Este artigo é parte integrante da revista.batistapioneira.edu.br

REVISTA BATISTA PIONEIRA

BÍBLIA ▪ TEOLOGIA ▪ PRÁTICA

**ONLINE** ISSN 2316-686X - **IMPRESSO** ISSN 2316-462X

Vol. 6 ▪ n. 2 ▪ Dezembro | 2017

# JEROME'S READING OF JEREMIAH 20:7-18

A leitura de Jerônimo de Jeremias 20:7-18

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## ABSTRACT

This essay is a study of how Jerome reads Jeremiah (Jer) 20:7-18. It presents the exegetical practice of Jerome within his Christian theological frame of reference and examines how he approaches a difficult text of the Old Testament (OT) as Christian Scripture. This essay is in five parts. The first briefly introduces the reader to Jer 20:7-18, sets the context for the importance of hearing premodern interpreters in contemporary biblical and theological scholarship, and presents a caveat to the reader with methodological issues. The second part focuses briefly on situating Jerome as a reader of Scripture within the general patristic exegesis, its interfaces between literal and allegorical modes of reading Scripture and how Jerome receives and modifies

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the exegetical tradition inherited from the patristics. The third part presents quite extensively Jerome's exposition of Jer 20:7-18 and engages with his reading in order to hear his own voice as a distinctive Christian interpreter of this text. The fourth part provides some hermeneutical reflections on Jerome's reading of Jer 20:7-18 which may illustrate his theological usage of the OT. The final part evaluates Jerome's interpretation and concludes the essay by saying that his mode of reading the OT engages with the concerns of a life of faith and represents well the Christian usage of the OT in respect to issues of the church.

**Keywords**: Jeremiah 20:7-18. Jerome. Patristic exegesis. Theological interpretation.

## RESUMO

Este ensaio é um estudo de como Jerônimo lê Jeremias (Jer) 20:7-18. Apresenta a prática exegética de Jerônimo dentro de seu quadro de referência teológico cristão e examina como ele aborda um texto difícil do Antigo Testamento (AT) como Escritura cristã. Este ensaio está dividido em cinco partes. A primeira introduz o leitor no texto de Jer 20:7-18, estabelece o contexto para a importância de ouvir intérpretes pré-modernos nos estudos bíblicos e teológicos contemporâneos, e apresenta um *caveat* ao leitor em relação às questões metodológicas. A segunda parte preocupa-se brevemente em situar Jerônimo como um leitor da Escritura dentro do contexto geral da exegese patrística, entre os modos de leitura literal e alegórico, e como Jerônimo recebe e modifica a tradição exegética herdada da patrística. A terceira parte apresenta extensivamente a exposição de Jerônimo de Jer 20:7-18 e engaja com sua leitura a fim de ouvir sua própria voz como um intérprete distinto deste texto. A quarta parte providencia algumas reflexões hermenêuticas sobre a leitura de Jerônimo de Jer 20:7-18 que podem ilustrar o seu uso teológico do AT. A parte final avalia a interpretação de Jerônimo e conclui o ensaio afirmando que seu modo de ler o AT engaja preocupações da vida de fé e representa bem o uso cristão do AT em relação às questões da Igreja.

**Palavras-chave**: Jeremias 20:7-18. Jerônimo. Exegese patrística. Interpretação teológica.

# INTRODUCTION

The aim of this essay is to examine how Jerome read the obscure text of Jer 20:7-18. My concern is neither to give a detailed outline of the history of patristic exegesis nor to use Jerome's reading of Jer 20:7-18 as platform for demonstrating theological interpretation as a whole. Rather, I wish to demonstrate Jerome's exegesis of Jer 20:7-18 by examining and evaluating his reading of Jer 20:7-18 within his own Christian frame of reference. Although Jeremiah 20:7-18 has been much studied (and this includes an impressive diversity of methods), it may serve as a fruitful, albeit not well explored example, to be used for the inquiry of the Christian premodern exegesis of the OT. Hearing premodern voices should not be strange for biblical theologians. Rather, understanding how premodern theologians have dealt with interpretative difficulties in their own time and terms, might be interesting to compound contemporary discussion on biblical theology and hermeneutics. In this context, Jerome raises as a distinguished voice to be heard and his reading of Jer 20:7-18 offers a good example of approaching the OT with Christian concerns.

*Jeremiah 20:7-18 in focus.* Jeremiah 20:7-18 has been much studied for centuries. Perhaps, both the harsh language of the text and the change of tone between v.7-13 and v.14-18 have impressed many readers and raised a variety of theological reactions. A large range of methods have been employed to disclose the meaning of this text of Scripture. In this respect, Jeremianic scholarship, which tends to be historical-critical, has presented an intense and diverse treatment for Jer 20:7-18. The legacy of the historical-critical exegesis of Jer 20:7-18 might be well represented by the seminal work of Baumgartner, who employed the method of form criticism to study Jeremiah's laments[2]. He understands Jer 20:7-18[3] in the light of the context of ancient Israel's worship and represents a variation of Günkel's inquiry for the original form and setting of the laments of the Psalter[4]. Baumgartner's handling of the text illustrates a long practice of the modern research for dealing with incoherencies of the book and text.

[2] Walter Baumgartner, *Jeremiah's Poems of Lament* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988).
[3] *Ibid*, 76-78.
[4] Herman Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998).

Postmodern approaches have also targeted Jer 20:7-18. As postmodern readings are generally shaped by the loss of certainty, the modern understanding of history as a reality became suspect in the eyes of some. For that reason, the postmodern turn has brought to Jeremiah alternative solutions, especially from the point of view of seeking alternative explanations for the inherent issues of the text. An example of the postmodern tone is the well-known scholar Walter Brueggemann. He criticizes "modern scholarship" which sees that Jeremiah is "unreadable" and presents a "lack" of coherence[5] and invites the reader to pay attention to the final form of the text not as a "full end", but as a matrix that evokes multiples of "imaginative theological reflection"[6]. It is exactly in its "incoherence" that the text should be read. In consequence, there is not a "single reading" of the text. The text was given in a historical and literary expression, but it still remains in "theological tension"[7]. The postmodern turn has permitted the construction of diverse solutions which resist limiting the text to a single meaning.

Considering the many ways in which Jer 20:7-18 might be handled today and the possibilities of understanding it, it is valuable to hear what premodern voices have to say about this text of Scripture. This is not to advocate a return to the ancient mode of exegesis. Rather, it is an attempt to include premodern voices in the long journey of interpretation of Jer 20:7-18, in hopes that it might amplify the horizons of comprehension and understanding of the problems of this text. In the context of the exegetical task, to include the premodern voices is to understand better the testimony of "the ways in which readers in the past have understood a text that is problematic for us"[8]. In light of all this, the task of giving space for representative premodern voices is relevant[9]. In addition,

[5] Walter Brueggemann, *Like a Fire in the Bones: Listening the Prophet Word in Jeremiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 86-87.

[6] *Ibid.*, 95-98.

[7] *Ibid*, 98.

[8] Mary Callaway, "Reading Jeremiah with Some Help from Gadamer", in *Jeremiah (Dis)Placed: New Directions in Writing/Reading Jeremiah*, A.R.Pete Diamond, Louis Stulman (London, New York: T&T Clark International, 2011), 268.

[9] Those who have employed the task of reading premodern biblical interpreters have found them to be a valuable resource of hermeneutical insights, for example: Walter Moberly, "Christ in All Scriptures? The Challenge of Reading the Old Testament as Christian Scripture", *JTI* 1.1 (2007):94. See also: Brevard Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1974), x; Karl Barth, "The Preface to the Second Edition", in *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 7; R.W.L. Moberly *The Bible, Theology and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31.

the premodern handling of Jer 20:7-18 can be illuminative in the process of comprehension of the text as Christian Scripture in our contemporary context. Therefore, I propose that Jerome's reading of Jer 20:7-18 may exemplify a Christian approach to the OT and contribute to an ongoing debate on the enduring significance of this text of Scripture.

*A caveat to the reader*. In order to answer the main question of this study, I have adopted a straightforward methodology. First, I offer a brief introduction on the patristic climate within which Jerome comes from and offer insight on Jerome as a distinctive Christian interpreter. Second, I seek to hear Jerome as a Christian interpreter by his own voice in relation to Jer 20:7-18. I follow his original sequence of exposition of the text for reading carefully his interpretations and chose to illustrate the value of Jerome's distinctive reading without inflicting into it modern parameters of research. To examine Jerome's commentary on the text, I generally provide first textual issues of his translations. Then, I move on to present what I judge to be more useful from his commentary in order to illustrate his exegetical features. Of course, some selectivity was made due to the scope and limit of this paper and I hope to provide to the reader what represents the best of his reading. Third, I address to Jerome's reading of Jer 20:7-18 some hermeneutical reflections to highlight important nuances of his choices and hermeneutics. The evaluative content of this essay is then presented throughout these hermeneutical reflexions and more substantially at the very end of this essay.

Finally, I provide, for the sake of the reader, the English translation of Jerome's translation of Jer 20:7-18. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only English translation available[10]. As the reader will note, Jerome's English edition provides his Latin translation from his Hebrew and Greek sources separated by a dash. Most of his Greek sources were taken from the Septuagint (LXX), but I make reference when he matches Symmachus' or Aquila's text. I also cite, in brackets, some specific Latin words that might illuminate some textual emphasis that the English translation did not intend to observe. For the Latin text of Jerome's Jeremiah, I cite from *Corpus Christianorum* edition. I am aware that Jerome did not use the MT as he lived in a premasoretic period

[10] Jerome, *Commentary on Jeremiah* (Translated by Michael Graves. Edited by Christopher Hall. Ancient Christian Texts. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011).

and that the discussion on the Hebrew text which Jerome used is still open[11]. However, I use the MT as the basis for analysing Jerome's Latin translation and when his rendering differs from the MT, I also refer and comment on the possible vocalizations which led him to choose by this or that translation. When I cite Jerome's commentary on Jeremiah, I do this in parenthesis to facilitate the readability of the essay and to not direct the reader to the footnotes in every instance.

## 1. PATRISTIC EXEGESIS AND JEROME'S DISTINCTIVENESS

Jerome is a prolific scriptural commentator who wrote a commentary on Jeremiah and provided a diligent reading of Jer 20:7-18. As a Christian interpreter who takes Jer 20:7-18 seriously, Jerome is a premodern voice who deserves to be heard. He represents, on the one hand, the patristic attempt to interpret the OT in the context of the church.[12] On the other hand, he is also a distinctive voice among premodern commentators of Scripture as he employs some patristic features in his exegesis, sometimes following the traditional patristic legacy, sometimes changing it by making distinctive contributions[13]. Yet his influence is beyond his Latin translation of the OT and his commentaries on the Scripture are the result of his devotion to biblical translation and interpretation as we will see in his reading of Jeremiah 20:7-18. Contemporary discussions on Jeremiah should benefit from appreciating Jerome's reading of Jeremiah.

To engage with his commentary on Jer 20:7-18, the contemporary exegete should be aware of three important features of Jerome's scholarship. First is his appreciation for the Hebrew as the font for the best comprehension of the

[11] Emanuel Tov, "The Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah in Light of its Textual History", in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1999), 363-384; "Exegetical Notes on the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Septuagint of Jeremiah 27(34)", in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1999), 315-332; "On 'Pseudo-Variants' Reflected in the Septuagint", *JSS* 20 (1975):165-177; "Interchanges of Consonants between the Masoretic Text and the *Vorlage* of the Septuagint", in *"Sha'arei Talmon": Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. Michael Fishbane, Emanuel Tov (Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 1992), 255-267. See also: Sven Soderlund, *The Greek Text of Jeremiah: A Revised Hypothesis* (Sheffield: JSTO Press, 1985).

[12] For an introduction to distinctive of patristic exegesis, Henry de Lubac, *Scripture and Tradition* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2000); and his *Medieval Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998).

[13] J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London: Duckworth, 1975).

meaning of the OT. Nonetheless, by no means does this represent a rejection of the LXX as some scholars have emphasised[14]. Jerome's relationship with the Hebrew text performs a significant factor in his attempt to find what scholars have called the literal meaning of the text. Second, his exegesis can be understood as eclectic. He joined in a sophisticated manner, not only the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools inherited by the early Christian exegetes, but also the Jewish and grammarian modes of reading to approach Scripture[15]. Third, his commentary on Jeremiah was his last and unfinished exegetical work[16] and scholars have discussed that it reflects more openly his concerns against Pelagianism[17]. Nonetheless, I will not address the interfaces between Jerome's commentary on Jeremiah and its issues on his historical setting. Rather, I will focus on his reading and his hermeneutical moves towards his interpretation of the text. Now, let me briefly introduce the reader to some of theoretical concepts which might be necessary to provide the context to frame Jerome in. I am aware that this is a huge topic and I will give only few condensed remarks for a best appreciation of Jerome's exegesis.

[14] This feature is also well pictured in the context of his discussion with Augustine. See: Augustine's Letters 28, 71 and 82: *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, II/1/ Letters 1-99, ed. Roland Teske, John Rotelle (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2001). See also: Eva Schultz-Flügel, "The Latin Old Testament Tradition", in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation,* ed. Magno Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 1.1:657-662; Annemaré Kotzé, "Augustine, Jerome and the Septuagint", in *Septuagint and Reception: Essays Prepared for the Association for the Study of the Septuagint in South Africa*, ed. Johann Cook (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), 245-262; Paul Decock, "Jerome's Turn to the *Hebraica Veritas* and His Rejection of the Traditional View of the Septuagint", *Neotestamentica* 42.2 (2008):205-222; Edmon Gallagher, *Hebrew Scripture in Patristic Biblical Theory: Canon, Language, Text* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 98-102; Gerald Hobbs, "Hebraica Veritas and Traditio Apostolica", in *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. D.G. Steinmetz (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 83-99; Stefan Rabenich, "Jerome: The *Vir Trilinguis* and the *Hebraica Veritas*", *VChr* 47 (1993):50-77; Sarah Kamin, "The Theological Significance of the *Hebraica Veritas* in Jerome's Thought", in *"Sha'arei Talmon": Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. Michael Fishbane, Emanuel Tov (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 243-245.

[15] Dennis Brown, *Vir Trilinguis: A Study in the Biblical Exegesis of Saint Jerome* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992); and, Michael Graves, *Jerome's Hebrew Philology: A Study Based on His Commentary on Jeremiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 13-75.

[16] Michael Graves, "Translator's Introduction", in Jerome. *Commentary on Jeremiah*. Translated by Michael Graves. ACT (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), xxiii-li.

[17] Rousseau has argued that Jerome's commentary on Jeremiah addresses the Pelagian threat: Philip Rousseau, "Jerome on Jeremiah: Exegesis and Recovery", in *Jerome of Stridon: His Life, Writings, and Legacy* (Edited by Andrew Cain and Josef Lössl. Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 73-83.

### 1.1 LITERAL INTERPRETATION

Literal interpretation has to do with the *ad litteram* approach of Scripture. It is generally taken together with the historical or *iuxta historiam* meaning of a biblical text. Sometimes the term is employed in strong opposition the "allegorical", "figurative" or "metaphorical" mode of reading. It is thought that the literal sense provides one single meaning, while the allegorical sense allows multiple and varied interpretations. For Jerome, the literal sense involves, in general terms, outlining the elements which are intrinsically related to the text in its own terms. That is, it is the literal interpretation that demands the interpreter to concentrate his efforts upon philological aspects of the text and its basic historical understandings (though the reader must be aware that some of his basic understandings regarding historical aspects of his exegesis may differ from modern conceptions). It might serve as the foundation for the allegorical or spiritual sense that often appears in sequence of the literal one.

However, one of the puzzling aspects of the contemporary debate on the literal sense of Scripture is that scholars have understood that the patristic "literal" reading might also include the typological (sometimes "figurative") or even the Christological moves, as if they were the same thing[18]. Yet modern scholars have understood that each interpreter (or generation of interpreters) may present distinguished views and modes for operating what is meant by literal sense of Scripture[19]. However, it is a common point that the literal sense starts through philological, textual and historical issues and that the literal sense of Scripture tends to present theoretical and practical variations from author to author. For example, Jerome includes in his "literal" movement elements of Jewish exegesis and tradition and, although he is generally in line with the patristic "literal" sense of Scripture, he benefits from aspects of Jewish exegesis.

### 1.2 ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION

The same is true when one seeks to understand what is meant by allegorical

[18] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (London: Yale University, 1980), 2-3. See also the discussion on the literal and allegorical senses according to the modern standards in: James Barr, "The Literal, the Allegorical, and Modern Biblical Scholarship", *JSOT* 44 (1987):3-17.

[19] Brevard Childs, "The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem", in in *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag*, Walther Zimmerli, Herbert Donner, Robert Hanhart and Rudolf Smend, ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 89.

interpretation; that is, there is not a homogeneous consensus concerning allegorical interpretation. There is a general distrust of allegory as being less than historical or even dishonest among modern critical scholars. Yet, modern standards tend to understand some patristic interpreters as "uncritical" by featuring allegorical interpretation. However, allegory within the patristic framework refers to the Christian attempt to include some elements of a Christian theologically-oriented reading rather than the capturing of the text verbally itself. By performing allegorical readings, patristic Christian exegetes are less concerned about facts and objective meaning and more about a timeless and imaginative understanding of the text.

The allegorical mode of reading may include and present different aspects under the same attempt. For example, the allegorical movement might sometimes present a more pastorally-oriented reading; sometimes, it might include intertextual examples of Scripture to give a sense of unity between Old and New Testaments. Put simply, what is traditionally meant by allegorical interpretation might assume, in practice, a heterogeneous form. However, broadly speaking, it conveys the inclusion of Christian theological concerns in discussing biblical passages. In Jerome's case, although his preference for the literal sense is well known (which can assume forms and patterns beyond the exclusive philological work indeed and include other aspects such as typology and unhistorical, more subjective concerns), the allegorical sense of Scripture, as we will see, is far from absent. Jerome's allegorical or spiritual interpretation may present all of the above elements, some of them, or none of them in his generally verse-by-verse exposition.

It is not my aim to discuss this assumption extensively but only to introduce the reader to a more theoretical account of the patristic exegesis and its literal and allegorical senses and the possible different moves that Jerome can display drawing out from this context. Moreover, it is significant to say that in Jerome, at least, we see a combination between the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture and sometimes the line between the literal and allegorical readings becomes blurred. Yet, we may also see the inclusion of other additional elements in the practice of his exegesis. For this reason, although Jerome is a significant voice among the patristic Christian voices, he is at the same time a distinguished voice who leaves the imprint of his own interpretive nuances for reading the Christian Bible within that context.

## 2. JEROME'S READING OF JEREMIAH 20:7-18

Jerome's interpretation of Jer 20:7-18 is the focus of this section. I will follow his own sequence of exposition that is: v.7-8a; v.8b-10a; v.10b-11a; v.11b; v.12; v.13; v.14-18.

### 2.1 JEREMIAH 20:7-8A.

> [7]O Lord, you have misled me[seduxisti me, domine], and I was misled[et seductus sum]; – or you have deceived me[decepisti me, domine], and I was deceived[et deceptus sum]– you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed– or you have been powerful and have overcome. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me. [8a]For I have been speaking for a long time now, crying "Injustice!" and I proclaim "Destruction!"– or "for with my bitter word I will laugh, I will call on lawlessness and misery" (p.122).

For v.7-8a, Jerome highlights why Jeremiah said that he was deceived by the Lord. This phrase raises the issue of whether God might deceive the prophet or someone else. Jerome recognizes the difficulty of rendering the word פתה and proposes two possibilities to understand this word. His translation from the Hebrew appoints the Latin verb *seduco* "seduce" for פתה. But it is from the Greek text that he bases his interpretative proposal. He renders Ἠπάτησάς με, κύριε, καὶ ἠπατήθην as "you deceived me, Lord, and I was deceived" and starts his commentary showing this preference: "the prophet says that the Lord has deceived him" (p.122). Jerome approaches this issue first setting the text in the context of Jeremiah's calling, citing Jer 1:5. Also, he understands this text as showing Jeremiah's rejection by his audience for his prophetic message of Babylonian captivity and the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem. Hence, Jerome links Jeremiah's proclamation of doom as part of his prophetic agenda, according to Jer 1:10. It is likely that Jerome understands 20:7 in the light of both Jeremiah's calling and a certain Jewish tradition. Jerome says that when Jeremiah was appointed a prophet to the nations, "he did not think that he was going to speak against the people of the Jews but against the various nations – which is why he so readily accepted the task of prophesying" (p. 122).

Likewise, this resembles the same movement of a Jewish tradition found

in an ancient midrash called *Pesikta Rabbati* (*PR*) 26[20], which considers the Babylonian captivity and the destruction of the Temple in the context of Jer 20:7-18. Jerome then takes the LXX "for with my bitter word I will laugh, I will call on lawlessness and misery" to introduce his Christian interpretation. But he does not deal with the textual differences between those texts. The LXX is useful to connect the image of the suffering prophet to the Christian virtue of perseverance in the midst of suffering. He engages his reader in the context of Rom 8:18 and 2Co 4:17 and cited Luke 6:21. Here, Jerome performs the movement from the literal interpretation focused in Jeremiah (having no problems borrowing a Jewish tradition to deal with the issue of the text) to the so-called spiritual interpretation, which offers a Christian application.

## 2.2 JEREMIAH 20:8B-10A.

> [8b]For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. [9]I said, "I will not remember him"[non recordabor eius],-or "I will not name the Lord's name"– or "speak any more in his name". And there was in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was wearied,-or weakened– not enduring to bear it. [10a]For I heard the reproaches– or censure– of many, and terror on every side– or of the many who were gathered all around: "Persecute him! Let us persecute him!" (p.123).

In respect to his translation, Jerome translates the Hebrew more literally, though he did not abandon the LXX as a legitimate resource for reaching the meaning of the text. He seems to be unwilling to discharge the LXX to find the meaning of the text. For example, he renders לֹא־אַזְכִּרֶנּוּ as "I will not remember him", taking the verb זכר as literally as possible. But he also offers the LXX as an option, although it differs a little from the Hebrew: Οὐ μὴ ὀνομάσω τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου "I will by no means name the name of the Lord"[21]. He seems to be acknowledging that זכר might be rendered as "name" or "mention" as well[22]. The same movement appears in his treatment of מגשר מסביב which I will consider further.

In terms of focus, Jerome understood this passage governed by the theme

[20] *PR*, 523-538; and, H. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 296-302.

[21] *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, 9ª.ed. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1982), 927.

[22] *KB,* 1:270.

of דְּבַר־יְהוָה "the word of the Lord". He paraphrases 20:8b-10a as if it were his own voice to clarify the meaning of the text and pictures Jeremiah as one who had decided to not speak God's words: "Therefore, I resolved in my mind that I would no longer speak to the people with the words of God, nor would I name his name. Overcome with shame, I decided this out of modesty, to be sure, but foolishly" (p.123). Jerome sees Jeremiah as unable to give up his office and repentant when he said that the word of God was burning within him. The same view is suggested by Origen[23]. After the paraphrase, he proceeds to correlate the concept of "God's word" with the Christian truth. One may identify this movement as from the literal to the spiritual interpretation of Scripture. He cites 1Co 9:16-17 and compares Paul's indignation with the idolatry in Athens (Acts 17:6) with Jeremiah's frustrating attempt in Jerusalem. He then cites Acts 18:5 to stress that God's word "constrained" Paul in accordance with Jeremiah's experience. Jerome applies the object of the words הַגִּידוּ וְנַגִּידֶנּוּ, which he translated as "Persecute him! Let us persecute him!" to the teachers of the church of his day. This movement illustrates two features of his Christian approach to the text. First, he takes Jeremiah as "a just man and a teacher of the church" (p.124). Jerome conceives the prophet as a figure to inspire the Christians under similar persecutions and injustices. Second, he identifies Jeremiah's opponents in line with the opponents of the church. He compares them to those having the same voice saying: "the multitudes gathered around against them saying: 'Persecute them! Let us persecute them'" (p.123). However, to provide this comparison, Jerome bases himself on the LXX.

Jerome translates מגשר מסביב as "terror on every side" (20:10). He does not make clear whether he understands this phrase to be what Jeremiah had seen or as what Jeremiah's opponents were saying by Jeremiah's own voice. But he offers the LXX as a valid option which read מגשר as being the verb גשר "to dwell as a foreigner"[24] and translates as συναθροιζομένων "gathering together" (p.121). However, to translate 20:3 where appears the same expression מסביב מגשר in the context of Jeremiah and Pashhur, he does not offer any alternative similar to the LXX. For 20:3, the LXX rendered as μέτοικον which means "refugee". Hence, Jerome offered a very intelligent option to render מסביב

[23] *FOTC* 97, 238-239.
[24] *KB*, 1:184.

מגשר, one which is independent from his Greek sources. Interestingly, in the Middle Ages, Rashi renders מגשר as "terror" for explaining 20:3. However, Rashi translates מגשר as "gathering around" for 20:10 accordingly to the LXX's understanding[25]. The question of whether Jerome has knowledge of some ancient Jewish understanding or whether he has been original in his choice is still open to further clarification. This example makes clear that Jerome is operating with two possibilities to interpret Scripture, the Hebrew and the Greek.

## 2.3 JEREMIAH 20:10B-11A.

> [10b]All the men who had been my allies, watching over my side: "Perhaps he will be deceived[si quo modo decipiatur]; then we can prevail against him and take our revenge on him". [11a]But the Lord is with me as a strong warrior (p.123).

Jerome provides a brief commentary on this passage, focusing on the application of what he thinks to be the obvious meaning. In respect to his translation, he offers only the translation from the Hebrew. Also, he translates the expression אֱנוֹשׁ שְׁלוֹמִי which literally could mean "man of my peace" or "each man of my peace", as "all the men who had been my allies" (p.123). In addition to that, he reads שֹׁמְרֵי צַלְעִי as "watching over my side". It is possible to read the word צלע in two different manners depending of its vocalization. First, if one reads צלע as צֶלַע then the meaning might be "side" or "rib"[26]. But, if one reads צלע as צֶלַע the meaning might be "stumbling"[27]. Jerome chooses the first option. His choices of rendering the Hebrew leads him to identify those "men of peace" as Jeremiah's "former allies" and hence Jeremiah's enemies become "our" enemies in his usage of the text: "when our enemies rise up and our former friends and allies turn to war and desire to set traps for us..." (p.123). Jerome then encourages his readers to not be concerned with the difficulties and persecutions of the ministry. Jeremiah is taken as an example to be imitated by them. Jerome says, "we should not be overly concerned, but let us choose to say what the prophet says: 'But the Lord is with me as

[25] On Jerome's reception in the Middle Ages: Pierre Jay, "Jerome", in *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, vol.2, ed. Charles Kannengiesser (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1094-1133.
[26] *KB*, 3:1030.
[27] *KB*, 2:502.

a strong warrior'" (p.123). In interpreting these lines, Jerome is not feeling obliged in providing the literal meaning first and then the spiritual. It is also interesting that he translates the third occurrence of פתה in this text (v.10) without offering the same Hebrew-based translation as that he did for 20:7 in understanding פתה as "seduco" or "seduce"; he straightforwardly translates יִפָּתֶה as "he will be deceived".

## 2.4 JEREMIAH 20:11B

> 11bTherefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will be weak– or Therefore they persecuted me and were not able to understand. They will be greatly shamed, for they did not understand the eternal dishonour– or disgrace– that will not be blotted out (p.123-124).

Before I turn to Jerome's approach to these lines, it should be noted that Jerome's translation of v.11b may illustrate the fact that ancient interpreters have found difficulties about the vocalization of some Hebrew words and phrases. The reader should bear in mind that Jerome lived in a pre-massoretic epoch. So, he consulted the Hebrew without the massoretic signs that we now have.

For the first phrase of his translation, Jerome offers both his translation from the Hebrew and from the Greek: "Therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will be weak (רֹדְפַי יִכָּשְׁלוּ וְלֹא יָכָלוּ) – or Therefore they persecuted me and were not able to understand (διὰ τοὺτο εδίωξαν και νοήσαι ουκ ηδύναντο)" (p.123). First, Jerome understood רֹדְפַי as an qal participle and translated it as "my persecutors", whilst the Greek version Jerome consulted (Symachus) read רדפי as qal perfect 3rd masc. plural, "they persecuted me". The LXX read simply "they persecuted".

Second, Jerome translated יָכָלוּ which might mean "they will prevail" as "they will be weak". Jerome presumably understands that the root for the word יכלו is כלה "to be weak"[28] instead of יכל "to prevail"[29]. In this case, it is likely that Jerome does not recognize the negative particle that we found in the MT, וְלֹא "not", compounding the phrase "they will not prevail" (for the root יכל) or "they

[28] Graves, 123. However, the only support for for this understanding of the root כלה as "to be weak" I found in TDCH, v.4, 416 (David Clines, ed.).
[29] KB, v.2, 410-411.

will not be weak" (in the case of כלה)[30]. When we turn back again to the LXX, we find a very different translation. The LXX rendered יִכָּלוֹ as being the root יכל, but it is evident that it wants to mean "to be able" which is also possible[31]. The LXX, therefore, recognizes the negative particle וְלֹא and provides this: νοήσαι ουκ ηδύναντο "they were not able to comprehend". However, the LXX does not have vestiges of any replacement for יִכָּשְׁלוּ which Jerome renders as "they will stumble". It simply does not exist in the LXX. What does exist in the LXX is the word νοήσαι "to comprehend". In fact, the discussion about the MT and LXX texts of Jeremiah, or even a Hebrew *Vorlage* of Jeremiah is still a puzzle open to further research.

For the second phrase, Jerome's translation is: "They will be greatly shamed, for they did not understand the eternal dishonour – or disgrace – that will not be blotted out" (p.123). We read at the MT[32]: הִשְׂכִּילוּ כְּלִמַּת עוֹלָם לֹא תִשָּׁכֵחַ בּוֹשׁ מְאֹד כִּי־לֹא, though LXX[33] reads ησχύνθησαν σφόδρα ότι ουκ ενόησαν ατιμίας αυτών αι δι΄ αιώνος ουκ επιλησθήσονται. Here, Jerome first offers the Greek alternative only for the Hebrew word כְּלִמַּת, which the LXX reads ατιμίας and he renders it as "dishonour" and "disgrace"[34]. Also, the key verb of the phrase is the expression הִשְׂכִּילוּ[35] which the LXX renders ουκ ενόησαν "they did not understand". Jerome's translation is straightforwardly likewise the Greek. He renders it as: non intellexerunt "they did not understand" (p.123). According to Graves, Jerome's translation of the second phrase of v.11b resembles the

[30] If Jerome consulted a text where the negative particle ולא "not" was present, one can also understand that Jerome read יִכָּלוֹ וְלֹא as a Hebrew idiom. Given the basic meaning of כלה might also be "to be completed" (KB, v.2, 477; BDB, 477; TDCH, v.4, 416;), hypothetically speaking, the meaning of יכלו ולא would be "he will not be completed". The idea of someone who will not be completed resembles in certain aspects someone who will be weak.

[31] KB, v.2, 410-411.

[32] Compare with some modern renderings of v.11b: McKane translation: "They will suffer deep shame at their lack of success, disgrace which will never be forgotten" (McKane, 475). Bright translation: "Dire shame will be theirs, for they cannot succeed, a disgrace that will ne'er be forgot" (Bright, 129). "They are greatly shamed, for they did not succeed eternal disgrace will not be forgotten" (Lundbom, 859). "They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonour will never be forgotten" (ESV).

[33] "They were greatly confounded, for they perceived not their disgrace, which shall never be forgotten" (*The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, 927).

[34] T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 101. See also, W. Arndt and F. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 119; and, E. Hatch and H. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint*, 175-176. BDB offers the possibility to translate the word as "disgrace" associating it with the general meaning of the root כלם "to disgrace", BDB, 483-484.

[35] The root שכל might also mean "have an insight", "make wise", "achieve success" (KB, vol.3, 1328-1329), "be prudent" (BDB, 968), "ponder" or "observe" (TDOCH, 150-153)

translation of Symachus[36]. After Jerome, Rashi interprets כִּי־לֹא הִשְׂכִּילוּ as "they [Jeremiah's opponents] did not succeed with their plan". In similar fashion than the Greek and Jerome, Mezudath David points out that the literal meaning is to be "they did not understand". It is significant to note that for v.11b, we do not know whether Jerome was confident with the Hebrew or if he simply assumes the LXX is consistent to explain הִשְׂכִּילוּ.

Jerome's understanding of the subject matter of these lines is that God will vindicate his servant. The enemies and former allies of Jeremiah will suffer a great vindication from the Lord for whatever they have done against him. Jerome paraphrases Jeremiah's words: "because they persecuted me they were not able to understand the prophetic word. Severe disorientation followed on their ignorance, and they did not understand the eternal disgrace that will attend them and that will not be blotted out by any forgetfulness" (p.123-124). Jerome pictures Jeremiah as a persecuted prophet for his message was unsuitable for his interlocutors. Because the prophet was persecuted, his audience could not understand God's word. Hence, they were ignorant and did not understand what God would do. Jerome comprehends that God's punishment over Jeremiah's audience was in terms of (degrees of) understanding God's word. There is not emphatic "spiritual" interpretation here, only a reference to Jeremiah as a "just man and a teacher of the church" (p.124). Yet, he does not provide any explicit link between v.11b and the declaration of "But the Lord is with me as a strong warrior" (p.123) from the previous line. However, his commentary on v.11b shapes the idea of his v.10b-11a and is also shaped by it. In other words, the expected vindication from the Lord (v.10b-11a) is then connected to the theme of "ignorance" which leads to "shame" and "disgrace" (v.11b). Before Jerome, Origen has offered a very similar reading for 20:11[37]. The major difference between Origen and Jerome in respect 20:11 is that the former provides a more explicit relation between Jeremiah and Jesus, insofar as Jerome remains reluctant to provide a more "allegorical" or Christological interpretation of the text.

## 2.5 JEREMIAH 20:12

[12]O Lord of hosts, tester of the righteous[probator iusti],-

[36] Graves, 123.
[37] *FOTC* 97, 242.

> or who tests righteous things[qui probas iusta]– who sees the heart and the mind[renes at cor], let me see your vengeance on them, for to you have I laid bare my cause (p.124).

Jerome's translation from the Hebrew is very literal, although he considers the Greek consistent to elucidate the general meaning of the text. First, Jerome translates בֹּחֵן as "tester" (qal participle), insofar as Aquila's version (p.124n90) understood בחן as "he tests" (qal perfect 2nd masc. sing). The LXX presents an attempt to correspond בחן (participle) and δοκιμάζων (participle)[38] and offers literally κύριε δοκιμάζων δίκαια "O Lord, trying just things". Second, Jerome renders the word צדיק as "iusti" which is translated into English as "righteous". However, he alternatively offers the Greek translation of δίκαια as "iusta" or "righteous things". These translations differ because of the understanding of the correct vocalization for the word צדיק. If the reader understands צדיק as צַדִּיק (MT), then it might mean "righteous". On the other hand, if one reads צדיק as צְדָקִ (LXX), then it might mean "righteous things". Thereby, the LXX understands צדיק as צְדָקִ and renders it as δίκαια (adjective neuter plural). The Targum follows Aquila for בחן, but it follows the Greek for צדיק and reads: "But the Lord of the hosts tests the truth"[39]. Third, Jerome does not offer an alternative translation for the second half of v.12. He seems to be confident to render ראה as "one who sees" following the MT רֹאֶה. The LXX renders ראה which normally means "to see" more interpretatively as συνιών "comprehending" (it is still participle)[40]. Fourth, Jerome translates the expression כְּלָיוֹת וְלֵב in its literal sense: renes at cor "reins and heart" (though the translator has rendered "renes at cor" as "the heart and the mind"). Jerome operates in a more literal orientation for translating v.12. This may indicate that Jerome worked freely with both possibilities.

Moreover, Jerome recognizes that God tests the righteous. Recognizing that there may be pattern of divine testing which is followed by God's rescue, Jerome connects the theme of "God's testing" not only with Jeremiah's literal reading, but also with his reader. At this point, he does not identify Jeremiah's salvation from the enemies with Jesus's spiritual salvation. Also,

[38] δοκιμάζων comes from δοκιμάζω/δοκιμάζειν and means "put to the test", *GLNT*, 201.
[39] Robert Hayward, *The Targum of Jeremiah: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (Welmington: M. Glazier, 1987), 105.
[40] *CSGVOT*, 1316-1317; *GELS*, 657.

Jerome interprets "reins and heart" as the "inner parts of the heart" (p.124). What precisely does Jerome understand to be the meaning of "inner parts of the heart" in this context? It could be that the four biblical references that he provides as support for his commentary on v.12 might shed light on this question. First, Jerome mentioned Jesus who knew the thoughts of the people, where he clearly refers to passages such as Matt 9:4 and 12:25. Second, he cites Psalm 143:2 approaching the "righteous" as an OT broader concept. Third, he probably bears in mind Deut 32:35 and its references in Rom 12:9 and Heb 10:30 to say that the vindication belongs to the Lord; this is strongly reflected in Jerome's commentary on Jer 20:7-18 as a whole. Fourth, he cites Eph 5:13 where the concept of "revelation" and "the manifestation of what was previously hidden" brings evidence for his understanding of ראה in its broader OT and Jewish context. Jerome also emphasizes an "intertextual" approach to the OT and his uncontested usage of the OT as Christian Scripture. Although he makes the connection to the Psalm 143:2, he does not mention the likeness between Jer 20:7-18 and Psalm 31 nor did he show any resemblance between 20:12 and 11:20.

## 2.6 JEREMIAH 20:13.

> [13]Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy[animam pauperis] from the hand of evildoers (p.124).

Jerome's interpretation of v.13 is better understood in connection with his interpretation of v.12. He clarifies that connection under the word "vindication": "when he has obtained vindication from the Lord, he praises the Lord in spirit and boasts that he has been rescued from the hand of evildoers" (p.124). To interpret v.13, he first provides a straightforward translation from the Hebrew without any references to the Greek – though the LXX tends to present a very similar translation from the Hebrew. At first sight, there are any textual difficulties in his *iuxta hebraeos*. Then, Jerome explicitly links אֶבְיוֹן נֶפֶשׁ – which he translates as "animam pauperis" or "the life of the needy" – with the NT reference of "poor in spirit" from Matt 5:3 in Jesus' Beatitudes. He seems to be concerned about avoiding misunderstandings regarding the identity of the poor he is talking about. For this, he establishes that "the poor in spirit" is not the one who is destitute of "wealth". He adds that Paul refers to this kind of person in Gal 2:10. But he does not provide any further explanation

for this, which makes his connection odd because it seems that Gal 2:10 is presenting exactly the person who has little or no money. In consequence, Jerome includes exactly the concept of the poor that he would like to avoid. The exact sense of this scriptural correlation calls for clarification. Further, Jerome reads "the poor in spirt" in the light of the divine grace: "All of this [the deliverance from the hand of evildoers], however, is not by our merit but by the grace of him who delivers the needy person" (p.124). And then, he says that "poor in spirit" is an attitude of "humility": "Such a person does not have the wealth of amassed pride but the humility of a rescued pauper" (p.124).

Jerome's understanding of נֶפֶשׁ אֶבְיוֹן "the life of the poor" as πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι "the poor in spirit" is interesting. Jerome does not explain why he correlates נֶפֶשׁ אֶבְיוֹן directly with the NT πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι "poor in spirit". Since the LXX offers ψυχὴν πένητος "the soul of the needy", it is likely that Jerome may have considered such phrases theologically synonymous and requiring no further textual or philological attention. His treatment of this issue is highly theological. He moves freely between the Old and New Testaments: reading the OT by its own rights; going straightaway to the NT material; turning back to the OT with his Christian theology. So Jerome understands the OT "poor" in its broader Christian context.

## 2.7 JEREMIAH 20:14-18.

> [14]Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! [15]Cursed be the man– or person– who brought the news to my father, "A son is born to you", making him very glad. [16]Let that man be like the cities that the Lord overthrew and did not relent; let him hear a cry in the morning and wailing at noon, [17]who[qui] did not– or because[quia] he did not – kill me in the womb, so my mother would have been my grave and her womb forever pregnant. [18]Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow and spend my days in shame? (p.124-125).

Jer 20:14-18 is the poem where a double curse is given by prophet against the day he was born and the man who brought the news to his father. However, it is surprising that Jerome does not touch on the change of tone between v.7-13 and v.14-18 in any part of his commentary. Rather, he starts by setting what he considers a wrong usage of this text to support the doctrine

of the pre-existence of the soul: "Those who think that human souls were previously in heaven and that they fell from a better state into a worse one make use of this passage and passages like it, asserting that it was better to be in heaven than to dwell on earth and assume a lowly body, thereby coming up with new – or rather, already old arguments for their heresy" (p.124). His position against the pre-existence of the soul is a more open reprobation of Origen in his commentary on Jer 20:7-18. This illustrates that Jerome applies his interpretation of the OT to discuss intra-ecclesiastical and theological divergences of the church. Yet, it is quite possible that Jerome has included Jews among "those who think" (p.124) that souls have existed before their occupation into the body. This example illustrates how Jerome may have also addressed his text to Jewish issues of his epoch.

After Jerome's refutation of the pre-existence of the soul, he offers the heart of his interpretation on v.14-18 – though there is not a detailed explanation. He is selective in his judgement and informs the reader that the text is to be read as a hyperbole. So, Jeremiah had employed a hyperbole to transmit the meaning of the text. How then does Jerome explain the text? First, he addresses the discussion of the difficult likeness between v.14-18 and Job 3 by comparing Job 3:3 and Jer 20:15. He establishes the comparison as one of his methods to go about the text. He leads his reader to follow Job in thought. Although he does not enter into a detailed discussion between Job and Jeremiah, he offers a significant and clear explanation for the text as a whole: "the clear meaning [of Job's and Jeremiah's curse] is that it is better not to have existed than to live in torment" (p.125). This interpretation is consistent with the Targum, which tends to eliminate the possibility of Jeremiah's sinful wishes. The Targum reads 20:17 as: "Would that he had not said concerning me, that I had died from the womb, and that my mother should have been my grave, and that I should have been as if I had not existed"[41]. Although Jerome's translation is straightforward in relation to the Hebrew text verbally, it resembles the Targum thematically so that it is not impossible that he had had access to a pre-written form of the targumic interpretation[42]. Furthermore, in order to support his interpretation, Jerome referred to parallel texts where the

[41] Hayward, *The Targum of Jeremiah*, 105.
[42] Robert Hayward, "Saint Jerome and the Aramaic Targum", in *Targums and the Transmission of Scripture into Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 300-317.

focus is the same. He cites Sirach 30:17 in which Jerome read: "Death is the rest for the one whose way God has shut" (p.125). Then, he cites Job 3:20 in the context of Job 3:20-22. Further, he brings to the scene Matt 26:24 calling it "the Gospel" in a usage of the text completely out of its own context, but with the clear wordplay to support his arguments: "and in the Gospel [Matt] we read it simply stated: 'it would have been better for him if he had not been born', not in the sense that there is anyone who has not been born but in the sense that it is better not to exist than to exist wickedly" (p.125). Jerome adds more to prevent any misunderstanding of the matter: "For it is one thing not to exist altogether; it is something else to exist and to be tortured without ceasing, just as we prefer a peaceful death to a miserable life" (p.125). It is also likely that Jerome is aware of the discussion between Hillel and Shammai on whether is preferable to life or to not have existed, which might exemplify his interest and ability to think in Jewish traditions[43]. After that, he compares Jeremiah's deepest anguish with three other sources of Christian Scripture: the "day of the darkness" (Am 5:18-20), Jacob calling his days as "few and evil" (Gen 47:9) and, Paul's references on "evil age" and "evil days" (Gal 1:4; Eph 5:16).

Before concluding his comments on v.14-18, Jerome provides two technical terms which might shed illumination on his hermeneutics: prefiguration and hyperbole. In the context of what Jerome thinks on prefiguration, he mentions his awareness of a Jewish tradition on the fifth month (Ab) in which Jerusalem was captured in the same month of Jeremiah's birthday. He seems to be cautious in taking this source as totally credible because of the similarities between Jeremiah's and Job's cursing: if Jeremiah's cursing indicated that he was born in the same month as the destruction of the Temple, might this be the same for Job? Since Jerome thought that the book of Job had nothing to do with the destruction of the Temple, then he says that this reading can only be accepted "unless" Job's cursing was a "prefiguration and foretelling of the destruction of the temple" (p.125). Nonetheless, Jerome does not use this method to interpret Jeremiah, though he suggests it to read Job. Additionally, Jerome says that the astonishing expressions found in 20:17 should be read as hyperbole. This method is his favorite to read v.14-18 as a whole. Jerome

[43] Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, vol.1. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 252-254.

concludes v.14-18 by citing v.18 to explain that this verse represents the main reason why the prophet had preferred death or non-existence: his intense and constant suffering. Finally, Jerome resembles Jewish tradition in considering the "cities which the Lord overthrew" (v.17) are Sodom and Gomorrah.

## 3. HERMENEUTICAL REFLEXIONS ON JEROME'S HANDLING OF JER 20:7-18

Now, I wish to offer some reflections on the nuances of Jerome's exegesis of Jer 20:7-18 and make a few observations of some of his key features. Jerome's exegetical approach consists of the following: philological attention given to the text, two interwoven levels of hermeneutics, and resonances of midrashic and targumic exegesis.

### 3.1 PHILOLOGICAL ATTENTIVENESS TO THE TEXT

First, Jerome is an attentive interpreter and takes seriously the philological issues of the OT. His attentiveness is seen in his translation of Jer 20:7-18 as well as in many others of his commentaries on the Christian Bible. Despite Jerome's concern to recover the meaning of the text from the *hebraica veritas*, he does not mind to provide a Greek-based orientation reading of some verses. It seems that Jerome's focus is to reach what he thinks to be the best meaning of the text. For Jer 20:7-18, there are times that the Hebrew alone is sufficient for him; there are times that the Greek alternative translation is preferred; and, there are also times where both Hebrew and Greek are taken as valid to achieve the correct meaning of the text. This may be exemplified in his rendering of v.7 and v.10. He renders the two occurrences of פתה in v.7 into the Latin word "seduco" which might mean "seduce"[44]. So, he recognized that "deceive" is not the only way to render such a word. But clearly, he prefers to use the Greek to resolve the issue. The Greek reads Ἠπάτησάς which he renders as "decepisti" or "you have deceived". Perhaps, due to the theological implications of rendering פתה as "seduce" or just because this seems odd to him, the LXX's choice is taken for guiding his interpretation: Jeremiah was then "deceived", not "seduced". Although he provides a possible way to translate פתה from the

[44] "Seduco" might mean "seduce", but could be also mean: "lead away", "lead aside", "turn aside", "seduce". *OLD*, 1726; *CCELL*, 187. Graves (*ACT*) translates "seduco" as "you have misled me" (p.122).

Hebrew, he clearly basis his interpretation on the Greek. As a theological issue is still persisting, Jerome takes a Jewish story as a frame to fit Jeremiah's word. Yet, in the third appearance of פתה (20:10), he straightforwardly offers "decipiatur" or "he will be deceived" as he does with the LXX, but this time without presenting any Hebrew alternative. A second example is v.9 where Jerome offers both Hebrew and Greek-based translations, and he assumes that there is a valid meaning for either, leaving the reader free to choose. Although the Hebrew alone would be sufficient to establish the meaning, Jerome also chooses to give equal or higher value to the Greek. At least for Jer 20:7-18, Jerome is not discarding the Greek at all. This philological concern is certainly part of his literal attempt to read Scripture well.

### 3.2 CONTINUITIES BETWEEN THE LITERAL AND SPIRITUAL MOVES

Second, Jerome performs an exegesis that combines and sometimes modifies the model inherited from Antiochene and Alexandrian hermeneutics. In Jerome's treatment of Jer 20:7-18, he is clearly making a case for the literal interpretation of Scripture. Following the conventional handling for seeking the literal meaning, Jerome firmly offers the translations from the Hebrew and the Greek which fills the requirements of a good literal and philological investigation of the text. In addition, Jerome straightforwardly establishes the historical context for Jer 20:7-18. He does not connect the poem within its preceding narrative, Jer 20:1-6, as if Jeremiah were in Passhur's prison (it could be implied that Passhur was one of Jerome's enemies and perhaps this would be the normal move in the world of the text). Rather, Jerome sets the text in the context of the Babylonian captivity and the destruction of the Temple, in the broader context of the book as a whole. In explaining v.7-8a and v.8b-10a, the imminent captivity of Jerusalem is the prime content of Jeremiah's prophecy of doom and the main motive for the persecution against the prophet.

Jerome's literal treatment of the text also includes Jewish tradition. For interpreting 20:7, it is likely that he was conversant with a midrash found at *PR* 26, a midrashic homily prepared for the Ninth of Ab, the memorial of the destruction of the Temple, which provides a non-biblical scenario to include Jeremiah's astonishing words and relates it with his calling. In this respect, Jerome is seen in his commentary on Jer 20:7-18 using Jewish tradition to

elucidate the meaning of the text, especially for dealing with the difficulties of v.7 and v.14-18.

Jerome is also making a case for seeking the spiritual sense of Scripture. His "spiritual interpretation" is what comes from the literal. Jerome is willing to slightly move on to the spiritual sense in the light of the literal meaning. That is, Jerome's literal sense finds some continuities with his spiritual sense, and he sees no contradictions in this. In practice, his literal and spiritual interpretations are organically connected in his reading of Jer 20:7-18. He does not offer any technical terminology to describe what he is doing for seeking the spiritual meaning[45]. Yet, he seems to equate his typical terminology as if it were only one spiritual interpretation[46]. In consequence, Jerome's appreciation for the literal sense does not exclude his seeking for the spiritual one; this is often compatible with the Christian tradition he inherited.

As an extension of his allegorical approach, the reader will find some aspects of Jerome move much similar to what is now called intertextuality and combines elements of a pastorally-oriented reading. In dealing with Jer 20:7-18, Jerome's spiritual search has to do more with a form of an intertextual correlation of the OT with the NT, homiletic and moral usage, and the application of some truths that he finds pertinent for his readers. The connection of Jeremiah's experience with God's word and Paul (both as the true messengers of God) that moves on to the application for the readers of his day in Jerome's reading of v.8b-10a might exemplify Jerome's movement from the literal to the spiritual interpretation of Scripture. Also, his spiritual reading is more "pastoral" in orientation than "typological". In the context of v.8b-10a, Jerome relates the very literal words pronounced against the prophet directly to the teachers of the church who eventually might be censured hearing "Persecute them! Let us persecute them!" (p.123).

Nonetheless, Jerome does not follow a rigid program to present both the literal and spiritual meanings all the time. Rather, Jerome applies what he thinks to be the best approach to enhance his claims. Sometimes Jerome gives both interpretations and sometimes he does not. In commenting on v.10b-

[45] Brown has found five terms to describe Calvin's typical movement from the literal to the spiritual sense: *typus*, *allegoria*, *aenigma*, *theoria*, *tropologia*. See Brown, *Vir Trilinguis*, 143-151.

[46] Brown, *Vir Trilinguis*, 146. Also, Lubac has argued for the broader concept for "allegorical sense" as spiritual sense: *The Sources of Revelation* (Harder and Herder: New York, 1968), 11-31.

11a, for example, Jerome does not provide any literal interpretation (only the translation itself): he briefly moves on directly to the "spiritual" exposition which is, in practice, a theological application of the text. Jerome is working freely throughout the text, explaining what he judges to be more useful. Considering all this, Jerome's articulation of the literal and spiritual readings of Jer 20:7-18 becomes blurred especially in his "pastoral" appropriation of the text and in his "intertextual" moves which allow him to support his Christians claims linking Scripture with Scripture, appropriating Israel's Scripture as Christian Scripture, and applying it to his audience.

### 3.3 MIDRASHIC AND TARGUMIC RESONANCES

Third, in his commentary on Jer 20:7-18, Jerome presents resonances with midrashic and targumic exegesis. He generally works with these features in his literal appreciation. At first glance, Jerome sees the common ground between the Jewish and Christian readings of the OT in its literal sense. The Jewish allegory may have been both insufficient and unnecessary as it does not comprehend the OT as revealing the Messiah. Yet, although Jerome is not the first to deal with Jewish tradition in the context of the early Christian exegetes, his articulation of Jewish sources is a distinctive aspect of his hermeneutics.

The "midrashic" approach to Jer 20:7-18 provides another hermeneutical insight by which Jerome handles the difficulties of the text, particularly on 20:7 and 20:14-18. Before Jerome, Origen deals with the same issue on 20:7 and proposes a similar solution to explain that. In his Homily on Jer 20:7-12[47], Origen appeals to a Jewish tradition to discuss v.7 in the light of Jeremiah's calling. Origen's use of such a Jewish tradition resembles what is now found at *PR* 26[48]. It is likely that Origen and Jerome are conversant with this tradition. They argue in similar fashion to explain why God had deceived the prophet[49]. The tradition that he mentions on Jeremiah's birthday is also found at *PR*. Jerome therefore applies the same model of Jewish exegesis (which employed a new narrative context to set Jeremiah's words and explain the issues) to move Jeremiah from the world of the text to the world of the church. Jeremiah is then pictured by Jerome as at *PR*: not only the historical figure who lived in

[47] *FOTC* 97, 223.
[48] *PR*, 1-33;523-538.
[49] *PR*, 534-236.

Judah in the sixteenth century, but a man in the story-world of Scripture who encouraged readers of his day[50].

Jerome also uses Jewish tradition to support his exegesis of 20:14-18. His interpretation of v.14-18 appears in targumic dress. Jerome as well as the targumic exegesis cannot accept Jeremiah's double cursing. Targum reads 20:17 as "Would that he had not said concerning me, that I had died from the womb, and that my mother should have been my grave, and that I should have been as if I had not existed"[51], insofar as Jerome offers the meaning of the text as "the clear meaning is that it is better not to have existed than to live in torment" (p.125). Both Jerome and the Targum see that v.14-18 raises the same difficulties for Jews and Christians alike. Jerome and Targum bring the same solution for resolving the issue: Jeremiah would mean that it was better if he had not existed. The same discussion is proposed by Shammai and Hillel, where Shammai's view argues that if one is under intense suffering, it would be possible to wish that one should not have existed[52]. In contrast, Hillel's view emphasizes that it is better to be created and to live[53]. Jerome has effectively shown his knowledge of the Jewish tradition on this matter. These midrashic and targumic sources have favorably argued to set Jerome's exegesis of Jer 20:7-18 as grounded in Jewish hermeneutics as well. Significantly, he illustrates not only the Christian usage of Jewish sources but also the employment of a certain Jewish exegesis in early Christian readings of Scripture.

## CONCLUSION

How then can Jerome's hermeneutics of Jer 20:7-18 be evaluated? Let us offer a further evaluation on the significant exegetical features employed by Jerome in order to highlight his Christian usage of the OT.

First, Jerome makes a case for the Christian usage of the OT. For Jerome, the OT and the NT are Scripture of the church. He credits the OT as the source of Christian theological thought. Jerome is still working at two different levels of Scripture as the model inherited by the classic Patristic exegesis, but what is

[50] Mary C. Callaway, "Exegesis as Banquet: Reading Jeremiah with the Rabbis", in *A Gift of God in Due Season: Essays on Scripture and Community in Honour of James A. Sanders*, ed. Richard Weis, David Carr (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 219-230.
[51] Hayward, *The Targum of Jeremiah*, 105.
[52] Urbach, *The Sages*, 252-254.
[53] *Id*.

significant is the purpose for what he deals with them. However, one interest aspect of his appropriation of the OT is that although Jerome stands within the Christian tradition, he wishes to read the OT by its own rights. Hence, Jerome wants Jer 20:7-18 to be heard by itself rooted as firmly as possible in its OT ground. Within this, Jewish material seems to be heard when the biblical text is silent or obscure.

This perspective perhaps is helpful in explaining Jerome's resistance to connect Jeremiah too quickly with Jesus. In Jerome's exegesis, the reader will not find any enthusiastic typology between Jeremiah and Jesus, as it is found in Origen's Homilies on Jeremiah[54]. Also, there is not any correlation between Jeremiah's deepest anguish in v.14-18 and Jesus' forsakenness on the cross. Rather, Jerome remains firmly convinced that the best use of the spiritual reading should be done carefully. Jerome gives more space to how the OT speaks by its own voice and gives priority to the literal interpretation, even though he practices a two-levels interpretation for Jer 20:7-18. Jerome understands that Jer 20:7-18 might be best read not as a direct reference to Jesus, but as a reference to the Christian life.

Second, as consequence of what has been said above, Jerome orients his hermeneutics towards the church. Interestingly, this element is stressed by McKane who highlights the ecclesiastical interest of Jerome as a premodern reader who envisages to read the "Hebrew Bible" for the church[55]. Hence, OT characters are commonly flavoured with Christian virtues and they are used to encourage Christian behaviour towards the challenges of the church of their day. Jerome implements a "Christianization" of Jeremiah projecting a backward movement from the NT to the OT. He endorses the substantial pastorally-oriented reading of the text as an extended and necessary movement from what they understand as the correct application of the text. For Jerome, this generally looks like his "spiritual" reading of the text. In light of this, although sometimes his literal move becomes blurred with the spiritual one, they are still noticeable, especially in his attempt to link OT's lessons to his audience.

Third, Jerome's reading of the OT as Christian Scripture applies intensively the method of Scripture interpreting Scripture. He understands that the OT

[54] *FOTC 97*, 221-244.
[55] William McKane, "Calvin as an Old Testament Commentator", *NGTT* 25 (1984):254.

and NT are inspired by God; as part of the divine nature of the Scripture one passage can illuminate another. Along this line, Thiselton said that "texts open doors to other texts, and we find [in premodern interpreters] something like a notion of intertextuality in which Scripture is interpreted always by Scripture"[56]. This is true when one looks at Jerome's treatment of Jer 20:7-18 and his many "intertextual" decisions to read Jer 20:7-18 as Christian Scripture. Not rarely, he bridges OT and NT linking theological themes between a similar word, story, or "Christian" experience. The reader should bear in mind that Jerome offers a theological and practical reading of the text without any difficulty relating the OT to the NT within which indicate that Jerome's hermeneutical tendency is to appropriate the OT as Scripture of the church in similar ways of much that have been considered as a "canonical" or even as more recently an "intertextual" interpretation of Christian Scripture.

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[56] Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 171

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