

JEREMIAH 29:5–7: A DEUTERONOMIC ALLUSION

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In his letter to the Judean exiles in Babylonia, Jeremiah exhorts them in the following words:

Jer 29:5–7

כְּנֹו כְּתִים וּשְׁבוּ וּנְטַעוּ גִּנּוֹת וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־פְּרִיָן. קָחוּ נָשִׁים וְהוֹלִידוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת וְקָחוּ לְבָנֵיכֶם נָשִׁים וְאֶת־בָּנוֹתֵיכֶם תְּנוּ לְאִנְשֵׁים וְתִלְדֶנָּה בָנִים וּבָנוֹת וּרְכוּ־שֵׁם וְאֶל־תִּמְעַטוּ. וּדְרֹשׁוּ אֶת־שְׁלוֹם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר הִגַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בַעֲדָהּ אֵל ה' כִּי בְשָׁלוֹמָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שְׁלוֹם.

Build homes and settle, plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, and they will bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not diminish. And seek the well-being of the city to which I exiled you, and pray for it to the Lord, for in its well-being will be your well-being.

The message is clear: the exiles are to establish their own community in Babylonia, prepare for a long stay there, and hope for the continued prosperity of Babylonia itself, of which the Judeans may partake. Unlike the “false prophets” who view the exile as temporary, Jeremiah foresees a long period of exile and wants to institute measures that will preserve the community that must undergo it.

There are few textual problems in these verses. Jeremiah’s message seems to be couched in words commonly and naturally associated with establishing a settlement. Yet, though the surface meaning of the passage has long been apparent, I want to suggest here that the rhetoric of these verses is more subtle and more powerful than has been recognized. The wording is not just common and natural, but reflects specific wording in Deut 20:5–10. That is to say, Jer 29:5–7 contains a deuteronomic allusion.

וּדְרֹשׁוּ הַשְּׁטָרִים אֶל־הָעָם לֵאמֹר מִי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה כִּי־תִחַדֵּשׁ וְלֹא חָנְכוּ יֶלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁכַּח לְבִיתוֹ פְּנִימוֹת בְּמַלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ אַחֵר יִחְנַכֵּנוּ. וּמִי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נָטַע כֶּרֶם וְלֹא חָלְלוּ יֶלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁבּ לְכִיתוֹ פְּנִימוֹת בְּמַלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ אַחֵר יִחְלִלֵנוּ. וּמִי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אִרְשׂ אִשָּׁה וְלֹא

... לקחה ילך וישב לביתו פן-ימות במלחמה ואיש אחר יקחנה
 כ-תקרב אל-עיר להלחם עליה וקראת אליה שלום.

- v.5 And the officials shall speak to the people saying, "Whatever man has built a new house and has not dedicated it, let him go back home, lest he die in war and another man dedicate it.
- v.6 And whatever man has planted a vineyard and not enjoyed its use, let him go back home, lest he die in war and another man enjoy its use.
- v.7 And whatever man has betrothed a wife and not married her, let him go back home, lest he die in war and another man marry her."

- v.10 When you approach a city to fight against it you shall proclaim peace terms to it.

There are four common elements, in the same order, in Jer 29:5–7 and Deut 20:5–10:

בנה בנים	build houses
נטע כרם/גנות	plant vineyards/gardens
לקח אשה	marry wives
שלום העיר	peace/well-being of the city

To be sure, the intentions of the Jeremiah passage and the Deuteronomy passage are quite different, and therein lies the rhetorical cleverness of Jeremiah's use of the deuteronomic reference. Deuteronomy wants to insure that he who builds, plants, or marries should derive the benefit of these activities—that the main business of life should not have been undertaken and left unfinished. Jeremiah wants more; he wants the *initiation* of these activities—that the main business of life may begin in Babylonia. But there is yet more. In Deuteronomy, building, planting, and marrying are reasons for which an individual may be granted a deferral from military service, and the last item, proclaiming "peace" to a city, has the potential for preventing war altogether. It is this association with abstinence from war, I am suggesting, that underlies Jeremiah's rhetoric. For in addition to encouraging settlement, Jeremiah is also subtly counselling against revolt. Do those things, he tells the exiles, for which Deuteronomy permits a man to refrain from going to war. Jeremiah knew the futility of opposing the might of Babylonia, and continually advised submitting to its power rather than dying (cf. 21:9; 27:11–12; 38:17–18). Our passage reinforces this idea.

There are two particular usages in Jer 29:5–7 which support the view that these verses call upon the deuteronomic text. They are the sequence *build, plant, marry* and the phrase *well-being of the city*.

1. *Build* and *plant* are lexical associates conveying the notion of establishing a community, and they are found together often, both in Jeremiah (e.g., 1:10; 24:6; 31:3–4, 27; 35:7, 42:10; 45:4) and elsewhere in the Bible (Josh 24:13; Ezek 28:26; 36:36; Amos 5:11; 9:14; Zeph 1:13; Eccl 2:4).¹ But the series *build – plant – wives/children* is much rarer. In fact, the occurrence most similar to Deut 20:5–7 is in the curses in Deut 28:30–32.

אשה תארש ואיש אחר ישגלנה (ק' ישכנה) בית תבנה ולא תשב בו כרם תטע ולא
תחללנו
בניך ובנותיך נתנים לעם אחר

You will betroth a wife and another man will lie with her.

You will build a house but you will not dwell in it.

You will plant a vineyard but will not enjoy its use.

. . . .

Your sons and daughters will be given to another people. . . .

This, too, may echo in Jeremiah's message, where the deuteronomic curses are turned into a promise for the future.

Not too far removed from this is deutero-Isaiah's future promise which contains the idea of building, planting, and progeny but lacks the wife-motif.

Isa 65:21–23

ובנו בתים וישבו
ונטעו כרמים ואכלו פרים
לא יבנו ואחר ישב
לא יטעו ואחר יאכל
. . . .
לא יגעו לריק
ולא ילדו לבהלה
כי זרע כרוכי ה' המה
וצאצאיהם אתם

They shall build houses and dwell in them,

They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another dwell,

They shall not plant and another eat

1. Thompson (1980, p. 546) comments on Jer 29:5–6 that "*Build* and *plant* were verbs that went back to Jeremiah's call (1:10), but their use is different." I am suggesting that *build* and *plant* should be distinguished from *build*, *plant*, and *marry*. That is, although there is in the latter an echo of the former, it is turned into something with quite different associations by the addition of the third element.

They shall not toil for no purpose,
 And they shall not bear children for terror/in vain.
 For they shall be a people blessed by the Lord,
 And their offspring shall remain with them.

Finally, Ps 107:36–38 incorporates settlement, vineyards, and increase.

ויושב שם רעבים ויכוננו עיר מושב
 ויזרעו שדות ויטעו כרמים ויעשו פרי תבואה
 ויברכם וירבו מאד ובהמתם לא ימעט

There he settles the hungry, and they establish a city of settlement.
 They sow fields and plant vineyards, and they yield fruitful produce.
 He blesses them and they increase greatly; he does not let their cattle
 decrease.

Now the linking of building, planting, and increase/children may seem quite natural; poets might use it independently of one another. But the fact remains that it is not common, and if we compare these examples detail for detail we find that Jer 29:5–7 most closely matches the passages in Deut 20:5–7, where the series is *build houses – plant vineyards – marry wives* (without the addition of children) and/or Deut 28:30–32 which has *marry wives – build houses – plant vineyards – children*. But the Deuteronomy 20 passage, while lacking *children*, goes on to speak of *city* and *peace*, the same elements found in Jer 29:7.

2. Jer 29:7 has piqued a number of commentators, both because its content, praying for the peace of the enemy, seems to run counter to common sense and the views held at the time, and also because of the word העיר, “the city”, for it was not one particular city, but the entire country of Babylonia about which the prophet spoke. The ideological difficulty is solved simply and logically, for if indeed the Judeans were to establish a community in exile, then certainly their own well-being depended to a large extent on the well-being of the host country. The philological difficulty is circumvented either by following the LXX reading “country” or by understanding העיר in a distributive sense: “any city.” While these solutions are reasonably satisfying, the use of שלום and עיר become all the more acceptable, even appropriate in light of their occurrence in Deut 20:10.²

2. Weinfeld (1972, p. 360, citing Kaufmann) notes the similarity between Jer 29:7 and Deut 23:7: לא תדרש שלומם. Holladay (1983) has recently suggested a novel explanation for the appearance of שלום in this verse. He explains that normally a letter, which is what Jeremiah 29 is, opens with a stereotyped greeting containing the word שלום, but in this case Jeremiah confounded the expectation of his audience by deferring the greeting and inverting it to refer not to the Judean addressees but to Babylonia.

It will have served my purpose if this explication of the connection between Jer 29:5-7 and Deut 20:5-10 proves convincing and provides scholars with a better interpretation of Jeremiah's letter. But there are implications that go beyond these few verses and relate both to the study of the entire Book of Jeremiah and to the problem of allusion in the Bible.

It is not surprising, after all, to find a deuteronomic allusion in the Book of Jeremiah, for deuteronomic influence in Jeremiah is well documented (see Weinfeld for examples). There is not, however, complete agreement as to what this indicates about the history of the book. Some scholars take the deuteronomic passages to be later additions to the prophet's words—provided by post-Jeremiah editors of the deuteronomic school. Others note that Jeremiah was a contemporary of the early deuteronomists and may have himself drawn on their forms of expression, or even have been connected with their movement.³

If we are to speak of a deuteronomic *allusion*, as I have done, then the assumption is that the text of Deuteronomy (in oral or written form) was known and used by Jeremiah. This is, of course, entirely possible, for if the Book of Deuteronomy was composed and/or widely circulated during the time of Josiah (as most scholars maintain), then Jeremiah, who lived at that time, was certainly familiar with it. If, in fact, Deuteronomy had gained popular acceptance, then it seems quite reasonable that Jeremiah would have incorporated allusions to it into his speeches in order to make his own rhetoric more appealing to his audience.⁴ If Ezekiel, a slightly younger contemporary of Jeremiah, and a prophet not generally linked to the deuteronomic school, could quote Deuteronomy, then surely Jeremiah could also.⁵

I do not mean to suggest that all deuteronomic phraseology in the Book of Jeremiah necessarily originated from the mouth of the prophet. I am merely stating that, to my mind, Jer 29:5-7 is a deuteronomic reference which quite likely did. For one thing, scholars have not generally considered the beginning of this letter to show evidence of a later

3. This view is enunciated by Weinfeld (1972, pp. 159-60), Thompson (1980, p. 44), and Clements (1982, p. 122). For a lucid overview of scholarly opinion on the composition of the Book of Jeremiah see Thompson, pp. 33-50.

4. That is, Jeremiah's audience would have recognized the allusion. This is a case similar to what S. Lasine (1984, p. 38) calls "one-sided literary dependence." He defines it in reference to Judges 19 as follows: "By 'literary dependence' I mean that Judges 19 presupposes the reader's awareness of Genesis 19 in its present form, and depends on that awareness in order to be properly understood."

5. Ezek 18:20 is, as Moshe Greenberg has explicated (1983, p. 333) a reference to Deut 24:16.

editorial hand (perhaps because they had not perceived the deuteronomic connections), although there is some question about later parts of it.⁶ For another, it seems to me that the deuteronomic echo in our verses is different, in a way that I am not sure I can adequately express, from the kinds of deuteronomic editorial additions usually pointed out. It is somehow more organic to the passage, more a part of the fabric of the text; it is, if one can continue the textile metaphor, woven into the cloth rather than applied on top of it. All this means that we still need more work on the problem of distinguishing possible deuteronomic layers in the Book of Jeremiah.

And when it comes to allusion in the Bible, even more work is needed, especially in regard to recognizing and categorizing different types. Allusion has been defined as “a reference, explicit or indirect, to a person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage” (Abrams, 1981, p. 8). It would seem that a distinction between allusions to persons, places, or events and literary or textual allusions would be helpful, for it is the latter that is of greater interest to biblicists concerned with source criticism, redaction criticism, or problems of biblical intertextuality. The subject of allusion in the Bible is much too complex to be dealt with here, so I must content myself with a few observations on the recognition of the particular allusion under discussion. It was originally the sequence of *build, plant, marry* that made me think of the same sequence in Deut 20:5–10, and when I checked that passage I noted the additional element, *well-being of the city*. In other words, the allusion is not explicit (Jeremiah does not say that he is alluding to Deuteronomy, nor does he quote Deuteronomy exactly); neither does it involve the use of a particularly striking or obvious expression. Rather it is achieved through the use of a sequence of words, some of them quite ordinary, that recalls the same sequence in another text. Now I am not the first to notice this phenomenon. The linkage of texts through similar expressions and sequences is an old technique in the history of biblical interpretation, although, to be sure, it was not always viewed as allusion in the modern sense. Closer to the modern sense is the observation of the relationship between Ps 114:1–2 and Exod 19:1–6 made by Meir Weiss (1962, pp. 59–61).

Ps 114:1–2

בצאת ישראל ממצרים בית יעקב מעם לעז
היתה יהודה לקדשו ישראל ממשלותיו

6. Cf. Hyatt (1951, p. 86) and more recently Carroll (1981, p. 189).

When Israel went out from Egypt;
The house of Jacob from a foreign-speaking nation,
Judah became his holy one;
Israel, his dominions.

Exod 19:1-6

בחדש השלישי לצאת בני־ישראל מארץ מצרים כה תאמר לבית יעקב ותגיד
לבני ישראל. אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים . . . כי־לי כל־הארץ. ואתם תהיו־לי
ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש.

In the third month of the going out of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt. . . . Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and tell to the children of Israel. You saw what I did to Egypt . . . for mine is all the earth. And you will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

The points of contact are:

Ps 114:1-2

בצאת ישראל ממצרים
ישראל // בית יעקב
היתה
לקדשו // לממשלותיו

Exod 19:1-6

לצאת בני ישראל מארץ מצרים
בית יעקב // בני ישראל
תהיו לי
ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש

This is another case where one text (Psalm 114) draws upon another (Exodus 19) in a way which is structurally similar to Jer 29:5-7.

More recently, Moshe Garsiel has found numerous examples of what he calls “comparative structures, analogies, and parallels” in the Book of Samuel and elsewhere. For instance, he juxtaposes Gen 37:23-24 and Jer 38:6 and observes that both pericopes share the following sequence of expressions:

Gen 37:23-24

they took him
they threw him into the pit (הבורה)

*and the pit was empty; there was
no water in it*

Jer 38:6

they took Jeremiah
and they threw him into the pit (אל
הבור)

and there was no water in the pit.

Garsiel (1983, p. 26) comments that “the author intended to establish a linguistic and descriptive association which would link the pericope of Jeremiah’s being thrown into the pit to the scene of Joseph’s being thrown into the pit.”

Although this example is the same type as those I have cited above, it raises certain questions in my mind. Is this really a literary allusion, or is it that whenever one wants to describe a scene in which someone is thrown into a pit, one will inevitably use some of the words in the same order? How are we to distinguish allusions from stereotyped description?

How exact must the reference be to qualify as an allusion? May synonyms be used? May the sequence change?⁷ Much research remains to be done before we can identify allusions confidently, but it would seem that the Bible's use of discontinuous word sequences of the type illustrated here is a technique worth investigating further. From the investigation we stand to learn a good deal more about the literary milieu in which the biblical authors worked and the literary traditions on which they drew.

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7. There is already evidence that an inverted sequence indicates literary reference: Seidel's rule (cf. Seidel, 1956, p. 150). This rule is invoked by Greenberg to support the claim that Ezek 18:20 is dependent on Deut 24:16 (see note 5).

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