

“Days Are Coming, When It Shall No Longer Be Said”: Remembering and Forgetting in the Book of Jeremiah

CHRISTOPH LEVIN

In few places is the essential relation between remembering and forgetting in the Old Testament clearer than in the antithetical promise in Jer 16:14–15a:

Behold, days are coming, says Yahweh, when it shall no longer be said, “As Yahweh lives who brought up the Israelites out of the land of Egypt,” but “As Yahweh lives who brought up the Israelites out of the north country.”¹

A favourable future which is going to stand in a precise but antithetical correspondence to the history that has gone before is prophesied. The future exodus out of the north country is based on the foundational fact of the early period, the exodus from Egypt. The reason is paradoxical: the history is recalled because it is no longer to be recalled. What shall be new requires its foundation in what is old, yet at the same time it is supposed to make the old forgotten: “it shall no longer be said.”

I

In order to discover the tradition-history context of this prophetic saying, we must first look at its form. It is based on an already established speech pattern, for which there are other examples, as will be shown below.² It consists of an temporal designation, “Behold, days are coming, says Yah-

¹ Verse 15b was added in order to apply the original promise explicitly to the Babylonian Golah: “and I will bring them back to their land which I gave to their fathers” (see 24:6). The addition is easily recognized in the change from prophetic speech to divine speech. Later v. 15aβ was inserted in regard to the Jewish diaspora “out of all the countries where he had driven them.” This was probably added first in 23:7–8 (that is, in 23:8aβ) where the promise occurs a second time.

² The following argument was first presented in my *Die Verheißung des neuen Bundes in ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Zusammenhang ausgelegt* (FRLANT 137; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 22–31.

weh” (הַגְּהִימִים בָּאִים נְאֻם־יְהוָה), followed by a double quotation, which amounts to an antithesis between what was said earlier and what will be said in the future, “when it shall no more be said ... but ...” (וְלֹא־יֵאמָר עוֹד) ... כִּי אִם ...).

The particular character of the pattern emerges in the temporal designation. The word הִנֵּה “behold” occurs frequently at the beginning in prophetic speech. It is usually followed by a participle, so that the result is a temporally indefinite participial clause (so-called *Futurum instans*). As a rule this clause signals disaster, for a clear reason: הִנֵּה “behold” does not promise the future. The nature of the judgment is a threatening present, the dimension of time being its first victim.

In contrast to these cases, the introductory formula הַגְּהִימִים בָּאִים “Behold, days are coming” explicitly comprises a temporal designation. Moreover, the nominal clause has as its subject “coming days,” that is the future itself. But the future is liberating for the present, and can therefore only be favourable. We can define the expression נְאֻם־יְהוָה בָּאִים הַגְּהִימִים as an introductory formula for a prophecy of salvation.³

This becomes even clearer if we compare it with other similar formulas. None of the adverbial expressions בְּעֵת הַהִיא “at that time,” בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא “in that day,” and בְּיָמֵים הֵהֵם “in those days” are independent indications of time. As a rule they serve as a redactional link with the preceding text. Even the most frequent formula of this kind, וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא “And it shall come to pass in that day,” never loses its ancillary, dependent character.⁴ On the other hand, a temporal indication such as בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים “in the latter days” is clear and can therefore stand for itself.⁵ In Isa 2:2 (par. Mic 4:1) and Jer 49:39 it does occur in the introductory formula which reads as וְהָיָה בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים “And it shall come to pass in the latter days,” and it is not by chance that this is followed by a promise of salvation.

When it is compared with the formula וְהָיָה בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים, the meaning of the introduction בָּאִים הַגְּהִימִים becomes evident. In the formulas opened by וְהָיָה “the latter days” (or “that day”) constitute the temporal determination for what is to come, whereas the formula בָּאִים הַגְּהִימִים introduces the “coming days” themselves as the subject of the expectation. The formula “And it shall come to pass in the latter days” opens the prediction of com-

³ Barbara A. Bozak, *Life “Anew”: A Literary-Theological Study of Jer 30–31* (AnBib 122; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991), 29, agrees with this definition of the formula, though she programmatically restricts her analysis to the surface level of the present text.

⁴ Isa 7:18, 21, 23; 10:20, 27; 11:10, 11; 17:4; 22:20; 23:15; 24:21; 27:12, 13; Jer 4:9; 30:8; Ezek 38:10, 18; 39:11; Hos 1:5; 2:18, 23; Joel 4:18; Amos 8:9; Mic 5:9; Zeph 1:10; Zech 12:3, 9; 13:2, 4; 14:6, 8, 13.

⁵ Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Deut 4:30; 31:29; Isa 2:2 par. Mic 4:1; Jer 23:20 par. 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek 38:16; Hos 3:5; Dan 10:14.

ing events, while the formula “Behold, days are coming,” on the other hand, initiates a description of circumstances in a time to come. So we finally come to the conclusion: the original meaning of הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים is to introduce the promise of a coming era of salvation.

II

The original meaning tallies only in part with the real use of the formula to be observed in the different texts, however. There are twenty-one passages introduced by the formula הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים, and of these, nine are salvation promises (Jer 16:14 par. 23:7; 23:5; 30:3; 31:27, 30, 38; 33:14; Amos 9:13), but there are also seven judgment sayings (1 Sam 2:31; 2 Kgs 20:17 par. Isa 39:6; Jer 7:32 par. 19:6; Amos 4:2; 8:11) and five sayings against the nations (Jer 9:24; 48:12; 49:2; 51:47, 52). And the future can also be promised as an event, so that the “coming days” are not the subject of the prophecy but only its temporal determination. At the same time, it can be shown that this usage is secondary. In the course of time the formula has faded and become ossified.⁶

The difference between the usage that fits the meaning and the borrowed usage can be shown through a comparison of the description of the future era of salvation in Amos 9:13 with the threatening oracle to Eli and his house in 1 Sam 2:31. In the promise of salvation the formula and the content match exactly, describing a coming time of prosperity:

Behold, days are coming, says Yahweh, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.

In contrast, it is only indirectly that the judgment saying against Eli includes a vista of coming conditions:

Behold, days are coming, when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father’s house, so that there will not be an old man in your house.

Here the designation of the time acts like a *ritardando* which inadequately moves the punishment into the future.

⁶ Mark E. Biddle, *A Redaction History of Jeremiah 2:1–4:2* (ATANT 77; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1990), 99, holds: “There is nothing which prohibits the expression from functioning as an admittedly heightened reference to any future day. In this regard, it may better be seen as an ‘eschatological’ formula, rather than as a ‘salvation-oriented’ formula. It announces a day in which some extraordinary event will transpire; whether for good or ill must be supplied by the content of the saying which it introduces.” This judgment, however, is not based on the semantics of the formula itself.

The threatening oracle against Eli has only the introductory formula in common with Jer 16:14–15. The rest of the saying goes its own way. This is different with the polemic against the Topheth in Jer 7:32:

Behold, days are coming, says Yahweh, when it shall no more be said “Topheth,” or “The valley of the son of Hinnom,” but “The valley of Slaughter.”

The structure is precisely the same as in 16:14–15 α . It includes the pattern of the contrast between what is said today and what will be said in the future. But it is not original in this case. The announcement of a time when the valley of the son of Hinnom will be called “the valley of Slaughter” is only indirectly a threat, because it indicates the coming judgment by way of an after-effect that is of minor importance: the change of the name of the place where the false offerings have been performed. Moreover the language is inconsistent. The antithesis has to do with a name, the term for Topheth, not a saying as in 16:14–15. So instead of $\text{אמר} \text{ni}$. “to be said” the phrase should be $\text{קרא} \text{ni}$. “to be called.” It is in this sense that the wording was corrected on the occasion when the threat was repeated later in 19:6.⁷ That is to say, the form does not match the content. The reason is that the judgment saying about the Topheth in 7:32 was modelled on 16:14–15. This is assured by the following text: 7:33a follows the pattern of 16:4b, while v. 34a follows 16:9. The whole passage in 7:32–34 depends on the borrowing from Jer 16.

III

Nevertheless, there are two other examples in which form and content harmonize. In Jer 31:29–30 we have the following antithesis:

They shall no longer say: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge,” but every one shall die for his own sin.

In the way the passage now runs, this saying is introduced by the temporal designation בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם “in those days” which connects it with the preceding text. But the introductory formula $\text{יָמֵי בְּאֵימֵן יְהוָה}$ occurs two verses previously, in order to introduce the promise of the new seed of Israel and Judah:

Behold, days are coming, says Yahweh, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast.

⁷ For the evidence that Jer 19:5–6 is quoting 7:31–32 see Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (KHC 11; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1901), 161; Christoph Levin, “Das Kinderopfer im Jeremiabuch,” in idem, *Fortschreibungen: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (BZAW 316; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 227–41, esp. 230–32.

It is possible that here the formula was the basis, and that it has been torn apart by a subsequent addition. In that case the connection with בְּיָמֵי הָהֵם would not be a new beginning but would have to be interpreted as a resumptive repetition.⁸ In the same way the introduction:

Behold, days are coming, says Yahweh ...

which follows in 31:31, could continue with the antithesis in v. 34:

... when no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, "Know Yahweh," for they shall all know me.

The possibility that the formula underlies both these instances is obvious. It becomes probable if it can be shown that in each case the intervening text has been interpolated at a later point.⁹

(27) Behold, days are coming, says Yahweh, when

I will sow [*the house of*] Israel and [*the house of*] Judah (← 11:10) with the seed of man and the seed of beast. (28) And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over (← 1:12) them [*to pluck up and to break down and*] to overthrow [*and to destroy*] (← 1:10) and to bring evil, so I will watch over (← 1:12) them to build and to plant (← 1:10), says Yahweh. (29) In those days

they shall no [longer] say: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," (30) but every one shall die for his own sin.

[Each man]¹⁰ who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.¹¹

(31) Behold, days are coming, says Yahweh, when

I will make with *the house of Israel and the house of Judah* (← 11:10) a new covenant. (32) Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers (← 11:10), when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt (← 11:4), my covenant which they broke (← 11:10). But I myself, I am the lord of them, says Yahweh.

(33) Because this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts.

And I will be their God, and they shall be my people (← 11:4).

(34) No [longer] shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, "Know Yahweh," for they shall all know me,

from the least of them to the greatest (← 6:13), [says Yahweh]; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

⁸ See for this frequent editorial technique Curt Kuhl, "Die 'Wiederaufnahme' – ein literarkritisches Prinzip?" *ZAW* 64 (1952): 1–11.

⁹ In the following translation the original sayings are marked by bold types. Italics show the allusions borrowed from other texts of the book of Jeremiah, the origin of which is noted in brackets. Masoretic pluses are given in square brackets.

¹⁰ Probably מְלֹאֵי הַדָּם was added in the later transmission of the Hebrew text.

¹¹ This phrase – trying to balance the saying of the sour grapes by word – takes the metaphor literally. It is probably a late addition.

Today the formula “Behold, days are coming, says Yahweh” in both 31:27 and 31:31 is the prophecy not of an era of salvation but of a favourable event. Both sayings are constructed similarly. The announcement וְזָרַעְתִּי “I will sow” and וְכָרַתִּי “I will make” is followed in both instances by the same reference יְהוּדָה וְאֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בֵּית יְהוּדָה “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” and at the end by the object זֶרַע אָדָם וְזֶרַע בְּהֵמָה “the seed of man and the seed of beast” and בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה “a new covenant.” Both promises are then explained through a reminiscence of past history: וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁקַדְתִּי עֲלֵיהֶם לְנָתוּשׁ וּלְנָתוּץ וּלְהָרֵס וּלְהָאָבִיד וּלְהָרַע “And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and to break down and to overthrow and to destroy and to bring evil,” and לֹא כַּבְרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אֶת־אֲבוֹתָם “not like the covenant which I made with their fathers.” For this the author refers back to already existing texts out of the wider range of the book of Jeremiah.

Where 31:28 is concerned, this was already recognized by Bernhard Duhm. Watching for evil and good is related to the vision of the branch of the almond tree in 1:11–12, which Jeremiah experienced immediately after Yahweh had called him to be his prophet:

And the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, “What do you see?” And I said, “A rod of almond.” Then Yahweh said to me, “You have seen well, for I am watching (שָׁקַד) over my word to perform it.”

“For without 1:12 the ‘watching’ would be incomprehensible.”¹² The series of infinitives on the other hand has been taken over from the prophecy to the nations in 1:10:

See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant (לְנָתוּשׁ וּלְנָתוּץ וּלְהָרֵס וּלְהָאָבִיד וּלְהָרֹס (לְבַנּוֹת וּלְנַטְוֵעַ).

The wording is almost exactly the same in both instances.¹³ For the promise of 31:28, however, the negative and positive verbs no longer build up one single series but constitute an alternative, as they originally did in the theorem 18:7–10 about God’s justice in history from which the prophecy to the nations in 1:10 is borrowed.¹⁴ This model is still effective in 31:28 in

¹² Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, 253.

¹³ However, in the Greek text of 1:10 וּלְהָרֹס “to overthrow” is missing, whereas in 31:28, on the other hand, the Greek text presents only the equivalent of וּלְהָרֹס and omits לְנָתוּשׁ וּלְנָתוּץ וּלְהָאָבִיד. It may well be that the shorter Greek text is original in both instances. This means that in the Hebrew text both sayings influenced each other in order to get the complete. However, the basic dependency of 31:28 on 1:10 is obvious in any case.

¹⁴ See Christoph Levin, “The ‘Word of Yahweh’: A Theological Concept in the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism* (ed.

the form of the infinitive *וּלְהָרַע* “and to bring evil” which is missing in 1:10 but alludes to 18:8: “I will repent of the evil (*הַרְעָה*) that I intended to do to it.” The editor concludes his insertion through the oracle formula *וְנֹאֲמֵי יְהוָה*, before he returns in v. 29 to the interrupted promise of the “coming days” (*יָמִים בָּאִים*) by means of *הַהֵם בְּיָמִים הָהֵם* “in those days.”

In 31:32 the reference to an earlier text is also clear. The disobedience which is referred to here is mentioned in 11:10 as the occasion for the punishment, with the same words:

The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers (*הִפְרוּ בֵּית־יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבֵית יְהוּדָה אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אֶת־אֲבוֹתָם*).

This statement agrees with 31:32 to such a degree that only a direct literary relationship is conceivable:

not like the covenant which I made with their fathers (*אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אֶת־אֲבוֹתָם*), my covenant which they broke (*הִפְרוּ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי*).¹⁵

Compared to 11:10, all that has been added is the historical place of the broken covenant:

when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt (*בְּיּוֹם הַחֲזוּקִי בְיָדָם לְהוֹצִיאֵם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם*).

This temporal determination has been borrowed again, in this case from 11:4:

(3) You shall say to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: Cursed be the man who does not heed the words of this covenant (4) which I commanded your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt (*בְּיּוֹם הוֹצִיאִי־אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם*), from the iron furnace, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God (*וְהָיִיתֶם לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִי אֱהִיָּה לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים*).

Interpolated into the quotation of 11:10, it bursts apart the framework of the *Vorlage*, which the author holds together by way of *אֲשֶׁר*. The patchwork makes it obvious that 31:32 has been put together from texts that have been taken from elsewhere. It is only on the basis of 11:10 that *אֲשֶׁר* can be seen to be related to *בְּרִית*. The author wrote for readers who were in a position to pick up allusions of this kind. Now we see that it is not by chance that the promise of the new seed in v. 27 is also related to “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (*אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בֵּית יְהוּדָה*), again taken from 11:10.¹⁶ This makes it obvious that the present version of

Michael H. Floyd and Robert D. Haak; LHBOTS 427; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 42–62, esp. 45.

¹⁵ The Greek text reads *οτι αυτοι ουκ ενεμειναν εν τη διαθηκαι μου* “for they did not stay in my covenant.” This reading is secondary because it deviates from the quotation of Jer 11:10.

¹⁶ This shows that the twofold omission of *בֵּית* in the Greek text is secondary.

the two salvation promises in 31:27–34 goes back to the work of one and the same editor.¹⁷

The positive statement of the second saying follows in v. 32, as it did in v. 28: *וְאֲנֹכִי בְּעֵלְתִּי בָּם נְאֻם יְהוָה* “But I myself, I am the lord of them, says Yahweh.” As the text now stands, it is no longer evident that this statement begins the positive description of the new covenant.¹⁸ This is due to the fact that the new covenant is explicitly defined a second time in v. 33a, but now in the sense that Yahweh *אַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים הָהֵם* “after those days,” i.e., in the eschatological era, will write the Torah on Israel’s heart. This section of the text has been inserted at a later stage. This is clearly be seen (1) from the broad and explicit introduction *כִּי זֹאת הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר אֶכְרֵת* “because this is the covenant which I will make,” (2) because it is related to *אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל* “with the house of Israel” instead of *אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בֵּית יְהוּדָה* “with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” as in v. 31, (3) from the fact that the temporal designation has changed from the “coming days” (*יָמִים בָּאִים*) to the eschaton *אַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים הָהֵם* “after those days,” (4) from the oracle formula *נְאֻם יְהוָה* “says Yahweh” which usually marks a caesura within the textual flow, and (5) by the poetic form of the inserted logion *נָתַתִּי אֶת־תּוֹרָתִי בְּקִרְבָּם וְעַל־לִבָּם אֶכְתָּבָנָה* “I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts,” which differs from the prose of vv. 31–34.¹⁹

The covenant promise is completed in v. 33b with the covenant formula *וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְהֵמָּה יִהְיוּ־לִי לְעָם* “and I will be their God, and they shall be my people,” which was familiar to the editor from, e.g., Jer 11:4. In v. 34 the basic formula of the section is continued.

¹⁷ The twin term *בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבֵית יְהוּדָה* is to be found only in Jer 5:11; 11:10, 17; 13:11; 31:27, 31; 33:14; see also 2 Sam 12:8; Jer 3:18; Ezek 9:9; Zech 8:13.

¹⁸ My former suggestion that *בְּעֵלְתִּי* should be read as *Perfectum propheticum* “I will be their lord” (Levin, *Verheißung*, 57) was rightly criticized. The phrase may better be understood in the sense that, though the Israelites broke the covenant, Yahweh still kept it.

¹⁹ See Levin, *Verheißung*, 58–9, followed by Erik Aurelius, *Der Fürbitter Israels: Eine Studie zum Mosebild im Alten Testament* (ConBOT 27; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988), 123; Hermann M. Niemann, *Herrschaft, Königtum und Staat: Skizzen zur soziokulturellen Entwicklung im monarchischen Israel* (FAT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 223; and others. However, the majority of scholars hold (for obvious theological reasons) that the new covenant is not only the restoration of the relationship between Yahweh and his people, but moreover that it owns a distinct “new” quality. In this case v. 33a becomes indispensable because the supposed new quality of the new covenant is described only here. See (among many others) Walter Groß, *Zukunft für Israel: Alttestamentliche Bundeskonzepte und die aktuelle Debatte um den Neuen Bund* (SBS 176; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1998), 138; and my review of Groß in *ZAR* 5 (1999): 318–27.

The covenant promise finds its conclusion in the second half of v. 34. The editor has added a reason for the salvation promised in the previous saying. The caesura is again shown by the oracle formula נְאֻם־יְהוָה "says Yahweh" that opens the speech, so that לְמִקְטָנָם וְעַד־גְּדֹלָם "from the least of them to the greatest" can be seen to be the beginning of the addition. Again there is a reference to an older text in the book of Jeremiah:

(11) ... Both husband and wife shall be taken, the old folk and the very aged. (12) Their houses shall be turned over to others, their fields and wives together. ... (13) For from the least to the greatest of them (מִקְטָנָם וְעַד־גְּדֹלָם), every one is greedy for unjust gain. (6:11b–12a, 13a).

The expression וְעַד־גְּדֹלָם with a third person masculine plural pronominal suffix occurs only in Jer 6:13 and 31:34. With this reference, the history of guilt and punishment is recalled a third time, again in order to be replaced by the promise: "for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

The editor was an exegete who added a reason to the formerly unconditional promises of a favourable future by means of quotations from the judgment speeches in the parts of the book of Jeremiah that already existed at his time. This exegetical working method sets his interventions clearly apart from the underlying pattern. A comparison shows that the oldest textual basis of Jer 16:14–15, 31:27–30, and 31:31–34 consists of an already established form: a promise of a future era of salvation that is contrasted with the experience of the present. The contrast between disastrous history and a favourable future is marked in each of the three cases by a particular manner of speech, which is taken up in order to be refuted.²⁰

²⁰ Biddle, *A Redaction History*, 99–100, rejects this conclusion with emphasis. This is mainly due to the fact, that Biddle in his unpublished ThM-Thesis on *Israel in the Book of Jeremiah: A Study in Denotation and Connotation* (Rüschlikon Baptist Theological Seminary, 1985), which he wrote while my book was not yet published, developed the hypothesis that the "eschatological" texts introduced by the formula הִנְּהִיָּיִמִים בָּאִים "behold, days are coming" are the work of a single redactional undertaking. In his *A Redaction History*, he added the hypothesis that an editor had framed the Book of Consolation in Jer 30–31 by the "'Behold' introduction" Jer 30:1–3 and the "'Behold' coda" 31:27–34, and that at a later stage the Jerusalem-centered salvation prophecy of Jer 32 was framed through the "Behold" texts Jer 31:38–40 and 33:14–18 in the same way in order to join it to the Book of Consolation. See also his article "The Literary Frame Surrounding Jeremiah 31,1–33,26," *ZAW* 100 (1988): 409–13. Biddle's hypothesis was adopted and enlarged by 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). Schmid's hypothesis is weak as can be seen from his tortuous argumentation about 33:14–26. Though missing in the Greek text, this section is indispensable for the shaping of Jer 29–33 as it is conceived by him (pp. 55–66).

IV

No more than these three instances of the formula have been passed down.²¹ This is again to be seen from the introduction הַגְּהִימִים בְּאֵים. Except for Amos 9:13, it is only in the three cases of Jer 16:14, 31:27, and 31:39 that it initiates a description of a coming era of salvation, which we have reconstructed as being the literal meaning of the formula. Since the prophecy of salvation at the end of the book of Amos has to be given a late date, it would seem clear that with this genre of prophecy of salvation we have also found the genre in which the introductory formula הַגְּהִימִים בְּאֵים had its original place.

It is noticeable at first glance that with six exceptions the instances of the formula are confined to the book of Jeremiah. Moshe Weinfeld already noted that “The formula הַגְּהִימִים בְּאֵים ... occurs with surprising regularity in Jeremiah (15 times) as compared to the rare occurrence of this introductory phrase in other biblical books.”²²

The promise of the new exodus occurs a second time in 23:7–8 at the end of the sayings to the kings in order to underline Yahweh’s promise in 23:3–4: “I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them,” which on its part serves to balance the threat of v. 2 against the bad shepherds who “have scattered my flock.” This is emphasized by repeating the promise of return from 16:14–15a α , which for the same purpose was applied to the Jewish diaspora in general in v. 8a β : “and of all the countries where I had driven them, and they shall dwell in their land.”²³ In the Greek text 23:7–8 is to be found after 23:40 where it serves to introduce the vision of the two baskets of figs, which argues for the prerogative of the Babylonian Golah. The application to the Babylonian Golah is stressed: “As Yahweh lives who brought home (אֲשֶׁר הֵבִיא)²⁴ the offspring of Israel²⁵ out of the north country.” Compared to 16:14–15a α the application to the offspring (זֵרַע) in 23:7–8a α presents the later stage.

²¹ Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 70, raises the objection: “It is absolutely inadmissible to assume a genre based on one single clear specimen only (16:14–15a).” This may be true; however, the two other instances are based on evident reasons. The argument is not circular.

²² Moshe Weinfeld, “Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel,” *ZAW* 88 (1976): 17–56, esp. 18.

²³ The phrase was still missing when the saying of 16:14–15 par. 23:7–8 was alluded to in 30:3.

²⁴ Later in the Hebrew text the original אֲשֶׁר הֵעֲלָה “who brought up” was also added.

²⁵ The Greek text reads: “the whole offspring of Israel.” The Hebrew text reads: “the offspring of the house of Israel.”

The three remaining salvation sayings, which begin with the formula הַיְהוָה יִמְיָם בְּאִים all promise a saving *event*. The promise in 31:38–40²⁶ that Jerusalem will be rebuilt is, in its continuation of 31:27–34, a subsequently added application of the promise of the new seed of Israel and Judah: "The city shall never again be uprooted or overthrown" (v. 40b, taken from v. 28). The salvation saying in 30:3 constitutes a summary "preface," which was later put before the Book of Consolation. It serves to apply the salvation prophecy of Jer 30–31 to the Babylonian Golah exclusively.²⁷ The promise "And I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers," touches on 16:15b, so that the introduction was probably borrowed from 16:14.²⁸ The Davidic promise in Jer 23:5–6 does not exemplify an independent use of the formula. The announcement "I will raise up for David a righteous branch" gives concrete form to the preceding promise "I will set shepherds over them who will care for them" in 23:4. In its form, this promise links up with 23:7–8 (par. 16:14–15).²⁹

In the oracles to the nations in the book of Jeremiah, and in a number of judgment speeches, the introductory formula הַיְהוָה יִמְיָם בְּאִים is used without an individual *Vorlage* that could be identified. However, these instances are without exception very late. This is obvious when the formula occurs in the oracles to the nations (48:12; 49:2; 51:47, 52; including also 9:24). Outside the book of Jeremiah, we meet the formula in the already mentioned pronouncement of judgment against Eli in 1 Sam 2:27–36. The threat of the anonymous prophet is an interpolation, which clumsily anti-

²⁶ In the Hebrew text of 31:38 בְּאִים is omitted by haplography. Read with the Greek text and *Qere*.

²⁷ See Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Jeremiabuches* (FRLANT 118; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 46: "It is obvious that ... by the heading in Jer 30:1–3 (see esp. v. 3) all salvation oracles in Jer 30:4ff. are applied to the Golah." Also Levin, *Verheißung*, 165–69. This secondary interpretation applies also to 31:27–34 in the annexe to the book of consolation, because the promises of the new seed and of the new covenant do obviously not relate to the Golah. This shows that Biddle, "The Literary Frame," followed by Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 49–50 and 71–85, is wrong, who attributes 30:1–3 and 31:27–34 to the same literary level. Winfried Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26–45* (WMANT 52; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 20–28, puts 30:1–3 and 31:27–34 on one and the same editorial level ("D"), simply for linguistic reasons. He was followed by a number of scholars.

²⁸ Jer 32:44b as well as 31:27, 31 may also have had some influence on 30:3.

²⁹ Jer 23:5–6 is again quoted in Jer 33:14–16 in the frame of the youngest section of the salvation prophecy of Jer 29–33 which is still missing in the Greek text. "I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah," refers to 23:5–6, see Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, 274; Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1986), 637; Gunther Wanke, *Jeremia: Teilband 2* (ZBK.AT 20.2; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2003), 315.

pates the content of the divine revelation to Samuel in 1 Sam 3:2–18.³⁰ Isaiah's proclamation of the Babylonian exile in 2 Kgs 20:17 (par. Isa 39:6) is a late prophecy after the event. "The real Isaiah would of course have threatened the people with the Assyrians, not with the Babylonian exile."³¹ The announcement in Amos 8:11 that a time will come when the people will hunger for Yahweh's word is also late. This theological category of the "word of Yahweh" is as alien to the proclamation of Amos as it is common in the book of Jeremiah.³² The threat against the cows of Bashan of Samaria in Amos 4:2 has also been shown to be a late addition.³³

The tradition history of the formula הַנְּהִי־יָמִים בְּאֵיִם as far as we can follow it, confirms that the particular form of the prophecy of salvation as it has been preserved in the three examples of Jer 16:14–15, 31:27–30, and 31:31–34, is not merely the appropriate place for this introduction in light of its wording but is also its place of origin. Its widespread influence shows on the one hand that the original instances are relatively early, and on the other that the prophecy of salvation which appears here was of no small importance for the further development of the theology of the Old Testament.

V

Moshe Weinfeld already recognized that the three prophetic sayings belong together.³⁴ Probably they were once directly connected in the literary sense as is still the case for 31:27–30 and 31:31–34. The separate position of 16:14–15 could be conditioned by the redactional intervention that has gathered together the prophecies of salvation of the book of Jeremiah into chs. 29–33. In the course of this procedure, 31:27–34 has strayed into the coda to the Book of Consolation, Jer 30–31.

³⁰ See Julius Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs* (4th ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963), 237–38, and many others.

³¹ Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (2d ed.; HKAT III,1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902), 253.

³² Jörg Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos* (ATD 24/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 119–20, identifies the date of Amos 8:11–12 in exilic time.

³³ See Christoph Levin, "Das Amosbuch der Anawim," *ZTK* 94 (1997): 407–36, esp. 425; repr. in idem, *Fortschreibungen*, 265–290, esp. 281.

³⁴ Weinfeld, "Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel." Weinfeld includes 3:16–17 as a fourth instance, but this saying is obviously late, its form depending on 23:7.

Behold, days are coming, says Yahweh,
when it shall no longer be said,
"As Yahweh lives who brought up the Israelites out of the land of Egypt,"
but
"As Yahweh lives who brought up the Israelites out of the north country."

Behold, days are coming, says Yahweh,
when they shall no longer say:
"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."
But every one shall die for his own sin.

Behold, days are coming, says Yahweh,
when no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother,
saying, "Know Yahweh,"
for they shall all know me.

We can assume that the matching form is the result of a common *Sitz im Leben*. But anyone who looks for the occasion of these sayings runs up against difficulties. The three salvation promises are rounded off units. They show no signs of ever having belonged within a wider framework. The prophetic saying of this form looks instead for its starting point itself, by citing its addressees. It carries the dialogue with the listener into the prophet's monologue. The "quotation in the prophetic saying" makes it independent of any particular occasion.³⁵ The prophetic saying is not a reaction to its listeners; it refers to them, and in this way has its occasion within itself. It does not have a *Sitz im Leben* but assumes one wherever it is uttered. Unsatisfactory though this result is from the aspect of the sociology of literature, from a theological point of view it is nevertheless appropriate. The message of salvation would not be truly liberating if it were derived from the situation into which it was spoken.

Admittedly, it would contradict the promise just as much if the recipient's situation were not to find a place in it. The liberty of the proclamation proves itself in its relatedness to the situation. Although it is independent of the occasion and the need, the prophetic saying is spoken in response to a particular contemporary social, political, and religious situation. As can easily be seen, the three cited types of speech that establish this reference to the situation presuppose the experience of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. The deportation has taken place, for otherwise it would be impossible to expect the new exodus from the northern country. The saying about the teeth that are set on edge reflects the impression of the catastrophe, and the promise that responds to the lament does not yet know the pattern of disobedience and judgment which was to be dominant

³⁵ See Hans Walter Wolff, "Das Zitat im Prophetenspruch" (1937), in idem, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (2d ed.; TB 22; Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1973), 36–129.

in later theology. Since the new exodus is seen from the perspective of Judah, the salvation promise probably originated there, and not in Babylon.

VI

For the religious history of Judah, the fall of Jerusalem meant the most profound caesura that it had ever experienced. The change can be read from the three salvation promises. Paradoxically, the radical alteration is shown at the very point where nothing had altered; both before the catastrophe and afterwards, knowledge of Yahweh was lacking:

Every one deceives his neighbour, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they commit iniquity and are too weary to repent. Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, says Yahweh. (Jer 9:4–5)

What the Judeans refused earlier proves to be a painful lack at the time when the teeth are set on edge.³⁶ The neglected duty has changed into an urgent need. Now “each man teaches his neighbour and each his brother, saying, ‘Know Yahweh!’” But it is too late. The self-chosen distance from God has been followed by the eclipse of God.

Jeremiah 31:34 allows us to assume that the knowledge of Yahweh could generally be taught. Hans Walter Wolff termed *יָדַעַת אֱלֹהִים* (“knowledge of God”) as “the primal form of theology.”³⁷ This is appropriate provided that it is taken into account that, if theology is what it should be, it is as practical a science as it is a theoretical one. For the Hebrew’s sense of truth, which with good reason makes no fundamental distinction between the knowing of the right and the doing of it, the knowledge of Yahweh is indissolubly one with the knowledge of Yahweh’s nature as he made it known in his saving acts from Egypt onwards, and with the doing of his will. This is not confuted by the fact that in the time before the judgment had fallen, it is above all the lack of social justice and truth that is the subject of complaint as a result of a lack of the knowledge of Yahweh,

³⁶ We must admit, however, that the theme “missing knowledge of Yahweh” was conceived only in retrospect after Jerusalem fell. Each of the four instances Jer 4:22; 9:2, 5; 22:16 is added to prophetic speech in the form of divine speech. The statement in 9:8 at the end of the passage 9:1–8 is indicative of the situation: “Shall I not punish them for these things? says Yahweh, and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?” Yahweh no longer announces the punishment, but justifies it – after it had arrived. The other instances 2:8; 9:23; 10:25; 22:16 are still later.

³⁷ Hans Walter Wolff, “‘Wissen um Gott’ bei Hosea als Urform von Theologie” (1953), in idem, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, 182–205.

whereas afterwards the longing for the religious interpretation of the catastrophe has come to be seen as a lack of the knowledge of Yahweh.

Jeremiah 31:34 also shows that instruction in the knowledge of God was mutual. Everyone teaches his neighbour, everyone his brother.³⁸ There is no other way, for a religion whose focus is on history needs to be transmitted by instruction. One main occasion for that is upbringing and education. "When your son asks you" (Deut 6:20–25; Exod 13:14; Ps 78; etc.), the father is the instructor in the things relating to God. He does so by means of the short confessions of faith and the series of elementary commandments, whose most important examples, such as the *Shema* and the Decalogue, are used as elements in instruction down to the present day. Knowledge of God (דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים) is the simplest intellectual pursuit of faith: that Israel knows to whom it is indebted from Egypt onwards, and before whom it has to live responsibly. Because without this knowledge faith is dead, דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים stands for the conscious and responsibly accepted relationship to God.

VII

Now we come back to our leading question of remembering and forgetting. Faith of this kind does not rest only on the creed passed down by the fathers. It arises from the fact that the learned formulas and stories fuse with the experience of the present, so that on the basis of the creed the present is experienced as God-in-action, and God-in-action is experienced as present: "Know Yahweh!"

This learning process can break down, as it has done according to Jer 31:34. For this there are two conceivable reasons. For one thing, awareness of the self and awareness of the world of the following generations may have grown away from the order of living in which the faith of the fathers acquired its form. Whereas earlier experience appealed to the creed – to the confession of faith – the present remains mute. Additionally, God's activity at that earlier time and at present may appear to conflict, so that the present crassly contradicts the confession of faith. The two reasons generally go hand in hand. The events that one vainly tries to interpret as God's action are the same events that led to the change of awareness. In

³⁸ There is generally speaking no semantic difference between the pronominal clauses אִישׁ + אָחִיו "someone and his brother" (about 44 instances) and אִישׁ + רֵעֵהוּ "someone and his neighbour" (about 72 instances). This can be seen from Gen 26:31; Exod 10:23; Deut 25:11; 2 Kgs 7:6; Jer 25:26; Ezek 38:21; Joel 2:8. The double expression in Jer 31:34 (also in Exod 32:27; Isa 3:5–6; 19:2; Jer 23:35; 34:17; cf. Jer 9:3) simply stresses the emphasis.

both cases the creed that has been passed down becomes an empty formula. The demand “Know Yahweh!” no longer has any meaning.

The irritation that has replaced the knowledge of Yahweh is drastically expressed in the saying: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”³⁹ The meaning of בָּטָר as “sour grapes” is secured by Isa 18:5 and Job 15:33. The simple mashal is a double three-stress line in synthetic parallelism. It can say more about the catastrophe than a detailed account of the conquest. The biblical saying “The sins of the fathers are visited on the children” has entered the English language as a proverb. In German the same idea is expressed rather differently: “Was die Väter eingebrockt haben, müssen die Kinder auslöffeln.” The facts behind both sayings are the same. The sons suffer vicariously for the errors, mistakes and misdeeds of the fathers.

But if we look more carefully, we see that between the Hebrew and the German saying there is a remarkable difference. The German proverb takes the form of a rule. It teaches an experience that continually determines history. Accordingly the metaphor is something that can be experienced: the spoilt soup is left for the children to eat. In the Hebrew on the other hand the metaphor deliberately tends to the absurd. It denies causality. At the same time the saying is given the form of an established fact. It does not name what is a possible experience for all time, but relates to the present time, which has just been experienced. In this way, it does not appeal for assent, but passionately rejects the attempt to make the present reasonable “by ironically linking together a cause and an effect that have nothing to do with each other.”⁴⁰ This, in despairing rebellion, is the contradiction against the law of history itself, against the inescapable sequence of cause and effect, which is blind to guilt or innocence. It is “the convulsive effort ... to deny that most firmly established of all the lessons of history, that the sons suffer for the sins of the fathers.”⁴¹ It is, in short, the rebellion against God as the Lord of a history in which there is evidently no justice. Instead the proverb declares the logic of history to be nonsensical. The attempt to master the crisis by declaring that disorder is a component of the world order, so as in this way to preserve order, is abandoned in wilful protest.

³⁹ The proverb is found a second time in Ezek 18:2. This is probably taken from Jer 31:29, since the context of Ezek 18:2–4 mirrors the saying of Jer 31:27–30: “As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, this proverb *shall no more be used* by you in Israel. ... The soul that sins shall die (הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַנִּזְנָה הַנִּפְטָא הַיּוֹם תָּמוּת).” So Ezek 18 as a whole is an exposition of Jer 31:27–30. This is not unique in Ezekiel (Compare Ezek 7 with Amos 8:1–2.).

⁴⁰ Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, 253.

⁴¹ Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (trans. J.S. Black and Allan Menzies; Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1885), 307.

The despair that finds expression in the proverb about the teeth that are set on edge allows the real catastrophe of pre-exilic Judah, which is the religious one, to be recognized. Among all the consequences of the downfall the deeply felt eclipse of God was the most threatening. Yahweh had hidden himself in his wrath – or, as Israel's helper, had failed:

If Yahweh is with us, why then has all this befallen us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, "Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?" But now Yahweh has cast us off. (Judg 6:13)

Gideon's complaint about the oppression by the Midianites reflects the mood that reigned in the face of the ruins of Jerusalem.⁴² From the sombre present, thoughts took wing to the early era of salvation when Yahweh proved himself to be Israel's mighty God. The main assertion of the credo became crucial as never before: "As Yahweh lives who brought up the Israelites out of the land of Egypt." And yet the remembrance of God's power and faithfulness was no longer a source of consolation but made the despair even greater. So it bursts from Gideon, as representative of the exilic generation. How could the great deeds of Yahweh in history be reconciled with the disaster that had been experienced? Had Yahweh lost his power, or had he turned his back on his people?

VIII

One can understand how, under these circumstances, the knowledge of Yahweh became the dominant theme of one of the two great exilic prophets: Ezekiel. It was a matter of nothing less than to live his faith in the conditions of God's hiddenness in judgment. Ezekiel's answer to the exilic question about God was paradoxical: Yahweh had imposed his judgment for a single reason alone: "That you shall know that I am Yahweh!" Admittedly, such theological acuteness, which found the solution of the problem by turning experience upside down, could only flourish in the enforced leisure of the exile. In Jerusalem people were far removed from it, and not merely geographically. Rubble is no breeding ground for dogmatics. What was dominant here, if not speechlessness, was complaint. The lack of

⁴² Timo Veijola, "Das Klagegebet in Literatur und Leben der Exilsgeneration am Beispiel einiger Prosatexte," in *Congress Volume Salamanca 1983* (ed. John Emerton; VTSup 36; Leiden: Brill, 1985), 286–307; repr. in idem, *Moses Erben: Studien zum Dekalog, zum Deuteronomismus und zum Schriftgelehrtentum* (BWANT 149; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), 176–91, has shown that Judg 6:13 follows the genre of exilic lament.

knowledge of Yahweh touched prophecy too, and prophecy especially (see Ps 74:9; Lam 2:9).

The three salvation promises in the book of Jeremiah witness to the utmost that which could be said under these circumstances. And that was very little, hardly more than the inevitable attempt at prophetic “first aid” in a situation that was absolutely unendurable. The prophet did not stand apart from the desolation of his contemporaries. Like them, he was trapped in the midst of it. Consequently the starting point of his thinking is not God’s promise but his own human need. He starts not with a liberating new thing but with the “no more” of the oppressive present. He almost yearns for days to come, rather than promises them.

And the blueprint for the future is only the negation of the negative which he sees before him. A time for which the traditional exodus credo has become empty, longs for a new beginning from Yahweh’s side, and the prophet proclaims the new exodus “out of the north country.” A generation, in despair over a stroke of fate that imposes on it the faults and neglects of several decades – indeed ultimately the sum of a whole national history that has gone astray – demands justice, and the prophet promises a time “when everyone shall die for his own sin.” A people whose relationship to God has become hopelessly destroyed, waits for a future when God proves himself to be the self-same God as ever, when the meaning of what he does and the community between Yahweh and Israel will once again become manifest, and the prophet promises a time “when they shall all know Yahweh.”

So this prophecy gives expression to little more than what is in every heart. Its words are a hope that has become a promise, but the hope is fed by complaint. The prophet “offers us really no more than this wish clothed in a promise, without being able to tell us what right he has to promise it. ... The mere assertion that Yahweh will bring it about – which is always confronted by the question why he has not long since done so – is sufficient for him.”⁴³ It seems appropriate that the speech does not begin with the messenger formula, “Thus says Yahweh,” and does not talk about God’s coming acts, but contents itself with invoking a different time.

Nevertheless the prophecy of “the leaden time”⁴⁴ was also spoken and heard as Yahweh’s word. Bound up with it is the assurance: *נְאֻם־יְהוָה* “Yahweh has said it.” That is not merely the usual formula. Here, in the face of everything that is tied up with the situation, something is at work that is beyond the time, which out of the hope for better times allows this to become the message about God’s new time. True, this is not palpable

⁴³ Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, 256, on the author of Jer 31:33a.

⁴⁴ With this term Julius Wellhausen, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (9th ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1958), 142, characterized the period after 586 B.C.E.

from the content, but it is detectible in the decisive freedom with which it holds out the prospect of something different from present conditions. And in fact these words awakened faith among the hearers of the message. They have remained interwoven in the wide web of remembrance, were written down and have been passed on ever since.

IX

Finally, it is noticeable how in these few lines the great themes of later theology are already discernible, creating (1) a new picture of salvation history, (2) as well as one of divine justice in history, and (3) a new concept of the relationship of the Judeans to their deity Yahweh.

(1) Except for the nucleus of the stories of the book of Exodus, it seems that Jer 16:14 is the oldest textual witness of the tradition of the exodus from Egypt to be found in the Old Testament.⁴⁵ The exodus gained its importance for the self-understanding of the Judeans as the "new exodus" only late. The memory of salvation history was "new" right from the start. It is in that shape that the motive returns in the book of Deutero-Isaiah (see esp. Isa 43:16–21; 49:9–12). There too the promise is introduced with the words: "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing" (Isa 43:18). Thus speaks Yahweh, whom the prophet has beforehand called to the mind of his listeners as the God of the exodus of old. The former history is recalled to memory and at the same time is dismissed. So here too the recollecting reference to salvation history thrusts forward to the emphatically exclusive vista of the future. Salvation history serves as the blueprint of the future.

(2) In a similar way the proverb about the teeth that are set on edge already indicates the way the crisis was to be surmounted in the context of a theology of history. The reference to the sour grapes that the fathers have eaten contains in a nutshell the theologumenon about the "sins of the fathers" which for the following generations became the key to their understanding of history, beginning with Sinai down to Judah's catastrophe. In fact, the Old Testament's narrative shows the yearning for God's justice nearly on every page, in many cases added by later editors dealing again and again with this fundamental theological issue.

Furthermore, the promise of 31:30 "every one shall die for his own sin" turns the justification of the divine judgment into the indictment and admonition of the present generation, a move that can be seen repeatedly in the later prose speeches in the book of Jeremiah: the contemporaries, who

⁴⁵ See Levin, *Verheißung*, 48–50.

were subjected to the consequences of the judgment and to the challenges that were bound up with them, had reverted to the sins of the fathers (11:10), and had sinned as their fathers had taught them (9:13), indeed worse than them (7:26; 16:12). The way the later theology of history shattered the subjective innocence of the generation of the given present is still not in sight. But by setting Yahweh's promise over against the dissension, the self-righteousness of those affected by the disaster is severely shaken. It is of decisive importance for the future religious history of Israel that the sins of the fathers were no longer pushed aside, but were accepted and acknowledged as their own history (3:25; 14:20). In this way the confrontation with history could become fruitful for the future.

(3) What is still missing, however, is that the sin should be interpreted as an infringement of the First Commandment, as was later to become the rule: "Because your fathers have forsaken me, says Yahweh, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshipped them" (Jer 16:11). The claim for monolatry, which is the mark of the Old Testament, was introduced only later. It got its shape from the (originally political) concept of the covenant, i.e., the vassal treaty between Yahweh and Israel whose subject is the divine demand to be worshipped exclusively. Applied to the religious practice of everybody, it served to continue the relationship between Yahweh and his people after the loss of the monarchy that until then guaranteed and enabled the connection with the divine. The metaphor of Yahweh's covenant became the most important theological term coined in the Old Testament. Substantially this is nothing other than that which in its own way the earlier prophecy wanted to express when in Jer 31:34 it offered the prospect of an era when the knowledge of Yahweh will be attainable for everyone.