

The Metonymical Curse as Propaganda in the Book of Jeremiah

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In eight prose texts in Jeremiah, the curse serves a polemical function that justifies the existence of one particular socioreligious community (the Babylonian exiles), while marginalizing others (the remnant in Judah, Judeans who fled to Egypt, and foreign nations). This curse is not used as an invocation of misfortune but has a metonymical sense which describes the embodiment of that misfortune. Although specific curse terminology and order vary, the phrase "you will be a reproach, a byword, a taunt, and a curse" is directed against these three rivals to the Babylonian community and foreshadows the heterogenous constitution of the Judean communities in the Exilic, Postexilic, and Second Temple Periods.

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There is power in language to constitute reality, not just describe it. This was as true in antiquity as it is today, perhaps to a greater extent. J. L. Austin has argued that there are some utterances, which he calls performatives, that have a particular ability to bring about a thing rather than merely describe it.¹ For example, if someone were getting married and were to stand before a minister or judge and say, "I do," he/she would not merely be describing reality but would be engaging in it. It is, therefore, inherent within the nature of language for performatives to go beyond the descriptive realm and enter the constitutive realm of activity. One of the most powerful performatives is the curse. As is well known, cursing is a widespread phenomenon in many cultures throughout history, and the ancient Near East is no exception. The curse is pervasive in the literature of

1. John Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

ancient Israel as well, being regularly employed in texts of varied genres and from disparate periods of Israel's history.

Curses are used broadly in the Hebrew Bible, so it is important that one be sensitive to their nuances. Generally speaking, curses are employed along two different lines. First, a curse can be understood to be a speech act, either as an invocation for harm to come upon an individual or group or as profanely insolent language directed against a hated enemy. Second, a curse can refer to the embodiment of that evil or misfortune which comes as if in response to an imprecatory speech act. In this second sense, the curse can refer to something which is itself cursed or is the cause of great harm or misfortune.

Curses have a wide variety of social functions in the Hebrew Bible. There are times when a curse is uttered as a protective device for contractual/covenantal agreements (Deut 11:26-32, 27-29). It can be pronounced as an oath on oneself to ensure truth and reliability (Job 31; Ps 7:4-6) or upon one's enemies to invoke evil on their behalf (Judg 5:23; 1 Sam 17:43; 27:18). At times the curse can serve as an etiological explanation for some physical or natural phenomenon (Gen 3:14, 17). It can be used for purposes of retribution and punishment (Gen 4:11-12; 49:7; Deut 21:23) and even in legal adjudicatory matters (Num 5:19-22). Curses can also be uttered simply to protect personal or sacred property (Judg 17:2; Josh 7:26).

One dimension of the social function of the curse is particularly pertinent to the focus of this present study. Since a curse ordinarily has a pronounced social function, it is often a powerful tool of ideological rhetoric.² In a significant number of cases in the Hebrew Bible, a curse is employed as a polemical device used as propaganda to exclude or at least marginalize a particular community, while legitimating the community which utters the curse. Some representative examples of this might include the following: the curse of Cain and the subsequent ostracizing of his line (Gen 4:11); the curse of Canaan which reduces the descendants of Ham to be slaves forever (Gen 9:25); the curse of the Gibeonites, who, because of their deception, are reduced to the status of slavery (Joshua 9); the curse of the Shechemites by Jotham, with its later implications for the Samaritan community (Judges 9); and the marginalization of the foreign wives by means of a curse (Nehemiah 13). Curses were also employed by the Qumran covenantors against "the lot of Satan," presumably to exclude those outside of the *yahad* (1QS 1).

2. See Lewis S. Ford, "The Divine Curse Understood in Terms of Persuasion," *Semeia* 24 (1982) 82; and Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribners, 1971) 502.

In the representative selection of cases below from the prose texts of Jeremiah, certain marginalized communities are the object of a curse. This curse is not always a verbal imprecation, but by the operation of metonymy refers to the person or group suffering misfortune. In the examples from Jeremiah that will be examined in this study, curse terminology serves a polemical function which justifies the existence of one particular socioreligious community (the Babylonian exiles), while marginalizing others (the remnant in Judah, Judean communities in Egypt, and foreign nations).

THE METONYMICAL CURSE IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

It is widely recognized that the book of Jeremiah was influenced substantially by Deuteronomistic theology. However, the nature and extent of that influence is strongly debated.³ It is unclear whether Jeremiah himself was strongly influenced by Deuteronomic perspectives or whether the Jeremiah tradition went through a period when Deuteronomic ideas were fashionable or if a particular group of Deuteronomists added layers to the Jeremianic tradition. Regardless, Deuteronomistic terminology, clichés, and theology are overtly present in Jeremiah, particularly in the prose texts. In Deuteronomic fashion, the book of Jeremiah portrays the fall of Jerusalem as a result of the fulfillment of the covenant curse (Deuteronomy 27-28). The prophet Jeremiah shares the heritage of prophets who sought unsuccessfully to warn the people of God against breaking the covenant.

However, the curse is extended in the book of Jeremiah in a unique way, by means of the rhetorical principle of metonymy.⁴ A

3. The conflicting views of this discussion are presented in detail by Robert Carroll, *Jeremiah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 38-50, 65-82; John Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB 21; New York: Doubleday, 1965) lv—lxxiii; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 27-49; R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1988) 10-12; and William Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 10-24, 53-64.

4. For discussions on metonymy, see Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," in *Fundamentals of Language* (2d ed.; New York: Mouton, 1971) 90-96. Jakobson adopts the Saussurian principle that language has a two-fold character: selection and combination. Linguistic entities are first selected and then combined into linguistic units of higher degrees of complexity. He argues that although metonymy and metaphor are transformations of literal statements, they are generated according to opposite principles. Metaphor belongs to the selection axis and metonymy and synecdoche belong to the combination axis.

Also see the discussions in David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) 75ff.; Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) 57ff.

metonym is basically a trope or figure of speech in which there is a substitution of the name of one thing for that of another with which it is associated. This can take place in several ways. The first is for an adjunct to stand for a whole. For example, if it were stated, "the White House said yesterday," we would clearly understand that the adjunct "White House" is being substituted for the whole, the administration of the presidency. Another way in which this substitution takes place is for a proper name to be substituted for one of its qualities or visa versa. If someone is called a "Benedict Arnold," it is clear that he/she is being portrayed as a traitor.

Metonymy can also be employed when a cause is substituted for effect or effect for cause. It is this substitution of cause for effect that is important in understanding the curse in Jeremiah. Josef Scharbert has argued that curse terminology in the Hebrew Bible can sometimes be used metonymically as "a noun for persons on whom the curses pronounced come as devastating calamities."⁵ This, in effect, is a metonymical substitution of effect for cause. If, therefore, one wanted to curse someone else, he/she might refer to the dubious fate of that person who had been placed in such a dreadful situation that his/her whole existence could be considered cursed.⁶

In selected prose texts of Jeremiah, the people of Judah and Jerusalem are not just the recipients of the curse, but they actually become a curse incarnate. These people are portrayed as inhabitants of the land of the curse and have themselves become "a curse for all the nations of the earth."⁷ This metonymic use of the curse is found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as well. In the ordeal of Numbers 5, when the woman drinks the water which brings the curse, the priest is instructed to say, ". . . the Lord *make you* a curse and an oath." Sim-

5. Josef Scharbert, "'*ālāh*," *TDOT* 1.264-65.

6. Herbert Schneidau (*Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976] 248-306) contrasts the mythological world which is dominated by metaphor with the literature of the Bible which is dominated by metonymy. He sees biblical literature as a sort of "historicized fiction" which is in direct conflict with the world of legend and myth. Robert Alter sums up Schneidau's work with a brief quote, "Where myth is hypotactic metaphors, the Bible is paratactic metonymies." He concludes that Schneidau's dichotomy between myth and historicized fiction is overstated but applauds Schneidau's affirmation of a "vigorous movement of biblical writing away from the stable closure of the mythological world and toward the indeterminacy, the shifting causal concatenations, the ambiguities of a fiction made to resemble the uncertainties of life in history" (*The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: Basic Books, 1982] 26).

7. Johannes Pedersen points to the irony that those who were originally intended to be a blessing to all the families of the earth are now described as being a curse among all the nations of the earth (*Der Eid bei den Semiten* [Strassburg: Trübner, 1914] 73-74).

ilarly, Isa 65:15 (the implications of which will be examined below) states, "You shall leave my name to your chosen for a curse."

The metonymical curse is found in nine instances in the prose texts of Jeremiah, expressed in a formulaic string of words specified below.⁸

I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be **a reproach, a byword, a taunt, and a curse** in all the places where I shall drive them. (24:9)

So I took the cup from the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to whom the Lord sent me drink it: Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and princes, to make them **a desolation and a waste, a hissing, and a curse** as at this day. (25:17-18)

Then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city **a curse for all the nations** of the earth. (26:6)

I will pursue them with sword, famine, and pestilence, and I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, **to be a curse, a terror, a hissing, and a reproach** among all the nations where I have driven them. (29:18)

You shall become **an execration, a horror, a curse, and a taunt**. You shall see this place no more. (42:18)

Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to live, that you may be cut off and become **a curse and a taunt** among all the nations of the earth. (44:8)

. . . the remnant of Judah . . . from the least to the greatest, they shall die by the sword and by famine; and they shall become **an execration, a horror, a curse, and a taunt**. (44:12)

. . . therefore, your land has become **a desolation and a waste and a curse**, without inhabitant, as it is to this day. (44:12)

For I have sworn by myself, says the Lord, that Bozrah shall become **a horror, a taunt, a waste, and a curse** and all her cities shall be perpetual wastes. (49:13)

8. Herbert Brichto (*The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible* [SBLMS 13; Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature] 171, 188-89, 197-98) argues that the words which make up these strings should not be translated individually but should be seen as a hendiadys—thus "a byword for scorn" or "a proverb for humiliation" or a "byword for curse," and so forth. However, this argument has not been convincing to major commentators and translations.

This curse formula is found in three definable units of Jeremiah: four times in chaps. 24-29 (24:9; 25:17-18; 26:6; 29:18), a unit which begins and ends with the metaphor of the rotten figs; four times in the narratives regarding the Judeans who fled to Egypt in chaps. 42-44 (42:18; 44:8, 12, 22); and once in the Oracles against the Nations in 49:7-22 (49:13).⁹ The order and vocabulary vary, but these nine passages have a number of elements in common.¹⁰ First, they are all from the prose sections of Jeremiah. Second, the clichéd nature of the expressions parallels terminology in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history.¹¹ Third, the noun *qēlālāh* is employed in every instance except 29:18, where *'alah* is used.¹² In two cases, both *qēlālāh* and *'ālāh* occur (42:18; 44:12). Fourth, there are numerous expansions in the larger units surrounding most of these texts, presumably indicating their importance to the exilic and postexilic communities.¹³ Finally and most importantly, the object of the metonymical curse is always one of three groups: the Jewish community in Jerusalem and Judah, the Judeans which fled to Egypt, or a foreign nation. In other words, the phrase refers to someone, indeed anyone, outside of the Babylonian exiles.

What is meant by this particular clichéd string of words? One could assume from the juxtaposition of the synonyms "reproach," "taunt," "hissing," and "byword" to the word *qēlālāh* that the curse in these cases refers to an object of ridicule and scorn, something to be made light of, which is one basic meaning of the root *qll*. Rather than a curse which involves an actual utterance or imprecation, the word

9. Jer 24:9 and 25:18 lie in Mowinckel's source A; 26:6; 29:1, 8; 42:18; 44:18; and 44:22 lie in Source B; and 44:8 lies in source C. The oracle against Edom is deemed a later addition by Mowinckel. See the discussion in Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 10-24.

10. This phrase is used without the term "curse" in several instances. Two words or more occur in 19:8; 25:9, 11, 18; and 44:6. A single word occurs in 7:34; 22:5; and 26:6.

There are two particularly helpful studies which examine in detail the use of Deuteronomistic language in the book of Jeremiah: Louis Stulman, *The Prose Sermons of the Book of Jeremiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); and Winfred Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26-45* (WMANT 82; Neukirchen-Vluynsocioreligious Neukirchener Verlag, 1981).

11. With the exception of chaps. 24 and 49 which were not a part of his study, Thiel finds Deuteronomistic influence in each of the remaining passages under discussion (*Die deuteronomistische Redaktion*, 3-5, 17-19, 65, 69-81). M. Weinfeld also comments on these texts as "retrospective religious surveys, not necessarily reflecting the historical reality of Jeremiah's time" (*Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1972; reprinted Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992] 30-31).

12. In two cases (42:18; 44:12), both terms are used. Variations of the phrase employing synonyms occur in several instances. Two synonyms or more occur in 19:8; 25:9, 11, 18; and 44:6. A single synonym occurs in 7:34; 22:5; and 26:6.

13. Texts most often cited as expansions are 24:9; 29:16-19; 44:8; and 49:12-13.

qēlālāh metonymically refers to the material misfortune itself.¹⁴ It is not an invocation of misfortune but the actual embodiment of that misfortune. Thus, the object of this formula becomes an example of calamity and a proverb of disaster. Ironically, in dialectical fashion, this metonymical curse can then again become a derogatory speech act uttered against someone else by referring to that individual or group as a curse. As Isaiah referred to the inhabitants of Judah as "you rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah" (Isa 1:9), a group considered cursed can become an object of material misfortune.

In the Exilic and Postexilic Periods, there were three broad Jewish communities: the remnant in Judah, the community which fled to Egypt, and the exiles in Babylon. In the Postexilic Period, there was a great amount of conflict between the returning exiles from Babylon and the people who had remained in Judah. Could it be that these postexilic tensions are reflected in the curses of the Jeremiah tradition? To consider this question requires a brief examination of each of the texts introduced above.

JEREMIAH 24-29: THE ROTTEN FIGS

Jeremiah 24:1-10: The Vision of the Two Figs

The Vision of the Two Figs in Jeremiah 24 employs the fourfold formula of the curse. This text portrays the exiles of Judah who were deported to Babylon as the "good figs," while those who remained in Judah and those who dwelled in the land of Egypt were the "bad figs." The clichéd phrase under study is found in v. 9 and is seen by Niditch as an addition.¹⁵ These bad figs will be "a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a reproach, a byword, a taunt, and a curse [*wēliqlālāh*] in all the places where I shall drive them" (24:9). The implications of this text and its parallels in Ezekiel 11 for the exilic and postexilic situation are far-reaching. What or who might be the source for such a blatant condemnation of the exiles of Judah? It is not clear whether this vision was a *de novo* creation of the Deuteronomist or if it was an earlier oracle which simply served to encourage the exiles. Holladay notes that the terminology in this fourfold curse is most similar to the terminology in the Deuteronomistic history (Deut 28:37; 1 Kgs 9:7); but since its parallels in Deuteronomy 28 are almost certainly late, it is impossible to determine which text is

14. Brichto, *Problem of "Curse,"* 197-99.

15. Susan Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980) 62.

dependent on the other.¹⁶ Niditch hints at the polemical implications of this passage. She asks, "Does vs. 9 reflect a strain of anti-Egyptian-Jew sentiment on the part of the orthodox Babylonian returnees?"¹⁷ Other scholars have not been quite so cautious. Nicholson states,¹⁸

the composition of chapters 24-29 was motivated primarily by a specifically theological and polemical intention, for they seek to assert the claims of the Babylonian diaspora to be the true remnant of Israel through whom alone renewal and restoration would be wrought by Yahweh as against those who either remained in Judah or lived in Egypt during the exilic period.

Carroll extends this even further,¹⁹

The vision of 24 does not mean that all deportees in Babylon are the hope for the future, but *only* that group which can be identified with those who went into captivity with Jeconiah. It is an echo of seniority claims and differentiations made by the returning groups wishing to gain power in Jerusalem during its reconstruction.

At first glance, Carroll's statement may appear extreme, but it makes sense in light of the texts presently under consideration. It is worth noting that the book of Jeremiah concludes as Jehoiachin is given favor by the king of Babylon. Although the intent of the passage could be interpreted as ambivalent toward the Israelite monarchy, it is certainly possible, in any respect, that the book of Jeremiah concludes with a positive note of hope for the returning exiles (cf. 2 Kgs 25:27-30).²⁰

Jeremiah 26:1-24: The Temple Sermon

Jeremiah 26 is a narrative reporting the disturbance which Jeremiah's Temple sermon provoked, leading to the demand from the priests and prophets that Jeremiah be killed for blaspheming God and Temple. Jeremiah's sermon bears numerous parallels to the Temple sermon in chap. 7, and the subsequent narrative in 26:7-19 contains the most detailed account of a trial in the Hebrew Bible. Chapter 26 is integrally related to a larger section of material which runs from chaps. 26-29. The primary theme of this larger unit is to distinguish between true and false prophecy and to point out Judean rejection of the words of Jeremiah. Chapter 26 depicts the confrontation between

16. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 655.

17. Niditch, *Symbolic Vision*, 62.

18. E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970) 110.

19. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 483.

20. For a discussion of opposing views to the purpose behind this passage, see Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles*, 78-80.

Jeremiah and the prophets and priests at the Temple. In chap. 27, Jeremiah contends with the prophets who tell Zedekiah that the exile will be brief, and chaps. 28-29 recount the prophet's confrontations with Hananiah and Shemaiah. It is significant to note that the unit begins (26:6) and ends (29:18, 22) with a curse. Nicholson broadens the unit to include chaps. 24-25, because this larger unit begins and ends with the theme of the rotten figs. He argues the polemical intent of the unit to assert the claims of the Babylonian diaspora as the true remnant of Israel in contrast to those who remained in Judah or lived in Egypt.²¹ The metonymical curse is present in the apodosis of the conditional sentence in 26:6, uttered in the confines of the Temple, "Then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make the city a curse [*liqlālāh*] for all the nations of the earth." Just as Shiloh was once the place where Yahweh caused his name to dwell and was subsequently destroyed, Jerusalem will likewise suffer the same fate.²² The curse prompts rejection by the people because the curse against Temple and city are equivalent to blasphemy. The words spark a riot whereby the leaders demand Jeremiah's death.²³

Jeremiah 29:16-19: The Letter to the Exiles

A similar viewpoint is confirmed in the Letter to the Exiles of chap. 29. As with much of the surrounding material in which the clichéd curse phrase is located, this chapter is permeated by a large number of plusses in the Masoretic Text over the LXX, which are possibly Deuteronomistic expansions. The section in v. 16-19, which is not in the LXX, is almost certainly an expansion. Here, the kinspeople of the exiles who remained in Judah are referred to as "a curse [*lě'lāh*], a terror, a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations of the earth" (29:18). This addition is intentionally polemical. The picture presented draws a sharp contrast between the exiles, whose future is peaceable, and the remnant of Judah, who will be utterly driven from their land. The image of the rotten figs in chap. 24 resumes but is used in a different way. Here the Judean community is portrayed as vile figs which are so bad that they cannot be eaten. One suspects that the interests served by such strong polemics are those of the community in Babylon. Such hatred for the Jerusalem community betrays an

21. Ibid., 110.

22. The recent study of Donald G. Schley (*Shiloh: A Biblical City in Tradition and History* [JSOTSup 63; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989] 178-82) argues that the references to Shiloh in Jer 26:6 and 7:12-15 pertain to a destruction concurrent with the fall of Samaria and not during the hypothetical Philistine invasion of 1050 BCE. In either case, Shiloh became a paradigm for a cult center that had been devastated.

23. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 515-16; Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 525.

unbridled hostility for every community which might compete with the primacy of the Babylonian community.

Jeremiah 42-44: The Judeans in Egypt

More than ten years later, after the fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent murder of Gedaliah, Johanan and his forces, when worried about the reprisals of the Babylonians, ask Jeremiah whether they should flee to Egypt. Jeremiah warns against this, stating that those who flee to Egypt will become "an execration [*lě'ālāh*], a horror, a curse [*wěliqlālāh*], and a taunt" (Jer 42:18). The order of events described in chaps. 42 and 43 is in some doubt, but a rough reconstruction of the depicted events is as follows: Jeremiah promises that only those who remain in Judah will be spared. Johanan accuses Jeremiah of lying and flees to Egypt anyway, along with the entire remnant of Judah. Oddly, the text states that Johanan took to Egypt "all the remnant of Judah who had returned to live in the land from all the nations to which they have been driven" (43:5). Indeed, Jeremiah himself states, "Behold this day they [cities of Judah] are a desolation and no one dwells in them" (44:2). So the issue of the situation in Judah is a moot point—at least rhetorically. The remnant might have been spared, but the entire remnant fled to Egypt. There is literally *no one* left in the land. Such hyperbole is self-serving ideological propaganda pointing to the vested interests of the Babylonian community.

Later, after Jeremiah is taken away by Johanan to Egypt, he summons all the Judean communities in Egypt (Jeremiah 44). Jeremiah chides them for continuing to burn incense to other gods, again citing the formula that they will "be cut off and become a curse [*liqlālāh*] [which is omitted in the LXX] and a taunt among all the nations of the earth" (44:8). The remnant which fled to Egypt will face a future without hope and will become "an execration, a horror, a curse [*wěliqlālāh*], and a taunt" (44:12). Finally, the land of Judah which they left is depicted as "a desolation and a waste and a curse [*wěliqlālāh*], without inhabitant, as it is this day" (44:22). Relegating both the land in which they live (Egypt) and the land from which they fled (Judah) to the curse, this ideological rhetoric effectively cuts off any alternative for both Jewish communities: the Judeans in Egypt and the inhabitants of Judah.

What are we to make of the picture presented in chaps. 42-44? Do these texts betray the heterogenous constitution of the Judean communities in the Exilic or Postexilic Period? How are these communities to be viewed? In chaps. 42-44, the Judeans who fled to Egypt are portrayed as pagan worshipers of foreign gods. Yahweh

states, "My name shall no more be invoked by the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt saying, 'As the Lord God lives' (44:26). Nicholson comments that those who fled to Egypt are condemned "in language which is amongst the most bitter and vehement of the whole book."²⁴ On the other hand, the land of Judah is portrayed as being without inhabitant. Sources indicate that this was anything but true. Enno Janssen has argued²⁵ that Palestine continued to be a center of religious activity after the destruction of Jerusalem. While Noth overstates the case that the community in Babylon was a "mere outpost," it is clear that a devout community of Yahweh worshipers remained in Judah.²⁶ The Hebrew Bible gives witness to a significant amount of literature which might have arisen from the Palestinian community. In fact, Jer 41:5 presents an account of people from Shiloh and Samaria coming to present offerings at the Temple after its destruction. In fascinating reversal, this same metonymical curse may have been later invoked by the Palestinian community²⁷ against the Babylonian returnees, as Isa 65:13-15 states:

Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Behold my servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be put to shame; behold my servants shall sing for gladness of heart, but you shall cry out for pain of heart, and shall wail for anguish of spirit. You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse [*lišbûāh*], and the Lord God will slay you; but his servants he will call by a different name."

While such curse language may have been employed against the Babylonian returnees at a later time, the Deuteronomic texts of Jeremiah are colored by ideology. The result is obvious; both Judah and Egypt become the lands of the curse. By the simple process of elimination, it is only the Babylonian community that is left to be the exclusive possessor of hope for a future restoration of Israel.

24. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles*, 111.

25. Enno Janssen, *Juda in der Exilszeit: Ein Beitrag zur Frage der Entstehung des Judentums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1956) 17-18.

26. See the discussion in Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington: Meyer Stone, 1989) 32-33.

27. Building on the work of Janssen and others, Paul Hanson argues that a faithful community of Yahwists existed in Palestine throughout the years of the exile. The texts which portray Palestine as empty or containing an inferior rabble of syncretizers are either oversimplified or polemical. Hanson argues that Isaiah 65 portrays the tension between the Zadokite authorities which had power and the Palestinian community which did not. In Isa 65:15, this Zadokite community is depicted as a curse. The Palestinian community is given a new name and are true priests of Yahweh. The series of contrasts in Isa 65:13-15 are representative of blessings and curses (*Dawn of Apocalyptic* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 93).

Jeremiah 25:15-38; 49:7-22: The Oracle against the Nations

In the Oracles against the Nations (OAN), there are two final instances where the clichéd turn of phrase is used. The first of these is 25:15-38 which in the MT is not a part of the OAN but in the LXX is placed with the OAN. Space prohibits debating these complicated textual problems here, but it is intriguing to consider the ideological implications of this text's inclusion in OAN by the LXX. Astonishingly, the rhetorical result of doing so is that Jerusalem is placed among the foreign nations as though it were a foreign city. Verse 18 states, "Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and its princes, to make them a desolation and a waste, a hissing and a curse [*wěliqlālāh*], as at this day." In biting polemic, Jerusalem and its daughter cities are seen in the same light as Babylon, Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, and a host of other traditional enemies of Israel. Such inflammatory rhetoric effectively challenges the legitimacy of the Jewish communities in Jerusalem and the surrounding cities of Judah.

The second passage in the OAN is the poetic oracle against Edom (Jer 49:7-22), where a prose insertion states, "Bozrah shall become a horror, a taunt, a waste, and a curse [*wěliqlālā*]" (49:13). The exilic and postexilic disdain for Edom is well attested elsewhere in the HB.²⁸ Its capital city becomes a metonym for that which is anathema. These two passages, when viewed together, effectively do away with any competing group which might pose a religious threat to the primacy of the Babylonian community. The capital of the foreign nation of Edom and the capital of Judah are reduced to the same position as cursed cities.

CONCLUSION

This study has sought to demonstrate that, in the prose strands of the book of Jeremiah, curse terminology is a part of a recurring polemical phrase used, most likely by the Deuteronomist, to exclude any community outside of the exiles in Babylon and possibly even any community outside of the exiles of the first deportation. This clichéd phrase varies in order and vocabulary and, in many cases, is viewed as a later addition. In these texts, this curse is not an imprecation or speech act but by the principle of metonymy is the practical evil which comes in response to the Deuteronomic curse. One might say

28. Bozrah is associated with the Edomite kings in Gen 36:33 and 1 Chr 1:44. The only other references in the HB to Bozrah are in the Oracles against the Nations (Isa 34:6; 63:1; Jer 49:13, 22; Amos 1:12; and possibly Mic 2:12) where identification with Edom is not as clear. See *ABD* 1.774.

that these texts represent the theology of Deuteronomy but with a vengeance. Parallels in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history attest to this.

The experience of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile in Babylon wrought numerous changes which led to a heterogenous constitution of the Jewish people in the Exilic, Postexilic, and Second Temple Periods.²⁹ Suspicions were raised not merely against foreign influences but against any religious community outside of one's own. This is well attested in the postexilic literature, as well as in the documents from Qumran and the history of the Second Temple Period. In the book of Jeremiah, two important remnant Judean communities and the foreign nation of Edom are anathematized in order to legitimize a single Judean community in Babylon. Ideology has reduced all distinctions to the same level in order to issue a blanket condemnation of all of these peoples. Thus, by the simple process of elimination, the stage is set for what will become a matter of tremendous importance for the period of the restoration. Because those who remained in Judah were portrayed as being a curse, the returning exiles felt justified in prohibiting this community from taking part in the restoration.

This polemical rhetoric is consistent with evidence elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible where curses are used as propaganda designed to exclude a particular community. Once a community becomes disaffiliated through a curse, especially if it is presumed that the deity is the subject of this curse, the door is opened for a self-justified oppression of that community. Thus, religious curses in particular have the ability to foster an unparalleled degree of control upon a community. The use of curses in this way is one which has not been fully explored in scholarship and presents an exciting opportunity for future study.

29. See Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Emergence of Jewish Sectarianism in the Early Second Temple Period," *King, Cult and Calendar in Ancient Israel: Collected Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986) 165-201.