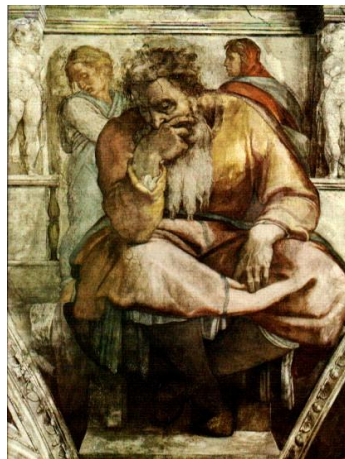


Prophetic Character as Role Model?

A narratological analysis of Jeremiah 32

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Master thesis
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2012/07/23

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Cover: Jeremiah, painting by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, the Vatican.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

“The word of YHWH came to ...” is one of the catchphrases of prophecy in the Hebrew bible. Prophecy is about words. But the books of the prophets present the coming of these words in historical contexts, and thus describe them in narrative terms. We can see this already in the catchphrase itself, which embeds the actual saying in a minute narrative context. This narrative embedding is most clear in the former prophets whom we find in the books of Samuel and Kings, but the majority of the latter prophets also contain extensive narrative sections. Such sections introduce the prophecy, sometimes very briefly, sometimes through detailed descriptions of the interaction between prophet and audience. Occasionally, the delivery of the prophecy is introduced and supported by non-verbal communication. These so-called sign-acts¹ typically consist of actions by the prophet that catch the attention of the audience. This audience focus then strengthens the rhetorical impact of the words of the prophecy.

The narrative embedding serves to position the prophecy in a concrete, historical context. But it also allows us to study the character of the prophet through narrative analysis. It should be made clear right away that the only thing we can study is the prophet as a *literary character*, as a *persona*². The historical figure of the prophet hides behind this literary character. Rather than speculating on the presumed character of the historical figure, it seems more fruitful to study the character of the literary prophet. In fact the historical prophet may have been hidden there on purpose by the composer/narrator of the final text. Along this line, Leuchter proposes that: “the personality of Jeremiah emerging from the book bearing his name becomes a ... didactic symbol Judahites could look [at] as a model of faith and behavior during times of uncertainty”³

This paper analyzes what can be concluded on the character of the prophet Jeremiah based on the sign-act narrated in Jeremiah 32. This sign-act is somewhat atypical. Firstly, the act is not initiated by the prophet but by his relative Chanamel, who comes to propose a land transaction. Then the act is followed not just by a brief prophetic statement but also by an extended dialogue between Jeremiah and YHWH. This makes Jer. 32 a challenging text for a narratological analysis. But before we can embark on that analysis, we first have to clearly state what questions we seek to answer, and what road we will follow.

¹ For an introduction of this term, see K.G. Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts, Rhetorical Non-Verbal Communication*, JSOT Sup 283, Sheffield 1999, 15.

² Throughout this paper I will mostly use the term (*literary*) *character* as a *terminus technicus*; see S.B. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Cornell 1978, 107.

³ M. Leuchter, “Cult of Personality, The Eclipse of Pre-exilic Judahite Cultic Structures in the Book of Jeremiah” in L.L. Grabbe and M. Nissinen, *Constructs of Prophecy*, Atlanta 2011, 114.

1.2 Research questions

Leuchter claims that the character of the prophet Jeremiah has been constructed to serve as a role-model for the Judeans in times of exile and despair. Is it possible to verify this claim through narratological analysis?

In this paper I will make an attempt on the basis of a single chapter. I've selected Jer 32 for several reasons. Foremost, it contains a sign-act, and thus a significant level of plot development. This makes it more likely that a narratological analysis will be fruitful. But also, this sign-act is followed by a prayer of Jeremiah and a response by YHWH. This makes the analysis more relevant to the prophetic genre, where discourse plays an important role.¹

The main question of this paper is thus: does the narrator of Jer. 32 present Jeremiah as a role-model? Before we can answer this, we first have to face another question: does the text present us with a coherent character at all? This will require not just an analysis of the internal coherence of the text, but also an analysis of the narrative in terms of plot and character indicators. As the text under scrutiny describes a prophetic sign-act, we also have to ask: how do such sign-acts reveal the character of the actors, in particular of the prophet?

1.3 Method and overview

We approach these three questions from two methodological angles: the "theory of character"² from the field of literature studies, and the analysis of the Hebrew text. General literary theories on characterization are not tuned to the Hebrew bible and thus need to be verified and modified.

Before we can address our questions, we thus need a significant amount of preparation:

- We need a "theory of character" that is applicable to the prophetic books. This framework is established in Chapter 2 and is then briefly related to earlier studies of the literary character of Jeremiah in Chapter 3.
- We need a translation and analysis of our text. The translation is presented in Chapter 4. The analysis in Chapter 5 concentrates on the structure, as this provides important clues for the coherence of the text and the development of plot.

Once theory and translation have been established, we can approach the characters in our text individually (Chapter 6). Our focus is on Jeremiah, but his character is revealed in relation with others. We will search for direct and indirect character indicators and study the tensions and ambiguities in the text. This will allow us to evaluate the sign-acts as narrative events and the coherence of prophetic character. It will finally allow us to assess whether Jeremiah is presented as a role-model (Chapter 7).

¹ A final reason has been that this passage was the first for which I prepared a bible study in the CJV group of my local church, many decades ago. My notes have not been kept in an earthen vessel and are thus lost, sparing me the embarrassment of comparing the results of this paper with my early work...

² The term seems to have been introduced by Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, see 2.1 for a definition.

2 Characterisation in the Prophetic Books

This chapter starts with a summary of the main theoretical views on character in literature. We then see how these have been related to the narratives in the Hebrew bible. We establish some main concepts and indicators and verify their relevance to the prophets, in particular to their sign-acts. From this we derive a small toolkit that will be used for the analysis of the characters in Jeremiah 32.

2.1 Theories of Character

A “Theory of Character” can be broadly defined as a coherent view on the way in which characters function in narratives, including the means to characterize them in a given text. There is a vast literature on literary characterization,¹ which shows however three major streams, introduced here with their initial proponents.

- Aristotle in his *Poetics* considers the characters in Greek tragedy as subordinate to the action. Action is carried out by *πραττοι*, *agents*, who are either virtuous or vicious. Aristotle maintains that “the line between virtue and vice is one dividing the whole of mankind.”² If the action requires so, agents can be given some *ἔθος*: stereotyped traits like “young man”, “rich”, “courageous”.
- Seymour Chatman develops a Theory of Character in which characters are treated as “autonomous beings, not as mere plot functions.”³ He also points at the way characters are *reconstructed* by readers based on implicit or explicit clues in the story. Each character is a “paradigm of traits”⁴, of personal qualities that are either stable, or that develop gradually in the course of the story. Mieke Bal further elaborates the reader-reconstruction aspect, e.g. by introducing the “character effect.”⁵
- Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan emphasizes the “directional’ dimension”⁶, the dynamic aspect of a character. A character is not just a paradigm, but rather a “network of character traits”. Characters can perform “one-time actions”⁷ that evoke the dynamic aspect, and should not be considered as authorial inconsistencies (as Chatman proposes). Rimmon-Kenan also introduces the concept of direct and indirect “character-indicators”⁸, which are further systematized by Bal.⁹

It should be noted that theories of character are mostly *descriptive*,¹⁰ in that they analyze what is found in narratives, rather than deriving general principles from those observations. If underlying principles are developed, they have to do with the reader response, rather than with the author’s composition process.

¹ For a general introduction, see K. Brillenburg Wurth and A. Rigney (ed), *Het Leven van Teksten, een Inleiding in de Literatuurwetenschap*, Amsterdam 2006.

² Aristoteles, *Poetics II*, referenced at Project Gutenberg (www.gutenberg.nl), 2010/05/02.

³ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 119.

⁴ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 126 ff.

⁵ The “character effect” describes how readers start to consider the fictional characters in a narrative as real persons, M. Bal, *Narratology, Introduction to the theory of Narrative* (second edition), Toronto 1997, 115.

⁶ Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction* (second edition), Abingdon 2002 (first edition 1983), 39.

⁷ Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 61.

⁸ Noting how the latter are more appreciated nowadays, as in our individualistic society “suggestiveness and indeterminacy ... [are] preferred to closure and definitiveness.” Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 59.

⁹ Bal, *Narratology*, 126.

¹⁰ Aristotle attempts to be prescriptive, although it is doubtful if the writers of tragedy paid much attention to him.

Before we relate these theories to the narratives in the Hebrew bible, a few other points have to be made.

The characters in a narrative are developed at varying depth. The simplest, binary model divides them into “flat” and “round” characters¹. The traits of Chatman and Rimmon-Kenan allow for a more nuanced view. Character traits are revealed through clues or indicators in the narrative. Characters in a narrative are developed with varying depth depending on the number of indicators provided for them.

Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes between direct (explicit) and indirect (implicit) indicators, and comparable concepts are found in Chatman. Direct indicators are qualifications given by the narrator (e.g. Jdg 11:1: Jephtha was a courageous man), or by characters about themselves and each other. These qualifications are unambiguous, but not necessarily reliable. Bal points out that even the narrator needs not be reliable, e.g. if (s)he is using irony. Indirect indicators are descriptions like appearance, function or lineage (Jdg 11:1: Jephtha was the son of a harlot), but more importantly: actions and speech. The way a character reacts to a situation, the way (s)he engages in dialogue with the other characters is reliable, but it is often ambiguous which character traits are revealed. It is through the careful analysis of consistency e.g. between action and speech, that we as readers reconstruct character.

Methodologically, close reading seems about the only tool available². Close reading pays attention to the details in a text, rather than to the overarching story. It looks for repetitions of words and patterns in syntax. Its basic assumption is that the text is a careful composition, so apparent inconsistencies are by default considered to be meaningful rather than erroneous.³

2.2 A Theory of Character for the Hebrew Bible

Character as a “dynamic network of traits” seems to do most justice to the complex character of human nature. We generally hold that human beings cannot be categorised along a single dividing line, and they are known to exhibit complex dynamic development. But this does not necessarily mean that the Hebrew bible shapes its characters this way. The biblical narrators could have chosen to pass clear judgement by applying an Aristotelian characterisation. Redaction critics often suggest that character traits have been washed out by layers of redactions.⁴ Only literary analysis can shed light on the model of characterisation found in the Hebrew Bible. Publications by Menakhem Perry & Meir Sternberg and by Robert Alter mark an important turning point in this field. Perry & Sternberg were biblical scholars writing for the secular audience of *Poetics Today*. Alter was (at that time) a literary scholar, reacting to what he saw as the diminishing effect of decades of Biblical criticism. Let us briefly consider some of their findings.

¹ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, Cambridge 1927, 103.

² The term is generally ascribed to I.A. Richards, who proposed the method in *Practical Criticism*, London 1929.

³ Bal extends this method by proposing the use of “semantic axes”, *Narratology* 126. I’ve used this approach in a study of 1Kings 18:1-20 (in M. de Vos, *Onder de Oppervlakte*, BA thesis, Utrecht 2010, 24-27). For the present study I choose not to apply it, because I expected the level of interaction between the characters to be insufficient for the identification of semantic axes. In retrospect, and especially after noting the contrast between Jeremiah and Zedekiah, I conclude that the method would have been quite applicable. The results of the study would not have been different though.

⁴ See e.g. K. van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, Harvard 2007, 125.

Perry & Sternberg notice that biblical narrative frequently leaves “gaps” in the story. The reader cannot fill these gaps arbitrarily. There is a limited range of options: “literature is remarkable for its powers of control and validation.”¹ Within these boundaries, judgement, especially moral judgement on the characters, is left to the reader. On 1 Sam 11, they comment that “[t]he chain of events is presented in a neutral manner, as it were, without comment or judgment; these the narrator leaves to the reader.”² This strongly indicates that an Aristotelian theory of character will not be adequate.

Alter convincingly demonstrates the literary cohesion of extended sections of biblical narrative. On character development he notes a “narrative technique of studied reticences which generate an interplay of significantly patterned ambiguities.”³ An example is not just the withholding of judgment (as above), but also the sudden end of dialogue at a moment where a response would have resolved the ambiguity (e.g. in 2 Sam 6:22 and 2 Sam 12:23). Alter relates this literary approach to the monotheistic view on humankind: created in God's image, but capable of making choices that go against that image. This includes the option of drastic change in the course of the story, indicating that the more static theories of character, like Chatman's, are insufficient.

Taken together, it seems that the model of character as a “dynamic network of traits” is most suitable for the narratives in the Hebrew bible. This model is adopted for the present study.

Some observations on the character indicators used in the Hebrew bible are in place. Both direct and indirect indicators are found, but they are variously evaluated.⁴ Alter assumes (*contra* Bal) that the narrator gives – within the world of the narrative – realistic information. That means that explicit statements made by the narrator about a character can be taken to be correct, again: within the world of the narrative. So direct qualifications by the narrator are the most reliable character indicators. Direct qualifications by the characters themselves are subject to doubt. Narrated appearance, action and speech is reliable, but also leave most room for speculation. Motives are often ambiguous and seldom explained. The same character is often identified variously in formal designations (“the woman”, “Uriah's wife”). This typically indicates a change of perspective in the narrative.⁵ In line with this, Shimon Bar-Efrat observes that the dominant use of indirect indicators “entails that the individual's character is depicted *dynamically*.”⁶ Adele Berlin emphasizes the use of contrast as an indirect character indicator.⁷ She concludes that descriptions of external circumstances⁸ are used primarily to position a character in society (this is consistent with Alter's observation on formal designation).

¹ M. Perry and M. Sternberg, “The King through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Reading Process,” *Poetics Today*, 7, 1986, 277.

² Perry & Sternberg, “King through Ironic Eyes”, 280.

³ R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York 1981, 126.

⁴ See the overview in Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 146.

⁵ Bal formalizes the narrative perspective under the technical term *focalization*, the relation between “who is observing” and “what is being observed”, *Narratology*. 145 ff.

⁶ S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 70, Sheffield 1989 (Hebrew original 1979), 89 (italics added).

⁷ A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Winona Lake 1983, 23ff. Berlin onderscheidt in de Bijbelse verhalen drie soorten personages: *functionaries* die alleen nodig zijn voor de voortgang van het verhaal, *types* die slechts een enkele karaktertrek hebben en *full-fledged characters*.

⁸ Contrary to Alter, Berlin considers these to be direct indicators.

Where does this leave us? Although there is no uniform Theory of Character for the narratives in the Hebrew bible, most authors support the view that character is a dynamic network of traits. No formal methods are suggested other than close reading

I propose to use seven important concepts and character indicators in the remainder of this study¹:

- a. Character is a “dynamic network of traits,” where the depth of characterization varies significantly, between characters in a narrative, and also from narrative to narrative.
- b. Indirect indicators, in particular action and dialogue, are used far more often than direct indicators. Dialogue is one of the most important literary devices in Hebrew narrative². Biblical narratives seldom employ “inner speech”, but they do occasionally use it.³
- c. Reticence is used extensively to create ambiguity and “gaps”, creating a parameter space within which the character can be interpreted. This can be used to describe the development of the character or to preclude moral judgement.
- d. The varying formal designations used to identify a character are important indicators of the perspective within the narrative. Direct descriptions of clothing and appearance serve primarily to indicate the social status of the character.
- e. Variations between repetitions (e.g. between a command and the report of its execution) are significant and give information on the inner feelings of the reporting character.⁴
- f. Contrasts between characters (in action or dialogue) are often employed as indirect indicators.
- g. Withholding information (e.g. a missing response where we would expect one) is employed as an indirect indicator to create a limited set of possible character traits.

2.3 From extended narratives to prophetic books

The authors cited above base their observations on characterisation primarily on the extended narratives. We now have to consider to what extent they apply to the prophetic books. We concentrate here on the latter prophets, that is on the prophets we (primarily) know through the books that have their name ascribed to it. For this study, we approach these books from a literary perspective. Therefore we deal with the texts as we have them. Whether or not these texts are the result of a long process of modifications and redactions⁵ is not our primary interest. Also, the historicity of the prophets is of secondary importance for this study; the historical prophet is veiled anyway behind the literary character.

First we have to ask the question if the prophet functions as a literary character at all. The fact that the books contain narrative is not sufficient. The collections of prophecies from Mari, Arbela and Nineveh have narrative elements, but the characters in these narratives are hardly developed.

¹ Derived and extended from de Vos, *Onder de Oppervlakte*, 16.

² Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 81, speaks about the “highly subsidiary role of narration in comparison to direct speech by the characters.”

³ The use may be more frequent than assumed if we take the frequent occurrences of אָמַר לִבִּי as indicators for inner speech (see the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew I*, 324 which mentions Ps 82:6 as a typical example).

⁴ Perry gives an excellent example in his discussion of Gen 24, M. Perry, “Counter-Stories in the Bible: Rebekah and her Bridegroom, Abraham’s Servant”, *Prooftexts* 27, 2007, 275-323.

⁵ E.g. the overview given for Jeremiah in W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2, A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26-52*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis 1989, 15ff, and van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture.*, Chapter 7, 173ff.

For instance, a prophecy reported to Zimri Lim¹ describes how a prophet devours a raw lamb in front of the assembled elders in the city gate. He then gives the message: “A devouring will take place” with instructions how to avoid the forthcoming disaster. The report concludes with a business-like statement by the author (probably Yaqqim-Addu) of the circumstances. We hardly find any character development in this brief report. The final instruction of the prophet is to give him a garment, which Yaqqim-Addu reports he did. This leads to some interesting questions about the motive of the prophet: was the request intended to secure his fee with divine authority, or rather to make sure his utterances were taken seriously as prophecy (as a garment was one of the customary ways to compensate a prophet). As this report is not connected at all to other narratives, we cannot verify either assumption.

From Inib-šina, the sister of king Zimri-Lim, two prophecies are reported.² In both she passes on to the king a prophetic warning: against the manipulations of a certain Ešnunna (ARM 26 197) and against enemies at the borders (ARM 26 204) respectively. Although we do have some more material here, there is no connection between the reports. We cannot derive any character traits; at best we might say that the messages by Inib-šina, compared to other prophecies to Zimri-Lim, seem to reflect a certain personal concern for the king.

The reason that the characters are hardly developed is in the nature of the reports. They are archived collections, consisting of individual letters or messages originating from a variety of persons. They contain descriptions of visions and contexts of oracles, but they are not integrated into a coherent (literary) work.

This shows a fundamental difference with the prophetic books in the Hebrew bible, which ascribe their material to a single, individual prophet. Even if the prophetic sayings would originate from different sources, the redactors have chosen to present them as the work of a single prophet. The primary reason may have been to attach the authority of a known prophetic figure to them.³ Nevertheless the prophetic books clearly go beyond a mere collection of prophecies brought under a single name.⁴ They provide large narrative sections and extensive dialogue. Action and speech provide (indirect) indicators of character traits. So the *means* for characterisation of the prophet were available to the writers.

Carroll postulates that “the figure of the speaker is not significant in *most* of the anthologies”.⁵ However, even a cursory reading of, e.g., Isaiah and Jeremiah leaves the reader with a significantly different impression of the two prophets. This casts serious doubts on Carroll's view (especially as he also assumes complex redaction processes). So it seems that the figure of the prophet was of some interest to the redactors, and that at least some level of characterisation is present in the prophetic books.

To verify this, we would have to derive character traits throughout a prophetic book, and study their development. We noted that character in Hebrew narrative is a *dynamic* network of traits, so we should not be surprised to see character development as well as the occasional “one-time action”⁶.

¹ Tablet ARM 26 206, in M. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, SBL, 2003, 38.

² Tablets ARM 26 197 and ARM 26 204, see Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 28 and 36.

³ As postulated by van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 186.

⁴ *Contra* van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 185.

⁵ R.P. Carroll, *Jeremiah, a Commentary*, Old Testament Library, Sheffield 1986, 58, italics original.

⁶ Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 61, see page 5 above.

Such a full-fledged survey is clearly outside the scope of the present study. We will study character traits at a more local scale.

Within the prophetic books, character traits can be constructed primarily in narrative sections. In extended sections containing only prophecy (e.g. Jer 46:1-51:58) this is almost impossible, even though these sections are formally direct speech. The prophetic books¹ contain various categories of narrative:

- Introductions (usually brief) that set the historical or geographical context of a prophecy²
- Dialogue and interactions with the audience (e.g. Amos 7, Isa 7; also sign-acts fall in this category)
- Dialogue with the sender, YHWH, in visions or prayers.
- Extended visions, as narrated in Ezekiel.

Prayer forms an interesting category, as it has characteristics of both dialogue and “inner speech.” In dialogue, a character can mislead someone else, whereas “inner speech” is among the more reliable indicators. In the prophetic books, prayer is considered as dialogue, but often of a highly reflective sort. It therefore seems a safe assumption that prayer can be considered as a reliable indicator of the prophet’s motives and inner thoughts.³ We could go one step further and assume with Becking that prophecy *originates* in this inner wrestling, that in this “interaction at the edge of loyalty, revelation takes place”⁴

This brings us to the question whether prophetic messages themselves can convey character traits. Prophetic messages are poetic rather than narrative. But for the present study, poetry can be treated as a heightened form of dialogue, and thus as a potential source of character traits. But prophecy is נאום-יהוה, so it seems not unreasonable that it reveals the character of YHWH, rather than of the prophet. Still the messenger is not neutral in the delivery of the message. Prophetic utterances are rhetoric speech-acts and thus we might find Aristotelian *ethos* in their delivery.⁵ This is already apparent in the “thus speaks YHWH”, where the prophet identifies himself as an honest messenger (leaving of course ambiguity as to whether this self-identification is reliable).

Let us now turn briefly to sign-acts. Do they reveal character traits in the same way as other narrative sections? It is important here to realise with Friebel that sign-acts are non-verbal rhetoric communication. As rhetoric communication they have an informative aspect⁶, revealing *en passant* the prophet’s social circumstances and moral ethos (as with verbal messages).

¹ The book of Daniel has extended narratives, but is now mostly considered as apocalyptic literature. A notable exception is L.L. Grabbe, Daniel, Sage, Seer . . . and Prophet?”, in L.L. Grabbe and M. Nissinen, ., *Constructs of Prophecy in the Former and Latter Prophets and Other Texts*, Ancient Near East Monographs 4, Atlanta 2011, 87-94.

² Note that this context can also be completely lacking, as in the prophecies to the nations in Jer 46-49 (Jer 50-51 gets its context *a posteriori* starting in Jer 51:60).

³ As assumed in A. Abela, “When the Agenda of an Artistic Composition is hidden” in de Moor, J.C. (ed), *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet As a Historical Person, Literary Character & Anonymous Artist*, Leiden 2001, 14.

⁴ B. Becking, “Means of Revelation in the Book of Jeremiah”, in Barstad, H.M. and Kratz, R.G., *Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 388, Berlin 2009, 46.

⁵ Aristotle, *Rhetorics* I.2.4: „The orator persuades by moral character when his speech is delivered in such a manner as to render him worthy of confidence“ (translation J.H. Freese, referenced at perseus.tufts.edu, 2012/06/08).

⁶ Friebel, *Sign-acts*, 36.

If we would treat the sign-acts as “symbolical-magical acts”¹, the rhetorical aspect is missing, and new traits about perceived power/freedom can be derived.² However, FriebeI has convincingly argued against the magical dimension of these acts,³ and we follow his conclusions in this study.

2.4 Prophetic character – a toolkit

So far we have found no *a priori* reasons to assume a different model of characterization in the prophetic books. We did find specific features though that bring different emphases to some of the seven characteristics identified in 2.2. Let us reformulate them accordingly:

- a. Character in the prophetic books is assumed to be a “dynamic network of traits”⁴. From a cursory reading it is already apparent that characters are developed with varying depth.
- b. Given the nature of the prophetic books, speech is the most prominent character indicator. Contrary to most Biblical narratives, the prophetic books do employ “inner speech” relatively often in the (reflective) prayers of the prophet.
- c. The content of many prophecies conveys explicit moral judgement, but otherwise it can be assumed that reticence is used to create ambiguity and “gaps”.
- d. Formal designations can be assumed to reflect the perspective, and direct descriptions can be assumed to position the character in society. Amos 7:14 gives a nice illustration of how the formal description of נביא as a position in society is denied, thus emphasizing the core function of the designation as prophet.
- e. The prophetic narratives contain relatively few repetitions, but e.g. any difference between the reception of a prophecy and its delivery is likely to be relevant.⁵
- f. Contrasts or rather conflicts between characters are abundantly present in the prophets (e.g. Amos 7, Jer 28) and can be assumed to be employed as indirect indicators.
- g. Withholding information is employed as an indirect indicator (e.g. in Jer 32 and Jonah 4)⁶.

¹ The term used by Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 619.

² As does Carroll for Jer 32, see Carroll *Jeremiah*, 621 and 6.2.1 below.

³ FriebeI, *Sign-acts*. 42-46.

⁴ Verification of this assumption by a rigorous analysis over an entire prophetic book remains to be done. Abela (“When the Agenda”) goes a long way towards a demonstration for Jonah.

⁵ As demonstrated for Jonah by Abela, “When the Agenda”, 28.

⁶ In both cases by a missing response of the prophet (for Jer 32 see below, for Jonah see Abela, “When the Agenda”, 27).

3 Jeremiah as a literary character

Treatments of Jeremiah as a person used to focus on the historical figure, making statements about his character and feelings based on the received text. Polk makes clear that most of these analyses are in rather general terms, and most often not based on thorough exegesis.¹

Modern scholarly opinions on the possibility to evaluate Jeremiah as a literary character greatly vary. Holladay is of the opinion that the book Jeremiah contains much biographical narrative as well as (prophetic) words.² He thus concludes that it is well possible to reconstruct not only the literary character, but even the historical prophet. Carroll on the other hand, considers the book to be a “collection of sayings that acquire shape and form through secondary stages of tradition”³ where the character of the prophet can be at best assumed to “carry the tradition”. Brueggemann takes yet another position in assuming that the book presents a *portrait* of the prophet that “reflects the taste and interest of the artist.”⁴ For him, the literary character stands on its own, but is reflective of concrete historical experiences.

Both Holladay and Brueggemann consider the narrative and prophetic words to relate in some way to an historical figure, and thus assume a high level of consistency in the literary character. Carroll considers the literary character as the result of the redactional organisation. Not only does the historical prophet hide behind the literary character, but the literary character also reflects a variety of traditions. Carroll recognises several *personae*⁵ in the book with contradicting character traits. E.g. Jeremiah is a solitary figure in several passages, but appears to have influential friends elsewhere. Still he maintains that the figure of Jeremiah is a paradigmatic prophet, which he characterises as being involved in a “Promethan striving with the deity.”⁶

Note that Carroll refers to an *editor*, rather than to a narrator. He considers the book as a collection of general prophetic words in poetic style. The narrative passages are provided by an editor to place this poetry in a specific setting: “only the narrative figure of Jeremiah gives specificity to the poetry.”⁷ However, there is no reason to interpret this process as the somewhat mechanical exercise of an editor. It is exactly what a *narrator* would do: combining prose and poetry in such a way that plot and character are developed in a coherent way.

Does the book Jeremiah present a coherent character of the prophet Jeremiah throughout? Verifying this would require a thorough analysis of character indicators in the full book. To my knowledge this has not been done yet, but such an endeavour is clearly outside the scope of this study. Therefore I will assume that such coherency exists at least at the local level of a chapter. More specifically, I will use the working hypothesis that Jer 32 is a coherent narrative, making a search for character traits a useful exercise. This hypothesis can be partly verified if literal and conceptual coherence can be demonstrated. But before we begin this verification, a translation of our text is presented.

¹ T. Polk, *The Prophetic Persona, Jeremiah and the Language of the Self*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 32, Sheffield 1984, 8.

² Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 1.

³ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 34.

⁴ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah, Exile and Homecoming*, Grand Rapids 1998, 11.

⁵ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 37.

⁶ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 55.

⁷ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 57.

4 Translation of Jeremiah 32

From this chapter on we study the text of Jeremiah 32. Jer. 32 follows the “Book of Consolation” in Jer. 30-31. Its chronology within Jeremiah is debated,¹ but fortunately not of primary concern for this study. In the present chapter I present a translation with translation notes. In Chapter 5 we analyse the structure of the text and verify its internal cohesion. With this preparatory work done, we can then look at the characters in our text, which is the subject of Chapter 6.

4.1 Translation

The translation below is structured into cola and subcola according to the Masoretic accents², as proposed by Korpel³. The Masoretic delimitation markers, Setuma and Petucha, are indicated. See section 4.2 for translation notes and text-critical remarks.

ו

1aA The word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH
1aB in the tenth year of Zedekiah, the king of Judah;
1bA that year was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar.

2aA At that time the army of the king of Babel laid siege on Jerusalem
2bA and Jeremiah, the prophet, was detained in the prison court
2bB of the house of the king of Judah

3aA There Zedekiah, the king of Judah, detained him, saying:
3bA Why do you prophesise saying: thus speaks YHWH:
3bB look, I give this city in the hand of the king of Babel and he will take her.

4aA And Zedekiah, the king of Judah
4aB will not escape from the hand of the Chaldeans
4bA for he will certainly be given in the hand of the king of Babel
4bB and speak with him mouth to mouth and eye to eye see him

5aA and to Babel he will take Zedekiah and there he will be
5aB until I visit him, word of YHWH
5bA [for making war on the Chaldeans you will not be prosperous.]

6aA And Jeremiah said:
6bA the word of YHWH came to me, saying:

7aA Look, Chanamel, the son of Sallum, your uncle
7aB comes to you saying:
7bA buy you my field in Anatoth
7bB for to you is the right of redemption to buy.

8aA And Chanamel, the son of my uncle, came to me, according to the word of YHWH, in the prison court
8aB and he said to me: buy, please, the field, the one in Anatoth, the one in the land of Benjamin,
8aC for to you is the right of inheritance and to you is the redemption, buy you it.
8bA Then I knew that this was a word of YHWH.

¹ Especially in relation to Jer 37:11-21.

² Atnach forms the main separator in all verses. Zakkef usually subdivides the two main subcola. In some few instances segolta or rebia subdivide subcola.

³ M.C.A. Korpel, “Introduction to the Series Pericope”, in M.C.A. Korpel, J. van Oesch (eds.), *Delimitation Criticism: A New Tool in Biblical Scholarship* (Pericope, 1), Assen 2000, 1-50.

9aA And I bought the field
9aB from Chanamel, the son of my uncle, the one in Anathoth
9bA and I weighed out for him the silver,
9bB seventeen silver shekels.

10aA And I wrote the letter, and sealed it,
10aB and let the witnesses witness
10bA and weighed out the silver on a scales.

11aA And I took the letter of purchase,
11bA the one sealed according to law and ordinances and the open one.

12aA And I gave the letter of purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Machseja,
12aB before the eye of Chanamel, [the son of] my uncle,
12aC and before the eyes of the witnesses
12aD who had written the letter of purchase
12bA and before the eye of all the Judeans
12bB who dwelt in the prison court.

13aA And I instructed Baruch
13aB before their eyes, saying:

14aA Thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel:
14aB take these letters, this letter of purchase,
14aC both this sealed letter and this open letter
14aD and place them in an earthen vessel,
14bA so that they may endure for many days.

⌋

15aA For thus speaks YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel:
15aB Again there will be bought houses and fields and vineyards in this land.

⌋

16aA And I prayed to YHWH
16aB after I had given the letter of purchase
16bB to Baruch the son of Neriah, saying:

17aA Ah, Lord YHWH, look: you have made the heavens and the earth
17aB by your great strength,
17aC and by your outstretched arm,
17bB nothing is too difficult for you,

18aA Offering mercy to thousands
18aB and paying back the iniquity of the fathers
18aC in the lap of the sons after them,
18bA the great and mighty God,
18bB YHWH of hosts is his name.

19aA Great of council
19aB and many of deeds,
19bA whose eyes are opened on all ways of the sons of man,
19bB to give each man according to his ways
19bC and according to the fruit of his deeds.

20aA Who put signs and wonders in the land of Egypt up to this day,
20aB both in Israel and in mankind
20bA and made yourself a name as of this day.

21aA And you let go out your people, Israel, from the land of Egypt
21bA by signs and by wonders and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm
21bB and by great terror.

22aA And you gave them this land
22aB of which you swore to their fathers that you would give it to them,
22bA a land flowing of milk and honey,

23aA And they came and possessed it, and listened not to your voice and in your laws did not walk,
23aB of all that you commanded them to do they did nothing,
23bA and you made them meet
23bB with all these evils.

24aA Look, the mounds have come to the city to catch it
24aB and the city has been given in the hand of the Chaldeans fighting against it,
24aC through the presence of the sword and the famine and the pestilence
24bA and what you have spoken has happened, and look, you are seeing it.

25aA And you, you have said to me, Lord YHWH:
25aB buy for you the field for silver and have the witnesses witness,
25bA while the city is given in the hand of the Chaldeans!

26aA And the word of YHWH
26bA came to Jeremiah, saying:

27aA Look, I, YHWH,
27aB God of all the living
27aC would for me anything be too difficult?

28aA Therefore, thus says YHWH:
28aB look, I give this city in the hand of the Chaldeans,
28bB and in the hand of Nebuchadrezzar, the king of Babel, and he will take her.

29aA And come will the Chaldeans who make war against this city
29aB and they will kindle this city with fire, and burn [it],
29bA as well as the houses where they kindled [offerings] on their roofs for Baal
and poured out offerings for other gods,
29bB to grieve me.

30aA For the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah have been
30aB surely doing evil in my eyes from their youth on,
30bA for the sons of Israel
30bB surely were grieving me through the deeds of their hands, word of YHWH.

31aA For to my anger and to my fury has this city been,
31aB from the day they built it
31aC up to this day,
31bA so that I make her go away from my face.

32aA Because of all the evil of the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah, that they did to grieve me,
32aB they, their kings, their chieftains,
32aC their priests and their prophets,
32bA both the men of Judah
32bB and those dwelling in Jerusalem.

33aA And they turned to me the neck and not the faces,
33aB and I instructed them from early morning on
33bA but they were never listening to grasp their instruction.

34aA And they put their abominations
34aB in the house over which my name was called, to defile it.

35aA And they built up the high places for Baal, those in the valley of Ben Hinnom,
35aB to let pass [through the fire] their sons and their daughters for Molech,
35bA which I had not commanded them
35bB and had not entered my heart,
35bC making this abomination
35cA to load sin on Judah.

⌋

36aA And now, therefore, thus says YHWH, the God of Israel,
36bA of this city, of which you are saying:
36bB she has been given in the hand of the king of Babel,
36bC through the sword and through famine and through pestilence

37aA Look, I gather them from all the lands
37aB where I have driven them to in my anger and in my fury and in my large wrath
37bA and I let them return to this place
37bB and I will let them dwell in safety.

38aA They shall be to me as a people
38bA and I shall be to them as a God.

39aA And I will give them one heart and one way
39aB so that they fear me all the days,
39bA to the good of them
39bB and of their children after them.

40aA And I will make with them a lasting covenant
40aB such that I will not turn from after them,
40aC so as to do them good,
40bA and my fear I will give them in their heart,
40bB so that they don't depart from me.

41aA I will rejoice over them to do them good,
41bA and I will plant them in this land
41bB with certainty, with all my heart and with all my soul.

⌋

42aA For thus says YHWH,
42aB as I brought on this people
42aC all this large evil,
42bA likewise I myself will bring over them all the good
42bB that I myself promised them.

43aA And fields will be bought in this land
43bA of which you say:
43bB it is desolate, without man or beast,
43bC it has been given in the hand of the Chaldeans

44aA Fields they will buy for silver
44aB and letters they will write and seal and have witnessed by witnesses
44bA in the land of Benjamin and in the region of Jerusalem
44bB and in the cities of Judah and in the cities of the mountains
44bC and in the cities of the valleys and in the cities of the South,
44cA for I will bring them back from their captivity, word of YHWH

⌋

4.2 Translation notes

Note on versions: Becking concludes for Jer 30-31 that MT and LXX probably reflect two different textual traditions¹. Shead concludes from a detailed comparison of Jer 32 in MT and LXX, that MT and LXX form “two ‘books’ or recensions.”² Thus questions about the originality of either version are not very fruitful. The present translation follows the MT unless there is a clear indication that the MT has been corrupted and that the LXX offers a less corrupted reading.

2aA וְאֵל can describe both the start of a process (from then on, e.g. Gen 4:36) or a specific moment (then, e.g. Gen 12:6). Although the siege by the Babylonians took a long time, the meaning of the verse is that the siege was going on, not that it started at this moment.

2bA הַצֵּר הַמְטָרָה lit. courtyard of the guarding, also used in Neh 3:25. This probably was not so much a prison as courtyard where guards were present (dwelt, see Jer 32:12b) to keep prisoners in custody. Van Selms assumes that Zedekiah kept Jeremiah here pending his verdict; this seems rather speculative.³

3bB ... בְּיַד: “in the hand of” signifies “in the power of”, the present translation renders the expression literally to keep the metaphor and signal the recurring use in the text.

4 This sentence is an almost verbatim quote of Jer 34:3, where Jeremiah delivers this prophecy to the king⁴; also note that this is the first of twelve occurrences of מִלְטָה in Jeremiah.

4bA הַנֶּתֵן יִנָּתֵן is an intensifying inf. followed by ipf., so: he will surely be given.

5aB The meaning of בָּקַד is ambiguous here: visit with punishment (e.g. Ex 20:5) or with consolation (e.g. Gen 50:24)? The sentence is missing in LXX. Rashi interprets the expression “until I remember him” as the remembrance of all mankind, that is death. This seems unnecessarily indirect. The use of בָּקַד is most often negative. However, Jer 32:5a has a clear parallel in Jer 27:22. Both verses mention the coming to Babel (of king and people respectively) and the staying there until YHWH visits. In Jer 27:22 this visitation is clearly positive, resulting in the return. So it seems likely that the meaning in Jer 32:5a is also positive. The present translation retains the ambiguity though, as the narrator may have introduced it on purpose.

5bA This subcolon is missing in the LXX, and no statement like this is found in Jer 34:1-6. The content of the statement is consistent with e.g. Jer 2:37. But note also that the subcolon follows the נֶאֱמַר-יְהוָה which elsewhere closes the verse. This is a strong indication that the verse might be a later addition, hence the [].

6 Note the switch to direct speech by Jeremiah, which continues up to v25. The LXX and the Peshitta have “The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah”, thus continuing narrative mode. However, in v8 Jeremiah relates the coming of Chanamel in first person (also in LXX). This is fully consistent with the MT version of v6 (and less with LXX).

7bB With הַנְּאֻלָּה the transaction is clearly brought in the domain of redemption as described in Lev 25:25. The relation is not entirely clear though. Lev 25 refers to land that has been sold by an impoverished relative and is bought back by the redeemer. Jer 32 seems to refer to the purchase (לְקִנּוּת) of the field by the redeemer from the relative himself. We should realize that our knowledge of the rules of landownership in

¹ B. Becking, *Between fear and freedom, Essays on the Interpretation of Jeremiah 30-31*, Old Testament Studies 51, Leiden 2004, 48.

² Andrew G. Shead, *The Open Book and the Sealed Book, Jeremiah 32 in its Hebrew and Greek Recensions*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 347, London 2002, 263. With the Sealed Book Shead refers to the Hebrew *vorlage* of the LXX.

³ A. van Selms, *Jeremia, deel 2*, De prediking van Oude Testament, Nijkerk 2002, 92; Zedekiah would be waiting to see if the prophecy happened (Deut 18:22).

⁴ A discussion of the internal chronology of Jeremiah is outside the scope of this paper.

ancient Judah is limited¹. Holladay considers מִשְׁפַּט הַנְּאֻלָּה to be a synonym for redemption and translates the “right of possession”.² Mezudath David reads “Since I have no closer kinsman than you, and you are fit to inherit my field, redeem it lest it fall into the hands of strangers, and buy it.”³ The present translation follows this reading, which fits well with Ruth 3:12, the only other reference to the practice of Lev 25:25. The LXX does not refer explicitly to Lev 25, but refers to the right (not duty) of purchase.

8aA LXX lacks the references to the “word of YHWH”. In relation to 8bA, this flattens out the narrative. Carroll⁴ compares 8bA to 1 Sam 10:1-7.

9bB The price is listed in an almost poetic way: שִׁבְעָה שֶׁקֶלִים וְעֶשְׂרֵה הַכֶּסֶף, seven shekels and ten [of] silver. The reason is unclear as the rest of the sentence is quite prosaic. All commentaries agree that it is impossible to establish whether seventeen shekels was a bargain or the normal price.⁵

10aB The Hiphil of עוֹד is used here in the sense of “called to witness”, which according to 12aD implied signing the letter of purchase. The whole sentence wants to impress upon the reader that this was a formal transaction, carried out scrupulously according to legal requirements.

11 The preceding verse just referred to “the letter”. Here it is designated as סֵפֶר הַמִּקְנָה, letter of the purchase. This seems to be a *terminus technicus* so it is translated without the definite article for purchase. Several sources show that such letters were in fact scrolls that were partly rolled up and sealed, with a copy or summary of the text on the remaining part which remained visible.⁶

12 The repeated לְעֵינַי has the effect of gradually extending the audience to the whole group of Judeans, guards and other staff, possibly other prisoners who dwelt there. The translation “before the eyes of” is intended to reflect this heightening effect, which is flattened out by the KJV’s “in sight of”. The MT has דְּרִי instead of בֶּן-דְּרִי. LXX does have υἱοῦ ἀδελφοῦ πατρος μου, and it seems likely that the MT has a gloss here.⁷ The present translation amends the text following LXX.

14 Note that the instruction is presented as a word of YHWH, as prophecy. Storing documents in earthen vessels was indeed an effective method, as demonstrated by the findings at Qumran.

15 This verse is the prophecy that gives closure to the sign-act. Note the extension from fields to houses, fields and vineyards (this goes beyond the list in Lev 25: vineyards are not mentioned there).

16aA פָּלַל in Hithpael has the connotation of intercession. Other occurrences in Jeremiah indeed relate to “praying for”. The present verse however does not give an object on behalf of whom the prophet would pray.

17-25 Throughout these verses language and images from Exodus and Deuteronomy are used. The translation attempts to reflect these references.

17aB,aC כַּחַךְ הַנְּדוּל וּבִזְרַעַךְ הַנְּטוּיָה parallel with Deut 9:29.

17bB פָּלֵא (Niphal) is translated here as “too difficult.” LXX and Rashi translate “hidden”, which would fit well here, but less well in 27aC. See the detailed discussion in 5.3.

¹ As explained by W. R. Domeris, “The Land Claim of Jeremiah – Was Max Weber Right?” in Diamond, A.R.P. and Stulman L. (eds), *Jeremiah (Dis)Placed: New Directions in Writing/Reading Jeremiah*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 529, New York 2011, 136-149.

² Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 203

³ A.J. Rosenberg, *Jeremiah, Volume two, A New English Translation, Translation of Text, Rashi and Commentary*, Judaica Books of the Prophets, New York 1985, 258.

⁴ Carroll, *Jeremiah.*, 622.

⁵ See e.g. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 620.

⁶ See Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 215.

⁷ Rashi first makes the highly implausible suggestion there were two Chanamels, but then concludes: “otherwise, I do not know what it means.” Of course calling it a gloss was no option for him.

18a The text is parallel with Ex 20:5-6 and to a lesser extent with Ex 34:7. Note that שלם (paying back) is used whereas Ex 20:5 has פקד (vist). One might speculate if פקד might have been avoided to keep the ambiguity with the positive use in Jer 32:5.

18aC חיק means either lap or bosom, both areas of intimacy. The lap is the place where a child is close to its mother (e.g. Ruth 4:16, 1Kon 17:19, Lam 2:12, see also Jes 40:11). The bosom is the place close to someone's heart (e.g. Psalm 89:50, Micha 7:5). Rashi understands the verse as "the iniquity of the fathers who is (also) in the bosom of the children", but this does not fit with the Masoretic accents. The present translation follows Jes 65:6,7 where vengeance is "thrown in the lap". There seems no reason to follow van Selms who sees the bosom as the place where money is kept in connection with "paying back".¹

19b There is a parallel with Ps 28:4.

20 The full sentence is echoed in Neh 9:10, including the final ותעש-לך שם כהיום הזה, see also Jes 63:12.

20aA There is a parallel with Ex 7:3

20aB אדם, lit. man, seems contrasted here with Israel, so translated [rest of] mankind.

21bB There is a close parallel with Deut 26:8-9.

22 There is a close parallel with Deut 11:9.

23 This verse merges concepts from Deut 4:11 (שמע) and Deut 5:33 (הלכו) both ending with the possessing of the land. Note the subtle transition from "and they came and possessed it", which is still in line with the promises quoted, to "and listened *not* and ... did *not* walk. The neat series of ו-consecutive give this turn great rhetorical strength and is therefore preserved in the present translation.

23aA ירש has the connotation of "possessing as an inheritance", which might refer back to Chanamels statement in 8aC or more likely to e.g. Deut 1:21.

23bA קרא in Hiphil here translated as "made meet with" to preserve the sense of the Qal.

24aC Sword, famine and pestilence are a common expression in Jeremiah, see e.g. Jer 14:12.

25aA In ואתה אמרת, the אתה emphasizes the speaker: you yourself. This expression occurs five times in the Hebrew Bible, of which four in discourse with YHWH.² Gen 32:12 and Ex 33:12 are a plea to YHWH by Jacob and Moses respectively. Num 11:21 and the present verse seem to be expressions of doubt/bewilderment.

26 After a long report by Jeremiah, that started after 6aB, the narrator now briefly takes over. LXX has προς με and thus includes the response of YHWH in Jeremiah's report. As Jer 32:1 started with the narrator, there is no reason to deviate from the MT.

27 The zakkef appears on הממני, coupling it to the preceding words rather than to יפלא כל-דבר. This would suggest a translation "Look, I, YHWH // God, all the living is from me // would anything be too difficult?". This however would break the parallelism with 17bB (לא-יפלא מומך כל-דבר) // (הממני יפלא כל-דבר) as well as the possible rhyme כל-בשר // כל-דבר. The present translation therefore does not follow the Masoretic accents.

27aB כל-בשר lit. all flesh, used in the sense of all living creatures. The term occurs first in the story of the flood, see e.g. Gen 9:17 which refers to the covenant between God and all the living. Note that Jeremiah in v17 referred to the creation of heaven and earth, now YHWH in his reply refers to the story of the flood.

27aC פלא (Niphal) is translated here as "too difficult" since "hidden" (LXX and Rashi) does not seem appropriate here. See the note at 17bB and the discussion in 5.3.

¹ Van Selms, *Jeremia.*, 94.

² In Jes. 14:13 it is used of Babel.

28aA לכן has been translated “therefore” since both 28aA and 36aA seem to reflect on 27, see 5.3.

29 This sentence shows a double development. The Chaldeans come, kindle, burn down whereas the Judeans burnt and pledged offerings. The climax of the first development (שרפ) connects with the start of the second (קטר). The present translation reads למען הכעס as expressing intentionality (in order to grieve YHWH) rather than consequential (thus grieving YHWH), in view of the parallel in Jer 7:18.

30-31 This series of three sentences starting with כי results in the verdict of 31bA. There is clear parallelism between 30a and 31a. The Judeans and Israelites *have been* doing evil (30aB) *from their youth on*, the city *has been* to Gods anger and fury (31aA) *from the day it was built* (31aB). The concluding להסירה, inf. const. Hiphil, expresses consequentiality. LXX misses 30b, thus avoiding the question why only the Israelites are mentioned there, and bringing 30a and 31a closer together. The present translation nevertheless follows the MT, as 30b is clearly parallel to 30a¹, and connected to 29bB and 32aA by כעס.

32 על in this verse seems to refer back to 31bA, otherwise there is no closure for it.

33aA “They turned”, יפנו with the same root as “faces,” פנים might serve to ridicule this behavior.

33aB לשכם ולמור ... השכם ולמור – literally: “instructed ... from the rising, and instructed”, so from early morning onwards continually. There is a parallel with Jer 7:25 and 28.

34-35 These verses are almost identical to Jer 7:30b-31. They also reflect the totality of city and the land that was mentioned in 32b.

34aA שקוציהם is used to refer to idols and their statues, here statues placed in the temple.

35aB עביר (Hifil) has been translated literally here because of the parallel with Jer 7:31. “Passing” probably meant passing children through the fire as an act of dedication (in Jer 7:31: actually burning them). More figurative interpretations of this dedication have been suggested, and in fact this verse itself already seems to tone down the brutal description we find in Jer 7.

35cA חטא in Hiphil means cause to sin, to load sin on, the intentionality is stressed by למען. As with 29bB, “to grieve me”, it seems somewhat hyperbolic to assume that this was really an explicit intent. Still this translation is most in line with the text.

36 See the discussion in 5.3 about the sudden turn introduced by this verse.

36bA Note that אמרים אתם (ptc. act.) is clearly plural. As the referent is missing (generic? those present at the sign-act? a later audience?) a translation like “you all” seems not warranted. The verse refers back to 24a, where Jeremiah is praying. This might imply that the prayer was an intercessory prayer indeed, partly on behalf of those present. The LXX has resolved the issue by using a singular.

37 This verse refers back to the sending away in 31bA, effectively reversing that act.

37aA There is a clear parallel with Deut 30:3 (קבצ), even more so in combination with 44c.

37aB באפי ובחמתי ובקצף גדול is found also in Deut 29:28 and Jer 21:5. Deut 29:28 describes the exile from the land using נתש (pluck out) and לכ (flung away), this verse has the Hiphil of נדה (driven out).

38 This verse gives the formal covenant formula (Ex 6:7, Lev 26:12, in Jeremiah: 7:23, 11:4 referring back to the exodus event, 24:7, 30:22, 31:1, 31:33 referring to the future). The sequence of the two parallel lines (you will be // I will be) varies in Jeremiah.

¹ Carroll reads עשה ידיהם in 30bB as a reference to idols (*Jeremiah*, 627) and translates accordingly “work of their hands”, however the present translation reflects the parallelism: doing evil // deeds of their hands.

39aA אֶחָד is used twice, conveying the sense of undividedness; the “one way” might refer back to the various ways in v19. LXX has another heart, Peshitta has a new heart, both lack the qualification which is implicit in “one [undivided] heart”. This “interiorization of torah”¹ is comparable to Jer 31:33.

39bA The translation is somewhat awkward but reflects the parallelism in the Hebrew with 39bB. Words with the root טוֹב occur here, in 40aC, 41aA and 42bA.

40aA בְּרִית עוֹלָם – first occurrences in Gen 9:16 (story of the flood) and Gen 17:6 (Abraham).

40bB כּוֹר is here in Qal, possibly referring back to the Hiphil in 31bA.

41bB נִפְשֵׁי-וּבְכָל-לֵבִי וּבְכָל-נַפְשִׁי, is only here said by YHWH of himself², is otherwise applied to the people, נִפְשֵׁי-וּבְכָל-לֵבָבְךָ in Deut 30:2,6,10.

42b The twice repeated אֲנֹכִי is shown in the translation as “I myself”, from the context it is appears that דִּבַּר is used with the connotation of “promised”.

43aA הַשָּׂדֶה is lit. “the field”, apparently it is used here in a categorical sense, LXX has the plural.

43bA אַתֶּם אֹמְרִים is plural, as in v32:36; LXX has the singular.

44a The terms from the act in v10 are repeated here.

44b The בארץ בנימן, referring back to 8ab, is used as the starting point of a series of geographical statements spanning up the whole land.

44c This closing verse is the only tricolon in the Jer 32. אָשִׁיב (Hiphil) is translated here literally by “bring them back”, rather than the more generic “turn” because of the analogy with 37bA. Captivity (שְׁבוּתָה) seems not to refer back to Jeremiah being detained (כָּלְאָה). Instead, as in 37a, there is a clear parallel with Deut 30:3. So the whole set of promises in 37-44 is framed in a reference to Deut 30:3.

¹ As aptly phrased by Carroll, *Jeremiah.*, 630.

² E.g. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 629.

5 Structure of Jeremiah 32

In Chapter 3 we concluded that a coherent text is a necessary precondition for coherent characterization. Therefore we have to pay close attention to the structure of our text. In a structured text the constituent parts support each other. Various approaches towards structural analysis exist. Talstra distinguishes between syntactical analysis (based on grammatical forms, verbal modes etc.) and literary composition (based on word repetitions, narrative perspective etc.)¹. Korpel distinguishes apart from the syntactic structure, a semantic, episodic and semiotic structure.² The semantic structure relates to the repetition of words and concepts. In this study, conceptual structure is treated separately for sake of clarity. The episodic structure relates to variations of perspective and the development of plot. The semiotic structure analyses a specific narrative model, the semiotic scheme³, which is not used here as it does not yield additional information on internal coherence.

This chapter starts with a brief overview of earlier proposals for the structure of Jer 32. Then I present a structure based on a simple syntactical analysis of the mode of delivery. It will turn out that this structure is to a large extent consistent with the Masoretic delimitation markers. These give guidance to the reading of the texts,⁴ and thus provide an early indication of the perceived structure. Within this structural framework, we can then look at the coherence of the text. First we take a closer look at the somewhat complicated turn of events in verse 36. Then we verify cohesion at three levels: semantic (repetition of words), conceptual (repetition of concepts/themes) and episodic (development of plot). This will allow us to relate our findings to the earlier proposals and draw conclusions on the likelihood to find coherent characterization in the text.

It should be noted that Jer 33 seems to seamlessly follow our text. Jeremiah is still (עֹרֵךְ) in the prison court as the word of YHWH comes to him again and the themes of destruction and restoration recur. However: the narrative in Jer 32 is clearly completed with the tricolon in 44. In Jer 33 it is the second time (שֵׁנִית) that YHWH addresses the prophet and the theme of the buying of fields does not return at all. Therefore we can legitimately treat Jer 32 as a separate narrative unit.

5.1 Earlier proposals

Before we turn to an analysis on the basis of mode of delivery, we first look at some earlier proposals.

5.1.1 Based on content (Holladay, Carroll, Brueggemann)

Holladay⁵, Carroll⁶ and Brueggemann¹ in their commentaries all structure the text mostly based on the general content. They arrive at similar divisions in three sections: purchase, prayer and response. They all struggle with the way in which verses in 2-5 fit in the chapter. The table gives an overview.

¹ E. Talstra, *Oude en Nieuwe Lezers, een inleiding in de methoden van uitleg van het Oude Testament*, Kampen 2002, see 253 for prophetic texts.

² M.C.A. Korpel, *Handleiding Exegese Oude Testament*, Utrecht 2005, 10.

³ Brillenburg Wurth & Rigney, *Leven van Teksten*, 172

⁴ Korpel, "Introduction", 16.

⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 206; several verses identified as secondary additions in 16-44 are not listed here.

⁶ Carroll, *Jeremiah*. 87.

	Holladay	Carroll	Brueggemann
1-15	Purchase of family field	Prose addition to poetry	Narration of land purchase
2-5	"Clearly secondary"	Redactional parentheses	General introduction
16-25	Jeremiah's prayer	Poetry framed between הנה in 17 and 24.	Prayer of the prophet
26-44	YHWH's answer	Major parts: 26-35, 36-41 and 42-44.	Oracle as response from YHWH
42-44			"Additional oracle"

Holladay notes that Jeremiah directly cites his prayer, and distinguishes three phases in it: expression of dismay, recitation of the past, description of the present. In YHWH's answer he distinguishes self-description followed by proclamation of salvation. He concludes that the passage affirms Jeremiah's proclamation of future hope. Holladay makes extensive use of redaction criticism. He finds in the text a core related to the historical Jeremiah which has been augmented by layers of redaction. In his original core he includes parts of sign-act, prayer and response. McKane, who also makes a detailed redactional analysis, considers only 1-15 as original (though not necessarily related to the historical prophet).²

Carroll takes an opposite perspective and considers all the narrative in our text to be prose additions to a cycle of poems about the restoration. Although Carroll does not assume many layers of redaction, he hardly considers the narrative to be a coherent whole. He sees the prayer as only loosely integrated with the theme of buying the field.³ Also, he considers 28-35 to be "quite out of place" in the context of buying the field.⁴

Brueggemann structures the text around 17bB, the statement by the prophet that nothing is too difficult for YHWH. In the prayer he distinguishes a doxology, a catalogue of "impossibilities God has wrought"⁵ followed by a retribution (in the "yet thou"). He rightly sees strong parallels between 17 and 27. He separates the response in a judgment in lawsuit form (28-36) and restoration (36-41)⁶. This requires him to see 42-44 as an additional oracle with the same two components (judgment being referred to in 42). Brueggemann thus treats the present composition as coherent.

5.1.2 Based on discourse (Shead)

Shead studies the structure of the discourse in Jer 32. He analyses in particular the use of the various messenger formulae.⁷ Based on this analysis he distinguishes a narrative (1b-25) with subsequent discourse (26-44) held together by the framework of messenger formulae.⁸ In his view 6b-25 form one unit, that is an "equal partner" of 26-44.

Shead finds three levels of discourse in the text: between the narrator (which he calls "compiler") and the reader, between God and the prophet, and between the prophet and the audience (which he calls "hearer")⁹.

¹ Brueggemann, *Exile & Homecoming*, 307.

² W. McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume II*, The International Critical Commentary, Edinburgh 1996, 851.

³ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 625.

⁴ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 628.

⁵ Brueggemann, *Exile & Homecoming*, 303.

⁶ Brueggemann, *Exile & Homecoming*, 307.

⁷ The Wortgeschehensformel, Shead, *Open & Sealed Book*, 52.

⁸ Shead, *Open & Sealed Book*, 242.

⁹ Shead, *Open & Sealed Book*, 35.

Since he uses his analysis to study the relation between MT and LXX, no further implications for the narrative structure are drawn from this observation. But from his extensive study he concludes that Jer 32 is a coherent whole linguistically in both MT and LXX.

5.2 Mode of delivery

We can extend the analysis of Shead by looking at the modes of delivery in our text. Narratives have various modes of delivery: events or circumstances are described; speech is reported directly or indirectly. All this can happen at various levels. Speech can be reported by the narrator or be quoted by a character. Events can be described by the narrator, by a single character or in dialogue. In our text we also find two specific categories of direct speech: prayer and prophecy.

We find the following modes of delivery, with the Masoretic separators indicated:

1-5 narrated events with embedded speech

- 1 narrated event: the word of YHWH came¹
- 2 narrated circumstances
- 3-5 embedded direct speech of Zedekiah, quoting Jeremiah's prophecy

6-25 reported direct speech by Jeremiah (6aA seems to refer back to 1aA)

- 7 reported direct speech of YHWH announcing the coming of Chanamel
- 8 events narrated by Jeremiah: coming of Chanamel,
quoted direct speech by Chanamel, confirmation of prophecy
- 9-13 events narrated by Jeremiah: purchase of the field, handing over to Baruch
- 14 quoted direct speech by Jeremiah: prophetic instruction to Baruch

⊔

- 15 reported prophecy: promise of future sales in this land

⊔

- 16-25 reported prayer of Jeremiah

26-44 reported direct speech by YHWH to Jeremiah

- 28-35 reported events: disobedience of the people

⊔

- 36-41 reported prophecy: promise of return and lasting covenant

⊔

- 42-44 reported prophecy: promise of return and property throughout the land

⊔

Verses 6-25 appear to be a single narrative unit, containing direct speech by Jeremiah. However, the Petucha after 15 seems to suggest that we should separate 16-25 from the preceding direct speech by Jeremiah.

¹ Although the text is a conventional messenger formula, it also functions as a narrated event as in e.g. 1Kings 18:1.

The Setuma's mark the start of a reported prophecy. There is no Setuma before the prophecy in 3-5, which I take as confirmation that this is quoted to set the scene, and not a core prophecy delivered in our text.¹

The prophecy in 15 is clearly the climax of the sign-act. Also the final statement in Jeremiah's prayer in 25 seems to be climactic. There is an implied question here: how is it possible that you say this. Both climactic statements refer to the buying of fields. It is therefore attractive to see the final prophecy in 42-44 as a climax too, as it once more makes this reference. However, this seems not appropriate: the promises in 36-41 are of a more fundamental nature than the ones in 42-44. The threefold reference in 15, 25 and 44 to the purchases (implying property) could best be interpreted as tying the three parts together. The real climactic prophecy is 44cA: "I [YHWH] will bring them back from their captivity."

Combining the structuring information from the narrative modes and the Masoretic separators, we can distinguish six sections in the text.²

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| A1 | 1- 5 | Setting the scene (narrator) |
| A2 | 6-15 | Sign-act (direct speech Jeremiah) |
| A3 | 16-25 | Prayer (direct speech Jeremiah) |
| B1 | 26-35 | Response part 1: destruction because of evil (direct speech YHWH) |
| B2 | 36-41 | Response part 2: promise of return and covenant (direct speech YHWH) |
| B3 | 42-44 | Response part 3: promise of return and property (direct speech YHWH) |

5.3 A complicated turn

Before we proceed to verify the internal coherence of Jer. 32, we have to address two major complications in the text. Between verses 35 and 36 there is a clear turning point in the reported speech.³ Verse 36 starts with *ועתה לכן*. Elsewhere in Jeremiah *לכן* clearly means "therefore".⁴ However, using this translation here and having it refer to the previous verses would imply that *because* Judah loaded sin upon itself, YHWH will gather them from all the lands. This seems highly implausible.

We have to realize though that there is a clear parallelism between verse 28 and 36. Therefore I follow Brueggemann⁵ in taking both "therefores" to refer back to verse 27:

- | | |
|----|--|
| 27 | Look, I, YHWH, God of all the living, would for me anything be too difficult? |
| 28 | Therefore, thus says YHWH:
look, I give this city in the hand of the Chaldeans, |
| 36 | And now, therefore, thus says YHWH, the God of Israel,
of this city, of which you are saying she has been given in the hand ...
look, I gather them from all the lands |

¹ Also in the books of Samuel, prophecies are preceded by Setumot, with the notable exception of 2Sam 7:3, which indeed turns out to be misleading (C. van Staalduinen-Sulman, presentation at SLB Int. Meeting 2012/07/23).

² There might be a pattern in the verse counts (5, 10, 10, 10, 6, 3 verses respectively), but no clear explanation suggests itself for it.

³ We will discuss the narrative implications later in 5.5.3.

⁴ Jer 42:15 is the only other occurrence in the Hebrew bible of *ועתה לכן*, and there is no reason not to translate it as "now therefore" at that place.

⁵ Brueggemann, *Exile & Homecoming*, 308; Brueggemann does not mention the parallelism between v28 and v36.

The reading would then be: because YHWH is God, because all the living originates from him, he can deliver this city up for destruction, but he can also gather the people back. This is entirely plausible, and also sheds light on the somewhat enigmatic **יִפְלֵא כָל-דְּבַר** in 27aC.

Translating **יִפְלֵא** as “hidden” (as LXX and Rashi do) would fit well with 28: the evils of the people are not hidden from YHWH. But this translation does not make sense in reference to 36. If the verse is to be read as: would anything be beyond my power, this makes perfectly sense for both 28 and 36. There is even a climax. It is not beyond the power of YHWH to give up city and people because of their abominations. This is what one can expect of an all-mighty God, as Jeremiah himself notices in his prayer. But even more: it is also not beyond the power of the God on whom all life is dependent to bring back the people to the city, making a new covenant. This is not expected by Jeremiah, just as Sarai does not expect YHWH will give her a son at her old age (Jer 32:27 seems to echo YHWH's reply to Sarai in Gen 18:14).¹

There is another complication with the turn in verse 36. Here, as well as in verse 43, **אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם אֹמְרִים** is clearly plural. This is not immediately plausible in a private response to Jeremiah. Of course this could be an indication that the passage is a later insertion. Or could it be that this statement conveys implicitly that Jeremiah is no longer alone in his conviction that the city will fall? This seems plausible. It is even possible that the narrator hints that Jeremiah's prayer was a public prayer, expressed at least partly on behalf of the people before whose eyes the sign-act was performed.²

One enigmatic form remain: if **אַתֶּם** in verse 36 refers to the fellow citizens of Jeremiah in the second person plural, who then are the referents of the third person plural in verses 37-38? Holladay assumes that reference is to the exilic community.³ However, one would expect an explicit referent then. It seems most likely that the referents are the descendants of the **אַתֶּם**.

5.4 Collection or coherent whole

As noted in Chapter 3, an incoherent text would falsify our hypothesis that the text develops coherent characters. Therefore it is important to verify if Jer. 32 is a coherent whole, or a mere collection of originally separate texts. We do this at the semantic level (reuse of words or phrases), the conceptual level (conceptual coherence) and the episodic level (development of plot). Note that internal cohesion does not rule out that earlier material was used. It does however demonstrate a purposeful, creative redaction that resulted in the present text.

¹ See Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 206.

² Note that all other occurrences of **יִפְלֵא** in Jeremiah refer to prayers of intercession.

³ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 207.

5.4.1 Semantic level

At the semantic level, we observe several keywords and catchphrases. The chart in Appendix A identifies various potential keywords and catchphrases that occur relatively often in our text. Different sets of words/phrases seem to connect various sections in the text; the major ones are listed in the table below.

	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	B3
“this city ... in the hands of ... through sword, famine and pestilence”	X		X	X	X	X
This land, land of Benjamin		X	X			X
Buying fields for silver, with witnesses and letters		X	X			X
Evil/grieve/not listen		X		X		X
Good					X	X

The table shows that no section is isolated in terms of semantics. A1 is the weakest link, but on the other hand introduces a major recurring theme: the city that is given in the hands of its adversaries.

5.4.2 Conceptual level

At the conceptual level, there is a clear repetition of two main themes:

- I. The city will fall in the hands of the foreign invaders
- II. There will be a restoration of Israel to the land

These two themes are readily related to the two transformations identified by Becking in Jer 31¹. Theme I, corresponding to Trans1, the transformation to “fear”, is consistently described as “falling in the hands of” the king of Babel or the Chaldeans. We see this theme being developed in the course of our text:

A1	Introduction	Statement: city will fall
A2	Sign-act	Implied confirmation: “many days” to come
A3	Prayer	Confirmation, motivation (“they did not listen”) and expansion (sword, famine, pestilence)
B1	Destruction because of evil	Confirmation with details (put on fire), detailed motivation (evil deeds, abominations)
B2	Promise of return and covenant	Indirect confirmation (“of which you say”), indirect details (“gather” implies exile)
B3	Promise of return and property	Indirect confirmation (“of which you say”)

So this theme climaxes in B1, the first part of YHWH’s response to Jeremiah: details of the destruction, but also details in the motivation.

¹ Becking, *Fear & Freedom*, 150.

Theme II, corresponding to Becking's Trans2, the transformation to "freedom", is described by the purchase of fields or in B2 by the new covenant; the theme is lacking in A1 and B1:

A1	Introduction	No reference
A2	Sign-act	Prophecy: "Again there will be bought ..."
A3	Prayer	Doubt: "you have said to me ... buy for you"
B1	Destruction because of evil	No reference
B2	Promise of return and covenant	Promise of return, covenant, being "planted" in the land
B3	Promise of return and property	Promise: "fields will be bought" / "fields they will buy" extending the scope (covering all the land)

Here the development is less even, but in terms of narrative more interesting. After delivering the prophetic statement, Jeremiah expresses his doubts in the prayer. In the response, YHWH confirms the prophecy in two consecutive promises. Note that Jeremiah's reaction is not recorded.

Also note that B2 uses the same language and metaphors as Jer 31:31-34. The new covenant is internalized¹, it is in the heart of the people. The fact that this section lacks any reference to "fields" (let alone to the buying thereof) might suggest that it is a later insertion. However, as described above, B2 is firmly connected at the syntactic level to the other parts of Jer. 32. In particular כל-הטובה in B3 (verse 42) clearly relates to the trifold mention of "good" in B2².

5.4.3 Episodic level

Merging the schemes for the two themes, we see a clear development of the plot.³

A1: Setting the scene, introducing Theme I *en passant* through the quoted prophecy.

A2: The purchase of the field, climaxing in the divine command to Baruch and the closing prophecy.

The setting of this section confirms Theme I, and gradually introduces Theme II

A3: The prayer in which Jeremiah wrestles with the instruction (after delivering the prophecy)

The content of the prayer expands Theme I, and casts doubt on Theme II

B1: The answer of YHWH initially drives home Theme I even further, providing detail and motivation.

Theme II is completely absent, Jeremiah's doubts seem to be confirmed.

B2: But then, after a brief reference to Theme I, there is a turn: Theme II is forcefully introduced in the language of return and covenant.

B3: Finally, Theme II is confirmed in the terms of the sign-act, climaxing in the closing promise of return.

Withholding information is often a sign that the narrator wants to create a gap that the reader is supposed to ponder about. Therefore I consider the fact that Jeremiah's response is missing as a final twist in the plot.

¹ Becking, *Fear & Freedom*, 259.

² לשוב in 39bA, להטיב in 40aC, להטיב in 41aA.

³ *Contra* Carroll who considers it a "heavily expanded chapter" that only slowly comes to the point, *Jeremiah*, 631.

We might consider B3 as a further development of B2, with the purchase of fields being used as an illustration of “all the good”. But we might also argue that the new covenant is of more significance than the transfer of property.¹ Then it seems that the prophecy gets an additional layer of significance in B2. The puzzled prayer of the prophet thus gives the opportunity for a new, a deeper promise in B2. This promise is then confirmed by the return of normal business transactions in B3.²

An alternative perspective, also from a narrative analysis of the text, is given by Stegeman³. She considers B2 to be a later layer in the narrative of Jer 32, resulting from a later appropriation of the story in a context where issues of landownership were less relevant.⁴ Such a diachronic reading of the text is quite possible, but it should be noted that multiple assumptions are needed to maintain it. Stegeman postulates rather than derives⁵ the various groups of ancient readers. As has been shown above there is no need from the narrative as *such* to consider the text to be multi-layered.

From the analysis above it appears that B2 is well integrated both semantically and conceptually. One cannot rule out that an earlier Vorlage existed⁶, which was reworked into the present narrative through the addition of the prophecy about the new covenant. But calling B2 a later addition, as if it were just plugged into the narrative does not do justice to the structure of Jer 32.

5.5 Preliminary conclusions

Our analysis shows that the text can be considered as a coherent whole, showing a clear narrative development. The themes of destruction of the city and restoration to the land are carefully woven into the plot. In all this I find not a trace of the “contesting narratives” that Stegeman claims to be present.⁷

The turning point in the plot at verse 36 is well embedded in syntax and plot, finding reference and closure in 27aC: “would anything be too difficult for YHWH.” Brueggemann considers the earlier reference of this statement by the prophet in 17bB as the center of the text⁸. In terms of narrative development, that verse can better be viewed as a foreshadowing of 27aC.

Both the development of plot and the semantic structure clearly relate the prayer to the surrounding text. Therefore there is no reason to conclude with Carroll that the prayer is only loosely integrated with the buying of the field.⁹ Carroll assumes that the text was constructed around poems of restoration. However, these poems must then have been heavily reworked, to accommodate the interweaving of the two themes

¹ Which after all presupposes it was lost in the first place, and does not come back for free.

² Could we see the return of normal business transactions in B3 as a sort of extended sign-act?

³ J. Stegeman, “‘Reading Jeremiah Makes Me Angry!’ The Role of Jeremiah 32[39]:36-41 in Transformation within the ‘Jeremianic’ Tradition”, in van Peursen, W.Th. and Dyk, J.W. (ed), *Tradition and Innovation in Biblical Interpretation, Studies Presented to Professor Eep Talstra on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, Leiden 2011.

⁴ Stegeman, “Reading Jeremiah”, 47.

⁵ Her argument from the differences between MT and LXX (Stegeman, “Reading Jeremiah”, 58) is not convincing as there is no clear chronology between the two recensions (Shead, *Open and Sealed Book*, 263).

⁶ Both of MT and LXX, as LXX has the same semantic and conceptual coherency.

⁷ Stegeman, “Reading Jeremiah”, 52.

⁸ Brueggemann, *Exile & Homecoming*, 303, see page 23 above.

⁹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 625, see page 23 above.

throughout the text, not only in concepts, but also in keywords. Our present analysis shows at the very least an alternative as the text can be successfully treated as an integral composition.

In redaction critical analyses such as made by e.g. Holladay and McKane, any wrinkles in the text are eased out by assigning them to one of many layers of redaction. Our analysis shows however that these wrinkles make perfect sense in the development of narrative. By treating changes of perspective and inner tensions as signs of scribal activity, Holladay and McKane ignore the way in which they function as indicators for the plot.

In fact a redaction critical analysis runs the risk of arbitrarily changing the narrative. Brueggemann a.o. is of the opinion that Jeremiah's prayer in 16-25 is out of place¹. However, placing prayer and response before the sign-act results in an entirely different plot: Jeremiah then receives the **נאם-יהוה**, expresses his doubts before acting, receives a detailed prophecy and acts accordingly. The complexity of interwoven themes is greatly reduced and so are the inner tensions of the prophet. But it is exactly through these tensions and ambiguities that we become engaged in the story, that we are made to wonder about what's going on!

Note that the analysis by Stegeman brings back some of these risks, now from the perspective of reception. Rather than a scribal redaction history, she reconstructs a the narrative appropriation history. Verses 36-41, which can indeed be perceived as a wrinkle in the narrative, are interpreted as reflection of later readers integrating the story into their cultural setting. This again changes the plot, elevating it from the level of landownership to covenantal relations. But this time the change is on purpose, to accommodate new priorities and perspectives into the narrative. Tracing the early reception history in the text is a fruitful endeavor, as Stegeman shows, especially in the process of actualizing the text. Sometimes an early reception history can be traced through earlier versions or at least parallels (e.g. in the case of Psalm 104 and the Egyptian Hymn of Aten). But in the absence of earlier versions of the narrative, such approaches have to remain highly speculative.

Based on the present analysis, I conclude that the text presents a coherent plot, and can thus serve as the basis for an evaluation of the actors. This is the subject of the next chapter. I will continue to read the text as it stands, asking what it tells us rather than how it came to be. This is a valid approach, and in my opinion a necessary step in any approach. It limits the range of conclusions we can draw, as we do not relate to specific audiences. It can be argued that a text can never be understood without such references.² Hermeneutically, this is quite true. But by assuming the broad categories defined in chapter 2, we stay as close to the text as possible. Even if one wants to study the development and reception of the text, this provides a good starting point.

¹ Because 25 alludes to the climax in 15, Brueggemann, *Exile & Homecoming*, 303. Assuming 15 as the climax of the whole chapter inevitably leads to this conclusion, but is not motivated at all.

² See e.g. M. Chilton Callaway, "Reading Jeremiah with Some Help from Gadamer," in Diamond, A.R.P. and Stulman, L. (eds), *Jeremiah (Dis)Placed: New Directions in Writing/Reading Jeremiah*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 529, New York 2011, 266-278.

6 Characterization in Jeremiah 32

With the insights in the text obtained in the previous chapter, we can now proceed to the analysis of the characters in the narrative. First we scan the whole text for character indicators. Although in this phase we mainly take stock, some preliminary conclusions can already be drawn. Then the seven characters appearing in the text are analyzed. Finally then, conclusions can be drawn on the character of Jeremiah.

6.1 Character indicators in the text

In Chapter 2, we developed a little toolkit to assess the development of character in prophetic texts. We will now scan our text accordingly.

6.1.1 Dynamic network of traits

The *dramatis personae* in our text are seven: Jeremiah, YHWH, Zedekiah, Chanamel, Baruch, the Witnesses and the “Judeans dwelling in the prison court.” The Witnesses and the Judeans are collective characters, and are not developed in any sort of detail. Also the character of Baruch is hardly developed in this text. In the terminology of Berlin¹ they are *functionaries*. Chanamel and Zedekiah are somewhat more developed, in that some independent action is revealed: Chanamel approaching Jeremiah with a request, Zedekiah reacting to Jeremiah’s prophecies. In Berlin’s scheme they seem *types*. Jeremiah and YHWH are developed in action and dialogue, in Berlin’s scheme they are *full-fledged characters*.

So we find the usual varieties of depth in character development. Can we also identify dynamic character development in this relatively short text? It seems not, but we should note that this is partly because Jeremiah’s reaction to YHWH’s response is not given.

6.1.2 Direct speech and action

Dialogue is one of the most important literary devices in Hebrew narrative². Our text contains a number of dialogues, some with quoted speech. The amount of direct speech given to a character is an indication of its relative importance. The table below lists the number of verses with direct speech from the various characters, as well as they main actions.

Character	Direct speech (X said: “...”)	Quoted speech (Y said: “X said: ...”)	Action (other than speech) ³
Jeremiah	20	2 (quoted by Zedekiah)	Buys, gives
YHWH	18	3 (quoted by Jeremiah)	
Zedekiah	3	-	(Detained Jeremiah)
Chanamel	-	1	Comes
Baruch	-	-	Receives letter
Witnesses	-	-	Sign letter
Judeans	-	-	-

¹ Berlin, *Poetics & Interpretation.*, 23, see note 4 on page 7.

² Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 81, speaks about the “highly subsidiary role of narration in comparison to direct speech by the characters.”

³ In addition to these actions, verse 12 presents Chanamel, the Witnesses and the Judeans explicitly as passively witnessing the prophecy in 13-14.

In terms of direct speech it is clear that Jeremiah and YHWH are the main characters. Note that half of the direct speech by Jeremiah is because he narrates the sign-act.¹ The audience of this speech is not identified. It is as if Jeremiah narrates the whole event, including his prayer, to some unknown audience and then receives the response of YHWH. This audience might then be the referent for the plural forms in 36bA and 43bA. Note that although Zedekiah is not present at the scene, he is given direct speech.

So we see in our passage both action and dialogue. Although Jeremiah does not take the initiative in either of these, his character has a strong vocal presence and is central in the action.

6.1.3 *Ambiguities and gaps*

Several ambiguities can be noted in the text:

- How should we understand Zedekiah's unanswered question in 3bA: "Why do you prophesize"? It seems to imply that Jeremiah is free to deliver any sort of prophecy, which is clearly not the way the prophet perceives things himself. Since the king detained Jeremiah, we can safely assume that he was in no particular favor of this prophecy. The prophet however, is put in relatively open custody.² Is Zedekiah expecting Jeremiah to deliver a more favorable prophecy in the end?
- Is the "visitation" in 5aB to be understood in a positive or negative sense?
- Jeremiah's attitude seems ambiguous: he delivers the prophecies in 14,15 without hesitation and then expresses his doubts/confusion in prayer.³
- The turn in YHWH's actions remains unmotivated. The "would anything be too difficult" does not explain why YHWH does exactly *this* difficult thing. There is a clue in 42bB that it has to do with earlier promises, but this could refer just as well to the promises made in the preceding verses.

Even in this single passage we find several open ends. Each of these deserves a careful analysis, but for the purpose of this study we will focus only on those related to the character of Jeremiah. Can we relate this ambiguity to character traits? At first sight, there are no indications whatsoever that Jeremiah is driven by fear or self-interest. So far we cannot rule out that Jeremiah has serious doubts when executing the sign-act. It is also possible that he loyally performs his role as prophet and then starts to doubt. We will have to test these options in our further analysis.

6.1.4 *Descriptions and designations*

Our text uses several formal designations for the characters and describes family relations, functions and circumstances.

- Jeremiah is introduced as prophet by the narrator (2bA) and implicitly identified as such by Zedekiah ("why do you prophesize", 3bA). His present place in society is that of a prisoner. But as he can weigh out the silver for the purchase, he is apparently not without means.

¹ Although it is highly speculative, one cannot rule out that a reason for this construction is to raise the attention to Jeremiah as a character.

² If we relate this passage to Jer 37:17-21, Zedekiah places Jeremiah in the prison court after a request by the prophet himself.

³ In a literary analysis, resolving this question by reordering the text is not acceptable without independent indications that the text is cluttered.

- The family relations between Jeremiah and Chanamel are repeatedly reported, and serve to motivate the purchase of the field as a “redeeming” act.¹ The need for this transaction, in reference to Lev 25, indicates that Chanamel, contrary to Jeremiah is without means.
- Baruch is identified through his ancestry, not through his function as scribe.²
- Zedekiah is introduced as king both by the narrator (1aB, 3aA) and by Jeremiah (4aA).
- YHWH is identified in various ways, as shown in the table below (references to נאם-יהוה not included). The section on the new covenant starts with “thus says YHWH, the God of Israel” (36aA). This might well reflect a change of perspective: YHWH again/still relates himself with Israel. The expression does not reappear in 42aA, where the perspective is the same. I think this serves to highlight the *turn* which occurs in 42aA. Jeremiah in 14,15 refers to both YHWH’s might (יהוה צבאות) and alliance (אלהי ישראל).

Name:	Narrator	Jeremiah	YHWH
YHWH	1aA, 26aA	3bA, 6bA/8aA/8bA, 16aA	28aA, 42aA
YHWH, God of all the living			27aA
YHWH, the God of Israel			36aA
YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel		14aA, 15aA	
Lord YHWH		17aA, 25aA	
The great and mighty God		18bA	
YHWH of hosts		18bB	

The formal designations generally serve to support the plot. It is noteworthy though that the only two formal roles mentioned are those of king and prophet. In combination with the direct speech given to the absent king, this can be an indication that the two characters are in some way to be compared. The designations for God in this passage probably serve to indicate changes of perspective.

6.1.5 Repetitions

We have noticed several repeated phrases at the syntactic level, but there are only two narrative repetitions:

- Purchase: the instruction in Jeremiah’s prayer (verse 25) and the execution earlier recorded in 9-11.
- Promise: in the prophecy of verse 15 and the response of YHWH (43-44).

The execution of the purchase gives more detail, but follows essentially the instruction. Note though that Jeremiah does not refer to the promise in verse 25. This can be explained on three grounds:

- Text-critical => scribal errors misplaced the text: 11-15 really belongs after 44.³
- Composition => the editor has created a parallel structure:
purchase (9-11) + promise (15) // purchase (25) + promise (43-44)
- Narrative => the narrator shows how Jeremiah’s confusion is grounded in the very act of purchase; this gives YHWH the opportunity to drive home the meaning of the sign-act.

The compositional argument gives sufficient grounds to reject the thesis that the text is cluttered. The narrative argument is hard to prove, but leads nicely into the compositional structure.

¹ Jer 11:21 informs us that the “men of Anathoth” wanted to kill Jeremiah. We will not use this information, as this would require an analysis of the relation between the two passages. Such an analysis is outside the scope of this study.

² Identification as a סופר is only found in Jer 36:26 and Jer 36:32. The safekeeping of documents might have been one of the duties of a scribe, in which case our passage might implicitly identify Baruch as a scribe, just as e.g. Jer 36:4.

³ As does Brueggemann, *Exile & Homecoming*, 303.

So the analysis of the repetitions sheds light on the inner motives of Jeremiah, possibly indicating that in 25 the promise had not yet been integrated in his thinking. It is in the performance of the sign-act and prophecy that he realizes where his doubts are. This makes it more likely that he acted out of loyalty towards YHWH.

6.1.6 *Conflicts and contrasts*

The whole narrative circles around the contrast between the city that is given in the hands of the enemy and the promise of the return of normal business transactions in the land. We find this back in the sign-act, in Jeremiah's prayer and in YHWH's response. This contrast relates to a turn in the acts of YHWH, summarized in 42: "as I brought ... all this large evil, likewise I myself will bring ... all the good."

There seems to be also a contrast between Zedekiah who asks "why do you prophecy" and Jeremiah who (implicitly) asks "why did you tell me to buy the field". Zedekiah does not face the consequences of the word of YHWH. Jeremiah does follow the word of YHWH (buying the field, delivering the prophecy), even though he clearly develops doubts. This also points to a conflict within the prophet.

So besides the rather obvious conflict between forthcoming disaster and promise of return, we find again indications that the relation between the characters of king and prophet has narrative significance. This confirms the earlier observation that Jeremiah, in contrast to the king, does not act out of fear or self-interest. The loyalty of the king lies entirely with himself, the loyalty of the prophet lies primarily with YHWH.

6.1.7 *Information withheld*

In the sequence sign-act -> prayer -> response we would expect a reaction by Jeremiah. This information is clearly withheld from us. Thus we are left puzzling whether Jeremiah is satisfied with the response, overwhelmed or still confused.

This implies that our analysis of Jeremiah's character can never reach closure, as is so often the case with characters in Hebrew narrative. We will come back to this in the concluding chapter.

6.1.8 *Concluding remarks*

We've taken stock of the various features characterizing the actors in our passage. In the next section we will apply this material as we look to each character individually.

Some initial conclusions can be drawn already now. The majority of indicators involves Jeremiah, so he is indeed the main character. This might seem rather obvious, but in Biblical narrative one does well to verify the obvious!¹ Also YHWH appears as a main character, and does not remain silent. Although Jeremiah and YHWH are engaged in dialogue, their characters are not contrasted: the ambiguities in the story are rather internal to their characters. It seems plausible that there is a contrast rather between Jeremiah and Zedekiah.

Many of the narrative clues point to an ambiguity within Jeremiah caused not by fear or self-interest but by his loyalty to YHWH, which brings him at odds with the present circumstances.

¹ In 1Kings 18:1-20 the apparently secondary character of Obadiah turns out to be worked out in most detail, see de Vos, *Onder de Oppervlakte*, 26.

6.2 Characters in the text

With our survey thus completed, we now assess each of the characters in turn, in reverse order of the amount of direct speech given to them.

6.2.1 *Judeans and Witnesses*

The Judeans “dwelling in the prison court” and the Witnesses are the least worked out characters in the text. They are witnessing: the Witnesses actively to the purchase, all passively to the instructions given to Baruch and the concluding prophecy (15). Their main function seems to be (a) giving proper legal status to the purchase¹, and (b) indicating that the act takes place in the open². Their attitudes towards Jeremiah, their hopes and fears in relation to the siege are not mentioned.

Their characters only get some shape if we assume that they are included in the plurals of 36 and 43.³ In that case they share the conviction that the city was given in the hands of the enemy, so they were not disinterested. Still this does not give any indication of related character traits: were they fearful or courageous, did they despair? We cannot say on the basis of the text.

6.2.2 *Baruch*

The character of Baruch is introduced in this text but hardly developed. He is presented through his ancestry and possibly through the archival function of a scribe. As the collective characters above, he serves as a catalyst⁴. But his character is worked out with some more depth. Apparently he is considered trustworthy. He does receive a prophecy, a divine order. This seems not to be very relevant in the present passage. But it is consistent with the other narratives in the book where he is staged, and where we are given more insight in his hopes and fears.

6.2.3 *Chanamel*

The character of Chanamel is hardly developed. Much can be speculated about his reasons for offering the field in Anathoth for redemption. The only clue we have is the reference to Lev. 25, which is a strong indication that he has run out of money. We cannot say if he was included in the “men of Anathoth” (11:21-23). Even if we assume he was, the text gives no clue whether his hostile attitude to Jeremiah has changed. As far as he knows, he offers his relative a field that is inaccessible because of the war. This is not necessarily a nice gesture. The narrator withholds moral judgment.

6.2.4 *Zedekiah*

Although Zedekiah is mentioned only briefly, his character is worked out in some detail. He is emphatically positioned as the king of Judah. As such he receives a prophecy, which he chooses to ignore. Even in this short passage we see ambivalence in the king. On the one hand he does not accept the prophecy. On the other hand he puts Jeremiah only in light detention⁵, whereas others wished to kill the prophet.

¹ Which otherwise could have been perceived as just a gift to Chanamel.

² See Friebel, *Sign-Acts*, 20ff; regardless of the historicity of the sign-act, this is what the narrative is about.

³ And even more so if Jeremiah’s prayer is at least to some extent intercessory on behalf of his audience.

⁴ Or a “helper” in the terminology of a semiotic scheme, see e.g. Brillenburg Wurth & Rigney, *Leven van Teksten*, 172.

⁵ In particular if we can relate this text in the overall narrative to Jer 37:17-21.

What could be the reason for including this character in the text, even with direct speech?¹ I propose that Zedekiah serves as a contrast to Jeremiah. Zedekiah and Jeremiah are both identified with their formal role: king and prophet. It is significant that Zedekiah asks a question: “why do you prophesise?” Brueggemann notes that the question is left unanswered: the king does not ask for information, but makes a plea for rescue.² I would go one step further: the king refuses to take the prophecy seriously. Rather than wrestling with the message, he chooses the easy way and detains the messenger, keeping him safely stashed, while he himself passively waits for a more suitable response.

Although the narrator refrains from a moral judgment again, he reveals the king as passive and weak, hiding from the consequences and implicitly running away from his duties. The king does not take his duties towards his people seriously, his loyalty is not with the people of Israel but with himself. These character traits of Zedekiah are consistent with the other narratives in the book where he is staged (most notably Jer 37-39).

6.2.5 YHWH

The character of YHWH is revealed in a variety of ways through Jeremiah’s prayer and self-description:

- Names: God of all the living, God of Israel, YHWH of hosts
- Qualities: mighty (17,27), offering mercy, paying back iniquity (18), grieved (29-32), tenacious (33aB)
- Deeds (past and present): the exodus event (20-23a), the current siege (2-5, 23b-24, 28-29)
- Promises: restoration and return (14-15, 37-44)

The main emphases in our text seem to be concisely reflected in Jeremiah’s identification in 14aA and 15aA: “YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel”. On the one hand YHWH’s power is stressed (both in the exodus event and in the current siege); on the other hand his alliance with Israel (both in the exodus event³ and in the new covenant). But note also the much broader perspective in 17a, 20aB, 27aB, referring to the whole of creation.

An important character trait of YHWH that is highlighted in our text, and which is also found in Jer 30-31, is what Becking calls “divine changeability.”⁴ Changing his course of action and restoring the people to the land is not too difficult for YHWH. This is not a “one-time action” reflecting a dynamic development, but presented as a structural character trait. YHWH both offers mercy to thousands and pays back the iniquity, as Jeremiah says in 18.

It is significant that YHWH answers Jeremiah. As van Selms remarks, the passage gives “an exceptionally intimate view in the interactions between God with his prophet.”⁵ YHWH not only takes the initiative for the sign-act and the prophecy of promise⁶, but also takes the prayer of his prophet seriously, deepening the promise in his response.

¹ For explaining why Jeremiah is in the prison court, just verse 2 would have sufficed.

² Brueggemann, *Exile & Homecoming*, 301.

³ See in particular verse 21

⁴ Becking, *Fear & Freedom*, 165ff and 298.

⁵ Van Selms, *Jeremia*, 103 (my translation).

⁶ See verses 1 and 6-7; we do not have to assume with Rashi that Chananel is coming by divine command.

6.2.6 *Jeremiah*

Jeremiah is unambiguously identified as a prophet. He is contrasted with the king, who refuses to wrestle with the prophecy. Jeremiah does wrestle with the prophecy, with the instructions given to him by YHWH. The king asks “why do you prophesise” and leans back, Jeremiah wonders why he has to buy the field and expresses this is prayer.

We already noted Jeremiah’s loyalty, which lies more with YHWH than with the king. This loyalty gets him into the prison court, gets him to redeem a relative at YHWH’s instruction,¹ gets him to deliver the prophecies in 14 and 15.

Jeremiah’s loyalty is not blind². As he mentions in 8bA, the appearance of Chanamel confirms to him that it was indeed YHWH instructing him. Apparently this confirmation was needed. We might interpret this as doubt, but then we should recognize he does not doubt YHWH’s word. Rather he doubts his own perception of YHWH. In this way, 8bA prepares us for the more existential doubt expressed in 25.

The sign-act is executed in a resolute way. Carroll mentions the “great freedom with which he manipulates the future”³, because he assumes the sign-act to be magical⁴. But there is indeed a strong contrast between Jeremiah’s circumstances as a prisoner and the freedom with which he obeys the divine word.

This does not stop Jeremiah from confronting YHWH with his doubts or at least puzzlement.⁵ He does so in what Holladay calls “conventional speech”⁶. I’d rather say that in his prayer he strongly relates to the history of YHWH with his people. He seems deeply aware of this history, and he interprets the present circumstances as a consequence of it. In this speech he mentions himself that nothing is too difficult for YHWH, but he seems not to draw a conclusion from it. He starts by mentioning mercy⁷ and retribution, but then continues with the theme of retribution only. He seems to be fully aware of the faults of his people, but not (yet) fully aware of YHWH’s mercy.

Jeremiah’s response is withheld, so we are left to guess whether the prophet is reassured by the divine answer or not.⁸ The closing statement in 44cA, “for I will bring them back from their captivity” is pretty strong, so the range of responses seems limited. Continued confusion is not an option. Jeremiah can either accept the promise of future return and restoration or reject it. More importantly, Jeremiah is put on the spot as to accept that YHWH can change his course of action from retribution to mercy.

¹ Parting with the silver may have left Jeremiah with limited means, which in the given circumstances could have further increased his hardships. The manifold references to the silver may reflect this. As Brueggemann remarks: “The prophet puts his money where his mouth is”, *Exile & Homecoming*. 302.

² As Holladay implies when referring to Jeremiah’s “dogged obedience”, *Jeremiah 2*, 211.

³ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 621.

⁴ Carroll concludes that “Jeremiahs act of familial loyalty creates the future”, *Jeremiah*, 631. There is no reference to such loyalty, in fact the text states that Jeremiah buys the field at the instruction of YHWH, not because of family loyalty.

⁵ Holladay speaks of “dismay at the shift in YHWH’s will”, *Jeremiah 2*, 206. But Jeremiah’s question in 25 refers back to the ongoing siege (24), and not to the failure of the people (23). So his puzzlement is with the order in the given circumstances, not with the change of mind implied in the sign-act. Carroll assumes the prayer shows the “absurdity of buying land while the city is under siege”, *Jeremiah*, 625. This seems to come closer to the utterance in 25.

⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 204; Holladay leaves out 18-20 because the speech is conventional, without further justification.

⁷ מִסְדָּד is paralleled here with retribution, so translating as “mercy” is more appropriate than as e.g. “loving kindness”.

⁸ Van Selms concludes that Jeremiah gets personally convinced here, *Jeremia*, 91, but this cannot be concluded on the basis of the narrative. We see the same lack of response in Jonah 4, see Abela, “When the Agenda”, 27.

What can we conclude from this analysis?

- The primary character trait revealed about Jeremiah is his **loyalty** to YHWH.
- He is also characterized by his **freedom or courage** to follow the instructions of YHWH even while detained.
- He is **cautious** though, looking for confirmation of what he perceives to be the word of YHWH.
- His loyalty does not prevent him from **questioning** his Lord, in fact his prayer is a clear example of “interaction at the edge of loyalty.”¹
- He feels deeply **connected with his people** (while recognizing their faults). His prayer reflects in language and content a deep embedding with the history of God with Israel.
- His prayer reflects a **somewhat fatalistic** view: although he recognizes the might and mercy of YHWH, he seems not to have applied this (yet) to the present situation.
- His prayer reflects **confusion** as to the instructions of YHWH, rather than doubt.
- His actions and prayer reflect a **wrestling** with the word of YHWH.

Jeremiah is thus presented as a complex character, with several open ends. His wrestling is not evaluated by the narrator. We do not know if he is reassured by YHWH's response. We do not know if the recurring mentioning of the silver meant the Jeremiah was concerned having to part with it.

6.3 Preliminary conclusions

Does our analysis lead to new insights in the character of Jeremiah? To some extent it confirms the impression of a cursory reading²: a prophet wrestling with the message of his God. We have seen however, that this is not the key characteristic of Jeremiah. Most prominent is his loyalty towards YHWH, which gives rise to these internal tensions.

This loyalty is completely opposite to the “dogged obedience” noted by Holladay.³ It is also quite different from the familial loyalty noted by Carroll.⁴ Jeremiah is shown to be loyally connected to the people of Israel, rather than to his immediate family (which the story indeed might suggest at first sight).

We have seen that Jeremiah's loyalty is far from blind or naïve. Early in the story we see Jeremiah carefully noting how he verified that he actually received a word of YHWH. We should let this careful reasoning color the later confusion expressed in the prayer. The prophet does not ignore the contrast between the present situation and promised future. The prayer also shows that Jeremiah does not close his eyes for the faults of his people (hardly surprising for a prophet, of course). His prayer is not a sign of despair, but rather a reflection of his utter puzzlement when facing the realities of the present situation.

¹ Becking, “Means of Revelation”, 46.

² Such impressions are certainly not always confirmed, so e.g. for the servant of Abraham in Perry, “Counter-Stories”.

³ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 211.

⁴ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 631.

Against Carroll I therefore think we cannot refer to Jeremiah's prayer in terms of a "Promethan striving with the deity."¹ Such striving requires ambition, almost a level of competition on behalf of the prophet. We did not find a single trace of that in the story, but rather a touch of fatalism. Not more than a touch though, whereas the conventional image of the prophet sometimes makes this a key characteristic.

So on a close reading of the passage we have to adjust the intuitive understanding of the character of the prophet. Jeremiah's internal struggles are not a character trait *per se*, as is often assumed, but result from the prophet's adherence to YHWH with eyes wide open. In our text Jeremiah appears less isolated from the Judeans than is commonly perceived. Especially his prayer shows his embedding in the history of his people, which we cannot do away with, as Holladay does, by calling it conventional speech². Also the extended direct speech and the plural in verses 36 and 43, if taken as narrative clues, point at a closer connection with at least part of the people.

The characterization is consistent through the text. One might perceive a difference between the careful execution of the sign-act and the puzzlement expressed in the prayer, as does Brueggemann. However, this is much better explained by ambivalence in the prophet between his loyalty to YHWH and his own doubts.

Finally, we found several narrative clues that Zedekiah is not brought to the scene accidentally. On the basis of the present analysis, I think it is highly plausible that we are invited to contrast the character of prophet and king here. The contrast is not just in actions but also in attitude. Now two contrasting characters offer an alternative to the reader. Such contrasts can be used by the narrator to lead the reader to narrative identification: who's the hero, with whom can I identify. The contrasting of prophet and king is an indication that that the narrator presents Jeremiah as a role model to the reader. It is to this topic that we now turn in the concluding chapter of this study.

¹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 55.

² Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 204.

7 Conclusions

This study started from the question whether the literary character of Jeremiah has been constructed to serve as a role model for the Judeans during times of distress. This first required us to study characterization in the prophetic books in general. Since the early days of literary criticism, many studies have been made on characterization in the Torah and the former prophets. So far such studies are lacking for the later prophets. One of the reasons may be that the scholarly discourse has focused on the *historical* prophets: is it possible to find them behind the veil of the text? This is reflected in three relatively recent commentaries on the book Jeremiah.

Holladay assumes we can find information on the historical Jeremiah¹ and therefore concentrates on separating biographical material from the remainder of the text. He does this systematically, mainly applying redaction critical methods. But he stops short of literary criticism, and does not apply the same systematic rigor to his observations on the character of the prophet. As a result these are made in rather general terms and usually not well-motivated from the text (e.g. the “dogged obedience” criticized above²).

Carroll goes at great length in explaining that “the precise relation between the character constructed by the writers of the tradition and a hypothesized ‘historical’ Jeremiah ... is a very difficult question to answer.”³ Having said that, he not only refrains from making statements on the character of the historical prophet, but also pays little attention to the constructed literary character. His observations about the character of Jeremiah in the passage we studied are dominated by his view that the sign-act has a magical meaning. This allows him to see the freedom that Jeremiah feels in his captivity, but makes him miss the fact that in the overall narrative Jeremiah’s loyalty is more focused on YHWH than on his family.

Brueggemann makes extensive use of literary criticism⁴ and decouples the literary character from the historical figure (which he assumes did exist). He, however, concentrates on the character of God as it is revealed in the text. Although he does not want to “ignore the lively presence” of the person of Jeremiah in the text, he feels one must not “excessively focus” on it.⁵ So he hardly refers to the character of Jeremiah. It should be noted that Brueggemann’s analysis of the character of God in the book is theological rather than literary.

It is quite telling that all three commentators place Jer 32:2-5 in parentheses.⁶ From a redaction critical view one can understand this. However, in a literary critical analysis we cannot do away with this passage as “clearly secondary.”⁷ This is a clear example where a close reading takes a different perspective and contributes to our understanding of the text. In the present analysis I concluded that these verses serve to contrast prophet and king. This might well be a recurring pattern in the book Jeremiah.⁸

¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 1.

² Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 211, see page 34 above.

³ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 75 (also 26).

⁴ See Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, 14 and following, where he gives his view on the method.

⁵ Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, 145 note 30.

⁶ See page 22 above.

⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 206.

⁸ To my knowledge a systematic study along these lines has not been done yet.

In the present study we tried to step away from the discussion about the historical prophet and firmly focused on the literary character of Jeremiah. For this we first extended the main concepts of the “theory of character” in Hebrew narrative to the books of the prophets. Most of these concepts have proven fruitful in our analysis of Jer 32, as shown in 6.1. The passage does not reflect the dynamic aspect of Hebrew character though. This is partly because information has been withheld.¹ We are not informed on the reaction of the Judeans to the sign-act, we are not told of Jeremiah’s reaction to YHWH’s response.

Can we say on the basis of this text that a coherent character of the prophet is presented? From our structural analysis we concluded that the text is a coherent whole, showing a clear development of plot.² It therefore has the *potential* to reveal a coherent character. In our analysis of the characters we found a variety of indicators, and were able to identify clear character traits. This shows, in my opinion, that the potential is indeed realized. Jer 32 presents a coherent character of the prophet through the development of plot, action and dialogue.

Of course our study covered only a limited amount of text. A more extended survey of the book Jeremiah is needed to verify the overall coherence. The set of character traits identified in this study could be used as the basis for this verification. Such a survey will have to take into account the complex ordering of the narratives in Jeremiah. For instance, it seems likely that Jer 37 precedes Jer 32 in the history of the narrative.³ Because of this complex ordering we cannot expect to find a gradual development of plot in the book Jeremiah as we do in e.g. the stories of the patriarchs. The book Jeremiah is clearly not a straightforward narrative. It contains a complex mixture of extended sections with prophetic sayings, private visions and prayers, sign-acts and extended narratives. One might with Carroll consider it a collection of prophetic sayings with narrative additions to provide specificity⁴. Then the book seems more like an archive of texts along the lines of e.g. the Mari tablets. However, this hardly does justice to the careful construction of the narrative sections, as demonstrated in the present study for Jer 32. If some continuity in narrative techniques could be demonstrated for the other narrative sections, visions and prayers, it might be fruitful to treat the book Jeremiah as a collection of short stories and prophecies. This is an important distinction: where an archive is typically established for reference purposes, such a collection is made for reading or even engaging.

Jer 32 is a sign-act and one of the questions we asked in the introduction was how such acts reveal the character of the actors. Our analysis shows that they do so in much the same way as extended narratives. Friebel pointed out that sign-acts, by their very nature as rhetoric communication, have an informative aspect (e.g. on the circumstances of the prophet).⁵ This is certainly the case for Jer 32, as it shows Jeremiah being in the prison court, having some financial means, taking the risk of parting with those. However, the more complex character traits like Jeremiah’s loyalty and questioning, his freedom and wrestling are revealed in the

¹ See 6.1.3, 6.17.

² See page 28 above.

³ Dömeris, “Land Claim”, 136, assumes Jer 37 follows Jer 32 in the history of the narrative. But his argument rests on the assumption that the transaction in Jer 32 needed completion by a personal visit, which would be the subject of Jer 37. This argument seems inconclusive: even though the principle is supported by 1Kings 21:16 there is no indication in the text that it is applied here. In fact the transaction in Jer 32 is described as quite conclusive.

⁴ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 57, see also 65.

⁵ Friebel, *Sign-Acts*, 36.

combination of the sign-act with the ensuing dialogue. This is consistent with Alters general observation that dialogue is one of the most important literary devices in Hebrew narrative¹.

It would be interesting to make a more systematic analysis of characterization in sign-acts. A quick scan based on Friebel's survey indicates that the majority of the sign-acts in Jeremiah reveal relatively few character traits because of their lack of dialogue. An exception is Jer 28 where the sign-act of the yoke leads to a dialogue with Hananiah and between YHWH and Jeremiah.

As Brueggemann points out, it is in the very nature of prophecy that it reveals the character of God.² It is through the embedding within a narrative framework that the character of the prophet is revealed. This character is not without ambiguities. We have seen a combination of caution, courage and confusion. The text shows the prophet as wrestling with YHWH. No moral judgment is passed on this. The fact that it leads to the revelation of a deeper promise in 36-41 is a strong indication that we should evaluate it positively.

It is tempting to see the ambiguities in Jeremiah's character as proofs of the reticence that is so common in the narratives of the Hebrew bible. This however cannot be concluded on the basis of the current text alone. It is possible that these ambiguities are there to encourage us to look below the surface, to get to the heart of the matter.³ It is also possible that they reflect a character trait in themselves, that the ambivalence is internal to the character of the prophet. In order to study this we have to include other passages as well. We have to limit ourselves to two brief examples here.

- In Jer 37:17-21 Zedekiah invites Jeremiah secretly to ask him about the future. As in Jer 32 we see Jeremiah boldly stating the word of YHWH. But he also pleads with the king for his life and safety.
- In Jer 12 we once more find the prophet wrestling with YHWH, here because of the continued flourishing of the wicked. The response of YHWH (Jer 12:14-17) also speaks of destruction (14) followed by restoration (15). But then two options are offered: continued restoration if the wicked learn the way of YHWH (16) or utter destruction (17). The reaction of Jeremiah is withheld, as in Jer 32.

Both examples confirm some of the character traits from Jer 32, but more importantly confirm the ambivalence and wrestling in the character of the prophet. This seems to indicate that this very human ambivalence towards the promises of YHWH *is* in fact the heart of the matter. To verify this preliminary conclusion, a more systematic study is needed.

Even though our text presents a coherent character for the prophet, this is not the main function of Jer 32. The structural analysis clearly shows that text focusses on the two themes of the forthcoming destruction of the city and the promise of restoration to the land. We find traces of the two themes at all structural level, confirming the centrality of these themes. Destruction and restoration, fatalism and hope are intertwined in the

¹ Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 81, speaks about the "highly subsidiary role of narration in comparison to direct speech by the characters."

² Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, 138.

³ De Vos, *Onder de Oppervlakte*, 29.

plot. But the climactic prophecies in verse 15 and 44C both refer to the promise. Also the variations in the repetition of command and promise point at the promise of restoration (rather than at the theme of destruction).¹ According to the text, restoration after destruction is possible because nothing is too difficult for YHWH (verse 27). The realization that God takes the initiative for restoration does not come without struggle. It is especially in this struggle that the narrator develops the character of Jeremiah. This development thus supports the main message of the text: restoration will come, however unrealistic this may seem, even to the main character, Jeremiah.

We concluded that the character of the prophet is exposed in relation to the main themes in the text. We have seen that this character shows significant ambivalence towards the promises of YHWH. Can we now conclude that this character has been constructed to serve as a role-model?

Role-models are behavioural models: they provide guidance by exemplary patterns of behaviour. Role-models can be real-life persons or literary characters. The process through which a literary character serves as a model is commonly called narrative identification². By identifying with circumstances and attitudes of one of the characters, the reader is led to follow that character in behaviour and development. This can happen spontaneously, but a narrator can also construct the story such that the reader is invited to identify with one of the characters. This technique is often employed in parables.³ An example of narrative identification in the Hebrew Bible is 2Sam 12:7 where Nathan makes the identification explicit in his discourse with David: "Thou art the man".⁴

Leuchter proposes that Jeremiah is presented as "a model of faith and behavior during times of uncertainty"⁵ for the Judeans. They should no longer rely on the Levite cult, on the family cult with its idols, on the temple cult. They should follow the example of Jeremiah in relying instead on a more personal relation with YHWH. This more personal relation is indeed confirmed in our text. YHWH promises a new covenant in the heart of the people (38-40).⁶ But this internalization of the new covenant is a divine promise: nowhere in the text does Jeremiah show behavior that goes against the Levite or temple cult. Therefore our passage does not support the view of Leuchter directly: the prophet does not show exemplary patterns of rejection of the Levite cult etc. As we have seen the main behavioral pattern shown by the prophet is one of loyalty to YHWH with open eyes and a questioning attitude. This pattern leads to obedience to YHWH, but also to confusion that is shared with YHWH. It is on those aspects that Jeremiah can serve as a role model. These aspects are highly relational in nature. With Leuchter we concluded that this relation is personal, but it is also practical, direct, and deeply embedded in history.

¹ See above, 31.

² The term is mostly used in a general sense without definition. S. Hauerwas and L.G. Jones, *Why Narrative – readings in narrative theology*, Grand Rapids 1989 relate it to persistent patterns of behavior by the character.

³ M. de Vos, *Karaktertekening in de Parabel van de Barmhartige Samaritaan*, Utrecht 2011, 11.

⁴ C. Halberstam, "The Art of Biblical Law," *Prooftexts* 27, 2007, 345-363.

⁵ Leuchter, "Cult of Personality", 114.

⁶ Becking, *Fear and Freedom*, concludes on the basis of Jer 31 that the new covenant is not coupled directly with the return. Jer 32:37-40 seems to imply a coupling, but this is not strictly necessary (the 1-consecutiva need not signify a chronology).

Different (groups of) readers will engage with the text in different ways. To study the way in which Jeremiah can serve as a role model, we have to make assumptions about those readers. It seems safe to assume that the first readers were indeed Judeans in distress. To such readers the text offers not just a prophecy of restoration, but also a behavioral model to deal with the tension between present circumstances and promised future.

It is difficult to prove with any level of confidence that Jeremiah is presented as a role model on purpose. There are some indications though that the reader is actively invited to identify with the prophet. Note that verses 6-25 are direct speech by Jeremiah, without an audience being identified. This has the effect of the reader entering in dialogue with the prophet. The answer of YHWH (told by the narrator!) is then almost directed both to the prophet and the now engaged reader. I think it is significant that the response of the prophet is not given. This almost forces the reader to ask: how would I react? The withholding of information thus encourages narrative identification. Finally, including Zedekiah in the story may be significant here. By presenting prophet and king next to each other, both reacting to prophecies in entirely different ways, the reader is offered an alternative. At the narrative level, the choice has to be made who's the hero. As the hero is not superhuman in this story, narrative identification is encouraged. This reasoning is far from conclusive though. The extended direct speech by Jeremiah may also just serve to highlight his role as main character.¹ Withholding a response and drawing contrasts are both common practices in Hebrew narrative.

Whether intentional or not, our text invites readers to engage with the prophet. This is especially true for readers that can relate to his circumstances: living in times of distress, dwelling, as it were, in some sort of prison court. Such readers are invited to identify with Jeremiah's loyalty towards YHWH. But they are also invited to wrestle like the prophet with the tension between the actual situation and the promise of YHWH.

The observations above explore the options for narrative identification of *individuals* with characters in the text, and the present study is somewhat geared towards such explorations. Stegeman moves beyond this to the analysis of narrative identification at the level of ethnic and cultural groups.² This usually involves appropriation of the story as a whole, rather than individual characters. It requires sociological categories rather than the relational ones used here. Both approaches are to some extent complementary. Texts, especially biblical texts, are not read in isolation, but always within the culture of societies and groups. Reception history is concerned with groups, rather than individual readers. However, stories do shape the characters of the individuals in these groups. The pervasive storage of a "collective memory"³ might be contained in stories, but it lives in the individuals making up the group. In this sense I see a difference between the appropriation of a story by a group (whether or not through adaption of the narrative) and the narrative identification with a character by an individual. Within a constituent narratives of a group, individuals in that group find role models. It is interesting to see that in the adaptations that Stegeman describes as different groups appropriate Jer 32, the character of Jeremiah seems largely unaffected. This confirms me in my opinion that a thorough analysis of the text as we have it is a necessary starting point for further exploits.

¹ Page 30 above.

² Stegeman, "Reading Jeremiah", 62.

³ Stegeman, "Reading Jeremiah", 57.

Let me conclude with some remarks on Jeremiah's struggle with the divine command and promise. This struggle is most clearly expressed in 25aA: וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ, "and you yourself said." The most closely related passage where this expression is used¹ seems to be Num. 11:21.² There we have Moses casting doubts on the promise of meat in the wilderness. Moses gets the answer: is the arm of YHWH too short? This is the same message as 27aC: would anything be too difficult for YHWH?³ Both Jeremiah and Moses feel the tension between current circumstances and a promise of YHWH. They both express their doubt or confusion in much the same way. They both get the answer that the promise is not beyond the power of YHWH.

It remains to be seen whether this answer is satisfactory, to the prophet and to the reader, ancient or present. As Stegeman rightly remarks, verse 37-41 yet "seems to be beyond the experience of any group of readers."⁴ But as we do not find any sign of rebuke in YHWH's response, it appears that the question needs to be asked. Not the question of the king: why do you prophesy things that don't suit me? Rather the question of the prophet, who has the courage first to obey and then to question his instructions. It is because of his wrestling with the word that a deeper revelation is given by YHWH. Therefore I consider it very likely that the narrative purposely invites the reader to identify with the prophet, both in his loyalty and in his wrestling. Prophetic character is indeed developed to serve as a role model for those in distress, a role model not in relation to cultic issues though, but in the personal response to the character and promises of YHWH.

¹ I realize that looking for parallels on the basis of a few words brings me on slippery ground, but given the general pattern of syntactic connections between our text and the Pentateuch, I think it is not unreasonable in this case.

² In Gen 32:12 Jacob reminds God of his promise before his wrestling at the Jabbock and the encounter with Esau. In Ex 33:12, Moses pleads with YHWH to lead Israel himself; this passage might also related to Jer. 32 by the reference to the way (דֶּרֶךְ) of YHWH, see Jer 32:39aA.

³ As mentioned earlier, this passage echoes Gen 18:14: Gods response to Sara, who has been laughing at the promise of a son in her old age. Also there we see the tension between divine promise and current circumstances.

⁴ Stegeman, "Reading Jeremiah", 56.

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