figure of the prophet himself. Such an emphasis on the written text leads to what Ellen Davis calls “the disappearing prophet” (Davis 1989: 133). According to John Barton, what happens to prophecy parallels what happened to the Torah, “the increasing veneration of the past to the detriment of the present” (Barton 1986: 115). The shift away from the figure of the prophet is well expressed in the book of Malachi. A product of the early second temple era,
it never identifies its putative author as a prophet. The word מלאך is also problematic. It may be the name of a prophet, or simply refer to an anonymous divine messager, similar to the one who mediates the visions of the book of Zechariah (e.g., 1.9, 13; 2.2; 3.6; 4.1).

Another difference between Jeremiah MT and a number of prophetic texts such as Haggai and Zechariah is the association of the latter pair with the temple. For Haggai, it is not simply a matter of rebuilding the old temple. Because of Yhwh’s intervention, the rebuilt temple will far surpass the old (2.9). In Zechariah there is a concern for both the rebuilding of the temple (1.17) and the importance of its festivals and rituals (14.16-21). In contrast, the Jeremiah tradition in both recensions contains a strong anti-temple strand, reflected above all in its threat to reduce the Jerusalem temple to ruins (Jer 7.14; 26.6), and its restrained view of the rebuilt temple (33.14-26).

The book of Jeremiah MT does not fit easily against the backdrop of a community, or a segment of a community, which is hostile to the claim of anyone to be a prophet. If, in that community, prophetic revelations are designated by the word מלאך, then Jeremiah MT is further out of step. Furthermore, if second temple prophetic books such as Haggai and Zechariah are deeply connected to the Jerusalem temple, Jeremiah MT is even more at odds with some aspects of early second temple thought. Against the backdrop of the early second temple period, Jeremiah MT’s accounts of the prophet’s mistreatment and imprisonment (chaps. 37—39) and the so-called confessions (chaps. 11—20) may have been interpreted as a paradigm that suffering and rejection, such as that indicated in Zech 13.2-6, is an integral part of the life of anyone who claims to be a מלאך.

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23 It has also been suggested by Conrad that Zechariah himself is not represented in the book as a prophet, but that the word מלאך in the 1.1 and 1.7 refers to his ancestor Iddo (Conrad 1999: 46).

24 On the meaning of מלאך, see Petersen 1995: 165.
2.3. The Vision of the Future in Jer 33.14-26

There are three components in the vision of the future found in Jer 33.14-26 MT: the promise of a Davidic ruler, the central role of the levitical priests, and the restoration of worship. Each of these needs to be examined against the backdrop of the Persian period.

In trying to understand the significance of the promise of a new Davidic ruler in the Persian period, a comparison between 33.15-16 and 23.5-6 is helpful. The latter, found in JerLXX, and is an earlier composition than the former.\(^{25}\) The promise of 23.5-6 has an immediate character about it. It is introduced in v. 5 by ( ENUMARAVIMIM) (“the days are surely coming”), a formulaic expression which suggests that the fulfilment of the promise lies in the near future (De Vries 1995: 158–159). 33.15 however is introduced by the enumeration “in those days and at that time”. Again, this is a formulaic expression, belonging to texts from the post-exilic period, and indicating that “the promise has been severed from the historical present and imminent future, and pushed into an indeterminate future” (De Vries 1995: 66; Fishbane 1991: 471–473). The emphasis on a less immediate fulfilment of the promise is also indicated by the introductory formula in 33.16: “in those days (ENUMARAVIM) Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety”. 23:6 however reads differently: “in his days (ENUMARAVIM) Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety”. The future promised in 33.15-16 will be realised, but not in the immediate future. There will be an extended and indefinite time of waiting (Fishbane 1991: 473–474). An important difference between 23.5-6 and 33.15-16 then is that the latter’s portrayal of the new Davidic ruler is more restrained, and he is not to be regarded simply as a

\(^{25}\) A variety of dates are suggested for its composition: around the year 597 BCE and the enthronement of Zedekiah (Fishbane 1991: 472); just before or soon after 587 BCE (De Vries 1995: 147); some time after the release of Jehoiachin around 560 BCE (Nicholson 1967: 91). McKane believes that a specific dating is not possible, and that the passage reflects an “exilic or post-exilic hope for the future” (McKane 1986: 565). For Carroll, 23.5-6 portrays an ideal king of the future, and “contrasts him with Zedekiah’s status as a client king of the Babylonians and behaviour as the leader who foolishly brought about the ruin of Jerusalem” (Carroll 1986: 447)
direct successor to the previous monarchs, whose corruption was one reason for the disaster of 587. The differences between 23.5-6 and 33.15-16 reflect the tensions in the Jeremiah tradition about the place of a Davidic ruler in the Yehud community of the Persian period.

The realities of life following the demise of Babylon and the rise of Persia may have led the Jeremiah tradition to dampen down the promise of 23.5-6. The promise of a Davidic monarch had the potential to destabilise the political situation in Yehud, especially early in the Persian period. During the rule of Darius I (522-486 BCE), there were rebellions in various parts of the empire, including Persia itself (Albertz 2003: 113–119; Berquist 1995: 51–55; Trotter 2001: 91–98). Consequently, it is hard to imagine that the Persians, as the occupying power, would have been untroubled by the community’s expectation that one of their own would one day appear as king and rule them. If the passage was understood by the Yehud community as referring to Zerubbabel, then it must have caused a great sense of both of expectation that something wonderful might happen, and also apprehension about Persian reaction. They would hardly have looked favourably on one of their own appointees becoming the person who was becoming the focus of a colonised people’s hopes for liberation. On the Yehuites’ side, any section of that community dependent on Persian goodwill to maintain positions of leadership or control would also not have been favourable to anyone threatening to upset the status quo. If projects such as the rebuilding of the temple and the construction of the walls of Jerusalem were dependent on the good graces of the Persian overlords, the local leadership in Yehud would not want such projects threatened by any movement focused on the appearance of a new king.

In 33.14-26 and its vision of the future, the community’s worship will be in the hands of the “levitical priests”. The view in 33.18 about the favoured position of the levites and the restored worship differs from that in Ezekiel 40—48. In Ezek 44.6-31 the role of the levites in

26 That 33.15 might refer to Zerubbabel, see Goldman 1992: 227–229.
worship is downgraded, and they are excluded from involvement in temple sacrifices. Similarly, where Jer 33.17-18 connect the Davidic monarchy with the restored worship, Ezek 43.1-12; 44.1-3 minimises the role of the king (so Albertz 1994: 431–432; Smith 1987: 60–65).

Furthermore the emphasis on the levitical priests in 33.18 does not sit well with the events described in Numbers 16.1-11, which portrays the levites as involved in a revolt against the authority of the Aaronide priests (Albertz 1994: 484–488; Blenkinsopp 1995: 92–94; Nurmela 1998: 124–134).

In its view of the future 33.14-26 makes no specific reference to the Jerusalem temple. Its restitution is implied by the references to “grain offerings”, “burnt offerings” and “sacrifices” in v. 18. A similarly indirect promise about the temple’s future is found in 27.16-22 MT, which contain a promise that Yhwh will bring back from Babylon the temple vessels which Nebuchadnezzar was to take away in 587 BCE. At the corresponding place in the LXXJer, there is no reference to their return. V. 22 LXX reads: “They shall be carried to Babylon”, whereas v. 22 MT then adds: “until the day when I give attention to them.....then I will bring them up and restore them to this place”. While the MT’s additions might be interpreted as a correction to what we read in chap. 26, it is significant that again the promise of temple’s restoration is expressed indirectly.  

What is reflected here is the Jeremiah tradition’s hostile attitude to the pre-587 temple and an ambiguity about the second temple. The pre-587 order, which linked a Davidic ruler with the Zadokite priesthood and the Jerusalem temple, has been thoroughly discredited by the events of 587, and thoroughly denounced in Jeremiah MT. Where the language used in the denunciation of the temple is extreme and unrestrained, that used to in reference to its future is indirect and muted. Furthermore, 33.20-22 affirm in expansive terms that there will

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28 That the MT’s additions in 27:16-22 are a corrective, see Goldman 1992: 237.

29 Other texts which refer to the future restoration and which may allude to a restored temple are 30:18-20;31:23, 38-40. However their precise meaning is debated. On this see McKane 1996: 772–777, 808–810, 832–835.
always be a Davidic ruler and levitical priests to minister to Yhwh, there is no similarly expansive promise about the future temple. It is at best implicit.\textsuperscript{30}

3. Conclusion

Jeremiah MT is a text which reflects some of the tensions within the community of the early second temple period. It also reflects the tensions within the Jeremiah tradition itself about the period. Its view about the exile as unended puts it at odds with other traditions which believed that the exile had ended with the appearance of Cyrus. 2 Chron 36.20-23 and Ezra 1.1-4, who represent that part of the community aligned to the Persian overlords and who had control of the temple, interpret the 70 year prediction of Jer 25.11-12 MT and 29.10 MT in a different way to the redactors of Jeremiah MT. The idea of the unended exile suggests that the redactors of Jeremiah MT were connected with those in the community for whom early second temple Yehud was a place of conflict and disillusionment.\textsuperscript{31}

Jeremiah MT also represents one voice in the conflicts over prophets and prophecy in the second temple period. Its elevation of the figure of the נביא over that of the סcribe (scribe) puts it at odds with those in the community who emphasised the role of the scribe, and who believed only that authentic prophets and prophecy belonged to an earlier era. Jeremiah MT also does not sit well with other second temple literature such as Haggai and Zechariah which has strong links to the Jerusalem temple.

The redactional history of Jeremiah MT also reflects tensions with the Jeremiah tradition itself, such as the attitude to the temple and the leadership of Yehud. The strong denunciation of the pre-587 temple in chaps. 7 and 26 MT (7 and 33 LXX) exists in some tension with texts such

\textsuperscript{30} As recognised by Carroll 1986: 639.

\textsuperscript{31} For a survey of the various views of scholars about these conflicts, see Albertz 1994: 436–533.
as 33.14-26 and 27.21-22. The MT additions, however, are rather restrained and of an indirect nature, and point to some unresolved tensions within the Jeremiah tradition about the temple. The promise that levitical priests will have a central role in the worship of the second temple reflects the tradition’s hesitation about the temple and about seeing the second temple as simply a reconstituted version of the first.

In regard to a future Davidic leader, Jeremiah MT also reflects a shift in its understanding of this promise. Its fulfilment belongs to the remote future, and in this respect Jeremiah MT does not see the promise as fulfilled in a historical individual such as Zerubbabel. It also does not see it as belonging to the immediate future, unlike an earlier strand of the Jeremiah tradition reflected in both recensions (23.5-6).

Jeremiah MT represents a tradition which has an uneasy relationship with some of the central ideas in early second temple Judaism, and it sits more on the edges of the community than at its centre. So, on the one hand, given the limits of our knowledge of the early second temple period, the conclusions of this essay are necessarily provisional and sometimes speculative. On the other hand, the understanding of the development of the Jeremiah tradition in the second temple period is a necessary and important undertaking, and my essay is offered as a small contribution to this task. I also offer it in appreciation for Leslie Allen and his contribution our understanding of the Old Testament, and especially the prophetic literature.
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