

JEREMIAH

An Introduction and Commentary

Volume 1: Chapters 1–20

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Mentor

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PREFACE

Adding another commentary on Jeremiah to the many which have appeared in recent years requires some measure of explanation. While I have frequently and gratefully availed myself of many insights that are to be found in the recent literature on Jeremiah, I have been perplexed by the comparative deficiency of works written from a conservative perspective. There seems to me to be two key components of such an approach. The first is that justice must be done to the prophet's claim that his message is not self-originated but divinely given. This is a subject which is shrouded in mystery, but it is an inadequate response to the claims of the text to pass over it in silence and, at best, treat the prophet as a man of considerable insight and perception who challenged his contemporaries to accept his reading of events during a very troubled period of their history. The second aspect of a conservative approach to the prophecy is surely to take seriously its further claim that the record we now possess originated with the prophet himself. Much contemporary analysis of Jeremiah assumes that the prophet is only indirectly responsible for the present text, and that there has been an assiduous band of later unidentified editors who have shaped, modified and even composed the material that is now presented to us under the name of Jeremiah. The willingness with which modern scholarship has posited the existence of such redactional activity has been a distorting prism which has skewed endeavours to interpret correctly the book as a whole. There can be no doubt that the text of Jeremiah is an edited representation of what the prophet said, but I have written this commentary on the basis that this editing has been done either by the prophet himself or under his direct supervision. If I may be permitted a New Testament analogy, in reading Jeremiah we are as close to the prophet himself as we are to Paul in reading his epistle to the Romans, no matter what role a Tertius played in writing down the letter (Rom. 16:21), or, in certain sections of the prophecy, to the Paul of Acts as portrayed by his friend and companion, Luke. It is the widespread unwillingness of modern scholarship to recognise the prophet as his own editor that has caused much confusion in biblical studies and has undermined confidence in the divine origin of the Scripture. This commentary is therefore presented as an attempt to elucidate the message of Jeremiah on the basis of a commitment to the inspiration and accuracy of the text.

The prophecy of Jeremiah is a book of considerable length, and it is consequently impossible to include within a convenient length all that might reasonably be said about it. The need to be selective is

intensified by the vast amount of literature that has been produced in connection with Jeremiah over recent decades. I have written this commentary with a view to exposition and proclamation. There are indeed no ready-prepared sermons within this volume, but there is, I trust, much to stimulate and guide. Though the commentary employs the New International Version as its basic translation, I have in fact worked from the Massoretic Text and have included (generally in footnotes) remarks that may help those who study in the same way. I have not attempted to summarise modern specialist debate regarding Jeremiah. This is done very adequately elsewhere and, because the presuppositions employed are at variance with mine, the relevance of such studies is frequently marginal to the task I have set myself.

Lastly, a preface should include acknowledgment of those who have assisted in the preparation of this work. To do justice to that requirement would almost require a history of my life and so, to keep matters within reasonable bounds, I would simply mention two: the congregation of St. Columba's Free Church, Edinburgh, who during a vacancy some years ago heard an early version of much of the material that is now contained in this book and whose comments were greatly appreciated; and also my wife Mary, whose support and encouragement for this project were invaluable when my stamina and enthusiasm were flagging.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- ABD* *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. D. N. Freedman (ed.). 6 volumes. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- ANET* *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. J. B. Pritchard (ed.) 3rd edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- AV Authorised Version (King James) (1611).
- BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs (eds.), *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907.
- BHS* *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph (eds.). Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1977.
- GKC W. Gesenius, E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius Hebrew Grammar*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910 (second edition). (cited by section.)
- GNB Good News Bible (= Today's English Version). Glasgow: Collins/Fontana, 1976.
- HALOT* *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm. 5 volumes. Brill: Leiden, 1994-1999. (cited by page.)
- IBHS* *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990. (cited by section.)
- ISBE* *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. G. W. Bromiley (ed.). 4 volumes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979-1988.
- Joüon Joüon, P. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Translated and revised by T. Muraoka. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991.
- LXX Septuagint, according to *Septuaginta II*, ed. A. Rahlfs. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, 1982.
- MT Massoretic Text (as in *BHS* above).
- NASB New American Standard Bible. LaHabra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1995.
- NIDOTTE* *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. W. A. VanGemeren (ed.). 5 volumes. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997. (cited by volume and page.)
- NIV New International Version. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988.
- NJPS *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

- NKJV New King James Version. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982.
- NLT New Living Translation. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1997.
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- REB Revised English Bible. Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- RSV Revised Standard Version. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- TDOT* *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren and H.-J. Fabry (eds.) 11 volumes, continuing. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-.
- TWOT* *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. R. L. Harris and G. L. Archer (eds.). 2 volumes. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980. (cited by entry number.)

INTRODUCTION

§1. APPROACHING JEREMIAH

The unfolding of divine salvation throughout the centuries of human history has not taken place like the smooth rising of the sun on a clear morning, gradually but steadily dispelling the darkness and spreading its warmth. While the course of events is undoubtedly moving on towards its consummation, there have often been times of darkness which call into question whether God's purposes will ever be achieved. It was at such a period of darkness that Jeremiah served as a prophet of the LORD at the end of the seventh and the beginning of the sixth centuries BC when the expansion of the neo-Babylonian empire under Nebuchadnezzar led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Centuries earlier the LORD's purpose for his people had involved intervention on their behalf to deliver them from oppression in Egypt. Subsequently they had been divinely brought into the land of promise and given the opportunity to serve God and to enjoy the blessings of the covenant. The land in which Israel dwelt was a precursor of a return to paradise, and designed as a training school for those who would live in obedience to the LORD. But by Jeremiah's day the history of the people was no longer a story of their struggle to realise that potential; instead it had become a tale of failure. At a human level the nation had come to a dead end. The presence of a spiritually insensitive and rebellious people could no longer be tolerated in the land of blessing and promise, and the city of Jerusalem which for centuries had been the focus of the divine presence on earth was to be abandoned by God and captured by her enemies. The people of God would be deported from the land which had been given them in covenant as a token of restored creation, because it was incongruous and unjust that those who had so flagrantly departed from God should occupy and enjoy the land of his blessing. It was a time of turmoil and tragedy that engendered urgent and perplexing questions in the hearts of the faithful remnant among the people. 'Will the LORD reject for ever? Will he never show his favour again? Has his unfailing love vanished for ever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?' (Ps. 77:7-9; cf. Ps. 79:5). It was at such a time that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet.

Jeremiah's ministry involved the proclamation of impending doom. What was to befall the people would not be a chance occurrence in the flow of human history, nor even the outworking of fundamental, underlying economic and social forces. It was an expression of the sovereign rule of the God who determines the flow of human history and whose covenant had been violated. If the people would not respond in repentance to the situation that had arisen because of their sin, then they would be swept into exile. Over the years repeated calls for repentance were spurned, and so

catastrophe became increasingly inevitable for the nation. But even then there were still opportunities for individuals to escape or mitigate the impact of what was happening. What was looked for was faith—a commitment to the LORD and a personal acceptance that his purposes were determinative for life.

However, Jeremiah's ministry was not one of unrelieved gloom. Setting out beforehand an explanation for the trauma that was to befall the people provided a structure for faith to survive through the dark years of divine judgment. Coping with the disaster would not be achieved by an irrational flight of fancy that sprang from a denial of reality, but by accepting the divine perspective on what was happening and why. Even more significantly, Jeremiah was privileged to have revealed to him that restoration would follow judgment. The LORD would not permit sin, even the sin of his people, to have the last word on their destiny. His covenant commitment to them endured even after they had reneged on their obligations to him. So he commissioned Jeremiah to describe the restoration that would take place and to set out the new covenant that would be divinely inaugurated to ensure the permanence of the arrangements which would be instituted after the impact of the catastrophe had been worked through in the nation's life.

That new covenant vision is one aspect of the prophecy that gives it special significance for the church today. While there was a partial fulfilment of the new covenant promises at the expiry of the seventy years of captivity that Jeremiah foretold, that has now been superseded by the consummation inaugurated by the coming of Christ. The age of the new covenant is now revealed as having two principal phases, but already there has been an initial realisation of it in the epochal transformation accomplished by the redeeming work of Christ and in the church's understanding and appropriation of that salvation through the sending of the Spirit. The conceptualisation of that change as 'new covenant' is to be traced to the dark days of Jeremiah's ministry, and in looking back to it, we can come to a more robust grasp of the privileges that are ours.

Alongside the twofold message Jeremiah had to deliver, there was another aspect to his prophetic calling. In a way that had been partially anticipated by Hosea and the marriage he was instructed to enter into (Hos. 1–3), Jeremiah was required to live out his message as well as to proclaim it. The Book of Jeremiah is more than the record of the nation's history; it is a record of the prophet's experience of rejection, hardship, suffering and eventual vindication that parallels that of the people as a whole. Jeremiah lived through a time of personal darkness as well as a time of national catastrophe, so that attention has to be given to the significance of the man himself along with that of the message he proclaimed. This too takes on a deeper meaning in the light of New Testament revelation because it is not difficult to detect the parallels that exist between the reception Jeremiah

was accorded and that given to the one who 'came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him' (John 1:11).

In this Introduction we begin by considering the nature of the evidence that we have in the Book of Jeremiah regarding the life and ministry of the prophet (§2). Then, because the prophet did not speak in detachment from the world of his day, but addressed its circumstances and needs directly, a description is given of the general situation that prevailed in Judah and the surrounding nations in the time of Jeremiah (§3). After that, the course of his career and his personal experience are outlined in terms of contemporary events (§4). Of course, Jeremiah was first and foremost a prophet. It is therefore appropriate to consider what was implied by this, and in particular to ask how he knew what it was he had to say (§5). After an outline of the principal features of the message Jeremiah presented (§6), the final section of the Introduction (§7) brings together various methodological observations about the content of the commentary. Mention should also be made of an Appendix (to be found at the end of Volume 2) in which problems connected with establishing the chronology of this period are looked at in greater detail.

§2. THE FORMATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Before we consider what the Book of Jeremiah tells us about the prophet and his ministry, we must first examine the book itself and account for its origin and form. Traditionally Jeremiah was considered to be written by the prophet himself, or at any rate under his close supervision. Though it was recognised that the material in the book was not ordered in any very easily comprehensible sequence, there was no doubt that the book told us directly about the prophet and was an accurate report of his ministry as he maintained a courageous witness to God's truth in an age of spiritual decline and impending divine judgment. The strength of such an understanding is that it is in accord with a straightforward reading of the text, and, I would contend, nothing has arisen to vitiate such an approach, though it is now generally set aside in favour of taking the book as produced by various redactors over a number of years after Jeremiah's death.

2.1 The Structure of Jeremiah. For the purposes of study it is possible to identify sixteen major divisions in the book of Jeremiah.

(I) *Introduction and Call (1:1-19)*. Here we are given basic biographical information about Jeremiah. He was descended from a priestly family that lived in Anathoth near Jerusalem, and at an early age he was called to be a prophet, though not without reluctance on his part because he felt himself unable to cope with the demands of the office. He was assured of

divine empowering, and by means of two visions was informed of the LORD's determination to carry out his word and also of the main theme of the message he had to present: that judgment was impending on the nation.

(II) *Jeremiah's Early Ministry (2:1–6:30)*. This summary of Jeremiah's initial preaching exposes the persistent apostasy of the people, confronts them with the need for repentance, and warns them of the horrors of enemy invasion that would come as the implementation of God's sentence of judgment on them because they had refused to turn back to him. Although King Josiah had carried through many reforms in the public worship and religious structures of Judah, the thinking of the people was still poisoned by the defection of Manasseh's reign so that they perpetuated the pattern of inner alienation from the LORD and readiness to engage in idol worship. Through the prophet the people were called on to return to faithful observance of their covenant commitment to the LORD.

The prophet's early proclamation also contained themes that would become more significant at later stages in his ministry. The political and religious leaders are held responsible for promoting rebellion against the LORD (2:8; 5:12-13, 30-31; 6:13-15). Even when judgment is seen as coming upon the land, there is a hint that it will not be total (5:10, 19). There is an awareness of future restoration to divine blessing (3:14-18), which even has an international aspect to it (3:17; 4:2). Also, we find that Jeremiah himself is drawn into reacting to the message he conveys, expressing his bewilderment and anguish at what is impending for Judah (4:10, 19-21; 6:11a). At this early stage, though the situation is not irrevocable, the outlook does not look promising.

(III) *Warnings about Worship (7:1–8:3)*. This division of the prophecy stands out from the material before and after it by being written in prose rather than poetry. In the Temple Sermon of 7:1-15 we have a record of a key address Jeremiah gave in the early years of King Jehoiakim's reign, challenging the prevailing assumptions of the people that all would be well with them, and setting before them the choice of the covenant: obedience which would lead to divine blessing, or disobedience which would lead to the imposition of the divine curse. Other sections list the corruptions that prevailed in Judah's worship. It was not enough for the LORD's people to mouth religious platitudes and to perform elaborate ceremonies. Holy living had to be practised in every area of life for the covenant ideal to be realised and for the people to be in harmony with the LORD's will.

(IV) *Disobedience and Punishment (8:4–10:25)*. This poetic supplement to the foregoing material contains messages probably first proclaimed during Josiah's time but reapplied to the rapidly degenerating situation of later years. The basic themes are those found earlier: that judgment is coming upon the land and that the people should recognise how unnatural and foolish their behaviour was. Jeremiah's grief as he realises how imminent and severe the catastrophe will be is vividly portrayed (8:18–

9:11), and chapter 10, after exposing the futility of idol worship, shows that its consequence will be destruction and exile (10:17-18).

(V) *Rejection of the Covenant (11:1–13:27)*.

(VI) *Inescapable Doom (14:1–17:27)*.

(VIII) *Jeremiah and the Potter (18:1–20:18)*.

In chapters 11–20, material from a variety of backgrounds is presented in prose and poetry to reinforce Jeremiah's message. In 11:1-17 we have a second example of a prose address of Jeremiah setting out the demands of the covenant. There is also the record of a number of symbolic actions he was instructed to perform or witness to bring his message home to the people (13:1-11; 18:1-4; 19:1-13). While from the start of his ministry Jeremiah had been sensitive to the suffering involved in what was revealed to him, these chapters include a number of prayers and dialogues, traditionally known as his Confessions, in which the prophet engages in vehement protest with God (11:18-23; 12:1-6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18). We are made aware of how much it cost Jeremiah personally to persevere in his ministry and especially, as the flow of material throughout these chapters increasingly emphasises, to persevere in a ministry that was being rejected. This collection ends with the nation likened to a smashed earthenware jar that cannot be repaired (19:11), and with the prophet flogged and publicly humiliated (20:2), so that he concludes despondently, bemoaning his very existence (20:14-18).

(VIII) *Kings and Prophets Denounced (21:1–24:10)*. At the beginning of chapter 21 there is a break in the material presented in the prophecy. The question being examined is no longer whether divine judgment on Judah will be avoided by repentance, but whether Judah, and especially its king, can be brought to see that judgment may be mitigated by accepting the punishment God has sent. The critique given of various kings of Judah does not hold out much hope for an appropriate official response, and the analysis of false prophecy in 23:9-40 shows the absence of spiritual perceptivity among the religious leaders of the day. The doom of the people is certain, and yet the future is not completely black. While the existing representatives of the dynasty of David are to be written off, the LORD will provide a true ruler for his people (23:5-6). Although the exile of the people is not going to be averted, beyond that the LORD will act to provide a new beginning by bringing them back to the land (23:3; 24:4-7). Here are dawning rays of the new day that will be expressed through the new covenant.

(IX) *Judgment on the Nations (25:1-31)*. Chapter 25 stands on its own as a significant point of transition in the book. For the part it plays in analysis of the Greek transmission of the text, see below (§2.6). Theologically it is a discussion of the outworking of divine judgment in the light of the emergence of Babylon as the superpower which will be used by the LORD to effect his judgment against Judah. Punishment was inevitable after

twenty-three years of ignored warnings (25:1-11), but there is also a divine limit of seventy years on Babylonian dominance before they too are judged (25:12-14). Indeed all nations are shown to come under the sovereign verdict of the LORD against them (25:15-38). This message, which comes from the middle of Jehoiakim's reign, stresses the universality of the LORD's rule and therefore the inescapability of the divine verdict against all. Though Babylon will in turn be overthrown, it is not yet hinted that her downfall has any implications for the restoration of Judah.

(X) *Controversy with False Prophets (26:1-29:32)*. This division of the book demonstrates how conditions deteriorated in Jerusalem. Chapter 26 contains another account of Jeremiah's Temple Sermon, but here the emphasis is on the response to it from the religious establishment, leading to a threat against the prophet's life. From a decade later, chapters 27 and 28 set out Jeremiah's opposition to rebellion against Babylon and the response this met with from another prophet, Hananiah. The issue of true and false prophecy is also explored in chapter 29 in terms of the advice that Jeremiah relayed to those taken to Babylon in 597 BC. However, the exiles are shown that the LORD does not intend that Babylon will have the final say on their destiny. He will eventually bring them back (29:10-14).

(XI) *The Restoration of Israel and Judah (30:1-33:26)*. These chapters are frequently called the Book of Consolation. In them Jeremiah sets out the programme that was revealed to him while he was imprisoned during the final siege of Jerusalem. To encourage him (and others) during the harsh conditions of those days, the LORD provided greater light on how his purposes would eventually be accomplished. After the terror of invasion and deportation (30:5-7)—that could no longer be averted—there would come a time when the LORD would renew his favour towards the people. These prophecies culminate in the new covenant (31:31-34), which involves restoring the fortunes of the land (31:12, 23-24; 32:15, 44), Zion (30:18; 31:6, 38-40; 33:16), the priests (31:14; 33:18-22) and the king (30:9; 33:15, 17, 20-22). Jeremiah is instructed to buy a field already captured by the enemy as a symbol of this coming restoration (32:6-15).

(XII) *The Need for Faithfulness (34:1-36:32)*. In these chapters a set of case studies show the extent of the moral and spiritual deterioration prevalent in the land. This decline justified the LORD's action against the people, and the record also explained to future generations why their national history had developed in the way it did. Chapter 34 shows the leading citizens of Jerusalem going back on a solemn agreement they had entered into before the LORD. Chapter 35 holds up the Rechabites as a group who remained obedient to instructions given by their founder, and in this they provide a decided contrast to Judah's attitude towards the LORD. Then chapter 36 relates how King Jehoiakim burned the scroll that contained the record of Jeremiah's ministry. By this he revealed not only his hostility to the prophet, but also his rejection of the God whom the

prophet served.

(XIII) *The Siege and Fall of Jerusalem (37:1–39:18)*.

(XIV) *Jeremiah after the Fall of Jerusalem (40:1–45:5)*.

Here we have a continuous narrative that centres on the fall of Jerusalem. The first division of the material (chaps. 37–39) focuses on Jeremiah's imprisonment during the siege and on how King Zedekiah in his weakness was unwilling to respond to the prophetic message presented to him. After the city fell, Jeremiah was released from confinement and treated favourably by the Babylonians. However, the new regime that they established in Judah did not last long, and Jeremiah was carried into Egypt by a group of Jews fleeing from anticipated Babylonian reprisals (chaps. 40–41). Though the prophet's long disparaged message had been vindicated, neither this group of refugees nor the wider Jewish émigré community in Egypt were prepared to accept his advice, and the final picture we have of the prophet is of him witnessing faithfully to a still unresponsive audience (chaps. 42–44). Chapter 45 presents an earlier message dealing with the destiny of Baruch, Jeremiah's friend and assistant. Its inclusion here is discussed in §2.2.

(XV) *The LORD's Words against the Nations (46:1–51:64)*. The Oracles against the Nations are the last major division of the book, and by the strategic placing of the oracles against Babylon last in sequence they provide a climax to the message. The earlier oracles predict judgment on various nations for offences they have committed, though even in them there occur a number of unexpected glimpses of divine blessing (48:47; 49:6; 49:39). But to Babylon no hope of redemption is extended. Rather her downfall is seen as providing the occasion for the restoration of the LORD's people, who are urged to leave the doomed city and to renew their covenant pledges to the LORD. Thus the vista of hope, which had been becoming clearer throughout the book, is most clearly displayed in the closing section regarding Babylon (chaps. 50–51).

(XVI) *A Supplement: Prophecy Fulfilled (52:1–34)*. Chapter 52 is a postscript added by someone other than Jeremiah or Baruch. It draws on material similar to 2 Kgs. 24:18–25:30 to restate various aspects of the fall of Jerusalem and to add additional information about the calamity that came on the land. Like Kings it ends with a note about the release of Jehoiachin from prison, which hints somewhat obscurely about the need for divine intervention to effect a release for the nation from captivity in Babylon.

2.2 The Composition of the Book. The Book of Jeremiah is the record of a prophetic ministry, and much of the material in it therefore originated in the prophet's proclamation to the people. It is, however, improbable that years later he had to rely on his personal recollection of what he had said earlier or on what others could recall. Though the normal mode of communication to one's contemporaries was by speech, ancient

Near Eastern society was insistently literate when it came to recording matters of long-term significance—and there is no doubt that revelation given to a prophet from God would be accorded the highest importance. Thus we find Barstad, who would firmly dissociate himself from ‘fundamentalist approaches’ to the text, arguing ‘because some importance was attached to these words [ancient Near Eastern divinatory texts], it became important to secure the message from the deity in the most accurate way possible, or the message had to be taken down in order that it might be delivered to the correct addressee. ... The same, we should assume, would apply also for ancient Israelite prophetic texts. There is little cause to believe that the ancient Israelites behaved in any way differently from their neighbours in this respect, and, again, there are indications in the biblical material itself suggesting that prophetic texts were written down after they had been delivered’ (1993:57).

These records, therefore, formed the basis for the bringing together the record of Jeremiah’s preaching, which was supplemented by narratives about his life, written with his knowledge by associates like Baruch who were eyewitnesses of the events they described. Narrative about prophetic action would not have been delivered orally, but would have been written from the start. This collection of material grew in various stages throughout Jeremiah’s life, and probably received a substantial major revision shortly before his death. If this was not carried out by the prophet personally, then it was probably effected by Baruch. There is no reason to suppose that the text of Jeremiah as we now have it was not in existence (with the exception of chapter 52) by around 580 BC.

However, even a cursory analysis of the prophecy makes it evident that the material in the book is not ordered chronologically. For instance, the events recorded in chapter 26 took place at some point in the years 609–605 BC and those of chapters 27 and 28 around 594 BC, but chapter 29 moves back to the immediate aftermath of 597 BC. Moreover, chapter 21 has previously dealt with a much later incident from 588 BC, as does chapter 34, but chapter 35 moves back to 598 BC. Chapters 36 and 45 both begin with the date ‘in the fourth year of Jehoiakim’ (605/04 BC), but chapters 37–44 are an account of incidents in 587 BC and the years immediately following. It is not that when events occurred was unimportant to the writer—after all he has recorded the information that alerts us to these temporal transitions—but that chronology was not the major factor in determining the structure of chapters 21–45. Furthermore, in chapters 1–20 next to no chronological information is given. It is therefore of interest to see to what extent we possess sufficient information to account for the order in which the material in the prophecy has been preserved.

The Two Scrolls. Jeremiah’s prophetic activity stretched over a period in excess of forty years, and the record of it was not all prepared simultaneously. The book itself gives significant information about its origin, though unfortunately not as much as we might desire.