Ytr as a Remnant Term in the Book of Jeremiah

Kenneth D. Mulzac
S. D. A. Theological Seminary, Andrews University

The root *ytr* is of common Semitic origin and is widespread in the Hebrew Bible.[1] It refers to the rest or remainder of an entity, expressing either the insignificance of that which has remained or its extraordinary surplus and abundance.[2] It occurs five times in the book of Jeremiah: 39:9 (used twice); 44:7; and 52:15 (used twice).[3] In order to appreciate the meaning of this word as used in Jeremiah, we need to take a cautious approach that examines "the individual semantic value of the various forms of *ytr* in their particular word-combination and sentence contexts."[4] It is with this note that the root *ytr* as related to the remnant of Judah is examined in the book of Jeremiah. We will exegete each passage using the following plan: translation and textual considerations; structure; historical background; and interpretation.

Jeremiah 39:9
Translation and Textual Considerations
(1) In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusa-

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[1] Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Origin and Early History of the Remnant Motif in Ancient Israel," (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1970), 182-194; T. Kronholm, "*Yētar* I," *TDOT* (1990), 6:483-491; John E. Hartley, "*Yētar*," *TWOT* (1980), 1:421-422; David Latoundji, "*Ytr* I," *NIDOTTE* (1997), 2:571–574.

[2] Hasel, "Remnant Motif," 185, 187.

[3] In both Jer 39:9 and 52:15 we find the noun *yeter* II. The noun *yeter* I is found only five times in the OT (Judg 16:7,8,9; Ps 11:2; Job 30:11) and means "bowstring" or "sinew." *Yeter* II is found 96 times and is important to the remnant language and motif.

[4] Ibid., 186.

lem and besieged it. (2) In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the city was breached. (3) And all the princes of the king of Babylon came and they sat in the Middle Gate: Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebu, Sarsechim the Rabsaris, Nergalsharezer the Rabmag and all the rest of the princes of the king of Babylon. (4) When Zedekiah king of Judah and all his soldiers saw them they fled, going out of the city by night by way of the king's garden, through the gate between the two walls; and they went toward the Arabah. (5) But the army of the Chaldeans pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. And when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, at Riblah, in the land of Hamath and he passed sentence upon him.[5] (6) And the king of Babylon executed the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes; and the king of Babylon also executed all the nobles of Judah. (7) He put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters to take him to Babylon. (8) The Chaldeans burned the house of the king and the people and broke the walls of Jerusalem. *(9) Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard deported to Babylon the remnant [yeter] of the people who remained [hanniš^ʾârîm] in the city and the deserters who deserted to him and the remnant [yeter] of the artisans[6] who remained [hanniš^ʾārîm].* (10) But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left [hiš^ʾîr] the poor people who had nothing, in the land of Judah and he gave them vineyards and fields[7] on that day.

Structure. Verses 1-10 form a structural unit based on the movement of the action in the account:

1. The dates spanning the beginning and end of the seige of Jerusalem (vss 1-2)

    2. The establishment of a military council (vs 3)[8]

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[5] MT *way^edabbēr ʾittô mišpātîm*, lit. "and he spoke with him judgments."

[6] *BHS* suggests correctly that *ha^ʿām*, "the people," should be read as *hā^ʿāmôm*, "the artisans," as found in the same rendering of the text in Jer 52:15.

[7] The word *y^egēbîm* is of uncertain meaning. "Fields" is used here following Syr. and Tg. Perhaps *l^eōr^emîm ûl^eyog^ebîm*, "to be vinedressers and field laborers," in 52:16, is instructive here. See John Bright, *Jeremiah*, Anchor Bible 21 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 242, 243.

[8] Some commentators see 39:3 as a variant of 39:13. They take 38:28b as a dittography which must be linked with 39:3 and then transported to 39:13,14, to describe the first account of Jeremiah's release. See John A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 645; cf. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 245, and Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremiah*, 3d edition, HAT 12 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1968), 225-237. The narrative would then read: (vss 3,13) "When Jerusalem was captured, all the officials of the king of

3. The fate of the nobility (vss 4-7)

4. The fate of the city, i.e., the physical plant (vs 8)

5. The fate of the remnant (vss 9-10).

Historical Background. Verses 1-2 indicate that the occasion was the fall of Jerusalem. Scholarship is divided regarding the date of this event: July 587 B.C.E.[9] or July 586 B.C.E.[10] However, since Zedekiah was installed as a puppet king when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem in 597 B.C.E.[11] and he reigned for eleven years (2 Kgs 24:18; 2 Chr 36:11; Jer 52:1) until the destruction of Jerusalem, it seems that 586 B.C.E. is more plausible. A month later (cf. Jer 52:12 and 2 Kgs 25:8), Nebuzaradan, the commander of Nebuchadnezzar's bodyguard,[12] arrived in the city. He set up "a court or better, a military government,"[13] and

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Babylon came in and took their seats in the Middle Gate: Nergolsharezer, the Rabnag, Samgarnebo, Nebushazban the Rabsaris and all the other officers of the king of Babylon. (Vs. 14) They sent and brought Jeremiah from the court of the guard."

[9] J. Barton Payne, "Jerusalem," *ZPEB* (1975), 3:472; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3d ed (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 329-330; E. W. Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52,* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975), 125; Robert Davidson, *Jeremiah*, vol. 2, The Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 130; Roland K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 157; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 291; M. Burrows, "Jerusalem," *IDB* (1962), 2:852; F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations,* The New American Commentary, vol. 16 (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 341; and Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1.

[10] G. W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 786, 794-798; Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 168-171; W. S. LaSor, "Jerusalem," *ISBE* (1988), 2:1016; Philip J. King, "Jerusalem," *ABD* (1992), 3:755-757; Julius A. Bewer, *The Prophets in the King James Version with Introduction and Critical Notes* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 278.

Evidence of this destruction was widespread. See Yigal Shiloh, "The City of David Archaeological Project: The Third Season, 1980," *BA* 44 (1981): 161-170; idem, *Excavations at the City of David, I, 1978-1982*, Qedem 19 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1984).

[11] D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings (626-556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1956), 32-35, 73.

[12] The term *rab-tabbāhîm* literally means "the butcher," an ancient title which is retained after the functions of the holder had altered. Cf. Gen 40:2. See Ralph H. Alexander, "*Tabbah,*" *TWOT* (1980), 1:342. For a discussion on the names of the Babylonian officials who accompanied the captain of the guard, see Julius A. Bewer, "Nergalsharezer Samgar in Jeremiah 39:3," *AJSL* 42 (1925/26): 130.

[13] Bright, *Jeremiah*, 243.

systematically burned and looted the city and superintended the deportation of its people.

Interpretation. With the fall of the city, the king and courtiers attempted to escape, only to be captured and brought to an ignoble demise. The nobles were summarily executed, an act which may be seen as a just, rather than a cruel fate, according to the canons of Near Eastern warfare.[14] Zedekiah was blinded, bound in chains, and deported to Babylon. The city was then destroyed by fire.

After Nebuchadnezzar had dealt with the leadership, he turned to the non-nobility: those who are described as the remnant. Two roots that reflect the idea of the remnant are here used: *šʾr* and *ytr*. They appear together five times in vss 9-10. The first has been aptly demonstrated as functioning as the main remnant term both in contexts of judgment and salvation in the book of Jeremiah.[15] The fact that *ytr* is juxtaposed with *šʾr* in Jer 39:9-10 adds significance to the remnant motif. In fact, the remnant is described in parallel phrases: *yeter hāʾām*, "remnant of the people" and *hanniš'ārîm bāʿîr*, "the remnant in the city." They both denote the defeated Jerusalemites. These two phrases "are in turn designated with the synonymous phrase *šᵉʾērît hāʾām*, 'the remnant of the people,' in Jer 41:10, 16. Therefore, it is safe to say that *yeter* is used synonymously and interchangeably with *šᵉʾērît.* . . ."[16] The biblical author deliberately uses two related terms in almost excessive proportion in such a small space to exclaim about the absolute worthlessness of those who survived the Babylonian onslaught. This is the first assessment of the historical remnant as a group of people who have survived an actual disaster.[17] Prior to this they were spoken of in a prophetic manner. From this point onward it is a historical reality. The point is sharp with dramatic irony: although they survived they lack status, statehood, and power. It is this dramatic reversal from nationhood to nothingness that is effectively captured in bringing together both terms.

The remaining skilled craftsmen or artisans is a reference to 2 Kgs 24 where eleven years earlier, after the fall of Jerusalem under Jehoiachin (597 B.C.E.), Nebuchadnezzar had exiled large numbers of people, including artisans, who had voluntarily given themselves up to the

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[14] Harrison, 159.

[15] Kenneth D. Mulzac, "The Remnant Motif in the Context of Judgment and Salvation in the Book of Jeremiah" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1995).

[16] Hasel, "Remnant Motif," 190.

[17] Gerhard F. Hasel, "Remnant," *ISBE* (1988), 4:130, defines the "historical remnant" as the survivors of a catastrophe.

Chaldean king. At that time, all the artisans were taken. Within that eleven year period, more were probably contracted, and now rounded up.[18]

Only the poorest people (*dāllîm*), probably peasants, were left and allotted holdings for survival. In all likelihood, they were the ones who would cause the Babylonians the least amount of trouble.[19] John Calvin comments that the irony of the landless man becoming a landowner must be noted. Further, the envy of the exiles must be aroused, for on the day of their demise, "they saw that they were more severely and cruelly tested than those lowest of men."[20]

Finally, while Jer 39:1-10 is substantially the same as Jer 52:4-16 and 2 Kgs 25:1-12, leading some scholars to conclude that it is a secondary insertion,[21] Nicholson has correctly shown that its position here is quite fitting: "The nation had rejected the word of God proclaimed to it by Jeremiah (chaps. 26-36), and had sought to destroy the prophet himself (chaps. 37, 38). The judgment declared against Judah and Jerusalem was now *violently realized*."[22] Judah had been reduced from a populous nation to a small surviving group of people that was poor, demoralized and lacking in any real military prowess, posing no apparent threat to the ruthless invaders. The judgment had rendered Judah a small insignificant historical remnant.

Jeremiah 44:7-10
Translation and Textual Considerations

(7) And now, thus says the Lord, God of Hosts, the God of Israel,[23] "Why are you doing great evil against yourselves, to cut off from you man and woman, infant and child, from the midst of Judah leaving [hôtîr] for yourselves no remnant [šᵉʾērît]? (8) Why do you provoke me

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[18] The fact that only a residue of skilled craftsmen was left mildly suggests that after the deportation (2 Kgs 24), those who came along were of inferior quality, having no master craftsman to train them since these were all taken away. Further, it may suggest that even some of these craftsmen had defected to the Babylonian camp.

[19] Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, The Expositors Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 6:623, expresses that the Babylonians did this because they felt that gratitude would prevent the settlers from rebelling.

[20] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 4:32.

[21] Holladay, 292; Bright, *Jeremiah*, 245: Hyatt, "Jeremiah," 1079, adds that this was the work of a deuteronomic editor.

[22] Nicholson, 125 (emphasis mine).

[23] LXX reads *kurios pantokrator*, "Lord Almighty," i.e., "Lord of Hosts."

to anger with the works of your hands, sacrificing to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to live so that you cut yourselves off and become a curse and a taunt among all the nations of the earth? (9) Have you forgotten the evil of your fathers, the evil of the kings of Judah, the evil of their wives[24] and your own evil[25] and the evil of your wives which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? (10) They have not humbled themselves[26] even to this day, nor have they feared.[27] And they have not walked according to my law and my statutes[28] which I gave to you and your fathers.[29]

Structure. Jer 44:7 is found in the second unit, vss 7-10, of chap. 44.[30] There is an inclusio that is indicated by several factors:

1. The introductory formula, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts the God of Israel," is found in vss 7 and 11, clearly demarcating the pericope.

2. The expression *yôm hazzeh*, "this day," is found at the end of vs 6 and again in vs 10.

3. While all three sections (vss 2-6; 7-10, and 11-14) have almost the same introductory formula, the latter two have distinct markers that stand at the beginning: vs 7 - *w^{ec}attah*, "and now"; vs 11 - *lāken*, "therefore." Verse 2 has no such marker.

4. There is a distinct change from the declaratory statements of unit 1 to the rhetorical question form of unit 2.

Verses 7-10 may be schematized as follows:

1. Introductory formula, "Thus says the Lord," introduced by the marker, *w^{e}ʿattah*, "and now" (vs 7a).

2. Body, consisting of three rhetorical questions:

Why do you commit great evil against yourselves? (vs 7b)

Why do you provoke me to anger by your doings? (vs 8)

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[24] LXX reads *kai tōn kakōn tōn archontōn humōn*, "and the evil of your officials."

[25] LXX lacks "and your own evil."

[26] MT *lō^{ɔ} dukk^{e}û*, lit. "they were not crushed" (Pual of *dk^{ɔ}*). LXX, *kai ouk ep-ausanto*, "and they have not ceased." As *BHS* observes, the versions render different readings.

[27] LXX lacks, "nor have they feared."

[28] LXX reads only *tōn prostagmatōn mou*, "my ordinances," the equivalent of *b^{e}hu-qqōtāy*.

[29] LXX reads "*their* fathers" instead of MT "*your* fathers."

[30] There are three distinct sections in 44:2-14: (1) vss 2-6; (2) 7-10; (3) 11-14. See K.-F. Philmann, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Jeremiabuches*, FRLANT 118 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978), 168-172.

Have you forgotten both your forebears' and your own wickedness? (vs 9)

3. Concluding statement (vs 10), with the expression *yôm hazzeh*, "this day."

Historical Background. Sometime after the remnant had sought refuge in Egypt, the divine oracle was given to Jeremiah (43:8-44; 14). In fact, chap. 44 provides the account of the accusations of God (44:2-14) and Jeremiah (44:20-30) leveled against the refugees because of their practice of, and open defense of idolatry (44:15-19).[31]

Jeremiah's address concerned all the Jews living in Egypt: at Migdol,[32] Tahpanhes, Memphis,[33] and the land of Patros.[34] This suggests that Jewish settlements already existed in Egypt before the arrival of these refugees.

Since no indication is given as to how much time had elapsed since the word and action of 43:8-13, we may agree with Holladay that it is difficult to envisage the implications of chap. 44. On the one hand, it suggests a kind of general epistle to all the Jews living in Egypt; but, on the other hand, vss 15, 19, and 20 suggest that this is an address to an assemblage, and it appears implausible to imagine that all the Jews living in Egypt would gather for such an occasion.[35]

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[31] Such idolatrous practices were not new to the Lord's people. Jeremiah had earlier condemned such in his "Temple Sermon" (7:16-20). Davidson, 150, claims that as a tolerated minority in a foreign land, it appeared sensible to adapt, as far as was possible, to local Egyptian customs.

[32] "Migdol" is a NW Semitic word which means "tower" or "fortress." It is known from the Tell el-Amarna letters (14th century B.C.) as Ma-ag-da-li. The exact site is unknown. Thomas O. Lambdin, "Migdol," *IDB* (1962), 3:377, identifies it as Tell el-Her. A more recent explanation claims a site labelled simply as T. 21, about 24 miles east-northeast of Taphanes. See Eliezer D. Oren, "Migdol: A New Fortress on the Edge of the Eastern Nile Delta," *BASOR* 256 (1984): 7-44.

[33] Memphis (Heb. *Noph*) was one of the main cities of Lower Egypt. It was located about 13 miles south of modern Cairo.

[34] The expression "Land of Pathros" suggests a region, perhaps in Upper Egypt. Thomas O. Lambdin, "Pathros," *IDB* (1962), 3:676, indicates that the Hebrew *Patrôs* is a rendering of the Egyptian *pꜣ-tꜣ-rsy*, "the Southern Land." It is also known that there was a Jewish community at Elephantine in the fifth century B.C.E. Their Aramaic documents tell much of their society. See A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923).

[35] Holladay, 303.

Interpretation. The first unit, 44:2-6, gives a review of Judah's *past* disobedience and her consequent destruction by the Lord.[36] This second unit, vss. 7-10, addresses the *present* situation of the Jews, accusing them of the same behavior as their fathers, and hence endangering their own lives to the extent of being cut off (*krt*) without a remnant (*šᵉērît*).

The people are indicted for committing great evil in spite of the fulfillment of the terrible judgments against Jerusalem. The refugees had learned nothing. Hence, the language of condemnation is strong: there will be no survival for those who had fled to Egypt.[37]

"Evil" (*rāʿāh*) is a key word that is woven throughout the first two units.[38] This motif of evil and desolation in operation against Judah and Jerusalem is found throughout the book.[39] It must be noted, however, that the Lord's evil, as expressed in 44:2, that is, his destruction of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, is different from the evil committed by the people. The latter "refers to the moral injury that is self-inflicted through idolatry."[40]

Against this background of evil and judgment, Jeremiah now confronts the people with a series of rhetorical questions (introduced by *wᵉʿattāh*, "and now"[41]): Why do you commit great evil against yourselves? Why do you provoke me to anger by your doings? Have you forgotten both your forebears' and your own wickedness?

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[36] The description of the cities of Judah as a waste or ruin (*ḥorbāh*) without inhabitants favored the exiles in Babylon because it left the land vacant for their return. Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 729.

[37] Some commentators point out that the similarity in language between chap. 44 and other prose passages in the book is an indication that the passage was freely compared by a deuteronomic editor who decided to expand the declaration of judgment in 43:8-13. So Nicholson, 152, and Rudolph, 239, who regard only vss 2, 7, 8 as the original words of Jeremiah, the remainder coming from the prophet's sermons. However, Thompson, 664, refutes this view, claiming that even if some expansion took place, there is no reason to question the essential historicity of the incidents recorded in chap. 44.

[38] See Jer 44:2,3,5,7, and 9. In vs 9 alone it appears five times.

[39] See Jer 25:11; 34:22; 35:17; 36:31; 40:2-3.

[40] Carroll, 729. See to W. Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktian von Jeremia 26-45*, WMANT 52 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 72. The evil, particularly idol worship, as committed by the people of Judah and Jerusalem should have cautioned these refugees to better behavioral practices.

[41] This phrase is frequently used in the OT when a conclusion to an argument is to be drawn. Thompson, 676. Cf. Exod 19:5; Deut 4:1; Josh 24:14; 1 Sam 8:9.

Even though the interrogative form is used, the conclusion is already implied: persistence in pagan worship[42] is a flagrant dismissal of covenant faithfulness and can only result in a cutting off, that is, destruction[43] of the entire community: men, women, children, and toddlers. In short, there will be no progenitive factor in the community. This effect is described as "leaving (*hôtîr*) . . . no remnant (*šᵉʾērît*)." The hiphil infinitive *hôtîr* is here associated with *šᵉʾērît*. Connected with the preposition of negation (*lᵉbiltî),* the expression *lᵉbiltî hôtîr lākem šᵉʾērît* may best be rendered, "leaving for yourself no remnant." Again, as in 39:9-10, both *ytr* and *šʾr* are combined, though not with the same frequency. The effect, however, is similar in that the combination draws the reader's attention to the essential "remnantlessness" nature of the community. Indeed, precisely this idea of "remnantlessness" is emphasized in the repetition of the "cutting off" motif, self-inflicted, so to speak, because of the people's idolatrous practices. Such repetition serves as a stylistic device to call attention to the gravity of the situation.

Instead of a remnant, they would degenerate into a universal curse and taunt (44:8).[44] Such a punishment is indicative of unfaithfulness to the covenant. Failure to heed its precepts leads inevitably to being reduced to an object of cursing and shame. This implies the result of violating the covenant, just as blessing implies the result of obedience to the covenant.

Verse 9, which more or less reflects the diction of vs 2 (as vs 8 does vs 3), highlights the evil of the people and their failure, as well as their forefathers', to acknowledge their actions as being wicked. Finally, this recalcitrant remnant stubbornly refuses to repent. This is underlined in the concluding statement (vs 10). Feeling no contrition (*lōʾ dukkᵉʾû,* "they

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[42] The question, *lāmāh ʾattem ʿōśîm rāʿāh gᵉdôlāh,* "Why are you doing great evil?" (vs. 7), suggests, "Why do you continue to do great evil?"

[43] For a more detailed discussion, see Gerhard F. Hasel, *"Kērat," TDOT* (1995), 7:339–352.

[44] The curse (*qᵉlālāh*) comes from the idea of being treated lightly. To discredit someone or depreciate something was to make light of that person or thing. Hence, the idea of dishonor is considered as a curse. The curse is frequently used in combination with other demeaning ideas: curse and taunt (*ḥerpāh*) in 42:18; 44:8,12; curse and horror (*šammāh*) in 42:18; 44:12,22; curse and waste (*ḥōreb*) in 49:13; curse and object of whistling (*šᵉrēqāh*) in 25:18. One can say that here in Jer 44:8 the remnant is described as an object of ridicule and a reproach before all the nations.

did not humble [themselves]),"[45] they deliberately rejected the Lord's sovereignty.[46]

The remnant that fled Judah and resided in Egypt completely violated the covenant with God. They risked being cut off, annihilated without a trace. We glimpse a threat that there would not be a remnant of the remnant. Hence, we see the people of Judah being progressively reduced by calamity to a mere decimal of their former population until in the end, none survives. Already reduced to a fraction by successive blows, the Judeans constitute merely a "remnant," and even this is threatened.[47]

The people's willful disobedience to God's law will bring about drastic repercussions. This historical remnant, those who had survived the fall of Jerusalem and had fled to Egypt against God's command, had disregarded or ignored the results of their evil (44:1-6). Such covenant disloyalty becomes the typical representation of the remnant. Now they follow the same practices of idolatry (here called "the great evil") that led to the "cutting off" of Jerusalem. Therefore, the same fate awaits them.

Two factors are important here: (1) the people were responsible for the predicted judgment; (2) the judgment was all-encompassing: man, woman, infant, and toddler would experience it. Therefore, the expression "leaving (*hōtîr*) to yourself no remnant (*šᵉērît*)" is like placing the period at the end of the final chapter of a dramatic prophecy of destruction and catastrophe.

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[45] The verb *dkʾ* appears only here in the book of Jeremiah. It is in the form of a plural and means "crushed with remorse," that is, the people failed to humble themselves before the Lord. However, LXX reads *kai ouk epausanto*, "and have not ceased." *BHS* is uncertain if this is equal to *niklᵉʾû* (Niphal of the root *klʾ*, "to be restrained, held back"). Both *BHS* and Rudolph, 260, propose *nikʾû*, (Niphal of the root *kʾh*, "to be disheartened"). MT seems best in light of the fact that the root *dkʾ*, "crushed," is also used in the sense of being humbled: Isa 19:10, *mᵉdukkāʾîm* (pual part.), i.e., "crushed by remorse." Cf. Isa 3:4; Pss 34:19 (Eng. 18); 51:19 (Eng. 17). Further, linking it with disobedience to the Lord's laws suggests a lack of repentance. Hence, the idea here is that they have not humbled themselves. See further H. F. Fuhs, "*Dākhăʾ*," *TDOT* (1978), 3:195-208.

[46] This is reflected in their refusal to reverence God or walk in His ways. For the motif of not walking in the Lord's *tôrāh*, see Jer 9:13, 26:4 and 32:23. The equivalent of this is seen in 2:8, 6:19, and to a lesser extent in 8:8 and 18:18. This rejection of the law and covenant statutes is recurrent in the book of Jeremiah: 7:23-26; 11:1-13; 17:19-27; 34:8-22.

[47] Sheldon H. Blank, "Traces of Prophetic Agony in Isaiah," *HUCA* 27 (1956), 90.

Jeremiah 52:12-16
Translation and Textual Considerations

(12) In the fifth month, in the tenth day[48] of the month, that is, in the nineteenth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,[49] Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard who served the king of Babylon [came] to Jerusalem.[50] (13) And he burned the house of the Lord and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem and every great house he burned with fire. (14) And the Chaldean army which was with the captain of the guard demolished the entire wall surrounding Jerusalem. (15) *Then Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, exiled some of the poor of the people[51] and the rest [yeter] of the people who remained [hanniš'ārîm] in the city and those who had deserted[52] to the king of Babylon and the rest [yeter] of the artisans.[53]* (16) *But some of the poor*

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[48] 2Kgs 25:8 records it as the seventh day.

[49] LXX lacks "in the nineteenth year of the reign of king Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon."

[50] MT *'āmad lipnê melek-bābel bîrûšālāim* reads literally, "he stood before the king of Babylon in Jersualem." It means that Nebuzaradan was a high official who was acting on the king's authority. This is especially so with the revocalization of *'āma* to *'ōmēd*, "he who stands." 2 Kgs 25:8 makes him the king's servant. Hence, Nebuzaradan came to Jerusalem on the king's authority.

[51] This phrase, "some of the people," is lacking in the MT of Jer 39:9 and 2 Kgs 25:11, which are parallel accounts of the same event. Hence, the inclusion of the phrase here in the MT is difficult to account for. It has been suggested, and reasonably so, that the phrase is partially dittographic from vs 16. The LXX offers no help since vs. 15 is lacking. This may be due to haplography since both vss 15 and 16 begin with *ūmiddallôt*, "and some of the poor." See John Gerald Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 6 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1973), 20-21.

[52] MT has literally, "the falling ones who had fallen [away] to the king of Babylon."

[53] MT *hā'āmôn* means "architect" or "builder." This is different from the other parallel accounts: 1 Kgs 25:11, *hehāmôn*, "the crowd"; Jer 39:9, *hā'ām*, "the people," hardly suits the context which points more toward skilled craftsmen. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 64, proposes a revocalization of the MT to read *hā'ommān*, (cf. Akkd.. *ummānu*), "skilled artisans," "craftsmen." As Thompson, 773, n. 11, indicates, "The point need not be pressed since the Chaldeans would have been as much interested in architects and builders as in craftsmen. In either case, the noun is singular grammatically, although the sense may be collective."

of the land,[54] Nebuzaradan,[55] captain of the guard left, [hišʾîr] vinedressers and plowmen.[56]

Structure. Jer 52[57] may be divided into four sections:
1. The fall of the city and capture of Zedekiah (vss 1-16)
2. The sacking of the temple (vss 17-23)
3. The numbers deported to Babylon (vss 31-34)
4. The release of Jehoiachin from power (vss 31-34).

The first section may be further sub-divided:

a. Introduction to Zedekiah's reign (vss 1-3), as demarcated by a specific time line, namely, Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king

b. The siege of the city (vss 4-5) as demarcated by a specific time line, namely, the "9th year of his reign, in the 10th month, on the 10th day"

c. The fall of the city and the fate of its king (vss 6-11) as demarcated by a specific time line, namely, "the fourth month, the ninth day of the month"

d. The fate of the property and the people in Jerusalem (vss 12-16) as demarcated by a specific time line, namely, "in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month."

The last section, vss. 12-16, now occupies my attention.

Historical Background.[58] Jer 52:3 makes clear one detail that is absent in the account in chap. 39; it was Zedekiah's rebellion against the

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[54] LXX replaces the phrase "some of the poor of the land," with *kai tous Kataloipous tou laou*, "and the remnant of the people."

[55] Both the LXX and 2 Kgs 25:12 lack this name.

[56] The meaning of the Hebrew *ûlᵉyōgᵉbîm* is uncertain. It may mean "plowmen," or "field laborers." The LXX understands it this way, for it translates *kai eis geôgous*, "and to be laborers, tillers of the ground."

[57] This chapter forms an appendix to the book of Jeremiah, as may be deduced from the final words of chap. 51, "Thus far the words of Jeremiah." This appendix describes the fall of the city in identical terms, a few minor variations excepted, to that of 2 Kgs 24:18-25:30. However, while 2 Kgs 25:22-26 gives a brief description of the assassination of Gedeliah and the escape of the group to Egypt, Jer 52 does not. But this is hardly a problem, since chaps 41-44 describe these details. Further, Jer 52:28-30 adds a register of the totals of the deportees to Babylon which is lacking in the account of 2 Kings.

[58] Jer 52:15,16, with minor variation, is a near duplication of 39:9,10. Indeed, Jer 52:7-16 is a near duplicate of Jer 39:4-10. In fact, chap 52 (except for vss 28-30) has very small variations from 2 Kgs 24:18-25:30. Therefore, the historical details are the same in all three accounts.

Babylonian king that provoked the siege and consequently led to the fall of Jerusalem.

Further, it must be added that both 2 Kgs 25:8 and Jer 52:12 specifically indicate that it was approximately one month *after* the fall of Jerusalem that Nebuchadnezzar commanded the destruction of the city by fire.[59] The question of the elapsed time is hard to answer. Two suggestions are: (1) the Babylonian troops waited for their commander to arrive;[60] (2) they waited to see who else would venture forth through the breach and be slaughtered.[61]

Interpretation. Nebuzaradan came a month after the breach in the walls to supervise the destruction of the city. The exact date is not certain since 2 Kgs 25:8 gives the seventh day but Jer 51:12 gives the tenth day. After the burning of the temple, the palace, and other important buildings (vs. 13) came the task of dismantling the city wall (vs. 14). The verb *ntṣ*, "pull down," is a key word, occurring several times throughout the book: Jeremiah is appointed to "pull down" kingdoms (1:10); the Lord Himself is involved in "pulling down" (19:7; 31:28). So the idea of judgment and destruction is at the fore here.[62]

After the destruction of physical properties, the Chaldeans turned their attention to the people (vss 15,16). As in Jer 39:9, we find the same deliberate parallel descriptions for the remnant: *yeter hāʿām*, "remnant of the people" and *hanniš'ārîm bāʿîr*, "the remnant in the city." Since the same historical milieu is in focus, it may be safe to suggest that the same theological idea is intended: the defeated Jerusalemites constitute a historical remnant, mere survivors of the Babylonian onslaught. They included poor people, those left in the city, deserters, and artisans. It is a mixture of people who are deported to Babylon.

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[59] It has been argued that the occurrence of this destruction in the 19th year of King Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 51:12) must be a mistake, since the 18th year is given in 52:29. But as Feinberg, 689, shows, there is no contradiction between vs 12 and vs 29. In the first text, the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar has been included. In the second, it has been excluded.

[60] Bright, *Jeremiah*, 367.

[61] Carroll, 863. He claims that these possibilities may have "derived from the story teller's presentation of the breach as something made by the besieged rather than by the besiegers."

[62] For the motif of "pulling down," see also Jer 33:4 and 39:8.

However, vs 16 denotes that from the remnant who survived the catastrophe, Nebuzaradan left a remnant to carry on agricultural pursuits.[63] They are the "poorest of the land." This idea of leaving only the dregs of Judean society behind after the sacking of Jerusalem and the deportation of its people suggests that those "left behind were 'bad figs', the poorest people."[64]

John Bright offers a fitting conclusion in this context:

> Perhaps the editor felt that on account of the fall of Jerusalem, the event that brought the vindication to Jeremiah's lifelong announcement of divine judgment, would furnish a fitting conclusion to the book because it would allow history itself to give its silent witness to the truth of the prophetic word.[65]

In the appendix, the conclusive idea concerning the remnant of Judah is that it is meaningless. The final account of the remnant in the book of Jeremiah is that they constitute the scornful dregs of a once prosperous Judean society. In their condition, even the Babylonian overlords are not interested in them. The effect of the judgment is that Judea has been reduced to an insignificant and wanton remnant.

Conclusion

While the book of Jeremiah employs the root *ytr* sparingly, it is notably used. Several conclusive ideas may now be drawn:

1. It is used consistently in combination or connection with *š'r*. This repeated juxtaposition of both words indicate an underlying intentionality. Its forcefulness cannot be disregarded or overlooked. The remnant is in trouble.

2. The word is used only in the context of judgment. Indeed, it appears only *after* the fall of Jerusalem, the ultimate form of judgment against Judah, because of her infidelity to the covenant. While all other remnant terms (*š'r, mlṭ, plṭ,* and *śrd*) have both positive and negative uses in Jeremiah,[66] such is not the case with *ytr*. It is absolutely negative. As such, there is an implicit idea of covenant curse attached to this word in Jeremiah. While the Babylonians were the *instruments* of judgment,

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[63] J. N. Graham, "'Vinedressers and Plowmen,' 2 Kings 25:12 and Jeremiah 52:16," *BA* 47 (1984): 55-58.

[64] Thompson, 777.

[65] Bright, *Jeremiah*, 370.

[66] See Mulzac, 287-365.

Yahweh himself was the *agent* of judgment. Yet, this is, in a sense, self-inflicted by the Judeans. They are culpable of covenant violation.

3. The way that *ytr* is used in these closing chapters in Jeremiah leaves a sour taste in the mouth. It may be that the point is being subtly made that these do not constitute the carriers of the divine election promises. As a remnant community they are insignificant.

Kenneth D. Mulzac was Associate Professor of Christian Ministry at the S. D. A. Theological Seminary, Andrews University, and pastor of the Highland S. D. A. in Benton Harbor, MI, when he died on July 23, 2008, at the age of 45. He earned a Ph.D. in Old Testament from the S.D.A. Theological Seminary, taught at Oakwood College, then was a Professor of Old Testament at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, located in the Philippines. This essay, uncompleted when he died, was edited by his colleague Richard Davidson.