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## **“The Prophet Jeremiah as Theological Symbol in the Book of Jeremiah”**

Gary E. Yates, Ph.D.

### Introduction

Timothy Polk has noted, “Nothing distinguishes the book of Jeremiah from earlier works of prophecy quite so much as the attention it devotes to the person of the prophet and the prominence it accords the prophetic ‘I’, and few things receive more scholarly comment.”<sup>1</sup> More than simply providing a biographical or psychological portrait of the prophet, the book presents Jeremiah as a theological symbol who embodies in his person the word of Yahweh and the office of prophet.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the figure of Jeremiah is so central that a theology of the book of Jeremiah “cannot be formulated without taking into account the *person* of the prophet, as the book presents him.”<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this study is to explore how Jeremiah the person functions as a theological symbol and what these motifs contribute to the overall theology of the book of Jeremiah.

### Jeremiah and the Word of God

There is an inseparable connection between the word of Yahweh and Jeremiah the person as the spokesman of that word. Peter Adam comments:

What is it like to be the messenger of the Lord, to have the words of the Lord in your mouth? Jeremiah’s experience shows that he is not removed from that message, a mere conduit for God’s words. On the contrary, he is called to incarnate the experience of the Lord and of his people, yet without losing his own identity. He experiences within himself both the urgency of the message of God’s judgment, and the great reluctance of his people to receive that message. The Divine drama of the Word is played out within the personal experience of the prophet.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Polk observes that “Jeremiah’s life interprets his message. He is a metaphor for God’s word. Through him we see into God’s pathos and purpose and into the plight and destiny of the people. Jeremiah becomes the data board on which is played out the economy of judgment and salvation.”<sup>5</sup> The repetition of the root **דבר** in the opening chapter of Jeremiah highlights the fusion of the voices of Yahweh and the prophet.<sup>6</sup> The superscription to the book indicates that the “words of Jeremiah” are what the prophet received as “the word of Yahweh” (1:1-2), and this characterization applies to all that follows in the rest of the book. When Jeremiah protests at his call that he does not know how to “speak” (1:6), Yahweh instructs the prophet to “speak” what he is commanded (1:8) and assures the prophet that he will place his own “words” in the prophet’s mouth (1:9). Jeremiah not only announces Yahweh’s intentions to “pluck up, pull down, destroy, overthrow, build, and plant” (1:10); his message actually accomplishes the work of tearing

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Polk, *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self*, JSOTSup 32 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 7.

<sup>2</sup> See Joep Dubbink, “Getting Closer to Jeremiah: The Word of YHWH and the Literary-Theological Person of a Prophet,” in *Reading Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence*, ed. Martin Kessler (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 25-39.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 26.

<sup>4</sup>Peter Adam, *Hearing God’s words: Exploring biblical spirituality*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 74-75.

<sup>5</sup> Polk, *The Prophetic Persona*, 170-71.

<sup>6</sup> See Else K. Holt, “Word of Jeremiah—Word of God,” in *Uprooting and Planting: Essays on Jeremiah for Leslie Allen*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, 459 (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 175-81. This root appears in 1:1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17.

down and building up.<sup>7</sup> However, the prophet's message only has this power because it is Yahweh himself who is ultimately watching over "his words" to bring them about (1:12).

This blurring of the words of Yahweh and his prophet is evident throughout the book. Holt notes that there are three voices in Jeremiah's Temple Sermon in 7:1-15.<sup>8</sup> The narrator informs that the "word of Yahweh" came to Jeremiah (v. 1). Yahweh then commands the prophet to speak "his word" (v. 2a), and Jeremiah's opening statement is to be "Thus says Yahweh" (v. 3a). The remainder of the sermon is thus Yahweh "speaking in Jeremiah's quotation marks."<sup>9</sup> In the formation of the written scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies in chapter 36, Baruch records the "words" of Yahweh that are spoken "from the mouth" (פִּהּ + מִן) of the prophet (cf. 36:4, 6, 17, 18, 27, 32). When Baruch reads the words of Jeremiah, the royal official Micaiah hears the words of Yahweh (36:10-11).<sup>10</sup> In addition to the proclamation of the divine word, Jeremiah often provides further incarnation of Yahweh's message by communicating in the form of powerful sign acts.<sup>11</sup> Both word and act "accomplish God's work."<sup>12</sup> The underlying theological reason for this blending of the voices of Yahweh and the prophet is the conviction that Jeremiah is reporting what he has seen and heard while standing "in the council of Yahweh" (23:18-22). The word of Yahweh has overpowered Jeremiah like fire in his bones, and the prophet cannot help but speak the message Yahweh has given him (20:9). Even more than that, because he has consumed Yahweh's words, Jeremiah himself becomes an expression of that word to the nation of Judah (15:16).

Jeremiah the prophet testifies to the faithfulness of Yahweh in providing his word even when it appears that his covenant with Israel is hopelessly fractured. As Dubbink notes, Jeremiah's ministry guarantees that "even in judgment, there is at least one prophet proclaiming the word of YHWH."<sup>13</sup> From the time of Moses, God had promised a succession of prophets for the people of Israel (Deut 18:15-18), and Jeremiah at a time of great crisis calls the people to repentance, warns of the coming judgment, and promises the future restoration of Israel because of Yahweh's everlasting love.<sup>14</sup> Jeremiah identifies the exiles taken away to Babylon in 597 B.C. as the "good figs" that will be the objects of Yahweh's gracious restoration (cf. 24:4-7; 29:10-14), but Jeremiah's ministry is to share in the anguish and suffering of those Judean communities that stand under God's judgment. His lot is to minister the word of Yahweh among the "bad figs." Following the deportation of 597 B.C., Jeremiah endures various forms of imprisonment until the city of Jerusalem itself becomes a prison. The prophet experiences firsthand the horrors of the final Babylonian siege of Jerusalem and the fall of the city. When given the option of being taken to Babylon where he would enjoy favorable treatment from his captors following the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah instead chooses to stay with Gedaliah and the poor

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<sup>7</sup> Holt, (Ibid., 177) notes that this string of 6 verbs (נָחַץ, נָחַץ, אָבַד, הָרַס, בָּנָה, and נִטַּע) or parts of this string are used six other places in Jer outside of ch. 1 and that God is the subject of these verbs in every other instance (12:14-17; 18:7, 9; 24:6; 31:28; 42:10; 45:4).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 179-81.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 180. With vv. 1-2 not appearing in Jeremiah LXX, this blending of the voices of Yahweh and prophet is not as pronounced as in the MT.

<sup>10</sup> J. Andrew Dearman, "My Servants the Scribes: Composition and Context in Jeremiah 36," *JBL* 109 (1990): 405, n. 7.

<sup>11</sup> These sign acts include: the ruined loincloth (13:1-7), the prohibition against Jeremiah marrying and having children (16:1-4), the two visits to the potter (18-19), the wearing of a yoke (27:1-15), the purchase of family property at Anathoth (32:1-15), the burial of stones at the Pharaoh's palace in Egypt (43:8-13), and the throwing of the scroll into the Euphrates river (by Seraiah on behalf of Jeremiah) (51:59-64). For a detailed analysis of the message, rhetoric, and function of these prophetic sign acts, see Kelvin G. Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication*, JSOTSup 284 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Adam (*Hearing God's Words*, 76), makes the important point that the prophet employed the sign acts, not because the spoken word alone was ineffectual, but rather because the spiritual dullness of the people required a more forceful and dramatic presentation of the message.

<sup>13</sup> Dubbink, "Getting Closer to Jeremiah," 35.

<sup>14</sup> For the essential message of Jeremiah, see Louis Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos: Jeremiah as Symbolic Tapestry*, The Biblical Seminar, 57 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). Stulman develops the first half of the book (chs. 1-25) as Jeremiah's message of Yahweh tearing down and the second half of the book (chs. 26-52) as his message of Yahweh building up.

people remaining in the land (40:1-6). After Jeremiah is kidnapped and taken away to Egypt (43:1-7), he spends the remainder of his life ministering to a community that refuses to turn from its pagan ways and that is threatened with divine destruction (44:16-19, 24-30). Jeremiah truly models an incarnational ministry as he becomes the word of Yahweh for those who most need it.

### Rejection of the Word of Yahweh and Persecution of the Prophet

Jeremiah the prophet also embodies the word of Yahweh in that the people's rejection of the divine message particularly expresses itself in the form of abuse and persecution toward the prophet. Holt writes that the people's response to the word of Yahweh is "personified in the prophet and his fate."<sup>15</sup> Jeremiah reminds the people that their central covenantal responsibility is to obey Yahweh's word (cf. 11:2,3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14), and the recurring charge in the primarily narrative materials of Jeremiah 26-45 is that Judah has not "listened to/obeyed" the word of Yahweh and his prophet (cf. 26:5; 29:19, 32-33; 34:14, 17; 35:14-17; 36:31; 37:2, 14; 40:3; 42:13, 21; 43:7; 44:16, 23). This rejection of the divine message extends from kings to religious leaders to the people themselves. Ebed-Melech (a foreigner no less), certain royal officials, the Rechabite clan, and the faithful scribes Baruch and Seraiah are held forth as rare examples of faith and obedience in the midst of this pervasive national unbelief. As was true of Israel's past, the people stubbornly refuse to turn from their sinful ways (5:3; 7:13, 25-26; 19:15; 35:15) and they ignore Jeremiah's warnings (18:12; 44:16). When the prophet calls the people to return to the "ancient paths" of God's law, they answer, "We will not walk in it" (6:16). When he sounds the trumpet warning of impending disaster, they respond, "We will not listen" (6:17).

Because of this unbelief, Jeremiah suffers various forms of physical abuse and persecution throughout his ministry that include the following:

- 1) The men of Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown seek to put the prophet to death (11:21)
- 2) Jeremiah is beaten and imprisoned at the command of the priest Pashhur (20:1-2)
- 3) People and leaders call for Jeremiah's death after his Temple Sermon (26:7-11)
- 4) Prophetic opponents like Hananiah counter Jeremiah's message of a long-lasting exile with a more hopeful and positive message (28)
- 5) Shemaiah the priest writes from Babylon calling for Jeremiah's censure and arrest (29:24-28)
- 6) Jehoiakim destroys Jeremiah's scroll and seeks to punish the hidden prophet (36:19-26)
- 7) Jeremiah is confined and imprisoned at various places and times during the reign of Zedekiah (32:2; 33:1; 37:13-15; 38:13, 28; cf. 20:1-6)
- 8) Jeremiah is thrown into a cistern and left to die by Zedekiah's royal officials (38:1-13)
- 9) Jeremiah is kidnapped and taken away to Egypt by a group of military officers who call the prophet a liar and reject his counsel (43:1-7)

These attacks on the prophet represent an attack on the word of Yahweh itself. Zedekiah's officials throw Jeremiah into the cistern and keep the prophet confined because they wish to silence and suppress his message of the need for submission to the Babylonians (cf. 37:11-21; 38:1-6, 24-28). The officials are angry that Jeremiah's "words" are weakening the war effort (38:4), and Zedekiah tells the prophet, "Let no one know of these words and you shall not die" (38:24). When Jehoiakim cuts up the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies in chapter 36, his real desire is to take the sword to Jeremiah himself as he had done with the prophet Uriah (26:20-23), and it is only Yahweh's hiding of the prophet

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<sup>15</sup> Holt, "Word of Jeremiah-Word of Yahweh," 174.

and the support of certain key officials that protect Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch from a similar fate (26:24; 36:19, 26).

Despite the intense hostility that Jeremiah faces, Yahweh ultimately delivers the prophet from those who oppose him. The deliverance of Jeremiah the man from these various forms of opposition and persecution testifies to the indestructibility of Yahweh's word and the certainty of its fulfillment (1:16-19). In chapters 27-29, the false prophets who oppose Jeremiah attempt to offset his message by mirroring his actions as a true prophet. Jeremiah wears an animal yoke to symbolize Judah's long term submission to Babylonian hegemony (27:2), but Hananiah breaks the yoke in order to present the counter-message that the exile will be short-lived (28:10-11). As Yahweh's prophet, it is Jeremiah who has the final word. Yahweh announces that he will replace the wooden yoke with a yoke of iron that will not be broken (28:14), and Jeremiah proclaims a death sentence on Hananiah that is carried out within two months (28:15-17), fitting punishment for Hananiah's message that the exile would last only for "two years" (28:15-17). In chapter 29, Jeremiah writes a letter exhorting the exiles to submit to Babylon (vv. 1-23) that is countered by Shemaiah's letter from Babylon to the high priest calling for Jeremiah's censure and punishment (vv. 24-28). Jeremiah then sends a second letter that contains an oracle of doom against Shemaiah (vv. 31-32). By opposing God's spokesman, Shemaiah has signed his own death warrant.<sup>16</sup> In chapter 36, Jehoiakim cuts up the prophetic scroll because he "thinks so lightly of Yahweh that he assumes he can destroy Yahweh's written word and thus change the prophecy," but Yahweh reaffirms that the judgment announced by Jeremiah would come to pass and commissions the prophet to record another scroll (36:28-32).<sup>17</sup> The prophet himself is as indestructible as the scroll. Jeremiah experiences various forms of confinement in chapters 37-38, but as Holt notes, the release of the prophet when the city of Jerusalem falls to the Babylonians (39:16-18) "clearly signifies that the word of God will defeat any human resistance and will be fulfilled in the end."<sup>18</sup>

### Jeremiah's Emotional Anguish and His Role as Representative Figure

The characterization of Jeremiah as "the weeping prophet" demonstrates the degree to which the prophet's life and message reflect deep emotional anguish. The prophet is greatly moved by the horrors of the judgment about to befall his people (cf. 4:19-21; 9:1), and the emotional intensity of the prophet's depictions of this coming judgment are designed to move the people to repentance. Jeremiah's Confessions (cf. 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-27; 20:7-18) are laments in which the prophet complains to Yahweh regarding the abuses and injustices he experiences in fulfilling his prophetic office. Jeremiah's life demonstrates what it costs to be a prophet of Yahweh and to preach judgment to a people who only want to hear of peace and prosperity. The difficulty of Jeremiah's calling is particularly reflected in the *inclusio* formed by the word "womb" in chapters 1-20. God has called Jeremiah from before he was in the "womb" (בֶּחַי) (1:4), but it is this divine calling on his life that causes Jeremiah to curse the day of his birth and to question why he ever came forth from the "womb" (בֶּחַי) (20:14-18).

Beyond expressing the prophet's personal grief and anguish, the emotional language of Jeremiah also reflects the representative role of Jeremiah the man. As a mediator between Yahweh and Israel, Jeremiah first represents Yahweh to Israel, and his emotions enable the people to see both the anger and compassion that Yahweh has toward them. At another level, Jeremiah represents the people before Yahweh, and his laments seek to motivate Yahweh to act on his

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<sup>16</sup> These incidents in chs. 27-29 also help future generations to see that the message of the prophets of peace leads to death, while it is prophets of judgment like Jeremiah who point the way to real hope for Israel's future.

<sup>17</sup> J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 187.

<sup>18</sup> Holt, "Word of Jeremiah—Word of God," 175.

behalf and on behalf of the people by delivering them from judgment. As a representative figure, Jeremiah's own experiences also prefigure how Yahweh will deal with his people and provide assurance that Yahweh will ultimately redeem and restore them.

### Jeremiah Representing Yahweh to the People

The prophet's highly emotional language communicates to the people the raw emotion of Yahweh himself. As Polk has observed, Jeremiah's intimate knowledge of Yahweh that has come through ingesting his words (15:16) "means a sharing of God's emotions."<sup>19</sup> The prophet is full of Yahweh's wrath (6:11), and Jeremiah's imprecations reflect Yahweh's righteous hatred of Judah's sin and rebellion (11:20; 12:3-4; 15:15; 17:18; 18:21-23; 20:12). The harsh language of imprecation is merited because the people's rejection of the prophet is in fact a rejection of Yahweh. Lundbom writes, "Jeremiah is not seeking a personal vengeance, rather the vengeance of Yahweh, which is appropriate punishment for wrongdoing."<sup>20</sup> It is the fierce anger of Yahweh, not of the prophet, that will ultimately bring about Judah's destruction (cf. 12:13; 18:23).<sup>21</sup>

Beyond God's wrath and anger, Jeremiah also expresses Yahweh's grief and sorrow over the devastation that he inflicts upon Judah. Jeremiah is the weeping prophet because he speaks for the weeping God. This conjoining of divine and prophetic grief is most evident in passages such as 4:19-21; 8:18-9:3[4]; 10:17-21; 13:17-19; and 14:17-18. Beyond the difficulty of often being unable to clearly distinguish between the overlapping voices of people, prophet, and God in these passages, there is the larger question of whether the weeping and grief in these texts is that of Yahweh, the prophet, or both. Biddle<sup>22</sup>, O'Connor<sup>23</sup>, and Roberts<sup>24</sup> emphasize almost exclusively the weeping of Yahweh, and Roberts connects these passages to the larger lament tradition of the ancient Near East where gods and goddesses frequently abandon their cities and weep over their destruction. Other scholars, such as Lundbom<sup>25</sup>, Allen<sup>26</sup>, and Henderson<sup>27</sup> view these expressions of grief as almost exclusively the voice of the prophet, noting that the normal

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<sup>19</sup> Polk, *The Prophetic Persona*, 56.

<sup>20</sup> Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 21A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 638. Such imprecatory language appears more than thirty times in the Psalms (cf. Pss 5:10; 6:10; 7:6, 9, 15-16; 9:19-20; 10:15; 17:13; 28:4; 31:17-18; 35:1, 4-6, 8, 19, 24-26; 40:14-15; 52:5; 54:5; 55:9, 15; 56:7; 58:6-10; 59:5, 11-13; 68:1-2, 10; 69:22-25, 27-28, 70:2-3; 71:13; 74:11, 22-23, 79: 6, 10, 12; 83:9, 11, 13-18; 94:1-2; 104:35; 109:6-15, 17-20, 29; 129:5-8; 137:7-9; 139:19, 21-22; 140:8-11; 141:10; and 143:12. For the theological and ethical issues involved with reading these imprecations as Christian Scripture, see John N. Day, "The Imprecatory Psalms and Christian Ethics," *BibSac* 159 (2002): 166-86.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph M. Henderson ("Who Weeps in Jeremiah VIII 23 (IX 1)? Identifying Dramatic Speakers in the Poetry of Jeremiah," *VT* 52 [2002]: 198-99) notes the recurring motif of Yahweh's anger toward Israel in chs. 1-25 from the following passages: Yahweh threatens to bring destruction from the north (4:6), invites predators to destroy his vineyard (5:6), commands the prophet not to pray for the people (7:11, 14, 15), sends serpents to bite the people (8:17), gives the people wormwood and poisoned water to drink (9:15), brings distress so that the people will feel it (10:18), will not respond when the people cry to him (11:11), abandons Judah because he hates her (12:7-8), resolves not to pity, spare, or show compassion (13:14), will consume even when the people cry out to him (14:12), will send foreign enemies because his anger will burn forever (15:13-14), will hurl them from the land and show no favor (16:13), will turn his back on the people in the day of their calamity (18:15), and will break them like a potter's vessel (19:10-11).

<sup>22</sup> Mark E. Biddle, *Polyphony and Symphony in Prophetic Literature: Rereading Jeremiah 7-20*, Studies in Old Testament Interpretation, 2 (Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 1996), 28-31.

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen M. O'Connor, "The Tears of God and Divine Character in Jeremiah 2-9," in *Troubling Jeremiah*, JSOTSup 260, eds. A. R. P. Diamond, K. O'Connor, and L. Stulman (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 387-402

<sup>24</sup> J. J. M. Roberts, "The Motif of the Weeping God in Jeremiah and its Background in the Lament Tradition of the Ancient Near East," *Old Testament Essays* 5 (1992): 361-74.

<sup>25</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 528-39 (for his treatment of Jer 8:18-9:1[2]).

<sup>26</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: WJKP, 2008), 105-13 (for his treatment of 8:4-23[9:1]).

<sup>27</sup> Henderson, "Who Weeps in Jeremiah VIII 23 (IX 1)?" 191-206.

pattern in laments in the Hebrew Bible is for the human petitioner to express his grief to God as a means of motivating God to action. Taking a more mediating approach, Brueggemann<sup>28</sup> and Fretheim<sup>29</sup> would hear both the voice of God and the prophet. Fretheim argues “that readers are not asked to make a sharp distinction between the voice of the prophet and the voice of God in these and other lamenting texts; in them we can hear the language of both.”<sup>30</sup> Fretheim understands God’s voice as “primary” and states that “if Jeremiah speaks these words, it is because God first speaks them. The lamenting prophet embodies the words of a lamenting God.”<sup>31</sup>

While the prophet speaks as God’s human mouthpiece, Henderson argues that carefully distinguishing between the voices of God and prophet is important for preserving the dramatic quality of these passages as dialogue between Yahweh and Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 8:18-9:2[3], Henderson employs the titles “daughters of my people” (בָּתֵּי-עַמִּי) (8:19, 21, 22, 23; 9:1[2]) and “my people” (עַמִּי) (9:2 [3]) to distinguish between the voices of Jeremiah and Yahweh. Elsewhere in Jeremiah and the Hebrew Bible, the designation “daughter of my people” is used in passages that elicit sympathy for Zion (cf. Isa 22:4; Jer 4:11; 6:14, 26; 14:17; Lam 2:11; 3:48; 4:3, 6, 8, 10), while “my people” is used more in passages which sharply criticize unfaithful Israel or Judah (cf. Jer 2:11, 13, 31, 32; 5:31; 8:7; 11; 9:7[8], 15[16]). Thus, Henderson reads the weeping prophet as appealing to the angry deity to have compassion on his suffering people.

However, it would appear that Henderson’s approach divides too sharply between the anger and compassion of Yahweh, especially in light of the fact that there are prophetic texts which speak of Yahweh’s deep emotional commitment to his people even as he inflicts severe judgment upon them (cf. Isa 63:15; Jer 31:20; Hos 11:8-9). When Jeremiah calls for Yahweh to bring judgment against the wicked in 12:1-4, Yahweh responds that he has abandoned Judah (12:5) and that his sword will devour because of his “fierce anger” (12:12-13). Nevertheless, even this passage that expresses raw anger also contains terms which reflect Yahweh’s endearment for his people and the value he places upon them (cf. “my heritage” in vv. 7, 8; “the beloved of my soul” in v. 7; “my vineyard” in v. 10; and “my pleasant portion” in v. 10). Henderson’s use of “daughter of my people” and “my people” to distinguish the voices of prophet and Yahweh is also suspect in that Yahweh himself is the one who commands Jeremiah to take up a weeping lament on behalf of “the daughter of my people” in 14:17-18. Yahweh also makes reference to “daughter Zion” in contexts portraying the judgment of Jerusalem in chapter 6 (cf. 6:2, 23).

Dearman notes the blending of the voices of prophet and Yahweh in these lamenting texts.<sup>32</sup> In Jeremiah 4:14-22, the prophet issues a call for repentance and a stern warning of the approach of an enemy army (vv. 14-17), and this warning is characterized as an “utterance of Yahweh” (v. 17). This oracle is followed by an expression of pain and anguish over the destruction to befall Judah (vv. 19-22), and whether this distress belongs to Jeremiah or the people, there is no change of person when Yahweh clearly speaks in verse 22 and declares, “My people . . . do not know me.” This blending of voices effectively demonstrates that ultimately “no one—people, prophet, or God—remains aloof from the horror of it all.”<sup>33</sup> Even where there is dialogue between Yahweh and the prophet as lamenter, it is the grief of Yahweh that looms over these passages.<sup>34</sup> The merging of the voices of Yahweh and prophet is evident in Jeremiah

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<sup>28</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 91-95 (for his treatment of Jeremiah 8:18-9:2[3]).

<sup>29</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA.: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 103-105, 148-156.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> J. Andrew Dearman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 86-87.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>34</sup> Tremper Longman III’s (*Jeremiah, Lamentations*, NIBC [Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 2008], 50) conclusions on Jer 4:19-22 would seem to provide a balanced approach to any of these passages where there is an overlapping of the grief of Yahweh and the prophet: “It is

8:18-9:11[12] as well. The prophet's deep sorrow over the destruction that comes to his people (8:23) leads to Yahweh's anguished cry of "what else can I do because of my people?" in 9:7[8]. The weeping and grief of 9:10[11] must be that of Yahweh because it is framed by his utterance in 9:9[10] that the judgment of his people is necessary and his declaration of how he will destroy Judah and Jerusalem in 9:11[12].

The portrayal of Yahweh sharing in the grief of his prophet and people provides a countering balance to other images of the deity in the book of Jeremiah. Yahweh appears as the angry husband who will punish his unfaithful spouse in Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 and as the military commander who leads the invasion of Judah in 4:5-6:30, but the image of a weeping God allows for the possibility of hope and restoration for Israel after the judgment is over. O'Connor comments, "God's tears mean that there may be a balm in Gilead, healing may be possible because God draws near, abandons fury, leaves aside honor, and joins in the people's suffering."<sup>35</sup>

### Jeremiah Representing the People to Yahweh

Jeremiah not only speaks to Israel on Yahweh's behalf but also to Yahweh on Israel's behalf. Polk explains that Jeremiah "stands in their place before God and renders to God what is fitting and natural for them to say and do, even though, and precisely because, they cannot say and do so for themselves."<sup>36</sup> The prophet issues calls for the people to "mourn" (4:8; 6:26; 7:29; 9:18-22; 25:34), but the people have bought into the "peace, peace" message of the false prophets (6:14; 8:11) and do not see the need to weep. Thus, the tears and anguish of Jeremiah (4:19-21; 9:1-2[2-3]; 14:17-18) model how they can bring their grief to Yahweh once they have experienced the devastation of war, invasion, and exile (4:13, 31; 6:4; 10:19). Jeremiah's Confessions will help to give voice to Israel's laments in exile when they fully come to realize their desperate plight.

When speaking to Yahweh on behalf of the people, the prophet Jeremiah also expresses the people's confession of sin that is essential for their restoration. The book of Jeremiah anticipates a transformation in which Judah will move from refusal to acknowledge its sin (2:23, 35) to true repentance and confession (3:22-25). Jeremiah preaches to a people who had forgotten how to blush and that knew no "shame" (*בוש*) (6:12; 8:15), but there would come a time in the future restoration when Israel would feel an appropriate sense of "shame" (*בוש*) over its dismal condition (31:18-19). Because the people were lacking a true understanding of their condition, Jeremiah not only calls on them to repent (3:22a), but also gives them the words that are the proper expression of such repentance:

Behold, we come to you, for you are the LORD our God. Truly the hills are a delusion, the orgies on the mountains. Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. But from our youth the shameful thing has devoured all for which our fathers labored, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonor cover us. For we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and we have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God (3:22b-25).

Jeremiah models the people's confession when they truly return to Yahweh, but Yahweh also initially rejects the confession of Judah's sins by the prophet and people. In Jeremiah 14:1-15:9, two laments of the people and prophet (14:1-9, 17-22) are met by Yahweh's refusal to forgive and relent from sending judgment (14:10-11; 15:1-9). As far as the words expressed, the laments are perfectly acceptable. The confessions of sin in 14:7, 19d parallel the model

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probably best . . . to understand these verses as the prophet's lament followed by an answer from God, but the ambiguity does remind us of the close connection between God and his spokesperson. Indeed, God was torn by what he states is the necessity of the impending judgment."

<sup>35</sup> O'Connor, "The Tears of God," 400.

<sup>36</sup> Polk, *The Prophetic Persona*, 47.



confession in 3:22-25. The people acknowledge that they are “faithless” (משׁוֹבֵה, 14:7; cf. “Return, o faithless sons,” 3:22), that they have sinned (חַטָּאנוּ, 14:7; 3:25), and that they are in need of healing (רפּא, 14:19; cf. “I will heal,” 3:22). The petitions for Yahweh to deliver and the motivations offered for Yahweh’s intervention (his reputation, his covenant, his relationship with Israel) fall in line with the lament tradition of the Psalms. However, as Allen notes, these laments and petitions only had their desired effect “if the covenant relationship was healthy” (cf. Pss 34:15-19; 91:14-15; 145:18-19).<sup>37</sup> Yahweh rejects Judah’s prayer because the people “love to wander” and there is no change of behavior to match their words (14:10).<sup>38</sup> Yahweh commands the prophet not to pray for the people (14:11-12) and states that even the prayers of Moses and Samuel, Israel’s great intercessors from the past, would not turn him from his determination to destroy Israel (15:1-2).<sup>39</sup> For the present, Judah’s insincere confession means that Yahweh will “remember their iniquity and punish their sin” (14:10), but Jeremiah looks forward to the reversal of that judgment as well. When Yahweh “restores the fortunes” of Israel, the people will truly acknowledge their sin, and Yahweh will then “forgive their iniquity” and “remember their sin no more” (31:34).<sup>40</sup>

In his Confessions, Jeremiah’s prayers for his personal deliverance ultimately give voice to Israel’s prayers for deliverance from exile, especially for the righteous who suffer through national calamity in spite of their personal godliness (cf. 11:20; 12:1-4; 15:15; 17:14, 18; 20:12).<sup>41</sup> Jeremiah’s protests of innocence (15:10, 15, 19; 17:16; 18:16-17) and accusatory language toward Yahweh (15:17-18; 20:7) encourage the righteous to boldly bring their complaints to Yahweh as well.<sup>42</sup> In response to the prophet’s laments in chapters 12 and 15, Yahweh first speaks a word of reprimand followed by a promise of deliverance (12:5-6; 15:19-21). If Jeremiah will “turn” (שׁוּב) to Yahweh, then Yahweh will “restore” (שׁוּב) him so that he might fulfill his role as prophet (15:19). Similarly, the people must “turn” (שׁוּב) to Yahweh so that he might “restore their fortunes” (שׁוּב שְׁבוּת) (30:3; 33:26). Yahweh promises to “save” (יִשַׁע) both his prophet (15:21; 17:14) and his people (30:7, 10, 11; 31:7; 33:16).<sup>43</sup> Jeremiah prays for “healing” (רפּא) of his “wound” (מכה) (15:18; 17:14), and Yahweh will “heal” (רפּא) Israel’s incurable “wound” (מכה) as well (30:17; 33:6).<sup>44</sup> Jeremiah laments that he experiences constant “sorrow” (יְגוֹן) in carrying out his prophetic commission (20:18), but his message of hope is that Yahweh will turn Israel’s “sorrow” (יְגוֹן) into rejoicing (31:13).

### Jeremiah’s Life as Paradigm for Israel’s Experiences in Exile

<sup>37</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah*, 169.

<sup>38</sup> For the problem of Judah’s repentance being only a pretense, cf. also 3:5; 5:2; 14:10; 34:15-17. See Polk, *The Prophetic Persona*, 70.

<sup>39</sup> Between the two rejected laments and even after he is commanded not to pray for Judah, Jeremiah continues to plead the people’s case. The prophet argues that Judah has not properly responded to Yahweh because they have been misled by the prophets who offered empty words of peace. In this instance, Jeremiah is not only speaking for the people but he is also speaking against Yahweh. Yahweh responds that both prophets and people will perish by the sword (14:13-16).

<sup>40</sup> For Jer 31:34 as a reversal of Jer 14:10, see Dearman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 153-54.

<sup>41</sup> While Jer 5:1-7 speaks hyperbolically of there not being a single righteous person in Jerusalem for whom Yahweh might spare the city from judgment, Ezek 9:4 presents a contrasting image in which a messenger from Yahweh puts a mark on the righteous so that they might be preserved as a faithful remnant. In times of national calamity, both the wicked and the righteous suffer together.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. 45:3, where Baruch brings the same type of complaint to Yahweh. Jeremiah’s Confessions stand in line with the larger prayer tradition of the Hebrew Bible. For the use of accusatory language toward God as a vital component of prayer, see Craig Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study*, JSOTSup 52 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989). Broyles finds this type of language in sixty different verses in the Psalms (cf. Pss 6:4; 10:1; 13:2; 22:2, 3, 16; 35:17; 39:6, 12; 42:8, 10; 43:2; 44:10-15, 20, 24, 25; 60:3-5, 12; 74:1, 11; 77:8-10; 79:5; 80:5-7, 13; 85:6; 88:6-9, 15-19; 89:39-47, 50; 90:3, 5, 8, 13; 102:11, 24; 108:12).

<sup>43</sup> Polk, *The Prophetic Persona*, 135.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Jeremiah's own life and experiences becomes paradigmatic of how Yahweh will deliver his people from the bondage of exile. Stulman explains that the prophet Jeremiah functions as a "foil character" in that his fate "will parallel and counter that of Judah's."<sup>45</sup> The element of contrast is present because of the faithfulness of the prophet versus the unfaithfulness of the people. Jeremiah was "consecrated" (Hiphil of קדש) to Yahweh from before his birth and was called when he was still a "youth" (נער) (1:4-7). Because of his faithfulness to Yahweh's calling on his life despite the difficult attendant circumstances, the prophet becomes "a fortified city" (1:18-19) that his enemies would not be able to overcome. Similarly, Israel was "consecrated" (Hiphil of קדש) as Yahweh's wife in her "youth" (נער) (2:2), but she turned from Yahweh and became an unfaithful prostitute (2:23-24).<sup>46</sup> As a result of this disobedience, the fortified city of Jerusalem would go down in ruins (ch. 39).

At the same time, despite his faithfulness to Yahweh's calling, Jeremiah also shares in the people's experience of suffering and exile. Jeremiah is not to marry or to have children because Judah's children will be taken away by sword, famine, and disease (16:1-4). Before the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon, Jeremiah experiences various forms of confinement and imprisonment that prefigure the coming exile (cf. 20:1-2; 32:2-3; 37:15-21; 38:1-13, 28). Leuchter comments on how the confinement of the prophet in the narrative material in Jeremiah 26-45 symbolizes the national exile of Judah:

Jeremiah himself becomes a character in the narratives within the Supplement, manipulated by the author as a symbol of the deportees' own experience. He shares in the prohibition from living in his ancestral homeland (Jer 37:11-14), he is imprisoned and given rations like Jehoiachin (Jer 37:15; cf. 2 Kgs 25:27, 30; Jer 38:32-34), and he is cast into a pit (בור), only to sink into the mud in a miserable sort of nether existence (Jer 38:6), paralleling the questions of the afterlife that would have accompanied the exile to Babylon. Indeed, his experience in the pit is reflected in a dirge to Zedekiah by the women of the royal circles who are brought to Babylon, though this dirge is couched in liturgical terminology (Jer 38:22). Finally, Jeremiah is forcibly taken captive to a foreign land (Jer 43:6-7), to live among a people who are not part of the covenantal community.<sup>47</sup>

Jeremiah's release from prison when the Babylonians capture the city of Jerusalem (cf. 39:11-14; 40:1-6) not only contrasts the fate of the faithful prophet to that of the wicked city but also offers hope of Judah's future deliverance. The book closes with the prophet in his own exile in Egypt (chs. 43-44), but Jeremiah has survived all of the ordeals he has faced, and there is no record of his death. Jeremiah's message promises a future hope for Israel (cf. 29:10-14), and Jeremiah's own life symbolizes and represents this hope. As McConville explains, Jeremiah's life demonstrates that while the exile was a form of death, the reality is that "the nation is merely dormant, awaiting revival."<sup>48</sup> Jeremiah's experiences reflect that "Faithful 'Judah' cannot be held by Babylon; the glories promised by the vindicated prophet of YHWH may yet follow."<sup>49</sup>

While Jeremiah's life offers hope for Israel's future, his story does not point to a smooth transition from exile to restoration for the nation. Jeremiah ends his life outside the land of promise, and his message that the exile will last for seventy years (cf. 25:11-12; 29:10) means that the generation experiencing the exile will not be the same as the one

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<sup>45</sup> Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos*, 148.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26-45* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 145. This motif is especially prominent in chapters 37, where two scenes of confinement for Jeremiah (37:11-16 and 38:1-13) are followed by the account of the fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent confinement of the city (39:1-13). This structure suggests that the fate of the city is just deserts for the treatment of the prophet by Judah's leaders and their rejection of the prophetic word.

<sup>48</sup> J. Gordon McConville, *Judgment and Promise: an Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 132.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

that ultimately enjoys the restoration.<sup>50</sup> The experiences of the remnant remaining in the land immediately after the fall of Jerusalem in chapters 40-43 are exactly the opposite of those promised in connection with the restoration of Israel in chapters 30-33.<sup>51</sup> The limited nature of the immediate promise reflected in Jeremiah's continuing adversity even after his release by the Babylonians parallels the minimal promises that Yahweh extends to other faithful individuals in the book.<sup>52</sup> The Rechabites, Ebed-Melech, and Baruch are promised survival and preservation of their lives but little more (cf. 35:18-19; 39:15-18; 45:4-5).<sup>53</sup> In the oracle promising his survival, Baruch is also instructed not to seek "great things" (גדלות) for himself (45:4), signifying that Baruch as one of Jeremiah's contemporaries "would not live to see and enjoy the great things that God would do to bring about the restoration of Judah and Israel."<sup>54</sup> Both Jeremiah and his faithful followers prefigure in their own life-experiences what lies ahead for Israel as the people of God in the aftermath of exile.<sup>55</sup>

### Intertextuality and the Portrayal of Jeremiah the Prophet

Intertextual connections to other portions of the Hebrew Bible inform a fuller understanding of the portrayal of Jeremiah the prophet and his theological significance. These intertextual relationships particularly serve to heighten various forms of prophetic failure that characterize Jeremiah's ministry. However, rather than these failures pointing to deficiencies in Jeremiah's ministry as a prophet, these failures demonstrate how the unbelief and disobedience of Jeremiah's generation bring about the judgment of exile that appears to dissolve the covenantal bond between Yahweh and Israel. At the same time, other intertextual connections reflect how the book of Jeremiah holds forth the hope of the restoration and renewal of God's relationship with Israel, but this hope is one that extends beyond the lifetime of Jeremiah and belongs to a distant and uncertain future.

### Jeremiah the Prophet Like Moses

As Longman has observed, the prophet Jeremiah stands "in the line of prophets that Deuteronomy 18:14-20 announced would follow Moses' pattern."<sup>56</sup> This Moses typology is introduced in Jeremiah's call narrative at the beginning of the book (1:4-19). Jeremiah's complaint concerning his limited speaking ability (1:6) recalls Moses' protests about his lack

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<sup>50</sup>See John Hill, "Your Exile Will be Long: The Book of Jeremiah and the Unended Exile," in *Reading Jeremiah: The Search for Coherence*, 151-61.

<sup>51</sup>See Gary Yates, "New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon," *Tyn Bul* 57 (2006): 1-22.

<sup>52</sup> Scalise, "Baruch as First Reader," 306-307. For a more extended discussion of the significance of the character Ebed-Melech, see Tom Parker, "Ebed-Melech as Exemplar," in *Uprooting and Planting*, 253-59.

<sup>53</sup> Ebed-Melech and Baruch are promised their lives "as a prize of war" (39:18; 45:5; cf. 21:9), which W. L. Holladay (*Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 574) explains as "an ironic soldier's joke" conveying the idea that "when a soldier is defeated and escapes, having barely saved his life, he has at least that as booty."

<sup>54</sup> Scalise, "Baruch as First Reader," 306. Note the reference to the works of Yahweh associated with the restoration as "great and wondrous" (גדלות ופלאות) in Jer 33:3.

<sup>55</sup>One might compare the limited freedom of Jeremiah and the minimal promises to his faithful followers to the account of Jehoiachin's release from prison in Babylon so that he might eat at the king's table at the end of 2 Kgs (25:27-30) and in the appendix to Jeremiah MT (52:31-34). There is hope, but that hope is greatly muted.

<sup>56</sup> Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 21. See also Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 53-62; Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos*, 158-66; Christopher R. Seitz, "The Prophet Moses and the Canonical Shape of Jeremiah," *ZAW* 101 (1991): 3-27; and William L. Holladay, "The Background of Jeremiah's Self-Understanding," *JBL* 83 (1964): 153-64.

of eloquence (Exod 4:10).<sup>57</sup> The instruction “whatever I command you, you shall speak” in Jeremiah 1:7 and the promise that Yahweh would “put” (נָתַן) his words in Jeremiah’s mouth (1:9) closely parallel the statements concerning the “prophet like Moses” in Deuteronomy 18:18.<sup>58</sup>

The reasons for the Moses and Jeremiah parallels in the book of Jeremiah are largely negative. As Allison states, “The construction of a Moses-like Jeremiah was a rhetorically effective means of condemning Jeremiah’s contemporaries. One of the outstanding features of the Pentateuch is the interminable opposition to Moses by those he unselfishly serves. Moses’ generation was obduracy and ingratitude incarnate. At every turn the stiff-necked people rebelled against God and his servant.”<sup>59</sup> Jeremiah’s generation is just as rebellious as the people of Moses’ day (Jer 7:25-26; cf. Exod 32:9; Deut 9:7; 10:16). Both generations had offended Yahweh with their idolatries (Jer 8:19; Deut 32:31). The scroll of Jeremiah’s prophecies destroyed by Jehoiakim and then rewritten by the prophet is as much a testimony to Judah’s covenant unfaithfulness as the tablets which Moses breaks when he comes down from the mountain (cf. Jer 36:27-28; Exod 34:1).<sup>60</sup> Moses had led the people out of Egypt in Yahweh’s ultimate act of deliverance, but the book of Jeremiah recounts the inversion of Israel’s salvation history as Jeremiah returns to Egypt with a group of Judean refugees (Jer 43:1-7). Stulman comments that Jeremiah “presents the end of Israel’s story where it originated, back in Egypt.”<sup>61</sup> Even though Moses and Jeremiah are faithful servants of Yahweh, they both end their lives outside the land of promise (cf. Jer 43:6; Deut 1:37; 3:26; 4:21). Jeremiah’s prophecy of a 70-year exile means that his generation will be excluded from the covenant blessings in the same manner as the generation in Moses’ day that left Egypt but died in the wilderness because of their unbelief (cf. Jer 25:11-12; 29:10; Num 14:21-24).

In his role as covenant mediator and spokesman for Yahweh, Jeremiah’s prophetic teaching and instruction becomes a second “book of the law” for his contemporaries, fusing with the law of Yahweh as divine instruction.<sup>62</sup> The prophet calls the king and people back to the standards of justice that are particularly set forth in the book of Deuteronomy (Jer 7:6-9; 22:1-5; 34:12-17; cf. Deut 6:11, 14; 15:12-18 24:19-21).<sup>63</sup> Jeremiah’s scroll in chapter 36 provides a warning to Jehoiakim similar to the curses found in the scroll that is discovered and taken to Josiah in 2 Kings 22 (cf. Deut 28).<sup>64</sup> With the recording and proclamation of the scroll’s message, Jeremiah takes upon himself the responsibility of the king to write a copy of the law for himself (Deut 17:18-20) and of the Levites to repeatedly read God’s word to the people (Deut 31:9-13).<sup>65</sup> In warning of the covenant curses in Jeremiah 11:1-17, the prophet’s preaching reenacts the ceremony of Deuteronomy 27:9-26, in which the Levitical priests remind the people of the blessings and curses of the covenant.<sup>66</sup> Jeremiah’s preaching has a one-sided focus on the covenant curses because of the rampant infidelity that characterizes the nation of Judah in his day.

<sup>57</sup> Allison, *The New Moses*, 57.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 59. See also Else K. Holt, “Word of Jeremiah—Word of God,” 185.

<sup>61</sup> Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos*, 93.

<sup>62</sup> One observes this phenomenon in other parts of the Hebrew Bible as well. The five-book structure of the Psalms likely indicates that the “torah” to be meditated on in Psalm 1 (v. 2) at the beginning of this collection is the Psalms themselves. For development of this idea, see Michael LeFebvre, “Torah Meditation and the Psalms: The Invitation of Psalm 1,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, eds. D. Firth and P. S. Johnston (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2005), 213-25.

<sup>63</sup> Leo G. Perdue, “Baruch Among the Sages,” in *Uprooting and Planting*, 280.

<sup>64</sup> For the close relationship of 2 Kings 22 and Jeremiah 36, see pp. 19-20 below.

<sup>65</sup> Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile*, 105.

<sup>66</sup> Mark Leuchter (*Josiah’s Reform and Jeremiah’s Scroll: Historical Calamity and Prophetic Response*, Hebrew Bible Monographs [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006], 160) notes that the threat of a curse (הַאִישׁ אַרְוֶר) in v. 3 and Jeremiah’s response of אֲמֵן יְהוָה in v. 5 recalls the ceremony in Deut 27 where this exact wording occurs. Leuchter notes other connections to Deut and DH in Jer 11. The prophet commands the people to “hear the words of this covenant” (שָׁמְעוּ אֵת דְּבַר יְהוָה הַזֶּה), closely resembling the הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת of Deut 5:3 and the הַבְּרִית

The flagrant nature of the covenant infidelity of Jeremiah's generation is particularly highlighted in the contrast between Jeremiah and Moses in their roles as intercessors for the people. Throughout his life, Moses is a mediator between God and Israel and he successfully appeals for Yahweh not to destroy the people after their worship of the golden calf and their unfaithful response to the report of the spies (Exod 32:9-14; Num 14:13-20). In contrast, Jeremiah is commanded not to intercede on Judah's behalf because it is too late for the nation to be spared from judgment (cf. Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11).<sup>67</sup> In Jeremiah's day, Yahweh's relationship with Israel has deteriorated to the point that a prophet cannot even engage in his normal ministry of intercession (cf. 1 Sam 12:18-25; Amos 7:1-6). Yahweh declares that he would not spare Judah even if Moses and Samuel were to pray for them (Jer 15:1). Moses interceded at the beginning of Israel's salvation history, and the prohibition of Jeremiah praying for the people reflects how this history is coming to an end.<sup>68</sup>

Even after the finality of the fall of Jerusalem and the exile, Jeremiah continues to serve in the Mosaic role of covenant mediator, seeking to reconcile the people of Israel to Yahweh. However, in two specific episodes, covenantal renewal like that envisioned in the book of Deuteronomy is foiled by the continued disobedience of the people. The first episode occurs in Jeremiah 40-41 as Gedaliah the governor encourages the people remaining in the land to submit to the king of Babylon so that it might go well for them (40:7-10). The political context and the absence of Jeremiah from this scene would at first make this episode read "like a human, non-theological account."<sup>69</sup> However, rather than merely dispensing political advice, Gedaliah is in fact applying Jeremiah's prophetic word that Yahweh has granted Babylon temporary sovereignty over Judah and that submission to Babylon is the only way that Judah will be spared from further judgment (cf. 27:1-15; 38:2-4).<sup>70</sup> Leuchter even notes how the reference to the appointing of "men, women, and children" to Gedaliah in 40:7 recalls the assembling of the "men, women, and children" in Deuteronomy 31:12 for the purpose of reminding them of the covenant commands so that they might continuously possess the Promised Land (Deut 31:9-13).<sup>71</sup> Thus, Gedaliah is fulfilling the Deuteronomistic directive to remind the people of the word of Yahweh as he stands in the place of the prophet and reminds them of Jeremiah's (Moses-like) message concerning what is necessary for them to remain in the land. When this instruction is followed, more refugees return to the land and there is an abundant harvest (Jer 40:11-12), but this initial good fortune turns to disaster when the prophetic counsel of submission to Babylon is rejected and Gedaliah is assassinated (Jer 41:1-3).

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ספר דברי 2 Kgs 23:3, 6. Jeremiah's message in 11:6-8 "condenses the basic historical and covenantal themes of Deuteronomy." The people are to "hear" (Deut 5:1; 6:4; 9:1) and "do" (Deut 5:1; 8:1; 11:22) the commands that were ignored by their fathers (cf. Deut 9:5). These connections serve to fuse together the Mosaic commands and Jeremiah's preaching as the "law" that the people must obey in order to remain in the Promised Land.

<sup>67</sup> R. E. Clements, "Jeremiah 1-25 and the Deuteronomistic History," in *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon* (Louisville: WJKP, 1996), 113-15.

<sup>68</sup> John D. Barry (*The Resurrection of the Servant* [Bellingham, WA.: Logos Research Systems, 2010], 133) points to an even more shocking intertextual reference regarding intercession and Jeremiah's generation in Jer 5:1-7. When Jeremiah is unable to find even one righteous man in Jerusalem that might save the city from destruction, it means that Jerusalem has become even more corrupt than Sodom and Gomorrah, which was destroyed in spite of Abraham's intercession because there were not ten righteous individuals in the city (cf. Gen 18:22-33).

<sup>69</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah*, 432.

<sup>70</sup> See Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile*, 120-24.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 122-23, and 242, n. 33. Jer 40:7 reads **כִּי הִפְקִיד אֹהֶוּ אֲנָשִׁים וְנָשִׁים וְטַף** ("because he appointed to him the men, women and children"), while Deut 31:12 reads **הַקַּל אֶת הָעָם הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׂים וְהַטַּף** ("assemble the people, the men, the women, and the children"). Both passages have to do with the assembling of the people before the Levites/Gedaliah so that they might receive instruction on how to remain in the land. The terms "men, women, and children" only directly follow each other in these two passages in the Hebrew Bible (though note Jer 41:16 in this immediate context). The reference to "children" and the phrase, "... from the poor of the land" is missing in the LXX, but this omission is likely due to haplography caused by the **ו** that appears at the end of **וְנָשִׁים** and the beginning of **מֵאֲשֶׁר**.

The second episode of failed covenant renewal occurs in Jeremiah 42-43. This episode begins with a reversal of the divine prohibition against Jeremiah's intercession on Judah's behalf (42:2-4), demonstrating that the nation no longer remains under an immutable decree of judgment. There is the possibility of a new epoch in Israel's relationship with Yahweh. The "if/then" sermon of Jeremiah that follows his intercession for the people reflects the paranetic style of the "life/death" sermons in Deuteronomy 28-30 as Moses prepares Israel for entrance into the Promised Land and sets forth the blessings and curses of the covenant (cf. Deut 28:1, 15, 58).<sup>72</sup> As with the Mosaic commands, following Jeremiah's counsel as the word of Yahweh is essential for the people's continued enjoyment of the land (Jer 42:9). The people who come to Jeremiah for advice also express their willingness to obey the word of Yahweh in the same way as Moses' audience at Sinai (cf. Jer 42:5-6; Exod 19:8; 24:3). Just as Moses went away for 40 days to receive the law of God on Mount Sinai, Jeremiah receives direction from Yahweh to give to the people after ten days (Jer 42:5-7). When the contingent led by Johanan rejects Jeremiah's advice and goes down to Egypt (Jer 43:4-7), they bring upon themselves the same types of punishments spelled out in the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28 (sword, plague, and famine; cf. Jer 42:22) and particularly the ultimate curse of return to Egypt (Deut 28:68).

Jeremiah's sermon in chapter 44 reflects the depth of the covenant fracture between Yahweh and the Judean refugees who flee to Egypt. The community expresses their disregard for their covenant responsibilities toward Yahweh in a rather shocking manner. They blatantly refuse to listen to Jeremiah's calls to repentance and defiantly vow that they will continue to worship their pagan gods (44:16-17). The expressed reason for their rebellion is their belief that the Babylonian crisis was the result of the (Josianic) reforms that ended the pagan rituals and offerings (44:18-20). In response to this defiance, Jeremiah warns that Yahweh will bring death and destruction upon this community so that only a few survivors will remain (44:26-30). Both before and after the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah's work as a covenant mediator results in epic failure and covenant dissolution.

### Jeremiah and Isaiah's Servant of Yahweh

A reading of Jeremiah in conjunction with the book of Isaiah also reveals a close parallel between the mission and ministry of the prophet and the Isaianic Servant of Yahweh. Though the New Testament identifies Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's servant prophecies, an exclusively messianic understanding of the Servant does not fit with the historical context of the book of Isaiah. The Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah is a figure whose identity is shadowy and unclear.<sup>73</sup> The Servant is both corporate Israel (cf. Isa 41:8; 42:1; 44:1, 49:3; etc.) and an individual who has a ministry to Israel (Isa 49:6). The individual features of the Servant are especially prominent in the four Servant Songs in Isaiah. The Servant in Isaiah reflects royal, priestly, and prophetic features that qualify him as a second Moses.<sup>74</sup> Rather than identifying one single individual as the Servant of Yahweh, the book of Isaiah seems to present the role of the Servant as an open job description that could potentially be fulfilled by various individuals in a trajectory that culminates with Christ.<sup>75</sup> This type of pattern-prophecy characterizes other aspects of Isaiah's eschatological message as well. The

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<sup>72</sup>Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 392-94.

<sup>73</sup> For bibliographic references to the most significant and recent sources for discussion of the identity of the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah, see Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 291-92, n. 80.

<sup>74</sup> For this understanding of the Isaianic Servant, see G. P. Hugenberger, "The Servant of the Lord in the 'Servant Songs' of Isaiah: A Second Moses Figure," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, eds. P. E. Satterwaite, R. S. Hess, and G. J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 105-39. Both Jeremiah and the Servant are thus portrayed as the "prophet like Moses" anticipated in Deut 18:15-18.

<sup>75</sup> C. B. Caird (*The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985], 58-60) refers to the Servant prophecies in Isaiah as an example of a "Situation Vacant advertisement" in which the prophet "describes in some detail a person whose identity is not yet known."

mission of the individual Servant in Isaiah involves suffering and interceding on behalf of others so that Israel might be restored to its proper role as Yahweh's national Servant. As the Servant suffers for the sins of others (Isa 53:6), his death becomes a "sin offering" (אֲשָׁם) (53:10) and he effectively "intercedes" or "intervenes" (פָּגַעַ) for others (Isa 53:12). His death and intercession are effective in bringing others to God.

The prophet Isaiah himself appears to fulfill in some way the role of the Servant in his proclamation of Israel's release from Babylonian exile (cf. Isa 61:1-3). Because of the intense abuse that Jeremiah experiences in fulfilling his prophetic vocation, his identification with the Servant is a natural one. The question of the direction of influence and whether the Servant provides a pattern for Jeremiah or Jeremiah a pattern for the Servant is not as important as recognizing the commonality between the two.<sup>76</sup> The Isaianic Servant and the prophet Jeremiah are beaten, shamed, and then vindicated (cf. Isa 50:4-9; Jer 20:7-12).<sup>77</sup> Both the Servant and Jeremiah are like sheep "led to slaughter" (לִטְבַח יוֹבֵל in Isa 53:7-8 and לִטְבוּחַ יוֹבֵל in Jer 11:19) so that they are cut off "from the land of the living" (מֵאֶרֶץ חַיִּים).<sup>78</sup> The ministry of the Servant brings "healing" to others (Isa 53:5), and Jeremiah promises Yahweh's future "healing" of Israel (cf. Jer 30:17; 33:6).<sup>79</sup>

There are also important distinctions between Isaiah's Servant and the prophet Jeremiah. The Servant willingly accepts his fate (Isa 50:5-6), while Jeremiah deeply resents the abuse and ridicule he experiences as Yahweh's spokesman (Jer 20:7-9).<sup>80</sup> The Servant does not open his mouth (Isa 53:7), while Jeremiah gives full voice to his laments and complaints. Just as in the parallels between Jeremiah and Moses, Jeremiah's failure as an intercessor offers a striking contrast to the Servant. The Servant will effectively "intercede" (פָּגַעַ) for many (Isa 53:12), but Jeremiah is forbidden to "intercede" (פָּגַעַ) for the people as they face judgment from Babylon (Jer 7:16; 15:11; cf. 11:14; 14:11). Barry comments, "In juxtaposition to Jeremiah's attempt to be an intercessor, the *very role* of the Servant in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is to intercede *for* transgressors. The Servant is not trying to convince Yahweh to help the people, but instead is placed in a position *by* Yahweh where he is required to be their intercessor (53:12)."<sup>81</sup> Whether Jeremiah is the prototype for the Servant or vice versa, there is a sense of incompleteness and inadequacy on the part of Jeremiah to be and do all that belongs to the role of the Servant. Though Jeremiah suffers greatly in fulfilling his mission, he does not suffer to the point of death like the Servant. While Jeremiah in his day is ultimately unable to find even the one righteous man that would spare Jerusalem from judgment (Jer 5:1), the role of the Servant is to become that one righteous man who delivers Israel. Barry explains, "Rather than waiting for one righteous man, Yahweh puts forth his own man who has 'done no wrong' in a legal sense (53:9), so that he might make many righteous (53:11)."<sup>82</sup> Despite these inadequacies, there is still a very real sense in which the ministry of Jeremiah anticipates the restoration to be accomplished by the ultimate Servant of Yahweh who will suffer on Israel's behalf.

## Jeremiah and the Kings of Judah

<sup>76</sup> Because of the generally recognized exilic setting of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40-55), the scholarly tendency is to see the Servant Songs in Isaiah as alluding to and referencing the preceding prophecies of Jeremiah. See Barry Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 64-66.

<sup>77</sup> Sommer (Ibid., 64-65), provides a fuller summary of the correspondences between these two passages.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 65. Sommer further notes 16 other examples of shared vocabulary between Isa 53 and Jer 11:18-20. A close connection between these two passages seems beyond dispute.

<sup>79</sup> R. N. Whybray, *Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet: An Interpretation of Isaiah Chapter 53*, JSOTSup 4 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), 62.

<sup>80</sup> Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 64-65.

<sup>81</sup> Barry, *The Resurrected Servant in Isaiah*, 134.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 133.

Jeremiah's conflicts with Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, the last two kings of Judah, echo other confrontations between prophet and king in the Hebrew Bible. Jeremiah's warnings to Zedekiah concerning the fall of Jerusalem if the king persists in his resistance to Babylon (cf. Jer 32:2-5; 34:1-7; 37:6-10; 38:2-3, 17-23) contrast with Isaiah's promises to Hezekiah concerning the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrians a century earlier (cf. 2 Kgs 19:5-7, 32-34). Zedekiah's request for Jeremiah to intervene so that Yahweh might perhaps "deal with us according to all his wonderful deeds" (Jer 21:2; cf. 37:3) reflects the king's hope that there might be a deliverance on par with what Yahweh had done when he destroyed the Assyrian army that surrounded Jerusalem in 701 B.C., but Jeremiah refuses to offer any such promise. Isaiah prophesied that the Assyrian king would not enter the gates of Jerusalem (1 Kgs 19:33); Jeremiah warns that Jerusalem will be captured and burned (Jer 37:8-10, 17; 38:3, 18, 21-23). In Isaiah's day, Yahweh miraculously destroyed the Assyrian army (2 Kgs 19:35-38); Jeremiah warns that even a major setback or defeat for the Babylonian army will not prevent the capture of Jerusalem (Jer 37:6-10). There are striking differences between Isaiah and Jeremiah, and in fact, the only figure that Jeremiah resembles from the Isaiah/Hezekiah story is the Assyrian Rabshakeh, the military commander who warns Hezekiah that trusting in Yahweh to deliver Jerusalem is futile and foolish (cf. 2 Kgs 18:19-25, 28-35; 19:8-13).<sup>83</sup> Rudmon comments, "The Rabshakeh and Jeremiah at different times present a message which is essentially the same: they seek to encourage the people to accept exile and not to resist the imperial power . . . on the basis that its current hegemony, and its destruction of Jerusalem is the work of Yahweh."<sup>84</sup> Diamond notes that such a comparison "risks undermining Jeremiah's authority" because it raises the question for the reader if Jeremiah's opponents are not correct in seeing Jeremiah as an apostate and a traitor (cf. Jer 38:4; 43:2-3).<sup>85</sup>

However, rather than faulting Jeremiah for being a lesser prophet than Isaiah, the narrative is in fact placing blame for the fall of Jerusalem on the unbelief of Zedekiah. Unlike Hezekiah who trusted Yahweh and acted in accordance with that faith (cf. 2 Kgs 19:1-4, 14-19, Zedekiah and his officials "did not listen to the word of Yahweh" (Jer 37:1-2), and it is Zedekiah's fearful unwillingness to follow Jeremiah's counsel of submission to Babylon (cf. Jer 38:2, 17-18, 20-23) that leads to the fall of Jerusalem. Though not promising a miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem, Jeremiah did provide the king with a viable way for the city to be spared from destruction.

While the contrast between Hezekiah and Zedekiah is more implicit, there is an explicit contrast between the faithful response of Hezekiah and the hostile unbelief of Jehoiakim in Jeremiah 26. Following Jeremiah's Temple Sermon, certain officials appeal to Micah's warning of the destruction of Jerusalem and Hezekiah's repentant response (Jer 26:17-19; cf. Mic 3:12) as grounds for why Jeremiah should not be put to death for preaching judgment against Jerusalem and the Temple. This argument based on the faithful response of Hezekiah wins the day and saves Jeremiah's life. However, this account of Jeremiah's vindication is immediately followed by a brief appendix recounting how Jehoiakim had the prophet Uriah executed for preaching the same message of judgment as Jeremiah (Jer 26:20-24). Rather than being repentant and contrite like Hezekiah, Jehoiakim puts God's messenger to death.

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<sup>83</sup> See Dominic Rudmon, "Is the Rabshakeh Also Among the Prophets? A Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings XVIII 17-35," *VT* 50 (2000): 105-6; and A. R. Diamond, "Portraying Prophecy: Of Doublets, Variants and Analogies in the Narrative Representation of Jeremiah's Oracles—Reconstructing the Hermeneutics of Prophecy," *JSOT* 57 (1993): 99-119. Diamond sets forth several direct parallels between the characters of the Rabshakeh and Jeremiah, which include: 1) both crush hope of relief from the assistance of the Egyptian army (cf. 2 Kgs 18:21; Jer 37:7); 2) both turn from the leadership to the populace at large to make their appeals for Judah to surrender (2 Kgs 18:31-32; Jer 38:2); and 3) the Rabshakeh views as false the idea that Jerusalem will not be given "into the hand" of the king of Assyria (2 Kgs 18:30), while Jeremiah constantly warns that the city will be given "into the hand" of the king of Babylon (Jer 37:17; 38:3, 18).

<sup>84</sup> Rudmon, "Is the Rabshakeh Also Among the Prophets?" 105-6. Rudmon's article (100-110) as a whole provides an excellent analysis of the Rabshakeh as a prophet-like figure who counters the message of Isaiah in 2 Kgs 18/Isa 36. The Rabshakeh and Isaiah both deliver their messages at "the conduit of the upper pool" (2 Kgs 18:37; Isa 7:3). Both indirectly deliver a message to Hezekiah focusing on the issue of trust at a time of military crisis. The manner in which the Rabshakeh offers to the people an alternate source of agricultural blessing and security apart from Yahweh and obedience to the covenant (2 Kgs 18:31-32; cf. Deut 28:1-7) also reflects the theological nature of his speech.

<sup>85</sup> Diamond, "Portraying Prophecy," 114.



The book of Jeremiah also unfavorably compares Jehoiakim and Zedekiah to Josiah, who is set forth in Kings as the prime example of royal obedience to Yahweh's commands (2 Kgs 23:24-25). In contrast to Josiah's practice of justice toward the needy, Jehoiakim is only concerned with the lavish decoration of his palace (Jer 22:13-17). Many scholars have recognized the commonality between the narratives in Jeremiah 36 and 2 Kings 22 that serves to portray Jehoiakim as an anti-Josiah figure.<sup>86</sup> Both passages center on the king's response to a recently discovered scroll claiming to be the word of Yahweh. While Josiah "tears" (קרע) his garments as a sign of repentance in response to the message of the scroll (2 Kgs 22:11), Jehoiakim "cuts up" (קרע) Jeremiah's scroll and throws it into the fire (Jer 36:23). While Josiah consults the prophetess Huldah and seeks further instruction from Yahweh (2 Kgs 22:12-14), Jehoiakim seeks to suppress Jeremiah's message and to have the prophet arrested (Jer 36:26). These differing responses to the word of Yahweh also result in contrasting consequences for the two kings. While Josiah receives the promise that national judgment would be delayed and that he would die in peace (2 Kgs 22:19-20), Jehoiakim is warned that he will not be mourned and that disaster will befall Jerusalem (Jer 36:30-31). Jehoiakim's burning of the scroll (36:22-23) guarantees the burning of the city of Jerusalem (cf. Jer 21:10; 32:29; 34:22; 37:10; 38:17-18, 23; 39:8; 52:13).<sup>87</sup>

Following the reign of Jehoiakim, Zedekiah makes a "Josiah-style covenant" in Jeremiah 34:8-22 in which he and the people of Judah agree to provide manumission for their slaves during the Babylonian crisis in an apparent attempt to appease God's anger for neglect of the Mosaic precepts concerning debt-slavery (cf. Exod 21:1-10; Lev 25:39-36; Deut 15:12-18).<sup>88</sup> However, the people soon "repent" (שוב) of their "repentance" (שוב) and take back the slaves they had recently released (Jer 34:11, 15-16). This short-lived commitment to follow the covenant commands contrasts to Josiah's lasting devotion and the genuine covenantal renewal in his reign that was prompted by the discovery of "the book of the law" (cf. 2 Kgs 22-23). This temporary release of slaves merely becomes another way in which the king and the people did not "obey/listen to" (שמע) the word of Yahweh (Jer 34:17). As Leuchter comments, "The portrayal of Judean society under Zedekiah demonstrates how far they have fallen from the time of Josiah; unlike that king's pious response to the discovery of Deuteronomy, Zedekiah does nothing to set the people right."<sup>89</sup> Zedekiah's obedience to Yahweh's law is only "on a ritualistic level."<sup>90</sup>

These intertextual references to earlier prophets and kings place the fault for Judah's doom with the unbelief of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah rather than with the preaching of Jeremiah. The preaching of Isaiah and Micah helped to spare Judah from destruction, but the avoidance of judgment was because of the faith and obedience of Hezekiah and Josiah. Because there is no such response in Jeremiah's day, the preaching of Jeremiah can only lead to judgment.

Exploration of the intertextual connections between Jeremiah's story and the Hebrew Bible at large reflects that Jeremiah's ministry in many ways is one of failure and disappointment. The book of Jeremiah depicts the apparent end of the office of prophet, of salvation history, and of Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel. This aspect of the

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<sup>86</sup> See Charles D. Isbell, "II Kings 22:3-23:24 and Jeremiah 36: A Stylistic Comparison," *JOT* 8 (1978): 33-45; and Scalise, "Baruch as First Reader," 292-94.

<sup>87</sup> Scalise, "Baruch as First Reader," 294.

<sup>88</sup> See Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile*, 84-94. Leuchter notes that the citation of Deut 15:12 in 34:14 is "the heart of the entire episode" (84-85). However, as Lundbom (*Jeremiah 21-37*, 558-59) notes, the general manumission of all slaves is more in line with the Jubilee Year release in Lev 25:39-46 and similar releases that occurred throughout the ANE. The expression "at the end of seven years" (מקץ שבע שנים) in 34:14 connects the manumission law in Deut 15:12 to the general sabbatical release in Deut 15:1. The earlier Josianic reforms prompted by the discovery of the book of the law in 2 Kgs 22-23 at the least suggest the strong possibility that Mosaic legislation had some influence on the actions of Zedekiah, though this release of slaves seems to reflect more conformity to the general spirit of the law than precise compliance to exact legislation. For the view that Zedekiah's manumission is not prompted by Mosaic legislation, see Simeon Chavel, "Let My People Go! Emancipation, Revelation, and Scribal Activity in Jeremiah 34.8-14," *JOT* 76 (1997): 71-95.

<sup>89</sup> Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile*, 86.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

portrayal of Jeremiah makes all the more remarkable the promises that ultimately emerge out of this book. As a second Moses, Jeremiah the prophet surpasses the first, promising a new covenant between Yahweh and Israel that will overcome the inadequacies of the first covenant when God writes his law on the hearts of his people (31:31-34; 32:38-40). After condemning the final rulers in the historical Davidic dynasty for their unbelief and disobedience, Jeremiah promises the restoration of the Davidic throne and an ideal Davidic king to sit upon that throne (23:5-6; 30:21; 33:14-26). The ways in which other parts of the Hebrew Bible have influenced the portrayal of Jeremiah the prophet enable the reader to more fully understand how the book of Jeremiah contains a message of tearing down and building up.

### The Movement from Jeremiah the Man to Jeremiah the Book

More than in any other prophetic book, there is a focus in Jeremiah on the movement from Jeremiah the man to the written text of Jeremiah's message as the vehicle of divine revelation.<sup>91</sup> Scribal activity is important to the communication of Jeremiah's message as the word of Yahweh is transferred from the mouth of the prophet to the written page. The scribes are the ones who preserve, protect, and disseminate the prophetic message. In Jeremiah 29, the prophet conveys his words of hope to the Babylonian exiles in the form of a letter that is delivered by an official named Elesah (29:1-4). This letter announces Yahweh's intent to prosper the exiles and to restore them after 70 years (29:10-14). In Jeremiah 30:1-3, Yahweh commands the prophet to write down his message of hope for Israel's restoration on a scroll. Longman comments, "Such a command underscores the importance of this message as well as a need to preserve it long term. Perhaps as well it gives the message a certain measure of assurance. It is a word that the faithful could come back to and remind themselves of God's continued involvement with them."<sup>92</sup> Jeremiah 51:59-64 makes reference to another written scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies that contains oracles of doom against Babylon (50-51). Seraiah, the brother of Baruch, reads these prophecies in Babylon and then performs a sign act that involves tying a rock around the scroll and casting it into the Euphrates River to symbolize the impending downfall of the Babylonian empire.

Scribal activity in the recording and dissemination of Jeremiah's message is most prominent in the narrative of chapter 36.<sup>93</sup> The narrative is framed by the commands for Jeremiah to write his prophecies in a scroll and the reports of Baruch the scribe doing the actual writing (36:1-8, 27-32). As Dearman notes, the word of Yahweh remains effective even when written down and read by Baruch.<sup>94</sup> This narrative particularly highlights the response of certain scribal officials to the message contained within Jeremiah's scroll (36:11-20).<sup>95</sup> After passing over with silence the people's response to the scroll when it is read at the Temple, the narrator notes that it was Micaiah who "heard" (שמע) Jeremiah's words and who reported the message to the other scribes and officers (vv. 10-13). Because they took the

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<sup>91</sup> See the discussion of "the symbolic shift from orality to writing" in Jeremiah in Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos*, 100-108.

<sup>92</sup> Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 198.

<sup>93</sup> See Dearman, "My Servants the Scribes," 403-21.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 404-405.

<sup>95</sup> Two of these officials (Micaiah and Gemariah) belong to the family of Shaphan, and Jeremiah's close relationship with this influential family is reflected throughout the book. The actions of these officers who support and defend Jeremiah in ch. 36 recall the actions of other officials who intervene on Jeremiah's behalf to keep the prophet from being put to death after his Temple Sermon (cf. Jer 26:16-19). In that chapter, Ahikam, another member of the Shaphan family, prevents Jeremiah from being handed over to the people after the prophet Uriah is put to death (Jer 26:20-24). Elashah, who delivered Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon, is Ahikam's brother (Jer 29:2-3). Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, is appointed by the Babylonians as the governor of Judah after the fall of Jerusalem (Jer 40:5). Like his scribal kin, Gedaliah also stands in the place of the place of Jeremiah in chs 40-41 and proclaims the prophetic word calling for submission and service to the king of Babylon (40:7-9) until his assassination by a member of the house of David in 41:2-3. For Jeremiah and the family of Shaphan, see Dearman, "Composition and Context in Jeremiah 36," 408-21; Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26-45*, 119-22, 166-76; and Perdue, "Baruch Among the Sages," in *Uprooting and Planting*, 277-79.

prophet's message seriously, these officers report the contents of the scroll to King Jehoiakim (vv. 14-20) and urge the king not to destroy the scroll (vv. 25-26).<sup>96</sup> The officials also take steps to protect Jeremiah and Baruch by keeping them hidden from the angry king. The making of a second scroll after Jehoiakim destroys the first (36:32) testifies to the vitality of the prophetic word.

Beyond chapter 36, Baruch plays an especially important role in the second half of the book of Jeremiah (cf. 32:1-44, esp. 12-16; 43:1-7; 45:1-4). His name appears 23 times in the text. Baruch is involved in the legal transaction when Jeremiah purchases family property from Shallum and Hanamel in chapter 32. Baruch places the documentation for the sale of the property in a clay vessel in order to preserve it for posterity (32:14). Beyond a mere legal transaction, the purchase of property is a sign act confirming Jeremiah's promise that houses, fields, and vineyards will once again be purchased in the land (32:15). By storing the documents in an earthenware vessel, Baruch thus preserves the words of the prophet for future generations. The prominent position of Jeremiah's oracle to Baruch promising the preservation of the faithful scribe's life in 45:1-4 as the conclusion to chapters 26-45 testifies to Baruch's importance in the book and likely also suggests his role in the book's composition.<sup>97</sup>

Beyond the historical data conveyed concerning the role of Baruch and others in the composition and transmission of the book of Jeremiah, the focus on scribal activity serves at least two rhetorical and theological purposes. At one level, this attention to written texts provides validation for the work of the writers and editors responsible for the final editions of the book of Jeremiah and the other closely related "Deuteronomistic" literature that emerges in the exilic period.<sup>98</sup> These scribes serve as "the guardians and the bearers of the prophetic legacy."<sup>99</sup> The manner in which

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<sup>96</sup>The way in which Jehoiakim "hears" (שמע) the words of the scroll (36:24), but does not "listen" (שמע) when the officials urge him not to destroy the scroll (36:25) contrasts to Micaiah's earlier response when he "hears" (שמע) Jeremiah's message in 36:11.

<sup>97</sup>Lundbom and others have suggest that the oracle concerning Baruch in Jeremiah 45:1-4 functions as a colophon, a scribal addendum that was the ancient Near Eastern equivalent of a title page or preface. These colophons conveyed information like the date of a text, the name of the scribe, the owner of the tablet, the reason for the writing of the text, and the blessings and curses associated with the text. Other examples of colophons in the Hebrew Bible would include Ps 41:14 [13]; 72:18-20; and Job 31:40. Colophons served a similar function as the superscriptions used in the Psalms and other texts (cf. Jer 1:1-3; 2:1; 3:1; 7:1; 11:1; 21:11; 25:1-2; Prov 25:1; Isa 38:9). Because 45:1 dates Jeremiah's oracle concerning Baruch to the fourth year of Jehoiakim, Lundbom suggests that this passage originally functioned as a colophon for the scroll composed in Jeremiah 36. At a later time, this colophon was relocated to its present position where it served as the conclusion to Jeremiah LXX. Lundbom also views the passage in 51:59-64 detailing Seraiah's reading of the scroll of doom oracles against Babylon and the attendant sign act as a colophon. This colophon originally ended the oracles against Babylon (Jer 28:59-64 in the LXX) and functions as a colophon for the book as a whole in Jeremiah MT. The statement "the words of Jeremiah end here" in 51:64 is not found in the LXX. The historical narrative concerning the fall of Jerusalem in chapter 52 was later added as an appendix to Jeremiah's prophecies. See Jack R. Lundbom, "Baruch, Seraiah, and Expanded Colophons in the Book of Jeremiah," *JOT* 36 (1986): 52-70.

<sup>98</sup>Scholars have long recognized the "Deuteronomistic" features of Jeremiah, particularly in the prose sermons of the prophet found throughout the book. See, for example, Henri Cazelles, "Jeremiah and Deuteronomy," in *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies*, eds. L. G. Perdue and B. W. Kovacs, trans. L. G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 89-111; Clements, "Jeremiah 1-25 and the Deuteronomistic History," 107-22; Gershon Galil, "The Message of the Book of Kings in Relation to Deuteronomy and Jeremiah," *BibSac* 158 (2001): 406-14; James Philip Hyatt, "The Deuteronomic Edition of Jeremiah," in *A Prophet to the Nations*, 247-67; Leuchter, *Josiah's Reforms and Jeremiah's Scrolls*; E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970); T. C. Römer, "How Did Jeremiah Become a Convert to Deuteronomistic Ideology?" in *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism*, eds. L. S. Schearing and S. L. McKenzie (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 189-99; W. Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Bedaktion von Jeremia 1-25*, WMANT 41 (Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchen, 1973); and *idem*, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26-45*, WMANT 52 (Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchen, 1981). While the prose sermons are likely a redactional feature of the book, the chronological proximity of the ministry of Jeremiah and the composition of the Book of Kings would suggest a close association between the prophet and those belonging to these "Deuteronomistic" circles. Leuchter (*Josiah's Reforms and Jeremiah's Scrolls*, 169) comments: "We can no longer speak of the prophet Jeremiah as a thinker whose work was brought into the fold only by later redactors. Deuteronomistic thought permeates both the poetry and the prose, and formal differences should not necessarily be understood as differences in authorship." There is likely a cross-pollination of ideas between the Deuteronomistic and Jeremianic traditions, but there is no need to consider "Deuteronomistic" ideas as foreign to the historical message of the prophet Jeremiah himself.

Jeremiah's second scroll is supplemented in 36:32 is also testimony to the complex compositional history of the book and the necessity of scribal preservation, development, and interpretation of the Jeremianic tradition. Holt comments, "The authority of the book of Jeremiah is ratified by God himself, and so is the growth of the book through the repetition of the writing process, caused by King Jehoiakim's destruction of the first scroll."<sup>100</sup>

More significantly, the movement from the spoken word of the prophet himself to the written word in Jeremiah testifies to the importance of written Scripture for the life and vitality of Israel from the exile onward. Leuchter explains, "Emerging from the ashes of the destroyed city of Jerusalem . . . is the idea of Scripture as the new locus of covenantal symbols and institutions, with revelation and covenant enshrined within the verses on the page (31.31-34), ready for individual internalization and application. It is the engagement of text that solidifies the principles of covenantal dialogue within the nation."<sup>101</sup>

In the days of Jeremiah, response to the prophetic word is a matter of life and death. Deliberation over a written text (involving the rare citation of an earlier prophecy from Micah) is what helps to spare Jeremiah from execution for preaching judgment in his Temple Sermon (cf. Jer 26:18 with Mic 3:12). In many ways, Jehoiakim's rejection of the prophetic message and his destruction of the scroll is the focal point of the book as a whole. References to the early part of Jehoiakim's reign or "the fourth year of Jehoiakim" are found at the seams of the book (cf. 25:1; 26:1; 45:1; 46:1-2), and chapters 26-45 appear to be structured around a "Jehoiakim frame" (chs. 26, 35, 36, 45) as a means of highlighting the epochal significance of the scroll episode.<sup>102</sup> Following Jehoiakim's rejection of Jeremiah's message intended to produce repentance and the avoidance of disaster (36:3; cf. 7:3-7; 26:3-6), judgment becomes inevitable and unavoidable.

Jehoiakim's disobedient response in chapter 36 provides a direct contrast to the obedience of the faithful scribe Baruch in chapter 36, who records and proclaims the message of the scroll at great personal risk. The personal oracles directed to Jehoiakim in 36:30-31 and Baruch in 45:1-4 reflect the contrasting fates awaiting future generations based on their response to the written word of Yahweh. Scalise notes that the dating of the oracle to Baruch "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim" suggests that Baruch's lament in the passage is his response to the judgment message of Jeremiah's scroll.<sup>103</sup> Because of his unbelief, Jehoiakim will die and receive an ignominious burial without descendants to sit upon his throne (36:30-31), but Baruch's life will be preserved in the midst of national calamity (45:5). Scalise comments, "The crucial difference between the king and scribe is their response to God's word written on the scroll. Jehoiakim exemplifies the way leading to death, but Baruch models the path of life."<sup>104</sup>

In providing concrete examples such as those found in Jeremiah 26, 36, and 45 of how individuals respond to oral or written messages from the prophet, the book of Jeremiah stresses the continuing importance of obedience to the word of Yahweh for the exilic and post-exilic communities. Later readers are to recognize that the completed book of Jeremiah serves for them as the word of Yahweh just as the earlier scroll served for Jehoiakim and Baruch.<sup>105</sup> As

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<sup>99</sup> Leuchter, *Josiah's Reform and Jeremiah's Scroll*, 181.

<sup>100</sup> Holt, "Word of Jeremiah—Word of God," 185.

<sup>101</sup> Leuchter, *Josiah's Reform and Jeremiah's Scroll*, 181.

<sup>102</sup> See Gary E. Yates, "Narrative Parallelism and the 'Jehoiakim Frame': A Reading Strategy for Jeremiah 26-45," *JETS* 48 (2005): 263-81.

<sup>103</sup> Scalise, "Baruch as First Reader," 297-307. Cf. the promises to the faithful Rechabites (35:18-19) and Ebed-Melech (38:7-13) discussed on p. 12 above.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>105</sup> Scalise (*Ibid.*, 307) stresses how Baruch becomes a model for future readers of the book of Jeremiah: "When he reads about the past, present, and future suffering of his people, the nations, and all creation, Baruch is word down with grief and groaning. He laments his pain, and he believes God's promise of survival. Without further reward, the book implies, Baruch remains faithful to the truth of God's word for the rest of his life."

Leuchter explains, there is also the hope that the later reader “will hear the words that are apparently ignored by the people of Judah within the narrative itself.”<sup>106</sup> For these future readers, the fall of Jerusalem and the exile would have confirmed and exonerated Jeremiah as a true prophet and would motivate them to continue to hear the words of Jeremiah the prophet through the written text. Moreover, as Hays notes, confirmation of Jeremiah’s words motivated obedience from subsequent generations by “adding great weight to his promises of restoration and blessing.”<sup>107</sup>

Outside the book of Jeremiah, Old Testament texts that portray Israel’s life beyond the exile focus on the study and proclamation of Scripture. Ezra was a model teacher who devoted himself to the study, teaching, and obedience of the law of Yahweh (Ezra 7:10). At a time of national renewal, Ezra stood and read the law for six hours, and the people confessed their sins and expressed their resolve to follow the commandments (Neh 8-9). The act of Baruch reading the scroll of Jeremiah at the Jerusalem Temple places proclamation of the written words of the prophet on par with the reading of the Torah in the ears of the people (cf. Deut 31:9-13). Response to the written word of Yahweh is how Israel will choose life over death (cf. Deut 31:15).

### Conclusion

The historical figure of Jeremiah lives on in the book bearing his name as a prophet for future generations, promising that Yahweh will act in grace to establish a new covenant with Israel but also reminding subsequent generations that living in covenant with Yahweh involves both blessing and responsibility. The prayers of Jeremiah give voice to the future community of faith as they anticipate the promised restoration, and the narratives of Jeremiah’s life illustrate the all-important lesson that listening to Yahweh’s word is a matter of life and death. Ultimately, the ministry of Jeremiah points forward to Jesus Christ. McConville comments, “The coming of Jesus is . . . presented as the culmination of that ‘incarnational’ trend, already visible in Hosea and Jeremiah, in which God commits himself, at cost, to the salvation of his people.”<sup>108</sup> Echoing Jeremiah, Jesus announces God’s impending judgment on the Temple of his day (Matt 21:13) and laments over the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 23:37). Also like Jeremiah, Jesus guarantees that judgment is not God’s final word, inaugurating through his own suffering and death the new covenant that the prophet had promised (Luke 22:20; Heb 10:11-17).

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<sup>106</sup> Leuchter (*The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26-45*, 105) compares this function of the book of Jeremiah to the rereading of Deuteronomy that is commanded in Deut 31:10-13. In this rereading, every subsequent generation became just like Moses’ original audience and faced the choice between obedience and life or disobedience and death.

<sup>107</sup> Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 146.

<sup>108</sup> J. G. McConville, “Jeremiah,” in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. K. J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 218.