

---

## PREACHING THE PENTATEUCH: READING JEREMIAH'S SERMONS THROUGH THE LENS OF CULTURAL TRAUMA

L. Juliana Claassens  
Stellenbosch University

---

### Abstract

*This article seeks to investigate the rhetorical function of Jeremiah's Temple, Covenant and Sabbath Sermons against the backdrop of cultural trauma. I propose that the three sermons found in Jeremiah 7, 11:1-14 and 17:19-27 provide a good illustration of what is understood under the notion of cultural trauma according to which one or more of the public intellectuals of the time seeks to offer an interpretative framework that is focused on making sense of the calamity that threatened to destroy not only the community itself, but also everything they regarded to be sacred and true. By means of these three sermons, Jeremiah is reminding the people of Judah once again of the important tenets of their faith such as the Temple, the Covenant and the Sabbath as found predominantly in the Pentateuch. By 'preaching' on Judah's earlier traditions, the prophet reconstitutes these ancient customs in a new way in an attempt to rebuild the fractured community.*

**Key Words:** Cultural Trauma; Jeremiah; Pentateuch; Trauma Hermeneutics

### Introduction

Ron Eyerman defines trauma "as the impact of shocking occurrences which profoundly affect an individual's life."<sup>1</sup> He continues to argue that "such 'inner catastrophes' leave wounds and memory scars that cannot easily be erased and which influence later behaviour in unexpected and unpredictable ways."<sup>2</sup> These wounds and scars are "collective and social as much as they are individual" as the response to trauma often impacts "notions of collective identity, including religious and national identity."<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, Jeremiah scholars have increasingly seen the potential of trauma theory to serve as a hermeneutical lens in interpreting the traumatic events of the threefold Babylonian invasion (597-587 BCE) that ended in the destruction of the Jerusalem city and temple as well as the deportation of a significant portion of the leaders of the Judean people.<sup>4</sup> Scholars like Kathleen O'Connor and Louis Stulman have compellingly argued how written prophecy serves the function of helping people cope in the aftermath of trauma – the 'shocking occurrences' that profoundly impact individuals as well as the community's lives referenced above. For instance, Stulman describes the function of the prophetic literature as to "re-order values, reconstruct meaning, and create new symbolic and social worlds in the aftermath of war and community dislocation."<sup>5</sup> And Kathleen O'Connor identifies the purpose of the book of Jeremiah as to "re-symbolise reality for the decimated nation."<sup>6</sup>

One aspect of trauma theory that is particularly suited to the process of reframing and/or re-symbolising the traumatic events underlying the book of Jeremiah is the notion of cultural trauma proposed by trauma theorists like Ron Eyerman and Jeffrey Alexander.

Cultural trauma, according to Eyerman, is the process involved where certain ‘carrier groups’ like public intellectuals and the mass media “influence the formation and direction” of “processes of meaning making and attribution” associated with the traumatic events.<sup>7</sup> And Jeffrey Alexander describes cultural trauma as involving the often complex sociological processes that work through traumatic events in ‘institutional arenas’ (e.g. religious, aesthetic, legal, scientific and political) in such a way as to represent a collective understanding of the ways in which the community had been harmed. This process includes outlining the nature of the pain, the nature of the victim, the relationship of the victim to the wider audience, and the attribution of responsibility – thus pinpointing exactly who is to blame.<sup>8</sup>

I propose that the three sermons found in Jeremiah 7, 11:1-14 and 17:19-27 provide a good illustration of what is understood under the notion of cultural trauma according to which one or more of the public intellectuals of the time seeks to offer an interpretative framework that is focused on making sense of the calamity that threatened to destroy not only the community itself, but also everything they regarded to be sacred and true. By means of these three sermons, Jeremiah is reminding the people of Judah once again of the important tenets of their faith such as the temple, the covenant and the Sabbath as found predominantly in the Pentateuch. By ‘preaching’ on Judah’s earlier traditions, the prophet reconstitutes these ancient customs in a new way in an attempt to rebuild the fractured community.<sup>9</sup>

This article that seeks to investigate the rhetorical function of Jeremiah’s Temple, Covenant and Sabbath Sermons against the backdrop of cultural trauma is dedicated to Professor Hendrik Bosman who has been my teacher as well as my colleague for many years. I, as also many of his other students, fondly remember his ability to tell stories, both in and outside the classroom, that in itself serves as an example of the importance of narrative traditions and memories in forging group identity. Bossie’s love for the Pentateuch is honoured in this article that seeks to show how future generations continue to reflect and rethink on the most revered traditions of the past especially amidst the darkest of days.

## **Defining Cultural Trauma**

According to Ron Eyerman, “cultural traumas begin with disruptions to the established foundations of collective identity, something which can entirely destroy a collective or at the very least demand a re-narration of the myths and beliefs which ground that collective.”<sup>10</sup> It is at this point where ‘carrier groups’ such as public intellectuals, preachers, authors, artists, and in a contemporary society, mass media play a vital role in the process of ‘re-narration,’ i.e., offering an interpretative framework in order to help shape the traumatic events in such a way to re-establish collective identity.<sup>11</sup> Eyerman offers the following definition of cultural trauma in an article that outlines the development of African-American identity in terms of the collective memory of slavery and the role of public intellectuals like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X to reframe this collective identity:

... [C]ultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people who have achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a group or have been directly experienced by any or all. While it may be necessary to establish some event or occurrence as the significant ‘cause,’ its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time, as well as mediation and representation. A

cultural trauma must be understood, explained and made coherent through public reflection and discourse.<sup>12</sup>

With specific reference to the African American experience, Eyerman outlines the role of black novelists and poets, the development of a distinct folk music genre of the spirituals and the blues, in addition to preachers as vehicles for expressing a collective group identity. Someone like Martin Luther King, for instance, played a crucial role in helping to forge a coherent narrative that speaks of “the progressive inclusion into the dominant institutions through good works” – an interpretative framework the Preacher King was able to link to religious themes that lived in the black church and was represented by religious metaphors in both sermons and songs.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore with reference to the African American experience Eyerman shows that there might be competing narratives in a community that function as expressions of cultural trauma. For instance, Malcolm X's ‘redemptive narrative’ that challenged the very hope for full acceptance and integration and instead advocated separation and withdrawal as the best strategy for African Americans offered a sharp contrast with Martin Luther King's ‘progressive narrative’ that ultimately believed the dream of liberation and integration to be within reach.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, one should note that the narrative constructions emerging from a process of cultural trauma are open to misuse, both political as well as societal. Jeffrey Alexander, for instance, warns that in particular the notion of moral scapegoating is responsible for the fact that traumatised groups who are unable to overcome the original traumatic events may inevitably return to it time and again, so reinforcing rather than getting beyond earlier resentment.<sup>15</sup> This is indeed the reason why Eyerman also proposes that such master narratives that are the product of a process of cultural trauma should be open to a process of critical reflection according to which these interpretative frameworks are subject to counter-claims.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Preacher Prophet<sup>17</sup>**

With these insights regarding cultural trauma in mind, let us now turn to three sermons by the prophet Jeremiah that offer a good example of the way in which a religious leader contributes to the formation of a master narrative of trauma in the process of helping his audience to face the devastating effects of the Babylonian invasion and exile. In the following section, it will be particularly evident how in his sermons the prophet Jeremiah draws on some cherished traditions of the past as found also in the Pentateuch. Amidst the chaos all around, the Preacher Jeremiah is reminding the people once more of the central tenets of their faith as represented in the Temple, Covenant and Sabbath, so re-symbolising reality for the people who find themselves in a situation of utter desymbolisation.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Temple Sermon (Jeremiah 7)*

In the first of Jeremiah's sermons in Jeremiah 7,<sup>19</sup> typically called the ‘Temple Sermon,’ the prophet, standing outside of the temple, tells the people that God's presence in their midst is conditional. The people in an almost magical or ritualistic fashion believed that God's presence in the temple would make them invincible (cf. e.g. Psalm 46). This belief is evident in their repetition of the words: “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord” (Jer. 7:4). Jeremiah, however, warned that in spite of what they believed, the temple would no longer serve as their sanctuary that would keep them safe from all harm, if they continued to commit gross injustices.<sup>20</sup>

In Jer. 7:3, God warns the people to change their ways and to do what is right. If they do this, God will allow them to keep on living “in this place” (בְּמִקְוֵם הַזֶּה). According to Jack Lundbom, in Deuteronomistic theology, ‘this place,’ refers to the temple that is considered to be the place where God causes God’s name to dwell (Deut. 12:5, 11; 14:23).<sup>21</sup> However, in Jer. 7:7, the use of ‘this place’ is very much linked also to the land which God had promised to their ancestors (Gen. 12:7; Deut. 1:8; 20-21; 4:1) with the threat of being plucked off from the land and scattered among the nations (Deut. 28:63-64) lurking in the background.<sup>22</sup>

The heart of the Temple Sermon consists of a list of these injustices that the people are purported to have committed. In Jer. 7:5-7, they are called to stop oppressing the foreigners, the orphans and the widows – a command that goes back to the special provision that is made for the protection and provision of these most vulnerable persons in e.g. Deut. 14:29; 16:11, 14:24:17,19, 20-21. In particular, the reference in Jer. 7:6 of not “shed[ding] innocent blood in this place” echoes the commandments in Deut. 19:10, 13; 21:8, 9.<sup>23</sup> And in Jer. 7:9, one finds a summary of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1-17 and Deut. 5:1-21) when the people are chastised for stealing, murdering, committing adultery, swearing under oath and engaging in the worship of other gods – the latter which is explicitly prohibited in Deut. 11:28; 13:2, 6, 13; 29:25.<sup>24</sup>

In haunting fashion, God warns in Jer. 7:11: “You know, I too am watching.”<sup>25</sup> This theme of a God who sees injustice and who hears the cries of those in pain: the marginalised, the poor and the oppressed, echoes the portrayal of a God who hears and sees the suffering of the Israelites at the hand of the Egyptians, causing God to remember the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exod. 2:23-24). It is also the same God who in a special way is the God of the widow, orphan, foreigner and poor, who is said to “execute[s] justice for the orphan and the widow” in Deut. 10:18; “who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing,” and who calls upon the people to follow God in loving the strangers, precisely because they have been strangers themselves in Egypt (Deut. 10:19).

The Covenant Sermon, however, is clear that the people had not followed God’s commandments as found in the Pentateuchal traditions listed above. Citing the example of the sanctuary in Shilo, God declares in Jer. 7:12 that God’s anger and wrath will be poured out on the temple in Jerusalem. Aligned with the enemy’s scorched earth policy, everything and everyone will be burned with an unquenchable fire (Jer. 7:20). It is significant though that, as O’Connor points out, Jeremiah does not directly say that the temple will be destroyed. Instead, the prophet refers to the destruction of another sanctuary north of Jerusalem that, according to O’Connor, serves as a sermonic tactic that speaks about the disaster in symbol and code.<sup>26</sup>

The Temple Sermon ends with a chilling description of corpses, scattered in the field, waiting to be eaten by the birds and wild animals (Jer. 7:33) – a reality captured in the final words of Jeremiah’s sermon: “For the land shall become a waste” (Jer. 7:34). This picture reflects the complete annihilation that followed in the wake of the Babylonian invasion and seems to constitute a haunting enactment of the curses found in Deut. 27:15-26. As Deut. 27:26 concludes: “Cursed be anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by observing them.” The reason for this complete annihilation is, according to the Deuteronomistic understanding, that the prophet proclaims that the people did not listen and did not respond when God called them (Jer. 7:13; cf. also the repeated use of the verbs ‘not listening’ and ‘not obeying’ in Jer. 7:24, 26, 27, 28). Therefore, God will reject them, as the following chilling words of judgment maintain: “Your prayers are futile. God will not hear you” (Jer. 7:16). Indeed the Temple Sermon challenges the cherished belief of the eternal,

unconditional covenant to David that was thought to translate into Zion and the Temple being untouchable as evident in God's declaration in Jer. 7:15: "And I will cast you out of my sight."<sup>27</sup>

### *Covenant Sermon (Jeremiah 11:1-17)*

In Jeremiah 11, we hear the second of Jeremiah's sermons that focuses entirely on the theme of the covenant. Walter Brueggemann intriguingly remarks that the entire unit of Jer. 11:1-17 is a meditation on Deut. 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone."<sup>28</sup> In this Covenant Sermon, covenant theology is hence explicitly introduced as evident in the repeated reference to "the words of this covenant" (דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת) (Jer. 11:3, 6, 8). In this regard, Leslie Allen has identified a number of parallels between the Covenant Sermon in Jer. 11:1-17 and references to the Mosaic Covenant in the book of Deuteronomy (cf. e.g. Deut. 27:15-26 with Jer. 11:3, 5; Deut. 4:20 with Jer. 11:4; Deut. 7:8 with Jer. 11:5 and Deut. 4:13 with Jer. 11:8).<sup>29</sup> In particular, Jeremiah reminds people of the blessings, but really also of the curses associated with the covenant in Deut. 27:15-26. Noteworthy is the fact that in contrast to Moses' sermon in the book of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 27-28) that includes both covenant blessings as well as curses, in the Covenant sermon in Jeremiah 11, there are only curses to be found that according to O'Connor could be explained in terms of the fact that the disaster already had occurred.<sup>30</sup>

Central to the Covenant Sermon is the memory of the Liberator God who brought Israel up from Egypt and to the Promised Land – a land flowing with milk and honey (Jer. 11:4-5).<sup>31</sup> On the way to the Land of Plenty, the people stopped at Sinai, which is where God had made the covenant with Israel (cf. Exod. 19:1-5). The covenant required them to listen to God and to adhere to the covenant obligations (Exod. 19:5). In return, God promised to support and care for the people (Jer. 11:7-8), i.e., to show covenantal faithfulness (חֶסֶד) to them (Exod. 20:6). Throughout the Covenant Sermon, however, we see that, whereas God had upheld God's part of the bargain, Judah does not. Thus, the reason for the pervasive violence that currently engulfs Judah is exactly this: the people went after other gods and broke the covenant agreement which resulted in God bringing disaster upon them and refusing to hear their pleas for mercy (Jer. 11:11).

It is rather ironic that instead of turning to the God of the Covenant, who is after all, known to them as the Liberator God, the people are bringing their offerings to other gods who, as evident in the previous chapter (Jer. 10:1-5), are utterly unable to save the people at this time of disaster (Jer. 11:12) – they are like scarecrows in a cucumber field who cannot walk nor talk and need to be carried around (Jer. 10:5).

Moreover, even when the people ultimately do realise the futility of sacrificing to other gods (Jer. 11:13); when they do turn back to God – praying, pleading, confessing, offering up vows, sacrificing, and thus engaging in all of the rituals and obligations expected within the covenant relationship – God refuses to listen. Instead the flames of God's fierce anger will ignite the fire that now will destroy Judah who is called a green olive tree with some marvellous fruit (Jer. 11:16-17) – the olive tree symbolising Israel as covenant partner (cf. also the similar use of 'vine' in Jer. 2:21; Isa. 5:1).<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly enough, the process of preaching on the covenant continues later in the book of Jeremiah when in Jer. 31:31-34, the prophet solves the problem of the failed covenant, by in O'Connor's words, taking "the old covenant tradition and mak[ing] it new, or more precisely, tinkers and fiddles with it to reinstate it under a new guise."<sup>33</sup> O'Connor remarks that this is the old covenant but one that is "reasserted, reaffirmed, and re-

inaugurated.”<sup>34</sup> By reclaiming the old tradition in a new context, the covenant is transformed to be “a new dynamic symbol” that helps the people move into the future.

### *Sabbath Sermon (Jeremiah 17:19-27)*

In Jeremiah’s third official sermon, the prophet turns his attention to the Sabbath. He preaches this sermon just outside the People’s Gate where the kings of Judah are said to go in and out. He directs this sermon first and foremost to the leaders of the people, the Kings of Judah, who are ultimately responsible for leading the rest of the people of Judah astray (Jer. 17:19-20). The fact, however, that the place where Jeremiah conducts his sermon is the People’s Gate is significant because all the people should hear the prophet’s message since all are guilty in the eyes of God.<sup>35</sup>

In the Sabbath Sermon, the prophet’s explanation for the disaster focuses on the kings’ and the rest of the Jerusalem’s inhabitants’ failure to keep the Sabbath commandments as instructed in e.g. the Ten Commandments in Exod. 20:11 and Deut. 5:15.<sup>36</sup> At the heart of the Sabbath commandment is the call to stop working – the reason being given in Exod. 20:11 because God had rested on the seventh day, and in Deut. 5:15 had delivered the Israelites from slavery.<sup>37</sup> However, Jeremiah’s interpretation of the Sabbath commandment is more specific than either version of the Decalogue since it focuses narrowly on carrying a load on the Sabbath day. According to Lundbom, the term ‘load’ possibly refers to goods coming into the city from the outskirts that, considering the fact that the addressees are kings, may refer to the unfair labour practices in service of the king.<sup>38</sup>

Jeremiah’ rather damning sermon regarding the Sabbath is rooted in the belief that keeping the Sabbath commandments constitutes a central aspect of the covenant obligations and is an indication of whether or not people are truly centred on worshipping God alone. The community’s Sabbath-breaking behaviour moreover symbolises the fundamental breakdown in relationships, with people failing to come together as a community. Worshipping together and celebrating the Sabbath together help people maintain their relationships with one another and with God.<sup>39</sup> For Jeremiah, there is a direct link between the inappropriate political decisions and wrongheaded alliances made by the kings: “They did not listen or incline their ear; they stiffened their necks and would not hear or receive instruction” (Jer. 17:23). According to Jeremiah, this failure of the leaders to truly worship God that includes keeping the Sabbath holy had a detrimental effect on how they conducted their political life.

In Jer. 17:24-27, Jeremiah presents a clear choice to the kings. If they keep the Sabbath, they will prosper and keep their position of power and influence as visualised in terms of the leaders riding in and out of the city on their chariots. Most significantly, God promises to be present in the city forever and ever, which relates to the popular belief in the indestructibility of the city of Jerusalem (Psalm 48). If, however, the people do not keep the Sabbath holy, the unquenchable fire of God’s anger will burn in the very gates of the city where Jeremiah is preaching this Sabbath sermon.

### **Cultural Trauma as Hermeneutical Lens for Interpreting Jeremiah’s Sermons**

So how do the theoretical insights regarding cultural trauma introduced in the first part of the article help one to understand the rhetorical and theological significance of Jeremiah’s sermons better in the context of coming to terms with the exceedingly traumatic events of the Babylonian invasion and exile?

One could say that the prophet Jeremiah serves a prime example of a carrier group who seeks to frame the traumatic events of the Babylonian invasion and exile in such a way as to help his audience on the one hand face the traumatic events they had lived through, while also finding some meaningful way of moving beyond disaster. The master narrative that the prophet is constructing by means of the three sermons outlined above looks something as follows:

First, in line with the title of this article, "Preaching the Pentateuch," a central feature of Jeremiah's sermons is the ongoing conversation with Judah's earlier traditions. In terms of trauma hermeneutics, this re-appropriation of earlier traditions can be understood in terms of the important task of reminding victims once again of their roots and reframing ancient theological traditions in the context of the ever new challenges posed by their current devastating circumstances. Thus, one finds evidence in Jeremiah of both reaffirming the tradition and also of challenging previous understandings of God, suffering, and human responsibility.<sup>40</sup>

Second, all of the sermons reflect an attempt by the prophet to explain the recent disastrous events in a straightforward fashion, as O'Connor rightly writes, "to turn chaos into predictable events."<sup>41</sup> In these fire-and-brimstone sermons, all the terrifying events associated with the previous chapters' convoluted attempts to put into words, become simplified into one singular event, and the people's actions of breaking the covenant are understood as the reason for 'The Disaster.'<sup>42</sup> Jeremiah's sermons thus have the function of helping to channel the raw emotion evident in the poetic sections preceding and following these sermons (e.g. Jeremiah 4-6; 8-10; 12-16), and make the overwhelming events a bit more bearable by offering a simplistic explanation.<sup>43</sup> In hindsight, with the destruction of Jerusalem being an inevitable reality, the Temple, Covenant and Sabbath Sermons seek to bring order back into a chaotic world by finding a clear explanation for the fall of Jerusalem that saw the destruction of the Temple and the deportation of the city's inhabitants.<sup>44</sup>

Third, in terms of the Temple Sermon that portrays God as the One who is responsible for the destruction of the temple, Steed Vernon Davidson proposes that this portrayal is a great example of ambivalence that constitutes a classic response to colonial power whereby the subjects are drawn to and mimic the imperial powers without becoming so similar that the imperial forces would not be threatened by this demonstration of power. On the one hand, one sees that the Babylonians are the perpetrators, who in an incredible show of imperial force, burned down the holy place of the people's city which they were invading. On the other hand, however, the prophet resists the colonial power's version of history by offering an alternative story for his community which is struggling to make sense of the disaster that saw its city invaded, the temple burnt down, and many of its inhabitants forcefully removed to Babylon (Jer. 7).<sup>45</sup> Trauma theorists have helped us understand just how necessary Judah's survival was in a post-disaster world to embrace this version of events. To them, their survival meant that, despite the disorder and chaos their world had become, God is still in control.<sup>46</sup> As O'Connor points out, the claims that "Judah's God is powerful, active, and present, lord of the world, and not a defeated lesser being" serves the function of restoring trust in God. As she maintains, "God the Punisher is a way to defend God."<sup>47</sup>

Fourth, in particular, engaging with the Deuteronomic theology with its emphasis on retribution theology rooted in the people's inability to keep the covenant, Stulman argues that the Covenant Sermon (Jer. 11:1-13) especially employs Deuteronomic categories according to which the prophet proclaims that the wicked will be punished for their sins.<sup>48</sup> In this regard, one clearly sees here evidence of self-blame that is often found in

traumatised communities which would in an attempt to reconstitute some kind of order in a world fallen into chaos, hold themselves responsible for the disaster, and in the process, blame the victims rather than the perpetrators of violence. Stulman rightly points out how countless commentators uncritically accept the rhetoric of self-blame evident in these sermons.<sup>49</sup> Read though in terms of a process of cultural trauma, this notion of self-blame according to Stulman can be understood as a way of reframing the traumatic events so as to help people make sense of what had happened to them. According to Stulman, “the prophetic inclination to blame this ‘tiny country’ for all its troubles and explain its political misfortunes by way of moral causality is a rigorous attempt to recreate symbolic coherence in times of social convulsion” with the primary goal of survival.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

This article has proposed that the notion of cultural trauma may help us better understand how the prophet Jeremiah by means of his Temple, Covenant and Sabbath Sermons offers an interpretative framework that serves the function of helping the people of Judah face the traumatic events that have destroyed many of their religious convictions together with their homes and their loved ones. These interpretative frameworks reached back to the traditions of the Pentateuch by, one could say, “Preaching the Pentateuch.” By drawing on the Pentateuchal traditions, Jeremiah’s sermons offer the community a measure of continuity with the past, while also clothing past traditions in a new way.

It has also been argued that all such interpretative frameworks may not be equally helpful or healthy. As O’Connor rightly points out, in order “to survive, victims need interpretations, even bad ones, even false ones, even partial ones, even self-blaming ones.”<sup>51</sup> Given the harm that some of these master narratives can do, and particularly given their potential for misuse and/or abuse, it remains important for future readers to continue to be critically engaged with the master narratives that emerge out of a process of cultural trauma.<sup>52</sup> Such acts of critical engagement require that one seeks to understand with great sensitivity whatever a person or a community had experienced both in terms of the depths of the trauma as well as the explanations given to frame these traumatic events. However, under no circumstance does this imply condoning further violation of others.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, Jeffrey C. *Trauma a Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.
- Allen, Leslie C. *Jeremiah: A Commentary*. OTL. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.
- Davidson, Steed Vernyl. “Ambivalence and Temple Destruction: Reading the Book of Jeremiah with Homi Bhaba.” Pages 162-171 in *Jeremiah (Dis)Placed: New Directions in Writing/Reading Jeremiah*. Edited by A.R. Diamond and Louis Stulman. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011.
- Eckert, Alexandra. “Remembering Cultural Trauma: Sulla’s Proscriptions, Roman Responses and Christian Perspectives.” Pages 262-274 in *Trauma and Traumatisation in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical*



- Studies and Beyond*. Edited by Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn and Else Holt. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.
- Eyerman, Ron. "Social Theory and Trauma." *Acta Sociologica* 56, vol.1 (2013):41-53.
- Eyerman, Ron. "The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory," *Acta Sociologica* 47, vol. 2 (2004):159-169.
- Garber, David G. "Trauma and Biblical Studies," *Currents in Biblical Studies* 14, vol. 1 (2015):24-44
- Lundbom, Jack. *Jeremiah. Pages 1-20*. The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries: New Haven, VT: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Maier, Christl M. "God's Cruelty and Jeremiah's Treason: Jeremiah 21:1-10 in Postcolonial Perspective." Pages 133-149 in *Prophecy and Power: Jeremiah in Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective*. Edited by Christl M. Maier and Carolyn J. Sharp. Bloomsbury T&T Clark, London, 2013.
- Mehl, Andreas. "Individual and Collective Psychiatric Traumas in Ancient Historiographical Literature." Pages 244-261 in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*. Edited by Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn and Else Holt. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.
- Miller, Patrick D. *The Ten Commandments*. Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- O'Connor, Kathleen M. *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011.
- O'Connor, Kathleen. "How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies." Pages 210-222 in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*. Edited by Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn and Else Holt. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.
- Stulman Louis. & Kim, Hyun Chul Paul. *You are My People: An Introduction*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2010.
- Stulman, Louis. "Reading the Bible through the Lense of Trauma and Art." Pages 177-192 in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*. Edited by Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn and Else Holt. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.
- Stulman, Louis. *Jeremiah*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005.

---

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Ron Eyerman, "Social Theory and Trauma," *Acta Sociologica* 56/1 (2013):41-53 (41).
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>3</sup> Eyerman, "Social Theory and Trauma," 43.
- <sup>4</sup> For a helpful overview of trauma hermeneutics and biblical studies cf. the article by David G. Garber, "Trauma and Biblical Studies," *Currents in Biblical Studies* 14/1 (2015):24-44.
- <sup>5</sup> Louis Stulman, "Reading the Bible through the Lens of Trauma and Art," in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else Holt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 189. Cf. also Louis Stulman's commentary *Jeremiah* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005) and his monograph on the prophetic literature and

trauma hermeneutics together with Hyun Chul Paul Kim, *You are My People: An Introduction*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2010).

- <sup>6</sup> Kathleen O'Connor, "How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies," in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, eds. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else Holt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 213. Cf. also Kathleen M. O'Connor's monograph on Jeremiah that is one of the first full-length expositions on trauma hermeneutics and Old Testament literature, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2011).
- <sup>7</sup> Eyerman, "Social Theory and Trauma," 43.
- <sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 17-24. Cf. also the appropriation of Jeffrey Alexander's work by Alexandra Eckert, "Remembering Cultural Trauma: Sulla's Proscriptions, Roman Responses, and Christian Perspectives," in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else Holt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 262-274.
- <sup>9</sup> O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 102.
- <sup>10</sup> Eyerman, "Social Theory and Trauma," 49.
- <sup>11</sup> Eyerman, "Social Theory and Trauma," 43, 49. Jeffrey Alexander writes as follows about these collective carrier groups: "Carrier groups may be elites, but they also may be denigrated and marginalised classes. They may be prestigious religious leaders or groups whom the majority has designated spiritual pariahs," *Trauma*, 16.
- <sup>12</sup> Ron Eyerman, "The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory," *Acta Sociologica* 47/2 (2004):160.
- <sup>13</sup> Eyerman, "The Past in the Present," 165.
- <sup>14</sup> Eyerman, "The Past in the Present," 167.
- <sup>15</sup> Alexander, *Trauma*, 101. Alexander mentions a range of examples e.g. Hitler's revenge of the defeated German people, Serbian ethnic cleansing, the ongoing Arab-Israel conflict and many others, p. 101.
- <sup>16</sup> Eyerman, "The Past in the Present," 167.
- <sup>17</sup> The following exegetical section draws on some of the work done for my forthcoming commentary on Jeremiah for Paulist Press, cf. L Juliana Claassens, 'Jeremiah' in *The Paulist Bible Commentary*, eds. J. Aguilar, R. Clifford and D. Harrington† *et al.*, (Paulist: New York, forthcoming).
- <sup>18</sup> O'Connor, "How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies," 213-214.
- <sup>19</sup> There are divergent views regarding where the so-called Temple Sermon ends. According to O'Connor, the Temple Sermon comprises the entire Jeremiah 7, extending into Jer. 8:3, *Jeremiah*, 94-98. Cf. also Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 77-85. Jack Lundbom notes though that the Temple Sermon typically is said to consist of Jer. 7:1-15. One should note also that Lundbom actually is quite negative about the term 'sermon' which he suggests ought to be abandoned. His argument is that Jer. 7:1-15 consists of three short oracles which, if 'preached,' would only be about 30-45 seconds each. According to him this 'sermon' would then be no longer than a couple of minutes, *Jeremiah 1-20* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries: New Haven, VT: Yale University Press, 1999), 458. I would say that the length of this prophetic pronouncement is not enough reason to abandon the term 'sermon' seeing that some of the best excerpts of e.g. Martin Luther King's sermons that can be viewed today on YouTube are often no longer than 2-3 minutes. The point of the designation 'sermon' is that it has a clear message, meant to be communicated to an audience in an oral performance, but also preserved in written form in what by means of analogy could be considered the form of 'collected sermons.'
- <sup>20</sup> Brueggemann notes that the prophet is in profound conflict with the dominant temple ideology that maintained that Jerusalem cannot be destroyed because of God's unconditional promises rooted in the temple and royal claims of David and Solomon, *Jeremiah*, 77.
- <sup>21</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 461.
- <sup>22</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 464.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 96-97. Cf. the further exposition of this commandment of worshipping other gods in Jer. 7:18 that regard the popular religious activities of worshipping the Queen of Heaven that involved men, women and children—an indictment that will be elaborated in more detail in Jer. 44:18-19.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. the reference in Jer. 7:11 that would be cited later by Jesus in in the New Testament when God laments that God's house had become "a den of robbers" (Matt. 21:13; Luke 19:46).

- <sup>26</sup> O'Connor points to the importance of encoding traumatic violence as if one were to watch a movie clip in order to help people manage trauma indirectly; thus, facing their situation without being retraumatized, *Jeremiah*, 96.
- <sup>27</sup> Lundbom powerfully demonstrates how the threefold repetition "the temple of YHWH" is undone by six infinitive absolutes citing Decalogue violations in v 9, arguing that "the people's rhetoric is effectively answered by the rhetoric of Yahweh," *Jeremiah 1-20*, 472.
- <sup>28</sup> Brueggemann, *Jeremiah*, 112.
- <sup>29</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah*, 137.
- <sup>30</sup> O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 99-100.
- <sup>31</sup> Allen notes that the change 'up from' Egypt instead of the more traditional 'out of Egypt' presupposes possession of the Promised Land, *Jeremiah*, 139.
- <sup>32</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah*, 141.
- <sup>33</sup> O'Connor, "How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies," 218.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> The summons 'to listen' (שמעו) in Jer. 17:20 is reminiscent of the imperative in Deut. 6:4 (שמעו) with the same verb being used twice in Jer. 17:23 when the sad truth is communicated by the prophet: "But they did not listen" (שמעו לא), Brueggemann, *Jeremiah*, 165.
- <sup>36</sup> The reference to keeping the Sabbath holy in Jer. 17:22 goes back to Deut. 5:12 which states that this day should be set apart from the other days, Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 806.
- <sup>37</sup> Cf. the exposition on the difference between the Exodus and the Deuteronomistic rationale for keeping the Sabbath, Patrick D. Miller, *The Ten Commandments* (Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 124-130.
- <sup>38</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 806.
- <sup>39</sup> O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 102. In time, the Sabbath, also functions as a crucial identity marker, so much so that, in later generations, keeping the Sabbath, circumcision, and the commandment against eating pork were some of the central ways in which one could tell who was Jewish. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah*, 165-167.
- <sup>40</sup> Cf. Stulman who shows how "governing assumptions of the dismantled world, such as covenant and election, are now reconfigured," *Jeremiah*, 285.
- <sup>41</sup> O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 94. O'Connor writes "if the world is ever again to be trustworthy, victims need interpretation. For their lives to rest on the most minimal order, they must have meaning, interpretation, explanation, even if the explanation is ephemeral, inadequate, partial, or outright wrong. Explanation puts order back in the world," p. 43.
- <sup>42</sup> O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 100-101.
- <sup>43</sup> O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 94.
- <sup>44</sup> Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 15-16.
- <sup>45</sup> Steed Vernyl Davidson, "Ambivalence and Temple Destruction: Reading the Book of Jeremiah with Homi Bhaba," in *Jeremiah (Dis)Placed: New Directions in Writing/Reading Jeremiah* (ed. A.R. Diamond and Louis Stulman; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011), 163. Cf. also a similar argument made by Christl Maier with regard to her interpretation of Jeremiah 21, "God's Cruelty and Jeremiah's Treason: Jeremiah 21:1-10 in Postcolonial Perspective," in *Prophecy and Power: Jeremiah in Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective* (ed. Christl M. Maier and Carolyn J. Sharp; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 145.
- <sup>46</sup> Davidson argues that "the Temple Sermon offers, like other texts in Jeremiah, a packaged theodicy for a post-disaster community seeking to understand its past and make its way into the future," "Ambivalence and Temple Destruction," 162.
- <sup>47</sup> O'Connor, "How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies," 216.
- <sup>48</sup> Stulman, "Reading the Bible through the Lens of Trauma and Art," 184.
- <sup>49</sup> Stulman, "Reading the Bible through the Lens of Trauma and Art," 185.
- <sup>50</sup> Stulman, "Reading the Bible through the Lens of Trauma and Art," 185-186.
- <sup>51</sup> O'Connor, "How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies," 216.
- <sup>52</sup> To mention but one example of many, Andreas Mehl cites the case of the political misuse of collective trauma in the way September 11, 2001 served as the impetus for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, "Individual and Collective Psychiatric Traumas in Ancient Historiographical Literature," in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Doehhorn, and Else Holt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 249.