

NEBUCHADNEZZAR, THE END OF DAVIDIC RULE, AND THE EXILE IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

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When did the Davidic dynasty end and when did the Babylonian exile begin?¹ The answer generally given to this question is that the two events coincide and are to be dated to the year 587 BCE. The main witness to these events in the Hebrew Bible, the book of Jeremiah, certainly agrees with this historical perspective, but it also develops a theological perspective that somewhat transcends these historical facts and offers a different answer. Some texts in the book of Jeremiah develop a universal understanding of history that remains in the background and is not formulated explicitly, but is instead accessible only through careful study of the text.

The starting point for my reflections is the narrative of Jer 36.² Its narrative development is well known: God commissions Jeremiah to write

1. Preliminary versions of this paper have been published in French and German as “L’Accession de Nabuchodonosor à l’hégémonie mondiale et la fin de la dynastie davidique: Exégèse intrabiblique et construction de l’histoire universelle dans le livre de Jérémie,” *ETR* 81 (2006): 211–27; “Nebukadnezars Antritt der Weltherrschaft und der Abbruch der Davidsdynastie: Innerbiblische Schriftauslegung und universalgeschichtliche Konstruktion im Jeremiabuch,” in *Die Textualisierung der Religion*, ed. Joachim Schaper, FAT 62 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 150–66.

2. On Jer 36, see especially the contributions by Hermann-Josef Stipp, *Jeremia im Parteienstreit: Studien zur Textentwicklung von Jer 26, 36–43 und 45 als Beitrag zur Geschichte Jeremias, seines Buches und jüdischer Parteien im 6. Jahrhundert*, BBB 82 (Frankfurt am Main: Hain, 1992); idem, “Baruchs Erben: Die Schriftprophetie im Spiegel von Jer 36,” in *Wer darf hinaufsteigen zum Berg JHWHs? Beiträge zu Prophetie und Poesie des Alten Testaments*, ed. Hubert Irsigler, Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 72 (St. Ottilien: EOS, 2002), 145–70; Yair Hoffman, “Aetiology, Redaction and Historicity in Jeremiah XXXVI,” *VT* 46 (1996): 179–89; Harald-Martin Wahl, “Die Entstehung der Schriftprophetie nach Jer 36,” *ZAW* 110 (1998):

down a judgment prophecy, which he completes with the help of his scribe, Baruch. Baruch later reads the scroll aloud in the temple before the entire people. This event comes to the attention of the nobles, who order Baruch to come and read the scroll to them a second time. Recognizing the explosiveness of the content recited before them, the nobles advise Jeremiah and Baruch to hide while they have the scroll read a third time, this time before King Jehoiakim. After each section of three or four columns is read, the king takes the scroll and burns it. In response to God's subsequent command, Jeremiah dictates a new version of the same scroll to Baruch. Finally, a severe word of judgment goes forth against Jehoiakim and his family, and it is this word of judgment, announcing the end of the Davidic dynasty in advance to Jehoiakim, that I will now investigate in detail. It can be found in Jer 36:30, and it reads as follows:

לְכֵן כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה עַל־יְהוֹאִקִים מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה לֹא־יְהִי־לוֹ יוֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא דָוִד
וְנִבְלָתוּ תְהִיָּה מִשְׁלַכֶּת לְחָרֵב בַּיּוֹם וְלִקְרַח בְּלִילָה:

365–89; Christof Hardmeier, “Zur schriftgestützten Expertentätigkeit Jeremias im Milieu der Jerusalemer Führungseliten (Jeremia 36): Prophetische Literaturbildung und die Neuinterpretation älterer Expertisen in Jeremia 21–23*,” in Schaper, *Textualisierung der Religion*, 105–49; Uwe Becker, “Die Entstehung der Schriftprophetie,” in *Die unwiderstehliche Wahrheit: Studien zur alttestamentlichen Prophetie: Festschrift für Arndt Meinhold*, ed. Rüdiger Lux and Ernst-Joachim Waschke, ABIG 23 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), 3–20; Johannes Taschner, “Zusammenhalt trotz inhaltlicher Differenzen: Jer 36 als Selbstvergewisserung der Beamten und Schreiber in frühnachexilischer Zeit,” *EvT* 69 (2009): 366–81. Jeremiah 36 seems to have been shaped quite clearly as a counternarrative to 2 Kgs 22; see Gunther Wanke, *Jeremia 25,15–52,34*, vol. 2 of *Jeremia*, ZBK 20.2 (Zurich: TVZ, 2003), 338; Konrad Schmid, *Buchgestalten des Jeremiabuches: Untersuchungen zur Redaktions- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von Jer 30–33 im Kontext des Buches*, WMANT 72 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), 245–47 and n. 206 (for bibliography); Thomas Römer, “La conversion du prophète Jérémie à la théologie deutéronomiste,” in *The Book of Jeremiah and Its Reception: Le livre de Jérémie et sa réception* (ed. A. H. W. Curtis and Thomas Römer; BETL 128; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 27–50, esp. 47–48; G. J. Venema, *Reading Scripture in the Old Testament: Deuteronomy 9–10, 31; 2 Kings 22–23; Jeremiah 36; Nehemiah 8*, OtSt 48 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 125–27; Caetano Minette de Tillesse, “Joiachim, repoussoir du ‘pieux’ Josias: Parallélismes entre II Reg 22 et Jer 36,” *ZAW* 105 (1993): 353–76; Norbert Lohfink, “Die Gattung der ‘Historischen Kurzgeschichte’ in den letzten Jahren von Juda und in der Zeit des Babylonischen Exils,” *ZAW* 90 (1978): 319–47; repr. in *Studien zum Deuteronomium und zur deuteronomistischen Literatur II*, SBAB 12 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1991), 55–86.

Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim, king of Judah: There shall not be for him one sitting on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night.

This text combines numerous peculiarities. First of all, it is striking that the prophecy *was not fulfilled* from two perspectives: neither did the Davidic dynasty end with Jehoiakim since both his son Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 24:6, 8) and his brother Mattaniah/ Zedekiah (24:17) ruled after him, nor is there evidence that Jehoiakim did not receive regular burial. Verse 6 formulaically announces that he was laid with his fathers, which is the usual expression for burial in the royal tomb:³

וַיִּשְׁכַּב יְהוֹיָקִים עִם־אֲבוֹתָיו וַיִּמְלֹךְ יְהוֹיָכִין בְּנוֹ תַחְתָּיו:

So Jehoiakim slept with his ancestors; then his son Jehoiachin became king in his place.

Even if an explicit declaration concerning Jehoiakim's burial location is absent (cf. 2 Kgs 21:18, 26), it is unlikely that the author of the book of Kings would have suppressed the fulfillment of a prophetic judgment oracle against Jehoiakim if he had somehow heard that Jehoiakim had not been buried in the usual way.⁴

Jeremiah 36:30 is therefore—when evaluated according to historical standards—a false prophecy. It goes unfulfilled twice over: Jehoiakim was neither the last Davidide nor was he buried irregularly. Historians usually

3. Cf. Bernardus Alfrink, "L'expression עִם־אֲבוֹתָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב," *OtSt* 2 (1943): 106–18; Stipp, *Jeremia*, 110; for complete discussion of the problem, see Oded Lipschits, "Jehoiakim Slept with His Fathers' (II Kings 24.6)—Did He?" in *Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures*, vol. 1: *Comprising the Contents of Journal of Hebrew Scriptures Volumes 1–4*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2006), 405–28; Nadav Na'aman, "Death Formulae and the Burial Place of the Kings of the House of David," *Bib* 85 (2004): 245–54. Less convincing is the argument of Alberto R. W. Green, "The Fate of Jehoiakim," *AUSS* 20 (1982): 103–9.

4. In his *Antiquities*, Flavius Josephus allows the threat in Jer 36:30 to become reality when he writes that Nebuchadnezzar killed Jehoiakim during the events of 597 BCE, having his corpse thrown from the city walls and forbidding proper burial (10.97). Josephus, on this point, merely constructs an *eventum e vaticinio*. Cf. Christopher T. Begg, "Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin (10,81–102 + 229–230)," in *Josephus' Story of the Later Monarchy (AJ 9,1–10,185)*, BETL 145 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 499–534.

exult in such a conclusion because the likelihood that a prophecy was “genuine” increases if it goes unfulfilled.

However, such is not the case here.⁵ The narrative of Jer 36 is highly reflective and probably does not stem from the time of Jeremiah himself,⁶ but provides a theological rationale for the demise of Judah and Jerusalem on the basis of Jehoiakim’s rejection of the prophetic word. The narrative’s learned scribal quality can also be seen in its character as counternarrative to 2 Kgs 22: The righteous king Josiah listens to God’s word, while the unrighteous king Jehoiakim rejects it. Therefore, a simple determination that the prophecy in Jer 36:30 is false seems to miss the point of the passage. There must be other reasons for the formulation of 36:30.

Before addressing this question, I should point out a second striking feature in Jer 36:30 (in addition to the unfulfilled pronouncement)—it is closely related to two other texts in Jeremiah: (1) the declaration of judgment against Jehoiakim in 22:18–19, which declares that Jehoiakim will not receive a burial or lamentation; and (2) the declaration of judgment of 22:29–30 against his son Jehoiachin, which announces the end of the Davidic dynasty (v. 30).

That 36:30 draws upon 22:18–19 can be recognized clearly on account of its identical content as declaration of judgment to Jehoiakim and the lack of burial in both.⁷ Jeremiah 22:18–19 says:

לְכֵן כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי־יְהוֹאִקִים בֶּן־יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה
לֹא־יִסְפְּדוּ לּוֹ הוּי אָחִי וְהוּי אָחוֹת
לֹא־יִסְפְּדוּ לּוֹ הוּי אָדוֹן וְהוּי הַדָּה
קְבוּרַת חֲמוֹר יִקָּבֵר סָחוּב וְהִשְׁלָד מֵהַלְּאָה לְשַׁעֲרֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם׃

Therefore thus says the LORD to Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah: They shall not lament for him: “Alas, my brother!” or “Alas, sister!” They shall not lament for him: “Alas, lord!” or “Alas, his majesty!” With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried—dragged off and thrown out outside beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

5. Contra Stipp, *Jeremia*, 110. See also his “Sprachliche Kennzeichen jeremianischer Autorschaft,” in *Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah*, ed. Hans M. Barstad and Reinhard G. Kratz, BZAW 388 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 148–86.

6. Cf., e.g., Hoffman, “Aetiology, Redaction and Historicity,” 183; Wahl, “Entstehung der Schriftprophetie,” 373–75.

7. The concrete formulation in Jer 36:30 appears to be inspired by Jer 14:16 (מִשְׁלָכִים).

The connection to 22:30 is obvious, too,⁸ although 22:30 is addressed to Jehoiachin, not to his father Jehoiakim. Nevertheless, a close intertextual connection can be seen in the use of the expression **יָשָׁב עַל-כִּסֵּא דָוִד** as well as the embedding of the expression in the declaration of the demise of the Davidic dynasty.⁹

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה
אֶת־הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה עֲרִירִי
גָּבֵר לֹא-יִצְלַח בְּיָמָיו
כִּי לֹא יִצְלַח מִזֶּרְעוֹ אִישׁ
שׁוֹב עַל-כִּסֵּא דָוִד
וּמִשָּׁל עוֹד בִּיהוּדָה:

Thus says the LORD:
Record this man as childless,
a man who shall not succeed in his days;
for none of his offspring shall succeed
in sitting on the throne of David,
and ruling again in Judah.

It therefore seems plausible to propose that these two declarations, 22:18–19 and 22:30, have been combined in 36:30 by means of scribal exegesis. The assumption that 36:30 is dependent on 22:18–19 and 22:30 and not the other way around is justified because 36:30 draws these two texts together. In addition, 22:18–19 and 22:30—unlike 36:30—appear to stem from authentic logia of Jeremiah and are therefore older than 36:30.

Neither 22:18 nor 22:30 is plausible as *vaticinium ex eventu*. Jehoiakim was given a regular burial (as we can safely deduce from 2 Kgs 24:6), and Jehoiachin, in all likelihood, had children (1 Chr 3:17–18 lists seven

8. Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 661; William McKane, *Commentary on Jeremiah XXVI–LII*, vol. 2 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 921. Stipp (*Jeremia*, 92) affirms the similarities, but his dating of 36:30 prior to 598 BCE rules out any genetic connections. For diachronic differentiations within 22:30, see William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1–25*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 611; Christl Maier, *Jeremia als Lehrer der Tora: Soziale Gebote des Deuteronomiums in Fortschreibungen des Jeremiabuches*, FRLANT 196 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 213 n. 48.

9. For the Hebrew phrase, see also Jer 17:25; 22:2.

sons for Jehoiachin). In addition, it appears quite improbable that Jer 22:30 knows of the appointment of Jehoiachin's grandson Zerubbabel to the position of "governor" over Judah.¹⁰ Would this oracle have been formulated the way it is if it had known of this later event? Therefore, in opposition to Jer 36:30, neither 22:18–19 nor 22:30 reveals any indication that their historically inaccurate statements of a particular fact came *ex post*. They are therefore likely authentic prophecies. If it is plausible to conclude that the judgment oracle against Jehoiakim in 36:30 reworks both older texts (22:18–19 and 22:30) on a textual level, it is still unclear *why* 36:30 takes up 22:30, a text that is addressing *Jehoiachin* instead of Jehoiakim. The combination of 22:18–19 and 22:30 in 36:30 must have a particular purpose. What could that reason be?

Before offering an answer, I think it would be helpful to review what I have argued so far. First, Jer 36:30 speaks contra the historical reality, stating that the Davidic dynasty came to an end with Jehoiakim and that Jehoiakim was the final representative of Davidic rule. This is historically false. That this pronouncement is unfounded and nevertheless continued to be transmitted as part of the tradition demands explanation. While it is valid to explain 22:18–19 as a fixed part of the written tradition before the death of Jehoiakim and the accession of his son Jehoiachin to the throne, this explanation does not work for 36:30. As it stands, Jer 36 is not a coeval text, but is a highly learned scribal product and presupposes Judah and Jerusalem's demise.

Then how did the historically false theory of the end of the Davidic dynasty with Jehoiakim come about? Why might a biblical writer have formulated this idea? Is there a higher theological purpose behind this historically false theory? Answers can be found by considering Jer 36:30 in its context. Decisive for understanding the announcement of the end of the Davidic dynasty in 36:30 are the *literary* datings in Jer 36. The recording of the first scroll in 36:1 is set in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, and the reading in 36:9, 22 is set in the ninth month of the Jehoiakim's fifth year. What is the theological significance of these dates?

The fourth year of Jehoiakim—according to our calculations, the year 605/604 BCE—was both the year in which the Babylonian king Nabo-

10. For the status of Judah as a Persian province as early as the time of Zerubbabel, see Joachim Schaper, "Numismatik, Epigraphik, alttestamentliche Exegese und die Frage nach der politischen Verfassung des achämenidischen Juda," *ZDPV* 118 (2002): 150–68.

polassar died and was Nebuchadnezzar's "first year" according to the Hebrew expression (his "ascension year" according to the Babylonian nomenclature).¹¹ This was known to the biblical writers as can be seen in a passage dated to the same year: Jer 25:1 expressly records the synchronism between the fourth year of Jehoiakim and the first year of Nebuchadnezzar.

הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר-הָיָה עַל-יְרֵמְיָהוּ עַל-כָּל-עַם יְהוּדָה בַּשָּׁנָה הָרְבַעִית לַיהוֹיָקִים בֶּן-
יֹאשָׁיָהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה הִיא הַשָּׁנָה הָרִאשׁוֹנִית לְנְבוּכַדְרֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל:

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon).

The passing of the scepter in Babylon from Nabopolassar to Nebuchadnezzar in the year 605 BCE marks a special date in the history of the ancient Near East, because, earlier in the same year,¹² Nebuchadnezzar, then in his capacity as crown prince of Babylon, led the Babylonians to victory over the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish, establishing Babylon as the new great power in the ancient world. He became the de facto sitting ruler of the world. Still in the very same year, on the first day of the month of Elul (the sixth month),¹³ Nebuchadnezzar ascended to the Babylonian throne.

This also appears to be reflected in the book of Jeremiah: according to Jer 25, Nebuchadnezzar is the "servant" (עַבְד) ¹⁴ of YHWH (v. 9), whom the land of Judah and other nations must serve for seventy years (vv. 10–11). By giving Nebuchadnezzar the title of "servant," Jer 25 picks

11. Cf. Herbert Donner, *Von der Königszeit bis zu Alexander dem Großen: Mit einem Ausblick auf die Geschichte des Judentums bis Bar Kochba*, part 2 of *Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen*, 2nd ed., ATD Ergänzungsreihe 4/2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 405 and n. 22. More concretely for Nebuchadnezzar II, see Albert K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (1975; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 100: line 12: MUSAG "ascension year"; Z.15 MU I^{kám} "1st year."

12. Cf. Udo Worschech, "War Nebuchadnezzar im Jahre 605 v. Chr. vor Jerusalem?" *BN* 36 (1987): 57–63.

13. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 100, line 11.

14. For the text critical and composition critical problem see Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 232–33, and literature cited there.

up on a corresponding terminology traditionally ascribed to David, the elect king.¹⁵ The argument involved in this “servant” terminology applied to Nebuchadnezzar seems to be the following: in Nebuchadnezzar’s ascendance to world domination in 605 BCE, the kingdom of God’s grace passed into Nebuchadnezzar’s hands. The closest parallel in terms of content in the Hebrew Bible is found in the Deutero-Isaian Cyrus oracle of Isa 45:1–7, which proclaims Cyrus to be the new messiah, probably a position quite similar to the “servant” designations in Jeremiah.

What do these considerations mean for Jer 36? Jeremiah 36:1–3 places the writing of the words of Jeremiah in the very year that Nebuchadnezzar ascends to world domination and interprets the proclamation of judgment that had been percolating since the time of Josiah until the fourth year of Jehoiakim as a possible trigger for the reversal of the Judeans:

וַיְהִי בַשָּׁנָה הַרְבִּיעַת לַיהוֹיָקִים בְּנֵי־אֲשֻׁרְהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה הָיָה הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אֶל־
 רַמְזֵהוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה לֵאמֹר: קַח־לְךָ מִגִּלְת־סֵפֶר וְכַתְּבָתָּ אֵלַיָּה אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים
 אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּרְתִּי אֵלַיְךָ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל־יְהוּדָה וְעַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם מִיּוֹם דִּבַּרְתִּי אֵלַיְךָ
 מִימֵי יִאֲשֻׁרְהוּ וְעַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: אוֹלֵי יִשְׁמְעוּ בֵּית יְהוּדָה אֵת כָּל־הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר
 אָנֹכִי חָשַׁב לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם לְמַעַן יָשׁוּבוּ אִישׁ מִדְּרָכּוֹ הַרְעָה וְסִלַּחְתִּי לְעֹנָם
 וְלִחַטָּאתָם:

In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel [LXX: Jerusalem] and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today. It may be that when the house of Judah hears of all the disasters that I intend to do to them, all of them may turn from their evil ways, so that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.

After the events at Carchemish and Nebuchadnezzar’s ascension to the throne, a final way out of the impending judgment by the Babylonians through YHWH’s forgiveness was set clearly before their eyes. However, also this final chance was gambled away by the king’s reaction to the scroll. According to 36:9, the three readings of the scroll, which finally bring it to

15. Helmer Ringgren, “עבד, *‘abad*,” *TDOT* 10:394: “Whenever David is called *‘ebed YHWH*, the context almost always involves election and the perpetual continuation of the dynasty.”

the ears of the king, take place several months after the battle at Carchemish and Nebuchadnezzar's ascension, now in the *fifth* year of Jehoiakim:

וַיְהִי בַשָּׁנָה הַחֲמִשִּׁית לַיהוֹיָקִים בֶּן־יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַתְּשַׁעִי קָרְאוּ
צוֹם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה כָּל־הָעָם בִּירוּשָׁלַם וְכָל־הָעָם הַבָּאִים מֵעָרֵי יְהוּדָה בִּירוּשָׁלַם:

In the fifth [LXX: eighth] year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, in the ninth month, all the people in Jerusalem and all the people who came from the towns of Judah to Jerusalem proclaimed a fast before the LORD.

The ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiakim is a striking date too. This was the exact month when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Ashkelon. A record in the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle provides specific information regarding this event:

The first year of Nebuchadnezzar (II., e.g., 604/603 B.C.E.): [...] He marched to [Ashke]lon (*a-na* ^{uru} *x-x-(x)-il-lu-nu illik-ma*) and in the month Kislev (9th month) he captured it, seized its king, plundered [and sac]ked it. He turned the city into a ruin heap. In the month Shebat he marched away and [returned] to Bab[ylon].¹⁶

In light of the theological importance of the fourth and fifth years of Jehoiakim in Jer 36, which allude to the two important military events of the battle at Carchemish and the destruction of Ashkelon, the announcement of the demise of the Davidic dynasty in 36:30 becomes immediately plausible without further need of explanation. With Nebuchadnezzar's rise to universal hegemony, generally apparent through the battle of Carchemish and for Judah particularly obvious from the destruction of Ashkelon, the Davidic dynasty is *theologically* dismantled. As everyone could see, God was no longer with the Davidic kings. Notably, according to Jer 36 the demise of the Davidic dynasty takes place *prior* to its *historically observable* end; it is dated to the year 605 BCE instead of 587 BCE.

In fact, Jer 36:30 contains one of the strongest and most pointed declarations in the Hebrew Bible of the theological legitimation of a foreign imperial power's dominion over Israel. Nebuchadnezzar's royal authority has a particular quality that can only be understood correctly when one

16. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 100, lines 15, 18–20.

notes that it follows the Davidic dynasty and replaces it. Jeremiah 36:30, with the aid of inner-biblical exegesis, reveals a notion of universal history that posits the theological end of the Davidic dynasty and the assumption of world dominion by Nebuchadnezzar as coinciding in the fourth and fifth years of Jehoiakim.

The depiction of events in Jer 27 allows for further explication of this theory of universal history in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 27 is dated to the reign of Jehoiakim, and here too the text is clear that Nebuchadnezzar has already been commissioned with world dominion by God. Jeremiah 27:6 states:

וְעַתָּה אֲנֹכִי נָתַתִּי אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרְצוֹת הָאֵלֶּה בְּיַד נְבוּכַדְנֶאֱצַר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל עַבְדִּי
וְגַם אֶת־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה נָתַתִּי לוֹ לְעַבְדּוֹ:

Now I have given all these lands into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him even the wild animals of the field to serve him.

The verbal form is perfective (נָתַתִּי) in the speech that YHWH now “has given” “all these lands” into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand. In the reign of Jehoiakim, this is already the case.

Surprisingly, however, Jer 27:6 is not dated to the fourth or fifth year, but to the ascension year of Jehoiakim, which is 609 BCE.

בְּרֵאשִׁית מַמְלַכְתּוֹ יְהוֹיָקִים בְּזִיאֹשִׁיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה הָיָה הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אֶל־יִרְמְיָהוּ
מֵאֵת יְהוָה לֵאמֹר:

At the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD. (27:1)

The present structure of Jer 27:1–6 seems difficult, since it claims Nebuchadnezzar’s world dominion already began in the year 609 BCE, four years before the battle of Carchemish and Nebuchadnezzar’s elevation to the Babylonian throne.

A number of scholars conclude hastily that the date in Jer 27:1 is mistaken because the subsequent narrative takes place under Zedekiah (who is mentioned in 27:3, 12). This was probably also the reason why the Septuagint skipped this verse: it simply does not fit the context. However, 27:1 can easily be understood without emendation within the framework of the con-

ception of universal history that has been described above.¹⁷ Still in need of explanation, however, is the chronological difference between the two dates 609 (27:1) and 605 (25:1). The proposal presented here is that the book of Jeremiah differentiates between the heavenly allocation and actual assumption of world dominion by Nebuchadnezzar. Yet why would this difference be introduced at all? Does this not complicate the situation unnecessarily?

The reason, even the need, for this difference lies in the “seventy years”¹⁸ prophecy of Jer 25:11–12 (cf. 29:10), which in that chapter limits Babylon’s dominion—not the exile!—to seventy years. This seventy years is synchronized in 25:1 between the assumption by Nebuchadnezzar of (world) dominion and Jehoiakim’s fourth year, that is 605 BCE. Babylon’s dominion came to an end in the year 539 BCE with the Persian king Cyrus’s bloodless conquest of Babylon. The resulting time frame from 605 BCE to 539 BCE is sixty-six years, four years short of the “seventy years.” Counting from the first year of Jehoiakim, 609 BCE, to 539 BCE produces the exact “seventy years.”

Apparently, the difference between the heavenly allocation and earthly assumption of world domination by Nebuchadnezzar was introduced in Jer 27 in order to mediate between the theological idea of “seventy years” and the relevant dates of empirical history, which mark a time span that is close to but not exactly seventy years. The “seventy years” was evidently a theological given and therefore could not simply be changed. This conclusion is supported by the Babylonian inscription of Esarhaddon as well as Zech 1:12, which is likely the oldest record of this concept in the Hebrew Bible. Esarhaddon’s Babylonian inscription states (Version a):¹⁹

17. Stipp still prefers the traditional “solution” for Jer 27:1 (“Zur aktuellen Diskussion um das Verhältnis der Textformen des Jeremiabuches,” in *Die Septuaginta—Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten*, ed. Martin Karrer and Wolfgang Kraus, WUNT 219 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 642 n. 62).

18. On the redaction-historical priority of Zech 1:12, see Reinhard G. Kratz, *Translatio Imperii*, WMANT 63 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), 261–67; Schmid, *Buchgestalten des Jeremiabuches*, 223.

19. Cited according to Matthias Albani, *Der eine Gott und die himmlischen Heerscharen: Zur Begründung des Monotheismus bei Deuterijosaja im Horizont der Astralisierung des Gottesverständnisses im Alten Orient*, ABIG 1 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000), 86. See further Mordechai Cogan, “Omens and Ideology in the Babylon Inscription of Esarhaddon,” in *History, Historiography, and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures*, ed. Hayim Tadmor and Moshe Weinfeld

Although he wrote (on the tablet of destinies) that the period of the exile would be 70 years, merciful Marduk, once his heart had become quiet, transposed the numbers and commanded the reconstruction to begin in the eleventh year.

The background of this declaration is provided by the mirror image cuneiform signs for the numbers “70” and “11”: a vertical wedge (before a *Winkelhaken* “60”) plus *Winkelhaken* (“10”) means “70”; a *Winkelhaken* (“10”) before a vertical wedge (“1”) stands for “11.” This inscription clearly demonstrates that “70 years” was an established duration that could be applied to the destruction of a city. It is probably implicit that after seventy years an entire generation would have completely passed away, so there was no longer anyone alive who had seen the destruction with their own eyes. The use of the phrase as the topos for a fixed duration of destruction appears for the “seventy years” in Zech 1:12 as well:

וַיַּעַן מַלְאֲכֵי־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה צָבָאוֹת עַד־מָתִי אֶתָּה לֹא־תִרְחֹם אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם
וְאֵת עָרֵי יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר זָעַמְתָּה זֶה שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה:

Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, “O LORD of hosts, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which you have been angry these seventy years?”

The book of Jeremiah appears to have taken the “seventy years” from Zech 1:12 (and transferred it to the dominion of Babylon),²⁰ but the authors of the book of Jeremiah could not simply change it, that is, shorten it; therefore, the conception of universal history needed to be modified ad hoc by differentiating between the heavenly allocation and earthly ascension to world dominion. Also in support of the differentiation between the allocation and ascension is the fact that 609 BCE was the year of Josiah’s death; after the death of the last pious king of Judah, Josiah, there was no longer a legitimate royal authority in Judah. To sum up, the proclamation of judgment against Jehoiakim in Jer 36:30 was written down for theological rather than documentary reasons. It reworks earlier prophecies against

(Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 76–87; Mark Leuchter, “Jeremiah’s 70-Year Prophecy and the *קמי לב/שך* Atbash Codes,” *Bib* 85 (2004): 503–22.

20. See n. 18.

Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin from Jer 22:18–19, 30,²¹ and pushes forward the demise of the Davidic dynasty to 605/604 BCE, though contrary to historical fact.

This is explicitly stated in Jer 25:1, a verse that marks the beginning of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, whose power is on display in the victory at Carchemish and destruction of Ashkelon. In this way a complementary system is constructed in the book of Jeremiah for the Davidic dynasty and the Babylonian world hegemony. As long as the Davidic dynasty remains theologically intact, then the great empire cannot do anything against it. However, once Nebuchadnezzar sits on the Babylonian throne and has taken dominion over the world—visible for all through the events at Carchemish and Ashkelon—then there can no longer be a legitimate Davidide. Instead, the kingdom of God's grace is now transferred to the ruler of the empire, first to Nebuchadnezzar, and then to Cyrus, as can be seen in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 44:28; 45:1).

Historically speaking, this conception of universal history in the book of Jeremiah was probably developed out of the experience of a double *translatio imperii* from the Assyrians to the Neo-Babylonians to the Persians within a century, which may possibly have brought on the initial sparks of such an understanding of universal history.²² This conception is probably not older than the fifth century, which does not mean that everything reported in Jer 27 or 36 was invented at that time, but rather that the material was shaped in the described way at that time.

As these examples from the Jeremiah tradition show, scribal prophecy²³ was even able to incorporate contradictions to actual historical events when it had a higher historical purpose in view, namely the display of God's control over history. However, these higher purposes were

21. It is probable that the words in 22:18–19 and 22:30 were included or remained in the book of Jeremiah through the reinterpretation of 36:30. In any case, 36:30 provides an understanding of history for why the unfulfilled declarations of judgment against Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin from Jer 22 continued to be passed on.

22. See, already, Martin Noth, "Das Geschichtsverständnis der alttestamentlichen Apokalyptik," in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, ThB 6 (Munich: Theologische Bücherei, 1957), 248–73; Eng. trans.: "The Understanding of History in Old Testament Apocalyptic," in *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Studies*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 194–214.

23. See also Martti Nissinen, "How Prophecy Became Literature," *SJOT* 19 (2005): 153–72; Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), esp. 173–204 for the book of Jeremiah.

not explicit for the audience of the book of Jeremiah, but first arise upon intense study of the book. The truth concerning this world and its history is recognizable not (any longer) in the events themselves, but through the texts that interpret it. This reveals the beginning point of a development in intellectual history that fundamentally influenced later Judaism and Christianity.