
Introduction: Jeremiah

Title and Place in Canon

The book is known by the name of the prophet whose words and actions provide its content (see commentary on 1:1–3). In both the English (based on the Greek Septuagint) and the Hebrew order of books, it occurs with the other prophetic books, after Isaiah and before Ezekiel and the Twelve. The order of the three major prophets is according to their putative historical settings. Isaiah son of Amoz was a figure of the eighth century B.C., whereas Jeremiah and Ezekiel reside closer to the events of 586 B.C. Jeremiah's life and work begins before that of Ezekiel, though the latter is contemporary with the last part of Jeremiah's prophetic work. The Twelve are grouped together because of their length and have a rough chronological order between them.

In terms of length, Jeremiah is notable for being the second longest biblical book, preceded only by the massive book of Psalms. According to Lundbom, Jeremiah has 21,835 words, followed in length by Ezekiel with 18,730 words and then Isaiah with 16,932 words.¹

The appeal of the book of Jeremiah not only has to do with the content of his prophecies or the intriguing nature of his life, but also with his personality as it shines through the book.² Jeremiah broods, worries, mourns, lashes out. It is no wonder that he is often considered the "weeping prophet" (2 Chr. 35:25).

Author and Date: History of Composition

The superscription to the book ascribes its contents to "Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin" (Jer. 1:1). It further dates his prophetic activity³ to the period between "the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile" (1:2–3). These dates translate to 626–586 B.C. in a modern calendar. Later prose chapters narrate even later events

in Jeremiah's life, extending into the exilic period (post-586 B.C.), for which see chapters 40–44.

The testimony of the superscription, however, should not blind the reader to evidence that the book of Jeremiah represents the conclusion of a long oral and written tradition. The connection with Jeremiah it asserts also does not require the reader to believe that every word of the book must come from the mouth or pen of the prophet, though it likely intends to closely associate him with the prophetic oracles of the book. For instance, it is possible, perhaps even likely, though not provable, that stories about Jeremiah emanate from his close circle of disciples and followers.

No doubt attends the understanding that the book is the result of a long process, even though explicit evidence locates the redaction of the book within the lifetime of the prophet (though it does not exclude the idea that the process extended for some time after his death). Jeremiah 36 is intriguing in this regard. The time is the "fourth year of Jehoiakim" (= 605 B.C.), some years after the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry (= 626 B.C.).

At the beginning of the chapter, God tells Jeremiah to get a scroll and write down "all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now" (36:2). The verse reveals that these prophetic oracles were not written down for years, even decades, after they were spoken on the streets by the prophet.

Jeremiah did not write these words down himself. He was assisted by Baruch, son of Neriah, who functioned as his scribe, though we must not imagine him to be a mere lackey of the prophet (see commentary at 43:1–3). Once the text was completed it was taken to the temple area and read to the people, but eventually came to the attention of the king. The king reacted strongly against the message of the scroll and burned it. Even so, the concluding verse of the chapter (v. 32) informs us that Jeremiah simply had Baruch rewrite the scroll. Notable for our present subject, however, is the fact that on this new scroll Baruch added "many similar words." Thus, we get a glimpse at the growth of a biblical book. We know that these are only the beginning stages of a long process, because many oracles and stories about Jeremiah are dated well after 605 B.C.

Even without chapter 36 it is fairly obvious that the book is the result of a long and complex history of composition. Yates well summarizes the evidence when he points to the relatively confusing structure, the lack of chronological development in the book,⁴

the significant differences between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint (see below), different genres of literature, as well as the question of the relationship with a Deuteronomic theology.⁵

The modern discussion of this issue starts with the work of Duhm,⁶ who differentiated different strands within the book of Jeremiah. Mowinckel⁷ adopted this basic approach and described three sources (though in his later writings he thought of them as layers of tradition rather than sources per se) that constituted the book of Jeremiah.

Source A: Described as dirgelike poetic oracles, found primarily in the first twenty-five chapters of the book, and attributed to Jeremiah. Duhm believed there were about 280 verses in this material.

Source B: Composed of prose stories about Jeremiah. He located about 220 verses that he believed belonged to this source. He believed that this source was a biography of Jeremiah written by Baruch, though later scholars question the label "biography."

Source C: Found throughout the book, these are prose speeches/sermons and narratives that he believed betray a Deuteronomic perspective. This source consists of about 850 verses.

Since Duhm and Mowinckel, scholars have debated the exact shape of the sources and their association with Jeremiah. Mowinckel disagreed with Duhm about the role that Baruch supposedly played in the production of Source B, instead treating the material as produced by an anonymous figure before 480 B.C. in Egypt.⁸ Other significant disagreements include the relationship between the prose speeches (Source C) and Deuteronomic theology. McConville casts suspicion on the Deuteronomic character of the material, while Eissfeldt affirms the connection but believes it can be explained by Jeremiah being influenced by Deuteronomic theology.⁹

The view of the present commentary is that, while the history of composition of the book is complex, it is virtually impossible to gain any certainty about the specifics of its growth. Attempts like that of Holladay¹⁰ to recover the pre-605 scroll from later developments are precarious and distracting from the message of the final form of the book.¹¹

The Historical Jeremiah

One practical consequence of the issue of the history of composition is to raise questions about the relationship between the

book of Jeremiah and the historical prophet. Does the book give us window to the real Jeremiah and to his words?

Carroll and McKane¹² have argued negatively, but their radical views have been tempered in recent commentaries. No one believes that the words of the poetic oracles are the *ipsissima verba*, as if they were captured by an audio recorder, for all narrative involves some matter of shaping. The stories are not objective reports as if captured on camera. Fretheim well expresses the view accepted by this commentary: "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 in the past and the present issues they seek to address, Jeremiah emerges as both more than and less than the actual historical prophet."¹³

Historical Context

Jeremiah's prophecies are best read against the backdrop of the historical context of his life and ministry.¹⁴ Neither the prophet nor the editor consistently dated each oracle, nor are they arranged in a chronological order. Nonetheless, Jeremiah's words are deeply enmeshed in the turbulent events of his day. The superscription (see also 25:3) dates his prophetic work from the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (626 B.C.) to the eleventh year of Zedekiah (586 B.C.). The historical narrative in Jeremiah 39–44 takes the reader beyond the time of Jeremiah's prophetic activity and follows his story into the early exilic period. This section provides a brief overview of the period.

626 B.C. was a year of great significance. In the first place, it was the beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry.¹⁵ At this time, Josiah was king of Judah. According to 2 Chronicles 34:3a, this king, whose father and grandfather were notorious for their idolatrous practices, began to seek the Lord. Then the year before Jeremiah's ministry started, 2 Chronicles 34:3b–7 says that Josiah began to purify Judah and Jerusalem, destroying pagan shrines. Thus, Jeremiah's ministry began in a context where the king was working to promote the interests of proper worship. Significant events were also unfolding outside of Judah. Nabopolassar, a Chal-

dean tribal chief, began a Babylonian uprising against Assyria. This revolt would have great importance for the history of Judah, at that time a vassal of Assyria. Judah under Josiah would be happy to be rid of Assyria, but as events develop we will see that Judah's freedom from oppression involves more than being rid of Assyria.

Babylon's rebellion did not reach quick resolution. It was not until 612 B.C. that a coalition of Medes and Babylonians defeated the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. This defeat, anticipated by the prophet Nahum, meant the certain demise of Assyria, but a remnant under a self-proclaimed leader who took on the name Asshurballit ("Assyria lives!") reassembled in the vicinity of Carchemish.

In 609 B.C., Neco, pharaoh of Egypt, got involved when he led an army up the Levant to try to bolster Assyrian forces against Babylon. At this time, Josiah showed his interests when he mustered a Judean army to ambush Neco at the pass near Megiddo. He obviously wanted Assyria to disappear and tried to stop this Egyptian attempt to help them. However, Josiah was defeated and killed at Megiddo. The Egyptians continued on the march but were defeated in the battle of Carchemish. The Judeans placed Josiah's son, Jehoahaz on the throne.

The defeated Egyptian army, still under Neco, retreated through Judah and on the way meddled with the succession. They removed Jehoahaz from the throne and replaced him with another son of Josiah, Jehoiakim, whom they identified as more in keeping with their aspirations in the region.

Unfortunately for the Egyptians and for Jehoiakim, Babylon's armies, now led by Nabopolassar's gifted son Nebuchadnezzar, were able to subdue Syria, and from its staging area in Riblah, exerted their power into Judah. This is demonstrated in 605 B.C. in a siege where Jehoiakim is required to turn over to Babylon some of the temple utensils as well as a few of the young noblemen of Judah (see Dan. 1:1-3). This same year, Nabopolassar died and Nebuchadnezzar assumed the throne of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar seemed content to have Judah as a vassal rather than move to incorporate it into his empire as a province. His real interests were in subduing Egypt and he needed Judah as a staging area. He also benefited from the annual tribute that Judah as a tribute state would pay. However, Jehoiakim disturbed the relationship by rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. Such a rebellion entailed refusal to pay annual tribute and perhaps also the ejection of Babylonian agents from Judah.

In the time it took to mobilize and march the Babylonian army to Jerusalem, Jehoiakim was removed from the throne and replaced by his son Jehoiachin.¹⁶ After a relatively short siege, Nebuchadnezzar prevailed and removed Jehoiachin from the throne, deporting him (and other leading Judean citizens including a priest named Ezekiel) to Babylon. The Babylonian king then chose yet another son of Josiah, Mattaniah, though his name was changed to Zedekiah, to sit on the throne in Jerusalem.

Nebuchadnezzar may have had some reason to think that Zedekiah would be an amenable vassal, but ultimately even this choice proved wrong when in 586 B.C. the Judean king revolted. This time Nebuchadnezzar was in no mood for half measures. He came and decimated Jerusalem. He exiled leading citizens and he killed Zedekiah's sons before blinding him and taking him in chains to Babylon never to be heard from again.

It was during this time period (626–586) that Jeremiah carried on his prophetic ministry, though chapters 39–44 narrate events in the early exilic (post-586) period. Nebuchadnezzar made Judah a province of his empire, complete with native Judean governor, Gedaliah, and a Babylonian garrison. However, there were still insurgents on the loose. One named Ishmael, with Ammonite support, assassinated Gedaliah and attacked the Babylonian garrison. The remnant of Judah chose then to go to Egypt rather than face the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar one more time. They went despite Jeremiah's warnings, dragging him along with them.

Jeremiah's death is not mentioned in the book. The last datable event is the release of Jehoiachin from a Babylonian prison. This event can be dated to 562 B.C.

The Text of Jeremiah

Though certainly related to the issue of the history of composition of the book of Jeremiah, we will briefly treat its well-known text critical issue separately. Since this commentary series treats the text of the NIV, which uses the Masoretic Text (MT) as its basis, it is that tradition's text that will be the subject of the commentary to follow.

That there is a textual issue is immediately recognizable since the Septuagint represents a text that is significantly shorter, indeed about one-eighth shorter since it lacks about 2,700 words represented in the MT. Further, the order is not the same between the two. For instance, the oracles against the foreign nations in

chapters 46–51 in the MT are found right after 25:13, and the nations are treated in a different order. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it was determined that the Septuagint text reflects a different Hebrew tradition. Two (4QJer^a [4Q70], 4QJer^c [4Q72]) of the three fragmentary texts discovered at Qumran supported the MT tradition, but the third (4QJer^b [4Q71]) agreed with the Greek tradition in both brevity and arrangement. These texts have recently been published by Tov (1997).

While the shorter text could conceivably represent an abridgement of the longer text,¹⁷ it is more likely that the longer version represents the later stage. As remarked above, the end of Jeremiah indicates that there were multiple editions of the book during the lifetime of the prophet and we have speculated that there may well have been post-Jeremiah editions as well. Tov argues that changes that exist between the longer and the shorter text are the kinds of changes one might expect in the process of expansion (editorial and exegetical) rather than abridgement (for details see Longman and Dillard, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 328–32). Modern translations (NIV, NRSV, NLT, TNIV) all follow the longer Masoretic Text. While some might think that the earlier, shorter text should be considered authentic and in some cases canonical, on the basis of what we know about the development of the book, it is better to think that the longer, later text supersedes the earlier in importance. The other major ancient versions (Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, Lucian, Syriac, and Vulgate) follow the MT.

The Covenant in Jeremiah

In a book as varied and complex as Jeremiah, no single theological theme can capture its theological scope and depth, but covenant comes very close to doing so. In one sense, that is not surprising since covenant is one of the most productive theological themes in the Bible. But even in comparison to other biblical books and the other prophets, Jeremiah is the one of the most explicitly covenantal in its theology. In this, we find ourselves in agreement with Holladay, who says, “central to Jeremiah’s proclamation is the covenant established by Yahweh with Israel,” and “the covenantal relation is the constant basis of Yahweh’s words to Israel.”¹⁸

“Covenant” (*berit*) is a legal term that describes a relationship between two parties. The word is used to describe agreements

between two parties on a human level where there are promises given and obligations imposed (Gen. 31:44).

The word “covenant” is used to describe the relationship between God and his followers beginning with Noah (Gen. 9:9, etc.). It also describes the relationship between Abraham and God (Gen. 15:18; 17:2, etc., but reflecting back on the divine promises and human obligation described in Genesis 12:1–3), Moses and God (Exod. 19:5; 24:7–8, etc.), and David and God (Pss. 89:3, 28, 34, 39; 132:11, reflecting back to 2 Samuel 7).

The scholarship of the past half century has recognized that the covenant idea and even its literary form has a relationship with ancient Near Eastern treaties. Deuteronomy is a case in point. The book may be understood as the libretto of a covenant renewal ceremony and has the rough structure of a Near Eastern treaty,¹⁹ specifically a vassal treaty, as follows:

Introduction: 1:1–5

Historical Review: 1:9–3:27

Law: 4:1–26:19

Rewards and Consequences: 27:1–28:68

Witnesses: 30:19–20

Review and Succession: 31:9–13

After an introduction that names the parties involved in the relationship (in this case God and Israel with Moses serving as mediator between the two), the treaty/covenant rehearses the relationship between the two parties up to the present. The burden of this report, whether in a secular or biblical treaty, is to demonstrate the good services of the sovereign king (God in Deuteronomy) to his vassal people, thus providing a foundation for the next section. Since the sovereign has been so good to the vassal, the latter should follow the instructions (law) that the sovereign commands. In Deuteronomy, this section is the longest and is sanctioned by the next section, the blessings resulting from obedience to the law and the curses that follow upon disobedience. As a legal document, there must be witnesses that monitor the relationship and to whom appeal can be made if there is a breach of the covenant. Finally, many, but not all covenant/treaties stipulate a review and recommitment. In the case of Deuteronomy, this renewal is to happen every seven years.

The prophets in general, and Jeremiah in particular, may be helpfully thought to be the lawyers of the covenant, particularly the Mosaic covenant as established in Exodus 19–24 and expositied and renewed for the first time in Deuteronomy (see also, but not as extensively Josh. 24; 2 Sam. 12; Neh. 8–10). In particular, Jeremiah is a prosecuting attorney for the Lord. The covenant law has been extensively broken for a prolonged time. Jeremiah's ministry is to charge God's people with wrongdoing and call them to repent, otherwise God will effect the covenant curses—curses like those found in Deuteronomy 28:25–26, 64–68, which speak of defeat at the hands of an enemy and a scattering among the nations: Since they have broken the covenant and thus deserve to experience the curses of the covenant, Jeremiah “brings charges” (from the verb *rib*) against them on behalf of God:

“Therefore I bring charges again you again,” declares the LORD, “And I will bring charges against your children's children.” (Jer. 2:9; see also 11:1–8; 12:1–6; 30:12–17 and discussion in the commentary below.)

How have the people of God broken the covenant according to Jeremiah? The most egregious charge that the prophet brings against his people is that they have committed idolatry in direct violation of the first two commandments. Such is the charge in the oracle found in Jeremiah 11, which begins with a general statement outlining the theological dynamic we have been discussing:

“Listen to the terms of this covenant and tell them to the people of Judah and to those who live in Jerusalem. Tell them that this is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: ‘Cursed is the man who does not obey the terms of this covenant—the terms I commanded your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt. . .’” (11:2–4a)

He goes on to charge them with idolatrous worship of Baal:

“You have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah; and the altars you have set up to burn incense to that shameful god Baal are as many as the streets of Jerusalem.” (11:13)

But the people of God break the covenant in other ways as well. The covenant called on them to depend on God alone for their protection, but against God's wishes, they sought military and political shelter against Babylon from other superpowers of the day, leading the prophet to ask: “Now why go to Egypt to drink water from the Shihor? And why go to Assyria to drink water from the River?” (2:18).

Besides a fundamental betrayal of the divine-human relationship by their worship of other gods and their trust in other nations, the Judeans also offend God by desecrating the Sabbath (the fourth commandment). Contrary to God's will, they carry on their commercial work on this holy day of rest and worship (17:19–27).

If these offenses are not bad enough, Jeremiah also cites violations of God's instructions regulating the relationship among human beings. They lie and cheat (9:1–6); they do not release their slaves in accordance with the law (34:8–22). They even sacrifice their children to false gods (32:35). These are just a few of the horrible ways in which they break the covenant.

But it is not just Jeremiah's message of judgment that echoes with the language of covenant. When he looks beyond the judgment that is surely coming because they do not repent, he sees a period of restoration that is also described in covenantal language. The people have broken the old covenant. The old covenant refers to the relationship that God established with his people particularly from Abraham through David, but the explicit reflections about covenant come most pointedly from the Mosaic covenant because of its heavy emphasis on law.

God will punish them for their breach of covenant loyalty, but that is not the end of the story. In the future, God will establish a "new covenant" with them (31:31–34).

In the exposition notes to 31:31–34 we have commented on the fact that the "new covenant" is specifically contrasted to the Mosaic covenant. This accusation makes sense since the Mosaic covenant emphasizes law, and it is that law which is broken and its curses that thus go into effect. Even so, it would be a mistake to treat the Mosaic covenant in isolation from other covenants. With Paul (Gal. 3), it is better to understand the various covenants as building on each other rather than replacing each other. By the time of the covenant at Sinai mediated by Moses, we already have heard of covenants with Noah (Gen. 9) and Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; 15; 17). After Moses and before Jeremiah, there was one other covenant administration and that was with David (2 Sam. 7). Quite simply stated, it would be difficult to imagine Jeremiah just contrasting the Mosaic covenant with the new covenant. It is better to regard the new covenant over against the entire system of covenants up to that point in redemptive history.

Jesus announces the new covenant on the eve of his death during the celebration of the Last Supper.²⁰ As he passed the cup to his disciples, Luke 22:20 reports his words as, "this cup is the

new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (see also 1 Cor. 11:24–25). Previous covenants were often associated with specific signs that represented the covenant. The Noahic covenant sign was the rainbow (Gen. 9:13), the Abrahamic covenant's was circumcision (Gen. 17:11), the Mosaic covenant's sign was the Sabbath (Exod. 31:13, 17). While the Davidic covenant never speaks of a sign, and the new covenant does not actually use the term sign in reference to the cup, the cup representing Christ's death functions as the sign of the new covenant. The point is that the new covenant is founded on the death and resurrection of Christ.

And this new covenant replaces the old. This is the argument of the book of Hebrews, which twice cites the relevant passage in Jeremiah to make the point (Heb. 8:8–12; 10:15–17; see also 2 Cor. 3). According to the author of Hebrews, the old covenant failed, not because of a defect in God or his instrument, but rather because of the people (8:8). They consistently broke that covenant by disobeying the law explicated in the covenant with Moses. As a result, as Jeremiah himself announced, the people would be expelled from the land (reversing the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant),²¹ and the monarchy (a provision of the Davidic covenant) would be brought to an end.

But what does it mean that the new covenant replaces the old? It is perhaps better to say that the new covenant fulfills the old. Specifically, Jesus fulfills the old covenant. As O. P. Robertson forcefully puts it: "The heart of this consummative realization consists of a single person. As fulfiller of all the messianic promises, he achieves in himself the essence of the covenantal principle: 'I shall be your God and you shall be my people.' He may therefore be seen as the Christ who consummates the covenant."²² One can immediately think of Galatians 3:16: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to his seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ." As lawgiver (Matt. 5–7), perfect law-keeper, and the one who bears the punishment for breaking the law, Jesus fulfills the Mosaic covenant. And in the extensive teaching about Jesus position as son of David, we see that God indeed did establish the David's throne forever (2 Sam. 7:13).

Literary Components

The book of Jeremiah utilizes a set of literary types as it presents its message to the reader. The following provides a brief

description of the most commonly occurring types. They may be divided into poetry and prose genres.

Poetry

Judgment and Salvation Oracles

Jeremiah's oracles are often delivered in a poetic form. Jeremiah announces that he is speaking in the name of the LORD. The prophet is a messenger of Yahweh while he delivers these oracles. Jeremiah 1–25 contains the largest portion of his judgment oracles, while 30–31 is a collection of poetic salvation oracles.

Oracles against the Nations

A special category of judgment oracle may be seen in chapters 46–51. These are oracles directed not toward the people of God, but toward the nations. Theologically, they may be rooted in the Abrahamic covenant, which announced that God would curse those who cursed his people (Gen. 12:1). Even though God used many of these nations to punish Israel, they did it for their own selfish reasons and so they themselves deserved punishment.

Confessions/Laments

Jeremiah's so-called confessions are in the form of laments in which he complains about the burdens that his prophetic task has brought on him. These laments have many similarities with laments in the psalms, including such elements as an invocation, a declaration of innocence, an imprecation against enemies, and divine response. While the lament has a certain ritual form, there is no good reason to deny that they authentically represent the emotions of the prophet. The confessions/laments are found in 11:18–23; 12:1–6; 15:15–21; 17:14–18; 18:19–23, and 20:7–17.

Prose

Prose Oracles

Not all of Jeremiah's oracles came in poetic format. Jeremiah 7, the so-called temple sermon, is a good example of an oracle that was delivered in a prose literary vehicle. A particularly close connection has been drawn between these prose oracles and Deuteronomic theology. However, no good reason may be given for using this connection to draw a division between the prophet and these oracles. Jeremiah could very well be writing from a Deuteronomic perspective.

Biographical Material

A significant part of the prose material may be described biographical in that it tells events in Jeremiah's life (chs. 26–29; 34–45). These descriptions often carry a prophetic oracle. It may be likely that these biographical descriptions were written by someone other than Jeremiah (Baruch?), but there is no necessity to that hypothesis.

Prophetic Sign-Acts

A special category of the above may be the biographical description of Jeremiah's life and acts that carry prophetic significance. Jeremiah 13:1–11 is a good example as it narrates Jeremiah's trip to the Euphrates (?) River to bury his dirty underwear.

Structure

From the description of the history of composition, we might anticipate that the book does not have a crisp structure, and this intuition would be correct. Of course, Jeremiah is not unique among the prophets. It is reported that Martin Luther said: "They [the prophets] have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they are getting at."²³

While this observation is correct when applied to Jeremiah, we may still make some general observations about the flow of the book and its large sections, even though we cannot always account for why one oracle follows another or why, when they are given chronological indicators, they are not arranged sequentially.

There are reasons to think that chapter 25 plays a pivotal role in the book, though it may be that this was more explicit in an earlier form of the book (when the oracles against the foreign nations followed immediately after it, as in the Septuagint version). Even so, Jeremiah 25:1–14 summarizes the message of chapters 2–24 and then Jer. 25:15–38 announces judgment against the nations. Chapter 1 then is an introduction to the book with its account of the prophet's commissioning and chapter 52 an epilogue describing the fall of Jerusalem.

Within these two large sections we can recognize blocks of material.

Jeremiah 1 introduces the prophet, recounts his call, and presents two undated oracles that serve to introduce important themes of the book.

Jeremiah 2–24 is a collection of sermons, poetic and prose oracles, prophetic sign acts that are undated. Indeed, it is often difficult to tell when one oracle ends and another begins. Some scholars (Craigie, Kelley, Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, p. xxxii); suspect that these are the oracles that come from the first part of the prophet's ministry, i.e., his first scroll described in chapter 36.

After Jeremiah 25 summarizes the first part of the book and turns attention to the judgment against the nations, we see a block of prose material that consists of stories about Jeremiah as well as reports of oracles (chs. 26–29).

Jeremiah 30–33 is a collection of salvation oracles, a break from the heavy barrage of judgment in the book up to this point. Traditionally, these chapters are known as the Book of Consolation. Chapters 30–31 are poetic oracles, while 32–33 are prose.

Jeremiah 34–38 returns to prose stories about Jeremiah and oracles of judgment. It culminates with the first account of the fall of Jerusalem.

The next section, chapters 39–44, gives the distressing account of the exile and the continuing failures on the part of those who stay in the land with Jeremiah. They end up in Egypt because of their lack of confidence in God's ability to take care of them. Chapter 45 is an oracle directed toward Baruch, Jeremiah's associate.

The book ends with a collection of oracles against foreign nations (chs. 46–51), culminating with a lengthy prophetic statement directed toward Babylon. The book then culminates with a second account of the fall of Jerusalem (ch. 52).

This brief description supports Fretheim's (*Jeremiah*, pp. 19, 22) description of the structure of the book as "a collage, a work of art in which materials of various kinds are thrown onto a screen, then the intended effect is achieved by an imaginative profusion of different genres, images and metaphors, life settings, and personal encounters." The following commentary intends to explore this collage. When connections can be mapped and subunits identified, they will be pointed out.

Notes

1. Together the Twelve contain 14,335 words. See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, p. 57.
2. The view that it is not the “historical” Jeremiah who is presented by the text is discussed below.
3. Though some (see footnote 15) believe the first date is the date of his birth, not the beginning of his prophetic activity.
4. Some oracles are dated (e.g., the oracles against Egypt in 46:1–49:33 to the fourth year of Jehoiakim [605 B.C.]; see Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 341, for a list of all dated materials in Jeremiah) and some are undated (particularly in the first twenty chapters of the book). Those that are dated are not in chronological order in the book.
5. Yates, “New Exodus and No Exodus,” p. 2.
6. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*.
7. Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia*.
8. J. Lundbom (“Text, Composition, and Historical Reconstruction in Jeremiah,” p. 6) reports that Mowinckel came to believe that Baruch was responsible for the Source B prose in his book *Prophecy and Tradition*.
9. J. McConville, *Grace in the End: A Study in Deuteronomic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 55–57; a longer discussion in idem, *Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 12–13; also O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. P. R. Ackroyd; Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 352–54.
10. W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah*, vol. 2, pp. 10–24. Indeed, Holladay goes so far as to suggest that Jeremiah’s preaching can be associated with the public reading of Deuteronomy (see Deut. 31:9–13) every seven years (622, 615, 608, 601, 594, 587 B.C.).
11. In agreement with B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, p. 345.
12. Carroll, *The Book of Jeremiah*, and W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*.
13. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, p. 12. This view is essentially the same as J. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 2 vols., W. Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, and J. G. McConville, *Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah*. Holladay (*Jeremiah*, 2 vols.) too is optimistic about the relationship between actual prophet and text.
14. See Provan, et al., *A Biblical History*, pp. 274–85.
15. This date is disputed by J. P. Hyatt (“The Beginning of Jeremiah’s Prophecy,” in Perdue and Kovacs, *A Prophet to the Nations*, pp. 63–72) and

others who believe that the date refers to the prophet's birth year, not the year of his prophetic call.

16. The conditions under which Jehoiakim was removed are not known. Assassination is not out of the realm of possibility.

17. Lundbom ("Text, Composition, and Historical Reconstruction") has made a strong case that indications of shortening by haplography are frequent in the Greek text, citing far more (330 cases) than previous studies (Janzen cites 63 cases). In this way he argues for the superiority of the MT.

18. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 78.

19. As may be seen especially in the Hittite treaties of the mid-second millennium, though one may also point to the neo-Assyrian treaties of the seventh century B.C. See most recently, K. A. Kitchen, *The Reliability of the Old Testament*, pp. 242–44, 283–94.

20. That the new covenant comes to full realization in the New Testament does not preclude the fact that there is an anticipatory fulfillment of these promises in the return from exile. As Rata (*The Covenant Motif*, p. 85) states, "the coming days (of Jeremiah 31:31) refer to the immediate postexilic restoration as well as to the future restoration in the eschaton."

21. Even when they returned to the land, it was under foreign domination.

22. Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, p. 273.

23. Cited by L. Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (NICOT; Eerdmans, 1976), 257.