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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“JEREMIAH WAS NOT
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XV

JEREMIAH WAS NOT DECEIVED

JEREMIAH 20:7a

פְּתִיתֵנִי יְהוָה וְאַפְּתַח חֻקֵּי תִנִּי וְתוֹכַל

Septuagint

ἠπάτησάς με κύριε καὶ ἠπατήθην
ἐκράτησας καὶ ἠδυνάσθης

Vulgate

*seduxisti me Domine et seductus sum
sum fortior me fuisti et invaluable factus.*

NIV

O LORD, you deceived; me, and I was deceived you
overpowered me and prevailed.

McDaniel Translation

You told me, O Yahweh, of the fiat
and I was informed of the decree.

You made me articulate
and intrusted (me).

The Meaning of פְּתַח

Failure to recognize that the פְּתַח in Jer 20:7 was *not* the denominative of פְּתִי / פְּתִי “simple/simplicity,” meaning in the *Pi^cel* “to deceive or to seduce” (BDB 834; KBS 3: 984), but a cognate of the Arabic فتو (*fatawa*) “*he notified the decision of the law*,” has created serious problems for commentators.¹ The Septuagint’s use of ἀπατάω “to deceive, cheat, mislead” and Vulgate’s use of *seduco* “to lead astray,

to seduce” have been followed by many subsequent translators and interpreters. As a consequence, commentators from Calvin to Clines have been hard pressed to save Jeremiah from the charge of blasphemy.

Calvin [1509–1564], in defense of Jeremiah, argued unconvincingly,

But there is no doubt that his language is ironical, when he says that he was *deceived*. He assumes the character of his enemies, who boasted that he presumptuously prophesied of calamity and ruin of the city, as no such thing would take place. . . .²

Clines and Gunn (1978: 21–23) followed Calvin’s translator John Owen [1616–1683] (though not mentioned)³ and argued that פָּתָה in this text actually meant God “tried to persuade” Jeremiah to become a prophet. They stated

“It appears likely that *pittâ* does not describe an act carried through to a successful conclusion, but an attempted act. That is, it seems to be more like our verbs “urge”, “advise”, “attempt”, than like “convince”, “induce”, “compel”.⁴

But it is difficult to recognize any such tentativeness in Jer 1:5, וּבִטְרָם תֵּצֵא מִרְחֹם הַקֶּדֶשׁ שְׂתִידָךְ נָבִיא לְגוֹיִם נְתַתִּיךְ, “before you come forth from the womb I [Yahweh] sanctified you [Jeremiah], I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Persuasion, therefore, seems not to have been a part of the process of Jeremiah’s appointment as a prophet by Yahweh.

Holladay (1986: 552), on the other hand, appealed to the words of Micah ben Imlah (I Kings 22:21ff.)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵצֶא וְהִיִּיתִי רוּחַ שְׂקֵר בְּפִי כָּל־נְבִיאָיו
 וַיֹּאמֶר תִּפְתָּה. . . .
 נָתַן יְהוָה רוּחַ שְׂקֵר בְּפִי כָּל־נְבִיאֵיךְ אֱלֹה

And he said I will go out and be a lying spirit
 in the mouth of all his prophets.
 And he [Yahweh] said, ‘You shall deceive’ . . .
 Yahweh put a lying spirit in the mouth
 of all these prophets of yours.

According to Holladay (1986: 552–553),

Jrm interpreted the contrast between the prophets of his own day who proclaimed good news and his own proclamation of bad news in the same way: Yahweh had “deceived” this people and Jerusalem”. . . . Jrm questions the effectiveness of Yahweh’s word and accuses Yahweh of misleading him . . . the implication is that Yahweh has broken his own torah in his treatment of Jrm. . . . Verse 7a thus embodies an outburst that is deeply rebellious, not to say blasphemous: Jrm understands Yahweh as brute force, as deceptive, beyond any conventional norm.

Jeremiah’s words in 15:16, הָיָה תְהִיָּה לִי כְמוֹ אֲכָזֵב מַיִם, “Verily, you are to me like a deceitful brook,” could be a variant of the charge in 20:7 that Yahweh had deceived him. But the Septuagint reads γλυτομένη ἐγενήθη μοι ὡς ὕδωρ ψευδές, “it indeed became to me as deceitful water,” with an (impersonal) third person rather than the second person addressed to Yahweh. The *Vorlage* could have been הִיָּה הַיּוֹת הִיָּה or הִיָּה הִיָּה for the MT הִיָּה תְהִיָּה. Similarly, the Vulgate has *facta est mihi quasi mendacium aquarum* “it became to me as of deceitful waters,” reflecting the same *Vorlage* as the Septuagint, while the Syriac agrees with the MT. No doubt, Jeremiah felt deceived, but the question remains as to whether or not Jeremiah believed Yahweh had deceived him.⁵

In light of פָּתָה appearing in Exod 22:15 for sexual seduction and חָזַק being used in Deut 22:25 in reference to forcing

a woman sexually, McKane (1986: 470) simply concluded,

. . . the right conclusion is that v. 7a employs the language of seduction and violation. Jeremiah feels a deep sense of betrayal in view of his sorrowful experiences as a prophet and the bitterness of the outcome of his acquiescence. Yahweh overpowered him, crushed his resistance and compelled him to be a prophet, and he has found the office a bed of nails.

But once the Arabic cognate فتو (*fatawa*) becomes the key for interpreting Jer 20:7, Jeremiah appears as a bewildered prophet, but not a quasi-blasphemous one. The verb فتو (*fatawa*) in form IV means “he notified the decision of the law, . . . made known, or explained to him, [what he required to know, and in particularly what was the decision of the law, in, or respecting,] the case.” The noun فتوى (*fatwā*) means “the giving of an answer, or a reply, stating the decision of the law respecting a particular case . . . an answer, or a reply, to a question relating to a dubious judicial decision”; and the related noun مفت (*mufti*) means “a jurisconsult who notifies the decisions of the law, in, or respecting, cases submitted to him for guidance of the قاضي (*qâdî*), who is the “magistrate” issuing a قضاء (*qâd'â*), which is a “decree; ordinance; sentence, or judicial decision” (Lane 1877: 2336–2337; 1893: 2990; Wehr 1979: 815, 904). The lexeme פִּתְּוָה is attested in the name פִּתְּוִיָּאֵל, the father of the prophet Joel (Joel 1:1), which could mean “young man of God,” or “tempted by God” (see KBS 3: 985), or “God announced (the verdict/decree).”

Thanks to the *fatwa* of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued on February 14, 1989, calling for the death of Salman Rushdie upon the publication of his novel *Satanic Verses*, and the subsequent declaration by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on December 26, 1990, that the *fatwa* was irrevocable, the word *fatwa* and its association with death became known world-

wide.⁶ Furthermore, the *fatwa* signed by Sheikh Usamah Bin-Muhammad Bin-Ladin on February 23, 1998, urging a *jihad* against Americans, made the Arabic *fatwa* a household word in America after September 11, 2001. At onetime פְּתָה (= *fatwa/fatwah*) was a recognized term in Biblical Hebrew.⁷

The case in point for Jer 20:7 had to do with Yahweh's decision to implement the penalty clauses contained in *the Torah*—summarized in Deut 28:15–68. The covenant called for Israel's recognition of Yahweh as God alone, requiring total obedience to his will. Failure of Judah and Jerusalem to fulfill the covenant stipulations would result in their death and destruction—just as Ehpraim and Samaria had been destroyed for violating the same covenant.

Jeremiah had been informed—to borrow the Arabic term—of the divine *fatwa*, and had been called as a prophet to announce the divine decree, especially the fact that the *fatwa* /fiat was revocable!⁸ Repentance by Judah and Jerusalem and the renewal of covenantal obligations to Yahweh would make null and void Yahweh's death sentence for them.

Jeremiah acknowledged earlier וַיְהוֹה הוֹדִיעֵנִי וַאֲדַעָה “Yahweh made known to me, and I knew” (11:18), which has essentially the same meaning as the פְּתִיתֵנִי יְהוֹה וְאֶפְתָּה (20:7), except the פְּתָה includes in itself the object of what became known—the fiat, the decree, the sanction—without a separate word as the direct object.⁹

The Meaning of חִזַּק

In a similar manner, failure to recognize that the חִזַּק in Jer 20:7 is *not* the verb meaning “to be strong, to strengthen,” but the cognate of the Arabic حَذَق (*ḥadaqa*) “he became skilled, learned,” led to highly improbable interpretations of this verse. For example, Clines and Gunn (1976: 395, 397) concluded,

In v. 7f. Yahweh is cast in the role of the traditional “enemy” of the psalmist. Jeremiah’s complaint, “Thou art stronger (חִזַּק) than I / and thou hast prevailed (יָכַל)”, exemplifies the classical theme of the powerful persecutor that one meets, e.g. in Ps 35:10 . . . or Ps 134f. . . . But Yahweh, to whom the psalmist in his weakness conventionally appeals against the powerful persecutor, has ironically become in Jeremiah’s experience the very one who has ruthlessly used his strength against frailty.

It is precisely because in the prophet’s own experience Yahweh is an oppressive and irresistible God, who is stronger than his victim, prevails over him and commits violence and outrage against him (v. 7f.), that he may be called on in turn to become the irresistible divine oppressor of the prophet’s human oppressors (v. 11).

Holladay (1986: 553), on the other hand conjectured,

It is conceivable that this verb [חִזַּקְתִּינִי], like those in the first colon, can carry sexual connotations: חִזַּק qal does in 2 Sam 13:14 [וַיִּחַזַּק מִמֶּנָּה], “and he was stronger than she),” and the hip’ il of חִזַּק does in Deut 22:25 [וְהִחַזְקָה הָאִישׁ וְשָׂכַב] and the hip’ il of חִזַּק does in Exod 22:15 [וְכִי־יִפְתָּהּ] . . . the probability is strong that the verb “you are stronger than I” continues the semantic field of sexual violence with which the verse began.

Thus, Holladay was in agreement with McKane (1986: 470), Baumgartner (1917: 64), and Rudolph (cited by McKane) that “Yahweh’s deception of Jeremiah is like the seduction of an innocent girl . . . the right conclusion is that v. 7a employs the language of seduction and violation.”

But once חֲזַק is identified as the cognate of حَذَق (*ḥaḍaqa*) “he made him skilful” (form II) and حَادِق (*ḥâdiq*) “a man chaste or eloquent, of tongue, perspicuous in language . . . skilled, or skillful, and thoroughly learned, . . . skillful in his art, or habitual work or occupation” (Lane 1865: 536; Castell 1669: 1123), a contextually more appropriate interpretation becomes obvious.

Initially, Jeremiah lacked confidence in becoming a prophet, saying, “I do not know how to speak for I am a youth” (1:5).¹⁰ At which point, “Yahweh then put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and Yahweh said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth” (1:9). Gifted with God’s words, Jeremiah became חֲזַק , i.e., “eloquent, articulate, masterful in speech,” and he would later affirm, “your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, OYahweh, God of hosts” (15:16) and “I stood before you [O, God,] and spoke well (טוֹבָה) concerning them to turn away your wrath from them” (18:20).¹¹ Thus, the MT חֲזַקְתָּנִי in 20:7 can be translated “you made me eloquent” or “you made me quite articulate,” an idea which is reinforced by Yahweh’s promising Jeremiah כְּפִי תְהִיָּה “you will become as my mouth” (15:19).

The Meaning of יָכַל and זָעַק

Moreover, the failure of translators and commentators to recognize that the וַתִּיכַל in Jer 20:7 is *not* from the verb יָכַל

“to be able, to prevail” has contributed to some of the contrived interpretations. The **וַהֲוִיכֶל** in 20:7 is the cognate of the Arabic **وكل** (*wakala*) “he left him to his opinion, judgment,” and in form II, “he appointed him, or intrusted him, as his commissioned agent, or deputy,” and in form V “he relied upon him and confided in him” (Lane 1893: 3059; Wehr 1979: 1283–1284; and Castell 1669: 938 “*commisit, commendavit . . . fretus, fisus fuit*”).

The appointment of Jeremiah was announced in 1:10, “today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms”¹² and 1:18. “I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land.” Jeremiah’s being taken into the confidence of Yahweh is found in 11:18, **וַיֵּדְעָה יְהוָה הַרְרִיעֵנִי**, “Yahweh made known to me, and I knew” and 20:7, **פְּתִיתֵנִי**, “You told me, O Yahweh, of the sanction and I was informed of the decree.”

McKane (1986: 471–472) provided a helpful summary of the interpretations of 20:8a (“For whenever I speak, I have to howl and proclaim ‘violence and ruin!’”) found in the versions and in Rashi and Kimchi.¹³ There is general agreement in these sources that the “violence and destruction” is part of Jeremiah’s prophetic message. But McKane argued,

The view that v. 8a is a reference to the prophecies of doom uttered by Jeremiah should be rejected. . . . **אזעק** must mean something like ‘I cry out for help’, and if this is so **חַמַּס אֶקְרָא** cannot be an allusion to prophecies of doom. It too like **אזעק** must refer to an expression of inner desperation and extremity. . . He is saying that his speech has been reduced to a continuous cry for help (**כִּי מְדִי אֶדְבֵר**), to an explosive verbal expression of inner despera-

tion (חַמֹּס וְשָׂדֵה אֶקְרָא), and that it is his obedience to his prophetic calling which has reduced him to this condition.

But צַעַק is an interchangeable by-form of זַעַק, and צַעַק is well attested as a part of the doom prophecies, such as Jer 25:36 “A *shriek* (קוֹל צַעֲקָת) from the shepherds . . . for Yahweh lays waste their pasture,” and Jer 48:3–5, “Hark! a *cry* (קוֹל צַעֲקָה) from Horonaim, desolation and great destruction . . . the have heard the cry of destruction.”

Therefore, contra McKane, the אֶזְעַק חַמֹּס וְשָׂדֵה אֶקְרָא of 20:8 must be recognized as part of the prophecy of impending death and destruction. Holladay (1986: 554) listed the following interpretations given for the “violence” and “destruction” in 20:8.

- it proclaims the coming punishment on the nation
- it denounces the people’s sins of violence and destruction
- it refers to the violence done to Jeremiah by his opponents
- it is a complaint by Jeremiah for Yahweh’s violence to him.

Contrary to Holladay’s assertion, “Given the general density of the imagery in the passage, all four possibilities may compete for the hearer’s attention,” the *first* in this list is surely the correct one. The impending violence and destruction announced in Yahweh’s *fatwa* or *fiat* are spelled out in a number of prior passages, including 6:8, 6:12, 8:3, 9:11, 13:14, 14:11, 15:3, 15:8–9, 16:18, 17:27 and 19:8–9, not to mention the texts that come after 20:8, like 21:3–10 and 22:5–7, “But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, the oracle of Yaweh, that this house shall become a desolation. . . . I will prepare destroyers against you, each with his weapons.” Consequently, Jer 20:8a is best understood as

meaning “Yea, whenever I declare (the *fatwa*), I cry out ‘Violence!’ I shout ‘Destruction!’”¹⁴

Jeremiah’s Bewilderment and Anger

Jeremiah’s proclamation of impending violence produced hostility, not repentance. Jeremiah anticipated appreciation from those who heard his warnings. But prophets, priests, and people who had absolutized the inviolability of Jerusalem (see note 4), took Jeremiah to be a liar and a traitor who needed to be silenced. Thus, according to Jer 18:18, “they said, ‘Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah, for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not heed any of his words.’”

Jeremiah resented this response, complaining “I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. . . . For the word of Yahweh has become for me a reproach and derision all day long” (Jer 20:7b, 8b). His decision to cease announcing the *fatwa* (Jer 20:9) put him into a terrible bind: “then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am wearied with holding it in, and I *cannot* (i.e., I *cannot* hold in the *fatwa*).”

This confession of his weariness and inability to remain silent should be followed by the statement in 20:10c, which in the MT reads כָּל אָנוּשׁ שְׁלוּמֵי שְׁמֵרֵי צִלְעֵי, meaning literally “every man of my peace watching my side/my stumbling.” But the MT needs to be repointed and translated as כָּל אָנוּשׁ שְׁלוּמֵי שְׁמֵרֵי צִלְעֵי, “An incurable weariness is my recompense; my being on guard is my undoing.”¹⁵ The derivations supporting this translation are

- The אָנוּשׁ should have been read as אָנוּשׁ rather than אָנוּשׁ and given the same meaning as that found in Jer 15:18,

וּמִפְתִּי אֲנוֹשָׁה יִמָּאֵה הִרְפָּא כָּל אֲנוֹשׁ “my wound is incurable, refusing to be healed.” This singular כָּל is not the same as the plural כָּל אֲנָשִׁי in 38:22.¹⁶

- The MT כָּל is the cognate of the Arabic كل (*kalla*) “he became fatigued, tired, weary, incapacitated” and كليل (*kalîl*) “weak, faint,” as in the expression لسان كليل (*lisân kalîl*) “a dull tongue, lacking sharpness” (Lane 1893: 3002).¹⁷
- The MT צַלַע, translated variously as “side” or “stumble,” or by some synonym of the latter, is *not* the cognate of the Arabic ضلع (*dil^c*) “rib” or “side,” nor the cognate of ظلع (*dala^c a*) “to limp”; but it is the cognate of أصلع (*ʿaṣla^c*) and صليعا (*ṣulay^c ā^c*) “hard, distressing, calamitous . . . any notorious affair or event . . . of great magnitude or moment, to accomplish which, or to perform which, one finds not the way . . . an evil, abominable, or unseemly, action or saying, such as is apparent, manifest, or unconcealed, or a calamity, or misfortune, hard to be borne” (Lane 1872: 1717).¹⁸ It is used here as a variant for לֹא אוֹכֵל “I am not able.”

Jeremiah’s bewilderment turned to anger after hearing the “defamation of many” (דְּבַת רַבִּים), whereby he recognized that everyone—aside from the Babylonians—was surrounded by terror (מַגֵּר מִסָּבִיב). Jerusalem was surrounded by Babylonian terrorists and Jeremiah was himself surrounded by Judean terrorists. Despite the many translations of דְּבַת as “whispering,”¹⁹ Jeremiah’s enemies were vocal and vicious, shouting הַגִּידוּ וְנִגִּידְנוּ “Overpower him! Let us overpower him!”

Elsewhere נגַד (used in the *Hiph^cil*) means “to announce, tell, proclaim,” but not “denounce.” In a context of hostility, such as that found in Jer 20:10, the Arabic نجد (*najada*) provides the clue for the interpretation of this particular נגַד. It means, among other things, “he overcame, conquered, subdued, overpowered, prevailed over, or surpassed” (Lane 1893: 2766). The Septuagint translators certainly understood the נגַד here in this way for they rendered וַיִּגְדוּ־נָוּ וַיִּגְדוּ־נָוּ as ἐπισύστητε καὶ ἐπισυστώμεν αὐτῷ “Attack! Let us attack him!”²⁰

The פָּתָהּ in Jer 20:10 is the well used verb “to entice,” not the rare פָּתָהּ in 20:7, related to a *fatwa*. Were Jeremiah’s enemies able to entice him, they could prevail (יָכַל) against him and take their full revenge. Jeremiah’s response to their hostility was at first tit for tat, his response being, “Let those be put to shame who persecute me, but let me not be put to shame; let them be dismayed, but let me not be dismayed.” But then—mid sentence—the level of violence escalated from “smiting with the tongue” to “smiting with the sword.” Jeremiah ended this sentence with the petition “Bring upon them the day of evil; destroy them with double destruction!” He went on to plead with God, “let the *fatwa* begin,” expressed in these words:

Therefore deliver up their children to famine; give them over to the power of the sword, let their wives become childless and widowed. May their men meet death by pestilence, their youths be slain by the sword in battle. May a cry be heard from their houses, when thou bringest the marauder suddenly upon them! . . . Yet, thou, O Yahweh, knowest all their plotting to slay me. Forgive not their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from thy sight. Let them be overthrown before thee; deal with them in the time of thine anger. (RSV 18:21–23)

It is difficult to know whether Jeremiah's bewilderment abated once his anger was expressed. On the one hand, he was confident that Yahweh was with him as an awesome warrior who would make his enemies stumble (20:11–12). But, as the text now stands, after his affirmation of confidence Jeremiah proceeded with (a) a prayer for vengeance (in 20:12, which is essentially a repeat of 11:20 and 18:21), (b) a one verse doxology acknowledging Yahweh's salvation of the poor (20:13), and (c) a five verse lament (20:14–18), cursing the day he was born (reminiscent of 15:10).²¹ Jeremiah's mood swings in eleven verses went from

- *humility* in his acknowledgment of Yahweh's informing him and entrusting him to announce the divine fiat
- *humiliation* when his warnings were met with derision
- *frustration* that he could not keep his mouth shut
- *fear* because there was terror and adversaries on every side
- *confidence* that Yahweh was with him and would save him
- *anger* expressed in a call for divine vengeance
- *jubilantion* that Yahweh delivered the needy from evil doers
- *depression* and *despair* that he was even born.²²

The doxology would fit better at the end of 38:12, where Jeremiah might well have praised God after the Ethiopian Ebed Melek saved him from certain death in the muck of Malchiah's cistern. The lament might well have been composed while he was imprisoned in the cistern before Ebed Melek and some of the king's bodyguards rescued him.²³

This lament could have been uttered by any number of Jewish exiles in Babylon, especially by King Zedekiah after

“the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes; and the king of Bablyon slew all the nobles of Judah” (Jer 39:6) . . . “He put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in fetters to take him Babylon and put him into prison until the day of his death” (52:11).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Holladay (1986: 558) wrote that in Jer 20:7–13 Jeremiah conveyed a sense of his being “existentially trapped” and that

Initially he [Jeremiah] expresses his bitter accusation to Yahweh that Yahweh has deceived him, seduced him, tricked him; in blasphemous daring this accusation is unmatched in the Bible. . . . an accusation of deception presses God into a diabolic frame which is unique.

However, recognition of several rare Hebrew words clears Jeremiah of any and all charges or hints of blasphemy.

The Hebrew פִתָּהּ is a homograph of two totally unrelated verbs. פִתָּהּ, stem I, means “to deceive” and פִתָּהּ, stem II, is the cognate of فتو (*fatawa*) “to make known a judicial decree, fiat, or *fatwa*.” Once Jeremiah became informed of God’s intent to enforce fully the covenantal curses, he became a doom-sayer. The good news that *God would relent if Judeans would repent*—which was at the core of his message—was not heard nor heeded. Bewildered by the hostility his warnings generated, Jeremiah bemoaned the terror from fellow Judeans which surrounded him and the terror from the Babylonians which surrounded his fellow Judeans. But down to the very end of his life Jeremiah was faithful in the proclamation of the fateful *fatwa*: “Repent and Yahweh will relent! Continued disobedience will bring destruction and death!”

The cognate *حذق* (*ḥaḏaqa*) “eloquent, perspicuous” clarifies the second meaning of *חֲזַק*. Far from implying something analogous to an overpowering sexual seduction of Jeremiah by Yahweh, the *חֲזַק* in Jer 20:7 means Yahweh had gifted Jeremiah with language skills befitting someone entrusted to be the “mouth” of God. Jeremiah’s vocabulary was so exceptionally erudite it has confounded translators and interpreters down to this day. Only thorough philological inquiry, making use of comparative Semitic lexicography, can some of the rare words used by Jeremiah be recovered.

Just as *פָּתָהּ*, like *חֲזַק*, is a homograph of two unrelated stems, so also is *יָכַל*. It is a homograph for (1) the verb “to prevail” in 20:11, and (2) the cognate of *وكل* (*wakala*) “to appoint, to entrust” in 20:7. Other homographs which have contributed to mistranslations and contrived interpretations are (1) *כל* = *כָּל* “all” or *כָּל* (*kāl*, not *kōl*) “weariness,” (2) *אָנוּשׁ* = *אֲנוּשׁ* “man” or *אָנוּשׁ* “incurable,” (3) *שָׁלוֹם* = *שָׁלוֹם* “peace” or *שָׁלוֹם* “recompense,” (4) *צָלַע* = *צִלְעַ* “side” or *צָלַע* “stumbling” or *צָלַע*, the cognate of *أصلع* (*ʿaṣlaʿ*) “undoing, inability, misfortune,” and (5) *נָגַד* = *נָגַד* “to tell” or the cognate of *نجد* (*najada*) “to overpower, prevail over.”

Of the seventeen words lurking behind these eight homographs, five have yet to be recognized in current Hebrew lexicons, although the cognates were cited in Castell’s lexicon of 1669. It is ironic that the prophet who was gifted with eloquence and became the “mouth of God” has had some of his rare words so misconstrued that he is charged by his interpreters and translators with blasphemy, and Yahweh is even charged with being diabolic in the seduction of his servant. But Jeremiah was bewildered and pained, not by Yahweh, but by his fellow Judeans.

NOTES

1. KBS 3: 984 cites the Arabic فتو *fatā* (*ftw/y*) “youthful, young” but does not cite فتوى *fatway* “the giving of an answer or stating the decision of the law” (Lane 1877: 2336–2337). The פתה of Jer 20:7 was translated as “to let oneself be deceived” or “to let oneself be taken as a fool.”

2. Calvin stated further (28), “He [Jeremiah] afterwards adds, *Thou hast constrained me*. By saying that he had been *deceived*, he meant this,—‘O God, if I am an imposter, thou hast made me so; if I have deceived, thou hast led me; for I derive from thee all that I have; it hence follows, that thou art in fault, and less excusable than I am, if there be anything wrong in me.’

3. John Owen, added a footnote at this point in Calvin’s commentary on Jeremiah, stating

I find none agreeing with *Calvin* in his view of this verse; nor many with our versions in rendering the first verb “deceived.” So is the *Septuagint*, but the *Vulgate*, *Syriac*, and *Targum* have “enticed.” In other parts it is rendered in our versions “enticed,” “allured,” and “persuaded.” *Blayney* has “allured,” but *Gataker* and *Lowth* prefer “persuaded; . . . I would render the verse,—Thou didst persuade me, O Jehovah, and I was persuaded; Thou didst constrain me, and didst prevail: I am become a derision every day; the whole of it [the city] are jeering me.”

4. For a summary of the interpretations of other commentators see McKane 1986: 467–475 and Holladay 1986: 548–559; Lubdbom 1999: 851–874.

5. Jeremiah was aware of much deceit coming in the name of Yahweh from fellow prophets and priests, as in

- 4:10 “I said, ‘Ah, Lord Yahweh, how sadly you deceived this people and Jerusalem when you used to say, “You will have

peace,” whereas the sword is now at our throats!” (NJB)

- 7:4–8 “Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh’ . . . Behold you trust in deceptive words to no avail.”
- 6:14, 8:11 “everyone deals falsely . . . saying ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” (RSV)

Jeremiah was apparently referring to the false security provided by those who took these words of Isaiah as absolutes:

Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning the king of Assyria: ‘He shall not come into this city, or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city,’ says Yahweh. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David (Isa 37:33).

6. In 1998, the Iranian government revoked its support of the bounty for anyone who would kill Rushdie, but religious hard-liners have continued their threats against him.

7. On the relationship of ל"י / ל"י and ל"ה stems see GKC 75^a.

8. See, for example, Jer 3:11–18, 4:1–4, 7:5–7, and 17:24–27.

9. Compare the translations of the ASV “you persuaded me,” NKJ “you induced me,” NRS “you enticed me”—which softened Jeremiah’s words—to the NAB “you duped me,” NJB “you seduced me, and the KJV, DRA, RSV, NIV, NIB, NAS and NAU, all of which have “you deceived me.”

10. The MT נַעַר could well mean “servant,” in which case, by reading the אַל as an emphatic particle rather than the negative, God’s reply, אַל-הַאֲמַר נַעַר אָנֹכִי, would mean, “You well said ‘I am a servant,’ for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.”

11. Reading the טוֹבָה “well” as an adverbial accusative rather than as “good,” the direct object of הֵבִיר .

12. The kingdom and nations may have included Ephraim and Judah only. Compare Ezek 37:21–22.

13. For the MT $\text{כִּי־מַדִּי אֶדְבֹר אֶזְעַק}$ “Whenever I speak, I must cry out,” the Septuagint reads $\text{ὅτι πικρῶ λόγῳ μου γελάσομα}$ “For I will laugh with my bitter speech.” The πικρῶ reflects a misreading of MT מַדִּי “whenever” as מָרָר “bitter,” reflecting the confusion of a י and ר , as well as a ר and ד (see Delitzsch 1920: 105–107 §104^{a-c} and 111 §109^{a-b} for other examples). Although Hatch and Redpath (1897: 235) marked γελάσομα with a † indicating that it lacked a corresponding word in the MT, γελάσομα reflects a confusion of זַעַק “to cry out” with צַחַק “to laugh.”

14. On the use of the asseverative כִּי “verily, yea,” see McDaniel 1968: 210–215.

15. Prov 21:23, $\text{שֹׁמֵר פִּי וְלִשְׁוֹנוֹ שֹׁמֵר מִצָּרוֹת נַפְשׁוֹ}$, “he who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble,” provides a good commentary for understanding Jeremiah’s desire to keep his mouth shut.

16. Jer 38:22, reads $\text{הַסִּיתוּךָ וַיִּכְלֹךְ לְךָ אֲנָשֵׁי שְׂלֹמֶךָ}$, “Your trusted friends have deceived you and prevailed against you.”

17. Hebrew כָּל “all, every” is the cognate of کل (*kull*) “all, everyone, entirety” (Lane 1893: 3002; Wehr 1979: 977–978).

18. Compare the use of צָלַע “adversity” in Psa 35:15 (KJV, NKJ,

ASV), which also reflects the Arabic cognate أصلع (*ʿaṣlaʿ*) “a calamity, or misfortune, something hard to be borne.” The Septuagint, which reads πάντες ἄνδρες φίλοι αὐτοῦ τηρήσατε τὴν ἐπίνοιαν αὐτοῦ, “All (you who are) his male friends, watch his intentions!” reflects a different *Vorlage* for צַלַע that has yet to be identified.

19. See the NIV, NIB, NAS, NAV, NRS, NAB, and BDB 179.

20. See Liddell and Scott : 662, s.v. 4.

21. For a discussion of the relationship of Jer 20:14–18 and Job 3, see McKane 1986: 482–484.

22. Compare Clines and Gunn (1976: 407) who stated,

We suggest, therefore, that the form and function of the unit 24¹⁴⁻¹⁸ should be distinguished and that these verses did not originally express the prophet’s private emotions of despair at some personal calamity (such as disappointment in his prophetic ministry), but was a conventional utterance of distress accompanying a judgement-speech or woe-oracle.

23. The MT אַנְשֵׁים שְׁלֹשִׁים “30 men” in Jer 38:10, on the support of one manuscript with אַנְשֵׁים שְׁלֹשָׁה “3 men,” has been reduce from 30 to 3 in the RSV, NRS, NAB, and by Holladay (1989: 267) who noted, “One would expect the singular אִישׁ with ‘thirty.’ And certainly the task would have demanded only the smaller number.” But the שְׁלֹשִׁים may have nothing to do with the numbers 3 or 30. Cowley (1920: 327) suggested that the well attested שְׁלִישׁ did not refer to “the third man in a chariot” but was the Hittite loanword *šal-la-e-eš* used for “an important official in close attendance on the king.” This being the case, the אַנְשֵׁים would not be “men” as a gender marker but a marker of intimacy and familiarity (Lane

1863: 113–114), so that **שְׁלִשִׁים אַנְשִׁים** would refer to King Zedekiah’s “personal bodyguards.” Ebed Melek, accompanied by an unspecified number of the king’s bodyguards, could expect compliance from the officers holding Jeremiah prisoner to the king’s orders for his release.