

**Is Jeremiah Green? An Eco-theological reading of
the Land Texts in the Book of Jeremiah.**

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I declare that this is my own account of the study and research I have undertaken during my honours period and contains no work that has been previously submitted for a degree at any other university.

Clive Douglas McCallum

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Abstract

This thesis examines key texts from the book of Jeremiah that refer specifically to the land, and analyses them using the perspective of the Six Ecojustice Principles of the Earth Bible Project. The critical question that this study seeks to answer is: To what extent do the land texts in the Book of Jeremiah correlate with the principles? Significant texts are Jer 2:7; 3:19-20; 4:23-28; 9:10-11; 12:4, 7-12 and 14:1-6. When examining each principle questions are formulated to ask of the texts in order to elicit their degree of congruence with the Ecojustice Principles. It is found that some principles align better than others, particularly those concerning interconnectedness and mutual custodianship, with intrinsic worth and purpose having a lesser congruence. The principles of voice and resistance have the least correlation, raising the issue of how far an eco-theological reading can go without taking into account the original historical meaning of the texts. Other issues raised by the study are the degrees of relationship between the symbiotic partners YHWH, people and the land, what wilderness actually means in Jeremiah, how the land is treated as inheritance, and how that the various levels of text add to the complexity of drawing conclusions. When examining each of the Ecojustice Principles it was found that only partial fit was achieved. The questions that are used for discussing the principles often are answered with a limited yes and only some were answered with a high degree of correlation. In all cases each of principles had aspects which did not correlate. While the Book of Jeremiah has some texts that seem to open the way to an eco-theological approach, on closer examination these texts support a more traditional approach and retrieval of a new way of thinking is somewhat difficult, although not entirely impossible as some of the conclusions show.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The issues of climate change and global warming are very much part of the global agenda in the twenty-first century and concerns for the earth and its environment are constantly being aired. At the same time there has been a move towards searching the scriptures for clues from the ancient texts in understanding current environmental issues. One of the significant theological approaches to what has been described as the ‘earth crisis’ or ‘earth justice’ has come from the Earth Bible Project. This is one of the collaborative research projects of the Centre for Theology, Science and Culture, at Flinders University, South Australia. This project had its beginnings in 2000 under the leadership of Norman Habel, principal researcher, and published five volumes addressing various parts of the Bible that were seen to be concerned with the earth itself. In setting up a basis for the study of these texts the Earth Bible Project developed a set of six principles that were concerned with the earth, its environment and issues of justice. These were called the Six Ecojustice Principles.¹ These principles are basic to all the writers in the project who have been set the task of reading particular biblical texts from the perspective of earth.²

In the first four volumes of the Earth Bible Series, there are three chapters devoted to Jeremiah texts that concern the earth.³ In each of these some of the Ecojustice Principles are applied to the texts and certain conclusions are drawn in relation to

¹ Norman C Habel. (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 1, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2000) pp 25-27.

² *Ibid.*, p24.

³ These are Jeremiah chapters 4, 12 and 32.

these principles. While they do not neatly affirm the principles there is enough connection to examine other Jeremiah land texts to ascertain how they may or may not conform to the Ecojustice Principles. The Earth Bible team suggests that their principles serve three purposes, firstly, they identify an ecological orientation, secondly, they embrace specific ecological values, and thirdly, they provide a basis for articulating and answering key questions posed in the definition of the principles.⁴ The Book of Jeremiah itself is open to providing an opportunity to further explore the Ecojustice Principles and has the potential to inform the current ecological debate from a theological perspective.

The topic of this thesis, “Is Jeremiah Green? An Eco-theological reading of the Land Texts in the Book of Jeremiah,” indicates that there is a question over what conclusions can be drawn in relation to how far an eco-theological reading of the Jeremiah land texts is possible. Asking whether Jeremiah is ‘green’ is using a term that is more recently being used to describe anyone who cares about the earth and its environment. It is used in this study within a context of publishers HarperOne who published *The Green Bible* where texts relating to caring for creation are highlighted in green. “Passages were selected on how well they demonstrate: How God and Jesus interact with, care for, and are intimately involved with all creation; How all the elements of creation – land, water, air, plants, animals, humans – are interdependent; How nature responds to God; and How we are called to care for creation”.⁵ In the present context, the term ‘green’ refers to an attitude of sharing a vision of caring for God’s creation and being engaged in healing and sustaining it. In this thesis the question is asked whether

⁴ *Ibid.*, p38.

⁵ Maudlin, Michael G. and Marlene Baer (Eds.) *The Green Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. Foreword by Desmond Tutu, (New York, HarperOne, 2008) I-16.

the writer(s) of the Book of Jeremiah have this understanding of creation, that it is good, that there is a link between nature, animals and humanity, and that the text has a vision of healing and sustainability when referring to the earth and all its components.

An Eco-theological reading is an approach to the interpretation of texts that uses issues such a creation, care for the environment and the interaction between persons and the earth as interpretative categories. They are interpreted as interrelated and affecting the future through the consequences of this interaction. In the light of what they call the ‘earth crisis’⁶ the Earth Bible Project group have sought to formulate a fresh and new approach to reading the Bible. They indicate that ‘rather than reflecting about the earth as we analyse the text, we are seeking to reflect with earth and see things from the perspective of earth’.⁷

The Earth Bible project seeks firstly to retrieve any meaning in the text that has been overshadowed or overlooked by previous interpretation, often guided by interpretation that reflects God’s relation to humanity rather than to earth.⁸

Retrieval implies that there is something there in the text that exists that has not been clearly brought to light in the interpretation of the particular text. This means the that the Earth Bible Project has an historical component to its interpretation and shows it is not only interested in the final form reading of the text and is concerned with what the text meant in its ancient or original context. As a result, examination of the process of composition and historical context for

⁶ Norman C Habel. (Ed.). ‘The Earth Bible, Volume 1’, *op. cit.*, p 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 33-4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p39.

the texts of Jeremiah is an important consideration in an analysis of the Earth Bible Principles and their relationship to the texts.

The Book of Jeremiah⁹ itself forms part of the Hebrew Scriptures written during the sixth century BCE.¹⁰ Jeremiah is suspected to have been born in 627 BCE and died sometime after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Some of the text was redacted or added in exile or post exile and the composition of some parts of the book could have been later than this. Space prevents a full discussion of the dating of the texts but this study follows widely accepted views on this issue, especially as canvassed by R. Carroll.¹¹

One of the problems any Jeremiah scholar faces is the incidence of levels within the text. There are no clear chronological patterns in the Book of Jeremiah nor is the relationship between the prose and poetry always clear.¹² B. Childs quotes three distinct sources for the text of Jeremiah, these being, authentic poetic, biographic prose, and Deuteronomic redactional material.¹³ He adds that literary and historical elements provide a source for discontinuity, although in some cases there is clear literary and historical continuity.¹⁴ There is also the issue of whether texts are pre-exilic, exilic or post-exilic. However, by selecting isolated texts which relate to the land, this study by nature has some textual discontinuity but is

⁹ The Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, or BHS, is an edition of the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible as preserved in the Leningrad Codex, and supplemented by Masoretic and text-critical notes. Ref: Karl Elliger & Willhem Rudolph, (Eds.). *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Rev. Ed. of Rudolph Kittel (Ed.), (Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1969/77). It is assumed that the reader will have access to both the Hebrew and English translations of the Book of Jeremiah as space precludes the inclusion of the translations of all the passages cited. When English translations are used they are either those of myself or from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Division of Christian Education, National Council of Churches USA, and The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (London, HarperCollins, 1989).

¹⁰ Robert P. Carroll. *Jeremiah, A Commentary*, Vol. 1, (Sheffield, Phoenix Press, 1986) p 65.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 65.

¹² Brevard S. Childs. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London, SCM Press, 1979) p 342.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p 342.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 344.

held in unity by the themes of land usage and the relationship between land, people and YHWH. Where a text has issues of chronological discontinuity these are dealt with when they arise. The relationship between prose and poetry is less clear and the meaning of the text takes precedence rather than arguments regarding historical or literary continuity. The analysis between the text and the Ecojustice Principles means that different land ideologies are represented as they are present in the text and these are related in some instances to redactional layers.

In this study the reading is facilitated using the Six Ecojustice Principles of the Earth Bible Project as the basis for asking questions of the texts. It should be noted that the principles are accepted as they are published and are not themselves critiqued, even though this may be a useful exercise. For this study they are taken as they stand in their entirety. Taken in turn, each of the principles is discussed using texts related to the land from the Book of Jeremiah. This is in keeping with the Earth Bible Project which stated in the fifth volume, after reviewing the practical use of the principles, that writers would adapt circumstances or texts to focus on the principles that were most pertinent to the particular passages being examined.¹⁵ The commonality of the study is achieved through reading the texts from the relatively broad focus of the perspective of earth. The challenge is to draw conclusions that inform the Eco-theological debate. Although not critiquing the principles this study critically analyses their correlation with Jeremiah through the selected texts.

Defining the land texts in the Book of Jeremiah is a more complex task as an element of selective subjectivity is required, however this is kept within the realm

¹⁵ Habel, Norman C. & Vicky Balabanski (Eds.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 5: The Earth Story in the New Testament* (Sheffield, Academic Press, 2002) p 1.

of the use of the Ecojustice Principles. In selecting the texts for study, three Hebrew roots were considered, ארץ, אדמה and נהלה. The first two are used synonymously for land, earth and ground, and the second is inheritance or heritage. In the Book of Jeremiah ארץ has 262 occurrences, אדמה 14 occurrences, and נהלה 13 occurrences.¹⁶ While the texts to be examined principally concern the land, the land as inheritance is closely related and this needs to be considered to ensure a full coverage of the topic. In narrowing down the number of texts to examine those that reflect human, YHWH and land interaction were primarily considered. Texts which refer to the land simply as geographical reference, or those that use the word but the principal meaning is outside the land being an important part of the context, were also not considered. In the Book of Jeremiah ארץ and אדמה can mean land, earth or ground. ארץ is the principle term used and four distinctive meanings of this can be identified. Firstly, there is land as a place of being, (for example, Jer 1:18; 9:19; 16:3), secondly, as a geographic reference, (Jer 6:22; 11:4; 31:8), thirdly, as part of the psyche of the Israelites, (Jer 12:15; 14:18; 25:38), and fourthly, as a place for agricultural growth, (Jer 2:7; 14:4; 33:10). These four meanings are demonstrated in Jer 4, v 23 as place of being, v 16 as geographic reference, v 7 as ‘your land’ part of the psyche, and v 20 land able to support the growing crops. While ארץ is principally translated as ‘land’ there are other examples of other use such as ‘earth’, (Jer 4:23; 10:12; 24:9; 33:25), and ‘ground’ (Jer 8:2; 14:2; 16:4). אדמה is used far less often and has only two meanings in Jeremiah, ‘the ground’, for example, Jer 7:20; 8:2; 14:4; 16:20, and ‘the land’ as belonging to Israel, for example, Jer 12:14; 16:15 and 23:8. However, there is no evidence for specifically different meanings to be

¹⁶ Einspahr, Bruce. (Comp.). *Index to Brown, Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon* (Chicago, Moody Bible Institute, 1976) pp 360-388.

attributed to אֶרֶץ and אֶרְמָה as they appear in the text. All the texts chosen for discussion contain at least one of אֶרֶץ אֶרְמָה and נְהִלָּה. There are five texts that are critical to the arguments put forward in this thesis; these are Jer 2:7, a plentiful land of good things; 3:19-20, the gift of a pleasant land, a beautiful heritage; 9:10-11 lamentation for the land laid waste; 12:4, 7-12 the land mourns, the people have made the land a desolate wilderness; and 14:1-6, the great drought liturgy. These texts appear in the chapters where the principles most relevant to them are discussed.

The Six Ecojustice Principles¹⁷ provide a basis for the exploration of the specific biblical texts. These principles allow writers to dialogue with the biblical texts with some flexibility, they embrace specific ecological values consistent with a basic hermeneutic, and they provide some basic questions with which to approach the texts.¹⁸ However, after using the principles in dialogue with the chosen Jeremiah land texts it soon became obvious that more was needed in order to provide a tighter focus on the outcomes. As a result, more specific questions were developed for each principle. While in the discussion of the principles there are some suggestions of questions, these are neither definitive nor comprehensive. This was noted by G. Tucker who states: ‘It would be preferable for ‘principles’ to be stated in the interrogative rather than in the indicative or any other mood, that is, as questions rather than statements or instructions’.¹⁹ Each of the six principles is discussed in order with one chapter for each. The essence of the

¹⁷ Norman C. Habel. (Ed.). ‘The Earth Bible, Volume 1’, *op. cit.*, p 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p38.

¹⁹ Gene M. Tucker. *Ecological Approaches: The Bible and the Land*, in Joel M. LeMon & Kent Harold Richards (Eds.), “Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David L. Petersen” (Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2009) p 358.

principle is outlined followed by the formulation of key interrogative questions. The specific texts from Jeremiah that best correlate with the focus of each principle are discussed, followed by conclusions that answer the key questions posed. This thesis does not attempt to make the particular texts fit the principles, rather an approach has been adopted whereby the questions interrogate the text, and only where there is a clear congruence with the principle are conclusions drawn that indicate a correlation between Jeremiah and the principle. This approach also means that this thesis demonstrates where the texts do not correspond to the perspective of the principles.

One of the key problems faced with using a modern hermeneutic on an old text is how far the new concepts can be identified in the ancient texts. Historical context and meaning of the Jeremiah texts is considered by the Earth Bible Project and this study. As such this stands as a barrier to an interpretation of the texts that may be able to be demonstrated by the modern meaning of the words but not through the contextual meaning of the texts. A bias to make the texts fit the principles has to be avoided in order for the conclusions to reflect what is in the text and not what we may like to find in the texts.

In the Earth Bible Vol. 5 a review of the hermeneutic of the project produced a statement that the writers who use the Earth Bible Principles were invited to adapt their methods. This demonstrated a change in focus as the project had developed.²⁰ It was clear even in 2002 that there was a need for more flexibility. They concluded that there were still many challenges, more texts needed to be analysed in the light of the principles, and further refinement was required with

²⁰ Habel & Balabanski (Eds.). 'The Earth Bible, Vol. 5', *op. cit.*, p 1.

ecological, biblical and religious input.²¹ Since the first publication of the Ecojustice Principles in 2000 and 2002 there has been some refining of method by N. Habel and P. Trudinger, in the light of more recent consultations at meetings of SBL [*The Society of Biblical Literature*].²² The result has been a three-way emphasis on a method that comprises suspicion, identification and retrieval. Suspicion that biblical texts are most likely to be anthropocentric or interpreted in this way is the basis from which to start. The Earth Bible Project would like to see different interpretations but if they are not supported by textual evidence, then suspicion becomes a reality and can be taken no further. Identification is an ontological approach to being part of and identifying with the earth and its components. This does raise consciousness but does not necessarily lead to finding it in biblical texts, although some are more receptive to this interpretation than others. Finally retrieval is related to suspicion and identification and involves bringing out something that has been suppressed or lost, or in a new way highlights something that has not been noticed. While it is possible to examine a perspective, it is not possible to give something inanimate a voice or attribute to it a life of its own if there is no evidence in the text that it exists. Critical questions to ask of a text when seeking to retrieve voice are: Who is the speaker? What is the message they are to convey? To whom are they speaking? and, What is the context? These are critical questions that need to be addressed when examining texts in relation to the Ecojustice Principles.

Regarding method, three writers have a pertinent contribution to this thesis. G. McAfee reviewed methods of biblical scholarship in relation to the environment

²¹ *Ibid.*, p 14.

²² Norman C. Habel & Peter Trudinger (Eds.). *Exploring Biblical Hermeneutics* (Lieden, Brill, 2008) pp 1-8.

in 1996.²³ He raised four issues that indicate care is needed in relating theology to environmental studies in an interdisciplinary context. Firstly, he says that there is a need for biblical scholars to be more scientifically aware of the physical environments in which they work. He believes this is necessary to bring out aspects other than the historical and cultural from the texts. Secondly, there is a need for critical self-consciousness when seeking what the bible has to say about nature. The relationship between nature and history needs care as the biblical writers often saw nature as merely background in which events were set. This has important implications as it can be dangerous to read into a text that which is not there when the texts are read from an historical perspective. Thirdly, he warns that ‘there is a danger of oversimplifying the goodness of creation and the evils of cultural existence’.²⁴ He is essentially warning of a simple cause and effect interpretation of matters that are more complex and ambiguous especially where referring to misfortune of a people. Finally, he has concerns about how far we can interpret scripture outside of its anthropocentric nature. He states: “It is very much an open question whether a theology based on a fundamentally anthropocentric scripture can bring us to an awareness that we live on earth ‘on the planet’s terms and not on our terms’.”²⁵ His warnings are pertinent to this study where there is a temptation to read more into the nature aspect of a text than is actually there and that the land texts do not say as much about the environment and ecology as the Earth Bible Project would that like to infer to them.

G. Tucker gives a brief history of Biblical scholarship as related to environmental issues and the various ideologies employed in the study, concluding with some

²³ Gene McAfee. ‘Ecology and Biblical Studies’ in Dieter Hessel (Ed.). *Theology for Earth Community: A Field guide* (New York, Orbis Books, 1996) pp 42-43.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p 42.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p 43.

general ecological reflections on the land in the Old Testament.²⁶ He gives a critique of the Earth Bible Project's hermeneutics, regarding this as a significant development in the interpretation of the bible from an environmental perspective. While he endorses the Principles of the Project he is critical of their presentation. He says that they would be better hermeneutic tools if they were presented in the interrogative rather than the indicative as this would provide a more generic and standardised starting point making the Principles better able to facilitate a dialogue with the biblical texts which are the subject of the inquiry.²⁷ To this end the present study has developed questions for each of the Principles in order to dialogue with the Jeremiah land texts. Using the outline of each principle,²⁸ sometimes with questions posed in the outline, a set of three to five generic questions have been formulated to define the principle more clearly and to enable dialogue with the specific biblical texts.

On further examination of the principles, Tucker sees principles one, two and five as fundamental, if not sufficient in their own right. These concern: intrinsic worth, mutual interdependence and the role of humans in the relationship with earth. In his view, they cover what is fundamental to an eco-theological approach. He has a problem with Principles three and six where the earth voices its cries against injustice and actively resists human injustice. He argues that the personification of earth is too extreme and is becoming anthropocentric by giving earth a 'human' voice.²⁹ These factors are considered in detail in the appropriate chapters where the Jeremiah texts are examined for evidence of the voice of earth and of the earth resisting in its own right. The fourth principle concerns purpose

²⁶ Gene Tucker, *op. cit.*, pp 349- 367.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p 358.

²⁸ Norman C. Habel. (Ed.). 'The Earth Bible, Volume 1', *op. cit.*, pp 42-53.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p 359.

and Tucker says this Principle opens the way for theological reflection.³⁰ Here he concludes that if we hold nature in too high a regard we fall into the danger of worshipping it and this highlights the conflict between Yahwist faith and Canaanite religion. He concludes that this Principle shows a theocentric rather than anthropocentric or geocentric approach.³¹ In the current study the relationship between YHWH, the people and the land is critical when looking at the land texts. However, this has an effect on the whole hermeneutic where suspicion, identification and retrieval are the basis. While they are each linked, Tucker says that suspicion is the most important. Before concluding that we can identify with the earth in the texts and retrieve non-human elements, any evidence that the texts are not anthropocentric or theocentric needs to be very carefully examined and interpreted in the historical context of the time of writing.

The Earth Bible Project has produced three studies directly related to Jeremiah's land texts. S. Wurst³², T. Fretheim³³ and G. Wittenberg³⁴ in addressing the Ecojustice principles have written on Jeremiah and the land texts as they apply specifically to chapter's 4, 12 and 32 respectively. Where their work is relevant to this study it is cited and discussed in the appropriate chapter of this thesis.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p 360.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p 360.

³² Wurst, Shirley. 'Retrieving Earth's Voice in Jeremiah: An Annotated Voicing of Jeremiah 4' in Norman C. Habel, (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 4, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2001).

³³ Terrance E. Fretheim. 'The Earth Story in Jeremiah 12' in Norman C. Habel (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 1, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2000).

³⁴ Wittenberg, Gunther H. 'The Vision of the Land in Jeremiah' in Norman C. Habel, (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 4, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2001) pp 130-131.

The Six Ecojustice Principles of the Earth Bible Project concern intrinsic worth, interconnectedness, voice, purpose, mutual custodianship and resistance.³⁵ Each principle has a heading followed by a summary statement.³⁶ Principle one is the Principle of Intrinsic Worth: The universe, the earth and all of its components have intrinsic worth/value. The principle explores the worth of the components of earth as being part of an ecological system, the duality of earth and heaven and looks for instances where the earth is declared good in the text. Principle two is the Principle of Interconnectedness: Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival. Evidence of a link between humans and the earthly environment, their interaction with creatures and the biological world is generally explored. Principle three is the Principle of Voice: Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice. This principle seeks to retrieve a voice for the earth and evidence of a common bond between humans and the earth. It looks for evidence of the earth being addressed in the text as subject. Principle four is the Principle of Purpose: the Universe, Earth and all its components, are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design. Evidence of the earth functioning according to an inbuilt purpose or design, whether the earth is viewed as a finite resource, and whether there is emphasis on restoration of past life systems or point to transformation form the core of this principle. Principle Five is the Principle of mutual Custodianship: Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers, to sustain a balanced and diverse Earth community. This principle explores humans as custodians or stewards of the land, how this custodianship is worked out and whether it is a mutual partnership and how far the

³⁵ Norman C. Habel. (Ed.). 'The Earth Bible, Volume 1', *op. cit.*, pp 42-53.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p 24.

relationships between earth, people and YHWH are sacred. Principle six is the Principle of Resistance: Earth and its components not only differ from injustices at the hands of human, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice. There are two parts to this principle, firstly, concerning justice where the question is asked whether earth actively or passively resists injustice, and secondly, concerning regeneration, where the issue of renewal of an ecosystem is explored and how far the earth is active in this change.

Each Ecojustice Principle of the Earth Bible Project will now be considered in order with one chapter for each principle. The questions formulated for each principle are discussed using the relevant land texts from the Book of Jeremiah. Conclusions are drawn at the end of each chapter that examine the correlation between the Jeremiah texts and the Ecojustice Principles. The final chapter draws some overall conclusions and observations.

Chapter Two: The Principle of Intrinsic Worth

The first Ecojustice Principle of the Earth Bible Project¹ is the Principle of Intrinsic Worth. Expanded it states: ‘The universe, the earth and all of its components have intrinsic worth/value’. This worth or value is not because the components have utilitarian value for humans living on the planet, nor because they are vehicles that reflect the creator’s handiwork, but they are valuable in themselves. Value is not confined to beings that can relate to the world through the senses nor through their day to day living, but is attached to the whole earth as a complex of ecological systems. Simply being part of these systems that are interconnected, provides a basis for intrinsic value and worth.²

While there can be basic worth in all the earth’s components and interrelated systems there needs to be some basis from which to make that assumption. It is the contention of the Earth Bible Project that earth does have intrinsic value and the Project uses a careful reading of Genesis 1 to ‘retrieve’ the traditions of intrinsic value in earth.³ They conclude that earth’s components are good because YHWH has declared them so, that is, YHWH has invested the earth with intrinsic value. That YHWH has a reaction to what he sees and in how the creation is unfolding testifies to an ecojustice principle way of reading the texts where the earth, the people and YHWH all interact in given situations.

¹ Norman C Habel. (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 1, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2000).

² *Ibid.*, p43.

³ *Ibid.*, p43.

From N. Habel's summary of the first principle⁴ one central question emerges: In the Book of Jeremiah, does the earth, and its components, have value in itself? Three sub questions refer to the expansion of the principle: Is there evidence of earth having worth in itself because its components are part of an ecological system? Does the text reflect a cosmology different from western Christian duality where heaven and earth are totally separate? and, Are there any instances in the text of YHWH declaring the earth or its components good? Following a general introduction to the main question, these issues will be addressed by an examination of the following texts: Jer 1:9-10; 2:7; 4:23-28 and 3:19-20. Jer 11:4a-5 and 32:22 will also be briefly considered.

In the Book of Jeremiah the earth and its components are generally indicated by use of terms for the land ארץ and אדמה. Habel states: "In the Book of Jeremiah, above all, the land is at the heart of a distinctive ideology".⁵ It is in the land that the prophet Jeremiah makes his pronouncements and this is where the people create their environment with a reliance on agriculture. There is also an emphasis in the book on building up cultural landscapes through cities with economic and social activity and these are created on and in the land that is so central to the people (Jer 9:10-11, Jer 32:15). Where there is a difficulty in reading these terms in relation to the ecojustice principles is the conflict between the land valued as a means to an end and where the land has intrinsic value in itself.

To start the textual examination, the authority with which Jeremiah speaks and the language used for his response is clarified in Jer 1:4-10 where YHWH calls

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 42-44.

⁵ Norman C. Habel. *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995) p75.

Jeremiah to the prophetic office. This call gives the subsequent text prophetic authority with Jeremiah speaking on YHWH'S behalf. Of significance to this topic is the use of language that relates to the land where there is some reference to land imagery, at least agricultural images **לְנִתּוֹשׁ וְלְנָתוּץ וְלְהַאֲבִיד וְלְהָרוֹס** *לְנִתּוֹשׁ וְלְנָתוּץ* [to pluck up and to break down, and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant]. This list of infinitives juxtaposes both de-creation and destruction with the possibility of new growth through building and planting thus giving an element of hope for a new start through agricultural productivity that comes after the exiles return. The whole phrase is reiterated in Jer 31:28, and re-echoed in Jer 42:10 as evidence of YHWH's action. The plucking up and breaking down is traditionally associated with the building up and breaking down of national institutions, especially as evidenced is Jer 18:9. The key to the building and planting is in Jer 29:5 and 29:28 where the infinitives are expanded to the building of houses and the planting of gardens so that the produce may be eaten. This shows the land has value when it is productive for agriculture and when there is a cultural landscape present. This does not indicate intrinsic worth, rather worth for what it can do for the people, or utilitarian worth.

The Earth Bible Project claims that intrinsic worth can be identified through the earth's components being part of an ecological system. There is not an emphasis on systems in the Book of Jeremiah yet in some cases connections can be made. One of the central land texts is Jer 2:7 which refers to the goodness of the land into which the Israelites were brought, yet through their own actions they caused problems of degradation by defiling the goodness of YHWH's land. W.

Brueggemann argues that there is nothing wrong with the land, rather it is with the

actions of the people that the fault lies.⁶ The focus on YHWH's agricultural gifts is contrasted with ungrateful abuse of the land which is easily reverts to a 'non-arable worthless wilderness',⁷ reminding the people of what YHWH has done in the past (Jer 2:2). It is important to recognise the use of *hif'il* (causative) verbs underlining that YHWH guided the people in into a plentiful land, that is, he is the giver of the gift of the land.⁸ This YHWH is the creator of the earth and the provider to the Israelites of a good and fruitful land. Here the worth of the land here is through what it is going to do for YHWH's plan and action towards the people and how this works out through the Israelites' response. It has worth to YHWH, but this is not intrinsic worth.

A further aspect for consideration is whether the text reflects a cosmology different from western Christian duality which essentially considers earth and heaven as totally separate. In examining a biblical text in the light of the first ecojustice principle, it is important to ask the question whether the text reflects this kind of dualism that Habel says has been inherited by the western world.⁹ In addressing this, the question is; does the text refer to heaven essentially as pure and spiritual in contrast to the earth which is represented as inferior, corrupt and transitory? Jer 4:23-28 does not represent a different cosmology and tends to reinforce western dualistic thinking. Cosmology when used here refers to the origin, structure and workings of the universe. This text is useful in considering the value of the earth, even though it is from a negative stance. Through all the

⁶ Walter Brueggemann. *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down* Vol. 1, Jer1-25, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1988) p 33.

⁷ Allen, Leslie C. *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) p40.

⁸ William L. Holladay, *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1986) pp 87-88.

⁹ Habel, *The Earth Bible Project* Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p43.

destruction and dismantling of creation there is affirmation of the worth of that which is being destroyed. The writer sees a waste land and the earth responding with mourning to the destruction. The place described in the text was deserted of people and living things and its cities were ruins, all as a result of YHWH's fierce anger and determination to ensure the desolation of the earth because of the sinfulness of the Israelites.¹⁰ J. Lundbom speaks of the great poetic imagination that describes the staggering destruction.¹¹ The lights in heaven may be gone but Jeremiah can still see the mountains, hills, sky and desert. It is the birds and humans that are gone. Lundbom is correct in emphasising that the destruction is not complete. What is missing relates to how the land is viewed by Jeremiah. Land that is uninhabited, not under agriculture and not built up with cities or the infrastructure of commerce is land that is seen to be without worth.¹²

L. Allen refers to the degradation of the cultural landscape, as well as the reversion to cosmic chaos, arguing that this is post fall of Judah rhetoric.¹³ What is described is the degradation of the cultural landscape. The wasteland or emptiness of v 23 is similar to that of Deut 32:10 where the theme is desolate [שממה] land or a wilderness [מרבר] waste land.¹⁴ The loss of cultural landscape is only part of the picture. The text refers to fertile country (v 26), and to birds

¹⁰ This idea is developed further in chapters 5 and 7 where this text is also cited and the dating of its authorship is discussed.

¹¹ Jack L. Lundbom. *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, Doubleday, 1999) p 357.

¹² Walter Brueggemann, *To pluck up, To Tear Down*, Vol. 1., *op. cit.*, p56. Brueggemann views the passage as a step by step dismantling of creation and highlights the similarities between Gen. 1:2 where the words formless and void are used and Jer 4:23 and 25. Void [הוהו], including formlessness linked to wasteland and wilderness, is evidence the creation is not paralleled but thematically linked. This passage highlights the ability of creation to regenerate through it not being destroyed completely.

¹³ Leslie C. Allen. *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, *op. cit.*, p69.

¹⁴ Where wilderness [מרבר] is cited in Jeremiah it has three main similar yet different emphases. In Jer 9:12 it is 'laid waste', in 9:10, 17:6, 50:12 it refers to 'dried up pasture', and in 3:2, 12:10, 31:2 it refers to 'a desolate place'.

(v 25), both natural elements, so when the landscape is described it refers to the absence of the cultural as well as the natural landscape.

R. Carroll describes the destruction as cosmic and assesses the thinking behind it as a trans-historical apocalyptic outlook, especially taking the view that this was written during the exile.¹⁵ He claims convincingly that this text was written after the invasion by Babylon and the destruction of Jerusalem with the benefit of hindsight. The fruitful land had become הַמִּדְבָּר [wilderness] with destruction, Jer 4:26. Yet, in v27 there is still a glimmer of hope for the future.

שְׁמִמָה תִהְיֶה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־הָאֲשֵׁרָה [the whole land will be desolation

but I will not make this the end]. Here there is a critical textual question; is this a full end or not? V 28 contradicts v 27 by saying that YHWH will not repent or turn back or relent on his act of ‘uncreation’. That the destruction did not cause a full end and there was a future indicates a later textual addition of v 27.¹⁶

McKane suggests that the setting of a limit is out of keeping with the flow of Ch 4 and refers to the mourning of the earth and heavens as proleptic, or saying the people will mourn when the desolation is complete.¹⁷ Carroll’s summary view makes the most sense when he states that nature and human kind are seen in a state of disintegration and that there is a link to creation and the text should be read with this link in mind.¹⁸ Its theology is that YHWH is seen as both creator and destroyer.

¹⁵ Robert P. Carroll. *Jeremiah, A Commentary*, Vol. 1, (Sheffield, Phoenix Press, 1986), p 168.

¹⁶ The theme of not doing away with creation is also evident in Jer 5:10 and 5:18.

¹⁷ William McKane. *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, Vol. 1, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1986) p 109.

¹⁸ Robert P. Carroll. *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p168.

With YHWH in control there is no room for a cosmology that is different from a separate heaven and earth and a hierarchical view of the universe. In Jer 4:28 the heavens grow black as a result of YHWH's action. In Jer 12:12 the sword of YHWH is seen as devouring the land. In both instances the deity seems to be hierarchical and separated from earth through being 'above' earth. Here dominion over the earth seems to be the way of YHWH and there is no evidence of a posture of empathy and partnership with the earth, so this quest of the Earth Bible Project¹⁹ cannot be realised here.

After the destruction of Babylon and when the land is returned to the Israelites in Jer 33:11b-12, it is seen as having value once more because it is to be productive and is able to sustain life again. Its worth is clearly defined within the existing worldview of heaven and earth as separate, with YHWH as the one who wills all into existence and is dominant over creation, and de-creation in this case. This is not intrinsic worth.

The strongest argument for the land having intrinsic worth in Jeremiah is that YHWH declares this so through declaring that the earth and its components are good. Three formula phrases can be identified in Jeremiah that address this, the 'good' or 'garden land', the 'land flowing with milk and honey' and 'a pleasant land, the most beautiful heritage'. The reference in Jer 2:7 to **הַכְּרִמָּה** [a land of plenty or a garden land] is further developed in Jer 11:5 and 32:22, where the land is described in terms of **אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וְדָבָשׁ** [a land flowing with milk

¹⁹ Habel, *The Earth Bible Project* Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p42.

and honey].²⁰ This phrase when used extensively to describe the land given to Israel²¹ can be interpreted as a formula phrase, one that is recurrent in the Hebrew Scriptures.²² The phraseology is particularly Deuteronomistic and reflects a tradition which is prominent in Jeremiah. The phrase implies a land that is basically good, has value and worth for what it can do for the people, but this is not intrinsic worth. It is a land capable of producing crops for Israel's sustenance. The disasters that became of the land were because of the actions of the people, not because of a faulty creation, nor of a fault in the creator or agency of creation, making the land potentially good, provided it could be made usable after the destruction.

The final phraseology reflecting worth in the land is found in Jer 3:19-20 where not only is the land a gift to the people, it is said to be a 'pleasant and beautiful land'. Being pleasant and beautiful the land perhaps indicates intrinsic worth, but this is speculation. נְחֻלָּה here refers to the land with the superlative meaning of 'the most glorious of all the lands',²³ that is, 'a pleasant land, the most beautiful heritage of all the nations'. These verses use family imagery to describe the relationship between the people and YHWH, with disobedience being described as a faithless wife in v20. The ideal has been set down but this has been spoilt by the actions of the Israelites. Basic worth and value is established, (v 19), but this is because YHWH declares it to be so, not because of its own intrinsic value.

²⁰ Robert P. Carroll, *op. cit.*, p 267, states that the phrase derives from Canaanite ritual descriptions of the land.

²¹ See Deut. 6:3, 11:9; 26:9 & 15; 27:3; 31:20 and Exod. 3:8 & 17 and 13:5.

²² Other instances: Ex 3:8 & 17; 13:5; Deut 6:3; 11:9; 26:9 & 15; 27:3 and 31:20.

²³ *Ibid.*, p122. [The parallels with 2:7 and the etymological context are clearly drawn by Holladay in his discussion of 3:19.]

The use of pleasant and beautiful in reference to the land, however, is in keeping with the garden imagery of growth and of agricultural abundance that describes the land as discussed in 2:7 above. Associated with this is the inherent value of the land itself where it is to be cared for and handed on as an example for other nations to observe. The word **הַמְּנוּחָה** [pleasant] has connotations of loveliness and excellence, although this is not common phraseology in Jeremiah.²⁴ Other synonyms for **הַמְּנוּחָה** mean a thing desirable, precious or beloved of women, all in keeping with describing something of value, wholesome or good.²⁵ While this language can be used of the land that is productive and inhabited it cannot be used when it is unproductive or has become a wilderness.

In conclusion, the land provides an environment for economic and agricultural prosperity and as such has value in what it can do for the people and as a vehicle for YHWH's plan for them, but this is not intrinsic value. The western dualism of a separate heaven and earth permeates the Book of Jeremiah. There is a clear hierarchy of YHWH being in control and the people using the land to achieve their purposes, which were sometimes at odds with those of YHWH. When describing the land specifically there are portions of the text that claim it is 'good' and its productivity and ability to sustain rural and cultural pursuits is evident. However, using the Earth Bible Project's definition of intrinsic worth the texts do not reflect this view. Ecosystems are only superficially referred to through the agricultural use of the land and the existence of birds, animals and humans and are not explained. There is no evidence for any cosmology other than YHWH being in control of the earth but being separate from it. While there is evidence that the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p122.

²⁵ William L. Holladay (Ed.). *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1988) p 108.

land is basically good with YHWH declaring it so, this does not imply that the earth has its own intrinsic worth.

Chapter Three: The Principle of Interconnectedness

The second Ecojustice Principle of the Earth Bible Project¹ is the Principle of Interconnectedness. This principle states that: “Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival”. Central to this principle is the concept of the earth being a web of complex relationships where every species and every member of every species is connected to others. This is in contrast to the view that the earth is a controlled mechanical structure consisting of independent parts governed by natural laws.² Animals and humans are also dependent on plants for survival and all living creatures are connected in some way to the whole complex of the earth environment. While this thinking underpins the ecological movement and the Earth Bible Project, two other aspects of interconnectedness are central. Firstly, there is the aspect of traditional western thought that is anthropocentric where it is assumed that humans are creatures of a different order, being the creators of culture with their mind, reason, soul and language. Other forms of life are believed to be inferior. The Earth Bible Project argues that interpretations of given texts in the past have been anthropocentric where the rest of the earth community, other than humans, and including the earth itself have been regarded as inferior creations. As a result, when biblical texts are approached there is an expectation that humans will be exalted over other creatures, even if their writers do not reflect this ‘sharp dualism of western thought’.³ Secondly, there is the

¹ Norman C. Habel. (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 1, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2000).

² *Ibid.*, p 40. I am defining natural laws as the physical scientific laws as we know now that govern the earth’s rotation around the sun and other scientific axioms that govern how the earth works physically.

³ *Ibid.*, p 45.

invitation by the Earth Bible Project to read texts with a view to retrieving alternative traditions, that is, specifically to look for affirmation of an interconnection and interdependence between the domains of the biological world, as well as between the earth and humans.

The Book of Jeremiah is written from a perspective that is not a modern ecological approach. There are, however, opportunities to examine some textual references to ascertain whether they do reflect an ecojustice perspective.

Specifically, the texts that highlight certain aspects of the principle are Jer: 3:2b-3; 6:8; 7:33-34; 16:1-4, 17-18; 19:7; 31:27 and 14:4-6, 22. Three questions are posed for these texts: Is there evidence of a web of relationships rather than simply mechanical structure, for example, humans being dependent on forests and trees, as part of the earth community? Is there any evidence of humans not being exalted over creatures? and, Is there any affirmation of interconnection and interdependence between the biological world and humans?

Interconnectedness encompasses relationship and connection. Cause and effect, or action and consequence, as well as prediction and result, permeate Jeremiah. There is a simple relationship between basic cause and effect, or action and consequence, Jer 3:2b-3; 6:8 and 14:4 are concerned with action and consequence and demonstrate a web of relationship. In 3:2b-3 there are two forms of connectedness. Firstly, there is the connection between the apostasy of the Israelites and the withholding of the rain that is necessary for the growth of their crops, their food supply being reliant on a yearly agricultural cycle. Secondly, there is the implied connection between the withholding of the rain and the subsequent impact on the people through there being no crops to harvest. That the

connection is real is highlighted by the use of two words for rain; showers **רְבִיבִים** and late rain **מִלְקוֹשׁ** indicating the yearly seasonal pattern that was relied upon for grain to be grown.⁴

Similarly, connectedness is demonstrated through prophetic warning in Jer 6:8 which results in the consequence of desolation and there is a connection between future action and the effect on the land. The imperative form is used to call Jerusalem to take advice, or to take warning, as the people can still repent. If they do not, then the place that they occupy will be changed and they will be unable to survive. The desolation is the ceasing of culture and economy, of agriculture and commerce, which is what the desolate land describes. The uninhabited land is where there is no activity and this is seen as inferior to where there is normal activity. So with the action and consequence the web of relationships is established and interconnectedness between their environment, YHWH and the people's actions is demonstrated.

The 'great drought liturgy', Jer 14:1-6, provides specific connection. The lack of rain created issues for the farmers, or ploughmen, but the drought was caused by the actions of the people resulting in YHWH's action and the people had to live with the consequences. The interconnection can be seen between the cracked or dried up earth, the inability to plant due to the lack of rain and the state of the

⁴ Robert P. Carroll. *Jeremiah, A Commentary*, Vol. 1, (Sheffield, Phoenix Press, 1986), p 143. There is another connection here that R.Carroll describes as an irony. The fertility cults connected with Baal worship, which he believes is the actuality of the fornication and wickedness described, were designed to ensure the continuance of the cycle of nature and that the sowing, growth and reaping of the crops were all under the aegis of the local baals representing the god Baal. He adds that there was an exception in Israel and Judah where the role of Baal was attributed to YHWH. This interpretation he says was anathema to the Deuteronomistic writers and the exile was viewed as a result of such syncretism, hence the droughts were blamed on it. He says that therein lies the irony: "The very cult that was supposed to guarantee crops and fertility was the cause of aridity and blight."

ground and the subsequent lack of harvest and shortage of food. This verse shows that the agricultural life cycle has been disrupted and each aspect affects each other aspect thus describing an interconnection or a web of life, regardless of cause.

The agricultural life cycle as a living system is acknowledged in Jer 14:22 where the idols are seen as incapable of influencing the seasons.⁵ There is also an acknowledgement that the necessary rains do not automatically, or mechanically, come. There is another factor or force in evidence here and this is YHWH who causes the showers. Carroll interprets this verse as the rain being caused by the god or gods, including YHWH, who when the people were faithful to him, caused rain on the earth.⁶ W. McKane, however, does not connect this verse with drought but sets it in a military context where rain is needed to cleanse the landscape from its desolation by warfare.⁷ While Carroll's argument is the stronger, since it highlights the connection between the deity and meteorological consequences, the connection to nature is still very much in evidence in both interpretations. V 22 is significant as it grounds in the Book of Jeremiah within a world view where YHWH is the essential cause and, while 'his' actions do not happen mechanically, and there is connection between effects on earth and YHWH, and this cannot be read as interdependence.

The issue concerning interdependence and inter-connection follows on from simple connectedness.. Jer 7:33-34; 16:1-4; 16:17-18 and 14:4-6 are concerned

⁵ These idols refer to worship of the baal(s).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 318.

⁷ William A. McKane. *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, Vol. 1, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1986) p 333, and Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) p 175.

with prediction and consequence, as distinct from action and consequence previously discussed. The key ideas are all present in Jer 7:33-34 where connection between the biological and the human world is identified. Because the people had continued to practice apostasy, the warnings of what would happen finally did eventuate and the land was laid waste and the exile to Babylon left a trail of death and destruction. These verses describe what actually happened, suggesting this is a later text. The consequence did occur after the warnings and predictions so there is interconnection through action and result. Interconnection can be seen between the biological world and the human world, with the corpses of humans becoming food for animals. This text shows that the normal balance of nature is no longer present, as demonstrated by the absence of people frightening away the wild animals to restore order and safety. Yet, in this context, the normal balance of nature is the domination of humans over the animals. A further environmental consideration is the lack of sound, [קִינָה], heard in the place. The sounds of ordinary life and living things has connection with normal routine, and the cycle of seasons and the web of life has been stopped. Yet the lack of sound is the lack of human sound created through normal cultural pursuits, reinforcing a view where humans are exalted over creatures.

That the land will become a waste, [קִרְבָּה], indicates an agricultural perspective on the future where there will be a dearth of conditions favourable for growth of plants. People will not be protected and the connections between YHWH, earth and people will have ceased for a time. When analyzing the word קִרְבָּה the sense is of a place that is waste, desolate or in ruins. When referring to the land it is

more of a waste place amid ruins.⁸ From this it may seem that the cultural landscape is the one that is devastated and the natural bushland or grasses may still be in evidence. This interpretation is at odds with the essence of the Earth Bible Project which sees value in the natural environment where the balance of nature is an ideal to be preserved. In the texts addressing this question the balance is disrupted through the cessation of normal human activity.

Similarly, Jer 16:1-4 has themes of famine, dead bodies, death and destruction. The animals are described as feasting on the dead bodies of the Israelites.⁹ A further shock is revealed in the call not to marry nor have children because of the danger of the prediction becoming a reality.¹⁰ There is connection between animals and humans but this is seen as human indignity rather than as a progression of the natural order where the animals begin to dominate the human landscape. The destruction of the normal order is given a reason in Jer 16:18b. Here the dead bodies refer to the idols that have been worshipped, especially in the form of fertility gods. Thus there is destruction and the normal way of life in the land has been interrupted. The focus is on the actions of the people rather than any reaction from the natural world.

⁸ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, & Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1907, reprinted with corrections 1959) p 352b.

⁹ Jack L. Lundbom. *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, Doubleday, 1999) p 499, reports that lack of proper burial was a great indignity in antiquity and was even considered a curse (Deut 28:26).

¹⁰ Holladay, William L. *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1986), p 469. states that childlessness suggests unworthiness and marriage is part of the created order.

It is significant that 7:33-34; 16:1-4 and 16:17-18 are all prose. McKane dates the Ch 16 references as exilic,¹¹ although Carroll is not as definite.¹² Jer 7:33-34, with its clear links to Deut 28:26, references the exile and is possibly the work of an exilic editor. Here reasons are being given for the exile and its onset is being justified.¹³ There is some connection and purpose found for the exile, but this concerns the actions of the people and the effect on the land as a result, rather than having a connection to the way humans and animals are treated.¹⁴

The idea of humans not being exalted over other creatures is a modern concept and outside the worldview of the time of the writing of Jeremiah. An illustration of people not being exalted over humans is found in Jer 19:7. Where ‘this place’ is, whether it be the temple, city or the land, Torpeth or Jerusalem,¹⁵ is not relevant here, it is simply showing that once the relationship between YHWH, people and land has been compromised, the people are treated as not being any more or less than part of the animal world. It is an indignity for the people, but in this context YHWH is not exalting humans over animals or the biological world generally. Another example is Jer 31:27 which demonstrates a non anthropocentric interpretation. The term **בהמה**, meaning beast or animal in a general sense, or wild animals in particular, is interpreted in this context as the animal world and it can be seen as alongside the human beings in equal part in YHWH’s created biological world. It can be argued that not all of the Book of Jeremiah is anthropocentric in nature and that some verses point to this, however,

¹¹ William McKane. A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, pp 368 & 377.

¹² Robert P. Carroll. Jeremiah, A Commentary, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p 68.

¹³ William McKane. A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p 180.

¹⁴ Jer 14:4-6 also demonstrates the Principle of Interconnectedness but this text will be dealt with in detail in chapter five when discussing the Principle of Purpose.

¹⁵ Robert P. Carroll, Jeremiah, A Commentary, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p 388.

the small number of texts that this interpretation is relying on show that it does not have a strong claim in the rest of the book.

In summary, interconnectedness is demonstrated through relationships which are more than mechanical cause and effect. The connection between the seasons and agriculture is clear. The actions of the people cause YHWH to act through punishing them and this causes environmental destruction. There is a breakdown of relationships between the earth and the people as well as with YHWH. This is most clearly demonstrated in the prose texts that describe what has occurred and there is clearly a link between the actions of the people and the resultant actions of YHWH. These are not demonstrating a modern eco-theological approach yet the consequences are seen in the affect on the agricultural activities of the people. There is interconnectedness which is not mechanical but this is interdependent with YHWH as the ultimate cause of what happens, although the actions of the people can influence this intervention.

Chapter Four: The Principle of Voice

The third Ecojustice Principle of the Earth Bible Project¹ is the Principle of Voice in summary: ‘Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice’.² There is a growing consciousness amongst ecologists that the earth itself is a living entity and functions more as a live organism rather than as a machine. The Earth Bible Project sees the interconnectedness of all living ecosystems into a super ecosystem, that is, the earth as an all embracing organism.³ From this they use the term ‘earth language’ to describe the earth’s living response. They claim that the earth as a living entity does have a certain voice of its own. The key question for this chapter is: ‘Does the earth have a voice and a language of its own in Jeremiah?’

In answering this question the issue of which language is used needs consideration. When the earth is spoken of as a living entity, there is a tendency to impose human categories upon a non-human reality.⁴ However, it must be realized that there is a need for some language to describe what is being spoken or sounded so it is impossible not to use some form of human language when describing the language or voice of earth. The Earth Bible Project does not imply that the earth speaks with a human voice or human language but with what they call ‘earth language’ which, ‘like human body language, may be physical and a consequence of orientation, rather than aural and a consequence of sound waves.’⁵

¹ Norman C. Habel. (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 1, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2000).

² *Ibid.*, p 46.

³ Norman C. Habel. (Ed.). ‘The Earth Bible’, Vol 1, *op. cit.*, p 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p46.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p47.

Earth quakes would come into this category of earth language. The Project specifically quotes Jer 12:4 where the writer hears the earth mourning. Much is made of this phrase which will be developed later in this chapter, yet it is always recognized that the language used in Jeremiah is anthropomorphic. Whether the earth can be read as a living entity is a difficult argument to sustain given the limited number of references to such activity in Jeremiah. The Earth Bible Project suggests that biblical interpretation has by and large tended to silence the language of earth and thus it is a challenge to look at texts in a new light and to retrieve the voice of the earth. This is difficult if the interpreter is trying to retrieve something that does not appear to be part of the writer's intention. It then becomes laboured and difficult to find evidence of earth's voice in a text where the writer has only a limited concept of the earth having its own voice. It is important that retrieval does not become an imposed perspective on the text.

Finally, to consider the earth as subject: "Presents a formidable challenge to our traditional conceptions of Earth and the non-human components of the earth community as objects, devoid of the consciousness, soul, mind, and the form of language that humans possess".⁶ To take this further, and consider the concept of an earth with human characteristics of language and consciousness, poses difficulty when approaching the texts from Jeremiah where such thinking is within the world view of the author(s), yet with considerable limitation. Thus, while the texts can be examined for evidence, there is every possibility that this will not exist, but the danger is that it will be imposed through an interpretation that assumes these features.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p47.

The questions posed: Is there any evidence of the earth being viewed as a living entity where earth is seen as an all encompassing organism? Do any of the texts show the earth having a voice and a language of its own? and, Does the text reflect an understanding of a common bond between humans and non- humans? By way of answering these there will be a search to find a voice for earth in Jer 4:13-22, consideration of the earth as subject in Jer 6:19; 22:29; 4:28; 12:4 and 23:10, and an examination the earth's language of response in Jer 8:16; 10:10 and 51:29.

If earth does have a voice then there needs to be some substantial textual evidence to show that the earth is responding in its own right to what is happening and has some influence on the outcome. S. Wurst,⁷ a contributor to the Earth Bible Project, believes that by unpacking the complex voicing of Jer 4 a unique voice for earth can be found. As a basis she treats as equal partners each member of the tripartite symbiosis, YHWH, people and earth, going further than N. Habel who identifies simply that in the text of Jeremiah a tripartite symbiosis exists.⁸ Symbiosis⁹ is essentially a living together of co-existence and does not imply an equal partnership between the participants only that each effects the other in some way when there is activity. As such it can be argued that the earth does not need a voice of its own to be part of the tripartite symbiosis and earth can be a silent or passive partner in the relationship.

⁷ Shirley Wurst. 'Retrieving Earth's Voice in Jeremiah: An Annotated Voicing of Jeremiah 4' in Norman C. Habel, (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 4, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2001) p 177.

⁸ Habel, Norman C. *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995) pp 75-76.

⁹ Scientifically, symbiosis is the living together of two species of organisms. The term symbiosis (from the Greek: σύν *syn* "with"; and βίωσις *biosis* "living") commonly describes close and often long-term interactions between different biological species. The term was first used in 1879 by the German mycologist Heinrich Anton de Bary, who defined it as "the living together of unlike organisms." The symbiotic relationship may be categorized as mutualistic, commensal, or parasitic in nature. [From public domain dictionary sources].

Wurst attempts to retrieve the voice of earth in Jer 4. She states clearly at the beginning that reading the text in a new way requires a re-visioning or seeing the text in a new way.¹⁰ She also extends Habel's definition of symbiosis. In an earlier work Habel applies the concept to the intimate bond that exists between YHWH, the people, Israel, and the land. He states: "YHWH is bound to both land and people. The land seems to be personified as a third party in this relationship."¹¹ In a later work he adds: "The ideology of the book of Jeremiah promotes what might best be described as a symbiotic relationship among YHWH, the land, and the people of Israel".¹² It is the threefold interaction that makes the symbiotic concept one that is particularly relevant to an eco-theology where there is responsibility together with cause and effect, all relating to an ecological balance on the earth. Symbiosis, when taken broadly to mean living together or in close relationship, is particularly relevant as a concept to the land texts in Jeremiah, even if the relationship between people, YHWH and the land is not an even nor consistent one.

For Wurst to retrieve an active voice for earth she needs to interpret symbiosis as a living together in a mutuality where each of the partners are exposed to the actions of each other. The partners are susceptible to their own weaknesses and when one suffers they each suffer.¹³ In such an understanding she is giving the earth a living voice. Wurst adds that each of the participants in the relationship are dependent on connection for their survival and through this connection they

¹⁰ Shirley Wurst, 'Retrieving Earth's Voice in Jeremiah', *op. cit.*, p 172.

¹¹ Norman C. Habel. 'The Suffering Land: Ideology in Jeremiah' in *Lutheran Theological Journal* Vol.26, No.1, (May 1992) p 24.

¹² Norman C. Habel. *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995) pp 75-76.

¹³ Shirley Wurst, 'Retrieving Earth's Voice in Jeremiah' *op. cit.*, p177.

become vulnerable.¹⁴ She associates feelings with all the participants and turns them into characters in a short dramatic play presented in the style of Shakespeare, where Jeremiah, YHWH, Israel and Judah each are players and have a speaking role. Looking specifically at Jer 4:13-22 with earth as a player, she finds a voice for earth in vv 13d, 19, 20b and 21.

Examining Jer 4:13-22 as a unit, the voicing is not always clear and different commentators attribute different voices to certain verses. R. Carroll suggests that the reason for the confusion is that this text is part of a collection of short poems with the various authors adding the concerns of their own situation.¹⁵ Vv 13-14 have Jeremiah addressing the people describing the invading army and calling on the community in Jerusalem to cleanse itself. Vv 15-18, as the invaders travel south, warnings come to Judah and Jerusalem. V 17b gives the cause of the invasion. Vv 19-22 is a poem of communal anguish.¹⁶ The 'I' in these verses is Jeremiah identifying with his people. V 22 is possibly a later addition where YHWH reflects on the situation. The key issue in determining the voicing is who gives the order that the message is to be proclaimed.¹⁷ If it is accepted that Jeremiah is the speaker in v 13 then he is also the speaker in vv 14-15. Vv 16-18 are the voice of YHWH. Vv 19-21 are the voice of Jeremiah who is personally identifying with his people in the form of a community lament, with YHWH speaking the concluding verse, v 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 173.

¹⁵ Robert P Carroll. *Jeremiah, A Commentary*, Vol. 1, (Sheffield, Phoenix Press, 1986) p 164-7, Carroll divides the text into three stanzas 4:13-14; 15-18; and 19-22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p167.

¹⁷ William McKane, *op. cit.*, p 100.

Wurst gives earth a voice in v 13d where she has all the characters speaking together, W. Holliday¹⁸ has this as the people speaking, and W. McKane¹⁹ as Jeremiah. It is the 'us' that is somewhat ambiguous.²⁰ The verse reads best with Jeremiah as the speaker describing the rapid advance of the enemy, and in v 13d he is replying in the first person plural on behalf of his fellow citizens, in the style of a community lament.²¹

The key earth voice passage as suggested by Wurst is v 19 where the anguish, the pain and the beating of the heart with the inability to keep silence, is in fact the earth who is breaking out of its passivity and presenting its feelings on the situation. Both McKane and Holliday, however, see this verse as the voice of Jeremiah, who is suffering personal anguish. The heart is a human organ producing human emotion and in this context there is no additional evidence to link it with the earth in any way. V 19d however, could be attributed to the voice of earth as this is the setting for the action, but it is unlikely as it follows directly in the context of Jeremiah speaking and there is no reason here for a change of voice. For it to be earth speaking, earth would need to be able to hear and listen, human characteristics, which have not been attributed to the earth previously in the text. V 20a reverts to Jeremiah in all interpretations since this is the voice of narration.

¹⁸ William L. Holladay. *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1986) pp 159-160.

¹⁹ William McKane. *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, Vol. 1, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1986) pp 96-101.

²⁰ There is also similar confusion on who is speaking in 14b, YHWH or Jeremiah, but this does not concern earth.

²¹ Leslie C. Allen. *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) p 66. Carroll, *op. cit.*, p 164, refers to v 13d as a communal response after the prophet has described the advance of the enemy. Jack L. Lundbom. *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, Doubleday, 1999) p 345, has Jeremiah as speaker sounding the alarm of everyone, including himself. He refers to the use of the verb, שִׁדְדָנוּ [we are devastated] being in form the beginning a community lament, similar to Jer 9:19.

Wurst then suggests vv 20b and 21 as earth speaking, whereas the traditional voicing is that of Jeremiah. The voicing of v 20b which speaks of the destruction of tents is not altogether clear and could be that of earth as this is where the action is taking place. However, if the tents refer to dwellings in the land of Judah,²² thus being part of what Jeremiah sees as the cultural landscape in destruction, then this strengthens the case for the speaker to be Jeremiah. V 21, also in v 19d, refers to the standard and the sound of the trumpet but this time through the sense of sight, again describing a human characteristic. As well, v 21 is in the first person singular fitting the context of Jeremiah as speaker and the ‘I’ represents Jeremiah’s identification with his people.²³ While there is a chance that it could be the earth speaking, this is unlikely as it has not previously been established that the earth has any sort of voice. One ambiguous instance of possibility does not make a case for the earth having its own voice. While Wurst’s approach is creative and novel, the outcome is limited since by using human characters she makes these equal each with human limitations and this does not reflect the interaction of the symbiotic partners, where they are not in equal relationship.

There are two references in the Book of Jeremiah where the earth is addressed as subject, that is, the ‘person’ to whom the verb ‘hear’ [שמע] is addressed. The first is Jer 6:19: שִׁמְעִי הָאֲרֶזֶת [Hear O earth...]. This text gives the reason for the disaster that is to be brought on the people, that is, that they have not obeyed YHWH’s laws. In this instance the earth is addressed as subject, but the critical question is to whom does the term אֲרֶזֶת refer? Allen sees this as a rhetorical call

²² Jack L. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20, op. cit.*, p 353.

²³ Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary, op. cit.*, p167.

issued to the world to witness YHWH's words of threat against Israel and that they are heading for disaster.²⁴ McKane gives the translation of v18 as: 'Therefore hear O nations, and note well what I shall do to them'.²⁵ Here those addressed are the inhabitants of earth rather than the earth itself.²⁶ However, the form is that of a covenant lawsuit where a charge is brought in a courtroom against the people by YHWH and the nations and earth are addressed as witnesses.²⁷ While the earth is not the speaker it is the subject of the address by the speaker. V 19 parallels v 18 by addressing different witnesses, v 18 the nations and v 19 the earth. This does not give the earth a voice of its own but it does provide a case where the earth is addressed in its own right with the understanding that it can hear. A similar instance occurs in Jer 2:12 where YHWH is addressing the heavens as the representative of the cosmic powers who are witnesses of the law court scene.²⁸

The second instance where the earth is addressed is the dramatic exclamation in Jer 22:29: אֲרֶץ אֲרֶץ אֲרֶץ שְׁמַעִי יְהוָה דְּבַר־יְהוָה [O land, land, land, hear the word of YHWH.] Holliday states that this verse is communicating a summons for the earth to pay attention,²⁹ Carroll suggests a ritual act or incantation,³⁰ but the stronger argument is that of Lundbom who sees the phrase as personification of the land where the land is called upon to be a witness to the divine word spoken to

²⁴ Leslie C. Allen, *op. cit.*, p 88.

²⁵ William McKane, *op. cit.*, p 150.

²⁶ A similar meaning of the 'earth' referring to 'inhabitants of earth' is found in Isaiah 1:2 and Micah 6:1-2. In both these cases the earth is a witness to the accusations made by YHWH.

²⁷ Jer 6:18-19a are a summons to the cosmic witnesses of YHWH's quarrel with Israel. These witnesses are the nations and the earth and they are to hear the judgement of YHWH. Looking at Jer 6:16-26, accusations and judgement are delivered and these are witnessed. Also in evidence is the response of the people, [vv 24-25] and the response of the prophet [v 26], Holliday, *op. cit.*, p 218 and p220.

²⁸ Holliday, *op. cit.*, p 91.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p 611.

³⁰ Robert P. Carroll, *op. cit.*, p 440.

the people.³¹ The repetition of ארץ [*land*] three times is for dramatic emphasis and highlights the importance of hearing the word of YHWH. Again the earth is called on to be a witness to the word of YHWH, in this instance in the context of the judgement on Jehoiachin. The earth is not being disobedient to the law, rather, it is a passive bystander which serves as a vehicle for the message of YHWH, through Jeremiah, to the people. The earth is addressed as if it can hear and be a witness but the message is for the people.

As previously stated, the references to the land, or earth,³² mourning in Jeremiah are seen by the Earth Bible Project as key in maintaining that the earth has its own voice. T. Fretheim goes as far as to state, in reference to Jer 4:28; 12:4; 12:11 and 23:10 that the land mourns to YHWH and this demonstrates that it has a relationship with YHWH that is independent of the relationship between YHWH and the human.³³ Each of these references show the earth or the land responding to the actions of YHWH which are a result of the actions of the people. Mourn [אבל] can be read as a term of lament although in this case it has connotations of drying up. Allen sees mourning as a metaphor for infertility and drought.³⁴ Drought can be seen as nature's response to human wickedness and the earth itself does take on a different character being non-productive and, as described in 12:4, where vegetation dries up and there is more sign of death than life. However, as Lundbom states, the mourning land in 4:28 refers to an image of ruined cities

³¹ Jack L. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20, op. cit.*, p 162.

³² In the Book of Jeremiah 'land' and 'earth' tend to be used synonymously. (See Ch 1).

³³ Terrance E. Fretheim. 'The Earth Story in Jeremiah 12' in Habel, Norman C. (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 1, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2000) P 99.

³⁴ Leslie C. Allen. *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) p 264.

rather than the landscape of withered and brown grass.³⁵ The importance of the cultural landscape together with an agriculturally prosperous land usage is the opposite of wilderness and the land mourning refers to the lack of human activity rather than its state of readiness for plant growth. Fretheim argues that when the earth mourns it is being referred to as a subject and he sees the land joining with Jeremiah in mourning the actions of the people.³⁶ This is the strongest argument for earth being seen as an entity in its own right and having an independent voice. While there is some merit in this argument, the earth is being totally reactive to the actions of YHWH and the people and the mourning is metaphorical rather than literal action. Earth does not have an independent voice in influencing the protagonists and is still the setting for human and divine interaction.

In searching for evidence of the land's own voice and of a response in its own right, the texts that refer to the earth's own body language are now examined; Jer 8:16, 10:10, and 51:29. The ground shakes at the sound of horses Jer 8:16, the earth quakes at YHWH's wrath in Jer 10:10, and the land trembles and writhes in response to YHWH's action in Jer 51:29. In the first two references רעש [quake] is used to describe the extent of the action. The earth responds through shaking, trembling or moving and each of these are responses to the horses describing the enemy from the North, 8:16, and the resultant fury of YHWH in 10:10. The quaking could equally refer to the actual thundering of hoofs on the ground as the horses run through the land. These responses are an echo of what is happening rather than the earth itself being an active participant in any action. Other responsive terms are used in Jer 51:29. Tremble is from the same root as quake

³⁵ Lundbom, Jeremiah 1-20, *op. cit.*, p 361.

³⁶ Fretheim, 'The Earth Story in Jeremiah 12', *op. cit.*, p104.

[רעש] and writhe is from the root היל which has as sense of tremble or of being pained, responding with some agonising movement.³⁷ This is really metaphorical language as YHWH's purposes are not achieved through earth movement, although the land of Babylon will become desolate as YHWH's purposes are achieved. It does not in any way give the earth an independent voice. The context of this text is that Babylon will be destroyed because of the evil done to the people of Israel. The land mourning and the land quaking are best seen as personification or poetic imagery. They do give evidence of the earth being in tune with the action, but this is sympathetic background rather than the earth having a voice or personality of its own.

The Earth Bible Project argues that earth does have a voice and that prophets like Jeremiah may be mediators of earth's communication and express this through anthropomorphic language.³⁸ The evidence that the present study has examined identifies metaphor and personification. The earth is addressed as subject with the implied ability to hear, but this does not give it its own voice. Finding evidence of a common bond between humans and non-humans is difficult and seems to be outside the scope of the text of the Book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is perceptive to the responses of earth and does demonstrate elements of the symbiotic relationship between YHWH, people and land. In some cases earth is shown responding to the plight of the people and of YHWH's actions but the texts do not point to it having an independent voice. Earth is the responsive but dependent partner in the relationship and is not represented as possessing a biological life of

³⁷ William L. Holladay. *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah, Chapters 26-52* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1989) p 427.

³⁸ Norman C. Habel (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 4, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2001) p 26.

its own, it cannot regulate its own environment, and it cannot respond without its partnership with YHWH and its inhabitants, the humans.

Chapter Five: The Principle of Purpose

The fourth Ecojustice Principle of the Earth Bible Project¹ is the Principle of Purpose. This principle states that: “The universe, earth and all its components, are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design”.² The concept that the earth is a complex of ecosystems all interacting with each other is central. Within these there is an inbuilt design or purpose and it follows that the earth is not random and demonstrates the greater purpose of a creator, in the Book of Jeremiah this is assumed to be YHWH. The Earth Bible view of creation is stated as: “All the pieces of these ecosystems form a design and reflect a direction. The design is a magnificent green planet called Earth and the direction is to sustain life in all its diversity and beauty”.³ This is perhaps an idealised view of creation but the centrality of connecting ecosystems and inbuilt design and purpose form a basis from which to get to the heart of the Principle of Purpose.

From this broad introduction, two questions emerge that can be applied to Jeremiah’s land texts to test whether they support this eco-theological reading, or whether there are some issues of extent and meaning that do not align with contemporary thinking. The questions are: ‘Is there any textual evidence of the earth functioning according to an inbuilt purpose and design?’ and ‘Do the texts point to individual parts of the earth community having a design and reflecting a direction that sustains life in all its beauty?’ In seeking textual evidence to answer

¹ Norman C. Habel. (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 1, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2000).

² *Ibid.*, p 48.

³ *Ibid.*, pp 48-49.

these questions Jer 14:1-6 and 31:35-36 reference design and Jer 2:7 and 9:10-11 reference beauty and sustaining life.

Two other issues that the Earth Bible Project raise in relation to the Principle of Purpose concern eschatology and future transformation. With a background of concern for the depletion of earth's natural resources, Habel asks when reading the Hebrew Scriptures whether there is a different view of the future. He asks if there is an alternative outlook demonstrated that does not involve the assumption that at the end of times the earth will become waste, destroyed in 'God's cosmic incinerator'.⁴ In the Jeremiah texts the question needs to be asked; does the writer reflect this view of the end of times or does earth have another ultimate purpose and design? The Book of Jeremiah is not an apocalyptic book, yet there is possibly some evidence for an eschatological perspective. The question asked is: 'Does the text reflect a view that the earth is disposable?' In answer to this question Jer 9:9-10 and 4:23-28 will be examined. The second issue concerns asking afresh how the Hebrew Scriptures understand the life cycles of earth? The crucial point is whether the purpose and direction of life on earth reflects the pattern of life established by YHWH. Also, is there an alternative to a mechanical model of life cycles being controlled by the creator without any deviation, or input, from humans on earth? In this thesis the question posed is: 'Does the text focus on restoration of past life systems or does it lean towards liberation and transformation?' This is addressed through a discussion of Jer 32:37-41.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 49.

The whole of Jer 14:1-6 concerns drought and is often titled ‘the great drought liturgy’ even though there is no strong evidence that it was ever a liturgy.⁵ However, it does outline connectedness between water and the seasons, and it does allude to interlocking ecosystems. When these systems cease to function as planned there is a breakdown in balance resulting in a catastrophic event such as a drought. Vv 1-6 describe such an event and, in so doing, it describe a certain inbuilt system and design that is being dismantled or un-created and is a result of YHWH’s judgement on the people. The graphic images highlight this.⁶ While there is a breakdown, the description indicates what the ideal world is in better circumstances, as well as the purpose and design of what is described. From the writer’s perspective in v 3, water is critical for growth. Thus, when the nobles as well as servants find no water, there is a problem. Lack of rain continues the water imagery, but vv 4-6 are from the perspective of Judah. The threefold parallelism, as highlighted by L. Allen,⁷ helps bring out the theme of purpose through citing the land three times, twice as ; אר [earth] and once as אמהה [ground]. This is balanced with references to lack of rain, grass and herbage [עֵשֶׂב, דָּשָׁא, גְּשָׁם]. The mourning of the drought is connected with the lack of rain and the lack of grass and herbage. It seems that the earth has no purpose in this situation and there is no growth and the ground has dried up. This connection is further emphasized by the use of three consecutive reason clauses each starting with כִּי [because] creating a link between the rain and grass which is fodder for animals. In the poem a simple ecosystem is described with the land, in this case the countryside, being a necessary part of the cycle of life, or ecosystem. This

⁵ Robert P. Carroll. *Jeremiah, A Commentary*, Vol. 1, (Sheffield, Phoenix Press, 1986) p 307.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 309.

⁷ Leslie C. Allen. *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) p 169.

passage also provides some images of specific animals that can be seen as examples of a wider purpose and design. The doe in the field abandoning her newborn is a sign of lack of food. The doe usually gives birth in the woods but here it is in the open because she is searching for food.⁸ The wild asses are seen as gasping, panting or quick sniffing [שָׁאֲפוּ רִיחַ], literally swallowing up the wind, which may refer to the laboured breathing of a dying creature.⁹ The drought has caused a breakdown in the normal functioning of the ecosystem. J. Lundbom points out that the failing eyes of the animals is due to a vitamin A deficiency, the source of which is adequate green feed.¹⁰ The reference to animals in vv 5-6, wild asses, jackals and doe, and the effects that a breakdown in the normal seasonal occurrence of adequate rain has had, are a poetic description of normal animal activity. In these selected events the normal purpose of animal life is described and this is representative of the design of the world that was the reality at the time of the Book of Jeremiah. This is not the language of prescribed purpose or design but there is implied design and purpose for some of earth's components within this text.

Inbuilt purpose and design features in Jer 31:35-36 where there is direct reference to the fixed order of things with the sun and moon being part of this. It states that if this order were to cease, Israel also would cease to be. In both verses, laws [חֻקֹּת] and ordinances [הַחֻקִּים] are used in the sense of a fixed order, from the root חקק, which means something prescribed, or a specific law particularly as it

⁸ Jack L. Lundbom. *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, Doubleday, 1999) p 697.

⁹ William L. Holladay. *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1986) p 432.

¹⁰ Jack L. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20, op. cit.*, p 697.

refers to nature. This order is clearly established by YHWH, but nevertheless is one that already exists. R. Carroll says that the fixed order of nature is analogous to Israel's permanence as a nation before YHWH.¹¹ While there might be some stirring up or disturbing by him [רָגַעַ], the order is set and YHWH still remains in control. The connection between creator and creation is clear and does not relate to a modern eco-theological approach since it is YHWH who is controlling the rain and not the natural physical laws of nature that are in evidence on earth. The purpose of the fixed order and design, that is in-built in this text, refers to the regular nature of the seasons as they provide adequate rainfall and sunlight, and how people and animals are affected by them.

Purpose is made clear definitively in Jer 2:7. This text highlights YHWH's primal gift of the land to the Israelites and how they were ungrateful for the gift and misused it.¹² This is a dominant theme in the Book of Jeremiah. It is the description of the gift that helps to address the question concerning the parts of the earth community and how they reflect a direction that sustains life. The hif'il construction of וְאָבִיא emphasizes that YHWH is the giver of the gift of the land and the הַכְּרֵמִים לְאֹכְלֵי פְרִיָהּ וְטוֹבָהּ [plentiful, to eat its fruits and goodness] is an indication of YHWH's purpose for the use of his gift of the land to the people. This is reflected in terms of abundance and attractiveness fitting Habel's description of the principle with its emphasis on the sustaining of life in all its beauty.¹³ The language is similar to that in Num 13:27 which states that; 'we came to the land where you sent us' [שָׁלַחְתֶּנּוּ] with pi`el intensity; which is

¹¹ Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah, A Commentary*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p 615.

¹² Walter Brueggemann. *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down* Vol. 1, Jer1-25, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1988) p 33.

¹³ Habel, *The Earth Bible*, Volume 1, *op. cit.*, p 49.

slightly different to the land being given for use in Jer 2:7. That the people have now interfered with the order of things and have upset the direction YHWH has set does not diminish the purpose for which the gift was given.

A further attestation to the earth community's purpose in sustaining life in its beauty, and diversity, again from a negative view, is found in Jer 9:10-11. This passage identifies animals and plants as having a purpose individually and together forming an ecosystem. There is evidence of pasture and of cattle, birds and other animals all living together in an environment with an abundance of pasture. When the balance is disturbed, the land becomes a wilderness and normal activity is no more. Carroll highlights another aspect of the image created when he refers to the land being emptied of its sound.¹⁴ When an ecosystem is functioning as it should there is the noise of the landscape that accompanies normal activity. When this is absent there is an added eeriness. The passage is not only about nature and the natural world. While v 10 and the first part of v 11 refer to the rural landscape, the towns of Judah in the second part of v 11 is a reference to the urban or cultural landscape. As Allen states: 'Destruction suffered by urban communities, including the capital is reserved for the climax of this portrayal of total ruin'.¹⁵ The view of the land is one where urban landscapes are a higher form of land use than agricultural use. Here the Book of Jeremiah is at variance with the Earth Bible Principles. It seems that land is not valued in its natural state, rather, for its ability to sustain human habitation. The land that has become wilderness may still be able to support the wild animals, or natural world, but cannot support human society with its agriculture and social and economic activity and it is this view that ignores the value of the whole of creation. In this

¹⁴ Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah, A Commentary*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p 242.

¹⁵ Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah, op. cit.*, p 116.

passage, the return of wilderness [מִדְּבָרָה] and desolation [שְׁמֹמָה], while indicating a return to chaos, defined as the inability to support human life, can be read from an opposite viewpoint where purpose is demonstrated through its reversal.

Jer 9:10-11 also addresses the question whether there is a view reflected that the earth is disposable, that there will be a final destruction at the end of times, that is, an eschatological view. The picture left in the text is one of ruin and desolation caused through YHWH's action. The 'and I will make' [וַיַּעֲשֶׂה] from the root נָתַן here meaning to make or constitute, clearly shows YHWH active in the de-creation event. It concludes with 'a desolation without inhabitant' [שְׁמֹמָה מִבְּלֵי יוֹשֵׁב]. This could refer to the end of the earth, including its cultural and rural landscapes.¹⁶ The interpretation of this depends on the dating of the writing of the particular text. As a later post-exilic text it could be referring to what was experienced in the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem. This is the view of McKane,¹⁷ as well as Carroll who states: "These fragments belong to the post-catastrophe redaction of the tradition and make connections between the poem of vv 2-6 and the fall of Jerusalem".¹⁸ While there is a stark view of devastation, there is no evidence to say that this is an eschatological view of final destruction.

This issue is again raised in relation to Jer 4:23-28 where there are similar references to destruction, ruin and desolation. There are four stages of devastation

¹⁶ While the cultural landscape is the dominant feature, the rural landscape is suggested in v 10 with the mention of cattle and pastures.

¹⁷ William McKain. *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, Vol. 1, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1986) pp 204-5.

¹⁸ Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah, A Commentary*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p 242.

each beginning with ‘I looked...’ [רָאִיתִי] and describing the lack of light, unstable earth, no animal life and a deserted land with ruined cities. YHWH’s action comes in 4:27-28, however there is a contradiction between vv 27 and 28. In v 27 YHWH says he will not make a full end [וְכִלָּה לֹא אַעֲשֶׂה], but in v 28 YHWH will not turn back on his decision to make the end full and will not relent from this. The question is whether this is an eschatological view or not. It has been suggested by McKane,¹⁹ who describes this text as a later apocalyptic addition, that it refers to an ‘eschaton’ or return to chaos with its language differentiating it from its surrounding text. Carroll,²⁰ points to the text as containing elements of a ‘trans-historical apocalyptic outlook’, that is, this text is similar to apocalyptic. This is in contrast to J. Vancil, who argues that Jer 4:23-26 was written early in Jeremiah’s career and sees it ‘as a prophetic pronouncement that is set simply within the framework of history and uses vivid imagery to depict the coming destruction of Israel and her land’.²¹ Assuming this interpretation he sees the imagery as simply that and relevant to the time of prophetic announcement only. His argument relies on future prediction and does not address the issue of the language of the passage being different from its surrounding text. He is not as convincing as McKane and Carroll, who see it being written after the actual fall of Jerusalem and are describing in poetic terms what actually happened. In conclusion, there is very limited evidence of an end of times view where the earth is to be eventually destroyed. However, v 27 which sets a limit and allows for restoration after devastation and not complete destruction, points to the opposite of an eschatological outlook.

¹⁹ William McKane, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah, Vol. 1, op. cit.*, p 106.

²⁰ Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah, A Commentary, Vol. 1, op. cit.*, p 168.

²¹ Jack W. Vancil. ‘From Creation to Chaos: An Exegesis of Jeremiah 4:23-26’ in F. Furman Kearley, Edward P. Myers, & Timothy D. Hadley (Eds.) *Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Practices* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1986) p 183.

The issue of transformation versus restoration is addressed in Jer 32:37-41. In essence the question is whether there is a focus on past life systems or whether there is something further that leans towards liberation and transformation. Is there a suggestion of something new that has previously not been tried? There is a transformative change in YHWH who will have what Carroll calls a ‘future permanent agreement’²² with the people, where fierce bouts of anger will not be exhibited. The passage is utopian in its essence, yet the reality is that the people are to return to what they were before, and not turn away nor act contrary to YHWH’s master plan and purpose. The emphasis is on restoration as stated in Jer 32:37b where there is opportunity for human activity in the land and the people going about their agricultural and cultural business without hindrance. R. Clements refers to this as ‘divine renewal’²³ where, as a consequence after the exile, there is an opportunity for a fresh start, but not one that is vastly different in its environmental conditions or purposes than before.

The ultimate control of YHWH is reaffirmed in Jer 32:40b-41. There is continual emphasis of “I” in this passage reinforcing who is in control. This is so strong that any alternative interpretation that has the earth being in some form of higher or privileged position in creating outcomes is difficult. What is being re-established is a land usage that will be a restoration of a past life that was well remembered. All of this is at the hand of YHWH, the land is a passive participant in the restoration and its systems are subservient to the work of YHWH.

²² Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah, A Commentary*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p 630.

²³ R.E. Clements. *Jeremiah, A Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, John Knox, 1988) p 197.

In summary, there is evidence of an inbuilt design and purpose, although there are not many textual references in support. The individual parts of the creation do reflect a direction that sustains life, although again evidence is limited. There is some degree of evidence for an end of times view but this is overshadowed by a limit on any destructive action by YHWH. There is evidence of the restoration of a past life system but one which does not demonstrate a leaning towards liberation and transformation. Overall, purpose and design are demonstrated, but this is YHWH's and there is no alternative view where each piece in the overall cosmic design has its own independent power. The earth community does have its purpose but the cause is YHWH. An eco-theological reading can only go so far in the Book of Jeremiah.

Chapter Six: Mutual Custodianship

The fifth Ecojustice Principle of the Earth Bible Project¹ is the Principle of Mutual Custodianship. This principle speaks of earth as a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodianship is needed to ensure the continuance of a balanced universe while maintaining its diversity.² The principle addresses the role of humans in the earth community, its thrust being that humans are the custodians of the earth and need to work as partners with the earth, rather than as rulers, to sustain a balanced earth community. N. Habel, quoting Gen 1:26-28, relates a common view regarding ‘humans as stewards ruling on behalf of God, but nevertheless ruling’.³ At the heart of the principle is the role of humans in the earth community and their exercising responsible stewardship of the earth, which is the human inheritance. Earth has been entrusted to humans by God and the custodianship that is referred to is that of mutual partnership. The earth’s resources and provision, specifically food, shelter, beauty and other riches that sustain body and spirit, are often assumed to be a right for humans to use and consume rather than treated as mutual partnership where the earth’s needs are considered.⁴ The Earth Bible Project also asks whether the earth is seen as in any way sacred in the relationship between humans and the earth. From this outline of the principle four questions can be asked of the land texts in the Book of Jeremiah: Do the texts indicate a role for humans to be stewards of the land? Is the custodianship of the land a mutual partnership between the land and the

¹ Norman C. Habel. (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 1, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2000).

² *Ibid.*, p 24.

³ *Ibid.*, p 50.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 51.

people? Is the earth considered sacred in the relationship between people and land? and, Do the texts indicate a hierarchical model of stewardship or is there an alternative view expressed? The texts considered in addressing these questions are: Jer 2:7; 3:19-20; 7:3-7; 16:18; 12:7-11 and 17:4.

Land is a central theme in the Book of Jeremiah and this is affirmed in the references to heritage or inheritance. The term my heritage [נַחֲלָתִי] raises one of the complexities in reading Jeremiah where the same word has different contexts and meanings. The land as נהלה, usually rendered inheritance, refers to YHWH's personal inheritance, נַחֲלָתִי [my inheritance]. In some cases it refers to the land itself, while in other cases the word refers to Israel the nation or the people. Instances where נהלה refers to the land itself are 2:7 'my land', 3:19 the land YHWH gave to Israel, that is 'Israel's land', 12:14 YHWH's heritage given to Israel to inherit, therefore 'Israel's land', 12:15 a similar context and here means 'their land', and 17:4 YHWH's heritage given to Israel that will be taken back, thus confirming his ownership of the land. Reference to the gift of the land is found in Jer 16:15b, where YHWH promises to bring the people back to the land, but restates that he has given this to them through their ancestors. The reference to 'ancestors' suggests a perpetual gift, or inheritance, where each generation is to hand the land on to the next having looked after it in an manner acceptable to YHWH.

Other references to נהלה where it refers to people are: Jer 12:7 where YHWH has abandoned Israel but is still the owner of the people, Jer 10:16 speaks of Israel as the tribe of YHWH's inheritance, meaning, that the tribe of Israel has been

allotted to YHWH's special care, that is, YHWH is caring for his own inheritance.⁵

In addressing the Principle of Mutual Custodianship, נהלה is used primarily in its meaning as the land itself. נהלה is not something simply handed down from generation to generation, it is the rightful property of a party that is legitimated by recognised social custom, legal process or divine charter.⁶ Thus, each generation needs to act in the best interests of preserving the land so that it can be used by future generations. However, it must not be forgotten that in Jeremiah the land and its productivity is owned by YHWH and is his blessing for the people of Israel.

A further clarification in the use of נהלה is that it actually refers to the land of Canaan, not the whole earth, as a grant for rightful possession in legal terms, with Habel suggesting the use of terms such as portion, share, entitlement, allotment and rightful property as more appropriate.⁷ Yet the gift of the land to the Israelites still remains the property of the giver, as evidenced in Jer 2:7, 3:19 and 12:14. While it can be interpreted that the land is Israel's heritage, Jeremiah focuses on the land as YHWH's heritage when, by their own action, the Israelites pollute it.

Jer 2:7, a key text already expanded in chapter two, speaks of a land of plenty and of the Israelites enjoying its abundance. How this is achieved and under what

⁵ William McKain. *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, Vol. 1, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1986) pp 227. A similar meaning can be found in the reference to inheritance in 51:19.

⁶ Norman C. Habel. *The Land is Mine : Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995) pp 35. Habel also quotes a derivation of the meaning of inheritance from Num 16:14 where the principle meaning concerns a right to share land for living and farming. While not restrictive solely to farming, 'the association with livelihood is reasonable in many passages,' pp 34-35.

⁷ Norman C. Habel, *The Land is Mine*, *op. cit.*, p 35.

conditions raises the concept of ‘stewardship’.⁸ Habel refers to humans exercising responsible stewardship over earth.⁹ This is generally described as humankind having a responsibility to ensure that the land is used properly, is cared for and is handed on in the same state as it was given to them.¹⁰ He points out: “YHWH expresses a deep affinity and personal sympathy with the land; YHWH speaks directly to the land and suffers anguish over its desolation”.¹¹ The theocentric nature of the Book of Jeremiah, however, points to YHWH being the landlord and master even though he is not always active in his relationship with the land and its inhabitants.

Jer 3:19 uses family imagery to describe the relationship between the people and YHWH, with their disobedience being described by the image of a faithless wife in v 20.¹² The important implication in the text for this discussion is the goodness of the land. If there is a breakdown in relationship between the people and YHWH and the land suffers as a result, there is a loss in the quality of the

⁸ Norman C. Habel. (Ed.). ‘The Earth Bible, Volume 1’, *op.cit.*, p 50.

⁹ Douglas John Hall. *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000) p 41 describes a model of stewardship. In this model the house (o ijk o v V), rendered household, has been entrusted to humans to look after by the owner of

the house, YHWH. He quotes Hall who says that the steward of the household (o ijk o n o v m o V) has

responsibility for the planning and administration or putting into order (n o m o V) the affairs of the

household (o ijk o v V), so the steward is responsible for the economy (o ijk o n o v m ia) of the house.

¹⁰ Clare Palmer. ‘Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics’, in I. Ball et.al., (Eds.), *The Earth Beneath: A Critical Guide to Green Theology* (London, SPCK, 1992), p 74. She considers this model to be anthropocentric and emphasises master and servant with YHWH being in the position of an absentee landlord, and claims a better model is one of mutual partnership or custodianship.

¹¹ Norman C. Habel, *The Land is Mine*, *op. cit.*, p 138.

¹² See similar discussion on these verses in ch 2 of this thesis when discussing the Principle of Intrinsic Worth, pp 22-23.

inheritance which has been described superlatively in Jer 2:7; 3:19¹³ and 12:10. The inheritance has lost some of its value and what is to be handed on to future generations is tarnished and not good enough for YHWH, (2:7b and 3:20). The use of pleasant and beautiful in reference to the land is in keeping with the garden imagery of growth and agricultural abundance that describes the land in 2:7. The word **חֶמְדָּה** [pleasant] has connotations of loveliness and excellence.¹⁴ Other synonyms for **חֶמְדָּה** mean a thing desirable, precious or beloved of women,¹⁵ all in keeping with something of value or intrinsically wholesome, good and definitely worth preserving. This highlights the quality and value of the inheritance and with the use of **חֶמְדָּה**, there is emphasis on the importance of how it is to be treated.

The custodianship of the land draws attention to the symbiotic relationship between YHWH, people and the land which is highlighted in Jer 7:7.¹⁶ YHWH is to dwell with the people in the land that he gave them, so this establishes a relationship between all three. This is significant for two reasons: Firstly, there is the promise for everlasting possession that is different from the promise in Deut 12:1-5 where the land is given to them as sojourners.¹⁷ However, in Jer 7:7, part

¹³ William L. Holladay. *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1986) p 122, states that the feminine suffixes in Jer 3:19 would have been quite striking to an audience not used to hearing of female inheritance. The following phrase Jer 3:19 b, c contains three feminine suffixes:

וְאַתֶּן-לָךְ אֶרֶץ חֶמְדָּה נְחֻלָּת צְבִי צְבָאוֹת גּוֹיִם וְאָמַר אָבִי לִי תִקְרָא-לִי וּמְאַחֲרַי לָא וְאַחֲרָי תִשׁוּבִי specifically לָךְ [to you], וּמְאַחֲרַי [and you shall], and תִשׁוּבִי [you shall turn away].

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 122. Holladay states that this is not common phraseology in Jeremiah

¹⁵ William L. Holladay (Ed.). *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1988) p 108.

¹⁶ There is a text critical issue here in Jer 7:7, וְשִׁכַנְתִּי אִתְּכֶם בְּמִקְוֹם הַזֶּה, which could be read 'and I will let you dwell in this place' which if read this way, lessens the symbiotic relationship between YHWH, land and people with there not being as much interaction as in the interpretation chosen for the context of this thesis.

¹⁷ Compare with Lev 25:23 which supports this interpretation.

of the ‘Temple Sermon’ (Jer 7:3-12), “YHWH gave the land to the fathers without any limit of time, yet only by covenant obedience will Israel expect to be blessed in the land”.¹⁸ The gift is forever and there is reference to a mutual partnership which is to continue for the same length of time with its custodial responsibility. Secondly, the temple sermon is built around a sense of place. ‘In this place’, [בַּמְקוֹם] in Jer 7:1-4 refers to the temple, but in 7:5-7 it is expanded to mean the land that has been given to the people’s ancestors for everlasting possession. Land handed on from generation to generation is an inheritance. Whether this is the land as a whole or a city or the temple, having a space is important to the people, especially as it affects their relationship with YHWH. Implied is a sense that YHWH will preserve this land for them because it is his inheritance to them. Thus there is a clearly established relationship between the people and YHWH. The land itself does not form such a strong relationship with the people, but it is important as the place where the relationship between YHWH and people is maintained. While the concept of ‘mutual custodianship’ is not on the people’s agenda at this time, through this text it becomes clear that ‘everlasting possession’ comes with responsibilities which, if neglected, will have consequences. As the symbiotic relationship unfolds, the balance and diversity of the earth community can be influenced by any of the partners.¹⁹

The people have a new or second opportunity to develop a balanced partnership between YHWH and the land. Here the critical promise is found in Jer 12:15. The heritage of the land is to be taken away, yet there is real hope for mutual partnership in the future, with a new start and the return of YHWH’s heritage to

¹⁸ William L. Holladay, *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25, op. cit.*, p 242.

¹⁹ This broken balance is in evidence in: Jer 4:23-28; 9:10-11; 12:4-12; 14:1-6 and 25:36-38.

the people, a fruitful, pleasant and beautiful land. Jer 3:16a highlights the expectation of productive land use as well as a growth of population all taking place within a certain place where the land is central to this development. YHWH has provided the land for the people to use with the expectation that they will do the right thing.

In the Book of Jeremiah the interplay between YHWH and the people often leaves the land itself as a silent partner. YHWH is considered sacred yet the land is not put on a level with YHWH. In Jer 12:7 the abandonment of the heritage refers to the people and while they may be considered sacred in this case, the land is not. Later, in Jer 12:10-11, the desecration of the land is described and while it is referred to as YHWH's pleasant portion [הַמְדָּתִי הַלְקֵתָּאֵת], sacredness is not the focus of this text.²⁰

In Jer 16:18 there is reference to filling YHWH's inheritance with idols and abominations, [שְׁקוּצֵיהֶם וְתוֹעֲבוֹתֵיהֶם]. This is about the relationship with YHWH and the balance that has been undone leading to the land becoming polluted. As R. Carroll remarks, there is a need for adequate compensation to be paid to YHWH.²¹ This compensation is paid through exile away from the land. Insightfully, L. Allen interprets YHWH's compassion and the people's physical return to the land as the setting for their spiritual transformation²². The people have been irresponsible custodians of the land with wrong priorities by having faith in other gods rather than total reliance on YHWH's creation. Human failing has been the cause of the desolation, destruction and eventual dislocation and

²⁰ This text is developed more fully later in this chapter.

²¹ Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah, A Commentary*, Vol. 1, (Sheffield, Phoenix Press, 1986) p 436.

²² Leslie C. Allen. *Jeremiah: A Commentary, op. cit.*, p 153.

YHWH has been caused to act in order to redress the balance, after the unfaithful custodians of the land have brought about an unbalanced and hostile environment. YHWH needs to cause the return to a balance so that the land will be able to continue in its ability to produce abundantly. The land needs to be made more sacred by removing the non-sacred idols.

Finally, there is the issue of whether an alternative view is expressed to the hierarchical model of stewardship. Especially relevant to an eco-theological reading is the consequence of custodianship which arises in YHWH's lament, particularly in Jer 12:7-11.²³ V 7 indicates a breakdown in mutuality, an abandonment of the heritage, in this case referring to the people, but at the same time the balance is lost between the symbiotic partners, YHWH, land and people. Vv 7-9 describes the broken relationship between YHWH and the people and vv 10-11 describe the destruction of the land itself.²⁴ There is a deep emotion at work here and the centrality of the **יְדִדְיָתָאֵת נַפְשִׁי** [*beloved of my soul (or 'heart' in NRSV)*] expresses profound feelings in this connection. The land is interconnected in the relationship so it is vulnerable as are the people; but here the

²³ The Jer 12:1-17 is a complex passage with heritage and land used with different meanings and emphases. V 1-4 is Jeremiah's complaint to YHWH with v4 asking: "How long will the land [אֶרֶץ] mourn?" Vv 5-17 are YHWH's reply. Vv 5-6 indicate the prophet Jeremiah will need endurance and persistence for the future and that his relationships will be conflictual if he is to deliver YHWH's message. V 7 is YHWH answering he has abandoned his house [נְהַלְהָה], in this case meaning the nation of Israel. In v 8 the heritage [נְהַלְהָה], Israel, has become like a lion lifting up a voice against YHWH, and in v 9 the hyena is depicted as greedy to devour this heritage. V 10 indicates that many shepherds, the leaders of other nations, have destroyed YHWH's pleasant portion making it a wilderness, in this case referring to the land of Israel, and in v 11 the land is described as a desolation. Vv12-13 are best read as the prophet Jeremiah describing what has happened and the reason for YHWH's fierce anger. Vv 14 and 15 each refer to נְהַלְהָה as the land, but with v 14 describing the land as YHWH's inheritance and in v 15 'their land', that is, Israel's land. These verses speak of YHWH plucking up the people, replanting them in another land but a compassionate YHWH bringing the people back to their land, the land of Israel as promised to Abraham. In v 16 the ideal is described where the people will worship only YHWH and not Baal(s). In v 17 other nations are warned to listen and if they do not, they will be destroyed.

²⁴ Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary, op. cit.*, p 152.

balance is lost between the partners. Now there is no sustainability and no future unless something drastically changes. Carroll argues that the whole of Jer 12:7-13 is a poem with general reference to divine anger which has resulted in the destruction of the temple, the people, and the land.²⁵ He continues by indicating that in the general sense the land is the prey and the wild beasts have devoured it.²⁶ What can be seen is that the balance is gone and non-human elements become the judgement, yet these vehicles are living things, albeit dangerous creatures.²⁷ In evidence is a real depth of feeling with an extreme of emotion through the statement **כִּי עָלַי שָׂנְאֵתִיהָ** [*therefore I hated her*]. There is a complete breakdown in relationship. In v 9 there is a picture of the challenge to the balance of nature in the statement **עָלְיָהּ הָעֵיט סָבִיב** [*the birds of prey gather all around against her*, or a question: *Are the birds of prey all around her?* (NRSV)]. This reading of complete destruction and a breakdown in the balance of nature is supported by the references in v10 to **כַּרְמִי** [vineyard] and **חֵלְקֵתָאֵת הַמְּדֵתִי** [*my pleasant portion*], which are images of growth and fruitfulness, even abundance. Reference is made to the whole land and its desolation, with the land returning to wilderness. Desolation [**שְׂמִמָּה**] v 11 and wilderness [**מִדְבָּר**] v 10 are strong words and help to add to the depth of feelings to the mournful state of what it is like when the relationship breaks down completely. V 11 is an eco-centric statement and indicates that no longer is there

²⁵ Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, Vol. 1., *op. cit.*, p 290. It should be noted here that Carroll puts the time of writing of this text post 587BCE.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p 290.

²⁷ The characterizations in the text are **כַּאֲרִיָּה בַיַּעַר** [*like a lion in the forest*] and **הָעֵיט צָבִיעַ** [*the greedy hyena*]. The literal translation of the latter is ‘like the speckled bird’ but this is only used once in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) so the NRSV translation is used here, with other commentators speaking of ‘the hyena’. In both examples of wild animals destruction is indicated and demonstrate a break down of balance and a move away from YHWH’s plan for the future of the earth.

a balanced and diverse community, and worse, no one cares or takes it deeply to heart; a state where growth is not happening. What has been created is gone so there is nothing to balance.

There is a more optimistic notion of the future where the prose section starts in Ch 12 indicating a return to balance in nature. The positive promise works where there is a return of the land to the people. In v 15 the people are able to start again, their uprooting as described in Jer 1:9-10, has come to fruition.²⁸ There is a second chance with a fresh start with the inheritance that here refers to the land. The people have an opportunity to work in partnership and use their inheritance with the implication of future agricultural prosperity, yet still dependent on YHWH as the ‘owner’.

Finally, hierarchy is re-established in the punishment that YHWH confers by sending the people to a land that they do not know, Jer 17:4.²⁹ In this text no partnership and essentially no custodianship is inferred. It is a land where they will have to begin again not knowing if it will be blessed or even fertile and fruitful not like their own land. Here punishment is implied where the people will serve in the manner of tilling the ground that will require considerable physical effort.³⁰

²⁸ Jack L. Lundbom. *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, Doubleday, 1999) p 662.

²⁹ Jer 17:4 has been read here as the people (the Israelites) being caused to go into a foreign land and serve their enemies. There is a text critical caution in Jer 17:4, וְהָעַבְדִּיךָ אֲבִיךָ אֶת־ אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ יִדְעֶתְלָא־ that may be read as; ‘and I will cause your enemies to cross over into a land that you do not know’. In this thesis the interpretation is; ‘and I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know’.

³⁰ William L. Holladay, *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25, op. cit.*, p 488, Holladay identified the root עִבַד can mean ‘serve’ or ‘till’.

The texts chosen to address the principle of Mutual Custodianship contain much about obeying YHWH, but not so much about looking after the land. There is always an expectation that the land will be fruitful if YHWH is pleased, not necessarily whether the people care for it. There is evidence for the people being given land with the implication that they will work it and that it will be fruitful for them, indicating a role for humans as stewards of the land. There is some evidence of the symbiotic relationship between YHWH, people and land, but with YHWH as the provider of the land and of the conditions for its working. The relationship between the people and the land is overshadowed by the relationship between the people and YHWH. While the earth is not overtly considered sacred in the relationship between people and land, it is described as YHWH's 'pleasant portion'³¹ and the removal of idols does create a land more sacred.³² Overall the texts model a hierarchical view, although there is a hint of an alternative where inheritance is depicted as the land for the people to work and to hand on to future generations. While mutual partnership at first glance could be a fresh new approach to the Book of Jeremiah, on closer examination, it is clear that YHWH remains the main protagonist in the workings of the land and the eco-systems, making an eco-theological interpretation somewhat difficult.

³¹ Jer 12:10b.

³² Jer 16:18.

Chapter Seven: The Principle of Resistance

The sixth Ecojustice Principle of the Earth Bible Project¹ is the Principle of Resistance which, according to N. Habel, is integral to an understanding of ecojustice.² The principle states: “Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice”. It is the active resistance that is at the heart of this principle. The principle has its genesis in the struggle some social groups have in their quests for social justice. Habel states that; “members of a group do not necessarily view themselves as helpless victims, but as oppressed human beings who find ways to survive and resist their oppressors”.³ He emphasises active rather than passive resistance or acceptance. While this refers to people the eco-theological approach identifies the earth community as part of this resistance. One would expect when examining ancient texts written by anthropocentric writers that the earth itself would be portrayed as a passive victim. Habel also adds we can suspect a given text to focus on sins against God and wrongs against other humans but to ignore wrongs against the earth.⁴ That is, the earth is expected to be portrayed as a passive object without any feeling or voice of its own. Following on from this, the earth is often seen as suffering because of human misdeeds and YHWH’s reaction to this. What this principle searches for is a hint that the earth itself resists this injustice. Hence, the first question to answer in reference to the Book of Jeremiah is: “Is the earth portrayed as a passive resister or does the earth text actively resist injustice”?

¹ Norman C Habel. (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 1, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2000).

² *Ibid.*, p52.

³ *Ibid.*, p52.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p52.

Then there is the earth itself where an emphasis on injustice specifically to the earth is the focus. In the Book of Jeremiah it can be seen that YHWH suffers in sympathy with the land, and the land is portrayed as mourning, yet this may simply be poetic imagery of the writer. The second question to be addressed is: “Are there any texts that focus on injustice to the earth, and if so, is this more than poetic imagery?” While this question refers specifically to YHWH and the earth, the other aspect is the partnership between humans and the earth. Is there empathy between humans and the wider earth community, and does the earth suffer in sympathy with humans? All these questions are connected by the nature of the symbiotic relationship between earth, land and YHWH. Specifically in this aspect of the resistance principle the question to be addressed is: “Is there any evidence of the earth suffering in sympathy with humans?”

These questions each concern justice, but there is another aspect of the Principle of Resistance that concerns regeneration. Habel asserts that the ecosystems of earth are not necessarily fragile; “they have a remarkable capacity to survive, regenerate and adapt to changing physical circumstances”.⁵ If the earth actively resists, then it cannot remain a waste of unproductivity, there needs to be new growth and revival. Whether this is restoration of the old order or regeneration of a new order is a matter of textual examination, nevertheless there needs to be a view that the earth as a subject has the power to revive and regenerate. Two questions to ask: “Is there textual evidence of ecosystems having the power to regenerate?” and “Does the text reflect earth as a subject with the power to revive and rejuvenate?” In this second question revival and regeneration are not

⁵ *Ibid.*, p53.

synonymous. Revival means a restoration of what has been in the past, while regeneration refers to new creation.

In answering the questions posed by the Principle of Resistance, the following texts have been selected: regarding justice, Jer 4:7; 4:23-28; 7:5-7; 9:10-14; 17:5-6 and 51:43, address whether the earth is more than a passive resister, Jer 3:13; 4:7; 4:24; 4:26; 9:10; 12:8 and 17:6 are examples of injustice to the earth itself, and Jer 12:4 and 12:10-11 address the earth suffering in sympathy with humans. Regarding regeneration, Jer 31:12 and 31:27-28 address the direct question and Jer 32:15 and 33:10-12 examine the earth's role in regeneration.

The portrayal of earth as a passive or active resister is at the heart of the first aspect of the principle. The natural world used as metaphor is found in Jer 4:7. In working out the metaphor the lion is seen as peaceful when lying in the bushes, it is only when it comes out that it becomes a predator.⁶ The lion is actually referring to Assyria, the national enemy,⁷ and this 'enemy' is the agent of YHWH. Whatever the agent, the result is ruin and the land being laid to waste and the cultural landscape, the cities, are also devastated. In this verse the earth itself remains passive.

More active response to injustice can be seen in Jer 4:23-28, especially vv 23-26a. Here the whole earth community is reacting. There is no light in the heavens. There is earthly movement, with earthquakes and mountains and hills in

⁶ Jack L. Lundbom. *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, Doubleday, 1999) p 337.

⁷ Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) p 65.

motion. The birds have fled,⁸ and the fruitful land has become a desert. The question is whether this activity is the earth and its animal inhabitants initiating action and thus resisting or whether it is a reactionary response to the devastation caused by YHWH. In v 28 the earth is described as mourning, being a response but not resistance. The earth is not removed from the action but is the passive victim of the actions which are taking place and of which it is powerless to change or avoid. The same arguments can be used in Jer 51:43 where the land has become a shocking place, a place of drought and desert, without human inhabitant.

A text that possibly shows the earth as active rather than passive is Jer 17:6. In this verse there is reference to the earth turning to salt [מלחה]. This raises a textual perplexity with the use of חרדִים [*the dried places*], which only occurs only in this passage. Whether this is a geographical place or a place of solitary existence in a wasteland lacking vigour and drained of vitality is an issue.⁹ The highlighting of a water shortage and the reference to shrubby trees is important imagery. According to R. Carroll, images of water and desert are used to highlight the deity's ability to transform nature in response to human behaviour.¹⁰ The context of the verse, when looking at vv 5-8, indicates that human experiences are being described with humans the ones being able to make the transformation, thus it is difficult to explain in terms of the earth being active in resistance when it is cited in terms of a simile and as the setting for the consequence of their action.

⁸ This is a depiction of the natural order, with the birds being representative of this.

⁹ William McKain. *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, Vol. 1, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1986) p 390.

¹⁰ Robert P. Carroll. *Jeremiah, A Commentary*, Vol. 1, (Sheffield, Phoenix Press, 1986) p 352.

While the land can be seen as responsive, what it is reacting to is spelt out in Jer 7:5-7. Justice is an important theme for the Principle of Resistance and is referred to in terms of dealings between neighbour and self, by not oppressing the alien, the orphan and the widow, not shedding innocent blood and not going after other Gods. Jeremiah is saying that there is a need to practice this justice as it is not being practiced at the present and the people need to thoroughly amend their ways. Where this is to take place is not so clear. The **בַּמְקוֹם הַזֶּה** [*in this place*] refers here to the land, although as part of the ‘temple sermon’ it can share its meaning with other places such as city and temple.¹¹ It is important as the people’s relationship with YHWH is paramount, but this happens in a particular place. Here, however the earth is passive and does not have any active part in the relationship.

Again in Jer 9:10-14 the land laid waste is presented as a fact and the text seeks to establish a reason, yet the earth itself is not part of the discussion. The passage is in the form of a question and answer, which as Carroll points out, allows the writer to present an ideology of the exile which concerns justice and the people’s actions and YHWH’s response.¹² In vv 11-12 The land is waste, burned like a wilderness [**נִצְתָה כַּמִּדְבָּר**] and no-one passes through [**מִבְּלִי עֹבֵר**] because they have forsaken YHWH’s law [**תּוֹרַת־יְהוָה**] and have stubbornly followed their own way. In this passage the earth itself is not an active participant. There is some evidence of the earth actively resisting, Jer 4:23-28 and 17:6, however the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 207. Also see chapter six of this thesis where the theme of place has been developed more fully.

¹² *Ibid.*, p243.

other texts cited show the earth as passive with YHWH as the subject and cause of the changes on earth.

The following texts focus on injustice to the earth itself, but are they any more than poetic imagery? They describe the earth generally, the land, or the natural world, using metaphor or other poetic imagery: Jer 3:13 describes immorality happening under 'every green tree', 4:7 has the lion as representing the destroyer of nations, in 4:24 the mountains and hills are in movement, in 4:26 the fruitful land has become desert and unproductive, in 9:10 the pasture has become a wilderness and lamentation and weeping is heralded, in 12:8 the lion is the representation of Israel actively raising its voice against YHWH, and in 17:6 the shrub in the desert cannot grow into anything larger through lack of water. While these short texts highlight the earth and problems concerning injustice or ecological disturbance, there is no evidence to show them representing more than poetic imagery.

Jer 12:4 is an important verse in the land texts as this is where the earth is represented as mourning and as such can be seen as suffering in sympathy with humans. The land has become dry and is said to be mourning. The question though, is whether this is evidence of the land's own response or simply a reaction to the interaction between the people and YHWH? Drought is seen as nature's response to human wickedness¹³ and while the earth is mourning the drought itself is the earth's own response to the situation where it is active in its response.

Whether it is active in support of YHWH or the people is a further question. The theme of drought is a response to human wickedness, yet it is YHWH who brings

¹³ Leslie C. Allen. *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) p 149.

the rain and makes the drought by its absence, so the earth is in fact reacting to a situation caused by YHWH but initiated through the actions of the people. The conclusion of the verse can be read as ‘he will not see our last end’ or alternatively ‘he is blind to our actions’.¹⁴ In either case this does not indicate the earth’s response. The earth mourning is the earth’s reaction to the situation and is providing sympathetic background rather than having its own action initiated. Earth in this case cannot be seen to be in sympathy with humans or even YHWH as it is simply being reactive. Sympathy implies an active human like response.

Jer 12:10-11¹⁵ makes direct reference to the land and to ‘many shepherds’ who have ruined YHWH’s land, referred to as a vineyard in this instance. The ‘many shepherds’ could be the foreign rulers who have destroyed the land, or the Judean Kings who have acted unwisely, although most commentators interpret it as foreign rulers. W. McKane says that the destruction of Israel’s agricultural prosperity is by foreign rulers,¹⁶ a view echoed by L. Allen.¹⁷ Carroll adds that as a result of the destruction, no-one pays any attention to the land¹⁸ so it remains silent and passive in its reaction.

The land is portrayed in the text as being desolate. The threefold use of שָׁמֶמָה [desolation] in the creation of לְמִדְבָּר [a wilderness] emphasizes the point. The desolation or drying up of the land could be read as is the earth itself mourning,¹⁹ but it must be recognized that it is the many shepherds that have caused this so the

¹⁴ The text, Jer 12:4d, לֹא יִרְאֶה אֶחָרִיתֵנוּ אֶת־.

¹⁵ See footnote 23, ch 6 of this thesis.

¹⁶ William McKane, *op. cit.*, p274.

¹⁷ Leslie C. Allen, *op. cit.*, p153.

¹⁸ Robert P. Carroll, *op. cit.*, p290.

¹⁹ William L. Holladay. *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1986) p 388.

earth responds, but in its passive state. The end result is that the earth is seen to be grieving for the people or suffering with the people. The people have turned away from YHWH, therefore the land has been invaded and the result is destruction, especially of agricultural production, with implied destruction of the cultural landscape. In v 11 the text says that the land, desolate it mourns to me [שִׁמְמָה אֲבָלָהָ לְעָלַי], that is to YHWH. There can be two readings of this text, firstly, it can be read as the land being personified as a mourner with lamenting before YHWH in its desolate state. Secondly, it can be read as the land having a mournful effect on YHWH where its desolate state makes YHWH mournful.²⁰ The first interpretation is preferred as this is the literal translation and it portrays the earth in a form of silent complaint²¹ that supports a theory of the earth being passive in the symbiotic relationship between earth, people and YHWH.²² The people are not in a good relationship with YHWH who is distant, the land mourns to YHWH indicating a close link, but this is a metaphoric reaction, not an initiated action and not necessarily an action in sympathy with humans. Also, in this case, the people are not portrayed as mourning.

The previous two texts discussed provide some suggestion of the land suffering in sympathy with humans, but the evidence is neither strong nor extensive. There are signs of the earth's own resistance through becoming a wilderness, but the texts are still strongly driven by the people's actions causing YHWH to grieve and

²⁰ William McKane, *op. cit.*, p 274.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p 274.

²² Walter Brueggemann. *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down* Vol.1, Jer1-25, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1988) p 116. Brueggemann states: "The land has not been well treated. The people have not been well served. The result is that the land is unable to be the land YHWH intended and hoped for. The community is unable to be the people YHWH proposed". He adds that YHWH thus grieves. Here the symbiotic relationship has broken down completely.

therefore earth is largely seen as the passive victim, yet with some limited suggestion of grieving itself through its desolation.

Turning to the positive or regenerative aspect of the Principle of Resistance, the questions being addressed concern finding evidence of ecosystems on earth having the power to regenerate, and how far the texts reflect the earth as the subject, rather than object, of this regeneration. It is significant that the verses pointing to regeneration or revival come from the 'Book of Consolation' within the Book of Jeremiah, specifically ch 30-33. Firstly in Jer 31:12c there is reference to overflowing goodness of grain, wine and oil, signifying agricultural abundance, growth, expansion and prosperity. Mention of the young of the flock and herd in 12b is also a reference to future growth and abundance of food supply. The use of רָוָה [watered, but used with the sense of being saturated] and יִסְפְּוּלֵא־לְדֹאֲבָה [they will not mourn again] (to mourn, but with a strong negative) is the language of abundance. It should be noted, however, that this reference to a well-watered garden is poetic imagery in the form of a simile, where the new life is like a well watered garden but does not indicate any action of the earth or land.

Jer 31:27-28 hints at new life and a return to eco-balance. There is evidence of new life with זרע [the seed of] used which follows the promises of a secure future, that is, restoration after judgement²³. There is future hope for both countries, Israel and Judah, and this comes in the form of agricultural prosperity

²³ Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary, op. cit.*, p355.

and the restoration of a known and effective eco-system. Again there to be animal and human partnership which is evidence for a new eco-balance. The six verbs from Jer 1:9-10 make a reappearance²⁴ but this time YHWH's emphasis is on building and planting. The earth can regenerate but YHWH is still the cause.

At the end of the passage where Jeremiah buys a field (Jer 32:1-15), YHWH is quoted as saying that houses, fields and vineyards will once again be bought in this land. This is evidence of the writer being able to proclaim hope for the future.²⁵ With the use of עִוֵּר [again] the idea of restoration, rebuilding and reinstallation comes to the fore. It is not so much regeneration as revival of the past yet it is a new start and it is clear that the earth has the capacity to allow and to enable this to happen. V 15 characterises Jeremiah's understanding of the land. G. Wittenberg sees in this verse Jeremiah's vision of the land. He claims that there is no future for Israel apart from the land as the land guarantees sustenance, that the land itself is the 'nurturing and life-giving ground of all new life for the community in the future', and that there is a vision for new life on the land.²⁶ This view places too much emphasis on the power of the land itself and emphasizes the agricultural over the urban and cultural land use. The land is portrayed by Jeremiah in this passage as something to buy and sell so that urban and rural life can be restored to the systems of the past. The earth is important in the relationship between YHWH and the people but it has no voice and neither resists or asserts. It simply assists passively, but it is still important in the restoration since it does not resist.

²⁴ See p17, chapter 2 of this thesis.

²⁵ Jack L. Lundbom, Jeremiah 1-20, *op. cit.*, p511.

²⁶ Gunther H. Wittenberg, 'The Vision of the Land in Jeremiah' in Norman C. Habel, (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 4, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2001) pp 136-7. He also adds, that this is not a vision for a city since Jerusalem is not mentioned.

Jer 31:12 indicates a future that would not again bring mourning or such a devastating event. This verse needs to be read in conjunction with 33:10-12 where YHWH states that he will restore the fortunes of the land, especially in ‘this place’.²⁷ Here there will again be towns as well as pasture for the shepherds to feed and rest their flocks. This revives a description of a desolate landscape without animals or people and where there is no rural or cultural landscape in which the people can interact. There are no sounds (v 11) and the desolation and breakdown of the eco-system is complete. It is in this context that future hope is expressed and a reversal of fortunes is indicated. As R. Carroll says there will be a reversal of the past with a return to normal urban and rural life where again they will become a culture with a thriving pastoral civilization.²⁸ It demonstrates the restoration of the fortunes of the land which has previously been described as waste. The land defined as waste does not have human habitation and human intervention. The term חרב [waste], or where the land is laid to waste, is found in this context specifically in Jer 4:7 where the original statement is and is inverted in 33:12.²⁹ What is crucial is the emphasis on the restoration of a past cultural and pastoral landscape which involves land use for cities and agriculture. The land itself supports and does not hinder this restoration but is a passive bystander throughout. YHWH has given the people the power to rejuvenate the eco-system and the people will thrive again.

Habel speaks of the reinstatement of the past rather than the genesis of a new order, when he says: “Ultimately the ideology of the Book of Jeremiah is not

²⁷ The Benjamin region near Jerusalem, as stated in Jer 32:44.

²⁸ Robert P. Carroll. *Jeremiah, A Commentary*, Vol. 2, (Sheffield, Phoenix Press, 1986) p 636.

²⁹ Other instances of חרב are Jer 4:20; 4:23; 7:34; 9:10; 9:12; 10:25; 25:12; 25:18 and 25:38.

about a totally new social order but the restoration of an idealized past order, where everyone from king to peasant will know YHWH personally and do his Lord's will."³⁰ The earth is portrayed as not resisting regeneration and its own power is not evident in the text which is within the context of the earth being passive. Pre-existing order is what is regenerated with YHWH as the ultimate cause of making the revival happen. Thus, it cannot be concluded that the earth is the subject of the regeneration rather, it is the passive object.

³⁰ Norman C. Habel. 'The Suffering Land: ideology in Jeremiah' in *Lutheran Theological Journal* Vol. 26, No. 1, (May 1992) p 24.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions

Having examined each of the six Ecojustice Principles of the Earth Bible Project,¹ as they apply to the Book of Jeremiah, it is clear that the land texts correlate in varying degrees to the multiple aspects of the principles. The complexity of the task is acknowledged through the diversity of issues raised by the sub-questions formulated for each principle. In all cases only part of the principle aligned positively and each principle exhibited differing degrees of correlation. Appendix One outlines in tabular form the conclusions for each of the six principles.

In selecting a hierarchy of correlation and comparing this with that of G. Tucker some comparisons may be made.² Tucker has been active with the Earth Bible Project since its inception and has critiqued their hermeneutic as the project has progressed. He has stated that the principles of Worth (One) and Mutual Custodianship (Five) could be sufficient on their own.³ Interconnection (Two) can be seen as an extension of each of these two Principles. Given he sees the Principles of Voice (Three) and Resistance (Six) as the two most problematic, Purpose (Four) would be ranked after Interconnectedness.⁴ These are generic rankings as Tucker is not referring to any specific Biblical text. In this thesis a ranking is provided for each of the Principles as they refer specifically to the Jeremiah land texts, (see Appendix One). It is notable that none of the principles

¹ Norman C. Habel. (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 1, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2000) p 24.

² Gene M. Tucker. *Ecological Approaches: The Bible and the Land*, in Joel M. LeMon & Kent Harold Richards (Eds.), "Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David L. Petersen" (Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2009) p 356-363.

³ *Ibid.*, p 358.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 359.

fit totally or correlate highly, but they do show some sense of matching in some aspects. The Principles of Interconnectedness (Two) and Mutual Custodianship (Five) correlate best, with a partial fit attributed to Intrinsic Worth (One) and Purpose (Four) to a lesser degree. There is some limited correlation identified with the Principle of Voice (Three) with Resistance (Six) having the least correlation. This hierarchy is similar to that of Tucker's but shows that the Principle of Intrinsic Worth does not correlate as well as does that of Interconnectedness. In both cases Mutual Custodianship correlates well as does Purpose, though not being identified as the most important Principle. Voice in Jeremiah fits better than Resistance, but Tucker is correct when he argues that the Earth Bible Project takes the Principles of Voice and Resistance and personify the earth too far, thus becoming excessively anthropocentric in their perspective.⁵

Four other important themes emerged out of the study of the principles that were present over more than one principle. These were the symbiotic relationship between YHWH, people and land, the various meanings of the use of the term land [אֶרֶץ or אֲדָמָה], the quest to find the land with a voice of its own, and the theocentric nature of the texts studied.

The symbiotic relationship, as described by N. Habel,⁶ is in evidence but it is not an equal tripartite relationship. The land responds to the actions of either YHWH or the people, but does not initiate any action itself. Essentially the land is a silent partner, a passive bystander, albeit responding with metaphorical sympathy.

YHWH initiates significant parts of the action, the people respond, then the land

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 359.

⁶ Norman C. Habel. *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press 1995) pp 75-76.

responds in reaction. The symbiotic relationship is hierarchical and the partners are not equal, yet there is a significant relationship between each of them and the Jeremiah texts constantly bring into play the interaction between each. This interaction, however, is not equal and the emphasis is more on relationship between the partners rather than on any benefit they gain from this association.

In Chapter One of this thesis four meanings were attributed to the term 'land', these were; land as a place of being, as a geographic reference, as part of the psyche of the Israelites, and as a place for agricultural growth. All are essential to the analysis other than land as a specific geographical reference. Land as a place of being is highlighted by the interaction between YHWH and the people, and is also referred to as inheritance in some specific cases. In the Book of Jeremiah the other two meanings are redefined by the context in which they are used. The land being part of the psyche of the Israelites supports an economic interpretation of the land where the cultural landscape is highlighted. Land able to support the growing of crops and vines, or general agricultural production, is also a common meaning of 'the land' in Jeremiah. Coupled to this is the implication of the land being developed with not only agricultural produce but with urban centres of growth and economic activity. That is, the cultural landscape is important as part of the term 'land' and this is often linked together with land for agricultural use. Wilderness in terms of its use in Jeremiah is land that is valued only for its potential ability to sustain life, although there is some sensitivity to the fragility of the land. It is not a modern interpretation where wilderness is untouched and undeveloped, left in its pristine state. This highlights one of the dangers of using ancient texts to interpret current concepts and issues where the meaning of the terms needs to be clarified before conclusions may be drawn.

The Ecojustice Principles of Voice and Resistance point to the earth having its own voice and being able to actively resist injustice. While human terms are used to describe the earth's action, these are not meant literally yet there is still an emphasis on what is described being more than simply poetic imagery, especially in the use of personification and metaphor. This imagery generally reflects the mood of YHWH or the people. Who is the speaker, what is the message they are to convey, who is the audience, and what is the context are critical questions that need to be addressed when examining texts in relation to the Ecojustice Principles. There is a danger in a hermeneutical approach that reads a text without taking account of its original historical meaning.⁷ While addressing the Principle of Voice there was some evidence for the earth being addressed as subject, and evidence of the earth responding in sympathy with the actions of YHWH and the Israelites, this fell short of retrieving a voice for earth. So while the earth, or the land in particular, is responsive it has no life, voice or will of its own.

In drawing conclusions at the end of each chapter where a particular principle was discussed, the power and influence of YHWH over the people and of defining the action of the people, especially the land and its environment, became clear in each. As well, the earth is often portrayed as a passive bystander and silent partner in the relationship between YHWH, people and the land. When using the basic hermeneutic principle of the Earth Bible Project, that is, suspicion, identification and retrieval, it became clear that the suspicion the texts were anthropomorphic was justified. Further exploration showed the omnipotence and

⁷ This refers to the meaning of the text as it relates to the author's contemporaries. The author was writing in a certain time in history and this writing was interpreted by the audience according to the historical context. In later times the same text can have a meaning for a contemporary audience that is different from that of the original.

dominance of YHWH. There was only limited opportunity for identification in the texts, and they were not often open to retrieval of non human living activity.⁸ This has led to the conclusion that the Jeremiah land texts are theocentric, rather than anthropocentric or ecocentric.

Regarding future studies in the area of the Ecojustice Principles and biblical texts, it is recommended that generic questions highlighting the thrust of each Principle be developed as a standardised starting point. This would facilitate better dialogue and provide more clearly defined parameters for inquiry. Given that the Earth Bible Principles are not specifically biblical in their formulation, it is possible that they could be used with other ancient non biblical texts. The principles themselves are possibly more closely linked with fertility cults and baal(s) than with the Hebrew scriptures, but this would be for a future study to investigate and ascertain. Given the current imperative to care for the earth, and land specifically, in a sustainable way to ensure its preservation for future generations, the exploration of the Principle of Mutual Custodianship using other Hebrew Bible texts, including other prophets, historical and wisdom literature, could be of some benefit.

The Jeremiah land texts do lend themselves to an eco-theological reading given the important relationship between YHWH, people and land. The land forms a

⁸ Norman C. Habel & Peter Trudinger (Eds.). *Exploring Biblical Hermeneutics* (Lieden, Brill, 2008) pp 1-8.

significant part of the triumvirate relationship. The question is asked in the title of this thesis: “Is Jeremiah green?” The Jeremiah land texts show some tendencies towards recognising worth in regenerative production and are sympathetic to the concept of a sustainable stewardship in caring for the earth, but only in that it sustains a way of life. This is not an eco-theological understanding as outlined in the Six Ecojustice Principles. The conclusion is that Jeremiah is not green.

Appendix One

The questions posed to discuss each of the Ecojustice Principles of the Earth Bible Project⁹ in the Book of Jeremiah and how the conclusions correlate or align with these Principles.

<i>Principle and Questions</i>	<i>Degree of correlation</i>		
	<i>Fully</i>	<i>Partially</i>	<i>Not at all</i>
<p>The Principle of Intrinsic Worth</p> <p>Is there evidence of earth having worth in itself because its components are part of an ecological system?</p> <p>Does the text reflect a cosmology different from western Christian duality where heaven and earth are totally separate?</p> <p>Are there any instances in the text of YHWH declaring the earth or its components good?</p>		<p>Superficial reference to systems, land valued for its ability to be used by the people.</p> <p>Yes, but this is not intrinsic worth.</p>	<p>No correlation.</p>
<p>The Principle of Interconnectedness</p> <p>Is there evidence of a web of relationships rather than simply mechanical structure, for example, humans being dependent on forests and trees, as part of the earth community?</p> <p>Is there any evidence of humans not being exalted over creatures?</p> <p>Is there any affirmation of interconnection and interdependence between the biological world and humans?</p>	<p>Yes, a link between the actions of the people, YHWH and the land.</p> <p>Yes, but YHWH is the cause.</p>		<p>No correlation.</p>
<p>The Principle of Voice</p> <p>Is there any evidence of the earth being viewed as a living entity where earth is seen as an all encompassing organism?</p> <p>Do any of the texts show the earth having a voice and a language of its own?</p> <p>Does the text reflect an understanding of a common bond between humans and non-humans?</p>		<p>Earth addressed as subject and is responsive but not itself a living being.</p>	<p>No correlation.</p> <p>No correlation.</p>

⁹ Norman C Habel. (Ed.). *The Earth Bible, Volume 1, Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield, The Pilgrim Press, 2000) pp 25-27.

<i>Principle and Questions</i>	<i>Degree of correlation</i>		
	<i>Fully</i>	<i>Partially</i>	<i>Not at all</i>
<p>The Principle of Purpose</p> <p>Is there any textual evidence of the earth functioning according to an inbuilt purpose and design?</p> <p>Do the texts point to individual parts of the earth community having a design and reflecting a direction that sustains life in all its beauty?</p> <p>Does the text reflect a view that the earth is <i>NOT</i> disposable?</p> <p>Does the text focus on restoration of past life systems or does it lean towards liberation and transformation?</p>		Limited references. Limited references.	No correlation. Restoration, but not transformation.
<p>The Principle of Mutual Custodianship</p> <p>Do the texts indicate a role for humans to be stewards of the land?</p> <p>Is the custodianship of the land a mutual partnership between the land and the people?</p> <p>Is the earth considered sacred in the relationship between people and land?</p> <p>Do the texts indicate a hierarchical model of stewardship or is there an alternative view expressed?</p>	Yes.	Yes, but YHWH part of the partnership. Only when rid of idols.	Hierarchical, no alternative view.
<p>The Principle of Resistance</p> <p>JUSTICE Is the earth portrayed as a passive resister or does the earth text actively resist injustice”?</p> <p>Is there empathy between humans and the wider earth community, and does the earth suffer in sympathy with humans?</p> <p>Are there any texts that focus on injustice to the earth, and if so, is this more than poetic imagery?</p> <p>REGENERATION Is there textual evidence of ecosystems having the power to regenerate?</p> <p>Does the text reflect earth as a subject with the power to revive and rejuvenate?</p>		Some evidence for sympathetic suffering. Does not resist, and has no power itself to regenerate.	Earth is a passive victim. No correlation. Earth is a passive object.

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