GEORG FISCHER

Jeremiah Studies

Forschungen
zum Alten Testament
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Mohr Siebeck

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From Text and Contexts to Theology

Mohr Siebeck

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Foreword

"I put my words in your mouth" (Jer 1:9) – thus speaks God to Jeremiah when he calls him to become his prophet. These words mark the beginning of a unique mission and an extraordinary biography. The divine statement gives highest authorization to Jeremiah and his proclamation which, through the book attributed to him, has been a source for inspiration and piety across various communities of believers.

In the last four decades, the Book of Jeremiah has become the object of increased interest among researchers. Never before have so many studies on the book appeared as in the period from the mid-eighties until today. These scholarly efforts have advanced the understanding of this book, especially in illuminating its background, its literary and theological complexity, and so many of its sophisticated details. Different approaches and theories have been brought to bear upon the specific characteristics of the book, breaking new ground. Naturally, these developments have resulted in much discussion and, quite often, in abandoning 'classical' positions for how Jeremiah and his book are to be understood.

The studies collected here mirror these debates on many levels. They originated as papers at various conferences and as contributions requested for dictionaries, monographs and journals. Most of them have been previously published; some of these contributions, while intended for other projects, are published here for the first time. Since nearly all of them were composed within the last ten years, they deal mostly with recent issues of scholarly debate, such as the text(s) of Jeremiah, its particular language, composition, and theology.

All of them were originally written in English; Mrs. Felicity Stephens from Edinburgh has revised the language, for which I am very grateful to her. The idea of collecting my English publications on Jeremiah in one volume stems from Dominik Markl SJ, my confrere and friend. I thank the editors Konrad Schmid, Mark S. Smith, Hermann Spieckermann, and Andrew Teeter for accepting my request to publish it in the FAT series. I am also grateful to Dr. Samuel Hildebrandt who corrected the English of the introduction and to the staff of Mohr Siebeck in Tübingen, especially Elena Müller, Tobias Weiß and Tobias Stäbler, for their help in editing this book.

The literature listed at the end of this volume covers all contributions with the exception of the two dictionary entries at the beginning. In order to ease the identification of my own work in the bibliography and to document the development

of my thinking about Jeremiah in the past thirty years, I have added the year of publication to each one in parentheses and ordered them accordingly. Apart from unifying the style of quotation for the FAT series, I have modified the content of the studies only rarely and slightly. Several contributions of the same author are listed in chronological sequence and, if from the same year, alphabetically. Abbreviations follow for the most part the 3rd edition of *Internationales Abkürzungsverzeichnis für Theologie und Grenzgebiete* by S. Schwertner.

It is my hope that this volume makes available my research, which up to now was accessible mainly in German, to a broader audience and that the studies in this volume may contribute to a deeper understanding of one of the most fascinating books in the Bible.

Innsbruck, November 2019 Georg Fischer SJ

Table of Contents

Introduction

1. Biographical Background

The prophet Jeremiah and his book have accompanied my life for the last decades. To mention just some decisive moments: Jer 1:4–10, the call of Jeremiah to become a "prophet for the nations", was the first reading at my priestly ordination on May 9th, 1981. Two years later, at the Pontifical Biblical Institute (PBI) in Rome, Pietro Bovati SJ gave a course on Jer 1–6 which illuminated its theological message in a rich and fascinating way. In 1988, I chose Jer 30–31, the "Scroll/Booklet of Consolation", as the topic for my "Habilitationsschrift"[1]. Since then, I have not ceased working on Jer and this book has become my main field of research and inspiration.

The formation of a Jesuit, the order of which I am a member, includes a novitiate[2] and studies in philosophy.[3] The first of these provides a greater familiarity with and appreciation for the Bible alongside with a deeper spiritual understanding of it. My philosophical training helped to sharpen logical thinking, to distinguish and to clarify the use of terms/concepts and to pay attention to the structure and strength of arguments. This two-fold training serves as a basis for engaging in theological subjects and as a background for discerning positions and developments.

In my time as a student, the department of theology at the Leopold-Franzens-Universität in Innsbruck had two foci, namely the systematic field and the biblical field.[4] Both areas attracted me; I wrote my master's thesis on the problem of coming to know God in Eberhard Jüngel's "Gott als Geheimnis der Welt",

1 A "Habilitation" is a second major research work after a thesis which is requested in German speaking countries. I wrote it in Innsbruck, beginning at the end of 1988 and finishing it early in 1992. I defended it at the Karl-Franzens-Universität in Graz in 1993 and published it as: *Das Trostbüchlein. Text, Komposition und Theologie von Jer 30–31* (1993).

2 This is a two-year training in spiritual and community life, including several kinds of 'experiments', like working with people with disabilities, in a factory, in a hospital, in parishes, etc. My novitiate was in Nürnberg (Germany), 1972–1974.

3 In my case at the Philosophische Hochschule (Berchmanskolleg) and the Ludwig Maximilians Universität in München, 1974–1976.

4 This reflects the main thrust of traditional Jesuit theological formation. Until a few years ago, the Jesuit order was responsible for the Theological Faculty of the University of Innsbruck and provided nearly all the professors. I studied there from 1978 to 1981.

though I spent more time in courses and seminars with Arnold Gamper SJ, chair for Old Testament and Oriental Studies, who was my predecessor here in Innsbruck, and with Klemens Stock SJ, for the New Testament. Both concentrated on solid philological and textual analyses and avoided speculations about the prehistory of the biblical books. Fr. Gamper was very much interested in their message and favoured theological interpretations.

A similar orientation continued at the PBI in Rome where I was sent for special studies. From 1981 onwards, my teachers were excellent exegetes like my confreres Alonso Schökel SJ, Dennis McCarthy SJ, Jean-Louis Ska SJ, Bob Lawton SJ, Mitch Dahood SJ, Werner Mayer SJ, Richard Caplice SJ, Horacio Simian-Yofre SJ and Norbert Lohfink SJ, and, from other orders, scholars like Charles Conroy MSC and Fabrizio Foresti OCarm.[5] The variety of their approaches and the broad horizons they opened with their knowledge and expertise became the foundation for my way of interpreting the Bible.

This training and group of teachers is one of the main reasons for the difference between my approach and what was 'usual' in the field of exegesis in German-speaking countries. In the seventies and eighties, literary-critical analyses were dominant there and represented across a variety of 'schools'.[6] The Pontifical Biblical Institute, however, was determined to keep a wider focus in addressing the task of biblical interpretation which included literature in various languages as well as early Jewish traditions and Church Fathers.[7] I also attended the courses of Luis M. Martínez-Fazio SJ on Early Christian Iconography at the Gregorian University who introduced his students in a fascinating manner to the symbolic language and deeper meaning of artistic expressions. Becoming familiar with such a diversity of methods, interests, and cultural and communal backgrounds allowed me to widen my own perspective and to gain a more 'international' dimension in research.

Having worked on the Torah for my thesis,[8] I felt the necessity to address still another field of research in the Hebrew Bible to get a broader understanding of it. This led me to study Jeremiah, especially the chapters 30–31, for the "Habilitation". Main critical issues to address for the interpretation included the

[5] In addition, I was also taught by several women, such as Ruth Geiger, who introduced me to Hebrew in Munich, and Bruna Costacurta, lecturer in Biblical Theology at the Gregorian Pontifical University. Later on, I learned a lot from the works of Barbara Bozak and Irmtraud Fischer, to name but a few female scholars.

[6] Influential names are e. g. Martin Noth, Rolf Rendtorff, Wolfgang Richter, and Erich Zenger.

[7] Besides English and German, many teachers had Italian, Spanish, or French as their mother tongue and many came from Asia and the Americas. The approximately 30 courses needed for the Licentiate included the History of Interpretation and Hermeneutics as well as Jewish exegesis which was taught by 'Rabbi' Reinhard Neudecker SJ.

[8] *Jahwe unser Gott. Sprache, Aufbau und Erzähltechnik in der Berufung des Mose (Ex 3–4)* (1989).

reliability of the transmitted text forms, the question of the composition, the theological message and the ideological background of Jer 30–31.

This became the start of a never-ending journey and occupation with the entire Book of Jeremiah. In 1995, I finished a small commentary in Italian which dealt with selected important passages.[9] Already in 1993, Erich Zenger had asked me for the commentary on Jeremiah in the Herder series; this work required nearly all my energy in the following years, until its publication in 2005.[10] For the continuation of the series "Erträge der Forschung", the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft required a new overview of the research on Jeremiah.[11] In order to make accessible recent insights to a broader audience, Rüdiger Lux invited me to present the prophet Jeremiah and his book in the series "Biblische Gestalten.[12] Besides these monographs, many requests for articles and papers have reached me and I am glad to be able to present the recent, more important English ones in this volume.

2. Orientations for Research in Jeremiah

The year *1986 represents a kind of 'turn'* in the exegesis of Jer. The commentaries of Siegfried Hermann, William L. Holladay, William McKane, and Robert P. Carroll[13] marked the beginning of a new phase in the understanding of this prophet and his book. Although their approaches were very different, together they changed the way in which we would perceive and study Jeremiah. Up to 1986, nobody had dealt with the texts of Jer so thoroughly as McKane. The philological, contextual, and historical discussions of Herrmann and Holladay evoked the impression of a highly complicated book, full of sophisticated details and tensions. Carroll, finally, undermined the confidence of 'encountering' the prophet in Jer, showing that many parts of the book are set in later times. After 1986, it is not possible anymore to read Jer 'naively'; the studies of these four exegetes have opened new avenues. In the decades since, *four major areas of debate* have developed, concerning (a) the text, (b) the composition, (c) the relations with other biblical scrolls, and (d) the distinctive profile of Jer. After presenting each of these areas, I will deal with the differences between the various approaches more and clarify my position within them (e).

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[9] *Il libro di Geremia* (1995), also translated into Spanish: *El libro de Jeremías* (^{2}1997).

[10] *Jeremia 1–25*, and *Jeremia 26–52* (both volumes in 2005).

[11] The forerunner is by Siegfried Herrmann, *Jeremia. Der Prophet und das Buch*; the title of my book is: *Jeremia. Der Stand* (2007).

[12] *Jeremia. Prophet über Völker und Königreiche* (2015).

[13] S. Hermann, *Jeremia 1,1–19*; W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*; W. McKane, *Jeremiah 1*; R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*.

a) The Texts of Jer

Already before 1986, the findings of Jeremiah manuscripts in Qumran had begun[14] to stimulate the dispute over the text(s) of Jer. Ever since, there is a hot debate about which text form is closer to the supposed 'original'. A majority follows now the lead of J. G. Janzen, P.-M. Bogaert, H.-J. Stipp, and others who *favour the LXX*, mostly by proposing for it a different Hebrew 'Vorlage' than what has later developed in the Masoretic tradition. They regard the latter one as being heavily expanded.[15]

On the other hand, recent analyses of specific texts and comparisons of both text forms, e. g. in Jer 10 and 25, have yielded *different results*.[16] These studies prompt us to consider that Jer MT is more sophisticated, especially in its communication structure, and that the Greek translation has altered it in many instances to make it more easily understandable. Following this line of argument, it would be Jer MT that deserves priority.

My own position adheres to this latter option at which I have arrived along various steps. First, working on the texts of Jer 30–31 // LXX 37–38 for nearly a whole year (1989), I tried to recognize what was the common basis and which form might have developed out of the other. I discovered inconsistencies in the LXX in the rendition of the same expressions and problems in comprehension,[17] and I perceived the difficulty in not having an external point of comparison. This led me, in a second step, to search for such a reference text 'outside' Jer which I found in the end of 2 Kings, the parallel text of Jer 52.[18] My analysis confirmed the processes of changes and reduction on part of the LXX seen elsewhere in the book. Next, the work on the Herder commentary and the invitation to collaborate in the project "Septuaginta Deutsch" for Jeremia[19] enabled me to check

[14] The preliminary publication of Jer manuscripts from Cave 4 by J. Gerald Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*, 173–184, had a major impact on Jer studies. Janzen followed a suggestion of F. M. Cross and interpreted what is now understood as three separate fragments (4Q71; 4Q72a and 4Q72b; he subsumed them as 4QJer^{b}) as being closer to the LXX.

[15] Jer LXX is nearly a sixth shorter than Jer MT. Assuming the criterion of *lectio brevior*, this is taken as a strong argument in favour of the LXX version.

[16] On Jer 10, see James Seth Adcock, *"Oh God of Battles! Steal My Soldiers' Hearts!"*; on Jer 25, Shimon Gesundheit, The Question of LXX Jeremiah; more generally, the study of Oliver Glanz, *Understanding Participant-Reference Shifts in the Book of Jeremiah*, raises enormous doubts on the reliability of the LXX textual tradition.

[17] The transliterations in Jer LXX 38:21, 40 are examples for that.

[18] Published as: Jeremia 52 – ein Schlüssel zum Jeremiabuch (1998), also in an abbreviated form in French: Les deux faces de Jérémie 52, and in an English version with the title: Jeremiah 52: A Test Case for JerLXX (2001). Recently, Henk de Ward has defended a thesis on *Jeremiah 52 in the Context of the Book of Jeremiah* at the Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, which starts with giving preference to Jer LXX and interpreting the differences; however, an unbiased observation of the discrepancies of all four text forms leads to the opposite result.

[19] For the latter one, Andreas Vonach is mainly responsible for the remarks on the details of the text whereas the general parts stem from us both. Our presentation has received heavy criti-

the entire book for the relationship of both text forms. I came to the conclusion that I could not see a single case where Jer LXX would have preserved the more original form of the text.[20] Lastly, in the past years, I could present my view in several articles.[21]

Since the issue of the texts of Jer remains so disputed, it seems wise to start any study of Jer passages with an *investigation of both text forms without preconceptions*. Clarity about the text and its development is the basis for every further research in Jer and indispensable for a responsible approach to Jer. The present majority position is a very recent one and there are weighty arguments against it from the other side.

b) The Composition of Jer

On first sight, the Book of Jeremiah seems to be a mess. It appears to be highly *irregular*, in many aspects, leading one to conclude that any attempt to explain its arrangement and/or its genesis is doomed to failure. At the same time, the very fact of this irregular shape requires explanations that do not only present one perspective, but consider various facets and dimensions.

The 'classical' solution for such problems is recourse to *redactional models*. S. Mowinckel, more than 100 years ago,[22] proposed a composition of Jer consisting of four major sources, yet later abandoned his own theory. Newer approaches reckon with one or several deuteronomistic redactions,[23] sometimes even multiple layers within a few chapters.[24] A kind of 'desperate shot' is the suggestion of William McKane that Jer is in essence a "rolling corpus",[25] having grown over the years in ways that can hardly be determined. The analogy with avalanches makes clear that such processes are beyond any control. Up to now, no convincing redactional proposal for the entire book has been produced.

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cism from the 'other position', especially H.-J. Stipp, Zur aktuellen Diskussion um das Verhältnis der Textformen des Jeremiabuches (2008), and H. Engel, Erfahrungen mit der Septuaginta-Fassung des Jeremiabuches im Rahmen des Projektes "Septuaginta Deutsch" (2007). Some parts of the critique, mainly on specifics, are justified; nevertheless, the fundamental issue of the priority of the Hebrew text form leading to MT is not touched by it.

[20] G. Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25* (2005), 46, and *idem*, *Jeremia 26–52* (2005), 659 f.

[21] For English ones, see in this volume, part 1, especially "Jeremiah Septuagint" and the first section of "Mysteries of the Book of Jeremiah – its Text and Formulaic Language", alongside many occasional remarks in other contributions.

[22] S. Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia*.

[23] See both volumes of W. Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1–25*, and *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26–45*, the proposal of three dtr redactions by R. Albertz, *Die Exilszeit. 6. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, 231–260, H.-J. Stipp's four articles subsumed unter the heading "Zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Jeremiabuches" in his *Studien zum Jeremiabuch* (261–378) and *idem*, *Jeremia 25–52*.

[24] E. g. Konrad Schmid, *Buchgestalten des Jeremiabuches*; see his diagrams for Jer 30–31 and 32–33 on pp. 433 f.

[25] W. McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, l–lxxxiii.

On the other hand, *deuteronomic and deuteronomistic influence is undeniable*, and strong.[26] Many words, phrases, ideas are close to Deut and the Former Prophets. Yet, this is only one side of the picture, as large parts of Jer are *markedly different* in language and theology. Furthermore, vocabulary and motifs of Jer are *much richer* and are obviously inspired also by sources other than Deut and the following books.[27] This aspect suggests that Jer is incorporating elements from various biblical scrolls, combining them and thus arriving at a kind of synthesis.

The mixture of prose and poetry poses another problem. Whereas Jer 1, 7, and 11 are predominantly in prose, most other sections are poetic. In my view, L. Stulman has offered the best explanation.[28] He understands both genres as mutual relationship: Prose texts serve as a reference frame, offering the background to relate Jeremiah's proclamation to concrete, 'historical' events, whereas poetry deepens and enriches the divine message with many images and in a large variety of motifs. As a result, Jer forms a kind of "symbolic tapestry". This procedure pervades the entire book, seeing that the second part, "new beginnings from a shattered world" (Stulman) also contains poetic sections, esp. in Jer 30–31 and 46–51.

The frequent interchange of genres indicates a conscious mixing of different elements, at least in the last stage of forming the book. Its chronology offers another indication for a deliberately *'inordinate' arrangement*, springing back and forth among the last Judean kings[29] and using the phrase "the fourth year of King Jehoiakim" as a structural device.[30] Obviously, Jer was composed against 'normal' expectations of a regular time sequence, thus suggesting alternative paths of structure and meaning.

All of these interrelated dimensions of Jer work together and result in centrifugal forces that seem to suggest that the book lacks a plan. Yet, there are a number of *unifying factors*.[31] For instance, Jer contains many repetitions. Doublets, like Jer 6:12–15 // 8:10–12; 6:22–24 // 50:41–43; 10:12–16 // 51:15–19, establish strong connections within the book and show special accents in their usage. Important motifs, e. g. the roles of the foreign powers Egypt and Babylon, pervade nearly the entire book and display reasonable developments. Other literary techniques are the question-answer and the command-fulfilment schemes

[26] Besides Thiel (note 23) and H.-J. Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, many other studies demonstrate this.

[27] For this aspect, see below c), the intertextual links.

[28] L. Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*.

[29] Jer 34:8 Zedekiah; 35:1 Jehoiakim; 37:1 Zedekiah, etc., see G. Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25* (2005), 80–83, and *idem*, Die Chronologie des Jeremiabuches (2018).

[30] Jer 25:1; 36:1; 45:1; 46:2; the important information about its significance is withheld up to its last occurrence.

[31] See the article below, "A New Understanding", esp. part 1.2 therein.

which link the first part of Jer with the "Scroll of Consolation", Jer 30–31.[32] These observations indicate, on various levels, a desire of "binding together" the different parts of the book. They are a sign that Jer, despite its 'chaotic' appearance, has undergone an intentional process of formation.

c) Intertextual Relationships

From antiquity onwards, Jer's connections with other biblical scrolls have received attention.[33] William Holladay has presented them *systematically for the first time* at length in the second volume of his commentary.[34] He distinguished texts and books prior to Jer, on which its author could draw, and other passages/scrolls dependent on Jer. The relationship with Deut was especially intriguing for him, working in both directions so that parts of it inspired Jer, whereas others were using Jer.

Holladay's contribution made obvious Jer's pervasive usage of earlier texts and opened a new area of research in Jer. The application of *criteria* for discerning literary dependence and the *interpretation* of the connections are essential issues for this task. In working on Jer 30–31, I already noticed regularities and emphases that pointed to consistent literary techniques; the following exploration of the entire book confirmed these observations throughout.

Conspicuous results of these analyses are: Jer shows a preference for certain books and key texts, e. g. Lev 26; Deut 28; 32; 2 Kings 17; 24–25. Often it takes up rare expressions, like the "iron furnace" (Deut 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jer 11:4) or the wordplay with הבל, "go after nothing and become nothing" (2 Kings 17:15; Jer 2:5); the latter one forms an "exclusive connection" between both texts – this type of unique linking occurs quite often. The relationships of Jer with other books are widespread. It seems that a large part of the Hebrew Bible, at least half of it, was already extant when Jer was written.[35]

The intertextual approach to Jer touches on the *methodological procedure*. Many exegetes up to Carroll have taken the time indications in Jer 1:2–3 as 'historical', referring to real events in the life of the prophet and giving the setting of the book. Such a position assumes that a large part of Jer stems from the last years before Jerusalem's fall in 587 BC.[36] It is hardly reconcilable with the picture emerging from Jer's literary links with other books. The latter ones require a much later setting, not before ca. 400 BC, and raise questions about the back-

[32] Examples are the question regarding healing in Jer 8:22 with 30:17 and the motif of the covenant in 14:21 with 31:31.

[33] See, e. g., the Church Fathers Origen, St. Jerome and Theodoret who are mentioned in the last contribution of this volume, "Early Interests …".

[34] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 35–95.

[35] For all these indications, see the extended treatment in part 2 of this volume.

[36] William L. Holladay and Jack R. Lundbom defend such an interpretation in their commentaries.

ground of the book and the reliability of its presentation. For interpreting Jer, one has to decide whether to take its chronological information at face value or to see in it a description of a time long past, reflecting on the largest catastrophe in Judah's history from a distance by incorporating important motifs and significant phrases from other biblical scrolls.

d) Some Aspects of the Specific Profile of Jer

Jer is markedly different from other prophets and their books. Already Jer 1 stylizes the *figure of Jeremiah* as a kind of 'super-prophet', the promised successor of Moses,[37] albeit with a wider international reach (v. 5 "prophet for the nations"). He receives various roles, even kingly or divine ones.[38] "Jeremiah" is a kind of synthesis, being priest (v. 1), commissioned as prophet, appointed authority over nations and kingdoms (v. 10), visionary (vv. 11, 13), replacing the functions of city, temple and walls (v. 18), and he is even God's privileged speaker.[39]

In contrast to such excellence, his *suffering* reaches a dimension up to then unparalleled. Several phrases are very similar to Isaiah's "Servant Songs".[40] In my view, Jer 1, 15, and 20 portray Jeremiah as the incarnation of Yhwh's servant as he is depicted in Isa. In any case, the physical pains, with torture, imprisonment, etc. go far beyond what other prophets had to bear. In addition, passages of lament and especially the confessions testify to inner torments.[41] The prophet and his body become a battlefield in the conflicts between God, resisting people and false prophets. Jer describes these struggles and sufferings at length[42] and with great intensity.

The prophet's pain mirrors, to some extent, *his message* which is full of doom. No other book of the Bible focuses so much on *Jerusalem's destruction* in 587 BC and the periods immediately before and after it. Jer reflects on these events and analyses the roots of this greatest catastrophe in Israel's history. The choice of this topic is a statement: it is necessary to deal with this past[43] and to learn

[37] There is debate about the relationship with Deut 18:18 (see the article: Jeremiah – "The Prophet like Moses"? below in 3.3, section 1); the better arguments, however, speak for Jer's dependence on Deut.

[38] See esp. Jer 1:10, with the list of opposing verbs. All other instances in Jer have God as subject.

[39] "My mouth", in Jer 15:19, as a unique sign of honour and distinction.

[40] Ulrich Berges, Servant and Suffering in Isaiah and Jeremiah, interprets the respective texts of Isa as being later than Jer, as does Katherine Dell.

[41] Job is the only figure comparable to Jeremiah in this respect within the Hebrew Bible, yet his suffering is not due to a divine commissioning as prophet.

[42] It starts in Jer 1:18–19 and runs through the book continuously until Jer 44. One of the rare exceptions is the Scroll of Consolation, Jer 30–31.

[43] Note in contrast the Book of Isaiah which 'jumps' without further comment from Isa 39:8 to 40:1 over this decisive period. This has received only recently the deserved special attention by Frederik Poulsen, *The Black Hole in Isaiah*.

from it, by discovering and acknowledging the roots of the downfall and one's own share in it. The treatment of the topic is also revealing: Jer concentrates on it from the beginning (1:14–16) until the end (Jer 52), thus confronting its addressees to deal with this issue without a chance to evade it.

However, Jer's scope is not to evoke pessimism or communicate a "negative anthropology".[44] The long dealings with the people's guilt and the outcome of it aim at *providing a better and true basis for the relationship with God*. The confrontation starts in Jer 2[45] and goes up to Jer 44. God and Jeremiah try to make the community perceive its "treacherous" behaviour[46] and "brokenness"[47] *in order* that they convert (Jer 3:1–4:4) and find anew "the eternal paths" leading to well-being (Jer 6:16). Although God has been forsaken and forgotten,[48] and Israel and Judah have broken his covenant (Jer 11:10), he graciously offers forgiveness and even a New Covenant (31:31–34). The discrepancy between God's and the people's actions and attitudes reveals their ingratitude and yet more divine generosity and love (Jer 31:3).

This *portrayal of Yhwh* in Jer is fascinating. It is also markedly different from other biblical books, including even some unique features. The articles in the last section[49] mention various times divine weeping, restoration of fortunes, incessant efforts, universal dominion and deep affection as divine characteristics. God in Jer is constantly struggling to overcome the people's waywardness and to lead them after the disaster to a new life again.

Jer's *spirituality* differs from those of other scrolls, too. Traditional forms of piety, as sacrifices, temple visits, pilgrimages, tithe, even the Ark of the Covenant etc. play no or no important role in Jer. Most priests appear as opponents of Jeremiah.[50] This undermines their authority and leads the addressees of Jer to a direct, personal relationship with God, promised by him in 31:34: "They all, from the least of them to their greatest, will know me". Such an orientation runs explicitly contrary to Deuteronomy which had insisted on religious teaching and learning.[51] Jer is confident that God himself will guide those listening to him and that this will result in a less problematic way of religious practice and in the true adoration of Yhwh.

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[44] Passages like Jer 9:1–5; 13:23 seem to suggest such a stance; cf. Helga Weippert, Das Wort vom Neuen Bund, 344.

[45] Samuel Hildebrandt, *Interpreting Quoted Speech in Prophetic Literature* (2017), has presented an excellent analysis of the use of quotations in this dispute.

[46] See the insistence on שׁקר, 37 times from Jer 3:10 onwards.

[47] The root שׁבר occurs in Jer 43 times (out of 223 instances in the Hebrew Bible) which is far more than in any other book (the next one being Isa with 25 occurrences).

[48] Jer 1:16 uses the first time "forsake", Jer 2:32 is the first instance of "forget" for Israel's relationship with God. Both verbs occur repeatedly within Jer in this sense.

[49] Cf. part 4 in this volume: The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah.

[50] E. g. Pashhur in Jer 20:1–6 and a group of them in 26:8–11; see further the frequent critical remarks, as in 1:18; 2:8; 6:13, etc.

[51] Cf. Deut 4:9–10, 14; 6:7; 11:19 …

e) Different Approaches

Interpreting Jer goes beyond one's capacities. You may read and study it 100 and even 1000 times, but *questions, problems and riddles will remain*. On various levels, its complexity and 'unevenness' does not allow easy solutions and will always lead to an ambiguous picture. One may find counter-arguments against any explanation because Jer is so full of contrasts and changes. The book addresses different situations whilst aiming throughout at salvation after just judgment. This characteristic of Jer is at least in part the source for the varying and sometimes disparate interpretations. It requires great sensitivity and sound discernment to weigh the evidence and recognizing which aspects merit preference over others. But even then, others may oppose a position reached after long consideration and deliberation.

Another problem is the *start of the research*. Most often researchers begin with a certain, limited text; yet, especially in the case of Jer it is necessary to know the entire book in order to perceive the function of this text within it, its links with other passages, and the development of its motifs along the book. Normally this alone requires years; who has the time and the opportunity to spend such an extended period of his life for studying Jer? According to my experience, new aspects emerge even after decades of research. It is a privilege, if one is to be granted so much time for it.

A common procedure in studying Jer is to begin with 'confidence'. Many take the initial remarks in Jer 1:1–3 at face value, assuming a *'real', historical proclamation of the prophet Jeremiah in these years* leading up to the disaster in 587 BC.[52] This is possible; yet the similar remarks in the books of other, earlier prophets, like Amos, Hosea, Micah, make me cautious against such an understanding. Their scrolls did not come into existence in the 8th century BC, but only much later. I do not deny that a prophet with the name Jeremiah may have lived at the indicated period; I only want to leave open the option that his portrayal and the messages attributed to him may (also) be literary products.

Another frequent approach to Jer is explaining it by deuteronomistic redaction(s).[53] These exegetes rightly acknowledge *a dominant feature of Jer*, namely the widespread use of phraseology, motifs and ideas common to Deuteronomy and the following books inspired by it. Thus far I can agree with them. Yet, this is only part of the picture. The full image comes to the fore when the other, distinctive features of the book are considered as well: Jer has many links with other prophets and a specific Jeremian idiolect. This makes Jer's thought and language more complex through the incorporation and combination of these various sources. Furthermore, Jer also evinces concepts contrary to dtr in some

[52] E. g. William L. Holladay, Jack R. Lundbom, Dalit Rom-Shiloni, and others.
[53] See above the remarks in b).

Index of Biblical Passages (selective)

Index of Authors

Index of Subjects (selective)