

THE NEW COVENANT OF JEREMIAH
JEREMIAH 33:31-34

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABR	Australian Biblical Review
ANE	Ancient Near East
AusBR	Australian Biblical Review
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BAR	Biblical Archaeologist Reader
BSac	Bibliotheca Sacra
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
ConJ	Concordia Journal
CTM	Concordia Theological Monthly
CurTM	Currents in Theology and Mission
ET	Eternity
GTJ	Grace Theological Journal
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	Interpretation
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, rev. ed., G. W. Bromiley et al.
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature

Jer	Jeremiah (the <u>book</u>)
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JRM	Jeremiah (the prophet)
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library
PRS	Perspectives in Religious Studies
RTR	Reform Theological Review
SJT	Southwestern Journal of Theology
TB	Tyndale Bulletin
VT	Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
YHWH	Yahweh
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

INTRODUCTION

The new covenant proclaimed by JRM in Jer 31:31-34 is one of the most loved passages of the Old Testament. It has also been the focus of scrutiny for many scholars with their varied agendas. Perhaps it is not possible to approach the new covenant without an agenda of some type. However, it seems that for the most part the agendas inflicted on this passage remove it far from the original setting and message. The prophets were messengers of God to His people within a historical setting. Many scholars have long since removed JRM from his book and, in so doing, have taken his words out of the realm of exilic history. Crediting JRM with a message in his lifetime or removing his message from his historical setting begins with one's views on the process of the composition of the book of Jer. Scholars whose studies have led them to believe that the compositional process of the book of Jer was a long and complex one are in the camp of those who remove the prophet's words from exilic history. However, we will propose a theory of composition that allows us to credit JRM with a message from God in his lifetime. The choices made regarding one's assessment of the composition of the book of Jer will influence the student of Jer on other issues of the

book and its message.¹ If the assessment is that the book of Jer is a product of a long and complex literary development and the work of several authors, redactors, and/or schools of tradition, then what we have is a product that is far removed from the historical person. It then becomes futile to reconstruct the life of the historical JRM and/or attach any of his oracles to historical events. If, on the other hand, significant portions of the book can be seen to have come from the prophet or close associate, then it is possible to reconstruct a history of JRM and to put his message into a historical context. In our study of the composition of Jer we will show that the process need not have been centuries long but rather one that we can with confidence associate the writing with the prophet JRM himself in his lifetime. We will seek to show that his messages had an exilic context. Since this study is focussed on the new covenant of the Book of Consolation in Jer 30-33, we will also need to demonstrate the indications of coherence in composition for these particular chapters. These chapters can be closely related to the prophet.

When we have satisfactorily shown that the book of Jer contains words that can be associated with the prophet

¹For the purpose of this study the Masoretic Text alone is being considered. I am adopting the position of D. Christianson that the LXX is a separate edition of the MT. See D. Christianson, "In Quest of the Autograph of the Book of Jeremiah: A Study of Jeremiah 25 in Relation to Jeremiah 46-51" JETS 33 (1990): 145-154.

himself, we are then free to assess the historical setting to which his messages are attached. What is the historical context of JRM's Book of Consolation which contains the new covenant? What was happening in JRM's world that would provoke the message of the New Covenant? The context we will establish is that of covenant renewal only a few months after the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its people to Babylon. The extent of king Josiah's reforms have far reaching implications here. We will explore various possibilities that suggest a covenant renewal setting for the new covenant.

What will be left then is to put the new covenant in the context of the old covenant. A covenant theology must be established. What did it mean for JRM and his people to be in covenant relationship with God? What were the roots of covenant? What were its implications for the Israelites? What were its conditions? When the ramifications of what it meant to be in covenant relationship is clear, then we can explore the implications of a new covenant. How does it relate to the old covenant? Does it supersede the old covenant? What is this new covenant?

Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes--his own teeth will be set on edge. "The time is coming," declares the Lord, "When I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. [This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put

my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'know the Lord' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. " For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."²

²Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version.

CHAPTER ONE

THE COHERENCE OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

1. The Composition of the Book of Jeremiah

Any study in the book of Jer begins with a study of its compositional process and literary structure. However, as even a cursory look at recent works on Jer will show, this is not a simple task. Scholarship has long been divided on all the major issues affecting this book, particularly the literary structure and composition. In the last decade several major commentaries have been published and scores of journal articles written, yet there seems to be little consensus. But the student of Jer must come to terms with these issues because, as stated above, one's assessment of them will determine the outcome of one's study.

The problem question of composition in the book of Jer rests on the existence of huge portions of both prose and poetry within the book. What is the origin and relation of these two types of material? Is one more genuine to the prophet than the other? Is there any of the material at all that is genuine to the prophet or is it the work of unknown redactors/authors? Is the poetry related to the prose?

Scholarship has conceded that the prophets were essentially poets, and therefore poetry in prophetic books is usually accepted as authentic unless it can be proven to be otherwise. That is why Robert Carroll can say "The primary datum about Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, or any of the biblical prophets is that they were poets."¹

The developments of the study of Jer in essence began with the work of Bernhard Duhm.² He saw three types of material constituting the prose and poetry of which Jer is made: the poems of JRM, the book of Baruch and the supplements of later writers to these two works. Of the poetry, he considered to be genuine only those that consist of two bicola. Material was judged to be late on the basis of content and theology. Duhm calculated that there were approximately 280 verses of poetry that were genuine to JRM and 220 verses genuine to Baruch's biography. That leaves roughly 860 verses attributed to late expansions. Many scholars are unwilling to credit JRM with the small amount that Duhm allows, but they are quite willing to search for genuine JRM material in the poetry of the book. Duhm's work has been a platform for the study of the poetry and prose sections of the book of Jer, but modern scholarship has

¹Robert P. Carroll, From Chaos to Covenant: Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1981), 11.

²Bernhard Duhm, Das Buch Jeremiah, Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament 11 (Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr, 1901).

certainly moved beyond this.

It is Sigmund Mowinckel's work in Jer that has likely been the most influential of all.³ He took Duhm's work and refined the distinction between poetry and prose and came up with a theory for the composition of the book of Jer. Mowinckel proposed four written sources. Source A was a collection of authentic poetic oracles by JRM (chapters 1-25). It was the earliest material in the book (580-480 B.C.E.) and originated in written form in Egypt. Source B (found mostly within chapters 26-45) was not written by the compiler, but rather an author who created a personal, historic work (i.e. a biography). It is a collection of historical tales about the prophet's life. These biographical narratives Mowinckel assigned to Egyptian origin as well, written by 480 B.C.E. Source C was autobiographical prose material that was scattered throughout sources A and B. Its origin was assigned to Deuteronomists who lived either in Palestine or in Babylon around 480 B.C.E. Source D (chapters 30-31) was comprised of a collection of sayings and was thought to be written by an anonymous non prophetic author who inserted it into the book near the end of its developments. Mowinckel found this source undatable and unlocatable. Chapter 32 he assigned to Source C and chapter 33 was considered to be a very late insertion.

³Sigmund Mowinckel, Zur Komposition Des Buches Jeremia (Oslo: J. Dybwad, 1914).

For Mowinckel the process of composition starts with Source A since poetry is most closely linked to the prophet himself. Each source after that moves further away from JRM. As for Source B, Mowinckel, in a later work,⁴ was willing to attribute to JRM's scribe Baruch. Source C must be removed from the prophet historically because it was written over a hundred years later, and it is geographically removed because he assigns its location to Palestine or Babylon (vs., Egypt where JRM spent the final years of his life). Theologically it is removed from JRM because it is written by Deuteronomists. Source D, even though it is poetry, is the furthest removed from the prophet because both its date and origin are unknown.

Composition took place by the combining of these written sources. In his later book Mowinckel concedes that these need not have been written sources but were in fact likely oral traditions. This, of course, allowed him to associate more of the material with Baruch. It also allowed room for Source C to be an independent tradition, influenced by Deuteronomists, but primarily by the prophet himself.⁵

For the most part modern scholarship has relied on Mowinckel's analysis of Jer for a starting point. As far as

⁴Sigmund Mowinckel, Prophecy in Tradition (Oslo: J. Dybwad), 1946, 62ff.

⁵For Mowinckel the original book was comprised of chapters 1-45. Chapters 46-52 were later additions (Zur Komposition Des Buches Jeremia).

composition is concerned the debate continues to centre around the relationship of the poetry of Jer to the prose of the book. Duhm's distinction between poetry and prose is basically accepted and employed for reconstructing the compositional process. Poetry is the prime candidate for originating with JRM, and prose less closely tied to the person of JRM. The issue at stake is always distinguishing between the words of the prophet and that of redactors or authors far removed from the prophet himself.

Source A (chapters 1-25), since it is poetry, raises few controversial questions because most scholars are willing to attribute it to JRM. However, Robert Carroll⁶ prefers to see a redactional framework attributing the poems to JRM. He says there is nothing in the poetry which identifies the speakers, and without the instructions provided by the redaction, the poems remain anonymous. So for him there is no reason to believe the poems of 1-25 are anything but anonymous utterances from various sources. The framework of the redactors provides the information necessary to identify the person of the poetry and the person of the prose. Without it the figure of the prophet JRM disappears.

Source B and the role of the scribe Baruch is the subject of considerable debate. Baruch is spoken of in

⁶Robert Carroll, Jeremiah, OTL (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 47-48.

32:1-13, 16; 36; 43:3, 6; 45. He is said to have written the oracles of JRM for a public reading (36:4-6) and is associated with JRM on three other occasions. But there are those like Carroll⁷ who are sceptical of a historical character named Baruch and his relationship to JRM. He is therefore sceptical of Baruch's involvement in the biographical sections of the book of JRM. "Whatever justification there may be for interpreting Baruch as JRM's amanuensis on the strength of a literal reading of 36, there is none for viewing him as the creative writer, biographer, or lifelong companion."⁸ Most scholars,⁹ however, accept the literal reading where Carroll refuses to and are therefore willing to attest this material to the scribe Baruch or at very least a close, intimate companion.

It is Source C, the prose sermons, that is the key critical area of modern study. These prose sermons are characteristically wordy, monotonous, yet highly rhetorical and very similar to that of Deuteronomy. It is presented in an "autobiographical" framework where God speaks to JRM and tells him what to do or say (eg. 7:2, 16, 27f; 16:1-13).¹⁰ The debate centres around the discussion of the

⁷Ibid., 44-45.

⁸Ibid., 45.

⁹For example: Duhm, Bright, Hyatt, Rudolph, Weiser, Thompson.

¹⁰John Bright, Jeremiah AB 21 (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1965), LXVII-LXVIII.

Deuteronomistic influence and its significance in the construction of the book of Jer. The prose discourses are loaded with stereotypical expressions that are most similar to the Deuteronomistic literature. This type of material pervades all parts of the book of Jer. The opinion is widely held that exilic or even post exilic Deuteronomists are responsible for these portions.¹¹ Hyatt, for example, represents those who see the Deuteronomistic involvement as editorial.¹² What we have is an edition of Jer that depicts JRM as a prophet with Deuteronomistic leanings. Hyatt's position was taken up and developed by other scholars like Siegfried Herrmann,¹³ but most significantly by Thiel.¹⁴ Thiel has Jer produced in the sixth century in Palestine.¹⁵ Thiel argues for a very systematic production of a Deuteronomistic edition of the Book of Jer, so that only

¹¹Ibid., LXX.

¹²J. P. Hyatt, "Jeremiah and Deuteronomy," JNES (1942): 156-73.

¹³Siegfried Herrmann, Die prophetischen Heilserwartungen im Alten Testament: Ursprung und Gestaltwandel (BWANT 85, W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1965).

¹⁴W. Thiel, Die deuteronomistische Redaktion Von Jeremia 1-25 (WMANT 41, Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), and Die deuteronomistische Redaktion Von Jeremia 26-95 (WMANT 32, Neukirchener Verlag, 1981).

¹⁵Cf. Hyatt who thought it may have come from Egypt--"The Deuteronomic Edition of Jeremiah" in A Prophet to the Nations, eds. Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovaks, 247-267 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1984).

words found in Jer are attributed to Deuteronomistic work.¹⁶ W. McKane¹⁷ has taken Thiel to task for professing to know more than can be deduced from the text and says that he runs the risk of creating systematic theological aims for an editor he is merely postulating rather than extracting them from the text.¹⁸ But Carroll also argues for an extensive Deuteronomistic redaction.¹⁹

There are others like E. W. Nicholson²⁰ who explain the prose traditions as preaching to the exilic community. This means that the sermons addressed the theological concerns of the exiles in Babylon and not JRM's immediate environment.

Helga Weippert has added a significant contribution to this discussion. She has done an intensive study of specific linguistic features of the prose of Jer in an effort to show that the prose speeches are the utterances of the prophet and not a product of Deuteronomistic circles.²¹ Weippert pays close attention to the context within which

¹⁶Carroll, Jeremiah, 41.

¹⁷William McKane, Jeremiah, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1986).

¹⁸Ibid., 237.

¹⁹Carroll, From Chaos to Covenant, 249-268.

²⁰E. W. Nicholson, Preaching to the Exiles (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970).

²¹Helga Weippert, Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches BZAW 132, (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1973).

phrases, usually labelled Deuteronomistic, are found. For example the phrase "with all one's heart and with all one's soul" is found eight times in Deuteronomy and four times in Deuteronomistic historical work. It is also found in Jer 32:41, but in contrast to the other twelve passages it refers to God and not man. She concludes that the prose addresses represent a tradition that is closer to the prophet than even Mowinkel's "Source B" (the biographical narratives). She goes so far as to call them a Jeremianic tradition. Her detailed investigation of specific phrases indicates that the ties to Deuteronomistic speech are weak and only in a few cases indicate a direct line to Deuteronomistic phraseology (often the material in Jer has its own distinct slant to the phrases). Weippert's study leads her to further suggest that rather than a Deuteronomistic style and phraseology, what we have is also a widespread style of writing common in the ancient Near East in the late seventh century and early sixth century. Her intention is to undermine the theory of a Deuteronomistic redaction of the book and a Deuteronomistic origin for the prose sermons. The result of this is that she can then assign the formal prose to JRM himself.

William Holladay sees Weippert's studies as having solved a lot of the issues of the stereo-typed prose in

Jer.²² He develops the view that JRM himself used prose sermons which had Deuteronomic style. Poetic elements can be found in the prose²³ and this kind of prose is a reflection of a new type of prophetic discourse. Holladay demonstrates that many of the characteristic phrases of the prose sections are simply a reshaping into prose of phrases that were originally poetry. Simply put, what this means is that JRM said it first, the prose style is merely copying him, and other occurrences in the Old Testament are subsequent to the Jer prose. For example, "Gates of Jerusalem" is found in prose in 1:15 and three times in 17:19-27, but the prototype in JRM's poetry is found in 22:19 in the oracle over Johoiakim.

In recent work, Holladay²⁴ sets out to reconstruct a chronology of JRM's preaching by presenting his sermons as counter proclamations to the Deuteronomy 31:9-13 seven year covenant renewal recitation. He says, "I part company . . . with those who assume that much of prose material in the book was shaped by a circle of Deuteronomistic editors. Of course modest expansions in the tradition were made during and after the exile, but I have a different explanation for

²²William Holladay, "A Fresh Look at 'Source B' and 'Source C' in Jeremiah" VT 25 (1975): 394-412.

²³William Holladay, "Prototype and Copies: A New Approach to the Poetry-Prose Problem in the Book of Jeremiah." JBL 79 (1960): 351-67.

²⁴William Holladay, "The Years of Jeremiah's Preaching" Int 37 (1983): 146-159.

the so-called 'Deuteronomistic Prose' of the book."²⁵

John Bright is another scholar who is quite willing to attach close association of the prose sermons to the prophet JRM himself.²⁶ While he concedes that the sermons do not give us the ipsissima verba of JRM, he says that what we do have is the "gist" of his preaching. Bright affirms that the prose tradition doubtless had its origin in JRM's own preaching. His hearers, including supporters of the Deuteronomic reform and theology, remembered what he said without remembering exact words and phrases, and passed it on. We have records of how it was remembered and understood and repeated in his circle of followers. Bright believes that the style is a style in its own rights, and distinctions cannot be glibly classified as "Deuteronomistic." Therefore the developing prose traditions had a fairly close link with the historical JRM.

Through this brief survey of a number of approaches to the study of the book of Jer, it is evident that scholarship is still divided and uncertain about many of the issues pertaining to the composition of Jer and how, if at all, it is tied to the prophet JRM. It seems that the turmoil can be blamed on the various understandings of the process of composition. Everyone's theory of composition begins with the importance of the distinction between poetry

²⁵Ibid., 146-147.

²⁶Bright, LXX-LXXII.

and prose material of Jer. The difference surfaces over the assessment of the significance of the presence of both poetry and prose. How can this be incorporated into a theory of composition? One's assessment of this determines the extent to which material in the book can be associated with the historical person of JRM. For some scholars, the complexity of the theory of compositional process makes them sceptical of tying the prophet to the words now associated with him. But when it can be shown that the material as we have it is not far removed from the prophet himself, but is indeed a fair representation of what he had to say, we can then put it in the historical context to which his messages were directed.

2. The Composition of Jeremiah 30-33

Before proceeding to JRM's message of hope within its historical context, it is necessary to isolate the chapters which pertain to this message and to consider its composition. It is important, in order to perceive the message of JRM in the passage of hope, to determine the state of coherence and composition. Most scholars seem to view chapters 30-33 as having little coherence and a very complex process of composition.

Sigmund Mowinckel²⁷ found nothing in chapters 30-33 authentic to JRM. The chapters were a late addition, a

²⁷Mowinckel, Komposition.

collection of anonymous oracles added to the book at the end of its development.

John Bright,²⁸ in contrast, is quite willing to attribute authenticity to JRM for chapters 30-33. He sees virtually all of the poetry (chapters 30-31) as coming from the prophet though from different periods of his career (i.e. sections addressed to the North during the reign of Josiah). Chapters 32-33 are a little more questionable. The autobiographical report of 32:1-16 is certainly authentic, but the remainder of the chapter Bright sees as intrusions. Chapter 33:1-13 is editorially linked to 32 by reference to JRM's confinement to the court. It is similar to 32 and likely came about together. The rest of chapter 33 is missing from the LXX and Bright concedes that it likely a later addition.

Bright's willingness to credit the material of chapters 30-33:1-13 to JRM is clouded by the sense of incoherence he sees. He sees topical arrangement, but the impression of disorder and his desire to create a chronological arrangement of the book leads him to give in to the temptation to rearrange the text.²⁹

Carroll³⁰ sees only 31:2-6 and 31:15-20 as authentic out of Jer 30-33. He is noncommittal on 32:15, and Jer 33

²⁸Bright, 284-286.

²⁹Ibid., 288-298.

³⁰Carroll, From Chaos to Covenant, 204-225.

is definitely a later addition to the text. He gives a lot of attention to the influence of Deuteronomists but certainly not a systematic redaction of a coherent, already existing text. His theory is that the composition was a gathering of fragments. He refers to material from diverse sources, each having a distinct origin. These have all been brought together, but with little or no discernable overall structure. He and John Bright share the opinion that there is little evidence of an organized structure to the final form.

In his more recent work,³¹ Carroll's position is that basically none of Jer 30-33 can be associated with JRM. He gives the impression that the compositional process in Jer 30-33 was late and very complex.

William Holladay³² bases his study of these chapters on that of Norbert Lohfink.³³ Lohfink, unlike Bright, sees coherence and structure in chapters 30-31 of the underlying authentic material. He illustrates the coherence he sees by isolating seven strophes (30:5-7; 30:12-15; 30:18-20a, 21a; 31:2-6; 31:15-17; 31:18-20; 31:21-22) and showing the progression of thought that is developed in them. The first

³¹Carroll, Jeremiah, 568-570.

³²William Holladay, Jeremiah 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 148-226.

³³Norbert Lohfink, "Der junge Jeremia als Propagandist und Poet: Zum Grundstuck von Jeremia 30-31" in Le Livre de Jeremie, ed. P.-M. Bogaert, 351-368, BETL, 54 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1981).

two strophes describe the situation of distress in the North to which they were originally addressed. The third and fourth promise the restoration of the land. The fifth and sixth strophes address the issue of the exiled Israelites and promises their return. The last strophe exhorts the exiles to return home.

Holladay's strophes are slightly altered: 30:5-7; 30:12-15; 30:18-21 & 31:1a; 31:2-6, 9b; 31:15-17; 31:18-20 and 31:21-22. He sees in the arrangement of the sequence an architectural unity. The first two strophes are negative (crisis of the people), the last five are positive (proclaiming hope for restoration). There is symmetry in second-person or third-person reference to the people, and in masculine and feminine references. And the sequence is given in inclusio effect by the words "male" and "warrior" in the first strophe and "female" and "warrior" in the final strophe. Holladay takes the position that this section is an early recension to the North and justifies this by obvious words like "Ephraim," "Samaria," and "Rachael." He then proposes that JRM revised the recension of the North just before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 by the addition of three sequences of material: 30:10-11; 30:16-17; and 31:7-9a. These three passages in some way either reverse or offer compensation for the words of disaster spoken over the South in chapters 5 and 6. All correct or offer compensation for words in the first, second and fourth

strophes in the early recensions to the North. Holladay concludes then that the early recension to the North, along with the later enlargements (30:10-11; 30:16-17; and 31:7-9a), form a later expansion to the South.³⁴

Chapter 32 Holladay sees as authentic to JRM, though several sections are secondary. Chapter 33 he divides in two: 33:1-13 and 33:14-26. He is not explicit of the first section, but seems willing to attribute it to JRM as it has ties to chapter 32. The final passage is missing from the LXX. Holladay concedes that this alone is not enough to exclude its authenticity. It is possible the LXX suffered a large haplography. However, it is difficult to avoid suspicion when the style of Hebrew, the anthological nature of the passage, and the themes it sets forth are considered. This passage is dated by Holladay in the latter part of the fifth century and is therefore not authentic to JRM.

In his recent doctoral dissertation,³⁵ Don Burke refers to the Ph.D. dissertation of John Bracke³⁶ who studied Jer 30-31 as a coherent self-contained unit within the book of Jer. Bracke points out the rhetoric device in the two chapters which he understands to reflect the

³⁴Holladay, Jeremiah 2, 156-162.

³⁵D. E. Burke, "Hope for Your Future: The Composition and Coherence of Jeremiah 30-33" unpublished Ph.D. diss., The University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, 1988.

³⁶J.M. Bracke, "The Coherence and Theology of Jeremiah 30-31" Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, VA, 1983.

coherence of the final form. Burke commends Bracke for single-mindedly adhering to the task of demonstrating the coherence of the present form of Jer 30-31, resisting the temptation to label it incoherent. However, Bracke falls short in that he only considers 30-31 and does not see the features that link chapters 30-31 to 32-33.

In an effort to demonstrate the cohesiveness of chapters 30-33 I would like to look at Don Burke's work in this area. He does a commendable work of demonstrating the unity and coherence of these four chapters. He focuses on the literary issue of the compositional process itself and resulting text. He shows the clear indications that 30-31 and 32-33 are complementary. First of all, the occurrences of the expression šwb šbwt in Jer 30-33 suggests that it is functioning as a refrain or summary statement for the chapters. It also acts as an inclusio by appearing in 30:3 and 33:26, indicating the beginning and end of the discussion of the future restoration of Israel and Judah. Chapters 30-33 are also tied together by a common interest in the description of the future of Yahweh's people. This future is described in terms of a new covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people. Under the concept of covenant different aspects of the restoration are discussed. These concerns (e.g., progeny, status among nations, restoration after punishment) are developed throughout Jer 30-33 demonstrating that in these chapters there is

structure and thematic content to be found.³⁷ "The thematic development within the four chapters shows a common concern to describe and guarantee the future of the nation. The chapters do cohere."³⁸

Burke goes on to suggest that since, in the present form, Jer 30-33 evidences coherence and development of a perspective of the future of the people, it is unlikely that this final form was a piecemeal composition (eg. Bright and Carroll). "The chapters appear to have been written from a specific perspective and with a deliberate purpose . . . They would appear to be the work of an author who carefully crafted the text into its present shape and by doing so wrote a text which gives a perspective on the future of the covenant community."³⁹

Burke proceeds to work out a theory of composition that brings us to this final form. His study brought him to the conclusion that there were two editions of the text, and the process involved two writers. The first edition of Jer 30-33 is contained in 30-31, specifically Jer 30:5-7, 12-15; 31:3-6, 7-9, 15-17, 18-20, 21-22. The rest of Jer 30-33 was written by the second author.

The first author developed the question of whether Jacob and Rachel would have progeny, and thereby developed a

³⁷Burke, 182-192.

³⁸Ibid., 331.

³⁹Ibid.

perspective on the future of Israel. The emphasis on progeny is written from the perspective of Judah but directed to the remnants of the northern kingdom.

The author of the second edition (the final form of 30-33) used the first edition for his starting point. This author makes interesting use of the events of Exodus 32-34. These events are used as a typology of Israel's history. The destruction of Jerusalem and Judah by the Babylonians is understood to be punishment for the sin of the covenant-breaking people. However, just as in Exodus 34 Yahweh after punishing the people renewed the covenant, so the writer of Jer 30-33 asserts that Yahweh will make a new covenant with His people. It will be a covenant that surpasses the former covenant because it cannot be destroyed and can never be broken (Jer 31:35-37).⁴⁰

Burke concludes that the sense of coherence of the final form of the chapters causes us to give more credit to the writers of the chapters. They are to be viewed as authors and not redactors or editors. The chapters studied showed the writers to be skilled and thoughtful.

All this allows us to see the compositional process

⁴⁰The LXX is missing the last portion of chapter 33 (14-26). D. Christianson argues that the LXX is a separate edition of the book of Jeremiah and not simply an antecedent of the Masoretic Text ("In Quest of the Autograph of the Book of Jeremiah"). This is in opposition to the view of Gerald Janzen who sees textual development from LXX to the final form of the Masoretic Text. See Studies in the Text of Jeremiah, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.

of Jer 30-33 as much less fragmented than most scholars would like to make it.

We see primarily two stages in the process. Therefore, it is possible that the composition of these chapters was completed in less time than is usually the case. Certainly it is not necessary to conceive of the composition of these chapters as stretching out over centuries.⁴¹

Having surveyed the various approaches regarding the composition of the book of Jer, and more specifically Jer 30-33, the turmoil and uncertainty of the Jer scholarship has surfaced. However, we have seen through the work of those like Weippert, Holladay and Bright that the prose sermons of the book of Jer as well as the poetry can be attributed to the prophet himself. Burke and Bracke have been particularly helpful in showing that there is coherence in the oracles of Jer 30-33 and that they are closely related to the prophet JRM. The prose sermons (as the poetry) though not the ipsissima verba of JRM, are a fair representation of what his message was to the people of his day. JRM, like all the prophets of the Old Testament, wrote the message of God to the people of Israel within his historical context. It is the context of the hopeful message of JRM, the great new covenant, to which we must now turn.

⁴¹Burke, 340.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE NEW COVENANT

1. Introduction

JRM's Book of Consolation found in chapters 30-33 contains the majority of his oracles of a hopeful nature. The opening verses (1-3) of chapter 30 serve both to introduce the entire unit (30-33) and to state the theme, the glorious future of God's people. The rest of chapters 30 and 31 describe the nation's movement from distress to deliverance. Restoration is in store for Israel, culminating in that great new covenant (31:31-34). Chapter 32, though not in the form of oracles, continues the theme of restoration and hope with the account of JRM purchasing a field. Restoration is dramatized as God instructs JRM to buy a plot of land from his cousin, Hanamel. God's promise to restore the nation is the message of the event. Chapter 33 continues with oracles of restoration.

The purchase of the field in chapter 32 is important for understanding the hope JRM held for the future of Israel. It is this event and the events surrounding it that give us a historical context for JRM's message of hope. His message prior to this had been warning of judgment. Suddenly, in the midst of the events that herald God's

judgment, God has a message and task for JRM closely resembling an object lesson.

However, this is not the only context within which we must view the new covenant. It is important for our study to see the new covenant in light of covenant renewal. For this we will begin with the famous reforms of king Josiah. What did they involve and to what extent did he enforce them? Once this is established the question then concerns the nature of covenant renewal in the life and message of JRM.

2. The Field

The purchase of the field (Jer 32) can be seen as a gesture of hope. The time frame we are given for this passage is the tenth year of the reign of Zedekiah when JRM was kept in the court of the guard (32:1). The scene is the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Prompted by open rebellion Nebuchadrezzar had moved against the incompetent Zedekiah in 588 B.C.E. In the summer of that year Jerusalem was spared from the siege for a time (Jer 37:5) and given an illusion of hope due to the advancing Egyptian army. The Babylonians moved to snuff out this attempted rescue, lifting the siege for a time. Having made short order of the Egyptian army the Babylonians returned to Jerusalem and resumed the siege (Jer 39:1).¹

¹John Bright, A History of Israel 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981): 290-330.

In chapter 32 we read that God told JRM that his cousin Hanamel would come to JRM requesting him to buy some property in Anathoth. It is likely during the lifting of the siege when Babylon was pre-occupied with Egypt that the transaction took place. Hanamel came to the city and made his request of JRM. The transaction, as 32:15 tells us, was intended to be a symbol of YHWH's promise that land shall again be bought. Normal life would one day resume.²

The transaction is made according to proper legal procedure, signed by witnesses and put into storage. All this was to signify that Israel indeed had a future--a future in her own land. Verses 16-17, 24 indicate that JRM scarcely believed what was being revealed. But he was a prophet of YHWH, compelled to speak His words. His God was a God who never abandoned His people. Seeing no hope, JRM never-the-less acted in hope. It seems likely that this new found hope in the land's future contributed to JRM's refusal to go to Babylon (40:1-6) and his bitter opposition when forced to go to Egypt (42:7-22). This purchase of the field with its underlying message from God of hope is also likely the basis for the form of hope expressed in the New Covenant.³

²John Bright, Jeremiah (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1965): 235.

³Ibid., CXVII.

3. Covenant Renewal

a. Josiah's Reform

Since it is my intention to show that the new covenant had its setting in covenant renewal it is necessary to look at the place of covenant renewal in Judah. Covenant renewal at the end of the Judean kingdom must be seen in the light of Josiah's reform. Both 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34-35 record the events for us.⁴

The reforms of Josiah are extolled by biblical writers as his greatest achievement, overshadowing all his other military accomplishments. Indeed, Josiah is praised as Judah's greatest king. The focus of the reform was to purge the nation of all non-Yahwistic cults and practices (2 Kings 23:4-14, 24). Pagan cults of all sorts were abolished, and the officers (priests and prostitutes) of these cults were put to death.⁵ Josiah's reform efforts included repairing the temple and in this process the book

⁴The details of the reign and reform of Josiah differ in the two records. Scholars are willing to attribute this to the individual perspective and purpose of the two writers. Breslaur, for example, sees 2 Kings emphasizing the re-establishing of centralized cult and national religious tradition as a result of finding the book of the law. 2 Chronicles on the other hand stresses internal religious response. Covenant is renewed by an affirmation of personal commitment and not by public ritual [S. Breslaur, "Scripture and Authority: Two Views of the Josianc Reformation," Perspectives in Religious Studies 10 (1983): 137].

⁵Bright, Jeremiah, XXXIX.

of the law was discovered. It is generally agreed that this law book was some form of the book of Deuteronomy. Many of Josiah's actions can be explained only on this assumption. An example of this is the centralization of the cult and the integration of the rural clergy with the priests of the central shrine. These regulations are called for only in Deuteronomy (12:13f, 17f; 18:6-8). Josiah's harsh treatment of all idolatrous priests, including Yahwistic priests of Northern Israel, is best explained in light of Deuteronomy which demands death penalty for even the suggestion of idolatry. However, even though many of Josiah's reforms were based on Deuteronomic law it is a mistake to assume that the discovery of the law book is what sparked the reform. The reform was most certainly under way when the book was discovered. Josiah's reforms began early in his career. Chronicles tells us that he was a man who sought the LORD and walked in the ways of his father David beginning in the eighth year of his reign. In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah of his idolatrous shrines (2 Chronicles 34:3). The finding of the law book gave focus to the reform. The laws were hardly novel but rather were embedded deep in the neglected religious history of YHWH's disobedient people.'

The stress of the law books regarding sole worship of YHWH, obedience to His covenant and the threat of

⁶Ibid., XL.

destruction, must have seemed like the very voice of God. Josiah rent his garment (2 Kings 22:11). No doubt it was his conviction that in bringing the people into covenant to obey the law he had chosen the only recourse that could save the nation from ruin.⁷

The extent of Josiah's reform is in question but it appears safe to believe he extended his influence and reform north into Israel. Reform held political significance since religion and state were never separate, and so reform was also a result of political independence (i.e. ridding the nation of the overlord's cult). Abolition of the Sun cult and trying to extend his reform to the north was attempting to assert his authority over part of the northern kingdom.⁸ Nationalism was the political expression of the religion of the people. Josiah's reform was fed by nationalism but also by unease. There was a premonition of disaster, mixed with a nostalgic longing for the better days of distant past.⁹

Since the Assyrian empire was at that time breathing its last breath, the northern kingdom had become a

⁷Ibid., XLII.

⁸E. Todd discusses the possibility that the account of Josiah's northern reform is dependent on an earlier account of Hezekiah's northern reform. But he allows that it is quite possible Josiah was deliberately following the example of his predecessor and attempting to regain what had been Hezekiah's position [E. Todd, "The Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah," Scottish Journal of Theology 9 (1956): 292].

⁹Bright, Jeremiah, XLI

"no man's land."¹⁰ Circumstances were then favourable for Josiah to seek to extend his control and influence into Israel (II Chr 34:6), as far as upper Galilee (Naphtali). There are those scholars who say that Josiah's northern expansion was merely the pious notion of the Chronicler.¹¹ There is some archaeological evidence for Josiah's expansion in the south in the excavation of Mesad Hashavyahu, En-gedi, and Arad. The destruction of an Israelite temple at Arad could very well be attributed to Josiah's efforts at centralization.¹² Dillard, in his commentary on 2 Chronicles, concludes that considerable circumstantial evidence exists in favour of the reliability of the Chronicler's report that Josiah extended his border northward. But he concedes that this (united kingdom) was a theme dear to the heart of the Chronicler's message.¹³

Another point in favour of Josiah's northern reform is the fact that Josiah died defending the north. Josiah by his religious reforms had defied Assyria's power and was endeavouring to extend his influence in the north.

¹⁰J. A. Soggin, A History of Ancient Israel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 245.

¹¹H. Spieckerman, Juda unter Asser in der Sargonidenzeit (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1982): 112-14, 150-52, and Graham S. Ogden, "The Northern Extent of Josiah's Reforms," AusBR 26 (1978): 26-34.

¹²Raymond B. Dillard, 2 Chronicles. WBC 15 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1987): 279.

¹³Ibid.

Pharaoh Necho had marched north to aid Assyria against a greater Babylonian threat. But his efforts were too late, and Nineveh fell to Babylon. Meanwhile Josiah was moving against the Assyrian ally, in an effort to protect his now extended interests. Unfortunately it was a fatal mistake.¹⁴

William Holladay¹⁵ finds in Jer 41:1-5 a passage that further suggests the extension of Josiah's reform into the north. Verse 5 tells us that eighty men from Schechem, from Shiloh and from Samaria are on their way with an offering to the house of the LORD. This also suggests that the reforms were carried on long after Josiah's reign. Though the assassination of Gedeliah is not assigned a specific year, only the "seventh month," it seems likely it occurred in the same year as the fall of Jerusalem,¹⁶ and therefore September/October 587 B.C.E.¹⁷ The seventh month is the month for the feast of booths, and likely the goal of the "pilgrims from the north" (v. 5). All this time after Josiah they were still making the trek to Jerusalem

¹⁴Todd, "The Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah," 293.

¹⁵William Holladay, Jeremiah 2, Hermenia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 296.

¹⁶Paul Volz, Der Prophet Jeremia, KAT 10 (Leipzig: Deicheit, 1928); Albert Codamin, Le Livre de Jeremia EBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1936), Wilhelm Rudolph, "Jeremia," HAT 12 (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1968), against John Bright, Jeremiah, J. A. Thompson, The Book of Jeremiah (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), J. P. Hyatt, Jeremiah IB 5 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956).

¹⁷Or possibly 586 B.C.E. See discussion to follow.

(centralized worship).

There is no record of how Josiah's reform was enforced over the years but he seems to have been sincerely zealous for the reform. Throughout his reign his reforms were likely officially enforced since there was no foreign power to prohibit him. The results of the reform are not recorded either. It likely produced many good results but failed to yield the thoroughgoing repentance and change which was necessary. As reforms usually do, it seemed to have stopped short with external measures. The chief result seemed to have been an elevating of religious activity and a deadly complacency regarding the nation's future.¹⁸ Since the law demanded reform as the price of national security, people supposed that the reform would appease YHWH. With the demands of the Mosaic covenant met, the Davidic covenant supposedly guaranteed the permanence of the temple, the dynasty and the state--in other words, automatic protection by external compliance. That this sort of theology was fatal is evident by the prophecies of JRM.¹⁹ He preached to a wicked, unrepentant people whose hearts were hard toward the LORD. We have no record of what JRM thought of Josiah's reform. It is likely that he initially approved and encouraged it but recognized that it had fallen far short of evoking real change and led merely to more empty religion.

¹⁸Bright, Jeremiah, XLV.

¹⁹Bright, History, 323.

b. The Nature of Covenant Renewal in the Life of Jeremiah

William Holladay has an interesting and attractive proposal for how covenant renewal fits into the preaching of JRM. The proclamation of Deuteronomy by Josiah was initially 622 B.C.E. upon the discovery of the book of the law (2 Chr 34:30). On the basis of Deut 31:9-13 (the 7 year cycle), subsequent readings (covenant renewal) would have occurred in the autumn of 615, 608, 601, 594 and 587 B.C.E., at the feast of booths. In doing this, Holladay not only offers a chronological structure for JRM's career, but he links "deuteronomistic" portions to JRM himself and he provides covenant renewal setting for the new covenant.²⁰

With some reservations, Holladay suggests that the 615 B.C.E. recitation of the law is possibly the occasion for JRM's responding to his call (1:4-10). Since Holladay's position is that the "thirteenth year of Josiah" (1:2) is the date for JRM's birth (627 B.C.E.), in 615 B.C.E. JRM would then be twelve years old.²¹ Verses 7 and 9 show

²⁰William Holladay, "The Years of Jeremiah's Preaching," Int 37 (1983): 147.

²¹Crucial to Holladay's chronology and proposal of covenant renewal is his position regarding the date of JRM's birth. The "thirteenth year" of Josiah which is the date given for JRM's call (626 B.C.E.) for him is the date of his birth (as Jer 1:5 says "before I formed you in the womb I knew you"). This not only allows Holladay his chronology, but also explains other important issues such as JRM's silence regarding the reforms of Josiah. Not only do we have no indication of JRM's attitude towards the reforms, but none of his oracles can be confidently dated to the

similarities to Deut 18:18, where Moses learned of a prophet like himself who would one day appear. In these verses JRM himself protests that he is only a youth (v 6). Holladay even points out that Jesus was twelve when he discussed with teachers in the temple (Luke 2:41-47). Taking this position, Holladay suggests that young JRM acted to support Josiah's reforms for a period of time before Josiah was killed in 609 B.C.E. Portions of chapters 2-3 and 30-31 may have been originally directed to the North as JRM proclaimed YHWH's longing to bring the North into union with Judah in the South (Josiah's reform). These passages were later used by the prophet in addresses to the South.²²

For the 608 B.C.E. recitation, Holladay allocates the poem of 2:2-3 with its overtones of the festival of booths. Both Lev 23:39 and Deut 16:13-15 in their instructions regarding the festival use the term for "harvest" found in 2:3 (t³bû'â). The literal translation of the beginning of verse 2, "Go call out in ears of," suggests an audience at a festival. In Deut 31:11 (a covenant renewal passage), the instructions for reciting Deuteronomy use the same phrase. Holladay is also inclined to add to

period between 627 and 622 B.C.E. (the date of Josiah's reform) [Holladay, Jeremiah: Spokesman Out of Time (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1974); "The Background of Jeremiah's Self-understanding: Moses, Samuel, and Psalm 22," JBL 83 (1964): 153-64; "A Fresh Look at 'Source B' and 'Source C' in Jeremiah," VT 25 (1975): 394-412].

²²Holladay, "The Years of Jeremiah's Preaching," 147-148.

this brief proclamation chapters 2:1-4:4 (noting the likeness of 4:4 to Deut 10:16).²³

Before dealing with the next recitation in 601 B.C.E., Holladay clarifies some of his chronological construction. He dates the dictation of JRM's first scroll in 605 B.C.E. The scroll included material about the foe from the north (including Jer 4:14 and 6:8). The most likely context for such words would be the weeks following the news of Egypt's defeat at Carchemish by the Babylonians. Eventually, JRM's scroll was brought to the attention of the king who burned it (36:9). However, Holladay points out a chronological problem with this event that is crucial to his reconstruction. The Hebrew text states that the scroll was burned in November/December 604 B.C.E. (the fifth year of Jehoiakim). Contrary to this the LXX states that it was the eighth year which would have been 601 B.C.E. (Jer 43:9). On the basis of Norbert Lohfink's study²⁴ he points out that the historical circumstances of 601 B.C.E. are more reasonable than 604 B.C.E. for the burning of the scroll. In November/December 604 B.C.E. the Babylonians had marched to the Mediterranean and were moving south along the Palestinian coastal plain.²⁵ This would most certainly be a

²³Ibid., 149-150.

²⁴Norbert Lohfink, "Die Gattung der 'Historischen Kurzgeschichte' in den letzten Jahren von Juda und in der Zeit des Babylonischen Exils," ZAW 9 (1978): 324-28.

²⁵Bright, History, 326.

threat to Judah, and a scroll containing words of warning about YHWH sending a foe from the north would not likely have been so carelessly burned. But November/December 601 B.C.E. the Babylonian army had suffered a defeat by the Egyptian army and retreated to Babylon.²⁶ A cocky Jehoiakim perceiving this to be an indication of Babylonian weakness (and therefore hardly a threat) could have haughtily thrown the scroll in to the fire.²⁷

The "eighth" year must be chosen over the "fifth" year on a text-critical basis also because a scribe is most likely to change "eight" to "fifth" assuming a gap of only one year from "fourth year" mentioned in 36:1. The opposite is less likely to have occurred.²⁸

Since the burning of the scroll is then likely 601 B.C.E. and not 604 B.C.E., the reason for the fast called by the king (36:9) cannot be the sacking of Askelon.²⁹ Holladay here follows the lead of Wilhelm Rudolph³⁰ in suggesting that the reason for the fast is drought, that this is the date for the great drought presupposed by 14:1-15:9. A fast is also mentioned in that passage (14:2).

²⁶Ibid., 327.

²⁷Holladay, "The Years of Jeremiah's Preaching," 150-151.

²⁸Ibid., 151.

²⁹Bright, History, 327; Jeremiah, 150-182.

³⁰Rudolph, 233.

Holladay looks for a passage that evidences both the Deuteronomic recitation and the drought (8:8-10a and 13). This, he suggests, is the passage that was recited at the festival of booths in the autumn of 601 B.C.E. In addition to 8:8-10a and 13 being assigned to this reading of Deuteronomy (601 B.C.E.) Holladay adds 5:1-9, 5:20-29; 6:19-15; 8:14-9:9.³¹

In Autumn 594 B.C.E. Deuteronomy was used once again. For the proclamation Holladay suggests 11:1-17. Its resemblance to Deut 27:15-26 is well known (specifically the words "cursed," 11:3; and "amen," 11:5).³² But of significance as well is the reference to a "revolt" (or "conspiracy") mentioned only here in Jer (11:9) and nowhere in Deuteronomy. It is the typical word used of an attempted revolt by a vassal against his suzerain. It is in 594 B.C.E. that there is such a revolt against Nebuchadrezzar. But Nebuchadrezzar's yoke is YHWH's will so was a revolt against YHWH.³³

The final year for the recitation of the Deuteronomic covenant was the fateful year of 587 B.C.E. The city fell to Nebuchadrezzar and in August the walls, palace, and temple were destroyed and burned.³⁴ In autumn

³¹Holladay, "The Years of Jeremiah's Preaching," 151.

³²Rudolph, 233.

³³Holladay, "The Years of Jeremiah's Preaching," 157.

³⁴Bright, History, 329-330.

it was time to recite Deuteronomy again. The temple had been burned only weeks prior. To this time Holladay assigns the passage of the new covenant (31:31-34). The passage is strongly reminiscent of Deuteronomy³⁵ and it explicitly states that the old covenant is obsolete. When would a new covenant be proclaimed more effectively? The old covenant has been seen to be incapable of evoking relationship and the disobedient people have been exiled. Where is YHWH? Where is the God of the covenant? Has He abandoned his people and forsaken the covenant? No, He is establishing a new one.³⁶

Unfortunately Holladay's theory of covenant renewal being the context of the new covenant stands or falls on the date of the fall of Jerusalem. Holladay fails to address this issue. He refers only to Bright's History of Israel to document 587 B.C.E. and Bright does not deal with the problem. However there is a selection of modern scholarship that is leaning toward 586 B.C.E. as the date for the fall of Jerusalem.³⁷

The debate is still open because there are several problems involved in forming a chronology for the Old

³⁵J. P. Hyatt, Jeremiah, IB 5 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 1038.

³⁶Holladay, "The Years of Jeremiah's Preaching," 159.

³⁷H. Tadmor, "Chronology of the Last Kings of Judah," JNES XV (1956): 226-30; W. S. Lasor, "Jerusalem," ISBE (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982).

Testament. There is the uncertainty of which chronological system was used in Judah for the regnal year: the one that uses the month of Nisan (March/April) as the beginning of the year or the one that uses Tishri (September/October) as the beginning of the year. Uncertainty exists in knowing whether the years were recorded by post-dating or ante-dating the ascension year. And there is uncertainty concerning discrepancies in the dates of the siege as given according to the reigns of Zedekiah, Jehoiachin, and Nebuchadrezzar.

Establishing the chronology for the end of the kingdom of Judah has been exceedingly enhanced by the discovery and translation of the Babylonian Chronicle.³⁸ It is from this record that we can firmly establish a date for the first capture of Jerusalem. The Babylonian record tells us that

In the seventh year, the month Kislev, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched into the Hatti-land, and encamped against the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Adar he seized the city and captured the king. He appointed there a king of his own choice, received its heavy tribute and sent (them) to Babylon.³⁹

³⁸D. J. Wiseman, Chronicles for Chaldean Kings (626-556 B.C.) in the British Museum (London: British Museum, 1956).

³⁹Ibid., 73 (B.M. 21946).

Jerusalem was then captured 2 Adar 7 Nebuchadrezzar (March 16, 597 B.C.E.).⁴⁰ Unfortunately, for this study in particular, the Babylonian Chronicle is incomplete and no record remains of the second capture of Jerusalem. But from this fixed date, scholars can assign dates to events on either side of it by interpreting the data we have in light of it. Of course "interpret" is the key word, for alas, the data that remains is open to interpretation.

The biblical data that concerns us here is Jer 52:28-29 which dates the first captivity and the fall of Jerusalem in the 7th year of Nebuchadrezzar, and the second in his 18th year; 2 Kings 24:1,2 which dates the fall in the 8th year of Nebuchadrezzar; 2 Kings 25:2, 8 which says that the second fall of Jerusalem was in Nebuchadrezzar's 19th year (and Zedekiah's 11th, also Jer 39:2). Add to these discrepancies the uncertainty of which is the accepted regnal year being used, the accession year or the non-accession year. Further, there is the question of when the new year is established, Nisan or Tishri.

John Hayes and Paul Hooker⁴¹ say that although Nebuchadrezzar captured Jerusalem in March of 597 B.C.E. in the seventh year of his reign, it was not until the eighth

⁴⁰David Noel Freedman, "The Babylonian Chronicle," *BA* 19 (1956): 54.

⁴¹John Hayes and Paul Hooker, A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah and Its Implications for Biblical History and Literature (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 95-98.

year that things were settled (i.e. a new king appointed and deportation process begun). 2 Kings 24:12 is for them not the time when the city was captured, but the time when Nebuchadrezzar gathered up the spoils and marched off to Babylon, having installed Zedekiah as king. Zedekiah's accession year was then from the time Nebuchadrezzar appointed him as king (after 15 Nisan 597 B.C.E.) until 15 Nisan 596 B.C.E. His first regnal year began in 596 B.C.E. The walls of Jerusalem were breached the second time on 9 Tammuz in Zedekiah's eleventh and Nebuchadrezzar's nineteenth year (2 Kings 25:3, Jer 39:2). This puts the fall of Jerusalem for Hayes and Hooker in 586 B.C.E.

The end result of Edwin Thiele's study is a 586 B.C.E. date for the second fall of Jerusalem, but he interprets the data altogether differently from Hayes and Hooker.⁴² He begins by noting that the Babylonian account says that Nebuchadrezzar captured Jerusalem in his seventh year in contrast to the biblical account, which records it as the eighth year (2 Kings 24:12). This is due to the Babylonian practice of recording according to its accession regnal year, whereas the biblical account records Nebuchadrezzar's years according to the non-accession regnal year. The first half of the Babylonian Nisan year overlaps the last of the Tishri year. Jerusalem then was captured in

⁴²Edwin R. Thiele, The Mysterious Number of the Hebrew Kings, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 186-191.

Nebuchadrezzar's seventh year by Babylonian accession year recording, but in his eighth year by Judah's non-accession year. 2 Chronicles 36:10 says, "And at the turn of the year king Nebuchadrezzar sent and brought him to Babylon with the valuable articles of the house of the LORD, and he made his kinsman Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem." The statement "at the turn of the year" is also part of the interpretive data in this study. Thiele takes this to be the turn of the New Year at Nisan. Nisan 597 B.C.E. is the date for Jehoiachin's deportation and Zedekiah's enthronement. Thiele points out that the book of Jer records the regnal year at the beginning of Nisan for the kings of Judah and Babylon. Jer 32:1 equates the 10th year of Zedekiah with Nebuchadrezzar's eighteenth. Zedekiah's accession year began in Nisan 597 B.C.E. and therefore Nisan 587 B.C.E. begins his 10th year (synchronized with the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar, Nisan 587 B.C.E.). The year of final destruction of Judah, the nineteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar (2 Kings 25:8; Jer 52:12), according to Babylonian reckoning was Nisan 586 B.C.E. to Nisan 585 B.C.E. According to Judean reckoning, however, it was Tishri 587 B.C.E. to Tishri 586 B.C.E. Jerusalem fell in the fourth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah (nineteenth of Nebuchadrezzar), July 586 B.C.E. Thiele's discussion ends without dealing with the data in Jer 52:28-29, where Jerusalem is recorded to have fallen in

Nebuchadrezzar's eighteenth year.

Hayim Tadmor⁴³ is another advocate of 586 B.C.E. He focuses in on three synchronisms: the deportation of Jehoiakim and accession of Zedekiah synchronized with Nebuchadrezzar's eighth year (2 Kings 24:12); the tenth year of Zedekiah synchronized with the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar (Jer 32:1); and the eleventh year of Zedekiah (fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple) synchronized with the nineteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar (2 Kings 25:1-9; Jer 52:12). Tadmor states that his study is based on two presuppositions. The first is that at that time Judah reckoned her regnal year in accord with her Mesopotamian neighbours, with an accession year and year one beginning with the following Nisan. The second presupposition is that the regnal year began with Nisan. The outcome is that Zedekiah's accession year was 597 B.C.E. (Nebuchadrezzar's eighth) and therefore Nisan 596 B.C.E. was his first regnal year (Nebuchadrezzar's ninth). 586 B.C.E. was then Zedekiah's eleventh year and Nebuchadrezzar's nineteenth (2 Kings 25:8; Jer 52:12). Tadmor mentions Jer 52:28, 29 (referring to Nebuchadrezzar's seventh and eighteenth years for the captures of Jerusalem) but says only that although these verses seem to come from the same tradition, there is not as yet any satisfactory explanation

⁴³Hayim Tadmor, "Chronology of the Last Kings of Judah" JNES vol. XV (1956): 226-230.

for their origin. He adds merely that the years given here are wrong.

David Noel Freedman is a defender of the 587 B.C.E. date for the second fall of Jerusalem.⁴⁴ He boldly states that with the translation of the Babylonian Chronicle and its record of the fall of Jerusalem in 597 B.C.E., the debate concerning the chronology of Judah's last years is settled. Regarding the second fall of Jerusalem, he says "the chronicle now establishes the first date (March 597 B.C.E.) in the 7th of Nebuchadrezzar therefore the second date is in the 18th of Nebuchadrezzar (July-August, 587 B.C.E.)."⁴⁵ Freedman starts with the fixed date for the fall of Jerusalem which, according to the Babylonian Chronicle was in March 597 B.C.E. The chronicle states that Nebuchadrezzar captured the king (Jehoiachin) and appointed another king (Zedekiah). The end of Jehoiachin's accession must have happened in the same month (March 597 B.C.E., the last of the year) because the Chronicle records the event in the seventh year of Nebuchadrezzar. Zedekiah's first regnal year began the next month (April 597 B.C.E.). His eleventh year began in April, 587 B.C.E. and ended with his capture and the destruction of Jerusalem in July 587 B.C.E. (2 Kings 25:2-7, Jer 52:5-11). In noting the discrepancy between the synchronism with the seventh and eighteenth years of

⁴⁴Freedman, "The Babylonian Captivity," 50-60.

⁴⁵Ibid., 55 (footnote 20).

Nebuchadrezzar (Jer 52:28-29) versus the eighth and nineteenth (2 Kings 24:12, 25:8), Freedman defends Jer 52:28-29.

We may infer from the documentary character of this excerpt (contrast the precise figures for the number of captures with the round numbers of the account in Kings) that it was copied from an official record kept in Babylon, and which therefore followed Babylonian chronology accurately.⁴⁶

He also reviews several other suggestions regarding the discrepancies. Wiseman, for instance, infers that rounding up the captives delayed the exile until after the end of the seventh year, the start of Nebuchadrezzar's eighth. Therefore the capture of Jerusalem is the seventh year, but the captivity is the eighth.⁴⁷ Freedman points out that this merely emphasizes the discrepancy because Jer 52:28-29 dates the captivity in the seventh year while 2 Kings 24:12 dates the capture of Jerusalem in the eighth year. While Freedman concedes that the events took place at the end of the year and could then be assigned to the eighth year, he says the seventh is correct. He also observes that while in the first capture the difference is only a month, the second capture of Jerusalem is in the middle of the year, so the discrepancy is one full year (July/August 587 B.C.E. or 586 B.C.E.).

Another suggestion for the discrepancies is that

⁴⁶Ibid., 57 (footnote 29).

⁴⁷Wiseman, Chronicles, 34.

two different methods of calculating reigns were being used (accession year and non-accession year). According to the accession year method used in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar's seventh year began in April 598 B.C.E. and ended in March 597 B.C.E. However, according to the non-accession year method March 597 B.C.E. would have ended Nebuchadnezzar's eighth year. But Freedman states that there is no positive evidence that the non-accession year system was in use in Palestine. That the accession year system was used in Babylon is certain and it appears that the same system was used in Judah for the reckoning of regnal years. Therefore, says Freedman, it would be unlikely that the regnal years of a king of Babylon were recorded by a Judahite historian according to the non-accession year system.

The last suggestion for the discrepancies that Freedman makes looks at an altogether different explanation for the eighth and nineteenth pattern. It is possible that the Palestinian historian reckoned the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign from the year 605 B.C.E. instead of 604 B.C.E. In 605 B.C.E., Nebuchadnezzar's predecessor, Nabopolassar, was no longer active in the field. At the battle of Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar was in sole command of the Babylonian forces and may have already been recognized by the Palestinians as king of Babylon. Jer 46:2, referring to the battle of Carchemish, calls Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon. For the Judahite historian, Nebuchadnezzar's

first regnal year would have been April 605 B.C.E. to March 604 B.C.E., equivalent to the accession year of the Babylonian Chronicle. In addition, Freedman says,

the source of the error may lie in the fact that the first capture took place at the end of the seventh year. Then the second figure was erroneously calculated from the eighth year, instead of the seventh, and the 19th was arrived at, whereas the 18th was correct.⁴⁸

From this brief summary it would appear that most scholars have moved to the position of a 586 B.C.E. date for the second fall of Jerusalem. But even as I studied the various approaches to the 586 B.C.E. date, it became clear to me that each scholar's interpretation is significantly different from the others. In fact, often the various methods contradict each other even though they conclude with the same date, 586 B.C.E.. For example, Hayes and Hooker get to the 586 B.C.E. date by saying that 2 Kings 24:12 records the eighth year of Nebuchadrezzar because, although he captured the city of Jerusalem in his seventh year (Babylonian Chronicle), it was not until the eighth that he finished mopping up. He then starts his count down to 586 B.C.E. from Zedekiah's installation, first regnal year beginning in 596 B.C.E. Thiele says that the "eighth year" in 2 Kings is because biblical records were according to the Tishri accession regnal year, whereas the Babylonian records were according to Nisan non-accession. Tadmor, on the other

⁴⁸Freedman, "The Babylonian Chronicle," 57 (footnote 35).

hand, says that Judah was on the same Nisan regnal year as the Babylonians. Yet the outcome of all of these studies is a 586 B.C.E. date for the second fall of Jerusalem.

It is important also here to note that Freedman is the only one who based his study on all of the data. Thiele and Hayes and Hooker ignore completely the evidence of Jer 52:28-29. Tadmor, while mentioning these verses, is unable to account for them and dismisses them as an error. David Freedman, however, builds his defence for the 587 date on all of the available evidence.

I think that because no one scholar has convincingly defended the 586 B.C.E. date to the unrefutable exclusion of the 587 B.C.E. date for the fall of Jerusalem, we must allow the possibility of the 587 date to stand. It has not been disqualified yet. I like David Freedman's statement at the conclusion of his defense of the 587 B.C.E. date.

It is not always possible to reconcile divergent biblical data; at the same time a discrepancy of a single year in the chronology of events which occurred more than two-and-a-half millennia ago is rather a tribute to the accuracy of biblical editors and scribes. It is to the credit of modern biblical and Near Eastern scholars that they are able to pin down chronological data of such antiquity with precision, and that a slight discrepancy can be the subject of serious debate.⁴⁵

While this is true, Freedman must be credited with having built a solid case for the 587 B.C.E. date of the fall of

⁴⁵Ibid., 58.

Jerusalem.

The 587 B.C.E. date has strong supportive arguments. Peter Ackroyd acknowledges the debate and cites the defenders of both positions. He then proceeds to use the date 587 B.C.E. for the fall of Judah.⁵⁰ Christopher Seitz follows Ackroyd's example. He cites the problem but is unmoved by it, choosing for the fall of Judah the date 587 B.C.E.⁵¹ And there are those like David Freedman who firmly reject 586 B.C.E.⁵²

It is then possible, according to Holladay's seven year covenant renewal cycle, that JRM preached his message of the new covenant in the Fall of 587 B.C.E., a few weeks after the fall of the city.⁵³

⁵⁰Peter Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration, OTL (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968): 20, 48, 50ff.

⁵¹Christopher Seitz, "The Crisis of Interpretation Over the Meaning and Purpose of the Exile: A Redactional Study of Jeremiah 21-43," VT 35 (January 1985): 78-79.

⁵²D. N. Freedman, "The Babylonian Chronicle," BA 19 (1956): 50-60.

⁵³A. Weisser, in the introduction to his commentary on Psalms, states that covenant renewal was quite likely an annual event [The Psalms, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962): 23-25]. However he is basing this analysis on Sigmund Mowinckel's notion that the Israelite cult celebrated the same annual enthronement festival of the Ancient Near Eastern religions [The Psalms in Israel's Worship (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962): 109ff]. Walter Rast says, "Modern scholarship has shown that the book of Deuteronomy presupposes the pattern of what must have been an annual ceremony dedicated to the renewal of the covenant language" (Proclamation Commentaries: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 52). However, an annual covenant renewal is not substantiated

Further evidence for a covenant renewal setting for the recitation by JRM of the new covenant exists. Israel's history is dotted with covenant renewals because each time the covenant was breached it needed to be renewed. D. J. McCarthy says covenant renewal "occurred when, for one reason or another, it was felt that the covenant had been broken."⁵⁴ The devastation of Jerusalem was a direct result of the judgment of God because the people had repeatedly broken the covenant. JRM had spent the years of his ministry warning of that very thing. Now that it had indeed occurred, the Israelites knew what must inevitably happen. Breach of covenant required covenant renewal.

4. Conclusion

We have to this point established that the chapters in which the new covenant is found can be tied to the historical JRM in his lifetime. In this chapter we have further established that a possible setting was the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. More specifically we have determined that JRM's message of a new covenant was proclaimed in a covenant renewal setting. King Josiah, having discovered the book of the law, renewed the covenant with the people of his day. The 7 year renewal cycle thus

from Scripture. Deuteronomy 31 speaks specifically of a 7 year covenant renewal cycle.

⁵⁴D. J. McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1972), 29.

set in motion provides us with a covenant renewal year in 587 B.C.E., the fall of Jerusalem. Our covenant renewal setting is further confirmed by evidence of an annual covenant renewal ceremony and because covenant renewal is required upon breach of covenant.

Since the covenant was broken, covenant renewal was required. The fall of Jerusalem and the exile was a result of a breach of covenant. This is in itself justification for the context of covenant renewal, the event would be even more powerful if it were also the seventh year. Although either one provides a context and account for the new covenant of Jer 31, we have established that both were likely true.

What remains, then, is to picture Israel in covenant relationship. What did covenant mean to the Israelites of the sixth century? Why was a new covenant required?

CHAPTER THREE

HOPE FOR THE EXILES

Introduction

Having provided a setting of covenant renewal for the new covenant passage, we now need to provide a covenant theology for the new covenant. The new covenant must be discussed and understood in light of the old covenant. An understanding of what a new covenant would mean to Babylonian exiles and the homeless Jews left in Palestine is possible only when we understand what covenant meant for the people of Israel in those days.

At that point it will be possible to discuss the meaning of the new covenant and the hope it offered the Israelites. Was it a brand new covenant or a continuation of the old? What did it offer that the old covenant did not?

1. The Old Covenant

When JRM addressed the new covenant he did so by contrasting it to the old covenant.

Behold, the days are coming, 'declares the LORD', when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt . . . (31:31-32)

This is a clear reference to the covenant made at Sinai.¹ So it is with this covenant that we will begin to form our understanding of God's covenant relationship--old and new--to His chosen people Israel.

The nation Israel understood herself in light of her covenant relationship with God. Walter Rast says,

If Israel enjoyed a singular relationship to her God, it was because of the ancient covenant which more than anything else provided a special dimension for her national life.²

David Freedman says covenant defines the relationship of God to His people.³ Covenant is at the core of Israel's understanding of her relationship with God. Israel's beginnings as a nation were wrapped up in covenant. The covenant made at Sinai was constitutive of Israel: it called her into her being as a people.⁴

¹Roger T. Beckwith, "The Unity and Diversity of God's Covenants," TB 38 (1987): 118, says ". . . God has now made yet another covenant with His people, called, by contrast with that of Sinai, the New Covenant." John Bright "An Exercise in Hermeneutics: Jeremiah 31:31-34," Int XX (1966): 194 "Jeremiah declares (vss. 31-32) that 'the days are coming' . . . when God will make a new covenant with His people to replace the covenant made with their ancestors on the journey out of Egypt (reference is clearly to the covenant at Sinai: see Exodus 19 and 24).

²Walter E. Rast, Proclamation Commentaries: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 52.

³David Noel Freedman, "Divine Commitment and Human Obligation," Int 18 (1964): 419.

⁴It should be stated here that although it was at Sinai the nation as an entity had its beginnings through the establishment of the covenant relationship between God and the Israelites, this covenant has its root in the promise of

It created a bond between God and people which was based in gracious and saving actions of the Deity already performed, and it laid upon the recipient (Israel) the binding obligation to obey the divine commandments under threat of the severest penalties in the event of failure to do so.⁵

Having rescued the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt, God, at Sinai, established with them a covenant which would be the basis of their relationship. But like the Suzerain Treaties of the ANE to which it is related,⁶ the Sinaitic covenant had its stipulations. These were what are known to us as the ten commandments (Exodus 20). However, for Israel law/commandments were always subservient to the concept of covenant/relationship. The laws (the Torah) were parameters within which the covenant was to function and be maintained. Covenant for the Israelites was purely a religious affair. The stipulations of the covenant have essentially a religious sanction. The laws are the

God to the Patriarchal fathers (ibid., 427). Freedman's article identifies the promise to the Patriarchs and the covenant at Sinai as two different types of Suzereign treaties. In one type (that of the promise to the patriarchs) God takes upon himself certain obligations or commitments. In the other type (i.e. Sinai) terms or stipulations are imposed upon the human party. He then seeks to reconcile how two different covenants (apparently incompatible) can exist between the same parties.

⁵John Bright, Covenant and Promise (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 28.

⁶It is not necessary for our purposes here to enter into the long discussion of the ANE treaty form. Most studies along this line are based on the work of G. E. Mendenhall, Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955) and also that of M. G. Kline, Treaty of the Great King (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963).

result of, or perhaps the definition of, the covenant relationship, a religious relationship between Israel and God. The laws were the condition on which was based Israel continuing to enjoy the blessing promised to her. Israel was placed under obligation to keep the covenant by obeying the law.

Within the divine election, Israel's part in the covenant relationship is to accept and obey. It cannot bargain with God, for the covenant is the result of God's gracious initiative and choice. Israel can lay no obligations on Yahweh. The only obligations are those which God freely takes upon Himself toward Israel and which He lays upon Israel toward Himself. Such a covenant makes Israel into God's people, a whole that is His special concern and to which he has freely bound himself in gracious activity.

At the solemn ratification of the covenant, Moses rehearsed all the requirements of the LORD to which Israel responded: "all that the LORD has spoken we will do and we will be obedient" (Ex 24:7). The covenant code (Exodus 21-23), which follows the decalogue, spelled out the requirements which Israel would keep and observe.

So Israel as a nation had her birth and her covenant relationship with God inaugurated: ". . . You shall be My treasured possession. . . ." Indeed in the scholarly circles "I will take you for My people, and I will be your God" has been designated the 'covenant formula' (variant forms of it occur about twenty-five times

⁷Eric C. Rust, Covenant and Hope (Waco: Word Books Publishers, 1972), 62.

throughout the Bible).³ However, the condition of the covenantal relation was that Israel be faithful and loyal to Yahweh, the great king of the covenant. Breaking the covenant by going after other gods (substituting Suzerains) would be the most heinous kind of rebellion against Yahweh, their divine Suzerain. Israel was clearly warned of the consequences of rebellion. "Yahweh will cause you to be defeated before your enemies . . . Yahweh will scatter you among the nations, from one end of the earth to another" (Deut 28:63, 64). As David Freedman said,

this is the threat that constantly hangs over Israel in its historical existence: defiance of the God of the covenant, severing of the covenant tie, and death of the nation.⁴

The covenant was to be the lens through which Israel's history would be seen and understood and the measure by which God maintained His part of the covenant. However, early in Israel's life it became apparent that she was not able to keep the covenant (as the worship of the golden calf graphically illustrated). In Joshua 24:19, Joshua aptly states, "You will not be able to serve the LORD your God . . ." So at the beginning of Israel's history and throughout her history, the problems of broken or breached covenant emerged as an important factor in the God-Israel

³Elmer Martens, God's Design (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 66.

⁴Freedman, "Divine Commitment and Human Obligation," 428.

relationship. As a result, God ordained that the covenant was to be renewed every seven years (Deut 31:9-13). And of course every time this covenant was broken it must be renewed. Israel's history is interrupted at what seems regular intervals for these. Covenant renewals are scattered throughout the Pentateuch and historical books (i.e., in the plains of Moab (Deut 29-31); at Shechem (Joshua 24); and in the days of Hezekiah, Josiah, and Ezra-Nehemiah).

Before moving on to what happened to bring in the inauguration of a new covenant it is necessary to look briefly at one other covenant that played a significant role in Israel's understanding of herself and her relationship to God. This is of course the eternal covenant with David.

The Davidic Covenant maintained that God had chosen David as his designated king and had promised that his dynasty would never end (2 Sam 7:16). Wrapped up in this was also the notion that God had chosen Mt. Zion as the seat of his earthly rule and would there dwell among his people forever and protect them from their foes. (Perhaps this developed because David brought the Ark to Jerusalem and because Solomon built the Temple there.) This notion became dominant and progressively perverted to the point where the Israelites believed that since Yahweh had chosen Israel and bound Himself to it by covenant, He was therefore bound to protect and further its destiny. Jerusalem was

indestructible. The nation would never fall. The moral rigour of the Sinai covenant soon slackened and the covenant people were constantly enticed to worship the deities of their neighbours. JRM in his temple sermon (Jer 7), however, brings all this into focus and clearly tells the people that the Davidic covenant, the city of Jerusalem and its temple will not protect them from the wrath of YHWH, for they have broken the covenant.

Israel's history is a far cry from what it was intended to be. She came into existence with great style and fanfare in a covenant agreement with Yahweh, the one true God--her redeemer. Hers was the potential to be a great kingdom above all nations, ruled by the divine king. Her history, however, was nothing of the sort. Rather it resembled a broken record--rebellion, punishment, restoration. She was forever being enticed by what the deities of her neighbours offered. The concept of the covenant became almost entirely externalized and was constantly perverted. The prophets were continually warning the nation that persistent violations of the covenant would bring the irreversible condemnation of Yahweh. He was the divine Suzerain and he would be true to the covenant. He would implement the curse sanctions.

The people in JRM's time had witnessed the death of the northern kingdom. Their sister nation had received her just punishment for her constant, headstrong

disobedience. Conquered and exiled by Assyria, the northern kingdom was a picture of the curse of the covenant. But no matter how much the prophets warned the southern kingdom of Judah and used Israel as an example (Jer 3:11f), Judah was destined for a repeat performance. The people of Israel were well aware of their election. Even though the northern kingdom met destruction, the people of Judah relentlessly held on to the Davidic promises and the security implied in Yahweh's choice of Zion. The deep popular belief in the indestructibility of God's chosen people and the inviolability of Zion became a guiding principle even in Judah's political policy. The people's blind hope in their election knew no bounds. But, as Theodore Ludwig says,

In Yahweh's counsel it did not hold true that Israel's election implied their indestructibility. In fact just the opposite was true. . . . Their election was not a sign of security but of tension, for to be drawn into such an intimate relationship with Yahweh was to be uniquely exposed to the burning fire of His righteousness.¹⁰

In 587 B.C.E. judgment came and Judah too was conquered and deported to Babylon. The nation of Israel was completely dissolved. The Davidic monarchy had come to an end, Jerusalem was devastated, the temple destroyed and the people of God exiled. The covenant curses had been fulfilled. "The rude and crushing factuality of these

¹⁰Theodore Ludwig, "The Law-Gospel Tension in Jeremiah," CTM 36 (1965): 72.

events brought to an end traditions of expectations which had been developing in Israel for over six hundred years."¹¹

2. The New Covenant

Thomas Raitt in his book A Theology of Exile, said the survival of a lived faith is not so much determined by how it can build on the advantages provided by events flowing in a supportive direction; rather the survival depends more upon whether faith can endure the worst reversals imaginable.¹²

This is the test to which Israel's faith is now put. All that she had staked her identity and future in was wiped out. What could her faith cling to? To all appearances the God of the covenant had abandoned her. With the curses of the covenant fulfilled and the nation destroyed, the question became: Is there a covenant? Has Yahweh forsaken His people?

Previously we have stated that when covenant was broken a covenant renewal ceremony was necessary. And in chapter two we established the possibility that the year 587 was a covenant renewal year. So, for a double reason, in the fall of 587 when the people gathered for the annual feasts, it is entirely possible they came with the expectation of a covenant renewal ceremony. The covenant had been broken, the curses fulfilled. Certainly the covenant must be addressed. The foundations of faith had

¹¹Thomas M. Raitt, A Theology of Exile (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 3.

¹²Ibid., 2.

been shaken. Israel's very survival as a definable community was at stake. Humanly speaking she could not possibly have survived if she could not have found some explanation of the tragedy in terms of her faith, specifically in terms of Yahweh's sovereign power, justice and faithfulness to his promises.

What then would the prophet of Yahweh give to this forlorn people? Indeed, what could He offer them but a promised new covenant? Israel was in no position to patch up the covenant she had of her own wilfulness broken. As David Freedman said,

Israel could do so much to reinstate the covenant and no more (i.e. the covenant renewals of Hezekiah and Josiah). Once the agreement was broken, it was up to Yahweh, the divine Suzerain to decide whether to renew it or not. And the time came when, after many periods of grace and renewals of the relationship, the patience of the long-suffering Deity was exhausted, the curses of the Covenant were enforced against the condemned nation, and it fell.¹³

Besides, it was not in Israel's power as vassals to reinstitute covenant. No, God would take care of the covenant. He initiated it in the first place and He alone could restore it. But what would be the point? The covenant requires obedience to covenant stipulations, and Israel has repeatedly shown her complete inability to do so.

In light of the events surrounding it, this particular covenant renewal ceremony was likely the most

¹³Freedman, "Divine Commitment and Human Obligation," 409.

significant one in Israel's history. What then could be more appropriate than the instigation of a new covenant with Yahweh? The hearts of those faithful pilgrims (41:5)¹⁴ were heavy with agony and disillusionment. Standing in the still smouldering temple courtyard, they strained their ears to hear the word from the LORD from His servant JRM.

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "When I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'know the Lord' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

It is immediately evident that God is not dealing with simple continuation of the covenant from Exodus. That did not work because the people broke the covenant. The passage assumes that the relationship between God and His people (covenant at Sinai) had lapsed. God therefore initiates a "new covenant" which is "not like" the earlier one. Rejection, and all that led up to it, is taken seriously. There is here a clean attempt to resolve the problem of the broken covenant, the lapsed relationship, by the initiation of a new covenant.

On the other hand though, it is called a "new"

¹⁴See chapter 2 regarding the pilgrims to Jerusalem.

covenant; Bright points out that neither in its form nor in its content does it differ from the old.

Like the old, it is given through divine initiative, solely on the basis of the divine grace, and it presupposes that the recipients will live in obedience to its stipulations, which are in no way changed. The difference is that now, since the stipulations are inscribed on their minds and wills, the people are enabled to conform to them, and truly to be God's people.¹⁵

JRM proclaims that in the future the new covenant would be written on the heart and not engraved, as before, on tables of stone. God's Torah will be inscribed upon their hearts. This is, for Moshe Weinfeld, the novelty of the new covenant--the fact that it is not written on stones but on hearts.¹⁶ W. E. Lemke believes that

What is envisaged here is a process of internalization of the divine will upon the human will and consciousness, which would enable the people to move beyond mere lip service or superficial conformity and to live by those divine precepts which in the past they had been unwilling or unable to fulfil.¹⁷

Von Rad states that:

If we understand Jeremiah correctly, the new thing is to be that the whole process of God's speaking and man's listening to the divine will had not led Israel to obedience. Yahweh is, as it were, to by-pass the process of speaking and listening, and to put his will straight into Israel's heart . . . men are to have the will of God in their heart and are only to will God's will. What is here outlined is the picture of a new

¹⁵Bright, Covenant and Promise, 195-196.

¹⁶Moshe Weinfeld, "Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel," ZAW 88 (1976): 28.

¹⁷W. E. Lemke, "Expository Articles: Jeremiah 31:31-34," Int 37 (April 1983): 184.

man, a man who is able to obey perfectly because of a miraculous change of his nature.¹⁸

Throughout his long ministry, JRM had struggled with the problem of human sinfulness. He came to see it as deep rooted and all pervasive. He cried:

Can an Ethiopian change his skin
or the leopard his spots?
Then also you can do good
Who are accustomed to do evil (13:23).

Another time he said:

The heart is more deceitful than all else
and is desperately sick;
who can understand it (17:9)?

He also spoke of Judah's sin being written with an iron stylus or a diamond point (17:1). Somehow JRM understood that even when people conformed outwardly to God's laws, it does not guarantee that their whole heart is involved (i.e. their innermost thoughts, volition, and aspirations). It could be mere lip service.¹⁹ Surely Josiah and his reform is a good example of this. In 12:2 JRM says, "Thou art near to their lips but far from their mind" (heart).

In the light of his assessment of human capabilities, JRM was led by God to see that something radical would need to be done if redemption and restoration were to be possible for His people.

¹⁸Gerhard Von Rad, The Message of the Prophets (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1968), 182-183.

¹⁹Lemke, "Exposition Articles: Jeremiah 31:31-34," 18.

That is God would have to bring about a fundamental reorientation of the human mind and will. Only then might the covenant promise be fulfilled that he would be their God and they His people.²⁰

John Bright reminds us that whereas the law at Sinai had been written on stone tablets (Ex 24:12; 34:38f; or in a book, Ex 24:7), it will now be written on their hearts. It will be put "within" the people, giving them both the desire and the power to obey it. The covenant is then reestablished. "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (a standard covenant formula).²¹

And under those circumstances it will no longer be necessary to urge people to "know God." "And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbour. . . ." This would seem to be a reaction to old covenant instruction. In Deuteronomy 31 men, women, and children were to assemble at the end of seven years, and the law was to be read to them "in order that they may hear and learn . . . and be careful to observe all the words of the law" (Deut 31:12). And Deut 4:9-10 says, "Give heed to yourselves . . . lest you forget . . . and lest they depart from your heart . . . but make them known to your sons and your grandsons." Deuteronomy also instructs them to, "teach them diligently to your sons . . . write them on the doorposts of your house . . ." (6:7, 9). Moshe Weinfeld says,

²⁰Ibid.

²¹John Bright, "An Exercise in Hermeneutics: Jeremiah 31:31-34," 195.

Jeremiah's reaction to a written Law seems to reflect a certain disappointment with the literary-religious activity which had failed to improve the spiritual attitude of the people.²²

However, a feature of the new covenant seems to be that it will no longer be mediated by scribes and the elite. Rather, it will be apprehended and understood by all, from the greatest to the least. God and ordinary men are linked at last. It would not be enforced from the outside through learning and indoctrination which could be forgotten or put out of the mind (Deut 4:9-10). "No compulsive methods or external constraints will apply to this newly restored people, for they will act right from the heart."²³ Instead it would be put in men's hearts so that it would not depart from the heart nor be forgotten.

Further, the new covenant will be an individual one. Each man shall know Yahweh for himself. Personal and individual community will be at the heart of the new community.²⁴

But what about the sin of the people that broke the covenant? "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." God will of His free grace forgive it and erase it from His memory. Indeed, all the benefits of the new covenant are possible not because of human merit or striving but divine initiative, God's act of

²²Weinfeld, "Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel," 29.

²³Rust, Covenant and Hope, 118.

²⁴Ibid.

forgiveness for previous failures.²⁵ And this forgiveness would qualify all "to know" God.²⁶

This then is the covenant which God is instituting. In assessing this new covenant John Bright says,

Never before has the Old Testament presented such a comprehensive structure of deliverance; never before has it dealt so profoundly with the inner condition of man; never before was deliverance articulated not merely as temporary relief, but as a full ongoing plan for the future.²⁷

Finally, we need to decide whether this new covenant is merely a continuation of the old or a brand new covenant.

The new covenant resembles the old in that it is still between God and His people Israel; it is initiated by God, not human beings and has its roots in a divine act of redemption; it involves the Torah, God's instruction for living; its goal is to establish intimate and exclusive relationship between God and his people. But there are definite points of discontinuity as well. There will be increased internalization and immediacy in the appropriating of God's Torah (with corresponding de-emphasis on human/external aid); knowledge of God will be more widespread and no longer for the elite; divine redemption

²⁵Lemke, "Expository Articles: Jeremiah 31:31-34," 186.

²⁶Lester Kwyper, The Scripture Unbroken (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1978), 84.

²⁷Bright, Covenant and Promise, 179.

will grant freedom from bondage of human sin.²⁸

It seems then that the question cannot have an "either-or" answer. It has become apparent that the new covenant is linked to the old in all of its fundamental components while definitely advancing it at the same time. The old covenant was insufficient given man's propensity to fail. In the new covenant God would provide man with the heart to love and obey.

David Freedman in his article "Divine Commitment and Human Obligation"²⁹ tries to reconcile two seemingly incompatible covenants between the same parties. On the one hand there is a covenant of divine commitment involving an unconditional and irrevocable promise of God to his people (the promise to Abraham). On the other hand there is a covenant of human obligation in which the continuity of the relationship is the responsibility of the human party (covenant of Sinai). The question arises: can a covenant bond be broken and yet persist? For Freedman the answer is yes. God can sever a relationship as a result of covenant violations and still maintain its continuity.³⁰

Prophets like JRM were convinced that God's commitment to Israel continued in spite of and beyond the

²⁸Lemke, "Expository Articles: Jeremiah 31:31-34," 186.

²⁹David Freedman, "Divine Commitment and Human Obligation," Int 18 (1964): 419-431.

³⁰Ibid., 429.

destruction of the nation. The old covenant had been broken and its curses effected. Covenant renewal was not adequate for the crisis. A new covenant was needed. "The basis of the new order would be the divine promise, the unconditional commitment--the single happy constant in the whole tragic picture--as guarantee of the new age."³¹ Since God made the oath to himself, he will see to it that it is carried out.

As far as the human obligation side of covenant is concerned, Israel has demonstrated that it is impossible to maintain the covenant by human effort. History proves that the demands of a just God are beyond human attainment. The solution to this dilemma is the special grace of God. "He would transform the people's minds and wills, so that henceforth they would will to obey and would be empowered by his spirit to do so."³²

In the postexilic time, the new covenant was a future hope. So for the prophets hope was seen to be eschatological. They looked forward to a time when God would fulfil his promise. The New Testament teaches that we, as Christians, enjoy now what the prophets could only look forward to.

In Romans 8:1-4 Paul reiterates the new covenant of Jer 31:31-34 and spells out its message. Essentially he says that there is no difference in content between the law

³¹Ibid., 430.

³²Ibid., 431.

which Israel failed to keep (old covenant) and the law which God now undertakes to place within his people, writing it "upon the hearts" (new covenant). The difference is that knowledge of the law was once an external code but now, under the new covenant, knowing the law is an inward principle. "The difference lay in the fact that a new inward power was now imparted, enabling the believer to fulfil what he could not fulfil before."³³ God's will had not changed, but now instead of being written on stone tablets it is written on human hearts. An "inward impulsion accomplished what external compulsion could not do."³⁴

The transition from the old age to the new (from weakness of flesh to the power of the Spirit) was brought by the work of Christ (Romans 8:2). The ineffectiveness of the law was due to the weakness of human nature and its inability to keep it. But now, 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ' has set us free . . . in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (8:2-4). The written law-code was inadequate, given man's propensity to sin. The new covenant is not external but written on the heart. Under the new covenant, we are free from the condemnation of the law (8:1) but not from its

³³F. F. Bruce, Paul: The Apostle of the Heart Set Free (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 200.

³⁴Ibid.

requirements or obligation. Note the continuation of the necessity of the obligation to the covenant terms. In Christ the condemnation of the law is fulfilled for us, however we are still obligated to its terms because of our commitment to Christ. Here we see evidence of the continuity from the old covenant to the new. The difference, for Paul, is the Spirit (8:4). "The Spirit gives life, and with the life he imparts the inward power as well as the desire to do the will of God."³⁵

3. Conclusion

We have seen how the Israelite nation was identified with and linked to the covenant concept. The Sinai covenant showed the responsibility of Israel to be God's people, in faith and obedience. It also made clear the possibility of destruction as a nation that would result from the failure to trust and obey.

Because of insistent apostasy JRM had preached a judgment that would completely destroy the nation. But interestingly, at that time he also proclaimed full grace which would accomplish salvation for Israel. The salvation was entirely from God in a new act. This unconditional grace was not intended to take away from the fierceness of the judgment. The judgment must be total as that grace would be total.

³⁵Ibid.

Israel's breaking of the covenant did not destroy the relationship she had with God. Breaking of the covenant posed a serious problem for the relationship between God and Israel. On the other hand, keeping the covenant produced merely legalism. But the impetuous breaking of the covenant by worshipping other gods surfaced the problem of the covenant's durability. Israel's history is a cycle of disobedience, wrath, punishment and restoration. Finally, the punishment entailed destruction of the nation, city of Jerusalem and the temple. The old covenant curses were effected. A new covenant was instituted. This new covenant would bring about inner renewal. The law would be written on the heart which meant that God would implant His ideals and ways for life within man. His law would be known by all and it would be God's gracious forgiveness that would qualify all to know Him.

This new covenant was based on the old covenant but surpassed it by dealing with man's propensity to sin. Hope then, for the Israelites was that the God of the covenant had not abandoned them. Indeed He had done what was necessary to ensure future salvation. Complete judgment was necessary to inaugurate complete grace. We are given the impression that although JRM completely rejected the perverted confidence of the official theology of his day, he never surrendered his belief that God's sure purpose would

go beyond the nation's destruction. Destruction was not God's intended end but His necessary step for salvation.

The exiles were not left without hope. They were to cling steadfastly to the confidence that, in God's good time, His purposes on earth would be accomplished and all the promises made the fathers, and through the prophets, fulfilled.³⁶

³⁶Bright, Covenant and Promise, 197.

CONCLUSION

Our study of the new covenant of Jer 31 began with a study of the composition of the book of Jer and then, more specifically, Jer 30-33, the Book of Consolation. We stated that this was a necessary first step because the outcome of one's study of the compositional process determines one's stand on many other major issues regarding the book and its message. For this study, it was imperative to determine whether or not the book of Jer could be confidently associated with the prophet JRM, and therefore to specific historical events in his lifetime. Our study of the compositional process began with a brief survey of the history of the study of the compositional process (i.e., the works of Duhm and Mowinckle). Then we expanded our study to modern day scholarship and the prominent works available. We also focused in on Jer 30-33 (since it contains the new covenant) to seek to establish whether or not there are grounds on which to link it to the prophet. At the conclusion of our study of the compositional process of the book of Jer we were able to say that the book of Jer, including the book of Consolation, can be confidently linked to the prophet himself. We established that JRM, like every other prophet, was a messenger of God to the people of Israel within a historical context. The end result of this

is that we can determine what the historical context was for the message of the new covenant and the resulting implications.

Once the way was opened to put JRM's message of the new covenant in a historical context, our next task was to determine what that historical event was. We started off with the object lesson during the lifting of the siege in 588, JRM's purchasing of a field from his cousin, Hanamel. From there we explored the nature and extent of king Josiah's reforms because our intention was to see the new covenant in a covenant renewal setting. There were several reasons for postulating a covenant renewal setting. These ranged from the nature of the covenant relationship itself (i.e., when covenant was broken it must be renewed) and the regulations it embraced, to William Holladay's proposal of the seven year renewal cycle. In order to legitimately use Holladay's proposal it was necessary to establish grounds for maintaining that Jerusalem fell in 587, as his proposal requires.

One final step then remained before we could look at the new covenant. Our study required us to form a covenant theology. We outlined the covenant relationship between YHWH and his people and considered what it meant to be in covenant relationship. We scanned Israel's history of covenant relationship up to the fall of the city of Jerusalem and the exile of her people. Israel experienced

both the blessings and cursings of the covenant. The fall of Jerusalem, the vindication of God's anger for constant, blatant rejection of the covenant relationship, brought in a new era--the new covenant.

At this point our study turned theological as we considered this brand new covenant and its implications. We were able to see how the old covenant was foundational to the new covenant, but how the new covenant moved beyond the old. The new covenant dealt with man's bent toward sin, his innate inability to keep his part of covenant relationship. This new covenant is an internalized one.

Israel's history of flagrant disobedience brought her to a point in time when YHWH instituted the full conditions of the covenant. He destroyed the city of Jerusalem and exiled her people. When stark reality hit the nation then living in exile or trying to live an existence back in the homeland, it must have taken their breath away. The only way to live that they had ever known, the covenant relationship (though grossly perverted by them), was destroyed. How bleak life must have seemed. But God was not finished. His purposes were never to merely destroy. When it became clear that the old covenant had been broken and the resulting curses executed, God instructed his faithful prophet to speak that beautiful passage of the new covenant, found in Jer 31:31-34--the hope of Jer.

APPENDIX

When biblical dates are disputed, it is never as simple as choosing or preferring one date to another. Given that the Bible is not merely a historical record but rather a story of the events of God's involvement in the world, each event has theological ramifications. When a date is in question, its solution usually has ramifications on various theological positions.

Israelite chronology has long been a topic of contention among scholars. It has been disputed for centuries. The biblical historians have been under scrutiny and indeed questioned as to whether what they have recorded is actually "history." The issues centre around chronology and theology. Even surface study by a minimally concerned lay individual shows that biblical chronology at face value succeeds only in contradicting itself and seems to undermine its own credibility. Many scholars and lay alike have for the most part conceded that it is unreliable as a historical record. Attempts to harmonize the chronology of the Israelite kings with the Judean kings were for the most part futile. In addition to being apparently contradictory itself, biblical chronology is at variance with secular chronology. At every angle biblical chronology is seen to

be unreliable and inconsistencies are both magnified and multiplied. Suffice it to say that the biblical chronologies have suffered much at the hands of those who have attempted to harmonize it.

Edwin R. Thiele (The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings)¹ is a scholar who seems to have dealt with the issue with integrity. He started and finished with the assumption of the credibility of the biblical chronologists. When his chronology is finished, the biblical chronologist's work is basically held to be accurate and reputable.

Other works like that of John Hayes and Paul Hooker (A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah)² seem to leave the biblical chronologist still looking unreliable. The reader tends to hesitate to trust the biblical chronologist because Hayes and Hooker show little confidence in it, preferring their own chronology over the biblical one.

This distinction has been made simply because the underlying premise of each (reliability of biblical chronologist vs. unreliability) had implications for the principles of chronology of each. Since it is my estimation that Thiele sought to vindicate the reliability and

¹Edwin Thiele, The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983).

²John Hayes and Paul Hooker, A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah and Its Implications for Biblical History and Literature (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988).

integrity of the biblical historians, his studies led him to principals of chronology that would establish this. In my assessment, he has dealt with the most integrity. Therefore it is his principles of chronology which I will give in order to indicate the complexity of the issue of biblical chronology. This should illustrate what all is involved when dates for various biblical events are disputed. The following discussion will show what Thiele thought to be the issues.

The first thing to be established is the chronological procedure used by the nation in question (Judah/Israel). What year did the king begin to count the years of his reign--the year he ascended, the following year or another time? When in the calendar year did a king begin to count his reign? When a scribe of one nation was recording the years of a king from a neighbouring nation, did he record according to his own system or according to the neighbouring nation's system? Did coregencies occur? What about rival rulers simultaneously reigning? Did each nation always follow its own system or perhaps switch at some time for whatever reason?

Crucial to understanding the chronological system of a nation is determining its regnal year. There were two systems being used in ANE in biblical times: the accession-year system or the nonaccession-year system. In the accession-year system, the year a king came into power was

called his accession year, and not until the first day of the first month of the next year did he record the events of his first year. The nonaccession year system recorded a king's first year from the day he came to the throne. Reckoning according to the nonaccession-year system will always put a king one year higher than reckoning according to accession year. The first year, according to the accession year system is the second year of the nonaccession-year system, etc. At the outset, Judah used the accession-year system and Israel used the non-accession-year system. This, however, did not remain consistent throughout their recording of history. Thiele notes that at some point Judah makes a shift to the non-accession-year system and then shifts back again. This in itself is of considerable interest and leads to the complexity of dating historical events. Each nation used its own system for recording synchronisms for the year of neighbouring kings.

The exact time of the year at which a king began to count his regnal year is also important. The Hebrews had two calendar years, one beginning with Nisan (Spring) and one beginning with Tishri (Fall). Did Israel and Judah follow the same practice? Thiele establishes that Judah's new year was Tishri, while Nisan was Israel's new year.

Thiele goes to great lengths to establish that coregencies are an integral part of Hebrew Chronology.

"Kings were prone at times to associate their sons with them

on their thrones, but they did not always leave direct evidence of having done so. Often the evidence for a coregency is indirect. But if a coregency existed, it is important to know this, for otherwise years that overlapped might be treated as consecutive."³ Evidence of coregencies is dual dating. For example, two dates are given for the accession of Joran, the second year of Jehoram of Judah (2 Kings 1:17) and the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 3:1). This points to a coregency between Jehoshaphat and his successor, Jehoram (referred to also in 2 Kings 8:16). In five of nine such reigns the length of the reign is the number of years from the beginning of the overlap to the end of the sole reign. But the synchronism of accession marks the end of the overlap and the beginning of the sole reign (dual dating).

The foundation or starting point of the principles of Hebrew chronology is the established absolute dates. These allow the Hebrew chronology to be aligned with the fixed dates of neighbouring nations. "Of the greatest importance to the historian in the reconstruction of a sound chronological outline is the use of some device whereby events may be dated to the exact years when they took place and whereby the passage of the years may be reckoned

³Thiele, The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings, 54.

correctly over extended intervals of time."⁴ For this purpose, historians have available to them such things as eponym lists (lists of kings) from Assyria and Ptolemy's cannon (which includes as astronomical data). These tools are so valuable that Thiele states, "when the student has at his disposal chronological materials so dependable as the Assyrian eponym lists and the Ptolemaic canon, he may have complete assurance that he has a solid foundation on which to build."⁵

These are the issues--the fundamental principles of Hebrew chronology, as established by Thiele. These are the issues that make establishing accurate chronology difficult, why it is not wise to be absolutely dogmatic about questionable dates. This is why issues remain somewhat debatable.

⁴Ibid., 68.

⁵Ibid., 72.

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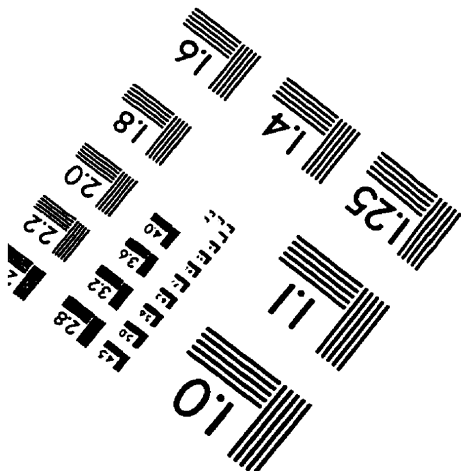
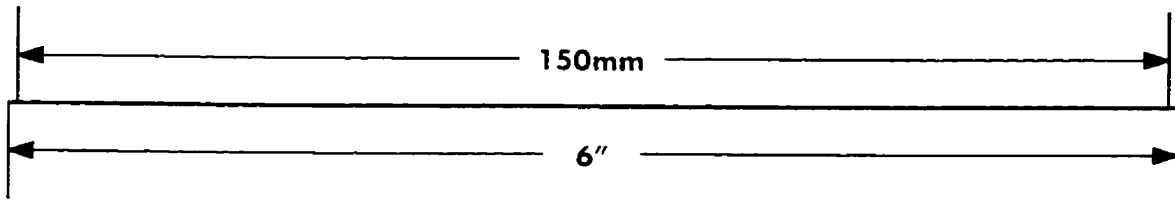
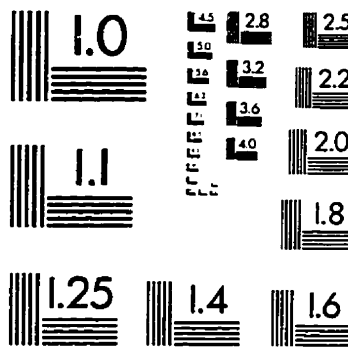
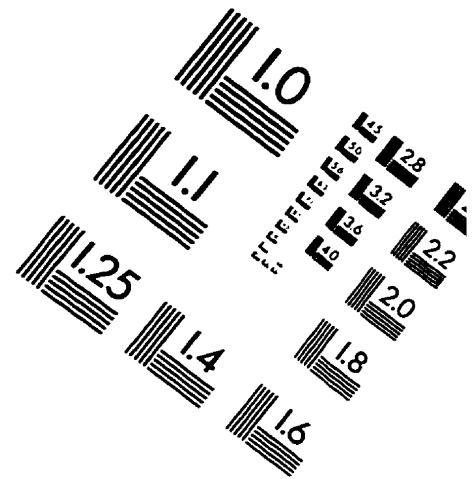
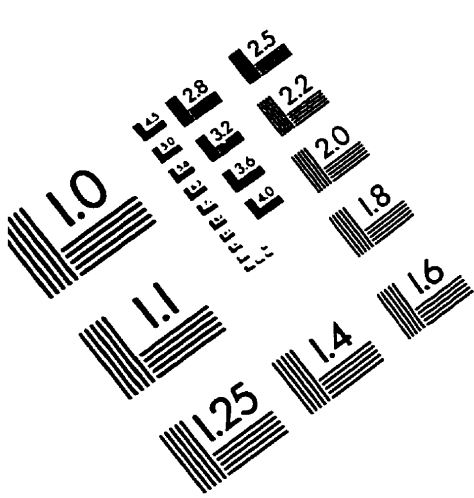
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