

JEREMIAH: FORTIFIED CITY, BRONZE WALLS, AND IRON PILLAR AGAINST THE WHOLE LAND

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In Jer 1:18a, God promises to make Jeremiah “a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land.” In the prevailing scholarly opinion, these metaphors were meant to encourage and reassure the prophet, offering him divine protection from persecution by “the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people” (1:18b) whom his mission was likely to antagonize. Examining the references to walls, fortified cities, pillars, bronze, and iron in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern literature, the present article argues that at least two of the metaphors in question, “fortified city” and “bronze walls,” primarily describe the militant character of Jeremiah’s ministry. In a world torn by war, the prophet was called to wage a warfare of his own, battling for the people’s minds. Any encouragement conveyed by these expressions is secondary, having to do with the prophet’s invincibility in the face of violent opposition to his rhetorical onslaught. However, the connotations of the third metaphor, “iron pillar,” seem to be completely different and it may even clash with the other two.

1. INTRODUCTION

God punctuated Jeremiah’s call in Jer 1:18–19 with the metaphors עיר מְבֻצָּר ‘fortified city’, עַמּוּד בְּרֹזֶל ‘iron pillar’, and חֲמוֹת נְחֹשֶׁת ‘bronze walls’. God also promised, “I am with you...to deliver you” (v. 19b). Most scholars read these metaphors in terms of divine encouragement and promise to deliver the prophet and consequently, interpret them as encouragement.¹ Few exegetes emphasize the significance of Jeremiah being fortified *against* his opponents, the violence he experienced at the hands of the community.² This

¹ Scholars who interpret these words as encouraging include: T. Laetsch, *Jeremiah* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1952), p. 31; B. D. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Tübingen: J. C. Mohr, 1901), p. 14; E. W. Nicholson, *The Prophet Jeremiah 1–25* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 27; N. C. Habel, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1968), p. 43; D. P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia* (2nd ed.; KAT 10; Leipzig: Hildersheim Georg Olms, 1928), p. 12; E. A. Leslie, *Jeremia* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), p. 24; A. C. Welch, *Jeremia: His Times and His Work* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1951), p. 56; H. Cunliffe-Jones, *The Book of Jeremiah: Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM, 1960), p. 51; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 157.

² R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), p. 110; compare W. Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down 1–25* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 29; R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah* (IBC; Atlanta: Westminster John Knox, 1990), p. 29; V. H. Matthews, “Jeremiah 1:13–19,” *TBT* 33 (1995): 201; J. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20* (AB 21A; New York: Doubleday, 1999), pp. 247–248; W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah I* (Philadelphia: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 45–46.

article offers the modified view that the metaphors in question portray primarily the warlike nature of Jeremiah’s ministry and only secondarily offer encouragement and a promise of deliverance.

2. THE TEXT

And I have made you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land—the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not prevail against you, for I am with you to deliver you, says Yhwh.³

Structurally, Jer 1:1–19 falls into preliminary remarks (vv. 1–3), the call vision proper (vv. 4–10), supplementary visions (vv. 11–12, 13–16), and an exhortation to Jeremiah followed by a promise of protection (vv. 17–19).⁴ Some scholars argue that the visions of verses 11–16 may have been independent of the call of Jeremiah.⁵ However, rhetorical criticism has shown the passage to be a thematic unit in which verse 19 is the appropriate conclusion.⁶ In this context, עִיר מְבֻצָּר, עֲמֹוד בְּרִזָּל, and חֲמוֹת נְחֹשֶׁת (v. 18) are defensive military metaphors that characterize Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry.

Jeremiah 15:20–21 is similar, but not identical, to 1:18b–19, as the following chart shows.

1:18–19	15:20–21
Jeremiah designated חֲמוֹת נְחֹשֶׁת ‘bronze walls’	Jeremiah designated חֲמוֹת נְחֹשֶׁת בְּצוּרָה ‘a fortified bronze wall’
Jeremiah is designated “bronze walls against (עַל) the whole land,” followed by the various subgroups comprising the land	Jeremiah is simply designated a fortified bronze wall “against (לְ) this people”

³ Translations are the author’s unless stated otherwise.

⁴ E. W. Nicholson, *Jeremiah*, p. 23.

⁵ J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (2nd ed.; AB 21; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), p. 6; E. W. Nicholson, *Jeremiah*, p. 23; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 144; A. C. Welch, *Jeremiah*, p. 46; R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 102. For a summary of the major positions, see W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah: Volume 1* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), pp. 11–14.

⁶ J. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, pp. 238–240. See also W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, pp. 23, 25–26, 30, 43; J. Bright, *Jeremiah*, pp. 6, 8; W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT; 3rd ed.; Tübingen: J. C. Mohr, 1967), p. 13; A. Gelin, *Jérémie, Les Lamentations, Le Livre de Baruch* (Paris: Cerf, 1951), p. 30a.

Uses the preposition על ‘unto, over, against’	Uses the preposition לְ ‘to, towards, against’
“[B]ronze walls” occur just before the various groups	“[T]his people” occurs just before “a fortified bronze wall.”
Has simply “to deliver you” (v. 19)	<p style="text-align: center;">Expansions</p> <p>“I am with you to save you and to deliver you” (v. 20)</p> <p>“I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked and ransom you out of the grasp of the violent” (v. 21)</p>

Some studies have attempted to explain the compositional relationship of these two passages.⁷ However, what matters for our purposes here is that 1:19 and 15:20 make the same point, though in different contexts.⁸ Since 15:20 is placed in the context of God’s rebuke of Jeremiah for calling him a “deceptive brook” (v. 18), the repeated use of the “fortified bronze wall” metaphor represents the restoration and reappointment of the prophet to his ministry should he repent. The imagery of both passages remains the same regardless of these literary discussions.

3. חֲמוֹת נְחֹשֶׁת ‘BRONZE WALLS’

The physical characteristics of the two items that constitute this metaphor provide a background for understanding the imagery of both חֲמוֹת נְחֹשֶׁת and חֲמוֹת נְחֹשֶׁת בְּצוּרָה. The term חֲמוֹת refers generally to the wall of a city but can also be used with regard to buildings such as temples and fortresses.⁹ The surrounding defensive walls of Israel’s fortified cities distinguished them

⁷ H.-W. Jüngling, “Ich mache dich zu einer ehernen Mauer,” *Bib* 54 (1973): 1–24. See also B. D. Duhm, *Jeremia*, p. 14; A. C. Welch, *Jeremia*, p. 56; J. Lundbom, “Jeremiah 15:15–21 and the Call of Jeremiah,” *SJOT* 9 (1995): 143–155.

⁸ R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 334.

⁹ *HALOT*, p. 298. See also W. T. In der Smitten, “חֲמוֹת,” *TDOT* 4:267–271; K. N. Schoville, “חֲמוֹת,” *NIDOTTE* 2:49–50; R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1961), pp. 229–236; Y. Aharoni, “The Date of the Casemate Walls in Judah and Israel and Their Purpose,” *BASOR* 154 (1959): 35–39; R. P. Dougherty, “Sennacherib and the Walled Cities of Judah,” *JBL* 49 (1930): 160–171; Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands in Light of Archaeological Study* (2 vols.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 2:16–23.

from the open village (חצר, cf. Lev 25:31).¹⁰ All of them had three principal components: the wall proper, which formed a barrier; the upper structure, composed of a firing platform and defensive cover; and the forward obstacles and traps.¹¹ Israelites utilized the walls they inherited from the Canaanites (Num 32:17; 1 Kgs 4:13) and built casemate and squamiform walls from scratch. The addition of salients, reentrants, and towers made the city's fortifications easier to defend; one example is Lachish.¹²

When new siege strategies emerged that made it possible to undermine such fortifications, a different technique evolved. A deep trench was dug in front of the walls whose foundations were sunk several feet into the ground. Often an outer wall, חיל, was constructed in front of this trench (Isa 26:1; Lam 2:8; Nah 3:8), creating an empty space between the חומה and חיל, which could be used for various military and defensive purposes. If the חומה was located on a high hill, the חיל was lower than the חומה but well within the range of the defenders' weapons. If the חיל was not constructed, a large moat was dug around the base of the חומה. Filling such constructions with water denied the enemy the use of a battering ram. Combinations of glacis, moat, and outer wall provided the greatest security. From a military point of view, these cities were superior to those with single walls.¹³

The idiom "PN [על]-היה חומה" 'a wall [unto/over/about] + personal name' signifies the protection of individuals. In 1 Sam 25:16, Nabal's shepherds describe David and his men as "a wall to us both by night and by day."¹⁴ In Ezra 9:9, God offers security (literally, "gives...a wall" [לָתֵת...גֹּדֵר]) to Judah and Jerusalem.¹⁵ Isaiah 26:1 describes Yhwh's salvation as "a strong city...a wall and a rampart [חומות וחיל]." Zechariah 2:5 (Hebrew 2:9) portrays Yhwh as a "wall of fire" (חומת אש) for the unwalled Jerusalem (cf. v. 4 [Hebrew v. 8]).¹⁶ Similarly, Isa 60:18 calls the walls of the New Jerusalem "Salvation" and its gates, "Praise." Israel was crossing the Red Sea with "the waters a wall to them" (הַמַּיִם לָהֶם חֹמָה; Exod 14:22, 29). Psalm 122:7 evokes an image of the

¹⁰ HALOT, p. 345; compare R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 229.

¹¹ Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare*, 1:19–20. See also W. G. Dever, "Gezer Revisited," *BA* 37 (1984): 211–212; S. R. Wolf, "Guarding the Border: The Iron Age City of Gezer," *NEA* 75 (2012): 4–19; G. Barkey et al., "A Late Iron Age Fortress in North Jerusalem," *BASOR* 238 (2002): 50, 62.

¹² D. Ussishkin, "Excavations at Tel Lachish 1978–1983," *Tel Aviv* 10 (1983): 103, 117–118, 127–130, 137–145, 149, 171–173. Italicized page numbers refer to towers, the rest to walls.

¹³ For details, see W. T. In der Smitten, "חומה," 4:267–271; Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare*, 1:20–21. See also HALOT, pp. 298, 312.

¹⁴ W. T. In der Smitten, "חומה," 4:270–271, discusses the metaphorical uses of walls.

¹⁵ HALOT, p. 181.

¹⁶ The Qumran community similarly uses חומה to describe God as protector; compare 1QH 3:37; 7:8–9; 1QS 8:7.

peace and security within the חֵיל of Jerusalem.¹⁷ Thebes took pride in its use of the sea for defense—“her rampart [חֵיל] a sea, and water her wall [חֹמָה]” (Nah 3:8). Israel’s political trust in Egypt was “like a crack in a high wall [בְּחֹמָה נִשְׁגָּבָה], bulging out, and about to collapse” (Isa 30:13). A rich man’s imagination is described as a high wall (כְּחֹמָה נִשְׁגָּבָה; Prov 18:11). Similarly, a man without self-control is “like a city broken into and left without a wall [אֵין חֹמָה]” (Prov 25:28).

Canticles 8:8–10 records the discussion of brothers’ actions toward their sister when she reaches sexual maturity:

Our little sister
 Has no breasts.
 What shall we do for our sister,
 on the day she is spoken for?
 If she is a wall [חֹמָה],
 we will build upon her a fortification of silver;
 but if she is a door [דֶּלֶת],
 we will enclose her with boards of cedar.
 I am a wall [חֹמָה],
 and my breasts are like towers;
 so then I have become in his eyes as one who brings peace.

The discussion of whether this time has arrived revolves around the size of the young woman’s breasts: the brothers assert that she has none, but she claims that her breasts are “like towers.”¹⁸ The imagery of the passage raises the issue of whether the contrast between the “wall” and the “door” has to do with the sister’s moral character (“a strong, virtuous woman,” *BDB*) or her “body” (*HALOT*).¹⁹ The difference is slight since a maiden’s decision to engage in sexual activity for the first time results in a physical change; thus, the term “wall” would in any case refer to an inviolate woman.

More specifically, if “wall” and “door” function synonymously, with both terms evoking a structure, the resultant nuance would be that of “opening” or “closing,” while their antithetical use yields a strong sexual connotation, indicating either accessibility or inaccessibility.²⁰ A wall may preserve, protect,

¹⁷ W. T. In der Smitten, “חֹמָה,” 4:270.

¹⁸ A. A. Bloch and C. Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 214–215.

¹⁹ *BDB*, p. 327; *HALOT*, p. 298.

²⁰ A. A. Bloch and C. Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, p. 215.

or repel. A woman described as a “wall” is inaccessible. A door serves the dual functioning of either offering an entryway or blocking it. A woman described as a “door” may be either open or closed.²¹ Therefore, “wall” yields the image of a virgin while “door” portrays a young woman who has a sexual partner.²²

When the female speaker describes herself in verse 10, it is as a “wall,” not a “door.” This choice of words may suggest that the latter metaphor had negative connotations. If the young woman was a “wall,” there was no doubt about her virginity and the family’s only concern was to adorn her lavishly (the “fortification of silver”). However, if she was a “door”—tending to be sexually active—the family would “enclose” her with boards of cedar, trying to ensure her virginity and dispel doubts about it.²³ A different nuance emerges if the woman’s description of herself as a “wall” evokes the “locked garden” of Cant 4:12 that is inaccessible to everyone but the lover who has the key to the “door.”²⁴ Then she would no longer be a virgin.

Disputing her brothers and defending both her sexual chastity and sexual maturity, the woman states, “I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers.” The picture is that of a city made inaccessible by its surrounding walls upon which watchtowers sit. This metaphor suggests the city’s ability to withstand any siege, resulting in peace—“then I was in his eyes as one who finds peace.” These terms may imply that as a “wall,” the woman is fully capable of independently defending her virginity from anyone except her lover who peacefully comes through her “door.”²⁵ The term חוֹמָה thus represents inaccessibility but it can be either (1) inaccessibility to everyone or (2) inaccessibility to anyone but the lover.

A synonym of חוֹמָה, גֹּדֵר, describes the function of prophets with regard to the people of Israel.²⁶ Ezekiel 13:5 indicts the former saying that they should “have gone up into the breaches, or built up a wall [תִּגְדְּרוּ גֹדֵר] for the house of Israel, that they might stand in battle in the day of the Lord” (cf. Ezek 22:30). The passage pictures Israel as a city with either weak spots or gaps (breaches) in the walls, insisting that its prophets should have either defended the vulnerable sections or repaired them. Instead of this, they prophesied lies

²¹ M. H. Pope, *Song of Songs* (AB 7C; New Haven: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 679–680.

²² W. T. In der Smitten, “חוֹמָה,” 4:270.

²³ Compare M. H. Pope, *Song of Songs*, pp. 679–681.

²⁴ A. A. Bloch and C. Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, p. 217.

²⁵ A. A. Bloch and C. Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, p. 218.

²⁶ W. T. In der Smitten, “חוֹמָה,” 4:270; G. I. Davies, “An Archaeological Commentary on Ezekiel 13,” in *Scripture and Other Artifacts* (ed. M. D. Coogan et al.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), pp. 111–113.

(vv. 6–7). The verb גָּדַר ‘wall up, build a wall’ also refers to imprisonment; thus Job 19:8 (cf. Lam 3:7):

He has walled [גָּדַר] up my way, so that I cannot pass,
and he has set darkness upon my paths.

To summarize, both the term הוֹמָה and its synonym גָּדַר conjure up the idea of protection. Specifically, they denote that the protection offered or denied to human beings, personality characteristics, or inanimate objects involves confining these things behind a barrier. Designation of a person or object as a wall thus both indicates that they provide protection and specifies what kind of protection is provided—a barrier that shields those confined behind it against assaults from without. Job 19:8 indicates that such use also carries the idea of “separation” or “isolation” since those protected are in a sense imprisoned behind the wall. This metaphorical function of the wall derives from its physical use as the backbone of the city’s fortifications.

While Sumerian, Akkadian, and Egyptian employed separate words for copper and bronze, Biblical Hebrew has only one term for both (נְחֹשֶׁת), as do Greek (χαλκοῦν) and Latin (*aes*). This ambiguity complicates the discussion of נְחֹשֶׁת in Jeremiah 1 because the properties of the two materials are substantially different. Copper can be rendered very hard by hammering but this property does not last, making it necessary to repeat the process.²⁷ Bronze, produced by a combination of copper and tin, can be hardened permanently, but not to the same degree as hammered copper.²⁸

The Hebrew Bible mentions a variety of uses for נְחֹשֶׁת. The altar and some decorations of both the tabernacle and the temple were made of it (Exod 38:30; 39:39; 1 Kgs 7:14–16), as well as their furniture and utensils (Exod 26:37; 27:2–3; 1 Kgs 7:23–38; 2 Kgs 25:13–17). It was also used for weapons and armor (1 Sam 17:5, 6, 16), fetters (Judg 16:21; 2 Sam 3:34; 2 Kgs 25:7; Jer 39:7; 52:11; 2 Chr 33:11; 36:6), and gates of fortified cities (1 Kgs 4:13). This range of uses suggests a combination of hardness, durability, and aesthetic value (Ezra 8:27 notes that “yellowed”—polished?—נְחֹשֶׁת is “as pleasing as gold,” and Isa 60:17 presumes that it was valued less than gold but more than wood, suggesting that נְחֹשֶׁת most commonly denotes bronze).

²⁷ R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, 9:44.

²⁸ J. A. Charles, “The Coming of Copper and Copper-Base Alloys and Iron: A Metallurgical Sequence,” in *The Coming of the Age of Iron* (ed. T. A. Wertheim and J. D. Muhly; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 172.

The characteristics and uses noted above probably inspired the figurative use of the term, usually conveying the impression of hardness. Job uses it in parallel with “stones” to ask rhetorically if he has a strong and hard (that is, sound) body—“Is my strength the strength of stones; is my flesh bronze?” (6:12)—and in parallel with iron to describe the strength and power of a mythological beast: “His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like bars of iron” (40:18). The same creature is described as strong enough to withstand weapons of iron and נְחֹשֶׁת: “He counts iron as straw, and bronze as rotten wood” (41:27, Hebrew 41:19). Micah 4:13 pairs the material with iron to describe the strength and hardness of Zion’s hoofs as threshing implements:

Arise and thresh,
 O daughter of Zion,
 for your horn I will make iron
 and your hoofs I will make bronze;
 you shall beat in pieces many peoples,
 and shall devote their gain to the Lord,
 their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth.

Likewise Isa 48:4 when characterizing Israel’s obstinacy in a way that brings to mind the English word “hardheaded”:

I know that you are obstinate,
 and your neck is an iron sinew
 and your forehead bronze.

The same pair of metals repeatedly serves to paint the picture of desolation brought about by drought:

I will break the pride of your power,
 and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze
 (Lev 26:19).

Your heavens over your head shall be bronze,
 and the earth under you shall be iron (Deut 28:23).

Lamentations 3:7, which, as mentioned above, echoes Job 19:8 in describing an imprisoned person as “walled...up,” uses the term נְחֹשֶׁת to make the image more graphic:

גָּדַר בְּעֵדֵי וְלֹא אֶצֵּא הַכְּבִיד נְחֹשְׁתִּי

He has walled me up round about so that I cannot escape;
he has made my bronze heavy.

Here, the metal is a metonymy for the bronze chains of the prisoner in much the same way that English speaks of putting someone “in irons”—that is, iron chains. This is the only biblical passage besides Jer 1:18; 15:20 to mention bronze and wall in the same breath.

Mesopotamian literature also uses the two terms figuratively. *Gilgamesh* describes Uruk’s walls as being “like copper/bronze.”²⁹ The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal describes himself as “the (protecting) wall of the weak.”³⁰ But the most direct ancient Near Eastern parallels come from the Egyptian cultural milieu.³¹ Abimilki, the king of Tyre, wrote to Akh-en-aton (EA 147, lines 52–56):

You are the Sun who comes forth over me, and a brazen wall set up for him, and because of the powerful arm: *nu-uh-ti* (I am at rest): *ba-ti-ti* (I am confident).³²

Sethos I is called “the wall of iron for Egypt, ‘whose battlements are of flint and whose shutters are of iron.’”³³ Sesostris III is designated a wall of copper:

²⁹ I. J. Gelb, *The Assyrian Dictionary* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1982), 13:291a. See also R. C. Thompson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Luzac, 1928), I:i:11; E. A. Speiser, trans., “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” *ANET*, p. 73b.

³⁰ I. J. Gelb, *The Assyrian Dictionary*, 3:194b.

³¹ A. Alt, “Hic murus aheneus esto,” *ZDMG* 86 (1932): 33–48. Because Egyptian literature used various terms to signify copper, bronze, and brass at different periods, there is disagreement among scholars as to the exact meaning of these terms: see R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, 9:54–55, 61–62. That does not, however, place the prevailing imagery in any doubt.

³² W. L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 233. See also J. A. Knudtzon, O. Weber, and E. Ebeling, *El-Amarna-Tafeln* (2 vols.; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1915; reprint: Aalen: Zeller, 1964), 2:610, 611; W. F. Albright, trans., “The Amarna Letters,” *ANET*, pp. 484b–c; A. L. Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 124. Although the letter is written in heavily Canaanized cuneiform Akkadian, W. F. Albright, “The Egyptian Correspondence of Abimilki, Prince of Tyre,” *JEA* 23 (1937): 199 n. 9 (cf. p. 197), maintains that the “brazen wall” expression is “of pure Egyptian origin.”

³³ A. Mariette, *Abydos I* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1869), p. 52. Online: <http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/mariette1869bd1/0054/image?sid=c5bc2f54be0af7b305deda8b4014f91c>. See also H. Grapow, *Die bildlichen Ausdrücke des Ägyptischen* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1924), p. 163; K. A. Kitchen, trans., “Second Beth-Shan Stela,” in *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols.; ed. W. W. Hallo; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 2.2.4D:28, 2.2.4G:31.

How great is the lord of his city:
 he is a walled rampart of copper of Sinai!
 How great is the lord of his city:
 he is a shelter whose hold does not fail!
 How great is the lord of his city:
 he is a fort that shields the timid from his foe!³⁴

Tutmoses III is described as “a king who is a champion, an excellent fortress for his armies, a rampart iron.”³⁵ An inscription at the Medinet Habu temple of Ramses III says, “The Good God, Montu over Egypt, great in might...mighty in strength, far-reaching in courage (lit., heart)...terrible in his might, a — wall, covering Egypt, so that everyone coming shall not see it, King Ramses III.”³⁶

Both Seti I and Ramses II invoke wall imagery to describe their protection of their troops: the latter claims to be “a great wall of bronze protecting his army...in the day of battle”; the latter, “a great wall of his army in the day of battle, whose fear has penetrated all lands.”³⁷ Similarly, Ramses II, chastises his troops for their flight in the battle of Kadesh, saying, “You who took to the air while I was alone! Did you not know it in your hearts: I am your rampart of iron!”³⁸ Other examples include “the great wall for Egypt” (Ramses II and Ramses III); “the wall which protects Egypt” (Amenophis II and Ramses III); “the excellent wall for Egypt” (Ptolemy Eurgetes); “the wall of bronze” (Prince Pesnufe); “the living wall surrounding his province as a wall surrounding the temple” (the prince of Koptos); “the beautiful falcon who protects Egypt with his flight, who grants shade to the subjects as a wall of the strong and victorious” (Ramses II); and “[he] who frightens the enemy, a wall which gives shade to Egypt” (Ramses III).³⁹ The metaphor inherent in all of these designations is that of the Pharaoh or a prince who offers protection

³⁴ M. Lichtheim, “A Cycle of Hymns to King Sesostri III,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 1:199. See also H. Goedicke, “Remarks on the Hymns to Sesostri III,” *JARCE* 7 (1968): 25; W. K. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 282; A. Erman, *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians* (trans. A. M. Blackman; London: Methuen, 1927), p. 136.

³⁵ J. K. Hoffmeier, trans., “The Gebel Barkel Stela of Tutmosis III,” *COS*, 2.2B:15.

³⁶ J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* (5 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906–1907), 4:44.

³⁷ J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 3:94.

³⁸ M. Lichtheim, “The Battle Inscriptions of Ramses II,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 2:70. See also J. A. Wilson, “The Texts of the Battle of Kadesh,” *AJSL* 43 (1927): 275; C. Kuentz, *La Bataille de Qadech* (MIFAO 55; Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1928), pp. 41, 58; A. Erman, *The Literature of Ancient Egyptians*, p. 268; K. A. Kitchen, trans., “The Battle of Qadesh—The Poem or Literary Record,” *COS*, 2.2.5A:33, 37.

³⁹ Compare H. Grapow, *Die bildlichen Ausdrücke*, pp. 163–164; see also pp. 52–53, 59.

by providing a barrier against the enemy that defends the country, subjects, or troops. This barrier is especially strong if made of bronze—even though in actuality no walls have ever been built entirely, or even predominantly, out of this metal.

In summary, the ancient Near Eastern materials offer provocative imagery in their figurative references to wall and bronze. The predominant idea is that of protection offered by a ruler or a deity. In some cases, those protected are designated explicitly, for example, when Ramses calls himself a “rampart of iron” for his troops or Abimilki praises Akh-en-aton as “a wall of bronze which rises over [him].” At other times, the metaphor has a more general referent; thus, Ramses III and other kings are described as “the wall of Egypt.”

Biblical and ancient Near Eastern sources suggest that the divine promise to render Jeremiah as “walls of bronze” was designed to convey the notion of unflinching, durable protection with the added nuance of value and beauty. However, in one crucial respect Jer 1:18–19 is the diametrical opposite of all the texts reviewed above. David and his men are called a wall in 1 Samuel 25 because they protected Nabal’s shepherds; a young woman is called a wall (as compared to a door) in Canticles 8 because she protects her virginity; an Egyptian or Mesopotamian monarch may be called a wall because he protects his country, his subjects, or his troops. Yet, for Jeremiah as “bronze walls,” there is no third party or object to protect. In particular, his being impenetrable carries no benefit for the people of Israel. On the contrary, the metaphor implies an impending attack against him.

Given that the idiom “PN [על]-חומה” usually signifies protection of individuals and that על and אל are commonly confused throughout the Hebrew Bible, the phrase “bronze walls, against [על] the whole land, against [ל] the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land” (Jer 1:18) is technically interpretable in its own right as making Jeremiah a defensive fortification for (אל) Israel. Specifically, he would serve as a bronze wall sheltering the people should they seek refuge in him by accepting his message, obeying his word, and thus averting the coming disaster, such as the invasion from the north predicted in verses 13–16. However, this does not fit the context. Verse 19 indicates the people will fight against Jeremiah as an invading army attacks the walls of a city. In fact, the passage does not specify any protected party.

The common argument that Jeremiah is called a bronze wall to emphasize the protection that Yhwh offers him on his perilous mission is also in need of reevaluation. Walls defend those within their confines, not themselves; con-

sequently, the promise of the prophet becoming one does not signify his enhanced security. God's promise to deliver Jeremiah in verse 19b implies the prophet's indestructibility rather than safety from possible assaults. Specifically, he will be able to *withstand* those assaults—"They will *fight against you*, but *will not prevail*, because...I *will deliver you*" (Jer 1:19; emphasis added).

The designation of Jeremiah as "bronze walls" probably occurs in the first place to emphasize the militant nature of his ministry and his ability to withstand the attacks on that ministry. The prophet should expect the people who rejected him to attack, just as an army would attack the walls of a fortified city. As bronze walls, he could expect to weather these assaults. Only in a secondary sense could the metaphor produce an image of protection for Jeremiah: his safety depended on his ability as "bronze walls" to remain strong. Seen in this light, the expression was a warning to the prophet concerning the great difficulty of his work. Jeremiah was promised to become a bronze wall not *for the people*, as in other Hebrew Bible passages and ancient Near Eastern usage, but *against the people*.

4. עיר מבצר 'FORTIFIED CITY'

The noun מבצר 'fortress, fortification' derives from the root בצר 'cut off, make inaccessible, enclose'. The feminine passive participle of this root is בצורה 'fortified'. The occurrences of עיר 'city' in construct with מבצר or בצורה are usually translated 'fortified city'. An עיר מבצר is a "a cut-off city," "inaccessible city," or "enclosed city."⁴⁰ Isolated references to fortified cities in the Hebrew Bible furnish incomplete information, limited to certain periods.⁴¹ According to Deuteronomy, ancient Canaanites possessed imposing cities that were protected by huge walls which reached to the sky (1:18) and had gates and bars (3:5). Unsurprisingly, the biblical account records that such awesome fortifications struck fear in the Israelites (Num 13:28). Where these early fortifications remained intact, Israel made use of them to construct its own ערי מבצר; those destroyed were built in new ways with new technology.⁴²

The surrounding defensive walls of Israel's fortified cities distinguished them from the open village (חצר, Lev 25:31). Such a city was larger than the unwallled village and possibly ruled over it in some way (1 Sam 6:17–18).

⁴⁰ H. Haag, "מבצר," *TDOT*, 8:65–68; *HALOT*, pp. 542–43; *BDB*, p. 130b.

⁴¹ R. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 29.

⁴² Compare D. R. Clark, "The Iron I Western Defense System at El-'Umeriri, Jordan," *BA* 57 (1994): 141–142, 147; W. G. Dever, "Gezer Revisited," pp. 206–218.

While any city of importance had defenses of some kind, the sites built by Israelite kings specifically to serve as military outposts probably stood out in this respect.⁴³ The walled city served as a defensive apparatus whose primary function was to protect its inhabitants against enemy attacks. The merism “from watchtower to fortified city” (2 Kgs 17:9; 18:8) indicates a scale ranging from the smallest defensive structure to the largest ones.

The references to fortified cities in connection with store cities (2 Chr 17:12, 19), garrison cities (2 Chr 11:11), and chariot cities (2 Kgs 10:26) may indicate that all of these were part of the kingdom’s maintenance and protection network, each making its own specialized contribution indicated by the name. The garrison city would quarter the troops, the store city would accumulate provisions, the chariot city would house the chariotry and its equipment, and the fortified cities would serve as the nation’s defensive strongholds. Alternatively, Aharoni argued that chariot cities, store cities, and fortified cities were subsets of garrison cities.⁴⁴

Judging by 2 Chr 11:11, which enumerates the fortified cities allegedly built by Rehoboam, they were placed at strategic points that were most favorable for the defenders.⁴⁵ In this specific case, the listed cities protected Judah’s western flank.⁴⁶ That subsequent kings, such as Hezekiah, largely kept the array seems likely because the supreme effort involved in amassing raw materials and constructing fortifications made it much easier to retrofit an existing fortified city than to build one from scratch.⁴⁷ That cities were continually refortified might also be inferred from the references to the building activities of various Judean kings: Asa (2 Chr 14:5–6), Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17:2, 19; 19:5), Uzziah (towers, 2 Chr 26:9, 10, 15), Hezekiah (2 Chr 32:5), and Manasseh (2 Chr 33:14). The biblical text does not provide any information regarding Josiah’s construction projects, but according to archeological data, he continued to build (or refortify) the cities maintained by his predecessors.⁴⁸

⁴³ Compare L. Tatum, “King Manasseh and the Royal Fortress at Ḥorvat ‘Usa,” *BA* 54 (1991): 136–145; A. Zertal et al., “Kh. ‘Awjah El-Foqa (Alaroth)—An Iron Age Fortified City in the Jordan Valley,” *PEQ* 141 (2009): 104–123.

⁴⁴ Y. Aharoni, “The Date of the Casemate Walls,” p. 39; compare A. Zertal et al., “Kh. ‘Awjah El-Foqa,” pp. 117–118.

⁴⁵ R. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 50. The dating of this list is disputed, with hypotheses ranging from the time of Rehoboam to that of Josiah. For the history of the debate and the present state of the discussion see N. Na’aman, “Hezekiah’s Fortified Cities and the LMLK Stamps,” *BASOR* 261 (1986): 5–21.

⁴⁶ N. Na’aman, “Hezekiah’s Fortified Cities,” p. 5.

⁴⁷ L. H. Wood, “Archaeology and the Bible: The Evolution of Systems of Defense in Palestine,” *JBR* 5 (1937): 135.

⁴⁸ R. Cohen and Y. Yisrael, “The Iron Age Fortresses at ‘En Ḥaceva,” *BA* 58 (1995): 223–255.

The fortified city's primary importance as a defensive structure lay in its making its inhabitants inaccessible to attackers. Comparing 2 Kgs 18:13 and Isa 36:1 with the conquest accounts of Sennacherib and other Assyrian kings, Dougherty demonstrates just how much of an obstacle such strongholds were for the Mesopotamian invaders.⁴⁹ Many locations in Judah were conquered by Sennacherib (according to him, forty-six of the country's strongest cities as well as countless smaller towns or urban villages). Yet their destruction was only partial. Comparisons reveal that destruction phraseology (e.g., "I destroyed the city," "I devastated it," "I burned it with fire," or "I turned it into mounds") is absent in Sennacherib's accounts. The implication is that Judah's fortified cities were not reduced to complete ruin: a thorough destruction would have required immense time and energy due to their enormously thick walls.⁵⁰ Instead, Assyrian scribes described the extreme efforts put forth by Sennacherib in his conquest.⁵¹ Three specific stages of attack are emphasized: piling of earth against walls (which allowed siege machines to move up these inclined planes against the fortifications); tunneling and cutting with shovels, picks, axes, and grappling hooks to create breaches; general storm of the city focused on these breaches. Only in such complicated ways could a Judean עיר מבצר be captured.⁵²

The above description indicates that during Jeremiah's time, a fortified city was an effective instrument of warfare that provided its inhabitants with a margin of safety by forcing attackers to go to great lengths to conquer and raze it. It is with these considerations in mind that Israelite kings spent so much time, effort, energy, and resources on their strongholds that they were tempted to trust in these rather than God (Jer 5:17).

The monarchy's massive investments in fortified cities had socio-political implications and at times, such cities could become an internal liability. A well-built, well-supplied, and well-manned fortress could serve as a springboard for an ambitious military leader plotting against the king. The latter thus had to be careful about not only building and maintaining the fortified cities but also exercising political control over them to stave off potential coups.

Three events recounted in the Hebrew Bible indicate as much. First, Jehoshaphat appointed magistrates to all of his fortified cities and instructed them to judge "on behalf of the Lord" (2 Chr 19:4–7). His concern could be

⁴⁹ R. P. Dougherty, "Sennacherib and the Walled Cities," pp. 160–171.

⁵⁰ R. P. Dougherty, "Sennacherib and the Walled Cities," pp. 165–166. See also A. R. Millard, "Sennacherib's Attack on Hezekiah," *TB* 36 (1985): 61–77.

⁵¹ R. P. Dougherty, "Sennacherib and the Walled Cities," p. 169.

⁵² R. P. Dougherty, "Sennacherib and the Walled Cities," pp. 166–167.

not only with observance of the biblical commandments requiring fair trial for everyone but also with the kingdom's stability that could be undermined by its subjects' disaffection caused by lack of justice. Second, after coming to power in a bloody coup, Jehu wrote letters to the "elders and officials" of Samaria, who were sheltering the scions of the overthrown dynasty, challenging them to use their "chariots and horses, fortified cities also, and weapons" to fight against him (2 Kgs 10:2). Since taking the capital city by storm would have required a massive effort, and could even prove impossible, the challenge was apparently a ploy designed to cause the remnants of the previous administration to surrender without a fight (as it indeed happens in vv. 4–11). The story demonstrates that a major fortress was a heavy liability to Jehu in terms of the power base it offered anyone who would challenge his authority. Third, the last years of the Northern Kingdom saw endless political intrigue, corruption, and coups (2 Kgs 15:8–31; cf. Hos 8:4a), with rebellion often originating in fortified cities. These examples suggest that such a city was a double-edged sword: while offering the king and his people invaluable protection in case of a foreign invasion, it could also be a source of serious threat to the same parties at the time of domestic troubles.

The warfare imagery of Jer 1:18–19 depicts the prophet's work as a constant battle with his people. The book itself corroborates this, recounting Jeremiah's life as one of antagonism, verbal skirmishes, and persecution—up to and including attempts on his life. The promise to make him a fortified city presupposes, of course, that his attackers will not prevail, at least not easily. Yet, the metaphor goes further than that, sharpening and intensifying particular aspects of his prophetic activity. Fortresses were not neutral; as mentioned, they could either serve as a shelter or present a threat. Ultimately, Jeremiah's mission was to protect his people from the external threats by bringing them back to God. But since his stance was far removed from that of his audience, he was perceived as an internal threat, an enemy, or a traitor. He did indeed become a "fortified city" but one pitted "against the whole land."⁵³

5. עמוד ברזל 'IRON PILLAR'

The *hapax legomenon* עמוד ברזל 'iron pillar' does not fit in well with the "bronze walls" and "fortified city"; it interrupts the chain of warfare imagery

⁵³ H. Haag, "מבצר," 8:67.

conveyed by the two expressions.⁵⁴ Some scholars consider the words in question secondary since they are not present in the LXX.⁵⁵ Janzen argued that this absence could indicate haplography due to the identical conjunctive and prepositional prefixes on both “pillar” and “walls” (וּלְחֻמּוֹת and וּלְעַמּוּד).⁵⁶ Talmon asserted that עַמּוּד בְּרִזְלָה refers to an iron bolt in the city gate rather than a pillar of the same material since several passages speak of “walls, gates, and bars [בְּרִיחַ]” (cf. Deut 3:5; 2 Chr 8:5; figuratively, Isa 45:2; Ps 107:16), but Holladay points out that עַמּוּד means “bolt” only in post-biblical Hebrew.⁵⁷ In any case, the very fact of עַמּוּד בְּרִזְלָה being in the MT at all indicates it meant something to someone. The phrase provides imagery that describes Jeremiah’s prophetic role in a different way from the other two metaphors.

Several scholars have discussed the imagery of עַמּוּד בְּרִזְלָה in terms of the permanency, or indestructibility, of Jeremiah’s work.⁵⁸ Giesebrecht argued that the phrase gives prominence to the concepts of invincibility, resistance, and imperviousness to destruction.⁵⁹ Fischer sees here a reference to the bronze pillars of the temple: Jeremiah will prophesy the destruction of these pillars (chaps. 7, 26) due to the people’s false confidence in them (50:28; 51:11) and they will indeed be broken up and carried off (27:19; 52:21–27). As an עַמּוּד בְּרִזְלָה, the prophet will replace them. Another object that may be foreshadowed by the phrase is the iron yoke that plays a central role in Jeremiah 27–28. Just as the change from a wooden to an iron yoke signifies the increasingly harsh subjugation of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, so the change from bronze to iron as the pillar’s material indicates that the prophet was a stronger, better replacement for the original bronze pillars. Such discourses of Jeremiah as the temple sermon (7:26) identify prophetic preaching as a replacement for the sanctuary that has lost its significance.⁶⁰ Seen in this way, Jeremiah was a better, more durable substitute for the temple, so essential to Israelite faith. In contrast to the removal of the real pillars, he remained standing and undefeated.

⁵⁴ A. S. Peake observed that the phrase “does not suit so well the metaphor of a siege” (*Jeremiah I–XXIV* [NCB; Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1910], p. 86).

⁵⁵ B. D. Duhm, *Jeremia*, p. 14; D. P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, p. 12; F. S. North, “Textual Variants in the Hebrew Bible Significant for Critical Analysis,” *JQR* 47 (1956): 78.

⁵⁶ J. G. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (HSM 6; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 119.

⁵⁷ S. Talmon, “An Apparently Redundant Reading—Jeremiah 1:18,” *Textus* 8 (1973): 160–163. See also W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 1:44–45; J. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, p. 245.

⁵⁸ T. Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, pp. 31–32; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 157; D. N. Freedman, B. E. Willoughby, and H. J. Fabry, “עַמּוּד,” *TDOT*, 11:191.

⁵⁹ F. Giesebrecht, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1894), p. 5.

⁶⁰ G. Fischer, “‘Ich mache dich...zur eisernen Säule’ (Jer 1:18): der Prophet als besserer Ersatz für den untergegangenen Temple,” *ZKT* 116 (1994): 447–450.

Though helpful, these interpretations force the issue of indestructibility. Whereas bronze walls and fortified cities are indeed meant to endure an assault, the pillars of the temple were mostly decorative; whether made of bronze or iron, they can be toppled and thus rendered useless with relative ease. Disconnect between the “iron pillar” and the other two metaphors used in Jer 1:18 weakens this interpretation.

Like bronze walls, עמוד ברזל is an inanimate metaphor the root image of which is a concrete but fantastic item. Pillars and walls are common; bronze walls and iron pillars exist only in the imagination, meant to illustrate that God can make what humans cannot—objects that could withstand any opposition.⁶¹

The combination of עמוד and ברזל generates the sense of support and hardness. The basic meaning of עמוד is “pillar” or “column,” with the latter either freestanding or offering some kind of support.⁶² The pillars of the tabernacle supporting the veil, as well as those in the court, were made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, and set in bronze bases (Exod 26:32–37; 27:10–11). Solomon’s palace was built on four rows of cedar pillars (1 Kgs 7:2) and contained a “hall of pillars” (7:6). Two bronze pillars, named “Jachin” and “Boaz,” were set up in the vestibule of the temple (1 Kgs 7:15–22). The account of Samson’s death has him pull down the two supporting pillars of the cultic building where the Philistines were gathered (Judg 16:23–30).

Pillar imagery derives from the above concrete objects. The references to the “cloudy pillar” and “fiery pillar” in the accounts of Israel’s wanderings paint a picture of a freestanding column that guided the people through the desert. In five cases, the term עמוד functions figuratively. Job 9:6; 26:11 and Ps 75:3 [Hebrew v. 4] mention the pillars of the heavens and the earth that God’s power either steadies or causes to tremble. In Cant 5:15, the woman describes her beloved’s legs as alabaster columns set on bases of gold. Finally, in Prov 9:1 the personified wisdom builds her house on seven pillars—possibly corresponding to the admonitions of verses 6–12. These passages evoke an image of some kind of supporting or freestanding column, perhaps represented in the architecture of the day.⁶³

The word ברזל is used metaphorically to describe the earth (Deut 28:23), Egyptian bondage (Deut 4:20; 1 Kgs 8:51; Jer 11:4), oppression (Deut 28:48; Jer 28:14), strength (Deut 33:25; Jer 15:12; Mic 4:13), distress (Ps 107:10, 16), Yhwh’s judgments (Pss 2:9; 105:18), evildoers (Jer 6:28; Ezek 22:18–

⁶¹ G. H. Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palastina* (7 vols.; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1928–1942), 7:134.

⁶² HALOT, p. 843; D. N. Freedman, B. E. Willoughby, and H. J. Fabry, “עמוד,” 11:187.

⁶³ D. N. Freedman, B. E. Willoughby, and H. J. Fabry, “עמוד,” 11:191.

20), the scorching sky (Lev 26:19), the bones of a mythical creature (Job 40:18), and Israel's obstinacy (Isa 48:4). Several biblical characters are called ברזלי, literally, "man of iron" (2 Sam 17:27; 19:32–40; 21:8; 1 Kgs 2:7; Ezra 2:61; Neh 7:63), which may indicate the name's relative popularity

In two biblical passages, iron implements are characterized as means of creating a lasting inscription:

Oh that my words were written!

Oh that they were in a book inscribed!

Oh that with an iron pen and lead

Oh that in the rock forever they were engraved! (Job 19:23-24)

Judah's sin is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of their altars. (Jer 17:1)

There are two possible interpretations. One envisages an iron tool used to incise letters that are then filled in with lead as evidenced by the Behistun inscription. Another construes "lead" as a parallel of "rock" and therefore as the material on which the text is recorded. The latter reading appears preferable since "'with iron stylus and lead' is like the expression 'with pen and paper,' the preposition with the first noun serves also the second."⁶⁴

In ancient Near Eastern texts, the two terms yield images of support and hardness. In Egypt, iron is used figuratively only in reference to mountains or walls.⁶⁵ The figurative use of pillar portrays support of some kind as illustrated by numerous Old and Middle Kingdom examples. A reference to support for the weak occurs next to the mentions of pillar and column; an outstanding individual is called "a high pillar for his family" and lamented in tomb inscriptions as "our beautiful pillar." "Pillar of the ages" is an honorary title from the Old Kingdom period; "pillar of his mother" is the constant epithet for the young Horus; a very busy citizen is lauded as "the high pillar in the district of Thebes" and another as the "pillar of his city," the "pillar of Upper

⁶⁴ M. Pope, *Job* (AB 15: Garden City: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 144–145; compare S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), pp. 170–171.

⁶⁵ H. Grapow, *Die bildlichen Ausdrücke*, p. 59.

Egypt,” or “pillar over Egypt for the king’s house.” Finally, a god can be invoked as “thou great column, which reaches unto heaven and the realm of the dead” and the Pharaoh as “column of the heaven, balk of the earth.”⁶⁶

Similar imagery is found in lines 7–10 from the stela of Sehetep-ib-Re where he styles himself as one “whose patience is unequaled; good at listening, excellent in speaking. An official who unravels what is knotty; whom his lord distinguished before millions. Truly exemplary and beloved; free of wrongdoing. Single-minded for the lord who has tried him; pillar of the South.”⁶⁷ Such phrases serve as examples of Middle Kingdom “titular epithets” applied to nobles in favor with the court.⁶⁸

When appointing Rehk-mi-Re to the highest position in the royal administration, Thutmose III advised him:

Look to the office of vizier,
 Watch over all that is done in it,
 Lo, it is the pillar for the whole land.⁶⁹

This analogy with the office of Rehk-mi-Re might serve as a means of understanding the mission of prophets such as Jeremiah. Both the prophet and the vizier acted in a judicial function. Each was concerned with the supervision and administration of the things that pertain to his superior, be that the

⁶⁶ H. Grapow, *Die bildlichen Ausdrücke*, p. 164. For discussions of the term *iwm* ‘pillar’, see R. O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1981), p. 13; A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (5 vols.; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953), 1:53; P. Spencer, *The Egyptian Temple: A Lexicographical Study* (London: Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 231–259.

⁶⁷ M. Lichtheim, “Stela of Sehetep-ib-re,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:127. See also A. Mariette, *Abydos*, 2:34, plates 24–26; H. O. Lange and H. Schäfer, *Grab- und Denkstein des Mittleren Reiches im Museum von Kairo* (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1902), 2:145–150; 4, plate 40; K. Sethe, *Ägyptische Lesestücke* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1928), pp. 68–69; K. Sethe, *Erläuterung zu den Ägyptischen Lesestücken* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1927), pp. 99–104; A. Kamal, “The Stela of Sehetep-ib-rē in the Egyptian Museum,” *ASAE* 38 (1938): 265–283; 40 (1940): 209–229; J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 1:745–748; H. Grapow, “Beiträge zur Untersuchung des Stils ägyptischer Lieder,” *ZÄS* 79 (1954): 21–27; C. Kuentz, “Deux versions d’un panégyrique royal,” in *Studies Presented to F. L. Griffith* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1932), pp. 97–110; G. Posener, *Littérature et politique dans l’Égypte de la xiii^e dynastie* (Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des Hautes études 307; Paris: Armand Colin, 1956), pp. 117–128.

⁶⁸ J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 1:744.

⁶⁹ M. Lichtheim, “The Installation of the Vizier Rekhmire,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 2:22. Other translations seem to reflect the same idea, for example, “mainstay of the entire land” (R. O. Faulkner, “The Installation of the Vizier,” *JEA* 41 [1955]: 18); “the consolidation of the entire land” (N. de G. Davies, *The Tomb of Rehk-mi-Re at Thebes* [2 vols.; New York: Arno, 1973], 2:86); “the support of the whole land” (J. A. Wilson, trans., “The Vizier of Egypt,” in *ANET*, p. 213b); “makes firm the whole land” (P. E. Newberry, *The Life of Rekhmara* [Westminster: A. Constable, 1900], p. 34). A. H. Gardiner, “The Installation of a Vizier,” *RT* 26 (1904): 3, restricts the expression to a description of one of the vizier’s official functions when he says that *swn* is “doubtless technically employed, in its sense of ‘confirming’ titles to land. The *diwan* [office] of the Vizier settled in reality many questions as to land.” See also J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 2:663–711.

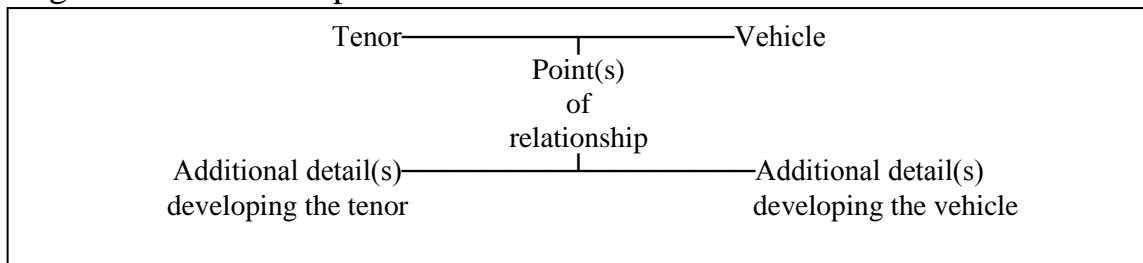
Pharaoh or God.⁷⁰ The divine designation of Jeremiah as an iron pillar at his installation to the prophetic office might be similar to the description of the vizier by Thutmose III as “the pillar of whole land” at the installation of Rehk-mi-Re to that office. Specifically, iron’s exceeding hardness may symbolize strength, stability, and perhaps, indestructibility, in the sense that Jeremiah’s prophetic duty to support the word he received from Yhwh could not be terminated.

However, these interpretations are problematic. Jeremiah is the only example of anyone in Israel ever being designated a pillar in the figurative sense. If this designation refers to his support of the divine word, there remains the issue of *how* he provided that support. If Jeremiah is an iron pillar in a way similar to that of a Middle Kingdom vizier, this similarity to Egyptian usage presents a further problem. At the very least, the imagery of “iron pillar” is quite different from that of both “bronze walls” and “fortified city.”

6. CONCLUSION: THE THREE METAPHORS TOGETHER

Fortified city, iron pillar, and bronze walls in Jer 1:18 are all obviously meant to describe the prophet Jeremiah and his work. Two of these metaphors are similar, though not identical, with regard to the imagery that they create, while the third is quite different. The following diagrams employ the terms “tenor” and “vehicle” to reveal the relationship between the metaphors and illustrate their differences in imagery.⁷¹

Figure 1: Relationship between tenor and vehicle



⁷⁰ K. Baltzer, “Considerations Regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet,” *HTR* 51 (1968): 567–581.
⁷¹ T. L. Brensinger, “Lions, Wind and Fire: A Study of Prophetic Similes” (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1985), p. 94.

Figure 2: The “bronze walls” and “fortified city” metaphors

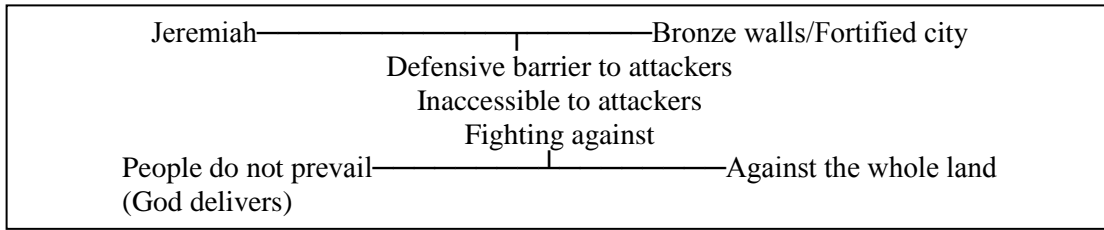
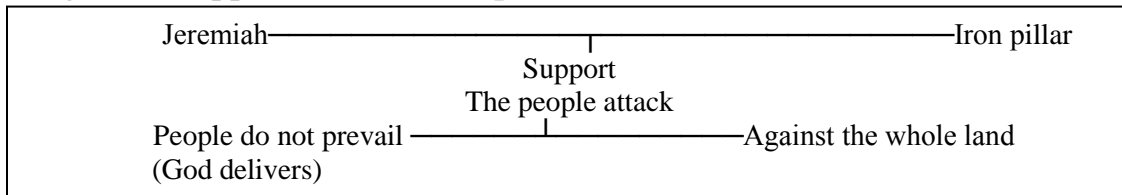


Diagram 3: Applied to the “iron pillar”



As Figure 2 shows, “bronze walls” and “fortified city” both picture the prophet and his work in a highly graphic way. The people assaulted Jeremiah—the fortified city with bronze walls. They did not prevail because he was strong enough to hold, thus fulfilling God’s promise of invincibility. Figure 3 yields quite different results. As the iron pillar, the prophet becomes a support of some kind. The imagery produced fails to show how Jeremiah is a support against the whole land or how the people attack this support. The image does not fit the context.

Generally, the context of Jeremiah’s life and work provides a better understanding of “bronze walls” and “fortified city.” He was active just before the captivity and in its early years. During this time, wars were common and rumors of wars were likely rampant. Emotions among the people ran high; battle lines were drawn between factions, and drastic choices had to be made on the spot. Battle lines on all fronts forced the Israelites to make drastic choices concerning the course of their actions. They could delay these choices no longer.

In this socio-political situation, Jeremiah’s dire and uncompromising message was doubtlessly perceived by many as another front opened against the community, another war declared on it. As “bronze walls” and a “fortified city,” the prophet did not offer the people any protection, any comfort. On the contrary, he stood firm against Israel’s disobedience to the Lord and was less vulnerable to an expected violent response than any fortification that the

book's audience had ever seen (as already mentioned, bronze walls existed only in the author's imagination).

At the same time, the reference to an "iron pillar"—projecting, as we have seen, the image of support and stability in all the extant biblical and extra-biblical sources—is unexpected against this background. Moreover, it would seem to dilute the sense of prophetic militancy associated with the "bronze walls" and "fortified city." Since neither diachronic nor synchronic approaches to the issue have been able so far to yield a satisfactory solution, the results of the present study indicate that further examination of Jer 1:18 is in order.