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‘And Their Children After Them’: A Response to Reformed Baptist Readings of Jeremiah’s New Covenant Promises

Neil G. T. Jeffers

Abstract

The promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 is a key text in the infant baptism debate. For Baptists, it describes the discontinuity between Old and New Covenants, highlighting in particular the individual, unbreakable, more subjective nature of the new. While paedobaptists often respond defensively, Jeremiah 32:37-41, where this promise is echoed with the important addition ‘for their own good and the good of their children after them’, suggests the old covenant principle of family solidarity may remain in place. This article re-examines the Baptist argument, and suggests closer exegesis shows that even Jeremiah 31 still includes children in the New Covenant.

Introduction

This study began life as the observation of an oversight. I am a Reformed evangelical Anglican. As such, I am also a convinced paedobaptist. Over recent years, I have become aware of how important the New Covenant oracle of Jeremiah 31:31-34 is in the baptism debate. Amongst Baptists, it demonstrates the features of the New Covenant which they consider exclude infants from being

marked with the sign of that New Covenant. It has considerable impact on Baptist sacramentology, ecclesiology, soteriology and eschatology.¹ In response, paedobaptists have often appeared to be on the defensive, almost apologetically massaging the text to permit infant baptism.

In this context, the oversight of Jeremiah 32:37-41 in the debate is surprising.² It appears as a recapitulation of the New Covenant promise, using very similar language, and yet employing that crucial phrase, 'for their own good *and the good of their children after them*' (Jer. 32:39). Despite this, I have discovered only one author on each side who mentions this particular phrase.³ On the Baptist side, I found the explanation unsatisfactory; on the paedobaptist side, it was little more than a proof-text.

Thus, the question remains, what additional light does Jeremiah 32:37-41 shed on Reformed Baptist uses of the New Covenant promise in Jeremiah? Inevitably, the baptism debate involves far more than exegesis of a single passage. Whilst exegesis is significant, there are major doctrinal arguments which convince paedobaptists that will not be part of this study. This question is a very specific one, and is one small brick in the temple building. If the answer is more amenable to the Baptist side, it will have little impact on the immense doctrinal and exegetical weight elsewhere in the paedobaptist argument. If the answer is more paedobaptist, then a useful rejoinder is available to Reformed Baptist citations of Jeremiah 31.

I have chosen to interact with Reformed Baptists, because I share with these brothers more than I do with many non-Reformed paedobaptists, notably a Reformed soteriology and a commitment to

¹ This is perhaps best illustrated in the exclusive focus on this one text in S. E. Waldron with R. C. Barcellos, *A Reformed Baptist Manifesto: The New Covenant Constitution of the Church* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2004), which is an exposition of this passage.

² This article began life as a dissertation submitted at Oak Hill Theological College; the initial idea for the dissertation came from Matthew W. Mason, a former student of the college.

³ F. A. Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone* (Cape Coral, FL.: Founders Press, 2003), 114; D. Wilson, 'Baptism and Children: Their Place in the Old and New Testaments', in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. G. Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003): 286-302, at 296.

the inspiration, authority, inerrancy and perspicuity of Scripture. With so much common ground in what I perceive to be historic, orthodox Christianity, it is the Reformed Baptist challenge I find most weighty. I also hope my arguments may have more strength with them because we approach so much from a similar perspective.

To this end, this article will outline, as faithfully as possible, the Reformed Baptist uses of Jeremiah 31 against paedobaptism,⁴ then proceed to examine the relationship between the two passages, before finally presenting a response to the Reformed Baptist arguments.

I pray this contribution may assist the Church of God as mother of the faithful to advance one more small step towards a common mind regarding the truth of God.

Jeremiah 31 in Reformed Baptist critiques of paedobaptism

The New Covenant oracle of Jeremiah 31:31-34 is one of the most frequently used Old Testament passages to argue against the inclusion of infants in the New Covenant, and consequently the continuing practice of infant baptism. Thus Waldron makes this single passage 'the focal point'⁵ of his study, seeing in Jeremiah 31 the basis for 'the New Covenant constitution of the Church',⁶ and 'the only passage in the Old Testament that clearly and explicitly speaks of the relationship of the Old and New Covenants'.⁷

We will seek to outline the main arguments drawn from this passage by Reformed Baptists to oppose the practice of infant baptism. Consequently, this is not a comprehensive examination of Reformed Baptist exegesis of Jeremiah 31:31-34. Waldron, for example, writes against Dispensationalism,⁸ Antinomianism,⁹ and Arminianism,¹⁰ all from these verses. Our concern is solely with the debate around paedobaptism.

⁴ I thank David W. Thomas for his feedback on earlier drafts, and corrections to my misunderstandings or uncharitable assumptions.

⁵ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 5.

⁶ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 1.

⁷ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 67.

⁸ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 9-30.

⁹ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 31-48.

¹⁰ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 49-64.

While inevitably involving overlapping categories, four main uses of these verses can be identified.

1. Pregnant Silence

There is a conspicuous silence in the content of the New Covenant promises, of which Jeremiah 31 is the most obvious example. The Old Covenant principle of 'to you and your seed' is not restated.¹¹ This principle was stated and restated with each fresh instance of covenant making by God.¹² More significantly perhaps, the Mosaic covenant of Sinai explicitly upheld this principle. To the original recipients, the Sinai covenant would have felt like a major development from the Abrahamic one. Thus, Kingdon argues, 'if [the seed principle] still held good one would have expected (by analogy) that it would have been explicitly incorporated within the New Covenant'.¹³ This silence is so significant that it must be considered 'that the principle of "thee and thy seed" is abrogated in the era of the New Covenant'.¹⁴

2. Increased Individuality

A consistent theme in the Reformed Baptist treatments is the individualised nature of the New Covenant. This comes from both the content and the context of the Jeremiah 31 oracle. Malone describes this as a fundamental shift 'from family relations to individual responsibility and membership'.¹⁵ This for Malone is a clear weakness of paedobaptist theology: 'The paedobaptist position ... ignores the increased individuality of the New Covenant expressed in texts such as Jeremiah 31:27-34'.¹⁶ In the content of the promise, this is seen most clearly in 31:34, in the promise of a universal, individual knowledge of God for those in the covenant. This is one of Malone's three major

¹¹ D. Kingdon, *Children of Abraham* (Cambridge: Carey Publications, 1973), 35.

¹² With Noah in Genesis 9:8; Abraham in Genesis 12:7; 15:18; 17:7; Phinehas in Numbers 25:13 and David on 2 Samuel 7:12-16.

¹³ Kingdon, *Children*, 35, n. 15.

¹⁴ Kingdon, *Children*, 34.

¹⁵ Malone, *Baptism*, 71.

¹⁶ Malone, *Baptism*, 70.

blessings of the New Covenant.¹⁷ For Waldron, this is the defining difference between Old and New, that previously only some of the covenant people had known the LORD, whereas in the New era, all will know Him.¹⁸ Kingdon argues similarly, from Romans 2, that not all in the Old Covenant knew God, in contrast to this promise for the New.¹⁹ Waldron draws a causal link between the circumcision of infants into Israel with the later presence of those adults who do not know God.²⁰ Hence, in the Old Testament, there was a corporate covenant which included individuals who did not know the LORD. However, in the New Covenant, individuals will no longer have to teach each other about God, because everyone will have an individual knowledge of Him. As this promise is worked in individual believers, it will not admit of the covenant subsisting in families marked by physical generation.²¹

This focus on individuals is equally noticeable in the immediate context. Jeremiah 31:27-30 is linked to the New Covenant promise by the repeated phrase, 'Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD' (v. 27, 31, 38). In v. 29, a proverb is circulating among the hearers which highlights the generational, covenantal nature of Judah's suffering. The complaint is that God is punishing an innocent generation for the sins of their fathers. In response, God insists, 'everyone shall die for his own sin'. Malone deduces from this that in the New Covenant, accountability will be individual, rather than for the failure of a previous generation: 'The link would be changed.'²² Malone agrees with Kingdon in interpreting these verses.²³ He concludes, 'Jeremiah 31:27-34 defines a heightened individual membership in the covenant relationship, with each member

¹⁷ Malone, *Baptism*, 88, 94.

¹⁸ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 71. See also T. R. Schreiner and S. D. Wright, 'Introduction', in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, eds. Schreiner and Wright (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2006), 1-9, at 3.

¹⁹ Kingdon, *Children*, 34.

²⁰ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 71.

²¹ P. K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism & The Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 228.

²² Malone, *Baptism*, 75.

²³ Kingdon, *Children*, 72.

experiencing its blessings'.²⁴

Paedobaptist explanations depend strongly on covenantal succession, in which God deals with his people not only individually, but also on the basis of corporate relationships: kings and peoples, fathers and children, patriarchs and nations. Thus, infants may be baptised because their parents are members of the covenant. If the Reformed Baptist outline of increased individuality in the New Covenant, and particularly the individual accountability of Jeremiah 31:30, is correct, this is a further argument against infant baptism.

3. Unbreakable Covenant

The promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31 includes a promise of faithfulness. The New Covenant cannot be broken.²⁵ At this point, a number of Reformed Baptists draw in Jeremiah 32:39-40 as a supplement and expansion of the promise in chapter 31. The purpose of the one heart in 32:39 is that 'they may fear [God] for ever', and the fear of God will be put in their hearts 'that they may not turn from me'. Malone conflates chapters 31 and 32 to argue that the giving of one heart and the writing of the law on the heart are synonymous and that this is what the New Covenant consists in.²⁶ He further argues that because the fear of God in 32:40 unfailingly prevents apostasy, repentance and faith must be required before baptism as evidence of a new heart which displays the fear of God.²⁷ Again, the argument follows that, as infants can give no evidence of their obedient hearts, there is no basis for their baptism.

4. Subjective Certainty

The promises set out in Jeremiah 31:31-34 speak of an inward work of God. The promise of the law being written on hearts (v. 33) emphasises a move away from 'the external ceremonies and

²⁴ Kingdon, *Children*, 91.

²⁵ Jewett, *Infant Baptism*, 152. Malone, *Baptism*, 58. S. J. Wellum, 'Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants', in *Believer's Baptism*, eds. Schreiner and Wright, 97-161, at 115.

²⁶ Malone, *Baptism*, 85, 113.

²⁷ Malone, *Baptism*, 85, 113.

institutions of the Old Covenant to the possession of inward spiritual life'.²⁸ Indeed, the major contrast between Old and New at this point is 'the degree of inwardness and subjectivity enjoyed by the covenantees'.²⁹ The Reformed Baptist understanding of the internalisation of the New Covenant, in contrast to the Old, immediately precludes infant baptism. 'Possession of inward spiritual life is required',³⁰ and it is the requirement for specific evidence of that which makes clear the promise does not incorporate infants.³¹

It may seem at this point that there appears to be an inherent assumption in the Reformed Baptist position that children below a certain age are incapable of inward regeneration. This age is not stated, but is presumably an age of conscious moral responsibility. However, this is not true. Fred Malone, at least, concedes the possibility of regeneration in the womb for the children of believers,³² but argues this is insufficient to be marked with the sign of New Covenant membership until evidence of this inward renewal can be provided.³³ This presumably requires the conscious moral capacity spoken of earlier, along with the ability to speak, or communicate meaningfully in another way. While Malone concedes this possibility, though without considering it normative or probable, others appear reluctant to countenance even this "embryonic regeneration". Waldron posits three objections to the presumptive regeneration of believers' infant children. First, 'experience shows that the infants of believers are very seldom regenerate'.³⁴ Second, he denies any biblical ground for the traditional Reformed presumption of the regeneration of believers' children.³⁵ He then argues,

Third, even if God promised to save all the children of believers, this would not mean that they would be as infants. Baptism is not to be bestowed because someone will in the future be saved, but because someone in the present displays credible evidence that they already know

²⁸ Kingdon, *Children*, 34.

²⁹ Jewett, *Infant Baptism*, 227.

³⁰ Kingdon, *Children*, 6.

³¹ Kingdon, *Children*, 35.

³² Malone, *Baptism*, 95.

³³ Malone, *Baptism*, 95.

³⁴ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 74.

³⁵ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 74.

the Lord.³⁶

Thus, while many Reformed Baptists concede the possibility of infant regeneration, it is never expected or understood to be promised. Hence, without evidence of this inward regeneration, baptism can not be administered.

These are the main Reformed Baptist uses of Jeremiah 31 against paedobaptism. As has been observed above, Jeremiah 32 is sometimes brought into this argument to enhance the understanding of the New Covenant promise. We must now proceed to examine the link between chapters 31 and 32, as a basis for responding to the Reformed Baptist critique.

The relationship between the promises in Jeremiah 31 and Jeremiah 32

While the Book of Consolation spans chapters 30-33 of Jeremiah, there is a broad-based scholarly consensus that 30-31 and 32-33 form two discrete units.³⁷ There is disagreement, however, over the extent to which these units integrate. Thus, the use of chapter 32 to illuminate chapter 31 might be challenged by some, who see these as two separate collections. At this point, then, it will be helpful briefly to examine the relationship between the two chapters to see if this project can succeed. We should examine first, various proposals for the broad relationship between the two sections, and second, exegetical links.

Parenthetically, for the purposes of this study, it must be observed from the outset that this argument shares common ground with the Reformed Baptist positions concerning the relationship of these chapters. Jewett,³⁸ Malone³⁹ and Waldron⁴⁰ all concur that 32:37-41 is a promise of the New Covenant, just as 31:31-34 is, the former

³⁶ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 75.

³⁷ R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, OTL (London: SCM, 1986), 568. J. R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21 – 36*, AB 21B (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 2004), 369.

³⁸ Jewett, *Infant Baptism*, 83.

³⁹ Malone, *Baptism*, 58, 69, 85, 114.

⁴⁰ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 51.

'supplement[ing] the predictions'⁴¹ of the latter. Given that our interlocutors share the same premise, it may seem unnecessary to discuss further the relationship. However, it is worth anticipating any form-critical objections.

1. Compositional Proposals

Some critical scholarship has tried to atomise the book of Jeremiah to such an extent as to make it of minimal value for an undertaking like this one. Carroll argues that the Book of Consolation contains nothing which can be associated with Jeremiah.⁴² One of his reasons is that this u-turn of hope contradicts his previous predictions of total destruction, without the survival of a remnant.⁴³ Holladay has helpfully surveyed the various critical approaches and challenged the traditional arguments from metre,⁴⁴ vocabulary,⁴⁵ phraseology,⁴⁶ and theme.⁴⁷

A number of scholars propose that the oracle of 32:36-41 is chronologically prior to 31:31-34.⁴⁸ However, the authors of the first volume of the Word commentary suggest 'insufficient data have survived from which to reconstruct accurately the process of the composition and compilation of the book'.⁴⁹

Instead, Brueggemann, following the earlier lead of Brevard Childs, has suggested taking a canonical and final form⁵⁰ approach to

⁴¹ Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 51.

⁴² Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 569.

⁴³ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 569.

⁴⁴ W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 1989), 11.

⁴⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 15.

⁴⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 53.

⁴⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 15.

⁴⁸ W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, A.: Fortress Press, 1986), 9.

⁴⁹ P. C. Craigie, P. H. Kelley and J. F. Drinkard Jr, *Jeremiah 1 – 25*, WBC 26 (Dallas, TX.: Word, 1991), xxxiii.

⁵⁰ Final form is the approach taken here, and a canonical approach applies in so far as it is complementary to final form.

Jeremiah.⁵¹ Thus, we approach the final form of the book, recognising in it a deliberate, purposed construction, as Brueggemann suggests, 'a *constructive proposal of reality* that is powered by *passionate conviction* and that is voiced in ... *artistic form*',⁵² even if the final redaction was undertaken after the death of Jeremiah. 'The editorial process of the book of Jeremiah has grouped together in these chapters the primary materials voicing God's intention of newness and, derivatively, Israel's restoration after exile'.⁵³ This approach is further supported by Lundbom's observation of superscriptional parallels. He observes that while the superscriptions in 30:1 and 32:1 show that chapters 30-31 and 32-33 are two original compositional units,⁵⁴ the further superscription of 34:1 shows that the whole of the Book of Consolation is a broader compositional unit.⁵⁵

The final form of the redaction of Jeremiah presents the Book of Consolation as a meaningful whole, within which links and relationships can be observed. However, even if the book of Jeremiah was to be seen as a disjointed collection of separate traditions, and different authors or widely different time periods were ascribed to chapters 31 and 32, this would not present a significant problem for this study. Just as theologians may synthesise the treatment of a subject from Exodus, Haggai and 1 Corinthians, so, if a common object may be discerned, we may synthesise the promises of Jeremiah 31 and 32.

2. Exegetical Links

One of the strongest arguments for the interrelationship of the New Covenant promises in chapter 31 and 32 is the number of parallels between them.

For the passage as a whole, Martens suggests that a New Covenant restatement in chapter 32 'fits with the style of this book, in which

⁵¹ W. Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile & Homecoming* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 10.

⁵² Brueggemann, *Jeremiah*, ix. Emphasis original.

⁵³ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah*, 264.

⁵⁴ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21 – 36*, 369.

⁵⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21 – 36*, 369.

poetically-given announcements are repeated for an “echo” effect’.⁵⁶ Scalise comments that ‘the literary alliance between chapters 30-31 and 32 is a fruitful one’.⁵⁷ We should examine first, the contextual parallels and second, the verbal parallels.

A. Contextual Parallels

First, both sections are promises of salvation ‘in the shadow of continuing and worsening suffering’.⁵⁸ Jeremiah 30:5-7 and 12-15 depict a situation of terror and despair in Israel and Judah.⁵⁹ 31:13 promises a move from the mourning of those verses to joy, and the threefold ‘behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD’ of vv. 27, 31 and 38 introduces a clearer description of this glorious future. In this context, vv. 31-34 explain how this is to be achieved. Similarly, 32:2-5 and 24-36 present an image of defeat and ruin under the Babylonian invasion.⁶⁰ But vv. 37-44 promise a coming salvation.

Second, both sections have in view a return from captivity in exile, and a replanting of the people in the land. Malone and Fretheim both observe the context in Jeremiah 31 of return from exile.⁶¹ Although this is not explicit in the New Covenant oracle, it is apparent from 31:8-14⁶² and 23-24. It is also implied from the rebuilding of the city in 31:38.⁶³ Replanting in the land is declared in vv. 27-28. This context is more obvious in chapter 32, as the LORD promises gathering from exile and recall to Jerusalem in v. 37.⁶⁴ Holladay observes as a parallel

⁵⁶ E. A. Martens, *Jeremiah*, BCBC (Scottsdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1986), 204.

⁵⁷ G. L. Keown, P. J. Scalise, and T. G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, WBC 27 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 149.

⁵⁸ Keown, Scalise and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 149.

⁵⁹ Keown, Scalise and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 149.

⁶⁰ Keown, Scalise and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 149.

⁶¹ Malone, *Baptism*, 183. T. E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 466.

⁶² Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 466.

⁶³ R. L. Pratt Jr, ‘Infant Baptism in the New Covenant’, in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. G. Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003): 156-74, at 164.

⁶⁴ Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 466.

the use of *צִבֵּץ* in both 31:8 and 32:37.⁶⁵ Planting in the land is promised in v. 41.

Finally, both sections look forward to a time when the city will be rebuilt. Pratt demonstrates this for chapter 31 in vv. 38-40, immediately following the New Covenant oracle,⁶⁶ as the reconstruction of Jerusalem is prophesied. Lundbom draws the explicit parallel between this promise in 31:38-40 and the promise that fields will again be bought and sold around Jerusalem in 32:42-44.⁶⁷ Lundbom also observes here the structural parallel between the two sections, in each case the prophecy of the 'new' or 'eternal' covenant (31:31-34; 32:37-41) is succeeded by the promise of Jerusalem's revivification (31:38-40; 32:42-44).⁶⁸

B. Verbal Parallels

There are also many verbal parallels. Fretheim suggests that the oracle of 32:37-41 is 'essentially continuous with the theme of the new covenant',⁶⁹ while Scalise comments that 31:26-40 'bear[s] some resemblance to the oracles in 32:36-44'.⁷⁰

First, both passages highlight that the classic covenant formula remains an essential part of the New Covenant. In 31:33 and 32:38 the traditional phrase is used.⁷¹ With the exception of the reversal of the two clauses,⁷² the Hebrew phrasing is identical.

Second, both passages promise that God will act on the heart. This is a greater emphasis in chapter 32, but it is present in both. In 32:39, God will give to the people one heart to fear him. The more significant parallel here is between 32:40 and 31:33.⁷³ In both of these

⁶⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 218.

⁶⁶ Pratt, 'Infant Baptism', 164.

⁶⁷ Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 21 – 36, 499.

⁶⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 21 – 36, 499.

⁶⁹ Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 466.

⁷⁰ Keown, Scalise and Smothers, *Jeremiah* 26 – 52, 149.

⁷¹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 21 – 36, 518. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 466. C. F. Keil, *Jeremiah*, Volume 2, trans J. Kennedy (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 59.

Brueggemann, *Jeremiah*, 293, 308.

⁷² Keown, Scalise and Smothers, *Jeremiah* 26 – 52, 160.

⁷³ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 630.

verses God is said to put or give (נָתַן) something (the law in 31, fear in 32) into the hearts of the people. The use of the singular here may indicate that God is dealing with the corporate heart of the whole people⁷⁴ as well as the hearts of individuals. The parallel is not identical at every stage,⁷⁵ but the sequence of the verb, an intervening direct object, marked by אֶת and the noun evokes an echo of 31:33 in 32:40.

Third, both passages emphasise divine initiative in covenant making.⁷⁶ God 'cuts' a covenant (כָּרַת בְּרִית) with his people in 31:31 and 33, as he does in 32:40. There is an obvious problem with this parallel. In chapter 31, God makes a new (חָדָשׁ) covenant, while in chapter 32 it is an eternal or everlasting (עוֹלָם) covenant. חָדָשׁה בְּרִית is a unique collocation in the Old Testament,⁷⁷ though Pratt suggests that the two elements within it evoke a more generic set of prophetic expectations.⁷⁸ The phrase עוֹלָם בְּרִית of 32:40 is more common, occurring 12 times in the Old Testament. In four of these, human initiative is in view. However, the everlasting covenant is associated with security in the land,⁷⁹ and restoration from exile,⁸⁰ as in Jeremiah 32:40, and as the new covenant of 31:31-34 is. It is possible also that a common derivation, both thematic and verbal, can be traced for the two promises. 'Seeds of both appear' in Jeremiah 24:7,⁸¹ in the promise of a heart to know the LORD, the covenant formula, and the promise in v. 6 of restoration to the land. Also notable is a common root in Deuteronomy 30:4-6, a promise of restoration after exile achieved with hearts circumcised to love God.⁸² It is unsurprising

⁷⁴ Keown, Scalise and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 160. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 466. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 198.

⁷⁵ Different prepositions are used (עַל in 31:33, בְּ in 32:40) and a different form of the noun (לֵב in 31:33, לֵבָב in 32:40).

⁷⁶ Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 466.

⁷⁷ Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 442. Pratt, 'Infant Baptism', 165.

⁷⁸ Pratt, 'Infant Baptism', 165.

⁷⁹ Psalm 105:10-11.

⁸⁰ Isaiah 55:3; Ezekiel 16:60; 37:26.

⁸¹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21 – 36*, 471. Keown, Scalise and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 160.

⁸² Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 443. Pratt, 'Infant Baptism', 165.

with this weight of coincidence that so many commentators conclude that the new covenant of 31:31-34 and the everlasting covenant of 32:40 are to be understood as one. Fretheim suggests that despite different formulations, the latter is 'essentially continuous with the theme of the new covenant'.⁸³ Lundbom concurs: 'It is generally agreed that this "eternal covenant" ... is the "new covenant"'.⁸⁴ Keil agrees that the everlasting covenant is the new covenant of 31:33.⁸⁵ Scalise observes that chapter 32 is 'composed largely of material found elsewhere in the book', citing the salvation promises of 24:7 and 31:31-34.⁸⁶

Fourth, Fretheim and Keil suggest there is an important parallel between knowing the LORD in 31:34 and fearing the LORD in 32:39.⁸⁷

Fifth, there is a possible parallel between 31:34 and 32:39 which is of salient importance to this thesis. In 32:39, God promises a generational comprehension of dealing with his people, 'for their own good *and the good of their children* after them'. There is a comprehension also in God's dealings in 31:34, 'they shall all know me, *from the least of them to the greatest*'. The understanding of this phrase, 'from the least of them to the greatest' is significant.

There are two main options, with some internal variation in each. First, the phrase can indeed refer to rank or standing. This can be 'secular' nobility,⁸⁸ or wealth,⁸⁹ or religious authority.⁹⁰ Second, in some instances it refers clearly to youth and old age. In Genesis 19:4, the men of Sodom are introduced as being 'both young and old'. In v. 11, all 'both small and great', were struck with blindness. It is unlikely young children were involved, but within the group indicated, this phrase is clearly a reference to age.⁹¹ There are also a number of examples where the context does not clarify what nuance is to be

⁸³ Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 466.

⁸⁴ Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 21 – 36, 519. Cf. p. 466.

⁸⁵ Keil, *Jeremiah* 2, 59.

⁸⁶ Keown, Scalise and Smothers, *Jeremiah* 26 – 52, 149.

⁸⁷ Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 466. Keil, *Jeremiah* 2, 59.

⁸⁸ Esther 1:5, 20; Job 3:19. Also 1 Kings 22:31; 2 Kings 23:2; 2 Chronicles 18:30; 34:30.

⁸⁹ Possibly Deuteronomy 1:17 in addition to nobility.

⁹⁰ Jeremiah 6:13; 8:10. See following discussion.

⁹¹ See also 1 Samuel 30:2 and possibly 1 Chronicles 25:8; 26:13; 2 Chronicles 31:15.

understood.⁹²

HALOT and *NIDOTTE* observe three main uses of קטן to indicate small size (in stature, humility or significance), to indicate age (either absolutely or comparatively young), and in conjunction with גדול as a totalising expression.⁹³ For גדול *HALOT* recognises eleven different uses, one of which is age.⁹⁴ *NIDOTTE* suggests a more quantified breakdown into seven categories. Out of 524 uses, nearly 100 indicate a position of prominence, while at least 13 times it is used of age.⁹⁵ Both sources note the frequent occurrence of the two together. *NIDOTTE* identifies the expression 'as a merism, an idiom of inclusiveness, which points to everyone or everything under consideration'.⁹⁶ However, within the confines of this particular collocation, neither source indicates which nuance of the expression should be preferred. Given that the function of merismus is to include, however, it is not unreasonable to suggest that, without indication to the contrary, it should be understood expansively to encompass the different nuances. Hence there is a burden of proof upon the Reformed Baptist position to demonstrate that age is not in view in 31:34. Even if social standing were to be the exclusive referent here, it would not be significantly damaging to the rest of our argument. However, if age is in view, then our case is greatly strengthened.

Lundbom argues that each occurrence of this phrase in Jeremiah refers to social standing: from the poor and weak to the wealthy and powerful. He adduces most commentators following Calvin in support of this reading.⁹⁷ It is difficult to find an explicit Reformed Baptist treatment of this specific phrase, but, like Lundbom, an understanding of social standing seems to be assumed. However, it is difficult to isolate a single referent inherent in this phrase. Holladay

⁹² 1 Samuel 5:9; 2 Kings 25:26; 2 Chronicles 15:13; Psalm 115:13; Jonah 3:5.

⁹³ *HALOT* 3:1093. M. D. Carroll R., 'קטן' in *NIDOTTE* 3:910-912.

⁹⁴ *HALOT* 1:177-178.

⁹⁵ M. G. Abegg Jr, 'גדול' in *NIDOTTE*, 1:823-827.

⁹⁶ M. D. Carroll R., *NIDOTTE* 3:910-912. *HALOT* 3:1093.

⁹⁷ J. R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, AB 21A (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999), 429. Also cf. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21 – 36*, 470, and *Jeremiah 37 – 52*, AB 21C (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2004), *ad loc.*

suggests that age is in view here, meaning from the youngest to the oldest.⁹⁸ Even within the book of Jeremiah, Lundbom's universal preference for social standing is falsifiable. This phrase occurs in almost identical form on six other occasions in Jeremiah.

In 6:13, the Targum suggests that age is in view, picking up on the contrast of עִם־מְלֵא יָמִים רְנָא זְקֵן בְּחֹרִים עוֹלָל in v. 11.⁹⁹ However, in this instance, we agree with Lundbom that the main thought here is one of social, or more specifically, religious, standing. The parallelism in v. 13 between 'the least to the greatest' in the first colon, and 'from prophet to priest' in the second suggests this is the primary focus, though age may be a background concept. In 8:10, the same parallelism is exhibited.

In 16:6, however, it seems more likely that age is a focus. The context is the curse that God will bring on his own people for their disobedience. In v. 3, the merism used is that both sons and daughters on the one hand and mothers and fathers on the other, will die in the land. Verse 6 then echoes this merism, highlighting that both the old and the young will die. The redundancy of v. 6 suggests that social standing is in view, in addition to age,¹⁰⁰ but does not exclude age as a referent.

In 42:1 and 42:8, the focus is unclear. Johanan has just rescued the people of Judah. In 41:16, those rescued have been clearly defined as including soldiers, women, children and eunuchs. Then, in 42:1 and 8, 'all the commanders of the forces ... and all the people from the least to the greatest' gather to hear Jeremiah. The separation of the commanders suggests that simple social standing is not the primary focus. Rather, a consideration of strength in battle may be in view. Thus, least to the greatest becomes weakest to the strongest. Though age is not in focus here, clearly the young are included as those unready for battle.

Finally, 44:12 provides the strongest example in Jeremiah of age as the primary focus. In v. 7, God condemns the people for cutting off from themselves עוֹלָל אִשָּׁה אִישׁ and יוֹנֵק the focus being on the most vulnerable, even those still suckling in infancy. In retribution it

⁹⁸ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 198.

⁹⁹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 430.

¹⁰⁰ Suggested by Dr Thomas Renz.

seems, God, in verse 12, will ensure that all of the remnant will be consumed in Egypt, 'from the least to the greatest'. This appears to be a direct reflection of the sin of the people in v. 7: just as the people cut off even the youngest in v. 7, so God will cut off even the youngest in v. 12.

Returning to Jeremiah 31:34 then, which nuance is to be understood here? In favour of age as the primary referent, Holladay cites the fact that teaching, in Deuteronomy, is an activity primarily done by parents to their children.¹⁰¹ This is attractive, but it ignores the teaching in this verse being explicitly between neighbours and brothers, not parents and children. In v. 29, a generational relationship is in view. However, this is not a strong pillar on which to build an exclusive reference here. There is nothing in the context to lead us to an exclusive reference to social standing. Given that this phrase is intended to be a totalising merismus, as observed earlier, perhaps it is better, in the absence of any contrary indication, to understand the reference here as including both age and social standing. Indeed, Fretheim suggests that what is in view here is 'a democratization of the people ... from whatever class or status, from priest to peasant, from king to commoner, *from child to adult*'.¹⁰² That being the case, there is another parallel between 31:34 and 32:39 – the inclusion of offspring in the promise in some way.

Having observed all these parallels, it must be concluded that in Jeremiah 31 and 32 are contained two related promises concerning the same object. Hence, it is to be expected that any apparent differences between the two will be complementary rather than contradictory and should admit of reconciliation.

A Paedobaptist Response

The background is now in place for a paedobaptist response, deploying Jeremiah 32:37-41, to Reformed Baptist uses of chapter 31.

¹⁰¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 198.

¹⁰² Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 444 (emphasis added).

1. Pregnant Silence

This is the weakest of the four arguments. David Kingdon is the only author who proposes it. Aside from the traditional reservations about *argumenta ex silentio*, this suggestion is simply untrue. Although Kingdon does not treat 32:37-41, it has already been observed that many Reformed Baptists treat these verses as a supplement to 31:31-34. Though its meaning will be explored below, the 'you and your seed' principle is explicit in 32:39. In addition, the examination of 'from the least to the greatest' in the previous chapter suggests that the same principle is implicit in 31:34.

2. Increased Individuality

There are two main elements to this part of the argument, as outlined in chapter 1: the universal, individual knowledge of God in 31:34; and the contextual argument of personal accountability in 31:27-30.

A. Individual Knowledge of God

There are four main responses to the former. First, 'they shall *all* know me' need not be understood as 'all without exception', but rather as 'all without distinction'.¹⁰³ This would be a familiar line of argument to Reformed Baptists in other contexts as it is a traditional distinction deployed in Reformed exegesis to explain so-called 'Arminian' texts.¹⁰⁴ I have not found this argument deployed in any paedobaptist texts, or answered in any Reformed Baptist treatments. Hence, the meaning would be that all types of people in the New Covenant (adults, children, rich, poor, noble, common etc) will know the LORD,¹⁰⁵ without the need for teaching, rather than every individual member of the New Covenant knowing the LORD. This understanding is more likely to be correct given that this applies

¹⁰³ Suggested by Dr Garry J. Williams in Doctrine of Salvation lecture handouts, Oak Hill College, London, 2006, 189.

¹⁰⁴ eg, 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9.

¹⁰⁵ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 611.

'from the least of them to the greatest'. Whether this is to be understood as exclusively referring to age, or social standing, or, as argued in chapter 2, both, the emphasis is on the full range of types or classes of people being included, not on the number of individuals. This understanding is further supported by the second response.

Second, then, it would appear at first reading of 31:34 that in the New Covenant there will be no teachers at all. Yet, the New Testament is clear that there will be teachers in the church.¹⁰⁶ Either this part of the New Covenant promise is only fulfilled eschatologically,¹⁰⁷ or the total absence of teachers is not in view. Don Carson suggests that 'the outlook is not of a time when there will be no teachers, but no *mediating* teachers'.¹⁰⁸ Garry Williams has suggested two ways in which the knowledge of God was obscured under the Old Covenant: first, 'the repetition of sacrifice reduc[ed] the knowledge of sins forgiven';¹⁰⁹ second, 'in general, knowledge ... was mediated by other men'.¹¹⁰ This seems to make more sense of the promise, that there will not be a class of priestly instructors in the New Covenant, but that all New Covenant members will have access to the knowledge of God. In this context, it is even more likely that the all in view is 'all without distinction' not 'all without exception'.

Third, the parallels between 'knowing'¹¹¹ and 'fearing'¹¹² the LORD, and 'from the least of them to the greatest'¹¹³ and 'the good of their children after them'¹¹⁴ have already been observed. Thus, if fearing God for the good of the children in chapter 32, and the youngest to the oldest knowing God in chapter 31 are paralleled, we must conclude that whatever 'they shall all know me' means, it must be understood to include the children of those to whom the promises are made. Even if it were concerned with every individual member of the

¹⁰⁶ 2 Timothy 4:2.

¹⁰⁷ Pratt, 'Infant Baptism', 156–174.

¹⁰⁸ D. A. Carson, 'Reflections on Assurance', in *Still Sovereign*, ed. T. R. Schreiner and B. A. Ware (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000), 247-276, at 257-8.

¹⁰⁹ Williams, *Salvation*, 187.

¹¹⁰ Williams, *Salvation*, 188.

¹¹¹ 31:34.

¹¹² 32:39-40.

¹¹³ 31:34.

¹¹⁴ 32:39.

New Covenant possessing the subjective knowledge of God, then infants and children should be included in that promise. This is not a difficulty for Reformed paedobaptists because of the systematic understanding of seminal faith in covenant children outlined later.

Fourth, both chapters 31 and 32 are couched in overwhelmingly corporate language. 31:31 opens with God making his new covenant with ‘the house of Israel and the house of Judah’. This is paralleled with 32:37, in which God promises to gather a scattered people. Brueggemann observes that these promises have a community focus: ‘The “new” covenant wrought by God also concerns the Israelite community. This is the community formed anew by God among exiles who are now transformed into a community of glad obedience.’¹¹⁵ In 32:37-41 especially, there is a proliferation of the plural third person pronoun. In addition, it has already been observed that Pamela Scalise, Terence Fretheim and William Holladay all suggest the use of the singular **לְ** in 31:33 and 32:39 addressed to a plural people emphasises solidarity: ‘it is the corporate will and intention of the people that is at stake.’¹¹⁶ Of course, corporateness and individuality are not incompatible, but the focus here seems to be on the former.

B. Personal Accountability

Some Reformed Baptists also pick out the contradiction of the proverb in 31:29-30.¹¹⁷ It seems, in the New Covenant, that people will be held responsible for their own sin. A number of responses may be made to this.

First, on systematic grounds, for any Christian who upholds penal substitutionary atonement, Jeremiah 31:30 (and Ezekiel 18:20) cannot be understood to exclude *any* transferral of guilt, otherwise the atonement becomes an overturning of God’s earlier promise. If greater individuality is intended here, it must be explained in congruity with penal substitution.

¹¹⁵ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah*, 292.

¹¹⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 198. Keown, Scalise and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 160. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 466.

¹¹⁷ Malone, *Baptism*, 75-6. Kingdon, *Children*, 72.

Second, it is likely that what is in view in 31:30 is generational, rather than individual. 'It is not that judgment in the future will be more individualistic (v. 30 is still communal in orientation) ... rather, each generation will suffer the consequences of their own sins.'¹¹⁸ Elmer Martens, a Baptist, argues that, in context, this section emphasises the communal nature of God's people.¹¹⁹ The context in 31:27-30 is one in which the Jerusalem exiles (either anticipating final defeat, or reflecting in exile, depending on dating) are exculpating themselves. They recognise a covenantal history in which children bear the consequences of parents' sin, and deploy this as an absolution of their own guilt: 'The proverb overstates the principle in order to emphasize inequity.'¹²⁰ Lundbom notes their conclusion that they were not responsible for the fate which befell them.¹²¹ God's answer through the prophet is to insist that they are held responsible for their own sin. In the parallel passage, Ezekiel 18, addressed to unrepentant inhabitants of Jerusalem, the purpose of the message is clear: 'Repent and turn from all your transgressions.'¹²² Similarly here, the message is that each generation will be held responsible for unrepentant hearts. This is less a message of corporate accountability being replaced by individual, as much as ancestral responsibility not absolving generational.

Third, when v. 30 is seen in conjunction with 31:34, a deliberate contrast may be understood, echoing Exodus 34:7. As in Exodus 34 the expansiveness of God's forgiveness, 'to the thousandth generation', is contrasted with the self-restriction of his retribution, 'to the third and the fourth generation', as an illustration of his compassionate and merciful nature, so here in Jeremiah 31, the extent of his love, 'forgiv[ing] their iniquity, and ... remember[ing] their sins no more', is brightened alongside the limitation of his justice, 'everyone ... [dying] for his own sin'. Admittedly, this is speculative, and no significant weight should rest upon it, but it is a striking parallel.

¹¹⁸ Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 440.

¹¹⁹ Martens, *Jeremiah*, 197.

¹²⁰ Martens, *Jeremiah*, 194.

¹²¹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21 – 36*, 462.

¹²² Ezekiel 18:30.

Consequently, neither the knowledge of 31:34, nor the accountability of 31:30 are seen to be exclusively, or indeed primarily, individual in nature. A broader perspective on chapters 31 and 32 may, on the contrary, indicate that the idea of the New Covenant set forth in Jeremiah is no more individual than the Old Covenant had been.

3. Unbreakable Covenant

It is observed that both Jeremiah 31 and 32 suggest the New Covenant is unbreakable. The contrast in 31:32-33 between 'my covenant that they broke' and 'But this is the covenant I will make' suggests this new one will not be breakable.¹²³ Equally, 32:40 insists the purpose of the New Covenant is 'that they may not turn from me'.¹²⁴

Richard Pratt has suggested that this element of the New Covenant promise (along with other elements) should be understood eschatologically.¹²⁵ Thus, 'in the consummation of Christ's kingdom, this prediction will be completely fulfilled'.¹²⁶ However, now, in the 'continuation'¹²⁷ of the kingdom, apostasy is still possible.¹²⁸ The fact that the New Jerusalem of 31:38-40 has been inaugurated and is continuing¹²⁹ while its final consummation is still awaited makes this hypothesis attractive.¹³⁰ However, there are elements of the New Covenant promise which clearly are already fulfilled: the covenant relationship, forgiveness of sins. Determining what is still awaited may be a subjective exercise.

A more comfortable fit in this thesis is the suggestion that this unbreakability is corporate rather than individual.¹³¹ Already, the strongly corporate nature of chapters 31 and 32 has been observed. Williams notes that the breaking of the old covenant in 31:32 is

¹²³ Jewett, *Infant Baptism*, 152.

¹²⁴ Malone, *Baptism*, 58, 85. Waldron with Barcellos, *Manifesto*, 72.

¹²⁵ Pratt, 'Infant Baptism'.

¹²⁶ Pratt, 'Infant Baptism', 169. Cf. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 470.

¹²⁷ Pratt, 'Infant Baptism', 169.

¹²⁸ Pratt, 'Infant Baptism', 170.

¹²⁹ Heb 12:22.

¹³⁰ Williams, *Salvation*, 184-5.

¹³¹ Williams, *Salvation*, 190.

corporate, indeed national.¹³² Hence the much wider context of the Book of Consolation: the punishment of the nation of Judah for its corporate apostasy, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and exile. Yet it is apparent that there were individual faithful Israelites who did not break the covenant.¹³³ The New Covenant, however, will not be broken. 'But the not-breaking will be of the same kind as the breaking with which the contrast is made; hence, it will be corporate not individual.'¹³⁴

Undoubtedly, there will be a fear amongst Reformed Baptists that admitting the individual breakability of the New Covenant is an attack on assurance, undermines the perseverance of the saints, and is an opening of the door to Arminianism. This is not the case. We are simply here observing that the New Covenant, like the Old, is mixed, and that the systematic category of election is not synonymous with the biblical category of New Covenant membership, though obviously there is considerable overlap. As Berkhof observes, following Bavinck's distinction between *in foedere* (in the covenant) and *de foedere* (of the covenant), 'It should be noted that, while the covenant is an eternal and inviolable covenant, which God never nullifies, it is possible for those who are in the covenant to break it. ... There may be, not merely a temporary, but a final breaking of the covenant, though there is no falling away of the saints.'¹³⁵ This is a well-established position in Reformed history: 'election and covenant for Calvin are *not* identical.'¹³⁶ 'Calvin denies that those who fall away from the covenant were never in the covenant in the first place. Rather, they were in the covenant, but only from the vantage point of a corporate election or adoption.'¹³⁷

Finally, a *tu quoque* argument may be employed here. If the New Covenant is individually unbreakable in the sense that Reformed Baptists maintain, there is ground for refusing adult baptism as well

¹³² Williams, *Salvation*, 190.

¹³³ Williams, *Salvation*, 190.

¹³⁴ Williams, *Salvation*, 190.

¹³⁵ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: Banner of Truth, 1941), 289.

¹³⁶ P. A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*, Texts & Studies in Reformation & Post-Reformation Thought 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 226.

¹³⁷ Lillback, *Binding*, 216.

as infant baptism. Both infants and adults are included in the New Covenant promise,¹³⁸ and experience shows that some fall away whether baptised as infants or adults. If later apostasy is an argument against baptising infants, surely the same argument applies to baptising adults?

4. Subjective Certainty

More than with the other elements of the New Covenant promises this debate is largely a systematic one, though there is also a significant exegetical element. On the systematic front, there is a well-established Reformed tradition of asserting 'seminal or radical and habitual faith'¹³⁹ in infant children of believers as the normative biblical pattern. This is understood to be not actual faith,¹⁴⁰ but 'the seed of faith'¹⁴¹ which grows into developed faith and action in maturity. Rich Lusk has clarified this in arguing, from the Psalms particularly, for faith to be expected even from the womb in the offspring of believers.¹⁴² Sadly, this is a major shortcoming of the latest Reformed Baptist treatment, *Believer's Baptism*, edited by Schreiner and Wright. Throughout the different essays, there is an *a priori* assumption that infants and young children are physically incapable of faith.¹⁴³ However, this article is not intended to be a survey of broader systematic arguments beyond the compass of Jeremiah 31-32.

The significant exegetical question which undergirds much of this study concerns 32:39 and 41. Twice God promises 'good' to the people. In v. 39, it is 'for their own good and the good of their children after them', in v. 41, 'I will rejoice in doing them good'. This is particularly significant as it is the element within the New Covenant promises which is explicitly promised to the children. Fred Malone offers the most explicit Reformed Baptist treatment.

¹³⁸ Jeremiah 32:39.

¹³⁹ F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. J. T. Dennison Jr, trans G. M. Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1997), 2:583.

¹⁴⁰ Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:584.

¹⁴¹ Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:586.

¹⁴² R. Lusk, *Paedofaith* (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 1995), 21 and *passim*.

¹⁴³ Schreiner and Wright, *Believer's Baptism*, 7, 62, 73, 77, 86, 93, 113.

Jeremiah 32:39 does not say that every seed of the heart-changed will be heart-changed as well, but only that it will be for “the good of their children after them.” This simply means that it will be good for the children to be raised in a heart-changed home, to hear about the everlasting covenant themselves, and to know the promise to parents that God will save from among their children.¹⁴⁴

In effect, Malone is saying that Jeremiah 32:39 means nothing more than that it is a good thing to grow up in a Christian home, rather than a non-Christian one. However, the good envisaged here is far greater.

First, the good the children will receive is the same good which God intends for the whole people. In the phrase, לְטוֹב לָהֶם, 'for good' (לְטוֹב) occurs once, not twice as in the ESV, thus one good applies to both 'them' and 'their children'. The good to the people cannot be differentiated from the good to the children.

Second, the good spoken of seems to have greater value than Malone allows. Commentators concede it is difficult to specify the nature of this good, but most see in it more than Malone. It is the opposite of suffering evil in 7:6 and a hopeful future promise.¹⁴⁵ It is so that 'they may enjoy his bounty'.¹⁴⁶ It may be an echo of the Genesis good, lauding God's initiative in creating life.¹⁴⁷ Scalise suggests that good is equivalent to a whole range of God's blessings: justice, absence of oppression, protection of life, experiencing the presence of God.¹⁴⁸ 'When construed personally as a statement concerning Yahweh's good deeds toward someone, *tôb* takes on historico-theological significance, deriving from the contrast between the upright and the wicked and conveying the notion of hope in the midst of misfortune.'¹⁴⁹

It is striking that most of the parallels to these two verses appear in Jeremiah or Deuteronomy. לְטוֹב in 32:39 is paralleled in

¹⁴⁴ Malone, *Baptism*, 114.

¹⁴⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 220. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21 – 36*, 519.

¹⁴⁶ McKane, *Jeremiah 2*, 850.

¹⁴⁷ Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 467.

¹⁴⁸ Keown, Scalise and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 161.

¹⁴⁹ I. Höver-Johag, 'טוֹב', in *TDOT* 5:307.

Deuteronomy 6:24 where ‘there is a correspondence between “have well-being” (lit. “good”) and “we shall be held righteous”’;¹⁵⁰ and in Deuteronomy 30:9, a significant parallel given the context of a promise of return from future exile, where good encompasses material prosperity and Yahweh’s delight in reversing his former curse.¹⁵¹

There are three relevant parallels to the hiphil infinitive construct form of **טָבַע** with God as the subject and the people as the object in 32:41. In Deuteronomy 8:16, it is God’s desire to do the people good which is the final cause of his leading them out of Egypt and sustaining them through the wilderness. That good is presumably the gift of the promised land. In Deuteronomy 28:63, as Moses warns the people of the consequences of apostasy, the God who once took delight in doing good to his people, will now take delight in destroying them. In vv. 62-3 there is a clear opposition between multiplying and doing good to the people on the one hand, and decimating, ruining and destroying them on the other. Gordon McConville notes the link to Jeremiah 32: ‘Yahweh’s joy in blessing turns into joy in bringing destruction. (The phrase in its positive side is echoed in 30:9; Jer. 32:41, both of which look beyond judgment to renewed blessing.)’¹⁵² In Jeremiah 18:10, in response to claims of injustice from the people, God asserts his sovereign right to relent of doing good to evil nations. Here **טָבַע** ‘serves to express God’s act of salvation as an offer and guarantee of later intervention.’¹⁵³ In v. 7, the parallel to this doing good is ‘that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it’.

Thus, some conclusions may be reached concerning the meaning of God doing good to his people and their children in 32:39 and 41. Doing good is connected in some way with making righteous;¹⁵⁴ it can be a description of the reversal of curse;¹⁵⁵ it often includes material

¹⁵⁰ J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, AOTC 5 (Leicester: IVP, 2002), 145.

¹⁵¹ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 428.

¹⁵² McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 408.

¹⁵³ Höver-Johag, *TDOT* 5:311

¹⁵⁴ Deuteronomy 6:24.

¹⁵⁵ Deuteronomy 30:9.

blessings under the old covenant;¹⁵⁶ it is equated with the fulfilment of God's promise of a land;¹⁵⁷ its opposites include curse, destruction, ruin and decrease in population. Höver-Johag is clear that this terminology indicates salvation:

A new theological element appears in the Deuteronomistic redaction of Jeremiah: announcement of salvation without prior performance on the part of the people (Jer. 32:42; cf. 24:5-7; 29:10 etc.) ... In Jeremiah, *tôb* frequently appears in the context of *Heilsgeschichte*, referring to the future well-being of both nation and individual (Jer. 8:15; 14:11, 19; 17:6 etc.) It takes on special importance as the substance of the new covenant, the *berît 'ôlām* (Jer. 32:40-42).¹⁵⁸

Stoebe also equates טוב with life, blessing, salvation and חַסָּד.¹⁵⁹ Some elements, at least, of טוב and יטב as they are used in similar contexts to Jeremiah 32, are salvific, and most elements suggest far more significance than Malone's explanation would allow.

In conclusion, while some doubt may remain about the precise meaning of God doing good to their children after them, it is clear that the children of the people of God are fully included in the promise of salvific blessing to come which is the New Covenant.

For each of these four elements of Reformed Baptist exegesis of Jeremiah 31, it is clear that the further exposition of the New Covenant set forth in Jeremiah 32:37-41 undermines or contradicts the criticisms of Paedobaptism set forth.

Conclusion

Jeremiah 31:31-34 and 32:37-41 both expound the promised New Covenant which the Old Testament anticipated. The parallels, both contextual and verbal, between them demonstrate their correspondence in the final redaction of Jeremiah, regardless of history, dating or compositional theory.

The explicit inclusion of children in Jeremiah 32:39 points to the visible membership of those children of believers within the people of

¹⁵⁶ Deuteronomy 30:9.

¹⁵⁷ Deuteronomy 8:16.

¹⁵⁸ Höver-Johag, *TDOT* 5:312, 315.

¹⁵⁹ H. J. Stoebe, 'טוב', in *TLOT* 2:488, 492, 493, 494.

God. The supposed silence of the New Covenant promises concerning children is shown to be false, whilst the three main features of the New Covenant used to object to the administration of the covenant sign to covenant children are shown not to be problematic.

It is doubtful whether the New Covenant is more individualistic than the Old in Jeremiah 31-32, and therefore the objections to covenant succession through generations are removed. The unbreakability of the New Covenant is primarily a corporate rather than an individual one, a source of hope for the people of God, but not complacency for individual covenant members. Finally, the subjective certainty of the New Covenant is available and promised just as much to the children of believers as to adult covenant members.

It should now be apparent that Jeremiah's promises of the New Covenant cannot be used as texts to attack the baptism of covenant infants.

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