

**Jeremiah's Kings –
a Study of the Book's Treatment of the Monarchy,
with Special Reference to Chapters 21-24.**

John Brian Job

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Reading Jeremiah as Christian Scripture

1. Introduction

Every reader of the Hebrew Bible comes to the text with a distinctive standpoint. Nonetheless, there are “family resemblances” which make it possible to name various categories, albeit with some overlap. It is approached differently, for example, by (a) Jews; (b) Muslims¹; (c) Christians; (d) atheists. The first three groups regard it as being in some sense inspired or revelatory, while atheists, if interested, see simply a remarkable human document². But there are symptomatic differences between the first three approaches: for Jews, “Hebrew Bible” is an appropriate term because for them its canon is complete; for Christians, “Old Testament” is appropriate to distinguish it from what is seen in the New as its sequel, but this understanding is quite different from the *replacement* envisaged by Muslims in the Qur’an.

To deal adequately with the Christian view of the Old Testament is far beyond the scope of this final chapter. Its purpose is rather to address issues highlighted by what could be seen as the disturbing conclusions to which we have been led about the way in which the book of Jeremiah has developed – raising questions about the whole of the Old Testament. The position would be easier if either of the following views were satisfactory. Thus first K.M.O’Connor, in one of the most recent commentaries on the book, recognizes that there may be elements in Jeremiah which date back to pre-exilic Judah, and also post-exilic additions, but these are *subordinated* to her synchronic reading, which assumes that its *essential* real audience was a group in the late exilic period³. She does not claim

¹ W.M.Watt, *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman*, Oxford:Clarendon, 1961, 42, addresses the question of how the development of a new religion was combined with the adoption of biblical ideas.

² C.S.Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land*, Edinburgh:T & T Clark, 2001, 326, remembers, after a lecture by R.P.Carroll, asking him why, if the Bible has such a malign effect, we should continue to read it. “His reply was essentially that we could not thrust it aside because it exists, it is *there* [italics Rodd’s]”.

³ K.M.O’Connor, ‘Jeremiah’, in J.Barton and J.Muddiman (edd), *OBC*, 489, epitomizes her approach as follows: “When the search for origins of texts is set aside, the book emerges as a

that Jeremiah actually said what he is recorded as saying, but she sees the book as stemming for practical purposes from a single historical period. Equally unsatisfactory, secondly, is the attempt made, as we saw, albeit seeking to engage fully with recent scholarship, by W.L.Holladay⁴ and others⁵ to salvage a view of the book which accords a high degree of factual reliability to its contents, as stemming from the historical Jeremiah himself. But our results do not endorse either of these approaches. The treatment of various kings in the book, as we have seen, confirms that, while there may indeed be preserved words which go back to the prophet himself, the composition of the book is extremely complex, and covers a period of several centuries, so that, whereas modern books usually have a straightforward date of publication, with the word “book” in English tending to imply an integral and coherent production, no one stage of the production of Jeremiah can be singled out without qualification as definitive, unless it is the final form. But “final form”, as we shall see, is a concept with its own problems.

How then in the light of the probable origin and nature of the book of Jeremiah can it be interpreted appropriately as Christian scripture? The problems are of two kinds:

- (i) those which surround the issue of what the book of Jeremiah is;
- (ii) those which involve its wider interpretation.

In both areas, we shall suggest, Jeremiah may be seen as a microcosm of the Old Testament as a whole, so that the discussion will have wider implications.

conversation between many voices in an open-ended structure”. But serious problems arise with what recent redaction criticism has made of her notion that a synchronic reading means merely “seeking to understand the relationship of the final form of the text to its audience in exile”. Such a view seems to take for granted the now highly questionable position of W. Thiel and E.W. Nicholson (see above, 10-18), who saw the book as given its fundamental character by a single deuteronomistic redaction, dating from this period.

⁴ W.L.Holladay, *Jeremiah*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, vol 2, 1989, 15-25 summarizes his position from this point of view.

⁵ E.g. R.K.Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, London: Tyndale Press 1970, 815; J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, 49.

2. What is the book of Jeremiah?

This innocent-looking question again reflects two fundamental concerns: (a) what text are we referring to when we speak of the book of Jeremiah and what are its characteristics? (Section 3 below); (b) what construction should be put on the opening phrase, יְרֵמְיָהוּ דְבַר? This probably meant in origin “the sayings of Jeremiah”,⁶ though in spite of the use of דְבַר in 1:2 and 1:4, the development of the book, and particularly the colophon (51:64MT [lacking in \mathfrak{C}]), which probably created an *inclusio* with 1: 1) may well have extended the meaning to cover “*die Geschichte Jeremias*”.⁷ A later *inclusio* may have been effected by the final reference in the present preface to exile “in the fifth month” and chapter 52. Here too, the term יְרֵמְיָהוּ דְבַר could by this stage have envisaged the whole book, not just the “sayings” of Jeremiah. But whatever its reference, the question is what attitude the Christian reader should take to what may be seen as variable historical accuracy. This will be discussed in section 4.

3. The textual question

3.1 Preliminary considerations

It was thought earlier that the Septuagint was the translation of a text confined to a single strand of tradition. However, the discovery at Qumran of two fragments of a Hebrew text-type similar to \mathfrak{C} ⁸ has refuted this: both \mathfrak{C} and MT have claims to represent the definitive form of the text, raising the question what is being referred to by “the book of Jeremiah”. The text-forms of \mathfrak{C} and

⁶ W. McKane, *Jeremiah*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1986, I.2, insists that the comparable heading for Amos shows this to be probable (cf. W. Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1-25*, WMANT 41, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1973, 49n2).

⁷ W. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, HAT I/12, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 3rd edition 1968, 2, so translates the phrase.

⁸ 4QJer^b contains the line-endings of 9:22-10:18. A fragment of Jer 10:4-11 (photographed upside down inside the back cover of Holladay, *Jeremiah I*) indicates that, like \mathfrak{C} , this Hebrew text has 10:5 following v9 with the omission of vv6-8 and v 10. K. Schmid, *Buchgestalten des Jeremiabuches*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996, 15, gives an up to date account of the evidence from Qumran and comments on the significance of this fragment: “4QJer^b bezeugt zwar nicht exakt die hebräische Vorlage von JerLXX aber eine Textform, die der anzunehmenden Vorlage von Jer LXX deutlich nähersteht als JerMT.”

MT are, of course, at variance throughout the Bible. But nowhere is the discrepancy so striking as in Jeremiah. The problem exists at various levels.

3.2 Detailed involuntary divergences

⊕ can sometimes be used to correct MT over simple mistakes in transmission. But more frequently the opposite is true, since the Hebrew tradition has been more carefully preserved, and it has to be remembered that ⊕ may sometimes simplify complexities arising from the lengthy growth of the Hebrew tradition⁹. Each case needs to be treated on its merits, according to established principles of textual criticism.

3.3 Deliberate alteration

We have noted changes purposely made both in the pre-Masoretic and Alexandrian traditions after the point of bifurcation. Many of these are trivial. But it is not insignificant for the way in which the text developed that, for instance, what looks like deliberate heightening of Jeremiah's status as a prophet is evident in MT¹⁰, whereas in ⊕ we have noted the phenomenon of *Entbabylonisierung*¹¹ reflecting a time when Babylon had ceased to be a factor in the international situation.

Such cases, though representing significant changes of emphasis, are still small-scale. More radical are those brought about, if Schmid is correct, in the Alexandrian tradition, changing the structure of the book to bring it into conformity with Isaiah and Ezekiel. The addition of 33:14-26, one of the most substantial pluses in the MT, may well mark the emergence, at what we have

⁹ Thus Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 22, writes: "JerLXX mag zwar bisweilen in der Tat ein älteres Entwicklungsstadium als JerMT zu repräsentieren; nur schon als Übersetzung ist sie aber prinzipiell ungeeignet Rückschlüsse auf redaktionelle Vorstufen des Buches vor dem Zeitpunkt der Übersetzung ins Griechische zuzulassen, denn die Übertragung ins Griechische bedeutet eine durchgängige, wenn nicht Eliminierung, so doch Nivellierung literarischer Nahtstellen".

¹⁰ The first of several examples is in 20:2, where, in view of the mention of Jeremiah by name in v1, ⊕ αὐτὸν almost certainly represents an original text which was deliberately changed to אֵת יִרְמְיָהוּ הַנָּבִיא – probably to mark the heinousness of striking a prophet, but producing an ugly repetition.

¹¹ The tendency to remove references to Babylon as no longer relevant. See above 212n16, 213, 226, 231, 239, and Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 222, 309, 313f.

seen to be the latest stage of the text's development, of an enthusiasm for the prospect of a Davidic king far exceeding anything that is also represented in \mathfrak{G} .

3.4 Questions relating to the canon

3.4.1 Indication of the difficulties

Problems which arise with Jeremiah from comparing \mathfrak{G} and MT question the exact constitution of what Christians call the Old Testament. Thus in an article probing the notion of any final form of the text J. Barton asks:¹² (a) which Bible do we have to open to find it? (b) if it is *BHS*, is it the unemended text? (c) might not the *LXX* provide the final text? He goes on (d) to suggest that for Catholics it might be the Vulgate. This catena of possibilities effectively reduces the notion of a final form of the text *ad absurdum*, but at the cost of missing an important consideration: translation into Greek already marked a body of literature which had ceased, apart from minor subsequent glosses, to develop and the advent of New Testament literature *set* its seal on this crystallization while standardization is also to be seen in the work of Symmachus and Aquila; the book of Jeremiah, like the Torah, was approaching near-immutability. Barton's concentration on differences between existing versions serves only to distract attention from the sense in which these books, whether in their Greek or Hebrew form, had long been gravitating towards completeness.

Barton was no doubt influenced by the claim of B.S. Childs¹³ that the MT should be regarded as the final form – a claim ridiculed by D. Barthélemy, who refers to it, in words translated by J. Barr as “a sclerotic and archaizing text-form”.¹⁴ However, replacement of the MT by the Septuagint as the final form of the Old Testament, favoured, for example, by M. Müller¹⁵ because it was in

¹² J. Barton, 'Looking back on the 20th century: 2. Old Testament Studies', *ExpT* 110, 1998/99, 349-51.

¹³ *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, London: SCM, 1985, 10.

¹⁴ J. Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, London: SCM, 1999, 577.

¹⁵ M. Müller, *The First Bible of the Church – a Plea for the Septuagint*, JSOT.S 204, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996. Compare M. Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002, 126, “Does the church still need a clearly demarcated, strictly

general the Bible of the early Christians, is likewise susceptible to objections, not least on account of evidence that New Testament writers could on occasion depend on a Hebrew text which was different,¹⁶ and often diverged from the Septuagint in their citations without any observable change of meaning.¹⁷

3.4.2 *The definition of canon*

It is clear from Jerome's use of the Latin word,¹⁸ (perhaps owing something to the way in which Paul uses *κανών* in 2 Cor 10:13-16, where, difficult as those verses are, the meaning is "allotted sphere of action"¹⁹) that for Jerome it referred to a definitive list of books. This is the sense which it usually has in English, *circumscribing* the list regarded as authorized. This, however, is only one of the ways in which the word has been used in recent discussion. The work of B.S.Childs, which has been at the centre of discussion, and which he calls "a canonical approach"²⁰, involves two extensions of the concept. His concern, which reflects his disillusionment with the "legacy of the Enlightenment"²¹ is that Old Testament theology should operate (a) with the *final form* of the text, and (b) expound any given passage in the light of its place within the canon as a whole. Both of these considerations are focused on the

closed Old Testament canon, since the New Testament is after all the conclusion, the goal, the fulfilment of the Old?"

¹⁶ For example, in Jer 38:15[Ⓞ], it is highly likely that the original reading (cf. *^{NA}) was ἐν τῇ ὑψηλῇ (cf. [Ⓟ] in excelsis), which means that Παμά was secondarily introduced into the tradition represented by [Ⓞ]^B either from Matthew or from *testimonia* based on 31:15[Ⓟ]. Again, in Mt 2:15, ἐκάλεσα, intended as a literal translation of מִן־מִצְרָיִם (Hos 11:1), was probably a deliberate change from μετεκάλεσα, which, though capable of the meaning "summon" (as probably in the doubtful text of Hos 11:2 MT), can also mean "call by a new name" (LS⁹ cite *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 3:419). The interpretation of Hos 11:1 as "From [the days in] Egypt I have regarded [Israel] as my son" is found in Tg, [Ⓞ], [Ⓟ] and [Ⓢ]. It clearly fits the parallelism better, and מִן־מִצְרָיִם is not usual in connection with the Exodus, according to G.I.Davies, *Hosea*, NCB, London: Marshall Pickering, 1992, 254.

¹⁷ For example, there are considerable differences between Isa 42:1-4[Ⓞ] and the citation in Mt 12:18-21, but they serve only to emphasize that, in spite of a general predilection for the LXX, other Greek versions were known and used.

¹⁸ E.g. 'Praefatio in Evangelio', line 52 (Gryson, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, p1516).

¹⁹ A. Sand, 'κανών', in H.Balz and G.Schneider (edd), *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1991, 249: "Here [sc in II Cor 10:13, 15b] κανών does not mean the geographical region... Instead the apostle boasts that he cannot proceed beyond the limit given to him."

²⁰ Childs, *Theology*, 6-16.

²¹ Childs, *Theology*, 14.

content rather than the *boundaries* of Scripture. The notion of a canon within the canon, to which we refer below, introduces a further nuance.

3.4.3 The “final form” of the text

Childs lays himself open to criticism with his concept of the final form of the text. We have seen how Barton can ask what that form is, implying that it is very elusive. Childs seriously plays down the extent to which the early Christians, because they had the Septuagint as their scriptures, included a number of books which did not figure in the Hebrew canon, and in any case would have had a different selection from place to place²². But as soon as the decision is for anything other than a particular extant text, the door is opened to difficulties which go beyond the question which books should be included, since no two candidates for an authoritative text concur in detail.

On the other hand, Childs is right that “both Jews and Christians agree that the canonical process of the Hebrew scriptures, or Old Testament, came to an end,”²³ even if it is misleading for him to continue “...and a different *canonical*²⁴ process began for both faiths”. But in order to make his position plausible, it has to be maintained: (a) that it is the New Testament which constitutes the Old Testament as what it now is in Christian eyes; (b) that logically there can have been no development of the Old Testament subsequent to the writing of the New; (c) that the varying boundaries of the canon for different New Testament writers do not affect the concept of finality envisaged

²² H. Gese, *Alttestamentliche Studien*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991, 27: “Eine scharfe Abgrenzung des tritten Kanonteils war angesichts des neuen Kanons eine zweitrangige Frage, und so kam es zu manchen Differenzen im kirklichen Gebrauch”.

²³ Childs, *Theology*, 7. Compare Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 99, “The early Christian community of the New Testament never developed a doctrine of scripture different from the Jewish”. There may have been differences as to the contents of the canon, but not as to the principle of its completion.

²⁴ Italics mine, J.B.J. Whether Childs means that the canonical process was different from what had obtained before, or different as between Judaism and Christianity, the use of the word “canonical” is strange. He says, *Theology*, 8, that “the Hebrew scriptures are not viewed [*sc* by Jews] as a closed entity in a dialectical relation to the later rabbinic tradition but rather there is an unbroken continuity between scripture and tradition which results in a different understanding of how its authority functions.” But even in Judaism there is a distinction between scripture and rabbinic tradition, and certainly the main use of the word “canonical” for Christians lies in the distinction between scripture and later tradition.

in point (b) above; (d) that the important factor is the common core, both with regard to the books included and their contents.

3.4.4 The New Testament as the creator of the Old

Of course, the New Testament writers did not create the Old Testament as if the notion of any acknowledged collection were a new thing: even the translators of the Septuagint accepted for the Torah and the prophets acknowledged collections of books. Ultimately, definition of boundaries may have resulted partly, at least, from Pharisaic reaction to the handling of Scripture by the Christian community²⁵. But delimiting the third section of the canon in Christian circles is likely to have been of little concern compared with the status accorded to emerging Christian documents. Paul's expression in 2 Cor 3:14, ἐπὶ τῇ ἀναγνώσει τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης, while not implying a collection of books with that title, any more than the anarthrous καινὴ διαθήκη in v6, clearly refers to a practice of reading which implies a distinction between scriptural books and others, and arguably marks an important step towards calling such books the Old Testament. No attempt is made in the New Testament to enumerate these books, nor can one be certain what the list would have consisted of, if there had been one, or even whether there would have been agreement between one writer and another about its constituents. For them to refer to "scripture" or "scriptures"²⁶ might have been like referring to the

²⁵ Gese, *Studien*, 26, deems probable that the "Abgrenzung von der christlichen Traditionsbildung" led to the sharp circumscription of the Pharisaic canon. Gese cites the *Tosefta*, Yad, II.13, where it is said "in einem Atemzug" that neither the gospels nor the book of Ecclesiasticus count as holy scripture (lit. "defile the hands"). It is not quite certain, however, that by the term קְדוּשָׁה in this passage the gospels are meant: see G.Lisowsky, G.Mayer, K.H.Rengstorf and E.Schereschewsky, *Die Tosefta*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1967, 259nn127, 129.

²⁶ The New Testament writers tend to use αἱ γραφαί. When the singular ἡ γραφή is used, a particular passage seems always to be envisaged, though implying membership of αἱ γραφαί. Paul has ἐν γραφαῖς ἁγίαις in Rom 1:4, where "the absence of the article gives additional solemnity: it does not make the expression indefinite – it is clear that the Old Testament is meant" (C.E.B.Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, Edinburgh:T & T Clark, vol 1,1975, 56n5). Cranfield also cites BDF, §255, for the omission of the article in prepositional phrases. In 2 Tim 3:15 [τὰ] ἱερὰ γράμματα is found. The anarthrous alternative is preferred by Westcott and Hort, but it is not clear whether the article was original and omitted when the phrase had come to mean "Holy Scripture", or *inserted* to give it this meaning. In any case, however, Timothy was envisaged only as having had access to a selection of the canon implied by πᾶσα γραφή in 2

population of England in 1500: the concept is not meaningless because we cannot put a name to everybody involved, or decide easily whether Frenchmen living here should be counted. Such lack of definition may seem unsatisfactory, but it is important that (a) there are only rather slight divergences from what became the canon of the Hebrew Bible, and none concerning the first two sections; (b) the naming of, or allusion to, Old Testament books in the New probably played some part in their inclusion in the canon²⁷; (c) the extent of citation from the Septuagint shows that “Scripture” was at least coterminous with the accepted collection translated from the Septuagint in the first Latin Bible (V),²⁸ witness, for example, the citation of Sir 1:10 in I Cor 2:9;²⁹ (d) the quotation of I Enoch in Jude 14f probably shows that this book was not excluded from the category of Scripture.³⁰ To speak of the New Testament creating the Old is not to deny that in the Law and the Prophets there were collections of books long canonized in Jewish circles, and the fact that the third section had not been finalized in the same way does not gainsay Gese’s point that it was chronologically impossible for any Christian list to have been dependent on the Pharisaic canon, since Christian tradition had begun to form by the middle of the first century CE³¹, while the Pharisaic canon, though beginning to crystallize as early as 70CE, is only first clearly attested by Josephus³² c.100 CE. Since Pharisees and Christians were theologically at odds, it was improbable that the latter should be bound by their opponents’ list. All

Tim 3:16. The anarthrous usage in 1 Pet 2:6, 2 Pet 1:20 probably reflects a later tendency to use the singular to refer to the whole of Scripture.

²⁷ The well-known lack of reference in the New Testament to the book of Esther shows that this could not have been a decisive criterion, and may mean that *ultimately* inclusion in the Hebrew canon exerted some influence.

²⁸ See F.G.Kenyon, *The Text of the Greek Bible*, London: Duckworth, 2nd edn, 1948, 27.

²⁹ See Gese, *Studien*, 268n9.

³⁰ Gese, *Studien*, 281, suggests that the “canonical” respect shown to the book of Enoch in Jude 14 indicates late finalization of the Christian Old Testament canon. R.T.Beckwith, ‘Canon of the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament’ in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1993, 100-102 reaffirms an earlier position: in *The Old Testament Canon in the New Testament Church and its Background in Early Judaism*, London: SPCK, 1985, 396, he recognizes that the Letter of Barnabas refers in 4:3 to I Enoch 91:5-7 with the word γέγραπται and in 16:5 quotes I Enoch 89:56-66 with the words λέγει γὰρ ἡ γραφή, but pleads that “what Gentile Christians from Gentile countries might do in the fourth decade of the second century is not always a guide to what a Jewish Christian from Palestine, like Jude, would do in the first century”. This is a weak rebuttal of the likelier view that Jude’s canonical respect for I Enoch is confirmed by the language used in the Letter of Barnabas.

³¹ Gese, *Studien*, 259.

³² *C.Ap.* I.38-41.

this makes Childs's insistence on the limit set by Jewish tradition anachronistic and perverse.³³ On the other hand, he is right to point out that the church "neither incorporated the Old Testament within the framework of the New nor altered its shape significantly": rather "it accepted the scriptures of the synagogue"³⁴. What is crucial about this act of appropriation is that, as in the case of a woman getting married, the form of the Hebrew scriptures was left virtually unchanged, but their *status* was radically altered. In this sense, it is fitting for Barr to say, "Christianity created its Old Testament".³⁵

3.4.5 Proximity of various forms of text

To an extent, Barton's criticism of Childs's proposed adherence to the final form of the text may seem carping in the light of seemingly slight differences between one candidate for this term and another. However, as we have seen with Jeremiah³⁶, after the bifurcation of pre-Masoretic traditions an important section was added (33:14-26), arguably accompanied by the repositioning of the present 23:7f from the place attested by \mathfrak{C} at the end of chapter 23, while, as also noted,³⁷ the reconfiguration of the OAN changed Babylon's climactic position at the end to make the oracles refer to the Gentile world in general. Thus both arguments are valid: no extant text can be identified with the Old Testament, but the New Testament marks for Christians the end of its development. Childs's position has its area of weakness. But it is unfair to him to see it demolished by the problem of determining the "present text". The canon may have "fuzzy edges", and there may be a certain lack of definition in its contents. But the concept of a canon in the sense of an agreed list of books is, with the above qualifications, still a useful one, and implied by the New Testament use of such expressions as αἱ γραφαί and γέγραπται.

³³ For the variety of arguments used by Childs to make the MT theologically normative, see M.G. Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 64f.

³⁴ Childs, *Theology*, 7. Childs consistently writes as though the term "Old Testament" is suitable for a time before the Hebrew scriptures were adopted by the Christian Church. This tends to obscure a correct understanding of this process of adoption.

³⁵ Barr, *Concept*, 364.

³⁶ Above, 197-201.

³⁷ Above, 256n14.

3.5 Questions related to the character of the text

3.5.1 *The recognition of historical depth in the existing text*

Besides questions about determining the final form of the text, a much more profound problem arises as to how the text should be handled when its form is not disputed. This is illustrated by a debate between Childs and Gese. Childs's concentration for the purposes of biblical theology on the final form has been criticised by Gese on two main grounds. Starting with the claim that the text should be understood as the text intends to be understood³⁸, he argues that there **can be** no question of overlooking flagrant inconcinnities in the form in which it left their hands. Gese's examples come from Genesis – for instance, the fact that the child laid by Hagar under a wilderness bush (Gen 21:15) would, if neighbouring texts are taken into consideration, have been seventeen!³⁹ The technique, Gese says, must have been deliberate, and this leads to his second point: if it is characteristic of the final text to *exhibit* its history, it must be part of the exegete's task to explore what he calls its *historische Tiefendimension*.⁴⁰ Childs had to some extent addressed this⁴¹ by saying that

“the controversy with the traditio-historical critics is not over the theological significance of a depth dimension of the tradition. Rather the issue turns on whether or not features within the tradition have been subordinated, modified or placed in the distant background of the text can be interpreted apart from the role assigned to them in the final form when attempting to write a theology of the Old Testament”.

The exchange prompts two comments.

3.5.2.1 *A weakness in Gese's position*

First, Gese writes as though each contribution to the tradition was like an entry in an album, or a piece in a mosaic pattern. Thus the two creation narratives, however different from one another, he argues, both had their part to play in the final Genesis account⁴². Even the various stories about Abraham, with the

³⁸ *Studien*, 269: “Es muß als hermeneutische Grundregel gelten, daß der Text so zu verstehen ist, wie er verstanden sein will, d.h. wie er sich selbst versteht”.

³⁹ *Studien*, 270.

⁴⁰ *Studien*, 276.

⁴¹ *Theology*, 11.

⁴² Gese, *Studien*, 270. Gese is more than once anxious to stress the compatibility of different layers of the tradition. New interpretation is recognized, but *not flat contradiction*: “Oder

incoherences noted, all have their role in the final form of the text. But there is no question of a *debate*. Thus Gese does not deal with the kind of situation we have seen in the Jeremiah tradition, where, even when one layer of the tradition is *in deliberate and explicit disagreement with another*, the earlier layer is not deleted. Of course, if it had been, this might be difficult to detect. But sufficient examples exist in the extant text of something added, or, as often, prefixed, to contradict or modify the thrust of what was there before, to assure us that redactors felt generally constrained to respect the wording of their *Vorlage*, and not expunge it when they disagreed.

The effect of this is that whereas the text can put its own construction on the history that lies behind it, as Schmid suggests has happened according to his analysis of the combination of Genesis with the “Deuteronomistic” tradition⁴³, explaining the intention to present a series consisting of *Heilsgeschichte*, *Unheilsgeschichte* and (with the prophetic corpus) *Heilsgeschichte* to come⁴⁴, there is a different sense in which the text embodies its own history, and (agreeing with Gese) not in any fortuitous way, but quite deliberately in a manner open to inspection. This is even seen (what Gese does not allow for), when the text records a *sharply polarized debate* of the kind we have found in our investigation of the treatment of kings in Jeremiah⁴⁵. There is thus an open-endedness⁴⁶ in the present text not to be overlooked, paving the way, from a Christian point of view, for further development, to the extent that the New Testament not only accepts the Old as holy writ, but also serves to appraise it, as we argue below (section 3.6).

wollen wir sagen daß die Priesterschrift die jehowistischen Traditionen verfälscht hat, u.s.w?” (*Studien*, 28).

⁴³ Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus*, WMANT 81, Neukirchen-Vluyn:Neukirchener Verlag, 1999, 36, sees problems in reckoning a start for the so-called Deuteronomistic History with Deuteronomy itself, and argues throughout the book for a combination of Genesis on the one hand with a lengthy history from Exodus to 2 Kings (though not yet in their finished form) on the other: he envisages Joshua 24 as composed to represent the climax of *Heilsgeschichte*, corresponding with the nadir of *Unheilsgeschichte* in 2 Ki 25.

⁴⁴ Schmid, *Erzväter*, 241-250. Cf. above, 94n30; 144n67; 202n68.

⁴⁵ As particularly in the case of Jehoiachin (above, 135).

⁴⁶ That is, in any candidate for being the final form of the text, important questions are left undecided or eligible for arbitration, – such as the prospects for the Davidic line, or the importance of the passage about the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34).

It might be objected that the *Tiefendimension* of the Old Testament was lost as early as ben Sirach, who, for example, treats Isaiah, including chapters 40-55, as the work of a single eighth century prophet, without any recognition of or concern for its composition history. However, it may be argued that once a problem is recognized, it becomes incumbent on the exegete to deal with it.

3.5.2.2 *The flaw in Childs's position*

The second comment relates to Childs's argument that while the final form of the text bears the marks of its former history, this is subordinated to whatever the final form is intended to say. There is no doubt an important element of truth in this contention – obvious enough, for example, in Genesis 3, where the question how snakes lost their legs is far removed from the concerns of the present text⁴⁷. But Childs hardly does justice to the point that glaring inconcinnities are left in the text in the interests of not eliminating previous forms. Particularly in the light of Schmid's analysis of successive *Buchgestalten* in Jeremiah, and evidence above of the different ways in which the various kings are handled, Gese's concern for the *historische Tiefendimension* is not adequately met by Childs, and weight should be given to Gese's contention that it is in the *process by which the final text was produced* that revelation from a theological standpoint subsists.

If this seems a fine distinction, Childs's illustration brings out the point: "To seek to give theological autonomy to a reconstructed Yahwist source apart from its present canonical context is to disregard the crucial theological intention of the tradents of the tradition and to isolate a meaning from its reception".⁴⁸ But isolating a meaning in one layer from its reception in another is precisely what is needed to understand the kind of debate we have seen represented in Jeremiah, and to account for clearly conflicting points of view. In the light of Childs's approach in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (and in his

⁴⁷ J. Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, London: SCM, 1992, 88f, distinguishes between this sort of aetiological explanation of the biblical account and "an aetiology of immortality, or more correctly, non-immortality".

⁴⁸ Childs, *Theology*, 11.

earlier commentary on Exodus)⁴⁹, where he certainly does some justice to the development of the text in the interests of understanding it⁵⁰, one might wonder whether he could be enlisted as a supporter of the point at issue. But the superiority of Gese's position is seen particularly in problems which arise with the interpretation of Jer 33:14-26, with its promise of a glorious future for David's line. Just how difficult this is for Childs can be seen, if the slant imposed on the book by this passage (generally agreed to be the latest major contribution to the text) is supposed to determine the final form. In a sense, it may, as Schmid himself argues⁵¹. But in an equally important sense it is simply one contribution to a long debate about the destiny of the Davidic dynasty. The final form of the text *embodies this debate*. Can this passage really be thought to settle it, when it is not even present in the Septuagint? With his emphasis on the primacy of the MT, Childs would have to say so. But radically different estimates of the future of the Davidic dynasty bulk so large in the book that it does not seem reasonable to see them as subordinated by the final form of the text. As soon as it is allowed that Jeremiah represents the unfolding of a debate, especially if the debate is unfinished, it seems at the very least relevant for the exegete to interpret the contributions in a way which is fair to the contributors, rather than simply as edited by later ones, or indeed by the last one. If Childs would agree with this⁵², it is misleading for him to say, "Canonical analysis focuses its attention on the effect which the different layers have had on the final form of the text, rather than using the text as a source for other information... such as the editor's self-understanding"⁵³.

⁴⁹ London:SCM and Philadelphia:Westminster Press, 1979; *Exodus – A Commentary*, OTL, London:SCM and Philadelphia:Westminster Press, 1974

⁵⁰ E.g. Childs, *Introduction*, 253, "Over against this hermeneutical reflex, a canonical approach strives to understand the full dimension of the interpreted testimony". But even here it is clear that he regards the final form of the text as univocal: he goes on "It does not seek to play off the various levels of tradition against each other, but rather follows the leads within the composite as to how the parts relate theologically".

⁵¹ Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 323-7.

⁵² One can understand Childs's plea for an approach to the text which is not simply archaeological, and a pointer to the kind of resolution argued for in section 3.6 above comes as early in Childs's career as *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, London:SCM, 1960, 98, 105, where he says that the Old Testament is theologically meaningless apart from the New Testament.

⁵³ 'The Exegetical Significance of Canon for the Study of the Old Testament', *Congress Volume, Göttingen*, 1977, VTSup 29, 1978, 68. Here Childs seems to show sympathy for the position of those who opposed the "intentional fallacy". See below, 276-279. But the dangers of

3.6 The New Testament as final “redaction”

Some of the problems which arise from Childs’s view of the final form of the text could be avoided, if the New Testament could be considered as a final redaction of the Old, in the sense that it arbitrates over the whole gamut of earlier scripture⁵⁴. Of course, in large measure, the New Testament accepts the Old, so that Gese can ask the interesting question, “Wo geht Paulus so weit wie Ezekeil, der von unguter Gottesoffenbarung weiß (20:25f)?” and state, “Nirgends wird im Neuen Testament irgendein Teil des Alten Testaments als Unwahrheit oder irgendwie wegen mangelnder Offenbarungsqualität abgelehnt”.⁵⁵ This may not be true without qualification – witness, for example, the statement that Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19) – but it is certainly an indication of the way in which the New Testament generally related to the Old. Its writers had the same concern as the redactors of Jeremiah to mark themselves the true heirs to the tradition they received, and in view of the lordship of Jesus which they proclaimed, represented both his endorsement of it and entitlement to modify it. Gese sums up his position in this important statement:

“So sehr das Neue Testament – als apostolisches Zeugnis traditions-
geschichtlich eingeschränkt auf die Bezeugung des Christus Ereignisses
und seine apostolische Verkündigung – als Telos der Offenbarung sich von
jedem alttestamentlichen Zeugnis unterscheidet, so untrennbar ist es doch
mit dem Alten Testament als der einen Offenbarung Gottes verbunden; und
beides voneinander trennen und das Alte Testament als inferiore
Offenbarung betrachten hieße, die Einheit der Gottesoffenbarung verfehlen
und letztlich auch die Würde des Neuen Testaments als Zeugnisses des
Endes und Zieles dieser gesamten Offenbarung verlieren”.⁵⁶

As part of the same overall revelation, the New Testament stands in continuity with the Hebrew scriptures, and not simply with those which attained the status of the Jewish canon, but with the important thinking embodied in other works of the second temple period.

their position are reflected by the limitations of Childs’s view: we do want to know what the earlier layers intended in order to understand the debate which they constituted.

⁵⁴ The New Testament text might be seen as sufficiently uncertain to warrant questions about *its* final form. But such doubts obviously pale into insignificance beside the problems faced with the Old Testament in general, and Jeremiah in particular.

⁵⁵ *Studien*, 260.

⁵⁶ *Studien*, 260.

Admittedly, the New Testament writers were not consciously editing the Old, and one needs to make allowances for the way in which much of what finally became the Old Testament had already crystallized to an immutability completely precluding the kind of major interference with the text that affected the book of Jeremiah during the fluid period of its development⁵⁷. Nevertheless, because of its relationship to what was proclaimed as the finality of Jesus, the New Testament can be viewed in a certain sense as a final redaction of the γραφαί:⁵⁸ in a way comparable with the successive alterations to the *Buchgestalt* of Jeremiah, *without necessarily changing the wording, but simply by addition and juxtaposition*, the New Testament too altered the *Gestalt* of Scripture as a whole⁵⁹, simply by claiming Jesus (and thus implicitly itself) as its capstone. Reacting against Gese's view, Childs says with regard to the problem of relating Old Testament theology to Judaism that Gese fails to resolve it when he "envisions a traditio-historical trajectory uniting the Old Testament with the New"⁶⁰, and in a further symptomatic comment Childs states "The New Testament is not to be seen as an analogy to the Chronicler's editing of Kings".⁶¹ Of course not, but then much of the redaction with which we have been concerned in Jeremiah is not like that either. Interestingly, the

⁵⁷ There is, however, some evidence of the preparedness of New Testament writers to alter the sense of Old Testament texts: see above, 282n117.

⁵⁸ The concept's "fuzzy edges" should not be exaggerated, since by the first century, there was a very solid core. Among the points which Gese makes (*Studien*, 17-20) for the early crystallization of the canonical form of law and prophets are: (a) that the book of Jubilees may reconstruct the narrative on the basis of a fresh chronology, but there is no question (i.e. c. 180 BCE) of replacing the Torah, which had reached a stage of unalterable completion (p17); (b) that the book of Malachi (late Persian period) was formed from an addition to Zechariah in order to constitute a twelfth component for the *Dodekapropheton*. But later comparable additions (cf. Zech 9:1 (c.320 BCE), 12:1 (c.300 BCE) could not be tacked on to the end of Malachi, since this was already regarded as an ending: they had to be fitted in at the end of Zechariah (p20); (c) that such evidence shows the *framework* of the prophetic corpus to have been in place by the end of Persian rule.

⁵⁹ This seems more satisfactory than J.D.G.Dunn's representation of the New Testament as the canon within the canon ('The Authority of Scripture according to Scripture', *Churchman* 96, 1982, 216), which arguably adds a further nuance to the word "canon" and suggests a negative evaluation of the outer canon. No doubt the New Testament writers were highly selective in their *use* of the Old Testament, but there is nowhere any suggestion of abandoning any of it: that it was valued *as a whole* in the early church is indicated by its laborious preservation, culminating in such great manuscripts as Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus.

⁶⁰ *Theology*, 5.

⁶¹ *Theology*, 76.

layer which, if Schmid is right⁶², added the prophecy of the new covenant, significantly changing the thrust of Jeremiah *in toto*, could represent quite a close analogy to the way in which adding the New Testament to the Old has also dramatically altered the meaning of what was there before.

Admittedly the redaction of Jeremiah is contained in the book itself, and to this extent interpretation may seem a more suitable category to describe the New Testament's relationship with the Old. But this does not bring out the similarity between what we have seen happening within the Jeremiah tradition (for which the word "redaction" is evidently appropriate) and *the effect on the meaning* of Old Testament scripture introduced by the New. Nor does it account for the occasional changes made in the Old Testament text when cited or alluded to⁶³. However, while the New Testament may reflect an adoption of the Hebrew scriptures which indicates continuity with that tradition, Barr⁶⁴ has emphasized the point that the New Testament writers see themselves far removed from the prophets: they spoke *πάλαι* – long ago; and certainly Heb 1:1 (Barr's source for this word) indicates a contrast between the new situation and the old, rather than the continuity of God's speaking in one way and another. But the echo of *λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν* in *ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν* shows that the writer cannot dispense with the element of continuity *in spite of* the contrast and the distance in time. It is true that Gese's notion of continuity is coloured by his inclusive view of the second temple literature, but while Barr's admiration for Gese is tempered by other objections, the appeal to Heb 1:1 fails to refute his position.

4. Questions relating to history

4.1 Problematic features in the tradition

Whether Jer 1:1 refers to his sayings or his history⁶⁵, there are problems with any straightforward acceptance of either account of its contents, which are

⁶² *Buchgestalten*, 69-85.

⁶³ Compare n18 above, and, for example, the treatment of Psa 68:19 in Eph 4:8, where by whatever process an original "received" has probably been changed to "gave". Mention should also be made of the likely interpolation in Baruch 3:38: see below 282n117.

⁶⁴ *Concept*, 366.

⁶⁵ See above, 254n7.

pressing for those who feel that if the Bible reports something as having happened, that report ought to be true. There is therefore on the one hand the question of understanding the book, and on the other assessing its authority for lessons which can be read from it relevant to the present day. We have seen, particularly in our investigation of the kings material that Jeremiah is represented as saying contradictory things in one part of the book compared with another, and Holladay's attempt to explain such contradictions by supposing a change of mind on the part of the prophet⁶⁶ is far from convincing, let alone calculated to ease the hermeneutical issue. Furthermore, the prophet himself is portrayed differently as the tradition developed, witness the "larger than life" impression in probably late parts of the concluding narrative compared with earlier material.⁶⁷ We have noted too Maier's demonstration that at a late stage Jeremiah was made anachronistically a teacher of the Torah⁶⁸.

With regard to the historical issues that are raised, three areas need to be addressed: (a) the extent to which the book actually contains the דְּבַרְיִי יְרֵמְיָהוּ (below, 4.2); (b) the overall understanding of history in which the book of Jeremiah plays its part (below, 4.3); (c) the actual history of the text itself (below, 4.4).

4.2 How far is the book of Jeremiah historical?

While there can be no question, as we have seen, of agreeing with Holladay's defence of the book's virtually complete historical accuracy as a transcript of Jeremiah's words and deeds, it is arguable that the kind of scepticism which led Carroll to compare the book with Hamlet or Macbeth⁶⁹ as an indication of the extent of any historical link is also unjustified. There are points at which the balance of historical probability favours acceptance of the book's account of the situation. Thus it may reasonably be claimed: (a) that the prophet was proved

⁶⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah*, II.71.

⁶⁷ Note the contrast between the all too human Jeremiah, whose life is threatened by the Judahite notables (38:4-6) and the figure he cuts when commanded to dig up the entrance to Pharaoh's palace (43:9).

⁶⁸ C.Maier, *Jeremia als Lehrer der Tora*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002, esp. 370-372.

⁶⁹ R.P.Carroll, *Jeremiah*, OTL, London: SCM, 45.

right about the unwisdom of resisting the Babylonians, and that this was the fundamental reason for the preservation of the tradition⁷⁰; (b) that although each of these sections has been supplemented in the course of the tradition, some element of the poems in chapters 1-20, 21-24 and 46-51, however tenuously, is actually Jeremianic: why else would a link have been made with him in the first place?⁷¹ (c) that some fragments within the *Prosareden* may be traced back to the prophet⁷²; (d) that he made common cause with Gedaliah, and advocated remaining in the land under Babylonian control⁷³; (e) that, besides the political stance which his convictions demanded, he also spoke out against social and moral evils;⁷⁴ (f) that in spite of the unpopularity of his message, especially in high places, attempts to execute him, at any rate arising from crucial confrontations before Jerusalem's downfall, were unsuccessful⁷⁵.

On the other hand, McKane is right to "throw doubt on a procedure which has been pursued by generations of critical scholars" – that of seeking to anchor each passage in a particular set of historical circumstances, which he castigates as a kind of guesswork.⁷⁶ Carroll too is right to argue that the concern of the various redactions is not biographical:⁷⁷ those who handled the tradition used it to support their own theological and political concerns, and, inasmuch as they claimed the prophet's authority, they introduced an unhistorical element into

⁷⁰ Compare C. Hardmeier, *Prophetie im Streit*, BZAW 187, Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 1989, *passim*.

⁷¹ Compare McKane, *Jeremiah* I. xcvi-xcvi, where his discussion of the nature of divine communication indicates a belief that much of the poetry is Jeremianic, a position adopted by many exegetes since B. Duhm's remark (*Jeremia*, Tübingen und Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr, 1901, XXI) that "das eigentliche Rückgrat dieses Buches [sc. chapters 1-25] sind natürlich die Dichtungen Jeremias". Although this position has been challenged by recent redaction criticism, the nature of the overall material in the book makes it *improbable* that the prophet's *ipsissima verba* are entirely lacking.

⁷² For example, Maier, an incisive redaction critic, writes: "Die Bundesrede in Jer 11:11-17 nimmt in 11:15f wohl authentische Einzelsprüche auf" (*Lehrer*, 357).

⁷³ This is an element of the narrative (in chapters 37-45) which there is no reason to doubt, and may have made the book attractive to those who imported further *golah*-oriented material into it.

⁷⁴ For example, Maier, *Lehrer*, 356, arguing the impossibility of eliciting from 7:1-15 a sermon by Jeremiah preached in the Temple, gives reasons for thinking that the first four infinitives in 7:9 (relating to theft, murder, adultery and perjury) may well represent authentic material.

⁷⁵ Unless this was so, it is hard to see, whatever Jeremiah's ultimate fate, how 1:18 could ever have been written.

⁷⁶ McKane, *Jeremiah*, I. lxxxviii.

⁷⁷ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 45f.

the book. The extent to which historical truth has been distorted is very difficult to ascertain. It is difficult also to determine whether any hard and fast line can be drawn between redactors appealing to Jeremiah's authority in this way, seeing themselves as extrapolating his own teaching, and later exponents of pseudepigraphy, who, as with such figures as Enoch, had only an imaginary link with their hero of faith. However, the difficulty of answering this question because of the considerable possibility with Jeremiah of *ipsissima verba* being preserved, and likely elements of historical truth in the narrative parts of the book, suggests that Carroll has made the mistake of thinking that what cannot be demonstrated cannot be probable.

On the other hand, his remarks about a possible analogy between the situation with regard to Jeremiah and that obtaining in the case of Jesus in the gospels⁷⁸ are suggestive as to how Christian readers might approach the former, provided they are prepared to see that the gospels similarly are likely to reflect, along with genuine memories of Jesus, theological and practical concerns of a later generation, hence raising similar issues of historicity.⁷⁹ In both cases we find similar kinds of detailed contradictions and similar elements of arguable accretion. But in both cases there is the same probability that behind the tradition there lies an equally historical figure. The New Testament writers could work⁸⁰ with the understanding of history which the Old Testament presents, but if this account was a literary construct without any relation to historical events at all, the arguments based on it would be deprived of their foundation. For example, if Christ is said to have "redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Gal 3:13), this may not, to be meaningful, require the historicity of the Pentateuch in detail, but it does require that the curse of the law can somehow be related to the historical reality of an actual human predicament⁸¹.

⁷⁸ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 63.

⁷⁹ For a recent summary of the questions involved, see L. Houlden, 'Introduction to the New Testament' in J. Barton and J. Muddiman (edd), *OTC*, 840-843.

⁸⁰ E.g. in such summaries as Acts 7:1-50 and 13:1-22.

⁸¹ Cf. P. R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach – a Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995, 60.

4.3 The model of history created by scripture

We need then to consider the important work by Schmid, mentioned above, in which he argues not only that the so-called Deuteronomistic History should be seen as embracing at the outset some form of the book of Exodus, but that at a later stage, with the prefixing of material in Genesis, there was envisaged a tripartite model of history consisting of a period of *Heilsgeschichte*, culminating in the conquest of the land (Jos 24), a period of *Unheilsgeschichte*, extending to the downfall of Jerusalem (2 Ki 25), and finally a period of *Heilsgeschichte* in prospect to which the latter prophets bore witness. A factor in this is the belief that the fulfilment of the first two stages of this process, foretold as they were by prophets – here it is important that Abraham is seen as a prophet, to whom God divulged his plan (Gen 15:13-16; cf. Amos 3:7)⁸² – is an earnest that the final stage of prophecy will also be fulfilled. Examination of this thesis in detail is beyond the scope of the present work, but, if valid, it draws attention to the manner in which the Hebrew scriptures, as they reached the point of near finality, portrayed history in a way which was governed by literary traditions, with a relationship to hard historical facts notoriously hard to determine. Key exceptions are the two well-attested catastrophes which befell Jerusalem, the former of which is documented to the day in the Babylonian Chronicle, while the latter, in spite of some uncertainty as to the date (which can nevertheless be determined within narrow limits), is one of the most certain events of ancient history.

Interpretation has tended to polarize on the one hand towards a conviction of the general facticity of the Old Testament, and on the other to a view that any correlation of the Old Testament with history is problematic. Neither of these positions is satisfactory. On the one hand, Schmid's literary research on the Pentateuch (owing an important debt to J.Ha⁸³) makes very implausible, for example, that the narrative in Gen 15, though crucially important in shaping the

⁸² Schmid, *Erzväter*, 185, sees an analogy between the vision which Abraham experiences (Gen 15:1) and that of Isaiah which is intended to cover the whole of the biblical book.

⁸³ J.Ha, *Genesis 15, A Theological Compendium of Pentateuchal History*, BZAW 181, Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 1989, 215, shows that he had already come to the important conclusions which Schmid develops.

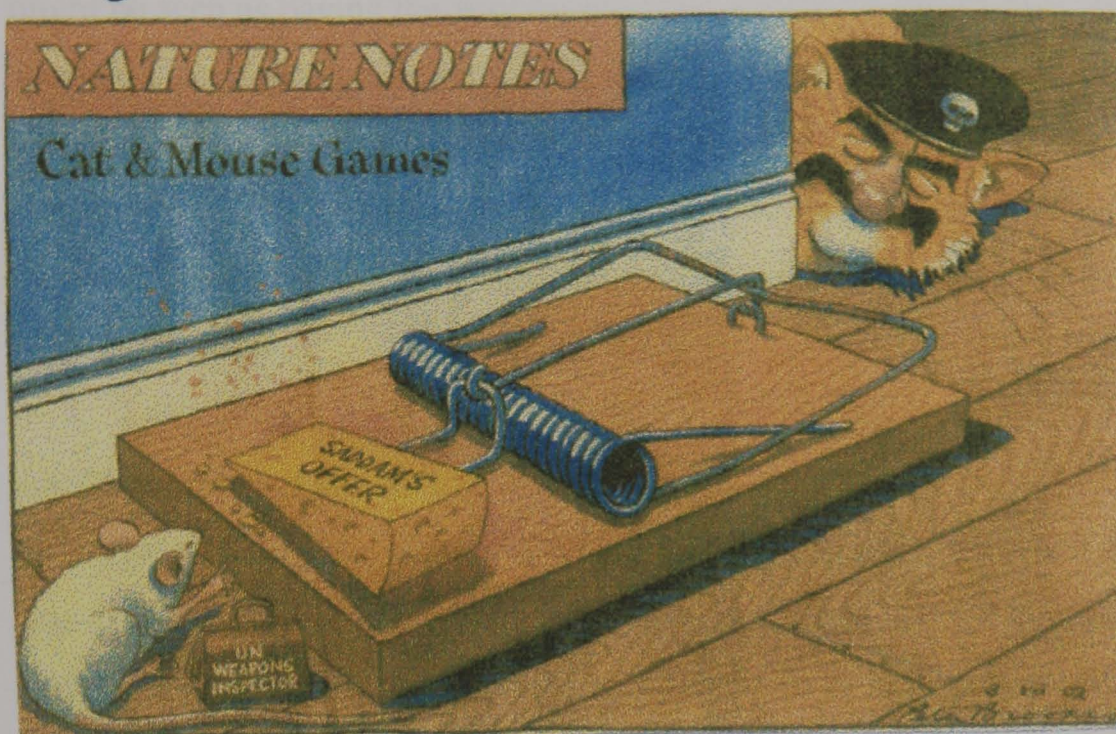
thrust of the biblical account, has any basis in fact. On the other hand, it is wrong to use such a conclusion to detach the Old Testament from history altogether. The truth is rather that the whole Old Testament, Torah and Prophets in particular, pivots on Jerusalem's downfall, and while there may be a considerable legacy of historical references in the variegated material employed to give colour to the picture, the whole corpus apart from the Writings has been angled in the later stages of the tradition's development to interpret what led up to this cardinal event, and what can be expected to ensue from it.

It is striking that as one moves to either end of this material, so it gathers features which assimilate it to a cartoon. This is well illustrated, for instance, by Noah's ark and the Tower of Babel on the one hand, and on the other by the 'apocalyptic' chapters in Isaiah (24-27) or Ezekiel (38-39). Although the limits of this analogy have to be clearly conceded, the notion of a cartoon offers a helpful clue to how the dilemma about history might be resolved.

Take, for example figure XI.1 (page 273A). Here there is represented a particular historical event – the offer by Saddam Hussein to allow limited inspection of Iraqi weapons by UN inspectors. What has led up to it is represented by the bloodstains on the wall and mousetrap, and what is hinted at for the future by the danger to the mouse. But whereas "Saddam's offer" appears in so many words, representing the "hinge event", the interpretation of the past and implications for the future are conveyed by a *model* which, while not unrelated to history is not *literally* historical in the same way. Similarly, it may be suggested, the Old Testament uses the model of *Heilsgeschichte* and *Unheilsgeschichte* (created, according to Schmid, by the combination *in series* of the primevally *parallel* origin-accounts in Genesis and Exodus-2Kings) to interpret the pivotal event of Jerusalem's destruction.

Since, at an earlier stage, hope of restoration was bolstered by the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy of destruction, thus encouraging belief in his prophecies for the future, although the latter are not necessarily attributable to him

Figure XI.1



Cartoon by Peter Brookes,
The Times, August 3, 2002

Figure XI.2

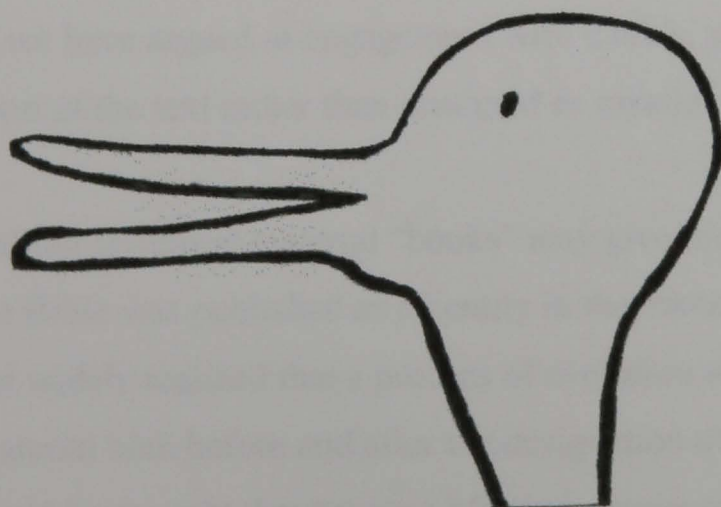


Illustration in L.J.J. Wittgenstein,
Philosophical Investigations, 194

historically,⁸⁴ the book of Jeremiah on its own, like other prophetic books, might be seen as paving the way for the more extensive pattern of Genesis - Malachi⁸⁵ as a whole, which emerged when this collection was effectively transformed into one great prophecy. The central event which the prophet almost certainly foretold was thus seminal both for the developing book of Jeremiah⁸⁶, and for the Old Testament as a whole. The historicity of that event is quintessential.

4.4 The history of the text

Over against the model of history which the Old Testament presents, there is also to be considered the redactional history of the text itself. Piecing this together may be hazardous, and one would have to be bold to claim that it has yet been adequately charted, but over against the construction that the text puts upon history, which we have seen to be an interpretative model with a varying relationship to what actually happened, the process of its development constituted a series of real events in history. Furthermore, the redactors, in large measure at pains to preserve earlier layers of tradition, even when they purposed to contradict their *Vorlage*, did much, with whatever motives, to indicate and preserve this history. The real history of the text's development is, as we have argued in engagement with Childs, a factor *pointed up* by the final form of the text rather than obscured or invalidated by it.

Calling scriptural material "books" may give the impression that each book of the Bible was published as an entity in the manner of modern books, and it is not widely realized that a process of evolution was at work, transforming the material both before and after the designation of the various scrolls. Thus it could be thought that because Moses is envisaged as living several centuries before Jeremiah, any references to the ten commandments in Jeremiah must be

⁸⁴ Probably Jeremiah did forecast the return to normal life shortly after the Babylonian conquest, but later redaction has changed the reference of his words to conditions when the Babylonian exiles returned seventy years later (Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 253-5). See below, 281n113.

⁸⁵ As arranged in the Hebrew Bible, all appearing before the Writings.

⁸⁶ R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah*, Interpretation, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988, 227, "This catastrophe provides the centre of the entire book".

citations of an existing Torah. In the light of Maier's work⁸⁷, the opposite is likely to be true: historically, the ten commandments are probably a late compilation to which teaching in Jeremiah may have made some contribution. This perspective changes an impression of the "Mosaic" law which dates it to the remote past into the mature fruit of centuries of deliberation, without necessarily infringing its status as divine revelation.

Such considerations emphasize the need to know what to read a document *as*. A mile from its start, a Chesterfield Canal signpost reads: "Chesterfield 1: Istanbul 2500".⁸⁸ In an illustration of the need for competence⁸⁹, J. Barton imagines Martians able to speak English, but perusing a demand for payment couched in letter form. What would they make of "Dear Sir" and "Yours faithfully" and the sinister expression, "obliged to take steps"?⁹⁰ It is clear likewise that an appreciation of the history of the text is essential for a mature understanding of what to read the book of Jeremiah *as*.

But what actually happened to the text, whether of Jeremiah or of the Old Testament as a whole, constitutes a series of historical events, which, creating the literature which carries the model of history which we have discussed, is itself an anchor in history to be set side by side with the historicity of certain events which the model attests. The model is important for the New Testament writers to express their points, as Paul's references to Adam, Abraham or the exodus make clear. But it is important too that the New Testament, rather than coming to birth in a historical vacuum, represents from a Christian perspective the culmination of this series of historical events, which, whatever doubts may surround the historicity of what is recorded in the Old Testament as having taken place, *at least consisted of the literary process which gave rise to these documents*.

⁸⁷ Lehrer, 282-352

⁸⁸ Analogous problems can arise with perception: my two-year old son, surveying the Isle of Wight from Bournemouth on his first visit to the sea, asked, "Is it sticked on?"

⁸⁹ The word is used in a technical sense, which J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984, 11-12, explains by comparing familiarity with the moves in chess to being a good player.

⁹⁰ Barton, *Method*, 14.

5. Wider questions of interpretation

5.1 The scope of the enquiry

What does it mean to speak of Jeremiah as Christian scripture? In view of the path taken in recent years by literary criticism, and because Childs, as we saw,⁹¹ has to some extent been affected by issues raised by it, attention needs to be given first to the question whether a text can mean anything other than what its author meant by it. This is clearly important for the Old Testament, whose authorship is largely obscure, and where, as our investigation has confirmed, the text has evolved over centuries. We shall broach these questions in section 5.2. Then we shall deal with whether the Old Testament in general or Jeremiah in particular has probative value in the sense of corroborating Christian claims (5.3), and finally whether they have normative or prescriptive value⁹² (5.4).

5.2 Intention

5.2.1 *The discussion in modern literary criticism*

Childs's concern for the final text, and depreciation of the path taken earlier by historical critics, who looked for meanings lurking in layers beneath the "surface" of the final form of the text, prompts a comparison with those whom he himself refers to as exponents of the "Newer Criticism"⁹³ (more generally called the "New Criticism"). These writers in the field largely of English literature were anxious to move away from an earlier "Romantic" notion that it was important to consider the intention of the poet in order to interpret his work. This was dubbed the "Intentional Fallacy":⁹⁴ in its place came the idea that a work of literature was comparable with a beautiful artifact, such as a chair that a carpenter might make⁹⁵, where clearly it was of no consequence what the carpenter had in mind when he was making it. Similarly a text had to speak for itself. Later it came to be realised that in one sense the intention of the

⁹¹ Above, 265n53.

⁹² I.e. to what extent are the moral positions which the book (or books) adopt valid from a Christian point of view today?

⁹³ *Introduction*, 74; cf. Barton, *Method*, 142

⁹⁴ This is the title of a seminal article by W.K. Wimsatt and M.K. Beardsley, in *Sewanee Review*, 54, 1946, 468-488; reprinted in *The Verbal Icon - Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, Lexington University Press of Kentucky, 1954, 3-18.

⁹⁵ Cf. T.S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, London: Faber, 1957, 113f.

writer could be relevant to ascertaining the meaning of his work, so that the notion of an intentional fallacy was refined⁹⁶. However, the extent to which it dominated literary criticism is illustrated by the hackneyed story about T.S.Eliot. Asked after a lecture what he meant by “Lady, three white leopards lay under a juniper tree”, he replied, “I mean ‘Three white leopards lay under a juniper tree’”.⁹⁷ Similarly structuralists⁹⁸ believed that once a poem was in the public domain its meaning was determined by what readers made of it, though also by its place in the canon of literature a whole.

The extremes to which such a view might be taken are illustrated by Noble⁹⁹, who tells how Stanley Fish wrote on the board for one class a list of linguistic specialists, and asked the following class to explain what he had written as a religious poem. Fish claimed that his students’ ability to attempt this shows that poetic features are not objectively in the text, but are created by the expectations which the reader brings to it. “Interpreters do not decode poems: they make them”¹⁰⁰. Fish might have difficulty in defending himself against the objection that by parity of reasoning those reading his book are not making out what he means but constructing their own interpretation¹⁰¹. Noble is able to

⁹⁶ Barton, *Method*, 149.

⁹⁷ Cited by Barton, *Method*, 148, from S.Spender, *Eliot*, Fontana Modern Masters, London: Fontana, 1975, 129.

⁹⁸ The term is lucidly explained by Barton, *Method*, 106f, with reference to a supposed analogy between a symbolic act like a handshake, whose meaning is determined by the *structure* of a particular culture, regardless of the *intention* of the owner of the hand, and verbal expressions.

⁹⁹ *Approach*, 207.

¹⁰⁰ S.E.Fish, *Is There a Text in This class? – The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge USA/London: Harvard University Press, 1980, 327.

¹⁰¹ Fish envisages a defence against solipsism in his notion of “interpretive communities”, which set realistic boundaries to possible interpretations. But he tries to evade the idea of a right interpretation with two kinds of example. Thus (a) some of Shakespeare’s songs are no doubt open to a variety of interpretation; but arguably this is because they have features which make them akin to *music*, with *a minimum of translatable meaning*; (b) Fish (*Text*, 113-16) tries to press some of Milton’s poetry in the same direction, by showing that there have been a variety of theories of who or what stood “at my window” in *L’Allegro* (line 46), as also (*Text*, 116) about whether it is “Patience” or the poet himself that is responsible for the last line of the sonnet on his blindness, “They also serve who only stand and wait”. But in these rare cases of Miltonian ambiguity, it is more reasonable to suppose that the poet could have solved the riddle, if asked, than that the reader does anything but “decode the poem”, and if there is a *double entendre* intended by the writer, that *double entendre* itself constitutes the meaning – as may be the case, for example in W.Cowper’s well-known words:

The clouds you so much dread
are big with mercy,

point out other problems with Fish's view, but it does highlight the question of the importance to be assigned to a writer's intention.

Similar issues arise with the theory of hermeneutics developed by Heidegger's pupil H.-G. Gadamer. Believing that no interpreter can have an outlook congruent with that of the writer, even if he seeks to make due allowances, Gadamer argues that what takes place with interpretation inevitably falls short of the writer's intention owing to the difference in historical circumstances. He develops the notion of a hermeneutical circle¹⁰², to describe the process whereby a reader moves to and fro from his own point of view to that of the writer, aiming to probe steadily nearer to the meaning of the text under consideration, thus leading to "the fusion of two horizons". Barton thinks that in spite of disavowals, Childs has been influenced by the "New Criticism" and there are similarities in the way in which he gives priority to the final form of the text at the expense of the intentions of underlying writers or editors, and also in the way in which he thinks of the whole canon of scripture as the

where "big" may be intended to mean both "large" and "pregnant" (in the hymn entitled *Light in Darkness*, first published in J. Newton, *Twenty-six Letters on Religious Subjects: to which are added Hymns & c. by Omicron*, London: J. and W. Oliver, 1774). However, the schoolboy who read from his crib, for "Adhuc dux Carthaginensis...", "Hitherto the Carthaginian general..." with pronunciation that betrayed his interpretation of "Hitherto" as the general's name had failed to understand the *objective meaning* of his text. The situation of the translator is important: on the one hand, no translation can ever be more than an approximation to the original, which points up the element of truth in Fish's position; on the other, the way in which translations can be compared for accuracy shows that an objective meaning in the text, dependent on the writer's intention, is taken for granted. Of course, interpretation is something that goes on in the mind of the reader as vision is something which goes on in the mind of the viewer. But it is just as misleading to talk about the reader "making the poem" he is reading as it would be to talk about the viewer "making" the table that besides forming an image in his mind is objectively "out there".

¹⁰² Gadamer, H.G., *Truth and Method*, ET J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall, London: Sheed and Ward, 2nd revised edition, 1989 (original German *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1960), 190-192, 266, 291f. The translators oscillate between the form "hermeneutic" and "hermeneutical". A.C. Thiselton, who deals with related issues in *The Two Horizons*, Exeter: Paternoster, 1980 (esp. 104-10, 163-8, 194-7), traces in a later work, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, London: Harper Collins, 1992, 195, something akin to the notion of a hermeneutical circle as early as J.H. Bullinger (1504-75), but emphasises (p222) the important contribution of Schleiermacher, who himself acknowledged his debt to his junior contemporary, Friedrich Ast.

context for interpreting any given text.¹⁰³

However, the New Criticism in general and Gadamer in particular long ago came under attack from E.D.Hirsch in a book¹⁰⁴ which emphasised the importance of authorial intention, over against the notion that a text could speak independently of what the author meant: it confused two senses of the word “meaning”. Hirsch insisted on a distinction between meaning and significance. His point was based on a distinction made by G.W.Frege between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, usually translated “sense” and “reference”.¹⁰⁵ Frege’s article was popularized in England by Bertrand Russell’s response¹⁰⁶, with his memorable illustration based on the expression, “The present King of France”, a phrase which means something, but refers to nobody. If the monarchy were restored in France, the sense of the phrase would remain the same, but the reference would change. The issue is important because of its bearing on the claim that the reader’s interpretation of a text inevitably contributes to its meaning, whether along the lines of Fish’s view that an interpreter creates meaning for a text, or of Gadamer’s notion of the fusion of two horizons: one comes to a text with a pre-understanding based on historical circumstances inevitably different from those surrounding the text and its author, so that interpretation depends on interaction between past and present, as explained above¹⁰⁷.

The danger of concluding that the meaning of a text cannot be objectively grasped, whether because the fusion of the two horizons can never be perfectly achieved, or because meaning lies, like beauty, in the eye of the beholder, is illustrated by an example from the hymn-book. John Wesley’s translation,

¹⁰³ Barton, *Method*, 154. Childs comes near to an admission when he appeals to the “fresh insights stemming from literary theory”, in ‘Critical Reflections on James Barr’s Understanding of the Literal and the Allegorical’, *JSOT* 46, 1990, 7.

¹⁰⁴ E. D. Hirsch Jr, *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967.

¹⁰⁵ G. W. Frege, ‘Über Sinn und Bedeutung’, *ZPPK* 100, 1892, 25-50, esp p 40; Hirsch, *Validity*, 211

¹⁰⁶ B. Russell, ‘On denoting’, *Mind* 14, 1905, in H. Feigl and W. Sellars (edd), *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949, 8, 103-115.

¹⁰⁷ Gadamer, *Truth*, 269.

What shall we offer our good Lord,
Poor nothings, for his boundless grace?¹⁰⁸

is certainly understood by some singing it today as if “poor nothings” was a second object of “offer”. But there are two reasons for believing that it is to be understood as in apposition to “we”: (a) in the original translation, the phrase “poor nothings” is followed by an exclamation mark and printed in brackets; (b) Wesley wrote “can” rather than “shall” – probably to avoid the misinterpretation of “poor nothings”, since Spangenberg wrote (if correctly reproduced),

“Was sol (*sic*) man doch dem guten HErrn (*sic*)
vor diese seine treue schenken (*sic*)?”¹⁰⁹

and Charles Wesley in a comparable paraphrase of Psalm 116 wrote, “What *shall* I render to my God?” (italics mine, J.B.J.). This point is laboured to show the way in which objective criteria are brought to bear to decide the *right* interpretation. Thus Noble¹¹⁰ refers to a critique by B.Ollenburger of Stendahl’s distinction between what a text meant and what it means. Ollenburger argues¹¹¹ that it is relevant to ask of subsequent interpretations whether they are *correct*, and this is very pertinent to the Wesley example just cited.

5.2.2 Application to biblical interpretation

The foregoing paragraphs scarcely scratch the surface of a long and complex discussion, to which K.J.Vanhoozer has recently contributed a thorough-going defence of the position that meaning does reside in a text, and that the attractiveness of the opposite case lies in the undoubted fact that interpretation must always be an approximation to the writer’s intention, and should never claim absolute knowledge¹¹².

¹⁰⁸ As punctuated in R.G.Jones and I.H.Jones (edd), *Hymns and Psalms*, London:Methodist Publishing House, 1983, no.807. The original by A.G.Spangenberg was printed in the 1737 appendix of the *Herrnhut Gesang-Buch* (1735).

¹⁰⁹ J.L.Nuelsen, *John Wesley and the German Hymn – A Detailed Study of John Wesley’s Translations of Thirty-Three German Hymns*, ET Theo Parry, Leeds: Sydney H.Moore and Arthur S.Holbrook, 1973, 161.

¹¹⁰ Noble, *Approach*, 330-340.

¹¹¹ B.Ollenburger, ‘What Krister Stendahl “Meant”: a Normative Critique of Descriptive Biblical Theology’, *HBT* 8, 1986, 68f

¹¹² K.J.Vanhoozer, *Is there a meaning in this text?* Leicester: Apollos, 1998, 139, 300.

However, the issues raised suffice to provide markers for discussing how the question of intention affects the interpretation of Jeremiah and other Old Testament material. One corollary of our discussion in earlier chapters is that there was a succession of editors, each of whom intended the book to be understood in a particular way. Since there is an important sense in which the book of Jeremiah represents a debate between successive redactors, and since the product of earlier editorial work is not usually deleted by later redaction, the existing text cannot be fully understood without an appreciation of the intention of those who contributed to it during its development.

However, the question of intention is complicated in the biblical context we are considering. The process of redaction could deliberately alter the intention of its *Vorlage*. This is something which could be true both of the overall thrust of a passage, as in the case of the time envisaged for the return to normality in Jer 32,¹¹³ and of a particular grammatical construction, as seen in Schmid's acute analysis of the positioning of the insertion in Jer 29:16-20¹¹⁴. Such instances do not imply a change of meaning as a result of reader-response, or in any way that might be of interest to structuralists, whose concern would not be with situations arising from *deliberate manipulation* of the text. For every stage of redaction examined one can adopt an objectivist¹¹⁵ position: a text has a definite

¹¹³ Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 253: "In der ersten Fortschreibung der Ackerkauferszählung (... 32:*16-44) hat sich eine sachliche Position erkennen lassen die den ihr vorliegenden Text (32:*6-14) dahingehend umpolt daß nicht mehr die Wahrung dokumentierter Besitzrechte über den nationalen Zusammenbruch im Zentrum der Aussage steht, sondern umgekehrt das Gericht als total ... beschreibt und erst *danach* (32:42) wieder legitime Kaufvorgänge, die nun aber den *Neuerwerb* von Boden betreffen ins Auge faßt (32:44) [italics in each case Schmid's]". Another example of the same kind is the effect on the meaning of 30:21 when 30:9 was added (Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 124): the word מֶלֶךְ (ruler), used arguably at the outset to *avoid* association with David's line (30:21), later in time *acquires* it from the interpolation of words about מֶלֶךְ at an earlier point in the text (30:8f).

¹¹⁴ Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 241: "Deutlich ist, daß 29:16-20 den vorausgehenden Vers 29:15 zum Anakoluth werden lassen, zu dem Jer 21 die ursprüngliche Fortsetzung gebildet hat. 29:16-20 wurde also zwischen 29:15 und 29:21 eingeschoben. Die Positionierung des Einsatzes V. 16-20 erstaunt um so mehr als sie nach V.*10-14 inhaltlich und syntaktisch wohl passend angeschlossen werden können. Will man die Stellung von V. 16-20 nicht bloß als 'unglücklichen Einsatz' bestimmen [cf. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 232], so besteht die naheliegenste Erklärung für den jetzigen Ort von 29:16-20 mit Goldman, *Prophétie*, 83, darin, daß V. 16-20 bewußt nach V. 15 plaziert wurden, um diesen als Abschluß erscheinen zu lassen. Aus der Sicht von V. 16-20 gehören also nicht bloß 29:10-14* zusammen, sondern 29:10-15, die in der jetzigen Textstruktur inklusorisch zusammengehalten werden".

¹¹⁵ "Objectivist" implies here that a writer's intention is the key to the meaning of a text, as against the notion that its meaning is affected by the perceptions of the interpreter.

meaning depending on the editor's intention, whereas changes in significance have to be seen as an entirely different issue¹¹⁶.

It is not surprising if we attend to the limited sense in which the New Testament can be viewed as a further stage in the redaction of the Old, to find a phenomenon similar to what we have mentioned above in connection with Jeremiah. We noted, for instance, how Matthew (or the *testimonia* on which he depended), while reverting to the Hebrew text for the words translated in Matthew 2:15,18, rather than, as was more usual, using the Septuagint, altered the meaning from what was *intended* in the original¹¹⁷, which is effectively just as redactional as changing (as he also did) the actual wording of the Septuagint. The question then arises whether Matthew is reading Old Testament texts with a view to understanding them (as one might read Chaucer today), or whether he is wresting the meaning of the words in the manner of Jeremiah's editors. The fact that in both cases we considered, the correct interpretation of the original meaning was known to Matthew through the Septuagint suggests that, rather than seeking to convey the prophet's intention, he is discerning hidden meanings. Clearly the writer did not see himself as inventing them, since this would have vitiated the purpose of the quotations. Yet the idea of fulfilment of prophecy implies more than *accidental* ambiguity in the words quoted from Hosea and Jeremiah and invites the question whose intention is involved. Matthew has Jesus referring to one of the Ten Commandments as "the word of God", and this implies, whether consciously or not, a belief in divine intention and dual authorship.

It was, of course, flight from such interpretation in a quest for the original historical meaning of Old Testament texts which has characterized modern

¹¹⁶ For example, if somebody smoking was rebuked by a friend with the words, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit", he might understand the utterance as meaning, "Don't smoke", when this implication could not have been in the mind of the Apostle.

¹¹⁷ Probably by this time (cf. Mt 5:18) changing the text of the Hebrew would have been unthinkable, though Schmid, *Erzväter*, 20, points out that changes to the Torah were still possible in Maccabean times. Gese, *Studien*, 27 believing that the third section of the canon was by contrast still crystallizing in early New Testament days suspects an early Christian insertion in Baruch 3:38, which, with regard to "Wisdom", says, μετὰ τοῦτο ὠφθη ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις συνανεστράφη.

research.¹¹⁸ It is interesting therefore to find Noble arguing that Childs could save himself from unsatisfactory fideism in his account of the interaction of faith and reason by adopting a formal model of biblical inspiration, which (a) justifies the search for pan-canonical and Christian meanings of an Old Testament text and (b) gives exegetical guidance to such a search.¹¹⁹

Our conclusion is that the intention of the various redactors of Jeremiah, which on Schmid's showing is often discernible, is important for the full understanding of the present text, and that it is illuminating to see how (to use Hirsch's distinction) a redactor could change not only the significance of his *Vorlage*, which by application to a later analogous situation might not involve impinging on its intention, but also its sense, which did. Exactly the same is true of the way in which the New Testament handles the Old: the form of the Hebrew text of law and prophets was probably regarded as sacrosanct by New Testament times, but this did not prevent making changes in its intention; and in writings which might have been accepted into the canonical third section interpolations could be made.

Wider questions are raised by the way in which the significance of Jeremiah developed. This already emerges with the redaction of the material in Old Testament times, but a further development took place with allusions to Jeremiah in the New Testament¹²⁰, implying that his career was prophetic of Christ's, and that the two were linked by providential or divine intention. The irony apparent in a comparison between Jesus as a king and the

¹¹⁸ Noble, *Approach*, 347: "The decisive shift from a theological to a historical conception of the canon seems to have occurred with J.S.Semler and J.D.Michaelis" in the late 18th century.

¹¹⁹ Noble, *Approach*, 369: his own proposal is that a specifically Christian reading of the Old Testament can adopt as a model (perhaps, in the light of his book as a whole, Noble has in mind the analogy of a *scientific* model) "the collected works of a single author, ... assuming a variety of authorial personae, each with its own distinctive character, historical situation etc" (p341), and then discuss whether this is borne out by the kind of exegesis that Barth makes of the early chapters of Genesis, "which one does not need a special faith-commitment to assess" (p352).

¹²⁰ M. Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel – The Rejected Prophet Motif in Matthaean Redaction*, JSNT.S 68, Sheffield:Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, finds twenty probable allusions to the book of Jeremiah in Matthew (p217); he argues typologically for the fate of Jeremiah as prefiguring Jesus's death, and also for Jeremiah's prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction as foreshadowing Jesus's forecast of its recurrence (p264).

(predominantly) bad kings studied above likewise implies the concept of intention on the part of a divine author responsible for the combination of both testaments as a single *oeuvre*.

5.3 The probative value of the Old Testament

Clearly many of the references to the Old Testament in the gospels aim to corroborate claims made about Jesus. Events in his life are represented as fulfilments of prophecy and the motive is to attest his messiahship. By any reckoning the contours of Old Testament prophecy which we have been examining are much more complicated than what was envisaged by New Testament writers referring to one prophet or another. But this is not the only complication. The modern tendency is to regard many gospel incidents as tailored to produce “fulfilments of prophecy”, or at any rate expressions of faith in Jesus couched in the “vocabulary” of the Old Testament. As a result there are two angles from which the probative value of the Old Testament as creating a relationship of foreshadowing and fulfilment needs to be defended.

Although Jeremiah is seldom named in the New Testament – all instances are in Matthew, and Mt 27:9, which refers in fact to a passage in a different prophet (Zech 11:12f) – it is likely that the New Testament writers were conscious of Jeremiah’s career as structurally similar to Jesus’s. Points which stand out are fearless proclamation, warning compatriots of the likely outcome of their policies, conflict with the authorities, undeserved sufferings, cry of dereliction, but also the note of hope beyond the apparent end. The gospel account of Jesus’s career and teaching suggests that such features served to confirm the possibility of a Messiah characterized by *prophetic* suffering, and in no case is a prophet’s career documented in anything like the detail found in Jeremiah. On the other hand, the many bad kings and the one good one (Josiah) forming the main subject-matter for the present work served to create, both negatively and positively, a kind of “identikit picture” within the book of Jeremiah by which any candidate for Messiahship could be measured – particularly with regard to conformity with the law which crystallized as the key question to be asked about a king.

It is clear that for New Testament writers the portrait of Jeremiah is that painted by the received text, as it had developed over centuries. On the other hand, important features of this portrait are probably historical. While the New Testament writers would not have made any distinction at this point, the formation of the text of Jeremiah itself came about through a series of historical events, complete in large measure long before New Testament times.

Furthermore, Jeremiah is but one of a large number of models or types to which New Testament writers alluded or referred. Some at least clearly saw Jesus as the culmination of a process in which God's hand was at work throughout the Old Testament scriptures (cf. Heb. 1:1; Gal 3:8). The question then is whether the change which modern research has introduced by comparison with an originally simpler notion of prophecy-fulfilment is enough to deny to Jeremiah in particular or the Old Testament in general a contributory role in substantiating the claims made in the New Testament regarding the person of Jesus. The correspondences between Old Testament and New could be put down in their entirety to the capacity of the Christian writers for matching their message to existing scripture. But it seems more reasonable to take Noble's view that invention is not an adequate explanation, even if it is allowed to be a partial one.¹²¹ Granted that the pattern of Old Testament "fulfilment" is in one sense the product of human minds, is that all there is to be said?

Even if the New Testament writers may have extended the similarities between Jesus and Old Testament characters and events in their accounts of certain incidents, there might still be a sufficient basis for believing that there were remarkable resonances between the Old Testament record and Jesus's actual career and experience, such as serve to argue a case for his being the person claimed in the New. With regard to elements which may not be historical, the

¹²¹ Cf. Noble, *Approach*, 326: "That the Old Testament should contain numerous patterned presentations of its principal characters (or events or institutions...) which just happened to provide striking illustrations of the Christian doctrines of atonement, ecclesiology, eschatology and the like, and which constantly lent themselves to giving apposite presentations of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, would be too convenient to be accidental".

illustration of a cartoon may again be helpful. We saw how a cartoon could portray a historical truth with unhistorical imagery without affecting its truth content. Usually the purpose of a cartoon is satirical, whereas the narratives in the New Testament with their Old Testament allusions are by contrast doxological. Supposing, for example, for the sake of the argument, that details of the feeding of the five thousand are unhistorical, one might see the account as appealing in a cartoonlike way to the narrative of Moses's involvement in the supply of manna (Ex 16) and Elisha's in the feeding of a hundred men (2 Ki 4:42-44).

If then there is still probative or apologetic value in the relationship between Old Testament and New notwithstanding the insights of modern biblical scholarship, the question arises what sort of argument is involved. Its character may be likened to the argument presented by the perceived universe for divine creation. Paul classically deployed this argument in Romans 1:19f. His statement is effectively an appeal to analogy¹²². Proofs of the existence of God have, particularly since Kant, often been regarded with contempt. The reason for this is that they have often purported to be deductive, and hence to provide the kind of certainty attainable with a geometrical theorem. But analogical arguments are appropriate over wide areas of human experience – notably in courts of law, where the jury has to come to a conclusion based on just such arguments. The claim that the New Testament serves to uncover in the Old Testament a storehouse of pointers to Jesus is an argument from design comparable from a Christian point of view with discerning in the universe a creative hand. The argument would only be invalidated if it could be shown that the whole pattern of correspondences was a New Testament invention, so that its writers could be convicted of fraud.

Similar to the analogical argument is the philosophical concept of “seeing *as*”.

¹²² For a lucid and robust defence of the analogical argument, see R. Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1979, 142-151.

L.J.J. Wittgenstein illustrated the point¹²³ with a picture he found in Jastrow, *Fact and Fable in Psychology*, which could be seen both as a duck and a rabbit (figure XI:2, p273A). I.T. Ramsey developed the idea¹²⁴ with regard to arguments for the existence of God. A similar illustration is that of a puzzle-picture, where a face, for example, is hidden in some scene, which, once discerned, is unmistakable. John 20 provides an important biblical parallel with the variation in words for “see”. In v 5, βλέπει means that the “other disciple” *noticed casually*¹²⁵. In v 6, θεωρεῖ means that Peter *looked at* all the wrappings. Finally his companion, entering the tomb, εἶδεν καὶ ἐπίστευσεν. Here εἶδεν clearly means “saw with understanding” what the disposition of the graveclothes implied. That the word has this meaning is likely from the fact that the passage mentions his seeing without such understanding (βλέπει v5). This also illustrates the point that analogical arguments, when convincing, do not lead to deductive certainty (logically there could be other explanations of the scenario): they lead to *belief*.

5.4 Authority

Does the Book of Jeremiah have authority for Christians in the sense that lessons can be read from it still relevant for today? The question is in principle no different from that relating to the Old Testament as a whole, and has ramifications beyond the scope of the present work. Comments here relate particularly to the perspective demanded by conclusions we have arrived at with regard to Jeremiah, where different strata have carried significantly different messages. In so far as the whole process of scriptural development evinces a divine hand in the kind of way proposed by Gese, Noble and Vanhoozer, the Bible as a whole has to be taken seriously by Christians as something like a letter which God addresses to them. No doubt the process of redaction makes this divine communication one of undeniable complexity, but

¹²³ *Philosophical Investigations*, ET G.E.M. Anscombe, accompanying previously unpublished German text, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1st edn, 1953; 2nd edn, 1958, 194.

¹²⁴ *Religious Language*, London: SCM, 1957, 23f. Cf. Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 415-422.

¹²⁵ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel according to St John*, Leicester: IVP, 637, notes that the headpiece of the wrappings is not mentioned until v 7, and may not have been envisaged by the writer as visible from outside the tomb.

one in which, as we have argued, from a Christian point of view the New Testament constitutes the final stage. The New Testament is not fully comprehensible without being viewed as interpretative of the Old Testament. But its finality derives from its witness to Christ and its claims that he is the climax of the revelatory process, and implies that any further development has to be of a different kind: *exegetical* and *applicatory*, rather than redactional.

In terms of ethics, there are aspects of Jeremiah – for example his wish for vengeance (15:15), and in the Old Testament generally – for example the extermination of pagan neighbours (Jos 6:17), which are transcended by the New Testament. In terms of theology, the later importation of the figure of Satan, already developed (anarthrously) as a proper name in 1 Chron 21:1 (contrast Zech 3:1f; 2 Sam 24:1)¹²⁶ and adopted in the New Testament (Rev 20:2) serves to nuance or challenge the identification of Nebuchadnezzar with Yahweh's servant¹²⁷. But other aspects of Old Testament ethics and theology are endorsed. Vital steps forward have been taken within the redactional process of Jeremiah – the most important being what is taught about the new covenant (31:31-34), for which we have accepted Schmid's assignment of a late date, and his argument that it caps a debate within the book.¹²⁸ The process by which Jeremiah becomes a teacher of the Torah, as shown by Maier,¹²⁹ indicates the way the Torah took on a definitive form during the period of Jeremiah's development as a book. The same can be seen in other parts of the Old Testament. In Joshua, for example, superimposed on the command to

¹²⁶ See further, J.B. Job, *Where is my Father? – Studies in the Book of Job*, London: Epworth 1977; revised edn, Ilkeston: Moorley's, 1993, 17-29.

¹²⁷ R.P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, London: SCM, 1981, 276 criticises works by L.E. Elliott-Binns, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*, Westminster Commentary Series, London: Methuen, 1919 and *Jeremiah – A Prophet for a Time of War*, London: SCM, 1941 for seeking to compare Jeremiah's situation with wartime Europe, an analogy stultified in Carroll's view by the enormity of the holocaust. Carroll is unfair to Elliott-Binns, who claims (*War*, 44), "I was careful not to bring out too markedly the likenesses of Jeremiah's world to our own". But again, it is important to see that the doctrine of Satan serves to modify *within the Old Testament* Jeremiah's conception of the use by Yahweh of an evil king as his instrument. On the other hand, it is unsatisfactory from a Christian standpoint to allow that God had lost control even in such horrendous events as the holocaust.

¹²⁸ See above, 268n62.

¹²⁹ Maier, *Lehrer*, *passim*.

capture the land is the later injunction to obey the Mosaic law, witness the virtual repetition of Jos 1:6 in v7.

Thus already in the Old Testament there is presupposed that certain passages are intended to modify others or supersede them from an ethical or theological point of view. The New Testament takes this a final step further, and acts as a lens or filter for viewing positions reflected in the Old. Thus on the one hand, R.W.L.Moberly¹³⁰ has made the important criticism of H.D.Preuss's *Old Testament Theology* that in his preoccupation with history, Preuss says, "This is not the place to ask whether and to what extent the Old Testament as a whole is to be classified as the revelation of God"¹³¹. Moberly's conviction, by contrast, is that the Old Testament is indeed revelatory. But one suspects that his choice of an example of genuine revelation in the Old Testament, Ex 34:6f, has a hidden debt to his own Christian perspective. Not that this is wrong; but it needs to be spelt out. If even now we see "through a glass darkly", that, from our present standpoint, was even more the case in Old Testament times, but does not mean that claims to see what God was revealing, however complex the authorial and redactional wrapping, have to be reduced to nothing more than flights of human imagination.

6. Conclusions

6.1

In considering what constitutes the book of Jeremiah, the question which text should be accepted as normative is complicated not only by differences in quantity and order between \mathfrak{C} and MT, but also by the fact that \mathfrak{C} represents an alternative Hebrew tradition. A case could be made out for accepting \mathfrak{C} rather than MT as the text to which the New Testament relates. But the New Testament is itself eclectic in its treatment of the Old. Since the MT is more comprehensive and represents a more reliably preserved tradition, and since the

¹³⁰ R. W. L. Moberly, 'How may we speak of God? – A reconsideration of Biblical Theology', *TB* 53.2, 2002, 190.

¹³¹ H. D. Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols, ET L. G. Perdue, T & T Clark, 1995, 1996 (German original, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1991, 1992), I.200.

pluses in \mathfrak{G} are relatively minor, it seems best to continue using the MT as the basic text, while referring to \mathfrak{G} for critical comparison.

6.2

While Childs has been justly criticised for his insistence on identifying the MT as the final form of the text, and regarding this as canonical, the New Testament, simply by what it is as opposed to the Old, inevitably brings the process of the latter's development to a close. The difficulty of identifying in the third section of the canon what is included must not obscure this understanding of the final form of the text. The New Testament created the Old by changing the status of the scriptures adopted from Judaism, and accepting others about which the Jews were in doubt, some eventually being rejected when the Pharisaic canon was finalized. The book of Jeremiah, in spite of problems associated with ascertaining the text, unquestionably belongs to the canon, whether Jewish or Christian, although its contents cannot be so rigidly defined for the latter, and the prominence given to the new covenant in the New Testament¹³², compared with the neglect of the pertinent passage (31:31-34) in Jewish circles, enhances its significance within the Old Testament book.

6.3

In discussing the debate between Gese and Childs as to the status of earlier forms of the tradition, while we disagreed with Gese, who, because he does not allow for the factor which we have seen in Jeremiah of sharply antithetical points of view, over-emphasizes the 'compatibility' between various layers of the text, we agreed with his concern for accommodating the way in which earlier forms of the text are preserved, and with his important argument that it is not simply the standpoint of the final form that constitutes revelation but the overall process of scripture formation. What Gese calls the *historische Tiefendimension* is not to be neglected in a mature Christian reading.

¹³² Barr, *Concept*, 30n7 (p644), enlists "even Childs" in support of his view that the new covenant plays a minor part in the New Testament. But, quite apart from the long citation in Heb 8:8-12, the concept is given an importance out of all proportion to the amount of text it occupies by the "words of institution" (1 Cor 11:25 cf. Mk 14:23, Mt 26:28), whether or not an equivalent for the word "new" was uttered by Jesus himself.

6.4

Another disagreement between Gese and Childs turned on the question whether the New Testament should be thought of as a further *redaction* of the Old. Inasmuch as the Old Testament is seen as both complete and, as far as the law and prophets are concerned, distant in time, this seemed an inappropriate description of the relationship. But inasmuch as both testaments are to be seen as constituents of a gradually formed single revelation, it is an illuminating approach. The act of adoption serves to change the status of the Hebrew Bible from something which has for Jews a kind of completeness into what for Christians is more like prolegomena.

6.5

Of the three issues relating to history, (a) it was concluded against Holladay that his wholesale acceptance of the book's historical reliability could not be sustained, but against Carroll that there was sufficient evidence for believing in a firm historical personage about whose career a number of features can be regarded as historically probable; (b) it was accepted on the basis of the work of K. Schmid that the book of Jeremiah took its place in a construct of history imposed on the Old Testament at a penultimate stage (before the Torah was separated from the Prophets), but that this construct pivoted on the historical event of the fall of Jerusalem, an event central also to the Book of Jeremiah; (c) in contrast to the *model* of history created by the text, the actual history of textual development was an overt feature left undisguised by successive redactors, so that no mature reading of Jeremiah (or the Old Testament in general) should ignore it as unimportant. The way in which the actual production of the Old Testament text constituted a historical process, if *against all probability* nothing else does, makes the New Testament the culmination of a revelatory continuum and saves it from the suggestion that Christianity has arisen without lengthy historical preparation.

6.6

Although Childs has to some extent modified his position in response to criticism, his zeal for the final form in his view constituted by the Masoretic Text suggests that it is only the intention of this that needs to be taken into account. But to do justice to the history of the text, and to understand its present form, note often needs to be taken of the way in which the intention of an earlier redaction has been altered, sometimes with minimal change to the wording of the text. We saw that the way in which an Old Testament text was quoted in the New could also mean a change to its intention, without implying that the words as they stand in the Old Testament should not be read in a sense appropriate to the passage concerned.

6.7

In spite of conclusions by modern scholars about the likely character of some New Testament references to Old Testament prophecy, and notwithstanding its newly discovered complexities, it was argued that in a way similar to how the natural world points to the creative hand of God, the overall pattern of Scripture presents, with what is effectively an analogical argument, a case for being revelatory, and hence capable of supporting the messianic and incarnational claims of Jesus. The kings studied in the foregoing chapters play a not unimportant part in this pattern, acting as they do for the most part in a negative way to foreshadow the requirements which Jesus as the true king fulfilled, rather as the unsatisfactory Saul paved the way for David.

6.8

The fact that different strata of Jeremiah (to say nothing of the Old Testament as a whole) present different theological and ethical positions has to raise questions about the authority of the text. Our conclusion has been that as the contradictions between one passage and another are explained by a long redactional process, so the New Testament, while in one sense standing over against the Old as something entirely fresh, can also be seen as the final stage in the redaction of the Old, capable of arbitrating whether by way of contradiction, modification or endorsement of its messages. This does not mean that the Old

Testament becomes superfluous, since New Testament answers are fully intelligible only in the light of questions posed by the Old, and its verdicts are debilitated, if severed from the debates which preface them. There is thus an important analogy between how the “final form” of the Old Testament text can only be understood when its *historische Tiefendimension* is considered, and the way in which the definitive positions taken by the New Testament writers are expressed in concepts and vocabulary moulded in the long process which formed the Hebrew scriptures and their translation into Greek.

6.9

At first sight it might look as though this final chapter was misplaced in a thesis about the treatment of kings in Jeremiah. However, the results of our examination of this have pointed to a lengthy series of redactions. We have seen evidence that these are not unrelated to changes in the way in which the developing Hebrew Bible was envisaged as a whole. We have claimed, following Gese, that from a Christian point of view this development was crowned and completed by the advent of Christ and that the New Testament can be seen as a final redaction of the scriptures which it constitutes as the Old. The book of Jeremiah therefore, looked at in this way, is what it is, not so much in the light of its final form, – something which, because of its variants, as we saw, is elusive – but *as viewed in all its forms* through the lens provided by the New Testament’s presentation of Christian faith. In sum, Jeremiah’s kings were for the most part purveyors of disaster, and to this extent provided negatively a contrasting characterization of a successor bringing salvation. The one exception, Josiah, who stands in Jeremiah for the importance but at the same time human unattainability of the law, points to the fulfilment of the prophecy (Jer 31:31-34) that one day there would be a solution to this Deuteronomic problem, and God would himself write on human hearts what no amount of human effort could write there. Together with the typological links between Jeremiah’s experience as a prophet and Jesus’s sufferings, such perspectives make sense of an otherwise very confusing book.

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