

# Is Jeremiah 24 a Propaganda Message for the Babylonian Exiles?

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## *Abstract*

A rhetorical analysis of Jeremiah 21–24 discovers a startling reversal that sees the “exiles of Judah” in Babylon as the objects of divine favor, experiencing the exile as part of God’s sovereign plan to make a new covenant with those who have a new heart. In contrast to the “remnant of Jerusalem” who considered themselves favored by God, Jeremiah’s rhetorical strategy is to emphasize the grace shown to the “exiles of Judah,” who are the future of Judah and the bearers of hope for God’s newly created people. Thus, Jeremiah 24 is much more than a propaganda message for the Babylonian exiles. (*Keywords: Jeremiah, rhetorical analysis, rhetoric, exilic period*)

## I. Introduction

In the present study we **claim that rhetorical analysis will be fruitful** as a text-centered and holistic approach to the interpretation of the book of Jeremiah. The application of classical rhetorical theory helps explain the structure of Jeremiah 21–24 and also the prophetic techniques of persuasion which are used.

The argument of Jeremiah 21–24 is that God’s salvation plan requires the exile of Judah; the experience of exile will help the people’s future understanding of the covenant. Jeremiah’s rhetorical techniques build up a persuasive argument to the audience of Jeremiah 21–24 that the traditional institutions of Israel (the Davidic dynasty, Jerusalem, the land) must be destroyed before there can be a new beginning. We reach to a conclusion that Jeremiah 21–24 is a coherent persuasive discourse, which aims to convince its audience that the experience of exile is a necessary condition for the renewed covenant.

In this paper we narrow our attention on Jeremiah 24 and investigate whether Jeremiah 24 is a propaganda message for the Babylonian exiles over the people who remained in Jerusalem or for those who fled to Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. In the first section of

this paper we will suggest that a self-contained unit Jeremiah 21–24 is rhetorically structured as a rhetorical unit. The second section will present a rhetorical strategy of Jeremiah 24. As the main body of this paper, the third section will analyze the text of Jeremiah 24 according to rhetorical analysis.

### I. The Rhetorical Arrangement of Jeremiah 21–24

Literary and historical questions have traditionally been the dominant concern in Jeremiah research. However, we will focus in this study on the literary features of the book as it stands in its present form, and apply rhetorical analysis to the interpretation of Jeremiah 24.

By rhetorical analysis we mean the type of interpretation used by rhetorical critics in modern applications of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, that is, the study of texts as persuasive discourse. In this study, we broaden the meaning of "rhetoric" beyond stylistic analysis to include logical persuasive argument intended by the author to achieve a particular effect.

We argue that the principles of rhetoric help us understand the compilation of the literary materials in Jeremiah 21–24.<sup>1</sup> As a rhetorical unit, Jeremiah 21–24 is a well-defined subsection of the book of Jeremiah. The categories of classical rhetoric illuminate the structure and flow of the text as a whole. We argue that the literary materials in Jeremiah 21–24 are structured coherently in the present location according to a rhetorical purpose. For the practical convenience of exegesis of the text, we divide sub-units into exegetically manageable smaller units by identifying basic prophetic judgment speech forms as suggested by Claus Westermann and H. Van Dyke Parunak.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is the general view of Jeremiah scholarship that the extant form of Jeremiah 21–24 is a compilation of earlier prophecies of the prophet Jeremiah. Depending on one's view of the authorship of the book, the author (or the final editor) who is responsible for the present form of the book could be either the prophet Jeremiah himself or a later (Deuteronomistic) editor(s). The former is our position in this study. It is not our purpose here to prove or disprove the Deuteronomistic redaction of the book of Jeremiah. In this study, however, we rather accept the view that the book of Jeremiah has an overall literary structure for the whole book, regardless of the extent to which the prophet Jeremiah (or the final editor) is responsible for the present form of the book. There is an issue of terminology. The "author" of Jeremiah 21–24 is a construct. We will sometimes use this term. Sometimes we refer to "Jeremiah," at other times "the speaker" or "the author." These references are not meant to identify an exact person or group. The focus is rather on the power of the speech or writing to persuade.

<sup>2</sup> C. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); H. Van Dyke Parunak, "Some Discourse Functions of Pro-

We propose that the literary unit of Jeremiah 21–24 is structured according to the principle of the “rhetorical arrangement” of literary material. As rhetorical critics, we attempt to identify the intentional ordering of the material: Prologue (Jer 21:1-2); Proposition (Jer 21:3-10); Confirmation (Jer 21:11–23:8); Refutation (Jer 23:9-40); Epilogue (Jer 24:1-10). This rhetorical interpretation is different from previous methods of interpretation of Jeremiah 21–24.

In Jeremiah 21, the Prologue (Jer 21:1-2) informs the audience/reader about the subject of the discourse. The Prologue is followed by the Proposition (Jer 21:3-10) where a general statement of judgment is made. The Proposition outlines the general statement that will be proved specifically in what follows.

The Confirmation (Jer 21:11–23:8) **provides specific proofs in contrast to the general indictments made in the Proposition. In the confirmation section specific evidence is presented against those who were kings in the last years of Judah. After presenting his argument in the Proposition and the Confirmation concerning the kings, the author challenges in the Refutation (Jer 23:9-40) the opposing views of the other prophets.**

In the Proposition and Confirmation, the author introduces briefly the prophecies which are critical toward the kings and the people. This is contrary to the popular view concerning the fate of the king and the nation in times of war in the history of Israel. The author at this point addresses something about the (false) prophets who were prophesying contrary to Jeremiah. The author feels the need to suppress the rival views of other prophets in order to reinforce his argument. The author needs to consolidate his position as a qualified and authoritative prophet over other prophets.

As a conclusion to his argument, the author presents in the Epilogue (Jer 24) that God is doing something radical concerning Judah and Jerusalem. The emotional appeal to the audience reaches its peak with Jeremiah’s declaration about the fate of those who “remain in this land or live in Egypt” and “the exiles from Judah.”

## II. The Rhetorical Strategy of Jeremiah 24

Jeremiah 24 is the Epilogue to Jeremiah 21–24. The Epilogue sums up the argument and seeks to arouse the emotions of the audience to take action or make judgment. It often employs appeals through ethos

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phetic Quotation Formulas in Jeremiah,” in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (ed. R. D. Bergen; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994): 489-519.

and pathos. Aristotle describes the main function of an Epilogue as recapitulation.<sup>3</sup>

In the Epilogue the author does more than simply recapitulate his former arguments. Recapitulation is only partly helpful as a way of describing the place of Jeremiah 24 in the argument of Jeremiah 21–24. This is because Jeremiah 24 brings in important new ideas as part of the completion of Jeremiah’s argument. The Proposition opened up certain questions; the Epilogue will give answers which are quite new in the argument of Jeremiah 21–24.

The Epilogue is the end point of Jeremiah’s argument in the rhetorical unit Jeremiah 21–24. In the Proposition (Jer 21:3-10) Jeremiah argues that the city will fall. This opens up the question how the Davidic covenant might continue, if it can do so at all. This message must be very hard to accept for the people who wanted to resist the Babylonians, and who have thought God would act for them as the Divine Warrior. Probably many thought that the Davidic covenant meant that Jerusalem could not fall and the Lord would always come to their rescue. The issue is the nature of the Davidic covenant.

He presented his case in the Confirmation (Jer 21:11–23:8). Jeremiah argues that the Davidic covenant was broken because the kings failed to keep their covenant obligation of maintaining justice and righteousness in society. In the Refutation (Jer 23:9-40) Jeremiah rebuts the rival prophets as false prophets who prophesied  $\square\psi\iota$ . Jeremiah argues that the false prophets had misinterpreted the Davidic covenant. Jeremiah has brought his audience to this point to accept his prophecy which he proclaimed in the Proposition (Jer 21:3-10). He presented his case in Jeremiah 21:11–23:8 (Confirmation). His rival prophets are denounced as false prophets in Jeremiah 23:9-40 (Refutation).

All this rhetorical preparation reaches a climax in the Epilogue (Jer 24). **The point of Jeremiah 24 will be the point of the whole argument.** This is what Jeremiah as a rhetorician finally wants his audience to accept. The exigency is the need to understand how God’s covenant

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric* (trans. W. R. Roberts; Modern Library College Editions; New York: Random House, 1984), III.19.1419b: “Finally you have to review what you have already said. Here you may properly . . . repeat your points frequently so as to make them easily understood. What you should do in your introduction is to state your subject, in order that the point to be judged may be quite plain; in the epilogue you should summarize the arguments by which your case has been proved. The first step in this reviewing process is to observe that you have done what you undertook to do. You must, then, state what you have said and why you have said it. Your method may be a comparison of your own case with that of your opponent; and you may compare either the ways you have both handled the same point or make your comparison less direct.”

with his people might continue after he punished them according to the covenantal curse. The audience may have believed that there could be no future if judgment came. This is an exigency of the rhetorical situation. It is part of the obstacle to the speaker winning over his audience.

### III. Analysis of Jeremiah 24

Jeremiah 24 recounts an oracle that came to Jeremiah through a vision. A divine proclamation is announced in the form of a vision report in autobiographical style. The rest of verse 1, except the historical background, and verse 2 describe the vision that came to Jeremiah. The vision is followed by a dialogue between the Lord and the prophet (v. 3). The vision is interpreted by the oracle (vv. 4-10). The oracle falls into two halves. After the introduction (v. 4) the “good figs” are identified in the first half with the Babylon exiles (vv. 5-7) and the “bad figs” in the second half with the “remnant of Jerusalem” and the Egyptian exiles (vv. 8-10).

1 The Lord showed me: Behold two baskets of figs set before the temple of the Lord, after Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the officials of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths from Jerusalem and had brought them to Babylon. 2 One basket had very good figs, like first-ripe figs; and the other basket had very bad figs, which could not be eaten due to rotteness.

1 הָרָאִנִי יְהוָה וְהִנֵּה שְׁנֵי הַדְּבָאִי הָאֵלֵּים מוֹעֲדִים לִפְנֵי הַיְכָל יְהוָה אַחֲרֵי הַגְּלוֹת נְבוּכַדְרֶצְצַר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל אֶת־יְכִנְיָהוּ בֶן־יְהוֹיָכִים מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה וְאֶת־שָׂרֵי יְהוּדָה וְאֶת־הַחֹרֶשׁ וְאֶת־הַמְּסַכֵּר מִירושָׁלַם וַיָּבֵאוּם בְּכֵל: 2 הַדְּבָאִי אֶחָד הָאֵלֵּים טֹבוֹת מְאֹד בְּהָאֵלֵּים הַפְּסוּדוֹת הַדְּבָאִי אֶחָד הָאֵלֵּים רְעוּת מְאֹד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תֵאכְלֵנָה מֵרַע: 8

The vision report begins with the announcement of the vision (v. 1), which is connected to the vision proper by the transitional particle (הִנֵּה in v. 1).<sup>4</sup> The vision reports two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the Lord (v. 1).<sup>5</sup> The phrase “the Lord showed me” suggests

<sup>4</sup> B. O. Long, “Reports of Visions among the Prophets,” *JBL* 95 (1976): 353-65. Long sets forth three basic elements for a vision report: 1) the announcement of the vision; 2) the transition; 3) the vision-sequence—(a) the image; (b) the question by the Lord and the prophet’s answer (v. 3); (c) the oracle of the Lord (vv. 4-10).

<sup>5</sup> There is no way to determine for sure whether they were physical figs or the vision was only Jeremiah’s inner experience. Some assume it was visionary: J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 220; W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT I, 12; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1947), 135; F. B. Huey Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (NAC 16;

a visionary experience.<sup>6</sup> It seems preferable to describe the image of the figs in Jerermiah 24 as a vision although visions are not mentioned frequently in the book of Jeremiah.<sup>7</sup> This expression is used to indicate the divine origin of the vision.<sup>8</sup>

Verses 2-3 explain the significance of the two baskets of figs mentioned in verse 1: one basket has very good figs, the other has very bad ones. The good figs are “like the first-ripe figs.”<sup>9</sup> The point of the simile in verse 2 is to make a statement about the quality by comparing them with the high quality, first figs of the harvest. The “very bad” figs were inedible for some reason. Perhaps the vision is “symbolic of the fact that what was corrupt would be rejected.”<sup>10</sup> The clause “which could not be eaten due to rottenness” in verses 2 and 3 may be interpreted in terms of covenant curse.<sup>11</sup> The vision in verses 1-2 contains no hint of its sub-

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Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 221; C. F. Keil, *The Prophecy of Jeremiah I* (BCOT; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 368. Others are convinced that the vision had a physical basis: J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), 140; J. Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21; New York: Doubleday, 1965), 194; P. C. Craigie, P. H. Kelley and J. F. Drinkard Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1991), 358; W. Zimmerli, “Visionary Experience in Jeremiah,” in *Israel’s Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter Ackroyd* (ed. R. Coggins, A. Phillips and M. Knibb; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 114; R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah: Interpretation* (A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 145. For further reading on the phenomenology of visions, see S. Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition* (HSM 30; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> BHS suggests that the כֹּה has been omitted by haplography with the word הַשֵּׁבִיחַ at the end of 23:40. The opening formula יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ has no parallel in Jeremiah. But it introduces the visions of Amos 7:1, 4, 7; 8:1 where the phrase כֹּה בִּהַר אֶרֶץ אֲדָנִי appears. John Berridge assumes that v. 1 is modeled on Amos 7–8. See J. M. Berridge, *Prophet, People, and the Word of Yahweh, An Examination of Form and Content in the Proclamation of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Basel Studies of Theology 4; Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1970), 65.

<sup>7</sup> Only in Jer 1:10-16 and perhaps Jer 25:15-29.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Exod 25:9; Zech 1:20, 3:1; Amos 7:1, 4, 7.

<sup>9</sup> BDB 114. Closely related to בְּכֹרֶת “first-ripe fig” is בְּכֹרִים “first-fruits,” which suggests the first of the harvest. Early figs were considered a special delicacy.

<sup>10</sup> J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 507.

<sup>11</sup> In 2 Kgs 2:19, the “bad” (רַע) water and “unproductive” (שָׁבֵל) land are the results of the covenant curse. In Josh 6:26 a curse is pronounced on those who would rebuild Jericho. According to 1 Kgs 16:34, in Ahab’s time Jericho was rebuilt. The inhabitants of Jericho were experiencing the effects of the covenant curse (cf. Deut 28:15-18 with Exod 23:25-26; Lev 26:9; Deut 28:1-4). The Lord has healed this bad water to be “wholesome.”

stantive message. The figs do not have any deeper meaning. The image of the figs is merely an occasion for the oracle. The vision of verses 1-2 is followed by the question of the Lord and answered by the prophet.<sup>12</sup>

3 Then the Lord said to me, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” And I said, “Figs, the good figs, very good; and the bad figs, very bad, which cannot be eaten due to rottenness.”

3 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי מַה־אַתָּה רֹאֶה וַיִּרְמִינֵהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הַטְּאִנִּים הַטְּאִנִּים הַטְּבוֹת טְבוֹת מֵאֵד  
וְהַרְעוֹת רְעוֹת מֵאֵד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תֹאכְלֵנָה מֵרַע: פ

The Lord’s question prompts Jeremiah to scrutinize the object of the vision. Jeremiah recounts in the first person what he has already observed. The consistency and frequency of this format shows that such repetition should not be understood as unnecessary. The implication of the Lord’s question to the prophet is not the possibility of the prophet’s seeing wrong.<sup>13</sup> It rather indicates that Jeremiah has seen the vision correctly.<sup>14</sup> The implication of the dialogue between the Lord and the prophet is that the Lord reveals himself through the medium of a vision and the prophet recounts the revelation.<sup>15</sup> Its main point is given by the oracle of the Lord (vv. 5-10). The oracle does not interpret or explain the image, but proclaims the divine revelation. The important intent of the vision report is to announce a revelatory word.

4 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 5 ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: “Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place to the land of the Chaldeans. 6 ‘And I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and I will build them up and not tear them down, and I will plant them and not uproot them. 7 ‘And I will give them a heart to know

<sup>12</sup> The question-and-answer motif is relatively common in the vision-report in the prophets (Amos 7, 8; Zech 5:1-4; Jer 1:11-14). Close parallels to Jer 24:2-3 are found in Amos 7:7-8 and 8:1-3. The Lord’s question is found in Jer 1:11, 13; Amos 7:8; 8:2.

<sup>13</sup> Keil, *Prophecy of Jeremiah*, 368.

<sup>14</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 358: “It is comparable to the messenger correctly repeating the message entrusted to him. It further indicates that the source of interpretation is God, not the prophet—the interpretation is not evident from the vision.”

<sup>15</sup> Long, “Reports of Visions,” 356: “A number of reports are built upon a dialogue between God, or an angel, and the prophet. One group has God asking questions of the prophet (Amos 7:7-9; 8:1-3; Jer 1:11-14; 24:1-10; Zech 5:1-4); another group has the prophet asking questions of an angel (Zech 2:1-4; 4:4-10, 11-14; 5:5-11).”



me, that I am the Lord; and they will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with their whole heart.

4 וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר: 5 כִּי־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פְּתֹאנִים הַטְּבוֹת הָאֵלֶּה בְּכַף־צִבּוּר אֶת־גִּלְוַת יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתִּי מִדְּהַמְקוֹם הַזֶּה אֶרְצֵי פְּשָׁדִים לַטּוֹבָה: 6 וְשָׁמַתִּי עֵינַי עַל־יָהִם לַטּוֹבָה וְהַשְׁבֵּתִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וּבְנֵיהֶם וְלֹא אֶהְרַס וְנִמְעַתִּים וְלֹא אֶתּוֹשׁ: 7 וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם לֵב לְדַעַת אֶתִּי כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה וְהִירֵדִי לָעַם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים כִּי־יָשׁוּבוּ אֵלַי בְּכָל־לֶבָם: 8

The introductory formula “Then the word of the Lord came to me” (v. 4) serves as a transition from the vision to the oracle that interprets the vision.<sup>16</sup> The interpretation of the vision is also coming from the Lord. Jeremiah is dealing with the future of the people of Judah as it is revealed to him in the vision. Verses 5-10 contain the oracles that interpret the vision of verses 1-2. The temporal clause in verse 1 provides the historical context of the vision.<sup>17</sup> The historical setting described in verse 1 may reflect the deportation of the leading members of Judah by Nebuchadrezzar to Babylon after the events in 597 B.C. (cf. Jer 22:24-30; 2 Kgs 24:10-16). After the exile of Jehoiachin and the leadership of Judah, those who remained in Jerusalem were headed by Zedekiah. There may have existed an apparent tension between these two groups over the interpretation of the events of 597 B.C.<sup>18</sup> The vision oracle is directed toward these two groups of Israelites and provides a theological evaluation of both groups in terms of the Lord’s action “for good” and “for bad.” The positive aspect of the vision (vv. 5-7) is balanced by the negative one (vv. 8-10). The “exiles of Judah” are regarded by the Lord as “good figs” (v. 5) while the “remnant of Jerusalem” were the “bad figs” (v. 8) and their contrasting fates differentiate them.

Some scholars view Jeremiah 24 as propaganda.<sup>19</sup> They fail to address the rhetorical issue, simply seeing the text of Jeremiah 24 in

<sup>16</sup> The introductory formula, וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה יְרֵמְיָהּ or וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי, occurs 28 times in Jer, marking the beginning of a report.

<sup>17</sup> The historical notation in v. 1 is syntactically a parenthesis. It interrupts the description of the image in the Hebrew text. Thus, it is regarded as an editorial insertion adopted from 2 Kgs 24:14-16 by Bright, *Jeremiah*, 193; and W. A. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 657.

<sup>18</sup> C. R. Seitz, “The Crisis of Interpretation over the Meaning and Purpose of the Exile: A Redactional Study of Jeremiah 21-43,” *VT* 35 (1985): 78-97. Seitz analyzes the pro-exile view and pro-land view and then concludes that “the viewpoint propounded from the side of those who remained in the land: that they, and not the Babylonian exiles, are the true heirs of God’s plan for the future Israel.”

<sup>19</sup> E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 110: “[T]he composition of



social terms. Holladay, however, rightly argues that the issue here is “not whether the present passage could become propaganda for the exiled segment of the community (it most assuredly did) but whether the original form of the passage could have offered to the community at a given time an unconventional prophetic view that cut across popular notions; it is clear that it could.”<sup>20</sup> The vision of Jeremiah 24 contrasts these two groups of Israelites. Contrary to the conventional Deuteronomic understanding of the event regarding exile, **Jeremiah 24 presents an “alternative interpretation of God’s actions and the significance of these two Jewish communities.”**<sup>21</sup> This is a way of describing the exigency of this rhetorical situation.

Form-critically speaking, **verses 5-7 are the announcement of judgment with “I”-speech form.** The proclamation comprises a series of nine first person singular active verbs and two additional singular personal pronouns.<sup>22</sup> In each case the Lord is the subject. The Lord himself is his own agent. It emphasizes the determination of the Lord’s will and the sovereignty of the Lord’s action. The Hiphil form of the verb נָכַר (“regard”) in verse 5b sets the general tone of the oracle in terms of the act and its subject.<sup>23</sup> The Babylonian “exiles of Judah” are regarded as

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chapters xxiv and xxix was motivated by primarily by a specifically theological and polemical intention, for they seek to assert the claims of the Babylonian diaspora to be the true remnant of Israel through whom alone renewal and restoration would be wrought by Yahweh as against those who either remained or lived in Egypt during the exilic period.” Robert Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 484, suggests that the party with Jehoiachin is advocated in chapter 24 against the party with Zedekiah and pro-Egyptians. “A more realistic interpretation of the chapter is to be found in reading it as propaganda. It is a partisan account on behalf of the deportees presenting them as Yahweh’s special group and reassuring them of their claims to live in and control Jerusalem.” W. Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down. A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1–25* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 211-12, suggests that “while this partisan struggle may be the life setting for chapter 24, the Bible no longer presents this text as a self-serving claim. The rereading of history in chapter 24 is presented as a verdict rendered by God.”

<sup>20</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 656.

<sup>21</sup> Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 209; See also W. Brueggemann, “A Second Reading of Jeremiah after the Dismantling,” *Ex Auditu* 1 (1985): 156-68.

<sup>22</sup> In v. 5 אָבִיר “regard” and שָׁלַחְתִּי “sent away”; in v. 6 שָׁמַתִּי “set,” הַשְׁבִּיתִים “bring back,” בְּנִיתִים “build,” לֹא אֶהְרֵס “not tear down,” נִטְעַתִּים “plant,” and אֶתְוֹשׁ לֹא “not uproot”; in v. 7 נָתַתִּי “give”; and in v. 7 the first person singular personal pronouns, both אֲנִי and אֲנֹכִי.

<sup>23</sup> Brueggemann, “A Second Reading of Jeremiah,” 159: The verb אָבִיר (“I regard”) “suggests a decree that goes against the facts and against normal expectation. The term is used negatively to warn against partiality in judgment (Prov 24:23; Deut 1:17, 16:19). In our passage, the term suggests an intentional act of

good by the Lord (v. 5).<sup>24</sup> This identification is reinforced by the clause “And I will set my eyes on them for good” in verse 6. Those taken to Babylon would be treated favorably by the Lord and eventually brought back to their land (v. 6). The expressions, “for good” (לְטוֹבָה) and “for evil” (לְרָעָה),<sup>25</sup> are used with a variety of verbal phrases in Jeremiah concerning the destiny of the city and the people.<sup>26</sup> The equation of the “exiles of Judah” as “good figs” may suggest a moral judgment on the exiles of Judah. However, the emphasis is on the bestowal of the grace of God by divine sovereignty.

The vision contradicts the conventional understanding that would have been held by the audience: according to that understanding, the people remaining in Jerusalem are the favored ones, while the exiles are objects of God’s judgment. The “remnant of Jerusalem” presumably considered themselves to be God’s favorites as we see clearly in Ezekiel.<sup>27</sup> Yet the Lord regards the “exiles of Judah” as “good figs.” This is to meet the rhetorical exigency. This oracle proclaims the reversal of the fortune and says further that Judah’s future lies with the “exiles of Judah.” The exiles will be the objects of God’s favor. The reversal of fortune has been the significant rhetorical style that Jeremiah has applied throughout chapters 21–24. In Jeremiah 21:3-10, the holy war image is reversed.

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partiality by Yahweh. That is, this judge handles justice in a new way by issuing the verdict.”

<sup>24</sup> The identification of “the exiles of Judah” is not clear from our passage. The current passage deals with events after 597 B.C. W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah I, I-XXV (ITC)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 608-9, says that Jehoiachin’s group appears to constitute the entire exilic, Babylonian community, and the deportees of 586 B.C. are not considered as part of the exiles of Judah.

<sup>25</sup> These expressions are more common in Jeremiah than elsewhere. The term “for good” (לְטוֹבָה) occurs in Deut 28:11; 30:9; 2 Chr 18:7; Ezra 8:22; Neh 2:18; 5:19; 13:31; Ps 86:17; Jer 14:11; 21:10; 24:5, 6; 39:16; 44:27; Amos 9:4. The term “for evil” (לְרָעָה) occurs in Gen 31:52; Deut 29:20; Judg 2:15; 2 Sam 18:32; 2 Chr 18:7; Prov 6:18; Jer 21:10; 24:9; 29:11; 38:4; 39:16; 44:11; 44:27; 44:29; Ezek 4:23; Amos 9:4; Zech 1:15.

<sup>26</sup> Seitz, “Crisis of Interpretation,” 83. Seitz differentiates the city from the people. He says that “the object of Yahweh’s wrath is not the people, but the city itself.”

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ezek 11:15; the Babylonian “exiles of Judah” were sent there fulfilling the covenantal curse for their disobedience to the Lord. The deportation is not accidental, but both the will of Yahweh (Jer 16:13; 22:25) and the consequence of “following the stubbornness of his evil heart instead of obeying me” (Jer 16:12).

The equation of exiles as “good” is not because of their righteousness (Deut 9:6). Their goodness does not rest in themselves. The exiles did not merit God’s favor. It is the sovereign faithfulness of the Lord that declares them good. Jeremiah is concerned primarily with their fate and not their quality.<sup>28</sup> The judgment is not based on the righteousness of the recipient.<sup>29</sup> The judgment in favor of the exiles is the grace of the Lord not induced by the merit of the exiles.<sup>30</sup> Jeremiah is not emphasizing “the moral qualities of exiles.”<sup>31</sup> The rhetorical force of the Epilogue (Jer 24) is the grace of the Lord that indeed creates the new historical possibility for the audience.<sup>32</sup> It is part of the persuasion that the way forward is through exile.

The people may understand that the exiles have been expelled as a consequence of the covenant curses of Deuteronomy. Thus, exile exemplifies the judgment of the Lord. According to Deuteronomy, the land plays the central role as the symbol of the Lord’s promise and blessing.

<sup>28</sup> H. G. von Reventlow, *Liturgie und Prophetisches Ich bei Jeremia* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1963), 87-94. Reventlow correctly argues that “good” and “bad” figs do not indicate the character of the exiles and the remnant of Jerusalem respectively, but their fates. By the sovereign grace of the Lord, the exiles are regarded “for good” and the remnants of Jerusalem are proclaimed “for bad.” Israel’s new hope is placed on a new action of God to save Israel in his grace, apparently by means of the exiles rather than of the remnant of Jerusalem.

<sup>29</sup> Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 210: “The freedom of Yahweh in making such a dramatic assertion parallels that of Gen 15:6, in which Yahweh ‘reckons’ (*hashab*) Abraham to be righteous.” God graciously responds to a man’s faith by crediting righteousness to him, “Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited (קָרַבְתָּ) it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6).

<sup>30</sup> Brueggemann, “A Second Reading of Jeremiah,” 159. See G. von Rad, “Faith Reckoned as Righteousness,” in *The Problems of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966): 125-30.

<sup>31</sup> D. R. Jones, *Jeremiah* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 319. The vision is about the Lord’s plans for judgment and salvation. It is God who brings both about. The symbol recedes into the background, the prophet sees the people symbolized by the baskets placed in God’s court, “good figs” and “bad figs.”

<sup>32</sup> Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 210: “This is one of most stunning theological claims in Jeremiah. The community in exile is the wave of God’s future. Such a claim may indeed be self-serving propaganda, or it may simply be pastoral consolation for displaced people. It is nonetheless presented to us in the Bible as a theological verdict by this God who is now allied, by free choice, precisely with the community that the world thought had been rejected. It is indeed an act of free grace which creates a quite a new historical possibility. The text thus bears witness to the conviction that this God can and will create a new community from those rejected.”

Apparently, some in the exile considered those remaining in the land to be under the covenant blessing, while those who went to Babylon were under the curse. But in this alternative view, it is the turn of the exiles to be favored. The exiles are the ones who will be blessed through God's gracious intervention. The Lord will "bring them back to this land" (v. 6a). He takes the initiative to bring them back from exile and to allow them to live in the land. This is a dramatic turn from judgment to hope. But more importantly, it is a dramatic new interpretation of Judah's future.

The Lord will bring the exiles of Judah back to "this land" (v. 6a). There is here a further development of turning from judgment to hope (v. 6b). This is reminiscent of Jeremiah's call (Jer 1:10).<sup>33</sup> There is a change of thought with the reference to Jeremiah's initial call which has a mostly negative nature. Verse 1:10 predicts the largely judgmental nature of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry. Tearing down and uprooting have already happened because they had broken the covenant. This destruction (exile) was a necessary judgment, but now the Lord will restore them solely by his free and saving grace.<sup>34</sup> This is a message of hope for the eschatological future.<sup>35</sup> God will "new-create" them.

The sovereign act of the Lord breaks the obvious expectation of the time. The restoration process—bringing the exiles back to this land, and building them and planting them—is joined by the promise of the "new heart" (v. 7) for the exiles by which they shall know the Lord and through which he will re-establish his covenant.<sup>36</sup> The expression "I will give them a heart to know me" in verse 7 further implies that a person can know the Lord only when the Lord enables that person's mind or will to do so.<sup>37</sup> He will create in them the seat and source of a new life

<sup>33</sup> This theme of destruction and construction is repeatedly mentioned in the book: 1:10; 12:14-17; 18:7-9; 31:27-28, 40; 42:10; 45:4.

<sup>34</sup> Brueggemann, "A Second Reading of Jeremiah," 160: "Restoration is only to exiles and that restoration is founded only in Yahweh's free assertion. The move from negatives to positives is not understood simply as a literary process of redaction, nor simply as historical sequencing. It is understood as the free action of reversal which Yahweh can do without explanation."

<sup>35</sup> P. Williams, "Living Toward the Acts of the Savior-Judge: Study of Eschatology in the Book of Jeremiah," *ASB* 94 (1978): 13-39.

<sup>36</sup> G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology II* (New York: Harper, 1962), 211-12.

<sup>37</sup> Calvin, *Jeremiah III*, 229. The Lord is not called the helper, but the author of their knowledge. There is no exact parallel to the expression "I will give them a heart to know me" (וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם לֵב לְדַעַת אֹתִי) in the Old Testament, but the expressions in Deut 30:6; Jer 31:33; 32:38-39; Ezek 11:19; 36:26 point toward the same idea. Cf. Deut 5:29; 1 Kgs 8:58. For further information on the language of knowing the Lord, see W. Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982).

that consists in the knowledge of their covenant God. “For Jeremiah the eschatological future was not focused on temple or king but on a new covenant by which God would establish a new individualized relationship with his people (Jer 31:31-34).”<sup>38</sup> This must have been a powerful point for the people who no longer had temple or land, thus whether in exile or in Palestine afterwards.

The gift of a new heart is a free sovereign act of the Lord. This act of the Lord was necessary because of Judah’s unwillingness and inability to repent. In Jeremiah 23:17 the false prophets are accused of prophesying “peace” (שָׁלוֹם) to “everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart.”<sup>39</sup> Israel could not change its heart. A drastic action of the Lord was necessary, giving them a new heart (cf. Jer 4:14; 17:1). This idea is classically Deuteronomic.<sup>40</sup> Even so, it comes with fresh force. Thus, the solution to the Israel’s inability to obey the Lord is placed in the Lord himself.<sup>41</sup>

We have seen so far the progress of restoration of the exiles by the grace of the Lord. After the judgment of exile, the Lord regards the exiles of Judah as good. He will bring them from exile to their homeland, building and planting them. He will change their heart. The “I”-speeches with the Lord as the subject in the continuous successive clauses in verses 5-7 reaches a climax at the phrase “I am the Lord.”

The knowledge of God is coupled with the covenant formula “they will be my people, and I will be their God” (Jer 24:7). Verses 5-7 reach a

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The clause *אֲנִי יְהוָה כִּי* appears otherwise in Jeremiah only in 9:23. The clause *כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה* may be translated “for I am the Lord” as a causal clause as Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard claimed that the causal clause emphasizes the active role of the Lord (Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 358). This expression is common in Ezekiel, where it is translated “that I am the Lord” as a result clause (Ezek 13:9; 23:49; 24:24; 28:24; 29:16). Here it should also be translated “that I am the Lord” as a result clause instead of as a causal. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel give hope for a new heart: Jer 31:33, “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts”; Jer 32:39, “I will give them singleness of heart and action”; Ezek 11:19, “I will give them an undivided heart”; Ezek 36:26, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.”

<sup>38</sup> Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 34.

<sup>39</sup> In Jeremiah references are made to “the stubbornness of their evil hearts,” or their “stubborn and rebellious hearts” that brought judgment upon them (3:17; 5:23; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17).

<sup>40</sup> “The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants” (Deut 10:6; cf. Deut 10:16).

<sup>41</sup> J. G. McConville, *Grace in the End: A Study in Deuteronomic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 137: “He will somehow enable his people ultimately to do what they cannot do in their strength, namely, to obey him out of the conviction and devotion of their own hearts.”

climax in the covenant relationship between God and Israel.<sup>42</sup> Jeremiah combines the concept of covenant with the idea that Israel's future is rooted in her past. Israel is now in covenant relationship with God. God and people are in an intimate relationship, "my people" and "their God." Again, the remarkable thing is that the covenant will be with the exiles.

They will return to the Lord. The physical restoration—the return to the land, and the building and the planting of verse 6—will be accompanied by spiritual regeneration of the people through returning to the Lord with their whole heart (v. 7).<sup>43</sup> Judgment was the beginning of the new beginning. Thus, the re-establishment of the relationship comes only after judgment. The series of events are initiated by the Lord: God would give them a new heart; they would return to the Lord with their whole heart; the covenant relationship would be re-established. The re-establishment of the Lord's covenant relationship with Judah by giving them a new heart is a positive message. It is a turning point in the composition of the whole book of Jeremiah, making a transition from the theology of inevitable doom to the theology of hope.<sup>44</sup> God offers hope by a change of heart. The turn from judgment to hope is by the free, saving act of God.

8 But like the bad figs which cannot be eaten due to rotteness," For Thus says the Lord, "so I will abandon Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials, and the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and the ones who dwell in the land of Egypt. 9 'And I will make them a terror and an evil for all the kingdoms of the earth, as a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse in all places where I shall scatter them. 10 'And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence upon them until they are destroyed from the land which I gave to them and their forefathers."

<sup>42</sup> The covenant formula "they will be my people, and I will be their God" is found nowhere more often than in the book of Jeremiah. It occurs six more times in Jeremiah (7:23; 11:4; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38). It occurs in Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Deut 26:18; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; Heb 8:10; Hos 2:23; cf. Hos 1:9-10, where the negative aspect is given.

<sup>43</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 609. The phrase כִּי־יָשׁוּבוּ אֵלַי בְּכָל־לֵבָם is often taken as causal, "for they will return to me with their whole heart." McKane suggests that the meaning of כִּי־יָשׁוּבוּ אֵלַי בְּכָל־לֵבָם is "not that Yahweh's work of rehabilitation is conditional on the wholehearted repentance of his people, but rather that this wholehearted repentance is part and parcel of his work of restoration."

<sup>44</sup> J. G. McConville, *Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 59.



8 וּבַתְּאֲנִים הַרְעוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא תֹאכְלֶנָּה מֵרַע פִּי־כֶּה אָמַר יְהוָה בֵּן אֶתֶן אֶת־צִדְקֹתָיו מִלְּךְ יְהוּדָה וְאֶת־שִׁרְיוֹ וְאֶת־שְׂאֵרֵי יִרְשָׁלַם הַנְּשָׂאֲרִים בְּאֶרֶץ הַיּוֹזֵאת וְהַשְּׁבִים בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: 9 וְנִתְּתִים לְזֹעֶה [ל] [וְנִעְוָה] לְרַעָה לְכֹל מִמֶּלְכּוֹת הָאֶרֶץ לְחֹרְפָה וּלְמַסָּל לְשָׁנֶיהָ וּלְקַלְלָהּ בְּכָל־הַמְּקֹמֹת אֲשֶׁר־אָדִיחַם שָׁם: 10 וְשָׁחַתְתִּי בָם אֶת־הַחֵרֶב אֶת־הָרֶעִב וְאֶת־הַדָּבָר עַד־הַמָּוֶם מֵעַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־נִתְּתִי לָהֶם וְלְאַבְתֵּיהֶם: פ

The baskets of “good” and “bad” figs are paralleled to the Babylonian “exiles of Judah” and the “remnant of Jerusalem”/Egyptian exiles (vv. 4-7 and vv. 8-10). Contrary to the presumed understanding, the “bad figs” represent those who had remained behind in Judah under Zedekiah or fled to Egypt. Corresponding to the evaluation of “good” and “bad” are their respective destinies.<sup>45</sup> Thus, Jeremiah sees no hope in the “remnant of Jerusalem” (v. 8) as the remnant of the covenant people of the Lord.<sup>46</sup>

Jeremiah commands the king and the people that they surrender to the Babylonians in Jeremiah 21:3-8. The only hope of the future depends on surrendering in order to save the city from destruction and avoid the loss of life.<sup>47</sup> But the prophecy of Jeremiah was not heeded. Those who stayed in the land considered themselves blessed after the events of 597 B.C. Jeremiah’s message is a simple one-dimensional statement: those who remain in the land are “bad figs.” Although no explicit reason is offered for “bad” here in Jeremiah 24, it is understood from the consistent message of Jeremiah that they are “bad” because of their disobedience to the Lord. It is simply asserted to be “bad.” Two communities are equated with the “bad figs” in verse 8.<sup>48</sup> Whether they have remained

<sup>45</sup> Clements, *Jeremiah*, 145: “It is noteworthy that the negative assessment of the community that remained in Judah along with Zedekiah is further supported by Ezekiel 33:23-29, where the detailed list of the offenses committed by those in the land of Judah is given.”

<sup>46</sup> The word שְׂאֵרִית or שְׂאֵר, the usual words for the “remnant” in the Old Testament, is used for designating those who were left in Jerusalem (v. 8). For the “remnant motif” in the Old Testament, see G. F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1972). Jeremiah uses the collective abstract noun גְּלוּת “exiles” (1:3; 24:1, 5; 27:20; 28:4 29:22; 40:1; 43:3; 52:31) for the expression “the exiles of Judah” גְּלוּת יְהוּדָה (v. 5). About the possible reason for Jeremiah’s use of גְּלוּת instead of שְׂאֵר or שְׂאֵרִית, Yoshiaki Hattori, “The Prophet Ezekiel and His Idea of the Remnant,” (Th.D. diss.; Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1968), 195-96, suggests that Jeremiah “could not associate the general meaning of the term שְׂאֵר or שְׂאֵרִית (‘reside’ or even ‘remnant’) with the idea of future hope, when he saw the thoroughness of the destruction of Jerusalem, and he started to use the term גְּלוּת for the exiles, in whom he saw the future of restoration.”

<sup>47</sup> Jer 21:9-10; 32:3-4; 34:2-5; 38:2-3, 17-18.

<sup>48</sup> There are many different views on the date of “those who dwell in the



in the land or have fled to Egypt, this remnant is a source of resistance to God's purpose, which is for Israel to submit to Babylon. Thus, any attempt to avoid the exile to Babylon would result in judgment.<sup>49</sup> This is the crucial point. Many who stayed in the land, of course, had no choice in the matter, but were simply left behind by the Babylonians.

As we have seen above in the analysis of verses 5-7, the equation of the exiles as good, is not based on their righteousness. The effect of the vision is only to say that those who did not go into exile should not feel superior.<sup>50</sup> This point suggests the rhetorical intention of Jeremiah 24: the exile is necessary.

Verse 8 implies that the flight to Egypt seems to have happened after the fall of Jerusalem. In Jeremiah 40-42, Jeremiah now preaches to those who are left in the land after the second wave of exiles have already been taken to Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem. However, this time Jeremiah is preaching to the people not to leave Jerusalem for Egypt. Jeremiah's message has changed with the new circumstances. The people must stay in Jerusalem and submit to Babylonian rule. However, the submission is the same whether in exile in Babylon (Jer 24) or in Jerusalem which itself is under Babylonian rule (Jer 40-42). Jeremiah's message then is that the Lord's purpose is being fulfilled by means of the Babylonian subjection of Judah and the people must not resist God's plan by going to Egypt to avoid Babylonian rule.

Jeremiah presents a dreadful consequence of the alternative to surrender. Judgment against the "bad figs" is announced in verse 9 using words as "object of terror" (אֲנִי־עֹרֶה), "reproach" (חִרְפָּה), "byword" (בְּזוּלָה),

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land of Egypt." Regardless of when they went there, "those who are living in the land of Egypt" were "bad figs." Some identify the Egyptian exiles to be those who fled to Egypt after 586 B.C. or after the Assassination of Gedaliah (42:1-43:7). Thus Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 482, and Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles*, 110, believe that the entire passage is written after 586 B.C. The mention of Zedekiah leads them to believe that Jerusalem had not yet fallen and Gedaliah had not become governor. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 659, and Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition*, 61, view the phrase "those who are living in the land of Egypt" as a later addition. However, Bright, *Jeremiah*, 193, identifies them as pro-Egyptian Jews who had fled to Egypt when Jehoiakim became Nebuchadrezzar's vassal (ca. 603 B.C.), or when Nebuchadrezzar invaded Judah in 598/597 B.C. Some may even have gone with King Jehohaz in 609 B.C. (2 Kgs 23:34). Thus, this phrase does not require a date 586 B.C. See also Nicholson, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 207.

<sup>49</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 360.

<sup>50</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 656, suggests that "the message of the present is not that the exiles are innocent and those who stay at home were guilty, but rather that Yahweh had positive plans for the exiles, and that those who stay at home should not feel superior; this is the crucial issue."

“taunt” (שְׁנִינָה), “curse” (קָלָלָה), “condemnation” (אָלָה), “desolation” (הַרְבָּה), “horror” (שֹׁמֵה). The repetition of similarly threatening words intensifies the severity of the judgment. It appeals strongly to the audience’s emotions. Various combinations of these words appear frequently throughout the book of Jeremiah in the context of the humiliation of Judah.<sup>51</sup> The judged communities, “the remnant of Jerusalem” and the Egyptian exiles, will be humiliated in the eyes of the other nations. The threefold expression “the sword, the famine and the plague” is pervasive in Jeremiah.<sup>52</sup> This same expression is used in Jeremiah 21:7. The threefold structure refers to expressions either in positive or negative aspects.<sup>53</sup> Here in verse 9 it describes the totality of the destruction.<sup>54</sup> The threefold structure serves to magnify the full extent of the judgment.<sup>55</sup>

In the verdict of verses 8-10, the judgment is “the consequence of the evil, not the ground of it.”<sup>56</sup> The language of verse 9 is closely related

<sup>51</sup> Jer 7:34; 15:4; 18:16; 19:8; 22:6; 25:9; 11, 18; 26:6; 29:18; 34:17; 42:18; 44:6, 8, 12, 22.

<sup>52</sup> The threefold instruments of judgment, “the sword, the famine and the plague,” are mentioned fifteen times in Jeremiah (14:12; 21:7, 9; 24:10; 27:8, 13; 29:17, 18; 32:34, 36; 34:17; 38:2; 42:17, 22; 44:13). Outside Jeremiah it occurs only in Ezekiel (5:12, 17; 6:11, 12; 7:15; 12:16; 14:21) and Chronicles (1 Chr 21:12; 2 Chr 20:9). On the other hand the dual elements from this threefold structure occur before Jeremiah: “sword, famine” (Isa 51:19); “sword, plague” (Exod 5:3; Lev 26:25; Amos 4:10); “famine, plague” (Deut 32:24; 2 Sam 24:13). Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 435, attributes the repeated usage of these terms in Jeremiah and Ezekiel to a specific historical crisis. For a detailed study of these terms, see H. Weippert, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches* (ZAW 132; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), 148-91. J. W. Miller, *Das Verhältnis Jeremias und Hesekiels sprachlich und theologisch untersucht* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1955), 86, suggests that these terms constituted a slogan which arose during this time, concerning the repeated use of the triad in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

<sup>53</sup> The threefold structure these terms refers to the blessing with the lack of these terms while the curse when they are present (Exod 12:13; Num 8:19; Deut 7:12-16; 32:23-25). Various types of curse, biblical and non-biblical, are discussed by Delbert Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (BibOr 16; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964).

<sup>54</sup> Jer 24:10, “until they are destroyed”; Jer 11:23, “not even a remnant will be left to them”; Jer 27:8, “until I destroy it”; Jer 44:12, “from the least to the greatest, they will die.”

<sup>55</sup> The covenant is totally negated. The reason for this negation of covenant is explained in Jer 29:16-19: “They have not listened to my words” (29:19). Jones, *Jeremiah*, 210, writes, “It concerns the ultimate punishments promised for disobedience.”

<sup>56</sup> Brueggemann, “A Second Reading of Jeremiah,” 161.

to that of the covenant curses.<sup>57</sup> The highly stylized form indicates that the expression must have been available as a fixed form at the time of Jeremiah, and likely is not composed in the current context.<sup>58</sup> Thus the audience is familiar with these strongly pathos-filled words. Jeremiah is using the already available fixed curse formula to appeal to the emotion of the audience.

## V. Conclusion

We see God's judgment through the historical process in this text. The Lord preserves his people for the future. There will be continuity through the remnant. There is a future for Judah, but it is not through the "remnant of Jerusalem" or the Egyptian exiles. The remnant of Jerusalem presumably considered themselves to be God's favorites. Yet the "exiles of Judah" will be the objects of God's favor. The "exiles of Judah," those who were carried into exile in Babylon, bear Judah's future. This is contrary to the conventional Deuteronomistic understanding of the event regarding exile. God will bring about a future for Judah by means of those who were thought to have been without hope for a future. This is another case of reversal of fortune that has been the significant rhetorical style that is applied throughout the rhetorical unit of Jeremiah 21–24. In the Proposition (Jer 21:3-10) the people were told to surrender to the Babylonians and they would be spared. There is certainly a hint that this is more than just survival in Jeremiah 21:8: "I set before you the way of life and the way of death." This is covenantal, based on Deuteronomy 30:15, 19. However, in Jeremiah 21:8-9 it is not developed, and in the context it could be just an exaggerated use of the Deuteronomistic formula. The meaning in Jeremiah 21:8-9 is, rhetorically speaking, open. The audience may wonder what it meant, but the dominant point in Jeremiah 21:3-10 is simply survival by surrendering to the Babylonians.

Covenant breach brings the covenant curse. The judgment of exile is inevitable. So the people may ask what is next for them. What has been left open in Jeremiah 21:3-10 is now fully spelled out in Jeremiah 24. What is important is that Jeremiah 24 brings in a new idea as part

<sup>57</sup> Jones, *Jeremiah*, 318. The words used here in v. 9 include the curse formula of Deut 28:37 (cf. 1 Kgs 9:7 and 2 Chr 7:20) that negates Israel's election. Although v. 9 has the same form and content as Deut 28:37, it is expressed with detailed variations. The word "horror" (הַיָּזוּז) occurs (with spelling variations) in Deut 28:25 but also in Jer 15:4; 29:18; (34:17; "byword" (מַשְׁל) in Deut 28:37; "curse" (קְלָלָה) in Jer 25:18; 26:6; 42:18; 44:8, 12, 22; 49:13 but not in this sense in Deut.); "reproach" (רִיבָה) occurs in Jer 6:10; 20:8; 29:18; 42:18, 12; 49:13; 23:40, but not in Deut.

<sup>58</sup> Brueggemann, "A Second Reading of Jeremiah," 162.

of the completion of Jeremiah's argument. The covenant can continue by means of the judgment of exile. This is why the future covenant will be based on those who go through the exile. The rhetorical force of the Epilogue (Jer 24) is the grace of the Lord that indeed creates the new historical possibility for the audience. The emphasis is on granting the grace of the Lord by his divine sovereignty. The "exiles of Judah" are regarded as "good" (v. 5, 6) and Judah's future lies with the "exiles of Judah." The destruction (exile) was a necessary judgment, but now the Lord will restore them by his grace (v. 6).

The equation of the "exiles of Judah" as good, and the "remnant of Jerusalem" and the Egyptian exiles as bad is not based on the righteousness of the recipient. The rhetorical intention is to emphasize that the exile is necessary. Jeremiah's message in the Epilogue (Jer 24) is that the Lord's purpose is being fulfilled by means of the Babylonian exile. Thus the people must not resist God's plan either by resisting the Babylonians or by going to Egypt to avoid the Babylonian rule.

The message of Jeremiah 24 is not to distinguish who is and who is not to be included in the future plan of Judah. The purpose of God is not a matter of who happens to be taken and who happens to be left behind by the Babylonian army. The rhetorical impact of the Epilogue (Jer 24), as the final point of argument of the rhetorical unit Jeremiah 21–24, is to emphasize that the endurance of the exile is essential to the future shape of the religion of the people of Judah. The judgment on Judah and the exile into Babylon are a part of God's redemptive purpose.

The exiles must go through exile, in order that the exilic and post-exilic communities should know that the covenant does not depend on king, temple, and land. Beyond judgment lies salvation. The restoration process is joined by the promise of a "new heart." In the Epilogue, the climax is reached with the covenant language: "they will be my people, and I will be their God" (v. 7). The new covenant will be confirmed with a new heart: "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord" (v. 7). God will make the exiles a faithful remnant with this renewed covenant. Thus, this verdict anticipates the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 (cf. Jer 32:39). The experience of exile shows that covenant with the Lord is in reality a matter of the heart. This answers the question left open in Jeremiah 21:8-9 in the Proposition. By surrendering to the Babylonians they not only save their lives, but also open up a new way of living in covenant with the Lord. This solves the rhetorical exigency of the rhetorical unit, Jeremiah 21–24.

Against the interpretation of the text in terms of political propaganda, we present the rhetorical interpretation in this study that the message of Jeremiah 21–24 is not the struggle between the "exiles of Judah" and the "remnant of Jerusalem." It is not advocating one group

over others. But the message is that they all need a “new heart” to know the Lord as their God. To the restoration process is added the promise of a new heart, in a New Covenant. God’s future plan is inclusive—it applies to both “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31). Whoever has a new heart to know the Lord as his God is included in God’s future plan, regardless of whether they are the Babylonian exiles, the remnant of Jerusalem, or the Egyptian exiles.