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'The Pain of Being Faithful to the Word of the LORD': An Exegetical Study of Jeremiah's Confessions

Rebekah J. Lindberg
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“The Pain of Being Faithful to the Word of the LORD”

An Exegetical Study of Jeremiah’s Confessions

Rebekah J. Lindberg

Seattle Pacific Seminary

“The Pain of Being Faithful to the Word of the LORD”

An Exegetical Study of Jeremiah’s Confessions

By Rebekah J Lindberg

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the requirements of a degree of

Master of Arts in Christian Scripture

at Seattle Pacific Seminary

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Approved by: _____


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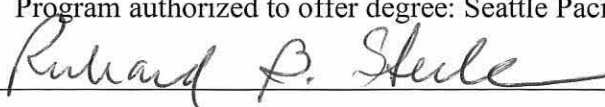

Dr. Richard B. Steele Ph.D., Associate Dean, Seattle Pacific Seminary

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List of Abbreviations

ch	chapter
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
Ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OAN	Oracles Against the Nations
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
v	verse
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
vv	verses

Introduction

The book of Jeremiah contains a unique portrayal of the relationship between the prophet and the word of the LORD;¹ this relationship is poignantly explored in the Confessions of Jeremiah. I argue that the Confessions, as poems in the genre of poems of lament express the pain and suffering of the character of the prophet because of being faithful to, containing and internalizing the word of the LORD. The prophet is faithful to the word, or message, of the LORD, and is therefore persecuted by the people who are not faithful. The prophet also contains and expresses the word of the LORD and because of this unique relationship the prophet feels and experiences the emotional response and pain of the LORD, as expressed in the word of the LORD.

I will also argue that the character of Jeremiah as presented in the book of Jeremiah is based on a historical person who was the prophet of the LORD during the final years before the Babylonian Exile. The Confessions may not have been written by this historical prophet; however, they should be interpreted as they are presented in the book of Jeremiah, in connection with the historical prophet's life and ministry.

Finally, I will argue that the presence of the redactors throughout the Confessions and the literary genre of the Confessions do not limit them to only representing the individual pain and persecution of the prophet. Instead, the Confessions are representing the prophet's pain while simultaneously representing all of the members of Judah who are faithful to the word of the LORD and are persecuted because of their faith.

¹ Throughout this thesis I will be using the phrase “the LORD” to represent the Tetragrammaton, יהוה.

In the presentation of this argument I will begin by discussing the issues surrounding the historical Jeremiah. The second chapter will explore the genre of poems of lament and the importance of this genre in the understanding and interpretation of both the individual and communal aspects of the Confessions. Chapters three through seven will analyze each of the six Confessions, focusing on the pain of being faithful to and containing the word of the LORD. The final chapter will reflect on the prophet's individual pain and the communal pain of the faithful remnant as represented within all six of the Confessions collectively, as well as explore future areas of study within the Confessions.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Historical Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah, the account of prophetic ministry of the prophet Jeremiah before and during the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, has been a historically difficult book to study and understand. Problems arise from a collection of issues, including significant differences between the MT and the LXX, a variety of different methodological and ideological approaches, and a seemingly haphazard organizational structure.² Both the MT and the LXX versions of the book of Jeremiah contain a unique compilation of materials: biographical stories, poetic laments, prose sermons, and oracles of destruction are scattered eclectically throughout the book of Jeremiah with no obvious criteria for organization. Many scholars have proposed overarching structures to the book of Jeremiah, but as of yet no theory has garnered general acceptance.

Despite these difficulties, there are a few general assumptions agreed upon by most Jeremiah scholars. One is the divisions of Jeremiah into (A) (B) and (C) sources, based off the work of Bernhard Duhm and Sigmund Mowinckel. Within this structure (A) sources are poetry, (B) sources are prose stories, and (C) sources are from the Deuteronomistic Redactors.³ It is also generally accepted that the (C) sources were added into the book of Jeremiah during or closely following the Babylonian Exile.⁴

² Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, Pa: Fortress, 2011), 342.

³ Scholars use the three sources for a variety of purposes. Traditionally, sources (A), (B), and (C), have been used to date the historical processes involved in the composition of the book of Jeremiah. The classic interpretation is that (A), the poetry, is older than (B) and (C) sources. Therefore, to date a passage, it was only necessary to sort the text into prose or poetry to discover which passage is older, and therefore original and not redacted. See Geoffrey H. Parke-Taylor, *The Formation of the Book of Jeremiah: Doublets and Recurring Phrases* (Atlanta, Ga: SBL, 2000), 298.

⁴ C.L. Allen, "Jeremiah: Book of," *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*, 423.

a. The Historical Jeremiah

One of the most important and meticulous arguments currently being addressed by scholars of the book of Jeremiah is centered on the person of Jeremiah. Throughout most of the history of the book, it has been assumed that since the book bears the name “Jeremiah,” it was written by the historical prophet Jeremiah, born around 650 B.C.E, and was written by him exactly as it is currently presented in the final form of the text. Therefore, any historical and biographical data contained in Jeremiah has been assumed accurate, and any poetry, especially the Confessions, with the numerous “I” statements, have been traditionally considered genuine accounts from the pen of the historical Jeremiah.

Within the last hundred years this basic assumption has begun to change and there is now general agreement that the entire book of Jeremiah cannot be from the pen of the historical prophet. Scholars have begun searching for the historical Jeremiah and have used the (A), (B), and (C) sources to divide the text and search for the “authentic voice” of the prophet. They are not as concerned with the book of Jeremiah as a whole, but instead scour the text to find the “genuine” words of the historical Jeremiah.⁵ Traditionally, the genuine, historical words of the prophet Jeremiah have been considered the poetic (A) sources.

As a response to the search for the historical Jeremiah, some scholars have approached the search for the person of Jeremiah from an entirely different direction. Many scholars who study the book of Jeremiah from a literary perspective claim that Jeremiah was not a historical person at all and is, instead, an entirely fictional character invented by the redactors to portray specific ideas or theologies. One of the main supports for this interpretation is that the only

⁵ Louis Stulman, “Jeremiah the Prophet: Astride Two Worlds,” in *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence* (ed. Martin Kessler; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 44.

evidence currently available to support the historical Jeremiah is the book of Jeremiah itself.

Smelik explains that:

Outside of the book of Jeremiah we have no data concerning the prophet by this name. He is not named in the book of Kings. The references to him in Daniel, Ezra, and Chronicles are dependent on the book of Jeremiah. The possibility that he is exclusively a literary figure may not be ruled out. Each ascription of passages to the historical Jeremiah rests on a circular argument.⁶

Some scholars, such as Joep Dubbink and C.R. Carroll, have attempted to find a middle ground between these two positions.⁷ They argue there *was* a historical person named Jeremiah who acted as a poet or prophet at the time of the Fall of Jerusalem and “a real life figure of flesh and blood stands behind these words.”⁸ On the other hand, they also argue that the way the character of the prophet Jeremiah is represented by the redactors in the final form of the text is more important than finding the historical Jeremiah. They look at the final presentation of the character of the prophet as one collected whole; this is important because some of the ways the prophet is presented in the final form of the text appear contradictory, but they are presented that way nonetheless. Stulman comments:

Jeremiah is represented in his book as a son of a priest, a messenger and spokesperson for God, an actor, a litigant, a gleaner, a sentry, a righteous sufferer, a covenant mediator, an iconoclast, a writer, a surrogate city, an impregnable wall of bronze, a confidant of kings, a prisoner and exile, a prophet to the nations, an assayer and tester of people’s ways, and

⁶ Klaas A. D. Smelik, “The Function of Jeremiah 50 and 51 in the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence* (ed. Martin Kessler; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 87.

⁷ Carroll, C.R. “The Polyphonic Jeremiah: A Reading of the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence* (ed. Martin Kessler; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2004) 77-86. Dubbink, Joep. “Getting Closer to Jeremiah: The Word of YHWH and the Literary-Theological Person of a Prophet,” in *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence* (ed. Martin Kessler; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 25-40.

⁸ Ronald Clements, “Jeremiah’s Message of Hope: Public Faith and Private Anguish,” in *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence* (ed. Martin Kessler; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 139.

a proponent and opponent of God. Moreover, Jeremiah appears as a champion of Torah teaching, an intercessor forbidden to pray, a subversive poet, the voice of God and the voice of the poor, a madman, a survivor and witness, a symbol of destruction and hope, and a prophet like Moses.⁹

Scholars who follow this viewpoint do not discount the literary, almost “fictional,” quality of the portrayal of Jeremiah and they readily admit that the prophet Jeremiah as he is presented in the text may have been “embellished.” However, they are not willing to let go of a historical person on whom all the stories are based. They see the purpose of the book of Jeremiah as being “not to preserve biographical or autobiographical exactitude but to proclaim and instruct by employing historical memory and poetic imagination.”¹⁰ The redactors are working with memories and sources of events that actually happened, and are using them to craft the final image of the historical prophet that is contained in the book of Jeremiah.

This third viewpoint coincides with my personal understanding of the historical person of Jeremiah and the connection of this person to the portrayal of the prophet in the book of Jeremiah. It is my view that there was a prophet who served under the last four Kings of Judah: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. He served during the final invasion and destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar. Some of what is contained in the book of Jeremiah is connected to this historical prophet who served Judah and Jerusalem during this time. Other sections have been added by redactors and are not historically connected to the words or life of the prophet at all. It is almost impossible to ascribe certain sections of the text of Jeremiah to the historical prophet or to the redactors. It is equally impossible to correctly prove or provide historical connections between certain sermons or poetic utterances and events contained in the biographical narrative sections of Jeremiah. However, instead of spending the entirety of the

⁹ Stulman, “Jeremiah the Prophet: Astride Two Worlds,” 45-46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

study of the historical Jeremiah attempting to pick apart the character of the prophet into all of the separate individual sources, I have spent significant time analyzing the unified portrayal of the character of Jeremiah as a whole, throughout the entire book.

Not all scholars are comfortable with this approach to the person of Jeremiah. Some argue that focusing on the final, unified presentation of the historical prophet is limiting. Robert Carroll argues that “the original poets were free spirits, poets of the imagination, denouncing the social structures of their own time, but through redactional transformation have become conventional ‘prophets’, a fixed form of institutional activity, and thereby made to serve purposes which they themselves might very well have despised.”¹¹ This may be correct. However, the book of Jeremiah and the presentation of the historical Jeremiah contained within its chapters, from both the MT and the LXX, are the only presentations currently available to scholars. Within the current historical and textual limitations, I have striven to look at all of the historical information that is available, while also acknowledging the redactors’ presence in the text, and in order to analyze the final, unified portrayal of the character of the prophet Jeremiah.

The book of Jeremiah is a complicated and important text in the Biblical Canon. Of all the prophetic books, it gives the most information about how it was written and composed. It also spends significant time presenting the life of the prophet. The character of the prophet Jeremiah as presented in the book of Jeremiah appears to be just as important as the message announced by the prophet. It is therefore important to define how one approaches the relationship between the prose narratives describing the prophet’s life and the poetic announcements attributed to the mouth of the same prophet. For my part, I argue that there was a

¹¹ Robert Carroll, “Poets not Prophets: a Response to ‘Prophets through the Looking-Glass,’” *JSOT* 27 (1983): 28.

historical prophet upon whom the entire book is based, and the prose narratives within the book of Jeremiah represent his life. The redactors have worked within the text of Jeremiah to craft the relationship between the poetry, such as the Confessions, and the prose narratives describing the prophet's life. In my view, the prose narratives and the poetic utterances have been placed together to interpret each other and the Confessions should be interpreted within the context of the life and ministry of the historical prophet as compiled and preserved within the book of Jeremiah.

Chapter 2: Introduction to Confession Studies

A unique, famous, and controversial section of the book of Jeremiah is the Confessions of Jeremiah. When studying the Confessions, or Laments, of Jeremiah, it is quickly discovered that there is little scholarly consensus to be found. Even the number of Confessions contained within Jeremiah is not an undisputed fact.¹² Kathleen O'Connor argues there are five Confessions. Other prominent Confession scholars, such as M.S. Smith, argue there are six Confessions.¹³ Walter Baumgartner divides the Confessions into smaller poetic units, some of which are still classified as Confessions, while others are not.¹⁴ As of yet, no scholar has produced a list of Confessions that has garnered scholarly agreement. Through my own research, I have concluded that there are six Confessions: Jeremiah 11:18-23; 12:1-6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:19-23; and 20:7-13.

¹² Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Interpretation and Role in Chapters 1-25* (Atlanta, Ga: Scholar's Press, 1988) 1.

¹³ M.S. Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts A Literary and Redactional Study of Jeremiah 11-20* (Atlanta, Ga: Scholar's Press, 1990) 1.

¹⁴ Walter Baumgartner, *Jeremiah's Poems of Lament* (Decatur, Ga: The Almond Press, 1987) 41.

The Confessions have confused and intimidated scholars for generations. Historically, they have been viewed as memoirs or diary entries. One reason for this is the commonality of first person pronouns throughout the Confessions. For example, “your words were found and I ate them. And your words were for *me* exultation and joy for *my* heart, because he called *me* by your name, the LORD God of Armies” (Jer 15:16).¹⁵ Not only does the first person language lend itself to personal expression, but the topics contained within the Confessions appear deeply heart-felt. The poet writes phrases such as “Why was my pain everlasting? And my wound sickly refusing to be healed?” (Jer 15:18). In modern life, these sorts of phrases would be used in personal individual expressions of lament, possibly in a prayer journal. As such, the Confessions have been historically viewed merely as expressions of the prophet’s feelings; they were not considered as having any true prophetic value. Instead, they are “expressions of personal anger and distress [and]... are not commissioned announcements to Israel.”¹⁶ If the Confessions were read by these scholars, it was to connect each Confession with a specific event in Jeremiah’s life and ministry in order to date them.¹⁷

However, if the Confessions are truly personal memoirs or diary entries, as they have been considered historically, then there would be nothing in Scripture to compare them with because “these texts, if indeed authentically autobiographical, are truly unique. There is nothing like them in the ancient Near East. No one kept this kind of personal diary.”¹⁸ Indeed, all forms of writing in the Ancient Near East were rare. It is unlikely that anyone would take the space and time to write personal reflections, such as a diary or a memoir. Therefore, “the Confessions

¹⁵ Translation by Author. All subsequent translations are by the Author unless otherwise noted.

¹⁶ O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 83.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁸ Baumgartner, *Jeremiah’s Poems of Lament*, 66. Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, 2009), 189.

cannot be anything other than a scribal creation.”¹⁹ This does not necessarily mean they were not written by the historical prophet, simply that they do not fulfill the role of the modern diary.

Another reason the Confessions have been traditionally difficult for scholars to interpret is because the Confessions are not expressing simple or pious emotions. Some of the phrases uttered by the prophet are violent and full of doubt, not the sort of phrases that a man traditionally known as being holy, gentle, tender and given to weeping is expected to proclaim.²⁰ For example, in the Fifth Confessions, Jeremiah asks the LORD to “give their sons over to famine and hurl down the hand of the sword. Let their women become childless and widows. And let their men be brutally put to death, their young men smote by the sword in battle” (Jer 18:21). In the Sixth Confession the writer of the Confessions turns his powerful words against the LORD himself: “You deceived me LORD and I was deceived. You overpowered me and were able to do it. And I became laughter all of my days, all of them mocking me” (Jer 20:7). These are not the pious, dignified words generally connected with the perception of a prophet.

Modern scholarship has convincingly argued that the Confessions of Jeremiah are not personal diary entries. They are also not a brand new genre or something entirely unique. The seemingly difficult first person pronouns and the violent language within the Confessions allow the Confessions to be categorized as poems of lament, a common poetic genre found in ancient literature.²¹ These poems, or songs, are common especially in the Psalms and in Job: about a

¹⁹ Van Der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 189.

²⁰ Baumgartner, *Jeremiah's Poems of Lament*, 72-73.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

third of the Psalter is comprised of poems of lament.²² This genre of poem would have been commonly used in worship and part of the cultic experience of being Jewish. The genre would contain stock words or phrases and when a poet, such as the writer of the Confessions, wanted to use the genre of poem of lament, he or she would have traditional words, phrases, ideas and symbols from which to draw.²³ While most of the poems in this genre are corporate in nature and express the pain of the entire nation, individuals sometimes used the genre to express their own pain. Individual experiences could only be “expressed in the special treatment and arrangement of the building blocks and forms of the received tradition; and by adding depth to these in line with his own deeper experience.”²⁴ It is important to note that while the Confessions are in the genre of poems of lament, they are not found in the Book of Psalms. Indeed, while the Confessions follow the typical patterns of the genre, they also tend to use more shocking language than what is found within the Psalms.

When categorizing a specific poem as a poem of lament, scholars look for five main components. The first is a call to the LORD: an “invocation of God.”²⁵ The second is a lament or petition directed to God. There is usually a mention here of an enemy and “no names can be rude enough for their enemies- evil-doers, wicked, impious, etc.”²⁶ The third component of a poem of lament is an assurance that the petition will be heard. The fourth component is a vow made to

²² Baumgartner lists Ps 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 11; 28; 31; 42; 43; 51; 55; 62; 64; 71; 77; 88; 109; 119; 120; 123; 130; 140; 144 as references to some of the Psalms in the genre of the poems of lament. See Baumgartner, *Poems of Lament*, 19.

²³ *Ibid.*, 39. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (Vol. II. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox, 1965) 203.

²⁴ Baumgartner, *Jeremiah's Poems of Lament*, 40.

²⁵ Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, 2.

²⁶ Baumgartner, *Jeremiah's Poems of Lament*, 23.

God, and the fifth and final component is a hymn of thanksgiving.²⁷ While all of these components are expected in a poem of lament, the structure is fluid. Sometimes a poet will change the order of the sections or lengthen a section. At other times the poet may leave out a specific component all together. The outline for a poem of lament is provided by cultic tradition, but each poet is free to use and modify the pieces in order to make something “new.”²⁸

Alongside the five components found in poems of lament, there are also four main motifs.²⁹ The first motif, the Honor Motif, is the idea that the poet is suffering for the honor of the LORD. There is something intrinsically good and honorable in the suffering because it is undeserved. The second motif, the Trust Motif, is that the sufferer will trust in the LORD despite the difficulties. Eventually, the one lamenting will be rescued and proven righteous. The third motif, the Repentance Motif, is found when the poet accepts the punishment and after searching his or her soul finds a sin and realizes why the suffering is occurring. The last motif, the Innocence Motif is the opposite of the Repentance Motif: here, the sufferer maintains that they are being punished unjustly. Instead of asking for mercy, they ask for justice. All of these motifs are commonly found in poems of lament. However, all but one of the Confessions of Jeremiah employ only the Innocence Motif. In all six of the Confessions the poet claims innocence and asks the LORD for justice against his persecutors. Only the final Confession, Jeremiah 20:7-13, combines the Innocence Motif with any other motif, in this case the Trust Motif.

Along with the Innocence Motif, the Confessions of Jeremiah commonly employ a Dialogue Structure. This is a poetic technique where two parties are in conversation with each

²⁷ Ibid., 20.

²⁸ Ibid., 40. Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, 1.

²⁹ Baumgartner, *Jeremiah's Poems of Lament*, 31-34.

other. One party voices a complaint, and the other party responds.³⁰ Poems using this structure generally flow from one voice to another without obvious clues such as “the prophet said.” Instead, changes in pronouns or points of view mark the transition from one voice to another. Within the Confessions, the dialogue is between the LORD and the prophet.

Classifying the Confessions of Jeremiah as poems of lament can help explain the pervasiveness of first person pronouns throughout the Confessions. “The ‘I’ of the poems should be understood as the corporate ‘I’ of the Psalms, that is, as a typical or literary ‘I.’”³¹ The first person pronouns simultaneously represent the poet and all the people reading or reciting the poem. The genre of the Confessions allows for a corporate meaning and understanding of each of the Confessions, as the “I” in represents everyone, even as they represents the uniquely prophetic struggle of announcing and containing the word of the LORD.

While it is helpful to categorize the Confessions as poems of lament, this does not provide answers to all of the questions and difficulties connected to studies of the Confessions. One remaining problem for scholars is to analyze why the Confessions of Jeremiah have been placed in their final location by the Deuteronomistic Redactors. It is assumed that, like the rest of Jeremiah, the Confessions have been redacted. The dramatic shifts in mood contained within the Confessions, as well as the “textual displacement within the poems” are strong evidence for the presence of the redactors in the Confessions.³² The presence of the redactors within the Confessions is supported by the argument that the Confessions may have been one unified collection of Jeremiah sayings that was incorporated into the final book of Jeremiah.³³ Another

³⁰ Erhard S Gerstenberger, “Jeremiah’s Complaints,” *JBL* 82:4 (1963): 405.

³¹ O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 83.

³² *Ibid.*, 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 81.

collection of Jeremiah's sayings circulating as a similarly separate unit was the Oracles against the Nations (OAN), now found in Jeremiah 46-51 in the MT. Like the Confessions, the OAN was added by redactors to the final version of Jeremiah. However, the OAN was kept as one unit, while the Confessions were separated and scattered, seemingly chaotically, throughout the beginning portion of the book of Jeremiah.³⁴ I have assumed that if the redactors sometimes added complete units into the text of Jeremiah and separated others to scatter them throughout the book of Jeremiah, both were done intentionally. The Confessions have been worked with and edited and not inserted randomly into the text, even though they occasionally seem that way. Scholars are left with the difficult task of unravelling why each Confession was placed into its final location by the redactors.

There are three main theories about how the Confessions were separated from each other and placed into the full text of Jeremiah. The first is that the Confessions were placed in chronological order and paired with the historical event that triggered the writing of that particular poem of lament.³⁵ The second theory also connects each Confession to the surrounding narrative, but not based off historical chronology. Instead, themes or characters form the connection between the Confessions and their place in the final presentation of the text. The final theory is based off oral tradition and argues that "the Confessions were attracted to their present positions by the operation of catchwords and thematic mnemonic devices."³⁶ Most scholars agree with the second or third options, and do not look for the initial trigger event specifically. I agree with these scholars and do not look for a specific historical connection between each Confession

³⁴ For a more thorough treatment of the difference between the LXX and the MT versions of the Confessions see Diamond, A. R. Pete. "Jeremiah's Confessions in the LXX and MT: a Witness to Developing Canonical Function?." *VT* 40:1 (1990): 33-50.

³⁵ O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 98.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

and its final location. Instead I look for the thematic reasons the redactors placed each Confession into its “new” location, in connection with specific prose narratives, sermons, and other poetry.

It is important to note that the obvious presence of the redactors with the Confessions does not necessarily mean the historical prophet was not involved in the original Confessions. As I argued earlier, I view the book of Jeremiah as based upon the historical memory of the person and life of the historical prophet, as well as on writings connected with the ministry of the prophet. The Deuteronomistic Redactors worked with these sources to create the final form of the book of Jeremiah. It is possible that the Confessions were at least partially from the pen of the historical prophet and were taken and edited by the redactors into the final version of the book of Jeremiah. The connections between the poems of lament and the prose narratives describing the prophet’s life may have been manufactured by the redactors, but I propose that readers should not ignore the historical person of the prophet on whom the whole book of Jeremiah, including the Confessions, is based.

The presence of the redactors within the Confessions, as well as the genre of the poems of lament, has significantly complicated the dating of the Confessions. Most scholars categorize the Confessions as source (A), poetry. Traditionally, therefore, the Confessions have been viewed as “original” and “early” texts. Coupled with the “I” statements found throughout the Confessions, it appears simple to date the Confessions to the time, and the mouth, of the historical prophet.³⁷ However, because of the presence of the redactors within the text, and because the Confessions follow specific patterns and structures particular to the genre of the poems of lament, some scholars argue that the laments are so formulaic that “a disciple of

³⁷ Parke-Taylor, *The Formation of the Book of Jeremiah: Doublets and Recurring Phases*, 296.

Jeremiah or a later editor of this material could have formulated these words in the knowledge that the prophet's ministry caused him to lament."³⁸ They propose the Confessions could have been written a generation or two after the life of the prophet. It is also possible that the Confessions follow the patterns of the poems of lament because they are cultic expressions articulating the pain of the community at large. In this argument, the Confessions were originally used primarily in the context of worship and not individual prayer. They were pre-existing laments, most likely from before the time of the historical prophet Jeremiah, and were inserted into the text of Jeremiah by the redactors.³⁹ The reality that the Confessions, or versions of them, could be found in the Temple, both before and after the time of historical prophet, again complicates the dating process.

In my own opinion, the Confessions were written within a couple of generations of the historical prophet, either by the prophet himself, a close disciple of the prophet, or redactors who were familiar with the life and ministry of the historical prophet. They were not pre-existing laments from the Temple. I argue this because of my view of the historical prophet in relation to the redactors, and because of the word choice and style of the Confessions. While the Confessions are poems of lament they are unlike any of the poems of lament currently found in the Psalter and are an example of using traditional cultic expressions and forms to create new poetry.

While the Confessions follow the cultic formula, they are not the traditional poems of lament used in cultic worship practices. As already stated, this is partially because of word choice and the relation between the historical prophet and the redactors. However, it is also

³⁸ Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, xvii.

³⁹ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 32.

partially because of the uniquely prophetic character of Jeremiah's Confessions.⁴⁰ The redactors have placed the Confessions into the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, and every word credited to the prophet within the book of Jeremiah, including the Confessions, is "the word of God... conveyed in and through a suffering prophet."⁴¹ By having the prophet announce the Confessions, the Confessions are given a prophetic role, alongside the more typical corporate role fulfilled by poems of lament in general. In this sense, I argue that there is a connection between the Confessions and Jeremiah's life and ministry as a prophet, as preserved in the book of Jeremiah.

A final question scholars of Jeremiah's Confessions struggle to answer is the role of the Confessions, especially in connection to their final location within the book of Jeremiah. The traditional view is that prophet is expressing his own pain and is struggling with the LORD. He is resisting his calling to be a prophet. This is implied by such verses as "You deceived me LORD and I was deceived" (Jer 20:7). However, Diamond argues that "it would be incorrect to view the central issue of the confession as a conflict between prophet and Yahweh. On the contrary, these two occupy positions of solidarity."⁴² The poet seems to be expressing the difficulty and pain of his role as a prophet, and not attempting to escape it.

If the prophet is not arguing against the LORD, then why is the prophet lamenting? Who are the "enemies" who "dug a pit for my life" and who "devised plans" against him? (Jer 18:20, 11:19). Some scholars, including Diamond, argue that the "enemies" are false prophets, and that the Confessions are a representation of the difficulty between what the prophetic mission was

⁴⁰ Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, 1.

⁴¹ Terrence E Fretheim, "Caught in the Middle: Jeremiah's Vocational Crisis," *Word & World* 22:4 (2002): 352.

⁴² Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 34-35.

understood to be and what it actually was.⁴³ The prophet in the book of Jeremiah continually proclaimed the destruction of Jerusalem, which was not what a prophet of the LORD was supposed to proclaim. The LORD had rescued the people of Judah from Assyria. Why would the LORD not also rescue them from the Babylonians? The people did not believe Jeremiah's message, and attacked and criticized Jeremiah for it. The confrontation between the false prophet Hananiah and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 28 is a classic example. O'Connor has argued that the purpose of the Confessions was "to establish the authenticity of Jeremiah's claim to be the true prophet of Yahweh. Each aspect of the content of these poems adds strength to this claim and serves to distinguish Jeremiah sharply from the false prophets."⁴⁴

Smith, and other scholars, argue that the purpose of the Confessions is to explain why Judah went into exile in Babylon. For these scholars, the poet who expresses the Confessions of Jeremiah becomes the archetype for all the people in Judah who remained faithful to the Word of the LORD, and the enemies are national sin and attitude. The Confessions show the faithful of God being so persecuted that the only "just" response from the LORD is exile. "National sin and destruction become the dominant referent of the prophetic laments. The laments, viewed through the themes in the introductory stories, become vehicles of national judgement."⁴⁵ The people in exile are able to look at the Confessions and see that they did not listen to or believe word of the LORD given through Jeremiah, and can therefore see the necessity of the exile.⁴⁶

In my opinion, the role of the Confessions of Jeremiah is to express the difficulty of being faithful and true to the word of the LORD which the prophet received, internalized, and

⁴³ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁴ O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 85.

⁴⁵ Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, 42.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 39-40.

felt. The word, proclaimed, felt and contained by the prophet was truly from the LORD, even though Judah as a whole continually ignored the proclamation; the final form of the text shows the people following false prophets and refusing to listen to the true prophet. The prophet, and the faithful remnant who believed the LORD's word as announced by the prophet, were persecuted by the other members of Judah, and even though they were faithful they too experienced the pain of the Fall of Jerusalem to Babylon. The Confessions express the pain of the faithful remnant who believed the word of the LORD, while simultaneously expressing the pain of the faithful prophet who announced and contained the word, feeling both his own pain because of persecution and the LORD's because of this unique relationship.

This concludes the descriptions of the historical prophet and the genre of the Confessions and begins the exegetical analysis of each of the six Confessions of Jeremiah themselves. As argued earlier, every word attributed to the mouth of the prophet is important and has a prophetic role, even the Confessions which have historically been viewed as diary entries. The Confessions are not diary entries but are poems of lament, placed by redactors into the final form of Jeremiah. I argue that by combining the prose narratives and the Confessions together within the same chapters, the Confessions are simultaneously representing the pain of the people as they attempt to be faithful to the word of the LORD and the pain of the prophet as he feels, holds, internalizes and expresses the word of the LORD. As the one holding the word, the prophet also feels and holds the pain of the LORD. The Confessions offer a unique insight into the difficulty of interacting with the word of the LORD, for the people and the prophet.

Chapter 3- The First and Second Confession- Jeremiah 11:18-12:6

Each of the exegetical analyses will begin with a translation of the Confession from the Hebrew. A discussion of where each Confession begins and ends will follow, along with the narrative context and an outline of the Confession. I will examine the Confession for all five of the expected components of a poem of lament. Any information about the enemies that is provided within each of the Confessions will also be analyzed. Finally, I will conclude each exegetical analysis by providing a proposition for why each of the Confessions was written, and how it represents the pain of the prophet, the people, and the LORD simultaneously. Within certain Confessions, I will include a brief analysis on unique components of that specific Confession, such as an analysis of the cursing language found within the Fifth Confession (Jer 18:19-23).

a. Translation

Jeremiah 11:18-23

And the LORD has made known to me and I knew; then you caused me to see their deeds.

And I am like a tame lamb born for slaughter. And I did not know that they devised plans against me: "Let us destroy the tree and its good. Let us cut it from the land today and his name will never be remembered again."

And the LORD of Armies, who governs with righteousness, examining hearts and minds, I will see your vengeance upon them because to you I have disclosed my dispute.

So thus says the LORD to the men of Anathoth, those seeking your life in order to say, "You will not prophesy in the name of the LORD and then you will not die by our hand." So thus says the LORD of Armies: "Behold! I am seeking the young men. They will die by the sword and their daughters will die by famine. There will be no remnant for them because I will cause evil to come upon the men of Anathoth, the year of punishment."

Jeremiah 12:1-6

You are just LORD. Therefore I will contend with you. Surely I will present my case to you. Why does the path of the wicked prosper? They who are deceitful are at ease in their treachery. You planted them and they are rooted. They grow and they produce fruit. They are near you with their mouth and you are distant from their hearts.

And you LORD, you know me. You will see me and you will examine my mind before you. Draw them away as sheep to slaughter and set them apart for the day of slaughter. Until when will the land mourn? And all the plants of the field wither from the evil dwelling in it. The animals and the birds were swept away because the people say, "He will not see our future."

If you had run with your feet and they wearied you, how can you contend with horses? And if you are trusting in the land of peace, how will you fare in the wilds of the Jordan? Thus even your brothers and your father's house, even they will cry out fully after you. You will not trust them, even though they will speak well about you.

b. How Many Confessions are Included in Chapters 11-12?

There is debate amongst scholars in regards to how many Confessions are included in Jeremiah 11:18-12:6. Some scholars, including O'Connor, argue it is one Confession while Smith and others argue it is two separate Confessions.⁴⁷ Most scholars agree, however, that Jeremiah 11:18-12:6 has four main parts: Jeremiah 11:18-20, 21-23, 12:1-4, and 5-6. Disagreement arises when attempting to connect the four sections together in logical patterns. Of all the Confessions, Jeremiah 11:18-12:6 contains the largest variety of scholarly options regarding where to divide the pericope.

In my opinion, there are two Confessions contained within 11:18-12:6. The division between the two is found at 12:1. The division is here because of the Dialogue Structure of the two laments. The poet announces his complaint to the LORD in 11:18-20. The LORD responds

⁴⁷ O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 16. Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, 6.

in 11:21-23. This is a complete unit: the First Confession. The Second Confession comes directly afterwards; in Jeremiah 12:1, the very next verse, the poet again complains to the LORD, and in 12:5-6 the LORD responds to the complaint. This second complaint and response, also expressed in a Dialogue Structure, is the Second Confession.⁴⁸ Even though there are two different and separate Confessions, there are many similarities. The themes and word choices, as well as the final form of the text, connect the two laments together and it is helpful to study the First and Second Confessions together.

c. Narrative Context

The First Confession is found at the end of Jeremiah 11, and the Second Confession immediately follows the First Confession. The beginning of ch. 11 shows evidence of the Deuteronomistic Redactors. Reminiscent of the style used in Deuteronomy, the LORD commands the prophet Jeremiah in the beginning of ch. 11 to speak to the people of Judah, saying “Hear the words of this covenant and do them. For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, ‘Obey my voice.’ Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will” (Jer 11:6-8b NRSV). The LORD then reminds the people that they did not listen, and that “the LORD of Armies, who planted you, He has proclaimed evil upon you on account of the evil which the house of Israel and the house of Judah did” (Jer 11:17). After these reminders, the prophet begins to lament.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 4, 6.

d. Outline

The First Confession is Jeremiah 11:18-23. It begins with the poet calling on the LORD and discussing the actions of his enemies.⁴⁹ In v. 20, the poet asks the LORD to act on his behalf, claiming that “I will see your vengeance upon them because to you I have disclosed my dispute” (Jer 11:20b). The first three verses, where the poet cries out to the LORD, are poetic; the verses that follow, the LORD’s response, are prose. This is unusual within the Confessions; generally the entire Confession is poetic in structure. This has led to the suggestion that 11:21-23, the LORD’s response and the second half of the First Confession, is a (C) source from the Deuteronomistic Redactors. I agree with the argument that the response is not original to the Confession, and was written by a different author(s) than the first half of the Confession. This argument is further supported by the different types of images found in the two halves of the Confession. The first half has natural imagery, such as trees and lambs. The second half, beginning in v. 21, involves war imagery, such as sword, remnant, and famine.⁵⁰

This redacted second half of the First Confession, Jeremiah 11:21-23, is the prose response from the LORD to the poet’s request. This half of the Confession begins with the messenger formula, “thus says the LORD,” which is a common phrase within prophetic literature and is used to connect the spoken words of the prophet with the word of the LORD.⁵¹ This phrase is used in v. 21 and v. 22. The double usage of the messenger formula close together shows both the importance to the poet in connecting himself, his words and his mission to the LORD, and the importance of proving to his enemies that the LORD *will* do as the message says and act in defense of the prophet.

⁴⁹ Jeremiah 11:18-19

⁵⁰ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 28.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

The Second Confession is found in Jeremiah 12:1-6. It also follows a Dialogue Structure; the poet calls to the LORD in vv. 1-4 and the LORD responds in vv. 5-6. The entire Confession has become important in the study of theodicy, for it is one of the few places in Scripture where the question of theodicy is stated so bluntly. The poet asks the LORD: “Why does the path of the wicked prosper? They who are deceitful are at ease in their treachery” (Jer 12:1). The rest of the Second Confession continues this theme; the poet asks the LORD why he is surrounded by enemies who appear to be prospering. Like the previous Confession, the poet asks the LORD to punish his enemies and, continuing the Dialogue Structure, the LORD responds to the poet’s prayer in vv. 5-6. However, the messenger formula is not used and there is no obvious marker that the speaker has changed from the poet to the LORD. This change is found in the context of the poem. The LORD asks the prophet, “If you had run with your feet and they wearied you, how can you contend with horses? And if you are trusting in the land of peace, how will you fare in the wilds of the Jordan?” (Jer 12:5). Instead of promising future punishment for the poet’s enemies, the LORD reminds the poet that “it will only get worse.” This does not mean the LORD’s promise from the First Confession will not be fulfilled, but instead that there will be a delay. The two questions the poet asks in vv. 1 and 4 of the Second Confession are answered by the LORD in vv. 5-6, but the answer is unexpected.

e. Connections Between The First and Second Confessions

Even though there are two different Confessions found in Jeremiah 11 and 12, they are intentionally, and closely, related to each other. The most obvious connections are found between the first half of each of the Confessions: 11:18-20 and 12:1-4. Both are poetic and are direct petitions from the poet to the LORD instead of responses from the LORD. The poet announces similar petitions to the LORD, asking for the LORD to notice his enemies. In v.

11:20, in the First Confession, the poet asks the LORD to give the people over to the LORD’s vengeance; in v. 12:3 of the Second Confession he asks the LORD to draw away his enemies “as sheep to slaughter and set them apart for the day of slaughter” (Jer 12:3).

Similar imagery is found at the beginning of the two Confessions as well. In 11:19, the poet compares himself to “a tame lamb born for slaughter,” and later his enemies describe him as a tree (Jer 11:19). They are attempting to destroy the tree’s “goods” or fruit and cut it off from the land. In the Second Confession, the poet, describing his enemies, reminds the LORD that the LORD himself “planted them and they are rooted. They grow and the produce fruit” (Jer 12:2a). Later, the poet asks the LORD to “draw them away as sheep to slaughter and set them apart for the day of slaughter” (Jer 12:3b). These images form a chiasmic structure: sheep to slaughter, tree and fruit, and then tree and fruit, and sheep to slaughter. This pattern and use of images suggests a strong internal connection between the first two Confessions.⁵²

Jeremiah 11:19 And I am like a tame lamb (כִּבְשֶׂה) born for slaughter (טבח)
Jeremiah 11:19b Let us destroy the tree (עֵץ) and its good (לְחֵמוֹ). Let us cut it from the land
Jeremiah 12:2 You planted them (נטע) and they are rooted (שרש). They grow and the produce fruit (פְּרִי)
Jeremiah 12:3 Draw them away as sheep (צֹאן) to slaughter (טְבַחָה) and set them apart for the day of slaughter (הַרְגָה)

The third textual clue linking the two passages together is the repetition of key verbs. The verb, ראה (“see”) is used in 11:18 and 20 in the First Confession, and 12:3 and 4 in the Second Confession. The verb, ידע (“know”) is found four times within the two Confessions, twice in

⁵² O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 16.

11:18 and once in both 11:19 and 12:3. These two verbs are used exclusively in connection to the LORD or the prophet. The enemy is never connected to “seeing” or “knowing.” The verb **בִּחַן**, (“examine”) used when the LORD “examines” hearts and minds, is found once in each in each of the Confessions: 11:20 and 12:3 respectively. Verse 11:18 from the First Confession, and v. 12:3 from the Second are the most similar in their word choice.

Jeremiah 11:18

Jeremiah 12:3

<p>“And the LORD has made known to me (יָדַע) and I knew (יָדַע); then you caused me to see (רָאָה) their deeds.”</p>	<p>“And you LORD, you know me (יָדַע). You will see me (רָאָה) and you will examine my mind before you.”</p>
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Not only does 12:3 contain the two main verbs of 11:18, it also uses the idea of “examining” found in 11:20. The prevalence of similar words and ideas strengthens the connection between the two Confessions.⁵³

f. Components of a Lament

There are five necessary components in categorizing a specific poem as a poem of lament. As mentioned earlier, it is not necessary for every poem of lament to contain all five components, but should include a majority of them. The pericopes of Jeremiah 11:18-23 and 12:1-6 each include a majority of these components. The first poem has the first component, a call to the LORD, in 11:18, where the poet calls out to the LORD by name. The second component, the petition and description of the enemy, is found in 11:19-20. The enemies of the poet are plotting against him, and saying, “Let us destroy the tree and its good. Let us cut it from

⁵³ Ibid., 18.

the land today and his name will never be remembered again” (Jer 11:19). The poet then asks the LORD to enact vengeance upon them. The third component is an assurance that the LORD has heard the prayer. This is most obviously found in the future tense of the verbs. The poet is assured that the LORD *will* punish the people for their sins. Verses such as 11:22-23 state that “they *will die* by the sword and their daughters *will die* by famine. There *will be* no remnant for them” (Jer 11:22-23). All of the future activities will happen because the LORD will act on the poet’s plea, which has been heard. A vow made to the LORD is typically the fourth element of a poem of lament, but it is not found in this Confession. Instead the LORD makes a vow to the poet; the LORD promises that the men on Anathoth will be punished for their wickedness.⁵⁴ The final component, a hymn of thanksgiving is found in v. 20: “And the LORD of Armies, who governs with righteousness, examining hearts and minds I will see your vengeance upon them because to you I have disclosed my dispute” (Jer 11:20). Because of the presence of the majority of the components of a poem of lament within Jeremiah 11:18-23, I have classified the pericope as a poem of lament and the First Confession.

The components of a poem of lament can also be found in the Second Confession: Jeremiah 12:1-6. A call to the LORD, the first element, is in the first verse of the Confession: “You are just LORD, therefore I will contend with you” (Jer 12:1a). The petition and the description of the enemy is the most lengthy of the components in the Second Confession: vv. 1b-2 and 3b-4. The poet is lamenting that his enemies are prospering and asks the LORD to punish them. The third element is the assurance of being heard. Similar to the previous Confession, the poet uses future tense verbs to describe what the LORD will do; there is no

⁵⁴ “There will be no remnant for them because I will cause evil to come upon the men of Anathoth, the year of punishment” (Jer 11:23).

doubt the lament has been heard and the LORD will take appropriate action.⁵⁵ The LORD’s response to the poet’s question in vv. 5-6 is also evidence that the LORD has heard the poet’s plea. The LORD would be able to respond directly to the poet’s questions only if the LORD heard them. As before, the poet makes no vow to the LORD, but this time there is no vow from the LORD either. The fourth component of traditional poems of lament is not found in the Second Confession. The last element, a hymn of thanksgiving, is brief. It is found in the middle of the Confession: “And you LORD, you know me. You will see me and you will examine my mind before you” (Jer 12:3a). Because of the presence of the majority of the components of a poem of lament within the pericope of Jeremiah 12:1-6, I have classified Jeremiah 12:1-6 as a poem of lament and the Second Confession.

g. Descriptions of the Enemy

Most poems in the genre of poems of lament describe the enemy of the poet. It is unclear in the first two Confessions who exactly the enemy is; the common word describing the enemy is the attachment of the pronoun **הֵם** (“they”) to the end of verbs, which is not helpful in identification. In v. 11:19, the words of the enemy are quoted but no names are given.⁵⁶ The only name given is “men of Anathoth” in Jeremiah 11:23. Jeremiah 1 also mentions the name Anathoth; the very first verse of Jeremiah introduces the prophet as the “son of Hilkiah, from the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin” (Jer 1:1). This connection between the prose stories describing the historical person of the prophet and the poetic Confessions makes it likely that the “men of Anathoth” are family members, or people who lived in the region of

⁵⁵ “And you LORD, you know me. You will see me and you will examine my mind before you. Draw them away as sheep to slaughter and set them apart for the day of slaughter” (Jer 12:3).

⁵⁶ Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, 4.

Judah that the historical Jeremiah was connected with. This is further supported by the final verse of the Second Confession, in which the LORD reminds the poet that “even your brothers and your father’s house, even they will cry out fully after you. You will not trust them, even though they will speak well about you” (Jer 12:6). The enemies of the poet as described in the First and Second Confessions appear to be family, people familiar with the prophet Jeremiah, who should know and support the prophet, but do not.

h. Causes of the Laments

The Confessions, as poems of lament, are able to simultaneously express the corporate pain of the faithful people and the individual pain of the prophet. The corporate expression of pain found in the First and Second Confessions is the faithful community lamenting their inability to escape an undeserved punishment. All of the people are caught in the coming destruction, whether they have been faithful or not. The “year of punishment” is coming upon all of the people of Judah (Jer 11:23). The faithful remnant, the ones who believe in and are faithful to the word of the LORD, know what is coming. They also know they are innocent of the coming punishment; they are as innocent as lambs and are still being lead to the slaughter. The theme of innocent suffering is further supported by the Innocence Motif, a common theme amongst poems of lament, and the motif which is found in both the First and Second Confessions. The first two Confessions are lamenting that it appears as though the LORD does not know or see that the faithful are being persecuted while the wicked prosper.

And yet, the claim that the LORD does not see or know the future is untrue. The poet and the faithful amongst the people know the LORD does see the future; the LORD does know. The verbs ראה, (“see”) ידע, (“know”) and בחן (“examine”) are found throughout the two

Confessions. Part of the question of theodicy comes from the fact that the LORD does see and know, and yet is waiting to act. The punishment, the one that is coming and no one can escape, is still on the horizon. The only ones currently being punished and persecuted are the prophet and others who are faithful to the announcement of the word. Instead of being blessed for their faithfulness they are being cut off from the land.⁵⁷ The suffering of the faithful remnant in the future *and* the present is the corporate reason behind the writing of the First and Second Confessions.

The Confessions have a uniquely prophetic role alongside their corporate role. One part of this role is fulfilled by the person of the prophet. The prophet, as he is described within the final form of the book of Jeremiah, is the symbol of the faithful and innocent man being attacked and persecuted. He is not being persecuted by the LORD, but by the enemies, the men of Anathoth. But the reason they are persecuting him is not only because the prophet is faithful; they are persecuting the prophet so that he “will not prophesy in the name of the LORD” (Jer 11:21). They are making plans to “destroy the tree... [to] cut it from the land” (Jer 11:19). In effect “he suffers because he is a prophet.”⁵⁸ There is nothing personal against the poet; instead the prophet is being rejected and persecuted solely because of his message. At the beginning of ch. 11 Jeremiah is reminding Judah of all the ways they have failed to uphold the covenant, a message many do not want to hear. Making sure the prophet no longer speaks the word of the LORD is easier than changing their lives to fit the LORD’s message, and if the prophet does not speak the message of the LORD, it is easier to ignore the message, and to ignore the LORD.

⁵⁷ “And I did not know that they devised plans against me: ‘Let us destroy the tree and its good. Let us cut it from the land today and his name will never be remembered again’” (Jer 11:19b).

⁵⁸ O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 26.

Without hearing the word of the LORD, the announcement of coming judgment, it will be easier to believe that the LORD “will not see our future” (Jer 12:4).

The prophet experiences personal pain and persecution by his enemies because of his proclamation of the LORD’s message. However, he also experiences pain because of his connection with the people.⁵⁹ Jeremiah 12:5-6, with the naming of the men of Anathoth, claims the pain experienced by the prophet will come because of and through his family; if the prophet did not belong to the people, if he could simply speak the message given to him by the LORD, it would not be as painful. Also, the LORD promises the prophet that “there will be no remnant” (Jer 11: 23). The prophet is included amongst the people who are earning this punishment; he himself will not be saved, for there will be no remnant. All the people will experience the “year of punishment” (Jer 11:23). The prophet belongs to the people, to the men of Anathoth. The punishment they earn is on his shoulders as well, for he belongs to them. He feels their coming pain and punishment, as well as the current pain of his persecution by those he belongs to.

When the enemies are persecuting the prophet, one of the goals is to make it so “his name will never be remembered again” (Jer 11:19). The enemies are attempting to remove this person so thoroughly that even his memory is forgotten. So, whose name is being removed? The obvious answer is that the prophet’s name is being removed. The enemies do not want the prophet, and his message, to be recalled ever again. It is the message which makes the messenger offensive; but the message is not simply the words invented by a person but a message from the LORD to the LORD’s people. The enemies are attempting to cut off the LORD and the memory of the LORD’s message from the land. It is the LORD’s name they are attempting to remove.

⁵⁹ D.P. Melvin, “Why Does the Way of the Wicked Prosper? Human and Divine Suffering in Jeremiah 11:18-12:13 and the Problem of Evil,” *EvQ* 83:2 (2011): 104.

The best way they have to remove the LORD's name is to silence the LORD's prophet. The prophet is the one who contains and announces the word of the LORD: as such he is the representation of the word of the LORD amongst the people. The people do not want to listen to, or remember, what the LORD has proclaimed through his word. To achieve this, the people persecute and ignore the prophet and the announced word. But, because the prophet internalizes and holds the word of the LORD, any acts of hostility or anger directed at the prophet are actually being directed to the LORD. And, as the one containing the word of the LORD, the prophet experiences the LORD's pain of being purposefully ignored by the people and their attempts to cut the LORD from the land. Therefore, the prophet has pain from all sides; he is currently persecuted because of announcing the unwanted word of the LORD to an obstinate people. He and the others faithful to the word of the LORD will be punished, along with the entire nation, in the future because of the nation's refusal to listen, even as they are currently being persecuted because of their faithfulness. And finally, the prophet feels the LORD's pain as the word is continually rejected and ignored and as the people attempt to remove its memory from the land forever.

Chapter 4: The Third Confession - Jeremiah 15:10-21

a. Translation

Woe to me, my mother, because you gave birth to me, a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land. I have not loaned and they have not lent. All curse me.

The LORD said, "Surely I have let you lose for good. Surely I had met with the enemy for you in the times of evil and in times of distress.

Can iron break iron and copper from the north? Your strength and your treasure I will give as spoils without price, for all your sins and in all your territories. I will cause you to pass over to

your enemies in a land you do not know, because when a fire is kindled by my anger it will burn against you all.”

You knew, O LORD. Remember me and visit me and avenge yourself for me from my pursuers. Do not let me be taken from your presence for forbearance. Know that I am taking reproach for you.

Your words were found and I ate them. And your words were for me exultation and joy for my heart, because he called me by your name, the LORD God of Armies.

I was not sitting in the council of jesters; I sat in isolation in the presence of your hand because you filled me with righteous indignation. Why was my pain everlasting? And my wound sickly refusing to be healed? Being you will truly be for me as deceiving waters, like waters that fail.

Therefore, thus says the LORD:

“If you turn back I will bring you back and you will stand in my presence. And if you will bring out what is precious from what is worthless you will be as my mouth. They will turn back to you and you will not turn back to them. I will make you for this people as a fortified wall of bronze. They will fight against you and they will not prevail against you for I am with you to deliver you and to rescue you,” says the LORD. “I will rescue you from the hand of the evil ones and I will ransom you from the palm of the ruthless.”

b. Narrative Context

The Third Confession is in Jeremiah 15. The entirety of Jeremiah 14 and 15, including the Third Confession, is in a Dialogue Structure.⁶⁰ Sometimes the people are lamenting the coming destruction. At other points the poet is lamenting false prophets, and sometimes the LORD is the one speaking. The LORD is tired of the people of Judah turning away and commands Jeremiah to “not pray for the welfare of this people” (Jer 14:11 NRSV). There is nothing that either the people, or Jeremiah, can do to change the LORD’s mind. In fact, the LORD explicitly states that “even if Moses and Samuel stood before me, nothing would move my soul for this people. Send the people away from my presence. Let them go!” (Jer 15:1). This

⁶⁰ Gerstenberger, “Jeremiah’s Complaints,” 405.

dialogue between the prophet and the LORD is not part of the Third Confession itself, but the Dialogue Structure is continued into the Confession.

c. Where Does the Third Confession Begin and End?

Like Jeremiah 11-12, scholars are not in agreement about how many Confessions are contained within Jeremiah 15, or where the Confession(s) starts and ends. The traditional viewpoint has the Confession beginning in v.10 and ending in v. 21.⁶¹ This view is supported by O'Connor. However, not all scholars agree with this division. There are multiple other suggestions, based off the structure of the passage. The first is to divide the passage into two separate Confessions: Jeremiah 15:10-14, and Jeremiah 15:15-21, as argued by Diamond.⁶² Some scholars view only the second half, Jeremiah 15:15-21 as a true Confession, and not 15:10-14. This is usually because of the redacted nature of vv. 13-14. Other scholars, including Smith, respond to the concerns over the redacted nature of vv. 13-14 by removing them from the Confession. Smith argues that the Third Confession is vv. 10-12, 15-21.⁶³ Another possible division, supported by John Bright, is Jeremiah 15:10-18.⁶⁴ Bright ends the Third Confession at v. 18 instead of v. 21 because the last three verses of ch. 15 are a response from the LORD, and he considers them "formally distinct" from the lament proper.⁶⁵

Much of the confusion regarding where the Confession(s) are found in Jeremiah 15 and how many there are revolve around vv. 13-14. Scholars have spent a significant amount of time attempting to discover the connection between Jeremiah 15:13-14, and Jeremiah 17:3-4. They

⁶¹ O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 1.

⁶² Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 53, 66.

⁶³ Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, 55.

⁶⁴ John Bright, "Prophet's Lament and its Answer, Jeremiah 15:10-21," *Int* 28:1 (1974): 61.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 73.

are almost exactly the same, but Jeremiah 17:3-4 was composed earlier than Jeremiah 15:13-14.⁶⁶ As such, “many commentators emend 15:13-14 to accord more completely with that text, and then simply treat 15:13-14 as alien matter.”⁶⁷ Others argue that since these verses interrupt the narrative flow, they were added later and while they should not be ignored entirely, they are considered less important than the authentic, original, material.⁶⁸

When the two pericopes are analyzed together, many similarities are observed.

Jeremiah 15:13-14

Jeremiah 17:3-4

<p>Your strength (חִיל) and your treasure (אֲצִרָה) I will give (נָתַן) as spoils (לְבָז) without price, for all your sins (חַטָּאת) and in all your territories (גְּבוּל).</p> <p>I will cause you to pass over to your enemies (אֹיֵב) in a land you do not know (בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתָּ), because when a fire is kindled (קָדַח) by my anger (אַף) it will burn (יָקַד) against you all.</p>	<p>On my hill in open country, your strength (חִיל) and all your treasure (אֲצִרָה) will be given (נָתַן) as spoil (לְבָז), your high places and all your territory (גְּבוּל) because of your sin (חַטָּאת).</p> <p>And by your own actions you will pull away from your inheritance which I gave to you. And I will make you servants to your enemies (אֹיֵב) in a land you do not know (בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתָּ), because you all kindled (קָדַח) my anger (אַף). It will burn (יָקַד) for eternity.</p>
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Many of the same words are used in both pericopes: treasure and strength, spoils, territories and sin, and anger of the LORD, for example, are found in both passages. However,

⁶⁶ Gerstenberger, “Jeremiah’s Complaints,” 394-395.

⁶⁷ O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 37.

⁶⁸ Michael H Floyd, “Prophetic Complaints about the Fulfillment of Oracles in Habakkuk 1:2-17 and Jeremiah 15:10-18,” *JBL* 110:3 (1991): 407.

the Jeremiah 17 version has more details, and is more explicit about what the anger of the LORD will bring about. “In 17:3-4 Judah's punishment specifically includes the destruction of the ‘high places’... and exile to a strange land, both of which are missing” in the Jeremiah 15 version.⁶⁹ It is not uncommon for biblical passages to directly quote other biblical passages, so any differences are deliberate and should be taken as such.⁷⁰ However, when a verse is copied with changes, the newer version is typically more detailed than the older version. The opposite is found here; the older version is longer and more detailed than the newer version of the verses found in Jeremiah 15.

It is my opinion that vv. 13-14 are editorial additions into the Confession, transplanted from Jeremiah 17. These two verses do not fit well into the narrative flow of the Third Confession and it is unclear who exactly is being addressed by these verses. However, they function as redaction to “explain and expand the immediately preceding verses.”⁷¹ Even though these verses are redactions, they have been inserted into the Confession in the final form of the text. Therefore, it is not correct to remove or ignore vv. 13-14 from the Third Confession.

The next question, then, is if the Confession is two separate Confessions or only one. Jeremiah 15:10-21, taken as one unit and not two, is structured with an *inclusio*, with connections to the Call Narrative in Jeremiah 1. The Third Confession begins with an unusual image, a mention of the prophet's mother: “Woe to me, my mother, because you gave birth to me, a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land” (Jer 15:10). Michael Floyd argues that this is simply a rhetorical device, in which the prophet is “lamenting that he was born to a

⁶⁹ Ibid., 413.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 408.

⁷¹ O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 37.

life of conflict and controversy.”⁷² However, many commentators take this verse in connection with Jeremiah’s Call as found in Jeremiah 1. When Jeremiah is first called by the LORD to be a prophet, the LORD tells him, “Before I had formed you in the womb, I knew you. And before you left the womb I set you apart; I gave you as a prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5). It is unusual for a poem of lament to start with a call to someone besides the LORD, so the reference to the prophet’s mother is certainly purposeful. Many scholars, including Bright and O’Connor, argue that the connections between the Third Confession and the Call Narrative show the difficulty of the prophetic ministry or the inability of the prophet to refuse the role to which he had been called.⁷³

The end of the Third Confession also contains a connection to Jeremiah’s Call Narrative. Many similar images and themes are found in both Jeremiah 15:20, in the Third Confession, and Jeremiah 1:18-19, in the Call Narrative.

Jeremiah 15:20

Jeremiah 1:18-19

<p>“I will make you for this people as a fortified wall of bronze (לְחֹמַת נְחֹשֶׁת בְּצוּרָה). They will fight against you and they will not prevail (יִכַּל) against you for I am with you (כִּי אֲתָדָּ אֲנִי) to deliver (נִצַּל) you and to rescue you.”</p>	<p>“Today I have made you, today a fortified (מְבֻצָּר) city, a column of iron, and a wall of bronze (וּלְחֹמַת נְחֹשֶׁת), against the whole land, the kings of Judah, her officials, her priests and all the people of the land. They will wage war against you and they will not prevail (יִכַּל) against you because I am with you (כִּי אֲתָדָּ אֲנִי),” says the LORD, “to deliver (נִצַּל) you.”</p>
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⁷² Floyd, “Prophetic Complaints,” 411.

⁷³ Bright, “Prophet’s Lament,” 63-64. O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 33.

In both of these passages, the LORD is speaking directly to the prophet, and the message includes many of the same words, symbols and themes. Jeremiah 1:18-19 and 15:20 are allusions to each other.

The prophet begins the Third Confession in v. 10 with a reference to his Call Narrative, the mention of his mother. This may be an allusion to the difficult life the LORD has called the prophet, and the fact that the prophet has no way to escape this vocation. At the end of the Confession, the LORD responds with another allusion to the Call Narrative: the LORD's promise given to the prophet, a promise of solidarity and a "readiness to rescue."⁷⁴ With these two powerful images from the prophetic Call Narrative framing the Confession, Jeremiah 15:10-21 should be viewed as one complete unit: the Third Confession.

d. Outline

Even though the pericope is one Confession, it can be divided into two halves: vv. 10-14 and vv. 15-21. Each half represents an individual dialogue between the prophet and the LORD. The first half begins with the allusion to the prophet's mother: "Woe to me, my mother, because you gave birth to me, a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land. I have not loaned and they have not lent. All curse me" (Jer 15:10). The LORD responds to the complaint by reminding the poet that the LORD has not abandoned him and that just punishment will meet the prophet's enemies; "Surely I have let you lose for good; surely I had met with the enemy for you, in the times of evil and in times of distress" (Jer 15:11).

⁷⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 149.

The most difficult part of this first half of the Confession is the singular and plural endings for the word “you.”⁷⁵ This distinction is difficult to show in English translations, as there is no difference between אַתָּה, the singular second person, and אַתֶּם, the plural second person, in English even though it is obvious in Hebrew. The second person pronouns in Jeremiah 15:11-13 use singular endings.⁷⁶ For example, the Hebrew verb שְׂרוּתֶךָ, (“let you lose”) in Jeremiah 15:11 is speaking of just one person, the poet. Again, in v. 13 when the LORD references חֵילְךָ וְאוֹצְרוֹתֶיךָ (“your strength and your treasures”) both nouns use the second person singular ending, referencing just one person’s strength and treasure. However, in v. 14, the anger of the LORD “will burn against you all” (עַלְיֶכֶם תּוֹקֵד) (Jer 15:14). This shift between the singular and plural second person sometimes makes it difficult to know if the LORD is responding directly to the poet or to all of the people. However, the dual nature of the Confession implies that both אַתָּה (“you singular”) representing one person, and אַתֶּם, (“you plural”) representing all of the people, are appropriate, since the poem of lament represents both the individual prophet and the faithful remnant simultaneously. The use of these pronouns connects the Third Confession to both the life of the historical prophet and to the faithful community as a whole.

The second half of the Third Confession is Jeremiah 15:15-21. This half of the Third Confession is in a Dialogue Structure. The poet cries out to the LORD, poignantly saying “You knew, O LORD. Remember me and visit me and avenge yourself for me from my pursuers.... Why was my pain everlasting? And my wound sickly refusing to be healed?” (Jer 15:15, 18).

⁷⁵ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 62. O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 38.

⁷⁶ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 62.

The LORD responds to the complaint in 15:19-21 reminding the prophet that he has been called to be a prophet and that while it is difficult, it must continue. “The basic assurance is ‘I am with you.’”⁷⁷

This latter half of the Third Confession has a chiasmic structure. Verses 15 and 20-21 are a description of the enemies of the prophet, first from the perspective of the prophet and then the perspective of the LORD. The middle verses are also parallels. Verses 16-18 and 19 are descriptions of the prophetic ministry. First, in vv. 16-18, the prophet is lamenting his mission and the difficulty of the prophetic role. In v. 19 the LORD reminds the prophet that even though persecution will continue, if he continues to speak the LORD’s message, “you will stand in my presence. And if you will bring out what is precious from what is worthless you will be as my mouth” (Jer 15:19). The middle of a chiasm is usually the most important part and the intended focus of any pericope. Here the focus is on the word of the LORD, how the prophet contains the word and “ate” it, how the people mock him for the word, and the promise that the LORD will support Jeremiah if he continues to speak the word.

	Description of Enemies	Prophetic Ministry
15:15	Avenge yourself for me from my pursuers.... Know that I am taking reproach for you	
15:16-18		Your words were found and I ate them.... Why was my pain everlasting?
15:19		And if you will bring out what is precious from what is worthless you will be as my mouth.
15:20-21	I will rescue you from the hand of the evil ones and I will ransom you from the palm of the ruthless.	

⁷⁷ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 150. Floyd, “Prophetic Complaints,” 411.

e. Components of a Lament

Most of the components of a traditional poem of lament can be found in Jeremiah 15:10-21. However, they are not all in the usual order and the poet has augmented the traditional forms. For example, this lament begins “in a way no lament in the Psalter does, or could. These normally open with an appeal to God for aid. Here the prophet apostrophizes his (presumably) long-dead mother.”⁷⁸ There is an appeal to the LORD, in Jeremiah 15:15, but it is not at the beginning of the Confession.⁷⁹ However, since the LORD responds to the prophet’s call to his mother in the second verse of the Confession, it seems likely that while the Confession names the prophet’s mother, it is directed to the LORD.

The next component of a traditional poem of lament is the lament or petition itself, along with the description of the enemy. This section is the longest component of this particular lament: Jeremiah 15:10, 15b-18. The poet is asking the LORD why he is being persecuted, especially because he has done everything the LORD has asked of him and yet “I am taking reproach for you” (Jer 15:15b). The third component of a lament is an assurance that the petition has been heard. This is found in the Dialogue Structure of the Confession. The petition is more than just heard, in Jeremiah 15:19 it is answered.

The fourth component of a poem of lament is a vow. As in the First Confession, the vow in this Confession is not made by the lamenter, but by the LORD. After the poet cries out the LORD responds by vowing that, if Jeremiah continues his prophetic ministry, the LORD will

⁷⁸ Bright, “Prophet’s Lament,” 63.

⁷⁹ “You knew, O LORD. Remember me and visit me and avenge yourself for me from my pursuers” (Jer 15:15a).

remain with him.⁸⁰ The final component, a prayer of thanksgiving, is not found in the Confession. Instead, the lament ends with the vow that the LORD will be with the prophet. It is up to the prophet to either accept the promise and continue to announce the word, or not.

f. Descriptions of the Enemy

The enemy, an important part of all poems of lament, is not well described in this lament. In v. 15 the enemies are described as the ones “pursing” the poet (Jer 15:15). In v. 17 the poet says that he was not “sitting in the council of jesters,” which could describe how the poet sees his enemies (Jer 15:17). The LORD himself gives three different terms to describe the enemy. The first is the basic “this people” (Jer 15:20). It is likely that “this people” are the people of Judah or Jerusalem, therefore making the enemies of the prophet the people he is supposed to be serving and representing. The LORD also describes the enemies of the poet as “the evil ones” and “the ruthless” (Jer 15:21).

g. Causes of the Lament

As with the Confessions found in chs. 11 and 12, the Third Confession has an individual and communal purpose. The communal implications of this Confession center on vv. 13-14 and the controversial use of the second person pronouns.

Your strength and **your** treasure I will give as spoils without price, for all **your** sins and in all **your** territories. I will cause **you** to pass over to **your** enemies in a land you do not know, because when a fire is kindled by my anger it will burn against **you all**. (עֲלֵיכֶם)

⁸⁰ “Therefore, thus says the LORD: ‘If you turn back I will bring you back. And you will stand in my presence. And if you will bring out what is precious from what is worthless, you will be as my mouth. They will turn back to you and you will not turn back to them. I will make you for this people as a fortified wall of bronze. They will fight against you and they will not prevail against you for I am with you to deliver you and to rescue you,’ says the LORD” (Jer 15:19-20).

All of the second person pronouns within this pericope are in the singular except for the last one. Since English does not have a second person plural pronoun, “you all” is used to capture this idea. Many scholars argue the second person singular pronouns are addressing one person, most likely the character of the prophet, and the plural pronoun must be addressing someone else.⁸¹ However, it is a common prophetic technique to personify a group, such as a country, as a single person. For example, in Jeremiah 3, the LORD is talking to the country of Israel and says:

“Return, faithless Israel... I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge **your guilt** (אֲשָׁמְךָ), that **you have rebelled** (רָשַׁעְתָּ) against the Lord your God, and scattered **your favors** (רַחֲמֶיךָ) among strangers under every green tree, and have not obeyed my voice,” says the Lord (Jer 3:12-13 NRSV).

In these verses, second person singular pronouns are being used to describe an entire group of people, the country of Israel. This is what is happening in Jeremiah 15:13-14. The whole country of Judah is being described. This is more obvious when looking at the nouns used in the verse: strength, treasure, spoils, sins, territories, enemies. While some of these are appropriate for an individual, few individuals have territories; this is usually in connection with countries. In these verses, the anger of the LORD is revealed against the entire nation, all the people of Judah. Everyone will be passed “over to your enemies” (Jer 15:14). This passage is directed simultaneously to both the singular “you” (אַתָּה) of the prophet, and the plural “you” (אַתֶּם) of the entire nation. The prophet and the faithful remnant know that the punishment is coming and are already experiencing persecution, but everyone will experience the Fall of Jerusalem into the hands of their enemies; many will be taken into exile, never to return to the land.

⁸¹ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 54.

The Third Confession is clear in expressing individual pain as well. The poet asks the LORD, “why was my pain everlasting? And my wound sickly refusing to be healed? Being you will truly be for me as deceiving waters, like waters that fail” (Jer 15:18). The more difficult question is where the pain comes from, why the poet is lamenting.

As stated earlier, placing the Confessions into the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah allows each of the Confessions to have a unique, individual, role connected with the person of the prophet alongside their corporate role. The Third Confessions shows that one of the reasons the prophet is suffering is because of his role as a prophet, the one announcing the word of the LORD. The poet reminds the LORD that he is “taking reproach for you” (Jer 15:15). At this point, the poet is voicing a question from both the faithful remnant and himself personally. The reproach they are experiencing is connected with the word of the LORD and all who believe it and are faithful take the reproach. However, the prophet’s pain is different from the remnants because, unlike the remnant, the word is inside of and contained within the prophet: “Your words were found and I ate them. And your words were for me exultation and joy for my heart, because he called me by your name, the LORD God of Armies” (Jer 15:16). The word the LORD has given the prophet, the word the prophet has eaten, is announced by the prophet to the people. Instead of joy at the announcement, however, the people curse the prophet.⁸² When the LORD responds to Jeremiah’s lament, it is with the reminder that the people will continue to fight against him, but only if “you will bring out what is precious from what is worthless,” for only then will the prophet truly be the mouthpiece of the LORD, the announcer of the word of the LORD, a true prophet (Jer 15:19). If the prophet was not announcing the word of the LORD, if he was not a prophet, the persecution would cease.

⁸² “Woe to me, my mother, because you gave birth to me, a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land. I have not loaned and they have not lent. All curse me” (Jer 15:10).

The prophet's pain also comes from the prophet's membership in the people of Judah, best expressed in the unusual reference to the poet's mother in the first verse of the Confession. The prophet laments, "Woe to me, my mother, because you gave birth to me, a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land. I have not loaned and they have not lent. All curse me" (Jer 15:10). Looking beyond the reality that any historical person, including the historical person represented by the character of the prophet Jeremiah, has a mother, the references to the prophet's mother have two vital roles within the Third Confession. One is to connect the Third Confession to the Call Narrative; the other is to act as an illustration of the prophet's membership in the community. The prophet was brought into the community by his mother and it would have been better for him and the community if he had never belonged. Everyone curses him. The people whom he serves, the community he was born into, will "fight against you" and the prophet feels the pain and persecution of being rejected by his own people (Jer 15:20).

Verse 17 offers an interesting perspective on another reason the prophet is feeling pain and lamenting. The prophet complains to the LORD, saying, "I was not sitting in the council of jesters; I sat in isolation in the presence of your hand because you filled me with righteous indignation" (Jer 15:17). When the prophet receives the word of the LORD and it fills him, the prophet is filled with joy.⁸³ With the consumption and internalization of the word, however, come the emotions connected to the word. The LORD feels righteous indignation when looking at the people sitting in the council. This emotion is translated directly to the prophet; "The

⁸³ "Your words were found and I ate them. And your words were for me exultation and joy for my heart, because he called me by your name, the LORD God of Armies" (Jer 15:16).

disposition of the deity and the prophet toward the people is not merely the same; the prophet's posture derives from Yahweh...; Jeremiah feels what Yahweh feels toward Israel."⁸⁴

The prophet is being torn in multiple directions. He feels and represents the pain of the faithful remnant; he with the rest of Judah is going to go into exile. The prophet and the remnant will be punished for the sins of the nation, even though they are undeserving of the punishment. The prophet is also being persecuted because of his announcement of the word of the LORD. The people, who disagree with the prophet's message, lash out against the one announcing the destruction. The prophet feels the pain of distrust, anger and personal persecution directed at him. His pain is everlasting.⁸⁵ The prophet *must* announce the word of the LORD, no matter the persecution, because he has eaten the word, brought it into himself and internalized it. However, by eating the word and taking it within himself, the prophet also takes the emotions connected to the word of the LORD and feels and internalizes them as well. The prophet is feeling the pain of the unjust being punished, the messenger being persecuted, and the message being ignored.

Chapter 5: The Fourth Confession- Jeremiah 17:14-18

a. Translation

Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed. Deliver me and let me be delivered, because you are my praise.

Behold! They are saying to me "Where is the word of the LORD? Surely it will come!"

And I did not leave from laboring in your service and I did not desire the day of weakness. You know what came forth from my lips. It was before your face. Do not become a terror to me. You are my refuge in the day of evil. Let those who are pursuing me be ashamed, and do not let me be

⁸⁴ Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, 13-14.

⁸⁵ "Why was my pain everlasting? And my wound sickly refusing to be healed?" (Jer 15:18).

ashamed. Let them be shattered, and do not let me be shattered. Cause the day of evil to come upon them and break them with a double breaking.

b. Where Does the Fourth Confession Begin?

Even though the Fourth Confession is the shortest of the Confessions, scholarship is not in agreement about where the Confession begins.⁸⁶ The debate is centered on Jeremiah 17:12-13:

O throne, O glory, high and exalted from the beginning, shrine of our sanctuary, O Israel's Hope- the LORD. All those who are forsaking me will be ashamed. Those who are found with faults in the land will be recorded, because they forsake the spring of the water of life, the LORD.

Many scholars, including Brueggemann and O'Connor, do not include this pericope in the Fourth Confession, claiming it is a unique unit that should be considered entirely separate while Baumgartner argues it should be considered part of the Fourth Confession.⁸⁷ Generally poems of lament include a hymn of thanksgiving, and Baumgartner argues vv. 12-13 are this hymn, especially because there is no other hymn of thanksgiving elsewhere in the Fourth Confession.⁸⁸ He see it as "a festive, hymnic introduction (vv. 12f.), a string of honorific titles for the temple and Yahweh."⁸⁹

I agree with Brueggemann and O'Connor and view vv. 12-13 as redactions that have been glossed into the Fourth Confession. However, simply arguing that the material has been provided by redactors does not mean that the verses do not "have a formal function as part of the

⁸⁶ There is general scholarly agreement that v. 18 is the end of the Fourth Confession.

⁸⁷ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 161. O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 48.

⁸⁸ Baumgartner, *Jeremiah's Poems of Lament*, 20.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

confession unit.”⁹⁰ There are other elements besides being redacted to lend support to my argument that vv. 12-13 do not belong in the Fourth Confession.

Part of this argument is based on the grammatical structure of the pericope. Jeremiah 17:14-18 is “composed of short, balanced clauses of nearly equal length, while vv. 12-13 consist of longer, less-balanced clauses that do not blend rhythmically with those of the confession.”⁹¹ A variety of repeated words, such as day (יּוֹם), heal (רפא), deliver (ישע), shatter (חתת) and break (שבר), are found within vv. 14-18; they are not found within vv. 12-13. I argue it would be unusual to purposefully add verses with a different grammatical style and word choice to the beginning of the Confession.

The argument against including vv. 12-13 in the Fourth Confession is also based on the shift between persons. Shifts in person are always important to notice when interpreting a text; in the Third Confession they were used to argue for the inclusion of the redacted verses 15:13-14 into the Confession. In this Confession, the shifts in person argue *against* the inclusion of vv. 12-13 to the Confession. Verse 12 of the Fourth Confession uses second person plural pronouns: for example, “shrine of **our** sanctuary (מִקְדָּשֵׁנוּ)” (Jer 17:12b). Verse 13b, however, uses a first person pronoun: “all those who are **forsaking me** (יסורי) will be ashamed” (Jer 17:13b). The shift between second and first person makes the most sense if it viewed as a conversation, with the “our” being the people of Judah, and the “me” being the LORD.⁹² While there are examples

⁹⁰ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 80.

⁹¹ O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 48.

⁹² Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 80.

of the LORD speaking directly within the Confessions, generally the LORD is responding to a lament expressed either by the people or the prophet. In these verses the LORD is not responding to a previous call or lament. Instead, the LORD is reminding the people that they will be judged and, if they forsake the LORD, they will be ashamed. This section articulates a “doxology of judgment,” using classic cultic expression.⁹³ The pronouns indicate that while these two verses are part of a Dialogue Structure, they are not part of the dialogue that is occurring in the poem of lament contained within Fourth Confession.

The final piece of the argument that Jeremiah 17:12-13 does not belong in the Fourth Confession is the context of the rest of ch. 17. Chapter 17 in general “reflects a very heterogeneous character.”⁹⁴ Jeremiah 17:1-4 is a judgment against the people because of their sin.⁹⁵ Jeremiah 17:5-11 is a series of blessings and curses. Those who trust in the LORD will be blessed: “his leaves will remain green and in the year of drought he will not be anxious and will not stop producing fruit” (Jer 17:8b). Those who do not trust in the LORD but instead trust in the heart or in the flesh will become fools.⁹⁶ Jeremiah 17:12-13 is a hymn of praise; it continues the series of blessing and curses found in vv. 5-11 and this thematic continuation connects the hymn with the previous verses and not the Confession that follows. Based on multiple stylistic clues such as word choice, thematic continuity, and grammatical structure, it becomes clear that Jeremiah 17:12-13 is not actually part of the Confession. The Fourth Confession is Jeremiah 17:14-18.

⁹³ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 161. Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 81.

⁹⁴ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 161-162. Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 159.

⁹⁵ Jeremiah 17:3-4 is found modified in the previous Confession, Jeremiah 15:13-14. This was discussed on page 32-34 of this thesis.

⁹⁶ “As a partridge gathers together what he does not lay, so are those who become rich unjustly. In the middle of the day it will leave and in the end he will become a fool” (Jer 17:11).

c. Narrative Context

The unusual compilation of ch. 17 does not stop with the end of the Fourth Confession in v. 18. After the Fourth Confession, there is a sermon on the keeping of the Sabbath. It is Deuteronomistic and seems at odds with both the preceding judgment blessings and curses and the Fourth Confession. However, the sermon on the Sabbath continues the idea of the blessings and curses found at the beginning of the chapter. The wise will keep the Sabbath as the LORD has commanded their ancestors so that Jerusalem “will be inhabited forever” (Jer 17:25). They will be blessed. Meanwhile, the foolish who do not keep the Sabbath will be cursed. The LORD “will cause a fire to come out from her gates, and it will devour the citadels of Jerusalem and will not be extinguished” (Jer 17:27). The Fourth Confession is placed in the middle of a discussion about who will receive the blessings and who will receive the curses.

d. Outline

The Fourth Confession is the shortest of Jeremiah’s Confessions with only five verses: Jeremiah 17:14-18. It begins with the poet calling out to the LORD asking for healing and deliverance. The verbs רפא (“to heal”) and ישע (“to deliver”) are each used twice in the first verse. The repetition of verbs is a traditional way to show emphasis. Verse 15 is a direct quote from the enemies of the poet, similar to the technique used in Jeremiah 11:19 in the First Confession. The enemies are taunting the prophet, asking why the word of the LORD announced by the prophet has not come about.⁹⁷ In the last two verses of the Confession, the prophet cries out to the LORD, and asks that the LORD bring the same evil upon his enemies that they

⁹⁷ Behold! They are saying to me ‘Where is the word of the LORD? Surely it will come!’” (Jer 17:15).

brought to him; “Let those who are pursuing me be ashamed, and do not let me be ashamed. Let them be shattered, and do not let me be shattered. Cause the day of evil to come upon them and break them with a double breaking” (Jer 17:18). Unlike the previous Confessions, in the Fourth Confession the LORD does not respond directly to the prophet’s specific petition. There is an answer, but it is not in response to the plea of the prophet. Instead, the Confession is followed by the LORD assigning the prophet his next task: to give the sermon about keeping Sabbath.⁹⁸

e. Components of a Lament

Despite the confusion regarding vv. 12-13, the Fourth Confession, beginning in v. 14, can be categorized as a poem of lament. It begins with the poet calling out “Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed” (Jer 17:14). This is the invocation of the deity, the first component. The second component, the petition is found in 17:16-17. The description of the enemy, classically connected with the petition of a poem of lament, is found in v. 15 and is a direct quotation of the taunt against the poet.⁹⁹ The third section, an assurance that the petition has been heard, is not as explicit. However, the directness of the language shows that the poet assumes the LORD is listening, and has the power to change the circumstances if the LORD so chooses. It is similar to the Dialogue Structure of the previous Confessions, except this time there is no response from the LORD. The Confession ends in silence, from both the poet and the LORD. There is no response from the LORD and there is no vow or hymn of thanksgiving, the traditional concluding elements of a poem of lament. Instead, the Confession concludes at the end of the poet’s petition.

⁹⁸ Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, 18.

⁹⁹ “Behold! They are saying to me ‘Where is the word of the LORD? Surely it will come’” (Jer 17:15).

f. Descriptions of the Enemy

While the presence of the enemies in the Confession is obvious, because of the direct quote found in Jeremiah 17:15, there is no knowledge of who the enemies actually are. Besides the word הַמְּזַדְּמִים (“they”) the only other information given by the pericope is that the enemies are “pursuing” the prophet.¹⁰⁰ However, the fact that the word הַמְּזַדְּמִים is actually included in the text can give a clearer understanding of who the enemies are. There is no need to add pronouns in Hebrew text. It is implicit in the person and tense used in the verb and, unlike in English, pronouns are added for impact rather than necessity. This makes the pericope unique because there are a lot of pronouns used when they are not strictly necessary. The word אַתָּה (“you”) is found in 17:14, 16, and 17, all of which are referencing the LORD. The word אֲנִי (“I”) is in 17:16 and 18, referencing the character of the prophet. In 17:15 and 18 the word הַמְּזַדְּמִים (“they”) is found. “They” are the unnamed enemies.¹⁰¹ Generally, אֲנִי (“I”) and אַתָּה (“you”) are in agreement, while אֲנִי (“I”) and הַמְּזַדְּמִים (“they”) are not. הַמְּזַדְּמִים (“they”) and אַתָּה (“you”) are never found in the same verse. If אֲנִי (“I”) is the prophet, and אַתָּה (“you”) is the LORD, then הַמְּזַדְּמִים (“they”) is “everyone else,” the nation in general. The LORD and the nation are not on speaking

¹⁰⁰ “Let those who are pursuing me be ashamed, and do not let me be ashamed” (Jer 17:18).

¹⁰¹ O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 49.

to each other. The use and structure of the pronouns show “the relationship of prophet and nation, and nation and Yahweh in exclusively antithetic terms.”¹⁰²

g. Key Words and Images

This Confession does not focus on a few specific words. Instead the Forth Confession contains a few common words used repeatedly, like the pronouns, to add emphasis. The first verse of the Confession, 17:14 uses the repetition of רפא (“heal”) and ישע (“deliver”). Both are used first in the imperative and then in the imperfect. The repetition shows the importance of healing and deliverance for the poet. Verse 17:15 has no repeated words, as this is the description of the enemies rebuke, but 17:16-18 does use repetition. The idea of the “day of evil” (יום רעה) or the “day of weakness” (יום אנוש) is found three times within these three verses. I argue that the repetition makes the day of evil, sometimes referred to as the day of judgment, the focus of the Confession. This is further supported by the blessings and curses found throughout ch. 17. The “day of judgment” is traditionally the day when all curses will be enacted, justice administered, and the righteous and faithful finally justified.

Verse 17:18 also uses the repetition of the same verbs to add emphasis. The verbs בוש (“be ashamed”) and חתת (“be shattered”) are both used twice consecutively, once in connection

¹⁰² Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 87.

to the enemy, and once in connection to the prophet.¹⁰³ The poet knows that the day of evil will bring judgement. He asks that it happens to “them” and not to “me.” The words that are repeated are a classic block of vocabulary that “is especially associated in the book of Jeremiah with the destruction and judgment and restoration of the nation. This provides a strong indication that the opponents... referred to so obliquely are in actuality to be identified as the whole nation.”¹⁰⁴ I agree, and argue that both the pronouns and the key words are pointing to the nation of Judah as the enemy of the poet and the remnant who remains faithful to the word of the LORD as announced by the prophet.

h. Causes of the Lament

The prophet, as represented within the Fourth Confession, is being persecuted, and the individual purpose of the Fourth Confession is to show that the persecution is related to his role as a prophet and his announcement of the word of the LORD. The ironic taunt from the enemy, “Where is the word of the LORD? Surely it will come!” implies that the prophet announced the word of the LORD, and the announcement has yet to take place (Jer 17:15). This is especially important because Deuteronomy teaches that the only way to know a true prophet from a false prophet is whether or not their prophecy comes to pass: “If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but whatever is prophesied about does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it” (Deut 18:22 NRSV). Because the day of judgment that the prophet Jeremiah has been announcing has yet to come to pass, the people feel no need to believe his message. “The delay

¹⁰³ “Let those who are pursuing me be ashamed, and do not let me be ashamed. Let them be shattered, and do not let me be shattered. Cause the day of evil to come upon them and break them with a double breaking” (Jer 17:18).

¹⁰⁴ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 86.

in fulfillment has created a crisis of legitimacy before the nation who now can taunt an apparently misguided or even self-styled prophet.”¹⁰⁵ As a prophet whose word has not come true, the people do not need to listen to the prophet and can persecute and pursue him, for he is viewed as a “false” prophet.

But the character of Jeremiah as presented in the book of Jeremiah is not a false prophet. He is injured, pursued and ashamed and knows that he is undeserving of this treatment. He knows that he has spoken only the word given to him by the LORD: “I did not leave from laboring in your service.... You know what came forth from my lips. It was before your face” (Jer 17:16). Since Jeremiah spoke the word of the LORD “what is at stake is not only Jeremiah’s credibility as Yahweh’s true spokesman, but the very word of God which the prophet claimed to speak.”¹⁰⁶ If the word is not vindicated, and the day of judgment does not come, both Jeremiah and the LORD will be judged by its failure. The prophet asks for “the day of evil to come upon them” so that the word of the LORD may be fulfilled, and himself vindicated (Jer 17:18). The taunting and pain comes upon the prophet because of the word, and its apparent un-fulfillment.

The nation’s mockery and ignorance of the word of the LORD is painful to the prophet, but it is also painful to the LORD. At the beginning of ch. 17, this promise is announced against the people of Judah:

On my hill in open country, your strength and all your treasure will be given as spoil, your high places and all your territory because of your sin. And by your own actions you will pull away from your inheritance which I gave to you. And I will make you servants to your enemies in a land you do not know, because you all kindled my anger. It will burn for eternity (Jer 17:3-4).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰⁶ O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 49.

Jeremiah 17:3-4 is from the mouth of the LORD, not the mouth of the prophet. However, the Fourth Confession, a poem of lament connected to the words and emotions of the prophet Jeremiah, contains similar curses from the mouth of the prophet.¹⁰⁷ The pain and anger the LORD feels against the people of Judah has been internalized and expressed by the prophet. The LORD knows the message as announced by the prophet is true and is angry that the people continually ignore it. The prophet now feels and expresses this pain back to the LORD. This is why the Confession “calls for vindication of the prophet and his proclamation by Yahweh’s execution of the promised judgment.”¹⁰⁸ If the judgment comes and the people are punished for their sins, then the LORD will prove that the word was truly given to Jeremiah, making Jeremiah a true prophet and proving the LORD trustworthy. If the LORD responds to the prophet’s enemies and acts according to his word, then the LORD will not be a terror to Jeremiah, but a refuge.¹⁰⁹ The LORD will be a terror to the people, for by fulfilling the proclaimed word the terror, evil, and judgment the people have placed upon Jeremiah will fall upon them instead. The pain of the unfulfilled word is the root of both the prophet’s personal pain and the LORD’s pain.

The Fourth Confession promises coming pain for all of the people of Israel, not just the ones deserving of the punishment. The coming day of evil is directed to all of the people, even though not all of the people are guilty of ignoring the word of the LORD and taunting the prophet. The faithful remnant and the poet know they are undeserving of the coming destruction. When the poet asks for the LORD not to abandon him, to heal him, to “not become a terror to me,” he is speaking for all the people who believe in the announced, and as yet un-fulfilled, word

¹⁰⁷ “Let those who are pursuing me be ashamed, and do not let me be ashamed. Let them be shattered, and do not let me be shattered. Cause the day of evil to come upon them and break them with a double breaking” (Jer 17:18).

¹⁰⁸ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 86.

¹⁰⁹ “Do not become a terror to me. You are my refuge in the day of evil” (Jer 17:17).

of the LORD (Jer 17:17). The chapter begins with a reminder of the sin of the people and the coming destruction: “The sins of Judah are written by an iron pen. With a nail of stone, they are engraved on the tablet of their hearts and on the horns of your altars” (Jer 17:1). It appears there is no way for the people to escape the coming judgment; it is engraved in their hearts. The coming day of evil is expressed throughout the chapter. However, the promised curses are interspersed with blessings; “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD. The LORD will be his confidence” (Jer 17:7). All of the faithful who do trust the LORD are promised blessings, but the coming destruction is still imminent. In this context the faithful amongst the people cry out to the LORD. They are asking for the LORD to truly be their “refuge in the day of evil” (Jer 17:17).

Part of the role of a prophet is to represent the people to the LORD. In this Confession, a portion of the pain the prophet is feeling comes specifically from this prophetic role. I argue this is shown by the lack of response from the LORD. After the Fourth Confession, the announcement of pain and despair to the LORD, there is an expectation of an answer from the LORD. The last three Confessions have all contained a response; the only answer to this lament is silence: The prophet’s pain receives no answer.¹¹⁰ The LORD does respond, giving the prophet his next task to complete, but the LORD makes no mention of the poet’s plea. This silence is telling, for “God’s silence to the poet corresponds to the absence of God announced to the whole people. God is no longer available, either to Israel or even to the poet. The poet experiences the very absence that is the destiny of Israel.”¹¹¹ The pronouns used in the Confession show the LORD is not in communication with the people. The lack of response to the Confession shows that the LORD is not communicating the same way with the prophet either. The people do not know the LORD has stopped responding; the prophet does. The pain the people *should* feel

¹¹⁰ Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, 17.

¹¹¹ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 165.

because of God's distance, the poet feels now. The pain they *will* feel when the day of evil comes, the poet and the other faithful feel now. The character of Jeremiah is presented as standing in solidarity with the people of Judah, and begging for their rescue, even before the people feel the pain.

The prophet longs for the word to be fulfilled so that his pain is vindicated and the LORD's word proven true and faithful. As the one who holds and contains the word, he needs the word to come to pass. However, he knows that the day of judgment will be a day full of terror and shame. People will shatter. The prophet and the faithful remnant will experience the day of evil along with the nation, because they belong to the nation. Jeremiah already knows the pain they will feel and is torn between longing for the day and terror at what it will bring.

Chapter 6: The Fifth Confession- Jeremiah 18:19-23

a. Translation

Please pay attention to me, O LORD! And listen to the voice of my accusers! Is good repaid by evil? For they dug a pit for my life. Remember, I stood before you in order to speak good to them, to cause your anger to turn back from them.

Therefore, give their sons over to famine and hurl down the hand of the sword. Let their women become childless and widows. And let their men be brutally put to death, their young men smote by the sword in battle. Let the cry be heard from their houses, because you will cause troops to come over them suddenly. For they have dug a pit in order to capture me and have hidden traps for my feet.

And you, O LORD, know all their schemes planning my death. Do not cover up their punishment and their sin from before your face. Do not blot it out. Let them stumble before your face. In the time of your anger, do this to them.

b. Narrative Context

The final two Confessions are found within Jeremiah 18-20, a unique portion of Jeremiah. These three chapters are “the most tightly shaped unit of the entire section of cc 11-20.”¹¹² These three chapters are purposefully shaped by redactors and include narrative stories, prose sermons, poetic expressions, and the final two Confessions.

The Fifth Confession itself is in Jeremiah 18. The beginning of this chapter is the famous story of the potter and the wheel. The potter works on the vessel, and ends up remaking the vessel when it does not turn out as the potter intended. After watching the potter work, the LORD calls to Jeremiah and asks him “Am I not able to do to you all, O house of Israel, as this potter has done? . . . Behold! Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you all in my hand, O house of Israel” (Jer 18:6). The story of the potter and the clay is a representation of the validity of the LORD’s future destruction of Judah.¹¹³ The LORD is the Potter and can shape, re-shape or completely destroy the vessel as needed, especially if the vessel refuses to be shaped. Knowing the destruction that is coming, the LORD asks the people to “repent now, each of you, from the evil road and do all your deeds well” (Jer 18:11). The nation of Judah is given another chance to choose to acknowledge and listen to the word of the LORD as announced by the prophet Jeremiah, or to continue not listening and accept the consequences. It is at this point in the narrative of the book of Jeremiah that the people of Judah make their final choice about whom they will listen to, and they choose to reject the message: “we will go after our own plan and each man will do the evil of our stubborn hearts” (Jer 18:12).¹¹⁴

¹¹² O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 109.

¹¹³ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 172.

¹¹⁴ O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 58-59.

c. Where Does the Fifth Confession Begin?

Like the other Confessions, there is some scholarly debate about which verses are to be included in the Fifth Confession. The debate is focused on whether or not to include Jeremiah 18:18 as the first verse of the Confession or not, as it is generally agreed that the Fifth Confession ends at v. 23. The questioned verse, Jeremiah 18:18, reads:

And they will say, “Come! Let us devise plots against Jeremiah. For the law will not perish from the priest, nor advice from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come! We will smite him with the tongue and let us not pay attention to all his words.”

General scholarly consensus states that this is a prose verse that was redacted into the Confession, making v. 18 a (C) source.¹¹⁵ Originally, v. 18 was not a part of the five verses of the Confession. It has a different speaker and does not follow the Dialogue Structure common to all of Jeremiah’s Confessions. Therefore v. 18 should not be considered part of the Fifth Confession.¹¹⁶ However, I argue that even though it is not specifically part of the Confession, there are intentional verbal and logical connections between the two verses. For example קשב (“to pay attention to”) is used at the end of v. 18 and the beginning of v. 19, both in the Hifil imperative. It appears that v. 18 is “the editorial introduction to the lament... [and] clearly intends us to read the confession against the backdrop of opposition to prophetic mission and Jeremiah’s prophetic mission in particular.”¹¹⁷

While v. 18 is not part of the Fifth Confession, I argue it is important in providing the context of the Confession, and offers insight into the significance and purpose of the Fifth Confession. The middle of v. 18 mentions two different triads: the priest, the wise, and the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 56-57.

¹¹⁶ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 90.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 95.

prophet, and the law, advice, and the word. These are what the enemies of the prophet are putting their hope in. These are claimed to endure eternally and never to fail. It seems possible that the prophet could have stated, along with the story of the potter, that a time was coming “full of terror and disaster, when all wisdom will fail and no one will be able to give counsel and help; then Torah will cease from the priest, counsel from the wise and the word from the prophet.”¹¹⁸ This is inconceivable to Judah, and instead of repenting and turning back to the LORD, the nation decides to make sure they can no longer hear the message by going after the messenger. I argue the v. 18 is a direct quotation from the poet’s enemies, explaining why the people are ignoring and persecuting the prophet. Even though v. 18 does not belong in the Fifth Confession, it provides important information for interpreting the Fifth Confession in its final context and should not be ignored.

d. Outline

With v. 18 as an introduction to the Confession, the other five verses can be divided into two sections. The first section is vv. 19-20. It abruptly begins with the poet presenting his petition to the LORD: “please pay attention to me, O LORD! And listen to the voice of my accusers!” (Jer 18:19).¹¹⁹ The prophet then briefly describes what the enemies have done against him. The second section, vv. 21-23, is marked by the transition word לְכֵן (“therefore”). These verses are a description of what the prophet wants the LORD to do to his enemies. The poet is not gentle in his requests. He asks the LORD to “give their sons over to famine and hurl down the hand of the sword. Let their women become childless and widows. And let their men be brutally put to death, their young men smote by the sword in battle” (Jer 18:21). At the end of the

¹¹⁸ Baumgartner, *Jeremiah’s Poems of Lament*, 57-58.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

Confession, the prophet asks the LORD to “not cover up their punishment and their sin from before your face” (Jer 18:23). The punishment the poet is requesting to come upon his enemies is a reversal of what is happening to him. The evil that has come upon him is what the poet wants to come upon his enemies.¹²⁰

e. Components of a Lament

Like the previous Confessions, this is a poem of lament. It begins with a desperate invocation to God: “Please pay attention to me, O LORD!” (Jer 18:19). This is the first component of a poem of lament. Most of the rest of the poem is part of the petition and the description of the enemy, the second component of the genre. The use of the grammatical imperative shows the poet petitioning the LORD to do certain acts: to remember, to let their men be put to death, to let the people cry out, to not cover up their sin. The next component is the assurance that the petition is heard. Like many of the preceding Confessions, the poet is not explicit in this statement. However, the Confession ends with this phrase, “And you, O LORD, know all their schemes planning my death.” (Jer 18:23). The poet *knows* the LORD hears not only his prayer, but the plans of his enemies. The LORD knows all and the LORD hears all. Now the poet asks that the LORD act on what is known and heard. The poet asks the LORD to come and save.

There is no vow to the LORD or a hymn of thanksgiving in the Fifth Confession. Like the Fourth Confession in ch. 17, there is no response at all. Instead, it ends with the silence of the LORD and the poet’s knowledge that the LORD has heard his cry. There is almost no need to make it explicit. The poet and the LORD have such a unique and intimate relationship that the

¹²⁰ O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 54.

traditional opening and closing lines of prayer are not needed. The poet knows who the LORD is and has continued to act as a prophet and speak the word of the LORD: an extra vow from either party is not necessary.¹²¹

f. Descriptions of the Enemy

Similarly to the Fourth Confessions, the enemies are generally described vaguely, with third person plural pronouns. What is known about the enemies of the prophet is that they are the prophet's "accusers" that they "dug a pit for my life" and that they have made schemes "planning my death" (Jer 18:19-20, 23). The idea that the enemy is making plans, or devising plots, suggests that "the opposition to the prophet and his fearsome word is not simply an irrational, emotional response, but it is opposition that is formidable and intentional, that has developed a strategy for silencing this treasonable voice."¹²² The enemy is becoming organized and powerful. In v. 18, the enemies are attempting to silence the voice of the prophet; they no longer want to hear his message. Who else hears the message but the people of Judah? The petition against the enemies mentions children, wives, and houses. This means the enemy has children, wives, and house, and I argue that enemy is the nation, everyone who will be punished for ignoring the word of the LORD and threatening the LORD's messenger.¹²³

Although not a part of the Confession itself, v. 18 is important in the analysis of the identity of the prophet's enemies because v. 18 is a direct quote from the enemies. The enemies call the prophet by name, a first for any of the Confessions or their surrounding contexts. The enemies talk amongst themselves and decide they "will smite him with the tongue" (Jer 18:18).

¹²¹ "Remember, I stood before you in order to speak good to them, to cause your anger to turn back from them" (Jer 18:20b).

¹²² Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 171.

¹²³ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 99.

The phrase “smite him with the tongue,” a literal translation of the phrase נִכְהוּ בְּלִשׁוֹן, is difficult for exegetes to interpret. Most translations take this phrase metaphorically, translating it to represent the idea of bringing legal “charges against him” (Jer 18:18b NRSV). Brueggemann argues that this phrase means “taking the prophet to court and filing public charges, with the hope of marking him as an enemy of the state.”¹²⁴ This smiting is more than simply gossip, but stays in the realm of words. However some scholars, including Benjamin Foreman, take the phrase literally and argue that “the phrase should be understood as a violent, physical threat to Jeremiah, rather than as a conspiracy to verbally abuse the prophet.”¹²⁵ Throughout the book of Jeremiah, the prophet is threatened with physical abuse and in some places in the Ancient Near East people were punished by extracting their tongue, so this may be a feasible argument.¹²⁶ What seems more important than whether or not the people are scheming to physically hurt the prophet or not is that the people are plotting against the prophet so that “they will not hear him anymore.”¹²⁷ The reason for the persecution of the prophet is that he holds the word of the LORD and announces it to the people. In v. 12 the people have rejected the message, now they are planning to destroy the messenger.

g. Cursing Language

A unique feature of Fifth Confession is the lack of repeated words. There are a few, but nothing significant. What is noticed instead is the brutality of the curse statements against the enemies. Verses 21-22 are striking examples of the violence contained in the curses. They are

¹²⁴ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 171-172.

¹²⁵ Benjamin Foreman, “Strike the Tongue: Silencing the Prophet in Jeremiah 18:18b,” *VT* 59:4 (2009): 654.

¹²⁶ Foreman, “Strike the Tongue,” 657.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 654.

“so gruesome that many of our most recent exegetes do not dare to accept that Jeremiah was capable of it. But savagery and passion belong to the prophet’s nature: even with Jeremiah, who in many respects is so mild, we find, often enough, eruptions of the most terrible anger.”¹²⁸

While these curses are brutal, this type of brutal curse is not found only in the book, or the mouth, of Jeremiah. In fact, similar curses are found throughout the Psalms:

Let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and make their loins tremble continually. Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your burning anger overtake them. May their camp be a desolation; let no one live in their tents. . . . Add guilt to their guilt; may they have no acquittal from you. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous (Ps 69:23-25, 27-29 NRSV).

This section of cursing does not seem more or less brutal than the curses the prophet has called upon the people. The curses themselves are not unusual. What is unusual is having most of the petition section of a poem of lament expressed through curse statements. All the other components of the lament are subjugated to the curses. The stylized curses are against the enemies of the LORD and the people of Judah may have been nervous upon hearing the classic curses leveled against themselves instead of the traditional enemies. The curses are against all of the poet’s enemies; in this case the enemies are the nation of Judah and the curses are a statement of “general judgment upon the whole nation.”¹²⁹

h. Causes of the Lament

The list of actions done against the character of prophet Jeremiah by the enemies in the Fifth Confession is extensive. The enemies “dug a pit for my life” and “have hidden traps for my feet” (Jer 18:20, 22). They plotted against the prophet, and amongst themselves planned to “smite him with the tongue” so they do not have to “pay attention to all his words” (Jer 18:18).

¹²⁸ Baumgartner, *Jeremiah’s Poems of Lament*, 58.

¹²⁹ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 97.

All of the pain and persecution the people are planning for the prophet stem from the word of the LORD. If Jeremiah was not acting as a prophet and speaking the word of the LORD, the enemies would not be against him. The prophet *is* speaking the word of the LORD and the people have chosen to ignore the word. The easiest way to do this is to plot against the prophet, to silence him for good. But the prophet knows that he has spoken the truth: “Remember, I stood before you in order to speak good to them, to cause your anger to turn back from them” (Jer 18:20b). The prophet is lamenting the fact that the people are persecuting him because of his role as a prophet.

There is another reason the prophet has been announcing the word of the LORD to the people. The poet contains the word inside of himself, and can do nothing else besides announce it. However, the word is announced “in order to speak good to them, to cause your anger to turn back from them” (Jer 18:20). The prophet Jeremiah, as presented in the final form of the book of Jeremiah, belongs to the people and is speaking as a member of the people of Judah. The prophet knows evil is coming upon them, but there is always the hope that maybe the message the prophet is announcing will be enough to change the people’s minds. Then good would be brought upon them instead of evil. The prophet is fighting for the future of his own people, and these people have continually ignored his word and are persecuting him instead of turning back to the LORD. Finally, the people have made their choice explicit and have decided to “go after our own plan and each man will do the evil of our stubborn hearts” (Jer 18:12). The people have refused to listen to the warnings. The hope of the people listening to the word is finally crushed and the only option left for the prophet is to mourn for his people.

The distinction between the prophet and the people is so pronounced there is almost no reference to a remnant or to any who are faithful to the word besides the prophet. The only mention of the communal purpose of the Fifth Confession comes from the invocation at the

beginning of the Confession: “Please pay attention to me, O LORD! And listen to the voice of my accusers!” (Jer 18:19). It is not only the prophet that is being persecuted and punished; anyone who believes the prophet’s message is viewed as suspect and susceptible to persecution and accusation. However, the majority of the Confession contains a lament specifically and uniquely connected to the prophet. I argue this is because of the unique prophetic role the character of the prophet Jeremiah is fulfilling at this point in his ministry. The prophet has been continually announcing the message of the LORD, and representing the people to the LORD. Throughout the previous four Confessions the prophet has been the classic representation of the one who is faithful to the word of the LORD and his laments represent the entire faithful remnant. However, at the explicit rejection of the word of the LORD by the nation of Judah, the prophet embraces another part of the prophetic role; the prophet has stopped mediating for the people and has started praying down curses upon them instead. “The prophetic role here is not mediation for the people; it is judgment against them.”¹³⁰ His previous role of representing the faithful remnant to the LORD has been superseded by representing the LORD to the people. The people have finally rejected the word of the LORD, and “when Yahweh’s ‘plan’ is rejected... death will come. No amount of hostility against the messenger will modify the message. The clay will finally have to submit to the potter or be discarded.”¹³¹

The anger and frustration the LORD feels because of the peoples’ rejection of the word has been internalized and expressed by the prophet, shown through the announcement of the curses contained in the Fifth Confession. It has truly become the prophet against the nation, as the LORD promises the prophet Jeremiah in the Call Narrative of Jeremiah 1; “I have made you today a fortified city, column of iron, and a wall of bronze against the whole land, the kings of

¹³⁰ Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, 21.

¹³¹ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 174.

Judah, her officials, her priests and all the people of the land. They will wage war against you and they will not prevail against you because I am with you,' says the LORD, 'to deliver you'" (Jer 1:18-19).

It is important to note that the prophet is not calling the curses down to vindicate himself and punish his enemies. Instead, he is acting because of his role of containing the word of the LORD and is calling down the judgment as the LORD's representative and for the sake of the LORD's word. The LORD responds to evil with judgment, and when the prophet, who announces and holds the word, comes into contact with evil and injustice, the response is unstoppable: "Do not cover up their punishment and their sin from before your face. Do not blot it out. Let them stumble before your face. In the time of your anger, do this to them" (Jer 18:23). Jeremiah is asking the LORD to fulfill the word, even if it means terrible things will come upon his people. Jeremiah is a member of the people and will suffer if the land is attacked, but in the Fifth Confession the focus is on justice and the fulfillment of the word. The prophet is not speaking as a member of Judah; he is speaking as the one containing and expressing the word of the LORD.

Chapter 7: The Sixth Confession- Jeremiah 20:7-13

a. Translation

You deceived me LORD and I was deceived. You overpowered me and were able to do it. And I became laughter all of my days, all of them mocking me. As often as I speak I cry out, "Violence and destruction" I will call. Because the word of the LORD was for me a reproach and always a derision. And I will say, "I will not remember him" and I will not continue to speak in his name. And it will be in my heart as a fire burning, shut up in my bones. And I will be weary to contain it and will not be able to do it.

Surely I heard much whispering, terror from every-side, "Declare! Let us declare!" All men of peace are watching my stumbling. Perhaps he will be deceived and we are able to do it to him. Let us take our vengeance from him.

The LORD is with me as an awe-inspiring warrior. Therefore the persecuting ones will stumble and they will not be able to continue. They were greatly shamed because they did not prosper. The eternal reproach will never be forgotten. And the LORD of Armies, who tests righteousness and sees hearts and minds, I will see your vengeance upon them because unto you I have revealed my case. Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD because he rescued the life of the needy from the hand of the evil doers.

b. Narrative Context

The Sixth and final Confession in Jeremiah is in Jeremiah ch. 20. This Confession follows one of the most destructive pronouncements in the book of Jeremiah. The LORD commands Jeremiah to break a pot in the presence of the people. This action is a symbolic representation of what the LORD will do to the city. Jeremiah is then to declare to the people: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I am now bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their necks, refusing to hear my words" (Jer 19:15 NRSV). After this pronouncement, Pashhur, the High Priest, throws Jeremiah into the stocks.¹³² When Jeremiah is released from the stocks, he announces his final Confession. It is important to note that it is entirely possible that the Sixth Confession was not originally connected to the historical Jeremiah, or the prophet's time in the stocks. However, the final form and location of the Sixth Confession connect the two ideas intimately.¹³³

¹³² Jeremiah 20:2.

¹³³ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 120.

This narrative describing the prophet's punishment in the stocks precedes the final Confession; it gives concrete evidence of the people's rejection of the message announced by the prophet and their refusal to listen to the LORD.¹³⁴ In Jeremiah 18:12, a verse connected with the Fifth Confession, the people reject the message. In Jeremiah 20:1-2 they reject the messenger as well. It is the High Priest himself who orders Jeremiah thrown into the stocks; this is a representation of the religious establishment's refusal to listen to the word of the LORD. The harsh judgment of the people against the word result in painful consequences for Jeremiah; the prophet finds himself persecuted and his life full of hurt and despair.

c. Where Does the Sixth Confession End?

Like the other Confessions, there is scholarly debate about the length of the Sixth Confession. Classically, the last Confession extends from v. 7 all the way to v. 18.¹³⁵ Most scholars now agree that only half of this pericope is the final Confession; the first section, vv. 7-13, is a traditional poem of lament, and the Sixth Confession, while the second section, vv. 14-18, is not a part of the Confession but is in a different poetic genre, that of a curse.¹³⁶ It reads:

Cursed is the day on which I was born. The day on which my mother bore me, it will not be blessed. Cursed is the man who brought the news to my father, saying, "A child is born to you, a son, to make you exceedingly glad." Let this man be like the cities which the LORD overturned, and he was not moved to compassion. And let him hear a cry in the morning and a shout at noon. He who did not put me to death from the womb, so that my mother was for me my grave, and her womb forever pregnant. Why did I leave this womb in order to see troubles and sorrow, and my days will end in shame? (Jer 20:14-18).

The reasons for the division between the two poems are mostly structural. Jeremiah 20:7-13 contains the traditional components of a poem of lament, while 20:14-18 does not contain any

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹³⁵ O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 64.

¹³⁶ Joep Dubbink and Martin Kessler, "Jeremiah: Hero of Faith or Defeatist? Concerning the Place and Function of Jeremiah 20.14-18," *JSOT* 86 (1999): 68.

of the necessary parts. Verses 14-18 are a separate, self-contained unit.¹³⁷ This pericope focuses on the day of Jeremiah's birth and is framed with a reference to the word "day," found in v. 14 and v. 18 respectively.¹³⁸ Another difference between the two sections is who the sections are addressed to. Verses 7-13 address the LORD, while there is no addressee for vv. 14-18.¹³⁹

The two poems are also considered separate unites because they do not connect thematically. Verse 13, the last verse of the Confession, reads, "Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD because he rescued the life of the needy from the hand of the evil doers" (Jer 20:13). The poet is praising the LORD and trusting in the LORD's strength. The following verse, beginning the next poem, contains a dramatic shift: "Cursed is the day on which I was born. The day on which my mother bore me, it will not be blessed" (Jer 20:14). The poet is no longer blessing the LORD; instead the poet is despairing and "the apparent abrupt and contradictory swings in mood expressed in this passage have caused a number of scholars to question the correctness of viewing it as a unified whole."¹⁴⁰

d. Outline

Since Jeremiah 20:14-18 is a curse poem, the Confession itself is found in Jeremiah 20:7-13. This Confession can be divided into two parts. There are two possible places for the division, based upon the placement of 20:10.

Surely I heard much whispering, terror from every-side, "Declare! Let us declare!" All men of peace are watching my stumbling. Perhaps he will be deceived and we are able to do it to him. Let us take our vengeance from him.

¹³⁷ O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 75.

¹³⁸ Dubbink and Kessler, "Jeremiah: Hero of Faith or Defeatist?," 67-84.

¹³⁹ "You deceived me LORD and I was deceived. You overpowered me and were able to do it. And I became laughter all of my days, all of them mocking me" (Jer 20:7).

¹⁴⁰ O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 64.

Scholars who include v. 10 in the second half of the Confession, vv. 11-13, see these four verses as a complete unit that was added by the Deuteronomistic Redactors.¹⁴¹ Since they were all added by the same redactor(s) they are grouped together. Scholars, including Dubbink and Kessler, who view v. 10 with the first half of the Confession, vv. 7-9, divide the Confession thematically and conclude that v. 10 is more compatible with the first half of the Confession, which describes the feelings of despair and the difficulty of announcing the prophetic word.¹⁴² Verse 11, which begins, “the LORD is with me as an awe-inspiring warrior,” marks the transition from the description of despair to an expression of confidence in the LORD (Jer 20:11a).¹⁴³ I agree, and argue that v. 10 should be included with vv. 7-9 in the first half of the Sixth Confession.

e. Components of a Lament

The Confession in ch. 20 begins with the first component of a poem of lament, an invocation to God; “You deceived me LORD and I was deceived” (Jer 20:7). The next component, the petition or lament and a mention of the enemies, is found in Jeremiah 20:7-10. The second half of the Sixth Confession, vv. 11-13, is a hymn of thanksgiving, which is another classic component of a poem of lament. Contained within the hymn is the confidence that the LORD has heard the petition, a fourth component of poems of lament. The poet states that “I will see your vengeance upon them because unto you I have revealed my case” (Jer 20:12b). The poet’s confidence in the LORD’s future actions is proof that the poet’s lament has been heard. It is important to note the prophet’s assurance, because the LORD does not respond in the

¹⁴¹ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 105.

¹⁴² Dubbink and Kessler, “Jeremiah: Hero of Faith or Defeatist?,” 78. O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 66.

¹⁴³ Ellen Davis Lewin, “Arguing for Authority: A Rhetorical Study of Jeremiah 1:4-19 and 20:7-18,” *JSOT* 32 (1985): 115.

Confession itself. As with the previous Confession, the final poem of lament is met with silence.¹⁴⁴ Even in the face of the LORD's silence, the poet is confident the petition has been heard. The final component, the vow made to the LORD, is the only classic component of a poem of lament that is not found in Jeremiah 20:7-13.

f. Motif

All of the previous Confessions use the Innocence Motif as the overarching motif for the pericopes. The Innocence Motif is found in the Sixth Confession as well. With the opening line, "You deceived me LORD and I was deceived. You overpowered me and were able to do it," the poet is placing the blame for what has happened to him on the LORD; he is innocent and not deserving of the punishment that has come upon him (Jer 20:7). However, unlike the previous five Confessions, the final Confession does not contain only the Innocence Motif. The second half of the Confession, starting in v. 11, operates in the Trust Motif.¹⁴⁵ The Trust Motif states that no matter what happens, the sufferer is going to trust the LORD. Eventually the LORD will rescue the sufferer. This idea is presented in v. 11: "The LORD is with me as an awe-inspiring warrior. Therefore the persecuting ones will stumble and they will not be able to continue. They were greatly shamed because they did not prosper. The eternal reproach will never be forgotten" (Jer 20:11). Even in the face of the LORD's silence, the poet is confident in the LORD's provision and presence and trusts the LORD to act.

g. Descriptions of the Enemy

As with the previous Confessions, there is not an obvious statement of who the poet's enemies are. The descriptors provided by the text include "the persecuting ones" and "the evil

¹⁴⁴ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 113.

¹⁴⁵ Baumgartner, *Jeremiah's Poems of Lament*, 62.

doers” (Jer 20:11, 13). However, the narrative context of the Sixth Confession provides more evidence of who the enemies may be. In fact, at least one scholar comments that “chapter 20 begins to name names and make clear who bears the responsibility for Judah’s fall.”¹⁴⁶ The beginning of this chapter names the High Priest Pashhur as the one who had Jeremiah thrown in the stocks. Jeremiah 20:4 alludes to the fact that Pashhur’s actions are going to cause pain and terror to all those around him.¹⁴⁷ The Temple and the High Priest are among the enemies the prophet has been fighting against.

Another phrase that may be used to describe the enemies of the prophet is found in v. 10: “Surely I heard much whispering, terror from every-side, “‘Declare!’ Let us declare!’ All men of peace are watching my stumbling” (Jer 20:10). The phrase “men of peace” (אֲנֹשׁ שְׁלוֹמִי) seems an odd descriptor for the prophet’s enemies. However, the book of Jeremiah occasionally describes false prophets as those who proclaim “peace.” If that is being alluded to here then the men of peace are really the “enemies of peace who preach a competing prophetic message, one which is the opposite of his message of judgment. They would have every reason to hope for the suppression of Jeremiah’s preaching by having him identified as a false prophet.”¹⁴⁸ The false prophets who preach a message of peace would align themselves with the Temple and the High Priest, and would therefore be connected to the enemies, such as Pashhur, who are described in the text.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, 41.

¹⁴⁷ “For thus says the LORD, ‘Behold I am setting you as a terror for yourself and for all whom you love. They will fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes will see it. And I will give all of Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon and he will carry the, away into exile in Babylon, and he will strike them with the sword’ (Jer 20:4).

¹⁴⁸ O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 74.

A discussion of the enemies of the prophet is complicated when considering the first verse of the Confession: “You deceived me LORD and I was deceived. You overpowered me and were able to do it” (Jer 20:7a). It appears as though the LORD himself is the enemy of the prophet. After all, it is the LORD, not the “evil-doers” or the “men of peace,” who is accused of deceiving the poet. There is a certain “parallelism between Yahweh and the enemies as oppressive forces over against the prophet.”¹⁴⁹ The enemies are attacking the prophet *because* the LORD “deceived” him. Without one, the other would not exist. However, because of the Trust Motif found in the second half of the Confession, I argue that the prophet views the LORD as his protector and vindicator, not his enemy.

h. Key Words and Images

The most striking word used in this Confession is the word פתה loosely translated “to deceive.” It is used three times in the Final Confession, twice in v. 7 and once in v. 10. In v. 7, the verb is used to describe the relationship between the prophet and the LORD: “You deceived me LORD and I was deceived” (Jer 20:7). In v. 10, the verb comes from the mouth of the prophet’s enemies who are waiting to see if the prophet “will be deceived” (Jer 20:10). This verb has concerned exegetes for generations. It is worrisome for one of the respected prophets of the LORD to be claiming the LORD deceived him; it makes the LORD appear untrustworthy. The fluidity of possible meanings for the Hebrew verb פתה adds other complications. Throughout the Tanakh the verb can be used to mean “allure,” “persuade,” “make a fool of,” “harass,” “take advantage of,” and even “rape.”¹⁵⁰ The sexual imagery sends a powerful image, one not all

¹⁴⁹ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 103-104.

¹⁵⁰ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 181. Fretheim, “Caught in the Middle,” 352-353.

exegetes are comfortable connecting with the LORD and the LORD's word. Many exegetes, after doing careful word studies, tend to translate פתה as "deceive" and claim that "it is not likely that such sexual connotations exert a dominant influence in the present passage."¹⁵¹ While the more explicitly sexual meanings would be a powerful image in v. 7, it would make less sense in v. 10, where it comes out of the mouth of the prophet's enemies.¹⁵² I argue פתה should be translated as "deceive," as this translation allows for a meaningful and understandable translation in both locations.

פתה ("deceive") is the first verb of the Confession and the rest of the Confession continues in this vein; the central focus is on power and influence: who has the power and who does not. The verbs פתה ("deceive"), חזק ("overpower") and יכל ("able to do it") are all found in v. 7.¹⁵³ These are all verbs describing the LORD. Later, in v. 9, the prophet describes himself as powerless against the LORD: "And I will say, 'I will not remember him' and I will not continue to speak in his name. And it will be in my heart as a fire burning, shut up in my bones. And I will be weary to contain it and will not be able to do it" (Jer 20:9). The last verb in this verse "not be able to do it" (ולא אוכל) is the verb יכל negated, one of the verbs used in v. 7. The poet is the opposite of the LORD. He does not have power or influence and will not be able to hold back the fire, here representing the word of the LORD. At the end of the Confession, when the poet switches from the petition to the declaration of trust, the ideas of power and influence

¹⁵¹ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 110.

¹⁵² "Perhaps he will be deceived and we are able to do it to him. Let us take our vengeance from him" (Jer 20:10b).

¹⁵³ Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 103.

continue. The LORD is still the one in control, but his influence is over not only the poet but also the poet's enemies. The poet claims that because the LORD is with him, his enemies "will stumble and they will not be able to continue" (Jer 20:11a). The line "not be able to continue" (וְלֹא יִכָּלֵוּ) is a conjugation of the verb יָכַל: the same verb used in vv. 7 and 9.¹⁵⁴ Throughout the lament the poet is asking who has the power and control over his life, who is able to do things and who is not. The Sixth Confession concludes that the poet himself has none of the power, but neither do the enemies. Instead, the power rests with the LORD, in whom the poet trusts.

i. Causes of the Lament

The most obvious pain presented in the Sixth and final Confession is the individual pain connected with the prophet Jeremiah. The Confession itself opens with the striking claim that the prophet was deceived: "You deceived me LORD and I was deceived. You overpowered me and were able to do it. And I became laughter all of my days" (Jer 20:7). The word the prophet is announcing causes mocking and plots against his life. There is "terror from every-side" and people are continually mocking him (Jer 20:10, 7). His enemies are waiting for him to stumble and fail so they can enact their vengeance.¹⁵⁵ The life of the prophet Jeremiah, as presented in the final form of the book of Jeremiah, is painful and full of persecution because of his role as a prophet. The prophet feels the LORD has deceived him; he has continually spoken the word of the LORD, and yet the promised rescue has yet to appear.

¹⁵⁴ "You deceived me LORD and I was deceived. You overpowered me and *were able to do it*. And I became laughter all of my days, all of them mocking me" (Jer 20:7).

"And it will be in my heart as a fire burning, shut up in my bones. And I will be weary to contain it and *will not be able to do it*" (Jer 20:9b). The emphasis was added by the author.

¹⁵⁵ "All men of peace are watching my stumbling. Perhaps he will be deceived and we are able to do it to him. Let us take our vengeance from him" (Jer 20:10).

This persecution is more personally painful to the prophet because of his relationship with the enemies. In the context of Jeremiah 20, the High Priest and the Temple itself are the ones leading the persecuting against the prophet. These institutions formed specifically to worship and honor the God whose word the prophet is announcing are the ones in charge of persecuting the prophet. They are the ones who watch and whisper, “perhaps he will be deceived and we are able to do it to him. Let us take our vengeance from him” (Jer 20:10). These upright and godly members of Judah are the ones who are laughing at and mocking the prophet. They are the formal, institutional, representation of the LORD on earth, and because of their persecution and scorn it appears that the prophet has been abandoned and “deceived” by the LORD. The enemies seem to be in control.¹⁵⁶ The prophet is left to the mercy of the enemies, and the LORD appears to be watching silently.

While the Sixth Confession is specifically connected to the prophet and the announcing of the word, all who were faithful to the word were “deceived” by the LORD. The unfulfilled word would have made the prophet “false;” all who believed these “false” teachings were to be pitied at best and punished at worst. The High Priest and the Temple would persecute all who were connected with the message: all those who were faithful and believed the message of the prophet as well as the prophet himself. However, even in the midst of this persecution and destruction there is hope for the prophet and for the faithful remnant. The hymn of thanksgiving at the end of the Confession honors the LORD as the one who “tests righteousness and sees hearts and minds” (Jer 20:12). Because of this, the LORD is able to distinguish between those who are persecuting, and those in need of rescuing. The LORD is faithful, seeing and hearing the petitions of the faithful. Those who are in need, such as the prophet and others who remain

¹⁵⁶ Dubbink and Kessler, “Jeremiah: Hero of Faith or Defeatist?,” 80.

faithful, will be helped in the midst of the disaster, while those who are persecuting the faithful “will not be able to continue” (Jer 20:11).

This persecution and pain experienced by Jeremiah comes specifically because of the announcement of the word of the LORD. However, the Final Confession adds another layer to the prophet’s pain. Not only is the prophet persecuted because of announcing the word of the LORD, but also because he contains and internalizes the word of the LORD. The message the prophet is announcing is always “violence and destruction” and even the prophet himself has begun to view the message as “a reproach and always a derision” (Jer 20:8). Because of this, the prophet wishes to stop announcing the word; “I will say, ‘I will not remember him’ and I will not continue to speak in his name. And it will be in my heart as a fire burning, shut up in my bones. And I will be weary to contain it and will not be able to do it” (Jer 20:9). The word of the LORD is a fire and it burns. Sometimes fire bring life, but other times destruction. Attempting to contain a fire is dangerous and potentially deadly. The fire of the word contained within Jeremiah is a word of “violence and destruction;” either the word reaches the people, or it burns the one who contains and refuses to announce it: the prophet (Jer 20:8). The *word itself* brings pain to the prophet.

The word of the LORD overpowers Jeremiah. The prophet cannot stay silent. There are only two choices, and “neither one works. When he speaks, Yahweh does not support him. When he is silent, Yahweh does not console him. He has this awesome burden from Yahweh, but without the accompanying power or presence of Yahweh.”¹⁵⁷ This overpowering of the prophet by the painful consequences of the word of the LORD is a representation of the future fate of the people of Judah. The suffering, the enemies on all sides, the feelings of deception and

¹⁵⁷ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 182.

abandonment, the despair of life itself, is the judgment the people of Judah will experience because of their sin. The prophet is experiencing the judgment of the word *before* the people experience the judgment. The word will burn through the people and will be violence and destruction against them, just as it is currently burning through the prophet.

The prophet, as the one who contains and announces the word of the LORD, also feels the pain of the LORD. Jeremiah 20:11 describes the LORD as a warrior and then describes what this warrior will do to the enemies. They “will stumble and they will not be able to continue. They were greatly shamed because they did not prosper. The eternal reproach will never be forgotten” (Jer 20:11). Any reproach held against someone eternally cannot be held by a mortal person, such as the prophet. Only the LORD can hold reproach forever; the prophet is able to proclaim the eternal reproach of the enemies only because he holds within himself the word of the LORD, which *is* eternal. The people have done evil in the eyes of the LORD, and the LORD must respond with justice. They have rejected the prophet of the LORD: the one who is the announcer of the word of the LORD. The rejection of the prophet and his message is a rejection of the LORD himself. The anger and pain of the LORD at this rejection is expressed and felt by the prophet, the one who holds the word.¹⁵⁸

Jeremiah is stuck between the people and the LORD. As a prophet of the LORD and the proclaimer of the word, the prophet is squeezed “between an insistent God with a compelling word and a resistant people with a derisive word. He has had to voice violence and destruction, and he has had to deal with a people who have done violence to him for doing just that. He is caught in the middle.”¹⁵⁹ Stuck between these opposing forces, with no power to resist either, the

¹⁵⁸ Fretheim, “Caught in the Middle,” 355.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 359.

only option left is for the prophet to lament the pain. The prophet believes it would have been better for everyone if he had died and the word was never announced. But in the end, no matter how painful the word or the persecution, the LORD is worthy of praise “because he rescued the life of the needy from the hand of the evil doers” (Jer 20:13).

Chapter 8: Conclusion

There are a number of unique aspects involved when studying the Confessions of Jeremiah. One is a firm understanding of the genre of the Confessions; they are not personal diary entries but poems of lament. The Confessions, as poems of lament, are an unusual and important contribution to the book of Jeremiah. No other prophetic book contains poems of lament attributed to a named prophet. Connecting the poems to the prophet implies that there is a prophetic purpose to the Confessions; otherwise there would be no need to place the Confessions into the mouth of the prophet. I have argued that the Confessions have a dual role of representing the difficulty experienced by the prophet who is feeling, containing, and announcing the word of the LORD, and the faithful remnant who believes the word.

Another unique component of the Confessions of Jeremiah is the person of Jeremiah. As mentioned, the Confessions are placed into the mouth of a single person, the character of the prophet Jeremiah. However, the problem of the historicity of the prophet should not be ignored. It is possible that the character of the prophet Jeremiah is only partially based on actual historical events and people. While the narrative accounts describing the prophet life may be based on the life of the historical prophet, they may have been significantly expanded or altered. Even if it were possible to prove any of the narratives as historically accurate, it would still be impossible

to connect each narrative account with the “correct” corresponding poem or sermon. The poetic sections of Jeremiah, while attributed to the prophet in the final form of the text, may not have originally been connected with, or written by, the prophet. None of the poems can be attributed to the prophet with absolute certainty; they could have been written, redacted or expanded by later editors. Even the author(s) of the Confessions themselves is not without question, although it is highly probable that the author of the Confessions was the prophet Jeremiah or someone intimately acquainted with the prophet and his ministry. However, I have assumed there *was* a historical prophet who served during the Babylonian Conquest of Jerusalem and this historical person was the base for the current narrative character of the prophet Jeremiah. The redactors were working with a variety of sources, including historical memory, oral tradition, and other collections of writings attributed to the prophet Jeremiah when they compiled the book of Jeremiah and described the character of the prophet. I have used the final form of the text as composed and organized by the redactors to analyze the overarching narrative and character of Jeremiah in connection with the Confessions. While it may never be possible to come to a full understanding of what the purpose was, I would like to offer a few modest proposals about the possible purpose of the Confessions.

First and foremost, the Confessions of Jeremiah have a communal purpose. There is nothing contained within the Biblical texts that have a purely individual purpose, the Confessions of Jeremiah included. Therefore, even with the numerous “I” statements, the Confessions actually represent a community and not simply the prophet. The community represented within the Confessions of Jeremiah is the faithful remnant, the portion of the population of Judah who was faithful to the word of the LORD as announced by the prophet Jeremiah. Immediately preceding the Babylonian Exile, most of the people of Judah ignored the prophet’s message, but

not everyone. There were members of Judah who were faithful to the word of the LORD as presented by the prophet and were persecuted because of it. Everyone suffered because of the majority's unfaithfulness, even the land itself. The Second Confessions asks the poignant question "until when will the land mourn? And all the plants of the field wither from the evil dwelling in it. The animals and the birds were swept away because the people say, 'He will not see our future'" (Jer 12:4). All of the evil brought upon the faithful of the land came about because of the rejection of the LORD's word, even though not everyone in the land was deserving of the punishment. The Confessions are a place for the innocent of the land, the righteous and faithful remnant, to voice their complaints and their prayers. They can beg the LORD to "pay attention to me, O LORD! And listen to the voice of my accusers!" (Jer 18:19). They are able to ask the LORD to "not become a terror to me. You are my refuge in the day of evil" (Jer 17:17). The use of the Innocence Motif in all six of the Confessions supports the idea of the innocent and faithful remnant crying out to God along with the prophet.

The Confessions are also unique because they are poems of lament that come from the mouth of the prophet. They must have a prophetic role alongside their communal role; otherwise there would be no difference between these poems of lament and the poems of lament contained in other biblical books such as the Psalms, Job, or Lamentations. Placing the Confessions in the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah is important. As I have argued throughout, the Confessions are significant because they represent the pain the prophet experiences because of internalizing, containing and announcing the word of the LORD.

In order to speak the word of the LORD, the character of Jeremiah brings the word into himself and internalizes it: "Your words were found and I ate them. And your words were for me exultation and joy for my heart, because he called me by your name, the LORD God of Armies"

(Jer 15:16). The prophet is so connected to the LORD that he is called by the LORD's name. The emotions of the LORD fill the prophet and the prophet feels and expresses what the word inside of him is feeling and expressing. In the Third Confession the prophet complains that the LORD "filled me with righteous indignation" (Jer 15:17). This emotion was not originally from the prophet, but instead came because of his connection with the LORD. As the one internalizing the word of the LORD, the prophet is continually caught between two different sets of emotions: his own and the LORD's.

This causes great difficulty for Jeremiah, especially when the two emotions are not identical. Sometimes, as in the Fifth Confession, the word of the LORD is so overpowering within the poet that the only possible response is to call down curses against his own people: "Give their sons over to famine and hurl down the hand of the sword. Let their women become childless and widows. And let their men be brutally put to death, their young men smote by the sword in battle. Let the cry be heard from their houses, because you will cause troops to come over them suddenly" (Jer 18:21-22a). When the people reject the message and the messenger, they also reject the one who sent the messenger, the LORD. The LORD is filled with anger and betrayal and these emotions carry over into the prophet and lead to the announcement of dreadful curses and prophecies against the people. As a member of the people of Judah, Jeremiah would experience the curses he is announcing. However, the word of the LORD and the LORD's anger overpowers the prophet's connection with the people of Judah, and the prophet expresses the LORD's anger. Because of the word, Jeremiah is able to promise that "there will be no remnant . . . because I will cause evil to come upon the men of Anathoth, the year of punishment" (Jer 11:23). As a member of this people, the prophet would not want to make these claims. This is an

example of the prophet not announcing his own thoughts and feelings, but instead announcing the word of the LORD contained within him.

However, these curses are incredibly poignant because the people Jeremiah is cursing are his own people. He belongs to them. Any pain and punishment given to them by the LORD he too will experience, even as he announces its coming. The poet himself is among the people who will have no remnant. At times containing the LORD's pain and announcing the curses against his own people becomes overwhelming. Jeremiah wants to stop, to no longer announce the destructive, painful and unbelieved word of the LORD. But he cannot. "I will say, 'I will not remember him' and I will not continue to speak in his name. And it will be in my heart as a fire burning, shut up in my bones. And I will be weary to contain it and will not be able to do it" (Jer 20:9b).

This combination of emotions within the prophet, the LORD's and his own, is most fully and intimately expressed in the Confessions. The classic worship style of the poems of lament is perfectly situated to express the pain of the one faithful to the LORD who is being punished unjustly, in this case both the individual prophet and the entire faithful remnant. However, placing the Six Confessions in the mouth of the prophet add another layer to the poem of lament. The laments have a prophetic role. Many of the Confessions are in a Dialogue Structure and there is a conversation going on between two distinct parties. In the Confessions the word of the LORD is in intimate dialogue with the prophet. Both are lamenting and expressing their pain. The prophet's pain *is* the LORD's pain, because of the word, and vice versa. When looking at the Confessions, people are able to see the LORD, through the word, come alongside the faithful remnant and mourn with them, asking for and promising future justice in the land.

Nothing is able to resist the word, not even the prophet. The word, as a fire, burns through the prophet, the people and the land. Throughout the Confessions, the enemies of the prophet are continually asking why the word the prophet has announced has not yet come to pass. They ask, “Where is the word of the LORD? Surely it will come!” (Jer 17:15). When Jerusalem falls to the Babylonians, the word announced by the prophet finally comes to pass: all of the curses and judgments finally fall upon the people of Judah, vindicating the prophet and the message.¹⁶⁰ Throughout the Confessions, it appears as though the prophet is viewed as a false prophet, but the fulfillment of the word of the LORD proves that, in the eyes of the text, Jeremiah is a true prophet, announcing the true word of the LORD. In the midst of all the destruction and horror, the LORD has proven himself and his word true and faithful. This is evident when looking at the six Confessions within the context of the entire book of Jeremiah. The individual Confessions record the difficulty and pain felt by the prophet, the faithful remnant, and the LORD in response to the sin and unbelief of Judah. The Confessions promise coming judgment in response to the pain and persecution. The Sixth Confession ends with prophet’s firm belief in the LORD’s future deliverance before it has come to pass. Looking at the Confessions from the perspective of the entire book of Jeremiah allows readers to see the fulfilled word and the vindicated prophet. As much as the enemies attacked the prophet and attempted to cut him off from the land so that “his name will never be remembered again,” they were not successful (Jer 11:19). The LORD’s word is never thwarted.

While studying the Confessions, I stumbled upon an interesting idea that deserves further thought and scrutiny. The LORD responds to each of the poet’s laments differently. Based on the final locations of each of the six Confessions, the LORD appears to move farther and farther

¹⁶⁰ Jeremiah 52.

away from the poet with each lament. Within the First Confession, the LORD responds to the prophet with assurance that the LORD has heard the petition and will take action: “So thus says the LORD of Armies: ‘Behold! I am seeking the young men. They will die by the sword and their daughters will die by famine. There will be no remnant for them because I will cause evil to come upon the men of Anathoth, the year of punishment’” (Jer 11:22-23). The Second Confession also involves a direct response from the LORD. The LORD has heard the lament, but does not respond with the same assurance as with the First Confession. After the poet’s complaint, the LORD asks him:

If you had run with your feet and they wearied you, how can you contend with horses?
And if you are trusting in the land of peace, how will you fare in the wilds of the Jordan?
Thus even your brothers and your father’s house, even they will cry out fully after you.
You will not trust them, even though they will speak well about you (Jer 12:5-6).

The response is proof that Jeremiah has been heard. However, there is no guarantee that the LORD will respond as Jeremiah wishes. The LORD acknowledges the prophet’s complaint but unlike the First Confession the LORD does not appear sympathetic. Instead, there is only the promise that the future holds more difficulty for the prophet. Based on the final location of this pericope within the book of Jeremiah, the trials promised in the Second Confession come to pass; the narrative describing the High Priest Pashhur throwing Jeremiah in the stocks is just one example (Jer 20:2). The Third Confession continues to show the separation between the LORD and the prophet. The LORD promises rescue eventually, but first the prophet must continue to stand in the LORD’s presence, to internalize the word, and to announce it to the people, no matter the immediate pain or consequence.

“If you turn back I will bring you back. And you will stand in my presence. And if you will bring out what is precious from what is worthless you will be as my mouth. They will turn back to you and you will not turn back to them. I will make you for this people as a fortified wall of bronze. They will fight against you and they will not prevail against

you for I am with you to deliver you and to rescue you,” says the LORD. “I will rescue you from the hand of the evil ones and I will ransom you from the palm of the ruthless” (Jer 15:19-21).

The Fourth and the Fifth Confessions continue expanding the distance between the LORD and Jeremiah. The LORD responds to both of these Confessions in a similar manner: the LORD speaks to the prophet, but does not acknowledge the lament. Instead of a promise for future rescue or punishment for the prophet’s enemies, the LORD simply gives the prophet his next task. After the Fourth Confession, the prophet is told to announce the word of the LORD to all who were entering the city gates of Jerusalem.¹⁶¹ The LORD responds to the Fifth Confession by commanding him to buy a jug and break it in front of the elders as a symbolic action. It is this action that, according to the narratives contained in the book of Jeremiah, leads to the prophet’s time in the stocks and the Final Confession. It appears that after the Third Confession, the LORD does not acknowledge the prophet’s complaints anymore. The LORD is not necessarily silent, but the promise of rescue contained in the Third Confession is the last; the prophet must continue to speak the word, to be a wall against the people, without continual reassurance. The LORD has promised to be faithful and rescue the prophet. It is up to Jeremiah whether or not to trust that the LORD will keep the promise or not.

The Sixth and final Confession, placed into the text after Jeremiah’s punishment in the stocks, does not receive an immediate answer of any kind from the LORD. The next verse is the account of a message the prophet is to speak to Pashhur, the High Priest. However, it does not occur immediately after the Sixth Confession. Instead, it occurs when “Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur son of Malchiah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah” (Jer 21:1 NRSV). The King

¹⁶¹ Thus says the LORD to me – “Go and stand in the gate of the sons of the people, which the kings of Judah used to enter and which they went out from, and by all the gates of Jerusalem. And you will say to them, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and all of Judah and the dwellers of Jerusalem, those who enter by these gates’” (Jer 17:19-20).

sends the High Priest to speak to Jeremiah, and *then* the LORD has a message for the prophet, not before. The LORD responds to the final complaint not with distance as before, but with complete silence.

However, the Sixth Confession does not end with despair or with a desperate question for the LORD. The Final Confession is the only one of the six Confessions that does not use only the Innocence Motif; it also uses the Trust Motif. Even with the LORD's continual distance and silence, and the prophet's own personal pain and persecution, the final idea of the Confessions is one of hope and trust:

The LORD is with me as an awe-inspiring warrior. Therefore the persecuting ones will stumble and they will not be able to continue. They were greatly shamed because they did not prosper. The eternal reproach will never be forgotten. And the LORD of Armies, who tests righteousness and sees hearts and minds, I will see your vengeance upon them because unto you I have revealed my case. Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD because he rescued the life of the needy from the hand of the evil doers (Jer 20:11-13).

Despite the LORD's silence and distance, and the persecution and pain the prophet is experiencing because of the word, the prophet has chosen to trust the LORD. The LORD slowly steps back and becomes silent in the face of the prophet's pleas. There are a few possibilities about what the increasing distance between the prophet and the LORD may represent. It may be a representation of the punishment coming upon Judah: the LORD will be silent in the face of the coming punishment and persecution, but will not completely leave or abandon them. Eventually, the LORD will rescue the lives of the people of Judah, as the prophet Jeremiah was eventually rescued. The increasing silence and distance may represent a strengthening of the prophet's resolve to follow the LORD and accept his calling as a prophet no matter the pain or persecution. In the end, what matters is the prophet's continual internalization and

announcement of the word of the LORD, and his faith in the LORD and in the LORD's word, despite the difficult circumstances.

The Confessions of Jeremiah are an important part of the book of Jeremiah. It is one of very few sections that address the difficulty involved in being a prophet of the LORD, of internalizing the word of the LORD and announcing it to a difficult and obstinate people. The life of a devoted and true servant of the LORD can be difficult and full of pain. This is true both for individuals such as the prophet and whole communities of faithful believers. The Confessions teach that it is appropriate and acceptable to voice these laments and feelings to the LORD. They also show the LORD is faithful. Those who believe in and trust the word of the LORD will be rescued, no matter the circumstances, the delays, or the enemies, for the word will always be fulfilled and can never be stopped.

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