IN QUEST OF THE AUTOGRAPH
OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH: A STUDY OF
JEREMIAH 25 IN RELATION TO JEREMIAH 46-51

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The doctrinal basis of the Evangelical Theological Society makes specific reference to the concept of autographs for the individual books of the Bible. The book of Jeremiah is interesting in this regard in that the MT of Jeremiah is markedly different from its LXX text. For those who believe that the original autograph was indeed the inerrant Word of God, it is of interest to determine which of the two textual traditions is closer to that presumed autograph.

This paper is primarily concerned with Jeremiah 25 and the theme of the cup of Yahweh's wrath in relation to the so-called oracles against foreign nations in chaps. 46-51 (MT), which appear in the LXX immediately after 25:13. It will be argued that it is not easy to posit a simple evolutionary model to explain the relationship between the divergent textual traditions represented by MT and LXX. Moreover it does not seem possible to choose between these separate traditions in relation to a presumed autograph from which either or both of these texts developed. In short, the very concept of an autograph of the book of Jeremiah may be in question. Perhaps we need to formulate a new model for thinking about the concept of the inerrancy of the Biblical text in relation to the elusive scholarly construct we have designated by the term "autograph."

The fact that Jeremiah 25 is somehow connected with the collection of oracles against the nations of chaps. 46-51 (MT) is obvious. As Hay puts it: "The drinking of the cup symbolizes the judgment of the nations, a judgment that is articulated in the oracles."[1] In the text of the LXX the collection of oracles against foreign nations appears after 25:13 and the "cup of wrath" pericope (25:15-38) was regarded as the proper conclusion to this collection. Nonetheless the relationship between chaps. 25 and 46-51 in the MT is not entirely clear.

More than eighty years ago Cornill argued that in spite of the present textual situation in the LXX, which has 25:1-13 as an introduction to the larger collection of oracles against foreign nations in Jeremiah, it is only

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[1] L. C. Hay, *The Oracles Against the Nations in Jeremiah 46-51* (dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1951) 75.

in the MT form of the text that this passage forms a suitable introduction to that collection.[2] In the MT the discourse threatens Judah with destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and then after seventy years Babylon in turn will be judged. The LXX nowhere mentions Babylon or Nebuchadnezzar in this chapter. The vague reference in v. 9 to the "family/nation from the north" that Yahweh will send against Judah is in keeping with the general "enemy from the north" motif of Jeremiah's early preaching.[3] The desolation wreaked on both Judah and her neighbors by this unnamed foe is presented in language typical of ancient treaty-curses (vv. 9b–11a):

> I will make them a desolation, and a hissing and an everlasting reproach; and I will destroy from them the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the scent of ointment, and the light of a candle. And all the land shall be a desolation.

In the summary judgment Judah is to be enslaved "among the nations" (v. 2) for seventy years. Again the specification of Judah's enemy is vague. The reference to "that nation" and "that land" can be interpreted as a reference to Babylon, but this is by no means certain. Bright has argued that "the nation threatened in vs. 13 was originally Judah, while 'this book' was the (original) scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies."[4] According to Cornill, the text of 25:1–13 has undergone a systematic editing that preceded the LXX and that the MT carried much further.[5]

If 25:1–13 in its original form does not form a proper introduction to Jeremiah's oracles against the nations, perhaps the "cup of wrath" pericope in 25:15–38 was the introduction and not the conclusion to this collection, as Cornill, Rudolph and others have suggested.[6] The relationship between 25:15–38 and chaps. 46–51 (MT), however, does not appear to be so simple. The text of 25:15–38 has also undergone a complex development in the history of transmission and expansion. The difference between the texts of the MT and the LXX is again of primary importance in determining the relationship between these two parts of the book of Jeremiah.

J. G. Janzen has shown that the LXX represents an early recension of the text of Jeremiah, which not only is significantly shorter but also preserves superior readings in many instances.[7] Because of this fact I found the LXX helpful in reconstructing Jeremiah's poetry in an earlier

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[2] C. H. Cornill, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Leipzig: Chr. Herm. Tauchnitz, 1905) 282.

[3] Cf. Jer 1:13–15; 4:5–31; 5:15–17; 6:1–5; etc.

[4] J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB 21; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) 163.

[5] Cornill, *Jeremia* 282. Cornill is following the arguments of F. Schwally in *ZAW* 8 (1888) 183.

[6] Cornill, *Jeremia* 284; W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT I/12; 2d ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1958) 141; G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972) 397.

[7] J. G. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (HSM 6: Cambridge: Harvard University, 1975). See also E. Tov, *The Septuagint Translation of Jeremiah and Baruch* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1976).

study.[8] With the objective control of the historical development of Hebrew prosody, the Hebrew text reflected in the LXX was found to be generally superior to the expansionist text of the MT.

The text of 25:15-38, as reconstructed with the aid of the LXX, reveals a complex history of tradition. A poem against the nations in general (25:30-38) shows striking affinity to the eighth-century oracles of Amos. In Amos 1:2 the series of oracles against the nations was introduced by a quatrain:

Yahweh / from Zion roars /	[	11
from Jerusalem / he utters his voice //		15
The pastures of shepherds / dry up /	[	15
and the top of Carmel / withers //		.10

This refrain (the first verset of which is also quoted in Joel 4:16) provides the formative theme of the poetry in Jer 25:30-38 (LXX 32:16-24).[9]

[30] You / shall prophesy against them / all these words //	16	3
and you shall say unto them /	10	1
Yahweh / from the heights he roars /	[11	2
and from his holy abode / he utters his voice /	16	2_
He roars mightily / against his fold /	[13	2
like the shout / of the grape-treaders it rings out /	13	2_
Against all the inhabitants / of the earth //	[12	2
[31] clamor resounds / to the ends of the earth /	15	2_
For YHWH has an indictment / against the nations /	[13	2
he is arraigning for judgment / all flesh //	11	2
The wicked / he will put them to the sword /	[15	2
utterance of YHWH / ⟨of hosts⟩[a] //	10	2_

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[8] D. L. Christensen, *Transformations of the War Oracle in Old Testament Prophecy: Studies in the Oracles Against the Nations* (HDR 3; Missoula: Scholar's, 1975), republished under the title *Prophecy and War in Ancient Israel* (Berkeley: BIBAL, 1989).

[9] For a discussion of the method of prosodic analysis used here, which combines the counting of morae to assess the relative length of poetic lines and the distribution of syntactic accentual-stress units as marked by the disjunctive accents of the Masoretic system to determine the rhythmic structure of the poem, see D. L. Christensen, "Prose and Poetry in the Bible: The Narrative Poetics of Deuteronomy 1,9-18," *ZAW* 97 (1985) 179-189; "Narrative Poetics and the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah," in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSup 40; ed. E. R. Follis; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987) 29-48. Notes to the text of Jer 25:30-38: (a) The term *ṣbʾwt* is frequently missing, or located in different places, in the LXX text of Jeremiah. It is missing in both places here in LXX and is relocated in MT to improve the metrical structure. (b) A conjectural emendation based on LXX, *hoi krioi*, which is used to translate *krym* in Ps 65:14. (c) The text is emended to read *s⟨b⟩kw*, which involves a simple haplography and is based on the parallel usage in Jer 4:7. Cf. also Jer 21:14; 46:14, where MT *sbybyh* and *sbybyk* may also reflect a textual corruption of this same word. (d) Reading *h* as a vowel letter for the third person singular masculine suffix rather than the article of the following word.

[32]Thus / says YHWH [of hosts][a] /   <u>8</u>   2
   Look! Disaster / spreads / from nation to nation //   17   3
   And a mighty tempest / stirs / from earth's farthest bounds //   <u>18</u>   3_
[33]Those who are / slaughtered by YHWH / in that day /   18   3
   (They shall extend) from one end of the earth /   ⌈ 8   1
    verily, to the other end of the earth //   ⌊ 10   1
   They shall not be mourned / and they shall not be gathered /   <u>18</u>   2
    and they shall not be buried /   10   1_

   Verily, dung / on the face of the ground / they shall be //   18   3
[34]Howl, O shepherds / and cry out /   <u>17</u>   2
   And roll (in ashes) / lords of the flock /   14   2
   For your time has come / to be slaughtered //   <u>15</u>   2_

   Indeed, your dispersion (has come) /   <u>10</u>   1
   And you will go down / like the choicest rams[b] //   ⌈ 11   2
[35] and there shall be no refuge / for the shepherds /   ⌊ 15   2
   [And] no escape / for the lords of the flock //   ⌈ 15   2
[36] listen! / A howling from the shepherds /   ⌊ 11   2_
   Indeed, the wail / of the lords of the flock //   ⌈ 11   2
    for YHWH is despoiling / their pastures //   ⌊ 15   2
[37]And they are devastated / their quiet sheepfolds //   ⌈ 14   2
    because of / the fierce wrath of YHWH //   ⌊ <u>11</u>   2_

[38]Like a lion he has left / his lair[c] //   ⌈ 11   2
    for their land has become / a shambles /   ⌊ 14   2
   Because of / ⟨his⟩ oppressive anger[d] /   ⌈ 13   2
    yea, because of / (his) dreadful anger //   ⌊ <u>11</u>   2_

The rhythmic structure of the text[10] may be diagrammed as follows:

Jer 25:30-31 [8:4:4:8]
Jer 25:32-38 [8:8:9:9:8:8]

    The first section of this pericope (vv. 30-31) is an expansion of the theme of YHWH "roaring from Zion" as presented in Amos 1:2. The unit concludes with the substance of YHWH's "roar"—namely, the Divine Warrior/Judge is arraigning all the nations for judgment. Amos' theme of the "pastures of the shepherds withering" before YHWH is expanded by Jeremiah in a remarkable manner. In imagery taken from Israel's ancient war songs, the coming disaster that "spreads from nation to nation" is portrayed as *gdwlh šᶜr*, "mighty tempest," which has come "from the

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[10] The rhythmic structure is simply the distribution of disjunctive accent marks, which are indicated in the translation of the text by a single slash (/), with a double slash (//) for *silluq* and *athnach*. These disjunctive marks tend to fall into discernible patterns, which probably represent the metrical structure of the text in terms of its performance musically in ancient Israel.

earth's farthest bounds" (v. 32). The rulers of the nations, addressed as
r^cym, "shepherds," and $^{\circ}dyry$ $\d{s}^{\circ}n$, "lords of the flock," are summoned to
mourn their calamity, for there is no escape from the wrath to come. The
summons to mourn in vv. 34-35 is in effect an announcement of judg-
ment—a terrible scene, which the prophet envisions. The rulers of the
nations howl in terror, for YHWH is devastating their $n^{\circ}wt$, "sheepfolds"
(vv. 36-37). Like a lion YHWH has gone up from his lair to vent his
"dreadful anger" (v. 38). The final two versets form a poetic inclusion
with the opening series. Both present YHWH in the image of a roaring
lion who has come up in fierce anger against the nations.

The above prosodic analysis and interpretation of Jer 25:30-38 demon-
strates the fact that the passage in question is an integral part of the
developing tradition of oracles against foreign nations, and as such the
pericope must be associated with the larger collection of such oracles in
chaps. 46-51. But is this relationship merely that of an introduction or
conclusion to the formal collection of Jeremiah's oracles against the
nations? To answer that question one must look more closely at the "cup
of wrath" pericope in 25:15-29.

Weiser has denied that 25:15-38 once formed the introduction to the
collection of oracles against the nations in chaps. 46-51, as Rudolph and
others maintain.[11] He argues that the enumeration of the individual
nations in vv. 18-26 interrupts the stylistic continuity of the "cup of
wrath" pericope (vv. 15-17, 27-29).[12] To Weiser the list of nations is a
secondary addition to the text, made when the oracles were moved from
their original place after 25:14, and so served as a kind of substitute for
the original poems.[13] The "cup of wrath" pericope is then reduced by
Weiser to six verses (25:15-17, 27-29), which appear in prose. These
verses, as preserved in the LXX, may be translated as follows:

> [15]Thus spoke YHWH, the God of Israel: "Take this cup of the wine of wrath
> from my hand, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.
> [16]They shall stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending
> among them." [17]So I took the cup from YHWH's hand, and I made all the
> nations to whom YHWH sent me drink it. [27]"Drink, be drunk and vomit!
> Fall and rise no more, because of the sword that I am sending among you."
> [28]And if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall
> say: Thus spoke YHWH: "You must drink! [29]For look! I begin to work evil at
> the city that is called by my own name, and shall you go unpunished? You
> shall not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword against the inhabi-
> tants of the earth."

Again it should be noted that no specific nations are mentioned. The
agent of YHWH's wrath is a sword (vv. 16, 29), which YHWH has
summoned. The imagery is that of holy war, and the agent of YHWH's

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[11] A. Weiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia Kapitel 25:15-52:34* (ATD 20; Göttingen:
Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1955) 231.

[12] J. W. Rothstein and P. Volz have influenced Weiser here.

[13] Weiser, *Jeremia* 231.

destruction, presumably the Babylonians, is unimportant to the prophet. It is YHWH's battle.

Weiser has argued that the motif of YHWH's cup of wrath is not the invention of Jeremiah, as Cornill and others have suggested, but probably goes back to a sacral tradition of divine judgment, perhaps connected to an ancient ordeal as reflected in Num 5:11 ff.[14] Bright is also uncomfortable with making Jeremiah the author of this motif, though he does note that "the figure of the 'cup of wrath' . . . is first clearly witnessed in sayings and writings of this general period . . . and may well have been popularized by him and his followers."[15] F. M. Cross has suggested that the motif may reflect an ancient rite in which the cup contained blood rather than wine.[16] A possible reflex of this rite is found in the Ugaritic literature where the warrior goddess ʿAnat "drinks blood without a cup" in a gory battle scene.[17] In the context of holy war the cup of wine/blood may have been a victory cup used in cultic celebration. In typical reversal of imagery the cup of victory has become a cup of wrath or poison that the nations are forced to drink to their own destruction.

Bright has reacted strongly to Weiser's excision of the list of nations from the pericope in Jeremiah 25: "Although the list of peoples in vss. 18-26 has doubtless received expansion (but one would expect a list of some sort here!), the prophecy itself [vss. 15-29] may be credited to Jeremiah."[18] The shorter list of nations as preserved in the LXX reads as follows (25:18-26; LXX 32:4-12):

[4]Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, and his kings and his nobles—to make them a desolation and a waste and a thing of scorn.

[5]And Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants and his nobles, [6]and all his people and all the hodgepodge (of races there).

And all the kings of the Philistines, Ashkelon and Gaza and Ekron and what remains of Ashdod.

[7]And Edom and Moab and the children of Ammon, [8] and the kings of Tyre and the kings of Sidon and the kings of the coastland beyond the sea.

[9]And Dedan and Tema and Ros(?), and all those who clip the hair of their temples, [10]and all the hodgepodge of peoples who dwell in the desert.

[11]And all the kings of Elam, and all the kingdoms of the Persians, [12]and all the kings from the north.

[14] Ibid. 232. Cf. also the discussion of Hay, "Oracles" 85-86.
[15] Bright, *Jeremiah* 164.
[16] Private communication.
[17] Cf. *UT*, ʿnt:II:6-35. The obvious parallel to this cup of wine/blood in the eucharist of Christian tradition is intriguing.
[18] Bright, *Jeremiah* 164.

> Those far and near, each one with his brother, and all the kingdoms that are on the face of the earth.

The list of nations as preserved in the LXX displays a carefully balanced structure. The series of five thought units concerned with specific foreign nations is framed by an introductory reference to Judah (v. 4) and a concluding summation (vv. 12bc), to the effect that all the kingdoms of the earth are included. The order of the foreign nations listed is indeed interesting. The first two units present Egypt and Philistia, the most immediate threats to Judah in the Josianic period, and the first to fall before the might of Babylon in the closing decade of the seventh century. The third and central unit completes the list of Judah's traditional neighbors, including each of the member nations listed in 27:3 as participants in the anti-Babylonian coalition of c. 594 B.C. In the next two units the prophet turns to the insurgent Arab peoples and the emergent world powers beyond Babylon in the east.

Objections may be raised regarding the reconstruction of a prosaic list of the nations in a form that suggests poetic composition. It should be noted, however, that lists do appear elsewhere in poetic contexts, such as the list of Moabite cities in 48:21-24. The best known extra-Biblical example of an apparent prosaic list imbedded in a poetic context is the "catalogue of ships" in Homer's *Iliad*.[19] Moreover the prose context in which the list of nations is found contains evidence of an original poetic tradition. Verse 27 may be reconstructed in poetry:

Drink, be drunk / and vomit! /	12
Fall / and rise no more! //	13

Verses 15-16 may also reflect an original poetic unit:

Take / this cup of wine / from my hand! //	9
Make them drink it / all the nations /	9
They shall reel in a drunken stupor / before me / .	9

The reuse of this material in poetic form in the oracle against Edom (49:12-13) suggests that 25:15-29 is a single literary unit. Jeremiah 49:12 reflects 25:28-29 in the "cup of wrath" pericope, whereas 49:13 reflects 25:18 in the list of nations.

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[19] See F. Dirlmeier, "Homerisches Epos und Orient," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 98 (1955) 18-37, esp. p. 30. Cf. also C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1949) 6: "When the Ugaritic poet begins Baal's plea for a house, he uses wellbalanced stichoi in the best literary tradition; but as soon as the poet, in the course of the same plea, enumerates the houses of other gods (e.g., 51:IV:52-57), he gives a jejune listing, as unsatisfying to the modern esthete as Homer's Catalogue of the Ships is to most modern lovers of Homer." An interesting parallel usage of "the catalog" as a poetic device in English literature is discussed by R. E. McFarland, "Thanksgiving in Seventeenth-Century Poetry," *Albion* 6 (1974) 302-304.

The basic connection between the formal collection of oracles against foreign nations in chaps. 46-51 and 25 is the poem preserved in 25:30-38. Since the poem is an expansion of the introduction to a similar tradition in Amos 1-2, and since its pastoral motifs are dominant throughout chaps. 46-51, one can conclude that the poem may have formed an introduction, or conclusion, to that collection as reflected in the LXX. Nonetheless the formal collection of oracles against foreign nations enjoyed an independent life, as witnessed by their inclusion as a sort of appendix to the book of Jeremiah in MT. Moreover oracles against foreign nations in Jeremiah are not in fact limited to chaps. 25 and 46-51. A prose oracle against Egypt is preserved in 43:8-13; 27:5-11 is an oracle against Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon; and 9:25-26 is an oracle against Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and the Arab peoples. Consequently we ought not to press too hard for a formal literary connection between chaps. 25 and 46-51, as though we could thus circumscribe Jeremiah's prophetic ministry to the nations. The history of tradition behind chap. 25 is much too complex to posit any simple answer to the question posed by the position of Jeremiah's oracles against foreign nations after 25:13 in the LXX.

Holladay may be correct in his decision to go with the shorter text of the LXX as more original in his analysis and translation of chap. 25,[20] as I did in my earlier study of the oracles against foreign nations.[21] But there is something amiss in this methodological approach, for the present text of MT is not to be explained as a simple redactional process on the part of some scribe(s) in antiquity, in which the shorter text was glossed. The prosodic analysis of 25:30-38 presented here shows that the present text of MT has integrity from a metrical point of view, such that individual words or phrases missing in LXX are not to be excised as secondary expansions. They are essential to that text, from a metrical perspective, and represent a tradition in which that text was sung, or chanted, in some community within ancient Israel in essentially its present form.

The quest for the autograph of Jeremiah 25 appears to be as elusive as was the earlier quest for an *Urtext* of the *Iliad* among Homeric scholars.[22] In both cases the actual textual tradition in antiquity turns out to be more dynamic than we thought. The LXX and MT represent two different points in time, within separate communities of faith, in which the living tradition of Jeremiah was set forth in written form within a sacred context. Both forms of that tradition were canonical in a formal sense, at least within those particular communities of faith. It does not appear

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[20] W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 662-682.

[21] Christensen, *Transformations*, esp. chap. 5, "Jeremiah and the Transformation of the War Oracle," pp. 183-280.

[22] *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Perry* (ed. A. Perry; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1971); A. B. Lord, "Homer, Perry, and Huso," *AJA* 52 (1948) 43-44; *The Singer of Tales* (New York: Atheneum, 1968) 141-197; C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1958).

possible to move behind either tradition to recover a single autograph as such, from which both the LXX and the MT were derived. Since both traditions were clearly the canonical "Word of God" within their respective communities of faith, I would prefer to accept the arguments of Lohfink that the concept of inerrancy needs to be applied in terms of the Bible as a whole, rather than in terms of individual books or human authors such as Jeremiah.[23] In one sense, from an historical perspective, both LXX (as a translation and in terms of its Hebrew *Vorlage*) and MT are the canonical "Word of God," at least within their respective communities of faith. Consequently this writer would prefer to see both texts of Jeremiah as inerrant rather than choose between them or apply that term to a scholarly construct called an autograph, which may never have existed as a written entity and which is certainly beyond our grasp so far as Jeremiah 25 is concerned.

[23] N. Lohfink, "The Inerrancy of Scripture," in *The Christian Meaning of the Old Testament* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1968) 24–51.