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שָׁלוֹם proclamations in the Book of Jeremiah: The dilemma of Jeremiah 4:10 and 23:17

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The use of the noun שָׁלוֹם in the Book of Jeremiah, as it occurs in prophetic proclamations, is of interest for this article. From an overview of a number of passages, it seems that the utterances in Jeremiah 4:10 and 23:17 are contradictory. In Jeremiah 4:10, Jeremiah utters the phrase שָׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם, but in 23:17 he rebukes prophets for proclaiming the very same message. The author argues that the prophet Jeremiah, as he is portrayed in the Book of Jeremiah, developed in his thinking and reaction to matters in correspondence to political and social changes that occurred in the history of Judah. A case is argued that 4:10 should be assigned to the prophet Jeremiah.

Contribution: This article offers original research in the field of biblical studies, more specifically, in the field of the Old Testament. This is in line with the scope of HTS Theological Studies. The article aims at addressing a contradictory pronouncement in Jeremiah 4:10 and 23:17 regarding שָׁלוֹם prophecies in the Book of Jeremiah. The issue of false שָׁלוֹם prophecies and the danger of such proclamations are at the heart of the discussion.

Keywords: Jeremiah 4:10; Jeremiah 23:17; שָׁלוֹם; prophetic proclamation; Judah; royal-Zion ideology.

Introduction

The noun שָׁלוֹם often occurs in the Book of Jeremiah. This noun has different translation possibilities, depending on the context. Of interest are instances where prophets announce 'peace', in most instances in opposition to the view held by the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah 6:14 (3x), 8:11 (3x), 14:13 and 28:9 are relevant for the occurrence of שָׁלוֹם in Jeremiah 4:10 and 23:17. There is an interesting use of the noun שָׁלוֹם in Jeremiah 4:10. In this verse, the exact same phrase (שָׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם) is used as in Jeremiah 23:17. It is important to note that Jeremiah is apparently uttering these words in a context when Judah and Jerusalem are threatened by an enemy from the north. In Jeremiah 23:17, optimistic prophets are blamed for deceiving the people with false assurances of peace and well-being.

There is obviously a contradiction in the use of the phrase שָׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם in Jeremiah 4:10 and 23:17. This article aims at addressing this presumed contradiction. Firstly, an overview will be presented of verses in the Book of Jeremiah where the noun שָׁלוֹם is used as a prophetic proclamation. Secondly, analyses of the passages in which both Jeremiah 23:17 and 4:10 occur will be conducted with the purpose of understanding the context of these utterances. Finally, a number of proposed solutions will be entertained to arrive at a suggested solution of the issue raised.

Overview of passages related to Jeremiah 4:10 and 23:17

In this section, attention will be given to Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11; 14:13 and 28:9.[1]

Jeremiah 6:12–15 serves as a separate unit attached to the passage ending in verse 11 (cf. Carroll 1986:197–198). In a corrupt society, priests and the prophets are singled out for their dishonest dealings (עֹשֵׂה שֶּׁקֶר). Verse 14 blames the religious leaders for being deceitful by offering the Judean people false promises of peace (שָׁלוֹם). While corrupt practices were prevalent in the Judean community, there were prophets falsely reassuring them that all was well (שָׁלוֹם; Allen 2008:86). Jeremiah 6:14 brands the Judean society as wounded, in need of healing. Although the larger collection of oracles concerns an enemy from the north, Carroll's (1986:198) view of linking the

wounds to the enemy's invasion seems unlikely. The context instead suggests that the society is morally 'sick', deserving punishment (cf. Allen 2008:86). The repetition of the noun שָׁלוֹם in verse 14 has an incantatory function, possibly to instil the idea of wellness amidst the people (Carroll 1986:198). The priests and the prophets have neglected their duty of steering people away from committing moral transgressions, instead they offered superficial treatment (Thompson 1980:258). The truth of the matter is that there is no שָׁלוֹם. Jeremiah 6:15 concludes:

> They acted shamefully, they committed abomination; yet they were not ashamed, they did not know how to blush. Therefore, they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the LORD. (NRSV)

There is verbal correspondence between Jeremiah 6:12–15 and 8:10–12; the application in 8:10–12, however, differs in context. A lawsuit in 8:8–10 precedes the passage 8:11–12, pointing out the folly of their wisdom claims (Brueggemann 1998:88–89). How can they regard themselves wise, while rejecting the word of Yahweh? The conclusion drawn about the use of שָׁלוֹם remains the same as in 6:12–15: the prophets proclaiming peace are shamelessly misleading the people (Goldingay 2021:268). It is a lie; there is no שָׁלוֹם. The result will be the same as in 6:12–15: Yahweh will punish them because of their deception; they shall be cast down.

The concept שָׁלוֹם also appears in Jeremiah 14:13. This verse forms part of the prose passage in Jeremiah 14:10–16 concerning a prophecy that drought (famine) and wars will be the consequence of the people's sin and iniquity (Wessels 2013:864–881). This passage reveals Jeremiah's concern with prophets who are speaking falsely (שֶׁקֶר) in Yahweh's name. In 14:13 Jeremiah is addressing Yahweh, quoting what the rival prophets said Yahweh informed them to say to the people: They said: 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you true peace in this place' (NRSV). We find the word combination 'true peace' (שְׁלוֹם אֱמֶת) used with the verb give (נתן Qal) in this verse. Jeremiah 14:14 states that Yahweh is querying their prophecy, and their peace (שָׁלוֹם) message is nothing less than a lie. The reason for rejecting their prophecy as false is the fact that they never received any commission by Yahweh to function as prophets to the people of Judah. The legitimacy of these prophets is therefore questioned (Carroll 1986:315). Jeremiah 14:13 therefore states that the שָׁלוֹם prophecy proclaimed by these prophets should be considered deceitful (שֶׁקֶר).

Jeremiah 28:9 forms part of the narrative in Jeremiah 28:1–17. The narrative is about a confrontation between the prophets Hananiah and Jeremiah. The context is Hananiah delivering a message in the Temple, announcing that Yahweh will break the yoke of the king of Babylon resting on the Judean people. Jeremiah does not contradict Hananiah at first but says in verse 9: 'As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet' (NRSV). In this instance the verb נבא *niphal* (prophesy) is in combination with שָׁלוֹם. This condition is set as a challenge to Hananiah. He responds by removing the wooden yoke from Jeremiah's neck, breaking it as a symbolic act to demonstrate what Yahweh will do for the people experiencing the Babylonian oppression. Jeremiah responds with a prophetic word that an iron yoke will be placed on the nations by the king of Babylon. According to 29:15, Jeremiah then confronts Hananiah, refuting the fact that Hananiah has a commission from Yahweh to act a as prophet. His optimistic prophecies are nothing less than lying assurances; he made people believe in a lie (שֶׁקֶר). This narrative conveys a direct attack of Jeremiah on שָׁלוֹם prophecies, which he regards as nothing less than lies and deception of the people.

In all these cases, Jeremiah is critiquing prophets in the Judean society who uncritically promote the idea of שָׁלוֹם for the people of Judah. The question is why are these שָׁלוֹם-prophecies a matter of concern? It is a question whether the royal-Zion ideology caused a false sense of security and consequently a lack of loyalty and obedience towards Yahweh.

The royal-Zion ideology

The שָׁלוֹם prophecies are a consequence of a dominant ideology prevalent in both societies of Israel and Judah. At the centre of this ideology is not only the city Zion (Jerusalem) but also the Davidic kingship and the Temple. This ideology depended on the promise of the perpetuation of the Davidic kingship in Zion, the city of God. Another important aspect was the temple as the earthly abode of Yahweh.

This belief system has a long history, although scholars differ on its exact origin. Thomas (2012:908) refers to Rohland's view of tracing the origin of the Zion tradition back to the city of Jebusites, regarded as inviolable. Rohland therefore assigns the origin of Zion theology to the Jebusite religion. Thomas further mentions that some scholars have argued that the focus should be on Zion as Yahweh's earthly dwelling. The Temple served as the symbol of his presence amongst his people. Zion, according to this view, is therefore regarded as the bedrock of Zion ideology. Roberts (1973:329–344) disagrees with Rohland by linking the origin of Zion theology to the Davidic promise. It is stated in 2 Samuel 7:13 that Yahweh will establish an eternal kinship of the Davidic lineage. Yahweh has chosen Zion as the city where King David had to reign as his viceroy. To quote Thomas (2012:908), 'So Zion theology celebrated Yahweh's rule and simultaneously justified the Davidic throne and cultic centre in Jerusalem'. Ollenburger (1987:17) has pointed out that the emphasis should not be on the historical tradition as regards to Zion, but on Zion as theological symbol of Yahweh's presence and rule.

An important aspect of the discussion of Zion theology is the conditions regarding the promise of Yahweh's presence. The people of Israel and Judah were expected to acknowledge his presence by showing loyalty and obedience to Yahweh (Fretheim 2002:335). They, however, often violated these

obligations, resulting in admonishment by prophets. Part of the problem was that the people regarded Yahweh's presence as unconditional. With a Davidic king on the throne in the chosen city Zion where Yahweh resided in the Temple, the leadership and the people became complacent, resulting in a false sense of security. Albertz (1994:172) aptly states '… the cult of Jerusalem gave the upper classes a certainty of salvation which made them totally insensitive to the injustice which was emanating from them'. The misinterpretation of Zion theology resulted in it becoming nothing less than an ideology, used by those in power to benefit their aims. Scholars often refer to this ideology as the royal-Zion ideology, but Brueggemann (1992:273–276) called it the Davidic royal tradition in contrast to the Mosaic covenantal tradition. By doing so, he emphasises the covenant tradition, which Jeremiah promoted as based on loyalty and obedience to Yahweh.

Jeremiah reacted strongly against the prophets who promoted a distorted Zion theology (royal-Zion ideology), resulting in a false sense of security and complacency in their dedication to Yahweh. In both Jeremiah 4:10 and 23:17, the mention and reliance on שָׁלוֹם announcements became a matter of concern, considering the threat caused by the Babylonian army.

The focus now shifts to the discussions of Jeremiah 4:10 and 23:17. Both these passages justify thorough reflection for reason that they are at the heart of the discussion. As mentioned, the phrase שָׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם in 4:10 is identical to that in 23:17. In Jeremiah 23:17, Jeremiah condemns, as the discussion to follow will indicate, the so-called false prophets for proclaiming the phrase שָׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם. The problem this article addresses is 4:10, where Jeremiah seemly utters the very same phrase he later condemns.

A brief analysis of Jeremiah 4:10 in context

The verses of Jeremiah 4:1–10 are regarded as a unit for the purpose of this discussion. The pericope 4:1–10 can be subdivided into verses 1–4, 5–6, 7–8 and 9–10. Brueggemann (1998:53–55) only differs by regarding verses 5–8 as a subsection, and so also does Schmidt (2008:129–130). Weiser (1969:38–39) treats 4:9–12 as a subsection, while Allen (2008:65–66) regards Jeremiah 4:9–14 as a new section.

In Jeremiah 4:1–4, Yahweh is calling the people of Judah to change their ways and to get rid of the idols they worship and put their trust in Yahweh alone. The people of Judah are called on to 'circumcise their hearts', meaning they must renew the covenant not by external action but by inner conviction (cf. Bevere 2000:256; Brueggemann 2002:33–35). Verse 4 ends with a threat that if they do not do this, Yahweh's wrath will burn like fire because of their evil doings. Interestingly, it is mentioned that a converted Judah will serve as a blessing to the nations. From verse 5 onwards, it seems that Judah did not heed Yahweh's call, with the result

that a nation will now cause a serious threat to the people and cities of Judah as an exponent of Yahweh's wrath.

A change in style in verse 5, including a series of imperatives, indicates that a new section commences that continues up to verse 10. Verse 11 seems to be an introductory verse of a new announcement, starting with the phrase 'At that time …' Both stylistic aspects and content support the notion that a new passage commences in verse 11.

Jeremiah 4:10 is the verse of interest for discussion. It is necessary to take the broader section 4:5–10 into consideration as context for understanding 4:10. Jeremiah 4:5 introduces a new section consisting of a series of imperatives in verses 5 and 6, calling on Judah and Jerusalem to respond. The imperatives have the function of creating tension because of a serious situation that requires the urgent attention and action of the people of Judah. As far as the content is concerned, verses 5–6 with the imperatives indicate an emergency of a threat by an enemy from the north. The alarm raised is for the people of Judah to urgently assemble and seek shelter in Zion. Of note is that Yahweh is behind the calamity caused by the threatening enemy, with disastrous consequences for Judah (Goldingay 2021:173).

The two verses with imperatives are followed in verses 7 with reference to a lion. The enemy, depicted in the image of a lion, has left its thicket, about to cause severe harm. The lion is described as a predator which viciously destroys nations. For Judah, it means the destruction of their land and cities (cf. Allen 2008:65). Verse 8 again uses a series of imperatives (put on, mourn, wail) to instruct the people of Judah how to respond to the imminent threat. They are to practice mourning rites by dressing in sackcloth and lamenting fervently. The last part of verse 8 is introduced by a כִּי particle explaining the reason for the actions of the predator. The 'blazing anger' of Yahweh, which has not turned away, is the subject of the verb שׁוּב [turn]. This last part of the verse relates back to 4:4, where Yahweh has indicated that if the people do not reconsider and refrain from their evil behaviour, his anger will burn like an unquenchable fire. Verse 8 states that the evil doings of the people have caught up with them, for the fierce anger of Yahweh has not subsided (Carroll 1986:160; Craigie, Kelley & Drinkard 1991:73). The petuḥa at the end of verse 8 indicates that verse 9 belongs to the next section.

The last two verses, 4:9–10, are both introduced by waw consecutives, linking it to previous verses. The waw consecutive in verse 9 is followed by an introductory phrase, 'On that day …', followed by three verbs, the first with the kings as subject, the second with the priests and lastly the prophets as subject. It is said that the king and the officials will be discouraged, the priests appalled and the prophets stunned. Verse 9, an announcement of Yahweh, states that when the threat and destruction described in the foregoing verses materialise, it will cause distress to the key leadership of Judah. The leadership consists of both civil and religious leaders (Tiemeyer 2009:247).

Jeremiah 4:10 is introduced by a waw consecutive to a first-person singular verb אמר [say], followed by an interjection particle to indicate a cry of alarm (*Ah!*). The subject of the verb is not disclosed but in all probability implies the prophet Jeremiah, with Yahweh the object of concern addressed. As readers, we assume, because of the broader context of the book, that the prophet Jeremiah is implied (cf. McEntire 2015:98). The content of the address is introduced by an adverb particle אָכֵן [surely], expressing the unexpected of what is occurring. The adverb is followed by the repetition of the *hiphil* verb נשא [deceive], the first as an infinitive absolute and the second a second-person masculine perfect, for expressing intensification (utterly or greatly deceived). A direct quotation, שָׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם, follows the two verbs, followed by a waw consecutive, to be translated as whereas or even, attached to the verb נגע [touch] with the noun חֶרֶב [sword] as subject. The object in focus is the noun 'throat' [נֶפֶשׁ]. Verse 10 can be translated as follows:

> Then I said, 'Ah, Lord GOD, how utterly you have deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, "It shall be well with you", even while the sword is at the throat!' (NRSV)

The prophet seems in shock because of the emerging threat of the enemy from the north and the damage the enemy may cause. It is important to observe that Jeremiah is responding to an oracle supposedly from Yahweh, not on the instruction of Yahweh. Jeremiah is not announcing peace but is stating a common existing belief that Yahweh has promised 'peace' to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. He acknowledges the existence of such a belief in Judah. His response is scathing by blaming Yahweh for deceiving the people and Jerusalem. It reminds one of the language of the laments in Jeremiah (Allan 2008:66). It is significant that not only the people of Judah are mentioned but also Jerusalem. Goldingay (2021) said in this regard:

> [T]he city is like an individual who has been attacked by an enemy in such a way *that the sword has reached to the throat* and is about to take his life … Jerusalem is the source of *šǎlôm*. (p. 175)

In the next section, a brief discussion of Jeremiah 23:17 follows.

A brief analysis of Jeremiah 23:17 in context

Jeremiah 23:17 forms part of the passage 23:16–22 (Craigie et al. 1991:341–345; Rudolph 1968:151; Schmidt 2013:43–47), which is part of the cycle of oracles against the so-called false prophets in 23:9–40. Jeremiah 23:16 commences with the messenger formula 'so says Yahweh of hosts', indicating a new pronouncement. Verse 23 commences with a statement in question form, stylistically different from the previous passage. Both stylistically and in content, Jeremiah 23:16–22 forms a separate unit. It is important to observe that 23:16–22 is an oracle from Yahweh that Jeremiah must convey to the people of Judah.

The unit 23:16–22 can be subdivided into 23:16–17, 18, 19–20 and 21–22. In 23:16–17, the people of Judah are instructed not to listen to the prophecies of some prophets who give them misleading messages ('Mahnung', Schmidt 2013:44). The judgement is that the so-called visions the prophets claim to have received 'are deluding you', 'filling you with emptiness' (Goldingay 2021:515), because they speak visions of their own minds (literally from their own hearts), not from the mouth of Yahweh. In verse 17, those who listen to the prophets are labelled as people who despise Yahweh, all too ready to receive words from these 'false' prophets. A number of issues are raised in Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) text-critical apparatus, but there is sufficient support to maintain the Masoretic Text (cf. De Waard 2003:101–102; Lundbom 2004:191).

Verse 17 continues with the announcement of what Yahweh has said according to these prophets. What follows is a quoted direct speech of Yahweh within the direct speech of Yahweh. These 'false' prophets say Yahweh says, 'you will have peace'. A second verb is used in verse 17, denoting a direct quotation of what Yahweh allegedly has said, namely 'You will not experience calamity'. This is again an instance of direct speech within the direct speech.

The false message of the prophets is displayed in a parallel structure:

- For those who *despise* Yahweh … they say *peace* be amongst them.
- For those *who act with stubborn hearts* … they say *no calamity* will come over them.

The meaning of שָׁלוֹם in this regard correlates with the absence of calamity. The phrase שָׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם has a reassuring function in this context. According to Jeremiah as spokesperson for Yahweh, this is a case of false security and hope (Rudolph 1968:151).

Those who despise Yahweh are also labelled as people who follow their own stubborn hearts. This implies that the people of Judah are ignoring or discounting Yahweh. In the context of verse 17, stubbornness has to do with the prophets' proclamation of שָׁלוֹם and the parallel proclamation 'no calamity will come upon you', meaning upon the people of Judah. It concerns the denial of the looming threat of judgement proclaimed by Jeremiah (Schmidt 2013:45).

The issue of true and false prophecy is continued in verses 18–19, where the question is posed of who has stood in the council of Yahweh, meaning in the privileged position to receive Yahweh's true words. The implied message is that the so-called 'false prophets' failed in this regard. Jeremiah is disputing the authority of these establishment prophets to justify the messages they announce (Brueggemann 1998:212). Verses 19 and 20 introduce the theme of Yahweh's rage, stating that his rage will not subside until Yahweh has reached his decided goal. Verses 21 and 22 resume the idea of what qualifies somebody to function as a prophet, emphasising that only those who experienced the intimate presence of Yahweh in his council, received his words and were sent by him may qualify as true prophets.

Jeremiah 23:17–22 is an oracle from Yahweh with Jeremiah as the mouthpiece. The fact that this oracle forms part of the cycle of oracles against the prophets should not go unnoticed. Goldingay (2021:511) regards the collection of oracles relevant for the time of Zedekiah when the threat of the Babylonian invasion was real. It is, however, more likely that the individual oracles in the cycle were assembled in the exilic or post-exilic period by scribes with the agenda of emphasising the legitimacy of Jeremiah as the true prophet (cf. Carroll 1986:449–450; Thelle 2009:1910). The collection also served as a warning to the people in the period after the exile that they should not believe anyone who simply claims to be a true prophet. Schmidt (2013:39–40) has argued that the collections are all about the issue of '*Wahrheit*'.

The focus now shifts to the essence of the article. Jeremiah's statement about שָׁלוֹם in 4:10 is not congruent with his viewpoint stated in Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11; 14:13; 23:17. The overview of these passages has revealed that Jeremiah blames some prophets in Judah for creating a false sense of security amongst the people of Judah by proclaiming messages of peace.

Before proposing a solution to the contradiction between Jeremiah 4:10 and 23:17, some views on how to address the issue is presented.

Scholarly views on Jeremiah 4:10

In an attempt solve the problem of Jeremiah 4:10, some text versions of Jeremiah propose that the text should be altered to read, 'And then they said', (also Schreiner 1981:35). It is, however, unnecessary because there is sufficient support from Hebrew manuscripts to maintain the Masoretic Text version (Craigie et al. 1991:71). Others, such as Holladay (1986:149), contend that Jeremiah believed that some optimistic prophets were responsible for the peace announcements, only to understand that Yahweh has deceived them. Huey (1993:82) states that Jeremiah is simply repeating the people's complaint. Allen (2008:66) asserts that Yahweh was not the source of this optimistic statement but allowed it. The 'peace' proclamation was unacceptable to Jeremiah. Allan furthermore regards Jeremiah's objection of deception as a prelude to the laments of Jeremiah following from Chapter 11. A better way of understanding this verse is to consider the solution Lundbom (1999:399) offers. He contends that 4:10 should be viewed as an expression of Jeremiah's perplexity that prophets and priests could advocate שָׁלוֹם to the people of Judah while war is threatening. Goldingay (2021:176) again asks the question whether Jeremiah is speaking sarcastically in 4:10, 'deriding the bewildered prophets' who claim such a 'peace' promise. This line of reasoning emphasises the irony of the situation. If Yahweh is the source of this peace proclamation as claimed by the prophets, then the blame of deception is justified. But as an enemy from the north is threatening Judah, this surely cannot be the case.

Another possibility is that in the initial stages of his career, Jeremiah still entertained the likelihood that the prophecy

שָׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם was from Yahweh. It seems that he did not critically engage the notion of the promise of שָׁלוֹם for the people of Israel and Judah in these early stages. His thinking most likely changed over time because of his dissatisfaction with the leadership and the people of Judah regarding their loyalty and dedication to Yahweh and their response to external threats. This is the line of thinking that will be followed in understanding Jeremiah 4:10. Before doing so, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of the Jeremiah text (Masoretic version) and how the text is viewed and related issues.

Complexity of the Jeremiah text

It is extremely difficult nowadays to date passages in the Book of Jeremiah, with the views expressed that the final versions of documents were compiled by scribes during the Persian period (Thelle 2009:187). Van der Toorn (2007:184) argues that oracles and narratives ascribed to Jeremiah were probably collected by followers supportive of his views. It is also clear from engaging the text of Jeremiah that there are many chronological and redactional issues facing researchers (O'Connor 2011:128, 130–132). Weeks (2009:272) doubts whether some of the oral traditions in existence were captured as literature because he regards levels of literacy not remarkably high in Judah. He is even sceptical regarding the Book of Jeremiah as prophecy (Weeks 2009:265–274). Leuchter (2021) cautions by saying:

> Yet the matter of dismissing the material in Jeremiah as useful resources for tentatively reconstructing some sense of the past is problematic, and arguments that the contents of the book derive only from the Persian period or later are difficult to sustain. (p. 110)

Without denying the complexity of the Book Jeremiah, Weeks's view seems too extreme and less appealing. The possibility remains that some texts were in existence during different stages of Jeremiah's ministry as prophet (cf. Van der Toorn 2007:173–176). Nissinen (2009:116–117) acknowledges the existence of written documents of ancient Hebrew prophecy, which would be a prerequisite for literary prophecy. It seems possible to argue that the prophet Jeremiah's views, as reflected in the Book of Jeremiah, went through stages of development. This in line with events that took place on the international and the local scene in Judah. As Barstad (2009) puts it:

> The Book of Jeremiah contains many different agendas and many diachronic layers, and also some historical facts about events that took place in the Neo-Babylonian Empire in the 6th century BCE. (p. 32)

There were also developments in some theological facets in the society, affected by real-life politics and history (Schmid 2012:109). It also seems that Jeremiah's engagement with the leadership, consisting of the kings and their administration, the prophets and the priests, changed as historical circumstances and political responses to changes took place. The history and enfolding political challenges posed to the various kings that reigned during Jeremiah's time are

displayed in the Book of Jeremiah (cf. Goldingay 2021:3). Jeremiah's interaction and engagement with the people of Judah also went through various phases over the span of history.

The Book of Jeremiah consists of collected material (oracles), went through editorial processes, and were finally compiled in post-exilic times. The book presents a picture of the prophet Jeremiah one can only attempt to reconstruct by engaging the text in its current form (cf. Brueggemann 1998:12; Diamond 2003:547). Nissinen (2009:117) regards it is an 'arduous task' to gain knowledge of the Hebrew prophets as historical figures. However, I concur with Leuchter (2021:111) that biblical texts are 'sites of memory'. In the context of referring to the persecution of Jeremiah and the scribal house of Shaphan as his protector (Reimer 2009:133), Thelle (2009:191–192) alludes to 'the bond between prophet and scribe and thus between prophecy and writing'. Thelle (2009:191) also remarks, 'By using the Jeremiah tradition and the persona of the prophet, the writers record the past expressions of the divine will'.

A proposed scenario for understanding Jeremiah 4:10

A brief scenario of the various interactions Jeremiah had as spokesperson of Yahweh follows. The purpose is to show a growth in the reasoning of Jeremiah because of various experiences with societal leaders and the people of Judah.

In Jeremiah 2 Jeremiah is commissioned to speak out 'in the ears of Jerusalem'. Verse 8 is significant, when for the first time it is said:

> The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit. (NRSV)

This is the first indication that not all is well with the leadership of Judah. In Jeremiah 2:28, the people of Judah are blamed for worshipping foreign gods, with verse 29 the reaction of the people and Yahweh's response: 'Why do you complain against me? You have all rebelled against me, says the LORD' (NRSV). The thrust at this stage is to urge the people of Judah to turn around (convert) from their wrongdoing and worship Yahweh alone. The next phase in Jeremiah's response to matters is 4:10, our verse of focus, which seems to show that Jeremiah, as others did, still entertains the notion that Yahweh has promised שָׁלוֹם to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. At this stage, there is little evidence of real conflict with the other prophets, which is later clearly the case. The common conviction at this time in history was that Yahweh has promised שָׁלוֹם for Jerusalem and its people. In the initial stages of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry, King Josiah made some significant reforms, probably because of the discovery of a copy of the Torah (Goldingay 2021:2; Lundbom 2010:36). It should be pointed out that there is much debate whether Jeremiah's activities coincided with those of King Josiah (Crouch 2021:51). Irrespective of this, Josiah's reign was

characterised by religious reforms and territorial expansion (Crouch 2021:52–53), which created a positive climate in the country. This certainly contributed to the fact that Zion was viewed as a prosperous city because of Yahweh's blessing. An announcement and expectation of שָׁלוֹם was therefore not so strange. Even for Jeremiah, this must have been a reality because he continued to promote the Law and the stipulations of the covenant relationship with Yahweh during his ministry. Jeremiah was hailed as a prophet like Moses (Crouch 2021:52; Lundbom 2010:37).

Matters look different when we turn to Jeremiah Chapter 5. The backdrop to this chapter is a threat of invasion by the Babylonian forces, a time of real crisis (cf. Römer 2012:159–160). In this chapter, the prophet is voicing Yahweh's dissatisfaction with the situation in Jerusalem. The people of Judah are lacking moral judgement; there is no sense of justice, truth and knowledge of Yahweh; and most seriously, the leaders are the main culprits (Wessels 2015:657–677). Even the threat by the invading enemy does not cause a change in attitude; they are all in denial. This is clear from 5:12–13:

> They have spoken falsely of the LORD, and have said, 'He will do nothing. No evil will come upon us, and we shall not see sword or famine'. The prophets are nothing but wind, for the word is not in them. Thus, shall it be done to them! (NRSV)

There is unmistakable evidence of false security in the quoted response.

Jeremiah 5:31 shows a change in attitude towards the prophets, the priests and the people of Judah in the following statement: 'the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule as the prophets direct; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?' (NRSV). In this verse, the noun שֶׁקֶר appears, often used by Jeremiah in his conflict with opposing prophets. Jeremiah is at wits' end, astonished (Huey 1993:94). There seems to be a culmination of frustration with the state of affairs in Judah and Jerusalem.

In Jeremiah 6:10 the prophet accuses the people that they are deaf, they are not responding to the word of Yahweh. In actual fact, they are making a mockery of Yahweh's word. Schmid (2012:109) has remarked that no longer only the leaders were to be blamed for Judah's moral depravity, but the guilt shifted to the people as a whole. What follows in verse 11 shows an angry, frustrated and weary prophet (Goldingay 2021:219) when he said:

> But I am full of the wrath of the LORD; I am weary of holding it in. Pour it out on the children in the street, and on the gatherings of young men as well; both husband and wife shall be taken, the old folk and the very aged. (NRSV)

The rage of Jeremiah continues in verse 13 where he blames everyone in the society for greediness for unjust gain; even the prophets and the priests deal falsely. Goldingay (2021:221) refers to this as a 'total societal collapse in Jerusalem'. Here the noun שֶׁקֶר again raises its head. The falsehood (שֶׁקֶר) continues in verse 14 with the announcement of שָׁלוֹם שָׁלוֹם [all is well, all is well], when in fact nothing is well. The overview of the

passages presented seems to reflect a clear shift in Jeremiah's attitude and views.

Concluding observations

Jeremiah 4:10 challenged scholars to suggest a solution. The proposed interpretations mentioned before are possible but not conclusive. This applies to my interpretation as well. O'Connor (2011:31–34) suggests that the apparent chaos of the text reflects the turbulent times in the history of Judah because of the Babylonian threat. My reading of the various passages to show a development in Jeremiah's experience and convictions, as the Book of Jeremiah depicts him, are exploratory considering the difficulty in the arrangement and redaction of the Jeremiah text. Despite the obvious problems one encounters in this regard, the text does inform readers of the turbulent history of Judah in the time before the Babylonian invasion. It also informs about the internal religious and moral challenges faced by a prophet with strong covenantal convictions (cf. Barstad 2009:32). Although the phrase שָׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם in Jeremiah 4:10 and 23:17 corresponds, the contexts in which these texts function are clearly different.

If the given brief overview of the development of external factors, socio-religious circumstances and changes seem viable and convincing, then it is not far-fetched to ascribe Jeremiah 4:10 to the prophet Jeremiah. From the time of uttering those words, many changes took place, not only in the Judean society but also externally. Consequently, his perspective on matters also changed. Jeremiah gradually moved to a position of insight that the mere proclamation of שָׁלוֹם is no longer tenable. In this regard, Brueggemann (1998) says:

> According to Jeremiah, the message of unconditional well-being (*shalom*) is false (*sheqer*). The prophets' message of *shalom* misread the historical situation and misrepresents the character of Yahweh, who is uncompromising about the concerns of justice and righteousness. (p. 211)

Jeremiah has grown to an understanding that the royal-Zion ideology, promoted uncritically by some optimistic prophets, created a false sense of security which was detrimental to the people of Judah. For Jeremiah, obedience and loyalty to Yahweh and his word were indispensable.

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Author's contributions

W.J.W. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards of research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

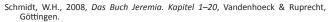## Funding information

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Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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