
JEREMIAH

Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Jeremiah

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JEREMIAH

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ADVANCE PRAISE

After a long absence of Jeremiah commentaries, we are currently happily experiencing a revival in Jeremiah studies and a variety of new commentaries. Among the more important of these is this offer by Terence Fretheim, perhaps the premier biblical expositor of his generation. Fretheim is thoroughly grounded in critical study, but his commentary is no weary repetition of that learning. Here speaks a lively believer attentive to the current world and convinced of the pertinence of the texts to that world. The welcome outcome is an effective connection between text and world made by Fretheim as well as can be made by any contemporary interpreter. Fretheim's contribution is a major presence in the new Smyth & Helwys commentary series that holds immense promise for critical, faithful exposition.

—*Walter Brueggemann*
Columbia Theological Seminary

This perceptive commentary benefits from Terence Fretheim's attention to theological substance and to stylistic detail. Readers will be well served by his mediating position between maximalist and minimalist interpretations of the book of Jeremiah, as well as by the rich analysis of the prophet's understanding of God.

—*James L. Crenshaw*
Duke University Divinity School

Terence Fretheim's commentary makes the book of Jeremiah accessible and appealing for readers at this crucial time in our history. Like no other commentary, this one illuminates the suffering of God and the suffering of creation in the book of Jeremiah. Fretheim draws out from the text the interconnections of human actions, political realities, and ecological well-being. He calls Jeremiah an assaulter of the mind, a champion of the poor, and a prophet of divine anguish.

Balanced scholarly judgment characterizes this commentary. Fretheim finds in the figure of the prophet neither a fiction nor a precise historical character but a persona who embodies God's voice, God's pathos, and God's love.

The commentary is beautifully written, clearly designed, and sprinkled liberally with interpretive voices and perspectives other than Fretheim's own. The book will make a wonderful companion for any reader of Jeremiah, and this biblical text will be a central resource for the work of recovery and critical analysis after the September 11th tragedy.

—*Kathleen M. O'Connor*
Columbia Theological Seminary

Few interpreters of Scripture go so quickly and well to the heart of the matter as does Terence Fretheim. Nowhere is that more clearly demonstrated than in his clear and articulate comment on the book of Jeremiah. Fretheim's long wrestling with the God of the Old Testament has been brought to bear effectively on his interpretation of that ancient God-wrestler, Jeremiah. If one wants to hear the word of the Lord afresh in the study of this most important prophet, Fretheim's commentary gives the reader a whole new set of ears for careful listening.

—*Patrick D. Miller*
Princeton Theological Seminary

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS COMMENTARY

Books of the Old Testament, Apocrypha, and New Testament are generally abbreviated in the Sidebars, parenthetical references, and notes according to the following system.

The Old Testament

Genesis	Gen
Exodus	Exod
Leviticus	Lev
Numbers	Num
Deuteronomy	Deut
Joshua	Josh
Judges	Judg
Ruth	Ruth
1–2 Samuel	1–2 Sam
1–2 Kings	1–2 Kgs
1–2 Chronicles	1–2 Chr
Ezra	Ezra
Nehemiah	Neh
Esther	Esth
Job	Job
Psalms (Psalms)	Ps (Pss)
Proverbs	Prov
Ecclesiastes	Eccl
or Qoheleth	Qoh
Song of Solomon	Song
or Song of Songs	Song
or Canticles	Cant
Isaiah	Isa
Jeremiah	Jer
Lamentations	Lam
Ezekiel	Ezek
Daniel	Dan
Hosea	Hos
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Obadiah	Obad
Jonah	Jonah
Micah	Mic

Abbreviations

Nahum	Nah
Habakkuk	Hab
Zephaniah	Zeph
Haggai	Hag
Zechariah	Zech
Malachi	Mal

The Apocrypha

1–2 Esdras	1–2 Esdr
Tobit	Tob
Judith	Jdt
Additions to Esther	Add Esth
Wisdom of Solomon	Wis
Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach	Sir
Baruch	Bar
Epistle (or Letter) of Jeremiah	Ep Jer
Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three	Pr Azar
Daniel and Susanna	Sus
Daniel, Bel, and the Dragon	Bel
Prayer of Manasseh	Pr Man
1–2 Maccabees	1–2 Macc

The New Testament

Matthew	Matt
Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
John	John
Acts	Acts
Romans	Rom
1–2 Corinthians	1–2 Cor
Galatians	Gal
Ephesians	Eph
Philippians	Phil
Colossians	Col
1–2 Thessalonians	1–2 Thess
1–2 Timothy	1–2 Tim
Titus	Titus
Philemon	Phlm
Hebrews	Heb
James	Jas
1–2 Peter	1–2 Pet
1–2–3 John	1–2–3 John
Jude	Jude
Revelation	Rev

Other commonly used abbreviations include:

ad loc.	at the location discussed
AD	<i>Anno Domini</i> (“in the year of the Lord”)
(also commonly referred to as CE = the Common Era)	
BC	Before Christ
(also commonly referred to as BCE = Before the Common Era)	
C.	century
c.	<i>circa</i> (around “that time”)
cf.	<i>confer</i> (compare)
ch.	chapter
chs.	chapters
d.	died
E.	English
ed.	edition or edited by or editor
eds.	editors
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> (for example)
et al.	<i>et alii</i> (and others)
f./ff.	and the following one(s)
gen. ed.	general editor
H.	Hebrew
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> (in the same place)
i.e.	<i>id est</i> (that is)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
lit.	literally
n.d.	no date
rev. and exp. ed.	revised and expanded edition
sg.	singular
trans.	translated by or translator(s)
vol(s).	volume(s)
v.	verse
vv.	verses

Additional written works cited by abbreviations include:

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
BRev	<i>Bible Review</i>
BZAW	Beiträge zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
DH	Deuteronomistic History
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
Dtr	Deuteronomist

HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	<i>Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible</i>
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JEDP	Yahwist-Elohist- Deuteronomist-Priestly
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint = Greek Translation of Hebrew Bible
MDB	<i>Mercer Dictionary of the Bible</i>
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OAN	<i>Oracles Against the Nations</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TEV	Today's English Version
TNK	Tanak = Hebrew Bible
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Jeremiah is an enigmatic and extraordinarily difficult book. It taxes one's interpretive capacities at every turn, whether the issues are literary, historical, or theological. The book also has had a way of getting inside my person — even my dreams! — and interrupting long-cherished directions of thought. Having arrived at the end of this project, I am convinced that I have only begun to understand its complexities.

Yet, for all of Jeremiah's complexity, a certain coherence is observable. I have been especially attentive to the theological perspectives of the book, and that will be evident at every turn. The portrayal of the God of Jeremiah is particularly challenging and I have been concerned to work with this material in such a way that it can continue to inform faith and life. It is hoped that teachers and preachers of these texts will be aided in a special way.

Work on this commentary would not have been possible without the help of many persons. I wish to express my appreciation to students at Luther Seminary and McCormick Theological Seminary, who have responded to this material in earlier forms. I am also grateful to the Administration and Board of Directors of Luther Seminary for granting a sabbatical leave. Special thanks are due to my editors, Scott Nash, Mark Biddle, and Samuel Balentine, whose encouragement and assistance have been invaluable.

Finally, and especially, my gratitude goes to my wife, Faith, to whom this book is dedicated. Her unfailing support through many fits and starts with this material is immeasurable.

Terence E. Fretheim

SERIES PREFACE

The *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* is a visually stimulating and user-friendly series that is as close to multimedia in print as possible. Written by accomplished scholars with all students of Scripture in mind, the primary goal of the *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* is to make available serious, credible biblical scholarship in an accessible and less intimidating format.

Far too many Bible commentaries fall short of bridging the gap between the insights of biblical scholars and the needs of students of God's written word. In an unprecedented way, the *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* brings insightful commentary to bear on the lives of contemporary Christians. Using a multimedia format, the volumes employ a stunning array of art, photographs, maps, and drawings to illustrate the truths of the Bible for a visual generation of believers.

The *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* is built upon the idea that meaningful Bible study can occur when the insights of contemporary biblical scholars blend with sensitivity to the needs of lifelong students of Scripture. Some persons within local faith communities, however, struggle with potentially informative biblical scholarship for several reasons. Oftentimes, such scholarship is cast in technical language easily grasped by other scholars, but not by the general reader. For example, lengthy, technical discussions on every detail of a particular scriptural text can hinder the quest for a clear grasp of the whole. Also, the format for presenting scholarly insights has often been confusing to the general reader, rendering the work less than helpful. Unfortunately, responses to the hurdles of reading extensive commentaries have led some publishers to produce works for a general readership that merely skim the surface of the rich resources of biblical scholarship. This commentary series incorporates works of fine art in an accurate and scholarly manner, yet the format remains "user-friendly." An important facet is the presentation and explanation of images of art, which interpret the biblical material or illustrate how the biblical material has been understood and interpreted in the past. A visual generation of believers deserves a commentary series that contains not only the all-important textual commentary on Scripture, but images, photographs, maps, works of fine art, and drawings that bring the text to life.

The *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* makes serious, credible biblical scholarship more accessible to a wider audience. Writers and editors alike present information in ways that encourage readers to gain a better understanding of the Bible. The editorial board has worked to develop a format that is useful and usable, informative and pleasing to the eye. Our writers are reputable scholars who participate in the community of faith and sense a calling to communicate the results of their scholarship to their faith community.

The *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* addresses Christians and the larger church. While both respect for and sensitivity to the needs and contributions of other faith communities are reflected in the work of the series authors, the authors speak primarily to Christians. Thus the reader can note a confessional tone throughout the volumes. No particular “confession of faith” guides the authors, and diverse perspectives are observed in the various volumes. Each writer, though, brings to the biblical text the best scholarly tools available and expresses the results of their studies in commentary and visuals that assist readers seeking a word from the Lord for the church.

To accomplish this goal, writers in this series have drawn from numerous streams in the rich tradition of biblical interpretation. The basic focus is the biblical text itself, and considerable attention is given to the wording and structure of texts. Each particular text, however, is also considered in the light of the entire canon of Christian Scriptures. Beyond this, attention is given to the cultural context of the biblical writings. Information from archaeology, ancient history, geography, comparative literature, history of religions, politics, sociology, and even economics is used to illuminate the culture of the people who produced the Bible. In addition, the writers have drawn from the history of interpretation, not only as it is found in traditional commentary on the Bible but also in literature, theater, church history, and the visual arts. Finally, the *Commentary* on Scripture is joined with *Connections* to the world of the contemporary church. Here again, the writers draw on scholarship in many fields as well as relevant issues in the popular culture.

This wealth of information might easily overwhelm a reader if not presented in a “user-friendly” format. Thus the heavier discussions of detail and the treatments of other helpful topics are presented in special-interest boxes, or Sidebars, clearly connected to the passages under discussion so as not to interrupt the flow of the basic interpretation. The result is a commentary on Scripture that

focuses on the theological significance of a text while also offering the reader a rich array of additional information related to the text and its interpretation.

An accompanying CD-ROM offers powerful searching and research tools. The commentary text, Sidebars, and visuals are all reproduced on a CD that is fully indexed and searchable. Pairing a text version with a digital resource is a distinctive feature of the *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary*.

Combining credible biblical scholarship, user-friendly study features, and sensitivity to the needs of a visually oriented generation of believers creates a unique and unprecedented type of commentary series. With insight from many of today's finest biblical scholars and a stunning visual format, it is our hope that the *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* will be a welcome addition to the personal libraries of all students of Scripture.

The Editors

HOW TO USE THIS COMMENTARY

The *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* is written by accomplished biblical scholars with a wide array of readers in mind. Whether engaged in the study of Scripture in a church setting or in a college or seminary classroom, all students of the Bible will find a number of useful features throughout the commentary that are helpful for interpreting the Bible.

Basic Design of the Volumes

Each volume features an Introduction to a particular book of the Bible, providing a brief guide to information that is necessary for reading and interpreting the text: the historical setting, literary design, and theological significance. Each Introduction also includes a comprehensive outline of the particular book under study.

Each chapter of the commentary investigates the text according to logical divisions in a particular book of the Bible. Sometimes these divisions follow the traditional chapter segmentation, while at other times the textual units consist of sections of chapters or portions of more than one chapter. The divisions reflect the literary structure of a book and offer a guide for selecting passages that are useful in preaching and teaching.

An accompanying CD-ROM offers powerful searching and research tools. The commentary text, Sidebars, and visuals are all reproduced on a CD that is fully indexed and searchable. Pairing a text version with a digital resource also allows unprecedented flexibility and freedom for the reader. Carry the text version to locations you most enjoy doing research while knowing that the CD offers a portable alternative for travel from the office, church, classroom, and your home.

Commentary and Connections

As each chapter explores a textual unit, the discussion centers around two basic sections: *Commentary* and *Connections*. The analysis of a passage, including the details of its language, the history reflected in the text, and the literary forms found in the text, are the main focus

of the *Commentary* section. The primary concern of the *Commentary* section is to explore the theological issues presented by the Scripture passage. *Connections* presents potential applications of the insights provided in the *Commentary* section. The *Connections* portion of each chapter considers what issues are relevant for teaching and suggests useful methods and resources. *Connections* also identifies themes suitable for sermon planning and suggests helpful approaches for preaching on the Scripture text.

Sidebars

The *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* provides a unique hyper-link format that quickly guides the reader to additional insights. Since other more technical or supplementary information is vital for understanding a text and its implications, the volumes feature distinctive Sidebars, or special-interest boxes, that provide a wealth of information on such matters as:

- Historical information (such as chronological charts, lists of kings or rulers, maps, descriptions of monetary systems, descriptions of special groups, descriptions of archaeological sites or geographical settings).
- Graphic outlines of literary structure (including such items as poetry, chiasm, repetition, epistolary form).
- Definition or brief discussions of technical or theological terms and issues.
- Insightful quotations that are not integrated into the running text but are relevant to the passage under discussion.
- Notes on the history of interpretation (Augustine on the Good Samaritan, Luther on James, Stendahl on Romans, etc.).
- Line drawings, photographs, and other illustrations relevant for understanding the historical context or interpretive significance of the text.
- Presentation and discussion of works of fine art that have interpreted a Scripture passage.

Each Sidebar is printed in color and is referenced at the appropriate place in the *Commentary* or *Connections* section with a color-coded title that directs the reader to the relevant Sidebar. In addition, helpful icons appear in the Sidebars, which provide the reader with visual cues to the type of material that is explained in each Sidebar. Throughout the commentary, these four distinct hyperlinks provide useful links in an easily recognizable design.

ΑΩ

Alpha & Omega Language

This icon identifies the information as a language-based tool that offers further exploration of the Scripture selection. This could include syntactical information, word studies, popular or additional uses of the word(s) in question, additional contexts in which the term appears, and the history of the term's translation. All non-English terms are transliterated into the appropriate English characters.



Culture/Context

This icon introduces further comment on contextual or cultural details that shed light on the Scripture selection. Describing the place and time to which a Scripture passage refers is often vital to the task of biblical interpretation. Sidebar items introduced with this icon could include geographical, historical, political, social, topographical, or economic information. Here, the reader may find an excerpt of an ancient text or inscription that sheds light on the text. Or one may find a description of some element of ancient religion such as Baalism in Canaan or the Hero cult in the Mystery Religions of the Greco-Roman world.



Interpretation

Sidebars that appear under this icon serve a general interpretive function in terms of both historical and contemporary renderings. Under this heading, the reader might find a selection from classic or contemporary literature that illuminates the Scripture text or a significant quotation from a famous sermon that addresses the passage. Insights are drawn from various sources, including literature, worship, theater, church history, and sociology.



Additional Resources Study

Here, the reader finds a convenient list of useful resources for further investigation of the selected Scripture text, including books, journals, websites, special collections, organizations, and societies. Specialized discussions of works not often associated with biblical studies may also appear here.

Additional Features

Each volume also includes a basic Bibliography on the biblical book under study. Other bibliographies on selected issues are often included that point the reader to other helpful resources.

Notes at the end of each chapter provide full documentation of sources used and contain additional discussions of related matters.

Abbreviations used in each volume are explained in a list of abbreviations found after the Table of Contents.

Readers of the *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* can regularly visit the Internet support site for news, information, updates, and enhancements to the series at <www.helwys.com/commentary>.

Several thorough indexes enable the reader to locate information quickly. These indexes include:

- An *Index of Sidebars* groups content from the special-interest boxes by category.
- An *Index of Scriptures* lists citations to particular biblical texts.
- An *Index of Topics* lists alphabetically the major subjects, names, topics, and locations referenced or discussed in the volume.
- An *Index of Modern Authors* organizes contemporary authors whose works are cited in the volume.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Jeremiah is the longest book in the Bible (in terms of words and verses) and is certainly one of the most complex. The complexity of the book is evident in several ways, including its structure and flow of thought, the person and role of the prophet, the historical setting of its individual texts, its understanding of God, and its relationship to a much shorter Greek version. **[Carroll on Jeremiah]** Yet, for all of the book's difficulty, its depth of reflection on divine action and human response, as well as the range and rigor of its rhetoric, has kept the book very much alive in the religious communities that recognize its canonical stature. Indeed, its language of "new covenant" has left its mark on the very name of the larger biblical collection to which it belongs.

Carroll on Jeremiah



The book of Jeremiah is long, complex, and difficult. To the modern reader it appears to be a repetitive mess, a mixture of prose and poetry, in no particular order, but containing traces of attempts to collate and give some order to parts of the material... The reader who is not confused by reading the book of Jeremiah has not understood it!

Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 9.

JEREMIAH IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The book of Jeremiah is introduced by a brief description of the historical context in which Jeremiah's words were spoken (1:1-3), namely, the period leading up to the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 587 BC and its immediate aftermath. This event was a watershed moment in Israel's history and the book of Jeremiah centers on that event with all of its complex social, political, economic, military, and religious dimensions. **[Focus on the Fall of Jerusalem]** **[Israel in the Ancient Near East]**

A chronology of this period can be sketched on the basis of various biblical and nonbiblical sources, though the book of Jeremiah itself is

Focus on the Fall of Jerusalem



That Babylon so filled the scene during Jeremiah's ministry can be seen in the fact that Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar are explicitly mentioned more than two hundred times in chs. 20–52 (and implicitly elsewhere; Assyria is named only four times). The role that Judah's kings play in Jeremiah also reveals this focus; the closer in

time the kings are to the fall of Jerusalem, the more attention they are given in the book. Hence, only one text speaks of oracles delivered in the time of Josiah (3:6), and Jehoiakim plays an active role only in 26:20-23 and 36:1-31 (and Jeremiah never encounters him directly); Zedekiah, however, is given a prominent role and is the only king with whom Jeremiah personally engages.



only of partial help in this task. Some Jeremiah texts present a relatively straightforward recounting of the fall of Jerusalem (see 39:1-10; 52:1-30) or specify a certain chronology (e.g., 24:1; 25:1-3; 26:1; 27:1). Other passages, however, are almost completely devoid of specific historical reference (see chs. 2–20, 30–31), and the attempt to date many of these oracles more specifically has been sharply contested. William Holladay, for example, seeks to date Jeremiah's oracles with some precision, but most interpreters understand that such exactitude is not possible, indeed may be unfaithful to the text itself (a perspective followed in this commentary).¹ The book, especially the poetic oracles with their numerous metaphors, often presents the historical situation, not as "factual history," but in more impressionistic terms (see below). Moreover, the various perspectives of the editors of the book have certainly colored the telling of these events (see below). The following general sketch of the historical setting of the book is commonly accepted and will serve our purposes at this point.

Assyria was the dominant power in the region during the century and more prior to Babylon's ascendancy; its armies decimated the North in 722 BC (see 2 Kgs 17) and subjugated the South (Judah). As Assyrian power weakened over the course of the seventh century, the political and religious landscape of Judah changed in significant ways. Under King Josiah (640–609 BC) significant reforms were undertaken and some opportunity for independence presented itself, but these developments proved to be fleeting,

especially when Josiah was killed in battle with the Egyptians (2 Chr 35:25 speaks of Jeremiah's lamenting reaction to his death). Babylon began to overshadow Assyria in Israel's larger world and then decisively defeated its armies at the battle of Nineveh (612 BC). Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar (who ascended the throne in 605 BC) set its sights on further conquests; it defeated Egypt and its allies at Carchemish (in northern Syria) in 605 BC and secured control of the region.

In the years following the death of King Josiah in 609 BC incompetent kings led Judah to ruin. [The Last Kings of Judah] Among them King Jehoiakim stood out; his contemptuous response to Jeremiah's warnings by personally destroying Baruch's scroll (36:1-32) may be a representative behavior (see 26:20-23; 22:13-19). When Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylonian rule (601 BC), Babylon moved against Jerusalem. Jehoiakim died in the siege and his son Jehoiachin, who reigned only three months before Jerusalem fell (598–597 BC), was exiled to Babylon along with many leading citizens (see 22:24-30). Jehoiachin in exile remained the titular head of Israel; he was alive in Babylon at the end of the book of Jeremiah (52:31-34; 561 BC).

The Babylonians put Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle and another son of Josiah, on the throne. In the following decade King Zedekiah dithered away any good will Israel may have had with Babylon. Zedekiah was the only king with whom Jeremiah interacted in person, at least according to the book. The prophet persistently counseled Zedekiah to submit to the yoke of Babylon (21:1-14; 27:12; 32:1-5; 34:1-7; 37–38), but the king ignored him and rebelled. Babylon came against Jerusalem, razed the city and temple, humiliated the Davidic king, and sent him and other Judahites to join their compatriots in exile in Babylon (39:1-10; 52:1-30; 587 BC).

Nebuchadnezzar appointed a leading Judean citizen, Gedaliah, to govern Judah (from Mizpah, north of Jerusalem). Jeremiah, who was not exiled to Babylon because of his counsel of nonrebellion, became involved in advising those who were left in the land. Within a few years, however, anti-Babylonian zealots assassinated

The Last Kings of Judah



The length of Jeremiah's ministry is remarkable in that it takes place over the course of the reigns of the last five kings of Judah and one governor. While two of the kings reigned for less than a year, this length of time is witness to his staying power through periods of great tension and hardship, both for himself personally and for his community. The rulers and key events during their reigns are:

Josiah (640–609 BC)

Jehoahaz (609 BC)

Jehoiakim (609–598 BC)

Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar establishes hegemony in the region with its defeat of Egypt (and Assyria) at the battle of Carchemish (605 BC). Jehoiakim rebels against Babylon, an act which leads to the subjugation of Jerusalem.

Jehoiachin/Coniah (598–597 BC)

Judah/Jerusalem falls to Babylon in 597 BC and the first deportation of citizens to Babylon occurs.

Zedekiah (597–587 BC)

Zedekiah's rebellion against Babylon leads to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, followed by a second deportation.

Gedaliah (587-582? BC)

This Babylon-appointed governor is assassinated by anti-Babylon conspirators, leading to a third deportation to Babylon while still others flee to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them.

Gedaliah and more Judeans were exiled to Babylon (582 BC?). Other Judeans, ignoring Jeremiah's counsel, migrated to Egypt and forced the prophet to accompany them (40:7–44:30).

The presentation of the history of Israel in the book of Jeremiah ends in the middle of things; ambiguity reigns and no resolution of these disturbing and devastating events is in view. The future of the people of God hangs in the balance. God has made promises, but fulfillment lies beyond any horizon visible to the community to whom Jeremiah is written.

The Primary Issues of the Book of Jeremiah and the Rhetorical Strategies Used to Address Them

The importance of knowing at least the broad outlines of this historical situation for the interpretation of Jeremiah cannot be exaggerated. At the same time, the introduction of the book (1:1-3) specifies that the intended readers have already experienced these events; the history in and of itself will not be news to them. These verses, which indicate that the fall of Jerusalem has already occurred, provide a lens through which the book is to be read. The historical setting for the *book* in its present form (however late its final editors are dated) is a time when Israel had been scattered across the ancient Near Eastern landscape, from Egypt to Babylon and beyond. Even more, however much later editors appropriated this material in order to speak to new situations in the life of the people of God, from the book's own standpoint those newer situations do not include a time after Israel's restoration to the land (538 BC). For all the promises about Israel's future fortunes (e.g., chs. 30–31, 50–51), they remain unfulfilled from the perspective of the book.

These opening verses (1:1-3) mean that the original audience for the *book* of Jeremiah is fundamentally different from the audience for the *preaching* of Jeremiah (even if many people are a part of both audiences). The word for that audience is not about religious matters that float above the maelstrom of life. The book is addressed to a particularly horrific situation in the life of the people of God and is to be interpreted in terms of that specificity. The fall of Jerusalem is such a disastrous event for Israel because every aspect of its life is so deeply affected (see the poignant cries in the book of Lamentations). This includes the devastation of the city and country, the death and traumatization of many citizens (including women and children), the exile of key leaders to

Babylon, and the loss of two institutions that had centered Israel's life for centuries—the temple and the Davidic kingship.

The book of Jeremiah is most basically concerned to address itself in as forthright a way as possible to pressing questions voiced by the survivors of this debacle, most of whom are probably in exile in Babylon. Given these implied readers, the book is not primarily concerned to transmit the words and deeds of Jeremiah as such, but to use the heritage of Jeremiah to address the ongoing spiritual and religious needs of a devastated and questioning community. Their most compelling question is one that regularly punctuates the text either explicitly or implicitly (e.g., 5:19; 9:12; 13:22; 14:19; 16:10; 22:8): “Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through?”

The responses to this and related questions (e.g., What might have been? What will the future be?) are the decisive contribution of the book of Jeremiah for its implied readers. The reason these disastrous events took place is most basically rooted in the nature of the God–Israel relationship. The book stakes a theological claim that these events occurred, not because Israel's God was incompetent or uncaring, but because the people of God were unfaithful and their own God would not, indeed could not, remain indifferent, for the future of the *creation* was at stake. At the same time, the effect desired in readers of the book was not simply informational. Walter Brueggemann's statement regarding the intended effects of the preaching of Jeremiah would apply in a general way to the book, namely, “to have an impact on persons, to impinge upon perception and awareness, to intrude upon public policy, and to evoke faithful and transformed behavior.”² I would add: the intended effect is to bring to shamed and hurting exiles a clear word about the kind of God who is present and active on their behalf. This divine engagement means that, despite the people's unfaithful past and desperate present (which must be squarely confronted), God will act to make all things new.

What rhetorical strategies are used in Jeremiah that could have such an effect on the intended audience? What would this rhetoric do to those who read it? For one thing, words are used with considerable passion and energy, not only through striking images and metaphors, but in the forms and patterns of the language itself: “in exclamations and interjections, in emphatic particles, in passionate shouts and urgent expostulations and warnings, and, above all, in extraordinarily striking assonances.”³ This use of language conveys a sense of urgency and deep concern. [Brueggemann on Jeremiah's

Language]

Brueggemann on Jeremiah's Language

The situation of the people is such that language "must not be conventional, reasonable, predictable, or expected. It must shock people's sensitivity, call attention to what is not usually noticed, break the routine, make statements with ambiguity so that people redescribe things that have long since seemed settled, bear surpluses of power before routine assessment."

Walter Brueggemann, "The Book of Jeremiah: Portrait of the Prophet," in *Interpreting the Prophets*, ed. J. L. Mays and P. J. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 118.

In addition, the frequent change of speakers and exchange among speakers gives to the entire book a dialogical character. This dialogue conveys a sense of urgency as various voices get into the conversation about the nature of the crisis at hand and what to do about it. The people are often quoted, in interaction with both Jeremiah and God (e.g., 3:22b-25; 8:19; 14:19-22). Individuals (usually community leaders) are often in conversation with Jeremiah, and with God, though usually through the intermediation of the prophet (e.g., 21:1-7). The prophet and God are often in lively and urgent communication, with regard to both personal and community matters (e.g., 12:1-6; 15:15-21); though God's word begins the relationship (1:4-5), both take the initiative in the ongoing interaction. The God of Jeremiah not only speaks, but listens, and is open to taking new directions in view of what is heard (e.g., 18:7-10).

The dialogue is especially revealing of the highly conflicted character of perspectives and relationships. Who speaks the truth regarding the nature of the situation and God's will with respect to it? The prophet-to-prophet interaction is particularly important to note, for claims regarding who has the true word of God for these implied readers are highly contested, not least among the exiles themselves (see especially chs. 27–29). But opposition to Jeremiah and the word of God stems from virtually every quarter—from his family and friends (11:18-23; 12:1-6), kings and other governmental officials (20:1-6; 26:1-24; 36:1-31; 37-43), the "remnant of Judah" (42–44), and the people more generally (e.g., 15:10). The conflict that began early in Jeremiah's career persisted throughout his ministry and continued into the very situation of the implied readers. It would be crucial for them to learn how to discern the truth amid the cacophony of voices claiming to know the will of God, and this story of conflict was designed to make them aware of the options and to help them sort things out. Their future was at stake.

From a different perspective, language is used in Jeremiah in a starkly realistic way. These texts tell the truth about the situation

and do so in an unsparing way through the use of vivid portrayals, piercing images, and harsh, outrageous metaphors. This unrelenting realism and these shocking metaphors are used for all levels of the divine-human relationship, but especially the people's infidelity and their experience of judgment.

Regarding the people's infidelity, they had been unfaithful to their relationship with God, both with respect to their life of faith and worship and of their relationships with one another. The primary metaphor used for the God-Israel relationship is marital. The marriage began very well (2:2-3) but was soon violated as people and leaders alike became idolatrous (2:5-13). Shocking sexual imagery is used to depict this infidelity (see 2:20, 23-24, 33; 3:1-9, 13, 20; 4:30; 13:27) as well as the divine judgment (13:22-26). Because Israel is "wife" in this metaphor, the infidelity is described one-sidedly in terms of female behavior and has been rightfully evaluated as degrading to women, whether then or now (see commentary on the several texts). Suffice it to say here that this imagery was likely used for its shock value, particularly in view of the predominantly male audience. It was a way to bring sharply home to readers the depth of their unfaithfulness.

With respect to Israel's failure in interhuman relationships, the metaphors used are also barbed and biting, designed to get to the heart of things in a hurry. Adulterous Israelite men are likened to lusty stallions, neighing for their neighbors' wives and trooping to brothels (5:7-8). Wealthy Israelites are likened to fowlers; they are scoundrels who set traps and catch human beings by stealing the goods of the less fortunate to fill their own pantries and growing fat and sleek in the process (5:26-27). They are legal sharks who misuse the court system, draining the lifeblood of the innocent poor (2:34) and failing to come to the defense of the widow and orphan (5:28). They use their tongues like a bow and arrow, speaking lies and slandering even their own family and friends (9:3-6). There is no commandment that remains unbroken (7:9), and yet they claim innocence (8:6). Again, the sharp metaphors are designed to get under the skin and expose the inner rottenness that infects all their relationships. Given this rhetoric the readers would not be able to claim innocence or argue that God or even life itself has somehow been unfair to them.

Regarding the experience of judgment, the rhetoric is designed for different purposes. The devastating experience in and through which readers have gone is not downplayed. Considerable energy and passion is used to portray a community that has experienced a disaster approximating a nuclear nightmare (see 4:23-26). While

the text commonly speaks of these events in future terms, readers would recognize that they have already experienced them and continue to bear their effects.

The text repeatedly speaks of those realities that caused this suffering, especially evident in the recurring phrase, “sword, famine, pestilence” (e.g., 14:12, 16; 15:2). These words are repeated *ad nauseam*; “famine” occurs more than thirty times; “sword” more than seventy times (along with numerous other words for instruments of war); “pestilence/disease” more than twenty times. Words such as “death,” “destroy/destruction,” “devour,” “break,” “scatter”—of adults and children, military and civilian—are common. Even more graphic language is used for those who die: their bodies are not buried (or are disinterred) and are used for dung or become food for birds and beasts (7:33; 8:1-3; 9:22; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20) and even for members of their own families and neighbors (19:9)! Repeated words such as “waste,” “ruin,” and “desolation” speak of the devastating effect upon their entire environment—homes, cities and towns, birds, animals, vegetation, and land. All of this incessantly repeated language gives full rhetorical recognition of the hell through which the readers have gone; they will be able to recognize their own experience in all of its gory and tragic details in the text itself.

Even more, the language Jeremiah used to portray this disaster includes reference not only to external realities but also to their internal effects. Common words, often occurring in clusters for maximal effect (e.g., 25:9; 42:18)—“horror,” “shame,” “disgrace,” “curse,” “hissing,” “taunt,” and “derision”—say something not only about how others perceive them but also, especially when thinking about shame in that culture, about their own depleted sense of self. James Muilenburg has catalogued the “terminology of adversity” in Jeremiah, and the range of frequency of the language of pain and suffering is truly remarkable.⁴ His categories include the following: sickness and wounds (e.g., 30:12-15); travail and anguish (e.g., 4:31); horror, terror, desolation (e.g., 12:10-11); abandonment, rejection, alienation (e.g., 14:19-21); grief and mourning (e.g., 6:26; 31:15). The pain of readers is thereby put on full public display for all to see and hear and in a way that is both wrenching and realistic.

That this painful experience of the people is so fully acknowledged in both its external and internal aspects is of great importance; only when this is done—and done publicly—can any positive words about the future begin to take hold among the readers. The several dimensions of the lament psalms, which so

straightforwardly voice the cries and acknowledge the pain and the hurt, both self-inflicted and enemy-inflicted, with all of the internal and external effects, certainly lies in the background of the use of this language.

No wonder it is often said that the book of Jeremiah is filled with tears. It is notable that not only the tears of the people are put on public display (often in their own words, e.g., 14:19-22), so also are the tears of the prophet and the tears of God (e.g., 4:19; 8:18-9:1; 9:10, 17-19; 10:19; 12:7; 13:17; 14:17; 20:14-18; 23:9). What becomes so apparent in the book is that readers could see that neither God nor God's messenger remained aloof and unaffected by what they have had to go through. The same or similar language is used for the tears of all those involved in this disaster.

Abraham Heschel has been most articulate in lifting up the tears of prophet and God.⁵ Others have followed his train. Regarding the prophet, Muilenburg speaks strikingly of "his capacity for empathy, both social and cosmic, his profound sympathy with his own people, despite their waywardness and infidelity, his ability to identify himself interiorly with their afflictions."⁶ The prophet's suffering is not simply empathetic and personal, however; the prophet embodies the suffering of God. I have spoken at length of the tearful speeches of God in Jeremiah, tears because the people have been unfaithful to the relationship and tears because of the suffering the people are having to undergo.⁷ The suffering of God, however, despite all the heartache at the people's infidelity, is not a passive, enervating suffering; God's suffering is of such a nature that it enters powerfully into the lives of people where they are and works to transform their mourning into joy (31:13-17). The tears of the people are fully recognized; their desperate situation is named for what it is. But because of the suffering of the prophet and God, their tears will not have the last word.

Another unusual rhetorical detail in the book is the naming of over fifty different individuals from the time of Jeremiah's ministry, often with specific family connections. Almost all of these names occur in chapters 20-45. Whereas chapters 2-20 are dominated by oracles directed to the people as a whole, chapters 20-45 focus on various officials and religious leaders. Of what import is this interest in familial detail and in narratives that portray them in action? For one thing this narrative detail shows how widespread was the rejection of the prophet and his word; every level of Israelite society was resistant. And through the telling of stories, and not just giving oracular prophetic pronouncements, memories can be jogged and this wholesale rejection can be given a "real life"

status. A *story* of resistance can have greater potential impact on those who lived through this time. From a post-fall perspective such a portrayal of individuals and their stories would also make clear that there are no innocents among the exiles. A few persons are lifted up and given a positive stature (e.g., 26:24; 38:7-13), perhaps to show that the people were not somehow fated to speak and act as they did and to suggest that there is a faithful remnant upon which a new community can be built. There may also be some interest here in putting into place the families and individuals who would or would not be leaders of a post-restoration community. These specifics, as well as the numerous chronological references, may also serve the rhetorical function of anchoring the narrative in specific persons, times and places so that appeals cannot be made to faulty memories.

In this connection we note the considerable amount of narrative material that speaks of the prophet and his work. After a period of time in scholarship during which the person of the prophet was given front-page attention, with special focus on the confessions,⁸

Von Rad on the Person of the Prophet



Jeremiah serves God not only with the harsh proclamation of his mouth, but also with his person; his life becomes unexpectedly involved in the cause of God on earth. Thus, now—and in Jeremiah this is something new—the prophet not only becomes a witness of God through the strength of his charisma, but also in his humanity; but not as one who triumphs over the sins of mankind, not as one overcoming, but as a messenger of God to mankind breaking under the strain. Hence, Jeremiah's life here becomes a forceful witness, his suffering soul and his life ebbing away in God's service becomes a testimony of God.

Gerhard von Rad, "The Confessions of Jeremiah," in *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies* (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 346.

there has been a recent tendency to decenter Jeremiah and emphasize the word that he speaks.⁹ But the pendulum has now swung too far in the other direction. The existence of so many narratives calls us back to the prophet as agent of the word of God (the degree to which the life of the prophet is idealized is beside the point; see below). The narratives want to say, at the least, that the word of God does not arrive on the human scene in a disembodied way; that word is spoken by human beings and their abilities and character count with respect to how that word is handled and proclaimed. Human beings with their gifts make a difference to God and to the word that is spoken. Even more, the word of God is conveyed not simply in the words that are spoken but also in and through

the prophets' actions (of which the symbolic acts are but one sort) and through the persons that they are, through their very humanity. [Von Rad on the Person of the Prophet]

Finally, how might we evaluate the rhetorical strategies in the book? How effective were (are) they? Might they serve as models for other times and places? Are they (always, often) meant to be taken literally? How much of a role does hyperbole or irony or even humor play? Were (are) all of the metaphors of God appropriate?

Are some of them exhausted, no longer possible to be used? The metaphors of violence, patriarchy, and perhaps even misogyny come to mind. But the evaluative questions become even more pressing: What kind of God is this who uses such coarse and violent language and who speaks and works in ways that issue in such suffering and displacement? And what kind of person must the prophet be who agrees to be the agent for such language and action?

The Portrayal of Jeremiah and the Tradition in which He Stands

Generally speaking, the book portrays Jeremiah as a prophet who has personally received a word from God regarding the divine purposes with respect to Israel and its larger world, has been called to speak that word in a public way, and who obediently, though reluctantly takes up that task.

Considerable scholarly disagreement exists, however, regarding the extent to which the book's portrayal of Jeremiah corresponds to reality. Basic to this debate are two observations: the book is unique in the considerable amount of material that speaks of the person of Jeremiah; at the same time, the book itself expresses no interest in biography or autobiography per se (witness the absence of reference to his birth or death). To construct a portrayal of Jeremiah, the interpreter has the difficult task of seeking to weave a fabric from bits and pieces of various sorts laid out in an uncertain order over the course of the book. It may be legitimate for readers to attempt to do this, but they should be aware that they are then using the book in a way in which it was not written to be used.



Rembrandt's Portrait of Jeremiah

Perhaps no other artist captures the depth of the human psyche better than Rembrandt van Rijn. In this painting, Jeremiah is portrayed amid the destruction of a smoldering Jerusalem; yet, he is strangely illuminated by a glowing light. Underlying his deep sense of lament, perplexed in the midst of his prophetic obedience to God, Jeremiah leans on the "Word," with his left arm leaning on a book of Holy Scripture. The vessels of gold and glitter from a previous prosperous temple site, perhaps symbols of self-offering, have been reduced to a few gathered remains. His use of subtle tonal modulations reflect Rembrandt's use of light and dark (*chiaroscuro*) to create a sense of God's Presence as if emanating from the depths of the ruins.

Rembrandt van Rijn. *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem*. 1630. Oil on Panel. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. (Credit: Super Stock, Inc)

A traditional approach to this issue, still well represented among modern scholars, is that the book narrates the story of the ministry of a prophet named Jeremiah who lived during a tumultuous period of Israel's life. The assumption is that the reader can determine the setting of the individual texts and construct a consistent portrayal of the prophet in his historical context.¹⁰ A more recent approach, represented by Carroll especially, claims that such a reconstructive task goes beyond the evidence available.¹¹ For him, the book presents an idealized character; Jeremiah is essentially a literary figure, with only shadowy links to historical reality.

Brueggemann and others seek to move between these two extremes, correctly in my estimation.¹² As is true to a greater or lesser degree with the presentation of any historical figure, the portrayal of Jeremiah reflects both the speech and action of an actual individual and a literary construction by editors or authors informed by varying perspectives. The book presents us with both

a powerful personality *and* an interpretation of his role and significance. Because the editors are inevitably selective and have been shaped by their perspective on the past and the pressing issues they seek to address, Jeremiah emerges as both more than and less than the actual historical prophet. [Truth and Historicity]

According to the chronology the book provides (see 1:1-3; 25:1-3; 36:1-2), Jeremiah's prophetic ministry lasts for over forty years. It

begins with his call in 627 BC in the thirteenth year of Josiah (see 1:2; 25:3), though that has been disputed,¹³ and ends several years after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC (see chs. 42–44). There seems to be no good reason not to accept this chronology in a general way. Jeremiah's ministry thus begins at a time of great promise under King Josiah and his reforms, though it is not clear how Jeremiah is related (if at all) to these efforts (see 2 Chr 35:25), and it ends with the country and its treasured institutions in ruins and its people scattered across the region.

Jeremiah has a priestly lineage, and this probably informs the character of his message to some degree. He is a native of Anathoth (1:1), a village three miles northeast of Jerusalem in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin. He is a descendant of the tribe of Levi through the priest Abiathar, one of the two priests appointed by David to oversee Israel's religious life (1:1; 2 Sam 20:25). Abiathar was banished to Anathoth by Solomon (1 Kgs 2:26-27) because of his support of Solomon's brother Adonijah as David's successor.

Truth and Historicity



It is important to say that, though considerable uncertainty exists regarding the extent to which the book reflects the "facts" regarding the prophet and his life situation, truth is not necessarily related to historicity. Truth can be conveyed through a variety of types of literature, including idealized portraits of prophetic figures.

The descendants of the other chief priest, Zadok, were thus in charge of the temple during the centuries after Solomon, and at the time of Jeremiah; they would have been supporters of the Davidic monarchy.

So Jeremiah belongs to a family of priests that had long been out of the loop of religious authority in the land. He was thus an “outsider” with a pedigree and was raised in a village where his family had long been settled; it is reasonable to think that they had maintained a critical stance with respect to the religious and royal establishment. Jeremiah’s various critical references to the temple and to matters such as sacrifice may stand in this critical tradition (e.g., 6:20; 7:1-22). But it seems unwise to claim that his sharp criticism entails rejection of such religious institutions (see 33:17-26 and God’s promise regarding the levitical priesthood). At various points his ministry is carried out in proximity to the temple (chs. 7, 26), and some think he could have been a priest, or a cultic prophet, that is, a prophet with responsibilities in association with the temple worship.¹⁴ But this seems unlikely in view of his heritage; he may rather have intruded publicly into these areas to make his point as vividly as possible.¹⁵

Regarding his royal connections, Jeremiah often comes into conflict with Josiah’s successors, though he is reported to have had direct personal contact only with King Zedekiah. His efforts were rewarded by much condemnation and derision from these kings as well as from other authorities and the populace as a whole (see chs. 26, 36). Interpreters often make much of Jeremiah’s opposition to a “royal–temple ideology” (this is a key element in Brueggemann’s interpretation of the book),¹⁶ but some caution is in order.

Jeremiah does subject the kings to sharp attacks in the concentrated passage in 23:10-30, but in the major section that focuses on indictment and judgment (chs. 2–20) kings are rarely singled out (Manasseh in 15:4, but he is from a previous generation). Kings do come in for criticism more directly in chapters 21–45 and their responses are directly related to the fate of the nation. This judgment is unrelenting, however, only with respect to King Jehoiakim (22:18-19; 26:20-23; 36:20-31). Jeremiah expresses hostility toward Jehoiachin in 22:24-30, yet the final form of the book ameliorates this judgment with a positive note (52:31-34). Jeremiah’s most personal relationship with a king (Zedekiah) is marked by frustration and disappointment, yet less than full condemnation; indeed the prophet holds out positive possibilities (e.g., 27:12; 34:4-5; 38:17-18).

Moreover, several statements about the kingship suggest a positive value (22:1-4), including the approval of Josiah's way of ruling (22:15-16). Jeremiah's hopes are shaped in terms of a new David (23:5-6; 30:9; 33:14-26; cf. 30:21). In fact, 33:17-26 refers to the unconditional character of the Davidic covenant and the divine commitment thereto is stated in the strongest of terms—as firm as the creation itself. Jeremiah's sharpest words about individual kings seem not to be grounded in a blanket condemnation of the Davidic kingship as such. It is often claimed that many or all of these positive statements did not originate with Jeremiah himself. This may be so, but that is a speculative claim; clearly the book's final editors want to characterize the message of Jeremiah for readers in these terms.

Jeremiah is consciously linked to Israel's prophetic heritage. The only full quotation of a text from the prophetic literature (26:18) explicitly links him to the prophet Micah (Mic 3:12). Connections with Hosea, a northern prophet, are often noted, especially the use of the marital metaphor for the God-Israel relationship and sexual imagery for Israel's infidelity (cf. Hos 1-3), as well as the stress upon the pathos of God in response (see Hos 6:4; 11:1-9). Though Jeremiah's focus on issues of social justice does not match that of Amos or Isaiah, his concern is lively enough to continue that tradition (see Jer 5:25-28; 7:5-6). Jeremiah's witness to God's use of Babylon as both agent and recipient of judgment (see below) parallels Isaiah's understanding of Assyria (see Isa 10). The conflict with false prophets, which often centers Jeremiah's attention (e.g., 6:13-15; 14:13-16; 23:9-32; 27-29), stands in the tradition of Micah 3:5-6 (cf. Hos 9:8-9; Isa 28:7-10; Zeph 3:4). Examples could be multiplied, but these are sufficient to show that there is a self-conscious linkage of Jeremiah to an existing prophetic heritage. Jeremiah is not unique nor, for all the opposition he faces, does he stand alone (see 26:20-23).

Particularly because of the connections made to Deuteronomy (see below), commentators make much of Jeremiah's links to Moses.¹⁷ Yet, the various correspondences that are drawn seem often to be strained. Parallels between Jeremiah's call (1:4-10) and that of Moses (Exod 3:1-6) have often been noted, yet the differences are profound regarding the nature of the commission (except in general terms); the similarities may be more due to conventional ways of narrating call experiences than conscious linkage. The reference in Deuteronomy 18:18 to God raising up a prophet and putting words into his mouth probably lies in the background of Jeremiah 1:9 (see 15:16; Ezek 2:8-3:3).¹⁸ At the same time, there is

only one mention of Moses in the book (15:1) and surprisingly few explicit references to the Sinai covenant (11:2-10; 22:9; 31:32) or even the Law (e.g., 5:5; 6:19; 7:5-9; 9:13; 16:11; 26:4; 32:23). Certainly the Law plays an important role in Jeremiah, particularly as the grounds for the indictment of the people (e.g., 7:8-10). At the same time, certain emphases in Jeremiah go well beyond Moses, not least the “new” covenant that sets aside the Mosaic form (31:31-34), a “new” constitutive act of God that depreciates the exodus (16:14-15; 23:7-8), the continuing claims regarding the promissory covenants of Abraham and David (see commentary on chs. 32–33), and an understanding of God that is much more relational and filled with pathos than that of the Deuteronomist.

Regarding matters of a more personal nature in the portrayal of Jeremiah, several are noted in the book; yet, they are mentioned not out of biographical interest, but in the service of the word of God that Jeremiah brings. We are told that he was not married, had no children (16:2) and did not participate in mourning rites or community feasts (16:5-9), but this was done at the command of God to serve as a symbolic act (see commentary at ch. 13). In obeying God’s command in these respects, the prophet not only prefigured the end of these experiences for the people of Israel but also portrayed, indeed embodied what God’s own experience of abandonment and the loss of community was like (12:7; 14:8).¹⁹ We are also given glimpses into Jeremiah’s concern for personal safety (37:20; 38:15). These references suggest that his courageous stand on behalf of the word of God is not undertaken with total disregard for personal well-being and his complaints indicate that he would rather not have had to bear the painful pressures brought upon him by his antagonists.

This reference brings us to Jeremiah’s several laments or confessions (see commentary at chs. 11–12). A consistent theme in the laments is Jeremiah’s complaint to God regarding the opposition he faced (e.g., 11:19-20; 20:10-12). Specific testimony is given to efforts made by his opponents to silence him, including trial, arrest, and imprisonment (e.g., 26:10-19; 36:26; 37:11–38:6), though he was not without supporters (26:24; 38:7-13). Resistance to him and the message he brings continues until the end of the narrative (ch. 44). Again, this information is not provided for biographical purposes, as real as the experiences may well have been; rather, the prophet’s experience of rejection and his lamenting his situation were understood to mirror *God’s* experience at the hands of the people. Even more, because the prophet not only spoke God’s word, but embodied it, God’s experience becomes Jeremiah’s experience. As God was rejected by the people, so also the prophet who

spoke and embodied God's word was resisted and renounced by them. Jeremiah's laments, whatever their roots in his personal life, thereby have become a proclamation of the word of *God* to the

Heschel on the Prophet



An analysis of prophetic utterances shows that the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, *a sympathy with the divine pathos*, a communion with the divine consciousness which comes about through the prophet's reflection of, or participation in, the divine pathos He lives not only his personal life, but also the life of God. The prophet hears God's voice and feels his heart. He tries to impart the *pathos* of the message together with its *logos*.

The prophet's inner life was not wholly his own. His emotional situation reflected the divine relation to Israel: compassion as well as anger. What he felt was not always original with him.

The prophet does not see the world from the point of view of a political theory; he is a person who sees the world from the point of view of God; he sees the world through the eyes of God.

Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper, 1962), 26, 125, 138.

audience for whom these chapters were written.²⁰ [Heschel on the Prophet]

The last picture readers are given of Jeremiah finds him condemning the idolatry of his compatriots in Egypt (43:8–44:30). The time of his death is left unreported; the place of his death is probably Egypt.

The portrayal of Jeremiah is developed even further beyond the borders of the book. The tradition of Jeremiah as a “weeping prophet” is reinforced by 2 Chronicles 35:25 and is extended by the Septuagint's (LXX) preface to Lamentations (1:1), which ascribes the book to Jeremiah. In Jewish literature, later legends imagine varying accounts of his ministry in Egypt and Babylon as well as Palestine, both before and after the exile. Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, and 2 Maccabees (2:2-8; 15:14-16) continue the tradition within the deuterocanonical books (see also Sir 49:4-7), as do the

pseudepigraphical 1 Esdras (1:28), *Lives of the Prophets, Paralipomena of Jeremiah*, and 2–4 *Baruch*. It may also be noted that Jeremiah is given more attention than any other prophet in both Josephus and Philo; in contrast, Jeremiah is mentioned in the Qumran texts relatively infrequently.

In the New Testament, the prophet is mentioned three times, all in Matthew (2:17; 16:14; 27:9), but only the first reference is clearly understood, citing Jeremiah 31:15 in connection with Herod's slaughter of the innocents. Citations of Jeremiah texts in the New Testament are relatively infrequent. The most famous use of Jeremiah are the references to the new covenant in 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:5-6; and Hebrews 8:8-12, 10:16-17 (see the commentary at 31:31-34). Revelation 18 has several direct references to Jeremiah 50–51, especially in using language regarding Babylon to speak of Rome (see also Rev 7:17; 13:9-10). Other allusions may be noted, such as the “den of robbers” (Jer 7:11 and Mark 11:17); “find rest for your souls” (Jer 6:16 and Matt 11:29); “boasting” in the Lord (Jer 9:23-24 and 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17); and Paul's being set apart before he was born (Jer 1:5 and Gal 1:15).

The Structure of Jeremiah

The structure of the book of Jeremiah, while clear in some respects, is finally something of a puzzle.²¹ Several factors contribute to this difficulty, including the less than obvious development of thought, the lack of a consistent chronological ordering, the references to various scrolls and other writings, and the differences between the Hebrew Bible and the LXX (see below). That the book is clearly a collection of materials emergent in various times and places could mean that the book as a whole has been somewhat haphazardly arranged; scholarly difficulties in discerning a precise structure may well be revealing of this reality.

Within the book itself there are some signs of specific collections of material. Chapter 36 speaks of two scrolls, but we cannot be certain which portions of the present book are being referenced (see below). In 30:2 we are informed of a “book,” commonly called the Book of Comfort/Consolation, a smaller collection of oracles of hope and promise; it is probably to be identified with chapters 30–33, but some think only chapters 30–31 are to be included. Chapters 46–51 consist largely of oracles against the nations (OAN); they likely constituted a separate collection at some point (see below on their placement in the LXX), and some think that the “book” of 25:13 refers to this collection (others identify it with the scroll in ch. 36 and to all or most of chs. 2–24). These signs of collections within the book suggest that it has been composed at least in significant part by bringing together originally separate blocks of material (see below).

The concern for dating at many different points in the book (28 instances) opens up the question of a possible chronological arrangement. Yet, the various parts of the book are not in chronological order; for example, 21:1–2 is dated close to 588 BC; 24:1 dates that chapter soon after 597 BC; the next chapter is dated in 605 BC (25:1). Moreover, hardly any concern for chronology is present in chapters 2–20 (3:6 speaks generally of the time of Josiah). While a greater chronological concern exists in chapters 21–45 (e.g., 25:1; 26:1; 27:1; 28:1; 36:1), no pattern seems evident. Such mixed chronological references suggest that other factors have been more decisive in arranging the material.

Stylistic devices have also been thought to provide clues to the arrangement of the book. For example, recurring words/phrases at key points have been noted. Jeremiah’s reference to the womb of his mother in 1:5 and 20:18 has been considered an *inclusio* for chapters 1–20;²² on other hand, the repetition of the commissioning verbs of 1:10 in 24:6 could be said to bracket chapters

1–24. Or, the references to the ancestral promises and restoring Israel's fortunes in 30:3 and 33:26 have been said to bracket the Book of Comfort. Yet, perhaps the phrase "the days are surely coming" in 30:3 and 31:38 serves this function for a shorter book. Perhaps all of these bracketing devices played an organizing role at one or another stage in the formation of the book, but we cannot be certain.

Various collections according to theme suggest editorial arranging: 2:1–4:4 (sin and repentance); 7:1–8:3 (cultic matters); 14:1–15:4 (drought and war); 18:1–19:15 (image of potter and clay); 21:11–23:6 (royal house and city); 23:9–40 (prophets); 27–29 (prophets and Babylon); 37–38 (Jeremiah and Zedekiah); and 40:7–41:18 (community without Jeremiah). Yet, such topical arrangements do not seem to be carried consistently throughout the book or with any overall framework in mind.

The pivotal role played by chapter 25 in the book has suggested a plausible arrangement for the entire book. Most scholars are agreed that 25:1–14 (or the bulk of it) constitutes a summary and conclusion to the first half of the book (or perhaps chs. 2–20). Especially helpful is the further idea that the entire chapter constitutes a "hinge" for the book as a whole.²³ On the one hand, the chapter summarizes the first half of the book with its focus on the judgment against Israel (vv. 1–11; vv. 8–11 constitute the oracle). On the other hand, the chapter anticipates the OAN at the end of the book with its general oracles against the nations (vv. 15–38), especially the demise of Babylon, anticipated in vv. 12–14, 26 (cf. chs. 50–51). The judgment of Israel is not the end of God's work; indeed, God's agent for that judgment (Babylon) shall itself be judged and Israel will be delivered and return home (chs. 50–51 could thus be considered climactic). This consideration then doubles back to the first chapter and picks up the theme of Jeremiah as a "prophet to the nations" (1:10). This role of Jeremiah among the nations is picked up especially in the more personal references in 25:15–17 and 51:59–64. This point of continuity across the entire book of the word of God spoken against the nations provides, finally, a word of hope for Israel.

It seems best then to divide Jeremiah into two major blocks of materials (chs. 2–24, 26–51, with ch. 25 as a hinge), to which is attached an introductory chapter (1) and a concluding epilogue (52). The latter bracket the book in its final form; they provide the call of Jeremiah and a summary of the most basic historical situation that both book and prophet address, dating from 597 BC

(52:1) to 561 BC (52:31-34). The latter verses anticipate a positive future, especially when viewed through the lens of chapters 50–51.

The division of Jeremiah into two major blocks of material has often been elucidated in terms of their respective emphases on judgment and deliverance.²⁴ Though this is an appropriate observation in terms of the number of texts that are devoted to these two themes, it can be misleading. The first half of the book contains several strong oracles of unconditional future salvation (3:15-18; 12:14-16; 16:14-15; 23:5-8), even climactically so (24:4-7, 25:12-14). These announcements are indeed amplified in the second half of the book, but the latter does not introduce a new theme.

Emphasis on the discontinuity of two halves of the book can neglect the fact that the second half of the book contains many narratives that *illustrate in specific terms* the resistance of specific groups and individuals to the word of God of that Jeremiah speaks more generally in the first half of the book (chs. 26–29; 34; 36–44; these in turn have been anticipated in 20:1-6 and 21:1-7). This move from the general to the specific must also be emphasized in thinking through the factors behind this division of the book.

One additional factor may be noted regarding this division. The people of Israel as a whole tend to be indicted in the first half of the book, but the climactic vision of chapter 24 first introduces a division *within the community*, between the exiles in Babylon and other Israelites.²⁵ This issue of the identity of the true people of God within Israel receives focused attention in the second half of the book, with its interest in prophetic conflict and the future of the exiles in Babylon (27–29), the perfidy of those remaining in the land (34, 37–38), the exception of the Rechabites (35), and the denunciation of the “remnant of Judah” that goes to Egypt (41–44). The future of Israel in the plan of God lies with those in Babylon (from where they will return to the land of promise, 50–51).

The organization of the materials *within* the two major blocks of chapters 2–24 and 25–51 is contested.²⁶ We only give a basic outline at this point, suggesting relationships as the commentary proceeds. Chapters 2–24 may be divided into chapters 2–6, 7–10, 11–20, and 21–24. Chapters 26–51 may be divided into chapters 26–35, 37–45 (with ch. 36 constituting a hinge), and chapters 46–51. [\[Outline of the Book of Jeremiah\]](#)

Having made these observations, there may be a point in the absence of a clear overall structure. If the book is understood as a *collage*, a work of art in which materials of various kinds are thrown

Outline of the Book of Jeremiah

- I. The Call of Jeremiah, 1:1-19
 - A. Superscription, 1:1-3
 - B. The Call of Jeremiah, 1:4-19
- II. Indictment for Infidelity and Call to Repentance, 2:1–4:4
 - A. Israel's Infidelity, 2:1–3:5
 - 1. A Divine Memory, 2:1-3
 - 2. On Changing Gods, 2:4-13
 - 3. Israel Exposed, 2:14-19
 - 4. Israel's Apostasy Detailed, 2:20-37
 - 5. The Divorce, 3:1-5
 - B. Repentance and Return, 3:6–4:4
 - 1. Israel and Judah Compared, 3:6-11
 - 2. The Call to Repentance, 3:12-14
 - 3. A Promised Future Back Home. 3:15-18
 - 4. A Divine Lament, 3:19-22a
 - 5. A Ritual of Repentance, 3:22b-25
 - 6. Another View On Repentance, 4:1-4
- III. God Will Not Turn Back, 4:5–6:30
 - A. Disaster Threatens Israel, 4:5-31
 - 1. A Foe from the North, 4:5-8
 - 2. Is God Deceptive? 4:9-12
 - 3. The Enemy Is Near, 4:13-18
 - 4. Personal Anguish at Creational Devastation, 4:19-31
 - B. Why Has God Done All These Things to Us? 5:1-31
 - 1. How Can I Pardon You? 5:1-9
 - 2. Infidelity Leads to Exile, 5:10-19
 - 3. An Appalling and Horrible Thing, 5:20-31
 - C. Take Warning, Jerusalem, 6:1-30
 - 1. The Invader Approaches, 6:1-8
 - 2. Prophetic Weariness, 6:9-15
 - 3. Forsaking the Ancient Paths, 6:16-21
 - 4. The Invaders Advance and Israel Reels, 6:22-26
 - 5. Tested and Rejected, 6:27-30
- IV. The Temple Sermon, 7:1–8:3
 - A. The Temple of the Lord, 7:1-15
 - B. The Inevitability of Judgment, 7:16–8:3
 - 1. No More Intercession, 7:16-20
 - 2. A History of Disobedience, 7:21-26
 - 3. A Horrific Judgment, 7:27–8:3
- V. Judgment and Tears, 8:4–10:25
 - A. Is There No Balm in Gilead? 8:4–9:1
 - 1. Why Has This People Turned Away? 8:4-13
 - 2. Laments Over the Coming Disaster, 8:14–9:1
 - B. The Laments Intensify, 9:2-26
 - 1. Words as Weapons, 9:2-9
 - 2. Divine Grief and Judgment, 9:10-11
 - 3. Why?! 9:12-16
 - 4. Calls for Lamentation, 9:17-22
 - 5. On Boasting, 9:23-26
- C. A Universal Frame of Reference, 10:1-25
 - 1. An Incomparable God 10:1-16
 - 2. The Final Siege, 10:17-25
- VI. Laments of Jeremiah and God, 11:1–20:18
 - A. Covenant Violated, 11:1-17
 - 1. The Indictment, 11:1-10
 - 2. The Judgment, 11:11-17
 - B. Jeremiah's Laments and God's Responses, 11:18–12:17
 - 1. A Lamb Led to the Slaughter, 11:18-23
 - 2. The Mourning of/for the Land, 12:1-17
 - a. The Land Mourns! 12:1-4
 - b. God's Response, 12:5-17
 - C. Symbolic Actions and Violent Words, 13:1-27
 - 1. The Linen Loincloth, 13:1-11
 - 2. The Metaphor of the Wine Jars, 13:12-14
 - 3. Another Chance before Exile? 13:15-17
 - 4. No Hope for Royalty, 13:18-19
 - 5. Jerusalem's Shame, 13:20-27
 - D. It Is Too Late! 14:1–15:9
 - 1. The Drought and Its Effects, 14:1-6
 - 2. A Penitential Lament and Divine Response, 14:7-10
 - 3. Interaction between God and Jeremiah, 14:11-16
 - 4. God and People Lament, 14:17-22
 - 5. God's Response to the People's Lament, 15:1-9
 - E. More Laments from Jeremiah, 15:10-21
 - 1. Jeremiah's Lament and God's Righteousness, 15:10-14
 - 2. Once Again, Jeremiah's Lament and God's Response, 15:15-21
 - F. The Shape of the Life of a Prophet, 16:1-21
 - 1. An Embodied Word of Judgment, 16:1-13
 - 2. Restoration of Israel and the Nations, 16:14-21
 - G. In Whom Do You Trust? 17:1-27
 - 1. An Oracle of Judgment, 17:1-4
 - 2. In Whom Do You Trust? 17:5-11
 - 3. A Hymnic Interlude, 17:12-13
 - 4. Jeremiah's Lament, 17:14-18
 - 5. Hallow the Sabbath Day, 17:19-27
 - H. The Potter and the Plots, 18:1-23
 - 1. The Potter and the Clay, 18:1-11
 - 2. The People's Plots Against God and God's Response, 18:12-17
 - 3. The People's Plots Against Jeremiah and His Response, 18:18-23
 - I. A Broken Jug and Its Effects, 19:1–20:6
 - 1. The Breaking of the Jug, 19:1-15
 - 2. Jeremiah Persecuted Publicly, 20:1-6

- J. Jeremiah's Final Lament, 20:7-18
1. Jeremiah's Complaint, 20:7-13
 2. Jeremiah's Cry of the Heart, 20:14-18
- VII. Indictment of Israel's Leadership, 21:1–23:40
- A. Oracles to Kings and People, 21:1-14
 1. Oracles against Zedekiah and Jerusalem, 21:1-10
 2. General Oracles Against King and City, 21:11-14
 - B. The Trouble with Kings, 22:1–23:8
 1. Why Jerusalem Was Destroyed, 22:1-9
 2. Concerning King Jehoahaz, 22:10-12
 3. Concerning King Jehoiakim, 22:13-19
 4. Concerning Jerusalem, 22:20-23
 5. Concerning King Jehoiachin, 22:24-30
 6. Return to the Land Under Faithful Rulers, 23:1-8
 - C. True and False Prophets, 23:9-40
 1. A General Indictment, 23:9-12
 2. The Prophets Are the Problem, 23:13-15
 3. The Council of the Lord, 23:16-22
 4. Dreams and Words, 23:23-32
 5. The Burden/Oracle of the Lord, 23:33-40
- VIII. Vision of the Good and the Bad Figs, 24:1-10
- IX. Summary Judgments Against the Nations, 25:1-38
- A. Summary Indictment and Judgment, 25:1-14
 - B. God's Wrath Poured Out on the Nations, 25:15-38
 1. Drinking the Cup of Wrath, 25:15-29
 2. Jeremiah's Word to the Nations, 25:30-38
- X. Jeremiah in Controversy, 26:1–29:32
- A. The Temple Sermon Revisited, 26:1-24
 1. Sermon and Trial, 26:1-19
 2. Death for One Prophet, Deliverance for Another, 26:20-24
 - B. Jeremiah and False Prophecy, 27:1–28:17
 1. The Yoke of Submission to Babylon, 27:1-22
 2. Jeremiah and Hananiah, 28:1-17
 - C. Jeremiah's Letters to the Exiles, 29:1-32
 1. Jeremiah's First Letter, 29:1-23
 2. Two More Letters from Jeremiah, 29:24-32.
- XI. The Book of Consolation, 30:1–33:26
- A. Promised Restoration for Israel and Judah, 30:1-24
 - B. Restoration and New Covenant, 31:1-40
 - C. Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord? YES! 32:1-44
 - D. Restoration and Secure Promises, 33:1-26
- XII. Announcements of Judgment to Zedekiah and Israel, 34:1-22
- A. Judgment Pronounced Against Zedekiah, 34:1-7
 - B. Judgment on Israel for Mistreatment of Slaves, 34:8-22
- XIII. Commendation of the Rechabites, 35:1-19
- XIV. The Scrolls of Jeremiah, 36:1-32
- A. The Writing of the Scroll, 36:1-8
 - B. Readings of the Scroll, 36:9-26
 - C. A Final Word of Judgment and a New Scroll, 36:27-32
- XV. The "Baruch Narrative," 37:1–45:5
- A. Encounters between Jeremiah and Zedekiah, 37:1-21
 1. Zedekiah Pleads in Vain, 37:1-10
 2. Jeremiah Imprisoned, 37:11-21
 - B. Jeremiah among Foes and Friends, 38:1-28
 1. Jeremiah in the Mud, 38:1-6
 2. Ebed-melech Rescues Jeremiah, 38:8-13
 3. Jeremiah and Zedekiah One Last Time, 38:14-28
 - C. The Fall of Jerusalem and Jeremiah's Fate, 39:1-18
 1. The Destruction of Jerusalem, 39:1-10
 2. Nebuchadnezzar's Treatment of Jeremiah, 39:11-14
 3. God's Promise to Ebed-melech, 39:15-18
 - D. Gedaliah and Post-Fall Judah, 40:1–41:18
 1. The Release of Jeremiah, 40:1-6
 2. Gedaliah's Rule in Mizpah, 40:7-16
 3. Ishmael Leads an Insurrection, 41:1-10
 4. Johanan's Response, 41:11-18
 - E. Jeremiah and the "Remnant of Judah," 42:1-22
 - F. Jeremiah in Egypt, 43:1–44:30
 1. The "Remnant of Judah" Rejects the Word of God, 43:1-7
 2. A Final Symbolic Act by Jeremiah, 43:8-13
 3. Indictment and Announcement of Judgment, 44:1-14
 4. The People Are Defiant, 44:15-18
 5. Jeremiah's Final Sermon, 44:20-30
 - G. Jeremiah Comforts Baruch, 45:1-5
- XVI. The Oracles Against the Nations, 46:1–51:64
- A. Oracles Against Egypt, 46:1-28
 - B. Oracle Against the Philistines, 47:1-7
 - C. Oracles Against Moab, 48:1-47
 - D. Five Oracles Against the Nations, 49:1-39
 1. Oracle Against Ammon, 49:1-6
 2. Oracle against Edom, 49:7-22
 3. Oracle Against Damascus, 49:23-27
 4. Oracle Against Arabian Tribes, 49:28-33
 5. Oracle against Elam, 49:34-39
 - E. Oracles Against Babylon, 50:1–51:64
- XVII. The Fall of Jerusalem and Its Aftermath, 52:1-34

onto a screen, then the intended effect is achieved by an imaginative profusion of different genres, images and metaphors, life settings, and personal encounters. This would match the use of language more generally (see above). That is, the book does not present an argument in any usual sense or a clear historical development but seeks to achieve its objective by a kaleidoscopic look at a highly complex situation from a myriad of angles. The resultant portrayal is highly impressionistic, perhaps even surreal, and leaves the reader with a sense of the situation that is much more effective than a photograph or linear argument could achieve. As such, the book conveys the remarkable complexity of the situation for readers who had to come to terms in a personal way with this period in their history.

The Formation of the Book of Jeremiah

The formation of the book of Jeremiah has been the subject of considerable debate. Scholars generally agree that Jeremiah achieved its

Luther on Jeremiah



So, it seems as though Jeremiah did not compose these books himself, but that parts were taken piecemeal from his utterances and written into a book. For this reason we must not worry about the order or be hindered by the lack of it.

Martin Luther, "Preface to the Prophet Jeremiah," in *Luther's Works* (vol. 35; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 280-81.

present form over an extended period, continuing well beyond the time of Jeremiah himself. But the details regarding the growth of the book, including the amount of material to be ascribed to the prophet, are contested.²⁷ [Luther on Jeremiah]

The dispute regarding how much material goes back to Jeremiah himself corresponds to that of the portrayal of the prophet (see above).

Traditionally, scholars have accepted the claims of the book itself, and hence assign more material to Jeremiah than to later editors and, moreover, seek to determine the historical setting for most (if not all) texts.²⁸ Others scholars emphasize to a greater or lesser degree the use of Jeremiah's words by later editors who seek to speak to new situations and who often idealize the prophet in so doing.²⁹ The result of this later usage is that the actual words of Jeremiah are not considered recoverable and the amount of reliable material about the person of Jeremiah is minimized. From this angle, the original Jeremiah and his historical setting are not certainly available except in very general terms. A mediating position on this point is comparable to that noted above regarding the portrayal of Jeremiah; material originating with Jeremiah or dependent upon his work, though not able to be determined in any precise way, has been combined with later editorial reflections. But, in any case, given the highly speculative character of the enterprise,

interpreters of Jeremiah should expend little effort in seeking to sort out what may or may not go back to the prophet himself.

The complexity of the development of the book of Jeremiah is evident in several ways. The following features can help us better understand the matter, though issues of formation will finally remain elusive.

1. *Claims the Book Itself Makes.* The book itself reports some details regarding its formation, especially chapter 36. The chapter is probably not a straightforward historical account but has been built up over time from an unknown nucleus. Yet, its basic framework, unique among the prophets, can be relied upon in a general way. The chapter ascribes the committal to writing of Jeremiah's preaching to divine initiative and dates the undertaking to 605 BC, the fourth year of King Jehoiakim (36:1-3). This timing may be due to key political events associated with the rise of Babylonian hegemony in the region (see above); Judah's future hangs in the balance. This writing takes place about midpoint in Jeremiah's ministry, so at least half of the present book is apparently not included in this scroll. Yet, at this point the die is understood to have been cast regarding the shape of Israel's future (see commentary, especially on 36:27-31).

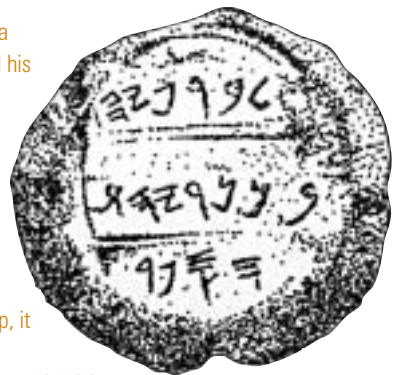
Jeremiah commissions Baruch the scribe to write at his dictation all the words that God had spoken to him (36:4). In other words, what had existed only in oral form is here committed to writing; writing is seen as a secondary, but significant development. Later, after the destruction of this scroll, he will dictate a second scroll and "many similar words were added to them" (36:32). [*Jeremiah and Baruch*]

Jeremiah and Baruch



Baruch, a somewhat shadowy figure, is commonly thought to be a companion of Jeremiah (they went to Egypt together, 43:3-6) and his amanuensis. This is the only clear case of a prophet having such a companion (see Isa 8:17). Given the role of Baruch in the transmission of Jeremiah's oracles, being explicitly linked both to the first scroll and the second scroll with its additions (36:4, 32), he is often given a considerable role in the composition of the book. It has been claimed that he not only wrote down the oracles dictated to him by the prophet but is also responsible for the third person narratives regarding the activities of the prophet. Though the latter writing activity may reflect actual authorship, it is sheer speculation and should not be pursued in any precise way.

The relationship between Jeremiah and Baruch is further developed in later Jewish literature (e.g., the Deuterocanonical book *Baruch*), and there is some tendency to read that legendary material back into the life of Jeremiah. What Jeremiah says about the relationship between the two figures is no doubt the beginning of that legend (see commentary at chs. 32; 36; 43; 45).



Seal of Baruch

The first scroll contained the oracles of Jeremiah delivered from the beginning of his ministry to this moment (627–605 BC; see 25:3; 45:1). The words are described as oracles of judgment that provided an occasion for the people of Israel to repent and return to the Lord, a return that God desired because God prefers forgiveness to judgment (36:2-3). Yet, it remains unclear exactly which parts of the present book of Jeremiah were written on the first scroll (or were added to the second scroll). Perhaps they included the poetic oracles of chapters 2–24, or significant parts thereof. Jeremiah 25:1-14, the summary of part I of the book, is usually thought to speak of these oracles (see above). In addition, as noted above, there are references to other writings within the book (25:13, a possible reference to the first or second scroll), including some ascribed to Jeremiah himself (29:1, 30-32; 30:2; 51:60-63).

These various references to written documents give Jeremiah (and Baruch) credit for originating important parts of the book. At the same time, no claim is made that they are responsible for the entirety of Jeremiah. In fact, the writings that are referenced have been dispersed at several places in the book. This suggests that later editors have gathered such collections, pieced them together, and introduced their own levels of interpretation, understanding themselves to be true to the heritage of Jeremiah.

2. *The Identification of Speaker.* Sometimes the book presents the words of Jeremiah in the first person, whether in his call or other receptions of the word of God (e.g., 1:4, 11; 13:1, 8; 14:11; 15:1; 28:1), in interaction with God (e.g., 4:10; 6:11a, 26; 10:19, 23-24; 11:18-20; 12:1-4), or in response to the effects of God's action (e.g., 4:23-26; 15:10). At other times, the narrative is *about* Jeremiah, presented in the third person; this is especially the case in prose sections and in the last half of the book (e.g., 7:1; 11:1; 14:1; 25:1; 27:1). In these cases, another writer/editor seems to be telling readers about the prophet. To make matters more complicated, sometimes the texts where the first person is used are interwoven with materials in the third person (e.g., 11:1, 6, 9; 14:1, 11; 25:1, 15; 28:1, 5; 36–45). At other times, readers cannot clearly sort out whether it is God or Jeremiah who is speaking (4:19-22; 8:19–9:3).

A straightforward reading of these differences suggests that we have to do with a combination of words from Jeremiah himself (or so it is claimed) and reports about Jeremiah by others. While Baruch has been understood to have a significant role in transmitting these materials, it seems more likely that, whatever his role, several editors have been at work on this material over an extended period of time. The force of those texts that intermingle first and

third person reference to Jeremiah may witness to a strong sense of continuity between Jeremiah himself and subsequent interpretations of his life and work.

3. *The LXX Version of Jeremiah*. One type of evidence for understanding the book of Jeremiah as having developed over time is the difference between the LXX and the Hebrew text (MT).³⁰ These differences suggest that there was no fixed book of Jeremiah for many (unknown) years. Fragments of Hebrew texts linked to both Greek and Hebrew versions have been found among the DSS—evidence that demonstrates the continuing existence of both versions over a long period of time and their relative antiquity.

Many of the differences between MT and LXX are not especially important, but they are significant enough to have prompted no little reflection on the formation of Jeremiah. The major differences include the following. The LXX version of Jeremiah is one-seventh (14.7% of 52 chapters) shorter than the MT. The MT and LXX have the same number of chapters, but the LXX has fewer verses and words. The MT has 3,097 words the LXX does not have; the latter has 307 words the former does not have. The LXX has less repeated material than the MT (see below). The LXX also has a different arrangement of some chapters. Most important is the placement of the OAN; they occur in chapters 46–51 in the MT but in the LXX they are placed in the middle of the book—as with Isaiah 13–23 and Ezekiel 25–32—after 25:13a (and in a different order from the MT). One effect of this difference in the LXX arrangement is that chapter 45—reporting Jeremiah’s word to a disconsolate Baruch—becomes his last word in the book, though dated in 605 BC (as is 25:1; 36:1); it is then followed by a somewhat shorter version of chapter 52 (51:64b is missing in the LXX).³¹

In its translation of biblical books, the LXX normally expands on the MT. The unusual shortened form of the text in the LXX of Jeremiah suggests that it was translated from an earlier version of the Hebrew rather than being a later shortening of the Hebrew (probably in Egypt, where a shorter Hebrew text had been preserved from expansive editing). Among the examples that suggest this conclusion are these: Jeremiah is called the prophet only four times in the LXX, but thirty times in the MT. This suggests some development in thinking about the stature of Jeremiah as a prophet. Also, the phrase “oracle of the Lord” occurs much more frequently in the MT, which also has more epithets for God (e.g., 35:13). These expansions in the MT suggest that theological and/or liturgical factors were at work in the later transmission of

the material. If the LXX is a translation of an earlier version of the Hebrew text (no longer extant) than the one we now have, this would indicate that the Hebrew Jeremiah continued to grow for some (unknown) period of time until it reached its present form.

4. *Doublets and Recurring Phrases.* A prominent literary feature of Jeremiah is the presence of numerous doublets (repeated texts) and recurring phrases.³² This phenomenon may be revealing of the complexity of the editorial process through which Jeremiah has passed. Over fifty doublets have been noted (e.g., 6:13-15=8:10-12; 10:12-16=51:15-19; 11:20=20:12; 15:13-14=17:3-4; 16:14-16=23:7-8; 23:5-6=33:14-16; 23:19-20=30:23-24; 30:10-11=46:27-28; 49:19-21=50:44-46). The repeated verses are often given a fresh interpretive cast by the new context in which they have been placed (e.g., 23:19-20 is a word of judgment against Israel; in 30:23-24 other nations are the probable addressee). In other cases, readers are presented with earlier material that is developed in differing ways (e.g., 7:1-15 with 26:1-6; 26:1-3 with 36:1-3; 39:4-10 with 52:7-16).

Scholars continue to puzzle over this literary phenomenon more generally and over the interpretation of the individual repeated texts in their respective contexts. The repetitions in whole or in part may conceal some sort of editorial framework, tying various parts of the book together, but that is not clear. We note the doublets in this context because the sheer number of repeated verses, often with fresh interpretations by virtue of their new contexts, suggests that later editors have been at work and have honored the material they have inherited by seeking to use it in new ways.

5. *Poetry and Prose.* Another factor that affects reflection about the formation of Jeremiah is the combination of poetry and prose; they are often intermingled in Jeremiah, but poetry dominates in the first half of the book, prose in the second half. Prophetic oracles are often presented in poetic form, but they are also accompanied by prose passages providing interpretive comment (e.g., 5:18-19). Prophetic oracles also occur in prose in accounts of what the prophet did (e.g., 35; 44). It is commonly suggested that the prose material in chapters 2–20 was written in light of later reflection on these events and in support of the poetic oracles (see below).

6. *Deuteronomistic Language and Perspective.* Scholars have observed that a number of Jeremiah passages have a style, vocabulary, and perspective similar to that of the book of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History (=Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings; often referred to as Dtr). For example, see the focus on covenant in 11:1-17 or the ending of the book (ch. 52), which does not mention the

prophet, but bears a strong family resemblance to the ending of Dtr (2 Kgs 24:18–25:30). As for their form, these texts are in prose and commonly supplement or interpret poetic sections. As for their content, the concern with infidelity to Yahweh is especially strong; the issue is centered in the first commandment and a breakdown in the relationship between God and people. At the same time, some prose texts also convey hopeful signs that witness to a God who is prepared to move into a positive future in spite of the mistakes of the past (e.g., 3:15-18).

Arguments against such a deuteronomic editorial hand have been presented (e.g., the presence of a common style and perspective in Seventh-century Judah that Jeremiah himself might have appropriated). It seems likely, however, that editors that had been at work on other literature (such as Dtr) have had their hand in Jeremiah. These prose expansions witness to subsequent use of the Jeremiah material in the community, probably in the wake of the fall of Jerusalem (see below).³³ At the same time, separating out this material in any precise way is speculative and, in any case, these materials have become so much an integral part of the present book that Jeremiah would not be Jeremiah without them.

7. *Scholarly Reconstructions.* In view of this textual data several scholarly theories have been offered as to how Jeremiah might have grown into its present form. These formulations are not unlike the source-critical hypothesis regarding the Pentateuch (JEDP). The stages in the growth of Jeremiah could be understood both in terms of separate sources that have been brought together (see above on written texts) as well as ongoing revisions of existing forms of Jeremiah. Three primary sources have been commonly isolated:

A. *The poetic oracles*, especially in chapters 2–25 (commonly designated Source A). In view of 36:1-4 and 25:1-11 these may correspond to the material recorded by Jeremiah's secretary, Baruch. At the same time, the ascription of the poetry to Jeremiah is dependent on the mention of him in the editorial framework and the prose sections. Also to be noted is that these oracles do not mention Jeremiah's actual confrontations with the various kings of Judah (see 22:6-30), a concern that is prominent in chapters 26–45.

B. *The prose accounts of the ministry of Jeremiah*, at least parts of which may have been written by Baruch, commonly referred to as source B (e.g., 19:1–20:6; 26–29; 32; 34–45). While too selective to be a biography, these texts do chronicle key aspects of Jeremiah's

ministry. The presence of so much biographical material in the book gives rise to questions about how it functions as prophecy. As noted above, it probably shows that the word of God is understood to be conveyed not only in and through what the prophet said, but also in the person the prophet was. His very life conveyed a word of God.

C. *Expansions by Deuteronomic Theologians.* These later editors, working after the fall of Jerusalem, expanded the oracles of Jeremiah, especially in chapters 1–25, so as to make them more applicable to a subsequent generation (commonly known as source C). Key texts often assigned to these editors include: 7:1–8:3; 11:1–17; 13:1–11; 14:1–15:24; 16:1–13; 17:19–27; 18:7–12; 19:1–20:6; 21:1–12; 22:1–5; 24; 25:1–13a; 26–27; 29:10–20; 32:1–33:13; 34:8–22; 35:12–19; 36:28–31; 37:1–2; 39:1–40:6; 42:7–22; 44–45. In addition, numerous shorter pieces are included (e.g., 1:15–16, 18–19; 3:6–14; 5:18–19; 8:19b; 17:2b–3a).

While there are increasing tendencies to regard this schematic as too mechanistic an understanding of the growth of the book, most scholars recognize a basic distinction between the oracles of Jeremiah and the work of later editors of various sorts over an extended period of time. In thinking about the complexities of the formation of the book, William McKane offers a helpful hypothesis. He speaks of a “rolling corpus” in the growth of the book; a nucleus of texts is built up over time by other texts, and this process in turn generates further reflections.³⁴ All of this is presented in a somewhat haphazard way, suggesting that the book in its present form is not the product of a single editor who shapes the book finally according to some particular schematic. “We are dealing with a long, complicated, untidy accumulation of material extending over a very long period, to which many people have contributed.”³⁵ The coherence of the book that results from this work must not be exaggerated nor the book’s obscurities underestimated.

Another helpful perspective is that of Brevard Childs; he is concerned less with historical issues than with the book in its final, canonical shape.³⁶ He does make a distinction between material original to Jeremiah and that of later editors but claims that it is the combination of the two that reveals the heart of the canonical form of the book. For example, in a general way the original Jeremiah is more concerned about words of judgment, the later editors are more centered on words of promise. Together they constitute a tension-filled judgment-promise theme for the book as a whole.

This double theme is made evident immediately in the call of Jeremiah (see the six verbs in 1:10) and shapes the book in a general way. The first twenty-five chapters in the book emphasize uprooting and destroying judgment, while chapters 26–52 move more toward planting and building up the community (but see above on the structure of Jeremiah).

The later editors made these editorial moves, not basically in order to demonstrate Jeremiah's predictive accuracy (no such claims are made, not even in ch. 52; though see 2 Chr 36:21-22), but in the interest of interpreting the significance of Jeremiah's words to their own audiences (see above). These later developments are important theologically, for they reveal an understanding that Jeremiah's words continue to speak to audiences that live on the far side of the original historical context. They enabled an understanding of what had led to this disaster, how they might face the tragedies that had so deeply affected their community and which in turn might guide them in thinking through means to ensure that it would not happen again. Even more, the words of hope provided some glimmer of assurance that God's judgment, as severe as it proved to be, was not God's last word to Israel, but that God had a remarkable future in store for them.

Themes in Jeremiah

The question of the theological coherence of the book of Jeremiah has often been the subject of scholarly debate. Certain characters appear regularly across its pages (God; Jeremiah; the people of Israel), but the question has been raised as to whether they or the perspectives they represent are coherently presented (let it be noted that problems of coherence are often rooted in the *interpreter's* theological perspective).³⁷ Various efforts have been made to distinguish among differing perspectives in the book, for example, between the theology of the prophet himself and that of one or more editors of the book. Yet, because we cannot certainly separate out the prophet's theology from that of later editors, and because the editors probably understood their own perspectives to stand in the tradition of Jeremiah, it seems best to seek to speak of the theology of the book as we now have it. In this task, while coherence should not be forced, more continuity may be available than is commonly thought. [\[Keeping Track of Jeremiah's God\]](#)

That God is made such a prominent actor in Jeremiah is not an inference drawn from the historical data, but is reflective of long held theological convictions about the presence and activity of God

Keeping Track of Jeremiah's God



Whatever we might think about issues of coherence, the sheer complexity of Jeremiah's God will no doubt create tensions within the reader. One of the more complex aspects of the book of Jeremiah is the violence associated with its theology; we hear some of the sharpest condemnations to be found anywhere in the prophets. You wonder how readers could pick themselves up off the ground after having heard them. On the other hand, we hear clear and ringing promises that God's commitment to Israel will not fail. How could readers keep the judgment oracles and the salvation oracles together? That fact that the intended readers lived between the experience of judgment and the fulfillment of the promise is important in seeking to sort this issue through.

These complex theological realities suggest that readers keep track of what is said about God as they read. What kind of God is this? It is not enough just to ask about God; the question is more specific: what *kind of God* is portrayed

here? And then, remembering that your own views of God will impinge upon these reflections, is Jeremiah's kind of God your kind of God? If not, in what ways does Jeremiah's God differ from yours and what do you do with those points of difference? Do you, for example, leave them aside and appropriate the God of Jeremiah selectively, picking and choosing (perhaps unconsciously)? What criteria do you use to make such decisions?

In thinking about such questions, keep track of the images and metaphors that are used to speak of God and God's activity. For example, can the sexual metaphors used for divine judgment be appropriated as a word of God for our own time? Is Jeremiah's God too angry and/or insufficiently compassionate? Does Jeremiah's God get carried away? Are Christians now exempt from such harsh divine judgment talk, however much we may claim that the indictment of sin continues to be appropriate? If not, as is surely the case, why not?

in Israel's life story. The prophet and those who gathered and edited these texts believed themselves to have the God-given capacity to see the "something more" in these events. In other words, God's will had been specifically revealed to the prophet (and others) and that enabled the capacity to discern God's purposes in and through what was happening in these tumultuous times. At the same time, no simple theological interpretation would do, for God and God's prophet(s) were at work in and through all the social and political realities that were a lively force in this situation. And so God's word in Jeremiah catches up to all dimensions of life, both those of Israel and those of other peoples with whom Israel has to do. [\[Israel's Actual History and Confessed History\]](#)

The following are leading theological claims that inform the writing and editing of the book of Jeremiah.³⁸

1. *God and Creation.* God "made the earth" (Jer 33:2; cf. 10:12-13=51:15-16; 27:5; 32:17) and continues to uphold the "fixed orders" of creation (31:35-36; 33:20, 25). Such "fixed orders" refer to the great rhythms of creation (the sea, sun, moon, stars, day, night; see Gen 8:22). But, notably, this language does not bespeak a mechanistic world or a divinely determined one, for the land can become desolate and mourn, the animals and birds can be swept away (12:4), and human behaviors can wreak havoc in God's good creation, and with impunity (12:1). God does not "control" or micromanage the world, however much God's actions are deemed to be effective.

Israel's Actual History and Confessed History



The much-discussed question of the relationship between Israel's actual history and its confessed history is often raised in this connection. The texts need not be literally descriptive of the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in order to speak the truth about God's purposes and actions and be theologically and religiously significant. Yet, if no links exist between the confession and Israel's actual life, at least in its broad strokes, then the confession itself does become problematic. Even though the reported events may not be able to be finally verified, their general happenedness is important. Moreover, God's activity should be linked not only to the events themselves but also to the confessional activity of Jeremiah and the later editors who interpret these events. Only God's act in the gift of faith enables the confession that God has acted in Israel's external world.

This perspective regarding the creation entails an openness for genuine creaturely decision-making and (lack of) responsiveness. Again and again in Jeremiah, the people are given choices that will shape their future, which in turn will shape the future of all other creatures, indeed the future of God (God will do different things depending upon what creatures do). The various "if, if not" constructions (12:14-17; 17:24-27; 21:8-10; 22:1-5; 38:17-18; 42:9-17) demonstrate such an openness to the future. God "plants" the people, but it is they who take root, grow, and bring forth fruit (12:2). What creatures "grow up into" and the fruit they bear make a difference both for themselves and for their world, for good or for ill. People can make God's "pleasant portion a desolate wilderness" (12:10); the God who is "near" and "far" (23:23) can be "far from their hearts" (12:2); and Babylonian armies can exceed their divine mandate, with devastating effects upon land and people (12:14, "evil" neighbors; see 25:11-14; 51:24). From another perspective, there is room for an incalculable and frustrating randomness in God's created order (e.g., Jer 12:1, the "way of the guilty" can prosper; Eccl 9:11 speaks of "chance" for such realities), so that no theory of retribution (or any other theory) can explain the way the world works (even for the Deuteronomists).

Jeremiah's relational God has created a relational world. An inter-relatedness exists among all creatures for Jeremiah (and for Israel). The world could be imaged as a giant spider web. Every creature is in relationship with every other, such that any act reverberates out and affects the whole, shaking the entire web in varying degrees of intensity. This understanding may be illustrated by the virtual drumbeat of Jeremiah that moral order affects creational order, though not mechanistically or inevitably. Again and again, we read how human sin has an adverse effect upon the earth, indeed upon the entire cosmos. Because of human wickedness it does not rain (3:3; 2:12; 5:24-25; 14:4), the land is made desolate (12:10-11; see 23:10), the animals and birds are swept away (12:4; see 4:25; 9:10;

14:5-7; Hos 4:3; Zeph 1:3), and the land is polluted (3:2, 9; 16:18; see 2:7; Isa 24:5) and mourns (12:4; see 4:28; 23:10; Isa 24:4-7; 33:9; Hos 4:3; Joel 1:10-20)—to God! (12:11). Indeed, the entire “earth...heavens” seems to be reduced to a precreation state of being (4:23-26), though that very context (v. 27) insists that no “full end” of the earth is in view. Modern understandings of the interrelatedness of the ecosystem connect well with these insights.

An important claim of Jeremiah is that God “fills heaven and earth” (Jer 23:23-24). At the least, this means that God is present and relational to everything in creation that is not God, whether “near by” or “far off” (in creaturely terms). Inasmuch as God “fills heaven and earth,” the latter exist as realities to be filled; hence, all creatures are a genuine “other” to God. Given the comprehensive character of “heaven and earth,” the divine relationship with the other is not limited to the human sphere. God as the “God of all flesh” is one formulation in Jeremiah that moves this relationship beyond the human (32:27; see Gen 9:15-17). Moreover, that the desolate land mourns *to* God (12:11; see 4:28; 23:10; Joel 1:10, 20) demonstrates that it has a relationship with God that is independent of God’s relationship to the human (see Job 38-41; Pss 104:21, 27; 145:15-16; 147-148). That God in turn addresses the land (16:19; see 22:29) also evidences such an independent relationship.

Such language regarding the nonhuman cannot be reduced to figurative speech, poetic license, or worshipful exuberance. Rather, this language of interresponsiveness shows that God’s presence to and relationship with the earth and its creatures is more than external; there is an inwardness or interiority characteristic of the earth and its creatures such that a genuine relationship with God exists. To speak in this way does not necessarily lead to a panpsychism or vitalism, only that some kind of *internal* relationship with God is claimed.³⁹

This considerable detail regarding the importance of creation in Jeremiah provides the theological grounding for the understanding of Jeremiah as “a prophet to the nations” (1:5, 10) as well as the variety of ways in which the nations become the subject of various oracles (especially chs. 25, 46-51). Because God is the God of all creation, God is the God of all peoples and nations. God is present and active among them, even though they may not recognize this to be the case (it is just such activity that enables insights such as 22:8-9). Moreover, God’s purposes for all creation include these various peoples (cf. 12:14-17; 18:7-10), whether as agents for judgment or deliverance (see below), as objects of judgment

(chs. 10; 25; 50–51), or as objects of divine deliverance (see 3:17; 4:2; 16:19-21; 46:26; 48:47; 49:8, 39).

2. *A God of Pathos.* The relational God of Jeremiah is no aloof God, somehow present but detached. God is a God of great passions (pathos); deep and genuine divine feelings and emotions are manifest again and again. Sorrow, lament, weeping, wailing, grief, pain, anguish, heartache, regret, and anger all are ascribed to God in Jeremiah.⁴⁰ While these divine passions are focused on an unfaithful people, the earth and its creatures also get caught up into God's vulnerable heart. To God, Israel and its land are "my house...my heritage...the beloved of my heart...my vineyard...my portion...my pleasant portion" (12:7-10; see Ps 50:10-11). This recurrent "my" shows that the relationship God has with people and land is not perfunctory in character; God is deeply involved in their life and is profoundly affected by that engagement.

At the same time, this display of divine pathos is no sentimental or romantic matter. God manifests not only sorrow (3:19-20; 9:10, 17-18; 12:7; 13:17) but also sword-wielding anger (12:12-13; see 4:26; 7:20 and often; see above on rhetorical strategies). Indeed, into the midst of this language of closeness and possession comes the strong expression of hate (12:8; see 44:4; Amos 5:21; Hos 9:15). As we know from close interhuman relationships, the sharp juxtaposition of love-and-hate language indicates something of the trauma of this broken relationship for God. These are divine emotions of great intensity, evidencing the depth to which God's own "heart and soul" are affected (see 32:41).

An angry God is a difficult concept for moderns, not least because God in anger is made responsible at least in part for the human devastation and environmental degradation. Take 4:23-26, "I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void...all the birds of the air had fled...the fruitful land was a desert...before the Lord, before his fierce anger" (see also Jer 7:20; 10:10; 21:5-6; 44:22; 51:29, 43; more generally, see 2:15; 4:7, 20; 7:34; 45:4; 50:46; cf. Isa 13:13; 24:18-20). In Jeremiah 12:11-13 the land is made desolate and produces thorns even though wheat has been sown—because of "the sword of the Lord" and "the fierce anger of the Lord."

The anger of God is always *provoked* by creaturely words and deeds (e.g., 7:18; 8:19; 32:29-32).⁴¹ Anger is a divine response not a divine attribute; if there were no sin, there would be no anger. The sin most in focus in Jeremiah is infidelity, unfaithfulness within Israel's relationship with God. The dominant metaphor is marital, assuming a deep intimacy between God and people; the

images used are often graphic (e.g., 3:1-5; 13:20-27). In “unpacking” this metaphor, the anger (mixed with other emotions) felt by a spouse at a partner’s unfaithfulness may be used to signal something of the depth of the feelings of God. The juxtaposition of anger over the breakdown of a close relationship and sorrow over its personal and public effects, not least on the land, is evident in 12:7-13 (another striking text is 9:10-11; the verb in v. 10 has God as subject, see NRSV footnote). The Godward side of wrath is always grief; and a striking thing about the God of Jeremiah is that both the grief and the anger are revealed to the prophet, who puts both on public display. Readers must distinguish anger and grief but never separate the two in any interpretation of these texts.

These texts insist that this grieving/angry God bears some responsibility for the wasted land and cities, but how to refine such a claim is no easy task. Consideration of two additional matters, each of which is implicit or explicit in Jeremiah, will help us sort this matter out: the relationship between sin and consequence and the issue of agency.

3. *Sin and Judgment.* How one thinks about sin and judgment in Jeremiah shapes one’s thinking about the aforementioned matters. The relationship between them is conceived in intrinsic rather than forensic terms. Jeremiah’s call account sets the issue: disaster (*rā’āh*) breaks out because of the people’s wickedness (*rā’āb*; 1:14, 16). This understanding may be observed in various formulations (note the image of “fruit,” as in 12:2). God brings disaster (*rā’āh*), which is “the fruit of *their* schemes” (6:19; see 14:16). God gives to all “according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings” (17:10; see 32:19). In other words, *rā’āh* issues in *rā’āh*. Like fruit, the consequence grows out of (or is intrinsic to) the deed itself. God introduces nothing new into the situation, and so the consequence can be designated by the same word as “sin/evil.”

This reality can also be observed in the use of the verb *pāqad*, “visit.” Its translation as “punish” in NRSV is often problematic, as in 21:14: “I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings.” A more literal translation catches the thought more precisely: “I will visit upon you the fruit of your doings” (see 5:9; 14:10). These formulations show that God mediates the consequences of that which is already present in the wicked situation. The people’s sin already has had a significant level of “negative fallout” on the land, given the interrelatedness of all creatures; God’s mediation of the effects brings those consequences to completion, though the agency issues cannot be factored out in any precise way. In other terms, God’s anger and withdrawal is a “seeing to” the moral order for the

sake of justice and a future for the land. It is no favor to land or people to let evil and its ill effects go unchecked. But God's way of resolving the problem does not entail a flick of the divine wrist—a "quick fix." To provide for a positive future for the land God uses another strategy; God enters deeply into the realities of sin and evil—including experiencing the very suffering that people and land experience (see above)—and breaks them open from within.

This understanding of judgment is supported by the fact that, while there is a personal dimension to divine anger, wrath is also impersonally conceived in Jeremiah (and elsewhere, e.g., Num 1:53; 16:46). Wrath "goes forth" because of their *rā'āh* (4:4=21:12; 23:19), "is not turned away" (4:8; 23:20), "bursts upon" (23:19), or "is poured out upon" (7:20; 10:25; 42:18), the effect of which may include environmental degradation. In this way of thinking, wrath is an effect that grows out of a violation of the moral order of God's creation. God's personal anger may be said to be a "seeing to" this movement from deed to consequence that is the moral order.

4. *God Works Through Means and the Accompanying Violence.* God works in Israel's world through means, including human beings—as individuals and communities, both within and without the community of faith—and, potentially, all other creatures. This is the case for both judgment (Nebuchadrezzar) and deliverance (Cyrus). Moreover, the language used for God's actions in Jeremiah is often conformed to the means that God uses (see below), one effect of which is the ascription to God of an inordinate amount of violence.

Some scholarly statements regarding agency tend to discount the genuine role that the Babylonian armies play; it is as though God is the only real agent. But readers must not diminish the distinction between God and God's agents or discount the stature and the very real power of that human army. Just how God is involved in this activity cannot be factored out with precision; however, 51:11 may contain a clue with its reference to God as having "stirred up (*hē'ir*) the spirit of the kings of the Medes" (cf. Zech 1:14; Jer 6:22; 25:32; 50:9, 41; 51:1; Isa 13:17; 41:25; 45:13; Ezek 23:22; Joel 4:7).

In determining to work through means, God chooses to be dependent on that which is not God to carry out the divine purposes in the world. This is a risky move for God because it links God with the character and activities of the chosen instruments. God does not perfect people before working through them, which means that one must not necessarily confer a positive value on the results (following the pattern of the evaluating work of God, who places a negative value on some Babylonian activity).

Conformation of Divine and Human Actions



Generally, note the virtual absence of God talk in descriptions of the fall of Jerusalem (39:1-14; 52:3b-30); they are also uncommon in the oracles against Babylon (chs. 50-51). Some violent actions are also ascribed to both Jeremiah and God (cf. 1:10 and 24:6; 25:15-29).

God's Action

Jer 13:14—I will dash (*npš*) them
 —I will not pity (*hml*), or spare (*hus*) or have compassion (*rhm*)
 —when I destroy (*šht*) them (also 13:9; 9:15; 13:24; 18:17; 30:11)
 —I will scatter (*pûš*) 24:9; 27:10
 —I will drive them away (*ndh*)

21:5—I will fight against you (*lhm*)
 21:6—I will strike down (*nkh*)
 21:14—I will kindle a fire (*yšt*)
 49:20—God has plan (*yc's*) and purpose (*hšb*)

49:38—God will set (*śhm*) his throne

19:11 (+)—God will break (*šbr*) the people

25:9—those slain (*hl*) by the Lord
 27:8—Until I have completed its destruction
 12:12; 47:6—sword of the Lord (see 14:12; 15:9)
 25:8; 49:19—God imaged as a lion
 29:4, 7, 14—God sends into exile (*glh*)
 29:17—God will pursue (*rdp*) them
 30:3; 31:20—I will bring them back to land
 —I will have mercy

Nebuchadrezzar/Babylon/Others

Jer 48:12—they will break in pieces (*npš*)
 21:7—he will not pity (*hml*), or spare (*hus*) or have compassion (*rhm*)
 36:29—he will destroy (*šht*); see 51:25; 52:8; 23:1-2
 —have scattered (*pûš*) the flock 50:17; cf. 23:2
 Israel driven away (*ndh*) by Assyrians and Babylonians

21:2—he is making war against us (*lhm*)
 21:7—he shall strike them down (*nkh*)
 32:29—they will kindle (*yšt*) a fire
 49:30—Nebuchadrezzar has plan (*yc's*) and purpose (*hšb*)
 43:10—Nebuchadrezzar will set (*śhm*) his throne
 43:13 – Nebuchadrezzar will break Egyptian holy objects
 51:49—Babylon must fall for slain of Israel by his (king of Babylon) hand
 20:4—they shall fall by the sword of enemies
 4:7; 5:6—foe from the north like a lion
 29:1 (and often) —Nebuchadrezzar sends into exile
 39:5; 52:8—Chaldeans will pursue them
 42:12—he will bring them back to land
 —he will have mercy

Remarkable correspondences exist between God's actions and those of Nebuchadrezzar.⁴² [Conformation of Divine and Human Actions] I lift up several of these texts. The "sword of the Lord" (12:12; see 47:6), which God "summons" and "sends" (25:16, 29), refers to human beings wielding the sword (6:25; 20:4). The judgment of God is mediated through the Babylonian armies or, later, the enemies of Babylon (the "weapons of his wrath," 50:25). A striking juxtaposition of God and the means God uses is evident in 13:14 and 21:7; both God and Nebuchadrezzar "will not pity, or spare, or have compassion" in the destruction of Jerusalem.

What conclusions might one draw from this common fund of language? Such harsh words appear to be used for God because they are used for the actions of those in and through whom God mediates judgment. God's language in 27:8 puts the matter in a nutshell, "I have completed its destruction by his hand." In view of

this mediation, God refers to Nebuchadnezzar as “my servant” (25:9; 27:6; 43:10). Others whom God designates “my servant” in Jeremiah are David, the prophets, and Israel! In some sense God has chosen to be *dependent* on Nebuchadnezzar in carrying out that judgment.⁴³ Exodus 3:8-10, where both God and Moses (often called “my servant”) bring Israel out of Egypt, could function as a paradigm for such considerations.

Servant language is also used for the birds and animals of the land in Jeremiah; they will “serve” the king of Babylon in his judgmental work (27:6; see 28:14; they are parallel with the sword in 15:3). Such an understanding is present also in Jeremiah 12:9 (see 7:33; 16:4; 19:7). The animals may be used as metaphors for the Babylonians (e.g., 4:7; see Isa 56:9), but these texts speak of the agency of the animals themselves. One may also note God’s command to cut down the trees to make siegeworks (6:6) or the use of the hot wind (4:11; 22:22) and fire (5:14). Indeed, desolation of the land as an effect of human iniquity is used by God as an instrument of judgment (3:2-3; 5:24-25; 14:2-12). “Victim” language is sometimes used for these effects on the land and its animals, but this insufficiently recognizes the “vocation” to which God calls them in service of the divine purposes, a vocation that may entail suffering. One might compare God’s use of wind, waves, clouds, and darkness in judgment of the Egyptians in Exodus 14–15; these nonhuman creatures become the *savior* of the human!

As Nebuchadnezzar is identified as God’s servant,⁴⁴ so, at the time of the return from exile, another “unchosen” one, King Cyrus of Persia, will be identified as God’s “anointed one” or “messiah” (Isa 45:1-7). As with Cyrus (Isa 45:4),⁴⁵ Nebuchadnezzar does not know Yahweh. The coalescence of God’s actions and those of Nebuchadnezzar are abundantly clear in these texts. God will bring Babylon’s armies against Israel and destroy them (and their neighbors). God may be said to be the ultimate agent in these events, but not in such a way that the power of other agents is less than real.

That God does not “control” Nebuchadnezzar is shown by the fact he overreaches and exceeds the divine mandate (25:11-14; 51:24; see Isa 47:5-7); he is no puppet in the hands of God. That God is not the only effective agency in these events is made clear by the divine judgment on Babylon (25:12-14; 50-51; see Isa 47:6-7; Zech 1:15, “while I [God] was only a little angry, they made the disaster worse”; note also the statement of divine regret in Jer 42:10, “I [God] am sorry for the disaster”). In effect, Babylon goes beyond its proper judgmental activities, and commits iniquity itself in making the land an “everlasting waste.” It is assumed (as with

Barton on Amos's Oracles Against the Nations



John Barton's helpful comments on Amos could also apply to Jeremiah's oracles against Babylon: "...He was appealing to a kind of conventional or customary law about international conduct which he at least believed to be self-evidently right, and which he thought he could count on his audience's familiarity with and acquiescence in . . . at a crucial place in his message he sees moral conduct as a matter of conformity to a human convention held to be obviously universal, rather than to the overt or explicit demands of God."

John Barton, *Amos's Oracles against the Nations: A Study of Amos 1:3–2:5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 2.

the OAN generally) that there are moral standards that should be known by the nations and to which they are held accountable.⁴⁶ [Barton on Amos's Oracles Against the Nations] This divine judgment on Babylonian excessiveness shows that God did not micromanage their activities; they retained the power to make decisions and execute policies that flew in the face of the will of God. Hence, the will and purpose of God, indeed the sovereignty of God, active in these events is not "irresistible."⁴⁷ In some sense God risks what the Babylonians will do with the mandate they have been given. One element of that risk is that God's name will become associated with the violence, indeed the excessive violence of the Babylonians.⁴⁸

Another factor to be considered here are those texts wherein God calls Jeremiah to bring a word of nonviolence through Israel's submission to Babylon (see chs. 27–29; 38:17–18). This divine command, which intends to reduce the violence, was announced after the Babylonian subjugation of Jerusalem in 597 BC and before the fall and destruction of 586 BC. With a political realism, God announces that, if Israel would not rebel against Babylon, its future would take a less violent course. In other words, Babylon would function as an agent of divine judgment in different ways, depending upon how Israel responded to the call for nonviolence. Israel's own resorting to violence would lead to its experience of even greater violence as well as to the fuller association of God with such violence.

To recapitulate, God is not the sole agent with respect to the downfall and devastation of Israel; God acts in and through the agency of Babylon. At the same time, the latter will certainly act as kings and armies in that world are wont to act. That is predictable and God (and other observers) knows this from experience with conquerors such as these. This portrayal of God is a kind of extreme realism regarding what is about to happen to the people. And when the people do experience the pillaging, burning, and raping of the Babylonian armies, readers can be sure that they were real agents. Jeremiah also makes this witness when it describes the

actual destruction of Jerusalem (chs. 39; 52) in terms that hardly mention God.

These striking parallels suggest that *the portrayal of God's violent action in Jeremiah is conformed to the means that God uses*. God is portrayed in terms of the means available. God thereby accepts any fallout that may accrue to the divine reputation ("guilt by association").

This perspective is testimony to a fundamentally *relational* understanding of the way in which God acts in the world. There is an ordered freedom in the creation, a degree of openness and unpredictability, wherein God leaves room for genuine human decisions as they exercise their God-given power. Even more, God gives them powers and responsibilities in such a way that *commits* God to a certain kind of relationship with them. This entails a divine constraint and restraint in the exercise of power in relation to these agents (Babylon overdid it!). These texts in Jeremiah are testimony to a divine sovereignty that gives power over to the created for the sake of a relationship of integrity.

5. *God and Prophet*. We have already spoken in several of the above contexts regarding the relationship between God and Jeremiah. Here we lift up Jeremiah's role as agent of God. We have seen above how there is a remarkable conformation of the language used for divine action and the action of the means that God uses. In addition, there is a striking conformation of the language used by God and God's prophet. For example, Jeremiah's laments often petition God to visit his enemies with various judgments (11:20; 12:3; 15:15, 17; 17:18; 18:21-23; 20:12; also 6:11; 10:25), language that God also uses. The correspondences between the speech of Jeremiah and God indicate something of the range of conformation. [\[Conformation of God's Speech and Jeremiah's Speech\]](#)

One question that arises from the statistics in the accompanying sidebar is how the situation with God and Jeremiah relates to that of God and the Babylonians. Does God use such violent language because that is the language God's prophet uses? This would be similar to what happens in any proclamation of the word of God in any age; God becomes associated with the language the preacher uses. This is certainly true at some basic level for God's words in the book of Jeremiah; they are presented in human language. God does not micromanage the written or spoken words, but is linked to them by virtue of the claim that God's word is being spoken or written. That God criticizes Jeremiah's language (15:18-19) could suggest this approach, though God never criticizes him for the violence of his language. The task would certainly be much easier if we



Conformation of God's Speech and Jeremiah's Speech

GOD'S SPEECH

Wrath (*ḥēmāh*, 4:4; *z'am*, 10:10)

—pour out wrath (*špk*, 6:11; 14:16)

Slaughter (*harēgāh*, 7:32; 19:6)

Vengeance (*nāqām*, 5:9, 29; 9:8)

Shame (*bôš*, 2:26), dismay (*htt*, 8:9)

Bring evil/disaster (*rā'āh*, 4:6; 6:19; 11:23)

Break this people (*šbr*, 19:11) doubly
(16:18)

Give sword, famine (11:22; 14:12; 15:2, 9)

"Therefore" (18:13+)

Childless, widowed (6:11b-12; 15:7-9)

Young men die by sword (12:22)

Suddenly (*pit'ōm*, 15:8)

Crying Out (*zā'ag*, 11:11-12; 25:34)

God will not listen after repentance (14:7-
11)

Trip up, stumble (*kšl*, 6:15, 21; 8:12)

"Time" of visitation (6:15; 10:15; 11:12-
14)

Violence, destruction (6:7)

Weariness (15:6)

They will not prosper (*škl*, 10:21)

JEREMIAH'S SPEECH

Filled with *God's* wrath (6:11), indignation
(15:17).

—Pour out wrath (10:25)

Set them apart for slaughter (12:3).

Let me see *your* vengeance upon them
(11:20; 15:15; 20:12)

Let my persecutors be shamed, dismayed
(17:18; 20:11)

Bring upon them evil/disaster (17:18)

Break them with *double* destruction
(17:18)

Give them sword, famine (18:21)

Therefore+ announcement of judgment
(18:21)

Let wives become childless and widowed
(18:21)

Let young men die by the sword (18:21)

Bring marauder suddenly (18:22)

May a cry be heard (18:22)

Do not forgive their iniquity (18:22)

Let them be tripped up (18:23; 20:11)

"Time of anger" (18:23; cf. v. 17)

Must shout, "violence and destruction"
(20:8)

I am weary (6:11; 20:9)

They will not succeed (20:11)

could say that the violent language of God has been conformed to the violent language of Jeremiah. Perhaps it would be more accurate to appeal more generally to the interactive character of the God–Jeremiah relationship, so that who learns from whom is not so clear.⁴⁹

Many interpreters have had difficulty with Jeremiah's outbursts for their harsh and unforgiving nature and sought to explain them (away) in one fashion or another, usually appealing to Jeremiah's humanity. This is a human being in deep anguish. But these texts say more than that; their language is not simply to be evaluated: "he's only human." However much Jeremiah's language corresponds to that of psalms of imprecation, it cannot simply be ascribed to outbursts over his suffering at the hands of his enemies. Jeremiah's language has been explicitly shaped by God's language;

God's judgment has become his judgment. Jeremiah has become conformed to the wrath of God.

6. *Jeremiah as Prophet of Hope.* For all the language of divine judgment, eminently deserved by an unfaithful people, God loves Israel with "an everlasting love" and continues to be faithful to those who have experienced judgment (31:2). In Heschel's words, "God's attachment to Israel is eternal"; "Beyond all indignation and imprecations lay the certainty that Israel as God's creation would abide, Israel would exist"; "The rule of Babylon shall pass, but God's covenant with Israel shall last forever." It was "only in the certainty that His mercy is greater than His justice that the prophet could pray: 'Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O Lord, for Thy name's sake'" (14:7).⁵⁰ Such convictions are at least in part grounded in Jeremiah's claim that the Davidic promises are still in place through all that has happened (33:14-26), which in turn are grounded in God's commitment to Israel's ancestors (7:7; 11:5; 16:15; 30:3; 33:26). God's promises will not fail; they will never be made null and void as far as God is concerned. Though a rebellious generation may reject the God of the promise and remove themselves from the sphere of fulfillment, God's promise can be relied on absolutely.

It is this understanding of divine faithfulness to promises made that finally shapes the rhythm of the book of Jeremiah. Hence the book includes words of salvation integrated throughout, amid words of judgment (3:15-18; 12:14-16; 16:14-15; 23:5-8; 24:4-7), and not just in the last half of the book. Indeed, God's saving actions are in view from the beginning in the call of Jeremiah (1:10); God will build and plant this people, come what may. The conditional features associated with deliverance (e.g., 7:5-7; 18:7-8; 22:1-5; 24:8-10; 38:17-18; 42:10) pertain to a look back at Israel's possibilities before the final act of judgment fell. What might have been! Once Judah and Jerusalem are devastated and the exiles scattered, then the promises are stated in an unconditional way (e.g., 31:1-6, 31-34; 32:37-41; see commentary on these texts).

God will establish this future for Israel in a unilateral way; this future is finally not dependent on anything that Israel does. God will make a new covenant with Israel and so write the Law in their hearts that there will be no further need for teaching (31:31-34). God "will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them" (32:40) and God "will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for all time" (32:39; cf. Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-27). This God will do, come what may, but it will happen only on the far side of a refining fire.

NOTES

- ¹ William Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 15-25.
- ² Walter Brueggemann, "The Book of Jeremiah: Portrait of the Prophet," in *Interpreting the Prophets*, ed. J. L. Mays and P. J. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 117-18.
- ³ James Muilenburg, "The Terminology of Adversity in Jeremiah," in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament*, ed. H. T. Frank and W. L. Reed (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 60.
- ⁴ See Muilenburg, "Terminology."
- ⁵ Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper, 1962), both generally and in his chapter on Jeremiah (103-39).
- ⁶ So Muilenburg, "Terminology," 60.
- ⁷ Terence Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 107-37.
- ⁸ Classically, see J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922). Regarding the confessions in particular, see Gerhard von Rad, "The Confessions of Jeremiah," in *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies* (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 339-47.
- ⁹ For an example, see Robert Carroll, *Jeremiah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986).
- ¹⁰ For example, Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 25-35. The standard presentation of this perspective is that of J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion*.
- ¹¹ See Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 55-64.
- ¹² See Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 11-12; Idem., "The Book of Jeremiah: Portrait of the Prophet," in *Interpreting the Prophets*, ed. J. L. Mays and P.J. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 113-29. In the same volume, see also James Crenshaw, "A Living Tradition: The Book of Jeremiah in Current Research," 111-12.
- ¹³ For example, Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 25-26.
- ¹⁴ See Carroll, *Jeremiah*.
- ¹⁵ For an extensive discussion of the relationship between Jeremiah and the other books of the Old Testament, see Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 36-70.
- ¹⁶ See Brueggemann, *Jeremiah*, 6.
- ¹⁷ For the issues and the literature, see L. Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos: Jeremiah as Symbolic Tapestry* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 158-65.
- ¹⁸ For the various links between Moses and Jeremiah and for Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, see Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 38-39, 53-63. See also E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970).
- ¹⁹ For the development of this understanding, see Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 156-57.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 157-59.

²¹ For several helpful efforts to consider the structure, see *Troubling Jeremiah*, ed. A. R. P. Diamond, K. M. O'Connor, and L. Stulman (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), especially the essays by Stulman, Kessler, and Carroll. See also L. Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos*.

²² See J. R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric* (Missoula MT: Scholars Press, 1975); W. L. Holladay, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1–20* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1976).

²³ See M. Kessler, "The Function of Chapters 25 and 50–51 in the Book of Jeremiah," in *Troubling Jeremiah*, 64–72.

²⁴ For example, see Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos*, 23–98.

²⁵ On this issue, see C. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989).

²⁶ For a detailed argument regarding the structure within these two major divisions, see Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos*, 23–98.

²⁷ For a helpful survey of Jeremiah scholarship up to 1984, see Leo Perdue, "Jeremiah in Modern Research: Approaches and Issues," in *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies*, ed. L. G. Perdue and B. W. Kovacs (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 1–32. See also J. Crenshaw, fn. 12; A. R. P. Diamond, "Introduction," in *Troubling Jeremiah*, 15–32.

²⁸ For example, Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 25–35.

²⁹ For example, Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 65–82.

³⁰ For a thoroughgoing study of their relationship, see J. G. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (HSM 6; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

³¹ The idea of S. Delamarter, "But Who Gets the Last Word?" in *Bible Review*, 1999, 34–45, 54–55, that this placement promotes the role of Baruch (and the MT demotes him) is unlikely for several reasons, not least the image of Baruch as one engaged in self-pity.

³² For a study of these doublets and recurring phrases, see G. Parke-Taylor, *The Formation of the Book of Jeremiah: Doublets and Recurring Phrases* (Atlanta: SBL, 2000).

³³ See E. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles*.

³⁴ William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), lxxxiii.

³⁵ William McKane, quoted in Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 43.

³⁶ Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 342–54.

³⁷ On the impact of the theology of readers on questions of coherence, see Fretheim, "The Character of God in Jeremiah," forthcoming.

³⁸ These materials are drawn from two of my articles: Terence Fretheim, "The Earth Story in Jeremiah 12," *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. N. Habel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 96–110, and "The Character of God in Jeremiah," forthcoming.

³⁹ For detail, see Terence Fretheim, "Nature's Praise of God in the Psalms," *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987): 17–31.

⁴⁰ See Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*.

⁴¹ See Heschel, *The Prophets*, 279-98, for a fine discussion of divine wrath. See also Terence Fretheim, "Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God in the Old Testament," in *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, forthcoming.

⁴² For further reflections on these matters, see Terence Fretheim, "The Character of God in Jeremiah," forthcoming.

⁴³ On issues of divine dependence on the human, see Terence Fretheim, "Divine Dependence on the Human: An Old Testament Perspective," *Ex Auditu* 13 (1997): 1-13. Brueggemann's perspective on this issue is stated in his *Jeremiah*, 106 (see 463): God is "not dependent on what is in the world." See also Fretheim, "Creator, Creature, and Co-creation in Genesis 1-2," in *All Things New: Essays in Honor of Roy A. Harrisville*, ed. A. Hultgren et al., *Word and World Supplement I* (1992), 11-20.

⁴⁴ For the issues, see T. Overholt, "King Nebuchadrezzar in the Jeremiah Tradition," *CBQ* 30 (1968): 39-48.

⁴⁵ It is helpful to note that the granting of mercy could take place through the king of Babylon (42:11-12). Both the removal of peace and mercy (see 16:5; 21:7) and its restoration are thus related to his agency.

⁴⁶ On this issue of "natural law," see John Barton, *Amos's Oracles against the Nations: A Study of Amos 1:3-2:5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁴⁷ Contrary to Brueggemann, *Jeremiah*, 222.

⁴⁸ See John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downer's Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1998).

⁴⁹ It might be suggested that Jeremiah's sharp statement to God in 20:7 constitutes, at least in part, a critique of the word he was called to bring. This seems doubtful. Yes, God duped him with respect to the call, but he recognizes that action for what it was and he has done what he was called to do in the full knowledge of the deception. *Deception recognized* changes the equation, and he never intimates that the word he was called to proclaim was a false word (see commentary).

⁵⁰ So Heschel, *The Prophets*, 110, 127, 129, 298.