AOSIS

An 'undervalued' salvation oracle in the book of Jeremiah: Jeremiah 50:4–5 (Masoretic text)

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The present article sets out to demonstrate that the promise of an eternal covenant in Jeremiah 50:5 plays a pivotal role in the *book of Jeremiah* Masoretic text (MT). In contrast to the promise of the new covenant in 31:31, this promise of an eternal covenant has received relatively little scholarly attention. A close reading of the salvation oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 does, however, reveal that the promise of an eternal covenant presents a distinctive voice when compared to that of the new covenant. Within its immediate context, the oracles against Babylon, the oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 introduces the subtheme: the restoration of Israel and Judah. Allusions to material in the preceding chapters reveal a dialogical relationship between Jeremiah 50:4–5 and the Foe from the North oracles in 4:5–6:30, the communal lament in 14:19–22 and the salvation oracle in 31:2–6. The placement of the oracles against Babylon in the MT of the *book of Jeremiah* had the effect that the hope expressed in Jeremiah 50:4–5 became more pronounced. In spite of the tragic events of 587 BCE., there was hope for a restoration of the covenantal relationship with Yahweh.

The article takes a close analysis of the salvation oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 MT as premise. In light of the intertextual character of the *book of Jeremiah*, allusions to material in the preceding chapters are explored.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The research highlights the pivotal role of the salvation oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 in the *book of Jeremiah* MT. It should be taken into consideration for the understanding of the book as a whole.

Keywords: Jeremiah 50:4–5; allusions; new covenant; eternal covenant; oracles against Babylon; Book of Jeremiah MT.

Introduction

In contrast to the promise of a new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31, the promise of an eternal covenant in Jeremiah 50:5 has attracted relatively little scholarly attention. The oracle in Jeremiah 31:31–34 forms part of the '*Book of Consolation*', Jeremiah 30–31. These chapters occupy a special position within the *book of Jeremiah* (cf. Fischer 2020:309). Placed between material that reflects on the events of 597 BCE. and 587 BCE, they reveal a hopeful future for the people of Israel and Judah. The oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 is located within the collection of oracles against the nations. These oracles seemingly represent a violent, nationalistic interlude into the *book of Jeremiah* (cf. Graybill 2021:534). Several scholars have, however, demonstrated that the positive theological values of these oracles are beyond doubt (cf. Chae 2015:158–169; Peels 2007:81–91).

Jeremiah 31:31 attests to the sole occurrence of the expression ברית חדשה ('new covenant') in the Old Testament. Yahweh would in the future conclude a 'new covenant' with the people of Israel and Judah. As a result, Jeremiah 31:31–34 has become the most influential saying in the *book of Jeremiah*. It is for instance cited in Hebrews 8:8–12 and 10:16–17 (cf. Fischer 2020:312). Interestingly, Schüle (2015:49) notes that in the Major Prophets the antonym of the 'old' covenant is not so much the 'new' covenant, but the ברית עולם, the 'eternal covenant'. Rom-Shiloni (2015:171) furthermore suggests that the 'new covenant' was but one of several images for expression of the continuity of the covenant relationship during the 6th century BCE. The promise of the ברית עולם in Jeremiah 50:5 is frequently regarded as nothing more than a variation on that of the new covenant (cf. Kessler 2003:75; Lundbom 2004b:466; Mason 2008:232). It is, however, conceivable this promise may have a distinct identity when compared to the promise of the new covenant. The present article sets out to show that the promise in Jeremiah 50:5 does not only have a distinct identity but also plays a pivotal role in the *book of Jeremiah* as is attested in the Masoretic text (MT).

Methodological issues

A close analysis of the salvation oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 MT is taken as premise. It is furthermore crucial that the oracle should be interpreted within its literary context, the oracles against Babylon, before its role in the *book of Jeremiah* can be considered. In these oracles, Babylon, which had acted as Yahweh's instrument to punish Judah and the neighbouring nations, suddenly becomes the victim.

The intertextual character of the *book of Jeremiah* is widely recognised (cf. Carroll 1996:19). Jeremiah 50:41–43 is, for example, an almost verbatim repetition of 6:22–24. Words that were directed at the daughter of Zion in Jeremiah 6:22–24 are addressed to the daughter of Babylon in 50:41–43. A nation from the north would bring about the demise of the Babylonian empire. In an ironic reversal, Babylon, who turned out to be the 'foe from the north' referred to in Jeremiah 6:22, will face an enemy from the north (cf. Keown, Scalise & Smothers 1995:368). Jeremiah 50:41–43 is seemingly in dialogue with 6:22–24. Could the salvation oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 be in a dialogical relationship with material in the preceding chapters in the *book of Jeremiah*? As it is crucial to determine whether there is an interpretative motivation behind the invoking text, the form of literary dependence most relevant seems to be that of allusion. An allusion utilises material from another text for some rhetorical or strategic end. It may, for example, allow the alluding text to achieve a distinct identity in apposition with the evoked text (cf. Sommer 1998:11). An allusion in Jeremiah 50:4–5 to 31:31–34 could imply that there is more than a dependence of the former on the latter. It could be in a dialogical relationship with the latter.

An allusion consists of the recognition of an identifiable element, the marker, whose appearance intends to elicit the recollection of another independent text (cf. Nogalski 1996:109; Sommer 1998:11). As Mastnjak (2015:17) aptly remarks, verbal parallels are necessary in the identification of allusion in ancient texts. To guard against coincidental similarities, these parallels need to be weighed. There should furthermore be a diachronic relationship between the invoking text and the evoked text (Rom-Shiloni 2021:393).

In the *book of Jeremiah*, the placement of the oracles against Babylon in the text form that is attested in the MT differs markedly from that in the text form reflected by the Septuagint (LXX). In the latter, the collection of oracles against the nations occurs immediately after Jeremiah 25:13. In Jeremiah MT, the collection of oracles against the nations is located in the penultimate position in the book. In addition, the sequence of the different nations that are addressed differs. In Jeremiah LXX, the oracles against Babylon are third in the list of foreign nations, following those concerning Elam and Egypt, a position of no importance. In Jeremiah MT, on the other hand, the oracles against Babylon stand in the final position, constituting the climax (cf. Kessler 1999:70). Controversy remains with regard to the original placement of the collection of oracles against the nations (cf. Mastnjak 2018:27–30). Although the present inquiry will take the placement of the promise of an eternal covenant in Jeremiah LXX into consideration, it focuses on Jeremiah MT. Jeremiah MT ostensibly ends on a more positive note than Jeremiah LXX. It is likely that the placement of oracles against Babylon in Jeremiah MT had an effect on the impact of the promise of an eternal covenant in Jeremiah 50:5 on the book as a whole.

The article commences with an analysis of the oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5, which permits a comparison of the promise of the eternal covenant with that of the new covenant. Next, the role of the oracle within its immediate context, the oracles against Babylon, is considered. Subsequently, possible links between Jeremiah 50:4–5 and material in the preceding chapters of the *book of Jeremiah* are scrutinised. Finally, the effect of the placement of the oracles against Babylon in the MT on the impact of the salvation oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 on the book as a whole is explored.

An analysis of Jeremiah 50:4–5

The text:

בימים ההמה ובעת ההיא נאם־יהוה	'In those days, at that time', declared Yahweh,
יבאו בני־ישראל המה ובני־יהודה יחדו	'the people of Israel and Judah together will come,
הלוך ובכו ילכו	they will come weeping
ואת־יהוה אלהיהם יבקשו	and seek Yahweh their God.
ציון ישאלו דרך הנה פניהם	They will ask the way to Zion with their faces toward it.
באו ונלוו אל־יהוה	They will come and bind themselves to Yahweh
ברית עולם לא תשכח	in an eternal covenant never to be forgotten.'

Jeremiah 50:4–5 is a brief salvation oracle addressed to the Israelites and Judeans (cf. Lundbom 2004b:373; Stipp 2019:789). The temporal formula בימים ההמה ובעת ההיא, 'in those days and at that time', separates verse 4 from verses 2–3 (Kessler 2003:45). The verbal pair שאל/בקש ('seek' and/or 'ask') ties verse 4 to verse 5 (Kessler 2003:75). Although Yahweh refers to Israel as 'my people' in verse 6, the presence of the pastoral metaphor signals a break between verses 5 and 6. Moreover verses 6–7 do not describe a future action but look back to the past. Beuken (2016:64) furthermore points to the contrast between the journey to Zion, described in verses 4–5, and the aimless, deceitful wondering about of Yahweh's people is the past referred to in verses 6–7. The link to verse 6 through the use of the verb שכח therefore seems secondary. Verses 4–5 can be regarded as a distinct oracle.

The LXX-version of the text does not reflect the oracle formula נאם יהוה in verse 4 MT. Text 4QJer[b], which generally agrees with the LXX, does, however, support the MT-reading. In verse 5, the MT reads באו as an imperative. This reading contrasts awkwardly with the series of verbs in the imperfect that precede in verses 4 and 5 (Sharp 1997:500). The LXX-reading: 'they will come' should rather be followed.

The oracle formula נאם יהוה in verse 4 marks the continued speaking of Yahweh (Glanz 2013:264; Raabe 2018:233). Yahweh gives the undertaking that the Israelites and Judeans will ask the way to Zion and join themselves in an eternal covenant with him. The phrase ובכו הלוך depicts the manner in which the Israelites and Judeans would return. On the way to Zion, they would be weeping, as they have sinned (Hill 1999:173). The subsequent phrase את־יהוה אלהיהם יבקשו, 'they would seek Yahweh their god', affirms that the people would have repented (Stipp 2019:773).

The MT takes ברית עולם לא תשכח in verse 5 as an independent clause (McKane 2014:1255). The passive verb signifies that the eternal covenant would never be forgotten, neither by Yahweh nor by Israel and Judah (Stipp 2019:773). While an eternal (everlasting) covenant is generally regarded as an unbreakable, unconditional and unilateral covenant, Mason (2008:226) is of the opinion that a ברית עולם is a bilateral, conditional and breakable covenant involving the obligations of God and humans. According to him, 'eternal' and 'breakable' are not mutually exclusive ideas. In Jeremiah 50:5, however, the asyndetic clause לא שכח explicitly testifies to the fact that the promised covenant will not be forgotten. It will indeed be an eternal covenant.

The catastrophe of 587 BCE. brought the status of the covenant between Yahweh and the people into dispute. In Jeremiah 1–24, the prophet repeatedly announces that the people have violated the covenant. In the disputation speech in Jeremiah 3:1–5 the marital metaphor is, for instance, used to describe the dissolution of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The covenantal relationship had seemingly been terminated with no option of restoration (cf. Rom-Shiloni 2015:163–166). In contrast, the oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 envisages a future in which the validity of the covenant would never be in doubt.

The promise of a new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31 also occurs in a context that speaks of restoration. What would the relationship between Jeremiah 31:31–34 and 50:4–5 be?

A distinctive voice

The oracles in Jeremiah 31:31–34 and 50:4–5 both use the metaphor of the ברית to depict the restored relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Several considerations do, however, militate against the notion that the promise of an eternal covenant is nothing more than a variation on the promise of the new covenant. Jeremiah 31:31–34 attributes the establishment of the new covenant solely to divine initiative. Although the divine initiative seems to be the driving force in the establishment of the eternal covenant, the people would also play an active role in its institution. Jeremiah 50:4, for example, asserts that the people would come weeping to Zion. A confession of sins would facilitate in the restoration of the relationship with Yahweh that has been undone by human infidelity (cf. Bautch 2009:85). Jeremiah 31:33 is unique in that Yahweh writes his *torah*

directly on the heart (Fischer 2020:311). Peculiar to Jeremiah 50:4–5 is the association of the future covenant with Zion. In contrast to Jeremiah 31:31–34, which explicitly refers to the covenant that Israel breached, 50:4–5 does not make any reference to a former covenant. Despite the fact that Jeremiah 31:31–34 and 50:4–5 share the theme of a future covenant between Yahweh and the people of Israel and Judah, there are notable differences between the two passages. In light of Israel's failure to live up to Yahweh's expectations, Jeremiah 31:31–34 stresses that in future Yahweh's *torah* will be written directly on the people's hearts. Jeremiah 50:4–5, on the other hand, specifically links the conclusion of the eternal covenant with the return of Israel and Judah to Zion. The promise of an eternal covenant attested in Jeremiah 50:5 obviously presents a distinctive voice when compared to that of the new covenant. Notably, Brueggemann (2007:2) asserts that the final form of the text of the *book of Jeremiah* has permitted several contesting voices to stand alongside one another without noticeable harmonisation.

The oracles against Babylon presuppose the destruction of the temple and depict Media as the nation that would conquer Babylon. A date between 587 BCE. and 550 BCE. could therefore be set for the oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5. While some scholars attribute Jeremiah 31:31–34 to the prophet Jeremiah himself (cf. Lundbom 2004a:471), it is frequently regarded as post-Jeremianic (cf. Allen 2008:355). Albertz (2003:344) attributes it to a Deuteronomistic redaction of the *book of Jeremiah*, while Maier (2014:223) suggests that the promise of a new covenant is in all likelihood a post-exilic re-interpretation of earlier expectations. Leene (2000:171) argues that the oracle was written under the influence of Ezekiel 36:26–27. Whether Jeremiah 50:4–5 was influenced by 31:31–34 therefore remains a matter of conjecture. From the perspective of the reader of Jeremiah MT, it could nonetheless appear as if the promise of an eternal covenant is in dialogue with the promise of a new covenant. Interestingly, in Jeremiah LXX, the promise of an eternal covenant (LXX 27:5) precedes the promise of a new covenant (LXX 38:31).

The role of the oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 within its immediate context, the oracles against Babylon

Reading the oracles against Babylon one is overwhelmed by the quantity of literary forms that seem to tumble over one another (cf. Kessler 2003:39). Although there is no scholarly consensus with regard to the structure of Jeremiah 50–51 (cf. Fretheim 2002:622), Kessler (2003:51) observes that the different literary components, which imitate genuine genres, produce a kind of literary mosaic. Most scholars find it easier to describe these chapters thematically than structurally (cf. Kessler 2003:57). The themes of Babylon's destruction and of Israel's return run through the whole collection. It is of significance to note that both these themes are introduced in Jeremiah 50:2–5.

Following a superscription that represents Yahweh as speaking against Babylon, Jeremiah 50:2–3 announces the demise of Babylon by a nation from the north. The finite verbs in verse 2 depict it as an accomplished fact. Unspecified heralds are directed to proclaim to all nations the news of the collapse of the Babylonian empire. Moreover, it is stressed that Marduk, the head of the Babylonian pantheon, is defeated.

The temporal formula בימים ההמה ובעת ההיא, 'in those days and at that time', in Jeremiah 50:4 links the promises of a new future for Israel and Judah to the announcement of Babylon's demise. The demise of the Babylonian empire would allow the Israelites and Judeans to return to Zion. The implication is that Zion, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians (cf. Jr 50:28), would be restored. The notion of the reversal of the fortunes of Babylon and Zion runs throughout the oracles against Babylon. Jeremiah 50:2–5 ostensibly summarises the entire message of the oracles against Babylon (cf. Goldingay 2021:910).

In Jeremiah 50:6, Yahweh calls Israel עמי, 'my people'. In Jeremiah 51:33, he refers to himself as the אלהי ישראל, 'the God of Israel'. In Jeremiah 51:19, Israel is called שבט נחלתו, 'the tribe of his inheritance'. As the גאל, 'redeemer', of Israel, Yahweh would champion their cause (Jr 50:34) (cf. Stulman 2005:375). Yahweh depicts himself repeatedly in the oracles against the nations as 'the king' (cf. Jr 46:18; 48:15; 51:57). Yahweh's kingship imposed a special status on Israel (cf. Chae 2015:169). The promise of an eternal covenant in Jeremiah 50:5 thus seems to be superfluous. The promise does, however, place the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel and Judah on a firm footing. The future relationship will never be forgotten, neither by Yahweh nor by the people.

Remarkably the use of the word עולם to describe the covenant that will be concluded between Yahweh and the Israelites and Judeans in Jeremiah 50:5 mirrors the repeated use of the word עולם in the texts that describe the end of Babylon in chapters 50–51. Yahweh, for example, says that Babylon would forever not be inhabited (Jr 50:39). The city would forever be a desolation (Jr 51:26). Its inhabitants would sleep a perpetual sleep (Jr 51:39). The Babylonian empire deemed itself to be everlasting. In this regard, Sheriffs (1988:25) points to an inscription of Nabopolassar on a barrel cylinder. It expresses a sense of continuity from Babylon's primeval foundations to the remote future. The inscription deals with the rebuilding of Imgur-Enlil, the inner wall of Babylon (cf. Da Riva 2013:97). In the inscription the long-term future perspective is conveyed by various phrases meaning 'forever': *ana dūr ūmē, ana dārati, ana ūmē dārûtu* (3:21, 28, 35). The expression ברית עולם ('eternal covenant') occurs 18 times in the Old Testament, predominantly in texts from exilic and post-exilic times. It is nonetheless possible that the author of Jeremiah 50:5 intentionally applied the word עולם in the description of the new relationship between Yahweh and

the people in order to highlight the contrast between the fates of Babylon and Israel. In contrast to Babylon, which would be a desolation forever, the future of the people of Yahweh was guaranteed by an eternal covenant with Yahweh, never to be forgotten.

As was noted earlier, the linkage of the eternal covenant to Zion is peculiar to Jeremiah 50:5. Interestingly, the name ציון occurs elsewhere in the oracles against Babylon in Jeremiah 50:28 and 51:10, 24, 35. These texts are, however, all concerned with vengeance for what the Babylonians had done to Zion. Jeremiah 50:28 and 51:10 state that the refugees will proclaim in Zion what Yahweh had done to Babylon. Jeremiah 51:24 contains a word by Yahweh directed at Babylon. He would punish Babylon for what was done to Zion. In Jeremiah 51:34–35, the exiles themselves call for Babylon's destruction. Christensen (1975:278–279) suggests that an original nucleus of oracles against Babylon was subsequently expanded and transformed. What was an announcement of judgement became both an announcement of judgement for Babylon and an explicit announcement of salvation for Israel. It is instructive that Jeremiah 51:10 and 24 seem to be secondary additions (cf. Stipp 2019:797, 799). Jeremiah 51:34–36, in which Zion plays an active role in the confrontation with Babylon (cf. Beuken 2016:71), was in all likelihood inserted at a still later stage. Kalmanofsky (2016:112) regards Jeremiah 51:35 as testimony that the oracles against Babylon can be viewed as revenge fantasies. The incorporation of the promise of an eternal covenant between Yahweh and the people of Israel and Judah to be concluded on Zion nonetheless has the effect that these oracles are more than mere revenge fantasies. The God who used Babylon as an instrument to destroy Jerusalem promises to restore the covenantal relationship with the people of Israel and Judah in Zion.

Sharp (2022:383) believes that Jeremiah 50:4–5 is possibly a later interpolation linking the restoration of the covenant people more securely to the material that mainly focusses resolutely on the downfall of Babylon. She nonetheless concedes that such a gesture could also have been part of a single compositional moment. It is, however, evident that in the final form of the oracles against Babylon, the salvation oracle is firmly linked to its immediate context. Jeremiah 50:4–5 introduces the subtheme of the oracles against Babylon: the restoration of Israel and Judah. Besides the demise of the Babylonian empire, the exiles could count on the establishment of an eternal covenant between them and Yahweh, a covenant that was deemed unbreakable. The reversal of the fortunes of Babylon and the people of Israel and Judah would be brought about by Yahweh, the king (Jr 51:57). As a result of the presence of the salvation oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5, the oracles against Babylon remained a source of hope to the people of Israel, even when the figure of Babylon became a symbol for any oppressive empire (cf. Bellis 2003:65–73).

Allusions to prophecies of judgement

As was already noted, the oracles against Babylon used and adapted terminology from the material originally addressed to Judah. Holt (2003:196–197) asserts that the oracles against Babylon function as intertext of the Foe from the North oracles in Jeremiah 4:5–6:30. The predominant theme in these oracles is the destruction of Zion. Of the 17 occurrences of the term ציון in Jeremiah, four are attested in the Foe from the North oracles (ציון in Jr 4:6 and בת־ציון in 4:31; 6:2, 23). It is noteworthy that Jeremiah 50:4–5, which is closely linked to the announcement in 50:2–3 that a nation from the north would destroy Babylon, specifically announces the return of the Israelite and Judean exiles to ציון. The call to flee from Jerusalem in Jeremiah 6:1 is thus reversed. The inhabitants of Babylon should flee ahead of the calamity that was approaching from the north (cf. Jr 51:6). The juxtaposition of the themes of the demise of the Babylonian empire and the restoration of Israel is also found in Jeremiah 50:18–20. Interestingly, these verses make no reference to Zion or Jerusalem. Jeremiah 50:4, on the other hand, explicitly mentions Zion as the destination of the exiles. When the close link between Jeremiah 50:2–3 and 50:4–5 is taken into consideration, it seems plausible to conclude that the latter also alludes to the predictions of the destruction of Zion in 4:5–6:30. Once Zion was subjected to the enemy from the north. Now it was Babylon's turn.

Jeremiah 14:19–22 is a community lament. The people of Judah call upon Yahweh to remember his covenant with them (v. 21). Remarkably, the words ברית and ציון occur in close proximity to each other. In a rhetorical question, Yahweh is asked whether he despises Zion. In light of close correspondences between Jeremiah 14:19–22 and Leviticus 26, Thiel (1973:192) assigns the lament to the exilic period. With the exception of Jeremiah 14:19, Leviticus 26:15, 43 and 44 are the only texts in the Old Testament where the verbs מאס and געל are used in parallelism. In addition, the expression זכר ברית is utilised in Jeremiah 14:21 as well as in Leviticus 26:42 and 45. Boda (2001:195–196) has, however, convincingly demonstrated that Jeremiah 14:19–22 reflects an event during the reign of Zedekiah, drawing on a form of Leviticus 26 already known in the late pre-exilic period. It should furthermore be noted that while Jeremiah 14:21 is a plea by the people to Yahweh not to break his covenant, the stress in Leviticus 26 is on the people breaking the covenant.

In Jeremiah 14:21, the people of Judah call upon Yahweh not to dishonour his glorious throne. He should remember (זכר) his covenant and not break it. In the Old Testament, the verb זכר is frequently used as antonym of the verb שכח, 'to forget' (cf. Schottroff 1984:510). As was noted earlier, in Jeremiah 50:5, the asyndetic clause לֹא שכח explicitly testifies to the fact that the promised future covenant would not be forgotten. The expression כסא כבודך, 'your glorious throne',

in Jeremiah 14:21 evokes the notion of Zion as Yahweh's abode, a notion prevalent in Judah in the late pre-exilic period (cf. Jr 7:4). It is of significance to note that Jeremiah 14:21 associates the covenant with Yahweh with the notion of his presence on Zion, a notion that is seemingly presupposed in 50:4–5. The oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5, with the promise of the future covenant as one that will not be forgotten, neither by Yahweh nor by the people of Israel and Judah, ostensibly alludes to the community lament in 14:19–22.

In the book of Jeremiah, the community lament in 14:19–22 is incorporated in a prophetic liturgy comprising 14:1–15:4. The liturgy ends with announcements of disaster that included exile (Jr 15:1–4). Yahweh was unmoved by the lament. Judah did not consider the breach between them and Yahweh as serious enough (cf. Beuken & Van Groll 1981:33). Through the allusion in Jeremiah 50:4–5 to 14:19–21, a very different picture is presented. The exiles are assured that despite what had happened in the past, they would be taken up in a covenantal relationship with Yahweh that will never be forgotten.

Allusions to prophecies of salvation

Kessler (2003:74) believes that Jeremiah 3:18 is the literary antecedent of 50:4. In Jeremiah 3:18, the return of Israel and Judah to the land Yahweh had given to their ancestors is announced. Yahweh's promise in Jeremiah 3:14 of a return to Zion does, however, appear to be secondarily linked to 3:18. The formula בימים ההמה ('in those days') in verse 18 introduces a separate oracle (cf. Thompson 1980:203). Although the theme of the return of Israel and Judah is also attested in Jeremiah 50:4, a distinctive terminology is applied to refer to the returnees.

In the salvation oracle in Jeremiah 31:2–6, Yahweh assures the people of Ephraim and Samaria that they would go in pilgrimage to Zion in future (cf. Bozak 1991:80). Stipp (2019:238–239) suggests that there is a high probability that the oracle goes back to the prophet Jeremiah himself. The references to Ephraim and Samaria would indeed signify that the oracle emanated from Jeremiah's early prophesying to the people of the former northern kingdom. The series of three promises in verses 4 and 5, which all begin with עוד, 'again', stresses that the restoration of Israel is contemplated.

The verbal correspondence between Jeremiah 31:6 and 50:5 points to an allusion in the latter text to the former text. The words ציון and יהוה are used in parallelism in both texts (cf. Becking 2004:97). Although Jeremiah 31:6 does not explicitly refer to the covenant, the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is evidently presupposed as he is called 'our God'. Interestingly in the salvation oracle in Jeremiah 50:4 Yahweh is depicted as 'their God'. In Jeremiah 31:3, Yahweh states that he loved Israel with an everlasting love (אהבת עולם). This assurance of Yahweh's abiding fidelity to

Israel is in tension with the texts in the *book of Jeremiah*, which suggests that he has terminated his relationship with Israel (cf. Brueggemann 1998:282–283). By proclaiming the re-establishment of Yahweh's relationship with Israel Jeremiah 50:4–5 does, however, give substance to the promises in the prophecy of consolation in 31:2–6. Jeremiah 50:4–5 furthermore adapts the theme of renewed pilgrimages to Zion by the promise of the conclusion of an eternal covenant between Yahweh and Israel and Judah in Zion.

There seems to be a conscious reuse of Jeremiah 31:2–6 in the salvation oracle in 50:4–5. However, in contrast to Jeremiah 31:2–6, 50:5 uses the metaphor ברית to describe the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Sommer (1998:13) notes that certain properties of the source text outside of the marked sign may prove relevant for the alluding text. Yahweh's statement in Jeremiah 31:3 that he loved Israel with an everlasting love evidently provides the grounds for his promise of an eternal covenant in 50:4–5. It is noteworthy that another oracle, which forms part of the so-called *Book of Consolation*, is utilised in the oracles against the nations in Jeremiah 46:27–28. A word of hope for Israel is attached to the oracle against Egypt. In Jeremiah MT, this oracle of salvation is also attested in Jeremiah 30:10–11. Peels (2018:124) attributes the absence of the oracle in the LXX to the LXX's tendency to eschatologise. Lundbom (2004a:387), on the other hand, suggests that the tendency of the LXX to omit doublets the second time they appear in the book is to blame. Becking (2004:163) has convincingly demonstrated that there is no compelling reason to regard Jeremiah 30:10–11 MT as a later addition. It is therefore likely that the oracle was present in the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX.

Hope is also based on a promise of an eternal covenant in Jeremiah 32:40. Yahweh will institute an eternal covenant with the exiles on their return to Palestine. Hibbard (2015:205) has convincingly demonstrated that the *book of Isaiah* contains contrary understandings of the ברית עולם. The understanding of promise of the עולם ברית in Jeremiah 32:40 does indeed differ from that of the promise in 50:5. Jeremiah 32:40 lacks any reference to ציון. As was noted earlier, Jeremiah 50:5 suggests that the people would play an active role in the establishment of the new covenant. In contrast, Jeremiah 32:40 ascribes the establishment of the eternal covenant solely to Yahweh's initiative. While Jeremiah 50:5 depicts the people as weeping while returning to Zion, 32:40 lacks any reference to their sins. In Jeremiah 32:39, Yahweh declares that he would give the people one mind and one way of life so they would always revere him. The phrase אחד ודרך אחד להם נתתי לב seems to be an alternative way of expressing the promise of the internalisation of the *torah* in Jeremiah 31:33. Fischer (2020:324) believes that the phrase can be regarded as an additional qualification of the new covenant announced in Jeremiah 31:31. It is noteworthy that Rom-Shiloni (2003:221) is of the opinion that Jeremiah 32:36–41 should be viewed as independent in regard to the other renewal prophecies in the *book of Jeremiah*. In certain lexical details, it is close to the prophecies of Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah. Interestingly,

Stegeman (2011:60) suggests that Jeremiah 32:36–41 should be attributed to a group that claimed that the exile did not end with the return of the exiles from Babylon.

A dialogical relationship

The occurrence of the name ציון in Jeremiah 14:19–22 and 31:2–6 as well as in 50:4–5 is of great significance. Although the metaphor ברית is not utilised in Jeremiah 31:2–6, the notion of a fixed relationship between Yahweh and the people plays an important role in the oracle. The allusions in Jeremiah 50:4–5 to 14:19–22 and 31:2–6 thus seem to be intentional. They point to a dialogical relationship between Jeremiah 50:4–5 and these prophecies of doom and salvation. The recollection to the reference in Jeremiah 31:3 to Yahweh's everlasting love for Israel provides an assurance that there was hope for a restoration of the covenantal relationship. In contrast to the situation reflected in Jeremiah 14:19–21, in which Judah hinted that Yahweh had forgotten the covenant, 50:4–5 asserts that Yahweh in future would conclude an eternal covenant with them that would never be forgotten, nor by him, neither by the people. The contrast between salvation oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 and the Foe from the North oracles and the lament in 14:19–22 highlights the message of a hopeful future for the people of Israel and Judah in the oracles against Babylon. Babylon, the foe from the north, caused the destruction of Zion. Another foe from the north would cause Babylon's demise. The oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 does not only adopt themes from the material in the preceding chapters but also reflects on them.

There are clear indications that the oracles against Babylon are more than an addendum to the *book of Jeremiah*. Jeremiah 51:15–19 obviously quotes 10:12–16 (cf. Fretheim 2002:622). As was noted earlier, Jeremiah 50:41–43 is seemingly in dialogue with 6:22–24. The allusions in the salvation oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 to material in the preceding chapters allow a similar conclusion. Interestingly Becking (2004:292) observes that the hope for a return to Zion is one of the basic themes in Jeremiah 30–31. This hope is also expounded in the oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5. The promise of the eternal covenant evidently functions as a bridge between the promises of the restoration of Israel in chapters 30–31 and those in chapters 50–51.

The *book of Jeremiah* is intended to engage with a readership or audience (Meeks 2009:271). What effect would the placement of the oracles against Babylon in a climactic position in Jeremiah MT have on the impact of the salvation oracle in 50:4–5 on the book as a whole?

The oracles against Babylon: The prophet Jeremiah's final words

Jeremiah 51:64 MT depicts the oracles against Babylon as Jeremiah's final words. The prophet's final words do, however, not only consist of oracles that foretell the end of

the Babylonian empire but also of an oracle that promises the restoration of the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel and Judah.

The final chapter of the *book of Jeremiah*, chapter 52, consists of an account of king Zedekiah's reign and Jerusalem's fall (vv. 1–30) as well as a report on the release of the former king Jehoiachin from house arrest in 562 BCE (vv. 31–34). Jeremiah 52 summarises the double message of the book, as mainly negative, but to some extent positive (cf. De Waard 2020:156). Fischer (2020:282) asserts that the chapter bears witness to the truth of the prophet's proclamation, showing that what he said became real in the course of time. The prophet Jeremiah was indeed sent by Yahweh (cf. Jr 28:9).

The plurality of styles and voices intermingled with one another in the *book of Jeremiah* may give the impression of incoherence and disorder (cf. Biddle 2021:337). However, as far as the MT is concerned, several scholars suggest that there is order amid the disorder. Stulman (1998:57), for instance, argues that chapters 1–25 function as prolegomenon to chapters 26–52. While the shadow of the events of 587 BCE. covers the whole book, chapters 26–52 present a 'hope-full' script for a reimaged community beyond the cessation of the old world order. Holt (2003:200) characterises the *book of Jeremiah* MT as a circular composition beginning and ending with the acts of the universal, sovereign God with its epicenter in the prophecy of doom directed at Israel or Judah and the foreign nations, in particular Babylon. Kessler (1999:64) asserts that chapters 1, 25 and 50–51 function like pillars in a structure. He furthermore suggests that chapters 50–51, which contain the oracles against Babylon, are crucial for the understanding of the book as a whole (Kessler 1999:67). The placement of the oracles against Babylon, with the message of the demise of the Babylonian empire and the restoration of the relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel and Judah, in a climactic position substantiates Kessler's argument. The salvation oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 should notably be taken into consideration for the understanding of the book as a whole. It highlights the notion that in spite of the tragic events in 587 BCE., there was hope for a restoration of the relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel and Judah.

Edenburg (2010:144) remarks that as allusion invokes a specific text, there is no guarantee that members of a text's audience will succeed in identifying the allusion and attain full appreciation of the text. In the LXX, the oracles against Babylon occur in a position of no importance. However, as a consequence of the placement of these oracles in the two penultimate chapters of the *book of Jeremiah* MT, the oracle of salvation in Jeremiah 50:4–5 gained significance. The depiction of the promise of an eternal covenant as belonging to the prophet's final words provides a useful interpretive lens to Jeremiah MT as a whole. In spite of the tragic events of 587 BCE., there was hope for a future restoration of the covenantal relationship with Yahweh.

Tov (2021:198) regards the differences regarding the position of the oracles against the nations between the Jeremiah LXX and Jeremiah MT as editorial. As a result of the placement of the oracles against Babylon in Jeremiah MT in the two penultimate chapters of the book by an editor, the oracle of salvation in which Yahweh announces the future establishment of an eternal covenant between him and Israel, gained significance. In Jeremiah LXX, on the other hand, the promise of an eternal covenant (LXX 27:4–5) occurs in the middle of the book in a position of no importance.

Conclusion

This article suggests that the promise of an eternal covenant attested in Jeremiah 50:4–5 MT presents a distinctive voice when compared to the promise of the new covenant in 31:31. As the chronological relationship between these texts remains a matter of conjecture, it is not possible to determine whether Jeremiah 50:4–5 invokes 31:31–34. From the perspective of the reader of Jeremiah MT, it could, however, appear as if the promise of an eternal covenant is in dialogue with the promise of a new covenant.

This article furthermore postulates that the oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 has a meaningful role in the *book of Jeremiah* MT. Within its immediate context, the oracles against Babylon, the oracle introduces the important subtheme: the restoration of covenantal the relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel and Judah. Allusions to material in the preceding chapters directed at Judah reveal a dialogical relationship between Jeremiah 50:4–5 and the Foe from the North oracles in 4:5–6:30, the communal lament in 14:19–22 and the salvation oracle in 31:2–6. These links testify to the fact that the oracles against Babylon should not be regarded as a mere addendum to the *book of Jeremiah*. The placement of the oracles against Babylon in the Masoretic text had the effect that the hope expressed in Jeremiah 50:4–5 became more pronounced. Belonging to Jeremiah's final words the promise of an eternal covenant assures the exiles that they could look forward to a future, which would not merely encompass the demise of the Babylonian empire but also a return to Zion and a renewed relationship with Yahweh. The salvation oracle in Jeremiah 50:4–5 should notably be taken into consideration for the understanding of the book as a whole.

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Data availability

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