

The Expansion of Jerusalem in Jeremiah 31:38-40: Never, Already or Not Yet?

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Introduction

Certainly one of the most pointed differences between the various millennial schools is the nature and fulfillment of the “land promises” made to Israel in the Old Testament. Typically those discussions are related to the “larger” issues of the overall scope of the land as it relates to the Abrahamic Covenant¹ and the overall national boundaries². In addition to these “macro-prophecies” there are also several individual “micro-prophecies” dealing with specific areas and considerations within the larger geographical context of the land.

¹ For a thorough discussion of the Abrahamic Covenant see Keith Essex “The Abrahamic Covenant,” *The Master's Seminary Journal* 10:2 (Fall 1999), 191-212. For a discussion of the larger “land” issues and the Biblical covenants see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Land of Israel and the Future Return (Zechariah 10:6-12)” in *Israel the Land and the People*. H. Wayne House, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications), 209-27; Ralph H. Alexander, “A New Covenant—An Eternal People (Jeremiah 31)”, in *Israel the Land and the People*. H. Wayne House, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications), 169-206; and John R. Master, “The New Covenant,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master, eds. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1997), 93-112.

² For an excellent overview of the boundaries of the land as detailed in the Abrahamic Covenant and subsequent passages (e.g. Exodus 23:31; Numbers 34:1-12) see Barry Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1985), 5-13. See also Walter C. Kaiser, “The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 (1981), 302-12.

Although, as Wilken states, “in the original promise of the land, Jerusalem played no part.”³ Subsequent prophecies (most notably Jer 30-33; Ezk 35-48; Zech 10-14) detail specific predictions related to Jerusalem and the Temple located therein. While some of these prophecies, mainly those related to the Temple,⁴ have received considerable discussion, one particular prophecy, that of the Jeremiah 31:38-40, dealing with the expansion of Jerusalem, has often been superficially dealt with or simply overlooked⁵ within the larger millennial discussions.⁶

This article seeks to enlarge the discussion by dealing with the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:38-40 and its message relating to the expansion of Jerusalem. We will examine the details of the prophecy and the three interpretative possibilities regarding its fulfillment, affirming that a future fulfillment during the millennial kingdom is the only satisfactory interpretation of the passage.

I. The Prophetic Details of Jeremiah 31:38-40

Within the larger context of the “Book of Consolation” portion of Jeremiah (30-33), and the prophecy of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31); an additional prophecy, specifically

³ Robert L. Wilken. *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1992), 9.

⁴ For a thorough discussion of the issues related to a “third” temple and the exegetical and theological considerations, see Ralph H. Alexander, *Ezekiel in the Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 6:942-52. See also: John W. Schmitt and J. Carl Laney, *Messiah’s Coming Temple: Ezekiel’s Prophetic Vision of the Future Temple* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1997).

⁵ For example in Randall Price’s otherwise fine book, *Jerusalem in Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998), Jeremiah 31:38-40 is only quoted in part once (222) and mentioned only once in passing (229); a strange oversight of a passage that W. F. Birch called, “the key to Jerusalem.” “Note on Jeremiah xxxi, 38-40.” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 14:1 (Jan 1882), 58. Even in George Adam Smith’s classic two volume work, *Jerusalem: The Topography, Economics and History from the Earliest Times to A.D. 70* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), the passage receives only passing mention, likely because Smith felt that the passage was not original to Jeremiah, calling it an “exilic addition” (2:261).

related to Jerusalem, is announced in vss. 38-40. This prophecy, one of the “provisions of the New Covenant that make it so welcome;”⁷ is all the more striking since it is “the very city that Jeremiah was before long to see destroyed by the Chaldean army.”⁸ The English text reads as follows:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. And the measuring line shall go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah. And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it shall not be plucked up, or overthrown anymore forever.” (NASB)

Utilizing the same introductory formula, “behold days are coming” (הִנֵּה יָמֵי בְרִיאִים) (*hinneh yamîn ba’îm*)⁹ as in 31:27 (and elsewhere), Jeremiah indicates the announcement of a prophecy with a fulfillment subsequent to its utterance¹⁰. This phrase is used 21 times in the Old Testament with 15 of those uses appearing in Jeremiah. Throughout the Old Testament this phrase universally introduces a prophetic pronouncement (e.g., 1 Sam 2:31; 2 Kings 20:17; Is. 39:6; Jer 7:32; 9:25; 16:14; 19:6; 23:5, 7; 30:3; 31:27, 31, 28; 33:14; 48:12;

⁶ Even in discussions about Jerusalem in general, this passage is often ignored. For example in Meir Ben-Dov’s *Historical Atlas of Jerusalem* (New York: Continuum, 2002), he offers no discussion of the Jeremiah passage at all.

⁷ Larry D. Pettegrew, “The New Covenant.” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10:2 (Fall 1999), 255. A large part of the problem with this “micro-prophecy” is that it is usually overwhelmed by the promise of the New Covenant, to the point that it isn’t even mentioned in that discussion (e.g. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, *Holy People, Holy Land: A Theological Introduction to the Bible* [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, Baker Books, 2005], 125).

⁸ Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah*, in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 6:579.

⁹ In 31:38 the final part of the phrase, בְּרִיאִים is omitted. However, as Thompson notes, “In the Hebrew text there is a strange gap, ‘Look, days . . .’; but there can be no doubt about the missing word.” (J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmann’s Publishing, 1980]), 583. See also William L. Holladay (edited by Paul D. Nanson) *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chs. 26-52*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 155; William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* Volume 2, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 832; and Benjamin Blayney, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: A New Translation with Notes Critical, Philological and Explanatory*, (Edinburgh: Oliphant and Balfour, 1810), 374. Blayney states in part, “the word בְּרִיאִים is wanting; but the Masoretes have supplied it; and it is found in twenty two, perhaps twenty three, MSS. and in five Editions; in two MSS. a word of four letters is erased after בְּרִיאִים . All the ancient versions express it.”

¹⁰ Feinberg, *Jeremiah*, 6:579.

49:2; 51:47, 52; Amos 4:2; 8:11; 9:13); and, as Feinberg notes, the phrase “look[s] toward eschatological times . . . Jeremiah is contemplating the distant, not near future of the nation.”¹¹ Also commenting on the use of this phrase at the beginning of the “Book of Consolation” section (Jer 30-33),¹² McKane states:

But what if the future of v. 3 [“days are coming” Jer 30:3] is much vaster than this, so that the coming days stretch out for a great distance, as Kimchi supposed? The question whether a fulfillment is thought of as historical or eschatological can degenerate into a somewhat barren logomachy, but there is a significant difference between a hope for the future which attends to power constellations among the nations in the present and one which thumbs its nose at historical probabilities, its future hope more remote and defiant—a resounding ‘nevertheless’. The one finds support for a radical turn-around and transformation in a present where great movements of history are interpreted as Yahweh’s shaking of the nations. The other, like Kimchi’s, is disengaged from a present which offers no support for it and demands nothing less than a new age—a Messianic age. The coming days of v. 3 are perhaps of this latter kind.¹³

The specifics of the prophecy are that in the future “the city” (i.e., Jerusalem) will be rebuilt and enlarged,¹⁴ sanctified,¹⁵ and immune from future devastation.¹⁶

As will be shown some have attempted to interpret Jerusalem here in a non-literal manner, as either symbolic or representative of some heavenly counterpart. However, this

¹¹ Ibid., 6:559.

¹² John Bright. *Jeremiah*, in *The Anchor Bible*. (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1965), 269-300.

¹³ McKane, *Jeremiah*, 755. David Kimhi’s last name has various spellings, including Kimchi and Qimhi. The preferred rendering is Kimhi.

¹⁴ Martin Raundal Hague. “Some Aspects of the Motif ‘The City Facing Death’ of Ps 68,21.” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 2 (1988), 13,

¹⁵ Thompson. *Jeremiah*, 584.

¹⁶ Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers. *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 26-52*. (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1995), 139. Detailing this promise they write:

Although no new fortifications are mentioned, the LORD guarantees Jerusalem’s inviolability. The boundary sketched in vv. 38-40 would be a poor location for a defensive wall because the strategic valleys would be inside the city instead of outside the walls. This map illustrates that Jerusalem will not need defenses made of stone. It will be safe because it will be holy. Its people will not continue in the sin and apostasy that led to its destruction. The LORD’s new building, v. 38, will be protected by the promise not to uproot or overthrow (cf. 31:28).

will not do, “the physical form of Jerusalem is clearly in mind as the prophet draws his picture of the future.”¹⁷ Feinberg further states, “this passage will not permit an interpretation that applies it to a spiritual, heavenly, or symbolic Jerusalem.”¹⁸ The rebuilding and enlargement of the city are “an explicit reversal of the destruction decreed in 7:30-8:3.”¹⁹ The picture of the rebuilt and enlarged city “is foretold with topographical precision.”²⁰ As McConville notes this prophecy detailing the rebuilding and expansion of Jerusalem cannot be separated from that of the promise of the New Covenant. “The continuity with historic, geographical Judah should also be noted, since the new covenant promise is followed almost immediately by an assurance that the devastated city of Jerusalem will be rebuilt.”²¹

The Geographic Features of the Prophecy

Jeremiah presents seven specific geographic markers detailing the borders of the city in a “counterclockwise fashion,”²² which “seem to describe a circuit about the city going round from north to west, then to south and ending at the east.”²³ In his classic work, *Jerusalem in the Old Testament*, Simons states, “the language and the terms used are thoroughly concrete and the topographical features enumerated are mostly known also from

¹⁷ J. Gordon McConville, “The Theology of Jeremiah,” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Willem A. Van Gemeren, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 4:762.

¹⁸ Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” 6:579.

¹⁹ Carolyn J. Sharp, “The Call of Jeremiah and Diaspora Politics.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119:3 (2000), 427.

²⁰ C. Von Orelli. *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*. (London: T & T Clark, 1889), 242.

²¹ J. G. McConville, “The Book of Jeremiah,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed). (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 355.

²² Lawrence E. Stager. “The Archaeology of the East Slope of Jerusalem and the Terraces of the Kidron.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 41:2 (1982), 117. For a contrary view see Gabriel Barkay, “Northern and Western Jerusalem in the End of the Iron Age” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Tel Aviv University, April 1985). Barkay takes the geographic markers to move in a “clockwise direction starting on the northwestern part of the Temple Mount, embracing the large area north of town, and coming back to the northeastern corner of the Temple Mount” (II).

²³ Birch. “Notes,” 58.

other sources.”²⁴ Our study is benefited by the fact that more archaeological work has been accomplished in and around Jerusalem in the last 30 years than in all the years previous. As Avigad points out:

The reunification of Jerusalem in 1967 was not only a great historical event—well expressed in the Bible by the Psalmist: “Jerusalem, built as a city which is bound firmly together” (122:3)—but as well an event that will long be remembered as a turning point in the archaeological exploration of the city. The vast increase in archaeological excavations conducted in Jerusalem since the reunification, in locations not even dreamt of previously, has resulted in an unanticipated growth of our knowledge of the city’s past.²⁵

Starting on “its northern or weakest side,”²⁶ and moving in a counterclockwise fashion Jeremiah details the landmarks and geographic markers of Jerusalem that need to be examined.

Boundary Marker One: The Tower of Hananel

The first marker is the *Tower of Hananel*. This was located at the “the north-east corner of the city walls”²⁷ (Neh 3:1; 12:39; Zech 14:10). This tower, along with the “Tower of the Hundred” (Neh 3:1), were the main fortifications protecting the city and temple area

²⁴ J. Simons. *Jerusalem in the Old Testament: Researches and Theories*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1952), 231.

²⁵ Nahman Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), 13. For a recent and thorough discussion of the major archaeological work in Jerusalem and an archaeological survey of its history, see Dan Bahat, “Jerusalem,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Eric M. Myers, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3:224-38; also Nahman Avigad, “Jerusalem,” in *the Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Michael Avi-Yonah, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 2:580-647. The older, and in places superceded, work of Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Jerusalem: Excavating 3000 Years of History*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967); *Jerusalem Revealed: Archaeology in the Holy City 1968-1974*, Yigal Yadin, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press and The Israel Exploration Society, 1976) and W. Harold Mare, *The Archaeology of the Jerusalem Area* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987) should also be consulted.

²⁶ Birch, “Notes,” 58.

²⁷ Von Orelli, *Jeremiah*, 236. See also Avigad, *Jerusalem*, 13. Avigad notes that the tower was at the “north-west corner” of the Temple mount which is essentially the same location from a different perspective in the pre-Herodian expansion era. See also, Randall Price, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2005), 222.

from an attack from the north.²⁸ Nehemiah 2:8 mentions a “fortress which is by the temple,” and it is thought that these towers were related to that fortress.²⁹ Eskenazi notes that “the later citadel of 1 Macc 13:52 and the Antonia Fortress of Herod may correspond to the Tower of Hananel or mark the spot on which it had stood earlier.”³⁰ This conclusion is most reasonable since a wall, tower, or other important defensive feature is generally determined by some topographical or geographic consideration; a consideration that is not likely to change from one generation to another.³¹

Boundary Marker Two: The Corner Gate

The next marker is the *Corner Gate*. This gate is mentioned with several times in the OT (2 Kings 14:13; 2 Chr 25:23; 26:9). This gate is also noted in prophecy of Zechariah 14:10, which all agree is connected in one way or another with Jeremiah 31:38-40.³² Although the exact location of this gate has been debated it seems most reasonable to locate it approximately 250 meters south of the *Tower of Hananel* near the significant “Broad Wall.” Liid states, “It is at the W. end of this 8th-century wall, built along the Transversal Valley to protect the vulnerable NW approach to the city, that the Corner Gate should

²⁸ Michael Avi-Yonah, “The Walls of Nehemiah: A Minimalist View.” *Israel Exploration Journal* (1954), 241. Historically, Jerusalem has always been the most vulnerable from its northern flank. When Pompey laid siege to the city he concentrated on the northern flank. When Jerusalem was taken by the Crusaders under Godfrey de Bouillon in 1099 the city walls were breached from the north. In World War I General Allenby made his main assault to take Jerusalem from the north (Ronald Sanders, *The High Walls of Jerusalem* [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983], 622-23).

²⁹ Avi-Yonah, “Walls of Nehemiah,” 242.

³⁰ Tamara C. Eskenazi, “Hananel, Tower of,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1992), 3:45. See also Avi-Yonah, “Walls of Nehemiah,” 242. Avi-Yonah notes that the Antonia Fortress, “certainly had a front of two towers and there is no reason to suppose that its predecessors were restricted to one tower only.”

³¹ Eddinger Terry W. “Tower,” in the *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, David Noel Freedman, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 1321-22.

³² McKane, *Jeremiah*, 834.

provisionally be located.”³³ Moving in the counterclockwise direction this location can only be on the western side of the city, as Simons points out:

That a location of the Corner Gate elsewhere than on the western ridge would cut off all possibility of reasonable suggestions for Gareb, Goah and ‘the valley or corpses and ashes. The initial section of Jeremiah’s boundary description is intelligible only in the supposition, that he is dealing with the course of a wall substantially identical with that outlined by Josephus and containing on the northern side two sharp turns: one formed by the western temple-wall and the northern city-wall, the other at the point where this east-to-west-wall reaches its most westerly end and “the measuring line goes further, southward.” This latter turn, well to the west of the Central Valley and at the north-western angle of the city’s circumference, is Jeremiah’s first “corner” and in this supposition the remainder of the descriptions become intelligible enough.³⁴

The Upper Pool is also located in the proximity to the Corner Gate. These pools were generally man-made and while they were “important to the inhabitant’s livelihood, for they served as catchments and storage areas for the rainwater,”³⁵ they were also significant defensive fortifications as well, “to prevent the enemy from approaching [the city gates] with their battering rams.”³⁶

Interestingly, while the *Tower of Hananel* is mentioned in the rebuilding of the city walls under Nehemiah, the Corner Gate is not mentioned at all in Nehemiah’s extensive and detailed presentation of the construction and repair of the walls of the city. Liid and others have speculated that this “lack of reference to the Corner Gate may be attributed to his

³³ Dale C. Liid, “Corner Gate,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1992), 1:1156.

³⁴ Simons, *Jerusalem*, 232.

³⁵ Menashe Har-El. *Landscape, Nature and Man in the Bible: Sites and Events in the Old Testament*. (Jerusalem: Carta, 2003), 387.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 386.

[Nehemiah's] reinforcing of the old defensive lines of the smaller City of David and the temple area."³⁷

Boundary Marker Three: The Hill Gareb

Next is the Hill Gareb.³⁸ Mentioned only in this passage this site has remained obscure. Attempts to identify this site at the so-called Mt. Zion at the SW extremity of the city seem clearly in error. Jeremiah's description indicates that the location of this site is across the Hinnom Valley south and west from Jerusalem, closer to the "Shoulder of Hinnom," a well-known burial area; which would also fit the prophet's description in 31:40. Possibly named for Gareb, one of David's mighty-men (2 Sam. 23:38; 1 Chr. 11:40), but this cannot be stated with certainty. Holladay notes:

"Gareb Hill" and "Goah" are otherwise unknown; the sequence of the landmarks in these verses suggests a movement counterclockwise around the city, so that Gareb Hill would be on the southwest and Goah on the southeast, but this is only what may be deduced from the passage itself. It may be added that Giesebrecht suggests reading the rather puzzling "opposite it" נגדו as "southwards" נגב, see BHK, BHS); if that suggestion is sound (and compare "eastwards" in v 40), then the location of Gareb Hill on the southwest is reinforced.³⁹

Henderson and others have proposed that since the verb form of Gareb means "scratch or scrape" that Gareb was a "locality to which lepers were removed, as they were not allowed to remain in the city."⁴⁰ While this is an interesting proposal and may add significance to the aspect of the prophecy indicating that a formerly unclean area would be "holy to the LORD" it adds nothing to our current understanding of the exact location.

³⁷ Liid, "Corner Gate." For perhaps the most thorough and detailed description of excavations related to the "Broad Wall" and the settlements of western Jerusalem, see: Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, esp. 23-62.

³⁸ Swanson, Dennis M. "Gareb (place)," in the *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, David Noel Freedman, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 483.

The “measuring line shall go out farther straight ahead to the Hill Gareb and then turn to Goah” indicates that from the Corner Gate a קָוָה (*qaw*) or a “measuring cord” will stretch in a straight line to the hill and then turn. This concept of the “measuring cord” in the prophets “relates to the rhetoric of judgment and restoration.”⁴¹ In the context of our passage, “God promises to stretch a line in the future for Israel’s/Jerusalem’s restoration.”⁴² The text indicates that these two sites are beyond the existing environs of the city as Jeremiah knew them.

The evidence seems clear that the site of Gareb and that of Goah are to be “sought to the west of the city.”⁴³ Freedman, sums up this consensus by stating, “Nothing is known of these [Gareb and Goah], but apparently the verse indicates an extension of the city boundary on the western side.”⁴⁴

Boundary Marker Four: Goah

From the Hill Gareb the next marker is *Goah*.⁴⁵ The precise location of Goah remains unknown; but in the context it must certainly be southeast of Gareb, on the southern flank of the Hinnom Valley and west of the Kidron Valley. Some have attempted to identify Goah as referring to Golgotha⁴⁶ but this has received little support and would violate the clear orderliness of the sites presented by Jeremiah. George Adam Smith equated Goah with

³⁹ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 199. See also McKane, 832 who states that the idea is “attractive and is mentioned favorably by Peake, Rudolph and Weiser.”

⁴⁰ Henderson, *Jeremiah*, 192. See also Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, 259

⁴¹ A. R. Pete Diamond, “קָוָה” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Willem A. Van Gemeren, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 3:892.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Von Orelli, *Jeremiah*, 236.

⁴⁴ H. Freedman. *Jeremiah: Hebrew Text and English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*. (London: Socino Press, 1949), 213. So also: Bright, *Jeremiah*, 283; Birch, “Notes,” 58;

⁴⁵ Swanson, Dennis M. “Goah,” in the *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, David Noel Freedman, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 510.

Gibeah⁴⁷ but this is certainly far-fetched.⁴⁸ In translating Goah, the LXX, interestingly renders the word as a descriptive **ex eklekwn liqwn** (*ex eklekon lithon* “stone of the elect” or “stone of the chosen”) rather than as a proper name or a town location; however, this yields no further indication as to an exact location. Birch concludes that “Goath seems to me to have been a place more to the west, and identical with the site of *the Assyrian camp* of Josephus; the name probably has reference to the destruction of the 185,000 men.”⁴⁹ Thus it is also is a location which is unclean or defiled.

Boundary Marker Five: The Valley of Dead Bodies and Ashes

From Goah the southern boundary is described as “whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes.” This is most certainly the well-known Hinnom Valley, which curves around the southwest and southern flank of the city. It connects with the Kidron Valley at the southeast corner of the city, below the spur of the City of David. “The Hebrew word is *geihinnom*, a contraction of the phrase *gei Ben-Hinnom*, literally, ‘the valley of the son of Hinnom’ (presumably, a tract named after its one-time owner).”⁵⁰ As Von Orelli notes that “at least a part [of the valley] was held unclean from Josiah’s days (2 Kings xxiii. 10), and whither corpses and sacrificial ashes were carried, both having their special places.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ Blayney, *Jeremiah*, 375.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Jerusalem*, 2:261.

⁴⁸ In our research only Smith makes this connection. See Patrick M. Arnold, “Gibeah,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:1007-1009 for a thorough discussion of the various options regarding Gibeah.

⁴⁹ Birch, “Notes on Jeremiah,” 58. (italics in original).

⁵⁰ Daniel Hillel. *The Natural History of the Bible: An Environmental Exploration of the Hebrew Scriptures*. (New York Columbia University Press, 2006), 184.

⁵¹ Von Orelli, *Jeremiah*, 236. More recent work indicates that Von Orelli is probably not correct to conclude that the sacrificial ashes from the Temple were removed to a special place in the Hinnom (see Lev 4:121 6:10-11), which recent work and archaeological findings now indicate the location being “north of the Temple area” (Robert J. Way, “דִּישָׁן” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Willem A. Van Gemeren, ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997], 1:1001). Way notes that the reference to the “valley of dead bodies and ashes” has reference to the “offerings to Molech.”

The phrasing clearly refers to the “whole valley south of the city.”⁵² This valley was always on the outside of the city, being accessed through the “Potsherd Gate” (Jer 19:2) and is also mentioned in Jeremiah 7:32. At least a portion of this area was also called “Tophet,” a location where child sacrifice and “heathen cults” had been practiced⁵³ (Jer 19:4-9). So well known was the area and its abominations in the time of Jeremiah, he simply refers to it as “the valley” in 2:23. The Hinnom Valley has also been identified with Gehenna.⁵⁴ Keown, Scalise and Smothers conclude that this area “represents the epitome of the people’s unholiness.”⁵⁵ The common view of The Hinnom Valley or Gehenna as a place of “perpetual fire” where unburied bodies were burned⁵⁶, apparently originated with David Kimhi (1160-1235) the famous Jewish scholar and commentator of Narbonne, France.⁵⁷ While calling Kimhi’s view “plausible” he notes that it has no support “in literary or archaeological data from the intertestamental or rabbinic periods.”⁵⁸ Bailey notes that the area was a “low place” where the underworld deities such as Molech were worshipped and sacrifices made (2 Kings 23:10; Is 57:5). He notes, “Therefore since human sacrifice had been offered in the valley of Hinnom to the underworld deity Molech, the worshippers likely assumed that there was an entrance to the underworld at this location.”⁵⁹ In the eyes of the Jew it was perhaps the most defiled location in the immediate environs of Jerusalem.

Boundary Marker Six: All the Fields as Far as the Brook Kidron

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Birght, *Jeremiah*, 283. See also Hauge, “The City Facing Death,” 13. See also Mare, *Jerusalem*, 176.

⁵⁴ L. R. Bailey, “Gehenna: The Topography of Hell.” *Biblical Archaeologist* 49: 187-91.

⁵⁵ Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah*, 138.

⁵⁶ Bailey, “Gehenna,” 189.

⁵⁷ Unfortunately, Kimhi, like most of the European scholars of the Middle Ages and through the Reformation (both Jewish and Christian) had never been to Jerusalem or had the advantage of thorough geographic studies of the land.

⁵⁸ Bailey, “Gehenna,” 189.

The eastern boundary is mentioned as “all the fields as far as the brook Kidron.” The Brook Kidron lay outside of the eastern wall of the city and Temple.⁶⁰ The fields have been identified as the “architectural terraces for buildings (and their adjacent trees and gardens)”⁶¹ which also lay outside of the eastern defensive wall of the city. In any defensive wall the “high ground” would normally be the location of the wall, at the top of the ridge on the west side of the Kidron or the north side of the Hinnom. This gives the obvious advantage in defense in that any attack must first ascend the hill to mount an attack on the wall. The prophecy indicates that this will no longer be the case, the wall of the city will be placed in a manner that is “a poor location for a defensive wall because the strategic valleys would be inside the city instead of outside the walls.”⁶² “The Kidron Valley was a garbage dump (1 Kgs 15:13; 2 Kgs 23:6) and the location of the graves of the common people, which Josiah defiled with the dust and ashes of then images he removed from the temple and destroyed (2 Kgs 23:6).”⁶³ The Kidron is only mentioned outside of the historical books by Jeremiah as Auld and Steiner note, “which anticipates an extended reconstruction of Jerusalem including ‘the fields as far as the brook Kidron.’”⁶⁴ Jeremiah seeing a future where this area, “strewn with corpses (or stelae) and ashes, as far as the Horse Gate (near the Palace or the Temple Mount) will once against be ‘sacred to Yahweh.’”⁶⁵

Boundary Marker Seven: The Horse Gate

⁵⁹ Ibid., 190. Bailey also notes that the “altars were sometimes supplied with pipes so the sacrificial blood could be channeled to the underworld.”

⁶⁰ Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah*, 138.

⁶¹ Stager, “Archaeology of the East Slope of Jerusalem,” 118.

⁶² Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah*, 139

⁶³ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁴ Auld, Graeme and Margreet Steiner. *Jerusalem I: From Bronze Age to the Maccabees*. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 20. See their discussion of the Kidron being outside of Jerusalem proper during its entire history (pp. 16-20).

Finally, the more specific marker, “the corner of the Horse Gate,” anchors the boundary-line. Burrows points out that this gate “obviously led from the temple to the palace, it must have been near the SE corner of the temple enclosure, not far from the city wall but probably not part of it.”⁶⁶ However, this conclusion is not as “obvious” as Burrows indicates. There were two separate gates with this name. The gate identified by Burrows was an inner gate (see 2 Kings 11:16 and 2 Chr 23:15), a minor utilitarian gate that allowed an “entrance for horses into the royal compound from the Horse Gate in the outer wall.”⁶⁷ It would be strange that the “Horse Gate” referenced by Jeremiah would be this strategically insignificant, interior passageway within the city. Certainly Avi-Yonah is correct when he states, “The Horse Gate was a gate in the city wall, which served as the east gate of the Temple and palace quarter.”⁶⁸ Simons also concludes that the reference in Jeremiah 31:39 is a “text [which] in our view also constitutes a decisive argument”⁶⁹ that the Horse Gate was in the “outer defensive wall on the E. side of the city.”⁷⁰

Summary of the Geographic Markers

Of the seven markers presented by Jeremiah we can be certain on several issues. Two (*Tower of Hananel* and the *Corner Gate*) have a fairly secure, although not settled, archaeological consensus as part of the northern wall complex. As noted above, the *Corner Gate* was certainly part of pre-exilic Jerusalem, but not afterwards, at least in Nehemiah’s

⁶⁵ Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*. Library of Ancient Israel, Douglas A. Knight (ed). (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), 217.

⁶⁶ Burrows, “Horse Gate,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, G. A. Buttrick, ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962), p. 849.

⁶⁷ Dale C. Liid, “Horse Gate,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1992), 3:209.

⁶⁸ Avi-Yonah, “Walls of Nehemiah,” 247.

⁶⁹ Liid, “Horse Gate,” 3:209.

rebuilding. While neither *Gareb* nor *Goah*, are pinpointed by specific geographic or archaeological evidence, it seems a certainty that their locations lay outside of both pre-exilic and post-exilic Jerusalem. *The Valley of Dead Bodies* and *All the Fields to the Brook Kidron* are also outside of the proper boundaries of the city as it was constituted in Jeremiah's time. Additionally, none of these locations were subsequently part of the city proper, from the restoration under Nehemiah and Ezra; even into the expansion of the Temple Mount by Herod the Great and to the present day. The *Horse Gate* is attested to in Nehemiah's rebuilding (Neh 3:28), but disappears by the time of Herod the Great.

While seeing a larger expansion than Barkay, we still agree with him that this prophecy demonstrates that there will be a significant enlargement of Jerusalem where additional territory "in the future would be included within the limits of the fortified city."⁷¹

II. The Fulfillment of the Prophecy

Three schools of thought have developed in the interpretation regarding the fulfillment of this prophecy. Those interpretations can be categorized under the headings: (1) Never; (2) Already; and (3) Not Yet. While the "Never" and "Already" categories tend to be the options of amillennial interpreters and Covenant Theologians, the "Not Yet" category is the option of choice for futuristic premillennialists.

The Fulfillment Option: Never

Many interpreters, particularly those holding to the amillennial or "realized" system of eschatology, have explained this passage in a figurative or non-literal manner.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Representative of that position is certainly John Calvin. In his *Commentary on Jeremiah*, Calvin presents the following interpretation of our passage:

At the same time when the Prophet affirms that the extent of the city would not be less than it had been, we see that this prophecy must necessarily be referred to the kingdom of Christ: for though Jerusalem before Christ's coming was eminent and surrounded by a triple wall, and though it was celebrated through all the East, as even heathen writers say that it excelled every other city, yet it was never accomplished that the city flourished as under David and Solomon. We must then necessarily come to the spiritual state of the city, and explain the promise as the grace which came through Christ.⁷²

Calvin's reasoning here is fallacious at several levels with the most obviously being an "either-or" fallacy. While he states that the prophecy "affirms that the extent of the city would not be less," he inserts as a condition that if this prophecy were to have had a literal or geographical fulfillment, it would have occurred by the time of Christ. This is a condition that has no mention or justification in the text. Calvin readily admits that Jerusalem had not, to date, achieved the predicted boundaries (a literal fulfillment); therefore, the prophecy must have a figurative (non-literal) fulfillment of which Calvin offers two: (1) it refers to the "kingdom of Christ; or (2) "the grace which came through Christ."

Among the considerations possibly leading Calvin to this conclusion was the fact that in his lifetime Jerusalem had not been under "Christian" control since the expulsion of the

⁷¹ Barkay, "Northern and Western Jerusalem" II.

⁷² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and The Lamentations* (Vol. IV). Translated by John Owen, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, nd), 150-51. In the above quotation the editors of the text add the following footnote after the phrase "David and Solomon:"

Some think, such as Gataker and Blayney, that according to the description here given, the dimensions of the city are much larger than they had ever been before. The 'line' was to inclose [sic] a part at least of the hill of Gareb, the whole of Goath, supposed to be Golgotha, the valley of the carcasses, and the fields of Kidron, all which were formerly without the walls of the city.

Apparently, Calvin believed that Jerusalem had reached its territorial apex during the reigns of David and Solomon and the editors were attempting to mitigate this error in his research.

Crusaders in 1187, except for a brief period from 1229-39.⁷³ In fact during Calvin's own lifetime (1509-1564) Jerusalem remained firmly in Islamic hands, though governmental control did transition from the Mamelukes to the Ottoman Turks (in 1517). While the construction of new walls and gates around the city was accomplished under the direction of Suleiman I (the Magnificent) between 1537-41, Jerusalem remained a relatively small, politically insignificant, and an economically depressed city during this era with a population of only around 10,000.⁷⁴ During Suleiman's reign and afterwards a small number of Jews and Eastern Christians were allowed to reside in Jerusalem; however, their numbers and influence were negligible. Certainly, there was no reason to entertain any thoughts that these earthly circumstances would likely ever change. Also, consistent with his theology, Calvin does not give even the slightest consideration to the possibility of a more literal fulfillment subsequent to his own time.⁷⁵

Dealing with the final portion of the prophecy, which states that the city "shall not be plucked up, or overthrown anymore forever" (31:40b), Calvin states:

Moreover, this passage teaches us that the Church will be perpetual, and through God may permit it to be terribly shaken and tossed here and there, there will yet ever be some seed remaining, as long as the sun and the moon shall shine in the heavens, and the order of nature shall continue; so that all the elements, everything we see with our

⁷³ Price, *Jerusalem*, 352.

⁷⁴ Philip J. King, "Jerusalem" in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1992), 3:767. The city had been essentially without walls since 1219 when al-Malik al-Mu'azzam, the nephew of Saldin (who had retaken Jerusalem from the Crusaders) dismantled the walls he had built only seven years earlier when it appeared that a new army of Crusaders were about to retake the city and he did not want a well-fortified city to fall into their hands.

⁷⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles. (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1960), 3:25:5. Calvin states of chiliasts or premillennialists, "Now their fiction is too childish to need or be worth a refutation." Geerhardus Vos echos the same contempt calling premillennialism a "naïve type of faith," achieved only by means of a "reckless abuse of the fundamental principles of O.T. exegesis," a "perversion" and expresses disappointment that "pre-millennialism has not been psychologically studied" to discover why or how these naïve "characteristics" begin and perpetuate themselves. *The Pauline Eschatology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1930), 227.

eyes, bear evidence to the perpetuity of the Church, even that it will ever continue: for though Satan and all the world daily threaten its ruin, yet the Lord will in a wonderful manner preserve it to the end, so that it will never perish. This is the import of the passage.⁷⁶

Certainly the problem with this interpretative approach is that the words of the passage cease to have any real meaning and certainly have no meaning when it comes to the original readers. Could any in Jeremiah's immediate audience, later readers in the OT era, or even those of the New Testament era, possibly have read this text and concluded that its "import" was the "perpetuity of the Church"? As Wilken points out

For the ancient Israelites *land* always referred to an actual land. Eretz Israel was not a symbol of a higher reality. It was a distinct geographical entity, a territory with assumed, if not always precise boundaries.⁷⁷

Another example of this problem is the Lutheran commentator, Theodore Laetsch. In his commentary he exerts great effort to give precise information as to the geographic markers of the passage, details their location and explains the options but then remarkably concludes "the underlying idea of this passage (vv. 38-40) is not the enlargement of Jerusalem, but its complete sanctification. Even the areas formerly unclean 'shall be holy unto the Lord,'"⁷⁸ and equates the fulfillment with the "heavenly Jerusalem."⁷⁹ While the sanctification or consecration of the land that would be within proper boundaries of Jerusalem is an important aspect of the prophecy, the fact remains that the geographical expansion of the city is central to the entire fulfillment. If the prophecy speaks of the "heavenly Jerusalem," what need is there of asserting its "complete sanctification"? Is there

⁷⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁷⁷ Wilken, *The Land*, 8. (italics in original).

⁷⁸ Theodore Laetsch. *Bible Commentary: Jeremiah*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publications, 1952), 259.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

a part of heaven that is in need of sanctification or some part of it that was “formerly unclean”?

Feinberg correctly identifies the problem of this approach as he states, “in the broader context of prophecy, this passage will not permit an interpretation that applies it to a spiritual, heavenly, or symbolic Jerusalem. If that were possible, why is it so full of literal detail?”⁸⁰

The Fulfillment Option: Already

Perhaps the larger mass of interpretative conclusion rests in the idea of the prophecy being already fulfilled. Among others, this is the position of Hoekema, who, while not commenting directly on the text of Jeremiah 31:38-40, nevertheless states:

Old Testament prophecies about the restoration of Israel may also have multiple fulfillments. In fact, they may be fulfilled in a threefold way: *literally, figuratively, or antitypically*. . . As we have just seen, all the prophecies quoted about the restoration of Israel to its land have been literally fulfilled, either in the return from Babylonian captivity under Zerubbabel and Joshua (in 536 B.C.), or in a later return under Ezra (in 458 B.C.).⁸¹

The problems for Hoekema’s position here are several. First of all, as has already been detailed, the boundaries of the city predicted by Jeremiah were not accomplished by the post-exilic returns. In fact, as was pointed out in the discussion of the *Corner Gate*, Jerusalem, as fortified by Nehemiah, was significantly smaller than it had been prior to the exile. Michael Avi-Yonah states, “In the days of Nehemiah, the city seems to have shrunk again, being limited to the eastern hill.”⁸² Avigad adds his voice to this conclusion stating, “from all the

⁸⁰ Feinberg, *Jeremiah*, 10:579.

⁸¹ Anthony A. Hoekema. *The Bible and the Future*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), 209. (italics in the original).

⁸² Michael Avi-Yonah, “Jerusalem” in *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*.” Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976), 2:597.

above we can conclude that the minimalist view of the settlement in Jerusalem in the period of the Return to Zion is correct—that is, that it was limited to the narrow confines of the City of David, and that the *Mishneh* on the Western Hill remained desolate and uninhabited.”⁸³

Additionally, Kaiser brings another formidable challenge to bear:

While the sheer multiplicity of texts from almost every one of the prophets is staggering, a few evangelicals insist that this pledge to restore Israel to her land was fulfilled when Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah led their respective returns from the Babylonian Exile. But if the postexilic returns to the land fulfilled this promised restoration predicted by the prophets, why then did Zechariah continue to announce a still future return (10:8–12 {Zech 10}) in words that were peppered with the phrases and formulas of such prophecies as Isaiah 11:11 and Jeremiah 50:19?⁸⁴

To conclude that the prophecy has already been fulfilled in the manner Hoekema suggests is simply untenable; historical and archaeological data and the remainder of the OT simply will not allow for it.

O. Palmer Robertson has put forth a variation of this approach. Mixing a little of the “Never” approach of Calvin and the “Already” approach of Hoekema, he states:

It must not be forgotten that Israel as a nation was actually “restored to the land” after seventy years of captivity, just as Jeremiah had predicted (Jer. 29:10). The fact that this restoration did not correspond to the projected grandeur predicted by the prophets only points to a fulfillment beyond anything that could be realized in this world as it is presently constituted . . . The description of the restored Jerusalem in these prophecies anticipates a “New Jerusalem” coming down from heaven in the figurative perfections that will endure for eternity, not the temporal provisions of a mere one thousand years.⁸⁵

Here Robertson is attempting to have it both ways. While recognizing, as Calvin did, that the fulfillment of the Jeremiah’s prophecy simply did not occur with the “projected grandeur”

⁸³ Avigad, *Jerusalem*, 62 (italics in the original). See also Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Digging Up Jerusalem*. (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1974), 183-86.

⁸⁴ Kaiser, “The Promised Land,” 309.

⁸⁵ O. Palmer Robertson. *Understanding the Land of the Bible: A Biblical-Theological Guide*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishers, 1996), 142.

that the overall prophecy demands; he is unwilling to go as far as Calvin in simply declaring the import of the passage simply to be the “perpetuity of the Church.”⁸⁶ He states that:

Yet the context of the prophetic message concerning the new covenant resists a pure “spiritualization” of the blessings of this covenant. The language of the prophets contains far too much in terms of materially defined benedictions. The return of Israel to the land, the rebuilding of devastated cities, the reconstitution of the nation—even resurrection from the dead—play a vital role in the prophetic formulation of new covenant expectations.⁸⁷

However, Robertson’s solution to the problem is to replace the purely “spiritualized” interpretation of Calvin and others, with what is really an allegorical interpretation; which he calls “another kind of ‘literal’ fulfillment.”⁸⁸ He concludes that:

This historical return to a “land of promise” by a small remnant 70 years after Jeremiah’s prophecy encourages hope in the final return to paradise lost by the newly constituted “Israel of God.” As men from all nations had been dispossessed and alienated from the original creation, so now they may hope for restoration and peace, even to the extent of anticipating a “land of promise” sure to appear in the new creation, and sure to be enjoyed by a resurrected people.⁸⁹

But again, this line of exegetical reasoning simply renders the passage unintelligible to the original readers and equally mysterious to post-exilic Israel. As Wilken points out:

After the calamities of the sixth century Jewish life and institutions in the land had never been fully restored even though many Jews had returned to Judea and the temple was rebuilt. What the exilic and postexilic prophets had proclaimed with boundless confidence could hardly be identified with the condition of Palestinian Jewry during the centuries after the exile. Though Jews were living in Jerusalem they continued to hope for something grander and more glorious, “just as the prophets said” (Tob 14:5).⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Calvin, *Jeremiah*, 151.

⁸⁷ O. Palmer Robertson. *The Christ of the Covenants*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishers, 1980), 297.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 300

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Wilken, *Holy Land*, 22.

Kaiser also rejects Robertson's concept by stating, "To covenant theologians, we say that the inclusion of the Gentiles with Israel both throughout the history of redemption and especially after the cross may be obtained by solid grammatical-syntactical-theological exegesis without terminating God's offer to the Jews."⁹¹

Perhaps the decisive factor in rejecting this view is the fact that the last part of the prophecy asserts that Jerusalem "shall not be plucked up, or overthrown anymore forever" (31:40b). The simple fact is that since the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Nehemiah, the city *has been* destroyed on several occasions, the most significant being that of the Roman destruction of 70 A.D. Henderson's attempted explanation where he postulates that "forever, is here to be taken with the same limitation as it is frequently when applied to matters connected with the old dispensation,"⁹² is certainly most unsatisfactory.

Another approach in the "Already" camp is a reductionist approach to the text. In this view the passage is a later addition that served as either incentive or propaganda to spur on the rebuilding efforts of Nehemiah. According to liberal scholars the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:38-40 "may date to Nehemiah, governor of Jerusalem in the Persian period (538-332 B.C.E.)."⁹³ As we already noted George Adam Smith called the passage an "exilic addition."⁹⁴ McKane agrees with this assertion and states that the "prophecy" of 31:38-40 indicates activity that "had been planned and was taking place."⁹⁵ Somehow this passage was inserted into the text of Jeremiah to "ground it in a prediction, rich in detail, that

⁹¹ Walter C. Kaiser. *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1985), 192.

⁹² Henderson, *Jeremiah*, 192.

⁹³ Philip J. King. *Jeremiah: An Archaeological Companion*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 69.

⁹⁴ Smith, *Jerusalem*, 2:261.

⁹⁵ McKane, *Jeremiah*, 834.

Jerusalem would be rebuilt and extended.”⁹⁶ This approach dismisses the unity of the text of Jeremiah and handles a predictive prophecy that doesn’t fit into a preconceived scheme by relegating it to non-reality.⁹⁷ And, as Thompson states, “One ought not too hastily deny such a statement to Jeremiah.”⁹⁸ To this Kitchen adds, “to date much (or any) of Jeremiah to distinctly later periods (e.g., fifth to third centuries) would seem impractical.”⁹⁹

One other example of the “already” position are those, even among some premillennialists,¹⁰⁰ who take the 1948 reconstitution of Israel as a nation as a fulfillment of OT prophecy. In an article on his website (www.reasons.org), Hugh Ross offers this passage, along with many others, as “proof” of the Bible’s accuracy:

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Another example of this kind of approach is that of Walter Brueggemann in his *To Build, To Plant: A Commentary on Jeremiah 26-52* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), esp. 77. Brueggemann asserts that:

His the oracle is not simply reflective of a single rebuilding effort, but looms as a pervasive and enduring promise that marks the life and destiny of the city of Jerusalem in every time and circumstance. This oracle assures that Jerusalem in every time is a city under the powerful promise of God for rebuilding and for well-being.

Of course, this simply is an obfuscation of the fact that the prophecy asserts that Jerusalem will “not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever.” Of this approach Busenitz states, “Those who embrace the historical-grammatical approach may find the theological focus [of this commentary] less helpful than they desire.” (Irvin A. Busenitz, Review of *To Build, To Plant: A Commentary on Jeremiah 26-52*, *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 3:2 [Fall 1992], 220). An observation with which we heartily agree.

⁹⁸ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 585.

⁹⁹ Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 381.

¹⁰⁰ Remarkably Walvoord (John F. Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible*, [Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1999. Formerly titled, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*], 141) posits the notion that:

This remarkable prophecy, given by Jeremiah almost 2,500 years ago, has seen modern fulfillment in the recapture of Jerusalem. Modern Jerusalem has built up this precise area, and today there are lovely apartments and streets in a location formerly used as a place for garbage heaps and dead bodies. In spite of the fact that Jerusalem has been demolished many times, God declared that this section will not be demolished but will continue to be holy to the Lord until the Second Coming.

Here Walvoord places himself in the “Already” category of interpretation of this passage. However, he is clearly wrong at almost every point of fulfillment he expounds. The prophecy states that Jerusalem as a whole city will be “holy” and immune from destruction, not simply a “section” (which he fails to define). Additionally, an actual survey of the Hinnom and Kidron valleys on the outskirts of modern Jerusalem fail to

The exact location and construction sequence of Jerusalem's nine suburbs was predicted by Jeremiah about 2600 years ago. He referred to the time of this building project as "the last days," that is, the time period of Israel's second rebirth as a nation in the land of Palestine (Jeremiah 31:38-40). This rebirth became history in 1948, and the construction of the nine suburbs has gone forward precisely in the locations and in the sequence predicted.¹⁰¹

That the rebirth of Israel as a nation in 1948 is actually predictive of any Old Testament prophecy is dubious; beyond this however, Ross forgets that from 1948 to 1967 Jerusalem remained under Jordanian control and that whatever building has gone on around the city since then, nothing has been done on the scale that Jeremiah's prophecy demands either geographically (in terms of size) or spiritually (in terms of holiness).

The Fulfillment Option: Not Yet

The final option in the fulfillment of this prophecy is that it is still yet to occur.

Summarizing the premillennial position of dispensationalism, Hoekema correctly points out:

A great many passages in the Psalms and prophets (e.g., Ps. 72:1-20; Is. 2:1-4; 11:1-9, 11-16; 65:18-25; Jer. 23:5-6; Amos 9:11-15; Mic. 4:1-4; Zech. 14:1-9, 16-21) predict that the people of Israel will at some future time once again be regathered in the land of Canaan, will enjoy a time of prosperity and blessing, will have a special place of privilege above other nations, and will live under the benevolent and perfect rule of their Messiah, the descendant of David. *Since none of these promises has yet been fulfilled, dispensationalists expect them to be fulfilled during Christ's millennial reign.*¹⁰²

As has already been shown, Jeremiah's prophecy is simply too detailed to be relegated to a "spiritual" fulfillment such as Calvin's and the details are such that a supposed fulfillment in the return after the Babylonian Captivity is impossible. As Blayney states:

show the "lovely apartments and streets." Finally, it is difficult to see how even the temple area can currently be considered "holy to the Lord until the Second Coming" as currently it is under Islamic control.

Here follows a description of the circumference of a new city to be built on the site of Jerusalem; but that it does not mean the city which was rebuilt after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, is evident from two principal circumstances; first, because the limits are here extended farther, so as to include a greater space than was contained within the walls at that time; and, secondly, it is here said that it should never be razed or destroyed anymore. This new city therefore must be referred to those after times, when the general restoration of Israel is appointed to take place.¹⁰³

The major parts of the prophecy again are as follows: (1) the city will be rebuilt and enlarged; (2) it would be sanctified; (3) it would be immune from destruction forever. So expansive was this prophecy McKane, summarizing the conclusions of the famous 10th century Rabbinic commentator David Kimhi, states:

Kimchi assumes that the rebuilding programme would include provision for a third temple which, unlike the first and second, would never suffer destruction and it is on this third temple that he focuses the final promise of the verse [31:40]. The prediction (so Rashi) looks to a far future and a final redemption and it was not fulfilled in the times of the first and second temple.¹⁰⁴

This explanation fits well into the reading of the text.

Dealing with the parts of the prophecy again we see that no feature of it has been fulfilled at any level. After Jeremiah's time the city was rebuilt, under Nehemiah and then later enlarged (especially the temple area) under the auspices of Herod the Great. However, it was never enlarged to the extent that Jeremiah's prophecy expects; and, has not been enlarged to that extent up to the present time.

The second part of the prophecy is that this enlarged area would be "sanctified" or made "holy" by God. Again, this part of the prophecy has no fulfillment to date, as the

¹⁰¹ Hugh Ross, "Fulfilled Prophecy: Evidence for the Reliability of the Bible." <http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/prophecy.shtml> accessed on 16 Jan 2006. Ross calculates (somehow) that a "chance" fulfillment of this prophecy incurs odds of 1 in 10¹⁸.

¹⁰² Hoekema, *Bible and Future*, 188-89, (italics ours).

¹⁰³ Blayney, *Jeremiah*, 375.

specific boundaries are yet to be achieved. As Von Orelli states, “special emphasis is laid on the circumstance, then even the quarters about Jerusalem that were regarded as under a curse or impure, will share in the holiness which ensures indestructibility to all Jerusalem.”¹⁰⁵

The third aspect of this prophecy is the most problematic for those who wish to see an “already” fulfillment. As Carroll notes the prophecy assures Israel that,

The plucking up (*nts*) and the overthrowing (*hrs*) of the city in the past (587 and subsequently/) will be reversed in the future building of the area, (this motif appears in Isa. 48.2; 52.1). Such sacred status will afford the city permanent protection.¹⁰⁶

Others note that the certain meaning of the passage is that “the sacredness of the whole district will ensure that no one can again destroy what is built.”¹⁰⁷ “In strong language the section closes with the affirmation that the city will be invincible forever.”¹⁰⁸ However, the historical fact is that Jerusalem has been destroyed several times, even after the rebuilding of Nehemiah.¹⁰⁹ Fretheim, who affirms the “already” scheme, nonetheless admits the weakness of his position at this point noting that, “the promise that it [Jerusalem] will never be uprooted or overthrown seems to have fallen short of fulfillment.”¹¹⁰

Conclusion

¹⁰⁴ McKane, *Jeremiah*, 833.

¹⁰⁵ Von Orelli, *Jeremiah*, 242.

¹⁰⁶ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 618.

¹⁰⁷ Van Orelli, *Jeremiah*, 237.

¹⁰⁸ Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” 6:589.

¹⁰⁹ Contrary to those who see some sort of fulfillment of prophecy in 1948, there is nothing prophetically to prevent Jerusalem from being destroyed again. It is only the return of Christ and the establishment of the millennial kingdom that brings to fulfillment of Jer 31:38-40 to fruition.

¹¹⁰ Terence E. Fretheim. *Commentary on Jeremiah*. Smith and Helwys Bible Commentary. (Macon, GA: Smith and Helwys, 2002), 287. His explanation that “This is not unusual for Hebrew prophecy, not least because changing situations regularly occasion adjustments of one kind or another,” is anemic and self-defeating.

Jeremiah, in the face of the destruction of Jerusalem; either an accomplished fact or an imminent threat as he received this prophecy, predicts a future time¹¹¹ when the city will be rebuilt. The city will be changed in almost every way, changed in a manner that simply renders a “Never” or “Already” fulfillment entirely implausible.

As the future capital of the Messiah’s earthly kingdom, it will be rebuilt and enlarged; a necessity from the severe damaged which occurs during the tribulation (e.g., Rev 11:13)¹¹². The city’s topography will be altered so that the city is elevated (Zech 14:10). This enlarged and elevated city will be sanctified and become “holy to the Lord.” The city will be inviolable, never again falling victim to the destruction of war or natural disaster.¹¹³ Even when Satan rallies the nations to march against the city, during his short release from the bottomless pit (Rev 20:7) the city itself will suffer no harm. Before the rebels can launch their attack God directly intervenes and “fire came down from heaven and devoured them” (Rev 20:9). Certainly J. Barton Payne, late professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, was correct in assigning the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:38-40 to the period of the future “millennial kingdom.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ See Colin Brown’s excellent discussion of “time” as it relates to the futuristic aspect of prophecy in *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 2:888-92, esp, 890.

¹¹² Robert L. Thomas. *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 98.

¹¹³ Randall Price. *The Coming Last Days Temple*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1999), 190.

¹¹⁴ J. Barton Payne. *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and Their Fulfillment*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 329.