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Walter Brueggemann

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## THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

The Book of Jeremiah, second of the three major prophets, is immensely complex. Its different interpretive voices stretch across several generations and do not cohere into an easily identifiable and uniform theology. Instead, in both poetry and prose, the Book of Jeremiah witnesses an ongoing conversation among different advocates concerning the crisis of Babylon's expansion and Jerusalem's demise. In this volume, Walter Brueggemann elucidates these various voices in the context of Judah's commitment to the rule of the one God, YHWH. This messy interface of the theological and political constitutes the primal challenge of the Book of Jeremiah, and Brueggemann shows how the book asserts that God continues to be similarly and disturbingly operative in the affairs of the world. In this way, contemporary crises such as American imperialism and religiously inspired terrorism are shown to be dislocations with ancient antecedents, but dislocations that continue to invite readers to new futures that combine divine agency and human inventiveness rooted in faithfulness.

Walter Brueggemann is William Marcellus McPheeters Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary. Although his impact on the study of much of the biblical canon is widespread, he is probably best known for his scholarship on the Psalms and prophetic literature. His many books include *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* and *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, and he will co-author, with William H. Bellinger, Jr., the two-volume *New Cambridge Bible Commentary on the Psalms*.

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*In grateful memory  
of  
Shirley C. Guthrie*



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WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

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## *General Editors' Preface*

Some years ago, Cambridge University Press, under the editorship of James D. G. Dunn, initiated a series entitled *New Testament Theology*. The first volumes appeared in 1991 and the series was brought to completion in 2003. For whatever reason, a companion series that would focus on the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible was never planned or executed. The present series, *Old Testament Theology*, is intended to rectify this need.

The reasons delineated by Dunn that justified the publication of *New Testament Theology* continue to hold true for *Old Testament Theology*. These include, among other things, the facts that, (1) given faculty and curricular structures in many schools, the theological study of individual Old Testament writings is often spotty at best; (2) most exegetical approaches (and commentaries) proceed verse by verse so that theological interests are in competition with, if not completely eclipsed by, other important issues, whether historical, grammatical, or literary; and (3) commentaries often confine their discussion of a book's theology to just a few pages in the introduction. The dearth of materials focused exclusively on a particular book's theology may be seen as a result of factors like these; or, perhaps, it is the cause of such factors. Regardless, as Dunn concluded, without adequate theological resources there is little incentive for

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teachers or students to engage the theology of specific books; they must be content with what are mostly general overviews. Perhaps the most serious problem resulting from all this is that students are at a disadvantage, even incapacitated, when it comes to the matter of integrating their study of the Bible with other courses in religion and theology. There is, therefore, an urgent need for a series to bridge the gap between the too-slim theological précis and the too-full commentary where theological concerns are lost among many others.

All of these factors commend the publication of *Old Testament Theology* now, just as they did for *New Testament Theology* more than a decade ago. Like its sister series, *Old Testament Theology* is a place where Old Testament scholars can write at greater length on the theology of individual biblical books and may do so without being tied to the linear, verse-by-verse format of the commentary genre or a thematic structure of some sort imposed on the text from outside. Each volume in the series seeks to describe the biblical book's theology as well as to engage the book theologically – that is, each volume intends to *do* theology through and with the biblical book under discussion, as well as delineate the theology contained within it. Among other things, theological engagement with the composition includes paying attention to its contribution to the canon and appraising its influence on and reception by later communities of faith. In these ways, *Old Testament Theology* seeks to emulate its New Testament counterpart.

In the intervening years since *New Testament Theology* was first conceived, however, developments have taken place in the field that provide still further reasons for the existence of *Old Testament Theology*; these have impact on how the series is envisioned and implemented and also serve to distinguish it, however slightly,

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from its companion series. Three developments in particular are noteworthy:

1. *The present hermeneutical climate*, often identified (rightly or wrongly) as “postmodern,” is rife with possibility and potential for new ways of theologizing about Scripture and its constituent parts. Theologizing in this new climate will of necessity look (and be) different from how it has ever looked (or been) before.
2. *There has been an ethos change in the study of religion, broadly, and in biblical studies in particular.* No longer are the leading scholars in the field only Christian clergy, whether Catholic priests or mainline Protestant ministers. Jewish scholars and scholars of other Christian traditions are every bit as prominent, as are scholars of the non- or even anti-confessional stripe. In short, now is a time when “Old Testament Theology” must be conducted without the benefits of many of the old consensuses and certainties, even the most basic ones relating to epistemological framework and agreed-upon interpretative communities along with their respective traditions.
3. Finally, recent years have witnessed a *long-overdue rapprochement among biblical scholars, ethicists, and systematic theologians.* Interdisciplinary studies between these groups are now regularly published, thus furthering and facilitating the need for books that make the theology of Scripture widely available for diverse publics.

In brief, the time is ripe for a series of books that will engage the theology of specific books of the Old Testament in a new climate for a new day. The result will not be programmatic, settled, or altogether

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certain. Despite that – or, in some ways, *because* of that – it is hoped that *Old Testament Theology* will contain highly useful volumes that are ideally poised to make significant contributions on a number of fronts including: (a) the ongoing discussion of biblical theology in confessional and nonconfessional mode as well as in postmodern and canonical contexts; (b) the theological exchange between Old Testament scholars and those working in cognate and disparate disciplines; and (c) the always pressing task of introducing students to the theology of the discrete canonical unit: the biblical books themselves.

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## *Preface*

My study of Jeremiah goes back to ancient days, to my study with Lionel A. Whiston, Jr., at Eden Theological Seminary and with James Muilenburg at Union Theological Seminary. Since that time, I have been privileged to be in mostly friendly and always generative conversations with the principal interpreters of Jeremiah in our present generation: Robert P. Carroll, Ronald E. Clements, Terence E. Fretheim, William L. Holladay, Patrick D. Miller, Kathleen M. O'Connor, and Louis Stulman. (I heard Abraham Heschel lecture in only one series, and that concerned Jeremiah.) The present book reflects my engagement with these several writings in a way that has clarified and situated my own scholarship.

My point of reference for Jeremiah studies has been my teacher, James Muilenburg. He was among the most important Jeremiah scholars of his generation, although in the end he refused to let his commentary reach publication. Muilenburg's attention to rhetorical detail has largely dictated my method, and his passion for the prophetic tradition leads me to see in powerful ways the interface of the text with the issues that face our own culture in a time of "plucking up and tearing down." I am blessed to be rooted in his teaching and to have been sent beyond his teaching in freedom.

I am glad to thank Patrick D. Miller and Brent A. Strawn for including me in the series and especially thank Brent for engaging

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## PREFACE

me along the way with the manuscript. I am also particularly grateful to Tia Foley, who, like Baruch, has the skills that permit me to “add many words” and bring this manuscript to completion. I give my thanks to Chris Hooker for his preparation of the indexes. The biblical text has in it no indication of emphases for reading. In a number of texts quoted herein, I have italicized certain words in order to assist the reader in noting the rhetorical force of the text. In each case such underscoring is my own work and of course coheres with my own sense of the text.

I am pleased to dedicate this book to the memory of my colleague Shirley C. Guthrie. He and I were in good conversation over these issues over a long period of time. In the final days of his life up to his illness and death, he was reading my Jeremiah commentary and was both appreciative and critical in a way that let our conversation go further. I am glad to offer this memorial tribute to him in celebration of his gentle disputatiousness, his carefully honed cynical humor, and his deep faithfulness on the big issues. Such a force and such a presence he has been among us, and I stand among the great company of those grateful for him.

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*Abbreviations*

AB	Anchor Bible
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BS	The Biblical Seminar
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Interp	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series

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ABBREVIATIONS

KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
ThSt	Theologische Studien
<i>ThTo</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WW	<i>Word and World</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>