

Voting with One's Feet

Emigration as a Matter of Choice in the Jeremiah Narratives¹

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In and out of prison, down into the pit and up again, out of the city and off to Egypt: Jeremiah² seems to be constantly on the move within the narratives in Jer 37–43. Changes of location in these chapters are often related to particular political stances in the final phase of the Judean monarchy. Common readings of Jer 37–43 assume that Jeremiah's movements – whether voluntary or forced – also have political significance. Does Jeremiah thus convey a political message not only in his words, but also by his changes of place – is he, as it were, voting with his feet? In the present article, I will explore whether Jeremiah's movements in Jer 37:11–16; 40:1–6; and 43:6 take on political significance within the world of the narrative. In other words, does the text indicate that the changes of location express a political (or, theopolitical) stance? Close attention to textual difficulties in these chapters will show that a political motivation for Jeremiah's movements is not stated explicitly. Rather, the texts suggest that Jeremiah's changes of place follow the requirements of the narrative and correspond to a particular understanding of his prophetic role. It is Jeremiah's words that communicate the prophetic (and political) message. His feet, however, serve to keep the message close by the people on their dissenting way.

¹I would like to thank the organizers and participants of the conference for inspiring discussions. In particular, I thank Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor for her helpful suggestions on the manuscript.

²I use the term "Jeremiah," as well as all other personal names in Jer 37–43, to designate the literary persona.

1. Introduction: Choice, Movement, and Politics in Jeremiah 37–43

1.1. Choice

A cursory reading of the so-called Deuteronomistic History gives the impression that the story runs inexorably towards its tragic end. The wrongdoing of the people necessarily leads to their eventual doom, and even a good king like Josiah cannot change this course of events.

Unlike in the books of Kings, however, the narratives in Jer 37–43 do not present the end of the kingdom of Judah and the deportation of its population as a necessary consequence of earlier wrong behaviour. Rather, destruction and loss of the land are presented as the consequence of a series of fatal decisions.³ In particular, Jer 38 narrates how King Zedekiah fails to make the decision commended by Jeremiah, that is, to surrender to the Babylonians. In several instances in this chapter (Jer 38:2, 17, 21), Jeremiah calls upon the king to make a decision. His choice between two alternative options will entail two alternative outcomes. Moreover, the fate of the land does not lie in the hands of the king alone. In the book of Jeremiah, individuals can and should make choices. The idea of individual political agency is not without risks: Jeremiah's call to defect to the Babylonians (Jer 21:9; 38:2) brought trouble upon him not only within the narrative but also in the history of reception.⁴

1.2. Movement

In the Jeremiah narratives, choices have a spatial dimension; they generally involve or entail a change of place. The political decisions narrated in Jer 37–43 are almost all linked to movement: People choose whether they stay or go, and if they go, where to (e. g., 38:17–18; 40:4; 42:13–14). It has often been noted that the narrative in Jer 37–43 contains many references to movement and changes of place.⁵ Most of the movements

³In addition to Zedekiah's fatal decision in Jer 38 (contrary to Jeremiah's advice, he does not surrender to the Babylonians), see Jer 40:17 (contrary to Johanan's advice, Gedaliah does not assassinate Ishmael) and Jer 42–43 (contrary to Jeremiah's advice, the people do not remain in Judah).

⁴"To advocate a policy of capitulation on the regular government is one thing, but to incite soldiers or civilians to break their allegiance and go over to the enemy is a disloyal and treasonable act, which every right-minded man would condemn as inexcusable under any circumstances whatsoever." J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 261–262.

⁵For an analysis of verbs of movement within these chapters, see S. Laufer, "Should We Stay or Should We Go?: A Study of Narrative Space in Jeremiah 37–45" (PhD diss.,

related in these chapters involve a decision on the part of the protagonists: In Jer 37, Jeremiah freely decides to leave the city of Jerusalem during a temporary break in the Babylonian siege. In Jer 40, the Babylonian officer Nebuzaradan urges Jeremiah to choose whether he wants to go to Babylonia or to stay in Judah with Gedaliah. Finally, chs. 42–43 present the emigration of the remaining people to Egypt as a voluntary decision.

On the other hand, there are also forced displacements in Jer 37–43, and Jeremiah's freedom of movement, in particular, is restrained by enclosed spaces. Until the Babylonian conquest, no one in this narrative leaves the city; all the action takes place within Jerusalem. Jeremiah's attempt to leave the city in Jer 37 leads to his imprisonment, thus restricting his scope of action even further. The nadir of the story is reached when Jeremiah is confined in a pit (in 38:6) – “sunk in the mud is Jeremiah's lowest and deepest position.”⁶ With his feet stuck in the mud, Jeremiah cannot speak or act. His freedom of movement (or lack thereof) is directly tied to his theological mission and his political intervention.⁷

1.3. Politics

The voluntary and involuntary movements in Jer 37–43 also have a political dimension. Jeremiah is depicted as a political figure, his prophetic interventions advocating a particular stance in the conflict with the Babylonians and of direct concern to the future of the Judaeen community. In his message, the political positioning is connected to spatial positioning and to movement, as in his repeated statement:

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 98–140. As pointed out by H. Kremers, “Leidensgemeinschaft mit Gott im Alten Testament,” *EvTh* 13 (1953): 122–140, 131, and G. Wanke, *Untersuchungen zur sogenannten Baruchsschrift* (BZAW 122; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971), 92, each scene in Jer 37:11–40:6 concludes with the formulaic statement of Jeremiah's location (וַיִּשָׁב יְרֵמְיָהוּ).

⁶B. Green, “Sunk in the Mud: Literary Correlation and Collaboration between King and Prophet in the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Jeremiah Invented: Constructions and Deconstructions of Jeremiah* (ed. E. K. Holt and C. J. Sharp; LHBOTS 595; London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 34–48, 36.

⁷For an interpretation of Jeremiah's confinements in Jer 37–38 as “an attempt to silence Jeremiah, the word of God,” see E. K. Holt, “The Potent Word of God: Remarks on the Composition of Jeremiah 37–44,” in *Troubling Jeremiah* (ed. A. R. Diamond, K. M. O'Connor and Louis Stulman; JSOTSup 260; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 161–170, 164–165. It is noteworthy that, as in Jer 40:1, Jeremiah depends on a foreigner to liberate him from his situation of helplessness.

Those who stay (בָּשָׁר) in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but those who go out (לְצָר) to the Babylonians shall live, and have their lives as spoils. (Jer 38:2 // 21:9 MT)⁸

Accordingly, people's whereabouts and movements related in Jer 37–43 have political implications. Zedekiah refuses to move out of Jerusalem against Jeremiah's theopolitical advice. Similarly, in Jer 43, the people do not listen to Jeremiah's sermon and decide to move to Egypt, that is, out of the realm of Babylonian sovereignty. Jeremiah's own movements also raise political issues: His attempt to leave Jerusalem in ch. 37 arouses suspicion of defection. The fact that he joins the community in Mizpah is often interpreted as theological support for Gedaliah's rule. Jeremiah's emigration to Egypt, in contrast, is considered a forced move against his will and own advice.

In what follows, I will re-examine the possible political significance of Jeremiah's movements in chs. 37; 40; and 43 and argue that Jeremiah's changes of location do not express a political stance in these narratives. The three texts I will discuss have two points in common. First, in each case there is a strong exegetical tradition concerning the motivation for Jeremiah's movement. Second, in these texts, the motivation for Jeremiah's movement is not stated explicitly in the dialogue (in contrast, cf. Jer 38:19; 42:14). Moreover, textual difficulties obscure the choice or decision which leads to the narrated movement. In exegetical discussions, the evaluation of the textual difficulties often falls back eventually on assumptions about the historical facts of Jeremiah's life or about Jeremiah's character. In the following reading, I will try to avoid this kind of argument and keep to the text and its possible meanings.

2. Jeremiah 37:11–16

In Jer 37, Jeremiah appears to be voting with his feet when he attempts to leave the city of Jerusalem, especially if we compare the impact of movement in ch. 37 to a parallel account in ch. 38. It has often been noted that the plot of Jer 38:1–13 shares some features with Jer 37. In both stories, Jeremiah is a free man in the beginning (37:4; 38:1). Subsequently, he is arrested (37:14–15; 38:6) and held under life-threatening conditions (37:20; 38:9–10). After an intervention, Jeremiah is then moved to the

⁸Biblical translations are my own, made with close reference to the NRSV.

courtyard, where both stories end (וישב ירמיהו בחצר המטרה; 37:21 // 38:13).⁹ Therefore, the two stories have been considered parallel accounts or “variations on a theme” (R. Carroll).¹⁰ For the topic of the present study, it is noteworthy that while in ch. 38 Jeremiah is arrested because of what he *says*, in ch. 37 he is arrested because of where he *goes*. In ch. 38, Jeremiah obediently proclaims Yhwh’s words (cf. the prophetic messenger formula “Thus says Yhwh:...,” 38:2, 3) and is arrested without any resistance (as far as we are told). The image of Jeremiah in ch. 37 is quite different: without any divine order, Jeremiah decides to leave the city and defends himself when arrested.¹¹ Whereas in 38:2 Jeremiah *prophesies* that one should go out (יצא) rather than stay in Jerusalem, in 37:12 this is what he *does* (ויצא ירמיהו מירושלם). Is Jeremiah thus voting with his feet in 37:12? A closer look at Jer 37:11–16 and its textual difficulties is needed to discuss this question. As we will see, in all possible translations of the difficult phrase that conveys Jeremiah’s motivation, he appears to leave Jerusalem for personal reasons rather than as a political statement.

When the Babylonian army had withdrawn from Jerusalem at the approach of the Pharaoh’s army, Jeremiah set out to leave Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin to חלק [see discussion below] from there among the people. As he arrived at the Benjamin gate, there was a sentinel whose name was Irijah son of Shelemiah son of Hananiah, and he seized Jeremiah the prophet saying: “You are deserting to the Babylonians!” And Jeremiah said: “That is a lie! I am not deserting to the Babylonians.” And he did not listen to him, and Irijah seized Jeremiah and brought him to the officials. The officials were angry at Jeremiah and beat him and put him in prison, in the house of Jonathan the scribe (for they had made it into a prison). ‘Thus’¹²

⁹Moreover, in both stories the “Benjamin Gate” plays a special role (37:13; 38:7).

¹⁰R. P. Carroll, *The Book of Jeremiah* (OTL; London: SCM, 1986), 672. For the view that Jer 37 and 38 are parallel accounts of the same events, see Skinner, *Prophecy*, 258–259, n. 1; followed by J. Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 233; W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah: Vol. II: Commentary on Jeremiah XXVI–LII* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 968–969; and others. R. Goldstein, “Rumors and Lies: Zedekiah and Ancient Forms of Dealing with the Existence of Rival Narratives [Hebrew],” in *Shai le-Sara Japhet: Studies in the Bible, Its Exegesis and Language* (ed. M. Bar-Asher et al.; Jerusalem: Bialik, 2007), 23–36, argues that the account in Jer 38 corrects the weak image of the prophet in Jer 37 (I would like to thank the author for providing me with an English translation of this article).

¹¹This is all the more salient if one understands that Jeremiah is the subject of Jer 37:14a, with P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia* (KAT 10; Leipzig: Deichert, 1922), 332. While many commentators assume that *Irijah* did not listen to Jeremiah, the syntax suggests that Jeremiah is the subject of the sentence, meaning that “Jeremiah attempted to ignore or shrug off the accusation, to thrust aside the challenge and go through the gate, but was physically restrained by Irijah” (McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 928).

¹²The MT כִּי בֵּא is unintelligible and might be a scribal error influenced by the preceding כִּי. My translation follows Driver’s suggestion to emend to כִּה; see S. R. Driver, *The Book*

Jeremiah was put in the cistern house, in the vaults^[2], and Jeremiah stayed there for many days. (Jer 37:11–16 MT)

Verse 11 sets the stage¹³ for the following story: The Babylonians (temporarily) lifted the siege, which made it possible to leave the city. Verse 12 tells us that Jeremiah goes out of Jerusalem: ויצא ירמיהו מירושלם. Readers might be reminded of the prophetic recommendation to leave the city in Jer 21:9 // 38:2: “Those who go out (היצא) to the Babylonians shall live!” However, since the Babylonians are no longer outside the gates, the reader might wonder whether Jeremiah actually intends to defect to the Babylonians. Indeed, a different explanation follows: ללכת ארץ בנימן. Considering that Benjamin is Jeremiah’s homeland (Jer 1:1; 32:8, 44), this might provide sufficient explanation for him to go there. But the text adds another final clause, and this is where things start to get quite mysterious: לחלק משם בתוך העם. In particular, the meaning of לחלק is uncertain. I will discuss various options and argue that the verb most probably conveys the idea of Jeremiah leaving the city on personal grounds rather than in the interest of a larger community, namely to *escape*.

If we read only the consonants, the term לחלק looks like a *qal* infinitive לְחַלֵּק.¹⁴ This is indeed what the Vulgate, the Peshitta, and the Targum seem to read.¹⁵ They all translate “to divide” which corresponds to חלק II *qal* “to divide, to apportion.” However, this reading does not fit easily with the rest of the sentence, which they render rather freely as “to divide

of the Prophet Jeremiah: A Revised Translation with Introductions and Short Explanations (2nd ed.; New York: Scribner, 1908), 230. Others emend to ויבא with LXX (καὶ ἦλθεν), cf. C. H. Cornill, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1905), 398; W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (3rd ed.; HAT 12; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968), 238.

¹³The syntactic function of ויהי is disputed among scholars. While many commentators assume an original reading ויהי, cf. H.-J. Stipp, “w’=hayā für nichtiterative Vergangenheit?: Zu syntaktischen Modernisierungen im masoretischen Jeremiabuch,” in *Text, Methode und Grammatik* (ed. W. Gross, H. Irsigler and T. Seidl; St. Ottilien: Eos-Verl., 1991), 521–547; others argue that ויהי introduces background information. Adhering to the latter interpretation, H. Migsch, *Gottes Wort über das Ende Jerusalems: Eine literar-, stil- und gattungskritische Untersuchung des Berichtes Jeremia 34,1–7; 32,2–5; 37,3–38,28* (ÖBS 2; Klosterneuburg: Verl. Österr. Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981), 133–134, n. 60, and B. Isaksson, “‘Aberrant’ Usages of Introductory w’haya in the Light of Text Linguistics,” in *‘Lasset uns Brücken bauen ...’: Collected Communications to the XVth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Cambridge 1995* (ed. K.-D. Schunck and M. Augustin; BEAT 42; Frankfurt a. M., New York: P. Lang, 1998), 9–25, 22 argue that the main narrative resumes with ויהי in v. 13. This interpretation of the narrative syntax converges with my conclusion (see below) that Jeremiah’s reason for leaving the city (v. 12) is a necessary presupposition for the story rather than its focus.

¹⁴Or *piel* לְחַלֵּק “to apportion.”

¹⁵Thus Cornill, *Jeremia*, 396.

there (משם instead of משם) a property (object added).¹⁶ Perhaps this is why the Masoretes transmitted a different vocalisation: לְחַלֵּק, a *hiphil* infinitive.¹⁷ Most commentators derive this unique form from חֲלַק II *qal* “to divide,” translating the *hiphil* as “to perform a division (of an inheritance)”¹⁸ and assume that it refers to the division of land. This interpretation not only is in line with the Vulgate (and other versions), it is further suggested by the use of חֲלַק and בְּתוֹךְ in similar contexts (e. g., Num 18:20).¹⁹ However, the *hiphil* of חֲלַק II “to divide” is not attested in any other instance.²⁰ Moreover, it is difficult to make sense of משם in this interpretation. Some commentators venture a connection to Jeremiah's purchase of a field in the land of Benjamin, narrated in Jer 32.²¹ However, a historicizing reading of the symbolic prophetic action in Jer 32 seems problematic. Moreover, there is no verbal connection between Jer 37:12 and Jer 32. In other words, the interpretation that Jeremiah leaves the city because he has to divide a property in his homeland is no more than an educated guess.

The reading proposed by the Septuagint could be related to this exegetical tradition. In place of the Hebrew לְחַלֵּק, the Greek text reads

¹⁶Thus the Vulgate (*divideret ibi possessionem*); similarly Peshitta and Targum. משם should not be assimilated to שם without further explanation (*contra* Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 238, followed by H.-J. 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* [Frankfurt a. M.: Hain, 1992], 162; with Cornill, *Jeremia*, 396; McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 926), since out of more than 100 attestations of משם in the Hebrew Bible, Isa 65:20 (adduced as evidence for משם = שם by Rudolph) is, to my knowledge, the only case where משם could be taken to mean “there” (but probably rather “from that place,” referring to inhabitants).

¹⁷The regular *hiphil* infinitive would be לְחַלֵּיק; the present form must be taken as a defective writing with elided ה at the beginning, cf. W. Gesenius, *Hebräische Grammatik* (ed. E. Kautzsch, repr. 28th ed.; Hildesheim: Olms, 1991 [= 1909]), §53q.

¹⁸Thus Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 238, followed by W. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (ed. R. Meyer and H. Donner; trans. Udo Rüter-swörden; 18th ed.; Heidelberg: Springer, 2013): “eine Erbteilung vornehmen;” HALOT *s.v.* suggests “to take part in the dividing.”

¹⁹See also Josh 15:13 (בְּתוֹךְ חֲלַק בְּנֵי־יוֹדָה); Prov 17:2 (בְּתוֹךְ אַחִים יִחַלֵּק נַחֲלָה); cf. K.-F. Pohlmann, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Jeremiabuches* (FRLANT 118; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978), 60, n. 73.

²⁰One might doubt whether such a technical legal term, if it existed, would not be attested in any other text within or outside the Hebrew Bible; cf. Cornill, *Jeremia*, 396.

²¹Cf. Volz, *Jeremia*, 333; Bright, *Jeremiah*, 229; Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 237; A. Weiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia* (6th ed.; ATD 20/21; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), 333–334, n. 4; W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26–52* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 288; C. R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW 176; Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1989), 256.

ἀγοράσαι “to buy” from there. Some manuscripts further add the object ἄρτον “bread,” meaning that Jeremiah intended to leave the besieged city in order to purchase food from his homeland.²² This reading makes good sense. However, it is unclear how the Hebrew לַחֲלֵק might have derived from a Hebrew text meaning “to purchase.” The Greek text might have read a different *Vorlage* (i. e., לַקֵּחַ),²³ but the sense would not be very clear since the object is missing. It seems more plausible that the Greek text already encountered a difficult Hebrew text and tried to make sense of it.

A further interpretation takes לַחֲלֵק to mean that Jeremiah is making an exit. Commentators since the Middle Ages have suggested that לַחֲלֵק in this verse has the meaning “to slip” out of Jerusalem²⁴ or “to fade” into the crowd.²⁵ They derived the form from חֲלַק I “to be smooth” – the *hiphil* of this verb, meaning “to make smooth,” is well attested²⁶ – and suggested that the term might be used here in a figurative sense. The same meaning can be ascribed to לַחֲלֵק without recourse to a figurative sense. As Sperber proposed, לַחֲלֵק could be a *qal* infinitive of a verb חֲלַק III, related to Akk. *ḫalāqum* “to run away.”²⁷ The interpretation of לַחֲלֵק in the sense “to run away” has the advantage of making better sense of both מִשָּׁם and בְּתוֹךְ מִשָּׁם. מִשָּׁם can be translated in its usual sense “from there.” בְּתוֹךְ הָעַם is used in Jer 39:14; 40:5, 6²⁸ in closing formulas stating Jeremiah’s

²²The reading is common in manuscripts representing or influenced by the Lucianic text, cf. J. Ziegler, *Ieremias. Baruch. Threni, Epistula Ieremiae* (vol. 15 of *Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum/Societatis Scientiarum Göttingensis auctoritate*; 2nd ed; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976) and for discussion McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 926–927.

²³Cf. A. W. Streane, *The Double Text of Jeremiah (Massoretic and Alexandrian) Compared* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1896), 243; Cornill, *Jeremia*, 396; followed by Migsch, *Gottes Wort*, 20.

²⁴This meaning is suggested by medieval lexicographers, cf. McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 927. According to M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005 [=1943]), s.v., חֲלַק *hiphil* is used in the sense of “to slip” in rabbinic literature (‘Erub. X, 14; B. Meš. VI, 3). The KJV (following Kimchi) translates “to separate himself thence in the midst [sic] of the people” and notes in the margin “Or, to slip away from thence in the midst of the people” (I quote the reprint *The Holy Bible: An Exact Reprint in Roman Type, Page for Page, of the Authorized Version Published in the Year 1611* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985]).

²⁵Cf. W. Gesenius, *Thesaurus philologicus criticus linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae Veteris Testamenti* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1835), 384 (“um sich von da unter dem Volke zu verlieren”) who refers to 1 Sam 23:28 for חֲלַק *hiphil* being related to the idea of escape. A medieval Greek manuscript reading ἀποδρασαι (“to escape,” ms. 239) points to the same understanding.

²⁶Mostly in figurative use (“to flatter”); cf. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch* and HALOT s.v. חֲלַק I (e. g., Prov 2:16; Ps 5:10).

²⁷Cf. J. Sperber, “Zu Jer. 37,12,” *OLZ* 19 (1916): 132 (“um von dort zu entfliehen unter dem Volk”); this interpretation is also proposed by M. Tsevat, “חֲלַק II,” *TDOT* IV (1980): 450.

²⁸The attestation in Jer 37:4 is uncertain, since LXX reads διὰ μέσου τῆς πόλεως “through the midst of the city.” It is possible that the Hebrew *Vorlage* contained בְּתוֹךְ הָעַם (thus

whereabouts at the end of an episode. In both cases, it refers to people outside Jerusalem, and Jeremiah dwells among them as a free man (in contrast to his preceding confinement).²⁹ The same meaning could apply in Jer 37:12.³⁰

The ancient versions thus attest to a variety of exegetical traditions explaining Jeremiah's reason to leave the city. None of them suggests Jeremiah follows a divine order. Rather, he appears to act on his own initiative and for some personal reason. The Hebrew text obscures rather than explains the motivation Jeremiah has to leave the city by piling up final clauses and – if the translation of לָלֶךְ “to run away” is correct – by using an uncommon term. It does not suggest, however, that Jeremiah is putting into practice the prophetic advice of Jer 21:8 // 38:2. The idea of defection to the Babylonians is brought up only by the guard, and the text does not raise doubts about Jeremiah's protest in v. 13.³¹ If Jeremiah could be regarded as “voting with his feet” in this passage, he seems merely concerned about his own well-being. The text does not present his leaving the city as a political action in the sense that it would affect a community of people.

3. Jeremiah 40:1–6

As there are two accounts of Jeremiah's imprisonment, there are also two accounts of how he was released by the Babylonians and settled with Gedaliah at Mizpah. The first account is very brief. In the short version attested by the Greek text, Jeremiah's release immediately follows the

McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 923) and was changed in other manuscripts to בתוך העם, which is more frequent in the context of Jer 37–40.

²⁹Cf. *ibid.*, 981 (on 39:14): “וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּתוֹךְ הָעָם” is certainly an idiomatic expression for ‘and he enjoyed complete freedom of movement.’”

³⁰Many commentators suggest instead that the phrase must have a different meaning in Jer 37:12 than in 39:14; 40:5, 6 and relate it to family; cf. among others Volz, *Jeremia*, 333, Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 238; implicitly also Cornill, *Jeremia*, 396 (“Familienangelegenheiten”). Against this view, Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 288 rightly points out that in Jer 37:12 the definite article is used rather than a pronominal suffix (as in 2 Kgs 4:13, for instance).

³¹The case might be slightly different in the LXX, where Jeremiah is stopped by “a person with whom he used to lodge” (ἄνθρωπος παρ’ ᾧ κατέλυε, Jer 44:13 LXX). As P. Diamond suggested, in this version the situation is more ambiguous: “The reader ... is caught between the knowledge of the privileged narrator (v. 12) and the knowledge of Jeremiah's privileged associate” (A. R. P. Diamond, “Portraying Prophecy: Of Doublets, Variants and Analogies in the Narrative Representation of Jeremiah's Oracles – Reconstructing the Hermeneutics of Prophecy,” *JSTOT* 57 [1993]: 99–119, 104).

Babylonians' takeover of the city of Jerusalem in Jer 39:3 and fits into a single verse (39:14):³²

And they [= the Babylonian officers] sent and took Jeremiah from the court of the guard. They entrusted him to Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan and released him. So he stayed in the midst of the people.

In this account, Jeremiah is treated by the Babylonians more or less like an object; he ends up with Gedaliah because the Babylonian officers put him there. The second account in Jer 40, to which I will now turn, presents a different version which seems to involve a choice on the part of Jeremiah. Many commentators consider Jeremiah's choice as the very *raison d'être* of this passage and invest it with theopolitical significance. For instance, Robert Carroll states: "The presentation of Jeremiah as actively *choosing* to stay in Judah and associate himself with Gedaliah underwrites the legitimation of the community with its centre at Mizpah."³³

Jer 40:1–6 reads in the shorter version of the Greek text:

The word that came from the Lord to Ieremias after Nabouzardan the chief cook³⁴ from Dama sent him off, when he took him in handcuffs in the midst of the exile of Iouda, those led away to Babylon. And the chief cook took him and said to him, "The Lord, your God, has given in oracles these evils against this place, and the Lord acted, because you sinned against him and did not obey his voice. Behold, I have released you from the handcuffs on your hands. If it is good before you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will set my eyes on you. But if not, depart, and return to Godolias son of Achikam son of Saphan, whom the king of Babylon has appointed in the land of Iouda, and live with him among the people in the land of Iouda. Go to all that is good in your eyes to go to." And the chief cook gave him presents and sent

³²The MT has a slightly longer version, in which Jeremiah's release is attributed to an order by the Babylonian king (39:11–12). It is likely that here MT represents a secondary extension of the account, adding in vv. 4–10 details on the taking of Jerusalem from Jer 52 and in vv. 11–13 Nebuchadnezzar's concern for Jeremiah. See, among others, Stipp, *Jeremia*, 176–177; P. M. Bogaert, "La libération de Jérémie et le meurtre de Godolias: le texte court (LXX) et la rédaction longue (TM)," in *Studien zur Septuaginta* (ed. D. Fraenkel; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 312–322; McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 976–81.

³³Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 700; cf. similarly C. Hardmeier, *Prophetie im Streit vor dem Untergang Judas: Erzählkommunikative Studien zur Entstehungssituation der Jesaja- und Jeremiaerzählungen in II Reg 18–20 und Jer 37–40* (BZAW 187; Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 215; S. V. Davidson, "Chosen Marginality as Resistance in Jeremiah 40:1–6," in *Jeremiah (Dis)Placed: New Directions in Writing/Reading Jeremiah* (ed. A. R. P. Diamond and Louis Stulman; LHBOTS 529; London, New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 150–161, 150. This view is held by many commentators, cf. Stipp, *Jeremia*, 179 ("Der Abschnitt dient anerkanntermaßen dem Ziel, zu betonen, daß Jeremia die Nähe Gedaljas gesucht habe, und zwar aus freien Stücken und obgleich Alternativen offengestanden hätten.").

³⁴ἀρχιμάγειρος, literally "chief cook," is the usual rendering of רב־טבח־ים and similar titles in the Septuagint; cf. Gen 37:16; 2 Kgs 25:8; Jer 41:10; 52:14; Dan 2:14; etc.

him off. And he went to Godolias at Massepha and settled among the people who were left in the land. (Jer 47:1–6 LXX, translation: NETS)

The MT is considerably longer and seems to present in some instances a conflated text.³⁵ Both the Greek and the Hebrew text contain a number of interpretive problems, but I will focus here only on issues related to choice and movement.

It is noteworthy that the presentation of Jeremiah's choice is more elaborate in the MT. Thus, v. 4 MT reads:

Now look, I release you today from the fetters on your hands. If it is good in your eyes to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will keep my eye on you (i. e., take good care of you³⁶); but if it is bad in your eyes to come with me to Babylon, leave it. See, the whole land is before you; go wherever it is good and right in your eyes to go. (Jer 40:4 MT)

The longer text of the MT shows a tendency to emphasize the voluntary nature of Jeremiah's movement and his free choice.³⁷ The phrase "the land is before you" is used three times in the book of Genesis (Gen 13:9; 20:15; 47:6). In each of these texts, a landlord offers someone a place to live.³⁸ The closest parallel is found in Gen 13:9:³⁹

Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me! If you take the left hand, I will go to the right; and if you take the right hand, I will go to the left. (Gen 13:9 MT)

Like Jeremiah, Lot is given the choice between two options (left or right). The reason for Lot's choice is explicit in Gen 13: Lot looks at the land and prefers the more fertile region. The narrator's remark "this was before Yhwh had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah" (13:10) immediately foreshadows that – despite all appearances – Lot's choice will turn out to be not as good as it seemed. If the allusion to Gen 13 is intended in Jer 40 MT, one might wonder whether the gruesome ending of Gedaliah's rule is already anticipated here. Rather than supporting Gedaliah's legitimacy through Jeremiah's choice, the Masoretic wording of Jer 40 might actually cast some doubt on whether Mizpah really is the place to be.

Moreover, a textual difficulty in the Masoretic text of v. 5 calls into question whether Jeremiah is really choosing as freely as many commentators

³⁵Cf. J. G. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (HSM 6; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 22; McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 998–999.

³⁶Cf. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch*, 956; the same phrase is used in Jer 39:12.

³⁷A similar tendency is evident in Jer 39:12 (absent from the Greek text).

³⁸For a discussion of the allusion to Gen 13:9; 20:15 and 47:6 in Jer 40:4, cf. J. Hill, "Jeremiah 40.1–6: an appreciation," in *Seeing Signals, Reading Signs: The Art of Exegesis* (ed. M. O'Brien et al.; JSOTSup 415; London, New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 135–137.

³⁹The similarity was noted already by Streane, *Double Text*, 249.

suggest. The meaning of *ועודנו לא־ישוב ושבָה* at the beginning of v. 5 is unclear. Some commentators suggest heavy emendation so as to reach a shorter text similar to the Greek, which translates: “If it is good in your eyes to remain, (then) turn back to Gedaliah ...”⁴⁰ It seems doubtful, however, whether the MT and the confusion attested in the versions could have developed from such a clear and simple text.⁴¹ It is possible that the shorter Greek text smooths out a difficult Hebrew *Vorlage* closer to the MT of v. 5. In this case, v. 5a would have interrupted Nebuzaradan’s discourse. The Hebrew text can be translated either “he was not yet turning”⁴² or “he had not yet answered,”⁴³ which would be short for “Jeremiah had not yet turned *or* answered when Nebuzaradan went on: Make your way to Gedaliah ...”⁴⁴ Reading v. 5a with the MT as an interruption of Nebuzaradan’s discourse, the choice is not made freely by Jeremiah but rather is strongly suggested by Nebuzaradan. Barthélémy’s attempt to avoid this consequence underlines the fact that he has sensed this implication when he explains: “Jeremiah hesitates to express his refusal of the generous offer made to him. But Nebuzaradan, realizing his lack of enthusiasm, wants to ease his mind by issuing as an order what he senses to be Jeremiah’s desire.”⁴⁵ This attempt to attribute the decision to Jeremiah

⁴⁰The emendation goes back to Volz, *Jeremia*, 346. He eliminates *אם טוב בעיניך לשוב ושבָה* in v. 4 as dittography to the similar phrase in v. 5 and emends *אֶל־ישוב וְעוֹדְנוּ אֶל־טוֹב* (v. 4*.5) to *אם טוב בעיניך לשוב ושבָה*. His suggestion is followed by Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 246, and Wanke, *Untersuchungen*, 104–105.

⁴¹The Septuagint text does not represent *ועודנו לא־ישוב ושבָה*. Some Greek manuscripts closer to the MT, however, read a first person (*καὶ ἕως ἔμοῦ ἔτι οὐκ ἐπιστρέψεις*, Origen’s recension; similarly ms. 233, Q^{mg}; *καὶ πρὶν ἢ ἀπαλλαγῶ ἐγὼ*, Lucianic recension and Theodoret); cf. also the Vulgate (*et mecum noli venire*). The Targum reads “if you do not want to return.”

⁴²Cf. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 242; similarly Hardmeier, *Prophetie*, 215 (“noch war er einer, der nicht zurückkehren wollte”). J. M. Abrego, *Jeremías y el final del reino: Lectura sincrónica de Jer 36–45* (Estudios del Antiguo Testamento 3; Valencia: Institución San Jerónimo, 1983), 95 translates “;Y aun así no se volvía!” and points to Job 2:3 as a parallel. However, it should be noted that *עוֹד* + suffix is generally followed by a participle (as in Job 2:3); the only other attestation of a conjugated verb, Lam 4:17, is a poetic text with textual difficulties.

⁴³Cf. F. E. König, *Historisch-kritisches Lehrgebäude der hebräischen Sprache. Band III. 2. Hälfte 2. Teil: Historisch-comparative Syntax der Hebräischen Sprache* (repr., Hildesheim/New York: Georg Olms Verl., 1979 [=1897]) II/2 §383b (“und noch war er einer, der nicht erwiederte [*sic*],” correcting to *יָשׁוּב*); McKane, *Jeremiah II*, 1000–1001.

⁴⁴Cf. *ibid.* and Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch*, 931. A different interpretation is proposed by M. Dijkstra, “Legal Irrevocability (*lō’ yāšūb*) in Ezekiel 7.13,” *JSOT* 43 (1989): 109–116, 113, who reads the clause as a legal “formula of irrevocability” (“As long as he [=Jeremiah] lives, let nobody go back [on this decree]”); but the texts he adduces as evidence always include the adjective *יָחִי* which seems to be a necessary part of the expression.

⁴⁵Jérémié hésite à exprimer ainsi son refus de l’offre généreuse qui lui a été faite. Mais Nebuzaradân, constatant son manque d’enthousiasme, veut le mettre à l’aise en lui intimant

can hardly conceal that, on the level of the text, it is Nebuzaradan and not Jeremiah who is making decisions.

Finally, the outcome of the situation in v. 6b corresponds exactly to Nebuzaradan's suggestion in v. 5b: Jeremiah "stayed with him [i. e., Gedaliah] among the people" (וַיֵּשֶׁב אִתּוֹ בְּתוֹךְ הָעָם, cf. וַיֵּשֶׁב אִתּוֹ בְּתוֹךְ הָעָם in v. 5). Jeremiah thus seems to carry out in v. 6 what Nebuzaradan told him to do in v. 5. Moreover, the final emphasis is placed on Jeremiah's staying with the people rather than his choosing Gedaliah.

In my view, this passage therefore illustrates two principles which are dominant in the composition of the Jeremiah narratives: a) the Babylonians treat Jeremiah well and are not to be feared; b) Jeremiah stays among the people (who, within the Jeremiah narratives, are *not* generally deported to Babylonia).

4. Jeremiah 43:6

The last case I would like to discuss is the people's emigration to Egypt in Jer 43 and, in particular, the departure of Jeremiah and Baruch in 43:6. I will be brief on this case since there is a detailed study on the voluntary or involuntary character of the emigration by Hermann Stipp.⁴⁶ Stipp argues that the widespread opinion that Jeremiah was forced to emigrate to Egypt is not supported by the text. After a long speech in which Jeremiah transmits Yhwh's warnings against emigration to Egypt, the leaders of the people reject the advice as a "lie" (שָׁקֶר). Jeremiah 43:5–7 reports the emigration of the people without further discussion:

And Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces took all the remnant of Judah who had returned to settle in the land of Judah from all the nations where they had been driven – the men and the women and the children and the daughters of the king and all those who Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, had left with Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch son of Neriah, and they came into the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of Yhwh, and they came to Tahpanhes. (Jer 43:5–7 MT)

comme un ordre ce qu'il pressent être l'objet de son désir." D. Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament. Bd. 2: Isaïe, Jérémie, Lamentations* (OBO 50/2; Fribourg/Göttingen: Ed. Univ./Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 738. Abrego, *Jeremias*, 93–96 construes Jer 40:1–6 as a scene of trial, with Jeremiah resisting the Babylonians' tempting offer.

⁴⁶H.-J. Stipp, "Legenden der Jeremia-Exegese (II): Die Verschleppung Jeremias nach Ägypten," *VT* 64 (2014): 654–663.

Many commentators interpret these verses to mean that Jeremiah and Baruch were taken to Egypt by force.⁴⁷ Although such an interpretation softens the contradiction between Jeremiah's words and his moves, the text does not indicate that Jeremiah's emigration to Egypt was any less voluntary than the people's in general. As Stipp points out, no terminology indicating violence is used. The term לָקַח is also used in the similarly phrased 41:16: "Then Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him took all the remnant of the people ..." (וַיִּקַּח יוֹחָנָן בֶּן־כָּרְיָהוּ וְכָל־רֹאשֵׁי הַצְּבָאוֹת אֲשֶׁר־עִמּוֹ אֶת־כָּל־שְׂאֵרֵי הָעָם).⁴⁸ In 41:16, the phrase refers to the liberation of the people who were forcefully led away – the term שָׁבָה is used in this case – by Ishmael after he assassinated Gedaliah. Moreover, syntactically, Jeremiah and Baruch are objects of the action led by Johanan in the same way as all the remaining people, and nothing indicates that they were given special treatment.⁴⁹

Rather than narrating a forced deportation, the text implies that Jeremiah and Baruch remain with the people even when the people's decision does not concur with their own prophetically informed assessment. Jeremiah merely transmits Yhwh's advice. He does not take decisions on his own or perform individual political actions. Whereas the people might be seen as "voting with their feet" in leaving what they consider a Babylonian-dominated war zone, Jeremiah's emigration to Egypt seems to follow a narrative rather than political logic: throughout a series of fatal decisions, Jeremiah stays among the people and delivers his message like the soundtrack to a journey out of the frying pan into the fire.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, according to Jer 37–43, it is not primarily the deportations by the Babylonians, but a series of fatal decisions that leads to the abandonment of the land of Judah. However, these decisions are generally not

⁴⁷This is a common opinion found in many commentaries; see the list provided *ibid.*, 657, n. 15.

⁴⁸Cf. *ibid.*, 660–661.

⁴⁹It is likely that the reference to Jeremiah and Baruch, singled out after an enumeration concluded by וְאֵת כָּל־הַנֶּפֶשׁ, constitutes a secondary addition; cf. R. Goldstein, "Jeremiah between Destruction and Exile: From Biblical to Post-Biblical Traditions," *DSD* 20 (2013): 433–451, 449. G. Wanke, *Jeremia. Teilband 2: Jeremia 25,15–52,34* (ZBK.AT; Zürich: TVZ., 2003), 372 and Stipp, *Jeremia*, 201 argue that v. 6aβ.b, including the reference to Jeremiah and Baruch, was added secondarily.

narrated in explicit verbal statements. Rather, they are manifest in where people do or do not move.

Jeremiah, in these stories, is not the one who takes political decisions. In Jer 37 – the only instance where Jeremiah moves on his own initiative – he seems to do so for personal reasons. The text does not make clear his motivation. At the same time, Jer 37 effects a transition from Jeremiah as a protagonist moving around freely (cf. Jer 37:4 and the narratives in chs. 18–35) to a passive character whose movements are determined by others, his independent agency being limited to speech.⁵⁰

In Jer 40 and 43, Jeremiah follows decisions regarding movement suggested by others. Unlike in the imprisonment stories in Jer 37–38, he is not forced to do so. Contrary to the traditional interpretation of this passage, nothing in Jer 43 indicates forced deportation. On the other hand, nothing in Jer 40 indicates that Jeremiah expresses political support for Gedaliah's rule by joining the community in Mizpah. In both cases, the main rationale behind Jeremiah's movements seems to be to stay with the people, even where the people's way goes against his prophetic advice. Thus, we can hardly say that Jeremiah is "voting with his feet" in the same way Johanan and the people are in Jer 43. Jeremiah's movements in Jer 37–43 do not express a particular political stance nor do they follow Yhwh's advice. While Jeremiah forcefully voices political recommendations in his prophetic utterances, he does not communicate them through exemplary actions. Rather, his movements correspond to a particular understanding of his prophetic role. He accompanies the people with Yhwh's word even though they move in the opposite direction. The people and their leaders, rather than Jeremiah, are voting with their feet. An interesting side effect of Jeremiah's movements in these narratives is that they define "the people" by a spatial dimension. Those who did not defect to the Babylonians, those who were not deported to Babylonia, those who decided to go to Egypt against the prophetic advice – they are the people who remain in dialogue with Yhwh's word. Jeremiah's movements do not express his approval or disapproval; rather, his role is to stay among them and to keep up the prophetic communication.

⁵⁰For related observations, cf. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 717, and Laufer, "Should We Stay," 153–155.