

Introduction

JEREMIAH 48 IS AN ORACLE CONCERNING MOAB. IT BELONGS TO THE genre of oracles against the nations (hereafter OANs), in which YHWH¹ condemns non-Israelite nations, and it occurs in the middle of the OAN collection in Jeremiah (46–51). Clements writes that the OANs are, “amongst the most obscure and difficult passages of the entire prophetic corpus of the Old Testament to understand.”² For example, were the oracles intended for the nations’ hearing or not? Either way, what purpose do they have? Were the OANs written in the context of holy war? What purpose might they have for Christians?

Jeremiah 48 is one of the strangest texts in some ways. Apart from the oracle concerning Babylon in chapters 50–51, which is often treated as a special case, Jeremiah’s oracle concerning Moab is the longest OAN in Jeremiah (and longer than most of the OANs in other books, too). Yet it does not sit in first or last position in the collection (even if the Babylon oracle is excluded). However, perhaps the most distinct element in this oracle is the strong note of lament that sounds almost constantly from beginning to end and even includes YHWH’s tears and wailing.

The aim of this monograph is to investigate Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture. Chapter 1 will begin by giving an overview of the field of OAN studies with attention given to significant contributions, especially those relating to Jeremiah’s OANs. Then, before I engage with the main concerns of the book, I will address two preliminary issues about which something needs to be said. Chapter 2 will deal with the first: an examination of the differences between MT and LXX. This analysis is particularly pertinent, since there is more disparity between Jeremiah’s OANs than is usual between MT and LXX—in the OT generally as well as Jeremiah specifically. The second is a comparative study between Isaiah 15–16 and Jeremiah 48, since these two oracles concerning Moab are remarkably similar. Chapter 3 will cover this, giving at-

1. I use YHWH even when the Tetragrammaton is vocalized.
2. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, 130.

tention to the distinct nuances of each in order to build up a picture of their individual characteristics and emphases.

The next two chapters will then analyze how recent Christian theologians have interpreted Jeremiah. Chapter 4 will examine the three U.S. interpreters—Terence Fretheim, Patrick Miller, and Walter Brueggemann—and chapter 5 will add two UK scholars—Douglas Jones and Ronald Clements—in order to give a slightly more comprehensive scope. As well, having representatives from both the U.S. and UK might highlight any obvious differences in the approaches of the two nations, though this is not a main aim of this study. In the course of analyzing these interpreters' approaches to the chapter, it will also become clear what the key themes and major questions relating to Jeremiah 48 are.

Chapter 6 will deal with Jeremiah 48:10, a curious curse that sits awkwardly in its context. The chapter will tentatively suggest a plausible account of the verse so that its place and role in Jeremiah 48 as a whole becomes clearer. Finally, chapter 7 attempts to propose ways in which Jeremiah 48 may be read as Christian Scripture, paying particular attention to the reasons given for Moab's punishment, as well as the pervading tone of lament. The reading utilizes figural interpretation in addition to making value judgments within a Christian frame of reference. It concludes with two film-like imaginative readings that explore the possible continuities and differences between Jeremiah 48 in its ancient and Christian contexts.

My understanding of Jeremiah's oracle concerning Moab in chapter 48 has developed through studying the works of others, especially Fretheim, Miller, Brueggemann, Jones, and Clements, and their words have sometimes sparked ideas of my own. Therefore, if I may utilize the words of Jones, "If there is anything fresh here, it is only because a dwarf has been able to sit on the shoulders of giants! Some of the giants are listed in the bibliography."³ In this case Jones himself is one of the giants.

3. Jones, *Haggai*, 13.