

Jeremiah's New Exodus in Galatians

Lisa Beyeler

Pesher Group: Pauline Theology

Dr. Leithart, Dean of Graduate Studies

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Introduction

The challenge of finding a cohesive literary theme in the books of Jeremiah and Galatians has been a source of frustration for many theologians. On one hand, the book of Jeremiah

presents problems for the Biblical literary critic in its confusing chronology and a seemingly random set of accounts of Jeremiah's life and ministry. "The person who is not confused by reading the book of Jeremiah has not understood it!" wrote Robert Carroll.¹ And R.R. Wilson wrote, "From the standpoint of literary analysis, the book of Jeremiah presents some of the most frustrating problems to be found anywhere."² On the other hand, the book of Galatians has been understood primarily as Paul's exposition on the works of the law and justification by faith. This traditional view of Galatians has resulted in a fragmented epistle wherein portions of the book that do not emphasize the law or justification are passed over in favor of the more "relevant" sections of the epistle. Recently, however, the works of such scholars as J. Louis Martyn and N. T. Wright have deemphasized the traditional theme of Galatians in order to focus on the greater idea of the letter. Martyn has concentrated on the apocalyptic nature of Galatians while Wright has concentrated on both the apocalyptic nature of the book and Paul's efforts to grapple with the new covenant under Jesus within the framework of first century Judaism. Wright's argument for the "new perspective on Paul" emphasizes Paul's understanding of the Scriptures as a story moving towards a final end:

"For Paul, the story was always moving towards a climax; it contained within it, at specific and non-arbitrary moments, advance warnings and promises about that climax; it contained within it, again at not arbitrary moments, prefigurements of that climax (the story of Isaac, of the Exodus, and so forth); and, most importantly, it was the story whose climax, Paul believed, *had now arrived*."³

These "prefigurements" of the covenantal climax are evident throughout Galatians, from the Abrahamic covenant (3.8), to the story of Isaac (4.22-31), to the exodus (4.1-7). The book of Jeremiah is also seeped in Pentateuch motifs, including the exodus. In this paper I will trace the development of the new exodus narrative arc that begins in Jeremiah and is expanded and made complete in Galatians. I will argue that one of Paul's concerns in his

¹ Carroll, Robert. Quoted from *New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon*. Liberty Theological Seminary and Graduate School, Faculty Publications and Presentations: Lynchburg, VA, 1.

² Wilson, Robert R. Quoted from *New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45*, 1.

³ Wright, N.T. 1991. *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and Law in Pauline Theology*. T&T Clark: Edinburgh, Scotland, 264.

letter to the Galatians is to present Jesus as the one who fulfills the hope of Jeremiah's long-anticipated "new exodus."

Exodus and Anti-Exodus in Jeremiah

The Pattern of Jeremiah: The Curse of Faithlessness

Jeremiah begins his first oracle with the cheerful recounting of the faithful love of God's people at the beginning of their spiritual betrothal to Him at the exodus. Israel gave her Husband great delight when she followed Him out of Egypt, forsaking her former life of bondage, to form a new life with Him. And she was joyful in the prospect of freedom and the promise of inheritance in her marriage to Yahweh.

"I remember you,
The kindness of your youth,
The love of your betrothal,
When you went after Me in the wilderness,
In a land not sown.
Israel was holiness to the Lord,
The firstfruits of His increase."⁴

Her initial love and faithfulness, however, quickly turns to infidelity and abandonment. Israel's faithlessness is inexcusable in light of the generous love of her Husband. Her shameful apostasy is so disgraceful that the Lord contrasts the unfaithfulness of Israel to the faithfulness of the heathen nations to their gods. Even idolatrous nations remain true to their false gods. And yet Israel has the audacity to turn away from the God that *does* exist. The Lord displays his astonishment at the adultery of His bride.

"Has a nation changed its gods,
Which are not gods?
But my people have changed their Glory
For what does not profit.
Be astonished, O heavens, at this.

⁴ Jeremiah 2.2-3.

And be horribly afraid;
Be very desolate,' says the Lord.'"⁵

The promise of exodus and the overturning of this promise as a result of Israel's faithlessness is a central theme in the book of Jeremiah. Exodus allusions and references to the exile of the Israelites in the wilderness and their subsequent conquest of Canaan are prevalent throughout the book as well as Israel's habitual return to unfaithfulness and eventual exile.

Jeremiah's promise of restoration for Israel in chapters 30-33 is book ended by the warnings against unfaithfulness and the corresponding judgment of Israel in chapters 1-29, and the pronouncements and events of judgment upon the remnant following the exile in chapters 33-52. Chapters 30-33 stand out as a singular beacon of hope in the midst of judgment and ruination. Jeremiah describes the promise of a new exodus for the Israelites who are in exile in Babylon that will be greater the old exodus: "For behold the days are coming,' says the Lord,' that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah,' says the Lord. 'And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.'"⁶ The terms that the Lord uses to describe Judah's enslavement in slavery is Exodus language and is related to the oppression experienced by the Israelites in Egypt.⁷ Similarly, the redemption the Israelites seek is freedom from a Gentile nation.⁸ Israel's cries of oppression are also acknowledged by the Lord as He heard the cries of the Israelites in Egypt: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more."⁹ As the Israelites plundered the Egyptians and then witnessed their miraculous destruction at the Red Sea, so the people of Israel will pillage their oppressors and behold their ruin.¹⁰ The Lord will also lead the Israelites back to their homeland, supplying them during their journey through the wilderness with water and providing them with a straight

⁵ Jeremiah 2.11-12.

⁶ Jeremiah 30.3.

⁷ Jeremiah 30.8.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Jeremiah 31.15.

¹⁰ Jeremiah 30.16-17.

route.¹¹ The new exodus will culminate in the singing of God's praise and joyful dancing in a rich land that is "like a well-watered garden."¹² This echoes Miriam's song and dance after the deliverance of the old exodus, and furthermore a return to Eden.¹³

The beginning of Jeremiah up to the promise of the new exodus in chapters 30-33, and the conclusion of Jeremiah following this promise outline the warnings of impending judgment and the eventual overturning of the new exodus in favor of the anti-exodus, or "no exodus."¹⁴ The first third of Jeremiah, chapters 1-30, focus on God's warnings to the people of Judah for their unabashed disobedience and rebellion. He warns His people of their coming judgment and exile, but implores them to heed His warnings so that He might pronounce mercy upon them. The Lord's enduring patience, has been imposed upon for far too long, however, and the Lord who is quick to forgive, cannot be pressed any further. "Then the Lord said to me, 'Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight and let them go forth.'"¹⁵ The Israelites are threatened with exile and enslavement, a return to Egypt. The culmination of Israel's rebellion in the beginning chapters of Jeremiah is their refusal to submit to Gedaliah's exhortation to submit to the authority of the Babylonians in Jeremiah 29. It is ironically their refusal to be "enslaved" that will result in the eventual reversal of the exodus wherein the Israelites will truly be enslaved in Egypt, which Jeremiah warns in the sign act will be a place of death and destruction.¹⁶ Yahweh's anger reaches a climax in chapters 33-52 wherein Johanan takes the remnant of Judah, including Jeremiah and Baruch the son of Neriah, to Egypt to flee from the Babylonians after their assassination of Gedaliah.¹⁷ Johanan's rebellious descent into Egypt with the remnant describes the ultimate covenant curse, the return to slavery in Egypt, the anti-exodus.¹⁸ The contrast between the glorious

¹¹ Jeremiah 31.9.

¹² Jeremiah 31.12-14.

¹³ Exodus 15.20-21.

¹⁴ Yates, Gary. 2006. *New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon*. Liberty Theological Seminary and Graduate School, Faculty Publications and Presentations: Lynchburg, VA, 8.

¹⁵ Jeremiah 15.1.

¹⁶ Jeremiah 43.9-13.

¹⁷ Jeremiah 43.1-6.

¹⁸ Yates, Gary. 2006. *New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon*. Liberty Theological Seminary and Graduate School, Faculty Publications and Presentations: Lynchburg, VA, 9.

hope of the promise of the new exodus in chapters 30-33 and the return to enslavement in Egypt in the following chapters is a frightening reversal of the original exodus and deliverance from slavery for Israel. Gary Yates describes these two contrasting themes as “new exodus” and “no exodus,” which he believes to be the primary focus of chapters 26-45.¹⁹ I would argue that Yates’ motif is present throughout the entire book of Jeremiah, with chapters 26-45 as the pinnacle of the development of this theme that serves as a warning to the remnant of Judah exiled in Babylon.

Because of the sins of the nation, Israel will live a life of covenant cursing in the land of her oppressors. Yahweh has divorced His bride, and she has returned to the bondage of her youth. She has forsaken the joy of her union with God in favor of strife and affliction, and Jeremiah can only offer mixed hope for the future of Israel. The promises of new exodus will ultimately fulfilled, that is certain, but it the promises are open-ended as to when they will be realized, and when Israel restored to obedience and faithfulness.²⁰

Jeremiah: The New Moses

As a part of the exodus imagery in Jeremiah, the prophet himself is portrayed as a new Moses. Jeremiah is the overseer of Israel’s covenant with the Lord, and understanding their unfaithfulness to the Mosaic covenant, looks to a new covenant to bring Israel to repentance and faithfulness:

“Moses had led the Israelites to God’s first covenant, and thereby obedience to him and his gift to them of the land became correlated. But now in the eyes of Jeremiah the people had disobeyed, and the land was no longer theirs; and so, as the new Moses in the face of the new wilderness into which the people had been sent, Jeremiah dared to look forward to the time when God would draw up a new covenant, thereby to fulfill his ultimate purposes for his people.”²¹

Jeremiah was a prophet who regarded to be in succession of Moses and who rightfully

¹⁹ Yates, Gary. 2006. *New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon*. Liberty Theological Seminary and Graduate School, Faculty Publications and Presentations: Lynchburg, VA, 8.

²⁰ Jeremiah 31. 31-34.

²¹ Holladay, William L. Quoted from *New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon*. Liberty Theological Seminary and Graduate School, Faculty Publications and Presentations: Lynchburg, VA, 5.

wielded this authority to call Israel back to faithfulness to Her Lord. Yahweh's commission to Jeremiah, to be a "prophet to the nations,"²² was not willingly accepted. Like Moses, who objected to God's calling saying, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue,"²³ Jeremiah protests, claiming he lacks the power of speech as well: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth."²⁴ The Lord's response to Jeremiah echoes God's promise of a future prophet to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18:

"But the Lord said to me:
'Do not say, 'I am a youth,'
For you shall go to all to whom I send you,
And whatever I command you, you shall speak.
Do not be afraid of their faces,
For I am with you to deliver you,' says the Lord.

Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me:

"Behold, I have put My words in your mouth."²⁵

The pattern of disobedience in the face of increasingly urgent warnings by the Lord through Jeremiah also mirrors the Israelites' proclivity to unfaithfulness despite Moses' repeated exhortations to faithful obedience. The fickle obedience of Johanan in Jeremiah 42, who sought counsel with the prophet after the assassination of Gedaliah, is similar to the fleeting pledge of faithfulness by the Israelites when Moses prepares to climb Mount Sinai to receive the law of God.²⁶ In response to Johanan's request, Jeremiah inquires of the Lord on their behalf only to be accused of being a false prophet and ultimately taken into captivity in Egypt after Jeremiah declares the word of God to Johanan and his men.²⁷ The disobedience of Johanan is similar to the near immediate disobedience of the Israelites at Mount Sinai,

²² Jeremiah 1.5.

²³ Exodus 4.19.

²⁴ Jeremiah 1.6.

²⁵ Jeremiah 1.7-9.

²⁶ Yates, Gary. 2006. *New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon*. Liberty Theological Seminary and Graduate School, Faculty Publications and Presentations: Lynchburg, VA, 8.

²⁷ Jeremiah 42.1-43.6.

who, while waiting for Moses to descend from the mount, built for themselves a gold calf to worship in Yahweh's stead.²⁸ Finally, Jeremiah, like Moses, is unable to lead Israel to obedience in order that they might live a life of covenant blessing in the land of their inheritance. And, as in the original exodus story, the new Moses is excluded from the promise land because of the sins of his people.²⁹

Jeremiah's New Covenant Hope

The promise of new exodus presented in chapters 30-33 foretells the coming of a new covenant between the Lord and His people wherein Israel will have "the law in their minds and...in their hearts."³⁰ This new covenant will produce a faithful and obedient nation who will receive the promise land and all of the covenant blessings available. The people of God will no longer need instruction in the knowledge of the Lord, "for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord."³¹ Through the new covenant, the Lord will enable His people to overcome their own wickedness, and He will forgive all of the iniquities of His people, "remember[ing] their sin no more."³² The promises of the new covenant echo the words of the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!

You shall love the Lord your God with all your *heart*, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

And these words, which I command you today shall be in your *heart*.

You shall *teach* them diligently to your *children*, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets *between your eyes*.

You shall write them on the doorposts of your *house* and on your gates.

So it shall be, when the Lord your God *brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers*, to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob, *to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build.*"³³

Jeremiah's new covenant is the promise of true obedience to the *Shema* by the people of

²⁸ Exodus 32.1-6.

²⁹ Jeremiah 43.5-6.

³⁰ Jeremiah 31.33.

³¹ Jeremiah 31.34

³² Jeremiah 31.34.

³³ Deuteronomy 6.1-10. Italics mine.

God. And it is clear in the book of Jeremiah that the hope of this new covenant lies in the remnants of Israel who are exiled in Babylon.³⁴ The Lord portrays the exiled remnants as “good figs,”³⁵ and because, although they deserve their state of exile, they obeyed God by submitting to the authority of the Babylonians. In Jeremiah’s vision of the good and bad figs, the Lord promises to “bring them back to this land; I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.”³⁶ Yahweh’s promise to the exiled remnant also reflects His promise in the *Shema* to the Israelites in Exodus. He promises to give them the inheritance of the promise land and to grow and cultivate them as a people. Likewise, the Lord commands the exiles in Jeremiah 29 to bring about the promise of the *Shema* (albeit under the authority of the Babylonians):

“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon:

‘Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit.

Takes wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters – that you may be increased there, and not diminished.”³⁷

The disobedience of the remnant serves as a reminder to the exiles in Babylon of the cost of disobedience to the word of God.³⁸ The remnant could have enjoyed the blessings of faithfulness if they had heeded the words of Gedaliah to settle in the land of Babylon and submit to their authority.³⁹ Instead, the remnant murders Gedaliah in spite of the blessings of his leadership. They are spared judgment by the interceding prayers of Jeremiah and they

³⁴ Yates, Gary. 2006. *New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon*. Liberty Theological Seminary and Graduate School, Faculty Publications and Presentations: Lynchburg, VA, 14.

³⁵ Jeremiah 24.2-10.

³⁶ Jeremiah 24. 6-7.

³⁷ Jeremiah 29.4-6.

³⁸ Yates, Gary. 2006. *New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon*. Liberty Theological Seminary and Graduate School, Faculty Publications and Presentations: Lynchburg, VA, 21.

³⁹ Jeremiah 40.9-10.

pledge fidelity to the Lord, but their promise is fickle. Johanan disregards the wise counsel of Jeremiah and flees to Egypt, where the Lord inflicts His punishment to the remnant by reversing the promise of the exodus. The exiles witness the judgment of the remnant and through by experience are exhorted to remain faithful and obedient to the Lord.

“Yahweh will restore his people from exile with a second exodus even greater than the first, but the exodus reversal experienced by the remnant in the land as the final chronological event in the ministry of Jeremiah suggests that unbelief and disobedience remain as impediments to the blessings of restoration promised to the exilic community...While looking forward to the fulfillment of Yahweh’s promises of restoration and renewal, the exilic community must also look backward and learn from the experiences of the remnant in the land that missed out on potential blessing because of their disobedience to the word of Yahweh.”⁴⁰

New Exodus in Galatians

The Pattern of Galatians: The Promise of Faithfulness

Paul begins his letter to the Galatians by rebuking their faithlessness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He accuses the Galatians of distorting the true Gospel, and exhorts them to keep the orthodox view of the Gospel that was presented to them by Paul himself. By seeking to pervert the Gospel, Paul claims that the Galatians are turning away from, “Him who called you in the Gospel of Christ,” that is, Jesus Christ, their bridegroom.⁴¹

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”⁴²

Paul “marvels” at the faithlessness of the Galatians just as Yahweh was “astonished” by the infidelity of His bride in Jeremiah 2.11-12. He cannot believe that the Galatians would so quickly abandon their Husband. For Paul, the desire of the Galatians to pervert the Gospel

⁴⁰ Yates, Gary. 2006. *New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon*. Liberty Theological Seminary and Graduate School, Faculty Publications and Presentations: Lynchburg, VA, 22.

⁴¹ Galatians 1.6.

⁴² Galatians 1.6-8.

reflects their desire to re-enslave themselves, to return to Egypt.⁴³ This is the same trajectory of the Israelites in Jeremiah who had the audacity to turn away from God and flee to Egypt after the assassination of Gedaliah. The story for Paul, however, does not end in bondage as it did for the remnant of Israel in Jeremiah. Paul's account of the Galatian story is an exodus narrative that moves from slavery, to adoption as sons, to the temptation to return to slavery, to the warnings against disobedience and threat of disinheritance, and finally to obedience and inheritance.⁴⁴ The reversal of the exodus in Jeremiah is set right and made complete in Paul's narration of the Galatians' own story. Instead of ending in captivity, Paul promises the Galatians Israel's long-delayed inheritance: new creation. Paul's story of God's salvation of the Galatians does not simply allude to Jeremiah's exodus, but he constructs a Jeremaic exodus paradigm that informs their understanding of their redemption in Christ.

Just as the Israelites' story in Jeremiah began with bondage, so the Galatians' story, as Paul recounts it, begins with slavery. Throughout the letter, Paul recalls their initial state of enslavement, when they were separated from Christ, and exhorts them not to return to slavery. "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world."⁴⁵ The Galatians are a new Israel, who, just as Israel was imprisoned in her "youth,"⁴⁶ were also in bondage as "children." Paul reminds the Galatians of the yoke of slavery they carried under the bondage of the law. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."⁴⁷

The Jeremaic tone of Paul's language echoes the Lord's promise new covenant promise to the remnant of Israel in Jeremiah 30: "For it shall come to pass in that day," says the Lord of hosts, "That I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; foreigners shall no more enslave them,"⁴⁸ which is an allusion to Leviticus 26: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; I have broken the bands of your yoke and made you walk upright."⁴⁹ The power of God is made known to his people through this divine freedom from slavery. The Galatians

⁴³ Galatians 4.9.

⁴⁴ Keesmaat, Sylvia C. 1996. *Paul and His Story: Exodus and Tradition in Galatians*. Horizons in Biblical Theology 18. Brill: Boston, MA, 140.

⁴⁵ Galatians 4.3.

⁴⁶ Jeremiah 2.2.

⁴⁷ Galatians 5.1.

⁴⁸ Jeremiah 30.8.

⁴⁹ Leviticus 26.13.

have experienced the saving power of God and should therefore know that their God is Lord.

Paul's exodus narrative then moves to the Lord's adoption of the Galatians and sons, to make them heir to Christ's inheritance. They are no longer subject to the law of Moses, but are sons of God through adoption. This pattern of redemption from enslavement to sonship is the bedrock of the exodus story and is the paradigm for the new exodus in Jeremiah, which Paul applies to and fulfills in the story of the Galatians.

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”⁵⁰

The Galatians' adoption as sons stands in contrast to their bondage of slavery as children.⁵¹ As sons of God, the Galatians have experienced true freedom in as heirs of the promise. The book of Jeremiah is also riddled with themes of sonship rooted in the exodus. Jeremiah uses terms of marriage to describe Israel's joyful “adoption” in his first oracle,⁵² but when entreating His people to return to faithfulness, mixes marital terminology with that of sonship: “Return, O backsliding children,’ says the Lord, ‘for I am married to you... You shall call Me, ‘My Father,’ and not turn away from Me.’ Surely as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel,’ says the Lord.”⁵³ Jeremiah is variously the husband of an unfaithful wife and the father of wayward children. This interplay between familial relations heightens the anguish of Yahweh over His people; He feels the pain of both husband and father. This combination of familial imagery also emphasizes the high hopes the Lord had for His people. As a husband, the Lord longed to rescue His bride from the bonds of slavery to share a new life with Him, and as a father, the Lord hoped to give His children all of the blessings of His rich inheritance. The new exodus of Jeremiah through their adoption as sons, promised a great inheritance, that of

⁵⁰ Galatians 4.4-7.

⁵¹ Galatians 4.3.

⁵² Jeremiah 2.2.

⁵³ Jeremiah 3.14, 19-20.

bride and heir.

Despite the promise of their glorious inheritance as adopted sons of God, the next section of Paul's new exodus narrative is the Galatians' temptation to return to the yoke of slavery. By the act of circumcision, the Galatians, in Paul's view, seek to exchange their freedom in Christ for bondage to the law. This temptation is unbelievable to Paul because the Galatians have experienced sonship in Christ and cannot comprehend how they would want to forfeit their freedom. "But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?"⁵⁴ Paul's question to the Galatians echoes the Lord's own question to the Israelites in Jeremiah 2:

“What injustice have your fathers found in Me?
That they have gone far from Me,
Have followed idols,
And have become idolaters?
Neither did they say,
‘Where is the Lord, who brought us out of the land of Egypt?
Who led us through the wilderness,
Through a land of deserts and pits,
Through a land of drought and the shadow of death,
Through a land that no one crossed
And where no one dwelt?’
I brought you into a bountiful country,
To eat its fruit and its goodness.
But when you entered, you defiled my land
And made My heritage an abomination.”

Paul uses the imagery of Jeremiah's exodus to compare the Galatians' desire to submit to the yoke of circumcision to the habitual disobedience of the Israelites in Jeremiah that eventually leads to their disinheritance. Specifically, it brings to mind Johanan's desire to flee to Egypt, the land of their enslavement, in unabashed defiance of the Lord's exhortation through

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Galatians 4.8-9.

Jeremiah.⁵⁵ The Galatians are aligning themselves to Johanan, a type of Pharaoh, by persisting in their desire to be torah-keepers. Ultimately, the Galatians' temptation also brings to mind Israel's appeals to Moses in the wilderness, to return them to slavery in Egypt.⁵⁶

In light of the Galatians' temptation to follow in the disobedience of the Israelites in Jeremiah, Paul warns them in his letter that those who persist in rebellion will not receive the inheritance as sons. In opposition to the false teachers, who preach that obedience to the law of Moses will result in the promised new kingdom, Paul proclaims that such stringent adherence will actually result in their disinheritance and enslavement.

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you before hand, just as I also told you in times past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”⁵⁷

The exodus motif in Jeremiah serves as a vivid example of the promise of inheritance for faithfulness, and the revocation of the promised inheritance for disobedience. The descendants of the exiled remnant in Babylon are heirs of God while the remnant who have fled to Egypt are enemies of God. Yahweh promises restoration for the exiled remnant after seventy years of submission to the Babylonians: “For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.”⁵⁸ It is significant that their redemption is still contingent on their continued faithful obedience to the Lord. This promise of their restoration to the exiles is sharply contrasted with the promise of judgment for the remnant in Egypt:

“Then hear now the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah! Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘If you wholly set your faces to enter Egypt, and go to dwell there, then it shall be that the sword which you feared shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt; the famine if which you were

⁵⁵ Jeremiah 43.4-6.

⁵⁶ Numbers 11.1-6.

⁵⁷ Numbers 11.1-6.

⁵⁸ Jeremiah 29.10.

afraid shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there you shall die.”⁵⁹

This “remnant of Judah” will fall by the sword and will leave behind no remnant, but will be childless. The exile’s descendants are children of promise and inheritance, while the remnant’s descendants are disinherited through the assurance of their own extinction. Paul’s works of the flesh are also echoes of Jeremiah’s exodus, for Israel participated in the wicked actions listed in Galatians 5 against her Lord in Jeremiah..

Paul’s exodus narrative of the Galatians’ story does not end in disinheritance and annihilation or in uncertain promises of inheritance. The final movement of his narrative ends in new creation. Paul marries the promise of new creation with the saving power of Jesus Christ. Thus he claims that participation in the suffering of Christ will lead to true inheritance.

“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”⁶⁰

Paul has emphasized again and again in his letter to the Galatians that adherence to the works of the law is bondage. If the Galatians truly seek freedom, they must turn away from their desire to submit to the law. The new exodus has already been enacted for them in the work of Jesus Christ. This is where true freedom is to be found. It is this reality that informs all of Paul’s words in his epistle and overturns and completes Jeremiah’s reverse exodus. The chronological events in the book of Jeremiah end with the Israelite remnant’s return to slavery in Egypt. The promises of new covenant in Jeremiah 30-33 are shadowed by Israel’s captivity. Jeremiah looks forward to a new covenant, but his hope is bittersweet because of the uncertain timing of these promises. Jeremiah does not know when Israel will be restored to faithfulness. Paul is on the other side of the Lord’s promises. He has met the promised One of Israel and lives in light of His new covenant where the Lord promises a restored Israel and her inheritance. Paul finishes the narrative arc of the exodus from the

⁵⁹ Jeremiah 42.15-16.

⁶⁰ Galatians 6.14-16.

descent of the Israelites into Egypt in Jeremiah to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the reality of His new covenant for His people as expressed in his letter to the Galatians.

Paul: The New Jeremiah

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul presents himself as a prophet in the succession of Jeremiah, and ultimately Moses. Like Jeremiah, Paul was called to the ministry from infancy: “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace...”⁶¹ The Lord’s early commission of Paul echoes Jeremiah’s account of the beginning of his ministry: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”⁶² Paul is also exhorted to “preach Him among the Gentiles [or nations].”⁶³ Both Jeremiah and Paul were born of a priestly heritage into an age of religious and moral declensions, and are rejected and persecuted. Jeremiah is beaten repeatedly on account of his prophecies and is, under the authority of Zedekiah, even left for dead in a well:

“So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah, the king’s son, which was in the court of the prison, and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire.”⁶⁴

Paul, like Jeremiah, is repeatedly beaten and imprisoned. He recounts his life of suffering in 2 Corinthians:

“...I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness...”⁶⁵

⁶¹ Galatians 1.15.

⁶² Jeremiah 1.5.

⁶³ Galatians 1.16.

⁶⁴ Jeremiah 38:6.

⁶⁵ 2 Corinthians 11.23-27.

Paul is eventually martyred in Rome, and while there is no account of Jeremiah's death his final enslavement to Johanan and descent into Egypt is a type of death. Most interesting, however, Paul's references to his lack of eloquence, a characteristic that is also expressed by Jeremiah and, as illustrated earlier in this paper, Moses.⁶⁶ Paul describes his power of speech to again to the Corinthians: "I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."⁶⁷ Paul's reference to the Spirit in his orations are reminiscent of Yahweh's promises to Moses and Jeremiah to give them His words in Deuteronomy 18.18 and Jeremiah 1.9.

The greatest similarity between Paul and Jeremiah is their portrayal of themselves as a type of Moses. Paul compares himself to Moses in many of the same ways as Jeremiah does. Paul, an expert in the law of Moses, understands the inability for God's people to remain faithful to their Lord. He looks to the new covenant of Jesus Christ to bring repentance and faithfulness to the people of God:

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."⁶⁸

Paul presents himself, like Moses, as a prophet who uses his authority to exhort God's people to faithfulness to her Lord, Jesus Christ. The Galatians' desire to disobey the words of the Gospel preached to them by Paul echoes the Israelites' propensity towards unfaithfulness in the face of Moses' numerous appeals to them to remain obedient. Paul is like Moses who ascends Mount Sinai and returns only to discover that the Israelites have almost immediately fallen into idolatry. The swiftness in which the Galatians have fallen away from the Gospel is astounding to Paul, as it was for Moses: "I marvel that you are turning away *so soon* from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel..."⁶⁹ Jeremiah, however, is predestined to the fate of Moses, who is unable to persuade Israel to obedience in order that they might inherit the blessings of the Lord. Both

⁶⁶ Exodus 4.19.

⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:3-4.

⁶⁸ Galatians 3.13-14.

⁶⁹ Galatians 1.6. Italics mine.

Moses and Jeremiah are excluded from the promise land. Paul, on the other hand, is able to partake of the blessings of the Lord's inheritance because the new covenant has come through the death and resurrection of the True Mediator, the Great Moses: Jesus Christ. Through the work of the Lord Jesus, Paul is able to exhort the people of God to faithfulness with confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit.

“But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith, which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”⁷⁰

The Fulfillment of the New Covenant in Jesus

The new covenant of Jesus Christ presented in Paul's letter to the Galatians is the fulfillment of the Jeremiaic exodus narrative and the promise of the new covenant in chapters 30-33. Jeremiah foretold of a time when the law of God would be written on the hearts and minds of His people.⁷¹ In Galatians, Paul explains that this age has come with Jesus Christ: “But when the fullness of the time had come, god sent forth His Son...And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son *into your hearts*, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’”⁷² The saving power of the Holy Spirit will enable God's people to overcome their own sinfulness through the forgiveness of sins found in Christ. This forgiveness is the fulfillment of God's promise in Jeremiah 31.34 to “remember their sin no more.”

The hope of this new covenant, as in Jeremiah, lies in the remnant of Israel, who, in Paul's epistle, are the Gentile converts of Galatia who remain faithful to the Gospel of Christ. In Jeremiah, the remnant is portrayed as “good figs.”⁷³ In Galatians, Paul describes the life of the new remnant as the “fruits of the Spirit.”⁷⁴ Those who live in the Spirit will

⁷⁰ Galatians 3.22-28.

⁷¹ Jeremiah 31.33.

⁷² Galatians 4.4-6. Italics mine.

⁷³ Jeremiah 24.2-10.

⁷⁴ Galatians 5.22.

reap of God's inheritance. Those who live by the flesh, however, will not inherit the kingdom of God.⁷⁵ Like the "good figs," in Jeremiah, the Galatian remnant will receive the inheritance because they submitted themselves to an authority, the authority of Jesus Christ. Jeremiah's exiled remnants submitted themselves to the Babylonians and were rewarded. The Galatians who submit themselves to the bondage of Christ will receive true freedom.

"If the Galatians were hearing a telling of the exodus which promised the new exodus on the basis of faithful torah-keeping, then Paul's argument in Galatians serves to undermine such a telling. He asserts that the new exodus has already happened in Jesus Christ, the salvation has come, freedom from bondage is here, and the way to participate in this great exodus is to join with the Son in crying, 'Abba, Father.'"⁷⁶

The unfaithfulness of the false teachers in Galatians serve as a reminder to the faithful remnant of the danger of disobedience to the word of God just as the disobedience of the remnant in Jeremiah was an example to the exiles in Babylon. The false teachers have also experienced the freedom found in Christ, but have abused that freedom and perverted the Gospel by bringing the Galatians under the bondage of the works of the law. "They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them."⁷⁷ Through Jeremiah's exodus narrative, Paul illustrates the future for the false teachers in the final act of the faithless remnant. If the false teachers (and the remnant of Galatia) do not repent of their disobedience and turn back to the Lord, they will end up in bondage, enslaved to the works of the law, as the Jeremaic remnant returned to enslavement in Egypt. They will not receive the promised inheritance of the Lord, and will not even have a remnant of their own, for they will be extinguished. In one of the most striking reversals of the Jeremaic exodus in Galatians, the false teachers of Galatia and the remnant in Egypt have become aligned with Jeremiah and Moses, for their story serves as an exhortation to Israel to remain faithful to her Lord. And because of the power of the Spirit in their hearts, Israel will finally remain obedient.

⁷⁵ Galatians 5.21.

⁷⁶ Keesmaat, Sylvia C. 1996. *Paul and His Story: Exodus and Tradition in Galatians*. Horizons in Biblical Theology 18. Brill: Boston, MA, 145.

⁷⁷ Galatians 4.17.

“The new creation becomes a reality through the cross of Christ, which effects reconciliation and righteousness...Believers are enabled to live a new life by virtue of the work of Christ on their behalf, and through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. God’s work, however, does not cancel out the response of human beings but establishes it. The indicative is the basis for the imperative, and Paul summons his churches to live out the gospel they have embraced.”⁷⁸

Jeremiah’s New Exodus in Galatians

I have argued that the exodus motif of the book of Jeremiah has been reinterpreted by Paul in his letter to the Galatian church, and that his interpretation of Jeremiah’s exodus in his epistle completes this narrative arc. While I do not believe that this theme is the central idea of Paul’s message to the Galatians, I believe it is useful for interpreting some of the major themes of Paul’s letter such as adoption as sons, and slavery and freedom. This next section is a brief illustration of how Jeremiah’s exodus narrative might be found to function as the *basso continuo* for the book of Galatians. The application of Jeremiah’s new exodus to the book of Galatians might provide a deeper understanding of the letter, and bring to the surface some interesting perspectives on the Galatian story.

Adoption as Sons

In Galatians, Paul creates an interesting dichotomy of sonship in Galatians between sons of God and sons of slavery, which serves to illustrate one of his central themes: that the law of Moses is the law of death, and that life by the Spirit is true freedom. This theme is fully expressed in Paul’s interpretation of Hagar and Sarah: “For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise.”⁷⁹ Paul’s identification of Hagar with Mount Sinai is extremely controversial. In the traditional exodus story, the law of Moses was freedom for the Israelites. By corresponding Hagar to Mount Sinai and the giving of the law, Paul reinterprets the law as the birthplace of slavery.⁸⁰ Paul’s illustration of Hagar and Sarah, and the story of Isaac and Ishmael, mirror a Jeremiaic

⁷⁸ Schreiner, Thomas R. 2001. *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*. InterVarsity Press: USA, 269-270.

⁷⁹ Galatians 4.23-24.

⁸⁰ Keesmaat, Sylvia C. 1996. *Paul and His Story: Exodus and Tradition in Galatians*. Horizons in Biblical Theology 18. Brill: Boston, MA, 141.

account of a usurper from the Davidic line. In Jeremiah 41, Ishmael, a Davidic figure in Jeremiah 40-43, murders Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, who faithfully exhorted the Israelites to obey the word of the Lord through Jeremiah and submit to the authority of the Babylonians.

“Now it came to pass in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family and of the officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. And there they ate bread together at Mizpah. Then Ishmael the son of Methaniah, and the ten men who were with him, arose and struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword, and killed him whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.”⁸¹

Ishmael then goes on to take captives from the people of Judah, and in this way mimics the act of bondage of the Babylonians. The story of Ishmael and Gedaliah is an excellent example of the reverse exodus in Jeremiah. A Davidic king, named *Ishmael* no less, kills the righteous Gedaliah to seize his power and take the Israelites captive. He brings them back into bondage and thus overturns the exodus; he brings the Israelites back to Egypt.

“Ironically, the very segment of the population of Judah that had avoided deportation from the land of promise by the Babylonians is taken captive by a member of the house of David. Ishmael acts more like a foreign oppressor than a beneficent leader.”⁸² The Davidic king is behaving like Hagar’s son who persecuted Isaac, and whom Paul claims, was the firstborn of the line of Israelite slaves: “For these are two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai, which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar – for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem, which now is, and is in bondage with her children.”⁸³ According to Paul, the law of Moses, like Jeremiah’s Ishmael, brings bondage and death. It is the life of the Spirit, which is a life lived apart from the works of the flesh that is the true inheritance of God’s people.

Paul’s emphasis in Galatians on the law of Moses being the catalyst of enslavement is an warning against works of the flesh, works which are primarily portrayed as strict law

⁸¹ Jeremiah 41.1-2.

⁸² Yates, Gary. 2006. *New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon*. Liberty Theological Seminary and Graduate School, Faculty Publications and Presentations: Lynchburg, VA, 10.

⁸³ Galatians 4.24-25.

keeping. The Galatians are tempted by false teachers to turn away from the freedom they have in Christ and return again to the bondage of their youth, by submitting themselves to the yoke of circumcision; to become sons of slavery. By incorporating exodus motifs into his letter, Paul is in effect correlating the Galatians' desire for circumcision to the Israelites' desire to return to bondage in Egypt. Furthermore, the false teacher's persecution of the Galatians to be circumcised is compared to Ishmael's persecution of Isaac in Galatians 4.29, and to Jeremiah's Ishmael who violently murdered the faithful Gedaliah in Jeremiah 41.2.

Both Paul and Jeremiah are prophets against the flesh, and exhort God's people to be sons of God by submitting to the Spirit, rather than becoming sons of slavery by adhering to the works of the law. Paul's war against flesh is evident through his letter to the Galatians, and it is an important argument for him against the Galatians' desire for circumcision. Paul uses the theme of sonship expressed in his illustration of the covenant of bondage at Mount Sinai: "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now."⁸⁴ For Paul, those who live by the flesh are under the curse of the law and are in bondage to it. Likewise, Jeremiah states that trust in the flesh will lead to cursing:

"Cursed is the man who trusts in man
And makes flesh his strength,
Whose heart departs from the Lord.
For he shall be like a shrub in the desert,
And shall not see when good comes,
But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness,
In a salt land which is not inhabited."⁸⁵

Jeremiah's warning against the flesh is another allusion to the exodus. Those who trust in the flesh will be exiled to the wilderness as the Israelites were for their disobedience. Furthermore, they will be excluded from the promise of the inheritance as they were. Only the sons of God, who trust in the power of the Spirit, will receive the inheritance of Christ.

⁸⁴ Galatians 4.28-29.

⁸⁵ Jeremiah 17.5-6.

From Slavery and Freedom

Paul's primary argument against the Galatians' desire for circumcision is his portrayal of this Jewish rite as a sign of bondage juxtaposed with the freedom available in Christ. In this way, Paul depicts the false teachers of the Galatian church as oppressors who desire to enslave the remnant, for circumcision is slavery to the law.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”⁸⁶

The false teacher's desire to enslave their brothers echoes the disobedience of King Zedekiah in Jeremiah 34. After Judah's defeat by Babylon, the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah to proclaim liberty to the Israelites. He commands the people of God to free their slaves, a Hebrew man and woman, “that no one should keep a Jewish brother in bondage.”⁸⁷ The people of Judah are quick to obey Yahweh's commandment, but just as the Israelites at Mount Sinai, they almost immediately turn back to rebellion:

“Now when all the princes and all the people, who had entered into the covenant, heard that everyone should set free his male and female slaves, that no one should keep them in bondage anymore, they obeyed and let them go. But afterward they changed their minds and made the male and female slaves return, whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection as male and female slaves.”⁸⁸

Not only are the Israelites like their forefathers at Mount Sinai, they also follow the actions of Pharaoh in Egypt who promised to free the people of God and then sought to enslave them once more. Jeremiah pronounces judgment from the Lord for their wicked deeds. Since they enslaved their brothers, the Lord will deliver them to the hand of the Babylonians

⁸⁶ Galatians 5.1-4.

⁸⁷ Jeremiah 34.9.

⁸⁸ Jeremiah 34.10-11.

and eventually the bondage of the Egyptians under Johanan. “I will give them into the hands of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. Their dead bodies shall be for meat for the birds of the heaven and the beasts of the earth.”⁸⁹ In this way, the account of Paul’s confrontation with Peter can be compared to Jeremiah’s rebuke to the Israelites. Peter’s actions echo the disobedience of Zedekiah and his people, who sought to re-enslave the Israelites in blatant opposition to Jeremiah’s commands from the Lord. Through his hypocrisy, Peter seeks to return God’s people to bondage by excluding them as the false brothers in Galatia who, “want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.”⁹⁰ Like the people of God in Jeremiah’s account, Peter’s actions echo those of Pharaoh in Egypt. Peter has not only disobeyed the laws of the new covenant, but the laws of the old covenant as well; he has disobeyed Jeremiah who instructed Zedekiah that, “no one should keep a Jewish brother in bondage,”⁹¹ as well as Moses who commanded Pharaoh to release God’s people. Peter is enslaving his own people just as Zedekiah enslaved Israel, and just as Pharaoh enslaved Israel in Egypt. But Paul exhorts the Galatians not to be like Zedekiah and his people, Pharaoh, or even Peter in Antioch, and to not submit themselves to slavery, especially captivity by their own brothers.

Conclusion

Paul does exhort the Galatian church to submit themselves to the yoke of slavery, but not to the works of the law, but to Christ. True freedom from slavery is only found in submission to Christ and his death and resurrection. As slaves to Christ, the Galatians are called to live a life of suffering, of service, and of sacrifice.

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ...And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”⁹²

⁸⁹ Jeremiah 34.20.

⁹⁰ Galatians 4.17.

⁹¹ Jeremiah 34.9.

⁹² Galatians 6.1-2, 9-10.

They are called to share in the life of the crucified Christ, which is true freedom; freedom from the flesh: “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”⁹³ And in their participation of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Galatians are called to be prophets in the succession of Jeremiah, the suffering servant.

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