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A Spiritual Call: Jeremiah's Call to the Heart
And the Stages of Spiritual Progression in Carmelite Spirituality

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Theology

Department of Biblical Studies
Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology
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South Orange, New Jersey

2023

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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Julia S. Whelan has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the Masters thesis for the Master of Arts in Theology during this Spring semester, 2023.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is first, to identify resonances between Jeremiah 1:10 and the three stages of the spiritual journey as defined by the Carmelites such as John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila (i.e., the stages known as purgative, illuminative and unitive) and then, in light of an in depth understanding of the spiritual senses attributed to Jeremiah 1:10 in its reception history, to evaluate the impact of Jer 1:10 upon the Carmelite conception of the spiritual journey.

A comprehensive Word Study is undertaken of six task verbs from Jer 1:10, presented as three pairs: *to root out* (נָחַץ) and *to pull down* (נָהַץ), *to destroy* (אַבַּד) and *to throw down* (הָרַס), *to build* (בָּנָה) and *to plant* (נָטַע). This analysis offers support for the alignment and resonances of the task verbs with the three stages of the spiritual journey. The Word Study also suggests that for the spiritual sense, the Hebrew text may provide a typology of a three-stage progression, in which two stages of purification (described by two pairs of negative task verbs) are necessary before the holiest and whole-hearted stage of unification is effected (described by the positive pair of task verbs). In addition, the repeated proximate position of task verbs to the themes of “turning” and “the heart” suggest that the verbs may work to turn the heart to the Lord, who continues to love his people despite their spiritual adultery and other sins.

The evidence reviewed in the Word Study is supported by the reception history and indicates that Jer 1:10 may offer a significant and early spiritual model. This verse directly impacts upon Paul and Origen in the early era of Christianity. Based on Origen’s interpretation, it is possible that Jer 1:10 offers a biblical model for the tri-partite spiritual journey which precedes the conception of spiritual stages by Pseudo-Dionysius, who is often considered the originator of

the purgative, illuminative and unitive concepts. In a number of ways, Origen's spiritual interpretation seems to be carried through Christian tradition and may challenge oft-assumed Platonic or Neoplatonic sources of the spiritual journey.

However, the impact of Jer 1:10 upon the Carmelites Saints John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila is diffuse and indirect. No direct citation or echo of Jer 1:10 has been identified in their writings. Nonetheless, like Origen's interpretation of Jer 1:10, John recognizes successive stages of spiritual "destruction" (purgation and illumination) designed to open space in the soul for God, allowing for a third phase of "construction" (i.e., union). Jer 1:10 may offer insight into the earliest theological seeds of the spiritual journey, with echoes and resonances throughout the ages.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION, RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY

The call of the prophet Jeremiah includes six verbs of purpose in verse 1:10: “Today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, *to root out* (נָחַשׁ) and *to pull down* (נָחַץ), *to destroy* (אָבַד) and *to throw down* (הָרַס), *to build* (בָּנָה) and *to plant* (נָטַע)” (NKJV). The use of four negative verbs seems to reflect the great weight of suffering that the people undergo through the exile, while the two positive verbs are associated with hope in future restoration of their fortunes and in a New Covenant with the Lord (Jer. 31:33).¹ As part of the call narrative, the negative tasks can be seen to anticipate the traumatic experiences of Israel and Judah in the book of *Jeremiah* including captivity and deportation from the promised land, as well as the destruction of the revered Temple in Jerusalem. The positive terms seem to reflect the promises offered by the Lord such as those in the Book of Consolation. This understanding of the verbs of 1:10 points to the literal sense.

These verbs may also carry a spiritual sense that demonstrates resonances with the three-phased spiritual journey² as described by the Carmelite saints John of the Cross and Teresa of

¹ As will be explained in chapter 2 (see Commentary Review), modern exegetes seem to agree on a dualistic understanding of the set of task verbs. See also footnote 21 in this chapter (Methodology: Literature Review) for a brief reference. In Chapter 3, a more detailed Word Study will be undertaken. For references linking the 1:10 task verbs to restoration and the New Covenant see Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 235; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); 36-37; Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 96.

² For a description of the tri-partite phase of the spiritual journey, see Ralph Martin, *The Fulfillment of All Desire* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2006). Part I describes the Purgative Way; Part II the Illuminative Way; and Part III the Unitive Way. For a summary and overview of significant saints and the stages as described by them, see page 13. Jordan Aumann’s textbook *Spiritual Theology* (London: Continuum, 1980) offers a detailed discussion of many aspects of the spiritual life, including a thorough discussion of “Conversion from Sin” in Chapter 7 (139-176) and “Progressive Purgation” in Chapter 8 (177-207). Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange provides an earlier discussion which is often more clearly classified according to the tri-partite structure of purgative, illuminative and unitive way in his short treatise *The Three Conversions in the Spiritual Life* (TAN Books:

Avila, who have provided descriptive and enduring understandings of the stages of spiritual progression. While both these Saints employ their own multi-faceted structure and descriptions of spiritual progress, their structures conform broadly to the three stages known as purgative, illuminative and unitive. St. John of the Cross uses the analogy of ascending Mt. Carmel and adds dark nights between the primary stages.³ St. Teresa of Avila describes seven mansions in her classic work *Interior Castle*.⁴ For the purposes of this paper, the tri-partite structure will be used as the framework.

This study will seek to establish resonances of the spiritual journey with the task verbs of Jer. 1:10 through an examination of the spiritual sense of the terms. This review will establish the understanding from the literal sense, examine usage of the terms within *Jeremiah*, and follow the transmission through early Christianity through to the Carmelite saints, in particular John of the Cross.

Rationale

While the task verbs listed in Jeremiah's call, in the context of the Exile, can be understood in the literal sense as physical effects on an exiled community, their senses are also moral and spiritual, and aim to draw the people of Israel into closer communion with God. I initially perceived a loose correspondence between the task verbs and the stages of the spiritual journey while simultaneously studying biblical call narratives (in particular that of *Jeremiah*), and spirituality, including the writings of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila. The point

Charlotte, NC, 1938; reprint 2015). This is a short summary of his teaching, based on his longer classic text *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*. See R. Garrigou-LaGrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life: Prelude of Eternal Life*, transl. by Sr. Timothea Doyle (River Forest, IL: Rosary College, 1946).

³ This study relies upon *The Collected Works of John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, transl. and ed. by E. Allison Peers (Doubleday: New York, 1961).

of departure for this paper lies in the observation that when it comes to the moral and spiritual sense of these task verbs, their meaning and order corresponds closely to the stages of spiritual progression as described by the Carmelite saints⁵:

- 1) In the purgative way of beginners in the spiritual journey, sinful behavior is largely eliminated; Jeremiah's initial task "to root out and pull down" (NRSV) can be seen to apply to sinful behavior.
- 2) In the illuminative way, a soul grows in detachment from worldly things, and sinful tendencies which do not lead to God are eliminated; Jeremiah's terms "destroy and throw down" are applied to what must be done to the spiritual attachments to sin in the depth of the soul, leading the soul closer to God.
- 3) Finally, in the unitive stage, a "transforming union"⁶ of great "fruitfulness"⁷ occurs; Jeremiah's final task, "to build and to plant" is applied to the growth of souls who seek a union of wills with God, and as such whose lives are built and planted in the love of God.

Spiritual progression is a process of the heart. As John of the Cross observes in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, the exhortation of Deut. 6:5, (and emphasized by Jesus (Mt. 22:37)), "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" is the summation of everything spiritual persons must do to unite themselves with God.⁸ Strong resonances, textually and thematically, in the book of *Jeremiah* (29:13; 31:31-34),

⁵ A more detailed discussion of this initial observation can be found in my exploratory article: Julia Whelan, "Spiritual Renewal in Jeremiah's Call: A New Look at 'Uproot and Tear Down, Destroy and Demolish, Build and Plant'," *Studies in Spirituality* 27 (2017), 222. DOI: 10.2143/SIS.27.0.3254104.

⁶ John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love and Spiritual Canticle*, quoted in Ralph Martin, *The Fulfillment of All Desire: A Guidebook for the Journey to God Based on the Wisdom of the Saints* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2006), 13.

⁷ Ralph Martin, *The Fulfillment of All Desire* (Emmaus Road Publishing: Steubenville, OH, 2006), 13.

⁸ John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, A.3.16.1 in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, revised ed., trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), 292. Note also, Jesus describes this as the greatest commandment (Mt 22:36-42).

warrant an investigation of the purpose of the task verbs in 1:10. An examination of the mechanisms and extent of the links between the task verbs of Jer. 1:10 and the spiritual journey, by way of the heart, will illuminate the spiritual⁹ as well as the literal sense of the tasks.

Literal and Spiritual Senses. The literal sense of the text concerns the meaning as intended by the original author. This is the first sense of the reading upon which other interpretations such as the spiritual sense must be based.¹⁰

In the literal sense, the book of Jeremiah conveys physical events and the state of the nation of Israel and Judah from a theological viewpoint around the time of the Babylonian exile. Yet somehow the literal sense also applies to each person. This nation or “body” of people includes Jeremiah himself. Jeremiah is both subject to the events of the nation (a conquest seen as a consequence of their corporate behavior in violation of God’s covenant), while simultaneously living out his individual vocation as prophet. What is true of the body of Israel is true for Jeremiah; yet each individual within the body experiences the events both corporately and in their own way.

Scripture is not “literalist” but rather inspired by the Holy Spirit for the sake of our salvation.¹¹ The literal sense includes the meaning intended by the author and is “discovered by exegesis, following sound rules of interpretation.”¹² The literal sense of the text often includes figurative language and metaphors to convey meaning. Jeremiah for example repeatedly calls for the people to “return” to God. Despite their exile from the promised land, this call is not

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II* [CCC] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 115-118.

¹⁰ CCC 116.

¹¹ CCC 105, 107.

¹² CCC 116.

simply about a return to the land (and the Temple), but rather a spiritual return to the ways of God and the love of God. To return (שׁוּב) is used in *Jeremiah* over 100 times. In order to return to the Lord, the people must hear and obey (שָׁמַע makes more than 180 appearances), seek the Lord (בָּקַשׁ appears more than 20 times) with the whole heart (29:13) and even circumcise the foreskin of those hearts (Jer. 4:4; see also Deut. 10:6). Circumcising the heart of the people is not a literal cutting of a physical heart of course, but rather a spiritual purification. This purification applies not only to the characters in the text in the literal sense, but is relevant to every reader of the text. In other words, the heart upon which the Lord will write his law (Jer. 31:33) belongs not only to the nations of Israel and Judah or the prophet Jeremiah, but applies to the reader of the text in ancient times, and the reader today.

The spiritual sense then builds upon that. It recognizes that the words of the author may be applied, in some sense, to the reader at any time “thanks to the unity of God’s plan...”¹³ The spiritual sense includes the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses.¹⁴ The “profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture.”¹⁵

In the literal sense, the tasks of Jeremiah’s call seem to anticipate the physical movement of the people away from the center of worship in the Temple in Jerusalem (and perhaps a perception of the “only” or “real” presence of the Lord) into foreign exile. By moving the people physically further from Jerusalem, could the text be conveying not only a moral teaching of the covenantal consequences of sin, but a spiritual teaching pointing to a typological framework for

¹³ CCC 117.

¹⁴ CCC 117. The allegorical sense recognizes the significance of events “in Christ” seeing for example the crossing of the Red Sea as a “sign or type of Christ’s victory and also of Christian Baptism.” The moral sense of Scripture teaches us to “act justly” while the anagogical sense speaks to the “eternal significance” of realities and events. For example “the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem.”

¹⁵ CCC 115.

the interiority of the human relationship with the Lord, i.e., the spiritual journey? This paper will employ a theological approach to the canonical text as it stands, as it seeks to add to the “richness” of understanding of the spiritual sense of Jer. 1:10.

Christian Spirituality. In the Christian view, God seeks to draw man to Himself: “when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (Jn. 12:32). This aspect of God can be seen throughout the Scriptures as well in the writings of the Fathers, and the lives of the saints throughout the history of the Church. God is immutable and eternal, immanent and transcendent, and He has created us in his likeness and image (Gen. 1:26) with a natural desire to know him and find Him.¹⁶ This theme is central in the Old Testament (e.g. Gen. 3:9, 4:26; Deut. 4:29; 12:5; 1 Chr. 16:10, 11; Ps. 14:2; 22:26; 105:3,4; Isa. 55:6; Jer. 50:4).

Christian spirituality and the endeavor to find God is often framed in language of turning (or returning) and imagery of the heart, including circumcising the heart (Jer. 4:4; 32:39-40; Deut. 30:1-3, 6, 17). Jesus tells us the greatest commandment is to “love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Mk. 29:29-30; Mt. 22:37; Deut. 6:4-5). This principle, originally Deuteronomistic (Deut. 4:29; Deut. 6:4-5), is reflected in the text, themes and theology of the book of Jeremiah. “When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13). The Lord searches the heart (17:10) and promises the people a new heart, with his law inscribed upon it, that they may know Him (31:31-

¹⁶ CCC 27. In addition, St. Paul in particular echoes this philosophy of seeking. God, says Paul, “made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions, so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us....” (Acts 17:26-27).

34). This study will consider how these themes might relate to the purpose of Jeremiah's call to root out... and plant.

Interaction with Deuteronomy. The book of Jeremiah demonstrates intertextual relationship with *Deuteronomy*. Both *Jeremiah* and *Deuteronomy* note that hearts must be circumcised before they can return to the Lord (Jer. 4:4; also Deut. 10:16; 30:6). Deuteronomic themes and theology are referenced and present in the text of *Jeremiah*.¹⁷ Traditional (“maximalist”) scholarship interprets this to imply knowledge of and dependence by the author(s) of *Jeremiah* on the book of *Deuteronomy*.¹⁸ The issue of the direction of dependence between *Jeremiah* and *Deuteronomy* is beyond the limits of this study and not directly relevant to the questions pursued by this discussion.

Building on the Literal Sense: Finding Spiritual Implications. A review of the usage and placement of the task verbs will point to the purpose of the task verbs. This brief form critical analysis speaks to the literal sense, but simultaneously engages the figurative language and spiritual implications.

Placement of the task verbs throughout the book of *Jeremiah* seems to imply a relationship between the task verbs and the turning of the heart:

- 1) The collection of all six task verbs from 1:10 appears together again in only one verse in Jeremiah (31:28) in the Book of Comfort, in a passage immediately preceding the

¹⁷ For example: Jeremiah as a prophet like Moses; the finding of the book of the law during the time of Josiah; the covenantal theology of blessings and curses.

¹⁸ Georg Fischer, “Jeremiah – ‘The Prophet Like Moses’?” in *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Reception and Interpretation*, ed. Jack Lundbom et. al. (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 45-46; see also Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 316-317.

announcement of the New Covenant and the Lord's promise to write his law on the heart (31:31-33).

- a) This passage with the verse containing all six task verbs (31:27-30) and the passage announcing the New Covenant (31: 31-34) both begin with "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will..." (sow seed 31:27; make a new covenant 31:31) indicating a cohesiveness of construction and related purpose as crafted by the author.
 - b) Preceding the New Covenant is a passage in which the theme of turning is prominent (31:1-25). The people return (31:8, 16, 17), led by the Lord (31:9, 23) to "the height of Zion" (31:12). They acknowledge turning way, repent (31:19) and answer the Lord's call to return (31:21).
- 2) Four of the task verbs from 1:10 are used in 24:6 in the vision of the two baskets of figs (24:1-10), also immediately preceding the prophecy of a new heart from the Lord.¹⁹ This prophecy includes a "return" with the whole heart (24:7).
- 3) In the vision of the Potter and the Clay (18:1-17), the image of the heart, albeit an evil one (18:12) and a call to turn from evil ways (18:11) appears in proximity to the verbs uproot, tear down, build and plant (18:7, 9). The Lord calls the people to turn from their evil ways (18:11) but they refuse because of the stubbornness of their evil heart (18:12).

This proximity between the figurative language of the heart, and the task verbs could imply a spiritual purpose to the call of Jeremiah, in addition its literal sense. This paper seeks to elucidate how and to what extent the tasks of Jeremiah's call (to uproot, tear down, destroy,

¹⁹ "For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; I will *build* them and not *pull* them *down*, and I will *plant* them and not *pluck* them *up*. Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart." (Jer. 24:6-7).

demolish, build and plant) facilitate processes of the heart and in turn the stages of spiritual progression.

Methodology

In order to address these questions regarding the spiritual sense, most importantly the correspondence between the task verbs of Jer. 1:10 and the stages of spiritual progression, this study proceeds through a literature review, a word study within *Jeremiah*, and then a tracing of the reception of the text in early Christianity, through to the writings of John of the Cross. The approach is described below.

Literature Review. In chapter 2, the positions taken by major commentaries of *Jeremiah*²⁰ including those by Bright, Carroll, Holladay, McKane, Brueggemann, and Lundbom and provide the basis for a literal interpretation of the task verbs of 1:10. Through the literature review a foundational understanding of the literal sense of the terms is established, alongside identification of gaps in understanding. The modern commentary on Jer. 1:10 tends to see two purposes for three sets of infinitives: destruction is associated with the negative verbs and restoration with the final positive pair.²¹ There seems to be no recognized association between

²⁰ John Bright, *Jeremiah*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965); Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*; William Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (1986); William Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); William McKane, *Jeremiah 1—25* (London: Bloomsbury, 1986), repr. 2014; William McKane, *Jeremiah 26—52* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), repr. 2014; Walter Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25: To Pluck Up, To Tear Down*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1988); Walter Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26—52: To Build, To Plant*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991); Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36* (New York: Doubleday, 2004); Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37—52* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

²¹ Bright, cxvi-cxvii; Carroll, 95; McKane, 814; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 37; Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 10; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 237; see also E. W. Nicholson, *Jeremiah 1—25*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 26; Patrick D. Miller, “The Book of Jeremiah” in *The New Interpreters Bible*, Volume VI (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 583; L.C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 28. A more detailed discussion is presented in chapter 2.

the spiritual sense in Jeremiah 1:10 and the three stages of spirituality, nor a satisfying explanation as to why there are three pairs of verbs for two purposes.

Word Study. Chapter 3 offers a thorough review in the form of a word study on the usage and meaning of the six task verbs within the book of *Jeremiah*. This research touches on how and to what extent they are related to terms of the heart, including circumcision, and turning of the heart. The comprehensive analysis of the usage will offer evidence of an alignment between the task verbs and the spiritual stages which seems consistent in terms of both progressive order, and the spiritual meaning and connotations of the verbs.

Transmission and Reception History. The next challenge is to understand whether and how a potentially nascent and subtle conceptualization of the three stages in *Jeremiah* impacted on the Christian tradition and the conceptualization of the three stages of spirituality as described by the Carmelites.

In the New Testament, the letters of Paul provide the earliest demonstration of the influence of *Jeremiah*, including Jer. 1:10.²² This early avenue of interpretation offers Paul's allusions to his authority for "building" up rather than "tearing down" or "destroying" (2 Cor. 10:8; 12:19; 13:10). He describes his own ministry in terms that exhibit identification with Jeremiah's ministry.²³ Paul speaks in terms that can be seen to describe spiritual progression (Gal. 5:24, 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:19). An examination of Paul's understanding and use of the task verbs in chapter 4 offers an interpretive context and understanding of the verbs from Jeremiah's call (1:10).

²² Hetty Lalleman, "Paul's Self-Understanding in the Light of Jeremiah: A Case Study into the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament" in *A God of Faithfulness: Festschrift J.G. McConville* (eds. Jamie A. Grant, Alison Lo and Gordon J. Wehnham; LHB/OTS 538 (London, T&T Clark, 2011), 96-111.

²³ *Ibid.*, 103-111.

Transmission of the task verb concepts continues through early Christian literature of the Fathers of the Church, especially Origen, for whom we have 20 homilies on *Jeremiah* from about 242 CE.²⁴ It is here that an unexpected and exciting discovery comes to the fore (see chapter 5). Origen links Jeremiah's words to Paul's teaching²⁵ and directly and clearly interprets Jeremiah 1:10 as related to three stages of spiritual progression.²⁶ These stages align with the purgative, illuminative and unitive stages and even echo elements of the terminology²⁷.

Most surprisingly, this interpretation is articulated well before the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, who is traditionally credited as the source of the three-stage terminology.²⁸ In a few studies, early conceptual roots have been identified in Plotinus (often considered the founder of Neoplatonism)²⁹ or even Origen, who often spiritualized biblical texts.³⁰ And interestingly, there may even have been contact between Origen and Plotinus, although this is difficult to determine (chapter 6 examines the transmission from Origen forward until just prior to John of the Cross). However, the reference to Origen is based on his Commentary on the Song of Songs.³¹ Most significantly, this study was unable to identify any modern recognition of a connection between

²⁴ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah, Homily on 1 Kings 28*, trans. John Clark Smith, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998).

²⁵ Origen, *Fragments from the Catena*, 27.

²⁶ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.15.

²⁷ Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, Prologue 3.

²⁸ Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 51. See also Andrew Louth, "Denys the Areopagite" in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 186.

²⁹ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, translated by Stephen Mackenna and B.S. Page (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1917-1930), Ennead VI 7, 36. See chapter 6 of this study for the excerpt and brief discussion.

³⁰ John Bergsma and Brant Pitre, *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2018), 660-661.

³¹ Origen, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, translated and annotated by R.P. Lawson, *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1957). Prologue 3. A detailed examination of the interactions and direction of influence between Origen and Plotinus is beyond the scope of this study, but may warrant further investigation.

the spiritual journey and Jeremiah. Yet, Origen's interpretation ties the spiritual journey to the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures.

This finding raises the question of whether Jeremiah contributes to the broader Christian tradition through Origen. By tracing the reception of Jer. 1:10 across the span Church history (chapter 6), it is possible to gain a sense of the influence of Jeremiah 1:10 on early Christian thought. The influence will be seen to grow more diffuse in the period after Gregory the Great (c. 540- c. 604).

John of the Cross, Jeremiah and the Spiritual Journey. Chapter 7 reviews the interaction between John of the Cross and Jeremiah 1:10. John of the Cross, a doctor of the church and master teacher of the spiritual journey, references the book and person of Jeremiah across his writings over 20 times (and *Lamentations* another 20), including in *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *Dark Night of the Soul* and *Living Flame of Love*.³² Jeremiah is used to describe various spiritual stages and experiences. A quote from *Jeremiah* was selected by John of the Cross to explain the summit of his famous sketch of Mount Carmel, his visual depiction of the journey to union with God: "I brought you into the land of Carmel to eat its fruit and its good things (Jer. 2:7)."³³ However, John of the Cross does not speak directly to his understanding of Jer. 1:10. This is frustrating, but opens the way for further questions. Inferences are identified and discussed.

A summary of the findings and conclusions is presented in chapter 8.

³² John of the Cross refers to God as the supernatural builder (in *Living Flame of Love*, LF. 3.47); cites Jeremiah's suffering in discussing the attainment of perfection (LF. 2.26); and asserts, by relying on St. Paul, that they have deliberately turned away from God (Col 3:5).

³³ John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Sketch of Mount Carmel, 111.

The study of the usage of these task verbs from *Jeremiah* will offer evidence that a spiritual understanding of a three-stage progression can be gleaned from the text of Jer. 1:10, and this understanding evolves through the writings of Paul, Christian Fathers such as Origen, and ultimately (if somewhat diffusely) into the Carmelite spirituality of the purgative, illuminative and unitive stages.

Chapter 2

JEREMIAH 1:10 BACKGROUND AND COMMENTARY REVIEW

The task verbs used in 1:10 are repeated in various collections at 12:14-17; 18:7,9; 24:6; 31:28, 38-40; 42:10; 45:4, often to describe the consequences of obedience/disobedience to the Lord (12:17; 18:7-9; 24:6; 42:10) as well as the intention of the Lord for the future (31:28, 38, 40; 45:4).³⁴ The verbal imagery of verse 1:10 can be seen as a leitmotif.³⁵ This leitmotif often occurs in proximity to text that speaks of turning to the Lord (or refusing to) and acting with the heart (for good or evil). The table below lays out the key passages containing the leitmotif as well as contiguous or proximate passages involving turning (שׁוּב) and/or the “heart” (לֵב) unless otherwise noted).

Table 1: Task verbs of 1:10 and proximate passages of turning and/or the heart		
Key Passage (Leitmotif)	Turning	Heart
1:10	n/a	n/a
12:14-17	12:15	12:3
18:7-10	18:8, 11	18:12
24:6	24:6, 7	24:7
31:28, 38-40	31:21	31:21, 33
42:10	42:10 (idiomatic use of שׁוּב indicating “still” with dwell יָשַׁב); thematically the passage speaks to the absence of turning, i.e., remaining.	42:20 (נָפֶשׁ)
45:4	n/a	n/a

The task verbs under scrutiny are used in a complete set of six to describe the mission of Jeremiah (1:10) and in whole and part in the framing of the New Covenant (31:28, 38, 40). Their

³⁴ McKane notes that task verbs are not paralleled in Deuteronomy, per Weippert. McKane, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 13.

³⁵ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26-52: To Build, To Plant*, 78. See also Carvalho, *Reading Jeremiah: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2016), 15.

usage throughout the book, alongside additional proximate verses containing terms related to turning and/or the heart tentatively suggests a relationship or potential interaction between the verbs of 1:10 and the turning of the heart. A closer look will be undertaken in chapter 3 to elucidate patterns of the spiritual sense and lead to a deeper appreciation of the purpose of Jeremiah's call to root up, pull down, destroy, throw down, build and plant. Each Hebrew term as well as the key passages in which they appear will be reviewed in detail.

However, first it is necessary to establish an understanding of the book of *Jeremiah*, including its context and evolution.

Background

The Book of Jeremiah. The book of *Jeremiah* is one of the longest and most complex books of the Bible. It describes a turning point in the history of Yahweh's chosen people, the exile of 587 B.C., from a theological perspective that seeks to explain and comprehend the events. The book ranges from the depths of despair – through the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, and fear that Yahweh had abandoned his people - to the heights of hope in the Book of Consolation which assures the people of Yahweh's everlasting love and the restoration of their fortunes. The text veers from accusations of infidelity and covenant violations to the traumas of invasion and war, while persistently holding out the hope of a renewed life in and through Yahweh (31:1-5ff).

The structure can feel disorderly and chaotic at times. Sections of prose are interspersed with poetry, and it can be difficult to identify the speaker of various passages. The presentation of events is not chronological: the first half (ch 1—24) gives no clear indication of dates

although it tends to indicate time prior to the disaster of the exile;³⁶ the latter half of the book (ch 25ff.) provides dated material, although not in the order events occurred.³⁷ The book does follow a loosely ordered sequence that introduces the call narrative in the first chapter and places Jeremiah's last activities in Egypt at or near the end (LXX 51:1-30; MT44).³⁸ The Book of Consolation (Jer 30—33) as a unit is considered a late addition that reflects the devastation of 587 B.C. (30:18; 31:38).³⁹ However, the comforting text may be built on preaching that was originally directed towards the exiles from northern Israel.⁴⁰ No matter its precise dating, the Book of Consolation is placed at the center of the book, highlighting and emphasizing its importance. As noted, the task verbs are included in the text frame around the culmination of the Book of Consolation, the New Covenant.

The complexity of the book reflects its history of composition by many hands over a long period of time. Scholars vary on whether the text of the book of *Jeremiah* is tied closely to Jeremiah the prophet as a person (like Holladay and Lundbom's maximalist position) or is primarily the product of an editorial construction (Carroll for instance takes a minimalist view). As is often the case, per Miller, the truth may lie somewhere in between. Many oracles and events may be directly related to the prophet Jeremiah, while at the same time the book has undergone a complex process of growth and redaction over the years.⁴¹ Beginning with a core of "authentic" Jeremianic material, overlaid by biographical material written by Jeremiah's

³⁶ Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 131.

³⁷ See O'Connor, 131-132 for a brief discussion and illustration of the "dischronology" of the arrangement of the book of Jeremiah.

³⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 86. Lundbom identifies Jer 2 as the prophet's "earliest preaching" with the bulk of ch 1—20 preceding the prose of 24—29 and 34-44.

³⁹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 370. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 34-35. Holladay dates the proclamation of the New Covenant to Sept/Oct 587 "a scant six weeks" after the temple was burned.

⁴⁰ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 370. See also 376.

⁴¹ Miller, 564-565. See also McKane on the "rolling corpus," xlix.

scribe Baruch, and then adding sermons “influenced by the theology of the book of Deuteronomy,”⁴² the editorial product of the book evolved in both Hebrew and Greek texts somewhat independently⁴³ with the Masoretic text (MT) unexpectedly offering a longer version⁴⁴ raising the possibility that the Hebrew MT is an expansion on the Greek LXX, or possibly that the LXX is based on a shorter Hebrew text.⁴⁵ Both the LXX and MT include Jer 1:1-19 although with some variances, including at 1:10: the MT lists six task verbs, while the LXX has only five. This difference is discussed below in more detail.

Context of Events in the Literal Sense. With all of its ambiguity and complexity, the book of Jeremiah theologically describes the crisis that “dominates and shapes” the entire Old Testament, the Exile.⁴⁶ Jeremiah is called to relate the words of the Lord to Judah and Israel, in an effort to bring the people back to covenantal faithfulness with YHWH. Despite condemnations and doom-laden prophecies from Jeremiah, the people, driven by stubborn, evil hearts, will not listen or obey the Lord. Yet alongside the words of judgment that incur plucking up, tearing down, destroying, demolishing, the Lord’s love and mercy persist in the preaching of the prophet. The Book of Consolation, most likely written for an exilic and post-exilic people, offers assurance of the Lord’s continued love and solicitous care for his people and serves as an avenue of hope for their restoration as a nation and as a people in relationship with God. The Lord promises a new and everlasting covenant written on the heart (31:33) from which neither

⁴² O’Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, 125. In addition, Carroll also notes that “the Deuteronomistic redaction...represent(s) a single strand of explanation” for the catastrophe of the exile. Jeremiah reflects multiple layers of tradition (including another which places blame on the prophets (4:10) and “can be read as a collection of stories and accounts which attempt to explain 587.” 74.

⁴³ Miller, 567.

⁴⁴ Bergsma and Pitre. 779. The chapters are also presented in a different order: in the LXX the oracles against the nations are located in chapter 25; while in the MT these appear at the end of the book as chapters 46 through 51 (using the English chapter divisions).

⁴⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 58.

⁴⁶ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1-- 25*, 1.

the Lord nor the people will turn away. The Lord himself will “rebuild” (33:7) and “plant” (32:41) the people, cleansing and pardoning their sin (33:8). Their city shall be holy and will never be “plucked up” or “torn down” again (31:40). For the reader, through the words of the Lord, Jeremiah not only predicts the disaster of the exile, but also offers hope in a future in which Yahweh will be their God and they will be his people (31:33).

Deuteronomic Connections and Covenantal Theology While the historical context involves the conflict of Judah with Babylon and Egypt after the collapse of the Assyrian empire, the book of *Jeremiah* seeks to explain the events theologically. The destiny of Israel and Judah is explained in terms of curses invoked as a result of disobedience to the covenant (2:29, 35; 4:4; 5:13-17; 6:19; 7:13-15ff; 9:13-16; et.al.). The Babylonians are seen as Yahweh’s agents of doom⁴⁷ (21:3-10; 27:6; 37:17; 38:17-18ff.), the invasion as the actualization and implementation of the covenantal sanctions of death or displacement.

The “governing paradigm”⁴⁸ of *Jeremiah* is largely the Deuteronomic presentation of Israel’s covenant relationship with Yahweh, a cycle of blessing and curses.⁴⁹ Covenantal theology is particularly evident in the book of Deuteronomy which is structured in the ancient legal form of a suzerain-vassal treaty.⁵⁰ “Deuteronomy is the final form of the Mosaic covenant. Israel has violated its stipulations, thus triggering the covenant curses, the greatest of which, as it

⁴⁷ Nicholson, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 173. Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26—52*, 32. See also Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 182-183.

⁴⁸ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3-4. See also Bergsma, 798.

⁵⁰ Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 29; 62. In the treaty-type covenant, the oath is sworn by the inferior party. See also Bergsma, 260-261. The structure of Deuteronomy itself (a treaty-type covenant) implies difficulties in the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The previous covenant made through Moses at Sinai (Exod 20) was a kinship-type (or parity) covenant. Abraham benefitted from a grant type covenant. The covenantal relationship suffered violations such as the golden calf and Beth-Peor incidents and is recast in Moab as suzerain-father obligating his vassal-son (see Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 65) to certain behavioral standards with conditions. Israel has been a difficult child (Num 25), who must be reined in (Deut 8:5; 32:19) with more explicit laws and obligations.

turns out, was exile from the land (Deut 27—32).”⁵¹ Though the people swear to abide by the covenant, they choose otherwise. Deuteronomy has set forth the options and consequences:

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, ¹⁶ in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; ... choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; ²⁰ that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He *is* your life and the length of your days....” (Deut 30:15-20)

The book of *Jeremiah* shares this philosophy and builds upon parallel themes. *Jeremiah* uses the words from Deut 30:15⁵² in his counsel to Zedekiah (Jer 21:8). Interestingly, one of the task verbs used in Jer 1:10 as “destroy” (in a hiphil infinitive) is the same root הָרַס as that of Deut 30:18: to “perish” (qal imperfect). Both are the result of turning the heart away and worshipping other gods.

As a prophet, Jeremiah can be seen as “bringing a covenant-lawsuit (*rib*) on behalf of the Lord.”⁵³ Instead of “obedient listening”⁵⁴, the people of Israel refuse to hear (Jer 11:10; 13:10; Deut 5:1). They worship foreign gods (Jer 7:6,9; Deut 5:7); violate the Sabbath (Jer 17:21-27; Deut 5:12-15); and turn away from the Lord who they should love with their whole heart (Jer 3:10; 24:7; 32:39; Deut 6:5). The people follow the dictates of their own evil hearts (Jer 7:24; 11:8; 16:12; 18:12), which are in desperate need of circumcision to the Lord (Jer 4:4, 9:26; Deut 10:16; 30:5).⁵⁵

⁵¹ Bergsma and Pitre, 798.

⁵² Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 119.

⁵³ Bergsma and Pitre, 798.

⁵⁴ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 4.

⁵⁵ Bergsma and Pitre, 798.

Similarly, in *Jeremiah*, disobedience and worship of other gods leads to death; obedience and love of Yahweh leads to life (21:6-8; see also for example 8:3; 19:4-7 27:10,13, 17; 38:17, 20, et. al.). Jeremiah is called by God to “root out” the way of death, i.e., sin. However, Jeremiah is also called to build and plant. This is applied to the exiles who must build and plant wherever they are (29:5), but also as to the Lord, who with lovingkindness will draw them to Himself and then, “rebuild” them (31:4). The literal sense of the text illustrates both ends of a spectrum in which at one end sin causes distance from the Lord and ultimately death; and at the other, returning with obedience results in “building” the people, and protection of life. This offers resonances with the spiritual journey, a process which necessitates the elimination of sin, in order to facilitate closeness to the Lord.

Despite the myriad violations of the covenant, “royal-temple ideology”⁵⁶ became a deeply entrenched mindset. The Jerusalem establishment assumed and asserted that Yahweh resided in the Temple, acting as an eternal “patron and guarantor”⁵⁷ of the Temple and Jerusalem, rendering them immune to judgment or curse. Jeremiah’s proclamations directly challenge this mindset in his Temple Sermon (Jer 7:9-10; cf. Deut 5:7-21).

The destruction of the Temple brought up existential questions such as where Yahweh’s presence could be found, what was His relationship to the people and how could the people of Yahweh face the future without the Temple? The book of Jeremiah provides reassurance: the Book of Consolation promises a New Covenant not tied to the Temple but to the heart. This promise is also tied to the Lord’s commitment to watch over “building” and “planting” in this future, rather than watching for destruction (31:28).

⁵⁶ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

Covenantal Renewal. Scholars such as Brueggemann and Heschel⁵⁸ have noted that the “pathos of Yahweh,” a deep and irrepressible yearning for a continuing relationship with Israel, permeates the covenant and offers the people hope in the face of covenantal sanctions.⁵⁹ The concept of covenant implies more than a contractual relationship; it connotes a familial one.⁶⁰ Rather than an exchange of goods, the covenant can be seen as the “exchange of persons”⁶¹ as in marriage or adoption (Jer 2:2; 3:1). The covenant formula “I will be their God and they shall be my people” aptly encapsulates this (Jer 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; 31:33; 32:38).

The book of Jeremiah simultaneously proclaims a litany of offenses while acknowledging a filial relationship (Jer 31:9) assured by the covenants. The intimacy and depth of feeling of Yahweh for his people is clear; yet so is the people’s disregard for Yahweh. Despite the people’s rejection of Yahweh, the book of Jeremiah foresees the restoration of Israel in a “new and better union”⁶² through the New Covenant which will bestow a new heart that knows the law of the Lord and is able to love the Lord wholly. Described in Jeremiah 31, it is fulfilled by Christ in the New Testament (Luke 22:20).⁶³ If the New Covenant is seen as a bridge between the literal and spiritual sense, i.e., between obedience to the covenant and becoming people of God who love

⁵⁸ Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; repr First Perennial Classics, 2001), 296-7.

⁵⁹ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah* 1—25, 4.

⁶⁰ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 28-29. This relationship had three primary structural alternatives in the ancient Near East: Kinship type (sometimes called ‘parity’) covenants in which both parties, usually equal in sociopolitical status, swear an oath establishing a reciprocal relationship; Treaty covenants in which a superior party (a ‘suzerain’) imposes obligations on an inferior ‘vassal’; and Grant covenants in which the superior party assumes the vast majority of obligations and responsibilities towards an inferior, often as a reward for “faithfulness or meritorious qualities.” Through Israel’s history across the Old Testament, in Hahn’s perspective, “God finds it necessary, as a good father, periodically to reconfigure the covenant with Israel.” (Hahn, 334). Hahn has concluded that “successive reconfigurations of the covenant with Israel” in broad terms correspond “to the stages of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.” (Hahn, 334). Whether and how these stages might correspond to a corporate spiritual journey is a question that may warrant further investigation. See also Hahn, *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 168.

⁶¹ Hahn, *Catholic Bible Dictionary (CBD)*, 169.

⁶² McCarthy in Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 65.

⁶³ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 32.

him with the whole heart in a new Jerusalem, the use of the task verbs in key passages related to the New Covenant (31:28, 38, 40) may imply a spiritual purpose for the task verbs.

The placement and usage of the task verbs will enhance the understanding of Jeremiah's mission at 1:10 and its connection to the New Covenant. A review of the task verbs and key passages will illuminate the meaning of the verbs as intended by the author and possibly point to a spiritual typology or pattern of development.

Call Narrative. Jeremiah's call, as Yahweh's prophet to the nations (reiterated in 1:5, 10), asserts his authority as coming from Yahweh. Yahweh's word through Jeremiah becomes as an "important source of continuity and authority when Jerusalem" falls.⁶⁴ The entirety of chapter 1 can be seen as a prologue to the book of Jeremiah, added on as either an editorial framing subsequent to the collection of texts⁶⁵ or a text crafted by Jeremiah himself as an introduction to the events recalled in the book.⁶⁶

The text of Jeremiah's call narrative generally follows the structure of other prophetic call narratives.⁶⁷ It also evokes a number of other prophetic texts, in theme, motif and language; for example, touching of the mouth is an element in Isaiah (Isa 6:6-7), and Ezekiel (Ezek 2:8-3:3) as well as Jeremiah (Jer 1:9).⁶⁸ In particular, Jeremiah's call places repeated emphasis on comparisons to Moses.⁶⁹ Both Jeremiah and Moses claim not to speak well (Exod 4:10; Jer 1:6);

⁶⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 46.

⁶⁵ Carroll, 96, 99; McKane, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 14.

⁶⁶ Bright, 6. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 46.

⁶⁷ See Norman Habel's classic article for a discussion on the basic form of the call narrative (Habel, Norman C. 1965. "Form and Significance of the Call Narratives." *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77 (3): 297–323. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=rft&AN=ATLA0000708989&site=eds-live>.) See Miller, 578–586 for a discussion of the call including the intertextuality; also Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 230–236.

⁶⁸ For a discussion of the intertextuality of Jeremiah's call narrative, see Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 26–29. See also Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, especially 107–108, 221–248; Carroll, 39–50, 89–11.

⁶⁹ Lundbom, 237. See also 107–108.

the vision of a budding almond branch (Jer 1:11-12) evokes Moses and the burning bush (Exod 3:2-6).⁷⁰ Most importantly, the Lord puts his words in Jeremiah's mouth (Jer 1:7), a "clear"⁷¹ reference to Deut 18:18.⁷² Despite Jeremiah's objection that he cannot speak, the Lord reassures Jeremiah that he will speak all that he is commanded (Jer 1:9), another echo of Deut 18:18. In addition, the introductory phrase "And Yahweh said to me" is "precisely the phrase that introduces the 'prophet like Moses' promise of Deut 18:17."⁷³ Lundbom argues that Jer 1:9 reveals that, at some point, Jeremiah "understood himself to be "the prophet like Moses."⁷⁴ Deuteronomistic themes and theology recur throughout the tradition of *Jeremiah*, including repetitive exhortations for the people to hear and obey (Jer 2:4; 3:25; 5:21; 6:18; 7:23-24; et. al.; Deut 6:3-4; 28:1ff) and turn to the Lord (Jer 18:8; 25:5; 26:3 et. al) with their whole heart (Jer 4:4; 12:2; 29:13; 31:33; Deut 30:10). However, while there are parallels between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy/Deuteronomistic literature, parallels specifically between Deuteronomy and the task verbs of 1:10 are not apparent.⁷⁵

Jeremiah's call narrative (Jer 1:1-19) describes two phases during which the word of the Lord came to him (Jer 1:1-3):

- First, during the thirteenth year of Josiah (627 B.C.) as reported in Jer 1:2, a date repeated in Jer 25:3.

⁷⁰ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 107.

⁷¹ Ibid., 233. Deut 18:18: I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

⁷² Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 235.

⁷³ Ibid., 233.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁵ McKane, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 13.

- Later, from the days of Jehoiakim's rule (609-598 B.C.) until "the eleventh year of Zedekiah" (approximately 587/586 B.C.) as reported in Jer 1:3.⁷⁶

Exegetes largely agree that 1:1-3 is an editorial superscription, most likely added by the scribe Baruch in an expanded construction of the second scroll to replace the burned first edition.⁷⁷ Although the word was first "received" in 627, the earliest indication of it being written comes in Jer 36 which tells us that the first scroll of Jeremiah was written by Baruch in 605. Soon after its public reading, this scroll was thrown into the fire by Jehoiakim, indicating his disdain for Jeremiah's preaching (Jer 36:23). Baruch was then instructed to rewrite the scroll, and in doing so, added to it (Jer 36:32). The second, larger, scroll was produced by Baruch over an unspecified time. Given that the process of writing the call took place long after the call itself was heard, intervening events must have shaped the prophet's view of his call.⁷⁸ The first phase can be aligned with Josiah, while the second and more active phase emerges under Jehoiakim and Zedekiah.

During Josiah's reign, religious reform was broadly enacted (2 Kgs 22:3) centralizing worship in Jerusalem and attempting to eliminate non-Yahwistic cults and high places throughout Judah and into the northern kingdom.⁷⁹ The reform was "the most extensive and far-reaching in Israel's history"⁸⁰ albeit short-lived as it was abruptly ended by the death of Josiah in 609.

⁷⁶ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 225

⁷⁷ Ibid., 222.

⁷⁸ Gregory Glazov, *The Bridling of the Tongue and the Opening of the Mouth in Biblical Prophecy*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001). <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=e000xna&AN=244705&site=eds-live.164-165, 175>.

⁷⁹ Miller, 556. Miller, agreeing with most scholars, dates the reform to 622 based on 2 Kgs 22:3 and 23:3. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 106. Lundbom suggests that the reform may have begun in 628 based on 2 Chron 34—35.

⁸⁰ Miller, 556.

The superscription of 1:2 introduces the call from 1:4-10 and dates it to the “good” king Josiah’s reign⁸¹ who Jeremiah regarded as acting with “justice and righteousness” (Jer 22:15).⁸² Jeremiah’s call as a prophet to the nations (1:5, 10) contains no specific reference to his own people, but rather seems oriented towards foreign nations, in contrast to other prophets who are sent to Israel or Judah (Amos 7:15; Isa 6:8-9; Ezek 2:3-7; 3:4-11).⁸³ If this is the case, Jeremiah’s initial perception of his mission to “root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant” may have been seen to refer to Judah’s neighbors and enemies (such as Egypt and Babylon), but not to Judah itself. In this way, Jeremiah may have seen his call initially in a positive light.⁸⁴

However, as events unfolded, and the words of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time (1:3), a different understanding of his call would have emerged, in light of the visions (1:11-19).⁸⁵ Glazov dates the construction of 1:3 to late in Jeremiah’s career, during the reign of Zedekiah.⁸⁶ In contrast to 1:2, the introductory verse 1:3 reflects not only the prophet’s Temple Sermon, but also subsequent crises, giving readers an interpretive guide for the “doom-laden commission”⁸⁷ in 1:13-19. Jehoiakim (successor to Josiah after the brief reign of Jehoahaz) “showed no interest in covenantal norms.”⁸⁸ Holladay notes that after the burning of the scroll by Jehoiakim, Jeremiah’s “early optimism about the north faded,” and his tasks, colored by the

⁸¹ Glazov, 168-170.

⁸² Bright, xcii.

⁸³ Carroll, 97. The precise definition of “nations” is unclear; in Hebrew the term *gôyîm* “invariably applies to the foreign nations” while the singular *goy* can refer to Israel or Judah (5:9, 29; 7:28; 9:8). See also Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 1—20, 232.

⁸⁴ Glazov.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 168, 170. This time the word came from “the days of Jehoiakim until the eleventh year of Zedekiah” (Jer 1:3).

⁸⁶ Ibid., 182. The verse must come after the injunction against intercession in the Temple Sermon, and based on the crises giving rise to Jeremiah’s laments and the suppression of expected objections in the call narrative,

⁸⁷ Ibid., 182.

⁸⁸ Miller, 559

visions (1:11-19) became one of delivering “words of judgment to the exclusion of words of restoration.”⁸⁹ A return to positivity is seen by Holladay only at the end of the prophet’s career when he “bought the field at Anathoth (32:6-15) and proclaimed words of hope gathered in a new scroll (chapters 30—31).”⁹⁰ The commission (1:11-1:19) as written, reframes the understanding of Jeremiah’s mission in 1:10, as one that included Judah and Jerusalem herself in his prophecy to the “nations.”

This universality of Jeremiah’s mission to both enemy nations and his own nation in the literal sense may carry theological implications. By applying his mission to all people, it allows the spiritual sense to appeal to the universal purpose of a spiritual truth. Jeremiah’s purpose not only involved warnings and pronouncements of judgment and hope in restoration, but also a call to the hearts of all people.

Commentary Review

This review will include commentary from a range of sources including: Nicholson (1973, 1975); Bright (1980); Carroll (1986); Holladay (1986, 1989); Brueggemann (1991, 1993); Miller (2001); Lundbom (2004); O’Connor (2012).⁹¹ While Lundbom, as a recent and comprehensive source, provides a basis for exploring the issues around Jer 1:10, the range of commentaries will demonstrate areas of broad agreement as well as areas of dissonance.

⁸⁹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 37. Holladay dates the earliest material of Jeremiah as 2:1-4:4, verses directed at the north. He notes that both the positive and negative aspects of Jeremiah’s call can be seen here. However, the optimism “fades” as he focuses on the south, and King Jehoiakim burns the scroll.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁹¹ See chapter 1, Literature Review, n20 for publication details for Bright, Carroll, Holladay, Brueggemann, Miller and Lundbom and n21 for Nicholson. See also chapter 2, n3 for O’Connor.

Macro Structure. As evidence that the call narrative has been retroactively shaped in an “anticipatory interpretation “of Jeremiah’s message throughout the book”⁹² Nicholson notes that the collection of verbs (or parts thereof) is used only in prose, not poetry.

Some scholars, such as Brueggemann and Allen, see the verbs of 1:10 as associated with the structure of the text. “The canonical shape of the book thus makes clear that God “watches over” the sovereign word of God, first to pluck up and tear down, then to plant and to build (Jer 1:10; 31:27-30).”⁹³ Allen asserts that the six task verbs of 1:10 announce the overall structure of the book of *Jeremiah*.⁹⁴ Allen and Brueggemann agree with Clements⁹⁵ observing a recurring literary pattern which sees lengthy, doom-laden messages ended with short hope-filled material, much like the verbs of 1:10.⁹⁶ “The dual theme of judgment and promise is reflected in the editorial shaping of the canonical text.”⁹⁷

However, on the overall macrostructure Lundbom disagrees and does not associate it with the task verbs: “We must resist all developmental schemes that assume one continuous flow in the book – or in the Jeremianic preaching – from judgement to hope.”⁹⁸ McKane sees the structure emerging from a “rolling corpus.”⁹⁹ Glazov has shown that the meaning of 1:10 varies across the text.

⁹² Nicholson, 26.

⁹³ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 10. Brueggemann sees an overbearing theme of destruction, which frames the entire book of Jeremiah (see the captivity inclusio formed by 1:1-3 and 52:12-30). See Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26—52*, 39.

⁹⁴ Allen, 28.

⁹⁵ Ronald E. Clements, “Patterns in the Prophetic Canon” in *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology* (ed. G.W. Coats and B. O. Long; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 42-55.

⁹⁶ Allen, 12-14; Brueggemann, 24.

⁹⁷ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 10.

⁹⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 235

⁹⁹ McKane, xlix.

Miller notes that call narratives often preview the message to follow and this is “clearly the case” in Jeremiah since “the Lord later speaks of plucking up and pulling down, of destroying and overthrowing, of building and planting. The fundamental message of the prophet is set forth in these verbs.”¹⁰⁰

Task Verbs of 1:10. The series of six tasks contains four negative (root out, pull down, destroy, throw down) and two positive terms (build, plant). The sequence is considered three pairs, with the first (root out and pull down) standing in opposition to the last (build-pull down; plant-root out). Although there are three pairs of tasks, the purpose is seen as dualistic. Nicholson, Bright, Carroll, McKane, Holladay, Brueggemann, Allen, Lundbom, Miller, and O’Connor imply this like-minded understanding.¹⁰¹ The predominance of negative terms is seen to reflect the traumatic experience of conquest and exile (hence two negative pairs: uproot/tear down; destroy/demolish), followed by the necessity, and opportunity, of resettling and rebuilding in a new land (described by one pair: build/plant). Nicholson and Brueggemann frame the duality as themes of “judgment and promise” or “judgment and renewal.”¹⁰² Holladay describes Jeremiah’s tasks as “constructive as well as destructive.”¹⁰³ Allen sees the “accumulation” and variance of the negative verbs as a reflection of the dominant negative nature of the oracles in the book.¹⁰⁴ Lundbom summarizes it as a “twofold” task: “to dismantle and rebuild.”¹⁰⁵

Within the duality, Bright emphasizes the positive. Jeremiah’s call was not *primarily* one of judgment, though that was “his burden,” but rather served a “constructive purpose.”¹⁰⁶ For

¹⁰⁰ Miller, 583.

¹⁰¹ Nicholson, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 26; Bright, cxvi-cxvii; Carroll, 95-96; McKane, 814; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 37; Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 10; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 235, 237; Miller, 583; Allen, 28.

¹⁰² Brueggemann, 1-25, 10; Nicholson, 26 (see also 119, 156, 206-7).

¹⁰³ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 36.

¹⁰⁴ Allen, 28.

¹⁰⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 237.

¹⁰⁶ Bright, cxvi-cxvii.

Bright, the judgment was always one “sincere repentance could avert.”¹⁰⁷ He describes Jeremiah’s prophecy in terms of spiritual intent: Jeremiah “desired and demanded... sincere and heartfelt repentance, an inner change in the national character....” Indeed, “the only hope of the nation lay in an inner turning to Yahweh in word and deed.”¹⁰⁸ Even Josiah’s reforms were not sufficient to conform the people to the will of Yahweh. “Divine demands could be met only by a repentance and obedience that sprang from the heart.”¹⁰⁹ Even when that repentance was not forthcoming, signs of hope were offered: for instance, Jeremiah reassures the Rechabites of their survival and comforts deportees from the first exile in 597 that their situation is temporary.¹¹⁰

Jeremiah (or the editor) recognizes that interior change, described as “some deeper repentance, some inward and heartfelt assumption of the covenant obligations” is necessary.¹¹¹ *Jeremiah’s* stress on the “inward and personal nature of man’s relationship to God surely prepared for” the survival and re-formation of exilic and post-exilic communities.¹¹² It seems to stand to reason that the purpose of Jeremiah’s call to uproot...and plant ought to have some effect on this interior change.

Carroll notes that, outside of 1:10, Yahweh is the agent of the task verbs “in every other use” (12:14-17; 18:7, 9; 24:6; 31:28, 38, 40; 42:10; 45:4). In other words, the prophet is appointed, yet it is Yahweh who “destroys or builds.”¹¹³ Interestingly, there is a similar difference in agency and usage between chapter 1 and chapters 2 to 51 in the use of the verb שָׁדַד (1:5) and

¹⁰⁷ Bright, cxvii.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., xciv.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., cxv. Bright eschews the assertion of some that Jeremiah was a discoverer of “individual religion” noting that Jeremiah looked forward to a new community, the survival of Israel as a people beyond the destruction of their temple and exile.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., cxvii.

¹¹¹ Ibid., xciv-xcvi.

¹¹² Ibid., cxv.

¹¹³ Carroll, 95; McKane, *Jeremiah* 26—52, 814; Allen, 27.

פקד (1:10).¹¹⁴ In chapter 1, Jeremiah is the agent; in chapters 2 to 51, it is Yahweh. While this points to editorial shaping, Carroll also describes it as an elevation of Jeremiah to a “divine role.”¹¹⁵ Yet, is there a spiritual implication in the fact that the God who tries hearts is also the one uprooting and planting? Divine agency for the task verbs may mean that the literal sense is pointing to a spiritual reality. It seems to be leading the reader into the spiritual sense. The relationship with the divine is at stake. While the prophet can be the mouthpiece for the Lord and call for a change of heart, ultimately, it is the Lord who is watching over his word to perform it (1:12). It is the Lord who writes his law on the heart (31:33).

Lundbom observes that the task verbs introduce the “visions” (1:11-16) in reverse order: the almond branch including the promise of the efficacious word of the Lord represents hope and is associated with building and planting; the boiling pot reflects destruction and the negative verbs of 1:10.¹¹⁶ This structure implies a link between the negative pairs (uproot...overthrow) with not only the physical foe from the north but also the spiritual judgement against “all wickedness” (1:16). Associating imagery of building and planting with the word of the Lord, and applying uprooting to wickedness lends support to a spiritual interpretation and to the spiritual sense of the terms.

Brueggemann sees the dominance of the first four negative verbs (uproot...destroy) as “assert[ing] that no historical structure, political policy, or defense scheme can secure a community against Yahweh when that community is under the judgment of Yahweh.”¹¹⁷ Build

¹¹⁴ Carroll, 96.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 95-96. With respect to *פקד*, God appoints Jeremiah (1:10) but in most other cases, Yahweh uses *פקד* regarding the punishment of Judah’s enemies.

¹¹⁶ Lundbom, 230. Citing Mack (1994, 273).

¹¹⁷ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 24.

and plant attest to God's creative newness even in "hopeless" and "closed" circumstances.¹¹⁸

The task verbs "make a pointed statement of God's way with the nations." Yahweh's purpose and power lead to the "*ending of beloved Jerusalem... and the formation of a new beloved Jerusalem.*"¹¹⁹ The valley of dead bodies shall be holy to the Lord, never to be "plucked up" or "thrown down" again (31:40). Though the pre-exilic city of Jerusalem is doomed to destruction, the new Jerusalem carries not only a literal connotation in the text, but also a spiritual one. The city "rebuilt" for the Lord (31:38) cannot be simply physical; it must somehow incorporate the whole heart.

Task Verbs as Pairs. The task verbs are presented as pairs not only in 1:10, but in many instances across the book of *Jeremiah*. McKane notes that the four verbs of 1:10 as used in 24:6; 42:10; and 45:4 are structured as "antithetic pairs."¹²⁰ He cautions however, that this "design" may not be useful in assessing the verbs as used in 1:10, 18:7, 9; and 31:28 "where an accumulation of destructive terms (either three or four) is followed by the two constructive terms which are consistently used."¹²¹ However, Miller sees the set of six as "paired" words and notes, as does Allen¹²² that the positive pair remains constant while the negative pair is "variable"¹²³ throughout the tradition: uproot (נחש) is paired with destroy (אבד) in 18:7-9 as well as 12:17; while in 24:6; 42:10 and 45:4 uproot (נחש) is paired with throw down/overthrow (הרס).¹²⁴ Lundbom points out that the last two verbs in the set of six, build and plant "are a stereotyped pair (cf 29:5, 28; Zep 1:13) which also appear in the poetry of 31:4-5 regarded as "early

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹²⁰ McKane, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 10.

¹²¹ Ibid., 10.

¹²² Allen, 28.

¹²³ Miller, 235.

¹²⁴ Allen, 28.

preaching to Northern Israel in exile.”¹²⁵ The use and variance of pairs is curious and will be discussed subsequently in the treatment of each of these relevant passages.

As discussed above, exegetes see two purposes for three pairs of infinitives: judgment and restoration. Might the use of three pairs reveal a tri-partite purpose, one that can be elucidated by examining and tracing the usage of each term and pair? Will the spiritual journey find resonance in a textual analysis? The subsequent chapters will examine these questions.

Textual History: Septuagint (LXX), Vulgate and Masoretic Texts (MT). As noted above, the text of *Jeremiah* comes to us from both the Greek LXX (translated circa 250-100 B.C.) and various Hebrew editions ultimately stabilized in the MT between 700-1000 A.D.¹²⁶ It is possible that the MT represents an expansion on the LXX or the LXX a shortening of a lost Hebrew vorlage.¹²⁷ Variances include the verse of interest, Jer 1:10. In the MT, Jer 1:10 has six task verbs, while the LXX has only five. The differences are discussed below.

The reception history may also be impacted by potential variances, given that different interpreters may have relied upon different texts. For instance Paul seems to have relied on a Greek LXX.¹²⁸ In contrast, the Latin Vulgate produced by St. Jerome in 382-405 A.D. seems to

¹²⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 235.

¹²⁶ Discoveries at Qumran include multiple fragments of both long and short forms of Jeremiah providing evidence that the tradition of Jeremiah developed in two somewhat independent streams. The two differ in the organization and structure of the chapters of Jeremiah, particularly after chapter 25 and the position of the oracles to the nations. See Marvin Sweeney, “Jeremiah Among the Prophets,” in Lundbom, *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Reception and Interpretation*, 27-28. Lundbom proposes that the stream most similar to the LXX links back to the Egyptian exile of Baruch and Jeremiah (ca. 582 B.C.); the MT version is seen as a likely compilation of Seraiah from his own exile in Babylon (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 100). Carroll notes that in the LXX, Jeremiah is “seldom” described as a prophet, while in the MT Jeremiah is “frequently” referred to as “the prophet.” (Carroll, 94)

¹²⁷ See Andrew Shead, “The Text of Jeremiah (MT and LXX)” in *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, edited by Jack R. Lundbom, Craig A. Evans, and Bradford A. Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 2018) for a discussion of theories related to the evolution of the text. Also see Bergsma, 779-780.

¹²⁸ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), Preface x-xi.

closely resemble the later MT.¹²⁹ The Vulgate would have been the source for many Christian theologians, including John of the Cross.¹³⁰

LXX Omission. As noted the LXX of Jeremiah 1:10 omits one of the six task verbs included in the Vulgate and the MT. Since the translation of the LXX's word κατασκάπτειν can mean either נָחַץ (to pull down/tear down, the second verb of the MT six) or הָרַס (to destroy/demolish, the fourth of the MT six) the precise word omitted is unclear.¹³¹ The text versions between the MT, Vulgate and LXX are displayed in the table below.

Table 2: Ancient versions of Jer 1:10

LXX	Vulgate	MT
<p>ἰδοὺ κατέστακά σε σήμερον ἐπὶ ἔθνη καὶ βασιλείας ἐκρίζουσιν καὶ κατασκάπτειν καὶ ἀπολλύειν καὶ ἀνοικοδομεῖν καὶ καταφυτεύειν</p> <p>Look, I have appointed you today to nations and kingdoms, in order to root out and cast down and utterly destroy and build up and plant.</p>	<p>ecce constitui te hodie super gentes et super regna, ut evellas, et destruas, et disperdas, et dissipes, et ædifices, et plantes</p> <p>Lo, I have set thee this day over the nations, and over kingdoms, to root up, and to pull down, and to waste, and to destroy, and to build, and to plant.</p>	<p>רָאֵה הַכְּדִתִּידָּ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה עַל־הַגּוֹיִם וְעַל־הַמַּמְלָכוֹת לְנָתוּשׁ וּלְנָתוּץ וּלְהַאֲבִיד וּלְהָרוֹס לְבָנוֹת וּלְנָטוּעַ: פ</p> <p>See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to overthrow; to build, and to plant.</p>

Source: Data for English translation of LXX from Ken M. Penner, Rick Brannan, and Israel Loken, *The Lexham English Septuagint*, Second edition revised (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019); Vulgate from Douay-Reims; Masoretic text from Mechon-Mamre.org <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt1101.htm>

Holladay reasons that נָחַץ is left out and הָרַס is translated in the LXX.¹³⁵ McKane¹³⁶, Carroll and Lundbom identify הָרַס “*wlhrws* ‘and to overthrow’ as the missing Hebrew verb”¹³⁷ of the LXX.

¹²⁹ Bergsma, Pitre, 780 (see also the discussion on 37).

¹³⁰ Kieran Kavanaugh, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Foreword, 7.

¹³¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 21.

¹³⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 21. Based on usage patterns in the Latter Prophets and another use in Jer 27:15

¹³⁶ McKane, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 10.

¹³⁷ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 94. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 235.

Citing Volz and Janzen, McKane notes that the middle pair may be additions to MT 1:10 based on other passages across the Jeremianic tradition that rely on the uproot...plant motif: *הָרַס* is used in 24:6, 42:10, 45:4, and *אָבַד* in 12:17 and 18:7. If so, then the “original” or earliest text of 1:10 may have been formed as a chiastic, paired arrangement of two negative and two positive terms: *נָטַע/נָחַשׁ* uproot/plant and *בָּנָה/נָחַץ* tear down/build.¹³⁸ Holladay and Allen agree with the omission of the middle pair in the earliest literary forms.¹³⁹ Holladay notes the assonance of the chiasmus and describes the middle pair in the MT as “prosaicizing synonyms” added for completeness.¹⁴⁰ Lundbom also notes the assonance of the first and last pair of task verbs, while agreeing with Carroll who points out that 1:10 “accurately reflects the range used throughout the book.”¹⁴¹ Based on rhetorical data, Lundbom argues for retaining the middle pair.¹⁴² And it should be noted that, curiously, MT 31:28 not only uses all six verbs from 1:10; it adds another (*רָעַע* afflict).

This study will review 1:10 as a set of six verbs, as is the case in the MT, Vulgate, and modern Christian biblical translations such as the NKJV, NRSV and NAB. Variances of the LXX, the “form in which the OT was most widely circulated in apostolic times”¹⁴³ will be examined when necessary, e.g., when reviewing the reception of the text by the Fathers.

¹³⁸ McKane, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 10.

¹³⁹ Allen, 28. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 21. Allen sees the earlier literary chiasm of four original verbs as based on the tradition at 24:6; 42:10 and 45:4.

¹⁴⁰ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 21. Holladay sees *אָבַד* as coming from 18:7 (where it is cited alongside both *נָחַץ* pluck up and *נָחַץ* pull down) and *הָרַס* reflecting 45:4 (where it is used in opposition to *בָּנָה* build).

¹⁴¹ Carroll, 94. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 235.

¹⁴² Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 228.

¹⁴³ Raymond Brown, D.W. Johnson, Kevin G. O’Connell, “Texts and Versions” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer and Roland E Murphy (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1990), 1091.

Chapter 3

WORD STUDY AND KEY PASSAGE REVIEW

This chapter will first consider each task verb independently and then subsequently in the context of key passages that employ a selection of verbs as a leitmotif. The analysis will review significant, recurring themes such as “turning” and “the heart,” and each section will seek to develop insight into the literal and spiritual understanding of the text, including the theological implications.

Jeremiah 1:10 Task Verbs

The six task verbs of Jeremiah 1:10 are an integral part of Jeremiah’s call narrative and speak to Jeremiah’s mission: “See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant” (NKJV). Most of the verbs are subject to certain slight translation variances, as noted:

Table 3: English Translations of Task Verbs of Jer 1:10			
Hebrew Root	NKJV	NRSV	NAB
נחש	root out	pluck up	uproot
נחץ	pull down	pull down	tear down
אבד	destroy	destroy	destroy
הרס	throw down	overthrow	demolish
בנה	build	build	build
נטע	plant	plant	plant

This study will rely primarily on the NKJV, although other versions will be noted at times.

Root Out/Pluck Up/Uproot

The root נָתַשׁ *nāṭaš* occurs in *Jeremiah* 11 times (1:10; 12:14, 15, 17; 18:7, 14¹⁴⁴; 24:6; 31:28, 40; 42:10; 45:4), out of 19 in the Hebrew OT, demonstrating a “clear center of gravity in usage.”¹⁴⁵ It is “never” used without another of the series of verbs from 1:10, and “usually used in contrasting correlation” with plant (נָטַע).¹⁴⁶ Both uproot (NAB) and plant are “always used figuratively in *Jeremiah*” regarding exile from, or settling in the land.¹⁴⁷

Carroll sees plucking up as “a loss of normal living conditions.”¹⁴⁸ The root has not been observed in preexilic texts, suggesting that it “derives from the experience of exile itself...”¹⁴⁹ Across biblical versions, in Jer 1:10, it is variously translated as “to root out” (NKJV), “uproot” (NAB), or “pluck up” (NRSV; this translation is also used in the NKJV in verses other than 1:10). The verb appears in relation to both “good fortune” (24:6; 31:28, 40, 42:10) and “disaster” (1:10; 12:14f., 17; 18:7; 45:4) and “always with an eye on Yahweh’s prospective salvific activity.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ J. Hausmann, “נָתַשׁ *nāṭaš*” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)*, edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, transl. David E. Green and Douglas W. Stott, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), vol 10, 123. Accessed via Accordance, Mar 1, 2022. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=cat00991a&AN=sth.on1078688645&site=eds-live>. 18:14 can be “eliminated” from the list as part of an “apparently corrupt text; it is universally accepted that 18:14 should be emended.” See also Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 822 for a discussion of the scribal error.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 123.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 123.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 123. See also McKane, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 284.

¹⁴⁸ Carroll, 292.

¹⁴⁹ Hausmann, *TDOT*, vol 10, 126.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 124.

One key observation for the purposes here, noted by Carroll, is that despite being assigned these tasks in his call narrative (1:10), Jeremiah is not the agent of uprooting (nor for our other task verbs) outside of 1:10.¹⁵¹ The agent is the Lord.¹⁵²

In the LXX, 14 different Greek verbs are used across the OT in translating שׁחַט.¹⁵³ *Jeremiah* uses at least six different terms including ἐκρίζω at 1:10 and three different terms in one passage alone: ἀποσπάω (12:14), ἐκβάλλω (12:14, 15), and ἐξαίρω (12:17).

Who is Plucked Up? In *Jeremiah* the usage of שׁחַט is always directed towards a group of people or a nation, rather than an individual.¹⁵⁴ The people who are plucked up are nations and kingdoms (1:10; 18:7); “evil neighbors” (12:14, 15, 17); Judean exiles (24:6); the house of Judah and/or the house of Israel (31:28) as well as the group intent on fleeing to Egypt (42:10); and Jerusalem¹⁵⁵ (31:40). In the prophecy to Baruch, “pluck up” is broadly applied to “what I have planted...that is this whole land” (45:4).¹⁵⁶

Causes for Plucking Up. Generally, those who have not obeyed the commandments and/or have provoked Yahweh’s anger are subject to uprooting.¹⁵⁷ Evil neighbors who have “attacked the heritage”¹⁵⁸ of Israel (12:14) are plucked up. Furthermore, the Lord notes that any nation that does not hear/obey (שׁמָע וּשְׁמָר) will be plucked up... and destroyed (12:17).

¹⁵¹ Carroll, 94.

¹⁵² Hausmann, *TDOT*, vol 10, 124. The verb used in 31:40 is the niphāl; the only other example in this form in *Jeremiah* is the discredited 18:14 (see footnote 1). At 31:40, the agent is technically unspecified, although the Lord is implied (see Miller, “The Book of *Jeremiah*” in *NIB*, 813).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁵⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 21-36, 494.

¹⁵⁶ Holladay notes that this verse is intended for the nation, although the verb may apply to either who or what Yahweh created. Holladay, 310. See also Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 37-52, 176, who sees it more broadly as “the whole earth.” Lundbom also notes that this phrase is missing from the LXX, but argues that its omission “is probably due to haplography (homoeoarcton: w’t...w’t).”

¹⁵⁷ Hausmann, *TDOT*, vol 10, 126.

¹⁵⁸ Lundbom *Jeremiah* 1—20, 662. See also 260: Lundbom notes that “heritage” can refer to land or people.

Yet, if a nation turns from evil, (18:7-8) or if the people are obedient (12:17; 42:10) the Lord will not pluck up. Similarly, when he sets his eyes on the exiles for good, the Lord will not pluck them up (24:6). The Lord “watches over” the houses of Israel and Judah for the purpose of plucking up (31:28), and for carrying his word out (1:12). The Lord monitors the people; this ‘looking’ by setting eyes on or watching can be for good or evil. It seems obedience and turning from evil may avert plucking up, although in some cases the Lord’s intention to pluck up cannot be altered (45:4).

Plucking Up and Turning. The theme of turning/returning (שׁוּב) appears repeatedly in proximity to the concept of “plucking up”:

- After plucking up, the Lord will return with compassion (12:15).
- Turning from evil can prevent plucking up (18:7-8)
- “Good figs” will be returned to the land, not plucked up (24:6).
- While “turning” does not appear directly in 31:28 alongside “pluck up,” forms of the term (שׁוּב) are repeated in the passages preceding the announcement of the New Covenant. “Restore me and I will return...Surely after my turning, I repented” (31:18-19; see also 31:8, 16, 17, 21, 23). The theme of turning is prevalent in the Book of Comfort where plucking up is used twice (31:28; 40).
- In 42:10, the people are called to stay in Jerusalem. In effect, if the people turn from their disobedient plans, they will not be plucked up.¹⁵⁹
- The statement to Baruch at 45:4 is preceded by a condemnatory passage describing the Israelite’s refusal to “turn from their wickedness” (44:5) and a declaration of

¹⁵⁹ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 300. Holladay notes that the MT indicates that verse 10 could be understood as “If you change your mind and stay in this land....”

consequences: “I will punish you in this place, that you may know that My words will surely stand against you for adversity” (44:29). “Adversity” is noted again in 45:4-5: “Behold...what I have planted I will pluck up, that is, this whole land. ...I will bring adversity on all flesh” (45:4-5). The refusal to turn leads to “adversity” seemingly in the form of plucking up.

Each use of “pluck up”/“uproot” occurs in conjunction with other verbs of the 1:10 sequence. These passages are discussed in a subsection addressing Key Passages so that multiple terms can be considered together.

Pull Down/Tear Down

The second task verb נָחַץ *ntš* in 1:10, is used 7 times in *Jeremiah* (1:10; 4:26; 18:7; 31:28; 33:4; 39:8; 52:14), almost half as frequently as pluck up. It is translated as “to pull down” (NKJV and NRSV) or “tear down” (NAB). Just as the first term, “pluck up,” is associated with the last term, “to plant,” this verb forms a counterpart “to build” בָּנָה.¹⁶⁰ It is a “specialized”¹⁶¹ term applied primarily to manmade structures: to “break up, demolish, tear down (an edifice or some construction)” generally indicates “houses,... cities, as well as altars, sanctuaries and other cultic institutions.”¹⁶² Its usage is seen across the Deuteronomistic literature¹⁶³ and it is semantically close to הָרַס *hrs*, another verb of the 1:10 sequence.¹⁶⁴ (By contrast, הָרַס *hrs* broadens the meaning to include “break through.. destroy, obliterate”¹⁶⁵; הָרַס is also applied

¹⁶⁰ Christoph Barth, *TDOT*, vol 10, 109.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 109. Judges and 2 Kings, 8 times; 2 Chronicles, 6 times (5 in piel); *Jeremiah*, 7 times. It also appears 3 times in Ezekiel and less frequently across the rest of the Hebrew OT.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

primarily to groups of people (Exod 15:7; Ps 28:5) though sometimes symbolically (the land in Prov 29:4; Zion personified in Isa 49:17).¹⁶⁶)

Across the OT “pull down” is used most often in regard to the “destruction and desecration of Canaanite sanctuaries and cultic objects” and somewhat less frequently in regard to Levitical (Lev 11—15) rules for priestly purity, uncleanness (a house that has become unclean must be torn down in Lev 14:45), and cultic reform.¹⁶⁷ It is also used in a more “secular”¹⁶⁸ way parallel to ancient military reports to refer to houses, towers, walls and cities, such as Gideon’s tearing down the tower of Peniel (Jgs 8:9, 17) and to some extent in Jer 52:14 and 39:8 describing the Chaldeans tearing down walls of the city. In translation, the LXX uses “as a rule” primarily *kathairein*, *kataskaptein*, and *kataspaein*, for both נהץ and הרס.¹⁶⁹

Although it is used less often than root out in *Jeremiah*, agency is more varied:

- Jeremiah is the agent in his call (1:10).
- The Lord pulls down three times¹⁷⁰ (4:26; 18:7; 31:28):
 - In one instance, cities are broken down before the Lord by his “fierce anger” (4:26).
 - In two other instances, the term is used alongside task verbs of 1:10. Nations and kingdoms can be plucked up, pulled down, and destroyed (אבד) at 18:7; the term is applied to the houses of Israel and Judah with the complete sequence of 1:10 verbs (plus another term, “afflict”) in 31:28.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 109.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 110-111.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 112.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 110.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 113.

- Houses are pulled down to fortify the city (33:4).
- The Chaldeans pull down the walls of Jerusalem (39:8; 52:14).

Many of these uses of *ḥāḥ* (Jer 1:10; 4:26; 18:7; 31:28; 33:4) are similar to occurrences in Isaiah and Ezekiel in which the verb applies to “certain houses” (in Jerusalem in Isa 22:10; Jer 33:4; and in Tyre in Ezek 26:12) and defensive towers, or foreign cultic sites (Ezek 16:39; 26:9).¹⁷¹

The occurrence of pull down alongside other verbs of 1:10 (in Jer 18:7; 31:28) will be discussed with Key Passages below. However, pull down is also used “independently” of its 1:10 counterparts (4:26; 33:4; 39:8; 52:14). Two of these (4:26; 33:4) indicate a relationship with the key themes of turning and the heart.

Pulling Down, Turning and the Heart. In the vision of 4:26, the fruitful land has become the “horrifying” desert of the exodus.¹⁷² The Lord complains that His people do not know Him; wickedness is in their heart (4:18) and they do evil (4:22). This leads into a bleak, dystopian image of the dismantling of creation¹⁷³ and “pulled down” cities (4:26). “Disobedience finally leads to chaos for the entire creation.”¹⁷⁴ The Lord will not turn back (4:28).

Still Yahweh “will not make a full end (4:27).”¹⁷⁵ While the “full end” phrase is debated as possibly a later addition in light of the exile¹⁷⁶ the phrase “is a signal” that despite the

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 113.

¹⁷² Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 166.

¹⁷³ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 360. See also O'Connor, 51.

¹⁷⁴ Brueggemann, 57. Holladay agrees: see *Jeremiah 1*, 166.

¹⁷⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 167. Interestingly, Holladay sees 4:27-28 as a reverse of 18:1-10, a passage which employs the sequence of 1:10 task verbs. He also interprets “the land” (4:27) as “the earth” or “whole cosmos” rather than the local area. He suggests a revocalization of *kalah*, rendering the meaning “none of it shall I (re)make.”

¹⁷⁶ Miller, “Jeremiah” in *NIB*, 614-615. See also Carroll, 170-171.

inescapable judgment, there is a “promissory note”¹⁷⁷, or “ground for hope”¹⁷⁸ in the future. In a literal sense something of Israel will survive.

In a spiritual sense of a personified Israel, the fruitful land has become a wilderness (4:26). Something of this sinful wilderness will be “pulled down” and something will remain. Might this be associated with the heart, which the Lord wants in “whole” (Dt 6:5; Jer 3:10; 24:7)? The heart must be circumcised (4:4) of evil, a theme developed in the cry of woe “O Jerusalem wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved” (4:14). Could it be that evil puts up manmade walls of the heart which must be pulled down? Physical salvation seems a distant hope: cities which can be “secure places in times of war”¹⁷⁹ are to be “pulled down” in ruins (4:26). Yet, salvation in the spiritual sense may be closer than it appears. It is in the lack of security that Israel turns to the Lord: “they have turned their back to me...but in the time of their trouble they say “Arise and save us!”” (2:27). Pulling down serves to turn the people toward the Lord.

In 33:4, after the houses of the city and of the kings of Judah are pulled down and the Lord has withdrawn his ‘face’ because of “wickedness” (33:5), there is a transition from “judgment to ...prosperity...from death to healing.”¹⁸⁰ The Lord will not only heal the captives of Judah and Israel, He will return (שׁוּב) them, and rebuild בְּנֶה (33:6-7). The theme of turning reappears (as does building), in a similar way to its appearance near plucking up: pulling down is followed by a return.

¹⁷⁷ Miller, “Jeremiah” in *NIB*, 615.

¹⁷⁸ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 57.

¹⁷⁹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 166.

¹⁸⁰ McKane, *Jeremiah 26—52*, 857.

In the healing, Holladay¹⁸¹ and Carroll note a connection to Jer 8:22, where recovery literally means “new flesh” and the wound is one of idol worship. Despite the physical damage of pulled down houses, the solution is spiritual, turning and listening to the Lord (although Holladay notes an example in 1 Kgs where the pi’el form of the verb is used to repair an altar).¹⁸² Carroll links the healing and recovery to the forgiveness of sin and the New Covenant of 31:34.¹⁸³ The rebuilding in 33:6-7 is seen as more than a promise regarding building structures, but a promise of the restoration of the royal reign of David and Solomon.¹⁸⁴ In fact, rebuilding is also parallel with the Lord’s action to cause the return (שׁוּב) of Judah and Israel. This return is not simply physical, but above all a spiritual return to the covenant.

In the literal sense, the Lord pulls down because of disobedience and violations of the covenant. Wickedness leads to distance from the Lord; He withdraws (16:5,13). The security of the Lord (his presence or ‘face’) is no longer available (33:5). Healing includes hints of grace and spiritual renewal -- clues as to the spiritual sense.

Destroy

The next verb in the series is ‘to destroy’ (אַבַּד *’abad*) (translated as such in each of the NKJV, NRSV, and NAB). In the OT, the verb appears more than 150 times with 26 in *Jeremiah*. The meaning seems to have derived from Northwest Semitic and Akkadian languages indicating “to perish”; “to wander off, run away” as in a lost animal or as an escaped slave or warrior; and in effect to destroy or be destroyed.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 225.

¹⁸² Ibid., 221. 1 Kgs 18:30

¹⁸³ Carroll, 635. Miller, 825.

¹⁸⁴ McKane, *Jeremiah* 26—52, 858.

¹⁸⁵ B. Otzen, *TDOT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), vol 1, 19-20.

Across the OT, the term is often used figuratively in the qal, describing Israel as sheep without a shepherd “wandering aimlessly” (Jer 50:6; Ezek 34:4, 16). When it is used in the causative forms of hiphil or piel, Yahweh is the subject in almost half of the 65 OT occurrences.¹⁸⁶ Yahweh, portrayed as a warrior, is often behind the destruction of “heathen” nations by Israel (Dt 7:24; 9:3; Num 24:19) and vice versa (Josh 7:7; 2Kgs 13:7; 24:2; Dt 28:51).¹⁸⁷ He destroys those who violate the law (Lev 23:30; Dt 7:10), lie (Ps 5:7), or oppress the righteous (Ps 143:12).¹⁸⁸ In the intransitive qal form of **הָבַח**, the implied cause of destruction is Yahweh (Moab in Jer 48:8; also Egypt in Exod 10:7; the Canaanites in Deut 7:20, et. al.), or divine judgment being rendered (for disobedience as in Jer 9:12; also Lev 26:38; Deut 28:20, 22; resulting in exile as in Jer 27:10, 15, see also Isa 27:13).¹⁸⁹ In contrast to divinely willed destruction, the verb can also be used in more general terms (in the piel or qal) to describe destruction of persons (Jer 10:15; 23:1; 46:8; cf also Jer 40:15; 2 Kgs 10:19; 11:1; 19:18; Ezek 22:27), idols (Jer 51:18; Num 33:52; Deut 12:2f; 2 Kgs 21:3) or other things such as riches and more (Jer 48:36; 2 Sam 1:27; Deut 22:3, et al).¹⁹⁰

In *Jeremiah*, the hiphil form of destroy is used in 1:10, compared to the qal in each other use of the task verb in the key passages. In the other verses which echo the 1:10 verb sequence in part or in whole, similar causative forms of **הָבַח** are used: in 12:17, the form is a piel, infinitive absolute; 18:7 and 31:28 use a hiphil infinitive construct, the same form as 1:10.¹⁹¹ Like 1:10, in each of these verses (12:17; 18:7; 31:28), the other task verbs appear in a qal form.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 21.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 21-22.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹⁹¹ Compared to 1:10, 31:28 adds the verb to afflict, which is also in the hiphil infinitive construct form.

Otzen notes that theologically, it is interesting that the verb **אַבַּד** is used across prophetic texts to describe “how in critical times, when evil increases, good attributes and positive ideas vanish.”¹⁹² In the Temple Sermon, the truth perishes (7:28) because people have “evil hearts” (7:24) and will not obey (7:28). (The exhortation to listen/obey (**שִׁמְעוּ**) is repeated four times (7:24, 26, 27, 28)¹⁹³ yet they refuse.) Similarly, the spirit of the law, wisdom and good counsel (Jer 18:18; 49:7; also Isa 29:14; Ezek 7:26; Deut 32:28) perish, as does courage (Jer 4:9) and even refuge (Jer 25:35).¹⁹⁴

Throughout *Jeremiah*, destroy is used more frequently than any of the other task verbs (26 times vs 22 for the common verb “build”) in its variety of forms and incorporating the wide range of application.

Table 4: Task verb usage throughout *Jeremiah*

Task Verb	Occurrences in <i>Jeremiah</i>
Root Out, Uproot נָחַשׁ	11
Tear Down, Pull Down נָחַץ	7
Destroy אַבַּד	26
Throw Down, Overthrow, Demolish הָרַס	7
Build בָּנָה	22
Plant נָטַע	16

The Lord is explicitly named as the agent of destruction in seven cases (12:17; 15:7; 18:7; 25:10; 31:28; 49:38; 51:55); in five, He destroys people:

- Any nation that will not listen (12:17);
- My people who do not turn from evil ways (15:7);
- House of Israel, nation or kingdom (18:7);

¹⁹² Otzen, *TDOT*, vol 1, 23.

¹⁹³ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 79.

¹⁹⁴ Otzen, *TDOT*, vol 1, 23.

- Houses of Israel and Judah (31:28) and
- Kings and princes of Elam (49:38)

In the additional two cases, the Lord destroys voices: those of mirth, gladness, of the bridegroom, and bride (25:10); and Babylon's voice is 'silenced' (51:55). In 25:10, the Lord also destroys the "sound of the millstone" and the "light of the lamp," symbols of life and joy.¹⁹⁵

In the LXX, a wide variety of terms can be used to destroy. In *Jeremiah*, this is most commonly ἀπόλλυμι but may include ἀπώλεια (12:17) or ἐκλείπω (7:28).

Destroying, Turning and the Heart. In 15:7, the theme of turning to the Lord is explicit and tightly connected as the reason for destruction: "I will destroy My people, since they do not return from their ways." Interestingly, in the case of Elam (49:34-39), the Lord not only destroys the royal leadership, but they will also be scattered and consumed by the sword. He sets his throne there (49:38). Yet, in the end, the captives will be brought back (returned) (49:39). The idiom describing this return is often translated as "fortunes will be restored"; nonetheless, the Hebrew (שׁוּב) points towards the theme of turning again (see also 48:46-47).

This "return" (שׁוּב) with its implications of divine blessing "can only happen however, when Yahweh's throne is firm in the land, and all other claimants to the throne have been eliminated."¹⁹⁶ While it is not explicit in the biblical text, this claim of the Lord to His sovereign throne is not entirely unlike the process of spiritual growth towards union, a process in which all things other than the Lord are eliminated. Despite the "destruction" of unworthy attachments in this spiritual maturation, the attachment to God remains. As John of the Cross alludes to in his

¹⁹⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 21—36, 248-49.

¹⁹⁶ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah* 26—52, 256.

“nada doctrine,” to reach the heights of spiritual maturity, one must give up everything that does not lead to God.¹⁹⁷ In a sense, God seeks to sit on the throne of our hearts.

Notably, the heart of the king and officials will “literally”¹⁹⁸ perish (4:9) in a passage that follows the call of the Lord to Israel to “return” to receive blessing (4:1). Israel is called on to “circumcise” its heart to remove the evil (4:4). The extended unit of 3:1-4:4 “is a meditation on the theme of return” with four appeals to return following a proclamation of the law and a guilty verdict.¹⁹⁹ The themes of heart, turning/returning are dominant, and in proximity to ‘destroy’ (and pull down נָחַץ appears in 4:26). A warning comes that the Lord’s anger has not “turned” away (4:8) and the task verb of 1:10 is set to a (presumably unturned) heart that perishes (אָבַד).

Looking to Deuteronomy’s prohibition on a return for a cheating wife (24:1-4), Brueggemann, denies that simple “spiritual repentance” or “moral reconstruction” are the “dominant concern” of the extended unit (Jer 3:1-4:4), but sees an even deeper intention, that of speaking to the “violated”²⁰⁰ relationship between Yahweh and Judah. The wounded pathos of Yahweh is felt (“humiliated indignation”), but still, He yearns for restoration (cf 3:11).²⁰¹ The literal purpose of this passage may be to explain the physical destruction. But it also serves a theological and spiritual purpose that demonstrates the deep love of Yahweh for his people, and the almost unlimited possibility of return because of Yahweh’s grace and mercy.

¹⁹⁷ Thomas Dubay, *Fire within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel, on Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 6. Titus 2:12.

¹⁹⁸ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 154.

¹⁹⁹ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 47.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 47.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 48.

Causes for Destroying. “Destroy” is included in the leitmotif of 1:10 verbs at 12:17; 18:7 and 31:28. The causes for destruction include disobedience, or doing evil (also 15:7), although in the announcement of the New Covenant, destruction is a thing of the past (31:28).

“Destroy” does not easily align with the planting or building metaphors that frame the series of 1:10 verbs in that its imagery is not clearly associated with nature or manmade structures. Yet when the Lord destroys, his actions are consistent with the other verbs of the leitmotif in that he destroys people, just as the building/planting imagery is also applied figuratively to Israel, Judah, Jerusalem and the nations. It is interesting that the verb persists in passages that employ oppositional terms such as uproot or tear down; or build or plant.

Throw Down/Overthrow/Demolish

The etymology of הָרַס *hāras* indicates a connotation of “attack, tear down” or “penetrate, advance.”²⁰² Across the OT, it is used 42 times and generally applied to cities (Jer 31:30; also 2 Sam 11:25; 2 Kgs 3:25; Isa 14:17; Ezek 36:35; Prov 11:11; 1 Chron 20:1) but also to walls, strongholds, and altars (Jer 50:15; also Jgs 6:25; 1 Kgs 18:30; Ezek 13:14; 26:4; and even a mountain (Ezek 38:20) and teeth (Ps 58:6)).²⁰³ In some cases it describes the “humiliation or destruction” of persons (Exod 15:7; Isa 22:19; 49:17; Ps 28:5).²⁰⁴ It describes a quite similar effect to its partner “destroy” by “implying destruction” or “removal.”²⁰⁵ However, הָרַס also modifies the connotation when compared to its close synonym נָחַץ. The meaning shifts from tearing down [a house] to “breaking through” or “obliterating” [something].²⁰⁶ It can also

²⁰² G. Munderlein, *TDOT* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978) vol 3, 462.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 462.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 462.

²⁰⁵ Francis Brown, 1849-1916, *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic : Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (BDB)*, (Peabody, Mass. :Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 248.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 248.

connote entry into a “restricted” or forbidden place such as the presence of God (Exod 19:21, 24).²⁰⁷ It is “characteristic of Yahweh to rebuild what has been destroyed (Ezek 36:35f.).”²⁰⁸

Within *Jeremiah*, the verb is used seven times. It is variously translated as “throw down” (NKJV), “overthrow” (NRSV) or “demolish” (NAB). In four cases (24:6; 31:28; 42:10; 45:4) the Lord is the stated agent, and in each (plus 1:10 where Jeremiah is the agent) the object is the people. The people include nations and kingdoms (1:10); the captives of Judah (24:6); the houses of Israel and Judah (31:28); “Johanan the son of Kareah, all the captains of the forces with him, and all the people from the least even to the greatest” (42:10) and “this whole land” (45:4) which as noted by Holladay refers to both ‘who and what’ the Lord created.²⁰⁹ Each of these occurrences are within a key passage using the sequence of 1:10 verbs, where the theme of turning is evident, as will be discussed with the key passages. In the two remaining uses the agent is not directly specified and the object being thrown down is a city (31:40) or walls (50:15).

In several cases outside of *Jeremiah*, הָרַס is set as the opposite of build (Ezek 36:36; Mal 1:4; Ps 28:5; Prov. 14:1; Job 12:14)²¹⁰. God rebuilds ‘torn down’ places (Ezek 36:36); God can tear down what the people have built (Mal 1:4); rebuilding something God has torn down cannot be done without His help (Job 12:14).²¹¹

“Tear down” (הָרַס) is also set opposite “to build” (בָּנָה) in the likely earliest²¹² use of the task verbs at Jeremiah 45:4: “what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will

²⁰⁷ Mündlerlein, *TDOT*, vol 3, 462.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 462.

²⁰⁹ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 310. Holladay notes that verse 45:4, while part of the oracle to Baruch, is intended for the nation. The verb can apply to either who or what Yahweh created.

²¹⁰ Mündlerlein, *TDOT*, vol 3, 462.

²¹¹ Wagner, *TDOT*, vol 2, 173.

²¹² Lundbom, 174; Glazov, 165.

pluck up” as well as at Jer 42:10 and 24:6: “I will build ... and not pull ...down.” Munderlein sees this as either the “end of *Heilsgeschichte*, God’s historical involvement with his people” (45:4) or with the emphasis inverted as “a new beginning” (42:10; 24:6; as well as 31:28; cf. 31:40). The 1:10 sequence is seen as a reflection of the exilic history of Israel.²¹³ He notes that abstract usage of tearing down and building appears primarily in “relatively late texts” (Ezek 36:36; Mal 1:4; Ps 28:5; Job 12:14) that are likely dependent on *Jeremiah*.²¹⁴ In 1:10 and related passages, the task verbs “have lost their original concrete meaning.”²¹⁵ In this context, הָרַס is not applicable to cities and countryside, but, along with the series, has to do with “the connection between the salvation and the disaster that proceed from God.”²¹⁶ Might this dually apply to temporal and spiritual welfare-- not necessarily at the same time or in the same way. But somehow the language carries both a literal and spiritual sense.

Build

Various Semitic languages offer בָּנָה *bānā* as a root, meaning “to build” or “create.”²¹⁷ It is used most often literally, but also figuratively throughout the OT.²¹⁸ בָּנָה connotes “not only an act performed on a certain object, but also the process of that object’s coming into existence,” alongside its purpose.²¹⁹ The meaning extends to “building up, rebuilding and improving or finishing.” Figuratively, building often refers to the growth of families, dynasties or even an individual; it also describes the creation of the world.²²⁰

²¹³ Munderlein, *TDOT*, vol 3, 463.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 463.

²¹⁵ Munderlein, *TDOT*, vol 3, 463.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 463.

²¹⁷ Wagner, *TDOT*, vol 2, 166.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

Most often in the OT, building refers to cities²²¹ but also to individual buildings, walls, houses, palaces, and siegeworks.²²² In another use, Yahweh’s “steadfast love” is “established” forever (Ps 89:3(2)). God appears as the master builder (Ps 122:3) of Jerusalem and his sanctuary (Ps 78:69; 147:2) although men are also acknowledged as the physical builders (Jer 32:31). God builds a woman from the rib of man (Gen 2:22) and builds “upper chambers” in the heavens (Am 9:6 NRSV).²²³ Psalm 127:1 reminds the reader that unless the Lord build the house, efforts are in vain.

Building is the first seemingly positive term in the *Jeremiah* leitmotif²²⁴, appearing fifth out of six task verbs. Jeremiah’s mission is comparable to that of a master builder (1:10; cf. 18:9)²²⁵ and he himself is made into a fortified city (1:18). The root of the verb is used almost 22 times in *Jeremiah*; in almost half Jeremiah or the Lord build people or nations:

Table 5: Objects of building in *Jeremiah*

Who is Built?	Verse
nations and kingdoms	1:10; 18:9
“evil neighbors,” i.e., Gentile ²²⁶ nations	12:16
exiles of Judah in Babylon (good figs)	24:6
“virgin Israel” ²²⁷	31:4
house of Israel and house of Judah ²²⁸	31:28
Israel and Judah ²²⁹	33:7
Johanan’s group	42:10
“the whole earth”	45:4

²²¹ Ibid., 169.

²²² Ibid., 171.

²²³ Ibid., 173.

²²⁴ Wagner refers to the 1:10 task verbs as a ‘motif’ rather than a leitmotif. S. Wagner, *TDOT* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), vol 2, 173.

²²⁵ Ibid., 172.

²²⁶ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 663.

²²⁷ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, 416. Lundbom asserts this was originally meant as Northern Israel as in Amos 5:2.

²²⁸ Ibid., 460. Lundbom sees 31:28 as intended for a “united” Israel and Judah, just as the New Covenant is. He also notes that the LXX omits “house of” for each.

²²⁹ Ibid., 532. Although some LXX mss have “Jerusalem” instead of Israel, Lundbom prefers the broader “Israel” as consistent with the promises of the Book of Restoration.

The groups may be good (24:6) or evil (12:16) at the start, but must follow his ways (12:16), or turn to the Lord (18:8; 33:7; or remain in the land as in 42:10) to be “built.” The theme of turning is apparent here, not only in the passages which rely on the leitmotif with multiple task verbs (to be discussed below), but also in the independent occurrence at 33:7.

In the LXX build is translated with ἀνοικοδομέω or οἰκοδομέω.

The themes of judgment and salvation can be associated with tearing down and building: tearing down is a curse, while building is a blessing.²³⁰ The building activity of the Babylonian exiles, as encouraged by Jeremiah (29:5f., 28), is a “sign of God’s faithfulness.”²³¹ Dwelling securely is a “gift of salvation” from Yahweh; expectations of salvation described in the OT and *Jeremiah* include the rebuilding of Israel (Jer 24:6; 31:4, 28; 33:7; Am 9:14), the Davidic dynasty (Am. 9:11), as well as Jerusalem (Jer 31:38) and the temple (Isa 44:28; Ezra 1:2; Ps. 102:15-17 [14-16]) which point towards a “world restored according to the will of God.”²³²

Humans also build, and what they build can be good or bad: the captives are to build houses to dwell in (29:5, 28), but the children of Judah build idolatrous high places (7:31; 19:5; 32:35); Jehoiakim builds houses by unrighteousness (22:13, 14).²³³ Jerusalem is built (30:18; 31:38; 32:31); a siege wall is built (52:4). The Rechabites are not to build houses (35:7, 9).

In the restoration and rebuilding of 33:6-7, Holladay sees a reversal of the defiled houses from 19:13; and a “companion to ch. 32 which focuses on fields to be planted.” McKane and Holladay both note that the broader meaning of 33:6 applies to the inhabitants of the houses as

²³⁰ Wagner, *TDOT* vol 2, 174.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

²³² *Ibid.*, 178.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 174.

well as the houses.²³⁴ McKane points out that cleansing the people and forgiving their sin (33:8) indicates that “divine grace” and “a consequent inner renewal of the community” are part of the (re)building process.

When the people build, the outcome can be either good or evil. When the Lord builds, the implication is blessing for the people and a beneficial outcome that aligns with God’s will. There are resonances between the Lord’s building of people and the spiritual journey, in which the spiritual process involves cleansing and grace, and the goal is to build a will that is united with the will of God. In doing so, one will be blessed by Him. Both the literal and spiritual sense point to salvation from the Lord.

Plant

“To plant” (נָטַע *nāṭa* ך) is the work of “the settled farmer”²³⁵ inserting a “slip” into the soil²³⁶ and a term that is widely used literally and figuratively²³⁷ in the OT (55 times in the qal, and once in the niphal). The root is rarely attested in other Semitic languages.²³⁸ In literal usage, a direct antonym is rare (Eccl 3:2) although figuratively נָטַע is used throughout *Jeremiah* (1:10, etc). The object of planting can be a simple plant or vine (Gen 21:33; Ps 104:16; Is 44:14; Ps 80:8; Dt 16:21) although more commonly the verb refers to “tracts of cultivated plants” such as vineyards (Gen 9:20; Deut 6:11; 20:6; 28:30, 39; etc.), gardens (Gen 2:8; Jer 19:5; 28), plantations (Isa 17:10; Jer 31:5), and trees (Lev 19:23; Eccl 2:5). However, when God plants, “the action... almost always has to do with human beings” (Exod 15:17; 2 Sam 7:10; 1 Chron

²³⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 223; McKane, *Jeremiah* 26—52, 857.

²³⁵ Helmer Ringgren, *TDOT*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), vol 9, 387.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 390.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 390.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 387.

17:9; Jer 2:21; 11:17; 12:2; 24:6; 32:41; 42:10; Am 9:15; Ps 44:12).²³⁹ In both literal and figurative usage, it is not uncommon for the place of planting to be named (Eden in Gen 2:8; mountains of Samaria in Jer 31:5; this land in Jer 32:41).²⁴⁰ In the LXX, the verb נטע is consistently translated as φυτεύω or καταφυτεύω.

Used 14 times in *Jeremiah*, נטע is translated as ‘plant’ in each of the NKJV, NRSV and NAB. Yahweh is the one who plants nine times (2:21; 11:17; 12:2; 18:9; 24:6; 31:28; 32:41; 42:10; 45:4). Jeremiah is assigned the task in 1:10. In the remaining four occurrences, planting is to be done (or not done) by the people, including the exiles in Babylon (29:5, 28), “virgin Israel” (31:4-5) and the Rechabites (35:7). In the literal sense, Jeremiah instructs the exiles to build and plant right where they are (29:5).

When Yahweh plants, His action refers to the house of Jacob and Israel (2:21, 31:28), Judah (11:17, 31:28), the wicked (12:2); a nation/kingdom (18:9; also 1:10 with Jeremiah as agent); captives from Judah (24:6); children of Israel and Judah (32:41); Johanan’s group (42:10) and ‘the land’, i.e., whoever or whatever the Lord has planted²⁴¹ (45:4). As with building, the Lord plants people. These can be either good or ‘wicked.’ In the case of the wicked, it is Jeremiah in his own voice who proclaims that the Lord has planted them, rather than the more typical formula in which the Lord says ‘I’ planted. Curiously, God’s planting action across the OT applies to a group, with only Jer 12:2, (planting of the wicked) referring to a singular wicked individual.²⁴²

²³⁹ Ibid., 388.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 388.

²⁴¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 310. Holladay notes that verse 45:4, while part of the oracle to Baruch, is intended for the nation. The verb can apply to either who or what Yahweh created.

²⁴² Ringgren, TDOT, vol 9, 388.

The understanding of נָטַע can incorporate not only the act of planting, but also the beginning of growth (Jer 12:2) as well as taking root, spreading out, and bearing fruit (see also Jer 2:21; 11:17; 17:8, 10). Like building, planting is generally associated with hope and expectation.²⁴³ “Taking root” and “bearing fruit” are concrete, albeit figurative, manifestations of salvation for Israel and Judah.²⁴⁴ One could also suggest the planting is associated with peace; certainly enjoying the fruits of planting is a sign of salvation, not judgment.²⁴⁵

“Plant” is commonly included in the key verses (1:10; 18:7-9; 24:6; 31:28; 42:10; 45:4) although it is omitted from two: 12:14-17; 31:38-40. These will be discussed with the key passages.

Planting, Turning and the Heart. The themes of turning and heart are not far away from the planting verses within the key passages using the leitmotif (1:10, 24:6; 31:28; 42:10; 45:4) and beyond (2:21; 11:17; 12:2). In the independent passages the following can be observed:

1. The Lord proclaims that he had planted Israel as a “noble vine, a seed of highest quality” (2:21). Yet she has offended the Lord by easily succumbing to temptation, and to false idolatry (cf. 2:23). No matter, Israel continues to claim “I have not sinned” (2:34). Israel’s self-deception leads to the mistaken belief that the Lord will turn (שׁוּב) his anger away from her (2:35). Yet the protestations of innocence are “precisely” why Yahweh is pursuing his case.²⁴⁶ As McKane observes “Deeply ingrained habits have brought about an inner perversion so fundamental that repentance, a change of heart and new patterns of behavior would seem to be ruled out”²⁴⁷ despite the repeated calls for turning.

²⁴³ Ibid., 390.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 391.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 391.

²⁴⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 111.

²⁴⁷ McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1—25, 43.

2. The indictment of his people is reinforced in 11:17: “For the Lord of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced doom against you...” The unit 11:1-17 is described as a “meditation” on Deut 6:4²⁴⁸; the people have not obeyed the covenant, but instead followed their evil hearts (11:8) and turned (שׁוּב) back to sin (11:10).
3. In 12:2, Jeremiah complains that the Lord has planted the wicked, and they have “taken root.” While they may speak of the Lord, they are not wholly his; He is far from their minds. Yet Jeremiah’s heart has been tested and the Lord knows him (12:3).

Observations On Pairing

The six task verbs which are used as a leitmotif throughout the book of *Jeremiah* are arranged in three pairs in 1:10: pluck up-pull down; destroy-throw down; and build-plant. It has been observed that the first and third pairs are counterparts because they are direct opposites (i.e., pluck up/plant; tear down/build).²⁴⁹ The relationship between these four task verbs at first glance appears to divide the action between negative (pluck up, tear down) and positive (build and plant), using imagery of both manmade structures (tear down/build) and natural growth (pluck up/plant).²⁵⁰ This chiasmus (in part) led Holladay to conclude that the middle pair is an editorial addition to the “concision of the original text”²⁵¹. The expansive negative vocabulary is seen as useful for varying the text and carrying the burden of Jeremiah’s negatively weighted mission and message.²⁵² This approach leaves the middle pair drifting through the text with little purpose other than linguistic variation.

²⁴⁸ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 106-107. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (Deut 6:4-5)

²⁴⁹ McKane, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 10; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 235.

²⁵⁰ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 21.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 22.

²⁵² Miller, 583.

Let us consider the internal cohesion of each pair:

1. “Pluck up” (נָתַשׁ) and “pull down” (נָחַץ) together form the first pair that between themselves play on the opposing concepts of up/down while at the same time indicating a similar activity – one of destruction either through tearing down something tangible such as the houses of a city or a metaphorical house, city or nation²⁵³ or plucking up something that has grown, such as a plant or garden or a metaphorical group that has put down roots. The Hebrew terms together demonstrate alliteration and assonance.
2. The second pair, “destroy” (אַבַּד) and “throw down” (הָרַס), are also both negative actions of destruction. “Destroy” can also mean “perish,” possibly from running away. “Throw down” is a term that implies destruction that penetrates, and advances through, say city walls; one definition incorporates “removal”; another conceives of entry into a restricted area; even the possibility of humiliation of persons is raised. In Hebrew, both rely on similar vowel sounds, although there is less alliteration or assonance here.
3. The final pair, “build” (בָּנָה) and “plant” (נָטַע) are positive and as noted, connote hope and even salvation. There is an assonance between these two. Like the first pair, it uses imagery of building and nature.

The difference between the first two pairs is nuanced: while both connote destruction of some sort, the first pair could be seen as less intrusive than the second. For example, it is possible to imagine an example in which a wall is torn down and rubble strewn visibly; the wall

²⁵³ BDB, 683.

has been “plucked up” from its foundation and “torn down.” However, a pile of rubble remains. The second pair implies further destruction by “demolishing” (NAB) the rubble in order to completely destroy it.

The connotations also indicate that the second pair implies a fluidity of action not present in the first from “tearing down” to “breaking through” or “obliterating”²⁵⁴. The destruction (to overthrow, throw down, demolish) could be characterized by more movement and a more complete effort than the initial pair. The connotation of entry into a restricted or holy place of God (Exod 19:21, 24)²⁵⁵ fits nicely with imagery of God in the soul, such as St. Teresa of Avila’s description of the Lord deep in the center of the soul²⁵⁶, and St. Paul’s description of us as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16). Through these spiritual lenses, the holiest aspects of God within us can only be reached through progressive purification, i.e., once the sins blocking us from hearing and loving God are removed, i.e., uprooted and demolished.

These subtleties may lend support to the thesis that the pairs offer a typological framework for the stages of the spiritual journey, i.e., “pluck up/tear down” align with the purgative stage of uprooting sin; and “destroy/throw down” can be seen in light of the second illuminative stage during which the Lord moves further into the soul, and the very roots of sin are “obliterated.” “Build” and “plant” look to nearness and cooperation of the will with the Lord.

If each pair forms a unit, in effect there are three elements. Each element may correspond with the stages of spiritual progression.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 248.

²⁵⁵ Munderlein, *TDOT*, vol 3, 462

²⁵⁶ St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, 13, 17.

Let us turn to the task verbs in the context of the key passages that employ them as a leitmotif and evaluate whether the text supports this proposal.

Key Passages

Key passages have been defined above as those passages that have “heaped”²⁵⁷ the task verbs and that exegetes recognize are related to 1:10: in particular 12:14-17; 18:7, 9; 24:6; 31:28, 38-40; 42:10; 45:4.²⁵⁸ Each of these prose passages employ more than three of the verbs of the leitmotif and have the Lord (implicitly or explicitly) as the actor or initiator of the action.

Of particular interest is the only verse that repeats all six task verbs of 1:10: verse 31:28. This verse appears in the Book of Comfort and immediately precedes the New Covenant (31:31-34). While 1:10 in Jeremiah’s call narrative seems to foretell a period of doom, the same leitmotif in 31:28 prophesies a complete renewal of relationship with the Lord: “And it shall come to pass, that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord.” Just after the New Covenant, another passage (31:38-40) also repeats a selection of the task verbs. These two passages (31:28, 38-40) within the Book of Comfort frame the New Covenant passage (31:33) and will be discussed first.

The additional passages to be reviewed, in order of interest based on the predominance of task verbs and thematic links, include:

- The pericope of the Potter’s Vessel (18:7, 9) which uses five of the six terms;

²⁵⁷ Miller, “Jeremiah” in *NIB*, 583.

²⁵⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 235. See also Carroll, 94. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 21. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 24. McKane, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 10. McKane and Brueggemann omit 31:38, 40.

- Verses in the pericopes of the Good and Bad Figs (24:6), Jeremiah Advise Survivors Not to Migrate (42:10) and A Word of Comfort to Baruch (45:4) which each employ the same four terms (pluck up, throw down, build and plant) and exclude the same two terms: pull down and destroy; and
- The pericope God Replies to Jeremiah, vv. 12:14-17, which uses three of the terms (including one from each pair) with a fourfold repetition of “pluck up.”

Proximity to and association with the themes of the heart and/or turning and repentance will be discussed. Limitations of space require that the review does not dive deeply into the dating of each passage or its dependence on/priority to other texts.

Framing the New Covenant

Two of the passages that echo the leitmotif of Jer 1:10 appear in literary units on either side of the New Covenant in which the Lord promises a new heart to the people. The passage the precedes the New Covenant includes the only other verse in the book of *Jeremiah* which repeats the entire series of six task verbs (31:28)²⁵⁹. The passage following uses one term from each pair of the verbs (pluck up, throw down, build (31:38-40)).

The three units together (31:27-30, 31-37, 38-40) can be seen as a cohesive composition described by Allen as “Divine Guarantees for Israel’s Future.”²⁶⁰ Each of these three units are introduced with the “identical introductory formula”²⁶¹: “Behold the days are coming, says the Lord...” (31:27, 31, 38) (הנה ימים באים נאם־יהוה). Weinfeld notes that this formula appears “with

²⁵⁹ Carroll, 607. Carroll notes that the Septuagint omits two of the terms from 1:10

²⁶⁰ Allen, 351.

²⁶¹ Bright 287. See also Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 196. Holladay links 31:28 to the opening of the Book of Comfort which also relies on the same formulaic phrase (30:3)

surprising regularity in *Jeremiah* (15 times)” compared to only four times in other Old Testament books.²⁶² The use of ‘demolish’ (or throw down הָרַס) in both vv 28 and 40 creates a “frame” of “divine activity relegated to the past and ruled out for the future.”²⁶³ Lundbom sees a broader arrangement based on a “key word chiasmus” that begins and ends with rebuilding holy Jerusalem (31:23-26 and 31:38-40).²⁶⁴

Carroll describes the literal sense of the three passages (31:27-30; 31:34; 38-40) as “three future hopes” for reversal of the nation’s fate.²⁶⁵ In the first, Yahweh will watch carefully to cultivate the land and build communities, reversing his “watching over them for evil purposes (18:11; 21:10).”²⁶⁶ In the second the broken relationship with Yahweh is restored with an unbreakable new covenant; the house of Israel will become Yahweh’s people and He their God.²⁶⁷ Finally, the city which has become unholy will be rebuilt to be holy and sacred to the Lord, healing and embracing it wholly, and reversing the images of defiled and desolate Jerusalem (7:30-8:3).

Allen describes the three passages together as proclamations of salvation and assurance of future security.²⁶⁸ Scholars also recognize that these passages “herald not only a physical but

²⁶² Moshe Weinfeld, “Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel.” *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 88, no. 1 (1976): 17–56.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=shib&db=rh&AN=ATLA0000757129&site=ehost-live>. 18-19. The prophecies that rely on the introductory formulae “Behold the days are coming” concern captivity (30:3), a Davidic branch (23:5; 33:14-16), sowing seed (31:27); making a new covenant (31:31); rebuilding Jerusalem (31:37); vengeance on Israel’s enemies (48:12; 49:2; 51:47, 52); the transformation of Tophet into a burial place (7:32; 19:6); and punishment of the uncircumcised in heart (9:25-26). Weinfeld omits mention of 31:27

²⁶³ Allen, 354.

²⁶⁴ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, 455. The intermediate passages are linked through the “seed” theme (31:27-30; 35-37) and placing the New Covenant (31:31-34) at the center.

²⁶⁵ Carroll, 608.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 608.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 611.

²⁶⁸ Allen, 353.

also a spiritual rebirth.”²⁶⁹ The New Covenant in particular is a covenant of ‘grace’ or lovingkindness.²⁷⁰

The three units generally conform to a typical antithetical pattern introduced by the phrase characteristic of *Jeremiah*: “in those days” (31:29; see also 3:16, 18; 5:18; 33:15, 16; 50:4, 20).²⁷¹ Here the house of Israel and Judah will be built up; the “sour grapes” will be no more. A new covenant will be in their hearts²⁷²; no longer will teaching knowledge of the Lord be necessary. And finally, the city shall be rebuilt in holiness; no longer will it suffer plucking up or tearing down.

Each literary unit is presented below (NKJV) for ease of reference with relevant elements emphasized.

²⁷ “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. ²⁸ And it shall come to pass, that as I have *watched over* them to **pluck up**, to **break down**, to **throw down**, to **destroy**, and to afflict, so I will *watch over* them to **build** and to **plant**, says the Lord. ²⁹ In those days they shall say no more: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ ³⁰ But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— ³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their *hearts*; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

²⁶⁹ Weinfeld, 17

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 27. Weinfeld notes that the New Covenant is in many ways formulated like a priestly grant covenant.

²⁷¹ Weinfeld, 18. “In those days” (31:29 and eight other instances) is never used prior to the book of Jeremiah, and only rarely after (four times in other biblical books: the phrase appears at 1 Sam2:31; II Kings 20:17; Is 39:6; Am 8:11; Am 9:13). See also Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 314.

²⁷² Ibid., 17. “...not like the covenant (of the exodus)” ... “but this is the covenant that I will make...”

...[31:35-37]

³⁸ “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that the city shall be **built** for the Lord from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. ³⁹ The surveyor’s line shall again extend straight forward over the hill Gareb; then it shall turn toward Goath. ⁴⁰ And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the Brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the Lord. It shall not be **plucked up** or **thrown down** anymore forever.”

Sowing Seed and Watching Over. The first section (31:27-30) evokes planting imagery through sowing seed, indicating that the communities of Israel and Judah will grow. Populations of man and beast will replenish the desolate land.²⁷³ Just as the Lord watched over them to pluck up, pull down, destroy and throw down, now he will watch over to ensure building and planting (31:28). This verse contains all six task verbs (plus one). As Holladay describes it “Yahweh’s words of judgment are replaced by words of restoration.”²⁷⁴ The sequence of the verbs demonstrates that the ultimate end is one of hope²⁷⁵ and signals a “resurrection”²⁷⁶ and “a full resumption of all life”²⁷⁷ in the future.

Interestingly, the negativity of the judgment theme evoked by usage of four negative task verbs (“pluck up”...“throw down”) is further “intensified” by the addition of a new term, to “afflict” (NKJV) or “bring evil” (NRSV).²⁷⁸

In the LXX, only two negative verbs are used here: *καθαίρῃω* and *καχῶ* (“to overthrow” and “bring evil”).²⁷⁹ Holladay sees an MT expansion while Lundbom attributes the shorter LXX

²⁷³ Nicholson, 69. See also Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, 459.

²⁷⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 197. See also Allen, 354.

²⁷⁵ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26-52 To Build To Plant*, 68.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁷⁹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, 460.

to two haplographies.²⁸⁰ The LXX word choice has also been seen as a contraction of the four “standard *Jeremiah*” verbs²⁸¹ into one all encompassing term meaning “destroy.”

The three prophecies of this unit serve to “balance the covenant promises of vv 35-37”²⁸² regarding sowing and preserving the seed of a united Israel and Judah.²⁸³ 31:28. The reference to the Lord’s watching (31:28; cf. 1:12) is a reassurance of sorts. The Lord will fulfill his promise of restoration.²⁸⁴

This passage ends with the negation of a popular saying that the children’s teeth are on edge because their fathers ate sour grapes (also a subject of Ezekiel 18, the same chapter in which the prophet calls for a new heart, and a new spirit for the people). Sour grapes are to be no more. Now, each individual shall bear his own responsibility for sin (31:29-30), rather than bearing the consequences of the sin of the previous generation.²⁸⁵ In a literal sense, Allen observes that the sins of the earlier king Manasseh will no longer be borne by this later generation suffering displacement; the exiles are assured of restoration to the land.²⁸⁶ Introducing the concept of sin also prepares the reader for the announcement of the New Covenant in the next passage.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁰ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, 460. First, the loss of *lintôš wēlintôš wē* “to uproot and break down, and” due to homoeoarcton (*l ... l*); second the loss of *ûlēha’ăbîd* “and to destroy” also homoeoarcton (*wlh ... wlh*). Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 21; see also 512. McKane, *Jeremiah 1—25*, xviii; McKane does not comment on 1:10 specifically in regard to this issue, but generally sees the MT as an expansion of the LXX; see also pp. 1-2 for a discussion of the “rolling corpus.”

²⁸¹ Becking (1994a: 151) in Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, 461.

²⁸² Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, 459.

²⁸³ Ibid., 455.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 460.

²⁸⁵ Carroll, 609. Nicholson, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 69. See also Allen, 354.

²⁸⁶ Allen, 354.

²⁸⁷ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, 463.

In the spiritual and moral sense, personal responsibility for sin is noted. This theme repeats a stated Deuteronomic principle (Deut 24:16).²⁸⁸ The Lord is watching in order to build and plant (31:28), and to enact his word (1:12). How? The Lord announces the bestowal of a new covenant and a new heart (31:33).

Verse 31:28 recalls not only the task verbs of 1:10, but also points to the themes of watching and word (1:11-12).²⁸⁹ Because he is watching, the fulfillment of God's divine purpose is "inevitable."²⁹⁰ As he has watched over them for evil (44:27), he plans for their welfare, and for a future of hope (29:11). Allen sees 31:28 as a sort of counterpoint to 1:10 in which restoration is emphasized over judgment, in the culmination of Yahweh's watching.²⁹¹

A New Covenant and a New Heart. These two adjacent passages (31:27-30 and 31:31-34) are linked through the introductory formula and the antithetical structure of the passages. They are also connected through a pattern of reversal. Just as knowledge of the Lord was handed down, so was the sin of the fathers. No longer will sin be passed down through the generations. No more will knowledge of the Lord be passed from person to person. Sins will be forgiven. The knowledge of the Lord will be with everyone, from the least to the greatest.

While 31:27-30 can be read from a more literal perspective (uprooting people from the land and then building again), the New Covenant (31:31-34) is a passage which demands a spiritual interpretation. This is not a physical heart transplant, but rather divinely issued grace, forgiveness and spiritual closeness. It has been called "one of the most important passages in the

²⁸⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 21—36, 462. "Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* children, nor shall children be put to death for *their* fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin." (Deut 24:16)

²⁸⁹ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 196. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah* 26-52, 68.

²⁹⁰ Nicholson, *Jeremiah* 1-25, 27.

²⁹¹ Allen, 354.

book of *Jeremiah*”²⁹² and possibly one of the most “profound” in the Bible.²⁹³ Placed between two passages that rely on the 1:10 leitmotif, this passage highlights a primary theme of this thesis, that of the heart, and the spiritual connection between the heart and the Lord. If both passages are considered in a spiritual sense, then Jeremiah’s call to uproot, which is carried out through Yahweh’s rather than the prophet’s own action, ought to have a spiritual effect. This effect could be simply a moral and behavioral one, such as avoiding idolatry and other occasions of sin so frequently called out by the prophets. It may also be a deeply spiritual effect that goes straight to the heart, i.e., to the new heart (31:33; 32:39-40) that Yahweh has promised to His people.

The people “followed the counsels and dictates of their evil hearts” (7:24; cf. 31:32). In order to live as a people of the covenant, “that all may be well” (7:23; cf. 29:11), the people must hear and obey the word of the Lord (31:10, also 2:4; 6:19; 7:2; 10:1; et al.). But the people do not obey the word or “incline their ear.” The Lord’s solution is an entirely new heart that ‘knows’ the Lord. While the text does not say the old heart is plucked out, spiritually the Lord is watching his people, plucking up and pulling down His people and their places. He also puts “my fear” in their hearts so that they will not “depart” from Him (32:40). He is intent on effecting a change of heart in His people, intent on carrying his word out so that he can build and plant Himself as the one Lord in His people’s heart.

The “genuine solidarity” repeated in the covenant formula “I will be their God and they shall be My people” (31:33; also 7:23; 11:4; 24:7), speaks to a “new communion” with “full knowledge of Yahweh” brought about by the New Covenant, possible because Yahweh “breaks

²⁹² Nicholson, *Jeremiah*, 26-52, 70.

²⁹³ Bright, 287.

the vicious cycle of sin and punishment” with the grace of forgiveness.²⁹⁴ After the inevitable judgment has occurred, past guilt will be wiped away in a “gracious act of amnesty” by God.²⁹⁵

Writing on the heart highlights the difference with the previous law written on stone tablets, the torah. It also calls to mind the sins of Judah, which are also written on the heart “with a pen of iron with the point of a diamond” (Jer 17:1). Allen notes that the change of the new covenant hinges on motivation, and that the new heart indicates that “internal cues replaced external ones.”²⁹⁶

Brueggemann observes that in the imagery presented by the New Covenant “All inclination to resist, refuse, or disobey will have evaporated... (in) transformed people who have rightly inclined hearts.”²⁹⁷ Allen also leans into the idealistic vision. Through a great supernatural gift of God, “the social pervasiveness of sinning...would be replaced by compliance with the divine will.”²⁹⁸

The “utopian” imagery is a typical feature of “prophetic anthologies,” and here envisions a sinless future.²⁹⁹ Although Carroll asserts that this future society “does not and cannot exist,” he recognizes the hope it gives to a devastated community in exile.³⁰⁰ The literal covenant written on stones or scribal documents is transformed into a symbolic and “metaphorical status” in which the divine torah is automatically kept by the community.³⁰¹ In the spiritual sense

²⁹⁴ Brueggemann, 72.

²⁹⁵ Allen, 357.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 356.

²⁹⁷ Brueggemann, 71.

²⁹⁸ Allen, 357.

²⁹⁹ Carroll 609, 612.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 614.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 614.

however, the task verbs somehow serve this idyllic New Covenant and the new heart required for it.

Turning. Turning is a major theme in *Jeremiah*, with שׁוּב (to turn/return) used over 100 times throughout the book, and 20 times in Jer 30—33.³⁰² While the term ‘turn’ is not addressed within the first unit 31:27-30, it is unmissable as a leitmotif³⁰³ in the Book of Comfort³⁰⁴ (31:8, 16, 17, 18-19; 21; 32:37, 40). Turning, and heart, are both referenced in 31:20-21 as well as 32:37-41. Israel is called to turn back by setting its heart to the highway (31:21).

A related phrase שׁוּב שְׁבִיתָ־שְׁבוּת *šûḇ šebûṭ* is used seven times in the Book of Consolation (Jer 30:3, 18; 31:23; 32:44; 33:7, 11, 26; see also 29:14 and the Oracles to Foreign Nations 48:47; 49:6; 49:39) and forms an inclusio around the Book of Consolation (30:3 – 33:26). The phrase is translated alternately as “bring back from captivity” (Jer 30:3 NKJV) or “restore the fortunes” (30:3 NAB) or even “to turn around the fate”³⁰⁵. Lundbom prefers “restore the fortunes” although the precise meaning of the phrase is debated because the derivation of the noun is unclear, possibly coming from שׁוּב (to turn/return/restore) or שְׁבָה (to capture/take captive).³⁰⁶ Morrow argues that the phrase is a Jeremianic allusion to Deut 30:1-10³⁰⁷ and notes that repentance and restoration, as well as a new covenant are common themes in both books.³⁰⁸ In any case, the theme of turning remains prominent in the phrase, which is most relevant for this study.

³⁰² Morrow and Quant, “Yet Another New Covenant: Jeremiah’s Use of Deuteronomy and שׁוּב שְׁבִיתָ־שְׁבוּת in the Book of Consolation” in Lundbom, *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, 183 n66.

³⁰³ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, 450.

³⁰⁴ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, viii; Miller, 797. The Book of Comfort is defined as 30:1 – 33:26.

³⁰⁵ Fischer, “Jeremiah – “The Prophet Like Moses”?” in Lundbom, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 57, n48.

³⁰⁶ Morrow and Quant, 172-174.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 172.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 187.

The Lord in fact will cause the people to return, give them one heart, and make an everlasting covenant so that He won't turn away (32:37-41). A heart turned to the Lord is a heart that is planted, with all His heart and soul. Somehow this will happen through the new heart and the New Covenant, after the people of Israel and Judah have been plucked up and destroyed.

The question arises: how will the “miraculous transformation”³⁰⁹ of the New Covenant take place? Holladay notes that how this “new situation” will come about is not explained by the text, nor is the question of how to reconcile free will with God's injection of law into the heart of the people.³¹⁰

In part, the answer is certainly an eschatological telos, perhaps the beatific vision. Boadt notes that the new covenant will be effective because it will be given power by God's spirit and grace³¹¹. As Allen puts it, “...the two-sided covenant formula would find perfect fulfillment in the mutuality of its partners.”³¹² Allen's comment reflects an internalization of spirituality or a relationship between a person and God in which both are wholly committed and perfectly behaved – a unification of wills. Holladay sees the new covenant as directed towards a “corporate will” rather than an individual one, based on the singular form of heart and interior in Hebrew.³¹³ McKane describes the alignment of the human will with God's will as a “transformation at the core being... and a ‘knowledge of Yahweh’ which every member of his community will possess.”³¹⁴ However, Lemke sums it up as “What is envisaged here is *a process*

³⁰⁹ Allen, 356.

³¹⁰ Holladay, 198.

³¹¹ Boadt, 327.

³¹² Allen, 356.

³¹³ Holladay, 198.

³¹⁴ McKane, 820.

[my emphasis] of internalization of the divine will upon the human will and consciousness.”³¹⁵

This study proposes that the 1:10 leitmotif anticipates this process:

1. “Obedience” and “turning” seem prominent in the first pair (“pluck up” and “pull down”). The purgative stage of spiritual development requires the elimination of grave sin and turning to God through surface-level moral behavior.
2. The second pair (“destroy” and “throw down”) add an element of complete destruction. In the illuminative stage, the Lord works with a soul to eliminate any attachments that do not lead to the Lord.
3. The third pair, “build” and “plant,” leads to loving God with the whole heart, soul, mind and strength. This has resonances of the union of wills in which the Lord and the soul live as one.

In the Christian view, perfection is continually sought and approached through growth in holiness, demonstrated in particular through the lives of the saints. However, in the Old Testament, does this process of the internalization of the divine will, this giving and reception of a new heart, begin to happen at all? Is the process anticipated, i.e., is there a typology or prefiguration hidden in the text? Since, as Augustine puts it, “the New Testament lies hidden in the old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New”³¹⁶ it seems some sort of Old Testament evidence should point us toward an illumination of the new covenant and the process to change the heart.

³¹⁵ Lemke, Expository Articles, “Jeremiah 31:31-34” in *Interpretation*, 37 no 2 (April 1983), 184

³¹⁶ St. Augustine, Quast. In Hept.2, 73:PL 34, 623 in CCC 129.

Rebuilding Sacred Jerusalem. In the third proclamation (31:38-40), the focus shifts to the restoration of beloved Jerusalem using the building leitmotif (vv. 4, 28; cf 30:18). The entire city, inside and outside the walls,³¹⁷ will be made holy to the Lord, even the valley of death where sins so awful that the Lord had not thought of them, like child sacrifice, occurred (i.e., Hinnom in 31:40).³¹⁸ Once holy, it will never again be plucked up or thrown down (31:40). This section predicts the “transcendent realization of the covenant relationship.”³¹⁹ This description could almost apply to a spiritual sense of union with the Lord. However the postexilic return to the land has yet to fulfill this prophecy in the literal sense.

This passage contains three of the task verbs: “build” בנה (31:38), “uproot” (נחש) and “throw down” הרס (31:40); one from each pair of task verbs at 1:10.

While the agent of rebuilding Jerusalem is ambiguous in 31:31-34, the Lord is agent in the introductory passage (31:28). As will be seen below, the Lord is the agent who effects uprooting...planting in each of the key passages identified here and certainly in the bestowal of a new heart. If the Lord is the agent of rebuilding Jerusalem, the text in a spiritual sense may demonstrate resonances with the eschatological and heavenly city. Jerusalem is the spiritual heart of Israel and Judah, located in the land of Benjamin. Benjamin is “the beloved by the Lord” who “shall dwell between His shoulders” (Deut 33:12; see also Jer 32:44). Interestingly the city is rebuilt for Yahweh, not for Israel.³²⁰ The city’s rebuilding is also mentioned in 3:17; 30:18; 33:4-9³²¹ and offer additional connections to the themes of turning the heart and resonances with a process of spiritual building:

³¹⁷ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, 490-493.

³¹⁸ Allen, 359.

³¹⁹ Allen, 360.

³²⁰ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, 490.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 490.

- In 3:17, Jerusalem will be called “The Throne of the Lord,” and the people will not follow their evil hearts. Hebrew wordplay uses assonance and in a literal translation cries out “Return turnable children”³²² (3:14). Shepherd’s after the Lord’s “heart” will feed the people knowledge and understanding (3:15).
- The city will be built on its “tell”³²³ or remains, and a congregation will be built after Yahweh “bring(s) them back from captivity (30:18). The covenantal formula (30:22) is invoked. Turning and a people unified with God are part of rebuilt Jerusalem. After destruction the Lord builds on what he has left in place.
- In 33:4-9, the Lord not only causes the captives to return, he cleanses them of sin (33:8). Again, turning to God and purification are associated with Jerusalem.

In the literal sense, Lundbom notes that like the measurements of Jerusalem here in *Jeremiah*, the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21—22 “also contains measurements for the city, its gates, and its walls (Rev 21:15).”³²⁴ If Jerusalem indicates a state or place of heaven, i.e., the kingdom of God, in the Christian view, this kingdom begins here in our earthly existence in the hearts of each faithful believer. The spiritual sense then would be that the Lord would build his holy domain in the hearts of His people. Never (again) would it have to be uprooted or torn down, because it will be holy.

The Potter’s Vessel (18:1-12): Turning the Wheel of the Heart

The pericope of the Potter’s Vessel uses five of the six task verbs in 18:7-9, omitting throw down/demolish (הָרַס the second verb of the second pair). Each pair is represented:

³²² Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 313.

³²³ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21—36*, 405.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 491.

Table 6: Task verb pair representation in Jer 18:7-9

Pair 1	pluck up נָחַשׁ; pull down נָחַצ	18:7
Pair 2	destroy אָבַד	18:7
Pair 3	build בָּנָה and plant נָטַע	18:9

God compares Israel to a vessel of clay, marred in the making, that is remade by the potter “into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.” (18:4). Lundbom notes that the pericope anticipates the New Covenant.³²⁵ The 1:10 leitmotif is used to explain the metaphor: “Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!” (18:6). The explanation carries two conditional statements: when the Lord declares He will pluck up, pull down or destroy a nation or kingdom, if that nation turns from evil, then the Lord will *not* carry out his declaration for destruction. Similarly, if the Lord declares building and planting, but the nation does not obey, the Lord will no longer engage in building. Holladay notes that the interaction highlights the freedom of choice of both God and humanity.³²⁶ McKane sees vv. 7-10 as a “general theological statement, with a carefully contrived structure” resulting from a period of reflection and “drawing out” the Deuteronomistic theme of repentance.³²⁷

Turning. The theme of turning is central to the Lord’s actions of plucking up...planting in 18:7-10. There is no clearer call to repentance in *Jeremiah*.³²⁸ If the people turn away from evil, plucking up, pulling down and destroying will not happen. If they turn away from God, they will not be “built.” The negative pairs are associated with evil while the positive pair is associated with covenantal compliance.

³²⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 815.

³²⁶ Holladay, 515, 518.

³²⁷ McKane, *Jeremiah, 1—25*, 426.

³²⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 816.

The turning theme points to the frequent refrain throughout the book of *Jeremiah*, calling the people to turn back to God, or condemning them for not turning (3:19; 5:3; 8:4,5; 11:10; 15:7; 25:5; 26:3; 31:18, 19; 34:16; 35:15; 36:3,7; 44:5). The turning theme is even echoed (and possibly emphasized) in the imagery of the potter's wheel, sometimes called the turning wheel.³²⁹ God is “forming” (צ' *yāšar*) the clay, i.e., the people as he formed Jeremiah (1:5) and formed man (Gen 2:7-8, 19).³³⁰ Like the potter, He “does not throw the spoiled clay aside, but rather fashions it anew.”³³¹ For the purposes here, it is relevant that the shaping of the clay is not necessarily a simple act, but an iterative and sometimes repetitive process, as is the case in the journey of the spiritual life.

Carroll states that the theme of turning was developed after the fall of Jerusalem in the Deuteronomistic literature to offer hope for the possibility of remaining in the land or avoiding further destruction (cf. 7:3-7; 11:2-5; 18:11; 26:2-6; 36:2-3).³³² He describes vv.7--10 as “idyllic and unreal”³³³ given that turning from sin does not always preclude disaster. Yet this “idyllic” theology does underly the text. Although the vocabulary is not Deuteronomistic³³⁴ the theology is consistent with the Deuteronomistic concept of turning and the “crucial function of repentance.”³³⁵ Literally, the future of the nation and the action of the deity depend on the “preparedness to change (for good or evil).”³³⁶

³²⁹ Jerome, OT Vol. XII, 146. See also Holladay, Jer 1, 515.

³³⁰ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 815.

³³¹ Ibid., 815.

³³² Carroll, 373.

³³³ Ibid., 372.

³³⁴ McKane, 424.

³³⁵ Ibid., 426.

³³⁶ Carroll, 372.

However, the concept in *Jeremiah* is “very mechanical and lacks any depth of content.”³³⁷ Carroll contrasts the usage of turning in *Jeremiah* to that in the book of Jonah: while turning or repentance is exhibited in the book of Jonah through fasting, sackcloth and ashes, no such clarity of action is offered in *Jeremiah*.³³⁸ Perhaps because the redactors know that destruction of Jerusalem is a foregone conclusion, the refusal of Israel to turn has become the editorial and theological explanation, and hence, exploration of turning as a theological concept is limited.

Still turning is related to the task verbs. Turning to the Lord implies building and planting, i.e., hearing the Lord’s voice and keeping the covenant. Turning away from the Lord implies sin (such as idolatry) which requiring plucking up, pulling down *and* destroying (18:7). What exactly is plucked up, pulled down and destroyed: the nation or the sin? In the biblical context, the answer seems to be both. The nationhood of Israel is destroyed in the exile, but the cause is its sinful behavior. Biblically, morality and spiritual attitudes are linked to the literal and physical outcomes.

The Jeremianic tradition stretches the principle of turning further than previous texts by extending it beyond Israel and Judah to the broader terms of nations and kingdoms.³³⁹ Universal application of the concept supports the proposal that the text serves a spiritual purpose, in addition to a literal one. The authors and redactors were primarily concerned with the fate of their own people, yet the Scripture reflects God’s concern and mercy for all nations. Note also that each individual (18:11) is called to turn, indicating that the responsibility to the Lord is not

³³⁷ Ibid., 374.

³³⁸ Ibid., 373.

³³⁹ Ibid., 373.

only a corporate one, but a personal one. This is consistent with the theological approach of the New Covenant.

Heart. Despite the Lord's call for "every one" or "each of you" (inhabitants of Jerusalem) to turn³⁴⁰ from evil ways (18:11), the people cannot or will not obey the Lord. Instead, they obey their stubborn, evil hearts (18:12). Where there is an evil heart, the Lord must uproot and tear down. Where the heart is with the Lord, He builds and plants.

Brueggemann points out that the first clause (in both 18:7 and 18:9) highlights the sovereignty of God, while the second clause (regarding whether or not a nation turns 18:8, 10) brings out the free will of the nation.³⁴¹ God's action depends on human action. Judah's obedience is key to salvation and living in the promised land.³⁴²

However, while Brueggemann focuses on the duality of pluck up (18:7) and plant (18:9) seeing those as the alternative decision points of God, the clause incorporates three of the task verbs representing both of the "negative" pairs: God speaks to pluck up, pull down, and destroy (18:7). These actions will not be taken if evil is turned from. The inclusion of both negative pairs supports the thesis that the framework of changing the heart involves more than one stage.

Spiritual Sense. Nicholson notes that the people have been "spoiled" by their sinfulness and God's potter-like remolding "would destroy what they had been and reconstitute them to conform to the original purpose he intended for them."³⁴³ This "purpose" hearkens back to the themes of covenant and spiritual marriage referenced in the New Covenant and elsewhere

³⁴⁰ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 513.

³⁴¹ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 161.

³⁴² Ibid., 161.

³⁴³ Nicholson, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 155.

throughout *Jeremiah*: Judah broke the covenant though “I was a husband to them” (31:32; also 3:14).

While the literal sense of 18:1-12 may be the physical uprooting of nations from their homelands, the purpose leans towards the spiritual. The people must turn away from sin and turn their hearts to the Lord. Uprooting... and planting serve this soul-centered purpose. God is shaping them as the potter shapes clay.

The pericope of the Potter’s Vessel points to the spiritual principle: a change of heart leads to a change in the action of the Lord. Turning is a process of the heart. Turning implies a change of heart.³⁴⁴ Yet this apparent tit for tat (i.e., if the people turn, the Lord turns) is subject to the mercy of the Lord, and will someday be supplanted by the New Covenant and the new heart mercifully bestowed by the Lord. This new heart will be turned to the Lord, leading to building and planting, and to an intimate relationship between the Lord and Israel.

Passages with the Same Task Verb Pattern: Jer 24:6; 42:10; and 45:4

Each of these verses employ the same four terms and exclude the same two terms (“pull down” נהצ and “destroy” אבד). Each verse sets “pluck up” נתש against “plant” נטע, and “build” בנה against “throw down/tear down/demolish” הרס.³⁴⁵

Table 7: Verses using the same task verb pattern

24:6	For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; I will build them and not pull them down (הרס), and I will plant them and not pluck them up .
42:10	If you will still remain in this land, then I will build you and not pull you down (הרס), and I will plant you and not pluck you up .
45:4	“Thus you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Behold, what I have built I will break down (הרס), and what I have planted I will pluck up , that is, this whole land.

³⁴⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 516.

³⁴⁵ The verb is variously translated as “throw down” (NKJV), “demolish” (NAB) or “overthrow” (NRSV).

Given that “plant” is set against “pluck up” in these three passages (24:6; 42:10; 45:4) in a consistent pattern relying on nature imagery, it might be expected that “build” would be aligned with “pull down/tear down” (נתַּצ) the other verb of the first pair, which has been shown to connote building imagery.³⁴⁶ However, this is not the case.

In effect, in these passages, הָרַס is treated as counterpart of “build.” Possibly it is seen as a synonym of נָתַץ also translated as “pull down” (1:10 NRSV) or “tear down” (1:10 NAB). הָרַס is part of the second infinitival pair, while נָתַץ is of the first. This is seen in several other OT texts where destroy הָרַס “is used as the opposite of”³⁴⁷ build בָּנָה (Ezek 36:36; Mal 1:4; Ps 28:5; Prov 14:1; Job 12:14).

Interestingly, by using these four terms, a representative of each pair from 1:10 is included:

Table 8: Task verb pair representation in Jer 24:6; 42:10; and 45:5

Pair 1	pluck up נָתַץ	24:6; 42:10; 45:4
Pair 2	throw down הָרַס	24:6; 42:10; 45:4
Pair 3	build בָּנָה and plant נָטַע	24:6; 42:10; 45:4

In these three verses the point-counterpoint is explicit: build/tear down; plant/pluck up. By comparison, 31:38-40 pairs “throw down” (הָרַס 31:40) with “pluck up” (נָתַץ 31:40) in opposition to “build.” It omits “plant.” “Build” appears in an earlier verse within the passage (בָּנָה 31:38) rather than in immediate and direct contrast. In other words, instead of the one-to-one antitheses seen in 24:6; 42:10; and 45:4, both negative verbs are set against “build.”

³⁴⁶ See Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 21; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 235.

³⁴⁷ Munderlein, *TDOT*, vol 3, 462.

Another commonality of these three verses is that “this land” is a consistent theme and place of focus. In the literal sense, this can be seen as Judah (42:10),³⁴⁸ all Israel or even “the whole earth” (45:4).³⁴⁹ It is described as “a place for a redeemed slave people to live in freedom and goodness.”³⁵⁰ This land is the Promised Land, Jerusalem, the land where the Lord led them and where he has resided in the Temple. In the spiritual sense, it is the place where the people are turned to God.

24:1-10 Good and Bad Figs: Turning and “Wholehearted Repentance.” Jeremiah is given a vision of two baskets of figs in the temple. The good ripe figs are compared to the captives who were “carried away...for their own good” to Babylon (24:5). The rotten figs are likened to those who remained in Jerusalem or those who fled to Egypt (24:8-10). Again the task verbs are invoked (24:6). Good figs are returned to the land, built (not pulled down) and planted (not plucked up). Good figs are even given a heart which knows the Lord (24:7). Bad figs will suffer the cursed trifecta of the sword, famine and pestilence and will come to a complete end (תָּמַם *tāmam*) in the land (24:10).

In a literal sense, this vision upends the likely contemporary thought that those who survived in the holy city of Jerusalem were favored by God, while those who were deported were suffering the judgment of divine disfavor.³⁵¹ This reversal of conventional wisdom could be “self-serving propaganda, or...pastoral consolation for displaced people.”³⁵² Carroll notes the polemic may reflect Deuteronomistic elements, including traditional hostility towards Egyptian

³⁴⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 37—52, 132.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.

³⁵⁰ Miller, *NIB*, 758.

³⁵¹ Brueggemann, 209.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 210.

communities.³⁵³ In a spiritual sense, only the good will remain and be built upon. The bad will be eliminated.

Turning with the Whole Heart. In 24:6 those who have suffered deportation will return (שוב) to the land, and the Lord himself will build and plant them with a new heart, one that not only knows Him but returns in whole (24:7). Echoing themes of Deuteronomy and anticipating the New Covenant³⁵⁴ the text declares “They shall be my people and I will be their God” (24:7). Turning (bringing back) precedes building (24:6); building precedes a new heart. The new heart leads to another “return” (24:7), this time with the whole heart. Like the passages of the New Covenant, building and planting is emphasized, the negative verb pairs are no longer active, and the heart is turned and wholly given to the Lord.

Spiritual Sense. McKane notes the spirituality of Yahweh’s sovereignty in 24:6: “It is Yahweh who builds and plants; it is he who performs the work of inner renewal...bestowing on his people a spiritual vitality and heightened moral sensitivity, all of which constitutes a ‘knowledge’ of him.”³⁵⁵ He offers further theological clarification of returning with the whole heart:

“the meaning... is not that Yahweh’s work of rehabilitation is conditional on wholehearted repentance of his people, but rather that this wholehearted repentance is part and parcel of his work of restoration.”³⁵⁶

This observation is consistent with Christian descriptions of the primacy of grace, as well as descriptions of the spiritual journey in which the “work” of spiritual progress is often

³⁵³ Carroll, 486.

³⁵⁴ Holladay, 660.

³⁵⁵ McKane, 609.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 609.

accomplished by the Lord. Nonetheless, progression on the journey requires the free-willed cooperation of the soul in its efforts to grow in closeness to the Lord.

However, McKane objects to the notion that the use of building and planting in *Jeremiah* herald a *Heilsgeschichte* or salvation, asserting that this is the case in only here (24:6) and 42:10, while our other verses of interest, including 31:28; 1:10 and 18:7-10 are concerned with both “salvation and doom and 45:5 only with doom.”³⁵⁷ While this may be true in a literal sense which seeks to anticipate and explain the exile, a spiritual sense of the terms may shift the sense of uprooting from one of doom to one of necessary suffering in the interest of spiritual progress. In the spiritual sense, suffering needs not herald doom, but can lead towards salvation, i.e., looking towards the salvation through Christ on the cross. John of the Cross speaks of the painful experience of dark nights of the soul.³⁵⁸ In turn, build and plant are associated here with a heart that is close to the Lord. The whole heart is turned to and facing God.

The bad figs present a challenging segment of the passage. They are ultimately “destroyed” (NRSV), i.e., in Hebrew *tāmam* (“consumed” (NKJV) or “disappeared” (NAB)). Theologically, the fate of the bad figs is explained as a consequence of their disobedience. In the literal sense the people suffer and die. Despite the talk of hope and the persistent searching of the Lord for his people, the bad figs seem to have come to an end without finding or being saved by the Lord. Spiritually this could imply those people who reject the Lord and are destined for eternal damnation. It can also point to the need for the elimination (or death) of sin in order to allow growth in holiness.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 616.

³⁵⁸ Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within*, 160. Dubay describes the purification process of passive nights as “painful” and a “cutting away, a removal of the roots of spiritual maladies.”

42:1-22 Jeremiah Advises Survivors Not to Migrate. In the wake of the fall of Jerusalem, the assassination of the Babylonian appointed governor, (Gedaliah), and new political uncertainty, Johanan is leading a rescued group towards Egypt to avoid any reprisal by the Babylonians (41:17-18). Johanan and the people “from the least to the greatest” come to Jeremiah and ask him to “pray for us to the Lord *your* God” about “the way in which we should walk and the thing we should do” (42:2-3). Jeremiah agrees to pray, while subtly pointing out that the Lord is their God too (42:4).³⁵⁹ In a recurring theme, the people promise to “obey” (42:6). After waiting ten days for the word of the Lord, Jeremiah conveys a message bearing the building/planting leitmotif (42:10). Hearing the Lord takes time.

Turning. If the people change their plans and stay in the land, God will cause them to return (נָשׁוּ) (42:12) to the land.³⁶⁰ Holladay notes the close similarity of 42:10 with 18:7-8, and observes a correspondence with the “scheme” of turning from evil in 18:8.³⁶¹ “Yahweh will treat them like one of the nations... in 18:1-12.”³⁶² As in other passages, the enabling of the positive pair of the task verb depends on the obedience of the people.³⁶³ Staying “in the land” (42:10) is accompanied by the presence of the Lord: “I am with you” (42:11; see also 1:8, 19; 15:20). Disobedience (going to the land of Egypt) will result in the curses of the sword, famine and pestilence (42:16-17). In the end, “they did not obey” (43:7).

Heart. A connection to the heart is detectable here, although less explicit. For their insincere promise and disobedience, Jeremiah cries out that “you were hypocrites in your hearts”

³⁵⁹ Holladay, 298.

³⁶⁰ See McKane, *Jeremiah* 26-52, 1034-1035 for a discussion of interpreting the Hebrew text as “return” versus “remain.”

³⁶¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 300.

³⁶² Ibid., 300.

³⁶³ See Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 37—52, 132. “...divine grace is still not guaranteed; building and planting are conditional on people remaining in the land.”

(42:20 NKJV). The word for ‘heart’ here is *neṭēš* (נֶפֶשׁ) sometimes translated as soul, rather than the more common לֵב.

Spiritual Sense. In the literal sense, Egypt is often representative of slavery and sin. Spiritually, disobedience involves turning away from the Lord and implies a state of sin. McKane compares the arrangement of verbs at 42:10 to 1:10: “the destructive processes are envisaged as a necessary preparation for rebuilding and new growth” in 1:10, but at 42:10 he asserts that the “constructive and destructive terms are... mutually exclusive.”³⁶⁴ McKane’s observation on 1:10 supports the resonances with the three stages of the spiritual journey. His assertion about 42:10 poses a challenge as to the precision of the resonances. The pattern in 42:10 is that obedience (remaining in the land) leads to both building and planting and the *avoidance* of pulling down and uprooting. The task verbs in 42:10 do not appear to lay out the progressive structure of a spiritual journey; according to this study uprooting and pulling down are precursors for building and planting. It is problematic to explain spiritually the avoidance of purification. One element of an explanation may come through the understanding that the tripartite spiritual journey is not a rigidly linear experience; it is possible to experience all three stages in an overlapping or simultaneous fashion.³⁶⁵ However, while it may hint at a possible explanation, it is not sufficient. Further investigation may provide a more detailed explanation.³⁶⁶

The resonances of the spiritual journey here in 42:10, as well as in *Jeremiah*, are not a precise and detailed blueprint, but rather bear the imprint of a pattern, and possibly offer the

³⁶⁴ McKane, *Jeremiah* 26—52, 1032-1033.

³⁶⁵ Martin, *Fulfillment of All Desire*, 12.

³⁶⁶ A consideration of the spiritual sense in the context of Scripture as a whole may offer a better understanding. It is clear in the OT that obedience to God does not always lead to an avoidance of suffering or purification. Take Job as an example, or Jeremiah himself, who is uprooted and carried to Egypt by Johanan in his disobedience. Nonetheless the text does offer simple polarities such as that of the obedient Rechabites who are rewarded with the honor of “standing before” Yahweh “all the days” (see Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 37—52, 579) while disobedient Judah and Jerusalem are subject to evil and judgement (and later restoration).

beginnings of a typology. The biblical text of *Jeremiah* here (and in other key passages) uses at least one verb from each pair, offering support for three separate stages within Jeremiah's call at 1:10. In a general spiritual sense, it may be said that the Lord uses uprooting and tearing down to eliminate disobedience, or broadly, what is not holy. The Lord builds and plants what is holy.

45:4 A Word of Comfort to Baruch. In verse 45:4, build (בנה) is again paired with 'break down' or 'demolish' (הרס); plant is paired with pluck up. Each pair of the task verbs is represented.

The Baruch passage emphasizes the negative task verbs and is definitive, while the other two passages (24:6 and 42:10) are based on conditional statements and emphasize the positive aspects of building up. In 24:6 and 42:10, the building and planting are in the past, not the future.³⁶⁷ In 45:4, the destruction is imminent. This passage (45:1-5) which appears so late in the canonical arrangement of *Jeremiah* has been dated by a majority of scholars to early in Jeremiah's ministry (605) prior to the destruction foretold by the prophet.³⁶⁸

God is tearing down what he has built. This can be puzzling and problematic. If God builds what is holy, how and why would God tear it down? The answer may lie in the mystery of creation. In *Jeremiah*, God "forms" Jeremiah in the womb just as He "forms" man as an individual in Genesis. In the book of *Jeremiah*, God mostly "builds" a collection of people (e.g., the house of Israel and Judah, nation, kingdom, or other subgroup) and always metaphorically. Although humanity is created by God in his likeness and image this does not ensure holiness. In

³⁶⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 21.

³⁶⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37—52*, 174. For an alternative view see Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 309. Holladay dates the passage no earlier than 600, possibly later than 594.

Jeremiah, Israel “was” holy, but has become idolatrous (2:3-4). The book of *Jeremiah* offers a long list of offenses. God is tearing down what is not holy to the Lord.

Turning and Heart. Turning and heart (לֵב) are not addressed directly in this passage. Interestingly, Baruch is awarded his life (נֶפֶשׁ) using the same Hebrew term for soul or life, and sometimes heart as in 42:20, 32:41 (see also 4:10, 19). If 45:4 is an early demonstration of the task verbs, it raises the question as to whether the other key passages are later theological developments incorporating elements of turning and the heart.

Spiritual Sense. God, as creator and covenant partner, has built up the people. Yet the people have rejected their “husband” (3:20; 31:32) despite having agreed to a covenantal relationship with the Lord. Their free will and actions (obedience or disobedience) have influenced the direction of God’s action toward them. For the people to be God’s people loving Him with the whole heart, everything that is not holy to the Lord must be plucked up and broken down.

12:14-17 Uprooting Judah and its Neighbors In this final key passage, three of the task verbs are used, including one from each pair: pluck up (נָתַשׁ); destroy (אַבַּד); and build (בָּנָה) with a fivefold repetition of “pluck up” (12:14-17). Tear down and plant are omitted.³⁶⁹

This passage does not rely as clearly on the usage of antithetical pairs e.g. uproot/plant or tear down/build, as in the Potter’s Vessel (18:7, 9). Instead the action of plucking up is carried throughout, and the positive counterpart is בָּנָה, translated as “established” (NKJV) but also as “built up”(NRSV, NAB). Despite the emphasis on the plucking up, restoration comes not through

³⁶⁹However, the planting leitmotif is nearby in an antecedent passage where Jeremiah complains to the Lord about the wicked: “you have planted them and they have taken root” (12:2).

the image of planting, but rather that of building (12:16). Obedience to the “ways of My people” will bring building, i.e., establishment for the evil neighbors of Judah. Disobedience leads not only to plucking up, but also to destroying (12:17). Again, as in the Potter’s Vessel, the two negative pairs are represented as is the positive pair, although not as might be expected based on natural and architectural imagery.

The literal translation of 12:17 as rendered by Holladay gives a sense of the emphatic use of plucking up: “But if they do not obey, then I shall uproot that nation, uproot and destroy...”³⁷⁰ This double usage echoes the double usage in 12:14 in which Judah is plucked up from the already plucked-up evil neighbors. By framing the passage with plucking up, the placement serves to highlight the central and “final action”³⁷¹ of the Lord: His return with compassion even to the evil neighbors, and the return of the people to their land and heritage (12:15-16). In this passage, the foreign nations are “potential covenant partners” for Yahweh.³⁷²

It is curious that as evil neighbors are plucked up, Judah is plucked out from the midst of them. While the effect on the neighbors seems negative, the effect on Judah is unclear here, and possibly positive or even salvific. Scholars argue over the precise meaning³⁷³. Brueggemann sees it as a “surprising”³⁷⁴ use, contrary to the typically negative implications of the verb in which plucking up is “displacing peoples who are disobedient.”³⁷⁵ Yet, as a mark of Yahweh’s sovereignty, the usage of pluck up here is that of “rescue and homecoming” (cf. Amos 4:11).³⁷⁶ McKane considers uprooting to mean “exiling” and sees the uprooting of Judah as an indication

³⁷⁰ Holladay, 390.

³⁷¹ Brueggemann, 118-119.

³⁷² Ibid., 119.

³⁷³ For a discussion of scholarly positions, see McKane, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 279-284.

³⁷⁴ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 119.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 118.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 119.

of the necessary and effective separation of the Jews from the corrupting influence of surrounding Gentile neighbors.³⁷⁷ Carroll notes that the focus on Judah “hardly make sense in this context”³⁷⁸ since both the nations and Judah have been plucked up, i.e., lost “normal living conditions” and both will be restored through Yahweh’s compassion. Lundbom sees it as “Judah’s deliverance from the nations to which she has been exiled.”³⁷⁹

For the nations, their continued success depends on conforming to Judean religious standards.³⁸⁰ Nonetheless Yahweh’s compassion applies not only to Judah, but “astonishingly”³⁸¹ to all nations that obey. As in the potter’s vessel (18:7-10) and the New Covenant, this passage demonstrates “powerful”³⁸² universality: the Lord’s actions of plucking up, building and planting can apply to his chosen people and to nations beyond them. The Lord brings “everyone” (12:15) back to his heritage and land. The nations are to be “invited in and judged by the standard covenantal norms.”³⁸³ Theologically, God is not tied only to Israel, but seeking every nation “with a readiness for obedience.”³⁸⁴ From a spiritual perspective, the inclusivity fits with the Christian understanding of God.

Turning. After He plucks up the nations, the Lord promises to return (שׁוּב) them to their own “heritage” and land. (12:15). Here the 1:10 leitmotif and turning are clearly linked. Carroll describes the literal sense of this unit as a “practical application of the general principles about turning (שׁוּב) in 18:7-10. If a nation responds to the divine will, it will survive and be able to

³⁷⁷ McKane, 284.

³⁷⁸ Carroll, 292.

³⁷⁹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 662.

³⁸⁰ Carroll, 292.

³⁸¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 391.

³⁸² Miller, *NIB*, 680.

³⁸³ Brueggemann, 120.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

maintain a thriving existence in the land..., but if it refuses to obey Yahweh, it will be plucked up....”³⁸⁵

Heart. No reference to the heart is within the unit 12:14-17; however, there are two adjacent: preceding and following. In the preceding unit, linked to 12:14-17 by the term “heritage,”³⁸⁶ Jeremiah’s heart is tested and known by the Lord (12:3), but the rulers (shepherds) have let the “whole land” become a desolate wilderness; no one has taken it “to heart” (12:10-11).

In the pericope that follows 12:14-17, the people who refuse to hear the Lord’s word, and “follow the dictates of their evil hearts” (13:10) are just like Jeremiah’s ruined linen sash—good for nothing. Both units (12:14-17; 13:1-12) are also connected by “catchwords” about not hearing.³⁸⁷

Spiritual Sense. Plucking up is generally a negative action in this and other key passages. Interestingly, in this passage it is also used in what seems to be a positive sense for Judah, when it is separated from (saved from?) corrupt neighbors (12:14) who taught them to “swear by Baal.” In the spiritual sense, this separation from a source of sin may indicate the Lord’s wish to detach us from our attachment to sins. Obedience to the Lord’s way leads to both Judah and neighbor being “established,” i.e., “built” (בנה).

If the restoration offered by the Lord in 12:17 is met with disobedience, the result is yet more discipline -- not only “plucking up,” but also “destroying” (12:17). Note that both pairs of the negative task verbs are represented. In the spiritual journey, two stages are required to

³⁸⁵ Carroll, 292.

³⁸⁶ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 651.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 661. In 12:17, the phrase “But if they will not hear” is aligned with 13:11 “but they did not hear.”

eliminate sin. This supports the thesis that each pair is intentionally represented throughout the key passages.

In 12:14-17 what is somewhat problematic is that “not hearing” leads to not only plucking up, but also destroying, which Lundbom sees in the literal sense as “destroyed, for good.”³⁸⁸ In the spiritual journey, the stages of progression move from purgation of sin toward a “illumination,” a stage of deeper purification and holiness which eliminates the roots of sin. In the literal sense disobedience at 12:17 seems to indicate sin that persists or develops after the Lord brings the people back. This leads to both plucking up and destroying. In the spiritual sense, the argument is that the negative task verbs eliminate sin and by doing so move a soul towards holiness and oneness with God. How can the literal sense of sin through disobedience be aligned with deeper stages of spirituality that are suggested by the task verbs? This is difficult to reconcile. A more focused exegesis may offer insight. This doubly negative action appears after turning, i.e., repentance at 12:17. Might the answer be found in a need for continual repentance? Or does it suggest a harsher judgment after turning and then refusing to learn the ways of the Lord?

The Christian spiritual journey is an iterative process in which the soul does not proceed along a straight path toward unity with God and his will. It is more like a spiral in which the soul circles closer and closer to its goal, i.e., attempting to decrease its distance to God. Along the way, there can be failure (sins) that slow or reverse the progress. A soul in grave sin requires restoration through the sacraments. In *Jeremiah*, disobedience is in the context of the Torah and the ‘words’ of Yahweh, spoken through Jeremiah. The text points to “that nation” (12:17) being

³⁸⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 664.

plucked up and destroyed. In the spiritual sense, the ‘disobedience’ may be the target of the negative task verbs, not particular individuals or groups of people. The New Covenant with Israel declares that the Lord will put torah in minds and hearts. All will “know” the Lord (31:33). The text foresees a shift from corporate responsibility (31:29) and relationship (31:34) to the individual (31:30, 34).

Turning is a critical element. In the literal and spiritual sense, it is repentance. In 12:14-17, Yahweh plucks up, then turns back to the people with compassion, and causes them to return as well. Biblically, turning can be an opportunity to avoid a physically destructive event. It can be a willing action of the people (as in 18:8) or a merciful act of the Lord “causing them to return” (as in 12:15 using the Hebrew hiphil verb tense). It seems that the Lord can cause “turning” i.e., repentance, through uprooting or destroying.

In the modern Christian spiritual sense, we are called to repentance every day. The dynamic nature of a relationship with the Lord requires a joint effort of both the individual and the Lord to advance a spiritual state. If one learns the ways of God (12:16), the God who formed, will continue to build.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of passages relying on verbs from 1:10, the following observations can be made:

- *Pattern of Pair Representation.* One verb from each pair is used in each key passage. If this is deliberate, then each pair of 1:10 task verbs may be recognized as needing representation throughout the text and may carry significance. This study suggests it may offer a typology of the spiritual journey.

- *Alignment through Meaning of Terms.* The negative task verbs are generally associated with disobedience or sinful behavior, and definitionally, seem to increase in movement, completeness and intensity from the first to second pair. Interestingly, in one instance, “pluck up” can be seen in light of salvation (12:14) rather than judgement and destruction. Building and planting occur when the people are turned to the Lord, not following their evil hearts. “Build” and “plant” are associated with closeness of the heart with the Lord.
- *Pattern of Usage of Negative Terms.* “Pluck up” (נחש) and “build” (בנה) are used in every key passage. The task verb from the middle pair alternates between “destroy” (אבד) and “demolish” (הרס). The table below summarizes the usage of task verbs across passages.

Table 9: Usage of 1:10 task verbs by pair in key passages in *Jeremiah*

Verse(s)	Pair 1		Pair 2		Pair 3	
	To pluck up/uproot (נחש)	To pull down/tear down (נתץ)	To destroy (אבד)	To throw down/ overthrow/ demolish (הרס)	To build (בנה)	To plant (נטע)
1:10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12:14-17	✓		✓		✓	
18:7-10	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
24:6	✓			✓	✓	
31:28	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31:38-40	✓			✓	✓	
42:10	✓			✓	✓	✓
45:4	✓			✓	✓	

- The use of opposites would naturally pair “pluck up” (נחש) with “plant” (נטע) and “pull down” (נתץ) with “build” (בנה). These pairs also demonstrate a “pleasing assonance.”³⁸⁹ Yet, “build” בנה is paired more often with “demolish” (הרס from the second pair) than with the more expected “pull down” (נתץ from the first pair). While it may be the case

³⁸⁹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 21.

that הָרַס is simply a synonymous negative task verb, the pattern of use across the key passages is curious.

- In 24:6; 42:10; and 45:4, the point-counterpoint of the task verbs is explicit. Each uses “pluck up” נָתַשׁ, “throw down” הָרַס and “build” בָּנָה. In 12:14-17 and 18:7 הָרַס is omitted and אָבַד is used instead. Like 31:40, the point-counterpoint of 18:7 is not explicit.
- Verse 31:28 uses all six task verbs and adds another negative term, muddling the presentation of pairs and/or opposites.
- The key passage 12:14-17 emphasizes “pluck up” נָתַשׁ while also incorporating “destroy” אָבַד rather than הָרַס. The tension is primarily between “pluck up” נָתַשׁ and “build” בָּנָה, not a natural pairing.
- Plant (נֶטֶעַ) is usually paired with its expected counterpart pluck up (נִתְּעַ).
- It is possible that this ‘mis-pairing’ of verbs reflects an editorial range of literary description. However, resonances with the spiritual journey as well as connections to terms of turning (repentance) and the heart, and consistent representation of each pair suggests an intentional placement. This supports the proposal that the task verbs offer a typology of three phases of development in the dedication of the whole heart to the Lord.
- *Relevance to the New Covenant.* Verbs from 1:10 are used in passages that frame the New Covenant (31:28; 31:38-40).
 - In the New Covenant, the emphasis is on the positive verbs, rather than the negative, despite the repetition of all six 1:10 verbs. However, an “extra” negative verb is added; and the order of destroy and demolish is reversed when compared to 1:10. The reasons are unclear but may be due to editorial redaction (a “rolling corpus” as McKane describes

it) or may be deliberate word choice, possibly reflecting the devastation experienced during the exile experience.

- Both mentions of God working in the heart (bestowing a new heart in 24:7; writing his law on the heart 31:33) appear in proximity to the use of 1:10 task verbs.
- *Association with Turning.* Apart from 45:4, turning is an element in each of the key passages. Turning can work to move the people to the Lord or away from the Lord. In some cases, the Lord himself causes the turning. Turning plays a significant role in whether the heart is close to the Lord. The direction of turning is key to the Lord's action for uprooting or building.

The fourfold negativity of the first two pairs (alongside the literal events of the exile) means that, understandably, the destructive nature of Jeremiah's mission is emphasized and amplified in exegetical commentaries. However, if the spiritual foundation of the 1:10 leitmotif can be seen as the desire for whole-hearted turning to God, then uprooting...throwing down leads to building and planting as the people of God. From this perspective, the positive aspects of the prophetic mission, including its spiritual purpose, come into sharper focus.

Calling the people to turning away from sin is a common mission of the prophets, and one with particular emphasis and urgency in *Jeremiah*. Repentance implies "genuine sorrow" often followed by a change in action, i.e., an act of penance such as fasting, tearing garments, weeping, wearing sackcloth and ashes, or an outright confession of guilt.³⁹⁰ In *Jeremiah*, the Lord calls the people repeatedly, noting that not only have they sinned (not obeyed his voice) they refuse to "acknowledge" it. In Abraham Heschel's words "Indeed, every prediction of

³⁹⁰ Hahn, "Repentance" in *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 763.

disaster is in itself an exhortation to repentance.”³⁹¹ Repentance or turning to God is the way to be saved: “Guilt is not an abyss.”³⁹² The Lord’s anger is not eternal, nor is it self-indulgent. The anger of the Lord is “instrumental” for the purpose of stimulating repentance.³⁹³ A demonstrable change of heart may move the Lord. He may relent of punishment and judgment (18:7-9).

The reward for true repentance, i.e., a true change of heart, is divine blessing, joy, happiness, salvation and deliverance.³⁹⁴ The people’s sin comes from their “evil hearts” (7:24). Biblically, the heart is often seen as the source and center of prayer, as well as the place of “decision,” “truth,” “encounter” and “covenant.”³⁹⁵ To be purified, hearts must be cleansed³⁹⁶ or even circumcised³⁹⁷. In *Jeremiah*, the Lord tests and searches the heart (12:3; 17:10). The heart of the people is wicked (4:14), defiant, rebellious (5:23), evil (11:8, et. al.) and deceitful (17:9). Through metaphors of “handicapped organs of perception,” such as uncircumcised ears that cannot hear, and eyes that cannot see (5:21), the “failure to listen” ends with “damage of the heart, a central intellectual volitional and emotional organ in the Bible.”³⁹⁸

Immediately after receiving his mission to “pluck up” ... “plant,” Jeremiah receives a vision of the branch of an almond tree (1:11). Like Amos 8:1,2, this prophecy works on the basis of a word pun between almond and watching (שָׁקֵד *šāqēd*, “almond”/שָׁקַד *šāqad* “watching”³⁹⁹). The connection between the two words may be more than merely homophonic. The almond tree

³⁹¹ Heschel, *The Prophets*, 14.

³⁹² Ibid., 237.

³⁹³ Ibid., 367.

³⁹⁴ Hahn, *CBD*, 763.

³⁹⁵ CCC 2562-3.

³⁹⁶ “O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved” (4:14; see also 3:17; 7:24; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17).

³⁹⁷ “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts...” (4:4)

³⁹⁸ Wojciech Pikor, “A Prophet as a Witness to His Call: A Narrative Key to the Reading of the Prophetic Call Narratives,” in *Scripta Theologica*, Vol 52, 2020, 90.

³⁹⁹ Allen, 29.

is sometimes described as “wakeful” or a “watchful branch”⁴⁰⁰ because it blossoms earlier than most trees and “watches” for the spring.⁴⁰¹ Using the Hebrew play on words the Lord tells Jeremiah that He is watching over his word to perform it (1:12).⁴⁰² “Watching” over the blossoming of an almond branch can be ominous⁴⁰³: it is like a leopard stalking the inhabitants of city (5:6) and the Lord watches Judeans in Egypt (i.e., those outside the holy land who seem to have returned to pagan ways) for “adversity and not for good”(44:27).⁴⁰⁴ Sin has consequences. But “watching” also has a positive feature. Immediately prior to the New Covenant (31:27-28), the Lord watches not only for plucking up and tearing down, but reassuringly, he watches to build and to plant (31:28). In the Book of Comfort, “watching” leads to restoration.

To be a true prophet, Jeremiah must fulfill the criteria of one, namely, faithfulness to Moses and effectiveness of the word (Deut 13:1-3; Deut 18:15, 18, 19). Jeremiah, the prophet and the book seek to establish him in this light.

Exegetes largely agree that in Jeremiah’s call (1:12) Yahweh is indicating the inevitable fulfillment⁴⁰⁵ of the “divine word(s).”⁴⁰⁶ Yet, how does Jeremiah’s prophetic mission anticipate and facilitate how the word will be “actualized”⁴⁰⁷ and from a spiritual sense, internalized? In

⁴⁰⁰ McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 14.

⁴⁰¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 37.

⁴⁰² The question arises as to the definition of “word” or “words.” The precise definition is not explicitly clear. In one recent study, the word of the Lord is described as “the book’s protagonist” (see Andrew Shead, *A Mouthful of Fire: the Word of God in the Words of Jeremiah*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 29, edited by D.A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 38) and “an instrument for the breaking and building of nations.” (Shead, 265.) Holladay broadly defines Yahweh’s word as not only those spoken through Jeremiah, but also those from the prophets and even on the Deuteronomistic Scroll (Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 38). However, the word that Yahweh watches over may simply be Yahweh’s “communications” through Jeremiah (Allen, 29). Brueggemann implies that the word indicates Yahweh’s purpose, i.e., that of rooting up and tearing down, building and planting (Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 26).

⁴⁰³ cf. Num 17:8; Glazov, 200.

⁴⁰⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 304; Carroll, 742.

⁴⁰⁵ Carroll, 103-4; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 37-38; McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 14; Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 26; Nicholson, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 26; Bright, 5.

⁴⁰⁶ Carroll, 103.

⁴⁰⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 38.

the literal sense, Yahweh's word clarifies the consequences of breaking the covenant, i.e., the exile: the houses of Israel and Judah are plucked up, the Temple destroyed and then the exiles rebuild in Babylon. In the spiritual and moral sense, the word is encountered by the true prophet as a joyful heart (15:16). Jeremiah himself is faithful to the word⁴⁰⁸ False "self-serving,"⁴⁰⁹ prophets "of the deceit of their own heart" (23:26) will experience the word "like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces." (23:29). If the word of God is rejected, it becomes to the listener a word of destruction and death instead of a word of transformation and life.⁴¹⁰ Israel and Judah's heart is unable to receive or keep the word of God. The people have "hewn themselves ... broken cisterns that can hold no water" while also forsaking He who is the "fountain of living water" (2:13).

Like the almond blossom in 1:12, the Lord may be watching for the awakening of his word in the hearts of His people. A successful "journey" of the word of God, is "through a human speaker and into a receptive listener."⁴¹¹ Yet in the time of *Jeremiah*, "The word of God, an irresistible force, has come up against incurably deaf listeners..."⁴¹² This does not lessen the effectiveness of the word; it does "precisely" as it says, including uproot, tear down, destroy, throw down, build and plant. "The crucial dissonance between the power of the word to judge and the intention of the word to turn the nation back to God"⁴¹³ is in stark relief.

The uproot...plant leitmotif in Jeremiah's call seems to anticipate a Spirit-filled relationship with the Lord, one which will depend on both grace and the cooperation of both

⁴⁰⁸ Boadt, 377.

⁴⁰⁹ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 206.

⁴¹⁰ Shead, 181.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 180.

⁴¹² Ibid., 180.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 181.

parties. For the whole heart to return, anything that is not the word of God must be removed, i.e., uprooted. Ultimately the Lord steps in with a new heart with which the people will “know” the Lord and return to Him with their whole heart. In a literal sense, certain words of Jeremiah (11:8)⁴¹⁴ can be seen as a Deuteronomistic explanation for the destruction of Jerusalem: the word was proclaimed and rejected.⁴¹⁵ Yet a spiritual sense will not be suppressed. While literally, Israel, Judah, nations and kingdoms will be gathered again (32:37; 12:15-16), spiritually the Lord will rejoice over them, and plant them with all His heart and soul (32:41). The Lord can cleanse and transform the heart (Jer 4:4; 24:7; 31:33, 34; 32:39). The heart is where we encounter the Lord.⁴¹⁶ Yet the transformation may not be an instantaneous event but rather a process of growth over various stages. The use of the task verbs alongside the themes of turning and the heart offer a glimpse into the difficulties of the process while demonstrating resonances with the spiritual journey. The context of the task verbs in the key passages helps to explain how these terms apply to humanity, why the Lord who wants to be one with His people (Israel, Judah and beyond) uproots, destroys or builds a people.

⁴¹⁴ The people “did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart; therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant.” (Jer 11:8)

⁴¹⁵ Carroll, 269.

⁴¹⁶ CCC 2562-3.

Chapter 4

PAUL'S USE OF JEREMIAH

Echoes, Allusions and Touchpoints

In the Pauline literature, multiple references to themes and verses from the book of *Jeremiah* point to Paul's familiarity and awareness of the text. Paul describes himself as a minister of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:6; Jer 31:31); he also uses "new covenant" to describe Jesus' offering of the cup at the Last Supper (1 Cor 11:25). He describes his own calling in terms that recall Jeremiah's call narrative: he is "set apart" (NRSV) from before birth to preach to the Gentiles (Gal 1:15-16; Jer 1:5).⁴¹⁷ Similar to Jeremiah's objection regarding his own speaking ability, itself an allusion to Moses's objections in this sphere (Jer 1:6), Paul describes himself as "untrained in speech" (2 Cor 11:6). In his rejection of false apostles and false doctrine, "Paul uses words from Jeremiah to claim God's authority as a true apostle."⁴¹⁸ Paul echoes Jeremiah's themes on circumcision of the heart,⁴¹⁹ boasting,⁴²⁰ false peace,⁴²¹ and marriage.⁴²² He incorporates imagery of the potter and the clay.⁴²³ "In his work on Rom 2, Timothy Berkley argues that the key texts lying behind Paul's exegesis are Jer 7:9-11; 9:23-24; and Ezek 36:16-17

⁴¹⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 95; see also Lalleman, 98.

⁴¹⁸ Hetty Lalleman, "Paul's Self-Understanding in the Light of Jeremiah: A Case Study into the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament" in *A God of Faithfulness: Essays in Honour of J. Gordon McConville on his 60th Birthday*, eds. Jamie A. Grant, Alison Lo, Gordon J. Wenham (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 111.

⁴¹⁹ Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989), 44-45.

⁴²⁰ Lalleman, 98.

⁴²¹ Jeremy Punt, "Paul and Postcolonial Hermeneutics: Marginality and/in Early Biblical Interpretation" in *As It Is Written: Studying Paul's Use of Scripture*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Christopher D. Stanley, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 270.

⁴²² Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 1—20, 756.

⁴²³ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 95. Hays, 65.

and that the explicit quotations in Romans are simply summary texts.”⁴²⁴ Additional parallels include the great suffering of both Paul and Jeremiah; both were “unmarried God-sent messenger(s) from the tribe of Benjamin,” (Jer 1:1; 32:8; Phil 3:5) and both carried a “message of ‘tearing down and building up.’”⁴²⁵

These points of intersection between the two do not preclude the influence of other prophets, particularly Moses, Isaiah or Ezekiel on Paul’s writings. Scholars continue to debate influences upon each text.⁴²⁶ Paul’s references to *Jeremiah* are often more conceptual than quotation. Paul’s terminology, including his echoes and allusions, are often not precise textual adaptations, but rather conceptual paraphrasing and sometimes melded ideas from multiple sources.⁴²⁷ Hays describes Paul’s use of scriptural metaphors as an “intertextual matrix.”⁴²⁸

For the purposes of this study, it is important to recognize *Jeremiah* as a significant influence on Paul’s writings as we seek to understand further the transmission of the task verbs of Jer 1:10 and their possible role in the evolution of understanding of the spiritual journey as ultimately described by the Carmelites. Also, it must be noted that this analysis is solely focused on the letters of Paul which scholars agree are written by him.⁴²⁹ It also does not include Luke’s portrayal of Paul in Acts. While Acts would be expected to reinforce the findings of this study, space constraints preclude its inclusion.

⁴²⁴ Timothy W. Berkley, *From a Broken Covenant to Circumcision of the Heart: Pauline Intertextual Exegesis in Romans 2:17-29* (SBLDS 175; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 139-40 cited in Steve Moyise, “Quotations” in *As It Is Written: Studying Paul’s Use of Scripture*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Christopher D. Stanley, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 16.

⁴²⁵ Lalleman, 111.

⁴²⁶ See Lalleman, 98-99.

⁴²⁷ B.J. Oropeza, “New Covenant Knowledge in an Earthenware Jar: Intertextual Reconfigurations of Jeremiah in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, 3:2-11, and 4:7” in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* v. 28, no. 3, 2018 (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2019), 406; Hays, x-xi.

⁴²⁸ Hays, n64, 206.

⁴²⁹ This analysis excludes Hebrews and other canonical writings which may or may not be attributed to Paul, although in certain cases references to these writings will be noted.

Table 10: Selected touchpoints of *Jeremiah* in Pauline literature

Theme	Verses in Jeremiah	Verses in Paul's letters	Commentator
Jeremiah's call ("set apart before I was born")	Jer 1:5	Gal 1:15	Holladay ⁴³⁰ Lalleman ⁴³¹ Other scholars ⁴³²
"true apostle, sent by God" ⁴³³ to the nations	Jer 1:5	Gal 1:15-16	Lalleman ⁴³⁴
untrained in speaking	Jer 1:6	2 Cor 11:6	Lalleman ⁴³⁵
sent "to the nations"	Jer 1:10	Rom 3:29-30	Chae in Lalleman ⁴³⁶
building and tearing down	Jer 1:10	2 Cor 10:8 2 Cor 10:17; 2 Cor 13	Lalleman ⁴³⁷ Oropeza ⁴³⁸ Punt ⁴³⁹
circumcision of the heart	Jer 4:4; 9:26	Rom 2:28-29	Hays ⁴⁴⁰
false apostles in Paul are like the false prophets in Jeremiah who did not deal with "sin and injustice"	Jer 6:13- 14; 23:9- 32	2 Cor 10--13	Lalleman ⁴⁴¹
false peace	Jer 6:14	1 Thess 5:2-3	Punt ⁴⁴²
boasting	Jer 9:22- 23	1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17	Holladay ⁴⁴³ Punt ⁴⁴⁴ Lalleman ⁴⁴⁵
marriage	Jer 16:2	1 Cor 7:25-31	Lundbom ⁴⁴⁶

⁴³⁰ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 95.

⁴³¹ Lalleman, 98. Lalleman notes that Moises Silva also cites this link in M. Silva, "Galatians," in G.K. Beale, and D. A. Carson (eds.) *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007, 786-87).

⁴³² Lalleman, 104-105. Lalleman offers a brief discussion, noting on other scholars who cite this allusion, and those who believe the reference is primarily to Isaiah 49. She argues convincingly that Paul may have had both Jeremiah and Isaiah in mind.

⁴³³ Ibid., 102.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 102-106.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 111.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 105.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 106-107. Lalleman cites C.K. Barrett, M.E. Thrall, Hafemann.

⁴³⁸ B.J. Oropeza, "New Covenant Knowledge in an Earthenware Jar: Intertextual Reconfigurations of Jeremiah in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, 3:2-11, and 4:7," 408.

⁴³⁹ Punt, 287.

⁴⁴⁰ Hays, 44-45. In citing the echo to Jeremiah, the language of Romans is not exclusively depending on Jeremiah, but also on Deut. 10:16; 30:6). As Hays notes, "the images that inform Paul's radical position allude to scriptural passages so familiar that he need not cite them explicitly."

⁴⁴¹ Lalleman, 108.

⁴⁴² Punt, 270.

⁴⁴³ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 95.

⁴⁴⁴ Punt, 284, 287.

⁴⁴⁵ Lalleman, 98, 109, 110.

⁴⁴⁶ Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 1—20, 756

Table 10: Selected touchpoints of *Jeremiah* in Pauline literature

Theme	Verses in Jeremiah	Verses in Paul's letters	Commentator
potter and clay	Jer 18:6-10	Rom 9:19-21	Holladay ⁴⁴⁷
potter and clay	Jer 18:3-6	Rom 9:20-23	Hays ⁴⁴⁸
New Covenant	Jer 31:31-34	1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:5-6 [Heb 8:8-12; 10:16-17]	Holladay ⁴⁴⁹ Hays ⁴⁵⁰ Lundbom ⁴⁵¹ Lalleman ⁴⁵² Montague ⁴⁵³
New Covenant	Jer 31:31-34	Rom 11:25-32	Lundbom ⁴⁵⁴
New Covenant	Jer 31:33	Rom 2:15; 2 Cor 3:1-3, 6	Hays ⁴⁵⁵ Lundbom ⁴⁵⁶

Source: Data adapted from scholars as listed by footnote: Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*; Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*; Lalleman, "Paul's Self-Understanding in the Light of Jeremiah"; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1--20, Jeremiah 21--36*; Montague, *First Corinthians*; Oropeza, "New Covenant Knowledge in an Earthenware Jar"; Punt, "Paul and Postcolonial Hermeneutics."

Most relevant to this study is Paul's awareness of Jeremiah's call narrative, which implies that Paul conceived of himself as being set apart to be sent to the nations like Jeremiah, and that his awareness extended to Jeremiah's mission of building and planting. As Lalleman observes, "The terminology of 'building up and not tearing down' is obviously an allusion to verses from *Jeremiah*, as several commentators have noted."⁴⁵⁷ The usage of these terms in Pauline literature

⁴⁴⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 95. Holladay cites a link between Rom 9:19-21 and Jer 18:6-10. This does not exclude an allusion to Isa 45:9 which also uses the potter/clay imagery.

⁴⁴⁸ Hays, 65. Hays cites a link as between Rom 9:20-23 and Jer 18:3-6

⁴⁴⁹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 94.

⁴⁵⁰ Hays, 127.

⁴⁵¹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21--36*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 475, 477, 478.

⁴⁵² Lalleman, 97-98, 109.

⁴⁵³ George T. Montague, *First Corinthians*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 197.

⁴⁵⁴ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21--36*, 477. Lundbom is cautious here, noting that the phrasing could also be related to Is 27:9.

⁴⁵⁵ Hays, 45, 127-132. See also the discussion on pp 128-129. Hays also notes that "Paul's allusions gather and meld the prophetic images of Jer 38:33 [LXX; 31:33 MT] (God will write on the heart) and Ezek 36:26 (fleshy hearts replace stone)." 129.

⁴⁵⁶ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21--36*, 476.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 107. Lalleman cites C.K. Barrett, M.E. Thrall, Scott Hafemann, see n32.

will be considered in more detail below, but first it is necessary to establish an overview of Paul's approach to spirituality.

Paul and the Interior Life

Paul sees the Christian life as a mystery of participation in the life of Christ.⁴⁵⁸ The death and resurrection of Christ have brought a “new life of the Spirit” (Rom 7:6), that was not possible under the Law. As Paul says “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23) and sin brings death (Rom 5:12; 6:23). “God accomplished through Christ and the Spirit what the law could not do: destroy the power of sin and fulfill the law in the Spirit.”⁴⁵⁹ The Spirit “enables” believers to do the will of God and conform their lives to Christ. It also shapes believers into a community, i.e., the church. Believers receive “God’s love...poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5).⁴⁶⁰

Justification by Participation and Transformation⁴⁶¹ in Faith. This gratuitous and gracious gift of the Spirit, through Christ, leads to salvation, through faith.⁴⁶² Faith is used by Paul in opposition to ‘works’; man cannot merit his own salvation through charity or obedience to the law. For Paul, grace is offered freely and abundantly by God; for a person to be justified (i.e., made righteous), grace must be accepted. In other words, a human response to divine initiative – faith – is needed; man is justified by faith.⁴⁶³ Faith is not blind belief, but rather an

⁴⁵⁸ E.P. Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters and Thought*, 1517 Media, 2015. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt155j31c>. Accessed 26 Aug. 2022, 709; Fitzmyer, NJBC, 789; Gorman, 140-141.

⁴⁵⁹ John F. O'Grady, *Pillars of Paul's Gospel* (New York: NPaulist Press, 1992), 108.

⁴⁶⁰ Neil Ormerod, *Creation, Grace and Redemption* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 109.

⁴⁶¹ Michael Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul & His Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 141.

⁴⁶² O'Grady, 27.

⁴⁶³ Gorman, 124.

active response of belief and trust⁴⁶⁴ to the “kaleidoscope of grace” offered by God.⁴⁶⁵ For Paul, Baptism is the act of faith through which one enters into Christ.⁴⁶⁶ Baptism replaces circumcision of the heart and “accomplishes what circumcision could not.”⁴⁶⁷ The Israelites tried to “merit” grace through obedience to the law but failed: righteousness through the law became “self-centered”⁴⁶⁸ rather than love-centered or Christ-centered. In contrast, faith is utter reliance on God; it is “self-knowledge and self-abandonment.”⁴⁶⁹ Salvation by faith comes through participation “in Christ,” i.e., “a life of *mutual indwelling*, or reciprocal residence: Christ and the Spirit of God living in and among believers, and believers living in Christ and the Spirit.”⁴⁷⁰ This experience of faith is “transformative” with “habits and practices that both express and enable that transformation.”⁴⁷¹ Change involves not only believing the gospel, but “becoming” it.⁴⁷² “Christian perfection consists in the full development of the sanctifying grace received at baptism as a seed.”⁴⁷³

This gospel is a “mystery” or *mysterion*, not in the sense of an exclusive secret, but rather, in the sense that full understanding is not possible in this life. *Mysterion* connotes “understanding which invites, envelops, entices [and] calls for ever deeper involvement.”⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 148.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 134. Gorman lists the available “benefits” of grace to include: justification, reconciliation, peace, forgiveness, redemption, freedom, new life, incorporation into the people of God, the gift of the Spirit, certainty of God’s love, sanctification, deliverance from wrath, salvation, bodily resurrection and eternal life, and glorification., 134-136. See also W.D. Davies, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 324.

⁴⁶⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 139.

⁴⁶⁷ Gorman, 560-561.

⁴⁶⁸ O’Grady, 117. See also 106.

⁴⁶⁹ W.D. Davies, “The Great Pauline Metaphors” in *Invitation to the New Testament: A Guide to Its Main Witnesses* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993 repr.), 325-326.

⁴⁷⁰ Gorman, 140-141.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 140-141.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 141.

⁴⁷³ Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 133.

⁴⁷⁴ O’Grady, 39.

Paul's usage implies being drawn into relationship and communion with God⁴⁷⁵ and growth in faith, hope and love.⁴⁷⁶ These connotations are consistent with the concept of a spiritual journey, if not yet specific enough to discern a structure like that taught by the Carmelites.

Paul's Use of Metaphors. To explain the gospel mystery, Paul relies on a variety of metaphorical models, often grounded in the Hebrew Scriptures⁴⁷⁷ such as Creation, Exodus, The Sacrificial System and the Law. For example, invoking Genesis and the creation narrative, Paul asserts that Jesus Christ is the new Adam (Rom 5); the work of Jesus as Messiah is described as a kind of new Exodus (1 Cor 10:1-11).⁴⁷⁸ In other cases, he relies on the experience of Christ, such as his likening of baptism to crucifying the old self and being resurrected to new life. The theological conception of interior growth and renewal is expressed in metaphors, such as:

- *Growth and maturation from childhood to adulthood:* Paul references spiritual childhood (1 Cor 3:1-3; 13:11; 2 Cor 6:13, 12:14; Eph 4:13-15, 22-24; 1 Thess 2:7; see also Heb 5:12-13) and characterizes it as “of the flesh” and able to receive only “milk” rather than the solid food of the mature (1 Cor 3:1-3).
- *New creation:* He notes that one becomes a “new creation” in Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). He also describes God, who brought light out of darkness, as causing his light to shine in us (2 Cor 4:6). Paul also notes that while the “outward man,” i.e., our physical body, is perishing, the “inward man is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor 4:16).

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁷⁷ Davies, 310. Davies classifies the metaphors as belonging to one of four realms: Exodus, Creation, The Sacrificial System, The Law.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 311.

- *Clothing*: Paul talks about transformation in terms of putting off the old self and putting on Christ (Eph 4:22-24)
- *Temple imagery*: the Spirit shapes believers into a community “marked by God’s presence, like a temple (1 Cor 3:16).”⁴⁷⁹ Furthermore Paul spiritualizes the temple theology “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are” (1 Cor. 3:16-17 RSV).

These examples demonstrate Paul’s spiritualization of common themes. Although Paul’s conveyance of the development of the spiritual life is not a clear theological treatise, but rather is unpacked from multiple epistles directed to various communities, it seems that Paul understood spiritual development as an on-going process, not a lightning strike of change as might be inferred from the New Covenant as described by Jeremiah, or indeed from his own radical conversion experience.

Comparing the Spiritual Journey and Paul’s Metaphor for Growth and Maturation. In order to paint a broad picture of Paul’s teaching and establish that it demonstrates certain consistencies with the teaching of the Carmelites⁴⁸⁰ let us briefly consider the alignment of the metaphor of spiritual growth (that of a child maturing into an adult) with the spiritual journey described by the Carmelites. The starting point of spiritual childhood begins with the “flesh.” These “infants in Christ” (1 Cor 3:1) are jealous, quarrel among themselves and “walk according to man.”⁴⁸¹ They are unsure in their faith, “tossed to and fro... with every wind of doctrine, by

⁴⁷⁹ Gorman, 152.

⁴⁸⁰ While contradictions and misalignment may certainly be found in a detailed review, for the purposes of this paper in tracing the development of the task verbs of Jer 1:10, a broad overview of the spiritual growth journey is sufficient.

⁴⁸¹ NKJV 1 Cor 3:3, note a

the trickery of men” (Eph 4:14). Spiritual children are focused on the self. Similarities can be found in the purgative phase: while awakening to God, a soul relies on itself rather than God, is often careless about sin, inattentive to the graces of God, and anxious to avoid suffering.⁴⁸² Teresa of Avila cites the Pauline epistle 2 Tim 4:3-4 as an example of the inclination towards selfishness early in the spiritual journey.⁴⁸³ John of the Cross refers to 2 Cor 6:10-11 to describe a soul’s attachment to earthly things that must be purged in order to free the heart for, ultimately, union with God.⁴⁸⁴ As it progresses, the soul begins to rein in and control the sensitive passions or concupiscence as well as gain knowledge of the self⁴⁸⁵ in the light of God.

By contrast, Paul sees the spiritually mature person “grow up in every way” into Christ, “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). Famously, he proclaims, “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). For John of the Cross, this “affirmation” of Paul summarizes the “union and transformation of love” in which “the image of the Beloved is so sketched in the will and drawn so intimately and vividly that it is true” to say both are one.⁴⁸⁶ In the Carmelite understanding of union with Christ, a soul has purged its desires for earthly goods, and even spiritual favors, and lives for Christ, with the light of Christ shining in and through the soul. It is a union of love filled with apostolic fruitfulness.⁴⁸⁷ Paul’s metaphor of physical growth

⁴⁸² Martin, 20-26.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 21. “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.”

⁴⁸⁴ Martin, 98. “[They will] obtain more joy and recreation in creatures through the dispossession of them. They cannot rejoice in them if they behold them with possessiveness, for this is a care that, like a trap, holds the spirit to earth and does not allow wideness of heart (2 Cor 6:11)... though they have nothing in their heart, [they] possess everything with greater liberty (2 Cor 6:10).”

⁴⁸⁵ Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 166.

⁴⁸⁶ Martin, 380. Martin cites John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 12, no.8.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 391.

seems to point towards two of the three phases of the spiritual journey, the beginning (childhood/purgation) and the end (maturity/union).

While this is but a brief touch on the spirituality of Paul, eliciting a full understanding, including the remaining phase of illumination, would require a full exposition of Paul's teaching and the Carmelite stages. It is worth noting that the papal preacher, Raniero Cantalamessa, in his spiritual commentary on Romans loosely aligns Paul's letter to the Romans with phases in the spiritual journey.⁴⁸⁸ Based on chapter six and seven of the Letter to the Romans, Cantalamessa sees the "content of salvation" initially coming through a cleansing from sin, i.e., freedom from sin and the law⁴⁸⁹ i.e., purgation. In reviewing Romans 8, Paul's discourse on the spirit and the law, Cantalamessa speaks of "an 'illuminative' catechesis" which must "enlighten our minds... Its purpose is to broaden the horizon of our faith...so that we shall not be satisfied with meaningless exterior practices of devotion but we will embrace the fullness of the Christian mystery."⁴⁹⁰ Finally, Cantalamessa ties the end of the Letter to the Romans to "unity"⁴⁹¹ in Paul's assertions about living and dying "to the Lord" (Rom 14:7-9), noting that "living for oneself has become the real death." Passing from this physical life can even be a "gain" since we will be "more fully 'with Christ' (cf. Phil 1:21 f.)"⁴⁹² It seems possible that Paul recognized

⁴⁸⁸ Raniero Cantalamessa, *Life in Christ: A Spiritual Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990).

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 101. Cantalamessa cites five steps "out of the land of sin": acknowledge your sin; repent of sin; stop sinning; destroy the sinful body; suffering and praise.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 216. Cantalamessa cites the story of the mystic Blessed Angela of Foligno who realized she should desire God and God alone, and "felt as if her whole being was forming a unity, as if her body was forming a unity with her soul, her will with her intelligence, and only one will was being formed in her." This is a classic description of the unitive stage of spirituality, upon which Cantalamessa concludes his spiritual commentary on the Letter to the Romans.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 212-213.

various developmental levels of spirituality, even if he did not articulate or name the stages with the clarity of later theology.

Paul, Jeremiah, and the New Covenant. For Paul, the grace offered through the Spirit (Rom 5:5) after the life, death and resurrection of Christ is the inauguration of a “more glorious” (2 Cor 3:10) new covenant.⁴⁹³ The old covenant relied on law, written on stone tablets which brought death and condemnation (2 Cor 3:6-9). In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes the community as a human “letter” written on the heart with the “‘ink’ of God’s Spirit” (2 Cor 3:1-3),⁴⁹⁴ essentially the example of the new covenant in action. As a metaphor of the difference between the old and new covenants Paul points to the veil donned by Moses to hide the glory of the Lord (Exod 34): in Christ the veil is removed when one “turns to the Lord.” (2 Cor 3:16). Without Christ “when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart (2 Cor 3:15).” For Paul, the New Covenant bestows a “fleshy heart”⁴⁹⁵ that allows those who turn to the Lord to become more like the Lord, “sharing in God’s glory.”⁴⁹⁶ In this difference between the Spirit and the Law, we see a theme that is also (though not exclusively) in *Jeremiah*: turning to the Lord with the heart. In Paul’s letters, the Spirit enables the turning, while in *Jeremiah* the Lord often “causes” the people to turn (in part through literal uprooting and tearing down).

Paul sees Christ as the “solution to human incompetence” interpreting the Christ event through the “ancient voices” of *Deuteronomy*, *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*, in particular with respect to

⁴⁹³ Gorman, 354-356.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 354.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 355.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 356.

the antithesis of the flesh and the Spirit.⁴⁹⁷ Paul builds on spirit of the new covenant (Jer 31; Ezek 36) with the assurance that the Spirit animates and empowers the people of the covenant.⁴⁹⁸

In *Jeremiah*, Yahweh laments the people's persistent disobedience (Jer 7:24-26) and compares them to a leopard who cannot change its spots (Jer 13:23). Sin is engraved on the heart (Jer 17:9). In light of their "propensity to reject the prophet's message"⁴⁹⁹, the people are "unable" to do good. The remedy is the new heart of the new covenant, a gratuitous gift of Yahweh (Jer 31:33) which will lead to "planting" the people with all His heart and soul (Jer 32:41). As Wells notes, "Here an expression reserved to communicate the pinnacle of human responsiveness now describes YHWH's initiative to achieve such responsiveness."⁵⁰⁰ Yahweh does what he wishes the people would do. In this, Yahweh mercifully and graciously takes the first step and gives the people an example to follow. The new covenant in *Jeremiah* bestows the Spirit and forgives sin⁵⁰¹ in order to "create the kind of society which previous generations failed so miserably to achieve."⁵⁰² The evil deeds of the people in *Jeremiah* are a symptom of an "evil heart" which only God can remedy.⁵⁰³ Without the Spirit, Jeremiah's mission to uproot... and plant is fraught with frustration and failure. The people will not love the Lord with their whole heart.

For *Jeremiah*, the new covenant is a hope for the future. For Paul, it is now! Paul knows that God wants all to be saved⁵⁰⁴ from sin and God's grace through His Spirit is available to

⁴⁹⁷ Kyle Wells, *Grace and Agency in Paul and Second Temple Judaism: Interpreting the Transformation of the Heart Account*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 157 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 288.

⁴⁹⁸ Wells, 280.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 48, n37.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁰¹ Aumann notes that in the OT, sin is described as "spiritual adultery (breaking the covenant with God), a kind of idolatry (serving the false gods of self-love)" or simply failing to follow religious dictates. While the New Testament recognizes covenantal obligations and violations, the emphasis shifts to failures in love of God and neighbor. *Spiritual Theology*, 148.

⁵⁰² Carroll, 614.

⁵⁰³ Heschel, 163.

⁵⁰⁴ Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 118-119.

all.⁵⁰⁵ The “indwelling Spirit enables God’s people to fulfill the Law, particularly the law of love. All believers possess and are guided by”⁵⁰⁶ this Spirit of both Father and Son.

Paul, Jeremiah, and the Task Verbs of Jer 1:10.

The task verbs of Jer 1:10 offer to a hinge between Jeremiah and Paul’s understanding of the New Covenant. The task verbs primarily burden Jeremiah’s mission with negativity: uprooting, tearing down, destroying and demolishing; less emphasis is granted to building and planting in *Jeremiah*. By contrast, Paul sees his mission as one of building up the church.⁵⁰⁷

The framing of the New Covenant text in the Book of Consolation (31:27-30, 31-34, 38-40) provides a structure for the shift in mission from Jeremiah to Paul. In Jer 31:28, just before the announcement of the New Covenant, the Lord says that just as he has “watched over” for uprooting, so he will watch over for building and planting. “In those days” the New Covenant will come (31:33). The days are coming when the city of Jerusalem will be “rebuilt” never to be “uprooted” (31:38). The New Covenant, then, can be seen as a time of building and planting. Spiritually, the negative task verbs are connected to the old covenant (31:28), while the positive terms are ushered in with the New Covenant and the coming of the Spirit. Paul, a minister of the New Covenant, uses forms of “build” at least 28 times (see Table below: “Building Up” in Paul’s Letters.)

In order for Yahweh to be their God and they to be His people, the Lord watches over them to build and plant, through a new covenant and a new heart. What are the implications of this? Does this mean that the negative task verbs no longer apply to the spiritual life, i.e., sin no

⁵⁰⁵ Gorman, 356.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 179.

⁵⁰⁷ Lalleman, 106.

longer needs to be plucked up? With the New Covenant, has the evil heart been plucked up, and the time for “building” (the church? the soul?) begun? From Paul’s point of view we are built in Christ. From a Christian spiritual point of view, building implies interiorization of the Spirit. However, at the same time, the human being must cooperate with the grace from God, and the inclination to sin must be eliminated through an ongoing process of repentance and turning to the Lord. Uprooting and destroying still apply, in a spiritual sense to the life of a Christian seeking “maturity” in Christ.

A review of Paul’s conceptual usage of the task verbs will demonstrate Paul’s spiritual understanding of Jeremiah’s task verbs as part of his mission. A note of caution is warranted here -- it is difficult to trace Paul’s usage precisely since Paul seemed to work primarily with the Greek LXX⁵⁰⁸ and the verbs of 1:10 are not consistently translated from the MT to the LXX. For example, while the verb ‘destroy’ [אַבַּד] is used in Jer 1:10 MT, as well as Jer 12:17; 18:7; and 31:28; the LXX uses a range of Greek verbs including ἀπόλλυμι at 1:10, 18:7, ἀπώλεια (Jer 12:17), and κακώω (31:28). Where the Hebrew repeats the word for “uproot” four times in 12:14-17, the Greek uses at least 3 different words: ἀποσπάω (12:14), ἐκβάλλω (12:14, 15), and ἐξαίρω (12:17). While the variance from the MT to the LXX is somewhat problematic in tracing the transmission of task verbs, the usage of the verb concepts can offer insight into Paul’s interpretation.

Paul’s emphasis with the task verbs is on the positive aspects of Jeremiah’s mission. As a minister of the new covenant, he claims authority to build, not tear down (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10) and often uses terminology related to building⁵⁰⁹ including using forms of οἰκοδομέω 11 times and

⁵⁰⁸ Hays, x-xi.

⁵⁰⁹ Rom 14:19; 15:2, 20; 1 Cor 3:9, 10, 12, 14; 8:1, 10; 10:23; 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26; 2 Cor 5:1; 10:8; 12:19; 13:10; Gal 2:18; Eph 2:20, 21, 22; 4:12, 16, 29; 1 Col 2:7; 1 Thess 5:11. See also 1 Tim 1:14; Heb 3:3; 3:4; 11:10.

οικοδομή 17 times. He uses plant (φυτεύω) four times (each in 1 Cor). Rather than use “uproot,” he uses the inverse term “root” (ρίζα) seven times (Rom 11:16, 17, 18*2; 15:12; Eph 3:17; Col 2:7, not including an instance in each 1 Tim and Hebrews). In comparison, he speaks of tearing down (καθαίρεσις) three times (2 Cor 10:4, 8; 13:10) and destruction approximately 17 times using a variety of terms.⁵¹⁰

In seeking to build (and plant), Paul reflects the third pair in Jeremiah’s call. Paul seeks to build the body of Christ, including both church and the neighbor. Building for Paul is associated with the increase of good relations (Rom 14:19; 15:2), virtue (1 Cor 3:12-14), righteousness and holiness (1 Cor. 3:9-10), for the growth of the church as well as for individuals:

Table 11: “Building up” in Paul’s letters

Romans
Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding (Rom 14:19)
Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor . (Rom 15:2)
Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, (Rom. 15:20)
First Corinthians
For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building . According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. (1 Cor. 3:9-10)
Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw-- the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. (1 Cor. 3:12-14)
Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies .” (1 Cor. 8:1 NKJ)
For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? (1 Cor. 8:10)
“All things are lawful,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up . (1 Cor. 10:23)

⁵¹⁰ Destroy covers a range of Greek terms including φθείρω (1 Cor 3:17*2; 15:33; 2 Cor 7:2; 11:3; Eph 4:22), πορθέω (Gal 1:13, 23; also Acts 9:21), καταργέω (Rom 3:3; 6:6; 7:2; 1 Cor 2:6; 6:13; 13:11; 2 Thess 2:8), καταλύω (Rom 14:20); ἀπόλλυμι (1 Cor 1:19).

On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their **upbuilding** and encouragement and consolation. Those who speak in a tongue **build up** themselves, but those who prophesy **build up the church**. Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be **built up**. (1 Cor. 14:3-5)

...since you strive eagerly for spirits, seek to have an abundance of them for **building up the church**. (1 Cor 14:12)

For you may give thanks well enough, but the other person is not **built up**. (1 Cor. 14:17 NRS)

What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for **building up**. (1 Cor. 14:26 NRS)

Second Corinthians

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is *destroyed*, we have a **building** from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Cor. 5:1)

Now, even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for **building you up** and not for *tearing you down*, I will not be ashamed of it. (2 Cor. 10:8)

Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you? We are speaking in Christ before God. Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of **building you up**. (2 Cor. 12:19)

So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for **building up** and not for *tearing down*. (2 Cor. 13:10)

Galatians

But if I **build up** again the very things that I once *tore down*, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. (Gal. 2:18)

Ephesians

built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone in whom the whole **building**, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord in whom you also are **built** together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. (Eph 2:20-22)

for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the **edifying** of the body of Christ (Eph 4:12)

from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in **building itself up** in love. (Eph. 4:16)

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for **building up**, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. (Eph. 4:29)

Colossians

rooted and **built up** in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (Col. 2:7)

First Thessalonians

Therefore encourage one another and **build up** each other, as indeed you are doing. (1 Thess. 5:11)

Spiritually, Paul notes that “love” is the element that builds (1 Cor 8:1; 1 Cor 10:23) and never ends (1 Cor 13:8). Building up is associated strengthening, developing, and ultimately with the essence of God (Eph 4:16) who himself is love (1 John 4:8). This supports the association of this positive pair with the final, unitive stage of the spiritual journey. However, unlike Jeremiah (MT), where the Yahweh is the one who builds and plants, in many instances Paul designates himself as the agent, the master builder, or as the one who plants (1 Cor 3:6, 9-10; 2 Cor 10:8, 13:10) but always with “grace” (1 Cor 3:9) and “authority” or God. (He notes that Apollos waters and God gives growth (1 Cor 3:6).⁵¹¹) Wells points out that Paul sees God himself as the “transformative agent.”⁵¹²

Paul does not appear to carefully distinguish between the negative task verbs of Jer 1:10. In a number of cases, Paul pairs a form of build with an opposing concept from Jer 1:10, either tear down or destroy (Gal 2:18; 2 Cor 10:8, 13:10). Consequently, it is difficult to establish a typology of the spiritual journey based on the three pairs of task verbs from Jer 1:10 MT.

Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to observe how the negative verb concepts including the second Jeremianic pair, destroy and demolish are applied to eliminate sinful or undesirable things. Tear down (καταργέω) is used as a counterpoint to building up twice in Paul’s assertion of his authority for building up (2 Cor 10:8, 13:10; Gal 2:18) including an objection to building

⁵¹¹ In this passage (1 Cor 3:1-23), Paul uses the term plant three times (1 Cor 3:6,7,8); describes the Corinthians as God’s field and building (an extension of the Jeremianic metaphors of plant and build); employs a building metaphor in which he uses terms related to build approximately nine times; uses temple imagery to describe the relationship between God and the human person, within which he uses a term meaning ‘destroy’; and references boasting, another theme of Jeremiah.

⁵¹² Wells, 293.

up what has been torn down (Gal 2:18). Paul “tears down”⁵¹³ strongholds and obstacles to God (2 Cor 10:4-5) and warns against “destroying” God’s work.

Bad company destroys (“corrupts” NKJV or “ruins” NRSV) good habits (1 Cor 15:33); and those opposed to the cross are headed for destruction (Phil 3:18-19). Paul “destroys” arguments against God (2 Cor 10:4-5) and warns against destroying the work of God (Rom 14:20). In one case, the concept of destruction is applied to minds which can be “corrupted” (2 Cor 11:3) by deceitful lusts. Paul himself does not “corrupt” or destroy his communities (2 Cor. 7:2 NKJ; 2 Cor 10:8); ⁵¹⁴ when necessary, that is left to God: “if any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him” (1 Cor. 3:17 RSV; see also 1 Cor 6:13).

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul proclaims: “But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor” (Gal 2:18). It may be notable that the reference in Galatians, a passage described as a “concise summary”⁵¹⁵ of Paul’s teaching on faith, incorporates two Jeremianic task verbs. Paul has torn down the requirement that Gentiles must be circumcised, and observe the Law.⁵¹⁶ If he restores the law as a norm, it could mean admitting that he was a sinner for abandoning it, or that by building up the law again, he is doomed to a life of transgression.⁵¹⁷ In either case, Paul does not want to build the things he relates to sin.

⁵¹³ Paul invokes the concept of tear down/destruction twice, using two similar verbs: καθαίρεσις and καθαίρω (2 Cor 10:4-5)

⁵¹⁴ Often destroy is indicated by the Greek φθείρω (five times). The Greek can also be used to mean “corrupted.”

⁵¹⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Letter to the Galatians” in Brown, Raymond E., ed. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1083-1112. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990, 785.

⁵¹⁶ Gorman, 248.

⁵¹⁷ Fitzmyer, “The Letter to the Galatians,” 785.

Both Paul and Jeremiah's ministry were "meant to have a purifying effect. Only by tearing down false beliefs and behavior was a new beginning possible."⁵¹⁸ Paul is seeking to destroy the attitudes that lead to sin "without destroying them themselves."⁵¹⁹

While tear down/destroy are used as negative terms, Paul turns "uproot"⁵²⁰ into a positive, speaking of "roots" and "rooted" rather than the negative counterpart used in Jer 1:10.⁵²¹ An explanation of the reversal may be found in "Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of building you up" (2 Cor 12:19). Paul seems to focus on making sure that God, rather than sin, is the "root" of the communities that he established. In his letter to the Romans, he teaches that "if the root is holy, so are the branches" and reminds his readers that "you do not support the root, but the root supports you" (Rom 11:16-18). (In this passage is also a reference to boasting (Rom 11:18), a theme noted as a link to Jeremiah in other passages.) Paul exhorts the Colossians to be rooted and built up in Christ (Col 2:7) and in Ephesians speaks of "being rooted and grounded in love" (Eph 3:17).

In the spiritual journey, sins are uprooted in the purgative stage. Similarly, Paul calls for repentance, specifically for the sake of building up (2 Cor 12:19-21). Paul looks to establish the foundation of the spiritual life as a life in Christ (1 Cor 3:11). This "root" must be the basis for growth (1 Cor 3:6-15). When Paul enacts negative terminology, such as tear down or destroy, his intention is not to eliminate persons or things, but rather sins⁵²² much like Jeremiah. Paul describes the purification by describing a fire that tests one's "work." He compares a foundation

⁵¹⁸ Lalleman, 108.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 107-108.

⁵²⁰ The translation of Jer 1:10 task verbs in the NAB, "uproot and tear down" is used here to most clearly show the possible antithetical use of 'root' in the Pauline literature, rather than the NRSV's "pluck up and pull down" or the NKJV's "root out and pull down."

⁵²¹ Rom 11:16, 17, 18*2; 15:12; Eph 3:17; Col 2:7; see also 1 Tim 6:10; Heb 12:15.

⁵²² Lalleman, 108.

of gold with that of straw: “each one’s work...will be revealed by fire...If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15).

“Thus Paul’s work resembles Jeremiah’s ministry which also seemed to be merely negative, yet was meant to have a purifying effect. Only by tearing down false beliefs and behaviour was a new beginning possible.”⁵²³ As Lalleman notes, the negative actions in Jeremiah’s call (tearing down and destroying) “are necessary to make way for God’s forgiveness and restoration.”⁵²⁴

Similarly, in Paul’s mission, sin must be removed so that a “deeper relationship”⁵²⁵ with God can be developed. “St. Paul took us by the hand at the beginning of our journey while we were still immersed in impiety, deprived of God’s glory” and living “for ourselves” and he has led us to the new state in which we no longer live for ourselves but for the Lord.”⁵²⁶ It seems that Paul recognizes various developmental levels of spirituality, even if he does not articulate or name the stages with the clarity of later theology.

This section is but a brief touch on the spirituality of Paul. Constrained by the limits of this study, our focus must return to and remain on the task verbs of Jeremiah 1:10, and the reception and possible typology of these verbs as placeholders for the stages of spiritual progression.

⁵²³ Ibid., 108.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 108.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 108.

⁵²⁶ Cantalamessa, 212.

Chapter 5

ORIGEN AND THE SEEDS OF THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Pseudo-Dionysius (whose works were written between 485 and 518–28 CE⁵²⁷) is often considered the “originator”⁵²⁸ of the three stages of the spiritual life based on his use of the expressions “purification, illumination, and perfection.”⁵²⁹ However, the roots of these concepts pre-date his writings. In effect, they are clearly expressed in Origen (c.185-c.253/4) for whom spiritual progress was a recurring theme. In his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*,⁵³⁰ Origen describes the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs as three progressive stages corresponding to the stages of the spiritual life:⁵³¹

- Proverbs teaches “moral instruction”⁵³² that offers “rules for living”⁵³³ to purify the “manner of life.”⁵³⁴ Origen notes that wisdom only comes after keeping the commandments.⁵³⁵ This describes a first phase of spiritual development like the purgative phase.

⁵²⁷ Kevin Corrigan, and L. Michael Harrington, “Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed Aug 30, 2022

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/pseudo-dionysius-areopagite/>. 1.

⁵²⁸ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 51.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 51. Pseudo-Dionysius applies the terms to choirs of angels performing the functions of purification, illumination and perfection; “liturgically, baptism is the sacrament of purification; the Eucharist is...illumination; ... confirmation ... perfects”; and in one passage, catechumens, the faithful and the monks represent three stages of progress.

⁵³⁰ Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. and annot. by R.P. Lawson. Ancient Christian Writers (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1957). The Commentary was completed approximately 240 CE. See Introduction, 4.

⁵³¹ Bergsma, 660-661. See also Origen, *Song of Songs*, Prologue 3.

⁵³² Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, Prologue 3.

⁵³³ Ibid., Prologue 3.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., Prologue 3.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., Prologue 3. Origen cites an apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus 1:26 “Thou hast desired Wisdom: then keep the commandments, and God will give her to thee.”

- Ecclesiastes trains the intelligence to distinguish vanities which should be spurned from eternal things which are to be pursued. It “teaches that all visible and corporeal things are fleeting and brittle”⁵³⁶ and that once the “seeker after wisdom” has renounced the world and “learnt to know the difference between thing corruptible and things incorruptible”⁵³⁷ the soul will be “competent to proceed to dogmatic and mystical matters” presented through the “secret metaphors of love...taught in the Song of Songs.”⁵³⁸ Here Origen seems to anticipate the cooperation of a soul with grace⁵³⁹ in the purification of the intellect that results from a detachment from worldly things of the senses⁵⁴⁰ and leads to a soul being led by the light of faith.⁵⁴¹ In other words, the second stage of spiritual progression for Origen is like the stage of illumination in which the soul has grown in virtue and prayer, is ordinarily centered on God⁵⁴² and “loves God more than itself”⁵⁴³ though with a still “imperfect love.”⁵⁴⁴
- The Song of Songs invokes the metaphor of a bride’s love for her “celestial Bridegroom” which is the love of the “perfect soul for the Word of God” and leads to “mystical matters and ...contemplation of the Godhead with pure and spiritual love.”⁵⁴⁵ In this Origen conceives union with God through love, a state

⁵³⁶ Ibid., Prologue 3.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., Prologue 3.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., Prologue 3. Origen’s discussions incorporate a cooperative relationship between a person and God. For instance he notes that one should “[knock] at Wisdom’s door, beseeching God to open to him and make him worthy to receive the word of wisdom and...knowledge through the Holy Spirit and to make him a partaker of that Wisdom....”

⁵³⁹ Martin, 181.

⁵⁴⁰ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 187-190.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁴² Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Conversions in the Spiritual Life*, 40.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁴⁵ Bergsma, 660-661. See also Origen, *Song of Songs*, Prologue 3.

which John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila describe as spiritual marriage.⁵⁴⁶

Both Origen⁵⁴⁷ and John of the Cross often speak of the soul as the bride and Christ as the Bridegroom.⁵⁴⁸

Writing approximately three centuries before Pseudo-Dionysius, Origen applies Christian thought⁵⁴⁹ to the Greek teachings of ethics, physics and enoptics⁵⁵⁰ using the Greek structure in approaching these three works of Solomon. Origen describes the framework of spiritual progress as a “threefold structure of divine philosophy.”⁵⁵¹ The three books are seen as stages of spiritual development put forth by Solomon who distinguishes between “the meanings of” instruction, knowledge, and wisdom.⁵⁵² The threefold structure described by one scholar as “purification, knowledge and perfection,” can even be seen in Origen’s analysis of Israel’s desert wanderings.⁵⁵³ However, according to Meredith, rather than a mystical journey which transcends

⁵⁴⁶ Martin, 13. See also John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Prologue 1, for achieving perfect union through love.

⁵⁴⁷ Origen, *The Song of Songs, Commentaries and Homilies*, Prologue 1. Origen sees the Word of God, as the divine logos, or Christ. See also Text: Part One The Commentary, footnote 2.

⁵⁴⁸ For example, see John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, SC. 28.2.

⁵⁴⁹ Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, Prologue 3. Origen believes that in some sense, the Greeks “borrowed” ideas from Solomon “who had learnt them by the Spirit of God at an age and time long before their own.”

⁵⁵⁰ Paul B. Decock, “Origen’s Christian Approach to the Song of Songs,” *Religion & Theology* 17 (2010), 19-20.

⁵⁵¹ Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, Prologue 3. See also Andrew Louth’s chapter on Origen in *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* for a detailed and clear discussion of Origen and “the beginning of the idea of the three ways of the mystical life, and very nearly, the later familiar language of purification, ...illumination... and union.” In addition see Decock, “Origen’s Christian Approach to the Song of Songs,” 20. Origen sees Abraham as an example of the first stage because of his obedience, Isaac represents the second stage because he “digs wells and searches out the roots of things” and Jacob “earned his name Israel from his contemplation of the things of God” including the ladder to heaven.

⁵⁵² Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, Prologue 3.

⁵⁵³ Decock, “Origen’s Christian Approach to the Song of Songs,” 21, footnote 33. Decock cites Torjensen’s discussion of Origen’s 27th homily on Numbers 33. Yet, Origen “works with a definite understanding of the three basic stages.” See also Decock, “Migration: The Letter to the Hebrews, Philo and Origen,” *Neotestamentica* 51.1 (2017), 145. Nonetheless Origen will “depending on the context... consider different numbers of stages, for instance seven stages according to the number of seven biblical songs or 42 stages according to the 42 stations of Israel in the desert.”

the natural powers of the mind, for Origen, the spiritual journey is one of returning to the perfect pre-fall unity with God and a final end of loving contemplation of God in Heaven.⁵⁵⁴

For Origen, these stages clearly apply to the individual soul. By contrast, Aumann notes that Pseudo-Dionysius' teaching was not applied to the individual Christian, but rather speaking of "ways in which men or angels participate in the divine perfections."⁵⁵⁵ Louth however, describes Pseudo-Dionysius as applying the triadic structure of purification, illumination and union to his "theologies"⁵⁵⁶ as Pseudo-Dionysius defines them.⁵⁵⁷ The three elements are characteristic of "all engagement with God."⁵⁵⁸ In other words, every engagement involves "purification of all that hinders our approach to God, the gift of illumination from God, and... as we are assimilated to this, union with God."⁵⁵⁹ While this is a brief glimpse of the understandings of each, a full excursus is beyond the scope of this study. In the interest of identifying the transmission of thought however, the theological development will be traced in the next chapter, in order to demonstrate the impact of Origen's thinking as a link to later Christian theology of the spiritual journey, and the relevance of the Jeremianic task verbs.

Origen's approach to biblical exegesis is extensively allegorical, leading some scholars to question its value (noting that it detaches itself from the historical context and can seem like

⁵⁵⁴ Anthony Meredith, "Origen" in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 116-119.

⁵⁵⁵ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 51. "Thus in *De caelesti hierarchia*, various choirs of angels perform the functions of purification, illumination and perfection; in *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*...these same functions are performed by the liturgy, the clergy and the faithful. Liturgically, baptism is the sacrament of purification; Eucharist...illumination; chrismation (confirmation)...perfects the graces of baptism." Similarly, applying the terms to the clergy, ministers or deacons purify, priests "illumine" and bishops "perfect" through word and liturgy.

⁵⁵⁶ "Theology" is how the process of "deification" or "union" is effected. See Andrew Louth, "Denys the Areopagite" in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, 186. "Theology" can be cataphatic, apophatic or symbolic.

⁵⁵⁷ Andrew Louth, "Denys the Areopagite" in *The Study of Spirituality*, Editors: Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 186-188.

⁵⁵⁸ Louth, 186-187.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 186-187.

“biblical alchemy”⁵⁶⁰). However, he is simultaneously “recognized as one of the greatest theologians and religious thinkers of the Christian Church.”⁵⁶¹ Reservations toward his conception of spiritual progress are often directed at his balance of divine grace and human effort.⁵⁶² However, at least one scholar concludes that Origen successfully conveys the “elusive interaction” through the image of marital union,⁵⁶³ a central image in the Carmelite descriptions of the pinnacle of the spiritual journey.⁵⁶⁴

Origen is of particular interest in this study for three reasons: first, he provides an early reception of Pauline literature; second, his *Homilies on Jeremiah* demonstrate a spiritualization of the task verbs; third, he is a key link in the historical chain of Christian thought. In his *Homilies on Jeremiah*, Origen uses the task verbs of *Jeremiah* to illustrate his thoughts on spiritual progress, including touching on both the action of the soul and the action of God. In his exegesis on *Jeremiah*, Origen also relies on the Pauline writings, providing a bridge of spiritual interpretation between these Old and New Testament writings.

It must be noted that Origen was a “devotee” of the writings of Philo, a Jewish thinker of the second temple period, who also relied extensively on allegory. While Philo is a significant

⁵⁶⁰ Adolf Harnack quoted in Leslie Barnard, “To Allegorize or Not to Allegorize,” *Studia Theologica* 36 (1982) no 1, 5. Other scholars have questioned whether Origen’s “doctrine of pre-existence and the fall [have] more in common with Plato’s myth. than with the book of Genesis.” See Meredith, 118.

⁵⁶¹ John Clark Smith, introduction to *Origen: Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings* 28, trans. John Clark Smith. The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), xiii.

⁵⁶² Decock, *Migration as a Basic Image for the Life of Faith*, 129-130.

⁵⁶³ Decock, *Migration as a Basic Image for the Life of Faith*, 148. For Origen, reading the Scriptures are “an encounter with Christ” and the readers understanding depends on their stage of faith (see also 146). Compared to the Carmelites, Origen emphasizes a life and steps of virtue, rather than a mystical journey of prayer intertwined with action.

⁵⁶⁴ See Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle* (in particular the Seventh Mansion, chapter 2; and the writings of John of the Cross (in particular *Spiritual Canticle*).

influence on Origen, his writings focus on the Pentateuch (i.e., not Jeremiah) and have not been considered for this study. Further investigation may be warranted.

Origen's Reception of Paul

In an age when a number of church fathers did not engage with Paul,⁵⁶⁵ Origen wrote commentaries on First and Second Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Titus, Philemon and more.⁵⁶⁶ Origen references Paul's letters and echoes his themes throughout his writings⁵⁶⁷ including frequently in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* and his *Homilies on Jeremiah*. This offers an insight as to the early Christian understanding and interpretation of Paul alongside the Hebrew Scriptures, in particular *Jeremiah*.

In his descriptions of spiritual progression, Origen calls on Paul's description of spiritual infancy and maturity (1 Cor 3) describing the Song of Songs as "strong meat...for the perfect"⁵⁶⁸, and teaching that "to those who are at the stage of infancy and childhood in their interior life—that is to say, who are being nourished with milk in Christ, not with strong meat, and are only beginning to desire the rational milk without guile --- it is not given to grasp the meaning of these sayings."⁵⁶⁹ Origen expresses concern that the spiritually immature will not

⁵⁶⁵ Miyako Demura, "The Reception of the Pauline Letters and the Formation of the Canonical Principle in Origen of Alexandria," *Scrinium VI* (2010), *Patrologia Pacifica Secunda*, 30. Accessed 8/30/2022 7:51:44 p.m. Demura attributes this to the appropriation of Pauline letters by heretics.

⁵⁶⁶ John Anthony McGuckin, ed. *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), xvii-xviii. While not all of these have been handed down through the ages, their existence is attested and many survive, even if some only in fragments.

⁵⁶⁷ Ronald E. Heine, "Origen : Scholarship in the Service of the Church." in *Christian Theology in Context* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2010) <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=369815&site=eds-live>. 122-125, 176-177, 191, 197, 211.

⁵⁶⁸ Origen: *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Prologue 1. See also John J. O'Keefe, "Origen (c. 185-c. 253): Commentary on the Song of Songs," in *Christian Spirituality: The Classics*, 1–12. London, 2010.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001752244&site=eds-live>.

⁵⁶⁹ Origen: *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Prologue 1.

benefit from the text but rather be tempted to carnality and passion. Paul's words are placed within the final stage of Origen's tri-partite framework of spiritual progression, i.e., the Song of Songs. It is not uncommon for Origen to align with and incorporate, in his own way, Paul's stages of progression which begin with spiritual infancy, and move through childhood into maturity. This imagery is also used in his analysis of *Jeremiah* and in his discussion of the task verbs.⁵⁷⁰

Origen's Homilies on Jeremiah

Twenty of Origen's homilies on *Jeremiah* survive extant in the original Greek.⁵⁷¹ These were delivered shortly after 240 CE,⁵⁷² around the same time he wrote his commentary on the Song of Songs. His *Homilies on Jeremiah* are described as "a catechism of Origen's view of Christian doctrine and Christian philosophy."⁵⁷³ He sees Jeremiah as a "type for Christ in the Hebrew Scriptures."⁵⁷⁴ Drawing on the significance of Jeremiah (both as book and prophet) in the history of Israel's exile and captivity, Origen touches on themes including "conversion, repentance, the Judgment, spiritual progress, the Fire, the role of Christ, the role of evil, the meaning of Israel, salvation, etc."⁵⁷⁵

In his first homily on *Jeremiah*, focusing on Jeremiah 1:1-10, Origen attests the goodness of God despite his judgment and punishment of Israel which will deliver them into captivity under Nebuchadnezzar.⁵⁷⁶ Origen sees Jeremiah's prophecy as a call to repentance from sin so as

⁵⁷⁰ See Origen: *Homilies on Jeremiah* 18.6 (4); catena 10.

⁵⁷¹ John Clark Smith, introduction to Origen: *Homilies on Jeremiah*, *Homily on 1 Kings 28*, xvii.

⁵⁷² Ibid., xv.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., xvi.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., xvi. See also Origen, Homily 1.5-1.6.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., xvii.

⁵⁷⁶ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.1-1.3, page 4. See also Meredith who notes that Origen sees punishment as "entirely corrective," 117-118.

to obtain God's mercy.⁵⁷⁷ Sin leads to captivity; just as captives from Jerusalem were delivered to Nebuchadnezzar, "so it is also for us."⁵⁷⁸ Sinners are "delivered to Satan" so that they may repent and be saved.⁵⁷⁹ Origen quotes Paul "the Apostle's" words, from 1 Tim 1:20: men are "delivered to Satan, so that they may learn not to blaspheme."⁵⁸⁰ Origen also alludes to Paul's words to the Corinthians: "...you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1 Cor 5:5).⁵⁸¹ In his next point Origen notes that if we repent ("hear" the words of the Prophets, the Law, the Apostles, and of Jesus), God will also repent of the evil he planned.⁵⁸² Here, Origen alludes to Jer 18:8, a verse within the pericope of the potter and one of the key passages related to the task verbs of Jer 1:10. The task verbs are tied to God's call for repentance: "...I foretold what concerns the building and planting and the tilling...they will suffer if they should not repent."⁵⁸³

Origen engages extensively with the task verbs of Jer 1:10⁵⁸⁴ even going so far as to say that they are words "fitting for the Savior."⁵⁸⁵ He clearly (if not unsurprisingly) ascribes a spiritual meaning to Jer 1:10, and again, also ties that understanding to the writings of Paul:

For when one has considered human souls which are ruled by sin according to the passage from the Apostle *Let not sin reign in our mortal body*, and when one sees also the many kinds of sins, he interprets allegorically also the nations and kingdoms as the bad movements in the souls of men which are uprooted and demolished by those words of God which are given either to Jeremiah or to whomever.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁷⁷ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.1 (2).

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 1.3 (2).

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 1.3 (2).

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 1.3 (2).

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 1.3 (2).

⁵⁸² Ibid., 1.4 (2).

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 18.5 (2).

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 1.6 (1); 1.7 (1), (2), 1.9, 1.14 (2), (3), (4), (5); 1.15 (1), (2); 1.16 (1), (2), (3).

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 1.6.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 1.7. The reference to the "passage from the Apostle" is Rom 6:12.

He further asserts that “it is evident that the Savior uprooted the kingdom of the Devil and has demolished the pagan nations by destroying the pagan life.”⁵⁸⁷ Origen even ties uprooting to Jesus’ words in Matthew “Every plant which my Father in heaven has not planted will be uprooted” (Mt 15:13)⁵⁸⁸; then expands on this, describing “things in souls which my Father in heaven has not planted” as evil thoughts, murders, adultery, theft, and false witness.⁵⁸⁹ In several places Origen reiterates that the power to uproot and destroy comes from the words of God: “God is good when he uproots what is bad through words.”⁵⁹⁰ And “Words uproot nations, words demolish kingdoms – but not the corporeal and worldly kingdoms.”⁵⁹¹ The power of the word uproots “lack of faith... hypocrisy... wickedness... licentiousness.”⁵⁹²

Looking to the last pair of task verbs (build and plant), Origen continues to weave together his understanding of Jeremiah and Paul, describing the potential for both a “building of the Devil” and “a building of God” (1 Cor 3:9), noting that “those who belong to God” are “a field of God, a building of God.” (1 Cor 3:9).⁵⁹³ He explains that this pair needed to appear last in the sequence of task verbs: “first the words of God fulfill the need to uproot, demolish and destroy, then to build and to plant.”⁵⁹⁴ He further clarifies that “that which is bad needs to be removed from us first. God cannot build where there is a worthless building.”⁵⁹⁵ He likens this to the Deuteronomic words “I will kill and I will make alive” (Deut 32:39) and then in turn, to

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 1.7 (2).

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 1.14 (4).

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 1.14 (4).

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 1.14 (5). See also 1.7, 1.9, 1.15, 1.16 (3).

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 1.16 (3).

⁵⁹² Ibid., 1.16 (3).

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 1.15.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 1.16 Origen is working from the LXX which uses only five of the six task verbs.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 1.16 (3).

Paul's conversion: "Whom will I kill? Paul the traitor, Paul the persecutor. And I will make alive so that he becomes Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 1:1).⁵⁹⁶ Finally, in order to defend the God of the Law who uproots... and plants, Origen points to the resurrection which is "foreshadowed for each person" and to Paul's theology by proclaiming: "We were buried with Christ through baptism and we have risen with him" (Rom 6:4; cf. Eph 2:6).⁵⁹⁷ Later, he declares that Christians are "planted" in Christ.⁵⁹⁸

In reflecting on another key verse, Jer 24:6, Origen expands on God's role as builder and planter:

Thus the Lord said, And I will build them up and I will not tear them down (Jer 24:6). For the God who is good takes down certain buildings. For it is necessary that the building of unclean spirits be destroyed in us and a temple to God be built in this way from virtues and right teachings so that His glory can be seen in it. Yet he is also a tiller who plants (Jer 24:6) and one who grafts (Rom 11:17) on those who are worthy.⁵⁹⁹

His exegesis continues, immediately connecting Christ to the prophetic mission of Jeremiah, the teaching of Paul, and the words of the gospels:

For the Savior as a root who holds up all branches (Rom 11:18) said I am the true vine, you the branches but my Father is the tiller. Every branch which abides in me and makes good fruit my Father prunes in order that it may bear more fruit. But every branch which abides in me but does not bear fruit my Father cuts off and throws it into the fire. (John 15:1-2, 5-6; cf. Mt 3:10; 7:19; Luke 3:9)⁶⁰⁰

For Origen the task verbs of Jer 1:10 provide a framework for the spiritual journey in terms of sequence and imagery.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 1.16.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 1.16 (2).

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 18.5 (4).

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., catena 23.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., catena 23.

However, it is not yet clear whether Origen sees a threefold purpose in the task verbs of *Jeremiah*. He explicitly states that he does see this triad. Origen clearly describes this understanding using the task verbs of *Jeremiah*, and even includes the action (grace?) of God as a key part of the transformation:

If a person uproots, the thing uprooted is not destroyed, but is uprooted. If one demolishes, the rocks of what is demolished are not destroyed; they are what is demolished. Hence there is need of the goodness of God after the uprooting, to destroy what has been uprooted, after the demolition to destroy what has been demolished. With respect to what is destroyed and what is uprooted, read carefully how such things are destroyed: And the chaff you will burn with unquenchable fire, and bind the bundles, bundles of weed and deliver them to the fire. In this way, it is destroyed after the uprooting.⁶⁰¹

Origen clearly sees uprooting as the first stage, followed by a second stage of destruction in order to fully eliminate the remnants of sin. Building is the final stage. “For it is necessary that the inferior does not ever survive, and once destroyed the rocks do not prove useful for another building upon which the evil one could build.”⁶⁰² By using one concept from each pair of verbs⁶⁰³, Origen supports the understanding of the task verbs from Jer 1:10 as a typology of the spiritual journey. This also offers evidence that the three stages can be seen by not only the Hebrew MT, but also in the Greek tradition.

Origen’s awareness of the Greek school of thought, and subsequent attribution to Solomon does not prove a source of thought. It is plausible that Origen is consciously or unconsciously supporting his allegiance to the church⁶⁰⁴ rather than academically pinpointing the origination of an idea. He may have applied his platonic learning to Christian and Hebrew texts.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 1.15.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 1.15 (2).

⁶⁰³ Since Origen relied upon the LXX, he sees five task verbs rather than six, so for him they were not “pairs.”

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 39. Origen introduces the discussion by framing it around the choices of the church: “let us first investigate the reason why, when the churches of God have adopted three books from Solon’s pen, the *Book of Proverbs* has been put first, that which is called *Ecclesiastes* second, while the *Song of Songs* is found in the third place.”

Nonetheless, as an early Christian writer, Origen's writings raise the possibility that the source of thought on spiritual progression may be scriptural.

In *Jeremiah* MT, God is the agent in all three stages who uproots...and plants. As described by Origen, after the initial uprooting, God becomes more active. Similarly in the illuminative stage, God is more active in the soul: "God now begins to communicate Himself to it..." by ways the senses or lower parts of the soul cannot attain. Building is a process of being planted in Christ and growing in the love of God. Origen's basic process aligns with the broad tripartite framework identified in *Jeremiah*, as well as the stages outlined by the Carmelites.

Origen also connects the task verb actions to the heart (as well as again including a Pauline reference to Eph 4:27): "If we give a place to the Devil, the enemy sows a plant which the Father in heaven did not plant and it will be utterly uprooted. If we ...give a place to God, God rejoicing sows his seed in our hearts."⁶⁰⁵ He concludes the first sermon on *Jeremiah* by looking to Paul and emphasizing the power of God's word to destroy "an idol temple...built in the heart" so that the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16) may be built and the glory of God found there.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.14 (4).

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.16 (3).

Chapter 6

POST ORIGEN RECEPTION OF JER 1:10

The spiritual interpretation and themes of Origen carry into the evolving thinking of the church. Despite the somewhat diverging development of Eastern and Western traditions of Christianity over time, the cross-pollination of thought in this period of Patristics was active and vibrant. One avenue of transmission begins with the Eastern Cappadocian Fathers who included Origen's works as part of their daily routine.⁶⁰⁷ Gregory of Nyssa's (c.335- c.395⁶⁰⁸) writings were further developed by the Eastern church in Evagrius Ponticus (c.345-399), a devotee of Origen,⁶⁰⁹ who in turn influenced his friend John Cassian (c.360-c.432⁶¹⁰) in the West,⁶¹¹ who influenced Pseudo-Dionysius (late fifth or early sixth century⁶¹²) and Gregory the Great (540-c.604⁶¹³).⁶¹⁴

In the West, Jerome (c.347/8-419/20⁶¹⁵), translated much of Origen's work into Latin; Jerome was in contact with Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa.⁶¹⁶ Jerome translated Origen's homilies, in part, reportedly, "to expose the plagiarisms" of another Western father,

⁶⁰⁷ Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition* (1985, repr., San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 44.

⁶⁰⁸ Andrew Louth, "The Cappadocians" in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 162.

⁶⁰⁹ Simon Tugwell, "Evagrius and Macarius" in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 169.

⁶¹⁰ Owen Chadwick, "John Cassian" in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 145.

⁶¹¹ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 59. See also Owen Chadwick, "John Cassian" in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 145.

⁶¹² Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 51. See also Louth, "Denys the Areopagite" in *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Kindle, 155.

⁶¹³ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 74.

⁶¹⁴ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 50-51, 195-196; Anthony Meredith, "Gregory of Nyssa" in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 87.

⁶¹⁵ Thomas P. Halton, transl., "Introduction" to *St. Jerome: On Illustrious Men*. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), xxiii, xxix.

https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=e000bna&AN=498825&site=eds-live&custid=s8475574&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_xxvii

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

Ambrose, who relied on the homilies of Origen in his own writings.⁶¹⁷ Jerome's influence extended to Augustine (354-430⁶¹⁸), who exchanged letters with Jerome.⁶¹⁹ Augustine, of course, is a major influence across the Church, including for Gregory the Great, and for Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Gregory the Great also read Cassian as a "primary source"⁶²⁰ and himself was a "primary source" for Aquinas.⁶²¹ Aquinas was influential for another Dominican, Johannes Tauler (1300-1361⁶²²). Cassian, Gregory the Great, Aquinas, and Tauler are all considered influences on John of the Cross.⁶²³

This intellectual interchange does not include every thinker or their influence with respect to particular ideas. Plato, Aristotle, Philo⁶²⁴, Plotinus (204/5-270⁶²⁵) and Proclus are in the picture too. This historical chain is noted simply to highlight the fact that to define strictly the direction and evolution of thought is a muddy rather than a clear task. Nonetheless, it is possible to see connections between these great thinkers across a great distance of time, and in particular, a potential avenue of influence for Origen's reception of Jer 1:10. Let us review the evidence to attempt to discern the patterns related to Jer 1:10 and its spiritual senses.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., xxvii.

⁶¹⁸ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 61.

⁶¹⁹ Halton, xxviii.

⁶²⁰ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 75. See also Owen Chadwick, "John Cassian" in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 148. Cassian was required reading for the Benedictines.

⁶²¹ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 133.

⁶²² Oliver Davies, "Johannes Tauler" in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 319.

⁶²³ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 195-196.

⁶²⁴ For a discussion of Philo and Paul, including the term *nous* and the flesh vs. the heart, see Wells, 229-231. Also 188-206.

⁶²⁵ Christian Wildberg, "Neoplatonism" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/neoplatonism/> (accessed September 28, 2022).

Plotinus (204/5-270)

Considered the founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus studied in Alexandria under Ammonius Saccas.⁶²⁶ Interestingly, Origen was also taught by a certain Ammonius. However, whether it is the same Ammonius is not clear.⁶²⁷ Plotinus, through Neoplatonism, is “one of the most influential philosophers in antiquity after Plato and Aristotle.”⁶²⁸ This influence flows directly into Christian theology through the Cappadocian Fathers, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas.⁶²⁹

Neoplatonic thought is based on a single principle of consciousness, “the One” from which the universe “emanates” to the Intellect (*nous*) and then the Soul,⁶³⁰ and desires to return.⁶³¹ The Soul is not “fallen” in the Christian sense; it is not the “highest life”— that happens through the Intellect.⁶³² The theory includes “a process of purification, which for Plotinus is the same as the acquisition of virtues.”⁶³³ The lowest virtues “serve to control the appetites” while higher virtues “separate the person from the embodied human being.”⁶³⁴ Evil, whose “source is in self-will”⁶³⁵ leads the soul to fall into a place of “unlikeness” to the divine.⁶³⁶ Purification is

⁶²⁶ Lloyd Gerson, “Plotinus” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, 1. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/plotinus/> (accessed September 28, 2022).

⁶²⁷ Mark J Edwards, “Origen” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2022 Edition). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/origen/> (accessed 9/1/2022). In a contrasting view, Andrew Louth believes that Origen studied under Ammonius Saccas. See Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), chapter IV: Origen, 52, Kindle.

⁶²⁸ Gerson, “Plotinus.”

⁶²⁹ Wildberg, “Neoplatonism,” 8.

⁶³⁰ Gerson, “Plotinus”, 2. Emanation is a process of “derivation” best “understood in terms of atemporal ontological dependence.”

⁶³¹ Wildberg, “Neoplatonism,” 2, 3.

⁶³² Gerson, “Plotinus,” 2.

⁶³³ Anthony Meredith, “Plotinus” in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 98.

⁶³⁴ Gerson, “Plotinus,” 3.

⁶³⁵ Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, chapter 3, “Plotinus,” Kindle, 41.

⁶³⁶ Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Kindle, 41-42. Plotinus distinguishes purificatory and civic virtue.

necessary for the soul to recover the likeness⁶³⁷ “or identity with God.”⁶³⁸ A process of “introversion” or turning inwards leads to the true self as Soul and Intellect (*nous*) which “brings one into direct relation with the One in ecstasy.”⁶³⁹

In one passage from Plotinus, the early neoplatonic concepts of purification, illumination, and union appear. Purification leads into the Intellect which gains vision and light (illumination), ultimately become identical with the divine:

Knowledge of The Good or contact with it, is the all-important... Purification has The Good for goal; so the virtues, all right ordering, ascent within the Intellectual, settlement therein, banqueting upon the divine- by these methods one becomes, to self and to all else, at once seen and seer; identical with Being and Intellectual-Principle...

Here, we put aside all the learning; ...but, suddenly, swept beyond it all by the very crest of the wave of Intellect surging beneath, he is lifted and sees, never knowing how; the vision floods the eyes with light, but it is not a light showing some other object, the light is itself the vision. No longer is there thing seen and light to show it, no longer Intellect and object of Intellection; this is the very radiance that brought both Intellect and Intellectual object into being for the later use and allowed them to occupy the quester's mind. With This he himself becomes identical...⁶⁴⁰

In this “union,” the soul ecstatically “passes out of itself into the other” but “the One has no knowledge of awareness of anything below itself.”⁶⁴¹ The Intellect is “eternally satisfied by contemplation of the One.”⁶⁴² This is in “radical opposition”⁶⁴³ to the Christian view of union.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁶³⁸ Meredith, “Plotinus” in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 98.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 98. See also Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, ch. 3 “Plotinus,” for the relationships between One, Intellect (*nous*) and Soul.

⁶⁴⁰ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, translated by Stephen Mackenna and B.S. Page (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1917-1930), Ennead VI 7, 36 <https://archive.org/details/plotinustheennea033190mbp/page/590/mode/2up>. (accessed 10/2/2022) Special thanks to Kevin Corrigan for pointing out this passage.

⁶⁴¹ Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Kindle, 45-46.

⁶⁴² Gerson, “Plotinus,” 2.

⁶⁴³ Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Kindle, 49.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-c.395)

The Cappadocian Fathers relied on Origen's works, with Basil and Gregory of Nazianzen together producing an anthology (the *Philokalia*) of the work of Origen.⁶⁴⁴ Each of them, including Gregory of Nyssa were influenced by Origen and by Neoplatonism, of which Plotinus was a leading exponent.⁶⁴⁵

Gregory's *Homilies on the Song of Songs* cite *Jeremiah* only a few times, and do not specifically include *Jeremiah* 1:10.⁶⁴⁶ However, in a passage developing the thought of Origen, Gregory applies building and planting imagery to the growth of a soul.⁶⁴⁷ He later describes building "our own dwellings" through virtue.⁶⁴⁸ (Like Origen, he often employs an allegorical approach, seeing virtue as the goal).⁶⁴⁹ He alludes to a passage from Paul (1 Cor 3) that expounds on the "building up" motif and speaks of being "rooted" in a life of evil and vanity of idols.⁶⁵⁰ He likens a person to a garden with "fully planted" trees protected by the "fence of the commandments"⁶⁵¹; God plants virtues.⁶⁵²

While this offers a limited insight, and his teaching differs from Paul and Origen, Gregory's usage of the positive terms (noting that "building" is a common term, and no direct

⁶⁴⁴ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 45.

⁶⁴⁵ Louth, "The Cappadocians," in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 163.

⁶⁴⁶ Gregory, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, transl. Richard A. Norris (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2012). The scriptural index identifies Jer 2:13; 4:19; 5:8; and 31:33.

⁶⁴⁷ Gregory, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, Homily 4, 125. Gregory speaks of "the Bridegroom who build himself a house—me," i.e., a soul, and notes that the soul is "worked on...by the Tiller of our natures soil."

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., Homily 7, 243.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., Homily 7, 243.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., Homily 7, 221, 243.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., Homily 9, 289.

⁶⁵² Ibid., Homily 9, 291-292.

reference to all the task verbs of 1:10 has been detected) may indicate a spiritual interpretation along the lines of Origen.

Evagrius Ponticus (c.345-399)

Evagrius was an educated Christian monk, ascetic, teacher and writer. Only one reference to *Jeremiah* (Jer 16:1-4) is identified in his works.⁶⁵³ In a verse related to marriage, Evagrius takes an “allegorical reading”⁶⁵⁴ of sons and daughters who die of disease, likening the text to “sons and daughters born in the heart, namely, thoughts and desires of the flesh.”⁶⁵⁵ He is relating this concept to celibacy for monks and Paul’s comments on unmarried men (1 Cor 7:32-24). A more detailed review may reveal certain thematic echoes with spiritual progression and the task verbs of Jer 1:10. However, a full exposition of Evagrius is beyond the scope of this study.

Jerome (c.347/8-c.419/20)

Jerome not only translated Origen’s *Homilies on Jeremiah* but also authored his own *Commentary on Jeremiah*.⁶⁵⁶ Despite controversy and his own reservations about the theology of Origen, Jerome “valued and translated Origen’s works.”⁶⁵⁷ Jerome offers a crucial link between the East and the West for the interpretation of Jer 1:10. His commentary on this verse follows the spiritual interpretation of Origen, although not in as much detail. Throughout his commentary, Jerome makes a point of noting clear differences with Origen: in one instance,

⁶⁵³ Evagrius Ponticus, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, transl. Robert E. Sinkewicz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 348.

⁶⁵⁴ Robert E. Sinkewicz, trans., “Introduction” to *Evagrius Ponticus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, 1.

⁶⁵⁵ Evagrius Ponticus, “Foundations” 1 in *The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, 4.

⁶⁵⁶ Michael Graves, trans., “Introduction” to *Commentary on Jeremiah* by Jerome, Ancient Christian Texts, ed Christopher A. Hall (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic InterVarsity Press, 2011), xxix – xxxii. Jerome began work on this commentary in 414 A.D. See xxix for a discussion on Jerome’s conflict with Rufinus over Origen.

⁶⁵⁷ John Clark Smith, transl., “Introduction” to *Origen: Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings* 28, xxviii.

Jerome condemns Origen as a “perverse interpreter”⁶⁵⁸ for understanding the cup of wrath (Jer 25:15-17) as restorative. Jerome sees only punishment.

Jerome looked to Hebrew and Greek manuscripts⁶⁵⁹ for his commentary on *Jeremiah*. For Jeremiah 1:10, this means that Jerome identifies six task verbs,⁶⁶⁰ whereas it appears that Origen identifies only five (as in the LXX). Given Jerome’s unique position as a lynchpin connecting Origen to the Latin church on this topic, it is worth including his entry:

That which we have added from the Hebrew, “to **over throw**” or “to **throw down**,” is not found in the LXX. And one ought to consider carefully that the two favorable actions come after the four harsh ones. For good things cannot be **built** until the bad things are **destroyed**, and the best cannot be **planted** until the worst is *wiped out*. For “every plant that my heavenly Father has not **planted** will be **rooted up**,” (Mt 15:13) and any structure that does not have its foundation **built** on the rock, but instead was **built** on sand, will be **overthrown** by the word of God and will fall down. (Mt 7:25-27). This structure, namely, every sacrilege and perverse doctrine, which Jesus will consume with the breath of his mouth and will **destroy** by the appearance of his coming, will be put to ruin forever (2 Thess 2:8). Furthermore, whatever is exalted against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:5) where people are trusting in their own wisdom (which is foolishness with God (1 Cor 3:19)), he will **destroy** and **throw down**, so that what is humble may be **built** in its place, and so that things suited to ecclesiastical truth may be **built** and **planted** on the site of the haughty things that were **destroyed** and **plucked up**. In this way the saying of the apostle may be fulfilled: “You are God’s building, God’s field.” (1 Cor 3:9)

Many interpret this passage as relating to the person of Christ. For “Jeremiah” is translated “the exalted one of the Lord,” who **destroyed** the kingdoms of the devil that were shown on the top of the mountain (Mt 4:8) and who did away with the adversarial powers, canceling the bond of errors on the cross (Col 2:14-15). Beyond the truth of the *historia*, the psalm speaks about these powers in a tropological⁶⁶¹ way: “Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together (Ps 2:1-2).” In place of those **plucked up, destroyed, ruined**

⁶⁵⁸ Graves, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 154.

⁶⁵⁹ Michael Graves, *Jerome's Hebrew Philology: A Study Based on His Commentary on Jeremiah*, Supplements to *Vigilae Christianae* (Leiden: Brill, 2007). 10-11. For a discussion of Jerome’s use and knowledge of Hebrew, see Chapter One Introduction (1-12).

⁶⁶⁰ The Hebrew texts that Jerome worked with were prior to the codified Masoretic text, which this study relies upon. His text seems to agree with the MT in this case, as Jerome’s commentary notes that the LXX is missing a verb found in the Hebrew text of Jer 1:10.

⁶⁶¹ Graves, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 5n23. Jerome is referring to a “figurative sense.”

and *brought down* lower, the church of God is **built** and **planted**. There is no doubt, however, that this text applies to the person of Jeremiah, since we read in the following chapters that he receives in his hand a cup filled with wine and is commanded to make all the surrounding nations drink from it. (Jer 25:15).⁶⁶²

Jerome's comment that good cannot be "built" until the bad is "destroyed," and the best cannot be "planted" until the worst is gone is very reminiscent of Origen's thought, and may imply a multi-stage (possibly three-fold) "building program" of spiritual development like that of Origen and the task verbs of *Jeremiah* (i.e., uproot/tear down the "bad," continue destroying the "worst," build "good"/plant the "best"). Yet it is difficult to ascertain in a brief glimpse. Like Origen the "structures" to be torn down are spiritual rather than physical: "sacrilege and perverse doctrine." The instrument used is the word of God, or Jesus. In this passage, Jesus consumes and destroys false doctrine. For Origen, across the *Homilies on Jeremiah*, Christ is variously described as the destroyer of idolatry⁶⁶³ as well as an "architect and builder."⁶⁶⁴ For Jerome, in those places of destruction, the church is "built" and "planted." Building and planting incorporate things that are humble and suited to ecclesiastical truth. By comparison, Origen refers to the "temple of God."⁶⁶⁵ Jerome's spiritual interpretation is extended to at least two other key verses: Jer 31:28 and 31:37-40.⁶⁶⁶ Jerome even ties the task verbs to the will and a type of cooperative grace in his commentary on Mt 15:13.⁶⁶⁷ At the same time, he also makes a point of

⁶⁶² Jerome, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, trans. Michael Graves, Ancient Christian Texts, ed. Christopher A. Hall. (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic InterVarsity Press, 2011), 4-5.

⁶⁶³ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, c 39.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, c 23.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.16 (3).

⁶⁶⁶ Jerome, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 199-200, 203-205.

⁶⁶⁷ St. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), The Fathers of the Church, ed. Thomas P. Halton, 180. "Will even that plant be **uprooted** about which the apostle says: "I **planted**, Apollos watered"? (1 Cor 3:6) But the problem is resolved because of what follows: "But God gave the growth." (1 Cor 3:7) And he himself says: "You are God's field, God's building"; (1 Cor 3:9) and in another place he says: "We are God's co-workers. (1 Cor 3:9, cf 3 Jn8) [...] God indeed has **planted** it, and none may **root up** His **planting**. But since that **planting** was through the disposition of the will of him which was **planted**, none other can **root it up** unless its own will consents thereto."

noting that the literal sense of Jer 1:10 is also valid and applicable to the person of Jeremiah.⁶⁶⁸

There are a number of consistent elements between the approaches of Jerome and Origen as illustrated in the table below. As noted, this is only a brief review to note striking similarities.

Table 12: Jerome and Origen commentary on Jer 1:10

Jerome on <i>Jeremiah</i> 1:10	Origen: see passage in <i>Homilies on Jeremiah</i>
It is necessary that the negative verbs come before the positive verbs	1.16
Ties Jer 1:10 to Mt 15:13 (every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up)	1.14 (4); 1.16 (3)
Ties Jer 1:10 to Mt 7:25-27 (build on the rock or on sand)	1.15
Ties Jer 1:10 to 1 Cor 3:9 (God's building, God's field)	1.15
Ties Jer 1:10 to Mt 4:8 (kingdoms of devil from the mountain top)	1.14
Ties Jer 1:10 to whatever is exalted against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:5)	c27

Source: Data adapted from Jerome, *Commentary on Jeremiah*; Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings* 28.

In this brief review, it is unclear whether Jerome identifies only two stages of spirituality or the three put forth by Origen. Yet, the linkage between Jerome and Origen is clear. It is worth noting that resonances of Origen in Jerome extend beyond Origen's first homily on Jer 1:1-10. Both Origen and Jerome use extensive references to the Pauline literature in explaining the Jeremianic text. Jerome alludes to an etymology of Jeremiah which can be found Origen⁶⁶⁹ as well as in Eusebius. Current space constraints prevent a more comprehensive review that is required in the future to provide a better understanding of the subject.

⁶⁶⁸ Jerome, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 5.

⁶⁶⁹ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, c 60.

Augustine (354-430)

One of the greatest doctors of the church⁶⁷⁰ Augustine, offers another aspect on the reception of the task verbs of Jer 1:10. Although his usage is not extensive, it demonstrates a spiritually-minded interpretation, with notable similarities to the writings of Origen. However, it is not apparent whether Augustine was influenced directly by Origen's writings.⁶⁷¹

On several occasions, Augustine references Jeremiah 1:10. In his *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, he says of Psalm 89:

For Thou hast said, "Mercy shall be **built up** for ever" (Ps 89:2). It is this that I sing: this is Thy truth, for the making known of which my mouth serveth. In such wise Thou sayest, I **build**, as not to **destroy**; for some Thou **destroyest** and **buildest** not; and some whom Thou **destroyest** Thou dost **rebuild**. For unless there were some who were **destroyed** to be **rebuilt**, Jeremiah would not have written, "See, I have this day set thee to **throw down** and to **build**." (Jer 1:10) And indeed all who formerly worshipped images and stones could not be **built up** in Christ, without being **destroyed** as to their old error. While, unless some were **destroyed** not to be **built up**, it would not be written, "He shall **destroy** them, and not **build** them up." (Ps. 28:5)... In what follows, he joins these two words, mercy and faithfulness; "For Thou hast said, Mercy shall be **built up** for ever: Thy truth shall be *established* in the Heavens:" in which mercy and truth are repeated, "for all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth," (Ps. 25:10) for truth in the fulfilment of promises could not be shown, unless mercy in the remission of sins preceded.⁶⁷²

Here, the verbs are applied for a spiritual purpose: sins such as idolatry must be

"destroyed" before one can be "built up" in Christ. Augustine also ties the use of "built up" in *Jeremiah* to the growth of mercy. Where Origen speaks of building the temple of God, Jerome speaks of the church, and Augustine mercy. Like the progression of task verbs which start by

⁶⁷⁰ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 61.

⁶⁷¹ Augustine was taught and converted by St. Ambrose, who himself learned from the Greek Fathers and Neoplatonists (see Yarnold, "Ambrose," 131). Neoplatonism and the work of Plotinus had a major influence on Augustine, although Christian influence came through Ambrose as well as an African convert Marius Victorinus (see Louth, "Augustine," 136).

⁶⁷² Augustine, NPNF1-08. *St. Augustin: Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1886), Psalm LXXXIX, 3. http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1819-1893_Schaff_Philip_2_Vol_08_Expositions_on_The_Psalms_EN.pdf (accessed September 28, 2022).

addressing sinfulness and result in a positive outcome, “mercy in the remission of sins” comes before “fulfillment of promises.” Augustine seems to use “destroyed” rather than “throw down,” focusing on the simple dichotomy of destruction and building. While this passage does not establish a three-fold pattern of growth, it clearly establishes a spiritual interpretation of the task verbs, and offers intriguing echoes of Origen’s commentary.

In his *Exposition of Psalm 51* he again references Jer 1:10 (using six verbs) and in this case ties it to the heart:

... Nineve stood: was Nineve **overthrown**? One way indeed it seemeth to men, and another way it seemed to God. But I think that it was fulfilled that the Prophet had foretold. Regard what Nineve was, and see how it was **overthrown**; **overthrown** in evil, **builded** in good; just as Saul the persecutor was **overthrown**, Paul the preacher **builded** (Acts 9:4) Who would not say that this city, in which we now are, was happily **overthrown**, if all those madmen, leaving their triflings were to run together to the Church with contrite *heart*, and were to call upon God’s mercy for their past doings? Should we not say, Where is that Carthage? Because there is not what there was, it is **overthrown**: but if there is what there was not, it is **builded**. So is said to *Jeremiah*, “Behold, I will give to thee to **root up**, to **dig under**, to **overthrow**, to **destroy**,” and again, “to **build**, and to **plant**.” (Jer 1:10). Thence is that voice of the Lord, “I will smite and I will heal.” (Deut 32:39). He smiteth the rottenness of the deed, He healeth the pain of the wound. Physicians do thus when they cut; they smite and heal; they arm themselves in order to strike, they carry steel, and come to cure.⁶⁷³

Augustine envisions a change of heart overthrowing an entire city. In addition, by likening “Nineve” to the conversion of Saul/Paul, Augustine demonstrates the spiritual sense of the verbs. Notably, Origen also uses Paul’s conversion and the same verse from Deuteronomy (Deut 32:39) as explanatory texts alongside Jer 1:10.⁶⁷⁴

Finally, in his classic *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine uses Jer 1:10 to address “severe” interpretations of certain biblical passages. He describes the “pulling down” and “destruction” of the dominion of lust, which can be “overturned.” Of Jer 1:10 he asserts “there is no doubt the

⁶⁷³ Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, Psalm LI, 11.

⁶⁷⁴ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.16.

whole of the language is figurative.”⁶⁷⁵ A more complete review may offer insight as to whether Augustine ties stages of spiritual progression to the task verbs.

John Cassian (c.360-c.432)

Cassian sees a “twofold” spiritual purpose for the task verbs of Jer 1:10. They are intended to rid the self of vice, and gain virtue and righteousness:

But you should know that we must make an effort with a twofold purpose in our exertion; both for the expulsion of vice, and for the attainment of virtue. And this we do not gather from our own conjecture, but are taught by the words of Him who alone knows the strength and method of His work: “Behold,” He says: “I have set thee this day over the nations and over kingdoms, to **root up**, and to **pull down**, and to **waste**, and to **destroy**, and to **build** and to **plant**.” (Jer 1:10). He points out that for getting rid of noxious things four things are requisite; viz., to **root up**, to **pull down**, to **waste**, and to **destroy**: but for the performance of what is good, and the acquisition of what pertains to righteousness only to **build** and to **plant**. Whence it is perfectly evident that it is a harder thing to **tear up** and *eradicate* the inveterate passions of body and soul than to introduce and **plant** spiritual virtues.⁶⁷⁶

Clearly, Cassian ascribes the work of spiritual transformation to the task verbs. Bearing in mind Cassian’s “twofold” purpose, and the appropriate scholarly warning that “it is easy but erroneous to read later development into Cassian’s words”⁶⁷⁷ it does not at first glance appear that Cassian sees three stages associated with the task verbs. Yet immediately prior to this excerpt, Cassian recognizes stages of spiritual progression, including first the necessity of self-knowledge (“faults” and “their cure”); second, knowledge of virtue and formation of the mind: and finally “the higher stage” of spiritual “mysteries” and “heavenly things.”⁶⁷⁸ In this limited view, and

⁶⁷⁵ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book III, Chapter 11.17.

⁶⁷⁶ John Cassian, “Conference XIV. The First Conference of Abbot Nesteros. On Spiritual Knowledge” in Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian. NPNF-211 Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, vol 11, ed. Phillip Schaff. (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), Chapter III. How practical perfection depends on a double system, 1096 <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/s/schaff/npnf211/cache/npnf211.pdf> (accessed October 4, 2022).

⁶⁷⁷ Owen Chadwick “John Cassian,” 146.

⁶⁷⁸ Cassian “The Works of John Cassian” in *Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, “The Works of John Cassian.”* <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/s/schaff/npnf211/cache/npnf211.pdf> (accessed September 25, 2022).

recognizing that elsewhere Cassian describes the movement of the soul towards God in more detail, Cassian seems to allow for the possibility of a general three stage framework. Whether he ties that framework to Jer 1:10 requires further investigation.

Pseudo-Dionysius (late fifth or early sixth century)

Writing at the end of fifth/early sixth century⁶⁷⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius⁶⁸⁰ combined both Christian Platonism (with influence from Gregory of Nyssa⁶⁸¹ and the Cappadocian Fathers), and Neoplatonic thought.⁶⁸² Pseudo-Dionysius's writings reflect Plotinus⁶⁸³ and exhibit "strong affinities"⁶⁸⁴ to Proclus, an Athenian Neoplatonist, who adopted and modified Plotinus' teaching.⁶⁸⁵ It is "probable" that Pseudo-Dionysius was a student of Proclus.⁶⁸⁶

Pseudo-Dionysius' enormously influential writings are cited by Gregory the Great and Aquinas, and his influence extends to the Rhineland mystics including Meister Eckart and Johannes Tauler, and the Spanish mystics including John of the Cross.⁶⁸⁷ The Dionysian theology "focuses predominantly on the Jewish and Christian scriptures"⁶⁸⁸ and "is concerned

⁶⁷⁹ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 51. See also Louth, "Denys the Areopagite" in *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Kindle, 155.

⁶⁸⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius earned his label due to the somewhat successful (for a time) attempt to portray the author as a St. Dionysius the Areopagite, a first century Athenian converted to Christianity by Paul. Rather than a fraudulent effort, his work can be seen more appropriately in the context of his time as adopting a "rhetorical device" in the interest of communicating a tradition. See Kevin Corrigan, "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1.

⁶⁸¹ Andrew Louth, "Denys the Areopagite" in *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Kindle, 167. See also Kevin Corrigan, "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 3.4. Like Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius compares Moses' ascent of the mountain to a journey through "sensible and intelligible contemplation of God" into ... "darkness above the mountain's peak" in which there is a "union" with the godhead.

⁶⁸² Kevin Corrigan, "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1.

⁶⁸³ Andrew Louth, "Denys the Areopagite" in *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Kindle, 170. Differing with Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius' concept of union implies that "the soul in ecstasy meets God's ecstatic love for herself."

⁶⁸⁴ Andrew Louth, "Denys the Areopagite" in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 185.

⁶⁸⁵ Anthony Meredith, "Proclus" in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 100.

⁶⁸⁶ Kevin Corrigan, "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

with the creature's response of praise and worship to the Love of God"⁶⁸⁹ although it sometimes draws on sources outside of Christianity.⁶⁹⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of scripture as the "basis for a deeper understanding" that goes beyond normal human ability.⁶⁹¹ He is known for his early coining of the purification, illumination and perfection terminology.

Pseudo Dionysius does not appear to address the verse Jer 1:10.⁶⁹² However, the concepts of purification, illumination and perfection⁶⁹³ are described at length across his writings on two "hierarchies" defined by Pseudo-Dionysius: first the celestial hierarchy, made up of higher beings such as angels, and second, the ecclesiastical hierarchy, covering the sensible and human realm. In the *Celestial Hierarchy* he applies the terms to the celestial beings, saying:

...purification, illumination and perfection are all three the reception of an understanding of the Godhead, namely, being completely purified of ignorance by the proportionately granted knowledge of the more perfect initiations, being illuminated by this same divine knowledge (through which it also purifies whatever was not previously beheld but is now revealed through the more lofty enlightenment) and being also perfected by this light in the understanding of the most lustrous initiations.⁶⁹⁴

God's beatitude is "itself purification, illumination and perfection."⁶⁹⁵ God is the source.

At the same time, these tasks are assigned to particular ranks: "the order of the hierarchy will

⁶⁸⁹ Andrew Louth, "Denys the Areopagite" in *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Kindle, 160.

⁶⁹⁰ Kevin Corrigan, "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 3.2-3. In *On Divine Names*, Pseudo-Dionysius draws on sources outside of Christianity (i.e., Platonic sources) while insisting that the names in question are strictly Hebrew and Christian Scripture-based. Similarly, in his discussion of symbols, he pulls from other traditions.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 4.2-3.

⁶⁹² *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, ed. John Farina, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), biblical index 297-298. *Jeremiah* is cited more than ten times according to the translation by Luibheid and Rorem: Jer 2:12-13; 7:16, 24; 11:14; 16:12; 17:13; 18:5-6; 23:21, 24, 29. A review of the Greek text with particular attention to the purificatory passages may reveal subtle echoes of and allusions to the Jeremianic task verbs.

⁶⁹³ Pseudo-Dionysius applies the terms to both celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies. See CH 3 165B 27 to 168B 16, and 209C 35f; EH 5 504 5 to 509A 3; EH6 537ABC and EH 6 532BC where the terms are "particularly prominent" in relation to the clerical orders.

⁶⁹⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, CH 7 III 209C – 209D. In CH 7 II 208A – 209A Pseudo Dionysius expands upon each characteristic as it applies to the heavenly beings. By contrast, humans are purified morally, rather than purified of ignorance.

⁶⁹⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius CH 3 164D-168B.

mean that some are being purified and others purify, some are being enlightened while others enlighten, some are being perfected while others complete the perfecting initiation for others.”⁶⁹⁶

The terms are more “prominent”⁶⁹⁷ in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. In one of the many triadic structures defined by Pseudo-Dionysius, the ecclesiastical hierarchy is divided into an overarching triad of sacramental rites, clerical order and laity. The first and highest ecclesiastical rank is not a human, but rather sacramental rites while humans are listed in “eight ranks”⁶⁹⁸ below the sacraments (bringing the total ranks to nine, or three triads).⁶⁹⁹ Concluding his discussion of the ecclesiastical hierarchy Pseudo-Dionysius says:

We must now sum up. The holy sacraments bring about purification, illumination and perfection. The deacons form the order which purifies. The priests constitute the order which gives illumination. And the hierarchs, living in conformity with God, make up the order which perfects. As for those who are being purified, so long as they are still at this stage of purification they do not partake of the sacred vision or communion. The sacred people is a contemplative order. The order of those made perfect is that of the monks who live a single-minded life.⁷⁰⁰

In Louth’s view of the Dionysian perspective: “the rites or mysteries *perfect* us, the clergy *illuminate* us to receive the mysteries and the laity are *being purified*.”⁷⁰¹ Pseudo-Dionysius sees the purpose of the hierarchy, within which purification, illumination and perfection happen, as “assimilation to God and union with Him as far as possible”⁷⁰² and a structure through which, in

⁶⁹⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, *CH* 3 164D-165C.

⁶⁹⁷ Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem, transl, *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, CH 3, n47. Purification is ethical or moral for humans rather than purification of “ignorance” as for celestial beings.

⁶⁹⁸ Kevin Corrigan, “Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 3.5. Including hierarchs or bishops, priests, deacons, monks, laity, catechumens, penitents and finally the demon-possessed.

⁶⁹⁹ Andrew Louth, “Denys the Areopagite” in *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Kindle, 163.

⁷⁰⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy,” 536D 248 in Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 113. See also Kevin Corrigan, who summarizes the structure as: The deacons purify the catechumens, penitents and possessed primarily by giving them ethical instruction. The priests illuminate the laity, who are able to receive the intelligible truth. The hierarchs perfect....”

⁷⁰¹ Andrew Louth, “Denys the Areopagite” in *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Kindle, 165.

⁷⁰² Pseudo-Dionysius, *CH* 7 III 209C – 209D.

effect, “the vision of God is handed from being to being downward through the levels of the hierarchy.”⁷⁰³ The hierarchs are able to “contemplate the intelligible realm directly” those in lower ranks cannot, and therefore the hierarchy must engage in administering and mediating the sacramental rites. Rorem concludes of the famous triad used today for stages of the spiritual journey: “These powers are not moral purification, contemplative illumination and a uniting perfection, but together involve the progressive understanding of sacred things namely the proper uplifting interpretation of the biblical and liturgical traditions.”⁷⁰⁴

Gregory the Great (540-c.604)

Gregory the Great, a Benedictine monk who became Pope in 590, is the “first Western Father to quote Pseudo-Dionysius.”⁷⁰⁵ At the same time, the “primary sources of his doctrine are Scripture, St. Augustine and Cassian.”⁷⁰⁶ Gregory clearly sees a spiritual purpose to the task verbs of Jer 1:10 and directly ties the verse to the conversion of heart. His discussion of the task verbs (of which he notes six) appears in his [*Book of Pastoral Rule*](#), addressing the issue “[How those are to be admonished who do not even begin good things, and those who do not finish them when begun.](#)” His somewhat lengthy discussion is worthy of review:

For hence it is that it is said to **Jeremiah** when sent to preach, *See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to scatter, and to build, and to plant (Jer. 1:10)*. Because, unless he first **destroyed** wrong things, he could not profitably **build** right things; unless he **plucked out** of the hearts of his hearers the thorns of vain love, he would certainly **plant** to no purpose the words of holy preaching. Hence it is that Peter first **overthrows**, that he may afterwards **build up**, when he in no wise admonished the Jews as to what they were now to do, but reproveth them for what

⁷⁰³ Kevin Corrigan, “Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 3.5.

⁷⁰⁴ Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 114. Kevin Corrigan, “Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 3.4

⁷⁰⁵ Karlfried Froehlich, Introduction III to *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 45.

⁷⁰⁶ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 75. See also Benedicta Ward, “Gregory the Great” in *The Study of Spirituality*, 277-280.

they had done, saying, *Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by powers and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves know; Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have by the hands of wicked men crucified and slain; whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of hell* ([Acts 2:22–24](#)); in order, to wit, that having been **thrown down** by a recognition of their cruelty, they might hear the **building up** of holy preaching by so much the more profitably as they anxiously sought it. Whence also they forthwith replied, *What then shall we do, men and brethren?* And it is presently said to them, *Repent and be baptized, every one of you* ([Acts 2:37–38](#)). Which words of **building up** they would surely have despised, had they not first wholesomely become aware of the ruin of their **throwing down**. Hence it is that Saul, when the light from heaven shone upon him, did not hear immediately what he was to do aright, but what he had done wrong. For, when, fallen to the earth, he enquired, saying, *Who art Thou, Lord?* it was straightway replied, *I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest*. And when he forthwith replied, *Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?* it is added at once, *Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee there what thou must do* (Acts 9:4; 22:8). Lo, the Lord, speaking from heaven, reproved the deeds of His persecutor, and yet did not at once shew him what he had to do. Lo, the whole fabric of his elation had already been **thrown down** and then, humble after his downfall, he sought to be **built up**: and when pride was **thrown down**, the words of **building up** were still kept back; to wit, that the cruel persecutor might long lie **overthrown**, and rise afterwards the more firmly **built** in good as he had fallen utterly upset from his former error. Those, then, who have not as yet begun to do any good are first to be **overthrown** by the hand of correction from the stiffness of their iniquity, that they may afterwards be lifted up to the state of well-doing. For this cause also we cut down the lofty timber of the forest, that we may raise it up in the roof of a building: but yet it is not placed in the fabric suddenly; in order, that is, that its vicious greenness may first be dried out: for the more the moisture thereof is exuded in the lowest, by so much the more solidly is it elevated to the topmost places.⁷⁰⁷

Highlighting the spiritual significance, Gregory sees “wrong things” destroyed and “vain love” being “plucked out of the heart.” He clearly sees the terms as a way of encouraging repentance, and ties the actions to the heart. The negative verbs are applied to sin and distance from God, while the positive imply righteousness and divine work, through words or otherwise.

⁷⁰⁷ [Gregory the Great, “The Book of Pastoral Rule, and Selected Epistles, of Gregory the Great”, in NPNF-212 *Leo the Great, Gregory the Great* \(Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library\), ed. Philip Schaff, ch XXXIV *How the Ruler, While Living Well, Ought to Teach and Admonish Those that are Put Under Him. How those are to be admonished who do not even begin good things, and those who do not finish them when begun*, 685. <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/s/schaff/npnf212/cache/npnf212.pdf> \(accessed October 2, 2022\).](#)

Gregory also defines a need for space or time between the negative and positive action, space in which the desire to be built arises, as well as the ability to be built “more firmly.”

Like Origen (and with Neoplatonic echoes), perfection of virtue is the goal. However Origen mentions both perfection of virtue and a type of mystical union or spiritual marriage with God. In a striking echo of Augustine and Origen, Gregory uses Paul’s conversion as an example of the action of the task verbs of Jer 1:10.

Gregory’s discussion of Jer 1:10 above, alongside the example of Paul’s conversion, and that of lumber for a roof, indicates that Gregory recognizes a general progression of three stages in the framework of Jer 1:10. Paul is first “thrown down.” And then, in humility, he seeks to be “built up,” but “the words of building up were still kept back.” The “persecutor” in Paul lays “overthrown” so that he may “rise afterwards more firmly built in good.” Gregory explains that he is speaking of those who have not begun to do good. Gregory does not use the verb terminology precisely or in the same sequence as they appear in the Hebrew; it is possible that this may be explained by issues of translation (i.e., the Greek LXX does not precisely follow the verbs from the Hebrew, and instead uses more than one Greek verb for a single verb from Jer 1:10 MT). It may also reflect Augustine’s seeming emphasis on duality rather than a tri-part progression. (See Augustine’s *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, Psalm 89 above). In addition, if Gregory were relying in part upon Scripture, Paul focuses more on the positive verbs than the negative without a clear distinction between the negative task verbs.

Nonetheless, Gregory’s timber analogy confirms three stages. After being (1) cut down, the timber is not “suddenly” lifted into its place in the roof; (2) instead its “vicious greenness” must be dried out, and become more solid; then (3) it can be “elevated to the topmost places.” In other writings Gregory teaches three stages of “progress in the spiritual life”:

In the first stage, the Christian strives to combat vices and gain control of the passions. The second stage is a period of growth in virtue and especially the moral virtues, although the theological virtues are also necessary, since without them nothing is pleasing to God. Finally, all virtues brought to their perfection by the actuation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰⁸

Considered in light of Gregory's view on spiritual progression, it is possible that his understanding is similar to Origen's, in that the task verbs represent stages of spiritual progression. However, another possibility is that Gregory sees the verbs as only applying to two of the three stages. Or his understanding of the stages may align differently to the state of a soul than Origen, but still indicate progress. For instance Gregory's characterization "not yet done good" could imply a pre-purgative stage (not in a state of grace) instead of purgative stage (in a state of grace) to use the modern terms. His use of the negative verbs, i.e., "overthrowing" and "destroy" seems to apply to those who have not yet done good. Does he see two stages prior to entering a state of grace? Origen and Gregory may have different images of the framework of Jer 1:10. But both see a three-stage progression ending in building and planting.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

Aquinas, a Dominican and Father of the Church, uses a verse parallel to Jer 1:10, Jer 18:7, in his major work *Summa Theologica*. Interestingly, in this passage, Aquinas references Origen, Augustine and Gregory.⁷⁰⁹ Aquinas cites Augustine's assessment of Nineve, including the spiritual usage of overthrowing and building. The reference is used as Aquinas is addressing whether men will be punished for eternity:

⁷⁰⁸ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 75. Aumann cites Gregory's teaching in both *Moralia* and his *Homily in Ezech.* See Notes, n45, 286. See also Garrigou-Lagrange, *Three Ages of the Interior Life*, 236.

⁷⁰⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 99, a.3, ad 2. "I answer that, As Augustine says (*De Civ. Dei* xxi, 17,18), some evaded the error of Origen by asserting that the demons are punished everlastingly, while holding that all men, even unbelievers, are at length set free from punishment. But this statement is altogether unreasonable [...]. Reply to Objection 2: As Augustine (*De Civ. Dei* xxi, 24) and Gregory (*Moral.* xxxiv) say, the saints in this life pray for their enemies, that they may be converted to God, while it is yet possible for them to be converted [...]

Hence: "I will suddenly speak against a nation and against a kingdom, to **root out** and to **pull down** and to **destroy** it. If that nation . . . shall repent of their evil, I also will repent of the evil that I have thought to do to them" ([Jer. 18:7](#)). Therefore, since the merits of the damned cannot be changed, the threatened punishment will ever be fulfilled in them. Nevertheless the prophecy of commination is always fulfilled in a certain sense, because as Augustine says (*De Civ. Dei*. xxi, 24): "Nineve has been **overthrown**, that was evil, and a good Nineve is **built up**, that was not: for while the walls and the houses remained standing, the city was **overthrown** in its wicked ways."⁷¹⁰

In this passage, Aquinas embraces the spiritual sense of Jer 1:10. Rather than any physical structure, wickedness is “overthrown,” allowing for the good to be “built.” While a three-phase journey is not evident, separately, Aquinas does recognize three stages of a spiritual journey, using the terminology of beginner, proficient and perfect.⁷¹¹ A broader analysis could reveal a better understanding of Aquinas’s interpretation of Jer 1:10. With the limits of this study in mind, that must be reserved for another effort.

Johannes Tauler (c. 1300 – 1361)

Lesser known than many of the other philosophers and theologians addressed here, this disciple of Meister Eckhart may have been “the author that most influenced” John of the Cross.⁷¹² A Dominican and one of the Rhineland mystics, Tauler’s sermons are directed towards the personal spiritual experience and extol the need for detachment: if the mind is not “completely emptied of all sensible and intellectual images, it cannot contemplate God, because God is not knowable in that way.”⁷¹³ Tauler teaches and preaches about three stages of spiritual development, using the terminology, like Aquinas, of “beginner, proficient and perfect.”⁷¹⁴

⁷¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 99, a.3, ad 3.

https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum646.htm#XP_Q99_A3-p12.1

⁷¹¹ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Three Ages of the Interior Life*, 237.

⁷¹² Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 195.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁷¹⁴ Johannes Tauler, “Beginners, Proficients and the Perfect – First Sermon for the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity” in *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler*, transl. Walter Elliott (1910; Omaha, NE: Patristic Publishing, repr. 2020) Kindle.

While he does not refer directly to Jer 1:10, the themes of the task verbs seem embedded in a number of sermons. Tauler speaks of spiritually “rooting up” in numerous examples, including a Sermon bearing the title “Laying the Axe to the Roots of Imperfection.”⁷¹⁵

I must further explain my teaching that the **root** of our imperfections must be **dug out**. For when one has weeded his garden, there may remain unnoticed a **root** or two deep set in the ground, which will spring up with the good seed and spoil the crop. By this I mean that the deep lying defects of our soul, which too often get little notice, are not **destroyed**...

[God] insists peremptorily, that we shall uncover these harmful **roots** of sin and **cast** them **forth** from the soul... if you find these **root** weaknesses, **destroy** them relentlessly by humility....

In another sermon he speaks of exterminating defects from the heart using the metaphor of a vinedresser who “digs up the soil and roots out the weeds... and if he finds spiritual weeds there, imperfect tendencies, whether great or small, he puts in his spade and cuts them out by the root.”⁷¹⁶

Might this language indicate a resonance from *Jeremiah*? It must be noted that this identification is based on a high-level review of the English translations of Tauler’s sermons; further study of the translation history is needed. Nonetheless, the themes are apparent. “Roots” must be “dug out,” “cast forth,” and “destroyed.” As this sermon continues, these efforts are also linked to purification of the heart.

In another Sermon, he asks, “Are thy roots, that is to say intentions, not planted in the good fertile soil that God alone is, in real and submissive humility...?”⁷¹⁷ Roots are likened to intentions; if intentions are not planted in God, they will not grow in virtue. This example pairs concepts from two of the three sets of task verbs.

⁷¹⁵ Tauler, “Second Sermon for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.”

⁷¹⁶ Tauler, “The Different Degrees of Spirituality — Sermon For Septuagesima Sunday.”

⁷¹⁷ Tauler, “Lessons for the New Year -- Sermon for New-Year’s Day.”

Not unlike Paul (1 Cor 3:15), he emphasizes that the spiritual sense is not physically detrimental: “Dig down for the roots of thy vices and strike those roots dead; nor should this be the destruction of thy nature.”⁷¹⁸ Like Jer 1:10 there are two “negative” tasks: here digging down, and then striking dead. The vice is destroyed at the root. At the same time, human nature is preserved and presumably purified. In a possible resonance of Paul, sins are destroyed, not persons (1 Cor 3:15).

To turn to the positive pair of Jer 1:10, lives should be “built” upon Christ.⁷¹⁹ in a teaching on humility as the “sure way” and “foundation” Tauler ties “building” to spiritual perfection:

...we **build** the house of the love of God, and we adorn it with the virtue of discretion. ...those who set out towards perfection by ways of high reasoning—not traveling by this humble road of St. Peter – every one of them will fall into the pit of hell.⁷²⁰

It may be that these are simply common analogies inside and outside of the Biblical context. Nonetheless, Tauler uses the themes of Jer 1:10 in a way that appears consistent with the typology of the spiritual journey.⁷²¹

In more than one instance he uses verses from *Jeremiah* as examples of a spiritual state. Reflecting on a soul who experiences the withdrawal of God’s presence, Tauler cites the

⁷¹⁸ Johannes Tauler, “Attiring the Bride for the Bridegroom – First Sermon for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.”

⁷¹⁹ Johannes Tauler, “Jesus is the Divine Light – First Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Lent.”

⁷²⁰ Johannes Tauler, “Three Foundations Stones: Humility Love and Detachment – First Sermon for the Third Sunday after Trinity.”

⁷²¹ In “Dwelling with God – Sermon for the Feast of St. Andrew, The Apostle” Tauler interprets the foe from the north in Jer 1:14 (a verse from Jeremiah’s call narrative) as “an evil wind, withering all the spiritual fruits of God’s graces.” In “Why Christ Upbraids Men—First Sermon for the Feast of the Ascension” the evils decried in Jer 2:12-13, forsaking the fountain of living water and making broken cisterns, are tied directly to the heart: “What comes into the cistern of their heart is foul and dirty rain water. They have nothing of God in their hearts, and that is the great evil that God, through the prophet, laments in the sight of Heaven and earth.” People cling to “external observances...not at all penetrating to the inner meaning from which alone all good must spring forth.”

prophet's isolation (Jer 15:7).⁷²² He defines one of the marks of a "chosen spouse" of the Lord as inner peace, illustrated by Jer 14:13.⁷²³ He again cites *Jeremiah* to explain the state of the perfect:

The third and highest vocation is the imitation of the blessed example of our Lord Jesus Christ in all respects, actively, passively and in contemplation, with purest motive, in entire detachment of spirit, thereby attaining the loftiest point of perfection. ... It is about entering this state that Jeremias speaks: "Thou shalt call Me Father and Shalt not cease to walk after Me" (Jer 3:19).⁷²⁴

Tauler's interpretation of *Jeremiah* seems predominantly (if not exclusively) spiritual. The usage of the task verbs in a thematic way may demonstrate the diffuse nature of transmission and reception. He does not seem to use the three pairs together or, as a matter of course, pair the counterparts (such as, build and plant) as in *Jeremiah* MT and in some verses in the Pauline literature. Evidence of a direct correspondence for Tauler between the task verbs and the spiritual journey warrants further study and elucidation. For now, it is important to note that, like *Jeremiah* the negative verbs are applied to sin and seem to require two stages, while the positive terms of build and plant refer to the Love of God and Christ himself, as the strong foundation.

⁷²² Johannes Tauler, "Watching for Friends and Enemies – Sermon for the Feast of St. Augustine."

⁷²³ John Tauler, "Sermon II: On St. Barbara's Day, or That of any Other Holy Virgin" in *Inner Way*, ed. Arthur Wollaston (London: Methuen & Co., 1901). URL http://www.ccel.org/ccel/tauler/inner_way.html.

⁷²⁴ Johannes Tauler, "Beginners, Proficients and The Perfect—First Sermon for the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity."

Chapter 7

JOHN OF THE CROSS, JEREMIAH, and THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

John of the Cross (1542-1591⁷²⁵) is a Spanish mystic and Doctor of the Church. He wrote several works which are considered masterpieces of the spiritual life. The vast majority were composed between 1578-1588.⁷²⁶ His major works include *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night*, *Spiritual Canticle*, and *The Living Flame of Love*.⁷²⁷ Together they describe the experiences of a soul as it seeks a supernatural union of love with God, through poetry which reflects his own mystical experiences, and a series of prose treatises which explain his poetic imagery. Beyond this, there is additional poetry, various sayings and letters and a famous drawing of Christ on the Cross.⁷²⁸ Across his works, more than 20 direct and indirect references to the book of *Jeremiah* and another 20 to *Lamentations* have been identified.⁷²⁹

His imprisonment in Toledo (1577/8) was the setting in which he composed his first work, the *Spiritual Canticle*, a mystical, poetic expression of ineffable love between a bride and Bridegroom, between the soul and Christ, inspired by the *Song of Songs* which he “knew by heart.”⁷³⁰ Across his writings, John draws on his work as spiritual director for Carmelite nuns and friars, and lay persons under his direction, as well as on his knowledge of theology,

⁷²⁵ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 194.

⁷²⁶ Leonard Doohan, *The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross: An Introduction to His Life and Teaching* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1995), 23.

⁷²⁷ The primary English reference for these works used in this paper is *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991). For the Spanish text, online resources including *San Juan de la Cruz: Obras Completas* (Nueva Edición Integral), (Sweden: Wishehouse Publishing, 2021) Kindle edition. Abbreviated references: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (A); *The Dark Night* (N); *The Spiritual Canticle* (SC.); *The Living Flame of Love* (LF.).

⁷²⁸ Kavanaugh, 33-35, 37.

⁷²⁹ Kavanaugh, Scriptural Index to *The Collected Works of John of the Cross*.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, 461, 464.

philosophy, psychology, and above all Scripture.⁷³¹ John's intent is to instruct others in reaching the summit of perfection by teaching them how to "unburden the self of all earthly things, avoid spiritual obstacles and live in that complete nakedness and freedom of spirit necessary for Divine Union."⁷³²

John recognizes the general structure of the three stages of the spiritual life, referring to the stages as that of beginner, proficient and perfect⁷³³ (using terminology also employed by Aquinas and Tauler), as well as to the purgative, illuminative and unitive way. In the prologue to the *Spiritual Canticle*, his understanding is clear:

The initial stanzas treat of the state of beginners, that of the purgative way. The subsequent ones deal with the state of proficient, in which the spiritual betrothal is effected, that is, the illuminative way. The stanzas following these refer to the unitive way, that of the perfect, where spiritual marriage takes place. This unitive way of the perfect follows the illuminative way of the proficient. The final stanzas speak of the beatific state, that sole aspiration of a person who has reached perfection.⁷³⁴

John's assessment of spiritual progression understands the three stages of the purgative, illuminative and unitive ways named by pseudo-Dionysius; however, his focus is on "painful transition" periods⁷³⁵, i.e., active and passive stages of purgation which he calls "nights" of the sense and of the spirit. The progression described by John starts with the purgative way for beginners, moves into the night of sense, then into a "plateau"⁷³⁶ period of proficiency or the illuminative way, before moving into the night of the spirit, and finally into "permanent

⁷³¹ Doohan, 48. See also *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Prologue, 2. John notes that experience and science can deceive us, so he relies extensively on Scripture.

⁷³² *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 113. This description is in a prelude to the text is by Juan Evangelista, "John's confessor, secretary and close companion." See Kavanaugh, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Introduction, 109.

⁷³³ For example, see John of the Cross, *The Dark Night* N.1.1.1-3.

⁷³⁴ SC. Theme 1-2.

⁷³⁵ Doohan, 54. For a discussion and visual depiction of spiritual progression incorporating "John's System" see 50-55.

⁷³⁶ Doohan, 70-71.

transformation”⁷³⁷ in the supernatural union with God. Each “night” has an active and passive aspect. In an active night, the effort of the soul (as a response to God who is drawing the soul toward him⁷³⁸) is necessary, while in passive nights God Himself works in the soul. While the stages can be described as sequential, they are also overlapping, and one can regress as well as progress. Movement is constant, whether forward or backward.⁷³⁹

John does not address those in the pre-purgative stage, or those entering into the purgative way for beginners; rather his attention is focused on those already committed to the service of the Lord.⁷⁴⁰ For John, the active night of sense is the “point of departure”⁷⁴¹ for purification.

For our purposes, we will consider the night of sense within the purgative way, and the night of spirit within the illuminative way.⁷⁴² It will be useful here to compare the understanding of the three spiritual stages (the purgative, illuminative and unitive ways) as presented through Origen, Pseudo-Dionysius, Tauler, and John of the Cross.

Table 13: Comparative excerpts and description of the spiritual stages

Stage	Origen	Pseudo-Dionysius	Tauler	John of the Cross
Purgative	“God is good when he uproots what is bad through words.”	The purgative way is the reception of understanding “...being completely purified of	“Beginners are absorbed in keeping the commandments,” ⁷⁴⁹	Beginners must pass through active and passive night of the senses.

⁷³⁷ Doohan, 55.

⁷³⁸ N.1.1.1.

⁷³⁹ A.1.11.5

⁷⁴⁰ Doohan 63. His audience were in large part Carmelite friars and nuns committed to religious life.

⁷⁴¹ A.1.2.1.

⁷⁴² This approach to classification is based on that of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (see p. 24) and Ralph Martin, *Fulfillment of All Desire*, 13. In his major works, John’s focus can be generally classified within each stage as follows: the purgative way is addressed in *Ascent I*, *Dark Night I*; the illuminative way in *Ascent II*, *III*; *Spiritual Canticle 1-21*; *Dark Night II*; and the unitive way is the focus of *Living Flame*; and *Spiritual Canticle*, 22-40. However, it is important to note that particular passages within any section may address various stages across the spectrum.

⁷⁴⁹ Tauler, “Beginners, Proficients and the Perfect –First Sermon For The Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity.”

Table 13: Comparative excerpts and description of the spiritual stages

Stage	Origen	Pseudo-Dionysius	Tauler	John of the Cross
	<p>The Savior uprooted the kingdom of the Devil.⁷⁴³ Every plant not planted by the Father such as evil thoughts, murder, adultery, theft, false witness must be uprooted.⁷⁴⁴ But, what is uprooted or “demolished” is not destroyed.⁷⁴⁵ <i>Proverbs</i> is likened to first phase.⁷⁴⁶</p>	<p>ignorance by the proportionately granted knowledge of the more perfect initiations” Ignorance applies to heavenly beings; humans are ethically and morally purified.⁷⁴⁷ Deacons purify.⁷⁴⁸</p>	<p>“in external good works, and [are] easily are led astray.”⁷⁵⁰ “Hidden enemies steal and destroy the treasures of God’s grace, and lay waste His interior kingdom.”⁷⁵¹</p> <p>They “labor for God with external religious works and according to their own plans, and ...what they consider great things, fasting, keeping vigils, reciting prayers; at the same time paying little regard to the strictly interior religious life⁷⁵²</p>	<p>The soul has “numerous imperfections,” takes joy in prayer and penance, is motivated by consolation; and is like a weak child.⁷⁵³</p> <p>The soul grows “aware of her obligations...”⁷⁵⁴</p> <p>“it will perhaps seem that we are tearing down (<i>destruimos</i>) rather than building up (<i>edificamos</i>) the way of spiritual exercise. This would be true if our doctrine here were destined merely for beginners”⁷⁵⁵</p>
Illumin.	<p>There is need of the goodness of God to destroy what has been uprooted and demolished. How? The chaff with unquenchable fire,</p>	<p>The reception of understanding “...being illuminated by this same divine knowledge (through which it also purifies</p>	<p>Proficients seek to correct the least defects,⁷⁶⁰ have overcome sensual appetites, attained virtue, but are overly content with</p>	<p>Proficients must pass through active and passive night of spirit, including spiritual betrothal. A soul contemplates, “prepares for union</p>

⁷⁴³ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.14 (5), 1.7 (2).

⁷⁴⁴ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.14 (4) Origen cites Mt 15:13.

⁷⁴⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.15.

⁷⁴⁶ Bergsma, 660-661; see also Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, Prologue 3.

⁷⁴⁷ Based on Pseudo Dionysius, *CH* 7 III 209C – 209D, *CH* 7 II 208A - 209A.

⁷⁴⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *EH* 536D 248.

⁷⁵⁰ Tauler, “The Different Degrees Of Spirituality — Sermon For Septuagesima Sunday.”

⁷⁵¹ Tauler, “The Good Shepherd And His Sheep — Fourth Sermon For The Feast Of Pentecost.”

⁷⁵² Tauler, “The Different Degrees Of Spirituality — Sermon For Septuagesima Sunday.”

⁷⁵³ N.1.1.2-3.

⁷⁵⁴ SC. 1.1.

⁷⁵⁵ A.3.2.1-2.

⁷⁶⁰ Tauler, “How Men Thirst After God Differently — Sermon For The Second Sunday After The Epiphany.”

Table 13: Comparative excerpts and description of the spiritual stages

Stage	Origen	Pseudo-Dionysius	Tauler	John of the Cross
	and bundles of weed are bound and delivered to the fire. ⁷⁵⁶ <i>Ecclesiastes</i> is likened to the second phase: the “seeker of wisdom” has renounced the world, knows “the difference between...corruptible and...incorruptible” and is “competent to proceed to dogmatic and mystical matters.” ⁷⁵⁷	whatever was not previously beheld but is now revealed through the more lofty enlightenment). ⁷⁵⁸ Priests give illumination. ⁷⁵⁹	spiritual consolations ⁷⁶¹ “This second degree is “much higher than the first, being the way of chastity, poverty and obedience.” ⁷⁶² “The vine-dresser digs up the soil...and roots out the weeds; (i.e.), the devout man vigilantly searches his soul's very depths, and if he finds spiritual weeds there, imperfect tendencies, whether great or small, he puts in his spade and cuts them out by the root.” ⁷⁶³	by gifts, graces, interior and exterior trials.” ⁷⁶⁴ Divine light of contemplation causes spiritual darkness by surpassing natural understanding. ⁷⁶⁵ Imperfect affections and habits remain “like roots (<i>raíces</i>) in the spirit, for the sensory purgation could not reach the spirit. The difference between the two purgations is like the difference between pulling up roots (<i>raíz</i>) or cutting off a branch...” ⁷⁶⁶ In spiritual betrothal the soul is able to see her excellent qualities and ample riches and also that she does not possess and enjoy them as she would like because she still dwells in the body, her suffering is often intense...” ⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁵⁶ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.15.

⁷⁵⁷ Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, Prologue, 3.

⁷⁵⁸ Based on Pseudo Dionysius, *CH* 7 III 209C – 209D.

⁷⁵⁹ Pseudo Dionysius, *EH*, 536D 248.

⁷⁶¹ Tauler, “The Different Degrees Of Spirituality — Sermon For Septuagesima Sunday.”

⁷⁶² Tauler, “Beginners, Proficients and the Perfect –First Sermon For The Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity.”

⁷⁶³ Tauler, “The Different Degrees Of Spirituality — Sermon For Septuagesima Sunday.”

⁷⁶⁴ Martin, 13.

⁷⁶⁵ N.2.5.3.

⁷⁶⁶ N.2.2.1.

⁷⁶⁷ SC. 18.1-2.

Table 13: Comparative excerpts and description of the spiritual stages

Stage	Origen	Pseudo-Dionysius	Tauler	John of the Cross
Unitive	<p>“It is necessary that the inferior does not survive so that there is nothing upon which the evil one can build.”⁷⁶⁸ God sows in our hearts⁷⁶⁹ to build a temple of virtue so that His glory can be seen in it.⁷⁷⁰ <i>Song of Songs</i> is third and final phase of wisdom and perfection.⁷⁷¹ A soul (or the Church) weds “perfect Bridegroom,” the Word of God.⁷⁷²</p>	<p>The reception of understanding “...being also perfected by this light in the understanding of the most lustrous initiations.”⁷⁷³ Hierarchs perfect.⁷⁷⁴</p>	<p>The soul emptied of self, is raised up and given “His kiss of love.” The lower its self estimate the higher its elevation. With “ineffable greetings...both are made as one.”⁷⁷⁵</p> <p>At the judgment of God, when all things be overthrown and cast away, those who have built on this deep and hidden foundation of truth and of God, stand in security.⁷⁷⁶</p> <p>“The perfect are totally absorbed in imitation interiorly and exteriorly of the life and passion of Christ...with purest motives, in</p>	<p>Perfection, “habitual contemplative union; spiritual marriage, transforming union.”⁷⁷⁸</p> <p>“building...belongs only to the Father of lights from whom descends every good and perfect gift (Jas 1:17). If the Lord, as David says does not build the house, in vain do it’s builders labor (Ps 127:1)”⁷⁷⁹</p>

⁷⁶⁸ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.15.

⁷⁶⁹ Origen *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.14 (4).

⁷⁷⁰ Origen, *catena* 23.

⁷⁷¹ Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, Prologue, 3; see also Decock, 21 n3.

⁷⁷² Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, Prologue, 1.

⁷⁷³ Based on Pseudo Dionysius, *CH* 7 III 209C – 209D.

⁷⁷⁴ Pseudo Dionysius, *EH* 536D 248.

⁷⁷⁵ Tauler, “Beginners, Proficients and the Perfect –First Sermon For The Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity” in *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler* . Kindle Edition. Tauler also cites the verse regarding Elijah detecting God in the whisper/sheer silence: “When this silent peace is established in the soul, then comes the Lord as He did to Elias, “in the whistling of a gentle air” (1 Kgs 19:12).”

⁷⁷⁶ Tauler, “On Temptations— Sermon For The Twentieth Sunday After Trinity.” Tauler is preaching on St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (Eph 6).

⁷⁷⁸ Martin, 13.

⁷⁷⁹ LF. 3.47.

Table 13: Comparative excerpts and description of the spiritual stages

Stage	Origen	Pseudo-Dionysius	Tauler	John of the Cross
			entire detachment of spirit. ⁷⁷⁷	
Summary of Journey	Two stages purification followed by building a temple of virtue/right teaching in the self, leading to pure love, and mystical marriage through which God's glory is seen.	All three stages are "the reception of an understanding of the Godhead." ⁷⁸⁰ Vision is handed down through the hierarchy. ⁷⁸¹	Three "calls" First: to give up the world, leading from an outward to an inward life. Second: be transformed into the living image of Christ by meditation on Him, perfected by Holy Communion. Third: absolute abandonment to God. ⁷⁸² One must strive to have dear nothing but God's honor and glory. ⁷⁸³	Active and passive nights of progressive purification lead to a union of wills that is spiritual marriage and transformation in the love of God.

Source: Data adapted from Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*; Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*; Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*; Johannes Tauler, *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler*; John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of John of the Cross*.

How, and to what extent, if any, are John's descriptions influenced by the task verbs of *Jeremiah* and the spiritual interpretation taken by Origen?

John's Purpose: Only the Honor and Glory of God

John created a visual "map" that summarizes his teaching in his Sketch of Mount Carmel which employs a verse from *Jeremiah* near the summit (Jer 2:7).⁷⁸⁴ He placed it at the beginning

⁷⁷⁷ Tauler, "Beginners, Proficients and the Perfect –First Sermon For The Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity" in *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler*. Kindle Edition. Tauler also cites the verse regarding Elijah detecting God in the whisper/sheer silence: "When this silent peace is established in the soul, then comes the Lord as He did to Elias, "in the whistling of a gentle air" (1 Kgs 19:12)."

⁷⁸⁰ Based on Pseudo Dionysius, *CH* 7 III 209C – 209D.

⁷⁸¹ Pseudo Dionysius, *EH* 536D 248.

⁷⁸² Tauler, "The Call To Peace — First Sermon For Low Sunday."

⁷⁸³ Tauler, "Not Our Own, But God's Activity Makes Us Perfect — Sermon For Sexagesima Sunday."

⁷⁸⁴ Kavanaugh, 101.

of *Ascent* and made “many copies”⁷⁸⁵ for those under his direction. The drawing illustrates three approaches to the summit of the mount or “the high state of perfection we here call union of a soul with God”⁷⁸⁶: two ways of the imperfect spirit (beginning with either the goods of heaven or the goods of earth) appear to the left and right side of the central, narrow path of the perfect spirit, which is paved with “*nada*” or nothing. In the narrow, perfect path, John repeats “*nada*” seven times in a direct approach to the mount, at the peak of which is “only the honor and glory of God.”⁷⁸⁷

Essentially, the sketch emphasizes that the way to “all” or God is by way of “nothing”; in other words, in order to reach the summit, the soul must detach itself from temporal goods, spiritual goods, and anything that does not lead it to God. And in a paradoxical outcome, “now that I no longer desire them, I have them all without desire.”⁷⁸⁸ To reach this state of purification and union with God, John describes active nights of the sense and spirit in *Ascent*, and passive nights in the *Dark Night*. The *Spiritual Canticle* describes “the dynamism and stages of love” while *Living Flame of Love* “addresses the fullness and satisfaction of union.”⁷⁸⁹

John’s spirituality is resolutely Christocentric: “The active night of sense...begins with an habitual desire to imitate Christ.”⁷⁹⁰ The search for union is a search for “‘better love’...a desire for Christ that is greater than all other desires.”⁷⁹¹ It is Christ who enkindles the love that is able to order our ‘appetites’ and who is the “perfect model since love produces likeness in the

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., 101.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Theme.

⁷⁸⁷ See Kavanaugh, 110-111 or Doohan, 51-52 for a copy of the sketch. Doohan notes that whether the ways of the imperfect actually reach the mount or are dead ends is a matter of debate, 50.

⁷⁸⁸ Kavanaugh, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 11.

⁷⁸⁹ Doohan, 107.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., 68.

⁷⁹¹ Doohan, 47.

lover.”⁷⁹² Christ is “God’s definitive Word”⁷⁹³. While we seek Him, learn about Him and imitate Him, this knowledge alone cannot lead to union with God; union with God is beyond our intellect and our natural abilities. The three theological virtues must be infused by God and developed in the spiritual faculties. The intellect must be “darkened” by faith in God who is beyond natural knowledge, the memory reoriented by hope that learns to look beyond our limited experience of God, and the will reformed by love through which we seek not our own satisfaction, but that of doing God’s will. This life in Christ “uproots every habitual disorder”⁷⁹⁴ through a virtuous cycle of purification opening room for growth in virtue, and growth in virtue allowing for deeper and continued purification.⁷⁹⁵ A person moves from knowing about Christ to knowing Christ personally and intimately.⁷⁹⁶ In union, everything is oriented toward the honor and glory of God, as at the summit of the mount in the Sketch.

Encircling the peak of the mount (the “honor and glory of God”) is a verse from *Jeremiah*: “I brought you into the land of Carmel⁷⁹⁷ to eat its fruit and its good things (Jer 2:7).” Given his Christocentric theology and nuptial imagery, one might have expected Paul’s passage that Christ is living in him (Gal 2:20) or another New Testament verse. Instead, John chooses a verse from the book of *Jeremiah* (Jer 2:7).⁷⁹⁸ In the context of the sketch, John omits the second portion of the verse as it appears in the biblical text: “... But when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination.” John’s quote seems to highlight the destination; the remainder of the verse seems to refer to all that must be overcome to attain the goal, i.e., sin.

⁷⁹² Kavanaugh, 104-105.

⁷⁹³ Ibid., 105.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., 107.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., 107.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid., 107.

⁷⁹⁷ The Dhoulay-Rheims reads “land of Carmel”; the NKJV has “bountiful country.”

⁷⁹⁸ One might have expected Paul’s statement that Christ lives in Him (Gal 2:20) which John cites three times (SC. 12.8, SC. 22.5, LF. 2.34) or another verse about the riches of heaven (e.g. 1 Cor 2:9)

Might this verse of *Jeremiah* be seen by John as a beginning and ending point for the spiritual journey? John also uses the figure and text of *Jeremiah* to exemplify various aspects of the spiritual journey, as we will see.⁷⁹⁹

How might John's understanding of *Jeremiah* and the spiritual journey align? Had John commented on Jer 1:10, the answer to this would be clearer and more straightforward. His awareness of Jer 1:10 would be established, and in light of the importance that his conception of the spiritual journey gives to Jer 2:7, one could reasonably argue that 1:10 influences John's general reading of *Jeremiah* and prioritization of *Jeremiah* in his explanations of the spiritual journey. However, the interesting thing is that, as far as I can see, he never comments on 1:10. This makes it much more difficult to argue that 1:10 is somewhere on the horizon when he also cites 2:7. The question then becomes whether John is at all influenced by Jer 1:10. If so, 1:10 might be influencing him directly but John simply does not mention it (in which case, there is nothing to be said without additional discoveries of what he said or wrote). Alternative, the influence might be indirect, as witnessed by his Spanish terminology which may show rootedness in Jer 1:10, or ultimately independent of *Jeremiah* in John's own mind, but indirectly dependent on *Jeremiah* by being mediated by the tradition (such as Origen, Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory the Great, Aquinas, or Tauler). Given this, the problem may be reframed by asking: Might the reception history of *Jeremiah*, particularly that related to the text of Jer 1:10, have influenced John's understanding of the spiritual journey? How might this influence be affected by translation issues from Hebrew and Greek texts into Latin and Spanish?

⁷⁹⁹ This is not to eclipse other biblical characters in John's writings, such as Job or David; John employs many varied scriptural passages. However, given the topic of this study, John's interest in *Jeremiah* is notable.

In order to explore these two questions, we will first review the sources for John's education and understanding. Then since John does not employ the verse Jer 1:10, we will consider the use of the task verb concepts across his writings to examine if any patterns or resonances can be detected. The use of Jeremiah throughout the text as examples of the spiritual journey will be considered.

Methodology

To review these sources and attempt to understand their influence on John, an electronic search of his collected works⁸⁰⁰ was conducted to identify "authorities"⁸⁰¹ cited by John, their themes and the works underlying John's thoughts. A high-level review was conducted of selected references identified in John's writings to ascertain whether their understanding of the task verbs of Jer 1:10 or other references to *Jeremiah* may have influenced John.

In addition, Scripture references to *Jeremiah* were catalogued and reviewed based on the Scriptural Index in *The Collected Works* as well as on references to "Jeremiah" in the text. Finally, a search on the task verbs was conducted to attempt to identify conceptual transmission from Jer 1:10 and possibly uncited passages that may be relevant. It is possible that not all relevant sources, scripture references or allusions were identified. Further study may reveal additional connections.

⁸⁰⁰ Kavanaugh, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* 3rd edition. Kindle Edition.

⁸⁰¹ The search included Augustine, Aquinas, Dionysius, Gregory the Great (described by John as "St. Gregory"), Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, Tauler, Origen, and the philosophers. There are no direct references in "The Complete Works" to Jerome or Tauler.

Sources

John's theological treatises reflect not only the teachings of the church and the fathers before him, as well as his interpretation of Scripture but also his own personal experience and even the personal experience of his spiritual advisees.⁸⁰² The academic influences on John's thought and writings include the Thomistic training of his university in Salamanca⁸⁰³ as well as the Jesuit education he received in Medina from the age of 17.⁸⁰⁴ Beyond the influence of Aquinas and the scholastics, elements of Neoplatonism, as well as the teaching of Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory the Great,⁸⁰⁵ Augustine and the Rhineland mystics,⁸⁰⁶ such as Johannes Tauler have been identified. And of course, Teresa of Avila was a spiritual friend, colleague and major influence in John's life. John's work and thinking is a complex compilation of these factors. While Aumann cites Tauler as one of the most significant influences on John,⁸⁰⁷ Kavanaugh identifies an apocryphal work of Aquinas as the most "visible" influence on John's writings, particularly in *Flame*.⁸⁰⁸

John weaves sources and Scripture together in a unique tapestry of teaching, not infrequently citing multiple sources and Scripture verses to make a point. For example, in a short paragraph of *Ascent* (describing the limits of natural knowing and contemplation as a path of unknowing) John cites "St. Dionysius," the "prophet Baruch," Aristotle, and the "Apostle" Paul.⁸⁰⁹ He then goes on to say "We would never finish if we continued to quote authorities and

⁸⁰² Kavanaugh, "General Introduction" to *The Collected Works of John of the Cross*, 35-37.

⁸⁰³ Ibid., "General Introduction" to *The Collected Works of John of the Cross* 11; Aumann, 195.

⁸⁰⁴ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction" to *The Collected Works of John of the Cross*, 10.

⁸⁰⁵ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 194.

⁸⁰⁶ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction" to *The Collected Works of John of the Cross*, 35.

⁸⁰⁷ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 195.

⁸⁰⁸ Kavanaugh, SC. 38.4 n1. John cites the reference as St. Thomas in *De Beatitudine*, a work which was likely written by Helvicus Theutonicus, O.P.

⁸⁰⁹ A.2.8.1-7.

present arguments as proof...⁸¹⁰ Similarly, he cites a multiplicity of Scriptural examples: in this same chapter, he references 12 Scripture passages.⁸¹¹ The roots and evolution of many avenues of thought come together in John's writings. The "fundamental idea in John's teaching, that love effects a likeness between the lover and the loved, has its roots in the classic Greek and Roman poets and philosophers."⁸¹² Simultaneously, interpreting Scripture in the spiritual sense "goes back to Origen and Gregory of Nyssa."⁸¹³ John explicitly references in his writing Aristotle (sometimes described as the "philosopher(s)"), Augustine, "St. Gregory" (the Great), "St. Dionysius" (pseudo- Dionysius), Bernard, and Aquinas.⁸¹⁴ Dionysius is cited in each of John's major works, referring four times to his teaching of contemplation in *Mystical Theology* as a "ray of darkness."⁸¹⁵ From the homilies of Gregory the Great, John takes an example of the Apostles burning gently with the love of the Holy Spirit.⁸¹⁶ It is possible to see that John is aware of the teachings of the fathers and philosophers, yet John's use of *Jeremiah* does not seem to reveal a clear line of influence related to task verbs of Jer 1:10. He did not write a commentary that spelled out his thinking on particular Scripture books or passages. Nonetheless, he was clearly familiar with the writings of pseudo-Dionysius. His use of Gregory's homilies may imply an indirect influence of the teachings of Cassian, and even Origen. It is possible that he read

⁸¹⁰ A.2.8.7.

⁸¹¹ Three of the 12 describe David's lofty view of God (Ps. 77:13, 86:8, 138:6); six regard our inability to see God (Exodus 33:20, Isaiah 64:4; 1 Kgs 19:11-13; John 1:18; Acts 7:30-32 and 1 Cor 2:9); Is 40:18-19 is "noteworthy" signifying that the "intellect is not a proximate means leading to God" (A.2.8.5) ⁸¹¹; and finally, Baruch 3:23 and Rom 11:33 teach that "what is highest to God is least known by humans" (A.2.8.6).

⁸¹² Kavanaugh, A.1.4.3 n2.

⁸¹³ Ibid., A.2.23.3 n2.

⁸¹⁴ Occasionally John cites an author when the work is actually pseudonymous; for example, he notes a pseudo-Augustine work, *Soliloquiorum animae ad Deum*, and a work *De Beatitudine* attributed to Thomas Aquinas, but authored most likely by Helvicus Theutonicus, O.P.

⁸¹⁵ A.2.8.6, N.2.5.3, SC. 14-15.16, LF. 3.49. Kavanaugh notes that John also evidences influence of The *Celestial Hierarchy* at N.2.12.4 n1. At N.2.5.3, John cites "St. Dionysius and other mystical theologians."

⁸¹⁶ Based on Kavanaugh. N.2.20.4, LF. 2.3, LF. 3.23 See Gregory's *Homilia 30 in Evangelium*; in A.3.31.8, John also cites a reference to *Homilia 26 in Evangelium*.

Augustine's spiritual interpretation of Jer 1:10 (see chapter 6) but makes no reference to it. This chapter will examine the evidence that is available to see what might be understood and inferred.

Use of Scripture

Paramount in John's teaching is the Scriptures.⁸¹⁷ He often uses Scriptural examples to explain metaphysical and mystical aspects of his writing. It is relevant to note that "John often quoted from memory or from medieval compilations."⁸¹⁸ John used the Latin vulgate and then made his own translations in Spanish. His translations are sometimes closer to the Rheims-Douay version than current biblical translations.⁸¹⁹ Like other experts in Scripture, his familiarity with the text may lead to language which comes to the author naturally but is used without direct citation. Allusions or even more broadly, "touchpoints" can appear in his teaching; scholars have taken pains to identify not only the source of citations, but also allusions not explicitly named by John. This study will suggest that the themes and concepts from Jeremiah 1:10 may have been incorporated indirectly into John's understanding and work.

In terms of Jeremiah, John speaks in a familiar and personal tone about the prophet, as well as of other Biblical figures such as Moses, Job, David, Paul and John.⁸²⁰ John "identified" their experiences of God with his.⁸²¹ Likely, John could identify with the prophet Jeremiah in many ways: like Jeremiah, John endured unjust imprisonment and much suffering throughout his life. Both Jeremiah and John were humble men, obedient to the word of God and faithful despite persecution. John's understanding of the biblical text was consistent with the approach of the

⁸¹⁷ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction" to *The Collected Works of John of the Cross*, 35.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Foreward, 7.

⁸²⁰ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction" to *The Collected Works of John of the Cross*, 36.

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

time; he sees both the book of *Jeremiah* and Lamentations as personal testimony from the prophet.

Literal and Spiritual Sense. John emphasizes the spiritual sense of interpretation throughout his writings. In one case, he notes that the literal sense is an impediment to Israel's interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy: The people seek peace but find terror (Jer 8:15) and "it seemed God was deceiving them" because, "guided by the literal sense, it was impossible...to avoid deception."⁸²² In another case, he is discussing spiritual betrothal, and notes that a soul is aware of riches, but suffering because trapped in body and comments on the spiritual sense:

Jeremiah, feeling this miserable treatment the soul suffers because of its captivity in the body, speaks in a spiritual sense to Israel: *Is Israel perhaps a servant or a slave? Why is he thus imprisoned? The lions have roared upon him,* and so on. By 'the lions' he refers here to the appetites and rebellions of this tyrant king, sensuality.⁸²³

Jeremiah Helps Explain the Spiritual Journey. John repeatedly uses examples from the book of *Jeremiah* to explain different aspects of the spiritual journey (often the active, purgative aspects of both sense and spirit, though he most frequently cites *Jeremiah* when discussing the active night of spirit). These citations span the book of *Jeremiah*, are present in each of John's major works, and pop up in each major stage of the spiritual journey. The table below suggests a summary of the references based upon the general framework offered by Kieran Kavanaugh in his 1993 translation of *The Complete Works of John of the Cross* as well as the description of the stages in Ralph Martin's *The Fulfillment of All Desire*.⁸²⁴ This is not meant to be a definitive classification, but rather an overview of John's usage of *Jeremiah*.

⁸²² A.2.19.7.

⁸²³ SC. 18.2

⁸²⁴ Kavanaugh, 102-108, 354-357, 466, 634; Martin, 13.

Table 14: Usage of *Jeremiah* in the works of John of the Cross⁸²⁵

	John of the Cross	<i>Jeremiah</i>
Purgative Stages	<i>Ascent</i> (active night of sense)	2:13*2; 2:24-25; 2:25; 4:23
	<i>Dark Night</i> (passive night of sense)	31:18
Illuminative Stages	<i>Ascent</i> (active night of spirit)	1:11; 2:13; 4:10; 8:15; 20:7-9; 23:21, 26, 28-29, 32; 45:3; 49:16
	<i>Dark Night</i> (passive night of sense)	1:6; 2:2
	<i>Spiritual Canticle</i> (spiritual betrothal)	2:14-15
Unitive Stages	<i>Living Flame</i> (spiritual marriage)	12:5; 23:29; 31:18
Journey Summary	<i>Ascent</i> (Sketch of Mount Carmel)	2:7

Source: Data adapted from John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of John of the Cross*; Ralph Martin, *The Fulfillment of All Desire*.

John states that “Jeremiah gives good testimony” that a soul must be “tempted, tried and proved” in order to be “strengthened”: “You have chastised me, Lord, and I was instructed” (Jer 31:18).⁸²⁶ This is tied to the “gradual” preparation of the senses and faculties. John also uses *Jeremiah* as an affirmation that God will console the suffering soul with joy and spiritual delights. “I have remembered you, pitying your youth and tenderness when you followed me into the desert” (Jer 2:2). By likening the “desert” to “interior detachment” John sees this verse as testifying to the “immense love” of Christ who “cannot long endure the sufferings of his beloved without responding.”⁸²⁷ In *Flame*, he ties the description of God’s word as “spirit and life” (John 6:63) to Jeremiah 23:29 “Are not my words perchance like a fire?” In this description of union, John describes these scripture verses as “the language...God speaks in souls that are purged, cleansed, and all enkindled.”⁸²⁸ He also uses *Jeremiah* to decry the unwillingness of many souls to suffer. Instead of submitting to ordinary sufferings (“running with footmen”), souls are “like

⁸²⁵ This placement of verses in this table may not precisely match the general framework laid out in footnote 18 because individual citations may not have matched John’s general focus of discussion, i.e., in a section on the unitive phase, he may refer back to the purgative or illuminative phase including using a reference to Scripture.

⁸²⁶ N.1.14.4.

⁸²⁷ N.2.19.4.

⁸²⁸ LF. 1.5. He also ties this description to Psalm 119:139.

useless containers”⁸²⁹; they are not able to advance (“keep up with the horses stride”) unless they accept the suffering of detachment and seek God’s help (Jer 12:5).⁸³⁰

Yet, frustratingly regarding the focus of this study, John of the Cross does not directly speak of Jer 1:10, nor does he address the key passages (see Table x in Chapter 3) which repeat the task verbs of 1:10, including those framing the New Covenant. This is problematic and is discussed below.

John and the Task Verb Concepts of *Jeremiah* 1:10

An examination of his language and themes reveals notable similarities with the typology of Jer 1:10 in the spiritual sense. John of the Cross uses language which speaks of multiple stages of destruction before the creative stage of building begins in full. Thematically, resonances of the concepts of Jer 1:10 may be detected in his description of aspects of the spiritual journey. John uses terms for the concepts of root/uproot, tear down, destroy, throw out/cast out, overthrow, build and plant in a spiritual sense and applies them to the spiritual journey.⁸³¹ As in the translation from the MT to the LXX, translation issues contribute to a broad range of verbs covering the task verb concepts of Jer 1:10.

Table 15: Jer 1:10 task verb translations

Task Verb	Hebrew MT	Greek LXX	Latin Vulgate	Conceptual Spanish Equivalents in John of the Cross
Uproot/ Root out/ Pluck Up	נחש	ἐκρίζοῦν	ēvello	<i>Arraigar/desarraigar, raíz</i> ⁸³² , <i>acabar</i>

⁸²⁹ Thematically, this is similar to John’s use of “leaking cisterns” (Jer 2:13-14) at A.1.6.1.

⁸³⁰ LF. 2.27.

⁸³¹ An electronic search of the English edition of *The Collected Works* by Kavanaugh (Kindle edition) initially identified task verb concepts. This was followed by an electronic search of the Spanish edition *San Juan de la Cruz: Obras Completas (Nueva Edición Integral)*, (Sweden: Wisehouse Publishing, 2021) Kindle edition (or otherwise noted) to further investigate context and meaning.

⁸³² *Raíz* is the noun form of “root.”

Pull Down/ Tear Down	נָחַץ	κατασκάπτειν	destrũo	<i>destruir</i>
Destroy	אַבַּד	κατασκάπτειν	disperdo	<i>destruir, acabar, aniquilar, arrojar, quitar, desharcer, consumir, gastar</i>
Throw Down/ Demolish	הָרַס	ἀπολλύειν	dissĩpo	<i>echar, arrojar, vencer</i>
Build	בָּנָה	ἀνοικοδομεĩν	aedĩfĩco	<i>edificar</i>
Plant	נָטַע	καταφυτεύειν	planto	<i>plantar</i>

While his use of the concepts does not seem to contradict the typology of the spiritual journey as seen in Jer 1:10, and may even be shown as consistent, it would be a stretch to link the negative concepts precisely to the task verbs given that John does not cite Jer 1:10 or related key passages. The connection then is a diffuse one. A look at each term will provide a better understanding of John's use of the concepts.

Root/Uproot. The terms for root (*arraigar* in verb form; *raiz* in noun form) or uproot (*desarraigar*) are used more than 40 times, in many cases in the discussion of attachments, whether good or bad. For instance, in describing the disordered attachment of imperfections “the soul... is unable to see the imperfection and impurity still rooted within”⁸³³; and other times to describe beneficial attachment: “for virtue takes root in dryness, difficulty, and labor, as God says to St. Paul: Virtue is made perfect in weakness [2 Cor. 12:9].”⁸³⁴ In another example “St. Paul admonished the Ephesians ...to be strong and rooted in charity....”⁸³⁵ In one particular example of root imagery and terminology, similarities to the typology of Jeremiah 1:10 seem possible:

“The imperfections in these proficient are of two kinds: habitual and actual. The habitual are the imperfect affections and habits still remaining like

⁸³³ N.2.7.5 Adjacent to this description are several references to Jeremiah in Lamentations (Lam 3:1-20 at N.2.7.3; Lam 3:8, 29, 44 at N.2.8.1).

⁸³⁴ SC. 30.5.

⁸³⁵ SC. 36.13.

roots (*raíces*) in the spirit, for the sensory purgation could not reach the spirit. The difference between the two purgations is like the difference between **pulling up roots** (*raíz*) or **cutting off** a branch, rubbing out a fresh stain or an old deeply embedded one.”⁸³⁶

There is a first stage of purification in which more obvious faults can be seen, followed by deeper purification of the not-so-easily visible roots. Literally, John says the difference is “like that of a root and a branch” (*...la diferencia que hay a estotra, es la que de la raíz a la rama*). The first purgation starts at the branch, while the second “pulls up” (evoking “pluck up”) the roots in the spirit. This imagery is consistent with a spiritual interpretation of Jeremiah 1:10 including Origen’s interpretation (see chapter 5).⁸³⁷ These examples exhort the reader that to grow in perfection, they must rid themselves of imperfect attachments by uprooting them. Not to uproot them is to allow the problem to grow and become “more deeply rooted.” Both John and Origen apply this purification to the individual soul (for pseudo-Dionysius, the emphasis is corporate). While it is not surprising that John makes no mention of (and may not have directly studied) Origen given the controversy surrounding him, there are parallels in their approach that may warrant further investigation: both use the *Song of Songs* and the marriage metaphor to describe the most advanced stage of the spiritual journey;⁸³⁸ both note that sin leads to captivity.⁸³⁹

Uproot is conveyed through the term *desarraigar*, which can also connote removal or displacement. In one instance, John notes that “*se desarraigue del sabor de las cosas*

⁸³⁶ N.2.2.1

⁸³⁷ Origen sees the first stage as ‘uprooting’ and the second as ‘destruction’. However, the effect is the same in that there are two stages of the removal of sin, the first goes to that which is easier to access, the second is more complete.

⁸³⁸ Lawson, Introduction, 6 in *Origen: The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies*. Lawson notes that before Origen, the “Christian writer... Hippolytus of Rome had undertaken the task.” After Origen, other Christian authors include Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor and others.

⁸³⁹ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.3 (2); John of the Cross A.1.4.6. John notes that attachment to freedom of the world leads them to be “treated by God as base slaves and captives, not offspring...” See also A.1.15.1, SC.18.2.

sensuales”⁸⁴⁰ which Kavanaugh translates as “the appetite is torn away from sensual things.”

The destructive nature of the term is retained and using the term *desarraigar* may indicate an echo of *Jeremiah*’s task verbs. However, whether John intended an echo is less clear. John also applies the term to being weaned from a mother’s breast.⁸⁴¹

In some cases, an additional term, *acabar*, is translated by Kavanaugh as “uproot.” *Acabar* can mean to finish or to end; in other instances it is translated as “destroy.” *Acabar* is a common word, used hundreds of times in the text.⁸⁴² In terms of attachments, John declares that if spiritual persons “do not have the courage to uproot (*acabar*) it when it is small and in its first stages, how do they think and presume they will have the ability to do so when it becomes greater and more deeply rooted (*arraigar*)?”⁸⁴³ *Acabar* applies to sin in a number of other instances⁸⁴⁴ such as, “Since true devotion comes from the heart and looks only to the truth and substance represented by spiritual objects, and since everything else is imperfect attachment and possessiveness, any appetite for these things must be uprooted (*acabar*) if some degree of perfection is to be reached.”⁸⁴⁵

Tear Down and Build Up, paired: On several occasions, John combines the opposing terms “tearing down” and “building up” referring to the negative and positive aspects of the spiritual journey.

⁸⁴⁰ LF. 3.32.

⁸⁴¹ A.2.19.6.

⁸⁴² Based on an electronic search for “*acabar*” in *San Juan de la Cruz: Obras Completas (Nueva Edición Integral)*, (Sweden: Wisehouse Publishing, 2021) Kindle edition.

⁸⁴³ A.3.20.1.

⁸⁴⁴ See A1.11.7, A.3.20.1; N.1.3.1; N.1.4.8; SC.7.4; LF.1.33-34; LF.2.3.

⁸⁴⁵ N.1.3.1.

Table 16: Combined use of “build” and “tear down” in John of the Cross

Reference	Excerpt
A.3.2.1-2	Observing how we <i>annihilate</i> (<i>aniquilamos</i>) the faculties in their operations, it will perhaps seem that we are tearing down (<i>destruimos</i>) rather than building up (<i>edificamos</i>) the way of spiritual exercise. This would be true if our doctrine here were destined merely for <i>beginners</i> ... But we are imparting instructions here for <i>advancing</i> in contemplation to union with God.... One has to follow this method of <i>disencumbering, emptying and depriving</i> the faculties of their natural authority and operations to make room for the inflow and illumination of the supernatural.
A.2.30.5	A soul can easily fall into the hands of some persons who will tear it down (<i>destruyan</i>) rather than build it up (<i>edifiquen</i>).

John’s usage might be seen as a diffuse reflection *Jeremiah* itself or of Paul’s use of Jeremiah 1:10 (see chapter 4).⁸⁴⁶ The letters of Paul are cited frequently in John’s writings (approximately 150 times).⁸⁴⁷ Paul pairs build and tear down (2 Cor 10:8; 2 Cor 13:10), on at least two occasions, instances which scholars have identified as a reflection of Jeremiah 1:10.⁸⁴⁸ Paul uses καθαίρεσις and οικοδομή in both instances; the Vulgate uses *destruō* and *aedifico*; John uses *destruir* and *edificar*. While it is difficult to trace a direct linguistic link from *Jeremiah* to John, the concepts are clearly cited as a pair by John, in a similar way to both Paul and *Jeremiah*. Further support for the alignment of John’s spiritual progression with the typology of the task verbs of *Jeremiah* can be found in his application of the negative tasks to beginners, and the positive tasks to more advanced seekers.

⁸⁴⁶ See chapter 4. For example: “I write these things...so that when I come...I may not have to be severe in using the authority the Lord has given me for **building up** and not for **tearing down**” (2 Cor 13:10). Also “if I **build up** again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor” (Gal 2:18).

⁸⁴⁷ These citations include the use of Paul’s metaphors of spiritual childhood (1 Cor 13:11) at A.2.17.6 N.2.3.3. N.2.3.3 also includes being clothed in a new self (Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:22-24; Rom 12:2). Eph 4:22-24 is also cited in A.2.5.5, N.2.13.11, LF.2.33, SC.20-21.1

⁸⁴⁸ See chapter 4, in particular the table Selected Touchpoints of Jeremiah in the Pauline Literature.

To look at another aspect of the first example (A 3.2.1-2) John invokes multiple “negative” actions to “make room for the inflow and illumination of the supernatural.”⁸⁴⁹ John uses the term “annihilation” *aniquilar* and equates it with “disencumbering, emptying and depriving” (the faculties). This purification must happen before the good, i.e., the “supernatural” can enter. John’s use of annihilation and the additional three ‘emptying’ verbs might be compared to *Jeremiah*’s use of four negative task verbs at Jer 1:10. *Jeremiah* uses terms that are tangible and physically related to the natural surroundings and the civilization of Israel: uproot, tear down, destroy, demolish. John’s terms are more metaphysical implying a removal of weight or ties, a spiritual emptying, self-denial and self-discipline. John seems to summarize these actions in the term “annihilation.”⁸⁵⁰ While John does not use the same words as *Jeremiah*, conceptually the pattern is similar to the spiritual sense of Jer 1:10: the negative must be embarked upon before the positive is possible. Annihilation evokes images of destruction and demolition, not unlike Origen’s description “to destroy what has been uprooted”⁸⁵¹. Subsequently, an inflow of the supernatural can build up God’s goodness in a soul.

In the second example (A.2.30.5), John is speaking of locutions and the risk of falling prey to the “devil’s deceits.” He cautions that a soul in the wrong hands will be “torn down,” rather than “built up.” Here, tear down implies a soul’s action in moving away from the Lord, rather than moving towards him. Tearing down is associate with sin, vice and actions that are not pleasing to the Lord. The pairing of concepts is consistent with the conclusion that the soul should be built up in order to move to the Lord.

⁸⁴⁹ A.3.2.1-2

⁸⁵⁰ Kavanaugh, 767. As Kavanaugh defines it, annihilation for John is often used in the “moral, spiritual sense” to indicate “the emptiness or poverty of spirit that disposes one for a greater infusion of faith, hope and love. It is also used in one case in the metaphysical sense as the end of existence.

⁸⁵¹ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.15.

The Lord Builds. Like *Jeremiah*, John asserts that (at a certain point) it is the Lord who builds:

Let [spiritual directors] not desire to go any further than this in **building**, since that function belongs only to the Father of lights from whom descends every good and perfect gift (Jas 1:17). If the Lord, as David says, does not **build** the house, in vain do its **builders** labor (Ps. 127:1). And since he is the supernatural *artificer*, he will *construct* supernaturally in each soul the *edifice* he desires, if you, director, will prepare it by striving to **annihilate** it in its natural operations and affections, which have neither the ability nor strength to **build** the supernatural *edifice*.⁸⁵²

Here the verbs annihilate *aniquilar* and build *edificar* carry the action. Interestingly, only the Lord is able to construct the “supernatural edifice.” This passage appears in *Living Flame*, a work devoted to describing love in the unitive stage. In the proposed typology associated with Jer 1:10, building is associated with the unitive way, and building is an action of the Lord (see chapter 3). Again, the pattern seems to resonate with the task verbs: *aniquilar* is applied to purification, building implies advancing toward the Lord, and the Lord is the builder.

Destroy. John uses terms for destroy many times. Various terms include *destruir* (to destroy, demolish), *acabar* (to finish, end), *anniquilar* (to annihilate), *arrojar* (to throw, hurl, produce, send out), *quitar* (to remove, take off/away), *desharcen* (to undo, unpack destroy), *consumer* (to cosume, destroy), *gastar* (to spend, use (up); wear out, wear down). Other verbs used as synoymys of annihilate (*aniquilar*) include *desembarazar* (to clear, ease), *vaciar* (to empty something (of); hollow (out)); *negar* (to deny, refuse).⁸⁵³ These terms often carry metaphysical connotations in John’s writings, compared to the physical and tangible uses in *Jeremiah*.

⁸⁵² LF.3.47.

⁸⁵³ See A.3.2.1-2.

One passage in particular is worth noting, which combines the concept of destruction with building. It is not clear whether the passage is connected to Jeremiah 1:10. Rather than *Jeremiah*, John cites Genesis (and in a broader context, the Exodus):

...Until the appetites are eliminated, one will not arrive no matter how much virtue is practiced. For one will be failing to acquire perfect virtue which lies in keeping the soul empty, naked and purified of every appetite. We also have a striking figure of this in Genesis. ...

Jacob desired to **build** an altar to offer sacrifice to God, he first ordered his people to do three things: **destroy** all strange gods, purify themselves and change their garments.⁸⁵⁴

John uses Jacob as an example of the necessity of renouncing all before being able to reach “the top” and converse with God. Interestingly, before Jacob can “build” his altar, three actions must be taken: the first of which is to “destroy” all idols. In addition, the people must purify themselves, and change their garments.⁸⁵⁵ This passage relies on two of the concepts from Jer 1:10, while requiring multiple levels of purification (signified through “negative” verbs) before the “positive” action (building) ensues. It also invokes the imagery of new clothes, not unlike the Pauline metaphor in Ephesians (4:22-24). This passage also invokes the ascent of Moses to the top of the mountain (Exod 34:3). The children of Israel remain at the bottom symbolizing Moses’ renunciation of all things. The beasts are forbidden from grazing on the mountainside as Moses ascends, which John likens to restricting appetites from “pasturing” on “things that are not purely of God.”⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵⁴ A.1.5.6.

⁸⁵⁵ A.1.5.6.

⁸⁵⁶ A.1.5.6-7.

In John's discussion of this passage, which continues to clarify the stages which a soul must pass through, John notes three stages which are also in alignment with the stages of Jer 1:10:

- First the soul must “destroy” (*arrojar*) strange gods. In the next passage John also describes this purification with *arrojar*, translated as “cast out” all “affections and attachments” alien to God.
- Second, the soul must be purified of any residue through denial and repentance of these appetites.
- Then, “by means of the first two works” God will be able to “substitute new garments for old”⁸⁵⁷ with new understanding and love of God in God.

Although it relies on Genesis rather than *Jeremiah*, the initial stage relies upon a destructive concept of *Jeremiah*, reminiscent of the negative task verbs of Jer 1:10. The verb *arrojar* can be and is translated two ways: both as destroy and cast out. It is also used on occasion for throw down/demolish. After a second stage of purification, characterized by denial and repentance, the soul experiences a newness of knowledge, love and understanding of God, and in God. This newness can be seen as a sort of rebuilding to become an altar of love to God.⁸⁵⁸ By John's account, “building” Jacob's altar implies that human activities become divine and this is “achieved in the state of union when the soul, in which God alone dwells, has no other function than that of an altar on which God is adored in praise and love.”⁸⁵⁹ Since it is clear that John accepts the three-part division of the journey, it is not entirely surprising that John sees three stages of spirituality in this biblical text, and that it aligns with the spiritual interpretation of

⁸⁵⁷ A.1.5.7.

⁸⁵⁸ A.1.5.6-7.

⁸⁵⁹ A.1.5.7.

Jeremiah 1:10 which frames the journey with two “negative” stages preceding the positive. More notable is the consistent incorporation of a task verb concept.

The use of biblical ascent imagery may suggest that John sought out or naturally thought of these types passages as he considered the development of the spiritual journey and growing closer to God. It may reflect a fusing of traditions including *Jeremiah*, or it may simply reflect common terminology of the time. Further review of John’s scriptural use may reveal additional insight.

Throw Down/Demolish. This concept can be represented by several terms and is not uncommonly commingled with terms that mean destroy. *Arrojar* is an example that has been seen in the discussion of Destroy. In another example, which demonstrates the difficulty of tracing the task verbs through these very similar concepts, John discusses “the soul, which in itself uproots (*echar*) and rejects (*arrojar*) every vanity and trace of it.”⁸⁶⁰ The concept of purification through the removal of what is bad and complete destruction of it seems consistent with the usage here. However, it is not possible to trace a direct link to the task verbs.

Plant. John uses the term *plantar* on multiple occasions in a spiritual sense, primarily in the *Spiritual Canticle*. One verse cries out “O woods and thickets planted by the hand of my beloved!”⁸⁶¹ John praises the creation of God which strongly awakens the soul to love him.⁸⁶² He speaks of the “south wind” or the Holy Spirit which awakens love in the garden of the soul germinating flowers and plants. He also speaks of “flowers of

⁸⁶⁰ A.3.35.4.

⁸⁶¹ SC.4.

⁸⁶² SC.4.2.

perfections and virtues planted within her” coming to life.⁸⁶³ This spiritual usage conveys a positive imagery of growth and development in God, consistent with the imagery of Jer 1:10.

Connection to the Call of the Heart. John’s audience were largely committed religious persons who as a matter of course were not likely to question whether God was calling them. John seems to speak more of the soul being drawn to God, honing in on the reaction of the soul and providing it guidance so that it may not obstruct its progress and may let God work in it unimpeded. Nonetheless, John does declare “God calls the soul to the desert... that God may give it sweet manna.”⁸⁶⁴ He uses an extended analogy from Exodus to demonstrate that the “Egyptians” i.e., the slavery of the senses, are “drowned in the sea of contemplation.” John’s work itself leads us through this process/journey and in fact, the work itself has been described as a “universal call to holiness and prayer.”⁸⁶⁵

In terms of Jeremiah’s call, John references verses from the call narrative briefly. Jeremiah’s difficulty in speaking (Jer 1:6) is seen as evidence of the ineffability of “divine language.” His reception of visions (Jer 1:11) is used to acknowledge God’s teaching through supernatural imagery, but also to warn that the devil can also use such imagery to deceive. “John sees the spiritual life as this universal call to search constantly for union with God.”⁸⁶⁶

The heart is at the center of the process of spiritual transformation. John proclaims that “for a treatise on the active night and denudation of this faculty [the will], with the aim of forming and perfecting it...I have found no more appropriate passage than...‘You shall love the

⁸⁶³ SC.17.5.

⁸⁶⁴ LF.3.38.

⁸⁶⁵ Doohan, 25.

⁸⁶⁶ Doohan, 46.

Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength' (Deut 6:5)." He emphasizes this by saying: "This passage contains all that spiritual persons must do and all I must teach them here if they are to reach God by union of the will through charity."⁸⁶⁷

Three of John's references to *Jeremiah* are also tied to the heart, either within the scripture itself (Jer 23:26) or through John's commentary (Jer 2:13; 23:26 and 49:16). John ties the leaky cisterns of Jer 2:13 to the defiled hearts in Ps 73.⁸⁶⁸ Spiritual pride described in Jer 49:16 comes from the heart.⁸⁶⁹ Similarly, false prophets (Jer 23:26) are taken with spiritual pride and attached to supernatural goods, focused on "the visions of their own heart."⁸⁷⁰ John observes that if they had "overcome their abominable attachment" or possibly turned their hearts wholly to the Lord, the prophets would not have disobeyed God and deceived the people.⁸⁷¹ The deceptive arrogance of Jer 49:16 is a sign of "boastfulness of heart over one's works."⁸⁷²

Uprooting is also tied to the heart: "Spiritual persons must exercise care that in their heart and joy they do not become attached to temporal goods. They must fear lest, through a gradual increase, their small attachments become great."⁸⁷³ He also declares that "true devotion comes from the heart" and condemns the "possessiveness of heart" associated with the spiritual avarice of beginners.⁸⁷⁴ The heart is a recurring theme for John, a term which appears hundreds of times in his writings. Authentic movement towards God comes from the heart. Further study would elucidate the relationship between the task verb concepts and the theme of the heart in John's

⁸⁶⁷ A.3.16.1.

⁸⁶⁸ A.3.19.7.

⁸⁶⁹ A.3.29.1. Jer 49:16.

⁸⁷⁰ A.3.31.3.

⁸⁷¹ A.3.31.3.

⁸⁷² A.3.29.1.

⁸⁷³ A.3.20.1.

⁸⁷⁴ N.1.3.1.

writings, particularly in a Carmelite context. However, it is clear that the heart is central to this purification activity and the ability to make progress towards union with God.

Conclusion: John, *Jeremiah* and the Overview of the Spiritual Journey

In terms of John's description of the spiritual journey and his connection to Jeremiah 1:10, the link is not direct. Problematic issues remain. Although he cites two verses related to Jeremiah's call (1:6, 11), instead of Jeremiah 1:10 John cites images of ascent from Genesis in one three-stage illustration spiritual purification. John omits any reference to this element of Jeremiah's call. John could have selected from pericopes such as the key passages (Jer 12:14-17; 18:7-10; 24:6; 31:28, 38-40; 45:4) had he had the task verbs of Jer 1:10 in mind. Notably, John does not cite the New Covenant (Jer 31:33), nor does he address the verses containing the 1:10 verbs surrounding the New Covenant (Jer 31:28, 38-40). John was clearly very familiar with the book of *Jeremiah*. It is not clear why he selected as many Jeremianic passages as he did without making note of others. He may not have recognized the typology of Jer 1:10, as Origen and Gregory the Great teach. This may provide avenues for further investigation.⁸⁷⁵ A review of additional writings such as those of Teresa of Avila may also shed light on the Carmelite understanding of Jer 1:10.

It is apparent that John uses many scriptural references and that *Jeremiah* is just one component of his biblical support. While he does not use Jeremiah 1:10 directly, John adopts the concepts of building and destruction or tearing down in a multi-valent blending of biblical concepts and examples to describe the spiritual journey. The concept

⁸⁷⁵ Another potential avenue for investigation is John's use of the book of *Song of Songs*, *Ecclesiastes* and *Proverbs* and their representations of the spiritual journey. Origen suggested these three books as representative of three stages. Might John's conception be consistent with Origen's and/or reflective of the early Christian understanding? This study has focused on the book of *Jeremiah*, but the scriptural citations are extensive and warrant study.

of two “negative” phases preceding a “positive” phase persists and is in continuity with the Jeremianic framework. In certain cases, John does use building and tearing down (or destruction) as language that seems to be resonant with that of Paul, and possibly in the more distant past, *Jeremiah*. John’s structure is based on that put forth by pseudo-Dionysius and is simultaneously aligned with the task verbs of Jeremiah 1:10. This itself is possibly a reflection of the influence of Origen in the early stages of the Christian and Neoplatonic conception of the spiritual journey. The influence of Jer 1:10 is indirect but analysis of John’s writings seems to reveal imagery and themes that are resonant with the spiritual sense of Jeremiah 1:10 and its interpreters (particularly including Paul) throughout the ages. The spiritual journey as John defines it is not inconsistent with the typology presented by Jer 1:10.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study is first, to identify resonances between Jeremiah 1:10 and the three stages of the spiritual journey as defined by the Carmelites such as John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, and then, in light of an in depth understanding of the spiritual senses attributed to Jeremiah 1:10 in its reception history, to evaluate the impact of Jer 1:10 upon the Carmelite conception of the spiritual journey.

This concluding chapter will: (1) lay out the results of the comprehensive word study, (2) summarize the reception history of Jer 1:10 in light of the tradition of the three-stage spiritual journey; (3) identify the challenges and weaknesses of this study; (4) highlight the most exciting finding, the impact of Jer 1:10 upon the Christian father Origen and his understanding of the spiritual journey; and finally (5) clarify the study's chief contribution and further areas for investigation.

(1) Resonances of the Word Study

A comprehensive word study considered the usage of each Hebrew task verb (“to root out/uproot” נָתַשׁ and “to pull/tear down” נָחַץ; “to destroy” אָבַד and “to throw down/demolish” הָרַס; “to build” בָּנָה and “to plant” נָטַע) within *Jeremiah*, including the definition, agency, placement and verb choice within seven key passages (in addition to 1:10) that rely on a collection of the 1:10 task verbs (12:14-17; 18:7-10; 24:6; 31:28, 38-40; 42:10 and 45:4). The themes of “turning” and “the heart” associated with these passages are also considered to help explain their spiritual and thematic implications.

The balance of four negative task verbs set against two positive ones in Jer 1:10 is often explained in modern exegesis as a reflection of the balance of suffering versus joy in *Jeremiah* (see Chapter 2: Commentary Review, Task Verbs of 1:10). Based on this understanding, modern commentaries summarize the three pairs of task verbs of Jer 1:10 as having a dual purpose described as exile and restoration, or, destruction and reconstruction.⁸⁷⁶

A close look at the definition and connotation of each verb demonstrates a subtle shift in meaning between the negative pairs (see chapter 3 Word Study: Jeremiah 1:10 Task Verbs). The theme of destruction evoked in the first pair, “root out” (“uproot/pluck up” נָחַשׁ) and “pull down/tear down” (נָתַץ) can be tied to Yahweh’s initiative in response to Israel’s “deviation from the commandments...”⁸⁷⁷ “Pull/tear down” has a “specialized meaning” that is a “concrete notion” applied to humanly constructed objects or edifices. For the second pair, “destroy” (אַבַּד) and “throw down/overthrow/demolish” (הָרַס), the meaning shifts to a deeper type of destruction, one which adds connotations of “break through”⁸⁷⁸ and completely “obliterate.”⁸⁷⁹ A reading interested in the spiritual sense of this definitional shift may align it with those phases of the spiritual journey in which grave sin (i.e., frequent acts contrary to the commandments) is eliminated in the purgative stage, and then in the next phase of illumination, the roots of those sins (described by John of the Cross as attachments of sense and spirit) are removed. In the Carmelite conception, this interior change is effected by a soul more open to and cooperating more fully with the action and grace of God. The “destructive” phases have in effect opened up space for God. The terms constituting the last pair, “build” and “plant,” evoke creative, positive

⁸⁷⁶ Nicholson, *Jeremiah 1—25*, 26 (see also 119, 156, 206-7); Bright, cxi-cxvii; Carroll, 95; Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 10; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 36; Allen, 28; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1—20*, 237; Miller, 583.

⁸⁷⁷ Hausmann, *TDOT*, vol 10, 126.

⁸⁷⁸ Barth, *TDOT*, vol 10, 109.

⁸⁷⁹ *BDB*, 248.

imagery (including healing Jer 33:6-8; purity Jer 2:21), including newness, physical and spiritual fruitfulness (Jer 31:4-5; see also 17:8-10), and spiritual hope and peace. God is the master builder (Ps 122:3) of nations, kingdoms, the houses of Israel and Judah, and even of gentile nations who may be evil. In order to be “built” however, following or turning to the Lord is often necessary (Jer 12:16; 18:8; 33:7). Building activity is often associated with salvation (Jer 30:18; 31:28, 38-40; see also Ezek 28:26; Ps 69:36; Isa 44:26)⁸⁸⁰ and “fundamentally ... is used to describe the world restored according to the will of God.”⁸⁸¹ Seeking and doing the will of God is precisely the goal of the spiritual journey.

As the task verbs are used in *Jeremiah* beyond 1:10, particularly in the key passages at 12:14-17; 24:6; 31:28, 38-40; 42:10 and 45:4, the Lord rather than Jeremiah acts as the agent of plucking up... and planting, in most cases. In the spiritual sense, the first pair of task verbs denotes an action of the Lord to uproot, from a subject such as a people, nation or person, sins such as idolatry and disobedience; while the second pair denotes divine activity aiming at complete obliteration of what was uprooted, such as resistance to the Lord. Finally, the third pair relates to the divine action that serves to build and plant that subject (people/nation/person), in a way that benefits their welfare, blesses them, and is salvific. In the spiritual sense, the souls that have been turned and made open to God can build houses (spiritually of God) and plant vineyards (spiritually yielding the fruit of God, i.e., love). This is characteristic of union with God. The progression aligns with the phases of the spiritual journey (in the Carmelite understanding) in sequence and spiritual meaning. The correlations may be explained briefly as follows:

⁸⁸⁰ Wagner, *TDOT*, vol 2, 174.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

The Purgative Way. In the purgative way, sins are uprooted. In other words, beginners eliminate grave sin and obey the law of the Lord, i.e., the commandments. In *Jeremiah*, the people are accused of forsaking the Lord, who offers them living water, and making themselves into “leaky cisterns” that cannot even hold the waters of the Lord (2:13). They cannot listen or obey. As a result, whether the people are His people or their evil neighbors, they may be “plucked up” (12:17). Yet, if they learn the ways of Yahweh’s people, i.e., the commandments, they will be “built” (12:16). Even the exiles from Judah who obeyed by leaving the land will be “built”; they will not be “uprooted” although in a physical sense, leaving is like being uprooted. (24:6). “Plucking up” can be averted by turning from evil in 18:8. The purgative way, for Teresa of Avila, is characterized by “turning away from sin” and “growing in a stable, well-ordered Catholic life.”⁸⁸² John of the Cross speaks of imperfect attachments which can lead to mortal sin and “turning the heart” away from God.⁸⁸³ Because of this, John notes “they cannot be satisfied...” since it is God “the fount alone that can satisfy them. To these individuals God refers through Jeremiah: They have abandoned me, the fount of living water...” (2:13).⁸⁸⁴

The Illuminative Way. In the illuminative way, the deeper attachments to sin and the smaller imperfections, i.e., remnants of previous sin and behaviors that are impediments to union with the Lord, are “destroyed” or “annihilated”⁸⁸⁵ making way for the light of God. In *Jeremiah*, any nation that will not listen (12:17), and people who do not turn from evil ways (15:7) are “destroyed” by the Lord. Those who are to be “pulled down” include Zedekiah who is likened to a fig “so bad [it] cannot be eaten” (24:8); and Johanan who disobeys the clear instruction of the

⁸⁸² Martin, 13.

⁸⁸³ See A.3.19.7-8.

⁸⁸⁴ A.3.19.7.

⁸⁸⁵ LF.4.16.

Lord through Jeremiah, despite seeking and receiving the Lord's guidance (42:10). This level of destruction in the second terminological pair in Jer 1:10 might be seen to be associated in the spiritual reading with a persistent defiance of the Lord's will. The analogy could be applied to the removal of persistent impediments to doing the Lord's will. It can only be taken so far, but the alignment resonates. In the illuminative way, John looks to the purification of spiritual attachments. John even points to a "two-fold" sensory and spiritual peace which is as yet imperfect despite prior purification and must be purged.⁸⁸⁶ He looks to *Jeremiah* repeatedly for examples of this stage, including: "You have chastised me Lord, and I was instructed" (Jer 31:18). This verse is cited as an example of trials during which "senses and faculties may gradually be exercised, prepared and inured for the union with wisdom..." in order to strengthen them. He declares that "Jeremiah [31:18] gives good testimony of this truth."⁸⁸⁷ John also uses the false prophets of *Jeremiah* as examples of "imperfect passion" and the need for detachment. Citing Jer 23:21 and 23:32, John notes that these false prophets "behold the visions of their own heart" (23:26) and would never have revealed these visions "had they overcome their abominable attachment to these works."⁸⁸⁸

The Unitive Way. In unitive way, the soul enters into "spiritual marriage" and a "transforming union."⁸⁸⁹ This union is brought about by the Lord, the master builder, in cooperation with a soul.⁸⁹⁰ In *Jeremiah*, those who do the will of God are "built" and "planted" (sometimes after being "uprooted" or "destroyed"). Any nation, whether God's people of Israel

⁸⁸⁶ N.2.9.6.

⁸⁸⁷ N.1.14.4.

⁸⁸⁸ A.3.31.3.

⁸⁸⁹ Martin, 13.

⁸⁹⁰ In John's words, this awakening can be misperceived by the soul who "can feel as if God has awakened in its own heart" (LF.4.9) rather than understanding that God has been there all along, and it is the soul that is now more open to God's actions. Teresa of Avila compares union to the light of two wax candles shining together (*Interior Castle*, Mansion 7, Chapter 2.5).

and Judah, or their neighbors who turn to Him and follow His ways will be built and/or planted (see chapter 3). The writings of John do not cite Jeremianic “building” or “planting” verses directly, though resonances of the theme recur. In a possible resonance with the “building” of Jer 1:10, the ineffable experience of “awakening” to God’s “immense, powerful voice” with infinite “excellences” and “virtues” leads to the soul being, as John of the Cross describes it, “established” in God.⁸⁹¹ In *Living Flame*, John sees Jeremiah 23:29 “Are not my words perchance like a fire?” as “the language and ... words God speaks in souls that are purged, cleansed, and all enkindled.”⁸⁹² In the *Spiritual Canticle*, John speaks of the soul in union as a “vineyard in flower” in which “the flowers of perfections and virtues planted within her come to life and begin to grow.”⁸⁹³ Later he notes that God “nurtures and give being to all creatures *rooted* [my emphasis] and living in him.”⁸⁹⁴ He also sees supernatural insights as “implanted” into the soul, citing Jeremiah’s knowledge of and instruction to Baruch in 45:3.⁸⁹⁵ At the summit of his sketch of Mount Carmel, depicting union with God, John evokes the fruitfulness of planting in citing Jer 2:7 “I brought you into the land of Carmel to eat its fruit and its good things.”⁸⁹⁶ In the spiritual sense, in addition to being firmly fixed in God, the bearing of fruit is a key element of the unitive stage.⁸⁹⁷

A Typology for the Spiritual Journey Linked to Turning of the Heart. Within *Jeremiah*, the pairing and sequence of the task verbs supports a typology of a spiritual journey. The verbs

⁸⁹¹ LF.4.10.

⁸⁹² LF.1.5.

⁸⁹³ SC.17.5. See also SC.4.1-3: John also speaks of “woods and thickets planted by the hand of my Beloved” in which “woods” are the elements of creation (earth, water, fire, and air as seen by John) and thickets are creatures.

⁸⁹⁴ SC.39.11

⁸⁹⁵ SC.26:16-17.

⁸⁹⁶ John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 111.

⁸⁹⁷ See Teresa of Avila *Interior Castle*, Mansion 7, chapters 2-3. Teresa describes the soul in spiritual marriage as always keeping its center in God, and the great fruitfulness that results.

persistently reappear throughout the Hebrew MT text in a pattern that suggests an intentional placement. Throughout each of the key passages, at least one verb from each pair is present (see Chapter 3: Conclusions). In fact, the expected pairing based on the building or nature theme is often not what the author/editor opts for, offering additional evidence that the word choice is deliberate. For example, “build” בנה is paired more often with “demolish” (הרס from the second pair) than with the more expected “pull down” (נתן from the first pair). (See Chapter 3: Conclusions). By representing each pair of task verbs in each key passage, the editor renders each pair significant. This representation is consistent with the Carmelite conception of the three-fold progression of the spiritual journey,⁸⁹⁸ a journey that requires thorough purification before holiness can be attained.

With the notable exceptions of 1:10 and 45:4, each of the key passages displays a proximity to the themes of turning and the heart. In 18:8 and 18:11, turning towards the Lord averts the pain of uprooting, and in 18:10 turning away from the Lord causes it. In 12:15, the Lord will cause the turning, i.e., the return to the land where, if they will “diligently learn” His ways, they will be “built.” The positive activity of building and planting in both 24:6 and 31:28 is related to the bestowal of a new heart (24:7, 31:33) and turning to the Lord with the whole heart. The theme of the heart reappears throughout Jeremiah, including calls to circumcise the heart (Jer 4:4; see also 9:26) and turn the whole heart to the Lord, rather than obeying one’s evil heart (Jer 3:17; 4:14; 7:24; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12). The placement and usage of the task verbs in multiple contexts serve to encourage this change of heart.

⁸⁹⁸ “Spiritual journey” is possibly better described as a “spiritual cycle,” given that in the Carmelite understanding motion can be forward or backward, and stages can overlap and be repeated in an individual soul.

The emphasis upon the negative or positive aspect of the task verbs varies throughout *Jeremiah*. For example in 1:10, the task verbs are presented as a collection, all of which are to be enacted in the future, by the prophet Jeremiah. In 45:4 destruction is imminent. In 31:28 the text seems to reverse the emphasis of 1:10: just as the Lord has “watched over” the difficult actions of plucking up and breaking down, overthrowing, destroying, and bringing evil, “the days are coming” when He “will watch over them to build and to plant (31:28).” (The days are also coming when He will bestow a new heart in Jer 31:33). In almost half of the key passages, the action of the Lord depends on the choices of the people (12:16-17; 18:7-10; 42:10). If they act according to the will of the Lord, they will be “built”; if not, uprooting and destruction ensue. However, the love, faithfulness and mercy of Yahweh (Jer 31:3, 20) also allow for building and restoration of fortunes (שוב שבית *šûb šebûṭ*). In both cases, turning (שוב) the whole heart to the Lord is a key element.

The omission of the turning-heart theme in 1:10 and 45:4, which apply to Jeremiah and Baruch respectively, might be explained through the theme of hearts that are already turned to the Lord. Or it may be relevant to the dating of the passages and the evolution of the “rolling corpus.” Further study may elicit a better understanding.

(2) Resonances in the Reception History

A review of the reception history of Jer 1:10 traced the understanding and interpretation from the earliest canonical reception in Paul, through Christian fathers and theologians, such as Origen, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory the Great and Aquinas and across eras to the spiritual writings of the doctor of the church, John of the Cross. The impact of Jer 1:10 on Christian theological thinking through the ages reveals an early and persistent understanding of Jer 1:10 in

the spiritual sense from Origen through Aquinas including the most exciting and surprising finding, that Origen sees three stages of spiritual development in Jer 1:10. Origen's homiletic exegesis raises the possibility that Origen saw a typology of the three-staged spiritual journey in *Jeremiah*, and may not have been simply applying Greek neoplatonic thought to the Scriptures. Origen's understanding seems to impact the tradition through the writings of Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great in particular. A summary of the Christian reception history (and touching on Greek neoplatonic thought) is presented below. This analysis supports the proposition that an alignment and resonances can be identified in this reception history between the three pairs of task verbs in Jeremiah's call to "to root out (נחש) and pull down (נחץ), to destroy (אבד) and throw down (הרס), to build (בנה) and plant (נטע)" and the three stages known as purgation, illumination and union.

Paul. The earliest canonical reception of the task verbs comes through Paul, who sees himself in light of Jeremiah's prophetic career and describes himself as a minister of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:6; Jer 31:31). Paul echoes and spiritualizes the task verbs. He speaks of "building" up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12; 2 Cor 12:19) and "building" a person as the temple of the Lord (Eph 2:20-22; 1 Cor 3:9-17) with Christ as the cornerstone. In a clear reference to *Jeremiah*, Paul claims authority for "building up," not "tearing down" (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10). He notes that love "builds up" (1: Cor 8:1 NRSV).

Origen. The spiritual sense is picked up by Origen, who confirms the alignment of the task verbs with two stages progressive purification, and in turn, an ability to grow in ("build") holiness. In his *Homilies on Jeremiah*, Origen clearly sees the task verb pairs as three stages in a spiritual journey, aligning them with two phases of progressive purification, and in turn, an

ability to grow in (i.e., “build”) holiness: “It is necessary to **uproot** evil at its roots; it is necessary to **demolish** the building of evil from our souls so that then the words may **build** and **plant**.”⁸⁹⁹

With clarity, he definitively addresses two stages of purification prior to the positive stage:

If a person **uproots**, the thing **uprooted** is not **destroyed**, but is **uprooted**.
... Hence there is need of the goodness of God after the **uprooting**, to **destroy**
what has been **uprooted**...⁹⁰⁰ [...] That which is bad needs to be removed from
us first. God cannot **build** where there is a worthless building.⁹⁰¹

Origen’s explanation aligns with three stages: sin is uprooted in the first stage similar to the purgative way; its roots and remnants are eliminated in the second stage to make room for the good (much like the illuminative way); and then, in the third stage, like the unitive way, God can build his temple in the heart and plant a plantation and a paradise in Christ Jesus.⁹⁰² In the second stage, Origen even seems to state the particular need for God’s action, much like the action of God needed in the illuminative stage (and as described by John of the Cross). Only after two purgations have been undertaken, can the positive phase ensue. While the Carmelites posit a more complicated and nuanced understanding (in which movement – either forward or backward-- is constant; and stages can overlap and include more than three), the basic framework is consistent.

Origen develops his understanding of Jer 1:10 based on Paul’s writings. Origen notes that our “good” Lord seeks to “build” us into a “temple to God *built*...from virtue and right teachings so that His glory can be seen in it.”⁹⁰³ He also ties the task verbs to the Gospels including Mt. 15:13. Origen uses Paul’s conversion and the Deuteronomic phrase “I kill and make alive; I

⁸⁹⁹ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 1.16 (3)

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., 1.15 (1), (2).

⁹⁰¹ Ibid., 1.16 (3).

⁹⁰² Ibid., 1.16 (3).

⁹⁰³ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, catena 23. Origen cites Rom 11:17 here.

wound and I heal” (Dt 32:39) as an illustrative text alongside his discussion of Jer 1:10. Notably, several later theologians also cite Paul’s conversion and Dt 32:29 alongside their comments on Jer 1:10, including Augustine and Gregory the Great. (See Chapter 5: Origen and the Seeds of the Spiritual Journey for a detailed discussion.)

It must be noted that Origen had exposure to a Platonic and Neo-platonic thought, possibly including that of Plotinus, who is considered the founder of Neoplatonism. Origen was also influenced by the Philo, a Jewish thinker from Alexandria⁹⁰⁴ who also relied extensively on allegory. Whether and how Philo may be impacted by Jer 1:10 and if Philo’s understanding is touched on by Origen is another avenue for further study. Significantly, Origen’s interpretation of Jer 1:10 and his recognition of the three stages of spiritual progression comes several centuries prior to that of the commonly credited source of the purgation/illumination/union terminology, Pseudo-Dionysius, who wrote in the late fourth or early fifth century. (See below for a summary of findings related to Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius and chapter 6 for more detail. No evidence has been identified that Pseudo-Dionysius is impacted by Origen’s interpretation of Jer 1:10, although further study may reveal a connection.)

For Origen, the task verbs of Jeremiah 1:10 are intended to provide a spiritual structure for a soul to advance in virtue. For the implications of this, see the “Significant Findings” section below.

Plotinus. In at least one passage from Plotinus, the early Neoplatonic concepts of purification, illumination, and union have been identified. Plotinus’ influence flows directly into Christian theology through the Cappadocian Fathers, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas.

⁹⁰⁴ Meredith, “Philo” in *The Study of Spirituality*, 95.

Interestingly, both Origen and Plotinus studied under a teacher called Ammonius in Alexandria. For Plotinus, the teacher is named as Ammonius Saccas.⁹⁰⁵ However, it is unclear whether Origen had the same teacher or another Ammonius.⁹⁰⁶ If Origen and Plotinus shared the same teacher or source of thought, it is possible that there is a common Neoplatonic root to these ideas. Nonetheless, Origen's reading of Jer 1:10 raises the possibility of a scriptural basis to the concepts.

Gregory of Nyssa and The Cappadocians. The transmission of Origen's work and thinking continues through the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzen) in the east who devoted consistent effort to studying and teaching his works. While no specific reference to Jeremiah 1:10 has been identified, Gregory of Nyssa employs the task verb themes and terminology in a manner consistent with Origen's use (such as rooted evil, building and planting virtue in a soul, and the planting of virtue by God). A more thorough review may reveal additional connections.

Jerome. In the west, Jerome translated the work of Origen, including his *Homilies on Jeremiah* as well as the *Song of Songs Commentary* in which Origen lays out his understanding of the three stages as represented by *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes* and *Song of Songs*. While it is not clear whether Jerome sees Jer 1:10 as two or three stages in precise agreement with Origen on

⁹⁰⁵ Lloyd Gerson, "Plotinus" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, 1. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/plotinus/> (accessed September 28, 2022).

⁹⁰⁶ Mark J Edwards, "Origen" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2022 Edition). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/origen/> (accessed 9/1/2022). In a contrasting view, Andrew Louth believes that Origen studied under Ammonius Saccas. See Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), chapter IV: Origen, 52, Kindle.

1:10, Jerome's interpretation incorporates the spiritual sense, exhibits many elements common to and consistent with Origen, and does not exclude the possibility of a tri-partite model.

Augustine. Augustine offers a dualistic spiritual interpretation of 1:10, in which progressive purification is not clearly differentiated by the negative task verbs. Notably, like Origen, he uses the conversion of St. Paul alongside Deut 32:39 as an explanation of Jer 1:10.

John Cassian. While Cassian notes that the spiritual purpose of the task verbs of Jer 1:10 is to eliminate vice and gain virtue (a "twofold purpose"), his writing does not seem to rule out the possibility of a general three-stage framework.

Pseudo-Dionysius. Pseudo-Dionysius (whose works were written between 485 and 518/28 CE⁹⁰⁷) is often credited as the source of the three stages of the spiritual life based on his use of the expressions "purification, illumination and perfection." Pseudo-Dionysius does not appear to address Jer 1:10.⁹⁰⁸ However, his writings demonstrate the influence of Christian Platonism (including Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian Fathers), and Neoplatonic thought, including that of Plotinus and Proclus, an Athenian Neoplatonist. Pseudo-Dionysius' enormously influential writings are cited by Gregory the Great and Aquinas, and his influence extends to the Rhineland mystics including Meister Eckart and Johannes Tauler, and the Spanish mystics including John of the Cross. Given Origen's impact on the Cappadocian Fathers, it is possible that Origen's thought, and conceptions of spirituality have indirectly impacted Pseudo-

⁹⁰⁷ Kevin Corrigan, "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1.

⁹⁰⁸ *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, ed. John Farina, translator Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), Biblical Index 297-298. Jeremiah is cited more than ten times according to the translation by Luibheid and Rorem: Jer 2:12-13; 7:16, 24; 11:14; 16:12; 17:13; 18:5-6; 23:21, 24, 29. A review of the Greek text with particular attention to the purificatory passages may reveal subtle echoes of and allusions to the Jeremianic task verbs.

Dionysius. However, no direct link has been identified. Further investigation may yield additional insight.

Gregory the Great. Gregory the Great (540-c. 604) provides a specific interpretation that is consistent with Origen and sees three stages of spiritual development. He likens the progression of 1:10 task verbs to lumber that is (1) cut down, and then (2) dried out, before being (3) “solidly...elevated.”⁹⁰⁹ Like Origen, the conversion of Saul/Paul (Acts 9:4; 22:8) is used as an example of being “thrown down” and “built up.” It is possible that Gregory was influenced by Origen; however, tracing that connection requires further study. Gregory the Great also quotes Pseudo-Dionysius. In the findings of this study, Gregory’s work is the last clear alignment of Jer 1:10 with a tri-partite spiritual growth process.

Aquinas and Tauler. Aquinas (1225-1274) also sees 1:10 from a spiritual viewpoint, though whether he sees three stages at 1:10 is not evident. He does understand a three-stage progression described as “beginner, proficient and perfect” but does not appear to tie this to Jer 1:10. Interestingly, he cites Augustine’s passage in which Augustine seems to echo Origen. As a Dominican scholar and doctor of the church, Aquinas is vastly influential. In seeking to trace the influence through to John of the Cross, it is noted that John of the Cross “was trained in Thomistic theology.”⁹¹⁰ One particular link between Aquinas and John of the Cross comes through a lesser-known German Dominican, Johannes Tauler (c.1300-1361), a known influence on John of the Cross. Tauler clearly sees three stages of spiritual development, echoing Aquinas’

⁹⁰⁹ Gregory the Great, “The Book of Pastoral Rule, and Selected Epistles, of Gregory the Great”, in NPNF-212 *Leo the Great, Gregory the Great* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), ed. Philip Schaff, ch. XXXIV *How the Ruler, While Living Well, Ought to Teach and Admonish Those that are Put Under Him*. How those are to be admonished who do not even begin good things, and those who do not finish them when begun, 685. <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/s/schaff/npnf212/cache/npnf212.pdf> (accessed October 2, 2022).

⁹¹⁰ Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, 195.

terminology. While a brief review has not revealed any direct comment by Tauler on Jer 1:10, in his discussions of the spiritual journey, Tauler echoes the themes and terminology of the task verbs.

John of the Cross. Looking to the writings of John of the Cross, the Carmelite doctor of spirituality who provides us with detailed descriptions of the spiritual journey, the impact grows diffuse, but an assessment of themes and concepts suggests that it may be possible to detect an indirect influence.

In his writings John of the Cross: (1) recognizes the three-stage framework of the spiritual journey, (2) uses a similarly themed approach and (3) in a few places may even echo the terminology of Jer 1:10. However he also cites both Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas, incorporating the terminology of both. Frustratingly, John of the Cross does not comment on Jer 1:10. Nor does he cite Origen. He does however, use a verse from *Jeremiah* to encircle the summit of his famous Sketch of Mt. Carmel (Jer 2:7). Furthermore, he cites *Jeremiah* and *Lamentations* over 40 times to explain elements of spiritual experience and the spiritual journey. (*Lamentations*, which has not been looked at in this study is also an avenue for further investigation.) In his writings, John uses each of the concepts from Jer 1:10 in his descriptions, and in a similar sequence.

In the *Dark Night*, John of the Cross speaks of “two purgations, like the difference between **pulling up roots** (*raíz*) or **cutting off** a branch.”⁹¹¹ In *Ascent*, he pairs “build” and “tear

⁹¹¹ N.2.2.1.

down” and uses the term “annihilate” with a “heap”⁹¹² of additional negative terms in his description of the necessity to make room for the “inflow and illumination” of God:

Observing how we *annihilate* (*aniquilamos*) the faculties in their operations, it will perhaps seem that we are **tearing down** (*destruimos*) rather than **building up** (*edificamos*) the way of spiritual exercise. This would be true if our doctrine here were destined merely for *beginners*... But we are imparting instructions here for *advancing* in contemplation to union with God.... One has to follow this method of *disencumbering, emptying and depriving* the faculties of their natural authority and operations to make room for the inflow and illumination of the supernatural.⁹¹³

John further notes that until the high state of union is reached “the senses are not fully annihilated... and still have some activity...since they are not yet totally spiritual.”⁹¹⁴

“Annihilation” is John’s frequently used term for the destruction of sin and impediments to union with God. It also conceptually describes a summary of the negative task verbs, although John does not acknowledge any link to Jer 1:10. While a connection cannot be directly attributed to Jer 1:10, the conceptual framework that multiple levels of purification (destruction) precede holiness (building) seems to resonate. Also as in *Jeremiah*, where God is the primary agent, for John “only God” can open the eyes of the soul which “could never awaken itself.”⁹¹⁵ The spiritual journey requires the action of God; it is not a simply human accomplishment.

No direct connection has been identified between John of the Cross and Origen. However, the themes of the spiritual journey present in both may warrant additional investigation. One potential avenue may come through Origen’s *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (240 CE), a book which was also dear to John’s heart.

⁹¹² Miller, 583.

⁹¹³ A.2.3.1-2.

⁹¹⁴ LF.4.16.

⁹¹⁵ LF.4.9.

(3) Challenges and Weaknesses

One difficulty of this study is that it is subject to complex and layered language and translation issues. While the word study and canonical text of Jeremiah are based primarily on the Hebrew MT (which uses 6 task verbs, compared to 5 in the Greek LXX), numerous other languages come into play. The other canonical text relied on here, Paul's writings, is originally in Greek. (Paul though was familiar with the Hebrew Bible and comfortable reading it.⁹¹⁶) Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Pseudo-Dionysius also wrote in Greek. (Origen also demonstrates some knowledge of Hebrew.) Jerome, Augustine, Cassian, Gregory the Great and Aquinas worked in Latin. Origen and Jerome did demonstrate knowledge of Hebrew and commitment to engaging with the text of the Hebrew Bible. The sermons of Johannes Tauler, a Rhineland mystic and Dominican, are originally in German (although he also preached in Latin).⁹¹⁷ John of the Cross wrote his famous works in Spanish, although he read Scripture in the Latin Vulgate. This complex translational path of transmission makes tracing a particular concept less precise than might otherwise be possible. Nonetheless, in the scriptures and the reception history, the words, concepts and themes associated with Jer 1:10 and the spiritual journey provide sufficient material to consider, to elicit insights and to frame additional questions.

(4) Significant Finding in Origen's Reading of Jer 1:10

The most important finding has emerged unexpectedly in the reception of Jer 1:10 by Origen. Prior studies have identified Origen's conception of three stages, primarily through his commentary on the three "Solomonic" books. In his commentary on the *Song of Songs*, Origen

⁹¹⁶ Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 426-427.

⁹¹⁷ Walter Elliott, Introduction to *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler*. Kindle Edition. Location 195 of 13272.

ties his understanding of spiritual progression to the order of the books of *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes* and *Song of Songs* in a manner that is also aligned with the Carmelite description. For Origen, *Proverbs* teaches morality such as keeping the commandments, while *Ecclesiastes* further “trains the intelligence” in incorruptible eternal wisdom (differentiating it from things corruptible and corporeal). The *Song of Songs*, spiritual marriage, “comes last that a man may come to it when his manner of life has been purified.”⁹¹⁸ Origen compares the three Solomonic books/stages to the Greek teaching of “ethics, physics and enoptics” and asserts that “the Greeks borrowed these ideas from Solomon, who had learnt them by the Spirit of God at an age and time long before their own.”⁹¹⁹ As noted, Origen is clearly aware of the Greek school of thought; influences on him include platonic and neo-platonic teachings, possibly including the thought of Plotinus. His attribution to Scripture is not proof of any particular source, since it is plausible that Origen is applying neoplatonic concepts to his reading of Scripture.

However, Origen’s reading of Jer 1:10 seems not to have been considered in modern scholarship. His understanding of a three-stage framework in this specific biblical text offers evidence that perhaps his source of thought on spiritual progression may be based on Scripture. This study offers evidence that Jer 1:10 supports a three-stage typology of the spiritual journey in the Hebrew. Origen clearly sees three stages in Jer 1:10 and extends this understanding to other key passages such as Jer 18:7-10. With Greek as his native tongue, Origen has arrived at this conclusion, at least in part through the Greek LXX, but also possibly through a reading of the Hebrew text.⁹²⁰ The results of the study offer the possibility that Origen’s conception of three

⁹¹⁸ Origen, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, Prologue, 44.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁹²⁰ Origen is the composer of the Hexapla which compares Hebrew and Greek biblical manuscripts.

stages may have been influenced directly by his reading of Jer 1:10 and a Hebrew typology that extends throughout the book of *Jeremiah*.

Origen's interpretation (c. 240 CE) precedes Pseudo-Dionysius by more than two centuries. (No evidence has been identified that Pseudo-Dionysius is impacted by Origen's interpretation of Jer 1:10, although further study may reveal a connection.) Origen's exposition in the third century means that the nascency of the spiritual journey may be tied back to the Hebrew Scriptures and can be seen in the Hebrew MT and the Greek LXX, biblical texts which support and inform both Christian and Jewish traditions. In this light, the balance of pagan philosophical influence may warrant review.

Origen's interpretation of Jer 1:10 demonstrates a spiritual sense consistent with three stages of spiritual progression as described by the Carmelites. However when it comes to the John of the Cross, the impact of Jer 1:10 is much less clear. It seems plausible that thematic links and sequential alignment in the spiritual journey are impacted by Jer 1:10, but no direct link is available.

(5) Jeremiah 1:10 and the Spiritual Journey: Current State of Investigation, Chief Contributions and Further Study Needed

The major contribution of this study has been to uncover Origen's interest in Jeremiah, particularly Jer 1:10, reading it with a spiritual sense that pre-dates Pseudo-Dionysius and seems to pre-figure the spiritual journey as described by the Carmelites. Origen's interpretation of Jer 1:10 also offers a potential Scriptural source for the tri-partite spiritual journey which may challenge oft-assumed Platonic or Neoplatonic origination of the spiritual journey.

The Word Study has offered evidence that the Hebrew text provides a typology for a three-stage progression, in which two stages of purification (described by two pairs of negative task verbs) are necessary before the holiest and whole-hearted stage of unification (described by the positive pair of task verbs) is effected. The task verbs of Jer 1:10 work to turn the heart to the Lord, who continues to love his people despite their spiritual adultery and other sins.

Further study of the traditions behind Origen (and his broader corpus of work), including Neoplatonism, Philo and possibly other Christian sources may reveal a better understanding of the source of the three-stage progression alongside Origen's reading of Jer 1:10 and the Solomonic books. In addition, a more thorough review of the receptive texts of Jer 1:10 in their original language, particularly the Latin and Greek translations and writings, may reveal additional insight into whether and how the task verbs and themes of Jer 1:10 may be impacting the tradition as a whole. This study necessarily remains focused on Jeremiah 1:10.

Jer 1:10 offers a significant and early spiritual model. It may offer insight into the earliest theological seeds of the spiritual journey, with echoes and resonances throughout the ages. While the understanding of 1:10 is well-defined in Origen (and then appears to dissipate after Gregory the Great), the philosophical schools of thought also flow into the stream of understanding of the spiritual journey. Yet, the Christian seeds of a three-stage process of spiritual progression were planted and sown in a text that originates prior to the birth of Christ. By Origen's interpretation, the text recognizes that a soul must be built by God and in cooperation with God. As God told Jeremiah, He is watching over his word to make sure it blossoms. Jeremiah's call may have been fraught with the trauma of the exile, but his purpose in the spiritual sense is one that calls nations and kingdoms, and all souls, to uproot and tear down,

destroy and demolish those things that prevent them from turning to God with the whole heart. By building and planting their lives in his will, souls will be blessed and saved.

Ultimately, in *Jeremiah*, the Lord will be their God and they will be His people. The Lord promises to “rebuild” Jerusalem “for the Lord.” In the spiritual sense, the city is not a physical site, but rather a holy place of the Lord. In the Christian view, this can be understood eschatologically, but also in terms of a spiritual temple to the Lord, and the heart. The heart is the place of spiritual upheaval and renewal, of uprooting and tearing down, destroying and demolishing, and of building and planting our best selves in God’s love.

The evidence indicates that Jer 1:10 directly impacts upon Paul and Origen in the early era of Christianity. Through these two, this study suggests that the task verb concepts continue to have an important, though less identifiable impact on the tradition. The spiritualization of the task verb concepts, as well as the periodic use of Paul’s conversion and Deut 32:39 to explain Jer 1:10 are likely evidence of Origen’s influence.

In a number of ways, Origen’s spiritual interpretation seems to be carried through Christian tradition. The three-stage interpretation of Jer 1:10 as a proxy for the spiritual journey is consistent with that of Gregory the Great. Several foundational Christian theologians, including fathers of the church Jerome and Aquinas, look to the spiritual (and/or figurative) sense of 1:10 as a way to eradicate vice and establish virtue (see also Cassian), though often without a detailed explication of progressive purification. Origen’s texts related to Paul and Deuteronomy are cited by later writers alongside Jer 1:10. The language and concepts seems to persist and resonate, if more opaquely, through the later Christian chains of thought, including Tauler and John of the Cross. Language issues no doubt contribute to a lack of more precise terminology.

This study offers evidence that Jer 1:10 impacts the tradition in the spiritual sense, possibly preceding (and potentially including) the conception of spiritual stages by Pseudo-Dionysius. For the author of this study, this hidden spiritual richness points to the infinite wisdom of God and the breadth and depth of the living and effective Word of God, not only in *Jeremiah* but in the collection of texts we know as the canonical Bible. May we continue to build on Him in our work and lives.

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