Providence College
DigitalCommons@Providence

Theology Graduate Theses Theology

7-2024

Communal Lament in Jeremiah

Phoebe C. Chetsas
Providence College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/theology_graduate_theses

Part of the Biblical Studies Commons, and the Catholic Studies Commons

Chetsas, Phoebe C., "Communal Lament in Jeremiah" (2024). *Theology Graduate Theses*. 30.
https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/theology_graduate_theses/30

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theology at DigitalCommons@Providence. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theology Graduate Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Providence. For more information, please contact dps@providence.edu.

COMMUNAL LAMENT IN JEREMIAH

A Master's Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Theology

Providence College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Theology

By Phoebe C. Chetsas

July 2024

Under the Direction of

Patrick V. Reid, Ph.D.

This paper is dedicated to Dr. Patrick Reid

Dr. Reid, thank you for always taking an interest in my studies and for introducing me to prophetic literature. Your enthusiasm for Theology and your incredible breadth of knowledge never cease to amaze me. Thank you for working tirelessly with me as my thesis advisor; I could not have done this without your support.

And to my loved ones.

Lay down, black gives way to blue.

Lay down, I'll remember you.

- Alice in Chains -

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ……………………………………………………………………………..3

Chapter

1. Background to the Story…………………………………………………………………7
2. Understanding the Text……………………………………………………..………..10
3. The Burden of Prophecy……………………………………………………………...…13
4. Crime & Punishment……………………………………………………………………22
5. Judah is Disgraced……………………………………………………………………29
6. Contextualizing Jeremiah in the Bible………………………………………….……….36
7. God & Israel……………………………………………………….………………….38
8. Covenant Theology…………………………………………….………………..42
9. Lament, O Israel!..48
10. The Laments……………………………………………………….…………………56
    1. Lament 1…………………………………………………………………….……56
    2. Lament 2……………………………………………………….……………………72
    3. Lament 3……………………………………………………………………..…93
    4. Lament 4…………………………………………………..………..…..115
    5. Lament 5……………………………………………...…………………125
11. Vindication & Restoration………………………………………………………..141

CONCLUSION……………………………………………………………………………144

BIBLIOGRAPHY…………………………………………………………………………146

Introduction

There is some literature so powerful that it demands recognition as a living, breathing entity. The book of Jeremiah is so authentic, emotional, and human that it cannot be called anything less than life changing. It is an eternal monument to the suffering of individuals and a nation as they faced erasure. Judah's destruction is inevitable, foretold in the call narrative (Jer. 1:13-16), but just as Jeremiah has no choice but to continue to prophesy in vain (Jer. 1:17), readers must bear witness to the horrors of war, famine, and exile as the nation is crushed under the hand of Babylonian forces. Through Jeremiah, readers experience a first-person account of the disasters as they unfold, and we see what it would have been like to experience community life in a time of unprecedented tragedy. Foreseeing fast-approaching doom from the north (Jer. 1:15), Jeremiah tries desperately to awaken those around him, who are entrenched in the monotony of daily life, to the fact that their doom is fast approaching, spurned on by their own God. The Judahites, believing that they are God's chosen people and protected by the covenant, listen to the corrupt priests and prophets, "Saying, "All is well, all is well," when nothing is well" (Jer. 6:14). The end of days is inexorable, and yet Jeremiah never stops trying to save his adopted community. He attempts to intercede on their behalf (Jer. 11:14)—to spare even a remnant of them from plague, famine, captivity, and death (Jer. 15:2). God has abandoned His people, and deserted Judah when she is surrounded by killers (Jer. 12:7), but Jeremiah is always there for the Judahite community. Even though they do not always heed his advice (Jer. 18:12), Jeremiah pleads their case before God, and denounces Him as "a stranger in the land" (Jer. 14:8) when He ignores their pleas. Jeremiah, much like Moses or David, steps up as a leader in the nation's time of need, providing spiritual guidance (Jer. 44:15-30) and practical knowledge to help them survive (Jer. 42). Jeremiah never sought to be a prophet (Jer. 1:6), and he contested his calling (Jer. 20:7-8), but even when he could not save the people, he was always an advocate on

their behalf, and he stayed with them to bear witness to their suffering, giving them a voice after death through his prophetic book. The story is not just an autobiography, but a testament to the resilience of a nation, sentenced to death by their own wrathful God. Come, and bear witness to their suffering through a comprehensive rhetorical analysis of the laments.

The distinction between a good book and a great book is that a good book tells a story, while a great book allows you to interpret the story. Within the larger framework of the Bible, Jeremiah is not unique for its opacity; part of why there are so many religious sects today is because the text can be interpreted in so many ways. For example, a common criticism heard today is that passages in the Bible are sexist, homophobic, or otherwise discriminatory. Like any ancient piece of literature, there are certainly portions of the Bible that are offensive by modern standards. One story often referenced to discredit the faith is that of Lot and his daughters (Gen. 19:1-11). Angels appear to Lot and his family, but soon after, the townspeople surround the house and demand that Lot, "Bring them [the angels] out to us, that we may be intimate with them" (Gen. 19:5). Rather than offering his guests, Lot offers his virgin daughters to the mob to be assaulted (Gen. 19:8). This story can be read as a condonation of violence against and the objectification of women; however, it can also be read as a testament to the importance of hospitality in ancient Judaism. Because Lot acted piously and protected his guests, he and his family were saved from the mob and Sodom's destruction (Gen. 19:10-12). This story is an extreme example of how accounts in the Bible can be interpreted in different ways. Jeremiah's laments, although far less controversial than the story of lot, can also be read with different meanings depending on the themes that the reader focuses on. In this exploration of Jeremiah's laments, we will be studying three different, but not mutually exclusive analyses, to better understand the poetry. The most popular way to interpret the laments is as insight to the

psychological and spiritual state of Jeremiah during different points in his prophetic career, but acclaimed scholars O'Connor and Carroll argue that New Criticism is a much more appropriate approach, and that the laments should be studied for their rhetorical, rather than biographical, purposes. The biographical and psychological elements of the text can be used with a rhetorical understanding of it, but it is dismissive to attribute the laments as a diary. In this paper, we will study the laments as reflections of Jeremiah's mental and spiritual state, and as communal or individual prayers.

Ultimately, this paper will conclude that Jeremiah's laments were written as communal psalms of lament; however, they can also be interpreted as individual psalms of lament. (A psychological understanding of the poems will be used in conjunction with the analyses of Carroll and O'Connor, however, it will never be used as a stand-alone assessment of the meaning of the text.) As a genuine reflection of the human experience, the book is content to sit with paradoxes without forcing resolutions. As readers, we have to become comfortable with the idea that Jeremiah could have been an advocate for the same community that he was persecuted and mocked by. The tapestry of rhetorical, literary, and Theological elements makes it difficult to interpret exactly what the laments are about, and forces readers to consider a wide range of possible meanings to each lament.[1] This will be explained in much further detail when we explore the laments later in the paper. In his laments, Jeremiah becomes a presentation of the community in exile, and when he speaks, in many cases, it can be interpreted as a communal prayer offered by the prophet.[2] The laments reflect the conditions of the community in exile,[3] and the Jeremiah tradition is one in which the voice of the prophet blends with the cry of the

[1] Carroll, Robert P. *From Chaos to Covenant*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1981, 123.
[2] Carroll 123
[3] Carroll 123

people. With that said, the voice of Jeremiah also fuses with the voice of God at points,[4] and the fiery wrath of God overwhelms the prophet (Jer. 20:9). At some points, like the controversial condemnation in Jer. 18:21-23, it can be very difficult to know the meaning behind the speech. Is it a rage against the community, or a petition for retribution against Israel's enemies? Although there has been much debate between scholars, because of the complex redactional history of the book, we will likely never know the true intention behind the text. All that we can do today is speculate and appreciate the book as a literary and Theological work of art.

Jeremiah is a book of horror, trauma, and most importantly, the fight for survival. The adage that there are worse fates than death plays in reader's minds as the remnant of Jerusalem is condemned to exile and death in a foreign land (Jer. 20:1-6), or oppression by a foreign power in a city destroyed by warfare. The remnant of Judah is presented with a sliver of hope through the New Covenant and the Oracles Against Nations (OAN), but the road to rebuilding the community is long, arduous, and laced with the haunting aftermath of famine, disease, and war. As the community suffers, so suffers the prophet, and the laments offer readers a glimpse into the internal and external world of those living through the tragedy of the Babylonian invasion and exile. The laments show the progression of Jeremiah from an embittered and persecuted pariah into a great mediator, and finally into one of thousands of victims in a displaced population who dies in exile. Jeremiah, the "weeping prophet," had much to bemoan as the narrative shows through his struggles with the burden of prophecy, social isolation, and the mission of saving a people who do not realize they are in danger until the great terror of the north (Jer. 1:14) is in their window. The prophet foresees: "disaster overtakes disaster, for all the land has been ravaged" (Jer. 4:20), and tries to cry out, to warn the people to repent, and yet like one trapped in

[4] Heschel, Abraham J. *The Prophets*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1969.

a nightmare no one cares to listen (Jer. 4:22). The major themes that will be explored in this paper are the impact of trauma on the community, Jeremiah's relationship to his community, and the promise of vindication for Israel through the Oracles Against Nations and the New Covenant This paper will also explore the rhetoric of lament as it relates to Jeremiah's Levitical background and the liturgical tradition from which the prayer style descended. I intend to honor the religious sanctity of the text, and to highlight the resilience of the prophet and the Jewish community by introducing modern trauma study to the conversation.

Background to the Story

Invasion and exile are the greatest tragedies that could befall a community in the ancient world, and this is a theme that begins very early in the Hebrew Scriptures with the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:23). Exile plagues the Israelites throughout history, as is represented by Daniel's animal apocalypse prophecy in which the four beasts represent the four major exiles that the Jewish people will face (Dan. 7). These terrifying, unholy, and blasphemous creatures are symbolic of the horrors of invasion and exile. During the time of the book of Jeremiah, the Israelites had many powerful enemies that loomed over the heads of the people, like Assyria, Egypt and Babylon, threatening disaster at any moment. In Jeremiah's early vision of the boiling pot, the Lord says, "Out of the north disaster shall break out on all the inhabitants of the land. For now I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north… And I will utter my judgments against [Jerusalem]" (Jer. 1:14-16). Although the poeticism of a vague enemy from the north is ominous, the threat of invasion by enemy nations was a very real possibility for the ancient Israelites, and as we see later in the story, the Babylonian invasion and exile has disastrous consequences. When Judah eventually falls to the Babylonian army (Jer. 39), the results are just as the prophet feared, and everyone fortunate

enough to retain their life must now assimilate into Egyptian culture, which means—for many—succumbing to paganism. The Babylonian invasion and its aftermath also brought the expansionist era of King Josiah to a tragic denouement; the result was the humiliation and destruction of the territory and its people.[5] The reign of king Josiah was righteous, and it is said, "He did what was pleasing before the Lord" (2 Kings 22:2). Josiah was staunchly opposed to the pagan habits that had gained popularity before his reign, and he worked to defrock all the corrupt priests, destroy the idolatrous shrines, and he abolished pagan cultic practices in Israel (2 Kings 22-23). Tragically, all of the work that he did to re-consecrate Israel is lost when Jerusalem is sacked by the Babylonians. It is critical to keep the historical context of the implications of invasion in mind while reading Jeremiah, because although the threats are vague and shadowy, the result is very real and nearly results in the erasure of Judaism. Although the prophecies are beautifully written, the doom that they promise reduced the city to rubble and turn the community into nothing more than a "haunt of jackals" (Jer. 10:22) where lawlessness and chaos abound.

What manner of man is the prophet? This is the question that opens Abraham Heschel's masterfully crafted book, *The Prophets*, and it is a question worth asking.[6] The prophet is a multifaceted, tormented, and hysteric individual; he is cursed by God and assailed by his fellow man. Invasion, famine, bloodshed, and extinction are threatened at every turn, and he is burdened with a divine mission: turn an unabashed people to repentance or see the awesome wrath of the Lord. "Hark, a noise! It is coming, a great commotion out of the north, that the towns of Judah may be made a desolation, a haunt of jackals" (Jer. 10:22). By the time that the Lord invokes the

---

[5] Carroll 21

[6] Heschel 3

prophet, the covenant has been broken (Jer. 11:10), and the chosen people have turned to false gods (Hos. 4:13). Just as the community is doomed to suffer, the prophet is doomed to watch as the world he once knew melts away into the horrors of invasion and exile, and none suffer so much as Jeremiah. As a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5), Jeremiah is consecrated by the Lord "to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). Jeremiah is to proclaim a message of doom not only to Judah, but to the entire world (Jer. 46-51). As if being witness to a major eschatological event were not miserable enough, the prophet must proclaim the wrath of the Lord and the sins of the people, even though it will turn the people against him (Jer. 1:19). It was even common for the other Israelites to murder prophets for speaking out against them. The Lord condemns their hate for His prophets, saying, "Your sword has devoured your prophets like a ravening lion" (Jer. 2:30). Even if the prophet survives persecution (1 Kings 18:14 on the crimes of Jezebel), he often dies in exile (Lam. 1:3). Prophecy is a lonely and thankless vocation, leaving the prophet trapped in an impossible limbo between the community and the Lord. In most cases (except for Jonah), his mission is pre-destined to failure, and he is forced to live with the guilt of knowing the nation was destroyed because he failed to convert the people. There is no question as to why Jeremiah tried to renounce his prophetic calling (Jer. 1:6).

Although he communicates with the divine, the fate of Jeremiah is inevitably tied to that of the Judahite community. Although God promises to protect him (Jer. 1:19), if the land falls to warfare and exile he will undeniably be impacted by these tragedies. With that said, Jeremiah's ties to the people to whom he prophecies are complex, and his social status impacts how his message is received. Jeremiah was a priest from the region of Anathoth, and scholars believe he stemmed from the line of Abiathar, a priest during King Solomon's reign who was banished to

Anathoth (1 Kings 2:26-27) for having supported Adonijah over Solomon after King David's death (1 Kings 1). When Solomon sent Abiathar away, he also defrocked him of his priesthood, and therefore, Jeremiah, hailing from a northern tribe and a declassed priesthood, would have likely been marginalized by those in Judah.[7] The divide between Jeremiah's lineage and the Judahites is made apparent very early in the text. Even the book's outset in Jer. 1:1 underlines that Anathoth is within "the territory of Benjamin," removed from the territory of Judah. This becomes more relevant as the narrative progresses, and we see Jeremiah alienated from the Judahites, and set apart from the rest of the community. Like many prophets, Jeremiah was reluctant to accept his divine calling, and his fears would have only been exacerbated by the command to preach to Jerusalem (Jer. 2:2-3), a city which has reason to treat him as an outsider. It would be difficult to preach oracles of doom even to Anathoth, but the mission becomes much more daunting when it is revealed that he must declare destruction against Judah, a hostile land. It is also worth noting that Jeremiah was a young man at the time of his calling, responding, "Ah, Lord God! I don't know how to speak, for I am still a boy" (Jer. 1:6). Considering he was a priest, he was not a literal child, but in a society that values the spiritual wisdom of elders (Num. 11), his youth would have worked to his discredit.

Understanding the Text

Keeping in mind the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, scholars are also keen to point out the unique editorial features of the book of Jeremiah—specifically the Deuteronomic influence apparent in the text. As was mentioned previously, Jeremiah was a Levitical priest, and Deuteronomistic tradition is widely recognized to have descended from Levites of northern

[7] Petersen, David L. *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989, 98.

heritage.[8] The Deuteronomists, the Levites, and Jeremiah all have a similar theological and regional background. There are two schools of thought regarding the Deuteronomic influence on Jeremiah as Petersen explains (and they are not mutually exclusive). One is that Jeremiah knew and employed portions of Deuteronomy (Deut. 5-26; 32), and that redactors of Deuteronomy used some of Jeremiah's very words in their own work.[9] In this regard, the books and ideologies of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah are in conversation with one another, showing the Deuteronomic preferences of the author of Jeremiah. However, there is also the thought that the redactors of Jeremiah were Deuteronomic and that they added their own prose sections and other editorial additions in Jeremiah to support Deuteronomic Theology. Petersen recalls the work of Nicholson,[10] who argued that the prose portions of Jeremiah reflect theological concerns of the Deuteronomists,[11] and identifies two major Deuteronomic themes in the text. These major themes are Judah's rejection of Jeremiah's message, and Jeremiah's role as a mouthpiece of the Torah.[12] Reading Jeremiah through the angle of a Deuteronomist, the ultimate purpose of the book is to show that if Israel returns to God, then they will be restored. Of course, this is the message that paves the way for Jeremiah's New Covenant, as will be discussed in detail later. A Deuteronomic influence on the text, whether by author or redactor, is important to keep in mind because it shapes the way that Jeremiah presents the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, setting his Theology apart from other prophets,[13] and allows modern readers a better understanding of his message. The rhetorical purpose of the text will obviously differ from the

---

[8] Leuchter, Mark. "The Historical Jeremiah." Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 78–92. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 84.
[9] Peterson 133
[10] Nicholson, E. *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah*. Shocken, NY, 1971.
[11] Petersen 133
[12] Petersen 133
[13] Petersen 132-3

original text because of these editorial changes. For example, if the laments were originally communal, they may be altered to appear as individual psalms (Jer. 18:18).

The general warning of all the prophets is of repentance and a return to God, and in that way, there is unity to all the prophetic books; however, scholars have found that some prophets had access to the writings of their predecessors. Petersen explains that the book of Jeremiah presents an unusual theological issue in that so much of the book is like the rest of the Old Testament. Indeed, overlap occurs most commonly between Jeremiah and Hosea, and between Jeremiah and the Deuteronomists (as was discussed in the previous paragraph).[14] Hosea was the prophet of the northern kingdom of Ephraim, just as Jeremiah, a native of the north, served Judah a century and a half later.[15] In both Jeremiah and Hosea, one of the major sins that the prophets are concerned with is the worship of other gods, or adultery. It is worth noting that Hosea—like Jeremiah—possessed Levitical heritage and hailed from a northern tribe,[16] and they are often grouped as having similar theological concerns. In Hosea, the Lord charges the people, "Behold, you have fornicated, O Ephraim; Israel has defiled himself! Their habits do not let them turn back to their God, because of the lecherous impulse within them" (Hos. 5:3-4). In Hosea, the people have broken the covenant to worship Baal, a Canaanite fertility God (Hos. 2:15), a crime also referenced in Jeremiah 2:23, which mimics the language of Hosea; "How can you say, "I am not defiled, I have not gone after the Baalim"?". Both sections use the analogy of sexual promiscuity and impurity to show how the people have sinned. Like Hosea, Jeremiah presents the analogy of marriage between God and Israel as the male and female spouses, respectively.[17]

[14] Petersen 132
[15] Brown, Sydney Lawrence. *The Book of Hosea*. London, UK: Methuen & Co, 1932, xvi.
[16]Leucheter 85
[17] Petersen 132

We see this in the bridal language used in Hos. 2:21, which reads, “And I will espouse you forever: I will espouse you with righteousness and justice, and with goodness and mercy” and Jer. 2:2: “I accounted to your favor the devotion of our youth, your love as a bride—.” Jeremiah and Hosea use covenant language to articulate the relationship between God and Israel,[18] and in many cases the authors choose to use the imagery of a marital covenant to covey this bond. The tie between Israel and God is blessed and intimate, just like a spousal relationship. These overlaps and the overall Deuteronomic undertones of the books lead scholars to believe that Jeremiah had access to an early form of the book of Hosea, thus informing his understanding of prophecy and his prophetic mission.

The Burden of Prophecy

Both Jeremiah’s age and cultural background as a Benjaminite would have been barriers to gaining the favor of the Judahites, however the real social impediment stemmed from the burden of prophesy. One factor which greatly contributed to Jeremiah’s ostracization by the Judahites was his perceived paranoia. He fears—perhaps rightfully so—that there are conspirators in the community who wish to silence him (Jer. 18:18). Jeremiah laments, “For every time I speak, I must cry out, must shout, “Lawlessness and rapine!” For the word of the Lord causes me constant disgrace and contempt” (Jer. 20:8). His prophetic vision shows him that “terror on every side” (Jer. 6:25) and doom is approaching from the north (Jer. 6:22). He is surrounded by villains, both from Judah and the enemy nations. The threat of conspiracy is a major theme in Jeremiah and in the laments he is troubled by shadowy figures who have “laid snares” for him (Jer. 18:22). In the fifth lament, he even claims that his “[supposed] friends” seek

[18] Petersen 132

his life (Jer. 20:20); everyone is perceived as a danger. As Heschel candidly acknowledges in his chapter *Prophecy and Psychosis*, Jeremiah's prophetic frenzy could have even been off-putting to the Judahites.[19] For example, Jeremiah is often commanded to undertake symbolic acts, such as being told to don the "yoke of Babylon"(Jer. 27:1-3). This action was not well received by the masses, and the false prophet Hannaniah goes so far as to humiliate Jeremiah by breaking the symbolic yoke (Jer. 28:10-11), an act that likely reflected the attitude of the masses, as he was not taken seriously. However, frenetic prophets like Amos and Jeremiah could not be differentiated by their contemporaries from the ecstatics, who were regarded as epileptics, or even as insane,[20]making it difficult for the people to discern whether Jeremiah was divinely inspired, a zealot, or mentally ill. This is a diagnosis which has only gained favor in the modern era, and one which invalidates the prophetic experience.[21]

Just as a working knowledge of Jeremiah's theological background is necessary for fully comprehending the book, so is an understanding of the prophet's mental state at the time of his career. The rhetorical purpose of the laments is so much greater than a psychological analysis, but a mindfulness of what Jeremiah and the exiles endured helps us to better understand the historical context of the laments. Speaking on prophetic literature, McEntire reflects that although the narratives vary by place and time, they all serve the purpose of trying to make sense of life in the aftermath of defeat and disaster and look towards recovery.[22] Indeed, although the enemy nation varies by book, all the prophets and their audiences arise from harrowing and traumatic circumstances. L. Juliana Claassens speaks on this topic in her piece, *Jeremiah: The*

---

[19] Heschel 505

[20] Kittel, R. Essay. In *Geschichte Des Volkes Isreal* II, 2nd ed., II:449. Gotha, 1903, 449.

[21] Heschel 508-9

[22] McEntire, Mark. *A Chorus of Prophetic Voices: Introducing the Prophetic Literature of Ancient Israel*. *ProQuest*. Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2015. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/providence/detail.action?docID=3446613, 7.

Traumatized Prophet. She explains that the structure of Jeremiah, coupled with the historical context, presents as a stereotypical trauma narrative. The book of Jeremiah could be read as a trauma narrative, with the prophet as the main protagonist, looking to rationalize the trauma of the Babylonian invasion and exile.[23] Jeremiah employs the literary devices of trauma narratives, such as fragmented memories, moments of action, and suggestions of emotion.[24] Some have even deemed the book unreadable because of its anarchic nature.[25] Fragmented memories can be found in moments like the covenant speech preached to the king of Judah (Jer. 22) and other recollections (Jer. 1), while moments of action can be seen in the symbolic acts of breaking the pottery (Jer. 19:1-13) and the purchase of land in Anathoth (Jer. 32:6-15). There are also many moments in which Jeremiah expresses his profound emotion in poems such as the laments (Jer. 20:7-18). Likewise, poetry enables writers a cathartic way to process their grief and trauma, and Jeremiah uses this medium time and time again in the book. Claassens explains that Jeremiah's role as a prophet exposes him to trauma, especially because he witnessed the horrors twice: once in a divine vision, and again in real life. Jeremiah carries the "burden of being a witness" as he is called both to see and to hear (Jer. 4:31) the approaching disaster. In the instance of the almond branch and the boiling pot (Jer. 1:11-16), for example, the prophet is shown a vision of the siege of Jerusalem by the ominous enemy from the north[26]. He is also forced to witness the corpses of Israelites (Jer. 7:33), who have become nothing more than carrion for the birds in a gruesome scene of ruin and chaos where cities and their inhabitants cease to exist.[27] Witnessing the

[23] Claassens, Julia. "Jeremiah: The Traumatized Prophet." Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 358–73. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 359.
[24] Claassens 359
[25] O'Connor, Kathleen M. *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2011, 29.
[26] An evil, or enemy from the north is a reference to the northern Assyrian army, however, in the book it comes to represent general foreign threats. In this case, the Babylonian army.
[27] Claassens 360

imminent horror in these visions would be enough to traumatize the prophet alone; however, Jeremiah is doubly cursed by seeing and hearing these haunts, and then experiencing them in real life during invasion and the subsequent exile. There is no doubt that Jeremiah would have been deeply traumatized, and the result can be seen in his paranoia, emotional outbursts, and reclusion from society. Jeremiah has seen the great dread of what is to come, and yet, he remains powerless to stop it as the people will not repent.

Accusations of mental instability would have certainly made Jeremiah's relationship with the community difficult, especially with the lack of understanding surrounding psychology in his time. With that said, one of the greatest contributors to Jeremiah's isolation was God's commandment that he does not participate in community life (Jer. 16:1-4). The Lord commands, "Do not enter a house of mourning, do not got to lament and to condole with them" (Jer. 16:5) and "Nor shall you enter a house of feasting, to sit down with them to eat and drink" (Jer. 16:8). These rules are not made out of cruelty, as Jeremiah is not the target of God's aggression—the rest of the community is—rather, abstaining from these activities is symbolic. Because "Great and small alike shall die in this land, they shall not be buried; men shall not lament them" (Jer. 16:6), Jeremiah is barred from participating in communal mourning. In ancient Israelite culture, this would have been a great tragedy for mourning was a much more emphatic and communal experience than what we may think of in Western death customs. Examples of the communal laments are highly prevalent in the Old Testament, with a few notable examples being the mourning following the Golden Calf incident (Exod. 33:4), the tradition of remembering Jephthah's daughter and her virginity (Judg. 11:40), and grieving the death of Moses (Deut. 34:8). To be excluded from a communal ritual like mourning would have left the prophet ostracized and full of grief. Oddly enough, it crops up as a recurring law throughout the

prophetic books. The prophet Ezekiel is even prohibited from mourning following the death of his wife (Ezek. 24:18), and the Lord says, “you shall not mourn or weep, but you shall pine away in your iniquities and groan to one another” (Ezek. 24:23).

Although Jeremiah and Ezekiel are prevented from mourning, it is far more common to see commandments to mourn in the prophecies. We see elsewhere in Jeremiah a call for mourning in which the Lord instructs the women, “teach your daughters wailing, and one another lamentation. For death has climbed through our windows” (Jer. 9:19-20). Unspeakable horrors that are about to darken the skies of Israel, and the nation will become one in mourning, as we see in Jeremiah’s book of Lamentations. In the book of Amos, God swears that he will make the people mourn after they are punished, saying, “I will turn your festivals into mourning, and all your songs into dirges; I will put a sackcloth on all loins, and tonsures on every head; I will make it mourn as for an only child” (Amos 8:10). God does not only allow mourning here but promises to be the cause of it. The book of Hosea also draws on this theme of communal mourning by including the land and the animals among those who mourn; “For that, the earth is withered: everything that dwells on it languishes—beasts of the field and birds of the sky—even the fish of the sea perish” (Hos. 4:3). This passage demonstrates that grief is such a collective experience for the ancient Israelites that the whole earth mourns. Why then, are Jeremiah and Ezekiel excluded from this cathartic spiritual and communal experience and forced to mourn alone? The anguish and loneliness of the prophet is certainly symbolic of how the rest of the community will feel once God punishes and rejects them. This is particularly true of Ezekiel, whose companion was taken from him in his prophetic frenzy. We will explore this further later when examining what Carrol calls the *chaos* of Jeremiah’s mind, body, and soul.

Returning to Claassens' view on Jeremiah through the lens of trauma, one could read the passages on social isolation and persecution as a post-traumatic stress disorder response as well. This is significant because it minimizes the physical threat to Jeremiah from his community and emphasizes his agonized and anxiety-ridden psychological state. Referencing the work of clinical psychologist Maria Root, Claassens explains that increased isolation, social and emotional withdrawal, strained intrapersonal relationships, feelings of distrust, and paranoia are typical identifiers of an individual who has suffered trauma.[28] Jeremiah's portrayal certainly fits this description, especially when recalling all of the traumatic events that he has experienced, and sees in the future. In the previous sections, we investigated Jeremiah's forbiddance to partake in community life and events such as marriage, parenthood, and all social gatherings (Jer. 16:2-8). Trauma scholars have pointed to these examples as reflections of the increasing sense of isolation around the prophet.[29] Although this section is most often read as a metaphor for the calamities that are about to come to Judah, it can also be interpreted as the social isolation that results from post-traumatic stress disorder. Similarly, Claassens examines Jeremiah's laments on the persecution that he faces from the community as a heightened sense of paranoia, distrust, and feelings of betrayal resulting from a traumatized mental state. In Jer. 18:18-23, Jeremiah references enemies that he fears are setting out to "strike him with the tongue" (Jer. 18:18), however, the enemies are vague, as are their specific plots to kill him (Jer. 11:19). This section rings of trauma-induced paranoia and shows readers a battered individual experiencing an augmenting state of social dissolution, resulting in complete and utter isolation.[30] The fact that Jeremiah fears his brother priests from Anathoth (Jer. 11:21) are among those seeking his life is

[28] Claassens 363
[29] Claassens 363
[30] Claassens 364

all the more evidence that this may be paranoia, as that idea would mean betrayal by his own people, another sign of post-traumatic stress disorder.

It is often said that an air of chaos or anxiety characterizes the book of Jeremiah; it also characterizes him as a person. The portrait of Jeremiah that we see in his laments is a conflicted individual, deeply plagued by inner turmoil and memories of trauma.[31] There are as many variations of anxiety and depressive disorders as there are people who suffer from it, but a common cause of them is experiencing traumatic events or living in an unstable environment. As we talked about in the previous section, Jeremiah certainly experienced trauma, and it likely affected him psychologically and emotionally. Carroll reasons that Jeremiah's Laments would more aptly be termed soliloquies, as the prophet confides his struggles to God, and God alone[32]. The laments are a raw and vulnerable glimpse at the prophet's deepest secrets, struggles, and fears, and his mental torment as he struggles with doubt and adversity.[33] These laments drip with the heaviness of the depression and anxiety that the prophet suffers from. Mirroring Ps. 120:5 and the despondent language of Job and Ecclesiastes, Jeremiah wails, "Woe is me, my mother, that you ever bore me—A man of conflict and strife with all the land! I have not lent, and I have not borrowed; Yet everyone curses me!" (Jer. 15:10). This passage shows how alone and miserable Jeremiah feels, especially as he perceives danger from everyone around him. Later in the chapter, the prophet continues, "I have not sat in the company of revelers and made merry! I have sat lonely because of Your hand upon me, for you have filled me with gloom" (Jer. 15:17). Referencing the command of Jer. 16:8, this line reflects the social isolation and unending woe that that he experiences because of his prophetic mission. As an individual with Generalized

[31] Claassens 364
[32] Carroll 107
[33] Carroll 107

Anxiety Disorder myself, I would attest to the fact that Jeremiah's suspected PTSD, anxiety, and depression do not make him weak, rather, they show his immense fortitude as he struggles with the chaos both around, and within him.

The chaos of Jeremiah's external and internal world is a topic of significance for Robert Carroll in his sterling book, *From Chaos to Covenant: Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah*. Carroll calls the prophetic book a strategy for survival in the period following the collapse of Judah,[34] and focuses the tremendous and chaotic upheaval that was occurring during Jeremiah's prophetic career. Responses to the fall of Jerusalem and exile of the population, political power struggles, and attempts to legitimize the parties and policies emerging during reconstruction all contributed to the Jeremiah tradition.[35] Carroll attributes much of the material in Jeremiah to the Deuteronomic redactors, and identifies Jeremiah as a poet, warranting the prose sections the likely product of the redactors, and therefore inauthentic of the prophet.[36] Refraining from endorsing or denying the claim, I would point to scholarship backing its characterization as a survival guide because of the psychological, emotional, and spiritual benefits of writing and revisiting communal trauma as Jeremiah has done. Mary Mills adds to this conversation by analyzing the "deathscapes" in the book of Jeremiah. Deathscape is a term that derives from interpreting a text by the symbolism of memorial and grave.[37] Essentially, Jerusalem becomes a deathscape as the story progresses, leaving the city as a ghost town as the majority of its community are dead or exiled. Jeremiah's depiction of a desolate landscape, as in Jer. 4:23-26, mirrors the ruined Judah, providing a literary site for survivors to process their grief.[38] The

---

[34] Carroll 2
[35] Carroll 2
[36] Carroll 10; 14
[37] Millis, Mary. "Jeremiah's Deathscapes." Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 405–19. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 407.
[38] Mills 407

traumatized and dislocated remnant of Judah had to come to terms with the horrors that occurred, and because many of them were unable to visit the scene of the incident, the next best way to process that grief was to rebuild it in literature. Apocalyptic scenes like in Jer. 4:23-26 and Jer. 9:16-21 haunt readers with images of unburied corpses in the streets, murdered children and infants, and Jerusalem in a state of pre-creation emptiness. These scenes could be read as the vindictive threats of an angry God, but they should also be viewed as a cathartic form of expression for those who experienced the famine, drought, siege, and subsequent warfare.

Although it is appropriate for scholars to reflect on the impact that trauma may have had on Jeremiah's mental health, as the text provides narratives in which he was persecuted by some members of the community. In fact, it would be patronizing to claim his paranoia was unfounded, as we see many instances in which very powerful people set out to harm, and even kill the prophet. One such man is Pashhur, a priest who served as chief officer of the Temple (Jer. 20:1). Following Jeremiah's oracle of destruction in the Temple (Jer. 19:14-15), "Pashhur thereupon had Jeremiah flogged and put in the cell at the Upper Benjamin Gate in the House of the Lord. The next day, Pashhur released Jeremiah from the cell" (Jer. 20:2-3). The imprisonment was not long, but the threat of violence in response to prophesy is always something that the prophets of doom have had to contend with. Another example of persecution in response to prophesy can be seen in Jeremiah 32, in which King Zedekiah of Judah detains the long-suffering prophet in a prison compound attached to his palace (Jer. 32:1-2). "King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him, saying, "How dare you prophesy: 'Thus said the Lord: I am delivering this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall capture it" (Jer. 32:3). King Zedekiah also takes issue with Jeremiah's claim that he will be exiled to Babylon (Jer. 32:5). Jeremiah was persecuted and imprisoned by the king of the very nation he aims to save,

solely for his prophetic message. In keeping with the trend of persecution by powerful figures for his prophesy, in chapter 26, we see Jeremiah threatened with the death penalty (Jer. 26:11) by "the priests and the prophets and all the people [who] seized him shouting, "you shall die! How dare you prophesy in the name of the Lord that this House shall become like Shiloh"" (Jer. 26:7-9). Once again, there is a radical response to Jeremiah's words, and he only narrowly escapes a public execution when it is recalled that Micah the Morashitite, a fellow prophet of doom, was heeded by King Hezekiah, and the people reminisce on the unjust execution of Uriah by King Jehoiakim (Jer. 26:16-24). In this example, one can see the tremendous influence that authority figures, such as priests, respected prophets, and kings, can have on the mentality of the community. When the men in power deem Jeremiah a threat, so do the people. This has disastrous results for the persecuting people whom Jeremiah tried so hard to save.

Crime & Punishment

Jeremiah promises catastrophe if the people do not repent and return to God (Jer. 4:1-4). He warns, "For the Lord has a case against the nations, he contends with all flesh. He delivers the wicked to the sword" (Jer. 25:31). But what have the people done to deserve such a sentence? At times, it can appear as though Jeremiah and the prophets are overreacting to the sins of the people, however, to prophets, even a minor injustice swells to catastrophic proportions (Amos 8:7-8). When the people turn from God, the prophetic voice warns of chaos, destruction, erasure, and abandonment from God, which creates an urgency to warn the people away from sinfulness. Heschel explains that a prophet's words are outbursts of violent emotions and that his words can be harsh and relentless.[39] However, he counters that if the prophet's sensitivity to evil is

[39] Heschel 5

hysterical, how much worse is the sin of indifference to evil?[40] Indeed, the prophet's greatest service to mankind his discovery of the evil of indifference.[41] It is apathy to the suffering of others which causes the terrible evil of injustice, a topic that the prophets speak on prolifically (Amos 5:21-24 and Jer. 22:15-16). If there is one thing that the prophets are not, it is apathetic. Compassion flows from the hearts of the prophets, and righteousness from their lips. Endowed with the divine wrath of God, and attuned to the plight of the poor, the prophet is acutely aware of the moral state of the community, and makes it his mission to combat injustice, and this undertaking begins with making the people aware of their wrongdoings.

There are two sins that Jeremiah accuses the Israelites of: apathy, as previously mentioned, and adultery. When modern readers think of adultery, the most common thought is a romantic affair, and although that is also against the Law (Exod. 20:14), it is not so great a charge as spiritual infidelity, which is what the prophet is concerned with. The Lord confides in Jeremiah, "They have forsaken Me and sacrificed to other gods and worshipped the work of their hands [idols]" (Jer. 1:16), betraying their covenant with God, in which it was sworn, "You shall have no other gods besides me" (Exod. 20:3-5). As a condition of the Mosaic Covenant which was formed in the great Theophany (Exod. 19:16-25), the people must be loyal to their God, and not fall into the worship of other gods. The early Jewish population was not monotheistic, rather, they were henotheistic, which means that they believed in the existence of other gods, but also the supremacy of the Lord. Therefore, they could stray to worship other gods. This is a sin that even King Solomon succumbed to by worshipping Astarte of the Sidonians and Milcom of the Ammonites. "In his old age, his wives turned away Solomon's heart after other gods, and he was

[40] Heschel 5
[41] Heschel 5

not as wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord his Gods as his father David had been" (1 Kings 11:4), just as he had been warned of when he began talking many pagan brides (1 Kings 11:1-2). Religious adultery is also a major theme in the book of Hosea, in which he is commanded, "Go, get yourself a wife of whoredom [a Temple Prostitute] and children of whoredom; for the land will stray from following the Lord" (Hos. 1:2). This biting language conveys the severity of the crime. Following their exile to Egypt, the Jewish women are caught making offerings to the goddess, the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 44:15-19), and although they trivialize it, Jeremiah speaks on behalf of the Lord, "all the men of Judah in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by sword and famine, until they cease to be" (Jer. 44:27). So, the cycle continues, and the people are punished for their adultery once more (Jer. 46:2-24).

The second charge leveled against the Judahites is apathy. The community oppresses and harms the vulnerable, and they neglect the charitable obligations of Judaism. Green explain that the prophets frequently spoke of social or economic justice— relations among various members of society, and the injustice of how the rich treat the poor.[42] The people of Judah have neglected to act justly. In a plea for repentance, the Lord tells the people, "No, if you really mend your ways and your actions; if you execute justice between one man and another; if you do not shed the blood of the innocent in this place; if you do not follow other gods," (Jer. 7:5-7), then the covenantal relationship can be repaired and the people may live in Israel. The topics of apathy, oppression, and injustice are so prevalent in the prophetic books (Isa. 29:20-21) because they stem from a rich tradition of almsgiving in the Wisdom Literature. Anderson explores the topic in *A Loan to God*, a book centered around the spiritual importance of charity in early Judaism.

---

[42] Green, Barbara. *Jeremiah and God's Plan of Well-Being*. *ProQuest*. University of South Carolina Press, 2013. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/providence/detail.action?docID=2054895, 10.

He explains that almsgiving became such a prominent feature of Second Temple Judaism because it fulfilled the religious obligation to help the less fortunate, and served as a way to proclaim belief in God.[43] This is because in Judaism (like Christianity and Islam), God requires that his people give alms in order to bring justice to the less fortunate. Deut. 15:7-8 reads, “If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsmen.” While modern readers may associate loans with taking advantage of the poor, providing loans was actually considered a very respectable form of charity in ancient Judaism because interest could not be collected and the practice was not exploitative (Exod. 2:25-27). Ben Sira, a Wisdom Teacher, pays special attention to the condition of the poor in his book, saying, “do not neglect to give alms” (Sir. 7:10), and “Give graciously to all the living; do not withhold kindness even from the dead” (Sir. 7:33). This almsgiving was often performed in the way of giving loans to those in need. It is commonplace in Judaism to call these charitable gifts loans, even when there is little to no chance of repayment. This grace allows the beneficiary to save face while accepting help.[44] Although almsgiving and care for the needy is commanded by the Torah, the Judahites in Jeremiah had grown complacent, and they forgot their obligation to give charitably. Jeremiah reflects on their ancestors, saying, “Do you think you are more a king because you compete in cedar? Your father [King Josiah] ate and drank and dispenses justice and equity… That is truly heeding me” (Jer. 22:15-16). However, the people of Judah no longer know the Lord (Jer. 2:8), and they neglected to care for those in need.

[43] Anderson, Gary A. “Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition.” Essay. In *A Loan to God*, 35–52. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013, 35.
[44] Anderson 49

Tension and conflict between God and the community is the main theme of Jeremiah, and that conflict is reflected in the confrontation between Jeremiah and Judah's leaders.[45] Oftentimes in prophetic literature, there is a set of charges leveled against the community, and then another section dedicated to the leaders. For example, the dirge in Ezek. 19 laments the condition of the king of Israel, depicted as a brawny lion, after he was taken captive into Egypt. Hosea foretells a similar fate for all corrupt rulers, who could be killed by the very people whose sinfulness they encouraged. It reads, "In malice they make a king merry, and officials in treachery. They commit adultery, all of them, like an oven fired by a baker" (Hos. 7:3-4), and as the godlessness progresses, "They all get heated like an oven and devour their rulers—none of them calls to Me. All their kings have fallen [by their hand]" (Hos. 7:7). Through the misdirection of Israel's leadership, the people descend into destruction and chaos, and the prophets are not afraid to condemn those in power when they act unjustly (Amos 5:10-13). Jeremiah is more concerned with prophesying to the masses rather than leadership (Jer. 36:11-32), and his primary concern is holding the people accountable so that they can see the error of their ways and repent, saving their lives. Petersen explains that preaching to the community was also a way of practicing equality. Surely, prophets addressed kings, but they ultimately challenged the entire population; in a way, they democratized the responsibility for justice and righteousness.[46] All are responsible for the punishment, and thus, all suffer. The suffering even pervades to non-human creation, such as can be seen in the drought (Jer. 14:5-6) when the flora and fauna of Judah wither under the burden of drought. As this paper will continue to address, there is a very strong sense of

[45] Fischer, Georg. "Contested Theologies in the Book of Jeremiah." Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 311–27. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 316.
[46] Petersen 13

community in Judah, even in the midst of all of this devastation, which makes the communal laments, such in Jer. 14:7-9, all the more potent.

Elaborating on the relationship between the prophet and political leadership, Holt paints a portrait of Jeremiah as a political advisor, claiming that that role is one of the major functions of prophets. Jeremiah primarily addresses the people, but at times, it becomes necessary to consort with leadership. This title of political advisor is grounded in the example of Samuel, a political advisor to King Saul (1 Sam. 15), and Nathan, who counseled King David (2 Sam. 12). Jeremiah's near-contemporary, Isaiah, can also be read as a political advisor as he guides Kings Ahaz and Hezekiah (Isa. 7; 37). Holt explains that Jer. 21 presents Jeremiah as royal advisor and intercessor[47] as Jeremiah is called upon by King Zedekiah's officials to provide advice and to advocate for God's protection. Pashhur and Zephaniah the priest plead, "Please inquire of the Lord on our behalf, for King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon is attacking us. Perhaps the Lord will act for our sake… so that [Nebuchadrezzar] will withdraw from us" (Jer. 21:2). This scene is remarkable because the authority figures in this story address him with respect, knowing that he can speak to, and even sway God on their cause. Usually when Jeremiah is approached by authority figures, he is degraded, imprisoned, and threatened with death, but here the power of the prophet is recognized, and his insight is valued. In this scene, Jeremiah's response is delivered to the people rather than the king, promising that those who desert to the Chaldeans will survive as the remnant of Judah (Jer. 21:3-10). Here, Jeremiah's image changes from that of a political advisor to a leader of the Judahites.[48] It is no coincidence that Jeremiah's prophesy in chapter 21 mimics the language of Deut. 30:15-16, in which Moses lectures the Israelites to obey

[47] Holt, Else K. "Portraits of the Prophet in the Book of Jeremiah." Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 343–57. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 355.
[48] Holt 355

the Torah. In Jeremiah's response to Zedekiah's appeal, authority is granted to the prophet through his connection to Moses, who was so highly esteemed by the Deuteronomist redactors. This authority is reflected in the respect with which Pashhur and Zephaniah approach Jeremiah, a man who they would normally mock and disregard.

In addition to leadership and the community, Jeremiah also places blame on the false prophets who negate his calls for repentance by announcing oracles of peace. The Lord judges them harshly; "Priest and prophet alike, they all act falsely. They offer healing off hand for the wounds of My poor people, saying, "All is well, all is well," when nothing is well" (Jer. 8:10-11). Here, the community is treated as a victim of the false prophets, rather than a perpetrator of a crime, although they are elsewhere charged with idolatry and other sins. The phrase, "My poor people" is one that appears often in Jeremiah's writing (Jer. 8:22; 6:26), and it is used by both God and prophet, showing their empathy for the community amid great suffering. The antidote is repentance (Jer. 7:1-11), yet the false prophets make healing impossible by claiming that there is no need for repentance. Although in many other contexts the Judahites are held responsible for their pride and sins (Jer. 22:13-16), in the oracles against false prophets, it almost reads as though the people cannot discern true prophet from false prophet, and thus the prophets of peace are responsible for the non-repentance. Jeremiah asks in frustration, "To whom shall I speak, give warning that they may hear? Their ears are blocked and they cannot listen" (Jer. 6:10). The issue is not only the hard-heartedness of the people—the Judahites are hearing differing oracles and they are believing an incorrect one. Looking at the situation from the perspective of the people, it would be much easier to believe the prophet that is proclaiming peace and Israel as God's favorite than a prophet that promises destruction and accuses the people of vague injustices, as mentioned previously. We see this phenomenon in modernity as well, where we are

warned time and time again by climate scientists that the planet is going to be destroyed, and yet, it is easier to accept the message from large corporations and climate change deniers, which promise that the current rate of pollution and destruction is nothing to be alarmed about. At one point, Jeremiah even confronts the false prophet Hananiah, who appears to publicly denounce the Yoke of Babylon oracle. Jeremiah challenges the prophet of peace, “The prophets who lived before you and me from ancient times prophesied war, disaster, and pestilence against many lands and great kingdoms” (Jer. 28:8) and only the prophecies of disaster can be believed, as that was the message of previous legitimate prophets. Jeremiah cites the ancient tradition of prophets of woe, who are implied to be the true prophets.[49] Throughout this encounter, it becomes obvious that the Judean community was receiving contradictory messages on the fate of the kingdom, and the false prophets of peace like Hananiah were largely to blame. Thus, alongside the people and royalty, the false prophets will be punished for their sins (Jer. 28:15-17).

Judah is Disgraced

While Jeremiah specifically calls out the false prophets and kings, ultimately, the people are responsible for their behavior. In fact, the book implies that the current state of sin is what the people prefer, as can be seen in Jer. 5:31, which reads, “The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule accordingly; And My people like it so.” The people are not helpless victims; they are malevolent actors in this drama, and Jeremiah sees this firsthand. He does not have to blindly trust God’s accusations, rather, “The Lord informed me, and I knew—You let me see their deeds” (Jer. 11:18). The destruction of Judah and its inhabitants is a last resort, and it pains God greatly to see His people suffer so, but their actions have left him with no choice (Jer. 15:7).

---

[49] *The Jewish Study Bible: Torah, Nevi’im, Kethuvim*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014, 972.

Both Jeremiah and the Deity speak of the punishment in a pattern of cause and effect. One example of this is in Jeremiah's laments, which call for retribution (a standard feature of laments). He says of the community, "Let my persecutors be shamed, and let not me be shamed… shatter them with double destruction" (Jer. 17:18). The cause of Jeremiah's call for retribution is the persecution he faces from the community (covered in greater detail in the Laments portion), and the effect of that villainous behavior is the persecutor's destruction. In the sixth lament, Jeremiah beseeches, "Listen to me, O Lord—And take notes of what my enemies say! Should good be repaid with evil?" (Jer. 18:20). This question reflects the teachings of the wisdom tradition (Amos 7:1-6), and an example can be seen in Psalm 37: "For evil men will be cut off, but those who look to the Lord—they shall inherit the land" (Ps. 37:9). This is the natural order of the world, and the retribution/reward complex that Jeremiah is begging God to uphold; however, in the current apocalyptic state of Judah, there is no justice (Jer. 5:1), and the promises of the wisdom tradition go unfulfilled. It is almost as if the natural consequences have reverted the world to a state of disorder as the covenant has been broken, Judah has been disowned, and the people cannot rely on God to save them anymore.

In a fury of righteous indignation, the Lord condemns Judah for her idolatry and lack of justice, commanding, "Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be horrified, utterly dazed!" (Jer. 2:13). The people have committed adultery by following other gods, and they have spilled "the lifeblood of the innocent poor" (Jer. 2:34) without remorse. Of course, these two sins are terrible, but the ambiguity surrounding the exact crimes can be a sticking point for modern readers. For a reckoning so severe, surely there should be a rap sheet of sorts. The OAN functions in a similar manner, doling out extreme punitive measures without a clear description of the offense. Petersen explains that Jeremiah differs from other prophets, like Isaiah, Amos, and Micah

because they are disinterested in offering specific indictments on what the Judahites has done wrong.[50] The statements of wrongdoing are usually generic and unimaginative, echoing phrases like “your wicked acts” (Jer. 4:4), “their transgressions” and “their rebellious acts” (Jer. 5:6). Similarly, when they are chastised for idolatry, mention of the competing deities by name is rare, and commonly exchanged for coveralls (Jer. 2:11). This uncertainty can be difficult to reconcile when the stakes are the survival of an entire nation and her people, however, Petersen reminds readers that the ambiguity of Jeremiah’s poetry allows readers to reflect on what lies below the surface and come to their own conclsuions.[51] The poetry of Scripture is complicated, inspired, and to grasp, it requires the grace of the Holy Spirit. Rather than picking at the threads, one must appreciate the tapestry for the masterpiece that it is, and trust in the authority of every verse. It does not make a difference if the people worshipped Baal or Jupiter, the result is the same that they broke the sacred covenant.

The sinful behavior of Judah is made even more ruinous when one considers that the Israelites are God’s chosen people, and thus, they are held to a higher standard of conduct than the Gentiles, and yet, they are just as sinful—if not worse. Unlike the Gentiles, the Jewish community was entrusted with knowledge of the Lord, and therefore with the knowledge of the Torah. In one of the first encounters that Moses has with God, the Lord instructs him to say this to the people: “I am the Lord. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God” (Exod. 6:6-7). To know the Lord and his divine power is also to fear the Lord. Following the parting of the Red

[50] Petersen 105
[51] Petersen 106

Sea (Exod. 14:26-30), it is said that once the people saw this miracle, they believed in the Lord and they feared him (Exod. 14:30). Although fear tends to carry a negative connotation, fear of the Lord is much more complex, and it tends to come with undertones of reverence and exultation. This reverence and praise can be seen in the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15:1-21) which follows immediately after a claim that the people feared the Lord. However, the people in Jeremiah's time have chased after other pagan gods, and they have forgotten their Lord and his divine power. The Judahites no longer fear God, and that is a major issue. Jeremiah prophecies against Judah, "Climb Lebanon and cry out, raise your voice in Bashan, cry out from Abarim, for all your lovers are crushed. I spoke to you when you were prosperous; You said, "I will not listen" (Jer. 22:20-21). The false gods that have seduced the Israelites will not be able to save them when they are judged, because even though the people were called to God and had the opportunity to heal their relationship, "Yet they did not listen or give ear; they followed their own counsels, the willfulness of their evil hearts" (Jer. 7:24). The Lord offers instructions through the Torah, and sends prophets to speak his wisdom (Jer. 7:25-26), yet the people choose not to remember the Lord, unlike the Gentiles who were never given the privilege of knowing the commandments. Despite their lack of knowledge, the pious Gentiles (Matt. 8:5-9) are depicted graciously as they offer laments for the Moab as they are punished (Jer. 48:34-39).

The Babylonian siege of Judah was not the first time that God delivered his people into the hands of an enemy. Throughout the book of Jeremiah, the tragedy at Shiloh is repeatedly referenced due to the similarities between the current atmosphere in Israel and that of Shiloh preceding its destruction. In the story of Shiloh, the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, "were scoundrels; they paid no heed to the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:12), and God warned the then-young Samuel that the House of Eli would be punished for its sacrilegious practices (1 Sam. 3). Later,

the Israelite army encounters the Philistines, and seeking divine protection they bring out the Ark of the Covenant, as the Lord's presence in the Ark had saved them in battles previously (Num. 10:33-36). However, this time God does not save them and "The defeat was very great, thirty-thousand-foot soldiers of Israel fell there" (1 Sam. 4:10); the Ark was captured by the Philistines, and Eli, Hophni, Phinehas, and his wife all perished (1 Sam. 4:11-22). The rest of the city is then destroyed. It is worth noting that Jeremiah may have descended from the house of Eli because the priests of Anathoth could trace their ancestry through Abiathar, to the house of Eli, who was the priest that officiated at the pre-Jerusalem worship center at Shiloh (1 Sam. 1-3).[52] With this lineage, and with the lineage of his contemporaries in mind, it is fitting that Jeremiah so frequently compares Judah to Shiloh, such as when the Lord says, "therefore I will do to the House which bears My name… just what I did to Shiloh" (Jer. 7:14). Although the Levitical priests had special ties to Shiloh, the Judahites of Jeremiah's day would have considered Shiloh to be synonymous with apostasy, and the epitome of evil according to the Torah.[53] Of course, this interpretation is somewhat ironic given that Shiloh was also punished for its sinfulness and arrogance, much like Judah. The people believed that because God dwelled in Jerusalem, they were safe and there was no need to heed Jeremiah's warnings, just as those in Shiloh believed the Ark, the temporary dwelling place of the Lord would save them from the ravaging of the Philistines. As Tarazi explains, the Lord once resided in Shiloh, which he forsook; it once dwelled in Jerusalem, but he forsook that city also. He now dwells in his venerable prophet, Jeremiah.[54] It is only through Jeremiah's words and calls for repentance that the people can be

[52] Miller 158
[53] Tarazi, Paul Nadim. *The Chrysostom Bible - Jeremiah: A Commentary*. St. Paul, MN: Ocabs Press, 2013, 40.
[54] Tarazi 41

saved. This rejection of safety in the land of God's physical presence will later contribute to Jeremiah's New Covenant Theology, which we will address later in this paper.

At times, the question is raised by the prophet and the people, does the punishment fit the crime? When the accusations leveled against Judah are as vague as what Jeremiah offers, it can appear as though the Lord may be overreacting out of anger and jealousy (Jer. 28:16). The people accuse God of acting callously and say, "You have clothed Yourself in anger and pursued us, You have slain without pity" (Lam. 3:43). Jeremiah also becomes frustrated by the relentless nature of God's wrath, and he cries, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Can no physician be found? Why has healing not yet come to my poor people?" (Jer. 8:22). One common criticism of ancient Israelite literature is that it often appears as though the Lord is overly austere with his people (Isa. 40:2). However, as a Levitical priest, Jeremiah's scroll assumes Deuteronomic Theology, where the sin of idolatry leads to divine punishment—most commonly exile. It is warned that if the people do not obey the Torah, and do not abstain from idolatry, "The Lord will put you to rout before your enemies; you shall march out against them by a single road, but flee from them by many roads; and you shall become a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth" (Deut. 28:25). In addition to political collapse and exile, the Lord threatens the Israelites with drought, famine, and panic (Deut. 28:20-24), all of which are fulfilled in the book of Jeremiah. During the crippling drought, the word of the Lord conveys, "Because of the ground, there is dismay, For there has been no rain on the earth" (Jer. 14:4) and the Lord swears, "I will send the sword, famine, and pestilence against them until they are exterminated from the land that I gave to them and their fathers" (Jer. 24:10). The subsequent warfare, drought, and exile cause panic and strife for all of Judah. All the punishments that the book of Deuteronomy warned of are fulfilled in the

punishments in the book of Jeremiah, reaching a pinnacle in the punishment of exile for the crime of idolatry.

There is a dual nature to Judah's offenses: not only have they sinned, but the sin is made more offensive because of the high standard that they should be held to as God's covenant people. Ethical norms regarding empathy and social justice inform much of the critique offered by the prophets, including Jeremiah. To put it simply, there are two different levels of norms: those common to all mankind, and those that Israel and the Jewish people understand as specific to them.[55] In the case of Jeremiah and his text's Levitical/Deuteronomic undertones, this idea is compounded in the focus on covenant Theology. As God's chosen people, the Jewish community is held to higher ethical norms than those outside the faith. The Lord often invokes the formerly unsoiled covenant relationship and contrasts it to the current state of disrepair. Following the laments of Jer. 14, the Lord says to the prophet, "Even if Moses and Samuel were to intercede with Me, I would not be won over to that people. Dismiss them from My presence and let them go forth!" (Jer. 15:1). This dialogue alludes to the Mosaic covenant both by name, and by the use of the phrase, "Let them go!" One may recall the famous line Moses, as a divine mouthpiece, delivers to Pharoah time and time again in Exodus: "Let my people go" (Exod. 5:1; 7:16; 8:1; 9:1). Now, the Lord does not deliver the people from oppression, but forsakes them to the hands of their enemies: Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt—the very nation he once liberated them from. It is as ironic as it is tragic that the Lord would return his people to exile from a land that he once did so much to free them from. This reversal is a metaphor for the degenerating state of the Judahites.

[55] Petersen 39-4

Contextualizing Jeremiah in the Bible

The book of Jeremiah draws heavily from Exodus and the likeness of the prophet to Moses. David Petersen delves into this matter, highlighting the theological complications that arise from likening Moses to a latter prophet, such as Jeremiah. One particularly complex theme in this matter is the idea of Mosaic prophecy, and scholars conclude that there was an understanding of prophecy specific to the northern kingdom, including Jeremiah's homeland. Texts such as Hosea, Deuteronomy, and Jeremiah reflect an understanding of Mosaic prophecy as it evolved over time.[56] Jeremiah, approaching his prophetic call from a Northern and Levitical background, a group that adhered strictly to the principles of Deut., would have understood this idea of Mosaic prophecy, and the authority that association with Moses would grant. One excellent example of this call to authority is Jer. 15:1, in which the Lord proclaims, "Even if Moses or Samuel were to intercede with Me, I would not be won over to that people." This passage is significant because it shows the severity of the offenses, and it implicitly tells readers that it is not Jeremiah's shortfalls that make him unable to fulfill the Mosaic duty of covenant negotiation and renewal[57] because even if the greatest "prophet" (Moses) were to speak on their behalf, God still would not reconsider. Reading books like Jeremiah and Hosea (Hos. 12:13) begs the question, was Moses a prophet? Petersen explains that although there are many similarities between Moses and the prophets, Moses holds a status different from prophets because God only communicates with the prophets by the way of visions and dreams (Jer. 23:16).[58] While the prophets act as a mouthpiece for God, Numbers explains, "Not so with my servant Moses, he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, visibly, not

[56] Petersen 220
[57] Petersen 220
[58] Petersen 223

in riddles. He can see the image of Yahweh" (Num. 12:6). This oracle refers to the Theophanies Moses experiences at Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:16-25), unique to Moses. With that said, the similarities between Jeremiah and Moses do much to establish the religious authority of Jeremiah, which is a necessity considering the consequences of false prophets negating his warnings of punishment.

Although many prophetic books contain Oracles of Hope (Jer. 32), generally, they lean more heavily towards lamentations, and the book of Jeremiah is no exception. In fact, most Wisdom Literature in general is burdened with an undercurrent of intense hopelessness and bereavement. The content of books of Job and Ecclesiastes revolve around spiritual crisis and the transient nature of the human experience. Following the loss of his land, wealth, children, health, and relationship with God (Job 1-2), Job grieves, "I walk about in sunless gloom" (Job 30:28), and "So my lyre is given over to mourning, my pipe, to accompany weepers" (Job 30:31). In this quote, Job's life of faith and fortune has turned to one of punishment and sorrow. In Ecclesiastes, Qohelet, while more fortunate, is just as miserable. He writes, "A good name is better than fragrant oil, and the day of death than the day of birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting" (Eccles. 7:1-2), and "Wise men are drawn to a house of mourning, and fools to a house of merrymaking" (Eccles. 7:4). Both Wisdom Books convey an almost funeral air, with a great emphasis on the need to mourn; how appropriate, then, is the Funeral Dirge of Wisdom we see in the book of Jeremiah. Wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7), yet Jeremiah's people no longer fear the Lord, which can be seen in the way they disobey His commandments by way of adultery and injustice. Jeremiah marks the death of wisdom in the land through a Funeral Dirge of Wisdom, saying that the people no longer know the ordinances of the Lord (Jer. 8:7), and therefore they are doomed. He grieves, "For the Lord our God has

doomed us, he has made us drink a bitter draft, because we have sinned against the Lord. We hoped for good fortune, but no happiness came; For a time of relief—instead there is terror!" (Jer. 8:14-15). This emotional dirge is followed by a lament from God himself, showing the divine pathos. The punishment of His covenant people effects God deeply, and he cries, "Because my people is shattered, I am shattered… Why has healing not yet some to my poor people?" (Jer. 8:21-22). This same language can be found in Lamentations, a book that is widely believed to have been written by, or at least inspired by, Jeremiah. Although Daughter Zion speaks this line, the language echoes Jer. 8:21: "My heart is in tumult, My being melts away over the ruin of my poor people" (Lam. 2:11; Lam. 3:48). The speaker in Lamentations is not God, however, because of the covenantal relationship between the Lord and the Israelites, when his people are in anguish, the Lord suffers with them. When reading the prophetic books, the primary emotion that we see from God is usually divine wrath, however here we see a God that suffers alongside his people and empathizes with their pain. Here we see a Creator that mourns the destruction of his beloved creation, and a Father that grieves the loss of his child.

God & Israel

The identity of God as the Father is central to the Abrahamic faiths. This relationship is so central to our Theology that the first words of the Lord's Prayer proclaim His title as *pater noster*. Just as human fathers are responsible for the physical creation of their children, God is responsible for the creation of mankind (Gen. 1:27). This creation shows that not only is God a metaphorical father-like figure, but He is also a father in every sense of the word. Furthermore, the title of father connotates the existence and care for a child, and the Lord is the father of the faithful—of *His* people (Gen. 17:7-8). Fatherhood in the relationship between God and mankind is not just religious, but literal in every sense. Deut. 14:1-2 reminds the people, "You are the

children of the Lord your God… you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God: the Lord your God chose you from among all other peoples on Earth to be His treasured people." This touching passage should be kept in mind when reading oracles of punishment, because it shows the deep love that God feels for his people despite everything that they must endure. He created us, He loves us (Ps. 86:15), He cares for us (Exod. 16), and He leads us when we go astray (Jer. 31:31-34). Just as dutiful parents enforce rules on their children to ensure safety and appropriate behavior, so the Lord legislates rules for his children, the Israelites. However, "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. He will not contend forever, or nurse His anger for all time" (Ps. 103:8-9). Amid their suffering in the wake of besiegement, plague, famine, and eventual exile, Lamentations promises an end to God's wrath. Once Edom faces judgement, it is promised, "Your iniquity, Fair Zion is expiated; He will exile you no longer" (Lam. 4:22 and see also Obad. 1:1 and Jer. 49:18-20). This verse can be read as doubly hopeful because the once humiliated and "unclean" Zion is called "fair" once more as she was in the days of old (Lam. 1:7-17). Eventually the punishment will relent once the people have learned their lesson and restore their relationship with the one true God (Isa. 43:10-13). Even when the covenant has been broken as in the case of the book of Jeremiah, the Lord mercifully calls to the people, "Turn back, O Rebel Israel—declares the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am compassionate—declares the Lord; I do not bear a grudge for all time. Only recognize your sin" (Jer. 3:12-13). Even when the people have disobeyed the Lord, he gives them an opportunity to repair the relationship and save themselves from the punishment that awaits if they do not repent. This is not an empty promise, as can be seen in the book of Jonah when the people of Nineveh and their king repent, and God spares them (Jon. 3:6-10). The anger of God only arises when the people are too prideful to repent.

The tender relationship between God and Israel is also reflected in the analogy of the loving couple depicted in the Song of Songs by King Solomon. This book stands out from the rest of the canonical literature due to its focus on the sensual, passionate, and rewarding nature of romantic partnerships, a radical departure from the heavy theological nature of most other canonical books. The Song celebrates the love between the two youths, saying, “How sweet is your love, my own, my bride! How much more delightful your love than wine, Your ointments more fragrant than any spice! Sweetness drips from your lips, O bride” (Song of Sg. 4:10). While most other canonical poetry focuses on abstract ideas like piety and justice, The Song relishes the joy that the physical senses can bring in a relationship. We see the Divine Lover compare her to the taste of wine, the fragrance of oil, and the sweetness of milk and honey. The poem may be about a holy covenantal relationship, but it is grounded in the same love that we can experience between humans. Although the Song of Songs is the most detailed poem reflecting this metaphorical relationship between God and Israel, it is also present in the prophetic books. One of Isaiah’s oracles of hope reads, “The Lord has called you back as a wife forlorn and forsaken. Can one cast off the wife of his youth? —said your God. For a little while I forsook you, but with vast love I will bring you back” (Isa. 54:6-7; Jer. 2:1; Ezek. 16; Ezek. 23; Hos. 1-3). Once the punishment has been executed, God loves Israel once more, and longs to return to the marital covenant. Jeremiah also alludes to the marriage bond, recalling, “I accounted to your favor the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride—How you followed me in the wilderness” (Jer. 2:2). The now adulteress Israel was once a faithful partner to God, following him into the safety of the woods as can be seen in Exodus. Although eventually Israel was an unfaithful bride and sought out other lovers (gods), their Bridegroom (God) offers to welcome her back to the sacred union in passages like Isa. 54 because He knows how beautiful the relationship can be. This

renewal is made doubly significant when one recalls the image of daughter Zion from Lam. 4:22, a woman who has been rejected by her lovers and ravaged by the horrors of war. What relief it would be to return to the safety of a loving husband after such an experience, to be deemed clean and pure once more through the restoration of the covenant. This is God's plan for Israel: to make her His chosen wife once more, for all eternity.

The intimate relationship between God and Israel, whether depicted as a parent and child or as spouses, is reflective of the covenantal relationship that they share. Covenants are an essential thread running through the Bible, beginning with the Noahic covenant of Genesis, and ending with Jeremiah's New Covenant. William J. Drumbrell, an expert on covenant Theology explains that Old Testament covenants are indicative of the divine direction of the development of a biblical eschatology spanning from creation to the end of days, or from Eden to the new Eden in the final account in Rev. 22:1– 5.[59] The book of Jeremiah sees dissolution of the Mosaic Covenant as a punishment for the sins of Judah (Jer. 11:9-10), the people are reprimanded through the drought, disease, warfare, and exile, but they are ultimately brought closer to God through the promise of the New Covenant. In Jer. 31's oracle of hope, the Lord promises the people a new covenant, unlike the one held with their ancestors; "I will put My teaching into their inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts. Then I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33). Although this covenant is unprecedented, it echoes the language of Exodus where the Lord takes ownership of the Jewish people as His own (Exod. 6:6-7). A covenant inscribed on the heart, rather than on the stone tablets of Moses (Exod. 32:16), would have been especially poignant given the recent destruction of the Temple by the Babylonian

[59] Dumbrell, William J. *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology* (version Revised and Englarged ed.). *ProQuest*. Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2013. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/providence/reader.action?docID=3116668, xvi.

army (2 Kings 25:8-17). V. Rev. Dr. Paul Tarazi also explains the significance of the New Covenant in the wake of the desecration of the Temple; The Torah circumscribed God within the world of the temple and Jerusalem, however, Jeremiah's God of the New Covenant was totally free of such limitations.[60] This New Covenant provided hope for the people; although God's dwelling place (Ps. 132:14) in Jerusalem was destroyed and the Israelites exiled, He would now be present in the hearts of His people. It is also worth noting that this law could not be corrupted by the aforementioned false priests and prophets because it would be known by all. Jeremiah's New Covenant Theology was intended to serve as the necessary transition from Israel as a earthly nation to Israel as a theological idea.[61] The people may be scattered, and the Temple looted, but the New Covenant could persist in the hearts of the community, fragmented as they may be.

Covenant Theology

Traditionally, covenants of the Hebrew Bible center around the promise of land, safety, political autonomy, and a robust population. In the Noahic Covenant after the Great Flood, God vows to never destroy creation by a flood again (Gen. 9:7-17), and in the Abrahamic Covenant, the Lord introduces the Promised Land, blessings, and vows to make Abraham the father of a great nation (Gen. 12:1-3). To Moses, God made the conditional covenant, "If you will obey Me faithfully, and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples" (Exod. 19:5). The Davidic Covenant, like the Abrahamic Covenant, pledges a great royal line (2 Sam. 7:12-17), an everlasting covenant, and the Mosaic Covenant crowns the Israelites as God's chosen people (Exod. 19:5-6), if they obey His commandments and uphold the *Torah*. The New

[60] Tarazi 41
[61] Dumbrell 256

Covenant, however, stands out even in its title because unlike the others, it is not named after a patriarch. Rather, the New Covenant carries an air of universality, a feature that Christian Theology has been heavily influenced by (Heb. 9:15). Although an all-embracing covenant can be viewed as a way to build a broader community, it also, in a way, negates the nationalism of previous covenants[62]. At the time of the Babylonian invasion and subsequent exile, the physical Jewish community was torn apart, and its treasures and people carried to different nations, and now a covenant is introduced, but unlike prior covenants, it does not emphasize a reinstatement of Israelite political power. The idea of covenant is an abstract term and can be viewed as a metaphor for organizing the community; it must be viewed in similarly metaphoric terms. The vision of the new covenant in Jer. 31:31-34 should not be removed from the lens of communal activity, rather seen as a variation on the standard Deuteronomistic presentation of life constructed by the metaphor of covenant.[63] We see then that the New Covenant is not a renunciation of Jewish community and covenant, but a new approach to it that was appropriate to the state of exile and dissolution that the community found themselves in at this time. Carroll also highlights the role that this internalized form of covenant and spirituality would later play, claiming that centuries later, Judaism began to develop an interiorized form of religion, which likely stems from the exilic development of internalization.[64] The physical city of Jerusalem was no longer the center of worship and dwelling place of God, but the New Covenant promised, "I will put My teaching into their inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). The displaced Israelites would be God's people once more.

[62] The exception to this is Jer. 31:38-40, which is "a nationalistic outlook from sources which had learned virtually nothing from the exilic experience" (Carroll 214).
[63] Carroll 222
[64] Carroll 225

One uniting element in the covenants prior to Jeremiah's New Covenant is the emphasis on nationalism. Today the term is politically charged, but the official definition of nationalism is: "loyalty and devotion to a nation, especially: a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others."[65] As early as Genesis one can see hints of nationalism for the developing Jewish nation. After the flood, God blesses Noah and his sons, and directs them, to "be fertile and increase" (Gen. 9:1), to create a blessed community, favored by God. The Abrahamic Covenant builds on this and directs Abraham to leave his native land for a new land designated by God, and He promises, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you" (Gen. 12:2). This covenant is nationalistic because it concerns the creation of a new nation, which will be favored above all others with God's blessing. The creation of Israel is central to this covenant. The Mosaic covenant also delivers a blessing upon the chosen people, promising, "you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples" (Exod. 19:5). In the following paragraph, we also see the Lord referring to the developing community in a familial sense, dubbing them, "the children of Israel" (Exod. 19:6). These three covenants all center around the creation of the nation of Israel and the expansion of its population, laying the foundation for the blessed state. The importance of community is established with the creation of the nation, and the multitude and prosperity of the people is essential to the covenant. With the Davidic covenant, David, like Abraham is blessed with a great lineage, and the vow that God will protect the Davidic line's authority (2 Sam. 7), thereby linking the kingship of the Davidic line with the history of Israel. The covenant also promises, "I will establish a home for My people Israel and will plant them firm, so that they shall dwell secure and tremble no more" (2 Sam. 7:10). Having

[65] "America's Most Trusted Dictionary." Merriam-Webster. Accessed May 30, 2024. https://www.merriam-webster.com/,

suffered displacement and enslavement at the hands of a foreign power, autonomy and security are the greatest blessings that can be bestowed on the Israelites.

With the foundation of the Davidic covenant came a new component to covenant Theology, and that is the establishment of Israel as the God's home. It is revealed that David's descendant Solomon will build the Temple, and "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish his royal throne forever. I will be father to him, and he shall be a son to Me" (2 Sam. 7:13-14). Therefore, we see the presence of the Lord tied to the everlasting covenant, and the success of a dynasty attributed to the presence of God in the nation. Consistent, stable leadership signifies the health of a nation, and the endurance of the Davidic line is promising for the wellness of Israel. The residency of God in the city as a blessing is reflective of the narratives in 1 Samuel, which show the Ark of the Covenant as a powerful weapon, capable of bringing the Israelites to victory. In 1 Sam. 4, when the ark is brought to the camp, "all Israel burst into a great shout, so that the earth resounded" (1 Sam. 5). Although the Philistines won this battle, that the people exclaimed just at the sight of the ark shows the power that it holds. Similarly, after the ark has been captured, it brings great destruction to every enemy tribe it visits, cursing the Phillistine people with mice and hemorrhoids (1 Sam. 5:6-12). The Jewish Study Bible notes that a more accurate translation is tumors, likely referring to the bubonic plague, which is carried by mice. One sees then, the power that the presence of the Lord in the city, either in the Ark or the Temple had. Knowing the significance of God's presence to Judah's survival makes it all the more devastating when he withdraws from the Temple, deserting the people to enemy nations. In Jer. 3, God recounts all the aforementioned covenant blessings, saying, "I had resolved to adopt you as My child, and I gave you a desirable land—the fairest heritage of all the nations; and I thought you would surely call Me "Father," and never cease to be loyal to Me. Instead, you have

broken faith with Me" (Jer. 3:19-20). Referencing the blessing of land, favoritism, and a familial relationship, the Lord laments that He must depart from His people and the Temple, as they have broken the covenant.

When reading books like Jeremiah and Hosea, one cannot help but to note the undertones of Deuteronomic covenant theology within the text. Previously, we explored the complex relationship between perceptions of Jeremiah and his predecessor, Moses. As the final paragraph of Deuteronomy states, "Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses" (Deut. 34:10), and the Mosaic covenant was by far the most authoritative. Although the covenant of Moses was supreme, the Deuteronomists were not opposed to re-workings of the covenant. In fact, the word Deuteronomy is play on the Greek word *Dueteronomion*, meaning "second law," which is very appropriate considering that Deuteronomy is essentially a recommitment to the Mosaic Covenant. Petersen argues that it is inappropriate to speak of the New Covenant as a radical and new type, rather, it should be seen as a recasting of earlier ideas largely collected from Deuteronomy.[66] The Torah and the commandments received in Deuteronomy will not change, but the way that the people know God's Law will, as it will be inscribed upon their hearts (Jer. 31:33). This idea already existed in principle in an early articulation of the Mosaic Covenant[67] in Deut. 6:6, which reads "Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day." The language in Jeremiah echoes that of Deut., which is no surprise given that Jeremiah had access to the earlier text, and that Deuteronomists likely edited his book. One notable distinction, however, is the emphasis placed on knowledge of the covenant and its everlasting nature rather than on the Law itself as we see in Deuteronomy (Jer. 31:32). Just as

[66] Petersen 131
[67] Petersen 131

Jeremiah's charges of sinfulness, adultery, and injustice are vague, so is his expression of the New Covenant's laws. This could very well be a purposeful reflection of the nature of the covenant as written into the very fabric of one's being, therefore, it does not need to be described at great lengths or mediated by a figure like Moses.

The traditional covenants of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David are compounded by great community leaders, men who came to be respected as religious, political, and militaristic authorities by the Jewish community. Meanwhile, the prophets are the primary figures in scripture that promise the advent of the New Covenant. The prophets that preach the New Covenant—Jeremiah, Isaiah (Isa. 59:21), and Ezekiel (Ezek. 31:31-34 and 36:24-38)—are described as social pariahs, and they are ostracized and doubted by the communities they prophesy to. Jeremiah is heavily persecuted by the people, and laments, "they have dug a pit to trap me, and laid snares for my feet. O Lord, You know all their plots to kill me" (Jer. 18:22-23), and later he is imprisoned in deplorable conditions by royalty (Jer. 38:4-6). Similarly, after being called to prophesy, Ezekiel spent much of his time as a catatonic shut-in (Ezek. 3 and 4). Heschel, referencing E.C. Broome, even goes so far as to say that Ezekiel exhibits behavioristic tendencies consistent with paranoid schizophrenia.[68] Even if their neighbors had accepted them as men of God, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were barred from participation in community life, and would have been viewed as outsiders (Jer. 16:5-8 and Ezek. 24:23). Carroll emphasizes the importance of the development of an internalized covenant and spirituality emerging from prophets who were unhappy with their external lives in exile, failed at their prophetic mission, and were excluded by their community. The book's presentation of a prophet who has consistently failed to persuade the community to take him seriously, in a time when prophecy

[68] Heschel 505

itself was considered dubious, makes it unsurprising that there would be elements of internalization in the New Covenant, as internalization is a way to escape from, or a resolution of failure.[69] Some scholars even claim that there was never a less successful prophet than Jeremiah.[70] Of course, when one says that Jeremiah failed, it is not in any way placing blame on him, as from the moment of his call to prophesy, God warned that the people would be resistant to his message (Jer. 1:19). Although he is somewhat removed from the community, in a sense, the internal state of Jeremiah is reflective of the rest of the community, who have been punished and exiled, or made to suffer in a homeland overrun by foreign powers (Jer. 39:8-10). The internalization of Jeremiah's struggle with his mission and emotional state becomes an image of the community's self-awareness during the dark days of exile.[71] However, it is this self-awareness and reflection that ultimately brings the people back to God through the New Covenant. We see then, that although Jeremiah is othered by his community, his state reflects the people's fall from God's favor.

Lament, O Israel!

Beginning in chapter eleven, and ending in chapter twenty, the laments account for many of the most poignant poetic sections of Jeremiah. The laments, whether spoken by the prophet, the people, or God Himself, offer readers insight to the internal state everyone experiencing the tragedies leading up the Babylonian invasion and exile. In a standard liturgical lament, the priest invokes God, calling upon Him for help, and expresses trust that the plea will be answered. Normally, the prayer is heard, acknowledged, and if appropriate, acted upon. In the book of Jeremiah though, the last four laments fall upon a mute God, disrupting the expected call and

[69] Carroll 223
[70] Petersen 121
[71] Carroll 224

response format—at least, that is how it initially appears. In time, it becomes clear that God did not ignore the voice of Jeremiah and the Judahites, rather, He responds through the hope of the New Covenant and the Oracles Against Nations.[72] The New Covenant promises a sweet reunion between God and the chosen people, restoring their status as God's faithful, while the oracles concerning the nations read as a damnation of Israel's enemies. Modern readers, and even scholars may struggle to reconcile such a violent, and even misanthropic text, especially when it is coupled with the compassion and grace of the vision of the New Covenant. OAN authority Rhiannon Graybill even goes so far as to call the OAN "rape revenge fantasies"[73] as Israel's adversaries are pillaged and violated, just as the holy city was. The graphic and disturbing nature of the OAN will be discussed at length later, but it is important as modern readers to understand the position of the Judahites at the time of the exile. After experiencing extended periods of trauma during the siege and invasion, contending with disease, drought, and the undoubted loss of loved ones, a burning for retaliation would have been a very human response. OAN and calls for revenge are common literary themes in the prophetic books, with another notable example in Amos, which contains OAN about Damascus, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab (1:3-5, 1:6-8, 1:9-10, 1:11-12, 1:13-15, and 2:1-13). On a smaller scale, the compassionate prophet, Jeremiah, even calls for retribution against his enemies in Anathoth, pleading, "Let me see your retribution upon them" (Jer. 11:20). While vindication prayers may not sit well with modern readers, to an exiled Judean, there may have been a strange sense of comfort in the idea of cosmic justice. The New Covenant and OAN serve as a response to the laments of Jeremiah and the Judean community, although the response is not as immediate as a textbook lament prayer.

[72] Also called Oracles Concerning the Nations depending on the translation

[73] Graybill, Rhiannon. "The Jeremian Oracles against the Nations." Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 387–404. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 401.

The raw and emotional nature of the laments can feel disruptive, and even jarring within the text. Intense, and plagued by trauma, the laments seem to intrude upon the story with disturbing suddenness, and many scholars disregard them as a haphazard and misplaced collection of poetry.[74] Contrarily, O'Connor argues that the laments legitimize Jeremiah's claim as a true prophet, tormented by persecution and maligned by false prophets and corrupt priests.[75] Jeremiah's authority as a true prophet is a major concern of the rest of the book. The language that God uses when speaking to and about the prophet emphasizes that he is chosen, righteous, and true to the word of God. This is established from the very outset of the book, in which God tells Jeremiah that "Before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet concerning the nations" (Jer. 1:5). Much like Israel is God's chosen nation, Jeremiah is God's chosen spokesman, a just prophet to deliver the divine message to an irreverent people. The call narrative also states that Jeremiah's words are God's own, as the Lord touches his lips and says, "Herewith I put My words into your mouth" (Jer. 1:9). This claim to prophetic authority is built upon in every subsequent prophesy, which Jeremiah begins with, "The word of the Lord came to me" (Jer. 2:1) or similar variations. The narratives also show Jeremiah confronting false prophets, like his clash with Hannaniah in which he says, "Listen, Hannaniah! The Lord did not send you, and you have given this people lying assurances" (Jer. 28:15). Jeremiah's very nature as a prophet of doom rather than a prophet of peace should bestow a sense of authority, as historically in Israel, prophets of doom were known to be legitimate. When speaking against Hannaniah, Jeremiah reminds the people, "The prophets who lived before you and me from ancient times prophesied war, disaster, and pestilence against many lands and great kingdoms"

[74] O'Connor, Kathleen M. *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Interpretation and Role in Chapters 1-25*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988, 2.
[75] O'Connor 3

(Jer. 28:8). In Jeremiah's time, it would be well known that prophets of peace are more often than not, false prophets. In the following section, we will explore each of the eight laments, drawing insight as to what they tell readers about the prophet, and his place in the Judean community as it faces disaster and displacement, with the ultimate promise that it will be renewed through the New Covenant.

In her book, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, Kathleen O'Connor explicates the formula for a standard psalm of lament, because as was discussed previously, this type of prayer existed long before Jeremiah's time. O'Connor specifies that although these elements are typical for a lament, most of Jeremiah's laments are missing at least one component because the style of a lament is creatively adapted to serve the speaker or redactor's theological purposes.[76] For example, in later laments, a lack of response from God is reflective of the broken covenant, and a fractured relationship between Judah and her Creator. O'Connor identifies the standard elements of a lament as:

1) A direct address to God
2) A complaint or description of the speaker's dilemma
3) An assertation, or plea of innocence by the speaker
4) A statement of confidence that God will intervene
5) A petition for divine intercession
6) A response from God, or oracle of assurance
7) An expression of praise, or a vow to God

[76] O'Connor 24

As we will see in the following close readings, many of these elements are seen repeated in Jeremiah's laments, with complaints especially prominent, given the turmoil mounting around and within the prophet at the time of composition. Although all these features are common, complaints, petitions for intercession, and expressions of trust and praise are considered to be constitutive of the form itself.[77]

Like any work of poetry, Jeremiah's laments can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and the hypothesis that readers carry into the poems dictates how they will be read. The laments are full of rich symbolism, hyperboles, and metaphors, allowing for both literal and implied readings of the text. Also important is a knowledge of the historical context, as what was happening in the socio-ecological-political sphere impacted the events in the story. For example, knowing about the deadly drought illuminates the meaning of Jer. 14:1-6, and understanding the history of warfare between Israel and Babylon gives depth to the Oracle against Babylon in Jer. 51. To surmise, different scholars interpret the book in their own ways. The prevailing notion regarding the laments is that the laments are biographical and serve to give readers a view of the prophet's disturbed psyche;[78] however, that is an irresponsibly shallow reading of the text. In this portion of the paper, I will be exploring the contrary opinions of two authors who take a different approach to the text, looking carefully at symbolism and what is *really* being said in the laments. The first of these brilliant scholars is Kathleen O'Connor, whose thesis is that the personal voice in the laments is a strategy to self-advocate for acceptance as a true prophet.[79] Under this guise, the laments are less of a cathartic monologue, and more of a public declaration of Jeremiah's

[77] O'Connor 24
[78] O'Connor 3
[79] O'Connor 3

prophetic authority.[80] O'Connor uses form-critical analysis to demonstrate that the changes in mood of the poems is explained by the literary form, the psalm of individual lament, and not emotional agitation.[81] This analysis explains Jeremiah's shifts in tone and sentiment as rhetorical devices, moving from uncertainty to confidence in his God and prophetic calling, with the ultimate goal of the laments as praise.[82] This reading gives the prophet agency, and credits his remarkable ability as a poet to write beautiful and persuasive pieces of theological literature. This is an individualistic reading of the text, and it emphasizes Jeremiah's estrangement from the community, whereas Carroll sees Jeremiah as speaking for the collective in many cases. In O'Connor's reading, Jeremiah is a stereotypical Deuteronomic prophet who is persecuted and mocked by a community that does not believe him to be a true prophet, and the laments are a means of validating himself against their skepticism. My analysis will ultimately gravitate towards a more symbolism-driven reading of the laments, but O'Connor's research and commentary are invaluable.

When reading an ancient piece of literature like the book of Jeremiah, it is important to remember that the text we see today is a heavily altered version of the original. Pieces are lost, rearranged, purposefully omitted, and adapted to serve the editor's intentions. This is especially relevant to books that have been translated, as is the English translation used for this paper. Carroll reminds readers that as a literary style, the prophetic books are anthologies, and by design, the material within them is selective from the presumably larger original text.[83] As was mentioned previously, the Deuteronomic redactors of Jeremiah took great liberties with the text

[80] O'Connor 3
[81] O'Connor 3
[82] O'Connor 3
[83] Carroll 51

to make it suit their theological needs. While O'Connor tends to read the laments as persuasive soliloquies, Carroll leans into a more symbolic reading. He explains that the laments reflect the condition of the Jewish community in exile and exemplify how the Jeremiah tradition utilized elements of community life while presenting the life of Jeremiah.[84] The laments oscillate between a redactional presentation of Jeremiah as a victim of persecution from the community, and Jeremiah as a personification of the persecuted community.[85] This makes critical analysis of the text highly subjective, and as a result, there are two main lenses that the text can be read through, and each drastically changes the text's meaning. In the following section on the laments, I will work with both analytical preferences, so that readers can gain a comprehensive understanding of both readings. Ultimately, my thesis is more in line with Carroll's view that Jeremiah's voice in the laments is symbolic of the suffering community, rather than focusing on the suffering that Jeremiah endures at the hands of the community. However, I believe that these theories are not entirely mutually exclusive, and that they can complement each other. There is no doubt in my mind that like the prophets before him, Jeremiah faced resistance to his prophetic mission, even at the threat of death, but there is much more evidence within the text to support that Jeremiah was a man of the people, despite the suffering that his enemies put him through. Jeremiah's empathy for his people (Jer. 9:12) and continued intervention on their behalf (Jer. 11:14) is evidence that the laments can be read as communal appeals by the prophet, with him appealing on behalf of the community to God. In this reading, it is not the Judahites, but the invading nations that are persecuting prophet and people. Analyzing the text in this way, with an

[84] Carroll 123
[85] Carroll 120

attention to what is semi-original versus what is redacted material, makes all the difference in the lasting impression of the text and the example it sets for believers.

This paper addresses three theses on how the laments are to be understood. While the biographical reading could be criticized as too one-dimensional, it can be a helpful lens for understanding the text and psychoanalyzing Jeremiah as an individual. For example, Claassens' analysis of Jeremiah as a trauma-driven narrative showing the effects of isolation, warfare, and exile allows readers to understand Jeremiah and the Judean community with more empathy. Jeremiah and Lamentations should be read with love and empathy for the prophet, the people, and God, all of whom suffer greatly throughout the story. The first time that I read through Lamentations, I remember tears welling in my eyes. In English classes, students are taught to perform literary analysis through a number of lenses, reading stories and poems through different views. For example, *The Great Gatsby* is a favorite among English teachers because of its rich symbolism. One could perform a classist analysis of the text, but they could also explore feminism, or mental health in the story. The book of Jeremiah can be read in the same way, meaning that there is room for multiple analyses to exist and to compliment one another. Jeremiah is very long and incredibly complex, fusing poetry and prose to create a tapestry of passionate faith in the face of hardship. With so many styles, contributors, and themes, there is no "one size fits all" reading of the text—and to suggest that there is would be to disregard the evolution of centuries of redaction. A sharp change in messaging or themes is usually the result of a redactor addressing a theological issue that was hotly debated during their lifetime. Carroll speaks to the tremendous influence of Deuteronomist redactors on the Jeremiah material, explaining that a less edited version of Jeremiah was collected by the Deuteronomists at some point, and because of the central themes like calls to repentance and resistance from the

community, they crafted the material to make Jeremiah a spokesman of their school.[86] Idolatry was another major concern of the Deuteronomists,[87] and it is referenced many times throughout the book (Jer. 1:16, 2:11, 5:7-9). If idolatry was an issue to the historical Jeremiah, there would be references to the cults and their practices, but the pagan gods in question are rarely named (Jer. 19:5 and Jer. 32:35); inconsistences like this point to the work of redactors. A book so heavily edited to suit a wide range of theological arguments would undoubtedly lead to multiple theses for reading the text. For that reason, I believe the readings of both Carroll and O'Connor to be accurate, with O'Connor's emphasizing the issues of the Deuteronomists and their concern with Jeremiah's reputation, and Carroll's as an understanding of the text as a liturgical communal lament. In the following paragraphs, I will analyze the first lament through O'Connor's reading, and then we will switch to Carroll's. Ultimately, we will find that both help us understand Jeremiah and the book's editorial aims.

The Laments

Jer. 11:18-12:6: The Lamb and the Sheep

The first lament that appears in Jeremiah begins in chapter 11, verse 18 and ends in chapter 12, verse 6. This lament comes after the Lord announces Judah will be punished for her infidelity and pursuit of other gods (Jer. 11:11-13). The Lord's retaliation cannot be deterred this time, and Jeremiah is commanded, "do not pray for this people, do not raise a cry of prayer on their behalf" (Jer. 11:14). Although the prophet is known for his poignant sense of empathy, he heeds God's words and instead of interceding on behalf of the people, he pities himself as a victim of conspiracy and asks the Lord to punish those who wish to do him harm. Intertwined

[86] Carroll 14-16
[87] Carroll 50

with Jeremiah's speech are responses from God, in which he promises to avenge the prophet and punish his enemies. This lament follows the formula of a typical psalm of lament, as described by O'Connor.[88] It directly addresses God as the recipient of the prayer in 11:20 and 12:3, and although these addresses are not found in the beginning of the lament, they are present regardless. Secondly, the prophet expresses his complaints, which are that he "was like a docile lamb led to slaughter" (Jer. 11:19)—the target of a murderous plot by the men of Anathoth—and a more general compliant that the wicked prosper (Jer. 12:1). This complaint echoes the sentiments of Job, who says God, "destroys the blameless and the guilty" indiscriminately (Job 9:22), and Ecclesiastes muses, "God will doom both righteous and wicked" (Eccl. 3:17). These books call into question the validity of the wisdom trope that the wicked perish and the righteous prosper (see Psalm 1:6 for an example), as the speakers observe divine injustice. The lament also subtly pleads Jeremiah's innocence in verse 11:18, and again in verse 12:3, where Jeremiah claims, "You have tested my heart, and found it with You." Scholar Herbert Huffman draws a connection between this appeal and the testimony of the heart as outlined in the "Egyptian Book of the Dead." At "weigh-in" scenes, it is believed that the heart always bears a true testimony, either damning their owner to be devoured, or corroborating their account.[89] Finally, the lament contains a response from God in the form of an oracle of reassurance (11:21-23) that those who persecute Jeremiah will be killed, and a reply in 12:5-6. This reply deplores the state of Judah and warns against trusting his conspirators.

[88] O'Connor 24

[89] Huffmon, Herbert B. "The Ultimate Commitment: A Covenant Written on (the Tablet of) the Heart and Its Ancient Near Eastern Background." Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 438–46. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 443-4.

In the first lament, Jeremiah lays before God his interpersonal struggles with those in his community who wish to do him harm. Isolated from the Judahites, and proclaiming a message of condemnation, Jeremiah is hardly a crowd pleaser. In the oracle of assurance in chapter 11, it is implied that those persecuting the prophet are men from his hometown of Anathoth (Jer. 11:23), and O'Connor claims that the interaction between these men and Jeremiah is reflective of the degenerating relationship between God and Israel.[90] The men from Anathoth scheme, "Let us cut him [Jeremiah] off from the land of the living. That his name be remembered no more!" (Jer. 11:19). In verse 21, the Lord identifies that they want to kill Jeremiah because of his prophecies, which are the word of God; therefore, the connection can be draw that the death of the prophet is the death of God in Israel, because the people have forgotten God. Referring to the people's idolatrous impulses, God laments, "My people have forgotten Me" (Jer. 18:15), and a sense of loss pervades the book as the people stumble further from the Law. It is common to see a blurring of identity between God and prophet, and this theme is especially prevalent in Jeremiah. Heschel introduces the idea of a divine pathos, driving Jeremiah to feel the emotions of God, who is full of wrath and indignation, but also, sorrow.[91] Just as Jeremiah feels overwhelming empathy for the Judahites (although they often do him harm), God is anguished by what he must do to punish the people.[92] Hence, the identity of God and His prophet often intermingle, just as the traitors from Anathoth are a reflection of the Israelites. Returning to the language in the lament, it is worth noting that the verbiage "the young men shall die by the sword, their boys and girls shall die by famine. No remnant shall be left of them" (Jer. 11:22-23) echoes threats usually associated with the destruction of the whole nation.[93] The imagery of the death of the nation by

[90] O'Connor 18-19
[91] Heschel 147
[92] Heschel 140
[93] O'Connor 18

sword and famine can also be seen in Jer. 14:18, which reads, "If I go out to the country—Lo, the slain of the sword. If I enter the city—Lo, those who are sick with famine." Later, when the people contemplate departing to Egypt, they are warned, "know well, then, that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence" (Jer. 42:22). These passages and their elation to the promise of punishment for the men of Anathoth show that Jeremiah's relationship with them is a reflection of God's relationship with Israel.

Another unique feature of this lament is its judicial tone. The language in 12:4 alludes to the terrible drought, asking, "How long must the land languish, and the grasses of the countryside dry up?" O'Connor explains that the drought vocabulary used here is common of prophetic literature, in which the land "languishes" or "dries up" or becomes otherwise infertile as a result of breaking the covenant.[94] In Amos' calling, it says, "the pastures of the shepherds shall languish" (Amos 1:2), and the book of Joel opens with a grueling scene of the impact of drought (Joel 1:2-17). The impacts of drought were far reaching in the ancient world, and the book of Lamentations offers readers a glimpse into the morbid reality of a long-term drought (Lam 4:9 and Lam 5:10). It should come as no surprise that in times of hardship, people would often slip into the worship of Baal, a Canaanite fertility god, which causes drought, idolatry, and punishment to become a self-feeding crisis. Although the sentence is extreme, it is doled out in response to their sinfulness, and their treatment of Jeremiah (Jer. 11:19). The drought passage in 12:4 comes only after Jeremiah petitions for divine intervention in 11:20 and 12:3, linking Jeremiah's plea and the punishment of Judah by drought. Previously, we mentioned that Jeremiah likely had access to an early rendition of Hosea's book, and that claim is solidified by the comparison of Jeremiah's first lament and Hosea 4:1-3. The chapter begins with a prophecy

[94] O'Connor 20

against the nation because of the people's sins, which include dishonesty, murder, theft, and adultery (Hos. 4:1-2). It then moves to a prophesy of drought that mirrors the language of Jeremiah. It reads, "the earth is withered: everything that dwells on it languishes" (Hosea 4:3). O'Connor explains though, that this passage differs from Jeremiah 12:4 in that Hosea's is a sentence against the people, whereas Jeremiah questions God Himself, believing that He is acting unjustly through the punishment of drought.[95] If the situation were a court scene, in Jeremiah's trial, God would serve as the judge, the Israelites as a defendant, and the prophet Jeremiah as a defense lawyer. Rather than standing idly by as his client is punished excessively, Jeremiah asks questions of theodicy to the judge, implying that justice is not being served. This is an amazing instance of empathy from Jeremiah, because although he just explained the ways in which the community attacks him, he still intercedes on their behalf. While the lament showed his "otherness" from the community, it also showed his undying dedication to saving them.

Jeremiah's first lament gives readers much insight into the prophet's mental state, as well as his relationship with God and the community. We see that Jeremiah is deeply troubled by the persecution he faces, but that he also feels the need to intercede on behalf of the people in the face of drought. We also see God acknowledge Jeremiah's suffering because of his prophetic calling (Jer. 11:21), which in itself establishes legitimacy to Jeremiah's claim as a true prophet. Similarly, God's promise to vindicate Jeremiah in the face of his enemies from Anathoth shows that his petition for intercession is warranted, and that he is innocent.[96] Fulfilling the psalm of lament guidelines, Jeremiah, who was a priest, establishes himself as a legitimate prophet, which O'Connor argues is the ultimate purpose of this lament.[97] The lament also establishes that

[95] O'Connor 20-21
[96] O'Connor 26
[97] O'Connor 26

although Jeremiah will suffer, that does not negate from his prophetic authority, nor does it imply immorality. This book, like Job, upends wisdom tropes which promise prosperity to the righteous and death to the wicked. Both Job and Jeremiah are righteous men, chosen by God, and yet, they are both dealt with cruelly. Job laments, "Why make of me your target, and a burden to myself?" (Job 7:20) and Jeremiah echoes, "I have not lent, and I have not borrowed; yet everyone curses me" (Jer. 15:10), and both men suffer so greatly that they curse their very birth (Jer. 15:10 and Job 3:1). O'Connor explains that rather than viewing their misery as a punishment, it should be seen as a part of divine plan, and Jeremiah's misfortune actually gives him authority against the prophets of peace.[98] God's response in 12:5-6 shows that not only is Jeremiah's persecution expected, but it will also only get worse from here; going forward, even kinsmen must be treated as enemies, and Jeremiah cannot trust anyone (Jer. 12:6). Just as a prophecy of doom is deemed more legitimate than a prophecy of peace, in the ancient world, a suffering prophet's word was better credited than one who lived in luxury. All of these elements build Jeremiah's reputation as a true prophet through the internal narrative of lament.

Jer. 11:18-12:6: I have abandoned My House

The previous section explored the first lament from the perspective that the laments' primary concern is Jeremiah's prophetic authority. In this interpretation, we saw a fairly literal understanding of the text, with Jeremiah complaining that he is persecuted by enemies that hate him for his prophecies, and he petitions God to intervene on his behalf by killing the conspirators. The overarching purpose of the lament is to establish Jeremiah's prophetic authority through God's responses and promises of eventual vindication, with the vindication

[98] O'Connor 26

coming by way of foreign invasion and the death of everyone who doubted Jeremiah. In his analysis, Carroll acknowledges that poetry is about Jeremiah's persecution, but proposes that it should be read as a communal, rather than an individual lament.[99] At the forefront of this thesis is the identification of Deuteronomic redactional material, such as the motif of prophetic persecution. The collusion to kill Jeremiah referenced in 11:19 and subsequent mentions of the "Men of Anathoth" (Jer. 11:23), are likely editorial additions, which play into the Deuteronomic literary genre of a prophet opposed and targeted by the community.[100] Distinguishing redactional material from a more authentic version of the text is theologically controversial given that the text as-is is canonical, however, understanding the development of the text is important for understanding the layers of meaning within it. In the case of the first lament, O'Connor's analysis gave us a foundation to work from, and a rhetorical understanding of the material without discriminating against Deuteronomic elements. Now, we can delve a bit deeper and read the text symbolically, keeping in mind the divergence between the author of Jeremiah's intentions and the theological goals of the redactors. While the Deuteronomists were concerned with establishing Jeremiah as a true prophet of the true God, there is evidence presented by Carroll that the original poem was meant to be read as a communal appeal to God to punish the foreign nations who sought to destroy Israel. Under this guise, the lament does not isolate Jeremiah from the people, but unities them as Jeremiah invokes his special connection with God to bargain for the vindication of Israel and all her people. This unifies prophet and community against a common enemy and shows Jeremiah's shared stake in the survival of Judah.

[99] Carroll 109-111
[100] O'Connor 109

Looking to other books in the Old Testament can shed light on the interpretation of Jeremiah's laments. Earlier in this paper, we explored the literary connections between Hosea, Exodus, and Jeremiah in both their language and themes.[101] Carroll explains that the laments seem to be heavily influenced by the liturgical language of the Psalms, connotating cultic source material.[102] As a Levitical priest, Jeremiah would have been well educated in the communal liturgical laments of the Psalms, and it is not far-fetched to speculate that he would have rendered his own poetry in the same format. One motif from Psalms that Jeremiah mirrors in his first lament is that of sheep led to slaughter as a metaphor for wicked persecuting the righteous.[103] Describing the attacks of his enemies—who may or may not be interpreted as the men from Anathoth (Jer. 11:21, 23)—Jeremiah says, "For I was like a docile lamb led to slaughter; I did not realize it was against me they fashioned their plots" (Jer. 11:19). The trope of sheep led to slaughter is also seen in Psalm 44:23, which reads, "It is for your sake that we are slain all day long, that we are regarded as sheep led to slaughter." There are also many instances in Psalms where God is called a shepherd, and the faithful are His flock of sheep. One example of this is Psalm 23, which reads, "The Lord is my shepherd; I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me to water in places of repose; He renews my life" (Psalm 23:1-3). Juxtaposing the representation of God between these passages shows the tension in the relationship between God and Israel. During times of misfortune, God is accused of handing His people over to be slaughtered, yet in times of peace, God is depicted as a loving guide who leads His people to abundance. Notice that in the Psalms, the sheep are referred to as a flock. Carroll explains that although Jeremiah refers to himself as a "docile lamb" (Jer. 11:19), Psalm 44 is a

[101] Chetsas, Phoebe C. "Communal Lament in Jeremiah," 2024, 4-5; 16-17.
[102] Carroll 109
[103] Carroll 109

communal lament.[104] Although Jeremiah, the lamb, is the voice in this lament, the implication is that he is speaking on behalf of the whole flock, who are all being persecuted by the enemy nations. This passage is not a compliant against the community, but a complaint by the community, expressed by the prophet, who is also a priest, which fits with the typical deliverance of liturgical communal laments.

Another motif of Psalms is the conspiracy of enemy nations against an individual, a king, a community, or Israel itself.[105] In these cases, the enemy may be named explicitly, or they may be alluded to, as in Jeremiah's symbolic representation of the threatening Babylonian army as an enemy from the North. Before the invasion, Jeremiah warns the Judahites, "a people comes from the northland, a great nation is roused… Against you, O Fair Zion!" (Jer. 7:22-23). The fear of extinction by a foreign power is common theme in the Psalms, and there is usually a collusion by enemies to collectively destroy Israel. One example of this is Psalm 83, in which the speaker asks God to intervene on behalf of the community because, "Your enemies rage, your foes asset themselves. They plot craftily against your people… They say, "let us wipe them out as a nation; Isarel's name will be mentioned no more" (Psalm 83:3-5). Later in the prayer, the speaker names the enemy nations (Psalm 83:6-9), and claims that they are all "unanimous" in their allegiance against the God of the Israelites (Psalm 83:6). Another example of the conspiracy motif is Psalm 2 which pleads, "Why do nations assemble, and people plot vain things; kings of the earth take their stand, and regents intrigue together against the Lord and His anointed" (Psalm 2:1-2). Connivance against Israel is interpreted as an attack against God Himself, demonstrating the unique bond between the Lord and His chosen people, Israel. This rhetorical strategy frames

[104] Carroll 109
[105] Carroll 109

aggression against the nation of Israel as an act of heresy as the foreign nations are said to be plotting against the true God. The conspiracy motif also paints a very lonely portrait of Israel as a solitary nation against whom the whole world seems to wage war. Surely, at times it must have felt like that for the authors of Psalms, and Jeremiah and his community, all of whom faced tremendous hardship at the hands of foreign invaders (Psalm 137; Jer. 52:24-27). The focus on conspiracy among the writers of Psalms also shows a sense of paranoia (perhaps rightfully so) that the other nations are plotting their downfall. Claassens spoke on Jeremiah's own likely post-traumatic stress disorder, and the same analysis applies to the writers of Psalms. They, like Jeremiah, appear to be suspicious of deceit and conspiracy in every corner of the globe.[106]

The victim of the collusion of enemy nations in the Psalms is not always the whole nation of Israel. Certain communities, a king, or even an individual can be the target of foreign aggression.[107] King David's Psalm 35 is a strong example of the conspiracy motif against a king, as he prays for deliverance from his pursuers (Psalm 35:3): "For without cause they hid a net to trap me; without cause they dug a pit for me. Let disaster overtake them unawares; let the net they hid catch them" (Psalm 35: 7-8). Noticeably absent in this excerpt is the identification of David's persecutors; ultimately their identity is unimportant, as is the exact ways in which they conspired against him. What is important is the fact that there are shadowy threats to David, which could strike at any time, and they can only be thwarted by God. Jeremiah's lament in Chapter 18 mimics the language and themes of Psalm 35. The prophet begs for the death of his enemies, who are also referred to as an unidentified "they." Verse 22 is almost an exact mirror of Psalm 35, saying, "Let an outcry be heard from their houses… for they have dug a pit to trap me,

[106] Claassens 364
[107] Carroll 109

and laid snares for my feet" (Jer. 18:22). Although King David in Psalm 35 is an individual speaker, the prayer and it's mimic in Jeremiah 18 still supports Carroll's claim that the laments are communal rather than individual because the speakers,[108] David and Jeremiah, can be read as speaking on behalf of the masses. Both kings and prophets are leaders of their communities, doing all that they can to keep their people out of harm's way. Both David and Jeremiah fear the destruction of Israel by foreign armies, and their appeals to God against enemy nations are seen in David's and Jeremiah's laments. I mentioned earlier that the men of Anathoth persecuting Jeremiah in the first lament are most likely editorial editions, suggesting that the original enemy in these verses remained another unnamed "they" (Jer. 11:19; 12:2). When reading the first lament as communal, one can assume that the enemy here is not the men from Anathoth, but conspiring foreign powers who seek the destruction of Israel. The connection between the formal lament style in Jer. 11:21-23 suggests an editorial attempt to relate the cultic elements of Davidic material to the life of Jeremiah.[109] The Deuteronomists, however, were less concerned with the invasion of Israel, and more concerned with painting Jeremiah as a stereotypical, and therefore respected, prophet who would have been persecuted by his community. The way that Jeremiah's (or the community's) enemies are identified in this lament drastically changes its interpretation.

A central theme to Carroll's interpretation of the laments is that the speaker serves as a voice for the whole community. In the previous paragraph, it was established that Jer. 11:18-20 could be read as an appeal to God by the Judean community for revenge against their enemies. Invoking the language and motifs of the poetry in Psalms, the lament recalls how unidentified enemies of the nation have conspired against Israel (Jer. 11:19), in reference to the Babylonian

[108] Carroll 109
[109] Carroll 109

invasion (Lam. 1:3). Jeremiah's use of the language and motifs of cult worship casts him as analogous to Israel, and his enemies, like the men from Anathoth named in the first lament, a symbol of the enemies of the nation.[110] Looking at the laments from this approach allows readers to interpret them as either the innermost thoughts of a persecuted prophet opposed by his community (Jer. 18:18),[111] or as the collective cry of a nation facing erasure and exile. The interpretations can overlap as well,[112] as one can reflect both on the struggles that Jeremiah faced as a disrespected prophet (Jer. 28:10-11), and the concerns of the Israelite community as they are displaced and taken captive by the Babylonians (Jer. 41). Carroll argues that Jeremiah's laments blur the boundaries of the relationship between Israel and God to become reflective of the relationship between God and His prophet.[113] The second half of the first lament is an excellent example of this theory in action as the focus shifts from the persecution Jeremiah faces in 11:18-20 to the broader theodicy motif of the prosperity of the wicked and the persecution of the righteous.[114] The speaker challenges God with a charge: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease?" (Jer. 12:1). The people question God and the validity of the wisdom tradition, which teaches that righteousness is rewarded and that "the wicked shall perish and the enemies of the Lord shall be consumed" (Psalms 37:20). Upending popular wisdom sayings in the face of undue hardship is a very common motif throughout the Old Testament, with a well-known example being the book of Job, which mainly consists of Job's friends trying to console him with wisdom sayings, and Job's refutations. In response to Bildad's promise that "God does not despise the blameless; He gives no support to evildoer"

[110] Carroll 109
[111] Carroll 109
[112] Carroll 109
[113] Carroll 109
[114] Carroll 110

(Job 8:20), Job counters, “It is all one; therefore I say, “He destroys the blameless and the guilty” (Job 9:22). Genesis 1 shows that God created order out of nothingness, and that He classified the “good” from the wicked, and yet, in texts like Jeremiah and Job, God’s order and sense of justice are questioned when the victim of God’s wrath feels that they are being unduly punished.

The writing style of Jeremiah’s theodicy questions also mimics that of Psalms. Referencing the unrelenting drought (Jer. 14:1-6), Jeremiah begs God to answer, “How long must the land languish, and the grass of the countryside dry up?” (Jer. 12:4). The interrogative “how long” is common in psalms of lament,[115] such as Psalm 13 in which David asks, “How long, O Lord; will You ignore me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?” (Psalm 13:2), and “How long will my enemy have the upper hand? Look at me, answer me, O Lord my God!” (Psalm 13: 3-4). Both Jeremiah’s lament and Psalms suggest that God is no longer watching over Israel and that His people are abandoned, which is the consequence of breaking the covenant. After lamenting the drought in 12:4, Jeremiah says that the inhabitants of the land perish because of the evil people “Who say, “He will not look upon our future.”” This line is interesting because it could be interpreted in two very different ways. He may be saying that the sinful people in Judah have brought on the punishment of the drought by believing that God will not see their deeds, and so they continue to act wickedly, or it could be saying that the faithlessness of the Judahites has caused the drought because they no longer believe that God is watching over them and ensuring the survival of the nation. Knowing that this book was written to help process the trauma of the Egyptian exile, I would say that Jeremiah is condemning those who loose faith in the face of hardship, like drought or exile. The remembrance of disasters like drought, invasion, and displacement through the laments gives the community a literary site that

[115] Carroll 111

readers can return to over and over again to process their trauma and grief.[116] Jeremiah's laments, written in the style of a communal lament serve as both a religious text, and an emotionally cathartic deathscape.[117] Carroll calls the two lament poems in 11:18-20 and 12:1-4 liturgical compositions written to express the community's response to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile, and therefore they should be read as the collective lament of the nation.[118]

The subject matter of the drought should, in itself be indicative that the lament is more than just the emotional, innermost thoughts of the prophet, as some scholars have suggested. The subject matter pivots from Jeremiah's personal grievances to external shared crisis. Although the first part of the lament in Jer. 11 is heavily edited to fit the Deuteronomic ideals of prophethood, the second half in Jer. 12 shows a vested interest in the community's well-being as they suffer from the drought. In the call narrative (Jer. 1), God promises Jeremiah that although he will suffer during his prophetic career, he will survive because, "I am with you—declares the Lord—to save you" (Jer. 1:19). This promise appears again in Jer. 30:11, when God promises the descendants of Jacob, "I am with you to deliver you—declares the Lord." When this assertation of God's presence is made, it tells the recipient that although they will bear hardship, their survival is ensured, even if it is only a remnant as in the case of Israel. Therefore, Jeremiah would have known that he would survive the drought, so his plea for an end to the drought in Jer. 12:4 shows his concern not for his own well-being, but for the well-being of the people who are punished by the drought. This observation also supports the idea that Jeremiah's laments are the collective prayers of Israelites because a drought would have effected everyone from farmers to

[116] Mills 407
[117] Millis 405
[118] Carroll 111

priests to royalty. The destruction of crops, lack of water, and death of livestock would have dire consequences for the nation, and for that reason, the punishment of drought is recurrent in the prophetic books. Drought is referenced many times in Isaiah's prophecies as a punishment for both Israel and foreign nations (Isaiah 19:5-10). Relief from drought is also used as symbolism for the reparation of the relationship between God and Israel. For example, in Isaiah 58, God promises that if the people follow the Torah, "He will slake your thirst in parched places and give strength to your bones. You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose waters do not fail" (Isaiah 58:11). When the covenant is renewed, so too are the people through lifesaving water, but when the covenant is broken, as is the case in Jeremiah (Jer. 11:10), the people are cut off from rain. Jeremiah 15:18 speaks about God as an unreliable spring, saying, "You have been to me like a spring that fails, like waters that cannot be relied on" because not only has He cut off the people from lifesaving water, but He has also abandoned them to enemy nations. Conversely, when God and Israel share a covenant relationship, the metaphor of a rejuvenating spring is used, like in Psalm 36:9-10: "They [mankind] feast on the rich fare of Your house; You let them drink at your refreshing stream. With You is the fountain of life." In Jer. 2:13, God also alludes to Himself as "the Fount of living waters" and claims that the people are "broken cisterns, which cannot even hold water." It has been established that Jeremiah and his redactors would have been familiar with the liturgical language of the Psalms, and we can see it borrowed in this metaphor used by the community in Jeremiah's lament.

The theodicy questions asked in the second part of the lament could be read as an extension of the complaints in Jer. 11:18-20, but Carroll suggests they could also be read as the voice of Israel.[119] Here, the interrogator uses legal language (Jer. 12:1), which could be a

[119] Carroll 111

challenge to the accusation that the people have forgotten the Torah (Jer. 18:15). Their charge, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease?" (Jer. 12:1) implies that God has allowed the order of the universe to be disrupted, as is amplified by the accusatory "You have planted them" in the following line (Jer. 12:2). Throughout the Old Testament, there is a lot of value placed on order, justice, and law. The book of Genesis begins with a categorization and division of the world (Gen 1), and as soon as humanity is created, we are given a law to not eat from the Tree of Knowledge (Gen. 2:15-17). Soon after, humanity is shown the concept of justice when Cain is banished for the murder of Abel (Gen. 4:10-16). The seeds of obedience that are planted in Genesis come to full fruition when God bestows the Ten Commandments to Moses in Exodus 20. It is established from the outset of Judaism that justice and order are the foundation of a Godly society, yet it appears that this order has been disrupted by the exile. Jeremiah, praying on behalf of the community calls into question the suffering of the righteous (the Israelites) and the prosperity of the wicked (the invading nations).[120] 12:5-6 show the conspiracy of nations against Israel, and further the argument that the nation has been unjustly targeted and punished both by God, and the foreign powers. The Jewish people can trust no one: "Do not believe them when they speak cordially to you" (Jer. 12:6), for the world is lawless, and the horrors that Israel must endure are unending. All of this contributes to a central theme of Jeremiah, which is the question, "Does the punishment fit the crime?" The people and their prophetic spokesman see injustice in the treatment of Israel. Immediately following the lament, God admits, "I have given My dearly beloved into the hands of her enemies" (Jer. 12:7). God has rejected His chosen people (Jer. 12:8), and they are left bruised and beaten in enemy

[120] Carroll 110-11

land. This is the sad reality from which Jeremiah's psalms of lament are formed, and it is no wonder why the people cried out for help through the prophet's prayers.

Jer. 15:10-21: An Incurable Wound

Jeremiah's second lament is in chapter 15, following a languid description of the drought ravaging the land in chapter 14. The situation is Judah is steadily worsening, however, chapter 15 opens with an oracle of destruction in which the divine Judge sentences His people to death by plague, sword, famine, and captivity (Jer. 15:2). Invoking imagery of dogs and other beasts eating the people, God promises to make Judah "a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, on account of King Manasseh" (Jer. 15:4), echoing the curse of Deuteronomy 28:25. King Menasseh set the people on a path away from God, and "he did what was displeasing to the Lord" (2 Kings 21:2), erecting shrines to Baal, worshipping pagan gods, and building altars for them in the Temple (2 Kings 21:3). With the Judahites reverting to pagan habits, it is sensible that God would invoke the disastrous reign of Manasseh. The Lord accuses the people, "You cast Me off… you go ever backward" (Jer. 15:6) by practicing idolatry, an oracle of destruction is prophesied (Jer. 15:5-9), and then Jeremiah begins his second lament. This lament focuses on the central complaint that Jeremiah is suffering because he must bear insult on God's account.[121] In addition to facing persecution for his prophetic career, the prophet is now mocked because the word of God has not yet come to fruition, and because he is unable to prophesy. Jeremiah has been unable to participate in community life because of his prophetic calling, and because of this, he has been left very lonely and full of gloom (Jer. 15:17). Although fulfilling the role of prophet originally delighted Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16), he now feels that God has not fulfilled his

[121] JSB 945

side of the arrangement by delaying the fulfillment of his oracles. This has threatened Jeremiah's already tenuous credibility as a true prophet, and has made him a target of criticism, and physical threats (Jer. 15:15.). This lament alternates between complaints from Jeremiah, and responses from God, and shows the complex relationship between the prophet and his God.

Looking at the structure of the lament, most of the constitutive elements of a psalm of lament are present, but notably absent are the statement of confidence and the vow of praise.[122] Theologically, the absence of these features causes some tension, as it would imply that Jeremiah may not be confident that God will listen and resolve his complaints. In the lament, Jeremiah compares God to unreliable waters, and neglecting to include a statement of confidence and vow of praise shows that the prophet may believe God to be untrustworthy, and the cause of his suffering rather than a subject of praise.[123] Conversely, the fact that Jeremiah would write a psalm of lament in itself suggests that he maintains an underlying trust that God is with him and will avenge him against his enemies.[124] Without even looking at the context of the text, the theological dichotomy Jeremiah faces is apparent by his writing a psalm of lament to a God that he claims not to trust to fulfill His word.[125] Moving on to the elements of lament that are present,[126] there is a direct address to God, although it does not appear until after the initial complaint and response (Jer. 15:15 and 16). There are also two complaints issued, the first of which appears in Jer. 15:10-11 in which the prophet curses his birth—or rather, his life as a prophet—and says that everyone unjustly curses him (Jer. 15:10). The second complaint is in Jer. 15:16-18, and in that Jeremiah complains that God is the cause of his suffering, because although

[122] O'Connor 41
[123] O'Connor 41
[124] O'Connor 41
[125] O'Connor 42
[126] O'Connor 41

he has been a faithful prophet, God has shown Himself to be unreliable. The lament also contains pleas of innocence, which are combined, in this case, with the complaint portions.[127] Jeremiah claims in the first compliant that he is innocent because he has neither lent, nor borrowed (Jer. 15:10), and therefore the curses against him are unwarranted. Similarly, Jer. 15:17 reminds us that Jeremiah has obeyed God's words (Jer. 16:2-5) and he has not participated in community merrymaking. The petition for divine intervention comes in Jer. 15:15 with the prophet asking to be remembered, and for vengeance against his enemies. He says, "Remember me and take thought of me, avenge me on those who persecute me." Calls for retribution, although distasteful to a modern audience, are very common for laments, as we saw in the first lament as well (Jer. 11:20). The final element that we see is oracles of assurance (Jer. 15:12-14 and Jer. 15:19-21). These will be discussed in further detail in the coming paragraphs.

The psalm of lament opens with Jeremiah cursing his very birth, saying, "Woe is me, my mother, that you ever bore me" (Jer. 15.10), however, it is important to understand here that Jeremiah does not resent his mother for giving birth; rather, he resents the conflict that characterizes his life as a prophet.[128] The focus draws from his birth to his unhappy current state with the addition of the following lines: "A man of conflict and strife with all the land! I have not lent, and I have not borrowed; yet everyone curses me" (Jer. 15:10). His gift of prophecy has made him a target, and everyone from false prophets (Jer. 28) to royalty (Jer. 38:1-6), to his own brethren in Anathoth (Jer. 11:19) seek to humiliate and harm him. Jeremiah's assertion that he has neither lent nor borrowed also serves as a plea of innocence, a standard element of psalms of lament.[129] Jeremiah has done nothing to warrant his current state of misery—he suffers only

[127] O'Connor 41
[128] O'Connor 33
[129] O'Connor 34

because of his prophetic obligation to God. In the call narrative, we see God tell Jeremiah that before he was even conceived, he was already designated to be a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5), and when he is assigned the mission to prophesy against Judah, it is sworn, "They will attack you, but they shall not overcome you; For I am with you—declares the Lord—to save you" (Jer. 1:19). Although this vow was made, now that Jeremiah faces adversity, he feels that God is abandoning him in his time of need. He accuses God of being an inconsistent ally and says, "You have been to me like a spring that falls, like waters that cannot be relied on" (Jer. 15:18). The portrait of God as a treacherous and unreliable sea is even more impactful when remembering that Judah was in a state of terrible drought during this lament. Although God could end the drought and the suffering of the people, He instead chooses to withhold the lifesaving water. God, being all powerful, could end Jeremiah's suffering by fulfilling his prophecies and validating Jeremiah as a true prophet, but He withholds relief instead. Furthermore, up to this moment, Jeremiah has served as a prophet par excellence, never denying or disobeying God's will, unlike Jonah. Recalling his initial zeal, he says, "When Your words were offered, I devoured them; Your word brought me the delight and joy of knowing that Your name is attached to me" (Jer. 15:16). While the people are quick to forget the Lord in favor of other gods (Jer. 18:15), Jeremiah has always been grateful for his relationship with God, even though it has come at the cost of solitude and vexation.

In many ways, this lament paints a jaded picture of Jeremiah's feelings on his prophetic career and his connection to God. Is he nothing but a mouthpiece, quick to be forgotten, and easy to replace? Certainly not. Although Jeremiah feels that God is unreliable, this lament actually shows God's attentiveness and empathy for the prophet. In this lament, every complaint and petition that he makes are answered by God; furthermore, He gives Jeremiah favorable answers

and asserts that He will protect Jeremiah against his enemies (Jer. 15:21). In response to Jeremiah's complaint that he is cursed for his prophecies, God offers an oracle of destruction. He thunders against Judah, "I will bring your enemies by a way of land you have not known. For a fire has flared in My wrath, it blazes against you" (Jer. 15:14). O'Connor reminds readers that the real issue here is that Jeremiah's eschatological prophecies have not been fulfilled, and that is why he is cursed by others as a false prophet.[130] That context makes an oracle of destruction a very appropriate, and even consoling response to Jeremiah's complaint. The second portion of the lament is considerably more complex, but the complaints are essentially the same. He asks for vengeance against those who persecute him (Jer. 15:15), reminds God of the insults he has borne on His behalf (Jer. 15:15), decries his isolation and the other miseries that prophecy carries (Jer. 15:17), and accuses God of being unreliable (Jer. 15:18). Speaking with grace and compassion, God affirms to Jeremiah that He plans to keep him as a divine spokesman (Jer. 15:19), since there appears to be drought in Jeremiah's prophetic abilities at the time of this lament. That may also account for Jeremiah's claim that God is unreliable since it sounds as though he was inactive for a time. God promises that He will protect Jeremiah against his enemies, and that even though they attack him, he will preserve as "a fortified wall of bronze" (Jer. 15:20). The response concludes with a vow that he will save the prophet from the wicked and rescue him from the violent (Jer. 15:21), showing that although he is isolated, Jeremiah is never alone because of his close relationship with God. The Lord's response to these complaints show that his calling is genuine, and that God is with Jeremiah.[131] In this lament, we see Jeremiah's petitions and complaints answered directly, showing God's care for His prophet.

---

[130] O'Connor 41-42
[131] O'Connor 43

This lament focuses heavily on the theme of redemption through judgement; however, it is not Judah that will be redeemed, but Jeremiah. As was touched on in the prior paragraph, Jeremiah is anxious because his prophecies have not come to fruition, and the lack of action has caused him to lose credibility as a true prophet. This results in him being cursed (Jer. 15:10) and insulted (Jer. 15:15). The oracle of destruction promises that this indignity will not last, and that "the enemy from the north" will bring "a time of distress and a time of disaster" (Jer. 15:11). Jeremiah's prophecies will be fulfilled by the invasion of a foreign enemy, Babylon, that will show everyone that Jeremiah's prophecies were true, establishing his authority as a true prophet. God will make His prophet a metaphorical "wall of bronze" whose prophecies are fulfilled through Babylon.[132] He also threatens the Judahites, "I will hand over your wealth and your treasures as a spoil, free of charge, because of all your sins through your territory" (Jer. 15:13). This shows that the punishment that they are facing is the direct result of their actions, and in this context, particularly their plots against Jeremiah because the oracle stems from his claims of harassment and unjust treatment. Although he has not lent, borrowed, or done anything to cause contention, he is cursed by everyone (Jer. 15:10). The oracle of destruction in Jer. 15:11-14 can be traced back to similar curses against the Israelites in the book of Deuteronomy. For example, in this verse, God threatens destruction by the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonians, both of whom practiced mass deportations as a war strategy[133]: "The Lord will drive you… to a nation unknown to you or your fathers, where you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone" (Deut. 28:36). This mirrors the language of Jer. 15:14, which references an unknown land following a lost war. The lines, "For a fire has flared in My wrath, it blazes against you" (Jer. 15:14) can also be traced to Deut. 32:22: "For a fire has flared in My wrath and burned to the bottom of Sheol."

[132] O'Connor 38.
[133] JSB 409

These similarities in diction could be the result of Jeremiah's Deuteronomic redactors associating the prophet with such a well-respected book, or it could be attributed to Jeremiah's background as Levitical clergy.

The second lament shows Jeremiah's innermost thoughts and feelings as he processes the negative social interactions that he is experiencing, and understandably, the lament reflects a very pessimistic mindset. As outside readers, it is easy to make the mistake of characterizing the lament as hopeless for that reason, however, critical analysis reveals this lament to actually be encouraging because of the responses we see from God. Jeremiah is offering a lament, but God is offering the promise of a brighter future, at least for his prophet. In reply to Jeremiah's first short speech, God tells Jeremiah that his prophetic authority will be reestablished once the prophecies are fulfilled, and the city falls to invasion (Jer. 15:13-14). When Jeremiah's local enemies are taken into exile, it will be apparent to everyone that his prophetic words were true.[134] Recognition as a legitimate prophet is a major issue for Jeremiah, and his status as an unreliable prophet seems to be the cause of his persecution. Secondly, God promises Jeremiah that his ability to prophesy will be regained if he is able to meet certain conditions (Jer. 15:19). The conditions are that Jeremiah must turn to God and speak what is true and not worthless (Jer. 15:19).[135] They are likely added to ensure readers that there are conditions one must meet before being considered a true prophet, since legitimizing prophecy would have been an issue extending past Jeremiah to prior and subsequent prophets as well.[136] If the office of prophecy is respected as a whole, it makes Jeremiah's message more respectable as a result. On a personal level, knowing how much Jeremiah values the relationship he has built with God throughout his

[134] O'Connor 38
[135] O'Connor 43
[136] O'Connor 43

prophetic mission (Jer. 15:16), it would have probably been very upsetting for Jeremiah to lose the ability to prophesy. God's words, "You shall be my spokesman" (Jer. 15:19), then would have been a great comfort to the lonely prophet. The response also contains an oath of protection (Jer. 15:20-21). God promises, "I am with you to deliver and save you" (Jer. 15:20), and "I will save you from the hands of the wicked and rescue you from the clutches of the violent" (Jer. 15:21). The threat of physical violence—and even death—is a very real danger for Jeremiah, and we see him narrowly avoid execution many times throughout the book (Jer. 26:7-16). Reassurance of his physical safety would allow Jeremiah to focus his attention on his ministry, such as meeting the conditions for prophethood, and relieve some of his anxiety.

The underlying message in these consolations is that even though he may feel abandoned, Jeremiah is not alone; God has a plan for His spokesman. Whether Jeremiah is concerned about his status as a prophet, his safety, or his relationship with God, God responds with words of reassurance. Although Jeremiah is isolated from the Judean community and persecuted by his enemies, this lament shows that he can find companionship with his Creator. In O'Connor's close reading of the lament, she points to a critical line in the text that reflects its message of hope: "Can iron break iron and bronze?" (Jer. 15:12). This line emerges from an oracle of destruction against Judah, that simultaneously serves as an oracle of hope for the prophet. The origins of this rhetorical question can be traced back to Proverbs 27:17, which contains the phrase, "as iron sharpens iron,"[137] as an analogy for the witty banter of friends. O'Connor suggests that the original wording of the quip in Jeremiah was likely, "Can iron break iron (and bronze)?" referencing Genesis 4:22, Numbers 31:22, and Jeremiah 6:28, or "Can iron break iron

[137] O'Connor 35

from the North?," with the region of Chalybes known as producer of high-quality iron.[138] In Jeremiah and other prophetic books, the theme of a looming enemy from the North is a very common trope (Jer. 1:14, Jer. 10:22, and Jer. 47:2), and this verse is meant to conjure fears of that same Northern foe, usually characterized as Assyria. Turning now to the "bronze" of O'Connor's analysis, she explains that bronze is symbolic of Jeremiah's strength from God against non-believers.[139] Looking back to the call narrative, God empowers Jeremiah, "I make you this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land" (Jer. 1:18). The prophet turned to bronze shows Jeremiah's God-given strength against his persecutors. In the context of the lament then, the question, "Can iron break iron from the North (and bronze)?" should be answered as no, because the prophet and God's tool of the enemy from the North cannot be defeated by the Judahites.[140] Therefore, this rhetorical question should be viewed as hopeful for Jeremiah, because it shows that God's word will be fulfilled and Judah will fall to the Northern invader, and that Jeremiah's tormentors will not overpower him because God is there to give him strength.

Continuing the intention of the first lament, the purpose of Jeremiah's second lament is to legitimize his credentials as a true prophet of God.[141] This argument reaches its pinnacle in the final response, when God promises Jeremiah, "If you produce what is noble out of the worthless, you shall me My spokesman. They shall come back to you, not you to them" (Jer. 15:19).[142] The qualifier that the people will seek out Jeremiah, rather than him changing his convictions to follow the people, shows that he has been in the right all along. Jeremiah's loyalty (Jer. 15:15),

[138] O'Connor 35
[139] O'Connor 36
[140] O'Connor 36
[141] O'Connor 42
[142] O'Connor 42

will pay off once his prophecies come to pass, and his credibility will be redeemed. Not only is Jeremiah concerned with his own image, he also is anxious to discredit the false prophets of peace that mock him. God's responses to Jeremiah validates that unlike other prophets, Jeremiah's calling is genuine, and God's replies show that he is with Jeremiah against those who persecute him.[143] Similarly, this lament emphasizes that there are certain conditions that must be met in order for a person to be considered a true prophet of God, and the implication is that Jeremiah is going to meet all of these conditions.[144] This section speaks to some of the conditions that one must meet to be a true prophet, as mentioned previously, although they are vague (Jer. 15:19). Even when his head is full of doubt and his life full of strife, Jeremiah always stands before God (Jer. 15:19) and endures persecution and insult (Jer. 15:15). He is not a prophet for the sake of popularity, he is a true spokesman of the Lord. The second major function of this lament is to highlight the action and power of God.[145] Up to this point, God has been an almost passive character in the story. Aside from punishing the people with the drought (Jer. 14:2-6), God has not taken direct action against Jeremiah's enemies yet, nor has He reprimanded Judah through invasion and exile. The verbiage in this lament reminds readers that God is all powerful, and that He will intercede to save His prophet. He will make Jeremiah "a fortified wall of bronze," He will "deliver and save" the prophet (Jer. 15:20), and He will "rescue" him from those that wish to kill him (Jer. 15:21). Jeremiah complained that God was absent and unreliable (Jer. 15:18), but God is about to enter human history to answer His prophet's lament and save him. This shows God's power over the idols of false gods who cannot interact with mankind

---

[143] O'Connor 43
[144] O'Connor 43
[145] O'Connor 43

(Deut. 32:37-39) and gives Jeremiah prophetic authority by showing God's desire to maintain him.

Jer. 15:10-21: Can iron break iron?

While O'Connor argues that the second lament's intention is to legitimize Jeremiah's status as one of God's true prophets, Carroll believes that the second lament is quite clearly intended to be communal. This claim may sound far-fetched considering the seemingly biographical content in Jer. 15:10 and 15:15-18. The lament expresses the pain that Jeremiah has endured as a result of his prophesy, such as persecution (Jer: 15:15) and curses (Jer. 15:10), as well as the hardships of social isolation (Jer. 15:17). O'Connor interprets these complaints as reflective of Jeremiah's personal life, and while Carroll does not refute that, he adds that they mirror the state of the Judean community as well. Carroll calls Jer. 15:10-21 the most ambiguous and complicated lament in the book[146] because of very apparent editing, with a lack of apparent context.[147] For example, although Jer. 15:10-12 presents as the motif of the persecuted prophet against a resistant community, Jer. 15:17-18 employs similar language and more easily leans towards a communal interpretation.[148] Both of these passages sound as if they originate from a shared source material—or at least a similar theological tradition—and echo the gloomy sentiments of Job. Jer. 15:17 complains, "I have sat lonely because of Your hand upon me, for You have filled me with gloom" and Job 13:21 says, "Remove Your hand from me, and let not your terror frighten me." In both of these situations, the weight of God's seemingly unjustified punishment crushes the life out of Job and Jeremiah. In the case of Jeremiah, his persecutors are cited as the cause of his lamentations, however, this lament calls God the source of his gloom

[146] Carroll 113
[147] Carroll 112
[148] Carroll 112

and endless pain (Jer. 15:17-18). (Because of the ambiguity surrounding Jeremiah's relationship to the community, the persecutors could be either the Judahites, or the enemy nations.) Assuming that the original composer of Jeremiah writes the book in response to the invasion and exile, it is logical that God would be held responsible for the pain that the Israelites have endured. Carroll often interprets Jeremiah's oppressors as the foreign enemies of Israel, and that holds true in this lament as well (Jer. 15:11 and 15:14), but ultimately, God Himself is held accountable because even though the invading nations dealt the blows, it is God who "will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth" (Jer. 15:4). The disaster from the north (Jer. 1:14) is interpreted as God's pawn by the exiled Israelites as they struggle to process the horrors of war.

The laments are not standalone poems; they exist within the framework of the rest of the book, and the context of the rest of the book can give insight to the meaning of the laments. This is especially helpful in discerning who Jeremiah's persecutor is, which is an issue that pervades scholarship on the book. Although O'Connor, and many of her contemporaries, read the second lament as a plea for deliverance from enemies within the community, in the JSB translation, the shadowy "Men from Anathoth" and the Judahites are never named. Reading the first lament literally would imply that the second lament is also poised against Jeremiah's opposition within his community, but assuming that such assumptions are redactional efforts to fit the "prophet versus community" trope of the Deuteronomists, we are given no reason to believe that it is the Jewish community Jeremiah is asking for vengeance against in the second lament. In fact, without the context of the line "concerning the men of Anathoth who seek your life" (Jer. 11:21), there is no reason to believe that Jeremiah is facing enemies within the community in the second lament. Within the book, including the prose accounts, there is actually minimal evidence indicating that Jeremiah was hated or targeted by the community as a whole. This was touched

upon in the introduction, but the prose accounts suggest that Jeremiah's persecutors are those in power, not the masses. The altercation in Chapter 26 is a great example of this, because it shows the response of the religious and political leaders to Jeremiah's controversial prophecies, and the influence that they have over the Judahite people. Following Jeremiah's oracle that Judah will be cursed like Shiloh (Jer. 26:4-6), the text says, "And when Jeremiah finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests, prophets, and all the people seized him, shouting, "You shall die!" (Jer. 26:8).

The false prophets and corrupt priests are afraid of Jeremiah's influence over the people, and their actions influence the people. Notice that they are listed first, implying that they first seized Jeremiah, and the people followed. This is supported by the fact that later in the story, the people defend Jeremiah against the religious leaders. "Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and prophets, "This man does not deserve the death penalty, for he spoke to us in the name of the Lord our God" (Jer. 26:16). The elders of the community also come to Jeremiah's defense, citing Micah, another prophet of doom (Jer. 26:17), whose mistreatment was punished by the LOrd (Jer. 26:17-19). Here, we see the tremendous leverage that leaders have over the people. They are frightened and unsure who to trust in such turbulent times. When the priests and prophets turn them against Jeremiah, they persecute him, but without their wicked influence, the people are not cited as a threat. There is nothing in the second lament suggesting that it is the Judahites oppressing Jeremiah. The only vague reference to the people is "They shall come back to you, not you to them" (Jer. 15:19). This implies that although the people may not be ready to accept his prophecies yet, they will come around and support him, which alludes to a positive relationship in the future.

While there is little evidence that the community is the subject of the second lament, there is a rich tradition pointing to Jeremiah as an intercessor for the people. The image of Jeremiah as an intercessor for the nation is a hallmark of the Jeremiah tradition.[149] However, this depiction of the prophet is at times muddled by the redactional efforts to portray the prophet within the bounds of the prophet against the nation motif.[150] Looking at the larger context of the text, we do not see a prophet enraged by his people, but a prophet desperate to save the community from eradication at the hands of an angry God who works through invading armies. Jeremiah pleas with God on behalf of the community repeatedly throughout the book, although his efforts are often futile. While the nation suffers from unrelenting drought, Jeremiah gives voice to the people through prayer: “Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O Lord, for the sake of your name” (Jer. 14:7). Echoing the unreliable waters accusation of the second lament (Jer. 15:18), Jeremiah calls God “a stranger in the land” and “a traveler who only stops for the night” (Jer. 14:8). Throughout the book, God’s revelations to Jeremiah express His wrath and plans to destroy Judah (Jer. 11:11-12); surely Jeremiah feared God and His volatile anger. This makes it even more admirable that Jeremiah would speak to Him so plainly, and it shows his resolve to save the community. The theology of the Old Testament emphasizes that fear of the Lord is the greatest virtue that the faithful can have, and the teacher in Ecclesiastes warns, “The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: Revere God and observe His commandments!” (Eccles. 12:14). The NRSV translates this message to “Fear God.” As His elect prophet, Jeremiah has seen God’s plans of violence, carnage, and destruction, and yet, he has the courage to stand up for his people, even though he knows he will not die in the disasters ahead (Jer. 1:19).

---

[149] Carroll 114
[150] Carroll 114

Jeremiah is also commanded not to intercede on behalf of the people at several points, which implies that he habitually pleads for their lives. Jer. 14:11-12 states, “And the Lord said to me, “Do not pray for the benefit of this people. When they fast, I will not listen to their outcry… I will exterminate them by war, famine, and disease.” Although God warns Jeremiah not to intercede (Jer. 11:14), the prophet still offers the liturgical laments, in the hopes that God’s heart will soften and spare the community. Jeremiah’s reputation as an intercessor is so well-known that even King Zedekiah sends a representative to ask the prophet, “Please pray on our behalf to the Lord our God” (Jer. 37:3). Similarly, Chapter 42 shows “all the army officers” and “all the rest of the people, great and small” (Jer. 42:1) approaching Jeremiah to ask for guidance from God on whether they should flee to Egypt for survival. Jeremiah agrees and promises them, “I will withhold nothing from you” (Jer. 42:4). Although God—and the people (Jer. 43:1-4)—do not always listen to Jeremiah, he nonetheless prays on their behalf. This lays the groundwork for the interpretation of the laments, which are essentially poetic intercessions to spare Judah.

Although the ambiguity of the laments can be frustrating during analysis, they are a testimony to the author’s—presumably Baruch’s—talent. The complex redactional history certainly plays a role in the laments’ obliquity, but it is the rich symbolism and metaphorical nature of the poems that make them so difficult to deconstruct, but also so very rewarding to read. In his scholarly editorial on “The Historical Jeremiah” Mark Leuchter attributes the prophet’s eloquence and wordplay to his possible background as a scribe.[151] Jeremiah’s vocation as a priest is identified in the call narrative (Jer. 1:1), but that would not have been mutually exclusive to a scribal career. Deuteronomic Theology derived from the literary traditions of the Levitical scribes who emphasized the importance of a written covenant in the face of socio-

[151] Leuchter 86

political upheaval.[152] Looking past the craftsmanship of the poetry for a moment, one can see that writing is a central theme to the book. Jeremiah struggles to form friendships with those in Judah, but one of the people who he bonds with is Baruch, a scribe, who "wrote down in the scroll, at Jeremiah's dictation, all the words which the Lord had spoken to him" (Jer. 36:4). Unlike those who mocked the prophecies of doom (Jer. 20:10), Baruch believes in Jeremiah, and serves his mission even though it marks him as a political target (Jer. 36:15-19). Baruch is one of Jeremiah's only allies, and for his faith and loyalty, God promises, "I will at least grant you your life in all the places where you may go" (Jer. 45:5). This may not sound like much, but it is essentially the same promise that the Lord made to Jeremiah in his calling (Jer. 1:17-19); just as Jeremiah is God's chosen prophet, Baruch is a designated survivor. Jeremiah's scribal background is also alluded in Jer. 8:8, which reads, "How can you say, "We are wise, and we possess the Instruction [Torah] of the Lord"? Assuredly, for naught has the pen labored, for naught the scribes!" This passage is commonly mistaken as a condemnation of the scribes, when it is really a critique of the ruling class, who decry scribal work because it challenges their privileged way of life.[153] It also implies that Jeremiah's prophetic literature is viewed as part of the scribal tradition by his opposition, who had a contentious relationship with the socially progressive genre, which is critical of opulent wealth at the cost of justice (Jer. 5:4-6).

Because of the complex redactional history of the book of Jeremiah, prophetic motifs from different theological traditions coexist, although they oftentimes contradict one another. The second lament is an excellent example of this uneasy union as it balances the motif of the prophet as intercessor for the nation with the motif of the nation as the prophet's enemy.[154] One

[152] Leuchter 84
[153] Leuchter 86
[154] Carroll 114

way to cope with this dichotomy is the solution that I have alluded to throughout this paper, which is that there is a literal and symbolic way to read the laments. For example, looking at the second lament, the following verse could be read in the context of different enemies, “Against these people I will make you as fortified as a wall of bronze: they will attack you, but they shall not overcome you” (Jer. 15:20). A scholar like O’Connor, who reads the laments as a plea by Jeremiah for God to enact his prophecies of doom against the people may interpret this as speaking about the Judahites, while a critic like Carroll, who reads the laments as communal, could interpret the enemy here as the foreign nations. The enigmatic nature of the laments could also be seen as a reflection of the oftentimes paradoxical feelings humans feel in close relationships. Although Jeremiah loves his people and wants to save them, he may be fearful of them because of how they react to his prophecies. Chapter 26 is a perfect example of this dualistic relationship between Jeremiah and his community; within a couple of paragraphs, they go from seizing him for execution (Jer. 26:8-9) to pleading with the priests and prophets for his life (Jer. 26:16). Carroll explains that although Jeremiah is at odds with the stubborn people at times, that motif is balanced with one of Jeremiah as the priestly voice of the people, interceding with God to save them from annihilation.[155] Jeremiah’s reputation as intercessor was well known to the people and royalty, hence the plea from King Zedekiah in Jer. 37:3 for the prophet to pray for their survival (see also Jer. 42:1-4). The book also blurs the boundaries between empathy and identity, and Jeremiah’s pleas for the Judahites cross into community prayer. One example of this is “”Harvest is past, summer is gone, but we have not been saved.” Because my people is shattered I am shattered; I am dejected, seized by desolation” (Jer. 8:20-21). Although this passage is not recognized formally as a lament, the plea for the survival of the people and

[155] Carroll 114

expressions of anguish mimic the features of a psalm of lament. As one can see, the lines between prophet and people are unclear, and both suffer as God rejects Jeremiah's prayers for salvation from the invading armies. Jeremiah's famous empathy could run deeper than just emotion. Is he praying for the community, or do his prayers embody the voice of the doomed community?

Despite his efforts, Jeremiah's intercessions are in vain. God orders him, "As for you, do not pray on behalf of these people, do not raise a cry of prayer on their behalf, do not plead with Me; for I will not listen to you" (Jer. 7:16). (The command not to pray on behalf of the people could also refer to the communal laments, in which Jeremiah prays not for the people, but on behalf of them.) This passage almost sounds as though God is rebuking Jeremiah because of the harsh language, but really it is the Judahites that God is angry with, and that tone is projected onto Jeremiah, who serves as an advocate for the people. Jeremiah's prayers are not derogated because of a shortcoming on his part, but because the Jerusalem community is beyond redemption.[156] In His righteous indignation, the Lord says, "Even if Moses and Samuel were to intercede with Me, I would not be won over to that people" (Jer. 15:1). Notice that God calls them "that people" rather than "My people" (Jer. 2:13). The covenant has been broken, and the connection between God and the community is severed beyond repair; Jeremiah's supplications cannot save them. Carroll explains that the commandments against intercession are likely the work of redactors, and that Jer. 15:1 serves a two-fold purpose of affirming Jeremiah's prophetic credibility and fulfilling the "prophet as intercessor" motif.[157] As was explained previously, the Deuteronomists were keen to associate Jeremiah with Moses because of the authority that he

[156] Carroll 115
[157] Carroll 114-5

holds in Deuteronomic Theology. Mosaic Prophecy was a pillar of Northern Kingdom, which is the region from which Jeremiah originated,[158] and the invocation of Moses would have given credit to Jeremiah, who, as O'Connor explains in detail, was doubted by his community. When editing the book, the Deuteronomists were not only concerned with how Jeremiah was received in his time, but also how his prophecies and signs would be viewed by readers of the scroll. For that reason, claiming that even Moses and Samuel, two patriarchs of the faith, would not be able to save the Judahites dispels the idea that there is a fault with Jeremiah. Even though he dedicates his life to the mission of saving Judah, he is destined to failure because God has already signed their death warrant. Their destruction was preordained from the moment that Jeremiah was called to prophecy (Jer. 1:11-16), and despite his faithfulness and dedication, there is nothing he can do to redeem them in the eyes of God.

Surrounded by enemy nations and rejected by their God, it seems that there is no one to care for the people. When the covenant was instated, God loved Israel and called her, "The first fruits of His harvest. All who ate of it were held guilty" (Jer. 2:3). He punished any army that dared to invade her, but now that the covenant has been broken, God has summoned the kingdoms of the north to unleash disaster upon His former people (Jer. 1:14-15). He once protected his people from invasion, and now that they have forgotten His law (Jer. 2:6-8), He is summoning foreign nations to defile them, just as they defiled themselves by idolatry (Jer. 2:23). Echoing the language of Hosea (Hos.1:2-3), God accuses "Rebel Israel" (Jer. 3:8) of adultery and warns her to return to Him (Jer. 3:8-15). However, because the people do not repent, they become the target of God's wrath, which leads us to the prayers in Jeremiah's laments. Israel's adultery and casual immorality (Jer. 3:9) is now irredeemable, but there is still one person who

[158] Petersen 221

fights for her: Jeremiah. Mere verses before Jeremiah offers the second lament, God warns him not to pray for the people (Jer. 15:1) and utters an oracle of doom that He will make Judah "a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth" (Jer. 15:4). Having commanded Jeremiah not to intercede, God asks, "But who will pity you, O Jerusalem? Who will console you? Who will turn aside to inquire about your welfare?" (Jer. 15:5). Not to be mistaken as a rhetorical question, the answer is Jeremiah.[159] Although God has divorced his bride and left her to face her attackers alone (Jer. 13:22), Jeremiah still fights for the people, even though he has been ordered not to (Jer. 14:11). Jeremiah faithfully obeys God in all else that he commands, but interceding for the people when he has been ordered not to is the only instance in which we see the prophet blatantly disobey God. Carroll explains that the motif of prophet as intercessor stems from the tradition of Samuel in which he says to "all Israel" (1 Sam. 12:1), "As for me, far be it from me to sin against the Lord and refrain from praying for you; and I will continue to instruct you in the practice of what is good and right" (1 Sam. 12:23). Recall that the command not to intercede in Jer. 15:1 references Samuel, the intercessor "par excellence." The Deuteronomic redactors of Jeremiah were very familiar with the Theology of the book of Samuel; invoking him here would associate Jeremiah with his legacy, and illustrate his commitment to praying for the nation, even when it seems to be futile.

Considering that the laments are written during a period of great suffering, it is easy to focus on the punitive elements of Jeremiah. The people and prophet bear insult after insult, tragedy after tragedy, and once the covenant is broken, God becomes a terror. Mills explains that the language of embodied horror in the book (Jer. 19:7-8) turns God into a kind of literary

[159] Carroll 115

monster, embracing military aggression to torture the Judahites.[160] Interspersed within oracles of destruction, though, are calls to repentance and promises to forgive. Jer. 15:19 is a perfect demonstration of God's mercy when He offers this goading response to Jeremiah's lament: "Assuredly, thus said the Lord: If you turn back, I shall take you back and you shall stand before me." O'Connor interpreted this verse as a promise that Jeremiah will be restored as a prophetic mediator,[161] but Carroll identifies it as a clear instance of Jeremiah standing as the community.[162] Looking back to Chapter 3, the analogy of an unfaithful wife returning to her husband after marrying another man is used (Jer. 3:1). God asks, "Now you have whored with many lovers: can you return to me?" (Jer. 3:1). Although the language is derogatory, God assures His wayward bride that it is never too late to renew their covenant; "Turn back, O rebellious children, I will heal your afflictions!" (Jer. 3:22). The Judahites do not have to be abandoned to the sword, "If you return, O Israel—declares the Lord—If you return to Me… in sincerity, justice, and righteousness—Nations shall bless themselves by you" (Jer. 4:1-2). He gives them ample opportunity to return to their faith, but because they refuse, "their land will become a desolation, an object of hissing for all time" (Jer. 18:16). In this case in the second lament, by God inviting Jeremiah to return to Him, He is inviting the exiled community to return as well.[163] The hope for redemption through repentance is a favorite motif of Deuteronomists and should be the guiding basis for reading these verses.[164] This message would, of course, be welcomed by people facing destruction, but one must remember that Jeremiah was written for the exiled community. What good is a pardon if the sentence has already been served and the damage

[160] Mills 410
[161] O'Connor 42
[162] Carroll 120
[163] Carroll 120
[164] Carroll 120-1

wrought? God's willingness to forgive the people once they have repented is fulfilled in the promise of the New Covenant. The nation that has been destroyed by war will be renewed, "And the entire Valley of Corpses and Ashes, and all the fields as far as the Wadi Kidron, and the corner of the Horse Gate on the east, shall be holy to the Lord" (Jer. 31: 40). Once the people are returned home, "They shall never again be uprooted or overthrown" (Jer. 31:40).

Jer. 17:12-18: The Shepherd

In the second lament, although Judah was facing a catastrophic drought, and Jeremiah was working through his own cognitive dissonance, the psalm presents many elements of hope. It was promised that things would get better for Jeremiah, and we see this tone shift carry on to the third lament. O'Connor notes that this lament begins on a more positive note than any of the other confessions,[165] and that holds true whether the lament begins at verse 12 or verse 14. Scholars debate the first verse of the third lament, with some claiming that it begins in Jeremiah 17:12, and others arguing that the verses are better suited to a communal hymn than an individual lament.[166] However, on this issue I would tend to agree with Carroll, that the verses are not out of place, rather, they illuminate the cultic nature of the lament.[167] Praise of the Lord is more overt than covert in these lines, but laments are, at their core, psalms of praise. The voice does differ from the rest of the lament, making it sound as though the author is mimicking the language of Psalms (Psalm 19:1, for example), but the message is closely tied to that of verses 14-18. Exulting the glory of God, the lament reads, "O Throne of Glory exalted from of old, our Sacred Shrine! O Hope of Israel! O Lord!" (Jer. 17:12-13). The following verses also praise God's glory, saying, "For You are my glory" (Jer. 17:14), and affirm confidence in God, saying,

[165] O'Connor 49
[166] O'Connor 48
[167] Carroll 121

"Heal me, O Lord, and let me be healed; Save me, and let me be saved" (Jer. 17:14). Verses 14-18 continue with the themes of hope and confidence in God that are sown in verses 12-13. Verse 13 also delves into the issue of retribution, both for the people's sins and their treatment of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 17:13 reads, "All who forsake You shall be put to shame, those in the land who turn from You shall be doomed men." This sentiment is repeated verse 18 which reads, "Let my persecutors be shamed" and verse 19 which says, "Bring on them the day of disaster." Both sections of the text call for the shaming of the unfaithful, with the second portion elaborating on the ideas planted in verses 12-13. Because Jeremiah is a genuine prophet speaking God's own words, those who persecute him are surely forsaking God by attacking His divine messenger. Both portions of the text also suggest an eschatological event as the punishment for the enemies of God (and Jeremiah). The harsh language of "doom" and "disaster" is interchangeable and shows the speaker's prayer for vindication through the fulfillment of God's word. Of course, the prophecies that Jeremiah has preached call for an apocalyptic end of days for the city. Looking at the language and theological themes, it becomes apparent that there is some continuity between verses 12-13 and 14-18, and thus, I will consider verses 12 and 13 as a part of the lament.

O'Connor identifies Jer. 17:12-13 as a communal lament because of its "abstract, impersonal tone,"[168] but there is nothing detached about communal psalms of lament. They may be considered impersonal in that they are meant to represent the voice of the masses, but they are vulnerable and passionate expressions of emotion and faith. Because O'Connor does not believe that Jeremiah's major laments—as discussed in this portion of the paper—are communal, even removing those, there are several heartfelt communal laments in the book. O'Connor identifies

[168] O'Connor 48

Jer. 14:7-9; 14:19-22; and 16:19-20 as communal prayers offered by the prophet,[169] and they are far from apathetic; they are brimming with complex emotions. These laments sting with an overwhelming sense of betrayal and a longing for love. Accusations of abandonment are coupled with bittersweet memories of a past relationship, as in the following verses: "O Hope of Israel, its deliverer in time of trouble, why are You like a stranger in the land, like a traveler that only stops only for the night?" (Jer.14:8). God and His people used to share a sacred covenant relationship, but He no longer dwells in the land, and He has left the people to destruction at the hands of the foreign nations. The lament continues, "Your name is attached to us—do not forsake us!" (Jer. 14:9). Much like how a bride takes her husband's last name after marriage, the Israelites have taken God's name, but now He has divorced them for their infidelity. Far from being abstract or impersonal, this communal prayer invokes a parallel to the most sacred relationship there is: marriage. Jer. 14:19-21 also uses familial metaphors to show the impact of desertion on the people. "For your name's sake, do not disown us" (Jer. 14:21) uses the language of a parent disowning a child. Because God's name is attached to Israel through their covenant bond, to disown His children would be a "dishonor" to His "glorious throne" (Jer: 14-21). This lament also references the drought, pleading, "Can any of the false gods of the nations give rain? Can the skies themselves give showers? Only You can, O Lord our God" (Jer. 14:22). These rhetorical questions show that the people have self-reflected and understand that their idolatry is the direct cause of the drought, while also affirming confidence in God. This is not just a theological assertion, but a desperate plea for deliverance from the drought. This is not abstract, but earthly…and urgent. The God of the Israelites is an actor in human history, and He has the

---

[169] O'Connor 48

power to intervene on behalf of, or against the people, unlike the pagan idols who cannot even bring rain.

The primary concern of this lament is that the prophecies that Jeremiah has made have not yet come to pass, and therefore, he is not yet considered a true prophet.[170] One of the distinguishing factors between true and false prophets is whether their prophecies come to fruition, and because Jeremiah's have not, he is anxious to establish his credibility. He complains that his enemies taunt him by asking, "Where is the prediction of the Lord? Let it come to pass!" (Jer. 17:15). These verses highlight the predicament that Jeremiah faces; he has proclaimed God's word of destruction, but judgment has not been executed.[171] The Judahites hear Jeremiah proclaim that they must repent, or disaster will strike, but now some time has passed, and the people are unrepentant, yet there is no sign of invasion, and the false prophets continue to assure the people that all is well (Jer. 6:14). With every day that passes, Jeremiah's prophetic authority drops lower and lower in the public eye. Therefore, Jeremiah pleas, "Bring on them the day of disaster, and shatter them with double destruction" (Jer. 17:18). By fulfilling the oracle of destruction, God would both redeem Jeremiah's reputation and liberate him from his persecutors. O'Connor explains that it is not only Jeremiah's credibility that is on the line, but the word of God Himself.[172] The reputations of Jeremiah and God are linked, meaning that if God does not enact His Word, the people will mock both Him and His prophet. Jeremiah begs God to vindicate him by fulfilling the prophetic word, and to ultimately vindicate God Himself against an unbelieving people.[173] After bearing insults for so long (Jer. 15:15), Jeremiah invokes God's

[170] O'Connor 49
[171] O'Connor 49
[172] O'Connor 49
[173] O'Connor 51

commitment to him (Jer. 15:19) and pleas, "Let my persecutors be shamed, and let not me be shamed" (Jer. 17:18). Consoling the prophet, God had promised Jeremiah, "I will save you from the hands of the wicked and recue you from the clutches of the violent" (Jer. 15:21). In the previous lament, Jeremiah accused God of being unreliable (Jer. 15:18), and this request is an opportunity to see if God can be trusted to stay true to His words.

It is no secret that Jeremiah's laments are full of persuasive rhetorical devices; a major component to psalms of lament is a petition convincing God to intervene.[174] The third lament, however, takes a very bold approach in its petition by inverting the language of the call narrative. When Jeremiah is called to his prophetic office, God delivers the threat, "Do not break down before them, lest I break you before them" (Jer. 1:17). If Jeremiah adheres to the divine plan and prophesizes against Judah, then he will have God's protection (Jer. 1:18-19), but if he falters, then he, like Judah, will be crushed. The adage, "stuck between a rock and a hard place" perfectly applies to this situation. If Jeremiah prophesizes against the people, then they will persecute him, but if he refrains from his calling, he will have to answer to an even more dangerous enemy: a vengeful God. As we know, Jeremiah obeys God and does all that he can to warn the Judahites of the fast-approaching enemy nations, and as a result, he is persecuted by the people and the laments are written, according to O'Connor. In the third lament, Jeremiah invokes the promises made at his call and petitions, "You are my refuge in a day of calamity. Let my persecutors be shamed, and let not me be shamed; Let them be dismayed, and let not me be dismayed" (Jer. 17:17-18). Jeremiah has heeded the covenant made at his call, and he expects God to be true to His word: "They will attack you, but they shall not overcome you; For I am with you—declares the Lord—to save you" (Jer. 1:19). Jeremiah has "not evaded being a

[174] O'Connor 24

shepherd in your service" (Jer. 17:16), but he feels as though God has abandoned him to his persecutors, who diminish him for his prophecies of doom (Jer. 17:15). Because Jeremiah has done God's will as commanded, it would be unjust for God to terrorize him and break him down, but because the prophetic word has not yet been enacted, that is exactly what God has done. These verses are an appeal for intervention, but also instructions for how God can fix the relationship that He has strained by allowing Jeremiah to be terrorized.[175] In order to fulfill the agreement made in the call narrative, God must stop "dismaying" Jeremiah, and instead dismay the prophet's enemies by bringing on them "the day of disaster" (Jer. 17:18).

In the form-critical analysis of the first two laments, we saw that certain elements of the individual psalm of lament can be added or omitted to suit the theological intention of each piece. Interestingly, the third lament is the first time that Jeremiah includes a statement of confidence in God as part of his speech.[176] The lament begins with direct addresses to God (Jer. 17:12 and Jer. 17:14), and then moves to statements of confidence. Jeremiah expresses confidence that if God wills for him to be healed and saved, it will be so (Jer. 17:14), and calls Him, "my refuge in a day of calamity" (Jer. 17:17). In the two previous laments, Jeremiah cited God as the cause of his suffering (Jer. 11:21 and Jer. 15:17-18), but in this lament, God is his refuge from the outside world. There appears to be a shift in how Jeremiah views his relationship with God, with it moving from almost abusive, to loving and protective. The lament also contains praise,[177] which is seen most clearly in the (often omitted) introduction to the lament, which reads "O Throne of Glory exalted from of old, Our Sacred Shrine! O Hope of Israel! O Lord!" (Jer. 17:12-13). These exclamations of praise claim God as the speaker's own, showing

---

[175] O'Connor 50
[176] O'Connor 52
[177] O'Connor 52

great pride in their relationship. Rather than viewing God as full of wrath and bringing destruction, He is called the "Hope of Israel." These verses also seem to recall the days of Exodus when God travelled with the people in the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 15:10-22), by calling God a "Sacred Shrine." Verse 14 also calls God "my glory," although Jeremiah's enemies mock God's word in the following line. The lament also contains the standard feature of complaint, which is in this case, the fact that Jeremiah's prophecies have not been fulfilled and general qualms about his treatment as a prophet (Jer. 17:15-18). Jeremiah's plea of innocence appears here as well, where the prophet reminds God that he has served as "a shepherd in your service" as was prescribed (Jer. 17:16). He also qualifies that he has never "longed for the fatal day" (Jer. 17:16), rather, he has only prophesied what God has told him to. He did not start conflict with his enemies, God dictated the oracles of destruction and then failed to fulfill them, causing Jeremiah to be persecuted and mocked. The lament ends with a petition in which Jeremiah begs God not to "be a cause of dismay to me" (Jer. 17:17) and to flip the script against his persecutors, causing them to be "shamed" and "dismayed" instead of him (Jer. 17:18). Jeremiah also calls for the much-anticipated arrival of the "day of disaster" and the "double destruction of his enemies" (Jer. 17:18). This last line somewhat contradicts his plea of innocence; however, it can be read that he never wished for the destruction of all of Judah, only his enemies.[178]

Jer. 17:12-18: The Fount of Living Waters

Scholars can all agree that the focus of the third lament is centered around the "day of slaying" (Jer. 12:3). "A great commotion out of the north" threatens to crumble Judah into "a

[178] O'Connor 50

haunt of jackals" (Jer. 10:22) but because of the ambiguity of the lament and its complex redactional history, it is unclear exactly what Jeremiah is petitioning for here. O'Connor claimed that Jeremiah is pleading for the execution of Judgement Day so that his prophecies can be vindicated, and so that those who mock him (Jer. 17:15) will finally recognize him as a true prophet.[179] She interprets his persecutors (Jer. 17:18) as the Judahites who ridicule him,[180] and interprets the final verses as a prayer for vindication in which Jeremiah asks God to "shatter them with double destruction" (Jer. 17:18). Carroll also notes the eschatological nature of the lament, but he interprets it as a plea for deliverance rather than destruction.[181] In this lament, the prophet is presented as the community offering a communal prayer for restoration.[182] In this context, the petition, "Do not be a cause of dismay to me; You are my refuge in a day of calamity" (Jer. 17:17) is not to be read as Jeremiah seeking deliverance from the disbelieving Judahites, but Judah seeking support while she is ravaged by foreign armies. While pangs seize the nation like a woman in childbirth (Jer. 13:21) and her people are scattered "like straw that flies before the desert wind" (Jer. 13:24), the inhabitants offer this communal lament in the hopes that they will be saved. This interpretation also rectifies the claim in Jer. 17:16: "Nor have I longed for the fatal day. You know the utterances of my lips, they were ever before You." If this lament is construed as a petition for Judgement Day, then this line would be a blatant lie, and God would know the utterances of Jeremiah's lips as praying for the downfall of the city rather than its salvation. Reading the poem as a communal lament eliminates the contradiction posed by this verse and replaces it with a sincere appeal to God's merciful nature. Despite the hardship that Jeremiah has endured in his vocation, he has not "evaded being a shepherd" in God's service

[179] O'Connor 51
[180] O'Connor 50
[181] Carroll 121
[182] Carroll 122

(Jer. 17:16) and he continues to try to save the people, just as he was appointed to in the call (Jer. 1:5). Jeremiah does not seek the fulfillment of the divine and wrathful Word—he seeks to escape it through the offering of communal laments.

This lament is also implicated as a communal prayer by the healing motif present in Jer. 17:14.[183] It reads, "Heal me, O Lord, and let me be healed; save me, and let me be saved; for You are my glory." This plea for healing is repeated several times in the book of Jeremiah and Carroll identifies that when this motif is present, the verses should be read as the community's prayer for restoration.[184] Communal application of such restorative prayers is apparent in Jer. 3:22, when God warns the people: "Turn back, O rebellious children, I will heal your afflictions!" This verse is followed by a response from all the people, which says, "Here we are, we come to You" (Jer. 3:22). These lines are also significant because they show that the community does pray to God together, and they are spoken to directly by God. This sets the precedent early in the book that the people are known to offer communal prayers. Notice the language of healing as well. The healing motif is also seen in Jer. 30:17 (The Book of Consolation), in which God promises, "But I will bring healing to you and cure you of your wounds." We can easily identify this as addressed to the community because of the healing motif, and the fact that God addresses the oracle to Israel (Jer. 30:10) and reflects on the punishment that the people have endured (Jer. 30:12-15). Within this oracle, God also plants the seed of hope for restoration of the nation by the New Covenant. He consoles the exiled community, saying, "You shall be My people, and I will be your God" (Jer. 30:22). In the second lament, Jeremiah, praying on behalf of the people, called their wound "incurable" and "resistant

---

[183] Carroll 122
[184] Carroll 122

to healing" (Jer. 15:18). The pain of exile and the humiliation of defeat feel endless for the Israelites (Jer. 15:17), but there is the hope of relief and healing through the New Covenant. For that reason, Carroll notes that when the healing motif is present, the poetry takes on a liturgical and consolatory tone.[185] Remember that Jeremiah was a prophet, but he was also a priest, and during a frightening, uncertain time like the exile, people would have looked to him for comfort and support. Jeremiah may not be a king like David, a nationalist hero, or opulently rich like Solomon, but he was a religious leader. The people did not always respect his authority, but he never ceased to try to save them by guiding them on the right path. He always loved them and advocated for their safety, even when he was warned against it (Jer. 11:14). Just as Jesus built his ministry on healing, Jeremiah was a physician to mortally wounded Judah, and through the everlasting love of the New Covenant, she was eventually restored.

The healing motif in the laments is not unique to Jeremiah, rather, it echoes the language and themes of Psalms.[186] Jeremiah's prayers for healing can be read as either petitions for help in his own life, or as an appeal for the community, and the Psalms can be interpreted similarly. For example, Psalm 63 reads "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I languish; heal me, O Lord, for my bones shake with terror." The suffering here is two-fold; the speaker is both "worn out because of all my foes" (Psalm 6:8), and he is spiritually troubled by the fact that God has not rescued him yet, much like what we see in Jeremiah's own laments. On a communal level, there is the very obvious implication, like in Jeremiah, that the enemies of Israel are the cause of its distress. Psalm 41 also reflects the conspiracy against Israel motif that we talked about earlier, as the speaker suspects "All my enemies whisper together against me, imagining the worst for me"

[185] Carroll 122
[186] Carroll 122

(Psalm 41:8). Utilizing the language of healing, the speaker expresses his faith in God: "The lord will sustain him on his sickbed; You shall wholly transform his bed of suffering. I said, "O Lord, have mercy on me, heal me, for I have sinned against You"" (Psalm 41:4-5). In these verses, it is implied that God will have mercy on and restore the speaker because he has repented, which parallels the appeal God makes in Jer. 3:22: "Turn back, O rebellious children, I will heal your afflictions!" In Deuteronomic theology, there is always hope for restoration if the afflicted person repents and returns to God. There are many, many examples of the language of healing in Psalms, but one last example I will give is Psalm 107, which can be identified as a psalm of praise in which confidence is expressed by the speaker that God will heal and redeem His people. The JSB footnotes identify this as post-exilic literature, meaning that it would have been composed around the same time and under the same socio-political circumstances as Jeremiah.[187] Alluding to Exodus and the wilderness tradition, the psalm says, "In their adversity they cried to the Lord and he saved them from their troubles. He gave an order and healed them; He delivered them from the pits" (Psalm 107:19-20). Although this prayer references the Exodus from Egypt, it can be applied to the exiles, hopeful that Israel will be restored by the promise of Jeremiah's New Covenant. While Jeremiah's laments have more of a post-traumatic and anxious tone, this psalm deals with the same situation in a much more hopeful way. The people have experienced great loss, but it will be repaid by a renewed relationship with God. "The wise man will take note of these things; he will consider the steadfast love of the Lord" (Psalm 107:43). The Wisdom Literature warns readers that the wise fear the Lord, but this triumphant voice counters that the wise man also remembers the steadfast love of the Lord. His punishment is only inflicted so that the people can be restored by his loving embrace.

[187] JSB 1390

Looking to similar verses in Psalms and Jeremiah's other communal prayers, Jer. 17:14 should be interpreted as a communal prayer for healing. With most of the Israelites in exile in Babylon, and the remnant in Judah impoverished and disenfranchised, after the invasion, the Jewish community was desperate for restoration, and that is reflected in Jeremiah's appeals for healing. Looking back to Jer. 17:13, there is another appeal for Israel's restoration. The stanza is marked by a tone of praise and confidence in "the Lord, the Fount of living waters" (Jer. 17:13), and it calls for all those who forsake the Lord to be shamed and doomed. O'Connor disregards the verse as a literary gloss, and eliminates it from the lament,[188] but the most common analysis of these lines is that Jeremiah's enemies—who have forsaken God by persecuting His prophet—will be punished for their sins. Under this interpretation, the prayer is a prophesy against the Judahites, however, looking at the prayer through Carroll's lens of the laments as communal prayers, the oracle is more likely against enemy nations than the Judahites. The Oracles Against Nations are a confusing bit of literature that will be further explored in the next section of this paper, but essentially, in them, God seeks to punish the foreign nations that have wronged Israel. These oracles of doom are proclaimed as retribution for the sacking of Judah and the exile of her people. For example, the oracle against Babylon reads, "For you rejoiced, you exulted, you who plundered My possession" (Jer. 50:11), "because of the Lord's wrath she [Babylon] shall not be inhabited; she shall be utterly desolate" (Jer. 50:13). Following a brutal besiegement, Babylon invaded Jerusalem and exiled the Jewish population, leaving a remnant behind, who were terribly mistreated by the Babylonians (Jer. 40). At the start of Jeremiah's story, God tells the prophet that He is the one summoning the invading armies (Jer. 1:15), but by the end of the book in the OAN, God has turned His divine wrath from Judah to the enemy nations. Now, violence

[188] O'Connor 47-48

against Israel is taken as an offense to God as He seeks to vindicate His people. Because of the New Covenant, God reclaimed the Israelites and He is seeking blood for blood. When the Babylonians plundered the Temple and displaced the people (2 Kings 24:13-16), they forsook God, and for that they are doomed (Jer. 17:13). These verses, coupled with Jer. 17:15, hint to the revenge that will be taken in the OAN after the exile.

Like Jer. 17:13, Jer. 17:15 is commonly interpreted as a statement on the faithlessness of the Judahites. Scholars like O'Connor, who believe that the laments follow in the prophet against community motif, interpret these verses as the Judahites mocking Jeremiah because his prophecies have not come true, and he has not yet been established as a legitimate prophet.[189] Through this lens, while his enemies ridicule him as a false prophet, Jeremiah begs for fulfillment of his oracles of doom.[190] The goal of the lament, according to O'Connor, is not to redeem Israel in the eyes of God, but to vindicate Jeremiah's reputation.[191] In keeping with his thesis that the laments are communal prayers, Carroll interprets Jer. 17:15 as impatience for the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies rather than a derision of them.[192] The "they" that are questioning Jeremiah are not his opposition in Judah, but the exiles.[193] There is less skepticism in the question than there is desperation. The people have been promised restoration by the New Covenant, and as a part of that, they were promised that they would someday be returned to the homeland. Jeremiah prophesized, "They shall return from the enemy's land. And there is hope for your future—declares the Lord: Your children shall return to their country" (Jer. 31:16-17). At the time of the composition of this book, the people were still suffering in exile under the

[189] O'Connor 49
[190] O'Connor 51
[191] O'Connor 51
[192] Carroll 122
[193] Carroll 122

heavy hand of enemy nations. In these verses, the divine word is not one of judgement, but one of salvation and restoration,[194] so the people beg, “Let it come to pass!” (Jer. 17:15). There is an interesting distinction in the immediacy of Jeremiah’s prophecies concerning Israel; it is implied by language and time markers that the prophecies will come to fruition soon. For example, Jer. 4:21 asks, “How long must I see the standards and hear the blare of horns?” This suggests that the visions of war that Jeremiah sees are fast approaching. The sonal description of the blare of horns also creates a sense of urgency as the wail of sirens is universally known as a signal of imminent danger. Similarly, oracles of hope are placed in the near future. God even gives a timeline in the Jer. 31:16-17 oracle, promising that the exiles’ children will be returned to Israel. It makes sense then, that the people would question Jeremiah as to why his prophecies of restoration have not yet been realized when there is a communal expectation of proximity of the prophetic word. Carroll also qualifies that even if the original composition was pre-exilic, in the context of the rest of the laments, it should now be understood as a prayer of the community while in exile.[195] To put it simply, the interaction in Jer. 17:15 is not born out of skepticism or ridicule, but eagerness for the end of the exile.

The book of Jeremiah, with its incredibly complex editorial history, is known for contradictions. For example, there are two different versions of the book in circulation today: the MT (Masoretic Text) and the LXX (Greek translation). As a translation of the original Hebrew text, the LXX is shorter and presents a different sequence of the OAN, and both variations can have a substantial impact on how the text is interpreted.[196] There are also double narratives in the

[194] Carroll 122
[195] Carroll 122
[196] Tov, Emanuel. “The Last Stage of the Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah.” Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 129–44. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 129.

book, like the imprisonment and release story which is first found in Jer. 37:11-21 and is retold with conflicting information in Jer. 38:1-Jer. 40-6. [197] There is also the aforementioned contradiction of God utilizing the invading armies to punish Israel versus God's punishment of the enemy nations in the OAN. All of these examples are meant to demonstrate that the messaging in Jeremiah can be paradoxical. Individualized analyses of the third lament, like O'Connor's, tend to fall back on the idea that Jer. 17:16 could simply be the result of a redactional slip-up. The prophet bargains with God, saying, "Nor have I longed for the fatal day. You know the utterances of my lips, they were ever before you" (Jer. 17:16), immediately after asking for the fulfillment of the oracles of doom. This would be ironic for Jeremiah to say, considering that under this interpretation, he has just appealed to God for the "fatal day." Carroll explains that this verse is not contradictory to the rest of the lament, because Jeremiah does not seek the fulfillment of his prophecies, rather, he is aligned with the community by praying for their restoration.[198] This would be in keeping with Carroll's thesis that the laments are communal prayers for healing rather than individual appeals for God's destruction of Judah. All the elements that appeared contradictory in O'Connor's interpretation fall in like puzzle pieces in Carroll's analysis; Jeremiah has not longed for the fatal day, rather, he has fought desperately to prevent it, and God knows this because of Jeremiah's appeals to His mercy in the laments. The claim could also be a proclamation of innocence not only directed to God, but to the community. Jeremiah may have been afraid of being regarded as an actor in the destruction of Judah, and as a result he clearly aligned himself with the community in these verses.[199] As God's prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5), it would have been easy for people to blame Jeremiah for the terrible

[197] Goldstein, Ronnie. "The Prophet Jeremiah: Legends, Traditions, and Their Evolution." Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 159–76. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 162.
[198] Carroll 122
[199] Carroll 122

occurrences that he predicted, so he was careful to state that he was not an agent of destruction, but simply a divine mouthpiece. While these verses may appear ironic and contradictory in an individualist understanding of the lament, they flow naturally in a communal prayer.

Jeremiah has not “longed for the fatal day” (Jer. 17:16) against Israel, but this lament does make an appeal for the punishment of enemy nations. Reading the lament from the perspective of a communal prayer, Jeremiah’s petition: “Let my persecutors be shamed, and let not me be shamed; Let them be dismayed, and let not me be dismayed” (Jer. 17:18) is a call for retribution against the foreign nations that have ravaged Israel.[200] The invasion and subsequent exile have shamed and dismayed the people, and in this lament, Jeremiah offers a prayer to God on their behalf for vindication. Personifying Israel as a grieving mother, one of Jeremiah’s oracles of doom says, “She who bore seven sons is forlorn, utterly disconsolate… she is shamed and humiliated” (Jer. 15:9). This depiction of the city as a woman who is ashamed or humiliated by her violated condition is common in prophetic literature, and a motif that is employed in the laments of Daughter Zion in the book of Lamentations. The book uses metaphors of sexual violence to convey the nation’s feelings of violation in the aftermath of besiegement and invasion. One verse says, “All who admired her despise her, for they have seen her disgraced; and she can only sigh and shrink back. Her uncleanness clings to her skirts” (Lam. 1:8-9). The rest of the world has seen the immense toll that the war has taken on Israel, and the people are ashamed that everyone has seen their suffering. The claim that “uncleanness” clings to her (Lam. 1:9), is a reference to ritual impurity caused by sexual immorality—in this case, a play on the metaphor of idolatry as adultery.[201] Another verse reads, “How the enemy jeers! The foe has laid

[200] Carroll 122-3
[201] JSB 1584

hands on everything dear to her. She has seen her Sanctuary invaded by nation" (Lam. 1:9-10). In this and the previous excerpt, there is an emphasis on the shame and humiliation that Daughter Zion endures from her defeat, coupled with thinly veiled allusions to sexual assault. The claim that "her Sanctuary has been invaded by nations" (Lam. 1:10), is a reference to the looting of the Temple (Chron. 36:10), but it is also a reflection of the violation the Jewish people felt when their holy place was desecrated by the Babylonians.[202]

The imagery of a woman who has been sexually abused is reflective of the emotional and mental state that the Israelites felt after the invasion. This vulnerable feminization of Israel also conjures the image of the woman in childbirth, "panting, stretching out her hands" as the enemy army closes in (Jer. 4:31). There is also the observation in Jer. 30:6 that the men have been feminized by their defeat and compared to women in labor. God offers the harrowing oracle, "Surely males do not bear young! Why then do I see every man with his hand on his loins like a woman in labor?" (Jer. 30:6). Obviously, the men are not giving birth, but they are in the same compromised position as a women in labor now that Israel has fallen to the Babylonian invaders. The characters of the assaulted woman and the woman in childbirth show the pain and vulnerability that the Israelites feel at the time of the composition of Jeremiah and his secondary book, Lamentations. Violence against the female body is a major motif in Jeremiah and Lamentations, appearing in the metaphorical rape of Daughter Zion (Lam. 1:8-11), the attack on the woman in labor (Jer. 4:31), and the grieving mother (Jer. 15:9). This, coupled with the transformation of Judah's men to women in labor (Jer. 30:6) shows a clear linkage between horror, motherhood, and the female body in the book. Coming from an ideology of female empowerment and modernity myself, I urge readers blinded by offense to instead see the

[202] JSB 1585

development of a metaphor of horror and “abjectification” throughout Jeremiah and Lamentations. The rhetoric of horror is crucial to the book of Jeremiah,[203] conveying to audiences the frightening and disturbing socio-political events that the book grew from. The language of horror in Jeremiah creates literary monsters; they are dangerous and impure characters who create a feeling of nausea in the reader.[204] The women and pseudo-women in Jeremiah and Lamentations are all literary monsters, written to create a sense of horror in readers that could not be accomplished through any other means. Just as God can be the source of great blessings or great calamity (Job 2:10), motherhood demands a vulnerability that can become a source of great suffering. The woman in labor, surrounded by killers in Jer. 4:31 is doomed because her physical condition makes escape impossible. Her pregnancy and delivery have condemned her to death, and she is made doubly afraid because just as she cannot save herself, she cannot save the child she is birthing.

This brings us to the mother of seven in Jer. 15:9; her life may be spared, “but her sun has set while it is still day” (Jer. 15:9), and her life is ruined because of the implied death of her seven children. She has suffered a fate worse than death, and just like personified Daughter Zion, this loss is a cause of shame and humiliation (Jer. 15:9). There is a clear link in Jeremiah and Lamentations between horror and abjection,[205] and the female body, or childless mothers, becomes a favorite motif because of the vulnerability and hopelessness these women are associated with. The woman in labor cannot save herself or her newborn from the brutality of the enemy armies that surround her. She must go through the terrible pain of birth to deliver a baby

---

[203] Mills 410

[204] Kalmanofsky, Amy. “Poetic Violence in the Book of Jeremiah.” Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 328–42. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 47.

[205] Mills 410

that will only know pain and a cruel death at the hands of men; it will never know the tender embrace of its mother, who is powerless against the killers. Similarly, the grieving mother failed to save her children from death either at the hands of the enemy, or from the famine and disease brought on by the siege. There is no greater horror for a parent than knowing they are powerless to save their child, an extension of their being, and this loss creates literary monsters. Their suffering has transformed them into repulsive creatures that evoke horror in readers because they have become everyone's greatest fear.

Daughter Zion and the laboring warriors are not monsters for their loss, but for the abnormality and vulnerability of their physical bodies. In Lamentations, Daughter Zion, who was once "the princess among states is become a thrall" (Lam. 1:1). Although she has suffered a great loss— "her people fell by enemy hands with none to help her" (Lam. 1:7)—she becomes a literary monster because of the abuse that she suffers. Understand that the term "monster" in this interpretation does not mean a character of loathing, rather Mill's definition of a character that provokes a sense of disgust, disease, and nausea.[206] These characters are monsters not because of what they have done, but because readers fear what has happened to them and their physical condition. Daughter Zion evokes a feeling of horror because of the graphic descriptions of sexual violence that she suffers at the hands of enemy nations. "Her Sanctuary invaded by nations" (Lam. 1:10), she has become abject to the will of her captors (Lam. 1:11), and she has been abandoned (Lam. 1:2). "Her infants have gone into captivity" (Lam. 1:5), and she has been left to be ravaged by killer. The condition of Daughter Zion is made much more horrifying because she has a female body. In warfare, the worst that can befall a man is death; the worst that can befall a

[206] Mills 410

woman is sexual violence, and while death is quick and final, a woman can be tortured with assault endlessly. That is why Daughter Zion is horrifying.

The pregnant warriors in Jer. 30:6 evoke horror for many reasons, the first being that it is entirely unnatural and ungodly. The natural order has been upended, and chaos has taken control. It signals "a time of trouble for Jacob" (Jer. 30:7) and shows that the end of days is upon them. Similar to the women in labor surrounded by enemies, these men are also objects of horror because they are completely vulnerable to the surrounding Babylonians. They cannot defend themselves, and they are seized by pain so severe, it could only be created as a curse upon the female body (Gen. 3:16). The fact that they have female bodies also implies that they could become victims of sexual violence like Daughter Zion, a truly terrifying reality, and one that male warriors would not normally have to consider. Switching gears, these men are also literary monsters because of unwanted and unintended pregnancy. When a pregnancy is intentional, the growing infant is a blessing and cause of joy for its mother. On the other hand, when a baby is unplanned, especially in a time of war and invasion, the mother is made vulnerable by her uncontrollable physical condition, and subject to the fate of the laboring woman or the grieving mother. The pregnancy becomes a death sentence, or a source of unimaginable sorrow and horror if the child is killed. Modern horror also explores the horror of inexplicable pregnancy in films such as the latest installment of "The Omen,"[207] or "Immaculate."[208] In both horror movies, young and pious nuns find themselves inexplicably pregnant by satanic means. The terror is amplified for these women because they must host the demonic offspring to term, and they culminate in incredibly raw and violent birth scenes, highlighting the natural horror of vaginal

[207] Keith, Levine. *The First Omen*. Film. United States: 20th Century Studios, 2024.
[208] *Immaculate*. Film. United States: Neon, 2024.

birth, and birth by cesarean section. Much like the nuns, these male warriors must be appalled and confused by their feminine condition, as are all onlookers. If the description in Jeremiah does not resonate, I would recommend watching the birth of the anti-Christ in Alex Garland's shocking gender commentary, "Men."[209] The men giving birth become monstrous, and evoke the horror and disgust that Millis explains is the goal of Jeremiah's scenes of violence against the female body.

The enemy nations are the subject of Jeremiah's solemn petition: "Bring on them the day of disaster and shatter them with double destruction" (Jer. 17:18), but they are not identified as the catalyst of the situation. For the desecration of Israel and her Temple, the enemy nations deserve twofold destruction, but God is ultimately the source of Judah's shame and dismay. Although the enemy nations are God's chosen weapons, if there is evil in the community, God is ultimately behind it.[210] Much of the scholarship on Jeremiah identifies the Judahites as the "evil" in the land because of the idolatry and faithlessness that they are accused of—or conversely, the invading nations are seen as the "evil" because they are the ones assailing Judah. Certainly, there is sinfulness in Judah because the needy are oppressed and the people have succumbed to idolatry (Jer. 3:8-10), but in this lament, Jeremiah implies that God is the true source of evil rather than the Judahites. His appeal, "Do not be a cause of dismay to me" (Jer. 17:17) reveals that God is currently the source of his dismay, not his dissenters within the community, or even the enemy nations. The enemy nations have caused suffering, and that is why he calls for their destruction, but he identifies God Himself as the root of the community's pain.[211] This bold allegation is in keeping with the accusation in Jer. 14:8 that God is "like a stranger in the land" or

[209] *Men*. Film. United States, United Kingdom: A24, Entertainment Film Distributors, 2022.
[210] Carroll 122
[211] Carroll 122

a "traveler who stops only for the night." The Lord has neglected his obligation to the Jewish community under the claim that the covenant was broken, but like we discussed earlier, the charges against Judah are vague (Jer. 13:25), and seemingly disproportionate to the punishment. In Jer. 15:18, the prophet similarly complains that God "has been to me like a spring that fails, like waters that cannot be relied on." Although eternal, God has become unreliable. He has cursed the nation with drought, famine, and terrible warfare (Jer. 14:18), and he has given His chosen people, His bride (Jer. 2:1-3) over to the ravaging hands of the Babylonian army, allowing her to be defiled and abused (Lam. 1:10).

The literature of the Hebrew Bible is much more comfortable with identifying God as a source of evil and misfortune than the books of the New Testament. Job is a poignant example of the evil that God can cause, even for the pious. After suffering the loss of his livestock, his children, and his health (Job 1:13-2:1-10), his wife cannot understand his conviction (Job. 2:9). Job's shocking response is: "Should we not accept only good from God and not accept evil?" (Job 2:10). God can be a wealth of great blessings, or He can be a terror to the land. Amos 3:6 asks a similar theodicy question: "Can misfortune come to a town if the Lord has not caused it?" Surely, God has brought terrible misfortune to Judah in the book of Jeremiah, and the prophet and people identify Him as the source in the third lament. Because both good and evil, protection and destruction, survival and death, are doled out by God, Jeremiah calls Him the community's "refuge in a day of calamity" (Jer. 17:17). The people know that God could choose to end the shame and dismay that He has brought to Israel, and that is why while blaming Him for the tragedies, they also appeal to Him as their savior. This communal prayer, offered by the prophet, reflects the complexities in the relationship between God and the exiled Jewish community.

Jer. 18:18-23: Snares & Pits

If the third lament, with its cultic expressions of praise and confidence (Jer. 17:12-14), encouraged optimism, the fourth lament quickly douses it. The lament arises from the social context of Jer. 18:11-12,[212] in which Jeremiah prophesizes against Judah and offers them a final warning to return to God, and the people respond “It is no use. We will keep following our own plans; each of us will act in the willfulness of his evil heart” (Jer. 18:12). This flippant rejection is the breaking point for both God and His prophet, and the statement is followed by a harrowing oracle of doom against Israel (Jer. 18:13-17). The oracle concludes with the vow, “I will look upon their back, not their face, in their day of disaster” (Jer. 18:17). If there were any hope for salvation, the people would have ruined it for themselves by rejecting the prophetic word time and time again. O’Connor explains that this is why Jeremiah is so embittered in this lament.[213] Rather than calling for healing (Jer. 17:14), the prophet now calls for vengeance. He calls upon God to vindicate his suffering, praying, “Oh, give their children over to famine, mow them down by the sword. Let their wives be bereaved of children and husbands. Let their men be struck down by the plague, and their young men be slain in battle by the sword” (Jer. 18:21). Although he interceded for them before (Jer. 18:20), he now calls for their destruction because of how they have rejected him and his prophetic authority. The petition flows logically from the complaint as stated in Jer. 18:19-20.[214] The enemy has dug a pit for Jeremiah (Jer. 18:20) and they have plotted, “Come, let us strike him with the tongue” (Jer. 18:18). Jeremiah’s persecution is directly correlated to his profession as a prophet. The redactional introduction in verse 18 makes it very clear that he is hated because of his prophecies. The only way that Jeremiah can be vindicated

[212] O’Connor 58
[213] O’Connor 58-59
[214] O’Connor 56

now is if the prophecies are fulfilled, and Israel destroyed.[215] In the third lament, Jeremiah claimed "Nor have I longed for the fatal day" (Jer. 17:16), but now that he has faced his final rejection in Jer. 18:12, he calls upon God to "Act against them in Your hour of wrath!" (Jer. 18:23). Far from a communal prayer, this lament shows the breaking point of the prophet's indignation, and a transformation from communal advocate to opponent.

Jeremiah's suffering is the impetus behind all the laments, but the focus of the fourth lament is not Jeremiah's persecution, rather his petition for divine intervention.[216] His suffering is only mentioned directly in Jer. 18:20 when he asks, "Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for me."[217] His complaint is that although he has not evaded being a shepherd in God's service (Jer. 17:16), and he has always obeyed his commandment to prophesy (Jer. 1:17), he has been repaid by evil. God's failure to fulfill the divine word has left Jeremiah a target in the community, and his enemies have dug a pit for him so that they no longer must listen to his prophecies (Jer. 18:18). However, because the petition for intervention that we see in Jer. 18:21-23 comprises most of the lament, it indicates a shift in tone from one of complaint and accusation to a subtle statement of confidence in the Lord.[218] Jeremiah is embittered and frustrated with the stubborn people and the delay in punishment, but he is confident nonetheless that God will ultimately vindicate him. If he did not have faith that God would vindicate him, he would not waste his energy and reputation by listing all the terrible ways in which he wants the Israelites to suffer. O'Connor notes that some question the authenticity of Jer. 18:21-23 because the excessive calls for violence appear inappropriate of the prophet, but there is no literary basis

[215] O'Connor 56
[216] O'Connor 57
[217] O'Connor 57
[218] O'Connor 57

for eliminating these verses.[219] Much like the gratuitous violence of the OAN, these verses may be uncomfortable for modern readers, but they are still a valuable part of the text. Part of this dissonance between prophetic expectation may come from the fact that the Old Testament ethic of vengeance against the enemy is compared to the New Testament's ethic of Christian love for the enemy.[220] In my opinion, it is best not to make moral judgments on the content of the book, and to rather appreciate it for the unapologetically human and honest work of art that it is. Regardless, this lament continues the shift in focus from complaint to petition that began in the third lament (Jer. 17:18).[221] Even though Jeremiah's prophecies have not yet been fulfilled and his relationship with the community appears to be worse than ever (Jer. 18:11-12), his confidence that God will ultimately vindicate him is growing, as can be seen by his lengthy petition in Jer. 18:21-23.

The fourth lament does convey an air of assurance that divine vindication is forthcoming, but nevertheless, Jeremiah does voice his frustration with the current situation. In exasperation, he asks, "Should good be repaid with evil?" (Jer. 18:20). At a first glance, one might consider this question rhetorical as questions like this are plentiful in Psalms (Psalm 37:8-22; 52), Job (Job 9:22-24; 31), and even Ecclesiastes (Ecc. 4:1-3). It is also reminiscent of the Theodicy questions in chapter 12 where Jeremiah asks, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease?" (Jer. 12:1). In this first lament, the question is vague, and there is no indication that it is directed at his enemies in Israel. In the fourth lament though, the question just as much practical as it is rhetorical, and it arises directly from the persecution that

[219] O'Connor 54-55
[220] O'Connor 56
[221] O'Connor 57

the prophet is facing from his enemies as described in Jer. 18:18-20.[222] We know that this question deals with Jeremiah and his persecution because of both the editorial addition in Jer. 18:18 and the verse immediately following: "Yet they have dug a pit for me" (Jer. 18:20). O'Connor also notes the judicial tone of this lament as Jeremiah appeals to God to hear his case "And take note of what my enemies say!" (Jer. 18:19).[223] Notably, the emendation of "what my enemies say" is "my case."[224] This change in language would make Jeremiah's appeal into, "Listen to me, O Lord—and take note of my case!" becoming even more overtly judicial in tone. Initially it sounds as though the lawsuit is against his enemies, those who have dug a pit for him (Jer. 18:20), however, considering his previous case against the Righteous Judge in Jer. 12:1-3, it becomes apparent that the suit is directed against God Himself.[225] Because God is the cosmic puppeteer, in control of when—or even if—His word comes to fruition, He is the cause of Jeremiah's current state of shame.[226] God is also a witness to the plots of the wicked against Jeremiah, and yet, He still has not taken action to vindicate His prophet.[227] With that said, accusations are not the focus of this lament, which serves primarily as a petition for divine intervention.[228] God's intervention would ease the suffering of Jeremiah by establishing him as a true prophet, but it would also demonstrate the power of the divine word to those who doubt it.[229] God is omnipotent, and enactment of the oracles of doom against Judah, and later the OAN, would cause all to recognize Him as the One True God (Deut. 32:16-17).

[222] O'Connor 58
[223] See also Amos 7:1-6
[224] JSB 952
[225] O'Connor 58
[226] O'Connor 58
[227] O'Connor 58
[228] O'Connor 58
[229] O'Connor 58

In terms of form-critical analysis, this lament follows the same structure as the first two.[230] Directly following the editorial prose in Jer. 18:18, the prophet's prayer begins with a direct address in verse 19.[231] He implores God to listen not only to his prayer, but to the words of his enemies (Jer. 18:19). The petition that he will make in Jer. 18:21-23 is justified by the fact that his enemies are plotting to kill him for his prophecies (Jer. 18:18). Using similar judicial language to the third lament in which Jeremiah appealed to God's omniscience in a plea of innocence (Jer. 17:16), Jeremiah reminds God that he has stood before Him before to present the case of the Israelites (Jer. 18:20).[232] Now though, Jeremiah is not a defense lawyer, but a prosecutor, and he condemns the people for how they have treated him (Jer. 18:22-23). Jeremiah's plea of innocence in the second half of verse 20 is legitimate, because although now he seeks the people's destruction, he has always done what is right in the eyes of God, and he has tried to save them, but they attacked him for his efforts. The complaint portion of the lament is broken up throughout the poem, serving as a consistent reminder to God and readers that Jeremiah's anger is righteous. O'Connor identifies complaints in verses 20ab, 22cd, and 23a.[233] In 20ab, he complains that his good has been repaid by God with evil. His enemies dig pits for him and seek to kill him for his oracles that God has commanded him to speak. The second complaint in 22cd similarly complains of those who have "dug a pit to trap me, and laid snares for my feet." In 23a, Jeremiah appeals to God's omniscience claiming, "You know their plots to kill me." Although this line is a complaint, it can also be read as an accusation against God, like

[230] O'Connor 59
[231] O'Connor 59
[232] O'Connor 59
[233] O'Connor 59

the Theodicy question in Jer. 18:20. God knows how deeply Jeremiah suffers at the hands of his opponents, and yet, He has not interceded on his prophet's behalf.

The petition for intervention in Jer. 18:21-23 is made against the people, but God ultimately has the responsibility of vindicating Jeremiah by fulfilling His word. Looking at the thematic structure of the lament, it begins with an editorial prose introduction of the two portions of poetry that follow in Jer. 18:19-23.[234] The conflict—Jeremiah's enemies seeking his life—is explained in detail, and it is made clear that they hate him because of his prophetic vocation. Verses 19-21 expand on the theme of verse 18 and offers a plea of innocence.[235] Finally, Jer. 18:21-23 are his petition for a reversal of fate between himself and his enemies.[236] Echoing Jer. 17:18, these verses call for swift vengeance against his enemies. Just as the people have sought to kill him, he asks that marauders be brought against them (Jer. 18:22) so that they can suffer as he has. This lament, coming from a place of embitterment and exasperation, could very easily be read as an individual lament and petition against the Judahites. The (likely Deuteronomic) prose additions in Jer. 18:11-12 imply that it is the hard-hearted people at the center of Jeremiah's suffering. When reading heavily edited texts like Jeremiah, it is critical to keep editorial intentions in mind, and to imagine other contexts in which a subjective poem like Jer. 18:19-23 could be read.

Jer. 18:18-23: An Outcry

Interpreting the fourth lament as communal may seem like a stretch at first, considering Jeremiah's ultra-violent and controversial petition for the destruction of the Judahites in Jer.

[234] O'Connor 54-55
[235] O'Connor 55
[236] O'Connor 55

18:21-23. Because his enemies have dug a pit for him and laid snares for his feet (Jer. 18:22), the prophet calls upon God to “give their children over to famine, mow them down by the sword” (Jer. 18:21). As O’Connor notes, some question the authenticity of these verses because of their brutality.[237] Admittedly, they are uncomfortable to read, and it is terrible to imagine that a prophet of God would call for the destruction of a people he has fought so hard to save (Jer. 15:1). The redactional amendments (Jer. 18:11-12 and Jer. 18:18) help to relieve some of the cognitive dissonance by identifying the Judahites as fierce opposition to Jeremiah’s prophetic mission, but it is still difficult to rationalize that Jeremiah would advocate for the annihilation of his own nation. The dialogue of the people, especially in Jer. 18:12, should very clearly alert readers that it is an editorial addition, designed to further the Deuteronomic motif of people against prophet. The assertion, “each of us will act in the willfulness of his evil heart” (Jer. 18:12) is so clearly redactional manipulation that I feel foolish even pointing it out as such. Similarly, the editorial introduction to the lament in Jer. 18:18 expresses that all of Jeremiah’s enemies, the Judahites, seek to kill Jeremiah because they no longer want to listen to his oracles. Considering the historical context that at this time Jerusalem was facing many exterior and interior threats like besiegement, famine, disease, and drought, it is logically very unlikely that the community would have decided to focus all their attention on a prophet, especially an outsider with no authority.

With all of this in mind, it is fair to deduce that the identification of Jeremiah’s enemies in this lament is not the community, but the enemy nations. Outside of the editorial introduction, the antagonist is only referred to as “my enemies” (Jer. 18:19) or “they.” It is much more fitting with the rest of the book and the concluding OAN that these petitions be directed against foreign

[237] O’Connor 54-55

nations than Jeremiah's fellow Israelites. This is consistent with the conspiracy against Israel motif discussed earlier. The enemy is unidentifiable because they are everywhere: shadowy figures seeking the destruction of God's chosen people always loom nearby. Identifying the subject of Jer. 18:21-23 as the enemy nations also draws a connection to the similarly polemic Oracles Against Nations. For example, the Oracle Against Egypt in chapter 46 talks about the total and utter destruction of the nation and her people; "I will wipe out towns and those who live in them" (Jer. 46:8). Like in Jer. 18:21-23, the nation is punished with total destruction because of their hand crimes against Israel. All the nations that participate in conspiracy against Israel are ultimately punished, and in the OAN, we see the fulfillment of the petition made by the community in verses like Jer. 18:21-23 and Jer. 17:18.

The lament presents Jeremiah as aligned with the community, but it also reveals tension between the prophet and community leaders. The editorial introduction states, "Come let us devise a plot against Jeremiah—for instruction shall not fail from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor oracle from the prophet" (Jer. 18:18). This statement implies that there are priests, prophets, and wisemen—all of whom would have been highly influential in the community—preaching and advising against Jeremiah's message. The confrontation between Jeremiah and the prophet Hananiah is a perfect example of this dynamic, in which false prophets undermine the word of God. In this scene, Hananiah preaches against Jeremiah in the Temple, "in the presence of the priests and all the people" (Jer. 28:1), claiming that God will "break the yoke of the king of Babylon" (Jer. 28:4) in only two years (Jer. 28:3). He then "removed the bar from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, and broke it; and Hananiah said in the presence of all the people, "So I will break the yoke of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon" (Jer. 28:10-11). Hananiah's words and actions are meant to belittle Jeremiah publicly and humiliate him to the point that he no longer

prophesizes, just as the plots in the fourth lament seek to silence him (Jer. 18:18). Hananiah and the other false prophets are depicted as having great influence over the community, and they use their platform to disparage Jeremiah rather than save the people. They steal the opportunity to repent from the people by telling them ""'All is well, all is well," when nothing is well" (Jer. 6:14). Carroll explains that Jeremiah's controversial prophecies made him the target of three major social groups: priests, prophets, and wisemen.[238]

For modern readers, it can be difficult to grasp just how influential these individuals would have been in the community. Support from them would be the equivalent of a mega-celebrity endorsement, and if they opposed you before the masses, it would have been nearly impossible to gain traction. They hate Jeremiah not because he has committed a crime or harmed anyone, but because his oracles of doom contradict their oracles of peace, which make them popular and powerful in the community. An example of this in the story is in chapter 26 when Jeremiah is seized by "the priests and prophets and all the people" for claiming that Judah will be destroyed like the city of Shiloh (Jer. 26:7-9). In this encounter, the corrupt priests and false prophets use their leverage over the crowd to try to execute Jeremiah (Jer. 26:11). Because Jer. 18:18 is Deuteronomic redactional material, the enemy here is identified as Judah's people and leaders, and so in this case, it is appropriate to identify Jeremiah's enemies as the community rather than the enemy nations. All the corrupt society is in opposition to the holy, true prophet of God.[239] In this particular verse, Jeremiah is very clearly persecuted by the faithless Judahites for his prophecies because they challenge the false prophecies of peace that are being spewed at the people.

---

[238] Carroll 124
[239] Carroll 124

As we see in the laments, Jeremiah suffers greatly because of his enemies. Whether the enemy is interpreted as his oppressors in Judah or foreign nations seeking to destroy Israel, they cause much spiritual and emotional pain for the prophet. Jeremiah is as blameless a protagonist as one could ask for; he obeys God's word (Jer. 17:16), he intercedes and prays for his community (Jer. 7:16), and is even compared to the likes of Moses and Samuel (Jer. 15:1), two of the greatest men in Jewish history. Sadly, it is a stereotypical theme in psalms of lament that the righteous and upright figure becomes the victim of evil.[240] Carroll explains that the complaint, "Should good be repaid with evil?" (Jer. 18:20) reflects the conflict between the good and the godless typical of lament psalms.[241] Jeremiah offers a statement of innocence while reminding God, "Remember how I stood before you to plead in their behalf, to turn Your anger away from them!" (Jer. 18:20, see also Jer. 15:11). The act of praying and interceding for the people is cited as the good act that Jeremiah has done that has been repaid with evil.[242] Inspiration for this lament was probably drawn from other psalms of lament. Psalm 35, for example, shows many similarities to the language and themes in the fourth lament. It reads, "For without cause they hid a net to trap me; without cause they dug a pit for me" (Psalm 35:7), and "they repay evil for good, seeking my bereavement. Yet when they were ill, my dress was a sackcloth" (Psalm 35:13). This second verse is particularly compelling when drawing a connection to the texts that may have inspired Jeremiah and his editors. In our analysis, we are reading the laments as communal, and the evildoer as the foreign nations; remember that Jeremiah was appointed prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5 and Jer. 1:10). Jeremiah, in that way, was designated to serve all of mankind, not just Israel, yet his service and empathy are repaid with

[240] Carroll 124
[241] Carroll 124
[242] Carroll 124

evil. Judah and Jeremiah are both tortured by shadowy conspirators. Psalm 56 similarly complains, "All day long they cause me grief in my affairs, they plan only evil against me. They plot, they lie in ambush; they watch my every move, hoping for my death" (Psalm 56:7-8). Only God can act as a refuge for Israel against the enemy nations (Jer. 17:17), and the prophet appeals to Him, "Do not blot out their guilt from Your presence. Let them be made to stumble before You" (Jer. 18:23). In the Oracles Against Nations, Jeremiah's plea, "Act against them in Your hour of wrath!" (Jer. 18:23) is finally answered (Jer. 46:28), and the shame of defeat and exile is washed away by the newfound shame of Israel's enemies (Jer. 17:18). They will be shattered with double destruction (Jer. 17:18), and Jeremiah and his people will be retroactively vindicated.

Jer. 20:7-18: The Whispers of the Crowd

Just as the fourth lament's call for vengeance (Jer. 18:21-23) startles readers with its unflinching appeals for violence, the disunity of the fifth lament (Jer. 20:7-18) can raise questions about the authenticity of the text.[243] Basing assumptions on literary exegesis on psychological speculations, many scholars find the contrasts in emotion too sharp for one original literary unit.[244] The lament authentically showcases the full range of human emotions that one might feel in a time of crisis, moving from helplessness (Jer. 20:7-10), to confidence in God (Jer. 20:11-13), to existential despair (Jer. 20:14-18).[245] Consideration of the text as a cohesive literary unit should not be discounted on the psychological state of Jeremiah, firstly, because it would be incredibly lazy and negligent critical analysis, but also because the book is known for embracing human emotion, even when it is uncomfortable. Messy, unpleasant, and

[243] O'Connor 64
[244] O'Connor 64-5
[245] O'Connor 64

even upsetting at times, Jeremiah's words are honest reflections of human emotion. The psychological states of both Jeremiah and God are showcased throughout the book, even when it may conflict with popular theological ideas. The best example of this is the depiction of God and prophet in states of unbridled rage. Jeremiah calls for the death of his enemies and their families in the fourth lament, just as God vows to strike the Judahites down "By the blazing wrath of the Lord!" (Jer. 12:13). The existence of the OAN alone suggests that the author is vindictive and blinded by hate for enemy nations, to the point that they contradict the rest of the text at times. Jeremiah and God are also depicted as overcome by grief at many points throughout the book as they both reckon with the destruction of the nation. My mind always returns to Jeremiah's haunting proclamation, "Oh, that my head were water, my eyes a fount of tears! Then I would weep day and night for the slain of my poor people" (Jer. 8:23); one could even attribute this line to God, as it is unclear who the speaker is. God's dramatic monologues, such as Jer. 2:6-8, also suggest divine grief. God mourns the fact that He has been forgotten by His people, who have abandoned His love in favor of false gods (Jer. 2:8).

The book is also content to sit unapologetically with the duality of emotion. One can feel wrath, while also feeling empathy, or nostalgia while in enraged by betrayal. The laments overall showcase the paradox of the human heart as Jeremiah looks for comfort in the very being that has caused his suffering. He exalts God, begging him for healing (Jer. 17:12-14), and then cites Him as both a cause of dismay and a refuge in a day of calamity (Jer. 17:17). Emotions can co-exist—or shift rapidly—and although theologians are uncomfortable with this inconsistency, it is a reality of both the human experience, and a common experience in poetry, especially poetry dealing with trauma. Sylvia Plath's poem, "Daddy"[246] is an excellent example of the conflicting

[246] Plath, Sylvia. *Daddy*. HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1999.

feelings that can reside in a poem as the speaker reflects on her complicated relationship with her abusive father. Plath uses metaphors and imagery of Nazis and Hitler to convey the cruelty of her father, while also admitting that she tried to take her own life after his death to return to him. Just as the girl in the poem experiences the full range of emotions from hatred to grief, to depression, to empowerment, Jeremiah also expresses breadth of emotions in his laments.

While the psychological variations in the lament are interesting and worthy of attention, they are not a determining feature for interpreting the text's meaning. The laments are theological texts, but they are also poetry and prose, and I believe that the most appropriate way to analyze any text is through New Criticism. This is an intrinsic approach to literary analysis, seeking meaning through the text, rather than looking to the personal life of its author or the reaction it evokes.[247] Interpretation of the lament as only biographical insight into Jeremiah and his spiritual and psychological struggles, as some scholars suggest, is a great insult to the poetic skill of its scribal authors and redactors. For that reason, O'Connor dismisses the text as purely psychological insight, and conducts a form critical analysis of the unit as a psalm of individual lament. The fifth lament begins following a confrontation between Jeremiah and the chief officer of the Temple, Pashhur. When the priest Pashhur hears Jeremiah's prophesy, he has him flogged and imprisoned (Jer. 20:1-2) Upon his release, Jeremiah delivers a harrowing oracle against Pashhur and all of Judah, condemning them to captivity and death in Babylonian captivity (Jer. 20:3-6). The oracle identifies Pashhur as a false prophet (Jer. 20:6), which is notable because some scholars identify the antagonist of the fifth lament as false prophets.[248] The poem then begins with an invocation that also serves as a complaint: "You enticed me, O Lord, and I was

[247] Mambrol, Nasrullah. "New Criticism." Literary Theory and Criticism, May 30, 2021. https://literariness.org/2021/05/30/new-criticism/.
[248] O'Connor 74

enticed; You overpowered me and you prevailed" (Jer. 20:7).[249] Jeremiah's complaints are that God has mistreated him (Jer. 20:7), and that Jeremiah's enemies have acted wickedly against him.[250] His enemies jeer at him for his prophesies, and they wait for him to stumble, plotting, "Perhaps he can be entrapped, and we can prevail against him and take our vengeance on him" (Jer. 20:10). The unnamed enemies are all of his "[supposed] friends" (Jer. 20:20)—recall the "men of Anathoth" from Jeremiah's hometown in Jer. 11:21-23—making the betrayal doubly hurtful.

He also laments his inability to stop prophesying (Jer. 20:9), claiming that "the word of the Lord causes me constant disgrace and contempt" (Jer. 20:8). Jeremiah's offensive prophecies have made him a laughingstock (Jer. 20:7), but it burns him like fire, and he is unable to hold it in (Jer. 20:9).[251] After voicing his grievances, Jeremiah offers a confession of confidence,[252] assuring readers—any maybe even himself—that "the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior" causing his enemies to stumble (Jer. 20:11). He then petitions God to lay His retribution upon Jeremiah's enemies, just as the prophets lays his case before Him (Jer. 20:12).[253] The final element of psalms of lament that O'Connor identifies is a command to praise in Jer. 20:13,[254] which doubles as a statement of trust because it implies that Jeremiah trusts that God will rescue him "from the hands of evildoers" (Jer. 20:13). The identification of this poem as a psalm of lament is crucial, especially in the face of diminishment as inconsequential biographical material, is critical to understand how the psalm supports the author's rhetorical purpose.

---

[249] O'Connor 66
[250] O'Connor 66
[251] O'Connor 72
[252] O'Connor 66
[253] O'Connor 66
[254] O'Connor 66

In the lament, two sources are identified as the cause of Jeremiah's suffering: God and the enemies who have been persecuting Jeremiah throughout the laments. These adversaries feed one another in a vicious cycle. As God commands Jeremiah to prophesy oracles of doom (Jer. 20:8), his enemies mock him (Jer. 20:7), and the longer that God stalls on vindicating Jeremiah through the punishment of Judah, the worse the harassment becomes. Jeremiah is not respected as a true prophet because the prophetic word has not come to pass, but rather than fulfilling the prophecies and ending Jeremiah's persecution, God continues to force Jeremiah to prophesy with no divine action. Jeremiah laments that he has been deceived,[255] and God becomes an opponent rather than a refuge (Jer. 17:17). The invocation at the beginning of the lament, "You enticed me, O Lord, and I was enticed; You overpowered me and You prevailed" (Jer. 20:7), claims that God has deceived Jeremiah about his prophetic vocation, turning him into a false prophet by domination of the body and spirit.[256] Because his words have not come to fruition, Jeremiah fears that he has been reduced to a false prophet, like the prophets of Ahab in 1 Kings 22. The similarities in language between these passages suggest that Jeremiah was familiar with a version of the text and crafted his accusation in Jer. 20:7 in reference to this passage. 1 Kings 22:22 reads, "And he [the lying spirit] replied, "I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his [Ahab's] prophets." Then He [God] said, "You will entice and you will prevail."" Jeremiah fears that he too has been enticed by a lying spirit (Jer. 20:7), and this his enemies' accusation that he is a false prophet has become true.

The implication that God has become a lying spirit here is a reversal of the call narrative in which God promised His prophet, "They will attack you, but they shall not overcome you" (Jer.

[255] O'Connor 71
[256] O'Connor 71

1:19), because now God Himself has "overpowered" Jeremiah by enticing him with false oracles (Jer. 20:7).[257] Like Jer. 11:21 and Jer. 18:18, Jer. 20:8 makes it clear that Jeremiah faces ridicule and persecution from his enemies as a direct result of his prophecies. "The word of the Lord causes me constant disgrace and contempt" (Jer. 20:8), Jeremiah complains. Jeremiah's message of "Lawlessness and rapine!" (Jer. 20:8) is the cause of his persecution and spurs his accusation that God has deceived him like a lying spirit in Jer. 20:7.[258] God has had just as much of hand in Jeremiah's suffering as his enemies have, and Jeremiah seems to hold even more bitterness towards God because He could easily alleviate his suffering by bringing the prophetic word to fruition. That is why Jeremiah's laments conclude with a petition for vindication (Jer. 20:12), because it is within His power to end Jeremiah's oppression.

It is clear from the accusations of deception in Jer. 20:7 that God is the figure that has enticed Jeremiah, but the identity of his persecutors is less obvious. They are referred to in collective terms such as "everyone" (Jer. 20:7), the crowd (Jer. 20:10), "my persecutors" (Jer. 20:11), but at one point, they are called "All my [supposed] friends" (Jer. 20:10). Jeremiah is a mostly solitary figure, aside from his interactions with Baruch and Ebed-melech (Jer. 38:7-13), so to hear him reference other friends seems out of the blue. This line could be in reference to a shared homeland, as Jer. 11:21-23 identifies "the men of Anathoth" who plotted to kill Jeremiah. These men, sharing heritage and Levitical faith with Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1), should have been an ally to the prophet, but instead they sought to humiliate and kill him. O'Connor identifies the expression אנדש שלדמי which Jeremiah describes his enemies with as an idiom expressing friendship.[259] Psalm 41:10 uses this same expression, saying, "My ally in whom I trusted, even he who shares

[257] O'Connor 71
[258] O'Connor 73
[259] O'Connor 74

my bread, has been utterly false to me." The same אנדש phrase is used by Jeremiah in the context of the false prophets of peace (Jer. 6:14),[260] which would imply that his "friends of peace" are his "enemies of peace."[261] The false prophets may proclaim a peaceful message, but they seek violence against those, like Jeremiah, who oppose them. Just as Jeremiah seeks retribution upon them (Jer. 20:12), they seek vengeance against him (Jer. 20:10) because they consider *him* to be a false prophet. This would align with the marginal speculation that the cursing poem in Jer. 20:14-18 is born out of the context of his conflicts with false prophets.[262] Jeremiah's claim in Jer. 15:10 that, "I have not lent, and I have not borrowed; yet everyone curses me" could be referring to his refusal to borrow or lend prophetic materials within the community of prophets.[263] The verses may not refer to loans and almsgiving, rather, the independence of Jeremiah's own prophetic material,[264] which would have made him a target among the other prophets. The exact context of the conflict between Jeremiah and his enemies in Jer. 20:10 is less significant than the identification that the conflict exists because of the content of his prophecies, and the fact that they have not yet been fulfilled. The community and the other prophets consider him a laughingstock and jeer at him (Jer. 20:7) because God has not acted on the oracles He has placed in Jeremiah's mouth.

The call to prophesy is impossible to deny. Although prophecy may be considered a gift, it was—by many prophets—more of a curse than a blessing. Jeremiah bitterly recalls his recruitment, saying, "You enticed me, O Lord, and I was enticed; You overpowered me and You prevailed" (Jer. 20:7). Jeremiah's laments do become more cynical as the book progresses, but

[260] O'Connor 74
[261] O'Connor 74
[262] O'Connor 79
[263] O'Connor 79
[264] O'Connor 79

his call to prophesy was never a friendly one. When God announces that Jeremiah is to be a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:4-5), Jeremiah attempts to deny the call by claiming, "I don't know how to speak, for I am still a boy" (Jer. 1:6). God immediately counters his claim by commanding him not to say that and ordering, "Go wherever I send you and speak whatever I command you" (Jer. 1:7). God then warns him, "Arise and speak to them all that I command you. Do not break down before them, lest I break you before them" (Jer. 1:17). If there were any hope that Jeremiah could deny the call to prophesy, it ended here as it became clear that if he did not do as God said, he would be killed. Jeremiah's refuge (Jer. 17:17) is no friend. Jeremiah is not the only prophet depicted as trying to evade his prophetic mission. Jonah takes to the sea in an attempt to hide from his calling (Jon. 1:3), and Moses asks, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?" (Exod. 3:11). Resisting the call to prophecy is a natural human response, but Jeremiah is the only prophet who God threatens when he resists. I would speculate that this element of hostility within the Theophany is meant to reflect the contentious relationship between God and Israel while the people were exiled. Jeremiah's accounts of his resistance to God's word in Jer. 20:8-9 also show his emphatic desire to abandon his prophetic calling.[265] The fiery wrath of God's word has caused him great suffering, to the point that he tries to forget God entirely, [266] but his efforts are futile, and he is overwhelmed by a being much more powerful than himself.[267]

Despite his attempts to stop speaking in the divine name, he laments, "I could not hold it in, I was helpless" (Jer. 20:9). His inability to resist prophesying God's "raging fire" (Jer. 20:9) has disastrous consequences for Jeremiah, who immediately hears "the whispers of the crowd—

[265] O'Connor 73
[266] O'Connor 72
[267] O'Connor 73

Terror all around" (Jer. 20:9). God has become a terror to Jeremiah, a cause of dismay (Jer. 17:17), because He will neither bring about the promised punishment, or allow Jeremiah to stop delivering oracles of doom, leaving Jeremiah trapped in a dangerous limbo between the hateful people and the wrathful God. It is because of this predicament that Jeremiah utters the cursing poem (Jer. 20:14-18). The cursing poem is a testament to the hurt that Jeremiah has suffered at the hands of God and his enemies; it curses the day of his birth and his current circumstances.[268] The day of his birth is mentioned (Jer. 20:14-15), but the real cause of Jeremiah's misery is his life, and the unique suffering caused by prophethood.[269] Jeremiah's enemies in the community torment him, but God is to blame as the one that designated him as a prophet from within the womb (Jer. 1:5). When God preordained Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations, He also preordained him to a life of suffering and contention, trapped between God and man with no clear ally. Jeremiah's parents were overjoyed by his birth (Jer. 20:15), but now he is condemned to celibacy (Jer. 16:2) and without a friend in the world. The comparison of Jeremiah's birth, when he was loved and had family, to now, when even his friends seek his life (Jer. 20:10) shows how God has burdened him over the years with his designation as prophet.

The book of Jeremiah is one of great suffering and hardship, but ultimately, it is a story centered around hope: hope for the future, and hope for humanity's renewal. After the people are scattered in foreign nations, God promises, "They shall come with weeping, and with compassion I will guide them" (Jer. 31:9) and "He who scattered Israel will gather them" (Jer. 31:10). Just as there is hope for Israel through the OAN and the joyful promise of the New Covenant, there is hope for Jeremiah's vindication in the laments. Jer. 20:11 expresses

[268] O'Connor 76
[269] O'Connor 76

confidence through praise, saying, "But the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior; therefore my persecutors shall stumble; they shall not prevail and shall not succeed." These lines suggest that Jeremiah does not actually believe that God has deceived him[270] because they reverse the claims made in his complaints. In Jer. 20:7, Jeremiah implied that the call narrative was deceitful because God has not actually protected or vindicated him against his enemies. In the call narrative, God promised His prophet, "I am with you—declares the Lord—to save you" (Jer. 1:19, and although Jer. 20:7 suggested that that oath was sworn falsely, the statement of confidence here states that God is, in fact, with Jeremiah to protect him. Similarly, in Jer. 20:7, Jeremiah complains that God has overpowered him and prevailed over him, but in Jer. 20:11, he claims that his persecutors will not prevail over him (because God protects him). Jeremiah was mocked and shamed for his oracles of doom (Jer. 20:7), but now it is his persecutors who "shall be utterly shamed with a humiliation for all time, which shall not be forgotten" (Jer. 20:11). The role reversal that takes place here serves as a prelude for the divine plan that is about to take place in which Jeremiah will be vindicated and his enemies will be punished. Therefore, this lament serves an argument for the legitimacy of Jeremiah's claim as a true prophet because he has suffered insult for his offensive prophecies.

It is emphasized throughout the book that prophets of doom are the true prophets (Jer. 26:20), and the prophets of peace are false prophets (Jer. 28:8-9), so the focus on the destructive message of Jeremiah's prophecies in the fifth lament is a subtle argument for his claim to prophetic authority. The suffering that he endures only strengthens his legitimacy as a true prophet, and he reminds readers that God tests the righteous (Jer. 20:12).[271] It would have also been recognized

[270] O'Connor 74
[271] O'Connor 74

as the sign of a true prophet by Deuteronomists, who favorited the prophet persecuted by community motif. The appeal to innocence in Jer. 20:12 echoes the sentiments of Jer. 17:16, which claimed. "You know the utterances of my lips." The designation, You "Who examine the heart and the mind" serves a similar purpose by appealing to God's omniscience as evidence of his innocence. God knows His prophet perfectly: every word that he has spoken, his heart, and his mind, and knows that the words his proclaims are truly the words of God. The fifth lament, like those before it, serves as a claim to Jeremiah's prophetic authority, while underlining his suffering at the hands of the community, which would have been a highly respected motif by Jeremiah's Deuteronomic redactors. Overall, O'Connor argues that the laments establish the authenticity of Jeremiah's claim as a true prophet of God and distinguishes him from the false prophets who persecute him.[272]

Jer. 20:7-18: Terror All Around

Carroll's analysis of the fifth lament begins similar to O'Connor's with a deconstruction of the allegation "You enticed me, O Lord, and I was enticed; You overpowered me and you prevailed" (Jer. 20:7). Both scholars agree that the lines could be in reference to Jeremiah's fears that he was tricked into being a false prophet,[273] but O'Connor dismisses the possibility of a sexual connotation. Conversely, Carroll gives credit to the theory, and explains that the word used for enticement or deceit here is *pittītanī*, derived from the stem *pth*, which means "to be simple."[274] The verb can refer to the divine seduction of a prophet, or it can refer to the deceit, enticement, or seduction of a virgin (Exod. 22:15).[275] In the laments, Jeremiah tends to describe

[272] O'Connor 85
[273] Carroll 126 and O'Connor 71
[274] Carroll 125
[275] Carroll 125

himself in terms of helplessness and innocence; for example, when he claims "For I was like a docile lamb led to the slaughter" (Jer. 11:19), such phrases give the impression that he is a passive actor in his own story. God, on the other hand, is described as the "divine machismo,"[276] and Jeremiah refers to Him as "a mighty warrior" (Jer. 20:11), and overpowering (Jer. 20:7). The understandings of *pth* as sexually charged and dealing with the deception of prophets are not mutually exclusive in this case, as Jeremiah feels both emasculated and deceived as a prophet in this lament. This is not the first time that the metaphor of domestic relations is used in the book. After the call narrative, for example, God recalls the intimate marital relationship that He and Israel shared in the wilderness (Jer. 2:2), but the mood here is very different from what we see in Jer. 20:7. In the lament, there is no mention of mutual adoration and sacred covenant—there is only a claim that the prophet was physically overpowered—implying that the sexual metaphor here is one of rape rather than seduction.[277]

Although I promised to avoid falling too much into psychoanalysis, the argument could also be made that this allegation of assault is in line with Jeremiah's discomfort with sexuality.[278] Recall that Jeremiah was sworn to a life of celibacy with the command, "You are not to marry and not to have sons and daughters in this place" (Jer. 16:2). This story, along with the language of sexual assault against a virgin (Jer. 20:7), implies that by rendering him a false prophet, God has assaulted Jeremiah like one might assault a virgin. Young (Jer. 1:6), and vulnerable (Jer. 11:19), the somewhat feminine Jeremiah was easily overcome by the pinnacle of power and masculinity: God. There is also a common trend in prophetic books where the prophets seem to be obsessed with, and overly hostile towards sexuality. The celibate priest Jeremiah condemns

[276] Carroll 125
[277] Carroll 125
[278] Carroll 125-6

the pagan fertility cults (Jer. 2:23-25) just as his predecessor Hosea uses metaphors of promiscuity to criticize idolators (Hos. 2:13-15). Among scholars, there is much speculation that Hosea's preoccupation with purity is likely reflective of a deep-seated sex addiction, or at least an obsession.[279] Of course, this is not intended to suggest that the writings of Hosea and Jeremiah are born from depravity, but because sexual misconduct is a major theme in these books, it is our due diligence, as readers, to consider the implicit biases such a view carries.

Jeremiah's prophecies have caused him so much suffering that the prophet reveals he tried to silence himself, but it was impossible (Jer. 20:8-9). Every time he opened his mouth, the word of God would blurt out, "Lawlessness and rapine!" (Jer. 20:8). Jeremiah tried not to mention God or speak in his name (Jer. 20:9), but concedes, "But [His word] was like a raging fire in my heart, shut up in my bones; I could not hold it in, I was helpless" (Jer. 20:9). Raging fire or burning is often used as a metaphor for God's wrath (Jer. 7:20), and we see here that in an attempt to douse the fire, Jeremiah burns himself up from the inside. The laments, although an ancient form of prayer, are also expressions of emotion; this verse could be read symbolically as the importance of expressing and processing your emotions, especially after a tragedy like the Babylonian invasion and exile. The laments and the deathscapes of Jeremiah can be revisited time and time again until the grief has been processed, so that the exiled community can heal, even while they are in another land.[280] Jer. 20:8-9 can also be interpreted as a representation of the Jewish community subdued into silence about their God while they are in exile.[281] Trapped in Egypt and Babylon, the people are separated from the Temple, the physical residence of God, while those around them worship idols. The danger of cultural and religious erasure was a very real threat for

[279] Heschel 506-7
[280] Mills 407
[281] Carroll 126

communities in exile, and this is showcased in the confrontation account with the worshippers of the Egyptian goddess, the "Queen of Heaven" (Jer. 44). In horror, Jeremiah learns that the exiles are practicing paganism by making offerings to the Queen of Heaven, and he offers an oracle of doom against them: "I will take the remnant of Judah who turned their faces toward the land of Egypt, to go and sojourn there, and they shall be utterly consumed in the land of Egypt" (Jer. 44:12). The explicit use of the word consumed here is in reference to death (Jer. 44:12-13), but it could also be symbolic of the assimilation of the Israelites into Egyptian culture. Throughout the book, God mourns that He has been forgotten by the people (Jer. 2:32), and this has in turn caused them to forget the Law by sinning and being unfaithful. Jer. 20:8-9 could easily be interpreted as either an individual lament, or a communal lament because Jeremiah and the exiled community were both likely pressured into silence by their enemies.[282] These verses show the need for conversation on the question of whether the laments are intended as communal or individual; the different interpretations attribute different meanings to the text. Interpreting the lament as both an individual and communal psalm when read under different lenses is also valuable and pays homage to the complex rhetorical aims of the text throughout history.

Another verse that Carroll pays particular interest to is "I heard the whispers of the crowd—Terror all around" (Jer. 20:10). Like Jer. 20:8-9, these lines can be interpreted as a reference to Jeremiah's personal struggles, or those of the Judahite community. The text could be implying that the crowd imposes terror on Jeremiah, or that after hearing the prophet's message of doom, the crowd is terrified. Looking at it from the angle of an individual lament, the threat made by his "[supposed] friends" (Jer. 20:10) immediately after the ominous phrase implies that his persecutors are the terror in the land. However, the conspiracy against the prophet motif is

[282] Carroll 126

easily transferable to the conspiracy against Israel motif.[283] Carroll also explains that the use of the phrase, "Terror all around" indicates the liturgical nature of the complaint because similar material is found in Psalms.[284] Instances of the conspiracy motif in Psalms are too numerous to count, but one example can be found in the famous verses of Ps. 22. Referring to the conspirators as wild animals, the speaker laments, "Dogs surround me; a pack of evil ones closes in on me, like lions [they maul] my hands and feet" (Ps. 22:17). Here we see the same language of encirclement that is present in the claim "Terror all around" (Jer. 20:10). The conspirators are so wicked in both cases that they are barely human; they are killers (Jer. 4:31) and they turn the land into a den of jackals (Jer. 9:11). These conspirators could be Jeremiah's enemies in the community, but they could also be the enemy nations.

During the book, one must keep in mind that Judah was in the midst of besiegement, in which the Babylonian army encircled the city. Jer. 6:25 speaks to the dangers of leaving the city, warning, "Do not go out into the country, do not walk the roads! For the sword of the enemy is there, terror on every side." In this verse, the terror is very clearly meant to be interpreted as the enemy nations, but the phrase is also used to describe Pashhur the priest, who was one of Jeremiah's enemies within the community (Jer. 20:1-6).[285] After the corrupt priest flogs and imprisons Jeremiah, God renames him "Magor-missabib" (Jer. 20:3), which translates to "Terror all around." This could mean that Pashhur is a terror to Jeremiah, but the line is followed by an oracle of doom, which states, "you [Pashhur] shall go into captivity. You shall come to Babylon; there you shall die" (Jer. 20:6). Pashhur is a terror, but he will be terrified by the horrors of invasion and exile. The real terror may be the fact that everyone's fate is inescapable, and they

---

[283] Carroll 128
[284] Carroll 128
[285] Carroll 127

will all die at the hands of the Babylonians, or in exile in an enemy land. Moreso than any other lament, the fifth lament demonstrates that there are layers to the language, and that it is meant to be interpreted as the prayers of both the prophet and the community.

The last segment of laments that we will examine is perhaps the most puzzling: the cursing poem in Jer. 20:14-18. Thematically similar to—but linguistically different from—the content of Job (Job 3:1-5), there is evidence to suggest that the books were from similar circles, in which dramatic laments were standard methods of prayer and expression.[286] The poem is a curse not upon the actual day of his birth, but upon the current conflicts that he is experiencing, and the terrible judgment that has been cast against Israel.[287] In this way, the cursing poem can be interpreted as both a communal and individual lament, acknowledging Jeremiah's personal hardships, and the despair of the exilic community. Although it begins immediately after the triumphant statements of confidence in Jer. 20:11-13, the poem reverts to the pessimism we see in Jer. 20:7-10,[288] implying that verses 11-13 may be cultic additions, included after the original text was drafted. The poem begins with the denunciation, "Accursed be the day that I was born! Let not the day be blessed when my mother bore me! Accursed be the man who brought my father the news and said, 'A boy is born to you' (Jer. 20:14-15), recalling the prenatal designation of Jer. 1:5. Just as Jeremiah could not escape his call to prophecy (Jer. 1:6-8), Judah is unable to escape her destruction at the hands of foreign nations. To have never lived would be better than to suffer as the Judahites will (Jer. 20:17-18). These verses are reminiscent of the claim made in Ecclesiastes that those who have died are more fortunate than the living, and those who have not been born are more fortunate than either (Eccles. 4:2-3). Such a statement may

[286] Carroll 129
[287] O'Connor 76-77
[288] Carroll 128

sound melodramatic, but one must remember the context in which the book was written. At the time of the composition of both Job and Jeremiah, the Jewish community was in exile, disillusioned by the losses and atrocities of war that they had just experienced.[289] Liturgical lament psalms, the laments of Jeremiah, and the speeches of Job are all concerned with human suffering and the unfairness of life.[290] The laments, and the cursing poem in particular cut through the rhetoric of condemnation and sinfulness to reveal that the fate of the Israelites is not self-determined,[291] rather, it is left in the hands of violent monsters. The enemy nations, summoned by Israel's own wrathful God, determine whether the people survive, and they likewise determine all the horrors that they will endure. The book of Jeremiah, especially the laments, are a coping mechanism for the exiled community—a place where their story can be told, and their trauma can be processed while they also engage in restorative prayer, headed by the prophet.

Vindication & Restoration

The most important thing to understand about the New Covenant and the Oracles Against Nations (Jer. 46-51) is the fact that they are direct responses to the petitions offered in Jeremiah's laments. In this concluding section, we will analyze the oracles of hope regarding the New Covenant and the OAN and explore how they answer the petitions made in the laments. The OAN are violent, poetic oaths of revenge against all the foreign powers that have acted against Israel.[292] Graybill calls the violence of these oracles undermotivated, irrational, and legally untenable,[293] which is a description that also suits the oracles of doom and punishment declared

[289] Carroll 129
[290] Carroll 129
[291] Carroll 129
[292] Graybill 387
[293] Graybill 388

against Israel. What we see in these poetic, yet disturbing, chapters is a promise for vindication, and a reversal of fate between the Jewish community and the nations that have wronged them. Throughout his laments, Jeremiah often appeals for a reversal of fate, petitioning, "Let my persecutors be shamed, and let not me be shamed" and calling for his enemies to be shattered by "double destruction" (Jer. 17:18). In Carroll's analysis of the laments, he explained that the persecutors in these appeals are not the Judahites or anyone else within the community, but the foreign nations that have participated in conspiracy against Israel. Placed at the end of the book in MT versions of the text, serves as a climax to the book in which the supplications of the exiled community are answered, and their shame is finally vindicated by divine wrath enacted against those who have wronged them.[294] Just as God raised up the Babylonian army against Israel, in the OAN, He uses neighboring people against the nation that is being punished.[295] For example, in the oracle against Kedar, God, speaking through His prophet declares, "King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon has devised a plan against you and formed a purpose against you" (Jer. 49:30). Although Babylon is employed as a tool of destruction against other nations, the final OAN (Jer. 51) promises "Vengeance for His Temple" (Jer. 51:11) against the Babylonians. The excessive and repetitive accounts of violence become a counterpleasurable response as Israel's prayers are finally answered and her enemies are made to suffer just as she has.[296] The promises for vindication in the OAN ultimately seek to overcome to Israel's terrible reality as an exiled and fragmented nation by replacing reality with a promise that they will be avenged.[297]

---

[294] Graybill 391
[295] Graybill 401
[296] Graybill 401
[297] Graybill 403

Like the OAN, the promise of the New Covenant is offered in response to the petitions offered by Jeremiah on behalf of the community in the laments. Whereas the OAN promises vindication through the destruction of enemy nations, the New Covenant is a vow of restoration through unconditional love. Alluding to Jeremiah's calling in Jer. 1:10, God tells His prophet that just as He diligently uprooted and brought disaster, now He will build and plant the nation once more (Jer. 31:27-28). Now that the punishment has been doled, God and Israel can work to rebuild their relationship through the New Covenant. This covenant will not be like the conditional covenants of old, written on tablets, rather, God will "inscribe it upon their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). With this renewal of the covenant, God assures Jeremiah that He will no longer act wrathfully against the people; "For I will forgive their iniquities and remember their sins no more" (Jer. 31:34). The New Covenant acts as a fresh start, just like the Noahic Covenant back in Gen. 8:20-9:7. It took the destruction of Judah and the exile of all her people, but the score has been settled, and now God seeks to make the Israelites His people once more (Jer. 31:33). The rekindling of this relationship makes way for the fulfillment of the petitions offered in the laments: the reversal of fate and the vindication of Israel against enemy nations. The Lord promises, "I will gather them [the Jewish people] from all the lands to which I have banished them… and I will bring them back to this place and let them dwell secure" (Jer. 32:37). The instatement of the New Covenant is evidence that although God did not respond to all of Jeremiah's laments, his prayers were heard, and God had a plan to bring the Israelites home. The city, which was abandoned and silent, will be filled with cries of joy and psalms of praise (Jer. 33:10-11). It was promised in Jer. 3:12, "I do not bear a grudge for all time," after executing punishment against Israel, God is ready to welcome His bride home.

Conclusion

Historical context is critical to understanding the book of Jeremiah. The Babylonian invasion and subsequent exile forever changed Jewish literature, and popularized the lament form as we see in Jeremiah, Psalms, and Lamentations, all of which have post-exilic roots. This strong tie to Israel's history can leave modern readers wondering—to put it bluntly—why does it matter? Why are scholars spending so much time and energy debating the meaning of Jeremiah if it has no bearing on the world today? Although the subject matter of invasion, the destruction of the Temple, and exile are rooted in ancient Israel's history, the purpose of the text reaches far past that. Contemporary society still contends with many of the issues raised in the book. A relevant example of this is the fact that more than 2,000 years after the book's composition, there is still conflict in Israel and the Middle East. Innocent people are still suffering and falling victim to famine, illness, and violence as a result of the conflict between Israel and Hamas. Children, and other innocent victims are still being killed. Just as the mother of seven weeps for her children (Jer. 15:19), parents in Israel and Palestine mourn the death of their children. Around the world, the vulnerable still suffer from oppression in all forms. People are marginalized, discriminated against, and even persecuted for their gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation. There is genocide, the poor and homeless are neglected, people are starving, our children are being shot in their schools, animals are abused, and our politicians seem to be the worst that humanity has to offer, but like in the days of Jeremiah, there is an air of apathy. The stories are covered in the news, and people may talk about the injustice happening in the world, but the vast majority of people just do not seem to care. Following in the footsteps of Jeremiah, it is our calling to raise an alarm for injustice. It is our duty to give a voice to the voiceless, to speak out

when we feel the fire of empathy warming our hearts. It is a blessing to feel, and you become a blessing when you exercise compassion in an unkind world.

Bibliography

"America's Most Trusted Dictionary." Merriam-Webster. Accessed May 30, 2024. https://www.merriam-webster.com/.

Anderson, Gary A. "Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition." Essay. In *A Loan to God*, 35–52. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.

Brown, Sydney Lawrence. *The Book of Hosea*. London, UK: Methuen & Co, 1932.

Carroll, Robert P. *From Chaos to Covenant*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1981.

Chetsas, Phoebe C. "Communal Lament in Jeremiah," 2024.

Claassens, Julia. "Jeremiah: The Traumatized Prophet." Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 358–73. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Dumbrell, William J. *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology* (version Revised and Enlarged ed.). *ProQuest*. Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2013. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/providence/reader.action?docID=3116668.

Fischer, Georg. "Contested Theologies in the Book of Jeremiah." Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 311–27. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Goldstein, Ronnie. "The Prophet Jeremiah: Legends, Traditions, and Their Evolution." Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 159–76. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Graybill, Rhiannon. “The Jeremian Oracles against the Nations.” Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 387–404. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Green, Barbara. *Jeremiah and God’s Plan of Well-Being*. *ProQuest*. University of South Carolina Press, 2013. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/providence/detail.action?docID=2054895. .

Heschel, Abraham J. *The Prophets*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1969.

Holt, Else K. “Portraits of the Prophet in the Book of Jeremiah.” Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 343–57. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Huffmon, Herbert B. “The Ultimate Commitment: A Covenant Written on (the Tablet of) the Heart and Its Ancient Near Eastern Background.” Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 438–46. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Immaculate. Film. United States: Neon, 2024.

The Jewish Study Bible: Torah, Nevi’im, Kethuvim. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Kalmanofsky, Amy. “Poetic Violence in the Book of Jeremiah.” Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 328–42. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Keith, Levine. *The First Omen*. Film. United States: 20th Century Studios, 2024.

Kittel, R. Essay. In *Geschichte Des Volkes Israel* II, 2nd ed., II:449. Gotha, 1903.

Leuchter, Mark. “The Historical Jeremiah.” Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 78–92. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Mambrol, Nasrullah. “New Criticism.” Literary Theory and Criticism, May 30, 2021. https://literariness.org/2021/05/30/new-criticism/.

McEntire, Mark. *A Chorus of Prophetic Voices: Introducing the Prophetic Literature of Ancient Israel*. *ProQuest*. Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2015. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/providence/detail.action?docID=3446613.

Men. Film. United States, United Kingdom: A24, Entertainment Film Distributors, 2022.

Millis, Mary. “Jeremiah’s Deathscapes.” Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 405–19. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Nicholson, E. *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah*. Shocken, NY, 1971.

O’Connor, Kathleen M. *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2011.

O’Connor, Kathleen M. *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Interpretation and Role in Chapters 1-25*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988.

Petersen, David L. *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989.

Plath, Sylvia. *Daddy*. HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1999.

“Prophet Jeremiah Icon Cross Stitch Pattern.” Easterngiftshop. Accessed May 30, 2024. https://easterngiftshop.com/products/prophet-jeremiah-icon.

Tarazi, Paul Nadim. *The Chrysostom Bible - Jeremiah: A Commentary*. St. Paul, MN: Ocabs Press, 2013.

Tarazi, Paul Nadim. *The Old Testament Introduction: Prophetic Traditions*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994.

Tov, Emanuel. “The Last Stage of the Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah.” Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, 129–44. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.