With this volume Lundbom finishes his series of commentaries on the work of the great prophet Jeremiah. And in the spirit of that large and intricate work, Lundbom offers a large and intricate study. His study, however, is completely accessible to all. He does not talk over the nonspecialist’s head, nor does he leave the specialist without a great deal to think about. His treatment throughout is thorough and competent. Even when one disagrees with Lundbom’s views, one has to admit that he has presented all points of view in a judicious manner and has dealt with the text in all its detail. This makes the commentary an important component of the array of tools necessary for understanding the book of Jeremiah. This final volume, however, is not self-standing. The bibliography and list of abbreviations are found in the preceding volumes, and likewise some of the appendices are found in this one. In addition, Lundbom has supplemented and modified some of his earlier views in this volume.

The structure of the commentary lends itself to easy use. At the front one finds a translation of the chapters under examination, and this is followed with the biblical text broken up into pericopes and dealt with under the rubrics of “Rhetoric and Composition,” “Notes,” and “Message and Audience.” In dividing up the pericopes, special attention is given to the masoretic paragraph divisions as it is found in various manuscripts. There is also a compilation of such in appendix VII, which encompasses all fifty-two chapters of
Jeremiah and even includes the evidence from Qumran. Lundbom, in fact, even goes so far as to include high-quality, legible photographs of the Jeremiah material from Qumran. The author’s translation bears all the hallmarks of a careful and conscientious biblicist. His approach is generally conservative in as much as he tries to translate the MT as it stands without resorting to emendation. And he relies very heavily on the details of the MT for forming his views on literary structure and meaning. Thus a great deal of emphasis is placed on inclusio, catchwords, ballast lines (“i.e., weighty sentences, formulaic in nature, which bring each segment to a recognizable end” [51]), and chasms. One could perhaps wish that his translation had been governed a little more strictly by discourse linguistics: his use of the simple “and” does get a bit tiring at times. And it must be admitted that his literary analysis does falter in a few places. In 40:1–6, for instance, he finds an example of inclusio that does not seem tenable at all. But for the most part his literary analysis shows careful consideration and is at least thought provoking if not always cogent.

Lundbom’s conservatism is not a blind conservatism, however. He supports his views with adductions while giving due consideration to other scholarly opinions. As might be expected, he generally prefers the MT reading to the LXX reading, but this is due to his view that the LXX has suffered a great deal through haplography. Appendix V lists all the cases that he has found for the entire book including the reason and whether the omission was homoeoteluton or hamoeoarcton. Indeed, he finds that over half of the differences in length between the MT and LXX are attributable to scribal error on the LXX or its Vorlage’s part. These findings should provide plenty of material for scholarly debate in the years to come as the text critics try to decide whether the claims are overblown or accurate. But while Lundbom’s conservatism is not blind, on the literary side it is a little laborious at times. For instance, in the variant accounts of Jeremiah’s imprisonment and release in chapters 37–40 Lundbom sees two separate accounts of two different incidents due to the “many differences in detail” and the successive nature of the accounts (51). Such a view necessitates and produces a great deal of explaining that is not particularly elucidating or satisfying.

Amidst Lundbom’s multifarious quotations from just about every source imaginable—including older and current German and English scholarship; the rabbis; ancient Israelite, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian letters and literature—one finds that there is often an undercurrent of Protestant Christian thinking. There are constant quotations from Calvin and not infrequent quotations of hymns and sometimes accounts of Protestant theologians. In general, this undercurrent does not interfere with the author’s explanation of the text. He does, however, title 37:1–40:6 “Behold the Man” and designates the prose of chapters 37–44 the “via dolorosa prose” throughout the volume. But such things only cast a dim shadow over the brilliance and thoroughness of his work. In general it may be
said that he brings every possible tool available—historical, literary, or scholarly—to elucidate the pericope in question and the book as a whole.

An example of how Lundbom seeks to elucidate the structure of the book of Jeremiah as a whole in both the MT and LXX can be found in his discussions of expanded scribal colophons. In his view 36:1–8, 45:1–5, and 51:59–64 “function” as expanded colophons (172). Thus Baruch’s colophon in chapter 45 (LXX 51:31–35) closes the Egyptian recension of Jeremiah (= LXX Vorlage) with its oracles against the nations in their original place in the middle of the book, while Seraiah’s colophon in 51:59–64 concludes the Babylonian recension with its oracles against the nations moved to the end of the book. Seraiah’s colophon also forms an inclusio between 1:1 and 51:64 with the mention of the “legacy” of Jeremiah. The author’s discussion of these points and the details associated with them are far from pellucid at times, and the scattered nature of the discussion makes facile understanding a challenge. And while it must be candidly stated that a comparison of these putative expanded colophons with other nonexpanded colophons from Semitic texts ranging from Ugaritic to Syriac brings the viability of such a view into question, it is nonetheless an idea that is well worth further consideration and study.

Lundbom goes on to point out that Baruch and Seraiah were brothers from the same scribal family. And this kind of datum is indicative of his work: he is steadily pointing out connections and interrelations throughout the volume. These details bring the book of Jeremiah to life and further profitable reading. Lundbom, for example, notes that Baalis, the king of Ammon, was not implicated in the destruction of the Jerusalem temple as Edom was and that this may reveal a staunchly anti-Babylonian stance. This goes far in explaining why Baalis and Ishmael, a person of royal descent and the assassin of Gedaliah, conspired against the Babylonian-installed puppet ruler, Gedaliah. In fact, the Judean governor was part of scribal family “with whom Jeremiah had a long-standing friendship” (92). Lundbom goes on to note the bullae and seal impression finds that may show Ishmael and his family’s royal status and Ammonite connections.

But Lundbom is not just an illuminating commentator, he is also a sensitive one. When discussing the unique deportation summary in 52:28–30, for example, he observes the widely differing totals posited here and in 2 Kings, that is, 3,023 versus 18,000, respectively. And he offers the suggestion, “The numbers then of the summary doubtless present those who actually arrived in Babylon, which may go some—though not necessarily all the—way in explaining their low totals. Not everyone leaving Judah completed the trip” (532). His use of language and his ideas very poignantly describe what must have been a Judean “Trial of Tears” akin to what the American Indian suffered. Lundbom allows the modern reader a chance to experience the book of
Jeremiah, not just read it, and his work represents a large step forward in Jeremiah research for the scholarly world. It is for these reasons that his work forms an important tool in furthering our understanding of the complicated and large book of Jeremiah. I close by noting a couple of typographical errors. On page 45 read “Jehoiachin” for “Jehoiakim,” and some title or attribution is needed for the poem on pages 94–95.