

Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1:1-52:34

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2019-10-13

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I. Who was Jeremiah

It appears that Jeremiah was born somewhere around 645 BC¹ and was called to the ministry of a prophet in his late teens, perhaps 18 or 19. In chapter 1:6 you can see the fear that Jeremiah had for being a prophet. Who wouldn't be afraid of that calling. But the way he words it is interesting. He said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth." Why would being a youth make him think that he couldn't speak? Because a youth had no authority in that society. As a prophet it was God's authority that mattered, not his, but he was still intimidated. The word for "youth" there is na'ar (נַעַר), a word that refers to a person somewhere between puberty and 19 years of age. It is never used of a married person, and always refers to some person still under parental authority.² To put it into context of our last book, if Jeremiah was 19 years old when he began his ministry, he was born 50 years after Isaiah died. If he was younger, you just add a couple of years.

He was born into a priestly family in Anathoth, just north of Jerusalem (Jer. 1:1). Chapter 1:5 says that he was chosen to be a prophet even before he was born. When he was commissioned in chapter 1, God made it clear that it was God's authority that would make Jeremiah's words so powerful, that they would literally tear down kings and replant kingdoms. Why? Because God would back up that Word. And that is true to this day. If you share a verse with someone, that verse has power and authority no matter what your age. Hebrews says that it is more powerful than a two-edged sword. The prophetic word of Jeremiah continues to convict, and convert, and to tear down strongholds, and to heal and rebuild. We want that which is ungodly torn down in our lives. We want that which is godly planted.

He began his ministry in the 13th year of good king Josiah, and helped that king with his reforms. By Josiah's day Israel was flush with Canaanite religions, Baalism, child sacrifice, Babylonian cults, and the empty and

1 The way we arrive at that figure is that Jeremiah 25:3 says that he began his ministry in the thirteenth year of King Josiah, which is 628 BC. But in chapter 1 he was an under-age youth.

2 NIDOTTE says, "There seems to be no case where a נַעַר was married. Thus, we may conclude that one meaning of נַעַר is that it refers to any young person from infancy to just before marriage." Hamilton, Victor. VanGemeren, Willem A., ed. The New International Dictionary Of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis.

formalistic worship of Judaism. And Josiah and Jeremiah tagged teamed in bringing reform to the nation. When King Josiah died, Jeremiah mourned deeply at his funeral (2 Chron. 35:25). They must have had a very tight and close relationship. Josiah was the last good king. Everything was downhill to the exile after him. And it seems that after Josiah's death, Jeremiah only had a handful of friends.

And because so much of Jeremiah's ministry would involve tearing down, uprooting, and destroying all rebellion, he would be very unpopular in his day. People don't tend to like that kind of ministry. In fact, Jeremiah 16:1-4 tells him not to get married. Let me read the reasons God gave:

1 The word of the LORD also came to me, saying, 2 "You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place." 3 For thus says the LORD concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning their mothers who bore them and their fathers who begot them in this land: 4 "They shall die gruesome deaths; they shall not be lamented nor shall they be buried, but they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, and their corpses shall be meat for the birds of heaven and for the beasts of the earth."

There's one good reason not to get married and have kids. It's the same reason Paul gave in 1 Corinthians 7. He said that his preference (and it was only a preference, and not a command) was that young people remain single because of the present trouble. But (and this is a big "but") both Paul and Jeremiah commanded the average godly Christian to go ahead and get married because this does indeed continue to be God's norm. People miss that in 1 Corinthians 7 because of all the references to singleness. But 1 Corinthians 7:2 says, "let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." Well, in the same way, Jeremiah sent a letter to the remnant in Babylon commanding them to get married, build houses, settle down, and raise a family in Babylon. But if you were going to be staying in Israel, he told them not to bother. Israel would be a terrible place to be.

But Jeremiah had to stay behind and see this through to its bitter conclusion, even if it meant his death. And various people repeatedly tried to kill him. When false priests and prophets prohibited Jeremiah from preaching any longer at the temple, God told him to write his prophecies down and have his servant Baruch read them publicly. Well, King Jehoiakim was ticked off. He got the scroll of prophecies, cut it into pieces as it was read, and he threw it piece by piece into the fire. He ordered the arrest of Jeremiah, but God hid him and protected him. Jeremiah wrote the book all over again and the military leaders persecuted him, casting him into a dungeon. I have a picture of the Ethiopian eunuch who lifted Jeremiah out of the miry pit.

But right from the start Jeremiah knew that he was going to be a rejected

man and a hugely persecuted man. As far as we know, he never made a single convert throughout his 67 years of prophetic ministry. He was a great encouragement to believers, but it doesn't seem that God willed any of His enemies to repent. In fact, God prohibited Jeremiah from praying for them.

But he still preached his heart out, calling people to repentance, and said by inspiration that if a nation repents, God will instantly relent. You can see that in chapter 18. So there is this balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The message to repent is a sincere offer, but apart from God's grace it won't happen. And of course, there was no repentance, so they were justly condemned.

So if we were to measure Jeremiah's success by his conversion rate, he would have been a failure. But in God's eyes he was not a failure. He was a success. And as we will see later, his prophetic words did not return to God void - they accomplished everything God intended, and powerfully so. They continue to minister in powerful ways to God's people today.

We find in chapter 11 that the people of his hometown attempted to kill him - perhaps to endear themselves to the king, or perhaps because they were irritated themselves. Chapter 12:6 says that even his brothers, the sons of his father, tried to kill him. It is no wonder that he expresses his loneliness. In chapter 20 we find that Pashur the priest beat him and put him in stocks for part of a day and all night. Later he was imprisoned and charged with being a traitor in 37:11-16).

But it was his own message that burdened him the most. He loved his people and pronouncing these woes upon them broke his heart and brought him to tears. He was called the weeping prophet, and next week we will look at his book of Lamentations, that teaches the church how to weep over sin. In chapter 9 of this book he said,

1 Oh, that my head were waters, And my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night For the slain of the daughter of my people! 2 Oh, that I had in the wilderness A lodging place for travelers; That I might leave my people, And go from them! For they are all adulterers, An assembly of treacherous men.

He was so disturbed by the depravity of his countrymen that he decided to resign from ministry. He had had enough. He couldn't stand it anymore. He said, "I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name." I think he had a little bit of an attitude problem that day. Well, here's the problem with his plan. Prophets don't speak on their own initiative anyway, so he couldn't stop prophesying. 2 Peter 1:21 says, "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the

Holy Spirit.” And we see that moving of the Holy Spirit in Jeremiah 20:9. Though he tried to stop being a prophet, he couldn’t. He said, “But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.” (Jer. 20:9).

Authors have pointed out that there are ten similarities between Jeremiah and Jesus. Some people believe it is enough to make him a type of Jesus. I don’t think so, but these are interesting parallels. Here they are (and I won’t read the references).

- Both delivered an unpopular message to people that they loved (Jer 8:21; Luke 13:34)
- Both wept over Jerusalem (Jer 9:1; Luke 19:41)
- Both opposed the commercialization of the temple (Jer 7:11; Matt 21:13)
- Both predicted the temple’s destruction (Jer 7:14; Mark 13:2)
- Both were rejected by their people (Jer 12:6; John 1:11)
- Both were accused of political treason (Jer 37:11-15; Luke 23:2)
- Both were tried and imprisoned and eventually martyred (Jer 32:2-3; John 18:12)
- Both knew deep loneliness as almost everyone abandoned them (Jer 17:15; John 16:32a)
- Both demonstrated unusually deep fellowship and prayer-communion with God (Jer 15:16; John 16:32b)
- Both showed how God hated formalism in worship (Jer. 7-8; Matt 15:9)

Why would God bring such a tender-hearted person to bring His message of judgment? I believe it is because God wanted the prophet to reflect His own grief over depravity. If he had sent a cynical prophet or a thick-skinned prophet who didn’t seem to empathize at all, it would not have adequately reflected God’s heart. Chapters 2-3 show many expressions of God’s own pained heart. “Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number.” (2:32) In chapter 8:21 Jeremiah says, “For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt.” In 4:19 he said, “Oh my anguish, my anguish! I am pained in my very heart!”

But Jeremiah lived to see most of his prophecies fulfilled. He was not taken to Babylon, but was able to live in Israel for a time. But eventually, a small group of revolutionary Jews assassinated the Babylonian representative and then fled to Egypt. But on the way out of town they kidnapped Jeremiah and forced him to go with them (43:6-7). Tradition says that they stoned him to death in Egypt. So there are a lot of tough things in this book.

II. Samples of the rich theology of Jeremiah

Some people find it rough going to read through all of that weeping, sorrow, and judgment. But if you read even the negative passages with an eye to

theology, you will discover all kinds of treasures in this book. Even the weeping shows God's heart. I've given you three samples of theology.

A. Theology (doctrine of God)

There is theology proper - that is the doctrine of God. I didn't have space in the outline to show how much of the doctrine of God you can find in Jeremiah. It is all there - the Trinity is there with clear indications of the personality of each Person of the Trinity. But in your outlines I have just listed a sampling of God's attributes that are displayed in this book with Scripture proofs. You can see God's goodness (Jer 31:12, 14; 33:11), holiness (Jer 23:9; 50:29), justice (Jer 9:24; 32:19; 50:7), righteousness (Jer 9:24; 12:1), wrath (Jer 4:8; 7:20), forgiveness (Jer 18:7-8), patience (Jer 15:15), that He is the God of hope (Jer 17:13; 50:7), is loving (Jer 9:24; 31:3), merciful (Jer 3:12; 33:11), sufficient (Jer 20:11-13), wise (Jer 10:7, 12; 32:19), faithful (Jer 32:41; 33:14), avenging (11:20; 15:15; 20:12; 46:10; 50:15,28; 51:6,11,36), sovereign (Jer 5:15; 6:19), powerful (Jer 5:22; 10:12), true (Jer 5:3; 10:10), incomparable (Jer 10:6), omnipresent (Jer 23:23-24), and omnipotent (10:12; 27:5; 32:17; 51:15).

B. Hamartiology (doctrine of sin)

You have some of the most vivid descriptions of man's depraved nature (3:10,17; 5:23-24; 7:24; 9:8,14; 11:8; 12:2; 16:2,12; 17:5,9-10; 18:12; 22:17; 23:17; 48:29) and of his desperate need of regeneration (9:26; 4:4,14,18). Over and over these people are condemned as disobedient, and even worse, willfully rebellious. Jeremiah quotes them as saying, "We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart" (18:12; cf. 44:16; Jeremiah 17:9; Jeremiah 17:23). Wow! That's quite an admission.

C. The law

Likewise, Jeremiah accused the people of breaking all ten commandments. He accuses them of having other gods (2:11; 7:9), of idolatry (7:9; 10:14) and of defiling His name (7:9,10,12,14,30). He accuses them of breaking the Sabbath in chapter 17. They turned the fifth commandment upside down (2:27; 3:4,19; etc.), and engaged murder (7:6,9; 22:3,17), sexual sin (2:20; 3:2, 8-9; 5:7; 7:9; 9:2; 13:27; 23:10,14; 29:23), theft (2:26; 7:9,11), lying (5:2,31; 6:13; 7:4,8,9; 8:8,10; 9:3,5,8; 13:25; 14:14; 16:19; 20:6; 23:14,25,32; 27:10,14-16; 28:15; etc.), and covetousness (6:13; 8:10; 22:17; 51:13). You could of course get more detailed and look at numerous case laws that were violated. But this is a book that is bringing

covenant lawsuits against those who had broken God’s laws. As documentation for this covenant lawsuit he wrote 1 and 2 Kings. That was one of the functions of prophets - to bring covenant lawsuits. And there are many other theological lessons that you could learn from this book if we had time. And I’ve included a bunch of extra information including archaeological finds in your handout.

III. Structure is important

But what I want to do for the remainder of the sermon is to give you a bird’s eye view of the book. By now you know that I don’t like to preach on a book of the Bible until I understand its structure. The structure tells you a lot about the purpose and the direction of a book. It’s like a roadmap. And I don’t always necessarily share that information with you in my sermons. I follow the roadmap, but I don’t always give you the roadmap. But in the case of Jeremiah, it is so important to the interpretation that I do want to discuss it a little bit.

I own 98 commentaries on Jeremiah, and it is astounding how many authors have thrown up their hands in despair at finding any discernible order to this book. Let me quote you some of their descriptions of the order and arrangement of Jeremiah. Carroll calls it “enigmatic.”³ Others call it “puzzling,”⁴ “most perplexing,”⁵ “an incredible riddle,”⁶ “a hopeless hodgepodge,”⁷ “complicated,”⁸ “haphazardly arranged,”⁹ “following no discernible order,”¹⁰ and something that leaves the reader “baffled.”¹¹ A 2007 Study Bible says, “Biblical scholars have struggled to explain the arrangement of Jeremiah’s prophecies.”¹² In fact, very weirdly, a couple of

3 Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 9.

4 Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 17.

5 Samuel G. Green, *The Kingdom of Israel and Judah After the Disruption, Parts I and II* (London: Sunday School Union, 1876–1877), 260.

6 A. R. Peter Diamond, “Introduction,” in *Troubling Jeremiah*, 15.

7 John Bright, *Jeremiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), lvi.

8 Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 7.

9 The full quote of Fretheim is, “The structure of the book of Jeremiah, while clear in some respects, is finally something of a puzzle... That the book is clearly a collection of materials emergent in various times and places could mean that the book as a whole has been somewhat haphazardly arranged.” Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, ed. P. Keith Gammons and Samuel E. Balentine, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Incorporated, 2002), 17.

10 William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 133. The full quote is, “A brief analysis of the literary complexity of Jeremiah must be offered, since the book is a diffuse collection of oracles, not necessarily arranged chronologically, and often following no discernible order.”

11 Louis Stulman, *Jeremiah* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 11.

12 Ted Cabal et al., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), 1085.

commentaries have completely ignored the order in Jeremiah, thinking that these prophecies must have somehow gotten out of order, and have instead made their own attempts to rearrange the book into what they thought was the original order.¹³ Of course, we reject such nonsense because the Bible says that God will preserve every jot and tittle of His Word. But those commentators think that the original order has been lost. And it is not surprising that this has negatively affected their interpretation of the book. If you are following the wrong roadmap, you are probably not traveling where Jeremiah wants you to travel. It doesn't mean that you won't get a lot out of the book, but it does mean that you will miss a lot.

I will be the first to admit that the prophecies are not arranged by when Jeremiah prophesied them. A simple glance at the references to the kings mentioned in this book (and I've listed them on page 3 under "Key People") shows that the prophecies given during their reigns are not arranged chronologically. So it is more of a topical and theological arrangement.

Well, it all clicked in my head when I read an article in Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology that showed a suggested 9 point chiasm with the Book of Comfort being the heart of the book.¹⁴ Even though it was not a 100% satisfactory outline, the parts that were made me start studying structure like crazy. And with the help of a couple of other authors who noticed some parallels, God enabled me to pull together what I believe is an incredibly logical and smooth chiasm of the whole. There is nothing forced about this chiasm.

13 I don't own these commentaries, but Huey points out, "The commentaries by Bright and Leslie (Jeremiah: Chronologically Arranged, Translated, and Interpreted [New York: Abingdon, 1954]) arrange the chapters and their exegesis to conform with what they believe is the correct order of the events and messages. For a recent attempt to identify the structure of Jeremiah using headings and literary clues, see R. D. Patterson, "Of Bookends, Hinges, and Hooks: Literary Clues to the Arrangement of Jeremiah's Prophecies," WTJ 51 (1989): 109-31." F. B. Huey, Jeremiah, Lamentations, vol. 16, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993).

14 Elmer A. Martens, "Jeremiah, Theology of," in Walter A. Elwell (ed.), Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). The outline proposed by Martens was: A. God's Personal Message to Jeremiah (1) B. Speeches Warning of Disaster (2-10) C. Stories of Prophet Wrestling with People and God (11-20) D. Disputation with Kings and Prophets (21-29) E. The Book of Comfort (30-33) D1. Disputation with Kings (34-38) C1. Stories of a Sacked City and the Aftermath (39-45) B1. Oracles against Nations (46-51) A1. Appendix: Historical Documentation (52)

IV. The structure of Jeremiah solves a theological controversy

Structure of Jeremiah

By Phillip G. Kayser

- A Introduction - Jeremiah's call to destroy and plant begun (1)
 - B Oracles against Judah: invasion and disaster from north (2-12)
 - C Judah's exile and suffering predicted (13-20)
 - D Judgments against specific kings and groups (21-29)
 - E Israel will return from captivity in prep for Messiah (30:1-31:22)
 - F Israel will dwell in the land (31:23-26)
 - G Future restoration of individuals (31:27-30)
 - H New covenant (31:31-34)**
 - G' Future restoration of nation (31:35-40)
 - F' Israel will dwell in the land (32)
 - E' Israel will return from captivity in prep for Messiah (33)
 - D' Judgments against specific kings and groups (34-35)
 - C' Judah's suffering and exile accomplished (36-45)
 - B' Oracles against nations: invasion and disaster from north (46-51)
 - A' Epilogue - Jeremiah's call to destroy and plant fulfilled (52)
- 31:27-40 is a tightly-knit literary unit – note especially “Behold, the days are coming” 3x followed by a temporal *waw-perfect* Hebrew construction
- Book of Comfort (30-33)

I've only included enough points so that you can see the flow of the book. You will see that the Book of Comfort (which is chapters 30-33) is the heart of the book, and everything flows towards that.

So let me walk you through that outline. Chapter 1 shows Jeremiah's call to the office of prophet. He was definitely fearful to take up that mantle, but God assured him that his prophecies would have the power to accomplish everything He had sent him to accomplish. Look at verses 9-10.

Jer. 1:9 Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. 10 See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.”

He had a dual purpose in his ministry. The negative purpose was rooting out, pulling down, destroying, and throwing down. The positive purpose was building and planting.

Obviously the content of those prophecies comes in the chapters in between, but the actual accomplishment of the rooting out, pulling down, destroying, and throwing down is given in chapter 52, a chapter that gives the history of how those prophecies were fulfilled to a t. The city wall, the city, the temple was all pulled down, destroyed, and burned. The people were uprooted from their land and sent to Babylon. Everything was plundered.

What about the planting? Two things were planted. First, a remnant was preserved and protected in Babylon. They were planted and preserved by the word of Jeremiah. They constituted a new Israel as the old was rejected.

Second, the ancestor of Jesus (Jehoiachin) was very strangely released from prison, befriended by the emperor, ate at the emperor's table, and had all the provisions that he needed. God planted a seed that would become a faithful line of the Messiah.

If you look at the outline, I want you to notice the B sections. The first B section is in chapters 2-12. This constitutes the oracles against Judah that predicted Babylon's invasion from the north and the disasters that would follow. This is paralleled by the second B section in chapters 46-51 with the very same kind of oracles pronouncing invasion from the north and disasters to follow, but this time it adds that Babylon would come against all nations, not just Judah. But there are so many detailed parallels between those two B sections.

The C sections both predict Judah's exile and sufferings, with chapters 13-20 being a parallel to chapters 36-45.

The D sections have a bunch of parallels that I couldn't fit into the outline. For example, people have wondered why the kings are out of order. And the reason is that they appear in parallels on these points. Both Jehoiakim and Zedekiah are prophesied against in both D sections. They are topically arranged prophecies. False prophets are called out in both section. A remnant is praised and miraculously protected in both sections. Every point of this chiasm has clear and obvious parallels. The parallels form a double witness against the leaders and groups that will be judged.

But it is in the Book of Comfort itself that we see the importance of understanding this chiasm. The Book of Comfort shows us God's purpose in having Jeremiah root out, pull down, destroy, and throw down. It's to make way for the Messiah and His New Covenant. Something glorious will be planted and built up as a result of Jeremiah's prophecy.

The E sections within that Book of Comfort show the preparation for the Messiah. In both sections Israel is predicted to return from the land of Babylon (something unheard of in ancient history) and to be planted in the land of Israel once again. But where the center of the chiasm will show that remnant theology will eventually give way to fullness theology, the E sections still focus on the remnant. But it will be a faithful remnant. And they return to the land for a purpose - to prepare the way for the Messiah and His new covenant. So the last verses of each E section ends with a very short reference to the birth of the future Messiah, Jesus.

Not all modern commentators believe that chapter 31:22 refers to the birth of

Jesus, so I will spend a bit more time on it. First, look at the context. Chapter 31:15 is quoted by the inspired Matthew as being fulfilled in Herod's massacre of the infants in Bethlehem. Liberals question Matthew's interpretation, but hey, Matthew's inspired and they are not. So even the context gives a first century AD time-frame.

Jer. 31:15 Thus says the LORD: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more."

Now look at verse 22. If the context is one or two years after Christ's birth, then the past tense makes sense. Speaking to backslidden Israel, God says, How long will you gad about, O you backsliding daughter? For the LORD has created a new thing in the earth — A woman shall encompass a man.

Fausset's commentary says, "the Christian fathers almost unanimously interpreted it of the Virgin Mary compassing Christ in her womb. This view is favored" by, and Fausset gives eight reasons why this has to be a reference to Christ's birth. He says that it fits the context and gives a good reason for why Israel must return to the land. It fits the Hebrew word for "created," which no other theory has been able to account for. Third, it fits the phrase "a new thing." Every alternative interpretation that I have read makes zero sense of that phrase. For example, is it a new thing in the earth for a woman to have sexual relations, as some claim this means? No. Is it a new thing to simply give childbirth? No. Is it a new thing for a woman to protect her child? No. Is it a new thing for Israel to love Yehowah? No. None of the other theories make sense. As Fausset word it, this is "something unprecedented." "This was 'the new thing in the earth,' a woman, without a man, should bear in her womb a man."¹⁵ And he gives a bunch of other proofs that I will definitely not get into. I'll put them on the web.¹⁶ Gill gives

15 A. R. Fausset, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Jeremiah–Malachi*, vol. IV (London; Glasgow: William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited, n.d.), 108.

16 "But the Christian fathers almost unanimously (Augustine, &c.) interpreted it of the Virgin Mary compassing Christ in her womb. The objection is alleged that בָּרָא is not elsewhere used to mean gestation in the womb. But it does mean to surround; and also to be the cause, occasion, or starting-point of a thing (cf. 1 Ki. 12:15, "The cause was from the Lord"). This was "the new thing in the earth," a woman, without a man, should bear in her womb a man; not that she created the child, but that she was the divinely-appointed vehicle and starting-point of the child's birth. This view is favoured, 1. By the connection; it gives a reason why the exiles should desire a return to their country—viz., because Christ was conceived there. 2. The word "created" implies a Divine power put forth in the creation of a body in the Virgin's womb by the Holy Ghost for the second Adam, such as was exerted in creating the first Adam (Luke 1:35; Heb. 10:5, "A body hast thou prepared me"). 3. The phrase "a new thing," something unprecedented; a man whose like had never existed before, at once God and man; a mother out of the ordinary course of nature, at once mother and virgin. An extraordinary mode of generation; one conceived by the Holy Ghost without man. 4 The specification 'in the land' (not "earth," as the English version), viz., of Judah, where probably Christ was conceived, in Hebron (cf. Luke 1:39, 41, 42, 44, with Josh. 21:11); or else in Nazareth, 'in the territory' of Israel, to whom vv. 5, 6, 15, 18, 21 refer; His birth was at Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:5, 6). As the place of His nativity, and that of His being reared (Matt. 2:23), and that of His preaching (the temple, Hag. 2:7; Mal. 3:1), are specified, so it is

a number of ancient Jewish commentaries who said that this is a reference to the birth of their coming Messiah. So its not just Christians who interpreted it that way; Jews did too. Hawker says of this verse, God's creating a new thing in the earth, is eminently so, in respect to the incarnation of Christ. For, if Christ's human nature had been made out of man, as Eve was, this would not have been a new thing. Neither, had his human nature been made out of nothing, as Adam was, would this have been new. But to make Christ's human nature of a woman, yea, of the seed of the woman, and that without an human father; this was a thing new indeed.¹⁷

So the first E section has Israel returning from captivity in preparation for the coming Messiah, and leads up to the incarnation of that Messiah, and the resistance that this Messiah would receive. Jeremiah predicted that there would be unbelief in the time of the Messiah.

Well, the same is true of the second E section, which is chapter 33. God makes sure that Israel will return to the land in preparation for the coming Messiah. And if you look at 33:14-15 you will see that Messiah is being described. The context also shows first century, like the previous E did. But let's read verses 14-15.

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah: In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness.

This is referring to Christ's childhood. “I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness.” Earlier (23:5), Jeremiah had identified this Branch of Righteousness as being the Messianic King. And these verses go on to show that the rule of this Branch of Righteousness (Jesus) would be upon the throne of David, and that He would infallibly advance His righteousness in the earth. So you can see without question that the two E sections are parallel and are moving everything thematically to the same point in history - to the New Covenant.

The F sections deal with Israel dwelling in the land, and the importance of that land.

likely the Holy Spirit designated the place of His being conceived. The Hebrew for “woman” [יְהוּדָה] implies an individual, as the Virgin Mary, rather than a collection of persons. 6. The restoration of Israel is grounded on God's covenant in Christ, to whom, therefore, allusion is naturally made as the foundation of Israel's hope (cf. Isa. 7:14). The Virgin Mary's conception of Messiah in the womb answers to the “virgin of Israel” (therefore so called v. 21)—i.e., Israel and her sons, at their final restoration, receiving Jesus as Messiah (Zech. 12:10). 7. The reference to the conception of the child Messiah accords with the mention of the massacre of “children” referred to v. 15 (cf. Matt. 2:17); His birth would repair the evil caused by their death. The Hebrew [אֱדָם] for “man” is properly ‘mighty man,’ a term applied to God, Deut. 10:17; and to Christ, Zech. 13:7 (cf. Ps. 45:3; Isa. 9:6).” A. R. Fausset, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Jeremiah–Malachi*, vol. IV (London; Glasgow: William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited, n.d.), 108.

¹⁷ Robert Hawker, *Poor Man's Old Testament Commentary: Proverbs–Lamentations*, vol. 5 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2013), 648.

We are now going to see how this chiasm helps to settle a major controversy in eschatology that occurs over the central verses. If you look at the outline, you will notice in small print to the right of chapter 31:27-40 that the Gs and the H are actually a very tightly-knit-together unit of thought. We know that they are three paragraphs within this chiasm because of the three repeated phrases, “Behold the days are coming.” So you can’t merge the G’s and H’s into one G. But on the other hand, those “Behold the days are coming” expressions are followed by the temporal waw-perfect Hebrew construction, so they cannot be separated in time. The three units of two Gs and one H belong to the same period. It is the period of the New Covenant that is described in verses 31-34 and which forms such a central part of New Testament theology.

So why do I say that it is controversial? Because it continues to give a place for Jews and even for national Israel within the New Covenant period. And this is the point where Premillennialists will start cheering. But hold on a sec. Israel does not have the kind of place that Dispensationalists and Premillennialists insist that they must have. But neither is it the non-place that Amillennial Replacement Theology insists upon. As we will see, it is only historic Postmillennialism that has a place for Israel in the church that can account for this section of the book. And these three paragraphs are an amazing prophecy.

The first G section (verses 27-30) deals with the restoration and preservation of individual Jews throughout the New Covenant era. This is the remnant of Israel being saved. The second G section (verses 35-40) deals with the restoration and preservation of the nation of Israel during the New Covenant as well.

Is this the church? Yes, but it is a church made up of Jew and Gentile, and this central section parallels Paul’s theology in Romans 9-11 which shows that God still recognizes the difference between Jew and Gentile in the New Covenant, even though both Jew and Gentiles will be in the church and will constitute Israel. This was the mystery that puzzled the early church and that Ephesians says required so many prophets. It’s not replacement theology, which no longer recognizes the distinction of Jew and Gentile. And it’s not Dispensationalism, which sees the Jews and the Church as different entities. God has only one people. But God speaks of natural branches being broken off of the olive tree of Romans 11 and eventually those branches will be grafted back in again.

Perhaps if we look at the heart of the heart of this book (the H section)

things will come into sharper focus. Let's read verses 31-34.

Jer. 31:31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Now, here's the deal. Replacement theology is absolutely correct in their interpretation of these central verses - that the church has taken the place of Israel; that the church is the Israel of God. Jesus applied these verses to the church at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). Paul applies these verses to the church in 1 Corinthians 11:25 and 2 Corinthians 3:6. Hebrews applies these verses literally to the church in chapters 8,9, and 12, and insists that the Old Covenant was ready to pass away with the destruction of Israel. Hebrews 9:15 says that Jesus right now is the Mediator of the new covenant so that those who are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance. Which promise? The promise given in this chapter. We are heirs. We have entered this new covenant. How is that possible? It's possible because Gentiles were grafted into the new Israel. So far Replacement Theology makes sense and Dispensationalism makes no sense.

But for the sake of argument, I will let the Dispensationalist reject the idea that Israel and Judah represents the church in the heart of the heart of this book and see where it takes us. They see it differently. They think it is prophesying entirely about Israel's restoration to the land sometime in our future and that it refers to Israel and Judah as a people completely separate from the church. But we've already seen that that makes mincemeat of the nine times the New Testament applies this passage to the church and only to the church. If we are going to submit to the infallible interpretation of the New Testament, we must say that this promise was made to the New Testament church.

But presuppositions don't die easily, and Dispensationalists will still insist that this is not true - that this still must be made with Judah and Israel. And their arguments actually seem quite strong - that is, if you ignore the New Testament interpretation. Verse 31 says that God will make a new covenant "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" - two houses representing two nations with national recognition. They say that by mentioning both Israel and Judah, it is clear that he is not using one as a

symbol. Furthermore, it is the same Israel that had fathers who came out of Egypt in verse 32. They claim that that is not the church. We respond that the New Testament repeatedly has even Gentile churches calling the fathers who came out of Egypt “our fathers.” For example, Corinth was a Gentile church, and in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 Paul says, “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” They are indeed the fathers of us Gentile believers.

But another argument that the Dispensationalists give is that these verses say that 100% of these people will be regenerate believers, which has never been true of the historical church - a church that has always had tares. Well, that is true as far as it goes, but it still doesn't deal with the infallible interpretation given by the New Testament.

But it is in the G sections that the Dispensational argument shines and the Replacement Theology argument does not shine. Dispensationalists rightly point out that verses 35-36 say that as long as there is a sun and a moon, so long will the “seed of Israel” be a nation before God. In context, this seed of Israel has to refer to Jews, and the word “nation” has to refer to a national entity. They point out that the detailed measurements of the land of this Israel in verses 38-40 cannot be spiritualized away as the Gentile church. Let's read verses 38-40.

Jer. 31:38 “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that the city shall be built for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. 39 The surveyor's line shall again extend straight forward over the hill Gareb; then it shall turn toward Goath. 40 And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the Brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD. It shall not be plucked up or thrown down anymore forever.”

They rightly point out that this cannot refer to Jerusalem in Ezra's day since that city did get plucked up and thrown down in the time of the Maccabees. It can't refer to the time of Jesus, since that city was plucked up and thrown down in AD 70. So they believe that this has to be a national conversion at some point in our future. I agree. But that doesn't make the overall Dispensational interpretation right. Both sides of this debate have some right and some wrong.

The problem is that neither side is factoring in all of the evidence. The New Testament could not be more clear that we are in the New Covenant, and since Jeremiah 31 is the one prophecy that mentions the words the “New Covenant,” and since that New Covenant was made with us, the logical conclusion is that we are the Israel of God.

Did the Acts 2 community constitute Israel? Yes. It was composed 100% of the remnant of Israel from all twelve tribes. In my Acts series I gave abundant evidence that all the criteria for reconstituting the remnant as the true and legitimate Israel in Babylon during the exile (and the major prophets indicate that they were reconstituted as the genuine Israel back then) - all of those criteria were also met in Acts 2.

At the time of Jeremiah God did not consider the rebellious Jews in the land to be the true Israel. They were called Sodom and Gomorrah. Well, the New Testament calls the Talmudists Sodom and Egypt.

At the time of Jeremiah, God did not consider the temple to be legitimate. He reconstituted His temple among His remnant of Israel in Babylon and kept adding believers to their midst. Even Gentiles became Jews in Esther 8:17. Well, the same was true of the remnant of truly believing Jews in the first century that constituted the church. They were made up of the citizens of Judah and Israel. There is a literal fulfillment.

Though Gentiles were converted to Israel in Esther 8:17, the core group that reconstituted Israel in Babylon had to be Jewish. The same was true of the church of the first few chapters of Acts - it was 100% Jewish.

Next, just as there had to be 120 leaders representing at least twelve congregations of ten men in Babylon to reform the community, Acts 2 started with 120 leaders in the upper room. That was the minimum number needed.

Just as Israel in Exodus had to have 70 prophetic elders, all of the 70 whom Jesus anointed with prophetic powers in Luke 10 were in that upper room at Pentecost.

There had to be twelve princes over twelve tribes. And there were. Jesus told the twelve,

But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:28-30).

This is why there had to be a selection of Mattathias to replace Judas. There had to be twelve princes over the twelve reconstituted tribes of Israel. And Jesus speaks of a believing Sanhedrin (Matt. 5:22) that would replace the unbelieving Sanhedrin. That's just a General Assembly, right? On every level Acts 2 met the condition of constituting a new Israel. So Paul calls the church "the Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16. So that addresses the

Dispensationalist objections. There is a literal fulfillment of God making the New Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah in the first century.

But the fact that the church is now the true Israel does not mean that God wipes out the Jew-Gentile distinction. In Romans 1 Paul captures his strategy of New Covenant missions as being “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). Likewise Romans 2:9 promises judgments in that order, speaking of “tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 2:9-10). He is not erasing those distinctions. Jews continue to be grafted into the church as converts according to Romans 11:1-10 and the next section of Romans 11 (verses 11-32) speaks of a future conversion and grafting back into the church of the entire nation of Israel that had been broken off. Indeed, all nations will be converted, but there will only be one church. So Isaiah 19 speaks of three nations in the Middle East that will be 100% converted, and he names them as “Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance” (v. 25). That is not three churches, but three nations who have all been engrafted into the one church; into the one spiritual Israel.

So both the structure and language of Jeremiah 31 opposes both extremes of Dispensationalism and Amillennial Replacement Theology. The first G section of your outline corresponds to the first 10 verses of Romans 11 and showcases a remnant of Jews who will be saved throughout the New Covenant era. The second G section of your outline corresponds to Romans 11:11-32 and predicts that a nation called Israel will inherit specific geographic territory in the middle east and will be 100% converted. They will be regrafted back into the Olive Tree.

The only eschatological position that can fully account for all these facts is traditional Postmillennialism - the kind of Postmillennialism taught by John Murray, David Brown, Charles Spurgeon, William Carey, David Livingstone, Steve Schlissel, and many others. They did not speak of a separate entity that is parallel with the church. Instead, they spoke of the church as being Israel, (the only one that the H section could be fulfilled in) and this one Israel will constantly have both apostate Jews and never-covenanted Gentiles being grafted into it.

This means that the Israel of God is not ultimately ethnic since Esther 8:17 makes clear that Gentiles became Jews. Back then it was cultural and

religious. But the point is, apostates from this one Israel will eventually come back in. Gentiles who were never part of the church will come in.

But that verses 31-34 covers the entire span of New Testament history (and not just AD 30) can be seen by the fact that at some point there won't be tares. It will be impossible to find anyone to evangelize and convert. They will all be converted. Verse 34 says, "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." Now, God will resurrect tares on the last day of history (including a resurrected Gog and Magog), but the earth will be 100% converted. So again, this fits the trajectory of Romans 11 in that it describes total conversion - no longer a remnant, but fullness of the Gentiles and fullness of Israel being converted and placed into the church; the one true and spiritual Israel.

Along these lines Isaiah 65:23 says that at some point in history "They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble." 100% of the conceptions and births of babies will produce the elect who will never see judgment. But that implies that in the early stages of the New Covenant there will be babies born in vain and children born to trouble. We tend to confuse the final trajectory of history with the present if we do not add the progressive fulfillment to the Already-not-yet of Amillennialism.

Paedocommunionists also misapply this prophecy of what will happen in history by saying that we should admit all our children to the table because (based on Jeremiah) we must assume all our children are elect. But Jeremiah 31 doesn't say anything about assumption. It says all will be, not all are assumed to be. Ironically Credobaptists make the same mistake of interpretation and come to a different conclusion - that we should try to narrow membership down to the elect. But this says nothing about what we try to do. It's all about what God actually will do at some point in history. Election cuts down through the covenant (as Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob show), but as history progresses, the elect and the covenant community will more and more look alike until they are identical - and that includes babies - the least of these. So let me read verses 31-34 one more time and show how spectacular this new covenant is.

Jer. 31:31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, / [these are actual historical days - and days indicates ongoing history] when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—

He made it with the first century Jewish church, and He continues to establish that New Covenant with each individual grafted in over history.

Verse 32:

32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.

So there is something about the New Covenant that is quite different than the covenant under Moses. The difference is not the absence of Mosaic moral law. In fact, the same laws will be written on the heart. But the partial of ceremonies will give way to fulfillment of New Covenant Kingdom realities. Notice that God's Torah continues in the New Covenant in verse 33.

33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Eventually, all of Israel will truly be Israel because they will all be in the church. So there are similarities between the Mosaic economy and the New Covenant and there are radical differences. Let me quickly outline both.

First, the similarities: 1. Both are covenants, and as such, must have all five features of a covenant. All covenants have the Transcendent sovereignty of God. He is Lord. All covenants have human representatives of God's authority. All covenants have law. All covenants have sanctions of blessing and curse. And all covenants have a succession plan for the generations. So both are covenants. 2. Both have the same God. 3. Both have the same moral laws. True, this time they will be internalized and not all be unbelievers like the wilderness generation were, but the laws will continue.

But let's look next at the radical differences. Hebrews speaks of 14 ways in which the New Covenant is better. All 14 are implied here. 1. First, it's new. Not just new in time, but new in power. What Adam could not achieve, the New Adam will achieve for His people. Hebrews says that the new will endure forever, whereas the old was about to vanish away. 2. Second, there are better promises. Seven times the phrase "I will" is given to show that this is a work of God's grace alone. 3. Third, a better atonement is seen in the words "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Moses and other saints knew that the blood of animals was only looking forward to Christ, so they trusted in Christ. That's why Galatians 4 says that Isaac was in the New Covenant long before the New Covenant was ratified. He trusted Jesus. Anyone who trusted in the blood of bulls and goats alone was in the Old Covenant and lost. In every historical covenant you were either looking to Christ as your federal head or Adam as your federal head. If you are looking to Adam, you are in the Old Covenant and lost like the wilderness generation was. If you are looking to Christ, you are in the New

Covenant. 4. Fourth, there will be a new and better presence of God - "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." 5. Fifth, there will be a new heart. You can see that in the phrase, "I will write it on their hearts" or as Jeremiah worded it earlier, "I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD" (24:7). Does that mean that Moses didn't have a new heart? Of course he did. The remnant of believers back then all had new hearts, but they were trusting in the Christ of the New Covenant, not trusting in their own strength that Adam gave them. It was only those who broke the covenant in the wilderness who failed to look to the New Covenant Mediator. 6. Sixth, there will be a new testimony - an internal testimony. 7. Seventh, there will be a new intimacy, found in the words "I will be their God, and they shall be my people...each one...and each...they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest..." 8. Eighth, those same phrases speak of a better trajectory. In the Old Testament, everything was destined to be going downhill to the cross. But the cross reverses history and makes sure that the true believers will not always be a remnant. They will be the fullness. 9. Ninth, there will be greater clarity (seen in the words "they all shall know") 10. Tenth, a new empowerment ("not according to the covenant...which they broke...I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts"). In other words, God will enable what they could not do. 11. Eleventh, there will be a new extent ("they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.") 12. Twelfth, this covenant will have an eternal nature (see 50:5 - "an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten") 13. Thirteenth, there will be a new guarantor ("the LORD says" occurs 9x) 14. And finally, there will be a better mediator than Moses. Moses interceded and asked God to curse him and spare the people. God refused. Jesus asked God to curse Him and spare the people, and God listened and He did so.

According to Galatians 4, people throughout history have belonged in one of two overarching covenants. Every historical covenant had the same laws, but if the only mediator you looked to for help was a human one, you were lost. The New Covenant still has the same laws with the same demands for perfection, but Jesus met those demands for us. I would urge you to put your trust in Jesus, who alone has met the full demands of the law. Isaiah said that He took our sins upon Himself and suffered for our sins. That's called the imputation of our sins to Him. In turn, He gave us His righteousness so that we could receive God's favor and inheritance. That's called the imputation of His righteousness to us. It is faith that receives that. When we believe, we cast our sins on Him and He clothes us with His righteousness. It's a double imputation. So put your trust in the Mediator of the New Covenant and

rejoice in the incredible heritage He has purchased for you. Amen.