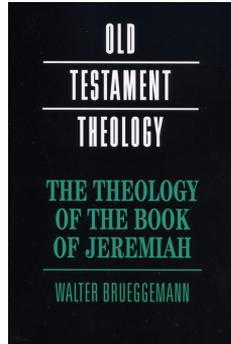


○ **REVIEW OF WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, *THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH***
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The first in the Old Testament Theology series (edited by Brent Strawn and Patrick D. Miller), Walter Brueggemann's volume on Jeremiah provides a helpful introduction to an extraordinarily complicated piece of biblical literature. This book's primary position in the series should prove felicitous, as his work provides an exemplary model for subsequent volumes to follow. Brueggemann (re)opens the book of Jeremiah for scholar and layperson alike as he makes the case for a uniquely prophetic synthesis of the political and theological. 'The book of Jeremiah,' he tells us, 'may be understood as a long, sustained act of prophetic imagination whereby theological claim and political reality are shown to be intrinsically related' (77). Whether or not readers choose to accept Brueggemann's account of prophetic political theology (theological politics?), they will find here a useful entrée into Jeremiah studies generally and the theological perspectives behind the book specifically.

The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah begins with an introductory chapter describing the current critical debate in Jeremiah studies ('Critical Access to the Book of Jeremiah'). Having acknowledged the difficulty of reading the book as a literary whole, Brueggemann forges ahead by discerning a 'quite complex coherence' (5) evident in the multivocal nature of the book. Such coherence provides room for Brueggemann to employ his rhetorical-critical methodology while leaving open the possibility of attending closely to the various ideologies present in and behind the text. Brueggemann's review of the current state of the field of Jeremiah studies is laudably concise, hitting several of the high points from the source-critical theories of Duhamel and Mowinckel to the vexed question of Jeremian historicity. Special attention is paid to the historical personality of the prophet Jeremiah, with Brueggemann choosing a mediating position between that of Holladay and Carroll. What one finds in the book of Jeremiah is a 'portrait of a prophet' drawn with particular interests in mind but not devoid of genuine historical roots. Adumbrating his third chapter, Brueggemann also attends closely to Jeremiah's 'rootage' in Hosea and Deuteronomy. Notably absent in this introductory chapter is a text-critical treatment. Brueggemann

deals almost exclusively with MT Jeremiah, pausing only briefly to note the LXX location of the Oracles Against the Nations (MT 46-51; LXX 25-31).

Brueggemann treats 'The Theology of Jeremiah' and 'The Place and Function of the Book within the Old Testament' in chapters two and three. Together these chapters form the bulk of the book, and they also provide a window into two major themes informing Brueggemann's study: the characterization of YHWH in the book of Jeremiah and that book's canonical location. In the second chapter, Brueggemann explores the theme of sovereignty as YHWH's primary characteristic in Jeremiah. YHWH is incomparable (e.g. Jer 10:6-7), supremely powerful as a source of judgment and promise. YHWH is sovereign over the prophet, and YHWH establishes his sovereignty over the nations through prophetic performative utterance (61). This performative utterance is first enacted by the spoken words of the prophet, but continues in perpetuity through the written words of the book. To demonstrate divine sovereignty, Brueggemann explores the judgment-promise duality in Jeremiah through detailed treatment of a number of metaphors for the divine, including YHWH as a scorned spouse, powerful healer, and creator of order. Throughout, he attends closely to specific texts, asking simply: what portrait does the book of Jeremiah paint of YHWH?

Brueggemann expands his field of vision in chapter three to include the entire Old Testament. Given the decisive and hugely influential events of the exile, he describes Jeremiah as a central text bridging the gap between pre- and post-exilic biblical traditions. Brueggemann takes each canonical division in its turn and details major points of contact between specific books of the Old Testament and Jeremiah, ranging from the Pentateuch to Chronicles. Jeremiah draws upon antecedent biblical traditions to address the exile, the 'decisive crisis of Old Testament faith' (184), but the book is also uniquely generative in subsequent biblical traditions (e.g. Dan 9:2; 2 Chr 36:22). This generative effect continues into the New Testament and beyond, as Brueggemann details in his fourth and final chapter, 'The Continuing Influence of the Book of Jeremiah'. After listing NT references to Jeremiah, Brueggemann closes his book with a section entitled 'Jeremiah Now'. Suggestive analogies are drawn between the exile and modern crises that shake human cultural and theological foundations (e.g. the Shoah and 9/11). Jeremiah, Brueggemann implies, is a text not only for the decisive crises of ancient Israelite faith, but also for those difficulties that modern readers may encounter. Therein they may find not only theological justifications of judgment but 'a script for recurring deep losses and recurring deep newnesses' (196). Following the book's fourth and final chapter, Brueggemann includes a brief list for further reading (197-202).

The fourth chapter of the book provides the reader with an excellent example of Brueggemann's constructive theological work, and it leaves one wishing for more of the same. To draw from the series description for Old Testament Theology, Brueggemann might engage more fully in the constructive theological task by doing theology 'through and with the biblical book under discussion' (xii). What might it mean, for example, for modern readers/hearers of Jeremiah to employ the book of Jeremiah's concept of divine sovereignty? Can such concepts fit into modern theological frameworks, or do they radically challenge them so that they must be reformulated altogether? One wonders also whether the discernment of a rough thematic coherence around the topic of divine sovereignty does not itself obscure some of the most fertile ground for theological insight. A cacophony of voices can still be heard in Jeremiah, and a more sensitive categorization of differing voices may be in order. For example, one expects a more thorough treatment

of the tendentious nature of texts such as Jer 24, a passage that primarily serves the needs of the returning exilic community. The idea of divine sovereignty in this instance subordinates the needs of one community of Israelites (the ‘people of the land’ who stayed behind during the exile) to those of another (the exilic community).

Another critique relates more broadly to Brueggemann’s vision of the prophetic task. Prophets, according to his model, connect public reality and theological claim by means of an extraordinary imagination. While this description accurately depicts the means by which modern ‘prophetic’ voices proclaim their messages, one wonders whether any ancient Israelite prophet would have conceived of the tasks of political analysis and theology as separate. Even now this division can mask the degree to which theological and political perspectives are always inextricably intertwined. In addition to this more substantial point, experts in Jeremiah studies will likely find minor issues with which to quibble, including the lack of attention to the intertestamental afterlives of Jeremiah (Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah) and the absence of an introduction to the substantial text-critical issues surrounding the book.

These critiques notwithstanding, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* provides biblical scholars and theological interpreters with a concise and useful study of the theology of Jeremiah. Especially valuable in divinity school and seminary settings, Brueggemann’s book is an excellent introductory volume for the Old Testament Theology series. As such, it is likely to contribute not only to the conversation surrounding the book of Jeremiah, but also to the debate concerning the nature and content of theological interpretation itself.