

Foreword

THE ORACLES AGAINST NATIONS OTHER THAN ISRAEL OCCUPY A SUBSTANTIAL part of the prophetic books of the Old Testament. But they are arguably the least congenial and most perplexing portions of those books. As a matter of ancient history it is unclear what the nature and purpose of these texts was; and in terms of enduring significance as Scripture for Jews and Christians it is unclear what believers should do with them.

Julie Woods tackles Jeremiah 48 as a representative oracle against the nations, in this case addressed specifically to Israel's neighbour Moab. Although she is attentive to the text as an ancient text, in both its Hebrew and Greek forms, her primary concern is with the constructive question of what, if anything, contemporary Christian faith might make of it. Can it be more than simply part of Christianity's pre-Christian history, perhaps best regarded somewhat as a box stored in a far corner of the attic, occasionally retrieved to see if there is something of interest inside, but then returned to its far corner?

In addition to a discussion of standard scholarly issues relating to the interpretation of Jeremiah's oracle against Moab, there are perhaps three areas in which Woods breaks fresh ground. First, she looks at eminent Christian scholars who have written commentaries on Jeremiah in recent years, and analyses their hermeneutical strategies in their handling of Jeremiah 48. Part of the interest here lies in seeing how the emphases they draw out of the text as enduringly significant relate to characteristic emphases in their writings elsewhere. Secondly, she proposes a fresh interpretation of arguably the most famous and most used verse of the chapter, "Accursed is the one who is slack in doing the work of the LORD; and accursed is the one who keeps back the sword from bloodshed" (48:10). Thirdly, she imaginatively re-envisages the text by casting it into movie mode, and offers two complementary renderings, one portraying the text in a pre-Christian frame of reference, and the other portraying it in a Christian frame of reference.

Jeremiah 48 remains a text that is unlikely to feature in most people's shortlist of preferred passages within the Old Testament. Nonetheless, Julie Woods suggestively shows how the study of a hard text can be surprisingly fruitful.

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