



“No One Will Say Anymore: The Ark of the Covenant of YHWH.” Jeremiah 3:16 and Its Significance for the Tradition of the Ark of the Covenant

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Abstract: The statement in Jer 3:16–17 about the loss of the Ark of the Covenant and the assertion that there is no further need to think about it is unique in the prophetic texts. Its significance, however, is not the result of this uniqueness, but of the contents contained in it. The article compares the statistical interest in Ark in various theological circles from the times of the Old Testament. This data, along with an analysis of the potential roles assigned to the Ark, revealed a process in which it gradually lost its significance. The analysis of the potential historical circumstances allowed us to conclude that the statement of the prophet Jeremiah does not provide any information about how and when the Ark was lost. Diachronic analysis allows us to classify it as an editorial addition from the late period after the Babylonian exile. As such, it contains information about a significant change in Old Testament covenant theology. In the spirit of the post-exilic tradition of patriarchal promises, to the current vision of return of the diaspora and the renewal of the Kingdom of Israel (Jer 3:14–15, 18), there is now added the announcement of the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion and the inauguration of the universal Kingdom of God on earth.

Keywords: Jeremiah, Ark of the Covenant, the universal kingdom of God, eschatology

The laconic statement of the prophet Jeremiah concerning the disappearance of the Ark of the Covenant, and his explicit indication that there was no further need to concern oneself with it in the later history of the chosen nation, has long aroused—and continues to arouse—considerable interest among exegetes. This is due to several reasons. First, it is the only mention of this cultic object in the prophetic books. Second, the replacement of the Ark's role (Jer 3:16) by Jerusalem, described as “the throne of YHWH” (3:17), invites reflection on how the symbolism and theological significance of the Ark were understood during the monarchic period. Third and finally, the fact that the prophet refers to the Ark's disappearance raises questions concerning the time and circumstances under which this cultic object might have been lost. We intend to examine these three issues in greater detail in order to understand the meaning of the so-called “Jeremian tradition” associated with the Ark of the Covenant, as well as the transformation that took place in its cultic and theological significance throughout the history of ancient Israel.

1. Jeremiah in the Context of Other Texts Concerning the Ark

We know very little about the origins and early history of the Ark of the Covenant. If one seeks analogies, similar ceremonial and cultic objects can most readily be found in ancient Egypt. It cannot be excluded that these may have served as inspiration for the biblical Ark (Noegl 2015, 223–42). Nevertheless, in the texts traditionally regarded as the oldest that refer to the Ark (e.g., Num 10:29–36; Josh 3–4; 6; 1 Sam 4–6; 2 Sam 6), we are in fact dealing with later literary traditions and the theological concepts expressed therein (Lemański 2006, 27–146; Porzig 2009, 33–38, 98–99, 155–56). It is therefore difficult to assert that the Ark existed already in the late Bronze Age or the early Iron Age—a time suggested by, among others, Scott B. Noegl (2015, 236–37), though critically disputed by Peter Porzig (2009, 156). The earliest biblical tradition associates the Ark initially with the sanctuary in Shiloh (1 Sam 3:3; 4:4–5; cf. Dietrich 2010, 215–20). After its loss, and consequently the decline in the significance of that sanctuary (cf. Jer 7:1–15), the Ark became associated with the holiest part of the Jerusalem temple (1 Kgs 8:6), and its transfer to Jerusalem was attributed to David (2 Sam 6).

At first glance, the central role of the Ark as the main cultic object during the existence of the so-called Solomonic Temple (the monarchic period) seems obvious. However, when we examine the distribution of the texts mentioning this cultic object throughout the Old Testament, this impression is significantly weakened. As already noted, the prophet Jeremiah is the only representative of his milieu who makes any mention of the Ark. This fact is rather surprising. If the Ark was indeed of such importance during the monarchy, the absence of references to it among all other prophets throughout that period is highly thought-provoking. Equally puzzling is the barely traceable allusion to the Ark in the Book of Psalms (Ps 132:8; Lemański 2006, 195–201; Porzig 2009, 228–43), and its total absence in the wisdom literature. In the latter case, however, this omission can be explained by the distinct interests and thematic focus of the sapiential authors.

On the other hand, we have the Deuteronomistic milieu, in which the Ark is mentioned rather frequently, though two fundamental tendencies are discernible. If we seek the earliest traditions concerning this cultic object, they are found primarily within the so-called Deuteronomistic History (DtrH). This concerns, above all, the aforementioned association of the Ark with the sanctuary at Shiloh and its downfall following the capture of the Ark by the Philistines (1 Sam 4:1–7:1), as well as its later recovery and transfer to Jerusalem “in the time of David” (2 Sam 6) (Lemański 2006, 58–141; Porzig 2009, 104–76). In these texts, it is made evident that the Ark represents YHWH himself. As Gerhard von Rad once stated: “Where the Ark came, there came YHWH.” (1931, 123) The narrative of these events plays a significant theological and symbolic role within DtrH, marking the transfer of divine splendor from Shiloh to Jerusalem (Lemański 2002, 147–68) and linking these events with

the merits of David (cf. Ps 132). The utilization of these older traditions allowed the Deuteronomistic redactors to strengthen the Ark's role as a numinous symbol legitimizing the Davidic dynasty reigning in Jerusalem, while simultaneously elevating the status of the Jerusalem sanctuary—a development culminating in the account of Solomon's construction of the Temple on Mount Zion and the placement of the Ark in its central location (1 Kgs 6:19; 8:1–11, 21; cf. 2:26; 3:15; see Lemański 2006, 147–58; Porzig 2009, 186–205). Yet the later Deuteronomistic narrative concerning the monarchy contains no further references to this cultic object. Conversely, in their programmatic text (the Book of Deuteronomy), these same redactors reduce the Ark's function merely to that of a container or chest holding the tablets of the covenant (Deut 10:1–9; Lemański 2006, 159–70; Porzig 2009, 46–55), thereby clearly diminishing its earlier role as a symbol representing the very presence of YHWH.

This process of diminishing the Ark's significance was later continued by the Priestly authors of the post-exilic period, for whom the Ark again became only a container—the Ark of the Testimony (in contrast to DtrH's Ark of the Covenant [of YHWH])—placed at the center of the tent or temple, the portable sanctuary built by the Israelites in the wilderness. The description of its construction (Exod 25:10–22) served primarily to assign theological importance to another cultic object of the Second Temple period—the mercy seat (כפרת *kappōret*). This element, described as the lid of the Ark, was thereby interpreted as the only part that survived the Babylonian exile (Exod 25:17–22; Lemański 2006, 171–87; Porzig 2009, 8–41).

The authors of Chronicles, much like their Deuteronomistic *Vorlage*, employ the Ark symbolically, presenting its history as a narrative leading towards the legitimization of the Jerusalem sanctuary as the final destination in the history of the chosen nation (Welten 1979, 169–83; Lemański 2006, 203–22; Porzig 2009, 244–55). For the Chronicler, Jerusalem and its temple—as the spiritual center—constitute the very meaning of Israel's history, and the people's attitude toward the sanctuary becomes the key criterion for evaluating individual rulers (Kalimi 2016, 135–54).

In summary, the greatest concentration of traditions concerning the Ark is found within Deuteronomistic literature, which, on the one hand, absorbs older traditions portraying the Ark as a numinous manifestation of YHWH's presence, and on the other, reduces its role to that of a container holding the tablets of the covenant (the Decalogue). Subsequent circles—Priestly and Chronicler—writing after the Babylonian exile, further develop this trend, solidifying the Ark's exclusively symbolic significance as a cultic object. Jeremiah's statement is situated between these two tendencies, indicating not only that the Ark had disappeared, but also that, as a result of new theological developments, it was no longer needed. This marks an essential transition from the situation of the monarchic period (the First Temple) to that of the post-exilic period (the Second Temple).

2. The Symbolic Meaning of the Ark

In biblical texts, the Ark is described as a wooden acacia chest, which is also the original meaning of the Hebrew term אֲרוֹן (*ʾărôn*) (*HAL* 1:83; Lemański 2006, 15–16; cf. Gen 50:26: “coffin”; 2 Kgs 12:10–11; 2 Chr 24:8, 10–11: “collection chest”). In cultic usage, however, it initially acquired the significance of a symbol representing YHWH himself and his presence. Over time, however, this role was reduced to that of a container holding the testimony of the covenant (the Decalogue), and in this sense—as a symbol of the covenant—it is most frequently mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Lemański 2006, 21–24; Eichler 2021, 11–15, for various additional designations of the Ark).

The narrative context crucial for understanding the Ark's role during the final period of the monarchy is found in the Deuteronomistic account of the construction of Solomon's Temple (1 Kgs 6–8). The description itself, however, is inconsistent and has undergone numerous redactions (Porzig 2009, 186–212; Knauf 2016, 218). This suggests that it does not reflect a historical building plan from the late 10th century BCE. As Konrad Rupprecht observes:

The report concerns works whose execution presupposes the completed construction of the temple ... as a necessary condition. The only possible explanation is the absence of a coherent account of Solomon's temple construction ... or the fact that the temple no longer existed. (Rupprecht 1972, 51–52)

In reality, this description contains an early Deuteronomistic core reflecting the cultic situation in Jerusalem at least since the late 8th century BCE, alongside numerous later updates that gradually idealized both the narrative and the associated sacred space (Würthwein 1985, 57–59, 89–91). From an archaeological perspective, however, the situation described there—particularly in 1 Kgs 8, depicting YHWH enthroned above the cherubim on an empty throne—is attested only by artifacts from the 7th century BCE (Lewis 2005, 69–107; Keel 2007, 299; Porzig 2009, 295; cf. Römer 2023, 445–59). It is with such a context that one must associate the Ark's meaning as a numinous symbol representing the visible and symbolic presence of YHWH. What, then, preceded this stage? Was the holiest part of the sanctuary empty prior to this development? Many indications suggest that YHWH may originally have been represented by some kind of figural depiction (Niehr 1997; Köckert 2007, 281). We cannot, however, determine with certainty when this situation changed, as the biblical texts make no mention of the removal of such a presumed image of YHWH (Lemański 2021, 282–96).

Another issue concerns the role the Ark played in the Temple beyond representing the divine presence. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, a hypothesis emerged suggesting that the Ark may have represented the throne of YHWH (Reichel 1897, 22–29, 33–34; 1902, 171–74; Dibelius 1906, 27–28). Initially, this

theory found many supporters (Lemański 2006, 239, n. 33; Eichler 2021, 138–40), and Jer 3:16–17 was frequently cited as a fundamental argument in favor of such an interpretation. Even today, many exegetes understand the prophet's intended contrast in this way: the Ark, which no longer exists, versus Jerusalem, as the present "throne (כִּסֵּא *kissē*) of God"—that is, Jerusalem replacing the Ark in the role of God's throne (Carroll 1986, 150; Holladay 1986, 121; McKane 1986, 74; Lundbom 1999, 314; Allen 2008, 58). However, both the shape of the Ark (a box) (Janowski 2004, 260, 262) and the absence of a direct reference to it as a throne lead to the conclusion that it was solely a container, a chest symbolizing (by virtue of its contents—the Decalogue) the covenant of YHWH. The role of the "throne," by contrast, was more closely associated with Zion (cf. Jer 14:19, 21; see Lemański 2006, 240; Eichler 2021, 140).

Another hypothesis, related to the concept of an invisible throne of YHWH in the Jerusalem Temple, positions the Ark as the footstool of that throne (Cassuto 1967, 330; Haran 1959, 89–92; cf. Lemański 2006, 241; Eichler 2021, 141). Certain biblical passages may suggest this role of the Ark (Lam 2:1; Ps 99:5; 132:7; 1 Chr 28:2), as does the well-known ancient Near Eastern practice of placing important documents (e.g., loyalty treaties) at the feet of the patron deity of a nation. However, a close analysis of these passages again indicates that in this role it is Zion or the Temple situated there—rather than the Ark itself—that should be regarded as the divine footstool. This is further confirmed by the fact that artifacts identified as footstools in the ancient Near East never took the form of chests (Eichler 2021, 141–45).

What, then, was the actual role of the Ark in the Temple during the monarchy? From both the perspective of Israel's religious development and literary evidence, the Ark—as a cultic object representing YHWH—becomes conceivable only after the implementation of the aniconic form of worship, that is, closer to the end of the monarchy in Judah than to its beginning (Porzig 2009, 296). Ultimately, however, rather than symbolizing God's presence itself, the Ark came to represent—in Deuteronomistic thought and later theological traditions—the covenant as such. It functioned as a tangible "artifact" embodying and visualizing the covenantal relationship. Its loss could therefore deeply trouble the faithful, raising the question: What will become of the covenant and of YHWH's presence in Israel? This very issue is addressed by the prophet—or, as we shall later note, by a subsequent redactor of the Book of Jeremiah—in the passage concerning the "Ark of the Covenant of YHWH" (Jer 3:16–17).

3. The Time and Circumstances of the Ark's Disappearance

In his now-classic article, Menahem Haran (1963, 46–58) identified three historical situations in which the Ark might have been lost. The first possible occasion was the campaign of Pharaoh Shishak (1 Kgs 14:25–26) during the reign of

Rehoboam (late 10th century BCE). However, it must be noted that on the list of conquered sites from this 925 BCE campaign, Jerusalem does not appear (Schneider 2001, 320; Weippert 2010, 228–38). Moreover, there is no certainty that the “Ark narrative” contained in DtrH (from the late 7th century BCE) preserved an authentic memory of events from the transition between the Bronze and Iron Ages (11th–10th centuries BCE).

The second possible occasion was during the reign of Amaziah of Judah (early 8th century BCE), when the temple was plundered by King Jehoash of Israel (2 Kgs 14:14). Yet here, too, there is no mention of the Ark, which is surprising, given that it was still regarded in Jeremiah’s time as a crucial element of the Temple furnishings. Furthermore, the list of seized treasures (“gold and silver, and all the vessels found in the house of YHWH...” [2 Kgs 14:14]) raises doubts from the perspectives of both textual criticism (McKenzie 2021, 555, 565) and literary criticism (Würthwein 1984, 371). Many scholars suggest that this passage more accurately describes the Babylonian plundering of the Temple in 587 BCE rather than the event implied by the Masoretic text (McKenzie 2021, 565).

The third “occasion” is the Babylonian invasion of 587 BCE, during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Yet even here, in the list of plundered items (cf. 2 Kgs 24:13), the Ark is not mentioned. In this context, Jeremiah’s statement gains great importance, as it may indicate that the Ark was still present in the Temple during his time and fulfilled the role assigned to it by the Deuteronomistic milieu—that of a chest containing the tangible testimony of YHWH’s covenant with Israel, guaranteeing God’s presence among his chosen people. For this reason, many exegetes conclude that the disappearance of the Ark should be dated precisely to the time of the second Babylonian invasion (Fischer 2005, 195; Allen 2008, 58; Maier 2022, 109).

The only remaining issue to explain is the absence of the Ark from both the list of items carried off from Jerusalem by the Babylonians (2 Kgs 25:13–17; 2 Chr 36:18; Jer 52:17–23) and the later list of sacred objects returned by Cyrus (Ezra 1:7–11; cf. 5:13–15). The most straightforward explanation may be that the Ark was destroyed in the Temple fire (Maier 2022, 109). Later texts (*b. Yoma* 53b–54a; 4 Ezra 10:11) suggest that it was indeed believed to have been taken to Babylon. However, the returnees from exile, as we have already observed, did not bring it back with them. Neither the prophet Ezekiel, in his vision of the new temple (Ezek 41:3), nor the Chronicler, who replaces it with the mercy seat (1 Chr 28:11), mentions the Ark. Yet even the actual existence of the mercy seat is questioned by some scholars (Keel 2007, 1033). In any case, in order to authenticate it through archaization, the Priestly authors—as noted above—described it in the Pentateuch as the “lid” covering the Ark (Exod 25:17–22) (cf. Lemański 2007, 149–56). Nevertheless, much evidence suggests that the Holy of Holies in the Second Temple was in all likelihood empty (cf. 1 Macc 1:21–24; Josephus, *Ant.* 3,123, 125; *m. Yoma* 5:2).

Another tradition connected with the Ark links its disappearance to actions undertaken by the prophet Jeremiah. In 2 Macc 2:4–7, citing a written document, we read that this prophet, together with a group of companions, hid the Ark in a cave “on the mountain where Moses had gone up and [from which he] beheld God’s inheritance.” Despite attempts to mark the way to this place, Jeremiah is said to have declared that “the site shall remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows them mercy.” Historically, however, this legend is of dubious credibility, since the prophet did not enjoy recognition among his compatriots in his own time, and the aforementioned inventories of temple objects indicate that they were not hidden but carried off to Babylonia. The written source to which the author of 2 Maccabees appeals was probably some apocryphon now lost to us (Lemański 2006, 225; Laskowski 2017, 148). The *Paralipomena Jeremiae* (3:9–11, 18–19) (cf. Paciorek 1999, 6), in turn, report that Jeremiah, together with Baruch, deposited the temple valuables along with the Ark in the earth, which swallowed them up (Bar 6:1–10) (cf. Doran 2012, 56, where an angel replaces Jeremiah in this role). In another version of the legend (*Vita Jeremiae* 2:11), Jeremiah himself rescues the Ark and allows it to be swallowed by a rock (Hare 1985, 388). Both of these latter legends date from the 1st century CE and are most likely a further consequence of the fact that Jeremiah is the only prophet to mention the Ark.

4. Jeremiah 3:16–17 in Its Literary–Historical Context

Another essential question must be asked: Does the passage Jer 3:16–17 in fact originate with the historical prophet? Commentators agree that we are dealing here with a statement that should be read together with what precedes and follows it (Jer 3:14–18). The fundamental context of this utterance is Jeremiah’s programmatic call to conversion and to the return of the chosen people to YHWH (Jer 3:1–4:4) (Fischer 2005, 178–84; Goldingay 2021, 141–43), or—as Christl M. Maier (2022, 67–112) construes the context—a reflection on the significance of Israel’s apostasy for Judah (Jer 2:1–4:2). Bernhard Duhm (1901, 39–40; cf. Porzig 2009, 223, n. 3, with literature) maintained that the passage in question is “badly” connected with its broader context, which led him to conclude that it has a secondary, redactional character and—as many exegetes hold today—was composed in several stages of expansion (vv. 14–15; vv. 16–17; v. 18; e.g., Porzig 2009, 223). Beyond the authentic formula “in those days,” which points in this direction (Lundbom 1999, 314), we also find here a significant eschatological expansion beyond the promise of a David descendant in Jer 23:3–6. This time the promise concerns not only the scattered members of the chosen people but all humanity gathering in Jerusalem.

The key Jeremianic term שׁוּב (*šûb*) no longer denotes “conversion” (cf. Jer 3:22a; 23:3) but “return.” (Schreiner 1981, 28) With this in mind, Maier (2022, 104, 109) points to an early exilic core in Jer 3, to which—in his view—verses 14–16, 18 were added only during the redaction of the Torah in the late post-exilic period, and verse 17 even later. Verse 18 surprises us with the mention of the “house of Judah” and the “house of Israel,” which could suggest that it falls outside the framework of verses 14–17. This can be explained, however, by supposing that the version in verses 14–15 was first supplemented by verse 18, and only subsequently by verses 16–17 (Levin 1985, 190; Porzig 2009, 223, n. 8). In fact, verse 16 cannot be understood without taking verse 17 into account. Thus, as Maier (2022, 109) himself concedes, the mention of the Ark is surprising at this juncture. It becomes intelligible, however, once verse 17 is included in the interpretation. Verse 16a alludes directly to Jer 23:3 (itself dependent on Priestly statements in Gen 1:21, 28—in reverse order; cf. Gen 9:1, 7 and Ezek 36:11). According to Jer 23:3, the time has come for the divine command to be fulfilled and for YHWH to bring his remaining “sheep” back to their pastures; this return is the subject of verses 14–15, 18. In Jer 3:16–17, the eschatological tenor of this utterance represents a subsequent stage of redaction and is extended to all nations (cf. Isa 2:2–4; 60:[1–]3; Mic 4:1–3) (Porzig 2009, 223–24). Let us therefore look at Jer 3:16–17 in its immediate context:

Return, faithless sons—Oracle of YHWH.

For I am your Lord / Husband (בַּעֲלִי *bāʿaltî*),

And I will take (לָקַח *lqh*) you, one from a city,

Two from a clan, and I will bring you to Zion (v. 14).

And I will give you shepherds (רֹעִים *rōʿim*) after my own heart,

Who will pasture you with wisdom and prudence (v. 15).

And when you multiply and are fruitful in the land,

In those days—oracle of YHWH—

Then they shall no longer say: “The Ark of the Covenant of JHWH,”
it shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor miss it, nor shall be made again (v. 16).

At that time Jerusalem shall be called the Throne of YHWH,

and all the nations shall gather to it in the name of YHWH, to Jerusalem,

and they shall no longer walk after the stubbornness of their evil hearts (v. 17).

In those day the house of Judah shall go to the house of Israel,

and together they shall come from the land of north to the land

that I give as an inheritance to your fathers (v. 18).

The biblical author interprets verse 14 quite literally in light of Jer 3:22, reading the call to the return of the “rebellious sons” as the return of the dispersed diaspora. The term Baʿal—“lord” (cf. Jer 31:32; Hos 2:18–19), when applied to YHWH, may

also bear the sense of "husband" (Lundbom 1999, 313), which fits well with Jeremiah's marital metaphors describing the YHWH-Israel relationship (Włodyga 2003).

The image of return (v. 14b) indicates that God will select each individual member of the diaspora from their city or clan and bring them to Zion. This need not imply a small number of returnees—as some scholars suppose—since the vision of Jer 31:8 suggests that the biblical author nonetheless has in mind a "great multitude." (Lundbom 1999, 313) Such an interpretation is permitted as well by the standard " $x + x + 1$ " numerical formula (cf. Amos 1:3; Hos 6:2; Deut 32:30; Prov 6:16; see Roth 1962). Zion—the place of the events—will be renewed (cf. Jer 7:1–15 for the theology of Zion). This becomes possible through the "healing of the heart" (cf. Jer 7:24; 11:18; see Stipp 1998, 144) of Israel's leaders, who earlier broke the covenant with YHWH (cf. Jer 31:32b). In contrast to the shepherds of the monarchic period (cf. Jer 23:1–2), shepherds will guide the people wisely and prudently (cf. Jer 23:3–4 for the promise). The later addition of the division "house of Israel—house of Judah" (v. 18) in turn evokes the prophetic theme of restoration of the old, united monarchy and the joint return of both communities (cf. Jer 50:4–5; Ezek 37:15–22; Isa 11:12; Hos 2:2; Zech 2:10–11; see Lundbom 1999, 315). Together they constitute an ideal "ganze Gemeinschaft." (Fischer 2005, 196) The reference to the "north" here denotes both Assyria and Babylonia. We thus have before us an eschatological vision of the renewal of the chosen people (cf. Gen 15:1; 17:8). Once this situation comes true, a subsequent redactor announces a new way of YHWH's presence among Israel, while significantly expanding this eschatological vision to include other nations (vv. 16–17; cf. Gen 12:3; 22:18).

5. What, in Essence, Does Jeremiah's Statement Tell Us?

The designation "Ark of the Covenant of YHWH" is characteristic of Deuteronomistic theology. We encounter it above all in Deuteronomy, the DtrH, and later in Chronicles (Lemański 2006, 22; Eichler 2021, 14). Already within this theological milieu the Ark was regarded as a "mere" container for the tablets of the Decalogue (Deut 10:1–5, 8; 31:26; 1 Kgs 8:9). According to the description in Exod 25:10–22 (a Priestly text), however, it was simultaneously the central cultic element of the Tent of Meeting. In this case, as noted earlier, we are dealing with a retrospective projection whose task is to authorize the mercy seat (כַּפֹּרֶת *kappōret*)—a key feature of Second Temple cult, constituting the place of divine encounter (Exod 25:21–22). In Jer 3:16 the redactor of the Book of Jeremiah employs five negated verbs to underscore both the lack of significance of the Ark itself and the futility of remembering it or attempting to reconstruct it. In his view, there is no need even to think about it in light of what is new in Israel's relationship with YHWH. The style is reminiscent of

Isaiah's proclamation of a new heavens and a new earth (cf. Isa 65:17). Such a radical dismissal of a central cultic element is without parallel in the history of ancient Near Eastern religions (Fischer 2005, 194). The prophetic declaration thus stands in sharp opposition to one of the key texts of the Torah (Utzschneider 1988, 261). Its roots lie in the simple fact that the Ark no longer exists.

What still requires clarification, however, is the issue that for the Deuteronomistic school constituted the crucial component associated with the Ark: namely, the tablets of the Decalogue (Deut 5 → Deut 10:1–9), the material witness to the covenant made with YHWH. To grasp the weight of this declaration—following Moshe Weinfield's suggestion (1976, 26–27)—one must proceed to Jer 31:33, where the covenant is said to be written not on stone tablets but on the living tablets of the heart. Only in light of this latter text does Jeremiah's present statement concerning the Ark of the Covenant of YHWH become fully intelligible. The new role of Jerusalem (Jer 3:17) as the "throne of YHWH"—elsewhere only in 1 Chr 29:23 with reference to Solomon's enthronement (Knoppers 2004, 956), though the Chronicler consistently identifies the Kingdom of David and Solomon with the kingdom of YHWH—is now significant not only because of the return of the diaspora, but also as the gathering place of all the peoples of earth (cf. Isa 2:2–4; Mic 4:1–3; Isa 60:4–9). What is envisioned, therefore, is the inauguration of the universal kingship of YHWH perceived both in the perspective of Priestly universalism (cf. Gen 9:1–17 → Gen 17) and patriarchal promises concerning also the blessing for other nations of the earth (cf. Gen 12:3; 22:[17]–18). The statement thus does not concern any specific historical event (different opinion cf. Schäfer-Lichtenberger 2000, 229, 235); rather, it addresses the former cultic significance of the Ark, which has now been superseded by a new theological conception. Jeremiah 3:16 serves as a witness to an earlier understanding of the Ark's role (cf. Exod 25:10–22), while the Ark itself—by way of *pars pro toto*—symbolizes the former temple cult, in which objects served as visible guarantees of God's presence (Duhm 1901, 40; Porzig 2009, 224).

Within the eschatological conception, such a role for any cultic objects, of which the Ark is a representative, is no longer necessary. This is not a blanket critique of cultic objects as such; rather it is a response to doubts, complaints, or laments over the Ark's loss, or to discussions about the need to recreate it in the post-exilic period. The answer to such tendencies is found in verse 17, without which verse 16 would lack its proper context. The connection between the two verses is already suggested by the introductory formula "they shall no longer say" (v. 16; cf. Jer 23:7), which demands something new in relation to the past. That new element is the declaration identifying Jerusalem as the "throne of God." Although Jer 3:16–17 requires reference to Jer 23 and 31, the idea of renewing the earlier covenant—which had been broken—is absent from those passages (Porzig 2009, 225, n. 23). Here, theological reflection goes one step further: the notion of the "shoot of David" (cf. Jer 23:5) disappears from the biblical author's field of view (Porzig 2009, 226), and the continuation

of the relationship with YHWH is determined solely by God's own action inaugurating his universal kingship on earth.

Weinfeld (1976) termed this genre of prophetic pronouncements in Jeremiah "spiritual metamorphosis." He identified texts in which the present and future states—often through quotation—are set in contrast to one another, thereby indicating a change that will occur or is already occurring in Israel's piety. They follow a similar pattern: a temporal formula ("on that day"); the words of YHWH ("they shall no longer..." + a citation—here concerning the Ark of the Covenant); an adversative introduced typically by "but"; and an indication of what should be said or done instead (cf. Jer 3:14–15; 23; 7–8; 31:29–30; and, in a somewhat different form, Jer 7:22–23; 31:31–24). All these texts signal a radical transformation in the faith of ancient Israel (Fischer 2005, 195).

Consequently, we may conclude that regarding the historical fate of the Ark, the prophet's statement contributes nothing substantive beyond asserting its disappearance. For him, the Ark functions representatively—symbolizing the cult of the old covenant and its linkage to the Davidic dynasty. For the redactor of the Book of Jeremiah—for it is to him (rather than to the historical prophet) that the primary importance now belongs: namely the eschatological message associated with a new reality. He proclaims not only the return of the exiles, members of the chosen people, but also the pilgrimage of all the nations to Jerusalem. The latter, as the "throne of God," becomes the new center of God's world, implying that earthly kingdoms and dynasties are no longer necessary for the realization of this eschatological ideal (Porzig 2009, 226).

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