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Tsunami, Hurricane, and Jeremiah 4:23-28
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Abstract

Jeremiah 4:23–28 depicts one of the most stunning visions and imagery in the Hebrew Bible. The language and metaphors portray large scale devastation, an un-creation, of the entire world. Paying attention to the hermeneutical features of the metaphor and intertextuality, this study explores the ways in which this text is intended to be read and interpreted in dialogue with other interrelated texts, such as the creation accounts and flood narrative in Genesis. The intertextual correlations of key metaphors intensify the impact of threat and warning as well as their rhetorical functions both within the larger unit of Jeremiah 2–6 and within the entire book of Jeremiah. These devices signify that just as the text needs to be read from various intertextual dimensions, these visions as metaphors should be interpreted from various hermeneutical angles toward the implications in the aftermath of the recent natural tragedies in today's world.

Recent natural catastrophes that mercilessly destroyed thousands of lives around the globe have shocked the whole world. The portraits of many victims and survivors depicted in the media are so horrific and unbelievable that many TV viewers have had a hard time fathoming the devastating impact. In the aftermath of these tragic incidents, numerous questions and issues have arisen; yet only the slightest possibility exists of finding answers. Various descriptions and concepts in biblical texts similarly evoke more questions than answers. Jeremiah 4:23–28 is one such text, one which Louis Stulman aptly regards as "the most stunning piece in the entire book" (70). This text portrays eerie yet vivid imagery of the immense reversal of creation. The terminology used echoes intertextual correlations with the earlier traditions of the creation and flood, depicting metaphorical imagery of chaos and destruction similar to those of recent devastations. Such linguistic and metaphorical similarity alludes to the intertextual correlation not only with other biblical texts but also with accounts of current events with similar contexts. To reassess these correlations in light of metaphorical, theological, and hermeneutical implications is the purpose of this study.

Hence, I aim in the present study to analyze dynamic features of intertextual correlations both explicitly and implicitly evident in Jeremiah 4:23–28 and to explore the resultant implications in interpreting the prophetic message. To do so, I shall examine the intertextual relationships between Jeremiah 4:23–28 and other pertinent texts, the rhetorical devices of key metaphors for delivering the message of warning for the world and Zion, and the implications these investigations signify for understanding this passage both within the larger unit of Jeremiah 2–6 and within the entire book of Jeremiah. A relevant discussion concerning the theological and hermeneutical implications toward today's society in the aftermath of the recent tragic events of tsunami, hurricane Katrina, hurricane Rita, and earthquake will follow.

Metaphors and Intertextuality

The prophetic visions often evoke imagery and metaphors that depict awe and terror. They portray such appalling events and occurrences that readers tend to find them unrealistic or improbable. Such visions function to form and cast

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metaphors toward the realm of imagination. Ricoeur defines metaphor as "an 'impertinent' predication, that is, one that offends against the ordinary criteria of appropriateness or pertinence in the application of predicates" (Baumann: 29). Metaphor thus points to a figurative resemblance that differs significantly from reality and yet produces the plurality of imaginative forces of and beyond possible reality. Furthermore, the relationship or tension between the literal and the metaphorical coincides intricately with the relationship between the concepts or metaphors of various texts. Inasmuch as words or concepts construct divergent meanings in intertextual relations (Tull), so "metaphors may be markers for intertextual reading" (Nielsen: 31). Therefore, we will look at how the prophetic vision leads to the various metaphorical forces, how these metaphors correlate intertextual concepts or tensions, and how they connect with readers.

Most commentators in recent decades rightly point out that the present text as a unit, Jeremiah 4:23–28, needs to be examined as an intrinsic part of the larger textual corpus in its present form (Stulman: 63). At the same time, however, they also note the apparent uniqueness of this text in its literary context. Accordingly, this text stands out quite distinctively with regard to language and metaphors. One of the key features for such peculiarity may be due to the text's intertextual correlations not only with Jeremianic language but also with other texts of the Hebrew Bible.

First of all, this text employs the creation language and metaphors of the Genesis accounts. The syntactical and phraseological echoes of the corresponding Genesis accounts are deliberate—intended to lead the audience to recall the marvelous moments and incidents of the creation "in the beginning." The linguistic echoes are purposeful. In this prophetic vision report (Sweeney: 35), four times the phrase "I saw" initiates the prophet's visionary encounter, each of which is consistently followed by the "behold" terminology again occurring four times (Fishbane: 152; Lundbom: 358). The prophet's "seeing" the various components of creation ironically echoes God's "seeing" in Genesis 1. The irony denotes that whereas God "saw that it was good" (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; cf. 3:6) in the majestic crescendo of all creatures coming into being, the prophet here sees the sudden and abrupt disappearance of all those creatures. If the woman's seeing that "the tree was good" (Gen 3:6) depicts an ironic contrast with God the Creator who alone truly sees "good," the spectacular scenes the prophet sees here take a gigantic leap toward the unfathomable reversal of the existence of all beings. The ironic contrast in the linguistic correlation is further heightened with the consistent appearance of

the word "behold" in this text, where in fact there would be nothing to see, find, or behold. Thus, the four appearances of these words, "I saw" and "behold," build a systematic frame of this text, albeit negatively, as if subverting the systematic pattern and orderliness of creation in Genesis 1.

The very first entity the prophet sees refers to both "earth" and "heavens," which reverberates the time "in the beginning" when God created both "heavens" and "earth" (Gen 1:1). These two terms together denote the whole universal realm. At the same time the terms in this sequence build a chiastic connection to Genesis 1, i.e., heavens–earth and earth–heavens, establishing a conceptual bridge to the creation tradition (Gen 2:4; cf. Judg 5:4; 2 Sam 22:8; Isa 24:4; 48:13; Joel 2:10; Job 38:24; Ps 68:8; Prov 3:19). What the prophet witnesses from the earth and heavens thus reverts to the motif of tension and chaos over against order and creation. The hendiadys of "waste and void" in Jeremiah 4:23, meaning "a shapeless emptiness," in its present form occurs only here and in Genesis 1:2 (cf. Isa 34:11). The direct correlation in its thematic contrast is evident. Likewise, whereas amid nothingness God ordered "let there be light" in Genesis 1:3, now, in Jeremiah 4:23, there is "no light." Thus, the reversal from creation to chaos is clearly implied from the start of this text.

We find another reversal motif of the creation tradition in Jeremiah 4:25. While the natural background is turned into chaos in Jeremiah 4:23, all the inhabitants in it are also depicted to have vanished in Jeremiah 4:25. Human beings created in the image of God (Gen 1:26) are no longer in the world the prophet sees, just as all the birds are no more. Here it is noteworthy that human beings are paired with the birds. Among the various possibilities these metaphorically allude to, the parallelism between Jeremiah 4:23 and 4:25 may offer an insight. In 4:23, the prophet sees the earth and then the heavens. In 4:25, the earthling is addressed first, followed by the winged creatures (Holladay: 148). In this parallel construction, the human beings and the birds represent all the creatures of the world (cf. Jer 31:27). Moreover, such parallel patterns may offer further insights on interpreting the relationship between Jeremiah 4:24 and 4:26, as well as Jeremiah 4:23–28 and Jeremiah 4:29–31.

Second, in addition to the echoes of the creation traditions, the text contains words and metaphors that allude to other traditions of the Hebrew Bible. The parallel pattern between Jeremiah 4:24 and 4:26 may reveal some clues. At first glance, the meanings related to Jeremiah 4:24, 26 seem less apparent, especially in comparison with those of 4:23, 25. If the creation tradition of Genesis 1 recurs in

Jeremiah 4:23, 25, then what do the "mountains," "hills," and "cities" in Jeremiah 4:24, 26 allude to, and how are those words related to creation motifs? We may imaginatively view the "mountains" and "hills" as counterparts of the rivers of Genesis 2 (Craigie, Kelley, & Drinkard: 81; Fretheim: 100). The disappearance of humanity in Jeremiah 4:25 may allude to the similar phrase in Genesis 2:5. Regardless of the validity of this comparison with Genesis 2 alongside Genesis 1, the outcome can direct the readers to read the two quite distinct motifs in thematic correlations. Several interpretive options are possible with regard to the "mountains" and "hills" of Jeremiah 4:24.

The first option is to consider these terms as idiomatic usage referring to the hiding places, considered to be secure and sacred. This notion of the fortress upon a high mountain echoes the similar motif of security in Mount Zion, which depicts a sharp contrast with other mountains in Psalm 46, as noted by Childs: "The mountains quake [Ps 46:3], but the city is secure against the onslaughts of the chaos, because God dwells in her midst" (189; cf. Jer 16:16; 50:6). In this sense, chaos is portrayed quite vividly in that both "mountains/hills" (Jer 4:24) and "cities" (Jer 4:26) lose their unshakable bedrocks.

The second option takes the mountains quaking as God's theophany with the Sinai tradition (Exod 19:16–25; cf. Amos 1:1–2; Nah 1:4–5). The earthquake is associated with the divine proclamation from the mountaintop with the sound of a trumpet (Jer 4:15, 21). The parallel correlation of Jeremiah 4:24 and 4:26 entails a similar metaphor from the words "mountains" and "Carmel" respectively. The "garden-land" in Hebrew is a synonym for Mount Carmel. The pun appears to be a deliberate association. On the one hand, just as the mountains filled with idolatry are quaking and crumbling (Jer 4:24), so the land flowing with milk and honey is turned to a desert (Jer 4:26; cf. 2:7; 50:19). On the other hand, just as the quaking mountains echo God's majestic theophany at Mount Sinai during the time of Moses, so the word *Carmel* echoes God's victory over the idols at Mount Carmel during the time of Elijah (1 Kings 18–19; cf. Rosenberg: 42). The result is an implicit correlation between the motif of God's creation (Jer 4:23, 25) and that of God's theophany associated with the great prophets of old (Jer 4:24, 26).

The third interpretive option is relevant to the parallel correlations between Jeremiah 4:24 and 4:26, i.e., between the mountains/hills and the land/cities. What are we to make of these parallel relations? The correlation does not appear to be as neat as that of 4:23 and 4:25 (earth–heaven and earthling–birds). However, it is possible to read into

the text an intertextual connection with the story of Lot and his wife in Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). Here the word combination of both "hills" and "cities" seems peculiar enough to ponder a metaphorical correlation. In Genesis 19, having been warned by the angels to flee to the "mountains" for safety, Lot begged to go to the nearby "city" instead. Both terms are present in the Jeremiah passage (Holladay: 165; Lundbom : 371). Echoing Sodom and Gomorrah, the hidden motif of the impending destruction may be heightened by the same word combination in Jeremiah 4:24 and 4:26. Beyond the possible options delineated above, the terms *mountains*, *hills*, and *cities* may signify other implications when considered in relation to 4:23–28 and 4:29–31, which will be discussed below.

Third, if this text explicitly echoes the primeval creation in Genesis 1 with the reversal motif, such a motif of un-creation implicitly echoes the flood account in Genesis 6–9 as well. Although there are numerous texts in the Hebrew Bible that warn of impending disaster upon the people, country, and nature, the flood tradition details a rare account that describes the very devastation of the entire creation. It is this large scale disaster beyond any human control that may be subtly implied in the Jeremianic text. In Genesis, soon after the creation of the world, God decides to destroy the entire world by the flood. Although no apparent connection may be obvious, the mountains and hills moving to and fro may be metaphorically understood in connection with the ark high up the mountain being tossed to and fro. Genesis 7:19–20 records the mountains being entirely covered by the waters until the ark finally rests on Mount Ararat (Gen 8:4). Furthermore, in Genesis 6:7, God resorts to the destruction of all creatures, including creeping things and "the birds of the air" (cf. Gen 6:20; 7:3, 14, 23). Similarly, the pertinent entities of both "humankind" and "the birds of the air" are said to have been demolished in Jeremiah 4:25. Even more subtly, the notion of the fleeing away of all the birds may echo the ravens and doves sent out from the ark for any sign of the dry ground (Gen 8:7–12). In the Jeremianic text, no such symbol for renewed life is hinted to be available, thereby intensifying the devastation. Therefore, if the echo of the creation account in the Jeremianic text signals the notion of chaos, then the echo of the flood account alludes to the notion of destruction.

This notion of destruction further points out the divine pathos, sharply contrasted with the similar depictions in the flood account and other prophetic texts. Admittedly, the notion of destruction in Jeremiah 4:23–28 pertains to the motifs of the "desert," "demolished," and "desolation"

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(4:26–27) rather than those of the waters. However, further notions such as God's resolute decision that "I will not make a full end" (4:27) and "I have not relented nor will I turn back" (4:28) possibly echo similar depictions of God's intentions in the flood account. On one level, the language in both texts is congruent, while also leading to divergent messages. For example, the divine plan not to destroy completely (Jer 4:27) may be both contrary to God's plan to "make an end to all flesh" (Gen 6:13, 17; 7:4) and comparable to the theme of God's rescuing Noah and his family in the ark (Gen 6:8, 14, 18; cf. 9:11, 15). Likewise, the motif that God would not "repent" in Jeremiah 4:28 can be found in the flood account where God did "repent" of creating human beings, who had become evil and wicked (Gen 6:6–7). If read together, Jeremiah's vision heightens the notion that God is determined not to change the divine plan of bringing destruction.

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On another level, these similar words and notions signify the divine pathos depicted in tension. The tension occurs as God is torn between the divine plan to destroy and the divine mercy to relent. It is possible that Jeremiah 4:27b, "I will not make a full end," may be a redactional addition (Brueggemann: 57). Regardless of the editorial evidences, however, the present form of the text conveys a thematic tension between the possibility of renewal and the impossibility of mercy. The language depicting God's pathos to "return" and "repent" of the plan to punish can be further found in Joel 2:14 and Jonah 3:9–10. In those texts, the possibility exists that God will return and change the divine plan to bring disaster. This known tradition of God's attribute of mercy and compassion (Exod 34:6–7; Num 14:18; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17) recurs in Jeremiah 4:28, except with the reversed motif so that there would be no room for any change of the divine plan for punishment (cf. Jer 15:6; 18:8, 10). Furthermore, similar contrasting depictions of the divine pathos can be found in the remote allusion between Hos 11:8–9 and Jeremiah 5:7–9, 29. In the former, God's pathos allows room for forgiveness, "How can I give you up?" (Hos 11:8). In the latter, God's pathos closes any case for mercy, "How can I forgive you?" (Jer 5:7), even though readers can still hear an anthropomorphic aspect of God who agonizingly struggles over the decision to reach a firm verdict.

The Place of Jeremiah 4:23–28

Thus far, we have looked at Jeremiah 4:23–28, paying attention to its intertextual allusions and echoes that enrich and intensify the severity of the prophetic warnings over the whole universe turned to chaos and desolation through the metaphors of the reversal of the primeval creation, the impending destruction like the flood, and the emotional denial of the possibility of divine compassion. What then is the conceptual relationship between Jeremiah 4:23–28 and 4:19–22, 29–31?

At first glance, syntactical and thematic discrepancies seem apparent. However, linguistic and metaphorical connections are detectable. First, the imagery of colossal destruction of the entire cosmos in a global dimension (4:23–28) is extended to the imagery of the military invasion of Judah in a national dimension (4:29–31). Just as "all the cities" were demolished (4:26), so "every city" is to be deserted (4:29, twice). Just as there would be no human being left alive following the destruction of the world (4:26), so there will be no one left alive in the invasion against Judah (4:29). Second, the metaphors of the garden land becoming a "desert," all the cities being "demolished," and all the earth becoming "desolate" in the cosmic realm (4:26–27) correlate with the addressee in the second person feminine singular form (Qere) declared to be "a despoiled one" (4:30). The rhetorical effect of the metaphorical correlations is intentional. The audience who may be merely appalled to hear the announcement of the prophet's vision of the cosmic doom (4:23–28) now more vividly acknowledges that the object of such a devastating destruction is indeed none other than Zion. Third, Zion is thus said to cry out and gasp for breath (4:31), just as the whole earth was seen to mourn (4:28). In the larger pericope, the earlier anguish of the speaker (4:19) is transferred to the very agony of daughter Zion in its climactic summation (4:31; Kaiser: 170). In such correlations, it is possible to construct a further deliberate interconnection between the mountains, hills, cities (4:24, 26) and Mount Zion, the city of Jerusalem (4:31). Again, the vision of the reversal of creation into chaos and destruction on the scale of the entire cosmos was in fact directed toward Jerusalem.

What then is the place of Jeremiah 4:23–28 in its larger context, i.e., Jeremiah 2–6 and beyond? We note that the anonymous speaker's anguish in 4:19 builds an *inclusio* with

the agony of daughter Zion in 4:31. In other words, inasmuch as 4:23–28 may be considered a unit, it has intrinsic continuity with 4:19–22 and 4:29–31 in its present form. Other catchwords are also noticeable in the entire chapter 4, connecting various subunits into a larger composite unit: e.g., the motif of YHWH's anger in 4:8 and 4:26, 28 (Lundbom: 359), the reference to Jerusalem/Zion in 4:4–5 and 4:31 (Olson: 82), the terms *trumpet* and *standard* in 4:5 and 4:21 (cf. 4:19), the language depicting the "land" becoming a waste and "cities" being "demolished" in 4:7 and 4:26, and the imagery of chariots and horses as invaders in 4:13 and 4:29.

Furthermore, in the larger literary context, we find additional catchwords that connect various units. The metaphor of Jerusalem as the bride, which reflects the metaphor in Hosea 1–3, occurs predominantly in Jeremiah 2–3 and also in Jeremiah 4:29–31. Also, the peculiar catchwords of "apostate Israel" and "treacherous Judah" in 3:11 recur with both Israel and Judah marked as "treacherous" in 5:11. Likewise, the labeling of "priests," "rulers," and "prophets" as idolaters occurs in 2:8, 26; 4:9; 5:31. Equally noticeable is the condemnation of the people's disobedience to the first, second, and third lists of the Deuteronomic Decalogue in 2:8, 11, 17, 19 which is picked up in the so-called temple sermon of Jeremiah in 7:9. While chapters 2 and 7 build an *inclusio* with such notions, chapters 6 and 8 build another symmetry with the duplicate segments on the false promise of *shalom* both in 6:13–15 and in 8:10–12, highlighting chapter 7 as their core. (This observation was made by students in my class on Jeremiah at MTSO, during the spring semester of 2005.) In these compositely interconnected formulations, 4:23–31 functions as a core of chapters 2–6 with the most shocking vision of the cosmic chaos which encompasses and identifies Jerusalem as the principal target. The rhetorical intention is further reiterated in chapter 7, where Jerusalem is astoundingly equated with Shiloh (7:12–15; cf. 26:9).

Finally, the present text in the context of chapters 2–6 builds a symmetrical connection with the closing chapters of the entire book of Jeremiah, the oracles against the nations in chapters 46–51. In this formation, YHWH's warning and accusation against "daughter Zion" in Jeremiah 2–6 (4:31; 6:2) are matched with the oracles of the impending doom against "daughter Babylon" in Jeremiah 50–51 (50:42; 51:33; cf. 46:11, 19, 24; 48:18; 49:3; Childs: 194–95). Just as the personified Jerusalem is warned of the agony as of a woman in labor (4:31), so the personified Babylon is doomed to suffer the same pain as those of a woman in labor (50:43). Between these accusations, we find the oracles of the new covenant to the people of YHWH in Jeremiah 30–31

as a center (Clements: 8). On the whole, while the messages of renewal and vindication are expected in chapters 30–31 and 50–51 respectively, the book of Jeremiah puts a strong emphasis on the divine accusation and call for repentance as proclaimed in chapters 2–6.

Theological and Hermeneutical Implications

In the aftermath of the recent tsunami tragedy and hurricane Katrina in our world, the vision of Jeremiah can offer pertinent hermeneutical implications. The unfathomable magnitude, indescribable sorrow, and horrible damages are disturbingly relevant, if not similar. What implications can be identified by those metaphorical and intertextual correlations between Jeremiah's vision and recent global tragedy?

First of all, it is the present interpreter's position to admit that there is no clear answer for such a correlated issue from the human standpoint. In fact, one clear answer may be that we ought not take this difficult text as a prooftext to justify or rationalize any segment of human affairs in this world. When the issues of justice and theodicy collide, we ought to beware of the dangerous tendency of the three pitiful friends toward Job. Were these natural catastrophes the acts of God's judgment? If so, why did so many innocent children and adults become victims, and why are the evil people around the world still unpunished? If not, where was God in all those places and moments?

Our tendency to control the issues in our own theological box falls short of comprehending and explaining the indescribably painful tragedy of our sisters and brothers on this planet. Anderson aptly presents a cautionary remark on this text: "It surely would be wrong to understand Jeremiah's language as a literal prediction. . . . Here the prophet is using the imagery of chaos metaphorically" (13). Furthermore, the prophetic vision with its metaphorical force reminds the readers of the incomprehensible but enduring creative power of God. The linguistic connections that echo various intertextual accounts of creation and flood depict human vulnerability amid the natural catastrophe of a large scale. Thus, the prophet could react to such a drastic vision only with deep anguish and cry (Jer 4:19, 31). This voice of outcry, lament, and even anger is the appropriate reaction. We too need to hear the voices of the victims first and foremost. The poetic irony is elusive in that the voice of the one who cries out "my anguish, my anguish" in Jeremiah 4:19 may be the voice of the prophet Jeremiah, daughter Zion, or even YHWH. How can we grapple with any clear-cut theological responses for such unfathomably tragic calamity, except to cry out with

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anguish, pain, and sorrow? Yet, one clear function of this prophetic vision was to awaken people's acknowledgment of wrongdoings and sensibility toward justice. The immediate audience is YHWH's people, who are "foolish" (Jer 4:22) and the "desolate one" (Jer 4:30). In other words, its apparent metaphorical function is aimed at alarming the would-be survivors, who must carry out "good" not "evil" (Jer 4:22) with obedience and righteous solidarity.

Second, the stunningly related correlations may mean that this unlikely catastrophe, as depicted in Jeremiah, can be more than a vision, that is, it can be reality. The fact that the tsunami tragedy did occur, on an energy scale 390 times more powerful than the Hiroshima atomic bomb, shocked the whole world (O'Connor: 370). The fact that this kind of cosmic, or apocalyptic, calamity can become a reality in our own time should now sound a clear alarm to all the members of this global habitat. The prophet's vision may have been perceived by the people and the rulers as mere imagination. One wonders how the people felt when they heard Jeremiah proclaiming this kind of alarming destruction. Were they in utmost shock and horror to hear of such a disastrous event? Or were they careless, even quite relieved, to learn that the incident would occur in a remote place and time, far from their lofty and secure palace? Yet, in our time when the superpowers have the capacity to cause this kind of disaster with nuclear weapons, the warning appears to be more compelling and troubling. At the dawn of this new century, we have indeed sadly seen and heard of how fruitful land and cities were turned into desolate ruins (Jer 4:26–27, 29), both by human-made wars and by natural disasters. It is then quite disheartening to see how often we so stubbornly neglect our obligation to keep and preserve our world, not as one nation or species, but all together. All too often and too easily, our callous and complacent attitudes steer us away from the reality of our shared dependence, both on one another and on this globe. Just as our human arrogance or naïveté keeps us unaware of the impending threats of natural disaster, including global warming, so our narrowly focused politico-ideological interests, such as our own national security, keep us unconcerned for the welfare of fellow human beings who happen to either stand in our way or live in distant lands. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s compelling words resonate forcefully: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom" (Washington: 640). Jeremiah's solemn warning is thus targeted to all of us, especially the technologically advanced, ecologically wayward, and socio-politically empowered nations and peoples.

Third, the sorrow we in the rest of the world may not feel with genuine empathy toward the victims and survivors in those mostly poverty-stricken regions was ironically felt perhaps by nature itself as the earth indeed mourned and the heavens grew dark (Jer 4:28). In the Asian culture, excessive amounts of rain are interpreted metaphorically as tears from the sky or heaven. Just as all the birds of the air fled (Jer 4:25), so animals such as the elephants, dolphins, and birds remarkably sensed the impending natural calamity even before humans could sense any change. How ironic then that while nature is more alert and attentive to the events of calamity, we human beings either remain senseless or, worse yet, twist the situations by our self-serving denial! History has taught us that human beings can become more brutal and cruel than any wild animals or birds.

It is no wonder that the celestial realms are invited to be witnesses of YHWH's works of wonder (Jer 2:12; 4:28; cf. 51:48). Theophany is likewise noticed by nature itself long before it is acknowledged by humans. Our tear-free eyes and insensitive hearts are sharply contrasted with the major waves of rain and snow that frequented the North American continents immediately after the tsunami tragedy, as if tears poured forth from the heavens—however such a phenomenon may be rationalized by scientists or meteorologists. Even if our empathy may lack any degree of ingenuity, let us not cause any more tears from our fellow brothers and sisters in those regions of extreme poverty and vulnerability: the tears from their calamity—its magnitude the rest of the world may have a hard time grasping; the tears from our apathy—in contrast with how the whole world mourned for the U.S. in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, tragedy; and the tears from our shallow or rigid theology—as if a good versus evil distinction resolves and explains all matters, especially when seen from our privileged perspective, which regards victims as deserving of such a disaster.

Fourth, while we have yet to grapple with the issues of theodicy amid these incomprehensible tragedies, Jeremiah's call to return and repent sounds more vigorously. We need not recall the temple sermon in chapter 7. Even in chapter 4 we can hear the call to return, with the four-fold "if" phrases (4:1–2), just as the present text started with the four-fold "I saw…behold" phrases (4:23–26). In 4:2, the prophet admonishes the people to obey in truth, justice, and righteousness. In today's culture, where countless reality shows inundate prime-time TV networks and yet ironically (deliberately?) fail to show the true reality of our world, the prophet's accusation against all who fail to do justice, care for the needy, and share solidarity is deeply troubling to the consumerism- and

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success-oriented nations. The prophetic vision seemed to deal with a natural catastrophe somewhere in a remote place. Alas, the people did not know that it was actually related to and directed toward Zion, their own city.

Perhaps, we in the U.S. too may need to see and hear more clearly and obediently who the real "desolate" or "desperate" ones are, while struggling to extend sorrow and solidarity to our sisters and brothers in remote places such as Banda Aceh (Indonesia), Sri Lanka, the coastlands of Thailand, India, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and more. In the aftermath of the tsunami tragedy, we in the U.S. tried to theologize their suffering by our theoretical and superficial analysis. When Hurricane Katrina (as well as Hurricane Rita) hit the Gulf Coast of the U.S., including New Orleans, Biloxi, Waveland, and many regions of Texas, we felt the pain within us, giving us no room or luxury to theologize these incidents. Soon afterward another horrible earthquake hit parts of Pakistan, India, and beyond with huge magnitude; but our attention or care for them has been hardly called for by the mass media.

In the past, the records of wonderful things this country has done include opening its borders and embracing refugees of the Vietnam War during a time when many other countries closed their gates tightly and spoke empty words of sympathy. Such a movement toward embodying care, solidarity, and justice again needs to occur in our polarized nation and globalized world. This too is overtly proclaimed by Jeremiah's call to action to care, reside, and live together (Jer 29:1–14). The promise given to Abraham and Sarah (Gen 12:1–3) resounds in YHWH's call for justice to Israel, YHWH's people, "nations shall be blessed by him and in him they shall take pride" (Jer 4:2). The global solidarity and responsibility to do justice and care for the needy sounds equally forcefully to the global leaders.

Last but not least, in Jeremiah 4:27, there is a phrase which causes much text-critical debate: "Yet I will not make a full end" (cf. Eppstein). Whether it is a later scribal addition or not, the existence of this phrase in the present form beckons readers to wrestle with its divergent implications, which may signify contrasting but interrelated theological insights. On the one hand, if the phrase denotes "no full end," this seemingly unfitting phrase projects a minuscule point of hope in the midst of widespread despair (Miller: 615). No matter how trivial or hidden it may be, such a notion of hope does indeed exist in the overall message of the book of Jeremiah (46:28; cf. 44:14, 28; 46:26; 48:47; 49:6, 39; 50:20).

A French TV news report following the tsunami tragedy showed a woman standing amid the debris of her entire village, shattered by the disaster. With tents behind her, where survivors in that small village were struggling to keep their lives going, she pointed toward the debris and said to the reporter, "Tomorrow we will return there; tomorrow we will live there again." It may be months, years, or decades before she and the people of her village can live in the rebuilt homes. Yet the hope she expressed, hoping against hope, does reside in this very text of Jeremiah's most chilling vision. Admittedly, readers of Jeremiah cannot ignore the fact that such notions of hope occur only minimally throughout the entire book, clearly denoting the prominence of the divine punishment and warning (Stulman: 257). Nevertheless, a notion of hope may be seen; and that hope belongs to God, the true King (46:18; 48:15; 51:57). The promise to build and plant (1:10; 24:6; 31:4, 28; 42:10) originates from God, no matter how long it may take.

On the other hand, if the phrase denotes a "full end," it heightens the seriousness of the disaster and admonition. As the majority of the texts of Jeremiah convey the message of impending doom upon the people of Judah and other nations for their wickedness, so the notion of hope should not diminish or avert the gravity of the disaster. Words of comfort may not heal or soften the wounds of the victims and survivors, especially when offered inappropriately. Likewise, any positive notions are not intended to obstruct the divine call for justice and repentance repeatedly demanded of the stubborn rulers, officials, and people of Judah by the prophet. This implies, in turn, that inasmuch as the victims and survivors so desperately need to hear the voices of hope and promise, we in the rest of the world ought to pay closer heed to the message of warning and call for change. Even though hope belongs to God, we in the U.S. and in other parts of this global village can and should be the instruments of that hope for rebuilding and replanting, both domestically and globally. If we listen to Jeremiah's warning more closely, it is not a choice but an obligation to do so, just as the prayer attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi implores so forcefully: "Lord, make [us—U.S.] an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let [us] sow love; . . . where there is despair, hope."

The prophet's poetic vision with its conceptual intertextuality and metaphors, therefore, becomes more solemnly vivid in our time. Just as Elie Wiesel remembered this Jeremianic text in his return to Auschwitz (Wiesel: 125–26) or the horrified survivors of the Hiroshima bombing lamented, a poem by a student from University of California, Davis correlates the depictions of tragic reality, sorrow, and prayer with hope and solidarity across the Indian, Atlantic, and

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Pacific Oceans:

That tsunami thing.

Let me tell you what I think
Of that tsunami thing.
That tsunami thing has killed
Two hundred thousand people, last I heard.
That tsunami thing
Leveled homes and savaged the fields
And broke the bodies of children
And threw railroad tracks off course
And tore people away from the arms of their loved ones
As it single-mindedly shifted the geography
Of island nations.
Like you, I watched the aftermath of
That tsunami thing on television.
Like you, I watched the faces of the people
Left behind,
Dazed and broken,
Shell-shocked and shattered.
What do you do when your world
Literally falls down in ruins
Around you? . . .

But I hope we will not forget.

Meanwhile,
The survivors dig the graves with their hands.
But our hands reaching across the ocean
Can in their own way be
As powerful, as majestic, as unstoppable
As the tsunami itself.

On them all:
Peace.
On the living and the dead.
On the found and the looking.

(Yasmine M. Khan)

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