

BOOK REVIEW

Title:	Deconstruction and Reconstruction in YHWH's Universal Project: Exegetical-Theological Study of Jeremiah 1:10 and Corresponding Passages
Author:	Louismary Ocha
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Ocha's work is the product of a doctoral dissertation submitted in 2019 to the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. Using a synchronic literary study of the canonical text, the author re-examines the book of Jeremiah as an organic unit and interprets it in the light of the commission and mission of the prophet as defined in Jer 1:10, 'I have set you over the nations and kingdoms, 'to uproot (נָחַשׁ), 'to knock down (נָחַץ), 'to destroy (אָבַד), 'to overthrow (הָרַס), 'to build (בָּנָה), 'and 'to plant (נָטַע).' This verse (Jer 1:10), according to the author, 'forms the overture of the entire book and could serve as a lens through which the whole text is viewed.' (p.1). With this verse as a primary text, the author argues that the six actions to be taken in the verse are variably reiterated in six other passages (Jer 12:14-17, 18:7-9, 24:6, 31:28, 42:10, and 45:4) and these knit the book of Jeremiah into a single whole, into a book that focuses on YHWH's universal project of deconstruction and reconstruction of Judah, Israel, and the nations. The author's choice of these passages is prompted by the fact that the twofold action of YHWH's universal project – deconstruction (judgment) and reconstruction (salvation) – are happening successively in the passages under consideration (p.50); even in passages where only three of the verbs are used – like in Jer 12:14-17 – the two poles of YHWH's actions are demonstrated.

Ocha tried to vindicate Jeremiah from the common view of him as a prophet of woes and laments, a prophet of doom; it is in this mindset that his prophecies are limited to only oracles of destruction, hence total annihilation. Contrarily, Ocha reveals that this opinion is disproved by the mission statement (Jer 1:10) and the recurrences of the verbs that form the *Leitmotif* of the book in other corresponding passages. Thus, Jeremiah's prophecies fly with two wings: oracles of judgment and oracles of salvation.

While some authors are biased against the nations and in favour of Israel by interpreting the four negative actions as against the nations and the two positive actions in favour

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of Israel, the author avers that all the six actions have a universal dimension and affect both the nations (gōyīm) and God’s people in the same proportion. Thus, the study views the six verbs in Jer 1:10 as keywords that decode YHWH’s deconstructive and reconstructive processes in His dealing with Israel and the nations in the book of Jeremiah. Concerning who the subject of the verbs is, the author argues thus, ‘The verbs define and describe the mission of Jeremiah. Jeremiah’s mission is invariably YHWH’s mission. YHWH, therefore, acts through the prophet, and He is the subject of the actions of the verbs. It could be ad rem to call Jeremiah the instrumental cause, while YHWH remains the principal or efficient cause’ (pp.42-43). While this distinction is necessary in Jer 1:10, the role of YHWH as the subject of these six actions is explicit in the other six passages. In these passages, Ocha opines that the actions of deconstruction and reconstruction complement each other and are inevitable coordinates of YHWH’s project (p.51).

Since the explicit occurrences of these verbs end in Jer 45, there is the question of how they serve as a *leitmotif* for the rest of the book (ch. 46-51). To explain this, the author states, ‘although the verbs of the *Leitmotif* do not explicitly feature at the latter section (Jer 46–51), the promise to Baruch in ch. 45 serves as a connection to the subsequent chapters (Jer 46–51). With this reasoning, the verbs seem to continue as *Leitmotif* for the rest of the book as they have been for the earlier sections (Jer 1–45)’ (p54).

In line with earlier prophets who preached both to Israel and foreign nations, Ocha presents Jeremiah as a prophet to Israel as well as to other nations. As he states, ‘YHWH’s word for Israel is equally valid for other nations’ (40). Furthermore, the unlimited scope of prophet Jeremiah’s ministry reveals the unlimited nature of YHWH’s sovereignty: ‘YHWH is God not only of Israel but also of the entire universe. Therefore, Jeremiah is a prophet of the one who rules the entire universe. He is sent by the king of the universe to preach to the territory of His dominion – that is, all the nations and all the kingdoms. His mission has both national and international dimensions’ (42).

Ocha’s work is divided into eight chapters, in addition to the introduction and general conclusion. From chapters one to seven, attention is given to the analysis of the seven passages that contain the *leitmotif*. Chapter eight is a synthesis that views deconstruction and reconstruction as dialectical variables in YHWH’s universal project. The fulcrum of this dialectic is YHWH’s mercy. Out of mercy, YHWH’s deconstruction does not end in destruction but in hope; YHWH’s mercy keeps the deconstructed people hopeful of being reconstructed. His judgment is ‘far from being vindictive but to be viewed as part of His saving activities’ (p. 221). In the dialectics of YHWH’s actions in the book of Jeremiah, judgment is only a penultimate; YHWH’s ultimate action is restoration.

Ocha has done justice to his analysis of the passages in chapters 1–7. Yet, some words in the titles of the chapters seem unnecessary. The coinage of chapter titles, while showing diverse expressions of the author's focus on the universal dimension of Jeremiah's prophetic activity, creates some difficulty in the mind of the reader. In chapter 3, for instance, the author says the focus is on the 'exclusive and universal application of the potter's story'. The universal application is obvious in context. However, the author does not explain what he means by 'exclusive' and does not give reasons for the choice of the term. The same critique goes for the 'exclusive' that is in the title of the fourth chapter.

If there will be a future revision of the work, care must be taken to edit properly the Hebrew and Greek words that are used in the book. There are instances of misplaced Hebrew words in some phrases. Examples: on p. 22, the Hebrew words of Jer 1:5 are not placed in their proper order (בָּטָרִם יִדְעִתִּךָ בְּבִטָּן אֲצִירָךְ). Other instances are on p. 25 (line 4), p. 31 (line 12: partially-punctuated Hebrew word), p. 37 (line 33), p. 40 (last line and n. 89: punctuation), and pericope is spelled as periscope (81). On pages 91-92, עֲשֵׂה and עָשָׂה are used interchangeably to mean the same word. There are problems of the transliteration of some Greek phrases that are jumbled with English words: 'and also adds kai. tou.j plousi, ouj 'and the rich' to the phrase' (p. 116); 'LXX translates it as diaskorpismo.n 'a scattering'' (p. 117); 'namely, avna, gkaj 'punishment' (p. 117); etc.

In summary, Ocha's work is written in clear and simple language. For academics, it serves as a tool for further investigations into the book of Jeremiah. For the common folk, it reveals the merciful dimension of YHWH's actions in relationship to humanity. Fundamentally, no one is excluded in God's salvific plan. Chastisement is part of God's salvific plan: 'YHWH disciplines the one He loves, as does a father the son in whom he delights' (Prov 3:12).