

RECENT TRENDS IN THE STUDY OF JEREMIAH

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Until recently, one would be hard pressed to list more than a handful of commentaries currently available on the book of Jeremiah. This important Old Testament prophet has been short-changed by the neglect of scholarly activity during the twentieth century; that is, until now!

At the end of the 1970s, there was an obvious dearth of up-to-date commentaries on Jeremiah.¹ But in the past twelve years, this *desideratum* has been met -- and with a vengeance. First came a trickle, which grew into a steady stream, and then a virtual downpour of commentaries on Jeremiah. It began with John A. Thompson's contribution in the NICOT series in 1980 and has continued unabated until the present.² And this avalanche of scholarly activity is not limited to commentaries. A host of important monographs on individual topics has also been published during this period.

This article will survey the new commentaries available since 1980 including Thompson's. The discussion will center around three major, critical commentaries which appeared together in 1986. Commentaries by Robert P. Carroll,³ William L. Holladay,⁴ and William McKane,⁵ were all published that year making it something of a landmark in Jeremianic studies. Additionally, I will include remarks here on the new works by Walter Brueggemann,⁶ Ronald E. Clements,⁷ Peter C. Craigie *et al.*,⁸ Elmer A. Martens,⁹ and Douglas Rawlinson Jones.¹⁰ I will also make brief comments on a few of the most important monographs.

This article attempts to evaluate the new commentaries by surveying how each one treats five of the most important exegetical issues in Jeremiah studies. In the process, the presentation will also survey the recent trends among scholars working on Jeremiah.¹¹ Three of these issues are rather standard for works on biblical books: authorship and date, historical background, and theological emphases. But in addition to these, any serious study of Jeremiah has two additional problems to address: the book's unique relationship to Deuteronomy and the puzzling text critical discrepancies between the standard Hebrew text and the ancient Greek translation of Jeremiah.

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I. Authorship and Composition

Scholarly opinions on the authorship and composition of Jeremiah are widely divergent for two reasons. First, the book contains more biographical information on Jeremiah than we possess for any other person in the Old Testament. Many doubt the historical accuracy of these biographical data, and the debate on authorship is usually divided along these lines. The fact remains that this biographical material creates a unique situation in prophetic literature. Second, the book has no clearly discernible order of arrangement, which makes Jeremiah susceptible to many theories of composition. Exactly how did these materials come to be collected and why in this arrangement?

Recently the debate has been polarized between two extremes, as illustrated by the new commentaries discussed here. There are those who are historical maximalists regarding the biographical information in the book and thus usually overemphasize Jeremiah the man. On the other hand, other scholars are more concerned with the newer literary approaches to the Bible, and these tend to emphasize Jeremiah the book at the expense of pursuing any historical investigation of the man.¹² The truth must lie somewhere in the middle.

A theory which is now over 90 years old continues to dominate the discussion on the authorship of Jeremiah. First suggested by Bernhard Duhm in 1901 and refined by Sigmund Mowinckel in 1914, this approach divides the material of Jeremiah into four original literary sources. Source A was a collection of poetic oracles from Jeremiah, found throughout chapters 1-25. Source B consisted of prose sermons about the activities of the prophet by an anonymous author, now found in chapters 26-45. The third source, Source C, was comprised of prose speeches written in a later deuteronomic style; that is, these sermons express the theology and worldview of Jews living in the exilic and post-exilic eras. This source is now located throughout chapters 1-45. Source D contained oracles of future salvation which were collected into chapters 30-31 in the present arrangement (this source has been omitted in contemporary discussions). In this theory, chapters 46-52 were later additions.¹³

The new works being considered here present several variations on this theory, while a few reject the hypothesis altogether. Holladay flatly rejects the Duhm-Mowinckel idea of sources on the basis of distinctive Jeremianic vocabulary across the various "sources" and the identification of what he calls the "authentic voice" of Jeremiah in all the alleged sources (II.15). Of course these are notoriously subjective criteria for analyzing biblical texts.

Holladay accepts the historical reliability of Jeremiah 36, where the prophet dictated a scroll to Baruch. After Jehoiakim cut up and burned the scroll, Jeremiah proceeded to dictate a second one to Baruch, which contained essentially the same material as the first scroll plus additional materials. Holladay assumes this second scroll was maintained as an "open-ended" document, to which were added additional prophecies of Jeremiah and historical or biographical materials of Baruch. From this time until their trip to Egypt, Holladay assumes there were simultaneously, oral and written traditions of Jeremianic sayings. He traces the development of the Jeremiah materials through two more scrolls, plus the oracles against the nations. Holladay supposes that Jeremiah composed or dictated the bulk of the prophecies which are credited to him, including even most of the materials usually assigned to source B and thought to be from Baruch. He assumes a large editorial role for Baruch in this process, concluding that very little of the book was original to later editors (II.15-24).

Brueggemann is influenced by the newer literary and rhetorical approaches. He has expressed frustration at the current state of historical-critical method which he believes has gone as far as it can with Jeremiah.¹⁴ He feels too much time is used on the historical and redactional issues, while omitting questions of theology and literature. He states that the rhetoric which is determinative for Jeremiah is a dramatic triangling involving Yahweh, Babylon and Judah. Initially, the triangle was Yahweh and Babylon against Judah. Only too late, Yahweh was triangled with Jerusalem against Babylon. Not surprisingly, Brueggemann is sympathetic to Brevard Childs' canonical approach (I.9).

If Holladay (and John Bright before him, see endnote 1) may be called a historical maximalist, then Robert Carroll is a minimalist. He and other British scholars¹⁵ have assumed the opposite position to Holladay; that is, little can be known of the historical Jeremiah, and the oracles accredited to him must be accepted as anonymous. Carroll takes the position that reform movements (such as Josiah's reforms) are patterns imposed on the past by deuteronomistic editors of the exilic and post-exilic periods. The concept of reform, in this view, was an idealized interpretation of history from the later period transposed over the deuteronomistic edition of Judah's history (Carroll, 49-50).

In Carroll's view, these same deuteronomistic redactors, who wrote history from the ideological perspective of Deuteronomy, also provided the redactional framework for the book of Jeremiah (such as 1.1-3; 7.1; 11.1, etc.). The rest of the book, both prose *and* poetry, is anonymous! Thus for Carroll, Jeremiah disappears, along with the scholarly quest for the historical Jeremiah (see below). Any discussion

of Jeremiah's attitude to Josiah's reforms or his literary relationship to Deuteronomy becomes irrelevant (Carroll, 48-49). Baruch's role becomes impossible to determine, and at one point it begins to sound as though Carroll doubts whether he actually played any role at all (61).

With regard to Mowinckel's sources A, B, and C, all are anonymous in Carroll's view. Even the poetry of chapters 1-25, the alleged A source, which is widely held to be authentic to Jeremiah, becomes anonymous once the deuteronomistic introductions are removed. Carroll avers that there is nothing in the poetry itself to identify the speaker and that it is "a dogma of Jeremiah studies that the prophet is the poet of the tradition" (47). Carroll's investigation leads him to conclude, "we have no *reason* (emphasis his) to believe the poems of 1-25 to be other than anonymous utterances from a variety of sources" (47). Ultimately, Carroll employs a sociological approach in assuming the book of Jeremiah is compiled from traditions deriving from various circles active after the fall of Jerusalem and during the Persian period (69-71). These groups are involved in a power struggle during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah! At this point, one might ask whether Carroll has not suddenly reversed himself and now become something of a historical maximalist. He is now skating his fanciful pirouettes on precariously thin ice.

J. A. Thompson accepts the basic Duhm-Mowinckel source divisions, but with modifications. He assumes, with the majority of scholars that source A (chapters 1-25) contains authentic poetic sermons of Jeremiah. Source B is the historical material from a "biographer" who was contemporary with the events and may have been an eyewitness. Baruch, Thompson concludes, is the best candidate for such a biographer. But source C, unlike the consensus view, is probably also authentic to Jeremiah. Thompson argues that there is no reason to confine the prophet Jeremiah to what we normally regard as poetry (Thompson, 46). He concludes that we have good reason to assume "the so-called prose sermons were already well developed in Jeremiah's lifetime" (47). He also, however, leaves open the possibility of some editorial processes in these sermons, deuteronomistic or otherwise.

In this as in other areas, Thompson appears to be much indebted to the earlier commentary of John Bright (see note 1). He is persuaded, for example, by Bright's theory that the Jeremiah traditions were transmitted both orally and in writing over a long period of time. These traditions would have existed simultaneously and would have interacted with each other - the oral tradition more flexible, easily supplementing materials over time; the written tradition more static, serving as a control of the oral (32).

Craigie is not inhospitable to Mowinckel's source approach, but does not find the classification particularly satisfying. He is also influenced by the previous work of John Bright, and particularly by the views of H. Weippert.¹⁶ She has gone beyond Bright's doubts regarding the label "deuteronomistic" for the prose of the discourse narratives, and has argued instead that the language of the speeches is sixth-century prose which is typical of Jeremiah's time.¹⁷ Craigie agrees that there is no difficulty in supposing the prophet used both poetry and prose in his addresses. He seems open to deuteronomistic influences in Jeremiah, but not necessarily a deuteronomistic redactor (Craigie, xxxii-xxxvii).

On the issue of the relationship between poetry and prose, Jones demurs. He argues that the book was composed for the most part from "poetic concentrates," and that Jeremiah was limited to the poetic form as the cultural form of the day. In this, he was not unlike his prophetic ancestors, from Amos onward (Jones, 18-19). Jones believes that the prose of the book (both the B and C type materials) is deuteronomistic in style, but that this is only a half-truth. He insists that the prose reflects a specific Jeremianic tradition, preserved by a Jeremiah school of preachers and redactors. These were not the deuteronomists of the post-exilic synagogue or in the Babylonian exile, but were distant disciples of Jeremiah, educated in the deuteronomistic schools (Jones, 19-22).

Clements appears to be within the mainstream of scholarly consensus on the composition of Jeremiah. He emphasizes the "developmental interpretation" of the prose discourse-like sermons which appear alongside the poetry of chapters 1-25. Though these are not directly the work of the historical Jeremiah, they are based on words, themes and situations authentic to the prophet. Baruch played an important role in the composition of the book, according to Clements, but only as a "link in the chain of preservation." He gives a larger role to the exilic deuteronomistic editors of these materials (Clements, 7-12).

McKane builds an elaborate case for a process by which the materials of the book were collected and compiled over a long period of time (McKane, l-lxxxiii). His thesis begins with small pieces of pre-existing texts (usually a verse or two) which triggered, or generated exegesis or commentary by later contributors in the Jeremianic tradition. In cases where poetry generated prose comment, McKane accepts the poetry as authentic to Jeremiah. He is not so confident in cases where prose has triggered prose commentary. McKane's hypothesis puts him at variance with the Duhm-Mowinckel source theory (McKane, lxxxiii-lxxxviii).¹⁸

This theory that small pieces of pre-existing texts triggered exegesis and expansions of the text is what McKane terms “a rolling *corpus*,” which occurred over a long period of time, and was presumably still rolling in the post-exilic period (McKane, lxxxiii). But this approach abandons all hope of finding a discernable pattern or design in the present canonical shape of the book, and assumes the elaborate process deals with written manuscripts. McKane underestimates the oral history of sermons and oracles in the prophetic tradition (for critique, see Jones, 27-28).

Recently, the editorial processes at work in the book have been analyzed thoroughly from the perspective of the socio-historical influences at work during the exilic period. Christopher Seitz has traced the contents of chapters 37-45 (his “Scribal Chronicle”) to a member of the post-597 community in Judah, who was sympathetic to the appointment and tenure of Gedaliah.¹⁹ Seitz believes the author of the chronicle was from one of the scribal families active in Jerusalem during the period and was an eyewitness to the events described in these chapters.

Moreover, since Gedaliah was the grandson of Shaphan, the scribe in Josiah’s court, Seitz further postulates that the author of chapters 37-43(45) was also a member of this scribal family, who was later exiled into Babylonia. This section of Jeremiah made its way to Babylon during the third deportation, where it received extensive editorial reworking from an exilic redactor under the influence of the Ezekiel traditions (i.e., chapters 43-44). With chapters 36 and 45 functioning as frame units for the original Scribal Chronicle, the document was combined with other Jeremiah traditions, and the present book was given its final shape (Seitz, 282-291).

Seitz has attempted in this work to “alter the sequence of investigation” (Seitz, 2). By focusing on the socio-historical background first, and the literary forms second, his work seeks to overcome the subjective quality of the earlier theories. His volume is impressive, both for its thoroughness and its incisive new ideas, and will undoubtedly impact the way we analyze the growth of the Jeremiah traditions. Regardless of whether his views of the Scribal Chronicle will win the favor of the scholarly community, his work has opened new vistas for discussion.

II. Historical Background

Jeremiah was active from 628/627 BC until the fall of Jerusalem and the beginning of the exile in June or July of 586 BC (1.2-3). However,

at least a few of his sermons were delivered during the years immediately after the fall of Jerusalem (chapters 40-45).²⁰ This half century was a turning point in ancient Near Eastern history, because it witnessed the fall of Assyria and the rise of Babylonia as the major world power. During the transition of international powers, Judah exerted her political independence, however briefly, and King Josiah enacted his major religious reforms. This is one of the best attested periods of Israel's history.

Since the book contains so much biographical and personal material, many scholars have participated in the so-called "quest for the historical Jeremiah."²¹ Most scholars begin by accepting the material in the A source as authentic Jeremiah sermons. Others go even further and argue for the reliability of B as Baruch's collection, and of the C source as also genuinely Jeremianic. Once this is accepted, it is obvious that we have more information about Jeremiah than any other person in the Old Testament. Besides his call (chapter 1) and the many biographical narratives of the Baruch scroll, chapters 11-20 contain also his seven confessions, or complaints. These private laments reveal the prophet's "inner self," his common human frailties, which occasionally erupted into bitter complaints to God.

The quest for the historical Jeremiah is not altogether unlike the nineteenth century quest for the historical Jesus. Many of the issues are the same: how much can we know about the *ipsissima verba* ("the very words") of Jeremiah, and how much has later generations mythologized the hero? A few of the commentators discussed are polarized between two extreme views: those of Carroll and Holladay.

Carroll assumes a position which may be called agnostic, by which I mean he does not believe we can know the relationship between the book and the historical Jeremiah. In fact, Jeremiah himself "disappears" from both the poetry and the prose of the book once the later deuteronomic redactional framework is removed (Carroll, 48). So, for Carroll, the literary figure of the prophet has nothing to do with historical reality. The prophetic figure is "not a real person but a conglomerate of many things, reflecting the fortunes of various Jewish communities during and after the Babylonian period" (Carroll, 62-64). This disappearing prophet is a slight of hand proposition: now you see him; now you don't!

By contrast, Holladay contends that the book has sufficiently reliable historical information to provide a basic, broad outline of the facts of Jeremiah's life (and so Thompson, 94-106 and Martens, 18-19). Though a complete biography is of course impossible, Holladay believes a plausible reconstruction of the life and times of Jeremiah is possible (I.1-10; II.24-35).

In his reconstruction, Holladay has argued forcefully for a rather unique interpretation of Jeremiah 1.2: "... to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign." While the majority of scholars assume this date (627/626 BC) refers to the beginning of Jeremiah's active ministry, Holladay garners seven arguments in favor of this date as the birth of Jeremiah (II.25-26). Holladay admits that some of his seven points are arguments from silence (and I would suggest that even the positive evidence is debatable). But he contends that the seven points listed together challenge the standard approach to the verse, though separately, no one of them is strong.

Though this view is not new, it has not been widely accepted, and it remains to be seen whether future students of Jeremiah will be swayed by Holladay's impressive effort. I am still unconvinced, and I prefer to assume 627/626 BC is the point at which Jeremiah began preaching the word of Yahweh. Seven weak points of evidence do not make a strong case. Craigie has argued that Holladay's innovation is unlikely on the basis of literary, contextual reasons. The verses in question (1.2-3) serve as part of the introduction, and Craigie believed the passage as a whole implies the point at which Jeremiah became conscious of God's call. Craigie prefers to see 627 as the year of Jeremiah's awareness of the divine vocation (Craigie, 3 and see further the rebuttal of J. A. Thompson, 53-56).

In his investigation of the historical background of Jeremiah, Holladay offers a second innovation: the role of the septennial reading of Deuteronomy (I.1-2 and II.27-35). According to Deuteronomy 31.9-13, the book was to be read every seven years in the hearing of a national assembly. Holladay assumes this injunction was taken seriously and that these septennial readings offer "a chronological structure" for the career of Jeremiah (I.1). I shall have more to say about this in section III below.

As I will point out in the section on theology below, the strength of Brueggemann's commentary (as with his other writings) is his theological sensitivity. He makes no attempt to trace the historical background of Jeremiah in great detail. Instead, he prefers to discuss the constructed persona of the prophet, which is no doubt rooted in historical reality, but which is presented in the book as an intentional literary production (Brueggemann, 11-12).

After a brief survey of the salient events of the late seventh and early sixth centuries, Brueggemann characteristically turns the discussion to theological concerns (I.1-2). The period is dominated by the fortunes of the great Near Eastern empires which form the context for Jeremiah (Assyria and Babylonia) and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Brueggemann states that these events could easily be interpreted in terms of *Realpolitik*, that is in terms of mere human power structures and political machinations. But Brueggemann wants to assume a different perspective on these events, a theological point of view that Jeremiah himself assumed (I.2).

Clements accepts the traditional date for the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry (627-626 BC), which means he had been prophesying for five years before Josiah's reforms took place. Since Jeremiah's written ministry appears to have begun in 605 (according to chapter 36), many have doubted that Jeremiah was actively preaching much before this time. Clements argues instead that the changed international political situation in 605-604 resulted in the sudden concern for preserving Jeremiah's prophecies. Nabopolassar's victory at Carchemish meant that Egypt's influence was waning and Judah came within the orbit of Babylonian imperial control. Clements concludes: "the beginning of Jeremiah's work as a prophet therefore was not coterminous with the concern to preserve a record of his prophecies on a scroll" (Clements, 5). This is certainly a plausible explanation for what has been thought of as Jeremiah's silence during his early years.

Craigie is quite critical of those who draw too much of a parallel between the quest for the historical Jeremiah and the New Testament problem of the quest for the historical Jesus. This is true primarily because, among other things, the analogy breaks down quickly when one considers the Gospel presentation of the person of Jesus as the object of faith. For Craigie, this crucial difference between Jesus and Jeremiah means the analogy is misleading and irrelevant. In fact, Craigie turns the argument around. He goes on to assert that the most persuasive argument in favor of the historicity of the book's recollections is that there is no evidence the prophet later became the object of beliefs or veneration of any kind (Craigie, xxxviii).

III. Jeremiah and Deuteronomy

Many scholars have noted the similarities between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy in style, vocabulary and ideology. But why is this so? What are the connections between these two books? Jeremiah clearly has some relationship with Deuteronomy, both literarily and historically. The literary dependency (or at least connectedness) is clear and unmistakable, but what of the historical relationship between Jeremiah and Josiah's reforms?

Since most of OT scholarship assumes the reforms were based on a newly written Deuteronomy (or at least UrDeuteronomy, i.e.,

chapters 5-26), the issue really has to do with the relationship of Jeremiah to Josiah's reforms (described in 2 Kings 22-23). Scholars are divided among four positions, three of which assume the earlier date for Jeremiah's call to prophetic ministry (627/26 BC).²² First, Jeremiah was an active supporter, and possibly even regarded the reforms as a result of his earlier preaching. Second, the lack of references to Josiah in the book demonstrates either Jeremiah's sympathy for the ideals of the reform, or his conviction that the inevitability of impending doom rendered futile any efforts at reform.

Third, Jeremiah was an active supporter at the beginning, but later, changed his position after determining that it was characterized by rampant nationalism and improper attention to the externals of religion (cult, sacrifice, and temple). A final stance is taken by scholars who have posited a 609 BC date for the call of the prophet (rather than the consensus 627/26). They suggest that Jeremiah's silence about the reform is due to his being only a child when the program was enacted.

Concerning the literary connections between Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, Clements goes so far as to assert that the very circles of scribes who "were responsible for composing the law-book of Deuteronomy, [and] the history of Joshua-Second Kings," would probably include the editors of the prophecies of Jeremiah (Clements, 11). Jones, on the other hand, argues that although Jeremiah's prose is deuteronomistic in form, this is the style of its age, used in learned circles during the seventh and sixth centuries. Thus the book's prose was written by a Jeremianic school that preserved genuine Jeremiah traditions, but wrote in a deuteronomistic style (Jones, 19-22).

Holladay's position is something of a compromise. In a lengthy and detailed discussion, he concludes that Jeremiah drew on Proto-Deuteronomy, which he believes consisted of Deuteronomy 5-26, but that exilic redactors of Deuteronomy occasionally drew on the words of Jeremiah (1:53-63). Furthermore, the influence of the Book of Deuteronomy was profound during this period because of the injunction of Deuteronomy 31.9-13 for a septennial, public reading of the book (see above). If indeed the book was read every seven years, Holladay argues, then several of the parallels between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy may be explained as prophetic addresses which were intentionally building on a public reading of Deuteronomy. Thus Holladay has attempted to locate certain Jeremianic texts with precise dates when Deuteronomy would have been fresh in Israel's collective consciousness (I.1-2).

For example, Holladay proposes the reading of Deuteronomy in 587 BC as the context for Jeremiah's proclamation of the new covenant (31.31-34). If this is correct, one of the most profound and hopeful

prophecies on the future of the covenant community was preached while Jerusalem lay in ashes, torn apart merely six weeks previously (II.34-35). Hopefully, the future will reveal to us whether this approach is legitimate and whether it is possible to be so specific with these texts. But I confess this is one of the most interesting aspects of Holladay's impressive work (see Jones, 25 for criticisms.)

For Carroll, of course, the question is moot, since whatever connections may be found between Jeremiah and Josiah's reforms were undoubtedly imposed by the later deuteronomistic editors of the Jeremianic traditions. For him, the question is in fact, irrelevant.

Thompson follows a detailed study by John Bright of the characteristic expressions of the prose of Jeremiah in comparison with that of Deuteronomy (Thompson 44-46). Although there are indeed many points of resemblance and similarity, Bright (and Thompson) concluded that there are also many points of difference. Any talk of literary dependence is unsubstantiated. Instead, Deuteronomy, the deuteronomistic histories, and the Jeremiah prose may be regarded as sharing the rhetorical prose style of the late seventh and early sixth centuries in Judah (Thompson, 46). Thompson also feels that we should not put too much emphasis on the differences between the poetic and prose portions of Jeremiah, a warning which is now widely held as axiomatic in Old Testament studies.²³ While minimizing Jeremiah's relationship with Deuteronomy, Thompson maximizes the connections with Hosea, both regarding vocabulary and ideology (81-85). This seems legitimate given the geographical and possibly even familial proximity to Hosea, as Thompson argues (81).

IV. Textual Problems in Jeremiah

The ancient translation known as the Greek Septuagint (hereafter LXX) is widely different from Jeremiah's Hebrew text (I refer here to the Masoretic Text, hereafter MT). The two differ more widely in Jeremiah than any other Old Testament book. Besides normal textual differences in individual passages, the LXX and MT are more significantly divergent from each other in two notable areas. First, the LXX is at least one-sixth shorter than MT.²⁴ Second, LXX contains profound deviations from the order of arrangement in MT, and therefore in our English Bible translations, which are, for the most part, based on the MT.²⁵ For example, the oracles against the nations form the last major unit in MT (chapters 46-51), but make up roughly the center of the book in LXX, where they also have a very different sequence than is found in MT.

Thus Jeremiah poses a unique and serious problem in Old Testament textual criticism. It used to be assumed that LXX was an abridgement of MT, and therefore secondary and further removed from the original text of Jeremiah. For some, this was natural to assume since LXX is, after all, a translation rather than the original language of the book. But since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it has become clear that our old assumptions regarding LXX were simplistic.

One of the most important manuscripts found at Qumran was a small fragment of Jeremiah found in cave 4 (4QJer^b). This text fragment from approximately the second century BC closely resembles LXX over against MT. Qumran yielded other fragments of Jeremiah as well, but they all followed the tradition of MT. This interesting turn of events has suggested to scholars that LXX actually represents a genuinely different Hebrew tradition, rather than simply an inferior translation tradition. The differences can no longer be dismissed as translational and abridgemental in nature in a way which regards LXX as a misreading or misunderstanding of the Hebrew *Vorlage* (or original text), as was once done routinely.²⁶ Indeed, the Dead Sea Scrolls have transformed Old Testament textual criticism in general in this regard: LXX must now be admitted as retaining a genuinely different Hebrew tradition in many cases where it was once dismissed as merely an interesting translation, albeit an early one.

The presence of a short Hebrew text of Jeremiah (that is, one which supports the shorter LXX) has led to much scholarly activity and seems to be giving rise to a new consensus on the textual tradition of Jeremiah. It is now widely assumed that the LXX translator(s) did not produce an abridgement of MT, but rather worked from a shorter Hebrew text in Egypt, where the translation originated. This alternate Hebrew textual tradition survived in isolation from the standard Hebrew text which stemmed from Babylon. Many scholars today prefer to speak of "additions" in MT rather than of "omissions" in LXX.²⁷ This assumes LXX is a purer and more original text.

The commentaries under consideration here are nearly unanimous on this issue. Most of these commentaries conclude that MT makes expansions over the text of LXX, which is purer. In an exhaustive section on the ancient versions, McKane gathers evidence for his thesis that MT arose from expansions of a shorter Hebrew text represented by LXX (McKane, xviii). Furthermore, his investigation of the growth processes of Jeremianic tradition reveal not a systematic scheme of editing, but exegetical additions of small scope. "This exegetical expansion or commentary is triggered by a verse or a few verses of pre-existing text, and it is this procedure which is indicated by the term 'rolling *corpus*'" (McKane, lxxxi and see discussion above under

“authorship and composition”). Carroll, relying on the work of J. G. Janzen,²⁸ believes the Hebrew original of LXX Jeremiah was prerecensional in nature and stood “at the end of a relatively inactive transmission history.” The transmission history of MT, by contrast, was spread over a much longer period of time and gave rise to many glosses and expansions (Carroll, 52). Holladay and Thompson stress that these expansions and conflation are found in the prose sections, not the poetic ones (Holladay, II.3; Thompson, 120).

Holladay concludes that one of the text traditions must have been preserved in isolation from the other in order for it to have survived as a distinct tradition. He states that the shorter text must have been preserved in Egypt and subsequently reappeared in the Qumran community (II.6-7). Holladay also offers a unique explanation for the problem of the different placement and arrangement of the oracles against the nations in LXX. He maintains that the *location* of the oracles near the center of the book in LXX is original, but their *sequence* as preserved in MT is original (II.5 and 313-314). Thus the material in Jeremiah 46-51 (in our English Bibles following MT) was originally near the center, but their sequence was changed in LXX. While their original sequence was preserved in MT, they were placed at the end of the book. Thompson suggests these oracles circulated for a time as an independent unit before they were woven into the whole in different ways. Clements summarily dismisses this approach as too simplistic, and sympathizes with McKane’s “rolling corpus” idea instead (Thompson, 686; Clements, 246).

Craigie enters this debate like a voice crying in the wilderness. In his impressive and persuasive section on this problem, Craigie points out that the Greek text itself is uneven and appears to have been prepared by two different translators.²⁹ Furthermore, the Hebrew fragment which supports LXX was discovered in the same Qumran cave with other samples of Hebrew fragments supporting MT, which indicates a continuing “state of fluidity with respect to the text of the Book of Jeremiah” (Craigie, xlii). If the consensus of scholarship is correct, it leaves certain practical problems. If the LXX is to be preferred, then the commentator must work “at arm’s length” from the original and best text, because in this approach, the better textual tradition has survived only in translation (with the exception of the small fragment from Qumran).

Ultimately, Craigie is reticent to accept the consensus view, built mostly on the works of J. G. Janzen, Emanuel Tov and others, because it is inevitably dealing with hypotheses. Craigie avers that the data are simply insufficient to “reconstruct a coherent history of the recensions of the Hebrew text of Jeremiah” (Craigie, xliii). Rather than take sides

in a debate about the stages of a redactional history in which the data are indecisive, Craigie simply suggests there may have been several (more than two!) "Jeremiahs" from an early date, representing different forms of the book produced in different regions (xliv). Since Craigie is unconvinced by the consensual arguments in the first place, and since the Hebrew text underlying the LXX has not survived, Craigie states that he is driven by practical concerns to comment primarily on the MT (Craigie, xli-xlv).³⁰

Jones attempts to have it both ways. He accepts Tov's arguments that the two traditions are related, the LXX being an earlier form of the same text. But he emphasizes that LXX itself is a heavily edited text, marked also by a heavy redactional hand. For Jones, this means the LXX cannot be considered the original or superior text. "It is simply," he concludes, "an earlier stage in the evolution of the text" (Jones, 50).

If, in fact, it turns out to be true that LXX preserves a more ancient tradition for Jeremiah, then scholars will have to start over again. All of these recent volumes on Jeremiah are basically commenting on the MT, with occasional reference to the LXX. If it can be proved that the Hebrew *Vortage* behind the Greek is purer, then we shall have to reconsider the approach of most of these works. But this is, of course, problematic since, as Craigie has pointed out, we will have to do our work "at arm's length" from the original text itself. The facts are these. The Hebrew *Vortage* of the LXX has not survived, and the Greek translation of the LXX presents its own difficulties. Caution is the better part of valor when one considers abandoning the MT for LXX.

V. Theological Contributions

It is ironic how often the larger, more extensive commentaries include little by way of theological interpretation, leaving the theologizing entirely up to the reader. This is no less true for the new works on Jeremiah. If one is looking primarily for theological application, one will be disappointed by Carroll, McKane, and to some extent by Holladay. But the reader should understand that the editors of most commentary series assiduously avoid imposing any particular theological perspective on the series.

McKane even spends two pages explaining why he does not engage in theological interpretation: "an examination of the truth claims made by Hebrew prophets in terms of 'inspiration' and 'revelation' is not a major preoccupation of this commentary" (McKane, xcvi). By contrast, Martens devotes eight pages to the message of the book ("a

theological digest") and application, in a commentary which is popular level from an evangelical perspective (Martens, 21-28).

In some cases, theological contributions are discussed subtly, as with Holladay, who usually concludes his treatment of each pericope with helpful and sometimes penetrating theological insights. Just so, his closing comment on the superscription of 1.1-3 is that it is "a paradigm of the biblical understanding of revelation: that in the fullness of time the word becomes flesh" (1.17).

Holladay has continued to emphasize, of course, his earlier contribution on the distinctive theological vocabulary of Jeremiah. That is, his use of the verb *shuv*, "(re)turn" in what Holladay calls "covenantal contexts," in which Israel (or some other nation) or God expresses a change of loyalty to the other party (II.15). This was an important observation in 1958 when Holladay first published his views on Jeremiah's use of the term, and the current commentary continues to build on the ideas presented there.³¹

Unlike most of the other large commentaries, Thompson includes an extensive section devoted to the theological message of Jeremiah to his own generation, and to the exiles and future generations (Thompson, 107-117). Perhaps the most penetrating part of this section is Thompson's discussion of sin and repentance in Jeremiah and the prophet's wide use of vocabulary to describe the misdeeds of Judah (110-112). Jeremiah's messianic hopes were limited to an earthly, Davidic king who would reign as an ideal monarch, a view which lacked the imaginative pictures of later Jewish writers (113).

On Jeremiah's emphasis on the sovereignty of Yahweh, especially in the oracles against the nations, Jones contrasts the confidence the book evinces in Yahweh over against circumstances of the period, a situation of extreme weakness, vulnerability and hopelessness. In light of this faith in the Lord of creation, Jones concludes, "this must be accounted one of the most amazing perceptions in the long saga of religion and thought" (Jones 48-49).

Of all the commentaries discussed here, that of Walter Brueggemann is the most consistently focused on explicating the theological significance of Jeremiah. In general, the theological framework of Jeremiah may be organized around Brueggemann's three-part outline (I. 2-7). First, the Sinai covenant is the "governing paradigm" for the Jeremiah tradition (I.3). We have already alluded to this by pointing out the obvious connections between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, the classic expression of the Mosaic covenant.

All of these commentators are agreed in general on the significant role of the covenantal concept in Jeremiah. For Holladay, the covenant is the central motif which binds together Jeremiah's understand-

ing of himself, his God, and his message to Israel (II.70-71). Martens has done the best job of drawing out the significance of the covenant formula, which occurs more in Jeremiah than in any other biblical book: "I will be your God and you shall be my people" (Martens, 23-24 and 294-295). The objective of the covenant, says Martens, is "intimacy with God" (Martens 23).

The second plank in Jeremiah's theological platform is the pathos of Yahweh. The pathos of God is set in tension with the curses of the Sinai covenant. Drawing on the classic work of Abraham J. Heschel, Brueggemann refers to the "inexplicable yearning" which reflects God's gracious resolve and his powerful will to act in a free and spontaneous way to redeem His people (Brueggemann, I.4-5). It is God's *pathos* which drives him to punish and to preserve. He wills Israel's continued existence because he cannot bear to see her die. "The juxtaposition of covenant claim and pathos makes clear that God is, in the life of Judah, more complex, free, and less controllable than a simple scheme of retribution would suggest." (I.5).

Brueggemann also points out that this emphasis on God's pathos sets Jeremiah apart from deuteronomistic thought. The tension created by God's commitment to Israel and her rejection of him forms "the central interest, theological significance, and literary power of the book of Jeremiah." In this sense, Jeremiah is an important theological departure from the primary thrusts of deuteronomistic thought (Brueggemann, 5 and especially note 8). Clements calls this "message of hope" the central literary theme in Jeremiah, which pervades the entire book and "gives the book its essential character" (Clements, 3 and 9).

The third and final element in Brueggemann's discussion of Jeremiah's theological tradition is what he calls the "royal-temple ideology" of Jerusalem (Brueggemann, I.5-7). The Jerusalem establishment believed God had committed himself through a series of irrevocable promises to the temple and the monarchy. Thus the city and temple were inviolable and Judah's future was secure, no matter how she sinned and no matter how threatening the international scene appeared. This misguided and unfounded confidence created in Judah a false sense of immunity from judgement and subtly became the official religion of Jerusalem. Obviously Jeremiah's message put him at odds with the establishment, as the book itself clearly attests.

Thompson also discusses Judah's royal-temple ideology, in terms of her survival after 586 B.C. The belief in the inviolability of temple and monarchy was a truly false basis for hope. Yet after the fall of Jerusalem, this ideology combined with the concepts of God's sovereignty and pathos resulting in the conviction that Yahweh was unimpeachably just and that he would not completely abandon his people without

a future. There resulted a rebuilding community which responded again to Yahweh's new acts of grace and understood afresh his ancient covenant relationship (Thompson, 114-116).

Several commentators have expounded on the theological significance of the fall of Jerusalem in 587/586 BC. Brueggemann calls this event the "dominant and shaping event of the entire Old Testament" (Brueggemann, 1). Clements notes that the loss of the temple and the Davidic monarchy in one violent stroke "demanded a total reappraisal and rethinking of Israel's self-understanding as the People of God" (Clements, 6). So the shadow of the events of 587 covers the entire book, "in much the same way as the shadow of the crucifixion rests over the whole of Mark's Gospel" (Clements, 9).

We close this section with a comment on the importance of "land" in Jeremiah. Scholars have long noted the theological importance of the land for ancient Israel, some even asserting that Israel's understanding of God is expressed in terms of "the land."³² Abraham became landless in response to the call of God, but pursued God's promise, which included a new land in the future (Genesis 12.1-4). Between the promise and the fulfillment were many digressions: Abraham was driven from the land into Egypt by famine; Jacob fled back to Haran to escape Esau; and Jacob and the whole family moved to Egypt for a sojourn lasting over 400 years, and culminating in a life of bondage. The Exodus was a movement of a landless people toward a new life in a land of their own.

Israel's history was a story of land (Jeremiah 2.1-7). The land had become the place where Israel lived in the presence of the covenant keeping God. "Land was part of that triangle -- God, people, and land -- that spoke of completeness" (Martens, 24). It had become a symbol for the good life, the life with God -- shorthand for the abundant life. In Jeremiah, more than in any other prophet, the dangers of losing the land become paramount. Deuteronomy had warned that broken covenant meant loss of the land (Deuteronomy 7.1-6; 8.7-20). Jeremiah's prophecies of exile meant reversal of past victories. The people would once again become landless (16.13). Likewise, sermons of hope, particularly in the Book of Consolation (chapters 30-33), equate salvation with a return to the land (ex. 30.3).

CONCLUSION

Commentaries are often difficult to compare because they are usually published as part of a series with different purposes in view. The works by McKane, Carroll, Holladay and to some degree that of Craigie and

Thompson are high level, scholarly presentations that engage the Hebrew text. Of these, McKane is the most difficult to read without knowledge of Hebrew (one also needs thorough familiarity with the text of Jeremiah and grounding in the secondary literature to benefit from McKane).

Holladay's two volumes mark the culmination of a lifetime's work on Jeremiah, and his work is masterful in several respects. Peter Craigie was tragically killed in an automobile accident before completing his work on Jeremiah, and this volume was completed by Page Kelley and Joel Drinkard. Some amount of disjointedness is inevitable, therefore, but Craigie's work on the introduction and first seven chapters is masterful as always.

Clements is solid, British scholarship and not terribly difficult to read. He displays textual sensitivity and occasional insights for ministry (following the series objectives). Brueggemann has produced a gem of a commentary which is easy to read and filled with his usual theological insight. As one of the most prolific authors of Old Testament studies today, his work is nevertheless rich in content. One is often amazed by Brueggemann's grasp of the secondary literature, though the restrictions of the commentary series have not allowed him to interact with the Hebrew text itself in a way possible for the larger, more critical commentaries.

In short, this has been a truly remarkable period of activity and intense interest in Jeremiah. During the 1980s and early 90s, we have witnessed a landmark in Jeremianic studies. Of the evangelical commentaries I have discussed here, I recommend most highly the work of Craigie and Thompson, though the volume by Martens has its own merits. Among the other commentaries, I definitely recommend Holladay over against Carroll and McKane, though the reader should remember his unorthodox approach to the date of Jeremiah's call in chapter 1. Clements and Jones are also good reading and will enhance any serious study of this important, but oft neglected prophet.

Admittedly the literary structure of Jeremiah, and therefore its prevalent message, is difficult to discern. But as part of God's unique, divine revelation to ancient Judah (and to us), it gradually and slowly exposes us to God's intricate plans and purposes. "Like a Picasso painting, it yields its contents slowly -- but with what force!" (Martens, 20). Ultimately, Jeremiah the individual becomes an example of what God is seeking from the people (like Isaiah 6). Jeremiah's obedience and faithfulness to Yahweh, in spite of his own suffering and lack of understanding, exemplified the fidelity God was trying to elicit from the nation corporately.

ENDNOTES

I have had the privilege of teaching two recent seminars at Ashland Theological Seminary on the prophet Jeremiah. This article is dedicated to my students in these seminars who have inspired me by their thirst for more of God's word, and whose observations have helped with this project on Jeremiah: David J. Bennett, John Bogdan, Carolyn DuBose, Timothy F. Geisse, C. Thomas Hogsten, Werner J. Lange, Marcia Lewan, Cheryl D. Phillips, Faith Proietti, Charles Reeves, and David B. Williams.

¹ The list was short, though of good quality: J. P. Hyatt (*Jeremiah: Prophet of Courage and Hope* [New York: Abingdon, 1958]); John Bright (*Jeremiah*, AB 21 [Garden City: Doubleday, 1965]); and R. K. Harrison (*Jeremiah and Lamentations, An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 19 [Downers Grove: IVP, 1973]).

² *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

³ *Jeremiah*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986).

⁴ *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah*, 2 vols., Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986 and 1989).

⁵ *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986).

⁶ *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 2 vols, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988 and 1991).

⁷ *Jeremiah*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988).

⁸ Peter C. Graigie, Page H. Kelley and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 26 (Dallas: Word, 1991).

⁹ *Jeremiah*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale: Herald, 1986).

¹⁰ *Jeremiah*, New Century Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

¹¹ Other similar surveys have been done, but prior to the advent of all this scholarly activity: Peter R. Ackroyd, "The Book of Jeremiah -- Some Recent Studies," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28 (1984) 47-59, and James L. Crenshaw, "A Living Tradition, The Book of Jeremiah in Current Research," *Interpretation* 37 (1983) 117-129.

¹² J. Gordon McConville, "Jeremiah: Prophet and Book," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42.1(1991)80-95.

¹³ For a convenient survey of the Duhm-Mowinckel hypothesis and subsequent refinements, see Leo G. Perdue, "Jeremiah in Modern Research: Approaches and Issues," in *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies*, eds. L. G. Perdue and B. W. Kovacs (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1984), pp. 14-22.

¹⁴ In a lecture to the "Composition of the Book of Jeremiah Consultation" at the Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco, November, 1992.

¹⁵ Certainly McKane, but also Peter R. Ackroyd ("Recent Studies," see note 11 above), and Ernest W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970).

¹⁶ Helga Weippert, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 132 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973).

¹⁷ For critique of Weippert's views, see McKane, xli-xlvi, and p. 457.

¹⁸ He does not speculate on source B, which will be dealt with in volume 2 of his commentary covering chapters 26-52.

¹⁹ *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah*, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 176 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989).

²⁰ Thompson emphasizes that 1.3 is intended as a general frame of reference for Jeremiah's ministry, not a precise historical datum (Thompson, 142).

²¹ For summary, see Perdue, "Modern Research," 22-28. This also makes Jeremiah susceptible to a spate of biographical treatments. See most recently R. E. O. White, *The Indomitable Prophet: A Biographical Commentary on Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

²² For this categorization into four positions, see Perdue, "Modern Research," 5-6.

²³ For the continuing debate about the role of poetry in Old Testament Hebrew, see most recently David L. Petersen and Kent Harold Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 13-14.

²⁴ Estimates differ, but many quote a ninety year old study that estimates about twenty-seven hundred words of MT are lacking in LXX, while LXX has about one hundred words lacking in MT (Holladay, 1:3). Another convenient way of stating the difference: LXX has over 300 words not found in MT, but MT has over 3,000 words not found in LXX (Jones, 49).

²⁵ For recent treatment of these problems by a leading authority, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; Assen [etc]: Van Gorcum, 1992), pp. 319-27.

²⁶ For technical introduction to this problem, see Louis Stulman, *The Other Text of Jeremiah: A Reconstruction of the Hebrew Text Underlying the Greek Version of the Prose Sections of Jeremiah with English Translation* (Lanhan/New York/London: University Press of America, 1985).

²⁷ Jack R. Lundbom, "Jeremiah, Book of," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* III, 707. Tov proposes different stages in the redaction process, so that the textual tradition of LXX reflects a first major redaction, whereas the tradition of MT reflects a second and expanded redaction (see note above, Tov, p. 321).

²⁸ "Double Readings in the Text of Jeremiah," *Harvard Theological Review* 60(1967)433-47.

²⁹ Citing the work of Emanuel Tov, *The Septuagint Translation of Jeremiah and Baruch*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 8 (Missoula: Scholars, 1976).

³⁰ And see Gordon McConville ("Prophet and Book," 93), who contends that the position of the oracles against the nations in MT provides a just reversal of the fortunes for Judah and Babylon and are "well fitted to their function there, providing a suitable climax to the book."

³¹ William L. Holladay, *The Root Shubb in the Old Testament, With Particular Reference to Its Usages in Covenantal Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 1958). Holladay also followed the work of Thomas W. Overholt on the term *sheqer*, "falsehood" in Jeremiah (Holladay, II.15).

³² Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

