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Das Buch Jeremia: Kapitel 1–20

Das Alte Testament Deutsch 20

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Wilhelm J. Wessels
University of South Africa
Pretoria, South Africa

Werner Schmidt is emeritus professor in Old Testament at the Bonn University in Germany. He is a well-known, well-published and respected scholar of the Old Testament. He is also a seasoned scholar when it comes to the study of Jeremiah research, and his path has crossed those of H. W. Wolff, W. Theil, and the likes of O. Kaiser in this regard. This current volume on Jeremiah covers chapters 1–20 of the book; work is in progress with regard to the remaining chapters of Jeremiah.

The commentary is prefaced by the usual words from the author, followed by a selection of literary sources consulted for the project. It is clear from the preface that Schmidt is not naïve when it comes to research on the book of Jeremiah. He admits that it is a risk one takes in taking on a project such as this commentary, since there is no consensus on matters emanating from research on the Jeremiah text, far from it. His aim is thus not to present a comprehensive overview of research on the book of Jeremiah. His intention, rather, is to show how the text of Jeremiah relates or refers to other texts in the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. Schmidt holds the view that the uniqueness of the message of Jeremiah will appear by comparing Jeremiah's message with the messages of the other writing prophets. The focus in the commentary is not so much the question of the origin of texts but the aim or intention of the message of the text. The context of conflict in which the prophet is situated is also taken notice of, without disregarding the

focus and purpose of the redaction of the text. Schmidt states that the interests of people with very little basic knowledge, including those without knowledge of Hebrew, were taken into account in the explanation and presentation of arguments. The aim is therefore to make the commentary accessible for a larger group of interested people.

A few observations with regard to the nature and presentation of the commentary are necessary. A list of selected literary sources consulted forms the first part of the commentary. These sources are not presented alphabetically but are grouped according to themes. This surely serves as an early indication of the focal points in the author's approach. The bibliography is structured in such a way that it indicates the main aspects he had considered when he engaged the Jeremiah text. Schmidt's commentary provides an extensive list of written sources on Jeremiah and other relevant material important for the exposition and understanding of the text. Although quite comprehensive in nature, he admits that it is not the full spectrum of literature available. Needless to say, most of the sources included in the list are from the German world.

The list of consulted works is followed by a forty-two-page introductory section. In this section the author explains his views on the book of Jeremiah, highlighting the aspects he regards as crucial for understanding the book as a literary composition. These aspects include the following: the context and period of Jeremiah's activities; Jeremiah as a person; the intellectual/spiritual/religious context and tradition from which Jeremiah came; the style of Jeremiah's oracles; Jeremiah's proclamation (themes and unity); and how Schmidt regards the formation of the book.

Schmidt considers Jeremiah's activity as a prophet between 627 and 585 B.C., covering four periods: from his calling as a prophet until the time of King Josiah's reform in 622 B.C.; the time of the reign of King Jehoiakim up to the first invasion of Jerusalem (597 B.C.); the period of King Zedekiah's reign between the first and second invasions of Jerusalem (597–587 B.C.); and, finally, from the fall of Jerusalem until the sojourn in Egypt (after 587 B.C.). Jeremiah therefore experienced Josiah's centralization of the cult, the decline of the Assyrian Empire, the rise of the Babylonian Empire, and the siege and final conquest of Jerusalem.

When it comes to the person of Jeremiah, Schmidt refers to his origin from the priestly city Anathoth and also mentions his affinity to Hosea's proclamation. He further describes the impact Jeremiah's calling as a prophet had on his life and how it affected his family relations. His life served as a sign and image of the message he had to convey, especially with regard to the suffering and punishment awaiting the people of Judah. Jeremiah is portrayed as following in the tradition of the writing prophets, applying

insights, motives, and experiences from his predecessors. The author also indicates that Jeremiah's proclamation influenced many who came after him.

Schmidt is well versed in form criticism and therefore, as expected, dedicates a section to the various forms and stylistic devices to be distinguished in the book of Jeremiah. This is followed by a survey of the various themes to be recognized in the proclamation of the prophet. It is clear that this is an important section to Schmidt, since he dedicates twelve pages to discuss eleven major components of Jeremiah's message. Not only does Schmidt show that the person (Jeremiah) and his commission are closely interrelated, but he indicates in many instances how Jeremiah's message link up with those of his prophetic predecessors. There are, however, also aspects of Jeremiah's message that are new and unique because of his historical context.

The last main issue Schmidt discusses in the introductory part of the commentary is the issue of how the book originated. This is an issue that is much debated, and scholars continue to propose new ways of addressing the problematic nature of the book. By now there is for the most part consensus on the issues involved in this regard, but the proposed solutions are still not convincing and need refinement. Schmidt distinguishes a double *Sitz im Leben* (29) for the proclamation by the prophet in the book: first an oral setting, then a written setting for the preservation and narration of the scroll. According to Schmidt, the core of the proclamation that the tradition has preserved goes back to Jeremiah himself. Schmidt, like many scholars, also works with the notion of a Deuteronomistic redaction of the book of Jeremiah. However, he calls it a "*jeremianisch-deuteronomistischen (jerdtr) Redaktion*" (37). This redaction did not exist independently but linked up with the tradition responsible for preserving and transmitting the Jeremiah oracles. This is an important observation, since it emphasizes the uniqueness of the Jeremiah text and tradition, but it also explains the similarities with regard to Deuteronomistic literature. Schmidt's treatment of the redactional issues in Jeremiah once again emphasizes the complexity of the formation and transmission of the Jeremiah text. This will continue to occupy the attention and energy of many more scholars in the future.

Schmidt structures his commentary by regarding each chapter of the book of Jeremiah as a main unit, subdivided into smaller sections that show his demarcation of different pericopes forming a chapter. This as such is fine, but the table of content has no numbers to guide the reader. The manner in which he has presented the table of contents is therefore not reader-friendly, since it makes it difficult to refer to a specific section. On a more positive note, there are, however, useful aspects that assist readers. What are in particular helpful and enlightening are sections in some of the units referred to as "small excursuses" or simply "excursuses." In these smaller excursuses he covers important matters

such as “Israel as a title for Jerusalem and Judah,” “The enemy from the north,” “the prohibition of intercessory prayer,” and a more extended excursus dedicated to the broader topic of “Jeremiah’s confessions.”

The exposition of the various textual units is done well. The content of the discussions and explanations Schmidt offers is not overshadowed with technical details but sufficient for understanding the text. The textual notes offer more than enough information for those who wish to pursue those issues in more detail. It is in the running commentary on the text that Schmidt shows his insight and wide range of knowledge and maturity as a scholar. There is a wealth of knowledge in his reflection on the various texts that will benefit scholars but also less-informed readers. The major contribution of this commentary lies more in the exposition and theological reflection on the text than in its contribution to the macro issues debated in research on the book of Jeremiah.

This commentary is an important contribution by a knowledgeable and skilled scholar from the German tradition. As many scholars acknowledge, doing research on the book of Jeremiah is a demanding task. There are many challenging issues to deal with, and it is impossible to entertain all the proposed solutions. Professor Schmidt has dealt with most of the thorny issues without getting entangled in the detail and the complexity of matters. However, when a matter requires more detailed discussion, he does offer it (e.g., Jer 7:1–15, the temple sermon, on 175–82). He takes notice of most of the important scholarly views, as the footnotes testify, but still manages to present his own view on matters. This is in particular clear in his treatment of the composition history of the book Jeremiah. His presentation does not shy away from the issues, but with the aim in mind that the commentary should be accessible for the not so technically informed readers, this commentary succeeds. He has managed in the process of the exposition of the text to highlight theological aspects emanating from the text without moralizing matters. In brief sentences and short references, he skillfully addresses faith issues in close relation to the text at hand (e.g., Jer 9:22–23).

I recommend this commentary as a welcome addition to resources on the book of Jeremiah. It will benefit those with an interest in doing research on the book of Jeremiah, but also those who wish to use it as a tool to prepare for the pulpit and serious study of the Bible.