

Schreiber, Mordecai. *The Man Who Knew God: Decoding Jeremiah*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009. xvi + 183 pp. Paper, \$29.50.

Mordecai Schreiber, a rabbi and a prolific writer in the field of biblical studies, has written numerous monographs, popular books, and journal articles. Having authored books on several biblical prophets, he now focuses on his favorite prophetic figure, Jeremiah, who, he states, made an enormous impact on his life. His thesis is that Jeremiah can be considered the founder of the postbiblical Jewish faith. Just as Abraham may be considered the first Hebrew, so Jeremiah is “the first Jew,” whose ministry ushered in “a permanent monotheistic culture.”

The Man Who Knew God is divided into three chapters: chapter 1 explores the life and mission of Jeremiah; chapter 2 contrasts the Jewish and universal aspects of Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry; and chapter 3, which is particularly useful, focuses on the practical aspects of Jeremiah’s messages in today’s society and attempts to answer the question, What would Jeremiah have to say to us today? To answer this question, Schreiber addresses topics such as pacifism, poverty, hunger, organized religion, and ecology. Each chapter is subdivided into smaller reading units, making it easier to read and reflect on the proposed topics.

The book also offers a number of valuable insights into the text of the Bible. Several of these are worth listing: (1) Judging by the nature of his first vision, we can say that before Jeremiah discovered God in history, he found God in nature. (2) The land of Judah was outwardly purged of idolatry through King Josiah’s reforms, but the hearts of the people were not necessarily cleansed. People still worshiped idols in the privacy of their homes. Yet Jeremiah did not give up completely on his contemporaries. He knew that where there is life there is hope. (3) Humans were created free to do good or to do evil. Free will is a godlike attribute. During his lifetime, it appeared as if Jeremiah lost his lifelong battle against paganism in Israel. Yet, posthumously, he won the war. (4) Today, we may not be worshiping Baal and Asherah, but we worship power, money, science, and other idols. (5) All three monotheistic civilizations [Judaism, Christianity, and Islam] can trace their roots to Jeremiah, who lived in Jerusalem around 600 B.C. Moreover, Jer 3:17 says that at the time of the end Jerusalem will be called the seat of the Lord to which all the nations of the world will gather, and they will no longer follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts. Schreiber shows the historical importance of Jerusalem for the Jews, Christians, and Muslims, although he concludes that the last part of the promise still awaits the fulfillment: “And they will no longer follow the stubbornness of their evil heart” (60).

One of the most valuable comments from Schreiber’s book has to do with the constancy of Jeremiah’s prophetic call:

The fire continued to burn in Jeremiah's bones, but Jeremiah, like the burning bush, was not consumed. No matter what happened to him, no matter what anyone did or said, the word of God could not be stopped. . . . No prophet [in Israel] ever ceased to be a prophet . . . , once the prophetic call was heard, there was no turning back. That person has now become the conduit of God's word and would remain one to the end (41).

I feel personally attracted to the author's thesis that Hilkiyah the Priest, who was prominent during the religious reforms in Judah, was none other than Jeremiah's father.

Throughout his book, Schreiber speaks respectfully of Christianity (and Islam). Yet, from the Christian point of view, the most questionable position that he takes has to do with the best-known passage of "Second Isaiah"—the Suffering Servant of the Lord. He recognizes that the first seven verses of Isaiah 53 are usually applied to Jesus, but he approaches this text as "a coded biography of the prophet Jeremiah." He credits R.E.O. White for discovering the link between Isa 53:7-8 and Jer 11:19, concluding that the unnamed prophet, Jeremiah, served as "a role model" for Jesus. At the end of this discussion, he states that all claims about the direct links between Isaiah 53 and Jesus are a matter of belief rather than a historical fact. As far as the story of Jeremiah is concerned, he maintains that it rests firmly on historical evidence. He proposes that "Unlike other major biblical personalities, we no longer need to take Jeremiah strictly on faith. We can begin to study him as an integral part of our history" (2).

I would argue that, while the study of the Bible should be done objectively, it should never be undertaken without faith. The evidence from Isaiah 53, when coupled with the Gospel accounts, has convinced many people that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah. Joseph Wolff, for example, who was the son of an ordained rabbi, and who became a Christian linguist and missionary, firmly believed that Isaiah 53 offers the strongest theological statement from the Hebrew Bible that Jesus was who he claimed to be.

Finally, Schreiber's claim that Jeremiah was the most afflicted prophet in the Hebrew Bible needs to be examined in light of Num 12:3, which portrays Moses as the most "miserable" person on earth.

It is a pity that the author says little about the prophet Daniel. He points out that Jeremiah had a successor in a young boy Ezekiel, who was taken captive to Babylonia. In fact, Schreiber refers to both Ezekiel and Daniel as those included among the best and brightest luminaries exiled to Babylonia (59). However, he does not discuss Jeremiah's influence on Daniel in spite of the fact that Jeremiah's prophecy is mentioned in Dan 9:2 in relation to the return from Babylon. In spite of this omission, I would like to commend Schreiber for writing an excellent monograph on Jeremiah's life and message. The book provides a stimulating reading and is highly

recommended to anyone interested in the study of Jeremiah, particularly, and in biblical prophecy, in general.

Walla Walla University
College Place, Washington

ZDRAVKO STEFANOVIC

Stone, Michael E. *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011. xiv + 242 pp. Paper, \$30.00.

During the last several decades, our understanding of ancient Judaism has become increasingly complicated, nuanced, and refined. Traditional scholarship assumed that most Jews in antiquity adhered to the legalistic worldview found in rabbinic literature and that the early Christian movement—steeped in apocalyptic visions, charisma, and mystical interactions with divine beings—emerged in sharp contrast to its Jewish surroundings. However, literary and archaeological discoveries of the last fifty years have demonstrated that ancient Jewish thought was much more diverse and dynamic than scholars previously imagined. It is now clear that ancient Judaism was not monolithically legalistic, but that Jews in antiquity promoted a variety of beliefs and practices, many of which provided an indigenous context for the development of early Christianity.

One scholar who has greatly expanded our understanding of ancient Jewish diversity is Michael Stone. An expert in largely unknown ancient languages and texts, Stone has, for many years, studied the manuscripts, content, and sociohistorical implications of pseudepigraphical writings. This literature (preserved mostly in Christian circles) often elaborates on biblical stories and expresses ideas not found in mainstream rabbinic Judaism, making it valuable evidence for alternative forms of ancient Jewish thought. Stone's new book—*Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views*—is his most recent contribution to this field of study. As stated in the preface, this book does not present a single and sustained thesis. Rather, it is a collection of studies in which Stone discusses various aspects of Second Temple Judaism in an attempt to challenge traditional assumptions regarding ancient Jewish beliefs and practices (ix), and to reevaluate the origins of early Christianity in light of new textual discoveries (1-4).

Chapter 1 begins with an insightful discussion on the “spectacles of orthodoxy.” For centuries the texts that informed us about ancient Judaism have been the traditional Christian and Jewish canons. However, because these texts were selected by groups whose beliefs and practices eventually became dominant, the traditional canons naturally filtered out worldviews that were not endorsed by the “orthodoxies” of later centuries. In recent decades, however, scholars have been able to recover this diversity of thought through the discovery of noncanonical texts that give voice to individuals,