I. Who was Jeremiah?

---Can we know? R. Carroll\(^1\) argued that the book of Jeremiah is a literary construct that gives the reader little or no information concerning the prophet Jeremiah. Rather, the book allows the reader to glimpse the world of the author/editor(s). His approach may be summarized in the question, “Are the stories about Jeremiah or Baruch anything more than examples of this legendary story-telling activity in the life of the second temple communities?”\(^2\)

--A more traditional approach would acknowledge the redactional layering of the Book of Jeremiah while also recognizing a portrait of the prophet Jeremiah rising from the text. Redactional layering was the process of the sayings of the prophet becoming a written book. The arrangement of the text, especially when compared with the Septuagint, suggest a complicated redactional process. When taking this approach, one discovers the following details.

---The son of a priest. His father, Hilkiah, was a priest.

---From Anathoth--This would suggest that he descended from Abiathar, the priest who was banished to Anathoth by Solomon for supporting Adonijah’s attempt to take the throne of Israel after David’s death. This makes Jeremiah part of an outcast priestly family. As Fretheim says, he was an “outsider with a pedigree,”\(^3\) thus having inside knowledge, without inside position. This type of position typically leads to a critical perspective, from both sides.

---Minority prophet—The text of Jeremiah shows the conflict between prophets, which the student of scripture can also find in other texts, for example 1 Kings 18 & 22, Mic. 3:5-6, Hos. 9:8-9, Is. 28:7-10, and Zeph. 3:4. The prophets of the LORD were regularly confronted by false prophets, some claiming to be true prophets and others serving Baal.

II. Where did Jeremiah preach?

--We know that he preached in Jerusalem, because he is there much of the time, preaching to kings, prophets, and priests. His messages may have taken him as far away as the Euphrates River (Jer. 13), although may be a reference to the village of Parah, near Anathoth, chosen because of its similarity to Hebrew for Euphrates. He also sent a letter to the exiles in Babylon (Jer. 29). He also uttered prophecies addressed to foreign nations, although there is


\(^2\) Ibid, 60.

no evidence that he preached in those places. The messages to the foreign nations, like the foreign prophecies in many prophetic books, are meant to display the sovereignty of God over all the earth and God’s directions of the paths of His creation.

III. When did Jeremiah preach?

1. General Context
   --640 BC—Josiah becomes king of Judah
   --622/621—“Book of the Law” discovered in the Temple
   --609—
   --Josiah killed by pharaoh Necho, who was attempting to aid the Assyrians in their battle with the Babylonians.
   --Jehoahaz placed on the throne by the people of Judah.
   --Jehoiakim placed on the throne by Necho.
   --598—Jehoiakim rebels against Nebuchadnezzar.
   --598/597—Jehoiakim dies during the siege by Nebuchadnezzar and is replaced by his son, Jehoiachin.
   --597—
   --Jehoiakim surrenders to Nebuchadnezzar. He is exiled to Babylon. He is considered the legitimate heir to the throne (see the end of Jeremiah and 2 Kings).
   --Zedekiah, son of Josiah, is placed on the throne of Judah.
   --587—Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar.
   --587/586—Nebuchadnezzar besieges and defeats Jerusalem, exiling Zedekiah to Babylon, after executing his sons.
   --Gedaliah made governor.
   --586?—Gedaliah assassinated and Jeremiah taken to Egypt.

2. Specific Context
   --Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry is precisely dated from the 13th year of Josiah (627 BC) until the 5th month of the 11th year of Zedekiah (586 BC). Thus he preached from before Josiah’s reform until the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586.
   --Jeremiah’s messages are placed in the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Jehoiachin is also mentioned in the text.
   --However, only one of Jeremiah’s oracles is dated to the reign of Josiah (3:6ff), although he does state that he has prophesied since the 13th year of Josiah (25:3).

IV. Structure, Text, & Canon

--Outline
   --Jeremiah does not outline well. In fact, the book appears to be chronologically jumbled, and the oracles are collected by themes, although even this scheme is less than satisfactory at times as well. A brief outline follows:
I. Jeremiah 1-25—Collection of Prophetic Oracle, loosely dated 627-605 BC, based upon 3:6, 22:18, 22:11, and 25:3, but cf. 21:1-7 and 24:8, 27. This section also includes a few narrative accounts of Jeremiah’s actions, usually associated with some prophetic word.

II. Jeremiah 26-29—Narrative accounts of events in Jeremiah’s life, along with prophetic words, but they are not in poetry.

III. Jeremiah 30-33—“Book of Consolation.” These are words of hope and comfort to Judah & Israel. God will restore His people after exile.

IV. Jeremiah 34-45—Narrative accounts of events in Jeremiah’s life & Judah’s last days, as well as various prophetic words, once again not in poetry.

V. Jeremiah 46-51—Foreign Prophecies. These are prophecies against Egypt, the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Hazor, Elam, & Babylon.

VI. Jeremiah 52—Appendix. This chapter contains the account of the fall of Jerusalem (repeated in Jeremiah 39:1-10) and the release of Jehoiachin by Evil-Merodach, king of Babylon. This material is essentially identical to sections of 2 Kings 24-25.

--Text
--The Septuagint (LXX) translation of Jeremiah is approximately 15% shorter than Masoretic Text (MT). Some of the repetitious narrative is omitted in LXX. This fact, and the Dead Sea Scrolls evidence of Hebrew texts containing both traditions, points to a complicated textual history for the Book of Jeremiah.

--The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) contain Hebrew texts that are very close the MT and Hebrew texts that support the Greek text of the LXX. The evidence of the DSS would seem to prove that there was no fixed book of Jeremiah well into the 2nd temple period.
--This evidence suggests (proves?) that there were multiple editions of the book in existence before the finalization of the OT canon in the post-exilic period.4

--Canon
--The LXX and MT also differ in regard to canon. The most obvious discrepancy is the placement of the foreign prophecies (MT Jer. 46-51) after Jeremiah 25:13 in the LXX. All of this serves to remind of us how little we truly know about the development of the OT text and canon!

V. Message of Jeremiah
--Personal Faith
--Jeremiah 1:4-5
--Yahweh’s call to Jeremiah is very personal, even before birth. This signifies a very special relationship between Jeremiah and Yahweh. God chose Jeremiah for an important task. This task would bring hardship & pain to Jeremiah, which is the backdrop for some very personal moments.

--Jeremiah 20:7-12
--Jeremiah cries out to Yahweh with unprecedented honesty, blaming Him for his troubles and asking Him to bring vengeance against his enemies. While we may not want

4 These multiple editions should be a part of any conversation concerning the inerrancy of the biblical text, since they complicate the discussion of the inerrancy of the “original manuscripts.”
to emulate Jeremiah’s words, his relationship with God would be worth following, one marked by personal call, direct and personal words, and obedience to those words.

---Sovereignty of Yahweh
--Jeremiah 6:22-23
—Yahweh himself is bringing Judah’s enemies against her. He can “build up” or “tear down” nations as He desires (1:9-10). The “enemy from the north” is a common theme in OT prophecy, esp. in Jeremiah.

--Jeremiah 18:1-10
—Jeremiah’s visit to the potter’s house underscores Yahweh’s control of all things. He can mold the peoples and nations of the world as easily as a potter molds a lump of clay. He can also destroy and remake a flawed piece of pottery. [Also note that Jeremiah is fond of this type of lesson, where his actions, or something visual, is used as an object lesson & delivers a message.]

--Jeremiah 46-51—Foreign prophecies declare loudly Yahweh’s control of all the earth.

---Judgment for Sin
--Jeremiah 1:11-16
—Yahweh is “watching” to see that His word of judgment will be fulfilled. [The word for “almond branch” is שָׁקֶד (shaqed) while the word for “watching” is שֹׁקֶד (shoqed). The only difference is one vowel. This similarity in pronunciation is the point of the visual image.]
--The word to be fulfilled is the "boiling pot" of judgment, poured out because of their two-fold sin, forsaking Yahweh and worshiping false gods.

--Jeremiah 2:9-13
—Do people change gods? Not usually, rather nations live & die for their own gods. This is the great sin of Judah.

—They have left Yahweh, “the spring of living water,” and served other gods, digging “their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” When we serve what we make, we are doomed to failure because only Yahweh can be our source of refreshment, strength, and nourishment.

--Jeremiah 6:13-15
—The leadership are especially chastised, for greed and deceit, for failure to preach the truth about the people’s sin, and for showing no shame concerning their sin. The leaders were expected to lead the people to Yahweh, instead they have allowed them to move away from Him, and at times they have led them away from Yahweh.
—They preach, “Peace, peace,” but there is no peace. God’s leaders must look sin in the face and call it sin, regardless of the consequences, as Jeremiah did, or face God’s wrath!
--Jeremiah 7:1-11
Judah was trusting in God’s presence at the temple rather than in their own faith in Him. They believed that the temple itself, “God’s house,” would save them. After all, would God allow His temple to be destroyed? They thought not, but they were wrong.

--The temple was a place for praying and seeking Yahweh, not a place of refuge from justice! (Jesus quoted this verse in Matthew 21:13 with reference to the merchants in the temple compound.)

--Note that their sins included both ritual and ethical sins. They had committed idolatry, but they were also guilty of the same ethical violations against which the 8th century prophets preached.

--Covenant and Law—Much of Jeremiah’s message revolves around the Torah, which Judah has broken, and the need for something new.

--Jeremiah 6:16-17
--The “ancient paths” in which they were to walk were certainly the laws of the Mosaic covenant. The Torah was given for life and rest (remember Dt. 30). But they had neglected that path and chosen another road, one that would lead to destruction. [This brings to mind Jesus’ words in Mt. 7:13-14.]

--Jeremiah 11:1-8
--Perhaps during Josiah’s reforms, or shortly thereafter, Jeremiah refers to the broken covenant. Because they had not obeyed the words of the covenant, they have faced & will continue to experience the curses of that covenant.

--Jeremiah 23:5-6
--In contrast to the present king, Zedekiah (צִדְקִיָּהוּ =“Yahweh my Righteousness”), a new king will arise. He will reign in justice and righteousness (like Isaiah’s Branch!) and will be called “Yahweh Our Righteousness” (וּיְהֹוָה צִדְָקָנִי). This is an obvious contrast between past failures and future glory, thus it is a word of hope for the future.

--Jeremiah 31:31-34
--The “New Covenant” signals something completely new. Unlike the promises of kings and leaders, this is the promise of a different kind of relationship altogether. This covenant will be:

--Internal, on their hearts and minds;
--Personal, each one will know Him; and
--Successful, bringing about the removal of sin. Thus the issue of sin will not enter into the new covenant because the covenant will bring total eradication of those sins.

--The author of Hebrews quotes this passage twice (8:8-12, 10:16-17) to describe the work of Jesus. Thus Jesus is the basis of a new covenant, bringing complete forgiveness and a new internal relationship with His people. This was the goal of Yahwistic religion from the beginning (i.e. marriage imagery), but only in Jesus is it finally brought about.