Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Session 5
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Composition of Jeremiah

Introduction

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his instruction on the book of Jeremiah. This is session number five on the composition of Jeremiah.

I really want to applaud you for your efforts in studying the book of Jeremiah. I know it's different from so many other parts of the Bible. It's actually the longest book in the Old Testament and there are times maybe as you are initially approaching the book where you say, "How do I make sense of this, this long confusing book?" What I would like to look at in the next couple of sessions is just thinking about how we approach the book of Jeremiah as a book. In this particular session, I will talk about the composition of the book of Jeremiah and how the book of Jeremiah was put together.

I think we understand that even though Jeremiah is the word of God and we believe 2 Timothy 3:16 "All scripture is God-breathed." It's given to us by God--2 Peter 1:21 "Holy men spoke as they were moved along [like the sails in the wind] by the Holy Spirit;" but it's not a book that fell out of heaven. It's also not a book where every time Jeremiah preached someone was there to transcribe what he said and that was immediately added to the book. It was not a book where God simply took Jeremiah up on the mountain and revealed to him what he should write down, there was a long involved process in putting together this long book.

Jeremiah's ministry extended from the time that he was called in the 13th year of Josiah, 626 BC, until sometime around 580 BC. So we're talking about a ministry that lasted approximately 50 years. So, putting together and representing a book that portrays that ministry obviously there was a long and involved process in this.

There are a couple of quotes from some scholars as they've approached the book of Jeremiah. First of all, Andrew Shead makes this comment and maybe you can resonate with this as you are trying to read through Jeremiah and understand the book. "Jeremiah
is long, full of repetitions, non-linear in its chronology, and constantly cycling from one genre to another." R.P Carroll in his commentary on the book of Jeremiah who takes an overly skeptical approach to understanding the message of this book, does make a couple of statements that we need to think about he says, "To the modern reader the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are virtually incomprehensible as books." And then he says this, "The person who was not confused by the book of Jeremiah has not understood it." I remember at times writing my dissertation on the book of Jeremiah and thinking that is exactly right. But, again, I think that is an overly skeptical approach.

As we are thinking about Jeremiah as a book I want to give us two images that maybe we can think of. Imagine someone trying to represent in one book the ministry of someone like Dr. Billy Graham and a long ministry of snippets of his sermons often without chronology or time or events going on in his life and trying to make sense of that. Putting together a picture of Dr. Graham's ministry is a very difficult thing to do. Another image that I think about is that we might think of the book of Jeremiah as an old farmhouse; and as you look at that house you realize that there was an early house there and there have been several additions, wings, and extensions added on as different family members came in and as the house perhaps changed ownership. Sometimes we have to go and look at the floor plan of that house to understand why and how it was put together.

So what I would like us to look at today in this session is to think about the composition. How was the book of Jeremiah put together? Then in the session that follows I’ll do an overview of the book of Jeremiah and giving an understanding that there is an order; there is a chronology; there is a flow and a sense to this book that helps us to understand it.

Mowinckel’s Three Categories and Jeremiah’s Composition

Poetic Oracle, Narrative, Prose Sermons

One of the issues that comes up as we are looking at the composition of the book of Jeremiah is that we recognize that it consists of different genres and types of material. In fact, one of the earlier critical studies in the book of Jeremiah, Bernard Duhm made a distinction between the poetry in the book of Jeremiah and the prose that's in the book of
Jeremiah. Sigmund Mowinckel came along and added to that study, noting that there are three different specific genres in the book of Jeremiah and he referred to these as the A, the B, and the C materials. The A material that Mowinckel identified were the poetic oracles of Jeremiah, and these are the oracles in poetic form. They are very common especially in chapters 1 to 25. Critical scholars have tended to look at this as the primary way that the prophets communicated their message. In fact, as we look at the prophetic books in general, they are filled with poetic oracles where with vivid imagery, parallelism and just powerful quick images, the prophets have conveyed their message.

The second type of material that Mowinckel identified was the B material or the narrative accounts or the stories from the prophet's life and ministry. One of the things that makes the book of Jeremiah unique is that there are a number of these stories from the life of Jeremiah. Really the only prophetic book that is like the book of Jeremiah in this regard is the book of Jonah but Jonah is a very brief book. Comparing it to the book of Isaiah, Isaiah has 66 chapters but there are really only two sections chapters 6 to 8 chapters 37 to 39 that have narratives and stories from the life of Isaiah. So Jeremiah is unique in this regard, there is a much more extensive use of narrative.

Then finally the C materials are what Mowinckel referred to as the prose sermons. These are sermons, rather than being in the forms of poetic oracles. These are sermons that are long flowing prose accounts.

Imagine a transcript of your pastor's sermons and there are passages where Jeremiah is preaching where in some sense it looks like the transcript of a sermon. One example of these, and I think very significant part of the book of Jeremiah is and I wanted to read a couple of verses here is the prose sermon that we have in chapter 11. The prose sermon in chapter 11 is focusing on the idea that God is punishing Israel and Judah for their violations of the covenant. So, obviously, it is a very important concept to the book of Jeremiah. Here is the way this passage begins. It says in verse 1, "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, 'Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. You shall say to them, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: cursed be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant that I
commanded your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace saying, ‘Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So you shall be my people, and I will be your God, that I may confirm the oath that I swore to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey as it is this day.’ Then I answered, ‘So be it Lord.’” Then the passage even goes on further. It gives us more of this account, more of this sermon, and so we don't simply have brief poetic oracles here we have an extended sermon.

Now what critical scholars have done with these three different types of material is that they have tended to view the poetry of the book as being the earliest sections and the more real and authentic Jeremiah. They have taken the narratives and the prose sermons and viewed those more as a later re-interpretation of the prophet. And they have tended to see these as being edited by the Deuteronomistic editors and to varying degrees, they see these later sources and these later materials reinterpreting the prophet Jeremiah and his message.

So there’s actually become a question in critical scholarship: How much of the historical Jeremiah can we really know? Is the portrait of Jeremiah in this book a realistic and honest one, or have these later sources basically given us a different person than what we would really see if we were there historically?

Response to Sources Theory

I want you to think about this, and couple of ideas and a couple of responses just in terms of that. I believe that the reasons for these different sources is just the obvious possibility that there were variant ways that Jeremiah communicated his message. Sometimes, maybe, as a street preacher, it was advantageous to communicate in powerful brief images and oracles. But I think it’s also very likely that there were times when Jeremiah went to the temple and preached his temple sermon and, that there were more extended sermons, and something more like what we would hear from our pastor on a Sunday morning. I think the second thing is that it’s not surprising to us that many of the words and the phrases in the sermons and in the narratives in Jeremiah are similar to the Book of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history. The book of Kings, which is part
of that history was written in 550 BC. Jeremiah concluded his ministry sometime around 580 BC. So I think it’s very likely that the editors who were involved in the composition of these historical books and their final editing in 550 and the 6th century and the time of the exile, may have also been involved in the final composition and editing of the book of Jeremiah. These books cross-pollinated each other and often times the direction of influence is very difficult to determine.

I think a third thing is to realize that as we compare the Deuteronomistic history books, as they’ve been labeled, and compare the book of Jeremiah, there are unique ideas in the book of Jeremiah that makes its message distinctive. Deuteronomy, for example, or the history of the Deuteronomistic history in Kings, is going to emphasize that God judges Jerusalem because of the wickedness of Manasseh and his 55 years, and God says “I’m going to wipe Jerusalem like a dish.”

Jeremiah is more going to focus on the latter part of the Davidic dynasty and the failure of the kings that came after Josiah that we looked at in our earlier lesson. Jeremiah, uh in contrast to Kings, is going to emphasize much more strongly the idea of restoration. The message of restoration in Kings is very minimal, at the end of the book we have Jehoiachin being released from prison. But a clear statement, or purpose of what God is going to do in all the restoration is not fully there. So Jeremiah looks more like the book of Deuteronomy in that respect, than it does the Deuteronomistic history.

I think a fourth thing that we can understand from the use poetry, prose, and narrative is that there has been, in many ways, a reflective recasting of Jeremiah. But, but I believe that that work was done by Jeremiah and Baruch himself. Conservative commentators like John Thompson in the NICOT commentary of Jeremiah have emphasized that Jeremiah and Baruch themselves, as they reflected over the long years of Jeremiah’s ministry came to a deeper understanding of what Jeremiah’s message was about. They came to a deeper understanding of what God’s plan was and God’s design and God’s intention for the future.

In the beginning of Jeremiah’s message, Jeremiah’s preaching is calling the people to repentance. During the reforms of Josiah there’s the possibility that they could
avoid judgment. But in the later recasting of that message, in the end of his life, that becomes a message for the exiles—for them to return, for them to come back to God. So I think the reflection that is going on about Jeremiah’s ministry doesn’t have to be Deuteronomistic editors that have revised and changed his message, it can be can be Jeremiah and Baruch themselves as they come to a deeper understanding of the purposes and designs of God.

Then, finally, with regard with this issue of the different types of material, whether we read the poetic oracles, the prose narratives or the prose sermons, the perspective of Jeremiah that emerges from these different materials is not that different. There is a basic theological unity to this book. There are certain key ideas that are going to come across no matter what part of the book we’re looking at, or what kind of materials we’re looking at.

There’s going to be the emphasis: Judah has broken the covenant; they have violated God’s law. They have worshipped idols. As a result of that they deserve God’s punishment that’s not simply Deuteronomy, that’s the message of the entire Old Testament.

The second key idea is that the Lord is using Babylon as the instrument of judgment. Again, that’s not just prose or poetry, that’s the message of the book as a whole. Then as we’re looking at the entire book, both in the poetic and the prose sections there’s the promise that after there has been judgment, there’s going to be restoration.

So, I don’t believe that we need to take Jeremiah and divide it up into sources. There’s theological unity in this book. We don’t have to pit the prose against the poetry, because there’s a unified picture of Jeremiah that emerges out from all of these different materials.

One likelihood is that there are also literary reasons why the message of Jeremiah is communicated in these different genres and these different forms. What Louis Stulman has suggested is that the prose sermons are actually placed in the book as a way to guide us through the message and ministry of Jeremiah. So what ends up happening is, as we have the poetic oracles of Jeremiah, all of these different images begin to bombard us:
Judah is an unfaithful wife. God is sending against the people of Judah a roaring lion; Judah has been unfaithful to God in all these different ways.

What the prose sermons do is that they take all of that poetic imagery and they summarize them, and in effect they provide a Cliff Notes summary for us of what the message of Jeremiah was all about.

So what Stulman suggests is that, in Jeremiah 1-25, we have five specific prose sermons. That, really in many ways, helped the people of Jeremiah’s day, and especially helps us as modern readers to be able to collate all of these poetic images together and understand: “Here’s what the message of Jeremiah is about.”

Typically these prose sermons are going to focus on the misunderstanding that the people of Judah have about their covenant with God. They have come to believe that God is going to protect them, God is going to bless them, God is going to watch over them—no matter what! And the prose sermons provide a different understanding of the covenant: Jeremiah 7 is one of these summary passages. They have placed false confidence in the Temple and God’s presence there being able to protect them. Jeremiah 10, a prose sermon, explaining that Israel has violated the covenant by their idolatry. Jeremiah chapter 11, a prose sermon, saying Jeremiah is warning that the people of Judah are going to experience the covenant curses because of their disobedience. The covenant was not just designed just to protect them and bless them. Jeremiah 18 and 19, prose sermons, explain the fact that Judah has had the opportunity to repent. They have forfeited that opportunity and God is going to judge them.

So I believe that there is actually a unity that emerges from these different literary genres. We can see that as we look at how the prose, the poetry, the stories, the narratives, and the sermons interact with each other.

**Sources for the Composition of Jeremiah**

There is a second issue relating to the compositions of the book of Jeremiah, leaving behind some of the critical theories and things that are really a sort of precursor of this. Jeremiah is an interesting book, and that probably more than any of the other major prophets it gives us insight into the process that was involved in the formation of
the book of Jeremiah as a book. In fact, there are references to five or six different sources and places where Jeremiah has actually composed parts of this book, or Baruch has composed parts of this book, and then these different scrolls and sources have been put together. The key passage in all of this is Jeremiah 36:1-3. In that particular passage, God commands Jeremiah to write down his messages and to dictate those messages to Baruch and then to have Baruch read those passages at the temple.

The year that this takes place is the fourth year of Jehoiakim. So what this means is that Jeremiah has been preaching for twenty plus years before he is ever specifically commanded to write down the words that he had been preaching. Now, I don’t think that means that Jeremiah never recorded this, but the actual composing of these things into a book the first time we see that happening is twenty years into the ministry of Jeremiah.

If you know the chapter it happens that Jehoiakim cuts up the scroll and then after that, at the end of the chapter it says in verses 23-26, that God commanded Jeremiah and Baruch to compose another scroll. And it says they rewrote the scroll. Many people feel that the basic heart of the message that was found in this scroll is what we have in Jeremiah 1-25, in the words of the oracles and judgment that were found there. But it also says by one who wrote the second scroll that many similar words were added to that. I believe that we can imagine the first substantive composition of the book of Jeremiah happening in the twentieth year of his ministry. Then over the next twenty to thirty years of Jeremiah’s ministry, many similar words were added to those original words. There was a constant process of adding new messages, new sermons, and perhaps even casting old sermons in light of the exile and the things that happened at the end of Jeremiah’s ministry.

Second mention of a source that I want to call attention to is Jeremiah 29:1. It tells us that Jeremiah wrote a letter after 597 BC to the exiles who were in Babylon. That letter instructed them what God’s plans and God’s desire were for the future. Remember, he said, “pray for the peace of Babylon just as you pray for the peace of Jerusalem, settle in the land, build houses there,” do the normal things that you do with your families, “serve the king of Babylon, and things will go well for you. And then after seventy years
God will release you, and God will send you back from exile,” that was in the letter that Jeremiah composed to the exiles. So we can imagine that some of the words of hope that promised that God gave through the Prophet Jeremiah may have come through that letter. That letter is the background to what Jeremiah has to say in chapter 29.

In Jeremiah chapter 30, we have very important section of the book in Jeremiah 30 to 33. It’s referred to as the “Book of Consolation.” It’s the message of hope that God gives through the Prophet Jeremiah. The amazing thing is that this prophet who was commanded to give so many words of judgment put consolation at the center of book of Jeremiah. There is a section of hope. But it tells us that Jeremiah composed these positive messages of hope into a book or a scroll. So we have to use our sanctified imagination here little bit, but I can imagine that the chapter that was found in 30 and 31, which are poetry and 32 and 33, which are prose, may have originally stood as an independent unit. And they were representatives of Jeremiah’s messages of hope.

A fourth scroll or a fourth source is mentioned for us in Jeremiah 51: 59-64. In the last two primary chapters in the book of Jeremiah 50 and 51, we have the oracles against Babylon. They are these long elaborate messages of judgment against the people of Babylon and against the nation of Babylon and the king whom God used to punish Israel. But at the end of the oracle, it tells us that Seraiah, who appears to be the brother of Baruch and another scribe that assists Jeremiah, actually took this scroll to Babylon with Zedekiah. When Zedekiah was there for meeting with king of Babylon sometime before exile took place, it says, Seraiah read the scroll in Babylon and then performed a symbolic act. He took the scroll and tied a rock around it and then he threw the scroll into the Euphrates River signifying the doomed the final destruction of a nation of Babylon. But here’s another source, another scroll, again, not coming in from the editor, not coming in from a later person but from Jeremiah himself.

In chapters 26 to 45, as we have already stated, we have a number of biographical narratives and stories from Jeremiah. These stories conclude in Jeremiah 45. There is a word of promise that’s given to Jeremiah’s scribe, Baruch. So I think there is the possibility rather than Jeremiah writing these as an autobiography, there is a likelihood
and possibility that Baruch was the one who composed these stories about Jeremiah. The message of hope, the promise of hope, that’s given to Baruch in chapter 45, functions as a qualifying or something that identifies the author or the person that has a significant role in composing the section of the book and pronounces God’s blessing on him. It’s like a postscript, or in the Psalms where we have superscriptions that give us titles we could have that going on with Baruch in that chapter.

Then finally one of the other things that are interesting about the formation of the book of Jeremiah as a book is that we often see the duplication of certain passages from one part of a book and they are found in another part of the book. For example, Jeremiah chapter 23:20 says, “The anger of the Lord will not cease until he accomplishes all that he attended.” The same statement appears in the Book of Consolation in chapter 30, verse 24. Chapter 23 talks about Lord raising a righteous branch that will come out of the House of David. That passage is repeated in Jeremiah 53:15 and 16.

So I think again in this process Jeremiah and Baruch are recasting and coming to understand Jeremiah’s ministry in a deeper way. Or it could be that Jeremiah is ministering in a different context and in a different situation, and messages from various parts of his ministry may have been reused or reapplied to different context and situations. Some of the oracles of the judgment about Judah in the early parts of the book are reapplied and stated toward Babylon in a latter part of the book.

Early in Jeremiah, we have Jeremiah saying that God’s judgment is going to come in the form of an enemy from the North that’s going to attack Judah. In Jeremiah chapter 50 and 51, “there’s an enemy from the North that’s going to attack Babylon as well.” So Jeremiah, in a way that really is not true of any other book gives us insight into the way that different parts of Jeremiah’s message were composed in different scrolls, in different sources and then over a long process of Jeremiah’s life those were put into the form that we have them today. There’s the possibility that even after Jeremiah has died, that Baruch finishes this process or the editors responsible for bringing the entire Hebrew Canon together and giving it order and design may have had their hands in this process as well. But we believe, and this is a conviction that I have about this book as I study it, that God
not only inspired Jeremiah in the preaching of this message; God also directed Jeremiah, Baruch and any inspired editor who may have been involved in the process of the formation of that book as well. As difficult and as complex as this process may have been, God had his hand in this and God was preserving the message of Jeremiah in the form that he desired and designed, first for the people of Israel and then later for the church because of the ongoing message that this book has for us.

**Massoretic Text [MT], Septuagint [LXX] and the Dead Sea Scrolls [DSS]**

Now, there’s a final issue related to the book of Jeremiah that again think reflects the development and the formation of this book’s composition, and that’s the fact that our ancient copies and manuscripts of the book of Jeremiah reflect two very different versions of the book of Jeremiah. In one version of the book is reflected in the Greek translation of the Old Testament referred to as the Septuagint [LXX] and then the other version is reflected in the Hebrew text or the Masoretic Text [MT] of the book of Jeremiah and the form of Jeremiah that is found in our Hebrew Bibles. The Masoretic Text is also the basis for our English Bibles. So all of our English Bibles whether it is King James Version, ESV, NIV, NASB all of them are based on that Hebrew Masoretic Version of the book.

But as we look at the two different forms of the book of Jeremiah, one in the Septuagint, one in the Masoretic Text there are some very interesting differences in these two versions of the book. First of all, the Greek text in the Septuagint is 14% shorter than the version that we have in the Masoretic Text. So that means that there are at least or there are approximately 2700 words in the Masoretic Text that are not found in the Greek text. These words don’t substantively change the essence of Jeremiah’s ministry, but it does provide some different insights and different readings of various passages.

A second difference between the two texts is that the Greek text has a different order and arrangement. Our English Bibles are reflective of the Masoretic Text, the oracles that Jeremiah preached against the nations come at the end of the book in chapters 46-51. In the Greek version, those oracles come after chapter 25 verse 13, and so they are found in the middle of the book. The other interesting thing is that the order of those
oracles in the Greek version of Jeremiah is different from the one that we have in our Hebrew version and again our English bibles.

A third difference is that there are, at times, significant passages and the most famous or the most important example: Jeremiah 33 verse 14-26, we are talking about a significant section of the book that are found in the Hebrew version of the book but are missing in the Septuagint version of the book.

Finally, the last difference is that there are additions to the Masoretic Text, like headings and chapters 2, 7, 16, 27, where there is an introductory title given. There are expressions like “thus says the Lord” that appears 65 times more in the Masoretic Text than in the LXX. That indicates for us that the LXX likely reflects a more early version of the book with things that had been added to it by the Masoretic version.

When people first hear about this, it raises a couple of questions and I know that this is confusing for my students. Which one of these versions comes first? Which one of these is more original? Then the large question is: which one of these is the Word of God for us? We might think that it’s obvious that the Hebrew version is original because Jeremiah spoke in Hebrew. Greek is a translation but as we have already said, the things that are added and the additions in Jeremiah that are found in our Hebrew Bibles indicate that it is more likely that those things were added to an earlier version rather than something that was deleted or taken out.

We have also come to a better understanding of the book of Jeremiah through the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls which moved our earliest versions of the Old Testament that we had back almost a thousand years. What we have come to understand from the Dead Sea scrolls is that they were likely Hebrew versions of Jeremiah in the early period that reflect what is found in both the Septuagint and the Masoretic text. In the fourth cave at Qumran, there were some important fragments and these are very tiny, small fragments of the book of Jeremiah that were found there. The interesting thing is that two of these fragments, 4Q Jeremiah A and 4Q Jeremiah C, based on what’s there and again, tiny fragments, they seem to reflect what we have in our Masoretic text. On the other hand, another fragment of the book, 4Q Jeremiah B, found in the same cave
seems to reflect the readings that we have in the LXX. So, what this suggests to us is that the changes that occur in the Greek are not the result of translating from Hebrew to Greek. They are not those kinds of changes, but it reflects that there was originally a Hebrew prototype for the Septuagint and a Hebrew version of the book that’s reflected in the Masoretic Text as well.

**Proposed Solution**

So should we be bothered by this? And how do we ultimately resolve this? I believe that these two versions are related to two specific issues. Number one, they are related to the length of Jeremiah’s ministry. Remember, his ministry occurs over a fifty-year period and so it is likely, again, that Jeremiah and Baruch may have had their hands significantly in the composition of both of these versions of the book. The LXX, perhaps, reflecting an earlier version of Jeremiah and then the MT reflecting the final form of the book of Jeremiah as Baruch, Jeremiah or any other inspired editors involved in this had God’s insight into the ultimate significance of Jeremiah’s ministry.

The other reality that gives rise to these two different versions is the fact that Jeremiah’s ministry occurs over a broad geographical area. In the days after the exile we have Jews who are in Babylon, we have Jews that are leading back in the land and ultimately Jeremiah, Baruch and the other refugees are living in Egypt. They do not have fax machines, they do not have printing presses, they do not have FedEx express where they can simply communicate and send things back and forth to each other. So I believe that these two different versions of the book of Jeremiah likely arose because of the different geographical locations in which the book was being read and produced.

So it’s likely that the LXX version was circulated in Egypt and it was an earlier form of the book of Jeremiah. The later the fuller book of Jeremiah and one that focuses more extensively on the exiles on Babylon, on the hope for Israel’s future was the one that circulated in Babylon and that was brought back to the land by the Jews became the primary version of the Jewish people.

My understanding of this is that we don’t really need to be bothered by the whole issue of which one of these is inspired. I believe that both of them reflect the Word of
God. Another interesting issue is that as we move to the time of the New Testament, the Septuagint was the Bible in the Old Testament of the early church. The Masoretic Text was the Hebrew Canon for the Jews and the Rabbis. So many people have raised the question “Shouldn’t we be using the LXX as the Christian version of the book of Jeremiah?” Well, again, I believe the church was using the Septuagint because of the specific context that they were ministering in. They were ministering to people that spoke Greek. They were not making a statement about the superiority of the LXX version of Jeremiah to the MT [Masoretic Text]. It’s simply the version that communicated most effectively to the culture that they were in. I believe that both of them accurately reflect the word of God. I believe that as scholars examine and study the book of Jeremiah it often is important for them to compare the two different versions, perhaps to understand how the book has developed or perhaps to understand a better reading in a specific text or passage but ultimately God was directing this entire process from the time of the early version of Jeremiah, composed at some point in his ministry to the final reflections of Jeremiah and Baruch about what Jeremiah had to say about the future of Israel and God’s restoration.

For example, remember that one of the passages that are not found in the Septuagint is Jeremiah chapter 33 verses 14-26. When we look at this passage and see what it’s talking about, it’s dealing with the future of the House of David and it repeats the passage found in Jeremiah chapter 23, “God is going to raise up a righteous branch for David.” It says that David will never lack a man to sit on the throne. So it was important in the context of the exile for the people that were living in Babylon, it was important for them to understand that there was hope based on the promises that God had made to David.

That passage also says the Levites will never lack a man to execute the office of priesthood. As the people were living in exile and as they would come back to the land and rebuild the temple, it was important for them to understand God was going to restore the worship that had taken place at the temple. God is going to restore the Levites and the priesthood and all of those things that are important to Israel’s future when the second
temple is built. So both of these versions of the book of Jeremiah are inspired. They simply reflect the message of Jeremiah at different times and from different perspectives in his ministry.

To wrap all this up, and we’ve covered a lot in this particular session dealing with the composition of the book. Andrew Shead has a quote about the Masoretic Text and why it’s important for us as Christians and why I think it’s likely that as God was directing the process of Jeremiah being formed to Scripture that this became the canonical book of Jeremiah in the Hebrew canon. Shead says this: “the Masoretic text has a special place for us as Jeremiah’s words to us. Not only was it his last and final version, but its target audience, the exilic community in Babylon was, in Jeremiah’s eyes, the one group of people with a future in the divine plan of salvation. The seeds of the church were planted in Babylonian soil. And so as we look at the hope that Jeremiah is giving to us about the exiles and about the return from exile in salvation history that ultimately is the seed of the church. God’s people are going to come back from exile and God is going to raise up Jesus to bring the ultimate restoration from exile.”

So it’s very important for us to understand in the final form of the book of Jeremiah and the fact that God was talking about the restoration of his people. Going back to chapter 24, the good figs were the people that were living in Babylon. Not because of their righteousness but because of the hope that God was placing on them being the ones who would come back from the exile and that God would bring them back to the land. The bad figs were those that remained in the land and the final form of Jeremiah is going to stress the hope for Israel’s future is not with the people who live in the land. The hope for Israel’s future is not with the exiles that are living in Egypt. The hope for Israel’s future is with the exiles in Babylon and God is fulfilling the covenant promises that he's made to David and to Israel and to his people. Jeremiah, with all of the judgment that is there, the final form of that book is emphasizing that hope and that consolation and the restoration that’s going to come in the future.

**Summary**

As we’ve looked at the composition of the book of Jeremiah, we’ve focused on
three specific issues today. We’ve talked about the different types of material and the reasons why the book of Jeremiah is made up of both prose and poetry. We’ve talked about the evidence within the book itself that Jeremiah was composed from different sources, different scrolls that were put and placed together, but again Jeremiah and Baruch are the ones who had a major hand in this process. Then finally we’ve looked at the different versions of Jeremiah that are reflected in the ancient manuscripts. First of all the Septuagint and the MT [Masoretic Text] and tried to come to an understanding again that this is pointing us to the fact that there has been growth and development in the book of Jeremiah. But ultimately this book is a unity that reflects God’s message of judgment and hope for the people of Israel.