



"Where is the truth? : Narrative exegesis and the question of true and false prophecy in Jer. 26-29 (MT)"

Osuji, Anthony Chinedu

Abstract

L'exégèse des chapitres 26-29 du texte massorétique du livre de Jérémie fournit une bonne base scripturaire pour poser des questions importantes autour du problème de la vraie et fausse prophétie que nous identifions comme le thème théologique majeur de ce bloc littéraire. En effet, parmi les textes bibliques qui parlent aussi bien de confrontation prophétique que de discernement entre vraie et fausse prophétie, Jr 26-29 - et particulièrement le « duel » entre Jérémie et Hananiau au chapitre 28 - est le locus classicus ou en tout cas la dramatisation la plus éloquente de ce problème dans la Bible. Dans ce bloc de chapitres qui nous occupe, nous identifions une séquence d'événements reliés narrativement les uns aux autres. La méthodologie adoptée dans ce travail est narrative, avec un intérêt non négligeable pour la théologie du texte. Nous avons mené cette recherche avec l'intime conviction qu'un édifice théologique solide pourrait être construit à p...

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Faculté de théologie et de droit canonique

Where is the Truth ?

Narrative Exegesis and the Question of True and False Prophecy in Jer. 26-29 (MT)

Dissertation presented by
Anthony Chinedu OSUJI in
partial fulfilment of the
requirements for a Doctorate
Degree in Theology, under the
direction of Professor
André WÉNIN

Louvain-la-Neuve

2005

Dedication

To the ever blessed and cherished memory of

Rev. Sr. Eucharika Ndidiamaka Osuji

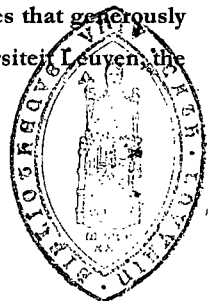
(21st July 1967 - 10th January 2003).

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While I acknowledge the help of these and others, I must quickly add that these helpers are in no way responsible for the evident imperfections in the text. But positively, I see the lacks as cracks that allow the light of future scrutiny and improvement to penetrate.



CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	ii
ABBREVIATIONS.....	xi
GENERAL INTRODUCTION.....	1

PART ONE

EARLIER-CURRENT ISSUES IN JEREMIAH RESEARCH: HERMENEUTICAL QUESTION AT THE BASE

CONCEPT.....	18
--------------	----

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY OF RESEARCH AND PROBLEMS

<i>Introduction</i>	19
1.1 THE SETTING OF THE AGENDA: THE PACESETTERS	21
1.1.1 Duhm.....	21
1.1.2 Mowinckel.....	22
1.2 THE MAJOR DEBATES: <i>STATUS QUESTIONIS</i>	24
1.2.1 Chronology.....	24
1.2.1.1 The Issue and Significance of the Debate.....	24
1.2.1.2 The Lower Chronology.....	25
1.2.1.3 The Higher Chronology.....	26
1.2.2 Textual Differences between the Massoretic Text and the Septuagint.....	28
1.2.2.1 The Major Differences.....	29
1.2.2.2 Proposed Solutions.....	30
1.2.2.3 In the Light of the Discovery of the Qumran Texts.....	31
1.2.3 The Question of Deuteronomistic Redaction.....	34
1.2.3.1 The Book of Jeremiah and Deuteronomy.....	36
1.2.3.2 Various Responses.....	37
1.3 THE BROADLINERS: THE COMMENTARIES OF HOLLADAY, CARROLL AND MCKANE	42
1.3.1 William Holladay.....	43
1.3.2 Robert Carroll.....	46
1.3.3 William McKane.....	49
1.3.4 General Evaluation of the Three Commentaries/Authors.....	52
<i>Conclusion</i>	54

CHAPTER TWO
METHODOLOGICAL/HERMENEUTICAL OPTION:
NARRATOLOGY, THEOLOGY, CONTEXT

<i>Introduction</i>	55
2.1 NECESSITY OF METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM SHIFT	56
2.1.1 The Missing Link: Call for New Option.....	56
2.1.2 The Fact of Variety in Methods and Approaches.....	58
2.1.3 The Emergency of Literary Approaches: The New Criticism and Structuralism...	62
2.1.4 Intersection of Critical Theory and Biblical Criticism.....	66
2.2 NARRATIVE BIBLICAL CRITICISM: ATTEMPT AT DESCRIPTION	68
2.2.1 Attempt at Description.....	68
2.2.2 Robert Alter, Yairah Amit and Jan Fokkelmann.....	70
2.2.2.1 Robert Alter: On the Biblical Text.....	71
2.2.2.2 Yairah Amit: On the Reader.....	73
2.2.2.3 Jan Fokkelmann: Text-Reader Relationship.....	76
2.3 THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH GOES NARRATIVE	79
2.4 THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTUAL STUDY?	84
2.5 FROM NARRATOLOGY TO THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTUALISATION	92
<i>Conclusion</i>	96

PART TWO

JER. 26-29: NARRATIVE EXEGESIS: TRUE VS. FALSE PROPHECY

CONCEPT.....	98
--------------	----

CHAPTER ONE

THE PLACE OF JER. 26-29 IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH (MT)

<i>Introduction</i>	99
---------------------------	----

1.1 THE MT OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH	100
---	------------

1.1.1 The Ordering of Jeremiah MT.....	100
1.1.1.1 Acknowledging a Formal Disorder.....	100
1.1.1.2 A Peculiar Concept of Order.....	104
1.1.1.3 An Organising Principle and the Question of Outline.....	105

1.1.2	The Book of Jeremiah as a Two-Part Drama.....	110
1.1.2.1	The Internal Literary and Theological Design.....	114
1.1.2.1.1	Uprooting and Overthrowing (Jer. 1-25).....	114
1.1.2.1.2	Building and Planting (Jer. 26-52).....	117
1.2	JER. 26-29 (MT): VERITY VERSUS FALSITY.....	123
1.2.1	Delimitation of Jer. 26-29.....	123
1.2.2	Identifying the Theme and Narrative Logic of Jer. 26-29.....	125
1.2.2.1	Identifying the Theme.....	125
1.2.2.2	Identifying the Internal Logic.....	127
<i>Conclusion</i>		130

CHAPTER TWO

JER. 26: THE THEME OF PROPHETIC AUTHENTICITY ENUNCIATED

<i>Introduction</i>		133
2.1	DELIMITATION, EXPOSITION AND STRUCTURE.....	135
2.1.1	Delimitation.....	135
2.1.2	Exposition.....	136
2.1.3	Structure.....	138
2.2	ANALYSIS.....	139
2.2.1	YHWH's Message to the Prophet (v. 1-6).....	139
2.2.1.1	Introduction (v. 1).....	140
2.2.1.2	YHWH's Command and his Aim (v. 2-3).....	141
2.2.1.3	The Sermon (v. 4-6).....	144
2.2.2	The Response of the Community (v. 7-27:1a).....	149
2.2.2.1	Initial Audience Response (v. 7-9a).....	150
2.2.2.2	The Formal Response (v. 9b-16).....	154
2.2.2.2.1	Court-like Composition: Accusation (v. 9b-11).....	154
2.2.2.2.2	The Defence (v. 12-15).....	156
2.2.2.2.3	The Verdict (v. 16).....	160
2.2.2.3	The Responses of Two Kings to Authentic Prophets (v. 17-23).....	162
2.2.2.3.1	Example of Hezekiah vis-à-vis Micah (v. 17-19).....	163
2.2.2.3.2	Counter Example of Jehoiakim vis-à-vis Uriah (v. 20-23).....	167
2.2.2.4	Conclusion of the Narrative (v. 24-27:1a).....	169
2.3	JER. 26 IN RELATION WITH JER. 7 AND 36.....	172
2.3.1	Jer. 26 vis-à-vis the Parallel Account of 7:1-15 and Jer. 36.....	173
2.3.2	The Specificity of Jer. 26.....	176
<i>Transition</i>		182

CHAPTER THREE
JER. 27: THE YOKE OF YHWH

<i>Introduction</i>	185
3.1 EXPOSITION AND STRUCTURAL PRESENTATION	187
3.1.1 Exposition.....	187
3.1.2 Structure.....	188
3.2 ANALYSIS	191
3.2.1 Divine Commissioning for a Sign-act and Oracle for the Neighbouring Kings (v. 1-11).....	191
3.2.1.1 Introduction (v. 1).....	191
3.2.1.1 Oracle to the Neighbouring Kings (v. 2-11).....	192
3.2.1.1.1 The Sign-act and the Commands (v. 2b-4).....	193
3.2.1.1.2 The Oracle to the Kings and Neighbouring Nations (v. 5-11).....	196
3.2.1.1.2.1 The Sovereignty of YHWH and the Role of Nebuchadnezzar (v. 5-7).....	197
3.2.1.1.2.2 Motifs of v. 4-7 in an Intertextual Context.....	202
3.2.1.1.2.3 Two Possible Eventualities and the Warning against False Prophets (v. 8-11).....	207
3.2.2 Oracle Report for Zedekiah (v. 12-15).....	211
3.2.3 Oracle Report for Priests and People: The Temple Furnishings (v. 16-22).....	213
3.2.3.1 v. 16-17.....	215
3.2.3.2 v. 18-22.....	216
<i>Transition</i>	218

CHAPTER FOUR
JER. 28: VERITY-FALSITY DRAMATISED:
DISCERNMENT OF CRITERIA

<i>Introduction</i>	221
4.1 DELIMITATION AND STRUCTURE	223
4.1.1 Literal and Thematic Unity of Jer. 28.....	223
4.1.2 Delimitation.....	225
4.1.3 Internal Structure.....	226
4.2 FIRST READING OF THE TEXT	228
4.2.1 Act I: The Face-to-Face (v. 1-11).....	228
4.2.1.1 Introduction (v. 1).....	228

4.2.1.2	Oracle Report of Hananiah to Jeremiah (v. 2b-4).....	229
4.2.1.3	Speech Report of Jeremiah to Hananiah (v. 5-9).....	231
4.2.1.3.1	On Fulfilment of Prophecy: Reference to Deut. 18:21-22.....	236
4.2.1.4	Sign-act and Oracle Report by Hananiah (v. 10-11).....	239
4.2.2	Act II: Sending and Dismissal (v. 12-17).....	241
4.2.2.1	Divine Intervention: Commission to Prophecy (v. 12-14).....	241
4.2.2.2	Oracle Report of Jeremiah to Hananiah (v. 15-16 [17]).....	243
4.3	CONSIDERING SOME POINTS OF THE NARRATIVE PLOT.....	245
4.3.1	Meeting and Parting.....	245
4.3.2	The Title נְבִיא.....	247
4.3.3	A Hierarchy of Criteria and the Role of v. 12.....	251
Transition.....		257

CHAPTER FIVE

JER. 29: VERITY/FALSITY BY CORRESPONDENCE

Introduction.....	259
5.1 EXPOSITION AND STRUCTURE.....	262
5.1.1 Exposition.....	262
5.1.2 Structure.....	263
5.2 ANALYSIS.....	265
5.2.1 Communication I (v. 1-23).....	265
5.2.1.1 Introduction of the Letter, the Addressees and the Messengers (v. 1-3)....	265
5.2.1.2 Text of the Document (v. 4-23).....	268
5.2.1.2.1 Revolutionary Advices: Initial Commands of Settlement (v. 4-7)..	270
5.2.1.2.2 Warning against False Prophets (v. 8-9).....	277
5.2.1.2.3 Promises (v. 10-14).....	277
5.2.1.2.3.1 שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה (Seventy Years) in Context.....	281
5.2.1.2.4 Fate of those who Remained in Jerusalem (v. 15-19).....	286
5.2.1.2.5 Oracle of Judgment against Ahab and Zedekiah (v. 20-23): The Identity of the Prophets in Babylon.....	291
5.2.2. Communication II (v. 24-32).....	293
5.2.2.1 Shemaiah's Words and Action (v. 24-29).....	294
5.2.2.2 Judgment Oracle against Shemaiah (v. 30-32).....	297
Recapitulation.....	298

CHAPTER SIX
JER. 26-29: LITERARY-THEMATIC COHERENCE AND CHARACTERISATION
OF PERSONAGES

<i>Introduction</i>	301
6.1 UNITY OF THE BLOCK: THEMATIC AND LITERARY COHESIONS	302
6.1.1 The Programmatic Function of Chapter 26.....	302
6.1.2 Chapters 27-29.....	305
6.1.2.1 Particular Threads of Cohesiveness.....	305
6.1.2.2 Chapters 27and 28: The Centrality of Chapter 28.....	308
6.1.3 Analysis of Key Motifs/Terms and their Narrative Effects.....	311
6.1.3.1 שקר (+ נבוא).....	312
6.1.3.1.1 שקר in the Torah, Psalms and Proverbs.....	312
6.1.3.1.2 שקר in Jeremiah.....	314
6.1.3.1.2.1 שקר + נבוא in Jer. 26-29.....	316
6.1.3.2 דבר (אמור), שמע and שלח.....	319
6.1.3.2.1 דבר (אמור).....	319
6.1.3.2.2 שמע.....	324
6.1.3.2.3 שלח.....	328
6.1.3.3 The Motifs of Life and Death.....	330
6.2 THE CHARACTERISATION OF PERSONAGES	333
6.2.1 YHWH vis-à-vis the Figure of Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon).....	335
6.2.1.1 YHWH.....	335
6.2.1.2 The Function of Babylon/Nebuchadnezzar.....	339
6.2.1.2.1 Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon) in Jer. 26-29: Occurrences and Problematic.....	341
6.2.1.2.2 Earlier Proffered Solutions.....	343
6.2.1.2.3 From the Narrative and Theological Points of View.....	347
6.2.2 The Prophet Jeremiah.....	354
6.2.2.1 The Character of Jeremiah (Especially in Chapters 26 and 28).....	356
6.2.3 Hananiah (and the Other False Prophets).....	362
<i>Conclusion</i>	367

PART THREE
THEOLOGY AND CONTEXT:
PROPHECY, TRUE AND FALSE PROPHECY, JER. 26-29 AND GOD-TALK

CONCEPT.....370

CHAPTER ONE
ON THE THEOLOGICAL STATUS OF PROPHETIC BOOKS:
THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Introduction..... 371

1.1 CURRENT DEBATES AND CRITICAL VOICES.....372

1.1.1 Auld and Carroll..... 374

1.1.1.1 The Linguistic and Terminology Argument..... 375

1.1.1.2 No Unanimity in the Bible about/on Prophetic Identity..... 376

1.1.1.3 Origin, Association of Books with Prophets and Editorial Activity..... 377

**1.2 THE PROPHETS AS PROPHETS: OVERHOLT, WILLIAMSON, RINGGREN
AND BRUEGGEMANN..... 379**

1.2.1 Overholt, Williamson and Ringgren..... 381

1.2.1.1 On the So-called Terminological Confusions and Crisis of Identity..... 381

1.2.1.2 The Identity: The Social Reality of Intermediation..... 382

1.2.1.3 Between the Historical and the A-historical: The Phenomenological..... 383

1.2.1.4 From the Broader Context of the Ancient Near East..... 385

1.2.2 Brueggemann’s Argument of “*The Prophetic Imagination*”..... 387

1.2.2.1 The Alternative Vision of Exodus..... 387

1.2.2.1.1 An Evaluation: Caution 390

1.2.2.2 The Content of the Prophetic Teaching:
Re-appropriating the Alternative Consciousness 392

Conclusion..... 395

CHAPTER TWO
JEREMIAH IN PROPHETIC THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

Introduction..... 399

2.1 JEREMIAH BACKGROUND AND SENSE OF COMMISSION.....400

2.2 JEREMIAH IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER PROPHETS..... 402

2.2.1 The Question of a Prophetic Tradition..... 402

2.2.2 Covenant Preaching in the Prophets..... 405

2.2.3 The Tradition of the Use of Symbolic Actions..... 413

Conclusion..... 416

CHAPTER THREE
TRUE VERSUS FALSE PROPHECY IN A THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Introduction..... 419

3.1 THE PROBLEM OF CRITERIA FOR PROPHETIC AUTHENTICITY.....413

 3.1.1 The Problem..... 413

 3.1.2 The Relativity of Criteria: A Sample Case (I Kings 13)..... 421

 3.1.2.1 “I saw all Israel scattered on the Mountains...”..... 423

 3.1.2.2 “If a prophet invites Israel to follow other gods...”..... 425

 3.1.2.3 Sycophants face to face with the fearless: the moral life of the prophet..... 426

 3.1.2.4 “Prophets ... before me and before you prophesied woes...”..... 428

 3.1.2.5 “If the word of the prophet comes to realisation...”.....428

 3.1.2.6 “Beware of false prophets... By their fruits”:
 Complement from the New Testament..... 431

3.2 TRUE VERSUS FALSE PROPHECY IN JER. 26-29 AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS 435

 3.2.1 Narratology Meets Theology..... 435

 3.2.2 Man’s Relativity and God’s Sovereignty..... 438

 3.2.3 Between Dynamic Pluralism and Appropriation of God..... 440

 3.2.4 Autonomy and Obedience..... 441

 3.2.5 Truth: Timelessness or Timeliness..... 442

 3.2.6 Prophetic Thinking, the Status Quo, the Resistance of Authorities..... 445

3.3 WHERE LIES THE TRUTH? DISCUSSION IN A PARTICULAR CONTEXT.....447

 3.3.1 Prophets: Between Truth and Falsity..... 449

 3.3.1.1 Desire for Success..... 450

 3.3.1.2 The Powers that Be..... 451

 3.3.1.3 Tradition and its Sway..... 452

 3.3.1.4 Crowd Expectation..... 453

 3.3.2 The Need for Self-definition: *A Prophetic Church* and *A Listening Church*..... 455

 3.3.2.1 *A Prophetic Church*..... 455

 3.3.2.2 *A Listening Church*..... 458

 3.3.2.3 Evaluation: The Listening Prophet..... 461

Conclusion..... 463

GENERAL CONCLUSION..... 465

 Recapitulation..... 465

 Narratology-Theology-Normativity..... 473

 Overtures: A gap closed, a gloss introduced..... 477

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 481

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible NY	Garden City, NY
ABD	The Anchor Bible Dictionary NY	Garden City, NY
<i>ACEBT</i>	<i>Amsterdamse cahiers voor exegese en bijbelse theologie</i>	Kampen
<i>AJT</i>	<i>Asia Journal of Theology</i>	Singapore
AnBib	Analecta Biblica	Rome
<i>ANES</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>	Leuven
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries	Nashville
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch	Göttingen
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>	Atlanta
BB	Biblische Beiträge	Fribourg
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge	Bonn
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i> Columbia	British Columbia
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums	Frankfurt
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Louvaniensium	Leuven
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>	Rome
<i>BibBh</i>	<i>Bible Bhashyam</i>	Kottayam
<i>BibRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>	Washington DC
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series	Leiden
BLS	Bible and Literature Series	Sheffield
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>	Munich
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>	Aberdeen
<i>BTod</i>	<i>Bible Today</i>	Collegeville
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft von Alten und Neuen Testament	Stuttgart
<i>BZ NF</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift, Neue Folge</i>	Würzburg
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>	Würzburg

BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft Berlin	
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>	Washington DC
CEV	Cahiers Evangile	Paris
CRBS	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>	Sheffield
DBS	Dictionnaire de la Bible Supplément	Paris
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios Biblicos</i>	Madrid
ETNS	<i>Etude Bibliques, Nouvelle Série</i>	Paris
ETL	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>	Leuven
ETR	<i>Etudes Théologiques et Religieuses</i>	Montpellier
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>	Hants
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments	Göttingen
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament	Tübingen
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>The Heythrop Journal</i>	London
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs	Cambridge
ICC	The International Critical Commentary	Edinburgh
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>	Jerusalem
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation. A Journal of Bible and Theology</i>	Richmond
ITC	The International Theological Commentary	Grand Rapids
JAAR	<i>Journal of American Theology of Religion</i>	Decatur
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>	New York
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>	Philadelphia
JBQ	<i>The Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>	Jerusalem
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>	Chicago
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>	Leiden
JSOT	<i>Journal of the Study for the Old Testament</i>	Sheffield
JSOTS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements	Sheffield
JSPS	Journal of the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplements	New York
JSSt	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>	Manchester
JTS	<i>The Journal of Theological Studies</i>	London
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament	Gütersloh

KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament	Tübingen
LD	Lectio Divina	Paris
<i>LTJ</i>	<i>Lutheran Theological Journal</i>	Adelaide
<i>LvSt</i>	<i>Louvain Studies</i>	Leuven
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament	Grand Rapids
<i>NRT</i>	<i>Nouvelle Revue Théologique</i>	Brussels
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis Göttingen	Fribourg-
OBS	Österreichische Biblische Studien	Wien
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>	Pretoria
OTL	Old Testament Library	London
OTM	Old Testament Message	Wilmington
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën	Leiden
OTWSA	Ou Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid Afrika	Pretoria
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>	Paris
<i>RevBib</i>	<i>Revista Biblica</i>	Buenos Aires
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor. A Baptist Theological Quarterly</i>	Louisville
<i>RivBib</i>	<i>Rivista biblica</i>	Bologna
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>	Paris
<i>RTL</i>	<i>Revue Théologique de Louvain</i> Neuve	Louvain-la-
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series	Atlanta
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series	Atlanta
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies	Missoula
SBM	Stuttgarter Biblische Monographien	Stuttgart
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien	Stuttgart
<i>SBT</i>	<i>Studia Biblica et Theologica</i>	Pasadena, CA
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>	Oslo
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>	Edinburgh
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica	Assen
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament	Grand Rapids

<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>	Basel
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>	New York
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>	Leiden
VTS	Vetus Testamentum Supplements	Leiden
<i>W&W</i>	<i>Word and World</i>	St. Paul
WBC	World Biblical Commentary	Dallas
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament	Berlin
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>	Berlin

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

0.1 A Hermeneutic of Reading:

A Triad of Text, Reader and Interpreter

Even though this thesis is a research work in an Old Testament prophetic book, and not principally an exercise in biblical hermeneutical principles, it will not be out of place beginning this introduction with an appeal to two New Testament (Lukan) episodes that throw some light on the hermeneutics of reading the Bible, which, however, encapsulate the intent and major axes of the exercise we propose here. Nevertheless, each of the two episodes has something to do with reading an Old Testament scroll, and each cites an Old Testament text. As such both deal with the question of interpreting the Old Testament. The first is a conversation between Jesus and a lawyer (Luke 10:25-28; cf. Matt. 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31). The lawyer puts Jesus to test and asks him what he must do to inherit eternal life. The response Jesus gives is couched in two questions: “What is written in the law? How do you read?” (Luke 10:26). The lawyer answers the first question by citing some of the demands of the Covenant in the Pentateuch. In brief, you must love your God whole-heartedly and love your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10:27; cf. Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18). “You have answered well. Go and do likewise and live”, Jesus tells him. But to justify himself, the lawyer demands who his neighbour is, a question Jesus answers by means of a story and analogy. The second is the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). Behold an unnamed eunuch travelling and reading a text of Isaiah (cf. 53:7-8), and Philip, prompted by the Spirit to join him, asks him a question that should remain paradigmatic in any reading exercise: “Do you understand what you are reading”? This question meets an answer that hints to a failure of the reading process and gives rise to a foundation to any hermeneutic exercise: “How can I unless somebody guides me”?

Authors agree that the triad – the text (scroll), the reader and the interpreter – as is exhibited in each of the two episodes above, forms the best paradigm for reading the text of the Bible. The interpreter must not necessarily be understood as a person. In principle, it is the hermeneutical key. In the episode in Luke’s gospel, the triad is clear: the lawyer

General Introduction

is the reader, Jesus asks him of the text (“what is written in the law?”) and the hermeneutical key (“how do you read?”). In the Philip-eunuch encounter, the triad is no less clear. Prior to the encounter, one among the three elements was lacking. There was the text, the reader, but a correct hermeneutics was still lacking which would lead to a comprehension of the text by the reader. The question by the eunuch, “How can I unless somebody guides me” is very direct about this. Philip was to provide this missing link because he possessed the hermeneutics of reading, a key which could unlock the text. Philip belonged to a reading community which had imbued him with the correct hermeneutics to unlock the knots of the text, and with that he could interpret the text to his and to the Ethiopian’s satisfaction.

Apart from the presence of the triad, there is another common element in these two related episodes. After reading each of the episodes, the reader has the impression that the goal of the intersection of the three elements was not just to produce a reading pleasure, but was to effect a change on the reader. In the first episode from the Gospel of Luke, the story shows that after the lawyer had enumerated some of the items in the covenantal demands, Jesus demands him to go and do so and live (cf. Luke 10:28). But from all indication, because the lawyer answered only the first part of Jesus’ question (question about the text) and not the second (the approach to the text), a question which interrogates the reading key, he seemed compelled to ask a further question, presented as a desire to justify himself. He needed to ask Jesus to provide the answer to the second question, to provide him with a reading scheme, a framework. His question, “But who is my neighbour” therefore becomes a demand for the correct hermeneutics to understand the word “neighbour” in the answer he already provided to the first question by Jesus. This led Jesus to relate to him the story of the Good Samaritan (cf. Luke 10:29-37). After the story, an exchange of question and answer led ultimately again to the introduction of the aspect of persuasion aimed at change on the part of the reader: “Go and do like wise” (Luke 10:37). In the episode of the Acts of the Apostles, Philip helped the reader (the Ethiopian eunuch) to become a participant in the reading community sharing the same hermeneutical key with him. The hermeneutics provided made such a sense to the

General Introduction

Ethiopian eunuch that he was persuaded to demand for baptism. Reading leads to understanding. Understanding leads therefore to action.

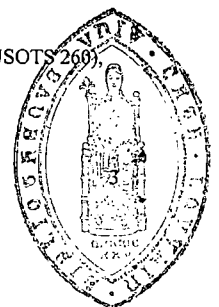
The research work we have set out to do could therefore be seen from the perspective of the description above, in the interaction of the elements of the triad. In essence, we engage in an exercise of reading a particular text (Jer. 26-29), equipped with a definite interpretive key (the narrative method) and finally aimed at understanding and discovering how the interaction between the readers (us), the text, through the perspective of the chosen methodology speaks to the readers of today from the theological standpoint.

0.2 Our Subject, Text and Scope

Many theses have been written on the book of Jeremiah. The book does not lack commentaries and monographs on its different editions or versions, “books”, chapters, units, oracles, narratives, imageries, symbolisms, theologies, personages, even verses and motifs. In fact, as the “longest and most tumultuous prophetic writing in the Bible”¹, the book of Jeremiah has attracted much attention, not necessarily because of its easy readability, but because of the pressing challenges the text presents. It is not necessary here enumerating the many aspects of the discussion that have made the book “an intractable riddle”², which will be partially the subject of our very first Chapter. But largely, on the one hand, the scholarly community has racked brains to understand the compositional history, the relationship between the various extant texts of the book, the traceability of the historical prophet or the grounds for associating the words in the book to the prophet or not, the explanation of the book’s kindred nature with Deuteronomy, and in the recent times, the understanding of feminist voices, the sociological and ideological elements in the book, etc. On the other hand, the ecclesial and faith community has seen in the figure of the prophet, and in the canonical form of the extant text, a sort of covenantal charter, and has heard in the voice of the prophet, an invitation, in the circumstances of today, to live the covenantal demands, and to engage

¹ STULMAN, *Jeremiah* (AOTC), Nashville, 2005, p. 1.

² A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah* (JSOTS 260), Sheffield, 1999, p. 15-32, see p. 15.



General Introduction

meaningfully in human affairs of today, taking as point of reference, the symbolic representations exhibited in the text.

We do not intend, in the present research work, to arbitrate as to which is the best prism through which the book of Jeremiah should be viewed. We have chosen to look at chapters 26-29 of the Massoretic text, a choice (about the text) which does not imply taking sides in the great debate as to which among the extant versions is/are more original, more anterior and more logical in its/their internal organisation, a sort of evaluation which characterises most of the commentaries from the historical critical standpoint. From the literary point of view, which is our concern here in the analysis that will follow, the two texts (talking in particular of the Massoretic and the Septuagint) are two complete and different books, demanding to be treated each independently of the other. Of course, we are not unaware of the textual differences between the Massoretic and the Septuagint texts in general, the shortness of the Septuagint when compared to the Massoretic text, and specifically the different placements of 26-29 (33-36 in the Septuagint), which shall only have attention on a general level (Part One Chapter One). We judge that entering into the details of the many diverging propositions in the textual debate is outside the scope of our work. But the choice of the Massoretic text is on the one hand for reasons of convenience; the existence of commentaries based on this text, and on the other hand because of its status as the canonical text in its original language. Specific differences between the two texts with respect to 26-29 will be mentioned in due course when the fact of the difference would help in throwing light to the analysis of the section or verse in question. The reading we propose is a narrative analysis with an interest at the same time in the theology evident in this chosen block. The narrative reading of the four chapters provides the scriptural basis for asking relevant questions concerning the problem of true and false prophecy, which we identify to be the major theological theme in the block under study.

The choice of this subject is on the one hand, due to personal interest in the prophetic books of the Bible, especially in the narratives that confront the status quo and attempt to suggest an alternative consciousness to the deficit existing programme, and on the other

General Introduction

hand, due to circumstantial exigencies. Coming from a tradition that has more or less only exegetes and biblical theologians trained in the historical-critical method, the work aims at exploring the potentialities of the narrative method in exegesis, with a view of introducing and popularizing it in my own milieu. Moreover, since the popularisation of the narrative methodology in the English and French speaking world, the prophetic books have not enjoyed as much attention as other corpus of the Hebrew Bible, especially the patriarchal and historical books. Finally, in an African religio-cultural context marked by a range of denominational and religious pluralism, and in a situation where the different competing religious voices vie for authenticity, what are the recipes for authentic prophetic action and what are the indices of its relevance? To what extent can the study of the book of Jeremiah in general, and precisely chapters 26-29, help in this regard?

There are many other texts in the Hebrew Bible that deal with prophetic confrontations, or with the old and unending question of the discernment between true and false prophecy, but we judge that Jer. 26-29 as a block, and especially the direct duel in chapter 28 between Jeremiah and Hananiah, is the climax and the most eloquent dramatisation of this problem in the Bible. It is equally true that the problem of true and false prophecy in the book of Jeremiah begins already in Jer. 23, our decoupage from Jer. 26 is justified on the grounds that we identify a sequence of events connected to each other beginning from chapter 26 till 29. Even though we are reserved, from the point of view of strict narrative parlance, in finding a roundly unified plot in the strict sense of the term in these chain of events, we could still, in a derived sense, notice a flow of story, a narrative logic which begins with the prophet's preaching in chapter 26, the tensions that are raised, his vindication as a true prophet, his fulfillment of this role in 27 and the challenges to the false prophets, a personification of the false prophets in 28 in the person of Hananiah who bets the challenge by a peaceful oracle and a counteraction of Jeremiah's symbolic act, Jeremiah's victory by prophesying the death of this opponent and its realisation, and finally Jeremiah's own vision of peace and the conditions on which the latter is possible in 29. Moreover, the generally accepted opinion designating chapters 1-25 of the book of Jeremiah (Massoretic Text) as an articulation of "uprooting, overthrowing and destructing" regarding the symbolic world of Judah, and chapters 26-

General Introduction

52 (same text) as the “planting and the rebuilding” of the ruins of destruction, makes it convenient to begin with chapter 26 which forms an introduction to this articulation of hopeful configuration after the catastrophic thrust of the “first scroll”. This block of chapters departs sharply on the one hand from the preceding chapter 25, which could be considered as a climactic statement ending the series of destabilisations characteristic of 1-25, and on the other hand from the following chapter 30, which begins a new “book”, that of consolation, with its unmistakable accent on promise and hope and literarily cast in poetic style, as against the narrative nature (in general) of 26-29. This block of chapters, placed in-between chapters 25 and 30, is mainly concerned with the confrontations between Jeremiah and the false prophets (personified in the middle of the block in the person of Hananiah), the latter representing the official bureaucratic interest and the former the voice of the authentic messenger of YHWH.

0.3 Methodology

The conception of these axes of the work: narrative exegesis and theology with an accent on context, poses a question of the conditions of its possibility in this research, considering especially the nature of the text studied. So far in the history of research in the book of Jeremiah, except of course in the very recent times, historical questions and enquiries have dominated, and many authors would doubt the applicability of the approaches with synchronic presumptions to the study of the prophetic books. Because of this, the book of Jeremiah has remained for the most part, as described by many authors (see our Chapter One of Part Two), either an unorganised conglomeration of disparate unconnected elements, or a product of ideological juxtapositions that do not exhibit any literary or theological intention, or even pieces of texts chanced together by redactional happenstance. Consequently, works and commentaries on the book have largely concentrated on clearly different accents but all united in the goal of discovering the different origins of the different disparate units, or detecting the *ipsissima verba* of the prophet (if any), or pinpointing the authorial intentions of the alleged different postulated ideological interest groups. But all in all, the problems of reading the book of Jeremiah could be said to be the question of the correct reading posture. On the one hand, some authors have defined the correct reading posture as the attempt to determine the date and

General Introduction

exact historical setting of each textual unit, asking specific historical questions about each passage, in fact aiming at maximising the role of the actual person of Jeremiah by assigning as much material as possible to the prophet and to accept whenever possible the claim of the book of Jeremiah itself, that the material does indeed stem from the work of the prophet (Holladay). On the other hand, some other authors basing their conviction on the ubiquitous presence of the hand of the deuteronomist in the book, focus on the deuteronomistic editing of the book of Jeremiah in the exile, some generations after the person of Jeremiah, a fact (about the person), they claim, cannot be established either from the text or from the process of redaction (Carroll). The extant text of Jeremiah becomes therefore the work and product of exilic editors and redactors who have recast and transformed the older material for the sake of the community in exile, under the influence of the tradition of Deuteronomy, the only raw material being the exilic experience, and their interest being in providing explanations for this experience from the lens (ideology) of the competing schools involved. These authors claim that as a result of the exilic community's theological mediation of the Jeremiah tradition, we cannot recover with any certitude any of the actual words of Jeremiah (Carroll). Yet, some other authors see the impossibility of drawing historical conclusions from the text and to relate it to concrete historical circumstances. The task should rather be that of discovering and establishing the process of how the text originated and especially developed. In this connection, McKane introduced and popularised his notion of the "rolling corpus". However, these three major conceptions of what the exegetical task of the book of Jeremiah should be, which we described in our research work as "broadlinings" (Part One, Chapter One) are yet unanimously agreed that questions about historicity, either from the point of view of date, provenance or process, are the major entrance gate to the book, even though they differ on the exact nature and shape of this gate, that is, how best to articulate these historical questions.

It is this imperialism of historical sensitivities that is responsible for suspicions and reticence in the application of synchronic hermeneutical tools to the book of Jeremiah, as to many other prophetic books. Some would therefore say that the synchronic approach is an attempt to bypass the problems by ignoring them (Carroll). However, we have to

General Introduction

admit that the very nature of the prophetic corpus, the mostly oracular nature, the evident disjoints, the uneasy flow of the chronological elements, the ideological voices (the book of Jeremiah as a very classical example), contributed to this negative judgement. This is undeniable even to champions of synchronic approaches to reading the Bible. For example, reading most of the works dealing with the theoretical framework of the narrative criticism for example, it is natural nevertheless to always have the book of Jeremiah at the back of the mind, and especially the chapters studied to see how the techniques apply. But it was revealing to discover that only very few of the examples in these books were drawn from prophetic books, much lesser even from the book of Jeremiah.

These difficulties notwithstanding, many encouraging factors are responsible for our paradigm shift in our methodological option. In the first place, there is the phenomenon, in the intellectual circle and exegesis especially, of “the Collapse of History” using the phrase of the title of Leo Perdue’s famous book. This could be said to be the anti-historical wave that is characteristic of modern scholarship and in fact, a call to a democracy of methodologies and angles of view, which is in itself, a child of literary studies in secular literature. Many factors including cultural factors played some role in ushering in this sensitivity. From the point of view of cultural factors, the reclaiming of imagination in countercultural and other movements of the sixties and seventies is connected inextricably with the growing interest in story. Disenchantment with things, in the words of Fackre, “abstract, rationalistic, cerebral, didactic, intellectualist, structured, prosaic, scientific, technocratic, and the appeal of the concrete, affective, intuitive, spontaneous, poetic”³ also made a huge contribution to this interest. Thus a sense of historical relativity and interest in existentialist issues would make the story form attractive since for many, telling a tale suggests simply a perspective stance and a commitment that does not necessarily entail marshalling universal and absolute truth claims. From secular literature, the in-road is made to the biblical texts. Talk about storytelling in religion and theology is a phenomenon that gained momentum not quite too long ago. Now in the world of prophetic books, another encouragement is the

³ G. FACKRE, *Narrative Theology: An Overview*, in *Interpretation* 37 (1983), p. 340-352, see p. 340.

General Introduction

concrete evidence of narrative and poetic blocks, clearly discernible in the book, which at least, at the first glance shows no immunity against a literary approach. And finally is the attempt equally by renowned authors in Jeremiah research in the recent years to pave out fresh grounds and literary perspectives of the book, a concentration to what John Hill termed “the world of the text” as opposed to the “world behind the text”⁴. Many considerations in the book that have seen the light of the day are informed by an understanding of the text as a literary work which constructs its own world. The individual parts of the text are seen in relationship with one another, so that the meaning of the parts emerges primarily from a consideration of the relationship of one part with the others and with the whole. Of secondary importance for the text’s meaning are authorial intention, the reconstructed world behind the text, and the meaning of a particular text at a point prior to its incorporation into the final form of the book. More description about our methodology, as much as necessary in the work will be given in Part One (Chapter Two).

0.4 Organisation

The work is organised in three Parts, each Part comprising different Chapters. Each of the three Parts of the work begins with a note articulating the concerns of the Part in general, while each of the component Chapters begins with a particular introduction and ends with a little conclusion by way of summary; an articulation of the main accents of the Chapter and at the same time (as transition), opening up for the discussion in the following Chapter⁵. After Part Three, a General Conclusion closes the work. Here, we shall attempt to recall the major accents of the Parts and underline the major theses in the different Parts and Chapters and in the whole. Since the gates of exegesis have not been locked, according to Maimonides, we shall attempt to dress other possible avenues for the future

⁴ J. HILL, *Friend or Foe? The Figure of Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah MT* (BIS 40), Leiden, 1999, p. 11.

⁵ Throughout the work, biblical quotations would be more or less our literal translation of the Massoretic text (BHS). For clarity of usage, chapter (small letter) will refer to divisions in the book of Jeremiah, while Chapter (capital) will refer to divisions in our research work, e.g. we shall treat chapters 26-29 in Chapters Two-Five of Part Two.

General Introduction

of the research. By this it implies we recognise the limits of our work and the need for its amelioration and furthering.

Part One

Part One contains the preliminary Chapters that help to register, on the one hand, the continuity of this thesis with the previous works in Jeremiah research, and on the other hand, establish its specificity. So, Chapter One of this Part is a review of research in the book of Jeremiah. As is often with exercises of this nature, we shall take as point of departure the work of Duhm and Mowinckel in the early beginnings of the last century. Here we must acknowledge that more detailed historical or thematic treatments of the controversies in Jeremiah research have been done in many other monographs and articles, especially those devoted solely to this. But the treatment here goes beyond the mere cataloguing of issues and questions. Neither is it an attempt to arbitrate between competing opinions and streams of thought. Its specific aim is to prove that major approaches to the book have been more or less concerned with articulations that have asked questions around the book's compositional history, stages of redaction, and in short, questions with historical-critical undertones. The absence of specific positions taken along the discussions on the mostly debated issues shows that our interest is not deciding which of the competing theories in each particular issue should have sway over the other, but to hint already that we intend in this research to ask questions of a different kind.

Consequently, the second Chapter of the Part discloses our methodological option and the nature of our hermeneutical key to the text: the narrative method. In this Chapter, we describe our reading strategy. Needless going into the details, we thought it necessary to justify this option. Beginning with a notice of a phenomenon in modern exegesis, which itself has roots in the emergence of structuralist and synchronic approaches in secular literature, we describe the intersection of critical theory and biblical exegesis, giving as product a variety of pluralist angles of view to the texts of the Bible; the narrative methodology for one. The narrative method is described as "close reading". In the main, the aim of the Chapter is to show that considerations of matters such as reliability of the

General Introduction

narrator, the description of characters and the technique of careful structuring of the narratives can lead to a serious hermeneutical engagement with the text of the Bible. The argument is that narrative reading can equally display a great sensitivity to the workings of the text, a complicated text, the book of Jeremiah inclusive. In this search for meaning from the narrative point of view, the chapters under consideration, as a text, are no longer interrogated from the point of view of historical or authorial veracity, or engaged with in order to achieve a historical reconstruction, but are considered first and foremost as a literary artefact, challenging the reader to probe into and journey along the text's inherent communicative strategies.

Part Two

The ground is now prepared for the narrative reading of Jer. 26-29 on which Part Two concentrates. But since it is always good to start from a general consideration to specific ones, the first Chapter of this Part casts a general look at the entire book from the narrative theological point of view. Though without agreeing with Stulman in all the details and extremities of his position, the phrase which titles his book "order amid chaos: Jeremiah as a symbolic tapestry"⁶, reflects the major thesis of the Chapter. With regard to the book of Jeremiah, there is a special type of order amid apparent chaos. The many discrete elements and the apparent confusions and contradictions, the wildness of the Massoretic Text, the incessant repetitions, the jumbling character of the text, the indeterminacy of the characters in the text; YHWH, the prophet/s, are not the last word. It depends on one's concept of order. The book has another vision of order. In short, the book's 'formal disarray', hides a tendency, an intention that can only be appreciated when a view on the totality is made from a stepped-back point of view.

In the subsequent Chapters of the Part, the narrative readings of chapters 26-29 are undertaken. The option is to take the chapters one by one, even though there could be sufficient reasons to consider some chapters together since they make a unified plot (especially chapters 27 and 28). The nature of the scrutiny has already been defined (Part

⁶ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos: Jeremiah as a Symbolic Tapestry* (The Biblical Seminar 57) Sheffield, 1998.

General Introduction

One, Chapter Two) and so the exercise consists of close reading to discover the narrative art in the final form of the Hebrew text. A first glance would be an attempt to delineate the geography of the text and to identify its internal structuring. Evidently, bumps and disjointed seams are encountered here and there. Journeying into the complicated network of a prophetic book par excellence, one cannot avoid such a phenomenon and at times, it is inevitable to recourse to certain presuppositions of other methodologies in order to make the journey going. Wénin⁷ gives three reasons that may warrant necessary digressions in a synchronic study. First at the semantic level, it is necessary to be able to give the precise sense of certain words or expressions to understand the text and these difficulties can only be adequately studied from the point of view of the ancient Hebrew language. At the narrative level, the existence of a grammar of the narrative, that is, genres and structures, motifs and themes, types of personages and the relations etc. invites us to confront the narrative with others; that is, as a means of perceiving better the originality and the specificity of the narrative studied. Finally at the intertextual level, chapters 26-29 of the book of Jeremiah for example, is part of a vast narrative block with which it has its connections: depending on the extent one wishes to go, the totality of 26-45, 26-52, or the whole book of Jeremiah or even in the context of the history of the people of Israel from creation or entry into the Promised Land till the exile in Babylon. To isolate a little block of chapters without taking consideration of a larger literary, historical or theological block would be missing the import of certain subtle elements.

After the narrative analysis of the individual chapters, a Chapter is considered necessary to make a synthesis (Part Two, Chapter Six). The aim is to trace the necessary literary and thematic connections and cohesions which the chapters have with each other, to underline the marks to show that the unit as a whole has as a major theme, the question of true or false prophecy, to explore the narrative characterisation of the major personages in the block; all geared towards demonstrating a unity of theme in the chapters of the block. Such terms like שָׁקַר (+ נִבְאָה), רִבְרָה, (אִמֹר), שָׁמַע, and שָׁלַח, and the motif of life and death, etc are scrutinised with particular reference to the effects on the text and the reader. The Chapter

⁷ A. WÉNIN, *Samuel et l'instauration de la monarchie*, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, p. 11-12.

General Introduction

therefore has the goal of placing the individual chapters in the context of the block and therefore making each of them a unit within an entity.

Part Three

It is true that narrative exegesis, just like many other literary approaches, proposes a look at the biblical text from the bias of the tools for reading secular literature, making an analysis of language and its form of expression, but is the goal of the reading exactly the same as when one reads a secular literature or novel? We answer the question in the negative. Human language has a variety of functions. Conveying information is not the only purpose of language and reading the biblical text just for this purpose alone is tantamount to reading it partially. Just as in the two New Testament episodes evoked in the beginning of this General Introduction, there is yet a very important aspect, based on the biblical view that language, the Word, is powerful, that it effects change, and that it performs actions (cf. the creation narratives of Gen. 1; Jer. 1:9-10; Mark 1:25-26; 2:5, 11). Biblical literary language is so, for not only that it does something to the reader by way of an effect of difference, this difference involves not merely an increase in information but equally a new experience, a new feeling, and perhaps a new life⁸. According to Wolfgang Iser, the goal for reading a text is not simply to exegete the text for its treasures but to “reveal the conditions that bring about its various possible effects”, effects which demand the participation of the reader in whose experience “the text comes to life”⁹. Understanding becomes a recipe for acting.

The question therefore could be couched thus: can narratology yield fruitful perspectives to modern theological thinking? To this question, a positive answer is offered. In the research work, the possibility of using such an ancient text to voice opinions on contemporary theological issues, even from the bias of literary reading, is an argument. Without neglecting the dynamics of change and without being oblivious of the danger

⁸ P.W. MACKY, *The Coming Revolution: The New Literary Approach to New Testament Interpretation*, in D.K. MCKIM (ed.), *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*, Grand Rapids, 1986, p. 269.

⁹ W. ISER, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore, 1978, p. 19.

General Introduction

and fallacy of domesticating texts, nay making them sacrosanct or untouchable, it is clear that issues about the theological problem of true and false prophecy are at the fore. And from this, further theological questions are implicated: the reader's personal conception and view of God, autonomy and obedience vis-à-vis the Word of God, the faith tradition, the dynamism and plurality with regard to it, the question of divine sovereignty and liberty, and human relativity, the dialectics between tradition and present exigencies of the faith, history, the courage of prophetic pronouncements in the midst of militating forces of power, etc.

Part Three is therefore designed to address these issues. After a synchronic reading of the Jeremiah text, the study of the literary structures and the narrative analysis involved will be placed in a global perspective that can be qualified theological; that is, allowing the text to dialogue with the questions of meaning and of faith as they are posed today in theological discussions. Made of three Chapters, the first poses the question of and considers the theological status of the prophetic books. This is followed by a second; an attempt at inserting the book of Jeremiah in a prophetic theological tradition. The justifiability of these two Chapters lies in the fact that there is no unanimity among scholars on the identity of the prophetic books, and critical stands regarding this issue consequently question the theological status accorded to these books. The third and last Chapter discusses the problem of true and false prophecy which is the theme of the block, and interrogates the implications for theology today. And finally our research work has a contextual flavour, partly because of our possible future engagements in a particular context. It is true that it is not a reflection on a particular theological environment, it is a reflection that does not neglect such an environment. And so, the last section of this Chapter is devoted to discussing the specific import of this discussion on true and false prophecy from the backdrop of a particular theological religious scene, my country. The atmosphere in the country is such that many competing voices presently vie for attention from the populace. Who has the truth, or better where is the truth to be located? The discussion however does not search to go into details. It is mainly an attempt to ask the necessary questions and to raise the consciousness from the point of view of biblical

General Introduction

theology. Working on the ground in the future will surely permit entering into the issues raised in their depth.

The research work will end with a General Conclusion where we shall try to recall and recapture the major theses of the different Parts and Chapters, and at the same time dressing out possible overtures to the furthering of the research. The Bibliography, grouped according to the different areas of relevance with regard to the work, but without claiming any exhaustiveness, not only highlights the major instruments of work, texts, commentaries, monographs and articles we could lay hands on or actually cited, but also include few other works that may be of interest in furthering research based on the major orientations traced in the work.

PART ONE

EARLIER AND CURRENT ISSUES IN JEREMIAH RESEARCH:

HERMENEUTICAL QUESTION AT THE BASE

Concept

We judge it pertinent to begin with a preliminary Part, made of two Chapters, which investigates, as the caption shows, the traces of research in the book of Jeremiah and the real nature of this research. These two Chapters are qualified preliminary, in the sense that there would be no necessary logical gap if we began directly by a narrative analysis of the chapters chosen as the subject of this thesis. However, that does not render the Part a mere appendage or prologue. The second Chapter of this Part, which discusses our methodological option, shows that the path toed in the research work is to a great extent new, in the sense that most of the earlier researches in the book of Jeremiah asked questions from a different perspective other than the one proposed in this one. As such, a reference to the past seems necessary in order to justify the departure of the present, and to clearly define the nature of the present. After all, definition is always made clearer by distinction and differentiation. It is therefore simply a question of continuity and specificity at the same time.

After Chapter One, which takes up salient problems about the book of Jeremiah, problems that have formed the major part of scholarly debate – the exercise proposed here is more or less descriptive analysis – we shall have discovered that the many concrete questions could be narrowed down to a methodological one. In fact we maintain that in the last century, a deep concern for the proper reading posture and the correct hermeneutical key has been at the base of manifold hot debates in Jeremiah research. Has our research work found *the* key? Perhaps, it has proposed other keys that open up to many other new possibilities. Plurality and democracy of approaches become the watchword, without at the same time meaning that any reading posture is as good as the other, or that there are no criteria. And what of moving from literary and synchronic reading to a search for relevance and contextualisation? This Part therefore proposes a panorama of opinions and works already done in the research in the book of Jeremiah, while at the same time, setting the tone and adjusting the lens for the subsequent Parts and Chapters of the thesis.

CHAPTER ONE HISTORY OF RESEARCH AND PROBLEMATICS

Introduction

While Mark Biddle and John Hill have in 1996 and 1999 respectively described the text of the book of Jeremiah as “hypertext”¹ and as still having a “capacity to surprise”², A.R. P. Diamond (1999) described Jeremiah research as “an intractable riddle”, and the latter continued: “Jeremiah has proved equally so for the interpretative guild. Armed with or against its Bernhard Duhm, Jeremiah studies has rushed toward the end of the twentieth century into impasse after impasse on almost every major point of the agreed agenda set for reading and resolving the problems of the Jeremiah tradition. The figure of Jeremiah remains troubled and troubling for the professional interpretative community”³.

Attempting a history of the research of the book of the prophet Jeremiah can be done from many points of view, what Halleman-de Winkel called “different accents”⁴. It is true that the most prominent issue has been the question of composition and redaction, other issues have also greatly commanded attention especially with developments and evolutions in exegesis⁵. For example, with the publication of the discoveries of the

¹ M.E. BIDDLE, *Polyphony and Symphony in Prophetic Literature: Rereading Jeremiah 7-20* (SOTI 2), Macon, 1996, p. 115-128.

² J. HILL, *Friend or Foe?* p. 218.

³ A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, p. 15.

⁴ H. LALLEMAN-DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition: An Examination of the Book of Jeremiah in the Light of Israel's prophetic Traditions* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 26), Leuven, 2000, p. 19.

⁵ We maintain that research on Jeremiah has been part and parcel of developments and evolutions in the broad field of Old Testament research and scholarship ever since the publication of W.M.L. DE WETTE, *Dissertation critica-exegetica*, Jena, 1805 and J. WELLHAUSEN, *Geschichte Israels*, 1878 which greatly influenced historical-critical research. For elaborations of the influence of these authors in the development of Old Testament research, see R.E. CLEMENTS, *A Century of Old Testament Study*, London, 1976; J.J. KRAUS, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des alten Testament*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1988; C. HOUTMAN, *Der Pentateuch: Die Geschichte seiner Erforschung neben einer Auswertung* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 9), Kampen, 1994.

Qumran, the issue of the relationship between and the search for the more basic of the two forms of the same book, the Massoretic Text and the Septuagint, has become equally popular. One can therefore speak more of histories of research than the history of research in the book of Jeremiah. A history in question is dependent on the issue at stake. For example in one and the same collection, Applegate and Römer trace two different histories of two different problems in Jeremiah research, but interestingly in each case, the historical actors are mainly the same. While Römer traces the history of the consideration of the book as a product of the deuteronomic school⁶, Applegate in his article traces that of the understanding and the appreciation of the “hopeful prophecy in the otherwise outspokenly judgemental book of Jeremiah”⁷. Surprisingly the two different sketches begin each with the works of Duhm (1901) and continue along historical lines with almost the same actors. For the sake of clarity and precision and at the same time without unnecessary repetitions, we hope here to pursue this historical tracing by first of all highlighting the problematics. Secondly, our goal will be pursued by reviewing the major recent commentaries; each of the three commentaries which, from all intents and bents, seems to have specified concretely and elaborated one of the many possible ways in which the book can be read, and the three collectively, which have in general, also helped to highlight the limits of the past work in this prophetic book. In concrete, we shall mention the pacesetters – those who set the agenda – then discuss the issues they highlighted and how these issues have been handled in the research in the book of Jeremiah, and finally conclude with a review of the opinions of whom I may call the modern broadliners.

⁶ T. RÖMER, *La conversion du prophète Jérémie à la théologie deutéronomiste: Quelques enquêtes sur le problème d'une rédaction deutéronomiste du livre de Jérémie*, in A.H.W. CURTIS & T. RÖMER (eds.), *The Book of Jeremiah and its Reception* (BETL 128), Leuven, 1997, p. 27-50.

⁷ J. APPLGATE, “*Peace, Peace, when there is no Peace*”: *Redactional Integration of Prophecy of Peace into the Judgement of Jeremiah*, in A.H.W. CURTIS & T. RÖMER (eds.), *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 51-90, see p. 52.

1.1 THE SETTING OF THE AGENDA: THE PACESETTERS

1.1.1 *Duhm*

In the last century, the first exegete to undertake a critical reading of the book of Jeremiah was Duhm⁸, often described as a convenient starting point for the history of Jeremiah studies in the twentieth century⁹. He marked a turning point in the history of the research¹⁰. After him was Mowinckel and, as Carroll remarks, “Duhm and Mowinckel have effectively set the agenda for modern Jeremiah studies”¹¹. It is to be noted that since Duhm, nearly all-critical scholars agree that the book of Jeremiah has at least two kinds of literary material, prose and poetry. In his analysis, three major strands account for the poetry and prose sections constituting the book of Jeremiah: the poems of Jeremiah, the book of Baruch containing Jeremiah’s biography, and the supplements added to these two writings by later hands. Of these three sources in the book, he affirmed that only the poetic oracles of chapters 1-25, around 280 verses are authentic to the prophet and their main characteristic was the dirge. The rest of the book was written by Baruch and a succession of editors (*Ergänzer*), who, in the history of the transmission of the book, kept adding to the words of the prophet¹². The language and ideas in this additional parts recall deuteronomistic¹³ parts in the former prophetic books and thus according to Duhm, one may assume that the same hands that worked in the final form of Jeremiah were also responsible for the historical books¹⁴. The writers of these supplements write more of theology than history and the influences of Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, Second Isaiah and

⁸ DUHM, *Das Buch Jeremia* (KHC AT 11), Tübingen, 1901.

⁹ CARROLL, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL), London, 1986, p. 39.

¹⁰ For a brief reference to a more antecedent history of Jeremiah’s research, especially from the point of view of textual comparison, see P.-M. BOGAERT, *Le Livre de Jérémie en perspective: Les deux rédactions antiques selon les travaux en cours*, in *RB* 101 (1994), p. 363-406, especially 365-369.

¹¹ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 40.

¹² DUHM, *Das Buch Jeremia*, p. x.

¹³ Generally, scholars use the term “deuteronomistic” to refer to the theological view that developed during and after the exile and which gave rise to deuteronomistic literature, that is the books from Joshua to II Kings. The term “deuteronomic” refers rather to things pertaining to the book of Deuteronomy.

¹⁴ DUHM, *Das Buch Jeremia*, p. xvi.

Third Isaiah may be discerned in their work¹⁵. Duhm's work can be described as pace setting since "his three source hypothesis has continued to hold scholarship in thrall"¹⁶ and since it has left a permanent imprint on Jeremiah research so far. Many authors after Duhm are either elaborators¹⁷ of his opinion or opponents¹⁸.

1.1.2 Mowinckel

Mowinckel¹⁹ took up this intuition (of Duhm) and distinguished five sources (A to E) in the book of Jeremiah: A is the authentic oracles in poetic form found in the first part of the book (chapters 1-25), composed by a redactor in Egypt; B is the biographic materials in prose (26-51), the work probably of the secretary between 580-480; C is the deuteronomistic discourses in prose found in 1-45 (mainly Jer. 7; 11; 18; 21; 24; 25; 32; 34; 35; 44), composed around 400 in Babylon or eventually in Palestine; D constitutes the book of consolation or the oracles of salvation (30-31), which he never specified their origin or date, while E is the Oracles against the Nations (46-51). This hypothesis by Mowinckel has become so popular in the domain of exegesis in the book of Jeremiah that today it is not uncommon to see such or such verse attributed to Mowinckel B or Mowinckel C or D. And such attribution eventually became the diverging point of many exegetes and commentaries on the book of Jeremiah especially with regard to the authorship of the prose discourses, that is, Mowinckel C. Mowinckel denied Jeremiah the authorship of the prose discourses of the source C and qualified them as deuteronomistic.

¹⁵ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 39.

¹⁶ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *The 'Baruch Connection': Reflections on Jeremiah 43.1-7*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 367-386, see p. 367, published previously as *The Baruch Connection*, in *JBL* 113 (1994), p. 405-420.

¹⁷ Mowinckel, Hyatt, Rudolph, Nicholson and especially Carroll who in 1990 writes: "This book is a supplement of other books (a kind of *Ergänzungstext*) and the social dynamics of its production will have to be found in terms other than historical reportage of the sixth century. That is how I read the text," see R.P. CARROLL, *Whose Prophet? Whose History? Whose Social Reality? Troubling the Interpretative Community Again: Notes Towards a Response to T.W. Overholt's Critique*, in *JSOT* 48 (1990), p. 33-49, see p. 40.

¹⁸ Bright, Weippert, Holladay, etc.

¹⁹ S. MOWINCKEL, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia*, Kristiania, 1914.

Examples of commentaries that build on and refine the work of Duhm and Mowinckel are those of Rudolph²⁰, Thompson²¹, and even Carroll. Later scholars debated issues about the book within this framework²², though they might clearly or slightly disagree with Mowinckel's or Duhm's position. Rietzschel for example identified the various blocks of tradition that make up the present form of the Massoretic text of Jeremiah, but rejected the view that prose and poetic material existed in mutual isolation, or that prose and poetic material constitute separate sources²³. Even the works of Holladay and Carroll whose views stand at extreme (opposite) poles as regards certain issues in Jeremiah scholarship are positively or negatively influenced by the opinion of Duhm and Mowinckel. For example Holladay rejects Mowinckel's source theory because the differences between poetry and prose do not point for him to different sources²⁴. But at the same time, he addresses issues raised by Mowinckel's work bordering especially on the extent and provenance of source C, the extent of source B and its authorship by Baruch, the contribution of chapter 36 to an understanding of the book's origins and growth²⁵.

From 1941, Mowinckel's hypothesis began meeting serious opposition. W.O.E Oesterley and T.H. Robinson affirmed that what Mowinckel considered deuteronomist was simply the current form of Semitic rhetorical prose in the last part of the seventh century and the early part of the sixth century and nothing prevents Jeremiah from using it²⁶. This stand

²⁰ RUDOLPH, *Jeremia* (HAT 1, 12), Tübingen, 1947, reprinted, 1968, see especially, p. xiv-xxii.

²¹ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT), Grand Rapids, 1980, see especially, p. 33-56.

²² J. HILL, *Friend or Foe?* p. 3.

²³ C. RIETZSCHEL, *Das Problem der Urrolle: Ein Beitrag zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Jeremiabuches*, Gütersloh, 1966, p. 23.

²⁴ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26-52* (Hermeneia), Philadelphia, 1989, p. 15.

²⁵ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 12.

²⁶ W.O.E. OESTERLEY & T.H. ROBINSON, *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament*, London, 1941, p. 298, cited by J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut dans la prédication prophétique de Jérémie* (BZAW 269), Berlin, 1999, p. 45.

was later to be taken up and elaborated by Holladay in his writings on Jeremiah and extensively by Weippert²⁷.

1.2 THE MAJOR DEBATES: *STATUS QUESTIONIS*

“If any agreement exists among commentators on the book of Jeremiah in the form we have it today”, writes Ferry, “it concerns the difficulty of tracing the history of the formation of the book and that of articulating the process of its organisation”²⁸, the major preoccupations of Duhm and Mowinckel. The reader is immediately surprised at seeing how many diverse elements follow in succession without apparent order: some in prose, others in poetry, some oracles are very brief while others really developed, some narratives appear in the first person while others in the third person. The chronological orders do not give direct indices: for example chapters 7 and 26 report the same event, chapter 35 narrates something of the time of Jehoiakim immediately after chapter 34 has narrated an episode which happened about ten years later, etc. There is also the existence of the same book in two different editions with different arrangements, even with content differences, and lastly, there is the difficulty entailed in the exact interpretation of the contents. We take up some of these particular issues.

1.2.1 Chronology

1.2.1.1 *The Issue and Significance of the Debate*

The book of Jeremiah does not lack chronological hints. In fact, more than every other prophetic book, the book of Jeremiah offers much insight into the portrait of the prophet and the progressive development of the prophet’s ministry. The first verses of the book give a chronological hint: “The word of YHWH was addressed to him in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign; then in the days of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the deportation of Jerusalem which occurred in the fifth

²⁷ See esp. H. WEIPPERT, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches* (BZAW 132), Berlin, 1973.

²⁸ J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut*, p. 41 (translation mine).

month” (Jer. 1:2-3). Outside this chronological indication, the book of Jeremiah makes mention again of king Josiah from the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah:

3:6 “In the days of King Josiah, YHWH said to me....”

25:3 “For twenty three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah, until today, the word of YHWH has been addressed to me and I have persistently spoken to you but you have not listened.”

36:2 “Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you about Jerusalem and Judah and all the nations from the day I first spoke to you, in the time of Josiah, until today.”

Historical critical scholars have not considered this character of the book to give historical hints neutrally. From the reconstitution of the prophet’s chronology, far-reaching implications are drawn which touch deeply on the question of provenance, on the composition of the book and on the attribution (or denial of this) of some part of the book to the prophet himself. In fact, the differences among commentators and the consequences of the so called lower or higher chronology depend on commentators’ interpretation of the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign.

1.2.1.2 The Lower Chronology

Hyatt²⁹ and (especially) Holladay³⁰ have put up series of arguments in support of a lower chronology. “The thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah” (1:2) is thus read from the

²⁹ HYATT, *The Book of Jeremiah* (IB V), New York, 1956, p. 775-1142, see p. 779; ID., *The Beginning of Jeremiah’s Prophecy*, in *ZAW* 78 (1966), p. 204-214.

³⁰ Holladay has developed his opinion on the chronology of Jeremiah in many articles and conferences especially *The Background of Jeremiah’s Self-Understanding: Moses, Samuel and Psalm 22*, in *JBL* 83 (1964), p. 153-164; *Jeremiah and Moses: Further Observations*, in *JBL* 85 (1966), p. 17-27; *A Fresh Look at “Source B” and “Source C” in Jeremiah*, in *VT* 25 (1975), p. 409-410; *The Identification of the Two Scrolls of Jeremiah*, in *VT* 30 (1980), p. 452-467; *The Years of Jeremiah’s Preaching*, in *Interpretation* 37 (1983), p. 146-159; *A Proposal for Reflections in the Book of Jeremiah of the Seven-Year Recitation of the Law in Deuteronomy (Deut 31, 10-13)*, in N. LOHFINK (ed.), *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft* (BETL 68), Leuven, 1985, p. 326-328; *A Coherent Chronology of Jeremiah’s Early Career*,

background of Jer. 1:5, which is interpreted literally: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I have appointed you as prophet to the nations”. Holladay concludes: “I take it that the thirteenth year of Josiah is the date of the prophet’s birth, 627, not the date of the beginning of his career”³¹. This lower chronology according to Holladay helps to understand many other issues in the prophetic book and by adopting it, several nagging problems in the book are solved³²: thus the curious lack of any clear reference in Jeremiah’s oracle to the reform of Josiah (622) is explained³³ and the order to remain unmarried given to Jeremiah by YHWH becomes understandable since the order cannot be meaningful, given the fact that if Jeremiah accepted the prophetic ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah, then he must have been born around 645 and so the interdiction to marriage should have been given when he was well into his forties; a reasoning not easily tenable given the matrimonial culture of the society at that time. According to this reasoning, a lower chronology along this pattern is sketched.

627/6	birth of Jeremiah
609	acceptance of his vocation
609/8	discourse on the temple
605	the first scroll.

1.2.1.3 The Higher Chronology

Holladay himself however admits that his argument has not won support by majority of scholars³⁴. Many other commentators³⁵ adopt the affirmations of the biblical text in Jer. 1:2 and adopt a higher chronology. According to this higher chronology, the thirteenth year of Josiah is understood as the year of the vocation of Jeremiah and not his birth. This

in P.-M. BOGAERT (ed.), *Le livre de Jérémie: Le prophète et son milieu, les oracles et leur transmission* (BETL 54), 2nd Edition, Leuven, 1997, p. 58-73.

³¹ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah* (Hermeneia), Philadelphia, 1986, p. 1.

³² W. L. HOLLADAY, *A Coherent Chronology*, p. 58.

³³ W. L. HOLLADAY, *A Coherent Chronology*, p. 70.

³⁴ W.L. HOLLADAY, *A Coherent Chronology*, p. 58.

³⁵ Volz, Rudolph, Bright, Cazelles, Thompson, Briend.

position does not adopt the argument of the interdiction to marry. There is no strong argument to show that the order to remain unmarried in Jer. 16 had not been given earlier. Then also, going by the lower chronology, the first public act of Jeremiah would be actually the discourse of the temple reported in chapters 7 and 26. J. Ferry points out the problem of the possibility of Jeremiah, at the age of around 18, having to make a discourse of such magnitude and authority like the temple sermon³⁶. A higher chronology more widely supported is therefore charted:

Between 650 and 645 birth of Jeremiah

627/6	the thirteenth year of Josiah, vocation of Jeremiah
609	discourse on the temple
605	the first scroll.

The problem of chronology, that is the birth of Jeremiah and the year of acceptance of his ministry, has no significance in itself, but is tied inevitably to the problem of the formation of the book (and the attribution of some parts of the book to the prophet himself), which is one of the major research questions hotly debated in Jeremiah research. Holladay has shown how he sees the question of the formation of the book directly related to the problem of the historical Jeremiah. Jer. 36:1 connects the years of the reign of Josiah and the order of YHWH to the prophet to dictate the oracles to his disciple Baruch, so that the latter may put it to writing. The following year, Baruch read the words in the temple. In Holladay's opinion, these various historical indices revealing the chronology of the prophet show also the course in which the formation of the book took, and especially the authenticity of the attribution of the prose discourses to the prophet himself. The base chronology of Holladay which hinges on a reading of the Deuteronomy every seven years implies therefore that Jeremiah must have had occasion

³⁶ J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut*: "Enfin, toujours dans l'hypothèse de la chronologie 'basse', le premier acte public de Jérémie serait en fait le 'discours du temple' rapporté aux ch. 7 and 26. N'arrive-t-il pas trop tôt? Comment Jérémie avec la timidité de ses 18 ans, aurait-il pu proférer un discours d'une telle autorité et aux conséquences si graves?" (p. 39).

to pronounce words and sermons in these occasions³⁷ and therefore it is not useful explaining the origin of these sermons by recourse to any other editor or tradition. Carroll, for whom the prophet is a figure created (invented) by the tradition, sees the question of the historical Jeremiah as a false proposition, and by implication, the question of the composition of the book should be pursued elsewhere; precisely in its redactional reconstruction.

1.2.2 Textual Differences between the Massoretic Text and the Septuagint

The disparity between the Massoretic Text (hereafter MT) and the Septuagint (hereafter LXX) of the Jeremiah text is well known and has been an old question³⁸, and the question of the relationship between the two texts has been discussed for a century and a half. A

³⁷ Holladay is very passionate with his positivistic stand on the historicity of the prophet as is shown in his many writings on the subject. Cf. again especially W.L. HOLLADAY, *A Coherent Chronology of Jeremiah's Early Career; The Years of Jeremiah's Preaching*.

³⁸ P.-M. BOGAERT, *Le livre de Jérémie en perspective*, shows how this discussion has occupied exegetes in the dim past: he begins with Origen and Saint Jerome who differently reacted to the substantial differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew text. In the *La lettre à Africanus*, around 250, in § 7, Origen writes: "J'ai observé aussi beaucoup d'exemples chez Jérémie, où j'ai même trouvé de grands changements et déplacements du texte des prophéties", ORIGEN, *Philocalie*, I-20: *Sur les Ecritures et La lettre à Africanus sur l'histoire de Suzanne*. Introduction, texte, traduction et notes par Nicholas de Lange (Sources Chrétiennes 302), Paris, 1983, p. 531. The main point of the letter is of course the difference between the Septuagint and the Hebrew Bible but Origen tackles the question in defence of the Christian Bible of the Septuagint. Jerome sees the issue differently and in the prologue of his translation of Jeremiah (Hebrew) around 390-392 writes: "En outre, nous avons rectifié selon l'autorité de l'original l'ordre des visions complètement bouleversé chez les Grecs et les Latins. Quant au livre de Baruch, son scribe, qui ne se lit ni ne se conserve chez les Hébreux, nous l'avons omis". (*"Praeterea ordinem uisionum, qui apud Graecos et Latinos omnino confuses est, ad pristinam fidem correximus. Librum autem Baruch, notarii eius, qui apud Hebraeos nec legitur nec habetur, praetermisimus..."*), *Biblia Sacra*, ed. R. Weber, Stuttgart, 1969, p. 1166). Bogaert refers then to: F. C. MOVERS, *De utriusque recensione vaticiniorum Ieremiae, Graecae Alexandrinae et Hebraicae Masorethicae indole et origine commentatio critica*, Hambourg, 1837, [4]-54; A.W. STREANE, *The Double Text of Jeremiah (Massoretic and Alexandrian)*, compared together with an appendix on the Old Latin evidence, Cambridge, 1896, vii-379; H. St. J. THACKERAY, *The Translators of Jeremiah*, in *JTS* 4 (1902-1903), p. 245-266 (see p. 367).

more detailed summary of the discussion may be found in the work of Janzen³⁹. It suffices to state the problem roughly in the words of Holladay thus: "In the main, is the LXX a shortened form of the MT, or is the MT an expanded form of the LXX? Or is the question unanswerable? Is the ideal of a 'more original' text form unattainable?"⁴⁰

1.2.2.1 The Major Differences

Holladay⁴¹ likens the book of Jeremiah to the books of Samuel in the disparity between their respective MT and LXX. But whereas in Samuel, MT is often shorter and defective in comparison with LXX, in the book of Jeremiah the reverse is the case⁴². Friedrich Giesebrecht estimated that about twenty-seven hundred words of MT are lacking in LXX, while LXX has about one hundred words lacking in MT, the result being that LXX is about one eighth shorter than MT⁴³. P.-M. Bogaert⁴⁴ gives the major differences in detail: 1) "The Greek text is habitually shorter, about one-eighth, than the MT". 2) "The place of the oracles against the nations is at the middle of the book in the LXX (after 25:13), towards the end of the book in the received Hebrew text (MT 46-51)". 3) "The order of the oracles against the nations differs. This last difference entails a difficulty in the numeration of the verses, and we note that the critical edition of J. Ziegler and that of A. Rahlfs (manual) do not follow the same pattern"⁴⁵. But the major problematic is the various attempts to explain these discrepancies and the status accorded to each of the texts by different exegetes.

³⁹ J. G. JANZEN, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (HSM 6), Cambridge, 1973, p. 2-7.

⁴⁰ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 3.

⁴¹ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 2-3.

⁴² HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 2-3.

⁴³ Quoted in HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ P.-M. BOGAERT, *Le livre de Jérémie en perspective*, p. 366. See also P.-M. BOGAERT, *Urtext, texte court et relecture: Jérémie xxxiii 14-26 TM et ses préparations*, in J.A. EMERTON (ed.), *Congress Volume Leuven 1989* (VTS 43), Leiden, 1991, p. 236-247.

⁴⁵ Translation mine. For a table of minuteuse comparison of these differences, see P.-M. BOGAERT, *Le livre de Jérémie en perspective*, p. 366.

1.2.2.2 Proposed Solutions

Schematically four⁴⁶ solutions are possible to explain these differences.

- a) A traditional opinion since Jerome supposes that the LXX abridges the MT and therefore concludes that they have the same *Vorlage*.
- b) J.G. Eichhorn was the first to oppose this view. His thesis is that the two texts came from two editions of the book produced by Jeremiah himself⁴⁷. Eichhorn thus explained the divergence not as a textual, but as an editorial phenomenon.
- c) Movers had already in 1837⁴⁸, introduced the debate over the worth of the Septuagint and he holds that the LXX represents an older text than MT and is to be preferred. The additional materials in the latter are therefore secondary glosses, pluses that are to be taken as expansions from familiar usage or scribal tendency to embellish, clarify, and otherwise elaborate the text. He however admitted that there are a number of instances of omissions in the LXX, which he also attributed to chance scribal lapse. Many

⁴⁶ J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut*, p. 51.

⁴⁷ "According to this hypothesis, a first edition was composed in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, augmented in Egypt with subsequent oracles, and in this form was sent to Babylon for the use of the exiles there. An identical copy was kept in Egypt, not in one continuous document, but in a series of smaller booklets. From this copy, Jeremiah prepared a second edition whose various additions were typical of the elaborations, retouching and up-datings. This revised edition was sent into Palestine where it entered the Hebrew canon and became the prototype for the received text. Meanwhile, the copy of the first edition which remained in Egypt, was transmitted in its unrevised form (though in somewhat different order because of reshuffling of the small booklets in which it was contained) and eventually was translated into Greek" cf. J.G. JANZEN, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Movers' position in his *De utriusque recensionis Vaticinorum Jeremiae*, is given by J.G. JANZEN, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*: "Movers holds that G represents an older text than M and is to be preferred. This is seen first of all, he argued, from an examination of Jer. 52 together with the parallel text in 2 Kings 25. In almost a score of instances, Jeremiah G and 2 Kings 25 agree against Jeremiah M. The additional materials in the latter are secondary glosses, drawn from similar usage. Similarly, elsewhere in Jeremiah M has a great number of plusses which are to be taken as expansions from usage elsewhere. Such additions occur also in G but to a lesser extent. As for the absence of second occurrences of doublets, examination reveals that they are secondary on internal grounds [...] the doublets common to M and G probably are also due to secondary development, which in this case occurred before the rise of the Alexandrian recension", p. 3.

exegetes today⁴⁹ revive this view and argue for the anteriority of the LXX or at least the dependence of the LXX on an ancient Hebrew Vorlage, and which in turn served the base for the present MT.

- d) Modern commentators⁵⁰ adopt a somewhat middle position. Their conclusions avoid embracing generalisations: each difference should be examined case by case and preference is given sometimes to MT and sometimes to LXX. For some, the discrepancy reveals a more complicated problem than that of anteriority or dependence. A commentator like Carroll does not search for the more original text. He sees in the disparity between the two texts more of evidences about the complicated origin of the book. The differences go a long way according to him to reveal and to confirm the thesis of the presence of different underlying ideologies behind the texts and their composition.

1.2.2.3 In the Light of the Discovery of the Qumran Texts

There has become in the recent time a breakthrough with the discovery of the Qumran (4QJer[a] and 4QJer[b]). This discovery has led to the affirmation that the two editions of the text of Jeremiah are both ancient since they are both attested in the fragments of the manuscripts. Emmanuel Tov concludes that one can discern two different types of the Hebrew text, a longer one of the MT and a shorter one of the LXX. The two texts are closely related, the longer being an amplification of the shorter text; the two which he also described as witnesses to two redactional traditions distinct as well as related⁵¹. A stronger and wider consensus is growing, in the recent years, in favour of the originality of the LXX of the book of Jeremiah and especially with regard to the Oracles against the Nations. Many works on this have seen the light of the day⁵², and many recent scholars

⁴⁹ Bogaert, Tov, Janzen, Schenker, Goldman.

⁵⁰ Holladay, Thompson, Bright, Rudolph, Volz, etc.

⁵¹ E. TOV, *L'incidence de la critique textuelle sur la critique littéraire dans le livre de Jérémie*, in *RB* 79 (1972), p. 189-199, see p. 191.

⁵² E. TOV, *The Septuagint Translation of Jeremiah and Baruch: A Discussion of an Early Revision of the LXX of Jeremiah 29-52 and Baruch 1:1-3:8*, Missoula, 1976; ID., *Exegetical Notes on the Hebrew Vorlage of the LXX of Jeremiah 27 (=34)*, in *ZAW* 91 (1979), p. 73-94; P.-M. BOGAERT, *Les mécanismes*

who have occupied themselves with the problem settle more often with the anteriority of the edition attested by the LXX over that attested by the MT⁵³. Some recent commentaries have even been criticised for their partial attention to the MT, as was the case before. Reviewing the twenty-sixth volume of the Word Biblical Commentary⁵⁴, Francolino Gonçalves, using the exegesis of Jer. 7:1-15 in the said commentary as a case in point, criticised the exclusivity accorded to the MT⁵⁵. He notes that a new appreciation is now accorded to the LXX in the last quarter of the last century. Unlike before when these differences are taken for simple textual variants, the LXX serving as much as possible for “ameliorating” the MT, the great majority of critiques today independently recognise that the disparities between the LXX and the MT of Jeremiah do not concern textual difference in the classic sense of the discipline. This is also the opinion of P.-M. Bogaert⁵⁶. He notes that the exercise of comparison between the *long text* and the *short text*⁵⁷ is not yet a finished project, and calls this exercise “exégèse différentielle”⁵⁸. His

réductionnels en Jer. 10:1-16 (LXX et TM) et la signification des suppléments, in P.-M. BOGAERT (ed.), *Le livre de Jérémie*, p. 222-238.

⁵³ Writes Bogaert: “Diverses études, anciennes et récentes ont occasionnellement montré que certaines des différences entre ces deux rédactions étaient liées entre elles. Les chercheurs qui se sont attachés de près au problème concluent le plus souvent à l’antériorité de la forme attestée par la Septante sur celle attestée par le texte massorétique. Mais il faut le dire, les grands commentaires sont restés en dehors de ces perspectives. S’ils reconnaissent la valeur de la Septante, c’est occasionnellement et non en tant qu’elle est une forme cohérente du livre de Jérémie”, P.-M. BOGAERT, *De Baruch à Jérémie: Les deux rédactions conservées du livre de Jérémie* in P.-M. BOGAERT (ed.), *Le livre de Jérémie*, p. 168-173, see p. 168. In this article he refers to the LXX as *réduction A* while the MT becomes *réduction B*.

⁵⁴ P. C. CRAIGIE, H. KELLY, J. F. DRINKARD, Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25* (WBC 26), Dallas, 1991.

⁵⁵ Writes F. Gonçalves: “Le commentaire est bon. [But] Ses défauts découlent, à mon avis, de l’un ou l’autre des présupposés ou de l’une ou l’autre des options qui le commandent. Les auteurs eux-mêmes reconnaissent qu’ils n’en sont pas tous prouvés, loin de là. Etant donnée (*sic*) la visée historique du commentaire, l’exclusivité accordée au TM est l’une de ses plus grandes limites, et une source certaine de défauts”, review in *RB* 107 (2000), p. 107.

⁵⁶ P.-M. BOGAERT, *Les mécanismes rédactionnels en Jer. 10:1-16*: “Il importe avant tout de rappeler d’abord que les différences entre la Septante et le texte hébreu massorétique ne relèvent pas tant de la critique textuelle que de la critique littéraire et de l’histoire des rédactions” (p. 222).

⁵⁷ Appellations by Bogaert for the MT and the LXX respectively.

⁵⁸ P.-M. BOGAERT, *Le livre de Jérémie en perspective*, p. 403.

hypothesis, which he shares with E. Tov, J.G. Janzen, A. Schenker and Y. Goldman is that the Hebrew model of the “*texte court*”, the LXX, goes back to an original Hebrew form of the book of Jeremiah. Writes Bogaert :

“si on voulait poser la question en termes de plaidoirie, le poids de la preuve ne paraît nullement se trouver du côté de la thèse de l’antériorité du texte court; il serait bien plutôt du côté de la thèse de l’antériorité du texte long”⁵⁹.

The hypothesis is, in other words, the anteriority of a Hebrew *Vorlage* from which the LXX was translated, which in turn, later served as the base for the translation of the MT. He maintains nevertheless that each text’s integrity should be appreciated and treated as such.

However it must be noted that there are also some modern authors who are staunch defenders of the anteriority of the MT. The protagonist in the recent time is Georg Fischer who has written severally in defence of the thesis⁶⁰, also using the same Oracles against the Nations as specimen.

“Les différences entre le texte hébreu (TM) et grec (G) de Jérémie apparaissent surtout en Jr 25 et dans les oracles contre les nations que l’un et l’autre place à des endroits différents. Ces dernières années, J.G. Janzen et P.-M. Bogaert ont soutenu la priorité de G (ou de sa *Vorlage* hébraïque) et leur thèse est devenue *opinio communis*. Cependant, quelques indices parlent au contraire en faveur de la priorité du texte hébreu qui est à l’origine du TM. Pour le prouver, cet article analyse la transition de Jr 25,12-15, le récit de la coupe (TM: 25,15-38; G: 32,15-38) et la façon d’introduire ou conclure les oracles contre les nations (TM: 46-51; G: 25-31). En fait, il semble que les traducteurs grecs aient simplifié et clarifié un texte hébreu devenu complexe en raison d’un long processus rédactionnel”⁶¹.

⁵⁹ P.-M. BOGAERT, *Le livre de Jérémie en perspective*, p. 401.

⁶⁰ G. FISCHER, *Jer 25 und die Fremdvölkersprüche: Unterschiede zwischen hebräischem und griechischem Text*, in *Biblica* 72/4 (1991), p. 474-499; *Zum Text des Jeremiabuches*, in *Biblica* 78/3 (1997), p. 305-328; *Les deux faces de Jérémie 52*, in *ETR* 74/4 (1999), p. 481-489.

⁶¹ Author’s (Fischer) abstract of G. FISCHER, *Jer 25 und die Fremdvölkersprüche*, p. 499.

Since the work of comparison according to Bogaert is not yet ended, interpretations and exclusive conclusions should remain sober. However, these interpretations are still necessary to stimulate observation and the search for coherence. We shall, in the translations and in the analysis of the relevant chapters in the present work follow the MT, as already muted in the General Introduction, for reasons of choice and more of the availability of major commentaries, which are based on it, than a judgement of text anteriority or even originality. On the latter issue, my first submission is the recognition of the fundamental fact of their canonical status, their differences notwithstanding. In the article of Bogaert largely cited in this connection: *Le livre de Jérémie en perspective*, he concludes with a sub-heading titled: “Quelle attitude prendre en théorie et en pratique?” His last advice reads:

“Nous plaignons-nous d’avoir quatre Evangiles? Dans le cas de Jérémie, l’identité mot pour mot de très longs passages pourrait donner le change, mais nous avons vraiment deux livres de Jérémie, dont les projets distincts se manifestent dans l’organisation générale et dans les différences quantitatives. Ne le regrettons pas. La nature nous a donné deux yeux pour distinguer le relief”⁶².

If the four gospels remain our heritage, with their similarities and differences, the textual differences in Jeremiah should not be extraordinary. The scope of our work and the bent permit only a notice of the fact of their similarities and differences and the much ink that has been spilt on the issue.

1.2.3 *The Question of Deuteronomistic Redaction*

Basing on the thesis of Martin Noth that the corpus Deuteronomy – II Kings is not the final outcome of a process of literary redaction and expansion of an original book or a series of books, but represents the attempt of an author (or authors) to write the history of Israel from Moses to the exile and to present a theological interpretation of that history⁶³,

⁶² P.-M. BOGAERT, *Le livre de Jérémie en perspective*, p. 405-406.

⁶³ M. NOTH, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* I, Halle, 1943. According to Noth, the central purpose of the deuteronomistic historian or tradition was to provide an explanation why YHWH had rejected Israel in the tragic events of 721 BC and 586 BC. Together with the promulgation of the Law by Moses had come

Nicholson believes that this deuteronomistic historian wrote in the shadow of 721 and 586 BC and was concerned mainly with providing an explanation of why YHWH had rejected his people, first the Northern kingdom and finally Judah, in these catastrophes. In writing his history, this author or the circle of tradition (traditionists) to which he belongs, according to Noth, had at his/its disposal a great deal of material deriving from very varied sources and periods in Israel's history, all of which he knit together by reworking them into a structural unity, armed with a literary framework, which together with frequent insertions and comments set forth his own theological interpretation and understanding of the events he records⁶⁴. For clarity of vocabulary, we refer to and adopt Lohfink's⁶⁵ definitions of the adjectives deuteronomic (in French *deutéronomique*, relating to Deuteronomy) and deuteronomistic (in French *deutéronomiste*, relating to deuteronomistic history: Joshua to II Kings)⁶⁶. Römer is of the opinion that the thesis of

the stern warning of the curse which would befall Israel if she failed to obey YHWH's will as set forth in this Law. The threat of this curse is already expressed at the earliest time by Moses (e.g. Deut. 4:25-27) and repeated by Joshua after the conquest has been completed (Jos. 23:16), whilst throughout Israel's history, according to the deuteronomist, YHWH warned Israel, 'by every prophet and seer' (II Kings 7:13), constantly calling her to obedience, but to no avail (cf. Jer. 7:13; I Kings 9:6ff.; II Kings 7:23; 21:14ff.). Now in the period in which the deuteronomistic history made its appearance, the threat, which had come with the giving of the Law and in the preaching of the prophets had been violently realised and Israel, who had rejected YHWH's Law and ignored the warnings of 'his servants the prophets', had fallen under the curse of the Law. What had occurred in the events of 721 BC and 586 BC was thus described as the judgement of a righteous God upon a wayward and disobedient people.

⁶⁴ E.W. NICHOLSON, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah*, Oxford, 1970, p. 72.

⁶⁵ N. LOHFINK, *Les traditions du Pentateuque autour de l'exil* (CE 97), Paris, 1996, p. 42.

⁶⁶ N. LOHFINK, *Les traditions du Pentateuque*: "Je commence avec des réflexions sur l'étiquette 'deutéronomiste' que nous collons sur des textes de plus en plus nombreux. Wellhausen a réfléchi sur la terminologie qui s'imposera plus tard, lorsqu'il a défini le début du livre de Josué dans sa composition de l'Hexateuque. Sa formulation pourrait servir de point de départ: 'Jos. 1 est purement deutéronomiste c'est-à-dire composé par l'écrivain qui a serti la Loi deutéronomique. Cet écrivain peut être désigné comme le deutéronomiste, pour le distinguer de l'auteur du Deutéronome proprement dit'. On distingue donc ici entre 'deutéronomique, (relatif au Deutéronome) et 'deutéronomiste' (relatif à l'Histoire deutéronomiste: Jos à 2 Rois). Plus tard on acceptera une dépendance du deutéronomiste par rapport au deutéronomique: la Loi deutéronomique (Dt 12-26) lui est supposée antérieure. Peuvent donc être désignés comme

deuteronomistic redaction of the Pentateuch as well as of the historical books entered into scientific discussion following the works of de Wette⁶⁷ and Ewald⁶⁸. This phenomenon continued its fast propagation but it was in the book of Jeremiah that exegetes noted first the presence of a very strong resemblance both in style and in theme with Deuteronomy and/or with deuteronomic texts⁶⁹, and such a notice further constituted and equally constitutes an issue of great divide.

1.2.3.1 The Book of Jeremiah and Deuteronomy

Reading the book of Jeremiah, one notices a very close border with Deuteronomy-II Kings, both in general outlook and in specific accents. In broader terms, there is, generally, a pro-Sinaitic slant in the book of Jeremiah. Some authors have identified Jeremiah as a new Moses, the Lawgiver or a teacher of the Law⁷⁰. The books of Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, for example, share the same social views, demanding from each Israelite a brotherly treatment of his neighbour (cf. Deut. 5:20; Jer. 9:4-9), from judges to judge justly (cf. Deut. 16:18-20; Jer. 7:5-6, 9; 8:8) from kings and from all not to pour away innocent blood (cf. Deut. 19:10; 21:8; Jer. 2:34; 7:6; 22:3). In specific terms, there

deutéronomistes des textes qui, du point de vue de la langue ou du contenu, ont des accointances avec le Deutéronome – voire avec seulement la Loi de Dt 12-26 et qui en sont dérivés” (p. 42).

⁶⁷ For the biography of W.M.L. de Wette (1780-1849), cf. especially J.W. ROGERSON, *W.M.L. de Wette, Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism: An Intellectual Biography* (JSOTS 126), Sheffield, 1992.

⁶⁸ Cf. T. RÖMER, *La conversion du prophète Jérémie à la théologie deutéronomiste*, p. 28.

⁶⁹ T. RÖMER & A. DE PURY, *L'historiographie deutéronomiste (HD): Histoire de la recherche et enjeux du débat*, in A. DE PURY, T. RÖMER & J.-D. MACCHI (eds.), *Israël construit son histoire - L'historiographie deutéronomiste à la lumière des recherches récentes* (Le monde de la Bible 34), Genève, 1996, p. 9-120, see p. 25.

⁷⁰ For articles that attempt such a comparison, see for example W.L. HOLLADAY, *The Background of Jeremiah's Self-understanding: Moses, Samuel, and Psalm 22*, in *JBL* 83 (1964), p. 153-164; *Jeremiah and Moses: Further Observations*, in *JBL* 85 (1966), p. 17-27; E.K. HOLT, *The Chicken and the Egg – Or: Was Jeremiah a Member of the Deuteronomist Party*, in *JSOT* 44 (1989), p. 109-122; C. SEITZ, *The Prophet Moses and the Canonical Shape of Jeremiah*, in *ZAW* 101 (1989), p. 3-27; *Moses als Prophet: Redaktionsthemen und Gesamtstruktur des Jeremiasbuches*, in *BZ* 34 (1990), p. 234-245.

are phraseological parallels and common diction⁷¹, and most often, like Deuteronomy, the book of Jeremiah has covenantal overtones. Because of similarities of the like nature, majority of authors concludes that the editor of Jeremiah has largely used Deuteronomy and that the second edition of Deuteronomy often had recourse to the images and thought of the prophet Jeremiah⁷². But the question still remains as to whether these similarities necessarily imply literary dependence.

1.2.3.2 Various Responses

The first major hint about deuteronomism was by Bernard Duhm (1847-1928) who, in his commentary⁷³, exposed the thesis of a deuteronomistic redaction of the book, leaving to Jeremiah only some 60 brief poems. With Mowinckel⁷⁴, inspired by the documentary hypothesis of Wellhausen and his school that triumphed in the researches on the Pentateuch, came an elaboration of a source theory for the book of Jeremiah, as we have already made clear. It is interesting that Mowinckel's source "C" is the most argued among exegetes: it brings the whole question of the participation of Jeremiah in the reform of Josiah, and from the literary point of view poses the question: could Jeremiah write in prose? The question is also otherwise put: is the "deuteronomism" of the discourses that of the prophet or of the redactor⁷⁵? While some deny the Jeremian authenticity of the materials and qualify them as purely deuteronomistic⁷⁶, others⁷⁷ affirm contrarily that Jeremiah is their true author.

⁷¹ Already in 1914, an extensive list of these parallels has been published in G. HÖLSCHER, *Die Profeten: Untersuchungen zur Religionsgeschichte Israels*, Leipzig, p. 382. See also R. DAVIDSON, *Orthodoxy and the Prophetic Word: A Study in the Relationship Between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy*, in *VT* 14 (1964), p. 407-416; M. FISHBANE, *Torah and Tradition*, in D.A. KNIGHT (ed.), *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, Philadelphia, 1977, p. 284-286.

⁷² Cf. for example, H. CAZELLES, *Jérémie et le Deutéronome*, in *RSR* 38 (1951), p. 5-36, see p. 36.

⁷³ DUHM, *Das Buch Jeremia*.

⁷⁴ S. MOWINCKEL, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia*.

⁷⁵ P.-M. BOGAERT, *La tradition des oracles et du livre de Jérémie, des origines au moyen âge: Essai de synthèse*, in *RTL* 8 (1977), p. 305-328, see p. 306.

⁷⁶ Hyatt, Nicholson, Thiel.

⁷⁷ Holladay, Weippert.

Mowinckel's model was modified with time. It was noticed actually that the deuteronomistic style is not limited to the prose discourses but is also present in the interior of the oracles, for example, Jer. 23:1ff and in the narrative sections for example, Jer. 36⁷⁸. Bright notes: "When B opens his mouth, he talks like C"⁷⁹.

A further step was yet to be noticed: "C" is transformed into a redaction with the works of Hyatt and Rudolph. Hyatt⁸⁰ considers that the deuteronomistic editors wanted to make Jeremiah a party to the reform of Josiah. In an article in 1951⁸¹, he maintains that "the school of writers we call the Deuteronomists" is at the same time responsible for the edition of the deuteronomistic historiography and that of Jer. 1-45. Rudolph on his part borrowed Mowinckel's model and terminology but in a more conservative way⁸². According to him, Baruch wrote "B", and "C" is based often on the authentic words of Jeremiah. Jer. 30-31 does not belong to an independent source but is part of "A" as equally a certain number of Oracles against the Nations is. About "C", he envisaged the possibility that it could act as the principal redaction⁸³. Subsequently the idea of one or many deuteronomistic redactions of Jeremiah became part of research. In the English

⁷⁸ T. RÖMER, *La conversion du prophète Jérémie à la théologie deutéronomiste*, p. 30.

⁷⁹ J. BRIGHT, *The Prophetic Reminiscence: Its Place and Function in the Book of Jeremiah*, in *Biblical Essays 1966. Proceedings of the 9th Meeting "Die Ou-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Africa" (OTWSA) in Pretoria, Stellenbosh, 1966*, p. 11-30, see p. 17, cited in T. RÖMER, *La conversion du prophète Jérémie à la théologie deutéronomiste*, p. 30, footnote no. 11.

⁸⁰ J.P. HYATT, *Jeremiah and Deuteronomy*, in L.G. PERDUE & B.W. KOVACS (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies*, Winona Lake, 1984, p. 113-127.

⁸¹ J.P. HYATT, *The Deuteronomistic Edition of Jeremiah* (1951), republished in L.G. PERDUE & B.W. KOVACS (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations*, p. 247-267. Cf. equally, J.P. HYATT, *The Book of Jeremiah*, see especially, p. 788-790.

⁸² RUDOLPH, *Jeremia*.

⁸³ "Es ist nicht ausgeschlossen, dass der Verfasser der C-Stücke zugleich der Hauptredaktor des Jeremiabuches war", quoted in T. RÖMER, *La conversion du prophète Jérémie à la théologie deutéronomiste*, p. 30.

speaking world, it was popularised by the work of E.W. Nicholson⁸⁴, who strongly insisted on the omnipresence of the deuteronomistic ideology and style not only in the prose sermons of Jeremiah but also in the biographical texts. According to him, these texts have their *Sitz im Leben* in the deuteronomistic preaching and teaching addressed to the exiles in Babylon.

But it was W. Thiel⁸⁵ who later tried to demonstrate in detail the presence of a deuteronomistic redaction in Jeremiah. This redaction according to him presupposes the deuteronomistic historiography and he goes into details to pinpoint these presuppositions beginning from Jer. 1 where Jeremiah is, at the moment of his vocation, presented as the worthy successor of Moses (compare Jer. 1:7, 9 to Deut. 18:18). By way of style, Thiel notes that Jeremiah deuteronomist uses the same stereotyped phraseology that the redactors of the deuteronomistic history use, but created from Jeremianic expressions. He dates the deuteronomistic redaction of Jeremiah around 550, after the death of Jehoiakim (cf. Jer 22:25-27). Thiel goes further to note that the deuteronomistic redaction of Jeremiah was not the last to intervene in the book.

However this consensus on deuteronomistic influence in the book of Jeremiah is contested by a “minority”⁸⁶ of exegetes who considers that this ‘evident’ deuteronomistic character of the texts in question corresponds in fact to a *Kunstprosa*, a widely spread prose type language current in the countries of Judah of the 7th and 6th centuries BC⁸⁷. The argument is that nothing prevents attributing the text “C” to the prophet himself who could also simply have had recourse to the same language of the editors of the deuteronomistic historiographers, a language that Ezekiel was later abundantly to utilise. Weippert therefore denies without qualification the deuteronomistic influence on

⁸⁴ E.W. NICHOLSON, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah*, Oxford, 1970.

⁸⁵ W. THIEL, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1-25* (WMANT 41), Neukirchener-Vluyn, 1973.

⁸⁶ T. RÖMER, *La conversion du prophète Jérémie à la théologie deutéronomiste*, p. 30.

⁸⁷ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*; H. WEIPPERT, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches*.

Jeremiah and considers the prose sermons as words of YHWH directly transmitted by the prophet. Three years later, Holladay wrote regarding Weippert's opinion: "My own conviction is that she has written the definitive work on the problem of the stereotyped prose in Jeremiah, and though questions remain, I believe we can consider that this issue is now solved"⁸⁸. This conviction does not however seem to respect adequately the spirit of democracy of opinion in scholarship, and making categorical statements of this nature cannot silence contrary voices.

William McKane devotes pages to moderate the two extreme positions of Thiel and Weippert, and balances their extremities with his terminology of "rolling *corpus*": "There is a nucleus of the book of Jeremiah which is distinctive, so that the prose which is generated by it, in connection with the processes of growth and aggregation (*triggering*) which result in our extant book, is, to a greater or lesser degree, influenced by this distinctiveness"⁸⁹. For him also, "time has come to concentrate more on the internal relations of the constituents of the Book of Jeremiah and to be less bothered about comparisons between the prose of the prose discourses of the book and the prose of other bodies of Old Testament literature"⁹⁰. The whole question of source C with regard to the text of the book of Jeremiah, he sees as "an additional, critical superstructure which is not functionally necessary and which ought to be demolished in the interests of economy"⁹¹. Nevertheless, he admitted that this is not intended as a denial of the significant resemblance between Jeremianic and deuteronomic-deuteronomistic prose.

A little evaluation could be necessary here, even though the limit of our work can only permit us to sample these opinions. From the arguments above, it is clear that the profoundly complex problem of exactly how deuteronomic or deuteronomistic the language of the prose passages is, cannot be addressed adequately by any one simple

⁸⁸ W.L. HOLLADAY, *A Fresh Look at Source "B" and Source "C" in Jeremiah*, p. 403.

⁸⁹ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah I-XXV, Volume I (ICC)*, Edinburgh, 1986, p. xlvi.

⁹⁰ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. xlvi.

⁹¹ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. lxxxv.

answer. In spite of the efforts of scholars since the past century to address the problem, it is clear that the linguistic evidence alone remains ambiguous and capable of generating more than one reasonable conclusion. Michael J. Williams has posed a very important question that should offer a guide to this discussion: “At what level of frequency is Dtr diction considered to become ‘characteristic’ of the analysed corpus?”⁹² And Carolyn J. Sharp in her *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah* adds the following: “To what extent can it be shown that a certain formulation is indeed Deuteronomistic and has its origin outside of the book of Jeremiah? If a term occurs more often in Jeremiah than in the Dtr corpus, why is it that we do not consider it ‘Jeremianic’ or ‘Deutero-Jeremianic’ rather than deuteronomistic? Must a term be shown to be central to the ideology of the DtrH for it to qualify as Deuteronomistic?”⁹³ She finally rightly suggests that the evidence of frequency provides only one datum in the larger equation; semantic cohesion in the immediate literary context and theological congruence with surrounding material must also be taken into consideration⁹⁴.

I believe we must also not forget the fact that the Hebrew Bible employs a relatively limited lexicon. It is also worth observing that the corpus comprising Deuteronomy to II Kings is a large and significant portion of the Hebrew Bible and so it is likely that any other portion of the Bible might be expected reasonably to share some similarities with that portion. In this vein, Ehud Ben Zvi urges that cultural competence be considered as a factor when analysing similarities between different books or different corpus in the Bible. He cautions equally against any rushed conclusions based on phraseological similarity because biblical writers and redactors “were conversant with the relevant religious literature and the literary (and theological) discourse(s) of their time [...] and were surely able to activate linguistic expressions in their language according to

⁹² M.J. WILLIAMS, *An Investigation of the Legitimacy of Source Distinctions for the Prose Material in Jeremiah*, in *JBL* 112 (1993), p. 193-210, see p. 208.

⁹³ C.J. SHARP, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremianic Prose* (Old Testament Studies), London, 2003, p. 14.

⁹⁴ C.J. SHARP, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah*, p. 14.

grammar, genre, stylistic conventions and the general discourse in which they lived"⁹⁵. In our study therefore, our analysis of texts will pay more attention to the phenomenon of intertextuality than to the consideration of a possible deuteronomistic influence.

1.3 THE BROADLINERS: THE COMMENTARIES OF HOLLADAY, CARROLL AND MCKANE

The year 1986 saw the appearance of three imposing English commentaries of Holladay, Carroll and McKane⁹⁶. It is needless to emphasise that these authors have, outside these major commentaries, written extensively on the book of Jeremiah in numerous articles and monographs. I refer to these authors and their commentaries as broadliners insofar as "they help to enable readers to read Jeremiah following different paths"⁹⁷. All three commentaries take note of the textual variations and the versions, and address substantially the MT and LXX versions of the book of Jeremiah, but where they really differ is in the important areas of presuppositions, approaches and execution of comment, in short, in discerning precisely what the nature of the development of the text may have been and in the import of the extant text. Carroll's own evaluation confirms this:

⁹⁵ E.B. ZVI, *A Deuteronomistic Redaction in/among "The Twelve"? A Contribution from the Standpoint of the Books of Micah, Zephaniah and Obadiah*, in L.S. SCHEARING & S.L. MCKENZIE (eds.), *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism* (JSOTS 269), Sheffield, 1999, p. 232-261, see p. 247.

⁹⁶ For reviews of one or all of the commentaries, see R.P. CARROLL, in *JTS* 38 (1987), p. 446-450; R.P. CARROLL, in *SJT* 42 (1989), p. 113-116; R.P. CARROLL, *Arguing about Jeremiah: Recent Studies and the Nature of a Prophetic Book*, in J.A. EMERTON (ed.), *Congress Volume, Leuven 1989*, p. 222-235. For reviews of the three commentaries in conjunction with each other, see C.S. RODD, *Which is the Best Commentary? VI: Jeremiah*, in *The Expository Times* 98 (1987), p. 171-175; W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Jeremiah: Intense Criticism, Thin Interpretation*, in *Interpretation* 42 (1988), p. 268-280; T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *Interpreting Jeremiah*, in *Religious Studies Review* 14 (1988), p. 330-334; R.P. CARROLL, *Radical Clashes of Will and Style: Recent Commentary Writing on the Book of Jeremiah*, in *JSOT* 45 (1989), p. 99-114; R.P. CARROLL, *Surplus Meaning and the Conflict of Interpretation: A Decade of Jeremiah Studies (1984-95)*, in *CRBS* 4 (1996), p. 115-159. The second volumes of Holladay and McKane appeared in the years 1989 and 1996 respectively.

⁹⁷ R.P. CARROLL, *Radical Clashes of Will and Style*, p. 101.

“Now no responsible consideration of these three commentaries should present them as being in opposition to each other and their disagreements are perspectival rather than in terms of textual exegesis. And close reading of a few verses of Jeremiah using all three guides will reveal how similar is their uncovering of the bones of the text. Where disagreement may arise is in their relating the significance of those verses to the overall understanding of the book of Jeremiah. And those larger understandings will refer in turn to complex, subtle and highly sophisticated readings of prophecy and the nature of the production of prophetic texts”⁹⁸.

1.3.1 William Holladay

One of the major points of the thesis of Holladay in his studies in the book of Jeremiah is that the book is, in the first place, never lacking in furnishing information about specific stages of the prophet’s real life. Holladay uses the injunction of Deut. 31:9-13⁹⁹ to construct the chronology of the life of Jeremiah¹⁰⁰. He assumes that the injunction was carried out seriously, that an early form of Deuteronomy was recited every seven years at the feast of booths (tabernacles): “I should like to propose that there is evidence within the book of Jeremiah for the practice of reciting the law of Deuteronomy every seven years at the time of the feast of booths, as prescribed in Deut 31,10-13, evidence, that is, during the period 615-587”¹⁰¹. In fact, Holladay makes this proposal out of attempt to locate settings for various pericopes in the book of Jeremiah and so reasons that if the law of Deuteronomy was recited every seven years in the celebration of the feast of booths in Jerusalem, those occasions would have offered Jeremiah an ample audience. “If the reform of Josiah is to be dated in 622, then the recitations of Deuteronomy would have

⁹⁸ R.P. CARROLL, *Radical Clashes of Will and Style*, p. 102.

⁹⁹ “At the end of every seven years, at the time fixed for the year of remission, at the feast of Tabernacles, when the whole of Israel comes to look on the face of YHWH your God in the place he chooses, you must proclaim this Law in the hearing of all Israel. Call the people together....”

¹⁰⁰ W.L. HOLLADAY, *A Proposal for Reflections in the Book of Jeremiah*.

¹⁰¹ W.L. HOLLADAY, *A Proposal for Reflections in the Book of Jeremiah*, p. 326.

taken place in the autumn of 615, 608, 601, 594, 587”¹⁰². In his commentary, he concludes, “It is my proposal that these occasions offer a chronological structure for the career of Jeremiah”¹⁰³.

In his introduction to the second volume of his commentary, he sets out at length to show how he envisages the formation of the book and its relation to the historical Jeremiah. It is Holladay’s conviction “that the data of the book can be used to build up a credible portrayal of the prophet, a portrayal against which there are no opposing data”¹⁰⁴. He however recognises the complexity of the data, admitting also that they are too few and too variable to make the task of fitting them together an easy one, and so he settles to produce a “reconstruction that is possible”¹⁰⁵. The conclusion of Holladay is that most of the poetry preserved in the book exhibits a distinctive vocabulary, style, and theology that one may attribute to Jeremiah, that the narrative portions of the book are trustworthy in the events they record, and that the book is largely the work of the scribe Baruch¹⁰⁶. There may be some resemblance with Deuteronomy but that does not necessitate the inference of literary dependence. He brought into the arena the old issue of sources and criticised it in order to show that Jeremiah’s vocabulary cuts across the sources. For example, the terms *shúb* and *sheqer* are found in the different sources, and that means one can recognise a specific style in Jeremiah, “the authentic voice of Jeremiah [...], its characteristics include surprise, freshness, imagination and irony. Words are often exploited for multiple meanings; conventional views are often reversed, the sermonic prose may preserve Jeremiah’s voice and that it is not to be taken as a literary source”¹⁰⁷. He claims therefore for the prophet not just the poetry in the book, but equally much of the prose, which he considers to be a recasting of the poetry by the prophet.

¹⁰² W.L. HOLLADAY, *A Proposal for Reflections in the Book of Jeremiah*, p. 326.

¹⁰³ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁴ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁵ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁶ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁷ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 15.

The first appreciative element in the work of Holladay on Jeremiah is the fact that among the major commentators on the book, he seems to be the closest to the text and he has the clarity of opinion that is simple to understand. His premises and assumptions accrue from the text itself and do not seem to issue from his general preconceptions and prejudices about the Old Testament. And from this sticking to the text, he allows himself to be led to where the conclusions logically follow. But the major criticism of Holladay's approach is the "breathtaking"¹⁰⁸ nature of his assumptions about the book and the consequent bold conclusions that would today sound very traditional; for example the assumption that there was a septennial reading of Deuteronomy, in accordance with Deut. 31:9-13, which literally took place every seven years, an assumption which provides him with a framework to construct a biography of the prophet, and a background against which he can set the prose sections of the book. His biographical sketch of Jeremiah's life is astonishing and is based on a literal reading of the text, and his theory of production equally based on the literal interpretation of chapter 36. In fact, Holladay's *A Coherent Chronology of Jeremiah's Early Career* is, in his own words, "an attempt to specify the passages present in the first scroll which Jeremiah dictated to Baruch, and therefore present in the second scroll as well, and to specify the additional passages which Jeremiah added in the second scroll, according to the narrative of Jer 36"¹⁰⁹. His assumptions and presuppositions are clearly stated in his introduction to the first volume of his commentary, but some of these presuppositions may not pass the critical test of modern scholarship. Carroll's evaluation in this regard seems proper:

"His (Holladay) is therefore the *ne plus ultra* reading of Jeremiah as the book represents the prophet's innermost thoughts, sayings, deeds and travels. His commentary represents the terminus of a long line of similarly minded writers in this century, of which John Bright and John Berridge are two outstanding examples. But for his strong objections to reading the book of Jeremiah as

¹⁰⁸ R.P. CARROLL, *Arguing About Jeremiah*, p. 225.

¹⁰⁹ W.L. HOLLADAY, *A Coherent Chronology*, p. 58.

containing a dominant deuteronomistic element foreign to Jeremiah's thought, Holladay could be the successor of John Skinner"¹¹⁰.

But his treatment of the problem of deuteronomism in the book could amount to a tactical dodging of a problem. He outflanks that problem by making Jeremiah's use of the so-called deuteronomistic language a response to readings of Deuteronomy and thereby renders a theory and a discussion of the deuteronomistic edition of the book of Jeremiah quite unnecessary. His passion about the historical Jeremiah, or the connections between the person and the text, and his unqualified denial of any deuteronomistic mediation give one the suspicion that for him (when one evaluates him extremely), Jeremiah and/or Baruch is the producer of the text, that is, he utters the prophecy, writes, corrects and publishes.

1.3.2 Robert Carroll

I see Carroll as a staunch representative, if not the most prolific of the modern critical readers of the book of Jeremiah. Posterity of lovers of Jeremiah and the book that bears his name would always be grateful to this Glasgow based exegete for daring to ask the hard questions and pushing the debate further than complacent grounds. In his writings, Carroll is sharp enough, writing "lucidly and challengingly. It was always possible to disagree with him, but at least you knew what you were disagreeing"¹¹¹. Though still to be aligned in the tradition of Duhm, especially with regard to the discussion on the deuteronomistic origin of the prophetic book, with Carroll however, assumed positions needed to be re-examined. Just on the opposite spectrum from Holladay, one of the high points (if not the major) of Carroll's commentary and writings on Jeremiah is his affirmation of the impossibility of attaining the historical Jeremiah. In many instances he battles to show that any historical approach to the book of Jeremiah is unjustifiable and

¹¹⁰ R.P. CARROLL, *Radical Clashes of Will and Style*, p. 104. Cf. J. SKINNER, *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah*, Cambridge, 1922.

¹¹¹ R. DAVIDSON, *The Bible in Church and Academy*, in A.G. HUNTER & P.R. DAVIES (eds.), *Sense and Sensitivity: Essays on Reading the Bible in Memory of Robert Carroll* (JSOTS 348), Sheffield, 2002, p. 161-173, see p. 161.

will yield no result¹¹². For Carroll, as a result of the exilic community's theological mediation of the Jeremiah tradition, we cannot recover with any certitude any of the actual words of the prophet. Indeed, we have no access to the person of Jeremiah or his words, except as mediated by the community, and to pose such a historical question is both futile and irrelevant. We should treat the character of Jeremiah as a work of fiction and recognise the impossibility of moving from the book to the real 'historical' Jeremiah, given our complete lack of knowledge independent of the book itself. We live "in an interpreted world (*in der gedeuteten Welt*), so the book of Jeremiah is full of interpretations. So we are engaged in interpreting interpretation. That takes us a couple of removes from the real (?) Jeremiah"¹¹³. From this scholarly perspective, the book of Jeremiah is seen to have no interest in the person of the prophet, and thus neither should we. Pursuit of such historical questions about the person or the words of the prophet should be abandoned and cannot be justified.

Carroll maintains that though it is assumed that Jeremiah did exist (like Macbeth or Richard III), that assumption does not underwrite the attribution of everything in the book to his authorship. The book of Jeremiah for him is the work of postexilic deuteronomic redactors who constructed an image of the prophet very near to their ideology and this image is the product of the conflicts between different groups in the second temple period. As he writes later, "only with the existence of the second temple can we posit the emergence of literacy in the 5th century"¹¹⁴. In Carroll's judgement, "we cannot get back behind the text to an imagined original Jeremiah who uttered his words before Baruch, the scribes, the deuteronomists, the redactors or whoever got to them and transformed

¹¹² R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant: Uses of Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah*, London, 1981: "The biblical writers, closer to being poets and dramatists than being historians, could imagine fruitful and dramatic encounters of this kind and on occasion did construct imaginative stories like this one. Such an imaginative construction is the Book of Jeremiah. That at least, is the thesis of this book, it is a metaphor of the redactional activity and community which produced it" (p. 2). See also his introduction in CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), especially sub-title no. 1 titled *General Remarks on the Book of Jeremiah*, p. 33-36.

¹¹³ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ R.P. CARROLL, *Arguing about Jeremiah*, p. 226.

them by addition, subtraction, redaction and supplementation”¹¹⁵. Just like Mark Biddle who said that the book “is *several steps removed* from the career of the prophet”¹¹⁶, in many of his writings, Carroll expresses the idea that “the prophet is lost to the scribe”¹¹⁷.

In all-important respects, Carroll’s work on Jeremiah represents a damn critical (or radical as he uses often) approach. But in some other respects, one has the impression that Carroll does not want himself to be led to some conclusions or avoids the conclusions even if they are implied in his positions, simply because he thinks that these conclusions could be traditional, positivist and non-radical enough. I evaluate Carroll from three standpoints, and incidentally the standpoints have each some negative slant: the prophet does not exist, there is no theology in the book but only ideology and there is no order even in the ideology. It will be worthwhile to imagine this central thesis of Carroll: “the connections between the so-called ‘historical Jeremiah’ and the presentation of Jeremiah in the text cannot now be determined because we lack the data to make such connections. In that sense the only Jeremiah we have is the textual or literary Jeremiah. That is, the prophet Jeremiah is a construct of the text”¹¹⁸. Sound and radical this thesis may seem, one would expect that this thesis would have led Carroll to imagine that a literary/synchronic approach to the book would have served better hermeneutical purposes to the exegesis of the text of the book of Jeremiah; hermeneutics that could have searched the sense in the literary construction that has been made of the prophet; after all the prophet does not necessarily have to exist before the book assumes some sense. Rather, Carroll opts for an ideological approach¹¹⁹ – the book is the product of conflicting

¹¹⁵ R.P. CARROLL, *Something Rich and Strange: Imagining a Future for Jeremiah Studies*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 423-443, see p. 432.

¹¹⁶ M.E. BIDDLE, *Polyphony and Symphony in Prophetic Literature*, p. 128 (emphasis by the author).

¹¹⁷ R.P. CARROLL, *Manuscripts Don’t Burn: Inscribing the Prophetic Tradition: Reflections on Jeremiah 36*, in M. AUGUSTIN and K.-D. SCHUNCK (eds.), *‘Dort siehen Schiffe dahin ...’: Collected Communications to the XIVth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Paris, 1992* (BEATAJ 28), Frankfurt am Main, 1996, p. 31-42, see p. 40.

¹¹⁸ R.P. CARROLL, *Radical Clashes of Will and Style*, p. 102.

¹¹⁹ For Carroll on ideological criticism and the Bible, see R.P. CARROLL, *As Seeing the Invisible: Ideology in Bible Translation*, in *JNSL* 19 (1993), p. 79-93; *Intertextuality and the Book of Jeremiah*:

groups with conflicting ideological interests – and even this approach would not dig out any order in the book since there is none in it. That means, after all is said and done, we are simply left with almost nothing and unsure of anything with regard to the book. The prophet does not exist, or rather we cannot say if he does, there is no discernible connection between the prophet and the text, those who wrote down the words had no theological intention, but an ideological one, and even in this ideology there is no harmony, no order. And yet we have the text and it is worthwhile to read and interpret it. A conscious attempt at an exercise doomed *ab initio* to futility?

1.3.3 William McKane

The commentary of McKane is more philologically and literarily inclined than historical. It shows also deeper and special interest in the ancient versions (Septuagint, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, Vulgate, Peshitta, Targum), which in the very first sentence of the commentary he says “is characteristic of this commentary”¹²⁰. This commentary, as often as is the case with the series in the International Critical Commentaries (ICC), is loaded with textual details, and reflects the close, disciplined, exhaustive, tenacious reading of the text associated with the high days of textual criticism at the turn of the century¹²¹. McKane’s own theory of the formation of the book has been described as “less doctrinaire and straight-jacketed”¹²². For him the book of Jeremiah is the product of a complicated and long process (his theory of rolling *corpus*). “What is meant by rolling *corpus* is that small pieces of pre-existing text trigger exegesis or commentary. MT is to

Animadversions on Text and Theory, in J.C. EXUM & D.J.A. CLINES (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTS 143), Sheffield, 1993, p. 55-78. *On Representation in the Bible: An Ideologiekritik Approach*, in *JNSL* 20/2 (1994), p. 1-15; *An Infinity of Traces: On Making an Inventory of our Ideological Holdings: An Introduction to Ideologiekritik in Biblical Studies*, in *JNSL* 21/2 (1995), p. 25-43; *Jeremiah, Intertextuality and Ideologiekritik* in *JNSL* 22/1 (1996), p. 15-34; *The Book of J: Intertextuality and Ideological Criticism*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 221-243; *Biblical Ideology: Ideologiekritik, Biblical Studies and the Problematics of Ideology*, in *JNSL* 24/1 (1998), p. 101-114.

¹²⁰ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. xv.

¹²¹ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Intense Criticism, Thin Interpretation*, p. 271.

¹²² W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Intense Criticism, Thin Interpretation*, p. 272.

be understood as a commentary or commentaries built on pre-existing elements of the Jeremianic corpus [...]. In general, the theory is bound up with the persuasion that rolling *corpus* 'rolled' over a long period of time and was still rolling in the post-exilic period"¹²³. He uses this theory to give account, according to him, of the untidy and non-systematic expansion of an original pre-existing nucleus of Jeremianic material¹²⁴. And in fact, McKane's description of the text as "untidy" and often arbitrary is an important analysis of the actuality of the book: "[...] there is a tendency to underestimate the untidy and desultory nature of the aggregation of material which comprises the book of Jeremiah. One does not have to look far for this: it is not only a lack of large-scale homogeneousness to which I refer, but sharp dissonances of form and content, and examples of erroneous, secondary exegesis, consisting of only a few verses"¹²⁵. In fact the theory of the *rolling corpus* of McKane is based on this prejudice of disorder.

The notion of the *rolling corpus* is always italicised because according to McKane, it is not a corpus *per se*. As a consequence of the triggering, the book of Jeremiah for him has "piecemeal character", without a comprehensive framework of literary arrangement or theological system with which the parts [...] are fitted together"¹²⁶. For McKane also, there is no sign of a permanent editorial hand with a theological intention, with a teleological *Tendenz*. Instead "we are dealing with a complicated, untidy accumulation of material, extending over a very long period and to which many poem have contributed"¹²⁷. And basing on this, he concludes that "the supposition that a major part of it (the poetic material) including much of the prose, was already in existence in the lifetime of the prophet Jeremiah is a literary judgement which does not seem to take serious account of the vexatious difficulties and baffling inconcinnities which emerge with a detailed study of the book"¹²⁸. McKane criticises authors who find any theological

¹²³ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. lxxxiii.

¹²⁴ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. xlix-l.

¹²⁵ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. xlix.

¹²⁶ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. xlix.

¹²⁷ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. xlvi.

¹²⁸ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. xlvi-xlix.

order in the book: “Those who claim a systematic theological activity for a Deuteronomistic editor and identify compositions in which this is realized are perhaps professing to know more of the inner working of his mind than can be gathered from the text. They are in danger of creating systematic theological aims for the editor whom they postulate rather than extracting these from the text. In general they exaggerate the coherence of the book and underestimate its lack of cohesiveness and obscurities”¹²⁹.

In the long introduction to the two volumes of his commentary, he tries to elucidate this theory but at times gives conflicting signals. For example, once he writes: “My argument is that there is no comprehensive framework of literary arrangement or theological system within which the parts of 1-25 are fitted together, and that the prose does not supply such a scaffolding. There is more of accident, arbitrariness and fortuitous twists and turns than has been generally allowed. The processes are dark and in a measure irrecoverable, and we should not readily assume them to possess such rationality that they will yield to a systematic elucidation”¹³⁰. One could therefore discern from the words of McKane a phenomenon more or less unthoughtful and arbitrary instead of a systematic redaction. “We err when we suppose that these processes are always susceptible of rational explanation, or that they must necessarily contribute to thoughtful, systematic redaction”¹³¹. McKane himself senses the discomfort in this conclusion when he writes: “The objection may be lodged that such an idea of corpus is ambiguous, vague and ill-defined, and the only defence which I can offer is that it has helped me to pick my way through the minefield of Jer. 1-25”¹³². But then two pages earlier he writes: “It is not necessary to search in the book about labels to attach to the chapters because this may distract us from matters which are more central to the study of the book, namely the *internal relations of its constituent parts*. With continuous cross references to deuteronomic-deuteronomistic prose, one is always in danger of succumbing to a

¹²⁹ W. MCKANE, *Relations Between Poetry and Prose in the Book of Jeremiah*, p. 237.

¹³⁰ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. xlixf.

¹³¹ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. xlix.

¹³² MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. xlix.

condition of distraction and disorientation"¹³³. While Carroll sees McKane's 'rolling corpus' theory as the "great strength of his (McKane's) commentary"¹³⁴ and eulogises it as "truth and sound scholarship"¹³⁵, some other authors see it as a simplistic explanation of a much deeper problem and above all an inappropriately highly literate solution to a problem that should have taken into consideration the primarily oral culture that produced the texts¹³⁶.

1.3.4 General Evaluation of the Three Commentaries/Authors

In their capacity as broadliners, these three commentaries (or commentators) reflect what has been the dominant approach and issue in Jeremiah critical studies at least until recently that Jeremiah studies have begun to broaden and incorporate new exegetical insights. And this dominating issue could be articulated in the following propositions, following Brueggemann's outline¹³⁷:

- a) The central issue about the book of Jeremiah is that there is a body of powerful poetry in the book which lives in an odd relation to a more verbose, very different, theologically tendentious prose.
- b) The book in its extant form has had a long complicated history of formation. It is held to contain a core of Jeremiah's work (not exactly for Carroll anyway), which has been subsequently expanded, reshaped, and reinterpreted to meet later needs; and the book as we have it today is the record and residue of that long process of redaction in the interest of ongoing contemporaneity.
- c) Basing on the above conviction and following the legacy of Duhamel and Mowinckel already designated as the pacesetters, two related questions occupied these commentaries: i) what is early and what is late? and ii) what is genuine and what is addition?

¹³³ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. xlvii (emphasis mine).

¹³⁴ R.P. CARROLL, *Radical Clashes of Will and Style*, p. 103.

¹³⁵ R.P. CARROLL, *Radical Clashes of Will and Style*, p. 104.

¹³⁶ R.F. PERSON, *A Rolling Corpus and Oral Tradition: A Not-so-Literate Solution to a Highly Literate Problem*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND et al. (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 263-271.

¹³⁷ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Intense Criticism/Thin Interpretation*.

Going through these three propositions, we can affirm in the words of Brueggemann, that for these commentaries, “the recognizable literary enigmas of the book have been shaped as historical questions to see when and in what context each piece of literature was created. It is characteristically assumed that the historical context provides the clue to the intention of the text”¹³⁸. It is this historical approach that is the common denominator of these commentaries but which each one of them tries to articulate in its peculiar way. It is interesting that while Carroll believes that the great virtue of such differences of approach and reading in these three commentaries “help to map *comprehensively* the territory of Jeremiah studies and then enable readers to read Jeremiah following different paths”¹³⁹, Brueggemann believes that incidentally their mapped out territory reveals also their limits¹⁴⁰, and that is true. Illuminating as they are limiting, all three commentaries, and in fact the approaches of the authors even in their other works, represent only a partial treatment of the richness of the book and ignore the interpretative possibilities inherent in other approaches especially approaches that de-emphasise the primacy of the history and the genesis of text. The second part of Carroll’s statement could be bearable: that the different bents of the commentaries enable readers read the book of Jeremiah following different paths. But the first part, that is, that it maps “comprehensively” the territory of Jeremiah’s studies, is today not defensible. Good a thing, Holladay himself recognises this insufficiency when he opines that the question in Jeremiah studies has known a slight shifting. The question therefore is not so much as “how did the book of Jeremiah come to be”¹⁴¹? since to such a question, no serious consistent response is available: “We are still far from understanding the way by which earlier collections of Jeremianic material were built up to become our present book of Jeremiah, in spite of all the effort expended on the problem by many scholars over a period of many decades. No real consensus has been reached, and the suggestions of individual scholars leave one with the uneasy impression

¹³⁸ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Intense Criticism/Thin Interpretation*, p. 268.

¹³⁹ R.P. CARROLL, *Radical Clashes of Will and Style*, p. 101 (emphasis mine).

¹⁴⁰ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Intense Criticism/Thin Interpretation*, p. 269.

¹⁴¹ W.L. HOLLADAY, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20*, Lewisburg, 1976, p. 13.

that real certainty might lie forever beyond one's grasp"¹⁴². The question, he says, concerns more of the outlining of the book of Jeremiah¹⁴³.

Conclusion

Our aim in this first Chapter is to sketch a quasi-historical and thematic development in the research in the book of Jeremiah. This exercise is not new and could be found in more details in many other antecedent works on Jeremiah. However, as is often the case, the Chapter has shown the relative 'chaos' that reigns in the world of the research in the book of Jeremiah. This is of course not particular with Jeremiah research but can be seen in almost every important question in biblical theology and exegesis. Our research here does not aim at introducing a definite order in this chaotic situation and part of our presupposition is the admittance of the fact of the near impossibility of finding a compromise between these competing and mutually exclusive opinions in these sensitive questions about the book. But our presentation of these developments here and the manner it is done serve a particular purpose in the discussions that follow. In the first place, the plurality of opinions in any single issue reveals another more significant plurality, that of hermeneutical approach. The multiplicity of opinions and differences become thus signs of the richness in the book. The existence of a myriad of presuppositions and their resulting conclusions show that the text's inherent richness may not have been exhausted and also that some other hermeneutical stand could offer further interpretative possibilities to the understanding of the text. Secondly, that we have not identified with any of the different 'schools of thought' in any of the issues evoked is not to wash hands off and remain unnecessarily neuter, but to show that the reading presupposition, which would guide the analysis in our work does not need such alignments. However, this does not render the issues unnecessary, but it relativises their necessity. The second Chapter of this Part will go a long way to show that no reading posture is absolute and will gradually open up the justification for our methodological shift and departure from the former dominant paradigm/s.

¹⁴² W.L. HOLLADAY, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 13.

¹⁴³ W.L. HOLLADAY, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 14.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGICAL/HERMENEUTICAL OPTION: NARRATOLOGY, THEOLOGY, CONTEXT

Introduction

From the history of the research on the book of Jeremiah as shown in the preceding Chapter, one thing is clear: its manifold orientations. But without doubt, the dominant methodology so far in the study of the book in the past years has been the historical-critical, and this methodology in turn does not display itself uniformly but in manifold points of departure and conclusions. For Holladay and Carroll who hold mutually exclusive opinions with regard to the question of historicity¹, the debate hinges on who is, or who are responsible for the book and when. While for Holladay, the responsibility falls within a relatively short, intensely complex period of compositional activity under the control of the historical prophet and/or his close associate(s) with historical or biographical intention, for Carroll, the compositional activity is conceptualised as a chronologically extended, complex, non-centralised process, under the control of diverse factional ideological intermediaries, who freely and creatively handled the tradition for their own ideological interests, and who felt little need to provide an overarching coherent orientation to the corpus of traditional material (see the previous Chapter).

To scholars of the book of Jeremiah to whom the possibility of a narrative reading of the book is not yet self evident, the first reaction to the title of this research work could be: Could there be a narrative reading of the book of Jeremiah worthy of a scientific study; a book almost every major author acknowledges its disjointed nature and composition²?

¹ “Die kommentare von W.L. Holladay und Robert P. Carroll, die 1986/87 fast gleichzeitig erscheinen, repräsentieren je auf ihre Weise die hier bezeichneten konträren Aussenpositionen”; S. HERMANN, *Jeremia/Jeremiabuch*, in *TRE* 16 (1987), p. 577.

² We admit however in this research that some sections of the Hebrew Bible are more suitable than others as regards narrative literary analysis. In fact, it is easily observable that there is a conspicuous paucity of examples drawn from prophetic books as one reads the books on narrative criticism. Much of the examples are drawn rather from the patriarchal narratives or from the so-called Former Prophets: Judges – I Kings. To illustrate this, for example, the book of D.M. GUNN & D. NOLAN FEWELL, *Narrative in the Hebrew*

Some narratives or stories in the historical books or Pentateuch for example are better cases for literary analysis, containing for example some of the most interesting instances of characterisation to be found in the Hebrew Bible³. Take for example the Abraham's cycle, the Joseph Story, the narratives of the institution of the monarchy till the division of the kingdom, the Elijah narratives (also the New Testament especially the Gospels), etc. It is understandable that the plot construction of these narratives is more evident, inciting a more vivid appetite to the narrative approach, that much of the prophetic corpus are oracles and discourses demanding more of a poetic appreciation than a narrative one. The glaring paucity (comparatively) of narrative blocks or prose sections in the prophetic books gives room to the question whether a narrative approach is at all possible for a prophetic book like the book of Jeremiah. In this Chapter, we are going to justify the methodological option we shall adopt in this research work, then briefly describe the method and then conclude by relating it to the book of Jeremiah.

2.1 NECESSITY OF METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM SHIFT

2.1.1 *The Missing Link: Call for New Option*

A brief recapitulation of orientations and conclusions in an author-text-reader paradigm is worthwhile here and can be seen in Helga Weippert's articulation, in an unpublished review, of the crux of the work done hitherto in Jeremiah research⁴, and she makes three crucial interrelated observations regarding the current paradigms used in the study of the book. First, confronted with the problem of making sense of the diversity, complexity and apparent contradictions within the book and the Jeremiah tradition, modern commentaries, she says, their actual disagreements in their conclusions apart, agree that a

Bible (Oxford Bible Series), NY, 1993 with index of biblical quotations: in 263 pages, examples drawn from the book of Genesis are over 60, II Samuel over 100 while the book of Jeremiah has just 2 examples; that of S. BAR-EFRAT, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, Sheffield, 2000 has 7 examples from Jeremiah as opposed to over 100 from Genesis and over 120 from I or II Samuel; M. STEINBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative. Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Bloomington, 1987, has 5 examples from the book of Jeremiah, 3 from Ezekiel and over 300 examples from Genesis or the books of Samuel.

³ K. STONE, *Sex, Honour and Power in the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTS 234), Sheffield, 1996, p. 106.

⁴ Here I follow a reference to this review made by A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, p. 17-19.

historical-critical approach/perspective provides the hermeneutical tool for the interpretation of the book. This has meant in the first instance a quest for the historical prophet by and large or put in another way, a negotiation of the “meaning of the text against the realities of author-text-reader by privileging the historical author or more broadly formulated the extrinsic realities that produced the book of Jeremiah”⁵. This search for the ‘historic person’ of the prophet provides the anchor point for interpreting the disparate materials collected in the book and from this perspective, diverse authors reach diverse conclusions, and at times mutually exclusive ones. From the question of history comes Weippert’s second observation: it is not just simply the ‘type of exegesis’, that is, historical-critical principles, that produces these diversities. Rather, it is the models employed to conceptualise the dynamics of literary process and production in the first millennium BCE. Her (Weippert’s) third observation is her regret that these historical-critical contributions to Jeremiah scholarship do not first explicitly engage the methodological debate or better the choice offered interpretation of either the historical-critical reconstructed genetic process or the book in its final form. There is then a gap and this we choose to call the missing link.

At this point, the following questions by Diamond are proper:

“Given the appearance of multiple up-to-date commentaries on Jeremiah, how shall further research proceed? What more can be done within the existing theoretical and critical frameworks that have generated these commentaries and guided Jeremiah studies to the present juncture? Or stated more appreciatively, what has current commentary on Jeremiah enabled us to see about the task of reading the prophetic book that represents indispensable gain? Yet what, at the same time, indicates we cannot simply continue within the framework of those reading strategies if we are to capitalize on the very insights they have made possible? It is not a question of repudiating the past achievements in the academic study of Jeremiah; rather how do we build and go forward? Will minor

⁵ A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, p. 17.

adjustments in the practice of ‘normative’ exegesis in Jeremiah suffice? Or do we attempt a major paradigmatic shift?”⁶.

Pete Diamond remarks that answers to these questions are not so easy to come by. Neither is it easy to strike a compromise between the various poles that separate and divide exegetes in Jeremiah, especially the historical question that is at the base of the discords, as Weippert has made known above. The difficulty is more pitifully fatal due to a vacuum of direct, non-biblical, non-traditional, concrete, extrinsic information about any of the postulated historical agents, and/or literary stages in the production of the prophetic book⁷. According to him – and on the weight we tag to this statement, hangs partially the basis for our methodological option in this work – “the text in its final form is not just the prime datum for adjudicating the contending models; it is the only datum”⁸, a factor we feel has not been put into serious consideration in Jeremiah research, a missing link, because “these historical-critical contributions to commentary on Jeremiah do not explicitly engage the methodological debate”⁹. Our work has not come to adjudicate or to bring a compromise to the debate *en cours*, but in the first place recognises the importance of the text in its final form in the interpretation of the book, therefore a synchronic approach.

2.1.2 The Fact of Variety in Methods and Approaches

After the discussion on the major disputes and disagreements that there are in Jeremiah research in the foregone Chapter, we call for a shift in reading strategy and are going to investigate the theoretical principles assumed in the methodology and approach

⁶ A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, p. 16.

⁷ A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, p. 18.

⁸ A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, p. 18. It is to be noted that Diamond made this statement not in explicit recommendation in favour of the synchronic approach or in criticism of other approaches. However, for us, the statement does not go without its force of argument for the approach.

⁹ A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, p. 18-19.

adopted.¹⁰ Our usages of these terms may not be strictly distinct but will be more clearly perceived from the context they appear.

It is a well-known fact that the variety and diversity of exegetical methodologies cannot be narrowed down to a single concept¹¹. It is not merely a simple matter of co-existent exegetical methodologies, but an intricate pattern of hermeneutical views, specialisation areas, and confessional differences, which constitute the variety¹². In recent years there has been an upshot of methods and approaches in biblical criticism ranging from the traditional historical-critical¹³, literary¹⁴, to the anthropological¹⁵, sociological¹⁶, semiotic¹⁷, rhetorical¹⁸, canonical¹⁹ etc. And rightly, Alonso Schökel compares biblical

¹⁰ We admit a subtle distinction between “approach” and “method”. “Approach” is used to refer to a specific set of epistemological assumptions used in doing exegesis, which differs from other sets of assumptions. “Method” refers to the practical manifestation of a specific exegetical approach in certain criteria and guidelines for doing exegesis. “Methodology” is used as collective term for “the theory of methods and approaches”, Cf. L.C. FONKER, *Exclusivity and Variety. Perspectives on Multidimensional Exegesis* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 19), Kampen, p. 17.

¹¹ L.C. FONKER, *Exclusivity and Variety*, p. 17.

¹² L.C. FONKER, *Exclusivity and Variety*, p. 17.

¹³ Here one can list more especially German speaking scholars like Loch, Westermann, Fohrer, Schmidt, Steck, Zimmerli, Hermisson, Mittmann, Groß.

¹⁴ This should be differentiated from the “Literarkritik” that pertains to the historical-critical. It rather refers to the influence of modern literary science and here, in the field of the Old Testament studies could be counted a myriad of names like R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York, 1981; M. STERNBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Bloomington, 1985; S. BAR-EFRAT, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTS 70), Sheffield, 1989.

¹⁵ Cf. J.W. ROGERSON, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, Oxford, 1978; R.R. WILSON, *Anthropology and the Study of the Old Testament*, in *USQR* 34 (1979), p. 175-181.

¹⁶ Cf. W. SCHOTTROFF, *Soziologie und Alte Testament*, in *VF* 19/2 (1974), p. 46-66.

¹⁷ Cf. W. VOGELS, *Reading and Preaching the Bible: A New Semiotic Approach*, Wilmington, 1986; E. VAN WOLDE, *A Semiotic Analysis of Genesis 2-3: A Semiotic Theory and Method of Analysis Applied to the Story of the Garden of Eden*, Assen, 1989.

¹⁸ J. MUILENBURG, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, in *JBL* 88 (1969), p. 1-18.

¹⁹ B.S. CHILDS, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, Philadelphia, 1970; ID., *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, London, 1979; ID., *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, London, 1985. Cf. also J.A. SANDERS, *Torah and Canon*, Philadelphia, 1972.

scholarship of the contemporary era to a tree when he writes: “Methods and models are branching out in different directions. It was not like this before, when each method developed as a continuation of the previous one, so that the development could be compared to the rings of a cedar or the notches of bamboo”²⁰. Along this line, Fonker talks of the relativity of the historical-critical exegesis, which according to him has become evident in the recent years²¹. The corner stone of this critical approach was and is literary criticism. This literary criticism presupposes a lengthy history of the development of a biblical text; the goal of literary criticism is then usually described in this way: according to Kaiser, to follow the growth of the text, from its final form back to its original writing²². A similar position is expressed by Willi-Plein²³: “Ziel dieser Arbeit ist in den prophetischen Büchern primär die zumindest als Ideal vorstellbare Auffindung der ‘ipsissima vox’ des Propheten”²⁴. The work is the tracing, by an experienced exegete, of the composed character²⁵ of the text which is evident in the unevenness in the text but which cannot be explained by recourse to the context or the form of the text. Examples of such unevenness include doublets, multiple transmissions, secondary connections, tensions at the lexical and grammatical level, tensions in theological content, etc²⁶. Then other exercises within the ambient of the historical-critical method are dependent for example upon the ability of literary criticism to differentiate sources (redaction criticism)²⁷ or to identify the first written layer (tradition criticism)²⁸.

²⁰ L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *Trends: Plurality of Methods, Priority of Issues*, in J.A. EMERTON (ed.), *Congress Volume Jerusalem 1986* (VTS 40), Leiden, 1988, p. 285-292, see p. 285.

²¹ L.C. FONKER, *Exclusivity and Variety*, p. 19.

²² O. KAISER, *Die alttestamentliche Exegese*, in ID et al. (ed.), *Einführung in die exegetischen Methoden*, München, 1966, p. 9-36, see especially p. 16-17.

²³ I. WILLI-PLEIN, *Vorformen der Schriftexegese innerhalb des alten Testaments: Untersuchungen zum literarischen Werden der auf Amos, Hosea und Micha zurückgehenden Bücher im hebräischen Zwölfprophetenbuch* (BZAW 123), Berlin, 1971, p. 1.

²⁴ Cf. also N.C. HABEL, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament*, Philadelphia, 1973, p. 1-8.

²⁵ S. PAAS, *Creation and Judgement: Creation Texts in Some Eight-Century Prophets* (OTS 47), Leiden, 2003, p. 153.

²⁶ Cf. L. SCHMIDT, *Literarkritik I: Altes Testament*, in TRE 21 (1991), p. 211-222.

²⁷ Cf. G.P.C. STREETE, *Redaction Criticism*, in S.L. MCKENZIE & S.R. HAYNES (eds.), *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, Louisville, 1999, p. 105-121.

We do not intend to single out just an approach for criticism. But, in his discussion of the historical-critical approach, Krentz²⁹ cites around ten points of criticism that have been levelled against it. All ten points hinge on the second which itself bases on the discrepancy between the ways in which faith and the historical method analyse truth and reality; the Christian is led into an intellectual dualism. Historical critical approach is equally criticised not only by scholars who practise other approaches but also by German speaking authors in exegetical circles. Rendtorff has two major points in this regard:

a) “Old Testament scholarship in its various forms very often has used the biblical text for different purposes and, at the same time, has neglected the interpretation of the text itself.

b) Bible scholars often constructed their own texts and took those texts as a basis for interpretation and historical reconstruction”³⁰. This critical stand tallies with that of another German exegete Schweizer. According to him, there are four “*Defizite*”: a) the historical critical method has not succeeded to be true to its name, that is being *historische Kritik* and has equally not succeeded to be *Glaubensinterpretation*; b) It has so emphasised the *Traditionsgeschichte* to the effect that the history and pre-history of the text have become so significant that it is impossible to recognise the given text as it is; c) there is no update with recent modern developments in literary science; d) in actual fact, the exegetes have not been as critical as they claim to be. He gives a simple example that many historical-critical exegetes still use the division marks of the MT when they refer to a certain part of a verse³¹.

²⁸ Cf. J. WERLITZ, *Studien zur literarkritischen Methode* (BZAW 204), Berlin, 1992, p. 43-50.

²⁹ E. KRENTZ, *The Historical-Critical Method*, Philadelphia, 1975.

³⁰ R. RENDTORFF, *Between Historical Criticism and Holistic Interpretation: New Trends in Old Testament Exegesis*, in J.A. EMERTON (ed.), *Congress Volume Jerusalem*, p. 298-303, see p. 299-300.

³¹ H. SCHWEIZER, *Wovon reden die Exegeten? Zum Verständnis der Exegese als verstehender und deskriptiver Wissenschaft*, in *ThQ* 164 (1984), p. 161-185, see p. 162ff.

2.1.3 The Emergence of Literary Approaches: The New Criticism and Structuralism

Fonker writes interestingly of “forerunners” to the literary approach³². Though it is only in the past three decades that unprecedented attention has been given to the literary qualities of the biblical text, he talks of the “long prehistory of literary approaches”³³ and Longman talks of the “precursors”³⁴ to the approach. These “forerunners” is treated under two principal stages: the early Church Fathers³⁵ and the study of Hebrew poetry³⁶. In our modern era, there arose an important shift in thought³⁷, which had a formidable influence not only in secular literary studies but equally in biblical research and that was the emergence of the New Criticism in the 1930s and Structuralism which, as a major school of thought, began, according to Longman³⁸, in the 1960s. The New Criticism won more popularity and gained acceptance mostly in North America and Britain where English literature was being taught in the universities with a strong historical and philological accent since the late nineteenth century. This historical and philological accent was

³² L.C. FONKER, *Exclusivity and Variety*, p. 186.

³³ Cf. also R. MORGAN & J. BARTON, *Biblical Interpretation*, New York, 1988, p. 205ff.

³⁴ T. LONGMAN, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, Michigan, 1987, p. 13.

³⁵ Many of the Church Fathers were well versed in classical rhetoric and poetry and applied the principles of classical literature to their study of the Bible. While Augustine for example considered the Bible of a lower literary quality when compared to classical literature, which however represented humility and challenge of faith for him, some other Fathers considered the Bible as of a superior literary quality to pagan literature both in form and content. For elaboration, see L.C. FONKER, *Exclusivity and Variety*, p. 186-188.

³⁶ After the Church Fathers, the second important stage in the development of the literary study of the Bible was the emergence of the study of Hebrew poetry, which occurred during the eighteenth century. Here the book of R. LOWTH, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, first published in 1753 is worthy of mention. R. MORGAN & J. BARTON, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 209, refers to the work as a “vital breakthrough in understanding the literary forms of Hebrew literature”, and for Longman, “Lowth’s results, though eventually receiving considerable modification, aided in the correct reading of the poetry of the Old Testament”, T. LONGMAN, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, p. 15.

³⁷ L.C. FONKER, *Exclusivity and Variety*, p. 188.

³⁸ T. LONGMAN, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, p. 29.

inherited from the educational model provided by the study of classical and secular literature. Morgan and Barton write: "The New Criticism won independence from that (educational) model, and integrity for the new curricula, by insisting on the autonomy of the individual work of art, which was to be judged by aesthetic norms. This successful struggle for the discipline's identity involved a reaction against the historical emphasis³⁹. Barton gives in summary the major points of the New Criticism: i) "A literary text is an artifact", that is the meaning of a piece of literature is not something separate from the text; rather, it is regarded as a quality of the text itself. The meaning is no different entity that the author wants to confer through the work of literature or poem, neither is it an emotion or experience in the author's mind which one gains access to by reading the literary piece. ii) "Intentionalism is a fallacy". We would not depend on the intention of the original author to get the meaning of a literature. Rather, "texts have life, which continues after their authors are dead; texts continue to have meaning in ever new contexts. The meaning is the sense the words can bear, not the meaning the author intended them to convey"⁴⁰. iii) "The meaning of a text is a function of its place in a literary canon". This implies that the canonical meaning depends on the canon of existing literature⁴¹ "which both determines what meaning a new work is capable of bearing and, in turn, is modified in its overall meaning every time a significant new work is added to it"⁴².

Though as a major school of thought, Structuralism began in the 1960s (following Felperin's⁴³ opinion that Roland Barthes' publication⁴⁴ marked the beginning of literary structuralism), the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) is often widely called the father of Structuralism⁴⁵. His thoughts are evident in a posthumous

³⁹ R. MORGAN & J. BARTON, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 217.

⁴⁰ J. BARTON, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, London, 1984, p. 148.

⁴¹ L.C. FONKER, *Exclusivity and Variety*, p. 189.

⁴² J. BARTON, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, p. 151.

⁴³ H. FELPERIN, *Beyond Deconstruction*, Oxford, 1985.

⁴⁴ R. BARTHES, *Critique et vérité*, Paris, 1966.

⁴⁵ John Rogerson however argues with force that even though it is accepted that Saussure is the founder of Structuralism, the spirit can be traced back to the 19th century in the work of de Wette. See J.W.

reconstruction by his students⁴⁶ of his lecture notes, “Cours de linguistique générale”⁴⁷, published originally in French in 1916 but in English only in 1959⁴⁸. About Saussure and his work, R.H. Robins wrote that “his influence on twentieth-century linguistics, which he could be said to have inaugurated, is unsurpassed” and that his “statement of the structural approach to language underlies virtually the whole of modern linguistics”⁴⁹. He made the famous distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic⁵⁰. Though both axes were legitimate and necessary to linguistics, Saussure maintained that interest in the synchronic was the newer, more original, and more creative element⁵¹. The two, for him, “are not of equal importance [...] the synchronic viewpoint predominates, for it is the true and only reality to the community of speakers” (Course 90). From this statement, one can therefore gain the impression that synchronic linguistics is to be “regarded as methodologically prior”⁵². And in Saussure’s own words he writes: “The linguist who wishes to understand a state must discard all knowledge of everything that produced it and ignore diachrony. He can enter the mind of speakers only by completely suppressing the past. The intervention of history can only falsify his judgment”⁵³.

ROGERSON, *W.M.L. de Wette: Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism*. See also J.W. ROGERSON, *Synchrony and Diachrony in the Work of de Wette and Its Importance for Today*, in J.C. DE MOOR (ed.), *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis* (OTS 34), Leiden, 1995, p. 145-158, see especially p. 145.

⁴⁶ Paul Joyce doubts however the fidelity of this reconstruction. See P.M. JOYCE, *Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on Ezekiel*, in J. C. DE MOOR (ed.), *Synchronic or Diachronic?* p. 115-128, see p. 115.

⁴⁷ F. DE SAUSSURE, *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris, 1971.

⁴⁸ J. BARR, *The Synchronic, the Diachronic and the Historical: A Triangular Relationship?* in J.C. DE MOOR (ed.), *Synchronic or Diachronic?* p. 1-14, see p. 1.

⁴⁹ R.H. ROBINS, *A Short History of Linguistics*, London, 1967, p. 200-201.

⁵⁰ J. BARR, *The Synchronic, the Diachronic and the Historical: A Triangular Relationship?* p. 1.

⁵¹ J. BARR, *The Synchronic, the Diachronic and the Historical: A Triangular Relationship?* p. 1.

⁵² P. MÜHLHÄUSLER, *Linguistics: Diachronic*, in R. HARRÉ & R. LAMB (eds.), *The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Psychology*, Oxford, 1983, p. 355.

⁵³ Quoted in J. BARR, *The Synchronic, the Diachronic and the Historical: A Triangular Relationship?* p. 2.

The work of Saussure therefore marked the shift from traditional philology to modern linguistics⁵⁴. Before his time, the study of linguistics and related issues were predominantly historical or even evolutionary, that is, attempting to trace the origin and development of words through time and history, hence diachronic. Characteristically it was more concerned with the comparative study of ancient written languages and had the tendency to be prescriptive, attempting to distil and codify standard forms. Since Saussure, the shift is awakened; linguistic studies have been more concerned with the static (or better, 'synchronic') picture⁵⁵; it has aimed at describing actual usage and practice in all its diversity, rather than presuming to prescribe. Language is to be understood as a coherently organised structure, hence structuralism. Language for him is the structural relation between words. "The linguistic system sign does not exist independently of a complex system of contrasts; being intrinsically arbitrary rather than having an inherent meaning; the linguistic sign can be identified only by contrast with coexisting signs of the same nature, which together constitute a structured system of language"⁵⁶.

Barton⁵⁷ mentions five important similarities that exist between the New Criticism and Structuralism⁵⁸. i) Both concentrate on the text itself, rather than on the author, or on the intentions of the author or on the historical contexts. ii) They express belief in the non-referential character of literature. iii) Both are interested in the form, shape and genre of the text. iv) They share the belief that exact synonymy does not exist. By this, it means that much comes into play to determine the meaning of a word or words in a text. Even no translation is exact. For example, H. Christ⁵⁹ in his monograph *Blutvergiessen im Alten Testament* has given the dangers of relying on translation when one is aiming at a sophisticated semantic definition. His main point is that Hebrew *dam* for example, does

⁵⁴ P.M. JOYCE, *Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on Ezekiel*, p. 115.

⁵⁵ P.M. JOYCE, *Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on Ezekiel*, p. 115.

⁵⁶ P.M. JOYCE, *Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on Ezekiel*, p. 115.

⁵⁷ J. BARTON, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, p. 180ff.

⁵⁸ Cf. L.C. FONKER, *Exclusivity and Variety*, p. 191.

⁵⁹ H. CHRIST, *Blutvergiessen im Alten Testament. Der gewaltsame Tod des Menschen untersucht am hebräischen Wort 'dam'*, Basle, 1977, p. 10-11.

not mean exactly the same thing as English 'blood' or French 'sang'. There is a wide overlap between these terms, but not a complete overlap: in particular Hebrew *dam* is never used in the positive sense of a family bond, as in 'blood-brother' or 'blood is thicker than water'. The Hebrew for that usage would probably be *bāsār* 'flesh'. Similar confusion, according to John Sawyer⁶⁰, has also arisen for example over the word *b^erīt* translated 'covenant' in some contexts, but 'promise' in others, neither providing in any way an accurate definition. v) That the meaning of texts is determined by the canon of literature, by the conventions of writing, and by the structures of language. All in all, the New Criticism and Structuralism made a shift from the study of the origin and development of a piece of writing to the study of the text itself, and therefore as consequence, promoted a viable interest in the role of the reader.

2.1.4 Intersection of Critical Theory and Biblical Criticism

Although the distinction between synchronic and diachronic perspectives has become commonplace in biblical studies in the recent years⁶¹, these new ideas in linguistics were slow to have any effect on biblical studies⁶². This is also the opinion of Joyce: "Typically, modern linguistics has concerned itself overwhelmingly with living, spoken languages, but many of its insights can be and have been applied to the study of ancient languages and literatures. Thus it is that synchronic studies of the Hebrew Bible have found a place over recent decades. All too often biblical scholars have been rather slow in taking on board the insights of other disciplines, and even then, they have frequently done so in a piecemeal fashion and in a somewhat diluted form"⁶³. J. Barr claims to be "the first or one of the first, to make familiar the distinction between diachronic and synchronic as an element within biblical studies"⁶⁴ in his works and articles⁶⁵. He writes: "Words can only

⁶⁰ J. SAWYER, *A Change of Emphasis in the Study of the Prophets*, in R.J. COGGINS, A. PHILLIPS & M.A. KNIBB (eds.), *Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd*, Cambridge, 1982, p. 233-249, see p. 235.

⁶¹ P.M. JOYCE, *Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on Ezekiel*, p. 115.

⁶² J. BARR, *The Synchronic, the Diachronic and the Historical: A Triangular Relationship?* p. 1.

⁶³ P.M. JOYCE, *Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on Ezekiel*, p. 115-116.

⁶⁴ J. BARR, *The Synchronic, the Diachronic and the Historical: A Triangular Relationship?* p. 1.

be intelligibly interpreted by what they meant at the time of their use, within the language system used by the speaker or writer”⁶⁶. In biblical studies, the terms ‘synchronic’ and ‘diachronic’ have tended to be used without all their broader connotations being in view, primarily in relation to questions concerning the unity and analysis of texts. The contrast has been, of course, mainly between studies and approaches which attempt to trace the development of texts through time (diachronic) and others which deal with texts as holistic units (synchronic)⁶⁷; in fact an exercise in holism⁶⁸; and this tendency has finally given rise to studies which have evoked new interest in the literary character of the Bible from this holistic point of view, and brought about a “breakthrough”⁶⁹ from the traditional historical-critical paradigm of thought. Many critics therefore express the conviction that biblical language is infinitely unstable and so meaning is not only deferrable but can radically foreground the reader’s values as determinative of interpretation; and that criticism is not anchored in fixed texts but in fragile communities of interpreters⁷⁰.

One important upshot, using the words of Gunn, of this breakthrough, is the conviction among biblical critics that no system of reading can ever guarantee the “correct” interpretation of a story, no matter how highly trained and “competent” readers may become⁷¹. There will be always different and differing interpretative strategies, just as there will be always interpreters who interpret from different places and angles, and who find significance in different and differing elements of the text.

⁶⁵ J. BARR, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, London, 1961; *Hypostatization of Linguistic Phenomena in Modern Theological Interpretation*, in *JSS* 7 (1962), p. 85-94.

⁶⁶ J. BARR, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, p. 139-140.

⁶⁷ P.M. JOYCE, *Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on Ezekiel*, p. 116.

⁶⁸ D.M. GUNN, *Narrative Criticism* in S.L. MCKENZIE & S.R. HAYNES (eds.), *To Each Its Own Meaning*, 1999, p. 201-229, see p. 201.

⁶⁹ R. MORGAN & J. BARTON, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 221.

⁷⁰ D.M. GUNN, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 202.

⁷¹ D.M. GUNN, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 201.

And so in the past three decades roughly, critical theory and biblical criticism have intersected, giving rise to a giant tree of multiple branches. Here we cannot enter into attempting even a rough sampling of these manifold upshots with particular reference to the Hebrew Bible⁷². One thing is certain: the fact of plurality⁷³.

2.2 NARRATIVE BIBLICAL CRITICISM: ATTEMPT AT DESCRIPTION

2.2.1 *Attempt at Description*

The term “narrative criticism” in biblical studies is loose⁷⁴. That is why in this subsection we adopt a style we judge will help us describe it to a relatively clearer extent. And this style would entail sampling the definitions of some major authors in the field or a quasi presentation of their presuppositions and convictions in the field. Sometimes narrative criticism is used broadly of literary-critical, in opposition to historical (literary)

⁷² For a review or a catalogue both from thematic and historical point of view see, D. GUNN, *Narrative Criticism*, in S.L. MCKENZIE & S.R. HAYNES (eds.), *To Each Its Own Meaning*, p. 202-212.

⁷³ Talking of plurality in biblical scholarship, the work of L.G. PERDUE, *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology*, Minneapolis, 1994, comes easily to mind, a book written with several objectives in mind: in the words of the author, “to describe the salient features of a select number of recent interpretive strategies of biblical interpretation and theology, to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, to discover grounds for common discourse between their significant representatives, and (which makes this work more interesting) to use their implications for the study of Jeremiah as a case in point”, L.G. PERDUE, *The Book of Jeremiah in Old Testament Theology*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 320-338. Current Old Testament biblical scholarship, explains Perdue, has shifted dramatically from an interest in history to a concern for literary and contextual interpretations, from the direct concern with the historical development of Israel’s faith (cf. the salvation-history approach of G.E. Wright or John Bright and the tradition-history approach of A. Alt, G. von Rad and M. Noth) to diverse interests among which are liberation theology, emphasis on myth, canonical and intertextual developments, literary insights from metaphor and story theologies, narrative theology, theology of imagination, etc. See L. BOADT, *The Book of Jeremiah and the Power of Historical Recitation*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 339-349, see p. 342. For thoughtful reviews and references to this book, see also D.T. OLSON, *Between the Tower of Unity and the Babel of Pluralism: Biblical Theology and Leo Perdue’s The Collapse of History*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 350-358; T. O. OVERHOLT, *What Shall We Do about Pluralism? A Response to Leo Perdue’s The Collapse of History*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 359-366.

⁷⁴ D.M. GUNN, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 201.

-critical analysis of the biblical text, from a variety of methodological standpoints. But in the main, from whatever angle, it has often meant “retour au texte”⁷⁵; interpreting the existing biblical text in its final form, that is, “in terms primarily of its own story world, seen as replete with meaning, rather than understanding them by attempting to reconstruct its sources and editorial history, its original setting and audience, and its author’s or editor’s intention in writing”⁷⁶. In the spirit of the New Criticism, the exegete understands the biblical text “to be an interpretable entity independent of both author and interpreter”⁷⁷. The route to meaning is the same thing as the key and that is ‘close reading’ (and just recently Martin Kessler goes further with the concept ‘listening’⁷⁸) which “identifies formal and conventional structures of the narrative, determines plot, develops characterization, distinguishes point of view, exposes language play, and relates all to some overarching, encapsulating theme”⁷⁹. Biblical texts are therefore viewed synchronically, rather than diachronically, that is, as a meaningful whole containing the essential elements of its own understanding rather than as understandable only as the product of a historically determined process of composition⁸⁰. The close reading in narrative method referred above is one in which one pays, in Robert Alter’s phrases,

⁷⁵ J.-L. SKA, J.-P. SONNET & A. WENIN, *L’analyse narrative des récits de l’Ancien Testament*, (CEV 107), Paris, 1999, p. 5.

⁷⁶ D.M. GUNN, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 201.

⁷⁷ D.M. GUNN, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 201.

⁷⁸ Kessler writes: “Biblical scholars have their agenda for doing responsible exegesis; rightly, it begins and ends with the text, i.e. the MT. The present work has tried to follow that agenda which essentially consists of paying attention; ‘close reading’ is often mentioned, but in a profound and prior sense it is ‘listening’”. Kessler arrives at this concept by maintaining that the provision of texts with accents (פנינים) and paragraphing (פרשיות) by the Massoretes for reading and chanting underscored the oral quality of the text. Oral quality in this sense is not just only concerned with just reading but also hearing. Martin Buber talks of the *Geschprochenheit* of the Bible and that means, for Kessler, that the text needs to be said aloud so it may be heard. Referring to the Rabbinic name for the Hebrew Bible which is *Miqra* (מקרא) from the root קרא (“to call”), Kessler says that “if we bear in mind the text as read and heard, then we should be concerned with its acoustic aspect”, M. KESSLER, *Battle of the Gods: The God of Israel versus Marduk of Babylon, A Literary/Theological Interpretation of Jeremiah 50-51* (SSN 42), Assen, 2003, p. 54.

⁷⁹ D.M. GUNN, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 201.

⁸⁰ D.M. GUNN, *Narrative Criticism*, p. 204.

“minutely discriminating attention” or “disciplined attention”⁸¹ to the use, repetition, and arrangement of words, structural patterns, shifts in voices, deliberate verbal strategies that cause breaks, surprises, contrasts, comparisons, ambiguities, and open-ended marvel in the text. The interpreter focuses on the action and voice of the text itself and is not led away from the actual world of the text by any external reference or hypothesis, since it is the fundamental presupposition in this method that the text contains in itself the threads for its unravelling. In this perspective, the only fundamental datum is the text. The biblical text is considered not as the product of the combination of diverse traditions (without its express denial anyway), but as a literary unity, itself containing its own norms of interpretation, and its proper hermeneutical key. The complicated origin of the text is not denied however, nor the fact of various stages and layers of redaction ruled out, but these do not form the underlying theoretical presuppositions necessary for the reading of the text. Even though the exegete does not deny them, he does not equally rely on them. The eventual ‘contradictions and internal incoherence’ require then an intrinsic interpretation to be perceived from the available structural or narrative data.

2.2.2 Robert Alter, Yairah Amit and Jan Fokkelman

It is our intention to use the views of these three authors to further the description of the narrative method and illustrate its major presuppositions. By choosing these authors, we have not made any ranking among experts, but for the following reason. Two factors are primarily determinant in any exegesis and they condition the eventual exegetical findings: the first is how the exegete regards or perceives the text before him, his *a priori* conceptions and bias and secondly how he defines his own task, that is what he does with his text, and these authors are chosen here because their presentation of these issues in their major works are simple and clear. While Alter writes more on the nature of the text, Amit dwells on the role of the reader and Fokkelman tries to relate the two to each another.

⁸¹ R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 13.

2.2.2.1 Robert Alter: On the Biblical Text

Convinced that “the shape and meaning of any literary text will naturally be dependent to some extent on its linguistic fashioning”⁸², Alter, professionally a specialist in novels who brought his literary competences and his knowledge of Jewish tradition to bear on biblical narratives, aims at illuminating “the distinctive principles of the Bible’s narrative art”⁸³. He calls attention to “the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional units, and much else, the kind of disciplined attention, in other words, which through a whole spectrum of critical approaches has illuminated, for example, the poetry of Dante, the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Tolstoy”⁸⁴. Though Alter sees the Bible as literature, he has the credit at the same time of recognising the fact of the composite nature of the text. Biblical narrative should not be treated “as though it were a unitary production just like a modern novel that is entirely conceived and executed by a single independent writer who supervises his original work from first draft to page proofs”⁸⁵. We should not turn our backs, “in other words, on what historical scholarship has taught us about the specific conditions of development of the biblical text and about its frequently composite nature”⁸⁶. But this does not make him lose sight of the integrity of the text itself, because historical scholarship should be regarded as “aspects of the distinctive artistic medium of the biblical authors [...]. Even if the text is really composite in origin, I think we have seen ample evidence of how brilliantly it has been woven into a complex artistic whole”⁸⁷. The idea Alter expresses here takes us into his concept of the ‘composite artistry’ of the Bible. According to him since the procedures of biblical narrative differ notably from those of later Western fiction, certain aspects of the Bible still baffle the efforts of literary critics to make sense of it as a literary form. And so there is always the problem of the “ambiguous status of those components of the biblical corpus commonly

⁸² R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. x.

⁸³ R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. ix.

⁸⁴ R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 12-13.

⁸⁵ R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 19.

⁸⁶ R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 19.

⁸⁷ R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 19-20.

called books or indeed of many discrete narrative segments within the individual books”⁸⁸; a fact accentuated by historical-critical scholarship⁸⁹. Alter postulates a solution with his conception of ‘composite artistry’: “the biblical writers and redactors [...] had certain notions of unity rather different from our own, and that the fullness of statement they aspired to achieve as writers in fact led them at times to violate what a later age and culture would be disposed to think of as canons of unity and logical coherence. The biblical text may not be the whole cloth imagined by pre-modern Judeo-Christian tradition, but the confused textual patchwork that scholarship has often found to displace such earlier views may prove upon further scrutiny to be purposeful pattern”⁹⁰. In other words, the astonishing literary effects often achieved by the authors of the Bible are the results of art and not of artlessness, as commented by J.M. Cameron on Alter’s book⁹¹, a result of an “activity of the literary imagination, some deep intuition of art that finely interweaves, shaping a complex and meaningful whole which is more than the sum of its parts”⁹².

⁸⁸ R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 131.

⁸⁹ The most eminent instance of this composite character of the biblical text has been found by scholars in the first four books of the Pentateuch, which, basing on the evidence of style, form of narrative data, theological accent, and assumptions of a historical nature, have been identified as comprising three separate primary strands – the Yahwistic document (*J*), the Elohist Document (*E*), and the Priestly Document (*P*). Different dates are assigned to each of these strands: *J* might date back to the tenth century B.C.E.; *E* about a century later, while *P* could be the work of priestly writers around the first temple period and which continued till the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. There are also propositions about sub-documents and intermediate stages separating the original literary castings and the final editing as we have them today. Alter remarks: “Beyond the Pentateuch, the textual components of the narrative books of the Bible have not been blessed with the classroom clarity of these alphabetical markers, but under analysis, a good many passages in the Former Prophets reveal composite elements analogous to, and perhaps sometimes even continuous with, what has been discovered in the Pentateuch”, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 132.

⁹⁰ R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 133.

⁹¹ Back page commentary: R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

⁹² R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 132.

2.2.2.2 Yairah Amit: *On the Reader*

Yairah Amit's work⁹³, written in Hebrew and translated in English in 2001 by Yael Lotan, sets as its aims, in the words of the author "to serve as an introduction to (reading) biblical narrative"⁹⁴. The driving questions are: "How does the Bible itself regard its narrative portions? Do biblical stories share peculiar characteristics, and can we speak about the particular nature of the biblical story? Who set the boundaries of these stories, and who was responsible for their headings? Should a reader of these stories bear in mind the considerations of biblical criticism and the findings of biblical research? Who is the omniscient and omnipotent figure in biblical narrative, God or the narrator? How are the plot, characters, time, and place designed? What is the relationship between content and form? How can we determine the meaning of a story, and can it have more than one meaning? These issues, and others I have not listed, underlie the chapters of this book"⁹⁵.

Two important remarks of Amit are worthy of mention here: first is her treatment of 'the power of stories' and second, her concept of 'dynamic reading'. A considerable part of biblical literature, she calculates, in fact one-third of the Bible consists of stories and the Bible ascribes great importance to stories and their presentation as a means of persuasion⁹⁶. The Bible is replete with stories in which one person succeeds in persuading another by means of a story⁹⁷. We have the story of Judah in Gen. 44:18-45:2⁹⁸, prophet

⁹³ Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, Minneapolis, 2001, p. xi.

⁹⁴ Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. xi.

⁹⁵ Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. xi.

⁹⁶ Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 1.

⁹⁷ For the treatment of some persuasive stories and intercessory interventions in the Bible, see F. ROSSIER, *L'intercession entre les hommes dans la Bible hébraïque. L'intercession entre les hommes aux origines de l'intercession auprès de Dieu* (OBO 152), Göttingen, 1996.

⁹⁸ Judah had to persuade Joseph not to harm Benjamin, the youngest of his brothers and to do this, he had to go by telling the viceroy of the King of Egypt, Joseph, the whole story of his family so that at the end of the story, the latter could not but be moved with emotion to the point of sobbing. A reader cannot but be impressed by the sophisticated characterisation in this narrative and the literary techniques that are employed in the speech. The eloquence of the speech, deferential but yet dignified; spirited but not provocative, full of pathos and passion, yet restrained and transparently sincere, is evident. There are the

Nathan and King David in II Sam. 12:1-14⁹⁹, Joab and King David in II Sam. 13:38-14:24¹⁰⁰; among others, all of which show that a story itself can be a means of persuasion and tell us much about its rhetorical functions in the biblical world¹⁰¹. Her opinion in concrete is that the biblical writer chose the medium of stories, with the “intention to influence (his audience) to accept his views”¹⁰².

In discussing the role of the reader in the second chapter of her work titled ‘Story scholars and the role of the reader’, Amit underscores the dynamism of the reader: “The outline of the story is dynamically determined, (and) the reader of biblical stories has an unusually active role, in the absence of clear boundaries and titles”¹⁰³. Based on the

powerful external factors of Judah’s speech and the overall course of events. There are also the powerful internal factors with which Joseph has been wrestling: his desire for Benjamin versus his growing concern for his father, the power struggle with his brothers versus the desire for reunion, the challenge of Judah’s selflessness versus his own self-interest, the shame and blame associated with his disclosure versus the anxiety of a son for his father. See also M.A. O’BRIEN, *The Contribution of Judah’s Speech, Genesis 44:18-34 to the Characterization of Joseph*, in *CBQ* 59 (1997), p. 429-447.

⁹⁹ Aiming at reproaching the King for the misuse of another man’s wife and putting her husband, Uriah the Hittite, tactically to death, Nathan the prophet had to invent a story of the rich man and the poor man’s ewe, which turns out to be a parable. The story and the way it is passionately delivered led David to blame the rich man and condemn him in unqualified terms. Only at this point does Nathan draw his analogy to the utter surprise, shame and acknowledgement of guilt on the part of the King. On this story, Wénin refers to this phenomenon as “le pouvoir de vérité de la fiction”. Cf. A. WÉNIN, *David et l’histoire de Natan (2 Samuel 12,1-7), ou : Le lecteur et la fiction prophétique du récit biblique*, in D. MARGUERAT (ed.), *La Bible en récits : L’exégèse biblique à l’heure du lecteur*, Geneva, 2003, p. 153-164, see 158ff.

¹⁰⁰ Joab notices that David is in pursuit of his son Absalom who had fled to the land of Geshur after having killed Ammon. He tries to persuade the king to bring Absalom back and summons a ‘clever woman’ from Tekoa. The woman tells David what looked like her own personal story; her widowhood, about a fight between her two sons, one of who killed the other, about the family’s determination to kill the survivor, and of her fear that this move will lead to the extinction of the family name. At the moment when David promises to help her out, she relates her story to the case of Absalom and that makes David to agree to bring Absalom back from the land of Geshur.

¹⁰¹ Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 2.

¹⁰² Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 2.

¹⁰³ Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 21.

evident premise that biblical stories have no original titles¹⁰⁴, it rests on the reader to define the boundaries of the stories and their limits, though not without certain basic criteria. She quotes Perry and Sternberg¹⁰⁵ who write thus: “The boundaries of a unit are dynamic, they are not defined in advance; once and for all, but are redefined and reorganized anew, according to the questions one seeks to answer, according to the kind of observation that one wishes to apply [...]. Every researcher and every research demarcate their own boundaries, and are quite free to do so, provided they take into account –explicitly or implicitly – all the other frameworks, both narrower and wider, to which the unit in question belongs”¹⁰⁶. Such frameworks or criteria could either be thematic criterion, or a structural one, a principle of symmetry or *inclusio*, that is, beginning and ending with a similar subject, phrase, or word. Another criterion pertains to considerations of time, relating to events that happened in one period of time. Finally she adds considerations of poetics and of style, such as techniques of narration that characterise a specific unit; for example, ironic representation, use of key words, and the like¹⁰⁷. Other authors like Ska¹⁰⁸ and Mlakuzhyil¹⁰⁹ equally list other criteria. In

¹⁰⁴ It is a known fact that originally, the stories in the scrolls of the Bible have no titles, and the titles we have today – for example, the story of the creation, the story of the flood, the binding of Isaac, the call of Moses – are simply products of readers, exegetical traditions and translators, who assigned titles depending on their interpretation of the contents of the stories and their boundaries. This being the case, we can say that the title of any biblical story is a product of a commentary, which means that a reader of these stories is free to disagree with it and to change it. That is to say, “the reader may engage in the same work as the various commentators who gave different titles to the same story [...]. As you examine the various commentaries, you will come across different outlines and titles since the boundaries and titles are not holy writ but the reader’s determination”, Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁵ M. PERRY & M. STERNBERG, *Caution: A Literary Text! Problems in the Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, in *Hasifrut/Literature 2* (1970), p. 608-663 (Heb.).

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁷ Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 18. Example is given with the story of Joseph (Gen. 37-39). A reader or commentator may choose to look at the whole story, or particular units within it, such as Joseph in the house of Potiphar and his wife (chapter 39), or the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker in chapter 40. If on the other hand one were to choose the motif of dreams in the whole Joseph cycle, then one would select the six dreams that appear in the course of the story: Joseph’s two dreams in chapter 37:5-10, the dreams of the baker and the cupbearer in chapter 40 and the two dreams of Pharaoh in chapter 41:1-38. Or in the story of the creation (Gen. 1:1-2:4a) there is no question that the subject is the creation of the world

summary, “what all this means is that the biblical stories call for dynamic reading, which must determine the boundaries of the stories and even their titles”¹¹⁰.

2.2.2.3 Jan Fokkelman: Text-Reader Relationship

Fokkelman talks of the three-fold alienation¹¹¹ with which historical-critical readers have discouraged many Bible readers, students of theology, and future preachers: the text comes from far away, dates from a long time ago, and is rooted in a radically different culture. He acknowledges of course that the text of the Bible comes from the Near East, that it is almost 2000 to 3000 years old, and that it originated in a culture which differed greatly from ours, both materially and spiritually. But distances for him, though “should not be underestimated”, are “only half-truths” and should not be treated as “unshakeable

by God in seven days. Here the concentric structure is evident since the unit opens and ends with like statements: “... God created heaven and earth...” (Gen. 1:1) and “such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created” (Gen. 2:4a) respectively. There is a definable time unit: creation in seven days. The unit is also characterised by a distinctive style: detailed and dry, with repetitive formulas, such as “and it was so,” and “and there was evening and there was morning”, such and such a day, see Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 16 and 18.

¹⁰⁸ J.-L. SKA considers the chief criteria to be related to the drama: “change of place, change of time, change of characters (characters entering or leaving the ‘stage’), or change of action. These criteria are frequently combined. Stylistic criteria are also very useful (repetitions, inclusions, shift in vocabulary...)”, *Our Fathers Have Told Us: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (SB 13), Roma, 1990, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ G. MLAKUZHIL, *The Christocentric Structure of the Fourth Gospel* (AnBib 117), Rome, 1987 distinguishes two sets of criteria. 1) Literary criteria: conclusions, introductions, inclusions, characteristic vocabulary, geographical indication, literary-chronological indications, transitions, bridge-passages, hook-words, techniques of repetition, change of “literary genre” 2) Dramatic criteria: changes of scene, technique of alternating scenes, technique of double-stage action, introduction of dramatis personae, the law of stage duality, technique of vanishing character, technique of seven scenes, technique of diptych scene, sequence of action-dialogue-discourse, dramatic development, dramatic pattern (cf. p. 87-121). Cf also L.R. KLEIN, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (JSOTS 68), Sheffield, 1988, p. 194-195; S. BAR-EFRAT, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 96-111.

¹¹⁰ Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 16.

¹¹¹ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative: A Practical Guide* (Tools for Biblical Study 1), Leiden, 1999, p. 21.

axioms” less they will “quietly turn into lies and optical illusions”¹¹². There is rather a greater, more important truth, which is that these texts are well written, and “as products of a deliberate and meticulous designing intelligence they have been crafted to speak for themselves, provided there is a competent reader listening closely. They are, after some training on our part, extremely able to reveal and explain themselves”¹¹³.

The text is a living text says Fokkelman¹¹⁴. Though it is worth investigating to know more about the writer, his purpose and the circumstances in which he wrote, none of this is actually essential since “a text does not remain the same throughout the ages but, being a living (i.e. read) text, itself also constantly changes. It acquires an ever growing history and ever-richer contents”¹¹⁵. What counts, as a matter of necessity is “that which the text provides, the world it evokes and the values it embodies, and then, the confrontation, the interplay, the friction and sometimes the clash between all this and the reader’s world and values”¹¹⁶. He continues his argument: “Whoever says the Bible is old, remote and strange, pushes the text too far away and as a result ends up with a formidable problem, namely whether the Bible ‘can still mean something for modern man’ and he evaluates this problematic as one that people have created themselves by way of the three-fold alienation”¹¹⁷. The problem is phantomatic and therefore unsolvable because “in reality, the Bible is very close – we have opened it, and already have expectations or assumptions about the values stored or presented in it – and its meaning takes shape thanks to our mental activity and the imagination we bring to the text. It is our own commitment that creates the field of intersubjectivity. After that, the question about the “relevance” of the Bible has largely become spurious”¹¹⁸.

¹¹² J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 21.

¹¹³ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 21.

¹¹⁴ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 23.

¹¹⁵ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 23.

¹¹⁶ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 23.

¹¹⁷ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 25.

¹¹⁸ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 25.

Interestingly, after talking about the text, Fokkelman relates it to the reader in a simple statement: “Without a reader, a text cannot operate, it is no more than a silent shadow”¹¹⁹, even though he admits that the relation between text and meaning is not a very simple one. One cannot simply say that there is meaning in the text or that the text ‘contains’ meaning in a way analogous to the statement that a cup contains coffee. Getting to the meaning of the text, that is ‘exegesis’ (a Greek word meaning ‘leading out’) is an activity which shows that meaning is not a fixed and objective string of data which one has “to coax out of a text because in actual fact, a text only speaks when a listener comes along”. It is by listening that a text becomes alive and begins to speak. “Reading is certainly not passive, nor a form of easy consumption, even though our body seems to suggest this when we are lounging in our armchair. Reading is a specific mental activity, it is *the action of conferring meaning to a text*”¹²⁰.

Fokkelman maintains that there are two sides of “meaning” in the art of reading, the reader who bestows it and the text which ‘has’ it. These two sides of meaning correspond to the two important questions which are at the base of any meaningful engagement in the reading of a text¹²¹. The two questions are: 1) what is the text saying, that is, what exactly is it telling me? And the second one is: May I assume there’s a message in its structure¹²²? Interestingly, Fokkelman gives to the first question a slightly “different emphasis”: the question is answered by way of an apparent detour, by asking: how is it saying it, and this shift of focus from the ‘what’ to the ‘how’ is an important characteristic of the narrative method of reading the biblical text¹²³. He gave three reasons why this shift of focus is necessary; all three which could be summarised in the fact that the stories in the Bible are products of literary design which are subtle and at times to the smallest detail, demanding therefore to be taken completely seriously in their literary mode of being, and that proves that the meaning of the story is not static, a

¹¹⁹ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 20.

¹²⁰ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 20-21.

¹²¹ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 25.

¹²² J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 25.

¹²³ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 26.

given¹²⁴, but originates only from the dialogue between the text and the reader¹²⁵. In fact, in his own treatment of the reader, Ska concludes thus: “The active participation of the reader is an essential part of the act of reading. A text is like a score of music. The music remains dead unless somebody plays or sings what is written in the score. A Biblical text remains dead unless the reader interprets it”¹²⁶.

2.3 THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH GOES NARRATIVE

Having given in summary the major theoretical presuppositions of narrative criticism, the last section of this Chapter considers these presuppositions from the point of view specifically of the book of Jeremiah. Of course, previously, the debate as to which of the two approaches, the synchronic or the diachronic, is the best method in the research of the book of Jeremiah has not been popular. But today it is clear that the nature of the biblical text gives itself away to be approached from different angles. This point has become so evident that in 1994, the Society of Old Testament Study at their Ninth Joint Meeting held at Kampen devoted the papers to ask the methodological question¹²⁷ which Weippert regrets has not been first and above all posed. In the said meeting, an article on Jeremiah was read by Carroll¹²⁸. That means that just as the questions of redaction and composition, of the relationship between the manifold texts of the same book, of chronology of the prophet, the question of the method of reading the text is equally important. Carroll begins the just cited article with the remark that the book of Jeremiah is a difficult book for post-Enlightenment scholars to read today, that it is both untidy¹²⁹

¹²⁴ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 26.

¹²⁵ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 27.

¹²⁶ J.-L. SKA, “*Our Fathers Have Told Us*”, p. 63.

¹²⁷ J.C. DE MOOR (ed.), *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis* (OTS 34), Leiden, 1995.

¹²⁸ R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah: Diachrony to the Rescue? Reflections on Some Reading Strategies for Understanding Certain Problems in the Book of Jeremiah*, in J.C. DE MOOR (ed.), *Synchronic or Diachronic?* p. 39-51.

¹²⁹ Talking of being “untidy” reminds of the evaluation which many critics, using the historical method, have already made as regards the book: the notice of the presence of different literary styles, the lack of any organising principle and chronological disorder in the arrangement of many chapters. In the forward to his

and repetitious, “frequently eschewing chronological sequencing (except in chapters 26-29, 34-44), and in chapters 2-20 there are insufficient rubrics to provide a narrative framework for the book”¹³⁰. On the question of its readability he asserts: “The question of whether it is readable today had better be avoided as a negative answer would undermine all contemporary scholarly operations. The question is better posed in terms of ‘how is this book to be read today?’ Following this formation of the question of reading allows for analyses of the book along diachronic and synchronic lines as one approach to exploring possible preferred readings of Jeremiah”¹³¹. In the first place, he understands and describes the synchronic reading of Jeremiah as an attempt “to do the impossible by rephrasing the book’s representational levels into a coherent narratological account”¹³² and “an attempt to bypass the problems by ignoring them”¹³³. He maintains: “The only way I can rescue a synchronic reading is to do it in a diachronic way”¹³⁴ since it is the diachronic that “makes sense of the untidy book of Jeremiah, it allows me to incorporate my post-Enlightenment critically reflective perspective into my reading of the text, and it seems to make due allowances for the discrete and diverse interests operating in the

commentary, DUHM, *Das Buch Jeremia* immediately focuses on the presence of different literary styles and their relevance for determining the authorship of the book’s contents, cf. p. vii. Then in the introduction, he takes the issue in more detail, cf. p. xii-xvi. It is also in the introduction that he takes up the question of the book’s lack of order, and where he makes his famous comment that the book’s growth was like that of an out-of-control forest. Similarly, S. MOWINCKEL, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia*, begins with the observation of the text and remarks a conspicuous lack of any plan – “eine auffällige Planlosigkeit” – and the presence of many parallel passages indicating that the book is not the work of one hand. The observation of the characteristics of the different superscriptions provides some insight into the book’s composition, cf. p. 5-6. Carroll provides a final example. In many of his writings, he also identifies certain features of the world of the text to support his interpretive approach to the book: the differences in language between prose and poetry, different attitudes in the book towards Judah and Jerusalem, the near absence in chapters 1-25 of markers which identify Jeremiah as the speaker and the abundance of these in chapters 26-52, the presence of parallel passages, see especially, CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 35-37.

¹³⁰ R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah: Diachrony to the Rescue?* p. 39.

¹³¹ R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah: Diachrony to the Rescue?* p. 39.

¹³² R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah: Diachrony to the Rescue?* p. 41.

¹³³ R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah: Diachrony to the Rescue?* p. 50.

¹³⁴ R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah: Diachrony to the Rescue?* p. 50.

production of the text”¹³⁵. Carroll concludes: “Perhaps a synchronic reading of Jeremiah can be sustained by postmodernist readers of the Bible or by readers who resolutely refuse to recognize the Enlightenment as ever having happened in matters pertaining to reading the Bible”¹³⁶.

The option for the narrative method is however not judgemental as has already been expressed. In this era of the plurality of methods, it is necessary to reiterate the point that any approach to a biblical text has its own limits and these limits derive mainly from its presuppositions. As John Hill puts it:

“Each approach has its own set of suppositions and its own set of questions which it brings to the text, and which generate a certain range of answers. In Jeremiah research the major questions put forward and the solutions proposed have been those generated by the historical-critical approach. As a result there has been a neglect of the interpretive possibilities that a synchronic reading can generate with its own particular set of questions and range of answers”¹³⁷.

We have therefore made an option among options, an option which further hinges on the conviction that, as Alastair Hunter rightly puts it, “perhaps the most fundamental problem facing anyone who wishes to discuss the work of an ‘author’ in any part of the OT is how to define the limits of that proposed author’s work. It is, of course, always possible to cut the Gordian knot by dealing directly with the ‘final form’ of the text; and in some cases that is perhaps the best way to handle interpretation [...]. And generally speaking, the recent school of ‘theology as story’ has encouraged the kind of analysis which emphasizes the anecdotal character of the narrative as the principal bearer of hermeneutic significance”¹³⁸.

¹³⁵ R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah: Diachrony to the Rescue?* p. 50.

¹³⁶ R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah: Diachrony to the Rescue?* p. 49.

¹³⁷ J. HILL, *Friend or Foe?* p. 11.

¹³⁸ A. HUNTER, *Father Abraham: A Structural and Theological Study of the Yahwist’s Presentation of the Abraham Material*, in *JSOT* 35 (1986), p. 3-27, p. 3.

There has therefore become a clear division along two strands of readings of the book of Jeremiah; one which concentrates in the “world behind the text” and the other which concentrates in the “world of the text” using again the words of John Hill¹³⁹. Recent years have however equally attested to works that do not primarily consider the book’s compositional history, but rather the world of the text; a “decisive turn from reading for extrinsic agency behind the text to an intrinsic reading for an immanent and meaningful form [...] a de-centering of extrinsic, and historicist preoccupation to the intrinsic, imaginative world of the text as constituting its own coherent hermeneutic system and portrait”¹⁴⁰.

Of particular notice is the work of Smith on the confessions of Jeremiah 11-20¹⁴¹. While recognising the importance of the issues of redaction, he sets out to explain how the respective chapters function as part of the book. Diamond analyses the laments individually, their significance when incorporated into a larger context of chapters 11-20 and how these chapters function as a whole¹⁴². In line with many other studies in the same direction, he does not seek to trace the meaning and significance of the confessions either from their original settings or from the historical mission of the prophet. Rather it is the crisis over the proper context in which the confessions are to be interpreted that poses the primary question¹⁴³. To pursue this question, the text will have to be the point of departure with close attention in order to recognise the poetic and composition conventions inherent in it. Since “in the last analysis the text represents a barrier to our immediate access to any other of these potentially significant contexts”, he stresses that the text is “both immediate primary source and potential barrier for current research interests”, hoping that “the inherent characteristics of the text will offer guidelines and place constraints upon our attempt at interpretation – metaphorically speaking, that the

¹³⁹ J. HILL, *Friend or Foe?* p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, p. 20.

¹⁴¹ M.S. SMITH, *The Laments of Jeremiah and their Contexts: A Literary and Redactional Study of Jeremiah 11-20* (SBLMS 42), Atlanta, 1990.

¹⁴² A.R.P. DIAMOND, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context: Scenes of Prophetic Drama* (JSOTS 45), Sheffield, 1987.

¹⁴³ A.R.P. DIAMOND, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context: Scenes of Prophetic Drama*, p. 17.

inherent conventions of the confessions will say ‘read me this way’ and establish a hierarchy of priorities in the attempt to achieve a valid reading of them”¹⁴⁴.

Perhaps even more interesting in this angle is the recent work of Stulman: *Order amid Chaos: Jeremiah as Symbolic Tapestry*¹⁴⁵. Stulman provides a very good discussion of the different ways of treating the chaos element detected by so many contemporary readers of Jeremiah, and offers a way of incorporating both notions of chaos and order in an account of the book’s structure. He made, one could say, a synchronic reading of Jeremiah that is grounded in diachronic sensibilities. Taking a strongly contextual approach, he argues that far from being “a hopeless hodgepodge” of oracles, the final form of Jeremiah has a purposeful literary plan and presents the reader with a concrete theological message. “To put it more modestly, in spite of the book’s untidiness this literature is readable, not primarily by standards of linear logic and coherence, but as a symbolic tapestry of meanings with narrative seams”¹⁴⁶. His analogy with a tapestry bears on his conviction that though Jeremiah scholarship has so far been too preoccupied with looking at individual oracular/narrative threads, in order to understand the book, it is necessary to step back and consider the “big picture”. He therefore provides an overview of the book in terms of its macro-structural units.

Having said this, we do not lose sight of the fact that all the members of the guild do not unanimously accept this opinion or this reading strategy. We do not gloss over the handicaps of this approach or the merits of the diachronic approach especially with regard to the book of Jeremiah¹⁴⁷. It has been shown that the biblical literature, the

¹⁴⁴ A.R.P. DIAMOND, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context: Scenes of Prophetic Drama*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁵ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos: Jeremiah as Symbolic Tapestry* (The Biblical Seminar 57), Sheffield, 1998.

¹⁴⁶ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁷ The problem with the ‘final form’ approach, says Hunter, however, is that it “sometimes leaves the interpreter dealing with what is really a very superficial development – in cases, for example, where an aetiological explanation has been glossed as the apparent point of what is in reality a much more complex account”, A. HUNTER, *Father Abraham*, p. 4. For works dealing with the merits and demerits of biblical methodologies and approaches, see again L.G. PERDUE, *The Collapse of History*.

prophetic books particularly, underwent editorial processes over time; ignoring this factual given as a constant may lead to a kind of scholarly one-sidedness that relies on rigid assumptions and seeks elaborate ways to justify the singularity of the received text, while ignoring the literary artistry of the biblical world, as well as the writers' intellectual world¹⁴⁸. Therefore some attention to questions of textual, source, form and redaction criticism is an important prerequisite of the hermeneutical task¹⁴⁹. It has its limits particularly with regard to the scholarship of Jeremiah, and that is why dissenting voices are equally strong. A.R.P. Diamond in the same introduction does not fail to remark:

“The difficulty for such strategies has been that they may never rise above a ‘pure’ formalism; as a result, they cannot successfully address the inconcinnities of the Jeremiah tradition that so trouble such (close) readers as Carroll or McKane. In such cases the effort to produce an overarching coherent reading of the book opens itself to the criticism of ‘over-reading’ beyond any demonstrable rhetorical rationale or structure to connect what is not explicitly connected; and still, at times, even the will to ‘over-read’ has had to prescind from the attempt by confessing no discernible coherent form¹⁵⁰.

From the description of narrative exegesis using the three authors as example, the triad evoked in the General Introduction becomes evident. The narrative exegetical methodology becomes the tool for the interrogation between the text and the reader.

2.4 THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTUAL STUDY?

Has the book of Jeremiah anything to say, theologically for the man of today? – a further implication of our theme. Is a theological reading, nay contextual, of the book of Jeremiah possible at all? To this question, Carroll¹⁵¹ has a categorical negative response. It all rests on the usefulness of Old Testament prophecy, which he looks at suspiciously. Addressing this question in the Appendix II (*A Note on Using Jeremiah Today*) of his

¹⁴⁸ Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 30.

¹⁴⁹ A. HUNTER, *Father Abraham*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, p. 20.

¹⁵¹ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*.

book¹⁵², he says there are two questions that can normally be asked, that of relevance and the theological question¹⁵³. The questions are respectively: ‘what is the point of studying an ancient book like Jeremiah?’ and ‘is there no word from the Lord for today from the book of Jeremiah?’ The answer to the first question, he says, is easy: “Because the study of ancient texts has an intrinsic value of its own without necessarily being relevant today”¹⁵⁴. And to the second question, the theological question, he gives a more pessimistic answer. After criticising William Holladay and Philip Hyatt who have insisted “in their minor writings on Jeremiah, that he is a prophet for today”¹⁵⁵, he argues, “sceptical of the success of projects which try to relate ancient literature to the modern world”¹⁵⁶:

“It would appear to be an occupational hazard of writing commentaries on the Bible that relevance must be sought for these ancient texts. Clearly we are not living in sixth-century Judah and, equally clearly, the sayings of Jeremiah are not addressed directly to us. What things we might have in common with the ancient

¹⁵² R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 275-279.

¹⁵³ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 275.

¹⁵⁴ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 275.

¹⁵⁵ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 276. In many other writings he takes Brueggemann to task and accuses him of “domesticating” the text, cf. R.P. CARROLL, *Century’s End: Jeremiah Studies at the Beginning of the Third Millennium*, in *CRBS* 8 (2000), p. 18-58, see especially p. 22; *Radical Clashes of Will and Style*, see p. 111; *Something Rich and Strange. Imagining a Future for Jeremiah Studies*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 423-443. In this article, Carroll writes: “[...] when I read the text of Jeremiah itself I necessarily read it *critically*. I am therefore bound to take issue with any easy, comfortable or slack readings of the biblical text. I would like to think that in the future participants in Jeremiah studies will *engage critically with* the text and its reception rather than with its current readers. So much of what I read in books and articles on Jeremiah represents *in my opinion* either the paraphrasing of the text itself or the internalisation of values imagined to be in the book of Jeremiah. So that there is no place for a critical engagement with the text or assessment of such textual values (*Sachkritik*) or room for allowance for the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* (reception history) of the tradition raising questions about text or tradition. For example, Brueggemann, who is currently one of the (if not *the*) outstanding American readers of Jeremiah sides with the textual representation of Jeremiah character, so that he lacks any critical distance from the text itself [...]. In my opinion that is far too easy a way of reading the text and *for me* it fails at every point to appropriate the text *critically*”, see p. 430.

¹⁵⁶ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 276-277.

world in respect of being human and living in social groups we share with all ancient literature, so we have no greater argument for Jeremiah's relevance than for the fragments of Heraclitus. This does not rule out the possibility that the Jeremiah tradition might have something to say to us; it just admits the possibility that it may have nothing to contribute"¹⁵⁷.

Carroll's position is without doubt a follow up, but of course with controversial consequence, of his counter historical perspective of the book. But there are two issues involved: the correct notion of historicity as regards biblical narratives and the relevance of the "historicity" (in Carroll's understanding) of the personality of Jeremiah, a debate that is not yet however terminated. Authors have recognised the special notion of historicity in the Bible as different from the case elsewhere¹⁵⁸. There is this interesting distinction by Cas Labuschagne between '*storylike history and historylike story*', both which he says are "characteristic for the biblical narrative: the first is essentially historical, the second is not; both belong to the didactical story which is the essential category of the biblical (historical) narrative"¹⁵⁹. Again Carroll makes a leap from the question of the "historicity" of the person of Jeremiah to that of the utility of the Jeremiah tradition, two quite different issues. His negative position, or as he puts it himself, his agnosticism not scepticism¹⁶⁰ on the historicity of Jeremiah is still problematic, but even known legends and myths often have relevance beyond their 'historical' epoch. Many commentators believe we can reconstruct the historical chronology of Jeremiah (Holladay for example), but even his non-historicity (eventually) does not negate the relevance of the 'construction' that has been made of him.

¹⁵⁷ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 276-277.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. M.D. KOSTER, *The Historicity of the Bible: Its Relevance and its Limitations in the Light of Near Eastern Archaeology: From Catalyst to Cataclysm*, in J.C. DE MOOR & H.F. ROOY (eds.), *Past, Present, Future: The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets* (OTS 44), Leiden, 2000, p. 120-149.

¹⁵⁹ C. LABUSCHAGNE, *Zin en onzin over God: Een kritische beschouwing van gangbare godsvoorstellingen*, Zoetermeer, 1994, p. 58-59, quoted in M.D. KOSTER, *The Historicity of the Bible*, p. 146. See also, J. BARR, *Story and History in Biblical Theology*, in J. BARR, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (EIT 7), London, 1980, p. 1-17.

¹⁶⁰ R.P. CARROLL, *Whose Prophet? Whose History? Whose Social Reality?* see p. 44.

Secondly, certain inconsistencies could be discerned in Carroll's position. According to him, instead of the question of relevance in Jeremiah for today, the message of the book of Jeremiah is something like this: "There is not, and cannot be any permanent security whether in God, theology, ideology, nationalism, patriotism, ritual ancestry, history or whatever" and "we must always relate to the past and be open to the future in constantly changing ways"¹⁶¹. Even on this single statement, this *message*, can be constructed a strong theological edifice. The inconsistency is further made clear in what follows immediately: "Surely here is word from Jeremiah if any will receive it – yesterday's dogma is today's lie"¹⁶². This much, that is, to learn that yesterday's dogma is today's lie is to have learnt something from the Jeremiah tradition and can be relevant today. This is because one does not have to enshrine or revere a tradition to appreciate it¹⁶³. Jeremiah's opposition to the dogma of his own day was a critic of an understanding of reality that he received from previous generations; in the same manner, we can build faithfully on his legacy by weighing the tradition of the past and by using those which survive critical scrutiny in the struggle for a better world¹⁶⁴, even though we have no assurance that we shall be any more successful in that endeavour than Jeremiah was and we may be "torn and shattered by the sense of the apparent absence and neutrality of God"¹⁶⁵. Even the simplistic argument that the Word is something addressed to man and not just the man of the epoch in which it is written, is not out of place here. I agree with James Crenshaw that, "what we witness in the history of the text that bears the name 'Jeremiah' is a living tradition, one that is absolutely essential to the spiritual health of a community. Indeed, that vital tradition is kept alive by those of us who read the book of Jeremiah and endeavour to grasp its meaning in an age when the ancient faith stood in jeopardy"¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 277.

¹⁶² R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 278.

¹⁶³ J.L. CRENSHAW, *A Living Tradition: The Book of Jeremiah in Current Research*, in *Interpretation* 37 (1983), p. 117-129, see p. 129.

¹⁶⁴ J.L. CRENSHAW, *A Living Tradition*, p.129.

¹⁶⁵ J. MUILENBURG, *The Terminology of Adversity in Jeremiah*, in H.T. FRANK & W.L. REED (eds.), *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament*, Nashville/New York, 1970, p. 42-63, see p. 62.

¹⁶⁶ J.L. CRENSHAW, *A Living Tradition*, p. 128.

because “careful studying of the book of Jeremiah helps us remain faithful to the prophet’s legacy by learning from him to weigh the traditions of the past and to use them in the struggle to forge a better world”¹⁶⁷. The distinction, which Carroll makes in his review of the three major 1986 English commentaries on Jeremiah¹⁶⁸, between commentaries ‘solely’ addressed to the academy and those others which favour ecclesiastical glossings of the text or that meet the demands of the ecclesia (or even his reference to a “set of theologised readings, readings which will disturb nobody’s theological or ecclesiastical positions and which will yield absolutely nothing to a postmodernist sense of the text or its modern reception, and which also resolutely refuse any ideological critical readings of that text”¹⁶⁹) is too extreme and remote to be applicable in this regard as some other authors have also remarked¹⁷⁰. One of the currently major commentaries, McKane’s to be precise, has a section on exegesis and theology¹⁷¹.

¹⁶⁷ J.L. CRENSHAW, *A Living Tradition*, p. 117.

¹⁶⁸ R.P. CARROLL, *Radical Clashes of Will and Style*, p. 111.

¹⁶⁹ R.P. CARROLL, *Century’s End*, p. 22.

¹⁷⁰ Writing on the possibility of a theological articulation based on the book of Jeremiah, L. BOADT, *Jeremiah and the Power of Historical Recitation*, wonders how the academy could hold sway with a study of the text outside its faith-effect on the reader. “Even if this has worked well in some areas, such as literary appreciation and historical recovery, or even in social critiques of ideologies inherent in the texts’ background cultures, it has not proven effective for doing theology of the Bible. If religious metaphorical language and imagination is an expression of faith-confession, can commentators effectively approach the text if they do not know how to articulate it within a real living community which takes it as a normative and authoritative religious text? One wonders” (p. 348-349).

¹⁷¹ McKane maintains a position that is more mellowed down. His position is that he does not believe that “a commentary is the right genre for a thorough exploration of (theological) matters which in important respects are meta-linguistic”. His major reason is that all language is human and God does not speak. Questions about inspiration and revelation are for him ultimate theological questions, meta-linguistic issues in important respects, and so “beyond the limits of a plain exegesis of the Hebrew text,” MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, p. xcvi-xcix. This response, though not as sharp and radical as Carroll’s, looks equally like bypassing a problem by ignoring it. Theology, though *theo-logos*, has never been taken to be the word of God. It is the word of man. And if theological questions should be totally out of place because all language is human, then this equally applies to the whole of Scripture since Scripture is nonetheless human language. Theology is not however divine language, though a discourse on the divine. It

The studies of Walter Brueggemann¹⁷² and Polk¹⁷³ and many others¹⁷⁴ in Jeremiah have this theological undertone. In his introduction dealing with the book of Jeremiah from “an interpretative perspective”, Brueggemann distinguished two emerging methods in Scripture study today. The two methods are those of sociological¹⁷⁵ and literary analysis¹⁷⁶. In sociological analysis, one pays attention to the interests, ideologies, and constructions of reality that are operative in the formation and transmission of the text¹⁷⁷. The text of the Bible is, in this understanding, taken neither as neutral nor as objective, but as text which reflects a particular context, be it social, religious, etc. And what is more, this context is determinative of the shape and focus of the text. The difference for this approach from the older historical-critical approach is of course in its character not to seek specific historical placement “but, rather, a placement within various social voices or dynamic forces. Interpretation requires attention both to the particular voice in the text and to the other voices in the situation with which this voice may be in dispute, tension,

remains a human articulation of the divine-human. For another more balanced articulation of the place of theological academic discourse on the Bible, see R. DAVIDSON, *The Bible in Church and Academy*.

¹⁷² BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, Cambridge, 1998.

¹⁷³ Especially T. POLK, *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of Self* (JSOTS 32), Sheffield, 1984.

¹⁷⁴ For a variety of presentations of theological issues in the study of Jeremiah, see B. CHILDS, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, Philadelphia, 1970; L.G. PERDUE & B.W. KOVACS (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations*; BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*; K. O’CONNOR, *Jeremiah*, in C.A. NEWSOM & S.H. RINGE (eds.), *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, Louisville, 1992, p. 169-182, etc.

¹⁷⁵ See R.R. WILSON, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament: Guides to Biblical Scholarship*, Philadelphia, 1984; N.K. GOTTWALD, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, New York, 1979.

¹⁷⁶ Among the better representatives of this approach in an expanding literature of books are the books (some already cited) by D.M. GUNN, including *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (JSOTS 6), Sheffield, 1978 and *The Fate of King Saul. An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (JSOTS 14), Sheffield, 1980; R. ALTER, including *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, New York, 1985; M. BAL, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Toronto, 1985; M.A. POWELL, *What is Narrative Criticism*, (Guide to Biblical Scholarship), Minneapolis, 1990; M. FISHBANE, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, Oxford, 1991; J.L. SKA, J.-P. SONNET & A. WÉNIN, *L’analyse narrative des récits de l’Ancien Testament*.

¹⁷⁷ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 13.

or agreement”¹⁷⁸. In literary analysis, Brueggemann explains, one pays attention to the power of language to propose an alternative imaginative world to the one that seems to be at hand, that is, “alternative to the one in which the reader or listener thinks herself or himself enmeshed”¹⁷⁹. The description of literature is therefore not in the sense of what is, but something that evokes and constructs another world.

Applying these two methods to the reading and the study of the book of Jeremiah, Brueggemann concludes that they respectively yield a critique of ideology and a practice of liberated imagination:

“These two methods enable us to take a fresh look at critical theological issues in the Jeremiah tradition. A sociological analysis helps us see how the covenantal perspectives of the prophetic tradition stand over against royal ideology. A literary analysis helps us see how Judah is invited to act faithfully, even if that faithfulness is against the presumed interest and truth of the Jerusalem establishment. And then when the text is read and heard as a critique of ideology and as a practice of alternative imagination, the text continues to have power and pertinence in many subsequent contexts, including our own”¹⁸⁰.

With reference to theological readings of the book of Jeremiah, we must call to mind the work of Polk mentioned above. His interest is neither the question of how the text came into existence or how the writer meant the text. This for him would not make clear the intent of the text. Rather, the issue would be: what is the effect on the reader of the text¹⁸¹? I see a convergence between Polk and Carroll in their departure points but notice very distancing conclusions. Polk is closer to Carroll in the sense that both consider the prophet first as a literary figure and Polk treats texts as literary unities and pays attention to literary structures evident in the text, and would not like historical questions about the

¹⁷⁸ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁹ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 15.

¹⁸⁰ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 17.

¹⁸¹ T. POLK, *The Prophetic Persona*, p. 14-18.

origins of the text tamper with “the integrity of the text, qua poetry or allow the power of a text to be lost by its reduction to a historically assured minimum”¹⁸². Polk’s synchronic exegesis is therefore based on philosophical-linguistic ideas, which however brings him to some theological conclusions opposed to that of Carroll, conclusions about the self-constituting language, which enacts the prophet’s identity¹⁸³. Lalleman-de Winkel puts it thus:

“Through his speaking in the first-person the prophet enacts a prophetic identity (*sic*) of identification with both God and people. He represents one party to the other. This results in a lot of tension by which his life becomes a paradigm for the situation of God and his people. The prophet by his life interprets the life of the people with God into two directions: judgment and promise”¹⁸⁴.

Granted the warning of Carroll¹⁸⁵, on several occasions, and equally of Brueggemann¹⁸⁶ that the text of Jeremiah should not be domesticated or its problematic ignored, it is also

¹⁸² T. POLK, *The Prophetic Persona*, p. 165-166.

¹⁸³ H. LALLEMAN-DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 44.

¹⁸⁴ H. LALLEMAN-DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 45.

¹⁸⁵ See for example, R.P. CARROLL, *Radical Clashes of Will and Style*, p. 111. See also *Something Rich and Strange*, p. 430-431; *Century’s End*, p. 22.

¹⁸⁶ Though criticised by Carroll on this ground, Brueggemann in his turn warns against “excessive eagerness to subscribe to what the text seems to affirm or even to press it further so that the God voiced in this material becomes the more established God of the orthodox, hegemonic Western tradition”. He calls this a domestication and familiarity, which engenders adamant skepticism, found especially among authoritarian fundamentalists, see W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Next Steps in Jeremiah Studies?* in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 404-422, see p. 416-417. These warnings are timely and should be taken seriously, but I would personally prefer, instead of the word “domesticate”, the word “sterilize” as used by A. WÉNIN, *L’homme biblique. Anthropologie et éthique dans le premier Testament*, Paris, 1995. In the work he envisages to place his narrative analyses in a global anthropologico-theological perspective: “faire entrer le texte biblique en dialogue avec les questions de sens, de foi et qui se posent aujourd’hui aux êtres humains vivant dans la société moderne ou postmoderne qui est la nôtre, le faire entrer en dialogue avec ce que les sciences humaines, en particulier la psychologie des profondeurs, disent aujourd’hui de l’être humain. L’interaction entre ces deux pôles [...] paraît particulièrement féconde, car elle rend une vigueur nouvelle aux vieux textes de la Bible, leur offrant ainsi d’interpeller et de donner à penser, pourvu qu’on ne les stérilise pas en les sacralisant” (p. 11). His idea is that in the process of

necessary to add here the words of Lys: “s’il est vrai qu’un texte n’a de sens que pour un destinataire, le lecteur d’aujourd’hui n’a pas le droit de faire dire n’importe quoi au texte ancien”¹⁸⁷.

2.5 FROM NARRATOLOGY TO THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

A “hermeneutic of appropriation”¹⁸⁸ based on a narrative reading is our goal. That is to say, from a narrative reading to a contextual theological exercise. The possibility or logical connection is not too difficult to grasp. We have earlier and on different occasions observed the shift in current biblical scholarship from a primary use of historical methodology towards the application of newer approaches (what Brueggemann describes as “hermeneutical maneuverability”¹⁸⁹), which can be classified generally as either literary readings or contextual interpretations, and it is to be noted again that both are easily applied together once historical questions or the search for original authorship are de-emphasised¹⁹⁰. While defining narrative exegesis, we also evoked the notion of the fact that a considerable part of biblical literature consists of stories. These stories tell us

theologising or even contextualising based on the scriptural data, one should avoid a fundamentalist or a non critical, non distancing approach that cages the Scripture and denies it the intrinsic capacity or freedom of speaking even differently to another reader or another context.

¹⁸⁷ D. LYS, *Jérémie 28 et le problème du faux prophète ou la circulation du sens dans le diagnostic prophétique*, in *RHPR* 59 (1979), p. 453-482, see p. 455.

¹⁸⁸ The phrase “A Hermeneutic of Appropriation” was coined by C.R. ROMERO, *A Hermeneutic of Appropriation: A Case Study of Method in the Prophet and Latin American Liberation Theology*, MI, 1982. This work focuses on liberation theologians especially Jose P. Miranda and J. Severino Croatto who develop biblical hermeneutic. Jeremiah was chosen from the prophetic corpus because of his similarity to the situation in Latin America – conflict with the historical situation, tension with the religious heritage, choice of images which speak to the conflict. The “Hermeneutic of Appropriation” is therefore a dialectic between the text and the interpreter’s own situation.

¹⁸⁹ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Editor’s Forward*, in L.G. PERDUE, *The Collapse of History*, p. ix.

¹⁹⁰ L. BOADT, *The Book of Jeremiah and the Power of Historical Recitation*, p. 341. For works that portray the relationship between narrative rhetoric and theological truth claims, see D. PATTE, *The Religious Dimensions of Biblical Texts: Greimas’s Structural Semiotics and Biblical Exegesis* (SSA 19), Atlanta, 1990; D. CUNNINGHAM, *Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology*, Notre Dame, 1991; *Theology as Rhetoric*, in *TS* 52 (1991), p. 407-430.

about humanity's early days, the place of Israel among the Ancient Near Eastern peoples, and the history of the link between God and his people, from the days of the patriarchs to the fall of Jerusalem and the return to Zion, and a great deal more¹⁹¹. A story itself can be a means of persuasion and tell us much about its rhetorical functions in the biblical world. Since biblical literature sought to convince its audience (readers or listeners) by the device of stories, it seems reasonable to assume that the authors of biblical narratives believed that if they told their audience about God's mighty deeds – how God saved the people in times of distress, how their fate was in God's hands, and how it paid to obey God – then the community of worshippers would keep its side of the covenant and remain faithful to God. Much depended on the power of stories, because a good story is irresistibly persuasive¹⁹². Amit argues further that though these stories have reached us in written form, most biblical scholars are convinced – though without solid evidence – that at least in part, they were transmitted orally for generations, as epics or legends (heroic tales of a local or national character), before they were written down. And once written down, “the intention was not to while away long evenings in a world without electricity, movies, and television, but to educate the readers or listeners and to persuade them to cling to the covenant and obey God's precepts. There is no mistaking the purpose of putting these stories in writing – it was to secure their preservation for as long as possible and to try to ensure that they reflected their author's aims”¹⁹³. Corollary to the nature of story is the role of the reader in creating the story's meaning. Sternberg and others¹⁹⁴ have pointed to such narrative techniques as gapping and allusion that force the reader to create much of the narrative's inner development. This involves readers and commentators in drawing on their life experiences to interpret the text. The prophetic language of persuasion also challenges the reader at the level of decision making so that

¹⁹¹ Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 1.

¹⁹² Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 2.

¹⁹³ Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁴ M. STERNBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*; R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

an intimate dialogue or confrontation that cannot be ignored is established between text and reader¹⁹⁵. Brueggemann writes:

“Indeed the text has the powerful capacity to cause us to rediscern our own situation, to experience our situation in quite new ways [...]. Such a text, when read critically, characteristically assaults every “structure and domination” with its self-serving and misrepresenting propaganda, including our own military, technological, consumer oriented establishment. Such a text, when read imaginatively, issues a forceful invitation to an alternative community of covenant, including a risky invitation in our own time to practices of justice, risks of compassion, and sufferings for peace”¹⁹⁶.

Critics such as Robert Alter have demonstrated with compelling convictions the composite artistry of biblical narrative by exposing the various techniques and structuring devices employed in the creation of character, motif and theme¹⁹⁷. Related to the convictions of Alter but even more provocative in its theological assumptions, is the canonical approach of Brevard Childs who argues that earlier critical methods, while uncovering much of value about earlier forms of the text and the community which produced it, have not taken seriously enough the canonical process in shaping the text into its normative form as scripture¹⁹⁸. “Only the received text”, says Brevard Childs, “bears witness to the full history of revelation”¹⁹⁹ and alone can guide the interpreter by

¹⁹⁵ See L. BOADT, *The Power of Prophetic Persuasion: Preserving the Prophet's Persona*, in *CBQ* 59 (1997), p. 1-20.

¹⁹⁶ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁷ R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 3-22.

¹⁹⁸ B. CHILDS, *Introduction of the Old Testament as Scripture*, p. 71-83.

¹⁹⁹ B. CHILDS, *Introduction of the Old Testament as Scripture*, p. 76. We need also to signal the balancing of the extreme view of the Childs of 1979 in his work of 1992: *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, London. Here Childs says that the major obstacle to serious theological reflection in the nineteenth century is the diachronic legacy of the historical criticism: “Consequently I greeted as an ally the growing twentieth-century appeal to narrative theology as at least a move toward recovering a holistic reading of the Bible”. But subsequent experience has disproved this expectation. “The threat lies in divorcing the Bible when seen as literature from its theological reality to which scripture bears witness. When the focus of the analysis lies in the ‘imaginative construal’ of the reader, the text is robbed of all

pointing to what has been highlighted and what subordinated in the traditioning process²⁰⁰. Or, as Robert Cohn says, using the book of Genesis as example, “the way in which its broad structural patterns contribute to a particular vision of how God’s presence is manifested in the human world [...] that the narrative units (of the Bible) exhibit increasingly tighter structures which correlate with increasingly more sophisticated depictions of the divine-human relationship”²⁰¹.

This hermeneutic of appropriation would then mean in fact: instead of attempting to reconstruct an ancient history, we read biblical narratives “as we might read modern novels or short stories, constructing a story world in which questions of human values and belief (and theology) find shape in relation to our own (and the readers’) world(s). Instead of seeking the one legitimate meaning, a facticity, a mono-meaning, a settled message, namely what the text (usually defined as the author) meant in its ‘original context’, we recognise that texts are multivalent and their meanings radically contextual, inescapably bound up with their interpreters”²⁰². Inescapably bound up with their interpreters, in other words, the emphasis, which has hitherto been laid on the historicity of the text, will now be laid more on the historicity of the reader²⁰³. Multivalent as they are, texts can have many voices, even counteracting (not contradictory) ones. At times, “it shows us not merely patriarchy, elitism, and nationalism; it shows us the fragility of these ideologies through irony and counter-voices”²⁰⁴. Thus these texts “may be uncovering a world in need of redemption and healing and a world-view much in need of change. This is the kind of reading that can be transformative. If we realise that the world of the Bible is a broken world, that its people are human and therefore limited, that its social system is flawed, then we might start to see more clearly our own broken world,

determinative meaning within various theories of reader response. The effect is to render the biblical text mute for theology and to deconstruct its tradition in a way equally destructive as the nineteenth-century historicists”, p. 722-723. But the thrust of our work is a disproof to this fear.

²⁰⁰ R.L. COHN, *Narrative Structure and Canonical Shape in Genesis*, in *JSOT* 25 (1983), p. 3-16, see p. 3.

²⁰¹ R.L. COHN, *Narrative Structure and Canonical Shape in Genesis*, p. 3.

²⁰² D.M. GUNN & D. NOLAN FEWELL, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 9.

²⁰³ S. PAAS, *Creation and Judgement*, p. 165.

²⁰⁴ D.M. GUNN & D. NOLAN FEWELL, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 205.

our own human limitations, our own defective social systems. And who knows? Maybe we shall find ourselves called to be the agents of change²⁰⁵. This reader-oriented approach to textual meaning does not go without its consequences as explained by Gunn and Nolan Fewell. For example, no matter how persuaded we are of the legitimacy of our own interpretation, we must depend upon some tacit agreement with our larger reading community about reading conventions (method) – what L. Perdue would term criteriology, though not without its attendant problems²⁰⁶ – and broad values if our interpretations are to be taken seriously by anyone but ourselves²⁰⁷.

Conclusion

The major accents of this Chapter could be summarised thus: Pursuit of historical questions has really contributed much to the study of the text of Jeremiah but has not been able to ask all the questions necessary to be posed. The exercise in our Chapter One shows this to a great extent. Many authors have observed and remarked that this historical pursuit and considerations have not first explicitly engaged the methodological debate and particularly have neglected the advantages of founding their exegetical enquiries on the base of the final form of the text. We identified this as the missing link. This missing link, which has been observed by modern exegesis, influenced by evolutions in linguistic and philological studies, though only lately, has influenced biblical exegesis. Our research work is one proof of this influence. Because of suspicions among exegetes of applying a synchronic approach to a prophetic book (the book of Jeremiah as a ready example) evidenced by narrative gaps and redactional layers, it was necessary to appeal to many authors who have dared to employ this methodology to the prophetic book. This Chapter is therefore one of transition. If the Chapter has as its major thesis to propose that the biblical text is polyphonic and so can be approached from varied points of view, the synchronic inclusive, it remains then to see how it applies to the book of Jeremiah as a whole, before concentrating on the chapters of the book under study.

²⁰⁵ D.M. GUNN & D. NOLAN FEWELL, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 204-205.

²⁰⁶ D.T. OLSON, *Between the Tower of Unity and the Babel of Pluralism*, see especially, p. 354.

²⁰⁷ D.M. GUNN & D. NOLAN FEWELL, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 10.

PART TWO

**JER. 26-29: NARRATIVE EXEGESIS:
TRUE VS. FALSE PROPHECY**

Concept

We described the previous Part as preliminary. Following the methodological option already made clear in the immediately preceding Chapter, the ground is prepared for the narrative reading of Jer. 26-29, and this is the concern of Part Two. In Part One Chapter Two, we tried to describe the nature of the scrutiny: close reading in view of discovering the narrative art in the final form of the MT text. The very first Chapter of this Part seeks to locate Jer. 26-29 in the general structure and theology of the entire book, especially at the backdrop of the 25 chapters preceding this literary block; believing that it is always fruitful to start from a more general consideration to specific ones. The subsequent Chapters take up one by one, the four different chapters of the block for a separate analysis. Without following a definite order, each of the chapters receives a particular and unique treatment judging from the elements we consider striking in the course of the reading. But in general, the first glance would be an attempt to delineate the geography of the text and to identify its internal divisions. It is important to note that other readers could adopt different delimitations and divisions. This is not unusual in exegetical exercises. However, we shall try to show the grounds on which our divisions into sections and units are based. On a second plane, these different sections of the chapters would be analysed.

Jer. 26-29, as a block, could be read from different perspectives. The reading proposed here would intend to see in each of these chapters a narrative, which in its particular way, touches on the problem of prophetic authenticity. While Chapters Two-Five take up respectively the four chapters of the block, Chapter Six attempts a synthesis to deepen this perspective by proposing a thematic and lexical consideration of the important and major motifs encountered along the reading. Thus at the end of this Part, we hope to have sustained the thesis that the book of Jeremiah, despite its jumbling character, has a unique order amid apparent chaos, and that Jer. 26-29, while participating in the general narrative and theological outlook of the entire book, is more especially a discussion on true and false prophecy.

CHAPTER ONE THE PLACE OF JER. 26-29 IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH (MT)

Introduction

From the last Chapter of Part One, it is evident that we understand narrative exegesis to be part of exegetical approach based on the conviction that there is sense and meaning in the actual form of the extant biblical text and that one can discover a meaning in the text without necessarily having recourse to another world outside the text itself. But before applying this method to the reading of chapters 26-29 of the book of Jeremiah, it is necessary to cast a look at the book as a whole. This will help us to see how possible and to what extent we can journey into the vast and wild field of the book with narratological tools. This exercise is necessary since it is a question of a prophetic book (the prophetic corpus is to a considerable extent oracular). It is all the more necessary for the book of Jeremiah, a book, as we said, believed by many experts to be a jungle of pieces of oracles and prose sermons originating from different sources and from competing ideological circles without any determinable principle of composition and unification, a block “pieced together by the manipulation of fragments and snatches of text”¹. Our contention is that in the final form of the book of Jeremiah, and in our particular case, the MT, we can dictate a principle of organisation, an order, even though we cannot deny the difficulty there is in tracing it. That is to say, without denying the complexity of processes that gave rise to the book in its present form, “a network of codes generated the surface expression of the text”².

This Chapter has two primary objectives. In the first place, we shall step back³ to look at the general composition of the book of Jeremiah, to look at the ‘world of Jeremiah’⁴ MT.

¹ R.P. CARROLL, *Intertextuality and the Book of Jeremiah: Animadversions of Text and Theory*, in J.C. EXUM & D.J.A. CLINES (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTS 143), Sheffield, 1993, p. 55-78, see p. 65.

² A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, p. 21.

³ This expression is borrowed from Louis Stulman whose works and ideas on the prose sections of the book of Jeremiah have a considerable influence in this Chapter. See especially L. STULMAN, *Order amid*

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

The objective is to find out to which extent the book of Jeremiah is readable as a narrative and what are the landmarks for such a reading. This general glance has an ultimate goal: to situate chapters 26-29 in the book as a whole. And so, we shall, in the second part of the Chapter, narrow the spectrum and consider in a closer ambient the range of chapters 26-29, the delimitation of the block and its thematic unity; all from the narrative-theological point of view.

1.1 THE MT OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

1.1.1 *The Ordering of Jeremiah MT*

1.1.1.1 *Acknowledging a Formal Disorder*

The considerations given by Greenberg as necessary questions with which the interpreter must arm himself when approaching a passage can as well go for the whole book. According to Greenberg, one must among many other questions ask:

“Is the unit which is delimited formally (by, say, opening and closing formulas) shown to be a unit through its structure (a recognized pattern?), its content, its figures or its verbal devices? How much interrelation and reference occurs among its parts? How much repetition (if with variations, are they significant)? How much irregularity occurs (in grammar, in length of lines, etc), and how much regularity? In the event of non-sequentiality, is another ground of collocation

Chaos: Jeremiah as a Symbolic Tapestry, Sheffield, 1998. Cf. also L. STULMAN, *Some Theological and Lexical Differences Between the Old Greek and the MT of the Jeremiah Prose Discourses*, in *Hebrew Studies* 25 (1984), p. 18-23; *The Prose Sermons of the Book of Jeremiah: A Description of the Correspondences with the Deuteronomistic Literature in Light of Recent Text-Critical Research* (SBLDS 83), Atlanta, 1986; *Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Jeremiah: Shifts in Symbolic Arrangements*, in *JSOT* 66 (1995), p. 65-86.

⁴ Phrase equally borrowed from Stulman where he uses it interchangeably with ‘literary milieu of Jeremiah’, the ‘social environment of Jeremiah’ and by that he means “the ‘presentation’” of Jeremiah which is “the resultant work of the shapers of the book for subsequent audiences [...] the amalgam of voices, meanings and codes embedded within the text (generally the MT), without reference [...], to the external world”, L. STULMAN, *Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Jeremiah*, p. 65. Cf. also L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 20, footnote 20.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

evident (e.g., thematic or verbal association)? Are effective elements present besides the plain sense of sentences, such as alliteration, punning, or chiasm? To what do they call attention? How much ambiguity is present; what are its causes and effects? Are elements which seem opaque illuminated by considering their placement (significance through juxtaposition)?⁵.

In these series of questions, including many other similar ones that could be posed, the issue of a 'recognisable pattern' is central. Coming to the book of Jeremiah MT, one can then ask: can we trace a pattern or order or arrangement, intentional or chancy and how? No matter our reading presuppositions about the book, we admit that the book, as Carroll writes, is never "a seamless robe running from 1:1 to 52:34 requiring a synchronic reading without punctuation"⁶. Today we all read Bibles whose texts have divisions into chapters and verses, a phenomenon that was never the case from origin. Any attempt to deny or overlook the difficult nature of this prophetic book is only a pretence and as Carroll again writes:

"Whatever the more sanguine commentators on Jeremiah may say and think, I am still of the opinion that the book of Jeremiah is a very difficult, confused and confusing text. *I refuse not to be confused by it.* So I found (and find) working my way through the text a very difficult task and very similar to working my way through a dark wood (*selva oscura*)"⁷.

⁵ M. GREENBERG, *The Vision of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8-11: A Holistic Interpretation*, in J.L. CRENSHAW & S. DANDMEL (eds.), *The Divine Helmsman*, New York, 1980, p. 143-164, see p. 146.

⁶ R.P. CARROLL, *Halfway through a Dark Wood: Reflections on Jeremiah 25*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 72-86, see p. 74.

⁷ R.P. CARROLL, *Halfway through a Dark Wood*, p. 75. Carroll's opinion here and in the preceding quotation are acceptable inasmuch as they underscore the complexity of the book and guards against a reading strategy that simply tries to save the appearances of the text, or that aims at making the text conform to expectations and academic prejudices. But his conclusions in the same article on concrete issues in the book give impression of a leap to the other extreme. Take for example his treatment of the figure of Babylon in the same article, a treatment which at best annuls any other possibility of interpreting the text except from the bias of history and ideology. For more on Carroll's position and conclusions on exegetical methodologies as regards the book of Jeremiah, see also R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah: Diachrony to the Rescue*, in J.C. DE MOOR (ed.), *Synchronic or Diachronic?* p. 39-51; R.P.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

Exploring through this dark wood, one will therefore certainly encounter complexity and perplexity or even frustration or disappointment especially if a seamless robe is expected. Along this line, John Bright claimed that the book “makes, at least on first trial, extremely difficult reading”⁸ because it is “a hopeless hodgepodge thrown together without any discernible principle of arrangement at all”⁹. And most commentators of the book of Jeremiah are of the opinion that the book “lacks chronological order; it vacillates along a wide range of literary genres under the larger headings of prose and poetry; and it exhibits apparently little literary coherence”¹⁰. And even if the presence of macro-structural units – units that smack of definite and discernible literary and theological intention – has been admitted by authors, it is still nevertheless believed by many of them that these composite blocks of material do not, when considered in general, reflect a meaningfully executed literary organisation¹¹.

CARROLL, *Something Rich and Strange: Imagining a Future for Jeremiah Studies*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 423-443.

⁸ BRIGHT, *Jeremiah*, p. lvi.

⁹ BRIGHT, *Jeremiah*, p. lvi. Against the absolutism of this assertion, see works like RUDOLPH, *Jeremia*; BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*; JONES, *Jeremiah*, Grand Rapids, 1992. B.A. BOZAK, *Life 'Anew': A Literary-Theological Study of Jer. 30-31*, Rome, 1991; A. O. BELLIS, *The Structure and Composition of Jeremiah 50.2-51.58*, New York, 1995; M. KESSLER, *Battle of the Gods: The God of Israel versus Marduk of Babylon, A Literary/Theological Interpretation of Jeremiah 50-51* (SSN 42), Assen, 2003.

¹⁰ Cf. L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 14.

¹¹ This corresponds to Campbell's opinion that Jeremiah is, “too bumpy” to be read as a coherent literary piece, see E.F. CAMPBELL, *Relishing the Bible as Literature and History*, in *Christian Century* 109 (1992), p. 812-815. In his review of the work of R. ALTER, *The World of Biblical Literature*, he argues that efforts to find literary coherence in the book succeed only in doing violence and hiding the intentional and inherent tensions in the Jeremian text, which is itself intentionally incoherent, E.F. CAMPBELL, *Relishing the Bible as Literature and History*, p. 814.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

The ‘disorder’¹² in the book of Jeremiah could be seen from different angles; from the character of the text itself, from the ‘ideological’ claims of the text and from the characterisation of God and the personality and characterisation of Jeremiah as presented by the narrator and as exhibited in the oracles. The book confronts the reader with a dense and chaotic character, what Stulman refers to as “formal ‘disarray’”¹³, enjoying “little linear logic and therefore appears almost ‘unreadable’. Its multiple ‘voices’ and ‘thick’ texture defy congruous and symmetrical literary categories”¹⁴. The book’s visible inconcinnity is complemented by its ideological din, using the words of Stulman. The ‘world’ of the book of Jeremiah is one that is fraught with danger, indeterminacy and conflict, a crumbling world and universe and one that is on the verge of waste and wild, a world covered in darkness and despair¹⁵. The personality and characterisation of the prophet as portrayed in the narratives and oracles of the book does not help matters. The personality of Jeremiah mirrors the personality of his God; a God who has become ‘untamed’ and undomesticated, in the sense of a God who has decided to become Israel’s principal assailant and Judah’s enemy¹⁶, and who has become a dreaded participant¹⁷ in the dismantling and undoing of system structures¹⁸. But at the same time, God is

¹² The reference by Combet-Galland could be interesting: she refers to the book of Jeremiah as “un livre prophétique à structure complexe, où le désordre de la composition semble refléter celui d’une période de crise politique et religieuse”, C. COMBET-GALLAND, *Jérémie 28 et le risque de la vérité*, in *Foi et Vie* 83/5 (1984), p. 70-77, see p. 70.

¹³ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 185.

¹⁴ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 185.

¹⁵ Cf. for example the wordings of Jer. 4:23-26: “I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of YHWH, and by his fierce anger”.

¹⁶ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 190.

¹⁷ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 185.

¹⁸ The shattering of structures would give rise to “cognitive dissonance”, in the words of Festinger. There was in the exilic era a clash between the Zion-Sabbath theology (YHWH’s royal presence on Zion) and the facts of political history (the conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple). From the theological

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

characterised in the narratives and oracles in the book of Jeremiah not only as the agent of destruction¹⁹ but also as a wounded victim. In the words of Brueggemann we notice in the book a shattering of God²⁰, and so one can say that “the reader confronts in the character of God the convergence of power and vulnerability, love and wrath, hope and disappointment. In other words, the jumbled character of God pulsates with tensions and contradictions that resist safe categories and orderly arrangements”²¹.

1.1.1.2 A Peculiar Concept of Order

However, it is also equally interesting to note that besides this general conception, there are however exceptional voices. Beyond apparent disorder, there is some consistency, some coherence in the book. Just as the formless void of the book of Genesis in the beginning²² (cf. 1:1-2) later gives way to creation, close reading discovers that the dissonance and the dissonant character of the text of Jeremiah do not go unattended. Smelik, writing on Jer. 29 makes a statement on the whole book and the question of order:

“Contrary to general opinion according to which the book of Jeremiah is ‘in rather a mess’, [...] this book has a structure of its own. The problem is that the authors of Jeremiah had another way to compose a book than we are used to. Our task as exegetes is not to adapt the text in order to conform it to our ideas of what a book should look like but to read the text carefully in order to search for its own structure and meaning. The historical interest of Old Testament scholars since the

point of view, the book of Jeremiah stands as one of the hermeneutical attempts to understand these historical realities and to situate them properly in the general perspectives of YHWH-Israel relationship.

¹⁹ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 186.

²⁰ W. BRUEGGEMANN; *A Shattered Transcendence? Exile and Restoration*, in S.J. KRAFTCHICK *et al.* (eds.), *Biblical Theology: Problems and Perspectives. In Honor of J. Christian Beker*, Nashville, 1995, p. 169-182.

²¹ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 186.

²² It is to be noted that the word *בְּרֵאשִׁית* which is the very first word in the Bible does not occur again in the whole of the Hebrew Bible except in the book of Jeremiah, and to be precise in 26:1; 27:1; 28:1 and finally in 49:34, all in the precise temporal sense of the beginning of a reign of a king.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

19th century has greatly enlarged our understanding of biblical texts but at the same time it can be a hindrance in the interpretation”²³.

There are many elements evident in the text that give it a *Tendenz*, especially the strategic placement of the prose discourses within a purposeful arrangement of the macro-structural units in the overall framework of the book, and the theological accent that this structure strikes. Without attempt to “exaggerate the coherence of the book and underestimate its lack of cohesiveness and obscurities”²⁴, it is necessary to articulate this new concept of order and this demands identifying the organising principle at work.

1.1.1.3 An Organising Principle and the Question of Outline

Neither chronology nor subject matter would work perfectly in finding the principle of arrangement in the book of Jeremiah²⁵. In the preceding paragraph, allusion is made to “in the beginning” of Gen. 1:1. This concept has much role to play in the different

²³ K.A.D. SMELIK, *Letters to the Exiles: Jeremiah 29 in Context*, in *SJOT* 10 (1996), p. 282-295, see p. 282.

²⁴ W. MCKANE, *Relations Between Poetry and Prose in the Book of Jeremiah with Special Reference to Jeremiah III 6-11 and XII 14-17*, in J.A. EMERTON (ed.), *Congress Volume Vienna 1980* (VTS 32), 1981, p. 220-237, see p. 237.

²⁵ Cf. C.H. BULLOCK, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, Chicago, 1986, p. 196. For the question of chronology, take for example the section ranging from chapter 32 to 45, a major part of the biographical section. Here the reader meets not only gaps but also flashbacks. If one were to follow a chronological order, chapter 36 should have begun this section followed by chapter 45. Chapter 32 is situated under the reign of Zedekiah. Chapters 33-34 refer to the same king but chapter 34 relates events that evidently took place before those of chapter 32. Chapters 35 and 36 carry the reader further backwards, under the reign of Jehoiakim who precedes Zedekiah, to relate two episodes, which apparently have no connection with the context. What is more, the two episodes are told in inverse chronological order; the triple reading of the scroll of chapter 36 taking place before the episode of the Rechabites told in chapter 35. After, chapters 37-39 return to the reign of Zedekiah, adding informations which chapters 32-34 had not given. For details on the apparent problem on the chronology of this section and effort to explain their placement on the narrative level, see E. DI PEDE, *Jérusalem, 'Ebed-melek et Baruch: Enquête narrative sur le déplacement chronologique de Jr 45*, in *Revue Biblique* 111 (2004), p. 61-77.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

concept of order which we propose in the book of Jeremiah whose beginning or end goes beyond geometrical measurement. As Neher writes:

“Aussi bien la notion de Genèse est-elle centrale dans le Livre de Jérémie. Centrale à la manière d’un centre de gravité autour duquel tout se noue, tout s’organise. Elle figure dans les chapitres médians – 26, 27, 28 – de ce livre qui en comporte 52 [...]. בְּרֵאשִׁית, le mot qui interroge, à la fois, le chaos et la lumière, qui a vue sur les deux, et qui seul peut faire surgir l’une de l’autre. C’est dans ce mot que se trouve le secret organisateur du Livre de Jérémie. Ce Livre n’a pas son point d’origine au début, son point de dénouement à la fin ; origine et fin se rencontrent dans le noyau central. Si l’on veut bien se placer là, dans ce milieu géométrique du Livre, on en reconnaît soudain tout le paysage, parfaitement coordonné dans toutes ses lignes de pente. La signification essentielle du Livre de Jérémie est dans le lien entre une rive chaotique, jonchée d’épaves, et une autre, rayonnante de végétation et de vie. Son effort est dans l’enjambement entre les débris et la plantation. La déchirure qui le traverse est une cicatrice, signalant que ce Livre renferme une blessure, mais aussi qu’il redonne à la chair meurtrie les forces de l’épanouissement. L’ombre et la lumière s’y rencontrent simultanément dans l’énergie conjuguée d’un chaos et d’une création”²⁶.

The prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible share a particular philosophy and theological outlook and the internal arrangement of the materials as we have them today from their “final redactor”²⁷, far from being arbitrary, has a definitive meaning within the prophetic context and the general context of the history of salvation in the Old Testament. This last point especially is highly significant in the book of Jeremiah and according to Martin Kessler, “unless we bear it in mind, we are apt to miss the dynamic relationship between ‘doom’ and ‘salvation’ in the book”²⁸. For example, after a book in which doom oracles against Judah are collected and which are followed by another “book” of doom oracles

²⁶ A. NEHER, *Jérémie*, Paris, 1998, p. 13-14.

²⁷ In the case of the book of Jeremiah, Martin Kessler calls him ‘the Jeremian traditionist.’ See M. KESSLER, *Jeremiah Chapters 26-45 Reconsidered*, in *JNES* 27 (1968), p. 81-88, see p. 82.

²⁸ M. KESSLER, *Jeremiah Chapters 26-45 Reconsidered*, p. 82.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

against foreign nations²⁹, we might expect 'salvation' or hopeful oracles, in view of the philosophy of history embedded within the Old Testament that, after Israel is punished for her alleged transgressions by nations chosen by YHWH for this purpose, these same nations and others will receive punishment as well, which leads to deliverance and hope for Israel³⁰. Two principles of literary organisation appear to be at work in the redaction of the book of Jeremiah: the formation of collections on the ground of broad topical or formal homogeneity on the one hand and the symmetrical inner construction of each collection on the other³¹. The presence of both principles is mutually corroborative: the identification of single collections on the basis of their homogeneity is confirmed by their symmetrical design, while the detection of symmetrical elements finds its corollary in the unity of the subject-matter³².

In the extant form of the book of Jeremiah, the literary organisation consists of large composite units which are integral to the "architecture of the book"³³. From a holistic point of view, these macro-structural artifices are not located arbitrarily or randomly in the ensemble of the book but they rather contribute meaningfully to the overall arrangement and to the symbolic logic of the book. In our review of the problematics of the book of Jeremiah as has been studied especially in the last century, it is evident that the classifications of Mowinckel as regards the make-up of the book have become a common parlance in Jeremiah scholarship. The prose sermons, the 'C' material are assumed to be distinct both from the poetic 'A' tradition and from the biographical 'B' material. These 'C' materials are commonly understood or misunderstood as scattered

²⁹ This statement is made basing primarily on the order of the materials in the LXX but can still be applicable to that in the MT.

³⁰ Cf. M. KESSLER, *Jeremiah Chapters 26-45 Reconsidered*, p. 83, footnote 15. This pattern can also be illustrated from the book of Isaiah: while the doom motif pervades chapters 1-23 (Judah 1-12, foreign nations 13-23), the *shalom* motif gains significance after chapter 23, especially with chapter 40ff.

³¹ Cf. A. ROFÉ, *The Arrangement of the Book of Jeremiah*, in *ZAW* 101 (1989), p. 390-398, see p. 390.

³² A. ROFÉ, *The Arrangement of the Book of Jeremiah*, p. 390.

³³ Phrase coined by Holladay. See W.L. HOLLADAY, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20*, Lewisburg, 1976.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

chaotically³⁴ throughout the book. At best they are treated simply as deuteronomistic, and the deuteronomistic editors in the pursuit of their conflicting ideologies had interest neither in order nor in theology³⁵. But it is not too difficult to observe on close reading that these prose sermons provide at times the hermeneutical keys for interpretative possibilities or guides that bring out in a clearer fashion the theological intent of the book, and this provision is not only in their content but also and more particularly in their placement. The main argument is that of their strategic placement and as Stulman writes:

“These prose discourses often enjoy a strategic place and significant function within the book as a whole. That is to say, they play a meaningful and teleological

³⁴ This position represents the dominant voice of twentieth century scholarship of Jeremiah, which sees the prose discourses as intrusive, extremely disjointed and irregularly scattered in the book. But it is worthwhile here to remark that outside the book of Jeremiah, or at least in most other biblical books, prose sermons and speeches have been recognised as playing a significant role, especially from the contextual and theological points of view. A ready example is the prose sermons in the Deuteronomistic history, which are well known to mark important transitions in the work and which are believed to reveal salient points of textual intention. See the work of H.W. Wolff who is of the opinion that the prose sermons in Deuteronomy determines the editor's kerygmatic or theological intention, H.W. WOLFF, *The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historical Work*, in W. BRUEGGEMANN & H.W. WOLFF (eds.), *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (trans. F.C. Prussner), Atlanta, 1975, p. 83-100. Cf. also Martin Noth who argues that “at all the important points in the course of the history, Dtr brings forward the leading personages with a speech, long or short, which looks forward and backward in an attempt to interpret the course of events, and draws the relevant practical conclusions about what people should do”, M. NOTH, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTS 15), Sheffield, 1981, p. 5. See finally E. Janssen's form-critical examination of the prose sermons of Deuteronomy where he discovers a structural pattern of introduction followed by recital of divine acts and then a description of disobedience and threats or promises, E. JANSSEN, *Juda in der Exilszeit: Ein Beitrag zur Frage der Entstehung des Judentums*, Göttingen, 1956, p. 105-110. In this sense the work of Stulman considers the role played by prose sermons in Deuteronomy and the well-established points of correspondences between Deuteronomy and the prose sermons in Jeremiah, L. STULMAN, *The Prose Sermons of the Book of Jeremiah*, p. 7-48.

³⁵ Against Thiel who makes a comprehensive analysis and argues for a very systematic production of a deuteronomistic edition of the book of Jeremiah, even to the point where words only found in Jeremiah are attributed to deuteronomistic activity (W. THIEL, *Die Deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26-45: Mit einer Gesamtbewertung der deuteronomistischen Redaktion des Buches Jeremia* [WMANT 52], Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1981, p. 93-99), Carroll and McKane do not find any of such systematic presentation in the deuteronomistic editorial work.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

part in the text's extant structure and developing theology. The prose sermons provide commentary (midrash) on their immediate literary setting (*Sitz im Buch*). They echo, punctuate and clarify existing motifs. Moreover they introduce equilibrium and symmetry into a wild world of poetry that is laden with incongruence and dissymmetry. Accordingly, these prose pieces contribute the structural and ideological grid to a composition executed with the intent to convey a final theological message³⁶.

Henceforth, the question therefore is not so much "how did the book of Jeremiah come to be"? (that is authorial³⁷) as the "outlining of the book"³⁸ using the terminology of Holladay; that is, the structuring and the meaning in the structuring. That implies that the question has moved from 'when' or 'from whom' the book was put together, to 'how' and 'why'. In that way, exegetic exercise has therefore moved beyond the source analysis of Mowinckel and his followers, and the tendency has shifted more to thinking of tradition in holistic terms; that is, tradition as both its content and the process of its transmission. With such thinking posture, previously important distinctions between the words of the prophet himself and later additions tend to fade³⁹.

³⁶ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 18.

³⁷ R.P. CARROLL, *The Book of J: Intertextuality and Ideological Criticism*, see p. 228.

³⁸ W.L. HOLLADAY, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 14. Holladay maintains that scholars at work on the problem of the origin of the book appear to have concentrated on two related issues and to have bypassed a third equally related and important one. The two issues are: 1) the attempt to identify the contents of the *Urrolle*, that first scroll dictated by Jeremiah to Baruch according to the account in Jer. 36 (LXX 43) and 2), the detection of a variety of literary styles within the book. "The related [bypassed] issue is the simple matter of *outlining* the book of Jeremiah; and it is by one's outline that one displays his conception of the way the book is put together", W.L. HOLLADAY, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 13. Interestingly, Holladay does not say 'from where or when' it is put together, but "the way" (and I add 'why' it is put so).

³⁹ T. W. OVERHOLT, *Remarks on the Continuity of the Jeremiah Tradition*, in *JBL* 91 (1972), p. 457-462, see p. 458.

1.1.2 The Book of Jeremiah as a Two-part Drama

Scholars have identified the broad division of the Jeremiah MT into two almost equal halves, the first scroll (1-25) and the second scroll (26-52). With an inner logic and literary ties connecting them, each part of this drama respectively portrays the death and the dismantling of a national cultic symbol system and piety on one hand (1-25), in preparation for an emerging theological and social structure, following the exile on the other hand (26-52). The Jeremiah scroll as a whole testifies to a God who ‘uproots and overthrows’ (1-25) to ‘rebuild and to plant’ (26-52). Interpretatively, the first scroll claims that Judah’s “sacred canopy”⁴⁰ – understood in terms of its temple and cult, its land claims and royal ideology, its Jerusalem consciousness and divine promises, and even covenant, in fact its network of meanings – is not enough to provide support and escape from the impending doom that awaits Judah consequent of her disobedience, and cannot save the community from radical redefinition and relocation. The second scroll, articulating a conceptual terrain beyond the collapses of the old, reconfigures hope and new life. The loss of traditional structures and the dismantling of false supports that would eventually lead to the exile will not be the end of the drama. The final curtain is not yet drawn since the drama continues to witness the reconstruction of new life and promises. The first scroll becomes therefore a sort of prolegomenon to the second scroll.

Before turning properly to the structural features of the two scrolls to discover their internal logic of organisation, it is necessary to tackle the question as to whether there is any justification in reading 26-52 ‘differently’ from 1-25. Put in another way, is there or are there textual guides that warrant reading 26-52 as separate from 1-25? The answer to this question cannot be found in any exclusiveness: there are reasons for reading 26-52 in isolation, but on the condition that at the end, both scrolls be read as a single literary entity. That is to say, that the text presents itself as both a unified whole and at the same time as a developing script⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Coinage by P.L. BERGER, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, New York, 1967. For the use of this expression elsewhere, see L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 18, 54. The latter also talks of “sacred pillars”, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 54.

⁴¹ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 59.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

First of all, at the level of the nature of the text, the second scroll, without denying the difficult nature of the totality of the Jeremiah text or presuming a strict and easy chronological arrangement because of the biographical gaps⁴² and narrative flashbacks, differs sharply from the first by being more tame, more linear and less multivocal: it speaks with more clarity and is more prosaic than poetic. Unlike in the first scroll where wild and unruly voices of poetry are controlled by intermittent prose discourses⁴³, the second scroll exhibits more literary and symbolic coherence. To a good extent, temporal categories (even though without any pretence of giving data in their strict chronological sequence) govern the second scroll (cf. chapters 26-29, 32, 34-35) while it is evident that the first scroll eschews the least chronological sequencing⁴⁴. Secondly, going by the classifications of Mowinckel⁴⁵, whereas the “A” and the “C” materials control the first scroll, we have more of the “B” material in the second scroll, except of course 46-51, the Oracles against the Nations; and this, authors have observed, smacks of a shift from orality to writing⁴⁶ evident in the MT tradition. Thirdly there are arguments also to see Jer. 26 as an introduction to the whole of the second scroll, thereby enjoying a function and placement that parallels Jer. 1⁴⁷ and such a patterning could argue for a “separate but related bodies of literature”⁴⁸. Finally on the theological interpretative level, the second scroll differs from the first by providing the building and planting remedy to the uprooting and dismantling of the first scroll. We do not however deny the presence of catastrophic elements in the text of chapters 26-52; after all, the latter witnesses to a great

⁴² See THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 29.

⁴³ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 61.

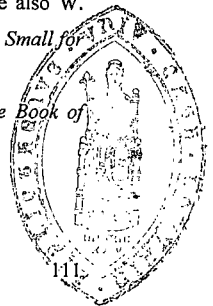
⁴⁴ Cf. also R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah*, p. 1.

⁴⁵ See our Part One, Chapter One.

⁴⁶ Cf. R.P. CARROLL, *Inscribing the Covenant: Writing and the Written in Jeremiah*, in A.G. AULD (ed.), *Understanding Poets and Prophets*, p. 61-76; R.P. CARROLL, *Manuscripts Don't Burn*. See also W. ZIMMERLI, *From Prophetic Word to Prophetic Book*, in R.P. GORDON (ed.), *The Place is too Small for Us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship*, Indiana, 1995, p. 419-442.

⁴⁷ See K.M. O'CONNOR, “...Do not Trim a Word”: *The Contribution of Chapter 26 to the Book of Jeremiah*, in *CBQ* 51 (1989), p. 617-630; RUDOLPH, *Jeremia*, p. xvii-xix, 143-147.

⁴⁸ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 61.



Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

extent the “siege and capture of Jerusalem”⁴⁹; but there are at the same time visible, positive and optimistic voices, a construction of a rhetoric of hope cast against the backdrop of disassembling and dashed hopes, a revivification of hopeful and salvific constructions almost marginalised in the first scroll. So, even the so-called “siege and capture of Jerusalem” becomes, in the logic of the second scroll, a necessary step towards the restoration of the people. Following the words of YHWH in Jer. 32:27-44, the city has to be destroyed because of the corruption of the people (see especially v. 27-35), but this will be a step towards the new covenant (cf. 36-44).

But here we still have one single book of Jeremiah, which from both canonical and literary point of view, we treat as a single piece of literature, and that not without reasons. In the first place, despite the new world of significance in the second scroll, despite the fact that it is replete with new and fresh network of meanings, there is no formal and clear-cut break between both scrolls. Here we talk particularly of course with reference to the MT of the book of Jeremiah⁵⁰. In this way, Jer. 1 serves as a functional introduction not only to Jer. 1-25, but also to the whole book since in Jer. 1, the cryptic and anticipatory categories governing the whole book are given⁵¹. This granted, we do not have two ‘meanings’ but one in the book. Theologically again, the whole book can be interpreted under a single rubric of promise/threat and fulfilment/catastrophe⁵². The second scroll shows the collapse of Jerusalem already predicted in the first scroll. We can also go by way of describing the book as arranged in the sequence⁵³ of uprooting and

⁴⁹ CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching), Atlanta, 1988, p. 8.

⁵⁰ In the LXX these two scrolls are separated by the Oracles against the Nations demanding a different explanation of the internal structural logic.

⁵¹ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 59. In chapter 1, Jeremiah is introduced as a prophet to the nations, whose word would be rejected but who would present himself as a fortified city against the threats of kings and princes.

⁵² This is exactly the central and underlying conviction in Brueggemann’s works on Jeremiah. See also L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 59.

⁵³ See the beautiful description of this by Brueggemann: “Specifically the book of Jeremiah is arranged to speak, in sequence; about *the judgment of God* who in prophetic tradition brings Jerusalem to an end, and

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

planting: circumstances in the national life of Judah warrants YHWH to uproot in order at last to plant, that is to establish new configurations of hope. The analysis of the first scroll shows that progressively, the text of chapters 1-25 seeks, especially by the strategic placement of the prose sections, to loosen all the symbolic structures of meaning and sacred pillars where the people had hoped; from the temple and cult, to the covenant, to the election and to the royal dynasty. And that rhetoric of dismantling predicts the collapse of human institutions and possibilities: all the claims of Judah that YHWH is indissolubly tied to her established religious symbolic and cultic systems. The second scroll is therefore not necessarily a departure from the first, but more of a complement, providing the building and planting remedy to a catastrophic world. Finally, not only that the whole book, both parts of the drama, share many of the same characters, settings or even scenes, the book in entirety has the same theological assumption: that YHWH is the controller of all destinies and history and is the sovereign ruler. He is free and unpredictable. Through the medium of his prophetic word he communicates, and the collapse of the old system is a direct consequence of the rejection of his word spoken by his prophet⁵⁴. The next paragraph will be an attempt at articulating this relationship between the two distinct sections of the book, with a view of demonstrating the internal literary and theological connections, aiming finally at a single message of the book. In that attempt, the place and the contribution of chapters 26-29 will be made much more evident.

the *deliverance of God* who offers to the consequent exilic community an open historical possibility”, BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. xi (his emphasis).

⁵⁴ Cf. J. ROSENBERG, *Jeremiah and Ezekiel*, in R. ALTER & F. KERMODE (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, Cambridge, 1987, p. 184-206, see p. 192. Rosenberg writes: the “central tenet of Jeremiah’s whole prophetic mission (is) that the God of Israel and Judah controls the destinies of all peoples with thorough impartiality and vigorous justice”.

1.1.2.1 The Internal Literary and Theological Design

1.1.2.1.1 Uprooting and Overthrowing (Jer. 1-25)

While McKane believes in the disorder and randomly accidental process of Jer. 1-25⁵⁵, Clements⁵⁶ sees clear signs of structural units within the said chapters (in the first scroll), though the latter discerns there an organisation which corresponds very closely to the deuteronomistic reflection on the downfall of the Northern Kingdom in II Kings 17:7-23. Authors have already observed and correctly too that chapters 1 and 25 form the editorial framework of this first scroll, or better put, “provide the outer framework for the whole larger structure”⁵⁷. While chapter 1 introduces the book in general by way of announcing or presenting its major themes in anticipatory terms⁵⁸, chapter 25 rounds up the scroll by announcing the fulfilment of YHWH’s word and its calamitous effects upon both Judah and other nations. In this way both chapters set a temporal scaffolding for the poetry and prose contained in chapters 2-24; temporal in the sense that “the poetry and prose sections are presented within a structured pattern of history that is governed by YHWH’s controlling goal (*teleos*): the realisation of God’s just rule over the nations through and in spite of Babylonian subjugation and control”⁵⁹.

⁵⁵ See again his theory of the “rolling corpus”, MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary I*, see especially p. lxxxiii.

⁵⁶ R.E. CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah 1-25 and the Deuteronomistic History*, in A.G. AULD (ed.), *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honour of G.W. Anderson* (JSOTS 152), Sheffield, 1993, p. 93-113.

⁵⁷ R.E. CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah 1-25 and the Deuteronomistic History*, p. 95. See also Stulman who writes: “Jeremiah I and 25 [...] perform a clear and discernible purpose in the overall structure of the book”, L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 31; T.R. HOBBS, *Some Remarks on the Composition and Structure of the Book of Jeremiah*, in *CBQ* 34 (1972), p. 257-275. For O’Connor, chapters 1 and 25 provide the functional framework to Jeremiah 1-25 – the so called ‘first scroll’, see K.M. O’CONNOR, *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Interpretation and Role in Chapters 1-25* (SBLDS 94), Atlanta, 1988; R.P. CARROLL, *Halfway Through a Dark Wood*.

⁵⁸ See especially K.M. O’CONNOR, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, p. 118-123; E.W. NICHOLSON, *Preaching to the Exiles*, p. 113-115. The major commentaries like those of Brueggemann, Carroll and McKane hold like view.

⁵⁹ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 33.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

Between these two bookends, we can find internal reading landmarks by way of the evident macro-structural units literarily and theologically designed⁶⁰. It is interesting that of all the five macro-structural units of the first scroll, only 2-6, the poetic introduction is cast entirely as oracles. Every other macro-structural unit begins with a narrative section⁶¹ and that is not without its significance both narratively and also at the level of the theological interpretation. This first macro-structural unit, Jer. 2-6 sets the tone of the entire first scroll since, often referred to as lawsuit oracle, is a reasoned apology for the innocence of YHWH against the culpability of his people⁶², leaving at the end of the unit, the impression of a declaration of war by YHWH on Judah; all life supports are in the verge of being dismantled, leaving disaster and death to loom large on the horizon. This unit therefore serves properly as an introduction to the first scroll marked by the uprooting and dismantling. The macro-structural units which follow this poetic introduction of the first scroll, progressively portray the overthrowing and uprooting aspect of the book. 7:1-10:25 concentrates on cultic concerns and especially abuses. In the temple sermon (7:1-15)⁶³ Judah is indicted of taking the Temple of Jerusalem as

⁶⁰ Authors suggest slightly different divisions of the first scroll into macro-structural units that provide reading guides. But it is of course important to add that attempts at structuring the book encounters much difficulty and the reader understands the complexity in the description of the materials. "Each section or description of that section may be disputed as to extent of division or accuracy of the summary of its contents. In such sense structural proposals become only convenient guides and not word from Sinai". See CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OT Guides), p. 17.

⁶¹ The macro-structural unit which runs from chapter 7 till 10:25 is therefore kicked off by a composite block of narrative material in 7:1-8:3 where one can observe a discourse concerning the temple, cult in general and other warnings of various nuances. 11:1-17:27 begins equally with a section on prose (11:1-17) but again terminates with a prose (17:19-27). 18:1-12 is the narrative introduction to the third macro-structural unit which spans from 18:1-20 till 20:18. The last of the macro-units of the first scroll, 21:1-24:10 begins again with a narrative section. The context is Zedekiah's request that Jeremiah get an oracle from YHWH to avert the enemy. This was denied categorically. Instead, Jeremiah declares that YHWH is waging a war against Zedekiah and the royal city (v. 4, 7, 9-10).

⁶² L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 39.

⁶³ The pericope is frequently interpreted as one of those deuteronomistic materials, Mowinckel's 'C' randomly scattered in the text. But from the *Sitz im Buch* of the text, we can equally see the close connection between the temple sermon and the previous text of 2-6. Not only that 7:1-15 is a prose homily using the previous text poetry as subtext, see L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 40, it could be seen

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

support for atrocities. The third unit (11:1-17:27) goes beyond possibilities of remedy to assert that even the Sinaitic covenant or prophetic intercession (chapter 14) cannot avert the threat of the imminent disaster facing Judah (הַחֵרֶם v. 11, 12, 14, 17). The tempo of the text therefore increases and the tension heightens, true to the theme of the first scroll. Exile is inevitable. From chapter 18, the beginning of another unit, another base is attacked; the assumption and the status of Judah as elected and chosen. This attack is couched by the symbolic language of the potter imagery⁶⁴. The freedom of YHWH in dealing with Judah is exemplified in the freedom of the potter to mould and remould his clay to his own taste. That means that YHWH can reform the destiny of the people and reverse the fortune of the nation⁶⁵. Responsive outsiders can therefore become insiders while revolting insiders become outsiders⁶⁶. In chapter 19, the judgement sounds definitive; there is no sign that the clay jar could again be reformed as the imagery in 18:1-10 might give impression. Rather "I will break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended" (v. 11). The last of the macro-units of the first scroll, 21:1-24:10, addresses, attacks and uproots the last of the 'first principles' or put in other words, the last of the sacred canopies, that is the royal dynastic theology. Jeremiah declares that YHWH is waging a war against Zedekiah and the royal

equally as a response or comment on 2-6. We can therefore say that 7:1-8:3 as the narrative beginning of the second macro-structural unit serves as a midrash to the preceding collection of oracles (2-6) and to what follows (8-10) by not only summarising "the early oracles by way of focusing on the cult and denouncing the practices found there", R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 84, but also by punctuating and reperforming the poetry and serving as a link to 8-10. From 7:1-15 we can understand the reason for the pride, confidence and smugness of which Judah is accused in 2-6.

⁶⁴ On the potter imagery in Jer: 18, see B.A. ASEN, *Needing and Being Kneaded: A Reflection on Jer. 18:3-4*, in *BT 20* (1982), p. 306-309; T.E. FRETHEIM, *The Repentance of God: A Study of Jer. 18:7-10*, in *HAR 11* (1987), p. 81-92; C.H.W. BREKELMANS, *Jer. 18,1-12 and its Redaction*, in P.-M. BOGAERT (ed.), *Le livre de Jérémie*, p. 343-350.

⁶⁵ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 46. This interpretation is however contestable. In fact, scholars are divided on the exact interpretation of the episode of the visit to the potter. For the issues involved in the interpretation of this periscope, see C.H.W. BREKELMANS, *Jer. 18,1-12 and its Redaction*, p. 344-345.

⁶⁶ For a better understanding of the notion of 'Insider-Outsider' perspective as transmitted through the Jeremiah tradition, see again L. STULMAN, *Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Jeremiah*.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

city (v. 4, 7, 9-10)⁶⁷. “YHWH will deliver Zedekiah to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon who is the instrument of divine judgment. The traditional and conventional claims for dynastic immutability have been subverted; hope is no longer extended to the historical dynasty or the royal city”⁶⁸. The conditional nature of the Davidic dynasty is accentuated (cf. 21:11-22:30). Consequently, new shepherds, an ideal ruler in David’s line, but one who will govern with justice and righteousness (cf. 23:1-8)⁶⁹ will be instituted. A short narrative in chapter 24 concludes the macro-unit: the vision of the baskets of fig⁷⁰. As if life now is in Babylon and no longer in Judah, YHWH promises salvation to the exiled in Babylon while those who remained in the land are rejected.

1.1.2.1.2 Building and Planting (Jer. 26-52)

From reading 1-25, it is clear that nothing can save Judah from exile and dislocation since the nation’s sacred canopies can no longer guarantee protection for a community condemned because of their recalcitrance. Neither temple nor cult, neither covenant tradition nor ancient land claims, even neither election privileges nor royal ideology is intrinsically strong enough as remedy for a condemned people. The argument that YHWH is absolutely tied or committed to established religious systems, even the systems that have since ages been privileged by divine favour, has equally been violated and

⁶⁷ Brueggemann describes extensively the inversion of the credo of the holy war traditions: “The astonishing [...] is that the old rhetoric is now inverted, so that the great verbs of the tradition are now used precisely against Judah, and therefore in favor of Babylon. Jeremiah has reversed the credo tradition of Judah to use against Judah. It is Judah who will now be without weapons, utterly vulnerable, completely helpless (v. 5). The most telling inversion is in v. 5, which uses the particular language of the Exodus. The notion of ‘outstretched arm and strong hand’ is an old formula (Deut. 26:8; Ps. 136:12), now used against Judah by Yahweh, who has become Judah’s enemy”, see BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 190ff.

⁶⁸ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 50.

⁶⁹ See R.W. KLEIN, *Jer 23:1-8*, in *Interpretation* 34 (1980), p. 167-172. The author sees these verses as the climax of the oracles found in Jer. 21:11-23:8 about kings and shepherds whose conducts caused the exile and the scattering of the sheep (people).

⁷⁰ For a relatively recent study on Jer. 24, see N. KILPP, *Niederreißen und Aufbauen: Das Verhältnis von Heilverheißung und Unheilsverkündigung bei Jeremia und im Jeremiabuch* (BThSt 13), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1990, p. 21-37.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

nullified by prophetic pronouncements. The second scroll however provides strategies for hope and new beginnings, without assuring any smoothness in the dealings between Judah and YHWH. The fact is that even out of the rubble of cosmic crumbling, the text of the second scroll could at the same time articulate new world constructions, social configurations and network of meanings beyond catastrophe. "The second scroll presents a 'hope-full' script for a reimagined community beyond the cessation of the old world order"⁷¹. This major concern of the second scroll as has just been described thus provides our reading strategy for the analysis of the Part II of the drama of the book of Jeremiah.

Dividing the second scrolls into major blocks or macro structural units has been variously done by many commentators. This is especially with regard to the first part of the scroll spanning from chapter 26 to 45. Chapters 46-51 are remarkably clear, the Oracles against the Nations cast in poetic style. Division into 26-36; 37-45; 46-51 as done by Stulman have strong arguments for, but is not spared some problems from the consideration of chapters 30 and 31 which are different both in content, theme and style from 26-29 and from 32 to 45. It is therefore safer, but never without contestations, to observe units in the following groupings: 26-29; 30-31; 32-45 and 46-51. But the question is: even though "the shadow of the events of 587 BC covers the entire book of Jeremiah"⁷², how does the text of the second scroll articulate this message of hope?

As an attempt to answer this question, it is necessary to just signal the strategic placement of chapters 26, 45 and 52. Though it is not so easy to determine with precision the beginning and end of the macro-units in the second scroll and different authors have slightly different demarcations, the very first encounter with the text, judging by the literary genre and the surface texture, would reveal two different texts in the second scroll, 26-45 and 46-51, remaining of course chapter 52 which serves as an epilogue to the book. Chapters 26-45 is a very long section of the book of Jeremiah which to a great extent is cast in prose and constitutes somewhat of an unsolved problem as to its theme

⁷¹ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 57.

⁷² CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah*, p. 9.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

and composition, and which is only being explored in some detail⁷³, giving rise to many opinions as to its focus⁷⁴ while 46-51 is the section of the Oracles against the Nations as found in the MT. There is again the second problem of determining the precise status of chapter 26 (especially) and of course 52. Though they serve as the introduction and conclusion respectively, the question is whether chapter 26 should serve only as introduction to the whole scroll or whether in itself it has some particular affinity with the first macro-structural unit. Thirdly, is literary genre the only criterion for determining the extent and limits of the macro-structural units, or do we also consider the question of thematic coherence and theological message? These questions already highlight chapters 26, 45 and 52 in the general framework of this scroll.

Placed strategically as landmarks in the entire second scroll, the chapters “juxtapose the rhetorics of dismantling with the constructions of hope and ‘new life’ for a reimagined community”⁷⁵. This is effected by either providing a “narratorial introduction to the second scroll, presenting its dominant motifs in cryptic and anticipatory terms (Jer. 26)”⁷⁶, supplying notes of survival⁷⁷ or a “positive ending to the tradition so characterised

⁷³ Cf. M. KESSLER, *Jeremiah Chapters 26-45 Reconsidered*, p. 81. See also M. KESSLER, *Form-Critical Suggestions on Jer. 36*, in *CBQ* 28 (1966), p. 389-401.

⁷⁴ Rudolph for example sees the unifying theme of 26-45 as *Heilswissagungen*, RUDOLPH, *Jeremia 26-52* (HAT), Tübingen, 1958, p. xvii, while Kessler sees this assertion as an over generalisation. The section can be divided into two tradition-complexes: chapters 26-36 and 37-45. Kessler adopts this division, as against Rudolph who makes chapter 36 the beginning of a new “complex”, see RUDOLPH, *Jeremia 26-52*; and C. RIETZSCHEL, *Das Problem der Urrolle. Ein Beitrag zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Jeremiabuches*, Gütersloh, 1966.

⁷⁵ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 63.

⁷⁶ For example, for the first time in the book of Jeremiah, we find an ambivalent reception of the message and prophetic word of the prophet. Hitherto there have been concerted and unilateral efforts to silence Jeremiah and a total rejection of his word by all (cf. Jer. 18:18; 20:1ff). However, in chapter 26, some of the characters seem to be at the side of the prophet. For the first time we meet a favourable situation which might give a glimpse of the character of the second scroll: “a faithful few will hear and be receptive to the words of the prophet, while the multitudes remain defiant and recalcitrant”, L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 65.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

by disaster and evil befalling everyone⁷⁸ (Jer. 45 in particular⁷⁹ and also equally chapter 52), or finally by announcing the fulfilment of the prophetic word about Jerusalem and mapping out a future beyond the cessation of the old symbolic universe (chapter 52)⁸⁰. The figures of Jeremiah saved from a menace of death (chapter 26), Uriah ben Shemaiah

⁷⁷ Carroll adds that this possibility of survival must be viewed as a benevolent, positive conclusion to a book so dominated by hate, anger, and disaster. The survival of Baruch becomes therefore an earnest of a more positive future: “in a context of a universal disaster Baruch will survive (we might add: and implicitly so will all others who can appropriate the term ‘your life as a prize of war’, 45.5; cf. 39.19; 38.2; 21.9)”, CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OT Guides), p. 110.

⁷⁸ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OT Guides), p. 110.

⁷⁹ Marion Taylor writes: “For the reader of chapter 45, the comprehensive promises of future hope and salvation [...] echo but faintly at this point. At the same time, however, the echoes of the salvation oracle given to Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian, resound (cf. 39.17-18)”, making Baruch and Ebed-melech to stand for the faithful whose presence provides ‘a telling foil to the flagrantly disobedient multitudes who will necessarily come under judgment’”, M. TAYLOR, *Jeremiah 45: The Problem of Placement*, in *JSOT* 37 (1987), p. 79-98, see p. 93.

⁸⁰ Incidentally chapter 52 has been for long considered as a mere historical appendix, as if it is dispensable or as if it is an unimportant appendage to the structure of the book. But in this single chapter cast in narrative is reflected the governing rubric of the book of Jeremiah, “to pluck up and to pull down”, and at the same time to “build and to plant”. It begins with the rhetoric of death: Jerusalem is besieged by the Babylonian armies and the temple burnt down, representing the overthrow of all the old configurations of reality, with the blame placed on the Judean kings and their followers. However, the text ends with the kind treatment of Jehoiachin in Babylon who is showed favour by King Evil-Merodach and brought out of prison “and is allotted a seat above those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin laid aside his prisoner’s garb, and for the rest of his life always ate at the king’s table. And his upkeep was permanently ensured by the king for the rest of his life day after day until his dying day” (Jer. 52:32-34). From an interpretative point of view, we can see Jerusalem, the temple and the people suffering a bad fate, with an individual, which could represent new life and new community born out of suffering, surviving the evil fate with a promise of kind treatment. The book therefore concludes with words of salvation, which does not cancel in any way the overthrow of the old systems but as Wolff says, implies that “God is still acting for his people”, H.W. WOLFF, *The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historical Work*, in W. BRUEGGEMANN & H.W. WOLFF (eds.), *The Vitality of the Old Testament Traditions*, p. 99. Carroll articulates it thus: “to read as the final entry in this long sorry tale the story of Jehoiachin’s release from prison is to glimpse briefly a sunny upland seldom seen in the book of Jeremiah. It is a shaft of sunlight on a darkling plain and it lifts the heart of the reader after a long day’s journey through the valley of the shadow”, CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OT Guides), p. 113.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

mentioned as example of a likeminded prophet (26:20), Ebed-Melech, a humane royal servant whose act of pity towards the suffering prophet earned him a hopeful oracle (38:7-12, 15-18) and Baruch the secretary of Jeremiah (45:5)⁸¹, all show that the narrator wants to express his conviction that a responsive remnant would always be present⁸² and that the curtain of the drama of the narrative in entirety is not drawn after the notes of devastations that characterised the first scroll.

Objections could be raised that the Oracles against the Nations (46-51) contradict this major thrust of the second scroll⁸³. But in the first place, the literary cohesion and symmetry which the placement effects in the text of the book of Jeremiah is easily noticeable: the Oracle against the Nations by its very name and content presents Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations already attested in chapter 1 (cf. v. 5 and v. 10). That means fulfilling at the end of the book the vocation of Jeremiah already announced at the

⁸¹ Chapter 45 is a positive oracle to Baruch, and going by the order of the LXX where this is the end of the book, is an indices of the place given to Baruch in the logic of the LXX of Jeremiah. See P.-M. BOGAERT, *Vie et paroles de Jérémie selon Baruch: Le texte court de Jérémie (LXX) comme œuvre biographique*, in E. BIANCHI et al. (eds.), *La Parola edifica la comunità*, Magnano, 1996, p. 15-29, see p. 18-19.

⁸² P.-M. BOGAERT, *Vie et paroles de Jérémie selon Baruch*: "Dans la forme courte de Jérémie, la longue section des Oracles Contre les Nations (46 à 51TM = 25,14 à 31,44LXX) se trouve au milieu du livre. Dès lors, si l'on tient à part le chapitre 52, d'une nature particulière, le livre même s'achève sur l'oracle de Jérémie promettant à Baruch la vie sauve partout où il irait (45TM = 51,31-35LXX). Si de plus on se souvient du rôle de Baruch dans la conservation de l'acte d'achat du champ (32TM = 39LXX) et dans la mise par écrit du recueil des oracles de Jérémie à lire devant le roi Joaqim, une première fois avant la lecture, la seconde après la destruction du rouleau par le feu (36TM = 43LXX), l'on conclura sans grand risque que le rédacteur du texte court veut nous faire saisir que Baruch est le légataire, après en avoir été le notaire et avant d'en être l'éditeur, des prophéties de Jérémie" (p. 18).

⁸³ As already hinted, the placement of the Oracles against the Nations at the end of the MT text is one of the major differences between the MT and the LXX and therefore presents difficulties from the interpretative point of view in the book. However majority of these difficulties are from the historical-critical point of view and questions the authorship, dating, growth and development of the tradition: which is more original, the placement in the LXX or in the MT? Do the geo-political events narrated in the Oracles against the Nations correspond to historical events or realities? Is the redactional history of the individual units identifiable? These questions do not however find great pertinence here.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

beginning. Symbolically, the Oracle against the Nations puts across in a clearer fashion the central metaphor of the book of Jeremiah: the claim that YHWH reigns and directs the affairs of the earth. This affirmation of the reign of God and the dependence of the future of history on him has implications in the text at the level of its theological message. The reign of God, his directorship of history and destinies would therefore imply his overthrowing of every pretence and power arrangement that opposes his design, a dismantling of every “act of self-aggrandizement”, in the words of Brueggemann⁸⁴, found among the nations. Most importantly in the Oracles against the Nations is, in the final analysis, the overthrow of Babylon, a nation that has a very significant function in the book of Jeremiah (MT). And here again, the fact that it is YHWH who controls history and destinies freely and unquestionably is brought again clearer. Babylon, once empowered by YHWH to accomplish his purposes and punish his people, will now be toppled. The concluding prose in 51:59-64 highlights the severe attack of YHWH on Babylon: the scroll of the oracle should be read by Seraiah and be cast into Euphrates to symbolise the drowning of Babylon. With this last allusion and the first temporal allusion that places the Oracles against the Nations at the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, one can say that the “OAN are bracketed by the birth announcement and ‘death certificate’ of Babylon, the object of Yahweh’s wrath”⁸⁵. The figure of Babylon in the text is more than that of a nation among the many foreign nations. It is a power, an evil power in war with God and his plans for his people⁸⁶ and therefore its overthrow would signify the victory of YHWH over every oppressive power structure in favour of his people. And the precise overthrow of this tyrannical empire, the once chosen instrument of judgement by YHWH for his work of dismantling, would signal the possibility of fresh beginnings for the exiles in Babylon. “In the end, the cessation of Babylonian control, the taming and subjugation of the very power structures

⁸⁴ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 420.

⁸⁵ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 95.

⁸⁶ See A.O. BELLIS, *The Changing Face of Babylon in Prophetic/Apocalyptic Literature: Seventh Century BCE to First Century CE and Beyond*, in L.L. GRABBE & R.D. HAAK (eds.), *Knowing the End from the Beginning: The Prophetic, the Apocalyptic and their Relationships* (Journal of the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement 46), New York, 2003, p. 65-73.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

responsible for Judah's forlorn condition, can only represent new and hopeful possibilities for a better future"⁸⁷.

1.2 JER. 26-29(MT): VERITY VERSUS FALSITY

As shown in the first part of the present Chapter, we are in the first four chapters that make up the first major literary block of the second scroll of the book of Jeremiah. After the look at the Jeremiah MT text from a stepped back point of view, it remains casting a narrower glance on chapters 26-29 to see how they form a single unit with a determinable focus. This exercise would also mean searching, even though yet in a very general manner, the hints in the text that from a synchronic point of view can lead us to a discussion on authentic prophetism in the context of theology today. Here, we do not yet intend going into detailed study of the narratives⁸⁸ in the text.

1.2.1 Delimitation of Jer. 26-29

Even though from the purely redactional point of view, we cannot deny the "heterogeneous origin"⁸⁹ of the block, chapters 26-29 can be grouped together by reasons of convenience, by some spatial indices and because of a common theme. As a matter of convenience, it is clear that the four chapters form an in-between group of chapters. On the one hand, chapter 25 stands by itself, and, as we tried to show, most scholars understand it to be a conclusion to, and a climactic statement⁹⁰ at the end of the first scroll (chapters 1-25), the so called 'cup of wrath'; a sustained and relentless announcement of YHWH's judgment upon all the nations of the earth, even upon Babylon, who is regarded in most of the Jeremiah (MT) tradition to be YHWH's agent. On the other hand chapter 30 begins a quite new sub-grouping, the so-called book of

⁸⁷ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 96.

⁸⁸ This is the issue from the next chapter: that is, looking at the literary organisation of the text from the point of view of its surface appearance: the verbal recurrences, parallelisms, inclusions and oppositions, the examination of the characters and the plot by the narrator.

⁸⁹ CARROLL, *Jeremiah (OTL)*, p. 540.

⁹⁰ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 229.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

consolation with its accent on the new covenant, on promise and hope, and marked also by its poetic casting. Between 25 and 30 we find our chapters.

The block has equally received further different attentions as regards indices for its delimitation. For example judging from the spatial point of view, Christiane Dieterle and Violaine Monsarrat, while detecting the theme of true and false prophecy, equally describe the four chapters as a narrative of the prophetic preaching from Jerusalem to Babylon⁹¹. In their introduction, they write:

“Parti d’une étude sur le vrai et le faux prophète dans les chapitres 27-28 du livre de Jérémie, il a semblé rapidement nécessaire d’élargir la lecture à un contexte un peu plus vaste et prendre les chapitres 26-29 comme un ensemble cohérent : un récit de la prédication prophétique de Jérusalem à Babylone. A travers ce récit, la personne de Jérémie est confrontée à de nombreux interlocuteurs ; des relations se nouent et se dénouent. Les paroles du prophète sont proclamées à la porte du Temple, lancées au loin vers les rois étrangers, adressées aux rois de Jérusalem et envoyées par écrit aux exilés”⁹².

This block begins with chapter 26 where we have the story of a chain of events leading finally to Jeremiah’s legitimisation as a true prophet of YHWH, vindicated by Judah’s highest court. This story therefore sets the tone for the succeeding narratives, indicating the severity of the opposition he had to endure, from the part of the people, the king and even fellow prophets. The three successive chapters give us an outline of the prophet’s message for Judah and her neighbours (chapter 27), a record of opposition by *shalom* prophets personified by Hananiah (chapter 28), and a record of further oppositions, and Jeremiah’s *shalom* message to the exiles in Babylon (chapter 29) for they had fulfilled the conditions of *shalom*: they had received due punishment, unlike the inhabitants of Jerusalem who kept rejecting the prophetic word and were therefore unfit subjects for *shalom* oracles. From this very concise glance, it is clear that the key word in the block is

⁹¹ C. DIETERLE & V. MONSARRAT, *De Jérusalem à Babylone : La prédication prophétique, Jérémie 26-29*, in *Foi et vie* 83/5 (1984), p. 56-69.

⁹² C. DIETERLE & V. MONSARRAT, *De Jérusalem à Babylone*, p. 1.

opposition and confrontation. This opposition is staged by the preaching of Jeremiah in chapter 26; Jeremiah gives YHWH's programme for the people in chapter 27. Chapter 28 articulates the concrete opposition to this programme and looks like a catalyst for Jeremiah's *shalom* oracles in chapter 29, for while opposing Hananiah's brand of imminent *shalom*, there is yet in YHWH's plan, as represented by his true prophet, *shalom* beyond Judah's inevitable calamities which YHWH had ordained as necessary punishment for their disobedience. In the narratives as a whole, the question is then: where is the truth?

1.2.2 Identifying the Theme and Narrative Logic of Jer. 26-29

1.2.2.1 Identifying the Theme

More than a grouping by convenience, the four chapters seem to converge in a single theme, a unified theology. Completely cast in prose, the block features from an interpretative point of view "a deep, partisan, ideological dispute concerning Judah's true situation vis-à-vis Yahweh and therefore vis-à-vis Babylon"⁹³. There is a confrontation between an 'official view' and its counter view of reality. The official view voiced by the Jerusalem establishment and sustained on the lips of the 'false prophets' represented chiefly at the centre of the block by Hananiah, is that Jerusalem is safe, guaranteed by the promises of God, and grounded by the well-established salvific tradition founded in election⁹⁴, and that the Babylonian intrusion into the life of Judah is very temporary and relatively short spanned, after which there will be a quick return to the normal situation⁹⁵. This situation is well described by Brueggemann:

"This ideology articulated in the Jerusalem establishment, fostered by the king and articulated by temple priests, claimed that the God of Israel had made

⁹³ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 229. On the issue of the ideological dispute, see H. MOTTU, *Jeremiah vs. Hananiah: Ideology and Truth in Old Testament Prophecy*, in N.K. GOTTWALD (ed.), *The Bible and Liberation*, New York, 1983, p. 235-251.

⁹⁴ L. STULMAN, *Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Jeremiah*, p. 73.

⁹⁵ This is of course from a theological interpretive point of view in that there is no direct verbal textual attestation. However, the prophecy of Hananiah in chapter 28 and that of many other prophets (see chapters 27 and 29) justify such interpretation.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

irrevocable promises to the temple and the monarchy, had taken up permanent residence in Jerusalem, and was for all time a patron and guarantor of the Jerusalem establishment. Jeremiah's work only makes sense as an antithetical response to that ideology"⁹⁶.

Contrary to this view, Jeremiah the prophet represents a quite different perspective. This perspective undermines and subverts the settled ideology. In concrete terms, the tradition of Jeremiah is that Jerusalem is not guaranteed at all costs, but its existence and *shalom* depend on the exigencies of the Torah, her resolve to keep it and her actual attitude of listening to the prophets of YHWH sent for this precise purpose. Again, it is that the Babylonian threat is a theological judgement on Jerusalem which is both long-term and severe⁹⁷; and that their present *καίρος* stands under the 'wrath' and not the 'love of God'⁹⁸. It is a question of the actual moment, the present tense reality in their relationship with YHWH, which in the tradition of Jeremiah "stands under the *Zorn* of Yahweh, and Babylonian hegemony is not only a political reality but also a 'theo-political' reality"⁹⁹. This theological reality or vision becomes the bone of contention, which places Jeremiah in one camp and the other prophets and intermediaries in the other. Brueggemann finds the expression "truth speaks to power" suiting to qualify the narratives of the four chapters, interpretatively judging from the confrontations which Jeremiah has to face with various groups of individuals on account of the verity of the word he proclaims¹⁰⁰. Thompson titles his commentary on chapters 26-29 simply as "Jeremiah's Controversy with False Prophets"¹⁰¹. Without betraying the spirit of the synchronic method which faces the world of the text, one can say that the above articulation is the task the narrator sets himself to show with the personalities he brings into play, the parts he allows them to act, the gestures and words he assigns to them and in that wise characterising them.

⁹⁶ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 6.

⁹⁷ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 230.

⁹⁸ E. OSSWALD, *Falsche Prophetie im Alten Testament*, Tübingen, 1962, p. 22.

⁹⁹ L. STULMAN, *Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Jeremiah*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁰ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, see p. 229-263.

¹⁰¹ THOMPSON, *Jeremiah*, p. 521.

1.2.2.2 Identifying the Internal Logic

Throughout the narrative, it is a scene of Jeremiah confronting many interlocutors, with the relations and confrontations tensing up and releasing. At the very beginning, the words of the prophet are proclaimed at the entry to the temple (a topographical condition which accentuates the primarily religious character of the prophecy), addressed to the kings of Jerusalem, sent afar as messages to foreign kings through their representatives and sent by couriers to the exiles. At different points of the narrative drama, there is a recurring question: which is true and which is false? In the words of Dieterle and Monsarrat, “ces chapitres présentent plusieurs prophètes dans leurs relations les uns avec les autres et avec les autorités en place. Ils posent la question du discernement nécessaire pour reconnaître la vraie parole prophétique”¹⁰².

This issue of discernment between true and false prophecy becomes the element that animates the reading of the entire block. At the beginning of the narrative in chapter 26, Jeremiah receives the mission of announcing the evil lot of the inhabitants of Judah if they do not repent. The question is: can this fate be avoided? And so it is a question whether this word is hearkened to, how the many and diverse interlocutors, the priests and prophets, kings and high functionaries, the whole people react with regard to the prophetic word. Semantically the preponderance of the terms נבא, שלח, רבר, שמע, reminds the reader that it is a question of which (is the) prophet (is) sent (?). Which or whose word is to be listened to? What consequences await the audience for the refusal to listen to this word? Two possible attitudes are at stake: it is either that Judah and her chiefs do not repent and consequently the temple be treated like Shiloh and the city destroyed which would prove the veracity of Jeremiah's words, or Judah and her chiefs adopt the same attitude which Hezekiah adopted before Micah of Moreshet in the presence of YHWH (cf. 26:18), and consequently YHWH would repent of the evil he intended to inflict, and Jeremiah (by implication) would also appear as a true prophet because he had led the people to life. On the whole, the narrator succeeds to highlight some necessary tensions that will play a very important role in the subsequent chapters of the block. In

¹⁰² C. DIETERLE & V. MONSARRAT, *De Jérusalem à Babylone*, p. 59.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

the first place, there emerge two different types of kings; one who listens to the prophets (exemplified in the person of King Hezekiah vis-à-vis Micah) and the other who opposes and kills the prophet (in the person of Jehoiakim vis-à-vis the prophet Uriah) and equally two types of prophets: those who announce the condemnation of the temple (Jeremiah, Micah, Uriah), and the others, who, in alliance with the priests, refuse such announcements or announce peace.

The narrator continues in chapter 27 to show precisely how the threat can be avoided. Vindicated as true prophet in Jer. 26, Jeremiah prophetically addresses successively the kings of Judah's neighbours by the intermediary of their ambassadors (v. 2-11), Zedekiah, king of Judah (v. 12-15), and finally the priests and all the people (v. 16-22). Two dispositions are necessary. Listening to Jeremiah would lead to accepting submission to the king of Babylon and refusing to listen to those who are against it. The problem becomes then how to recognise the words to which one should not listen; that is, to distinguish the false from the true. Many prophets or precisely many intermediaries are identified with the false and with death; the prophets of the neighbouring nations, some from Judah, the diviners, the dreamers, the fortune-tellers, the magicians (v. 9). The problem of the true and the false is again brought to light in the question: who is the master and who is to be served? Two kings are equally brought to the light: one in Jerusalem, Zedekiah (v. 12), and the other in Babylon, Jeconiah (v. 20). Nebuchadnezzar is presented as the king to be served and is called by YHWH "my servant" (v. 6) paralleling "my servants the prophets" in 26:5.

The confrontation of Jeremiah and Hananiah in a single combat, at the centre of the narrative (chapter 28), poses directly and dramatically the question of the discernment of the true and false prophet. From every point of view, one notices a dramatisation of the bone of contention in the previous chapters. A drama in two Acts involving three personages is presented to the reader; a plot in the strict sense, with the combination of telling and showing by the narrator. A neat connection is made with the preceding

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

chapter by the mention of the wearing of the yoke by Jeremiah (cf. v. 10)¹⁰³. The narrator's apparent presentation of the two prophets on the same footing, and at the same time, his subtle contrast of the two, confront the reader with some basic questions concerning authentic prophetic witness: indirectly one could notice the dynamic pluralism of one prophet (Jeremiah) as opposed to the appropriation of YHWH by the other (Hananiah), one's autonomy (Hananiah) as opposed to the obedient listening of the other (Jeremiah), etc. At the end of the chapter, with the mounting criteria for the discernment of the true from the false given by the narrator and finally with the irruption of the word of YHWH as the decisive criterion (cf. v. 12-14), coupled with the exit of one of the prophets¹⁰⁴, the reader is not sitting on the fence as to the direction of his judgement with regard to the intent of the narrative and with regard to the distinction between the true and the false.

Chapter 28 having established Jeremiah as the true prophet against Hananiah (28:16-17), chapter 29 deals with the best conditions in which destruction can be avoided even though the people are in exile. The words of the prophet are sent by couriers to the exiles. Jeremiah urges his contemporaries to prepare for a long haul of displacement and equally to reject false and easy assurances¹⁰⁵. Many other prophetic personalities surface in this chapter, and the exchange of letters and defamatory condemnations between them and Jeremiah show that the discussion on true and false prophecy had not been exhausted. The narrative ends with another prophetic figure being treated in the way Hananiah was, therefore providing a contrary frame to chapter 26 which is a vindication of a prophet.

With this internal logic of 26-29, it is easier to see the role of its placement in the logic of 26-52. The question could be asked as to why the second scroll should begin with this long debate on prophetic authenticity before the oracles of 30-31, the narratives of 32-45

¹⁰³ This phenomenon makes many authors to see the two chapters as one narrative, or that chapter 28 is an independent version of chapter 27. But our treating each of them as a separate unit in itself will be justified in the Chapters dedicated to them.

¹⁰⁴ By the eventual death of Hananiah (v. 16-17).

¹⁰⁵ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 231.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

and the oracles of 46-51. For the hopeful constructions, which could be said to be the theme of the second scroll, to be a reality, all false presumptions and assurances must be discarded. These false hopes are provided by no other figures than the false prophets. YHWH's hopes for his people are of a different kind and are conditional. The connection between chapter 29, which talks of the conditions for the true shalom, and chapter 30-31, which announces the new covenant, is all the more glaring.

Conclusion

The central thesis of this chapter; the readability and the grounds for the readability of the book of Jeremiah, should be the most difficult to sustain since it is a thesis that meets with objections once the reader sets out to find out for himself the facts of the case while reading the text of the book. This is also because it deals with the question of the correct reading posture (or reading lens), but which I think summarises the reason for the divergence among authors on the major questions in Jeremiah research. And so the reading posture we have adopted here is different from many and also similar to some. Carroll described his own reading posture as a "countervoice"¹⁰⁶, though others are also counter voices, depending on whose opinion is considered first before the other. It seems better therefore to describe the various opinions and postures as 'different voices' or even better simply as 'possible' voices or opinions. If we can follow Carroll in his description of the book of Jeremiah as "a strange and alienating text, quite discrete and different from our own contemporary values"¹⁰⁷, then it is not strange that different readers would adopt different postures in reading the text. We have in this chapter, adopted a reading posture similar to that of Stulman especially, though that does not mean that we consider the posture as totally comfortable. It is necessary, as has been intimated in the general introduction, to distance from his extremely positive appreciation of the order in the book, especially his evaluation of the whole of the second part of the book. Right in stressing the hopeful slant of the second scroll, it is equally good not to underestimate, as can be said of him, the motifs that contradict the hope of salvation for the people, equally largely present in the second scroll, so that the reader be not mistaken by assuming an

¹⁰⁶ R.P. CARROLL, *Halfway through the Dark Wood*, p. 85, footnote 19.

¹⁰⁷ R.P. CARROLL, *Halfway through the Dark Wood*, p. 78.

Part Two Chapter One: The Place of Jer. 26-29 in the Book of Jeremiah (MT)

impression of a clear cut demarcation of “uproot and overthrow//build and plant” motifs and attributing it without any qualification to the respective scrolls of the book. In that way, the book loses again its character of indeterminacy, and would negate its metaphorical bent. While we make this notice, we also admit that the second scroll configures hope especially when the reader reaches the final full stop. As Holt recently puts it:

“The second part of Jeremiah is not only a discourse on comfort; it is also a theodicy, an answer to the question of exile. And this answer is not primarily comforting; it is rather to be taken as a warning [...]. A sentiment of threat and uncertainty governs the second part of the Book of Jeremiah (Jer 26-52), side by side with the sections of hopefulness [...]. Only at the end of the Book of Jeremiah, in the Oracles against the Nations, and especially in the oracles against Babylon, the final threat against Israel/Judah is turned into unconditional and unlimited woes of deliverance. Until then, the reader of the Book of Jeremiah must be without any confidence in the reconciliation of Judah”¹⁰⁸.

What we have identified as the theme and the narrative logic of Jer. 26-29 will then guide our narrative readings, which is the task of the rest of Part Two.

¹⁰⁸ E.K. HOLT, *The Meaning of an Inclusio: A Theological Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah MT*, in *SJOT* 17/2 (2003), p. 183-205, see p. 186.

CHAPTER TWO

JER. 26: THE THEME OF PROPHETIC AUTHENTICITY ENUNCIATED

Introduction

Jer. 26 begins the second part of the Jeremiah scroll and gives the account of the prophet's threat to the temple of YHWH in Jerusalem. It is also the beginning of the section of narrative biographical material in the book¹, and by this fact marks a sharp departure in the texture of the book². This could partly explain the attraction which this chapter has had among many commentators, becoming the target of varied methodological approaches in exegesis³. Many of the studies on the chapter concentrate

¹ The narrative section beginning from this chapter and stretching up to 45:5, apart of course from the oracular sections of 30-31, 33, has sometimes been described as the 'Baruch Narrative' or the 'Baruch Biography', with the idea that the materials are written by Baruch. Such connection with Baruch bears also from the fact that the section refers mainly to Jeremiah in the third person and concludes with an address or an oracle in favour of Baruch in 45:1-5. The debate on this attribution falls outside the scope of our work here.

² CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah*, p. 153.

³ For different studies on this chapter outside the major commentaries, see F. HORST, *Die Anfänge des Propheten Jeremia*, in *ZAW* 41 (1923), p. 94-153; G.R. DRIVER, *Jeremiah xxvi 6*, in *VT* 1 (1951), p. 244-245; J.P. HYATT, *The Beginning of Jeremiah's Prophecy*, in *ZAW* 78 (1966), p. 204-214; J. SCHREINER, *Sicherheit oder Umkehr? Aus der Verkündigung des Propheten Jeremias, Jer 7,1-15; 26,1-6*, in *BibLeb* 7 (1966), p. 98-111; C. RIETZSCHEL, *Das Problem der Urrolle*; H.G. REVENTLOW, *Gattung und Überlieferung in der „Tempelrede Jeremias“ Jer 7 und 26*, in *ZAW* 81 (1969), p. 315-352; H. SCHULZ, *Das Todesrecht im Alten Testament: Studien zur Rechtsform der Mot-Jumat-Sätze* (BZAW 114), Berlin, 1969, especially p. 113-121; H.J. BOECKER, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament* (WMANT 14), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1970; G. WANKE, *Untersuchungen zur sogenannten Baruchschrift* (BZAW 122), Berlin, 1971; F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Der Prophet vor dem Tribunal: Neuer Auslegungsversuch von Jer 26*, in *ZAW* 86 (1974), p. 30-50; I. MEYER, *Jeremia und die falschen Propheten* (OBO 13), Freiburg, 1977; J. HADEY, *Jérémie et le temple, le conflit de la parole prophétique et la tradition religieuse, Jer. 7/1-15, 26/1-19*, in *ETR* 54 (1979), p. 438-443; R.P. CARROLL, *Prophecy, Dissonance and Jeremiah XXVI*, in L.G. PERDUE & B.W. KOVACS (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations*, p. 381-391; E.K. HOLT, *Jeremiah's Temple Sermon and the Deuteronomists: An Investigation of the Redactional Relationship Between Jeremiah 7 and 26*, in *JSOT* 36 (1984), p. 73-87; J. KEGLER, *The Prophetic*

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

equally on the question of the authenticity of the prophet, but our attention here gains specificity from the methodology.

That Jeremiah proclaimed a threat on the temple, and considered the latter as false security and therefore as no remedy to save Judah from severe judgment is not new to the reader of the book of Jeremiah at this point since this is the theme of 7:1-15, where the same preaching, of course with a different emphasis, is given in a fuller version and as a paraenetic prose. Cast purely in prose in this chapter, this report which “narrates what is clearly a crucial encounter between Jrm and the authorities”⁴ and a personal attack and threat to the life of the prophet, has been used by the narrator “to provide a thematic introduction to the sequence of reports concerning the message of the prophet, its widespread popular rejection by those in authority, and its terrible fulfilment”⁵. The exercise in this Chapter will consist first of all in delimiting the text and identifying the structure. A thorough narrative reading follows and finally a consideration on the intertextual level will be made since this chapter shares, from both literary and thematic points of view, much kindred with Jer. 7:1-15 and Jer. 36. From the narrative point of view therefore, the thesis of this Chapter is that Jer. 26 is neither simply duplication of material⁶ in the real sense of the term nor misplacement⁷ because of its purpose: to set

Discourse and Political Praxis of Jeremiah: Observations on Jeremiah 26 and 36, in W. SCHOTTROFF & W. STEGEMANN (eds.), *God of the Lowly: Socio-Historical Interpretations of the Bible*, New York, 1984, p. 47-56; K.M. O’CONNOR, “...Do not Trim a Word”: *The Contribution of Chapter 26 to the Book of Jeremiah*, in *CBQ* 51 (1989), p. 617-630; C. HARDMEIER, *Die Propheten Micha und Jesaja im Spiegel von Jer 26 und 2 Kings 18-20*, in J.A. EMERTON (ed.), *Congress Volume, Leuven 1989* (VTS 43), Leiden, 1991, p. 172-189; J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut*.

⁴ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah* 2, p. 101.

⁵ CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah*, p. 154-155. The analogy made by Clements here between the role of the report in this chapter and that of the cleansing of the temple by Jesus in John’s gospel is in order. There is a parallel in that John 2:13-25, the narrative of the temple cleansing, “has been made into a kind of preface to the ministry of Jesus”, p. 155.

⁶ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah* 2, p. 101.

⁷ Referring to the chapter as simply “a comment upon his pivotal ‘temple sermon’ in ch. 7”, Brueggemann undermines its deep narratological significance. His use rather of the words “proclamation” and “response” to refer to chapter 7 and 26 respectively is tenable in the sense that “the response puts the prophet in

forth the truth of the proclamation of Jeremiah the prophet⁸. It is rather, in the context of the block Jer. 26-29, the enunciation of a problem, the exposition and a programmatic introduction to the theme of true and false prophecy, which is the focus of the entire narrative block.

2.1 DELIMITATION, EXPOSITION AND STRUCTURE

2.1.1 *Delimitation*

Jer. 26 is a “self-contained narrative”⁹ and forms a literary unit. There is a marked rupture with the end of chapter 25, which consists, as prelude to the Oracles against the Nations, of a vision, while chapter 26 opens right away as a narrative¹⁰. Again, the dating of the two chapters differs vividly from each other. While chapter 25 reports the words addressed to Jeremiah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, taken by some commentators to be 605, the episode of chapter 26 is dated at the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, 609¹¹. The lack of a connecting verb at the beginning of the chapter also suggests the relative independence of the unit¹² and the almost identical heading in 27:1 gives the impression of a unit with more or less clear boundaries. After chapter 26, chapter 27 begins a new narration, that of the symbolic yoke, even though the historical datum given in 27:1 does

profound conflict with his community and its leaders and with its preferred theological conviction”, a theme of conflict which will be explored in greater detail in the three subsequent chapters, see BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 233.

⁸ See G. WANKE, *Untersuchungen zur sogenannten Baruchschrift*, p. 156; HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 102.

⁹ LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21B), New York, 2004, p. 283.

¹⁰ The voice of the narrator is unmistakable.

¹¹ For efforts at reconstructing the chronology of the prophet Jeremiah and especially the historical settings of the chapters, see “Introduction” in HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, especially, p. 25-35.

¹² Compare the use of וְהָיָה “and it came to pass” in 28:1 and 33:1 which establishes a connection with the preceding chapter. See also G.L. KEOWN, P.J. SCALISE, T.G. SMOTHERS, *Jeremiah 26-52* (WBC 27), Dallas, 1995, p. 5. This book is co-authored by the above three authors (to complete the work of Peter Craigie who wrote vol. 26 of the World Biblical Commentary covering Jer. 1-25, but after his death), names presented alphabetically. But since the part covering Jer. 26-34 is prepared by Pamela Scalise, the book will from henceforth be cited thus: SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*.

not synchronise with that in v. 3 and 11. 27:1 repeats the data of 26:1 by mentioning Jehoiakim even though the chapter later talks of Zedekiah and not Jehoiakim. For this we consider 27:1a to be the end of the story of chapter 26, forming therefore an inclusion with 26:1a. The narrative in chapter 26 ends therefore thus: “But Jeremiah had a protector in Ahikam son of Shaphan, so he was not handed over to the people to be put to death, in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah” (26:24-27:1a). However, chapter 26 has serious connection with what follows since chapters 27-29 likewise present the reactions to the preaching of Jeremiah, which opens up a confrontation between Jeremiah and the other prophets and intermediaries¹³. The legitimacy of the prophet Jeremiah which is the gist of chapters 27-29 is at the same time the core of chapter 26.

2.1.2 Exposition

At the beginning of the chapter, Jeremiah receives the mission of announcing the evil fate of the inhabitants of Judah if they do not change (v. 2 and 3). It is striking that here, just as in 7:1-15 (especially 7:5-7), the threat to the temple is firmly conditional upon the repentance and the good behaviour of the listeners¹⁴, an element which is unlike the sharp way in which most of Jeremiah’s threats and warnings are given¹⁵. From the conditional casting of the message, we can understand the challenge in the situation which can be put thus: can this fate be avoided from the part of YHWH? The situation gives rise to two different possibilities: either Judah and her chiefs give deaf ear to the word of YHWH pronounced by his prophet, resulting in the destruction of the temple and the city as threatened (v. 6, 9, 18), and leaving Jeremiah vindicated as having signalled this danger beforehand; or Judah and her chiefs adopt, in the presence of Jeremiah, the same attitude which Hezekiah adopted before Micah of Moresheth; in which case, credit also goes to

¹³ In Jer. 26-29 (33-36 of the LXX), the Greek translator often distinguishes between true and false prophets.

¹⁴ CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah*, p. 155.

¹⁵ Except for example in the temple sermon of 7:1-15, the first scroll (1-25), following our studies in Part Two Chapter One, was marked greatly by the progressive dismantling of Judah’s symbolic structures terminating with the eventual announcement of devastation.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

the prophet for provoking the conversion of the people. YHWH would then repent from the evil intended or announced (v. 17-19). A debate arose involving a) the religious authorities – the priests and the prophets who consider the threat of the possibility of Jerusalem becoming like Shiloh to be improbable (the first choice), thereby implying rejection of conversion and therefore favouring the realisation of the threat; b) the people – who could appear difficult to be pinned down to a camp, passing from the camp of the religious authorities (v. 7) to those of the political authorities (v. 16); c) the political authorities who appear to be the arbiter. V. 10-19 look like the juridical process in a situation that has appeared to be a court charge: the accusation is pronounced by the religious authorities (v. 11), the defence by Jeremiah (v. 12-15), the judgement by the princes and the people (v. 16), and a reinforcement provided by some elders of the land (v. 17-19). The role of these many personalities gives the narrative a court setting, giving a glimpse into legal proceedings¹⁶ and setting before the reader significant groups of people: the accused, Jeremiah; the prosecutors, priests and prophets; the judges, authorities from the civil cadre and the elders. At the gate of the temple, the procedures take place involving, just as in a court setting, first, prosecution and then defence. The prosecutor demands death penalty for the accused who defends himself, and is eventually acquitted, verdict given by the political authorities and the people (v. 16), based on a jurisprudence (in the past, the king Hezekiah did not put the prophet Micah to death) and on the ‘lessons of history’ (in consequence of which YHWH renounced the evil fate he threatened).

The narrative seems to have been concluded at this point when an introduction is made by the narrator, in v. 20-24 of “another man”, Uriah son of Shemaiah, from Kiriath-jearim. The fact that he is presented in the narrative as having prophesied in his own time “exactly the same things against this city and this land as Jeremiah” but suffered terrible fate at the hands of the king Jehoiakim introduces a tension in the narrative. What is the role of these verses in the narrative especially taking consideration of the preceding judgement that sounded conclusive? That is to say that at the end of the chapter, the issue

¹⁶ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 523.

of the debate, the threat inflicted or threat avoided is in suspense, inviting the reader's appetite for the subsequent chapters.

2.1.3 Structure

Chapter 26 as a single and self-contained narrative does not present a very complicated structure. The reader easily notices the giving of the sermon and the response of the community to the contents of the sermon, and so the chapter can be structured along these lines; that is, on the two principal wings of sermon and response¹⁷. After the introductory formula of v. 1 comes Jeremiah's oracular discourse. The content of the discourse stirs up a reaction described as a trial first of all by an initial judgement and later a formal set up which goes in the normal order of accusation, defence and judgement. Following the judgement, witnesses appear to reinforce the position by the citation of a precedent historical event. The narrator adds another story of a precedent case but which contrasts the experience of the prophet in the citation of the elders. 26:24-27:1a then serves as the conclusion of the narrative.

- I. Jeremiah's sermon (v. 1-6)
 - A. Introduction (v. 1)
 - B. YHWH's command and aim (v. 2-3)
 - C. The sermon (v. 4-6)

- II. The response of the community (26:7-27:1a)
 - A. Initial response (v. 7-9a)
 - B. Formal response: Court scene – accusation, defence, verdict (v. 9b-16)
 - C. The responses of two kings to authentic prophets (v. 17-23)
 - D. Conclusion: The rescue of Jeremiah (v. 24-27:1a)

The narrative of this chapter reveals a drama set up with many actors and interlocutors, and due to the interlocking nature especially of the authors of actions, speeches and more

¹⁷ Contrary to the division into three sections by Hossfeld and Meyer (Abschnitt I, II and III) based on the presupposition that v. 17-23 is not coherent with the preceding verses. See F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Der Prophet vor dem Tribunal*, p. 33-42. See also I. MEYER, *Jeremiah und die falschen Propheten*, p. 17-30 and a similar division in C. HARDMEIER, *Die Propheten Micha und Jesaja im Spiegel von Jer 26 und 2 Kings 18-20*, see especially p. 173.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

especially of their addressees, a table illustrating actor-orator-addressee could serve for a clearer articulation.

Verse	Actor	Speaker	Addressee
1		Narrator	
2-6		YHWH	Jeremiah
7	The priests, the prophets and all the people	Narrator	
8a		Narrator	
8b-9a	The priests, prophets and all the people	The priests, prophets and all the people	Jeremiah
9b	All the people	Narrator	
10	The officials of Judah	Narrator	
11	The priests and the prophets	The priests and the prophets	All the officials and all the people
12-15	Jeremiah	Jeremiah	All the officials and all the people
16a		Narrator	
16b		The officials and all the people	The priests and the prophets
17	Some of the elders of the land	Narrator	
18-23	Some of the elders of the land	Some of the elders of the land	Assembly of the people
24-27:1a	Ahikam	Narrator	

2.2 ANALYSIS

2.2.1 YHWH's Message to the Prophet (v. 1-6)

A close reading of the introductory part of the narrative of Jer. 26 confronts the reader with some perplexing issues. There are two introductory formulas: in v. 1, "this word was from YHWH" and in v. 2, "thus says YHWH" surprisingly being itself the words of YHWH himself¹⁸. Again the prophet is commanded two times: "You say all the words

¹⁸ This discrepancy is also noticed by Hossfeld and Meyer. They write: "Eigentümlich bleibt auf jeden Fall in unserem Text, daß Jahwe selbst die Formel in den Mund nimmt zur Einleitung einer Mitteilung, die gar nicht als Botschaft durch einen Boten an einen Dritten weitervermittelt werden soll. Hier ist nun noch die Beobachtung hinzuzunehmen, daß das Jeremia-Buch zahlreiche erzählende Abschnitte kennt, die mit „So

which I commanded you to tell them” (v. 2b), and in v. 4, “you shall say to them...”. The words in v. 2-6 have no precise destination¹⁹ because Jeremiah appears only in v. 7; and the content of the words to be proclaimed are not the same in v. 2b-3 and 4-6. In the former, the order is vague: the prophet should say “all the words which I give you to tell them”, while the content of the message in the latter is more precise, with the conditional proposition and the threat concerning the temple: “if you do not listen ... I will treat this house like Shiloh” (cf. v. 6a). Finally in this first part of the narrative, v. 5, which insists on the obstinacy of the people, appears in opposition to v. 3 where there is possibility of a return: “may be they will listen and each one turn ...” (v. 3). This shows that the people failed to meet the expectation expressed in v. 3.

2.2.1.1 Introduction (v. 1)

V. 1-6 constitute first of all the narrator’s introduction and afterwards a report of revelation to the prophet²⁰. A connecting chronological note typical of the second part of the book of Jeremiah opens the chapter²¹. While many commentators²² claim to find a historically precise reference to Jehoiakim’s accession year in the introductory בראשית יהויקים, some others believe that a theological purpose informs the use of the phrase: from the beginning of his reign, Jehoiakim militantly repudiated YHWH’s word²³.

sprach Jahwe zu mir“ (bzw. zu Jeremia) (13,1; 17,19; 25,15) oder auch kurz „So sprach Jahwe“ (19,1; 22,1) eingeleitet und mit einem Befehl zu prophetischem Auftritt fortgeführt werden. *כה אמר יהוה* ist also eine durchaus mögliche selbständige Erzählungseinleitung geworden und muß in diesem Zusammenhang sicher mit einem Erzähltempus wiedergegeben werden“, F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Der Prophet vor dem Tribunal*, p. 34. See also I. MEYER, *Jeremia und die falschen Propheten*, p. 19.

¹⁹ The NJB presumes the receiver of the word and translates: “At the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from YHWH” (v. 2).

²⁰ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 5.

²¹ See also 25:1; 32:1; 34:1; 35:1; 36:1; 40:1; 45:1.

²² HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah I*, p. 240; W.L. HOLLADAY, *A Coherent Chronology*, p. 58-73; BRIGHT, *Jeremiah*, p. 169; THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 524; NICHOLSON, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah 26-52*, Cambridge, 1975, p. 62-68.

²³ See for example, K. M. O’CONNOR, “...Do not Trim a Word”, p. 619.

2.2.1.2 YHWH's Command and his Aim (v. 2-3)

The divine word addressed to Jeremiah in this chapter has three parts: a) an instruction to prophesy to a definite audience at a specific spatial location, b) a description of the response that is hoped for, and c) the oracle itself²⁴. The first impression one gets in this group of verses is that it is YHWH's command to prophesy that is reported. The narrator's voice does not report the command and its execution in retrospect but rather quotes YHWH's speech which relates the event in prospect in a series of commands to the prophet²⁵. It suggests therefore the fulfilment of the order by Jeremiah by mentioning the reaction of the audience of the message.

YHWH's commissioning of the prophet initiates the action of the story: he must stand in the temple court and address the "cities of Judah" (26:2); YHWH specifically orders Jeremiah *אַל-תִּקַּע דְּבַר*: "do not subtract a word/thing" (v. 2b). The question is whether the command 'not to subtract a word', this comprehensiveness of the message refers to the verbal content or details of the message, or to its exigency²⁶. "Do not subtract a thing" prepares the reader for the purpose of the message to be given in the next verse: since it is for the people to repent (v. 3), the message in all its exigency and harshness should be given if that goal of repentance is to be achieved²⁷. A comparison with Jer. 7:1-15 will

²⁴ This is not the first and the last time we have this structure of reports in the book of Jeremiah. Similar reports are found in 7:1-8:4; 16; 17:19-27; 18:1-12; 19; 21; 22:1-9; 24; 27-28; 29:29-32; 32-36.

²⁵ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 5.

²⁶ K.M. O'Connor sees both as improbable. With her translation of *אַל-תִּקַּע דְּבַר* as "do not trim a word", she reads the expression symbolically. She likens the Jeremiah tradition to a beard that must be allowed to grow. A beard that is allowed to grow is a sign of hope and so cutting the beard is a sign of mourning over defeat. Like in Deut. 4:2 and 13:1, YHWH gives similar commands to Moses, see K.M. O'CONNOR, "...*Do not Trim a Word*", p. 627-628. This analogy is not in anyway necessitated.

²⁷ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 5. This note of exigency of the word is also the view of LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 287. On a later occasion in the book of Jeremiah, king Zedekiah requested from Jeremiah not to keep a word from him (cf. 38:14). Jeremiah later related to him the undiminished word of YHWH, which Zedekiah however was not prepared to hear, and in fulfillment of an oath he had sworn to Jeremiah, arranged for the prophet to hold back part of their conversation when critics questioned him later (cf. 38:24-26). Also after the fall of Jerusalem, people requested from Jeremiah to petition YHWH about

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

show that what we have in 26:1-6 is already an abridged version and so it may not be the question of the verbal completeness but of the 'wholeness' (in exigency) of the message: Israel must listen to YHWH and the prophets (v. 4-5), otherwise the temple will be destroyed like Shiloh (v. 6). The reader notices the first word of v. 3 (אולי "perhaps"), and so the sentence could be rendered in an antecedent-consequent phraseology, thus: "do not omit a thing, so that they may..." If the desired goal, that of repentance, is to be achieved, the message must be different from the previous messages of peace²⁸ the people are used to hearing, and so the message in all its harshness must be heard²⁹. This aspect of the exigency of the message is again confirmed later (in v. 9) by what the priests and prophets retained of the whole of Jeremiah's message in v. 4-6, where only the consequence of the threat and not the conditional aspect is emphasised. No mention of the call to repentance is made but only of the fate of the temple being treated like Shiloh and of the desolation of the city: "Why have you made this prophecy in the name of YHWH, 'this house will be like Shiloh, and this city will be desolate, without inhabitant'" (v. 9). Moreover, the narrator who took time to show Jeremiah's fidelity to

where they should go after they might have left Mizpah. Jeremiah promised to give them the response from YHWH without withholding a word (42:4). Lundbom concludes: "This message, too, was one the people did not want to hear, which means it took courage as well as commitment for Jeremiah to speak the whole of YHWH's word" (p. 287).

²⁸ Cf. Jer. 6:14: "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace, when there is no peace'". For an investigation into the conception of peace in the book of Jeremiah, that is the place of the hopeful messages in the otherwise outspokenly judgemental book of Jeremiah, see J. APPLGATE, "Peace, Peace, when there is no Peace": Redactional Integration of Prophecy of Peace into the Judgement of Jeremiah, in A.H.W. CURTIS & T. RÖMER (eds.), *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 51-90, see p. 52.

²⁹ Many other narratives in the Old Testament bear witness to prophets' withdrawal of something in the message mainly because of the harshness of the message. A reluctant Samuel was slow to repeat the message as devastating as it was to Eli his master (I Sam. 3:15-18). Micaiah ben Imlah ironically gave in the first place an expected favourable word and only afterwards delivered the true message of doom when the king insisted on having it (I Kings 22:13-28). In his article *Withholding the Word*, Janzen gives the possible reasons why a prophet could be tempted to withhold the word: a) fear of reprisal (Jer. 11:21; 26:20-24; 38:15), b) ill will toward personal enemies (Jer. 43:2-3), c) lying in God's service (II Sam. 17:14), d) commanded silence (Jer. 23:33-40) and e) a sense of futility (Jer. 38:15), see W. JANZEN, *Withholding the Word*, in B. HALPERN & J.D. LEVENSON (eds.), *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, Winona Lake, 1981, p. 106-109.

his commission by carefully indicating in v. 8; “when Jeremiah had finished saying *everything* (כָּל) that YHWH had ordered him to say” (that is without omitting a thing), now in v. 9 subtly contrasts Jeremiah’s fidelity with that of the “prophets and all the people” (v. 8) by giving the latter’s interested report of the oracle of YHWH which Jeremiah gave. That is an example of indirect characterisation³⁰. A motive is further added to YHWH’s command to announce the threats against temple and city: perhaps the people will change their hearts and thereby avert the disaster planned against them (v. 3).

The description of the hoped-for response is given in v. 3. Here three important but related words appear, שָׁמַע, שׁוּב and נָחַם³¹. The main message is yet to begin from v. 4 but the narrator decides to prepare the reader by giving what is the hope of YHWH for the message: that the people may listen (שָׁמַע) and turn (שׁוּב) each from his evil way, and that he (YHWH) may repent (נָחַם)³² of the evil he intended as a consequence of their

³⁰ Indirect characterisation in this context means the product of an analysis of the action or conduct of a personage by the narrator. For more details on the distinction between direct and indirect characterisation, see Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 74.

³¹ The first half of v. 3 is a shortened form of Jer. 36:3a and shares the key words “listen”, “turn” and “from his evil way”: “Perhaps when the House of Judah hears all the disaster I intend to inflict on them, they will turn, each one of them, from his evil way, so that I can forgive their guilt” (36:3).

³² Many commentaries and translators find it uneasy to use the word “repent” (as Carroll does, see CARROLL, *Jeremiah* [OTL], p. 510) for נָחַם and go for softer alternatives like “change his mind” or “relent” (McKane), “sich gereuen” (Volz), “think better of” (Thompson), “retract the evil” (Holladay). נָחַם “to repent” or “to be moved to pity”, “to be sorry” expresses an emotion-laden change of heart by which one grieves over his actions or plans. Throughout the Old Testament, we see human persons especially repent of their actions against God or against others or against themselves (Exo. 13:17; Job 42:6; Jer. 31:19). It is not uncommon also in the Old Testament to see God addressed as repenting. However in I Sam. 15:29 we see a rhetorical insistence on the part of Samuel: “The Glory of Israel ... will not repent, for he is not a human that he should repent”. This should not be understood strictly because just few verses later, in I Sam. 15:35, the narrator concludes: “For the Lord had repented that he had made Saul king over Israel”, in both cases using the same verb נָחַם. In the Old Testament tradition, God may also repent of a deed or, more often, of an announced plan and then act to undo or cancel a plan already made as he repented of the creation of the human being and therefore brought the flood to wipe the generation (cf. Gen. 6:6-7). However, in some circumstances and contexts, the Old Testament rules out the possibility of a change of heart as regards YHWH (cf. Psa. 110:4; Jer. 4:28; Ezek. 24:14; Zech. 8:14). Sometimes the

disobedience. In v. 2-3, the reader notices the emphasis laid on thorough repentance by the passage from “all” to “each”: the prophet should speak to all (לְכָל) the people who come to worship (v. 2); perhaps they will listen and turn back, each (שֵׁרָא) from his evil way (v. 3).

2.2.1.3 The Sermon (v. 4-6)

The oracle itself in v. 4-6 meant for the people is quoted in God’s command to Jeremiah. By giving everything as God’s words and speech enhances the authoritative claim of the text³³. V. 4-6 thus contains the divine message in the form of protasis and apodosis. The message begins with a threat articulated conditionally, the protasis (v. 4 and 5). “If you do not listen to me”, followed by two dependent clauses, in each case beginning with an infinitive construction with the preposition לְ (“by walking [לְלֶכֶת] ... and by listening [לְשִׁמְעַת]). The two verses present thus a chiasmic arrangement thus:

disposition to repent is presented as an integral part of the relationship between the divine and the human. In this sense נחם is understood in the relational or even passionate sense. YHWH’s willingness for נחם therefore has affinity with his אהבה “steadfast love” or covenant loyalty (cf. Joel 2:13; Psa. 106:45; Jon. 4:2). See SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 14. The response of YHWH to the intercession of Moses (Exo. 32) after the people’s guilt of worship of the golden calf, and that to Amos in Amos 7 is by his repenting of the disaster he intended for Israel (cf. Exo. 32:14 and Amos 7:3). And in our text, Jer. 26, the oracle of YHWH to Jeremiah is in the hope that the people may turn from their evil ways so that he too may repent of the evil he planned.

³³ Cf. E. DAVIS, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel’s Prophecy* (JSOTS 78), Sheffield, 1987, p. 83.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

v. 4 And you shall say to them: Thus says YHWH

If you will not listen to me

To walk (infinitive construction לָלֶכְתִּי) in **my law** *which I have put before your presence*

v. 5 To listen (infinitive construction לְשָׁמְעוּ) to the words of **my servants the prophets** *who I am sending to you persistently*

And you have not listened

These two verses could be understood legitimately from different angles: in a sense as two distinct parallel discourses and in another sense as complementary to each other. The articulation could suggest a distinction between the given Torah (in the singular) and the words of the prophets (in the plural). In this sense, the absence of a connecting conjunction between the two clauses would subordinate the second to the first: walking in the law would make the people to listen to the words of the prophets. In this sense, the law becomes the first in importance and the prophetic words depend on it. But in another sense, a different understanding could diminish this distinction and emphasise more the complementary roles of the two verses. In that sense, “to walk in my law which I have put before your presence” and “to listen to the words of my servants the prophets who I am sending to you persistently” become one demand and not two separate demands. In the first place, the two clausal frameworks are almost the same: the question of not listening. Secondly the fact that the second dependent clause “to listen to the words of my servants...” (v. 5) does not begin with a *waw* conjunction indicates that there is a continuation and that the second dependent clause modifies the first: walking in my law which I put before you then means in fact listening to my servants the prophets (among whom is Jeremiah)³⁴. This understanding tallies more closely with the goal of the narrative, which sets out to prove the authenticity of the prophet. V. 5 is therefore not to

³⁴ In this way, we do not accept the view of Hossfeld and Meyer for whom “V 5 stört den Übergang von der Protasis zur Apodosis, verdoppelt in unschöner Weiser – wie immer man die Infinitiv-Konstruktion auf v. 4 bezieht – das Element des Hörens und nimmt der in V 3 geweckten Spannung ihre Kraft”, F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Der Prophet von dem Tribunal*, p. 35; I. MEYER, *Jeremia und die falschen Propheten*, p. 20.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

be understood simply as a deuteronomistic addition³⁵. Well placed rather in its context, this narrative whose interest is to show Jeremiah as the true prophet sent by YHWH, here contains a reduced list of the prohibitions of the Decalogue in Jer. 7: 5-6 – “But if you do amend your behaviour and your actions, if you treat each other fairly, if you do not exploit the stranger, the orphan and the widow, if you do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow alien gods, to your own ruin... Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely ... and walk after other gods”, - to a single question of listening to the prophetic word; to “my servants the prophets whom I send you persistently” (v. 5)³⁶.

The divine oracle ends in v. 6, which is the apodosis of the conditional statement begun in v. 4. The threatened judgement is expressed in two parallel statements: “I will make this temple/house like Shiloh and I will set this city as curse to all the nations of the earth”. Once again the narrator calls up the memory of 7:1-15. No wonder the narrative of chapter 26 has also been considered as serving the function of an interpretive narrative contextualisation of the longer sermon in chapter 7³⁷, though the question remains as to what extent. Regarding this parallel, Holladay introduced an interesting reasoning while analysing the parallel account of the temple sermon in chapter 7. According to him, 26:4 and 6 lack a clear logic: “Why should the temple be destroyed because of the sins of the people?” He sees the passage in 7:3-12 as supplying the missing link: “The people have put false trust in the temple and so the temple must be destroyed”. He concludes therefore: “The abbreviated narrative in chapter 26 assumes the availability of the text of

³⁵ See for example CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 515: “[...] because of the Deuteronomistic schema of the sending of the prophets, and their rejection”. According to the deuteronomist, YHWH warned Israel, ‘by every prophet and seer’ (II Kings 7:13) while Israel constantly ignored the warnings of ‘his servants the prophets’.

³⁶ Reventlow already noticed this device by the narrator when he writes: “Offensichtlich hatte der Erzähler auch eine Erinnerung daran, dass Jeremia in seiner Rede auf Gebote eingegangen war. Aber ihre Aufzählung in der Strafrede 7 9 und schon in der Eingangstora 7 6 wird hier durch die Formel ללכה בחורתי ersetzt, in der das gesamte „Gezetz“ als „die Tora“ bezeichnet wird”, H.G. REVENTLOW, *Gattung und Überlieferung in der „Tempel Rede Jeremias“*, p. 343.

³⁷ SCALISE et al., *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 15.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

7:3-12 and refers to it in summarizing fashion³⁸. Though his conclusions about the text of chapter 26 presuming that of chapter 7 is tenable, logic is not altogether lacking in the text of chapter 26:1-6 in the sense he perceives it. The prophet is to stand nowhere else than in the court of *YHWH's house*, to speak to all the cities of Judah who *come to worship in the house of YHWH* (v. 2). This introduction of the topographic motif (two times) and especially the reference to their coming to worship in the house of YHWH makes the mention of the temple in v. 6 not a totally foreign element. If a punishment for the sins of the people by way of destruction must be evoked at all at that particular point in time, the nearest religious reality in the context is likely to be the immediate target.

Here is one of the three places where the Old Testament compares the fate of the house of YHWH in Jerusalem to that of Shiloh (cf. Psa. 78:60-69³⁹, Jer. 7:12). A lot of historical problem⁴⁰ is involved in the question of the destruction of Shiloh⁴¹, but which has not

³⁸ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 240.

³⁹ "Psalm lxxviii 60 is a historico-theological account of Yahweh's rejection of Ephraim and Shiloh in favour of Judah and Jerusalem. The rejection expressed in verse 59 is manifested in two immediate and distinct ways: verses 6 and 61: Yahweh abandons the Shiloh sanctuary, deliberately giving the Ark over to the enemy; and vv. 62-64, he 'gave his people over to the sword'. The one action is directed against the sanctuary and the other against the people as a whole; in neither case do we have evidence of a violent destruction of Shiloh or its shrine", p. 105-106. See R.A. PEARCE, *Shiloh and Jer. VII 12, 14 and 15*, in *VT 23* (1973), p. 105-108.

⁴⁰ The Shiloh sanctuary is mentioned in Jer. 7:12, 14, 15 and 26:6. In each instance, there is a mention of the destruction of the sanctuary or at least a maltreatment of the sanctuary. Just as the oracle itself has no precise dating in chapter 7, though historically situated in chapter 26 (the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim), there is no date precision as to when the sanctuary of Shiloh was destroyed. It has been held by many that Jeremiah refers to the destruction of the Shiloh sanctuary by the Philistines c. 1050 BC. See e.g. the commentaries of Carroll, Holladay and McKane; also O. EISSFELDT, *Silo und Jerusalem*, in G.W. ANDERSON *et al.* (eds.), *Congress Volume Strasbourg 1956* (VTS 4), Leiden, 1957, p. 138-147; M. NOTH, *History of Israel*, London, 1960, p. 166-167; R. DE VAUX, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, London, 1961; HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 1*: "the most likely destruction is that of the Philistines [...]. The archaeological evidence has not been altogether conclusive [...] but the fact that the Ark was taken from Shiloh during the Philistine wars and not returned to Shiloh suggests strongly that this is the period to which Jeremiah is referring" (p. 247-248), a quotation from J. DAY, *The Destruction of the Shiloh Sanctuary and Jer. 7:12, 14*, in J.A. EMERTON (ed.), *Studies in the Historical Books of the Old Testament*

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

much relevance to the narrative and rhetorical effect of this comparison in the text⁴². Such an effect will easily be seen in the immediate audience response, where the analogy to Shiloh unnerves the religious leadership who are the first to react. Modern archaeological findings apart⁴³, the world of the text makes it clear that the audience of the prophet takes Shiloh to be once an important cultic centre and that the people could see for themselves that the centre has suffered destruction. Jer. 7:12 goes as far as inviting the people to “go to my place which was in Shiloh and see what I did to it”. The

(VTS 30), 1979, p. 87-94. De Vaux writes: “il est probable que le sanctuaire fut détruit au XI^e siècle par les Philistins”, R. DE VAUX, *Les institutions de l'Ancien Testament* (Vol. II), Paris, 1960, p. 135-136. Pearce questioned this dating but rather concludes that Jeremiah was referring to a more “relatively recent disaster”, R.A. PEARCE, *Shiloh and Jer. VII 12, 14 and 15*, p. 105-108. He responds to the various biblical evidences on which this dating has been based: “I Sam. iv says nothing of Philistine action against Shiloh. Only from Jer. vii 12, 14; xxvi 6 (Ps. lxxviii 60), and from the change of abode of Eli's descendants (I Sam. xxi 2 ff.; xxii 9ff.), and from the absence of the name of Shiloh in passages like Amos v 5 and I Kg. xii 29, could we conclude that the sanctuary of Shiloh was at that time not only robbed of the Ark, but was also destroyed and non existent” (p. 105). Pearce responds to these indices basing on Psa. 78:60 (p. 105-106), I Sam. 21:2 ff. (p. 106-107) and the absence of the name of Shiloh in passages like Amos 5:5 and I Kings 12:29 (p. 107).

⁴¹ Of course there is no textual warrant to believe that Shiloh was still a place of worship by the time of the ministry of Jeremiah. It is even debated as to whether there was a temple ever built at Shiloh. Our text here mentions the name of the city and not the built structure within, and to complicate the question, Jer. 7:12 talks of *my place* which signifies neither tent nor building while II Sam. 7:16 says that YHWH had never lived in a “house” before the temple of Jerusalem was built. But biblical texts talk of tabernacle (Psa. 78:60), tent of meeting (Jos. 18:1; 19:51) in Shiloh. For details of the debate and different positions, see D.G. SCHLEY, *Shiloh, a Biblical City in Tradition and History* (JSOTS 63), Sheffield, 1989.

⁴² What is necessary to remark at this point is that the narrators of biblical episodes were not scientific historians even when they trace the historical developments of events. The theological interest of the narratives dominates: a presentation of the dealings of YHWH with his people. The same can be said of the prophets whose prophecies as we have them today in the books that bear their names are to a very good extent posterior reflections on the religious sensitivities of a people, in order to present explanations to their religious reality and in most cases, factual history or strict chronology was not the guiding compass both in their pronouncements and in the later redactions.

⁴³ Finkelstein maintains that modern archaeological investigations have not succeeded in finding any ruins identifiable as a temple, cf. I. FINKELSTEIN, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*, Jerusalem, 1988, p. 205.

devotees of Jerusalem could have imagined that Jerusalem had a privileged place with God and so was quite immune from the fate of Shiloh whose status, though sacred, was not same with Jerusalem. Such provocative analogy becomes a preparation to the reader for the high-pitched response of the audience. Whether such a dangerous threat would cause the people to repent as is hoped in v. 3 or would have a directly opposite effect becomes the task of the narrator in the subsequent verses.

2.2.2 The Response of the Community (26:7-27:1a)

There is much to capture one's attention in the section of v. 7-16. The first, described by Hardmeier as 'eine Unvereinbarkeit', concerns the attitude of the people whose unanimity normally described with the expression אַחֲדֵיכֶם (v. 7, 8 [twice], 9, 11, 12, 16, 18) is not clear⁴⁴. The inclusion in v. 8 of "all the people" with the priests and prophets as accusers of Jeremiah may become problematic to the reader trying to determine the precise camp of the people especially from the data of v. 11 and 16 where the people seem not to be with the priests and the prophets. That is to say, sometimes they side with Jeremiah against the priests and the prophets (v. 11, 16), and elsewhere, they oppose Jeremiah, siding with the priests and the prophets (v. 7-9), an ambiguity in the role which has been variously and differently explained by Rudolph⁴⁵, Bright⁴⁶, Thompson⁴⁷,

⁴⁴ Hardmeier describes the phenomenon thus: the 'Unvereinbarkeit' "handelt es sich um die völlig widersprüchliche Rolle des Volkes im vorliegenden Erzählganzen. Denn auf der einen Seite gehört das Volk in den v. 7-9 zu den Hauptgegnern Jeremias. Es wird in v. 17 von den „Ältesten des Landes“ besänftigt, und der Schafanide Achikam schützt Jeremia vor seinen Tötungsabsichten. Im Gegensatz dazu nimmt das Volk im Prozeßbericht von v. 10-16 zusammen mit den 'Beamten Judas' (*šry yhwdh*) auf der anderen Seite eine positive Verteidigerrolle ein. Nur in diesem Textteil stehen allein die 'Priester und Propheten' mit der Forderung der Todesstrafe auf der Anklägerseite", C. HARDMEIER, *Die Propheten Micha und Jesaja im Spiegel von Jer 26 und 2 Kings 18-20*, p. 174.

⁴⁵ RUDOLPH, *Jeremia*, p. 170.

⁴⁶ BRIGHT, *Jeremiah*, p. 167.

⁴⁷ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 521, footnote 3.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

Holladay⁴⁸, Hossfeld and Meyer, and basing on their position, Ferry, who maintain the narrative incoherence of the chapter and suggest a return to a literary analysis⁴⁹.

In v. 9, “the priests, the prophets and all the people” accuse Jeremiah basing on his words against the temple and this city in v. 6, while in v. 11, the priests and the prophets talk only of the city. A question becomes imposing: is the motive of the conflict political or religious?

2.2.2.1 The Initial Audience Response (v. 7-9a)

After v. 6, v. 7 begins with the active verb (וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ) referring to the hearing of the words by the priests and the prophets which emphasises the fact of the audiences hearing rather than Jeremiah speaking in order to lead to the report of the trial from v. 8. Immediately after the sermon, the narrator begins to relate a conflict story with the prophet at its centre. The consequence of the speech of Jeremiah is far more different from what YHWH had hoped while demanding Jeremiah to speak: the conversion of the people. Instead, it is aggression, revolt and hatred directed against the prophet, though the narrator gives no direct report of the prophet’s actual speech but only notice of what Jeremiah is authorised by God to say and the affirmation that he actually says it as is demanded. First he identifies Jeremiah’s audience as “the priests, the prophets, and all the people” (v. 7) who hear (שמע) Jeremiah speak “these words”. But incidentally what follows shows that they heard (שמע) not as YHWH hoped, because they did not “hear” in the sense of heeding and obeying. In fact, instead of the verb שָׁרַב following שמע as hoped for in v. 3, we have the verb חָפַשׂ (to seize or lay hold of) as the first initial reaction of the audience. The narrator recalls the command in v. 2b not to subtract a thing/word from the message, carefully relating that Jeremiah “finished to tell everything that YHWH commanded him to speak to all the people” (v. 8a: notice the double occurrence of the root כלל). It is not surprising that the narrative reports this fact again, since this claim is the point at issue in Jeremiah’s trial, and since “everything” and “not removing a thing”

⁴⁸ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 105.

⁴⁹ F.L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Der Prophet vor dem Tribunal*, p. 30-50; J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut*, p. 130.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

should be interpreted as giving the message in all its exigency and harshness. The priests and the prophets and all the people judged the threat to the city as treasonable (v. 8-9) and worthy of death and so the effect of the message upon the audience was to cause them to seize Jeremiah and to threaten him with a formula by which the death sentence (*Todesurteil*)⁵⁰ is pronounced, מוֹת תָּמוּת⁵¹. Carefully the narrator brings the reader to judge the fairness of the process of judgement and the first thing that strikes the reader is the fact of “judgement without trial”, a pre-trial opinion⁵². Promptly the prophet is found guilty with the statement (מוֹת תָּמוּת): “You shall die” (v. 8), a statement which is not just a cry of rage but could be seen as presumptuous judging from data in biblical tradition⁵³

⁵⁰ G. LIEDKE, *Gestalt und Bezeichnung alttestamentlichen Rechtsätze* (WMANT 39), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1971, p. 127-128.

⁵¹ The phrase מוֹת תָּמוּת occurs again 12 times in the Old Testament: Gen. 2:17; 20:7; I Sam. 14:44; 22:16; I Kings 2:37, 42; II Kings 1:4, 6, 16; Ezek. 3:18; 33:8, 14.

⁵² Writes Brueggemann: “The response to his speech is quick and aggressive [...]. The religious leadership has broad public support for finding him promptly guilty. The verdict, ‘You shall die’, is a pre-trial opinion, perhaps a product of crowd psychology (cf. Matt. 27:22-23), or perhaps the filing of a formal charge. These accusers have already reached their verdict”, see BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 234.

⁵³ The second-person active form of the death sentence is found severally in the Old Testament but either in the mouth of YHWH, or in the mouth of the king or a mouth-speaker of these. God or king gives such a command or imposes a warning or an oath of the death penalty on actual or future violators, and pronounces the death sentence either personally or through the agency of a prophet or another individual, for example, I Sam. 14:26-46 (Saul lays oath on the people). I Kings 2:36-46 shows oaths imposed by kings upon subjects under the threat of death. God gives personal commands that carry the death penalty to the human beings in Gen. 2:17 and to Abimelech in Gen. 20:7. The prophet pronounces the divine death sentence against the illegitimate child of David and Bathsheba in II Sam. 12:14, against king Ahaziah of Israel (cf. II Kings 1:4, 6, 16) and against king Ben-Hadad in II Kings 8:10. In Ezek. 3:18 and 33, this death sentence is seen as part of case law defining the responsibilities of a prophet, so that the prophet himself must announce the judgement “you must die” upon a wicked person once the Lord has ordained it, otherwise the prophet himself will be guilty of a capital crime himself. In these chapters in Ezekiel, the possibility of turning from evil and receiving pardon when repented is also laid out. A passive form of the judgement of death in the third person מוֹת יָמוּת “he shall be put to death” occurs in several places in the Pentateuch, including three lists of capital crimes in Exo. 21, Lev. 20 and Num. 35. But here they appear in an apodictic form: “whoever does so” or “the one who does so” and they are more or less categorical, that is, expressing legal punishments or measures that apply to all like circumstances. Elsewhere in the book of Jeremiah the priests’ authority over false prophets is limited to incarceration in the stocks (cf. the story of

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

since here is the only occurrence in the Hebrew Bible of the *Todesurteil* by humans without authorisation either by God or king. By repeating the prophet's 'blasphemous threats' (v. 9), "the priests, the prophets, and all the people" (v. 8) emphasise the unacceptable nature of his message and their resistance to it. With the promptness with which the narrator gives the response of the "priests and the prophets and all the people", he brings the reader to see immediately that the words of Jeremiah are not for a moment considered by his hearers as a serious word from God, but only probably, as Brueggemann interprets, an "alternative political opinion"⁵⁴. After the judgement without trial ("You must die" v. 8), the priests, the prophets and all the people marshal out their accusation against Jeremiah in form of a reproachful question⁵⁵ (which however, should have preceded the judgement of death) beginning with the interrogatory particle: מִדָּנֶיךָ: "why have you prophesied in the name of YHWH saying, 'like Shiloh will be this house, and this city will be desolate, without dweller?'"

Through this spontaneous judgement and especially through the direct quotation in form of a question, the narrator not only subtly characterises the whole group of opposition of Jeremiah by showing what they retained from the oracle, but also (more importantly) makes them to state themselves the bone of contention in the narrative: the veracity or falsity of prophetic claim. The charge made against Jeremiah in v. 9 distorts his actual

Passhur and Jeremiah in 20:2 and the reference to the letter of Shemaiah to Zephaniah the priest in Jerusalem in 29:26) because they lacked the authority to have someone executed and so had only to call for a trial on a capital charge. Prophets were sometimes sent to deliver this death judgement as a divine judgement word, as in the case of Elijah to king Ahaziah (II Kings 1:4) or Nathan to David (II Sam. 12:14) but Jeremiah's accusers here neither claim that it is a divine word, nor being sent by YHWH. Only in Jer 26:8 have we a death sentence מוֹת תָּמוּת "You must die" pronounced without the authorisation either of God or king. See also H.J. BOECKER, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens*, p. 59, 67; SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 20.

⁵⁴ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 234.

⁵⁵ Cf. the standard formula for pre-trial speech by H.J. BOECKER, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens*, p. 66. When the accusers are witnesses to the alleged crime, the accusation is articulated in form of a question. See I Sam. 22:13; II Sam. 12:9; I Kings 2:43.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

words⁵⁶. The accusation concentrates on the likening of the temple to Shiloh and on the fate of the city and neglects the invitation to repentance which was however the crux of the prophetic oracle. The accusation cites only the apodosis of his conditional message in v. 4-6 and does not even repeat that part exactly as it is, though without of course altering its essential meaning⁵⁷. The point of the narrator here is their omission of the first two verses of YHWH's words given in Jeremiah's oracle, an attempt to ignore the invitation to hear and obey God's law and prophetic word, to focus on the temple and the city. By dodging this invitation to hear and obey with their question, they end up articulating indirectly the central issue of the narrative, that of Jeremiah's legitimacy as prophet sent by YHWH. Jeremiah's trial is therefore on the veracity of this threat. Their question can be interpreted thus: Is Jeremiah speaking in his own authority or backed by the authority of YHWH? That is, is he speaking truly with YHWH's authority or is he speaking falsely out of his own thinking? Put in the language of Deut. 18:20, has Jeremiah presumed to speak a word in the name of YHWH which the latter has not commanded him to speak? To prove that this is the backbone of the question and the main issue of the trial in this narrative, Jeremiah's defence will be first of all nothing more than addressing these questions (beginning from 26:12) and the verdict of acquittal will be nothing but an answer to it (26:16)⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ Cf. the testimony of Amaziah which distorted the words of Amos in Amos 7:10-17.

⁵⁷ The Shiloh comparison makes only a slight difference for it substitutes one verb for another (הידיד in v. 9 for נתן in v. 6) without changing the substance of the meaning. The prophecy against the city finds complete restatement. Being made a curse in Jeremiah's word is interpreted by his opponents as a threat of desolation, that is the death or exile of the city's population, which is also prophetic without their knowing it. And this interpretation is not false for in Jer. 44:22, a prophecy against the land of Judah combines the terms found in 26:6, 9, "curse", "desolation" and "without inhabitant". It is also common in the Old Testament for quoted statements to be rephrased or reformulated instead of being repeated *verbatim*. Cf. J. SAVRAN, *Telling and Retelling: Quotation in Biblical Narrative*, Bloomington, 1988, p. 109. See also SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 22.

⁵⁸ Although the accusers of Jeremiah do not cite Deut. 18:20, or use the terms אֲשֶׁר יִיָּדַע לְרִבְרָא "who presumes to speak", their call for death penalty is based on this legal provision. See also M. FISHBANE, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, Oxford, 1985, p. 246; SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 22.

2.2.2.2 The Formal Response (v. 9b-16)

2.2.2.2.1 Court-like Composition: Accusation (v. 9b-11)

The reader notices a formal proceeding against Jeremiah initiated already in the second part of v. 9. The narrator constructs a formal court scene by the employment of three literary devices. First, he uses the verb קהל⁵⁹ (v. 9b), a very potent term in the *niphal* (to assemble together, to congregate) to identify the formal nature of the assembly. Second, he somehow stages in the officials to take their seats at the gate of the temple, presumably to sit in judgment (v. 10). Third, he structures the story according to court procedure: accusation (v. 11) defence (v. 12-15) and verdict (v. 16).

שרים in v. 10 is best to be translated as (royal) officials/officers and not the narrower term princes⁶⁰ and they appear again in v. 11, 12, 16. The priests and the prophets repeat the accusation against Jeremiah, but this time they address the judges – the royal officials⁶¹

⁵⁹ Besides the gathering of the community for liturgical purposes (for example the gathering together of the tribes for Aaron's ordination, Lev. 8:4, to set up the tent of meeting, Jos. 18:1, or to dedicate the temple, I Kings 8:2), in some of its uses, the verb קהל carries legal overtones (Exo. 35:1; Lev. 8:3, 4; Num. 1:18; 16:3, 19; 20:2, 8, 10; Deut. 31:12, 28; Jos. 20:1; I Chr. 28:1). The verb is also used of preparation for concerted action. For example, the men of Israel assemble themselves to lay their complaints before Moses and Aaron (cf. Exo. 32:1; Num. 16:3; 17:7; 20:2) or to go to war (cf. Jos. 22:12; Jud. 20:1; II Sam. 20:14). In the book of Esther, the Jews of Persia gather together for self-defence (cf. 8:11; 9:16). The verb in the context has therefore the nuance of solemnity and potential threat (offensive posture) characteristic of an accusation and a trial. On this writes Reventlow: "Den Ausdruck ויקהל wird man nicht im Sinne einer bloßen 'Zusammentrottung' des Volkes im Tempel verstehen dürfen, sondern da קהל die Versammlung aller wehrfähigen Männer ist, die auch die gerichtliche Funktion in der Ortsgemeinde ausüben, ist hier der Zusammentritt des Gerichtsforums gemeint", H.G. REVENTLOW, *Gattung und Überlieferung*, p. 345.

⁶⁰ Though to the modern reader, the term שרים sounds more easily princes and "prince" suggests blood kinship to the king, such a relationship cannot be necessarily implied in the text (cf. also SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 23) and so the term best indicates their leadership and authority but does not necessarily convey the close lineal connection between these men and the king, cf. Jer. 1:18; 2:26; 4:9; 8:1; 24:8; 34:21. In the book of Jeremiah, these royal officials sometimes act as the king's advisers, and in chapter 36 they listen to the scroll being read and later reported to the king what they heard, while in 37-38, they make a petition to the king to put Jeremiah to death after beating and imprisoning him.

⁶¹ We can refer to the royal officials as judges because of the information in v. 10b: וישבו בפתח שער־יהוה הַחֹקֵשׁ

and the people, the witnesses. Now in the accusation of v. 11, two elements attract attention:

a) In the first place, only the priests and prophets accuse Jeremiah, while “all the people” *כָּל-הָעָם* becomes part of the new audience in the court, in the company of the officers of Judah who were just for the first time introduced in the preceding verse. This classification tallies with v. 16 and differs slightly from the information in v. 8-9 where the people formed part of the accusers of Jeremiah. How does the reader understand this “switch”⁶²? True that in the first instance, the people formed part of the accusers of Jeremiah (cf. v. 8-9), the information in v. 11 is not contradictory because here it is the priests and the prophets who camp the people not as co-accusers but as witnesses with the princes (“the priests and the prophets said to the royal officials and all the people: ‘this man deserves death for he has prophesied against this city as you have heard...’”). This could therefore explain the transition of the people, the positive judgement brought by the people towards Jeremiah in v. 16, and it is understandable that in a formal court process, a party could reason otherwise and change position after listening to the argued defence of the accused, as is the case of Jeremiah in v. 12-15.

b) The charge by the priests and the prophets against Jeremiah omits his prophecy against the temple (v. 6, 9), mentioning only the city. Now the accusation has been pinned down to one verb and one prepositional phrase *כִּי נְבִיא אֶל-הָעִיר הַזֹּאת* “he has prophesied against this city...”. Not only that the narrator continues to characterise the authors of this accusation by their false or at least misrepresented accusation, it is also surprising that the priests and prophets would omit the temple when summarising Jeremiah’s message. They end their speech by adding, “as you have heard with your own ears”. The intention of the narrator who cites this emphasis of the priests and prophets could be ambivalently interpreted. It could be that the narrator gives it as reason why they did not quote all the words of Jeremiah since their audience were ‘ear witnesses’ of the speech or that he puts the clause to make their lie whiter and more open (since the audience heard more than that). But going only by the indices of the text, the first option is only presumable: “as

⁶² CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 517.

you have heard him speaking” does not really tally with what was heard and can only be a clever way of misrepresenting someone. That the latter is more likely, the case is supported by the omission (with interest) in the accusation, of the reference to the temple, which is surprising since the accusation, comes from the priests and the prophets, the religious leaders of the people. That shows the interested nature of the accusation because the purpose of the accusation speech to the judges was to persuade them to support the plaintiff’s case. Mentioning the city alone or concentrating on the threat to the city underscores the threat to everyone’s home, a threat which would really attract the wrath of any citizen, and which does not concentrate on the religious domain of the priests and prophets⁶³. It equally takes into consideration the authority of the judges, the שרים, whose competence would be to arbitrate on political issues and not religious. In this section, the gradual but subtle displacement of the crux of the problem, or rather the secularisation of the issue is evident. After Jeremiah’s pronouncement of the oracle, the priests and prophets and all the people in v. 9 implicitly question the status of Jeremiah’s words as YHWH’s, while in v. 11, the religious aspect of the oracle disappears completely. Only the oracle against the city figures in the accusation, an accusation addressed to “this man”. The prophecy becomes the imposture of a man, all a sort of finding motifs for condemnation. But Jeremiah would return in his defence to the true accusation.

2.2.2.2 The Defence (v. 12-15)

However, the accusation plays a smaller role in the narrative than the prophet’s defence, which takes up four verses (12-15), situated in the middle of the narrative⁶⁴. Two framing devices highlight the defence of Jeremiah. The first of these devices is the threat of death in v. 11 (מִשְׁפַּט־מָוֶת לְאִישׁ הַזֶּה) which occurs again in v. 16 in the verdict, now with negation: אִי־לְאִישׁ הַזֶּה מִשְׁפַּט־מָוֶת. The second framing device becomes the repetition of key words in Jeremiah’s defence: a repetition in the first and the last verse of his defence in the inverse

⁶³ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 24.

⁶⁴ Perhaps this geometric centrality makes some authors to consider Jeremiah’s response as the climax, see K. M. O’CONNOR, “...*Do not Trim a Word*”, p. 621. However, narratively speaking, the climax would be preferably the verdict which follows the defence without denying the centrality of the latter which takes up many previous elements of the narrative and influences the judgement that follows.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

position of the component words in the phrase “YHWH has sent me”: יהוה שלחני (v. 12) and שלחני יהוה (v. 15).

The narrator introduces the defence of Jeremiah just with almost exactly the same words he used to introduce the accusation of the priests and prophets, and since the latter address their accusation to the officials and all the people, Jeremiah equally addresses exactly to the same group:

Beginning of v. 11 (accusation): ויאמרו הכהנים והנבאים אל השרים ואל כל העם לאמר

Beginning of v. 12 (defence): ויאמר ירמיהו אל כל השרים ואל כל העם לאמר

In the speech of v. 12-15 we could notice a subtle recalling of the key terms of the preceding part of the narrative. V. 12 refers to v. 2: according to both verses, “all the words” (כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים) that Jeremiah speaks are from YHWH⁶⁵, and ends with the clause “which you have heard” (אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתֶּם), a clause which functions on more than one level in this passage because of the various nuances and allusions associated with the verb שמע. Together with v. 13, v. 12 equally echoes both the intention of YHWH in v. 3 that the people may heed to his words and reminds of the end of v. 11 (the fact of having heard the threat), indirectly acknowledging that the officials were ‘ear witnesses’ of the prophecy (“...of the evil he had pronounced on you”). Jeremiah’s defence therefore presents a concentric structure as follows, highlighting the element of the free choice which his preaching presents to the people.

⁶⁵ It is important to note that YHWH’s command to Jeremiah in 26:2 uses the key words from Deut 18:15-22; the prophet is to speak (דבר) what the Lord commanded (צוה).

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

- A. **Yahweh has sent me to prophesy** against this house and against this city *all these words which you have heard* (v. 12).
- B. And now make good your ways and your deeds and heed to the voice of YHWH your God and YHWH will repent of the evil, which he has spoken against you (v. 13).
- C. BEHOLD I AM IN YOUR HANDS. DO TO ME AS IS GOOD AND RIGHT IN YOUR EYES (v. 14)
- B¹. Only know surely that if you put me to death that you are bringing innocent blood on yourselves and towards this city and its inhabitants (v. 15b).
- A¹. For in truth **Yahweh has sent me to you to speak in your ears all these words** (v. 15c).

Jeremiah dispassionately defends himself against his accusers. It is easily noticeable that his defence speech begins by first of all denying the charge (implied) that he has spoken presumptuously (cf. Deut. 18:20), a phenomenon, which, as rightly pointed out by Bovati is a feature of real defence in biblical writings⁶⁶. This is seen even from the literary point of view. First of all, there is a remarkable contrast between the accusation in v. 11 and the beginning of Jeremiah's defence from the choice of words. The priests and prophets said: "Judgement of death to *this man* (לְאִישׁ הַזֶּה) because *he has prophesied* (נָבֵא) against this city", that is, an ordinary man has taken to prophesy against this city. To counteract this, Jeremiah's very first word in his defence is: YHWH has sent me (יְהוָה שְׁלָחַנִי). In such a way, the defence of Jeremiah becomes a restoration of the facts of the case. He takes up

⁶⁶ By means of some biblical episodes like II Sam. 19:25-31 (the narrative of the accusation of, and defence by Mephibosheth), Dan. 13 (especially the LXX, the story of the trial of Susanna) and our text of Jer. 26, Bovati arrives at the conclusion that a true defence is in practical terms, a reversal of the accusation: "Not only are the arguments against the accused brought down, but the latter is completely exonerated (by giving, for example, a new version of the facts that shows there has been an error'), but this also takes the shape of a new accusation (of falsehood, wicked intent, attempted crime) against the accuser. In other words, my thesis is: there is no such thing as a 'neutral' defence: defence is to accuse the accuser", P. BOVATI, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible* (trans. by Michael J. Smith) (JSOTS 105), Sheffield, 1994, p. 331.

three elements which his accusers neglected: first he is a prophet sent by YHWH; secondly, he spoke against this temple and against this city (the religious and civil aspect altogether); and thirdly he takes up again the phrase of 11b כְּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתֶּם ב (‘‘as you have heard’’) in 12b כְּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתֶּם בְּרִים אֲשֶׁר (‘‘all the things you have heard’’) reminding them that they heard all, and not just what was said in the partial representation of the prophets and priests.

He addresses his defence ‘‘to all the officials and all the people’’ but not to the priests and the prophets (v. 12). Is it so because he turns his defence into a new offence by issuing another call to repentance (v. 13) and that such a change of heart was considered farfetched to the priests and the prophets, the religious leadership? Or is it the response of the people that mattered more⁶⁷? Again Jeremiah does not directly counteract the charge or argue the point. But he groups his defence into three points: first, the assault on the city, which he has spoken, is not his speech but the word of YHWH (v. 12). Second, though unwelcome a threat this word be, it is still an offer of rescue, another call to repentance (v. 13). He gives the impression that the menace of YHWH is not yet definitive and that it rests on the community at large to turn the threat into hope by renouncing the illusions and changing their conduct. Third, without emotionally or rhetorically appealing to the sentiments of the judges, he acknowledges the latter’s authority to decide his case, and if they find him guilty, to be handed over for execution

⁶⁷ It is of course normal that Jeremiah addresses his defence to the judges and to the witnesses. That v. 13, another call to repentance (‘‘and now amend your ways and your deeds and heed the voice of YHWH your God and YHWH will repent of the evil which he has spoken against you’’) is incorporated here as address to the royal officials and people and not to the priests and prophets reveals the awareness of Jeremiah of the obstinacy of his accusers, the religious leaders. Boecker explains this verse as a ‘‘settlement proposal’’, a proposed settlement ‘‘supposed to satisfy the accusers’ complaint and end the trial’’, though that does not explain why it is addressed to the judges and not to Jeremiah’s accusers, cf. H.J. BOECKER, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament*, p. 118-119; F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Der Prophet vor dem Tribunal*, p. 38. But as Scalise rightly observes, ‘‘It seems doubtful, therefore, that a settlement proposal from the defendant would have any place in a death-penalty case. The nearest case in the Old Testament is I Sam. 14:45: the people ransom Jonathan and overrule Saul after he had announced the sentence, but the settlement proposal does not come from the defendant’’, SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 25.

of the sentence, and equally reminding them of the implications of an unjust judgement⁶⁸. Jeremiah's self surrender into the hands of his captors (v. 14) is an acknowledgement of the judges' authority⁶⁹ though he reminds them equally of the danger of condemning an innocent person⁷⁰: in that case he dramatically underscores the decision facing the community which this text places before them anew – to accept or reject the prophetic word; it is a matter of life or death for the community, and the choice remains theirs (v. 14 and 15). V. 15 is in fact an insistence of his innocence: “you will be guilty of innocent blood”.

2.2.2.2.3 *The Verdict (v. 16)*

The verdict by the judges and the confirmation by the witnesses, “the princes and all the people”, close the court scene (cf. v. 16) by the declaration of Jeremiah's innocence and his authenticity: “This man does not deserve death for he has spoken to us in the name of YHWH our God”. The verdict corresponds with the question of v. 9 (“why have you prophesied in the name of YHWH saying...”) and confirms the evidence of the defence since it is equally a direct answer to the question of authenticity: whether Jeremiah has prophesied in the name of YHWH. That implies that the judges heard the rectification by Jeremiah (cf. v. 12) of the truncated accusation by the religious group, the priests and the prophets (cf. v. 11) – thereby dodging the trap of Jeremiah's accusers. They render this verdict by speaking to the priests and prophets who were Jeremiah's accusers, using

⁶⁸ This statement is a formula, which is also found in Gen. 16:6; Jos. 9:25; Jer. 38:5.

⁶⁹ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 25.

⁷⁰ Is Jeremiah threatening his judges here with a form of personal revenge, or haunting them from the grave or laying a curse upon them or is he reminding them of an accepted principle of justice in the biblical tradition? The latter seems more plausible. In the first scroll of the book of Jeremiah, there are oracles accusing the people of the undeserved death of the innocent (cf. 2:34; 22:17). It could also be that the respect for innocent blood was the factor that deterred the officials from killing Jeremiah and instead they put him into the cistern (cf. Jer. 38:4-8). In the rest of the biblical tradition, innocent blood calls out for revenge by God (cf. Gen. 4:10; 9:5-6) and puts the whole community to danger (cf. Num. 35:33; Deut. 21:8-9), a fact sufficient to make Joseph's brothers refrain from killing him (cf. Gen. 37:21-22). Deuteronomy even makes the community, led by its elders, responsible for the life of one innocently accused of murder (or of manslaughter), and the community must not allow the avenger of blood to kill him if he has not committed a premeditated murder, but if guilty, he must be handed over for execution.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

exactly the same words of the proposed verdict in v. 11 (אִין לְאִישׁ הַזֶּה מִשְׁפֹּט־מָוֶת) but here of course negated, and referring to Jeremiah in the third person⁷¹. Another important element is that the wording of the judges gives impression of their conviction by the defence of Jeremiah and represent the judges as a group that respond to the call to conversion by Jeremiah. Throughout the text till Jeremiah's defence, YHWH has always been addressed as simply "YHWH" both by the narrator and by the other interlocutors. For the first time, in the defence of Jeremiah, is YHWH addressed as אֱלֹהֵיכֶם (‘‘now amend your ways and obey the voice of YHWH your God’’ v. 13). Immediately the judges take up this mode of address for themselves and understandably for the crowd, to address YHWH and such manner of address never occurs again till the end of the chapter: ‘‘this man does not deserve to die, for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God’’ (וְהָיָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ v. 16).

V. 16 is not simply a question of recognising Jeremiah's ‘‘right to speak and to be heard because he speaks a word other than his own’’ as Brueggemann interprets⁷², a belittling of the import of this verdict verse, but the court scene leaves no question that Jeremiah is a true prophet of YHWH, and that at least some members of the community recognise him to be so⁷³. If the bone of contention is the source of Jeremiah's prophecy as we have said

⁷¹ Other acquittals for example in II Sam. 12:13 and 19:24 address the accused in language that resembles that of 26:8b, but these occasions are no court scene. God or king is at the same time plaintiff and judge. The third person form of the verdict here in v. 16 is identical with the formula used in Deut. 19:6: ‘‘It must not be allowed that the avenger of blood, in the heat of his anger, should pursue the killer and that the length of the road should help him to overtake and wound him fatally; for the man has not deserved to die, (אִין מִשְׁפֹּט־מָוֶת) having had no previous feud with his victim’’ (NJB Translation).

⁷² Writes Brueggemann: ‘‘Their intervention and verdict affirm the right of the prophet to speak. The princes do not assert that Jeremiah's word is true. They allow only that he has a right to speak and to be heard, because he speaks a word other than his own’’, BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 236. This is a belittling of the import of this judgement speech.

⁷³ K.M. O'CONNOR, ‘‘...Do not Trim a Word’’, p. 622. It is also to be remarked that it is here for the first time in the book that Jeremiah receives a positive evaluation of his prophetic role of preaching. See for example 18:18: ‘‘Then they said, ‘Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah, for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not heed any of his words’’.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

above, this verdict answers it since it concentrates not on the justification of its content but on the source. It therefore confirms the framing phrase of Jeremiah's defence "YHWH has sent me" (וַיִּהְיֶה שְׁלֹחֲנִי v. 12 and וַיִּהְיֶה שְׁלֹחֲנִי v. 15)⁷⁴. One can thus confidently conclude that 26:1-16 questions the authenticity of Jeremiah and confirms his authenticity as a true prophet, not only by his own self-defence, but also by the legal validation of the officials and of all the people in a properly constituted court⁷⁵. The question the reader would battle with at this stage is: are the שָׂרִים and the קְלֵי־הָעָם converted as this verdict might suggest? The rest of the chapter would answer the question in the negative, which shows the gravity of the situation.

2.2.2.3 The Responses of Two Kings to Authentic Prophets (v. 17-23)

In this second axe of the chapter, we notice the specific problem of the status of v. 17-23, which could appear as unnecessary, given the acquittal already given to Jeremiah in v. 16. For scholars who work with the hypothesis of a deuteronomistic reworking of an older narrative – Hossfeld and Meyer for example⁷⁶ – the problem concerned was that of the original ending of the narrative⁷⁷. In the context of the final form of the text, it

⁷⁴ A question still remains how the officials and the people make their decision; that is, on what criteria do they base their judgement. The test for prophets mentioned in Deut. 18:22 is not applied, since the judges did not have to wait till they see the destruction of the city or the treatment of the temple like Shiloh before they determined whether Jeremiah had spoken a genuine word from YHWH or had spoken from his own initiative. Scalise remarks that such a situation exposes the limitations of the test in Deut 18:22: "How long must they wait before they know that Jeremiah has prophesied falsely? Will he be allowed to go on preaching in the interim? If this is a word from the Lord, their lives are at stake. To wait for empirical confirmation for the threatening word is to miss the chance to be saved", cf. SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 27.

⁷⁵ Kessler opines similarly, see M. KESSLER, *Jeremiah Chapters 26-45 Reconsidered*, p. 83.

⁷⁶ F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Der Prophet vor dem Tribunal*, see p. 45-48. For these authors, v. 5 is a later gloss.

⁷⁷ Hossfeld and Meyer therefore believe that v. 16 was originally the final judgement and acquittal by the judges of the court, but has been made in his deuteronomistic reworking, into a mere vote by one of the parties in the judgment. The reference to Uriah becomes therefore a historical note designed to illustrate the fate that faced Jeremiah, making the court proceedings a stage on the way of suffering of the prophet, F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Der Prophet vor dem Tribunal*, p. 49 (authors' summary of their article).

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

concerns precisely the identification of the speaker of these verses and the relevance to the plot of the narrative of the chapter. V. 16 seems to have ended the narrative when in v. 17 a new group appears: “the elders of the land”, whose intervention perplexes some scholars. “The story should end here with everybody returning to their homes [...]. If the purpose of the story is to present Jeremiah before the tribunal and its outcome, then it has been achieved”⁷⁸. Their discourse is introduced by another quite different formula from the preceding introductions: “Then certain of the elders of the land rose up and spoke to all the assembly of the people”. They address the assembly of the people, אֲנֶכְהָם לְכָל־הָעָם, the first time a group is so described in the chapter. These observations in these verses led Ferry to conclude that v. 17-19 are not of the same redaction as the narrative of the trial which precedes and that, in the final form of the text, it shows that v. 16 serves as the conclusion of the narrative. In the same vein does she see the narrative of the prophet Uriah (v. 20-23) as an appendix to the text of the trial: “There was also a man” showing that another story begins and this story is not integrated in the narrative of the trial⁷⁹.

2.2.2.3.1 Example of Hezekiah vis-à-vis Micah (v. 17-19)

With the verdict of v. 16, the narrative seems to have come to an end. That the chapter ends in v. 16 is the opinion of many commentators⁸⁰. For O’Connor, the remaining verses (17-24) confuse the narrative⁸¹, the confusion being how, though the court has concluded its verdict, new supporters come forward in favour of the prophet. Rudolph⁸² and Weiser⁸³, trying to explain this phenomenon, understand these verses to be part of the

⁷⁸ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 517.

⁷⁹ See J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut*: “Toutes ces observations nous conduisent à conclure que ces vv. 17-19 ne sont pas de la même rédaction que le récit du procès qui précède. De plus, dans l’état final du texte, ils enlèvent au v. 16 sa fonction de conclusion [...]. Le récit de la condamnation du prophète Uriyyahu (vv. 20-23) est lui aussi rajouté au texte relatant le procès : ‘il y eut aussi (אִישׁ) un homme’. Une autre histoire commence, et cette histoire n’est pas intégrée dans le récit du procès. Au lecteur de comprendre que ce qui est arrivé à Uriyyahu aurait pu survenir à Jérémie” (p. 132).

⁸⁰ See for example, C. RIETZSCHEL, *Das Problem der Urrolle*, p. 98.

⁸¹ K.M. O’CONNOR, “...Do not Trim a Word”, p. 622.

⁸² RUDOLPH, *Jeremia*, p. 154-157.

⁸³ WEISER, *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia* (ATD 20-21), Göttingen, 1969, p. 232-234.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

original court scene and so Rudolph reads the verbs וַיִּקְמוּ and וַיִּאמְרוּ in a pluperfect sense: the elders had risen or had spoken, that is, as a flash back to place the elders' speech before the v. 16 verdict⁸⁴. Many commentators however do not follow this logic⁸⁵. O'Connor sees these "inconsistencies and contradictions"⁸⁶ exhibited from this point "as indicating that v. 17-24 do not form part of the original narrative. Instead, an editor added them to the conflict story for the following reasons: to indict Jehoiakim by contrasting him with Hezekiah, to expand the themes of support for the prophet and the need for repentance, and to create additional similarities between this chapter and chapter 36"⁸⁷. Moreover, it is set against the self-contained and smooth literary unit of v. 1-16⁸⁸.

But neither this rendering ("had risen" for וַיִּקְמוּ; "had spoken" for וַיִּאמְרוּ) in the translation nor the opinion of O'Connor is necessitated since there is no justification for seeing a break in the narrative tram. That the verdict has been given does not exclude further witnesses to intervene, especially when they intervene positively⁸⁹ and in this case it is a question of citing historical precedents⁹⁰ to support the veracity of the judgement already given, or in the words of Holladay, "to reinforce the judgment of the officials: there is precedent a hundred years earlier for a prophet's speaking against Jerusalem without

⁸⁴ This is also the opinion of Fishbane, in M. FISHBANE, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, p. 246. He equally identified "the elders" with the officials, p. 246. Accepting this interpretation as base, Nicholson believes that all the people did not act as judges in v. 16; only the elders among them did, see E.W. NICHOLSON, *Preaching to the Exiles*, p. 53.

⁸⁵ Brueggemann sees v. 20-23 as "an unexpected intrusion in the narrative", *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 238, while Scalise sees the group of verses as introducing "a new subject matter", SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 29.

⁸⁶ K.M. O'CONNOR, "...Do not Trim a Word", p. 623.

⁸⁷ K.M. O'CONNOR, "...Do not Trim a Word", p. 623.

⁸⁸ K.M. O'CONNOR, "...Do not Trim a Word", p. 623.

⁸⁹ Even if the intervention were to be negative, it would only entail a fresh complication in the plot which is a common feature in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible.

⁹⁰ Hans Walter Wolff is of the opinion that it is the elders as village leaders who are versed and rooted in old covenantal traditions and who maintained a conception of social reality and some historical perspective that was not common to the existing royal definitions of reality. See H.W. WOLFF, *Micah the Moreshite: The Prophet and His Background*, in J.G. GAMMIE (ed.), *Israelite Wisdom*, Missoula, 1978, p. 77-84.

being executed”⁹¹. And such historical precedents could not be given better by any other than “some *elders* of the land”⁹², who from the narrative stage should be understood as part of the “all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the temple of YHWH” (v. 2b). These elders are not mentioned in the report of the trial in v. 8-16, but appear to have been present watching the process, and to intervene with a reference to the jurisprudence of the past, a contribution proper to their status.

The audience of the elders is not just the עֲלֵי־הָאָרֶץ who had congregated (לְקָהֵל , see v. 9b) for the trial but a group described by a subtle transformation of terminology: כָּל־הָעָם , “the whole assembly of the people”, no matter their camp but all who come to worship in the temple (v. 2) including those who had tried Jeremiah. The speech consists of an appeal to two precedents. First they cite part of an oracle by the prophet Micah (3:12)⁹³, place it in its historical context, and use rhetorical questions to challenge the audience. This is an

⁹¹ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah* 2, p. 108.

⁹² “Elders of the land” as a term is rare in the Old Testament. Much more common are the related terms “elders of the people” and “elders of Israel”. One finds “elders of the land” again in Pro. 31:23: describing how the husband of a worthy woman takes his place in the city gate among the elders of the land. Information on the elders in the Old Testament is not unified. One finds various indications about their description, their authority and their responsibilities. In different places they are seen as representatives of the people and so receive God’s law and instructions (cf. Exo. 24:1; Deut. 31:9, 28; II Kings 23:1). Sometimes the elders of the city act as judges (cf. Deut. 19:12, 21:3, 4, 6, 19, 20; 22:15-17; 25:7-9; Ruth 4:9, 11), whereas in other circumstances the elders act as advisers to kings (cf. I Kings 12:6, 8, 13; 20:8; Ezek. 7:26) or exercise independent political power (II Sam. 3:17-18; 5:3; II Kings 6:32; 10:1, 5). In the book of Jeremiah the elders appear in Jeremiah’s audience in chapter 19, the Sermon at the Potsherd Gate, and then in chapter 29, the letter to the exiles. In these two chapters, a priest or prophet is about to punish Jeremiah on account of his prophetic word (cf. 20:1-2; 29:24-32). Cf. G.J. BOTTERWECK & J. CONRAD, זְרֵי זֵאֲעֵן , in G.J. BOTTERWECK & H. RINGGREN, *TDOT*, p. 122-131.

⁹³ V. 18a, the reference to Micah’s prophecy is from Mic. 1:1 and here is the only place in the book of Micah where the prophet is named. But while Mic. 1:1 lists three kings of Judah – Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah – the elders in Jer. 26 place this particular prophecy of v. 18-19 within the time of Hezekiah. The elders begin their citation of Micah with the messenger formula: “Thus says the Lord of Hosts” common in the book of Jeremiah but is absent from the quoted verse from Micah and even in the entire book. This formula underlines the point that Micah, like Jeremiah, prophesied in the name of YHWH, see SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah* 26-52, p. 28.

example of intertextuality, of the Bible quoting other texts of the Bible. The immediate significance here is to show that the prophetic word does not stand in a vacuum but relies on a tradition, on precedents⁹⁴. Micah's audience was "all the people of Judah", the same description of the group that listened to Jeremiah, arrested him and tried him in Jer. 26. And just as Jeremiah's accusers cite only the threat portion of his oracle (cf. v. 9 and v. 11), the elders cite only the threat portion of the oracle of Micah (Mic. 3:9-12). But it is to be noticed that the offer which Jeremiah gives in the oracle in the beginning of the narrative, is more generous than the text quoted from Micah. Micah's oracle is unconditional, offering no way out while Jeremiah offers repentance as remedy of menace. Connecting Micah's oracle with Hezekiah's fear of YHWH and his grief (the verbs נָחַם and חָלַהּ of v. 19)⁹⁵, the repentance of YHWH (נָחַם v. 19) – implying the deliverance of the nation – together becomes a device to bring attention to the need to listen to the words of repentance preached by Jeremiah as prophet. This connection is made more evident in the employment of a series of rhetorical questions⁹⁶ by the elders (v. 19), a series of questions which "does not have the expected tone of a report of legal precedent" but in which "there is a surplus of content and of emotional intensity that exceeds the bounds of the legal question at stake in Jeremiah's trial"⁹⁷. But considering the first question bordering on whether Hezekiah and the people put Micah to death to be based on the argument of silence, since there is no information in the Old Testament on Micah's death⁹⁸, is a consideration from the lens of history, or at best, a look from the prejudice of canon. From the narrative context, the audience knows that the prophet did

⁹⁴ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 236. Jeremiah will be making such claims clearer in Jer. 28 where he appeals clearly to the prophets "before me and before you" in his address to Hananiah.

⁹⁵ In II Kings 19:1 the report of king Hezekiah's repentant actions is given. The Assyrians had conquered all the other fortified cities of Judah, while the Rabshakeh had given threats and menacing speech against Jerusalem in II Kings 18 which could have caused Hezekiah to take up acts of mourning and repentance in 19:1. Even though Micah's speech in Mic. 3:9-12 is unconditional in form, the elders' speech in Jer. 26 suggests that the preaching of prophet Micah had contributed to the reaction of the king.

⁹⁶ For more about Jeremiah and the use of rhetorical questions, see W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Jeremiah's Use of Rhetorical Questions*, in *JBL* 92 (1973), p. 358-374.

⁹⁷ SCALISE et al., *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 28.

⁹⁸ SCALISE et al., *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 28.

not die in that manner. The second question about the king entreating the face of YHWH and the latter repenting of the evil he had intended against the people, has the same interest as the original divine command (v. 3-4) and Jeremiah's insistence in v. 13 in his defence (the repentance of the people): turning the attention of the people assembled to the message that Jeremiah had proclaimed from YHWH. Unconsciously, the elders have confirmed the hope expressed in YHWH's message through his prophet at the beginning of the narrative. Having acknowledged Jeremiah as a true prophet, will they now believe in the divine word he has spoken and respond to it?

2.2.2.3.2 Counter Example of Jehoiakim vis-à-vis Uriah (v. 20-23)

It is not definitely and precisely clear the speaker of v. 20-23⁹⁹ and so the unit could from a point of view be perceived as a superfluous appendage to the defence of Jeremiah, offering a counter example to that presented in the elders' speech of v. 17-19. Could these verses also be considered as part or continuation of the testimony of the elders beginning from v. 17¹⁰⁰? If the answer is yes, there will be the question of its contribution to the argumentation of the elders in v. 17-19. Why give a double signal, that is, citing two cases that can lead to opposing outcomes especially when the verdict had already been pronounced? The series of questions by the elders and the reference to the guilt of evil just as Jeremiah mentioned in his defence (cf. v. 15) round up their argument of jurisprudence conclusively. The narrator therefore continues the story without the express introduction of any speaker. Levine's¹⁰¹ opinion that the words were pronounced by "some of Jeremiah's opponents" is only an assumption that has no textual support. Though evidently the words of the narrator, there is however no justification either from the nature of the narrative from the beginning or any semantic evidence for the narrator to

⁹⁹ Most of the major commentaries are equally not precise with regard to this: "The next unit 20-23 introduces new subject matter, a report about Jehoiakim and the prophet Uriah", SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah* 26-52, p. 29; "Verses 20-23 sketch quickly the story of the prophet Uriah, whose message was similar to that of Jrm, and how Jehoiakim executed him", see HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah* 2, p. 108. Brueggemann calls it "an unrelated episode", BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 238.

¹⁰⁰ This is Bovati's opinion. See his P. BOVATI, *Re-Establishing Justice*, p. 331, footnote 161.

¹⁰¹ M.H. LEVINE, *The Trial of Jeremiah*, in *Dor le Dor* 12 (1983), p. 36-38, see p. 38.

have begun a new story¹⁰² at that point. Rather, the semantic and content similarities, without neglecting the differences however¹⁰³, provide the narrative string between v. 17-19 and 20-23. The contents are similar: a king's response to YHWH's prophet. The grammatical structure of the first sentence of each account is similar: subject, then perfect of היה and then participle (v. 18 מִיָּכָה הַמִּוֹרְשָׁתִי הָיָה נָבִיא, and v. 20 אִישׁ הָיָה מִתְּנִיבָא). These parallels are reinforced by the particle וְ (also/another) at the beginning of v. 20 so that the beginning reads "and there was also a man"¹⁰⁴ (implication: "like Micah")¹⁰⁵. And so in such a story reflecting a mirror image of the Hezekiah versus Micah 'anecdote', v. 20-23 give a story involving Jehoiakim and Uriah the prophet. The former, on hearing a prophecy of the latter – the content of the prophecy not mentioned but is like all the words (כָּל־דְּבָרָי) of Jeremiah and again qualified יְהוָה אֱשָׁם (in the name of YHWH) – not only refused to heed, but pursued him till his hide out, brought him back, executed him and finally insulted his corpse. The contrast between Jehoiakim and Hezekiah is neatly drawn. A reference by the narrator here of the very king mentioned in the beginning of the chapter is proper and revealing. Even if Jeremiah has been saved from the hands of the religious group by the officials and the people, there is still, even with the support of the elders, a hanging threat: the king who brutally killed a prophet like him. In such a situation, Jeremiah still needs a protection, which is to be provided by Ahikam, son of Shaphan.

¹⁰² So J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut*, p. 132. Lundbom shares our opinion in this matter. He believes that the Uriah story is well integrated in the narrative but is the voice "of the one who is narrating the whole [...]. The narrator brings in the Uriah incident to tell his audience about another prophet who spoke in Yahweh's name but who did not escape Jehoiakim's wrath as Jeremiah did. The closing word in v 24 contrasts this tragic outcome with Ahikam's protection of Jeremiah, serving also as a quiet reminder of the divine promise to Jeremiah", LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 285.

¹⁰³ For example, the verb נָבֵא "prophecy" which appears in *niphal* participial form in v. 18 (נָבִיא) but in the *hithpael* participle in v. 20 (מִתְּנִיבָא), the fact that no oracle of Uriah is quoted, the absence of rhetorical questions or warnings in v. 20-23.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. the translation in KJV. This is quite different from "there was another man" as most translations like the NJB and NAB render it.

¹⁰⁵ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 109.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

The family connection of this personality with Jeremiah is interesting. II Kings 22:8-14 describes Shaphan, Ahikam's father and Ahikam himself to be part of the advisors to Josiah, and part of the delegation he sent to Huldah the prophetess to validate the newly found scroll. Ahikam's son Gedaliah, was the one chosen to be governor of Judah under the suzerainty of Babylon after Zedekiah had been ousted and taken to Babylon (cf. Jer. 39:14; 40: 5-7; 41). Gemariah, Ahikam's brother appears to be part of the advisers of Jehoiakim (cf. Jer. 36:12) and advised him against the burning of the scroll, though the latter did not pay attention (cf. Jer. 36:25). This tread of connections could explain the role which this personality plays in the safety of Jeremiah in this narrative.

The detection of the layers of redaction in this narrative, especially as concerns v. 17-23 is not as important to our context as the narrative contribution of these verses to the logic and theology of the block in general. In summary, there is a deeper narrative contribution to the intervention of the elders in v. 17 judging from the goal of the narrative. With the intervention of the elders from v. 17 till the end, the narrator lets the narrative, as already hinted (see Part Two, Chapter One, Section Two), highlight in the first place two types of kings; one who listens to the prophets (Hezekiah vis-à-vis Micha) and the other who kills the prophets (Jehoiakim vis-à-vis Uriah) and equally two types of prophets: those who announce the condemnation of the temple (Jeremiah, Micah, Uriah), and the others, allying with the priests, who refuse such announcements. There would therefore not be a better ending than this to a narrative that has the goal of enunciating the problematic of prophetic authenticity as its major focus. In such an ending a contrast between two opposites is brought clear. It is for the reader to judge.

2.2.2.4 Conclusion of the Narrative (v. 24-27:1a)

The question the reader poses here is: does Jeremiah need a miraculous rescue as the verse gives impression, having been acquitted (v. 16), and the reinforcement given by the citation of precedents by the elders (v. 17-23)? If v. 17-23 are witnesses and memories called up partly by some elders to reinforce the judgement of v. 16 which was already positive to Jeremiah, and partly by the narrator, is it necessary again for Jeremiah to be saved "from the hands of the people", by Ahikam son of Shaphan? Does that mean that

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

the people turned again against the prophet, threatened his life, evoking some unspecified action by Ahikam? Nicholson considers this verse as sufficient reason for discrediting the “not guilty” judgement of v. 16, meaning that the people and the king did not share the court’s opinion¹⁰⁶. Weiser maintains that the purpose of v. 24 is merely to illustrate the danger facing Jeremiah¹⁰⁷. This is also the opinion of Hossfeld and Meyer¹⁰⁸. But a better appreciation of the narrative significance could be seen in that very introduction of another supporter of the prophet (Ahikam). The action of Ahikam makes him part of the teeming supporters of the prophet but whose prophetic mission is always full of confrontations and never ending struggles. That the narrative aims at vindicating Jeremiah as a true prophet does not mean automatic conviction of all. Even though we should not imagine the prophet to be a lone religious authority standing against his community, he nevertheless stands in the centre of a deep public debate and dispute¹⁰⁹. To be noticed also here in v. 24 is the minute difference in the description of the people. V. 24 refers to the people differently from the rest of the chapter. Each of the previous cases says “all the people” (כָּל־הָעָם) v. 7, 8, 11, 12 and 16) while v. 24 omits כָּל. And this brings once again the problem of the shifting and unsteady nature of the exact attitude and camp of the people. Holladay introduces a psychological hypothesis to deal with this ambiguity: during the feast, there is an effervescent atmosphere and the people easily change camp¹¹⁰. The solution given by Lundbom to this discrepancy clarifies the psychological one of Holladay and seems among many others more acceptable:

¹⁰⁶ E.W. NICHOLSON, *Preaching to the Exiles*, p. 55, no. 2.

¹⁰⁷ WEISER, *Jeremiah*, p. 235.

¹⁰⁸ F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Der Prophet vor dem Tribunal*, p. 35; THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 528.

¹⁰⁹ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 239.

¹¹⁰ Holladay writes: “It is doubtless a festival season, there is always a crowd on the city streets of a Near Eastern city waiting for excitement, the general tone of a festival crowd in the temple area would be aroused by these words of the prophet. Calvin may not be wrong, furthermore, when he stresses the fickleness of crowds: but there is another thing to be noticed, - that the common people suffer themselves to be drawn in all directions; but they may also be easily restored”, HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 105. This position could be a psychological interpretation which cannot be totally excluded. See also J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut*, p. 130.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

“The problem about the people first grabbing hold of Jeremiah (v. 8) and only later crowding up to him (v. 9) is scarcely a problem in narrative writing, least of all in ancient Hebrew narrative writing, where reporting things in chronological sequence is not required. In Hebrew thought and in Hebrew rhetoric [...], things do not necessarily follow in sequence or in logical progression [...]. The shifting allegiance of the people is even less a problem, for one of the sure things the narrator here wants to report, and a universal phenomenon amply documented at all times and places, is the fickleness of crowds. In Shakespeare’s ‘Julius Caesar’, after the assassination is carried out by Brutus and his fellow-conspirators, Brutus gives a speech justifying the action, which is accepted by the crowd. Then Marc Antony gives his speech, which turns the crowd around and has them wanting now to take vengeance against Brutus and his fellows. That the crowd in the present situation might have changed sides after Jeremiah’s testimony is apparently not thought possible by Carroll, among others, who imagines instead a contrived complexity in the literary work. It is true that when the trial is over there were still hostile people from whom Jeremiah had to be protected (v. 24), but this does not preclude a shift in the mood of the crowd once Jeremiah had been heard and the princes had shown that they were in favor of acquittal. Perhaps the problem is with the hyperbole ‘all’. At no time did the people speak with a unified voice; but the controlling mood of the people appears clearly to have changed as the trial progressed”¹¹¹.

Moreover, it should be noted that the mission of the prophet and his prophetic word is one that must always cause division among his hearers. Could the imprecision in the reference to ‘the people’ in the narrative not be a pointer to the precarious situation of the prophet among his people, of the tears and divisions, which his words will cause among ‘all’ the people (even though some may heed his words)? There is therefore no wonder that at the end of the chapter, the text still leaves a suspense and from the narrative point of view, the chapter leads forward in the book to relay subsequent duels and

¹¹¹ LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 289-290.

confrontations between the prophets and other intermediaries¹¹². The issue of prophetic authenticity is merely articulated and scarcely solved.

2.3 JER. 26 IN RELATION WITH JER. 7 AND 36

In discussing the “setting” for Jer. 26, Holladay begins with the bold statement that “there is no need to resort to the idea that this chapter comes from a Deuteronomistic editor” since “the phrases presumed to be Deuteronomistic can be better explained otherwise”¹¹³. What follows as his explanation of this “otherwise” is nothing else than an exercise in intertextuality¹¹⁴. As particular examples, Holladay mentions that the phrase “make good your ways and your doings” (v. 13) is found in the temple sermon itself (7:3, 5, compare also 18:11). Another chapter that has been so closely linked with Jer. 26 is chapter 36 and many authors consider chapter 36, in the final form of the book, as a closure to the sequence that begins with chapter 26¹¹⁵. These two chapters provide us with clues for necessary intertextual considerations we have to make with chapter 26. Such exercise will help portray in a clearer fashion the function of chapter 26 and the placement it enjoys in the book and specifically in the literary block.

¹¹² K.M. O’CONNOR, “...Do not Trim a Word”, p. 625.

¹¹³ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 103.

¹¹⁴ Even though Holladay is moving towards an argument that “the conventional phrases here are not arbitrarily set forth as part of a particular editorial work of a later generation but give every evidence of offering authentic historical narrative”, see HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 103.

¹¹⁵ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 254; L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, observes that 26 and 36 contribute to a larger literary structure that comprises the first macro-unit of the second scroll and attempts structuring the materials within the range of the chapters. He observes that the theme of the word of YHWH, as proclaimed by the prophet recurs, while at the centre (chapters 30-32), the literary structure underlines hopeful configurations of life for a new Israel, see p. 86.

2.3.1 Jer. 26 vis-à-vis the Parallel Account of Jer. 7:1-15 and Jer. 36

Holt asks: "Why do we have the two accounts in one and the same book? Why has the Deuteronomistic editor [presupposing that the editing and composition of the Jer. 7 and 26 are deuteronomistic] not been able to content himself with telling the story just once?" The answer to the question he sees lies within the compositional structure of the book of Jeremiah. He sees the wordings of v. 4-14 of 7:1-15 as the original account of the temple oracle: Jer. 7 is the prophet speaking to the people. Jer. 26 is response¹¹⁶. About Jer. 26, he writes:

"To find an original Jeremiah temple oracle in chapter 26, as with chapter 7, would, of course, be impossible, since this chapter is a story (a legend) about the prophet told in the third person. On the other hand, it is possible to unveil the account upon which the present adapted chapter 26 is based [...] the temple oracle only contained the warning of judgment against the temple. Thus the judgement stands in the original account as unmotivated. We must regard chapter 26 as an abbreviated summary of the oracle, which exists in its complete form in chapter 7"¹¹⁷.

For O'Connor¹¹⁸, Jer. 7 presents the content of the sermon, while Jer. 26 emphasises the community's response to it¹¹⁹. On the relationship between the two chapters, she writes: "[...] chapter 26 is a midrashic¹²⁰ elaboration of chapter 7. It expands themes from chapter 7 and presents new themes in order to introduce the second Book of Jeremiah

¹¹⁶ A summary of the article, E.K. HOLT, *Jeremiah's Temple Sermon and the Deuteronomists*, in H.O. THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah: An Annotated Bibliography*, Maryland, 1996, p. 246, no. 1117.

¹¹⁷ E.K. HOLT, *Jeremiah's Temple Sermon and the Deuteronomists*, p. 77.

¹¹⁸ K.M. O'CONNOR, "...Do not Trim a Word", p. 617-630.

¹¹⁹ K.M. O'CONNOR, "...Do not Trim a Word", p. 617.

¹²⁰ She refers to the term "midrash" as the process described by M. FISHBANE, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* as the "redaction, elucidation, reformulation and outright transformation" of earlier biblical texts by later ones, p. 241-245. Fishbane prefers to use *tradtum*, *tradtio* to describe the elements in the process of inner biblical exegesis, except "where earlier biblical sources are clearly present." See also J. NEUSNER, *What is Midrash?* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship), Philadelphia, 1987, p. 7-20.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

(chapters 26-45), itself designed to meet the needs of the exilic community”¹²¹. Many interpretations rest upon the assumption that Jer. 26 is a historical report, composed by Jeremiah’s bibliographer, Baruch, to fill the lacunae left by the Jer. 7 account, that is, part of the ‘B’ source¹²². Some interpretations add theological and literary purposes to the biographical. For example, some scholars claim that Jer. 26 is a theodicy, designed to blame the exile on the community’s rejection of its prophet¹²³. The narrative of Jer. 26 has equally been regarded by some commentators as having been composed by Baruch as part of his biography or *Leidensgeschichte* of the prophet¹²⁴. J. P. Hyatt¹²⁵ takes it as having issued from the deuteronomists on the basis of Baruch’s memoirs. Others propose that the chapter has no historical value but give legitimacy to Jeremiah as true prophet of YHWH¹²⁶, or validates his word as the true prophetic word¹²⁷.

Since Jer. 7 and 26 “appear to report the same sermon from different vantage points”¹²⁸, it is necessary to pinpoint the glaring similarities and differences in the content and goal of the sermon in these two chapters. There are many points of contact, both at the descriptive and syntactical levels. The very first notice is that both narratives have the concern to connect the source of the word that come to the prophet directly to YHWH. It is a question of “this word” (7:2; 26:1) that comes from YHWH (מֵאֵת יְהוָה). After the introduction and preliminaries, the main speech begins again with the *Legitimationsformel*, כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה (7:3a; 26:4a). The temple is used as the geographical location of the speech and in each case, the message is to be directed to those who come (תְּבִיאִים) to worship (לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת) YHWH. The central message in the sermons of both chapters is a call to change of life (הִיטִיבוּ דְרָכֵיכֶם וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם), expressed immediately at the beginning

¹²¹ K. O’CONNOR, “...Do not Trim a Word”, p. 619.

¹²² BRIGHT, *Jeremiah*, p. 165-172; THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 523; WEISER, *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia*, p. 230; RUDOLPH, *Jeremia*, p. 154.

¹²³ E.W. NICHOLSON, *Preaching to the Exiles*, p. 106.

¹²⁴ Duhm, Volz, Rudolph, BRIGHT, *Jeremiah*, p. 171f.

¹²⁵ HYATT, *Jeremiah*, p. 1005.

¹²⁶ RUDOLPH, *Jeremia*, p. 154; R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 150.

¹²⁷ H.G. REVENTLOW, *Gattung und Überlieferung*, p. 315-352.

¹²⁸ K. O’CONNOR, “...Do not Trim a Word”, p. 617.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

in Jer. 7 (v. 3b) but which later comes up in Jer. 26 in the prophet's defence speech (v. 13). All in all, even though differently organised, the sermons highlight common elements: there is the accusation from YHWH about the conduct of the people (7:8-11; 26:3) both culminating in the phrase *וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם* ("and you have not listened" 7:13; 26:5); there is the appeal to the Torah (elements in the Decalogue listed extensively in 7:6, 9 but referred to generally as "my law" in 26:4); and then there is the controversial reference to Shiloh used as paradigm of the consequence of not listening (7:12, 14; 26:6).

Like chapter 26, Jer. 36 is "a unit of prophetic biography, a confrontation between Jrm and Jehoiakim"¹²⁹. An exercise in intertextuality reveals visible points of correspondence; temporal, spatial, and as regards the goal and personages:

	Jer. 26	Jer. 36
Time (Dating)	"At the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah", v. 1 (cf. 27:1a).	At the fourth year of King Jehoiakim, v. 1.
Space	Temple setting: "stand in the court of YHWH's house and speak" (v. 2). The officials hear Jeremiah's case "at the entrance of the New Gate of YHWH's house" (v. 10).	Interdiction of access to the Temple (v.5): Jeremiah sent Baruch "to read the words of YHWH from the scroll in YHWH's house" (v. 6). And Baruch reads the scroll "at the entrance of the New Gate of YHWH's house" (v. 10).
Personages and roles	Not only "all the people" but also the higher rungs of the society (26:7, 10, 12, 16, 20-34). The officials of government respond favourably towards Jeremiah v.16, 24 and save him from danger 16-23, 24 while the prophet's oral words are resisted and rejected by prophets, priests, and king (v. 7-11).	There is also a list of officials (36:11-14, 19, 20-24). The officials respond favourably to the case of Jeremiah (v. 11-19) and they saved Jeremiah from danger (v. 11-19), while the prophet's written words are rejected by priests and king (v. 20-26).
Aim	The hope of YHWH is that the hearers turn (<i>שׁוּבוּ</i>) from their evil ways (v. 3) ¹³⁰ .	That the people turn (<i>שׁוּבוּ</i>) from their evil ways (v. 3).

¹²⁹ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 254.

Some other parallels exist between the two chapters from different points of view. Concerning the fate of Jeremiah, he is threatened with capture in chapter 36 while in 26:8 is actually captured. In the two chapters, he is rescued from death almost at the last moment. Regarding the support to the prophet, in both narratives supporters and protectors of the prophet play an active role. In chapter 26 they are identified as “all the people” (v. 16), the royal officials (v. 16), the elders (v. 17-19) and Ahikam (v. 24). In chapter 36 numerous officials are named in v. 11-13, 16-19, 25 and are credited with hiding Jeremiah and Baruch (v. 19) and also for appealing to the king on behalf of the scroll (v. 25). Both narratives have like audience: “all the people” from the cities are specified (26:2 and 36:9). There is also similarity when the commission of the prophet is examined. Not only that the hope of YHWH is to reap the fruits of repentance in the people as tabulated above, YHWH commands the prophet to broadcast the message in the temple, though in chapter 36, the message is to be broadcast through Baruch as agent. Both narratives add this important clause that Jeremiah remove nothing from the message he has received to announce (cf. 26:2, cf. v. 8; 36:2). In chapter 36 it is added that Jeremiah include the message of his entire life career. Finally in both chapters, the role of King Jehoiakim is unmistakably clear. Both accounts present Jehoiakim in a bad light for his vicious rejection of the prophetic word (cf. 26:20-23; 36:26) and for his efforts to oppose the word either by the murder of Uriah (26:21-23) or by destroying the scroll (36:22-25) and by his attempt at Jeremiah’s life (36:23). The narrator could be playing on irony when he reports the curse on Jehoiakim’s corpse (36:30), which resembles the latter’s treatment of Uriah’s corpse in 26:23.

2.3.2 The Specificity of Jer. 26

These similar elements apart, their differences go a long way to underline the specificity of the Jer. 26 sermon. Even in the common elements, some nuances exist that create a

¹³⁰ In fact, the first half of v. 3 is a shortened form of Jer. 36:3a and shares the key words “listen” (שמע), “turn” (שוב) and “from his evil way” (מִן־רֵפוֹ הָרָעָה): “Perhaps when the House of Judah hears about all the disaster I intend to inflict on them, they will turn, each one of them, from their evil way, so that I can forgive their guilt” (36:3).

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

departure in chapter 26. The very fact of dating Jer. 26 in the very first phrase in the days of Jehoiakim could be a device by the narrator of alarming a danger: the king about whom the narrative ends showing his cruel treatment of a prophet (Uriah) who preached in words just like Jeremiah's: a story dealing with prophecy and opposition is about to commence. Bogaert¹³¹, who makes a short and concise comparison of the goal of the two similar but different texts (7 and 26), remarks that the most visible mark of resemblance, is clearly the reference to Shiloh (7:12, 14; 26:6, 9). Jer. 26 gives us the circumstances in which the more detailed words of Jer. 7 are pronounced, but surely with different perspectives:

“au chapitre 7, Jérémie accuse ses contemporains de négliger les préceptes divins de morale sociale et de se livrer à l'idolâtrie, sûrs qu'ils sont que le Temple de Yahvé leur sert de garantie contre toute adversité. Ce discours suppose que le Temple et son culte fonctionnent normalement et qu'ils soient source pour le peuple d'une confiance abusive. D'où la menace du prophète : l'exemple de Silo abandonnée par Dieu et dévastée reste d'actualité [...]. Mais, le Temple une fois détruit, elle perdait sa raison d'être, puisque la tentation n'existait plus. Plus exactement sa signification en sortait transformée, ainsi que le chapitre 26 le révèle”¹³².

In chapter 26 the accent is on the word given and rejected but on account of which eventually the king and with him the people would be judged.

Perhaps considering more the specific role of chapter 26 will help to give light to the relationship between the chapter and the other related ones in the book. O'Connor believes that consensus regarding the precise purposes of Jer. 26 has been elusive¹³³. Carroll asks the “simple question”: “what is going on in this text”? He sees this as a “primary hermeneutical move”¹³⁴. In attempt to answer this question, he opines that though the surface similarities between the temple sermon in 7:1-15 and 26 allow for a

¹³¹ P.-M. BOGAERT, *La tradition des oracles et du livre de Jérémie*.

¹³² P.-M. BOGAERT, *La tradition des oracles et du livre de Jérémie*, p. 313.

¹³³ K.M. O'CONNOR, “...Do not Trim a Word”, p. 617.

¹³⁴ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 93.

common treatment, however, the more the texts are scrutinized, the greater the dissimilarities appear evident.

“Starting from roughly the same point, the different traditionists have utilized the temple sermon to say different things within the Jeremiah tradition about the community. In 7:1-15 the content of the sermon is the focus, whereas in 26 the prophet’s fate and the response of elements within the community to him are the foci [...]. The first occurrence of the sermon should probably be seen as editorial reflection on the summary of the cycle of oracles condemning the community (chs. 2-6). The second use of the sermon (in summary form) is as a preface to the material on Jeremiah in controversy with the prophets, and should probably be seen as making a contribution, along paradigmatic lines, to that issue”¹³⁵.

Though Jer. 26 furnishes the circumstances in which the sermon in Jer. 7:1-15 is pronounced, the perspectives of the two chapters actually differ from one another¹³⁶. YHWH’s commissioning of the prophet which initiates the action of the narrative in 26:2 is similar to the one given in 7:2, but 26:2 changes slightly both the location of the speech (at the gate *בַּשַּׁעַר* in 7:2; at the court *בְּהֶחָצֵר* in 26:2), the audience to whom the prophet is to give the message (all Judah in 7:2 and all the cities of Judah in 26:2) and adds a significant interdiction to the prophet not to subtract a word/thing¹³⁷. The interpretation we gave to this significant interdiction as pointing to the severity of the message already announces the tension and confrontation which will be ensued by this sermon. More significantly, 26:2 expands the prophet’s commission from the account of Jer. 7.

¹³⁵ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 93-94.

¹³⁶ P.-M. BOGAERT, *La tradition des oracles et du livre de Jérémie*, p. 313.

¹³⁷ This phrase is also found in Deut. 4:2 (*וְלֹא תִקְרַעוּ מִמֶּנּוּ*) (do not subtract from it) and again in Deut. 13:1 (*וְלֹא תִקְרַעוּ מִמֶּנּוּ*). But there is a slight and significant difference here from the context in Deuteronomy. While in the latter, Moses instructs the Israelites not to remove anything from what he (Moses) commands them, in Jer. 26:2, YHWH instructs Jeremiah not to subtract from what he (YHWH) commands him to say to the people. The implication is significant in a chapter that sets the pace for a series of prophetic oppositions. It means that the prophet could also mitigate the word out of fear or favour and already in this second verse of the chapter the narrator prepares the reader for the subsequent oppositions beginning already with that described in v. 7-9. See also the analysis of this verse.

Jer. 26 further adds a motive to YHWH's command to announce the threats against temple and city which follow, a motive lacking in Jer. 7: perhaps the people will change their hearts and thereby avert the disaster planned against them¹³⁸. Though the prophet is not to subtract a thing, the sermon (Jer. 26) is drastically reduced to three verses (4-6). Of the three verses devoted to it, the first two select and highlight only one of the themes of the Jer. 7 sermon: the narrator in Jer. 26 eliminates from the 7:1-15 version of the sermon what does not interest him, and stresses what is of importance to him in the new circumstances of his community, that is, Judah must listen to YHWH and to the prophets (cf. 7:13; 26:4-5), if the calamity is to be averted. A clear reference to the Decalogue in Exodus and Deuteronomy is made in Jer. 7:7, 9, but all reduced in 26:5a to the issue of listening to "my servants the prophets"¹³⁹. However the cultic themes, so central to the Jer. 7 account, are no longer of explicit interest in Jer. 26¹⁴⁰ because here there is no longer the question of the false confidence in the temple, but the need to vindicate the prophetic word, as the response to the sermon indicates. No wonder that while in 7:13, YHWH reminds the people of their obduracy: "I (YHWH) spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear", but in 26:5, this obstinacy is expressed by YHWH

¹³⁸ The phraseology of v. 3 is similar also to that of Jer. 18:8: "If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" with repetitions of the terms שׁוּב "to return", רָעָה "evil", נָחַם "to repent", חָשַׁב "think, plan or intend", עָשָׂה "to do, to fashion" and also similar to that of Jer. 18:11: "Now therefore go to speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says YHWH, 'Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good'" with the repetition of the expression אִישׁ מִדְרָכּוֹ הֲרָעָה, and equally of the terms שׁוּב, רָעָה, חָשַׁב and the word מַעֲלָל in the plural.

¹³⁹ As already mentioned, here the intention of the narrator in this chapter comes out clearly. While in 7:5-6 items in the Decalogue and in the deuteronomic code are listed: "but if you do amend your behaviour and your actions, if you treat each other fairly, if you do not exploit the stranger, the orphan and the widow, if you do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow alien gods, to your own ruin..." (which is also the case in 7:9), in 26, these numerous socio-ethical and religious list of commandments are reduced to a single question of listening to the prophetic word: "my servants the prophets whom I send you persistently".

¹⁴⁰ K.M. O'CONNOR, "...Do not Trim a Word", p. 620.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

using the prophets as his medium of speaking to the people: “to heed the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently and you have not heeded”.

These differences have been differently approached. Some have appealed to the existence of two independent traditions arising from the same event, propose literary dependence of one account upon the other, or posit the occurrence of two different events. For example, E.K. Holt¹⁴¹ adopts the literary dependence of Jer. 26 upon Jer. 7:1-15. Some have bracketed biographical assumptions and interpreted Jer. 26 as a theological expansion of Jer. 7¹⁴². But in actual fact, Jer. 26 opens the biography of the prophet, reporting his passion and tribulations. At the root of these tribulations is a discourse whose content is not put in the mouth of Jeremiah since it is God who talks in 26:4-6 while in v. 12-15, Jeremiah only responds to the accusations of his adversaries in v. 9. The narrative becomes a report on the words of Jeremiah to prove the legitimacy of his prophetic status and the authenticity of his prophetic message. While the magistrates and the people stood in the side of Jeremiah, the priests and the prophets (the LXX specifies: the false prophets) attack him violently and demand his death. The precedence of Micah, left free after a like threat was evoked as well as the assassination of Uriah for the same motive. In this line of argument, Bogaert writes:

“certes, l'épisode a un intérêt en soi, mais il est facile de constater que le discours de Jérémie et le thème du Temple n'y [chapter 26] occupent qu'un (*sic*) place secondaire. Ce qui constitue, au chapitre 7, le point du discours, la dénonciation de la confiance aveugle dans le Temple, est omis. Dès lors il y a, au chapitre 26, disproportion entre la menace et les répercussions. Bien plus, ce qui au départ était une menace est devenu une prophétie (26,9), au sens courant du terme, une annonce de l'avenir [...]. Le discours du chapitre 7 est plus blessant que celui du chapitre 26. Mais au moment où le biographe écrit, les événements ont prouvé

¹⁴¹ E.K. HOLT, *Jeremiah's Temple Sermon and the Deuteronomists*.

¹⁴² H.G. REVENTLOW, *Gattung und Überlieferung*, p. 343; R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 91; F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Der Prophet vor dem Tribunal*, p. 30-50.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

que Jérémie a dit vrai. La menace a été exécutée, elle se révèle prophétique. Dès lors, l'autorité de la mission de Jérémie s'en trouve confirmée"¹⁴³.

In Jer. 26, the practical implication is that the community must repent and listen to the entire prophetic message by Jeremiah. The artful construction of the remainder of the story (v. 7-16) supports this view of the passage: there is more of a theological attention than sermonic: Jeremiah is a true prophet of YHWH. Stipp confirms this view saying that Jer. 26 is not a Jeremiah narrative as such, Jeremiah being only presented as one of the many prophets that YHWH has sent as Warner and Reproacher (Deut. 18)¹⁴⁴.

From all intents and purposes, we are more inclined to the position, which sees the chapter as dealing specifically with the question of prophetic authenticity. Jer. 26, surely a biographical narrative, records an episode of the tribulations of the prophet, and sets up chains of actions whose centre of interest is a prophet who has either wrongly prophesied or legitimately done so. Truth or falsity becomes the reader's search object. Going through the narrative, one is attracted by the occurrence of the roots דבר (19 occurrences) and אמר (15 occurrences). In correlation with the said word or to be said, are also the verbs שמע (to listen/obey), שוב (to return) and נחם (to repent). The theme of the word leading unto life or death is essential in the narrative. And what is at stake is the authority of the prophet as regards this word. The verb שלח, here used two times and as a flank to the self-defence of Jeremiah (v. 12, 15), is classic to prophetic vocation. The usage of this verb in this chapter is perfectly in coherence with Jeremiah 1:7: "Go now to all those to whom I send you and say..." The principal accent¹⁴⁵ is therefore that Jeremiah is the authentic prophet of YHWH. Jeremiah's legitimisation is thus reiterated in Jer. 26 even

¹⁴³ P.-M. BOGAERT, *La tradition des oracles et du livre de Jérémie*, p. 314.

¹⁴⁴ H.J. STIPP, *Jeremia im Parteienstreit: Studien zur Textentwicklung von Jer 26, 36-43 und 45 als Beitrag zur Geschichte Jeremias, seines Buches und jüdischer Parteien im 6. Jahrhundert* (BBB 82), Frankfurt, 1992, quoted in T. SEIDL, *Jeremias Tempelrede: Polemik gegen die joschijanische Reform? Die Paralleltraditionen Jer 7 und 26 auf ihre Effizienz für das Deuteronomismusproblem in Jeremia befragt*, in W. GROß (ed.), *Jeremia und die "deuteronomistische Bewegung"* (BBB 98), Weinheim, 1995, p. 141-179, p. 168.

¹⁴⁵ J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut*, p. 142.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

though Jer. 1 and the confessions earlier establish his authenticity in the book. Perhaps this shows again the new beginning, which Jer. 26 marks, since it introduces the “second book” of Jeremiah¹⁴⁶. The movement which begins in Jer. 26, that is, the confrontation between the true and the false, is pursued. Jer. 26 authorises Jeremiah as a true prophet in his battle against false prophets, who are of primary concern in the subsequent chapters. 27:16-18 narrates the attack against the false prophets, Jer. 28 describes his duel with Hananiah the hopeful prophet, Jer. 29 (precisely v. 21-23, 28-32) is again attack on false prophets. But if the threats of the true prophets were eventually proved to be true, that is, came to realisation, that means his promises will also be accomplished. The “book of consolation” (chapters 30 and 31) and its complements in prose (chapter 32 and 33) are thus well placed¹⁴⁷. That confirms again that chapter 26 is therefore programmatic with regard not only to the block 26-29, but also to the whole second scroll.

Transition

At the end of Jer. 26, the reader is able to articulate the problematic. The chapter is animated by the presence of the motif of opposition and discernment of the true and the false, not only regarding the word announced, but also regarding the announcer of the word. The narrator sets forth an important event in the career of the prophet where the latter’s announcement of YHWH’s word is challenged by opponents, but finally is confirmed as a legitimate announcer of the word. The question as to whether the threat announced will be avoided or not is yet to receive an answer. How does the audience react to the word? And if the threat were to be avoided, what should they do on the practical plane?

The end of the narrative shows the precariousness of the situation of the prophet. He has been acquitted, but the image of Jehoiakim as figure of a king who kills the prophet looms large with the mention of his treatment of Uriah and with the ending of the narrative with the date signature of his reign (27:1a). On the part of Jeremiah, two possible attitudes are open: either he profits from the narrow chance he has had and

¹⁴⁶ K. O’CONNOR, “...Do not Trim a Word”, p. 627.

¹⁴⁷ P.-M. BOGAERT, *La tradition des oracles et du livre de Jérémie*, p. 315.

Part Two Chapter Two: Jer. 26: The Theme of Prophetic Authenticity Enunciated

abandons the prophetic course, or the acquittal becomes an impetus for his mission not to “omit a word” (26:3); in which case, oppositions and confrontations would increase. The next chapter witnesses Jeremiah follow the latter option. Conscious that YHWH has sent him to say all these things (cf. v. 12 and 15), chapter 27 sees the prophet give out in practical terms how this threat should be avoided. In Jer. 26, the opposition was only but begun.

CHAPTER THREE

JER. 27: THE YOKE OF YHWH

Introduction

After Jeremiah's legitimisation as a true prophet of YHWH, vindicated by Judah's highest court in chapter 26, it is natural to expect immediately afterwards Jeremiah's self affirmation and proper fulfilment of this role (a factor which links chapter 27 [and equally 27-29] perfectly with the preceding chapter). This exercise begins in chapter 27. While Jer. 26 is programmatic, articulating the problematic of prophetic authenticity in the block 26-29, Jer. 27 begins an inner narrower cycle (27-29), and here exactly we meet narratives which, following the enunciation in chapter 26, portray Jeremiah confronting other prophets whether Judean or foreign, Jerusalem based or active in Babylon¹. This commonality in these three chapters permits many commentators to treat 27-29 together². These authors identify some indications of this homogeneity in these three chapters: two peculiarities of spelling in 27:1 through 29:3. One is the variant spelling of the name of the prophet Jeremiah which in the rest of the book is uniformly יְרֵמְיָהוּ³ but here spelt יְרֵמְיָה, that is, without the final *waw*, in 27:1; 28:5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 15; 29:1. The former spelling returns only in 29:27. The second spelling peculiarity is that of the name of the king of Babylon, spelt uniformly נְבוּכַדְרֶאֱצַר in the rest of the book, נְבוּכַדְרֶאֱצַר in 28:11 and 28:14. But it is spelt as נְבוּכַדְרֶאֱצַר in 27:6, 8, 20; 28:3, 11, 14; 29:1, 3. Variant spelling also occurs with regard to the name of the king, Zedekiah (compare 21:1, 4, 7; 32:1; 37:1; 39:1 and

¹ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 523.

² See for example Carroll: "Jeremiah against the prophets: an independent cycle 27-29", CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 523-568. See also HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, who sees "their subject matter" and the "peculiarities of spelling" as their point of unity (p. 114). For him, the cycle 27-29 forms "a literary unit with characteristics of its own and deal with matters connected with the renewal of hope aroused in those subject to Nebuchadnezzar during the year 594" (p. 114). Overholt titles: "Conflict with Prophetic Opponents": Jer. 27-29, see T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood: A Study in the Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (SBT SS 16), London, 1970, p. 24-48.

³ Of the 121 occurrences of this spelling in the Hebrew Bible, all except 7 are from the book of Jeremiah, see especially 1:1, 11; 7:1; 11:1; 14:1; 18:1; 20:1; 26:1, 12, 20, 24, 29:29, 30; 34:1; 45:1, 52:1, etc.

27:13; 28:1; 29:3; cf. 49:34). These differences and peculiarity of spellings have been explained from the historical-critical point of view by positing independent literary sources for these chapters, or in other words “independent origins of the cycle” according to Carroll⁴ but as Holladay rightly puts it, “one cannot gain any specificity on the matter simply from these spellings”⁵.

The context of Jer. 27 has equally been the subject of much debate by historical-critical scholars. Most of them agree that in the fourth year of the reign of King Zedekiah, vassal States in the western parts of Nebuchadnezzar’s empire began to explore the possibility of a rebellion, and representatives from neighbouring states came to Jerusalem to enlist the support of Zedekiah⁶. Consequent upon this, false prophets had been at their posts in Jerusalem promising the people the overthrow of Babylon and equally the return of

⁴ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 523.

⁵ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 115; CARROLL (OTL), *Jeremiah*, p. 523.

⁶ Holladay and Thompson believe that the historical background to the years referred to in the text has been greatly illuminated by the work of D.J. WISEMAN, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626-556 B.C.)*, London, 1956, especially, p. 72-73. See also J. BRIGHT, *A History of Israel*, Philadelphia, 1981; A. MALAMAT, *The Twilight of Judah: In the Egyptian-Babylonian Maelstrom*, in G.W. ANDERSON *et al.* (eds.), *Congress volume Edinburgh 1974* (VTS 28), Leiden, 1975, p. 123-145. Holladay relates it to an actual event and writes: “The meeting in Jerusalem of envoys from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon to conspire with Zedekiah to revolt against Nebuchadnezzar is a direct consequence of a rebellion against the king in Babylon in December 595 and January 594”, HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 118; while Thompson writes that the years between 596 and 593 were troubled times for Nebuchadnezzar and so, small States in the west thought they saw an opportunity to throw off the yoke of Babylon. As it happened the plan was fruitless. “Zedekiah became eventually involved as the present chapter shows”, see THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 532. But Carroll believes the framing to be a literary strategy and underlines the difficulties inherent in demonstrating a specific set of events which would account for a coalition against Babylon after 597. Doing this must raise doubts about the historicity of 27-28. That Zedekiah, a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar and presumably also pro-Babylonian in outlook and policy, should even entertain the idea of a rebellion against his overlord and at the beginning of his reign, he sees is, unlikely to be realistic. Carroll summarises: “These [difficulties] are created by the editing of the different themes together so that the impression is given that Zedekiah may be contemplating revolt or that he is under pressure from his prophets [...] to join in a coalition of rebellion represented by the embassy of five kings and their representatives”, CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 530.

Jehoiachin and the exiles, together with the temple utensils already taken away. Revolt seemed to be the climate of the time and it demanded a brave man to oppose such a public opinion and to divulge the purpose of YHWH. And that man was Jeremiah⁷. The will of YHWH in the Jeremiah tradition as transmitted in the text is quite the contrary: the Babylonian domination is not to be short and is part of the plan of YHWH for his people. Again, true to our methodology, the investigations in this chapter will be of a different kind: what is the function of the chapter and its place within the block where it is inserted? What narrative effects has its structural and literary composition? What theological note does it strike within the context of the book of Jeremiah as a whole and in the context of the discussion on true and false prophecy in the block 26-29?

3.1 EXPOSITION AND STRUCTURAL PRESENTATION

3.1.1 Exposition

Recognised by many authors as a typical example of passages in Jeremiah that give evidence of the various strata of redaction, revealing independent origins, made more evident by the variant spellings and through the exercise in textual comparison⁸, there is yet every reason to believe that the extant form of the text bears testimony to an intelligible arrangement and theology⁹, in the words of Lundbom, “a carefully-wrought

⁷ See THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 531.

⁸ For some of the works already done on Jer. 27 in these regards, see especially T. SEIDL, *Datierung und Wortereignis: Beobachtungen zum Horizont von Jer 27,1 in BZ 21* (1977), p. 23-44; E. TOV, *Exegetical Notes on the Hebrew Vorlage of the LXX of Jeremiah 27 (34)*, in *ZAW 91* (1979), p. 73-93, 184-199; F.C. FENSHAM, *Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Jeremiah*, in *JNSL 10* (1982), p. 53-65; F. BASTIDE & C. COMBET-GALLAND, *Essai sur la création dans le livre de Jérémie*, in *Foi et Vie 83/5* (1984), p. 45-51; J. SCHREINER, *Tempeltheologie im Streit der Propheten, zu Jer 27 und 28*, in *BZ 31* (1987), p. 1-14; A. VAN DER KOOIJ, *Jeremiah 27:5, 15: How do MT and LXX Relate to each other?* in *JNSL 20* (1994), p. 31-48; P. COXON, *Nebuchadnezzar's Hermeneutical Dilemma*, in *JSOT 66* (1995), p. 87-97; B. GOSSE, *Nabuchodonosor et les évolutions de la rédaction du livre de Jérémie*, in *Science et Esprit 47* (1995), p. 177-187; J. APPLGATE, *The Fate of Zedekiah: Redactional Debate in the Book of Jeremiah Part I*, in *VT 48* (1998), p. 137-160, *Part II*, p. 301-308.

⁹ On the theology of chapter 27, see especially W.S. PRINSLOO, *The Theology of Jer 27:1-11*, in *OTWSA 24* (1982), p. 67-83. In fact the concern of the author is that the older reading hermeneutical postures have not taken the text final form in consideration. Accepting that the verses under study come from various

structure” in three parts, with the whole hanging “together as a coherent discourse”¹⁰. Cast in prose, the chapter is mainly a record of oracles from YHWH through Jeremiah. The reader notices a first person report of Jeremiah only in v. 2a after the introduction by the narrator in v. 1b. The rest of the chapter is Jeremiah’s proclamation of oracles of YHWH. Oracles from YHWH are proclaimed to different classes of people: first to the neighbouring lands, then to Zedekiah king of Judah and finally to the priests and all the people.

At the beginning of the chapter, YHWH commands Jeremiah to fashion a yoke or yoke-collar, which he would put round his neck. The prophet gains access to the envoys from the five neighbouring kingdoms, charges them, all according to the directives of YHWH, to take the yokes to their masters who have sent them to Jerusalem. The summary of the message, which interprets the symbolic act runs: submit to the king of Babylon and stop listening to the various intermediaries who preach against this option (v. 1b-11). Oracles of similar nature are delivered to Zedekiah (v. 12-15) and to the priests and the people (v. 16-22).

3.1.2 Structure

The whole chapter is internally structured along the lines of the three oracles, which provides a delimitation of the chapter. V. 1b-11 are concerned with the instruction to Jeremiah to perform one or more symbolic actions (v. 2 and 3), which are of course with parallel instruction to send ‘word’ to some foreign kings through their representatives. Then v. 12-15 and v. 16-22 by contrast are direct reports of the prophet of words received from YHWH to the king Zedekiah and to the priests and the people respectively.

We therefore have three units following the different addressees

sources, he however believes that their present form constitutes a unity. He gives a chart that shows the syntactic analysis and though according to him, the section eludes classification in literary genre, theologically, the unit says YHWH is the Creator, a universal God with power over all history. Obedience brings true security, while disobedience brings annihilation.

¹⁰ LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 306-307.

- A. Divine commissioning for a sign-act and oracle for the neighbouring kings (v. 1b-11)
- B. Oracle for Zedekiah (v. 12-15)
- C. Oracle for priests and people (v. 16-22)¹¹

The internal literary unity is also evident. Equally aimed at confronting false prophecy, these three addresses contain as a common element the denunciation of falsehood, or put precisely, the warning against false prophets (v. 9-10, 14-15, 16b-18) “for they are prophesying falsehood to you” *הֵם נְבִאִים לְכֶם* (v. 10, 14, 16). The only slight difference (in vocabulary) is that in v. 16 the third person plural pronoun is the longer form *הֵנָּה*. The three oracles in the chapter are patterned alike in that, apart from the presence of the emphasis on true and false prophecy, they share other common elements. For example, they are described in a similar pattern consisting of many parallels:

- i) Serve Nebuchadnezzar: 5-8, 11, 12, 17
- ii) Life as the consequence of serving Nebuchadnezzar: 11, 12, 17
- iii) Not to listen to the other prophets: 9, 14, 16
- iv) Because they prophesy falsehood: 10, 14, 16
- v) If the people disobey, they or the temple furnishings will be removed from the land: 11, 15, 22.

However, despite this similarity in pattern, the three oracles (A, B and C) exhibit logical differences. A and B are addressed to kings. No wonder the highlight of the oracles are the submission to the yoke (cf. v. 8, 11, 12) of Babylon / Nebuchadnezzar (cf. v. 8, 9, 11, 12), the punishment in the case of disobedience, to be meted by the sword, famine, pestilence (cf. v. 8, 13). C is addressed to the priests and the people and concerns primarily the fate of the sacred vessels and the house of YHWH (cf. v. 16, 18, 19, 21), the

¹¹ Some authors settle for a slightly different division of the chapter. For example G. WANKE, *Untersuchungen zur sogenannten Baruchsschrift*, p. 25, omits v. 4 in his analysis because according to him it is a seam which joins two units that originally never belonged together, thus making 9-11, 12-15 and 16-22 individual units after 3-8 with v. 1 as superscription and 2-3 as the command to perform a symbolic act. J. Hill follows equally this division, see J. HILL, *Friend or Foe?* p. 129. Overholt proposes 3-11 as a separate unit, see T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood*, p. 34-35.

city (cf. v. 17) and the deported exiles (cf. v. 20). Logically, to the kings is the issue of yoke, to the priests and the people, that of cult.

In summary, one can say that the divine discourse of Jer. 27 is divided into three sections, each of which contains a two-part exhortation: do not listen to the falsehood by the prophets but serve the king of Babylon¹². Besides, each of the three oracles contain the rubric of divine stamp יהוה אלהי in the last verse (cf. v. 11, 15 and 22)¹³. In the chapter, one also notices a constant distinction between the true and the false, couched in an opposition between a programme of life and a programme of death; a programme of life (v. 11, 12, 17, 22) which will be made more explicit in chapter 29, opposed to a programme of death (v. 8, 10, 13, 15) that explains the woes announced in the preceding chapter¹⁴. The inevitable result (למעי, v. 10, 15) of listening to the voices of the false prophets will be death and destruction (v. 8, 10, 13, 15, 17b) which contrasts the promise of life made by YHWH to all who submit obediently to his will (v. 11, 12, 17a).

¹² One notices that the first section contains something extra not found in the other sections: the affirmation of YHWH as the creator and sovereign controller of all in the universe. Authors have remarked that this extra section is necessary to lay the groundwork for the exhortation, especially to the foreigners, who would be unfamiliar with the prophetic view of YHWH and the workability of his actions. Once given in the first section, it need therefore not be repeated in the subsequent sections. Weiser reasons that while speaking to Israelites in the second and third sections, Jeremiah can presuppose the faith and theological knowledge on which basis the exhortation would be intelligible, WEISER, *Jeremia*, p. 241.

¹³ On the basis of this rubric, Rietzschel concludes that v. 2-8 (without לְךָ at v. 2) is a *Jahwerede* while v. 9-11, 12-15, and 16-22 are a kind of prophetic preaching (*Prophetenrede*), cf. C. RIETZSCHEL, *Das Problem der Urrolle*, p. 114-116. This cannot be true especially considering the content of 9-11. The application of this to 12-15 and 16-22 is not equally clear since Rietzschel bases his argument on the appearance of יהוה אלהי at v. 12, 15 and 22 because it is the formula which establishes that the words are from YHWH. But it appears equally in v. 8.

¹⁴ See also C. DIETERLE & V. MONSARRAT, *De Jérusalem à Babylone*, p. 63.

3.2 ANALYSIS

3.2.1 *Divine Commissioning for a Sign-act and Oracle for the Neighbouring Kings (v. 1b-11)*

The first unit of the narrative (v. 1b-11) has two principal parts; v. 1 which serves as introduction and setting and then v. 2-11 which is the divine commissioning proper, with the oracle to the neighbouring kings.

3.2.1.1 *Introduction (v. 1)*

Jer. 27 begins in v. 1, which serves as introduction reflecting word-event, and messenger formulas¹⁵ and then followed by a command. The consistency of v. 1a with the rest of the narrative is questionable¹⁶ judging from the historical context narrated in the text¹⁷: “in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah”, when placed side by side with the information given in the subsequent verses in the chapter. But given the fact that division into chapters and verses may not have respected the artistry of narratives, we considered v. 1a and the historical reference to be the end of the narrative

¹⁵ For a detailed study of these formulas, see T. SEIDL, *Datierung und Wortereignis: Beobachtungen zum Horizont von Jer 27,1*, in *BZ* 21 (1977), p. 23-44, p. 184-199; 23 (1979), p. 20-47.

¹⁶ Holladay uses the phrase “is impossible”, cf. HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 115.

¹⁷ The entire v. 1 is absent in the LXX. Most commentators agree that the date formula in v. 1 MT is a copy of 26:1 with a variant spelling of “reign”. The chapter is about Zedekiah and not about Jehoiakim as can be seen in 27:3, 12 and even in 28:1 which has congruence with chapter 27. The synchronism in 28:1, which says “in that year”, invites the reader to find the date for chapter 27 in 28:1, see SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 41. This difficulty is complicated by the fact that v. 1 refers to the beginning of the king’s (Jehoiakim) reign while 28:1 refers the event to the fourth year and there it is stated that this was the same year in which the events of chapter 27 took place. Difficulties with the text of 27:1 and 28:1 and with the reconstruction of Ancient Near Eastern history during Zedekiah’s reign obscure the precise date. This is however more of a problem bordering on textual criticism. See D. BARTHELEMY, *Critique textuelle de l’Ancien Testament: Isaïe, Jérémie, Lamentations* (OBO 50/2), Fribourg, 1986, p. 665-666. With reference to our task here, we can only recourse to the presence of literary and theological consistency in the chapters and not that of chronology. See again SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 47. Our solution is making 27:1a the end of the story of Jer. 26. For this solution, see the Chapter on the analysis of Jer. 26.

of Jer. 26. But more important than chronological coherence in this verse¹⁸ is the narrator's legitimisation of the message that would follow by mentioning that the word is from YHWH (v. 1b) just as in the beginning of Jer. 26.

3.2.1.2 Oracle to the Neighbouring Kings (v. 2-11)

The fact that the words of v. 1 are the words of the narrator introduces a problem of coherence especially in v. 2 which begins as a first person report by Jeremiah (v. 2a). Now it is the prophet who speaks: "thus says YHWH to me" (וַיֹּאמֶר). One therefore gets an odd result that YHWH's private communication to his prophet begins with a messenger formula¹⁹, but which on the other hand could be an insistence on the origin of the word. The text of 2-11 presents a complicated structure equally by the descending series of quotations, what Van Dyke Parunak terms "nested quotations"²⁰; that is, quotations inside quotations. V. 1 as said above is a third person report of revelation to the prophet. Verse 2 and 3 are introduced again by the messenger formula and contains the command to the prophet to perform symbolic actions (compare 13:1; 18:2; 19:1-2) and v. 4 contains a parallel command from YHWH charging the messengers to carry a message to their kings and this prophetic word to the messengers is introduced by the messenger formula, then by the rubric of instruction to the envoys: "thus shall you say to your masters". And at last, v. 5-11 contain the message proper to the kings. Outside v. 2a therefore, this major part of this first unit is divided into two sub units; the sign act and the commands (v. 2b-4) and the oracle for the five kings (v. 5-11).

¹⁸ Carroll is right in his remark that the cycle is a literary creation rather than historical records or reflections, CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 523 and that "the historical problems may be put to one side in order to pursue the exegesis of 27 as they only bear on the question of the redaction of the text and the genre of the material presented" (p. 530).

¹⁹ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 48. This formula also occurs in 13:1 and 19:1 where in each case, the prophet is commanded to go and buy items.

²⁰ P. VAN DYKE PARUNAK, *Some Discourse Functions of Prophetic Quotation Formulas in Jeremiah*, in R.B. BERGEN (ed.), *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, Winona Lake, 1994, p. 489-519.

3.2.1.2.1 *The Sign-act and the Commands (v. 2b-4)*

There are four commands²¹: the command to make yoke-bonds and bars (v. 2a), to put them round the neck (v. 2b), to send them to neighbouring kings (v. 3) and to commission messengers (v. 4). Jeremiah is commanded in v. 2 to make “bonds מוֹסְרוֹת and bars (pl.) of yoke מִשְׁוֹת. The plural of the bonds and bands of yoke tallies with the second command of putting “them” וְהָחִתָּם (with plural suffix) and can therefore explain the second command (v. 3) of sending them²² (וְשִׁלַּחְתָּם) to the envoys of the kings of the nations mentioned even though he was commanded in v. 2 to make them “for yourself” לְךָ. There is therefore no reason to consider v. 3 or precisely the וְשִׁלַּחְתָּם as presenting any textual difficulty which would disappear “if וְשִׁלַּח is read”, or of supplying “message” as the grammatical object of the “send”²³. The reading of a Greek text (LXX/L) which has simply “send” and omits “them” is therefore equally not necessary, neither is the emendation “and you shall send word” of RSV and JB, under the assumption that Jeremiah would not send whole yokes to each king justified²⁴. There is equally no reason to suppose that Jeremiah wears first of all the bars of yoke and had to remove them in order to send them to the envoys of the kings mentioned since Jer. 28:10 shows Jeremiah to be wearing the yoke bars. Our text seems then to imply that Jeremiah made a yoke for himself as well as for each king and he put each yoke on his own neck and then gave to the respective ambassadors for their kings²⁵.

The narrative is silent about evidence of any alliance between Judah and the five neighbouring kingdoms mentioned or even of the plans for revolt against Nebuchadnezzar; a problem that has been debated by historical critical exegetes. The text is equally silent on the exact reason why the messengers from the kings of Edom, Moab,

²¹ Contrary to Scalise who identifies only three commands, not taking consideration of the second command, נָתַן, see SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 45.

²² Cf. HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 120.

²³ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 686.

²⁴ Cf. HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 120.

²⁵ See THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 532. See also Lundbom: “[...] the yokes duplicating the one Jeremiah has made for himself”, LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 310.

Ammon, Tyre and Sidon had come to Jerusalem, even though many commentators believe in an accurate historical reconstruction to provide the exact historical setting for this episode²⁶, a problem purely historical, and the resistance to the rule of Babylon can only be postulated judging from the content of YHWH's words. But the reader of the text cannot but ask the question of what the mission of these ambassadors could be. The only information, which the narrator drops, is the fact of the arrival of these delegations to Zedekiah (cf. v. 3) and then immediately the content of the message which should be given to them (cf. v. 5ff.). The only impression left for the reader is that the messengers seem to have come just to receive the prophetic message. No other information is given either by the narrator or YHWH concerning the precise goal of the delegation. The list of the five kings in v. 3 corresponds to their order of appearance in 25:21-22 where these five kings are part of a longer list of the nations who would drink from the cup of the wrath of YHWH (cf. 25:15-27). There is however a difference of motif in Jer. 27: the third command, that of sending the yoke bonds and bars to the named kings is intended to persuade the nations concerned to submit to the rule of Babylon, whereas the cup of wrath refers to their destruction, making it a distinctive nature of 27:2-11 that "the nations are appealed to rather than informed of their destruction"²⁷, reflecting therefore a

²⁶ According to Brueggemann, the words could equally suggest "a conspiratorial meeting of subservient nations in Jerusalem to organize against Babylon or the prophet simply appeals to the ambassadors regularly in residence in Jerusalem. Or perhaps the framing of the oracle to these nations is simply a device of the staging of the proclamation", BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 240. See also HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 118; D.J. WISEMAN, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626-556 B.C.)*, see especially, p. 72-73; A. MALAMAT, *The Twilight of Judah: In the Egyptian-Babylonian Maelstrom*, p. 123-145. For criticism of this position, see CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 531. Lack of concrete textual support makes such opinions not very necessary in the context of our work here. And just as Weippert writes: "Zwar schweigt Kapitel 27 auch über Anlaß und Absicht dieser Zusammenkunft; doch indirekt ergibt sich aus seinem Wortlaut, daß es darum ging, über ein gemeinsames Vorgehen der palästinischen Kleinstaaten Nebukadnezar gegenüber zu beratschlagen. Letztendlich dürften diese Überlegungen keine konkreten Massnahmen nach sich gezogen haben; wenigstens hören wir in den Texten aus der Folgezeit nichts mehr über eine Koalition dieser Staaten gegen Nebukadnezar", H. WEIPPERT, *Schöpfer des Himmels und der Erde: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Jeremiabuches* (SBS 102), Stuttgart, 1981, p. 66.

²⁷ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 531.

more positive attitude to the nations characteristic of this cycle²⁸. More important however than this historical correspondence or its setting to us here is the fact that the speech which follows reflects the global vision of prophetic faith, in that the speech focuses attention to the issue of the will of YHWH and not to the problem of Babylonian power²⁹.

In v. 4 comes the fourth and the last in the series of the commands *וְיָצִיאוּ אֹתָם*, with the third person plural pronoun referring to the messengers. The messengers have therefore two charges: one of carrying the yokes to their masters and the other of carrying the accompanying messages³⁰. The messenger formula closes this unit just as it opens it in v. 2.

²⁸ Scalise makes a significant observation concerning the above named nations, significance which would become more glaring at the end of the chapter where the issue concerns the fate of the temple vessels (v. 16-22); a correspondence with the facts of the history of the temple as regards the participation of the named nations in its construction. All the nations mentioned except Sidon had provided furnishings for the temple. II Sam. 8:11-12 narrates how David had dedicated to YHWH articles of gold and silver brought or taken from Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites and these Solomon had put in the treasuries of the temple (I Kings 7:51). On the side of Tyre, I Kings 5; 7:13-47 narrate a trade agreement, which Solomon made with Hiram of Tyre which provided the former with the building materials for the temple and equally with skilled craftsmen to produce the furnishings of bronze for the temple courts, see SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah* 26-52, p. 48-49. For a more detailed historical significance of the mention of these nations in context, see LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 311-312.

²⁹ See BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 241-242.

³⁰ Cf. S. MEIER, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World* (HSM 45), 1988, p. 75. According to Meier, messengers regularly carried both goods and words.

The commands, their objects and their destinations could be tabulated thus:

Messenger formula “thus says YHWH to me” (v. 2a)

	<i>Command</i>	<i>Object</i>	<i>destination</i>
First (v. 2b α)	Make עשה (imperative qal)	Bonds and bars of yokes	For yourself
Second (v. 2b β)	Put נתן (qal, qatal with waw consecutive)	Bonds and bars of yoke (them)	On your neck
Third (v. 3)	Send שלח (piel, qatal with waw consecutive)	Bonds and bars of yoke (them)	To the kings of ...
Fourth (v. 4)	Charge/command צוה (piel with waw consecutive)	The messengers (them)	To their masters

Messenger formula “thus says YHWH ...” (v. 4a)

3.2.1.2.2 *The Oracle to the Kings and Neighbouring Nations (v. 5-11)*

Here we have the long message to the kings. For the sake of clarity the speech can be subdivided into two:

- i. The sovereignty of YHWH and the role of Nebuchadnezzar (v. 5-7)
- ii. Possible dispositions and warning against false prophets (v. 8-11)

v. 8-11 further has an internal structure as follows

v. 8 *not serving Nebuchadnezzar, not submitting of neck equals to YHWH's visit and total finishing*

v. 9-10 Warning against false prophecy

v. 11 *submission of neck under the yoke and serving Nebuchadnezzar equals being settled on the land*

3.2.1.2.2.1 *The Sovereignty of YHWH and the Role of Nebuchadnezzar (v. 5-7)*

The first three verses of the oracle of Jeremiah to the foreign kings are as a whole a concise articulation of what had happened³¹, what is happening and what would eventually happen within the context of YHWH's intent for Judah vis-à-vis Babylon³². Brueggemann calls it a "frightened theological statement"³³. All begins with a personal self-assertion by YHWH which kicks off with the emphatic personal pronoun אֲנִי. Beginning exactly with the first person singular of the personal pronoun אֲנִי v. 5 ends with the first person suffixed to the word "eye" עֵינַי (in my eyes) referring to the same subject YHWH. It is not by mere chance to have such a divine self-assertion, such 'I-framework' in a chapter that partly deals with submission to Babylonian power, already pointing to the fact that the latter has no absolute status, but derives its status from the singular power of YHWH. No wonder v. 5 combines in its three parts, creation, power and authority. And what is more, each of the three parts of this verse, reflecting respectively the three motifs of creation, power and authority, has twice a first person expression, either in the form of pronoun, or a first person conjugated verb, or a first person suffix.

³¹ In the measure in which this introductory speech oracle is programmatic to the chapter, we can then say that all the three addresses are articulated in the same pattern: that is, what YHWH has done, what YHWH will do and exhortation, using the descriptions of Overholt. In the first address to the foreign kings therefore, we have v. 5-7 as what YHWH had done, v. 8 as what YHWH will do and v. 9-11 as exhortation. In the second and third addresses, there is no need of repeating the first and the second element since it is programmatic to the whole chapter, but each of them concentrates on the exhortation (v. 12-15 and v. 16-22). See also T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood*, p. 34.

³² CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah*, p. 161.

³³ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 242.

- 5a *Creation*: “I (אֲנִי), I have made (עָשִׂיהִי) the earth, the humans and the animals³⁴ that are on the face of the earth”
- 5b *Power*: “By my great power (בְּכֹחִי) and by my outstretched arm (וּבְזְרוּעֵי)”
- 5c *Authority*: “I give it (וְנָתַתִּיהָ) to whomever seems right in my eyes (בְּעֵינַי)”.

The employment of motifs from Exodus: “great power” and “outstretched arm” (cf. Deut. 4:34; Jer. 32:17, 21) serves equally the interest of the divine self assertion here, since YHWH as Lord and Controller of the destiny of all nations, uses reminiscences of Exodus language to address even nations who do not share Exodus faith³⁵. The final clause of v. 5 uses a phraseology (לְאִשָּׁר יֵשֶׁר בְּעֵינַי)³⁶ that can be ambivalently understood: If translated “to whom (that) is right (just) in my eyes”, it could imply the moral quality of the person referred to. In this case, Nebuchadnezzar would be declared righteous before YHWH. But if it is translated “to whomever it pleases in my eyes”, that is whom it pleases me to give, which sense we adopt, then the emphasis falls on the free action of YHWH, his freedom and sovereign power and not on the action or on the moral status of the person concerned³⁷. The possibility of ambivalence apart, the rhetorical effect on the narrative is however unmistakable. Its rhetorical intent is to remove the mind of Judah completely off from the apparent absolute power of Babylon and to recognise the real absolute control of YHWH who decides. By this phrase, Babylon, even though powerful,

³⁴ Whether the word בהמה “animals” refers to all living creatures other than human beings as in Psa. 36:7 or the cattle that work for and live with human families, each sense has some connection and significance in the chapter: YHWH the absolute creator can make the wild animals serve Nebuchadnezzar as expressed in v. 6, and the sign act of the bonds and bars of yoke has a great effect among people who work and live with draught animals, cf. also SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 49.

³⁵ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 242.

³⁶ Lundbom rightly refers to this expression as “a statement of principle building on the Creation theology of Gen. 1:28, which is given specific application in the verse following (*sic*)”, LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 314. Such a statement of principle is also found in Jer. 18:7-10, where YHWH’s prerogative to judge or rescind judgment builds on the potter image.

³⁷ See also Holladay who rightly points out here the significance in the expression לְאִשָּׁר (which is of course better translated “to whomever”) instead of לְאִשָּׁר+ לוֹ (to him who), HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 120.

is however nothing but he whom it has pleased YHWH to invest the power in the given moment. Power belongs therefore to him who gives.

Having put the nations on notice about the freedom of YHWH, of a sovereign personality “who does not need to respect old maps nor adhere to old power arrangements”³⁸, v. 5 becomes therefore a preparation for the startling declaration in v. 6 concerning Nebuchadnezzar. The latter is granted royal authority “over all these lands” and is called “my servant”³⁹. Who is then to be served? Who is at the helm of affairs becomes the question, especially when the reader stumbles over v. 7 where it is said that “all nations shall serve him”. He who is given authority over all lands or the giver of this authority? If all (v. 6, 7) should serve Nebuchadnezzar, and the latter is YHWH’s servant, then ultimately, service is to YHWH. The reader has already been prepared for this. It is only at the backdrop of a YHWH who is sovereign and absolute, that what follows in the subsequent decrees to the neighbouring nations and to Zedekiah could be understood. The text also interpretively brings the reader to the conclusion that the absolute power of

³⁸ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 242. Here Brueggemann makes allusion to Deut. 32:8-9: “When the Most High distributed to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel”. That means that YHWH can however redistribute the bounds at his own will without being indebted to give explanation or justification to the nations. See also L. STULMAN, *Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Jeremiah*.

³⁹ On the purely literal sense, one can say that from the point of view of the history of the Old Testament, Jeremiah joins the band of prophets through whom YHWH announces the removal of an old monarch and declares the choice of a new. In many instances, the new choice does not necessarily entail a choice of one who may not disappoint, or the choice of a definitively morally righteous alternative. What is at stake is the rejection of a former. The succession of the kings from Saul till the fall of the Northern Kingdom proves this. What is clear is that kings lose their throne because of their oppressive and unjust administration and especially for deviating from the mind of YHWH. And the kings of Judah have lost favour with YHWH. See for example Jer. 22:15-18: “Are you more of a king because of your passion for cedar? Did your father go hungry or thirsty? But he did what is just and upright, so all went well for him. He used to examine the cases of the poor and the needy, then all went well. Is not that what it means to know me? YHWH demands. You on the other hand have eyes and heart for nothing but your own interests, for shedding innocent blood and perpetrating violence and oppression. That is why YHWH says this about Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah: ‘No lamenting for him. My poor brother! My poor sister, No lamenting for him, His poor lordship! His poor majesty’”.

YHWH has no boundaries and extends even to political issues of the day. There is in fact the “convergence of the will of God and the rise of the empire” because “prophetic faith does not live in a religious vacuum, but must take sides on the public issues of the day”⁴⁰. That is why 27:6 should be read from the backdrop of Jer. 21-22 in order not to “lose sight of the divine justice at work within the storm of political controversy”⁴¹. The kings of Judah have lost the right to the throne because of their evil rule (cf. 22:17).

With this remark above, the reading and interpretation of “Nebuchadnezzar my servant” would be pursued, a phrase which has aroused different theological sensibilities. The designation is used again of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Jeremiah in 25:9 and 43:10. Many interpretations and many attempts at interpretations have been proposed to this verse and many commentators have also seen in this point the proof of the presence of ideological conflict groups that have led to the emergence of the text we have⁴². All the same, it has also become a task for narrative-theological exegesis to give a proper interpretation of the verse, which will suit well into the narrative and theological context of the book of Jeremiah. The centrality of this question and the fact that the figure of Nebuchadnezzar (and Babylon) runs through the whole block of 26-29 (at least making bold appearance in chapters 27, 28 and 29), demand that we give it a separate treatment at the end of this part of our work. Suffice here to point out, as already hinted, that any proper exegesis of this designation should put into consideration the literary context it appears, the theology of the book of Jeremiah, the narrative effect and the semantic significance (in context) of the Hebrew root “עבד”.

Part of this context is provided by the next verse, 7b, where immediately the independence of YHWH as regards Nebuchadnezzar, the subjugation of Nebuchadnezzar, or better put, YHWH’s lordship over history is spelt out⁴³ in

⁴⁰ See BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 243.

⁴¹ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 50.

⁴² See R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah, Diachrony to the Rescue*; R.P. CARROLL, *The Book of J: Intertextuality and Ideologiekritik*.

⁴³ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 533.

unflinching terms. Here the declaration of the prophet takes a very sharp turn. The text runs with a reverse gear and is introduced by a powerful עַד (until)⁴⁴ and the reader could easily notice the sharp reversal in the same verb עָבַר in v. 7a and 7b: “All the nations will serve him (עָבְדוּ אֹתוֹ), his son and his grandson, until (עַד) ... when mighty nations and great kings will enslave him (וְעָבְדוּ בּוֹ)”⁴⁵. As Weippert has it, “Aber noch ein weiterer Ton klingt in ‘*abdi*’ mit an: Auch als Sieger über die palästinischen Kleinstaaten bleibt Nebukadnezar ein Untertan Jahwes. Der Machtzuwachs des babylonischen Großkönigs bedeutet somit keine Schmälerung der Macht Jahwes; denn der politische Erfolg Nebukadnezars beruht auf Jahwes Entscheidung für ihn, sein Sieg ist Jahwes Sieg”⁴⁶.

Instead of seeing v. 7b (the relativity and limit of the power of Babylon and its king) as interrupting “the continuity between vv. 6 and 8”⁴⁷ which goes back again to the question of serving Babylon by putting their necks on the yoke of the king of Babylon, v. 7 is rather a highlight of the centrality of the position and power of YHWH in the relation between Judah and Babylon. In fact, v. 7b returns to the theme of v. 5b since it is YHWH who gives the earth (humans and animals) to whom he wishes (v. 5b). That means YHWH can equally give the latter (the favourite one) to others (v. 7b). The Babylonian rule is not limitless. Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar therefore appear only as means by which YHWH carries his independent will for the moment. Thus the same YHWH who authorises the empire at the same time anticipates its destabilisation, which is eventually enacted at the end of the book of Jeremiah, chapters 50-51, and “the very God who

⁴⁴ In the language of narrative exegesis, this could be seen as reversal of situation. The elevated picture of Babylon and of Nebuchadnezzar in the just preceding verses is turned upside down and there is a move from apparent absolutism to sheer relativity.

⁴⁵ This is the fourth occurrence of this term and this phenomenon of reversal in meaning in the fourth occurrence will be noticed again in v. 8-11.

⁴⁶ H. WEIPPERT, *Schöpfer des Himmels und der Erde*, p. 68. On this ground, Weippert concludes by rejecting Rudolph’s opinion that there is in this verse a correction of Israel’s dogma of election: “Aus der Parteinahme Jahwes für Nebukadnezar folgt nicht automatisch die Verwerfung Judas, und man braucht deshalb in diesem Zusammenhang nicht mit einer Korrektur des israelitischen Erwählungsdogmas zu rechnen”, p. 68. Cf. RUDOLPH, *Jeremia*, p. 175.

⁴⁷ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 116.

authorizes the deportation into exile is the very God who assures a return (cf. Isa. 54:7-8)⁴⁸. Narratively, the expression more or less vague to the reader in 27:7 would ring an echo with more clarity in 29:10. Many interpreters connect 27:7 and 29:10 where the length of Babylonian rule is set for seventy years (29:10), a span of three generations⁴⁹ (see also 29:6) which they see as corresponding to “Nebuchadnezzar, his sons and his sons’ sons” (27:7). Brueggemann simply sees the three generations, that is, Nebuchadnezzar, his sons and his sons’ sons as “a long time past the present rulers”⁵⁰ while Thompson sees it simply as “a stereotyped formula, a figure of speech”⁵¹.

3.2.1.2.2.2 *Motifs of v. 4-7 in an Intertextual Context*

Many of the motifs and ideas present in 27:4-7 call to mind readily several motifs in other texts especially in the creation and the patriarchal narratives, as well as the exodus and the royal tradition of Israel and Judah. Considering them with reference to these other texts would help make clearer the insertion and function of this section in the chapter in particular and in the block in general.

V. 5 reads: “I have made the earth, the humans and the animals that are on the face of the earth by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and I have given it to whomever it pleases in my eyes”, words which Jeremiah takes up himself during his prayer in Jer. 32:17 after the purchase of the field. “Ah, Lord YHWH, you made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. To you nothing is impossible”.

⁴⁸ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 245.

⁴⁹ It is true that historically speaking, Nebuchadnezzar did not have a grand son who succeeded him since his line was superseded in 560, CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 527; THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 533, footnote 19, this does not need to count against the MT since the biblical writers were not necessarily historians. Some commentators have seen in this historical incoherence the reason why the verse is omitted in the LXX (Bright, Rudolph). For the discussions as to the possible reasons for this omission, see E. TOV, *Exegetical Notes on the Hebrew Vorlage of the LXX of Jeremiah 27 (34)*, p. 84-85. For this interpretation of three generations see CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 527; MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 689.

⁵⁰ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 243.

⁵¹ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 533.

Interestingly, these words pronounced by Jeremiah are followed by the words of YHWH to the prophet about delivering the city to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who will attack the city and conquer it (cf. 32:28). Apart from this repetition in chapter 32, the text here shows adequate similarity with the narratives of creation and the exodus tradition. The expression עשה ארץ with YHWH as subject recalls the creation in the first pages of the Hebrew Bible. In Jer. 27:5, the verb עשה appears with three direct objects: the earth (ארץ) which is the major object supporting the existence of two forms of life: the humankind (אדם) and (בהמה) animals/beasts. In many instances in the creation narratives it is a question of יהוה אלהים or אלהים יהוה as the subject of עשה (cf. Gen. 1:31; 2:2 [twice]; 3:1; 5:1). In Gen. 6:6, though not in the context of divine creative authority but of the evil that אדם does, the three terms are combined⁵². The use of the term בהמה in Jer. 27:5 should not be understood from the strict point of view as to distinguish between domesticated animals and wild animals⁵³. Not only that the power of YHWH in creation is recalled, these objects always recur in most of divine self introductions and revelations: “I am the Lord your God, who made heaven and earth and all the animals in it” (see Psa. 144:6; Isa. 45:5ff; Ezek. 38:19-20; Jer. 23:24; Dan. 4:35). The creation motifs are equally present in v. 6 in the formula: “... and I have given him also the wild animals of the field to serve him” and in the words of Hill, “the idea of a human being with power over all creation, together with the expression חיה השרה (‘the wild animals of the field’) and the root עבר (‘to serve’, ‘to work’, ‘to till’), links v. 6 to the creation story in Genesis 2”⁵⁴. While Gen. 1:28 mentions the authority given to the human over the created world with which he

⁵² וַיִּנְקַם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֱת־הָאָדָם בְּאָרְצוֹ וַיִּחַעֲצֹב אֱל־לְבוֹ “And YHWH regretted having made human beings on earth and was grieved at heart”.

⁵³ Contrary to the position of Weippert in her analysis of the verse where she argues that the term בהמה refers only to domesticated animals, an argument she bases on the use of the expression in some Old Testament texts. In Gen. 2:19, 20; Exo. 23:11 and even Psa. 104:11, the impression is given that חיה השרה refers to wild animals while בהמה refers to domestic animals, see H. WEIPPERT, *Schöpfer des Himmels und der Erde*, p. 69. But this distinction should not be taken so strictly as in texts like Gen. 2:19, חיה השרה refers to all land animals as distinguished from those that fly: “YHWH formed every animal of the field and every bird of the sky”. For the fluid nature of the term and for an attempt at the different classifications for its understanding, see G.J. BOTTERWECK, בְּהֵמָה בְּהֵמָה b^hēmâ; בְּהֵמָה b^hēmôt, *TDOT* 2, p. 6-20.

⁵⁴ J. HILL, *Friend or Foe?* p. 134.

gave names to all cattle, the birds of the air and to the animals of the field (Gen. 2:20), Gen. 2:15 mentions that YHWH brought man and settled him in the garden of Eden “to till it and to guard it” (לְעַבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ).

הַגְּדוֹל וּבְזִרְוֵי הַנְּשִׂיָּה (“by my great power and outstretched arm” of Jer. 27:5) recalls the language of the Exodus and the events of the powerful and prodigious workings of YHWH among his people. It is used earlier in this sense in Jer. 21:5⁵⁵ almost in the same context: that of YHWH’s giving of his people into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (cf. v. 7), a description of the warring hand of YHWH against his people⁵⁶ and later in Jer. 32, it is first of all used in v. 17⁵⁷ together with the motif of creation of heaven and earth (with the occurrence of the verb עָשָׂה and the nouns שָׁמַיִם and אֶרֶץ) and that of his absolute power (לֹא-יִפְּלֵא מִמֶּךָ כָּל-דְּבָר) as in Jer. 27:5, and again in v. 21⁵⁸ as a reminiscence of the Exodus wonders. Otherwise, the description occurs again in Deut. 4:34; 5:15; 7:9; 11:2; 26:8; Psa. 136:12. The military tone characteristic of this phrase is not evident here, and the divine self-description in these terms relativises already any other exercise of power. The power of Babylon, which is the subject of v. 6, becomes clearly contingent.

27:5 concludes with the phrase: יִנְתְּתֶיהָ לְאִשֶּׁר יִשֶׁר בְּעֵינַי “I have given it to whomever it is pleasing in my eyes”, a phrase which tallies with the idea in the sentence by emphasising the absolute power of YHWH, just as has appeared in Jer. 18:4 in the story of the encounter between Jeremiah and the potter: as the potter reworks the clay as it seems good in his eyes (כַּאֲשֶׁר יִשֶׁר בְּעֵינַי הַיּוֹצֵר), so YHWH can “at one moment declare concerning any nation or kingdom...” (Jer. 18:7). Apart from the use in Jeremiah, the phrase recalls

⁵⁵ “And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath”.

⁵⁶ See H. WEIPPERT, *Jahwehkrieg und Bundesfluch in Jer. 21:1-7*, in *ZAW* 82 (1970), p. 396-409.

⁵⁷ “Ah, Lord YHWH, you made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. To you nothing is impossible.”

⁵⁸ “You brought your people Israel out of Egypt with signs and wonders, with mighty hand and outstretched arm and fearsome terror”.

especially elements in the history of the Kings where *יֵשֶׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה* occurs as part of the formula used to evaluate the reign of the kings⁵⁹. The most classical example is the evaluation given of David's reign in I Kings 15:5: "Because David did that which was right in the eyes of YHWH (*יֵשֶׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה*) and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite". Exactly the same expression (*הִיֶּשֶׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה*) is used for king Hezekiah in II Kings 18:3 and for king Josiah in II Kings 22:2. Other kings who received the same evaluation include Asa (cf. I Kings 15:1), Jehoshaphat (22:43), Jehu (II Kings 10:30), Jehoash (cf. II Kings 12:2), Amaziah (14:3), Azariah (15:3), Jothan (15:34)⁶⁰. But it has to be noted that the case of Jer. 27:5 departs slightly both at the semantic and interpretative level: each of the evaluations of the kings mentioned above has the verb *עָשָׂה* with the king in question as the subject, the common translation being that "King X did what is pleasing in the eyes of YHWH". The statement becomes a positive evaluation of the particular king in question. In other words, the individual king's standing before YHWH is the issue, which is not the case with 27:5 with regard to Nebuchadnezzar. But ironically, the sense could also be that, since the kings of Judah have done what is displeasing to YHWH, the latter gives out the land in order to punish them.

As regards the patriarchal narratives evoked by the text of Jer. 27:4-8, reference should be made specifically of v. 6 with its "echo of the patriarchal promises"⁶¹, especially the expression *נָתַן אֲרֵץ* which recalls the promise of the land to the patriarch Isaac and his descendants in Gen. 26:3: "Remain for the present in that land; I shall be with you and bless you, for I shall give all these lands to you and your descendants in fulfilment of the oath I swore to your father Abraham". In both verses, the word *אֲרֵץ* occurs in the plural (*אֲרָצֵי-כְנָעַן*); in Gen. 26:3, the recipient of the promise is Judah ("to you [Isaac] and your descendants") while in Jer. 27:6 it is Nebuchadnezzar (in the third person). In many

⁵⁹ J. HILL, *Friend or Foe?* p. 133.

⁶⁰ The phrase enjoys a wider usage than the history of kings. It appears also in the Pentateuch (see Deut. and other prophetic books (cf. Deut. 21:9: "You must banish all shedding of innocent blood from among you, if you mean to do what is right in the eyes of YHWH").

⁶¹ J. HILL, *Friend or Foe?* p. 133.

other instances, it concerns the gift (conquest) of the land to Israel by YHWH (cf. Exo. 23:31; Num. 21:34; Deut. 2:24; 3:2; Josh. 2:24; 8:1; 28:8; Judg. 1:2; 18:10). This is not the case in Jer. 27. Here, the expression *נתן ... ארץ ... ביד*, introduces a nuance, mainly military, but which is absent in the other texts evoked. The gift will be given not to Israel but to another, to Babylon. Already in Jer. 26, the word *יד* had occurred three times (v. 14 and 24 twice), all with reference to Jeremiah. In each case it is a question of life or death.

Here in Jer. 27, these motifs evoked serve different narrative functions. First they prepare the reader for the eventual startling decree of submitting to the power of an otherwise known enemy, thereby heightening the element of identity before the final phase of difference in a metaphorical articulation. Since these motifs are in the main expressions of the omnipotence of YHWH, they prepare the reader again for the surprise about his absolutely free ways and doings. It is only at the backdrop of a YHWH who is sovereign and against whose absolute power there is no appeal, that what follows in the subsequent decrees, first to the neighbouring nations, to Zedekiah and then to the priests and prophets could be understood. It is not just Israel's national God who is at work, but the God of creation of the earth who makes his decision in concrete political issue as Weippert analyses:

“Nicht der nationale Gott Israels, sondern der weltweit anzuerkennende Schöpfer der Erde macht den Mächtigen der Welt seine Entscheidung in einer konkreten politischen Situation bekannt. Das Ziel, dem Wort Jahwes über die Grenzen Judas hinaus Geltung zu verschaffen, führt aber nicht dazu, dass Jahwe sein Gesicht nun hinter einer internationalen Maske verbirgt. Auch als Weltschöpfer bleibt er unverändert und deutlich erkennbar der Gott seines Volkes. Die Wendung ‘mit meiner grossen Kraft und meinem ausgestreckten Arm’ [...], die in Jer 27,5 Eigenschaften des Weltschöpfers beschreibt, war den unter den Zuhörern sicherlich auch anwesenden Judäern recht vertraut; denn sie hat ebenso wie die häufiger belegte Formel, ‘mit starker Hand und ausgestrecktem Arm’ ihren festen Platz in Exodusgeschehen. ‘Mit starker Hand und ausgestrecktem Arm’ bzw. ‘mit grosser Kraft und ausgestrecktem Arm’ hat Jahwe sein Volk aus Ägypten

herausgeführt, und es ist dieser Gott, der sich nun als Weltschöpfer und Schöpfer von Mensch und Tier zu erkennen gibt”⁶².

3.2.1.2.2.3 Two Possible Eventualities and the Warning against False Prophets (v. 8-11)

The decree to the nations begun in v. 3 is far from ended⁶³ and v. 8-11 pursue it by highlighting two opposing possibilities; v. 8 and 11, negative and positive respectively, framing a warning against false prophecy. This warning against false prophecy is further highlighted in that it is cast in a striking second-person address, appearing in between the impersonal third-person conditional statements found in both v. 8 and v. 11. We have therefore a warning against false prophecy (v. 9-10) in between a warning of devastation (v. 8) and an alternative assurance (v. 11)⁶⁴. In the whole of these four verses, the term עִבֵּר occurs in a conspicuous regularity, a total of 4 times.

v. 8 (first possibility) And it will be (that) the nation and the kingdom that shall not serve him (עִבֵּר), Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that shall not put its neck in/under the yoke of the king of Babylon, with sword and by famine and by pestilence I will visit that nation, oracle of YHWH, until my finishing them with his hand.

v. 9-10 (warning against false prophets)

v. 9 And you, do not listen to your prophets and to your diviners and to your dreams and to your soothsayers and to your sorcerers who are saying to you saying ‘you shall not serve (עִבֵּר) the king of Babylon,

⁶² H. WEIPPERT, *Schöpfer des Himmels und der Erde*, p. 67.

⁶³ As against Brueggemann who sees four oracles in the chapter and makes a break between v. 3-7 and v. 8-11. For Brueggemann, while v. 8-11 “is formally addressed to the nations, we may imagine that this is a rhetorical way of addressing Judah and more specifically King Zedekiah”, BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 245. For him also “it is likely that the announcement in Jer. 27:1-11, ostensibly addressed to the nations, is in fact addressed to the Jerusalem community in the years of Zedekiah” and in v. 12-15 “that address is made explicit” (p. 246). This interpretation does not however have the support of the text. Zedekiah is mentioned only from v. 12. And there are no grounds to suspect the disruption of the progression of the text between 3-7 and 8-11.

⁶⁴ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 245.

v. 10 for falsehood (a lie) they are prophesying to you in order to make you distant from on your land, and I will banish you and you will perish’.

v. 11 (second possibility) But the (any) nation that will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him (עבד), I will settle it down on its land, oracle of YHWH, and it (the nation) shall till (work [עבד]) it and shall dwell in it’.

The reader notices a common structure in the three parts, each beginning with the subject; either the ‘nation’ or ‘you’, followed by a statement of evaluation of the possible act of the subject and then ending with the consequence of the act posed by the subject, consequence always presented as the action of YHWH and not that of Nebuchadnezzar.

The nation and the kingdom ...

that shall not serve him...

I will visit

You...

do not listen to... (if you do)

I will banish

The nation ...

that will bring its neck under the yoke...

I will settle

The same phenomenon of shift in meaning of the verb in the fourth occurrence in v. 6-7 is repeated here in v. 8-11 (see v. 8, 9, 11 [two times]). In v. 11b, the fourth occurrence in this section, the verb עבד refers no longer to serving the king of Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar) like in the three previous cases, but to the blessings following those who listen to YHWH, who will be privileged to be allowed to live in the land and till (עבד) it.

- Two Possible Eventualities: Danger of Devastation (v. 8) and Assurance (v. 11).

In v. 8 it is a question of the fate of the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon (and afterwards named specifically) and that will not put (נָתַן) its neck in the yoke of the king of Babylon⁶⁵. Whether ‘not serving Nebuchadnezzar’ is a question of sheer refusal of the hegemony of Babylon⁶⁶, or of involuntary submission, i.e. abandon under the powerful force of Babylon after futile resistance, the consequence that follows is the threefold threat of “sword, famine and pestilence” (חֶרֶב וָרָעָב וּבִבְהֶרֶת)⁶⁷, which will eventually end in destruction. This threefold threat is also found in 27:13; 29:17, 18 and ten other times in the book of Jeremiah⁶⁸. V. 8 ends by implying or even insisting that YHWH is the principal factor, leaving for Nebuchadnezzar an instrumental role and position: “I will visit (אָפְקֵר) that nation”... “in his hand” (בְּיָדוֹ). The alternative assurance (v. 11), which closes the message to the foreign kings, is presented equally in the same third-person form as v. 8, the warning of devastation. In many respects this verse contrasts v. 8 by the repetition of the key words and phrases: the nations (הַגּוֹיִם) - leaving off “and kingdoms”-, serving the king of Babylon and bringing of neck into the yoke of the latter. These last two are reversed while in v. 11 the verb בּוֹא (hiphil) is used in place of נָתַן to express the

⁶⁵ עַל מִלְכָּךְ בְּבָבֶל, “yoke of the king of Babylon” here is a common ancient Near Eastern phraseology to designate authority, rule or domination. In various parts of the Old Testament, the yoke is used as a symbol of dominion. For example, the image for the dominance of Jacob over Esau his brother in Gen. 27:40, and Solomon over the tribes of the north in I Kings 12:4. It becomes the image of the slavery in Egypt in Lev. 26:13, the oppression by Assyria in Isa. 9:3; 10:27; 14:25, by Babylon in Isa. 47:6; Jer. 30:8; Ezek. 34:27, even though in the book of Jeremiah also, the yoke image is sometimes used of service to God from which the people had abandoned (or revolted) cf. 2:20: “For of old time you have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and you said, I will not serve; for upon every high hill and under every green tree you wander, playing the harlot”.

⁶⁶ This is Brueggemann’s phrasing; see BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 245.

⁶⁷ These threats need not be understood only supernaturally since they can also be the predictable result of an occupying army. That means that the nation that resists submission could be invaded and devastated. See also BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 245. On the curses like the three-fold threat mentioned above, see also D.R. HILLERS, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (Biblica and Orientalia 16), Rome, 1964.

⁶⁸ Cf. Jer. 14:12; 21:7, 9; 24:10; 32:24; 32:36; 34:17; 38:2; 42:17; 44:13.

act of voluntary submission to the king of Babylon. One other feature is striking in v. 11: two wordplays, which reinforce the rhetorical effect of the sentence. There is assonance between *וְהִדְחֵתִי* (“I will drive out”) in v. 10 and *וְהִנְחֵתִי* (“I shall leave, cause to rest”) in v. 11 highlighting the contrast. Finally in v. 11 proper, one verb is repeated to link act and consequence⁶⁹: the nation that will serve him *וְעִבְדוּ* (that is Nebuchadnezzar), will, for that reason, till its land *וְעִבְדָה*.

- Warning against False Prophets (v. 9-10)

Between the two possible outcomes, between the danger of devastation and the alternative assurance, the text warns against false prophets and against an array of five sorts of pagan soothsayers⁷⁰: “your prophets, diviners, dreamers, soothsayers and sorcerers”⁷¹ though the word *הַלְמַחֲזִיקִים* is a noun plural and is to be translated as substantive (‘dreams’) and not as participle (even though some versions have the participle, dreamers, see BHS, textual note on v. 9). That a warning (interdiction) of such nature be found in the midst of the two contrary possible situations is a way of counteracting these voices which seduce the people to imagine that there is a “third option”, or “third alternative” in Brueggemann’s phrasing⁷². As said already, variants of this single warning command, here expressed as a second person address, appear in the chapter, one for each of Jeremiah’s three audiences (cf. v. 9-10; 14-15; 16b-17) and will be seen again in 28:15 and 29:8-9. The common element in all of them is the question of falsehood, and the language of the warning recalls the catalogue of Deut. 18:9-13. Framed on the one hand by ‘serving the king of Babylon’ and on the other by ‘bringing of the neck under the yoke of the latter’ (v. 8 and 11), the first of the two in-between verses (v. 9) takes over the central element of the (negative) possibility in v. 8 and

⁶⁹ See SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 51-52.

⁷⁰ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 121.

⁷¹ For the explanations of these terms and the biblical usages and nuances, see HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 121-122; LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 317-318. See also H.B. HUFFMON, *Prophecy in the ANE*, in *IDBS*, p. 697-700; M. OTTOSSON & G. J. BOTTERWECK, *קלם*, *TDOT* 4, p. 421-432; I. MENDENSOHN, *Magic*, in *IDB*, 3:224-225.

⁷² BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 245.

counteracts it (“do not listen [v. 9] to those who say to you ‘you shall not serve’”), the second (v. 10) anticipates indirectly the positive element in v. 11 by making clear that this punishment begins with deportation (“I will drive you out”), the opposite of the assurance offered in v. 11 (I will leave, cause to rest). The image is presented thus:

v. 8 *And it will be (that) nations and kingdom that shall not serve him, NEBUCHADNEZZAR THE KING OF BABYLON, AND THAT SHALL NOT PUT ITS NECK IN/UNDER THE YOKE OF THE KING OF BABYLON(...).*

v. 9 *And you, you shall not listen to your prophets (...) who say to you: ‘you shall not serve the king of Babylon,*

v. 10 *for falsehood (a lie) they are prophesying to you in order to **make you distant from the land, and I will banish you and you will perish.***

v. 11 *AND THE (ANY) NATION THAT WILL BRING ITS NECK UNDER THE YOKE OF THE KING OF BABYLON AND SERVE HIM, **I will settle it down on its land, oracle of YHWH, and it (the nation) shall till (serve) it and shall dwell in it’.***

3.2.2 Oracle Report for Zedekiah (v. 12-15)

Almost the same message in general terms in the preceding verses containing the two themes: “bring your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon” and “do not heed the false prophets” is given again but this time to king Zedekiah in particular (cf. v. 12a: “to Zedekiah ... I said ...”). Of course, v. 12 indicates פְּקֹלֵ-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה (like all these words, or in similar words), referring to what has been delivered to the foreign kings through their ambassadors⁷³. However, it is couched in second person plural immediately after introducing Zedekiah in v. 12a (the verbs and noun [בוא, עבר, חיה, and צָנָאָר] in the rest of the verse are all in plural) and the second person plural persists till the end of the

⁷³ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 122.

section⁷⁴. McKane's reflection on this section runs thus: "It is then not at all clear to whom Jeremiah's words are addressed and, though Sept. indicates that the audience at vv. 12-15 and 16-22 are partially common, according to Ziegler's text, this does nothing to remove the obscurity and the identity of the group to which vv. 12-15 refer is lost in the darkness"⁷⁵. The possible explanation to this shift in person is that it is probable that the address is made to the community under the king⁷⁶ as could be gleaned from the question of v. 13: "why will you die (תָּמוּתוּ second person plural), you (אַתָּה singular) and your people (וְעַמְּךָ).

Because of the elements taken from the preceding section in this one, the reader therefore treads on familiar grounds. There are three commands (expressed in three imperative verbs) in v. 12, which are logically connected to each other. The first, "bring your necks into the yoke of the king of Babylon" links to the sign act of Jeremiah in v. 2 and alludes to v. 8 where the phrase "the yoke of the king of Babylon" occurs for the first time. The second imperative "and serve him" (וְעָבַדְתֶּם) concretises and interprets the first, while the third (וְחָיִיתֶם) "and live" marshals out the consequences or the benefits if the first commands are heeded to. V. 13 reflects the negative alternative of v. 8 and appears here in form of a rhetorical question: "why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, by the famine and by the plague..." The mention of the three fold elements, death by "sword, famine, and pestilence" for refusal to serve the king of Babylon is exactly repeated, but while in v. 8 it is addressed to the foreign kings as threat and as a statement of fact, here it is addressed to Zedekiah (and his people) as an appeal, a persuasive question, as if to ask "why should you also be part of this threat as YHWH has decreed against that nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?" The passion in this question leads therefore to an offer of clue in v. 14-15; verses almost identical with v. 9, with three major differences: the additional charge against the prophets or a denunciation: "I did not send them" (v.

⁷⁴ On this ground Holladay maintains that in v. 12-15, "the diction of the speech is inconsistent", HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 122, while for McKane, "v. 12 is contradicted by the grammar of v. 12-15", MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 696.

⁷⁵ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 696.

⁷⁶ Cf. BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 246.

15), the absence of the longer list of diviners, dreamers, soothsayers and sorcerers as in v. 9 and the inclusion of the prophets themselves explicitly in the sentence of banishment and destruction. The absence of this denunciation “I have not sent them” in v. 5-11 (or v. 9 especially) is understandable in that the neighbouring kings and nations had no reason in the first place to imagine that their prophets and intermediaries had been sent by YHWH, the God of Israel⁷⁷. In v. 14, it is the Judean prophets who are described as prophesying ‘you (in plural) shall not serve the king of Babylon’ with the expression *לֹא תַעֲבֹדוּ*, an ambiguous but significant rendering. It could be a description of the future meaning ‘it will not happen’ or an absolute negative imperative ‘do not serve’. Even though the imperative form is stronger and more offensive, each of the renderings puts the prophets in opposition with the words of YHWH as pronounced by the prophet Jeremiah, because it then means that the prophets in question interdict the people from accomplishing that which YHWH has commanded, according to the words of Jeremiah. The plural form of address confirms once more that it is not only Zedekiah who is the recipient of the message, but he, together with the community⁷⁸.

3.2.3 Oracle Report for Priests and People: The Temple Furnishings (v. 16-22)

In v. 16-22, the third and the last unit of the chapter, a new subject of controversy: the issue of the temple vessels carried off to exile is introduced but which makes no literary or thematic dichotomy with the rest of the chapter. Therefore the opinion of McKane stands contestable:

“There is not only a change of scene at vv. 16-22, but also the introduction of a highly particular subject, derived from 28:2-4 [...] and secondary in chapter 27 whose nucleus consists of Jeremiah’s symbolic action and its explication. The entrance of the temple vessels is a sudden and disconcerting departure which begins to be understandable only when the information supplied by 28:2-4 is made available: Hananiah predicted the return to Jerusalem of the temple vessels

⁷⁷ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 52.

⁷⁸ Cf. CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 533.

which had been carried off to Babylon in 597 ‘within two years’ (28:3) as an example of the swift deterioration of the power of Babylon”⁷⁹.

The first notice is that this theme of the temple vessels in this last part furnishes an inclusion for this third part:

the vessels of the house of YHWH

will be brought back from Babylon...

v. 16

the vessels... in the house of YHWH

v. 21

to Babylon ... until... I bring them back

v. 22

But the substance of the material at this point of the narrative especially the first two verses (16-17) is very familiar to the reader. The *אֵלֵי־הַתְּשֻׁבָה* of v. 14 reoccurs again in v. 16 and v. 17; that means the same theme is taken up and developed in a new way. Here the attention of the reader is drawn to the warning once more about false prophets who claim that the deportation would not last long. The question of false prophecy becomes a continuum with the precedent while the issue of the temple vessels and the duration of their return becomes the new element that furthers the progression in the narrative. Even this new element is not unconnected with the precedent units since it has to do with the power of Babylon. Conquerors carried off articles like temple furnishings not simply and only because of their intrinsic value but because such exploits are proofs of defeat of the deity of the conquered people, in whose cult those articles were employed. In the words of Brueggemann, “the loss of such objects is passionately felt because it violates the highest symbolic, sacramental sensitivity of the adherents of the temple system”⁸⁰. In the context of the chapter therefore, the return of the vessels and furnishings would then be

⁷⁹ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* 2, p. 696. See also W. THIEL, *Die Deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26-45*, p. 6.

⁸⁰ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 248.

evidence of the break of Babylon's hegemony⁸¹, and this is part of the manifesto of the false prophets whose notion of the victory of YHWH is myopic and does not take care of his freedom, power, will and purpose. For priests and temple worshippers, articles from the temple would be of a particular concern. The promise of their return or of their immediate return would be to them especially an appealing message to hear. No wonder this last section concerning the fate of the temple furnishings is addressed to the priests and the people. Two stages in the argument of this section could be noticed, v. 16-17 and v. 18-22.

3.2.3.1 v. 16-17

The oracle in these two verses more or less reiterate the preceding announcement made to the nations (v. 3-11) and to Zedekiah (v. 12-15) and in a particular way as a whole is constructed in the same logic (inverse) as the oracle in v. 12-15, especially v. 12-14.

- v. 12-13 **Put your neck in the yoke of the king of Babylon**
serve him and his people and live
why will you and your people die by sword, famine and pestilence?
- v. 14 **STOP LISTENING TO THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS WHO SAY TO YOU**
you will not serve the king of Babylon
for they are prophesying falsehood to you
- v. 16 **STOP LISTENING TO THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS**
behold the furnishings of the Lord's house will be soon back from
Babylon
for they are prophesying falsehood to you
- v. 17 **Do not listen to them,**
serve the king of Babylon and live
why should this city become a ruin?

V. 16, like v. 14, is a prohibition against paying attention to the optimistic prophets and YHWH's assessment of those prophets. The prohibition is repeated in v. 17, followed by

⁸¹ Cf. P.R. ACKROYD, *The Temple Vessels: A Continuity Theme* in G.W. ANDERSON *et al.* (eds.), *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (VTS 23), Leiden, 1972, p. 166-181.

positive paraenetic appeal (“serve the king of Babylon”), which is in turn followed by a rhetorical question like that of v. 13 beginning with the interrogatory particle (הֲלֹא?). The presence of these thematic elements in the previous sections of the narrative goes to disprove McKane’s suggestion of a “sudden and disconcerting departure”⁸². There is also the connection between the preaching of the false prophets and the question of the return of the vessels. The false prophets do not preach only the coming to end of the hegemony of Babylon. One of the signs of this cessation of authority will be the return of the sacred vessels, to show that YHWH will restore elements of his people’s cult for him.

3.2.3.2 v. 18-22

Jeremiah therefore assumes that to true prophets belongs the prophetic task of intercession for the fate of the vessels left in the temple and so the argument advances in a quite new direction. Instead of fantasising about what is already decreed, they should rather devote their attention to intercessory prayer so that Babylon does not strike again to take what remained of the temple. The assumption of this challenge, that is, entering into an intercession of this nature, would mean that Jeremiah’s prophecy that Babylon would attack the city and temple again has been accepted as a true prophecy. There is no evidence to give a sarcastic interpretation to this verse or to see the challenge simply as a “playful invitation”⁸³: Jeremiah himself has been forbidden to intercede (Jer. 11:14; 14:11-22) and there is an implicit undertone here that there is the possibility of YHWH relenting (cf. Jer. 26:3), since this verse parallels v. 11 above where a positive disposition has been given as alternative possibility if the nations submit to the king of Babylon: in order that they be permitted to live in their land; and in v. 17 where the same idea occurs again: serve the king of Babylon and live. But that the text acknowledges that the prophets are false is not doubted. That is why the verse should rather be interpreted as a “contrary-to-fact conditional statement”⁸⁴; that is, “they are no prophets: if they were, then their behaviour would have been altogether different”⁸⁵.

⁸² MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 696.

⁸³ So BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 248.

⁸⁴ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 118, 123.

⁸⁵ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 118.

But in the final verses, it becomes evident that Jeremiah has invited his false adversaries to a task they cannot possibly achieve, partly because they are not authentic prophets (for they were not sent, v. 15), and because the will of YHWH is contrary. The subjects of the proposed intercession in v. 18 run through the remaining verses: they are mentioned successively in v. 19 (v. 20 being a circumstantial clause) while their definitive fate is marshalled in v. 21-22. The fact that Nebuchadnezzar would carry even more vessels to Babylon functions here to counteract the view of the optimistic prophets (see v. 16-17). The will of YHWH for the temple furnishings is expressed finally in terms of both judgement and salvation (v. 22): they shall be carried to Babylon “until the day I will give attention to them” (פָּקַד) and bring them up⁸⁶ and return them back to this place. The וַי “until” of v. 22, re-echoing that of v. 7 confirms once more the sovereignty of YHWH who is not coterminous with the empire of Babylon, but who makes the latter only an episode in his sovereignty, “an important episode but not to be taken with ultimate seriousness”⁸⁷. V. 22 ends the narrative with the note of the eventual restoration of the sacred vessels “to this place”, leading Carroll to conclude that v. 22 reversed “the note of doom” and “in a subtle way vindicates Hananiah (in chapter 28) but because 27 and 28 are independent variations on a theme, there is no conscious acknowledgement of that vindication”⁸⁸. This position does not have the support of the text since v. 18-22 set out a

⁸⁶ The expression used to express the act of bringing up here is הִשְׁלִיכֵם, the *hiphil* of the root עלה. Carroll notes the strangeness of the term, which he identifies as a term appropriate for a sacred procession, see CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 537. In many instances in the Pentateuch, the verb refers to “going up to Egypt” (cf. Gen. 46:4; Exo. 33:1) or is used in cultic context (Exo. 18:12; 29:18).

⁸⁷ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 249.

⁸⁸ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 537, conclusion of course reached from historical-critical and ideological bias: Carroll reminds that 27:16-22 as a discussion of the fate of the temple furnishings belongs to the world of Ezra and the Chronicler and bears on the social controversy behind the rebuilt temple and the rebuilding of Jerusalem relating to power in the community and the right to reorganise the cult. The questions for him border on when will the furnishings return from Babylon and whose party is in the right with reference to them? According to him, the attempt or struggle to answer such questions is reflected in the conflict between prophets in 27:16-28:9. “The importance of the cultic furnishings, their survival in Babylon and their return to Jerusalem *after* having been preserved for a long time in exile are the central issues in the dispute”, CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 535.

train of events that directly contradict the words of Hananiah in the following chapter: “I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon within two years”⁸⁹ (28:2). However, whether the prophets (v. 16) were right after all but only wrong in matter of timing⁹⁰ is not of dense consequence since right or wrong, authentic or inauthentic is not only a question of eventual fulfilment of prophecy, but (that as well) over and above all a question of divine commission, of either presenting the naked reality to the people or of deceiving them to their destruction (cf. v. 9-10, 14-15,17), an argument which the narrator would pursue by the plot of chapter 28.

Transition

Most of the major biblical texts that come readily to mind on reading chapter 27 have been partially evoked above. However the first issue that strikes the reader of Jer. 27 (MT) is the theme of submission to the domination of a foreign nation/king, which in the preceding century in biblical history was also the theme in II Kings 18 (cf. Isa. 36-37). Basic similarities are noteworthy: both concern submission to an attacking power and share similarities of language (see 27:12-15//II Kings 18:1-32, see especially v. 31-32). There are in each case the admonition “do not listen” (אל-תשמעו): Jeremiah to the three addressees in Jer. 27 (cf. 27:9, 14, 17) and Rabshakeh to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (cf. II Kings 18:31), and equally the imperative of the verb *חיה* (*חיה*): cf. Jer. 27:12 and II Kings 18:32). But the basic difference is that the advice in both texts have mutually exclusive goals. Where Isaiah advises Hezekiah to stand firm against the attacker, Jeremiah on the other hand counsels his audiences to submit. And this is precisely one of the specific theological significance of our text as regards the question of authenticity in matters of prophecy. True prophecy in the words of Brueggemann is saying the right thing at the right time⁹¹. The point at stake is that YHWH the Lord of history cannot be gagged by the confines and the vagaries of history. Deliverance of Jerusalem in days of Hezekiah must not be repeated here⁹² in Jer. 27 (cf. also Jer. 21:1-10), as if all historical circumstances

⁸⁹ This is also the opinion of McKane, see MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 704.

⁹⁰ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 537.

⁹¹ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 260.

⁹² J. HILL, *Friend or foe?* p. 140.

were the same, historical circumstances which prophecy, true to its name, must not isolate⁹³, for, using Brueggemann's phrasing, "if the present-tense reality of God cannot be discerned, then any prophetic discernment is likely ideology. Thus yesterday's certitude has become today's distorting ideology"⁹⁴.

Another element that strikes the reader most in reading these oracles of chapter 27 is the obsessive repetition of the same theme in the chapter. At the end of chapter 26 the reader gets impression of how the judgement goes in favour of the prophet as authentic prophet. But the preaching of the prophet in that chapter satisfies normal sensibilities: a call to repentance, failure of which the city and temple will be destroyed. But the fulfilment of this role in chapter 27, judging from the content of the oracles received by the prophet by YHWH goes beyond normal expectation. Everywhere in the chapter, it is the question of serving Nebuchadnezzar, the relationship with the Babylonian king, the injunction to submit to this pagan king and especially again the denunciation of false prophecy. These emphases hit hard on the conception of the reader for such a prophet with only but negative oracles to deliver. That goes the same for a YHWH who gives such messages. Again, though in chapter 27, it is everywhere a question of attacking false prophets, but till the end of the chapter, the text talks about and denounces false prophets in a very general manner, about what they say and about the necessity of not listening to them. None of the false prophets surfaces yet as an active character in the reading. Moreover, the positive elements in chapter 27 (v. 7b, 22) are yet only but promises in the distant indefinite future. Chapter 28 would fill the vacuum by the introduction of a prophet with

⁹³ This position will be developed in Part Three of this work. In the main, it is true that the words of Isaiah were vindicated in the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrians in a century before the era of Jeremiah and there is no doubt that such historical incidence gave room to a false confidence in Jerusalem or in the inviolability of Zion. This hope, rooted in an old, treasured memory has become an ideological distortion, having no reflection to what YHWH does in the concrete moment. And the obliteration of this memory, or the correction of this credo seems to be one of the functions of the block 26-29 in the book of Jeremiah. See also BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 251. And on temple ideology and its effects, see B.C. OLLENBURGER, *Zion the City of the Great King* (JSOTS 41), Sheffield, 1987, p. 59-66.

⁹⁴ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 251.

a contrary orientation, Hananiah. The reader then passes from a more generic approach of the problem to a more specific approach. And so the theme of the sacred vessels and their return in the indefinite future with which chapter 27 closes, opens up the narrative of chapter 28 with Hananiah prophesying their immediate return, therefore proving a concrete example of the false prophets being denounced in chapter 27.

CHAPTER FOUR

JER. 28: VERITY-FALSITY DRAMATISED: DISCERNMENT OF CRITERIA

Introduction

“An audience hearing this narrative (of chapter 28) following the narrative of chap. 27 would appreciate how things at the time were building to a grand climax. Jeremiah’s word mandating submission to the king of Babylon is given first to foreign envoys visiting the city, then to King Zedekiah, and then to priests and the people of Jerusalem. When will it be spoken to the prophets? The audience knows that they were the ones most offended, because Jeremiah had been telling everyone not to listen to them. What comes now in chap. 28 is a face-to-face meeting between Jeremiah and a lead prophet of the opposition. This has to rank as one of the most extraordinary encounters between true and false prophets in the Bible, comparable only with the meeting of Elijah and the prophets of Baal in Mount Carmel, where Yahweh’s word and truth itself shines forth with unbelievable clarity”¹.

The narrative in this chapter is again evidently a brief unit of prophetic biography². The beginning of the verse is told in the first person “the prophet Hananiah son of Azzur said to me in the house of the YHWH”. This chapter in the main, exemplifies a dispute or duel between Jeremiah and the opposing prophets personified in Hananiah, with the purpose of discerning the criteria for true prophetic proclamation and showing the truth of Jeremiah’s prophetic utterance³. Many studies of varying approaches have been devoted

¹ LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 342.

² See THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 538.

³ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 126. G. WANKE, *Untersuchungen zur sogenannten Baruchsschrift*, p. 156. For a very serious opposition to this point of view, see Carroll whose basic tenet concerning the composition of the book of Jeremiah is his belief that the book is a product of ideological conflict between clashing ideological groups. For Carroll, though “the chapter has attracted much special attention, especially in relation to questions about false prophecy and criteria for evaluating different prophets [...], the chapter offers no criteria for distinguishing between prophets because it is set in a tradition where

to the chapter from this perspective⁴. Our study of the chapter here will concentrate in exploring the narrative devices with regard to words, places and time, through which the narrator has constructed his plot and how, from the point of view of this construction, one can really say that the issue of true and false prophecy, and particularly the discernment of the criteria for distinguishing the true from the false, is the bone of contention in the chapter. Our first task will be justification of our option of treating the chapter as a separate narrative from the preceding chapter with which it has many ties, then the delimitation and structuring of the text, a rapid narrative glance at the text where the interest will also be pinpointing the problematic in the text, to be considered in details in the third section while considering the plot of the narrative.

Jeremiah is already established as the true prophet (e.g. 26:15-16) and in the confrontation between Jeremiah and Hananiah there are no differentiating marks which single out some of the prophets as true of false". He further argues that no careful exegesis could produce evidence from the text to back Jeremiah against Hananiah in matters regarding verity or falsity, CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 547. In other words, "the redaction is committed to Jeremiah, therefore Hananiah is false", CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 550. See also R.P. CARROLL, *A Non-Cogent Argument in Jeremiah's Oracles against the Prophets*, in *ST* 30 (1976), p. 43-51.

⁴ E. OSSWALD, *Falsche Prophetie im alten Testament* (Sammlung gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religionsgeschichte 237), Tübingen, 1962; T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood: A Study in the Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (SBTSS 16), Naperville, 1970, p. 37-45; H. SEEBASS, *Jeremia's Konflikt mit Chanania: Bemerkungen zu Jer 27 und 28*, in *ZAW* 82 (1970), p. 449-452; F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Prophet gegen Prophet: Eine Analyse der alttestamentlichen Texte zum Thema: Wahre und falsche Propheten* (BB 9), Freiburg, 1973, p. 90-103; I. MEYER, *Jeremia und die falschen Propheten*, Freiburg, 1977; S.J. DE VRIES, *Prophet Against Prophet: The Role of the Micaiah Narrative (I Kings 22) in the Development of Early Prophetic Tradition*, Grand Rapids, 1978, see p. 142-147 on "The Tests of True Prophecy"; D. LYS, *Jérémie 28 et le problème du faux prophète ou la circulation du sens dans le diagnostic prophétique*, in *RHPR* 59 (1979), p. 453-482; R.R. WILSON, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship), Philadelphia, 1984; C. COMBET-GALLAND, *Jérémie 28 ou le risque de la vérité*, in *Foi et Vie* 83/5 (1984), p. 70-77; J.P. SISSON, *Jeremiah and the Jerusalem Conception of Peace*, in *JBL* 105 (1986), p. 429-442; G. SHEPPARD, *True and False Prophecy within Scripture*, in T.D. PETERSON & R. WILSON (eds.), *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation*, Philadelphia, 1988, p. 262-282; J. THONDIPARAMBIL, *Prophecy as Theatre: An Exegetico-Theological Study of the Symbolic Acts in the Book of Jeremiah*, Rome, 1989, especially p. 101-104.

4.1 DELIMITATION AND STRUCTURE

4.1.1 *The Literary and Thematic Unity of Jer. 28*

Though it is clear there is a theme running through the whole block of Jer. 26-29, that of true and false prophecy as hinted in Part Two Chapter One, Jer. 28 however presents altogether some closer similarities with Jer. 27 which justifies, for reasons of convenience, some commentators' treatment of the two chapters of the book as a single narrative⁵ (see also Chapter Six of this Part). One of the most visible marks of this close unity is the fact that Jer. 27 could be considered as providing the exposition for Jer. 28. In 27:2, Jeremiah reports that YHWH asks him (כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי) to make a yoke, shoulder it and send messages to the foreign kings, to the king and the priests and people. In 28:1 he reports that Hananiah tells him (אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי הַחַיִּיָּה) the opposite of the contents of the message of YHWH in 27:2. Brueggemann however is equally right when he affirms that "though these chapters belong together thematically [...], they contain rather different materials"⁶. The independent nature of the individual chapters is still discernible. On the one hand, the introduction of chapter 28 with its peculiar date formula makes it the beginning of a separable unit and above all, not only that each of the two chapters has different characters and scenes, the nature of the narratives differ. On the other hand, while chapter 27 is all together a record of oracles of YHWH by Jeremiah, chapter 28 is a story cast in

⁵ As Scalise titled: "The Yoke of Nebuchadnezzar" (27:1-28:17 [LXX 34:1-35:17]), p. 38-59. For her, "Chaps. 27-28 must be read together in order to be understood properly in their present shape [...]. Four main features of the present shape of these chapters indicate they now form a unit (1) the story told or implied in the arrangement of the oracles and other materials; (2) the common formal pattern found in the oracles in both chapters; (3) intertextual connections by means of quotation, repetition, or allusion; (4) shared historical setting", SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 44. Brueggemann titled the two chapters: "The Yoke of Yahweh (27:1-28:17)", cf. BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 240-255. For an understanding of similar nature, see also F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Prophet gegen Prophet*, p. 90-103. This view by these authors is not wrong: there is no mention in the beginning of chapter 28 that Jeremiah strolls around with the yoke on his shoulders. The first reference to the yoke is in v. 10 when Hananiah snatches the yoke and breaks it. The information about the yoke on Jeremiah's shoulders has been given since 27:2.

⁶ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 240.

the third person after v. 1, and whereas chapter 27 is a three-part oracle of YHWH, chapter 28 is a stage-like narration of a person-to-person duel between Jeremiah and Hananiah, with a single intervention of YHWH, all interspersed by the narrator's comments. And for Holladay, though "in the case of chapters 27 and 28 at least, there is a unity of historical setting, the events on chapter 28 presupposing the actions and words of chapter 27 [...], the chapter divisions correspond with the divisions of the literary units, so that each chapter can be dealt with individually"⁷.

It is true that the question of the yoke (על) in Jer. 28:2 cannot be understood unless read as a follow up of Jer. 27:2, 12 and so Jer. 28 cannot be really considered apart, two further factors however allow a separate treatment of this chapter, though not in total isolation from its larger context. It is only in this chapter that the question of Hananiah is the issue, and where the only mention of Hananiah the prophet is found⁸. Though the narrative follows that of chapter 27, chapter 28 has a unity and interest of its own⁹ and the confrontation between the optimistic prophet and Jeremiah, with the direct quotations of each given, "gives the narrative a unique immediacy and interest"¹⁰. The neighbouring chapters of the block (in this case 26, 27 and 29) make clear allusions to the irruptions of the prophetic word, of the prophet who announces woes and converts king and people (cf. 26:18ff), of the prophet who announces threat and is executed (cf. 26:20ff), of the prophet who sends messages to neighbouring lands through their representatives, to kings, priests and all the people (cf. 27:1bff), of the prophet who deceives the people with illusions and against whom YHWH deals severely with (cf. 28:12-16; 29:24ff), but only here, in the words of Combet-Galland, "se joue de façon exemplaire, en une unité textuelle ramassée, le drame de la vérité et du mensonge, de l'écoute et de la révolte"¹¹.

⁷ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 116.

⁸ Hananiah is not mentioned any other place in the Old Testament. In the book of Jeremiah, the name 'Hananiah' comes up again twice, in 36:12 and 37:13 but of another interest all together.

⁹ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 126.

¹⁰ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 126.

¹¹ C. COMBET-GALLAND, *Jérémie 28 ou le risque de la vérité*, p. 70.

That is to say that the report is a “freighted, self-conscious narrative” and “points beyond itself to the great theological issue of truth and falsehood”¹².

4.1.2 Delimitation

There is a paradox as regards Jer. 28 in the context of the block of chapters 26-29. From a point of view, Jer. 28 does not seem to be an indispensable narrative or chapter in the narrative tram of the block since one can go directly from Jer. 27 to Jer. 29; that is from the preaching of the deportation in Jer. 27 to the letters to the exiles already deported in Jer. 29. The event of Jer. 28, the confrontation with Hananiah, looks therefore like an event between the preaching and its realisation, an event sparked off by the contestation by Hananiah of the message by Jeremiah. But on the other hand, this face to face confrontation is nevertheless the apex of the block because in this chapter is the confrontation between true and false prophecy actually dramatised, and the only chapter in the Hebrew Bible which deals solely on this problematic in such a tensed dramatised way¹³.

Moreover, there is a remarkable inclusion in the chapter as a whole: the chapter begins and ends by a dating that in each occasion concerns Hananiah, v. 1a and v. 17, and each of the datings effectively corresponds to a first encounter (meeting) and a last separation (death of Hananiah) between the two prophets. In these two verses which form inclusion, we notice the following key phrase repeated: “in that year”: *בְּשָׁנָה הַהִיא*, v. 1 and 17.

¹² BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 254.

¹³ There is admittedly some similarity of course with the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (cf. I Kings 18:21f.). But true that in this latter case, it is also a question of which prophet is true, it is more a question of which god is the true and potent God. The key issue is not the identity of the prophets, or which prophet is sent by God but which God is capable of working through his prophet(s). Cf. the prayer of Elijah for beckoning on YHWH to send fire down: “YHWH God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O YHWH, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the YHWH God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again” (I Kings 18:36-37). And when the proof is down, the reaction is thus: “And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, ‘the YHWH, he is the God; the YHWH, he is the God’” (v. 38).

4.1.3 Internal Structure

In the first instance, the narrative of Jer. 28 is framed by two temporal indications which envelop the first intervention of Hananiah in the temple and his dismissal from the face of the earth: “the fourth year of the reign of Zedekiah, in the fifth month” (v. 1) and “the same year, in the seventh month” (v. 17). Within this framework, two Acts can be neatly distinguished based on a rhythm of meeting and parting (v. 1-11 and v. 12-17). Interestingly the two Acts are each introduced by the conjunction particle: וַיְהִי “and it happened that Hananiah...” (v. 1), “and it happened that the word of YHWH...” (v. 12), and ends each with a concluding report by the narrator of the departure from the scene of one of the prophets: Jeremiah freely but to be recalled later by YHWH (time gap not determined in the narrative; “and the prophet Jeremiah went his way” v. 11), and Hananiah sent to death (“and the prophet Hananiah died in that year...” v. 17). Another common element is that each of the Acts begins with speech addressed to Jeremiah, either by Hananiah who believes that his words are from YHWH, or by YHWH himself.

There are other internal correspondences and inclusions in each of the Acts: the first half of the text (v. 1-11) is framed by the utterance כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה of Hananiah (v. 2 and v. 11, with the first, v. 2, containing צִבְאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל). In the second half, the phenomenon is repeated, but this time by YHWH. YHWH contradicts Hananiah saying also two times כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה (v. 13 and v. 14, and the last, v. 14, containing צִבְאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), on which basis Jeremiah can then say כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה (v. 16). The whole text is thus further framed by the כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה of Hananiah which opens the text (v. 2) and that of Jeremiah which closes it (v. 16). Within each of the two parts, sub-divisions can be noticed, following the interventions of the three speakers in the narrative, that is in the initiating of action between the two prophets or the intervention of YHWH. It is also striking that in a chapter that narrates the duel between two prophets, the narrator gives each of the prophets equal chance to speak; each of the prophets gets the floor twice, and in that wise YHWH who intervenes just once becomes sort of the arbiter. In the first Act, we have first Hananiah’s oracle (v. 2-4), then Jeremiah’s speech to Hananiah (v. 5-9), and finally Hananiah’s symbolic act and oracle (v. 10-11), and in the second Act, we have YHWH’s

commission to Jeremiah to prophesy (v. 12-14), and then Jeremiah's oracle to Hananiah (v. 12-16). Within the whole, the narrator's words can be read intermittently, but occupying the totality of v. 5, 10, 12 and 17.

ACT I: THE FACE-TO-FACE¹⁴ (v. 1-11)

Introduction of narrative: dating v. 1 – appearance of Hananiah

- A Oracle report of Hananiah to Jeremiah (v. 2-4)
- B Speech report of Jeremiah to Hananiah (v. 5-9)
- C Sign act and oracle report by Hananiah (v. 10-11)

ACT II: SENDING AND DISMISSAL (v. 12-17)

- A Divine commission to prophesy (v. 12-14)
- B Oracle report to Hananiah (v. 15-16)

Conclusion of narrative: dating (v. 17) – disappearance of Hananiah

The narrative is situated historically in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah and the temporal precisions “in that year...in the fifth month”, and the death of Hananiah “in the seventh month”, “in that year” gives the narrative a very clear definite narrated time. Everything took place within two months. The major question with regard to time and duration becomes how to repartition the time between the two scenes, that is, how to determine the temporal value of the “after” of v. 12. In other words, what duration of time passed between the moment when “Jeremiah went his way” and the irruption of YHWH's word and sending him back to Hananiah, after (אַחֲרָיִךְ) the latter had taken and broken the wooden yoke on his neck? The answer to this question will then determine the duration between the declaration of the death of Hananiah and his actual death. The text only says, “this year you will die” (v. 16) and that Hananiah died in that year in the seventh month (v. 17). To this question the text does not seem to give any indication.

¹⁴ It is true that Act II is equally a sort of confrontation since Jeremiah has to face Hananiah to talk to him directly in second person singular, but the aspect of confrontation differs from that of Act I in the sense that in the latter, the two prophets had occasions to speak and address each other (the sense of the “face-to-face”), while in Act II, Hananiah is not active, neither speaking nor acting but is rather addressed.

4.2 FIRST READING OF THE TEXT

4.2.1 Act I: *The Face-to-Face* (v. 1-11)

4.2.1.1 Introduction (v. 1)

As indicated above, Jer. 28 is a concrete and dramatic confrontation based on a dispute over the programmatic decree, which was the subject of the previous chapter (27). That is to say that the narrative of Jer. 28 has a very close link with that of chapter 27 (see 28:1) but made much more specific with the introduction of a new character and a new voice, that of Hananiah. The chapter begins with a complex date formula¹⁵, abnormal in the words of Bogaert¹⁶. Bogaert notes the three datings: in that year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, the fifth month of the fourth year, and he concludes, “c’est trop”¹⁷. But this dating has two functions, in the larger context on the one hand and in the context of the chapter on the other hand. First, it synchronises the events narrated in the preceding chapter with the new events related in chapter 28, with the verb היה (imperfect with *waw* consecutive) at the beginning of the narrative (v. 1) sustaining the connection between the

¹⁵ Holladay in his characteristic historical reconstruction to the minutest details sees the date formula as a historical setting for the narrative and that for him reports an incident occurring in the fifth month of Zedekiah’s fourth year, that is July/August 594. He sees the encounter with Hananiah as a plausible consequence of Zedekiah’s conference in Jerusalem to plan a rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, presupposed in 27:3; a conference which in turn is a plausible consequence of an aborted rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon in December 595/January 594. He concludes that the specificity of the notice of Hananiah’s death in September/October 594 (v. 17) speaks for the historicity of the narrative, HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah* 2, p. 127. Such is also the view of Clements for whom chapter 28 no doubt is an account “based upon an authentic incident relating to Jeremiah’s activity and message, containing as it does a number of circumstantial details”, details which we could assume “were reported through Baruch, or some other figure equally close to Jeremiah”, CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah*, p. 166. Carroll is clearly against this view: for him the chapter is “a story rather than a historical account of a real event”. This story portrays a clash of ideologies exemplified in two prophets: Hananiah a מְלִיץ prophet and Jeremiah a prophet of war, cf. CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 541-542.

¹⁶ P.-M. BOGAERT, *La datation par souscription dans les rédactions courte (LXX) et longue (TM) du livre de Jérémie*, in J. JOOSTEN & P. LE MOIGNE (eds.), *L’apport de la Septante aux études sur l’Antiquité* (LD 203), Paris, 2005, p. 137-159, see p. 152.

¹⁷ P.-M. BOGAERT, *La datation par souscription*, p. 153.

two¹⁸. That means, if 27:1a could be considered as the end of chapter 26 (forming an inclusion with the mention of the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah - 26:1a and 27:1a), then the reader would consider that the oracles of chapter 27 are not precisely dated, and that 28:1 supplies the date of the events of Jer. 27 and the events of Jer. 28. That means that the expression בַּשָּׁנָה הַהִיא would also mean the year of the episodes in the preceding chapter. Secondly, “the fifth month”, whose significance will eventually appear only at the end of the narrative, is mentioned here to show the speedy fulfilment of Jeremiah’s prophecy of the death of Hananiah who died according to v. 17, in the seventh month. The confrontational set up and character of the narrative is already hinted at by the use of the first person, “said to me”. Hananiah, a name which means “YHWH is gracious”, would give as prophecy the fact that YHWH is more immediately and powerfully gracious than Jeremiah can allow¹⁹. Interestingly, those in the presence of whom Hananiah utters his prophecy are the very audience of Jeremiah’s third oracle about the temple furnishings in 27:16-22: וְאֵלֵּי־כָל־הַעָם (the priests and all the people), a factor already mentioned that makes a neat connection between the narrative of chapter 28 and the last oracle of 27.

4.2.1.2 Oracle Report of Hananiah to Jeremiah (v. 2-4)

Hananiah, already introduced first in the narrative in his capacity as prophet (הַנְּבִיאַ v. 1) uses the classical messenger formulae יְהוָה כֹּה־אָמַר or נְאֻם־יְהוָה (v. 2, cf. also v. 4 and 11) just as Jeremiah (v. 16) as a claim to the divine source of his prophetic proclamation. Noticeable is that the first messenger formula of Hananiah כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (28:2a) is exactly the same with the formula for the last of the oracles of Jeremiah in Jer. 27 (cf. v. 21-22), another proof that the oracle is a response (by way of contradiction) to that of Jeremiah in the previous chapter. His first intervention is therefore to say that YHWH said that... Challenging the preceding assertion of Jeremiah in 27:16-22, the speech of Hananiah is that the Babylonian yoke is a broken yoke (v. 2b). The exile will

¹⁸ See also SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 53.

¹⁹ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 250.

end soon, within two years²⁰ and consequently, temple vessels will be restored (v. 3) and the exiled king will be quickly reinstated to power (v. 4). The mentioning of the vessels of the temple before the king is curious²¹ and could be explained from the backdrop of the larger unit. The narrator could have by this order wished to link this episode closely with Jer. 27:16-22 where the topic is the temple vessels²² and where the king is mentioned afterwards (cf. 27:20).

This oracle given by Hananiah (v. 2b-4) is attractive, both from the content and from the literary arrangement. In the first instance, from hindsight, the reader of Jer. 27 immediately knows that this salvation oracle has been prepared for²³ in the present organisation of the text²⁴ by 27:16, and already, the narrator prepares the reader with some bias to judge the credibility of the prophet. In 27:16, YHWH had already warned a specific audience not to pay attention to hopeful messages concerning the immediate return of the temple vessels. And the warning is given exactly to “the priests and all the people” (27:16a). Behold in 28:2b-4, a prophet has precisely such a message, given equally in the presence of the priests and all the people (end of v. 1). Concerning the literary structure, the oracle of Hananiah (2b-4) exhibits a concentric arrangement (A-B-C-B¹-A¹). Two categories of victims involved in the exile, cultic instruments and people (v. 3-4a), are immediately framed by the promise “I will make to return to this place” (v.

²⁰ The certainty of expression is interesting and as Hossfeld and Meyer remark, such precise timing is not so often in prophetic oracles. Likely parallel is 28:16, “in this year, you will die” (compare with 27:7, the three generation duration of Babylonian domination), see F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Prophet gegen Prophet*, p. 95.

²¹ McKane’s explanation of this verse goes the other way round and is informed by his convictions in matters concerning textual comparison: for him 27:16-22 derives from 28:2-4 and so he opines that possibly 28:4 did not contain יבניה ויאת when it generated 27:16-22, though he however admits that this is only conjectural, see MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 717.

²² Cf. also HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 128.

²³ Writes Lundbom: “We are prepared for this confrontation after hearing Jeremiah’s warning to the foreign envoys, king Zedekiah, and the priests and the people, that they not listen to prophets and seers of other description who are preaching rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar (27:14-18)”, LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 329.

²⁴ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 126.

3aβ and 4bα) and remotely by the declaration “I have broken/will break the yoke of the king of Babylon” (v. 2b and 4bβ):

- A. 2b I HAVE BROKEN THE YOKE OF THE KING OF BABYLON
 B. 3a in two years now, I will make to return to this place
 C. 3b-4a *all the vessels of YHWH's house which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon have taken from this place and brought to Babylon*
 C¹ *and Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the exiles of Judah that went to Babylon,*
 B¹. 4b I will make to return to this place, oracle of YHWH
 A¹. 4bβ FOR I WILL BREAK THE YOKE OF THE KING OF BABYLON

The reader notices that v. 2b is cast in the *qatal* while 4bβ is in the *yiqtol*. Why first the prophetic past? By beginning this speech thus, the definitiveness of the assertion is made evident, so that “in two years now” of v. 3a becomes an explanation or a giving of details of an already asserted opinion²⁵.

The narrative significance and strength of this oracle of Hananiah lies first and foremost in its inaugural character. The elements (the circumstantial details, the topographical conditions and the confrontational set up) in v. 1 make it challenging. Jeremiah perceives this challenge, made in the presence of the priests and all the people, in the temple as addressed to him personally. This is all the more made plausible since the speech writes off and disqualifies the givens in the two previous chapters: chapter 26 with its threat on the temple and the city, chapter 27 whose summary is the submission to the Babylonian yoke and the question of the duration and returning of the sacred vessels from Babylon. The narrator has therefore inaugurated and set a stage for a confrontation.

4.2.1.3 Speech Report of Jeremiah to Hananiah (v. 5-9)

The very first direct intervention of the narrator after v. 1 (the beginning of v. 5), underlines further the confrontational situation of the drama: “Jeremiah the prophet spoke

²⁵ The “in two years now” of B corresponds to “oracle of YHWH” in B¹ in the sense that it is the point of the opposition between Hananiah and Jeremiah: is this fact an oracle of YHWH?

to Hananiah the prophet²⁶, highlighting as well the same audience, “in the presence of the priests and in the presence of all the people who were standing in the house of YHWH”²⁷. And this confrontational character of “prophet against prophet” is always exhibited in all the verses that are entirely the words of the narrator (cf. v. 10, 12, see also v. 15a), except of course in v. 17 where it is only a question of the obituary announcement of Hananiah. Jeremiah publicly responds to the claim of Hananiah (v. 6-9)²⁸, a response that is his without any indication of a messenger formula or any

²⁶ “With both Jeremiah and Hananiah given the designation ‘the prophet’, added weight is attached to the confrontation”, LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 333.

²⁷ But curiously after this notice by the narrator of the same audience, Jeremiah in his speech in v. 7 neglects the priests and makes reference only to the people: “listen Hananiah to these words which I speak in your ears and in the ears of all the people”. It is therefore a bit strange that the priests who are also present and figure prominently in the audience, remain unacknowledged. See LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 334. Already in 26:13, the reader had noticed the neglect of the religious group, the priests and prophets, during the defence of Jeremiah when he turned his defence into another call to repentance directly only to the royal officials and to the people.

²⁸ Carroll points to the response of Jeremiah here as one of the reasons to believe in the independent nature of the story of chapter 28 in the context where it appears, or at least a variant tradition of the contents of Jer. 27. Since Jeremiah has in chapter 27 denounced all the prophets (like Hananiah) who proclaim hopeful messages like Hananiah, opines Carroll, then his response to Hananiah in 28:5-9 becomes “both unnecessary and incomprehensible”: “why should Jeremiah listen to a particular instantiation of a message he already has dismissed as false? If what the prophets say is a lie (*šeqer*), then Hananiah, who says the same thing and in the same way [...] is a liar. Why should Jeremiah treat a liar with such sensitivity? Why should he respond in a dignified manner instead of heaping abuse on Hananiah’s head? Why should he wish Hananiah to be right? Why should he accept the breaking of his own performative message and go his way?” CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 540-541. Carroll’s questions are based on a reading posture of a historical sort and bases on our evaluation of the individual prophets and the events as readers of today. The reader reading the text and visualising the events as a drama happening for the first time and who do not have any bias or prejudice to side with any of the prophets would not be surprised when Jeremiah takes his distance even from his own declarations and gives a benefit of the doubt to his fellow prophet in dialogue with him. The text has never at this point directly shown any of the prophets as false or true and so the reader would not be surprised at Jeremiah’s attempt to enter into dialogue and proof with his fellow prophet. In this perspective, responding “in a dignified manner” would not be problematic; what would really be would be “heaping abuses” on his fellow prophet, with whom one is in a common demonstration of the truth.

indication of oracular report. It is clearly stated in v. 7: “listen to the words which *I* (אָנֹכִי) am speaking in your ears...”. His response consists of three elements.

a. Jeremiah utters the word אָמֵן²⁹ followed by the wish which could be seen as sarcastic, ironic³⁰ or sincere. Comparison with other occurrences in the Old Testament³¹ could be luminous for a meaningful interpretation in the context here where irony and insincerity should be excluded³². Though quite differently articulated, the consensus regarding v. 6 is one that makes a distinction between the human feelings of Jeremiah and his obligation as a prophet to remain true to the demands of his prophetic vocation. There is the emphasis on the tensions confronting him as an individual burning with great

²⁹ The word is not very frequent in the Old Testament. The exact Hebrew word occurs again in Num. 5:22 (twice); Deut. 27:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26; I Kings 1:36; I Chr. 16:36; Neh. 5:13; 8:6 (twice); Psa. 41:14; 65:16 (twice), 72:19; 89:53; 106:48; Jer. 11:5. In this only other occurrence of אָמֵן in the book of Jeremiah, it serves to confirm a curse perceived to be valid.

³⁰ Holladay sees the ‘amen’ of Jeremiah as “expressing an optative of dubious validity”, HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 128, and the wish that follows appears “to be poised between a real hope and a contrary-to-fact expression” and “is possible that the expressions of this verse function as does Micaiah’s first insincere word to the king of Israel (cf. I Kings 22:15), which was intended to be a ridicule”, HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 127. See also J.A. MONTGOMERY, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC), New York, 1951, p. 338.

³¹ The ambivalence in the precise interpretation of this verse is also seen from the fact that in the 27 occurrences of אָמֵן in the Old Testament, it is principally either a confirmation of a curse or that of a blessing. It occurs in the context of curses in Num. 5:22 (twice); Deut. 27:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, Neh. 5:13; Jer. 11:5; and in the context of blessings in I Chr. 16:36; Neh. 8:6 (twice); Psa. 41:14; 65:16; 72:19; 89:53; 106:48. The only two exceptions but in similar contexts are I Kings 1:36 and Jer. 28:6. In I Kings 1:36 David has given orders to anoint Solomon king and Benaiah responds “Amen! May YHWH accomplish it”. He followed this declaration with a prayer for Solomon. In this verse, the grammatical pattern is the same as in Jer. 28:6: the word “amen” is followed by a jussive verb with YHWH as subject: אָמֵן בֶּן יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה יָקֻם (I Kings 1:36) and אָמֵן בֶּן יֵאֱמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי הַמִּלְכָּד (Jer. 28:6). There is no doubt as to the sincerity of the support of Benaiah, as there is no textual proof of ironical usage or insincerity in the expression used by Jeremiah. The verb used, in the *hiphil* (יָקֻם), here meaning “fulfil”, “establish” is the same used in the promise of YHWH in 29:10.

³² Scalise writes that “it is never an Israelite equivalent of ‘Bravo’ for a stirring performance of a prophet”, SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 54.

passion for his people and at the same time not having any pleasant hopeful messages to give at least in the meantime. Finding the opinions of the peaceful prophets pleasant, and not rejoicing in the prolongation of the exile, he would also wish it were so for his people but he knows at the same time that that is false. On this point Hossfeld and Meyer write: “Das Plädoyer Jeremias beginnt in V. 6aß mit einer captatio benevolentiae. In einem dreiteiligen Satz drückt Jeremia aus, daß, wenn es nach seinen eigenen Wünschen ginge, er dem Hananja nur beipflichten könne: Gewiß, so möge es Jahwe ausführen! Jahwe verwirkliche dein Wort! Aber wie in 8,18-23; 17,16; 20,8 muß Jeremia eine Kollision feststellen zwischen seinem Wunsch und seinem Auftrag als Prophet”³³. V. 6, as response could have been the last word of the narrative if the message of peace of Hananiah were true, that is, if Hananiah were a true prophet. But Jeremiah continues. And so אָמַן of v. 6 could be translated as true, let it be, okay; the wish that Hananiah be correct if Jeremiah is seen as giving a sincere reaction to the claim of Hananiah.

b. Almost immediately, this positive hope is countered by an adversative introduced by the particle אָ (translated variously as ‘yet’³⁴, however, but³⁵, only³⁶, nevertheless³⁷, but please³⁸) where he invites Hananiah to listen, to go down memory lane with him and to make with him an inspection of historical evidence³⁹, to consider the tradition of the prophets before both of them, a tradition which prophesies of pestilence, war and disaster (v. 8)⁴⁰. Jeremiah’s reference to these prophets as אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ לְפָנַי וּלְפָנֵיךָ “who were before me

³³ F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Prophet gegen Prophet*, p. 96. Cf. Also MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 718. See also C. COMBET-GALLAND, *Jérémie 28 ou le risque de la vérité*, p. 71.

³⁴ CARROLL, *Jeremiah (OTL)*, p. 537, BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 252.

³⁵ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 709.

³⁶ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 41; D. LYS, *Jérémie 28 et le problème du faux prophète*, p. 454.

³⁷ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 125.

³⁸ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 537.

³⁹ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 719.

⁴⁰ Interestingly in the block beginning from chapter 26, mention has been made of prophets in the past and their preaching and in each occasion, it has been that of doom. 26:5 talks of “my servants the prophets whom I have always sent you, but you have not heeded”, meaning of course that their words were not the

and before you” means that he does not exclude even his opponent from this succession⁴¹. Though part of the succession, his is a strange type. Doom *prophets* stand in a long succession in Israel, but behold a *prophet* with a peace message who stands alone.

c. This is a new word, and a new word that falls outside the tradition must be subjected to the test of fulfilment⁴². Finally Jeremiah challenges the prophecy of Hananiah by evoking the question of fulfilment as the sure proof of any peaceful prophetic claim (v. 9). The isolated prophet⁴³ does not enjoy the benefit and protection of tradition and so has to undergo a proof for accreditation. V. 8-9 as a whole exhibits a kind of logical syllogism that goes thus: the prophetic tradition is that of doom. That means that a doom prophecy has a priori grounds for being true since it has the support of tradition. That equally means that a hopeful prophecy like the one just given by Hananiah should not be placed in the same footing. But it can still be tested, whether the words come to fulfilment. The burden of proof lies on it and the only vindication is its fulfilment. And fulfilment will show nothing else than that YHWH has sent the prophet in truth. By so doing, Jeremiah puts the *Legitimationsformel* of Hananiah in v. 2 and v. 4 to question. Subtly, v. 8 and v. 9 make a juxtaposition of *prophets* and *prophet*: “the *prophets* (הַנְּבִיאִים) who were before me and before you....” (v. 8), “the *prophet* (הַנְּבִיאַ v. 9) who will prophesy peace...”. The insistence of הַנְּבִיאַ in the verse is clear (three times and once the verb in the imperfect).

הַנְּבִיאַ אֲשֶׁר יִנְבֵּא לְשָׁלוֹם
 קָבַא דְּכֵר הַנְּבִיאַ
 יִנְדַע הַנְּבִיאַ אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלְחוּ יְהוָה בְּאֶמְחַ

To be remarked in the response of Jeremiah is that the first word of the first section is of the same root with the last word of the second section (v. 9b). Actually, Jeremiah begins

palatable ones, and 26:18 where the prophecy of Micah is cited: “Zion shall become a plowed field, Jerusalem a heap of ruins, and the temple mount a forest ridge”.

⁴¹ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 55.

⁴² SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 56.

⁴³ F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Prophet gegen Prophet*, p. 96.

a response with “true” (אֱמֶת, v. 6) and ends with “in truth” (בְּאֱמֶת, v. 9). With these words flanking the incessant reference to נְבִיא the issue is therefore that of knowing how or to what extent each of the prophets stand in relation to the truth, in other words, which of the prophets has been truly sent by YHWH⁴⁴.

4.2.1.3.1 *On Fulfilment of Prophecy: Reference to Deut. 18:21-22*

The words of Jeremiah in v. 6-9 resemble the declaration in Deuteronomy:

And if you say in your heart,

‘How may we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him”.

Deut. 18: 21-22 falls within a self-contained section of the book of Deuteronomy dealing with state and religious officials, the local court and its process (cf. 16:18-20; 17:2-7), the central court (cf. 17:8-13), the king (cf. 17:14-20), and the priest and the prophet (cf. chapter 18). In the words of Nelson, “these chapters offer a sort of constitutional proposal with definite concepts about the judge, king, priest, and prophet”⁴⁵, focusing on the process of selection of these officers, their functions and the obedience due to them and the mechanisms of their succession. The last unit of this section 18:15-22 deals with three issues involving prophecy⁴⁶. After providing the aetiology for the institution of prophecy, it seeks to motivate obedience to authentic prophets and finally, strives to eliminate the danger of false prophecy. Tracing the aetiology of prophecy in connection with Moses, the text underscores obedience to prophets and in this stage, it is not so much as what

⁴⁴ Cf. D. LYS, *Jérémie 28 et le problème du faux prophète*, p. 473.

⁴⁵ R.D. NELSON, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (OTL), Louisville, 2002, p. 213.

⁴⁶ On the theology of the prophets in the book of Deuteronomy, see H.M. BARSTAD, *The Understanding of the Prophets in Deuteronomy*, in *SJOT* 8 (1994), p. 236-251; K. JEPPESEN, *Is Deuteronomy Hostile Towards Prophets?* in *SJOT* 8 (1994), p. 252-256.

prophets ought to do as what their audience are to do⁴⁷. “The text therefore reflects on the authorization of the prophet whose legitimation is a replication of the authorization of Moses”⁴⁸. Deuteronomy does not lose sight of the imminence of false prophets and sets out in the third place rules for their elimination, which is by execution (v. 20). When a prophet speaks in the name of other gods, there is no difficulty in knowing the verity or falsity of his claims, but the real issue is presented when a prophet claims to be speaking in the name of YHWH and here a pragmatic rule is needed. And then comes the advice of v. 22: “time will tell, for the true prophetic word inexorably sets impending events into motion (I Sam 3:19-20; Amos 1:2; Jer 1:9-10)”⁴⁹. It has to be noted that this wait and see principle is not presented in this text as an absolute test for all prophetic claims. The very fact that it comes only after admonishing obedience to the prophets raised up by YHWH in the manner of Moses, means that Deuteronomy proposes this test for presumptuous prophets speaking words not authorised by YHWH, though there remains the question of how one is to know again the criteria for deciding the cases which would be made subject to this principle.

The appropriation of this principle in the text of Jer. 28:9 seems to respect this intention in Deuteronomy. There is in the first place lexical similarity in the reoccurrence of two key terms of Deut. 18:22: true prophets are to be recognised (יִרֶע) if their words “come” or are brought to fulfilment (בִּיאָ). Jer. 28:9 does not have to be read in isolation with Jer. 28:8. The logic of both verses could be stated as follows: the general tendency of past prophecy has been that of doom. A hopeful prophecy has therefore not the support of tradition and needs something for authentication. And that is nothing else than the fulfilment of the claim. A question however arises: what is the pertinence of this test of fulfilment, the rationale of waiting in a here and now concrete case between two

⁴⁷ The reasoning in the text is: you asked yourself for the prophets and YHWH agreed, so heed the prophet. “Raise up” (v. 15, 18) emphasises the initiative of YHWH in the institution of the prophet (cf. Amos 2:11; Jer. 29:15), a phrase the prophets repeatedly claimed in their call narratives and in their use of the messenger formula.

⁴⁸ BRUEGGEMANN, *Deuteronomy* (AOTC), Nashville, 2001, p. 195.

⁴⁹ R.D. NELSON, *Deuteronomy*, p. 236.

prophets⁵⁰? Would waiting for two years to pass in order to see whether temple furnishings and the exiles⁵¹ would return seem very reasonable in a duel between the two prophets, in the presence of all the people and priests, and demanding the response of the latter? How does the narrative resolve this issue?

One notices a very important element in Act I, concerning two significant omissions in the reply of Jeremiah in v. 6-9, verses which are the central axis of the Act, framed by two thematically identical declarations of Hananiah: the omission of the mention of breaking the yoke of the king of Babylon, which was so central in the oracle speech of Hananiah that it formed the framing for the oracle in 2b-4, and the mention of the time limit of two years. These omissions in v. 6-9 would become all the more conspicuous by their reoccurrence in v. 10-11, as if Hananiah noticed his opponent's neglect of the major points of his oracle and so repeats them and leaves aside the question of bringing back the sacred vessels and exiles which were the points retained by Jeremiah. Is it that Jeremiah considered the Babylonian captivity as so inevitable that there is no question of disputing over it? Or that he simply reasons that "breaking the yoke of Babylon" is only theoretical while "bringing back exiles and sacred vessels" is the practical result, and so says: 'until we see the exiles and the vessels back, then we can be sure that the yoke of the king of Babylon has been broken'? Or finally is that a way of relegating the king of Babylon to the background, and neglecting his importance in the scheme of affairs, in coherence with Jer. 27 where Nebuchadnezzar's instrumental role is underlined? The response of Jeremiah shows in fact that the dispute is not over the material elements of the claim, which could be or not be, or even the temporal timing precision, but on the authenticity of the claim of the source of the oracle. That is why the central element of Jeremiah's response is whether the prophet is sent or not by YHWH. Jeremiah's response becomes

⁵⁰ Brevard Childs' canonical criticism still answers that the fulfilment criteria is still applicable in the collection and preservation of the oracles of Jeremiah: when the judgement of God fell on Judah and Jerusalem, Jeremiah was vindicated as a true prophet, cf. B. CHILDS, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 140. But this explanation is based on the prejudice of an already realised history and not an answer to be given from the standpoint of the immediate audience of the drama.

⁵¹ Notice that Jeremiah left the items in the order his opponent had listed them: the objects before people, though without express or separate mentioning of the king.

in the main to question the logo, the divine stamp, which his opponent sticks to his speech: in the beginning, that it is YHWH who speaks (v. 2a), and to question equally the signature at the end of the speech, in the end that it is "oracle of YHWH" (v. 4b). And this being the case, Carroll's opinion that Jeremiah disobeyed the warning he had already given in 27:16 by listening to Hananiah⁵² does not hold its ground⁵³.

4.2.1.4 Sign-act and Oracle Report by Hananiah (v. 10-11)

A convinced and intrinsigent Hananiah is presented as an antagonist necessary to the course of the drama⁵⁴. A neat connection with the previous chapter (cf. 27:2) is made again as the wearing of the yoke is here (v. 10) presumed. "Kurz und bündig" (short and decisive), Duhm would say, the drama of the incident is unprecedented⁵⁵ for here is the unique narrative of a symbolic act of a prophet intended to annul the symbolic act of an opposing prophet⁵⁶; of one "prophet's vandalism of another prophet's sign-act"⁵⁷. In a dramatic style Hananiah takes and breaks the yoke from Jeremiah's shoulders, a symbolic act which is followed by verbal explanation⁵⁸; a reiteration of the judgement that in two

⁵² CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), see p. 540-541.

⁵³ See also SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 55.

⁵⁴ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 253.

⁵⁵ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 56.

⁵⁶ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 129. There are however parallels between the confrontation of Jeremiah and Hananiah and that between Micah and the court prophet Zedekiah in 1 Kings 22. Each of these episodes involves a symbolic action and even the physical abuse of one prophet by the other (cf. especially 1 Kings 22:24: "Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah, came up and slapped Micah on the cheek, saying, 'Has the spirit of the LORD, then, left me to speak with you?'").

⁵⁷ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 56.

⁵⁸ But one would have expected Hananiah's sign act to come before his very first oracle in v. 2b-4 given the fact that sign-acts generally precede their interpretative speech. Cf. 1 Kings 11:29-31 where Ahijah first of all tears the new cloak he is wearing into twelve strips, and after explains to Jeroboam that by that, it shows that God will tore the kingdom from Solomon's hands and give ten tribes to Jeroboam. The narrative of Jer. 27 also follows this order, symbolic action preceding explanation. See also 1 Kings 22:11; Isa. 20:1-5; Ezek. 4:9-14; etc. However the structure of Jer. 28 resembles that of Jer. 19 (cf. 19:1-13) where Jeremiah receives a command to buy an earthenware jug, then to deliver a judgement oracle to the kings of Judah and the citizens of Jerusalem for the evil they have done, after which he is to smash the jar as a sign-act

years the exile will end (cf. v. 3), with a third claim of the divine source of his oracle (v. 11)⁵⁹. Hananiah repeats the time limit allowed in his oracle and adds the fact of breaking the yoke of the king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations, an addition which refers Jeremiah and the reader to 27:6-11. Without going into the details of bringing back the exiles, it is understandable that the yoke once broken, the return of the exiles and the utensils would be automatically consequential. Neither the act nor the verbal explanation is responded to and the narrative leaves it unresolved. Jeremiah simply walks (הלך) his way and leaves the stage. The curtain is drawn. End of Act I⁶⁰.

Authors react differently to the attitude of Jeremiah. For some, Jeremiah seems to be roundly contradicted and publicly shamed⁶¹; for some he appears to have been genuinely confused, rendered uncertain⁶² and taken aback⁶³ by the action of Hananiah. However, these opinions do not clearly emerge from the text, nor could the reader perceive that they are the reasons for the irruption of YHWH's word which brought Jeremiah back to the stage to confront Hananiah squarely in Act II. One would say therefore that in the first Act, the narrator subtly contrasts the characters of the two prophets: as against Hananiah who was raised to a high pitch of excitement and was filled with an irrational or demonic strength⁶⁴, Jeremiah is portrayed as a model of composure, "the unflappable prophet who does not rush his fences and was unruffled by the circumstance that he had no immediate

showing the way YHWH will smash the nation and the city, and this is described in the second oracle in v. 10-13.

⁵⁹ Symbolic action however efficacious in bringing about the fulfilment of prophecy has no effect if YHWH is not behind it. An example is the above-mentioned symbolic action of Zedekiah against Micaiah.

⁶⁰ Contrary to Hossfeld and Meyer who see v. 11 as the end of a scene, bearing from their consideration of chapter 28 as constituting a single narrative with chapter 27 and who sees the scene as not implying a public confrontation: "Das Deutewort V. 11 zeigt aber, daß es nach wie vor um das Joch für 'diese Völker' geht. Die Ablußnotiz, das Jeremia seines Weges gegangen sei, hat zunächst die Funktion, die Szene zu beenden. Zu einer Auseinandersetzung auf offener Strasse kommt es nicht", F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Prophet gegen Prophet*, p. 92.

⁶¹ LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 341.

⁶² CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah*, p. 166.

⁶³ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 540.

⁶⁴ Cf. MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 720.

riposte to make to Hananiah's theatrical gesture. He judged that reason would not prevail and refused to engage in a slanging match. He left the field and bided his time before he returned to reassert his prophetic authority, and deal finally with Hananiah⁶⁵. Duhm would say that his dignified retreat is indicative that he was the genuine article and not an impostor: "dass Jer ein wahrhaftiger Mensch sei. Ein Mensch ohne Pose, ohne Eitelkeit, wehrlos gegen brutale Angriffe"⁶⁶.

4.2.2 Act II: Sending and Dismissal (v. 12-17)

4.2.2.1 Divine Intervention: Commission to Prophecy (v. 12-14)

In v. 12, the narrator indicates that "the word of YHWH came to Jeremiah" (v. 12). Act II begins exactly like Act I with the word *וַיְהִי*. The confrontational atmosphere is again clear: "And the word of YHWH came ...after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah". The narrator reveals the exact circumstances that push YHWH to act. Breaking the yoke of Jeremiah is opposing directly the order of YHWH, which Jeremiah received in 27:2, a fact which makes YHWH to send Jeremiah back to the scene. It is also interesting that YHWH appears on the scene after the third claim of Hananiah that his prophecy is an oracle from YHWH (cf. 2, 4, 11), and, more significant, that YHWH accuses Hananiah and contradicts his words by confirming the prophecy given to Jeremiah in Jer. 27 (cf. especially 27:2). By the words of v. 12, YHWH holds Hananiah responsible for his action and sets forth the prospect of a harder situation in the future, a situation which Hananiah himself will take part in constructing. The NAB puts it precisely: "by breaking a wooden yoke, you forge an iron yoke", while the NJB puts it: "You have broken the wooden yokes only to make iron yokes to replace them"⁶⁷. In v. 13, for the first time YHWH adds the adjective "iron" to the noun "yoke"

⁶⁵ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 720.

⁶⁶ DUHM, *Das Buch Jeremia*, p. 226.

⁶⁷ Here the MT makes Hananiah responsible for the iron yoke by breaking the wooden one by the use of the word *וַיַּשְׁעֵהוּ* (and you shall make). But even the rendering in the LXX does not lighten matters for the prophet Hananiah. The expression in the LXX reads: *συνέτριψας καὶ ποιήσω*, "you have broken and I will make". In this way the narrator in the LXX makes it clear that the duel is more between YHWH and Hananiah since the latter breaks while the former fashions, symbolising the undoing by Hananiah who

which remains therefore highly metaphorical. Wood is breakable, but Jeremiah had already asked: “Can anyone break iron?” (Jer. 15:12). Through this metaphorical articulation, the narrator discloses the theology in the text, a theology articulated around the duel between truth and falsity⁶⁸. The narrator’s report in this section shows that YHWH contradicts Hananiah’s double prophecy (v. 2-4b and v. 11) directly in one single verse (v. 14) and approves that made by Jeremiah in 27:5-7: he will give the world over to Nebuchadnezzar, and this authorised hegemony⁶⁹ shall extend even to the beasts of the field⁷⁰ - the reader would notice the exact repetition of the phrase: וְנָם אֶחָד־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה הַשְּׂדֵה לֹו (v. 14, cf. 27:6). While Hananiah has prophesied “I will break/have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon” made as framing in his declaration (v. 2-4), YHWH in the last part of v. 14 reverses the roles, “I have put an iron yoke ... so that they will serve Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon” (v. 14). In the same verse, YHWH takes up the mention of the nations introduced by Hananiah in v. 11 and contradicts it equally: the iron yoke is put “on the neck of these nations...”.

Some other elements in the speech of Hananiah are taken up by YHWH to highlight the opposition. At the syntactical level the reader notices that the וְ of Hananiah in v. 4 concerning the question of breaking the yoke of the king of Babylon is taken up by YHWH in v. 14 (on the same question) and the words of YHWH are introduced exactly with the same formula as used by Hananiah: “thus says YHWH” or “thus says YHWH

therefore fails to provide the people the opportunity “to turn from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds” (Jer. 26:3; cf. 23:22), and the opportunity to bring their necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and consequently be established in their own land to till it and to dwell in it (cf. Jer. 27:11).

⁶⁸ Cf. also Lys : “c’est toute la théologie de la vérité et du mensonge chez Jérémie qui est impliquée : tu as fait reposer le peuple sur une fausse sécurité, du coup en brisant le joug de bois tu as fermé la voie du repentir et tu fabriques ainsi toi-même un joug de fer, ce qui ne fait qu’accomplir le jugement de Dieu”, D. LYS, *Jérémie 28 et le problème du faux prophète*, p. 470.

⁶⁹ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 253.

⁷⁰ Combet-Galland’s interpretation here is right: “La soumission à la puissance babylonienne devient dans le regard du Seigneur non un scandale d’impiété mais la forme historique d’un nouvel acte créateur, qui engage l’univers entier et a Dieu pour origine (« toutes ces nations [...] et même les bêtes sauvages, je les lui livre » [v. 14])”, C. COMBET-GALLAND, *Jérémie 28 et le risque de la vérité*, p. 73-74.

Sabaoth, the God of Israel” (compare v. 2 and v. 14; v. 11 and v. 13). But while Hananiah talks in the future (אָשַׁבַּר cf. v. 4 and v. 11), YHWH talks in the perfect (נִתְחַי) just like Hananiah in v. 2⁷¹. Whether Jeremiah returned to the encounter with an iron yoke-bar in his neck to re-enact the symbol is not indicated in the text. But the events of v. 15-17 would render that no longer necessary.

4.2.2.2 Oracle Report of Jeremiah to Hananiah (v. 15-16 [17])

The narrator continues his story by reporting an address of Jeremiah to Hananiah where he confronts him on the office of the prophet and the question of truth (v. 15-16). V. 15 is the climax of Jeremiah’s words to Hananiah because here the former insists that the latter is not sent by YHWH. Together, v. 15 and 16 are constructed in lawsuit form, the classic form of the judgement oracle to an individual⁷² where the accusation or diatribe is the composition of the prophet. This description applies well to v. 15 since there is no messenger formula and the imperative “listen” at the beginning of the accusation echoes the initial “listen” (שִׁמְעוּנָא) of v. 7 which is equally non oracular. After the accusation then comes the judgement linked together by לָכֵן⁷³ where the messenger formula indicates the divine origin. Hananiah is indicted in v. 15 that he had not been sent by YHWH and so is deceiving the people by prophesying lie (שֶׁקֶר), and also at the end of v. 16 that he has spoken apostasy against YHWH. A neat opposition of roles, one in the negative, the other in the positive is highlighted: “you have made this people trust in lie” (v. 15) // “behold, I am going to send you off from the surface of the earth” (v. 16). The judgement is given in a corresponding language with the indictment giving a rhetorical effect. Since YHWH has not sent (שִׁלַּח qal) him (Hananiah), YHWH will then send him (שִׁלַּח piel) to death, or will remove, that is send him off (“throw off”) from the face of the earth, which is the

⁷¹ Here in this verse the logic of the yoke image is spelt out. As Scalise explains, “just as animals are yoked in order to work, so the nations will be put under the yoke in order to serve Nebuchadnezzar”, SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 57.

⁷² Cf. C. WESTERMANN, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, Philadelphia, 1967, p. 142.

⁷³ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 57.

habitation of humankind⁷⁴. Death became the fulfilment of the verdict pronounced in v. 16 as the narrator adds conclusively that Hananiah “died in that year” (בַּשָּׁנָה הַהִיא v. 17), in the seventh month, that is within two months of his first oracle; two months for a prophet who announced with certitude the return of temple furnishings and exiles within two years. The irony is therefore clear. At the end of the narrative, the reader gets the image of Hananiah as a discredited prophet.

Two notices are conspicuous in the second Act. While the personality of Hananiah dominates in Act I, making the latter the initiator of the debate, giving him the control of the stage two times (v. 2-4 and v. 10-11), framing the response of Jeremiah in v. 6-9 and making Jeremiah playing only a defensive role, the reverse is the case in Act II. Now it is YHWH who kicks off, no longer a debate, since Hananiah has no words again to contribute. YHWH makes the arbitrage and sends Jeremiah. Hananiah is not even in the defensive since he only receives an oracle of judgement against him by Jeremiah. The Jeremiah, who in the first Act appears mild, now becomes one who pronounces the hard words of capital punishment. This offensive position of Jeremiah therefore discloses the second conspicuous notice in the second Act: the reader of this last section cannot but be struck by the disparity between the words of YHWH in the previous section and the words which Jeremiah told Hananiah, that is to say, the disparity between v. 13-14, God’s message to Jeremiah for Hananiah and v. 15-16, Jeremiah’s message to Hananiah. In other words, why has Jeremiah not said exactly to Hananiah what YHWH commanded him to say? No wonder these verses constitute for McKane “the biggest impediment to the coherence of chapter 28”⁷⁵. He represents Jeremiah as dealing with Hananiah in a high-handed manner and so contradicts himself by sidetracking the criteria of accomplishment he already marshalled for distinguishing between true and false prophecy. As he puts it, “Hananiah is despatched with a complete disregard for the theorizing of vv. 8f. which has no effect on the proceedings of vv. 15-17”⁷⁶ and so that

⁷⁴ See also divine judgement on Cain (Gen. 4:14), on Israel (Exo. 32:12; Amos 9:8) and on the human (Gen. 6:1, 7; Zeph. 1:3).

⁷⁵ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 719.

⁷⁶ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 720.

becomes a “Draconian measures against a man”⁷⁷ “who is sincere but wrong”⁷⁸. For this McKane suggests that here, it is not only the credibility of Hananiah’s death that requires consideration, but also the incompatibility of its sudden occurrence with the criteria in vv. 8-9⁷⁹. This question would be addressed while considering the plot of the narrative.

4.3 CONSIDERING SOME POINTS OF THE NARRATIVE PLOT

4.3.1 Meeting and Parting

The whole text is constructed and structured on a rhythm of meeting and parting, encounter and separation, as was shown already in the Structure. In the beginning of the narrative we observe the initial encounter of Hananiah and Jeremiah in v. 1 and their final separation, if not in v. 16 where the wordings of the oracle of YHWH through the mouth of Jeremiah, using the verb שלח expresses the sending of Hananiah away from the face of the earth, then in v. 17 by the death of Hananiah. Between the two, there is a parting, a separation in v. 11 where the narrator reports that Jeremiah goes his way. In the words of Carroll, “the first encounter is over and the two prophets part. Silence develops between the two figures”⁸⁰ as in the drawing of the curtain in a theatrical stage between two Acts of a drama. This single narrative sentence (end of v. 11) by the narrator has been subjected to a flow of speculation concerning the spiritual, emotional or vocational state of Jeremiah⁸¹. On this statement Holladay writes: “whether out of prudence, knowing that the optimistic word of Hananiah was popular with the crowd, or out of the conviction that he had already said and done all he could, or out of dread that perhaps Hananiah’s action was at the instigation of YHWH [...] one cannot say”⁸². These opinions apart, the

⁷⁷ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 720.

⁷⁸ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood*, p. 244.

⁷⁹ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 720.

⁸⁰ CARROLL, *Jeremiah (OTL)*, p. 545.

⁸¹ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 57.

⁸² HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 129. McKane’s opinion in this verse is more complicated. After giving the pros and cons of opinions from various authors like Kimchi, Duhm, Erbt, Rudolph and particularly Cornill, he sees with the latter that the phrase is “an exegetical intrusion which is triggered by the misunderstanding of a Hebrew idiom, namely, הלך ואמר אל הנביא (v. 13). This means then no more than ‘Answer Hananiah without delay’ [...]. When וילך ירמיהו לדרבנו is deleted, Jeremiah is seen to have answered

sentence serves to conclude this first episode where Jeremiah occupies a role of audience to his opponent and this fact has much to tell to the reader. The only speech of Jeremiah though touching four verses (6, 7, 8 and 9) in this first part is not a prophetic oracle from YHWH, but a personal response which functions as a dispute, or better, a critique to Hananiah's hopeful message. Reading the words of Jeremiah in these verses at the backdrop of Jer. 27, and v. 11b ("and the prophet Jeremiah went his way") one has the impression of a prophet who believes the "possibility that the Lord had changed the plan and that a word from the Lord might be spoken by a prophet otherwise thought to be false"⁸³.

Then a new meeting is established in v. 12 between the word of YHWH and Jeremiah, which paved the way for a meeting once more between Jeremiah and Hananiah. After the new encounter between the word of YHWH and Jeremiah, the command of the former in v. 13 annuls the decision of Jeremiah to walk away in v. 11 by taking up in fact the same verb (הלך), the only other occurrence in the text: "Go and say to Hananiah" (v. 13). The narrator gives the reader another clue for judgement: the coming of the word of YHWH to Jeremiah, at this point of decision, and after Jeremiah had enunciated the bone of contention as "being sent by YHWH" (v. 9). Three times in Act I, there are claims of oracle originating from YHWH; the *Legitimationsformel* ("thus says YHWH", cf. v. 2, 11, or "oracle of YHWH," cf. v. 4). All the three are claimed by Hananiah himself. It is only in v. 12 that the narrator reports נִיְהִי רַב־יְהוֹנָן and it is to Jeremiah. Without expressly qualifying Jeremiah as true prophet, the narrator hints the reader by exhibiting a certain omniscience that makes him relate what happened between Jeremiah and YHWH. Jeremiah is thus "sent" by YHWH (הִלְיָךְ). Jeremiah is exemplified in this section especially as a listener and audience of the divine word. In fact almost at the centre of each of the Acts, Jeremiah invites his fellow prophet to listen (v. 7 and v. 15): it is the status of the word, the source, and not simply that of the messenger in himself that is at

Hananiah without delay". This opinion however operates on a different presupposition from that adopted in our work.

⁸³ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 57.

stake, or otherwise, the source of the message gives status to the messenger and constitutes the verity of the message.

4.3.2 *The Title* נְבִיא

Some authors on Jer. 28 have titled their commentaries “Prophet against Prophet”⁸⁴. The weight of this titling bears not on the preposition “against” but on the identical qualification of the two individuals who confront each other. Such titling hinges on the fact that reading the narrative, one notices the narrator’s subtle way of hiding his prejudices against any of the opposing parties to allow the text itself provide the reader clues to discern the truth or the authentic prophet. In the narrative both prophets have the *Legitimationsformel*⁸⁵ put into their mouth (כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה cf. v. 2, 4, 11 and 16), Jeremiah’s symbolic action earlier in 27:2 receives a match in the symbolic action of Hananiah in 28:10, and the predictive words which Hananiah speaks as explanatory of his symbolic action “so I shall break” (כָּכָה אֶשְׁבֵּר v. 11) matches exactly those of Jeremiah concerning similar actions (cf. 13:9; 19:11; 51:64). Further, the text takes care in presenting the two prophets in the same platform at least apparently. Hananiah is introduced from his family background and his geographical origin just as Jeremiah is introduced at the beginning of the book: “the prophet Hananiah, son of Azzur, origin of Gibeon” (28:1), “the words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin” (1:1). Again the spatial situation for the two prophets is the same: “in the house of YHWH, in the presence of the priests and of all the people” (v. 1) for Hananiah, “in the presence of the priests and of all the people who stood in the house of YHWH” (v. 5) for Jeremiah (cf. also 27:16).

More important in this regard is the equality in attribution of the title prophet (נְבִיא) to the two protagonists. In a narrative given in the third person concerning two prophets and with regard to prophetic authenticity, it is natural to observe the inclination of the narrator with regard to the appellation “prophet” to both prophets, without in fact counting the

⁸⁴ See for example, J.S. DE VRIES, *Prophet Against Prophet*, Grand Rapids, 1978; F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Prophet gegen Prophet*, see especially p. 90-103.

⁸⁵ See D.U. ROTTZOL, *Die kh 'mr: Legitimationsformel*, in *VT* 39 (1989), p. 323-340.

times they are designated with the pronouns. Of course no other character in the text uses the title for the other, even YHWH does not use it for any of the prophets (cf. especially v. 13 “go and say to Hananiah saying” and v. 15 where Jeremiah talks to Hananiah directly, “listen Hananiah”). In the whole of the narrative, the attribution of this title is made to Hananiah six times (v. 1, 5, 10, 12, 15, 17) and to Jeremiah equally six times (5, 6, 10 11, 12, 15). From this very first notice, no indices would lead the reader to consider any of the prophets as corrupt, as an impostor or insincere⁸⁶. V. 12 and 13 are particularly remarkable: for the first time in the text, YHWH speaks in v. 13. He does not give the title to Hananiah (“go and say to Hananiah”), which comes just immediately after v. 12 where the narrator indicates that the word of YHWH comes to Jeremiah. And in this notice of the advent of the word of YHWH to Jeremiah (v. 12), the narrator takes time not to put the title immediately (v. 12a) to Jeremiah, but in v. 12b distributes the title equally to the two prophets: “and the word of YHWH *was to Jeremiah* after *Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke bars from on the neck of Jeremiah the prophet*”. The immediate conclusion we can make from this is best articulated in the words of Lys: “l’équilibre en apparence volontaire entre les désignations de Jeremiah et de Hananiah en ce qui concerne la désignation comme prophète est peut-être la volonté du texte de marquer que là est précisément le drame: devant deux prophètes, comment distinguer le vrai du faux »⁸⁷. This is more evident particularly in the direct confrontation in v. 5, 10, 12, and 15. But the two prophets are not by that fact to be placed on the same platform.

Notice of the equality of attribution apart, the picture which the use of this title נביא gives in the text of Jer. 28 is significant. First concerning Hananiah, a perfect symmetry is formed with the six occurrences; occurrences which single out all the interventions of the narrator with the exception of the discourses.

⁸⁶ The narrator of the LXX chapter 35(=TM 28) contrarily gives Hananiah the tag “false prophet” Ἀνανίας υἱὸς Ἀζωρ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης (v. 1). This is the type of rendering in the Targum (*nb' shqr'*) and Peshita (*nby' dgl'*). Curiously this appears in the very first verse and then subtly there is no other use of the title for both prophets; only in v. 8 and 9 where the title prophet is used without attaching it to any of them.

⁸⁷ D. LYS, *Jérémie 28 et le problème du faux prophète*, p. 462.

- A. v. 1 the fourth year, in the fifth month, THE PROPHET HANANIAH son of Azzur, from Gibeon
- B. v. 5 AND SO THE PROPHET JEREMIAH REPLIED TO THE PROPHET HANANIAH before the priests and *all the people present in the Temple of YHWH*:
- C. v. 10 and so the prophet Hananiah removed the yoke from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah and broke it
- C¹ v. 12 and after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke which he had taken away from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, the word of YHWH was addressed to Jeremiah
- B¹ v. 15 AND THE PROPHET JEREMIAH SAID TO THE PROPHET HANANIAH: “Listen well, Hananiah: YHWH has not sent you and you *have led this people to falsehood*”.
- A¹ v. 17 and THE PROPHET HANANIAH died that same year in the seventh month.

In the first place, the title forms an inclusion in the text: v. 1 gives the historical setting (fifth month) and the origin of Hananiah the prophet (son of Azzur), v. 17 gives his destiny and the historical setting (died in the seventh month). In v. 5 and 15, the title נְבִיא appears in each case in the context of an address of Jeremiah to Hananiah. The contrast is clear: while in B (v. 5), Jeremiah addresses Hananiah before the priests and all the people who are found in the temple (the holy place), that is in the presence of YHWH, in B¹ (v. 15), Jeremiah indicts Hananiah of leading this same people (away from the holy) to falsehood (שָׁקֶר). The two middle occurrences (v. 10 and 12), concern each the same action of Hananiah, that of removing the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah and breaking it. Remarkable also is the fact that the two occurrences give rise each to messages based on the same theme, the nations under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, but one contradicting the other. Following v. 10, the symbolic action of Hananiah, is an oracle made in the name of YHWH (כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה, v. 11), and explaining his symbolic action: “thus says YHWH, thus shall I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon within two years from the neck of all the nations”. Following v. 12 is the contradiction of this oracle by YHWH himself in v. 13-14: “thus says YHWH, yokes of wood you have broken, but you shall make in their stead yokes of iron. For thus says YHWH Sabaoth

the God of Israel, a yoke of iron I have set on the neck of all these nations to serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon”.

From the arrangement above, further general observation concerning the two prophets are still possible: apart from v. 1 and v. 17 which form inclusion, the other four occurrences showing the direct confrontation between the two prophets (v. 5, 10, 12, 15) disclose a chiasmic arrangement: the verses showing the confrontations are so arranged that words (אמר) from Jeremiah to Hananiah (v. 5 and 15) bracket actions (שבר, “the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet”) of Hananiah directed towards Jeremiah (v. 10 and 12).

A	v. 5	Jeremiah	Hananiah (word אמר) וַיֹּאמֶר יְרֵמְיָה הַנְּבִיא אֶל־חֲנַנְיָה הַנְּבִיא
B	v. 10	Hananiah	Jeremiah (action שבר) ... חֲנַנְיָה הַנְּבִיא אֶת־הַמוֹשָׁה מֵעַל צִנּוֹר יְרֵמְיָה הַנְּבִיא וַיִּשְׁבְּרֵהוּ...
B ¹	v. 12	Hananiah	Jeremiah (action שבר) ... שָׁבַר חֲנַנְיָה הַנְּבִיא אֶת־הַמוֹשָׁה מֵעַל צִנּוֹר יְרֵמְיָה הַנְּבִיא
A ¹	v. 15	Jeremiah	Hananiah (word אמר) וַיֹּאמֶר יְרֵמְיָה הַנְּבִיא אֶל־חֲנַנְיָה הַנְּבִיא

It remains therefore two other curious notices⁸⁸ (v. 6 and v. 11) where Jeremiah is given the title נְבִיא, two notices through which the narrator subtly characterises Jeremiah by way of his attitude: two immediate reactions by way of words (v. 6) and action (v. 11). In v. 6, Jeremiah is given the title “prophet” just before he responds אָמֵן (which could be translated ‘true’) to Hananiah, and in v. 11 Jeremiah is called prophet while the narrator describes his reaction to the violence of his opponent: “and the prophet Jeremiah went his way” (v. 11b). That is to say, to the words of Hananiah, Jeremiah the prophet (v. 6) responds verbally “אָמֵן”; to the action (confrontation) of Hananiah, Jeremiah reacts quite contrarily (without re-confrontation), as Lys writes “au moment où il semble définitivement lui donner raison et abandonner en rentrant chez lui”⁸⁹.

⁸⁸ D. LYS, *Jérémie 28 et le problème du faux prophète*, p. 461.

⁸⁹ D. LYS, *Jérémie 28 et le problème du faux prophète*, p. 461.

4.3.3 *A Hierarchy of Criteria and the Role of v. 12*

In the introduction to this Chapter we made mention of Carroll's position that the text of Jer. 28 does not adjudicate between the true and the false in matters of prophecy and that there is no indices in the text to disprove Hananiah in favour of Jeremiah. What we have so far been able to establish in the preceding sections of this Chapter is the fact of the confrontation between two opposing prophets, between the true and the false, which does not however show the definite criteria in the text to prove this. This can be perceived by the mounting nature of criteria given in the text and the role which the narrator brings YHWH to play in v. 12. After the initial oracle of Hananiah (v. 2b-4), the reader sees Jeremiah apparently acquiescing and giving in, following our interpretation that Jeremiah's *אָמַן* is sincere even though reserved. Later, there is a reversal of the situation with the *אָמַן* (v. 7) and the reader is made witness of a Jeremiah making effort to enunciate many criteria. First, he appeals to the prophetic tradition, an argument which, though, brings the words of Hananiah to suspicion, surely begs the question⁹⁰, or as McKane again suggests, troubled by ambiguity⁹¹. Since "historical signs are distressingly ambiguous, and each prophet sees them differently"⁹², coupled with the fact that there are also reliable hopeful prophecies in the prophetic tradition (for example prophecies concerning the yoke of the enemy in Isaiah⁹³), it becomes eventually a matter of probability and "such a higher degree of probability is too imprecise to enable a

⁹⁰ Lundbom's remark here is in order: after all Hananiah's oracles, too, could certainly qualify as the preaching of war, not against Jerusalem, but against Babylon. "Viewed as such, Jeremiah's statement here may be seen as a skilful attempt to make common cause with his opponent. The general principle applies to them both", LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 335. In another place he writes: "he (Jeremiah) himself has been preaching against neighbouring nations, and Hananiah now is preaching rebellion against Babylon. Who is the prophet of peace? And who is the prophet of war, evil, and pestilence?", p. 341.

⁹¹ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 718.

⁹² S.J. DE VRIES, *Prophet against Prophet*, p. 143.

⁹³ See for example, "Indeed the yoke of his burden, and the bar on his shoulder, the rod of one oppressing him, you shattered as on the day of Midian" (Isa. 9:3); "When that day comes, his burden will fall from your shoulder, and his yoke from your neck, and the yoke will be destroyed" (Isa. 10:27); "I shall break Assyria in my country, I shall trample on him on my mountains. Then his yoke will slip off them, his burden will slip from their shoulders" (Isa. 14:25).

distinction to be made between a a (*sic*) true prophet and a false prophet⁹⁴. But again, those hopeful prophecies were fulfilled (cf. the Isaiah example) and therefore another criteria, that of fulfilment (v. 9) becomes necessarily to be evoked. This later argument is not saved from its problematic in the context of the narrative: that of the rationale in waiting for two years to pass in order to see whether temple furnishings and the exiles would return, complicated by the fact that the matter goes beyond the two prophets to concern also the audience (the priests and people present). Even though v. 8 and 9 combine to make a round argument, they could not convince his opponent. No wonder Hananiah went on to re-enact his position in v. 10, and as Combet-Galland puts it, “il réduit à néant les arguments avancés et colmate la fissure que Jérémie a introduite par son ‘mais’, par son appel à écouter”⁹⁵, and in the face of this later theatrical action, Jeremiah could not but simply go away, another possible end to the narrative, waiting to be recalled by the word of YHWH (v. 12).

Given this condition, v. 7 and v. 12 therefore play a very significant role in the narrative. The $\text{אָמַרְתִּים וְנִשְׁבַּחְתֶּם}$ of v. 7 opens therefore the possibility of a new development in v. 12, a verse which functions on double grounds in the narrative. Not only that it begins the second part of the narrative, where the intervention of the divine word shows that Jeremiah could not but speak again only after receiving fresh revelation from YHWH, v. 12 forms a pivot, being the centre of a development from v. 7 till the end of the narrative, a development which is concerned with the truth of prophecy articulated around the word of YHWH as the centre. In this respect, v. 12 becomes a mirror verse: the image given in the text of v. 7-11 reflects in an inverse position that of v. 13-17, mirroring not only by taking up the literary indices in inverse order, but also with this literary inversion, thereby reversing the message⁹⁶.

⁹⁴ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 719.

⁹⁵ C. COMBET-GALLAND, *Jérémie 28 ou le risque de la vérité*, p. 73.

⁹⁶ “Il ne s’agit pas uniquement d’une reprise littéraire d’éléments en ordre inverse, mais d’un renversement de message, dont l’inversion littéraire est l’indication”, D. LYS, *Jérémie 28 et le problème du faux prophète*, p. 475.

- v. 8 On prophecy of doom, the type of prophecy Hananiah rejects
- v. 9 If prophecy of שלום is fulfilled, it is sign that YHWH has sent (שליח) the prophet in truth (באמת)
- v. 10-11 *Hananiah broke the yoke and said: thus shall YHWH break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations*
- v. 11b and the prophet Jeremiah went his way (separation)**
- v. 12 AND THE WORD OF YHWH CAME TO JEREMIAH
- v. 13a go and say to Hananiah (new meeting requested)**
- v. 13-14 *Thus says YHWH: "Yokes of wood you have broken, you shall make yokes of iron, ... I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon;*
- v. 15 YHWH has not sent (שליח) Hananiah, he has led the people to believe in falsehood (שקר)

v. 16-17 Hananiah receives his doom.

With v. 12 and the intervention of YHWH, another criterion, the last in the text, is made evident by the narrator, a criterion that does not search for justification either in the oblivious past or in the unknown future but in the (current) present. It is no longer a question of criterion based on the past (the prophetic tradition of v. 8) or that based on the future (fulfillment of v. 9), but that of the present, divine accreditation, divine commission, that is, being sent by YHWH. Above all, there appears in the text a significant dissymmetry⁹⁷ whereby the introductory formula (cf. v. 12) does not oppose the roles of Jeremiah and Hananiah, but Hananiah and the word of YHWH. Therefore, Jeremiah understands the duel not to be between him and Hananiah but between the latter and YHWH. YHWH contradicts the words of Hananiah. This decisive role of v. 12 is well remarked by Combet-Galland:

“pourtant à partir du v. 12, la parole du Seigneur fait irruption pour juger elle-même de la vérité des prises de parole, et l’un des deux prophètes apparaît en

⁹⁷ C. COMBET-GALLAND, *Jérémie 28 ou le risque de la vérité*, p. 72.

négatif, figure de mensonge et de révolte, renvoyée à la mort. L'autre, Jérémie, reçoit l'ordre de porter cette sanction de Dieu, il est l'envoyé de Dieu. Il y a donc bien vrai et faux prophètes ; mais en gommant les repères de la différence, le texte veut suggérer sans doute qu'il n'y a pas de vérité toute faite, qui s'imposerait d'elle-même. Il faut apprendre à déchiffrer et prendre le risque de l'interprétation"⁹⁸.

This leads to the question of the disparity between the words of the command of YHWH to Jeremiah (v. 13-14) and that of Jeremiah to Hananiah (v. 15-16). The fact of the disparity is undeniable, and can only be explained by recourse to what narratologists call the technique of alteration. This refers to a momentary radical violation or "infraction" of the code that governs a narrative discourse⁹⁹. According to Genette, there are two main types: *paralysis* which is an infraction occasioned by saying too much, for example, when a narrator tells what happened when no witness was present; and *paralipsis*, when the infraction is caused by saying too little by withholding crucial information, for example, when the narrator pretend to be subject to ordinary human knowledge restrictions¹⁰⁰. These phenomena in narrative theory produce gaps and ellipsis in the reading exercise. In their capacity to "interrupt the narrative", Iser calls them "vacant pages" and describes them as "gaps, indeed [are] those very points at which the reader can enter into the text, forming his own connections and conceptions and so creating the configurative meaning of what he is reading"¹⁰¹. Elsewhere, talking about blockage, unexpected twists and turns and frustration of expectations, Iser still affirms:

"[...] because no tale can ever be told in its entirety. Indeed it is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to

⁹⁸ C. COMBET-GALLAND, *Jérémie 28 ou le risque de la vérité*, p. 71.

⁹⁹ G. GENETTE, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. by J.E. Levin, Oxford, 1980, p. 194.

¹⁰⁰ See also M. JAHN, *Alteration*, in D. HERMAN, M. JAHN & M.-L. RYAN, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, London, 2005, p. 12-13.

¹⁰¹ W. ISER, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, London, 1978, p. 40.

us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections – for filling in the gaps left by the text itself¹⁰².

But the question is whether the words of Jeremiah in v. 15-16 have any narrative significance to the integrity of the text. It is clear that the divine intervention in v. 13-14 does nothing more than confirm the oracle of Jeremiah in the preceding chapter: all nations shall be subjugated to Nebuchadnezzar, with even the beasts of the field. These words were addressed privately to Jeremiah as revelation from YHWH (cf. Jer. 27:6). Though sure of this message, these words have received contradiction by a fellow prophet (cf. Jeremiah's "before me and before you" v. 7). The boldness with which Hananiah takes and breaks his yoke is again intimidating, hence the totally human reaction of Jeremiah (v. 6 and end of v. 11). With the intervention of YHWH (v. 12), Jeremiah is once more sure of standing on his two feet and on the right ground. Within the first Act of the drama, he had given two criteria for recognising authentic prophecy; it is mostly that of doom and/or otherwise, it may need fulfilment as vindication. What happened therefore in v. 15-16 is nothing more than bringing into operation all these criteria, so that Jeremiah cannot really be accused, in the words of McKane, of a "complete disregard for the theorizing of vv. 8f" or that "v. 8f. has no effect on the proceedings of vv. 15-17"¹⁰³. In the first place the announcement of death by Jeremiah to

¹⁰² W. ISER, *The Implied Reader*, p. 279-280.

¹⁰³ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 720. His words in full read: "The biggest impediment to the coherence of chapter 28 is constituted by vv. 15-17, where Jeremiah is represented as dealing with Hananiah in a high-handed manner which rides rough-shod over the criteria created by him for distinguishing between true and false prophecy and for testing the prophet in particular. It now appears that Jeremiah is not prepared to await the outcome of the test which he has prescribed for a prophet: Hananiah is not to have the advantage of being judged by whether or not his prediction is fulfilled. He is summarily denounced, either after a short interval or immediately as one who has abused Yahweh's authority and has spoken lies to bolster the populace with a false confidence (v. 15). He will not live to see whether or not his prediction is fulfilled, because Jeremiah condemns him to death and he dies two months later (vv. 1-f.). Hananiah is dispatched with a complete disregard for the theorizing of ...", p. 719-720. McKane's approach to this text has equally been criticized by Lundbom: "McKane sees in the chapter an interweaving of sources (vv 6-9 and 15-17 must be disengaged from the prophet Jeremiah) that in the end leaves us with a narrative scarcely more reliable than Carroll's 'story'. Once again, McKane finds ambiguities and

Hananiah is a prophecy of doom and so is in accordance with prophetic tradition as Jeremiah has said in v. 8. Should this prophecy need fulfilment, it is so in v. 17, and so the second criterion in v. 9 comes to play. Thirdly, to show that it is YHWH who sends him, the condemnation of Hananiah by Jeremiah after the diatribe (cf. v. 16) begins with “therefore, thus says YHWH”, the first and only occurrence of the use of the messenger formula by Jeremiah in the narrative. The realisation of the death oracle in v. 17 underlines therefore the truth of the words of Jeremiah according to the rules of v. 8 and v. 9. From the narrative context, the text has also addressed the issue of two years: there is no need waiting for two years to see whether Hananiah’s optimism would be validated as Jeremiah has suggested. In v. 15 Hananiah is depicted as having led the people to trust in lie (שקר). And the people may not remain in this false security for two years before they know that they have been fed with a false optimism. Dieterle and Monsarrat add in this line: “dans la deuxième manche Jérémie est seul en face d’Hananya et il est obligé de proposer une contre-épreuve. Puisque l’on ne sait pas si les paroles de paix amèneront la paix dans un proche avenir, seule la preuve du malheur, dont témoigne la mort d’Hananya (v. 16), est possible dans l’immédiat”¹⁰⁴. The fulfilment criterion is equally in place since by implication it leaves open the possibility of change in God’s plan, a motif which has occurred several times in the larger block 26-29 (cf. 26:3 “Perhaps, he will repent of the evil plan he has planned for you...”). In 27:11 we notice an alternative given to the nations: “But the nation that brings its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serves him, will I let dwell in its own land, oracle of YHWH; and it shall till it, and dwell therein”. There is also the challenge to the prophets to intercede (27:18); all which show the belief that YHWH is free to change his plans for the good of the people. And in that sense, Jeremiah’s theory of accomplishment in time is in order. And so, part of Hananiah’s fault becomes the fact that his prophecy closes the avenue for the repentance of the people and their true return to YHWH. Jer 13:25 makes a connection between trusting in lie and forgetting the Lord *שָׁכַחְתָּ אֹתִי וְהִבְטַחְתָּ בַשֶּׁקֶר* (“you have forgotten me and have trusted in lie”), and so could explain why Hananiah is accused of apostasy

discontinuities where there are none. There is no problem here with predictive prophecy, as in chap. 27...”, LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 326-327.

¹⁰⁴ C. DIETERLE & V. MONSARRAT, *De Jérusalem à Babylone*, p. 69.

(בְּיַד יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, 28:16b) even though he claims to have spoken in YHWH's name. And following Deut. 13:1, if a prophet should say: "Let us follow other gods", he is guilty of apostasy and shall be put to death (see especially v. 5). The judgement is also in accord with the law in Deut. 18:20 that the prophet who presumes to speak לְדַבֵּר falsely in the name of YHWH committed a capital offence (וַיָּמָת). 28:15 on the other hand implies the outcome of chapter 27 where it is stated concerning the false prophets who prophesy falsely "in my name" but are not sent, that YHWH "will banish the people and also the prophets who are prophesying to you" (27:15).

Transition

Reading the story of Jer. 28 from the optics of the two Acts, one can argue of a possible change of place or localisation between the first part of the narrative (v. 1-11) and the second part (v. 12-17). In v. 1 and 5, the spatial location is expressed in these terms: "in the house of YHWH and before the priests and all the people" though with some slight variations in vocabulary¹⁰⁵. The response of Jeremiah in v. 5 parallels the original declaration of Hananiah because the two are expressly said to be made "in the house of YHWH before the priests and all the people" (v. 1) and "before the priests and before all the people who stood in the house of YHWH" (v. 5). But in v. 11, during the verbal explanation of Hananiah of his symbolic action of breaking the yoke, the narrator only added לְעֵינֵי כָל־הָעָם ("before all the people"). But there is no textual evidence that the localisation has changed from 7-12. However we notice that the temple is never again mentioned in the rest of the narrative, neither is the assembly of the priests and people mentioned. That the second section of the narrative could have happened outside the temple is made plausible by the narrator's remark at the end of v. 11 "and Jeremiah went on his way". But even if the second Act took place in the same topographical conditions as the first scene, could the absence of the mention of the temple be of any effect to the theological interpretation of the text? The question is: in v. 1-11, the scene is YHWH's temple but without the irruption of the word of YHWH. In v. 12-17, the scene is outside

¹⁰⁵ In v. 1: בְּבֵית יְהוָה לְעֵינֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים וְכָל־הָעָם לְאָמֹר

In v. 5: לְעֵינֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים וְלְעֵינֵי כָל־הָעָם הַעֹמְדִים בְּבֵית יְהוָה :

the temple, or at least the temple is not mentioned, but the word of YHWH intervenes. The book of Jeremiah is one that attests to the absolute independence of YHWH from all structures, religious and symbolic, and in fact a book that strives to dispose these “sacred structures” of any claim of absolutism and pretence¹⁰⁶. It is true that the oracle of Hananiah is made in the temple, in the presence of the priests and all the worshipping community, with the claim of God as the guarantor, we can still say, following Combet-Galland, that “la parole de Dieu ne se laisse pas posséder, pas même dans le Temple, les prêtres et tout le peuple n’en sont pas les garants inconditionnels”¹⁰⁷.

Then comes the “two years” motif which was central in the first and second declarations of Hananiah (v. 3 and v. 11), the two claimed as being the word of YHWH. The question is: has “two years” as a definite duration any significance or could it simply mean the same thing as soon? If it has no particular significance, why the double mention and only by Hananiah who eventually died within two months? Is there any connection between the two? The prophet is the mouthpiece of God and not vice versa. That means the prophet has still to leave some free space for his YHWH. The two years deadline in the narrative sounds too precise and therefore presumptuous, which in fact seems to be the narrator’s intention to portray on the part of Hananiah. These two considerations about space and time in Jer. 28 show to a great extent the situations of the two prophets as regards the people and as regards YHWH. It could seem that Hananiah has a better and more positive word for the people. But the timing is however wrong. YHWH knows the plan he has for his people; he knows when, where and how he has the plans for them. The last chapter of the block deals with the best conditions in which these plans of YHWH for his people would be realised.

¹⁰⁶ See also D. LYS, *Jérémie 28 et le problème du faux prophète*, p. 467.

¹⁰⁷ C. COMBET-GALLAND, *Jérémie ou le risque de la vérité*, p. 74.

CHAPTER FIVE

JER. 29: VERITY-FALSITY BY CORRESPONDENCE

Introduction

So far, Jer. 26:1 to 28:17 in very different and subtle ways have dealt with the question of true and false prophecy. Jer. 29 closes this literary block with extracts from various correspondences between the community of the exiles in Babylon on the one hand and the community that remained in Judah on the other hand, emphasising again of course the reality of the exile and vindicating the truth of the prophecy of Jeremiah. The remark by Klipp about Jer. 29 is therefore correct: “Dieses Kapitel beschliesst den Komplex Jer 27-29, der durch die gemeinsame Prophetenpolemik zusammengehalten wird”¹. The preceding chapters, 27 and 28 especially, maintain that the exile would be long and that hope of return remains (and indefinitely) in the absolute free will of YHWH, at the same time condemning the wishful alternative of “romantic escapism and abdication”². In chapter 29, this announcement that the exiles are not going to return immediately (27:16, 22; 28:6 implicitly) is continued. While keeping the return of the exiles in the indefinite future, Jer. 29 gives attention to these exiles³, who must discover ways to manage their fate faithfully and hopefully, once more warning against the temptations of belittling the seriousness of their experience by listening to echoes from false prophets⁴. The

¹ N. KLIPP, *Niederreisen und Aufbauen. Das Verhältnis von Heilsverheissung und Unheilsverkündigung bei Jeremia und im Jeremiabuch* (BthSt 13), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1990, p. 42. However, we do not agree with Klipp that “die Prophetenpolemik ist in Jer 29 eine sekundäre Thematik”, p. 55.

² BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 255.

³ In this way, the reader of Jer. 29 would have to make references to Jer. 24 which equally concentrates on the fate of the exiles, with the famous parable of the basket of figs: the exiled are the good figs while those who remained are the bad ones that worth nothing. Lundbom talks of a rhetorical structure of 24, 27-29 and sees chapter 29 as a balancing of chapter 24 in this structure. See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 344. Scalise is also of the same view, SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 67.

⁴ For a different view to this, see McKane: “The next step is to disengage a theme which is extensively represented in chapter 29, namely, false prophecy. It has been argued that the intrusion of the format of a prophetic oracle has caused confusion at vv. 24f. and that the warning against false prophets at vv. 8f. is

connection between Jer. 29 and especially the two preceding chapters is therefore evident⁵. By giving counsel to the exiles, that is, by showing Jeremiah's care for the exiles⁶, "as a figure of authority writing letters to the leaders of the deportees in Babylon"⁷, the chapter "implies a confirmation of Jeremiah's proclamation in chapters 27-28"⁸.

The great bulk of the scholarly attention already given to the study of this chapter⁹ concerns primarily, just like most of other parts of the book of Jeremiah, the

caused by an assumption that Jeremiah's letter (vv. 3-7) is an attempt to oppose and defeat the activities of these prophets in Babylon [...]. There is no direct support from vv. 5-7 for the view that Jeremiah is countering the activities of false prophets in Babylon who are stoking up feverish expectations among Jewish exiles there. The letter concentrates on positive directives and gives no hint of the nature of any polemical situation to which its advice might be related", MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 738-739. McKane's judgment seems to be based strictly and isolatedly on v. 5-7 and not on all the units of the chapter as an integral whole.

⁵ Cf. Thiel who also observes that the prominence of the theme of false prophecy in chapter 29 establishes a connection between it and chapters 27-28, W. THIEL, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26-45: Mit einer Gesamtbeurteilung der deuteronomistischen Redaktion des Buches Jeremias* (WMANT 52), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1981, p. 11, 13.

⁶ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 255.

⁷ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 555.

⁸ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 255.

⁹ L. YAURE, *Elymas-Nehelamite-Pethor, Three False Prophets: Shemaiah the Nehelamite (Jer 29:24-32, etc)*, in *JBL* 79 (1960), p. 297-314; J.A. SOGGIN, *Old Testament and Oriental Studies* (Biblica et Orientalia 29), Rome, 1975, see p. 238-240; M. GILBERT, *Jérémie écrit aux exilés. Lecture de Jer 29*, in *Christus* 26 (1979), p. 108-116, reprinted in M. GILBERT, *Il a parlé par les prophètes: Thèmes et figures bibliques* (Connaître et croire 1), Namur, 1998, p. 205-214; W.L. HOLLADAY, *Enigmatic Bible Passages: God writes a Rude Letter*, in *Biblical Archeologist* 46 (1983), p. 145-146; A. BERLIN, *Jeremiah 29:5-7: A Deuteronomic Allusion?* in *HAR* 8 (1984), p. 3-12; V. MORLA, *Ironia de Jr 29,22*, in *EstBib* 46 (1988), p. 249-251; D. SMITH, *Jeremiah as a Prophet of Nonviolent Resistance*, in *JSOT* 43 (1989), p. 95-107; G.H. WILSON, *The Prayer of Daniel 9: Reflection on Jeremiah 29*, in *JSOT* 48 (1990), p. 91-99; G. BÜSING, *Ein alternativer Ausgangspunkt zur Interpretation von Jer 29*, in *ZAW* 104 (1992), p. 402-408; H. WEIPPERT, *Fern von Jerusalem: Die Exilsethik von Jer 29,5-7*, in F. HAHN et al. (eds.), *Zion – Ort der Begegnung: Festschrift für Laurentius Klein zur Vollendung des 65. Lebensjahres* (BBB 90), Bodenheim,

identification of the original core of the chapter and then the subsequent redactional additions. Unlike the poetic sections of the book of Jeremiah, the identification of the so-called secondary material in this chapter, which is to a good extent prosaic, has been largely based upon the pin-pointing of “distinctive vocabulary and formulaic expressions”¹⁰ and establishing its original core, with each single unit isolated, analysed and interpreted and finally placed in their diachronic relationship with each other¹¹. The presence of variants in the different available texts makes the work of historical-critical scholars more pertinent. Apart from the differences between the various textual witnesses of this chapter, especially the MT and LXX, many other factors concerning the placement of sections of units of the chapter have led to varied conclusions: there is for example the case of v. 10-14 and the problem of justifying its location and establishing its coherence in its present context; a section focused on promises, with its beyond-exile vision coming immediately after v. 5-9 with its dense concentration on settlement and integration in exile. Another similar problem is that of the status of v. 16-19. Reading this section, it is clear that there is one letter in view; from Jeremiah to the exiles (v. 1-15, 21-23). But the complexity comes in v. 16-19 (not attested however in the LXX), which many exegetes believe to be an interruption of the flow of Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles from v. 15 to v.

1993, p. 127-139; K.A.D. SMELIK, *Letters to the Exiles: Jeremiah 29 in Context*, in *SJOT* 10 (1996), p. 282-295.

¹⁰ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 64. For Nicholson, the original content of the letter is v. 5-7, E.W. NICHOLSON, *Preaching to the Exiles*, p. 98. For Thiel, the core of the chapter is introduction: v. 1, 3; letter: v. 4a, 5-7; while the subsequent history is v. 25, 26-30, 31a, 32a, W. THIEL, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26-45*, p. 19. G. Fohrer identifies the letter to be v. 5-7, 12b-14a, G. FOHRER, *Prophetenerzählung*, p. 149. And for Holladay, the letter is v. 1, 3-11, 12b, 14a, 16, 17ab, 18ab, 19ab, 20, 15, 21-23 minus some short expansions, HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, see p. 134-136.

¹¹ A very good example of this approach is N. KLIPP, *Niederreisen und Aufbauen*, see p. 42-67. This approach is criticised by Büsing from two different perspectives: “1. Mit relativ viel Arbeitsaufwand werden möglichst, ursprüngliche Textstellen erarbeitet und interpretiert, dem überlieferten Textbestand in seiner Gesamtheit wird nur eine kurz zusammenfassende Darstellung seiner ‚Zusammensetzungs‘ bzw., Einfügungsgeschichte gewidmet’. 2. Die Frage nach dem Wert des überlieferten Gesamttextes und seiner Aussage wird kaum gestellt, durch die zunehmend geringschätzig Bewertung der sich vom ‚Ursprung‘ entfernenden Überarbeitungen wird diese ungestellte Frage aber einseitig beantwortet”, G. BÜSING, *Ein alternativer Ausgangspunkt zur Interpretation von Jer 29*, p. 402.

21. Various and different judgements and assessments are made from particular reading and exegetical assumptions, and as we shall see in our subsequent analysis of the chapter below, their structural and literary significance is evident in the overall context of the chapter.

5.1 EXPOSITION AND STRUCTURE

5.1.1 Exposition

The various theories of composition and the efforts to identify the original elements of this chapter and the later redactional additions apart, we, as contemporary readers of this chapter in its final MT form, need to appreciate the placement of the individual units and see their connecting thread or threads, and exactly how they fit into the to and fro exchange of correspondences between the prophet/the community in Jerusalem and the community in exile which is the framework of the chapter. The story of the chapter as reported by the narrator is not mistaken. It exhibits a sequence as follows: a community is already in exile, confirming the truth of the prophecies of chapter 26, the oracles of chapter 27, and vindicating Jeremiah in his confrontation with the false prophets personified in Hananiah in chapter 28. In chapter 29, Jeremiah, himself in Jerusalem, follows up with a “pastoral concern”¹², by sending letter to the exilic community through the hands of the king’s messengers. A member of the exilic community in Babylon, Shemaiah by name, is not happy with the content of Jeremiah’s letter. He sends a rejoinder to Zephaniah, the priest in Jerusalem. In the said rejoinder, he summarises Jeremiah’s letter and demands why Zephaniah, in his capacity as the overseer of the temple, had not cautioned Jeremiah on account of the letter he had written. The priest reads the letter to Jeremiah without any other reported action taken on or against him. Shemaiah then is characterised in the text as another opposition to the prophet Jeremiah, and consequently YHWH instructs Jeremiah to deliver an oracle against Shemaiah. But interestingly, the content of the letter of Shemaiah about Jeremiah is incorporated into the oracle that YHWH sent to Jeremiah to say to Shemaiah which serves as an accusation against him: “Because you have sent letters in your name...” (cf. v. 25). Shemaiah’s

¹² BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 255.

punishment is that neither him nor his descendants will partake of the plan of restoration of YHWH for the exiles (v. 32), a plan exposed in Jeremiah's letter (29:10-14).

The text implies that the message of the prophet to the community in exile is in two separate sendings by the prophet from Jerusalem to Babylon (the second communication not described as פָּקַד but introduced with the command to Jeremiah "to say") but in between implies that there is a letter from Babylon to Jerusalem; that is, from Shemaiah to the priest Zephaniah¹³.

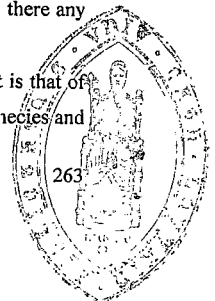
5.1.2 Structure

The structure of the entire chapter can therefore be broadly constructed from the point of view of the double communication between Jeremiah and the exiles in Babylon. The content of the letter from Shemaiah to Zephaniah is incorporated in the second correspondence since the narrator reports the letter in the context of the oracle that Jeremiah receives from YHWH for Shemaiah. Within each communication various units and divisions can as well be perceived as follows:

- A. Communication I, with the Judean exiles in Babylon (v. 1-23)
 - 1. Introduction of the letter, the addressees and the messengers (v. 1-3)
 - 2. Text of the document (4-23)
- B. Communication II, with the Judean exiles in Babylon (v. 24-32)
 - 1. The accusation against Shemaiah (v. 24-29)
 - 2. Judgement against Shemaiah (30-32)¹⁴

¹³ In fact authors vary on the exact number of letters or their traffic. For example Clements maintains that "these letters are probably four in number (Jeremiah to the exiles, vv. 1-15; Shemaiah in Babylon to Zephaniah in Jerusalem, vv. 21-23 (*sic*); Jeremiah to Shemaiah, v. 24, but broken off and no longer preserved in full; a further letter from Jeremiah to the exiles, vv. 31-32)". See CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah*, p. 170. However, he does not give the criteria for this classification and again, though the letter from Shemaiah to Zephaniah is referred to (from v. 24 and not v. 21-23 as Clements writes), v. 24 talks of the command of YHWH to Jeremiah to "say" and does not give evidence of any writing, neither is there any reason to see v. 31-32 as a separate letter. See CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah*, p. 170.

¹⁴ Another structuring based on other criteria but also from the bias of the final form of the text is that of Smelik. He sees the text of chapter 29 as consisting not just of correspondences but also of prophecies and



Looking at this structure, the immediate question becomes the literary criteria for establishing the two parts of the chapter, that is, Communication I and Communication II. At the junction between the two documents as the structure above shows, there is neither a narrative bridge to clarify the plot of the story¹⁵ nor any introduction as in the beginning to show the point of beginning of communication II. The narrator therefore leaves the reader with the choice of deciphering himself or herself the unspecified relationship¹⁶ between the two communications that form the two sections of the chapter¹⁷. But we notice in v. 24 the first occurrence of a command from YHWH to the prophet Jeremiah, thereby suggesting a new action¹⁸. There is equally a remarkable inclusion framing the first communication: the first and the last sections of the letter (v. 4-7 and v. 20-23): “Thus says YHWH Sabbaoth, the God of Israel to all the exiles whom I sent from Jerusalem to Babylon” (v. 4) and “now hear the word of YHWH, all the exiles whom I have exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon. Thus says YHWH Sabbaoth the God of Israel...” (v. 20-21). The major emphasis in the first communication is that the exiles will build,

so detects four prophecies which give him the grounds for four divisions. The first prophecy (v. 4-14) is addressed to the exiles in Babylon and admonishes them to settle down in the land of their captivity. The second prophecy (v. 16-19) is the announcement by the prophet of what will happen to the Judeans who remained in the land. The third (v. 20-23) is directed against two Judean prophets in Babylon who will be executed by Nebuchadnezzar, while the last prophecy, (v. 24-32) deals with the evil fate of still another prophet from Babylon, Shemaiah. See K.A.D. SMELIK, *Letters to the Exiles*, p. 285-286. This division as interesting as it may seem neglects certain data in the text. First it overlooks the import of the very first announcement in the text: וְאֵלֶּה דְבַרֵי הַסֵּפֶר (“these are the words of the letter...”). Secondly the writer’s criterion based on the different personages seems to simplify the complexity of the text and leaves evident questions: if the criterion is the different addressees, there is no reason why the third and the last prophecy should not be lumped together since the characters are all prophets in Babylon. However the analysis that followed his divisions based on the actions of the characters is revealing, coupled with his discussion on the context of the chapter and the relevance of the same to the book in general, see p. 286-291.

¹⁵ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 68.

¹⁶ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 68.

¹⁷ Gerhard Büsing arrives however at a three-part structure in his analysis. Basing the analysis on the occurrence of the *verbum dicendi* in the text, he arrives at a very complicated division into Introduction (v. 1-3), the letter to Shemaiah (v. 24-31a) and finally the main letter itself (v. 4-32). See G. BÜSING, *Ein alternativer Ausgangspunkt zur Interpretation von Jer 29*, see especially, p. 407.

¹⁸ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 68.

plant, marry and pray (v. 5-7) so that in the end, YHWH will visit (פקד) them and bring them back to “this place” (v. 10-14)¹⁹, while in the second communication the highest point is that YHWH will visit/punish (פקד) Shemaiah so that no man living among his household will see the good promised in the first communication (cf. v. 32). Brueggemann sees the extension of the letter from v. 4 to v. 28 because of the reiteration in v. 28 of the main admonition of v. 5 where the accent is on the imperative verbs, “build, live, plant and eat”. But in that case, he does not see the whole of v. 5-28 as a letter but as a “series of prophetic oracles. The first is cast as a letter, but the latter ones make little claim to the form of a letter and are simply oracles”²⁰.

5.2 ANALYSIS

5.2.1 *Communication I (v. 1-23)*

As shown in the sketch of the structure above, the section Communication I has two units of unequal length: the introduction of the letter, the addressees and the messengers (v. 1-3) and the text of the letter itself (v. 4-23).

5.2.1.1 *Introduction of the Letter, the Addressees and the Messengers (v. 1-3)*

The chapter is introduced as a text of a written document (וְאֵלֶּה דִּבְרֵי הַסֵּפֶר אֲשֶׁר), a text comprising a series of oracles²¹ addressed to Judean exiles in Babylon but on diverse

¹⁹ V. 15-23 denounce the prophets opposed to the authentic message of Jeremiah delivered in v. 5-14.

²⁰ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 257.

²¹ The extent or the limit of the letter is again quite difficult to establish because of changes in addressees and the phenomenon of nested quotations in the chapter. Van Dyke Parunak explains this phenomenon with respect to this chapter especially regarding v. 30-32 and sees the range of verses as “a good example of the challenge posed by the quotation formulas in the sixth-century prophets”. This paragraph for him poses three “knotty questions” of which the second is more relevant in our context here: “How should the Jer. 29:30-32 paragraph be punctuated? Conventional English punctuation would require four levels of nested quotations, the first beginning with v. 31, the second before ‘Thus says the YHWH,’ the third before ‘Because Shemaiah has prophesied,’ and the fourth before ‘Behold’ in v. 32. [...] such deep nesting seems unnatural, especially when the speaker does not change”, see H. VAN DYKE PARUNAK, *Some Discourse Functions of Prophetic Quotation Formulas in Jeremiah*, in R.B. BERGEN (ed.), *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, Winona Lake, 1994, p. 489-519, p. 489-490. For different opinions on the extent and

issues. Unlike the previous chapters in the block, this chapter begins without any precision about the historical setting²², without the word-event formula, even without express divine instructions to the prophet to prophesy or proclaim. The reader is therefore a “step removed from Jeremiah’s reception of revelation”²³. Could this distancing be a narrative device by the narrator to depict the spatial distancing between the two parties involved in the correspondence, the world of Babylon and that of Judah? Or from a theological standpoint, could it be a device to stress the wide gap of difference between the vision of life of the exiled and the remnant? As Scalise writes: “This distancing of the reader parallels the separation of the audience in Babylon from Jeremiah’s preaching ministry. A written document could go where the prophet could not. God’s word was still valid when read from a scroll”²⁴. The imprecision about date continues also in v. 2 despite the efforts to situate the circumstances “after Jeconiah the king, the queen mother...”

The addressees of the prophet are, following the translation of יְתָר we adopt here, the pre-eminent (foremost, leading)²⁵ of the elders, priests, prophets and all the people in exile,

limit of the letter, see, HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 137; THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 544, RUDOLPH, *Jeremiah*, p. 181. M. FISHBANE, *Biblical Interpretation*, divides the text of the letter showing a symmetrical structure of A-B-C-D-C'-B'-A', but this structure is based on the premise that the text of the chapter ends in v. 29, see p. 479. This cannot be the case since it does not account for v. 30-32.

²² Despite the fact of the absence of date in this letter, Holladay in his characteristic historical reconstruction of the life and activities of the prophet (for him the date 594 as the date of the letter “is thus doubtless correct”) sees a similar historical setting for this letter and chapters 27 and 28. Placement after these chapters suggests to him the excitement aroused by the attempted rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar according to his interpretation of 27:3. And the royal delegation that carried the letter may have been sent to reassure the king of Babylon of the loyalty of Zedekiah. Cf. HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 140. What is clear is that 29:1 follows 28:17 without recognisable rupture.

²³ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 69. See also Jer. 51:59.

²⁴ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 69.

²⁵ The normal meaning of the word יְתָר is “rest” in the sense of “remaining”, with reference to things (27:19) and to people (39:9; 52:15). Not attested in the LXX, the translation “to the rest/residue of the elders of the exilic community” would be curious begging the question as to why they should have been so reduced. If “the rest of” is the meaning here, the simplest conclusion is that some of the elders were no

forming a frame with the groups in Judah encountered at the beginning of this cycle (chapter 26: with the royal officials missing here but which appear eventually in v. 2).

V. 2 appears as a parenthesis²⁶ which tries to identify the historical setting. The verse reflects II Kings 24:12-16²⁷, with the mention of the exile of Jeconiah (same as Jehoiachin)²⁸, his mother, his officers, his dignitaries by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and equally reflects Jer. 24 the parable of the good and bad figs²⁹, with the mention of the deportation of the king, officers of Judah, the craftsmen and the smiths. But two items are added here: the queen mother (הַמְּלִיכָה) and the eunuchs (הַפְּרִיסִים). The

more in exile, and the question as to whether they were imprisoned or executed for revolt becomes consequent. Many exegetes have propounded possible answers to this if the translation is so adopted: Duhm has proposed a winnowing by persecution while Schmidt talks of imprisonment as hostages to exert pressure on kinsmen who were part of the rebellious party in Jerusalem, or that some of the elders may have died naturally (Weiser). But the other meaning of the word can offer a rescue: יָהִר meaning here “pre-eminence (of)” and this is the meaning in its double occurrence in Gen. 49:3 concerning Reuben: “You are the beginning of my power, the excellent dignity and highest might”. See also *BDB*, p. 451-452. This is also the opinion of B. WAMBACQ, *Jeremias, Klaagliederen, Baruch, Brief van Jeremias* (De Boeken van het Oude Testament 10), Roermond, 1957, p. 187 and more recently, HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 140. Holladay concludes: “Perhaps Jrm ironically intended a little of both: the ‘rest’ of the vessels are in Jerusalem, the ‘rest’ of the elders are in Babylon, doubtless “pre-eminent” in their way. All is scattered”, see HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 140. See also T. KRONHOLM, יָהִר I, *TDOT* 6, p. 482-491. Kronholm favours the meaning of “rest”, “remainder” though he admits also of etymological derivation that gives the nuance of “be extra, surplus, surpass in importance or quality” (see p. 482).

²⁶ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 69.

²⁷ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 545.

²⁸ In Jer. 24:1; 27:20 and 28:4, יְהוֹיָכִים is expressly designated as the son of Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim (609-598 BC) is the father of Jehoiachin. See also J. ROGERSON, *Chronicle of the Old Testament Kings: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Rulers of Ancient Israel*, London, 1999, p. 150-151.

²⁹ The parable of the figs in Jer. 24, a chapter which has elements in common with chapter 29, reflects an important tension in the Jeremiah tradition between those deported and those who remained in the city. In the evident pro-Babylonian slant of the tradition, the exiled ones are the bearers of the hope of Judah for the future and are the special objects of the concern of YHWH. It is to these that the letter of the present chapter is addressed. See also BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 256.

term קְרִיָּים usually translates “eunuchs” but can also refer to palace officials³⁰ (cf. Jer. 53:25; II Sam. 8:15) since it is not certain that the term is used strictly in the physical sense. In Gen. 39:1, Potiphar is called קְרִיָּים (singular construct) but is married.

V. 3 identifies the messengers with the expression (בְּיָד) literally “by the hand” which begins the verse; the messengers being Elasah and Gemariah, sons of Shaphan and Hilkiyah respectively³¹. They assume this messenger role in the context of a royal delegation the purpose of which the narrator does not reveal. In our narrative context, the purpose of the royal delegation to Babylon is not as important as the question of coherence and practical logic such as will be encountered in v. 16-20, which contains a negative oracle against king Zedekiah. The question is put by Holladay: how could Jeremiah send a negative judgement about Zedekiah by the hand of a royal courtier³²? Even though Jeremiah does not send an oracle against the king to the king personally, but informs the exiles of an oracle the king has already heard of (cf. v. 16, 20), in order to prevent the exiles from acting like their brothers who remain in Jerusalem and who do listen to the prophets (cf. v. 19-20), what point does Jeremiah score by using precisely the envoys of the same king?

5.2.1.2 Text of the Document (4-23)

It is difficult to specify strictly definite literary units in this section. We have already signalled the inclusion in the beginning and end of the letter concerning the addressees and the invocation of YHWH:

³⁰ R. DE VAUX, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, p. 121.

³¹ Commentators try to identify these personalities. But such identifications are problematic. The Elasah mentioned in the text here is mentioned only once in the Old Testament and there is no way to be certain that the father, Shaphan is the same as the Shaphan, the officer under Josiah when the book of the law was discovered in II Kings 22:3-13. One is equally uncertain that the Ahikam who saved the life of Jeremiah in the context of the temple sermon (cf. Jer. 26:24) was the brother of Elasah, being himself the son of a Shaphan. But since in a cycle where the Shaphan family has appeared both influential and at the same time well disposed to the prophet, one can assume that most of these people belong to the one and the same family. See J.M. WARD, *Shaphan*, art. in *IDB* 4, p. 307-308.

³² HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah* 2, p. 135.

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 לְכֻלְּהֶגּוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר־הִגְלִיתִי מִירוּשָׁלַם בְּבָבֶלָה (v. 4)

כֻּלְּהֶגּוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַחְתִּי מִירוּשָׁלַם בְּבָבֶלָה:
 כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (v. 20b-21a)

Nevertheless, a close look reveals that the text of the letter highlights the promise of v. 10-14 at the centre, repeating in the last part of the letter the elements of the first part, and in the same order but from a slightly different perspective. In the first part, before the promises of v. 10-14, the letter begins with addresses to those in exile, highlighting positive imperatives for settlement (v. 5-7). This is followed by a warning against false but unnamed prophets who deceive (v. 8-9). After the promises, the letter continues with the words addressed to those who remained in Jerusalem, but now with negative consequences of sword, famine and pestilence (v. 15-19). This is in turn followed by warning against precisely named false prophets, Zedekiah and Ahab (v. 21-23). We have an image thus:

- A. Address to exiles in Babylon: positive imperatives, build, plant, marry, eat (v. 5-7)
- B. Do not let your prophets (unnamed) deceive you (v. 8-9)
- Promises (v. 10-14)**
- A. Address to those who remained in Jerusalem: negative, punishments of sword, famine and pestilence (v. 15-19)
- B. Prophets who deceive named (v. 21-23)³³

³³ Lundbom looks at the structure of the letter (Communication I) from another angle not quite essentially different from the above format. He considers the letter to be in two divisions: the first half is about *shalom* while the second half is about judgement. Firstly we have the anticipated *shalom* of the Babylonian exiles (v. 7), then the eventual *shalom* of Jerusalem (v. 11). The remainder of the letter is judgement and here Jeremiah reverses the order: the remnant in Jerusalem is judged first, then prophets in Babylon who preach lies and commit atrocity. He therefore identifies a chiasmus based on key words and theme:

From the framework, the letter opines that YHWH has his plans for his people, his good plans of restoration but not to be dissociated with the reality of the exile and not to be realised by the false optimism of the false prophets.

We can therefore thematically divide the text of the letter as follows:

- i. Initial commands of settlement (v. 4-7)
- ii. Warning against false prophets (v. 8-9)
- iii. Promises (v. 10-14)
- iv. Fate of those who remained in Jerusalem (v. 15-19)
- v. Oracle of judgement against Ahab and Zedekiah (v. 20-23)

5.2.1.2.1 *Revolutionary Advices: Initial Commands of Settlement (v. 4-7)*

The first verse of the letter (v. 4) bears the signature of the author. Not only that it begins with the typical messenger formula of prophetic speech *כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*³⁴, there is equally a significant and explicit shift of emphasis in the way the addressees are described. This time around, it is not Nebuchadnezzar (as in v. 1) who is responsible for the exiling of the people; the letter is addressed to “all the exiles whom I (YHWH) have exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon”, implying therefore Nebuchadnezzar’s role of agent, with the repetition of the term *גָּלוּ* both as noun and as verb. It is interesting that from this point till the end of the chapter, the verb appears in the *hiphil* with YHWH as the subject. It is YHWH and not Nebuchadnezzar who is responsible for the exile (cf. v. 7, 14 in contrast with v. 1). Even in the verses where other verbs are used to express the idea of banishing, sending or driving away of the people, YHWH remains the subject (cf. v. 18,

“A Welfare (*shālom*) of Babylon (vv 4-9)
 B Welfare (*shalom*) of Jerusalem (vv 10-14)
 B¹ Judgment in Jerusalem (vv 15-19)
 A¹ Judgment in Babylon (vv 20-23)”

³⁴ For a survey of ancient Hebrew letters, the description of ancient Hebrew epistolography and the comparison of forms of Hebrew and Aramaic letters, see D. PARDEE, *An Overview of Ancient Hebrew Epistolography*, in *JBL* 97 (1978), p. 321-346. For his reference to the letter of Jeremiah in chapter 29, see especially p. 331 and footnote 47.

the verbs רָדַף [to pursue] and נָדַח [to banish, to drive away], v. 20 שְׁלַח [to send], cf. also 27:5-7).

In v. 5-7, the kernel of the letter, come unexpected revolutionary advices. The exiles have to prepare for a long haul³⁵ since the experience will extend beyond the present generation. A series of imperatives is used to portray what should be the attitude of the exiles in their new community. In a way, it summarises the normal life of a YHWH community. It begins with the basic necessities for a person or community to settle down in a new environment³⁶, “drei elementaren Neuanfänge im Leben eines Menschen”³⁷ (v. 5), extends to the plan for the future or posterity (v. 6) and finally regulates the cultic and social life in the midst of all this (v. 7). Gilbert terms it “une triple préoccupation”³⁸. “Build” (בָּנֵה) houses and “plant” (וְנָטַע) gardens recall the terminologies in Jeremiah’s call in Jer. 1:10 but here in a quite different use. The above two imperatives have their corresponding goals equally expressed in imperatives: “dwell” (שָׁבוּ) and “eat” (אָכְלוּ) of their fruits. After settling down with shelter and sustenance, it is consequent to think of establishing posterity and lineage (v. 6). And so they should also “take wives” (קָחוּ נָשִׁים), beget (וְהוֹלִידוּ) sons and daughters, take wives for their sons and give their daughters to husbands that they may beget sons and daughters. Just as the old enslaved community in Exo. 1 multiplied³⁹, Judah is also to multiply⁴⁰ (רַבָּה) there and not decrease⁴¹ (מִנְעַט +

³⁵ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 257.

³⁶ Ezek. 8:1 and 14:1 show that the people were free to settle down in their host community. They had their own organisation with the elders and Ezekiel, as well as other prophets, could minister to them.

³⁷ H. WEIPPERT, *Fern von Jerusalem: Die Exilsethik von Jer 29, 5-7*, p. 131.

³⁸ M. GILBERT, *Jérémie écrit aux exilés*, p. 112.

³⁹ However, the contrast is unmistakable. The description of the Israelite settlement in Canaan, especially in Jos. 24:13, shows that cultivated land, cities, vineyards and olive groves, realities which represent long years of technical and cultural achievements were given to the Israelite settlers. Conversely, here in the Babylonian exile, the exiles have to begin from the scratch, with the basic family needs of shelter, domestic agriculture and sustenance. In another web of contrast, in chapter 35 of the book of Jeremiah, YHWH praises the Rechabites for refusing to drink wine, build houses or have vineyards, grow fields or crops in obedience to the command of their ancestor. Their obedience to the order of unsettled life became model of obedience for Judah as regards their own specific order received. In our text here, the exiles are

negation). And finally they have to maintain a social and cultic⁴² life by seeking the peace of their host community and praying for the latter's peace upon which their own peace depends. Berlin⁴³ and Smith⁴⁴ suggest that Jeremiah is here (in v. 7) citing Deut. 20:5-10: the initiating of activities that would exempt one from military service. But this is only interpretative (suggestive) and has no serious textual support. Closer to the text is Holladay's remark that Jeremiah is here indirectly, but in a positive language, counselling against revolt. And v. 7 lends more confirmation to this by the last two imperatives וַיִּרְשֵׁי and וַיִּתְחַפְּלוּ (seeking for the peace of Babylon and praying YHWH for the peace of the latter) of the verse which are each connected with the שְׁלוֹם of Babylon.

Jer. 29:5 and Isa. 65:21

From the point of view of intertextuality, one is immediately attracted in the narrative of chapter 29 by the contents of Jeremiah's letter to the exile, especially by the directions to the exiles on how they are to live in Babylon. The motifs concerning building houses, planting gardens and bearing children, could be read in the light of Isa. 65:21⁴⁵:

commanded to build and to plant. It is still the issue of obedience to a word; the relationship of the people with YHWH with regard to the present tense reality and the latter's ultimate purpose.

⁴⁰ Cf. the creation imperative of Gen. 1:28 and the description of the descendants of Jacob in Exo. 1:7. It is important to recognise that the same verb (רבה) is used here as in Gen. 1:28; 9:1, 7 (as well as in Exodus). In both texts, it is YHWH who speaks to humans. But while in Genesis, it is a blessing, here calls for the responsibility of the people to eschew the temptation of depopulation.

⁴¹ Cf. Jer. 30:19 where the same verbs are used in YHWH's promise: "I will increase them (רבה); they will not diminish" (מעט).

⁴² Holladay suggests that "pray on behalf of it to YHWH" of v. 7 implies the obligation to see to some kind of community liturgy while in exile. This is not out of point judging from the fact that the verb פלל in the *hithpa'el* could also imply liturgical prayer, as in I Sam. 2:1; Jon. 2:2. See also *BDB*, פלל, p. 813.

⁴³ A. BERLIN, *Jeremiah 29:5-7: A Deuteronomic Allusion?* p. 3-4.

⁴⁴ D.L. SMITH, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile*, Bloomington, 1989, p. 133-137.

⁴⁵ Apart from the text of Isa. 65:21, the individual elements of this advice to the exiles in Jer. 29:5-7 are also to be found in strategic places in the patriarchal narratives. For example בנה בית (to build houses) in reference to Gen. 33:17, the idea of multiplying and not decreasing (the expressions רבה: "to be numerous" and אל מעט "not to decrease") with reference to Gen. 22:17 and Exo. 1:7.

behalf to YHWH because their peace would depend on the peace of the city; and here the city refers in context to Babylon. This particular verse, in recalling Psa. 122:6 identifies Babylon with Jerusalem. Psa. 122:6, a royal Psalm of David reads: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem (שְׁלוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַם), let them prosper those who love thee”⁴⁷. Prayer is now directed in favour, not of Jerusalem but of Babylon, a directive which “surely turns upside down the orthodox and the expected”⁴⁸. In this way, the interdiction of the prophet to pray for the people (cf. Jer. 7:16; 11:14 and 14:11) is equally recalled.

V. 5-7 therefore recall the major ideas of chapters 27 and 28 to suggest that the exile will not end soon. But here it is something more than this, because inevitably those exiled from their homeland would naturally find themselves counting the days till they return. More than the indefiniteness of the length of the exile, these positive imperatives suggest equally that their stay in Babylon must not just be negative (the normal mentality of the exiled) but positive: their home for the indefinite future is presently in the exile, and there they must build and construct their lives⁴⁹. Thus the imperatives “build”, “plant”, “marry”, “all long-term projects which produce a firmly established society with an open-ended future”⁵⁰ become expressions which are “paradigms of ‘integration’ and are used to project Jeremiah’s advice that the exiles should take a long-term view of their residence in Babylon; that they should plan on this assumption both for the welfare and continuance of their own community and for the prosperity of the Babylonian communities from which their own highest interests cannot be dissociated”⁵¹.

⁴⁷ In this Psalm, the prayer is said to comprise of two intentions: שְׁלוֹם בְּחֻלְכֶךָ (“peace within your walls”) and שְׁלוֹם בְּאַרְמוֹתֶיךָ “peace in your citadels”. The use of the word שְׁלוֹם here in Jer. 29 makes the advice more startling as it is now applied to an enemy city and a conqueror, and more so used in a cultic context with the verb פָּלַל. But Weiser gives a significance of the use of a cultic language here. It shows that the power of YHWH extends beyond the confines of Israel and Judah to foreign lands, and not in any way subordinate to the deities of Babylon. See WEISER, *Jeremia*, p. 261.

⁴⁸ J. HILL, *Friend or Foe?* p. 151.

⁴⁹ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 141.

⁵⁰ CARROLL, *Jeremiah (OTL)*, p. 556.

⁵¹ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 743.

If the counsel to build houses and plant gardens, that is settling down, is revolutionary, more so is that of seeking and praying for the בָּבֶלֶשׁ of Babylon⁵² and not its downfall. Hossfeld and Meyer are right that the content of the letter is to the hearers and to the reader an issue too demanding on three grounds (“eine dreifache Zumutung”)⁵³: “*Erstens*: Die Aufforderung zur Kollaboration und sogar deren religiöse Sanktionierung!” As one can see in Psa. 137 and other various oracles about the Nations, the normal religious reaction to the exile is the prayer to YHWH for his vengeful intervention for the restoration of the people, and the restoration of her national and religious institutions. Jeremiah himself prays personally for a severe punishment of his enemies (see Jer. 17:14-18; 18:19-23; 20:10-13). “*Zweitens*: Das geforderte Bittgebet der Exilierten für das (feindliche) Land setzte voraus, daß man außerhalb Israels zu Jahwe beten konnte”. What is normal for a modern religious sentiment would be problematic for the religiosity of the Old Testament. The ‘Nations’ means unclean lands (see Amos 7:17; Hos. 9:1ff). That David had to flee before Saul to foreign land meant for him “to serve other gods” (I Sam. 26:19). Apparently YHWH is bound to Israel’s soil, that Naaman of Syria (II Kings 5:17) had to demand to be allowed to take couple of mules’ burden of earth to his land so that he can worship the God of Israel there. “*Drittens*: Hauptärgernis, wie vor allem die Reaktion Schemajas in 29,28 zeigt, ist die Aufforderung, sich im Exil auf Dauer einzurichten”. This is seen especially from the succession of the imperatives for a long-term settlement and from the résumé (showing emphasis) in 29:28. The announcement of a long lasting exile contradicts the passionate and longing hope of the exiles, as well as

⁵² Smelik tries to save the text from its problematic character and is of the opinion that the exiles are not here advised to pray to YHWH on behalf of Babylon. He supports his argument from the occurrence of the name ‘Babylon’ in the text: 11 times (v. 1, 3 – two times -, 4, 10, 15, 20, 21, 22 – two times -, 28) but missing in v. 7, and he concludes that it “suggests a deliberate avoidance of the name here. The exiles are not supposed to seek the peace of their oppressor [...]. What we read in verse 7 is that the exiles should seek the peace of the city where they are now residing, whatever the name of that city be. Possibly, it is even better to interpret the Hebrew wording here not as ‘the city’ but as ‘every city’. And this has been the custom in the synagogue to this day,” see K.A.D. SMELIK, *Letters to the Exiles*, p. 291. This interpretation is however very literal and does not take into consideration the theological significance of Babylon and the function of the figure of Babylon in the theology of the book of Jeremiah. Even if ‘every city’ is preferred, the context still refers to Babylon, though without express mention of the name of the city.

⁵³ See F.-L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Prophet gegen Prophet*, p. 104-105.

those of the remnants, that Nebuchadnezzar's hegemony would soon be broken, hopes which prophets like Hananiah proclaim without the least reluctance. By this advice, Jeremiah casts the people completely adrift⁵⁴ from all their supporting and supportive systems: nation-State and State boundaries, army (not to revolt), of course kingship and temple. That means that YHWH can still furnish new perspectives of existence and survival even in the indefinite absence of these habitual realities⁵⁵. Seemingly a practical advice indeed⁵⁶ but which would be difficult for people in the actual situation to accommodate. However, any other thing to the contrary means the people falling prey to the suggestions of the false prophets (the following unit 8-9) who would instigate rebellion, while Jeremiah the true prophet foresees the end, though far off and indefinite perhaps, but certain, when God will make real his plans of restoration for his people (v. 10-14).

⁵⁴ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 546. See also W.L. HOLLADAY, *Enigmatic Bible Passages: God writes a Rude Letter*.

⁵⁵ Deut. 20:5 contains the prescription of customarily dedicating new houses to YHWH while Deut. 26:2 gives that of presenting the first fruits of the soil to YHWH. Therefore the command to build, plant and eat in v. 5-7 means that these ceremonies could equally take place even in foreign land. Rudolph sees in the commands the fact that these ceremonies were no longer necessary and that it is an example of prophetic piety that announces the universalistic mission to the Gentiles as announced by Deutero-Isaiah, RUDOLPH, *Jeremia*, p. 16. Cf. SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 71.

⁵⁶ Arguments have been advanced to see v. 5-7 as containing some element of political pragmatism, especially as regards the command of seeking and praying for the *shalom* of their host city: that is, the argument that a more powerful and secure Babylon would provide the people better conditions of life than Jerusalem would have done since it is under threat. Supporting this view, Adele Berlin argues that the expression *שלום העיר* reflects the advice that any city that is besieged should be offered some terms for peace making in order to avoid war. That means then that seeking for the "peace of the city" "is also subtly counselling against rebellion" which is founded on the recognition of the power of Babylon, see A. BERLIN, *Jeremiah 29:5-7: A Deuteronomic Allusion?* p. 4. Carroll supports this practical bent of the advice and calls it "civil religion at its best" and a "blue print for millennia to come", CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 556. See also MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 742-743; D.L. SMITH, *The Religion of the Landless*, p. 135. These opinions are not out of place from a sociological point of view.

5.2.1.2.2 *Warning against False Prophets (v. 8-9)*

After dealing with the reality of the exile and the practical strategy to live with the reality, v. 8-9 returns to the recurring theme of false prophets as already encountered in chapter 23 and in the preceding chapters of this block (cf. especially 27:9-10, 14-15, 16b-18; 28:8-9, 15). These verses therefore provide strong reinforcement for the preceding verses⁵⁷, fitting well in the sequence without interrupting the flow between v. 7 and v. 10. Chapters 27 and 28 particularly have made clear the reality of false prophets in Jerusalem who assure the people that the exile would be short. Jeremiah needs to counteract this notion once more and to assert in the usual language that this is שֶׁקֶר (see especially the phrase *הֵם נִבְּאִים לְכֶם* in 27:10, 14, 16 and in 28:15) propagated by those YHWH has not sent⁵⁸. Illegitimate sources of revelation⁵⁹ were also available to the exilic community in Babylon as will be made evident in v. 21-23 of the present chapter, propagating שֶׁקֶר in the name of YHWH. Though the precise content of the שֶׁקֶר is not given here (cf. v. 9), nor is the lie of Ahab and Zedekiah (cf. v. 21) and Shemaiah (cf. v. 31) explicitly reported by the narrator, the context of the cycle identifies it to be belief in the shortness of the exile, the reverse of “the peace of Babylon” which they had been instructed to pray for (v. 7); or the parallel verse in 27:9 “you will not serve the king of Babylon”, or even the forecast of Hananiah of the end of Nebuchadnezzar’s domination “within two years” (28:11), which was interpreted as making “this people trust in a lie” (28:15).

5.2.1.2.3 *Promises (v. 10-14)*

As with many other sections of this chapter, many commentators have problem of either justifying the location of these verses in its present context, or seeing the coherence of

⁵⁷ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 547.

⁵⁸ In many occasions in the block 26-29, the emphasis remains on the aspect of ‘sending’. Prophecy and dreams can never be false *per se*, and divining (קִסָּם) may not have been outrightly a questionable practice. At least, Joseph an Israelite ancestor says in Gen. 44:5 that he practices it, though here a different verb (נִחַן) is used but which equally means divination (see *BDB*, p. 638 and 890). But the central accusation, and the reason why the messages obtained by these intermediaries is false is first and foremost because YHWH has not sent them as is frequent against false prophets in the book of Jeremiah (see for example 23:21, 32; 27:15; 28:15; 43:2).

⁵⁹ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 72.

this section of promises, with its beyond-exile vision and especially when placed side by side with the whole of v. 5-9 with its dense concentration on settlement and integration in exile. The suspicion is that v. 5-9 is too limited or negative and therefore required supplementation with a prophetic prediction that looked hopefully beyond the exile⁶⁰. While Thiel attempts to bracket v. 10-14 in his characteristic general tendency of a deuteronomistic redaction of the whole chapter⁶¹, Carroll⁶² sees v. 10-14 as functioning in chapter 29 as a correction to the impression given in v. 5-7 that the exile would be permanent, and Nicholson sees the section as a development imposed upon it⁶³. But for Carroll, the problem of v. 10 is more than being a correction of impression of what precedes. For him it appears as a counterbalance to what precedes it: “For if v. 5-7 asserts the permanence of the exile, vv. 10-14 speak of a return to the homeland [...]. These two motifs do not necessarily contradict each other but v. 10-14 look suspiciously like the message of the prophets in the cycle who are declared to be prophesying falsehood [...]”⁶⁴. In the main, Carroll’s argument is that Jeremiah’s criteria for recognising true prophecy in 28:8-9 (the argument from tradition of the past and that of accomplishment in the future) are not respected in this section since this section is equally positive and hopeful-like and “it only differs from what they (the false prophets) say in having a longer time sequence – seventy years instead of two years”⁶⁵.

But it is in the side-by-side placing of these two seemingly exclusive motifs by the narrator that the totality of the prophet’s intention in the book in general and the block in particular can be gleaned. Looking beyond the confines of the individual segments, the kernel of the book of Jeremiah with its single theology – but in the wings of desolation and reconstruction – is made much more evident in these two complementary segments.

⁶⁰ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 738.

⁶¹ W. THIEL, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26-45*, p. 16ff.

⁶² CARROLL, *Jeremiah (OTL)*, p. 558.

⁶³ E.W. NICHOLSON, *Preaching to the Exiles*, p. 98ff.

⁶⁴ CARROLL, *Jeremiah (OTL)*, p. 557.

⁶⁵ CARROLL, *Jeremiah (OTL)*, p. 557. Carroll therefore sees the seventy years motif in the unit as evidence of post exilic creation: “As the return to the homeland never became a very popular movement, the strategy for building a permanent life in Babylon proved to be very wise counsel”, p. 557-558.

That is, while the preceding verses (5-9) assert the reality of the exile and the need for proper integration and full engagement with regard to the exiles, v. 10-14 immediately moves the horizon of the people beyond the confines of their exilic experience to announce the hope of return. From the point of view of content, the two component parts of 5-9 (that is 5-7 and 8-9) hang on two exclusive alternatives, or better put give two extreme positions. The promise in v. 10, which is the first promise in the chapter strikes out a middle ground between these two extremities, that is, between the imperatives of v. 5-7 and the admonition of v. 8-9. From the literal perspective of v. 5-7, the exiles would get the impression of a permanent settlement (the idea of building of houses and taking wives has that nuance of definite settlement), while from the perspectives of the intermediaries they have as implied in v. 8-9, they would benefit a near future of homecoming. V. 10-14 becomes an articulation of the middle point and the delicate theological balance between these two. Between the commands to prepare for a long haul in Babylon, to dispose oneself and adopt a positive attitude in one's new condition on one hand, and counteracting feverish excitement⁶⁶ for a quick return on the other, there is no conflict. Life in exile and for the exiles is not without hope and nowhere is that implied in the preceding verses or chapters. In v. 5-7, the presence of YHWH is expressed in his blessings of the means of settlement, increase and prayer. In 27:7, the powerful יְהוָה remains a suspense, an indefinite spot in the future, but nevertheless certain. In v. 10-14, Jeremiah is at the same time dampening hopes of a quick and immediate return and providing an antidote to defeat and despair. YHWH therefore carries out his plan to give the exiles future and hope by making theirs the blessings of fruitfulness and answer to prayer (v. 12-14). If the return from exile is an expectation in seventy years time, the reader understands better the injunction about procreation in v. 6: there is necessity for descendants so that the sons and grandsons would be the beneficiaries of the promise. The invitation to be fruitful therefore announces the anticipation of the promise.

It is noteworthy the contrast between the יְהוָה promised here and that of v. 7. While in v. 7 it is a task for the exiles since they have to seek for it in reference to the יְהוָה of the host empire, here in v. 11, it is a gift of YHWH and directly for Judah. From v. 11-14,

⁶⁶ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* 2, p. 737.

Babylon does not appear again as an intermediary between YHWH and the people. A series of statements connecting “I” and “you” comes in chain. In the final analysis, the ultimate purpose of YHWH is שְׁלוֹם for the people.

I to You: (v. 10-11), “I will visit *you* and confirm *my* good word to *you* by bringing *you* back to this place. For *I* know the purposes which *I* am purposing for *you*... to give *you* a future and a hope”.

You to Me, plus I to You (v. 12), “Then *you* shall call on *me*, and *you* shall go and pray to *me*, and *I* will listen to *you*”.

You to Me, plus I to You (v. 13-14a), “And *you* shall seek and find *me*, when *you* search for *me* with all your heart. And *I* will be found by *you*”.

I to You (v. 14b), “And *I* will turn away *your* captivity, and *I* will gather *you* from all the nations...*I* have driven *you*. And *I* will bring *you* again into the place from which *I* sent *you* in exile”.

From v. 12 till the end of v. 13 we find a repetitive series of four pairs of verbs: הִלֵּךְ/קָרָא (call/come), שָׁמַע/פָּלַל (pray/hear), מָצָא/בָּקַשׁ (seek/find), מָצָא/רָדַשׁ (inquire/be found), used to articulate this restoration of the close unmediated relationship between Judah and YHWH. The verb הָשִׁיבָה of v. 14 concludes the section by forming inclusion with v. 10 “by bringing you back” (לְהָשִׁיבָה) in the infinitive construction. V. 10-14 has been described rightly as “a rich inventory of Israel’s primary formulas for hope of return”⁶⁷. In this way, the little unit of v. 10-14 are framed by two references, in v. 10 to the end of the domination of Babylon and in v. 14 to the promise of restoration to the land⁶⁸.

⁶⁷ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 258.

⁶⁸ Cf. J. HILL, *Friend or Foe?* p. 154.

5.2.1.2.3.1 שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה (*Seventy Years*) in Context

While 29:4-7 gives impression of relaxed settlement in exile, v. 10-14 change the optic to announce the end of Israel's subjugation under the Babylonian domination, a "notorious"⁶⁹ allusion which engenders "unresolved questions"⁷⁰, just as it occurs again in Jer. 25:11-12:

"And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, says YHWH, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations".

Outside this occurrence in the book of Jeremiah, the concept of seventy years mapping out the length of Babylonian domination against YHWH's people occurs four more times in the Old Testament: in the prophetic writings in Zech. 1:12; 7:5, Dan. 9:2; and in II Chr. 36:21. The "seventy years" motif also occurs but without reference to the period of subjugation of Israel under Babylon but as significant length of years in Isa. 23:15, 17 (cf. Jer. 27:7). YHWH declares that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years and at the end of the seventy years will be dealt with. Here seventy years is taken as a period of the days of a king (cf. v. 15). And in Psa. 90:10, human lifespan is given to be seventy years (or eighty for those who are strong) that pass quickly in pain and suffering. Other Old Testament texts give the number seventy as a product of the symbolic numbers seven and ten and so envisage the figure as a measure of completeness (cf. Gen. 46:27; Gen. 50:3; Deut. 10:22; Jdg. 1:7; I Sam. 6:19; II Sam. 24:15).

Of all these occurrences, II Chr. 36:21 and Dan. 9:2 are more significant in that they make specific reference to the book of Jeremiah:

⁶⁹ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 665.

⁷⁰ L.L. GRABBE, "The End of the Desolations of Jerusalem": From Jeremiah's 70 Years to Daniel's 70 Weeks of Years, in C.A. EVANS & W.F. STINESPRING (eds.), *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of W.H. Brownlee*, Atlanta, 1987, p. 67-72, see p. 68.

“To fulfil the word of YHWH by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfil seventy years” (II Chr. 36:21).

“In the first year of his reign I, Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of YHWH came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem” (Dan. 9:2).

A further interpretation is given in Dan. 9:24 where the prophet Daniel is informed by Gabriel that this period of time would be for the Jews and Jerusalem a period to put an end to sin and transgression⁷¹.

Our interest here goes beyond the historical interpretations⁷² or the extra-biblical clues⁷³ offered. We try to offer an interpretation within the context of the extant text. What is basic is that one may not comfortably determine whether a literal or conventional meaning should be assumed in every case as the meaning of the phrase “seventy years”⁷⁴

⁷¹ See P. ACKROYD, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.*, Philadelphia, 1968, especially p. 242. In I Chr. another theological interpretation is given: counting backwards, the seventy years stand for seventy sabbatical years that were not observed (cf. Lev. 25:1-7; 26:27-35).

⁷² Actually, none of the Old Testament occurrences designates the exact beginning or end of the seventy-year span. The span corresponds to no exact pair of dates, in the words of Holladay who sees “no reason why such a span of time could not be the intention of an exilic redactor”, HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 665. Closest but not precise indication is given in II Chr. 36:21-22 which Whitley sees as the period from the destruction of the temple in 586 to the completion of the second temple in 515 BC. Whitley is of the opinion that 586-16 is the specific time indicated by “seventy years” in Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Daniel also, even though the period is described as pertaining to Babylonian rule in Jer. 25 and 29, see C.F. WHITLEY, *The Term Seventy Years Captivity*, in *VT* 4 (1954), p. 60-72, see especially p. 68-69, 72.

⁷³ Holladay suggests it may reflect an idiom larger than the Old Testament and in this context refers to the appearance of the seventy years in an inscription of Esarhaddon which is the period of time during “which Marduk shows displeasure toward Babylon,” designating “the proper period for an ancient Oriental city to lie desolate”, HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 669. See also SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 74.

⁷⁴ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 495.

and this is indicative of its flexibility of meaning and reference⁷⁵. We can only insist on the function of the phrase in the present context or more generally in the context of the book of Jeremiah.

Carroll's opinion that the distinction between the seventy years forecast here and Hananiah's two years in 28:2-4 is only a matter of duration, or even his remarks that v. 10 produces an unintended irony⁷⁶ in the cycle 27-29, implying that both Hananiah and Jeremiah are on the same platform on the question of prophetic authenticity, does not necessarily follow since that position does not take all factors into consideration. This interpretation does not take notice of the progression of the text. Before the proclamation of the future in chapters 27-29, the reader is aware that Jeremiah has been confirmed as a true prophet in chapter 26 where he also talked about the future. Carroll's interpretation is literal, seeing seventy years as another strict fixation of duration. Even scholars with the same reading posture have pointed out the danger of taking this motif in the literal sense. McKane writes, warning against an interpretation of this sort concerning this verse:

"It is an implication of Jeremiah's advice that he is not prepared to look far into the future (so Volz) and to promise the Jews in Babylon deliverance after seventy years. He has no such carrot to dangle before them and he does not predict what will be the outcome of their exilic experiences. He does not confuse those to whom his letter is addressed by moving the goalposts while the game is in progress. *He concentrates severely on the present and the immediate future and prescribes a regime in concrete language which should not be interpreted too*

⁷⁵ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 495.

⁷⁶ The argument of unintended irony goes thus: "In 28:9 a prophecy of *šālôm* requires fulfilment before it can be determined whether Yahweh sent the prophet or not. Although Hananiah is not condemned on the grounds of the failure of his prediction (28.9 does not function as a criterion in 29), his two years look very modest beside seventy years. A prediction of seventy years time would be absurd if either 28.9 or Deut. 18.22 was imposed as a test of authenticity. Nobody would be alive after another seventy years to be able to verify the speaker's genuineness and hence the criterion is not designed for long term predictions [...]. The speaker of vv. 10-14 need not be charged with being a false prophet because there are no grounds for considering the statement to be anything other than an after the event proclamation", CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 558.

*literally. The exiles are to pick up the broken threads patiently and resolutely and to live positively in their present circumstances, making themselves an asset to the communities in which they are situated*⁷⁷.

The seventy years of Jeremiah differs from Hananiah's two years not just from the point of view of duration but also from that of content and implication. In the words of Gilbert,

“il faut donc se dégager au plus vite de toute nostalgie, se guérir du mal du pays bien normal en pareilles circonstances, faire taire en soi le secret désir de retourner sur la terre natale. Le déracinement doit être accepté concrètement et la deportation doit être considérée comme une implantation nouvelle. Il faut refuser de se laisser mourir de langueur. Les joies de la vie doit être accueillies et même voulues, positivement recherchées”⁷⁸.

Even Carroll seems to have had this intuition without expressly admitting it when he writes about 25:11-12 but connecting 29:10:

“As part of the word of judgement against Judah for not hearing the divine word (however late it may be) it stresses the fullness of that judgment. For seventy years, i.e. a long time during which generations will come and go, the land must bear its punishment. This will be no short or momentary setback but a complete cycle of years (whatever its literal strength). A long history of rebellion merits a long period of punishment. If the word has not been heard through the decades of its proclamation, then the land will have to go through a period when there will be nobody there not-to-listen-to-it. Any mistaken belief about the brevity of Babylonian domination must be abandoned”⁷⁹.

In 29:10 therefore, the divine word stages a limit to the power of Babylon just as has been attested in some other parts of the book (cf. 25:11; 27:7; 50-51). More than the fixation of a definite moment, it is that of making a people's future hang on the will of YHWH. In 28:2-4, Hananiah stages a revolutionary situation that opposes YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar (“within two years, I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon”),

⁷⁷ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* 2, p. 738 (emphasis supplied).

⁷⁸ M. GILBERT, *Jérémie écrit aux exilés*, p. 112.

⁷⁹ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 495-496.

thereby making YHWH and the Babylonian king rivals in a duel; while here, YHWH declares he is not competing with any system, neither does he rival with anybody; instead “only when Babylon’s seventy years are completed, *I will visit you and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place. I will let you find me...*”. That is to say, the prediction of two years and immediate return is thus a programme based on the success of revolt, while Jeremiah talks of a long period of time lived in loyalty to YHWH. The instruction to settle in exile in v. 5-9 counteracts the popular expectation of the shortness of the exile and immediate return while the counsel to look beyond the exile nullifies the tendency to despair. Both affirmations by the same prophet are counter to common opinion and true prophecy includes also the capacity to say the right thing at the right time, a capacity at the same time alien to optimistic prophets and far from the reach of the voices of despair⁸⁰.

Within the context of the Jer. 26-29, seventy years has also some narrative coherence especially with reference to the construction of time at several places in the text. While in the duel between Hananiah and Jeremiah in chapter 28, the bone of contention was to a large extent the duration of the Babylonian domination (cf. two years in 28:3 and 28:11), Jer. 27:7 had already described the length of the Babylonian rule in terms of three generations of kings: Nebuchadnezzar, his son and his son’s son (בְּנֵי וְאֶת־בְּרָךְ). And in chapter 29, a subtle reference is made to ‘three generations’ of life in exile; in the command to beget children, who will in turn have children of their own: “Take wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters” (29:5). Such three generation description which “could point to a family perspective on the seventy years”⁸¹ given before the mention of seventy years in v. 10 already nullifies a literal interpretation, given also the fact that time can be measured by the stages of personal and family life (cf. e.g. Isa. 8:4 “before the child knows how to call ‘mother’ or ‘father’...”). On hearing the seventy years prophecy, adults would easily be led to think that they and most of their children would most probably not live to witness the realisation of the promises, but their

⁸⁰ See BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 260.

⁸¹ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 75.

grandchildren and those that come after. “Seventy years was a lifetime (Ps 90:10), and adult listeners would touch the promise only through the grandchildren and great-grandchildren born in their households”⁸².

5.2.1.2.4 Fate of those who Remained in Jerusalem (v. 15-19)

The major problem with this section as already hinted in the introduction to this Chapter is that of placement and that of logical coherence (practical reasoning); that is, the connection between v. 15 and 16-19 since v. 15 could appear to have nothing to do with the four subsequent verses, or v. 16-20 seems to interrupt the continuity of v. 15 and v. 21⁸³. For some authors, it seems to be out of context⁸⁴, coheres poorly with the concerns of chapter 29 and so assumed to be a late insertion, opening the way to conclude that they have interrupted an immediate connection between v. 15 and v. 21⁸⁵, “a digression”, bridging the “natural development” of the argument which “is from v. 15 to v. 21”⁸⁶. And therefore some commentators have suggested that v. 15 be moved to another position in the chapter, itself being a miscopying⁸⁷. There is also the problem of logical reasoning or

⁸² SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 75.

⁸³ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 135.

⁸⁴ S. MOWINCKEL, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia*, p. 41; G. WANKE, *Untersuchungen zur sogenannten Baruchschrift*, p. 45f.

⁸⁵ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 739; C. RIETZSCHEL, *Das Problem der Urrolle*, p. 116.

⁸⁶ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 548.

⁸⁷ W. THIEL, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26-45*, p. 14. He argues that v. 15 was accidentally omitted, retained in the margin and then reinserted in its present position. He therefore suggests that it be moved before v. 8-9. Rudolph suggests moving v. 8-9 after v. 15, which would allow v. 10-14 to follow immediately after v. 5-7. For Janzen, v. 16-20 should be moved between v. 14 and v. 15, J.G. JANZEN, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*, p. 118. This is also the opinion of HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 135 because for him, “it has the advantage of explaining the omission of vv 16-20 in G and fitting the form-critical analysis of the chapter”. And the strong proponents of large-scale deuteronomistic redaction (Duhm, Cornill, Volz, etc) see the hand of the deuteronomistic editor here just as they observe the same in the related chapter 24. Carroll sees v. 16-19 as an interpolation which should have been read immediately after v. 10-14 where it would afford a sharp contrast between the two camps; those exiled and those who remained behind.

better put the practicability of v. 16-20, and that is the question of how Jeremiah could have used the occasion of a king's personal delegation as an opportunity of recounting a negative oracle about the same king (cf. v. 3).

However recent exegetical efforts, without disregarding the pertinence of the remarks and observations over this section of the chapter, have also approached the text from other legitimate angles and have noticed its pertinence in its place in the context of the chapter and in the context of the book of Jeremiah⁸⁸. Goldmann, while admitting that "la place originelle du v. 15 était probablement devant les vv. 22ss.", in the actual form of the MT, maintains that "la seule lecture possible du v. 15 est à la suite des vv. 10-14, comme une finale de cet oracle de salut"⁸⁹. There is still a possible connection between v. 15 both with 16-19 and with 20-23 once it is admitted rightly that chapter 29 is the last in a series of chapters where the prophet combats false prophecy. A little recapitulation of the context of the letter would shed some light. Already deported to exile, the people in exile are not devoid of prophetic voices that prophesy (lie) to them (cf. v. 8-9, 20-22, 31). Even though their lie is not mentioned in chapter 29, from the context of Jer. 27-29, their prophecy is of two kinds and in this logical order: a) first of all, a negative appraisal of the reality of exile. That implies for these prophets that the exile was a mishap and it would have been better if the people were not exiled at all. Further implication would be that those who were not exiled, who remained in Jerusalem were luckier. This is not

⁸⁸ Scalise has an interesting explanation. She explains the placement of v. 16-20 by referring to the mirror effect it has on a preceding section of the book, chapter 24, the vision of figs. According to her, the hypothetical original sayings v. 15, 8-9 and v. 15, 21-23 would have been disputations about prophets in Babylon ("you said...", but "thus says the Lord"). Both chapters offer hope to the exiles (24:4-7; 29:4-14) and announce doom to Jerusalem (24:8-10; 29:16-19). Though v. 15 seems to interfere with this parallel, its effect is to tie v. 16-20 more closely to the rest of the chapter. It is true that chapter 29 lacks the unifying vision of figs in chapter 24, 29:15 introduces v. 16-20 as the response of God to the exiles' own statement and as warning by example. In conclusion: "The picture of the exiles' future in chap. 29 is more complex than the simple 'good' versus 'bad' distinction in chap. 24 between the deportees and those who were left behind", see SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 67.

⁸⁹ Y. GOLDMANN, *Prophétie et royauté au retour de l'exil: Les origines littéraires de la forme massorétique du livre de Jérémie* (OBO 118), Göttingen, 1992, p. 83.

Jeremiah's stand as is shown severally in the preceding chapters of the block and as the parable of the figs in chapter 24 shows, which is also a background to the present chapter. For Jeremiah, the exile falls into the divine plan. b) Secondly and consequently, these other prophets prophesy immediate return, which would be a result of revolution by the people. That is to say, the first lie concerns those who were not exiled while the second concerns directly those exiled in Babylon. Inasmuch as v. 15 ("for/because you have said: 'YHWH has raised up for us prophets in exile'") anticipates directly v. 20-23 where it is a question of naming precisely these 'false' prophets (Ahab and Zedekiah), v. 16-19 evokes the first of their lies with reference to those still in Jerusalem before eventually coming to address the issue about those in Babylon (v. 20-23, beginning with "you exiles whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon"). The placement of v. 16-19 becomes problematic therefore if the unit is separated from v. 20-23. One should therefore read v. 16-19 as if in parentheses. The narrator who in v. 15 ("because you have said, 'YHWH has raised up for us prophets in Babylon'") knows the contents of these prophecies, makes a necessary digression (those unexiled will receive their utter punishment and in the end must suffer their own exile: among all the nations where I will drive them, v.18), and then faces the people in exile as regards these prophets (v. 20-23).

The logic and placement of this unit could be summarised thus, in connection with the immediately preceding units:

- v. 8-9 Do not listen to the false prophets (who announce immediate return of exiles).

- v. 10-14 For (יָדַעַתְּ) seventy years would pass before YHWH's plan be realised, his plans for peace, restoration and well-being.

- v. 15 But (יָדַעַתְּ) you have said that YHWH has raised up for you (real) prophets...

- v. 16-19 (Remember however that those in Jerusalem, the king and those not exiled are suffering and will suffer because they have not listened to my servants and prophets).
- v. 20-23 these (false) prophets among you will be the object of my wrath (so do not listen to them, cf. v. 8-9).

The question of the rationality or the possibility of Jeremiah recounting a negative oracle concerning King Zedekiah by the hands of the latter's own royal messengers would not be too stressed in a book which opens up with the words addressed to the prophet by his YHWH: "For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes, against the priests, and against the people of the land" (Jer. 1:18). Our investigation into the character of the prophet as presented by the narrator in the four chapters, all in the context of the entire book, will shed more light to this problematic (see the next Chapter).

The five verses of this unit are then framed by two indictments (v. 15 and v. 19): each begins with a causal particle כִּי (v. 15) and תָּחַת אֲשֶׁר (v. 19), and the two having some connection with each other. While the indictment in v. 15 is because the exiles have said something, that of v. 19 is because the people of Jerusalem have not listened. And if the accusation in v. 15 is that the exiles have said that YHWH has raised for them prophets in Babylon, v. 19 indicts the people of Jerusalem for not listening to the real prophets sent by YHWH. The wording "my servants the prophets, rising up early..." echoes 26:4-5 and occurs frequently in the prose of the book of Jeremiah (cf. 7:25-27; 35:13-15; 44:4-5). The contrast is on the one hand between simply "prophets" (v. 15) for the exiles and "my servants the prophets" (v. 19) in Jerusalem; and on the other hand between the language of establishment of the prophet: in v. 15 הִקִּים לָנוּ "has raised for us"), while in v. 19 the prophets are sent (שָׁלַחְתִּי). The only occurrences of קָוַם (*hiphil*) with prophet or prophets as the subject is Deut. 18:15⁹⁰ and 18:18⁹¹, the former in the words of Moses himself and the

⁹⁰ "A prophet like me will the LORD your God raise up for you from among your own kinsmen; to him you shall listen" (Deut. 18:15).

latter in the words of YHWH, but all referring to Moses the prophet. From the point of view of biblical canonical tradition, this makes the claim of the exiles a very bold and even presumptuous one, another lie in fact. If they have prophets, that is, “bona fide Yahweh prophets”⁹² already (or better, if they claim to have already) in the calibre or in the manner of Moses, it becomes an incurable optimism⁹³ and the question of the necessity of the intermediation of Jeremiah (one of “my servants the prophets” sent) becomes an important factor in the dispute.

Within the frame of v. 15 and v. 19 is the sentence about the fate of king Zedekiah and those still remaining in the city (cf. especially v. 17-18), addressed to the exiles, informing them of the situation in the country and the lot also awaiting them (those who remained in the city). V. 17-18 make a double repetition of the triad of “sword, famine and pestilence” of 27:8, 13, and reflect many elements of the parable of the good and bad figs⁹⁴. The metaphor of inedible figs in this chapter recalls the vision in chapter 24 and this reference leads the reader to compare once more the exiles and their kindred in Jerusalem who were not taken into exile. Parallels are rightly to be noted:

29:17a “YHWH Sabaoth says this: I am now going to <i>send them sword, famine and plague</i> ” 29:18a “I shall pursue them with sword, famine and plague.”	24:10 “I shall <i>send them sword, famine and plague</i> until they have vanished from the soil I gave to them and to their ancestors.”
29:17b “I shall make them like rotten <i>figs, so bad as to be uneatable.</i> ”	24:2 “... the other contained very <i>bad figs, so bad as to be uneatable.</i> ”
29:18b “and <i>make them an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, of malediction, astonishment, ridicule, and reproach to all the nations among which I will banish them.</i> ”	24:9 “I will <i>make them an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth,</i> a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse, in all the places to <i>which I will banish them.</i> ”

⁹¹ “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him” (Deut. 18:18).

⁹² LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 355.

⁹³ LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 359.

⁹⁴ See RUDOLPH, *Jeremia*, p. 170; SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 76-77.

The function of the recalling of these images already in Jer. 24 is to remind the exiles of the oracles they had already heard but not heeded in Jerusalem (cf. “this city”, v. 16) before they were besieged and taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar. Hearing an oracle for the first time could be deterring, but hearing the same oracle for the second time while suffering the consequence of deaf-ear would even be more effective. This time around, the prophet repeats the oracle with the boldness of one already vindicated by history.

5.2.1.2.5 *Oracle of Judgement against Ahab and Zedekiah: The Identity of the Prophets in Babylon (v. 20-23)*

It appears that the thread, which was temporarily dropped by the narrator in v. 15, is now picked up in v. 20. But in the main, the identification of the prophets whom “you say: ‘YHWH has raised up for us prophets in Babylon’” is revealed. The note with which the letter is begun is here repeated: “all you exiles whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon, so says YHWH God of Israel...” (cf. v. 4). Now it is no longer falsehood with reference to the legitimacy of exile, that is indirectly, the fate of those who remain in Judah (v. 16-19); it is now falsehood with reference to those that are actually exiled. Two false prophets are named: Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah⁹⁵. V. 21-23 is cast in a chiasmic structure: accusation of speaking lie in YHWH’s name framing two punishments/curses: accusation (שָׁקַר) – punishment – curse – accusation (שָׁקַר).

A. Ahab and Zedekiah, *who prophesy lie to you in my name* (v. 21a)

B deliverance in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and he **will strike them before your eyes** (v. 21b)

B¹ Their name will be **used for a curse** (v. 22)

A¹ Because they have committed folly, adultery *and spoken a lie in my name* (v. 23).

⁹⁵ These two prophetic figures are not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament. Commentators have noticed the double pun on Ahab’s family name קִלְיָה which is worked by the term “roasted” קָלָה, together with “curse” קִלְיָה. Cf. SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 77; HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 143. Such play on words could therefore be a better explanation than Thompson’s over reading of the passage that “Nebuchadnezzar had them executed by roasting קָלָה in the fire” since the two prophets had not yet been arrested and executed following the logic of the text, see THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 549.

It is surprising that because of prophesying lie in YHWH's name, the latter would deliver the two prophets into the hand of the king of Babylon (v. 21b) when they were already exiles in Babylon. Holladay suggests that 'giving into the hand' here may therefore mean more than political control but also placing under arrest⁹⁶. The word "curse" (קָלָלָה) has been formerly used to designate "object of cursing" (Jer. 24:9)⁹⁷, but here it becomes a formula for curse ("may YHWH make you..."). The prophets in Babylon will suffer the same fate as the people who remained in Judah. YHWH will make them a curse. The placement of this verse here and its significance refers again to the legitimacy of the placement of v. 15. A stark contrast is highlighted: those who intend acclaiming these two figures as prophets (cf. v. 15), will end up using their names as curses. It is therefore interesting that Jeremiah announces their lot (their death) by putting this announcement in the form of curse in the mouth of the exiles who considered them as real prophets (cf. v. 15). This is because the action of YHWH towards them is giving them up for execution (cf. v. 22) and not raising them as prophets for his people (v. 15). The last verse (v. 23) comes up with another stricter accusation. These two prophets have committed folly or outrage (נִבְלָה)⁹⁸. The transition from the accusation of speaking lie in YHWH's name to adultery has been seen by many commentators as uncalled for in the context⁹⁹. But in the

⁹⁶ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 143.

⁹⁷ "I will make them an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse, in all the places to which I will drive them".

⁹⁸ Appearing only here in Jeremiah and 12 other times in the Old Testament (Gen. 34:7; Lev. 7:24; 17:15; 22:8; Deut. 14:21; 22:21; Jos. 7:15; Job. 42:8; Isa. 9:16; 24:4; 32:6; Ezek. 44:31), the word, though imbued with other nuances, is sometimes connected with sexual atrocities: the rape of Dinah (Gen. 34:7), the Benjaminites' rape of the Levite's concubine at Gibeah (Jud. 19:23-24; 20:6, 10), and the rape of Tamar by Amnon (II Sam. 13:12).

⁹⁹ For McKane, v. 23 is disconcerting in the sense that their adultery with other men's wives is a piece of information which the reader is not prepared for and which does not flow by consequence from the accusation of false prophecy. McKane therefore terms it an example of overkill; giving the impression as if everything that could discredit Ahab and Zedekiah were being raked up; a sort of calling a dog a bad name to hang it, MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary 2*, p. 740. And for Carroll, "it might be wiser to assume that either a story is involved here or one further example of the denigration of the prophets so typical of the cycle is intended by the allusion", CARROLL, *Jeremiah (OTL)*, p. 561.

first place, falsehood (רָשָׁע) is the essence of adultery¹⁰⁰ as the latter is frequently used to describe the infidelity in the relationship between Israel and YHWH; hence there should be no wonder in the connection between falsehood and being adulterers. Again from the context of the chapter, especially the letter by Jeremiah, their crime undermined the foundation of the exilic community of Judeans which is already laid down in the first part of the letter, especially the command in v. 6 to “take wives” and “beget sons”. The reference to the deity as a witness gives the impression of a legal analogy, as in Deut. 19:15¹⁰¹, where it is demanded that there be two or three witnesses to lay the foundation of a charge. But evil like adultery committed in secret (presumably) can only have the deity as the possible witness. The unit ends therefore in YHWH’s self designation as witness (רָשָׁע).

5.2.2 *Communication II (v. 24-32)*

In this second section of the chapter, a section not spared of its myriad of problems¹⁰², designated here as Communication II, the text continues the theme of false prophecy by means of exchange of correspondences (and reports of messages exchanged) between Babylon and Jerusalem¹⁰³. Communication II could therefore be said to be the

¹⁰⁰ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 561.

¹⁰¹ “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin; in any sin that he commits: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established”.

¹⁰² Mainly by the many differences between the different textual attestations of this section. MT and LXX differ in their different presentations of the story: while the MT reports that the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah is challenged about his failure to put Jeremiah posing as a prophet under control, LXX reports that the priest is scolded harshly for rebuking Jeremiah. In our text, letters arrive from Babylon about the conduct of Jeremiah (as false prophet) while LXX gives the impression that the material is oracular and not epistolary (cf. Jer. 36:24-25[LXX] “καὶ πρὸς Σαμαίαν τὸν Νελαμίτην ἔρεις οὐκ ἀπέστειλά σε τῷ ὀνόματι μου. καὶ πρὸς Σοφονίαν υἱὸν Μαασαιου τὸν ἱερέα εἰπέ”).

¹⁰³ Carroll has his own peculiar view regarding this section: he sees the section simply as “exchange of abuse” between Shemaiah and Jeremiah, as dealing with mutual accusations among prophets of playing the prophet, of telling lies, of not being sent, of making people trust in falsehood. He equally analyses it as simply the “stock-in-trade of prophetic conflict” and as nothing more than “the fulminations against one another of members of the same profession”, or as vituperative and defamatory exchanges as part of the

consequences or repercussions evoked by Communication I. A certain Shemaiah the Nehelamite, writes a rejoinder on Jeremiah's letter and addresses it to the temple overseer (פְּקִיד). Neither the details of the letter nor of Jeremiah's reply is given, but the summary of Shemaiah's letter of complaint is given in YHWH's message to Jeremiah (for Shemaiah). The gist of the letter is a reprimand; why the temple overseer had not rebuked Jeremiah for prophesying the way he did. The text understands this as a presumption on the part of Shemaiah; presumption because he sends letters (פְּקִידִים) to all the people in Jerusalem (אֶל-כָּל-הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בְּיְרוּשָׁלַיִם) and to Zephaniah the priest, in his name (בְּשֵׁם זְפַנְיָהוּ, v. 25), without being sent (v. 31). The word of YHWH is sent to Jeremiah to give Shemaiah a judgement for speaking in YHWH's name without being sent and for causing the people to believe in lie (cf. v. 31) and for apostasy / rebellion (פָּרָה) against YHWH. This unit, following the extant form of the MT, falls easily into two parts: v. 28-29 deals with Shemaiah's words and action, while v. 30-32 deals with the judgement against him.

5.2.2.1 Shemaiah's Words and Action (v. 24-29)

The context of this passage confirms the impression that Shemaiah the Nehelamite is another optimistic prophet like Ahab and Zedekiah already identified (cf. v. 21-22), but apart from this, he is nowhere again mentioned in the Old Testament. The attempt to explain his identity (the Nehelamite) by recourse to the similarity with the root הָלַם "to dream" (that is as a *niph'al* participle of the root verb)¹⁰⁴, to say that the text wants to

process of denunciation common to all prophets. Cf. CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 565. Though not untenable as conclusion, this is at best an ideologically biased interpretative approach.

¹⁰⁴ L. YAURE, *Elymas-Nehemalite-Pethor*, p. 297-314, see p. 306-309. In this article, the author studies the three biblical names, Elymas, a false prophet and bitter adversary of Paul in the Acts of the Apostles (13:6-12), Shemaiah of Nehelamite and Pethor which is said to have been the name of the place of residence of the famous Balaam (cf. Num. 22:5). He tries to see "the hidden connection" between these names by going into the etymological derivation and proper meaning of each of them. For Shemaiah the Nehelamite, he reasons that the epithet *hanneh'lamī* admits grammatically, contextually, and religio-historically of only one interpretation, and that is "the dreamer." Understanding the grammatical form of the word to be the substantivized participle *niph'al* of *hālam* (= to dream), with an *i relativum* affixed, he concludes that it denotes one who is inspired by dreams or occupies himself with dream interpretation. "The *i relativum* here signifies that the many *holme h'lo moth* formed a distinct class who practised dream interpretation as a

designate Shemaiah as a dreamer (cf. also v. 8; 27:9; etc) founders on the grounds that the designation sounds purely gentile, and in the same section is analogous to Jeremiah from Anathoth (v. 27)¹⁰⁵. The charge against him is for sending letters (פְּקָרִים in plural) in his name to the community in Jerusalem described as “all the people, to Zephaniah son of Maaseiah the priest and to all the priests” (v. 25). In v. 26-28, the summary of the contents of the letter quoted is that of the one addressed to the priest Zephaniah, though there is a larger audience in the preceding verse (v. 25) and the word “overseer” (פְּקָרִים) in v. 26 appears in plural. The concern of Shemaiah is that Zephaniah¹⁰⁶ had not been faithful to his duty as an overseer¹⁰⁷ (cf. v. 26-27) of the temple and had left Jeremiah uncontrolled or uncensored¹⁰⁸. As one (referring to Jeremiah) who took upon himself the task of prophesying (הִתְנַבֵּא), he (Zephaniah) should have put Jeremiah into the stocks. Specifically Shemaiah referred to the letter of Jeremiah to them in Babylon, that “it will

profession and that Shemaiah belonged to that class”. He justifies this position by referring to the context of the preceding chapters, 23, 26-27 where Jeremiah fights “his great battle against the lying prophets, who [...] practise their nefarious trade, (and) also lead astray the exiles in Babylon, this particularly by fraudulent interpretation of dreams. The foremost of these false prophets in Babylon is just this Shemaiah *hannah^llami*, that is, ‘the dreamer’” (p. 309). For the like view, see also M. GILBERT, *Jérémie écrit aux exilés*, p. 115. Persuading though this argument could be, it does not command certainty from the text.

¹⁰⁵ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 146. See also Scalise for whom this explanation by reference to dream is neither “convincing nor necessary”, SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 78.

¹⁰⁶ This Zephaniah had on two occasions consulted Jeremiah on Zedekiah’s behalf: in 21:1 to ask the prophet to inquire of YHWH for them because Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is warring against them, and in 37:3 to ask Jeremiah to intercede for the people. He is described as second priest in 52:24. See Jer. 52:24-27; II Kings 25:18-21.

¹⁰⁷ V. 26-27 give a good description of the duties of the overseer in the house of YHWH in the Old Testament. Pashhur who had held this post in the past had once put Jeremiah in the stocks overnight when he heard the latter preach the devastation of Jerusalem and Judah (cf. Jer. 20:1-3). One of the duties would be to put into the stocks every madman (פְּקָרִים pual participle masculine singular of the verb פָּקַד) who would arrogate to himself to prophesy. It is true that the *hitpa’el* of the verb נָבֵא could be used of legitimate prophecy (cf. Jer. 26:20), here it is used contemptuously of one who makes unwarranted prophetic claims; one who plays the prophet, cf. R.R. WILSON, *Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Re-examination*, in *JBL* 98 (1979), p. 321-337, see p. 336. See also SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 78-79.

¹⁰⁸ The verb used is נָעַר, translated “to reprimand”, “to rebuke” or “to discipline”.

be long” (אָרְרָהּ הִיא¹⁰⁹) and that they should “build houses and live, plant gardens and eat their fruit”¹¹⁰. In that way “אָרְרָהּ הִיא”, a phrase whose subject is a pronoun (הִיא), but from the context referring to the exile, becomes an interpretation which Shemaiah gives to v. 5-6 and also to v. 10, since he never mentions expressly the seventy year duration of Jeremiah. But it is also striking that he refers only to the “negative” side of Jeremiah’s letter, without any word on the promises of the whole section of v. 10-14¹¹¹, a subtle characterisation and confirmation of his dubious comportment. However “it will be long” is more than a reference to the seventy years motif of Jeremiah but also a subtle negation of the import of Jeremiah’s letter, and therefore his own personal interpretation of the exile, an interpretation that sees nothing positive in it¹¹². Whether that was all in the letter of Shemaiah or whether he summarised the contents of Jeremiah’s letter is not precise in the text. Whichever be the case, Zephaniah the priest read the letter to the hearing of Jeremiah (cf. v. 29 and in this parenthesis, the narrator adds interestingly “the prophet”); that is, he carried out the commission without however any mention of reprimand. The letters sent by Shemaiah are therefore intended in the text’s present form as a foil and as a contrast to the earlier letter of Jeremiah. They are not only a reaction to the letter of Jeremiah, they are provoked by it and intend to refute it¹¹³. Not only that by saying that

¹⁰⁹ Referring evidently to the seventy years, but interestingly making that reference before the details “build, plant...” which in actual fact preceded the reference to the seventy years in Jeremiah’s letter.

¹¹⁰ Notice the verbatim quotation (repetition) of v. 5 except the form of the 3rd person suffix at the end:

בְּנֵי בְתָרִים וְשָׁבוּ וְנָטְעוּ גִּזְרֵת וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־פְּרִיָהֶן v. 5

בְּנֵי בְתָרִים וְשָׁבוּ וְנָטְעוּ גִּזְרֵת וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־פְּרִיָהֶן v. 28

¹¹¹ It is true that shortening and paraphrasing are part of the features of the majority of citations of quotations in the Old Testament (cf. G. SAVRAN, *Telling and Retelling: Quotation in Biblical Narrative*, Bloomington, 1988, p. 29-35), yet in many occasions, it is also part of the subtle narrative devices to pursue interested goals in the plot of the story (cf. for example the intercession of Judah in Gen. 44:18-34 in order to plead for the release of Benjamin. Here, Judah, in most of his retold stories to Joseph, emphasises, removes details, and adds some, manipulates facts, all geared towards convincing Joseph for the success of his intercession).

¹¹² Klipp interprets Shemaiah thus “Davor setzt Schemaja seine Interpretation deselben: [...], es wird lange dauern’. [...]. Diese Interpretation setzt jedoch voraus, dass Heil in Babylonien nicht möglich ist und daher die Heilsaussagen Jeremiahs gar keine sind”, N. KLIPP, *Niederreisen und Aufbauen*, p. 60.

¹¹³ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 262.

every madman who prophesies (מְתַנְבֵּא v. 26) should be reprimanded by the priest and finally adding that Jeremiah poses as a prophet (הַמְתַנְבֵּא), Shemaiah accuses Jeremiah implicitly of being mad (מְשֻׁנָּן). The offence of Shemaiah was described in v. 25 not as simply prophesying falsely but as writing letters in his name, and below, in v. 31, he is described as having prophesied without being sent.

Zephaniah appears in the narrative with an undetermined character. Though his not concealing the developments from the prophet could be a testimony to his openness¹¹⁴, the narrator still leaves us in the dark about his precise attitude to Jeremiah and his camp in the narrative. This has led to confusing evaluations about him by different commentators. Is he co-operative with Shemaiah and hostile to Jeremiah by reading the letter “in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet” (v. 29), or does he sympathise with Jeremiah by not eventually reprimanding or restraining him¹¹⁵, and so a different kind of פְּקִיר from Pashhur (cf. Jer. 20:1-6), since the text does not indicate that he did, or is he simply ambiguous¹¹⁶? But from the context, Zephaniah’s role in the narrative is minimal, since what is at stake is the correspondence between two ‘prophets’. He is nevertheless part of the story, representing a group, the priests who have been part and parcel of the narrative in the block 26-29 (cf. 26:7, 8, 16; 27:16; 28:1, 5; 29:1, 25).

5.2.2.2 Judgement Oracle against Shemaiah (30-32)

In the final verses of the chapter, Jeremiah replies to Shemaiah’s action publicly. He writes to the exiles in Babylon concerning Shemaiah in similar terms with which he addressed Hananiah in 28:15-16. Shemaiah becomes an opponent of Jeremiah who, following the emphasis of the chapters 26-29, rejects the word of YHWH through his prophet. Even though his letters contain no oracle of his own, or any oracle which directly contradicts Jeremiah’s, his request in writing that Jeremiah be reprimanded is treated as a testimony of false prophecy, just as Passhur is accused of prophesying lies because he put Jeremiah in the stocks overnight (cf. Jer. 20:1-3). So Shemaiah becomes

¹¹⁴ MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* 2, p. 743.

¹¹⁵ So HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah* 2, p. 147.

¹¹⁶ So SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 79; THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 551.

apostate for opposing Jeremiah. Many points of contact between Shemaiah and Hananiah become apparent, made clearer by the use and repetition of same key terms to describe their activities.

Motif	Hananiah (Jer. 28)	Shemaiah (Jer. 29)
Positing of act	Hananiah broke the yoke-bars from the neck of Jeremiah (v. 10)	Shemaiah wants Jeremiah be put into the stocks (v. 26)
שָׁקֵר	Hananiah is accused of propagating falsehood (v. 15)	So is Shemaiah and he has also led the people to trust in it (v. 31)
לא שלש	Hananiah is not sent by YHWH (v. 15)	Shemaiah is not sent by YHWH (v. 31)
פָּקְדָה דָּבָר	Hananiah is accused of speaking (דבר) rebellion (פָּקְדָה) against YHWH (28:16)	Shemaiah has also spoken (דבר) rebellion (פָּקְדָה) against YHWH (29:32)
Punishment with death	Hananiah is punished with death and he died within two months (v. 16-17)	Shemaiah is punished with eventual death and that of his descendants, since none of them would live to see the good (טוב) YHWH has in stock for the exiles (v. 32).

The word (פָּקְדָה) “punish”, “visit” (v. 32) mirrors in a very ironical way v. 10 where it is a question of divine positive visit (פָּקְדָה) to the exiles, and so contrasts the fate of Shemaiah and his descendants with the descendants of the exiles.

Recapitulation

At the end of chapter 29, the reader would recognise that this exceedingly complex chapter continues the dispute of the two previous chapters (27-28) but which was already articulated in chapter 26. All through the chapters, it has been that of the prophet

disclosing YHWH's intention in form of threat, warning and judgement, which will not be forever, but will end when YHWH wills. Chapter 29 engages more visibly in this two-stage intention of YHWH: after plucking up and tearing down, there will be a homecoming, a planting and building (cf. v. 10-14). Chapters 30-31, the "book of consolation", would therefore have no better placement in the book.

Reading the four chapters, one must admit, has not made a very flowing one for the reader of today, who has penchant for discovering perfect flowing, either in the presentation of the stories or in chronological synchrony as in modern stories. But this is different with ancient biblical narrators who have their particular style of narration and who are guided by some other objectives than that of presenting a coherent piece in its modern sense. The reader notices a sequence in the nature of the texts: prose (26) – oracles (27) – prose (28) – oracles (29) with respect to the four chapters. The two prose like narratives are all account of the prophets meeting with oppositions while the oracles are directed to the nations and to the exiles. From this, the reader notices a connection between what the prophet says and the consequences and oppositions facing him on account of that. The very first chapter begins of course with a word from YHWH.

Another important element is the casting of these narratives in different historical periods and under different kings, of course with the evident chronological gaps. The reign of two kings becomes the historical landmarks in these conflict stories: Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. The reign of Jehoiakim frames the story of chapter 26; and the reader is "moved abruptly to another time, that of Zedekiah in chs. 27-28"¹¹⁷. In chapter 27 the prophetic action aims at Zedekiah (and the kings of neighbouring nations and the priests and people). Chapter 28 is cast in the period of Zedekiah with the mention of the bringing back of Jeconiah from exile, while in chapter 29, the mention is of Zedekiah and Jeconiah. Interestingly, in these stories, though conflict is the dominant motif, the kings are hardly involved¹¹⁸ since the concern of the narrator is to present the truth of the preaching and the prophetic authenticity of Jeremiah. This is also true even of chapter 26 where the

¹¹⁷ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 230-231.

¹¹⁸ The theme of prophet and king is developed in chapters 32-38.

presence of the king Jehoiakim is only implicit in the story¹¹⁹ (v. 20-23). One can therefore say that through these conflict stories involving these kings, the narrator presents how Jeremiah triumphs over oppositions and at the same time demonstrates the superiority of the true prophetic word.

Two issues therefore surface in these chapters which relate to the theme and theology of the book in general. Primarily, the issue of true and false prophecy, a recurrent theme; and these chapters in a special way insist on the truth of the prophetic identity of Jeremiah. This theme is couched through the prism of a second one: the role of the Babylonian threat and the reality of exile. The next Chapter would be an attempt to see how the dynamics of the text tries to articulate this double thronged theological theme, taking the four chapters as a whole.

¹¹⁹ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 150.

CHAPTER SIX

JER. 26-29: LITERARY-THEMATIC COHERENCE AND CHARACTERISATION OF PERSONAGES

Introduction

In the General Introduction, we announced the option of working on each of the four chapters of the block as a separate unit, and in the introduction to the analysis of each chapter, we tried to justify this option by showing the delimitation and internal structure of the chapter in question. By so doing we have in a way left out till now any treatment of some common elements in the block, or the considerations of the personages within the context of the integral narratives of the four chapters. This approach does not however make the individual chapters isolated from each other or independent units within the book of Jeremiah. The exercise in the second section of our Chapter One of this Part Two shows that there is a recognisable thread of connection, thematic and theological, that connects the four chapters. It also means that there is a common theme; that of prophetic authenticity, all situated in the context of the macro unit and having their proper place in the theology of the one two-scroll book of Jeremiah. Thus after the narrative analysis of each of the four chapters, it is judged necessary here a) to have a synthesis that will trace the necessary literary and thematic connections which the chapters have with each other, b) to underline the marks to show that the unit as a whole has as its major theme the question of true or false prophecy, and c) to explore the narrative characterisation of the major personages in the block; all geared towards demonstrating the unity of theme in the chapters of the block. This present Chapter therefore has the goal of placing the individual chapters in the context of the block and therefore making each of them a unit within an entity.

It comprises two sections. The first begins by considering the literary cohesiveness within the chapters, then continues by analysing some of the key terms which serve more or less as literary and thematic landmarks in the sense that their striking preponderance, taking into account their strategic usages in their significant nuances, their narrative effects in the contexts they occur, and the effect on the reader, continue to remind the latter of the

theme of the block. The second section looks into the narrator's characterisation of the major personalities in the drama of the text, and at the same time enquires into the narrative role of the figure of Babylon and the Babylonian king and its function in the theology of the block.

6.1 UNITY OF THE BLOCK: THEMATIC AND LITERARY COHESIONS

6.1.1 *The Programmatic Function of Chapter 26*

From the context of our investigations in the four preceding Chapters, our work understands chapter 26 as a programmatic introduction to the theme of the block of the four chapters. The block 26-29 strikes a basic theological point: that the rejection of YHWH's word is an act of rebellion which incurs divine judgement whether on a whole nation (27 and 29) or on individuals (28 and 29)¹; and that the authenticity of prophets is measured through this parameter, that is, to the extent which they identify with the true word from YHWH; and this altogether is the main focus of chapter 26. Of the four chapters, Jer. 26 has the merit of enjoying a complex narrative casting more evident than in any of the others. With its numerous characters, the tensed situation looming large in the narrative and in which the prophet (and even some other characters in the narrative) finds himself, the different fates of the prophetic figures mentioned by name and the narrator's incessant interventions, a network of relations is put to place, and with this network of relationships, the narrator articulates in unequivocal terms the question at stake. A court-like scene is presented to the reader, after a prophetic character in the drama has posited 'an act', a prophetic act, the preaching of a sermon; and at this juncture, the reader cannot but ask the question: what is the issue at stake, what is the bone of contention? Immediately after the preaching of Jeremiah, the hearers interpret his words by posing a question which looks very fundamental to the rest of the block: "Why have you prophesied saying: this house..."? (26:9), a question which introduces the notion of Jeremiah's legitimacy: is Jeremiah a true prophet or a false one? The reader who meets this question in chapter 26 would pose this question himself in the subsequent chapters when other prophetic figures are mentioned or appear on the scene. Thus with

¹ See also THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 538.

the question, a problematic is introduced, leading to an accusation levelled and the eventual judgment before trial by the accuser: *הַיָּהוּדָה לְשֵׁן הַמָּוֶת* “judgement of death to this man for he has prophesied against this city” (v. 11; cf. also v. 8). The narrator therefore leads the reader to discover the answer to the question by the accuser’s defence based on his personal conviction of his legitimacy, and the ruling of the court by the acquittal of the accused based on the admission of Jeremiah’s legitimacy. This is also the opinion of Clements:

“Chapter 26 uses the prophet’s temple address to provide a thematic introduction to the sequence of reports concerning the message of the prophet, its widespread popular rejection by those in authority, and its terrible fulfilment [...]. Here the conflict that surrounded Jeremiah’s preaching opens with a report of the sharp antagonism between Jeremiah and Hananiah, occasioned by the reassuring prophecies of Hananiah and the threatening word of God through Jeremiah”².

Narratively speaking, every important element evoked in the chapter has a part to play in this programmatic function. Take for example, the mention of king Jehoiakim in the very first introductory verse by the narrator: “In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from YHWH” (v. 1). It is surprising that in the court process that follows the preaching of Jeremiah, the king is absent, even though the officials take part. But by placing the story within the time of Jehoiakim, by the subtle contrast of this king with the mention of king Hezekiah who was well disposed towards the prophet Micah (cf. v. 18-19), and by ending the narrative by the negative action of the same king (Jehoiakim) to a prophet Uriah (cf. v. 20-27:1a), who preached “in words like those of Jeremiah”, the narrator already includes the king as a potential danger and counts the royal office as one of the many obstacles facing the prophet in his prophetic enterprise. Secondly, by placing the incident in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, whereas the subsequent chapters are situated in the years of Zedekiah, a chronological gap has been allowed; a fact which has much to say about the conditional nature of the preaching of the prophet in chapter 26; and a factor which distinguishes 26 from the rest of the chapters where the question is no longer that of exile or destruction if there is no

² CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah*, p. 154-155.

repentance, but that of unconditional submission to the yoke of the king of Babylon. One could therefore say that in the beginning of chapter 26, a programme of choice within a space of time is offered to the community, and in the subsequent chapters, the consequences of their choice are spelt out to them, given that the opportunity for repentance was not utilised.

One can also evoke the importance of the example of the citation of Micah's prophecy, which reinforced the contention that the message of Jeremiah about the judgement on Judah and Jerusalem was truly the word from YHWH. It means then that such a message has already had a place in the prophetic tradition and so the threat was far from being outlandish but real, a threat which demanded that Judah discern between the true and the false word of prophecy, and this theme occupies the attention in the subsequent chapters till the end of chapter 29³. The mention of Uriah is also not without its import in this light. Uriah ben Shemaiah is highlighted in v. 20ff. in anticipation of the question of the nature of true prophecy. With the surprising details about the circumstances surrounding his fate, the narrator reports that he "prophesied against this city and against this land in words like those of Jeremiah" (v. 20). His unfortunate destiny serves also to draw the reader's attention to the marked ambivalence in the attitude towards Jeremiah who could also suffer the same fate. In the words of Clements:

"Through Micah's words, through those of Jeremiah, and even through such otherwise unknown figures as Uriah, the word of God was shown to be sharper than a two-edged sword, separating truth from falsehood and those of spiritual discernment from those who were blind. Inevitably it generated conflict, suffering, and sometimes martyrdom as the price of its reception. The important narrative of chapter 26 alerts the reader to recognize that to hear the word of God could in no way provide escape from the need to make clear and responsible choices. Rather it was a summons to do so. Far from the prophet guaranteeing the truth of his word, setting the people free from any need to discern whether he was

³ CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah*, p. 158.

speaking the truth, the very opposite was the case. Responsible preaching by the prophet needed to be matched by responsible hearing on the part of the people”⁴.

Thus the stage is cast for the reader to confront this problematic. The rest of the chapters of the block elaborate this confrontation. Jeremiah speaks and acts. Different other prophetic personalities act and speak in reaction to Jeremiah. The narrator relates the story and brings YHWH as arbiter.

6.1.2 Chapters 27-29

6.1.2.1 Particular Threads of Cohesiveness

Having being accredited by the princes and people as the mouthpiece of YHWH and as a legitimate prophet in chapter 26, the sequence of the story in the subsequent chapters shows Jeremiah fulfilling his role and narrates the oppositions by other intermediaries. With chapter 26 as programmatic, various threads of cohesiveness more closely tie chapters 27-29. We have in our Chapter One and in the introduction to Chapter Three (all in Part Two) made references, respectively to the thematic coherence and the spelling characteristics and peculiarities, which set these three chapters apart from the remainder of the book⁵. We can equally move beyond these stylistic features to temporal sequencing of the chapters, noting that the narratives contained in these chapters seem to be arranged in a chronological order⁶, granted however the difficulty in detecting a strict chronological succession. The incidents took place within the same precisely circumscribed period of time, namely, the reign of Zedekiah (597-586) or from the perspective of the exile, the period between the first and the second deportations of Judeans to Babylon. Chapter 27 makes mention of Zedekiah the king (cf. v. 3, 12), and that Jehoiachin, that is Jeconiah, has been taken already into captivity with other Judeans

⁴ CLEMENTS, *Jeremiah*, p. 158.

⁵ We refer to the presence of both long and short spellings of the proper names Jeremiah, Zedekiah, Jeconiah, and Hananiah; the prevalence of the ‘נ’ spelling of Nebuchadnezzar in preference to the ‘ר’ spelling in the other parts of the book; and the frequent use of the formal titles like ‘נביא’ attached to proper names.

⁶ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood*, p. 27.

by Nebuchadnezzar (cf. v. 16ff.). This exile (precisely its length) is a major point of discussion in chapters 28 and 29 (cf. 28:1-4; 29:4ff., 24ff.). Further, for the argument for a logical sequencing, it is important to note the fact that chapter 27 has as its two main symbols the yoke which Jeremiah is wearing and the vessels of the temple (the people must submit their necks to the yoke of the king of Babylon and the vessels shall remain in Babylon indefinitely till the time it will please YHWH to restore them to their place). These two items become precisely the items taken up by Hananiah in his prophecy: "I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. In exactly two years' time I shall bring back all the vessels of the temple of YHWH which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from here and carried off to Babylon. And I shall also bring back Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah and all the exiles of Judah who have gone to Babylon, oracle of YHWH, for I shall break the yoke of the king of Babylon" (28:2b-4). And so Hananiah's prophecy of the fast return of the vessels of the temple, plus his breaking of the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah become a direct reply meant to contradict the message of Jeremiah in chapter 27. As regards chapter 29, Rudolph is of the opinion that the "י" with which it begins (29:1) serves to establish a connection with chapter 28, though it is not certain that the connection between them is strictly chronological⁷. But what is clear is that chapter 29 continues with the preaching of a long duration of the exile⁸.

The cohesiveness in these chapters from the point of view of theme, literary style and chronological sequence is further accentuated by the evident similarity in the structural patterns in which the narratives are given. The theme of the conflict of Jeremiah with the other intermediaries, that is of true and false prophecy, is elaborated in terms of the following broad outlines: the confrontation with the problem of false prophecy at home (Judah) and the confrontation with the problem of false prophecy abroad (Babylon), each cast in a sequence of message, tension (negative response) and resolution. Jeremiah gives a message which is contradicted by false prophets, leading to YHWH's intervention and

⁷ See RUDOLPH, *Jeremia*, p. 182; T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood*, p. 28.

⁸ See T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood*, p. 27-28.

consequently a prophetic utterance of judgement against the opposing prophet(s) in question. In this respect, Jer. 27-28 deals with the confrontation with the problem at home, while chapter 29 deals with the confrontation abroad:

I Dealing with the problem of false prophecy at home: Judah (Jer. 27-28)

- a. **Message:** Message about the exile: submission to the rule of Babylon through the address to the neighbouring nations, to king Zedekiah and to the priests and people plus the message of the prophets of peace (27:9, 14-15, 16) accused to be false prophets.
- b. **Tension:** Negative response to the message of Jeremiah by a prophet: Hananiah prophesies contrarily and enacts a symbolic action (28:2-4, 10-11).
- c. **Resolution:** YHWH intervenes and consequently, a curse is spelt out on the one who rejects and contradicts this message through the prophecy by Jeremiah of the death of Hananiah (28:12-16).

II Dealing with the problem of false prophecy abroad: Babylon (Jer. 29)

- a. **Message:** Message on the exile: about the length of the exile, settlement in exile and about false prophets (v. 5-9).
- b. **Tension:** Negative response to the message of Jeremiah by some prophets: Ahab and Zedekiah (v. 21-23) and Shemaiah (v. 26-28).
- c. **Resolution:** YHWH intervenes and consequently, a curse is spelt against the prophets (Ahab and Zedekiah in v. 21-23 and Shemaiah in v. 30-32).

A contrast is therefore neatly drawn between Jeremiah and the prophets named in chapters 27-29. While in 26:5 (see also 26:12, 15, 16) YHWH has sent Jeremiah, in 28:16, YHWH has not sent Hananiah. The unnamed prophets in chapter 27 are not sent by YHWH to prophesy (v. 15) and so they prophesy lies to the people (27:10, 14, 16; 28:16; 29:9, 21, 31). While Jeremiah has spoken in the name of YHWH (26:16, cf. 26:2, 12), Shemaiah has prophesied in his own name (29:25). Hananiah and Shemaiah (28:16 and 29:31 respectively) go a step further, having made the people put their trust in lie, and only in these verses is the causative form of the verb (בטח, to trust) used.

6.1.2.2 Chapters 27 and 28: The Centrality of Chapter 28

From the chart above, it is clear that there exists further closer ties between chapter 27 and chapter 28 in the sense in which both deal with false prophecy in Judah. If princes and people have in chapter 26 accredited the prophet Jeremiah as the mouthpiece of YHWH, a mission which the prophet seeks to accomplish by the different oracles of chapter 27, in chapter 28, YHWH seals this approval. Hananiah becomes the instrument. In the context of the block, the narrative of chapter 28 remains a story whose thrust is partly concerned with asserting yet again the truth of the word proclaimed by Jeremiah the prophet, an assertion achieved in an indirect way by focusing on another prophet and allowing YHWH himself to be the arbiter⁹. At the end of the account, opines Carroll, the dead body of Hananiah invalidates his message and serves to highlight the word of YHWH as spoken by the prophet Jeremiah¹⁰.

Chapter 28 is therefore evidently sequel to chapter 27¹¹ and the two chapters seem to be constructed on a single narrative stream, constituting as it were a clear narrative plot. The classical elements or stages of a plot could be identifiable. The plot as a full blown story, or in the words of Fokkelman, *trajectory*, “begins by establishing a problem or deficit; next it can present an exposition before the action gets urgent, obstacles and conflicts may occur that attempt to frustrate the dénouement, and finally there is the winding up, which brings the solution of the problem or the cancellation of the deficit”¹². Going by the definition of Ska, the first verse becomes the *exposition*; presenting the necessary pieces of information about the state of affairs that precedes or leads to the beginning of the action itself; among other things the background information relating to a) the setting of the narrative (place, time and in this case supplied in v. 12, where Zedekiah, king of Judah is mentioned) and b) the main characters and the relations obtaining among them¹³ (Jeremiah, YHWH). From v. 2, the action begins; Jeremiah is asked to put on the wooden

⁹ Cf. CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 541.

¹⁰ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 541.

¹¹ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 538.

¹² J. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 77.

¹³ J.-L. SKA, “*Our Fathers Have Told Us*”, p. 20-21.

yokes and afterwards, to explain this prophetic act, he firmly and categorically counselled the kings to submit to the king of Babylon, declaring that doing otherwise would contradict YHWH's purpose. Jeremiah's wearing of the yoke therefore becomes an enactment of the inevitability of Judah's continued subservience to Babylon. In chapter 28, the irruption of Hananiah and his message, plus the enactment of his symbolic act, contradict the symbolic act of Jeremiah, and thereby heighten the tension in the narrative. In actual fact after the oracles to the three different groups of people in chapter 27, no report is given by the narrator of any response to the word of YHWH through the prophet by any of the addressees. The third of the oracles has actually a specificity, that of a challenge thrown to the other prophets (if they were prophets) to intercede for the people and save the remaining sacred vessels from deportation (cf. v. 18). This bet does not go unchallenged. The prophet Hananiah from Gibeon bets it, incidentally not by interceding for the safety of the remaining vessels as the challenge goes, but by breaking the wooden yoke of Jeremiah and pronouncing salvation oracle for the temple furnishings, the king and the exiles, promising their return in a record of two years¹⁴. Carroll who considers 27:16-22 "as a discussion that is used by the redactors as a lead-in to the story of Jeremiah and Hananiah"¹⁵ writes:

"If the material in ch. 27 is concerned to blame the other prophets for the encouragement of the community in its revolt against Babylon, ch. 28 concretizes the discussion with a portrayal of one such prophet, but in order to set out a paradigm case of prophetic falsification, using the rules set out in Deut. 18.20-22"¹⁶.

Therefore the theme of 27:16-22 is in 28 revisited with an assurance that the temple vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar will be brought back to Jerusalem and this message

¹⁴ This nullifies the view of Carroll that, in view of the central theme of "do not listen to the prophets", the instantiation in 28 is odd since (according to him) "a specific conflict between two individual named prophets over the issue is unnecessary" and that the response of Jeremiah to Hananiah in v. 5-9 is "both unnecessary and incomprehensible", CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 530.

¹⁵ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 184.

¹⁶ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 187.

Hananiah elaborated and reinforced dramatically by taking the yoke bar from the neck of Jeremiah and breaking it. While the personality of Hananiah, his oracles and his sign act (28:2b-4, 10-11) present the complicating factor of the plot, by creating the suspense and making the reader pose questions like ‘what will happen?’ or ‘what does this mean?’ the turning point, which is the beginning of the *resolution* or *dénouement*, is launched with the irruption of the word of YHWH to Jeremiah and ends with the eventual death of Hananiah.

Chapters 27 and 28 are closely associated with each other in many other ways. In 27:2, Jeremiah is told to “put on” (נתן, literally “give”) the yoke-pegs, and in 28:10 Hananiah “takes” (לקח) them off Jeremiah’s neck. In the context of these two chapters, this sign act of Hananiah is open to two possible interpretations. The first is given in the text clearly, in his oracle in v. 11, which, as said already, resembles the command received by Jeremiah in 19:11. Both oracles begin with the messenger formula (כה אומר יהוה) and are followed each by the declaration ככה אֶשְׁבֵר (“in this way I shall break”). The sign act in each case equally falls between two explanatory oracles. V. 10 is therefore presented as a counteraction or contradiction to 27:6-11 which, among other correspondences of idea and interest, employs the same terminology “all nations” under the “yoke of Nebuchadnezzar”¹⁷ (על נבכרנאצר). Scalise’s close observation is true that even the verb forms serve to undermine Jeremiah’s earlier word, which uses the imperfect to express the future or potential subjugation of the nations. And thus the words of Hananiah not only exactly contradict Jeremiah’s words by prophesying the release as future or potential, but equally imply that in the current situation the nations are already “under the yoke”¹⁸ but will be set free within two years (cf. v. 2b-3 and v. 11).

If these verses are in effect a critique of 27:1-11, the second interpretation, which the sign act of Hananiah is open to in the context of the chapters, is that Hananiah as an individual and as a prophet has personally rejected the word of YHWH and has disobeyed the commands to “bring your neck under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar” and “serve the king

¹⁷ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 57.

¹⁸ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 56.

of Babylon and live” (cf. v. 12 and 17); hence his death at the end of the narrative. The indictments given against Hananiah in 28:15-16 are composed of many elements that have the effect of identifying Hananiah as an exemplification of the type of prophets about whom many audiences had already been warned in the precedent chapter and as the model for treating the other discredited prophets in the subsequent chapter. The oracles of YHWH in chapter 27 had demanded that the people “stop listening (אל תשמעו) to your prophets” (see v. 9, 14, 17) and in chapter 28, in two occasions, Jeremiah invites Hananiah with the same verb to “listen” (cf. v. 7 and 15). Hananiah becomes also the model of the prophets who are variously discredited with the phrase לא שׁלח. Like the unnamed Jerusalem prophets in 27:15, the diviners and prophets among the exiles in 29:9, and equally like Shemaiah in 29:31, YHWH has not sent Hananiah (cf. 28:15). From the above, we can say that chapter 28 enjoys a centrality in the chapters, not only by its placement, but also by the contents. From all indication, the dramatisation of the theme of the block in this chapter concretises the discussion for the reader. Even though it could be hard to describe the whole block as a single plot, it is however possible to see chapter 28 as the climax of chains of events in the block¹⁹. Confirmed by YHWH himself as a true prophet in 28:15-17, and precisely on the subject of the duration of the exile, Jeremiah writes to the exiles, confirming the truth of his prophecy, in chapter 29 (cf. especially v. 5-14). This becomes a confirmation of his authority and that of the message of chapter 27 (especially v. 16-22).

6.1.3 Analysis of Key Motifs/Terms and Their Narrative Effects

There is no doubt that Jer. 26-29 as a block focuses on the office of the prophet and more especially from the point of view of the question of its authenticity. Our analyses so far make us to conclude that chapter 26 is a programmatic articulation of the problematic and

¹⁹ “The moment of highest tension, the appearance of a decisive element or character, the final stage of a narrative progression”, J.-L. SKA, “*Our Fathers Have Told Us*”, p. 27. In this derived sense, we can see chapter 26 as the exposition, with the oracles of chapter 27 as the inciting moments while in chapter 29 we may find the elements related to the resolution (especially with the advice to the exiles and the motifs of peace that will come at the end of the Babylonian domination), even though in many respects the confrontation with false prophecy is still at stake in the chapter.

that there, the question of prophetic legitimacy is clearly posed. The analysis of chapter 28 in our Part Two Chapter Four confirms this, and there we concluded that the confrontation between the two prophets left the reader with the certitude of one of the prophets vindicated and the other discredited. In the totality of the text, certain terms occur with remarkable preponderance, in strategic positioning, in significant semantic nuances that point to the centrality of the question of prophetic authenticity in the block. Already from chapter 26, it is a question of the word of YHWH proclaimed by Jeremiah, whether Jeremiah is sent to prophesy in the manner he does, whether the word will be heeded to, and in the subsequent chapters, whether the other prophets were also sent and whether what they proclaim is true or false. Here would be an examination of these key terms which all together form the reading landmarks for the block as a whole: שקר and the combination with the term נבא רבר, (אמר) רבר, נבא שמע and שלח and the motif of life and death.

6.1.3.1 שקר (+ נבא)

The term שקר (usually translated “falsehood”) is very central in the book of Jeremiah and in the theology of the book. However, the term שקר is part of the theological vocabulary of the Old Testament²⁰ in general, and a reference to its occurrences in the other parts of the Hebrew Bible²¹— here²² we concentrate on the Pentateuch, the Psalms and the Proverbs – may help put to proper perspective its specificity in the book of Jeremiah and in chapters 26-29 in particular.

6.1.3.1.1 שקר in the Torah, Psalms and Proverbs

Occurring eight times in the Pentateuch, most of these occurrences are in a legal context, where it is a question of false witness, swearing falsely or speaking falsely, all viewed as a perversion of justice. The example from the Decalogue is clear: “You shall not bring your neighbour a witness of lie” (עֵד שֶׁקֶר) (Exo. 20:16; cf. Exo. 23:7; Lev. 5:22, 24; 19:12; Deut. 19:18 [twice]). Here what is central is saying that someone did something which he never did (see especially Deut. 19:15-19). Exo. 5:9 is the one exception to this legal

²⁰ Of the 113 occurrences in the Old Testament, the book of Jeremiah has 37.

²¹ 8 times in the Pentateuch, 20 in the Proverbs, 22 in the Psalms, 7 in Isaiah and 4 in Zachary.

²² The reflection here owes much to that made by T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood*, p. 87-91.

usage: the narrative describing Pharaoh's reaction to the initial demand of Moses that the Israelites make a pilgrimage into the desert to worship YHWH. Pharaoh regarded this wish as inclination to "lying words" (דברי שקר) and requested that the slave masters make their labours heavier so that they may not have time for lying words. In this way, Pharaoh uses the term just in the sense that Jeremiah would do for the other gods. For Pharaoh, YHWH's promise of liberation to the Israelites is ineffective and YHWH would be unable to carry out the promise he has made.

שקר as a term occurs 22 times in a total of 14 Psalms: 7; 27; 31; 33; 35; 38; 52; 63; 69; 101; 109; 119 (8 times), 120; 144 (twice). Overholt notes that beginning with those "šeqer-psalms" which may be classified as laments (of whatever sort), we may note that almost without exception, the term is used as descriptive of the actions of the enemies who are generally described as false witnesses (see for example 27:12) and who bear plots against the suppliant; this appears to be their main offence against the suppliant in their lament category. In other words, the connotation of the term in these psalms is mainly legal. Even in psalms that do not strictly fall into lament psalms, the reality is not quite different. Overholt gives a concrete example: "Ps. 101 is in effect the king's promise (doubtless uttered in connection with his enthronement) to maintain justice in the land, so the reference to 'those who utter lies' (*dôbhrê š'qārîm*, v. 7) probably refers to persons who in more strictly legal terminology would be designated 'ēdhê šeqer"²³. He then concludes: "It would thus seem that the term *šeqer* in the psalms retains the same basic connotation which we found it representing in the legal material of the Pentateuch, centring on the notion of 'lie' as 'non-correspondence to fact'"²⁴.

The book of Proverbs has a total of 20 occurrences of the term and here also the legal nuance predominates having explicitly in several instances the condemnation of false witnesses: "He who speaks the truth gives honest evidence; but a false witness utters deceit" (12:17; cf. also 6:19; 14:5; 19:5, 9; 25:18). Few other occurrences talk of lying

²³ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood*, p. 89, footnote 8.

²⁴ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood*, p. 90.

lips or tongue which conceal the true sentiments and intentions of their owners (cf. 6:17; 10:18; 12:19; 26:28).

6.1.3.1.2 שָׁקֵר in *Jeremiah*

The term שָׁקֵר is important in the book of Jeremiah not only because of its centrality in the theology but also even in the measure in which it serves as a key to the understanding of the world of the book and its narratives. Ferry writes that the term שָׁקֵר “était une voie d’approche suggestive pour le livre de Jérémie, un axe fécond pour la connaissance de la mentalité religieuse en Juda dans les années qui ont précédé la chute de Jérusalem”²⁵. It is also important because of its significance in Jeremiah research²⁶. In fact some authors²⁷ have made the term a very major point in contesting the source theory of Mowinckel largely taken for granted and adopted by earlier studies in Jeremiah. These authors either point to a term like שָׁקֵר, among others, as one of the terms that cut across all the sources and so is significant of the specificity of the book of Jeremiah, or that the term, because of its specificity in Jeremiah, like some others, shows that deuteronomistic origin is not the immediate explanation to be given to the evident literary similarity between Deuteronomy and the phraseology of the prophet²⁸. Within his own particular historical

²⁵ J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut*, p. 1.

²⁶ For studies in the theology of the book of Jeremiah done from the perspective of investigation into this terminology, see M. BARRETT, *True or False: Two Kinds of Faith (Jer. 17:5-17)*, in *Biblical Viewpoint* 18 (1984), p. 23-28; T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Falsehood of Idolatry: An Interpretation of Jer. X.1-6*, in *JTS NS* 16 (1965), p. 1-12; ID. *The Threat of Falsehood*, see especially p. 86-104, captioned: “šeqer in the Theology of Jeremiah”.

²⁷ See for example HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 15; T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *Remarks on the Continuity of Jeremiah Tradition*, in *JBL* 91 (1972), p. 457-462; H. WEIPPERT, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches*, p. 110ff.

²⁸ Weippert talks of “Untersuchung des jeweils spezifischen Kontextes”. The aim of this investigation will then be thus: “Analoge oder auch weniger ausgeprägte Formelzusammenhänge im Jeremiabuch und der alttestamentlichen Literatur überhaupt müssen dazu in Verbinden gesetzt werden, damit eine Antwort auf die Frage gegeben werden kann, ob der Sprachgebrauch der Prosareden eine direkte Verbindung mit den deuteronomistischen Parteien des Alten Testaments erlaubt”, H. WEIPPERT, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches*, p. 107.

context²⁹, Jeremiah in employing the term as a very important concept in arriving at his theological goal would not lose sight of the predominant legal sense, in which the noun has been used but would also go beyond this traditional usage.

As characteristic of the book of Jeremiah, this term would be enlarged³⁰. Over and above the ordinary sense of lie, and the legal sense of false witness, שקר in Jeremiah means also illusion, vanity, something without any power or effect³¹. In this book, the objects that are

²⁹ Any serious discussion on the specificity of the prophet's usage of terminologies must take into consideration as well his historical situation. It was the duty of the prophet to interpret events during his time on the basis of some set of theological insights or principles. Both Jeremiah and his prophetic opponents were inheritors of the same traditions of the past, but incidentally their interpretations of this past in the context of the age in which they lived differed. Jeremiah on his part saw a misconception, on the part of his contemporaries, of the nature of the security afforded by YHWH's election of the nation and other divine promises. Contrarily, his prophetic opponents saw themselves still upholders of these ancient verities and saw them as unchangeable dogmas despite changing circumstances. More than any of his contemporaries, Jeremiah saw that the upholding of the relationship with YHWH celebrated in these ancient veritable traditions depended on the people's fulfilment of two strict conditions: the preserving of social justice and involvement in cult that is directed only to YHWH. Though the people were not totally aware of the legitimacy of this Jeremiah claim, they were so inclined to the positive implications of the traditions that their sensitivity to their own misdeeds both in the social and religious domains remained dulled. And so Jeremiah saw the misconception of the nature of the security afforded by the election, the assuring words of his prophetic opponents, and the confidence in other gods, as ineffective and powerless (i.e. שקר) to change the concrete situation facing the people.

³⁰ One can notice such enlargement in the latter narrative chapters of the book where the noun is employed in the normal everyday sense of "lie". For example, once while the siege of Jerusalem is temporarily lifted, Jeremiah trying to leave Jerusalem for the city of Benjamin for a family issue, was stopped by a watchman, who accused him of attempting to desert to the Chaldeans, he retorted: "It is a lie! I am not deserting to the Chaldeans." (ויאמר ירמיהו שקר אינני נפל על־הפסחים) 37:14, cf. 40:16; 43:2.

³¹ In his syntactical analysis, Klopfenstein makes it clear, using examples from the Bible (for example, Gen. 21:23; I Sam. 15:29; Lev. 19:11) that even the verb שקר is first and foremost a verb of action and not just that of speaking: "Schon allein aus diesem syntaktischen Gebrauch bzw. aus dem Fehlen von Akkusativobjekten geht klar hervor, dass *šqr* kein verbum dicendi, sondern ein verbum agendi ist, also ein Handeln oder eine soziale Verhaltensweise ausdrückt. Dasselbe gilt für das Nomen *šaqra*", M.A. KLOPFENSTEIN, שקר *šqr täuschen*", *THAT 2*, Munich, 1979, p. 1010-1019, see p. 1011. In the same vein, Raphaël Draï observes that the term "désigne certes le mensonge mais en tant que, structurellement et

constantly tagged שקר are specific. The book condemns the false security that the people have in the cultic system and in the temple (cf. the temple sermon in chapter 7, especially v. 4, 8) to show the ineffectiveness of these when they are not matched with the correct attitude³². It condemns equally the falsity and worthlessness of Baals and the worship of them and the idols (cf. Jer. 3:23; 5:31; 7:9; 10:14; 16:19; 51:17), the insignificance of false oaths (5:2), the ineffectiveness of the law (8:8) and the deceit of the priests (20:6). In a special way which is more of our interest here, it condemns the falsity of prophecy and the prophets who are impostors (3:10), who “prophecy falsehood” (5:31; 6:13; 8:10; 14:14; 23:14, 25, 26, 32; 27:10, 14, 15, 16; 29:9, 21, 23), and equally the prophets who lead the people astray by making them trust in falsehood (9:2, 4; 28:15; 29:31). In the book of Jeremiah therefore, the issue is that the temple or the cult or the law or even election (cf. the notion of the sacred canopies in our Part Two Chapter One) are all שקר and cannot provide the necessary salvation if justice and fair play and monotheistic cultus are not at the base of people’s social and religious relationships. Without the latter, the former becomes merely magical. And the prophets who neglect these realities, while assuring the people of the effectiveness of these traditions, preach שקר.

6.1.3.1.2.1 נבא + שקר in Jer. 26-29

It is therefore interesting to note that while שקר is only but one of the Hebrew terms which convey the basic notion of ‘falsehood’, it is the only one that Jeremiah uses systematically in his prophetic utterances³³. Klopfenstein³⁴ worked on these terms, making a study of them and the sphere in which each was originally at home³⁵. But on the surface level of the text of the block 26-29, a special peculiarity is made evident with the

dynamiquement, il marque l’inversion de la vérité”, R. DRAÏ, *La communication prophétique: Le Dieu caché et sa révélation*, Mesnil-sur-l’Estrée, 1990, p. 255.

³² See especially the combination of שקר with the idea of ineffectiveness in Jer. 7:8: “Look, you are putting your faith in the words of falsehood, to worthless gain”, על־דַבְּרֵי הַשִּׁקָּר לְבִלְתִּי הוֹעִיל.

³³ See T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood*, p. 87, footnote no. 3.

³⁴ M.A. KLOPFENSTEIN, “שִׁקָּר *šqr* täuschen”.

³⁵ Klopfenstein concludes that “*šqr* is basically a term from the sphere of treaty law, *khš* from that of criminal law, *šaw*’ from that of primitive magic, and *kzb* from daily life”, cited in T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *The Threat of Falsehood*, p. 87.

use of שקר³⁶. In almost all the occurrences, it has something to do with prophecy. Except for 29:23, שקר has in each case something in the context to do with either the noun נביא or the *niphal* (or at times the *hitpa'el*) verb נבא as shown in the table below:

	כי שקר הם נבאים לכם	27:10
	כי שקר הם נבאים לכם	27:14
לשקר	והם נבאים בשמי	27:15
	כי שקר המה נבאים לכם	27:16
	אתה תבטחה את העם הזה על שקר	28:15 ³⁷
	כי בשקר הם נבאים לכם בשמי	29:9
	הנבאים לכם בשמי שקר	29:21
	וירברו דבר בשמי שקר	29:23
	נבא לכם ... ויבטח אתכם על-שקר	29:31 ³⁸

The narratives of chapters 26-29 therefore use the term שקר as the singular qualification for all the activities of the false prophets as regards the people. With the exception of chapter 26 where the term does not occur, a chapter which nevertheless presents the matter as a question of true or false prophecy, the term intervenes at the decisive moments in the other chapters. In chapter 27, it appears almost as a refrain in the three addresses: כי שקר הם נבאים לכם (cf. v. 10, 14, 16). It is used in the pronouncement of the doom of Hananiah, functioning as part of the principal accusation by Jeremiah (cf. 28:15). The same phenomenon occurs in chapter 29 where each mention of an opposing prophet is met with the accusation of prophesying שקר (cf. v. 21, 23, 31). To be observed also is that in each of the occasions, שקר refers to prophetic inauthenticity and not to any

³⁶ שקר occurs in 27:10, 14, 15, 16; 28:15; 29:9, 21, 23, 31.

³⁷ 28:15 and 29:23 do not have the root נבא but will be explained below.

³⁸ This connection between falsity and prophesying can also be noticed in Jer. 5:31; 14:14 (twice); 20:6; 23:25, 26). Weippert uses a similar but more enlarged table to show the specificity in the vocabulary in the book of Jeremiah, cf. H. WEIPPERT, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches*, p. 110ff.

other thing else³⁹. This specificity of שקר in his block could be equally perceived in the absence of the term in the temple sermon of the prophet in chapter 26, since in the parallel account of chapter 7, one of the high points of the sermon is the accusation that the people's confidence in the temple and their pronouncement of יהיה יתקל (cf. especially Jer. 7:4) is tantamount to trusting in שקר. Here (chapter 7), the thrust of the sermon is to attack the people's false confidence in the temple. In chapter 26 however, the interest of the text is not so much on people's confidence in the temple, but in the question of the authenticity of the prophet.

The reference of שקר to the question of prophetic authenticity in our text is shown by its constant association with the term נבא. Jer. 28:15 does not have the verb נבא. In place of the verb, it has the *hiphil* of בטח (to make to trust)⁴⁰. But the accused of שקר is presented as a נביא and both prophets are referred to by the narrator with this title in the same verse: "The prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah..." (28:15). Moreover the combination of נבא with שקר and בטח (*hiphil*) is found again in 29:31⁴¹. In place of the verb נבא, 29:23 employs the verb דבר: "They (Ahab and Zedekiah) have spoken (וַיִּדְבְּרוּ) a word in my name, a lie". The block therefore presents Jeremiah's message as mirroring the will of YHWH. The groundwork of this message is laid by the assertion that it is YHWH who is responsible for the creation of the earth and therefore is in control of it. In the light of his ultimate purpose, he has given his people into the hand of the king of Babylon and any resistance to the authority of the latter means infraction of the will of YHWH⁴². The significance of שקר in the book of Jeremiah as a point of departure, the

³⁹ For example, elsewhere in the book, it refers to the falsity and worthlessness of Baals and the worship of them and the idols (cf. Jer. 3:23; 5:31; 7:9; 10:14; 16:19; 51:17), or to the ineffectiveness of the law (cf. 8:8), or to the deceit of the priests (cf. 20:6).

⁴⁰ Out of the 118 occurrences of this verb in the Old Testament, 15 are in the book of Jeremiah (cf. 5:17; 7:4, 8, 14; 9:3; 12:5; 13:25; 17:5, 7; 39:18; 46:25; 49:4, 11; 28:11; 29:31).

⁴¹ וַיִּבְטַח אֶחָדָם עַל-שִׁקְרָא "and he has made you trust in lie". The combination is also found in Jer. 7:3, 4; 9:3-4; 13:25.

⁴² In this connection, Kraus stresses that Jeremiah's conviction that Nebuchadnezzar's exercise of power is in accordance with YHWH's will should not be seen as the adeptness of the prophet simply to political

prophets who preach disobedience to Nebuchadnezzar or who announce the immediate return to normalcy therefore show themselves to be powerless and their preaching inefficient since listening to them will bring death and destruction (cf. 27:8, 10, 13, 15, 17b), as opposed to the programme of life which YHWH has mapped for all who are obedient to his will (cf. 27:11, 12, 17a). The preaching of the other prophets is lie since it is powerless to prevent the catastrophe awaiting a disobedient people.

6.1.3.2 שלח and שמע (אמר) דבר

Corollary to the study of the terms נבא and שקר in the block 26-29 will be the examination of the term דבר (אמר), and the verbs שמע and שלח. If the people should not follow the other prophets and intermediaries because they prophesy and speak שקר and cause them to trust (חפיל-hiphil) in it, they should listen (שמע) to the word (דבר) of the prophet, proclaimed (piel of דבר) by the prophet sent (שלח) by YHWH. Two verses in particular articulate this phenomenon in the beginning and at the end of the block, bringing all these motifs together and thereby reflecting the intent of the narrative:

<p>לשמע על דברי עבדי הנבאים אשר אנכי שלח אליכם והשכם ושלח ולא שמעתם:</p> <p>“to heed the words of my servants the prophets whom I send you persistently and you have not heeded” (26:5, cf. v. 12)</p>	<p>החח אשר לא שמעו אל דברי נאם יהוה אשר שלחתי אליהם אדעברי הנבאים השכם ושלח ולא שמעתם</p> <p>“because they did not heed my words, oracle of YHWH, which I have sent to them by my servants the prophets persistently and you have not heeded (29:19, 20).</p>
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6.1.3.2.1 דבר (אמר) דבר

The theme of the word of YHWH proclaimed by the prophet is very central to the block of Jer. 26-29 and even extends till Jer. 36 where it is a question of the writing of the word in a scroll, reading it before the people, and the reaction of the king to this word. This theme of the word of YHWH goes with the warning which YHWH gives Israel through

issues. The Hebrew Bible after all makes no strict and clear-cut distinction between politics and religion. See H.-J. KRAUS, *Prophetie in der Krisis*, Neukirchen, 1964, p. 74ff.

his servants the prophets (26:4-5; 36:9-26); in response, Israel rejects prophetic message (26:5; 36:1-8) and in consequence, YHWH brings judgment upon disobedient Israel (26:6; 36:27-31). In 26-29 therefore, this theme of the word of YHWH proclaimed by his servants the prophets and rejected is exemplified in the opposition to Jeremiah and his confrontation with the other prophets. It is even clear that the notice of the advent of the word of YHWH with which the block begins (cf. 26:1) is repeated at the end in 29:30 (see also 27:1; 28:12), showing an emphasis on the theme of דבר-יהוה.

26:1 "In the beginning ...this word came from YHWH saying, thus says YHWH, 'stand...'"	29:30 "then came the word of YHWH to Jeremiah saying, 'send...thus says YHWH'"
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However an examination of the function of the terms דבר and אמר from the perspective of the individual chapters would make more evident its narrative effect in the totality of the text⁴³. At the first instance, the reader of chapter 26 will easily be attracted by the

⁴³ Even though the verbs דבר and אמר can stand in synonymous parallelism (cf. Isa. 40:27; 45:19), there is still some relationship of difference. Explaining out this subtle difference, Schmidt asks: "How does *dibber* differ from '*amar*'?" And citing Jenni he answers: "Unlike the resultative *dbr* in the piel, 'to utter specific words', where the object is already implied, '*mr* in the qal (present) needs to be supplemented in direct or indirect discourse". He continues by citing Gerleman: in the case of the verb '*mr*, "to say, speak", which is semantically connected to and partly synonymous with *dbr*, "the primary concern is with the content of what is said", whereas "*dbr* in the piel denoted primarily the activity of speaking, the uttering of words and sentences. While '*mr* requires that the content of what is said (in direct discourse) be stated and sufficiently defined by the context, so that '*mr* does not occur in the absolute, *dbr* in the piel can occur in the absolute without any more specific statement about what is imparted (e.g., in Gen. 24:15; Job 1:16; 16:4, 6)". According to him, "thus, in contrast to '*amar*, *dibber* has a more comprehensive and overarching sense, i.e., it sums up a conversation as a whole at the beginning or at the end, so that generally speaking it should be translated, 'to speak, have a conversation, converse with' [...]. The general meaning of *dibber* may also be seen perhaps in the contrast between 'speaking and doing' (Ezk. 17:24; etc.), or in expressions like 'speaking a language' (Isa. 19:18; cf. 36:11; Neh. 13:24) or 'knowing how to speak' (Jer. 1:6), which refer to speaking as a whole (cf. Job 34:35; Jer. 5:15; 44:25; etc.)". He adds that "in prophetic literature, the verb *dibber* denotes both the reception of the word and also its proclamation", W.H. SCHMIDT *et al.*, דבּר, *dābhar*, TDOT 3, Grand Rapids, 1978, p. 84-125, see p. 99-100.

frequency of the *dicendi* verb roots: a total of 19 occurrences for דבר and 15 for אמר. Related with the words pronounced or to be pronounced⁴⁴ is then שמע. The word (דבר)⁴⁵, which must be given without a thing withheld⁴⁶, becomes what determines the fate of both speakers and listeners. The word leads to death or to life⁴⁷. If the word were heeded to, then YHWH would repent of the evil he had planned. If not, the consequence is the destruction of the city and the temple. The nature of the word also determines the fate of the prophet: for Jeremiah (cf. v. 8, 11, 16, 24), for Micah (cf. v. 19) and for Uriah (cf. v. 21). Therefore the correlation of דבר and שמע affects both YHWH, prophet and the people:

“Dans ce récit, tous les groupes parlent, et leurs paroles sont efficaces, puisqu’elles conduisent à la vie ou à la mort du peuple et du prophète. Les deux ont partie liée : si la parole prophétique n’est pas entendue, le Temple et la ville sont détruits, le prophète condamné à mort, et alors le peuple se fait un grand mal à lui-même (v. 19b)”⁴⁸.

Though in the block, the reader notices a more or less free use of דבר and אמר, there are still recognisable patterns at a very close attention. In the first place, דבר is mainly used as a noun, referring either to the word of YHWH, that of the prophet or any other individual. Likewise, the verb אמר is mainly used to express the act of speaking, either of YHWH, the prophets, or the other characters. But in few occasions דבר is used in the verbal form. Here a subtle and revealing phenomenon is made evident. In chapter 26, wherever this occurs, דבר as verb is mainly used when it is a question either of the command of YHWH to the prophet to speak (cf. v. 2, “and speak וְדַבַּרְתָּ to all the cities of Judah ... all the words which I command you to speak לְדַבֵּר to them”, see also v. 8 “when Jeremiah had

⁴⁴ See J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut*, p. 129.

⁴⁵ The Hebrew noun דְבַר does not just mean only word, it is also translatable as thing, event, matter, issue.

⁴⁶ To be noticed is the incessant occurrence of the qualification “all” in the narrative of chapter 26. כָּל occurs 20 times with 5 times referring to the word (v. 2, 5, 8, 12, 15), 9 times referring to the people (v. 7, 8 [twice], 9, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, and 6 times referring variously to the cities of Judah (v. 2), the nations of the earth (v. 6), the people of Judah (v. 18), Judah (v. 19) the warriors of Jehoiakim (v. 21), the princes (v. 21).

⁴⁷ This is also seen from the image of either a protecting or a threatening hand (v. 14, 24 [twice]).

⁴⁸ J. FERRY, *Illusions et salut*, p. 129.

finished speaking לְדַבֵּר all that YHWH had commanded to speak” (לְדַבֵּר), or the narrator’s report of the speech or act of speaking of the prophet Jeremiah (cf. v. 7 “and the priests and prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking” (מְדַבֵּר), or a speech describing the speech action of YHWH (cf. v. 13 “will repent of the evil which he has pronounced [דִּבֶּר] against you”, cf. also v. 19), or the prophet’s description of his commission from YHWH (cf. v. 15 “for in truth YHWH sent me to speak לְדַבֵּר in your ears”), or even the people’s report of the prophet’s accomplishment of his mission from YHWH (cf. v. 16 “for in the name of YHWH he has spoken דִּבֶּר to us”). Though there are few exceptions of YHWH’s command to the prophet to speak expressed with אָמַר⁴⁹ or the narrator’s use of אָמַר to describe the speech act of Jeremiah (cf. for example 26:12), however, in no place is the verb דָּבַר used by the narrator or any other speaker (except in 28:6, 16 and 29:23, 32 which are not without their narrative significance) to designate the action of any other character in the narrative except that of either the prophet Jeremiah or YHWH.

We see that in chapter 27 the three occurrences of דָּבַר as verb are in the two introductions of Jeremiah’s oracles to Zedekiah (27:12 “to Zedekiah king of Judah I spoke דִּבַּרְתִּי”), and to the priests and to all this people (v. 16 “then to the priests and to all this people I spoke דִּבַּרְתִּי”), and v. 13 (“as has spoken דִּבֶּר YHWH”), being itself the words of the prophet Jeremiah citing YHWH. Every other occurrence of the root דָּבַר in the chapter is noun and every other description of the act of speaking is reported by the verb אָמַר (cf. for example, v. 4, 9, 14).

The case of chapters 28 and 29 becomes therefore exceptionally significant. These chapters present the prophetic confrontations and report the condemnation by Jeremiah of the other prophets who are not true with the divine word. What happens in these chapters is therefore narratively significant given the conspicuous departure from the trend described above. Jeremiah employs דָּבַר to describe the speech action of Hananiah (cf. 28:6, 16), that of Ahab and Zedekiah (cf. 29:23) and finally that of Shemaiah (cf. 29:32), all the four prophets condemned in the text for their misappropriation of the word of

⁴⁹ For example, 26:4: “and you shall say to them”; 28:13: “and you shall speak (וְאָמַרְתָּ) to Hananiah”.

prophecy. These are prophets who appropriate the divine word and who are condemned for their falsity with regard to it. There are six occurrences of דבר in chapter 28; four are nouns⁵⁰. Every other report of speaking, even the command of YHWH to Jeremiah to go and speak to Hananiah (v. 13), is expressed with אמר, except in the first and the last interventions of Jeremiah. Jeremiah uses דבר first in v. 7 while he invites Hananiah to listen to “this word (הַדְבָר הַזֶּה) which I am going to speak (לֵבַר) in your ears”, and secondly in his condemnation of Hananiah: “You shall die, because you have spoken (רָבַרְתָּ) rebellion against YHWH” (v. 16). The same phenomenon observed in chapter 28 is repeated in the last chapter of the block. Apart from the occurrences of דבר as noun referring either to the words of the letter sent by Jeremiah (cf. v. 1), the word of YHWH (cf. v. 19, 20, 30) or to that of any other individual/s (cf. v. 23), every other report of speaking is reported by the verb אמר (cf. v. 15, 24) except when it is a question of reporting the שִׁקַּר speech and the condemnation of the three false prophets mentioned in the chapter. Concerning Ahab and Zedekiah, v. 23 reads: “...and they have spoken (וַיִּדְבְּרוּ) a word in my name, a lie, which I did not command them” and for Shemaiah, “he shall not have anyone living among this people and he shall not see the good that I will do to my people, says YHWH, for rebellion he has spoken (דָּבַר) against YHWH” (v. 32).

The impression the reader gets by close reading is that as usual, chapter 26 maps out the programme, by recognising the specific significance of the term דבר, the potency of the word, the true word, the word which leads to life when accepted or to death when rejected. Prophesying is the commission by YHWH of a prophet to represent him

⁵⁰ “Your words” (דְּבָרֶיךָ) referring to Hananiah’s (v. 6); “this word” (הַדְבָר הַזֶּה) which I am going to speak in your ears, referring to Jeremiah’s (v. 7), “the word of that prophet” (v. 9), talking about fulfilment and “the word of YHWH” (v. 12) where the narrator narrates the recalling of Jeremiah to the scene by YHWH. There is a contrast between the דבר of Hananiah and that of Jeremiah in the speech of Jeremiah in v. 6-7: “May YHWH confirm your words (דְּבָרֶיךָ plural) and bring back the vessels... but hear this word (הַדְבָר הַזֶּה singular) which I am going to speak (לֵבַר) in your ears. By opposing his *word* and the *words* of Hananiah, does Jeremiah imply that the truth of YHWH’s word is not mistaken even amidst the confusion of plurality and anonymity? Hananiah’s *words* could be true but he invites him nevertheless to listen to “*this word*”.

(YHWH) in his own speech, that is, speaking not in his own name but in the name of YHWH. Writing on דבר as a very significant term in prophetic literature, Schmidt writes:

“*dabhar* is to a special degree a typical and specific term for prophecy. Together with intercession (Gen. 20:7; Jer. 7:16; etc.), imparting the word of God is the essential task of the prophet. Just as cultic-legal instruction (חורה *tōrah*) characterizes the priest and counsel (*‘etsah*) the wise man, so the word (*dabhar*) characterizes the prophet (Jer. 18:18). One may thus expect information from a prophet. To seek (דרש *dārash*) God through the prophet (1 S. 9:9; 2 K. 3:11; etc.) is ‘to ask a word from’ the prophet (1 K. 14:5; 22:5; cf. Jer. 37:17; 38:14; 42:2ff.; Am. 8:12; also 2 S. 16:23). Thus the OT can speak of the ‘word of the prophet’ (*debhar nabhi*’, Jer. 28:9; pl. 1 K. 22:13; Jer. 23:16; cf. Isa. 44:26). One meets the prophet’s word with confidence, and with the proviso that it is not a word invented by the prophet himself, but one heard and transmitted by him. Reception of the word counts as a mark of genuine prophetic sending (Jer. 27:18; cf. 23:18,22,28ff.; 36:2ff.; 37:17; etc.)”⁵¹.

In our text, Jeremiah speaks (דבר) in the name of YHWH (chapter 26). Each time a false prophet misspeaks, the true prophet reminds him, not just with the verb אמר, but with the term which refers also to an event, a reality. In this way, one could say that Jeremiah reminds his fellow prophets of the contradiction between what they say and the reality. Outside the block 26-29, in the book of Jeremiah, the “false” hopeful prophets are reproached because they steal the words of YHWH, that is, they speak (דבר), not as YHWH wants to be spoken; their message does not come from YHWH (23:16; cf. Ezek. 13:16; Deut. 18:20). Just as in Jer. 27:14, 16, the people are often urged not to trust the words of the lying prophets (Jer. 23:16; cf. 7:4, 8).

6.1.3.2.2 שמע

The verb שמע also plays a very decisive narrative and thematic role in our text. Like many others, the concept has some semantic fluidity and can extend to various different

⁵¹ W.H. SCHMIDT *et al.*, דָּבַר *dābhar*, p. 109.

meanings but with some similarity. Ordinarily the verb means to hear something with one's ears (cf. Gen. 3:8; 37:17) or to listen (Gen. 36:6; I Chr. 38:2; the famous *shema* Israel, Deut. 6:4). In some circumstances, it can also mean to have knowledge or to gain knowledge (Gen. 21:26; Jer. 37:5). In a special way and in many instances, it means to listen to, in the sense of to heed. In this way, it does not just imply hearing sound or speech, or coming to know of something, but agreeing with what is said and in that sense, with regard to a higher authority, it means to obey. In fact, there is no separate Hebrew word for 'obey': "The word of the Lord is uttered in order that it may be obeyed, and to speak of hearing it is to speak of obeying it (Jer. 17,24)⁵².

In the book of Jeremiah, the word שָׁמַע occupies a central place⁵³. Occurring 189 times, there is a total of 22 of it in chapters 26-29⁵⁴. Here, it also exhibits a variety of meaning and plays a definite narrative and theological role in the text. In chapter 26, with a total of 11 occurrences, the very first occurrence in v. 3 is not given as a statement of fact, but as a wish, as a possibility: perhaps (אולי) the people may listen (שמע) to the words of the prophet, and on such possibility hangs the fate of the people: "So that I may repent of the evil I planned against them..." (v. 3). Life or death depends on listening and obeying. In such a way, שָׁמַע is directly tied to דָּבַר and in fact, the latter is uttered in order to be obeyed. This very first occurrence sets the tone of many of the other occurrences of the word and we can thus say that the first meaning that can be detected in the majority of the occurrences is "to obey", though contextual translations can allow the word to be rendered "to heed" or to "listen" (cf. v. 4, 5 [twice], 13). To be noticed is that in this chapter, שָׁמַע, meaning to obey, occurs in the oracle speech of Jeremiah (v. 3, 4, 5[twice]).

⁵² M.C. NJOKU, *The Image of the Prophet Jeremiah in the "so-called Baruch Biography" and Cognate Prose-Texts: A Theological Consideration of the Canonical Text*, Freiburg, 1994, p. 101. In the book of Jeremiah, the expression שָׁמַע בְּקוֹל is often employed (76 times), with a single occurrence in 26-29 (cf. 26:13) and has the nuance of 'obedience'.

⁵³ In fact, after the first chapter of the book of Jeremiah considered in many respects as the introduction to the whole book with its narrative of the call and the advent of the word of YHWH to the prophet, the second chapter begins with the call on Israel "to hear": שָׁמְעוּ דְבַר-יְהוָה בְּיַד יַעֲקֹב וְכָל-מִשְׁפְּחוֹת בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל ("hear the word of the Lord, Jacob and all clans of the house of Israel").

⁵⁴ 26:3, 4, 5 (twice), 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 21 (twice); 27:9, 14, 16, 17; 28:7, 15; 29:8, 12, 19 (twice), 20.

It is true that v. 13 is the defence of Jeremiah, but even here, he repeats the oracle of v. 3. The other occurrences of שמע in chapter 26 are either the report of the narrator (v. 7, 10) or contained in the speech of the different interlocutors in the narrative (v. 11, 12, 21 [twice]) and in all these instances, it means simply “to hear”.

In most of the occurrences in the rest of the block, שמע takes up the sense of “to obey”. In these chapters, the occurrences are mainly connected with the issue of false prophecy and its consequences and so closely connected with the alternative of life and death that is very much abundantly present in the text. Four times in chapter 27, it occurs as an interdiction of the prophet in his oracular speech to the different classes of people not “to heed” the words of their many intermediaries. In 27:9, the nations should not listen to the five categories of intermediaries because what they say is שקר which will lead to (לְמַעַן, v. 10) removing them from their land, driving them out and also to their perishing. It is exactly the same in v. 14: Zedekiah and his people should not heed the words of the prophets because it is שקר (v. 14-15) and that will equally lead (לְמַעַן, v. 15) to their being driven out and their perishing, together with their prophets. Remarkable is the use of the same verb (נָחַח in the *hiphil*) in v. 10 and v. 15 to articulate the consequences of listening to the false prophets. The final occurrence in the oracle to the priests and people exemplifies the programme of life: v. 16-17, they should not listen to the words of the false prophets because they are prophesying שקר, they should rather serve the king of Babylon and live (cf. v. 17). Such occurrence in the context of the programme of life or death is equally the case with chapter 29. Here שמע occurs either as interdiction to listening to the words of the prophets (cf. v. 9 and especially the two occurrences in v. 19 and v. 20), or articulating the positive programme which YHWH has for the exiles. 29:8 is an interdiction just like 27:9 to listening to the intermediaries because they preach שקר. V. 12 is the only occasion where it is a question of hearing by YHWH, articulating the programme of life for the exiles who will call upon him and he will hear.

Compared to the rest of the chapters of the block, chapter 28 has only two occurrences of שמע and this makes it significant. The two occurrences of שמע in chapter 28 are true to the context of the direct confrontation in the chapter and both are invitations in the

imperative of the prophet Jeremiah to his fellow prophet to listen. The first (v. 7) invites the prophet specifically to listen to “this word” (הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה) as opposed in the context to his (Hananiah) own words – in the plural - (“your words”, דְּבָרַיִךְ, v. 6) which he prophesied. The context of the chapter shows that this invitation is not heeded to since Hananiah, even after the invitation, proceeded to a physical assault by taking the yoke bars from the neck of Jeremiah and breaking it (cf. v. 10). Jeremiah came back after listening (implied) to YHWH (cf. v. 12-14) to invite his opponent once again to listen, but this time to the words of his condemnation and, just as in chapter 27, because he has made the people trust in שָׁקֵר and has uttered (רִבַּר) rebellion against YHWH. The effect of the double appeal to listen, in the context of the block is therefore clear: since Hananiah in v. 7 does not listen to the word (הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה), which leads to life, he hears his condemnation and his death (cf. v. 15-16).

On the basis of this examination of the quasi random notices with regard to שָׁמַע in the text, we can make the following basic remarks and conclusions. שָׁמַע plays a very important role in the text inasmuch as its object is generally the word of God which is pronounced to be obeyed and to be heeded. As life and death, protection and destruction, depend on the attitude of the different actors in the text with regard to the word (רִבַּר) of YHWH, with regard to its true pronouncement, so also does the life or death of the actors depend on the correct hearing of the word. On a rhetorical level, this alternative of life and death is already articulated in the very first occurrence of the verb שָׁמַע, where YHWH in his oracle to the prophet makes it clear that “perhaps” (אִילָּן) they may hear and each turn from his evil way, and he will repent of the evil he has planned against them. Finally this alternative is dramatised at the centre of the narrative with Jeremiah and Hananiah. Invited to hear “this word”, and failing, he is invited to hear his condemnation. We can therefore maintain that the text in this way makes evident the necessity of hearing the word of YHWH which he sends by his true servants the prophets, a theme which forms a frame to the whole block (cf. 26:5 and 29:19).

6.1.3.2.3 שלח

The verb שלח is another equally important motif in the prophetic books and in a special way in the book of Jeremiah. Already in the call narrative of the prophet, the verb appears in connection with דבר.

“But YHWH said to me, ‘Do not say, I am a child’, for you must go to all to whom I send (שלח) you and say (דבר) whatever I command you” (Jer. 1:7).

Altogether in the book of Jeremiah, the verb occurs a total of 89 places, having different subjects or objects and without any special pattern to be easily detected⁵⁵. While in some occasions it is the king or the official who sends⁵⁶, in others, it is the sons of Israel who are demanded by YHWH to go for an inquiry or a mission⁵⁷. In some occasions the term has as the object, hand (cf. Jer. 1:9), sword (cf. Jer. 25:16, 17), or letter (cf. Jer. 29:1, 25) or concerns the sending of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (cf. Jer. 25:9; 43:10). It is however to be noted that the term occurs most in the context where the sending refers to prophets or a prophet. Where שלח concerns the prophets, the book of Jeremiah talks often (six places) of the continued succession of the prophets which YHWH has been sending⁵⁸, and in seven places, it is the sending of Jeremiah the prophet (Jer. 1:7; 25:15, 17; 26:12, 15; 42:5; 43:1); or it alludes to the denunciation of some unnamed prophets (cf. Jer. 14:14, 15; 23:21, 32; 27:15; 29:9), of Hananiah and Shemaiah (cf. Jer. 28:15 and 29:31 respectively). In an occasion, Jeremiah’s own sending is put into question by other

⁵⁵ Meyer notes this fact by writing: “Besondere Beachtung verdienen Stellen, wo Jahwe Subjekt ist. Allerdings ist zu beachten, dass keine Formunterschiede feststellbar sind zwischen den Fällen, wo Jahwe jemand sendet und den Stellen, wo die Aktivität eines Königs oder eines Offiziers genannt werden”, I. MEYER, *Jeremia und die falschen Propheten*, p. 55.

⁵⁶ See Jer. 21:1; 29:3; 36:21; 37:7, 17; 38:14; 26:22; 40:14; 39:13; 36:14.

⁵⁷ “Pass over to the coast of the Kittim and see, send to Kedar and carefully inquire: Where has the like of this been done?” (2:10); “YHWH Sabaoth says this, ‘Prepare to call for the mourning women! Send for those who are best at it’” (9:16).

⁵⁸ With שכח *hiphil*, Jer. 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4. Interesting is that in all these occasions, the sending of the servants the prophets by YHWH is met with ‘not paying attention’ (לא שמע) on the part of the people.

people (cf. Jer. 43:2)⁵⁹ and in another occasion, the term occurs in the context of the criterion of fulfilment as proof that YHWH has really sent a prophet (cf. Jer. 28:9).

Coming to Jer. 26-29, we can make the following observations. In its capacity as a chapter that launches the programme of the block, as has often been said, the narrative of chapter 26 makes it clear that the bone of contention in the drama cast in a court-like process is whether the prophet Jeremiah has spoken in his own name or in the name of YHWH, in other words, whether he is sent. The narrative of the chapter begins effectively with the oracle of YHWH where part of this oracle reads: “To heed the words of my servants the prophets whom I have been sending you persistently...” (v. 5). To be recalled is that after the giving of this oracle, the very first reaction of his hearers was articulated in the form of a question which in fact is essentially concerned with the prophet’s legitimisation: “Why have you prophesied in the name of YHWH saying...?” (v. 9). Put in other words, this reaction poses the question as to whether Jeremiah is also one among the “my servants the prophets whom I have been sending to you” referred to in v. 5. Jeremiah’s defence eventually was again nothing but responding to this question of legitimacy, a defence carefully framed by the confirmation that “YHWH has sent me” (בְּאִמַּת שְׁלַחְנִי יְהוָה (v. 12) and יְהוָה שְׁלַחְנִי (v. 15). And to crown it all, the judgment by the court though without using the root שלח, bases on the fact that the prophet Jeremiah has spoken (דבר) in the name of the Lord. In a sense then, שלח becomes an operative term and another guiding compass to the reader.

Even without any strict discernible pattern in the use of the root in the rest of the block, it is noticeable that each of the remaining chapters contains either the command to the prophet to send (27:3; 29:31), or a discrediting of a/some prophet/s by YHWH’s declaring that he/they is/are not sent by him, or both (27:15; 28:15; 29:9; cf. also 29:23 which uses the verb צוה “to command, to charge” to discredit the prophets, Ahab and Zedekiah). The irony is often expressed in the narratives using the root שלח: in chapter 28, YHWH has not sent Hananiah to prophesy (cf. v. 15) and for that reason Hananiah will

⁵⁹ “Azariah son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan son of Kareah, and all those arrogant men, said to Jeremiah, ‘You are lying, YHWH our God did not send you to say: Do not go to Egypt and settle there’”.

be sent off (removed) from the face of the earth (cf. v. 16). In Shemaiah's letter to Zephaniah concerning Jeremiah, his accusation against Jeremiah is that the latter has sent ("for he has sent" כִּי עָלֶיכֶן שָׁלַח) letters to Babylon saying: "It will be long" (v. 28). Immediately after the accusation of this 'sending' (שָׁלַח) of letter by Jeremiah, the narrator reports the advent of the word of YHWH to Jeremiah (cf. v. 30) and in v. 31, YHWH addresses him beginning with the verb שָׁלַח in the imperative: "Send (שָׁלַח) to all the exiles...", a subtle confirmation of the action of Jeremiah using the very word used as an accusation against him to commission him for a mission, thereby contradicting the accusation, and confirming that Jeremiah is actually sent.

6.1.3.3 The Motif of Life or Death

Perhaps another motif that is worth looking into in a more or less separate detail in the block is that of life and death. Although the treatment of the terms, שָׁמַע, (אָמַר) דָּבַר; נָבֵא, שָׁקַר, שָׁמַע and שָׁלַח have all shown the connection which the text makes of these concepts with the life or death of the different personages and parties concerned, it is still worthwhile to listen closely to the narrator to see the word effects of the verb מָוָה, the noun מָוָה and the verb חָיָה (three times in the sense of 'to dwell' with the verb יָשַׁב, cf. 27:11; 29:5; 29:32) even though not much could be observed by way of narrative consistency. To look at these terms must necessarily involve considering other kindred terms, which though not exactly, but are employed in the text to express the same idea of blessings or curses that will befall the parties concerned, consequent either upon their prophesying truly or falsely, their positive or negative response to the word of YHWH pronounced by his servants the prophets, or upon their obedience or non obedience to the will of YHWH with respect to the instrumentality of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. Particular references are to terms such as the nouns קָלָלָה (curse, 26:6; 29:22), הָרָבָה (desolation/ruin, 27:17, cf. 26:9), the verbs נָכַח (*hiphil* to slay, to kill, 26:23, 29:21), חָמַם (to consume, 27:8), אָבַד (to perish, 27:10, 15), etc.

In Jer. 26, these motifs follow exactly the logic and the progression of the narrative. That is to say, in each stage of the narrative, one of these motifs occurs as a hermeneutical guide to the reader. The narrative begins with the threat of the preaching of Jeremiah,

followed by an initial spontaneous and unanimous judgement by the priests and prophets and all the people who heard Jeremiah preach. Then come the formal court setting; the accusation, the defence and the verdict; and finally the citing of the historical precedent, the additional story by the narrator and the saving of Jeremiah. The very first of these motifs in the chapter is in the preaching of Jeremiah; the threat to the city (I will make this city as a curse קללה v 6), which later forms the major charge in the accusation (v. 11). After the preaching comes the unanimous judgement of death (מוֹת תָּמוּת) of v. 8. However, the gathering of the officials in v. 10 and the formal court setting lead the priests and the prophets to charge Jeremiah formally of speaking against this city with the sentence of death (תִּשְׁפֹּט־מָוֶת), v. 11). The charge pronounced gives way to defence which ends with the hypothetical statement: "If you put me to death... (אִם־מָמָתִים אֲתָם אֲתִי), v. 15). Then comes the verdict, using the same motif in the negative: אִין־לֹא־אִישׁ הָיָה מִשְׁפָּט־מָוֶת (v. 16). The crux of the intervention of the elders (v. 17-19) is centered in the question of v. 19 as to whether Hezekiah king of Judah put Micah to death on account of his preaching. The narrator's evocation of the story of Uriah reports not only that the king Jehoiakim sought to put him to death (הִמָּוֶת, *hiphil* of מוֹת, v. 21), but also that he slew (נָחַה *hiphil*) him and cast his dead body in the burial place of the common people (v. 23). Of course the chapter ends with this positive note of the survival of Jeremiah: he was not given to the hand of the people to be put to death (לִבְלֹתִי ... לְהָמָוֶת), v. 24). This phenomenon of correspondence of these occurrences with the important stages of the development of the text could be represented in a table as follows:

Stage of narration	Corresponding life-death motif
Jeremiah's sermon	Curse: קללה the city will be as a curse to the nation if there is no heeding of the word (v. 6)
Initial audience response against Jeremiah	Death: מוֹת תָּמוּת you shall die (v. 8)
Formal court: accusation and charge	Judgement of death: מִשְׁפָּט־מָוֶת judgement of death to this man (v. 11)
Formal court: defence	Death: כִּי אִם־מָמָתִים if you put me to death (v. 15)

Formal court: verdict	Death (negative): מִשְׁפַּט־מוֹתָּהּ ... אֵין no judgement of death to this man, he has prophesied in YHWH's name (v. 16)
Testimony of the elders: question	About death: הֲמָתָהּ did Hezekiah put Micah to death? (v. 19)
Narrator's story of Uriah	Death: וַיִּבְקֹשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ הַמִּיּוֹרִי (v. 21) Jehoiakim sought to kill him and eventually smote him וַיִּבְדֹּהוּ בְּחֶרֶב (v. 23)
Conclusion:	Fate of Jeremiah (survival): לֹבְלָתִי ... לְהַמְיוֹרִי he is not put into the hands of the people to be put to death (v. 24)

From observation, even though the end of the story is a positive note of survival, it is still clear that the motif of death looms large in the whole narrative. Even the note of survival is expressed *via negativa*, he is not put into the hands of the people to be put to death (v. 24). This shows the perilous nature of the situation of the prophet with regard to the preaching of the word and equally the fact that the life or death of the community depends on to what extent they identify with this preaching, and this is pursued in the subsequent chapters.

In chapter 27, one of the common elements in the three addresses is the exhortation to serve the king of Babylon, in order to avoid the mortal consequences (expressed variously: תִּמְנֹם 'to consume' v. 8; אָבַד 'to perish' v. 10, 15; מוֹת 'to die' v. 13; חֲרָבָה 'desolation'/'ruin' v. 17) and to live (v. 11, 12, 17, though in v. 11, the idea is expressed with the verb יָשַׁב 'to dwell'). In chapters 28 and 29, the narrator shows how these mortal consequences are meted to prophetic individuals who prophesied falsely. Because Hananiah prophesied falsely and spoke rebellion against YHWH, Jeremiah proclaims his death and he died (28:16-17). Ahab and Zedekiah will be slain (נָחַ *hiphil*, 29:21) and their names used as curse (קָלְלָהּ, 29:22). Shemaiah and his descendants will be equally punished; none of them will live (יָשַׁב, 29:32) to see the promise (good) of YHWH.

The reader notices therefore that chapter 26 offers as it were the options to the characters concerned; the prophets, the people, the kings. Chapter 27 elaborates this option while chapters 28 and 29 concentrate mainly on the prophetic personalities involved and shows their individual lot in the narrative. Life and death has also to do with prophetic authenticity. To the true prophet is life, to the false prophet, death. Of all the named prophetic actors in the text, Jeremiah is the only one who really survived, not punished by death or doomed to destruction or death. He spoke the true word. The reader therefore notices the power of the true speech to lead to life (Jeremiah) and otherwise to lead to death (Hananiah, Ahab and Zedekiah, Shemaiah).

It is also important to remark that there are many other terms and motifs that occur in more or less consistent regularity in the texts; motifs like על (yoke) and צְוּאָר (neck) which unite chapters 27 and 28 closely into a single narrative, the verbs שָׁבַר (to break), שָׁב (to bring back, to return), etc. While some of these terms have been touched in the analysis of the respective chapters, the exercise in the foregone paragraphs concentrates mainly on the motifs that cut across the chapters as a whole and that have direct consequences to the theme of prophetic authenticity.

6.2 THE CHARACTERISATION OF PERSONAGES

The narratives of Jer. 26-29 involve many *dramatis personae* in different categories: YHWH, Jeremiah and the other prophets brought to positive light (like, Micha, Uriah), Hananiah and many other intermediaries brought to negative light (figures like Ahab, Zedekiah and Shemaiah), kings both of Judah and Babylon, the people, the exiled, the priests, the officials, etc. In the analyses in the previous Chapters (see Chapters Two-Five of this Part), we have indirectly touched on these personalities and seen their roles in the development of the narratives. Few of these major characters of the *dramatis personae* call for more detailed attention. Our task in this section will concentrate on the technique of characterisation of some of these major personalities chosen from each of the categories of personages: YHWH, Jeremiah, Hananiah. By characterisation of personages in this context, we mean how the narrator uses the elements at his disposal to influence

the reader's point of view of a particular character in the story⁶⁰. This can be achieved through a variety of means: it can be either direct or indirect. Direct characterisation writes Amit, is provided by the narrator or by one of the persons in the story, while "indirect characterization is the product of an analysis of the persona's and his/her actions and conduct"⁶¹. Berlin⁶² mentions several techniques of characterisation used in biblical narratives to achieve the portraits of biblical characters: a) description which is used to enable the reader to situate the character in terms of his place in society, his own particular situation, and his outstanding traits, in other words, to tell what kind of person he is⁶³; b) Inner life, that is some information about the character could be given by a commentary from the narrator or even by a monologue by the character; c) speech and

⁶⁰ It is of course true that most of the views expressed or embodied in the narratives are put across through the characters in the narrative. In this way, the characters play the role of the mouthpiece of the narrator and ipso facto, what is and what is not told of them, which of their many characteristics and traits are emphasised or exemplified, which of their speeches, conversations and actions are recorded and which are not, when they intervene and why they intervene and why precisely then, all reveal the norms and values, even ideologies of the narratives. This is the reason why in narratives, the revelation of these norms and values and their appropriation by the reader or at least the latter's critical evaluation becomes more necessary than the question of whether the character/s existed or not. Bar-Efrat's description of characterisation supports this view exactly: "The characters can also transmit the significance and values of the narrative to the reader, since they usually constitute the focal point of interest. Their personalities and histories attract the reader's attention to a greater extent than do other components of the narrative (explanations, settings, etc). They generally arouse considerable emotional involvement; we feel what they feel, rejoice in their gladness, grieve at their sorrow and anticipate in their fate and experiences. Sometimes the characters arouse our sympathy, sometimes our revulsion, but we are never indifferent to them. We want to know them, to see how they act within their environment, and to understand their motives and desires. We follow their struggles to fulfil their aspirations and pay particular attention to everything they say, for when they speak to one another they are also addressing us", S. BAR-EFRAT, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 47.

⁶¹ Y. AMIT, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, p. 74. Amit gives the following example of direct characterisation by the narrator: "The man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. The woman was intelligent and beautiful, but the man, a Calebite, was a hard man and an evil doer" (I Sam. 25:3).

⁶² A. BERLIN, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, p. 33ff.

⁶³ A. BERLIN, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, p. 36ff.

actions, that is, through the characters' speech and actions, the narrator exposes them; d) contrast with some expected norm or lifestyle, or with an earlier actions or beliefs of the same character. In this same section, we also consider the figure of Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon) and its function in the theology of the block.

6.2.1 YHWH vis-à-vis the Figure of Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon)

The sub-title of this section would necessarily pose the question: why considering the characterisation of YHWH in the text vis-à-vis the image of the figure of Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon)? The reason derives from a theological perspective inherent in the text. In our text, the concrete truth or the untruth is nothing more than the question of the reality (the realisation of the prophecies of Jeremiah) and the duration of the exile. What is the role of YHWH and what is that of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon in this regard? Is the exile a theo-political reality, being itself the judgement of YHWH on disobedient Israel and part of his plan for his people, or is it so just in the sense that YHWH is expected to intervene exactly as he did when his people was enslaved in Egypt? How does the narrator present this reality? In the text, especially from chapter 27, YHWH intervenes or is evoked in the context of the exiling of the people so that the question that disturbs the reader is whether the exile of the people is the act of YHWH or that of the Babylonian king. In chapter 28, the intervention of YHWH is equally a statement on the meaning of the exile. It is all a question of power and authority. The king of Babylon is always described in his relative potency, that is, powerful as long and as much as this power is given to him by YHWH. That is to say that considering the figure of Babylon or of its king Nebuchadnezzar and the role it plays in the text would make clearer what the text intends the reader to understand about YHWH.

6.2.1.1 YHWH

Writing on the character of God already in the first book of the Bible and stressing the difficulty in its easy categorisation, Mann writes:

“Thus it must be, because one served a God whose nature was not repose and abiding comfort, but a God of designs for the future, in whose will inscrutable, great, far-reaching things were in process of becoming, one with his brooding will

and his world-planning, was himself only in process of becoming, and this was a God of unrest, a God of cares, who must be sought for, for whom one must at all times keep oneself free, mobile, and in readiness”⁶⁴.

‘Uprooting/overthrowing’ and ‘rebuilding/planting’ are the two principal concepts in the book with which we described the logic that binds the two scrolls into the one book of Jeremiah. It is also from this point of view that the personality of YHWH emerges in the text of Jeremiah. It is YHWH who overthrows in order to rebuild and plant. With regard to YHWH, these concepts are couched in an image of absolute sovereignty that goes with his personality in the book. That is to say, it is YHWH who decides to overthrow and who decides to rebuild. Interestingly these concepts do not follow each other simply in chronological or even logical succession. Rather ‘untamed’ and undomesticated, in the sense of a God who has decided to become Israel’s principal assailant and Judah’s enemy⁶⁵, and who has become a dreaded participant⁶⁶ in the dismantling and undoing of system structures⁶⁷, the text allows no easy categorisation of YHWH, leaving absolute sovereignty and freedom as the very first ready concepts to qualify his personality. YHWH is characterised in the narratives and oracles in the book of Jeremiah not only as the agent of destruction⁶⁸ but also as a wounded victim. In the words of Brueggemann we notice in the book a shattering of God⁶⁹, and so one can say that “the reader confronts in

⁶⁴ T. MANN, *Joseph and His Brothers*, quoted in W.L. HUMPHREYS, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal*, Louisville, 2001, p. iv.

⁶⁵ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 190.

⁶⁶ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 185.

⁶⁷ The shattering of structures would give rise to “cognitive dissonance” in the words of Festinger. There was in the exilic era a clash between the Zion-Sabbath theology (YHWH’s royal presence on Zion) and the facts of political history (the conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple). Within the context of the theology of the Old Testament, the book of Jeremiah stands as one of the hermeneutical attempts to understand these historical realities and to situate them properly in the general perspectives of YHWH-Israel relationship.

⁶⁸ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 186.

⁶⁹ See W. BRUEGGEMANN; *A Shattered Transcendence? Exile and Restoration*, in S.J. KRAFTCHICK et al. (eds.), *Biblical Theology: Problems and Perspectives. In Honor of J. Christian Beker*, Nashville, 1995, p. 169-182.

the character of God the convergence of power and vulnerability, love and wrath, hope and disappointment. In other words, the jumbled character of God pulsates with tensions and contradictions that resist safe categories and orderly arrangements”⁷⁰.

The characterisation of YHWH in the text of Jer. 26-29 reflects his personality portrayed in the entire book. That is to say that the question of the personage of YHWH within this specific block is indirectly a question of the place of YHWH in the book of Jeremiah. The first notice by the reader is that in this block outside chapter 27, YHWH rarely intervenes but his speech and interventions are made known by the mouth of the individual prophets. However, the beginning of the narrative of chapter 26 is the narrator’s description of the direct irruption of the word of YHWH, and in chapter 27, the text is dominated by the prophetic report of this word. Then only in 28:12 is YHWH made to intervene directly by the narrator and not through any other agent. While the reader might feel that Jeremiah has been defeated by his opponent, the former walks his way (28:11) and then the word of YHWH came to him saying, “Go and say to Hananiah” (v. 12). Then in the last part of chapter 29, YHWH intervenes again by the mouth of the narrator in the divine oracle of judgement to Shemaiah: “Then the word of YHWH came to Jeremiah, ‘send to all the exiles saying...’” (v. 30-31). The picture we have then is that the block is made of different prophetic claims by the various prophetic figures: Jeremiah, Hananiah, Ahab, Zedekiah, Shemaiah. The narrator uses the three occasions (the beginning of chapter 26, 28:10 and 29:30) to make YHWH arbiter, without neglecting of course the whole of the contents of chapter 27. Among all the prophets, only Jeremiah is mentioned by the narrator as having been commissioned by YHWH (cf. 26:1; 27:1; 28:12; 29:29), in spite of the fact that others equally claimed divine commission (cf. 26:18; 28:2, 4, 11). Interesting is that the block begins with such divine intervention in favour of Jeremiah and ends in the same note. Much more interesting is that the intervention at the centre (28:12ff.) is not simply the description of the intervention of YHWH by the narrator, but that in this intervention, YHWH takes up the central message of Jeremiah in the text: submission to the king of Babylon; and confirms, using Jeremiah’s own words, the latter’s prophecy in 27:6. Attention has been called to

⁷⁰ L. STULMAN, *Order amid Chaos*, p. 186.

the use of similar phraseology in 28:14b and 27:6b (תָּחִיחַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה). Since no indices or criteria on which this divine judgement and alliance with Jeremiah is given, the character of YHWH, as the lord of history and as a free and an independent personage is thereby made evident; independent personage in the sense that even in the text, YHWH does not allow himself to be circumscribed even by the sentiments of the prophet Jeremiah. The reader could be surprised by the absence of the intervention of YHWH in the court process in chapter 26. The beginning of the divine speech in chapter 27 (see v. 5) where YHWH introduces himself also confirms this image of a personality with unmatched sovereignty.

This absolute sovereignty is seen everywhere in the text. There are the propositions for life and the threat of death in the words of YHWH beginning with the words to his prophet in chapter 26, the oracles in chapter 27, the intervention of YHWH in chapter 28 and the contents of the letter and the interventions in chapter 29. It is YHWH in chapter 26 who sends his prophet to announce the choices: listening and life or disobedience and death. In chapter 27, the oracles begin with what we described in our Part Two Chapter Three as the ‘I-framework’: a personal self-assertion by YHWH in v. 5 which kicks off with the emphatic personal pronoun אֲנִי and dotted incessantly with the first person expression, either in form of pronoun, or a first person suffix, and finally ending with the first person suffixed to the word “eye” בְּעֵינַי (in my eyes):

“I (אֲנִי), I have made (עָשִׂיתִי) the earth, the humans and the animals which are on the earth. By my great power (בְּגִבּוֹרִי) and by my outstretched arm (וּבְרִמּוֹתַי) I give it (וְנָתַתִּיהָ) to whomever seems right in my eyes (בְּעֵינַי)”.

This absolute power is seen in the way the words are addressed to the kings, even foreign kings and nations who are not yet subjects of alliance, to the prophets and to the people. YHWH intervenes to repeat this message in 28:14 by the repetition of the verb נתן with the first person suffix (נָתַתִּי). It is “all these nations” that he has given to be under the yoke of Babylon, words that serve to underline the sense of his sovereignty in chapter 27. In chapter 29, the tone of the letter for installation till when it pleases YHWH is another device through which this sovereignty is made evident. We noted the use of the first person as concerns the verb גִּלָּה in the *hiphil*. Only in v. 1 is Nebuchadnezzar the subject

of this verb. But here it is the word of the narrator. In the letter, when it is a question of citing the words of YHWH in Jeremiah's letter, it is no longer Nebuchadnezzar (as in v. 1) who is responsible for the exiling of the people, the letter is addressed to "all the exiles whom I (YHWH) have exiled (הִגַּלְתִּי) from Jerusalem to Babylon" (29:4). Even in the verses where other verbs are employed to express the idea of banishing, sending or driving away of the people, YHWH remains the subject (cf. v. 18, the verbs רָדַף [to pursue] and נָדַח [to banish, to drive away]; v. 20 שָׁלַח [to send]).

The YHWH, who in Jer. 26 simply gives his message through his prophets but keeps aloof at the process, surfaces again with even harder oracles to his prophet in chapter 27. Jeremiah's attitude in 28:11 could also give impression that the prophet himself does not "trust" the workings of his YHWH. He knows that the latter is not bound to his (prophet's) sentiments and has no guarantee that YHWH may not have changed his opinion, his sovereignty and freedom taken into consideration. The irruption of YHWH in v. 12 becomes only then an assurance to the prophet that the former is still at his side. But again the content of chapter 29 with its mixed messages of installation and return shows the reader that the character of YHWH in the text could only be appreciated from the point of view of the concept of indeterminacy and absolute sovereignty.

This character of YHWH as the lord of history and as a character with absolute power and authority makes YHWH and not even Jeremiah the hero of the narrative, and this will be clearer by considering the figure of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon in the text. It is true that the narrative vindicates Jeremiah at the expense of the other prophets, such accreditation remains at the instance of YHWH. The exile and the domination of Babylon is a very central motif in the text. The question is: how does the narrator relate his story of this reality vis-à-vis the personality of YHWH and the power of Nebuchadnezzar?

6.2.1.2 The Function of Babylon/Nebuchadnezzar

As said above, the figure of Nebuchadnezzar/Babylon and his role in the text is a motif that makes clearer the character of YHWH. It is indubitable that the block 26-29 of the book of Jeremiah MT, presents a very pro-Babylonian cast, apparently different from the

Oracles against Babylon in chapters 50-51, where vehemence and violence blend into one⁷¹. Chapters 27 and 29 in particular give the most startling views of Babylon to be found in the book⁷², since here Babylon is described in terms that characterise Judah, and Nebuchadnezzar enjoys literally the same positive qualification as the servants of YHWH. These “pro-Babylonian sayings” are therefore pitted directly against the anti-Babylonian passages⁷³, passages that, in the words of Carroll, “spoil the effect of the pro-Babylonian material in the tradition”⁷⁴. Jer. 27:6 particularly has the bold mention of “Nebuchadnezzar my servant”, so translated by many commentators and translators. Such a description of Nebuchadnezzar in the book has given rise to much debate⁷⁵. What is the actual meaning of this description in the context of the book of Jeremiah? To talk of the literary status of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Jeremiah is to talk of the status of Babylon whose power is personified in the person of Nebuchadnezzar, and for which Nebuchadnezzar is a metonymy⁷⁶. Of course, the interest in Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon here is in their being literary rather than historical figures.

⁷¹ D.J. REIMER, *The Oracles against Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51*, p. 262.

⁷² J. HILL, *Friend or Foe?* p. 127.

⁷³ Most popular passages of this nature are 25:12-13, 26; 27:7; 29:10 and the oracles of 50-51.

⁷⁴ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 253.

⁷⁵ Among many works already done on this include: W. LEMKE, *Nebuchadnezzar, my Servant*, in *CBQ* 28 (1966), p. 45-50; T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *King Nebuchadnezzar in the Jeremiah Tradition*, in *CBQ* 30 (1968), p. 39-48; R. MARTIN-ACHARD, *Esaïe 47 et la tradition prophétique sur Babylone*, in J.A. EMERTON (ed.), *Prophecy: Essays Presented to Georg Fohrer*, Berlin, 1980; W. MCKANE, *Jer. 27,5-8, especially “Nebuchadnezzar my Servant”*, in V. FRITZ, K.-F. POHLMANN & H.-C. SCHMITT (eds.), *Prophet und Prophetenbuch: Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 65 Geburtstag* (BZAW 185), Berlin, 1989, p. 98-110. Cf. also D.J. REIMER, *The Oracles Against Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51: A Horror Among the Nations*, San Francisco, 1993; W. BRUEGGEMANN, *At the Mercy of Babylon: A Subversive Reading of the Empire*, in P.D. MILLER (ed.), *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life*, Philadelphia, 1994, p. 114-117; A. O. BELLIS, *The Structure and Composition of Jeremiah 50:2-51:58*, New York, 1995; L. STULMAN, *Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Jeremiah*.

⁷⁶ In literary parlance, metonymy refers to the substitution of a word referring to an attribute for the thing that is meant, as for example the use of the crown to refer to a monarch or by which a whole is represented by its part, cf. *Collins English Dictionary*, Millennium Edition, Aylesbury, 1998.

6.2.1.2.1 *Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon) in Jer. 26-29: Occurrences and Problematic*

The references to the proper name “Nebuchadnezzar” in Jeremiah MT, could, in terms of context, be divided into four groups following Overholt’s analysis⁷⁷. The four groups are a) three passages in which Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned in a chronological cross-reference, in order to synchronize a year in his reign or a victory with a corresponding year in the reign of a king from Judea: 25:1; 32:1; 46:2; b) references occurring in the context of a historical narrative and the mention of Nebuchadnezzar with reference to the siege of Jerusalem, mainly in 52:4, 12, 28, 29, 30; c) references which present Nebuchadnezzar as the ruler used as agent of the exile of the population, all with the approval of YHWH or according to his plan or even with his support: 21:2, 7; 22:25; 24:1; 27:6, 8, 20; 28:3, 11, 14; 29:1, 3, 21; 32:28; 34:1; 37:1; d) scattered references to Nebuchadnezzar in the Oracles against Babylon in chapters 50-51 for example, 50:17; 51:34.

There is no explicit mention of Nebuchadnezzar or Babylon in chapter 26, except of course one infers that the reference to the destruction of the city made by Jeremiah (v. 6) and by the priests and the prophets and all the people (v. 9) is to the ravaging that will come from the king of Babylon. In chapter 27⁷⁸ the proper name Nebuchadnezzar is used thrice (v. 6, 8, 20) and in each case, it is followed by the description “king of Babylon” characteristic of the MT (not counting the numerous references to Nebuchadnezzar by the use of the third person singular pronoun). Otherwise in the chapter, the reference to Nebuchadnezzar is made by the use of the description of his office “מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל” and in a total of 7 occurrences (v. 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17). Babylon as a city is mentioned alone four times (v. 16, 18, 20, 22). In chapter 28, Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned three times (v. 3, 11, 14) and here as in the preceding chapter (27), the proper name is always followed by the description “the king of Babylon”. Apart from these three occurrences, the description “king of Babylon” occurs twice (v. 2, 4), while the name “Babylon” outside

⁷⁷ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *King Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah Tradition*, p. 40-41.

⁷⁸ It is necessary to remark once more that in Jer. 27-29 the spelling of the king of Babylon changes from נְבוּכַדְרֶצְצַדְרִיסַר to נְבוּכַדְרֶצְצַדְרִיסַר. But in our work we quote each occurrence as it occurs in the text, and use Nebuchadnezzar throughout for the English.

the mention of Nebuchadnezzar or his title “king” comes up again three times (v. 3, 4, 6). Regarding occurrences, chapter 29 has the proper name Nebuchadnezzar in v. 1, 3 and 21. Of all these three, only in v.1 is the description ‘the king of Babylon’ not part of the naming of the personage. “King of Babylon” alone outside the attachment to Nebuchadnezzar occurs again only in v. 22 while “Babylon” occurs severally (cf. v. 1, 4, 10, 15, 20, 28)⁷⁹.

The major issue to be addressed here becomes how to understand this figure in the text and explain his role in the narrator’s art; also from the theological point of view, how to explain the attribution of the title “עבֵר” to Nebuchadnezzar, given the traditional significance of this attribution in the whole of the Old Testament⁸⁰. Such explanation

⁷⁹ Outside v. 10 and 15, all other occurrences of Babylon in this chapter implies a movement from Jerusalem to Babylon, faithful to the major preoccupation of the chapter which is a narrative of the letter sent by Jeremiah from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon.

⁸⁰ A little excursus on the title “servant of YHWH” is worthwhile here and the reflection here borrows much from that of Ringgren in H. RINGGREN, עֶבֶר, עֲבָדָה, *TDOT* 10, p. 394-395. It is true that the term means “to work, to cultivate, to serve, to develop, to venerate and to worship YHWH, and the substantive refers to a slave, a servant, עֶבֶר יְהוָה is a description normally used for the worshipper of YHWH. Individuals called עֶבֶר יְהוָה include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Caleb (Num. 14:24), Joshua (Jos. 24:29; Jdg. 2:8), Eliakim (Isa. 22:20), Job (1:8; 2:3), Hezekiah and Zerubbabel (Hag. 2:23). YHWH promises Isaac blessings and numerous descendants “for the sake of Abraham my servant” (Gen. 26:24), a statement which can either refer to Abraham as just a recipient of a promise or point to his special merits. The same formula occurs with reference to David in II Kings 19:34; 20:6, see also Psa. 105:6, 42. Isaac is called servant (of YHWH) in Gen. 24:14 and in Eze. 28:25; 37:25, YHWH refers to Jacob as the bearer of the promise “עֲבָדִי”. Collectively, the three patriarchs are called YHWH’s servants (Exo. 32:13; Deut. 9:27). On numerous occasions Moses is called עֶבֶר יְהוָה especially while referring to him as law giver and as mediator of God’s commands (Jos. 1:7, 13; 8:31, 33; 11:12, 15; 22:2, 4, 5; II Kings 18:12; 21:8; I Chr. 6:34; Neh. 1:7; 9:14; 10:30; Mal. 3:22 etc.). In the case of Moses, “the ‘ebed YHWH is thus an honorific title of the mediator of revelation rather than an official title, and is referring to the special status of his relationship with God”. In the case of David, the title appears often in the context which involves the election and the perpetual continuation of the dynasty (cf. I Kings 11:13, 32; II Kings 19:34; II Kings 20:6; Isa. 37:35; Jer. 33:21, 26; Psa. 78:70). In all these instances it is a question of “my servant David”. To be signalled also are the wordings of the introduction to Nathan’s prophecy in II Sam. 7:5, 8: “Go and tell my servant David” and in the concluding words of Solomon’s temple dedication prayer in II Chr. 6:42:

becomes necessary judging from the fact that in the same book, precisely in the section dealing with the Oracles against the Nations, the image given of Babylon and her king is quite contrary. In Jer. 51:34, the king of Babylon is addressed as the dragon or monster (of chaos). The questions are as put by Reimer: “How is this contradiction within the tradition to be resolved? Is there a third factor that holds these seeming opposites together? Or is the incongruity between these two positions irreconcilable”⁸¹? Carroll presents the problem in the following words:

“However, when I attempt to read these different perspectives synchronically I have difficulties. How can Babylon, how can Nebuchadnezzar, be at one and the same time servant and beast? Are there any grounds in the bible for making the equation servant=beast? Does the YHWH of the bible have such dealings with the chaos monster that the dragon rules by divine gift and authorisation? The multiplicity of questions indicates the degree of difficulty in taking a synchronic view of the representations of Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah”⁸².

6.2.1.2.2 *Earlier Proffered Solutions*

The easiest explanation to this is to assume that some of the texts involved are late developments within the Jeremiah tradition, judging especially from the absence of some of the strategic verses in the LXX, or to recognise that the book of Jeremiah holds together discrete streams of tradition which give ‘irreconcilable images’ of the prophet⁸³,

“Remember your steadfast love to your servant David”. The prophets are also generally designated servants of YHWH. Only in a very few instances is the reference made to an individual prophet (I Kings 14:18; 15:29, Ahijah of Shiloh; II Kings 9:36; 10:10, Elijah; 14:25, Jonah of Amittai; Isa. 20:3, Isaiah). Once a prophet refers to himself as servant, Elijah in his prayer at Carmel (I Kings 18:36). Generally it is YHWH who calls the prophets “my servants the prophets” (עֲבָדַי הַנְּבִיאִים). Through his servants the prophets he speaks to Israel (I Kings 14:18; 15:29; II Kings 9:36; 10:10; 14:25; 17:23; 21:10; 24:2; Eze. 38:17) and makes known his commandments (II Kings 17:13; Ezr. 9:11; Dan. 9:10). He avenges their blood (II Kings 9:7).

⁸¹ D.J. REIMER, *The Oracles Against Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51*, p. 262.

⁸² R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah*, p. 48.

⁸³ This is equally Carroll’s opinion quoted in D.J. REIMER, *The Oracles Against Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51*, p. 264.

or even to say that part of the Jeremiah tradition include a concern to ‘placate or cooperate with foreign governments’ which differs from the spirit of the foreign nation oracles⁸⁴. Some commentators have felt the difficulty and some have simply appealed to the boldness of the prophet’s faith and thought: an expression of Jeremiah’s belief in the universal rule of YHWH who had appointed Nebuchadnezzar as his instrument to judge and rule over the nations⁸⁵. Lemke sees the solution from totally another direction. Appealing to the absence of the three-fold designation of Nebuchadnezzar as עֲבָרֵי־יְהוָה in any of the three passages in the old Greek version of Jeremiah, he explains that the phrase owes its existence “to an accidental error in the textual transmission of the book [...] an interpretative gloss by a subsequent hand who identified the originally unnamed, enemy from the North with Nebuchadnezzar”⁸⁶. But such a conclusion hinges on a verse-to-verse textual comparison which is usually problematic. True there are only 12 occurrences of the name Nebuchadnezzar in the Greek version⁸⁷, closer and critical examination that goes beyond material comparison reveals that this paucity of usage is not as significant as it apparently seems. This is because even when the proper name is missing, the sense remains more or less the same in the two versions. In the LXX the enemy from outside is normally designated as ὁ βασιλεὺς Βαβυλωνός which from the events of 597 leaves no doubt that it refers to Nebuchadnezzar. In the block of 33-36LXX (26-29MT), it is noticeable that besides 34:5, Nebuchadnezzar is no longer referred to by name. But the title “king of Babylon” occurs 13 times again in these chapters, and the narrative is in all its essentials the same⁸⁸. Overholt is of the opinion that “a careful comparison of the two makes it evident that the sometimes lengthy phrases and sentences found in MT but not

⁸⁴ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 252.

⁸⁵ RUDOLPH, *Jeremia*, p. 161. See also J. ZIMMERLI & J. JEREMIAS, *παῖς θεοῦ*, in *TWNT* 5, Stuttgart, 1957, p. 653-713, see especially p. 663. See also WEISER, *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia*, p. 248; J.P. HYATT *Jeremiah*, in *The Interpreter’s Bible* 5, p. 1011.

⁸⁶ W.E. LEMKE, “Nebuchadnezzar, my Servant”, p. 47.

⁸⁷ The Greek text of Jeremiah, that is the B-S text, which J. Ziegler has used as the basis of his edition, *Jeremias, Baruch, Threni, Epistula Ieremiae*, Vol. XV of *Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum*, Göttingen, 1957.

⁸⁸ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *King Nebuchadnezzar in the Jeremiah Tradition*, p. 42.

in LXX are for the most part nothing but narrative developments of ideas or actions already present in both texts⁸⁹.

These designations (of Nebuchadnezzar of servant and monster in the same book of Jeremiah) in the words of Carroll are “end points on a spectrum, a merismus of loyalty and opposition to YHWH”⁹⁰, and it is only by an extreme ideological manipulation of the text that one can overcome this difficulty of imagining how one figure might be both vassal of YHWH and dragon of chaos⁹¹. He gives the crux of the conflict in his commentary. Introducing Jer. 50-51, he writes:

“If such a poem were to be attributed to the ‘historical Jeremiah’, it would raise the insuperable problem of reconciling the speaker of this anti-Babylonian outburst with the image of Jeremiah as the friend of Babylon portrayed in 27-29, 39-40 [...]. Utterances of the calibre of 50-51 lead to death sentences rather than honourable treatment under the patronage of the empire (39.12-14; 40.4-6). It is difficult to see how Jeremiah could have been advocating submission (27) or surrender (38) to the Babylonians and yet *at the same time* (cf. 51.59) have been proclaiming 51.1-14 or 51.25-40”⁹².

Since according to Carroll, much of the material in Jer. 27-29 concerning Babylon differ strikingly from the representation of it in Jer. 50-51 (we are referring specifically to Jeremiah MT) he finds “a better approach to the contradictory elements” in the recognition that “inconsistency is a major feature of the editing of the book of Jeremiah” and in the acceptance that “the various strands present irreconcilable images of Jeremiah

⁸⁹ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *King Nebuchadnezzar in the Jeremiah Tradition*, p. 42. See also his *The Falsehood of Idolatry*, for his arguments against unsystematic, verse-by-verse comparison of texts.

⁹⁰ R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah*, p. 46.

⁹¹ R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah*, p. 46. Elsewhere Carroll describes plainly the “contrary representations of Babylonians: Nebuchadnezzar as the servant of YHWH (25.1-14; 27-29) and Nebuchadnezzar as the dragon (50-51)” as one of the ideological traces inscribed in the book of Jeremiah, see R.P. CARROLL, *The Book of J: Intertextuality and Ideological Criticism*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 220-243, see p. 238.

⁹² CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 816. The emphasis is his.

the prophet"⁹³; and he finds the easy answer in a diachronic "reading of the two texts (which) would build on this difference and attribute them to distinctive origins and backgrounds in the construction of the book of Jeremiah"⁹⁴ and therefore sees any synchronic harmonisations questionable.

John Hill has a solution closer to synchronic bias. He explains this apparent discrepancy by reading Babylon as a metaphor. His point of departure is Paul Ricoeur's⁹⁵ understanding of metaphor as "an unaccustomed name to some other thing, which thereby is not being given its proper name"⁹⁶, based on a tension of similarity and difference, on relations of likeness and difference in the words of Francis Landy⁹⁷, on the perception of resemblance between one term and another, on the suspension of literal reference which creates a necessary tension and which generates a new meaning⁹⁸. There emerge therefore two levels of reference in a metaphorical statement: the literal and the metaphorical. The literal is that which is suspended or eclipsed, while the metaphorical is that which emerges from the suspension or eclipse of the literal, a phenomenon that Ricoeur refers to as "split reference"⁹⁹. This suspension of the literal reference Ricoeur

⁹³ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 816. The emphasis is his.

⁹⁴ R.P. CARROLL, *Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremiah*, p. 46.

⁹⁵ Cf. P. RICOEUR, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, London, 1994; *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Forth Worth, 1976.

⁹⁶ P. RICOEUR, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 65. See also F. LANDY, *Poetics and Parallelism: Some Comments on James Kugel's 'The Idea of Biblical Poetry'*, in *JSOT* 28 (1984), p. 61-87, see p. 72; A. BERLIN, *On Reading Biblical Poetry: The Role of Metaphor*, in J.A. EMERTON (ed.), *Congress Volume, Cambridge 1995* (VTS 66), Leiden, 2001, p. 25-36, see p. 27-28.

⁹⁷ F. LANDY, *Poetics and Parallelism*, p. 72.

⁹⁸ In explaining metaphor, Adele Berlin brings in the kindred term "parallelism" which she says with metaphor "are two sides of the same coin" – counterparts of the same phenomenon in a different dimension. "The basic form of metaphor is parallelism, in the sense of the contiguous or syntagmatic arrangement of paradigmatic elements such that unlikes become alike", BERLIN, *On Reading Biblical Poetry*, p. 28.

⁹⁹ P. RICOEUR, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 229-230. See also G. VINCENT, *Paul Ricoeur's "Living Metaphor"*, in *Philosophy Today* 21 (1977), p. 412-423; G.B. MADISON, *Reflections on Paul Ricoeur's*

calls the negative condition necessary for the emergence of a metaphor¹⁰⁰. With metaphor therefore, a self-contradictory statement is transformed into significant self-contradiction¹⁰¹, redescribing reality. This phenomenon, he terms, the referential function of a metaphorical statement¹⁰². Applying this understanding especially to chapters 27 and 29, Hill concludes:

“At one level Babylon is identified with Judah, a relationship brought about by the presence in the portrait of Babylon, of images and language used elsewhere in the Old Testament to represent Judah and its relationship with YHWH. At another level Babylon is differentiated from Judah. The elevated standing given it in Jeremiah 27 MT is for a limited duration. It will suffer demise while Judah will experience restoration. There then is a tension between the two figures, which is characteristic of metaphor. Babylon *is like* Judah, and Babylon *is not like* Judah”¹⁰³.

6.2.1.2.3 From the Narrative and Theological Points of View

Any interpretation of the figure of Nebuchadnezzar in Jer. 27 must bear in mind the crux of the oracles in the chapter which begin in v. 5 with the note on the absolute sovereignty of YHWH over the fate of nations and in line with the prophetic combat against אֲשֶׁר seen in the three parts of the chapter as we showed in our Chapter Three of this Part. “It is I who have made the earth, with the people and animals that are on the earth, by my great power and my outstretched arm, and I give it to whomever I please”. This therefore presents the theoretical and theological background for understanding v. 6 and what follows: the giving of these lands into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar נְבֻכַדְנֶצְצַר (v. 6), and all nations shall serve him until the time when many nations and great kings make him

Philosophy of Metaphor, in *Philosophy Today* 21 (1977), p. 424-430; P. GISEL, *Paul Ricoeur: Discourse Between Speech and Language*, in *Philosophy Today* 21 (1977), p. 446-456; A.P. CIPOLLONE, *Religious Language and Ricoeur's Theory of Metaphor*, in *Philosophy Today* 21 (1977), p. 458-467.

¹⁰⁰ P. RICOEUR, *Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language*, in M.J. VALDÉS (ed.), *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, New York, 1991, see p. 65-85, see p. 84-85.

¹⁰¹ P. RICOEUR, *Word, Polysemy, Metaphor*, p. 78.

¹⁰² P. RICOEUR, *Word, Polysemy, Metaphor*, p. 84-85.

¹⁰³ J. HILL, *Friend or Foe?* p. 144.

their slave (v. 7). Despite the mention of Nebuchadnezzar in the context of motifs that reflect the traditions of the chosen of YHWH, Nebuchadnezzar is at the same time a subordinate figure to YHWH and his power is limited: “then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave”. The irony is therefore clear. This limitation is already reflected in the repetition in v. 5 and v. 6 of אָנֹכִי to emphasise that it is YHWH who is in control. As already indicated in the analysis of chapter 27 (Part Two Chapter Three), the irony could be seen from the play on the term עֶבֶד. Two times there is the phenomenon of a reversal of meaning in the fourth occurrence in the text (cf. v. 6-7 and v. 8-11). Nothing therefore prevents עֶבְדִּי in v. 6 to be translated in the context as “my slave”. In the words of Ringgren,

“The subst. *'ebed* refers to a person who is subordinated to someone else. This subordination can manifest itself in various ways, however, and *'ebed* accordingly can have different meanings: slave, servant, subject, official, vassal, or ‘servant’ or follower of a particular god”¹⁰⁴.

Again in chapter 27 the question of the consequences of serving or refusing to serve Nebuchadnezzar is always articulated with a formula that portrays YHWH as the actor and not the Babylonian king. Whether it is ‘yes’ to Nebuchadnezzar or ‘no’, it is always ‘in order that I ...’ (referring to YHWH). Nowhere is it expressed that obedience to Nebuchadnezzar or failure to serve him will result in the king inflicting harm:

v. 8 “but if any nation will not serve Nebuchadnezzar... I will punish that nation... until I have consumed it...”

v. 9-10 “so do not listen to your prophets... who say to you, you shall not serve the king of Babylon. For lie they prophesy to you with the result that I drive you out...”

v. 11 “but any nation that will serve... I will leave on its land...”

v. 14-15 “do not listen to the prophets... for lie they prophesy... I have not sent them, but they are prophesying falsely in my name with the result that I will drive you out and you will perish...”

The first two occurrences of Nebuchadnezzar in Jer. 28 (v. 3, 11) are in the mouth of Hananiah: v. 3 is his initial oracle made in the name of YHWH that the latter would

¹⁰⁴ H. RINGGREN, עֶבֶד, אֲבָדָה, p. 387.

restore all the vessels of YHWH's house which Nebuchadnezzar carried to Babylon, while v. 11 is the explanation following his symbolic act, also pronounced in the name of YHWH. Even in the words of Hananiah, Nebuchadnezzar is equally an instrument. Hananiah, as well as the other prophets in the same camp with him envisage that YHWH will show his power by breaking the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar and by reversing the prodigies of the king: bringing back all the vessels he carried along with the king (cf. 28: 2-4, 11). It is then interesting that the only other mention of Nebuchadnezzar in the chapter (v. 14) is in the words of YHWH, in contradiction of the prophecy of Hananiah and his explanation of his sign act. The interest of the narrator in chapter 28 is more of dramatising the conflict between verity and falsity. No wonder that here, the figure of Nebuchadnezzar is tied more closely to the duel between falsity and verity. The divine oracle in v. 14 begins exactly with the messenger formula, just as the words of Hananiah in v. 3 (cf. beginning of v. 2) and v. 11: כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה. And in the divine words of v. 14, the narrator brings out clearly the attempt at contradicting the words of Hananiah: while both in v. 3 and v. 11, Hananiah speaks in the person of YHWH (with the first person: אֲנִי in v. 3 and אֲשַׁבֵּר in v. 11), YHWH from v. 13 retorts that it is Hananiah (and not Him) who has broken the yoke (מִיִּשְׁתַּח עַץ שִׁבְרֶתָהּ). In this sense, Brueggemann is therefore right when he writes: "The theme of Babylon is enmeshed in an argument about truth and falseness, so that the argument of the Jeremiah tradition is that the truth of YHWH enunciated by the prophet concerns the cruciality of Babylon in any assessment of Judah's place in the world"¹⁰⁵.

In chapter 29, the same phenomenon is repeated as in chapter 27: first there is a highlighting of Nebuchadnezzar, but immediately followed by a subtle reversal of roles; a description of Babylon in terms proper to Judah, but again followed by its relegation to its proper role as a land of exile. Immediately in v. 1, the exile is described as the action of Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian king is the subject of the *hiphil* verb גִּלָּה ("whom Nebuchadnezzar exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon"). But in v. 4, the same *hiphil* verb is used but this time with YHWH as subject: "whom *I have sent* into exile from Jerusalem

¹⁰⁵ BRUEGGEMANN, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 232.

to Babylon”¹⁰⁶. This is continued in v. 7 and v. 14 where the same verb is used with YHWH as the subject. In these verses (i.e. v. 1, 4, 7, 14) as a whole, one gets in the first place the impression of a partnership between YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar¹⁰⁷, but immediately after, the impression of the instrumental role of the Babylonian king. From another angle, v. 4-7, the directives of the prophet regarding how the exiles are to live in Babylon contain extraordinary understanding of Babylon, a very positive view of Babylon which echoes texts in the Old Testament that speak of life in the promised land¹⁰⁸. But like in chapter 27 where the limit of the power of the Babylonian king is the issue after the exercise of that power, in 29:10-14, it is a question of the occasion for a return to the land: Babylon becomes the place from where the exiles will be returned by YHWH back to the land. The structure of v. 10-14 makes the end of Babylonian hegemony and the promise of restoration to the people the frames that highlight the divine promises to his people (cf. our treatment of this unit in our Chapter Five of this Part). All this will make the attentive reader to situate Nebuchadnezzar properly in his role as servant, slave, used by YHWH for his purpose.

Apart from the literary composition of the text that exemplifies the instrumental position of Babylon/Nebuchadnezzar, the figure of Babylon in Jer. 26-29, as in the whole of the

¹⁰⁶ The translation of the Jerusalem Bible misses this subtlety and significant emphasis: English: “YHWH Sabaoth, the God of Israel, says this to all the exiles deported from Jerusalem to Babylon” (NJB); French: “Ainsi parle YHWH Sabaot, le Dieu d’Israël, à tous les exilés, déportés de Jérusalem à Babylone” (FBJ).

¹⁰⁷ Here again one notices one of the specificities of Jeremiah MT. The LXX lacks this impression of the partnership between YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar. The expression לְכַל־הַגּוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר־הִגְלִיָּה מִירוּשָׁלַם בְּבַלָּא of v. 4 is not represented in the LXX, showing that the LXX lacks the literary strategy that allows the bringing together of the figures of YHWH and that of Nebuchadnezzar as subjects of an equivalent verb גָּלָה in the *hiphil*. The LXX has rather only once in v. 4 the verb ἀποικίζω: οὕτως εἶπεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ ἐπὶ τὴν ἀποικίαν ἣν ἀπόκισα ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ: “Thus says YHWH the God of Israel, to the colony which I sent away from Jerusalem”.

¹⁰⁸ The reader has impression of the life in the Promised Land. The exiles have to build houses, marry and reproduce, plant vineyards and even the most startling of all, to pray for the well being of Babylon. Berlin gives the Old Testament background of the imagery evoked in this text. See A. BERLIN, *Jeremiah 29:5-7: A Deuteronomic Allusion?* in *HAR* 8 (1984), p. 3-10. See also D.L. SMITH, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile*, Bloomington, 1989, p. 135.

book, is equally a theological issue. The Babylonian conqueror becomes an earthly king appointed by YHWH to rule Judah as the agent of punishment against its wrongdoing. The threat that the people will suffer punishment as a consequence of their disobedience is a constant motif running from the beginning of the book of Jeremiah, and in 25:9, that threat is pinned down to the person of Nebuchadnezzar as agent. The solution that the title of “servant” is a “simple scribal error” by Lemke¹⁰⁹, citing the material absence in the LXX is therefore perhaps only significant to textual (comparative) critical sensitivities. Neither is the strict distinction between “servant” as a believer and “servant” as a mere instrument very necessary and will not be derived from any lexical semantics or analysis of the root עבד in the Hebrew Bible. Lemke has appealed to other Old Testament texts where the title refers to a believer and so cannot refer in the book of Jeremiah to an unbeliever. This is at best argument from silence, which does not give full weight to analogous expressions in prophetic literature¹¹⁰. Without using an identical terminology, Isa. 10:5ff. and Jer. 50:17 make mention of a foreign king as YHWH’s instrument of punishment for his people, and in both texts, the pattern of action is alike: YHWH’s punishment of the people at the hand of the foreign king is followed by the overthrow of the latter’s authority and restoration for the people (cf. the outcome of the cycle Isa. 10:1-12:6 and also the mention of the restoration after 70 years in Jer. 25:12ff. and 29:10). Making distinction between “servant” as believer and “servant” as instrument therefore shifts the emphasis. While most ‘servants of YHWH’ happen to be believers, the issue is not more of belief than a certain office or class among the people (e.g., prophet, king, patriarch)¹¹¹, that is, the responsibility of carrying out a specific function on YHWH’s behalf¹¹². The reference to Nebuchadnezzar as servant is analogous in the theological sense with the designation of the Persian king Cyrus as the anointed (מָשִׁיחַ)¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ W. LEMKE, *Nebuchadnezzar, my Servant*, p. 50.

¹¹⁰ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *King Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah Tradition*, p. 45.

¹¹¹ See T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *King Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah Tradition*, p. 46.

¹¹² Cf. H. RINGGREN, עָבַד, *ābād*, p. 395.

¹¹³ The anointed one, be he a priest (Exo. 28:41), a prophet (1 Kings 19:16), or king (Psa. 89:20).

in. Isa. 45:1-7 (especially v. 4¹¹⁴). He is to carry out a specific function, that of liberating the people from Babylon though that does not necessarily imply belief on his part¹¹⁵.

Overholt concludes:

“There seems nothing to prevent us from seeing a continuity in the prophetic conception of the manner in which Yahweh exercises his control over history, the high-points of which are Isaiah of Jerusalem’s oracle about the king of Assyria (10,5ff.), Jeremiah’s understanding of Nebuchadnezzar as Yahweh’s ‘servant,’ and Deutero-Isaiah’s description of Cyrus’ ‘messiahship’”¹¹⁶.

In this way, Nebuchadnezzar becomes an agent whom YHWH uses for the punishment of his people¹¹⁷. In 27:8 it is a question of the dire consequences to a nation which refuses to yield to Babylonian submission and against that nation YHWH decrees: “And I will punish that nation with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, ... until I have completed their destruction by his hand” (cf. also Jer. 21:1-7). It is YHWH’s punishment, which he realised freely, though by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. This argument is further confirmed by the passivity of the royal figure. Despite all the power given to him, Nebuchadnezzar is silent in the text. In no instance of the text does the figure speak or act, but is only mentioned in the report of the narrator (cf. 29:1, 3) but especially in the

¹¹⁴ Here it is expressly mentioned that Cyrus does not know YHWH: “It is for the sake of my servant Jacob and of Israel my chosen one, that I have called you by your name, have given you a title though you do not know me”.

¹¹⁵ Interesting to note that the contexts of both passages are alike. The designations of these pagan emperors as servant or messiah are cast in a context where YHWH describes his sovereignty and his independence of any other for his decision. In both, his power over creation (עשה) and the ability to give (נתן) it to any creature is clearly expressed, cf. Isa. 45:1-7.

¹¹⁶ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *King Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah Tradition*, p. 47.

¹¹⁷ Lundbom’s remark is straight to the point. He considers Nebuchadnezzar in this light as, though “not a worshipper of YHWH, simply a servant doing (without his knowledge) the bidding of the One who has created the world and controls the history of all nations [...]. The expression, ‘Nebuchadnezzar ... my servant’, is eminently worthy of Jeremiah, whose discourse teems with robust and even shocking images”, LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 315.

speech of YHWH. It is YHWH who gives Nebuchadnezzar his status in the text. The passive figure of Nebuchadnezzar does even no wrong¹¹⁸ in the text just as in Jer. 25.

Advocates of the opinion that the book of Jeremiah presents the figure that bears its name as a prophet and as a theologian are aware of the way in which the tradition in the book takes up a term and goes beyond the common use of it in order to create within it and with it a new symbol of meaning geared towards its theological goal. In his criticism of Mowinckel's idea of sources, Holladay talks of Jeremiah's use of words and "their theological angle of vision" and the "authentic voice of Jeremiah"¹¹⁹, a voice never easy to specify in the abstract and having the characteristics of "surprise, freshness, imagination, and irony"¹²⁰. In this way, the unit of 26-29 will not be seen as essentially contradictory to the tradition of the Oracles against the Nations especially chapters 50-51 or even contradictory to some other Babylonian passages in the first scroll of the book of Jeremiah especially chapter 25¹²¹, where again in v. 9, the title "my servant" is attributed to Nebuchadnezzar.

¹¹⁸ Contrast with Isa. 46, whose portrait of the absolute sovereignty of YHWH is accompanied by a satirical attack on the Babylonian deities and their impotence (46:1-7).

¹¹⁹ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 15.

¹²⁰ This is also one of the great merits of the work of Weippert: the attention she devotes to semantic functioning of the same vocabulary in different contexts, and the efforts she puts in establishing distinctions of nuance and function, meaning also that the same word may not be used in the same way and in the same sense, H. WEIPPERT, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches*. Weippert criticises former approaches for not looking at specific contexts: "Die in der Einleitung angedeuteten Nachteile der bisherigen sprachstatistischen Methode, die Vokabeln und Formeln ohne Rücksicht auf ihren Kontext zum Ausgangspunkt für die Aufstellung literarischer Abhängigkeitsverhältnisse macht, verlangen nach einer kritischen Überprüfung der mit Hilfe dieser Methode aufgefundenen Beziehungen zwischen dem Jeremiabuch und der deuteronomisch-deuteronomistischen Literatur. An die Stelle der Vergleichung isolierter Ausdrücke und Formeln tritt hier die Untersuchung des jeweils *spezifischen Kontextes* einer Formel inner- und ausserhalb des Jeremiabuches", H. WEIPPERT, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches*, p. 107. A good example in the unit of 26-29 is a term we have examined, the term *שָׂקָר*.

¹²¹ Here also in chapter 25, the same phenomenon occurs. The theme of judgement is central in this chapter and here the figure of Babylon occurs within the same context. First of all, Babylon appears as the agent and ally of YHWH in the judgment of Judah (cf. v. 1-11) and finally is represented as a recipient of YHWH's judgement (cf. v. 12-14, 15-26).

6.2.2 *The Prophet Jeremiah*

Many works on the personality of the prophet Jeremiah as depicted in the book that bears his name, concentrate solely or mainly on his Confessions: However, it is not only in the Confessions that the character of the prophet is made evident to the reader. From the book of Jeremiah, we notice that the prophet struggles with his commission. The proclamation of the word of God, which is his mission becomes unbearable and places him into conflict (see 20:7-8) and isolation (see Jer. 15:10-19) with his community¹²². This phenomenon is nowhere more evident in the book than, or is equally evident, in the block 26-29.

As would be expected, the characterisation of Jeremiah will not be far different from that of his God for whom Jeremiah is prophet¹²³. In many different respects and in different places in the book, the prophet reflects and personifies the complexity¹²⁴ of his untamed

¹²² Thus we meet a complaint of the prophet over his birth and in 20:7-10, the prophet tries to give back his mission though without success. Jeremiah received the word of God put into his mouth, burning as fire so that he must prophesy, and yet he is unable. And he cannot keep quiet, making life otherwise impossible. No wonder the complaint is even directed to the man who brought the news of his birth and to YHWH himself who commissioned him to prophesy, see J. DUBBINK, *Jeremiah: Hero of Faith or Defeatist? Concerning the Place and Function of Jeremiah 20:14-18*, in *JSOT* 86 (1999), p. 67-84, see p. 79.

¹²³ Holladay's opinion in this respect is true. He opines that even though one can make a separate discussion of Jeremiah's self-understanding, of his understanding of God, and his message to his people, all basing on the text of the book, there is in fact no way to separate these three. In his opinion, for Jeremiah, YHWH is pre-eminently the God who entered into covenant with Israel and he had called him (Jeremiah) as a prophet to speak on behalf of Israel: "Jeremiah can hardly be seen in any other way than in his task to proclaim Yahweh's word, and Yahweh's will for Israel is at the center of Jrm's attention [...]. Thus Jrm's understanding of his role and his understanding of Yahweh and Yahweh's expectation of the people are all interrelated", HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 70-71.

¹²⁴ Complex also in the sense of the inability of the reader to pin him down to a definite camp. Jeremiah's conception of the relation between him and his God is a relation open to changing circumstances. Taking a more historical approach, Holladay writes: "Jrm began his career with appeals to the north to come to terms with Yahweh and rejoin the south; during the period from the death of Josiah (609) until Jehoiakim burned the scroll (601) Jrm spoke out Yahweh's appeals to the people in the south to repent; after 601 Jrm perceived repentance no longer to be possible and declared Yahweh's decision to destroy the people, but in

God, an image which is ambivalent. As we explained in Chapter One of this Part, the characterisation of Jeremiah in the book that bears his name follows the ambivalent depiction of his God, a God who overthrows, uproots and at the same time plants and builds. Polk¹²⁵ has worked seriously on the prophetic persona of the prophet and from his expositions, one sees that the literary persona of the prophet is one that is dynamic, rich and also one adequately involved in the work of dismantling of idolatrous structures and old sureties. Being an associate of God¹²⁶, the prophet participates fully in the dismantling, in the uprooting and tearing down of Judah's world of meaning. This co-operation does not end with the uprooting. It means equally that the prophet will have his part in the anguish and disappointment of his God. No wonder that Jeremiah at times appears in the book as someone who triumphs and at other times as one who throbs with pain and emerges as the suffering servant of God. The shattering of God becomes equally the shattering of the prophet.

The first image presented in the book of Jeremiah comes from his call narrative in Jer. 1:4-19 where the reader encounters how powerfully the personality of the prophet was set forth and the place the text accords it. He is commissioned with full authority over the nations, armed with *דְּבַר־יְהוָה* put in his mouth as an inaccessible fortress¹²⁷ against nations and kingdoms (see especially v. 10). Given this as background to the mission of the prophet, one cannot but expect a very strong and controversial personality, exercising authority and being at the crossroads of conflicting opinions. This conception of the prophet leads Duhm therefore to remark that if Jeremiah had carried with him such consciousness, then he had a very different ground under his feet from other people. To

the context of the final siege of Jerusalem (588), after he bought the field at Anathoth, he once more spoke of hope, after 'a long time' for the fall of Babylon and for the restoration of the people (29:28)", HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 71.

¹²⁵ T. POLK, *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self*.

¹²⁶ A. HERSCHEL, *The Prophets: An Introduction* (Vol. 1), New York, 1969, p. 25-26.

¹²⁷ J. DUBBINK, *Jeremiah: Hero of Faith or Defeatist?* p. 80.

him, at least for his own person, the riddle of Being was solved¹²⁸. That is why the figure and personality of the prophet plays a central role in the interpretation of the book since the many seemingly discrete elements are held together by this figure. Even an author like Carroll who stands against any synchronic interpretation of the book of Jeremiah recognises this central role of the personality of the prophet:

“The streams [that is different traditions in the book] have not produced a unified book but a collection of variegated traditions which are held together loosely by the creation of the figure of the prophet. The presentation of the prophet is the linking element between so many discrete elements in the tradition, and this factor may help to explain the shape and size of the book of Jeremiah”¹²⁹.

6.2.2.1 *The Character of Jeremiah Especially in Chapters 26 and 28*

With regard to the characterisation of the prophet in the block under consideration, chapters 26 and 28 are particularly interesting being themselves integrally stories told by the narrator. The text begins in chapter 26 by the narrator’s focusing on the prophet vis-à-vis the word of YHWH and later, the reactions of different groups to Jeremiah’s obedience to that word. The uninterested reader has therefore in chapter 26 a conflict story with the prophet at the centre. The prophet becomes a target of conflict of opinions and images from the different classes; priests, prophets, civil authorities and elders of the land. The elusive nature and the inability of pinning down the character of the prophet is exemplified not only in the conflict of opinions among the different classes but also in the unsteadiness of the opinions in some of the groups, for example, the people, especially with regard to aligning with the prophet. But all in all, one gets as first impression the image of a vulnerable prophet, vulnerable on account of the word he proclaims. The first reaction to his words is the judgement of death. Even his defence which, though he turns to a new appeal to repentance (cf. v. 13), recognises this vulnerability and the dependence of his fate on his accusers. To be noticed especially is the expression נָקִי רָם ‘innocent

¹²⁸ DUHM, *Das Buch Jeremia*: “Hat Jer ein solches Bewusstsein mit sich herumgetragen, so hat er einen ganz anderen Boden unter den Füßen gehabt, als alle anderen Menschen. Ihm war, wenigstens für seine eigene Person, das Rätsel des Daseins gelöst”, p. 5.

¹²⁹ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 253.

blood' (v. 14): Jeremiah presents himself as a harmless, defenceless victim at the hands of his accusers. Part of the concluding words of the defence of Jeremiah in the chapter brings out clearly this vulnerability and innocence and the risky situation into which his preaching has taken him: "Behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you" (v. 14). This element is also present in Act I of chapter 28 where Jeremiah appears as the defeated prophet after Hananiah's theatrical act before the priests and the people, and also in 29:24-28, especially in the cited letter of Shemaiah demanding why Jeremiah was not rebuked because of the letter he sent. From the eyes of the majority of his hearers, Jeremiah is far from being a true prophet. Regarding especially 26:9, Holladay writes: "Since however, by the people's understanding of Jrm's contradiction of Yahweh's promises regarding the temple, he must be a false prophet, he is to be sentenced to death (Deut 18:20). What one sees here then is not so much mob hysteria as a theological judgment anchored in the tradition"¹³⁰.

But there is equally a hidden image of Jeremiah which is at the same time very much present in the text, and the narrator does not miss to portray this. Even the response of Jeremiah in his defence evoked in the previous paragraph is far from being totally the words and murmurings of a helpless vulnerable individual. He portrays equally an offensive posture by two devices. First he turns his defence into another preaching of repentance by repeating that they should amend their ways and their doings in order to avert the disaster decreed already by YHWH against them (26:13). Secondly, though Jeremiah acknowledges the judges' authority to decide his case, he reminds them that they are not free to decide it according to their whims and caprices: there is the danger of condemning an innocent person. That they may be guilty of innocent blood means that he is insisting forcefully on his innocence. Exegesis of chapter 28 in particular often ends up in portraying and highlighting the very gentle aspect of Jeremiah the prophet exhibited in Act I. The reader is tempted to see in the narrative of chapter 28 a story of subtle relationships and movements different totally from all the other narratives in the book where Jeremiah is the prophet of doom par excellence. But the tradition of Jeremiah is of course more of where "Jeremiah never listens to anybody but denounces and asserts all

¹³⁰ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 106.

the time. In such stories the other prophets are silent or have words put in their mouths, but always they are denounced from the moment Jeremiah opens his mouth"¹³¹. And so in the story, one sees two prophets of extreme characters: one appears to be very self-assertive and the other (Jeremiah) then becomes the quiet, humble and harmless listener, who goes his way to avoid confrontation (cf. 28:11), listens again to his master and waits for the latter's command before he speaks again. The fact that this image is quite different from the general image of Jeremiah in the book led Carroll to consider this account as "an independent story and only owes to 27 certain features necessary for it to be a variant account"¹³². But by a close reading, one would be able to notice the complexity of the character of Jeremiah in the account, a complexity which does not contradict the general image of Jeremiah in the book, an image difficult to pin down to a definite category and which keeps itself alive in its ambivalence; at times with parallel streams but which are unified in his role as a prophet to the nations armed with the pungency of YHWH's word.

The question as to which of the two opposing prophets reflects more the boldness and fearlessness that characterises the prophets, has been posed. The text has a subtle answer in favour of Jeremiah. From the development of the text, the reader is made to picture the stage and the context in which the two prophets confront each other. The reactions of the audience of Jeremiah in chapter 26 makes it clear that Jeremiah's message of the possible destruction of the temple and devastation of the city is far from being welcome to the people, and reveals the religious and political climate in which they operated. The drama of chapter 26 makes it clear that politically, the message of Jeremiah could be interpreted as treason. Why did the priests and prophets in v. 9 reprimand Jeremiah of speaking against the temple and the city, but immediately the civil authorities took their judgement seat, the same group of people accused Jeremiah of only prophesying against the city (v. 10), as if to conjure up the audience's resentments against any act contrary to the spirit of nationalism? Even Jeremiah's defence which solely bases on his strong personal awareness of YHWH's commission shows that he knows actually that he is threading on a very slippery ground. Of course, when it is again a question of relating the story of

¹³¹ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 542.

¹³² CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 541.

another prophet Uriah who suffered violent death at the hands of the king because he prophesied just in words like those of Jeremiah (v. 20-23), the narrator says Uriah preached “against this city and this land”. This could show that for the population in the world of the text, what counts more is national and political interest. In chapter 27, this polemic situation is not very clear since there was no response to any of the three oracles. But by normal reading reflex, the reader does not miss to discover that the prophet’s oracles are startling; YHWH becomes the distributor of yoke through his prophet. That foreign kings be subject to Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon may not be surprising, but that the king in Judah, priests and all the people be subject to the Babylonian king becomes a stronger message. Finally, the message about the king and the indefinite stay of the vessels is far from being palatable. With the first oracle of Hananiah in chapter 28, the sign act and the explanation (v. 10-11), the polemic situation becomes clearer. Behold the appearance of a prophet of hope who would prophesy to the taste of the people. If Babylon is therefore as powerful as the oracles of chapter 27 especially give impression, which, between the two prophets, takes greater risk in his prophecy?

The very nature of the message of Hananiah concerning Babylon on the one hand, and that of Jeremiah on the other, would, in the face value, give the impression that Hananiah involves himself in a more fierce and risky venture. In this perspective, one could be led to consider Hananiah as the prophet declaring the end of Babylonian hegemony over the people, that is, a prophet who proclaims the judgment of YHWH on Babylon while the latter is still exercising the real power through their vassal¹³³, thereby the prophet who takes greater risk in confronting the enemy frontally. In that way one could exonerate Hananiah of participating in the power relationship in the text, and Jeremiah himself appears as one who tries “to construct a working relationship with these powers”¹³⁴ by giving a more compromising and placating message. Nevertheless, one can follow Henri Mottu to a good extent in his analysis and representation of Hananiah as one who aligns himself on the side of the powerful, and as one who gives peaceful and reconciliatory

¹³³ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 549.

¹³⁴ R.P. CARROLL, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 252.

counsel¹³⁵. It depends on where (the) power is identified, and the notion of power is relative to different contexts. What of the argument that at times populist view is a way of allying with the power, perhaps not with the power on top, but with the majority opinion, the popular view? In the context of the political dispensation present in the text, one cannot talk of power without reference to the expectations of the people. And from this perspective, political and religious contexts intermingle. Given the situation, the natural tendency and expectation of Judah of their prophet, true to the name, in the concrete situation of the text, is one who would prophesy YHWH's disapproval of their political situation. Any prophet who would prophesy otherwise would be running the risk of being discredited; and prophets would be faced with the temptation of striking this image in order to retain their credibility or at least their acceptance among their audience. This becomes a way of holding close to power, perhaps not with the Babylonian hegemony but with the populist group, and this Hananiah does and Jeremiah risks. After all what is power for a prophet, if it is not first and foremost religious; that is, his acclaim and acceptance among his people? Again the stronger threat in the text does not come from

¹³⁵ H. MOTTU, *Jeremiah vs Hananiah: Ideology and Truth in Old Testament Prophecy*, in N.K. GOTTWALD & R.A. HORSLEY (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, New York, 1983, p. 233-251. With tools especially Marxist, Mottu sees in the personality of Hananiah one who aligns himself with the powers that be. Carroll criticises this as unqualified assertion. According to Carroll, Mottu's attacks on Hananiah for being on the side of the powerful is tantamount to reading into the text what his (Mottu) theory tells him must be there. Carroll has rather another vision altogether. He sees Hananiah as the prophet who attacks the authority of the day: "But consider the setting: in the temple of Zedekiah's day, i.e., with Babylonian overlords exercising the real power through their vassal, this prophet from Gibeon (not Jerusalem), this outsider or peripheral figure, proclaims the judgment of Yahweh on Babylon. How does that make Hananiah a participant in the power relationships of his time? If the authorities hear Hananiah, he will be executed (cf. 29:21-23). Hananiah risks all with his future-oriented faith that Yahweh will bring back furnishings, king and people. He may be wrong but not on the grounds that he lacks faith or praxis, is not open to the future, serves the powers that be or is trapped in the past [...]. To say that Yahweh will bring back the king, i.e., displace the present occupant of the throne, is an act of brave faith, however mistaken it may be. It is both radical and revolutionary in its political context and cannot be construed as support for the ruling classes. It is quite the opposite!" CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 547. Carroll's argument though not untenable makes a leap in definition. This necessary definition is the question of where to identify power, and what is power for the prophet.

Nebuchadnezzar or Babylon but from the local kings. Nebuchadnezzar is presented as YHWH's agent of his designs. He does not threaten in the text. But the king of Judah, Jehoiakim plays a direct offensive role in the text by killing a prophet who prophesies against the city and land. In that case Jeremiah has also taken a more serious risk; that of losing his credit among YHWH's people and his own flock, and by prophesying against his very city, land and people. In his Anchor Bible commentary, Bright writes:

“How one's country is best to be served is a question upon which men may at any time legitimately disagree [...]. The prophet Jeremiah [...] advised submission to Babylon, but to mark him down as a Babylonian sympathizer, or a collaborationist, would be to do him a grave injustice [...] to suppose that Jeremiah spoke as he did because of pacifistic leanings, or from personal cowardice, would be, if possible, even more unfair [...]. But his counsel was not politically motivated, or dictated by mere prudence, but was based in the word of Yahweh that had come to him”¹³⁶.

This relativity of power in context and time introduces another consideration; that of verity and falsity of prophetic proclamation with relation to time. Authenticity of prophecy is not an absolute and fixed concept. Hananiah could also be criticised as proponent of the Zion-oriented ideology, thereby forgetting the present realities and anchoring in past promises¹³⁷, which Van der Woude identifies as the mark of the false prophets¹³⁸. These arguments will be detailed in our third part of the work.

¹³⁶ J. BRIGHT, *Jeremiah*, p. cviii-cix.

¹³⁷ The argument is not untenable that the response of Jeremiah especially in 28:8-9 is equally anchored in the past than in the future. This is also Carroll's objection, pointing at the argument of Jeremiah in 28:8 as one “which uses the ancient tradition of the prophets of war”, CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 549. But our placing the argument in the context of all three arguments: that of tradition in the past, fulfilment and commission (cf. our Part Two, Chapter Four) makes it clear that for Jeremiah, the context is an important consideration. Moreover, reading 28:8, one can perceive the nuance of circumstances in the words of Jeremiah, especially with his reference to “many nations and great kingdoms”, to show that he does not search to make a blanket statement valid for all times and for all circumstances.

¹³⁸ A.S. VAN DER WOUDE, *Micah in Dispute with the Pseudo-Prophets*, in *VT* 19 (1969), p. 244-260, see especially p. 258-259.

So even though Act I of the narrative (of chapter 28) presents a very soft, gentle and easygoing Jeremiah, Act II complements this characterisation with a Jeremiah firm, disturbing and offensive. As Carroll puts it, “it is in the unfolding of the story that the eirenic features appear but by its conclusion death and destruction have put an end to such pleasantries”¹³⁹. But all in all, the text has not departed an inch from the overall but yet multifaceted characterisation that the book portrays of the prophet protagonist. Whether Jeremiah says “Amen, may it be” (v. 6) in sincere acquiescence or invites Hananiah to “listen to the word which I am speaking in your ears and in the ears of all the people” (v. 7), or remains silent while his opponent takes the yoke from his neck and breaks it (implication of v. 10), or “walks away on his way” (v. 11) seemingly defeated and confused, or then at long last declares the stern words of accusation and pronounces the verdict of death, what is basic is the text’s intention to provide the image of a prophet armed with the verity and vehemence of the word of YHWH, a word which in favourable and unfavourable circumstances has to be proclaimed. And this image of Jeremiah explains partly the severity of the handling of his fellow prophet at the end of chapter 28.

6.2.3 *Hananiah (and the Other False Prophets)*

The first notice on the character of the prophet Hananiah and the role of his personality in the narratives is that the character has served the narrator the means to dramatise the confrontation between the false and the true. This is also the opinion of Hossfeld and Meyer:

“Hatte der Grundbestand nur von einem Auftritt Jeremias, einer Gegenaktion Hananjas und einer Umwertung dieser Gegenaktion durch Jahwe berichtet, so tritt auf dieser Bearbeitungsstufe Hananja als Individuum mit seinem Schicksal in den Vordergrund. Jeremia seinerseits liefert in seinen Reden Kategorien der Deutung für Hananjas Auftreten und Ende. Dadurch erhalten Hananjas Person und Schicksal paradigmatischen Charakter. Der konkrete Konflikt Hananja-Jeremia wird durch den Traditionsbeweis (V 8), durch Anwendung eines Prinzips (V 9)

¹³⁹ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 545.

und durch die grundsätzliche theologische Qualifizierung (V 15) zum Typ der Auseinandersetzung zwischen wahrer und falscher Prophetie stilisiert¹⁴⁰.

Even though the question of prophetic authenticity has been posed already in chapter 26, there it concerns simply the personality of Jeremiah and not any other else. Chapter 27 introduces other prophets but unnamed. Jeremiah's oracles suggest that the neighbouring nations, Zedekiah and the priests and prophets should not listen to these other prophets. It is only in chapter 28 that a prophet is named, and now in opposition to Jeremiah. And here lies the subtlety of the characterisation of the prophet Hananiah in the text. Although Hananiah opposes Jeremiah, the text (MT), neither in the words of the narrator nor in the words of any other actor in the drama (God or Jeremiah), refers to him as "false prophet". The narrator takes time to install Hananiah in his capacity as bona fide prophet by addressing him as one whose official role is assumed and whose character is not impugned¹⁴¹, and who exemplifies the well-known features of the canonical Hebrew prophets. He employs the traditional speech forms and enacts symbolic actions with deep symbolic meanings and, without representing any foreign deities or unorthodox symbol systems, he utters words within the legitimate and acceptable traditions of his community. In our analysis of chapter 28 we also made reference to the exact mathematical equality in the narrator's reference to both prophets with the title נְבִיא.

But the attentive reader of the first verses of chapter 28 would notice that the narrator has already prepared an evaluation of this prophet (Hananiah) in the immediately precedent chapter. In many instances in chapter 27 (a chapter which the reader reads of course with the bias of chapter 26 and Jeremiah's legitimisation as an authentic prophet), it is a question of advising the different groups concerned not to listen to the prophets who would preach against the hegemony of Babylon. Such prophets are tagged false and their prophecies qualified as נִשְׁבַּח. In v. 16-22, it is precisely the question of the temple vessels. The oracle of Hananiah is simply this. Even though the text does not immediately qualify

¹⁴⁰ F.L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Prophet gegen Prophet*, p. 99.

¹⁴¹ L. STULMAN, *Hananiah*, in D.N. FREEDMAN *et al.* (eds.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids, 2000, p. 547-548, see p. 548.

him as false as does the LXX, the reader's doubt about his credibility is already evident when his words are placed side by side with the contents of the last section of chapter 27. The structure of 27:16-22 and the speech of Hananiah in 28:1-4 could be put thus:

Jer. 27:16-22

Audience: Priests and all the people

Message and preaching: YHWH says this: do not listen to their preaching, that the vessels of the temple will return soon from Babylon. It is lie. This is YHWH's opinion: the vessels, etc, Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim king of Judah carried off by Nebuchadnezzar will remain in Babylon; vessels etc not yet carried will be carried off to Babylon.

Duration: Till the day I will visit them and bring them to this place.

Jer. 28:1-4

Audience: Priests and all the people in the temple

Message and preaching: YHWH Sabbaoth the God of Israel says, I shall bring back all the vessels, Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah and all the exiles carried to Babylon... I shall break the yoke of the king of Babylon

Duration: in two years

Within the integral text of chapter 28, the narrator gives the reader sufficient guide to assess the character of the prophet Hananiah not by reference to his message, but by contrast with his opponent. A sharp contrast is that the narrator nowhere indicates that Hananiah receives his mission from YHWH to say *אמר יהוה אלהי צבאות* while such notice is indicated for Jeremiah (cf. 27:1b; 28:12), though one can also argue that this phenomenon is made possible by the autobiographic character of the introduction ("said to me" *אמר אלַי*, 28:1b). The repetitive nature of the two verbal interventions of Hananiah in v. 2b-4 and v. 11, contrasts sharply with the dynamism of the verbal interventions of

Jeremiah (see v. 6-9 and v. 15-16). Not only does the latter's interventions differ in each occasion, the two are separated (and in fact the dynamism is informed) by a fresh listening to the word of YHWH, which in fact makes Jeremiah to invite his opponent once again to listen (cf. v. 7 and v. 15). The confrontational option of Hananiah of physically annulling the symbolic act of his fellow prophet is another means of indirect characterisation. Symbolic act is part of the prophetic tradition but the act has to be sustained by the commission from the deity of the prophet (cf. 27:1a-2). But in this case, the reader has the impression of a prophet who initiates himself a symbolic act. And the reader knows already in 27:2, 8, 11 that the yoke is shouldered by Jeremiah at the order of YHWH, and will equally see the counteraction which YHWH's words would make to this symbolic act of Hananiah in subsequent verses (cf. 28:13-14). One would say that the narrator subtly contrasts the characters of the two prophets: as against Jeremiah who took the way of non-violent resistance¹⁴², Hananiah was raised to a high pitch of excitement¹⁴³. At the end of the drama, the reader is in no doubt in perceiving Hananiah as a discredited prophet even though he claimed to speak and act in the name of YHWH.

After chapter 28, chapter 29 serves equally the occasion for the characterisation of Hananiah by the reader's inevitable comparison between Hananiah and Shemaiah. This would first of all mean the marks in the text that characterises Shemaiah. To be noticed in the first place, is that in the previous chapters all the major actors in the drama are given their proper professional titles, of either priest or prophet or king. None is given to Shemaiah. His prophetic identity is therefore already in doubt. The reader understands him to be a prophet in an indirect way, only when in v. 31 Jeremiah refers to him as prophesying (נָבֵא) without being sent. And in his speech, Shemaiah has no claim of any word from YHWH in an oracular fashion. He has no oracular message for the audience (he sent letters in his name, cf. v. 25). He does not even contradict any message. Therefore he becomes a prophet without identity and without a word from YHWH, but who only reminds another (Zephaniah) of an alleged professional laxity, in the words of

¹⁴² See D.L. SMITH, *Jeremiah as Prophet of Nonviolent Resistance*, in *JSOT* 43 (1989), p. 95-107.

¹⁴³ Cf. MCKANE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* 2, p. 720.

Hossfeld and Meyer, of his *Dienstobliegenheit*¹⁴⁴. His citation of Jeremiah's letter is equally partial, leaving the positive side; the return of the exiles in due course, and only concentrating on the lengthy nature of the exile. Hossfeld and Meyer point to the strangeness of the punishment given to Shemaiah. Nowhere else in the Old Testament is a prophet punished in like terms. The punishment or blessing concerning one's posterity is found as regards mainly kings, priests or other titulars of other offices that are inheritable (cf. I Kings 9:5-7; II Chr. 6:16). They write: "Das Charisma des Propheten bindet sich nicht an eine Dynastie"¹⁴⁵. More important than the strangeness of this punishment is the implication of such punishment for the prophetic figure in the narrative. A prophet who criticises his fellow prophet for requesting the people to construct for themselves a temporary happiness, will be deprived of the permanent happiness, and would be deprived that permanently (him and his descendants). Ending the passage by the declaration of punishment for an opponent of Jeremiah becomes a judgement in favour of the latter.

The text therefore characterises Hananiah and Shemaiah and lumps them together into opposition groups of the prophet. Each of the opposing prophets wants to accomplish or actually accomplishes a physical assault on the prophet Jeremiah. In chapter 28, Hananiah broke the yoke-bars from the neck of Jeremiah (v. 10) while in chapter 29, Shemaiah asks that Jeremiah be put into the stocks (v. 26). Both are eventually accused of prophesying falsehood (28:15 and 29:31). To be noticed is the use of the same verb *בטח* (to trust) and the almost identical expression in the accusation against the two prophets *על־יהוה דבר כִּי־סָרָה דָּבָר* of 28:16 and *כִּי־סָרָה דְבַרְתָּ אֶל־יְהוָה* of 29:32; both have spoken apostasy against YHWH. Both prophets are discredited, expressed with *לֹא שָׁלַח* (28:15 and 29:31). Because their offences are alike, their punishments are equally so: Shemaiah is punished, not exactly with death within two months like Hananiah, but with his eventual death and that of his descendants, since none of them would live to see the good (*טוֹב*) YHWH has in stock for the exiles (v. 32). That means in effect, their deaths are scheduled before the arrival of the good days of 29:10-14.

¹⁴⁴ F.L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Prophet gegen Prophet*, p. 106.

¹⁴⁵ F.L. HOSSFELD & I. MEYER, *Prophet gegen Prophet*, p. 106.

Conclusion

Three notices are forceful concerning this group of chapters. First, these chapters participate visibly to the sustenance of the general theological thrust of the book of Jeremiah, in the plucking up and planting, overthrowing and building. While the text does not miss its pro-Babylonian slant, it does not fail to announce that the Babylonian reality in the life of Judah is not absolute, but rests valid till the day YHWH has chosen to reverse the situation in favour of his people.

Secondly, another notice about these four chapters as a block would be the proper position they occupy in the book of Jeremiah MT. At the end of the analysis of chapter 29, Lundbom writes:

“When the present judgment on Shemaiah is heard following the judgment on Hananiah in chap. 28, the audience will know two prophets by name – one in Jerusalem and one in Babylon – who have spoken rebellion against Yahweh. It will also know that Yahweh sent neither and that both are guilty of causing others to believe in a lie. Hananiah is cursed to die; Shemaiah is cursed to die without a descendant on hand to see Yahweh’s future good. For an audience hearing a longer reading, reference to a future good will suitably form a transition to the Book of Restoration following (chaps. 30-33)¹⁴⁶.

Thirdly, from the analysis, especially of the key terms and major motifs in this chapter, it is unmistakably clear that the block is on true and false prophecy. Even though Carroll sees no textual indices for the discernment between true and false prophecy in the chapters¹⁴⁷, their form indubitably presents Hananiah as false prophet opposed to Jeremiah the true prophet¹⁴⁸ through structure, content and subtlety of means. Chapters 27-28 especially remain at the centre in this regard. For example, though there is the ambiguity confronting the reader in seeing Hananiah act in the same way as Jeremiah,

¹⁴⁶ LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p. 365.

¹⁴⁷ See CARROLL, *Jeremiah (OTL)*, p. 547-550.

¹⁴⁸ P. SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 46.

using the messenger formula, and Jeremiah acting as if to believe in the possibility that God has spoken a true word through his opponent, we could still observe that a subtle network of indices gives the reader clues to believe that the question of true and false prophecy is the thrust of the narratives. The commission of Jeremiah, numerous times indicated by the narrator in the text, and the absence of this to his opponents, is one of these many clues.

PART THREE

THEOLOGY AND CONTEXT:

**PROPHECY, TRUE AND FALSE PROPHECY,
JER. 26-29 AND GOD-TALK**

Concept

Having concluded the narrative analysis of Jer. 26-29, the stage is due to cast another look on the block of chapters: the consideration of the narratives from the angle of the theology of prophecy and further, in a contextual ambient. The goal is not changed. The direction is, but all geared towards a deeper comprehension of the text. Besides the narrative thrust of our work, this thesis has a further accent. How can a theological discussion on true and false prophecy be advanced from the basis of the narrative reading of these texts? Human language has a variety of functions. Conveying information is not the only purpose of language and reading the biblical text just for this purpose alone is tantamount to reading it partially. Finding pleasure in observing the literary artistry in a written text is equally noble, but not enough, more so regarding the text of the Bible. Not only that reading literature does something to the reader by way of an effect of difference, this difference involves not merely an increase in information but equally an increase in (new) experience, a new feeling, and perhaps a new life¹ and reading demands the participation of the reader in whose experience "the text comes to life"². This is more so with the biblical text as Scripture.

Part Three is designed to address issues in this direction. To engage justifiably in them means that we assume that the prophetic books (the book of Jeremiah inclusive) enjoy a theological status, a presumption not accepted unanimously in the academic community. The first Chapter interrogates, and considers the theological status of prophetic books. The second follows logically; the book of Jeremiah is placed in the context of its theological prophetic tradition. The last Chapter discusses the theological problem of true and false prophecy, the central theme of Jer. 26-29. A short final section of this last Chapter will be devoted to articulating the implications of the study to a particular context.

¹ P.W. MACKY, *The Coming Revolution*, p. 269.

² W. ISER, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore, 1978, p. 19.

CHAPTER ONE

ON THE THEOLOGICAL STATUS OF PROPHETIC BOOKS: THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Introduction

The Bible attests that there were prophets in ancient Israel and Judah. Persons like Amos, Ezekiel, Hosea, Isaiah, etc. were recognised by their contemporaries as prophets. History after them and the redactors of the biblical text also recognised them as such. It is not an empty truism, says Thompson, to say that Jeremiah was one of these prophets of YHWH in Israel, of whom there were a great number¹ and the book that goes with his name has both literary and theological significance. This is the basic thesis of this Chapter. This statement may appear banal² and not necessary since it is considered as a piece of common knowledge and hardly something that needs argumentation for substantiation. But then, scholarly advance in the humanities often depends less upon sensational new discoveries than upon the questioning and re-evaluation of what had become unquestioned assumptions, and the truth is at times more rigorous than it is thought of by an age. Questions such as the following may not be irrelevant: should the books that bear the name of the 'so-called' prophets be considered, in whole or in part, to originate in pre-exilic Israel or after the exile? If the individuals termed 'prophets' ever existed, did they perform a recognisable role, religious or social, among their contemporaries? But is it necessary to assume the material historicity of a prophet in order to appreciate the theological density and texture of the book that bears his name? What is more important; the historicity of the personality or figure with whom a prophetic book is named, or the prophetic persona, which is a product of a tradition that keeps the prophetic book alive across the ages? Questions of this kind will be addressed in this Chapter, with the goal of first establishing that there is a prophetic theology.

¹ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 3.

² T. W.O. OVERHOLT, *Prophecy in History: The Social Reality of Intermediation*, in *JSOT* 48 (1990), p. 3-29, see p. 3.

1.1 CURRENT DEBATES AND CRITICAL VOICES

The history of prophetic research has actually undergone continuous evolution, with steady alternation between emphasis on the man (the prophet), and on the message he proclaimed, but with the fact of the existence of the prophets and of a theology of prophecy remaining constant. Crenshaw³ gives the dominant issues in research in prophecy in the mid 20th century. According to him, the emphasis within the designated time is reflected quite vividly in the attempts of Eissfeldt⁴, Wolff⁵, Fohrer⁶, and Schmid⁷ to analyse the major problems of prophetic research. For Eissfeldt the basic issues were a) the cultic prophets; b) the origin and transmission of prophetic books; and c) the supranormal experiences of the prophets. Wolff summarised the major problems confronting students of prophecy in terms of a) the relationship between Israelite prophecy and that of the ancient Near East; b) ecstasy; c) the sacred traditions preserved by the prophets; d) the cult; e) the political role of the prophets; and f) false prophecy. Fohrer's major concern was to correct erroneous assumptions and conclusions as to the traditions employed by the prophets, and to warn against too hasty "discovery" of new literary types. For Schmid, the basic issues were a) prophet and law; b) prophet and office; and c) prophet and wisdom.

From another angle altogether, until recently the books that bear the names of the prophets especially the Major Prophets were connected in one way or another with the actual activity of these prophets during the period of the kings mentioned in these books. Despite differences in opinions, there had been at least consensus that a large portion of the prophetic corpus and literature came from the disciples, 'prophetic schools' or later

³ J.L. CRENSHAW, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect on Israelite Religion* (BZAW 124), Berlin, 1971, p. 5.

⁴ O. EISSFELDT, *The Prophetic Literature*, in H.H. ROWLEY (ed.), *The Old Testament and Modern Study: A Generation of Discovery and Research*, London, 1961, p. 115-161.

⁵ See especially, H.W. WOLFF, *Hauptprobleme alttestamentlicher Prophetie*, in *EvTh* 15 (1955), p. 116-168.

⁶ G. FOHRER, *Remarks on Modern Interpretation of the Prophets*, in *JBL* 80 (1961), p. 309-319.

⁷ J.H. SCHMID, *Hauptprobleme der neueren Prophetenforschung*, in *STU* 35 (1965), p. 135-143.

Part Three Chapter One: On the Theological Status of Prophetic Books

from exilic and post-exilic redactions⁸. Another portion of the text is attributed to the historical activities of the prophets, and regarding the extent of this 'authentic layer', scholarly opinions differed, but its existence was not contested⁹. It was also believed that the thoughts of these historic figures could be traced by means of a historical reading of the books bearing their names and that these books could only be understood against the historical background of the time period that they describe¹⁰.

But in the 'recent' times, scholars like A. Graeme Auld and Robert P. Carroll have shown that the claim that the individuals are prophets is not self evident. They have in their different writings¹¹ brought the claim to serious attacks and Auld in particular began his article *Prophets and Prophecy in Jeremiah and Kings* with the declaration that "there are still very many open scholarly questions about 'prophecy' in the Hebrew Bible¹².

⁸ S. PAAS, *Creation and Judgement: Creation Texts in Some Eight-Century Prophets* (OTS 47), Leiden, 2003, p. 152.

⁹ Cf. for example K. KOCH, *Die Profeten I* (UB 280), Stuttgart, 1978, p. 177-181.

¹⁰ S. PAAS, *Creation and Judgement*, p. 152-153.

¹¹ A.G. AULD, *Prophets through the Looking Glass: Between Writings and Moses*, in *JSOT* 27 (1983), p. 3-23; *Prophets through the Looking Glass: A Response*, in *JSOT* 27 (1983), p. 41-44; *Prophets and Prophecy in Jeremiah and Kings*, in *ZAW* 96 (1984), p. 66-82; *Amos* (OT Guides), Sheffield, 1986; *Word of God and Word of Man: Prophets and Canon*, in L. ESLINGER & G. TAYLOR (eds.), *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of P.C. Craigie* (JSOTS 67), Sheffield, 1988, p. 237-251; *Prophecy in Books: A Rejoinder I*, in *JSOT* 48 (1990), p. 31-32; R.P. CARROLL, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions*, London, 1979; *Poets not Prophets: A Response to 'Prophets through the Looking Glass'* in *JSOT* 27 (1983), p. 25-31; *Dismantling the Book of Jeremiah and Deconstructing the Prophet*, in M. AUGUSTIN & K.-D SCHUNCK (eds.), *'Wünschet Jerusalem Frieden': Collected Communications to the XIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Jerusalem, Frankfurt am Main, 1986*, p. 291-302; *Inventing the Prophets*, in *IBS* 10 (1988), p. 24-36; *Prophecy and Society*, in R.E. CLEMENTS (ed.), *The World of Ancient Israel*, Cambridge, 1989, p. 203-225; *Whose Prophet? Whose History? Whose Social Reality? Troubling the Interpretative Community Again: Notes Towards a Response to T.W. Overholt's Critique*, in *JSOT* 48 (1990), p. 33-49.

¹² A.G. AULD, *Prophets and Prophecy in Jeremiah and Kings*, p. 66.

1.1.1 Auld and Carroll

These two scholars have studied different materials on prophecy and in the book of Jeremiah (especially Carroll for the book of Jeremiah), and though they have slightly different arguments concerning prophecy and regarding the theological status of the prophetic books, they agree basically that biblical personages like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, etc were poets and were never considered as prophets until exilic times. Auld maintains strongly that it is “at least plausible that [the terms] ‘prophet’ and ‘prophecy’ only came to be attached to those whom we regard as the towering prophets of the bible in a period no (*sic*) earlier than when Jeremiah and Ezekiel became similarly re-presented”¹³. In other words, he informs us that his “first aim is a negative one: to discount the inherited suggestion that these poets were ‘prophets’ in their own eyes or in the eyes of their contemporaries”¹⁴ and he refers to it as “a simple issue of archival accuracy”¹⁵. For him, the designation ‘prophets’ for the biblical ‘prophets’ is a very late phenomenon for “it was only after the exile that such figures became termed ‘prophet’”¹⁶ and that “both parts of the ‘prophetic’ canon of the Hebrew Bible received much of their distinctive and positively intended ‘prophetic’ vocabulary over a briefer and in a later period of the biblical tradition than is regularly supposed”¹⁷. In his support, Carroll writes: “I am in basic agreement with the thesis of Dr. Auld’s paper. For some time I have held the view, theoretically I grant but based on *a posteriori* grounds, that the individuals traditionally known as prophets should not be regarded as prophets (*n^ebi’im*) but require a different description. They were certainly poets, probably intellectuals, and possibly ideologues. Dr. Auld’s careful analysis of biblical texts has now provided a sound basis for developing such a view”¹⁸. Their arguments could be organised under the following three headings.

¹³ A.G. AULD, *Prophets and Prophecy in Jeremiah and Kings*, p. 82.

¹⁴ A.G. AULD, *Prophets through the Looking Glass: A Response*, p. 41.

¹⁵ A.G. AULD, *Prophets through the Looking Glass: A Response*, p. 41.

¹⁶ A.G. AULD, *Prophets through the Looking Glass*, p. 7.

¹⁷ A.G. AULD, *Prophets through the Looking Glass*, p. 16.

¹⁸ R.P. CARROLL, *Poets not Prophets*, p. 25.

1.1.1.1 The Linguistic and Terminology Argument

In addition to the declaration that there are still very many open and scholarly questions about ‘prophecy’ in the Hebrew Bible, Auld asserts that “the origin and the earlier biblical sense of the noun *nby*’ are far from clear. Equally disputed [according to him], are the relationship between this noun and the two verbal themes of *nb*’ – and indeed whether there is a distinction in sense between these verbal themes”¹⁹. Auld has been particularly interested in what he calls the “history of terminology”²⁰. His studies, which mostly centre on the noun and verb forms of נבא come to the conclusion that there are three identifiable stages in the use of these terms in the prophetic and historical books of the Hebrew Bible. He cites the book of Jeremiah as example. In the earlier stage, the terms were applied to groups that were the objects of criticism and, during this period, the canonical prophets like Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah – that is, in the poetic sections of the books – were not referred to as prophets. He admitted that the usage is rather more nuanced in Amos and Hosea, but “there is no suggestion that Hosea was himself a ‘prophet’; and that label is specifically rejected by Amos himself in Amos 7:14”²¹. Then comes the transitional stage, the second stage represented by the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which in addition to the prophetic criticism as a group, contain certain positive references to past prophets and apply the title ‘prophet’ to Jeremiah and Ezekiel themselves. Though the book of Ezekiel uses the verb to describe Ezekiel’s activities, Auld however concludes that neither Jeremiah nor Ezekiel used the noun to describe himself or the verb to refer to his own activity²². Then finally is the late stage in which the view of prophets is essentially favourable and individuals like Haggai, Zechariah, and Habakkuk are given the title prophet. According to Auld, this position can be validated with “degree of objectivity” in the book of Jeremiah “with its different editions, and with its blend of poetry and prose”²³. He explains that references to ‘prophets’ in the Jeremiah poetry are mostly critical. In the earliest stratum of prose (the material common to the

¹⁹ A.G. AULD, *Prophets and Prophecy in Jeremiah and Kings*, p. 66.

²⁰ A.G. AULD, *Prophets and Prophecy in Jeremiah and Kings*, p. 82.

²¹ A.G. AULD, *Prophets and Prophecy in Jeremiah and Kings*, p. 68.

²² Cf. A.G. AULD, *Prophets and Prophecy in Jeremiah and Kings*, p. 73.

²³ A.G. AULD, *Prophets through the Looking Glass*, p. 5-6.

Septuagint and the Massoretic), many critical references are made to prophets, but Jeremiah, Uriah, and Micah are referred to positively as prophets. The latest prose ('extra' material in the Massoretic) has a few critical references, but gives the title 'prophet' to Jeremiah (24 times) and Hananiah (6 times)²⁴.

1.1.1.2 No Unanimity in the Bible about/on Prophetic Identity

Another argument developed for the support of the 'poets, not prophets' hypothesis is the observation that there is no unanimity in the Hebrew Bible on 'what a prophet is or should be', or on the evaluation of the prophets, and here Carroll is more eloquent. He notices two opposing evaluations of prophets in the Hebrew Bible. On the one hand, there is the positive one, emanating from prophetic circles themselves, and which approves of the prophets as revealers of the divine word to Israel (cf. Amos 3:7 and the stereotypical phrase "thus says YHWH"). On the other hand, there is the negative perception of prophets: the prophets are sometimes dismissed as misleaders of the community and as false (cf. Isa. 9:14-16; Mic. 3:5-7; Jer. 23:9-12), described as madmen (II Kings 9:44, 11; Hos. 9:7; Jer. 29:27), sometimes condemned as causes of downfall of Jerusalem (Lam. 2:14) and as godless men (Jer. 23:15). Phrases with positive undertone like "his servants the prophets" (cf. II Kings 9:7; 17:3, 23; 21:10; 24:2; Amos 3:7; Jer. 7:25-26; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; Zech. 1:6; Dan. 9:6, 10; Ezra 9:11), are evaluated by Carroll as indications of redactional approval. While a positive image is highlighted mostly by passages like the story of Eldad and Medad in Num. 11:24-30, where Moses is represented as so approving of the spirit of prophecy that he would say 'Would that all YHWH's people were prophets, that YHWH would put his spirit upon them' (cf. v. 29), the negative views are epitomised in Zech. 13:2-5:

"When that day comes – YHWH declares – I shall cut off the names of the idols from the country... I shall also rid the country of the prophets, and of the spirit of

²⁴ Carroll has equally noted the development that has taken place between the two editions of the book of Jeremiah: while the first, represented by the Septuagint gives Jeremiah the title 'the prophet' only four times, the second, represented by the Massoretic, does so twenty-six times, making Jeremiah 'the prophet par excellence', CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OT Guides), p. 23.

Part Three Chapter One: On the Theological Status of Prophetic Books

impurity. Then, if anyone still goes on prophesying, his parents, his own father and mother will say to him, ‘You shall not live, since you utter lies in YHWH’s name’... When that day comes, the prophets will all be ashamed to relate their visions when they prophesy and no longer put on their hair cloaks with intent to deceive. Instead, they will say, ‘I am no prophet’”.

Carroll concludes that “these two very different attitudes towards prophets in the Bible produce a very odd evaluation of the prophetic role in late Israelite society”²⁵. The odd evaluation is, on the one hand, that the destruction of the community was because the community failed to listen to its prophets (positive evaluation of prophets), and on the other hand, that the destruction of the community was consequent upon the leadership of the prophets who misled it (negative perception of prophets). Carroll considers the normal resolution of this dilemma by the recourse to the notions of ‘true’ and ‘false’ attached to various prophets, to be a solution “both too facile and too problematic to be maintained”²⁶. These strange tensions between good reports about prophets and trenchant dismissals of them as deceivers and idolaters should, he advises, make the modern interpreter beware of assuming that he or she knows what biblical prophecy is²⁷.

1.1.1.3 Origin, Association of Books with Prophets and Editorial Activity

One of the most fundamental problems in studies on prophecy concerns the nature and connection (if there is) between the proclamation of a historical prophet in its originality and the message we read from the actual form of the prophetic book²⁸. Carroll has popularised the view that the association of texts with specific prophets is merely a matter of convention and cannot be substantiated strongly with evidence. The book of Jeremiah for example, he holds, provides perhaps the best paradigm of how redactional activity and transformation of a poet’s work eventually produced the fullest account of the life

²⁵ R.P. CARROLL, *Poets not Prophets*, p. 25-26.

²⁶ R.P. CARROLL, *Poets not Prophets*, p. 25-26.

²⁷ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OT Guides), p. 209-215.

²⁸ A. LAATO, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament Literature: A Semiotic Approach to the Reconstruction of the Proclamation of the Historical Prophets* (Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series 41), Jyväskylä, 1996, p. 1.

Part Three Chapter One: On the Theological Status of Prophetic Books

and times of a 'prophet'²⁹. The poetic sections of the prophetic books, Carroll pursues his argument, tend to be anonymous; they are associated with named individuals on the basis of the editorial frameworks, which serve to incorporate them into larger collections. The introductory colophons are very important in this respect, since in most cases they are the only place in the book where the prophet is identified. But the contents of the colophons defy historical substantiation, however, and "we may equally regard them as part extrapolation (from tradition) and part invention"³⁰. The author or authors of these colophons therefore "helped to *invent* the ancient prophets as biographical figures"³¹.

A related argument concerns the editorial activity that gave rise to the production of the prophetic books in their extant form. There are two aspects of this editorial process. The first is that the texts of the prophetic books are products of redactional literary activity while the second is the motivation of the "*red-actors*"³² which suggests a need to detect the interestedness in the editorial activity and discover the ideological slants of the texts. As regards the fact that the prophetic books are products of literary activity, Carroll reminds us that "prophecy was an oral phenomenon" and the writing down of prophecy severed the originally oral text from the speaker's situation and transformed it into a "timeless reference [...] addressed to future generations". Thus, unless there is "considerable justification" to infer a social background from the text, it amounts to "an illegitimate transfer of meaning from story to social background"³³. Auld and Carroll accept the theory of the 'rolling *corpus*' of McKane as explanation of how this editorial activity could be conceived, in the case of the text of Jeremiah. But unlike McKane who also accepts that the poetry of Jer. 2-20 contains genuine words of the prophet, Carroll, though accepting that "it is a hypothesis worth entertaining", insists that "there is no hard evidence to support it except the circular argument entailed in the claim [...], the claim that this poetry represents Jeremiah's original utterances is itself a question-begging

²⁹ R.P. CARROLL, *Poets not Prophets*, p. 27.

³⁰ R.P. CARROLL, *Inventing the Prophets*, p. 28.

³¹ R.P. CARROLL, *Inventing the Prophets*, p. 25.

³² This is Carroll's coinage to express the blow and the manipulation on the text by the editors.

³³ R.P. CARROLL, *Prophecy and Society*, see p. 206-207.

assumption. The figure of Jeremiah is derived from the editorial framework and the prose narratives and *not* from the poetry”³⁴. The argument here hinges not only on the presupposition that the prophetic corpus is a literary construct, but also on the fact that the constructors are interested and ideological (*red-actors*). And by ideology, Carroll avows that he understands not only a system of ideas, but also those distorting elements characteristic of ideology in the Marxian sense; elements that breed ‘false consciousness’. Such distortion can be seen in the critical judgements against the community, sweeping judgements which condemn everybody (cf. Jer. 5:1-5; 8:4-7; 9:2-6), the denunciation of opponents (cf. Jer. 23:9-32), and the stereotyped analyses of disparate situations (cf. Jer. 7:16-20; 44:15-23). Carroll points out that within the book of Jeremiah one finds quite contrary, even contradictory views on matters ranging from the social situation (society is corrupt / it is composed of both righteous and wicked persons), to the possibility of repentance (the people are incorrigible / repentance is possible), to the prophet himself (in the laments he is depressed / in the narratives he is offensive and commands)³⁵. Carroll thus follows Max Weber in describing the prophets as demagogues and pamphleteers: “The pre-exilic prophets from Amos to Jeremiah and Ezekiel, viewed through the eyes of the contemporary outsider, appeared to be, above all, political demagogues and, on occasion, pamphleteers”³⁶.

1.2 THE PROPHETS AS PROPHETS:

OVERHOLT, WILLIAMSON, RINGGREN AND BRUEGGEMANN

There is, it is worthy to note, certainly the growing tendency to date more and more of the biblical material to very ‘late’ periods, that is, regarding a considerable part of the Old Testament texts as originating during or after the exile³⁷. J. Van Seters for example, even

³⁴ CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL), p. 37-38.

³⁵ R.P. CARROLL, *Dismantling the Book of Jeremiah and Deconstructing the Prophet*, see p. 292-295.

³⁶ M. WEBER, *Ancient Judaism*, New York, 1953, p. 267.

³⁷ A proponent of this thesis among others is P.R. Davies. Basing on the theories of T.L. Thompson who neatly separated the historical realities of Israel from the biblical accounts, Davies distinguishes between the literal Israel, the historical Israel and the ancient Israel. The literal Israel for him is the Israel of the biblical accounts while the historical Israel is the Israel traceable to the Iron Age and the ancient Israel is

before Auld and Carroll, considered the patriarchal narratives³⁸ and the story of the ten plagues of Egypt³⁹ to be post-exilic. J. Vermeulen makes the story of the golden calf an invention after the fall of Jerusalem⁴⁰. O. Loretz considers all references to Hebrews as post-exilic⁴¹. There are good reasons, says Barstad, to suspect that the trend described above (that is, regarding all references to prophets as post-exilic), may soon turn into more than a general tendency, and eventually change completely the very nature of prophetic research and particularly put a definitive suspicion to the theological status of the prophetic books⁴². However, inasmuch as we would not advocate for an uncritical acceptance of the Old Testament data, that is also not to be led to conclude that there is no reliable tradition at all concerning pre-exilic prophecy. Referring to individuals like Amos, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, etc, as prophets, and treating the content of the books that bear their names as prophecy, is not a reference without grounds as some other authors have argued.

the Israel responsible for writing the biblical accounts, see P.R. DAVIES, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'* (JSOTS 148), Sheffield, 1992, see p. 16-17. According to him, we know little or nothing of the historical Israel, and what we know of it does not tally with the Old Testament records. He gives example with reference to the existence of monarchy under king David, and thus concluded that ancient Israel as reconstructed in historical-criticism by combining archaeological and historical evidence with the biblical stories never existed and that what we now call the Old Testament was written between about the sixth and the third century BC, see especially p. 105, 121, 133.

³⁸ J. VAN SETERS, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, London, 1975.

³⁹ J. VAN SETERS, *The Plagues of Egypt: Ancient Tradition or Literary Invention?* in *ZAW* 98 (1986), p. 31-39.

⁴⁰ J. VERMEYLEN, *L'affaire du veau d'or (Ex 32-34): Une clé pour la "question deutéronomiste"?* in *ZAW* 97 (1985), p. 1-23.

⁴¹ O. LORETZ, *Habiru-Hebraer* (BZAW 160), Berlin, 1984.

⁴² H.M. BARSTAD, *No Prophets? Recent Developments in Biblical Prophetic Research and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, in *JSOT* 57 (1993), p. 39-60, see p. 43. Cf. also J.M. WARD, *The Eclipse of the Prophet in Contemporary Prophetic Studies*, in *USQR* 42 (1988), p. 97-104; F.E. DEIST, *The Prophets: Are We Heading for a Paradigm Switch?* in V. FRITZ, K.-F. POHLMANN & H.-C. SCHMITT (eds.), *Prophet und Prophetenbuch: Festschrift für O. Kaiser zum 65 Geburtstag* (BZAW 185), Berlin, 1989, p. 1-18.

The arguments of authors in this camp will be presented in two streams. The first is an evaluation of the arguments of Auld and Carroll above, mostly championed by authors like Overholt, Williamson and Ringgren. The second is an argument that states that prophecy is a need that arose from a historical-theological context, popularised by Brueggemann. This argument, not without the risks of historical positivism, takes the logic of the Old Testament into serious consideration. It considers the history of the chosen people, a history with its foundation in the exodus and covenant, but which under the monarchy suffered a loss of the vision acquired in the exodus event. The argument is that at a point in the history of the chosen people, a new awareness, a new consciousness was needed to re-appropriate once more the sense of the covenant, and this task had the Israelite prophets as the major actors.

1.2.1 Overholt, Williamson and Ringgren

1.2.1.1 On the So-called Terminological Confusions and Crisis of Identity

There are no completely new creations in the world of religion⁴³. Every tradition is based more or less on earlier traditions. Christianity is built heavily on her Jewish heritage. Islamic religion is clearly dependent on Christian, Jewish and domestic traditions. So equally can we say that Deuteronomy and deuteronomistic school cannot have come into existence suddenly and out of nothing⁴⁴. They could not have created the whole of Israel's religious terminology from nothing. They must have had something to work with and so must have collected and organised the religious and theological vocabulary, but they have not certainly invented it⁴⁵. This is the premise of the argument against the linguistic argument of Auld. Actually, to admit the fact of redactional activities in the final form of the books as we have them today is to accept indirectly the possibility of an ideological influence in the formation of the text as Carroll insists. But the fact of the effects of ideology and the apparent contradictions in the text, or even the fact that some of these texts tend to attack prophets or that some texts in the prophetic writing present

⁴³ H. RINGGREN, *Israelite Prophecy: Fact or Fiction?* in *Congress Volume, Jerusalem 1986* (VTS 40), Leiden, 1988, p. 204-210, see p. 208.

⁴⁴ H. RINGGREN, *Israelite Prophecy: Fact or Fiction?* p. 208.

⁴⁵ H. RINGGREN, *Israelite Prophecy: Fact or Fiction?* p. 208.

the prophets as rejecting the appellation, should not be surprising. Prophecy is at home in times of crisis, and at such times, differences of opinion are bound to arise. And when the pre-exilic prophets reject their opponents, says Williamson, they do so not because they are prophets, but because they are false ones⁴⁶. The opinion of Fenton⁴⁷ seems to be equally forceful: “The rejection (of the term *nēbī'im*) by some of the new prophets, as has sometimes been suggested, may have been due to the fact that most *nēbī'im* belonged to a professional body and exercised their skills within the cult under the control of the regime which afforded them their livelihood and upon which they were dependent”. Amos and, no doubt, the major prophets were men who answered the call of their conscience to engage in a function which the community understood to be that of the נביא – even though this differed sharply from the conventional mode. Whether the prophet desired to be called נביא or not, the community understood him so, “hence the confusion in the scriptures and for us. The confusion is prominent, of course, in the notorious passage of Amos 7:14-16 (not a *nābī'* but ordered by YHWH *hinnābē'*) and in Jeremiah, where, in poetic passages, the poet clearly distances himself from the *nēbī'im* whereas in the prose sections he is designated *nābī'* by the deity, and bears the title throughout his functioning life”⁴⁸.

1.2.1.2 The Identity: The Social Reality of Intermediation

This argument is related to the one above and is the major counteraction given by Overholt to the argument of the history of terminology of Auld. He argues that the kind of religious intermediation we designate ‘prophetic’ was a social reality in ancient Israel and Judah⁴⁹, that prophetic intermediation was a widely distributed and precisely

⁴⁶ H.G.M. WILLIAMSON, *A Response to A.G. Auld*, in *JSOT* 27 (1983), p. 33-39, see p. 34. Cf. also R.R. WILSON, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, Philadelphia, 1980; B.O. LONG, *Social Dimensions of Prophetic Conflict*, in *Semeia* 21 (1981), p. 31-53; T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *Channels of Prophecy: The Social Dynamics of Prophetic Activity*, Minneapolis, 1989.

⁴⁷ T.L. FENTON, *Israelite Prophecy: Characteristics of the First Protest Movement*, in J.C. DE MOOR (ed.), *The Elusive Prophet. The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist* (OTS 45), Leiden, 2001, p. 129-141, see p. 139-140.

⁴⁸ T.L. FENTON, *Israelite Prophecy: Characteristics of the First Protest Movement*, p. 140.

⁴⁹ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *Prophecy in History: The Social Reality of Intermediation*, p. 12.

describable social phenomenon, and that cross-cultural research on prophecy can contribute to our understanding of the Hebrew prophets⁵⁰. Since Old Testament prophecy is not isolated, it conforms to a pattern of prophetic intermediation which are in turn rendered plausible by the assumptions of the societies about the relationship between daily human experience and the gods⁵¹. His arguments are based on this singular conviction that conclusions about prophets in ancient Israel which hinge on an examination of the use of words like ‘prophet’ and ‘prophecy’ err in failing to take into account a social reality clearly perceivable in (or behind) the texts⁵². This perceivable social reality is a pattern of behaviour that allows members of a society to recognise and respond to persons who seem to have taken up a certain socio-religious role⁵³. This pattern is recognisable both to the ancient Israelites and Judeans and readers and analysers of the phenomenon today. To the former, because they lived in a society hospitable to this kind of intermediation and with a tradition of such activity, and to the scholars today, because through research, we can recognise the presence of the pattern even independent of direct biblical accounts themselves⁵⁴.

1.2.1.3 Between the Historical and the A-historical: The Phenomenological

While Carroll (especially) looks at the problem mostly from the point of view of history, and uses the word historical and a-historical, some other authors introduce another concept ‘phenomenological’ in-between the two opposite poles of Carroll’s historical

⁵⁰ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *Prophecy in History: The Social Reality of Intermediation*, p. 12.

⁵¹ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *Prophecy in History: The Social Reality of Intermediation*, p. 12.

⁵² T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *Prophecy in History: The Social Reality of Intermediation*, p. 12.

⁵³ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *Channels of Prophecy*, p. 149-162.

⁵⁴ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, *Prophecy in History: The Social Reality of Intermediation*, p. 12. This argument of prophecy as a social reality of intermediation was of course again taken up critically later by Carroll. He argues principally that the prophets cannot be mediators because there were intermediaries in the Bible: priests (e.g. Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and this “complicates the matter considerably and raises tricky questions about intermediation in ancient Israel as represented by the bible”, R.P. CARROLL, *Whose Prophet? Whose History? Whose Social Reality?* p. 37. And for further responses to Carroll, see H.M. BARSTAD, *No Prophets?* p. 45; M.J. BUSS, *The Social Psychology of Prophecy*, in J.A. EMERTON (ed.), *Prophecy: Essays Presented to Georg Fohrer on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (BZAW 150), Berlin, 1980, p. 1-11, see especially p. 5.

reticence and some authors' historical positivism. Again one of the arguments for the negative stand on the prophets above is the claim that the identity of the figures after whom the prophetic books are named derives from the editorial material in those books and is a late fiction. Since for Carroll, the book of Jeremiah, for example, is a "highly polemical text made up of different polemical pieces, coming from a variety of sources, times and situations", it cannot definitely go to a single author. For Carroll in particular, even for the poetry in the book, the attribution to the prophet "must not be assumed without some evidence for it"⁵⁵. Nobody argues today that a biblical book and above all the prophetic books are traceable to a single person or denies the possible editorial and redactional activity along historical lines. What authors concede to is the fact that behind these strands of redactions, there is every likelihood of a historical reality; either a real historical person or historical phenomena. Barstad makes a reasoned reference to this historical phenomenon and gives an example with Jeremiah 36, a well-known story, where Jeremiah the prophet dictates his message to Baruch the scribe. This episode does not claim to be a historical relay of what actually happened though this is not the most pertinent question. But that does not again reduce the story of the putting down of the spoken word into writing to merely a symbolic act.

"The event would not have been used to portrait a symbolic act in the first place if it had not been meaningful to the readers of the story, who would be able to relate the episode to some known phenomenon. Carroll has put forward the thesis that what we find in the book of Jeremiah is what a postexilic writer believed or wanted his readers to believe that prophetic behaviour looked like, and that there is no connection whatsoever between this literature and what pre-exilic Israelite prophecy there was. Apparently a more correct way of viewing the whole matter is found in a phenomenological approach to the problem where 'the truth' is to be found somewhere in the middle of the line between Carroll's cognitive reticence and other scholars' historical positivism. What is important is that the *phenomenon* is 'historically' correct"⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ R.P. CARROLL, *Dismantling the Book of Jeremiah and Deconstructing the Prophet*, p. 298-299.

⁵⁶ H.M. BARSTAD, *No Prophets?* p. 59.

1.2.1.4 From the Broader Context of the Ancient Near East

In discussions such as prophecy and its reality, part of the disagreements arises due to excessive theorisations and taking little or no heed of the data as found in biblical texts and also not making serious attempt to relate the contents of the prophetic books to the phenomenon of biblical and ancient Near Eastern prophecy in general. In order to ascertain what can be said about the historical (or phenomenological) probability of Israelite prophecy, we have to ask following Ringgren: what, if any, sources are available outside the prophetic books concerning this phenomenon⁵⁷? How could anyone conceive the idea of prophets with the function of proclaiming messages from God if such prophets never existed⁵⁸? And to answer these questions, she suggests that we have to consider the material provided by comparative religion, especially from the ancient Near East⁵⁹. A considerable amount of literature exists, both of the primary and the secondary kind, on the relationship of 'Mari prophecy' to prophecy in the Hebrew Bible⁶⁰. The similarity discernible between these texts and that of the biblical texts does not prove the existence of preaching prophets in Israel, still less the historicity of prophetic individuals. But it shows at least that prophecy as a religious phenomenon existed among all the peoples surrounding Israel in periods previous to and contemporary with the alleged prophets in Israel. And since Israel shared so many other cultural and religious features with the neighbouring civilisations, it is not at all improbable that there

⁵⁷ H. RINGGREN, *Israelite Prophecy: Fact or Fiction?* p. 205.

⁵⁸ H. RINGGREN, *Israelite Prophecy: Fact or Fiction?* p. 206.

⁵⁹ H. RINGGREN, *Israelite Prophecy: Fact or Fiction?* p. 206.

⁶⁰ For a good survey of the literature on Mari, see J.-G. HEINTZ, *Bibliographie de Mari: Archéologie et textes (1933-1988)*, Wiesbaden, 1990, p. 1-37. A balanced survey of Mari and the Bible is provided by A. LEMAIRE, *Mari, la Bible et le monde nord-ouest sémitique*, in *Mari* 4 (1985), p. 549-558. See also M. WEINFELD, *Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature*, in *VT* 27 (1977), p. 178-195; H. RINGGREN, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, in R.J. COGGINS, A. PHILLIPS & M.A. KNIBB (eds.), *Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of P.R. Ackroyd*, Cambridge, 1982, p. 1-11; A. MALAMAT, *A Forerunner of Biblical Prophecy: The Mari Documents*, in P.D. MILLER, D. HANSON & S.D. MCBRIDE (eds.), *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of F.M. Cross*, Philadelphia, 1987, p. 33-52.

were prophets in Israel as well⁶¹. Of course we cannot claim that there is a direct connection between Mari and ancient Israelite prophecy. There is also a considerable gap in time. Nevertheless, the obvious phenomenological similarities, witnessed by contemporary documents from Mari, are very important for the assessment of historical prophecy in ancient Israel⁶². The parallels are both close and striking and, though without making them identical, this makes it in fact possible to see a 'pattern'. What we find in these different contexts are strongly related phenomena within connected cultures, showing us that 'prophecy' was a widespread phenomenon in the different ancient Near Eastern cultures⁶³.

Seeing the Israelite prophets within the broader context of the history of religions has the advantage of conforming and providing a clearer description of their role in the Israelite society. Moshe Weinfeld, in the article *Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature*, supports this dependence of Israelite prophecy on ancient Near Eastern models. Beginning with the consideration of "whether the literary conventions out of which classical prophecy has been formed were unique", he takes off with the proposition that "now, close investigation and constant follow-up of the ever growing literature of the ancient Near East show that basic forms as well as basic motifs of classical prophecy are rooted in the ancient Near-Eastern literature, and it is my purpose to illustrate and exemplify this thesis"⁶⁴. Exploring different elements of prophetic activity such as signs and portents, purification of the mouth, ecstasy, salvation oracle, false prophets, dream and vision, morality versus cult, violation of morality as cause for destruction, etc, he concludes that "basic procedures of prophetic activity as well as basic patterns of the prophetic message are found in the ancient Near East, especially in Mesopotamia [...], that basic ideological concepts – such as the metropolis as world centre, messianic hopes,

⁶¹ H. RINGGREN, *Israelite Prophecy: Fact or Fiction?* p. 207.

⁶² H.M. BARSTAD, *No Prophets?* p. 51.

⁶³ H.M. BARSTAD, *No Prophets?* p. 51.

⁶⁴ M. WEINFELD, *Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature*, p. 179.

the appearance of the deity for world judgement – also have their roots in the ancient Near East, though their development and realization in Israel remain unique⁶⁵.

1.2.2 Brueggemann's Argument of "The Prophetic Imagination"

1.2.2.1 The Alternative Vision of Exodus

Taking the standpoint of canonical biblical history, classical prophecy began to appear in Israel only towards the beginning of the divided monarchy around the 9th century BCE⁶⁶. In 1978, Brueggemann published his book "The Prophetic Imagination", revised in 2001, where he argues centrally that the emergence of the prophets, their activity and ministry, was a reaction against the actual form of the monarchy as introduced by Solomon whose imperialism put an end to the revolution initiated by the exodus⁶⁷. Brueggemann's analysis begins not with the Creation or with the Fall, but with the exodus, which is the foundational event by which Israel was given birth as a nation⁶⁸, and the foundational event of Yahwistic faith. The sortie from the scourging Egyptian bondage, the hard desert experience and the survival in the perilous deserts of the Sinai, and a more or less successful settlement in the land of Canaan, brought them to a new experience and awareness of God, and equally a new vision of society. Brueggemann sees the exodus event as a factor that discloses the necessary distinctions that highlight properly the Yahwistic faith and distinguishes it neatly from the faith of the neighbouring nations and peoples. In the exodus, not only did God's people experience their God as the YHWH of history, who (unlike the gods of the non-Semitic religions) was to be encountered not through introspection, but in the twist and thorns of political events, they experienced him as a God who (unlike the gods of the neighbouring Semitic peoples) was without a name, a temple or a city⁶⁹. The Old Testament possesses neither a single definition of

⁶⁵ M. WEINFELD, *Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature*, p. 195.

⁶⁶ K. KOCH, *The Prophets* (Vol. I), *The Assyrian Period*, trans. Margaret Kohl, London, 1982, see especially p. 17-35.

⁶⁷ G. SOARES-PRABHU, *The Prophet as Theologian: Biblical Prophetism as a Paradigm for Doing Theology Today*, in. *AJT* 2 (1988), p. 3-11, see p. 4.

⁶⁸ R.E. CLEMENTS, *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach*, Atlanta, 1978, p. 55.

⁶⁹ Moses' attempt to get the God who encounters him to reveal his name (cf. Exo. 3:14) is met with a subtle response: אֲנִי הוּא אֲנִי "I am that which I am" – an indirect assertion of his essential unnameableness.

God nor any one formula by which he is to be identified, although probably 'YHWH, the God of Israel' would be the closest expression. The opening self-introductory formula of the Decalogue could be taken as the broadest and most basic affirmation of the distinctive identity of YHWH in the pages of the Old Testament: 'I am the Lord (YHWH) your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage',⁷⁰ just as YHWH introduces himself descriptively to Moses in the latter's mission expedition⁷¹. This YHWH of the exodus is also free, unbounded and unlike the deities and divinities of Egypt, Babylonia, Canaan and Assyria and other neighbouring nations, does not belong to any state or city. According to Brueggemann, the God of the exodus, belonging to no city-State, is not the god of 'static triumphalism', that is, he is not the legitimising patron of a particular city-State indissolubly tied to its pre-feudal social system. He is unpredictable, unsettling, revolutionary, freedom-giving and free⁷².

Brueggemann 'imagines' this experiment (this new vision of society, life in common as a community of free and equal peasants, governed by locally elected charismatic chieftains ['judges'], and showing great sensitivity to the material needs of their people) to have lasted for hundreds of years and ended with the establishment of the monarchy⁷³. The narratives of the first book of Samuel present Saul as a popular leader, elected by lot

⁷⁰ This formula brings to fore three basic elements which recur frequently in the Old Testament: a) the expression 'your God' identifies him as the God of Israel, pointing to the situation in worship from which this formula grew. b) The second element is contained in the words 'who brought you out of the land of Egypt' and ties this knowledge of God to an event in the national past of Israel. c) The third element modifies the second in the sense that the fact that the knowledge of God is tied to a historical event does not make this historical interest the only and the dominating theological concern, see G. SOARES-PRABHU, *The Prophet as Theologian*, p. 5. It is important to note that this third element is normally privileged whenever there is tension between the nationalistic conception (second element) and the complementary ethical demands, and this is part of the prophetic consciousness that later emerged.

⁷¹ "I am YHWH ... and I will bring you out from under the burden of Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and I will take you for my people... So that you may know that I am YHWH your God who has brought you out from under the burden of Egyptians" (Exo. 6:6-7).

⁷² W. BRUEGGEMANN, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Philadelphia, 1978, p. 16.

⁷³ G. SOARES-PRABHU, *The Prophet as Theologian*, p. 5.

under the direction of Samuel (cf. I Sam. 9-10). David his successor tried to strike an uneasy compromise between the 'alternative vision' of Exodus and 'royal consciousness, but with Solomon, David's son and successor, the organisation of the monarchy reached its peak, and the Mosaic revolution was decisively reversed. Reading the narratives of Solomon critically, one, with the aid of hindsight, can appreciate Samuel's critical perception of the *הַיְסוּדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ* ("the rights of the king" cf. I Sam. 8:4-22, especially, 11-18), where he (Samuel), in an anti-monarchical polemic, not of course totally divorced from some personal interests⁷⁴, tried to alert the people of the political, social, economic, and by interpretation, the theological implications of opting for a king. Brueggemann⁷⁵ mentions basic elements of novelty that contradicted the Yahwistic faith that were introduced by the royalty of Solomon. He speaks of a harem that both permitted cross marriages to seal political alliances (cf. 1 Kings 11:1-4), but which also aimed at securing the future of the royal dynasty. This move Brueggemann terms a concern for 'self-generated fertility' and this contrasts sharply with the fertility of the Israelites assured by God despite the efforts of the Pharaoh to extinguish Israelite posterity (cf. Exo. 1:15-22). He also mentions the institution of a standing army, and the call to arms which no longer depended on the summons of spirit-inspired charismatic individuals (cf. Jdg. 6:11-18; I Sam. 10:26) who would be led by authentic theo-national interests, but on the self-serving imperial policies of the court; an elaborate bureaucracy patterned to those of the neighbouring empires, which concentrates so much on administrative efficiency that justice and compassion is sometimes sacrificed. Then a system of conscripted labour (cf. 1 Kings 5:13-18) to carry on successfully with the gigantic constructions (palace and royal cities) and to give physical expression to the imperial ideology; and equally a temple which links the deity to the state and thereby serving a religious legitimisation ("theological sanction") for imperial interests.

⁷⁴ For detailed insight into the narrative effects on the reader of the encounter between Samuel and the elders in I Sam. 8, see A. WÉNIN, *Samuel et l'instauration de la monarchie*, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, p. 140ff; J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis, Vol. IV Vow and Desire (I Sam 1-12)*, Assen, 1993, p. 352ff.

⁷⁵ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *The Prophetic Imagination*, p. 24ff.

1.2.2.1.1 An Evaluation: Caution

The book of Brueggemann was revised in 2001, where he admits really of the problematic nature of some of the historical presumptions in his study, especially when confronted with evolutions in historical criticism of the Bible since over twenty years the first edition was published⁷⁶. In the Preface to the second edition, he admits really that the publication of 1978 was his “first publication in which I more-or-less found my own voice as a teacher in the church”. In that way, one must understand that he wrote not first and foremost as a critical scholar, but in the service of a faith-community. He takes this factor into notice in the second edition, where though his basic thesis articulated in the first edition holds and continues to frame his work⁷⁷, there are however great influences coming from social scientific criticism, rhetorical criticism and ideological criticism, all popularised after his first edition had been published⁷⁸. A great deal has changed since 1978 in the critical study of the Bible. It could therefore be said that purely theological or even confessional interests led Brueggemann to pay less attention to some of the basic problematic related with pre-exilic history of the Bible.

It is outside our scope doing a historical-critical reading of the Pentateuch and pre-exilic writings here, or even tracing the history of the research. All in all, these data should be appreciated from the biblical historical-critical point of view and not from the literal historical point of view as I have shown in an earlier research⁷⁹, basing on the analysis of

⁷⁶ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Minneapolis (2nd edition), 2001.

⁷⁷ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *The Prophetic Imagination* (2nd edition), p. ix.

⁷⁸ He admits of influences from N.K. GOTTWALD, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.*, Mary Knoll, 1979; R.R. WILSON, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, Philadelphia, 1980; P. TRIBLE, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Philadelphia, 1978; *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah*, Minneapolis, 1994; G. GREEN, *Theology, Hermeneutics and Imagination: The Crisis of Interpretation at the End of Modernity*, Cambridge, 2000; F. ASALS, *The Imagination of Extremity*, Athens, 1982, etc.

⁷⁹ A. OSUJI, *Critique of the Temple in Jer. 7:1-15, 21-28 & 26 (LXX 33): A Biblical-Theological Understanding* (Mémoire Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for a Master's Degree in Theology, under the direction of Prof. J.-M. VAN CANGH), Louvain-la-Neuve, 2001, p. 13-14.

Part Three Chapter One: On the Theological Status of Prophetic Books

J.-L. Ska⁸⁰. Parting from the thesis that “une histoire des origines d’Israël est difficilement imaginable avant une époque tardive”⁸¹, the historical excursus he undertakes in his Chapter VI: “*Exégèse du Pentateuque: Histoire de la recherche de l’antiquité*”, goes to show that the understanding of the Pentateuch has always varied, and that at each epoch, the cultural and religious background and the exegetical school set the tone of the questions and their responses. Beginning from the Fathers of the Church who considered Moses to be the author of the Pentateuch and attached a literal historical value to the contents of the books, to the Medieval Age when for the first time a doubt was cast on the mosaic origin of the Pentateuch, he went through the humanistic period and the beginnings of modern exegesis: the times of Baruch Spinoza and Richard Simon, Witter, Astruc and Eichhorn, till de Wette and Wellhausen (and his classical documentary hypothesis), then to Gunkel, Noth and von Rad with their *Formgeschichte* and *Sitz im Leben*. He thus showed how each epoch and each culture, traditional and intellectual, pose new questions on the subject especially with regard to its historicity. His analogy is helpful to our thesis here. For him these books resemble a city reconstructed after a double earthquake, the first which took place in 721BC and the second 586 BC⁸². After the exile and return, following the permission of Cyrus the conqueror of Babylon, there was need to reconstruct the city. His analogy continues: in this work of reconstruction we can identify at least three types of edifices. Some survived entirely or partly the two earthquakes, though their state of conservation may have varied considerably. That means besides the debris and the ruins, some constructions remained almost intact. There were also edifices entirely new which took the place of those that disappeared. And finally there existed a good block of mixed constructions where one can really notice ancient elements reincorporated with entirely new portions, added as epochs elapsed. So he concludes, conclusion which suggests to readers of today, the attitude of reading in context and with critical distancing:

⁸⁰ J.-L. SKA, *Introduction à la lecture du Pentateuque: Clés pour l’interprétation des cinq premiers livres de la Bible* (Le livre et le rouleau 5), trans. F. VERMOREL, Bruxelles, 2000, shows actually the enormous problematic there is in reading the Pentateuch and the historical books.

⁸¹ J.-L. SKA, *Introduction à la lecture du Pentateuque*, p. 249.

⁸² J.-L. SKA, *Introduction à la lecture du Pentateuque*, p. 264.

Part Three Chapter One: On the Theological Status of Prophetic Books

“Dans certains cas, il est très difficile de distinguer avec exactitude les parties anciennes des parties plus récentes. La proportion entre matériaux anciens et matériaux modernes n’est jamais la même. Il faut donc avoir un œil exercé pour lire l’histoire de la ville et de ses différents quartiers. Ceci dit, tous les édifices, anciens ou modernes, ont le même but, celui d’accueillir une population et de répondre à ses besoins. La ville n’est pas un musée, son objectif n’est pas de préserver le passé, mais plutôt de créer les conditions indispensables à la survie d’un peuple au terme d’une expérience douloureuse.

Tout comme cette ville, le Pentateuque [and this applies *mutatis mutandis* to other parts of pre-exilic biblical corpus] contient des matériaux anciens qui entendent établir un lien avec le passé, et des matériaux neufs qui répondent aux questions du présent. Certaines zones ont été retouchées ou restaurées plusieurs fois. Chaque portion, ancienne, plus récente ou moderne, offre un abri à sa foi et à son espérance. L’ensemble doit donc être interprété dans le contexte de l’époque postexilique, de ses intérêts et de ses préoccupations”⁸³.

1.2.2.2 The Content of the Prophetic Teaching: Re-appropriating the Alternative Consciousness

Apart from the positivistic historical details and presumptions implicit in the ‘imagination’ of Brueggemann, some elements of the basic thesis are of interest. These interesting elements are seen from considering the oracles of the prophets, if we presume that some of these oracles could be considered as “authentic” (see the first section of this Chapter) and therefore “imagining” the world and the reality which they were reacting against. The question could be put in the words of Fenton: what calls forth the bard within the prophet, what passion evokes the prophetic creation? It is at the backdrop of the above ‘history’ that the prophets react. They do so through a critique of the ‘royal consciousness’ in favour of the re-appropriation of the ‘alternative vision’ of the exodus. Their criticism is thus both religious and social, though both boil down to the same issue:

⁸³ J.-L. SKA, *Introduction à la lecture du Pentateuque*, p. 267.

Part Three Chapter One: On the Theological Status of Prophetic Books

a) They condemn idolatry: in the ultimate sense condemning monarchy for theocracy⁸⁴. This means that Israel is not to 'forsake the YHWH of the covenant for other gods' she has not known (cf. Jer. 2:20-28; 18:13-17; Eze. 6:1-7) – that is, she is not to abandon her experience of the free God, and turn to the gods of the surrounding nations. She is not to turn YHWH into an idol by making him the legitimising principle of absolutised values like money, of absolutised ideologies like kingship, or of absolutised institutions like the temple or the state⁸⁵. It is probably in this criticism of rulership and the apparatus of government that the prophetic activity was more eloquent⁸⁶. b) The prophets criticise social injustice, that is, the concrete expressions of exploitation and oppression that result from such legitimising idolatry (cf. Amos 2:6-9; Isa. 3:3-15; Jer. 5:20-29; 7:1-15). In all, religious apostasy and neglect of social justice are arraigned and strongly criticised⁸⁷. There is a good melange of social protest and the critique of religious style in their preaching (cf. Isa. 58:1-14; Eze. 18: 5-9; Hos. 6:4-11).

The crux of prophetic preaching is therefore the covenant, the call to the original exodus vision and the covenant consciousness. The only legitimisation for this engagement is the

⁸⁴ This is not to say that the prophets sought to overturn the regime or to replace the monarchy. With regard to the replacement of the Omride dynasty by Jehu (cf. II Kings 10), Fenton rightly appeals to the conception that the redactional activity of prophetic historiographers or deuteronomistic editing may be responsible for the notion that the revolt was inspired by Elisha representing the loyal YHWH-worshipping anti-Tyrian section of the population. One can validate the 'YHWH-alone' movement already begun in the time of Elijah but doubt its involvement in Jehu's coup, especially in view of Hosea's condemnation of it (cf. Hos. 1:4) even though the author of II Kings seems favourable to Jehu's action. At any rate, the replacement of the monarchy does not seem to be part of the prophetic agenda, the criticisms notwithstanding. "Their aim is to 'restore' justice, loyalty to the 'national' deity and an informed and sensible handling of the dangerous forces at work on the international scene [...]. (It) is a record we have of criticism directed against monarchy or central government (over a period of centuries, and by a succession of men sharing broadly the same view without the intent to oust the current ruler or change the form of government. It sought to correct, not to replace", cf. T.L. FENTON, *Israelite Prophecy: Characteristics of the First Protest Movement*, p. 136 and no. 17.

⁸⁵ G. SOARES-PRABHU, *The Prophet as Theologian*, p. 7.

⁸⁶ T.L. FENTON, *Israelite Prophecy: Characteristics of the First Protest Movement*, p. 136.

⁸⁷ T.L. FENTON, *Israelite Prophecy: Characteristics of the First Protest Movement*, p. 136.

Part Three Chapter One: On the Theological Status of Prophetic Books

prophet's call, which according to Max Weber is "the decisive element distinguishing the prophet from the priest", for while "the latter lays claim to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition [...] (institution) the prophet's claim is based on personal revelation and charisma"⁸⁸. The detailed description of the various mechanisms for this call falls outside our immediate concern. However it could be by vision, trance, ecstasy or altered state of consciousness. But whichever it be, it involves a radical change in the prophet's consciousness, perception and vision of reality⁸⁹. The prophet appropriates the 'alternative vision' and begins to speak in a new language. The experience with the deity makes him to speak in his name and in his authority ('thus says the Lord'). Von Rad notes that while there are exceptions, the prophet's own way of speaking is principally poetic: that is to say, speech characterised by rhythm and parallelism. In contrast, passages in which they are not themselves speakers but are the subjects of report are in prose⁹⁰. The prophet speaks to convince and to make his audience aware of the dangers which they are approaching if they do not resort to the demands of the covenant.

It could be partial truth to say that it was only reasons hinging around the royal consciousness that sparked off the alternative vision of the prophets. There was also the question of worship and cult, which equally had much to do with the monarchy as its legitimisation⁹¹. In fact, Stefan Paas⁹² argues vehemently that most Old Testament accusations of polytheism are directed at the royalty⁹³. II Sam. 7:1-7 recounts how David thought of building for YHWH a "house" but was prevented by the order of Nathan the prophet who revealed that YHWH had reserved that role to his son and successor

⁸⁸ M. WEBER, *The Sociology of Religion*, London, 1965, p. 46.

⁸⁹ B. LANG, *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority*, Sheffield, 1983, see p. 102-111.

⁹⁰ G. VON RAD, *Old Testament Theology, Vol II: The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions*, Edinburgh, 1965, p. 15.

⁹¹ See M. COGAN, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eight and Seventh Centuries BCE* (SBLMS 19), Montana, 1974.

⁹² S. PAAS, *Creation and Judgement*. p. 146-151.

⁹³ See J.H. TIGAY, *Israelite Religion: The Onomastic and Epigraphic Evidence*, in P.D. MILLER *et al.* (eds.), *Ancient Israelite Religion*, p. 170.

Solomon⁹⁴. The history of the temple is a history of continuous construction, destruction and reconstruction. But the interest here is: even the temple and the cultic sacrifices became a legitimating factor for the powers that be⁹⁵. Sacrifices were duly performed but the prophets questioned the spirit of this exercise and criticised sacrifice without the correct attitude and interior disposition (see for example Jer. 7). Sacrifice becomes meaningful positive form of worship only when offered by the righteous and just. But from every indication, such a notion could have been foreign to ancient man, to *homo necans*, and that includes the Israelite who practised the cult 'on every high hill and under every leafy tree'⁹⁶. Sacrifice was simply understood as the service man owed and rendered to the deity from well before the dawn of history. Indeed, the ubiquitous view of the literature of ancient Babylon is that man is created specifically for this purpose⁹⁷. Eventually part of prophetic consciousness was the critique of such cultic and sacrificial worship performed only to arrive at some external correctness.

Conclusion

It is clearly admissible that the content of this Chapter is to a good extent apologetic. The aim is to clear a firm ground to engage in a discussion of the theology of the text of the book of the prophet Jeremiah. Even though that this conclusion is adopted in this work, the criticisms of Carroll and Auld have their indispensable relevance in that they have helped modern scholarship to be more critical about the biblical data concerning

⁹⁴ The problematic of the two slightly different biblical accounts of the reason for this prevention relates more to the redaction history: while the deuteronomistic redaction of the book of Kings gives as reason for this prevention the fact that David was much occupied by his wars (I Kings 5:17-19; 8:15-21), Chronicles gives to David a very important role in the realisation of the temple: David could not realise this dream because he was a man of war and had poured away blood, while Solomon was destined to this realisation being a peacemaker (I Chr. 22:8-10; 28:3-7). However David prepared all: he drew the plans of the temple and the furniture, assembled the materials for the construction and the golden and sacred objects, formed the workers team and established the classes and the functions of the clergy (I Chr. 22-28). On further ideological issues behind this, C. MEYERS, *Temple, Jerusalem*, in D.N. FREEDMAN (ed.), *ABD* 6 (1992), p. 350-369, see p. 355.

⁹⁵ Cf. W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Prophetic Imagination*, see p. 32-47.

⁹⁶ T.L. FENTON, *Israelite Prophecy: Characteristics of the First Protest Movement*, see p. 134.

⁹⁷ T.L. FENTON, *Israelite Prophecy: Characteristics of the First Protest Movement*, p. 134.

prophecy and its theology. For one thing, their critical suspicion has led scholars to rethink once more on the limits of knowability and certitude regarding these matters, and given occasions for a critical reassessment of presumed convictions, even forcing biblical scholarship to be conscious of naïve historical positivism and extreme empiricism⁹⁸. Reading the works of Carroll especially on the prophets and the book of Jeremiah in particular, one must also admit, “can be a particularly effective way of coming to conscious awareness of how precarious our ‘knowledge’ about the text we study”⁹⁹ is. In fact, Carroll is known to be at ease with his agnostic position and he uses the word ‘nescience’ regularly to explain the limit of what we can claim to know and to warn against unwarranted certainty on uncertain terrains¹⁰⁰. It is in this wise that Carroll’s call for certain agnosticism comes in order. For him, agnosticism should be the most welcome attitude in many contending issues in prophetic literature, and especially as regards the book of Jeremiah. In the article *Inventing the Prophets*, he catalogues the different areas scholars should avow their ignorance and uncertainty, in fact their nescience. This will help to mark out clearly, to the extent of its possibility, the border between certainty and issues that are only “hypothetical and non-historical speculation about *unknown* matters”¹⁰¹. Carroll’s list of areas where affirmations should be wary is a pointer to the approximate character of most of our assertions. And as he finally concludes:

“All this ignorance reflects a *nescience* which scholars might more frequently acknowledge rather than passing on as if it were knowledge! Such *nescience* imposes a strict focus on the literariness of the texts and recognition of just how *little we actually know* about historical and social settings of the literature [...]. It will certainly force the commentator to make more frequent confessions of *ignorance* and *perplexity*”¹⁰².

However, caution does not mean throwing away the baby with the bath water. The last citation of Carroll acknowledges the literariness of the texts which is our starting point.

⁹⁸ H.M. BARSTAD, *No Prophets?* p. 44.

⁹⁹ T.W.O. OVERHOLT, ‘*It is Difficult to Read*’, in *JSOT* 48 (1990), p. 51-54, see p. 54.

¹⁰⁰ R.P. CARROLL, *Inventing the Prophets*, p. 32-33.

¹⁰¹ R.P. CARROLL, *Inventing the Prophets*, p. 32.

¹⁰² R.P. CARROLL, *Inventing the Prophets*, p. 33-34 (emphases supplied).

Part Three Chapter One: On the Theological Status of Prophetic Books

On this platform, we can avoid the pitfalls of the two extremes of historical positivism and outright agnosticism. The prophetic books as a literary composition can still be a sure ground where a theological edifice could be sustained. To the extent the book of Jeremiah in particular shares in, and forms part of this theological edifice, is the task of the second Chapter of this Part.

CHAPTER TWO

JEREMIAH IN PROPHETIC THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

Introduction

From the last Chapter, we can conveniently talk of the theology of the prophetic books. This does not nullify the existence of myriads of questions, doubts and discrepancies, either originating from the attempt to capture the prophets' own self-definition, or to define the prophets' identity and mission, or from conceptual articulations of linguistic terms and their correct meanings, terms like, 'prophecy', 'prophets', 'seer', etc. The doubts and critical opinions of Auld and Carroll remain pertinent in the course of studies in prophecy. Part of these myriads of issues surrounding studies in prophecy is that of a possible prophetic tradition and in this sense, the question posed by Auld remains pertinent: "How far was 'classical prophecy' an offshoot or mutation from 'institutional prophecy'? Were there significant differences in practice and terminology between north (Israel) and south (Judah)? And – as if these difficulties were not enough – we have to keep asking how far the results of anthropological and sociological field-studies may properly be applied to texts from the Bible many of which are highly edited and so themselves far from been 'raw data'"¹. This Chapter admits of the existence of a prophetic theological tradition. The goal of the Chapter is to show, by means of few thematic choices, that the book of Jeremiah has a place in this theological tradition, a prophetic one. Cast in two short sections, the first articulates the background of Jeremiah and his self-perception of the sense of his vocation and mission as shown in the book itself. The second section, borrowing from the work of Lalleman-de Winkel², begins with a definition of what is meant by a prophetic tradition, and tries to establish how the book of Jeremiah follows in the tradition of the other prophetic books, by means of two themes: covenant sensitivity and the use of symbolic acts. The centre of interest is in the

¹ A.G. AULD, *Prophets and Prophecy in Jeremiah and Kings*, p. 66.

² H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition: An Examination of the Book of Jeremiah in the Light of Israel's Prophetic Traditions* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 26), Leuven, 2000.

question of true and false prophecy, but which, for its importance in the work in general, we leave for a separate treatment in the next and last Chapter of the work.

2.1 JEREMIAH: BACKGROUND AND SENSE OF COMMISSION

Jeremiah belongs to classical prophecy, and by the classical prophets, we refer to the prophets from around the 8th century BC. This prophecy of course was preceded by a long preparatory stage of spiritual development, formation of styles of activity and modes of expression, and has serious continuity with early prophecy. All the same, in the 8th century, a new factor emerges that sharply differentiates classical prophecy from the preceding phenomenon. This group was heterogeneous and varied and, apart from the wandering and the cult and court prophets following the divisions of Fohrer, was a very important grouping, comprising of the great individual prophets including Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, etc. These individuals represent what is commonly considered as the apex of prophecy in Israel. Not belonging to any group of a profession, or representing a clan or tribe or as functionaries of a sanctuary or of a king, they are prophets on the basis of a special call and self-perception as “conscious representatives and messengers of their God”³. The article by Haran⁴ gives as the most prominent characteristic of 8th century classical prophecy: the use of the written word as a medium of expression and creativity as is perceptible in the biblical texts. One can give examples of Jer. 36:1-3; Isa. 8:16. There is a considerate diminution of the narrative form of report, which is the only extant form of early prophecy. Being literary prophecy in contrast with early prophecy⁵, it is made of collections of sayings, poems and speeches, though there are sometimes considerable amount of narratives in prose forms especially in Jeremiah. Von Rad already wrote in 1968 that, with Amos, the centre of gravity in the prophetic tradition had shifted from the story about the prophet to collection and transmission of his sayings⁶. Within the classical prophets is a further grouping: the Major (Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) and Minor Prophets (The Twelve), a grouping

³ G. FOHRER, *History of Israelite Religion*, Nashville, 1972, p. 237.

⁴ M. HARAN, *From Early to Classical Prophecy: Continuity and Change*, in *VT* 27 (1977), p. 385-397.

⁵ M. HARAN, *From Early to Classical Prophecy: Continuity and Change*, p. 388.

⁶ G. VON RAD, *The Message of the Prophets*, London, 1968, p. 16.

which is however *a posteriori* (a product of the canonical arrangement of the prophetic corpus) and not contemporaneous with the activities of the prophets.

Following the book that bears his name (Jer. 1:1), Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, born in Anathoth, four kilometres Northeast of Jerusalem grew up as the son of a priest, and was part of the faithful of a religious community⁷. His priestly family may have preserved the religious tradition of Shiloh associated with Samuel. Our knowledge of Jeremiah is confined to the data within the book that goes by his name⁸. As has severally been said, commentators have come to very different conclusions with regard to the historical value of the data in the book or concerning the relevance of the data in arriving at any reliable conclusions about the historical personality behind the book.

From the theological angle that is our concern here, the book of Jeremiah presents the prophet as one who senses the overwhelming certainty of being called by YHWH, of having been called from birth (1:5), of having a special relationship with YHWH, and of being promised the protection of YHWH to overcome any fear he may have of opposition (1:8, 17-19). In the course of one of his confessions⁹, he affirms that YHWH is a “terrifying warrior” fighting on his behalf (20:11). Still the fact that the narrative of his call is part of his proclamation to his people suggests the importance for him of legitimating his divine calling: indeed the wording of 1:5-6, in which Jeremiah objects to

⁷ W.P. TUCK, *Preaching from Jeremiah*, in *RevExp* 78 (1981), p. 381-395, see p. 389.

⁸ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 24.

⁹ The confessions or laments of Jeremiah confront the reader at first sight with someone who is in desperation. One can decipher the mood in expressions and exclamations like: “Why does the way of the guilty prosper?” (Jer. 12:1), “Why is my pain unceasing?” (Jer. 15:18), or “Cursed be the day on which I was born!” (Jer. 20:14.) For more works on the Confessions of Jeremiah, other than the already cited ones, see H. DONNER, *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Form and Significance for the Prophet's Biography*, in *OTWSA* 24 (1982), p. 55-56; C. CONROY, *Methodological Reflections on Some Recent Studies of the Confessions of Jeremiah*, in *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 12 (1989), p. 7-25; D.H. BAK, *Klagender Gott-klagende Menschen: Studien zur Klage im Jeremiabuch* (BZAW 193), Berlin, 1990; C. BULTMANN, *A Prophet in Desperation? The Confessions of Jeremiah*, in J.C. DE MOOR (ed.), *The Elusive Prophet*, p. 83-93.

his call, suggests not only that YHWH is responsible but that his (Jeremiah's) embarking on prophetic proclamation is not his own idea. Nevertheless, he struggles with his relation to YHWH; the confessions being the vehicle for his prayerful laments to YHWH. He perceived himself called not to marry and have children and to abstain from funerals and wedding (cf. 16:1-9).

2.2 JEREMIAH IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER PROPHETS

2.2.1 *The Question of a Prophetic Tradition*

The work of H. Lalleman-de Winkel¹⁰ enquires into the relationship between the theology of the book of Jeremiah and that of other prophetic books; that is, whether there is a distinctive prophetic tradition in Israel, and whether the book of Jeremiah can be located in it¹¹? Her analysis is based on this conviction that “a prophetic book can never be regarded as a mere compilation of redactional layers”¹². Rather, the prophet must be placed in his theological context as well and that such context includes prophetic traditions. By prophetic tradition, she does not mean “the process or means by which the ideas were transmitted, as is the object of the “überlieferungsgeschichtliche” approach¹³. By prophetic tradition, our interest here, as in the expositions of Lalleman-de Winkel¹⁴, is not in the history of prophecy in the Old Testament but can be stated in the following question: can the features of a prophetic book be explained in terms of a distinctive prophetic tradition¹⁵? Or a related issue: whether the (prophetic) books can be explained in the context of the prophets' lives and ministries¹⁶. It is equally neither the question of the deuteronomistic influences on the formation and edition of the book of Jeremiah though any attempt to trace the characteristics of a prophetic tradition in the Old

¹⁰ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*.

¹¹ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 9.

¹² H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 14.

¹³ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 15.

¹⁴ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 45-84 titled “The Quest for a Prophetic Tradition”.

¹⁵ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 77.

¹⁶ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 77.

Testament is easily confronted by the question of Deuteronomy and that of deuteronomistic tradition¹⁷. And that therefore makes it a very complicated matter to track and determine what is prophetic in the Old Testament tradition¹⁸. Rather she tries, in her very words, “to search for traces of an intellectual and spiritual heritage in the Book of Jeremiah, which may also be detected in former prophetic books”¹⁹, and also detectable in the latter ones. In line with the work of H.W. Wolff who investigated the theological background of Hosea and Amos²⁰, Jeremiah too may be supposed to be part of a larger context. But what exactly was this context like? Is there any relationship between Jeremiah and especially Amos and Hosea²¹? Though this Chapter of our work goes in the same direction as that of Lalleman-de Winkel’s, our little reservation is that her work makes a grave presupposition: the existence or even the historical existence of the prophets. She actually sees no reason for arguing or discussing it, for she “assume(s) that there was indeed a historical prophet, who had some relation to the Book of Jeremiah [...]. I assume that prophecy was relevant at a certain moment in a certain period of Israel’s history”²², two categorical assumptions which had already been subjected to criticism by scholars like Carroll and Auld as seen above, and so would have needed some justified argumentation. It is necessary therefore to place Jeremiah in his theological, especially prophetic context, and to see how the various elements of Israel’s theological tradition, mainly the prophetic, helped to influence and shape the prophet. How does Jeremiah stand vis-à-vis Israel’s theologico-prophetic heritage of his days and what, basing on this background and tradition, is the specificity of Jeremiah and his prophecy? Put in another way, is there an alternative theory or even a concurrent one to the strict deuteronomistic programme in which the prophetic line is more highlighted²³? The argument of a prophetic tradition can even be pushed forward taken a clue from the

¹⁷ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 49.

¹⁸ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 49.

¹⁹ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 15.

²⁰ VAN DER WOUDE, *Three Classical Prophets: Amos, Hosea and Micah*, in R. COGGINS et al. (eds.), *Israel’s Prophetic Tradition*, p. 32-57.

²¹ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 15.

²² H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 14.

²³ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 77.

Part Three Chapter Two: Jeremiah in Prophetic Theological Tradition

remark in Jer. 28:8²⁴; that is, Jeremiah's reference to the prophets of the past. This would give a broader background for specifically studying the theology of true and false prophecy in Jer. 26-29.

We cannot of course comfortably claim that all the parallels, whether about words, themes or ideas which we encounter in the different prophetic corpus, could be explained by recourse to a definite system or uniformed transmission process. This is equally the opinion of Blenkinsopp²⁵. But at the same time, the history of prophecy cannot be limited to the presentation of a series of distinct portraits of the individual prophets, without recognising and analysing the line of continuity visible in the prophetic phenomenon. The task would have been less difficult had scholarship at its disposal, explicit recognition by the prophets, of the preceding traditions that inspired them. However, as Blenkinsopp asserts,

“mais il va sans dire qu'il est tout à fait légitime de parler d'une tradition prophétique. Tout en admettant l'existence d'une tradition prophétique, nous devons être prêts à reconnaître que cette tradition suit des lignes différentes en tenant compte de types différents de prophètes et de fonction prophétique. Il faut se rappeler que nous n'avons à notre disposition que très peu de sources choisies selon des critères spécifiques²⁶.”

We are only going to take few specific themes to investigate the issue of the possibility and existence of a prophetic theological tradition. We take the themes related to the content of prophetic preaching and to the methodology in transmitting their message: we choose the themes of covenant and the use of symbolic actions in preaching, two themes that have also much to do with the chapters of the book of Jeremiah under study. Another very important theme in this context is the theological question of true and false prophecy among the prophets, which will be discussed separately in the last Chapter of this Part.

²⁴ “The prophets who were before me and before you from the ancient time prophesied against many lands and against great kingdoms, of war and evil and of pestilence” (Jer. 28:8).

²⁵ J. BLENKINSOPP, *Une histoire de la prophétie in Israël* (LD 152), Paris, 1993, p. 9.

²⁶ J. BLENKINSOPP, *Une histoire de la prophétie in Israël*, p. 9.

There are of course myriads of other possible investigable themes; around issues pertaining for example to cult²⁷, the question of social justice and social transformation²⁸, the prophets and law²⁹, sin and judgement³⁰, even ideological questions³¹, and finally even eschatology³². The principal argument is: the study of prophecy and its history cannot be exhausted by presenting a series of portraits of individual prophets without tracing the line of continuity.

2.2.2 Covenant Preaching in the Prophets

While talking about covenant, we are not unaware of the different types that there are in the Old Testament. In the first place, there are the different covenant enactments beginning remotely with Adam, to Noah and Abraham, with the Israelites through the leadership of Moses, to that of David. Mendenhall and Herion's definition however looks embracing:

“A ‘covenant’ is an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make(s) promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance. As indicated by the designation of the two sections of the Christian Bible – Old Testament (= covenant) and New Testament – ‘covenant’ in the Bible is the major metaphor used to describe the relation between God and Israel (the

²⁷ Cf. R. MURRAY, *Prophecy and Cult*, in R. COGGINS *et al.* (eds.), *Israel's Prophetic Tradition*, p. 200-216.

²⁸ Cf. J.L. MAYS, *Justice: Perspectives from the Prophetic Tradition*, in K.L. PETERSON (ed.), *Prophecy in Israel: Search for an Identity*, Philadelphia, 1987, p. 144-188; F.K. FURMAN, *The Prophetic Tradition and Social Transformation*, in C.R. STRAIN (ed.), *Prophetic Visions and Economic Realities: Protestants, Jews and Catholics Confront the Bishops' Letter on the Economy*, Grand Rapids, 1989, p. 103-114; W.K. TABB, *The Prophetic Tradition: Economic Efficiency and the Quest for Justice in God and Capitalism*, in J.-M. THOMAS & V. VISICK (eds.), *God and Capitalism. A Prophetic Critique of Market Economy*, Madison, 1991, p. 30-52.

²⁹ A. PHILIPS, *Prophecy and Law*, in R. COGGINS *et al.* (eds.), *Israel's Prophetic Tradition*, p. 217-232.

³⁰ P.D. MILLER, *Sin and Judgement in the Prophets* (SBLMS 27), Chicago, 1982.

³¹ See for example, R.R. RUETHER, *Prophetic Tradition and the Liberation of Women: Promise and Betrayal*, in *Feminist Theology* 5 (1994), p. 58-73; H. BOSMAN, *Adultery: Prophetic Tradition and the Decalogue*, in M. AUGUSTIN & K.-D. SCHUNCK (eds.), *Wünschet Jerusalem Frieden*, p. 21-30.

³² Cf. R.P. CARROLL, *Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition*, in *ZAW* 94 (1982), p. 47-58.

Part Three Chapter Two: Jeremiah in Prophetic Theological Tradition

People of God). As such, covenant is the instrument constituting the rule (or kingdom) of God, and therefore it is a valuable lens through which one can recognize and appreciate the biblical idea of religious community”³³.

But the fact of the existence of the many covenants is of less importance however than the difference in nature between them. Freedman³⁴ divides covenants in the Old Testament into two types: those in which God imposes some obligations on the human partner, like the covenant of Sinai and those in which God takes upon Himself certain obligations, otherwise called the covenant of divine commitments like the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15) and that with David (2 Sam. 7)³⁵.

In discussing the idea of covenant in the prophetic tradition, our major thesis is that, with indices from intra and extra-biblical texts³⁶, it is highly probable that the Old Testament prophets were indeed familiar with the concept of covenant and that this idea occurs constantly explicitly or implicitly in their preaching. The question simply put is: can there be noticed a continuing tradition of the theological idea of a covenant in the prophets, including Jeremiah? At the outset we must admit with both McCarthy³⁷ and Clements³⁸

³³ G.E. MENDENHALL & G.A. HERION, *Covenant*, in D.N. FREEDMAN (ed.), *ABD* 1 (1992), p. 1179-1202, see p. 1179.

³⁴ D.N. FREEDMAN, *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation: The Covenant Theme*, in *Interpretation* 18 (1964), p. 419-431.

³⁵ J. BRIGHT, *Covenant and Promise: The Prophetic Understanding of the Future in Pre-Exilic Israel*, Philadelphia, 1976, describes the history of Israel as a tension between these two types of covenant. The Sinaitic covenant, being conditional, must be observed and the rupture of the demands attracts divine punishment whereas the covenant with Abraham and that with David, being unconditional contain promises and an oath on the path of God, even if the house of Israel should err. The awareness of this covenant, especially that of David prepared a fertile ground for the Zion theology, the conclusion that God will preserve Judah forever, see p. 25-31, 73-76.

³⁶ Cf. also our discussion on the similarities between Old Testament prophecy and that of the ancient Near East above (Part Three, Chapter One).

³⁷ D.J. MCCARTHY, *Covenant in the OT: Present State of Inquiry*, in *CBQ* 27 (1965), p. 217-240.

³⁸ R.E. CLEMENTS, *Prophecy and Tradition*, Oxford, 1975, see p. 8-23.

Part Three Chapter Two: Jeremiah in Prophetic Theological Tradition

that the issue is a very complex one since the prophets did not use the term *b^erît* a very great deal. But despite that, their thinking was strongly covenantal³⁹.

A lot of recent investigation has revealed abundant analogies between some parts of the Old Testament literature and that of ancient Near Eastern texts, and in this particular respect, largely following the work of Mendenhall⁴⁰, itself based on that of V. Korošec⁴¹, an analogy has been proposed between covenantal relationship in the Old Testament and the ancient Near Eastern treaties between sovereigns and vassals. From Mendenhall, it became popular to assume that the underlying literary structure of Exo. 20; Deut. 5; Jos. 24 and the whole book of Deuteronomy resembled the structure of a Hittite treaty, which included the following principal elements: a) preamble introducing the sovereign, b) historical prologue describing previous relations between the concerned parties, c) stipulations which outline the nature of the community established by the covenant, d) document clause providing for the preservation and regular rereading of the treaty, e) lists of gods who witnessed the treaty, and f) curse and blessing formulas, curses for infidelity and blessings for fidelity to the covenant.

This reference to ancient Near Eastern Hittite treaties above is only to point to the fact that “the issue of a treaty had already existed in the nations surrounding Israel for a long time. It is therefore possible that a treaty or covenant was known to Israelites in some form and the prophets based their message on it”⁴². As Thompson concludes: “There can be no doubt that the prophets issued their indictments and judgments against Israel along lines very similar to those of a treaty, and it is very difficult not to come to the conclusion that somewhere in their tradition lay an awareness that just as a breach of treaty in the secular world brought curses upon the offenders, so a breach of YHWH’s covenant brought judgment on Israel”⁴³. In his earlier work, Clements⁴⁴ entertained this opinion

³⁹ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 63.

⁴⁰ G.E. MENDENHALL, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, Pittsburgh, 1955.

⁴¹ V. KOROŠEC, *Hethitische Staatsverträge*, Leipzig, 1931.

⁴² H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 171.

⁴³ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 65.

though he modified it in his *Prophecy and Tradition* by assuming several theological traditions (Deuteronomy and deuteronomistic inclusive), instead of one coherent covenant theology, all of them influencing the prophets and contributing to the development of a coherent covenant theology in Israel⁴⁵. It remains however a matter of debate among scholars. For example, Perlitt opines that the idea of covenant was originally absent from the prophetic books and was only developed later in the postexilic period as an offshoot of the theology of the deuteronomistic circle. This deuteronomistic covenant theology, a key element of the deuteronomistic movement and literature, has its origins in the context of religious crises, probably under Manasseh in the seventh century. If any traces of vassal-treaties may be found in the Old Testament, according to Perlitt, they also must be dated in the seventh century⁴⁶. It does not however mean that we have to search for exact correspondences between the two because the context of covenants in the Bible is different from that of the surrounding peoples, the 'Umwelt'. The theological context of Sinai for example makes it essentially different from the covenants between kings and vassals, for in the latter there is great fear of possible revolts which might bring the toppling of the government of the ruling lord and so each thought or deed that might lead to this must first forcefully be banished. But in the Sinaitic covenant, though there is of course a strong demand to serve YHWH, the accent is however more on a wholehearted, free consent, and not borne out of the fear that man or Israel might overthrow YHWH from his throne, for He is the only YHWH⁴⁷. The conclusion of Bright in this debate could therefore serve better: YHWH-Israel relationship "was not simply conceived necessarily in terms of ANE-treaties, but that the form in which it is developed and expressed in the Bible could have been influenced by them and they may have

⁴⁴ R.E. CLEMENTS, *Prophecy and Covenant* (Studies in Biblical Theology 43), London, 1965.

⁴⁵ R.E. CLEMENTS, *Prophecy and Tradition*, p. 22-23.

⁴⁶ "Dass aber die dt Bundestheologie, die so fest mit gerade und nur dieser Zeit verwachsen ist, ein halbes Jahrtausend früher durch entsprechende hethitische Modelle angeregt worden sein sollte, um sich dann dasselbe halbe Jahrtausend hindurch nicht bemerkbar zu machen, gehört nicht in eine historische Debatte", L. PERLITT, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament* (WMANT 36), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1969, p. 152-153, 279-280.

⁴⁷ M. WEINFELD, *The Loyalty Oath in the Ancient Near East*, in *UF* 8 (1976), p. 379-414, see p. 402.

shaped Israel's self-understanding of her relationship with God⁴⁸. And this understanding reflected along prophetic preaching.

In most of the prophets for example, it is not so much a question of occurrence or the usage of the term ברית but more of the thinking in covenantal terms even when the term is absent. Hosea, a prophet who has been recognised by many commentators as having a close relationship with Jeremiah⁴⁹, envisages a close relationship between Israel and YHWH, a relationship that is comparable with that of parent and child (Hos. 11:1-4), expressed as a mutual belonging to each other; my God, my husband, my son, my people. When the relationship fares well, it is expressed in terms of my husband (2:18), my people, my God (2:23), but when broken, it is expressed in the terms: Lo-ammi (not my people, 2:25). Hosea chapters 1-3 especially 2 is popular for the rich marriage imagery. Common to marriage and covenant is that they express a very close relationship or contract, which is broken only by unfaithfulness. To sin is to be unfaithful to YHWH as in marriage (cf. 6:7; Mal. 2) and in Hosea marriage and covenant are constantly intermingled⁵⁰. It is clear that in Hosea, the exodus was the moment when YHWH initiated this relationship with the people of Israel (cf. 2:16-17) and the renewal of the covenant relationship is also expressed in marital terms (cf. 2:21). The analogy between sin or guilt and punishment in Hosea reminds of the cursing formulas and the verdicts of death penalty essential in a covenantal contract: "Because you have rejected the knowledge, I will reject you... you have forgotten the Torah of YHWH, I will forget your

⁴⁸ J. BRIGHT, *Covenant and Promise: The Prophetic Understanding of the Future in Pre-Exilic Israel*, Philadelphia, 1976, p. 40.

⁴⁹ See HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 45-47; THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 81-85. The similarity between the books of Hosea and Jeremiah does not concern only the use of language and figures but extends to fundamental ideas on God and his relation to Israel. Thompson conjectures how this relation can be explained in both geographical and familial terms: "Hosea was a prophet of northern Israel. Anathoth, the birthplace of Jeremiah, lay north of Jerusalem and not very far from the southern border of Israel. Moreover, Jeremiah's family was probably descended from Eli, the priest of Shiloh. There were thus both family and geographical links to the north, and Hosea the finest flower of North Israelite piety, may well have played a significant part in his early training", THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 81.

⁵⁰ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 179.

sons...” (Hos. 4:6). This reference to ‘Torah’ in singular here and also in 8:1 indicates at least a more or less fixed corpus with the commandments⁵¹ which were the concrete expression of the covenant, and this shows that for Hosea the possible breach of the covenant by breaking the particular stipulations was a serious issue (cf. Hos. 4:1-3).

Unlike Hosea who uses the term ברית five times (cf. Hos. 2:20; 6:7; 8:1; 10:4; 12:2), there is only one occurrence of it in Amos (1:9)⁵². But that does not imply, to assume with Perlitt, that remembrance of a covenant has no place in his preaching⁵³, or that Amos did not build his message on a covenant theology according to Wolff⁵⁴. While Perlitt sees Amos 3:2 as a text of “Erwählung” and not of “Bund”, Hayes who believes that there is “no evidence in the book that the relationship between Yahweh and Israel was understood in terms of covenant theology at the time”⁵⁵, maintains equally that the ירע in 3:2 only implies that “Yahweh was only Israel’s national God and only Israel’s” and does not imply a special election or covenant between YHWH and Israel. His arguments are partly based on the fact that there is neither a reference to the exodus, the giving of the land nor the revelation of YHWH’s will. However, in this interpretation, he neglects the many underlying undertones of the verb ירע, both with reference to extra-biblical treaty texts and to biblical literature. Soggin makes reference to the connotation of the verb in the vassal-treaties from the ancient Near East, in which the vassal asks the sovereign king to ‘recognise’ him and the king pledges to do this⁵⁶. The verb ירע implies therefore “a special, privileged relationship”⁵⁷. Two implications are therefore evident in the verb: ירע indicates mutual legal recognition on the part of the suzerain and vassal and the

⁵¹ D.R. DANIELS, *Hosea and Salvation History*, Berlin, 1990, p. 90-91.

⁵² “YHWH says this: For the three crimes, the four crimes of Tyre, I have made my decree and will not relent: because they have handed hosts of captives over to Edom, heedless of a *covenant* of brotherhood”.

⁵³ L. PERLITT, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament*, p. 135-136.

⁵⁴ H.W. WOLFF, *Dodekapropheten 2: Joel und Amos* (BK XIV/2), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1969, p. 122-123, 125.

⁵⁵ J.H. HAYES, *Amos: The Eight-Century Prophet. His Times and Preaching*, Nashville, 1988, p. 38.

⁵⁶ J.A. SOGGIN, *The Prophet Amos* (OTL), trans. J. Bowden, London, 1987, p. 84-85.

⁵⁷ J.A. SOGGIN, *The Prophet Amos*, p. 55.

recognition of the treaty or covenant stipulations as binding⁵⁸. And in biblical literature, the verb יָדַע has that connotation of an intimate and special knowledge arising from an intimate relationship. Sometimes it is used for marital relations (cf. Gen. 4:1, 17; 25). יָדַע in Amos 3:2 could therefore mean to “recognise by covenant” a covenant binding Israel to explicit responsibility⁵⁹. Without the covenant background and the stipulations and sanctions previously imposed on Israel, the prophet’s arguments in 3:2 (“You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities”) would be meaningless in the context⁶⁰.

This special relationship between Israel and YHWH and its implications is also the theme of Amos 9:7. There is no automatism between belonging to God and being safeguarded against judgement. If Israel does not obey the voice of God, she becomes just like every other nation. This means that the special relationship with God exists but only with a condition (cf. v. 4 and 8). The stress of Amos on social laws and the mention of particular breaches of justice (cf. Amos 2:6-8; 5:1-17) show a deep knowledge of the covenant stipulations. Even though the mention of the breaches concerning justice, idolatry and adultery are given some social accent, the theological context is not missing since Amos 5:8-9 puts the social laws in the context of creation and in the context of the special relationship with Israel⁶¹. And the list of plagues in 4:6-11 reminds one strongly of curses against covenant breaches (cf. Lev. 26; Deut. 28).

With reference to Jeremiah, our thesis is that he was an inheritor of a tradition, which may be traced back to his predecessors⁶². There is great interest in Jeremiah in the covenant between YHWH and Israel. The word בְּרִית occurs some twenty-three times,

⁵⁸ H.B. BUFFON, *The Treaty Background of Hebrew yāda*, in *BASOR* 181 (1966), p. 31-37, see p. 34-37. Cf. also H.B. BUFFON & S.B. PARKER, *A Further Note on the Treaty Background of Hebrew yāda*, in *BASOR* 184 (1966), p. 36-38.

⁵⁹ J.L. MAYES, *Amos: A Commentary* (OTL), Philadelphia, 1969, p. 57.

⁶⁰ F.I. ANDERSEN & D.N. FREEDMAN, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24A), New York, 1989, p. 381-382.

⁶¹ H. LALLEMAN – DE WINKEL, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition*, p. 186.

⁶² THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 66.

most of these in reference to YHWH's covenant with his people, whether the Sinaitic or the New Covenant (cf. Jer. 11:2, 3, 9, 10; 14:21, 22:9; 31:31, 32, 33; 32:40; 33:20, 21; 50:5), but five times in connection with the covenant that Zedekiah made with the people to liberate their slaves (cf. Jer. 34:8, 10, 13, 15, 18). Even without the express use of the term ברית in many instances, there is every reason to believe that YHWH's covenant with Israel is at the background of much of the prophet's thinking in those instances. There is much of the covenantal terms like "listen/obey", "not to listen/disobey", "law", "commandments", "return" etc. There is in Jeremiah a strong awareness of the tradition of Israel's election at the exodus, and the idea is given great prominence in the prophet (cf. Jer. 2:2-7; 7:21-22; 16:14-15; 23:7-8; 31:31-34). The covenant of Moses was fundamental to Jeremiah. There is every suspicion to believe that as a boy Jeremiah was schooled in the ancient traditions and so developed distaste for much that went on in the religio-social environment of his day⁶³. No wonder the vehemence of his attack on national sin cannot be overemphasised. In the temple sermon of 7:1-15 with parallel in 26:1-6, he is of the opinion that deep repentance, inward and sincere acceptance of the obligations of the covenant would alone fulfil the requirements of YHWH. Reciting the formula "the temple of YHWH, the temple of YHWH, the temple of YHWH", and at the same time still tolerating all kinds of personal and social evils and breaches of the covenant can never go hand in hand (cf. Jer. 7:4-10).

Jeremiah was certainly not unaware of the unconditional covenant with the house of David (cf. 23:5-6). But he would not allow the issue of the covenant with the descendants of David to take precedence over the ancient and more fundamental covenant with the whole nation⁶⁴. However, the idea of the New Covenant is very explicit in Jeremiah. In Amos, a new covenant is not mentioned explicitly but the idea of a new relationship between YHWH and his people is however not lacking (cf. Amos 9:11 ff). Hosea charges the people with breaking the covenant, but does not talk explicitly of a new covenant either. But a new beginning is promised, initiated by YHWH, and this terminology suits the context of the message of Hosea; that is, a new "marriage" is possible with YHWH

⁶³ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 61-62.

⁶⁴ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 66.

(cf. Hos. 2:21-22). In Hos. 14:5, it is stated that YHWH will change man's loyalty, so that he will no longer turn away. In Jeremiah, the concept of the end of the old and the beginning of the New Covenant is stated in explicit terms, and here stands one of the great novelties and the major theological insight of Jeremiah. As Freedman states: "The old covenant had been broken, and the full force of its penalties had been inflicted on the defiant people. It was no longer possible simply to renew the Covenant as had been done in the past. Now a new agreement was needed. This is the term used by Jeremiah (31:31-34)"⁶⁵.

2.2.3 The Tradition of the Use of Symbolic Actions

Symbolic action and symbolic perception⁶⁶ were also evidently part of the prophetic preaching tradition. Symbolic action in this sense is an action that accompanies the spoken word⁶⁷, and Jeremiah made a good use of them like many other prophets. Symbolic actions were used mainly to emphasise a particular message that was being declared, by providing a vivid visual illustration and a supporting "visible word"⁶⁸. The Hebrew word דבר does not only signify 'word' but also thing, action, event, because the Word of YHWH is an expression of the divine mind, and so not only what YHWH plans, thinks and says, but what he does. Therefore a spoken word plus a visible word convey the divine mind more forcefully.

Examples abound in the Old Testament of the use of symbolic actions by the Israelite prophets both before and after Jeremiah. Already in the 9th century, during the days of Ahab king of Israel, the prophet Zedekiah son of Chenaanah made horns of iron for himself and declared to Ahab and Jehoshaphat kings of Israel and Judah respectively: "With horns like these you shall gore the Arameans and make an end of them" (I Kings 22:11). To symbolise the forthcoming victory of Israel over the Arameans, Elisha told Jehoash king of Israel to shoot arrows in the direction of Syria (cf. II Kings 13:14-19).

⁶⁵ D.N. FREEDMAN, *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation*, p. 439.

⁶⁶ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 75.

⁶⁷ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 71.

⁶⁸ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 71.

There were also symbolic actions in Isaiah and Hosea of the 8th century. The short chapter of Isa. 20 is about how the prophet went naked and barefoot, without a loin cloth and sandals by the order of YHWH: “Go and undo the sackcloth round your waist and take the sandals off your feet” (v. 2). The next verse gives the significance of this symbolic act, explained by YHWH himself: “As my servant Isaiah has been walking about, naked and barefoot for the last three years – a sign and portent for Egypt and Cush – so will the king of Assyria lead away captives from Egypt and exiles from Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot, their buttocks bared, to the shame of Egypt. You will be frightened and ashamed about Cush in which you trusted, and about Egypt of which you boasted” (v. 3-5). Even the naming of his children by Isaiah is symbolical⁶⁹. The names Shear-jashub, “a remnant shall return” (Isa. 7:3) and Maher-shalalhashbaz, “spoil hastens, booty hurries” (8:1), refer to events in the future, and Immanuel, “God with us” (8:8, 10), symbolises the divine presence among his people.

The marriage of Hosea to Gomer is seen as a symbolic way of enacting the relationship of Israel to YHWH. Much has been written concerning the precise interpretation of this symbolic marriage⁷⁰, but Thompson sees the main thrust of the message as clear⁷¹: Hosea the faithful husband symbolises YHWH, and Gomer the unfaithful wife symbolises Israel⁷². Hosea equally named his children symbolically of the judgement of YHWH on Israel: Jezreel means “God sows”, showing that YHWH would soon demand from the house of Jehu “the blood of Jezreel” and the massacre of the royal family recorded in II Kings 9-10; Lo Ruhamah means “she who is unpitied”, symbolising that YHWH would have no pity on the house of Israel, while Lo ammi means “not my people” symbolising YHWH’s rejection of his people.

⁶⁹ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 71.

⁷⁰ H.H. ROWLEY, *The Marriage of Hosea*, in *BJRL* 39 (1956), p. 200-233; Cf. also J. LINDBLOM, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, Oxford, 1962, p. 165-169; A. WÉNIN, *Osée et Gomer, parabole de la fidélité de Dieu (Os 1-3)* (Connaître la Bible 9), Brussels, 1998.

⁷¹ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 72.

⁷² THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 73; J. LINDBLOM, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*.

Ezekiel is commanded to take a brick and lay it in front of himself, scratching on it a city, Jerusalem. He is then to besiege it, trench round it and build earthworks, pitch camps and bring up battering rams all round. He is to take an iron pan and place it as if it were an iron wall between him and the city. Further he is commanded to lie on his side like one paralysed for a long period to symbolise the guilt of Israel and her punishment (cf. 4:4-8). To symbolise the lack of provisions in Jerusalem during the siege⁷³, Ezekiel has again to take small quantities of bread and water: “As regards this food you are to measure out a daily portion of twenty shekels and make it last the whole day. And you are to drink water sparingly; your drink is to be the sixth of a hin and to last the whole day” (4:9-12). Life in exile is symbolised by Ezekiel’s eating of unclean food: he is to take his food in the shape of a barley cake baked where he could be seen, over human dung. And he would say, “YHWH, the God of Israel says this, this is the way Israelites will have to eat their defiled food, wherever I disperse them among the nations” (4:13-14).

There is enough evidence that Jeremiah was in this long tradition, which continued even after him⁷⁴. In fact, the text of Jeremiah has been described as a complex tapestry of metaphorical images interwoven with narrative seams, with the figure of the prophet providing the recurrent theme⁷⁵. To Pashhur the priest, Jeremiah gave the symbolic name *מְנוּרָה מִכָּבֵיב* (terror on every side) and accompanied this symbolic naming by a verbal forecast of the disaster that would befall Pashhur, his friends and his people in Jer. 20:3. Jeremiah’s symbolic celibacy was followed by a verbal explanation (cf. 16:1-3)⁷⁶. Interdiction to marry was followed by the prohibition to participate in the ordinary

⁷³ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 72.

⁷⁴ THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 75.

⁷⁵ W.R. DOMERIS, *When Metaphor Becomes Myth: A Socio-Linguistic Reading of Jeremiah*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 244-262, see p. 256.

⁷⁶ “The word of YHWH was addressed to me as follows: ‘you must not take a wife or have son or daughter in this place. For YHWH says this regarding the sons and daughters to be born in this place, about the mothers who give birth to them, and about the fathers who beget them in this land: they will die of deadly diseases, unlamented and unburied; they will be like dung spread on the ground; they will meet their end by sword and famine, and their corpses will be food for the birds of heaven and the beasts of earth’.”

festivities of life, eating and drinking to show the calamity that lay in the future, for “before your eyes and in your own days, I will silence the shouts of rejoicing and mirth, and the voices of bridegroom and bride” (16:8-9). In the same direction of the calamity that faces the people, one can mention the symbol of the jug of Jeremiah in 19:10-11: the prophet is to buy an earthenware jug, take some of the elders of the people and some priests with him to the Potsherd Gate, where he would break the bottle by smashing it before their eyes saying: “YHWH Sabaoth says this: I am going to break this people and this city just as one breaks a potter’s pot, irreparably”.

The two central chapters of our block under study (Jer. 27-28) narrate how Jeremiah, by the order of YHWH, made a yoke and carried it on his own neck and proclaimed that Judah and the other nations must have to bring their necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon if they hoped to survive. Hananiah the prophet takes the yoke from Jeremiah’s neck and breaks it, saying that thus will YHWH remove and break the yoke of Babylon from the shoulder of the nations, and part of the implications of the story is that in the past, occasions have also arisen for such messages and symbolic shalom messages.

Without endless enumeration, one can cite the incident with the Rechabites (cf. Jer. 35), the purchase of the land (cf. Jer. 32), the incident in the potter’s house (cf. Jer. 18), the burying of the large stones at the entrance to the government building in Tahpanhes (cf. Jer. 43:8-13), the story of the two basket of figs (cf. Jer. 24), etc.

Conclusion

The crux of this short Chapter is a demonstration that the book of Jeremiah is not an isolated island in the world of the prophetic books, but that it shares much in common with the rest of the corpus. In the dialogue with Hananiah, Jeremiah makes reference to the vision of the prophets before both of them (cf. 28:8). This is, in the position of our work, a very important point in the reading of prophetic books. It is true that the prophetic books cannot be used as data in the positivistic sense for reconstructing the world of the prophets as it actually was (cf. Chapter One of this Part), “the literary world

of the prophetic books themselves are important for knowing about the prophetic past”⁷⁷. It is in this literary world that we are inclined to find a tradition, a unity; unity however not in the sense of “complete unity” as criticised by David Carr who argued that “excessive confidence in the existence of [...] complete unity in biblical texts – and our need to find it – can blind us to the unresolved, rich plurality built into texts”⁷⁸. Rather, unity refers to the organisational principle arising in the collecting, cataloguing and archiving of material evident in the prophetic books⁷⁹. In this sense, one prophetic book could be read and understood in the context of another prophetic book. So is the book Jeremiah with the other prophetic books. The choice of these two themes in this Chapter; covenant and the use of symbols, is not by hazard. On the one hand, in Chapter One of this Part, one of the major arguments to corroborate the theological status of the prophetic books was that, following the history of the People of God as the narrators of the Bible present it to us, the exodus event and the consequent covenant with YHWH was the foundational event of the history of the People, and there was, at a point in time, when it was necessary to re-appropriate once more the alternative vision of the covenant. And behold this theme is very much common to the prophets. On the other hand, the block of chapters of Jeremiah we have chosen in this study, exemplifies the significance of the yoke as the symbol through which the narrator relays the truth or the falsity of the different prophetic figures involved in the drama. What remains then is to investigate closely into the problematic evident particularly in this block, especially from the angle of the theological discussion of true versus false prophecy.

⁷⁷ E. CONRAD, *Reading the Latter Prophets: Towards a New Canonical Criticism* (JSOTS 376), London, 2003, p. 4.

⁷⁸ D. CARR, *Reaching for Unity in Isaiah*, in *JSOT* 57 (1993), p. 61-80, see p. 80.

⁷⁹ E. CONRAD, *Reading the Latter Prophets*, p. 62.

CHAPTER THREE

TRUE VERSUS FALSE PROPHECY IN A THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Introduction

Jer. 26-29, as a literary block highlights the theological problem of true and false prophecy. It has to be noted that this is a major theological issue not only in the prophetic books, but also in the Hebrew Bible as a whole. Who has the truth? Where is the truth? Which spirit is operating in a given prophetic individual? There are many episodes in the Hebrew Bible where it is a question of discerning and deciding the veracity of a prophetic figure, or even a counter claim by a prophetic personality that YHWH has equally spoken to him or her and not only to the other. Already in the book of Numbers, Aaron and Miriam criticise Moses for taking up a Cushite woman, demanding whether it is only to Moses that YHWH could speak to. Had he not also spoken through them (cf. Num. 12:1-2)? The old prophet had to confront the man of God with the argument: "I also am a prophet like you and an angel has told me, by the order of YHWH: 'bring him into your house that he may eat and drink'" (I Kings 13:18). Elijah's confrontation with the hundreds of the prophets of Baal (cf. I Kings 18) attest the interest of the writers of the Hebrew Bible in putting in scene confrontations based on the theme of prophetic authenticity. But in fact, nowhere again in the Hebrew Bible is the confrontation so dramatised as that between Hananiah and Jeremiah. This is exactly why we left out treating the question of true and false prophecy while we discussed the insertion of Jeremiah in the prophetic theological tradition.

In this final Chapter then, we discuss some of the theological questions involved in this regard in the Hebrew Bible, questions like the problem of criteria for true and false prophecy; dangers facing prophetic figures that could cause them warp from verity to falsity, the theological implications one can draw from the confrontation of Jeremiah with false prophecy in Jer. 26-29, the essence of the novelty which the narrative approach brings to this theological discussion, and end the Chapter with a reference to the theological/religious context of Nigeria.

3.1 THE PROBLEM OF CRITERIA FOR PROPHETIC AUTHENTICITY

3.1.1 The Problem

Throughout the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible)¹, especially with regard to texts dealing with prophetic authenticity, many proposals are given with regard to the marks of authentic prophecy. But it is clear that there are no absolute criteria, valid for all times for such a determination. Certainly each of the narratives has one or more criteria to exemplify, but eventually in the same or in different circumstances, each criterion is called to question and therefore the relativity of that particular criterion becomes underlined. Both the Old and the New Testament attest to the fact that a human subject could believe falsely, consciously or unconsciously, to be imbued with the prophetic charism without being so in actual fact. Bovati writes:

The history of Israel exhibits a paradox: on the one hand, there is a certitude about the active presence of YHWH who has promised to raise prophets and as such to lead [...] all members of the people in the way of holiness; and on the other hand, there is total incertitude when it comes to determining whom to trust. It is clear that it is not so much a question of sound faith, that is, a question of accepting the path of obedience, but more of discernment, which is part and parcel even of the readiness to listen. The risk of giving credit to falsity, the danger of erring by following the words of one who is mistaken, motivates in fact, a general suspicion towards the prophets².

¹ As has already been hinted, the Hebrew Bible has no separate word for "false prophet". In ten places, the attack by one prophet upon another was so severe that the Septuagint used the word ψευδοπροφήτης to translate נִבִּי; cf. the reference to the future removal of every prophet and unclean spirit in Zech. 13:2; the reference to the bad conduct of prophets and accusation of the prophets and priests of healing Israel's wound lightly, proclaiming peace when there is none, Jer. 6:13-14; the threat to the priests and prophets with death, Jer. 26:7, 8, 11, 16; the rebuke of the prophets, diviners, dreamers, soothsayers, and sorcerers who advise the exiled not to bring their neck under the yoke of their conquerors, Jer. 27:9; the identification of Jeremiah's opponent, Jer. 28:1; the advice to the people not to heed the deceit and dreams of their prophets and diviners who prophesy in YHWH's name without however being sent, Jer. 29:1, 8.

² P. BOVATI, *Alla ricerca del profeta II: Criteri per discernere i veri profeti*, in *Rivista del Clero* 67 (1986), p. 179 (translation mine).

Apart from the argument from tradition and canonical considerations, how does one recognise a true prophet and how does one expose the impostor? The question is not relevant only to the onlookers or the audiences of the prophet. Even the prophets themselves have often the inner struggles within themselves as to their authenticity. Crenshaw calls it “kicking at the pricks”³, and the reasons for this are numerous, ranging from the failure of YHWH to be pinned down to his own word, to the often self interest of the man, the prophet, who could consider his personal reputation and vindication to be more important than the inscrutable purposes of his Master and even more important than the lives of the whole populace. Such an inner struggle leads the prophet to make frequent examination of conscience, or at least to doubt the authenticity of the voice he heard. Even if the prophet arrives eventually at an answer in his own favour, he is not yet spared the inner doubts forced upon him by an unbelieving audience and especially by a God who refused to be a slave even to his own word⁴. Put in the language of the New Testament, how then can the spirit be tested to see if it comes from God? (cf. I John 4:1).

3.1.2 The Relativity of Criteria: A Sample Case (I Kings 13)

Take for example I Kings 13. This may help clarify the questions and problems involved in establishing criteria. A man of God confronted Jeroboam and condemned his erection of an altar at Bethel. Attempting to seize the man of God, the hand of the king with which he used to lay hold of him dried up and he could not withdraw it again. He begged the man of God to appease YHWH his God to save his hand (v. 6). The man of God did so. The king invited him to table. On the order of YHWH, the man of God declined the invitation, for YHWH has commanded: “You shall not eat or drink and you shall return by another route” (v. 9). On hearing this through his sons, an “old prophet” from Bethel ran to the man of God and invited him to table in his own house. The man of God insisted on his refusal based on the word he had from YHWH. The old prophet argued: “I also am a prophet like you and an angel has told me, by the order of YHWH: ‘bring him into your house that he may eat and drink’” (v. 18). But that was a complete lie. However, this was

³ J.L. CRENSHAW, *Prophetic Conflict*, p. 3.

⁴ J.L. CRENSHAW, *Prophetic Conflict*, p. 3.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

convincing to the man of God who acquiesced. At table, the true word of God came to the old prophet who had lied before, for the condemnation of the man of God. He prophesied: “Your corpse will never enter the tomb of your fathers” (v. 22). The man of God was killed on his way by a lion and the old prophet buried him in his own sepulchre at Bethel.

There is real difficulty in discerning the criteria for authenticity and in evaluating the two prophetic figures involved in this narrative. Even though there is difference in appellations of the two individuals by the narrator⁵ – unlike in the Jeremiah-Hananiah confrontation where the narrator calls the two personages ‘prophets’ and on equal number of occasions in the text – no far reaching conclusions can be drawn with regard to this. If it is a simple question of discernment, does it then mean that the man of God could not discern that the man from Bethel was an impostor? In the narrative, he appears first as an authentic carrier of YHWH’s word (his prophecy and intercession for Jeroboam) but finally as one who receives divine punishment. From the logic of the narrative, it is plausible to think that the man of God could have believed in the present dispensation of prophecy, and so YHWH could have said something different from what he said in a different context before. If in Jer. 28, Hananiah is faulted partially because he sticks to the promise in the time of Isaiah without recognising that a present realistic analysis of faith may lead to a different diagnosis, if Hananiah is accused of simply parroting Isaiah, and Jeremiah admired for looking out for the path which YHWH indicates in the present⁶, what is the error of the man of God if he believed in the dynamism of the word of YHWH, meaning that his fellow prophet could have received a more recent word from

⁵ The figure from Bethel is called prophet (נְבִיא v. 11, 20, 25, 26) while that from Judah is termed man of God (אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים v. 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, etc.), but even the old prophet recognises his counterpart as ‘prophet’ (the old prophet said: “I, too, am a prophet נְבִיא like you” v. 18) and he calls him “my brother” while mourning him.

⁶ M. GILBERT, *Il a parlé par les prophètes: Thèmes et figures bibliques* (Connaître et croire 1), Namur, 1998, p. 175. Martin Buber says that Hananiah founded his hopes just in a theory enunciated a century ago in the time of Isaiah (Isa. 10:27), which he believes will be literally applicable in his own day, see M. BUBER, *Falsche Propheten*, in *Die Wandlung* (1947), p. 227-281. For a résumé of this, see L. RAMLOT, *Prophétisme*, in *DBS* 8 (1971), p. 1042.

YHWH? Worse still, the liar turned eventually to be the carrier of the authentic word of YHWH, which saw realisation. Is the prophet from Bethel both a liar and a true prophet of YHWH at the same time⁷?

Appeal to some other prophetic confrontations here will serve double role: enumerate certain major criteria exemplified respectively and at the same time disclose their insufficiency as absolute criteria for prophetic authenticity. The confrontation of Micaiah with the other prophets (cf. I Kings 22) focuses on the major criteria of being sent by YHWH, the moral life of the prophet and at the same time the criterion of accomplishment. The four hundred prophets had already encouraged the king to go to war, assuring him that YHWH will deliver Ramoth Gilead into his hands. By some dint of circumstances, Jehoshaphat suggested that they consult some other prophets of YHWH. Reluctantly, the king agreed to summon Micaiah even though he lacks confidence in him since Micaiah “never prophesies anything good about me but only evil” (v. 8). Eventually that was the case. Not only that Micaiah prophesied that he saw “all Israel dispersed like sheep without shepherd on the mountain” (v. 17), he explained how it happened that falsity was given to the king: YHWH sits on his throne and demanded for who will deceive Ahab to confront Ramoth Gilead and die (v. 19-20). The spirit came forth and promised to send a false spirit into the mouth of all his (Ahab’s) prophets (v. 22). YHWH agreed and allowed the spirit for this mission. This answer irritated one of the four hundred prophets who slapped Micaiah and said: “How come the Spirit of the Lord left me to talk to you?” The king, believing the multitude of prophets, boasted of coming back after the war to deal with Micaiah. The latter replied: “If you return sound and safe, that means that YHWH has not spoken through my mouth” (v. 28). The king died and the word of the prophet was confirmed.

3.1.2.1 “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains ...”.

A major criterion is the source of the commission of the prophet. “And YHWH said to me: ‘The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I have not sent them, I gave them no orders, I never spoke to them. Delusive visions, hollow predictions, daydreams of their

⁷ M. GILBERT, *Il a parlé pas les prophètes*, p. 172.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

own, that is what they prophesy to you” (Jer. 14:14; 23:25-28). In another context, Jeremiah writes: “Do not listen to the prophets who prophesy to you, they are deceiving you and give you the vision of their imaginations, that which they say does not come from the mouth of YHWH” (Jer. 23:16), “because they are excluded from the council of YHWH” (Jer. 23:18). Sometimes, their source of inspiration and allegiance is attributed to Baal (cf. Jer. 2:8; 5:31; 23:13; 32:32-35; Deut. 13:1ff). Such condemnations of prophets not sent are also found in Ezekiel (cf. 13:6), where he writes that they pretend to have visions (cf. 12:6-7).

But a question still remains: if it is not by visions, dreams or by simple dints of inspiration that YHWH communicates his words to those he sends, how does one evaluate the status of the visions of Amos, Jeremiah or Zechariah (cf. Amos 7-8; Jer. 1:11-14; Nah. 1:1; Zech. 1-6), or to evaluate Micah or Deutero-Isaiah who claims to speak and act under the influence of the possession of God (cf. Mic. 3:8; Isa. 61:1). Even if one could appeal to the records of the prophetic vocation, where the mission and divine mandate among some of the prophets are clearly stated so as to authenticate their vocation from YHWH, some other prophets do not have such records, for example, Joel and Zephaniah. One can still further ask: is the personal and sure awareness of the possession of divine mandate a solid criterion to evaluate the prophet’s authenticity? It is true that for the recognised authentic prophets of the Hebrew Bible, the certitude of their mission is an indispensable argument. The Major Prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel – see the foundation of their prophetic mission in a personal vocation outside the legitimisation of any established institution, which could furnish a Procrustean bed for measuring its conformity. Outside Moses who is prophet par excellence because YHWH spoke to him face to face (cf. Deut. 34:10), no other prophet is described in that wise. In the Jeremiah-Hananiah confrontation, Jeremiah could only resolve his dilemma basing on his personal conviction of having received a new revelation from YHWH. Micaiah had to describe a private revelation of a heavenly court where he saw ... (cf. I Kings 22:17). In that wise, this criterion becomes too personal and subjective. Prophets could equally feel personally sent without in fact being so and this subjectivity is hidden from the other. The man of God from Judah could not discern, for example, that the old prophet from Bethel

was lying (cf. I Kings 13). This could also be the case with Jeremiah and Hananiah in the first instance.

Talking of the prophet's consciousness and conviction of being commissioned by YHWH is talking of a special relationship between the latter and the former. In the words of Gilbert, "c'est la relation entre Yahvé et son prophète qui doit justifier aux yeux de ce dernier sa mission. Mais cette relation n'est guère analysable ni par les contemporains du prophète ni par nous qui cherchons à recourir aux méthodes scientifiques"⁸. This relationship is seen often from the point of view of the readiness or ability of the prophet to intercede before YHWH on behalf of the people. In Jer. 27, Jeremiah enjoins the priests and all the people not to listen to the prophets who advise them against serving their oppressors, because if they were prophets, if they had the word of YHWH in them, they would have interceded YHWH (Jer. 27:18)⁹. Ezekiel challenged the false prophets: "You have never ventured into the breach; you have never bothered to fortify the house of Israel, to hold fast in battle on the day of YHWH" (Eze. 13:5).

3.1.2.2 "If a prophet invites Israel to follow other gods..."

Related with the certainty of being sent is the fact of speaking what is in consonance with the will of YHWH. Deut. 13:2-6 proposes another criterion for the discernment among prophets; the question of speaking in the name of YHWH or of other gods: "If a prophet invites Israel to follow other gods other than YHWH, do not listen to the prophet or to the vision of the visionary, even if he justifies his mission by a prodigious act... The prophet should be put to death". It is probably on the basis of this legislation that Elijah killed the four hundred prophets of Baal as narrated in I Kings 18:20-40. This seems to be a very certain criterion. If a prophet leads the people astray or invites Israel to forget her

⁸ M. GILBERT, *Il a parlé par les prophètes*, p. 179.

⁹ Tradition sees Jeremiah as an intercessor of the people. "This is a man who loves his brothers and prays much for the people and the Holy City, Jeremiah, the prophet of God" (II Macc. 15:4; see Jer. 37:3). And in the book of Jeremiah, three times, the prophet is interdicted to intercede any longer for the people (cf. Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). In many other cases, intercession appears equally as a veritable mark of a good prophet, for example Samuel (1 Sam. 7:5-9), Elijah (I Kings 17:20-22), Elisha (II Kings 4:23), Amos (Amos 7:2), Isaiah (II Kings 19:1-4; Isa. 37:1-4), Ezekiel (Eze. 9:8; 11:13).

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

YHWH, how then can he be a true prophet (cf. Deut. 18:20; Jer. 2:8; 23:13)? But even in an issue apparently clear and sure like this, there are still nuances that reduce the sharpness of the intuition, as in some confrontations, the criterion is also put to question. When Hananiah speaks in Jer. 28, there is no indication that he invites the people to abandon YHWH, even though he is accused by Jeremiah of speaking rebellion against him. In such a case how can the discernment be carried; from the contents of the speech or from the personal evaluation of another prophet? The reader of the passage can only discern the truth or falsity of Hananiah's message from the moment YHWH intervenes and not at the moment of listening to Hananiah. Moreover, Isa. 6:9-10 and 7:10-12 show that the prophet is sent to make the people stiff necked so that they do not repent, thereby causing in Ahaz the lack of faith that leads him to demand for a sign from God.

3.1.2.3 Sycophants face to face with the fearless: the moral life of the prophet

The episode of Micaiah and the prophets narrated above has much similarity with the Hananiah-Jeremiah episode in Jer. 28 with regard to criteria. Contrary to the sweet and hopeful message of the four hundred prophets, Micaiah delivered woes to the king, just as Jeremiah appealed to the past prophets whose prophecies were those of woes, famine and pestilence. Each of the confrontations has the appeal to fulfilment and in each case, there is also the realisation of the respective prophecies and the death of the prophet's opponent. In such a way, YHWH becomes the arbiter and the authentic prophet is in no doubt clear. The narrator portrays a scene of two types of characters: in the first place a group of four hundred sycophants, who, feeling comfortable to appear in good light before the king, seek to please him (see especially I Kings 22:10-12, 24), and flatter the powerful by words which satisfy his ego¹⁰; and pitched against these, a prophet presented as authentic. The latter is free and stands firmly opposed to the group, leading to his denunciation of the former and risking his favour. Here and there, the question of the comportment and the life style of the prophet is evoked. Jeremiah writes: "But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: adultery, persistent lying, such abetting of the wicked that no one renounces his wickedness. To me they are all like Sodom and its inhabitants are like Gomorrah" (Jer. 23:14). In some other occasions, the

¹⁰ A. WÉNIN, *Méfiez-vous des faux prophètes*, in *Etudes* (2004), p. 351-360, see p. 353.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

prophets are denounced as drunkards (cf. Isa. 28:7; Mic. 2:11), as those who search after their own gain, accused of prophesying for money and coining the message according to reward (cf. Eze. 13:19; Mic. 3:5ff, 11), adulterers (cf. Jer. 6:13-15; 29:23), as allies to the wicked (cf. Jer. 23:14). This moral criterion received the blessing of Jesus in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 7:16).

The complication in this criterion is that it can also implicate some of the prophets recognised in biblical tradition as true prophets as some of their options in some isolated cases are equally questionable. Jeremiah wished the death and destruction of his enemies (cf. Jer 17:18¹¹; 18:21-22¹²). Jeremiah accuses the false prophets of stealing oracles from other prophets, but this overlooks the obvious dependence of his own message on the other prophets like Hosea and Micah¹³. The passages common to the prophets, says Crenshaw, can only be explained as implying borrowing from one another or all from one common source¹⁴. Hosea is married to an adulterous prostitute (cf. Hos. 1:2-3; 3:1)¹⁵. Elijah cursed forty-two children to death simply because they insulted him (cf. II Kings 2:23-24) and Isaiah walked naked for three years in the streets of Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 20:2)¹⁶. However, despite the relativity of the criterion of the moral life of the prophets, it is important to state that prophets are demanded a certain level of conduct and that the

¹¹ "Let my persecutors be confounded, not me, let them, not me, be terrified. On them bring the day of disaster, destroy them, and destroy them twice over".

¹² "So, hand their sons over to famine, abandon them to the edge of the sword. Let their wives become childless and widowed. Let their husbands die of plague, their young men be cut down by the sword in battle".

¹³ For a detailed study of Jeremiah's dependence on other prophets, see HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 46-56.

¹⁴ J.L. CRENSHAW, *Prophetic Conflict*, p. 59.

¹⁵ The marriage of Hosea has received numerous interpretations and hypotheses with the allegorical interpretation, which sees the marriage as a symbolic action as the major trend. See A. WÉNIN, *Osée et Gomer, parabole de la fidélité de Dieu (Os 1-3)*. However, von Rad is of the opinion that the symbolic action reveals nothing if anything at all about the prophet's domestic situation, G. VON RAD, *Old Testament Theology II*, p. 138.

¹⁶ For detailed treatment of the insufficiency of this criterion, see J.L. CRENSHAW, *Prophetic Conflict*, p. 56-60.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

most serious charge against the false prophets was mainly their conspiracy of silence¹⁷, that is, the failure to speak out in condemnation of evil.

3.1.2.4 “Prophets ... before me and before you prophesied woes...”

The other criteria proposed by Jeremiah are equally problematic. According to Jeremiah (Jer. 28:8-9), the prophets of the past announced generally woes, and if any prophet would announce peace, he is to be believed if his word came true. “These prophets have led my people astray and said ‘Peace’ when there is no peace” (Eze. 13:10). “For, from the least to the greatest, they are all greedy for gain; the prophet no less than the priest; all of them practise fraud. Without concern they dress my people’s wound, saying: ‘Peace! Peace!’ whereas there is no peace” (Jer. 6:13-14; 8:10). Even though we noted already in our Part Two Chapter Four the logic connecting the first two criteria (prophecy of doom and fulfillment) mentioned by Jeremiah in 28:8-9 —since doom prophecy is the general tendency, any exception to this must be backed by realisation – meaning that Jeremiah wished to limit the latter criterion to the prophecies of peace, these criteria are not always vindicated by the facts of history. True that the prophets often or mostly prophesied woes and doom for the people, there are considerable exceptions. Nathan in II Sam. 7 announced neither ruin nor punishment to David but divine faithfulness in his election. Nahum prophesied ruin for Nineveh and salvation for Judah (cf. Nah. 1:9-10, 12-13; 2:1-3). At the same time, the oracle of Immanuel in Isa. 7:14 is not a doom oracle. Not only that some oracles needed not be oracles of doom, even some doom oracles were never historically fulfilled.

3.1.2.5 “If the word of the prophet comes to realisation...”

The question of accomplishment is also the criterion found in Deut. 18:21-22. The true prophet becomes one whose words and predictions find eventual fulfillment. “Any prophet whose words were not so confirmed encountered a good deal of skepticism from the public (cf. Isa. 5:19; Jer. 17:15)”¹⁸, “and the ability to predict imminent events accurately was the means by which the authority of all the prophets’ words was

¹⁷ J.L. CRENSHAW, *Prophetic Conflict*, p. 60.

¹⁸ R.P. CARROLL, *When Prophecy Failed*, p. 35.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

confirmed”¹⁹, as Saul surely had to meet the people on his way according to the words of Samuel (cf. I Sam. 10:2-10). Samuel was in fact the first personality that demonstrated the characteristics generally associated with Israel’s prophets and the criterion of fulfilment was basic to his recognition as prophet. While serving the old priest Eli, he received vision about the divine punishment that would befall the house of Eli because of the iniquities of the latter’s sons (cf. I Sam. 3:1-14). His visions were realised and he was found to be “an accredited prophet of YHWH” because “none of his words fell to the ground” (I Sam. 3:19-21). He was honoured as prophet because “whatever he says always comes true” (I Sam. 9:6). The altar of Bethel burst and split into pieces as the man of God announced it (I Kings 13:2-3), and Hananiah died following the prediction by Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 28:15-17). Nathan foretold the death of the son born of the adultery of David and it happened despite the pleading of the latter with YHWH (cf. II Sam. 12:14-18); Ahijah the prophet foretold the overthrow of the house of Jeroboam (cf. I Kings 14:6-18). Elisha predicted a famine that would last for seven years (cf. II Kings 8:1-3) and the harm that Hazael would bring upon Israel if he became king (cf. II Kings 8:11-12). But not only that many oracles did not realise²⁰, the criteria of accomplishment is all the more problematic since they refer often to an indefinite time in the future, even

¹⁹ R.E. OTTO, *The Prophets and their Perspective*, in *CBQ* 63 (2001), p. 219-240, see p. 222.

²⁰ A. KUENEN, J. MUIR & A. MILROY, *The Prophets and Prophecy in Israel: An Historical and Critical Enquiry*, London, 1969, has made a list of prophetic predictions that did not find fulfillment. Most evident are the Zion oracles in Isaiah, the prediction that Damascus would become a heap of ruins (cf. Isa. 17:1ff.), that Israel and Syria would be despoiled before the child, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, learns how to say “my father”, “my mother” (cf. Isa. 8:4). Other classical examples are the unrealised prophetic promises in Second Isaiah, for example, Cyrus did not worship YHWH and Babylon was not destroyed, neither did the desert blossom like a garden; the oracles in Jeremiah that Judah and Israel would reunite (3:15ff.), that Hophra of Egypt would be given into the land of his enemies (44:30) and that Judah would return to Palestine after seventy years (cf. Jer. 29:10). Judah did not receive the salvation promised by the mouth of Nahum. Ezekiel announced that God will bring Nebuchadnezzar upon Tyre to destroy it (cf. 29:17-20), which, not being realised after sixteen years, the prophet had to announce again that God had changed his plan; that it is Egypt instead of Tyre that would be given to Nebuchadnezzar (cf. 29:19-20). James Barr describes this phenomenon in Israelite prophecy in the following words: “Sometimes, when a prophecy fails to produce exact correspondence with reality, the prophet hardly bothers to apologise. He just produces another prophecy in its place”, see J. BARR, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 37.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

though some authors have sought to explain away this problematic by means of some hypothesis termed “prophetic perspective”²¹, nuanced in many other authors as “prophetic foreshortening”²², “prophetic compenetration”²³, the “prophet’s telescopic vision”²⁴, thereby suggesting a rather new or different conception of time in prophecy. And since prophecy is equally in many cases conditional, like the case of Jonah, the criterion does not absolutely apply. Moreover, such a criterion would refer simply to prophecies that announce future events and would be relevant only to the contemporaries of its realisation; that is, it can be effectively used only in retrospect²⁵. But prophecies dealing with announcement of the future are only a class of prophecies. Although prediction plays a very important part in prophetic utterance, “biblical prophecy has more to do with ‘forth telling’ than ‘foretelling’”²⁶ and prophecy has, as its principal goal, to

²¹ L. BERKOFF, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, Grand Rapids, 1950. Berkoff minimises the significance of the element of time and subjugates it to his ‘prophetic perspective’ with which insight the prophets could articulate many events into a split temporal unit, rendering temporal significance to an associate level: “The element of time is a rather negligible quantity in the prophets. While designations of time are not altogether wanting, their number is exceptionally small. The prophets compressed great events into a brief space of time, brought momentous movements close together in a temporal sense, and took them in at a single glance [...]. They looked upon the future as the traveller does upon a mountain range in the distance. He fancies that one mountain-top rises up right behind the other, when in reality they are miles apart” (p. 150).

²² L.C. ALLEN, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT), Grand Rapids, 1976, p. 350.

²³ C. STUHLMUELLER, *The Prophets and the Word of God*, Notre Dame, 1964, p. 162.

²⁴ W.W. KLEIN, C.L. BLOOMBERG & R.L. HUBBARD, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Dallas, 1993, p. 304.

²⁵ But the whole idea of prophetic perspective does not sound very convincing for obvious reasons. It shifts the goalpost while the game is still on, in that how could it be said that a prophet was indifferent to the time element when he spoke about the exigencies of his own time and when the validation of his call depends to a large extent on the accomplishment of his predictions in the time in question (cf. Deut. 18:22)? Again, if prophets received revelations to discern the will of God, which to other people seemed to be just natural course of events, how do we evaluate the clarity of this vision if the prophets could not enable the people to distinguish between far and future events?

²⁶ R.E. OTTO, *The Prophets and their Perspective*, p. 219.

direct people in their true relation to YHWH, having therefore a more general vision of history²⁷ and not simply a forecast of the future²⁸.

3.1.2.6 “Beware of false prophets... By their fruits...”: Complement from the New Testament

This statement of Matthew’s Gospel put in the mouth of the hero of the Gospels shows that the problem in the Old Testament of the discernment between true and false prophecy also rears its head in the New Testament. The 1973 Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature on “Early Christian Prophecy” defined New Testament prophecy thus: “The early Christian prophet was an immediately-inspired spokesperson for God, the risen Jesus, or the Spirit who received intelligible oracles that he or she felt impelled to deliver to the Christian community or, representing the community, to the general public”²⁹. It is good to note that the interest of Judaism in prophetism did not come to an end with the coming of Jesus. After all, Jesus was considered himself also as “one of the prophets of the Old Testament come back to life” (cf. Matt. 16:14; Mark 8:28; Luke 9:8). The Apostles were also considered as prophets and it is necessary to remark the role which prophetism played within the early Christian communities³⁰. Imbued with prophetic charisma, these Christians form a particular group in the early Church where they exercise a function, which according to Paul, is placed immediately after that of the Apostles, and before the *didaskales* (cf. I Cor. 12:28). Just like the Israelite communities of the Old Testament, the Christian communities had also to wrestle with ambiguities

²⁷ M. GILBERT, *Il a parlé par les prophètes*, p. 177.

²⁸ Crenshaw enumerates further problems connected with this criterion. According to him, the standard has little value when one recognises a) the general nature of many prophetic words, b) the conditional aspect of prophecy, and c) the fact that this criterion deals only with the narrowly predictive words of prophecy, cf. J.L. CRENSHAW, *Prophetic Conflict*, p. 50; E. OSSWALD, *Falsche Prophetie im Alten Testament*, p. 23-26.

²⁹ Cited in M.E. BORING, *Prophecy, Early Christian*, in *ABD* 5 (1992), p. 495-502, see p. 496.

³⁰ See E. COTHENET, *Prophétisme dans le Nouveau Testament*, in *DBS* 8 (1971), p. 1222-1237; ID., *Les prophètes chrétiens dans l’Evangile selon saint Matthieu*, in M. DIDIER (ed.), *L’Evangile selon Mathieu, Rédaction et théologie* (BETL 29), Gembloux, 1972.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

connected with the prophetic phenomenon and also were obliged to establish certain criteria for discernment.

From the context of the words of Jesus in the Gospel, it is understandable that within the community to which Matthew writes, there were individuals who paraded themselves like prophets while they were not so in actual fact. And so Jesus refers to this necessary discernment and draws attention of his audience to this distinction. They camouflage in the toga of sheep, while in real fact they are rapacious wolves.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15).

Some other passages in the Gospel attest to this tension in the community. Ready to mind are: “Because many will come using my name and saying, ‘I am the Christ’, and they will deceive many” (Matt. 24:5); “Many false prophets will arise; they will deceive many (Matt. 24:11); “If anyone says to you then, ‘Look, here is the Christ’, or ‘Over here’, do not believe it; for false Christs and false prophets will arise and provide great signs and portents, enough to deceive even the elect, if that were possible” (Matt. 24:23-24). In his farewell speech at Miletus, Paul had to warn the Christian community to beware of some people who may come to cause trouble and division in the community after his departure (cf. Acts 20:29-31)³¹. Thus, there is the need for discernment. With regard to this, Jesus formulates a general principle, which seems to be followed in different adaptations in various New Testament writings. With the image of fruit, Jesus gives a principle: a good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a rotten tree cannot bear good fruit (cf. Matt. 7:18), a principle in a passage with a chiasmic structure. This principle is flanked immediately by

³¹ Many other instances in the New Testament are clear and attest to this tension in the Christian community. The second letter of Peter shows the opposition between the “authentic prophetic word that we proclaim” and the “false doctors, who like the false prophets of the Old Testament, cause harm in the Christian community” (II Pet. 2:1). These false doctors are reproached first and foremost for “denying the Master who redeemed them” (II Pet. 2:1; Jude 4); they introduce sects that are divisive to the community (cf. II Pet. 2:1) and promote licentiousness (cf. II Pet. 2:19). But these points, taken to be criteria for detecting false prophets are all already mentioned in the Old Testament.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

the emphasis that good trees bear good fruits (C and C'), then by the opposition between picking and cutting/throwing of fruits (B and B'), and finally at extremes by a more concrete one: by their fruits, you shall know them (A and A') (cf. Matt. 7:16-20).

- A ***By their fruits you shall know them*** (v. 16a).
- B Do people **pick** grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (v. 16b).
- C *Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit* (v. 17).
- D. A GOOD TREE CANNOT BEAR BAD FRUIT, NOR CAN A ROTTEN TREE BEAR GOOD FRUIT (v. 18).
- C' *Every tree that does not bear good fruit* (v. 19a).
- B' will be **cut** down and **thrown** into the fire (v. 19b).
- A' ***So by their fruits you shall know them*** (v. 20).

The subsequent verses attempt just to pin down this theoretical principle. Unlike in the Old Testament where it was either a question of accomplishment, the prophecy of woes, the moral conduct of the particular prophet, etc., "the fruits" for Jesus is something more general, even more than the general comportment of the prophet. The next verse begins concretising this general principle, for true disciples would be those who do the will of the Father. Jesus would reject the self-acclaimed prophets who may have taught in his name, because they bore bad fruits; he does not know them because they committed iniquity. That means, prophecy should be at the service of the whole Gospel message and all that Jesus stands for.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. When the day comes many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?' Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from me, all evil doers!" (Matt. 7:21-23).

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

Paul connected being a true prophet, that is, this capacity of bearing good fruits, to the ecclesial context and precisely, to the edification of the community (cf. I Cor. 14:3-4, Eph. 4:11-12). The prophetic ministry, which for Paul is quite different from speaking in tongues, is exercised within the community united together³² (cf. Acts 13:1-3; I Cor. 14). It is necessary to note however that for Paul, each spiritual gift has as goal the contribution, along with other spiritual gifts, to the building and edification of “the one body”, the community which has Christ as its head (cf. I Cor. 12). Repeating the principle of Christ in another language altogether, Paul underlines charity as the highest charisma and as superior to other spiritual gifts, prophecy inclusive: “If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries... but I have no charity, I am nothing” (I Cor. 13:2).

John in his stead introduces a very interesting element in his discussion on the issue. Unlike Paul who seems to understand the exercise of prophetic discernment to be the reserve of few Christians gifted and called to that ministry (cf. I Cor. 12:10), John, like Christ, sees it as something incumbent on every individual Christian. Every Christian should test the spirits properly to discern which comes from God and which comes from the anti-Christ, which in John’s writing is variously tagged ‘the spirit of error’ as opposed to ‘the Spirit of truth’ (cf. I John 4:2-3, 6). “My dear friends, not every spirit is to be trusted, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets are at large in the world” (I John 4:1).

If one could therefore try to articulate the image of a true prophet in the understanding of the New Testament, these words of Gilbert seem good enough even though the research and the question remains open. Defining the prophet of the New Covenant, he writes:

“remplis de l’Esprit de la vérité, il a charge de faire découvrir le mystère du Christ Jesus, Dieu et homme, mystère caché dans l’Ancien Testament et dont tous et chacun ont à vivre aujourd’hui ; pratiquant dans sa vie personnelle, quoi qu’il lui en coûte, ce qu’il proclame à ses frères, le prophète authentique ne peut ‘diviser

³² M. GILBERT, *Il a parlé par les prophètes*, p. 185.

Jésus', édulcorer le dépôt de la foi reçue des apôtres, confié à leur garde ; il ne peut diviser l'Eglise, mais il l'édifie, la console et l'exhorte"³³.

3.2 TRUE VERSUS FALSE PROPHECY IN JER. 26-29 AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

3.2.1 Narratology Meets Theology

In the General Introduction we made our point of view clear that it is possible to construct a theological edifice from the biblical text treated as narratives and read from the narrative point of view. The conviction is that insistence on the narrative and artistic aspects of a discourse "stresses the rift between the narrative and the events to which it may refer"³⁴. Robert Alter is of the opinion that narratology focuses attention to textual worlds, which are created by the "particularizing imagination" of the Old Testament writer, and these textual worlds become "crucial subject for theological reflection in their own right"³⁵. And what more, the aspect of narratology about character and characterisation is an area that can open up fruitful perspectives to theological reflections. In this section, we shall see in more specific terms the import of the narrative reading of these chapters to the theological discussion on true and false prophecy. The very first part will be a consideration purely from the world of the text (following the presentation in the different chapters), while the second, the implications and the articulation of the contact points where our discussion meets with theological discourse in global terms.

The setting of Jer. 26, especially when seen from its departure from that of 7:1-8:3, gives it the specific force of addressing generations of readers. This is seen especially with the mention of the elders' speech (see v. 17-19) and their interpretation of Mic. 3:2; this phenomenon in the text shows that the way the elders speech makes an application of an old prophetic tradition parallels how Jer. 26 could also apply to its future and today's

³³ M. GILBERT, *Il a parlé par les prophètes*, p. 189.

³⁴ A. BERLIN, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Bible and Literature Series 9), Sheffield, 1983, p. 13-14.

³⁵ M.J. OOSTHUIZEN, *The Narratological Approach as a Means of Understanding the Old Testament*, in *OTE 7* (1994), p. 84-91, see p. 86.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

readers. The reader already places himself in the position of the prophet's audience from the beginning of the narrative. In calling for a change of heart, the content of v. 3-5 is presented to the reader in the form of second-person address. The reader notices that there is no announcement of the acquittal to Jeremiah after the verdict, but the latter is followed immediately by the elder's speech, a speech that takes the reader back to the call for repentance. What is more, the reader notices that pronouncement of verdict is one thing, but the central issue still remains: heeding the demands of the speech. Of course, "the validation of Jeremiah as a true prophet by a court is not an adequate response to the divine word"³⁶. If it is ruled that Jeremiah has been truly sent by YHWH because he has truly "spoken to us in the name of YHWH" (cf. v. 16), it is logically binding that even the judges heed this word. The absence of this notice constantly reminds the reader of a missing point and challenges him also. And more so the inconclusiveness of the chapter; the "open-endedness of v. 19" throws a challenge to the reader with the question: "If this word is from God, how will you respond"³⁷? What is the prophetic personality? What does a prophet think of himself and his ministry? How does the reader perceive this problematic in the narratives under investigation?

If the reader senses the challenge of a response to the word of the prophet in chapter 26, chapters 27-28 represent to him the constant temptation for one to claim YHWH's promises and to trust in His election and to use this promises as means of resisting the sincere change that an encounter with YHWH demands. But the narratives have an antidote: the constant and repetitive advice, "Stop listening" to the prophets. By contradicting the judgement of YHWH on Judah, the prophets deny the people the opportunity announced in the previous chapter of turning away from the evil of their deeds, and in fact causing the city and the temple to be under divine punishment. Jeremiah had in 23:16-22 accused the other prophets of not having stood in the council of YHWH. They have not listened to YHWH and so should not be listened to. The oracles of submission to the foreign power becomes, not just the retributive action of an angry

³⁶ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 33.

³⁷ SCALISE *et al.*, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 33.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

deity, but a just judgement of a sovereign God on constant disobedience, judgement not aimed at eternity, but until (עד), his sovereignty wills. The figure of Hananiah, his words and actions, become this constant voice, which the reader should not listen to. At the end of the narrative of chapters 27-28, the exit of one of the prophets confirms the reader's quest for truth in matters of prophecy.

The narrative analysis of texts as we have done has further insights about the question of true and false prophecy, which are outside the sphere of historical critical analysis. Take for example the self-consciousness of being true or false with regard to prophecy as it concerns the "false prophet". The question the reader would pose to himself or herself is whether the false prophet is conscious of being false. From the narrative, it is clear that there is no self-deception on the part of the false prophet, who seems certainly sure of self. There is no sign of an intention to dupe the populace, but good willed disposition to reveal the intentions of the One thought to be the source and origin of the message. In a study published in 1952, Quell succeeds in liberating studies in true and false prophecy from a priori conclusions concerning Jeremiah's opponent who had largely been referred to as a "cultic, nationalistic pseudoprophet, a fanatic demagogue, a libertine in morals, illiterate of spirit, and, indeed an offender against the Holy spirit"³⁸. Of course the MT does not have any of such tags for Hananiah. Pointing at the fact that Hananiah employed the same forms of speech and symbolic action as Jeremiah, he (Quell) proves that intentionality is no longer a valid criterion to discern the true between the two prophets. As Sanders writes, "It is simply not possible to impugn the so-called false prophets with conscious, evil intention. Recognition of this fact in modern study has received broader support from the acknowledgment of pluralism as a factor in research"³⁹. There is therefore the question of the distinction between being deceptive and being mistaken. In the context of the narrative reading, the latter would seem more appropriate as a description. The narrator neither judges Hananiah nor says he is mistaken; the way the

³⁸ G. QUELL, *Wahre und falsche Propheten*, p. 65.

³⁹ J.A. SANDERS, *Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy*, in G.W. COATS & B.O. LONG (eds.), *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, Philadelphia, 1977, p. 21-41, see p. 22.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

drama is constructed does not give any indication of negative judgement about the good faith of Hananiah. The theological question becomes: how can the reader of today discern even his own particular situation with regard to the truth if one can be certain but again mistaken? It is because the false prophet is mistaken that leads to the incorrigible aspect of his character. How can one who is consciously sure of him/herself be convinced that what he or she is saying is not true? This is confirmed in chapter 28 by Hananiah, and in chapter 29 by Ahab, Zedekiah and Shemaiah.

It is true that Jer. 26-29 is in the main a confrontation of the prophet with the problem of false prophecy, this block of chapters has still, though concentrating on this theme, much to offer from the broader theological perspective. We believe that the character of the text has both a literary and a theological perspective. And as said earlier on, a narrative in this angle of vision does not deal just with the character of the text, but also with the character of God in the text. It is in this sense that Brueggemann talks much of the notion of imagination in the prophetic corpus. His conviction, which is shared very much in this work, is that, alongside the theological statement, which the biblical text carries, a revelation of the character of God is also in question⁴⁰. And specifically in Jer. 26-29, one can proceed to make the following theological considerations. Of course the centrality of the drama of chapter 28, that is, the confrontation between Jeremiah and Hananiah, makes the chapter dominant while discussing the theological emphases of the four chapters. What follows in this section may not avoid this bias. Our analysis of the characterisation of YHWH in the text in Part Two Chapter Six revealed salient aspects that need little more emphasis from the theological point of view.

3.2.2 Man's Relativity and God's Sovereignty

In Part Two, Chapter Three, we noted the tone underlining YHWH's sovereignty with which Jer. 27 begins, after the initial programme articulation in chapter 26. After the enunciation of the theme of prophetic authenticity in chapter 26, it is interesting that the

⁴⁰ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation*, in P.D. MILLER (ed.), *Walter Brueggemann, Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text*, Minneapolis, 1992, p. 1-21, see p. 4.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

text proceeds in chapter 27 with the affirmation of YHWH as the creator (cf. v. 5). Sanders argues that affirming YHWH as God of all creation, which was part of the monotheising process in ancient Israel, can be one of the signs of having come to awareness of the real nature of God⁴¹.

This affirmation of YHWH as creator has some other further implications. In fact this affirmation in Jer. 27:5 is prolonged by a corollary: the universal mastery of YHWH on men and beasts and over the earth, which he can give to the one he pleases (27:6-11). YHWH becomes a mystery that is greater than that of the universe and its system of things because of his status as Creator and because of his supreme power over creation. One of the major theological questions in the text of Jer. 26-29 is the status of the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar, and his relationship with YHWH. In the broad sphere, it is a question of the conception of God who would use a pagan figure as his agent to punish his people and the precise sense in which YHWH could describe this king as “my servant” (27:6). Despite every theological attempt to resolve this, the question does not become less pressing. It seems that in the long run, the only solution is recourse to this fundamental truth about God: YHWH is absolute. “Why should the nations ask, ‘Where is their God?’ Our God is in heaven, he does whatever he wills” (Psa. 115:1-3). He who does whatever he wills, in heaven and on earth must be above certain considerations of normality and reasonability (in human terms) since he is not accountable to any other being and since his ways and thoughts are different from that of other beings (cf. Isa. 55:8). The prophetic figures brought in bad light in the text could not reach at full understanding of YHWH who is not only a redeemer, provider or sustainer, but also a creator. Sanders points out the implications of this subtle distinction:

“To stress the tradition of YHWH as redeemer, provider, and sustainer and deny YHWH as creator would be [...] to engage in ‘false prophecy’; the so called true prophets never denied that God was the God of Israel who had elected Israel and redeemed them from slavery in Egypt, guided them in the desert and given them a home, and/or had chosen David and established his throne and city [...]. But in

⁴¹ J.A. SANDERS, *Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy*, p. 37.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

addition to affirming God as redeemer and sustainer, the true prophets stressed that God was also creator of all peoples of all the earth⁴².

And his prophet, if true to this name, should be well aware of this important distinction. Even though a messenger of YHWH, he should know that YHWH is not a subject that could be exhausted by human discourse. As already said before, the book of Jeremiah bears witness to the struggle of a prophet who needed to learn, even with difficulty, to understand the ways of YHWH who has not sold his right or freedom even to his faithful prophet; the YHWH who is not helplessly bound to his words and oaths to his people. In fact, it is not only Jeremiah the prophet who needed to learn this truth about YHWH. The Hebrew Bible attests to the fact that through varied experiences in the course of history, YHWH wished that his people understood that he (YHWH) is not to be localised or appropriated. He is the Other; the YHWH of the universe. Hence many notions of his universalistic programme are already muted in the Old Testament. As John Henry Newmann wrote already in 1935, "He, though One, is a sort of world of worlds in Himself, giving birth in our minds to an infinite number of distinct truths, each ineffably more mysterious than any thing that is found in this universe of space and time"⁴³. Yet this truth of God as an absolute Being has further reaching implications for theology.

3.2.3 Between Dynamic Pluralism and Appropriation of God

From the narrative of Jer. 26-29, especially 28, one can say that Jeremiah believes YHWH talks through him but also believes that he can also talk through another. And so when his opponent says 'thus says YHWH', Jeremiah begins by believing it could be so and says 'Amen' wishing that what he just heard be realised, or regarding "it as possible that YHWH had changed his mind and no longer stood behind his message"⁴⁴. Already in 26:14, the image of the prophet is that of a mild messenger. Before his accusers, he could only but articulate a defence speech by declaring himself to be "in the hands" of his accusers who could do whatever they please or think right. Without however the least

⁴² J.A. SANDERS, *Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy*, p. 37. See also J. LUNDBOM, *Jer. 21-36*, p. 313.

⁴³ J.H. NEWMAN, *The Idea of a University*, London, 1935, p. 463.

⁴⁴ A. LAATO, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament Literature*, p. 296.

doubt that his message has YHWH as source, the latter does not become for him a mere instrument of defence. The only guarantee he has, is as much as given him by YHWH, who however is free. On the contrary, reading Jer. 28 gives impression that Hananiah gives no room to make the reader believe in such openness. Jeremiah's 'Amen' in v. 6 and the development that followed till v. 9, is not to suppose that truth is multiple or that one should adopt an attitude of indifference as regards the truth, but could be understood as an invitation to his fellow prophet to an inspection of historical past in order to arrive at the truth of the present. But the physical action of Hananiah afterwards – breaking the yoke – makes the reader sense a partner that does not wish to dialogue. Unlike Hananiah therefore who appropriates YHWH and who only knows and voices 'thus says YHWH', Jeremiah believes in listening to the other (see the 'אָמַרְתִּי כַּדְבָרֵי יְהוָה' of Jeremiah in 28:7) with whom he dialogues in a common search for the truth, which is at the moment one and not multiple. Jeremiah still carries the yoke but at the same time leaves YHWH free, admitting therefore the possibility of YHWH talking through the other. One of the distinctions between false and true prophets is that the one confiscates the word of God by a self-affirmation of infallibility, while the other believes that God can speak through the other and that he himself can also make mistakes⁴⁵.

3.2.4 *Autonomy and Obedience*

In Jer. 28, the reader can notice the narrator's subtle play on the contents and circumstances of the announcements by the two prophets. Hananiah affirms to Jeremiah a political autonomy: the liberation from the foreign yoke and the return (v. 3, 4), before the complete circle of witnesses and in a quasi-religious environment, which gives him credence. Jeremiah opposes that with the irrevocable submission to the king of Babylon (cf. iron yoke, v. 14). Jeremiah's intervention shows submission, ultimately however to the will of YHWH. As has been often repeated, when his opponent announces the salvation which he would also desire but could not say (because he has not received such a message from YHWH), Jeremiah submits his desire and allows YHWH to realise it. Then, he was tempted in v. 7 to announce a personal word in challenge: "Listen however

⁴⁵ D. LYS, *Jérémie 28 et le problème du faux prophète*, p. 480.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

to the word that I (יְהוָה) tell you and to all the people”. But eventually, Jeremiah makes no direct response, either in affirmation or in opposition, on the issue raised by Hananiah. He only wished that Hananiah’s word be realised by YHWH and then draws his opponent’s attention to the facts of history and to the criteria of authenticity with regard to such “hopeful” prophecies. When Hananiah intervened again by the symbolic act of breaking the yoke on the shoulder of Jeremiah, the latter left him (cf. v. 11) in his insistence. He only talked again when the word of YHWH came to him once more in his silence and solitude inviting him to return: “Go and tell Hananiah” (v. 12). That is to say, he allows himself to be sent by YHWH. If the people are deported at the political plane, Jeremiah is delegated by YHWH at the religious plane. Only the Word of YHWH gives him initiative to intervene. One can suspect that the narrator makes the reader believe that Hananiah, though speaking in good faith, does not speak at the instance of YHWH. He makes YHWH speak instead of the other way round. Or he speaks in his place instead of speaking in his name. In this sense there is autonomy in his word, used to affirm political autonomy, what Jeremiah condemns as revolt and cheat, for there is truth of the message only when the prophet is sent in truth by his YHWH, in a relation of listening, of obedience, of submission. Jeremiah on the other hand is a man of relation to the other. He listens to the other prophet before speaking, he listens to the lessons of history before adhering to what will be pleasurable to him, and he listens to God before speaking in his name. There is a transformation of his human word (v. 6-9) into the word of YHWH (v. 13-16). What he announces is submission to the other, to the foreigner, Babylon.

3.2.5 Truth: Timelessness or Timeliness

With respect to Jer. 26-29 in this connection, especially the duel of chapter 28, this statement by Martin Buber is revelatory:

“God had, indeed spoken to him only an hour before. But this was another hour. History is a dynamic process, and history means that one hour is never like the

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

one that has gone before [...]; one must not rely on one's knowledge. One must go one's way and listen all over again"⁴⁶.

Following the presentation by the narrator, one sees that the words of Hananiah are a bit repetitive. Before and after the act of breaking the yoke, the terms are identical (compare v. 2-4 and v. 11). Read in a larger corpus, it appears like an out-of-context-repetition of Isaiah a century earlier; a declaration which does not take into account the challenges and the risks of the current situation but which trusts in the veritable traditions of the past. Hananiah, writes Childs, "was unable to see that applying tradition from progressively larger contexts incriminated his word". And as Childs continues:

"The same biblical tradition could be applied by various prophets in different contexts with very divergent results. What determined its truth was largely a question of timing. The prophet was thus engaged above all in the hermeneutical issue which turned on how correctly he applied his received tradition to his new situation. A false prophet was one who practised bad hermeneutics"⁴⁷.

Assuring security and happiness in the nearest future, Hananiah dodges the possibility of change and the call to conversion. He takes the yoke in the literal sense: object of oppression to be removed, and by breaking it, treats it like a magical object that acts by itself. But for Jeremiah, the yoke speaks of YHWH; or better put is a language by YHWH himself, a symbolic and open language.

The dialogue between faith and context (that is, social, political and religious context), on the reflective level, has always proved fruitful and the most successful of theologians have been those who, for the most part, succeed in restructuring the tradition of faith on the basis of its encounter with the context in which they theologised. The theological task of reflecting on faith, that is, God-talk, is always embodied in the specific context in which one theologises. The absolute Truth of faith, put in other words, the Being of God, cannot be expressed in words in a supra-contextual, absolute, timeless formulation. To

⁴⁶ M. BUBER, *False Prophets (Jeremiah 28)*, in N.N. GLATZER (ed.), *Biblical Humanism*, London, 1968, p. 277-283. See also LUNDBOM, *Jer. 21-36*, p. 337.

⁴⁷ B.S. CHILDS, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, p. 136.



Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

express this Truth, one needs concepts, ideas, discourses, narratives, interpretive models and categories, which are part and parcel of a particular context. There is always a relationship and dependence between the theological Truth as such and the context-dependent theological statements that point to the Truth. The implication of this is that there is a difference between theological statements on the one hand and the theological Truth on the other, and the two cannot be identified. Since theological statements are always dependent on the context in which they are uttered, they are thus particular, which makes their relevance and even validity seriously contextual, in other words, contingent to the vagaries of time and space. But the irony is that context-dependent theological statements are the only humanly available categories to refer and point to the Truth, which renders it worth taking serious.

“In other words, theological sayings are contextually determined and accepted ways to refer to God (and are not-God); nothing more yet also nothing less than that. They can be acknowledged truth as far and as long as they (1) succeed in making reference to the Truth and (2) possess the consciousness of being (only) reference. For, on the one hand, since its access to the divine is defined by and bound to the context, theology never expresses God as such; on the other hand, nothing but the context and its reflective patterns can offer theology the possibility to pursue a contemporary and comprehensible reflection on faith and tradition; i.e. the possibility of naming God in a contextually relevant way”⁴⁸.

Given this hermeneutical conviction, expressions about God must be vigilant to the signs of the times in its contemporary context. And since these truths about God and his dealing with man must look at the context, changes in the latter require thus a recontextualisation of the theological truths. Modern theological thinking therefore is not comfortable with what Lyotard calls the modern master stories⁴⁹ which have four basic characteristics: a) universalistic pretensions, thereby denying particular instances their

⁴⁸ L. BOEVE, *Bearing Witness to the Differend: A Model for Theologizing in the Postmodern Context*, in *LvSt* 20 (1995), p. 362-379, see p. 364.

⁴⁹ J.-F. LYOTARD, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans G. Bennington and B. Massumi, Minneapolis, 1984.

particularity and specificity; b) self legitimisation on an assumed finality of history; c) cognitive pretensions; that is, attempt to present reality as it really is; d) combination of the above characteristics; it is therefore hegemonic, exclusivist discourse which subordinates all other discourses. The narratives of Jer. 26-29 point therefore to the truth of the timeliness and not the timelessness of prophetic truths and statements. This should also be treasure and guide to modern theological discourses.

3.2.6 Prophetic Thinking, the Status Quo, the Resistance of Authorities

According to Brueggemann,

“[...] Prophecy is not in any overt, concrete sense political or social action. It is rather an *assault on public imagination*, aimed at showing that the present presumed world is not absolute, but that a thinkable alternative can be imagined; characterised, and lived in. The destabilisation is, then, not revolutionary overthrow, but it is making available an alternative imagination that makes one aware that the presumed world is imagined; not given. Thus, the prophetic is an alternative to a positivism that is incapable of alternative, uneasy with critique, and so inclined to conformity”⁵⁰.

The basis for such an alternative vision of reality among the prophets, continues Brueggemann, is their intuition of the sovereignty of YHWH, and I add, their belief that the realities of the world, the power structures, etc. continue to be only approximation and never a match to the sovereignty of YHWH, and so must be imagined differently. Jer. 26-29 witnesses to a parallel existence of two opposite streams of thought, one championed by the Jerusalem establishment – kings, temple, priests, official prophets – and the other represented singly by the vision of Jeremiah. None of the four chapters of the block misses this point, as each is in a way a duel between two mutually exclusive opinions.

⁵⁰ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *The Prophet as a Destabilising Presence*, in P.D. MILLER (ed.), *Walter Brueggemann: A Social Reading of the Old Testament, Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life*, Minneapolis, 1994, p. 221-244, see p. 224.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

In chapter 26, it is the question of whether such a prophecy about the destruction of the temple and the desolation of the city, under whatever pretext, is from YHWH. Reading especially v. 7-15 gives the reader the impression that the peoples' (especially the religious authorities) complacencies have been disturbed. The exigency of a change of habit is transformed into opposition to the prophet for preaching against the holy realities. In chapter 27 it is chiefly who and what to believe: Jeremiah who advises wilful submission to Babylon and envisions this as recipe for salvation, or the other prophets or intermediaries who propose the contrary. While chapter 28 exemplifies one of these prophets on the opposing camp, articulating how he seeks, with his sign act, to convince the populace and places him in the opposite spectrum with Jeremiah, chapter 29 refers to other prophets of like message and mentality, Ahab, Zedekiah and Shemaiah. In each case, Jeremiah becomes the lone voice in a system. The action of Shemaiah as revealed in the words of YHWH in 29:25-27 portrays also one whose peace and tranquillity has been disturbed by difficult demands. The reader of the narratives notices a constant difference between a system of normalisation and that of destabilisation, between a system with absolute claims and another that suggests an alternative vision. But absolute notion of reality is always a threat because it neglects its basic nature of determined historicity and in that wise, its contingency. Moreover, it does not lend itself to criticism and does not think of the possibility of an alternative.

To talk of alternative is to talk of change and this often generates resistance and negative reactions, especially in a system or power structure that thinks that change would undermine its basic gains. This is the situation in the text. As a lone voice, Jeremiah's is a voice that prevents the viciousness of a circle of unanimous voices. Such a voice insists on the necessity for the openness in such a circle and so is a voice that disturbs. Jeremiah therefore becomes the "destabilising presence"⁵¹ and in that wise becomes a model of prophetic activity. This destabilisation should not just be understood simply and singly overt political action. Even in matters purely religious, the prophetic role stands distinguished. After all, in the text, the opposition of Jeremiah and the alternative he suggests is first of all on religious grounds. The spatial conditions given by the narrator in

⁵¹ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *The Prophet as a Destabilizing Presence*, p. 223.

the beginning of chapter 26 do not lack in giving the impression of a principally religious affair. The prophet has to stand in the court of the house of the Lord and address all the city of YHWH, precisely, who come and worship. The speech has as a goal, that of inciting repentance so that each man would walk in the way YHWH had ordained (cf. v. 3). The content of the speech as given from v. 4 is paying attention to the law given them and listening to the words of the prophets (cf. v. 4 and 5). In the end, a challenge is posed: the need to differentiate between good news and nice news.

3.3 WHERE LIES THE TRUTH? DISCUSSION IN A PARTICULAR CONTEXT

To end up this research work without a word on the particular relevance of this narrative and theological analysis to the particular religious situation in Africa, and in particular that of my own country, Nigeria, would entail lagging on a very salient point. The research is not a research on the Church and situation in Nigeria and therefore a brief reference to this relevance will suffice here, hoping certainly for further in-depth studies in subsequent works especially while working on the terrain. As has often been maintained in this research work, the prophetic pages are not write-ups simply destined only to ginger academic analytical endeavours, but texts written with the aim of providing a guide to a faith community, comprising the immediate audience and the present audience which has received these texts. And so the Jeremiah-Hananiah duel remains a matter for reflection for the many Churches, ecclesial groups and religious personalities who stand in the community of believers as official mouthpiece in the peoples' relation with their God. Here, I would just mention two complementary aspects where the above analysis would be useful to the said context: the fact of the presence of the many Christian denominations and the manner of their coexistence, and the Church's need for proper self-definition. Holladay gives Calvin the last word in his analysis of Jer. 28:

“More than once in the course of exegesis on this chapter there has been occasion to refer to Calvin, but that is only because he so well senses the awesomeness of the encounter. So let him have the last word: «‘The people saw that God’s name was become a subject of contest; there was a dreadful conflict, ‘God has spoken to me’; ‘Nay, rather to me’. Jeremiah and Hananiah were opposed, the one to the

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

other; each of them claimed to be a prophet. Such was the conflict; the name of God seemed to have been assumed at pleasure, and flung forth by the devil as in sport»⁵².

Though a microcosm of the universal Church (and like other particular Churches), Nigeria today is a typical scene of an arena where there are many competitive ecclesial voices, each claiming to be the authentic voice. Just like many other societies of the twenty-first century, the Nigerian scene lives in an epoch of denominational confusion. It is not deprived of clues, but rather faces the problem of many and at times confusing signals. Related to and fuelled necessarily by the myriads of political, social and economic problems, many voices have arisen to present themselves as the messiahs of the moment, analysing the crises, denouncing social ills and at least of course suggesting the ways out. As consequence, the avenue is made wide open to manipulation and falsity and this often saps the critical spirit of people, most of who now have passed from credibility to gullibility. The question as to where is the truth and who (if any) has the truth becomes necessary. After the exegesis of chapter 28 of the book of Jeremiah, Holladay concludes with the following remarks:

“It would be easy to reduce this encounter between Jeremiah and Hananiah to question of the sociology of prophetism, to two different opinions struggling for support in the marketplace (or, in this case, in the temple precincts). Whose understanding of the word and will of Yahweh will win out? But this is not the perspective of those who recorded the tradition and incorporated it into the corpus of material that would become scripture; for them the question is how it can be that Yahweh’s word can be countered by some who claims to speak for Yahweh, how a symbolic action effective for Yahweh can be countered by another symbolic action in the name of Yahweh intending to nullify it. It is awesome”⁵³.

As it became clear while discussing the criteria for prophetic authenticity that in the Hebrew Bible, there are no such absolute criteria, valid for all times and in all

⁵² HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 130.

⁵³ HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 130.

circumstances for judging between veracity and falsity of prophetic pronouncements, our reflection and position here has equally no strict judgements and arbitration. That is also beyond the focus here. Our comments will consist only in giving some indices. The first will be a reflection on the contextual conditions and the attendant dangers in the country, confronting any group, body or personality that understands itself in the light of its prophetic role to the people. These might not be new since they were also more or less the same conditions within which the prophets of old, Jeremiah inclusive, had laboured. The second, titled 'The need for self-definition', would be a reflection on two different models proposed by theologians as a somewhat concrete proposals for religious groups in their prophetic ministry in the country today.

3.3.1 Prophets: Between Truth and Falsity

It is somewhat clear that no single criterion distinguishes neatly and absolutely the true from the false prophet in every instance. Therefore a degree of fluidity between the two remains inevitable. The fact of the relativity of criteria as shown above leads not only to the problem of discernment for readers today, but also to prophetic conflict. But as far as prophetic figures are concerned, they are confronted by certain basic facts and circumstances that create this conflict. Talking therefore about truth and falsity of prophecy, one cannot dodge talking of the circumstances behind and around a prophet. Truth is narrative-dependent, says James Brennemann:

“In the world of the prophets, how a prophet construed his reality coupled with how he voiced available traditions and texts to persuade his audience to hear him and ignore his prophetic counterpart are key components of a prophet’s repertoire for claiming to be true. For example, the prophets exploited the wilderness-wanderings tradition for positive and negative effect, depending on the rhetorical points they wanted to make [...]. The particularity of a prophet’s claim understood by a particular community is clearly central to discerning the truth or falsehood of a particular prophet”⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ J.E. BRENNEMANN, *Canons in Conflict: Negotiating Texts in True and False Prophecy*, New York, 1997, p. 99.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

The force of these circumstances and particularities surrounding a prophet, promotes equally the possibility of transition from true to false prophecy and for the “multiple possibilities of error and disbelief”, using the phrase of Crenshaw. As he writes,

“In view of these facts, one must conclude that prophetic conflict is inevitable, growing out of the nature of prophecy itself. The prophetic function is best described as embodying four stages: 1) the secret experience with God, sometimes followed by ecstasy of concentration; 2) the prophet’s interpretation of the unique experience according to the faith by which he lives; 3) the process of intellectual revision, particularly the addition of motivation clauses and conclusions; and 4) artistic development, the adaptation of the message to ancient rhetorical form and the clothing of it in metrical poetry. Within the two-fold talk of the reception of the word of God in the experience of divine mystery, and the articulation of that word to man in all its nuances and with persuasive cogency rest multiple possibilities for error and disbelief”⁵⁵.

3.3.1.1 Desire for Success

Talking of desire for success automatically refers to the criterion of fulfilment as one of the marks for the validation of authenticity for a prophetic claim. There is both a positive and negative side to it. It is either an authentic expression of the hope that the Word of YHWH is trustworthy, or a selfish attitude of one who wishes to see his pronouncements confirmed historically and therefore claims the approbation of his audience. If the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of a prophetic claim determines the veracity or falsity of a prophet’s vocation, then success would not mean simply a coincidence but a seal of divine approbation. Among the prophets in the Hebrew Bible one can perceive this phenomenon. Sometimes the prophets utter words that contributed to the possibility of their success among their audience. Ezekiel would say often: “Then you shall know that a prophet has been in your midst” (Eze. 2:5). Conversely, failure or apparent failure was also the lot of many prophets and they found it difficult to understand vis-à-vis their conviction of being sent. For example, Jeremiah’s confessions were in most cases a voicing out of his anguished emotions prompted by a sense of disappointment in

⁵⁵ J.L. CRENSHAW, *Prophetic Conflict*, p. 3.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

speaking for a God who was not always ready to vindicate him⁵⁶. Writing about Jeremiah, von Rad says: “There is not one single instance of hope, no occasion when he gives thanks to Yahweh for granting him redemptive insight or for allowing him some success. What a difference from the defiant boasting of Micah”⁵⁷. In a country confronted by political and economic hardship like Nigeria of today, it is only logical that many people turn to spiritual means as either the last resort or even the first resort for the solution to their problems, and therefore, many become clients or patients to whoever is believed to make more things happen. Logically the one who claims to makes this happen desires for success, at times at all costs, to legitimise his/her ways.

3.3.1.2 The Powers that Be

In the modern context the reference here is made to political authorities in general and the tendency of prophets to align themselves with civil powers. In the Hebrew Bible, authors have identified this factor as the king⁵⁸, who represents another obstacle to the prophets and so could constitute a pitfall in the fulfilment of their task. Whenever a cult is sponsored by the royalty, the prophet is always expected to further the interests of the court and in certain occasions, failure to do so meant danger to the life of the prophet himself. The Elijah narratives show clearly the constant clash between the desires of the kings and those of the prophets. Other examples of this in the Hebrew Bible are the story of the prophet Amos and Amaziah at Bethel (cf. Amos 7:10-17)⁵⁹, and the story of

⁵⁶ Von Rad remarks that it was difficult for the prophet Jeremiah to transcend his situation and interpret his suffering in a redemptive way, and recognise that the prophetic office implied equally martyrdom. Cf. G. VON RAD, *Old Testament Theology II*, p. 206.

⁵⁷ G. VON RAD, *Old Testament Theology II*, p. 203.

⁵⁸ See J.L. CRENSHAW, *Prophetic Conflict*, p. 67.

⁵⁹ Amos had prophesied concerning the sanctuaries of Israel and the house of king Jeroboam: “Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword” (Amos 7:8-9). The priest views this prophecy as conspiracy against the king and reported to the latter while at the same time pronouncing the words of banishment of the prophet with sarcasm: “O seer – he uses the word *תָּהָא* rather than *גָּבִיא* – go, flee away to the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy to Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary and it is a temple of the kingdom” (Amos 7:12-13).

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

Micaiah ben Imlah (cf. I Kings 22)⁶⁰. Here it is a question of understanding the prophetic vocation as partly strengthening the king in his military activities. In this way, the prophet should not demoralise the people or otherwise face the grave reprimands from the king. In the case of Jeremiah, the reader of the prophetic book notices that in different contexts, the prophet functions both as antagonist and protagonist to the kings of his epoch. Opposed evidently to Jehoiakim (cf. Jer. 22:13-19; 36), on the contrary, the weak and undecided Zedekiah appears to have a more or less positive regard for the prophet though he did not follow the advice of the latter (cf. Jer. 38:14-28). This phenomenon is no less actual today. The powers that be, in most occasions, the political powers could promote or hinder prophetic activities and prophets of today face the constant danger of compromising their messages either out of fear or favour.

3.3.1.3 Tradition and its Sway

Israelite prophets were often faced with the problem of articulating in proper terms the changing nature of the theological expression of faith in their days. Take for example the major elements of Israelite faith: the theologies surrounding the popular themes around the election, the Patriarchs, the exodus, the wilderness and conquest, Sinai, David, the ark and the temple. These were the constitutive elements of Yahwism, and at the same time constituted the major dangers to pure Yahwism in that they led the people to thinking about YHWH in a linear fashion. YHWH would fulfil his promises and would not remove the dynasty from David, even though the latter goes wrong. Since YHWH is faithful, little thought is therefore given to the conditional nature of the covenant as if the special relationship with YHWH is not dependent on the people's unconditional response to his purposes. The fact of election was thus also understood exclusively, forgetting its ultimate purpose, the blessing of all the earth through the blessing of Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:1-3). Some prophetic confrontations in the Hebrew Bible, like that between Jeremiah and Hananiah, can only be understood in this light. There is always a strong attraction of the elements of traditional faith, an appeal that forgets the present tense reality of the

⁶⁰ Here Micaiah stands in opposition to the other four hundred prophets whose interest is evidently their security with the king. The prophet however suffered for his boldness and for his uncompromising message (cf. I Kings 22:25, 27).

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

purposes of YHWH who is the author of election and cannot be bound helplessly even by his own oath. In Jer. 26:9, the question posed to Jeremiah by the priests and prophets and all the people: “Why have you prophesied against this city and temple?” hinges on this conviction. The prophecy of Hananiah is nothing more than a repetition of the ancient faith of the traditions precious to Isaiah a century ago. But the narrative makes it clear that “in this particular situation a message steeped in the election faith was out of place”⁶¹.

With the fast changing world, the tension between past realities and their present meaningfulness is immeasurable. Between blind conservatism and immoderate progressivism, many religions of the world battle to find an answer. It is simply in this problematic that the issue of religious fundamentalism in different quarters in Nigeria could be categorised; that is, interpreting the holy writ and applying it to human situation today as if, in Carroll’s expressions, thousands of years have not elapsed between the writing and today. In other words, the correct interpretation of the holy writ should again emphasise not the timelessness of the scripture but its timeliness. Martin Buber recognises this fact:

“It is not whether salvation or disaster is prophesied, but whether the prophecy, whatever it is, agrees with the divine demand meant by a certain historical situation that is important. In days of false security a shaking and stirring word of disaster is befitting; the outstretched finger pointing to the historically approaching catastrophe, the hand beating upon hardened hearts; whereas in times of great adversity; out of which liberation is liable now or again to occur, in times of regret and repentance, a strengthening and unifying word of salvation is appropriate”⁶².

3.3.1.4 Crowd Expectation

Consider the following passage in the book of Jeremiah. Accused (by Jeremiah) of being seduced, YHWH warns Jeremiah in the following words:

⁶¹ J.L. CRENSHAW, *The Prophetic Conflict*, p. 73.

⁶² M. BUBER, *The Prophetic Faith*, p. 178.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

“If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me; if you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth; they shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them” (Jer. 15:19).

Such words coming from YHWH to his prophet at a time when the latter feels abandoned by his audience could have a drastic effect on the prophet. Implicit is therefore the fact that Jeremiah understands his status as a prophet as dependent upon the people’s acceptance of his words and could choose to utter words other than what YHWH has spoken as long as they could be accepted favourably by the people.

Related with the problem of tradition is crowd expectation or popular interest. Religion cannot be totally divorced from human interest. Most often, in human religiosity, the deity is expected just to be there to attend to human expectations. Crowd expectation and populist theology go hand in hand. Between the expectations of the crowd, the society or epoch and the inner convictions of the prophet, a choice must be made. It could not be out of place to assume that this factor played a great role in the theatrical act of snatching the yoke from Jeremiah’s neck and breaking it by Hananiah. The scene appears as one where the crowd hails the prophet after his first utterance, which pushes him to enact his words in act. Elijah’s confrontation with the prophet of Baal has the presence of the crowd as a factor that animates the narrative. Elijah’s prayer is for YHWH to “let them know today that you are God in Israel, and *that I am your servant, that I have done all these things* at your command” (I Kings 18:36).

This difficulty or challenge appears in different forms today but especially according to different cultural contexts. In a very intellectualistic society marked by individual autonomy and emancipation, where traditional values have been gradually replaced by modern and post-modern thinking, where morality has been more or less relativised, prophets have the temptations to tune down the moral and religious demands to an acceptable degree. In a traditional society, the temptation is otherwise; closing one’s eyes to every wind of change and sticking to traditional fundamentalist principles. The audience of the prophet also determines to a large extent the content of his preaching. To the rich, the bourgeois, the kings and the shapers of the current, the prophet could offer a

religion that legitimates the status quo of his hearers and preaches a God of prosperity. To the poor, the down trodden and the marginalised, the prophet has the temptation of either painting the image of the suffering servant of YHWH, in which case religion becomes the opium of the masses, or God becomes only the God of the poor and never that of the rich. Along these lines, much of the religious activities in the country could be analysed.

3.3.2 *The Need for Self-Definition: A Prophetic Church and A Listening Church*

This subtitle is informed by the appearance, providentially, in the same year of two works by two Nigerian theologians, George Ehusani⁶³ and Eugene Uzukwu⁶⁴. From my point of view, these titles, their contents inclusive, represent two complementary aspects or mirrors, with which any religious or denominational group should view, judge and redefine itself, especially with regard to its role as guidance for the people, and as a voice among other voices that accomplish such a role.

3.3.2.1 *A Prophetic Church*

In religious scene all over the world today, there have emerged two distinct ways in which religion has shaped public life. One is priestly, the other prophetic, applying the distinctions by William Pape Wood⁶⁵. Both appeal to transcendent faith and moral values, but each has a very different orientation. In the priestly, religion is more or less institutional and serve institutional goals; used as a way to comfort people, to assure them of their institutions, to assert the righteousness of the national purpose and destiny. The appeal is to the pride and the glory of a people, group or community, past, present, and future. This is the religion of the prayer breakfast, where religious and political leaders or ordinary religious people gather, not to affirm their accountability to the Word of God, but to engage in mutual affirmation and even outright assurance⁶⁶. Following Brueggemann who suggests a bipolar construct for Old Testament faith which in his own

⁶³ G.O. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church*, Ibadan, 1996.

⁶⁴ E.E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, New York, 1996.

⁶⁵ W.P. WOOD, *John 2:13-22*, in *Interpretation* 45 (1991), p. 59-63, see p. 62.

⁶⁶ W.P. WOOD, *John 2:13-22*, p. 62.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

words, “serves both to legitimate structure and to embrace pain”⁶⁷, we can as well conclude with him that “the main dynamic of the Old Testament is the tension between the celebration of that legitimisation and a sustained critique of it”⁶⁸. Besides the priestly religious attitude stands the prophetic attitude. The prophetic religious tradition, to which Jesus identified himself together with Jeremiah, involves values, ideals, and faith that stand above the behaviour and practice of any one group or nation, any religion, institutional or independent. This is the religion of Amos who prophesied not only against Damascus, Tyre, Edom and Ammon, but against Israel and Judah as well. This is the religious tradition that calls into question all human institutions, no matter how pretentiously holy, and tests them against God’s demands for justice and righteousness⁶⁹. This is the type of religious leadership needed both in Nigeria and elsewhere, and the only type of leadership that has a promise for confronting the social, political and economic situation of many countries.

The book of George Ehusani⁷⁰ is one of the proposals and models in this direction. What he writes about the Church can pass for any other ecclesial or religious group. Beginning with describing the ironical contrast of a Nigeria with much wealth but yet with more poverty and distress (Chapter One), he envisages the situation as “The task before the Church” (Chapter Two). Then looking at God as “The God of Well-being” (Chapter Three), whose glory is man fully alive and who has incarnated himself in human life (Chapter Four), he reaches the apex in his Chapter Five: “Our Prophetic Calling”. With Jesus as model, the prophets and in the modern time Martin Luther King Jr., he describes the best attitude of those called into religious leadership in Nigeria, and not only that, the style of Christian witness by every baptised Christian today. His summary is that we need a prophetic leadership⁷¹. He is of the opinion that until religious ministers become also prophets, that is, become ready to speak even from behind the bars and even die, until the

⁶⁷ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *A Shape for Old Testament Theology*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *A Shape for Old Testament Theology*, p. 4.

⁶⁹ W.P. WOOD, *John 2:13-22*, p. 62.

⁷⁰ G.O. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church*, Ibadan, 1996.

⁷¹ G.O. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church*, p. 62.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

leaders of the Church align with the powerless poor for their liberation, until the Church in Nigeria is ready to go beyond mere soliciting and sermonical statements that only moralise, the witness of the Church in the country will be only cultic and less and less prophetic. In summary, 'prophetic' for him means some form of action. He relativises the necessity of the social documents issued by the Magisterium for the last one hundred years, which for him do not lack in theoretical enunciation of the principles for a more humanised world and for the evolution of a civilisation of love. He points at where he feels attention is needed at the moment: "responding to her prophetic calling in more practical ways than have been in the past" and this becomes the leitmotif in the book: the constant reminder to the Church to assume this prophetic role. Appealing to the people's traditional sense of religion, their readiness to turn to God at times of crisis, disaster, or epidemic, and to seek His intervention, and to look up to the ministers of God, the priests the mediums, and the chief custodians of their religious beliefs for explanation or interpretation of what is happening to them⁷², he reminds the Christian religion above all, and the ministers in particular, that they are looked upon by "the distressed and traumatised people of Nigeria" today to provide answers to the many pressing questions of their hearts. He sees the difficult circumstances of life in the country as challenge to the leadership of the Nigerian Church to let their faith take flesh in the lives of the people:

"Our leaders must now get to work, and as a matter of utmost urgency, formulate a methodology for 'incarnational discipleship,' by which the truths and mysteries of the Christian faith, along with the powerful statements of the Magisterium on social justice, will take flesh for the liberation and salvation of the oppressed masses of contemporary Nigeria"⁷³.

Reading his work, one can agree that he calls for some action to back up words; so that the Church could fulfil the role of, borrowing from a popular theological parlance, incarnational discipleship: in his words, "a discipleship whose passion for justice, equity, well being, liberation and salvation, will provoke not only powerful statements, but also

⁷² G.O. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church*, p. 62.

⁷³ G.O. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church*, p. 62.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

concrete prophetic action towards realising the liberation of the oppressed, the conversion of the oppressor, the empowerment of the poor, the practice of authentic religion, and ultimately, the salvation of all". Writing at the backdrop of the extreme circumstances of social, economic and political inequalities in which the country struggles to wriggle itself out, the writer stresses again in a more offensive manner, the inadequacy of pledges and pious admonitions, and considers them as elements which are even capable of working in the reverse direction and provoking "either rejection or cynicism and despair". He concludes: "We need a prophetic Church that will discern the current situation in our country and give it a theological interpretation. We need a prophetic Church that will tell some basic truths to the Nigerian people. We need a prophetic Church to tell Nigerians for example that the real problem militating against unity, national cohesion, and peace and prosperity is the selfishness of the elite"⁷⁴.

3.3.2.2 A Listening Church

Elochukwu Uzukwu, another Nigerian theologian, thinking in the same line but with clearly different accent, suggests the "listening model" to the Church. The application of this model begins from Church leadership, for "the Church in Nigeria to be an agent of social transformation, must begin by courageously changing her structures from the inside. In order to liberate the Spirit, to allow the Spirit initiative in the life of the church-community, this structural change is imperative. The boldness of the renewed community becomes a conversion of the whole Church"⁷⁵. Uzukwu's analysis goes beyond the confines of Nigeria and has an Africa wide relevance. It begins by an analysis of African reality and African Theology (Chapter One), then the unpleasant story of the encounter of African traditional institutions with the West (Chapter Two), the sad histories of Slavery and Colonisation, the "radical subjugation and exploitation of Africa", "the colonial invention of the African primitive native", etc. He pursues his analysis through a discussion on "the reconstruction of African societies and Church on the principles of democracy and human rights" (Chapter Three), a discussion on "the Church as the highest testimony of the renewal of the earth" (Chapter Four) and "The 'Church-Family':

⁷⁴ G.O. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church*, p. 62-63.

⁷⁵ E.E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 152.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

facilitator of relationship in an interdependent world” (Chapter Five) till the climax of his input in Chapter Six where he discusses “Service in the African Church: an alternative pattern of building society in Africa”. Among the many highlights of this climax is the ever occurring motif of “listening” and “large ears”: Ministry “with Large Ears,” or leadership of Communities in the Service of Listening; “the challenge of the ‘Listening chief’ to society and Church”, “Listening – the Overriding Metaphor”, “The Ministry ‘with large Ears’ and the Communion of Churches”, Pastoral Ministry “with Large Ears” and Decentralization.

The whole idea of listening and “large ears” the author draws from an analogy of the ‘Manja paradigm’. Among the Manja of the Central African Republic, the totem for the chief is the rabbit. The rabbit is an unobtrusive animal with large ears. Common in many parts of Africa, the community chief (traditionally) is considered to be close to the ancestors, to the spirits that protect the community and to God. He does not replace these anyway but with the elders of the community, he makes these invisible realities ever present (that is represents them) in his person and behaviour. And so with this totem or image, the Manja underlines the quality of listening as the most important characteristics of the chief. Alongside this image of the rabbit with large ears, Uzukwu appeals also to the case of Bambara (Malian) philosophy of the immensity of the Word. In this sense, the Word at utterance embraces the whole of the human community, effects healing and makes room for humane living. One of the clear marks of such a sacred Word is that it is too large for the mouth. It is almost in that sense personalised. No speaker will totally master it, exhaust it, appropriate or monopolise it, since it is something belonging to the human community in question. Rather, each sacred speech of the community leader or his representative is an approximation of the Word. The analogy is thus neatly drawn: the “large ears” of the chief “bring him close to God, ancestors, and divinities and close to the conversations taking place in the community. He has the last word because he speaks after having assimilated and digested the Word in the community. He is the guardian of the dynamic, life-giving Word which creates and re-creates the community”⁷⁶. To be an

⁷⁶ E.E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 127.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

efficient and fair chief, the chief has to do a lot of listening and this latter takes good time⁷⁷.

The prophet therefore is not only the one who tells what YHWH has said or criticises the social situation, but also first and foremost one who listens to YHWH. One of the dangers a religious institution can face is, considering only its 'holiness' and seeing just its role as the conscience of the society (which it truly is), it forgets the obligation to listen. A religious institution such as the Church should be first and foremost its own conscience following Jesus' principle of first removing from one's eye the log of wood before doing so for the other (cf. Matt. 7:3-5). In Nigeria where religion still possesses a strong influence and determines much of what happens in the society, where religious personnel are still deeply respected and greatly appreciated, where critical and autonomous thinking has not become independent even among a good number of the folk, and where many people still see themselves as receivers of the faith prepared by those skilled for it, there is tendency for religious bodies and institutions to understand themselves from a wrong perspective, and unconsciously enjoy hegemonic feelings. Jeremiah is of the opinion that self-criticism begins from the temple, and that this most holy institution stand and be brought under the sledgehammer of the judgement of the all-powerful God. For the prophet of Anathoth, as has earlier been said, the priesthood, the priests, the cult, the temple and sacrifices are all realities that have relative value and are *ipso facto* contingent. The different prophetic groups, denominations and bodies and their leadership individually and collectively should be convinced of their imperfections, their relativity and their liability to judgement. It is not difficult for such groups to think of themselves as "appointed regents of a God who cannot act in history unless he acts

⁷⁷ It is in this sense that some people talk of 'African palaver', which Uzukwu explains as "the liberation of speech at all levels of community in order to come close to that Word which is too large for an individual mouth, the Word which saves and heals". This, according to Uzukwu, is a reality in another logic of operation different of course from Aristotelian or Cartesian logic. African palaver should not be confused with interminable, time-consuming, endless, aimless, useless discussion. The Word is too big and inexhaustible. Its meaning and significance may not be reached by simple human logic and by simple and hasty syllogistic conclusions. Cf. E.E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 138ff.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

through them, who will be defeated if they are, and who will flourish if they do”⁷⁸. Prophetic groups in Nigeria and also elsewhere need really to understand themselves in the light of this radical relativism with regard to God. Absolutist tendencies and pretensions are not only arrogant but also idolatrous, making these bodies or groups more than mere means and limiting God’s proper unlimited and infinite horizons. The same God who can raise children for Abraham out of stones (cf. Matt. 3:9) if the Jews think that he has no other option because they are the sons of Abraham, the same God who can receive Hosanna from the stones if men refuse to sing (cf. Luke 19:40), the same God who in Jesus Christ has even accepted the hazards of relative human existence can always have unlimited options whenever man misunderstands this and becomes untrue to his proper mission, as was the case often in the history of the relation between YHWH and his chosen People in the Old Testament.

3.3.2.3 Evaluation: The Listening Prophet

We have decided to bring these two authors in the context of our work, not that they talked about Jeremiah, nay 26-29, but because their reflection on the situation in the country and Africa at large has much to do with the theology in the block analysed. But it is necessary nevertheless to pin-point the salient points of departure between these studies and the text of Jeremiah. First of all, the conception of prophetism in the book of Ehusani represents only a partial conception in Jeremiah. Ehusani, writing purely from a stand point of Social Teaching, decries what he discovers as a lack in the Church’s ministry: the use of her position to denounce social ills and effect social justice. Jeremiah’s concept of prophetic ministry, without neglecting this aspect, is however first and foremost, a religious one. The mission he received from YHWH is first of all a religious one; to stand at the court of YHWH’s house and preach repentance. The audience is equally a religious audience, those who come into the temple to worship. Therefore the narrator has given clearly spatial conditions couched in an atmosphere of religion. The content of the sermon (v. 4-5) is a call to pay attention to the law given them and to listen to the words of the prophets. The goal of Jeremiah’s sermon is simply religious (cf. v. 3), even though with ethical undertones: to incite repentance so that each man would walk in the way of

⁷⁸ J. C. SCHROEDER, *1 Samuel: Text, Exegesis and Exposition*, in *The Interpreters Bible*, p. 876.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

the Lord. Even the opposition to Jeremiah does not lack this aspect. They are chiefly the priests and the prophets and they accuse the prophet in the first place of preaching the destruction of the temple (see v. 9 and 11). In the subsequent chapters, 27-29, this religious aspect is not lacking. The challenge by Jeremiah to the other prophets in chapter 27 brings out clearly what primarily is the prophet's conception of his role:

"If they are real prophets, if YHWH's word is really with them, they ought now to be pleading with Yahweh Sabaoth that the remaining vessels in the temple of YHWH, in the palace of the king of Judah and elsewhere in Jerusalem, do not go to Babylon too" (v. 18).

This vision is immediately contradicted by Hananiah, who understands his prophetic role simply in political terms, beginning his message with a somewhat presumed political manifesto of YHWH, flanking two actions (bringing back vessels and liberating king Jeconiah) with the issue of "breaking the yoke of the king of Babylon". Jeremiah advises him to listen.

It is this religious aspect, this attitude of listening that Uzukwu attempts to provide in his own model, which he underscores, but without equal emphasis on the need to aim relentlessly at changing the social order. His emphasis, as eventually evident in the conclusion of his work, goes more on the direction of the need for the Church to begin by "courageously changing her structures from inside"⁷⁹, for a "renewal of the structures of the Church through *listening and hearing the other*"⁸⁰. However, his is more balanced since he admits also that it is this listening model which is the powerful means of empowering the community and its leaders, and which will help her "to challenge without fear, to witness even unto death before the tyrannies and dictatorships, the brutalities and massacres [...]"⁸¹.

These two models, being prophetic and being a listener, all well balanced in the text of Jer. 26-29, would help explain the reasonable path any institutional religious reality must

⁷⁹ E.E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 152.

⁸⁰ E.E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 153.

⁸¹ E.E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 151.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

toe in order to be an authentic voice of YHWH among the people. The prophet begins by listening to his Master, delivering the message, and every now and then in the text, the reader meets “go and tell...” (28:13; cf. 29:24), “send to” (27:3), “send this message...” (29:31). He must first of all listen and listen again. An Igbo proverb says: “Drop the ear on the ground and hear the sound of the ant”. The Church or the prophet must be a good listener of the Word, of the vast Word and then approximate it. Listening to the Spirit and hearing what it has to tell the Churches is a famous advice in the Book of Revelation: “Let anyone who can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches; those who prove victorious I will feed from the tree of life set in God’s paradise” (Rev. 2:7). All ecclesiastical denominations must see themselves as colleagues in the school of one Master and Lord Jesus Christ, the only Teacher and Master. Listening in the context we speak puts an ecclesiastical group or religious personality in the posture of the disciple, the learner. In this dialogue with many other interlocutors; the signs of the times, the World, Science, Philosophy, the Population, the disciple (*discipulus*) would take first and foremost the attitude of a pupil. This pupil cannot participate meaningfully in this dialogue without taking ample time to listen and learn from these many interlocutors.

Conclusion

This Chapter completes the logic began in Chapter One of this Part where the theological status of the prophetic books was ascertained. Among numerous questions posed concerning the prophets and the prophetic books, that of the discernment between true and false prophecy, without being new, has not also become obsolete. Of course, the problem of true and false prophecy in the Old Testament has become a focal point for studies especially in canonical hermeneutics⁸². And a great number of works done in this regard are attempts to discern the hermeneutics of prophecy, especially when it concerns disputations between or among prophets. More than all other texts of the Bible (including Deut. 13; 18; I Kings 13; 18; 22; Jer. 23 etc), Jer. 26-29, particularly Jer. 28 is the *locus classicus* of the problem. The study of this problem in this last Chapter has taken us into the investigation of what constitutes the objective criterion or criteria, valid for all occasions, to determine the truth or falsity of a prophet. It is clear that such hard and fast

⁸² J.A. SANDERS, *Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy*, p. 21.

Part Three Chapter Three: True versus False Prophecy in a Theological Context

rule does not exist in the Hebrew Bible. Even the complement from the New Testament does not put the final word to the problem. The submission in this work is that truthfulness and falsity are contingent on many factors, which have at times to come into play at the same time. Talking about many factors at the same time, means in fact, the context. Further, we looked at the implications of this manner of looking at the problem to theological discussions today. The underlying conviction remains that despite the age of the biblical texts, contemporary society have much to learn from them, for the use of contemporary men.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Since every Chapter of the thesis ended with a particular conclusion or summary, our task here in the General Conclusion will be two-fold: a recapitulation of the major concerns of each of the three different Parts, with highlight of their major accents (theses sustained) and finally dressing out possible future overtures for the continuation of the research.

Recapitulation

We began in Part One by noting that in the last century, Jeremiah research concentrated on several issues which could be simplified under two broad headings, and from which have emerged two major interpretative approaches. The first of these, the biographical approach argues that the book of Jeremiah contains a considerable amount of historically reliable, biographical and oracular materials that render possible a reconstruction of the life and theology of the prophet. The second, properly the traditional-historical approach notices the presence of literary complexes which are the product of the work of tradition circles operating from the time of the prophet and extending well into exilic and post exilic periods. These two tendencies, but all with historical-critical accent, gave rise to multi-faceted debates centred mainly on the compositional history and textual considerations. In the presence of these conflicting data, and informed by the emergence of a plurality of methodologies, the latter itself negatively sparked off by a general disenchantment for history and abstraction, and positively by a growing interest in narratives and stories as forms of communication, the question of the possibility of a paradigm shift became evident.

Given the array of opinions, the question of Diamond earlier evoked becomes relevant in the context of a hermeneutical debate:

“Given the appearance of multiple up-to-date commentaries on Jeremiah, how shall further research proceed? What more can be done within the existing theoretical and critical frameworks that have generated these commentaries and

General Conclusion

guided Jeremiah studies to the present juncture [...] Should we attempt a major paradigm shift?¹

Today therefore, even these major problems in Jeremiah research gain attention from diverse methodologies. Our excursus of the major questionings in Jeremiah research therefore confirmed the opinion of Leo Perdue when he writes: “The history of biblical criticism, including its advances and insights as well as its shortcomings, is clearly mirrored in Jeremiah studies”².

Against many authors who deny the possibility of a synchronic reading of the book of Jeremiah, we made an option for this, precisely narrative criticism, with the conviction that this reading posture has its particular light to shed to the many necessary questions and issues concerning the book, at least its narrative sections. To sustain this, we sided more with the positive and encouraging literarily and theologically significant elements in the book than with the frustrating phenomena of its alleged “disorder”. As a matter of fact, there is concrete evidence of narrative and poetic blocks visible in the book, and many authors have, since towards the end of the twentieth century, tried to apply narratological framework and principles to the book, concentrating on the world of the text.

Today we live and do theology in an era of pluralism. Pluralism is not only with regard to theological trends or opinions, but first of all in hermeneutical principles and methodological options. It is true that Scripture grows with its readers³, this does not imply, in the spirit characteristic of extreme postmodernism, that any reading posture or interpretation is as good as the other, or that there is no criteriology, again using Leo Perdue’s concept on the matter. Since “pluralism should not allow theology to enter into

¹ A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, p. 16.

² L. PERDUE, *Jeremiah in Modern Research: Approaches and Issues*, in L.G. PERDUE & B.W. KOVACS (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations*, p. 1-61, see p. 1.

³ *Mor. In Iob*, XX, I, quoted in A.-M. PELLETIER, *D’âge en âge les Ecritures. La Bible et l’herméneutique contemporaine* (Le livre et le rouleau 18), Bruxelles, 2004, p. 155.

General Conclusion

the quagmire of relativity and private preference”⁴, the opinion shared in this thesis is that emphasis can be placed on different motifs, and so the reader should be aware of different possible reading postures. In this respect, Carroll has a credit in his soliloquy: “Of course I do recognise that other readers will read the chapter [referring to Jer. 25] and the book quite differently from me. That is fine by me – the more readings the better, because every reading is a rereading which affords all other readers a further opportunity for insight, rethinking, reflection or whatever is entailed in any reading of a text”⁵. Having said this, the thesis has not denied the pertinence of the questions bordering on history and composition. Rather, these questions are relativised (de-emphasised), while other pertinent questions touching on what is written, and not why and where it is written, the intention of the writer and the historical atmosphere of the written, are valorised. That means then that questions on Jeremiah studies received different emphasis, in the spirit characteristic of literary exegetical methods, which allow the text to reveal the richness of its construction and at the same time its message. While one can therefore say with Culpepper that “... l’analyse narrative s’est montrée plus convaincante pour présenter la construction littéraire et rhétorique”⁶, one can equally claim that the same difficulties of the book are attacked through asking different questions.

Our Part Two, the major section of the work, attempts a reading of Jer. 26-29 from the bias of the methodological option made. Experts in the book of Jeremiah may see the Chapter One of this Part as begging the question, if it is taken as a conscious effort to search out for and dwell on the seams of a text while ignoring the cracks. Though the book of Jeremiah, it is necessary to repeat here, does not permit such smooth glossing over of the evident jumbling, it is still clear that the book, despite its chaotic character, reflects a meaningful literary structure through which a clear theological outlook could be gleaned. Pointing at the book’s chronological incoherence, its “mishmash of topics and

⁴ L. PERDUE, *The Collapse of History*, p. 303.

⁵ R.P. CARROLL, *Halfway through a Dark Wood*, p. 85.

⁶ R.A. CULPEPPER, *Vingt ans d’analyse narrative des évangiles*, in D. MARGUERAT (ed.), *La Bible en récits: L’exégèse à l’heure du lecteur. Colloque international d’analyse narrative des textes de la Bible, Lausanne (mars 2002)* (Le monde de la Bible 48), Genève, 2003, p. 73-93, see p. 80.

General Conclusion

themes, bewildering history of composition, and intermingled prose and poetry”⁷, is only but a way of appreciating the book, and not the only way. Time has come when it is necessary to see through and beyond these, and to unravel the secrets of the artful composition. Whether this is an a priori prejudice, or a demonstrable hypothesis, is left to the reader to judge. Our thesis in that Chapter which sets the pace for the analysis of the chapters of the book (see Chapters Two-Five of Part Two) is that the juxtaposition of the conflicting emphases of the two scrolls of the book of Jeremiah gives clue to the book’s exceptional character and to its theological direction. A book, which portrays a literary enactment of the death and dismantling of one world (Jer. 1-25) which leads to another (Jer. 26-52), claims that Judah’s most venerable and sacral traditions – temple and system of worship, covenant and land, election and kingship – are all targets of divine judgement and would be plucked and pulled down to be rebuilt again.

This main theological assertion of the book of Jeremiah, is better appreciated by, using Stulman’s phraseology, stepping back, that is taking a distant posture and looking at the overall picture. The comparison, we may try to find, could be a modern city. Entering into a city and trekking from one street and lane to the other, one has at the first instance the impression simply of how one street or road haphazardly connects to the other and may not easily discover the underlying principle of the network of connection and city plan. But from an aerial view like an in-flight view, one discovers that the city is constructed on a network of roads, sometimes encircled by a principal one to which all major lanes are connected, and which in turn connect the streets, and one can follow such principle of connection till the smallest path ways. With such a view, one understands that the locations of the airport, stations, parks, residential quarters, reserved areas, forests, industrial layouts, establishments, etc are not by random happenstance but are strategically planned and meaningfully placed, taking into consideration the topographical and geographical nature of the city. Such a ‘distant posture’ to view the book of Jeremiah would reveal two complementary fields of the book, which altogether make a unified crucial theological design. To articulate this crucial theological assertion, both fields must be represented. The book begins with a description of the impending

⁷ STULMAN, *Jeremiah*, p. xviii.

General Conclusion

ruins to be wrought by YHWH by the dismantling of Judah's sacred canopies. By the end of chapter 25, the reader should be already disgusted with a failing and catastrophic system, with the undoing of Israel's social and religious community. Jer. 26-52 now asserts that such endings and ruins are not definitive but are rather, impetus for new affirmations of faith and reviving new structures. In such a way, the fundamental theological claim of the text becomes that "the God who destroys is the very God who 'build and plants' (Jer. 1.10; 45.4). The God who judges trusted symbol systems and shatters sacred canopies is the One who transforms death into life by the power of love and mercy"⁸.

Our analyses of the four chapters lead us to detect in the literary block as a whole a concern over the problem of true and false prophecy, cast at the backdrop of the battle of the prophet with other intermediaries over the stance of the community vis-à-vis Babylon regarding the peace of the former. It is needless however to overemphasise the fact that the nature of a text determines the profundity of the application of a particular methodology. And so we are not unaware of the limits which the oracular nature of the major part of the text of Jer. 26-29 would pose to the treatment of the text as pure narrative. If chapters 26 and 28 are substantially stories told by the narrator, chapters 27 and 29 are mainly records of divine oracles as transmitted by the prophet. Therefore the elements favourable to the reader's narrative appreciation of a text – the presence of different (or many) characters, not just persons mentioned in the text, but characters acting in the drama, clear distinctions of the classical stages of a plot (*exposition, complication, climax, dénouement*, etc) – are scarcely present or greatly diminished, and this could not but allow us to make appeal to other reading strategies at some specific moments in the analysis. By this we admit that just like every other approach, the narrative method has its limits particularly with regard to the scholarship of the book of Jeremiah, and that is why, dissenting voices are equally strong. Regarding this, Diamond does not fail to remark: "The difficulty for such strategies has been that they may never rise above a 'pure' formalism; as a result, they cannot successfully address the inconcinnities of the Jeremiah tradition that so trouble such (close) readers as Carroll or

⁸ L. STULMAN, *Order amid chaos*, p. 97.

General Conclusion

McKane. In such cases the effort to produce an overarching coherent reading of the book opens itself to the criticism of 'over-reading' beyond any demonstrable rhetorical rationale or structure to connect what is not explicitly connected; and still, at times, even the will to 'over-read' has had to prescind from the attempt by confessing no discernible coherent form⁹.

This however said, we do not mince words in detecting, *grosso modo*, an element of plot in the four chapters as a single narrative; or put better, detecting a narrative logic which guides the narrator in the presentation of the discrete stories in the four chapters. It is in this sense that we can still take a recourse to the classical terminologies of narrative criticism to explain the narrative function of the individual chapters. In line with this, we considered Jer. 26 as programmatic to the whole block where the narrator gives the prophetic preaching and the tensions that accrue from the preaching. This chapter which has as its highest note the positive evaluation of the prophetic identity of Jeremiah, is followed logically by chapter 27, where the reader encounters the prophet fulfil his role, the chapter in its own turn having as a major accent the attack on the false prophets, on the question of the necessity of the yoke of Babylon vis-à-vis the peace of the people, and ending with a clear challenge thrown to them. The reader is again not surprised encountering in chapter 28 a personification of the false prophets and a betting of the challenge of Jeremiah in the previous chapter in the person of Hananiah. This confrontation serves as the climax. Hananiah' death at the end of the chapter shows the beginning of the resolution and proves the victory of Jeremiah, who in chapter 29 gives his own vision of peace and the conditions of its possibility. All in all, the conclusion by way of synthesis (see Chapter Six of Part Two), given that we decided to treat the four chapters of the block individually, is that the attentive reader, or the attentive listener, is in no way in doubt of the major theme of the block, that of discernment of true and false prophecy, beginning from Jer. 26 till 29.

⁹ A.R.P. DIAMOND, *Introduction*, in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 15-32, see p. 20.

General Conclusion

The problem about the book of Jeremiah is not only the question of the possibility of a narrative approach to the book, there is also in the writing of many authors, a strong opposition to the possibility of a theological articulation of the book's content. On another important note, the famous dialogue, even dispute, between Carroll and Brueggemann on the question of a theological intent of the book is revealing: it will always depend on the perspective that a scholar wants to valorize. Our inclination in this respect goes in favour of Brueggemann and other authors in the same camp. The opinion of our thesis is that in the final analysis, the book of Jeremiah, as a book that shares close affinity with other prophetic books, without dissolving its specificity in anonymity, remains a text that bears witness to an effort to construct and articulate the doubtful and enigmatic presence of God in human affairs, especially when this presence is met with dissonance. No wonder Brueggemann suggests in conclusion that the future work in Jeremiah scholarship should inevitably in a way be theological since "without reference to Yahweh [the book of Jeremiah] is no book at all and its sustained act of imagination is emptied of any force if Yahweh is flattened out to be only a code-term for aggressive land acquisition"¹⁰.

How does the block on prophetic authenticity share in the general theological framework of the book of Jeremiah? Chapters 26-29 participate centrally in the theology of the book not only by its geographical placement as the very first block of the second scroll, but in the development of the theme. Beginning with a conditional sermon of repentance or doom for the city and for the temple, it continues with the inevitability of the yoke under Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar, an inevitability dramatised in chapter 28. However, the wrath of YHWH is not forever; Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar are still agents for YHWH to realise and configure a newness of life for his people, a proclamation which begins in chapter 29 with the care to the exiles, but which will be clearly and explicitly articulated in an oracular fashion in chapters 30-31, demonstrated in a long section in narrative in 32-45, ending with a positive note of promise of life for Baruch, articulated again in the Oracle against the Nations in 46-51, which is in actual fact life for Judah whose enemies

¹⁰ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Next Steps in Jeremiah Studies?* in A.R.P. DIAMOND *et al.* (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, p. 404-421, see p. 416.

General Conclusion

are under the judgement of YHWH, and finally concluded in Jer. 52 with the description of the kind treatment meted to Jehoiakim.

From a more precise theological perspective, we identified the problem of true and false prophecy to be the major theological focus of Jer. 26-29, and Part Three was a discussion on this theme from the background of the text, a discussion that developed into contextual considerations. James A. Sanders¹¹ talks of the concept of “dynamic analogy” which he says is a helpful way to interpret and make use of a text. According to him, the analogy must be “dynamic”, that is, one that emerges out of one’s own interpretation and experience. The central thesis of Part Three is that with such dynamic analogy, the book of Jeremiah has a contemporary relevance when we abstract its theological articulations and then submit the contemporary situation to its light. Our present human societies can be viewed closely with the lens of the situation in the text. The different personalities and characters in the drama of the text, represent, in a sort, the different actors in the religious drama in the context in which we live and do theology today. The confrontation between Hananiah and Jeremiah in the middle of the block represents the conflict between contending propositions in matters of religion, theology or even denomination. This is even more the case in regions where religion still plays a strong role in the day-to-day life of the population, and where in addition, religious and denominational voices contradict one another while pronouncing the truth about the Inexpressible. Who has the truth? Where is the truth to be found? What are the criteria for knowing the bearer of the truth? What are the clues for discernment? How can an individual react and respond in the face of opposition to his own standpoint, even though each of the contending parties is consciously sure of the veracity of the truth claim of its contention? The Jeremiah-Hananiah duel reveals, from the background of the characterisation of these personages in the text, that there should be, in matters pertaining to the Truth, an attitude of reticence towards any absolute claims. YHWH alone is the arbiter in these matters and human beings need always to maintain consciousness of their contingency.

¹¹ J.A. SANDERS, *Hermeneutics*, in K. CRIM (ed.), *IDBS*, Nashville, 1981, p. 402-407, see p. 406.

General Conclusion

It takes us to the question of pluralism that forms a major motif in our Part One. Hermeneutical pluralism leads to practical pluralism. One of the many signs of the times, and equally one of the many blessings in our day, is no doubt what has been called religious pluralism, or in other words, a widespread and vigorous revival of religions in their multiple forms¹². And since religion is inevitably connected with culture, a religiously pluralistic society is, or should be, at the same time multicultural and multiethnic¹³. This multi-religiosity of the society, giving rise to multiculturalism and multiethnicity has helped the different religions (and should do so), theologians, religious and denominational leaders to develop a strong sense of respect for the other. In fact, pluralism could be said to be one of the marks of modern and post modern theological thinking. And what does this mean in concrete terms? It could have expression in different areas: in theological formulations, as concerns religious convictions, denominational boundaries, cultural ideological standpoints and prejudices, in interpersonal and intercommunitarian relationships, etc. In a word, it means an attitude of openness to and acceptance of the workings of the Spirit beyond one's particular confines. The minute intricacies involved in this theological question and discussion – the question and danger of relativism and subjectivism – was quite beyond the major crux of our focus; suffice it to say that one of the lessons of the narratives of Jer. 26-29 points to the obstacles to harmony which is an attitude of exclusivity, an attitude that is not willing to open oneself and recognise the truth and the nobility in the other, an attitude that is totalitarian in thinking and in acting.

Narratology-Theology-Normativity

In the logic of our work, theology becomes the prism through which a normal literary piece is seen as Scripture, and when this happens, clearly, the logic, the grammar, of the reading shifts. Polk beautifully articulates this shift of the language codes:

¹² P.C. PHAN, *Doing Theology in the Context of Cultural and Religious Pluralism: An Asian Perspective*, in *LvSt* 27 (2002), p. 39-68, see p. 39.

¹³ In saying this, we are not unaware of the many places and situations where this is still not the case; that is, where a religion, understood as a State religion, is privileged above others or even where free religious expression of the inhabitants is not yet recognised or even prohibited.

General Conclusion

“When the *Gestalt* is formed in the context of faith and the paradigm is taken as word of God, then the subjunctive mood and the adverbs of possibility [...] shift toward the indicative and imperative. This of course means that the quality of the reader’s involvement also shifts. [...]. The text, instead of merely proposing possible ways of construing word and self and beyond simple entertaining the reader with a sense of ‘having lived another life’, is now viewed as having a claim upon oneself. Its ultimate meaning, what it finally intends, is something that is only completed in the reader’s living. How s/he responds to the summons and pursues the intended transformation become part of the work’s scope. In fact, that response becomes one criterion for evaluating what the text is and does, what it ultimately means. The transformed life of a competent reader becomes a guide to interpretation”¹⁴.

It is therefore a question of the confluence between narratology and theological normativity. A narrative in its literary form is essentially characterised distinctly by the presence of a story and a teller of the story, the narrator¹⁵. In its encompassing sense, a narrative is an account of events and characters in the events, acting through time and space. The chaining of these events, their beginning and end is organised by the narrator, by his purposeful principle of selection. In other words, it is an account of characters and events in a plot moving over time and space through conflict toward resolution¹⁶. But in our contention, the arrangement of the materials does not rely only on editorial and literary sensitivities, but even that, also on the message. This is particularly interesting for the biblical texts, which remain an articulation of the Inexpressible, God Himself and the relations of the humans with Him. And so the biblical text could be appreciated as a text that puts in scene the interactions of the human characters with themselves and with God, though inaccessible, but still as a character.

¹⁴ T. POLK, *The Prophetic Persona*, p. 174.

¹⁵ R. SCHOLLES & R. KELLOG, *The Nature of Narrative*, London, 1966, p. 4.

¹⁶ G. FACKRE, *Narrative Theology: An Overview*, in *Interpretation* 37 (1983), p. 340-352, see p. 340.

General Conclusion

Then we come to narrative theology, which in the main is a discourse about God in the setting of story. In this sense, narrative becomes the image and medium for understanding and interpreting faith. Depiction and description of reality in terms of plot, coherence, movement and climax becomes the elements at the centre of talk about God. Robert Alter has the credit in writing: "In biblical narrative [...] God's purposes are always entrained in history, dependent on the acts of individual men and women for their continuing realization [...]. The biblical tale, through the most rigorous economy of means, leads us again and again to ponder complexities of motive and ambiguities of character because they are essential aspects of its vision (of humanity), created by God, enjoying or suffering all the consequences of human freedom"¹⁷. It is thus a question of seeing in the literary artistry itself the normative voice of Scripture. McCarthy cites the inner questionings of a "religious", disturbed because Scripture has been entangled in literary embellishment: "The Scripture scholars with their midrash and so forth have thrown out the baby with the bath as far as I am concerned. It is disconcerting to have no way of finding out how much is the word of God and how much is literary embellishment. I have simply given up meditation on the Bible". Responding to this pious concern and anxiety, McCarthy answers:

"There is 'no way of finding out' what 'is the word of God' and 'what is literary embellishment' because the distinction is impossible. The literature is the word of God. The literary expression is not a mere material cloak for some mysterious divine thing; the expression is the divine communicating itself to man in the only terms man can grasp, human terms"¹⁸.

Literary reading has therefore become at the same time theological, and why not, religious reading, and more so, for one who considers Scripture to be Holy Writ. It is true that many scholars think that modern biblical criticism should be based in large measure, on the rejection of religious dogma, at times for the simple reason to sound radical, or to avoid being tagged conservative, it is also true that "to the extent that a religious reading

¹⁷ R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 12, 22.

¹⁸ D.J. MCCARTHY, *The Word of God and "Literary Embellishment"*, in D.J. MCCARTHY, *Institution and Narratives: Collected Essays*, Rome, 1985, p. 287-311, see p. 287.

General Conclusion

suits the biblical texts and has an advantage for understanding them, it has significant scholarly contributions to make”¹⁹. Again, it is true that the attempt to balance the one-sidedness of a far too radical and secular reading of biblical narratives can lead to the danger of defending religious truth at the price of an apologetic compromise of scholarly rigour, it is equally true that “the glory of the religious reading of Scripture is not a search for some quasi-scientific confirmation of traditional verities but the exposition of religious questions that have been neglected by biblical scholarship. Questions that are genuine produce answers that are true”²⁰.

Robert Alter concludes his book thus:

“The Hebrew writers manifestly took delight in the artful limning of these lifelike characters and actions, and so they created an unexhausted source of delight for a hundred generations of readers. But that pleasure of imaginative play is deeply interfused with a sense of great spiritual urgency. The biblical writers fashion their personages with a complicated, sometimes alluring, often fiercely insistent individuality because it is in the stubbornness of human individuality that each man and woman encounters God or ignores Him, responds to or resists Him. Subsequent religious tradition has by and large encouraged us to take the Bible seriously rather than to enjoy it, but the paradoxical truth of the matter may well be that by learning to enjoy the biblical stories more fully as stories, we shall also come to see more clearly what they mean to tell us about God, man, and the perilously momentous realm of history”²¹.

Further, a last word on the theological accent given to the text we have analysed and the book of Jeremiah in general. It is true that there is temptation in religious (Christian) circles today, due to fundamentalism or even fanaticism, to push the text so further than reasonable; or even make the God of the text to become an ideological tool for

¹⁹ U. SIMON, *Reading Prophetic Narratives*, trans. from the Hebrew by Lenn J. Schramm, Bloomington, 1997, p. xvi-xvii.

²⁰ U. SIMON, *Reading Prophetic Narratives*, p. xvii.

²¹ R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 189.

General Conclusion

ideological ends. This attitude, described by Brueggemann as belated fideism and complementary scepticism²², we have previously described as sterilisation. That is also to say, with Brueggemann, it is not a question of ‘interpretation’ or ‘application’ of the text so that it can be brought near to suit our experience and circumstance. Rather, the text, powerful and compelling as it is, passionate and uncompromising, requires we submit our experience to it, and thereby re-enter our experience on new terms, namely the terms of the text. The text does not need to be applied to the modern situation; rather the situation needs to be submitted to the text for a fresh discernment. It is rather the situation that needs a re-interpretation. It is in a way a question of reading and always re-reading ancient biblical texts with a kind of social responsiveness however foreign to historical-critical methods. The reader’s reading compass does not entail asking what these texts mean or what they say, as if by that the reader would arrive at a final summary or conclusion, but rather “what these texts do, in their inception and each time in their retelling”²³. Brueggemann continues: “I argue that they [texts] propose to us an alternative world in which to live. They invite us to try it and for the moment to withdraw our intense allegiance to the world defined by the system. The stories have as their function to loosen our tight commitments to the life-world of our vested interests and for a moment to perceive the world differently”²⁴.

Overtures: A gap closed, a gloss introduced

Reading the book of Jeremiah, of course remains an ongoing process, despite the enormity of works and volumes that have seen the light of the day. One of the subtle and underlying presuppositions we have maintained in our hermeneutic articulation in Part One is that no reading is final. The reading we have proposed, like all others, is at best only partial, and using the words of Polk, “shaped (and misshaped) by the dialogue with earlier readings and limited by the restricted perspective and competences of this particular reader”²⁵, and I add, will be evidently limited by future reading postures yet to

²² W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Next Steps in Jeremiah Studies?* p. 417.

²³ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *The Prophet as a Destabilising Presence*, p. 226-227.

²⁴ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *The Prophet as a Destabilising Presence*, p. 227.

²⁵ T. POLK, *The Prophetic Persona*, p. 174.

General Conclusion

be born. This is why one of the major tasks of exegesis, in our contention, is not simply, giving explanations and answers to haunting questions, but engaging in the methodological and hermeneutical debate. The questions, especially the second, posed by Jesus (see the General Introduction), remains the guiding compass in all exegetical enterprise: “what is written in the Law (text)? *How do you read?*”

“The gates of exegesis have not been locked”, writes Maimonides. This thesis is not the first work on the book of Jeremiah. It is neither the first written in one or two or more of the chapters of this work. Even though the accents of the work delineate its specificity and difference from previous works on the book of Jeremiah, it does not pretend nevertheless to be the first work done from the bias of the synchronic approach on the book. This granted, each positive achievement in any exegetical exercise remains at the same time a delineation of its limit. The reader of an exegetical work retains the right, and why not, even the obligation, to add a personal link to the long chain of biblical exegesis. But this is supposed to be necessarily connected with those that preceded it, for the new is to a good logical extent a product of the old – either by continuation or by contradiction. Knowledge of the past links does not simply make one acquainted with the achievements of the predecessors, but also deepens one’s understanding and at the same time creates other overtures for future scholars. In this sense, an attempt to close a gap in exegesis becomes an introduction of a gloss.

And so, re-reading this thesis in the last few weeks hints me that if I were to rework on it, it is evident that it has opened up more ways than it has tried to close by finding alternative reading postures to previous glosses in interpretation. It suffices just to mention few of these areas according to the different Parts of the thesis. It remains for me a disturbing question if, taking the LXX as a point of departure, one would still arrive at the same theological design in the book of Jeremiah as we have detected with the MT, bearing in mind the different internal logic of organisation in the LXX. If the design is the same, that poses further problems about explaining the evident difference in the organisation of the two editions. Should the design be different, a work of comparison imposes all the more.

General Conclusion

In discussing the theology of the text, it was always at the back of the mind the confusion between the possible ideological claims of the text, as championed by Carroll, and the theological as by Brueggemann. It is true that in many stages of the thesis, we have more identified with Brueggemann, Clements, Stulman, etc, i.e. those who are aligned more to the theological voice of the text, reading Carroll however has always been an alarming voice which hints at the yet unearthed problems or some other facets of the old problems not easily explainable. Take for example Carroll's insistence on the question of the ideological stance of the book. Even though that synchronic sensitivities bracket these biases out, the reader does not find it so easy to ignore them especially when the latter also has an interest in the theological message of the narrative. Brueggemann is true when he writes that "there is no easy or innocent settlement of categories of 'ideology' and 'theology', and to project one's own reservations of certain categories of utterance (or one's own enthusiasms) is hardly helpful or scholarly"²⁶. It seems a deeper engagement with the text is needed in this respect, knowing that there are hazards in each of the options. While preference for theology may easily lead to succumbing to privileged claims, the champions of ideology may not pretend scientifically detached especially when the usage of the concept is reductionist. Whether these two streams should remain parallel or whether there is, or are meeting points, seems to me a further task that our research work should attempt in the future to engage with.

Finally, even though in the General Introduction it was announced that the theological articulation, especially as concerns the contextual aspect, would not be elaborated, I sense the necessity of future work in Jeremiah to dwell seriously and more concretely on what these ancient texts mean for the man and woman of today who read these texts, and this in more concrete and more specifically contextual ambient. How can these narratives be made part and parcel of the 'handbooks' of concrete Christian and Jewish communities in the last analysis, without at the same time rendering the text untouchable and blocking its dynamism? However, in the pages above and to the extent it is here articulated, part of Jeremiah's message is a call to hope even in the midst of ruins, bearing in mind that

²⁶ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Next Steps in Jeremiah Studies?* p. 413.

General Conclusion

YHWH is at work; a call to each reader to recognise his or her limits in his or her reading, in order to listen to the other, while both would equally recognise their common limits, then listen together, especially in matters and pronouncements concerning the Other, the Absolute.

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