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# Jeremiah 29:5-7 reread through the lens of post-traumatic growth

## ABSTRACT

*Jeremiah 29:5-7 is well known for exhorting the exiles to settle down and pray for the welfare of Babylon. The idea of settling down conflicts with the prophecy of returning home in the book of Jeremiah, and it sounds odd to encourage prayer for the enemy. Typical solutions focus on the strategy of survival. However, these solutions are not convincing enough because the language used in Jeremiah 29:5-7 indicates that the exhortation involves not survival but restoration. Given the background of national trauma behind the book of Jeremiah, this article proposes rereading Jeremiah 29:5-7 from the perspective of post-traumatic growth (PTG). Accordingly, the exhortation to settle down reflects the domain of appreciation of life in PTG, and the exhortation to pray for Babylon indicates the belief in a just world for self (BJW-self), which is closely related to PTG and entails forgiving others.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Jeremiah 29:5-7 witnesses a fascinating idea of praying for the enemy, which makes this text unique in the ancient world and calls for a theological explanation of its motive. Moreover, Jeremiah 29:5-7 contains an exhortation to settle down on the land of Babylon, which conflicts with an essential topic in the book of Jeremiah, the prophecy of the exiles' returning home. While scholars have put forward different interpretations for the exhortation of settling down and praying for the enemy in Jeremiah 29:5-7, none of them are without problems. Because the book of Jeremiah has the fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile



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as its background, both being traumatic, it becomes reasonable to reread Jeremiah 29:5-7 from the lens of post-traumatic reactions. A traumatic event often causes negative reactions such as anger, complaint, a sense of shame, and depression. Sometimes, however, a traumatic event leads to positive reactions because its victims may learn something new from it. A famous psychological concept for positive reactions to a traumatic event is post-traumatic growth (PTG), which sometimes accompanies another psychological phenomenon called the belief in a just world (BJW). PTG has five domains, one being the appreciation of life, which emphasises the value of the present life instead of the future. BJW has two forms, the belief that the world is just for self (BJW-self) and that the world is just for others (BJW-others). BJW-self indicates forgiving others, while BJW-others indicates punishing. This article argues that the exhortation to settle down in Jeremiah 29:5-6 reflects PTG on appreciation of life and praying for the enemy in Jeremiah 29:7 is motivated by BJW-self.

This article's discussion consists of three parts. First, in section 2, I explain the two puzzles in Jeremiah 29:5-7 and the typical solutions to them. I argue that these solutions are not convincing because they ignore a central theme of settling down, which involves restoration instead of survival. Secondly, in section 3, I investigate the connection between PTG, appreciation of life, and the exhortation of settling down. I argue that exhorting to settle down reflects the appreciation of life because such an exhortation emphasises the highest value of the present life. Thirdly, in section 4, I discuss how PTG, BJW, and the exhortation to pray for Babylon are related. I argue that exhorting prayer for the enemy is based on the belief that the world (God) is just to Israel, the form of BJW-self that implies forgiving others. However, we can also discern BJW-others in the book of Jeremiah, indicating a struggle between forgiving and punishing Babylonians.

## 2. TWO PUZZLES IN JEREMIAH 29:5-7, TYPICAL SOLUTIONS, AND THEIR PROBLEMS

Jeremiah 29 contains the prophet Jeremiah's letter to the captives in Babylon. Generally, Jeremiah's letter is represented in verses 1-23; verses 24-32 contain additional correspondence(s) resulting from his letter (Allen 2008:332; Davidson 1985:66-67; Schmidt 2013:98; Wright 2014:289, 298). Regarding Jeremiah's letter, some scholars hold a view that its main or actual content is in verses 5-7 (Schmidt 2013:98; Smith 1989:97).<sup>1</sup> This view makes sense for two reasons.

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1 Similarly, McKane (1996:738) uses the phrase "Jeremiah's letter (vv. 3-7)".

First, the content preceding verses 5-7 could be viewed as either superscription (vv. 1-3) or introduction (v. 4), having nothing to do with what Jeremiah wants to communicate to the deportees in Babylon. The ensuing texts, especially verses 8-9 and verses 21-23, involve Jeremiah's warning against the false prophets' deception, indicating what Jeremiah wants the captives not to do, different from what he wants them to do in verses 5-7. While one may argue that Jeremiah's exhortation (vv. 5-7) is an attempt to oppose the activities of these prophets in Babylon, there is no direct support for such reading (McKane 1996:738-739); the theme of false prophecy dominates the previous two chapters and continues in Chapter 29. Thus, verses 5-7 have a different orientation from the preceding and ensuing texts. Secondly, and more importantly, what surprises and even perplexes the vast majority of scholars, as discussed below, is Jeremiah's exhortation in verses 5-7. By contrast, Jeremiah's warning does not raise problems for interpretation. Because of these two reasons, the current discussion focuses on the pericope of Jeremiah 29:5-7, although it belongs to a large unit. I will not discuss the context of Jeremiah 29:5-7, unless necessary.

In Jeremiah 29:5-7, which is thought to be without parallel in the literature of antiquity (Carroll 1986:556; Feinberg 1986:553), Jeremiah exhorts the audience to

5 Build houses and dwell [in them], and plant gardens and eat their fruit.  
6 Take wives and beget sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, so that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 And seek the peace of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord for it because your peace is in its peace.<sup>2</sup>

This exhortation contains two puzzles. First, in the book of Jeremiah, the prophet Jeremiah prophesied in several places that his people should return to their homeland from exile. However, the exhortation in Jeremiah 29:5-7 emphasises not returning from the foreign land but settling down there as refugees, which contradicts these prophecies (McKane 1996:737; Schmidt 2013:100). Secondly, it seems odd to encourage the exiles to pray for the peace or welfare (שלום) of Babylon, the enemy of Israel, and to claim that their peace will be in the peace of Babylon. Given that Babylonians are sometimes called "our captors (שׁוֹבֵינֵינוּ)" and "our plunderers (תּוֹלְלֵינוּ)" (Ps. 137:3), it sounds even unimaginable to encourage praying for their well-being.

Biblical scholars have put forward several solutions to explain these two puzzles. For the convenience of discussion, I divide them into three groups, the details of which are shown below.

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2 In this article, all the translations of the Hebrew or Greek texts are my own.

First, some scholars discern a motive for expedient or strategic action behind these two puzzles. For instance, Carroll (1986:556) argues that settling down is a strategy for survival in a foreign land because “the fate of the exiles is bound up with the fate of their new territory”. Similarly, Smith (1989:95) holds that the intention of Jeremiah 29 “was to recommend a strategic posture of exilic existence that is best described as ‘nonviolent social resistance’”, and Stulman (2005:251) states that

the exiles must in some respect begin anew on foreign soil, and this reordering demands accepting their lot in Babylon.

Gossai (2019:266) has almost a similar comment from the post-colonial perspective, claiming that

Jeremiah sent a radical message of how we relate to each other, and how inextricably our lives are woven together. It is a bond of such proportions that whatever happens to one is indelibly connected to the other.

Secondly, other scholars emphasise a plan for long-term well-being behind these two puzzles. For instance, according to McKane (1996:743), such an exhortation reflects the advice of taking a long-term view or assumption of the residence in Babylon; thus,

[The exiles] should plan on this assumption both for the welfare and continuance of their own community and for the prosperity of the Babylonian communities from which their own highest interests cannot be dissociated.

By the same token, Allen (2008:324) argues,

Then the community is told to ... pray for Babylon. Thus they would survive what was to be a prolonged situation, to endure as long as Babylon was the agent of Yahweh's will.

Schmidt (2013:100) states that the well-being of the foreign city secures the well-being of the Judahites. Goldingay (2021:88) holds that “the Judahites need to settle down to an exile that will last decades, not months”.

Thirdly, different from the above two positions, some scholars focus on the textual context of Jeremiah 29:5-7 in or outside the Hebrew Bible. For instance, Berlin (1984:7) argues that the structure of Jeremiah 29:5-7 is mainly based on Deuteronomy 20:5-10. Weinfeld (1972/1992:360) also notices the association of Jeremiah 29:5-7 to Deuteronomy but emphasises a reversal of Deuteronomy 23:7 in Jeremiah's imperative to seek the well-being of Babylon (Jer. 29:7). Mueller's recent discussion of “building and planting” indicates a different textual context. According to Mueller (2020:270), an

emphasis on the inner biblical examinations regarding Jeremiah 29 “failed to provide an adequate answer for the unique pairing of ‘plant’ and ‘garden’ found therein”. Thus, Mueller (2020) suggests considering the context from outside of the Hebrew Bible for a more reasonable understanding of the trope of “building and planting”, especially “planting garden”, in Jeremiah 29:5, such as Mesopotamian agricultural or textual context.

While all the solutions mentioned above appear plausible, they are not convincing. The last solution, while making sense, does not help us explain two puzzles implied in Jeremiah’s exhortation. Suppose we accept the inner biblical or Mesopotamian contexts of the crucial tropes in the exhortation such as “planting gardens” emphasised by Mueller. In this case, it seems that we still need to explain why there are two puzzles in the exhortation, which are not in other biblical texts or Mesopotamian backgrounds. In other words, the puzzles are still there, even if we accept the inner biblical or Mesopotamian contexts of the prophet’s exhortation.

The first two solutions relate to each other because both involve the purpose of survival, whether short term or long term, and the significance of praying for Babylon to realise this purpose. Unsurprisingly, both solutions face two problems, detailed below.

First, what the exhortation involves is more than survival or residence. The exiles are encouraged to multiply (רבה) instead of to decrease (מעט). In the creation story, God blessed the sea animals and birds to multiply (Gen. 1:22: רבו); after creating human beings, God also blessed them to multiply (Gen. 1:28: רבו). Thus, multiplying does not seem to be a language for survival; instead, it indicates a sense of creation. In this regard, I agree with Fischer (2005b:292) to connect the command to plant a garden here to God’s same command in Genesis 2:8, which also implies an idea of creation behind Jeremiah’s exhortation. Such implication is echoed by Jeremiah 30:18-19, where God promises that he will restore the house of Jacob (30:18) and increase (רבה) them and will not decrease (מעט) them. We are supposed to explain the rationale behind the exhortation of creation or restoration. Or, as Fischer (2005a:294) pointed out, the exiles were encouraged to multiply in large numbers and fulfil God’s order, as at the beginning of creation. Therefore, what is at stake in this instance is creation or restoration, not survival, as emphasised by the first two solutions to the puzzles.

Secondly, the exhortation implies that the exiles had obtained a certain degree of freedom in Babylon, such as building their own houses, pursuing their marriages, and increasing in number; otherwise, it would make no sense to encourage them to do so. In other words, they already obtained the freedom or permission to survive and pursue their welfare. It thus seems unnecessary to pray for the welfare of Babylon, in order to secure their welfare. It might

be argued that, in this instance, the welfare for the exiles means not merely building houses, pursuing their marriages, and increasing in number. However, what could it be if welfare, in this instance, does not mean those things? As indicated in my brief discussion of the creation story and Jeremiah 30:18-19 above, increasing in number based on marriage seems to be God's highest blessing and represents the highest welfare for God's people. Therefore, praying for the welfare of Babylon must involve something other than the welfare of the exiles. When Jeremiah states, "because your peace is in its peace", this statement seems to imply a unique attitude towards Babylon.

The typical solutions to the puzzles in the prophet's exhortation in Jeremiah 29:5-7 seem to miss some crucial nuances for our understanding thereof. Because the book of Jeremiah involves a national disaster, it appears reasonable to approach the two puzzles through the lens of trauma studies, which is the focus of the following two sections.

### 3. POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH, APPRECIATION OF LIFE, AND SETTLING DOWN IN JEREMIAH 29:5-6

There are several issues regarding the book of Jeremiah in its historical background.<sup>3</sup> For instance, the extent of destruction in Judah in 587 or 597 BCE is unclear, due to the sparseness of ancient sources of information outside the Bible (O'Connor 2011:14). The book of Jeremiah and the prophet Jeremiah have different social settings (Stulman 2005:4-7). The prophetic anticipations of the invasion, siege, and terror of 597 or 587 BCE do not seem to indicate strong historical associations (McKane 1996).<sup>4</sup> Despite these issues, even a brief reading of this book may tell that the speaker and his people experienced a traumatic event. As O'Connor (2011:15) emphasised,

[m]ost scholars agree that the nation experienced a major disaster, and much interpretation of the book of Jeremiah recognizes that the collapse of the nation brought with it unspeakable suffering.

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3 In addition to the historical background, there are other issues such as the inconsistent voices in the book of Jeremiah (Brueggemann 2007:1-2). The current research emphasises the historical background because it helps us identify the traumatic event behind the book of Jeremiah.

4 This issue might be caused by the prophet Jeremiah's intention to write, which is not to create a coherent historical narrative to present a sequence of events, but to classify his story (Fischer 2005b:82).

More precisely, the prophet Jeremiah “was written after the fall of Jerusalem with the Jewish exiles in Babylon in mind” (Stulman 2005:6). Because both the war that led to the fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile are traumatic, in the forms of “exposure to war” and “incarceration as a prisoner of war” (American Psychiatric Association 2013:274), it is appropriate to investigate the prophet’s psychological reactions to these traumatic events.

The book of Jeremiah witnesses prophet Jeremiah’s negative reactions to a national disaster: painful feelings (Jer. 10:19-20; 30:12), complaint (Jer. 12:1-4; 15:18), or probably a sense of shame when the prophet states that “I was in derision all day long; everyone was mocking me” (Jer. 20:7b). These reactions are normal for a person who experienced a traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association 2013:272). Usually, a traumatic event abruptly shatters its victims’ fundamental assumptions about themselves and the world, resulting in mental distress or trauma (Janoff-Bulman 1992). For Jeremiah and the captives in Babylon, these assumptions must include God’s promises to Israelites, such as his promise to give the Canaanites’ land to Abram’s seeds (Gen. 12:7) and to build an everlasting kingdom for David’s offspring (2 Sam. 7:1-14). The fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile shattered ancient Israelites’ assumptions concerning these promises and caused psychological or theological trauma, more precisely. The devastation of the temple might even challenge the Judeans’ belief in the symbolic presence of YHWH in it because, just as Berlin (2008:73) insightfully pointed out, forgetting God’s name and worshipping a strange god is the temptation facing the exiled community in a foreign country.<sup>5</sup>

It is crucial to note, however, that the trauma victim(s) may have positive reactions, growing or learning new things afterward, and as discussed below, one can discern such reactions in Jeremiah 29:5-7. Remarkably, while the idea that suffering may lead to self-improvement has a long history (Calhoun & Tedeschi 2006:3), it was only in the past two decades that psychologists developed different concepts to describe it. A famous concept is post-traumatic growth (PTG), coined by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) to define the positive psychological changes that result from the struggle with a major life crisis. The PTGI is designed to measure the degree of these changes.<sup>6</sup> PTGI describes five domains of growth (see Table 1), namely relating to others, new possibilities, personal strength, spiritual change, and appreciation of life.

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5 While Berlin’s comment is on Psalm 44:18-19 it applies to Jeremiah 29, due to the same background.

6 In their previous book, *Trauma and transformation*, Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995:29) did not use the term “posttraumatic growth” but “psychological growth from trauma” to describe “the benefits that people living beyond traumas often perceive” (1995:230). Thus, the term ‘PTG’ appears for the first time in Tedeschi and Calhoun’s article (1996).

The well-known prophecy about a new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31 seems to indicate the knowledge of new possibilities, and the prophecy that God will bring the exiles back home sounds like the item that “I have a stronger religious faith” in spiritual change. In short, PTG is likely to be present in the book of Jeremiah.

**Table 1:** PTGI by Tedeschi and Calhoun

Categories	Items
Relating to others	6. Knowing that I can count on people in times of trouble 8. A sense of closeness with others 9. A willingness to express my emotions 15. Having compassion for others 16. Putting effort into my relationships 20. I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are 21. I accept needing others
New possibilities	3. I developed new interests 7. I established a new path for my life 11. I am able to do better things with my life 14. New opportunities are available which would not have been otherwise 17. I am more likely to try and change things that need changing
Personal strength	4. A feeling of self-reliance 10. Knowing I can handle difficulties 12. Being able to accept the way things work out 19. I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was
Spiritual change	5. A better understanding of spiritual matters 18. I have a stronger religious faith
Appreciation of life	1. My priorities about what is important in life 2. An appreciation for the value of my own life 13. Appreciating each day.

Regarding Jeremiah 29:5-7, the exhortation to settle down and multiply in Jeremiah 29:5-6 reflects PTG on appreciation of life. To clarify the point, I list the items close to the appreciation of life in other indices for positive reactions to a traumatic event (Table 1). As Table 2 tells, PTGI has three items to measure the factor of appreciation of life, two of which are directly related

to the exhortation of Jeremiah 29:5-6: “an appreciation for the value of my own life” (PTGI 2) and “appreciating each day” (PTGI 11). A comparison with other indices shows two crucial elements of the appreciation of life. First, all the indices emphasise life at the present instead of in the future, described as “now” (SRGS), “today” (SRGS), “the moment” (PBS), “every day” (CiOQ), and “each day” (CiOQ, PTGI). Secondly, they ascribe the highest value to daily life, best expressed by CiOQ’s item 12, “I live every day to the full now”, and SRGS’s item 10, “my life now has more meaning and satisfaction”. In other words, emphasising the present in these items is not for survival but involves the highest value of every day.

**Table 2:** Appreciation of life in main indices of positive reactions to trauma

PTGI	3. My priorities about what is important in life. 4. An appreciation for the value of my own life. 14. Appreciating each day.
SRGS (stress-related growth scale; Park <i>et al.</i> 1996)	10. My life now has more meaning and satisfaction. 17. I learned to live for today, because you never know what will happen tomorrow. 33. I learned to find more meaning in life.
PBS (perceived benefit scales; McMillen & Fisher 1998)	37. As a result of this event, I live more for the moment. 40. Because of this event, my priorities in life are different.
CiOQ (change in outlook questionnaire; Joseph <i>et al.</i> 1993)	12. I live every day to the full now. 15. I look upon each day as a bonus.

Turning to Jeremiah 29:5-6, we notice that those foci regarding the appreciation of life are also the emphases of the prophet’s exhortation. The suggestion to settle down indicates a focus on the present instead of the future, although the hope is ahead (Jer. 29:10). Pursuing a marriage and increasing in number is very close to seeking the highest value of the present, as my above discussion of the meaning of multiplying indicates. In short, in both the exhortation and the items concerning PTG’s domain of appreciation of life, the value of the present rather than survival is the focus. Therefore, given the background of the fall of Jerusalem and the ensuing exile, it is likely that Jeremiah 29:5-6 reflects PTG in the dimension of appreciation of life. The emphasis on the value of the present also distinguishes Jeremiah from those false prophets mentioned in Jeremiah 29:8-9, 21-23, and even 24-32. Examined from the lens of PTG, these false prophets might still believe in God and show spiritual change, compared to the Judeans who gave up their faith

in YHWH during the exile (see below). However, they differ from Jeremiah, due to the lack of another crucial factor of PTG, the appreciation of life. They are too naïve in holding a false optimism or premature expectation of return (Clements 1988:172) and are even sinful because of their adultery with their neighbours' wives (Jer. 29:23).

It is essential to note that the appreciation of life does not conflict with the prophet's prophecy of returning. As briefly mentioned earlier, such a prophecy indicates the prophet's belief in God's power, despite his punishment of Israel. This belief is a stronger religious faith after a traumatic event because it has been tested by a national disaster. In a discussion of the historical background of Lamentations, which also applied to the book of Jeremiah because of its similar historical background, Salters (2010:27) notices a contrast between those who gave up faith and those who still had faith in Yahweh after the fall of Jerusalem:

Those who, before the fall, had been half-hearted in their loyalty to Yahweh, would point out that Yahweh had been unable to keep his promise of protecting.

Among the various factions, there existed another element among the survivors, probably few in number – those still loyal to Yahweh.

Similarly, Carr (2014:91) points out that some exiles assimilated into the Babylonian culture and, while their names are Judean, "their legal documents are otherwise indistinguishable from the documents composed by native Babylonians". Thus, the Hebrew Bible is a testimony to some other exiles who resisted assimilation (Carr 2014:91). The observations of Salters and Carr indicate that faith in the Lord during the exile is a stronger religious faith after the fall of Jerusalem. Therefore, the prophet's prophecy of returning in the book of Jeremiah belongs to the domain of spiritual change in PTG, different from the domain of appreciation of life reflected in the prophet's exhortation in Jeremiah 29:5-6. The perspective of PTG helps us overcome the first puzzle in Jeremiah 29:5-7, the seeming inconsistency between the exhortation to settle down and the prophecy of returning home.

#### 4. POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH, BELIEF IN A JUST WORLD, AND PRAYING FOR BABYLON IN JEREMIAH 29:7

The second issue of Jeremiah 29:5-7, the exhortation to pray for Babylon in Jeremiah 29:7, is related not to PTG *per se* but to a factor that sometimes accompanies PTG, namely Lerner's concept of belief in a just world (BJW).<sup>7</sup> Theoretically, PTG and BJW are closely connected. According to the psychologists' research, there are two basic models on the rationale of PTG. One model connects growth to our assumptions about the world (Tedeschi & Calhoun 1995:77-92), while the other views growth as involving the meaning of the world (Joseph & Linley 2005). These two models are similar to each other in that our assumptions about the world may include or be identical to our beliefs about the meaning of the world (Gillie & Neimeyer 2006).

Both the theories of PTG ... postulate that the trauma can challenge the assumptive world of the individual ... growth happens when the individual slowly tries to find meaning in what happened (Kashyap & Hussain 2018:59).

Thus, it is appropriate to describe PTG as the outcome of rebuilding a traumatised person's assumptions about the meaning of the world. About the content of these assumptions, Janoff-Bulman (1992:6-11) emphasises that a crucial one of them is encapsulated in the concept of BJW, the idea that the world is just as it concerns us because people get what they deserve and deserve what they get in this world. Other psychologists have also noticed that one vital element of our fundamental assumptions about the meaning of the world is BJW (Park *et al.* 2008:864; Schultz *et al.* 2010:105). A study on the psychology of religion concludes that a main function of religion is to foster Lerner's notion that "things will always work out in a just and fair manner" (Spilka *et al.* 2003:173).

For the current discussion of Jeremiah 29:7, it is crucial to point out that psychologists have discerned two forms of BJW. In as early as 1996, psychologists distinguished between the belief in a just world for self (BJW-self) and the belief in a just world for others (BJW-others) (Lipkus *et al.* 1996). Soon thereafter, other psychologists began to emphasise this distinction and explore its importance in studying the relationship between the belief in justice and psychological well-being (Bègue & Bastounis 2003; Sutton & Douglas 2005; Sutton *et al.* 2017). An observation which is relevant to the current research is that these two forms of BJW are associated with forgiveness/

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<sup>7</sup> For the concept of BJW, see Lerner (1980). For the finding that BJW accompanies PTG, see Carboon *et al.* (2005).

punishment in opposite ways. Simply put, a person who holds BJW-self tends to forgive others and accept self-punishment, whereas a person who has BJW-others tends to accept self-forgiveness and punishment of others (Bartholomaeus & Strelan 2016; Lucas *et al.* 2010; Strelan 2007; Strelan & Sutton 2011).

Turning to the book of Jeremiah, we can easily observe that this book communicates a confession that the Israelites committed sins and that the fall of Jerusalem was God’s punishment for them. Such a confession is expressed in various places in different forms. As early as Jeremiah 2:17, there is the following expression:

MT 2:17	Do you not bring this on you, by forsaking the Lord your God, when he led you in the way?
LXX 2:17	Have you not brought these, by abandoning me? says the Lord, your God.

The context indicates that the pronoun “this” in Mt 2:17a refers to the prophecy of 2:15 about a disaster in Israel. Whatever the disaster is, the question in 2:17, which “is rhetorical and demands the answer ‘Yes’” (McKane 1996:36), implies that the Israelites had brought themselves to the traumatic situation because they abandoned their God (McKane 1996:36; Craigie *et al.* 1991:50; Stulman 2005:50; Fischer 2005b:164). The preceding statements in 2:4-13 tell a history of apostasy and become the background of verse 17 (McKane 1996:38). This background also supports reading a connection between the disaster that fell on Israel and its sin. While the LXX is different from the Matthew verse 17, this connection is still there. The idea that Israel had brought itself to a crisis is conveyed explicitly when the Lord taught the prophet how to explain to the people why the tragedy happened to them. The Lord stated:

as you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve strangers in a land that is not yours (Jer. 5:19).<sup>8</sup>

In the verses mentioned earlier, causation is built between the disaster that fell on God’s people and their faithlessness, their worshipping of other gods. It is implicit behind this causation that the Israelites got what they deserved

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8    LXX does not have “you have forsaken me” but keeps “you served other gods”. The idea is the same, although expressed more concisely.

and deserved what they got. They were not innocent (Jer. 2:35); they got the disaster as the punishment of the Lord on them, as clearly expressed in Jer. 5:29, which is almost repeated in Jer. 9:9:

5:29            Shall I not punish [them] for these things?  
                   says the Lord;  
                   shall I not avenge myself  
                   on a nation such as this?

As McKane (1996:132) pointed out, the speaker in this verse, who can only be Yahweh, expects an affirmative answer to the questions. The verb “punish” (פָּקַד), replaced by “visit” in the LXX (ἐπισκέψομαι), suggests that God’s people were not innocent of what fell on them. The expression “avenge myself”, which could be translated as “bring retribution” (NRSV), implies that God’s people got what they deserved. There is a similar idea in several other places with different emphases. Sometimes, the focus is on the Lord’s punishment for his people’s sins (6:15; 30:14-15, not in the LXX). Sometimes, the Lord’s vengeance on his sinful people is stressed (11:20). More often, the focus is not on punishment or revenge but on the disaster that the Lord brought or will bring to his people due to their sins (6:19; 7:13-15; 9:13-16; 11:17; 15:13-14; 32:30-36; 35:17).<sup>9</sup> In all these cases, although the terms “punishment” or “vengeance” are not used, a causal relationship between the disaster and the sins of its victims is established by different Hebrew terms meaning “because” or “on account of” (כִּי in 6:19, 32:30; יַעַן in 7:13, 35:17; עַל in 9:13; בְּגַלְלִי in 11:17; בּ in 15:13). It is implicit that the victims of the disaster deserved it because of their sins.

The idea that God’s people got what they deserved and deserved what they got is just another way of saying that the world was just for them. Therefore, the presence of BJW in the book of Jeremiah is certain. Now we need to clarify what form of BJW is present. In this regard, it is helpful to mention the concept of “corporate personality” in the Hebrew Bible. According to Robinson’s (1980:25) classical observation, in ancient Israel, the whole group ... might function as a single individual through any one of those members concerned as representative of it.<sup>10</sup>

9 The idea that the Lord revenged on Israel because of its sins in all these verses is also in the LXX, except for 35:17. In Mt 35:17, Israel’s sins are listed at the end of this verse, which is missing in LXX (42:17). However, verse 16 in both the MT and the LXX briefly mentions Israel’s sins and explains the reason for the Lord’s punishment on Israel.

10 For a critique of Robinson, see Rogerson (1970), who does not deny the concept of “corporate personality” in the Hebrew Bible; rather, he argues that there is not merely corporate personality there.

Thus, it is reasonable to assume that, from the perspective of the prophet Jeremiah, God's punishment on Israelites is like a punishment on the prophet himself, a corporate self that represents his community. This assumption is supported by texts such as Jeremiah 10:19-20, where the prophet confessed that his wound and hurt were punishment on him (10:19). The reference to the broken tent and cords in verse 20 suggests that the prophet talked about the collective disaster. Therefore, although Jeremiah 10:19-20 use the first-person singular pronoun, the prophet seemed to identify himself as the representative of his community (Craigie *et al.* 1991:109).

In conclusion, a confession of sins that caused God's punishment of Israel implies the belief that the world is just, and the object of justice is a corporate self, the speaker/prophet who identified with Israel. In this sense, the idea that the world is just for the Israelites equals BJW-self, which tends to be related to the forgiveness of others, other nations corresponding to the corporate self.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the prayer for Babylon in Jeremiah 29:7 reflects an idea of forgiving other nations implied in the book of Jeremiah. Such prayer is not strange or puzzling; it witnesses the motive of forgiveness.

Interestingly, the book of Jeremiah also contains the concept of BJW-others. As early as 10:25 (both MT and LXX), the prophet called the Lord to act against nations and peoples that did not believe in God:

10:25            Pour out your rage on the nations,  
                     who did not know you,  
                     and on the peoples,  
                     who did not call your name.  
                     For they have devoured Jacob;  
                     they have devoured him and consumed him,  
                     and they have made desolate his habitation.

Given what they did to Jacob, the nations and people, in this instance, must be those who brought disaster to the Israelites. They are "others" from the perspective of Israel or Jacob instead of from the perspective of any individual. The term "for" tells the prophet's reason for calling for the Lord's anger against these nations and people. This reason suggests that, from the perspective of the prophet, who represents Israel, other nations deserved the Lord's wrath. In other words, the prophet believed that the world was just for others, those

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11 A comment close to this idea is from Fischer (2005a:95), who argues that the prayer for enemies conveys a message that only those who are reconciled with their enemies can stand up before God.

nations who devoured Jacob and “carried their own guilt” (Allen 2008:132). In the words of Kelley (Craigie *et al.* 1991:164), “the Lord’s wrath upon the nations would also be an example of his justice”.<sup>12</sup> Such justice is a BJW-others from the perspective of a corporate self who represents Israel.

The same belief is addressed in Jeremiah 30:16-17 (not in LXX) by the Lord, who promised to punish the nations that plundered Israel, and in the oracles against nations in Jeremiah 46-51 (26-31 in the LXX). For instance, it is said that the day of Egypt’s defeat is “a day of vengeance” (יום נקמה) for the Lord to avenge himself (להנקם) against his adversaries (46:10). That day is also the day of calamity on them, the time of their punishment (פקדותם) (46:21), because the Lord is bringing punishment (פוקד) to Amon and Egypt (46:25). The terms “vengeance” and “punishment” suggest the belief that Egypt deserved the calamity that was expected to fall upon it. The descriptions of the Lord’s judgement on Babylon have more details than that on any other nation. The Lord said that he would punish (פקד) Babylon (50:18, 31; 51:44, 47), destroy Babylon out of his vengeance (נקמת) against it (51:11, 36), and repay (שלם) Babylon because of what it did (50:29; 51:24). The reason being that Babylon was arrogant (זדה) against the Lord (50:29); all the inhabitants of Chaldea did something wrong in Zion (51:24), and Babylon slaughtered Israel (51:49).<sup>13</sup> The belief behind these statements on Babylon is similar to the belief about other nations: Babylon deserved the Lord’s punishment because of all its sins.

The claim of punishment on Babylon appears inconsistent with the tendency to forgive Babylon behind the exhortation of praying for it (Jer. 29:7). From the perspective of trauma studies, such inconsistency may reflect a struggle between forgiving and punishing other nations. This struggle might belong to the author of the book of Jeremiah, the prophet, or it might reflect the tension between different composers of the book, depending on the nature of this book’s composition. Whatever the truth is, it suffices to emphasise, for the current discussion, that the exhortation of praying for Babylon in Jeremiah 29:7 reflects a motive of forgiving Israel’s enemies. This motive makes the prayer understandable and sheds new light on a rereading of Jeremiah 29:7.

12 Similarly, Feinberg (1986:451) argues that “he is not praying out of malice or revenge but is appealing to God’s justice”. Stulman (2005:109) comments on Jeremiah 10:25 that “Divine justice without restraint leads to irretrievable destruction”. Fischer’s (2005b:396) comment also implies a justification when he argues that the speaker in Jeremiah 10:25 is convinced that the court has to take others for their consumption of Jacob’s people.

13 There are some variants in LXX regarding these verses. For instance, the verb “punish” in 50:18 and 51:44 is replaced by “avenge” (ἐκδικέω) in LXX; “Zion” in 51:24 is missing in LXX; 51:47 is missing in LXX, and “Israel” in 51:49 is missing in LXX. Despite these variants, the main idea concerning the Lord’s judgement on Babylon is similar in both the MT and the LXX.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The above discussion explains how a psychological rereading of Jeremiah 29:5-7 through the lens of PTG works. It indicates that PTG offers a new solution to the puzzles implied in the exhortation to settle down and pray for Babylon in Jeremiah 29:5-7, a solution different from but more convincing than the typical ones. The exhortation to settle down in Jeremiah 29:5-6 reflects PTG on appreciation of life, which emphasises the highest value of daily life rather than the future. Such an emphasis does not conflict with the prophecy of returning home in the book of Jeremiah because this prophecy reflects another domain of PTG. Regarding the prayer for Babylon in Jeremiah 29:7, it results from BJW, which has a close connection to PTG. Such a prayer corresponds to the confession of sins in the book of Jeremiah, which indicates the belief that the world is just to Israel, namely BJW-self, a form of BJW that leads to a motive of forgiveness. Thus, the encouragement to pray for Babylon is motivated by the thought of forgiving Babylon. However, there is also a tendency to punish Babylon in the book of Jeremiah, which indicates a struggle between forgiveness and punishment in this writing.

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