Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)

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CHAPTER 6

Marriage Imagery in Jeremiah 2-4

Jeremiah's proposal of the world is indeed an imaginative construct, not a description of what is nor a prediction of what will be. [...] The text leads the listener out beyond presently discerned reality, to new reality formed in the moment of speaking and hearing.1

Jeremia spricht hier [in Jer. 2:4-4:2] gar nicht so sehr als ein Prophet, der etwas Neues anzukündigen hat, sondern als ein Seelsorger, der mit seinen Hörern um das richtige Verständnis ihrer Geschichte ringt, der mit ihnen die Geschichte ihrer Schuld aufarbeiten will, um ihnen einen neuen Anfang zu ermöglichen.2

1 Introduction

The book of Jeremiah opens with a call narrative that is followed by two large compositions. The first of these compositions is Jeremiah 2-4:4, the second Jeremiah 4:5-6:30. Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 is a complex text with switches from poetry to prose, from the past to the present, from one addressee to another and from one eloquent metaphor to another in order to portray Israel's conduct. At the same time it is characterised by a general focus on Yhwh and Israel and a great degree of non-specificity in terms of historical setting and occasion. No specifications of time and space are provided, the text moves easily from the period in the wilderness to the return to Zion and to a glorious period in the future when Yhwh will be present in Jerusalem without intermediation.

Within this composition three passages show elaborate usage of marriage-and-divorce imagery.3 The whole composition starts with reminding Jerusalem of the 'loyalty of your youth, the love of your bridal time, your going after me in the wilderness' (Jer. 2:2-3). This positive image of the close bonds between Yhwh and Israel, as fresh as in a honeymoon period, functions as a motto for the subsequent controversy concerning the disloyalty of Israel. The next chapter (chap. 3) resumes the marriage imagery and opens with a passage about renewed ties between the former husband and wife, in this case between Yhwh and Israel (Jer.

3. So M.A. Zipor, "Scenes from a Marriage" – according to Jeremiah, JOT 65 (1995), pp. 83-91 (p. 90): 'there is an impressive accumulation of metaphors describing scenes from the failed marriage or connected associatively to this theme'. Indeed terms and concepts congenial to this imagery are found throughout the text, cf. the motifs of 'love', 'lovers' and 'unfaithfulness' in Jer. 2:25; 2:33; 3:19-20.
3:1-5). To this a short tale follows about the unsuccessful marriage of Yhwh to the two sisters Israel and Judah (Jer. 3:6-10).

Characteristic of the marriage imagery in Jeremiah 2-3 is that it is found in combination with many other images and metaphors and functions as one of the tools to confront Israel with its poor functioning as Yhwh’s partner. Israel is not only depicted as the bride of Yhwh (2:2) but is also likened to a vine (2:21), a harlot (2:20), a young camel (2:23), a she-ass (2:24) and a girl (2:32). The nation is further compared to a thief (2:26) and is presented allegorically as two sisters (3:6-11). Yhwh is metaphorically portrayed as a spring of living water (2:13), as a planter (2:21) and as a partner, youth companion and intimate family member (‘father’) of the people (3:1-4). This implies that the marriage imagery in Jeremiah 2-4:4 is by far not as sustained as in Hosea 1-3 but comes to the fore in an impressionistic fashion.

Below I will present a synchronic analysis of Jeremiah 2-4:4 and highlight some of its characteristic motifs. Then I will zoom in on the passages with explicit marriage imagery, establish how they function within the whole and explain what they convey about the measure of abstraction and liberty with which the text of Jeremiah employs marriage imagery. In this stage I will specifically discuss Jeremiah 2:2-3, 3:1-5 and 3:6-10. In general, due to the more fragmentary occurrence of marriage imagery in this text, I will not deal with the entire text in the same detailed way as I did with Hosea 1-3 nor provide it with the same general introduction. I will explore Jeremiah 2-4:4 thus in a more cursory fashion and will refrain from discussing broader issues with respect to the book of Jeremiah.

2 Translation and notes to Jeremiah 2-4:4

2:1 And the word of Yhwh came to me, saying:
2. Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying:
   Thus says Yhwh:
   I remember you, the loyalty of your youth
   the love of your bridal time
   your going after me in the wilderness
   in a land not sown.
3. Israel was holy to Yhwh
   the first fruits of his harvest
   all who ate from it would make themselves guilty
   evil would come upon them
   – speech of Yhwh –.
4. Hear the word of Yhwh, house of Jacob
   and all the families of the house of Israel!
5. Thus says Yhwh:
   What injustice did your fathers find in me
   that they distanced themselves from me
   and went after worthless things
   and became worthless themselves?
6. They did not say:
   Where is Yhwh?
   who made us go up from the land of Egypt
   and made us go through the wilderness
   through a land of deserts and pits
   through a land of drought and deep darkness
   through a land that no one passes through
   and that nobody inhabits.

7. And I brought you into a land of orchards
   to eat its fruit and its bounty
   but you came in and defiled my land
   my inheritance you made into an abomination.

8. The priests did not say:
   Where is Yhwh?
   Those who handle the torah did not know me
   the rulers rebelled against me
   the prophets prophesied by Baal:
   they went after things that do not profit.

9. Therefore I will once again enter suit with you
   – speech of Yhwh –
   and with your children’s children I will enter suit.

10. For cross to the isles of the Kittiim and see
    send to Kedar and make serious inquiry
    and see if such a thing as this has happened:

11. Has a nation exchanged gods
    while those are non-gods?!
    But my people exchanged its glory
    for something that does not profit.

12. Be appalled, o heavens, at this
    be horrified and dry up completely
    – speech of Yhwh –

13. for two evils my people have committed:
    They have abandoned me
    the spring of living water
    to dig themselves cisterns
    cisterns that will become cracked
    and cannot hold the water.

14. Is Israel a slave
    or a bondman by birth?
    For what reason then has he become a prey?

15. Over him young lions roar
    and raise their voice;
    they have turned his land into a desolation
    his cities have been laid in ruins, without inhabitant.

16. Even the children of Memphis and Tahpanhes
    lay your skull bare.
17. Have you not done this to yourself
   by your abandoning of Yhwh, your god
   while he was leading you on the way?
18. Now then of what avail is it to you
   to be on the way to Egypt
   to drink the waters of the Nile?
   And of what avail is it to you
   to be on the way to Assyria
   to drink the waters of the Stream?
19. Let your evil correct you
   let your backslidings reprove you
   and you will know and see
   that it is evil and bitter
   that you abandoned Yhwh your god
   and that the fear of me is not in you
   – speech of the lord Yhwh of hosts –.
20. Look, long ago I broke your yoke
   and burst your bonds
   but you said: I will not serve
   and on every high hill
   and under every green tree
   you bent down and committed harlotry.
21. But I planted you as a choice vine
   in every respect a pure seed
   so how have you changed
   into the degenerate shoots of a wild vine!
22. Look, even if you wash yourself with soda
   and use plenty of soap
   your guilt would be a stain in my face
   – speech of the lord Yhwh –.
23. How can you say: I am not defiled
   I have not gone after the baals!
   See your way in the valley
   know what you have done:
   A swift young camel, zigzagging on her ways
24. A wild she-ass trained to the wilderness
   in the heat of her instincts sniffing the wind
   in her mating time, who can restrain her?
   All who seek her need not tire:
   in her month they will find her.
25. Keep your feet from running bare
   and keep your throat from thirst!
   But you say: It is useless, indeed
   for I love strangers
   and after them I will go.
26. Like the shame of a thief when he is caught
so they have behaved shamefully, the house of Israel:
they, their kings and their officials
their priests and their prophets
27. by saying to a tree: You are my father!
and to a stone: You gave birth to me!
Look, they faced me with their back
and not with their face
but at the time of their disaster they will say:
Arise and set us free!
28. Where are your gods
that you made for yourself?
Let them arise
if they can set you free at the time of your disaster
For as the number of your cities
have your gods become, o Judah.
29. Why do you enter suit with me?
You have all rebelled against me
– speech of Yhwh – .
30. In vain I have beaten your children
correction they did not accept;
your sword has devoured your prophets
like a lion out for destruction.
31. O you, generation, see the word of Yhwh:
Have I become a wilderness to Israel?
Or a land of supreme darkness?
For what reason then have my people said:
We have roamed about
and will no longer come to you?
32. Can a girl forget her ornaments
a bride her gown?
Yet my people have forgotten me
days beyond number.
33. How well you invent your way
in order to seek love!
In that respect, in evil things
you have surely trained your ways.
34. Even on your skirts is found
the lifeblood of innocent poor
whom you did not find breaking in;
but on top of all this
35. you said: I am innocent
his anger will surely turn away from me!
Yet look, I will bring you to judgement
on account of your saying: I have not sinned!
36. How very casually you go about to change your way!
Even by Egypt you will be put to shame
as you were put to shame by Assyria.

37. Even from this you will come away
with your hands on your head
for Yhwh has rejected those in whom you put confidence
and you will not prosper through them.

3:1 [Thus says Yhwh:]
If a man sends away his wife
and she goes from him
and belongs to another man
would he return to her again?
Would not that land be utterly profaned?
And you commit harlotry with many partners
and then return to me!
– speech of Yhwh – .

2. Lift your eyes to the traffic routes and see:
where have you not been lain with!
By the ways you have sat waiting for them
like an Arab in the wilderness
so you brought profaneness over the land
by your harlotries and by your evil.

3. And the showers have been withheld
and the latter rain has not come
while you have the forehead of a harlot
and refuse to be ashamed.

4. Is it not from now on
that you will call me: My father
the companion of my youth are you!

5. ‘Will he keep a grudge forever?
Or keep things in mind without end?’
Look, so you have spoken
and you do evil things and prevail.

6. And Yhwh said to me
in the days of king Josiah:
Have you seen what Turncoat Israel did
that she went on every high mountain
and under every green tree
and committed harlotry there?

7. I thought:
After she has done all this
she will return to me.
But she did not return
and her sister, Traitor Judah, saw it.
8. And I saw when on account of the fact that Turncoat Israel committed adultery I had sent her away and given her a bill of divorce that still Treacherous Judah, her sister, did not fear and went to commit harlotry herself.

9. And it will appear that with her casual harlotry she profaned the land committing adultery with stone and tree.

10. And even in all this Traitor Judah, her sister, did not return to me with all her heart but only in pretence — speech of Yhwh — .

11. And Yhwh said to me: Her soul, that of Turncoat Israel, is more righteous than that of Treacherous Judah.

12. Go and proclaim these words to the north and say:

   Return, Turncoat Israel
   — speech of Yhwh — :
   I will not let my face go down over you for I am loyal — speech of Yhwh — and will not keep a grudge forever.

13. Just acknowledge your guilt for against Yhwh your god you have rebelled you have spread your ways to strangers under every green tree and to my voice you have not heard — speech of Yhwh — .

14. Return, turnable children — speech of Yhwh — for I am your master and I shall take you one from a city and two from a family and I shall bring you to Zion.

15. I shall give you rulers after my heart and they shall rule you with knowledge and insight

16. And you shall multiply and be fruitful in the land in those days — speech of Yhwh — they shall no longer say: the ark of the covenant of Yhwh! It shall not come up in a heart they shall not remember it they shall not miss it it shall not be made again.
17. At that time
they shall call Jerusalem the throne of Yhwh
and all the nations shall gather to it
to the name of Yhwh in Jerusalem
they shall go no longer after the stubbornness of their
evil heart.

18. And in those days
the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel
and they shall come in together
from the land in the north
to the land that I gave to your fathers for an inheritance.

19. And I thought:
How would I set you among children
and give you a desirable land
an inheritance most beauteous among the nations.
And I thought
You would call me: My father!
and would not turn from after me.

20. But truly
as a woman that is treacherous to her partner
so you have been treacherous to me, O house of Israel
– speech of Yhwh –.

21. A voice may be heard on the traffic routes
the weeping and praying for grace of the children of Israel
for they have perverted their way
and have forgotten Yhwh their god.

22. Return, turnable children
I will heal your backslidings!
‘Here we are, we come to you
for you are Yhwh our god!’

23. Truly, close to deception is what comes from the hills
close to commotion what comes from the mountains
‘Truly in Yhwh our god
is the salvation of Israel!’

24. Shame has devoured the toilsome work of our fathers
from our youth onwards:
their flocks and their herds
their sons and their daughters.

25. So let us lie in our shame
let our disgrace cover us
for against Yhwh our god we have sinned
we and our fathers
from our youth onwards
and until the present day;
and we have not heard to the voice of Yhwh our god’.
4:1. If you turn, Israel—speech of Yhwh—to me you should turn. If you remove your detestable things from my face and do not waver

2. and if you swear ‘As Yhwh lives’ in faithfulness, justice and righteousness then nations shall exchange blessings in him and shall praise themselves in him.

3. For thus says Yhwh to the men of Judah and Jerusalem:
   Plough yourselves unploughed ground and do not sow among thorns;

4. Be circumcised to Yhwh and remove the foreskin of your hearts men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem or else my wrath will go forth like fire and burn with no one to quench it because of the evil of your doings.

Text-critical, grammatical and syntactical notes

A general note about indentation and the use of quotation marks

In principle, forms of direct speech are indicated in the translation by indentation. In order not to move the whole text to the right margin, I have occasionally departed from this principle, thus I have not indented in Jer. 2:2 and have moved the entire text back to the left margin from Jer. 2:10 onwards, although it is still the proclamation of the word of Yhwh through the prophet that we hear in Jer. 2:10-37 and 3:1-5. At the same time I have employed quotation marks in a number of complicated cases in order to clarify who is speaking (3:5; 4:2) or in order to indicate that an exchange of speech takes place in the text (3:22-25): such quotation marks have been used then in cases where the people are speaking.

Jeremiah 2:2

- The inf.abs. יִהְיֶה occurs in Jer. 2:2 with the function of an imperative (JM § 123u). See Jer. 3:12; 13:1; 17:19; 19:1; 28:13; 34:2; 35:2; 35:13; 39:16 for the same phenomenon. According to W.L. Holladay (Jeremiah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah chapters 1-25 (Hermeneia), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, p. 82) this replacement of an imperative form by an inf.abs. has an emphatic function; for a different view see JM § 123u. In general it seems that in the book of Jeremiah there is a preference for inf.abs. in speeches of Yhwh to the prophet and at major points in such speeches. Exceptions to this are Jer. 13:4; 13:6, the only cases that the imperative form יִהְיֶה occurs within the context of divine speech to the prophet.
Jeremiah 2:3

- In Jer. 2:3 the first of fourteen (!) Ketib-Qere cases in Jeremiah 2-3 is found. The final ה in the Ketib form נַדְשֶׁב הַבָּרוֹךְ suggests the presence of a 3.sg.fem. suffix while the vocalization suggests a 3.sg.masc. suffix. The Qere reading נַדְשֶׁב הַבְּרוֹךְ without the final ה is followed here. For final ה in combination with a masc. suffix, cf. JM § 94h (‘fairly common and normal in early Hebrew inscriptions’).

Jeremiah 2:9

- The verb יָרֵד occurs in this verse in combination with the preposition גָּלֶפָּה, while in Jer. 2:29 it occurs with the preposition יָנָה. In both cases I prefer the rather general translation ‘to enter suit with somebody’ (cf. Holladay, Jeremiah, p. 50) rather than alternatives such as ‘to accuse’ (NRSV), ‘to plead with’ (AV), ‘to contend with’ (RSV).

Jeremiah 2:11

- Traditionally the reading נְהָר (‘its glory’) is regarded as a tiggun sofrim, a text emendation of the Masoretes made for reasons of supposed irreverence. The original reading would have been נְהָרּוּ (‘my glory’). The thrust of the statement is either that the people dispose of their glory (3.masc. suffix), an euphemism for their god, or that the people dispose of God’s own glory (1. suffix). The former reading is evidently less offensive.

Jeremiah 2:13

- The translation of the ptc. Nifal of the verb נָפָשׁ with ‘cisterns that will become cracked’ rather than ‘cisterns that are cracked’ or ‘cracked cisterns’ is motivated by the notion that the Nifal participle can point to an action in progress, in distinction to the Qal passive participle which usually denotes a completed action (so JM § 121q). JM offer the translation ‘cisterns which tend to develop cracks’.

Jeremiah 2:14

- The phrase נְעָר נֵי literally refers to ‘one born in the household’, i.e., to one born as a slave in the household. The point of the expression is that besides ‘home-born slaves’, slaves may be acquired in other ways, e.g., through war or purchase (cf. Lev. 22:11). A home-born slave is a slave from the beginning of his life and has never been a free man. The poetic translation ‘bondman by birth’ is adopted from Holladay (Jeremiah, p. 50).

Jeremiah 2:15

- The verbal form נָשֶׁב in vs. 15d can be explained in two ways. It is either (a) a 3.fem.sg. Nifal form of נָשֵׁב (‘to lay in ruins, to be destroyed’, HAL 3, p. 675) with an accidental 3. plural -u ending or (b) a 3.masc.plur Nifal form of the verb נָשֵׁב (‘to be burned’) with an obsolete ה-ending. In either case the form is obscure. The Ketib is נָשֶׁב (‘his cities have been laid in ruins’); a singular verbal form in combination with a plural subject (‘his cities’) which is not
form as a 3.plur.pf. Nifal of נבש (‘to be burned’). It seems justified to accept the Ketib and interpret it as a third singular form of the verb נבש (‘his cities are in ruins’) (it must be a fem. sg. since otherwise the נ is unexplainable), in light of the fact that there is a comparably close parallel in Jer. 4:7 (‘your cities will be ruins’ – נבש Qal – and ‘without inhabitant’, הבוש במשם) and that Nifal forms of נבש occur in a similar sense in Jer. 9:11; 46:19. Furthermore the other instance of נבש Nifal is suspect (Jer. 9:9) and may need to be interpreted as a form of the root נבש. The same choice is made by M.E. Biddle (A Redaction History of Jeremiah 2:1-4:2 (ATANT 77), Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1990), p. 41, and the NRSV (‘his cities are in ruins’) in contrast to Holladay who follows the Qere (‘his cities have been burned’).

Jeremiah 2:16

- The verbal form in this verse is problematic. The root הנש (‘to harm’, a Hifil form, requires revocalization, cf. Holladay, Jeremiah, p. 51) or הנש (‘to lay bare’, Piel, see BHS app., assuming a change of consonant order). HAL 4 (p. 1175) suggests that the text may be kept as it is and suggests a translation such as ‘graze’ (‘werden dir den Schädel abweiden’, thus the Zürcher Bible) in the sense of ‘to render your skull bald’ or ‘to shave your head bald’. That represents a humiliating measure (cf. Isa. 3:24).

Jeremiah 2:18

- The Hebrew word נחש refers to one of the branches of the Nile or to the Nile as such, besides the more common designation of the Nile as נחשת (cf. Ex. 1:22; 2:3) (HAL 4, pp. 1369-70). The term נחש on the other hand is unspecific but occurs here as designation of the Euphrates in Mesopotamia (Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7). Hence the NRSV: ‘to drink the waters of the Nile’ and ‘the waters of the Euphrates’.

Jeremiah 2:20

- The particle י can mark a beginning or new point within a speech and in such cases may be translated as ‘look’ (cf. Holladay, Jeremiah, pp. 86, 90). This rendering has been employed in Jer. 2:20, 22, 27, while in Jer. 2:10, 13, 28, 37 the translation ‘for’ has been preferred.

- The verbal forms נחש and נחש would normally be interpreted as 1.sg.pf. forms but in this text a number of forms with י- ending can also be interpreted as archaic 2.sg.fem.pf. forms (cf. Jer. 2:33; 3:4-5, cf. JM § 42f). In such cases the Qere offers a variant reading without final י and thus indicates its understanding of the Ketib as a 2.sg.fem. In the present verse there is no Qere and since the expressions ‘to break the yoke’ and ‘burst the bonds’ occur elsewhere in Jeremiah with Yhwh as subject (Jer. 28:2-11; 30:8) it seems best to interpret these verbal forms as 1.sg. references, contrary to the LXX and the majority of modern translations (NRSV, RSV, NBG and, e.g., Holladay, Jeremiah, p. 52). Two arguments plead in favour of this reading: (1) The expressions ‘to break the yoke’ and ‘burst the bonds’ are frequently employed in order to describe the liberating act of Yhwh on behalf of Israel (cf. Jer.
At the same time, the covenant between Yhwh and people is rarely presented in terms of ‘yoke’ and ‘bonds’ (as far as I can see only in Jer. 5:5 and perhaps in Hos. 10:11). This evidence points to Yhwh as the subject of the act of breaking the yoke. (2) There is a contextual argument as well. If a parallel in thought may be assumed between vs. 20 and vs. 21, this would point to a pattern consisting of a ‘positive action of Yhwh’ at the start and the ‘dismissal of the relation with Yhwh by the people’ as follow-up. This would require that Yhwh be the subject of ‘breaking the yoke’ and bursting the bonds’ (so Biddle, Redaction History, pp. 42, 50-51).

Jeremiah 2:21
- The word נִלְבָּה is to be interpreted as the noun נִלְבָּה or נָלִלָה with a fem.suffix, literally meaning: its whole (KB, p. 435). One could either translate ‘wholly a pure seed’ or somewhat freely ‘in every respect a pure seed’.
- The term נִלְבָּה is a plural form of the adjective נָלֶב, the participle of the verb נָלָב. This adjective occurs in Jer. 2:21; 17:13; Isa. 49:21; Qoh. 4:14 and is used here figuratively in the sense of ‘deviating shoots’. The regrouping of words suggested in the BHS apparatus does not seem necessary, for the problem that Holladay has with the phrase נִלְבָּה can easily be solved by regarding it as part of the preceding colon (vs. 21c), as the Masoretic punctuation suggests, and interpreting it as a dativus commodi (‘how have you changed for me’).

Jeremiah 2:23
- The Hebrew word for ‘young female camel’ is a hapax legomenon and supposedly has the meaning of ‘a she-camel having given birth to her first calf’.
- The verb דָּרַק, here a ptc. Piel, also is a hapax legomenon (with Jer. 5:26 as uncertain case) and carries the meaning ‘to twist, to intertwine’ (cf. the noun דָּרַק meaning the thong of a sandal). With the word דָּרַק as object, the phrase refers to something like ‘twisting her ways’ or ‘interlacing her tracks’ (in the latter sense the NRSV). The image is clarified by K.E. Bailey and W.L. Holladay (‘The “Young Camel” and “Wild Ass” in Jer 2:23-25’, VT 18 (1968), pp. 256-260). They point out that ‘the young camel is the perfect illustration for all that is “skittery” and unreliable. It […] runs off in any direction at the slightest provocation […]; such a young camel never takes more than about three steps in any direction’. The picture is thus that the people are moving constantly in various directions, like a swift young camel without sense of orientation. As the vocabulary employed here is unique in the Hebrew Bible and has a poetic force, one might translate it in the sense of ‘zigzagging on her ways’ (my proposal) or ‘crisscrossing her tracks’ (so T. Jemielity, Satire and the Hebrew Prophets, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, p. 85).
Jeremiah 2:24

- The verb יָכַה means ‘to gasp, to pant’. It points to a strong and excited action of nose or throat, to rapid and audible breathing (see HAL 4, p. 1280 and cf. Isa. 42:14; Jer. 14:6). The rendering ‘sniffing the wind’ has been proposed by Bailey and Holladay (‘The Young Camel’, p. 259) and is motivated by the conduct of a female ass on heat: ‘When in heat, she sniffs the path in front of her, trying to pick up the scent of a male (from his urine). When she finds it, she rubs her nose in the dust and then straightens her neck and, with head high [...] “sniffs the wind”. What she is really doing is sniffing the dust which is soaked with the urine [...] she draws in a long, deep breath, then [...] racing down the road in search of the male’. The rendering ‘sniffing the wind’ (NRSV, NBG, Holladay) is thus meant to carry the connotation of sexual excitement. The picture is that of an animal on heat.

- The noun נָּבַשׁ in vs. 24c is another hapax legomenon and means ‘rut, mating time’ (HAL 4, p. 1544). The combination of this noun and the verb נָּבַשׁ (Hifil) can be understood in different ways. The NRSV renders ‘who can restrain her lust’, Bailey and Holladay propose ‘[in] her mating time, who brings her back’, in view of the motif of seeking and finding in vs. 24d-e. The second part of this translation is not satisfactory since the meaning ‘to bring back’ introduces a new element, namely, that of an animal that has disappeared. It is more logical to connect the verb with the ‘heat’ of the animal that cannot be ‘restrained’. HAL 4, p. 1330, suggests that the Hifil of the verb נָּבַשׁ may have here the meaning ‘to still, tone down’ which would make the ‘heat’ or ‘lust’ of the ass the object of the verb (‘her heat, who can restrain it?’). That may be the most economical interpretation. On account of the parallelism with vs. 24b, however, the preposition ‘in’ may be presumed and in my opinion the object of the verb is most probably the ass, so that the translation emerges: ‘in her mating time, who can restrain her?’.

Jeremiah 2:27

- The function of the article before the words ‘tree’ and ‘stone’ is disputed. Holladay (Jeremiah, p. 54) suggests that the text refers to a specific tree and stone (‘saying to the tree... and to the stone’). However, the article rather seems to be used in a generic sense, so that the reference is to the ‘class’ of trees and stones which comprises every specific piece of wood and stone (see JM § 137i). Hence the translation ‘by saying to a tree... and to a stone’.

- The translation ‘they faced me with their back and not with their face’ is an attempt to preserve the wordplay in Hebrew between the verb חָסֵן and the noun שָׁנָה.

Jeremiah 2:31

- The form בָּדָה in vs. 31 – from the root בָּדָה (‘to roam about’) – is disputed (see BHS app.). This verb and its meaning, however, do fit the context quite well since references to the abandonment of Yhwh by Israel (2:13, 17, 19) and the ‘going after the lovers’ (2:23-25) point to a similar activity as ‘roaming about, loafing around’ (so Holladay, Jeremiah, p. 55).
Jeremiah 2:32

- The word הבשׁ occurs only in Jer. 2:32 and Isa. 3:20 (with Ezek. 8:14 as uncertain case). HAL (3, p. 1077) suggests the meaning ‘breast bands, breast plates’ since the root הבשׁ has the meaning ‘to bind together’. This suggestion finds support in the LXX with the hapax ἄμμισθημία (‘breast bands’). According to Holladay (Jeremiah, p. 109) this is ‘a guess as good as any’. The reference may be specifically to the top part of the bridal garment or pars pro toto to the bridal robe as a whole. Hence the translations ‘attire’ (NRSV), ‘breast band’ (Holladay) or ‘gown’ (my choice).

Jeremiah 2:33

- The adverb נב in vs. 33c literally means ‘that being so’ (cf. BDB p. 486). Besides the common translation ‘therefore’ the phrase may occasionally be translated as ‘on that account, as a result’ or as ‘in that sense’ (‘developing what is logically involved in a statement’, according to BDB). Hence the translation ‘in that respect’. The emphatic particle ד reinforces the inference. The first two words in vs. 33c thus literally mean ‘in that respect, surely’ but for the sake of smoothness the word ‘surely’ is transferred to a later position in the clause.

- The phrase נבב in vs. 33cd is usually regarded as incomprehensible. The plural form עב (‘evil things’) has thus been changed into a 2.sg.fem. Hifil form of the verb עב (‘to act wrongly’, as do BHS app. and Holladay, Jeremiah, p. 56) or interpreted as a reference to ‘wicked women’ (so NRSV: ‘so that even to wicked women you have taught your ways’). I see no reason for emendations: the plural עב is also found in Jer. 2:13; 3:5 with the meaning ‘evil things’ and the nota accusationis log can occasionally function as a means of introducing an accusative of limitation (JM § 125j) and carry the meaning ‘concerning’. In support of this reading it may be noticed that the verse contains an antithetic parallelism with a turning point after vs. 33b. The elements are the opposition good-evil and the repetition of the word ‘way’. The thrust of the verse is thus that Israel is ‘good’ in ‘evil’. How well you invent your way in order to seek love in that respect, regarding evil things you have surely trained your ways.

- The translation ‘you have trained your ways’ reflects the Piel form of the verb הלל and does not require a revocalization of the present text into a Pual form (as does Holladay, Jeremiah, p. 56), for it appears that the verb הלל in the Piel does not always mean ‘to teach’ but may also mean ‘to train’ (cf. Jer. 13:21; Ps. 18:35; 144:1). In the latter texts the verb occurs with a double accusative, an acc. of object and an acc. of person, and assumes the meaning ‘to train somebody in something’. In Jer. 2:33 the verb occurs only with an acc. of object and in this case הלל Piel seems to assume a reflexive nuance: ‘to train one’s ways’. The import of the phrase is that Israel has become experienced in and ‘used to’ evil ways of life. R.P. Carroll (The Book of Jeremiah (OTL), London: SCM Press, 1986, p. 139) to my knowledge is the only other exegete who employs the word ‘to train’ in connection to Jer. 2:33 without making textual emendations (‘with evil deeds you have trained your
ways'). For the reflexive nuance in the root יָלַם, see further Jer. 10:2; 12:16. The Qal of the verb has here the meaning 'to accustom oneself to, to commit oneself to learning' rather than simply to 'learn'.

Jeremiah 2:34
- The word יֵלַם refers here to the skirts of a garment, cf. Deut. 22:12; Zech. 8:23; 1 Sam 15:5. References to blood 'on the garment' (Isa. 9:4) or 'on the hands' (Isa. 1:15; 59:3) are conventional means of pointing to the participation in bloodshed.
- The final phrase of vs. 34 has frequently been considered 'impossible' (so Holladay, Jeremiah, p. 56) and has led to complicated emendations. The problem centres in the meaning of the preposition על, which may mean 'in spite of' or 'on top of' in the sense of 'beyond' (HAL 3, p. 781). Literally translated the colon would mean 'yet on top of all this... you said' and that is not incomprehensible at all. It only requires that one reads vs. 34d in continuation with vs. 35a which is not unusual in poetry (cf., e.g., Jer. 4:1-2).

A general note on Jeremiah 3
- The verb יָבַשׁ is a key word in this chapter. It refers essentially to the return of Israel to Yhwh and points to a new start in the relationship between Yhwh and Israel (or another subject) (cf. 3:1, 7, 10, 22; 4:1). Occasionally the connotation of a geographical 'return' from the land of exile back to Jerusalem is present as well (3:12, 14). At the same time, the verb occurs also with reference to the turn 'away' from Yhwh (3:6, 8, 11, 12, 19). It is important to note that the primary meaning of the verb יָבַשׁ is 'to turn around'. The notion of 'repentance' or 'return to Yhwh' is often misunderstood as a 'return' to a pristine state of affairs, but it is primarily a 'turn-about' or 'change' from one way of life to another. When the change is towards Yhwh, then the dimension of 'return' is implied as well. Compare the general meaning description in HAL 4, p. 1327: 'Holladay defines the fundamental meaning of יָבַשׁ in the following way: After one has been moving in a certain direction, one subsequently starts to move in the opposite direction. If there is no proof to the contrary, the presupposition is that one returns then to the original place, whence one started to come into motion'. A text as Jer. 3 (including 4:1-4), in which so many forms and derivatives of the verb occur, evidently poses a challenge for translators. I have assumed the following translation practice:

3:1, 1, 7, 7, 10, 12, 14, 22 the verb יָבַשׁ to return
3:19; 4:1, 1 the verb יָבַשׁ to turn
3:6, 8, 11, 12 the noun מָשָׂעָה Turncoat Israel (see below)
3:22 the noun מָשָׂעָה (plur) backslidings
3:14, 22 the adjective מָשָׂעָבָבָבָבָבָבָבָבָבָבָבָבָבָבָv turnable

Jeremiah 3:1
- The formula יָלַם at the beginning of this verse marks the start of a new section within the discourse but has no clear grammatical relation to its
context. It functions here as a short form for a longer introductory formula, such as the phrase ‘thus says Yhwh’ (Jer. 2:2; 2:5), which one may add mentally. Syntactically speaking, it may even tie back to Jer. 2:1 ‘and the word of Yhwh came to me saying... and saying...’. Translations either leave out the phrase or supplement a phrase such as ‘and Yhwh said’.

 Jeremiah 3:2

- The noun יָסִף occurs 9 times in biblical Hebrew (Jer. 3:2, 21; 4:11; 7:29; 12:12; 14:6; Num 23:3; Isa. 41:18; 49:9). Its meaning cannot be determined with certainty (HAL 4, p. 1503). The following proposals have been made: (a) ‘bare plain, height’, an element in the landscape (so NRSV; HAL); (b) ‘caravan tracks’ (so Holladay, Jeremiah, pp. 113-114), in the sense of ‘routes’; (c) sand dunes. The word appears in combination with the word ‘wilderness’ in Jer. 4:11; 12:12 and there is an association with the word ‘path’ in Isa. 49:9. This suggests that the interpretation ‘caravan tracks’ or ‘traffic routes’ through the wilderness captures the meaning of the word quite well. The latter meaning fits in Jer. 3:2 since the notion of traffic and trade is present in the remainder of the verse as well (vs. 2cd).

- The Qere רָכָב (Pual) replaces the Ketib לָכָב (Pual), which is a denominative verb of the noun הָבִי meaning ‘concubine’ (Ps. 45:10; Neh. 2:6). This verb carries the connotations of rudeness and obscenity (cf. Deut. 28:30; Isa. 13:20). The Qere in all occurrences of the verb offers the less obscene term לָכָב as alternative and that is used as the basis for the present translation.

 Jeremiah 3:5

- The apparatus of BHS suggests in vs. 5c the change of the word רָכָב (‘behold, look’) into רְאֵנִי (‘thus, in this sense’). This results in a more understandable text (‘thus you have spoken’ rather than ‘look, you have spoken’), but the proposal is without support in the manuscripts and in the ancient versions (LXX: ἰδόν εἰλαλέσθαι). How is the particle רְאֵנִי then to be interpreted? It presumably functions as a deictic sign calling for attention and giving emphasis to the subsequent verbal clause. I interpret the qatal form רְאֵנִי רָכָב as a perspectival comment to the preceding. It has the function of a concluding statement and some sort of back reference to the preceding direct speech may be assumed to be implicitly present. Hence the translation ‘look, so you have spoken’.

- Does the article in רְאֵנִי (vs. 5d) indicate determination or not? The LXX decides in favour of determination (κατ’ εὐαγγελίας τὸ ποιημα τεύχου); however, the same phrase in Jer. 2:33 does not seem to imply determination. The article in the present case presumably functions as sign that the plural encompasses all of the ‘individuals of the class’ and refers to ‘evil things as such’ (the so-called generic use of the article, cf. JM § 137i).

- The verbal form רְאֵנִי הרָכָב in vs. 5d raises two difficulties. In the first place, the form is 2.sg.msc. while one would have expected a 2.sg.fem. According to Holladay (Jeremiah, p. 116) the exchange of these forms occasionally occurs, constituting a ‘valid but rare pattern’. In the second place, this verbal phrase has been interpreted both as a relative clause (‘thus you have spoken and done
the evil that you could’, so NRSV) and as a paratactic phrase (‘you have done wrong and you have prevailed’, so Holladay, Jeremiah, p. 58). Two arguments point in favour of the latter syntax: (a) a relative particle is missing; (b) the wayiqtol verbal form does not point to hypotaxis; (c) the verb לֹּא הִלֵּךְ occurs in Jer. quite frequently without complement in the sense of ‘to prevail’ (Jer. 1:19; 20:7, 9, 11). In the latter sense the verb may function here. The thrust of the statement would be that Israel ‘is successful in’ its evildoings.

Jeremiah 3:6
- The noun מַעֲבֶד is formed from the verb מָטָה and has the meaning ‘turning back, apostasy, backsliding’. In Jer 3:6-12 it is used as an apposition to Israel, creating the image of Israel as personified Apostasy. In order to make this transparent in the translation, the rendering ‘Turncoat Israel’ has been adopted from Holladay (Jeremiah, p. 58).
- The form הָוָה in vs. 6f is unanimously understood as a 3.sg.fem, although it technically is a 2.sg.fem form (see the BHS app. and HAL 1, p. 264). The final יִ is thus additional. It may perhaps be explained as a leftover from the original final root consonant which was י rather than י (IM § 79a-c).

Jeremiah 3:7
- The counterpart to ‘Turncoat Israel’ is formed by מַעֲבֶד or, with a minor variant, מַעֲבֶד. The former term is an adjective and occurs in Jer. 3:7, 10, while the latter term is a participle and occurs in Jer. 3:8, 11. Again the translation of Holladay (Jeremiah, pp. 58-59) is followed: ‘Traitor Judah’ in the former and ‘Treacherous Judah’ in the latter case.

Jeremiah 3:9
- The syntactic construction in this verse is unusual, since the introductory formula מְאוּר is followed by a wayiqtol form as apodosis, thus bringing a future form and a narrative consecutive form together in one clause. The future form has been interpreted as a past tense (‘Because she took her whore-dom so lightly, she polluted the land’, as in the NRSV), but it is also possible to interpret מְאוּר as a sign to the reader that the effects of Judah’s actions yet ‘will become clear’. There is further an element of repetition in this verse in comparison to vs. 6 (‘harlotry and adultery with stone and tree’ and ‘harlotry under every green tree’), which suggests that vs. 9 in distinction from vs. 6 is concerned with the effects of Judah’s harlotry. One would have to interpret the verse in the sense that ‘she also profaned the land and committed harlotry with stone and tree’. This also may explain the future tense, for the effects of the harlotry of Judah lay still in the future and are yet to be revealed, in contrast to the fate of Israel (cf. 3:8 and the setting in the time of king Josiah in 3:6).

Jeremiah 3:13
- The verb מָטָה (Piel) means ‘to scatter’ or ‘to sprawl’. It has no sexual connotations but rather the sense of ‘to scatter something all over the place’ (cf. Ps. 147:16). Construed with the word מְאוּר the phrase literally means ‘to scatter
your ways’. The picture is that of someone who directs her course in various directions.

Jeremiah 3:17
- The final words in vs. 17, שָׁרוֹדְתָה לָבָס דַעַי, should be understood as a construct-state construction in which the word ‘heart’ is further determined in a double way, namely, by the 3.plur. suffix (‘their’) and by the juxtaposed adjective (‘the heart, the evil one’). Hence the ‘stubbornness of their evil heart’. The combination with הָאַדִּיר יָדִיר is idiomatic and occurs further in e.g., Deut. 29:18 and Jer. 7:24; 9:13.

Jeremiah 3:19
- Verse 19b is frequently misunderstood (cf. NBG). Literally translated it reads ‘how would I set you (2.sg.fem.) among the sons’. It is open to discussion whether the article before בְּנֵי 네 is indicative of determination or not and, if so, whether it requires to be reflected in the translation (‘among the sons’ or ‘among sons’). The interpretation of Holladay (Jeremiah, p. 122) and Carroll (Jeremiah, p. 152) is that the clause indicates that Yhwh plans to bequeath an inheritance to the people of Israel, personified as female, treating the female people as ‘sons’, who are traditionally the only ones who receive a share in the inheritance (Deut. 21:16). The purport of the verse would lie in the ‘special treatment’ of Israel (cf. the translation ‘how will I treat you like sons!’ by Holladay, Jeremiah, p. 60). This interpretation misunderstands the poetic image. The verb מְשַׁמֵּש means ‘to put someone in a certain position, position someone in a certain way’ (cf. with the preposition ב in 2 Sam. 19:29). God thus intends ‘to position Israel among children’. The image is that of a mother proudly seated amidst her children, contrasting with the image of Sion who is bereaved of children (Lam. 1:20; cf. Jer. 31:15-17; Isa. 54:3). Israel is here thus addressed as a ‘mother’ who is given a glorious position. The sons would naturally have to be ‘the’ sons of Israel, and in that sense are determinate in the author’s view, which explains the article.
- The noun מִלָּה has been translated as an adjective although it occurs as an apposition (cf. Jer. 12:10).
- The word מָאָרִים מֶמְאָר in the apposition מֶמְאָרִים מֶמְאָר is, in spite of the נ, to be understood as a plural of the noun מֶמְאָר (‘beauty’) rather than of the noun מֶמְשַׁמֵּש (‘host’). This is the only case that the noun מֶמְשַׁמֵּש is found in the plural, so that this plural form may be an unconscious adjustment to the common plural מֶמְאָר (cf. the expression ‘Yhwh of hosts’). The construction of two identical nouns with the second in the plural expresses a ‘superlative idea’ (JM § 1411), which explains the translation ‘an inheritance most beauteous among the nations’.

Jeremiah 3:20
- In vs. 20ab the lack of a particle of comparison has led to emendations of the beginning of the verse (see BHS app.). Since, however, in poetry the particle of comparison before the following ב is frequently understood (cf. JM § 174e), it may be added in translations without having to emend the text.
Jeremiah 3:21
- The word מprecatedה carries the meaning 'prayers for grace' or 'cries for favor' (HAL 4, p. 1583). The same word occurs in Jer. 31:9; Ps. 28:2, 6; 130:2; 140:7 (and other places). The long construct chain literally means 'the weeping of supplication of the children of Israel', hence the translation 'the weeping and praying for grace'. There is a close parallel to this verse in Jer. 31:15 where the 'voice' of Rachel is heard 'weeping for her children'.

Jeremiah 3:23
- Verse 23ab is complex through its brevity. The problem lies in the prepositions יָמִן and ש in vs. 23a and in their absence in vs. 23b. The NRSV, smuggling the prepositions away, reads: 'Truly, the hills are a delusion, the orgies on the mountains'. Part of a solution lies in the assumption that the prepositions יָמִן and ש do double duty and are effective in both vs. 23a and 23b. The two clauses then show a parallelism, as the regular word pair 'hill' and 'mountain' suggests (cf. Deut. 12:2; Isa. 2:2; 30:25). Further I understand the preposition ש as an indication of direction or orientation. This notion requires here a somewhat more lengthy rendering, such as 'attaining to', 'coming close to' or 'verging on'. The translation 'close to deception is what comes from the hills' builds upon this understanding of the text. Vs. 23ab may be interpreted as a negative response of Yhwh to the people's utterance of repentance in vs. 22cd: this expression of repentance is apparently a pseudo-repentance in Yhwh's view.

Jeremiah 3:24
- The article before הָן in vs. 24a indicates that the noun may function as a proper noun and refer to Bosheth as a figure (so Biddle, Redaction History, p. 86: 'and Bosheth has consumed'). The term Bosheth is a well-known synonym or circumscription for the name Baal (cf. Jer. 11:13; HAL 1, p. 158). It occurs, however, in its usual meaning in the next verse (Jer. 3:25) so that the word 'shame' should be retained in the translation. It may be that vs. 24 contains an allusion to shame and disgrace caused by the worship of idols, and especially of Baal, but that it not certain.

Jeremiah 4:1-2
- In theory vv. 1-2 can be understood in three different ways: as a single construction of a protasis (vv. 1-2b) and apodosis (2cd); as two such constructions (1ab as protasis, 1c as apodosis, 1de-2ab as protasis and 2cd as apodosis) or as three such constructions (1ab-1c, 1d-1e, 2ab-2cd). The first option is found only in the NRSV ('if you return... if you return to me... if you remove'). In my view the second option is closest to the text (see Carroll, Jeremiah, p. 55, and Holladay, Jeremiah, pp. 61-62). This implies that one interprets vv. 1e and 2ab as a continuation of the סָפָט construction in vs. 1d. The opening phrase סָפָט then does double duty, covering not only vs. 1d but also vv. 1e and 2ab. The arguments for this interpretation are twofold: (a) the energetic שָׁמַע in vs. 1e indicates continuation rather than a climax in relation to vs. 1d. Further the syntactic link between vv. 1e and 2a is strong as the masc.sg. forms are continued and as the weqatal form in vs. 2a must be
dependent on the preceding yiqtol in vs. 1e; (b) the interpretation of vs. 1e as
a condition rather than as an outcome or result of the protasis fits better with
the meaning of the verb יְסַפֵּר. This verb means to ‘waver, shake’ (cf. 1 Kgs.
14:15). In all of its meaning aspects, the notion of moving back and forth is
present. In the present context the idea thus finds expression that Israel when
removing its abominations should not hesitate or incidentally ‘fall back’ to its
past behaviour.

Jeremiah 4:2
• The verb יְסַפֵּר (Hitpael) is translated here as ‘to exchange blessings’ with the
nuance of reciprocity and with a declarative aspect (cf. KB, p. 153). This
interpretation eliminates both the reflexive rendering of יְסַפֵּר (Hitpael) (‘to
bless themselves’, RSV), the passive (‘shall be blessed’, NRSV) and the strictly
reciprocal rendering (‘to bless each other’). The point of the Hitpael forms in
Gen. 22:18; 26:4; Jer. 4:2; Ps. 72:17 does not seem to lie in who is blessing
whom but in how the blessings are formulated. The picture in Jer. 4:2 is that
the nations will proclaim their blessings with an appeal to Israel (‘may you be
blessed like Israel!’), cf. Gen. 48:20; Ruth 4:11), the idea being that Israel
functions as role model of blessedness and as the blessed one par excellence.
The statement that the nations ‘will exchange blessings in him’ makes thus
two points at once: the nations will recognize the prosperity and blessedness
of Israel and use Israel as point of orientation and comparison for their
blessing formulas, and at the same time, they hope to receive a share in the
extraordinary blessedness of Israel by invoking Israel as model of blessing.
Foremost, however, the image is an indirect way of saying that Israel will be
blessed to an extraordinary extent. In this understanding the ‘exchange of
blessings’ does not refer specifically to the exchange of blessings between the
nations but may also refer to the exchange of blessings among one nation.
The picture is not that of general world peace but rather that of the world­
wide affirmation of Israel’s blessedness of which the nations all hope to
receive a share.
• The verb יַכְנֵא (Hitpael), meaning ‘to boast, to take pride in, to glory’, occurs
in the Hitpael quite frequently and a reflexive nuance is then present (Isa.
41:16; 45:25; Ps. 34:3; 63:12). The verb assumes the meaning ‘to praise
oneself for the sake of something’. Holladay (Jeremiah, p. 62) presents the
rendering ‘to congratulate oneself’.
• The implied antecedent in the phrase ‘in him’ in vs. 2cd presumably is Israel
rather than Yhwh, because in the parallel texts in Gen. 22:18 and 26:4 the
‘offspring of Abraham’ fulfills the same role, and in Ps. 72:17 the king
functions as the model of blessing in blessing formulas. Hence, the nation
Israel must be intended here. The change of second person to third person
speech is sudden but occurs more frequently (Jer. 2:15-16, 27-28; 3:12-13).
3 Demarcation

The argument for regarding Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 as a separate composition is that in both 2:1-2 and 4:5 phrases are found that mark the beginning of a new section of speech. In Jeremiah 2:1-2 the prophet receives the command to ‘go and proclaim the word of Yhwh in the ears of Jerusalem’ while in Jeremiah 4:5 a new address is introduced by the words ‘declare in Judah, make it heard in Jerusalem’.4

In the composition of Jeremiah 4:5-6:30 the theme of the text shifts from the ‘evil’ committed by the people to the ‘evil’ coming from the north. The accents on judgement and destruction caused by a foreign enemy give this composition a mood that differs from Jeremiah 2-3 in which the focus lies on the relationship between Yhwh and Israel and on the dangers from inside rather than from outside of Israel. In this respect Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 constitutes a relatively separate unit which is marked by the recurrence of certain key words and a prevailing focus on the relation of Yhwh and Israel.

4 Jeremiah 2-4:4 in contemporary research

In historical-critical scholarship, reflections concerning theme and content of a text usually interact with those concerning the formation of a text. For this reason I will make a brief detour into the field of the opinions concerning the origins of Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 in order to situate my own explanation of the content and thrust of Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 within larger debates concerning this text.

Until recently there was a widespread consensus that the prophecies in Jeremiah 2:4-4:2 belong to the early proclamation of the prophet.5 This view is based on the observation that the primary focus in this material is on Israel, an important indication being the opening address to the ‘house of Jacob and all families of the house of Israel’ in Jeremiah 2:4.6 The name ‘Israel’ is then interpreted as a reference to the northern kingdom and on account of these references the theory is developed that the prophet Jeremiah in his early days confronted the remnants of the former northern kingdom with an urgent appeal to acknowledge the failure of their past and to turn anew to Yhwh. Since the prophet in later chapters is almost exclusively concerned with the situation in Judah and Jerusalem, the surprising focus on the fate of Israel in Jeremiah 2-3 may well originate in a distinct stage within the prophet’s activity, most likely in a time preceding that of the later chapters.

4. The address to ‘Judah and Jerusalem’ in Jer. 4:3-4 is a matter of debate, but usually these verses are regarded as a coda to the preceding material (see Holladay, Jeremiah, pp. 62-63; Carroll, Jeremiah, pp. 115-116; for a contrary view see Biddle, Rédaction History, pp. 218-219, who regards Jer. 4:3-4 as a transitional passage). The arguments for the former view are (a) the continuation of the theme of repentance and of a new start in Jer. 4:3-4, (b) the recurrence of the term ‘to remove’ in Jer. 4:4 (4:1); (c) the expression ‘the evil of your doings’ in Jer. 4:4 which corresponds with some variation to the word ‘evil’ in Jer. 2:13; 3:5, 17.

5. For references see the survey of R. Albertz, ‘Frühzeitverkündigung’, pp. 21-25. This early proclamation of Jeremiah is situated roughly in the period of 627-609 BCE.

6. The title ‘Israel’ occurs fourteen times in Jer. 2:1-4:2 and the title ‘Judah’ occurs eight times, especially in 3:6-10 and 4:3-4. According to Holladay (Jeremiah, pp. 63, 80-81, 85) Jer. 2:4 refers exclusively to the northern kingdom while the framing rubrics in Jer. 2:2-3 and 4:3-4 make the material fit for reuse for Judah and Jerusalem.
In terms of historical background, this reconstruction would fit with the idea that Jeremiah in his early days acted as a 'propagandist' for the cultus reform of king Josiah. The king’s reform programme would have included the vision of a cultic and political reunion between the north and the south, as 2 Kings 23:15-20 illustrates, and the prophet would have supported this programme by propagating that Israel must return to Judah and conform to the worship practice in Jerusalem in order to find blessing together with Judah as one reunited nation. That is more or less the original message of Jeremiah 2:4-3:25.

The assumption is that in the course of time the original material for the northern kingdom was adapted for reuse for Jerusalem and Judah. The two framing addresses to Jerusalem and Judah in Jeremiah 2:2-3 and 4:3-4 reflect this process of adaptation. In terms of genre the whole of Jeremiah 2-3 may be qualified as a covenant lawsuit (2:4-3:5) and more specifically as an accusation speech of Yhwh followed by urgent calls for repentance. It may in a later stage have functioned as a sermon of repentance to Judah as well.

In my opinion, this direction of research concerning Jeremiah 2-3 eminently illustrates the weaknesses of historical criticism. The powerful imagery and rhetorical force of the text is lost, the interpretation is narrowed down to the issue of distinguishing original parts and redaction-historical stages within the text, and, last but not least, the text is forced into a model – early proclamation to the north – in which it by no means fits, as every careful synchronic reader will be able to see. Furthermore, some of the historical assumptions made in this respect are highly hypothetical, such as the premise that the motif of reunion between Israel and Judah is explainable as part of the Josian reform programme. This supposition specifically relates to Jeremiah 3:12-15 and would offer the possibility of explaining these verses as address to the remnants of the northern kingdom, calling them to reorientate themselves towards Jerusalem. Apart from the textual difficulties, the historical problem with this premise is that the account of the Josian reform in 2 Kings 22-23 in this respect is far from clear, while the far more obvious interpretation that the motif of reunion reflects the aspirations of the exilic period is dodged.

A voice of dissent in this respect is Biddle. In a detailed redaction-critical study, Biddle (1990) comes to an assessment of Jeremiah 2:1-4:2 that is diametrically opposed to the views of Holladay and Albertz just mentioned. A key role in Biddle’s reflections is played by the observation that the address in

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7. See Holladay, Jeremiah, pp. 3-5. Holladay explains the other references to Judah in the body of material (Jer 2:28; 3:6-10, 18) as secondary insertions and exilic expansions within the original text.
8. For more details see Holladay, Jeremiah, pp. 73-75, 80-81.
9. For a substantial critique of the view that Jeremiah was actively involved in the Josian reform, see Biddle, Redaction, pp. 17-23. For a discussion of the historicity of the Josian reform and other common assumptions in the Jeremiah Forschung, see J. Dubbink, Waar is de Heer? Dynamiek en Actualiteit van het Woord van JHWH bij Jeremia, Narratio: Gorinchem, 1997, pp. 15-22.
10. 2 Kgs. 23:15-20 refers to a journey of Josiah to Bethel and Samaria during which he destroyed and desecrated ‘all’ shrines and temples in Samaria. There is, however, no evidence that Josiah’s expansion to the north was motivated by a deliberate programme of reuniting Israel and Judah. It is altogether far more likely to connect the reunion motif in Jer. 3:12-15 and its tone of comfort to the exilic or post-exilic period (cf. Jer. 3:16-18, 31:31-34, 33:14-18, 23-26; Ezek. 37:15-28).
Jeremiah 2:4 does not refer exclusively to the northern kingdom but may also be interpreted as a reference to the united nation. This is related to a second observation: many details in Jeremiah 2:1-4:2 do not correspond to the idea that the text was originally addressed to the northern kingdom. The references to the destruction of Jerusalem (2:15), to the humiliation of Israel as servant of the nations (2:14, 16) and to the restoration of the fates of both Israel and Judah in Jerusalem (3:16-18) suggest that the text cannot unequivocally be regarded as a proclamation to the north.

Instead Biddle makes a strong case for the view that Jeremiah 2:1-4:2 is composed in view of Israel in its entirety and has the function of confronting the integral community with its sins and present it with a summons to repentance. It is characteristic that the charges and promises that are made apply to almost every group within Israel and include several generations from the past to the present. That provides the text with a ‘truly telescopic’ dimension. Other textual features, such as the lack of historical references and the broad applicability of the accusations, give Jeremiah 2-3 the character of a ‘theological treatise’ rather than of a prophecy suited to a particular occasion. These chapters seem to offer an exemplary treatment of the misconduct of the people and of the possibility of repentance, and together function as a ‘theological prologue’ to the book.

Biddle further presents the thesis that Jeremiah 2:1-4:2 in its entirety must be a post-catastrophe composition. His argument is that the motifs of a land lying in desolation and the humiliation of Israel by foreigners (Jer. 2:14-16, 36-37) seem to reflect the experience of the Babylonian crisis. As a matter of fact, Biddle suggests that the text in its oldest layer (Jer. 2:14-25, 33-37) adopts the vocabulary of laments about the destruction of the city and provides these with a response. The subsequent stages of growth in the text, according to Biddle, represent a logical development: the primary response to the disaster (Jer. 2:14-25, 33-37) is expanded first with a debate about the possibility and means of repentance (Jer. 3), then with a deeper look at Israel’s guilt (Jer. 2:4-13, 26-32) and finally with a positive framework for the text in its entirety (Jer. 2:2-3; 4:1-2).

12. Biddle, Redaction, pp. 19-20 (footnote 53). I will further unfold this point in the excursus at the end of this section.
13. Biddle, Redaction, p. 209. Biddle discerns in Jeremiah 2-3 a pan-Israel addressee, which is being addressed in all of its generations (pan-generations emphasis, cf. 2:5-7, 29-32) and confronted with a message of sin and repentance in an almost ‘atemporal’ (p. 32) and paradigmatic way.
15. See Biddle, Redaction, pp. 62-64. Biddle recognizes in Jer. 2:14-15 a communal lament pattern, circling around the question markers ha-im-madua, and concludes from this that the passages with a female addressee in Jer. 2 (2:14-25, 33-37) form an early response to the disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem. Biddle qualifies this redactional layer as the Schuldübernahme redaction. It is interesting that Albertz (‘Frühzeitverkündigung’, p. 35) also arrives at the conclusion that Jer. 2:14-17 looks back upon destruction, but he explains this in view of the demise of the northern kingdom (!!), overlooking the strong ‘destruction-of-Jerusalem’ colour of the vocabulary (cf., e.g., Jer. 2:18 and Lam. 5:6).
16. Biddle calls these four redactional layers: the Schuldübernahme redaction (2.fem.sg. material, Jer. 2:14-25, 33-37), the Fortschreibung redaction (Jer. 3 in different stages), the Generations redaction (Jer. 2:4-13, 26-32) and the Framework redaction (Jer. 2:2-3; 4:1-2).
On the whole, I concur with Biddle's assessment that some passages in Jeremiah 2:1-4:2 demand a date of origin after the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 2:15; 3:14-18) and if this holds for some passages, a reader from a synchronic persuasion will work with the hypothesis that this is valid for the whole text. This perspective opens up a different assessment of the content of the text as well. Like Biddle I find arguments in the text for considering it to be the theological prologue to the book. The observation that the text emphasizes the inclusion of all generations in the guilt of Israel and the awareness that the text reflects the crisis of the exile lead to a recognition of the strong didactic element in the text. The purpose of Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 with its emphasis on sin and repentance is apparently to delineate how Israel has reached its present position and how it will have a future.

**Excursus concerning the title Israel in chapters 2-4:4**

The view of Biddle that the expressions 'house of Jacob' and 'all the families of the house of Israel' in Jer. 2:4 do not refer exclusively to Israel but to the undivided nation is in my view correct and can be supported by the following arguments: (a) the adjective *all* in Jer. 2:4 ('all families') could suggest that both Israel and Judah are intended (cf. Jer. 33:24, the same terms); (b) the reference to Judah in Jer. 2:28 indicates that Judah is included in the heading of Jer. 2:4; (c) the reference to 'the house of Jacob' in Jer. 2:4 as such does not refer exclusively to the northern kingdom in Jeremiah (the only parallel is 5:20 which is an uncertain case) since the name 'Jacob' also occurs in an inclusive sense (Jer. 10:16, 25; 46:27-28; 51:19). A further consideration is that in Jer. 2:3 the name 'Israel' occurs within an address to and regarding (!) Jerusalem. This may be interpreted as a first indication of the strategy in Jer. 2-3 to address Judah in the broad perspective of the nation as a whole and 'as' Israel. If this strategy is present in Jer. 2:3, it may also be present in Jer. 2:4-3:5 and 3:19-4:2. The name 'Israel' in Jer. 2:4 would then refer primarily to Judah, implying that Judah is addressed here in an inclusive way, in terms that deliberately connect Judah to the past of the nation as a whole (so Biddle, *Redaction*, pp. 19-20).

In fact a further step may be taken: one may suggest that the thrust of the address in Jer. 2:4 is not that the members of the former northern kingdom are included; rather, the point is that the title 'Israel' is deliberately employed to indicate Judah, in order to give the speech in this prologue of the book a broad, historical and inclusive character and in order to set Judah in the perspective of the nation in its entirety. Contrary to the views of Holladay and Alberzt, a separate address to Israel without the inclusion of Judah is in my view not found in Jer. 2:1-4:2, except in Jer. 3:12 which is still part of the scene of the two sisters (Jer. 3:6-10, as argued below). On the whole, the references to Israel function as deliberate attempts to deal with the fate of Judah in a broad and inclusive sense. The notion that this nation actually consists of two parts, Judah and Israel, is latently present in Jer. 2:3:5 but surfaces only explicitly in Jer. 3:6-10 and Jer. 3:11-18. On the whole, the dominant notion seems to be that both Israel and Judah are included in the name 'Israel'.
5 Explanation of Jeremiah 2:1-4:4

5.1 Literary structure

Jeremiah 2-4:4 can be subdivided in four sections:

Jer. 2:1-3 positive overture about the relationship between Yhwh and Israel
Jer. 2:4-37 dispute with Israel about breaks in the relationship
Jer. 3:1-4:2 possibility and necessity of repentance
Jer. 4:3-4 concluding statement about renewal of the commitment to Yhwh.

Two explicit references to Jerusalem and Judah frame the composition. These references to Judah and Jerusalem are remarkable since the addressee or point of reference in the central part of the text is predominantly designated as ‘Israel’.

Jer. 2:2 Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem saying
Jer. 4:3 For thus says Yhwh to the men of Judah and Jerusalem

A characteristic feature of Jeremiah 2-4:4 is further the female personification of the nation. Such female personification is found for the first time in chapter 2:2 (‘I remember you, the loyalty of your youth, the love of your bridal time’) but continues to be present in the text. The alternation of female and male addressees leads to a further subdivision in the text:

Jer. 2:1-3 2.fem.sg. and 3.masc.sg. overture
Jer. 2:4-13 2.masc.plur. dispute about the sins of former generations
Jer. 2:14-25 2.fem.sg. dispute about the sins of Israel as female
Jer. 2:26-32 2.masc.plur. dispute about the sins of Israel in its generations
Jer. 2:33-37 2.fem.sg. final diagnosis about the sin of Israel as female
Jer. 3:1-5 2.fem.sg. possibility of repentance?
Jer. 3:6-10 no addressee parable of two sisters
Jer. 3:11-18 2.fem.sg. and 2.masc.plur. summons to repentance and attached promises
Jer. 3:19-20 2.fem.sg. and 2.masc.plur. Yhwh’s hopeful fantasy about good partnership
Jer. 3:21-4:2 2.masc.plur. and 2.masc.sg. liturgy of repentance
Jer. 4:3-4 2.masc.plur. final summons to repentance for Judah

17. The view that it is the nation rather than the city that is personified as female in Jer. 2-3 is further explicated in my discussion of Jer. 2:2-3 (see § 6 of this chapter).
18. Both Jer. 2:14-15 and 2:26-28 are ‘transitional passages’ in which mainly third person speech is found.
5.2 Key words

A number of prominent key words will be listed here in groups. Together they delineate the main themes and contrasts in the text.

The movement away from Yhwh

In the text three expressions are found that depict movement away from Yhwh. The first, the expression יֵלַל, occurs six times in Jeremiah 2:4:4. It means not only ‘to go after’ but also ‘to adhere to, to devote one’s way of life to’.

Jer. 2:2 I remember... your going after me in the wilderness
Jer. 2:5 they... went after worthless things
Jer. 2:8 they went after things that do not profit
Jer. 2:23 How can you say: ...I have not gone after the baals
Jer. 2:25 I love strangers and after them I will go
Jer. 3:17 they shall go no longer after the stubbornness of their evil heart

The first occurrence is positive: in her bridal time Israel ‘goes after’ Yhwh with complete loyalty. The next four occurrences contrast with this positive tone and indicate that Israel has set her heart upon ‘worthless things’. The last occurrence is again positive and denotes a change of direction: even the nations will ‘no longer go after the stubbornness of their evil heart’. At that time, Judah and Israel will also have experienced a change of heart and will live in the immediate presence of Yhwh (Jer. 3:16-18).

Another term in this field is the word הד (‘way’). It points to one’s way of life, one’s life style. Israel’s ‘way of life’ lies in this text under fierce attack: it is whimsical and unstable and moves away from Yhwh. The word הד occurs 11 times:

Jer. 2:17 while he was leading you on the way
Jer. 2:18 of what avail is it to you to be on the way to Egypt
Jer. 2:18 to be on the way to Assur
Jer. 2:23 see your way in the valley
Jer. 2:23 a swift young camel, zigzagging on her ways
Jer. 2:33 how well you invent your way
Jer. 2:33 in that respect, in evil things you have surely trained your ways
Jer. 2:36 how very casually do you go about to change your way
Jer. 3:2 by the ways you have sat waiting for them
Jer. 3:13 you have spread your ways to strangers
Jer. 3:21 for they have perverted their way and have forgotten Yhwh their god

The third term is the verb יָרֵד (‘to abandon’). It occurs three times in rapid succession and points to deserting the presence of Yhwh:

Jer. 2:13 they have abandoned me, the spring of living water
Jer. 2:17 by your abandoning of Yhwh, your god
Jer. 2:19 that it is evil and bitter that you abandoned Yhwh your god
Terms that undermine the partnership of Yhwh and Israel

This same course of action ‘away from Yhwh’ is brought to the fore in terms that relate to the analogy between the covenant relationship and a marriage relation. Three terms deserve mention in this connection: the verb לאז (‘to commit harlotry, to be promiscuous’), the verb לאד (‘to commit adultery’) and the verb להב (‘to act treacherously’) with the related adjective דובע (‘treacherous’). The latter verb does not occur exclusively in the context of a marriage relationship but in the present text the connotation of unfaithfulness and deceit within a marriage relationship is clearly present.

The verb לאז occurs four times:

Jer. 2:20 and on every high hill and under every green tree you... committed harlotry
Jer. 3:1 and you commit harlotry with many partners
Jer. 3:6 on every high mountain and under every green tree... [she] committed harlotry
Jer. 3:8 and went to commit harlotry herself

It is interesting that the expression ‘to commit harlotry’ occurs here twice with the fixed phrase ‘on every high hill and under every green tree’. These are the places ‘where the nations serve their gods’ (Deut. 12:2) and have their shrines and where Israel participates in illegitimate forms of worship. This combination of terms suggests that the verb לאז functions in Jer. 2:20 primarily as a standard term in the context of idolatry and false worship, while the background notion that the covenant relation in its exclusivity can be likened to a marriage is only secondary. The elements of ‘impermissible and outrageous behaviour’ and ‘idolatry’ stand in the foreground. Although the word ‘harlotry’ certainly indicates that the relationship between Yhwh and Israel is undermined through the conduct labelled as ‘harlotry’, the notion of an existing marriage relationship does not seem to be presupposed in Jeremiah 2:20. A connection between the verb לאז and the notion of a marriage relationship between Yhwh and Israel is presented only in Jeremiah 3:1 and 3:6-10.19

The verb לאד occurs twice, both times in the parable about the two sisters in Jeremiah 3:6-10:

Jer. 3:8 the fact that Turncoat Israel committed adultery
Jer. 3:9 committing adultery with stone and tree

19. In Hosea 1-3, on the contrary, the link between the verb לאד and the notion of marriage is prominent from the first moment. In fact, the analogy between the human marriage of Hosea and Gomer and the marriage relationship of God and Israel in Hosea 1-3 may be designed in order to ‘explain’ and ‘provide with some necessary background’ the use of the term לאד elsewhere in the biblical texts (e.g., in Jer. 2:20; 3:6; Hos. 4:13; Ex. 34:15-16; Deut. 31:16). This would mean that Hosea provides the word with additional meaning – namely, with the notion that ‘acts of harlotry’ affect and rupture an existing relationship – which previously was not present as consciously or perhaps only implicitly. Jer. 3:1 and 3:6-10 would form a first stage in this process finding fuller elaboration in Hosea 1-3.
The verb רָשַׁע and the related adjective רַשָׁע occur four and two times, respectively:

Jer. 3:8 Treacherous Judah... did not fear
Jer. 3:11 her soul... is more righteous than that of Treacherous Judah
Jer. 3:20 as a woman that is treacherous to her partner
Jer. 3:20 so you have been treacherous to me, O house of Israel
Jer. 3:7 her sister, Traitor Judah, saw it (adj)
Jer. 3:10 Traitor Judah, her sister, did not return to me with all her heart (adj)

The result: evil and profaneness
As a result of this, the conduct of Israel is repeatedly identified as ‘evil’. It brings ‘profaneness’ over the land. The noun רָשָׁע (‘evil’) and the related adjective רַשָׁע occur together ten times. In Jeremiah 4:4 another noun from the same root occurs (רָשָׁע) in the standard expression ‘the evil of your doings’. The word ‘evil’ thus constitutes a sort of refrain in the text:

Jer. 2:3 evil would come upon them
Jer. 2:13 two evils my people have committed
Jer. 2:19 let your evil correct you
Jer. 2:19 that it is evil and bitter that you abandoned Yhwh
Jer. 2:27 at the time of their disaster (evil)
Jer. 2:28 at the time of your disaster (evil)
Jer. 2:33 in evil things you have surely trained your ways
Jer. 3:2 by your harlotries and by your evil
Jer. 3:5 and you do evil things and prevail
Jer. 3:17 they shall go no longer after the stubbornness of their evil heart
Jer. 4:4 because of the evil of your doings

The effect of these evil deeds is described by the verb רָשָׁע (‘to pollute, to profane’), a forceful and radical term which indicates that something is utterly alienated from God, desecrated and unacceptable. Such profaneness lies as a curse over the land and makes the land impossible to live in for God and people alike.

Jer. 3:1 would not that land be utterly profaned?
Jer. 3:2 so you brought profaneness over the land by your harlotries and by your evil
Jer. 3:9 with her casual harlotry she profaned the land

The return to Yhwh as alternative
In contrast to the verbs that picture the movement away from Yhwh the verb בָּאוֹש expresses the movement towards Yhwh. This verb occurs frequently in chapter 3 and also occurs twice in chapter 2 (Jer. 2:24 and 2:35), though not in the sense of

20. Cf. e.g., Jer. 4:4; 21:12; 23:2, 22; 25:2; 26:3; 44:22.
a change of conduct as in Jeremiah 3. In the latter chapter (including Jer. 4:1) the verb is found eleven times:

Jer. 3:1 would he return to her again?
Jer. 3:1 and you commit harlotry with many partners and then to return to me!
Jer. 3:7 I thought: after she has done all this she will return to me
Jer. 3:7 but she did not return
Jer. 3:10 Traitor Judah... did not return to me!
Jer. 3:12 Return, Turncoat Israel
Jer. 3:14 Return, turnable children
Jer. 3:19 and would not turn from after me
Jer. 3:22 Return, turnable children
Jer. 4:1 (2 x) If you turn Israel... to me you should turn

Four times the verb יָשָׁע occurs in combination with the phrase ‘to me’, indicating that this verb expresses a reorientation towards Yhwh. It contrasts sharply with the ‘way of life’ going away from Yhwh. The ‘return’ to Yhwh is the means that can mend the broken relationship and bring Israel anew in the land of promise and blessing (Jer. 3:14-18; 4:1-2).

5.3 A central contrast: a pure versus a perverted land

A central contrast in Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 is that between a pure and a perverted land. Clusters of words express this distinction. On the one hand, the devotion and loyalty of Israel to Yhwh in the past and in the future are referred to and, on the other hand, frequent mention is made of the disloyalty of Israel to Yhwh. The latter turns the land into a profaned and perverted place, the former preserves the land as a pure and good place to live. That the land functions as the horizon of Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 appears from the fact that the word הָאָרֶץ occurs sixteen (!) times in these two chapters.

The overture in Jeremiah 2:2-3 in this respect sets the tone. It brings the wholehearted loyalty and love of Israel for Yhwh in remembrance. This love is situated in the wilderness, in a land ‘not sown’. The latter expression points to a land that is uncultivated and not covered by vegetation. In the present context the lack of vegetation also carries a figurative connotation, in the sense that this ‘land’ is free from wild, illegitimate and counter-covenant behaviour on the part of the people.

In the next passage (Jer. 2:4-9) more references are found to the land in its pure manifestation. Mention is made of the ‘land with orchards’ (Jer. 2:7) where Yhwh has brought the people after their liberation from the land of anxiety (Jer. 2:6). The land of their destination is a fertile and bountiful land where it is good

22. See Jer. 2:2, 6 (4 x), 7, 7, 15, 31; 3:1, 2, 9, 16, 18, 18, 19. Cf. the following assessment of Brueggemann in relation to Jer. 2:6-7: ‘Israel’s whole life is about land. Yhwh’s primal gift is land. Jeremiah is concerned with the surecoming destruction, exile and land loss. This passage suggests that where the story of the land is lost, the loss of the land itself will soon follow’ (To pluck up, p. 33).
to live. In the same verse, however, a counter-image is found: ‘but you came in and defiled my land, my inheritance have you made into an abomination’ (2:7). This is a sort of anticipating summary of the various forms of breaking of the covenant that will subsequently be described (Jer. 2:8-37). Such unfaithfulness to the covenant changes the land into a horror (מִנָּה). The involvement with Baals, the zigzagging around, the heated search for other partners, the interpretation of products of wood and stone as gods, that is how ‘you bring profaneness over the land’ (Jer. 3:2). The people’s conduct thus makes the land far from a promised land but distorts and deforms it. The ‘pure land’ is changed into a ‘perverted’ land, a land that is unliveable for both God and people: profaneness entails that everything is utterly estranged from the holiness of Yhwh and from the people’s vocation to be holy. In this way neither Yhwh nor Israel will ‘prosper’ (Jer. 2:37).

The salvation passage in Jeremiah 3:14-18 contrasts this anti-land with a land that is ‘pure’ in yet another sense. All concentration falls on Zion and on the immediate and direct relations between Yhwh and the people in that city. The promise is unfolded that in the days to come the people shall return from exile to the land promised to their fathers (3:16-18). In this ‘new’ land the relations between Yhwh and the people will be restored and the exceptional promise is made that Yhwh will be directly present with them, without the intermediation of the ark (3:16-17). The function of the ark, the symbol of utter holiness, is transferred to Jerusalem. Yhwh will in those days employ the city as his throne and be seated there directly among his people. A new sort of holiness is created by the immediate presence of the name of Yhwh among his people. In this utopian glimpse ahead the text focuses on the land in a quite specific sense: the focus is on Jerusalem as the place where the presence of Yhwh is directly felt. This Jerusalem, to which the nations will come in peace to seek the presence of Yhwh, is the form that the ‘pure land’ ultimately will assume.

To sum up, the contrast between the pure or perverted land is constantly present in Jeremiah 2:1-4:4. The pure land is the result of the covenant loyalty of Israel and of life in the presence of Yhwh (Jer. 2:2-3; 3:16-17), while the perverted land comes from covenant breaking and from life that is far from Yhwh and not prosperous (Jer. 2:5-37).

5.4 Purport of the text: a teshuva speech

Every attempt to define the purport of a poetic passage such as Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 falls short of fully capturing the wealth of imagery in the text. Yet it seems that this composition can be aptly described as a teshuva speech, a speech calling for a volte-face in conduct, a תְּשׁוֵבָה. This can be illustrated by the following features.

First, the text opens with references to the ‘covenant loyalty’ and ‘bridal love’ of Israel for Yhwh (Jer. 2:2-3). This initial harmony contrasts flagrantly with the rebellion of Israel described later in the text (Jer. 2:4-37). The tension that is thus created between the initial harmony and the present broken state of the relationship has the effect of delineating two diametrically opposed attitudes, rather than providing a nostalgic description of an ‘ideal’ and ‘irretrievable’ past. The point of the opening passage is that the contrast between the intimacy and
faithfulness of the bridal period and the faithlessness of the subsequent period becomes clear.

Second, the text employs a vast array of terms that express the movement away from Yhwh: to go after vanities (2:5, 8, 23, 25), to abandon (2:13, 17, 19), feet and run (2:25), to roam about (2:31). These inventive descriptions of the misbehaviour of the people, however, do not serve only to hammer home the guilt of Israel. There is also a repeated appeal to ‘know and see’ what this conduct amounts to (Jer. 2:19, 23; 3:13). These appeals have a paratelic character and serve to motivate Israel to change its conduct and to repent.

Third, the motif of repentance and return becomes explicit in Jeremiah 3. This chapter deals in various ways with the people’s return to Yhwh. Such different issues as the legal impediments to a restored relationship, the passion of Yhwh for Israel, the promises attached to repentance and the necessity of sincere repentance are discussed. One of these passages, Jeremiah 3:21-25, depicts vividly a scenario for repentance, demonstrating how repentance may be accomplished. The text portrays a dialogue between Yhwh and Israel, in which Israel initially confesses guilt in an apparently unacceptable way (3:22cd) and then presents a longer confession of sin (3:24-25). Yhwh ultimately phrases another appeal to repent accompanied by a promise of blessing and forgiveness (4:1-2). The affectionate and affirmative language in this liturgical setting is striking. Every time the name Yhwh occurs in the speech of the community, it is accompanied by the acclamation ‘our god’ (3:22-25). This indicates the strong reorientation of the people towards Yhwh. The passage is altogether a remarkable piece of dialogue within a prophetic text, and as a ‘realized’ liturgy of repentance it forms a fitting conclusion to Jeremiah 3.

What are the main characteristics that differentiate the guilt-and-repentance speech in Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 from other speeches with the same motifs? A few points may be mentioned. First, the present speech is distinguished by its lengthiness and its position at the head of the book of Jeremiah after the call narrative in chapter 1. Second, there is an emphasis on gods and idols. There is a certain theological interest in the text which becomes visible in the contrast between Yhwh, the spring of living water, and the other gods who are defined as leaking cisterns that cannot guarantee life but let it continuously slip away (2:13). Third, besides this theological accent, there is also a historical accent. This comes to the fore in recitals of the major events in the national past (Jer. 2:6-7, 17, 20) and in references to the recent political history of Judah and Israel (3:6-10), although the text is devoid of details with respect to time, place and content. The focus is on the relationship of Yhwh and Israel, in its ideal and in its degenerated state, and as it pertains to Israel in all of its generations and in both

23. Cf. T.M. Raitt, ‘The Prophetic Summons to Repentance’, _ZAW_ 83 (1971), pp. 30-49. Raitt recognizes in Jeremiah 3 three ‘summonsces to repentance’ and two more in 4:1-2 and 4:3-4. According to Raitt Jeremiah 3 is one of those texts that illustrate ‘the pivotal importance of the repentance issue within prophetic preaching’ (p. 31).

24. The word דנVN ('god, gods') occurs twelve times in Jer. 2-3 (2:11, 11, 17, 19, 28, 3:13, 21, 22, 23, 25, 25). The idols are further described with a variety of terms, such as ‘vanities’ (2:5, 8), Baals (2:8, 23; cf. 3:24) and objects of stone and wood (2:27).
fractions of the nation. On the whole, one may therefore conclude that Jeremiah 2-4:4 shows an encyclopaedic accent.\(^{25}\)

The comprehensive discussion of the waywardness of Israel in chapter 2 and of the necessity and possibility of repentance in chapter 3 seems to have a significance that goes beyond the limits of these chapters. It brings across a principle that is essential for the book of Jeremiah as a whole: the possibility of reorientation towards Yhwh. Such reorientation results in life in the presence of Yhwh and brings one into a ‘pure’ land.

The alternative in the text between a pure and a perverted land is also a central point for the implied audience. Within this framework the appeal to repentance becomes meaningful. The text suggests that the choices that Israel, or people in general, make about their way of life always have effects and results in terms of the ‘land’ in which they live. Such notions may speak to contemporary hearers as well and involve them anew in the choice between a land that is pure and good to live in or one that is perverted.

6 Passages with marriage imagery in Jeremiah 2:1-4:4

6.1 The bridal time (Jer. 2:2-3)

The opening passage of Jeremiah 2 contains two different metaphors that call attention to the positive nature of the relationship between Yhwh and Israel. In Jeremiah 2:2 the central image is that of marriage. The people are addressed in this verse as the female and God reminds Israel of the ‘loyalty of your youth’ and the ‘love of your bridal time’.

Both of these images carry a sense of freshness and expectation. They point to a period at the beginning of life (‘youth’) and of a marriage relationship (‘bridal time’). In the beginning the relation between Israel and Yhwh was fresh and undisputed. The words ‘loyalty’ and ‘love’ indicate how close the bonds were. The commitment of Israel to Yhwh was solid and strong. Israel and Yhwh lived together in a unique and reciprocal partnership.

A third characterization of this period is added in the text. The bridal time of Yhwh and Israel is said to coincide with the time of ‘your going after me in the wilderness’ (vs. 2e-f), thus identifying the latter period as the bridal time, as the period of the purest mutual commitment. This positive perception of the wilderness period has prompted the idea that the text adheres to the desert ideal and views the desert as the most ideal setting for the relationship between Yhwh and Israel to which the people must return.\(^{26}\) In another variant of this theory, the harmony between Yhwh and Israel in the wilderness constitutes a nostalgic and irretrievable ideal in the past, in comparison to which the present time is inferior and flawed. This view, however, does not suit the text.


\(^{26}\) For a similar perception of the wilderness see Hosea 2:16-17 and my comments in relation to this text. See further M.V. Fox, ‘Jeremiah 2:2 and the “Desert Ideal”’, *CBQ* 35 (1973), pp. 441-450, and M. DeRoche, ‘Jeremiah 2:2-3 and Israel’s Love for God during the Wilderness Wanderings’, *CBQ* 45 (1983), pp. 364-376. Both Fox and Deroche refute the idea that Jer. 2:2 adheres to a desert ideal.
In the first place, there is no evidence that the wilderness in Jeremiah 2:2 is regarded as an intrinsically positive place. The wilderness is only regarded as positive insofar as it is characterized by the affirmative attitude of Israel towards Yhwh. It is this attitude that constitutes the ideal rather than the place as such. In the second place, the text does not seem to express nostalgia for the lost harmony between Yhwh and Israel. Such a view is too static and takes the subsequent exposition of the unfaithfulness of Israel (Jer. 2:4-37) as a description rather than as an appeal to Israel to mend its ways. One may, however, also read the positive images in the opening passage as a didactic contrast to the present unfaithfulness and as points of orientation for the future. In this perspective the thrust of the contrast between the opening passage and the body of Jeremiah 2 would be to reorient Israel in the present and within the land towards the same wholesome partnership with Yhwh as it displayed in the wilderness.

Jeremiah 2:3 switches to a different metaphor. Israel is now qualified as ‘holy to Yhwh’ and as the ‘first fruits of his harvest’. In this agricultural image Israel is compared to the first proceeds from the land that are set apart for and consecrated to Yhwh (Lev. 23:9-20). Despite the different images of faithful partner and first fruits, the idea that Israel belongs purely and exclusively to Yhwh connects the two images. Both images offer a positive portrayal of the relationship between Yhwh and Israel. Together they serve as a foil to the subsequent picture of Israel’s broken covenant relationship with Yhwh.

A final question that requires discussion in relation to this passage is the identity of the female addressee. Can the ‘you’ addressed in this verse be identified as the city of Jerusalem or as Israel? Biddle and Galambush argue that the city of Jerusalem must be the intended addressee because of the immediately preceding reference to Jerusalem (vs. 2a) and the general pattern of the female personification of cities. According to these scholars, the female addressee surfacing time and again in Jeremiah 2-3 may consistently be identified with Jerusalem.

In my view, however, this suggestion is not convincing. That the female addressee in Jeremiah 2-3 seems to coincide with the nation rather than with the city is brought out by the following. First, the reference to the wilderness period in Jeremiah 2:2 and to the past of the entire nation suggests that the female addressee embodies the nation or at least incorporates elements associated with the nation. Second, the references to the alliances with Egypt and Assur (2:18) and to the breaking of the covenant (2:20-21, 23-25) also seem to indicate that the entire nation is the addressee, rather than only the city. Third, the tale of Judah and Israel as the two marriage partners of Yhwh (Jer. 3:6-10) shows that a nation or part of it can be personified as a female within the framework of marriage imagery. In view of these aspects, it is likely that the identity of the female addressee in Jeremiah 2-3 is not limited to Jerusalem but consists of the nation as such, incorporating Judah in the first place but also relating to Judah within the perspective of the entire nation Israel. Contra Biddle, it may thus be

27. Cf. W. Brueggemann, To pluck up, p. 32.
28. See Biddle, Redaction History, pp. 70-71, and Galambush, Jerusalem, pp. 53-54. Galambush allows for some overlap between the city and the nation (‘the capital city metonymously represents the entire nation’).
suggested that in Jeremiah 2-3 the people rather than the city are personified as female.

How can this female personification of the people be explained? It is likely that the bridal imagery in Jeremiah 2:2 has evoked the female personification of the nation in the opening passage. Further the themes of harlotry and adultery may have elicited the female personification of the nation (Jer. 2:14-25, 33-37; 3:1-5). The poetic character and richness of metaphor in these chapters may also have been a factor occasioning the female personification of the nation. At the same time, the strong focus on the covenant disloyalty of Israel, on Israel as covenant partner of Yhwh and on the motifs of lost and retrieved companionship between Yhwh and Israel may be the major motivation for the female personification of the nation in Jeremiah 2-3. Not marriage imagery in the limited sense, but the more comprehensive idea that the covenant corresponds to a one-to-one relationship may have stimulated the female personification of the nation in this text. Such female personification provides the opportunity of employing a number of metaphors having to do with marriage and adultery as well as the chance of developing other forceful metaphors for the people’s misconduct (young camel, she-ass). In the interplay of elements that account for the female personification of the nation in Jeremiah 2-3, the phenomenon of the female personification of capital cities hardly seems to play a role.

With respect to the marriage imagery in Jeremiah 2:2, it may be pointed out that the emphasis lies entirely on the love of Israel towards Yhwh rather than on the love of Yhwh for Israel. The positive response of Israel to Yhwh that is brought in remembrance should motivate Israel in the present to a renewed love for Yhwh. This focus on the positive response of Israel fits in with the character of Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 as a whole, in which the response of Israel to Yhwh, in one way or another, is the crucial issue. The longing and love of Yhwh for Israel come only to the fore in the tale of the two sisters in Jeremiah 3:6-10.

6.2 Reunion after divorce? (Jer. 3:1-5)

Marriage imagery resurfaces in Jeremiah 3:1. The focus in this passage is on the broken covenant relationship and, in terms of marriage imagery, on a situation of divorce. In light of this situation of divorce between God and Israel the text raises the issue whether repair of the marriage relationship is possible against such a background.

In general, the unit of Jeremiah 3:1-5 continues the lawsuit and the context of dispute between Yhwh and the people. In the opening verse the possibility of the repentance of Israel to Yhwh is raised, in terms of the reunion between former marriage partners. In vv. 2-3 the frequency and intensity of Israel’s liaisons with other partners are illustrated. In vv. 4-5 the attempts of Israel to restore the relationship are unmasked as insincere and idle. The raising of the issue of repentance thus results in a sharp demonstration of the adultery of the nation and in a strong indictment of Israel’s insincere attempts to repent.

29. Expressions such as יִתְבָּאוּ (Jer. 4:11; 6:28; 8:1, 18:14; 18:13; 31:4; 31:21) underscore that female personification in the book of Jeremiah is not limited to the city Jerusalem but extends to the nation as such.
A closer look at Jeremiah 3:1 reveals a number of conspicuous features. The verse may be quoted here in full:

If a man sends away his wife
and she goes from him
and belongs to another man
would he return to her again?
Would not that land be utterly profaned?
And you commit harlotry with many partners
and then to return to me!
— speech of Yhwh —

This verse portrays two situations between which a comparison is drawn. The first situation involves reunion after divorce on a human level, the second relates to reunion after divorce on the level of God and Israel. The verse as a whole suggests that a clear correspondence exists between the two situations and the implicit comparison between them serves to make a clear point about the reunion of God and Israel. According to the analogy with Deuteronomy 24:1-4, this point is that it is impossible and inconceivable that Yhwh would accept the return of Israel. The remarriage of former partners after the woman had had another partner in between is, according to the Torah, forbidden and brings 'profaneness' over the land. The same rule is applicable to the reunion of Yhwh and Israel: it seems simply impossible in the light of Israel's liaisons with others.

A closer look reveals that the two parts of the comparison show two striking differences. In the first place, the subject in the first situation is the male ('would he return to her again?'). That corresponds to the legislation in Deuteronomy, in which the male is portrayed as the active subject. He may not 'retake' his former wife. In the second part of the verse, however, the female is portrayed as the active subject ('would you then return to me!'). This new accent fits within the context of Jeremiah 3, where the return of Israel to Yhwh — rather than that of Yhwh to Israel — is the central issue. The second part of the comparison is thus adjusted to the present context in Jeremiah 3. In the second place, there is a qal wa chômer effect in the comparison. In the human case only one 'other man' is involved (vs. 1c), whereas in the case between God and Israel 'many partners' are involved. While the first situation already calls for the answer 'no, he cannot return to her again', the second situation invites even a stronger negative response 'no, impossible!'. In this way the sheer impossibility of Israel's repentance towards Yhwh is underscored.

At the same time, the point of the comparison does not seem to lie in the impossibility of repentance, but rather seems to lie in the exceptional character of God's marriage to Israel, in which, despite legal barriers, repentance is yet possible. That Yhwh hopes for such a repentance is apparent from further references in Jeremiah 3 (3:7, 10, 12, 14, 22). The accent on repentance in the remainder of the chapter indicates that the thrust of the questions in the opening verse must be to underline that which is impossible in the human sphere, is yet possible between God and Israel. Rules and customs on the human level may
surprisingly be surpassed when it comes to the reunion of Yhwh and Israel as covenant partners. Against all odds, Yhwh will take Israel back.  

Commentators have generally noted the correspondences between Jeremiah 3:1 and Deuteronomy 24:1-4. What is most interesting is that Jeremiah 3:1 links the marriage legislation in Deuteronomy to the metaphorical marriage between Yhwh and Israel. A rather precise parallel is drawn between the divorce of Yhwh and Israel and a similar situation on the non-metaphorical level, showing some audacity with respect to the marriage and divorce of Yhwh and Israel. The combination of these two levels of thought serves to make the impasse in the relationship between Yhwh and Israel unequivocally clear. If human partners are not allowed to be reunited under these conditions, what does that imply for Israel and Yhwh? This unsettling comparison serves to confront Israel with its unfaithful conduct and to bring it to a recognition of the logical consequences. Despite the striking comparison between human divorce and the present situation of Yhwh and Israel, however, Yhwh is in the end not bound to this legislation. In his passion to be reunited with Israel, Yhwh is ready to go beyond the stipulations of the Torah. The marriage relationship between Yhwh and Israel is surely in this respect not identical to a marriage between human partners.

6.3 Marriage and divorce with two sisters (Jer. 3:6-10)

Jeremiah 3:6-10 constitutes a narrative intermezzo in Jeremiah 2-3. It introduces two females with symbolic names, נַוָּיוֹן וּמְרִי, Turncoat Israel and Traitor Judah. These sisters represent the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the text retells the recent past of these kingdoms in terms of marriage and, especially, divorce. Originally, so the tale tells, Yhwh was married to both sisters but both marriages were put at risk by the adulterous behaviour of Israel and Judah. As a result, Israel has been sent away with a letter of divorce (3:8). Meanwhile Judah has not taken the example of her sister’s fate to heart and has failed to repent sincerely (3:10). Nevertheless, Judah has not yet been sent away and may still repent. That is the plot of the narrative in a nutshell.

Although the notion of marriage comes to the fore only implicitly in this passage, it is unmistakably present. It is most explicit in the reference to the ‘letter of divorce’ that Israel has received as a result of her wrongdoings (3:8), being an indication that Israel previously had been ‘married’ to Yhwh. The

30. This interpretation is in agreement with W. Brueggemann, To pluck up, pp. 40-41, and unlike that of Carroll, Jeremiah, p. 143. Carroll argues that Jer. 3:1-5 points out that Judah cannot return to Yhwh. He reads the passage in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem and situates it just before the destruction at a point of no return, thus allowing uncertain historical matters to dominate the text interpretation.


32. ‘Such violation of the torah, however, is the stunning point of the poem [...] Jeremiah here echoes the insight of Hosea on the vulnerable, risky love of Yhwh for Israel’ (Brueggemann, To pluck up, p. 41).
female personification of Israel and Judah and the motif words ‘to commit harlotry’ and ‘to commit adultery’ are further indications of the presence of the notion of a marriage relationship between Yhwh and Israel and Judah.

There is much debate about the point of this narrative. Is it to depict Judah as worse than Israel, since Judah neglected the warning of Israel’s fate? Is this passage simply an introduction to the promises addressed to Israel in Jeremiah 3:11-18 with the purpose of disqualifying Judah? Contrary to these interpretations, I suggest that two elements are crucial for the interpretation of this text. First, the parable must be interpreted as containing a message for Judah, since Judah is the audience implied by the text as a whole (cf. Jer. 2:2). Second, the setting for the comparison of the fates of Judah and Israel ‘in the days of king Josiah’ is a significant piece of information (3:6) indicating that the comparison between Judah and Israel is told from the perspective that the fate of Israel has been already decided upon (722 BCE) while the fate of Judah is yet open. On these grounds, I would suggest that the point of the parable is that sister Judah is not to follow the negative example set by sister Israel.

It is clear that Israel in Jeremiah 3:6-10 is the primary focus of attention and that Judah is secondary. This priority of Israel reflects the historical course of events, since in terms of history – according to the biblical account – Israel was the first to be confronted with guilt and sin and the first to undergo the downfall of its kingdom, the so-called ‘divorce’ of Yhwh. The same events threatened Judah only in a later stage. This chronological order is reflected in the parable. According to the text, Israel sets the example of misconduct and Judah ‘sees’ and follows it (3:7-8). The sending away of Israel should have functioned as an exemplary warning for Judah but yet Judah ‘did not return to me with all her heart’ (3:10). This disappointed conclusion confronts Judah with the fact that despite the extra time granted to her, her repentance is insufficient. When this statement is read not only as a description but also as a prophetic appeal, it implies that Judah in this critical hour is called upon to renew itself more genuinely and fundamentally. Repentance is demanding. At the same time, the point of the comparison between Israel and Judah in the parable is that Israel is presented as a negative example for Judah and as a predecessor not to be followed. This motif of doubleness in my view continues to be present in Jeremiah 3:11-18 and may contribute to the understanding of that passage as well (see the excursus below).

The most remarkable element in the marriage imagery in this passage is that Yhwh is portrayed as having two spouses. The marriage imagery is stretched beyond the normal pattern of a one-to-one marriage relationship in order to include both Israel and Judah in the metaphor. This departure from the strict analogy with human marriage demonstrates that the image of marriage is here employed with freedom. Both Israel and Judah can be conceived of as married to Yhwh since both are regarded as Yhwh’s partner in the covenant relationship.

33. See Carroll, Jeremiah, p. 145. Both Carroll and Holladay (Jeremiah, pp. 77, 81) interpret Jer. 3:6-10 in light of Jer. 3:11-18, rather than the other way around as the text order suggests.

34. It seems preferable to call Jer. 3:6-10 a parable rather than an allegory, as Holladay does (Jeremiah, p. 77), since an ‘allegory’ is mostly understood as presenting a point-to-point correspondence between the allegorical level and the reality to which it refers, while in parables the relation between the two levels of meaning is more loose and incomplete (cf. Abrams, Glossary, pp. 4-6).
The single covenant partner of Yhwh, the people of Israel, splits here into two complementary parts. In addition, the tale of the two sisters contains an element of amazement. Yhwh asks the prophet whether ‘he has seen what Turncoat Israel did’ and the introduction of the prophet as the third party creates an element of distance and indignation concerning the conduct of the two sisters. Nonetheless, it is clear that Yhwh deeply yearns for the return of both partners (3:7, 10) and wishes to restore the relationship.

Excursus concerning Jeremiah 3:11-18 and its relations with the preceding text

Jer. 3:11-18, the unit following this parable, is a complex text since the relation between the two speeches of return in 3:12-13 and 3:14-18 is unclear. The problem centres in the address to ‘Turncoat Israel’ in Jer. 3:12. This separate address to the kingdom of Israel is a major argument for the theory that Jeremiah 2-3 contains an original core of speech to the remnant of the northern kingdom (Holladay, Albertz). However, when one reads Jer. 3:11-18 in connection with Jer. 3:6-10 and as a continuation of the play with the two sisters the picture changes substantially.

In the first place, it is important to note that Jer. 3:11 strikes a surprisingly different tone and deals with Israel in a positive sense. I do not think that the thrust in this verse is anti-Judean but rather that this verse is a transition that anticipates a new focus on Israel. The verse makes clear that a new episode in the story of Israel and Judah, a different act in the play, is about to begin. The same is indicated by the reference ‘to the north’ as the address of the prophet’s proclamation (3:12). The word pax actually frames the two speeches in Jer. 3:11-18 (cf. Jer. 3:18) and indicates that the setting for what follows switches from the time of King Josiah to the time of the exile. The ‘north’ represents here the region to which the nation has been exiled (cf. Jer. 16:15; 23:8; 31:8). The change in address corresponds to a change in content as well. The emphasis in Jer. 3:12-18 is no longer on the misconduct of Israel and Judah but on the possibility of return from exile. The mood of accusation in Jer. 3:6-10 is replaced by one of reconciliation. The text thus provides indications that there is a crucial switch between Jer. 3:6-10 and Jer. 3:11-18 in terms of chronological setting, mood and content.

In the second place, it is clear that the ‘play’ or at least the ‘language’ of the two sisters is continued in the first repentance speech in Jer. 3:12. Turncoat Israel again precedes Judah and is the first to be addressed with an appeal and a promise concerning repentance (3:12-13). This address to Israel may be seen as an address to the virtual Israel as a figure on stage. In Jer. 3:14 a similar repentance speech is found with the variation ‘return, turnable children’ rather than ‘return, Turncoat Israel’. Contrary to the explanations which find here a continuation of the address to Israel, I suggest that in Jer. 3:14-18 both Judah (cf. 3:17-18) and Israel are addressed. The unspecific and inclusive term ‘children’ and the references to the reunion of Israel and Judah (3:18) plead in favour of this. In this understanding the inclusion of Judah is the most significant element in this second repentance speech. That would mean that the structure of the play in Jer. 3:6-10 of dealing with Israel first and then with Judah is continued in Jer. 3:11-18! Both times Israel takes precedence over Judah and in the case of Jer. 3:11-18 the issue is not harlotry but return and then the example of Israel is to be followed by Judah! The same double structure visible in Jer. 3:6-10 would thus be observable in the two repentance speeches in Jer. 3:12-13 and 3:14-18 and that would seriously undermine the theory that the northern kingdom is the addressee in Jer. 3:14-16 so that the text would reflect King Josiah’s program of uniting north and south.
7 Conclusions

There is a strong focus on the relationship between Yhwh and Israel and on relational imagery in Jeremiah 2:1-4:4. The fact that the repentance to Yhwh, the crucial theme in Jeremiah 3, is put in the perspective of a restored marriage relationship provides the return to Yhwh with the overtones of intimacy and a deep mutual commitment.

In the marriage imagery in Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 three accents are visible. The first accent is that in Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 terms related to the metaphor of marriage are employed in combination with many other images and metaphors. The marriage imagery is not the only metaphor used for the relationship of Yhwh and Israel but alternates with other imagery. As a result, one finds the instances of marriage imagery scattered throughout the text and, though it may be one of the central images, it is present only in an impressionistic fashion.

A second accent is that the notion of marriage is employed with liberty. There is no hesitance in portraying Yhwh as having two marriage partners, if that seems to be required (Jer. 3:6-10). Similarly, the legislation concerning divorce and remarriage on the non metaphorical level is easily surpassed when it comes to Yhwh and Israel. Human patterns and legislation concerning marriage are not decisive for describing and portraying stages within the relationship of Yhwh and Israel. In other words, there is a sense of differentiation between the notion of marriage when it applies to humans and when it applies to Yhwh and Israel. There is an awareness that with respect to the covenant relationship, marriage is a metaphor that captures some elements quite well while in other respects it needs readjustment. In Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 such adaptations are made quite naturally.

A third accent is that the emphasis lies on Israel as the active partner. Both in the original period of harmony and in the process of reunion the conduct of Israel is regarded as the major force influencing the state of the relationship. One may conclude from this emphasis on the loyalty and disloyalty of Israel that the partnership between Yhwh and Israel is a demanding relationship, one that is meant to last and to be actively preserved. Concomitantly Yhwh is portrayed as disappointed and disillusioned at the disloyalty of Israel (2:4-9, 10-11, 3:6-10). Nonetheless, Yhwh holds on to Israel as his partner. His effort is to win Israel back and to bring her to good partnership again in order that she may live in the bountiful land of his promise and be extraordinarily blessed (4:2).

In view of the other texts studied in this book, Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 has more in common with Hosea 1-3 than with Isaiah 50 and 54. The context in Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 is, like in Hosea, one of confrontation and the correspondences between the texts appear, for instance, in the shared themes of harlotry, adultery and divorce. At the same time, the texts are entirely different in their scope and purpose. Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 seems to have a didactic purpose and aims at confronting Israel by providing a mirror of its own conduct, while Hosea 1-3 is beyond that point and focuses on the element of punishment and the active interventions of Yhwh in order to stipulate the life-or-death alternative between keeping or forsaking the covenant relationship with Yhwh.