

[MJTM 23 (2021–2022)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

John Goldingay. *The Book of Jeremiah*. NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. xxvii + 1033 pp. Hbk. ISBN 978-0-8028-7584-6. \$52.77.

Since 1965, under the competent editorial leadership of Edward J. Young, Roland K. Harrison, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and now, Bill T. Arnold, the New International Commentary on the Old Testament (NICOT) series has established itself among the spectrum of evangelical theological works aiming to “publish biblical scholarship of the highest quality” (xv). In *The Book of Jeremiah*, veteran commentator John Goldingay does not disappoint, effectively replacing J. A. Thompson’s fine 1980 NICOT work *The Book of Jeremiah*.

While the introduction runs a mere sixty-five pages (half the total length of Thompson’s work), Goldingay ably handles the historical-cultural background of the book, such as the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah, and the fall of Jerusalem, alongside key questions about its unity of composition. Goldingay forthrightly maintains, “I do assume there is material in the scroll conveying Jeremiah’s own words and also material produced by people who wanted to write about him . . . I will refer to them as the scroll’s curators and storytellers” (9).

With respect to literary analysis, Goldingay judiciously asserts that distinguishing between “poetry and prose, and then between prose messages and narratives . . . an assumption that has been basic to Jeremiah scholarship since Duhm’s commentary (*Das Buch Jeremia*, Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Altern Testament 11 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1901]) and S. Mowinkkel’s *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiania: Dybward, 1914)” is unnecessary to studying the scroll, but maintains instead, “the two forms of speech or writing have different rhetori-

cal affects” (8). The author’s pronounced emphasis of “Jeremiah as Persuader” (32–34) is thus much appreciated. To be clear, Goldingay states, “The entirety of the Jeremiah scroll is rhetoric—not in a bad way, in order to manipulate, but in order to move. Jeremiah’s rhetoric is not a way of getting people to avoid thinking but a way of getting them to think” (34).

Concerning textual criticism (a not insignificant aspect of this book), Goldingay emphasizes, “both MT Jeremiah and LXX Jeremiah need to be understood in their own right” (14). More specifically, Goldingay states, “More or less invariably in this commentary . . . I follow MT<sup>L</sup> [the version of Jeremiah in the Leningrad (St. Petersburg) Codex] and try to make sense of it as it stands, though in the notes I draw attention to alternative versions of the text—especially readings that can be inferred from the old translations” (47). With respect to the LXX and MT text(s), Goldingay avers that his “working assumption” is that “both are independent recessions of an earlier text we no longer have” (44). He also (humbly) admits, “In placing the scroll’s finalizing in the Babylonian period, I take the minority position” (17).

As expected, Goldingay’s handling of the Hebrew text is par excellence. He judiciously cites the standard lexicons and ably differentiates the different Hebrew stems (*qal*, *niphal*, *hiphil*, etc.), thereby neatly avoiding the quagmire of many common exegetical fallacies, for example, etymologizing, semantic overload, etc. The commentary also uses linguistically informed nomenclature (e.g., *weqatal* and *yiqtol*) and pays close attention to various aspects of Hebrew syntax with ample references to many of the standard reference grammars (e.g., *GKC*, *IBHS*, Joüon, and *DG*). This is something that is warmly welcomed, and it stands in direct (and substantial!) contrast to Thompson’s *NICOT*. Would that more commentators followed suit.

The *crème de la crème* of analyzing Hebrew poetry, namely Wilfred G. E. Watson’s *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (JSOTSup 26. Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), is also leveraged. Goldingay particularly emphasizes “stress” and “rhythm” (27). To this end, the author draws special attention to different ways “one could change the punctuation [of MT<sup>L</sup>] and thus make

the rhythm more conventional” even feeling free “from time to time” to rework MT<sup>L</sup>’s “divisions of verses and cola where a recognition that the verses are poetic lines suggest such changes” (47).

While somewhat unique, many individuals are likely to appreciate the analog Goldingay makes (see 12–15) between the composition of Jeremiah (as a complete scroll) and the composition of the Gospels (including John). Specifically, Goldingay states (12–13):

While I include footnote references to some work on the possible development of the scroll so that readers may follow it up, in the commentary I focus on the text we have rather than seeking to uncover the compositional process whereby it may be developed. I do have a mental picture of the general compositional process, partly imagined on the possibility that the New Testament Gospels provide a plausible model (or plausible models) for thinking about the composition of the Jeremiah scroll and about its relationships to events. Like the Jeremiah scroll, the Gospels combine messages and stories, though they make the story the framework for the messages whereas the Jeremiah scroll makes the messages the frameworks for the stories. Like the Jeremiah scroll, the Gospels tell a story about what God was doing and saying historically but do so in a way that brings home its significance for the people of their day. In both respects, their telling corresponds to what one can envisage God wanting and inspiring.

That being said, some of the (potential) threads tying the analogy together may have been overdrawn by the author. By way of example, Goldingay opines, “Perhaps Jeremiah and Baruch’s 604 scroll is a bit like Mark, LXX Jeremiah is a bit like Matthew, and MT Jeremiah is a bit like Luke. (It is another nice coincidence that Mark wrote before the fall of Jerusalem, Matthew and Luke after it)” (13). Some individuals may also find certain other comments similarly disconcerting (cf. 25–26). For instance, Goldingay also claims (15):

The Holy Spirit inspired John to take events from Jesus’s life and his actual words and make them the basis for a reflection of his significance, which John presents as Jesus’s own words . . . It may be anachronistic to imagine the community thinking about this process in a way that made the distinction that I might presuppose between what Jesus said and what John might infer from it, but given that I cannot help making that distinction,

then the way I express it involves affirming my trust that the Christian community did the right thing when it recognized that John had truly articulated the significance of Jesus and, for that matter, my assumption that Jesus would have liked the way John has put things on his lips that he did not say.

Such infelicities aside, one would be hard-pressed to find a commentary on Jeremiah that is as useful (and accessible!) to scholars and pastors alike. Both the church and the academy will be well-served by this landmark (and remarkably cost-effective) work. John Goldingay's *The Book of Jeremiah* is a most welcome addition to the NICOT library. Highly recommended!

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