



JEREMIAH'S REBUILDING (בנה) OF THE DESTROYED CITY WITHOUT BRICK AND MORTAR

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Abstract

Where floods and wars wash away houses and cities, we re-store and re-build what has collapsed. In the book of Jeremiah, temple, palace, and the walls of the Davidic city are destroyed. The national identity of a people that for centuries saw itself as the chosen one got existentially compromised. When Jeremiah casts the vision of restoration in his book of Comfort (30-33), a major rebuilding takes place. In fact, no other prophetic book in the TNK (re)builds as much as Jeremiah does (the verb בנה is used 24 in Jer; Eze [16x], Isa [12x]). The restoration of Judah's world does, however, not know of temple and palace – the central institutions of national identity – as objects of rebuilding. In my paper, I will argue that Jeremiah's vision of healing a broken world is only the flip side of his analysis of the causes that lead to Judah's fall. Through his selection of objects to be rebuilt, the prophet teaches that buildings and institutions can become dangerous surfaces used by human beings to objectify their religious and national identity. Such objectification contributed to a morally hollowed-out society. Therefore, Jeremiah's rebuilding focuses on bodies and relations rather than buildings and rituals.

Key Words: restoration, jeremiah, new covenant, temple, tradition, humanity, valence, language pragmatics.

Introduction

Where things break, we repair them. Where earthquakes, avalanches, floods, and wars wash away houses and entire towns, we re-pair, re-build, and restore what has collapsed. But in the book of Jeremiah, more than just buildings are destroyed. Not only the physical world breaks apart with the destruction and burning of Jerusalem, its royal palace, and the Solomonic temple. It is also the religious-cultic world that collapses. Thus, time loses its guiding rhythm. There remains only a succession of meaningless days. Where to make sacrifices when there are no more altars? Where to ring in the New Year when there is no longer a holy of holies? As if that were not enough, the

national identity of a people that for centuries saw itself as the chosen one had collapsed. With the fall of the Davidic monarchy, the faith in the Messiah was also shaken. The prophecies of the official palace prophets no longer come true (cf. Jer 28).

But the book of Jeremiah does not only try to describe the reasons for the national collapse and social disintegration, it also presents a future reconstruction of the disintegrated. But in the restoration it describes there is no room for the temple and the throne to have significance. And yet there is a lot of (re)building going on in the *Book of Consolation* (Jer 30-33). No other prophetic book in the TNK (re)builds as much as Jeremiah does (the verb בנה is used 24 in Jer; Eze [16x], Isa [12x]).

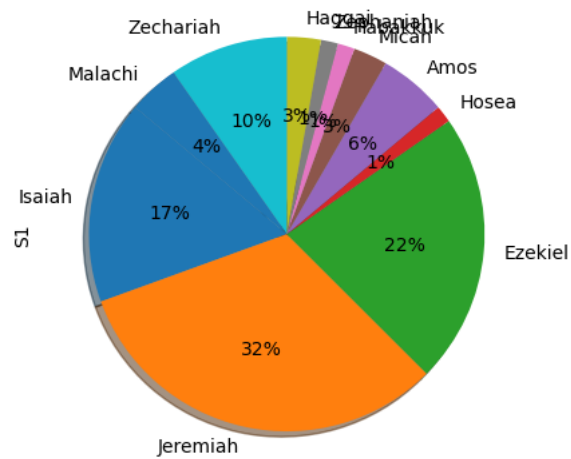


Figure 1: Distribution of בנה among the prophets

In my paper, I will argue that Jeremiah's restoration of Judah's broken world is not realized by a rebuilding of its central institutions: temple, palace. Unlike his colleague Ezekiel, the future is not in a restored and cleansed temple (Eze 40-48). Rather, Jeremiah sees in the future a God who rebuilds people, who rebuilds marriages, and who rebuilds individuals so that they are once again able to live in covenants.

I try to argue that Jeremiah's re-building vision is only the flip side of his decay analysis. The psychodynamic workings of the people's rhetoric, with its references to the temple and the throne were major factors that caused the decay of social justice, morality, and covenant loyalty to YHWH. The buildings that were once expressions of covenantal loyalty between God and his people became objectifications for religious and national identity at the end of the monarchy. This objectification contributed to the erosion of

human integrity. To rebuild magnificent buildings that contributed to the breakdown of Judah's world would only be counterproductive. Jeremiah's vision of restoration, consequently, is a critique of how humans relate to religious institutions and holy buildings.

Poetry and Valence

Jeremiah has been recognized as one of the greatest poets of the TNK. Scholarship has, therefore, sought to identify him as the author of a multitude of psalms, and the Judeo-Christian tradition has often believed that the poetry of mourning in Lamentations and the skillful narrative of the books of Kings have the prophet Jeremiah as their origin.

Particularly characteristic of Jeremiah's rhetoric is, however, not his focus on language aesthetics but on language deconstruction. In several cases, he uses language in unexpected ways.¹ While his language use follows the rule of standard Hebrew grammar, he deviates at times drastically from the standards of language pragmatics. By doing so, he invites the reader-listener to critically reflect on her own language use and the biases it embodies.

My presentation will rely on valence and syntax analysis in order to trace Jeremiah's deviation from standard Hebrew language pragmatics.² After going through these text passages, I will attempt to follow along the lines of Jeremiah's deconstructive language in order to sketch a new hermeneutical horizon for the interpretation of the *New Covenant*.

The Restoration of the Old World

In the MT, the *Book of Consolation* (Jer 30-33) is found in the center of an epos that is significantly larger than any book of the Bible: Jeremiah. For the purpose of today's theme, it is more than justified to name these chapters the *Book of Restoration* rather than the *Book of Consolation*. In the very center of the book of restoration, we find the most well-known verse about the *New Covenant* (Jer 31:31).

All the 48 chapters that surround this book of restoration are about destruction, judgment, and the end of Judah and Jerusalem. And then, like

¹ A few examples: hevel hevelu, shaked shoked, Waheji Devar Adonai, Pakod – faqed, Chakat.

² They query syntax and query results for each of my queries can be accessed here: <https://nbviewer.org/github/oliverglanz/Text-Fabric/blob/master/publications/RebuildingTheDestroyedCity.ipynb>

phoenix from the ashes, YHWH promises restoration in the midst of destruction. With vv31-34, the *Book of Restoration* receives its climax.

<p>Jeremiah 31:31–34 (BHS)</p> <p>31 הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים בְּאֵם נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְכָרַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בְּרִית יְהוּדָה בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה:</p> <p>32 לֹא כַּבְרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אֶת־אֲבוֹתָם בְּיוֹם הַחֻזְקִי בְיָדָם לְהוֹצִיאָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר־הִמָּה הִקְרִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְאֲנֹכִי בַעַלְתִּי בָם נְאֻם־יְהוָה:</p> <p>33 כִּי זֹאת הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר אֶכְרַת אֶת־בְּרִית יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲחֵרֵי הַיָּמִים הַהֵם נְאֻם־יְהוָה נִתְתִּי אֶת־חֻוּרֹתַי בְּקֶרְבָּם וְעַל־לִבָּם אֶכְתְּבֶנָּה וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לְאֱלֹהִים וְהָמָּה יְהִי־לִי לְעָם:</p> <p>34 וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ וְאִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו לֵאמֹר דַּע אֶת־יְהוָה כִּי־כֹלֶם יָדְעוּ אוֹתִי לְמַקְטָנָם וְעַד־גְּדֹלָם נְאֻם־יְהוָה כִּי אֶסְלַח לְעֹוֲנָם וְלֹא־אֶזְכְּרֵם עוֹד: ס</p>	<p>Jeremiah 31:31–34 (ESV)</p> <p>31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,</p> <p>32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.</p> <p>33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.</p> <p>34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”</p>
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The previous allusions to the Exodus (Jer 31:2 [מִצְרַיִם חוֹל בְּמִדְבָּר]), the allusions to the Edenic Garden and a new creation (v12 [בְּגֵן רְיָה], v22 [בְּרֵא [בְּרֵקָה יְהוָה]], the reformulation of the Aaronic blessing (v23 [יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ]), and the imagery of YHWH planting anew were all signs of what is now made explicit: a *New Covenant* (בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה).

Vv31-34 belong to the most well-known verses of the Bible, and it makes up the longest OT quote found in the NT (Heb 8:8-12). The reader is asked to look (הִנֵּה, v31a) into God’s future for his people and see a new covenant being established between YHWH and the houses of Israel and Judah (v31). If there were a future for YHWH and his people, it could only be established with a new covenant as YHWH declared the old covenant broken (cf. Jer 11:10). Fischer correctly points out that Jer’s idea of the *New Covenant* must have been so unexpected and challenging that the OT does nowhere else pick

up this idea in an explicit form to develop it further.³ It is only in the later intertestamental period (Qumran⁴) and the NT that Jer's idea reappears (Heb 8:8; 9:15; Luk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6).

In v32, emphasis is put on the fact that this new covenant is different from the covenant at Sinai. What the difference is, is not explicitly worked out.⁵ The fact that v33b repeats the characteristics of the Sinaitic covenant ("placing the law in the heart": Deut 30:14; "I will be your God and you will be my people": Ex 6:7, Lev 26:12) indicates that the *New Covenant* (v31) does not "overcome" the old Sinaitic covenant. The repetition of the old covenant formula, "And I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Ex 6:7; see also Jer 30:22; 31:1), further confirms this. The new covenant will have the Torah written on the tablet of the people's hearts. This writing appears as an *overwriting* of what has been written on their hearts earlier. Jer 17:1 describes how Judah's sins are written on the tablet of the people's hearts. Now the former letters of transgression are covered by words of the law. The overwriting of ancient clay tablets is not possible unless they are resurfaced. Such a resurfacing must be assumed (no exchange of the old table with a new one is mentioned) and indicates the people's willingness to change their attitudes and to allow God to reshape their beliefs.

But the clear statement "Not like the covenant, *that I have cut* with their fathers" (לֹא כַכְּרִיתִי אֱשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אֶת־אֲבוֹתָיִם) at the beginning of v32 must be taken seriously. Jer's "new covenant" cannot only be a "renewed covenant," as some have argued.⁶ The אֱשֶׁר clause stresses that the changing agent is YHWH, not the people. The specifics of the "newness" of the future covenant are not mentioned, however. But when Jer's rhetoric is traced carefully, an image

³ Fischer, *Jeremia 26-52*, 171.

⁴ Temple Scroll (11Q19), Rule of the Community (1QS, 4Q255-264a, 5Q11, 5Q13) and Damascus Document (4Q266-273, 5Q12, 6Q15). See Hauw, Andreas. "The New Covenant at Qumran" presented at the Society of Asian Biblical Studies (SABS) conference 2018. Widya Sasana Malang-Indonesia, 16 July 2018; Nitzan, Bilhah (<http://repository.seabs.ac.id:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/328>). "The Concept of the Covenant in Qumran Literature." Pages 85–104 in *Historical Perspectives: From the Hasmoneans to Bar Kokhba in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Edited by David Goodblatt, Avital Pinnick, and Daniel R. Schwartz. Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 37. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

⁵ For a good summary of the discussion see Fischer, Georg. *Jeremia 26-52*. Edited by Erich Zenger. Herders Theologischer Kommentar Zum Alten Testament. Freiburg: Herder, 2005, 175-176.

⁶ For example, O'Connor writes that the old is "reasserted, reaffirmed, re-inaugurated". See O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 111.

emerges that has the potential to define what it is that is new in YHWH's restored world.

The Valence of Building

In Jeremiah, the distribution of the verb (re)build (בנה) is the highest in the *Book of Restoration* (Jer 30-33). Eight of a total of 23 occurrences appear in this part of the book (Jer 30:18; 31:4 [2x], 28, 38; 32:31, 35; 33:7).

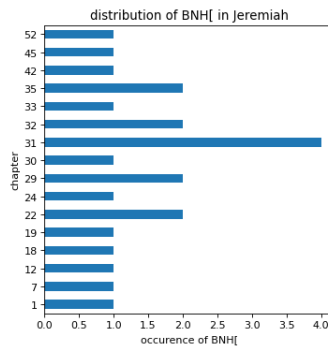


Figure 2: Distribution בנה of in Jeremiah

This simple statistic shows already that the *New Covenant* is all about (re)building a broken world. This emphasis becomes even more striking when one realizes that no other prophet uses the word בנה more often than Jeremiah:

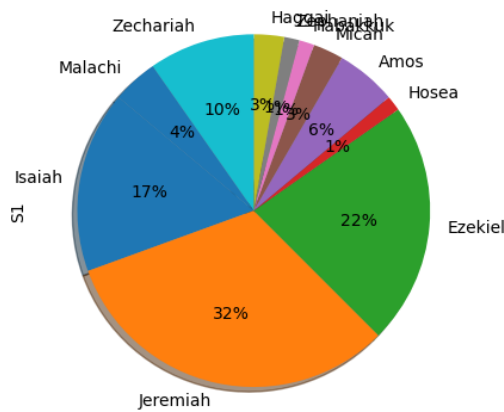


Figure 3: Distribution of בנה among the prophets

From a linguistic perspective, something else, however, catches the eye. Jeremiah uses of the word בנה breaks with the standard language pragmatics

of its valence. In order for בנה to trigger the meaning “(re)build” it requires a direct object (explicit or implicit). The valence analysis shows that – like in English – the typical objects governed by בנה are building objects like house, wall, altar, city, walls, etc.:

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Jeremiah's reBuilding (בנה) of the Destroyed City without Brick and Mortar, Oliver Glanz

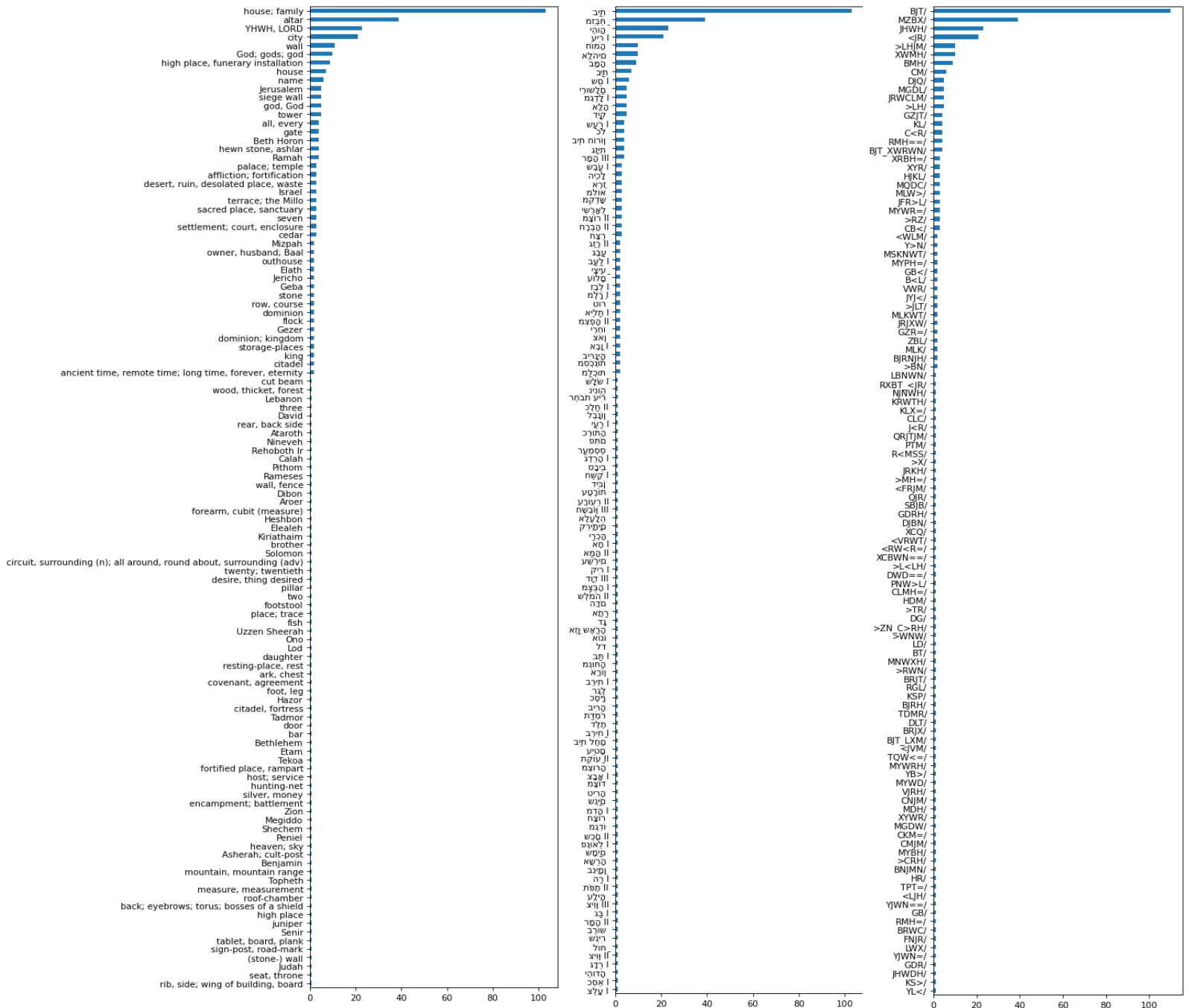


Figure 4: Distribution of בנה-governed syntactical objects

The OT has 307 clauses that have בנה as a predicate phrase while also holding a separate object phrase. The most common objects are “house” (בית, 103x), “alter” (מִזְבֵּחַ, 39x), “city” (עיר, 21x). But also “walls,” “shrines,” “gates,” or “towers” are the typical syntactical objects for building.

Obviously, the highly frequent words like YHWH, Elohim, and El, are not building objects. But they appear in this list (figure no4) only as they are part of construct relations. For example:

Deut 27:6	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Clause <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;"> Phrase:Objc אֶת־מִזְבֵּחַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;"> Phrase:Pred תִּבְנֶה </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;"> Phrase:Objc שְׁלֹמוֹת ⁶ </div> </div> </div>
1 Kgs 3:1	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Clause <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;"> Phrase:Objc אֶת־בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶת־בַּיִת יְהוָה וְאֶת־חוֹמֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם סָבִיב: </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;"> Phrase:Pred לְבָנוֹת </div> </div> </div>

Jer uses this standard valence behavior as well. The book uses בנה in its active qal stem 19 times. It shows that whenever Jer has human beings as the syntactical subject of בנה the objects of their building activities are exclusively physical buildings like the shrines on the high places (Jer 7:31; 19:5; 32:31), houses (Jer 22:13, 14; 35:7,9), the city (Jer 32:31), or siegeworks (Jer 52:4). For example:

Jeremiah 7:31 (BHS) 31 וּבְנִי בָמֹת הַתֶּפֶת אֲשֶׁר בְּגֵיא בְּוֵהֶזֶם לְשָׂרָף אֶת־בְּנֵיהֶם וְאֶת־בָּנוֹתֵיהֶם בְּאֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוִּיתִי וְלֹא עָלְתָה עַל־לִבִּי: 8	Jeremiah 7:31 (ESV) 31 And they have built the high places of Topheth , which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind.
Jeremiah 22:14 (BHS) 14 הָאָמֵר אֲבָנֶה־לִּי בַיִת מְלוֹת וְעִלּוֹת מִרְחֹקִים וְקָרַע לִי חַלּוּצֵי וְסָפֹן בְּאֶרֶז וּמִשׁוֹחַ בְּשֵׁשֶׁר:	Jeremiah 22:14 (ESV) 14 who says, ‘I will build myself a great house with spacious upper rooms,’ who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar and painting it with vermilion.
Jeremiah 32:31 (BHS) 31 כִּי עַל־אָפִי וְעַל־חַמְתִּי הִתְתָּה לִי הָעִיר הַזֹּאת לְמִן־הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר בָּנִי אֹתָהּ וְעַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְהַסִּירָהּ מֵעַל פְּנֵי:	Jeremiah 32:31 (ESV) 31 This city has aroused my anger and wrath, from the day it was built (lit: they built her) to this day, so that I will remove it from my sight

A striking deviation of this pattern, however, happens whenever Jer makes YHWH the syntactical subject of building (בנה). Whenever this happens, בנה never has a physical building as a syntactical object but always human beings or a people (cf. Jer 1:10 [implicit]; 18:9 [implicit]; 24:6 [explicit]; 31:4 [explicit], 28 [implicit]; 33:7 [explicit]; 42:10 [explicit]).⁷ For example:

<p>Jeremiah 31:4 (BHS) 4 עוד אֶבְנֶנּוּ וְנִבְנִית בְּתוֹלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד תִּפְעֲדִי תִּפְיֵדוּ וְיֵצְאוּ בְּמִתְהוֹל מִשְׂחָקִים:</p>	<p>Jeremiah 31:4 (ESV) 4 Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the dance of the merry-makers.</p>
<p>Jeremiah 33:7 (BHS) 7 וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי אֶת־שְׁבוֹת יְהוּדָה וְאֶת שְׁבוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנִיתִים כְּבָרְאשֶׁנָּה:</p>	<p>Jeremiah 33:7 (ESV) 7 I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first.</p>
<p>Jeremiah 42:10 (BHS) 10 אִם־שׁוּב תִּשְׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וּבְנִיתִי אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא אֶקְרֹס וְנִטְעַתִּי אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא אֶתְרוֹשׁ כִּי נִטְמַתִּי אֶל־הָרְעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לָכֶם:</p>	<p>Jeremiah 42:10 (ESV) 10 If you will remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I relent of the disaster that I did to you.</p>

In addition to this observation, we must add that Jer's use of the word "to plant" (נטע) is closely related to his use of the word "to build" (בנה). No other OT book uses the word "to plant" as frequently as Jer (a total of 16x).

⁷ Holladay recognizes that this specific construction of בנה is typical to Jer ("is a favorite device of Jrm"). However, he does not explore in what way Jer's use of the formulation opens new interpretative routes. See William Lee Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26–52*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 182. Similarly Lundbom and Fischer do not explore the actual meaning of the disruptive valence. See Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 21B of *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 416; Fischer, Georg. *Jeremia 26-52*. Edited by Erich Zenger. Herders Theologischer Kommentar Zum Alten Testament. Freiburg: Herder, 2005, 147.

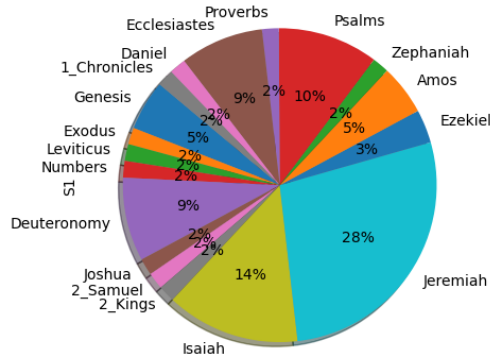


Figure 5: Distribution of the verb בנין in the TNK

In many cases, it is paired with the word “to build” and has people or human beings as a syntactical object for planting in mind (e.g., Jer 1:10; 31:28; 42:10; 45:4). This is an additional deviation from the standard languages pragmatics because the בנין valence has as dominant syntactical objects plants:

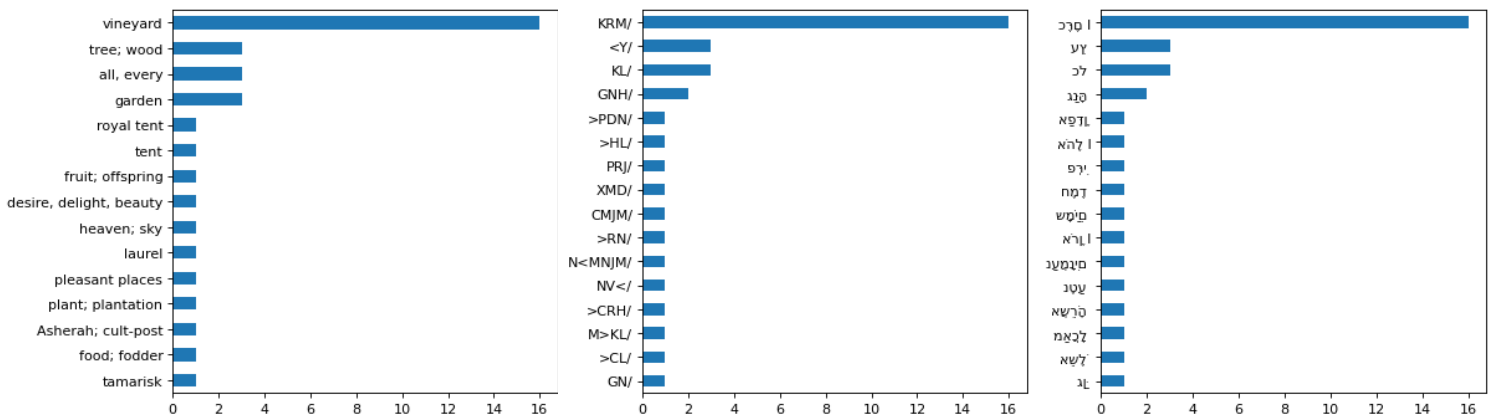


Figure 6: Distribution of syntactical objects of בנין

Contrary to usual language practice, the prophet’s poetry, then, paints a picture where YHWH plants a garden in which human beings grow like plants. Only the prophet Isiah uses similar pictures with such dedication (e.g., Isa 5).

In contrast, when Ezekiel thinks of the new covenant, he has the rebuilding of the city buildings and the replanting of actual fields in mind (e.g., Eze 36:36):

<p>Ezekiel 36:36 (BHS) 36 וְדַעְנוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאַרְוּ סְבִיבוֹתֵיכֶם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּנִיתִי הַמְהַרְסוֹת נְטַעְתִּי הַנְּשֻׁמָּה אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי וְעָשִׂיתִי: ׀</p>	<p>Ezekiel 36:36 (ESV) 36 Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the LORD; I have rebuilt the ruined places and replanted that which was desolate. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.</p>
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In Jer, the idea of planting is closely connected to the concept of a garden (גן, Jer 31:12). Even though Jer does nowhere make an explicit reference to the garden of *Eden* (cf. Isa 51:3, Eze 28:13), Jer's picture of the new covenant makes strong allusions to the creation account. The "garden" appears in the Pentateuch only as a reference to the garden of Eden. The only exception can be found in Deut 11:10, where the promised land is compared to a garden. But even here, the link between Kanaan and the "lost" garden is clear.

I will argue that in Jer, the restored temple, is a people planted in a garden (Jer 31:23). While a rebuilt physical temple is assumed in Jer 33:18, it remains only implicit. Explicit is the building of people and the planting of a garden with people and animals (Jer 31:27-28). While a rebuilt city with streets and walls is foretold in Jer 31:38-40, it is *not YHWH* who is announced as the builder.

Jer's disruptive language use deconstructs our own materialistic biases embodied in our own use of words. Why are we obsessed with physical structures as objects of building? Are not also the social fabric, the gender relations, the fabric of loyalty, and covenant-dedication objects that need to be (re)built and (re)planted?

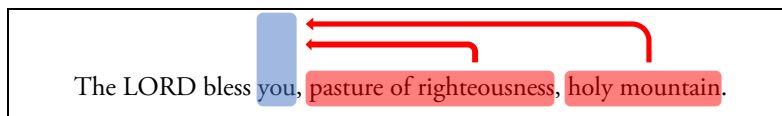
People as Temple

When Jer's deviation of the standard valence pattern of בנה and נטע is recognized, another puzzle that was difficult to fit into frameworks of interpretation might find its proper place in the *Book of Restoration*: Jer 31:23

<p>Jeremiah 31:23 (BHS) 23 כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד יֹאמְרוּ אֶת־הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה בְּאָרֶץ יְהוּדָה וּבְעָרֶיהָ בְּשׁוֹבֵי אֶת־שְׁבוֹתָם יִבְרַכֵּךְ יְהוָה גּוֹה־אֲדַבֵּר נָר הַקֹּדֶשׁ:</p>	<p>Jeremiah 31:23 (ESV) 23 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Once more they shall use these words in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I restore their fortunes: "The LORD bless you, O</p>
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	habitation of righteousness, O holy hill!
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In v23b Judah and his cities are talked about in favor, and the blessing formula will identify the restored places as *pastures/haunt* (הַנֶּחֱדָה) of *justice/righteousness* (צֶדֶק) and as a *holy mountain* (הַר הַקֹּדֶשׁ). The formulation “the Lord bless you” is typical Deuteronomic (16x in Deut) and appears elsewhere only in Numbers (Aaronic blessing in Num 6:24), Psalms (Psa 128:5;134:3), Ruth (Rut 2:4), and here in Jer.⁸ The formula is closely connected with the covenant that YHWH established with Israel during the Exodus. The recipient of the blessing is usually the nation (Num 6:24), an individual (Deut 24:19; Rut 2:4), or pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem (Psa 128; Psa 134). Together with the new creation in v22 (בָּרָא יְהוָה הַדָּשָׁה בְּאַרְצָא), the blessing formula in v23 (יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה) prepares the foretelling of the *New Covenant* of v31. After the blessing formula has not been heard in any of the historical books of Israel’s and Judah’s history, a future is foreseen where this affirmation of divine care is again (! יְזַד) heard. Jer’s blessing renders, however, in an unexpected way: The blessing uses two images for the recipient that drastically deviate from general language practice. First, the recipient is addressed as a pasture on which justice and righteousness graze (הַנֶּחֱדָה צֶדֶק). Jer uses this figure of speech elsewhere only in Jer 50:7 as a reference to YHWH. The pasture also appears elsewhere in the TNK with the qualification as “holy pasture” (cf. Exod 15:13), referring to the sanctuary. Second, the recipient is addressed as a holy mountain (הַר הַקֹּדֶשׁ). Usually, the holy mountain refers to Zion, the temple in Jerusalem (Isa 27:13; Sach 8:3). But where the blessing is found together with reference to Zion, it is never done in the way Jer puts it. The typical formulation would be “The LORD bless you *from* Zion (מִצִּיּוֹן)” (Psa 128:5; 134:4). Jer, however, uses the references “pasture of righteousness” and “holy mountain” as *appositions*:



This would mean that YHWH does not bless Zion but the people as Zion! The only explicit addressees in Jer 31 are people groups (foreign nations or exiles represented by “the virgin daughter,” “Rachel,” and “Ephraim”). Consequently, the reader-listener expects the exiles to be addressed by the

⁸ See <https://shebanq.ancient-data.org/hebrew/query?version=2021&id=4856>.

blessing. This, then, opens the possibility that YHWH's blessing wants to see the people themselves as the embodiment of the fertile soil on which righteousness can grow and as the personal embodiment of Zion, and thus, embodying with their life/existence the divine presence (*imago dei*). That Jer breaks with standard language pragmatics, and thus, traditional religious concepts can also be seen in how he uses the word "pasture." Usually, the construct form of רִנָּה ("pasture") is followed by animal names (e.g., haunt of jackals [Isa 34:13], pasture of flocks [Isa 65:10], and pasture of camels [Eze 25:5]). But Jer deviates from the default use of the formulation when speaking of "pasture of righteousness (רִנָּה צְדָקָה)."⁹

If my reading is correct, the blessing paints the image where justice itself becomes a personified agent who pastures in Judah's people.¹⁰ Thus, in contrast to the problematic, pre-exilic times, where "justice" only was present for the rich and mighty, the presence of justice is no longer restricted to specific locations, times, and social classes: justice is for everyone in all of Judah. In addition, the image suggests that the people are nurturing the rule of justice as they are imagined as nutritious soil on which justice grazes. The second apposition, "holy mountain," identifies the people with Zion. In the

⁹ We find a very similar but metaphorical use in Prov, where the poet speaks about the dwelling of righteous people (בְּיִשְׁבְּתֵי צְדָקָה). But in contrast to Proverbs, Jer does not have people in mind but righteousness as such.

¹⁰ Holladay disconnects the phrases from each other so that they do no longer function as an apposition. Therefore, the equation of the people with the temple is not being made by him. See William Lee Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26–52*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 195–196. Lundbom, however, recognizes the appositional function for at least the "righteous pasture". He also clarifies that the phrase does usually refer to the tabernacle, but that Jer applies it here to Jerusalem as a city ("But the 'righteous pasture' here is Jerusalem (Calvin), however much the imagery fails to suit an urban center (cf. Exod 15:17)"). The problem with such a reading is that the object suffix in צְדָקָה is 2sgM and could therefore not refer to the city. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 21B of *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 456. In a similar way does Fischer treat the issue. Fischer, Georg. *Jeremia 26-52*. Edited by Erich Zenger. Herders Theologischer Kommentar Zum Alten Testament. Freiburg: Herder, 2005, 165-166. However, in personal conversation with Fischer he admits that the formulation is difficult and does not allow for an easy interpretation.

time to come, the people themselves bring the presence of YHWH to the world.¹¹

People as Temple – an intrinsic Critique of Religious Objectifications

One of Jer's major critiques concentrated on the nation's relationship to the temple building. The objectification of God's presence in the form of the temple and the objectification of the covenant between Israel and God in the form of words written on tablets or scrolls lead to a disconnection of *letter* and *life* and the disconnect of *body* and *building*. The presence of the temple and the existence of the law as a written document have contributed to the false belief that God's presence and his covenant exist independent of one's conduct of life (cf. the Temple sermon in Jer 7).

One would worship in the temple and convince oneself of the presence of YHWH and believe in the invincibility of the people of YHWH only to continue a conduct of life that would break with the stipulations of Israel's covenant with YHWH (cf. Jer 7:10). As long as the temple was present, God's protection was present, and one's personal conduct of life would be less relevant for the survival of the chosen city. Consequently, religious objectification and moral decline go hand in hand.¹²

Jer's book of restoration, therefore, nowhere describes the rebuilding of the temple as part of the *New Covenant*. Planted (נטע), created (ברא), and built (בנה) are particularly humans, people, and animals (cf. Jer 31:22, 27-28; 33:7). Also, the law of the covenant is not placed in the arch of the covenant within a renewed temple but within the heart of the people (Jer 31:33, 32:40).¹³ Jer's restored covenant, then, anticipates a future in which the

¹¹ If, however, the addressee of the blessing is not the people but the temple, then v23b must be read as a saying of gratitude for the rebuilt temple. However, such a reading would break with the general flow of the chapter, where only people groups are addressed. Another challenge would be that the phrase "pasture of righteousness" (גִּדְהַיִּצְדִּיק) is elsewhere found only in Jer 50:7 where it refers to YHWH and not to the temple. The GT renders the text differently and prevents any interpretative challenge: "Blessed be the Lord on his righteous, holy mountain" (NETS, Εὐλογημένος κύριος ἐπὶ δίκαιον ὄρος τὸ ἅγιον αὐτοῦ). Identifying the people as the temple fits better the overall picture of the new covenant and the general addressee-flow of the chapter.

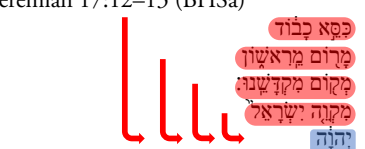
¹² See my presentation at the AU Faculty Institute on Oct 7, 2022 titled "Educating Across the Divide: Death Trap or New Covenant".

¹³ In the book of consolation, the word "build" (בנה) is used several times but only two times to refer to the building of material objects like the city (Jer 31:38) and the palace (Jer 30:18). Nowhere is the rebuilding of the temple mentioned explicitly. A restored temple is only assumed (cf. Jer 31:6,12; 33:18).

presence of God is no longer manifested so much in institutions and buildings but in the people's life, their joy, their care for each other (respecting social rules and regulations), and faithfulness to YHWH (cf. Jer 31:12-13, 34; 32:39, 44). Considering that the creation of the garden in Gen 2 imitates the basic structure of the Israelite sanctuary shows that the original idea of creation existed without the need for a physical temple structure.¹⁴ Human beings and the garden were everything needed to constitute holiness and allow for the presence of YHWH among his creation. *Jeremiah deconstructs religious transcendence by embracing the holiness of the immanent.* The book of restoration intrinsically critiques Judah's theology of transcendence and, with it, its religious objectification.

YHWH as temple

To go full circle, we should follow Jeremiah for one more step. After YHWH's meditation on the heart in Jer 17:5-11, a worshipping group tunes to a hymnic eulogy in vv12-13a.¹⁵ In the MT, YHWH responds with confirmation in v13b.¹⁶

<p>Jeremiah 17:12–13 (BHSa)</p>  <p>כָּסֵא כְבוֹד מְרוֹם מְרֵאשׁוֹן מְקוֹם מִקְדָּשֵׁנוּ מִקְנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה</p> <p>כָּל־עֲזָבִיד יִגְשׁוּ יְסוּדֵי בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִקְדָּר מַיִם־חַיִּים אֶת־יְהוָה:</p>	<p>Jeremiah 17:12–13 (Glanz)</p> <p>○ glorious throne ○ exalted one from the beginning ○ place of our sanctuary ○ hope of Israel ○ LORD</p>
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¹⁴ Reference Davidson textbook.

¹⁵ The case can be made that vv12-13 should be part of the confession that is traditionally considered to start with v14. Although the 1P reference shifts from 1plC forms in vv12-13 to 1sgC forms in vv14-18, the 2P reference to YHWH remains consistent throughout vv12-18. Since the shifting in numbers (here from pl to sg) is appearing quite often to transition from inclusive speaking (we=I and my people group) to exclusive speaking (I= I without my people group),¹⁵ and since no speech introduction between v13 and v14 creates an interruption of the speaking voice, it is very likely that Jrm's confession starts earlier in v12. Such a reading would have Jrm relate to himself as a member of a larger worshipping group ("we") in vv12-13. Only in vv14-18 does he redirect YHWH's attention to his own individual situation.

¹⁶ The GT continues with the worshipping voice and does not transition to a speech of YHWH. NETS: O endurance of Israel! O Lord! Let all who forsake you be put to shame; let those who have turned away be recorded on the earth, because they have forsaken the fountain of life, the Lord.

	all who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water.
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With v12, an exceptional series of four vocatives is directed towards the last (fifth) and climactic vocative, “O Lord!”. The first four vocatives are without equal. The use of “O glorious throne!” (כִּסֵּא כְבוֹד), “O exalted one from the beginning!” (מֵרִם מִקְדָּמֹת), “O place of our sanctuary!” (מִקְדָּשׁנוּ) (מִקְדָּשׁנוּ) as well as “the hope of Israel!” (תִּקְוַת יִשְׂרָאֵל) as titles for YHWH is not found elsewhere outside of the book of Jer. And within the book of Jer, these titles are exceptional as well, as only “the hope of Israel” is used elsewhere (Jer 14:8). Jrm, then, starts with creative, new ways of bringing praise to YHWH. The identification of YHWH with “place of our sanctuary” is remarkable and only further developed by Jesus in the NT (cf. John 2:19-21; see also John 1:14 and its use of σκηνώσ). Jeremiah wants the reader-listener to imagine YHWH’s presence as the materialization of the temple building rather than the temple being the materialization of YHWH’s presence. The *omnipresence* of YHWH (i.e. his embodiment of the temple), then, calls for a change of attitudes, behavior, and a passionate commitment to the laws of the covenant everywhere and at any time. There, where such commitment is missing and where YHWH’s presence is reduced to the space-restricted presence of the temple, immorality, nationalism, and other forms of idolatry lurk around the corner.

Conclusion

Jeremiah's analysis of destruction and his vision of restoration can help in a modern world to trace the real abysses of the religious fabric and prevent to rebuild the wrong buildings that functioned only as an objectification of a hollowed-out society that clings – at times desperately (cf. the temple sermon) – to its religious beliefs in order to hide its corrupt souls in pseudo-identities (“chosen people”).

Jer’s deviations from standard language practice disturb the reader-listener, as the prophet breaks with semantic conventions and the pragmatics of language valence. However, his disruptive use of language invites for a deconstruction of biases embodied in our language practice, and – like a surgeon of the mind – his language rewires synapses so that new thoughts are possible and new hermeneutical horizons can be explored.

Jer’s language then sees a restored world in which the idea of the temple is embodied by the presence of both God and humans. Religious rituals,

institutions, and buildings can no longer be used as hiding places for immorality or legitimization for religious and political superiority.

Jer's *New Covenant* does not make the Sinaitic covenant undone, rather, it wants more of that covenant. It wants to restore its transcendent essence by returning to the immanent purity of the original garden as it was at the beginning of the world.