Theological Patterning in Jeremiah: A Vital Word through an Ancient Book

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There is growing scholarly interest in detecting how the book of Jeremiah, as historically rooted as it is, guides later readers to hear God’s voice. Building on the previous findings that Jeremiah’s writtenness and organization enable later audiences to discern its relevance, this article considers how theological patterning contributes to this end. By focusing on three patterns, patterned places, nations, and people, it is evident that these networks of recurring, corresponding depictions of the God-human-world relationship assist the reader in grasping the enduring relevance of the prophetic word in Jeremiah.

Key Words: Jeremiah, theological interpretation, place, nations, synchronic, final form, theology

Those receiving Jeremiah (MT) as Scripture assume that it is God’s word to them, a people living many years after the historical setting of the book. As C. R. Seitz has noted, the challenge arises for scholars, ministers, and laity alike in discerning and explaining how a prophetical book grounded so deeply in a historical situation, as is the case with Jeremiah, can speak as God’s voice to future historical contexts. Before turning too quickly to a theological-hermeneutical schema external to the book to rescue us from its irrelevance, an interpreter would do well to first consider in what way Jeremiah employs its own strategies to assist later readers in discerning how it is God’s word for them. This article considers how theological patterning (TP) contributes to the book’s aim of helping later readers hear God’s word through Jeremiah.

Author’s note: This article is dedicated to Willem A. Van Gemeren, who first exposed me to theological patterns in the prophets. Thanks go to BBR’s anonymous reviewers and to Andrew Shead for their helpful feedback. An earlier version of this article was read at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2012 in Milwaukee.


2. I have in mind dispensational, covenantal, federal, or figural hermeneutical schemas. While there is a place for such, interpreters must also allow textual strategies “from below” to interact with those “from above.”
Our interest in how the words in Jeremiah speak theologically to situations after the time of the prophet is nothing new in biblical studies. In 1962, Peter R. Ackroyd offered a construal of how the OT developed out of an impulse to apply God’s word “to the ever new needs of a community sensitive to the vitality of that word.”  

E. W. Nicholson advanced Ackroyd’s observations to explain the production of materials in Jeremiah, claiming that the prose sermons and biographical material were products of deuteronomistic reshaping of Jeremianic traditions for exiles. This focus on the theological impulse in textual production behind the book, however, is limited for our purposes. It does not account for how Jeremiah in its final form guides a reader to detect its theological relevance. Reconstructing the practices and theological motivations that gave rise to textual creation after the time of the prophet is not the same as considering how a book may guide a reader to interpret its relevance, though the former may inform the latter.

There are several recent insights by scholars into how the final form of Jeremiah presents its message as theologically relevant for later readers. First, its writtenness reveals the assumption that its contents are applicable for those beyond the original oral settings, at least by one generation. Because the book of Jeremiah is ultimately about God’s word triumphing through time, its writtenness establishes an expectation in readers that God’s word in the book remains relevant for them as they detect its fulfillment throughout various eras.


5. For example, even if a deuteronomistic school preached messages informed by Jeremiah’s oracles in exile which then gave rise to the crafting of prose sermons, a reader of the book in its final form is not privy to this process of reappropriating the prophetic word and therefore receives no direct guidance for interpreting Jeremiah for today.  


Second, and related, many note how the organization of the materials in the book enhances its ability to speak to subsequent contexts. The first half of the book serves as a theodicy for the exiles, defending God's destruction of Jerusalem and Judah's social world. The second half of the book offers hope for restoration beyond the judgment of exile. For Seitz, this creates a past (fall of Judah), present (exile), and future (restoration) schema for later readers to locate themselves within the book. The scaffolding of the book (Jer 1, 25, 50–51) makes it clear that restoration will happen only after Babylon's fall. Because Babylon's fall is still prospective in the final form of the book, a reader interprets Jeremiah as speaking into life amidst an unending exile. The organization of the book, then, enables future readers to see themselves as the book's audience, a people facing death and living with deferred hope.

The preservation of the words and deeds of Jeremiah as a book for exiles and beyond and the arrangement of the materials to speak to their situations enhance the book's function in guiding later readers to detect God's voice. The aim here is to pursue how theological patterning contributes this end.

**DEFINING THEOLOGICAL PATTERNING**

What is meant by Theological Patterning (TP)? The designation refers to networks of recurring, corresponding depictions of the God-human-world relationship. TP establishes in the imagination of a reader consistency in terms of divine and human action, enabling later readers to cultivate expectations regarding how God may act in similar ways in the present and future. As we will see, however, the book of Jeremiah often slightly tempers these expectations of consistency.


9. C. R. Seitz, Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah (BZAW 176; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989) 7. See also his essay “The Place” in which he identifies several key verses within the broader structure of the book (chaps. 1–20, 21–45, 46–52) that enable it to speak beyond its original setting.


TP is not to be confused with figuration or reduced to typology. Figuration, with its aim of discerning how the workings of the triune God in the OT bear witness to God’s ways in Christ, is a more far-reaching hermeneutical schema than TP. TP is concerned with laying an initial foundation within a biblical book on which a figural reading may draw for reflection in light of the two-testament witness. As for typology, with a limited focus on “events, persons, or places” that correspond with later realities, it is a subcategory within TP. Outside the realm of typology, TP includes, for example, repeated characterizations of human rebelliousness within a book, whether the people in general, prophets, or kings, and God’s response to them. This certainly establishes consistency patterns within Jeremiah, but it is not typology. Thus, TP is a broader category than typology, but is not as far-reaching hermeneutically as figuration.

Theological Patterning in Jeremiah

In what follows, we will consider three sorts of TP in light of how they contribute to the book’s interest in helping a future reader hear God’s voice: patterned places, patterned nations, and patterned people. While not exhaustive and at times overlapping, the examples below aim to give a “sense” of this patterning. Due to the breadth of what might count as TP, the patterns identified will be limited to those that share terminological repetition.

Patterned Places

The book of Jeremiah employs theological patterning in terms of “place” in order to construe God’s word as relevant for future generations who treasure particular places or find themselves in various places. Consistent actions with and in places establish in the mind’s eye a landscape or a


14. Michael Fishbane defines typology as “a literary-historical phenomenon which isolates perceived correlations between specific events, persons, or places early in time with their later correspondents” (Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel [Oxford: Clarendon, 1985] 351). Goppelt has a similar definition but takes it further. “Only historical facts—persons, actions, events, and institutions—are material for typological interpretation. . . . These things are to be interpreted typologically only if they are considered to be divinely ordained representations or types of future realities that will be even greater and more complete” (Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New [trans. Donald H. Madvig; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982] 17–18). Frances Young shares a hermeneutical interest in typology with Goppelt, but she is not as historically bound. She emphasizes the important role of the reader in detecting correspondences between texts “so as to invest them with meaning beyond themselves.” See “Typology” in Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder (ed. Stanley E. Porter, Paul Joyce, and David E. Orton; Biblical Interpretation Series 8; New York: Brill, 1994) 29–48. Young takes typology in a hermeneutical direction akin to figuration, as she acknowledges.
theater for conceptualizing God’s ways in the world.\textsuperscript{15} It will be helpful to begin by looking at how this occurs within individual messages by the prophet, as this provides a foundation for making connections between passages on a larger scale in the book.

In Jeremiah’s temple sermon, the prophet assumes that God’s prior action in rejecting Shiloh provides a basis for expecting God to do the same with Jerusalem (7:12–14).\textsuperscript{16} Linguistically, the prophet drives home this point by describing both Shiloh and Jerusalem as places (место; 7:12, 14) associated with God’s name (שם; 7:12, 14) against which God will act (עשה; 7:12, 14). The כנאש at the end of v. 14 brings home this equation between Shiloh and Jerusalem. As Jones puts it, “The prophet’s purpose is to demonstrate that a sacred place . . . had been destroyed, and this was proof that the Jerusalem Temple was not immune.”\textsuperscript{17} God will do to Jerusalem just as he did to Shiloh when his people sin (cf. 26:6, 9).\textsuperscript{18} Thus, the prophet argues that God’s prior actions with a place, Shiloh, justify and lead to the expectation that God can act similarly with another place, Jerusalem, due to sin.

In Jer 44, a different sort of topological patterning occurs with Jeremiah warning Judahites in Egypt that God will punish their evil with disaster as he had in Judah.\textsuperscript{19} The prophet again repeats terms and employs כנאש (“just as”; 44:13). The term appears 14 times in this chapter (cf. עצ ב rides in 44:22), referring both to evil and disaster. כנאש refers to evil committed, both in Judah previously (44:3, 5, 9 [5×]) and in Egypt (by Judahites) currently (44:7, 22). כנאש also refers to the disaster God brings in response to this evil, both in Judah previously (44:2, 23) and in Egypt prospectively (44:11, 27, 29). Furthermore, the root כש (“to burn food offerings”)\textsuperscript{20} appears 11 times to characterize idolatrous behavior both that resulted in Judah’s prior judgment (44:3, 5, 18, 21 [2×], 23) and that was happening currently in Egypt among the Judahites (44:8, 15, 17, 19, 25).\textsuperscript{21} What is more, God will use the sword (חרב) and famine (רעב) in Egypt (44:12, 13, 27) כנאש he had in Judah (44:13, 18) as instruments for implementing punishing destruction. This use of repetition makes it plain that God will respond to evil with disaster regardless of geographical locale, whether in Judah or Egypt.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{15} On the importance of place in biblical and contemporary reflection, see Craig G. Bartholomew, Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).
\textsuperscript{17} Douglas R. Jones, Jeremiah (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 149.
\textsuperscript{18} For a discussion on the different aims in using Shiloh in Jer 7 (parenetic) and 26 (didactic), see Else K. Holt, “Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon and the Deuteronomists: An Investigation of the Redactional Relationship between Jeremiah 7 and 26,” *JSOT* 36 (1986) 73–87.
\textsuperscript{19} Admittedly, Jer 44 (and 42) can fit under “patterned people” as it focuses on persisting human action.
\textsuperscript{21} Carroll notes the repetition of כש in Jer 44. Jeremiah (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 731.
\textsuperscript{22} This logic is also in Jer 42 (cf. 42:16–18 with כש, חרב, רעב, and כנאש), warning Judahites after Jerusalem’s fall that they will experience a similar fate in Egypt if they disobey God.
Sin is in full view of God in foreign territory and is equally destined for judgment, just as it would be at home.

These two examples from Jer 7 and 44 invite a reader into the logic of prophetic reasoning in terms of place. In both instances, the texts depict the prophet arguing along a temporal axis. It is not just God’s actions toward a place in the distant past (that is, rejecting Shiloh) that inform how God can act toward chosen places again (Jer 7); God’s punishment of rebels in the recent past in a particular place (Judah) give rise to the expectation that God will bring similar punishments in other places too, namely, Egypt (Jer 44).

With the book of Jeremiah presenting the prophet as employing topological patterning to establish points in individual messages, it is likely that the compiler of Jeremiah would expect a reader to carry on this strategy modeled by the prophet to make similar associations between various passages in the book. A few brief examples and one extended instance will support this. God’s ability to act in similar ways in different geographical contexts is seen in God sending his servant (עבד) Nebuchadrezzar to bring judgment on the disobedient in both Judah (25:9) and in Egypt (43:10). Furthermore, and more positively, God enables his people to multiply (יהב) in the land (3:16) and outside the land (29:6). God also claims that he can build (בנה) and plant (נטע), or at least enable his people to do so, both inside (31:4–5, 28) and outside the land (29:5, 28).

Building on Joshua Moon’s recent argument that Jer 30–31 should be understood as announcing the reversal of the judgments anticipated elsewhere in the book, the wilderness (מדבר) reference in 31:2 can be associated with other instances of the term in the book. Jeremiah 31 opens by reflecting on how Israel found grace (חן) in the wilderness (מדבר), presumably during the time of the exodus (31:2). This is similar to the use of 


25. For an overview of the wilderness as a place of love in Jer 2, see Michael DeRoche, “Jeremiah 2:2–3 and Israel’s Love for God during the Wilderness Wanderings,” *CBQ* 45 (1983) 364–76. My own sense is that Jer 2:2–3 highlights both Israel’s love (v. 2) and Yhwh’s love for Israel (v. 3).
of abundance where they “ate its fruit and its goodness (טוּב)” (2:7), so the exiles addressed by Jer 31 have hope that they will feast on God’s goodness (טוּב) on their return to the land (31:12, 14). This return is similar to God’s bringing his people out of Egypt, but the return of God’s people from the north will be even more remarkable (Jer 23:8–9). With hope that God acts consistently in the wilderness by showing grace, later readers find encouragement to wait hopefully and obediently for the same from the God of the exodus in their various wildernesses. Wilderness as a place then serves as an imaginative theater for conceptualizing God’s consistency in bringing grace into future desolations.

In summary, the book of Jeremiah draws on God’s prior actions topologically to establish expectations for future divine action. The book, however, tempers some of these expectations. Though God can reject a place (מָקֵם) called by his name (chap. 7), Jerusalem’s destiny differs from Shiloh’s. The desolate place (מָקֵם), Jerusalem, will again be built up (33:10–12; cf. 3:14, 17; 31:38–40). Furthermore, though God can bless both inside and outside the land (Jer 29), grace in a foreign land is not the pinnacle, just as multiplication in the land of Egypt was not ultimate during the time of Moses (cf. Exod 1:1–7). Though he enables his people to build and plant in exile, it is only within the land of promise that God will permanently build and plant his people. This patterning in terms of place would exert an influence on future readers, assisting them to cultivate expectations with regards to future acts of judgment and salvation by a God who acts consistently with and in various places.

Patterned Nations

Along with patterned places, the book of Jeremiah depicts a consistency in God’s treatment of different nations within the book. This international patterning is not surprising as the book opens by portraying Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations (1:5), conveying a message applicable to them all (1:10). As in the previous section, we will begin by examining how such patterning arises in individual passages.

Jeremiah 18:1–12 offers a general template for God’s ways with the nations, resonating with key terms from Jer 1:10. If “a nation or kingdom” repents (רָחַם) of evil (רָעָה) after God declares that he will “pluck up (שׁנָת) and break down (לָקֵץ) and destroy (אָבָד)” it, God will relent from his plans for disaster (רָעָה; 18:7–8). On the other hand, if God promises to build (בָּנוּ) and plant (נָטָע) a kingdom or nation and the nation rebels against God, God will change his course (18:9–10). The prophet then applies God’s general ways with the nations to Judah’s situation (18:11; cf. 12:17). This assumes a relative consistency in God’s ways with the nations.26 As McConville notes,
Jer 18 fits within the book’s “setting of YHWH’s treatment of Judah in the context of his attitude to the nations.”

With this in mind, Jer 3 shows the outworking of this general template (Jer 18) in God’s relationship with Israel and Judah. God expected Judah to learn from Israel’s fate, being sent away because of its adulterous ways (3:6–10). Just as Israel was adulterous (זנה; 3:6) and did not repent (שׁוב; 3:7), so Judah was adulterous (זנה; 3:8) and did not repent (שׁוב; 3:10). The implication is that Judah will face the same fate (cf. 2:37) if it does not repent. God then claims that Israel is more righteous than Judah, leading to an invitation for Israel to return and repent (שׁוב; 3:11–4:2). Throughout this invitation to Israel, it is evident that Judah should be listening in on Israel’s invitation to repent (cf. 3:18). This becomes explicit in 4:3–4 where the writer makes the point of 2:1–4:2 for Judah apparent: circumcise the heart (cf. 3:10).

A similar reapplication to Judah of messages originally for Israel appears in Jer 30–31, as is thoroughly discussed by scholars. As with patterned places, Jeremiah draws on historical precedence and analogous behavior by God toward Israel and Judah to cultivate expectations for later readers, whether Israelite or Judahite, that God will judge idolatry, that repentance may avert judgment, and that grace might be available after judgment.

God’s consistency in his treatment of the nations is especially seen in passages that describe God’s universal judgment. In Jer 25, all nations, including and especially Babylon, will have their turn of drinking from the cup of God’s wrath. Jeremiah 27 contains a similar assumption that all nations, or at least those in the vicinity around Judah, should submit to the yoke of the King of Babylon as part of God’s plan.

With individual messages by the prophet employing the logic that there is consistency in God’s treatment of the nations, we again have legitimation for pursuing associations between various passages in the final form of the book. In terms of judgment, a network of association arises when observing that the use of a nation from the north (צפון), whether Babylon or the Medes, to judge all nations unites their destiny (e.g., 1:13; 6:1, 22; 50:3, 9). Furthermore, just as God judges Judah for its recalcitrant heart (e.g. 3:10, 17, 4:14; 5:23–24; 17:9; 22:17), Moab and Edom also receive judgment due to matters of the heart (לב; 48:29; 49:16). More positively, just as God will restore (שׁוב) the fortunes (שׁבות) of Judah (29:14; 30:3, 18; 31:23; 32:44; 33:7, 11, 26), so God will restore (שׁוב) the fortunes (שׁבות) of

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27. Ibid., 53.
28. Words with the root שׁוב recur throughout this section of Jeremiah. This emphasizes God’s desire for his apostate people to return (3:1, 6, 7 twice, 8, 10, 11, 12 twice, 14 twice; cf. 3:19, 20, 22; 4:1).
29. Ibid., 27–41. See also Seitz, “The Place.”
31. This insight derives from Lauren Hull, a former Ridley College student.
32. For an overview on the meaning of שׁוב, see R. J. R. Plant, Good Figs, Bad Figs: Judicial Differentiation in the Book of Jeremiah (LHBOTS 481; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008) 123.
Moab (48:47), the Ammonites (49:8), and the Elamites (49:39). Also, presuming that God’s establishment of a future king in Judah who reigns in righteousness will result in the fair treatment of the orphan (יתום) and widow (אלמנה; 22:3), it is significant to note that God will care for the orphan (יתום) and widow (אלמנה) remaining in Edom (49:11).

While the book generally depicts consistency in God’s ways with the nations, this is relativized by God’s special grace for Israel and Judah to whom he will never make an end, though the nations among whom they are scattered will reach an end (כלה; 30:11; 46:28). This is evident particularly in Babylon’s destruction and punishment, which is more final than that of the other nations, and in Zion’s restoration, which receives far greater attention than in other nations.

These examples of similarities in God’s treatment of nations help a reader to acquire international sensibilities regarding God’s ways in both judgment and salvation with the nations throughout time. Universalism is tempered, however, as not all nations in Jeremiah share an equal hope in restoration, particularly in comparison with Israel and Judah.

**Patterned People**

The book of Jeremiah often uses patterning in terms of people. From a temporal perspective, it portrays the audience as part of a continuum of rebellion. The rebellion of the audience is said to correspond to the sins of their ancestors (אבות). Furthermore, repetition of particular sins throughout the book such as not listening/obeying (לשון שמא) and burning offerings (קטר) to other gods (אלהים אחרים; 1:16; 7:9; 18:15; 19:4; 44:3, 5, 8, 15, 21, 23), such as Baal (7:9; 11:13, 17; 32:29) and the Queen of Heaven (44:17, 18, 19, 25; cf. 7:18), unites the various audiences as tending to ignore God and worship idols from preexilic times in Judah to after the fall of Jerusalem in Judah and even to exilic times in Egypt. In this way, a pattern of expectation emerges regarding the human propensity for rebellion, particularly idolatry.


35. Jer 2:5; 3:25; 7:24–26; 9:13 (MT, following baals); 11:7–9, 10 (idolatry); 14:20 (acknowledge father’s guilt); 16:11, 12, 19; 17:22–23; 23:37; 31:32; 34:14; 44:9, 17 (Queen of Heaven) 21.

36. This appears in texts written from preexilic (Jer 3:13, 25; 7:13, 22–26; 11:7–8,10; 25:4, 7, 8; 29:19; 32:23; 35:14–17) and exilic (42:21; 43:4, 7; 44:5, 23) settings.

37. See also Plant, *Good Figs, Bad Figs*, 165–66 who shows how announcements of differentiation in judgment in chap. 42, after Jerusalem falls, share similar terminology to those
Along with historical precedence, Jeremiah employs the theme of the heart (לבב) to show Judah’s perpetual lack of wholehearted repentance (3:10) and continually apostate, incurable heart (17:9). By portraying the people as consistently rebellious, a pattern of expectation arises whereby future readers have reason to weigh their actions on whether they are also going astray. This gives rise, however, to the hope that God will cure the hearts of the people by writing his law on them (31:33; cf. 24:7), establishing a new covenant (31:31–34) in place of the broken one (chap. 11), and judging people only for their own sins and not those of their fathers (31:29–30).  

Along with consistent generalizations of the people, individuals in the book of Jeremiah play a significant role as paradigms for God’s ways with people. The persona Jeremiah plays a patterning role in the book. In Jer 1, God assures Jeremiah, an outsider priest from Anathoth who will bring his word to the religious and political powers of the day, by saying twice, “for I will be with you (אני) to deliver (הצילך) you, declares Yhwh” (1:8, 19). In Jer 15:20, Jeremiah receives a similar promise of presence (אני), though this time it includes the promise both to “save” (ישע) and “to deliver” (נצל) him. This language of assurance for Jeremiah is applied to Judah and Israel in 30:11, where God assures them of his presence (אני) and commitment to save (ישע) them (cf. 46:28). By applying language describing God’s relationship with Jeremiah to Israel, a reader can detect in Jeremiah a pattern of what is available for the people. This, by implication, establishes a pattern for later readers, motivating them toward faithfulness.  

The use of Jeremiah as a paradigm for the people is also evident when God tells Jeremiah that, if he repents (שׁוב), God will restore (שׁוב in Hiphil) him (Jer 15:19). This links with the regular use of this verb to express God’s desire for repentance from the people in general (3:7, 10, 12, 14, 22, 4:1, 5:3; 8:5, 6; 15:7; 18:8,11; 23:14, 22; 24:7; 25:5; 26:3; 32:40; 35:15; 36:3, 7; 44:5) and to depict the prospect of various dynamics of restoration, including the return to the land and restoration of plundered goods (שׁוב; 12:15; 16:15; 23:3; 24:6; 27:22; 28:4; 6; 29:10, 14; 30:3, 10,18; 31:8, 16–18, 23; 32:37, 44; 33:7, 11, 26; 46:27; 48:47; 49:6; 49:39; 50:19). By promising to restore (שׁוב) Jeremiah if he repents (שׁוב), God’s relationship with Jeremiah, a marginal person called to faithfulness, is a pattern for exiles through which they can see their own story unfolding.  

Though Jeremiah suffers greatly throughout the book, he experiences God’s deliverance repeatedly and even finds grace from the Babylonians given in chap. 24 prior to the fall of the city. The audiences share similar tendencies and can expect similar responses from God.  

38. Seitz argues that instances in Jeremiah where a later generation protests the justice of God as they experience punishment due to the sins of their ancestors provide an angle for later readers to discern the message of the book (16:10–11, 19). Seitz, “The Place,” 71–72. The promise of 31:29–30 also addresses this issue.  


40. McConville, Judgment and Promise, 73.  

(26:12–24; 36:26; 39:11–14). God’s faithfulness to his promise to be with and deliver Jeremiah, as he remained faithful amidst innocent suffering, helps exiles respond to their own suffering. This creates an expectation for God to act in a similar way in the future, motivating the marginal sufferers in exile to remain faithful in hope of restoration.

God’s ways with Jeremiah coordinate with God’s ways with Baruch and Ebed-Melech. Readers find the faithfulness of Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe (chap. 45), and Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian servant, being rewarded by God granting them their lives as a “prize of war” (45:5; 39:8). God also offers this promise of life as a prize for war to all who leave the city and surrender to the Babylonians (21:9; 38:2). In this way, God’s reward for the faithful lives of Baruch and Ebed-Melech motivates the later audience generally to align with God that they may experience a similar rescue. This creates a network of consistency within the book where God’s ways of delivering faithful individual figures such as Jeremiah, Baruch, and Ebed-Melech are analogous in general to God’s actions with the upright.

While one gains a sense that God will preserve his faithful people amidst innocent suffering, the book tempers this expectation. Gedeliah, whose governance is generally presented positively, is assassinated, and even numerous worshipers who were mourning his death were murdered (40:7–41:18). This reminds a reader that at times God may not intervene to curb evil. The text surrounding these stories invites the people to trust in God and his care for them, nonetheless. They respond with fear rather than faith, however, as they flee to Egypt (chap. 43). This tempers the consistency pattern. While innocent sufferers should remain faithful, confident that God will deliver, at times God may not intervene, though innocent sufferers are still encouraged to dare to have faith.

While the book of Jeremiah uses God’s relationship with faithful individuals such as Jeremiah, Baruch, and Ebed-melech as a pattern of what

42. Stulman and Kim, You Are My People, 119–22.

43. There are numerous other ways that Jeremiah’s figure in the book conveys a message through theological patterning. Jeremiah’s role in the confessions as reflecting both God’s suffering and the suffering of the people portrays him as a “type” of the ideal community as they go through suffering. See Brueggemann, Exile and Homecoming, 187; McConville, Judgment and Promise, 61–78. Diamond also sees a role of the confessions as paradigmatic; though when seen in the larger schema of the first half of the book, the primary role of the confessions is not paradigmatic but is to defend God’s right to punish the people. The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context: Scenes in Prophetic Drama (JSOTS 45; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987) 182.

44. Stulman, “Jeremiah the Prophet,” 56. We may also include the Rechabites in this network.

45. See Tom Parker, “Ebed-Melech as Exemplar,” in Uprooting and Planting, 253–59. In his essay, he argues that Ebed-Melech is an exemplar who coordinates with Baruch and the Rechabites who receive their life because of their actions. This is a signal to Israel that though an Ethiopian cannot change the color of their skin (Jer 13:23), Israel must hope for change that it can become like Ebed-Melech.

46. Stulman and Kim, You Are My People, 123–27.

47. The fate of faithful Ahikam (26:24) is also not reported; perhaps God did not save him either.
the people as a whole could experience, it also is consistent in its portrayal of disobedient individuals, creating patterns for the behavior and destiny of the community in general. There are many verses that generally indict Judah’s elite, priests, prophets, and rulers as the leaders in disobedience (e.g., 1:18; 2:8; 2:26; 4:9; 5:31; 6:13; 8:10; 13:13; 14:18; chaps. 21–23 [kings]; chaps. 26–29 [prophets]; 34–38 [kings]). The book then provides individual examples of faithless priests (Pashur; 20:1–6), prophets (Pashur in 20:6; Hananiah in chap. 28; Ahab, Zedekiah, and Shemaiah in chap. 29), and kings (Shallum in 22:11–12; Jehoiakim in 22:18–19 and chaps. 35–36; Jehoiachin in 22:24–30; Zedekiah in 21:3–7 and chaps. 34, 37, 38, 39) from different stages of Jeremiah’s ministry. These people will and do experience the same destiny as faithless people in the book. Just as Pashur is told that he and his house will go into captivity (çaḇān; 20:6), so God’s rebels in the land (15:2) and even in Egypt (43:11) will go into captivity (ḇāḇāḇ). Just as God is going to give (ṯāḇāḇ) the city of Jerusalem (32:28; cf. 21:7; 22:25) and even the enemies of the faithful (46:26) into the hand (ḏēḇā’āḇ) of Nebuchadrezzar, so Yahweh will also give (ṯāḇāḇ) Judah’s faithless kings (21:7; 22:25) and the false prophets Ahab and Zedekiah (29:21), who are already in Babylon, into the hand (ḏēḇā’āḇ) of Nebuchadrezzar.48 These “leaders” universally reject God’s word, reflecting the trajectory of the people in general. The consistent theme of rejection in these stories serves to confirm further the tendency of the leaders to deny God’s freedom to bring an end to their symbols of power.49 Both the tendency of leaders to rebel and their destiny of judgment remain consistent throughout the book.

While this consistency in depictions of corrupt leaders receiving judgment could give rise to eternal pessimism, the book of Jeremiah offers the subversive hope that there will be future rulers (3:15; 23:4–7; 33:14–26) who are just (ḏēḇā’āḇ, ṭēḇāḇāḇ; 23:5; 33:15) in contrast to the unjust rulers (22:13) and priests (33:22). Thus, the book of Jeremiah uses disobedient individual priests, kings, and prophets as paradigms for the destiny of disobedient people in general, while also serving as a foil to the ideal leadership that the book hopes for during the time of restoration.

In summary, the book of Jeremiah uses theological patterning of people. By portraying a continuum of rebellion from the ancestors to those of Jeremiah’s time, along with the repetition of “heart” to depict disobedience among Judah and the nations, a pattern arises for expecting sin to continue among future readers. Also, the recurring mention of God’s care for faithful sufferers such as Jeremiah, Baruch, and Ebed-Melech coordinates with

48. The exiles have been taken into captivity by the hand of Nebuchadrezzar (29:1) but are promised “good” (ṯāḇāḇ) after their 70 years of Babylonian captivity (29:10). Ironically, the exilic false prophets will again experience judgment by the hands of Nebuchadrezzar (29:21) and will miss out on the “good” (ṯāḇāḇ) which the others exiles will experience (29:32). In this fashion, Yahweh’s use of foreign powers to punish his people multiple times if disobedience persists creates a pattern of consistency in divine response to disobedience. Furthermore, the contrast between the destiny of the exiles who will experience “good” and the false prophets who will miss out fortifies the retribution principle for coping with the exilic experience.

promises of comparable care for the people as a whole to encourage future communities to remain faithful. Furthermore, the ways and destinies of false prophets and wicked kings mirror the lives and fates of the disobedient in general. These networks of consistency are slightly relativized, however, as the book anticipates God’s transformation of the human heart, provides hope for faithful future leadership (Jer 23:5–6; 33:12–26), and speaks of instances in which God does not intervene to save the faithful.

CONCLUSION

The preservation of God’s words to and through Jeremiah in written form beyond the prophet’s lifetime and their strategic arrangement expose the book’s assumption that it is relevant for future generations. While by no means exhaustive, this article exposes how theological patterning contributes to the end of enabling later readers to detect the book’s abiding relevance. For a people receiving Jeremiah as a word in the midst of deferred hope, theological patterning in Jeremiah sparks the imagination of readers to discern how God’s voice in Jeremiah enables them to detect how God is acting throughout time to fulfill his word. The book uses patterned speech about places, nations, and people in order to help readers construct networks of consistency in conceptualizing the God-human-world relationship that persists through time. With the prophet Jeremiah, or at least his persona in the book, applying previous traditions about God’s actions to his contemporary situation and even crafting messages that are similar for those inside and outside of the land, prior to and amidst exile, a reader is invited to adopt this same practice of allowing theological patterns to cast light on their contemporary situation, thereby hearing God’s voice.

The use of theological patterning as a textual strategy to speak to future generations establishes a foundation for interpreters to construct and employ a hermeneutical schema that builds on and does not tear down strategies already present in the original aims of the book. These networks of consistency, albeit at times slightly tempered, pave the way for discerning in Jeremiah’s theological witness a God who after Jeremiah’s time rejects places called by his name while maintaining hope for them; who judges as his Son drinks the cup (Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 18:11) and will judge through the cup (cf. Rev 14:8–10; 18:6) in the end a persistently rebellious humanity from all places and nationalities; who offers and promises restoration in the Son for a wilderness people of all locales and nationalities that they may become a faithful people, resembling the likes of Jeremiah, Ebed-Melech, Baruch, and the hoped-for king.