

READING OF JEREMIAH 8:18-22
FROM A *TAULASEA*
PERSPECTIVE

A Thesis Presented to the
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Bachelor of Theology

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration into the biblical text of Jeremiah 8:18-22 using the hermeneutic of *Taulasea* as a perspective to draw out any other implications within the text. A discussion and historicising of the *Taulasea* concept will be done, using whatever information is gathered to see whether these very implications can be reflected in Jeremiah 8:18-22. The objective of this paper poses the question as to who is the *Taulasea* that the world we live in today must seek. This paper attempts to understand the significance of the *Taulasea* in the Samoan context, along with Jeremiah 8:18-22, and perhaps extracting a message that is possibly relevant for the world that we live in today especially with the COVID 19 pandemic crisis.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my beloved parents Rev Mani & Sareta Nepo

And also, to

My dear fiancé Tamara Aloiai

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Consent Form for the Retention and use of the Thesis | ii |
| Declaration of Authorship of Thesis | iii |
| Abstract | iv |
| Dedication | v |
| Table of Contents | 1 |
| Acknowledgments | 3 |
| List of abbreviations | 4 |
| Chapter 1 Introductory Chapter | 5 |
| 1.1 Introduction | 5 |
| 1.2 Purpose of Thesis | 6 |
| 1.3 Brief Summary of Jeremiah 8:18 – 22. | 7 |
| 1.4 Literature Review | 8 |
| 1.5 Chapter Outlines | 13 |
| 1.6 Summary | 14 |
| Chapter 2 Methodology and <i>Taulasea</i> Hermeneutics | 15 |
| 2.1 <i>Taulasea</i> as Hermeneutics | 18 |
| 2.2 Conclusion | 21 |
| Chapter 3 Exegesis of Jeremiah 8:18-22 | 22 |
| 3.1 A Literary Critique of Jeremiah 8:18-22 | 23 |
| 3.2 Is Israel sick/ill? | 28 |
| 3.3 Is Yhwh sick? | 30 |
| 3.4 The Balm of Gilead | 30 |
| 3.5 Chapter Conclusion | 33 |
| Chapter 4 Synthesis | 34 |
| 4.1 Why is Israel sick/possessed? God as <i>aitu</i> ? | 34 |
| 4.2 God as the <i>Taulasea</i> | 36 |
| 4.3 God as ‘the sick’ | 38 |
| 4.4 The <i>Taulasea</i> in the World | 39 |
| 4.4.1 Is there no balm in the World? | 39 |
| 4.4.2 The Church <i>Taulasea</i> | 40 |
| 4.4.3 The EFKS as <i>Taulasea</i> | 41 |
| 4.5 Conclusion | 41 |

| | |
|--------------|----|
| Conclusion | 42 |
| Bibliography | 45 |

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List of abbreviations

| | |
|----------|------------------------------|
| COVID 19 | Corona Virus Disease |
| BCE | Before Common Era |
| Gen | Genesis |
| Jer | Jeremiah |
| Yhwh | Yahweh |
| LXX | Septuagint Version |
| NRSV | New Revised Standard Version |
| Ch | Chapters |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

1.1 Introduction

In my family, along with growing up in a traditional Samoan environment, I have witnessed how important the work of a *Taulasea* is in curing our people, ranging from adults to children. There was an old lady named Saga'i, who was a *Taulasea* to remedy the ill, sick, sick children and especially pregnant mothers. This was ground-breaking and interesting to me; the fact that the *Taulasea* used leaves and fruits of the Samoan trees found in the community, to remedy and cure the ill. Therefore, I have chosen this topic to write a paper based on my understanding and experience, about the first or initial doctors of traditional Samoa in the past, before western society introduced the modern doctors and medication of today. Moreover, another reason why this paper was essential for me to discuss, was due to the current circumstances surrounding the dangerous outbreak of diseases and viruses such as the measles and the deadly COVID19 which has affected the world entirely. The selected passage of **Jeremiah 8:18-22**, is where this paper will dwell because of the text and its implication of Israel as being ill and sick.

Taulasea comes from two Samoan words *Taula* meaning “spirits” (ghosts) and *esea* meaning “away.” With this hermeneutical stance of *Taulasea* perspective, I believe the most important aspect of this research is to then know the full historical background and context in and of the text of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is one of the major prophetic books of the Old Testament and he is a Judaeen prophet whose activity spanned for almost four decades in his country’s history. He appears to have received his call to be a

prophet in the 13th year of the reign of King Josiah and continued his prophetic ministry until after the siege and the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE.¹

Jeremiah writes in metaphoric language in much of his literature, and he tends to showcase the mistake of those who are sick, searching and seeking the wrong help as seen in my chosen text for my topic. This is what the paper wishes to discuss: Jeremiah highlights that the one true doctor or healer is God himself and a depiction of this very notion is clear in the Chapter that will be analysed.²

1.2 Purpose of Thesis

The purpose of this paper is to offer a possibility of treating the idea of poetic metaphor in biblical prophecy not merely as a stylistic imagery but also as a device with the aid of metaphoric language and genre depicted particularly in Jer. 8:18-22. Such approach attempts to allow the text to initiate or reinitiate my perception as a reader. Thus, the intention in light of my research would hopefully equip me on how to read and/or draw an analogy between the use of the Palm trees in Gilead and the *fuesina*³ in Samoa as a medicinal herbal to heal wounds.

The inspiration of this thesis is the fact that my family hold a long line of descendants from the *Taulasea* concept, and I have always found *Taulasea* practices intriguing even though I am a devout Christian. Upon reading Jeremiah 8:18-22, the idea of medicine and herbal plants came to mind, leading me to ask the question; can we really attempt an analysis of the interpretation for the chosen text, as *Taulaseas*?

¹ Jean Calvin- *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations* Vol. 1. (USA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015).

² Job Y. Jindo, *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered: A Cognitive Approach to Poetic Prophecy in Jeremiah 1-24* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

³ The *fue sina* is one of the common Samoan medicinal plants used in Samoan medication.

To begin with, it is important to know the concept of the Samoan *Taulasea*. In every Samoan village, it is believed that there is a traditional Samoan healer who heals not only patients in the physical sense, but also the psychological ailments inflicted by a society in transition.⁴ *Taulasea* in the Samoan community are believed to be traditional healers who deal with psychological impairments and have a history of activity within the Samoan world. Before the arrival of Christianity, the so-called priests and priestesses are believed to have communicated with the spiritual realm of Samoa, ancient deities and ancestors who healed both the social and physical aspects through advice and healing. When Christianity had finally arrived, the concept had been demonized and swept under the carpet. However, this paper discusses how it can be viewed in the text selected.

The scope of this paper is to focus solely on this passage especially in relation to its specific themes and issues that can be identified through research and exegesis. I will not embark to undertake an analysis of all the poetic literature within the book of Jeremiah itself as it will be too broad and leave the paper prone to irrelevant issues which would require further elaboration, thereby losing focus of the topic.

1.3 Brief Summary of Jeremiah 8:18 – 22.

These verses show the great mental pain that Jeremiah felt. He saw what had happened. And he knew what was going to happen to his people. He was loyal to the LORD. But he felt mental pain when his people in Judah had troubles.

Verse 19: Jeremiah imagined the Lord's people who were in Babylon. They were wondering why the Lord had allowed the enemy to destroy their city. The Lord's

⁴Sier Maureen, "Taulasea and Cultural Continuity in Samoa," *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine* (2000): 441-5400.

answer was that they had made him angry. They had worshipped idols that were of no use.

Verse 20: The wheat harvest was usually from April to June. Then from July to August, the people gathered the harvest of fruits. If both the wheat harvest and the fruit harvest failed, there would be a serious lack of food.⁵ These words were probably a popular way to describe a hopeless situation. There was no way to escape from the situation. Nobody would rescue them.

Verse 22: The region called Gilead was to the south of the sea of Galilee. It was famous for its type of medicine called balm. Balm, which came from small trees, was oil. It had a pleasant smell.⁶ People used it to ease pain. It also helped to heal injuries. ‘My people’ are the words that both Jeremiah and the LORD use. Balm could heal a physical injury. But the health of Judah’s spirit would not improve if they did not return to the Lord.

The passage is a lament by Jeremiah who is sad at the lack of faith the people of Israel have in God, whom are looking elsewhere to solve their troubles instead of the Lord God of whom the covenant was made, to worship God wholeheartedly and in return God will protect them.

1.4 Literature Review

Jean Calvin addresses the apparent hypocrisy in the people of Israel whom pretending to be sorry and repentant when in reality they are not. He addresses the

⁵ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (USA: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck up, to Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1–25* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

supremacy of God in knowing their true intentions, for they relied on other nations instead of relying on the almighty God.⁷

Lalleman demonstrates important correspondences which point to a prophetic tradition received and developed by Jeremiah: hope, covenant, and the role of the prophet in intercession, as well as Lalleman's personal involvement in his message. Lalleman traces the prophetic tradition to the Deuteronomy which falls in the same time as the creation of the E source in the time of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, in which Jeremiah and Hosea were created. I argue however that this early dating of Jeremiah from Lalleman remains debatable.⁸

I will be conducting summaries of journal articles, commentaries, text books, websites etc of the medicinal properties of the trees and plants mentioned in the chosen text (Jeremiah 8:18-22).

Kathleen states that in the book of Jeremiah, the prophet's calling involves profound engagement with the world, with God, and with the local community at the context at the time. Jeremiah's call for allegiance to God and to have a deep and intimate relationship with God. This passion gives the prophet a recognition to listened to and be a model inhabitant of Israel into the World, become the fiery source of his passion, and makes Jeremiah the model of survival for his devastated community. In saying this, Kathleen's view of Jeremiah seems parallel to my Taulasea perspective as I dive into an exegetical review to further understand it.⁹

Tui Atua in his literature talks directly about the Taulasea aspect in the Samoan Cultural context and specific time. He talks about the origin of the Taulasea and the

⁷ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*.

⁸ Lalleman-de Winkel, Hetty. *Jeremiah in prophetic tradition: an examination of the book of Jeremiah in the light of Israel's prophetic traditions* Vol. 26. (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2000).

⁹ Kathleen M. O'connor, "The prophet Jeremiah and exclusive loyalty to God," *Columbia Theological Seminary* 59/2 (2005): 130-40.

definitive roles that it plays for the Samoan people or the Samoan community in the past and in the present. There has been a drastic change in the concept of Taulasea with many people having their own opinions on this cultural aspect. In saying this, I will undertake a study on this book and try to connect and correspond the research undertaken to my topic as a whole, especially in the context of the book of Jeremiah.¹⁰

In Claudias literature and book, it talks about the description and the classification of the current practice of the *Taulasea* and *fofō*. Claudia believes it is the Samoan art of healing, and in saying this it relates fully to the topic that I will be undertaking research on.¹¹

In relation to the selected passage, Fretheim refers to it as a lament because of their suffering due to their unfaithful worship and commitment to God. They are suffering under the Babylonians. Fretheim also refers to the “Balm in Gilead”. Gilead is an area in the Transjordan north of Moab where balm trees are many. The balm trees have healing properties which people use to heal wounds. But this is a physical healing whereas in the text itself, it refers to spiritual healing. It does not have any other cultural references or perspective on this healing aspect, which my *Taulasea* perspective will bring as a fresh way of looking at the text especially from a Samoan traditional perspective.¹²

In relation to the historical context, the captivity by the Babylonians is expected as the people of Israel question the reason for the sufferings of Jerusalem. There will be no harvest to offset the promised famine, and no prophets or righteous men to heal the national sickness of sin. Gilead was famous from the patriarchal period for its balsamic

¹⁰ Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi, “Le taulasea e, ia mua’i foia lou ma’i: Physician, heal thyself: Planning for the next generation,” in *Su’esu’e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*, ed. T. Suaalii-Sauni, I. Tuagalua, et al., (Apia: National University of Samoa, 2009), 142-52.

¹¹ Claudia Forsyth, *Samoan Art of Healing: A Description and Classification of the Current Practice of the "Taulasea" and Fofō*. (USA: United States International University, 1983), 2.

¹² Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (Macon, Ga.: Smith & Helwys, 2002).

resin (Gen.37:25), but the precise kind of balm mentioned here is uncertain. There has been no regeneration of Judah's health because her spirit is still stubborn and will not repent.¹³ It will be interesting to see how the *Taulasea* perspective can address this in light of the spiritual sickness with which the people of Judah are in need. There is no scholarly view in relation to a contextual reading which my hermeneutics will provide a fresh look into the passage.

There are two books which comprise this commentary and they both deal with one of the most tragic events in the life of the Chosen People. The first gives the reader a picture of the carefree Judeans of the pre-exilic period as they indulged shamelessly in the grossest forms of idolatry, ignored the many warnings of impending destruction given by their compatriot Jeremiah, and finally brought their long-promised ruin down on their heads. The second book shows something of the devastation and agony which accompanied divine judgment on national sin when Jerusalem fell in 587 BC. Together they formulate a theology commensurate with the nature of the catastrophe, but by their insistence upon the importance of the Sinai covenant, they point the way through suffering to spiritual renewal. There is also discussion of relevant archaeological discoveries that have been brought to compare with the material under consideration, and the most significant textual problems have been discussed in the appropriate places in the commentary sections of the book.

Martens explores the message and insights of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah, God disciplines people and punishes them. Yet there is also forgiveness and the promise of a new covenant. Martens makes the claim that this ancient book is strangely relevant to our generation. The more we learn about the stressful times in which Jeremiah lived, about the passionate prophet himself, and about the arrangement of the book that bears

¹³ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*, 4.

his name, the more forceful the message becomes in our modern world and contextual understanding.

When looking into the passage, Martens sees the sufferings of the people as the sadness of God. This is because God has repeatedly tried to warn the people of Judah for the sinful ways and would not listen, so they are taken prisoner by the might of the Babylonians. It feels as if God doesn't want to do it but has to in order to create some discipline and order and hopefully learn from the mistakes. The Balms that once were able to heal will not be able to heal now, as the spiritual sickness and lack of faith in God has come at a cost for God's people. What could a *Taulasea* do in this situation with this type of sickness? What kind of wounds would they be suffering? Are they wounds which the *Taulasea* can heal? These questions allow the opportunity for my hermeneutics to provide a different and fresh look into the passage, which the commentary does not have.¹⁴

I have also used the Jewish Study Bible, which is a one-volume resource tailored especially for the needs of students of the Hebrew Bible. Nearly forty scholars worldwide contributed to the translation and interpretation of the Jewish Study Bible, representing the best of Jewish biblical scholarship available today. A committee of highly-respected biblical scholars and rabbis from the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism movements produced this modern translation.

Gilead is the part of Israel located to the east of the Jordan River, south of Bashan (Golan Heights) and north of Moab. It was apparently a site where balm and other healing substances could be extracted from local plants (see Gen. 37.25). Even though it offers a Jewish perspective on the Old Testament, it also does not address too much in detail in relation to the passage. Again, my *Taulasea* hermeneutic can offer a contextual

¹⁴ Elmer A. Martens, *Jeremiah: Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Ontario: Herald Press, 1986).

perspective in as far as this source can only explain the Jewish understanding of the text.¹⁵

1.5 Chapter Outlines

Chapter one is the introductory chapter which briefs the reader on the lamentation of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 8:1-5. The reader is then lead towards the purpose of the paper, informing the reader why such a topic and introduction to the *Taulasea* hermeneutic. The reader is then informed about the literature review from the wide range of scholars on what they have to say about the issue. Lastly are the chapter outlines and the respective summary.

Chapter two is the methodology which involves the use of the *Taulasea* hermeneutic in alliance with the narrative criticism. The reader will also be briefed on the background, definition and the intended use of narrative criticism within the methodology. Lastly will be the summary of this chapter.

Chapter three is the exegesis of the passage using the methodology discussed in Chapter two. I will use the narrative criticism features of narrator, characters, plot and setting as data to evoke new meaning on the text from my accounting hermeneutic.

Chapter four is my conclusion in which I will link all the summaries of each chapter. I will then compare my findings in the exegesis against the scholarly opinions in the literature review. Finally, I will make relevant comments about offerings as an academic discussion but at the same time, acknowledge the relevancy in regards to our church as a whole.

¹⁵ Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds), *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

1.6 Summary

In summary of our introductory chapter, one can state that the literature review has validated both the issue and the purpose of the study. This is to explore the narrative gap and to regenerate discussion on the topic of lamentation and pain from a *Taulasea*.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND *TAULASEA* HERMENEUTICS

This chapter and its sole focus will be on the methodology that will be used in order to draw out the *Taulasea* perspective from the text and a description of what the *Taulasea* concept is in Samoan society. In terms of this paper, literary criticism will be used as a means of exegesis through the text. It is a criticism that developed over the years and I believe that it is essential in this type of study and exegetical process. It is important in analysing a passage or biblical writings and has its own objectives and methods that is vastly different to other kinds of criticism. There are various resources needed by the exegete in order to carry out literary critique, holding all the questions related to the composition of the text including its authorship, historical setting, purpose of the writing, and the overall structure or form that gives shape to the writing.

To start with, literary criticism historically stemmed from source criticism. In the eighteenth century, “it referred primarily to interpretation that focused on identifying sources, especially written documents that had been used in composing biblical writings.”¹ The historical roots of literary criticism happened in France in the eighteenth century and then spread through Europe and beyond, a conception that for the first time separated out poetry, prose fiction, and drama from a much wider range of humane letters.² Well into the twentieth century, source criticism and literary criticism have been used interchangeably but with a distinction: source criticism focuses on sources behind the text by examining its literary features, whereas literary criticism evokes meaning in the literary or surface structure of a text.

¹ Carl R. Holladay and John H. Hayes, "Textual Criticism," in *Biblical Exegesis, a Beginners Handbook* (Louisville London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007). 136.

² David Damrosch, "Foreword: Literary Criticism and the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 16/3 (2014): 4-10.

There are many scholars who study different types of literature in different types of cultures or people, such as English and Russian. In addition there is Literary criticism varies from a broad range of interests which include; literary structure, literary style, literary purpose, literary mood, literary strategy, and literary imagination. This type of technique is important and applicable especially in the case of this paper as it delves into all literary components of Jeremiah 8:18-22. There are many forms of writing that cause different expectations of meaning requiring appropriate methods and strategies for meaningful interpretation. Therefore as texts are interpreted such as the one this paper will undergo, asking different kinds of questions for particular form of writing is vital in this methodology.

Furthermore, literary criticism recognises that a single text or passage forms a larger document of which it is part of. In terms of this paper, the passage of Jeremiah 8:18-22 can be better understood when it is viewed in its larger literary context which would be the whole book of Jeremiah. Referring to a literal context can mean many things, which also takes into account looking at the immediate literary context by looking at the texts or passages prior and after the chosen text.³ Moreover when reading a passage in its literary context, we are attempting to understand how it relates to its surroundings, whether it fits with the literal material before and after, or whether it interrupts or ruins the sequence of the argument or the theme that has been proposed within the passage. In this paper, a more decisive way of relating the chosen passage to its wider literary context is to develop an outline of the entire document, and see where Jeremiah 8:18-22 fits in with the outline of the book of the prophet Jeremiah. We can say that assessing the outlines of Jeremiah is helpful in seeing the overall structure and style of writing and techniques that vary in its production.

³ Holladay and Hayes, "Textual Criticism."

As mentioned with the use of this literary criticism, relevant questions about the text is required in the ability to analyse the literary structure. Questions such as; *How does the passage relate to the passages immediately before and after? Is it transitional? Is it climatic? Does it serve as a culmination of several paragraphs or sections preceding it?* Asking these types of questions allows us to relate the passage to its larger literary context. In the aspect of exegesis because clues to interpret the passage often lie outside the passage itself, and many times found in the wider literary content. Furthermore, we can also ask about its immediate literary context and whether it is located somewhere else in the text itself. In terms of this paper, Jeremiah 8:18-22 talks about the balm of Gilead. We pose the question such as; *Is it found elsewhere in the text?* When asking these questions about the literary placement and function, it enables us to see certain things about the passage that we would miss while reading it.

Therefore, this highlights the importance of placing the passage in its larger literary context as it develops a much better understanding of the passage in its own right. This paper emphasises this idea as we attempt to analyse how Jeremiah 8:18-22 not only shares in the meaning of the larger literary context but it also contributes to it. In relation to this idea, *Taulasea* will be used as a hermeneutical perspective of the text, and this paper wishes to use the literary criticism to see whether the *Taulasea* concept is consistent through Jeremiah as a whole. In light of the paper, literary criticism will delve into the text and attempt to extract symbols,⁴ metaphors,⁵ and rhetorical language⁶ that relates to the hermeneutics that will be used.

⁴ Symbols in literary criticism refers to unique structures that have a deeper meaning. For example, chiasmus, can be a symbol that reiterates that the structure was written on purpose by the author.

⁵ Metaphors are a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two unlike things. As a literary device, metaphor creates implicit comparisons without the express use of “like” or “as.” Metaphor is a means of asserting that two things are identical in comparison rather than just similar

⁶ Rhetorical language are literary elements used to convince or persuade audiences using logos, pathos, and ethos. Their appropriate use makes the text rich, lifelike and enjoyable in prose and poetry.

2.1 *Taulasea* as Hermeneutics

The *Taulasea* concept is one of the oldest in Samoan culture and society. *Taulasea* is defined by Malhorta⁷ as Samoan traditional healers that Samoan people seek healing assistance from when prescribed medicine are not drastic. Malhorta believes that there are three types of categories which a *Taulasea* applies healing for; caused by *aitu*, or the possession of one's body by the spirit of a dead person; caused by internal or external factors, such as the environment; and caused by trauma. The difference of Samoan healing to western practices is that a spiritual element is included.

According to Arthur Wulf, Samoan healing is influenced by the people as they are religious and spiritual people.⁸ Before Christianity arrived to the shores of Samoa, there was already a spiritual existence which included gods of a spiritual realm that protected each distinct district. These gods were always in war with other district gods and to this day, there are sayings and landmarks of these wars which is used as reference by the Samoan public. The spiritual existence had issued curses as a means of attack to other districts for example, when taboos were breached by other districts. To make amends and heal the curse, specific *Taulasea* of the region were then approached as healers, to practice and heal and remove the curse.

Furthermore, Wulf talks about the family quarrels and how physical confrontations caused family gods to impose danger such as harm on the health of other members of the family. Therefore when looking from this perspective, sicknesses and illnesses for us Samoans are always associated with the spiritual realm. Sickness was caused by either a result of an attack from enemy gods or a breach of taboos that were put into place to keep peace among the gods. In order for the individual to then be

⁷ Lakshita Malhotra and Dr. Meetu Khosla, "The Healing Touch": Traditional Healing Practices of the Samoan People," *Indian Journal of Psychology* (2019): 1-13.

⁸ Arthur Wulf, "Was Earth Created Good?: Reappraising Earth in Gen. 1: 1-2: 4a from a Samoan Gafataulima Perspective" PhD Diss., University of Auckland, 2016.

cured, it was a requirement to not only be healed physically, but also spiritually and to make peace with the god's that they had disrupted.

Lakshita Malhotra and Meetu Kholsa's work on "The Healing Touch": Traditional Healing Practices of the Samoan People" focusses around the importance of traditional Samoan healing, or in this case, *Taulasea*, and how it has benefited the Samoan community in New South Wales, namely the Samoan community in Sydney. Through their study, they found that the Samoan communities; like their very own Indian communities, were family orientated and deeply rooted in their traditions.⁹ Furthermore, as immigrants, the urge of resorting to traditional methods of healing was favoured over the use of more modern alternatives such as medicine and hospitals due to prices.

They conducted a study amongst two *Taulasea*, or healers (age ranging from 24 years to 32 years) and three patients of one of the healers (age ranging from 20 years to 52 years).¹⁰ The study was carried out accordingly with proper precautions and professionalism. The information they found were all in support of the use of traditional methods. To them, *Taulasea* and *fofo*, or massage, is part of the Samoan culture and is embedded in them for life; **a sense of identity and belonging**. Furthermore, the belief that this skill is god-given; that god has blessed these healers to possess the ability to heal and help one another. Finally, the study also found that the Samoan people; namely the *Taulasea*, had an explanation to these illnesses, that being caused by an *aitu*, or spirit, that has either possessed the patient, or through trauma.¹¹ The study finishes up with the co-conductors laying out the importance of Samoan healing and how it makes Samoa distinctive.

⁹ Malhotra and Khosla, "The Healing Touch," 2.

¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹¹ Ibid., 11.

Otele Perelini further emphasises the idea of *aitu* and these negative forces within Christianity in Samoa stating that there is a traditional and holistic view of the world where all the beings, both divine and human exist and belong together within the framework of family and community. Understanding sickness and healings gives emphasis to the influence of supernatural forces in the causation and remedy of illness. Perelini further emphasises that serious illnesses and many less serious ones are produced by supernatural agents known by the generic term as *aitu*. Early accounts by the early missionaries showed that there was a devastating effect of some of the diseases upon the island communities. The impact of these new and unknown diseases led to the existence of both indigenous and new system of healing to work side by side for many years.¹²

In saying this, Perelini's research led to a discovery that many Samoans continue to seek remedies and well-being within the indigenous framework due to the understanding that *aitu* was always existent and still is. Therefore, although rare, alongside the modern practices of medication and healing was the traditional healing existing with patients moving from one to the other in terms of their needs. Moreover, he talks about the causality of sickness in Samoan Society as relative to the way people understood supernatural forces. Brown pointed out that the Samoan world is full of spiritual beings with some being good and others bad, and sickness is often attributed to the doings of these beings. They listed many pre-contact illnesses that Samoans suffered from such as hunchbacks, eye infections, skin diseases, epilepsy and many more. The traditional paradigm therefore did not ignore the natural causality and remedy of some illnesses however, the highlight was on the supernatural force.

¹² Otele Sili Perelini, *Comparison of Jesus' Healing with Healing in Traditional and Christian Samoa*, (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1993).

Matāvai Tautunu Aumua¹³ a current lecturer at the National University of Samoa also writes in his book '*O le valaau mai le tuugamau*' (The cry from the grave), the significance of a shellfish (*Acanthasta planci*) known as *alamea* in Samoan. This shellfish is unique as although its stinger are poisonous, it also has the ability to cure its prey. Its stingers are its defence mechanism from predators, even humans have been stung. What is unique is that if someone has been stung for example via the foot, the *alamea* is flipped on its back, then the foot is place on the *alameas* back. Then the *alamea* will extract or suck the poison out of the foot instantly. What Tautunu also mentions is the importance of the environment and our surrounding in the Samoan context as cures and medicinal sources. He states in book

E le taumateina e faapena togafitiga a Samoa e mafai lava ona foia le sosia o lona laueleele, e ala lea i lau o laau, o ogalaau aemaise o mauili o aiga ua tofafā mai tuugamau

There is no doubt that Samoan medicine can solve the problem of the soil, through the leaves of trees, logs from the practices of ancestors lying in the graves.

2.2 Conclusion

Now that the methodology and the hermeneutic is understood, the Methodology of Literary Criticism and the Taulasea hermeneutic will therefore be applied to **Jeremiah 8:18-22**. The following chapter will attempt to use methodology of Literary Criticism to extract symbolic and rhetorical factors within the text itself, showcasing the aspects of the Taulasea hermeneutic attempting to perhaps answer the question: Was Israel ill because of an *aitu*? Was Israel sick because they were cursed by God? These are the questions that the exegetical process carried out in the following chapter will attempt to answer.

¹³ Matavai T. Aumua, *O le fofō a alamea: O le valaau mai le tuugamau* (Apia: National University of Samoa, 2007), 73.

CHAPTER 3

EXEGESIS OF JEREMIAH 8:18-22

This chapter will use the methodology of Literary Criticism to exegete the chosen passage and see whether the perspective or the hermeneutical stance can be drawn from the selected text of Jeremiah 8:18-22. It will be divided into sections that will help further highlight the key factors especially with the criticism that is used, such as a literary critique of the selected passage and its positioning in the chapter itself, and whether or not the theme and messages in this passage is relatable or consistent not only throughout the chapter, but throughout the whole context of Jeremiah itself. Using the literary criticism, we also wish to consider the conceptual framework that is provided by the linguistic and literary forms of the selected text (Jer 8:18–22) itself.

This leads me to some moral questions as whether Israel is sick or not along with why they are claimed by Jeremiah to be sick or ill. Moreover, the question as to what the sickness or the illness is will also be asked, along with further research on how illness is described or used in the book of Jeremiah as a whole. Finally, the climax of this chapter will be to stress what the Balm of Gilead tends to signify in this text and how its historical background and context can help highlight the hermeneutical approach that is being used of *Taulasea* not only for its instant context, but also in the context of the Mediterranean at the time.

3.1 A Literary Critique of Jeremiah 8:18-22

The outline of Jeremiah must first be established and I will be using the outline that has been drawn out by Thomas Constable and his commentary on the book of Jeremiah.¹

OUTLINE

I. Introduction ch. 1

A. The introduction of Jeremiah 1:1-3

B. The call of Jeremiah 1:4-19

1. The promise of divine enablement 1:4-10

2. Two confirming visions 1:11-19

II. Prophecies about Judah chs. 2—45

A. Warnings of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem chs. 2—25

1. Warnings of coming punishment because of Judah's guilt chs. 2—6

2. Warnings about apostasy and its consequences chs. 7—10

3. Warnings in view of present conditions 11:1—15:9

4. Warnings in view of Judah's hardheartedness 15:10—25:38

B. Controversies concerning false prophets chs. 26—29

1. Conflict with the people ch. 26

2. Conflict with the false prophets in Jerusalem chs. 27—28

3. Conflict with the false prophets in exile ch. 29

C. The Book of Consolation chs. 30—33

1. The restoration of all Israel chs. 30—31

2. The restoration of Judah and Jerusalem chs. 32—33

D. Incidents surrounding the fall of Jerusalem chs. 34—45

¹ Thomas L Constable, *Notes on Jeremiah*, (Illinois: Sonic Light, 2013),25..

1. Incidents before the fall of Jerusalem chs. 34—36
2. Incidents during the fall of Jerusalem chs. 37—39
3. Incidents after the fall of Jerusalem chs. 40—45
- III. Prophecies about the nations chs. 46—51
 - A. The oracle against Egypt ch. 46
 1. Egypt's defeat in Syria 46:1-12
 2. Egypt's defeat in Egypt 46:13-24
 3. Egypt's defeat and Israel's deliverance 46:25-28
 - B. The oracle against the Philistines ch. 47
 - C. The oracle against Moab ch. 48
 1. The destruction of Moab 48:1-10
 2. The complacency of Moab 48:11-17
 3. The catastrophe of Moab 48:18-28
 4. The pride of Moab 48:29-39
 - D. The oracle against Ammon 49:1-6
 - E. The oracle against Edom 49:7-22
 - F. The oracle against Damascus 49:23-27
 - G. The oracle against the Arab tribes 49:28-33
 - H. The oracle against Elam 49:34-39
 - I. The oracle against Babylon chs. 50—51
 1. An overview of Babylon's future 50:1-10
 2. The fall of Babylon 50:11-16
 3. The restoration of Israel 50:17-20
 4. Divine vengeance 50:21-28
 5. Human arrogance 50:29-32

6. Israel's future redemption 50:33-40
 7. Babylon's agony 50:41-46
 8. The certainty of Babylon's judgment 51:1-14
 9. Yahweh's sovereignty over Babylon 51:15-19
 10. Babylon's destroyer 51:20-26
 11. God's instruments of Babylon's destruction 51:27-33
 12. Judah's complaint against Babylon 51:34-40
 13. Babylon's fate 51:41-48
 14. A call to flee from Babylon 51:49-53
 15. The justice of Babylon's judgment 51:54-58
 16. Babylon's fall dramatized 51:59-64
- IV. Conclusion ch. 52.
- A. The fall of Jerusalem and the capture of Zedekiah 52:1-16
 - B. The sacking of the temple 52:17-23
 - C. The numbers deported to Babylon 52:24-30
 - D. The release of Jehoiachin from prison 52:31-34

Now literary criticism allows us to look at the location of any given text and see how its placement indicates the structure and the message of the whole book and its agenda. In the immediate literary context of Jeremiah 8:18-22, we can see a clear example of it being sandwiched between some significant events foretold by Jeremiah. It is placed in between the sections that foretell warnings of coming judgement and punishment because of Judah's guilt, and the warnings of Jeremiah in view of the present conditions. As we can see here, there is a greatly time aspect in the texts before and the texts after our chosen passage of Jeremiah 8:18-22. It is a warning of coming

punishment which indicates a futuristic time aspect, and a warning for present conditions which indicates a present time distinction. Therefore, Jeremiah and the way he writes his prophetic book can be seen as timely in the sense that he urges people to change because of a future that will destroy, warning them about their present situation and what they are doing².

A number of scholars have supported this argument. Daniel Hays for instance also argues that the placement of this passage (Jer 8:18-22) in the whole section of Israel's serious sin of idolatry and syncretistic religious ritual (Jer 7-10) shows the prophet's first concern about apostasy as the most horrific and disgusting sin of Judah.³ The people of Judah have been listening to the lies and deceit, and all of which will lead them astray. Related to this point is the fact that the main motifs in Jer 9 is wailing. Israel has foolishly listened to lies rather than to the voice of Yhwh, and what they will hear next is wailing, which is the sound of judgement.

As Hays states, this kind of motif is "a phenomenon in the ancient world that normally accompanied tragedies (like a horrific invasion)."⁴ However, the people have been warned by Jeremiah in the beginning of chapter 7 (7:1-15) that if they really change their ways and turn to God by caring for the orphans, widows and foreigners, as well as by abandoning their idolatry, then Yhwh will avert the coming judgement and they can stay in Jerusalem. The people however, continue to break the ten commandments habitually especially in regard to idolatry (7:9) and then they have the audacity to come to the temple, expecting Yhwh to give them safety. Throughout Jer 7,

² Walter Brueggemann, "The Book of Jeremiah: Portrait of the Prophet," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 37, no. 2 (1983), 130-45.

³ J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2009), 147.

⁴ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 150.

Yhwh underscores that the people have not listened to him (or “obeyed” him the same word in Hebrew for both nuances).

Jeremiah as stated before in this paper, writes in metaphoric language in much of his literature, showcasing the mistake of those who are sick seeking and searching the wrong help. Jeremiah can be seen to be confused with this very timely aspect in verse 18 and 19, where he appreciates both the presence of God and his absence. This indicates that Jeremiah wrote from the depths of despair. Now reading Jeremiah 8:18-22 in light of such context, this very raw emotion of Jeremiah is consistent throughout the immediate literary context and the context of Jeremiah as a whole.

Interestingly when looking at verses 14-16 before leading up to the selected passage, Jeremiah urges the people to wake up to what was happening around them, for God’s judgement was becoming apparent. Verse 14 shows Jeremiah talking about a poisonous drink that God is giving the Israelites to drink from a poisonous plant which scholars refer to as the poppy.⁵ In fact the whole nation is wounded (שבר vs 8) as they were discharging the instructions of the Torah including the scribes.

This is the plague described figuratively by the prophet within the conceptual framework of sickness which there is no cure (vs 11-13). The law punishes to heal, serving as a balm of healing on the wounds of sin. This line of argument can be supported by the use of two verbs (“perish” הדמנו and “drink” ישקנו) in verse 14. It is quite clear that both verbs are *hiphil* in form, implying that God has caused them to perish and drink poisoned water “because we have sinned against Yhwh.”⁶ This cause continues on in verse 17 where Yhwh sends serpents against which there are no charms or incantations (להש) and they shall bite you (נשכו). The nuance of the verb נשכו in its

⁵ Zohara Yaniv, "Introduction: Medicinal Plants in Ancient Traditions," in *Medicinal and Aromatic Plants of the Middle-East* (Netherlands: Springer, 2014).

⁶ Dean O. Wenhe and Thomas C. Oden (ed.), *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Illinois: IVP Academic Press, 2009), 78.

piel form provides an intensive type of action, which implies that the people are hardly bitten and severely suffered.

Therefore, the conclusion can be made that this passage and its thematic ideas are consistent throughout the whole literature of Jeremiah. Although there are some parts of Jeremiahs literature that refer to the sin of foreign nations not Judah (e.g., chs 40-51), the idea of a sinful Judah without the inclusion of the foreign nations is consistent throughout Jeremiah. The prophet therefore proposes a perpetual lamentation, an endless of tears for the people of God. And with his lamentation comes confusion. This means that Jeremiah appears to be a jumble of conflicting emotions and contradictory ideas and this will be discussed down below.

3.2 Is Israel sick/ill?

The context and the meaning of the selected verses hold great significance in understanding the text.

Jer 8:18 מבלגייתי עלי יגון עלי לבי דוי

Trans: My joy is upon me, grief is upon me, my heart (לבי) is sick.

First of all, this verse says about the relationship between Jeremiah and God. Jeremiah had a strongest possible sense of God's presence. He spoke to God directly as a friend to a friend: My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart (לבי) is sick.

But by the time he gets to the middle of the next verse he is starting to doubt whether God is really there for his people at all: Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her king not in her? (8:19b). In fact, God is supposed to be in Zion because he has chosen Zion for dwelling place (e.g., see Psalm 132:13). But where is he? God does not seem to be at home. In his grief, Jeremiah is at once close to God and far away from Him. He senses

both the presence and the absence of God. This view must be very confusing but definitely it is not surprising. This confusion reminds us that Jeremiah wrote from the very depths of despair.

With the understanding of literary criticism however, there are several ways in which these questions may be viewed, based on other basic dimensions of literary analysis. As mentioned earlier in this paper, one of the concerns of the literary criticism points to the rhetorical dimension of a text. This rhetorical dimension refers to the functional and dynamic which includes the persuasive communicatively effective element of the verbal discourse. Based on this specific dimension, this paper argues that the confusion described above can be solved from this rhetorical dimension. That is, the theological confusion can be an issue paralleled to the two questions mentioned in Jer 8:22 which are all rhetorical questions. The speaker must have known that the answer is yes: there is a balm in Gilead.

Getting back to verse 18, it talks about the heart being faint and can be seen at the considerations of the calamities which were coming upon the people and was made known to him by the spirit of prophecy, and the Targum takes them to be words of the prophet paraphrasing them, “for them, saith the prophet, my heart grieves”⁷. This is already an indication of sickness, because we can look at a faint heart as being medically unstable. The heart is the core of the human body, and without its very purpose and its very function, the body does not work. This analogy of it being faint is in direct correlation with Israel and its people. A nation that is faint and in need of dire help to strengthen the core and the heart of the people.

So Jeremiah grieving and his heart being faint, is significant to a Jeremiah that is sick being Israel is too. He strives for Israel to seek help and assistance for their illness.

⁷ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*, 4.

Furthermore in the selected passage, the word translated as “mourn” (קדר) in verse 21 is an implication of darkness as a sign of great mourning. It appeared to be the blackest or the darkest time in Israel’s history. It was difficult to see any help and hope for them. Finally, verse 22 is the climax to the selected passages because we see a people who seem to be desolate without hope. The balm of Gilead was a substance at the time which is believed to have had healing power and was very expensive and I believe that there is significance in this very medicine and the way Jeremiah might of used it as a hope for the Israelite people and what they were really relying on.

3.3 Is Yhwh sick?

Jer 8:19 הנה קול שועת בת עמי מארץ מרחקים היהוה אין בציון אם מלכה אין בה מדוע הכעסוני בפסליהם בהבלי נכר

Trans.: Behold, the cry of “the daughter of my people” (בת עמי) from a wide land: Is Yhwh not in Zion? Is her king not in her? Why have they caused to be angry at me with their images and with their idols?

Here the poet continues to grieve over “the daughter of my people” (בת עמי) (8:19, 21, 9:1). So the poet mentions this phrase three times (8:19, 21, 9:1). I argue however, because it is Yhwh who refers to Israel as “the daughter of my people”, it is therefore incredible to consider that it is Yhwh who weeps over the city of Judah that is soon coming to ruin. On that reading, it is Yhwh who has a sick heart (vs 18). It is Yhwh who hears the surprise of Israel in vs 19. It is Yhwh who hears the resignation of Israel in vs 20, It is Yhwh who can say: Is there no balm in Gilead? (vs 22).

3.4 The Balm of Gilead

Jer 8:22 הצרי אין בגלעד אם רפא אין שם כי מדוע לא עלתה ארכת בת עמי

Trans.: Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

The LXX translation reads the word “poor” (תב) as “daughter” rather than “poor” as in the NRSV. This will be translated as “the daughter of my people...” With the metaphorical language, Jeremiah went to the pharmacy and discovered that the pharmacist was completely out of balm of Gilead. He asked if there was a doctor in the house, but there was no answer. Without doctor or medicine, the illness would be terminal. “Is there no balm in Gilead? Here, Jeremiah laments, “Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?” (8:22).

According to Philip G. Ryken, Gilead was the land just east of the Jordan river. It was known for its healing balsams. Ryken extends by stating that “when Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, he was sold to a caravan taking balm from Gilead down to Egypt (Gen 37:25).”⁸ Ryken also affirms that although scholars have been unable to determine how the balm of Gilead was made, he believes that it “seems to have been a soothing, aromatic resin made from a tree or plant. It might be compared to aloe vera. The balm of Gilead was useful in keeping wounds from putrefying.”⁹

In the language of verse 22, the prophet could find no balm in Gilead. Not for these wounds. As he examined the vital signs of the people, Jeremiah realized he could do nothing to bring them back to physical and spiritual health. There was no medicine to cure them and no doctor to heal their wounds. The people of God were in need of deliverance from sin but Jeremiah did not know where to find a deliverer.

What we have noticed from the surface meaning of verse 22 is the reality of suffering, one that is absolutely essential for Jeremiah’s community at the time. The real

⁸ Philip G. Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations; From Sorrow to Hope*, (Illinois: Crossway Press, 2001), 172.

⁹ Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 172.

error, in my view, is the fact that these rhetorical questions are understood correctly only on the factual level. What we have lost, I argue, as the result of recognizing that a text such as this gives us limited information, is the rhetorical impact of these questions.

The Balm of Gilead as mentioned before is rather interesting as it is seen as a medication for the ill in this specific time. It was a substance with healing power in it and was known to be very expensive.¹⁰ First of all, the tree or the shrub that produced this balm is commonly identified as *commiphora gileadensis* with some botanical scholars concluding that the actual source was a terebinth tree in the genus of *Pistacia*. It used to grow in Israel for the healing of the nations, but in the context of the text we can see that Jeremiah implies that the balm of Gilead may have run out. Gilead was to Israel what Israel was spiritually meant to be for the world. It was a rare perfume used medicinally, and named for the region of Gilead where it was produced. It is also mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, after having cast Joseph in the pit, his brothers had noticed a caravan on its way from Gilead to Egypt bearing myrrh and balm. The balm is also mentioned when Jacob dispatched his embassy into Egypt, where he presented a gift to the ruler that was a little balm. Now during the final years of the kingdom of Judah, Jeremiah now poses the question as to where the balm of Gilead has gone¹¹.

In the Talmud, the balm appears as an ointment which was a highly praised product of the Jericho plain, but its main use was medicinal rather than cosmetic. Furthermore when looking at the Hebrew Bible, the balm of Gilead is *tsori* or *tseri* and is a merchandise. It is believed to be one of the several components of the special incense that was used twice daily in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

¹⁰ Yaniv, "Introduction: Medicinal Plants in Ancient Traditions."

¹¹ Brueggemann, *To Pluck up, to Tear Down*.

3.5 Chapter Conclusion

To conclude, the exegetical analysis of this text has helped define the meaning of many words and phrases that has assisted in drawing out some important ideas and factors. The literary critique of this very chapter has helped with the analysis, showcasing how Jeremiahs positioning of the chosen chapter and text within his literary composition plays a vital role in the meaning of the chosen text. Not only does it show the sickness and how Israel is classified as ill by Jeremiah, but it also shows a solution to how they can be healed. It provides how the Balm of Gilead which was the medicinal aid at the time, is now missing from the location. Perhaps it is an insight from Jeremiah to now look elsewhere, or to possibly look to God now for the medication for this illness. This coincides well with the following chapter and how the hermeneutical perspective of *Taulasea* will be synthesised with the text and the literary method used.

CHAPTER 4

SYNTHESIS

The establishment of the past two chapters will be merged in this chapter as an attempt to utilise the data gained in order to locate or situate the *Taulasea* hermeneutic within the given or the selected text of **Jeremiah 8:18-22**. A recap on the past chapters will assist this chapter in merging the hermeneutical perspective with the biblical text. This synthesis will be important as it is the crux of this paper and the direction it is finalising and undertaking, and possibly allowing us to see who the *Taulasea* is in the text of Jeremiah 8:18-22. Furthermore, with the influence of Samoan healing to people because of religious reasons, this adds to the idea of this Samoan traditional method as very much present in Jeremiah 8:18-22. Just as spiritual existence was active in Samoa, this is the same in the world of Jeremiah.

4.1 Why is Israel sick/possessed? God as *aitu*?

As stated, before the arrival of Christianity to the shores of Samoa, there was already a spiritual existence which included gods of a spiritual realm that protected each distinct district and they were constantly in war with other gods. They issued curses as a means of attack to other districts like when taboos were breached. Now when Otele Perelini emphasised the idea of *aitu* in his reading, and their negative forces which possessed an individual, he said that understanding sickness and healings gives emphasis to the influence of supernatural forces in the causation and remedy of illness.¹ These were caused by supernatural forces or supernatural agents known by the generic term *aitu*, who also in my opinion can be referred to as local divine guardians who

¹ Perelini, *Comparison of Jesus*, 20.

provide protection and security for a specific Samoan village. Therefore this begs the question, of what the *aitu* or the spiritual deformation is within the given text.

The *aitu* I believe in the context of Jeremiah 8:18-22 is what is causing Israel to be sick or ill at the time, therefore leading to Jeremiah's analogy of Judah as a sick nation. He warns them about their present situation and what they are doing. They have been listening to lies and deceit as stated by Daniel Hays,² constricting themselves to serious sin of idolatry and syncretistic religious ritual. Although Jeremiah writes in a metaphorical language in this text, he writes from the depth of despair and this very raw emotion is consistent throughout his whole literature. Now to understand who the *aitu* is in this text requires us to delve into a concept that may be odd: God himself as the *aitu* within Israel.

It is clear in my exegetical work that breaking the law of God is detrimental especially in the case of God's people who have become notable sinners in this generation right from the origins of Israel. God as the *aitu* in this case is clear in the *hiphil* forms of 'perish' and 'drink', where the implication is made that God caused the Israelites to drink the poisoned water due to the fact that they have sinned against God. This very same cause continues in verse 17 where God sends serpents against which there are no hesitations but only biting. Although there may not be any direct link from the previous texts prior to my chosen text, the correlation I believe lies in the statements above. That God himself just as other districts of Samoa attacked other districts for breaking law and breaking taboo, God himself has become the attacker of Israel for not only breaking **taboo** in the sense of law, but because they worshipped other **taboo**. It is definitely difficult to come to terms with God as an *aitu*, but in the context of this paper

² Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 151.

and the hermeneutics used, I believe that there is no other acting force or supernatural phenomenon inflicting this very illness on Israel other than the creator himself.

Verse 18 talks about the relationship between Jeremiah himself and God, with Jeremiah having a strong possible sense of the presence of God. He spoke to him directly as a friend to friend, but this all changes when the following verse states the doubt that Jeremiah now has with God. He doubts the presence of God especially since Zion is his dwelling place. Why is he not home? However, as previously stated, this theological confusion can be answered in the rhetorical questions posed within these texts. Jeremiah not only knows the answer to his rhetorical questions, but it seems as if his rhetorical questions are not to God, but to the people of Judah. Furthermore, Jeremiah then becomes a representation of Israel especially with his grieving heart being faint. He strives for Israel to seek for help and assistance for their illness, he strives for Israel to seek help for the *aitu* that is possessing them in their time. It was their darkest time in history and it was difficult to see any hope and this is climaxed in the balm of Gilead statement where Jeremiah asks the question implying that there is none left. The question then lies, if there is no Balm of Gilead left in the land of the dwelling place of God, what then is the solution to the *aitu* that is possessing the Israelites? The answer lies in the rhetorical question in verse 22. Is there no Balm in Gilead?

4.2 God as the *Taulasea*

Traditional Samoan healers in the Samoan culture were often sought for assistance especially when prescribed medicine was no longer useful. This is influenced by the people as they are religious and spiritual people and perhaps this is the same as Israel in their context. Now since *Taulasea* were often called to by certain districts because of possessions from *teinesā* and other spiritual beings, I believe that God in the

text of Jeremiah 8:18-22 can be also seen as a *Taulasea* and possibly the solution to the issue at hand. As established in the previous section, God is indeed the issue because he is the one possibly inflicting this very pain on Israel, but the question that is left to beg of whether there is a Balm in Gilead, and its rhetoric sense implies the idea that Jeremiah is telling the people of Judah that no longer are they able to heal from the things of this world. They must seek for spiritual assistance as did Samoans in history when they were attacked by other spiritual auras.

In every Samoan village, it was believed that there was a traditional Samoan healer who healed patients not only in the physical sense, but also spiritually and religiously in the culture of Samoa. Perhaps this is the same situation with the **balm of Gilead** as mentioned in the text of Jeremiah 8:28-22. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? These two very rhetorical questions poses the idea that the balm of Gilead seemed to be the source or the *Taulasea* that the Israelites sought out for healing of all their problems. As stated, Jeremiah went to the pharmacy and discovered that the pharmacist was out of balm of Gilead and along with it there was no doctor. Now without both these factors, the illness or the *aitu* within the patient is therefore unable to be healed. Jeremiah realised that he could do nothing to bring them back to spiritual health. He was desperately in search of a *Taulasea* within the district to heal his people.

In light of the synthetic aspect of this chapter, Jeremiah is in search for a *Taulasea* for his people and his community but there seems to be none. In the context of the text however, these rhetorical questions posed by Jeremiah is an implication to his people that the remedies and the medicinal properties of the world that they had sought for even himself was no longer the *Taulasea*, but they now had a true *Taulasea* to look back to: God himself. Interestingly as mentioned, the issue or the *aitu* who inflicted this

pain on them, is now the answer or the solution to their problem. God inflicted this pain and **possessed** them when put in terms of the *Taulasea* definition as punishment for them breaking taboo and tradition. He inflicted sickness for a breach of taboos that were put in place to keep peace among not only the relationship of people with him, but people with people. They became idolatrous people. The cure now, was for them to turn back to God who is the *Taulasea* of their dire condition.

God as the *Taulasea* can be drawn from the relationship that Jeremiah had with God. He trusted him and his prophetic voice to the many nations inspires this concept. Now here in the chosen text, his rhetorical question subtly pokes at the people of God who are seeking for help from other nations with paganism and wrong worship to solve their problems and their illness, but now Jeremiah asks them indirectly to now look to the true *Taulasea* who was their creator, their redeemer, their physician, and their doctor. He is greater than the physical Balm of Gilead. He is the problem, the *aitu* so therefore, they have no other solution but to turn back and apologise to the one who possessed them in the first place. This is where they will find replenishing health, and true healing not only physically, but spiritually also.

4.3 God as ‘the sick’

As mentioned in the previous chapters, especially with the original Hebrew language drawn from the text, God also has a sick heart. It is God who is suffering with Judah. It is merely not a direct quote from Jeremiah as the text indicates, but it is an implication of God speaking from the first person, stating that his heart is sick. This in turn also has a deep theological meaning, and can be seen as God in the human form. It is difficult to place God as a human in the Old Testament especially with Jesus Christ and the latter in the New Testament, but our text implies that God indeed was hurting with Israel. He is a God that suffers with his creation.

4.4 The *Taulasea* in the World

The current medical crisis that the world is undergoing right now seems to be a problem that I believe will not only occur now, but also in the future. The COVID 19 virus has spread around the world. It is an infectious disease that was caused by a newly discovered virus in late 2019, and right until this current date, it has affected the world as a whole not only medically and physically, but in every sense. It has affected the economic state of the world, the political state, and the entirety of the world. There has been a dramatic loss of human life, and nearly half of the worlds work force is in near dire recession. Now the source of this is unknown, of whether it is a punishment from God or not is the question that is to be made. In the context of Jeremiah, the implication that Israel is sick is noticeable. So the question for the world today is whether there is a medication for this COVID 19 virus that is affecting the world? Is there no balm in the World?

4.4.1 Is there no balm in the World?

This is the main question that implies whether the world is looking for the cure for this COVID 19 in the wrong places? Jeremiah's question requires us to look at the world and to see whether there is a need for the world to reflect on the current situation. I believe that this is the answer to the COVID 19 world that we live in now, God is the true doctor to all the problems of this world.

COVID 19 not only offers us opportunities to change but it demands us to do so. It is making us rethink our lives entirely including our faith and our religious practices. There is so much pain around the world and we continue to see the death rate rising. Although Samoa has recorded no cases of coronavirus thus far, we, as Christians are responsible for each other and for those who are dying around the world. Alongside the many responses to the COVID 19 pandemic, there have emerged some deeply rooted

theological questions of faith: what might it mean to speak in this context of a loving God through the depths of suffering, uncertainty, exploitation and death? And if we manage to hold on to our faith in the midst of all these, what kind of faith is that exactly? Reading Jeremiah 8:18-22 leads us to avoid speculating about the origin of such crises. Rather, it bears witness to the divine promise of hope in the healing justice of God. One might be left with the impression that the EFKS has nothing to say about some of these questions that many people continue to dare to ask. Especially when faith has been built on the conviction that God always or usually intervenes on behalf of the faithful, this paper argues that some questions are simply too crucial to ignore.

With regard to COVID 19, some people are already desperate after 14 days of quarantine. Some might say that this is just who we are and we cannot escape that. But this is not true. This is not who we are. Rather this is what we have become. We have disconnected our being from the earth, from a deep sense of connectivity with other people and other living beings, trees, rivers, plants and birds. I suggest that this connection is also significant from a *Taulasea* perspective in both contexts (Samoa and Jeremiah).

4.4.2 The Church *Taulasea*

The Church can be a *Taulasea* for the world today in many instances, especially in the spiritual sense. When looking at the history of the world, the World Council of Churches are always held during a time where the world need the Churches and the gospel the most. A classic example of this is the Council of Faith and Order that was held in 1948, where they realised their failure in intervening with the World War Two that occurred from 1939-1945. They realised their failure and their guilt, and this is essential for us to acknowledge now that there is a hope for us and for the Church to

intervene in this pandemic that is affecting the world. It can be an extra ecclesia unity for the churches to try to unite in donations, aid, and many more.

4.4.3 The EFKS as *Taulasea*

It has been difficult for the EFKS to voice opinions especially as it is important for the Church to stand in the middle of any situation. However, the EFKS as a representation of God must be prominent now more than ever especially as the leading church of Samoa. We must assist our nation to perhaps turn back to God. It is only through guilt and self-denial that one does not turn back to God: Samoa has turned to the god of wealth, the god of greed and selfishness, the god of politics and government. It is our role now to remind the people of Samoa through our sermons and our way of living that the medication for Samoa cannot only be found from elsewhere, but can be found here in Samoa within our very borders. Thus, Samoa's true *Taulasea* is God.

4.5 Conclusion

This Chapter has attempted to synthesise the ideas from the previous chapters by using the hermeneutical lens of *Taulasea* as a perspective to read the chosen text. Jeremiah highlights the idea that Israel are seeking the wrong people for help, they are seeking the wrong *Taulasea* but should instead seek the true *Taulasea* for replenishing health physically and spiritually: God. God was their *aitu* and this just seems to be one of those problems where the problem, is the solution. Israel must turn back to God in order for them to be saved from his wrath.

CONCLUSION

This paper and research has helped synthesize the *Taulasea* hermeneutic within the selected passage of Jeremiah 8:18-22. Furthermore, the drawing out of implications of this idea has helped me understand the effects that were occurring not only in the text, but also during the time that the text was written. There have been a number of factors such as Israel being sick, along with God being sick in the language and the original literary methods used that have helped me understand the deeper meaning of Jeremiah and his message to the Israelites. It is not only Jeremiah grieving in his heart, but also God grieving and weeping over the city of Judah who is soon coming to ruin. A God who has a sick heart because of his love for his people. These two factors alone are a result of one ultimate factor: a nation that is sinning.

In saying this, the message implied for Israel implies to the world that we live in today. I propose for us to revisit this passage as a means of seeing a God suffering with his people. The common conception is the fact that God had suffered with his people in the New Testament when Jesus had come. However we see in the research made and the language that is used by the author, that God had suffered and wept over the sin of his people even prior to the arrival of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jeremiah is seeking for a *Taulasea* for the Israelites, someone to help them for their disobedience and their non-God like ways. He had gone to the pharmacist, and there was no medication left and no doctor. Is this not what is happening in our world today?

Is there no balm in the world that we live in today? The current medical crisis the world faces has asked us to unite more than ever against this disease that has physically made the world sick. As of now, there has not been a sufficient or adequate medication to heal the world of its damages. Not only has it affected the world physically, but economically, politically, and many more. It almost seems like going to the worldly

pharmacist has led to no medication, and the absence of medication is the absence of doctors in the sense that they have no reply to the problem at hand. I believe this paper proposes that we look at ourselves to see whether we are looking for the right pharmacist. Are we worshipping idols of this world rather than worshipping and turning to God? Is this not why God is sick? He is grieving because of the world that we live in today. A world that has forgotten him and turned to technology. A world that has forgotten the true *Taulasea* of this world, but turned to the *Taulasea* of idolatry.

Turning to the *Taulasea* of God requires us to reevaluate the things that we are doing right now. Perhaps we are doubting the power that God has and his healing *Taulasea* ability. There is no doubt there has been a dramatic loss of human life and the source of it being unknown, but the source of healing as researched by this paper is clear and obvious: God, the true *Taulasea*. It is God who we should seek for help and assistance. Just as Jeremiah was urging the people of Judah, he is also speaking to us in our context now. The world of 2021, “is there no balm in Gilead?”. Jeremiah’s analogy of a sick Judah is because they had been listening to lies and deceit, constricting themselves to serious idolatry and syncretistic religious ritual. Jeremiah writes from the depth of his despair with raw emotion, implying that breaking the law of God is detrimental especially in the case of God’s people. Just as God caused the Israelites to drink the poisonous water, perhaps this is the water we are drinking now: the water of “COVID 19”. We must turn to the true *Taulasea* of this world: God.

This paper has also asked the church to be a *Taulasea* for the world that we live in today, especially as an ecumenical movement to instil faith and love in those around the world that are suffering from this very disease. It is our duty now to do so, but not to wait till after its all over. This seems to be the recurring pattern for our church councils; to only meet after the situation has occurred like the second civil war. However, perhaps

it is needed now more than ever for the church to unite and set a mission to help those in need to be reminded or told about the true *Taulasea* of this world, to turn to God and seek his guidance. Furthermore, the EFKS I believe can be a *Taulasea* in itself, merging together as a church to contribute to the healing of the world from this dangerous disease. Just as the *fonotele* was completed by using Zoom, there must also be a way for the EFKS to come together in this cyber world that we live in today, and remind ourselves about the true *Taulasea* of this world. Remind our church to turn to God, who grieves for us as we live in this world.

In conclusion, the world as we know it is a world that turns from God when things are good and when things are bad. Moreover, when things are bad, the world tends to forget the true *Taulasea* of this world and turn to the things of this world for healing and peace. It is important for us to understand that God who is the creator of all things, is also the creator of peace, harmony, love, and healing. He is the medication of this world, the true balm needed for us, but it is only a matter of us turning back to him. We are sinners, and have our downfalls, but let us not forget that God is suffering alongside us, just as he did Jesus Christ. When we turn to our true *Taulasea*, we are restored to our true full health under his care and his everlasting love.

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