



# Jeremiah

Through the Centuries

Wiley Blackwell  
Bible  
Commentaries

Mary Chilton Callaway

**WILEY** Blackwell



# Jeremiah Through the Centuries

# Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries

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**Through the Centuries**

**Mary Chilton Callaway**

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This edition first published 2020  
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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Callaway, Mary, author.

Title: Jeremiah through the centuries / Mary Chilton Callaway.

Description: Hoboken, NJ, USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020. | Series: Wiley Blackwell Bible commentaries | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019049073 (print) | LCCN 2019049074 (ebook) | ISBN 9780631231516 (hardback) | ISBN 9781118780756 (adobe pdf) | ISBN 9781118780732 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Bible. Jeremiah--Commentaries.

Classification: LCC BS1525.53 .C35 2020 (print) | LCC BS1525.53 (ebook) | DDC 224/.207--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019049073>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019049074>

Cover Design: Wiley

Cover Image: Life of William Blake (1880), Volume 2, Job illustrations by Cygnis insignis is licensed under CC BY-SA

Set in 10/12.5pt Minion by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*For Jamie  
who always finds grace in the wilderness*





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# Series Editors' Preface

The Blackwell Bible Commentaries series, the first to be devoted primarily to the reception history of the Bible, is based on the premise that how people have interpreted, and been influenced by, a sacred text like the Bible is often as interesting and historically important as what it originally meant. The series emphasizes the influence of the Bible on literature, art, music and film, its role in the evolution of religious beliefs and practices, and its impact on social and political developments. Drawing on work in a variety of disciplines, it is designed to provide a convenient and scholarly means of access to material until now hard to find, and a much-needed resource for all those interested in the influence of the Bible on Western culture.

Until quite recently this whole dimension was for the most part neglected by biblical scholars. The goal of a commentary was primarily, if not exclusively, to get behind the centuries of accumulated Christian and Jewish tradition to

one single meaning, normally identified with the author's original intention. The most important and distinctive feature of the Blackwell Commentaries is that they will present readers with many different interpretations of each text, in such a way as to heighten their awareness of what a text, especially a sacred text, can mean and what it can do, what it has meant and what it has done, in the many contexts in which it operates.

The Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries will consider patristic, rabbinic (where relevant), and medieval exegesis, as well as insights from various types of modern criticism, acquainting readers with a wide variety of interpretative techniques. As part of the history of interpretation, questions of source, date, authorship, and other historical-critical and archaeological issues will be discussed; but since these are covered extensively in existing commentaries, such references will be brief, serving to point readers in the direction of readily accessible literature where they can be followed up.

Original to this series is the consideration of the reception history of specific biblical books arranged in commentary format. The chapter-by-chapter arrangement ensures that the biblical text is always central to the discussion. Given the wide influence of the Bible and the richly varied appropriation of each biblical book, it is a difficult question which interpretations to include. While each volume will have its own distinctive point of view, the guiding principle for the series as a whole is that readers should be given a representative sampling of material from different ages, with emphasis on interpretations that have been especially influential or historically significant. Though commentators will have their preferences among the different interpretations, the material will be presented in such a way that readers can make up their own minds on the value, morality, and validity of particular interpretations.

The series encourages readers to consider how the biblical text has been interpreted down the ages and seeks to open their eyes to different uses of the Bible in contemporary culture. The aim is to write a series of scholarly commentaries that draw on all the insights of modern research to illustrate the rich interpretative potential of each biblical book.

*John Sawyer*  
*Christopher Rowland*  
*Judith Kovacs*  
*David M. Gunn*

# Acknowledgments

Well over a decade ago, John Sawyer entrusted me with the task of writing the Jeremiah volume for the Blackwell Bible Commentary series. His patient editorial support made it possible for me to search out the sources, sometimes translate them, and weave them into a reception history. Judith Kovacs had originally challenged me to write a proposal for the book, and with characteristic generosity offered critical and creative support throughout the writing, even though as New Testament editor of the series she did not have to read a word. Her friendship and insights have been a sustaining presence. David Gunn has given crucial help with multiple readings, corrections, and above all encouragement and advice about the pictures. Rebecca Harkin has ably steered me through the shoals.

Early in my graduate studies Professor James A. Sanders introduced me to the Hebrew text and the passionate persona of Jeremiah. Later, as my *Doktorvater* on another topic, he directed me to the deep theologies and holy sense of humor in Jewish exegetical traditions. His wise teaching planted the seeds for this book.

Two editors have patiently worked over every detail of the manuscript to correct my lapses. I am indebted to Cynthia Shattuck for her expert readerly eye and merciless editor's pencil, which made the book leaner and better. Caroline McPherson put the manuscript into final shape, dealing graciously with late changes and bibliographic challenges.

Graduate students Alex Hwang and Jennifer Jamer located troves of Patristic sources and put them into a usable form, sometimes hunting down the Greek original. Ankie Wiegerink and Jan van der Staak generously translated an eighteenth-century Dutch text about Ebed Melek, which proved to be a challenge even for native Dutch speakers.

Fordham University has supported the project with two sabbatical leaves and a grant to help pay for permissions to publish images. Colleagues Harry Nasuti, J. Patrick Hornbeck, and Elizabeth Johnson have offered important insights and friendly goading in equal measure. Graphic designer Marc Tremitiere made many of the pictures in the book possible by expertly scanning my trove of antique prints into high-resolution images. Marta Martín Pérez and Ariadna Fernández at the publishing company M. Moliero generously made available high-resolution images from the *Bible moralisée*, which are a linchpin in the reception history of Jeremiah.

The rich but sometimes arcane resources that provide the raw material for reception history are housed in libraries around the world. I am indebted to the patient and creative assistance given by librarians at the British Library, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Fordham University Library, Houghton Library of Harvard University, New York Public Library, Pierpont Morgan Library, and Union Theological Seminary Rare Books Collection.

I am grateful for the persistent challenge posed by members of the Writing/Reading Jeremiah Group of the Society of Biblical Literature, and the opportunities they gave me to test and refine ideas about the reception of Jeremiah. In addition, Walter Brueggemann, Robert Carroll, Andrew Mein, Kathleen O'Connor, Carolyn Sharp, and Lou Stulman have generously offered support and asked sometimes discomfiting but always generative questions. Members of the Columbia University Hebrew Bible Seminar have offered constructive critiques in a formal setting together with helpful resources informally. The nine superb essays on the reception of Jeremiah in *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, edited by Jack R. Lundbom, Craig A. Evans, and Bradford A. Anderson (Brill 2018) appeared after my manuscript



was substantially complete, so I was regrettably not able to incorporate their insights. Likewise, Mark Leuchter's essay in *The Oxford Handbook to the Book of Jeremiah* was not available. I take these omissions as a good sign that reception history of Jeremiah has become significant in biblical studies.

Special thanks to Hannah Boone Callaway for help with translating and understanding important eighteenth-century French texts about Jérémie, and for insights into French political history and humor. Equally valuable were her expert readerly eye and persistent challenges to make the narrative compelling.

Finally, my beloved Jamie has made this book possible. His extravagant care, creative problem solving, insightful comments, and good-humored support are embedded in every page. He reminded me early and often that Jeremiah speaks to the present, whenever that is.



## *Jeremiah the Man*

“He was the most compassionate of the prophets.”

Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration 17*, 373 CE

“It was this good man’s unhappiness to be a Physician to a dying State.”

John Trapp, *A Commentary upon Jeremiah*, 1660

“Jeremiah is by no means wanting either in elegance or sublimity, although, generally speaking, inferior to Isaiah in both ... His thoughts indeed are somewhat less elevated ... but the reason of this may be, that he is mostly taken up with the gentler passions of grief and pity, for the expression of which he has a peculiar talent.”

Robert Lowth, cited in B. Blaney, *Jeremiah, and Lamentations. A New Translation with notes ... 1784*, p. 8

“Every thing relating to Jeremiah shows him to have been a man of an equivocal character.”

Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason II*, 1795

“Jeremiah has a kind of feminine tenderness and susceptibility; strength was to be educed out of a spirit which was inclined to be timid and shrinking.”

F.D. Maurice, *Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament: A Series of Sermons*, 1853, p. 370

“He was set by God’s hand as a solitary beacon on a lofty tower, in a dark night, in a stormy sea; lashed by waves and winds, but never shaken from his foundations.

Christopher Wordsworth, Bishop of Lincoln 1875, *The Books of Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Ezekiel in the Authorized Version*, p. x

“Jeremiah’s ministry may be summed up in three words: good hope, labour, disappointment.”

John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons, Vol.8*  
Sermon 9. ‘Jeremiah, A Lesson for the Disappointed’ p. 127

“Of the truth of his conviction he never had a moment’s doubt; he knew that Jehovah was on his side, that on Him depended the eternal future. But, instead of the nation, the heart and the individual conviction were to him the subject of religion.”

Wellhausen, *Prolegmena to the History of Israel*, Trans.  
John Sutherland Black, Allan Menzies p. 491

“There are always Jeremiahs who go about saying that we have never had such bad times.”

*Daily Express*, 23 February 1928

“In the midst of danger he was brave. In the midst of trouble he was true. In the midst of confusion he was calm. In the midst of dark he was a flame.”

Roy L. Smith, *Writing Scripture Under Dictators*, Nashville:  
Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1943, p. 60

“Jeremiah was a weak and timid man, but God’s power worked in him.”

George André, *The Prophet Jeremiah*, Sunbury, PA: Believers  
Bookshelf, 1988

“We hear him as he secretly talks with God.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. ‘The Significant Contributions of Jeremiah to Religious Thought’ (unpublished seminary paper, 1948) in *The Papers of MLK, Jr.* Vol. 7, p. 181

“He was accused of fantasizing, being stubborn, disturbing the peace and being an enemy of the people, as have those in every age even up to the present day who were seized and possessed by God.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, sermon, 21 January 1934, DBWE 13, p. 347

“Jeremiah was truly the genius of torment and dissent; the Euripides, the Pascal or the Dostoevsky of the Old Testament.”

Thomas Römer, ‘La conversion du prophète Jérémie à la théologie deutéronomiste,’ 1997

“Polarity of emotion is a striking fact in the life of Jeremiah. We encounter him in the pit of utter agony and at the height of extreme joy, carried away by divine wrath and aching with supreme compassion.”

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*

## *The Book*

“The book of Jeremiah is all doom.”

Talmud, Baba Batra 14

“In order that nothing be lacking in the sense even though much is lacking in the words, I have prepared the warp and the woof for you; you yourself will weave the most beautiful garment.”

Jerome, *In Hieremiam*, Prologue

“Frequently in the first part there is something in a later chapter which really took place before that which is spoken of in an earlier chapter. So it seems as though Jeremiah did not compose these books himself, but that the parts were taken piecemeal from his utterances and written into a book. For this reason one must not worry about the order or be hindered by the lack of it.”

Martin Luther, Preface to the Prophet Jeremiah, 1532

“It is a necessary thing to the understanding of the prophets to know the stories of the times wherein they prophesied.”

Myles Coverdale, Marginal Note to Jer. 1:1, 1535

“We may all very profitably read the Prophet Jeremy, who is full of incitation to repentance and new obedience.”

John Trapp, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 1660

“The prophecies of Jeremiah, which are related historically, are also taken from various chronicles; for not only are they heaped together confusedly, without any account being taken of dates but also the same story is told in them differently in different passages.”

Benedict Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, 1670

Were I ... to write in such a disordered manner, no body would read what was written, and every body would suppose, that the writer was in a state of insanity. The only way to account for the disorder is, that the book is a medley of detached unauthenticated anecdotes, put together by some stupid book-maker, under the name of Jeremiah.”

Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, Part II 1795, Paris, pp. 48, 52

“The prophet’s *individuality* is so impressed on his writings as to disarm suspicion of their authenticity.”

Christopher Wordsworth, Bishop of Lincoln, 1875, *The Books of Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Ezekiel in the Authorized Version*, p. x.

“Though it was ‘the word of the Lord,’ these communications were ‘words of Jeremiah;’ his personality, temperament, experiences, style of thought, modes of expression, are all stamped upon these Divine messages. Inspiration does not obliterate, scarcely subordinates individuality.”

*Preacher’s Complete Homiletic Commentary*,  
Vol. 17: 8, Funk & Wagnalls, 1892

“As a lad I started to read the Scripture through according to the familiar schedule, three chapters each weekday and five on Sunday, by which we were assured that in a single year we could complete the reading of the Book. I got safely through Numbers and Leviticus, even Proverbs did not altogether quench my ardor, but I stuck in the middle of Jeremiah and never got out. I do not blame myself, for how can a boy read Jeremiah in its present form and understand it?”

Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible*, 1930, p. 21

“It is a hardy adventurer who decides to brave the book of Jeremiah.”

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