

STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Adult Bible Equipping Class
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OLD TESTAMENT FLYOVER:

Jeremiah

I. Introduction

A. *Importance*

While Isaiah boasts considerable accolades, being the most well-known and studied of the OT prophets, Jeremiah deserves equal place in importance.

For one, Jeremiah holds the privileged title of being the longest of the prophetic books, one of the longest books in the OT.

While Isaiah's prophecies contain the richest vocabulary of any prophet, Jeremiah contains a greater variety of literary style and form than any other book in the Bible.¹ Throughout his prophecies, he utilizes such forms as courtroom language (2:5-9, 10-13), profound emotional language (4:29-31; 15:5-9), prose reports of visions such as the almond tree (1:11-12), the boiling pot (1:13-19), the loin cloth (13:1-7), and the basket of figs (24:1-10). He uses parables and object lessons like Jeremiah's bachelorhood (16:1-4), the potter at work (18:1-12), the broken pot (19:1-20:6), the yoke of iron (27:1-28:17), the field of purchase (32:6-44), the pile of stones (43:8-13), and the book in the river (51:59-64). His prophecies include an actual letter (29:1-32), closing summations (36:1-8; 51:59-64), as well as prayers and their answers (11:18-23; 12:1-6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-12, 14-18; 32:16-44).²

Jeremiah the prophet also distinguishes himself as having the longest prophetic ministry of any OT prophet, equally roughly 45 years (see Date & Historical Setting).

While Isaiah is quoted the most by NT authors, Jeremiah is set apart as the prophet who penned the single-most extensive passage quoted in the NT—the new covenant promise of 31:31-34.

¹ Mark F. Rooker, "The Book of Jeremiah," in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 384.

² Ibid.

The NT authors are not the only biblical writers influenced by Jeremiah's prophecies. Both in Daniel 9:2 and Ezra 1:1, it was Jeremiah's prophecy of the 70-year captivity that initiated Judah's return from exile under Cyrus.

Jeremiah is also the most autobiographical of any prophet. We learn very little of Isaiah the man from his prophecies. But the nature of Jeremiah's writing exudes his personality and heart, as well as personal details about his background, upbringing, and relationship with God, the people, and the leadership of Judah.

He has been referred to as the most psychological of the prophets and at the same time the most interesting as a man. Many are agreed that his greatest contribution to posterity is his personality: by birth a priest; by grace a prophet; by the trials of life a bulwark for God's truth; by daily spiritual experience one of the greatest exponents of prophetic faith in his unique relation to God; by temperament gentle and timid, yet constantly contending against the forces of sin; and by natural desire a seeker after the love of a companion, his family, friends, and above all, his people—which were all denied him.³

Jeremiah's life—private and public—is openly displayed in his book. His brave actions, his tenderheartedness toward his coreligionists, his deep emotional and spiritual struggles before God—all these and more are clearly presented. His disappointments and sufferings were undeniably as poignant as those of any other Jewish prophet.⁴

Jeremiah also provides a rare look into the process of how a biblical book was composed (see Authorship).

Within the Tanakh, many OT Hebrew manuscripts place Jeremiah *before* Isaiah at the head of the Latter Prophets, indicating that perhaps at one time Jeremiah and not Isaiah stood in first place in the Latter Prophets. Feinberg suggests that this could resolve the perplexing problem of Jesus' words in Matt 27:9, where he attributes a passage by Zechariah to the prophet Jeremiah. If Jeremiah stood at the head of the Latter Prophets during Jesus' day, then the Lord could have used Jeremiah as a representative of all the Prophets, including Zechariah.⁵

On the other hand, Jeremiah has the unfortunate accolade of being regarded as the most difficult prophet book to read. In fact, "Jeremiah, it has been claimed with some justification, is the least read and least understood of all the OT books because it reveals no clear arrangement and demands so much extrabiblical, contemporary history for its understanding."⁶

³ Charles L. Feinberg, "Jeremiah," in *EBC*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 6:358.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 6:357-8.

⁶ Ibid., 6:357.

It also holds the title for being the most textually problematic book in the OT.⁷ No other book has more substantial differences between manuscripts than Jeremiah. In fact, the LXX version of the book is one-eighth shorter than the Hebrew version—a difference of about 2,700 words! The LXX also represents a different arrangement of the text (the oracles against the nations are placed after 25:13 in the LXX, whereas they appear in chs. 46-51 in the Hebrew).

Nevertheless, all the extant Hebrew manuscripts represent basically the same text, indicating that the Hebrew text has been well-preserved down through the centuries. The general consensus among contemporary textual critics is that the Hebrew text is by far superior to its Greek counterpart. Yet whether one reads the Hebrew or LXX version, the book conveys the same message, indicating that these textual differences pose absolutely no harm to the theological thrust of the book.

B. *Title*

The title given is that of the prophet's name, יֵרֵמְיָהוּ, "Jeremiah." It was a common name in Israel yet whose meaning is somewhat disputed now. Scholars have suggested several glosses for the name: "Yahweh hurls," "Yahweh founds," "Yahweh establishes," or "Yahweh exalts."⁸

Perhaps the name represents his parents' hopes for him and the nation, in which case the last meaning would make sense. But the name could instead reflect the overall tone of the prophet's message, which was considerably negative, in which case the first rendering would fit better.

C. *Focus*

Jeremiah's focus is two-fold through the book. His first concern is the message he has for Judah (182x), and especially Jerusalem (107x). He intends to warn them of the imminent catastrophe that awaits them.

The second focus in Jeremiah is on Babylon (169x), who until chapter 20 is referred to only as the enemy "from the north" (4:6; 6:1, 22; 13:20; 15:12; 46:20; 47:2). For 19 chapters, this enemy remains nameless until Jeremiah finally divulges that it is indeed Babylon whom the Lord will use to scourge Judah for its wickedness.

D. *Authorship*

There have been two broad views on the authorship of Jeremiah. On the one hand, some scholars hold that Jeremiah wrote very little of the book. Instead they attribute the work to three different sources: (1) some of the messages were actually dictated by Jeremiah, but these passages are minimal; (2) some portions are ascribed to Baruch, appearing as a biography of Jeremiah; (3) the rest were later materials inserted by editors and redactors as the work was being compiled together. Conservative scholars, however, have long held that Jeremiah authored all or much of the book by dictation to Baruch, who served as his amanuensis.

⁷ For a good discussion of this topic, see Rooker, "Jeremiah," 380-2, and Feinberg, "Jeremiah," 371-2.

⁸ Feinberg, "Jeremiah," 6:358.

The former group came to their position based on two observations:

- 1) The book contains two main literary forms: prose and poetry. Critical scholars surmised that the poetic portions were the only ones that could be attributed to Jeremiah. The remainder must have come from other sources or authors. One seems to be a biographical source from someone close to Jeremiah. The remainder must have come from a postexilic writer.
- 2) The book contains two occurrences of the temple sermon (chs. 7 & 26), which they claimed indicated that there were two different sources for the prose material in the book. (This was the same justification scholars used to attribute multiple sources to the Pentateuch, based on the two creation accounts in Gen 1 & 2.) Since the temple sermon in chapter 7 is written in sermonic prose while it appears in biographical prose in chapter 26, these scholars posited that the book must have had two different sources for the prose material.⁹

Yet even among critical scholars, these kinds of views were not universally accepted. Other theories were submitted throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, yet “few scholars today continue to distinguish between the prose accounts in the alleged B and C sources. The great bulk of the C source that includes passages such as chaps. 1, 7, and 31 that had been designated as a postexilic retrojection is now viewed as reflecting the actual preaching of Jeremiah. This reversal illustrates how far scholars have departed from the old consensus of the three sources!”¹⁰

The book itself actually reveals much about its authorship and the process of composition. The first written material was produced in 605 B.C. during the fourth year of King Jehoiakim’s reign (36:1-3), about 20 years into his prophetic ministry. Jeremiah carried out this command by dictating his messages to Baruch, who served as his amanuensis, i.e., secretary (36:4, 18, 27). It also appears that other material may have been written down on this scroll (29:1; 30:2; 51:60).

In any case, Jeremiah had apparently kept written records of his preaching throughout the first part of his ministry, which he used during his dictations to Baruch (36:2).¹¹ Upon completion, the scroll was read to King Jehoiakim, who cut the scroll in pieces and burned it in the fire (36:9-26). The Lord then commanded Jeremiah to record the same message on a new scroll (36:27-28), apparently with additional material gradually added later (36:32).

The entire book was probably gathered together shortly after Jeremiah’s death (c. 586 B.C.). It seems reasonable that Jeremiah edited his work during the Captivity. The conclusion appears inescapable that Baruch’s rewritten scroll was the basis for Jeremiah’s

⁹ Rooker, “Jeremiah,” 382.

¹⁰ Ibid., 383.

¹¹ Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” 6:362.

written prophecies. The book bears marks of having been gathered together by one person at one time.¹²

E. *Date & Historical Setting*

As previously noted, one of the major contributors to the book's difficulty is the necessity for careful study of the historical events that occurred during the book's writing. As Feinberg observes, "To understand Jeremiah's prophecy requires close scrutiny of his times because of (1) the critical events in the political world of his day—events in which Judah was directly affected—and (2) the number of kings in Judah who reigned during his career and with whom he had close contact."¹³

The book of Jeremiah covers the final stage in the life of the southern kingdom. In fact, because of its importance in OT history, this is the "best-documented times in all Israel's history."¹⁴ Additionally, Feinberg notes that "the Book of Jeremiah is so filled with historical, biographical, and autobiographical material that his life can be synchronized with dates and known events to a degree unparalleled in the writing of other prophets."¹⁵

Jeremiah identifies himself as the son of Hilkiah, a priestly family who lived in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin (1:1). Some scholars suggest that his father was, in fact, the Hilkiah attributed with finding the "Book of the Law" in the temple during Josiah's reign (2 Kgs 22:8). There is no indication that Jeremiah ever performed any priestly duties. This time period can be divided into three macro periods:

1. **627–609 B.C.: The Call of Jeremiah to the Death of Josiah**

Jeremiah would have been born around 646 B.C., during the last years of the reign of Manasseh (697-643 B.C.). He would have grown up during the early period of Josiah's reign (641-609 B.C.).

In 627 B.C., God called Jeremiah to prophetic ministry. This occurred during the 13th year of Josiah's reign (1:2), roughly two years after the king began his spiritual reforms in Judah (2 Chron 24:36) and about five years before Hilkiah discovered "the Book of the Law" in the temple (2 Kgs 22:3-8).

It was also in or around the death of Asshur-banipal, the last great Assyrian king. His death marked the high tide of the Assyrian empire, whose influence began waning as Egypt resurged under Psammetichus and Babylon began pushing for independence under Nabopolassar. It was the latter who eventually destroyed the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in 612 B.C., marking the final collapse of Assyria.

Jeremiah's preaching coincided closely with the thrust of Josiah's reforms—both were intent on eradicating idolatry in the kingdom and calling the people to repent

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 6:363.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6:364.

¹⁵ Ibid.

and maintain covenant fidelity. Everything about Jeremiah's messages indicates his support for Josiah, though strangely the prophet barely hints at the king's reforms, save only for a short reference (22:15-16) as "one exception in a dismal national history."¹⁶

At that time, Judah was fully awash in the spiritual immorality that resulted from Manasseh's ungodly leadership, whose syncretistic worship had implicated not just the people, but the priests and prophets as well.

The spiritual reforms of Josiah were short-lived, however, for he died in 609 B.C. at the Battle of Megiddo when he engaged Pharaoh Neco of Egypt, who had come to join Assyria in military alliance against Babylon (2 Kgs 23:29; 2 Chron 35:20-24).

In response to Josiah's death, the people placed Josiah's 2nd son Jehoahaz on the throne. However, he only reigned for three months before he was removed by Pharaoh Neco for his anti-Egyptian stance and exiled to Egypt (2 Kgs 23:31-33).

2. 609–598 B.C.: Jehoiakim's Reign to the 2nd Babylonian Deportation

Pharaoh Neco set Josiah's eldest son Eliakim on the throne, changing his name to Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 23:30-35; 2 Chron 36:1-4).

Jehoiakim reigned for 11 years (609-598 B.C.), and proved himself to be one of the most evil of Judah's kings. "He has been labeled a blood-thirsty tyrant, an inveterate enemy of the truth. He cared nothing for the worship of the God of Israel, exacted exorbitant taxes, used forced labor without pay, and had no regard for the word or prophet of God (22:13-14; ch. 36)."¹⁷ This reality is evidenced clearly in the king's response to the reading of Jeremiah's prophecies in chapter 36—he cut the scroll to pieces and burned them.

This put the king at great odds with Jeremiah. In fact, prophet's greatest persecutions and opposition occurred during Jehoiakim's reign. In addition, both were diametrically opposed in their political stance. The king was pro-Egyptian, and wished to maintain alliance with Egypt as a means of hedging of the Babylonian threat. Jeremiah, however, continually urged the nation to submit to Babylon's rule, and warned that Egypt was not enough to protect Judah from Babylonian conquest.

That political decision was decided in 605 B.C., when Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish (46:2). This was "an event of permanent significance, for it marked the transfer of power over the Middle East from Egypt to Babylon. This defeat was the final blow to Egypt's aspirations and guaranteed the Chaldeans the supremacy of the West. It was the turning point of the period and had importance consequences for Israel's future."¹⁸

¹⁶ J. Gordon McConville, "Theology of Jeremiah," in *NIDOTTE*, 5 vols., ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:756.

¹⁷ Feinberg, "Jeremiah," 6:365.

¹⁸ Ibid.

In 605 B.C., following this victory, Babylon annexed Judah, made Jehoiakim their vassal, and deported some of Judah's upper-class to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:1), including Daniel (Dan 1:1). *This was the first of three major deportations of Judah.*

Jehoiakim revolted in 602 B.C. against Nebuchadnezzar during the latter's campaign against Egypt, most likely in support of an Egyptian victory (2 Kgs 24:1). In response, Nebuchadnezzar first sent forces from nearby vassal states against Jerusalem, who entered the city and bound the king in bronze chains in order to take him to Babylon (2 Chron 36:6). For whatever reason, Nebuchadnezzar relented, instead pillaged the temple, taking many of its treasures back to Babylon as punishment for the revolt.

Five years later (597 B.C.), Jehoiakim once again rebelled, forcing Nebuchadnezzar to mobilize his army and invade Judah a second time. However, before he reached Jerusalem, Jehoiakim had already suffered a violent death (most likely by assassination) and was given a dishonorable burial, e.g., "the burial of a donkey," just as Jeremiah had prophesied (22:18-19; 36:30).

Jehoiachin his son succeeded him as king of Judah—the last legitimate Davidic king to rule (2 Kgs 24:8-17; 2 Chron 36:9-10). His reign, however, lasted only three and a half months, but it was enough to reveal his wickedness as a king and foster Jeremiah's wholehearted denouncement (22:24-30).

At that point, Nebuchadnezzar arrived in response to Jehoiakim's rebellion, only to find the king dead and his son Jehoiachin ruling in his place. He besieged Jerusalem in 597 B.C. until Jehoiachin surrendered and was deported to Babylon along with 10,000 of Judah's people, including Ezekiel (Ezek 1:2) and the queen mother. *This was the second major deportation of Judah* (2 Kgs 24:12).

Jehoiachin remained captive in Babylon for 35 years until he was released in 562 B.C. by Evil-Marduk, Nebuchadnezzar's son (2 Kgs 25:27; Jer 52:31).

3. 597–586 B.C.: 2nd Babylonian Deportation to the Destruction of Jerusalem

In place of Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar set Josiah's other son Mattaniah (Jehoahaz's brother) on the throne as a puppet king, renaming him Zedekiah (2 Kgs 23:34; 24:17; 2 Chron 36:10; Jer 1:3). Nevertheless, this new king was blocked at every point by his officials who had maintained a pro-Egyptian policy.

Feinberg notes that "Zedekiah's relationship with Jeremiah was closer than any previous Judean king with the probable exception of the godly Josiah."¹⁹ Unfortunately, the king lacked the influence neither to change the nation's attitude toward Babylon nor protect Jeremiah from reprisal.

Nevertheless, in 593 B.C. Zedekiah began plotting in alliance with Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon a rebellion against Babylon, all despite Jeremiah's ceaseless condemnation (27:3-11). In 588 B.C., his conspiring included Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt.

¹⁹ Ibid., 6:366.

Babylon's response was immediate. Nebuchadnezzar launched an assault against the city, besieging it yet again. Jeremiah continually urged Zedekiah to surrender to Babylon (21:1-10; 34:1-5, 17-22; 37:3-10, 16-17; 38:14-23), but the king refused, and Jeremiah suffered at the hands of his enemies in Judah (37:11-21; 38:1-28).

The city fell in the summer of 586 B.C. As he tried to escape, Zedekiah was captured, forced to observe his sons' executions, blinded, and then deported to Babylon. The city was left in ruins, the Solomonic Temple was destroyed, and temple treasures plundered, and the majority of the population either killed or deported to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:1-21). *This was the third and final deportation of Judah.*

After the city was destroyed, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as governor of Judah. He was Josiah's "Secretary of State" and a friend of Jeremiah. About two months later he was assassinated by a man named Ishmael with the aid of the Ammonites. Fearing a Babylonian retaliation, the instigators fled to Egypt and took Jeremiah forcibly along with them against his will (Jer 40-44).

Nothing is written about Jeremiah's death. Assumingly, he died in Egypt between 586 B.C. and 570 B.C., though his prophecy of the death of Pharaoh Hophra (44:29-30) suggests that he may have died closer to 570 B.C., since the Pharaoh was killed in 569 B.C. Feinberg aptly writes, "By an unusual providence the prophet who fought all his life against Egypt was forced to end his days there as a captive."²⁰

II. Major Themes

A. *The Sovereignty of Yahweh*

The book of Jeremiah is a testament to God's sovereignty over everything. The prophet seems to see the God's hand in everything that happens—in Judah and Israel, in the nations, in nature, and in his own personal life.

1. **Over Creation**

Jeremiah presents Yahweh as the Lord of all creation. He created everything (10:12; 27:5; 51:15) and fills heaven and earth (23:24). He is the one who controls the heavenly bodies (31:35), gives rain (5:24; 14:22) and controls the seas (5:22; 31:35), making him incomparable to all the idols of the nations (10:11).

2. **Over Judah**

Jeremiah also presents Yahweh as sovereign over Judah. He sees beyond the superficial into the wicked heart of man (11:20; 17:5-11), and his priority is internal and not merely external.

Judah demonstrated an outward trust in the covenant (11:1-5), in circumcision (9:25-26), in the temple (7:1-15), in sacrifices (6:20; 7:21-23), in prayer (11:14; 15:1), in the throne (22:1-9), and in the ark (3:16). Yet their actions betrayed their inward rebellion against Yahweh and the covenant (7:8-11). None of this was hidden from

²⁰ Ibid., 6:360.

God, and for this reason Jeremiah's messages continually emphasized repentance and internal heart transformation.

Their failure to turn from sin and live righteously would result in death and exile, which Yahweh would bring upon them (6:19, 21; 9:7-11, 15-16; 10:18; 13:9; 29:17-19; 30:15; 39:16-18).

Yet Yahweh is also sovereign over Judah's restoration (see FUTURE RESTORATION). He exiled them among the nations, but he will also gather them from the nations (23:3-6; 30:8; 31:8), bring them back into the land (30:3), and restore his relationship with them (31:1, 31-34).

3. Over Nations

Yahweh is also sovereign over the nations (25:19-26; 46:1-51:64), and Jeremiah stressed the fact that Babylon was God's agent of judgment on Judah (5:15; 25:8-13; 27:6; 51:1-2). Nothing Judah did could protect the nation from this threat (21:3-7), and so Jeremiah continually urged Judah and the rest of the nations to submit to Babylon (27:1-11). Likewise, Jeremiah stressed that Nebuchadnezzar's success was due to Yahweh's sovereign will and not to the king's power or acumen (27:6).

Jeremiah also explains the principle governing Yahweh's relationship with the nations. Just as a potter has control over the vessels he creates, so Yahweh has authority to accomplish his purposes among the nations (18:1-10). While he may declare cursing or blessing on a nation, both are contingent upon the nation's actions. He reserves for himself the right to alter his plan for that nation depending on how it responds to him.

Note: This principle explains why the prophets continually call for repentance to avoid judgments that earlier appeared to be unconditional. *Just as blessing and cursing for Israel under the Mosaic Covenant was based upon obedience and disobedience, so God extended that contingency to all the nations during the OT.*

4. Over Jeremiah

Yahweh was also sovereign over Jeremiah. Not only did he personally create him and knew him even before birth, but he had already purposed to make Jeremiah a prophet (1:5). His ministry would be divinely empowered, and he would wield God's word with destructive force (1:9-10; 23:29). Though he would come under intense persecution, Yahweh would sovereignly protect him (1:8).

In fact, Jeremiah's ministry is a testament to God's sovereign protection over him (1:18-19; 11:18-21; 15:19-21; 20:1-2; 26:7-24; 36:1-26; 37:13-16; 38:1-6; 43:1-4). Despite living in some of the most hostile times in Judah's history, the prophet survived for 45 years—much longer than he should have.

This fact makes Jeremiah a unique prophetic figure. Even though he consistently declared the God's sovereignty to the people, his prayers reflect the Job-like tension of a man who was struggling to understand the purpose of his experiences and the reason for his suffering. Like the psalmists, Jeremiah repeatedly brought his laments to God and asked hard questions about why God was allowing him to undergo such trials (11:19-12:6; 15:10-18; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18).

B. *The Sin and Judgment of Judah*

Judgment is a prominent feature of the book of Jeremiah. In fact, chapters 2-29 constitute essentially twenty-eight chapters of unrelenting judgment oracles against the nation. But the judgment is intricately covenantal. Judah has failed to obey the Mosaic Covenant and so deserves everything that is coming (2:20; 5:5; 7:5-10).

1. **Idolatry**

Jeremiah repeatedly preached against Judah's idolatry, who had offered up worship to Baal, Molech, and Ishtar, i.e., "the Queen of Heaven" (7:31; 19:5; 32:35; 44:18-19). Their actions clearly revealed their ignorance of Yahweh and of the Torah, for the idols they worshipped were dead and impotent (10:2-5; 14:22), as contrasted with the living God, whom Jeremiah calls the "King of the nations" (10:7).

2. **Immorality**

Closely in line with their idolatry, immorality plagued the nation manifesting not only in sexual practices but also in social injustice (5:1-9; 7:1-11; 23:10-14).

3. **False Prophecy**

The word of Yahweh is especially important in the book of Jeremiah, particularly as it contrasts with the word of the false prophets. Judah was being led by corrupt kings who were guided by false prophets. Many of Jeremiah's heated exchanges involved his denunciations of the false prophets (5:30-31; 14:13-16; 23:9-40; 27:1-29:32).

4. **Exile**

Keeping in line with the covenant warnings (Lev 26; Deut 28), Judah had experienced numerous aspects of the covenant curses throughout her history, including drought (14:3-4), famine (14:5-6), and devastation (4:11-22). But Judah's ultimate punishment would be their expulsion from the land. From the very start of the book, Jeremiah's repeated emphasis was on a coming invader—an unstoppable army who would destroy the nation and drag its people away into exile (25:9).

C. *The Future Restoration of Judah & Israel*

Very little of Jeremiah's messages include encouragement for the nation. His main task was "to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow" (1:10b-c). But moments of Jeremiah's message include a final aspect of his ministry: "To build and to plant" (1:10d).

Amid the language of destruction and the oracles of judgment, the prophet momentarily pulls back the curtain to reveal the nation's ultimate future (3:11-4:2; 12:15; 16:14-15; 23:1-8; 24:4-7; 30:1-33:26; 46:27-28; 50:4-5, 19-20, 34). These points reveal that Yahweh's plan for Israel is ultimately intact. Once again, Yahweh is truly sovereign, and the nation's existence—while appearing at risk—is ultimately not in jeopardy (31:35-37).

Jeremiah promised that Israel would ultimately repent of their sin and return to Yahweh (32:37-40). A new Davidic ruler would arise and rule over the nation in justice and righteousness (23:5-8; 33:14-26), and the nation would return to the land and enjoy covenant blessing (3:17; 16:19).

D. *The New Covenant*

Jeremiah's most important and unique contribution to theology is his exposition of the new covenant. Of course, Jeremiah's covenant is not *entirely* new. As McConville writes, "The transition from God's judgment on his covenant people to a new act of salvation is in fact typical of the prophetic books."²¹ This was the original theme of Deuteronomic Covenant when Moses prophesied the nation's repentance and return to the land following their exile (Deut 29-30).

Jeremiah, however, clarifies just how God will accomplish this in Israel. It will not be under the Mosaic Covenant (i.e., "old covenant") but rather under a "new covenant" that Yahweh will be their God and Israel will be his people (Jer 31:31, 33). Yet there is both continuity and discontinuity between these covenants.

The *continuity* between these covenants is rather clear. Just as God made a covenant with Israel "in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt" (31:32), so God is making a new covenant with "the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (31:31). Likewise, both covenants have a corresponding "law."

Yet the *discontinuity* between these covenants is even more striking. Israel, of course, failed to keep the old covenant because the law remained external and the heart uncircumcised (11:1-13). It was an outward covenant. Its law was written upon stone, and it lacked a provision guaranteeing that the individual internalize the law and obey from the heart.

The new covenant, by contrast, is an internal covenant. Its law is written on the heart, guaranteeing that everyone in Israel will know Yahweh. Additionally, the new covenant also offers permanent provision for sin, while the old covenant merely covered for sin in anticipation of a coming sacrifice (cf. Rom 3:25-26). Jeremiah repeatedly emphasized that while the old covenant remained, Israel's heart remained uncircumcised—meaning that they could not hear and respond to Yahweh's word, even though they had been circumcised outwardly (4:4; 6:10; 9:25-26; cf. Deut 10:16; 30:6). The new covenant fixed that fundamental problem.

E. *The Experience of Jeremiah*

When Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?", one of their responses included "Jeremiah" (Matt 16:13-14). Indeed, it is a curious observance that Jeremiah's prophetic experience bears a striking resemblance to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Though the Bible in no way asserts that Jeremiah is a type of Christ, virtually no commentator denies the numerous parallels between their lives:²²

1. *Their historical settings were similar:* Jerusalem was about to fall; the temple was soon to be destroyed; religion was buried in formalism; there was need for emphasis on the spiritual life. Outwardly the life of Jeremiah closely resembled that of our Lord.

²¹ McConville, "Theology of Jeremiah," 4:764.

²² The following comparisons are taken verbatim from Feinberg, "Jeremiah," 6:361.

2. *Both had a message for Israel and the world*
3. *Both were conscious of the world of nature about them and used many figures from it*
4. *Both came from a high tradition: Jeremiah came from a priest-prophet background, Christ from the divine-kingly planes.*
5. *Both were conscious of their call from God*
6. *Both condemned the commercialism of temple worship and did so in a similar way (Jer 7:11; Matt 21:13)*
7. *Both were accused of political treason*
8. *Both were tried, persecuted, and imprisoned*
9. *Both foretold the destruction of the temple (Jer 7:14; Mark 13:2):* Two great external catastrophes struck the OT theocracy: Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and Titus' similar destruction of them. Of the first Jeremiah was the prophet; of the latter, Christ himself (Matt 24).
10. *Both wept over Jerusalem (Jer 9:1; Luke 19:41)*
11. *Both forcefully condemned the priests of their day*
12. *Both were rejected by their kin (Jer 12:6; John 1:11)*
13. *Both were tenderhearted:* Jeremiah was so much like the Man of Sorrows that the rabbis identified Jeremiah with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.
14. *Both loved Israel deeply*
15. *Both knew the meaning of loneliness (Jer 15:10; Isa 53:3)*
16. *Both enjoyed unusual fellowship with God:* One of the unique features of Jeremiah's life was that he could be so free and honest in communion and conversation with God (20:7; cf. John 11:41-42).

III. Purpose

Jerusalem will be destroyed by the Babylonians because of Judah's spiritual adultery; nevertheless, Yahweh's rule is assured through the New and Davidic Covenants.

Jeremiah's message promised sure destruction of a nation that lacked the spiritual capacity to repent. Their covenant infidelity required God's judgment, but Yahweh's faithfulness guaranteed that the nation would continue despite their exile.

IV. Literary Structure

The book of Jeremiah is not the least bit chronologically arranged, and that fact is a primary contributor to the book's difficulty. Readers who approach the book expecting its chapter and prophecies to proceed in a chronological/historical manner will find the book wholly frustrating and impossibly confusing.

On the other hand, there is nothing to indicate that the book has no purposefully arrangement. Instead, the book takes an ideological arrangement, grouping material for its readability, and there may even be chronological sub-arrangement to its primary sections which are arranged topically, though chapters 37-44 are chronological.

In general, the main literary genre that dominates chapters 1-29 is poetry. For the remainder of the book, narrative takes a primary role. If the book were to be rearranged into chronological order, it would look roughly as follows:

CHRONOLOGICAL ARRANGEMENT OF JEREMIAH²³

Reign of Josiah	1:1-6:30
Reign of Jehoahaz	--
Reign of Jehoiakim	7:1-13:17; 13:20-20:18; 25:1-26:24; 35:1-36:32; 45:1-46:12; 47:1-49:39
Reign of Jehoiachin	13:18-19; 22:1-23:40
Reign of Zedekiah	21:1-14; 24:1-10; 27:1-34:22; 46:13-28; 50:1-34

However, while rearranging the text may be tempting and even helpful, it remains the task of the Bible student to understand the book as it has been received—structure as well as content. To this end, numerous outlines have been offered. For the sake of simplicity, only a few will be included here:

OUTLINE OF JEREMIAH

INTRODUCTION	CONDEMNATION	COMFORT	CONDEMNATION	APPENDIX
Narrative	Oracles/Narrative	Oracles/Narrative	Narrative/Oracles	Narrative
Words (Word of Yahweh)	The Collected Oracles/Narratives of Jeremiah:	The Oracles/ Narratives of Jere- miah:	The Narrative/ Oracles of Jeremiah:	The Narrative of Jerusalem's Desolation by Babylon
Prophet	Yahweh's Judgment of Judah	Yahweh's Restoration of Israel/Judah	Yahweh's Judgment of Judah and the Nations	
Time	(and the Nations)			
1:1	1:4	30:1	34:1	52:1

**JEREMIAH
(alternate approach)**

Call and Commission of Jeremiah	Jeremiah and His People			Jeremiah and the Nations			Historical Appendix
	Theme: Yahweh's Punishment of Judah	Development	Sign: The Good and Bad Figs	Theme: Yahweh's Pronouncement against Judah and all the Nations	Develop- ment	Sign: The Sunken Scroll	
1:1	2:1	3:6	24:1	25:1	26:1	51:59	52:1

²³ Ibid., 6:367.

JEREMIAH²⁴
(suggested outline)

1. **Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (1:1-25:38)**
 - a. The Call of Jeremiah (1:1-19)
 - b. Israel's Guilt and Punishment (2:1-6:30)
 - c. False Religion and Its Punishment (7:1-10:25)
 - d. The Broken Covenant and Jeremiah's Complaints (11:1-15:21)
 - e. Confessions, Symbolic Acts, and Messages to Judah (16:1-25:38)
2. **Biographical Narratives Connected with Jerusalem (26:1-45:5)**
 - a. Jeremiah's Controversy with False Prophets (26:1-29:32)
 - b. Messages of Hope and Consolation (3:1-33:25)
 - c. Events from the Days of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah (34:1-39:18)
 - d. Events after the Fall of Jerusalem (40:1-45:5)
3. **Oracles against Foreign Nations (46:1-51:64)**
 - a. Egypt (46:1-28)
 - b. Philistia (47:1-7)
 - c. Moab (48:1-47)
 - d. Ammon (49:1-6)
 - e. Edom (49:7-22)
 - f. Damascus (49:23-27)
 - g. Kedar and Hazor (49:28-33)
 - h. Elam (49:34-39)
 - i. Babylon (50:1-51:64)
4. **Historical Appendix (52:1-34)**
 - a. The Fall of Jerusalem and the Capture of Zedekiah (52:1-16)
 - b. The Destruction of the Temple (52:17-23)
 - c. The Three Babylonian Deportations (52:24-30)
 - d. The Release of Jehoiachin from Prison (52:31-34)

V. Recommended Resources

Feinberg, Charles L. "Jeremiah." In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. 12 volumes. Edited by Frank E. Gæbelein, 6:355-691. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.

Harrison, R. K. *Jeremiah & Lamentations*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Merrill, Eugene H., Mark E. Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti. *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011.

²⁴ Taken from Rooker, "Jeremiah," 387-88.

JEREMIAH'S DATED ORACLES IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Year (B.C.)	Biblical Text	Historical Event	Jeremiah's Experience
695	2 Kings 21:1	Manasseh's Co-regency with Hezekiah	
686	2 Kings 20:21	Hezekiah's Death Manassah's Sole Reign	Isaiah's prophecy ends
657-639	Jer. 1:6-7		The Birth of Jeremiah
642	2 Kings 21:19	Accession of Amon	
640	2 Kings 21:26-22:1	Accession of Josiah	
627	Jer. 1:1		Jeremiah called and inducted into prophetic ministry
626		Nebopolassar controlled Babylon	
622	2 Kings 22:3-23:24	Book of the Law found Reforms of Josiah	
614		Asshur fell to the Medes	
612		Ninevah fell to the Medes and Babylonians	
609	2 Kings 23:28-37 Jer. 22:10-12 Jer. 7:1-15; 26:1-24	Death of Josiah Accession of Jehoahaz Accession of Jehoiakim	Exile of Jehoahaz Sermon at the Temple
605	Dan. 1:1 Jer. 25:1-38 Jer. 45:1-5 Jer. 36:1-8	Battle of Carchemish First Exile to Babylon	70 Year Exile Prophecy Life of Baruch to be Spared Scroll prepared by Jeremiah through Baruch
604	Jer. 36:9-32		Burning of Scroll
597	2 Kings 24:1-16 Jer. 22:24-30 2 Kings 24:17-18 Jer. 24:1-10 Jer. 49:34-39 Jer. 29:1-19	Accession of Jehioachin Second Exile: Jehioachin taken to Babylon Zedekiah made King	Exile of Coniah Good and bad figs Oracle against Elam Letter to Exiles
594	Jer. 51:59-64		Scroll thrown into the Euphrates
593	Jer. 28:1-4		Hananiah prophecied imminent return of the exiles
588	Jer. 34:1-22	Siege of Jerusalem	Freeing of Slaves
587	Jer. 32:1-33:26 Jer. 37:1-38:28	Attempt of Pharaoh Hophra against Babylon	Purchase of Land Arrest and cistern
586	Jer. 39:1-40:7 Jer. 52:1-30 Jer. 40:8-41:16 Jer. 42:1-22	Destruction of Jerusalem & Third Exile	Release of Jeremiah Number of Exiles Gedaliah killed Advise to stay in land
585	Jer. 43:1-44:30		Flight to Egypt