I. Disaster From the North, 4:5-6:30.

A. "In 4:5-6:30 on the one hand the approach of an enemy from the north is depicted in constantly changing dramatic imagery (4.5-31; 6.1-5, 22-26); and on the other hand the guilt of Israel is given as the cause of this judgment (4.13b, 14, 18, 22, 26b; 5.1-31; 6.6-21)."

B. 4:5-31: disaster from the north.

1. Disaster described, 5-9.
   a. The people are to flee for God is bringing disaster from the north (a reference to 1:14ff.?), 5-6.
   b. Described as a lion and destroyer of nations brought against the people by God's anger, 7-8.
   c. All the leaders will be horrified that day, 9.

2. Jeremiah intercedes and God responds with more specific judgments, 10-31.
   a. Charges that God has deceived Jerusalem in saying Shalom when a sword is coming, 10.
   b. God's response is a non-cleansing wind will blow that day (cf. 6:27-30) (11-12), which is elaborated in 13-31.
      (1) The besieging coming against Jerusalem, 13-17.
      (2) Reason for the punishment, 18.
      (3) Jeremiah's response, 18-21.
      (4) Jeremiah's description of his people, 26.

1Ibid.
C. **5:1-31:** Jeremiah playing Diogenes, none are upright.

1. If Jeremiah can find one righteous person the city will be spared for all
deal falsely, 1-2.

2. Jeremiah defends the people, 3-6:
   a. tries to argue they are unaccountable, 3-5ab.
   b. but they are rebellious and will be punished, 5c-6.

3. God argues he should not forgive them and will punish them, 7-11.
   a. Their sins are such they should be punished, 7-9.
   b. The command to punish, 10-11.

4. Poetic messenger declaration of punishment, 14-17.

5. Prose messenger declaration holding out hope--not complete annilation,
but punishment for sin, 18-19.

6. Poetic proclamation/disputation statement--their wickedness is reason for
the punishment, 20-31.

D. **6:1-15:** Jerusalem under siege.

1. Jerusalem will become barren, 1-3.

2. Words of invading army desirous of battle, 4-5.

3. Messenger statement warning of and describing the siege, 6-8.

4. Messenger statement describing punishment and God's frustration that no
one will listen, 9-12.
   a. Israel gleaned, 9.
b. No one will listen, 10-11a.

c. Punishment described, 11b-12.


E. 6:16-21: Because of wickedness and repentance is only outward, God will punish.

1. Command to walk in ancient path ignored, 16.

2. Ignored warnings of watchmen, 17.

3. Nations are witnesses of the just punishment, 18.

4. Earth a witness of why the punishment is just, 19.

5. God wants a religion of the heart, not hypocrisy, 20.


F. 6:22-26: Messenger statement describing the coming army.

G. 6:27-30:

1. ". . . is perhaps meant to bring the whole collection chs. 2-6 to an end, compares the prophet's task of disclosing the guilt of his contemporaries with that of a metal assayer. It thus reflects a prophetic self-understanding which does not limit itself merely to handing on sayings of YHWH which have been received, but promises the prophet an independent critical function over against his environment."\(^2\)

2. Has proven itself to be one of the most difficult passages in Jeremiah.

\(^2\)Ibid.
3. Many scholars have given much attention to the perceived textual problems in the passage, but little to its metallurgical image.³

4. "The [Hebrew] text of these verses is so confused, the metre so uncertain, and the presence of glosses so suspected that it is impossible to translate."⁴

a. The result—scholarly emendation of nearly every verse in the passage.

b. Verse 30 is free of textual difficulties.

c. But the poor condition of verses 27-29 necessitates a verse by verse discussion of their difficulties and the imagery they provide before attempting a translation of the whole text.

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II. EXCURSUS: THE TEXTUAL PROBLEMS

A. Verse 27:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NRS Jeremiah 6:27</th>
<th>WTT Jeremiah 6:27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have made you a tester and a refiner among my people so that you may know and test their ways.</td>
<td>דָּבָרָה יִנְחַלָּה לְעֵינֵי בָּהֵן</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The term דָּבָרָה, bāhôn, which is derived from the root bhn, “to examine, try,” and which is translated by nearly all modern scholars as the noun “assayer,” may have contributed to some of the problems in this passage.

³G. R. Driver, "Two Misunderstood Passages of the Old Testament," JTS n.s. 6 (1955): 86-7 and William L. Holladay, Jeremiah 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 230-31. Driver and Holladay are the only scholars who have seriously attempted to describe the metallurgical process and both have described it as the refining of silver.

a. This is due to the fact that there is another root bhn, represented in the words “watchtower,” “siege-tower” (Isa 32:14; 23:13).\(^5\)

b. Since “fortress” (בלשין, miḇšār) also occurs in this verse, some commentators, such as Laetsch,\(^6\) and the older translations, such as the KJV, would translate 27a as “I have made you a tower and a fortress among my people.”

c. This translation brings to mind the imagery of Jer 1:18, discussed above.

(1) However, since bhn, “to examine, try, test,” is used in 27b, and since the context of the passage deals with metallurgy, it is probably better to delete miḇšār altogether.

(2) Various suggestions have been offered even by those scholars who would delete it as an incorrect gloss.

(a) Duhm, Rudolph, and Bright revocalize miḇšār as a Piel participle, miḇaṣṣēr (“one who searches through,” i.e., “a tester”).\(^7\)

(b) Volz sees the term as related to baṣer, "gold," (Job 22:24).\(^8\)

(c) Holladay revocalizes the term as a Qal participle, bōṣēr, with a prefixed min, mibbōṣēr, thus

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\(^5\) GB, 91b; BDB, 103b; KB, 117b; KBS, 115a.

\(^6\) Laetsch, Jeremiah, 90.

\(^7\) Duhm, Jeremiah, 73; Rudolph, Jeremiah, 42; Bright, Jeremiah, 49. Rudolph (p. 42) and Bright (p. 47) omit the term in translation.

\(^8\) Volz, Jeremiah, 83.
producing the translation, “rather than a grape-harvester.”

(d) Driver emends mibšar wëteda’ to mibšarô têda’ producing the translation “whom thou wilt be able to test,” arguing that “… mbsr may then be taken as an Aramaizing infin. form from a Hebr. bâšär = Arab. bašar I ‘considered’ IV ‘observed, perceived, saw’… from which the Hebr. bešer ‘(tested) metal’ (Jb. xxii. 24, 25) is probably derived. The sing. pronom. suffix agrees with the sing. ‘my people’, although the speaker afterwards lapses naturally into treating this as a coll. plur. term, as in drkm “their way”.

(e) But as McKane has pointed out, "The circumstance that (ex hypothesi) mbsmy is resumed by a singular suffix at mbsrw and a plural suffix at drkm is a bigger difficulty than Driver allows." Hence it is probably best to delete the term.

2. Therefore verse 27 might be translated as follows:

I have made you an assayer among my people,
so that you may know and test their way.

B. Verse 28:

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9William L. Holladay, Jeremiah 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 228. Holladay also treats the term as a gloss which should be deleted from the text: “It [the term] appears to overload the colon and is best attributed to a glossator who noted that Jrm’s role had changed from that in v 9, where bóšer appears.”


1. Scholars have also puzzled over the phrase הָרִים הָרָעִים, sâre sôrêrim.
   a. Driver argues that the phrase is “a perfectly legitimate form of expression, in which two homonyms from distinct roots [swr and srr] are juxtaposed to heighten the effect.” This produces the rough translation “persons turning aside in disobedience.”
   b. Bright and Rudolph see the phrase as a construct which expresses a superlative. This gives the idea of “the most stubborn of rebels” (Bright), or “deviants of the most stubborn kind” (Rudolph).
   c. The Septuagint lacks sry altogether. Aquila, Symmachus, the Syriac, the Targum, and the Vulgate have sry; this so-called minority reading produces the rough translation “princes of rebellion,” and illustrates the superlative function as well.
   d. When it is observed that phrases virtually identical to sry swrrym also occur in Isa 1:23 and Hos 9:15 a good case can be made for the emendation. In this way Jeremiah, by building on the phrases of Hosea and Isaiah, is illustrating just how corrupt the people have become.
   e. Holladay makes this point and summarizes it as follows,

The phrase “princely rebels” (sôrê sôrêrim) is Jrm’s twist on phrases in the eight-century prophets: Isa 1:23, “your princes are rebels” (sârayik sôrêrim), and Hos 9:15, “all their princes are rebels” (kol-sârêhem sorêrim). In the eighth century the princes were rebels; now, says Jrm, all the people are princes of

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12Driver, “Two Misunderstood Passages,” 85.

13Bright, Jeremiah, 47; Rudolph, Jeremia, 42.
rebels—everyone is now what only the leadership had been a century before.  

2. The phrase “bronze and iron” (םלוע וברזל, נַהֲשׁוֹמֶשׁ בַּרְצֵל) is deleted by several scholars.  

   a. Driver would move the phrase to v. 29 to help resolve the difficulties there.  
   
   b. Holladay retains the phrase.  

   (1) He redivides the verse so that “all of them,” which is usually understood to begin the last half of the verse (so the MT accentuation), is translated with the end of the first half.  

   (2) This produces the phrase “bronze and iron, all of them.”  

   (3) Such a construction means that “‘destroyers they are’ becomes the last colon and one is left with a tetracolon with nice parallelism.” Thus Holladay’s translation may be tentatively offered as follows,  

   They are all princely rebels,  
   bearers of slander,  
   bronze and iron, all of them,  
   destroyers they are.
C. Verse 29:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NRS Jeremiah 6:29</th>
<th>WTT Jeremiah 6:29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The bellows blow fiercely, the lead is consumed by the fire; in vain the refining goes on, for the wicked are not removed.</td>
<td>נָהַר נָהַר (מִאָשֶׁר) [מַמֵּשׁ] נָפָרָה לָשָׁהָרָה צְרָה וּדְרָעֵי לָא נָכֵרָה</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Scholars are divided as to how to parse נָהַר, näḥar.

   a. Driver argues, “näḥar is not the Ni. from hr(r) ‘glowed’, since bellows are neither scorched nor burnt; for, if they are, they become useless! It is the Q. of another Hebr. nāḥar ‘snorted’, with which the Acc. nahāru ‘to snore’, the Arab. nahara = Eth. nahara ‘snorted’ and the Syr. nhar ‘panted’, are cognate; as such it aptly describes the noise made by a pair of bellows working at full blast.”

   b. While Bright and Rudolph have adopted this interpretation, other scholars take the opposite view and parse næḥar as a Ni., ‘to be scorched,’ from Hrr.

2. The ketib נָהַר, mēṣṭam in the MT is unintelligible. Most scholars take the qere, mēʾēš tam; tam (from the root tmm, to be complete, finished, consumed) is then read with “lead” נָהַר, qūpāreṯ

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20 Driver, “Two Misunderstood Passages,” 85.

21 Bright, Jeremiah, 47; Rudolph, Jeremia, 48.

22 BDB, 359a; McKane, Jeremiah, 154, 156; Holladay, Jeremiah, 228, 229.
a. This produces the translation “the lead comes whole from the fire,” or “the lead is consumed by the fire.”

b. Holladay reads mâcher with the first part of the verse. Since he translates nâhar as “to be scorched,” this produces the translation, “The bellows are scorched by the fire.”

3. The only difficulty with these last proposals is that “lead” is feminine while “consumed” is masculine.

a. There are two possibilities in answer to this. Either, as Duhm has suggested, a haplography for titum or titom or, the reading stands as it is with a feminine subject and a masculine verb as is the case with “bronze” in 1 Kgs 7:45.

b. Therefore, verse 29 offers the following possibilities for translation. The alternatives are set in brackets.

The bellows snort [are scorched by the fire],
the lead comes whole from the fire [the lead is consumed by the fire];
in vain he continues to refine, [the refiner has refined]
but the evil are not removed.

\[ \text{Bright, Jeremiah, 47.} \]

\[ \text{McKane, Jeremiah, 154} \]

\[ \text{Holladay, Jeremiah, 228.} \]

\[ \text{Ibid., 229.} \]

\[ \text{Šarôp, Holladay argues, “... is normally construed as an infini-tive absolute of šrp qal, but such an expression hardly makes sense with ‘in vain.’ It is better to understand the word as an agent noun with a formation like bâhôn ‘assayer’ in v 27 (see GKC, sec 84ãK; Bauer-Leander, sec. 61 ja ka); so Rudolph” (Jeremiah, 229, b--b). He therefore translates this phrase as “the refiner has refined.”} \]
4. Only Driver and Holladay have seriously attempted to describe the metallurgical process and they describe it as the refining of silver.\footnote{See my dissertation, 124ff, for details.}

5. All other scholars have followed their lead, arguing that:
   
   a. Since the process for assaying and refining of silver is the same, which it is, the terms assay and refine are used equivalently.
   
   b. Since Jeremiah is the assayer of v. 27 he must also be the refiner of v. 29 due to the theory of synonymous. (Evidence is furnished that in other passages where these two terms are paralleled (Jer 9:7 [H,6]; Zech 13:9; Pss 17:3; 26:2; 66:10) God is both assayer and refiner.)
   
   c. This results in an interpretation that Jeremiah is made an assayer, he attempts to refine them, but the process fails due to equipment failure, etc. That is, the prophet, who is made an assayer, attempts to refine the people, but fails.

6. These conclusions fail to notice certain facts:
   
   a. This description confuses the imagery of the passage by ignoring the difference in meaning of the Hebrew words, and arguing that Jeremiah was appointed an assayer and then asserting that he functioned as a refiner because the verbs are used equivalently.
   
   b. Granted the processes of assaying and refining were identical, yet the purpose for each process was different.
   
   c. The purpose of assaying was to test the purity of the metal, while the purpose of refining was to purify the metal.
   
   d. The passage does not say Jeremiah was made a refiner, but an assayer!
   
   e. A more precise description of the processes of assaying and refining indicate that even though assaying and refining of silver in
the ancient world used the same metallurgical process, each served
a different purpose which should not be equated.

f. The parallelism of בָּהַנ and סָרִפ in other passages does not
necessarily lead to the conclusion that because God is both assayer
and refiner in these passages, Jeremiah must be both in 27-30.

(1) The imagery of those passages show that even though the
assayer and the refiner may be the same, the purposes for
the processes described are far different.

(2) These passages use the different purposes of refining and
assaying to make the spiritual application that the people
would be made pure (refining) as well as tested for that
purity (assaying).

(3) The fact that the assayer and refiner is the same individual
is a different issue.

(4) Similarly, it does not logically follow that because the
assayer and refiner is the same person in these passages, he
is the same person in Jer 6:27-30.

(5) Translating נָּחָר in 29a as “to be scorched” (McKane and
Holladay) does not fit very well with this process because it
also ignores the different purposes of refining and assaying
in the passage.

(6) These proposals (having assumed that because Jeremiah is
the assayer he must also be the refiner) see the process
failing due to damaged equipment (hence the failure of the
refiner--Jeremiah), but verse 30, making use of language an
assayer would use attributes the failure to the impurity of
the metal by describing the people as “refuse silver.”

7. Operating with damaged bellows points to a failure in the process, not the
impurity of the metal. An image must be sought for which points to this
impurity. Recognizing the differences for the purposes of assaying and
refining does just that.
a. Translation of 27-30: Now that an adequate base for the imagery of 27-30 has been established attention can be given to a proper translation and explanation of the passage.

(27) I have made you an assayer among my people so that you may know and test their way.

(28) They are all princely rebels, bearers of slander, bronze and iron, all of them, destroyers they are.

(29) The bellows snort, the lead is consumed by the fire; In vain the refiner has refined, for the evil were not separated out.

(30) Refuse silver, they are called, for Yhwh has rejected them.

b. This translation results in the following picture.

(1) v. 27: Jeremiah is made an assayer so that he may know and test the people's ways.

(2) v. 28: God describes the people as rebels, destroyers, and bronze and iron.

(3) v. 29: Jeremiah begins the assay, either by cupellation or weighing.

(4) The bellows are used to heat the fire (weighing), or, if the process described is cupellation, to direct the air over the silver-lead alloy.

   (a) “The lead is consumed by the fire” indicates the completion of the assay.

   (b) “In vain the refiner has refined,” does not describe Jeremiah as the refiner. This confuses the two images of refining and assaying.

   (c) Since Jeremiah is the assayer, he must be giving his evaluation of the work of a previous refiner.
i) The assayer Jeremiah discovers that this is “refuse silver.”

ii) At the very best, the previous refiner had done a bad job.

iii) At the very worst he has done it intentionally. Since Jeremiah's verdict is “In vain the refiner has refined, for the evil were not separated out,” the people are rejected as “refuse silver” (v. 30).

iv) At this point the metaphorical image has been bridged.

8. The realization that verse 29a describes the assaying of a silver-lead alloy by means of either cupellation or weighing yields much more significant information.

a. The passage pictures Jeremiah as an assayer who assays a silver-lead alloy that some other refiner has produced, then verse 29b is Jeremiah’s verdict, “In vain the refiner has refined.”

b. That is, the previous refiner did a poor job of refining the silver-lead ore, resulting in a silver-lead alloy called “refuse silver.”

c. If the image were to continue one would expect that the next step would follow the imagery of the Psalms passages which describe metal being first assayed and then refined. That is, it might be inferred that Jeremiah's next step would be to refine the “refuse silver.” But the imagery stops before this occurs.

D. Conclusions:

1. There are several features of the metallurgical image which provide a new way of looking at Jeremiah and his work among his people.

2. Jer 6:27-30 also indicates that there was something different about Jeremiah's prophetic ministry.
3. There are not many such examples of prophets making such inquiry about the worth of the people.

4. In fact, this passage recalls Jer 5:1-5.
   b. In 5:1ff. Jeremiah is commanded to look for just people, so that God may pardon Israel.
   c. Though he attempts to defend the people, Jeremiah concludes that they are all guilty.
   d. In 6:27-30 Jeremiah is commanded to test the people; in metallurgical imagery, to assay them.

5. Thinking of the Jeremiah’s prophetic work in terms of assaying of silver suggests a kind of finality to that work.
   a. Whether 6:27-30 is seen as being part of the larger literary unit beginning with chapter 5, or even the smaller unit beginning with 6:16, its placement hints at a kind of irrevocable judgment.
   b. These units with their intermingling of accounts of the people's wickedness and the coming judgment-punishment provide an appropriate context for Jeremiah to state that the people have been finally rejected by God.

E. **Excursus: The Above Results in the Following Schema:**

1. **Chapter 1:**
   a. The call of Jeremiah in which he is appointed a prophet to the nations with power both build and destroy.
   b. The approach of the enemy from the north and the battle with Jeremiah.

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29Skinner, Prophecy, 138-164.
(1) The enemy from the north attacks Judah and its leaders from the outside.

(2) As Judah's fortified cities are attacked by this enemy it attacks Jeremiah (the fortified city with bronze walls), who prevails.

2. \textit{Chapters 2:1-6:26:}

a. A running debate between God and Jeremiah regarding Judah's wickedness and the punishment this demands

b. Ultimately God determines that Judah is utterly corrupt and challenges Jeremiah to test the people, beginning in 5:1ff., which feeds into 6:27ff.

c. \textit{6:27-30:} Jeremiah does just this and has to agree with God's judgment, the people are worthless.

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