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NARRATIVE PARALLELISM AND THE “JEHOIAKIM FRAME”: A READING STRATEGY FOR JEREMIAH 26–45

GARY E. YATES*

I. INTRODUCTION

Many attempting to make sense of prophetic literature in the Hebrew Bible would echo Carroll’s assessment that “[t]o the modern reader the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are virtually incomprehensible as *books*.”¹ For Carroll, the problem with reading these books as “books” is that there is a confusing mixture of prose and poetry, a lack of coherent order and arrangement, and a shortage of necessary contextual information needed for accurate interpretation.² Despite the difficult compositional and historical issues associated with the book of Jeremiah, there is a growing consensus that the search for literary and theological unity in Jeremiah is a legitimate enterprise.³ Hobbs has argued that “it is possible to trace a clearly defined theologically oriented structure to the Book of Jeremiah as it now stands.”⁴

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¹ R P Carroll *Jeremiah* (OTL, Philadelphia Westminster, 1986) 38

² *Ibid*

³ These compositional issues include the presence of literary doublets in the book, the textual differences between Jer-LXX and Jer-MT, the presentation of the Jeremiah traditions in various literary genres (poetic oracles, prose sermons, confessions, prose narratives), and evidences of apparent redactional variation. For discussion of these issues, see the following: C J Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremianic Prose* (New York: T & T Clark, 2003); G H Parker-Taylor, *The Formation of the Book of Jeremiah: Doublets and Recurring Phrases* (SBLMS 51, Atlanta: SBL, 2000); A H W Curtis and T C Romer, ed., *The Book of Jeremiah and its Reception* (BETL 128, Leuven: Peeters/University Press, 1997); M J Williams, “An Investigation of the Legitimacy of Source Critical Distinctions for the Prose Material in Jeremiah,” *JBL* 112 (1993) 193–210; C R Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW 176, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989); L Stulman, *The Prose Sermons of the Book of Jeremiah: A Redescription of the Correspondences with the Deuteronomistic Literature in the Light of Recent Text-critical Research* (SBLDS 83, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); E Tov, “The Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah in the Light of Its Textual History,” in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism* (ed. J Tigay, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) 211–39; L G Perdue and B W Kovacs, eds., *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984); W Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26–45* (WMANT 52, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981); *idem*, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1–25* (WMANT 41, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1973). For the movement in Jeremiah studies to a more literary and reader-centered approach to the book, as opposed to a historical-critical one, see the essays in A R P Diamond, K M O’Connor, and L Stulman, eds., *Troubling Jeremiah* (JSOTSup 260, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

⁴ T R Hobbs, “Some Remarks on the Composition and Structure of the Book of Jeremiah,” *CBQ* 34 (1972) 271

Stulman's *Order Amid Chaos* is the most extensive and ambitious work to date in looking at the book of Jeremiah as a whole and seeking to demonstrate "that Jeremiah reflects an intentional literary organization and final theological message."⁵

The purpose of this article is to examine the literary structure and message of one section of the book of Jeremiah, the largely narrative section in Jeremiah 26–45, and to posit a strategy for a holistic reading of this section of the book that will contribute to a further understanding of the literary and theological unity of the book of Jeremiah as a whole.⁶

II. EVIDENCES OF UNITY IN JEREMIAH 26–45

Not surprisingly, Carroll and others have argued that Jeremiah 26–45 is devoid of any sense of inner unity.⁷ Despite the overall lack of chronological order and the apparent episodic disarray in Jeremiah 26–45, there are three clear evidences of inner unity and cohesion in this section of the Book of Jeremiah that serve to legitimate this study. First, there is a *thematic unity* in 26–45 built around the recurring accusation that Judah has not "listened to/obeyed" (שמע) the word of Yahweh (26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 34:14, 17; 35:14, 15, 16, 17; 36:31; 37:14; 40:3; 42:13, 21; 43:7; 44:16, 23). Nicholson categorizes this section of Jeremiah as "a history of Yahweh's word proclaimed by Jeremiah . . . and the rejection of that word by Judah."⁸

Second, there is *the unifying theopolitical perspective* in Jeremiah 26–45 that Yahweh has decreed the temporary subjugation of Judah to Babylon as

⁵ L. Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos: Jeremiah as Symbolic Tapestry* (The Biblical Seminar 57; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 17. Stulman argues that the arrangement of Jeremiah "consists of large compositional units" (chaps. 1–25 and 26–52). The first large unit in Jeremiah 1–25 "testifies to the collapse of the created order" and "the demolition of Israel's trusted networks of meaning" (p. 19). The first unit in 1–25 serves as a prolegomenon for the second unit in chaps. 26–52, which documents the judgment announced in 1–25 but also provides "strategies for hope and new beginnings" through the articulation of "new world constructions, fresh networks of meaning and social configurations amid and beyond the symbolic end of the world" (p. 19). See also M. Kessler, ed., *Reading the Book of Jeremiah* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004).

⁶ T. E. Fretheim notes four ways that chaps. 26–45 are distinct from the preceding section in Jeremiah 1–25: (1) the predominance of prose (with chaps. 30–31 as an exception); (2) the focus on incidents from the life and ministry of Jeremiah; (3) the presence of names, persons, peoples, and events; and (4) a greater number of salvation-oracles (*Jeremiah* [Smith and Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smith and Helwys, 2002] 364). These distinctive features clearly mark off chaps. 26–45 as a separate unit within the book of Jeremiah.

⁷ Carroll (*Jeremiah: A Commentary* 509) writes: "The second half of the book of Jeremiah poses serious problems of division and classification. The long stretch of chapters from 26 to 45 is broken into smaller collections and discreet narratives. . . . No central theme can be detected in the twenty chapters which would allow them a unifying title. . . . If the word of judgment dominates 2:5–25:11 as an overarching concept (with only a few fragments of salvation material), there is no equivalent organizing principle for 26–45."

⁸ E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Schocken, 1970) 106. For the prominence of this motif, see also T. M. Willis, "They Did Not Listen to the Voice of the Lord: A Literary Analysis of Jeremiah 37–45," *ResQ* 42 (2000) 65–84; and E. K. Holt, "The Potent Word of God: Remarks on the Composition of Jeremiah 37–44," in *Troubling Jeremiah* 161–70.

punishment for Judah's covenant unfaithfulness toward Yahweh (27:4-7, 12-15). Any attempt to circumvent this submission to Babylon through political or military measures only serves to bring Judah under further divine judgment (37:7-10; 38:2-3, 17-18, 20-23). The narrator in Jeremiah makes the shocking assertion that Babylon has replaced Jerusalem as the city of *shalom* in God's program (cf. 29:4-7, 16-19)⁹ and that Nebuchadnezzar has replaced the Davidic king as Yahweh's divinely appointed "servant" (עֶבֶד) (26:10; 43:10; cf. 25:9).¹⁰ Another feature of this consistently "pro-Babylonian" perspective is the idea that Israel's hope for the future lies exclusively with the exiles living in Babylon (29:9-14; cf. 24:4-7).¹¹

Third, there is a *literary unity* reflected in the structure and arrangement of the material in Jeremiah 26-45. In an earlier study of the book of Jeremiah, Patterson has demonstrated that key words serve as literary "hinges" or "hooks" joining together smaller units or "bookends" marking the beginning and end of major blocks of material throughout the book.¹² Patterson concludes on the basis of this evidence:

Rather than being viewed as a loose aggregate of small bits of tradition materials that somehow came together into larger complexes, both in its overall design and its component parts from its large units down to its small segments,

⁹ For this aspect of the message of Jeremiah, see J. Hill, *Friend or Foe? The Figure of Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah MT* (Biblical Interpretation Series 40; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 145-57. Hill notes that conditions associated with covenant blessing and/or life in the promised land elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible are attached to Babylon in chap. 29—contrast the building of houses, marrying and reproducing, and the planting of vineyards in 29:5-7 with Deut 20:5-8. The activities Jeremiah encourages the exiles to perform in 29:5-7 are the very things which Deut 28:30 warned would be denied to the people in the judgment of exile. Hill further notes that Jeremiah's command to pray for the peace of Babylon in 29:5-9 contrasts with Yahweh's prohibition against the prophet himself praying for the well-being of Judah and Jerusalem (cf. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). For Babylon's replacement of Jerusalem as the locale of peace and security, see also J. P. Sisson, "Jeremiah and the Jerusalem Conception of Peace," *JBL* 105 (1986) 429-42.

¹⁰ Hill notes that the designation "servant" (עֶבֶד) for Nebuchadnezzar equates the Babylonian ruler with David (cf. 2 Sam 3:18; 7:5, 8) (*Friend or Foe* 106-11). The warning of the total destruction of Nebuchadnezzar's enemies in 25:9 recalls the annihilation that Joshua inflicted on Jericho in the conquest (cf. Josh 6:21). The figurative statement in 27:6 that even the "wild animals" will be subject to Nebuchadnezzar exalts the Babylonian ruler as "a human being with power over all creation" like Adam in Gen 2 (cf. Gen 2:20) (p. 134).

For the exaltation of Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah, see also L. Stulman, "Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Jeremiah: Shifts in Symbolic Arrangements," *JOT* 66 (1995) 53-54. Stulman explains: "As Yahweh's servant or vassal, Nebuchadnezzar cannot be opposed. Non-compliance to his decrees is denounced as false and viewed as direct insubordination." This arrangement with Nebuchadnezzar is temporary (cf. 25:11; 27:7; chaps. 50-51), and Nebuchadnezzar only retains his special status with Yahweh for as long as he serves as the instrument of Yahweh's wrath (cf. 21:2, 4, 7; 25:9, 11, 12; 27:6, 8, 12).

¹¹ R. E. Clements (*Jeremiah* [IBC; Atlanta: John Knox, 1988] 205) explains: "There is evident concern to show why neither the community that had survived the disasters of 597 and 587 in the land of Judah, nor those who sought political refuge in Egypt could play any effective role in preparing for the restoration of Israel. From this time on, restoration means a prior act of return, and this must first come from those who had been taken into Babylonian exile. They are henceforth looked upon as the spearhead of the new Israel that is to come into being."

¹² See R. D. Patterson, "Of Bookends, Hinges, and Hooks: Literary Clues to the Arrangement of Jeremiah's Prophecy," *WTJ* 51 (1989) 109-31.

the Book of Jeremiah displays evidence of a care and precision that can only be accounted for by the work of deliberate authorial design. The symmetry and thematic placement are far too perfect to be accidental.¹³

Evidence of structural unity in Jeremiah 26–45 in particular consists of the fact that two major blocks of material (chaps. 26–35 and 36–45) are demarcated by a framework created by the four passages in this section dating from the reign of King Jehoiakim.¹⁴

Table 1. *The Jehoiakim Framework in Jeremiah 26–45*

26:1—"at the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim"	36:1—"in the fourth year of Jehoiakim"
35:1—"in the reign of Jehoiakim"	45:1—"in the fourth year of Jehoiakim"

Demonstrating that the importance attached here to these Jehoiakim chapters is not arbitrary is the fact that references to "the fourth year of Jehoiakim" also appear at the end of the first major section of the book (25:1) and the beginning of the third major section (46:2).¹⁵ These references to Jehoiakim link all three major sections of the book of Jeremiah and identify Jehoiakim's fourth year (605 BCE) as a critical moment in the history of Judah and the ministry of Jeremiah. In addition, the two panels of material marked off by the Jehoiakim frame in chapters 26–45 are roughly parallel to one another in four key ways.¹⁶

¹³ *Ibid.* 129.

¹⁴ For the use of architecture and structure as a literary device, see H. Van Dyke Parunak, "Oral Typesetting: Some Uses of Biblical Structure," *Bib* 62 (1981) 153–68; and *idem*, "Some Axioms for Literary Architecture," *Sem* 8 (1982) 1–16. For a brief discussion of alternative proposals concerning the structure of Jeremiah 26–45, see Fretheim, *Jeremiah* 364.

The texts in Jeremiah 26, 35, 36, 45 are the only texts in chaps. 26–45 connected to the time of Jehoiakim. The reference to "in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim" (בראשית ממלכת יהויקים) in the MT of 27:1 is an obvious textual error (cf. references to "Zedekiah" in 27:3, 12). A few Hebrew manuscripts and the Syriac read "in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah," but this reading is also problematic, because the continuation of this story in 28:1ff indicates that these events occur in Zedekiah's fourth year. Verse 1 is absent in the LXX of Jer 27:1, leading W. L. Holladay to the plausible suggestion that the introduction to this account was lost in the original transmission (as indicated in the LXX) but was later restored (incorrectly) in the form reflected in the Hebrew tradition (*Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26–52* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986] 115).

¹⁵ A. Rofé, though recognizing a different structure for this portion of Jeremiah, has also recognized the framing effect of the Jehoiakim passages (Jeremiah 25/26 and 35/36) around the Zedekiah narratives (Jeremiah 27, 28, 29, 34) and the framing effect of references to Jehoiakim in Jeremiah 25 and 45 ("The Arrangement of the Book of Jeremiah," *ZAW* 101 [1991] 393–94). J. R. Lundbom has argued that one of the stages of composition for the book of Jeremiah involved the joining together of a "Jehoiakim cluster" (chaps. 25, 26, 35, 36) with a "Zedekiah cluster" (24, 27, 28, 29) of narrative materials (*Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric* [2d ed.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997] 46–47). While arguing for a chiasmic structure for each of these clusters based on the chronological headings for the individual chapters, Lundbom has not given as much attention to the significance of these chapters in the present form of Jeremiah MT.

¹⁶ For further development of these parallels, see G. E. Yates, "The People Have Not Obeyed: A Literary and Rhetorical Study of Jeremiah 26–45" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary,

Table 2. *The Parallelism of Jeremiah 26-35 and 36-45*

<i>Jeremiah 26-35</i>	<i>Jeremiah 36-45</i>
A. Jehoiakim's response of hostile unbelief to the prophetic word (26)	A' Jehoiakim's response of hostile unbelief to the prophetic word (36)
B. The false prophets and the issue of submission to Babylon during the reign of Zedekiah (27-29)	B' The royal officials and the issue of submission to Babylon during the reign of Zedekiah (37-39)
C. The aftermath of exile: the promise of Israel's glorious future restoration (30-33)	C' The aftermath of exile: a word of judgment for the Judean survivors of exile who go down to Egypt (40-43)
D. The issue of covenant unfaithfulness: national judgment and a word of hope for the Rechabites (34-35)	D' The issue of covenant unfaithfulness: national judgment and a word of hope for Baruch (44-45)

The correspondence between 26-35 and 36-45 suggests that this portion of the book of Jeremiah is not to be read consecutively as much as analogically. Chronology and sequence are not the primary concern in this narrative presentation of the message and ministry of Jeremiah as much as the recurring pattern of Judah's refusal to hear and obey the prophetic word. Jeremiah 26-45 pulls together events and episodes from three distinct periods in the ministry of Jeremiah:

1. The reign of Jehoiakim (before the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem in 597 BC): Chapters 26, 35, 36, 45.
2. The reign of Zedekiah (between the capture of Jerusalem in 597 BC and the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC): Chapters 27-29, 32-33, 34, 37-39.
3. The aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem (post-586): Chapters 40-44.

The narrator uses the structural parallelism between 26-35 and 36-45, as well as the narrative parallelism between various episodes from the life and ministry of Jeremiah, to argue that the nation of Judah has repeatedly failed to respond with faith and obedience to the prophetic word proclaimed by Jeremiah. Jeremiah 40-44 demonstrates that even the horrible experience of the fall of Judah and Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 BC has failed to produce an obedient response to the word of Yahweh and that Judah invites

1998). In an earlier study, E. Martens has argued that narrative parallelism may serve "as one of the keys to understanding the present arrangement of material in the book of Jeremiah" ("Narrative Parallelism and Message in Jeremiah 34-38," in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee* [ed. C. A. Evans and W. F. Stinespring; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987] 33-49).

further judgment by repeating the sin of unbelief that caused the fall of Jerusalem in the first place (cf. 43:7; 44:7–10, 15–19).¹⁷ Even the message of hope found in chapters 30–33 relates to this theme of response to the prophetic word by portraying a future time when Yahweh will enable Israel to obey his commands and to overcome this pattern of repeated rebellion (cf. 31:31–34).

III. THE “JEHOIAKIM FRAME” AND JEREMIAH 26–45

Perhaps the most important implication for this understanding of the structure of Jeremiah 26–45 is that the Jehoiakim frame which introduces and concludes the Jeremiah narratives brackets and provides an interpretive grid for the whole of chapters 26–45.¹⁸ It is first of all necessary to explore the parallelism of the framing chapters in order to demonstrate the dominant themes in Jeremiah 26–45 and then to explore the significance of reading the Jeremiah narratives from the perspective of this interpretive frame.

1. *The parallelism of Jeremiah 26 and 36.* Scholars have long recognized the parallels between the narrative accounts in Jeremiah 26 and 36. Stulman, for example, calls attention to six key points of correspondence:

1. Temporal setting: both chapters are associated with the reign of Jehoiakim (26:1; 36:1).
2. Physical setting: the Jerusalem temple is the setting for both accounts (26:2, 10; 36:5, 10).

¹⁷ For an overview of the key historical events that transpire in the immediate aftermath of the Babylonian exile, see J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 421–36.

¹⁸ This statement builds on the insight of Stulman that “examining strategically placed prose discourses” is important to the reading of Jeremiah (*Order Amid Chaos* 63). Certain key passages (chaps. 1, 7, and 25 in the first scroll and chaps. 26, 34–35, 36, 44–45 in the second) serve as signposts helping the reader to navigate the text of Jeremiah. These narratives at strategic points provide a prophetic perspective/summation on the whole of Jeremiah’s message.

For the literary device of framing Hebrew narratives and books, see J. D. W. Watts, “A Frame for the Book of the Twelve: Hosea 1–3 and Malachi,” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (ed. J. D. Nogalski and M. A. Sweeney; Atlanta: SBL, 2000) 209–17; and B. O. Long, “Framing Repetitions in Biblical Historiography,” *JBL* 106 (1987) 385–99. Long views the framing repetitions at the beginning and end of narratives as literary tools by which the writer could manipulate the reader’s experience of events and provide commentary on the significance of the events. Watts (p. 209) notes, “Some major Old Testament books have been composed in frames employing significant literary forms at the beginning and end.” Watts argues that references to God’s love for Israel in Hosea (cf. 2:9, 12, 14, 15–25 [2:7, 10, 12, 13–23]) and Malachi (cf. 1:2–3) bracket the Book of the Twelve and provide an affirmation of Yahweh’s continuing love for Israel in spite of the judgment that the prophets have proclaimed against Israel for their continued covenant unfaithfulness. The song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1–10) and the song of David (2 Sam 23:1–7) frame the stories of the books of Samuel and inform the reader that one of the major themes in these books is that God exalts the humble and obedient. The narratives in Job 1–2 and 42:7–16 bracket the book and provide a point of reference for the debate over Job’s suffering that occurs in the rest of the book. The book of Isaiah is likewise framed by references to rebellious children (cf. 1:2–3; 63:1–65:16). See K. P. Darr, *Isaiah’s Vision and the Family of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

3. Intent: Yahweh's intention in sending Jeremiah is to bring about the repentance of Judah so that the predicted disaster can be averted (note wording of 26:3 and 36:3).
4. Audience and Participants: the texts involve "all the people of Judah" but also the leadership of the nation—royal officials, prophets, priests, and kings (26:7, 10, 12, 16, 20–24; 36:11–14, 19, 20–24) who respond in various ways to the message of Jeremiah.
5. Genre: both stories share the genre of "edifying stories" that focus on the word of Yahweh delivered by Jeremiah. The issue of response to the prophetic word predominates in both stories.
6. Structure: both stories reflect a tripartite structure that includes: (a) the warning of the people through the prophet (26:4–5; 36:1–8); (b) the rejection of the prophet's message (26:5; 36:9–26); and (c) Yahweh's judgment of the people (26:6; 36:27–31).¹⁹

The introductions in chapters 26 and 36 prepare the way for what follows in each panel of material. Jeremiah's message is met with national rejection, resulting in the prophet experiencing various forms of opposition and persecution (cf. 26:7–11; 36:20–26). At the same time, a small minority (represented especially by members of the family of Shaphan) respond positively to Jeremiah's message and take steps to protect the prophet from his enemies (cf. Jer 26:16–24; 36:11–19).²⁰

The narratives in chapters 26 and 36 also introduce the prominent theme in the Jeremiah narratives that personal and national destiny is determined by how the people and their leaders respond to the prophetic word. In both chapters, Yahweh raises the possibility of national repentance resulting in the avoidance of judgment as the rationale for the commissioning of the prophet's message (cf. 26:3; 36:3).²¹ In chapter 26, Jeremiah reminds the officials and people that putting him to death will bring the guilt of innocent blood on their heads (26:14–16). The elders of Judah who intervene to protect Jeremiah acknowledge that Hezekiah's earlier response of repentance

¹⁹ Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos* 85–86.

²⁰ For references to the family of Shaphan in Jeremiah 26–45, cf. Ahikam, the son of Shaphan (26:24); Gemariah, the son of Shaphan (36:10); Micaiah, the son of Gemariah (36:11–14); Elashah, the Brother of Ahikam (29:3); and Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam (40:5; 41:1–3). For the relationship between Jeremiah and the family of Shaphan, see A. J. Dearman, "My Servants the Scribes: Composition and Context in Jeremiah 36," *JBL* 109 (1990) 408–14; J. Kegler, "The Prophetic Discourse and Political Praxis of Jeremiah: Observations of Jeremiah 26 and 36," in *God of the Lowly: Socio-Historical Interpretations of the Bible* (ed. W. Schottroff and W. Stegemann; trans. M. J. O'Connell; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984) 50–53, and R. R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 241–42.

²¹ Note the parallel construction in 26:3 and 36:3, 7 where a conditional statement introduced by the particle אולי raises the possibility that Judah might "turn" (שוב) from its evil ways. Jeremiah's message here reflects the contingent nature of much of the preaching of the OT prophets. Their prophecies concerning the future are contingent upon human response. Even absolute statements of judgment or salvation are subject to change based on the response to the message (cf. Jer 18:7–10; 26:17–19 with Mic 3:9–12; Jon 3:1–10). For the contingent nature of the prophetic message, see further R. L. Pratt, Jr., "Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions," in *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke* (ed. J. I. Packer and S. K. Soderlund; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 180–203.

to the preaching of Micah spared the nation from devastating judgment (26:17–20). In chapter 36, the officials who support Jeremiah recognize that the prophet's message has national import and must be reported to the king (36:14–16). At the conclusion to this episode, Jeremiah proclaims a withering message of judgment against Jehoiakim, his descendants, his officials, and the people of Judah at large as the direct consequence of Jehoiakim's cutting up of the scroll (36:29–31).

2. *The parallelism of Jeremiah 34–35/44–45.* Jeremiah 35 and 45 are the "Jehoiakim" chapters that complete the framework. Just as Jeremiah 26 and 36 function as parallel introductions, chapters 34–35 and 44–45 parallel one another as corresponding conclusions for the two panels. Providing closure to the introductory episodes that focus on response to the prophetic word, these conclusions share two key parallels—thematic emphasis on Judah's covenant unfaithfulness and the promise of deliverance to a group (the Rechabites, 35:1–11, 18–19) or an individual (the faithful scribe Baruch, 45:1–5) who have demonstrated faithfulness in the midst of national apostasy.

a. *Judgment of Judah's covenant infidelity.* Jeremiah 34:8–22 and 35:1–19 in the first panel focus on the subject of covenant fidelity by way of contrast.²² In the negative example found in 34:8–22, the residents of Jerusalem renege on their promise to release their Hebrew slaves in accordance with the Mosaic law.²³ This failed promise constitutes a breach of covenant with Yahweh. The word "covenant" (ברית) is prominent in this passage, and the repetition of ברית in the accusation (vv. 8, 10, 13, 15) and announcement (v. 18 [2]) sections of this judgment speech demonstrates that Yahweh's intended punishment is a fitting response to the people's failure to keep their covenant promise.²⁴ Verses 17–20 also employ the imagery of the covenant-making ceremony to portray the judgment that awaits Judah. The ceremony involved the parties cutting an animal in two and walking between the pieces of the dead animal as a reminder of what would become of the party violating the terms of the covenant.²⁵ Because of Judah's failure to keep their part of

²² For the parallelism of 34:8–22 and 35:1–19, see Martens, "Narrative Parallelism" 40.

²³ The laws of manumission in Exod 21:2 and Deut 15:1, 12 instruct that a Hebrew debt slave must be released after six years of servitude, and the wording of Jer 34:14 most closely resembles the passage from Deuteronomy. Lev 25:39–46 also states that Hebrew slaves are to be released in the Year of Jubilee. The general release of all slaves in Jer 34:15 is most likely due to long-term failure to observe the practice of releasing Hebrew slaves and appears to be an attempt to appease divine anger in light of the Babylonian crisis. For further discussion, see M. Kessler, "The Law of Manumission in Jer 34," *BZ* 15 (1971) 105–9.

²⁴ This point is also demonstrated by the repetition of the noun דרור ("freedom") in 34:17. Because the people failed to grant דרור to their slaves, Yahweh will grant the inhabitants of Jerusalem דרור to die as a result of the coming Babylonian siege. For this idea of talionic justice in the punishment of Judah's sin, see further P. D. Miller, "Sin and Judgment in Jeremiah 34:17–19," *JBL* 103 (1984) 611–13.

²⁵ Cf. Gen 15:9–10, 17. For the attestation of this custom, see *ANET* ("Treaty Between Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Mati'ilu of Arpad") 532–33.

the covenant, Yahweh will cause their corpses to be handed over to scavenging birds and animals.

The negative example of covenant unfaithfulness found in 34:8–22 contrasts with the positive example of the covenant fidelity of the Rechabites in 35:1–19, who are commended for remaining loyal to their family customs.²⁶ The Rechabites have been faithful to the command of their forefather Jonadab to abstain from the drinking of wine, engaging in agricultural and viticultural activities, and living in permanent structures (35:5–6). The faithfulness of the clan accentuates the unfaithfulness of the nation (cf. 35:13–15, 17). The point is not necessarily that the Rechabites have been more faithful to Yahweh, but as Lundbom explains, “the Rechabites are shown to be faithful to Jonadab, their father, in a way that Judah has not been faithful to Yahweh.”²⁷ Judah has failed to listen in spite of the fact that Yahweh has repeatedly communicated his commandments to them through the preaching of the prophets (35:14, 15, 16, 17).

The thematic emphasis upon covenant fidelity found in 34:8–22 and 35:1–19 is paralleled in the conclusion to the second panel by the lengthy prophetic indictment in Jeremiah 44 against the Judean survivors of the Babylonian exile who flee to Egypt.²⁸ This prophetic judgment speech against the Jews

²⁶ For an extensive discussion concerning the identity and historical background of the Rechabites, see K. G. Friebe, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign Acts* (JSOTSup 283; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 124–27. The Rechabites are most likely the descendants of “Jonadab son of Rechab” mentioned in 2 Kgs 10:15–17 in connection with Jehu’s purge of Baal worship in Israel. What is remarkable is that by the time of Jeremiah, the clan had remained loyal to their family customs for more than two centuries.

²⁷ J. R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21B; New York: Doubleday, 2004) 573–74.

²⁸ After the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, there are three distinct groups involved in the story of Judah as a people in the book of Jeremiah—the Jews in exile in Babylon, the Judean survivors who remain in the land, and the Jewish refugees who flee to Egypt after the assassination of Gedaliah in fear of Babylonian reprisals (cf. Jer 43:5–7). Jeremiah 26–45 provides narrative confirmation of the fact that the exiles in Babylon are the “good figs” with whom lies Israel’s hopes for the future (24:4–6; cf. 29:10–14). See R. D. Wells, Jr., “The Amplification of the Expectation of the Exiles,” in *Troubling Jeremiah* 263–71; Seitz, *Theology in Conflict* 245–73; K.-F. Pohlmann, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Jeremiabuches* (FRLANT 118; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978) 208–24.

The narrative in Jeremiah 37–44 stresses the total judgment of the Jews remaining in the land following the fall of Jerusalem and those who flee to the land of Egypt. The repetition of “all” (כָּל) in 43:1–7 (vv. 2, 4 [2], 5 [3], 6) is hyperbolic language suggesting that all of the Jews in the land fled to Egypt. Similarly, Jeremiah’s warning of judgment in 44:11–14 states that “all” (כָּל) the Jews in Egypt “from the least to the greatest” are the objects of Yahweh’s wrath and adds that none of those living in Egypt will survive or return to their homeland. See Fretheim, *Jeremiah* 566.

While Jeremiah 26–45 clearly shows the favored status of the exiles in Babylon, it does not necessarily follow that legitimate offers of blessing/hope for the Jews remaining in the land (cf. 40:7–12; 42:10–12) are a reflection of a conflicting redactional voice or that this portion of Jeremiah serves simply as a piece of political propaganda supporting the legitimacy of the exiles over the other groups. As Fretheim (p. 569) has noted, it is important to recognize that none of the Jewish groups after the fall of Jerusalem are “excluded in principle” from Yahweh’s blessing. This fate is rather the result of the choice to disobey the prophetic word (43:7) and to persist in sinful practices that have long characterized the people of Israel (cf. 44:7–10, 20–23).

in Egypt centers on the key covenantal issue of exclusive loyalty and devotion to Yahweh. The foremost sin of the Judahites in this indictment is the “burning of incense to other gods” (44:3, 5, 8, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 25). The people of Judah have given their loyalties to the “Queen of Heaven,” while the covenant between Yahweh and Israel demanded that Yahweh alone was to be the exclusive object of Israel’s worship and devotion (cf. Exod 20:3–6; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 32:16; Josh 24:19).²⁹ The people’s complete lack of understanding concerning the nature of their covenant relationship with Yahweh is reflected in the fact that the people view their calamities to be the result of their failure to continue the practice of their ancestors in making offering to the Queen of Heaven (44:17). They have turned the concept of covenant blessing and cursing upside down.

Jeremiah charges that Israel has not “obeyed” (שמע) the covenant messengers (the prophets, 44:4–5) or the covenant stipulations (44:10, 23, [תורה], “decrees” [חקות], and “commands” [מצוות]), and the people make no attempt to controvert his indictment. The people openly refuse to follow the ways of Yahweh—“we will not listen (שמע) to what you have proclaimed to us in the name of Yahweh” (44:16–17). At this point, the covenant infidelity of Judah has reached a point of outright defiance, and the people indict themselves by their own words. The breach between Yahweh and his people is total and complete.³⁰

The judgment speech in Jeremiah 44 warns that the consequence of Judah’s covenant rebellion will be the experience of the covenant curses to the fullest extent. The specific covenant curses referred to in the judgment speech against the refugees in Egypt include: the desolation of the land of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem and the other towns of Judah (44:6, 22); the cutting off of the men, women, children, and infants of Judah (44:7); the people of Judah becoming an object of horror and derision among the nations (44:8, 12, 22); and the death of the Jews living in Egypt by the “sword, plague, and famine” (44:12–14, 27–28).³¹

The parallelism between 34:8–22/35:1–19 in the first panel and 44:1–30 in the second panel extends beyond the general thematic emphasis upon covenant fidelity/infidelity. Both 34:8–22 and 44:1–30 revolve around the issue of keeping a vow. The judgment speech in 34:8–22 indicts the audience

²⁹ For the cult associated with the Queen of Heaven, see P. J. King and L. E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 51–52, 350–51.

³⁰ In the story of Judah’s unbelief and disobedience found in Jeremiah 26–45, there is a downward spiral from the point in 26:16 where various Judean officials and “all the people” recognize Jeremiah as a true prophet to this point in 44:16 where the refugees in Egypt openly state their refusal to obey the prophet. See Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah* 76–77.

³¹ For the use of the covenant curses in the OT prophetic literature, see D. B. Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002) 75–102; G. H. Johnston, “Nahum’s Rhetorical Allusions to Neo-Assyrian Treaty Curses,” *BibSac* 158 (2001) 415–36; D. Hillers, *Treaty Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (BibOr 16; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964); F. C. Fensham, “Common Trends in Curses of the Near Eastern Treaties and Kudurru Inscriptions Compared with Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah,” *ZAW* 75 (1963) 155–75; and *idem*, “Maledictions and Benedictions in Ancient Near Eastern Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament,” *ZAW* 74 (1962) 1–9.

for the breaking of a vow to do good, the promise of the citizens of Jerusalem to release their Hebrew slaves (cf. 34:10–11). With a twist of irony, the judgment speech in chapter 44 states that the survivors of the fall of Jerusalem have kept their vow, but their faithfulness is to a vow to persist in idolatrous behavior (cf. 44:17–18, 25–26). In 34:16, the inhabitants of Jerusalem “repent/turn from” (שׁוּבוּ) their decision to do what is right, but in 44:5, the Jewish refugees refuse to “repent/turn from” (שׁוּבוּ) their decision to do wrong.³²

The commendation of the Rechabites in 35:1–19 also parallels by contrast the indictment of the Jews in Egypt in chapter 44 at the close of panel two. The specific points of correspondence between 35:1–19 and 44:1–30 include: the contrast of the Rechabites’ abstinence from the drinking of wine (35:6, 9, 14) and the Judean refugees in Egypt offering drink offerings to their false gods (44:19, 25); the contrast of the Rechabites acting like their fathers in remaining faithful to their family vow (35:6, 8, 10) and the Jews in Egypt carrying on the family tradition of practicing idolatry (44:3, 9–10, 17, 21); and the contrast between the men of the Rechabite clan maintaining the fidelity of their family by protecting their wives and children from idolatry (35:9) and the men of Judah bringing calamity upon their wives and children because of their sinful deeds (44:7). The two passages both contain Yahweh’s charge that the nation of Judah has not responded obediently (לְאִשְׁמֹעַת) to “my servants, the prophets” (הַנְּבִיאִים עֹבְדֵי) that have been repeatedly sent (שְׁלַח + הַשְׂכִּים, lit. “to send early”) their way (35:15; 44:4–5).

In both 35:1–19 and 44:1–30, the issue of covenant fidelity has a family focus. The Rechabites are a clan with a long history of staunch observance of rigid family traditions. The Judean refugees in Jeremiah 44 also perpetuate a long family tradition of disobedience and idolatry (44:3–5). The prophetic indictment of chapter 44 stresses that the acts of rebellion and idolatry characterizing the Judean refugees in Egypt are practices in which the whole family participates.³³ After Jeremiah’s stinging indictment in 44:2–14, the men respond with a refusal to obey or to repent of their idolatrous practices (44:15–18), and the women affirm their loyalties to the Queen of Heaven (44:19–20). In the judgment speech that follows, the prophet’s message is directed specifically against both the men and women living in Egypt (44:20, 24). The Rechabites represent a clan that has maintained fidelity; the Judean survivors of the exile who have escaped to Egypt consist of families who have thoroughly compromised their covenant loyalties toward Yahweh.

³² There are two further points of correspondence between 34:8–22 and 44:1–30. Both passages make reference to the presence of Israel/Judah in the land of Egypt. Jeremiah 34:13 recalls Yahweh bringing Israel out of Egypt as a motivation for the citizens of Jerusalem to carry through on their promise to do good. In contrast, 44:12–14 refers to death in Egypt as an impending punishment for disobedience. The two passages also contain concluding messages of judgment that parallel one another in wording. In 34:21–22, Yahweh warns through Jeremiah, “I will hand over Zedekiah (צִדְקִיָּהּ + נָתַן + PN) king of Judah and his officials to their enemies who seek their lives.” In 44:30, Yahweh declares, “I am going to hand Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt (חֹפְרָה + נָתַן + PN) over to his enemies, just as I handed over Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.”

³³ For the prophetic confrontation of idolatry as a “family” issue in the OT, see M. D. Carroll R., “Family in the Prophetic Literature,” in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context* (ed. R. S. Hess and M. D. Carroll R.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 107–11.

b. *The closing promise of salvation/deliverance.* One final parallel between the concluding sections of the two panels in Jeremiah 26–45 is that each closes with a message of hope or deliverance. Even with the hopeful message of national restoration found in chapters 30–33 in panel one, this closing emphasis on salvation is somewhat surprising in light of the heavy tone of judgment that characterizes this section as a whole. The final word in panel one is the promise of the perpetual survival of the Rechabite clan (35:18–19), and the conclusion to the second panel is a personal oracle of deliverance to Jeremiah's faithful scribe, Baruch (45:1–5).

Even with the surprise element of a message of salvation at the close of two panels of material that document Judah's rejection of the word of Yahweh, these positive conclusions in no way diminish the severity of the message of judgment that echoes throughout the Jeremiah narratives. In fact, the reader is struck by the minimal nature of the prophet's words of hope. These promises are especially minimal when compared to the dominant theme in the promissory material in chapters 30–33 that Yahweh will "bring back from exile" (שוב שׁוּבָה) all Israel in the future restoration (cf. 30:3, 18; 33:7, 11). If the narrator is going to close each section with a message of hope, then why the minimal promises in chapters 35 and 45, rather than the grandiose promises of national restoration in 30–33?

The message of hope in 35:18–19 is directed to the Rechabite clan.³⁴ As already noted, the selection of the tiny Rechabite clan reflects masterful use of irony. The very fact that the prophet must turn to this small and peculiar group as an example of covenant faithfulness says something about the pervasiveness of corruption and infidelity in the mainstream of society. The selection of the Rechabites suggests that the prophet had to search long and hard to find a positive example of covenant fidelity.

There is further irony in the choice of the Rechabites in that this clan is promised continued existence in the land but espouses a lifestyle of abstinence (not drinking wine, not living in permanent structures, not growing vineyards) that prevents them from fully enjoying the blessings of life in the land that God had promised to Israel as a reward for their obedience to him. As McConville explains, "In short, the future held out to the Rechabites is one without the fulness which faithfulness to YHWH (rather than an inventive patriarch) could bring."³⁵ The Rechabites will have continued existence, but this promise is "limited, even negligible, in its capacity to give Judah a future."³⁶ The minimal nature of the promise to the Rechabites appears to

³⁴ For this message of hope to the Rechabites, see J. D. Levenson, "On the Promise to the Rechabites," *CBQ* 41 (1979) 205–19.

³⁵ J. G. McConville, *Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993) 107.

³⁶ *Ibid.* Their code of conduct suppresses the very things that are promised as Israel's blessings for covenant fidelity while living in the promised land (cf. Deut 7:13; 8:12–13; 31:12; 32:43–44; 33:10–11). Ironically, Jeremiah encourages the exiles in Babylon (cf. Jer 29:5) to enjoy an existence more like what God envisioned for Israel to enjoy in the promised land than the Rechabites can while living within the land.

stand at the end of panel one in order to emphasize the forfeiture of national blessing resulting from Judah's persistent rebellion and disobedience.

The minimal nature of the closing promise is even more pronounced in the conclusion to panel two found in chapter 45. The guarantee of deliverance in this text is given to one lone individual. In addition, the word of hope given to Baruch in 45:5 is nothing as far-reaching as the guarantee of perpetual posterity given to the Rechabites, but rather is merely the assurance that Baruch will escape with his life from the midst of very dangerous and difficult circumstances.³⁷

2. *The theological and rhetorical significance of the Jehoiakim framework.* In reading 26–45 through the lens of the Jehoiakim framework, three important elements emerge—a judgment/salvation pattern emphasizing that destiny is determined by response to the word of Yahweh; an assessment of the reign of Jehoiakim as a “watershed” moment; and an expression of ambivalence regarding the promises of national restoration in 30–33 which suggests that the exile is unended and that Israel will remain under a sentence of judgment until Yahweh makes it possible for the people to respond in a new way to the divine word.

a. *The judgment/salvation pattern in Jeremiah 26–48.* The Jehoiakim framework and the demarcation of chapters 26–35 and 36–45 as two distinct panels establish a judgment/salvation pattern that is central to the overall message of Jeremiah 26–45. This alternation of judgment and salvation is reflected in two significant ways in Jeremiah 26–45. First, the promises of salvation in 35:18–19 and 45:1–5 at the end the two panels offer stark contrasts to the opening accounts of disobedience and judgment in chapters 26 and 36. The concluding oracles of hope also contrast to the warnings of judgment that immediately precede them in 34:8–22 and 44:1–30. The pattern of judgment/salvation emerges as follows:

³⁷ The promise that Baruch will escape with his “life as booty” (נַפְשׁוֹ שָׁלֵל) is one of irony. The figure of booty conjures images of a soldier laden down with the spoils of war. The expression “life as booty” appears elsewhere in the OT only in Jer 21:9; 38:2; 39:18, and each of these passages fall within contexts that speak of battle, siege, or death at the hands of an enemy. W. L. Holladay explains this figure as a “soldier’s joke” conveying the notion that “when a soldier is defeated and escapes, having barely saved his life, he has at least that as booty” (*Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986] 584). The narrator could not have chosen a more effective way of stressing the minimal nature of the promise to Baruch.

For further discussion concerning the significance and placement of the Baruch oracle, see M. A. Taylor, “Jeremiah 45: The Problem of Placement,” *JSOT* 37 (1987) 79–88. Taylor comments: “Clearly the emphasis in ch. 45 is on an unequivocal judgment. No hope for restoration is intimated here.” Taylor notes that throughout the book of Jeremiah, the verbs “to build” (בָּנָה), “to plant” (נָטַע), “to uproot” (שָׁרַף), and “to overthrow” (הָרַס) found in Jer 45:4 are employed to describe Yahweh’s dual work of salvation and judgment (1:10; 31:28; cf. 12:14–17; 18:7–9; 24:6; 31:4–5; 31:40; 32:41; 33:7; 42:10). The closing oracle given to Baruch in chapter 45 highlights God’s work of judgment in that the terms for Yahweh’s salvific acts (בָּנָה, נָטַע) are placed in the past tense for the only time in the book. Clearly, there is nothing in the promise to Baruch that softens the tone of national judgment that predominates in chaps. 26–45 as a whole.

Table 3. *The Judgment/Salvation Pattern in Jeremiah 26–45*

26 Introduction 26:1 Early in the reign of Jehoiakim	27–33	34–35 Conclusion 35:1 During the reign of Jehoiakim	
National rejection of the prophetic word at the Jerusalem Temple		34 Covenant Infidelity Nation JUDGMENT	35 Covenant Fidelity Rechab SALVATION
(NATIONAL) JUDGMENT		(PERSONAL) SALVATION	
36 Introduction 36:1 In the fourth year of Jehoiakim	37–43	44–45 Conclusion 45:1 In the fourth year of Jehoiakim	
National rejection of the prophetic word at the Jerusalem Temple		44 Covenant Infidelity Nation JUDGMENT	45 Covenant Fidelity Baruch SALVATION
(NATIONAL) JUDGMENT		(PERSONAL) SALVATION	

This judgment-salvation pattern is central to the message of Jeremiah 26–45 as a whole. Life and death depend on response to the prophetic word. Jeremiah 26–45 provides narrative documentation with real-life examples of the theological principle of Jer 18:7–10 that Yahweh will relent from judgment if evildoers will repent and will also reverse the divine intent to bless when a nation refuses to obey. Judah is ultimately doomed because of its refusal to obey and follow the word of Yahweh spoken through the prophet. The Rechabites and Baruch, however, prove that God is able to save faithful individuals even in times of national apostasy and judgment.

b. The reign of Jehoiakim as a “watershed” moment. Another function of the Jehoiakim framework is that this structural feature reflects the narrator’s perspective on the reign of Jehoiakim as a watershed moment when Judah passed from potential repentance to unavoidable judgment.³⁸ Because

³⁸ McConville notes that Jeremiah’s emphasis on the failure of the kings at the end of Judah’s history as the cause for exile contrasts to the perspective of the Deuteronomistic History, which

of national rejection of the prophetic word, embodied in the response of Jehoiakim as covenant representative for the entire nation, Judah crossed the line of no return.³⁹ The use of the chronological notation of “the fourth year of Jehoiakim” (605 BC) as an *inclusio* for the block of narrative material in Jeremiah 36–45 (36:1; 45:1) seems to specify the exact moment in history when Judah’s judgment became a fixed certainty. Coupled with Babylon’s ascendancy to power with the victory over Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC, Jehoiakim’s rejection of the word of Yahweh demonstrated by his cutting up of Jeremiah’s scroll (36:22–26) marked the beginning of the end for Judah as a nation. As Stulman explains, Jehoiakim “is a prototype of infidelity and disobedience” who is “afforded every opportunity to ‘hear’ but instead chooses to disobey the prophetic word.”⁴⁰ The hostility between Jehoiakim and Jeremiah is such that the king and prophet never have a face-to-face meeting in the Jeremiah narratives.⁴¹

In the narratives within the Jehoiakim framework in Jeremiah 26–45 that recount events after the reign of Jehoiakim, the choices facing the nation of Judah have changed dramatically. Conditions have deteriorated to the point that Judah no longer has the option of judgment or no judgment based on repentance that is offered during Jehoiakim’s time (cf. 26:3–6; 36:3, 7). Inside the framework, the issue is whether Judah will submit to Babylon and be spared further judgment or refuse to submit and experience total annihilation. After Jehoiakim’s reign, Judah faces decisions involving death and calamity (i.e. foreign domination and/or exile) no matter what course of action is taken (cf. 27:9–15; 34:1–3; 37:7–10; 38:7–18). As Holt explains, even life in the midst of surrender is punishment because “it is precisely within their surrender that their punishment lies—deportation to a foreign land from which Jeremiah sees no possible return.”⁴² The Jehoiakim framework that

views the reign of Manasseh as the time when Judah moved to a point of irrevocable judgment (cf. 2 Kgs 21:10–16) (*Judgment and Promise* 56). McConville uses this difference, as well as others between Jeremiah and the Deuteronomistic History, to argue against the commonly accepted critical theory of the pervasive “Deuteronomistic” influence on the book of Jeremiah (see pp. 11–26, 173–81). Taken together, 2 Kings 21 and Jeremiah 26/36 perhaps illustrate the principle of God’s grace in providing flexible deadlines in which the opportunity of avoiding judgment is offered even after Judah has crossed the point of inevitable judgment.

³⁹ For the king as covenant representative whose responses to Yahweh have implications for the nation at large, see A. Gileadi, “The Davidic Covenant: A Theological Basis for Corporate Protection,” in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison* (ed. A. Gileadi; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 157–63.

⁴⁰ Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos* 64. From a literary perspective, it is interesting that the narrator in Jeremiah 26–45 juxtaposes the hostile rejection of Jehoiakim to the passive inaction of Zedekiah (cf. chaps. 37–39) as if to show the two sides of unbelief. For further discussion of the significance of Jehoiakim in later Jewish literature, see S. Delamarter, “The Vilification of Jehoiakim (a.k.a. Eliakim and Joiakim) in Early Judaism,” in *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition* (ed. C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders; JSNTSup 154; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 190–204.

⁴¹ For the volatile relationship between Jeremiah and Jehoiakim, see Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* 403–6.

⁴² E. K. Holt, “Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon and the Deuteronomists: An Investigation of the Redactional Relationships Between Jeremiah 7 and 26,” *JSOT* 36 (1986) 86, n. 11.

encloses Jeremiah 26–45 highlights the fact that failure to take advantage of the offer of divine grace (“perhaps they will listen . . . I will relent/I will forgive”) (26:3; 36:3) has grave national consequences.

When comparing Jeremiah 26–45 to what precedes in chapters 1–25, the same move from potential repentance to unavoidable judgment is reflected in the earlier section of the book as well. O'Connor notes the gradual diminishment of the calls to repentance in the opening section of the book of Jeremiah.⁴³ The call to repentance is a characteristic feature of the prophetic word in Jeremiah 2–10.⁴⁴ However, similar calls to repentance are found only three times in chapters 11–20 (cf. 13:15–17; 17:19–27; 18:12) and are completely non-existent in chapters 21–25.⁴⁵ O'Connor identifies Judah's refusal to respond to the call for repentance in 18:1–12 as Judah's point of no return, and the differences reflected in Jeremiah's two visits to the potter in chapters 18–19 appear to validate O'Connor's conclusion.⁴⁶

While chapters 18–19 appear to represent the final dismissal of the possibility of repentance in Jeremiah, the prose account of Jeremiah's temple sermon in chapter 7 also marks an important transition point in the decline toward unalterable judgment. The accusation of Judah's refusal to “obey” (שמע) the prophets that Yahweh has “repeatedly (חשכם) sent (שלח)” found in the framework of chapters 26–45 appears for the first time in this sermon (7:25–26; cf. 26:5; 35:14–15; 44:4–5). The temple sermon contains explicit statements concerning Yahweh's rejection of Judah. In 7:15, Yahweh declares, “I will cast you away from my presence,” and the prophet announces in 7:29 that “Yahweh has rejected this generation that is under his wrath.” In the setting of the Temple sermon in chapter 7, Yahweh also delivers the first prohibition of Jeremiah's prophetic intercession on behalf of Judah (7:16; cf. 11:14; 15:1).⁴⁷

⁴³ K. M. O'Connor, “Do Not Trim a Word: The Contributions of Chapter 26 to the Book of Jeremiah,” *CBQ* 51 (1989) 628.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Cf. chap. 2; 3:12, 14, 22; 4:1–4, 12–14; 5:1–17; 6:8; 7:3–15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* On Jeremiah's first visit (chap. 18), the potter creates, destroys, and then reshapes a clay vessel, the pliability of the clay suggesting the possibility of reform on Judah's part and the avoidance of judgment (cf. 18:8–10). In the second visit (chap. 19), the prophet performs the sign act of purchasing and then smashing a clay jar purchased from the potter, signifying the fact that Yahweh is planning “disaster” (19:3–5). The imagery of the first visit to the potter stresses the conditionality of Yahweh's judgment; the imagery of the second visit conveys the inevitability and certainty of judgment. See also McConville, *Judgment and Promise* 52–53, for discussion of the two visits to the potter in connection with the idea of the closing down of the hope of repentance in Jeremiah 1–25.

⁴⁷ This observation about the pivotal function of chap. 7 in Jeremiah 1–25 is all the more significant for this study in that it is generally agreed that Jeremiah 7 and 26 provide variant accounts of the same message. See Holt, “Jeremiah's Temple Sermon” 73–87, and H. G. Reventlow, “Gattung und Überlieferung in der ‘Templerede Jeremiah,’ Jeremiah 7 und 26,” *ZAW* 81 (1969) 315–52. Jeremiah 7 focuses more on the content of the Temple sermon, and Jeremiah 26 more on the response to the sermon. These two narratives are strategic passages showing that the Temple sermon of Jeremiah represented a critical moment in Judah's history as the people of God.

The point concerning Jehoiakim's reign as a pivotal point is further substantiated by the prominence of Jehoiakim in the oracles against Judah's kings found in Jeremiah 22. P. C. Craigie, P. H. Kelley, and J. F. Drinkard, Jr. point out the similarities between the opening oracle against the

The placement of the Jehoiakim narratives in chapters 26, 35, 36, and 45 helps to establish an important theological correlation between Jeremiah 1–25 and 36–45. Both sections of the book point to the temple sermon recorded in Jeremiah 7 and 26 as a key moment in Judah's exhausting of God's grace and patience. At this time in history, Judah missed a golden moment for repentance and fell under an immutable sentence of divine judgment.

c. *The continuation of exile and delay of restoration.* A final purpose of the Jehoiakim framework is that this structuring of the narratives in Jeremiah 26–45 reflects an ambivalence toward the promises of national restoration found in chapters 30–33 in the section known as the Book of Consolation, suggesting that the final narrator(s)/editor(s) of Jeremiah MT is/are pushing these promises into a distant and more eschatological future. Jeremiah 30–33 shines as the “pivotal center” of Jeremiah MT with judgment the primary focus in what precedes and follows in the rest of the book.⁴⁸ However, the structuring of Jeremiah 26–45 moves chapters 30–33 off center stage in this section of the book and sends forth the cautionary message that much judgment is to follow even after the catastrophic fall of Jerusalem before Israel can ever hope to experience the glorious future portrayed in 30–33.

In the first panel, the promise to the Rechabites parallels the oracle given to the houses of David and Levi in the Book of Consolation in 33:17–18. Both the oracles given to the Rechabites and David/Levi include use of the phrase “shall not lack a man . . . before me” (לא־יִכְרֶה אִישׁ . . . מִלִּפְנֵי) and have reference to the perpetuity of this condition (cf. 35:19; 33:17–18).⁴⁹ The covenant promises given to David and Levi have great bearing on the future existence of Israel as a nation and continuation of the important national institutions of monarchy and priesthood; in contrast, the promise of the continued existence of the Rechabites in the strategic position at the end of chapter 35 has virtually no relevance for Israel's ultimate national destiny. It

unnamed king in 22:1–6 and the Temple sermon in Jeremiah 7: (1) “Proclaim there this word” (7:2)/ “Speak there this word” (22:1); (2) “You say, ‘Hear the word of the Lord’” (7:2 = 22:2); (3) “If you will indeed do justice”/“Do justice” (22:3); (4) “Sojourner, orphan, and widow do not oppress” (7:6; cf. 22:3); (5) “Nor innocent blood shed in this place” (7:6 = 22:3) (*Jeremiah 1–25* [WBC 25; Dallas: Word, 1991] 297). With the oracle against Jehoiakim as the unnamed king in 22:1–5 and the specific word against this ruler in 22:13–19, it is clear from the perspective of the book of Jeremiah that Jehoiakim embodies all that is wrong with the house of David following the death of Josiah.

⁴⁸ Clements, *Jeremiah* 8. For the development of the message of hope found in Jeremiah 30–33, see A. J. O. van der Wal, “Themes from Exodus in Jeremiah 30–31,” in *Studies in the Book of Exodus* (ed. M. Vervenne; Louvain: Peeters, 1996) 559–66; McConville, *Judgment and Promise* 92–103; B. Bozak, *Life “Anew”: A Literary Theological Study of Jeremiah 30–31* (AnBib 122; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991); R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah, Prophet of Hope*, *RevExp* 78 (1981) 345–64; and T. M. Ludwig, “The Shape of Hope: Jeremiah's Book of Consolation,” *CTM* 39 (1968) 526–41.

⁴⁹ Levenson, “On the Promise to the Rechabites” 510–11. Levenson notes that this expression is used primarily with reference to the house of David in the rest of the OT as well (cf. 1 Kgs 2:4; 8:25; 9:5; 2 Chr 6:16; 7:18). This transfer of a promise from the house of David to the Rechabites is particularly fitting in the context of Jeremiah 26–45 because of the sustained focus on the unbelief and disobedience of members of the house of David in this section of the book of Jeremiah.

appears as if the promise to the Rechabites that serves as the conclusion to this section purposely mutes and shuts down the promises of national renewal and restoration given in chapters 30–33.

With the closing promise to a single individual (Baruch in ch. 45), this muting of national hope is even more pronounced in the second panel. There are no nationalistic promises in chapters 36–45 to parallel the message of hope in chapters 30–33. The promise to Baruch in 45:5 parallels only the promise given to another individual, a man named Ebed-Melech, the Cushite responsible for saving Jeremiah from the cistern and the plot of the royal officials in 35:15–19. Like Baruch, Ebed-Melech is promised that he will escape with his life (39:18). In panel two, there is only a minimal promise to two people, and one of those individuals is a foreigner at that!⁵⁰

The only possible connection between the promise to Baruch in 45:1–5 and the promise of national restoration in 30–33 is a rather negative one. In the oracle to Baruch, Yahweh counsels the faithful scribe “to not seek great things for yourself” (גדלות תבקש לך) (45:5). This word of caution is not a rebuke of selfishness on the part of Baruch but rather appears to be a warning/reminder that it is not Baruch’s lot to share in the experience of national salvation depicted in chapters 30–33.⁵¹ The reference to “great things” (גדלות) provides an interesting linkage to “the great and mysterious things” (גדלות וּבְצִוּוֹת) in 33:3 that Yahweh will perform in the future restoration of Israel as a nation. Coming at the end of chapters 26–45 as a unit, this exhortation for Baruch not to seek “great things” has significance for all the faithful of subsequent generations who wait in exile for God’s ultimate act of salvation.⁵² The message of Jeremiah anticipates a great salvation that will reverse the terrible judgment Judah experienced during the lifetime of Jeremiah but also suggests a time of delay as Israel waits for Yahweh to perform his sovereign

⁵⁰ The favorable treatment of Jeremiah by foreigners, including Ebed-Melech (38:7–13) and the Babylonian commander, Nebuzaradan (39:13–14; 40:1–6), heightens Judah’s guilt in persecuting Jeremiah and rejecting his message. Nebuzaradan even sounds like a good Deuteronomist in his explanation of the fall of Jerusalem (cf. 40:2–3). If pagans were able to recognize Jeremiah as a messenger of Yahweh, Judah is all the more culpable for failing to take heed to the prophet’s warnings of judgment.

⁵¹ This limited promise to Baruch is fitting in that all three references to this figure in the book of Jeremiah appear in contexts of opposition and/or suffering—(1) 36:4–10, Baruch’s reading of the scroll and Jehoiakim’s later reaction; (2) 43:1–7, the accusation that Baruch is inciting Jeremiah to commit treason and the taking of Baruch and Jeremiah to Egypt by force; and (3) 45:3, Baruch’s lament to Yahweh concerning his sorrow and difficulties. For the figure of Baruch in the book of Jeremiah, see W. Brueggemann, “The Baruch Connection: Reflections on Jeremiah 43:1–7,” *JBL* 113 (1994) 405–20.

⁵² This theme of the continuation of Israel’s exile carries over in to the NT. See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 126–27, 203–4; and *idem*, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 152–66. For a favorable assessment of Wright’s view, see C. A. Evans, “Jesus and the Continuing Exile of Israel,” in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God* (ed. C. C. Newman; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999) 77–100. For the Jewish perspective on the continuation of the exile, see M. A. Knibb, “The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period,” *HeyJ* 17 (1976) 253–72.

act of writing his laws on the hearts of his people (31:33–34) that will eliminate the need for any further judgment against a disobedient nation.⁵³

IV. CONCLUSION

The prophetic books of the OT are generally not linear and chronological texts, and thus attention to literary structure, patterns, and parallels is an important component in reading and interpreting these books.⁵⁴ While discussion of compositional issues behind the formation of the book of Jeremiah is beyond the scope of this paper, the parallelism of Jeremiah 26–35 and 36–45 and the Jehoiakim texts which frame chapters 26–45 point to a purposeful editorial design and structure for this section of the book of Jeremiah. The preaching of Jeremiah offers Judah an opportunity to turn from their sinful ways and avoid destruction, but Jehoiakim's rejection of the prophetic word brings Judah under a sentence of irrevocable judgment. The "fourth year of Jehoiakim" (605 BC) is a critical moment in Judah's history where the fate of the nation is sealed and Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar emerges as the human instrument of divine judgment. Deliverance is reserved for only a tiny minority (the Rechabites and Baruch) who reflect faithfulness in their lives. National restoration will only come in the distant future when that faithfulness characterizes the nation as a whole (cf. 31:31–34).

⁵³ Hill notes a similar ambivalence concerning the hope for the future in Jeremiah MT in that the book concludes in chap. 52 with the narrative of the fall of Jerusalem that closes with only a faint glimmer of hope as Jehoiachin is released from imprisonment and allowed a measure of freedom as he remains in the land of Babylon (*Friend or Foe* 17). Hill writes: "Jeremiah MT has a particular perspective about the exile, in which the themes of judgment and hope exist in an unresolved tension with each other. This tension is expressed both in 52:31–34 at the end of the book, and also in its structure, where words of punishment are juxtaposed with promises about the future. The progression from judgment to restoration, found in the book of Ezekiel, does not exist in Jeremiah. While there are promises about an end of the exile, this is not yet in sight."

⁵⁴ For an example outside of Jeremiah, see E. W. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah* (OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991) and note the importance for the message of the book as a whole attached to the parallels between the two narrative sections in the book—the Ahaz narratives in Isaiah 7–8 and the Hezekiah narratives in Isaiah 36–39.



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