

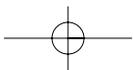
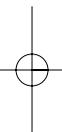
TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 21

TOTC

JEREMIAH AND LAMENTATIONS

To Pieter,
my dear husband and true companion
in life and work



TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 21

SERIES EDITOR: DAVID G. FIRTH
CONSULTING EDITOR: TREMPER LONGMAN III

JEREMIAH AND LAMENTATIONS

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

HETTY LALLEMAN



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GENERAL PREFACE

The decision completely to revise the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries is an indication of the important role that the series has played since its opening volumes were released in the mid-1960s. They represented at that time, and have continued to represent, commentary writing that was committed both to the importance of the text of the Bible as Scripture and a desire to engage with as full a range of interpretative issues as possible without being lost in the minutiae of scholarly debate. The commentaries aimed to explain the biblical text to a generation of readers confronting models of critical scholarship and new discoveries from the Ancient Near East, while remembering that the Old Testament is not simply another text from the ancient world. Although no uniform process of exegesis was required, all the original contributors were united in their conviction that the Old Testament remains the Word of God for us today. That the original volumes fulfilled this role is evident from the way in which they continue to be used in so many parts of the world.

A crucial element of the original series was that it should offer an up-to-date reading of the text, and it is precisely for this reason that new volumes are required. The questions confronting readers in the first half of the twenty-first century are not necessarily those from the second half of the twentieth. Discoveries from the Ancient Near East continue to shed new light on the Old Testament, whilst emphases in exegesis have changed markedly. Whilst remaining true to the goals of the initial volumes, the need for contemporary study

of the text requires that the series as a whole be updated. This updating is not simply a matter of commissioning new volumes to replace the old. We have also taken the opportunity to update the format of the series to reflect a key emphasis from linguistics, which is that texts communicate in larger blocks rather than in shorter segments such as individual verses. Because of this, the treatment of each section of the text includes three segments. First, a short note on *Context* is offered, placing the passage under consideration in its literary setting within the book, as well as noting any historical issues crucial to interpretation. The *Comment* segment then follows the traditional structure of the commentary, offering exegesis of the various components of a passage. Finally, a brief comment is made on *Meaning*, by which is meant the message that the passage seeks to communicate within the book, highlighting its key theological themes. This section brings together the detail of the *Comment* to show how the passage under consideration seeks to communicate as a whole.

Our prayer is that these new volumes will continue the rich heritage of the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries and that they will continue to witness to the God who is made known in the text.

David G. Firth, Series Editor
Tremper Longman III, Consulting Editor

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The book of Jeremiah has been part of my life for more than thirty years. It was the subject of my Master's thesis and subsequently became the focus of my PhD thesis which I wrote under the able guidance of Professor Gordon McConville, who was a great help to me in developing my thoughts on this wonderful book.

The personal character of the book has always fascinated me. In no other prophetic book are there so many references to the prophet's struggles and experiences in proclaiming the word of God, such that Jeremiah's life becomes a model of the suffering of God and the people. The breakdown of relationships, between God and his people and within the human community when people turn their back on God, is related in a dramatic way. The fact that there is still hope at the end and a new beginning is due only to God's loving grace.

The book of Jeremiah shows us that serving God is not a path to popularity and worldly success. Indeed, it may lead to loneliness and sadness about the world's rejection of the God who created everything. The book shows us that suffering can be part of the believer's life. In fact, Jeremiah may be regarded as a forerunner of the Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ. Henri Nouwen¹ speaks of 'downward mobility' and points us to a life with God which is not aimed

1. Henri Nouwen, *The Selfless Way of Christ: Downward Mobility and the Spiritual Life* (Orbis, 2007).

at popularity. Finding the centre of our lives in God alone keeps us focused on what is essential, and frees us from the urge to be successful in today's world, as constantly proclaimed by the media. The book of Jeremiah, on the contrary, shows us the way of the cross which eventually leads to an abundant life with God, as pictured in Jeremiah 30 – 31.

This commentary also deals with the book of Lamentations. Although I do not believe that Jeremiah was its author, the message of this book is related to that of the book of Jeremiah. The laments are expressed dramatically, in a similar style to that of Jeremiah. Lamentations is a fascinating book: it takes the reader on a journey from despair to hope and back to a glimpse of hope again at the end. Both Jeremiah and Lamentations can be sources of identification for those who are suffering; they affirm that God is still in control and will bring about a new future. My ardent wish is that readers of this commentary will be intrigued by both books and encouraged in their following of Christ, our Lord and Saviour, in all circumstances.

The main translation used in this commentary is Today's New International Version (TNIV 2005). The New International Version (2011 edn) was published after I had already worked through many of the verses. My references to TNIV and NIV (1984) and the explanation of difficulties in translation will, I hope, also help the reader to understand the changes made in NIV 2011.

Since 2000 I have been teaching Old Testament at Spurgeon's College. I owe much to my colleagues, including our excellent librarian Mrs Judy Powles, and to my students. Spurgeon's is a wonderful place to work, not least because of its multicultural character which results in fascinating discussions about the interpretation and application of biblical texts.

I am truly thankful for the wonderful practical help and advice of my husband Pieter. While working on this book, we have both gone through periods of severe illness, but have come out strengthened in our faith.

The Series Editor, Dr David Firth, has been a patient source of stimulating and encouraging comments.

I am indebted to Philip Duce and the staff at IVP UK for their work in seeing the volume through to publication.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

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I pray that my work on Jeremiah and Lamentations will lead readers to a closer walk with God.

Hetty Lalleman
Spurgeon's College
Autumn 2012

CHIEF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ANE	Ancient Near East
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
BZAW	Beihefte zur ZAW
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement series
NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
OAN	Oracles Against the Nations
OTL	Old Testament Library
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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Texts and versions

KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
MT	Masoretic Text (Hebrew text)
NIV	New International Version 1984
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
TNIV	Today's New International Version

The main English text used is Today's New International Version. Quotations from TNIV are in italics.

JEREMIAH

INTRODUCTION

The book of Jeremiah is one of the most intriguing in the Old Testament. Although it is a complex book, it also speaks to people's hearts because of the many personal elements concerning this 'suffering prophet'. It contains personal laments, and there is more biographical material than in the other prophetic books. It is also a puzzling book, partly because events are not included in chronological order, and partly because its contents seem to be so far removed from the 'good news' we like to hear. In English there is even a word for a lament that comes from the book of Jeremiah: a 'jeremiad'.

But is there more than 'doom and gloom' in the book? There certainly is. For example, one of the most famous texts in the Old Testament occurs in Jeremiah's message: the announcement of the 'new covenant' to come (Jer. 31:31–34). In his life, suffering and message, Jeremiah communicates that there is a time for God's punishment, and it causes pain, even on God's side. Even more importantly, there is always hope, even through judgment, because God is a God of grace. That is the good news in the book of

Jeremiah. For people who have made a mess of their lives, there is a message of hope and forgiveness. This book of doom and judgment, suffering and tears, but also of hope and redemption, still speaks powerfully to us today.

1. God's prophet

Within the Old Testament, the book of Jeremiah belongs to the group of 'writing prophets', together with Isaiah, Ezekiel and the twelve Minor Prophets. These books have several characteristics in common, though not every one has all of them. The book of Jeremiah, however, contains all of the characteristics mentioned below.

A prophet was first of all a messenger of God. Words such as *This is what the LORD says, declares the LORD* or *The word of the LORD came to me* express clearly that prophets did not speak their own words, but were sent by God. This is also clear from the fact that the prophet received a divine call. This is not always recorded, but it is present in all the major prophetic books: Isaiah (ch. 6), Ezekiel (chs. 1–3) and Jeremiah (ch. 1; cf. also Amos 7:14–15). An individual did not become a prophet because his or her parents were prophets. In Israel priesthood was hereditary, but being a prophet was not. Hence, Jeremiah's call was the important beginning of his prophetic career. In times of trouble he was reminded of it again (Jer. 15:19–21). He was specifically chosen by God, even before his birth, to be a *prophet to the nations* (1:5). The word of God was so compelling that Jeremiah could not keep it inside, even if he wanted to (20:9).

Another feature of the true prophets sent by God is mentioned in Jeremiah 23:18, 22: they stood *in the council of the LORD*—which was not the case with the (false) prophets addressed in this chapter. The true prophet had insight into the Lord's plans and his task was to communicate these to his people.

The writing prophets were primarily preachers, as is obvious, for example, in Jeremiah 7:1–15, where Jeremiah preaches at the gate of the temple. Their message was intended to be heard. Prophets summoned the people to repent of their sins of idolatry and social injustice. Their teaching was based on the covenant, mainly that given by God at Sinai. God had initiated the covenant, but the

people's responsibility was to keep the commandments that were part of it. Obedience would lead to blessings; disobedience to curses (Deut. 27–28). The oracles of judgment which the prophets passed on are based on breaches of the covenant (cf. Jer. 7:9). Announcements of judgment are always for a reason: sins are recorded and are followed by resultant words of judgment, often introduced by *Therefore* ... (Jer. 2:4–9; 5:7–14; 6:16–21; 8:4–10). Nobody could ever claim that they did not know why judgment had come.

Although the prophets were preachers first and foremost, their words were obviously written down afterwards. The book of Jeremiah contains a unique account of this writing in chapter 36 (see below, p. 253). Spoken words were preserved and collected. Apart from the content of Jeremiah's preaching, the book contains many stories *about* the prophet. What we have received is a compilation of words and events edited into one book.

As mentioned above, the message of the prophets was primarily based on the covenant between God and Israel. However, there are also references to other events from the past, such as creation and God as Creator (see 4:23–26, where creation is 'reversed',¹ and comment on that passage, p. 94; see also 10:12, 16; 31:35; 32:17; 33:2). There are references to the patriarchs (33:25–26), to the exodus and the time in the desert (2:1–3; 32:20–22) and to King David and God's promises made to him as recorded in 2 Samuel 7 (Jer. 22:2, 4, where the king is addressed as a descendant of David who therefore needs to behave like David, but fails to do so; 23:5; 33:15–17, 20–22, 25–26). The book of Isaiah refers to the house of David more frequently, but the theme is certainly not absent from Jeremiah. Jeremiah 23:5–6 and 33:15–16 proclaim a righteous and just king who will come from the house of David; these are messianic promises similar to those in Isaiah 9:7. However, more so than in Isaiah, in Jeremiah there is emphasis on the restoration of the people in the near future and beyond (chs. 30–33), which reaches its summit in the promises of the new covenant (31:31–34; 32:40, where it is called an *everlasting covenant*, reminiscent of the Davidic covenant in 2 Sam. 7). All this

1. See Lalleman (2009).

shows that Jeremiah, like the other writing prophets, was thoroughly familiar with the traditions of Israel, which were used to bring home their message of judgment and salvation. Kings, spiritual and political leaders, and the ordinary people were confronted with how they had fallen short of God's expectations in the past and failed to live up to their calling as the people of God.

As we have said, the promises for the future reach out far beyond the life of the prophet, whether or not he was aware of this. This is a unique characteristic of all the writing prophets: their words cover a time-span from long ago, into their own days and beyond into future times.

2. Historical background

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet in 627 BC, during the reign of King Josiah. Jeremiah 1:2–3 gives a list of kings under whom Jeremiah prophesied: Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Two names are omitted from this list: Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin, probably because they each reigned for only three months. From these introductory verses, it is immediately clear that Jeremiah lived and prophesied for a long period of time, during which many changes took place. Verse 3 ends with the exile of the people in Jerusalem which began in 587. The prophet spoke on the national and international scene during turbulent times.

In 722 BC the mighty Assyrian kingdom had led the northern kingdom, Israel, into exile (2 Kgs 17). This had made the position of the southern kingdom, Judah, rather vulnerable, because the aggressive Assyria was now its direct neighbour. In 2 Kings 18–19 there is an account of how Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, threatened to capture Jerusalem, but was miraculously forced to withdraw (701 BC). With the death of a later Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, in 627 BC, the power of Assyria essentially broke down. King Josiah (640–609 BC) made use of the relief and led Judah into political and religious freedom. In 622, he initiated a religious reform and started by renovating the temple. During this work on the temple, the Book of the Law was found (2 Kgs 22:8). When Josiah heard its contents, he was deeply impressed, realizing how far his people had strayed from God's commandments and laws (2 Kgs 22:11). He organized

an even more thorough reform, which included the removal of all the signs of pagan worship that his predecessors (Manasseh and others; see 2 Kgs 21) had set up in the temple (2 Kgs 23). We do not know the exact contents of the Book of the Law, but from 2 Kings 22 we may assume it was similar to parts of the book of Deuteronomy. This does not mean that Deuteronomy was written at that time only in order to justify the reform,² for the restoration of the temple had already started. Furthermore, the book was immediately accepted as having great authority, which would hardly have happened with a recent forgery.

It is remarkable that in Jeremiah we hardly read about this reform of Josiah, and scholars have been puzzled by its absence. Part of the explanation might be that the book of Kings shows that in the end the reform did not bring a radical and lasting change in the nation's life and attitudes. This may be largely due to the fact that Josiah died unexpectedly. He was killed by Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, when he tried to stop the Egyptian army that had gone out to help the Assyrians who were threatened by the ever-growing power of the Babylonians (2 Kgs 23:29–30). Moreover, Josiah's son Jehoahaz *did evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as his predecessors had done* (2 Kgs 23:32), thereby eliminating the effects of his father's reform. Jeremiah 3:10 says that *Judah did not return to God with all her heart, but only in pretence*. This may be a reference to Josiah's reform and Judah's reaction to it.

From that moment, Judah's situation went downhill. In the early chapters of Jeremiah, we read of idolatry, adultery, prophets and priests leading the people astray, injustice and a lack of righteousness. Nothing had changed.

On the international scene things changed rapidly: Assyria's capital Nineveh fell to the Babylonians and Medes in 612 BC; from then on, Babylonia controlled the whole area of Mesopotamia. After the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho had killed Josiah, Judah came under Egyptian control. Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, reigned for only three months; Necho replaced him with another of Josiah's sons,

2. As is usually assumed in critical studies of Deuteronomy. See further E. J. Woods (2011: 27–31).

Eliakim, whose name he changed to Jehoiakim (609–597 BC). Jehoiakim became a vassal of Egypt and was forced to pay a heavy tribute (2 Kgs 23:35). He undertook building works and had a splendid palace built, albeit by using forced labour (Jer. 22:13–19). Pagan religion was reintroduced (7:16–18; 11:9–13), and prophets who protested against this were killed (26:20–23). Yet many (false) prophets and priests proclaimed that everything was well (*Peace, peace*; see 6:14; 8:11; also 14:13).

King Jehoiakim strongly resisted the message of Jeremiah and even burned a scroll containing the prophet's words (ch. 36). Scholars reckon that this scroll included at least the prophetic warnings from chapters 2–6. After the burning of the scroll, Jeremiah's personal scribe Baruch wrote a second scroll, with the same content as the first, but with more words added (36:32). This event must have been one of the worst in Jeremiah's life as a prophet. King Jehoiakim, a king from the house of David, openly refused to listen to the words of the Lord as transmitted by the prophet. The present commentary is based on the assumption that this event (604 BC) marked the 'point of no return' in Judah's history and the dynasty of David. From then on, the prophet was no longer hopeful that Judah would repent and return as he had constantly urged them to do according to chapters 2–6. Judgment had become inescapable, and henceforth Babylon was announced as the 'enemy from the north', which had not yet been identified in Jeremiah 2–6.

In 605 BC the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish on the River Euphrates (Jer. 46:2). The Egyptians withdrew and the Babylonians became a threatening force for Judah, which was regarded as a pro-Egyptian country. Jehoiakim became a vassal of Babylon, but rebelled after three years in 601 BC, when the Babylonians had incurred heavy losses at the border of Egypt (2 Kgs 24:1). In retaliation, Judah was attacked by the combined forces of the Babylonians, Syrians, Moabites and Ammonites (2 Kgs 24:2). King Jehoiakim died during the siege of Jerusalem. In 597, his son Jehoiachin was taken captive, together with the queen mother and the highest ranks of the military force, as well as many skilled professionals (2 Kgs 24:8–16). The prophet Ezekiel was among the exiles (Ezek. 1:1–3). As part of his priestly upbringing, Ezekiel may have heard Jeremiah preach in the temple in Jerusalem.

After this first exile of Judeans, the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar made another of Josiah's sons, Mattaniah, king of Judah and gave him the name Zedekiah. This new king regularly consulted Jeremiah (Jer. 21:1–7; 37:1–10; 37:17–20; 38:14–27), but was too frightened of the court officials to obey the prophet. No wonder that he did not give heed, when the prophet urged him to surrender to Babylon as the only way to save Jerusalem from being destroyed completely.

In 589 BC King Zedekiah rebelled against the Babylonians (2 Kgs 24:20b), with disastrous results. Nebuchadnezzar responded with violence and destruction. The Judean towns were taken, the last remaining ones being Lachish and Azekah (Jer. 34:7). Jerusalem itself soon came under attack from the Babylonians and, although they withdrew when Egypt came to help, the prophet warned that this was only a temporary withdrawal (Jer. 37:5–10). The Babylonian army did indeed return and, although Jeremiah urged King Zedekiah to surrender, he refused out of fear for his people (Jer. 38:14–23).

Because of his message of surrender, the prophet came under suspicion of collaboration with the enemy and was thrown into prison. Later he ended up in a pit full of mud where he was expected to die. However, he was rescued by a foreigner, Ebed-Melek (Jer. 37:11 – 38:13). After an eighteen-month siege, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians; the city and the temple were destroyed, and many Judeans were taken into exile (587 BC; Jer. 39; 52; see also 2 Kgs 24:18 – 25:21).

The Babylonians appointed a governor, the Judean Gedaliah, but he was murdered (Jer. 40 – 41) by Ishmael, another Judean. A group of military leaders then decided to flee to Egypt and took a large crowd, including Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch, with them against their will (Jer. 42 – 43). In Egypt, the people once again started worshipping other gods (Jer. 44). Nothing is known about the end of Jeremiah's life. Apparently, the focus of the book was more on the word of God rather than the biography of the prophet.

Both 2 Kings and Jeremiah 52 end with a glimmer of hope. King Jehoiachin, who was led into exile in 597 BC, was released from prison and honoured by the next king of Babylon, Awel-Marduk.

In this historical overview, the importance of one particular

family should be noted, namely the Shaphan family. They were pro-Babylonian and supported the prophet Jeremiah. Ahikam protects Jeremiah (26:24), and we know from other passages that he was not the only member of the family who played a positive role in the life of the prophet. In Jeremiah 36:10, 12, 25, there is mention of his brother Gemariah, who tries to prevent King Jehoiakim from burning the scroll. Jeremiah 29:3 alludes to his other brother Elasah, who took Jeremiah's letter to the exiles. Gedaliah, the governor after the destruction of Jerusalem (chs. 39 – 41), was a son of Ahikam. The father of Ahikam, Gemariah and Elasah was Shaphan, who, together with Ahikam, was involved in the discovery of the Book of the Law during the reign of Josiah (2 Kgs 22:3–14).

The date of the fall of Jerusalem

Jeremiah 39:1 records that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon marched against Jerusalem to besiege it *in the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month*. Jeremiah 52:4 and 2 Kings 25:1 add that this happened on the tenth day of the tenth month. The Babylonians broke through the city walls *on the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year* (Jer. 39:2). There are differing opinions among scholars as to when these events actually took place. Did the Judeans at that time follow the Babylonian calendar in which the New Year starts in March/April, or the older Israelite calendar in which the New Year starts in September/October? Some scholars work with a so-called 'lower chronology', and date the beginning of the siege to January 587 and the fall of Jerusalem to July 586 (Jones 1992: 463 takes December 588 as the beginning and June/July 586 as the end of the siege). Scholars working with the so-called 'higher chronology', on the other hand, date the beginning of the siege as January 588 and the fall of Jerusalem as July 587 (Keown/Scalise/Smothers 1995: 230; Holladay 1989: 291 mentions December 589/January 588 and June/July 587). Lundbom (2004b: 84) thinks the city was besieged for two and a half years, from January 588 until July 586; the Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquitates* x. 116), however, mentions a siege of eighteen months.

This commentary presupposes the following dates: the *thirteenth year* of Josiah is 627 BC; the *eleventh year* of Zedekiah is 587 BC, the year in which Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Babylonians. In

the *fifth month*, the people of Jerusalem were exiled. In that month, August 587, the city and temple were ruined and burned down.

The spelling of a name

In the book of Jeremiah, there are two ways of spelling the name of King Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon: either with an ‘r’ or an ‘n’. In 21:2, he is mentioned for the first time by name as Nebuchadrezzar; again in Jeremiah 29:21 and many other places in the book, the name is spelled with an ‘r’ in the middle. According to Lundbom, this is the older version and is ‘doubtless correct’ (2004a: 100). The spelling Nebuchadnezzar (with an ‘n’) is used only in Jeremiah 27 – 29 (eight times: 27:6, 8, 20; 28:3, 11, 14; 29:1, 3). In Daniel too, Nebuchadnezzar is used, but in Ezekiel the name is spelled with an ‘r’ (Ezek. 26:7; 29:18, although TNIV translates with an ‘n’, but see TNIV footnote on Ezek. 26:7). Even in Akkadian texts, there is a difference in the spelling. Van Selms (1974c) thinks Nebuchadnezzar (with ‘n’) is a nickname, because instead of ‘Nabu, protect the (eldest) son!’ (*kudurri*), it says ‘Nabu, protect the mule!’ (*kudanni*). This commentary uses ‘Nebuchadnezzar’ in accordance with the TNIV, the preferred translation.

3. The relationship between the Hebrew and the Greek text

One of the main issues in the research of the book of Jeremiah is the great difference in its length as part of the Hebrew Old Testament (MT) and as part of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, known as the Septuagint. Throughout the Old Testament, there are discrepancies between the Hebrew text and its translation into Greek. But in the case of Jeremiah, the LXX is a formidable one-seventh shorter than the MT. In some cases, complete passages are missing from the LXX which are present in the MT, such as Jeremiah 29:16–20; 33:14–26; 39:4–13; 51:44b–49a; 52:27b–30. In other cases, the LXX omits a few words or a sentence. Again, the arrangement of the materials in the MT and LXX differs extensively. After Jeremiah 25:13a (*all that are written in this book*), the LXX places the Oracles Against the Nations (OAN) in a different order from what is found in the MT and ends them with the prophecy of the cup of God’s wrath, which in the MT follows 25:14.

The differences between the LXX and MT clearly amount to more than just a few variations in the text. Therefore scholars generally assume that the versions were based on different Hebrew texts. This impression was confirmed by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (from 1947), in which some manuscripts of Jeremiah are closer to the MT and others are closer to the LXX.

E. Tov suggests that we should speak of two *editions*, which are the basis respectively of the LXX (the shorter edition I) and the MT (the longer edition II).³

An interesting theory, although not followed by many, is that of A. van Selms (1980: 12–15). He argues that, on the flight to Egypt, Baruch took with him the part of the book of Jeremiah that he had already written at that point. However, this document was not yet the polished edition he had in mind. It was the scroll he had rewritten after the first one had been burned and to which he had added *similar words* (Jer. 36:32). In Egypt, this manuscript became the source behind the LXX, whereas the more extensive version finalized by Baruch in Egypt was written for the exiles in Babylon and became the basic text of the MT. Van Selms explains that, to Baruch, this ‘Babylonian copy’ was the most important one, because Jeremiah and Baruch saw the exiles in Babylon as the group beginning a new future, whereas the Judeans who fled to Egypt were in the wrong (Jer. 44).

In this commentary, the Masoretic Text is taken as the main source for exegesis.

4. How did the book of Jeremiah originate?

The book of Jeremiah is like a black-and-white picture such as professional photographers still like to take. It contains extremely sharp contrasts: dramatic passages offer vivid descriptions of doom that cause the reader to shiver; yet there are also passages in which the future is painted in beautiful colours, full of joy and hope. It incorporates repetitive prose, and poetry with short sayings that regularly puzzle the reader. Poetry and prose belong together, at

3. Tov (1981: 149); also Stulman (2005: 7–9).

least in the final form of the book as we now have it in our canon.

The history of research into the book has been long and rather complex. Scholars have tried to find ways to tackle this piece of literature which is so hard to fit into one particular schedule. One of the main issues is the lack of chronological order and connections between one passage and the next; often passages just seem to be glued together. There is a mixture of prose and poetry, biographical and autobiographical sections, oracles against nations and salvation oracles for Israel and Judah. The prose has even been defined as boring and dull because of the many repetitions.⁴ It reminded scholars of the style and theology of Deuteronomy and other related books, such as Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, the so-called Deuteronomistic History. Many prose passages in Jeremiah were ascribed to circles responsible for this kind of literature: people (scribes or theologians?) in exile in Babylon who were puzzled as to why such horrible things had happened to the people of God. They discovered a pattern of sin resulting in curses, including the exile. From their perspective, Israel's story was a continuous cycle of rebellion, warnings by the prophets, and disaster, followed by revival, and again rebellion – a pattern familiar from the book of Judges. These hypothetical 'theologians of the exile' were called the 'Deuteronomists', and they were assumed to have influenced the book of Jeremiah heavily, especially the prose sermons. Some scholars, such as W. Thiel, also attributed the poetic passages to the Deuteronomists, assuming that they were even able to use the poetic style which other scholars had regarded as genuinely prophetic.⁵ H. Weippert, however, has shown that many expressions and passages

4. Duhm (1901).

5. Thiel (1973). Earlier on, S. Mowinckel (1914) had distinguished four main sources in Jer. 1 – 45, known as A, B, C and D. Source A contains Jeremiah's oracles, mainly in poetic form and loosely connected. Source B offers stories about the prophet, while Source C consists of 'sermons' on the sins of the people and their ancestors, which are distinguished from the other parts by their 'monotonous' style and content. The sermons are mainly in prose and resemble the 'Deuteronomistic' language of Deuteronomy, Judges, Samuel and Kings. According to

which seem similar to those in the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua – Kings) actually often have a different function in Jeremiah. We should not take words out of context.⁶

E. W. Nicholson developed a coherent theory about how the original words of Jeremiah were transmitted, edited and adapted to the needs of the Judean people in exile.⁷ On the basis of similarities in style, structure, language and theology, he suggests extensive activity of what he calls ‘Deuteronomistic traditionists’. Like many others, he assumes that there were basically two stages in the development of the book: the prophet’s words during his lifetime and their expansion by the so-called Deuteronomists after his death. These Deuteronomists lived in Babylon, where they preached to the exiles. Judah’s exile is often regarded as a creative period for theology, although there is no hard evidence for this.

One of the present author’s objections to theories that are heavily defined by assumptions about ‘Deuteronomistic’ influence on the book of Jeremiah is that we do not have much proof of the existence of such a group of scribes or ‘theologians’ who rewrote Israel’s history from the perspective that the exile was a result of sin. This theological concept is indeed visible in Judges, Samuel and Kings, but it is hard to identify a specific group responsible for introducing it. From the prophet Ezekiel, who lived amongst the exiles in Babylon, we get a mixed picture. Even then, many were not convinced that what had happened was the result of their own sins and the end of a long tradition of disobedience and neglect of the Sinai covenant (Ezek. 18), and the people were not open to receiving God’s words via the prophet (Ezek. 3:1–11). The prophet is pictured as a lonely ‘watchman’, a loner who has the task of warning people who are not inclined to listen. The book of Ezekiel contains no

Mowinckel, Source C contains little historical information. Finally, source D is found only in chs. 30 – 31, which were not originally meant to be regarded as Jeremianic, but later became part of the book. Later, Mowinckel (1946) stated that the narratives in Jeremiah (source B) are very probably from the hand of Baruch.

6. Weippert (1973).

7. Nicholson (1970).

evidence of a larger group who were aware of their own guilt and were creative (re-) writers of Israel's past.

Nevertheless, there are clearly many links between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, not only in the language of the prose sections, but also in the overall message of doom and judgment as a result of sin. The covenant people could and should have known the *requirements of the LORD* (Jer. 8:7), but they did not. The consequences of disobeying God's commandments, which were an essential part of the covenant of Sinai as spelled out in Deuteronomy 27–28, form the backbone of Jeremiah's prophecies of doom and judgment (cf. Deut. 28:26; Jer. 7:33). The influence of Deuteronomy on Jeremiah's teaching, theological concepts and language is understandable for two reasons. First, as we know from 2 Kings 22:8, the Book of the Law was found during the restoration of the temple, and is generally regarded as containing (parts of) Deuteronomy because of the outworking its reading had. The prophetess Huldah was consulted, and she delivered the same kind of message as that found in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah (2 Kgs 22:16–20). So we can assume that Jeremiah's language and theology when he started his ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign were influenced by Deuteronomy.

Secondly, according to Jeremiah 1:1, the prophet came from a family of priests. This commentary does not support the idea that he served as a priest (see comment on 1:1). However, having been brought up in a priestly family, he would have heard stories from the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, and been familiar with its laws and commandments. This may account for the many connections not only with the book of Deuteronomy, but also with other parts of the Torah, for instance Jeremiah 4:23–26 which presupposes Genesis 1.⁸

It is striking that, in the recent commentary by J. Lundbom, issues of sources, redactions and traditions underlying the book of Jeremiah hardly play a role.⁹ This is illustrative of changes in Old Testament scholarship as a whole, which has become increasingly interested in the final form of the text, with its visible structure and

8. See above (p. 21).

9. Lundbom (1999, 2004a, 2004b).

movements. The older ‘diachronic’ reading of texts, searching for the origins of each passage and often assuming historical layers behind the text, is making way for a ‘synchronic’ reading, which concentrates on the text as it was transmitted to us and pays attention to literary structures, chiasms, catchwords and so on.¹⁰ Lundbom’s approach to the book of Jeremiah is eclectic. He places the prophet in a historical setting as far as possible; he is reluctant regarding assumptions of later redactions and pays much attention to literary patterns and style. Moreover, at the end of his comments,

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10. Lundbom’s three-volume commentary (1999, 2004a, 2004b) constitutes a remarkable change, when compared to the commentaries by McKane (1986, 1996) and Carroll (1986). McKane regards Jer. 1 – 25 as a ‘complicated, untidy accumulation of material’, formed over a long period, with contributions by many people (xlvi). He adds, ‘... it is not only a lack of large-scale homogeneousness to which I refer, but sharp dissonances of form and content, and examples of erroneous, secondary exegesis, consisting of only a few verses’ (xlix). McKane introduced the term ‘rolling corpus’ to suggest that small units of pre-existing text attracted interpretation or commentary, which itself became part of the book of Jeremiah during a process which continued into the post-exilic period (l). Carroll denies any relationship between the book and a historical person Jeremiah; his commentary in the OTL series has already been replaced by Allen’s (2008). Holladay disagrees comprehensively with McKane and Carroll, and places the book of Jeremiah in a firm historical context. He opens his commentary with the confident words: ‘I have become convinced that the data for a reconstruction of the chronology of [Jeremiah’s] career, and for the establishment of fairly secure settings for his words and actions, are attainable, and this commentary is based upon such a reconstruction’ (1986: 1). Holladay provides a chronology of Jeremiah’s life and sayings, based on hypothetical septennial readings of Deuteronomy at the Feast of Tabernacles in the years 615, 608, 601, 594 and 587 BC. This commentary also gratefully draws on the two volumes in the Word series (Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard, 1991; Keown, Scalise and Smothers, 1995); Thompson’s commentary (1980), written from a conservative evangelical point of view, has likewise proved valuable.

he places the book in its canonical Christian tradition. In Lundbom's long (151 pages) 'Introduction' to the three volumes on Jeremiah, the 'poetry-prose' debate and the issue of sources, which dominated so much of Jeremiah research in the twentieth century until about 1980, occupy only a few pages. Most of it is dedicated instead to rhetorical devices, figures of speech and style, repetitions and catchwords.

L. Allen's recent commentary on Jeremiah also focuses on 'the final form of the book as the canonical version, theologically and literarily'.¹¹ However, Allen also pays attention to other ancient texts and versions, as well as to different stages in the literary development of the text before it was finalized. Thus, his commentary does not fall into the category of synchronic readings of Jeremiah, although it does advocate paying ample attention to literary features of the text, such as chiasms¹² and the repetition of key words. These are matched, however, by suggestions about possible redactional developments of the text. On the whole, Allen dates the material found in Jeremiah to the life of the prophet, to the exile or soon after it. He draws the following interesting comparison:

The book of Jeremiah is like an old English country house, originally built and then added to in the Regency period, augmented with Victorian wings, and generally refurbished throughout the Edwardian years. It grew over a long period of time.¹³

The present commentary pays attention to the historical context of passages, in so far as we can know anything about the events. More attention, however, is devoted to the interpretation of passages in their literary contexts. It seems that the book of Jeremiah is not as unstructured as some scholars believe it to be, and passages that at first sight seem unconnected are often linked by the repetition of themes or by keywords/catchwords. An example is to be found in Jeremiah 16 – 17, which seems to consist of various unrelated elements:

11. Allen (2008: 2).

12. See below, 'Further literary features' (p. 47).

13. Allen (2008: 11).

- 16:1–13 (prose)
- 16:14–15 (prose)
- 16:16–18 (prose)
- 16:19–21 (poetry)
- 17:1–11 (poetry)
- 17:12–18 (poetry, one of the so-called ‘Confessions’ of Jeremiah; see below)

It is soon clear that chapter 17 continues several themes from chapter 16, so that there is more coherence than at first view. Chapter 17 proceeds to address Judah’s sin (v. 1), idolatry (cf. 16:11–13, 18, 17:2–3) and the ensuing judgment (16:13, 16; 17:3–4). There is also the theme of sins not being hidden from God (16:17; 17:9–10). Some verses deal with the issue of the human heart that turns away from God (16:12; 17:1, 5). In the ‘Confession’ of Jeremiah in 17:12–18, we discover several connections with verses 5–11: *turn away from the LORD* (vv. 5, 13); God knowing what is in people’s hearts (v. 10; in v. 16 applied to the prophet); people forsaking *the spring of living water* (v. 13), and the *parched places of the desert* for those who turn away from God (v. 6). Jeremiah is the one who *trusts in God*, as is clear from his appeal to the Lord. He stands in contrast with those who *turn away from God*, namely his adversaries. He asks that his persecutors be *put to shame* (v. 18), which places them in the same category as those *turning away from God* who will be *put to shame* (v. 13).

A second example of coherence occurs in chapters 17–20. Three times (17:19; 18:2; 19:1) a new section begins with *Go [and] ...*, whereas the end of chapter 19 flows straight into Jeremiah 20, with Pashhur having heard Jeremiah’s prophecy. Jeremiah’s lament in 20:7–18 in its present form seems to be triggered by Pashhur’s humiliating treatment of the prophet (20:2).

So what can we say with certainty about the origins of the book of Jeremiah? Evidence provided by the book itself is found in Jeremiah 36. As discussed above, this event took place in the year 605 BC, which internationally was a very important year because of the Battle of Carchemish in which the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians to become a threatening force for Judah. In that year, the prophet Jeremiah received the word of the Lord to take a scroll and write on it *all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all*

the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now (36:2). He was to do this in the hope that, by hearing the announcement of coming judgment, the people would repent so that God could forgive them. Jeremiah called his scribe Baruch and ordered him to write down *all the words the LORD had spoken to him* (36:4). In the next year (December 604 BC), during a time of fasting, Baruch went to the temple area and read the words of the scroll aloud (36:9–10). In the end, King Jehoiakim heard them as well, but he burned the scroll, piece by piece (vv. 23–25). However, a second command came to Jeremiah to take another scroll and write on it the same words, which he did (vv. 27–28, 32). The chapter closes thus: *And many similar words were added to them.*¹⁴

Chapter 36 suggests a number of conclusions. To begin with, a first scroll with prophecies of Jeremiah was written in 605 BC, containing words of warning and impending judgment. At that time, there was still the opportunity to listen and repent. The scroll contained words intended for Israel and Judah *and all the other nations* (v. 2). It cannot have been very long, since throughout Jeremiah 36 it was read aloud and heard several times (vv. 10, 13, 15, 21). Furthermore, Baruch obviously acted as Jeremiah's scribe. The text suggests that he was very precise in writing down exactly what Jeremiah dictated (vv. 4, 18). Again, after the burning of the first scroll, a second scroll was produced containing all the words of the first one, plus *many similar words* (v. 32). Nowhere else in the prophetic books do we find such an accurate description of the way in which prophecies were recorded. Note that this happened during the ministry of the prophet, not after his death.

What was the content of the first scroll? Jeremiah 25:1 is dated as the same year as Jeremiah 36:1. Many parts of chapters 1–25 can be characterized as announcements of judgment. Not everything in these chapters, however, is from the time before 605 BC, for instance, Jeremiah 21 and 24. Moreover, in some passages repentance is no longer seen as a possibility, and judgment cannot be averted (e.g. 11:11, 14; 14:11; 15:1). Those passages can be dated

14. Meier (2009: 103) comments on Jer. 36:1–6: 'What is presented here is ... nothing less than an explanation for the genesis of the book of Jeremiah.'

after the burning of the scroll. This commentary regards the burning of the scroll by the Davidic king in 604 BC as the turning point, after which God's judgment had become inevitable. The prohibition against the prophet interceding for his people is the discernible sign of this: escape is no longer possible; a new beginning will come only through judgment (Jer. 24, 29, 30–33).

We have seen that the events described in chapter 36 make it clear that Jeremiah's scribe Baruch played an important role in the transmission of the prophetic words. We may also conclude from the end of that chapter that the corpus of prophetic words was growing. The present commentary assumes much activity by Baruch, who may have ordered and gathered the biographical material about his master.

But the book was not completed during Jeremiah's lifetime. Chapter 52, which is largely similar to the end of 2 Kings, was added at the end. The function of this chapter within the whole of Jeremiah is unique, for it seems to emphasize the importance of recognizing Jeremiah as an authentic and true prophet of the Lord.

The beginning of the book (Jer. 1) sets the prophet firmly in a particular time and era, as does Jeremiah 52. These two chapters stand around the book as an *inclusio* (see below, p. 47). The programme of Jeremiah's prophetic career, as given in 1:4–19, matches the rest of the book as much as it does the end of it: judgment has come to Judah and other nations, and Jeremiah's prophecies have come true. Thus the book, as we have it, seems to be a late justification and vindication of a prophet who was so much despised and rejected during his lifetime. We can say that at least its beginning and end are well planned, despite our struggle to find much order in the rest of it.

The central chapters of the book affirm this point of view, as I have stated elsewhere:

This part of the book as we have it – in the Masoretic Text – contains several chapters on the theme of false and true prophecy: 23:9–40; 26, 27, 28 and 29. In these chapters the message of Jeremiah is heavily criticized by his opponents, who say that everything will be 'peace'. Jeremiah's message on the other hand is one of judgement, as is also clear from

chapter 25. In Jeremiah 24 the prophet makes clear that hope comes from an unexpected side. It is as if he turns all the popular expectations upside down. The building and planting (1:10) will come by means of the horrible experience of the exile (24:6; 29:5); the promised salvation of the LORD will only come after severe judgement. Only through judgement will there be a new beginning which is initiated by God's grace alone (24; cf. 29:10–14).¹⁵

The coverage of the fall of Jerusalem, not only in chapter 52 but also in chapter 39, underlines the fact that Jeremiah was indeed a true prophet, chosen and sent by God to speak his word, whereas his authenticity and authority as God's true prophet are emphasized by the wording of his call.¹⁶

5. The verb *šûb*

In the book of Jeremiah, there are announcements of doom and salvation to Judah, Israel and the other nations. The versatile Hebrew verb *šûb* in its diverse forms is used very regularly in prophecies of both judgment and salvation.¹⁷ The basic meaning of the verb is 'to turn', and, dependent on the context, it may be translated as 'turn away', 'turn from', 'turn around', 'return' in a literal or metaphorical way (e.g. return to the land or return as 'repent'). The word *šûb* thus indicates any turning from something to something else, away from someone (God or idols), but also back to God. In Jeremiah, the verb is also used for returning from exile, a geographical return. Jeremiah includes wordplays using *šûb*, as in 8:4–5:

When people fall down, do they not get up?
 When people turn away, do they not return? (*šûb* twice)
 Why then have these people turned away? (*šûb*)
 Why does Jerusalem always turn away? (*šûb*)

15. Lalleman (2011a: 101).

16. Lalleman (2011a: 102).

17. Holladay (1958).