

# “Who knows?” Reading the Book of Jonah as a Satirical Challenge to Theodicy of the Exile

Stephen Derek Cook

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
The University of Sydney

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## Abstract

Several scholars have challenged the reading of the final line of *Jonah* as a rhetorical question (“Should I not be concerned about Nineveh?”) and understand the Hebrew text instead to be a declaration by God that he will *not* be concerned about Nineveh. This reading has been resisted by some who argue that it would make little sense for the book to end on a negative note that God does not care about people who repent. This thesis examines the grammatical issues to determine which of the interrogatory or declarative readings has the stronger case; how a declaratory reading of the final line has an impact on how we read the book overall; and what such a reading has to say about the primary messages of the story.

This thesis proposes that the book of *Jonah* was written to challenge theodicies which failed, from the writer’s perspective, to provide satisfying answers or offer comfort in the context of the exile. It examines evidence of irony, satire or parody in the Hebrew Bible in general and in *Jonah* in particular to determine if the use of these literary devices should also guide our interpretation of the final lines of *Jonah*. It analyses other texts in the Hebrew Bible which seem to be cited or alluded to in *Jonah*, concludes that these literary parallels are often parodied in *Jonah*, and argues that the purpose and effect of such parody is not to ridicule the earlier texts themselves, but rather a theological position taken by some who appealed to them. Possible targets of this parody and the book’s likely audience are discussed, and similarities with other biblical literature of the period are analysed. It concludes that the book of *Jonah* is best described as a satirical challenge to theodicy of the exile. The final line has the effect of turning the reader’s or listener’s attention back to an earlier question: “Who knows? Perhaps God will turn and relent” and implies a satirical answer to this question: no one knows, or can know, what God will do.

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Stephen Derek Cook

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Eight years ago I enrolled at The University of Sydney in two units in Biblical Studies and Classical Hebrew ‘just for interest’ as part of an undergraduate degree, not knowing that it would change the course of my life. I consequently changed my major, undertook an additional year of study to do Honours, and subsequently enrolled in the PhD programme. I owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to Associate Professor Ian Young for kindling my interest in the Hebrew Bible in the first place, for his guidance through both my undergraduate and postgraduate studies, and particularly for supervising my research. I learn something new every time we speak or I attend one of his lectures. I am grateful to Dr Yitzhak Peleg whose undergraduate lectures on Jonah first aroused my interest in the possibility of reading the story as satire or parody. I would also like to acknowledge the teachers and my fellow students in the Department of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish Studies for continually challenging me with stimulating ideas and fresh approaches to Biblical Studies and for inspiring me to pursue my interests. Special thanks are due to my postgraduate colleague and friend Timothy Rafferty for putting up with every conversation turning to Jonah, and to my associate supervisor Dr Rachelle Gilmour for thoroughly reviewing several drafts of this thesis and helping me to clarify my arguments.

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## Abbreviations

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| BAR     | Biblical Archaeology Review  |
| BASOR   | <i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>                         |
| BR      | <i>Bible Review</i>  |
| BSOAS   | <i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>                        |
| BTB     | <i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>  |
| BZ      | <i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>   |
| BZAW    | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft                      |
| CBQ     | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>   |
| CBQMS   | Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series   |
| CurBR   | <i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>   |
| CurBS   | <i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>  |
| DCH     | Dictionary of Classical Hebrew   |
| ESV     | English Standard Version   |
| HALOT   | Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament                                      |
| HB      | Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)   |
| JAAR    | <i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>                                   |
| JB      | The Jerusalem Bible  |
| JBL     | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>  |
| JBQ     | <i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>  |
| JESOT   | <i>Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament</i>                        |
| JETS    | <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>                                |
| JHS     | <i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>  |
| JJS     | <i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>   |
| JNES    | <i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>   |
| JNSL    | <i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>  |
| JQR     | <i>The Jewish Quarterly Review</i>   |
| JS      | <i>Journal for Semitics</i>  |
| JSJ     | <i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period</i> |
| JSJSup  | <i>Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>                           |
| JSOT    | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>                                    |
| JSOTSup | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplementary Series</i>               |
| JSS     | <i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>  |
| KJV     | King James Version   |
| LXX     | Septuagint   |
| MT      | Masoretic Text   |
| NET     | The NET Bible, New English Translation   |
| NETS    | New English Translation of the Septuagint  |
| NIV     | New International Version  |
| NJPS    | New Jewish Publication Society (JPS) Translation                                     |
| NRSV    | New Revised Standard Version   |
| OTS     | <i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>   |
| VT      | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>   |
| ZAW     | <i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>                            |
| ZTK     | <i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>  |

## Introduction

The main problem with scholarship on *Jonah*<sup>1</sup> is that there is little agreement on what the book is about. Few these days would regard it simply as ‘history’ and the consensus has certainly shifted over the last century so that most commentaries regard it almost entirely as fiction, although based on an historical character who is mentioned in the book of Kings<sup>2</sup> as prophesying during the reign of king Jeroboam II. The days when scholars would discuss the feasibility of surviving inside the belly of a fish or when commentaries would include seafaring tales of sailors being swallowed by a whale and living to tell their story are well behind us. For some time the trend in scholarship was to regard the book as a polemic against the particularism and exclusivism of Ezra and Nehemiah, and while there are still some adherents to this idea the consensus has moved in a different direction.

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis whenever I refer to the book of *Jonah* the word “Jonah” will be italicised, while references to the character Jonah will be in a regular font. I occasionally use the term “book of *Jonah*” although my preference is for the “story of *Jonah*.” While *Jonah* is regarded as a “book” in the Christian Bible, one of the twelve Minor Prophets, its placement in the Hebrew Bible in the scroll of the Twelve justifies it being treated as a story or section within that book and not as a book itself. While the story can stand alone and may have been written independently of the other “books” in the Twelve, redaction critics argue that there are also signs of redaction which suggest some editing took place in other parts of the Twelve around the time that *Jonah* was written or incorporated into the collection, and possibly in *Jonah* itself. The redaction of the Twelve and *Jonah*’s place within the collection will be discussed at the relevant places in this thesis but see especially James D. Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 248-73; Aaron Scharf, “Reconstructing the Redaction History of the Twelve Prophets: Problems and Models,” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (eds. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 34-48.

<sup>2</sup> I use the terms “book of Kings” and “book of Samuel” (not “books”), or sometimes simply Kings or Samuel, as each of these is a single unit in the Hebrew Bible. For references I use the conventional divisions.



## The message of the story of Jonah

Until recently it was generally accepted that the message of *Jonah* emphasised the universalistic nature of God's compassion.<sup>3</sup> Whether or not the writer was reacting to the particularism and exclusivism identified in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the consensus has been that the message of the story is that God will respond favourably to anyone who repents and turns to him. For some scholars this represented a shift in the theology of Israel towards a position that the God of Israel was calling on them to reach out to other communities, and to be a "light to the nations." Michael Thompson, for example, argues that a "straight" reading of the story indicts Israel for its "failure to engage in ... a preaching mission to Nineveh."<sup>4</sup> It was thought that *Jonah* was similar in this respect to the ideologies of Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah, but that the history of Judaism in the second temple period demonstrated that the community did not take up the call and they maintained their exclusivism. For many Christian scholars it was thought that Christianity responded positively to the message and by taking the *evangel* to non-Jews there was a parting of the ways with Rabbinic Judaism. Sadly, this often resulted in the appearance of anti-Semitic stereotypes even in academic literature and the prophet Jonah was sometimes seen as a trope for Jews who, it was alleged, were unwilling to share their God or hope with foreigners.

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<sup>3</sup> This emphasis pervades much of the scholarly literature on *Jonah*. The following is indicative only and certainly not exhaustive. H.M. Orlinsky, "Nationalism-Universalism and Internationalism in Ancient Israel," in *Translating & Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honor of Herbert Gordon May* (eds. Harry Thomas Frank and W. L. Reed; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 206-36; Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), 185-91; Hans W. Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1986), 85-88; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 434-35; André LaCocque and Pierre-Emmanuel LaCocque, *Jonah: a Psycho-Religious Approach to the Prophet* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), passim; Tova Forti, "Of Ships and Seas, and Fish and Beasts: Viewing the Concept of Universal Providence in the Book of Jonah through the Prism of Psalms," *JSOT* 35, no. 3 (2011): 359-74.

<sup>4</sup> Michael E.W. Thompson, "The Mission of Jonah," *Expository Times*, no. 105 (1994): 234.

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Yvonne Sherwood has traced “a clear line of continuity” in the recurring stereotypes which are first seen in the interpretation of *Jonah* by Augustine, through the Reformation and the Enlightenment, and persisting to influence even some recent scholarship. These interpretations range from those which blatantly regard the character Jonah as, for example, representative of “the Israelite people’s hate and envy towards all the other nations of the earth” to those which express a similar idea although in more guarded terms so that “the dominant paradigm has become (Christian) universalism versus (Jewish) particularism.”<sup>5</sup> The notion of universalism seems to work best in this paradigm when it is set against and disparages Judaism. There are hints of this in Leslie Allen’s comment that the final line of the book demonstrates God’s universal compassion – “Israel has no monopoly of his [God’s] loving care” – while “the Israel to whom the book was originally addressed was doomed to misunderstand it.”<sup>6</sup> Why should one think they were “doomed to misunderstand it” and what evidence exists to suggest that they did? Similarly, Hans Wolff understands the storm scene (Jonah 1:4-16) to teach “that the God of Jonah, the Hebrew, is able to find among completely strange people the obedience and trust which his own messenger denied him” and takes this a step further to posit that “the heathen are undoubtedly more humane, more active, wiser, and also more devout” than Israel.<sup>7</sup> While the story portrays the foreign sailors positively, Wolff goes too far in extrapolating from this that “the heathen” are more humane, wiser and more devout than Israel.

The trend is shifting yet again, and recent research has focussed on the presence of irony and satire in the Hebrew Bible and *Jonah* is now read by many scholars as either containing some of these elements together with hints of comedy and humour, or being

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<sup>5</sup> Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: the Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 21-32 and references cited there.

<sup>6</sup> Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 194.

<sup>7</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 123.

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wholly satirical or parodic in nature. A book by Edwin Good noting several cases of irony in the Hebrew Bible, including in *Jonah*, was particularly influential in shifting this trend<sup>8</sup> as were later works by James Ackerman, dealing with satire in the Jonah-psalm,<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Miles which proposed a reading of *Jonah* as parody,<sup>10</sup> Carolyn Sharp which further developed Miles' work on irony also with specific reference to *Jonah*,<sup>11</sup> and more recently an article by Will Kynes on parody.<sup>12</sup> Yet the majority have still maintained that the overriding message of the story is that God is concerned about all people and will act compassionately to those who turn to him, and that the writer has used irony and satire to convey this message. The narrator does not give clear insight into the view of the character Jonah.<sup>13</sup> It is also difficult to determine whether Jonah changes his position in the course of the story, and amongst those scholars who think he does there is little agreement about when the change took place, or what actually changed.<sup>14</sup> There is considerably more agreement that God has the final word and asserts, via a rhetorical question, that he cares about Nineveh. I will argue that the story is structured in such a way that the writer has intended that the reader's

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<sup>8</sup> Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*. (London: SPCK, 1965).

<sup>9</sup> James S. Ackerman, "Satire and Symbolism in the Song of Jonah," in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith* (eds. Baruch Halpern, et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> J.A. Miles, "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody," *JQR* 65, no. 3 (1975): 168-81. Republished as: J.A. Miles, "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody," in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible* (eds. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 203-16. Citations will hereafter be to the 1990 edition.

<sup>11</sup> Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Will Kynes, "Beat Your Parodies into Swords, and Your Parodied Books into Spears: A New Paradigm for Parody in the Hebrew Bible," *Biblical Interpretation* 19, no. 3 (2011): 276-310.

<sup>13</sup> While I acknowledge that the character in our story was probably based on an historical person with that name mentioned in the Book of Kings, I read *Jonah* as fiction and any references to him or his 'views' as here should be understood as my interpretation of the writer's portrayal of the fictional character. For a discussion of the problem of characterisation in biblical narrative see Adele Berlin, "Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives," *JSOT* 7, no. 23 (1982): 69-85.

<sup>14</sup> This will be discussed at various points in this thesis, especially chapters 5 and 7.

*perception* of Jonah is meant to change, not that a change necessarily took place in Jonah, and that the story does not end with a rhetorical question, and ultimately God shows no concern for Nineveh. My unique contribution to *Jonah* scholarship will be to demonstrate how the writer develops the main character so that the audience is able to relate to Jonah's concerns about divine justice and mercy in the aftermath of catastrophe, and that the main purpose of the book is to challenge theodicy of the exile in a satirical manner.

### **Does *Jonah* conclude with a rhetorical question?**

However, a handful of recent scholars have challenged the reading of the final line as a rhetorical question and understand it instead to be a declaration by God that he will *not* be concerned about Nineveh. They argue that *grammatically* this is the best way to read the conclusion. This reading has been resisted by some who argue that it would make little sense for the book to end on a negative note that God does not care about people who repent. Instead, they read the story as a message about God's universal concern for all people, and as an exhortation to Israel to share their knowledge of the one true God with all humankind. Their reading of the final line is therefore governed by their understanding of the thematic concerns of the book and not by the grammatical considerations. In chapter 1 I question whether it is better, or even legitimate, to decide on the overall message of the book and then to interpret difficult phrasing in the story from that perspective, or whether the overall message and themes should be determined by first resolving the difficulties. The latter is the approach I will be taking and in doing so, I will examine the grammatical issues to determine which of the interrogatory or declarative readings has the stronger case. I then ask how a declaratory reading of the final line has an impact on how we read the book overall and what it has to say about the primary messages of the story.

## Irony, satire and parody

In chapter 2 the terms irony, satire and parody are defined and evidence of their use in the Hebrew Bible in general and in *Jonah* in particular is analysed. In chapter 3 I look closer at parody and examine all the texts which seem to be cited or alluded to in *Jonah*, with the exception of allusions in the Jonah-psalm to the book(s) of Psalms which I deal with in chapter 5. In doing so I argue that these literary precursors are often parodied in *Jonah* and that the purpose and effect is not necessarily to ridicule the earlier texts, but rather the theological positions of those who based their views on these texts. In chapters 4 to 7, I examine the literary style of the book and its possible use of irony, satire, parody and humour to determine if the use of such devices should also guide our interpretation of the final lines.

## Reading *Jonah* as post-exilic theodicy or antitheodicy

I accept the scholarly consensus that *Jonah* was written or redacted to its final form in the post-exilic Persian period,<sup>15</sup> by an individual or group and for a community living in the

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<sup>15</sup> I will discuss dating in more detail below, commencing on page 16. Scholars who date the book of Jonah to the postmonarchic or postexilic period include: Phyllis Trible, "Studies in the Book of 'Jonah'" (Columbia University, 1963), 104-16; Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 186-97; Terence E. Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 34-36; Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 76-78; James S. Ackerman, "Jonah," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (eds. R. Alter and F. Kermode; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 235-43; Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation* (Anchor Bible 24B; New York, New York: Doubleday, 1990), 22-28; Arnold J. Band, "Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody," *Prooftexts* 10, no. 2 (1990): 177-95; Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, 255-56; Yehoshua Gitay, "Jonah: The Prophecy of Antirhetoric," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in honor of David Noel Freedman in celebration of his seventieth birthday* (eds. Astrid B. Beck, et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 197-206; Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets* (2vols.; Colledgeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 306-307; Ehud Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud* (JSOTSup; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 7.

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aftermath of invasion and exile, and in chapter 8 I will argue that this individual or group was questioning the role of God in the calamity and the unpredictability of his mercy. I will compare it with other texts written after the exile and with later theological responses to calamity to see if the reader of *Jonah* should be guided by this literature of destruction in determining its themes and concerns. I argue that several of these texts share concerns of *theodicy* – whether, or how, one can defend or justify God in allowing his people to suffer overwhelming catastrophe – and that the theodicies written after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, the European pogroms, and the Holocaust can inform our reading of earlier texts written in the shadow of the Babylonian exile.<sup>16</sup> Theodicy is an inevitable problem of monotheism. In the Jewish and Christian traditions the one God is both loving and stern. As an omnipotent deity he dispenses justice as he sees fit and “undeserved suffering puts the relationship between God’s love and his omnipotence under strain.”<sup>17</sup> In this context I will also consider the emergence of the term *antitheodicy* to describe literature which deals with the issues of theodicy but is unable or unwilling to defend any role of God in human suffering, and will conclude that *Jonah* contains some elements of antitheodicy.

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Scholars who date the book late, seeing a Hellenistic literary or cultural influence in it, include LaCocque and LaCocque, *Jonah: a Psycho-Religious Approach*, 26-48; Thomas M. Bolin, “Should I Not Also Pity Nineveh? Divine Freedom in the Book of Jonah,” *JSOT* 20, no. 67 (1995): 109-21; G. Hamel, “Taking the Argo to Nineveh: Jonah and Jason in a Mediterranean Context,” *Judaism* 44, no. 3 (1995): 341-61. For a summary of the various positions see Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, 256 n.19.

<sup>16</sup> The term “theodicy” derives from the Greek words Θεός and δίκη and literally means “justifying God.” The term was coined by Gottfried Leibniz in 1710 in his work (in French) *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l’homme et l’origine du mal* (English translation: Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil* (trans. E.M. Huggard: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000).) While various definitions have been proposed since then, I use it in this thesis in a broad and commonly accepted sense to refer to an attempt to vindicate God and his justice in a world in which there is apparent evil. (Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor eds, *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), vii-liv.)

<sup>17</sup> Laato and Moor, *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, ix.

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In my examination of the four chapters of *Jonah* it will be seen that looming over the story are the ironies that by the time it was written or redacted to its final form the city of Nineveh had been destroyed and the Assyrian empire which had wiped the northern kingdom of Israel from the map had been overthrown itself by the Babylonians, who had subsequently lost their empire to the Persians. The reality was that God did not ultimately spare Nineveh, but also that if he had destroyed the city in the eighth century BCE, in the lifetime of the prophet Jonah – as he had planned to do according to our story – then, hypothetically at least, things may have worked out differently for Israel and history could have been rewritten.<sup>18</sup> The story is saturated with irony which, it will be seen, the writer uses as a device for satire. I will analyse the allusions within *Jonah* to other texts in the Hebrew Bible and argue that the writer uses these texts as parody, which is a particular form of satire, either to target or ridicule the texts themselves or as tools to parody a person or group of people. I will argue that the concluding line to the story must be interpreted in this context, that it should be considered as irony, satire or parody, and that against this background a reading of it as a declaration rather than as a rhetorical question makes perfect sense. A distinguishing feature of satire and parody is that it has a target. I acknowledge that we may not be able to determine the target of *Jonah*'s satire with certainty, but by comparing it with other texts –

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<sup>18</sup> The incorporation of Israel's history together with that of Judah in Samuel and Kings is evidence of a concern by the writers for the northern tribes beyond condemning them for apostasy. Even after the Assyrian exile Judahite writers included prophecies dealing with Israel in the literature. This implies that they understood Israel and Judah to be "one nation" with a shared history. While lessons could be learned from the history of the northern kingdom, these accounts demonstrate that God's dealings with the north did not end with the Assyrian exile. Texts such as Jeremiah 31:9 ("I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn"), the pericope in Ezekiel 37:15-23 where the prophet is told to take two sticks representing Joseph-Ephraim and Judah and join them together, and a theme running through Hosea which declares God's intention to preserve Ephraim and show compassion to it (for example in Hosea 11:8-9), all reveal an ongoing concern for the northern tribes post-exile. While the writer of *Jonah* may simply be drawing lessons for a Judahite audience from the experiences of the north, it is more likely against the background of the ongoing prophetic concern for the north that the writer cared about both Israel and Judah.

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particularly the book of Job – I will suggest that a likely target is a group in post-exilic Yehud who based their theology on the Deuteronomistic literature, or whose theology is reflected in the Deuteronomistic literature,<sup>19</sup> yet by appealing to these texts they failed to provide answers or offer comfort – at least for the writer and those associated with the writer – for the calamities whose memories were defining Yehud’s identity.

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<sup>19</sup> I use the terms Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic at various times in this thesis, recognising that there has been considerable scholarly discussion about these terms since the proposal of Martin Noth that Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings form a single literary presentation of the history of Israel. This does not imply that I regard this literature as the work of a single author or redactor or that I necessarily adopt Noth’s definitions of these terms. Scholars in various ‘schools’ of thought use Noth’s terms in ways which have changed markedly from his original proposal, so that his distinctions do not necessarily carry the same meaning in these contexts, and this can lead to confusion. Some scholars find it impractical to maintain the distinction between *Deuteronomic* and *Deuteronomistic* as suggested by Frank M. Cross and opt for either one term or the other. Raymond Person, for example, encourages scholars to either adopt one term or the other and use them consistently, or to define their terms so that readers are clear which of the multiple meanings they are using. Person himself opts for using ‘Deuteronomic’. In this thesis *Deuteronomistic* is used with reference to terminology, themes and ideas which are found in those biblical texts regarded by many scholars as coming from a common author or school of thought and sometimes called ‘the Deuteronomistic historian’ (namely, sections of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings and Jeremiah). The word *Deuteronomic* is used with reference to terminology, themes and ideas found in the biblical book of Deuteronomy. (Martin Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien: Die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1957); Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981); Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 274 n.1; Raymond F. Person, Jr., *The Deuteronomic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 6-7.) With respect to *Jonah* in particular the term ‘Deuteronomistic’ is used by several scholars when referring to certain texts or phrases in the Twelve which they consider to be part of a Deuteronomistic redactional layer. It should be clear from the context when I use the term in this thesis to refer to a possible Deuteronomistic ‘layer’ rather than the Deuteronomistic literature. It has not been my object in this thesis to examine in detail when the Deuteronomistic literature was written or redacted and I have therefore qualified many of my comments about allusions by the writer of *Jonah* to these texts to include the possibility that the writer was citing traditions which were behind the texts rather than the texts themselves. I am leaving open the possibility that these texts may not have reached their final form at the time *Jonah* was written, or when *Jonah* reached its final form, and the redactional processes involved in both *Jonah* and the Deuteronomistic literature may have been concurrent or have overlapped.



## Authorship

We do not know the identity of the author of the story of *Jonah*. We can be confident that it was not the prophet Jonah himself. It is likely that it was written by more than one hand, and that it was revised, edited and redacted over a period of time before reaching the final forms which have come to us in the Masoretic Text, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the ancient versions. While I will refer from time to time to possible redactional processes, my approach to the story is one of literary analysis rather than textual criticism and is largely a synchronic reading of the Masoretic Text or, as Paul Redditt has put it, it is “a synchronic reading informed by diachronic markers” because “to ignore those [diachronic] markers would rob the text of historical rootedness and leave it at times irredeemably self-contradictory (e.g. what did God do to Assyria? Did God spare it, as Jonah implies, or destroy it, as Nahum celebrates?)”<sup>20</sup> Consequently, when I use the terms writer or writer(s), author, and narrator, I acknowledge the likelihood that several writers and/or redactors were at work in the production of this work. As Ehud Ben Zvi puts it:

By the term “Book of Jonah” I refer to the book in its present form. Hypothetical forerunners, whether in the form of written sources or orally transmitted stories, do not qualify as the particular social product we call “the book of Jonah.”<sup>21</sup>

## Dating, the likely audience, and the target

There is an almost universal scholarly consensus that *Jonah* in its final form reflects the interests and conditions of post-exilic Judaism, with a minority dating it as late as the

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<sup>20</sup> Paul L. Redditt, “Recent Research on the Book of The Twelve as One Book,” *CurBS* 9 (2001): 72. Cf. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, xxxix.

<sup>21</sup> Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud*, 1 n.1.

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Hellenistic period. Some scholars have dated it to the post-exilic period for linguistic reasons, arguing that the story contains so-called Aramaisms.<sup>22</sup> Hence John Miles argued that the *Jonah*-psalm was composed earlier than its surrounding prose and inserted into the story after the composition of the prose narrative, based on the absence of Aramaisms in the psalm.<sup>23</sup> This is an extraordinary argument which I reject for reasons I provide in chapter 5, not only because its appeal to Aramaisms (or lack thereof) to date the text linguistically has been convincingly discredited by scholars such as George Landes<sup>24</sup> who argues for a 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE composition.<sup>25</sup> Landes agrees with Oswald Loretz that some of the alleged Aramaisms could in fact be Phoenician words, including three words which appear in the storm scene where Phoenician words would not be unexpected in a nautical setting.<sup>26</sup> In any case, Ian Young has pointed out that “we cannot say with confidence that a word or a form is really an Aramaism in the strict sense, that is, a loan from Aramaic into Hebrew. The two languages share too many common features at various levels to be readily distinguishable” and the possibility of Aramaic-like elements and Aramaic influence on Hebrew long before the late

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<sup>22</sup> For example, Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament An Introduction* (trans. P.R. Ackroyd; Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 405; John Day, “Problems in the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah,” in *In Quest of the Past: Studies on Israelite Religion, Literature and Prophetism: Papers Read at the Joint British-Dutch Old Testament Conference, Held at Elspeet, 1988* (ed. Adam S. Van Der Woude; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 34-36. Ian Young argues that many of Eissfeldt’s so-called Aramaisms are more strictly Mishnaisms, that is, forms typical of Rabbinic Hebrew, and qualifies this by saying that Mishnaic Hebrew is often considered to be strongly influenced by Aramaic. Ian Young, *Diversity in Pre-Exilic Hebrew* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1993), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Miles, “Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody,” 208.

<sup>24</sup> George M. Landes, “Linguistic Criteria and the Date of the Book of Jonah,” *Eretz Israel* 16 (1982): 147-70.

<sup>25</sup> “Those who would cite the theology and message of the Book of Jonah as most appropriate to a post-Exilic setting fail to demonstrate that the book was in any way dependent on those later literary sources with which it does share certain similar theological ideas.” George M. Landes, “The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah: The Contextual Interpretation of the Jonah Psalm,” *Interpretation* 21, no. 1 (1967): 9. He refers to Oswald Loretz, “Herkunft Und Sinn Der Jona Erzählung,” *BZ* 5(1961): 18-29.

<sup>26</sup> The three words Landes considers to be Phoenician are המלחם (Jonah 1:5), הספינה (1:5) and בשלמי (1:7). Landes, “Linguistic Criteria and the Date of the Book of Jonah,” 147.

period rules out any ability to date texts using these elements, based solely on the fact that they are Aramaisms.<sup>27</sup> While a variety of studies of the language of *Jonah* put it late, using criteria such as Aramaisms, they were all conducted before the emergence of the current discussion of the validity of linguistic dating.<sup>28</sup> They are therefore subject to the caveats that have emerged about the method, including the fact that linguistic features were not copied carefully by ancient scribes so the details of the Masoretic text are quite likely not those of the original authors.

As linguistics does not provide a reliable method for dating biblical texts, some scholars have attempted to date *Jonah* on other grounds. Russell Fuller argued from his examination of the 4QXII<sup>a</sup> manuscript of the Twelve that *Jonah* was placed in the second half and probably in the final third of the collection, and most probably followed Malachi.<sup>29</sup> If *Jonah* can be placed after Malachi an argument could be made from this that it was a late addition to the collection, and possibly of late composition, although this is mere conjecture, and Fuller simply suggests the order of the books remained fluid for some time. This order is otherwise unattested.<sup>30</sup> In any case, Fuller's ordering of the books from the evidence of 4QXII<sup>a</sup> has been disputed by Philippe Guillaume who questions whether the fragments of Malachi and *Jonah* are even from the same scroll. He deals with some of Fuller's evidence by suggesting that if the Malachi and *Jonah* fragments were from the same scroll, and if they were placed together, the evidence does not support the case for them being at the *end* of the

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<sup>27</sup> Ian Young, et al., *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts* (London: Equinox, 2008), Vol. 1, 217.

<sup>28</sup> For the current discussion on linguistic dating see Young, et al., *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts*; Robert Rezetko and Ian Young, *Historical Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew: Steps Toward an Integrated Approach* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014); Ian Young, "Ancient Hebrew Without Authors," *JS* 25, no. 2 (2016): 972-1003; Ian Young, "Starting at the Beginning with Archaic Biblical Hebrew," *Hebrew Studies* 58, no. 1 (2017): 99-118.

<sup>29</sup> Russell E. Fuller, "The Text of The Twelve Minor Prophets," *CurBS* 7 (1999): 83; Russell E. Fuller, "The Minor Prophets Manuscripts from Qumran, Cave IV" (Dissertation, Harvard, 1988), 151.

<sup>30</sup> The Masoretic tradition is preserved in 8HevXIIgr although this probably reflects a revision towards the MT.

scroll. They may in fact have been in the middle, with Malachi, rather than *Jonah*, being out of its ‘usual’ place.<sup>31</sup>

Some scholars refer to the myth of Perseus and Andromeda to argue that the classical legend lies behind the Jonah story.<sup>32</sup> It is further argued that the myth has been associated with Joppa only since the fourth century BCE, so if *Jonah* was dependent on the myth, including its association with Joppa, the connection would provide a *terminus a quo* in the fourth century.<sup>33</sup> However, we cannot be certain that one story had its basis in the other, or that Joppa was the main connection between the stories, so to date *Jonah* on this basis is extremely tenuous.<sup>34</sup>

It seems to me that *Jonah* cannot be reliably dated on any of these grounds.

Attempting to date it by its theology is also troublesome and although Neal asserts that “nothing anchors the book to any concrete time period”<sup>35</sup> I will argue in chapter 3 that the writer is familiar with several texts or traditions including Exodus 34, the Deuteronomistic history, and the prophecies of Jeremiah and Joel, and in chapter 5 that *Jonah* makes several

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<sup>31</sup> Philippe Guillaume, “The Unlikely Malachi-Jonah Sequence (4QXIIa),” *JHS* 7, no. 15 (2007): 1-10.

<sup>32</sup> See for example Day, “Problems in the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah,” 33 and his references there.

<sup>33</sup> Wolff notes that we cannot be certain about the Joppa connection as “there was a dispute about the location of the [Perseus and Andromeda] saga, some people believing that it had its setting in Ethiopia, i.e. on the Indian Ocean.” Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 102.

<sup>34</sup> Alistair Hunter also argues for a 4th century BCE date from the Perseus and Andromeda legend and Daniel Neal refers to Hunter’s argument but asserts that “Hunter is positing that the town of Joppa had only been called Joppa since that time [the 4th century BC] which would be a far more concrete *terminus a quo*.” To be fair to Hunter, he makes no such claim (at least, not in the work cited by Neal), and one of the Amarna letters written c.1350 BCE (letter EA296) refers to *Yapu* which is generally regarded to be Joppa thus dispelling the claim that Joppa was known by that name only since the fourth century BCE. Daniel A. Neal, “What Are They Saying About the Jonah Psalm? An Analysis of the Current Trends in its Interpretation” (Providence College, 2011), 11; Alastair G. Hunter, “Jonah from the Whale: Exodus Motifs in Jonah 2,” in *The Elusive Prophet: the Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist* (ed. Johannes C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 151.

<sup>35</sup> Neal, “What Are They Saying About the Jonah Psalm? An Analysis of the Current Trends in its Interpretation,” 11.

allusions to the book(s) of Psalms. If *Jonah* does allude to these texts we can be confident that it was written sometime after them which makes an eighth century dating unlikely and a fourth century date, or later, much more likely, although we cannot be certain when these ‘earlier’ texts were written either which makes dating extremely difficult. I am persuaded by the reasoning of scholars such as Katharine Dell who argues that we can identify links between *Jonah* and other texts such as Job which suggest they were written against the same theological background and in response to similar theological concerns.<sup>36</sup> This would enable us to date *Jonah* to the same period, if only it were easy to date texts such as Job. I will demonstrate that Job and *Jonah* share thematic concerns about exile and calamity, that “the traumatic experience of expatriation and captivity casts a spectral shadow across Jonah’s narrative”<sup>37</sup> and that we can therefore locate both texts in the exile or later, and tie them to a ‘school’ or scribal community who had concentrated their minds on the problem of theodicy as a result of their upheaval. However, we cannot be more specific about the date than that. I will argue that *Jonah* was the work of an individual or community who was challenging texts, traditions and theodicies which did not satisfy the need for an explanation of God’s role in the recent calamitous past.

### **The relationship of Jonah to the book of Kings**

I referred earlier to the Deuteronomistic history and the possibility that these texts may not have reached their final form at the time *Jonah* was written. That note needs some elaboration and clarification. Scholarship is divided on the questions of what constitutes the Deuteronomistic history, its formation and the redactional processes involved, the dating of

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<sup>36</sup> Katherine J. Dell, “Reinventing the Wheel: The Shaping of the Book of Jonah,” in *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason* (eds. John Barton, et al.; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1996), 95-100.

<sup>37</sup> David J. Downs, “The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah,” *Horizons* 31, no. 1 (2009): 27.

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the stages of redaction, the identity of the Deuteronomistic Historian, or Historians, whether such a person or group existed, and the possible agenda of the writer(s) and redactor(s).

Without weighing in to the debate on these issues I need to clarify my approach to dealing with some of these questions, especially how I understand the relationship between the writer of *Jonah* and the Deuteronomistic literature.

I have referred previously in this Introduction to the scholarly near consensus that confidently dates *Jonah* to the exile or later, although we cannot be more precise than that. I recognize that the dating of the texts which *Jonah* appears to cite or to which it alludes is uncertain and controversial. As some of these texts may have been composed, edited or redacted from earlier sources during the Babylonian exile or the post-exilic Persian period,<sup>38</sup> it is impossible to know with any certainty in what form they may have existed when *Jonah* itself was first composed (or when the final form was produced, if indeed *Jonah* went through a redactional process so that the first and final forms were different). Given what we know about textual fluidity, the writer of *Jonah* may have been drawing on an earlier form – whether oral or written – of the texts that we know.

The book of Kings generally treats the Jehu dynasty favourably (including its account of the reign of Jeroboam II with its naming of Jonah), although it assesses all of the kings in this dynasty with the standard formulaic “He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin” (e.g. 2 Kings

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Römer is skeptical about the extent of the texts and redactions that should be attributed to the Babylonian Era and argues “that the Judeans in the first decades after the destruction of Jerusalem certainly had more urgent concerns than to sit down and write or revise all kinds of scrolls. I think that many texts that we label ‘exilic’ may well have originated in the more stable situation of the early Persian period.” Thomas Römer, “The ‘Deuteronomistic’ Character of the Book of Jeremiah. A Response to Christl M. Maier,” in *Jeremiah’s Scriptures* (eds. Hindy Najman and Konrad Schmid; JSJSup 173, 2017), 125.

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13:2).<sup>39</sup> I will deal with this in Chapter 3 where I make the point that there seems to be conflicting messages in the book of Kings about the Jehu dynasty, and woven together with the standard condemnation of all northern kings are elements which are approving of them and express God's ongoing concern and compassion for the northern kingdom and his commitment to the covenant. Even when kings do evil God is sometimes compassionate to Israel.

It is important to state from the outset that I will argue that the writer of *Jonah* may have been familiar with a text or tradition about the northern kings which did not include the formulaic condemnation of their evil. There is some evidence of this preserved in a text history of Kings. For example, this can be seen in a comparison of the parallel traditions of Zedekiah's reign recorded in 2 Kings 24:18-25:12, Jeremiah 52:1-16 and the Septuagint version of Jeremiah 52. It will be seen in the table below which compares the first three verses from each account that the Septuagint does not contain the standard condemnation of Zedekiah which is in the Masoretic Text and the parallel account in Kings.

| <b>2 Kings 24:18-20</b>  | <b>Jeremiah 52:1-3</b>   | <b>LXX Jeremiah 52:1-3<sup>40</sup></b>   |
|--|--|---|
| <sup>18</sup> Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; his mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. | <sup>1</sup> Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. His mother's name was Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. | <sup>1</sup> It being Sedekias' twenty-first year when he began to reign—and he reigned eleven years in Ierousalem, and his mother's name was Hamital daughter of Ieremias from Lobena. |

<sup>39</sup> This phrase is traditionally identified as a significant marker of Deuteronomism since similar phrasing is found in Deuteronomy 4:25; 9:18; 17:2; 31:29. Kurt Noll, however, has pointed out that the actual phrase occurs only in 17:2 and argues that it begs the case for Deuteronomism in Kings. Kurt L. Noll, "Is the Book of Kings Deuteronomistic? And Is It a History?," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 21, no. 1 (2007): 68.

<sup>40</sup> Translation of the Septuagint is from Albert Pietersma and Marc Saunders, "Ieremias," in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under that Title* (eds. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For translations of the Masoretic Text see my comments about translation on page 30.

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| <p><sup>19</sup> <b>He did what was displeasing to the LORD</b>, just as Jehoiakim had done.</p> <p><sup>20</sup> Indeed, Jerusalem and Judah were a cause of anger for the LORD, so that He cast them out of His presence. Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.</p> | <p><sup>2</sup> <b>He did what was displeasing to the LORD</b>, just as Jehoiakim had done.</p> <p><sup>3</sup> Indeed, Jerusalem and Judah were a cause of anger for the LORD, so that He cast them out of His presence. Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.</p> | <p>--</p> <p>--</p> |
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Ian Young has analysed these parallel passages concerning the end of the Kingdom of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians.<sup>41</sup> He refers to the scholarly argument that it is clear that the material in Jeremiah 52 was taken from Kings because it contains key characteristics of Kings’ style, such as the formulaic evaluation that King Zedekiah “did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.” He notes, however, that Greek Jeremiah is missing all of the text that contains the characteristic Kings material.<sup>42</sup> Young provides three possible options for this variance. First, the scholarly consensus is that in general the shorter Septuagint version of Jeremiah is an earlier edition than the Masoretic Text. Raymond Person, for example, argues that MT Kings and Septuagint Kings preserve a later stage of the development of the book of Kings, and Septuagint Jeremiah provides evidence of an earlier stage of the redactional history of Kings which did not have the Deuteronomistic material mentioned above.<sup>43</sup> Second, some scholars argue for MT priority, that is to say, the distinctive Kings-related

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<sup>41</sup> Ian Young, “Literature as Flexible Communication: Variety in Hebrew Biblical texts,” in *Registers and Modes of Communication in the Ancient Near East: Getting the Message Across* (eds. Kyle H. Keimer and Gillan Davis; London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 156-73.

<sup>42</sup> Young, “Literature as Flexible Communication,” 163.

<sup>43</sup> Raymond F. Person, *The Kings-Isaiah and Kings-Jeremiah Recensions* (BZAW 252; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 98. For an overview of the differences between MT Jeremiah and LXX Jeremiah see Andrew G. Shead, “The Text of Jeremiah (MT and LXX),” in *The Book of Jeremiah* (VTSup 178; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018), 255-79; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (3rd ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), 286-94.



material was omitted by the Septuagint, which assumes it had the MT as its *Vorlage*. Third, Young raises the possibility that Jeremiah 52 may have come from another source, either written or oral, which was available to both Kings and Jeremiah, although he says it is difficult to decide on an explanation and this is just a possibility. While scholarship is currently unable to resolve the difficulty, a comparison of these parallel texts raises the possibility that the Deuteronomistic condemnation of the kings of Israel may have been added to the material now found in Kings *after* or around the same time as the writing of *Jonah*. In this scenario the writer of *Jonah* was aware of an earlier version of Kings less condemnatory of the kings, and may have been opposed to the later redaction.<sup>44</sup>

Coming to the problem with another perspective, David Lamb draws attention to the disparity between the positive material in Kings about the Jehu dynasty and the fact that Jehu and his successors are assessed more negatively than the evidence presented about them seems to warrant.<sup>45</sup> Lamb argues that there is significant positive information about three kings in this dynasty in particular – Jehoahaz, Jehoash, and Jeroboam II – and posits that the writer was drawing on sources which were favourable to these kings. Although the writer of Kings has a different agenda to his sources, the disparity between this material and the

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<sup>44</sup> James Linville cites a number of scholars who have proposed post-exilic dates for the writing of the book of Kings or for a Deuteronomistic editorial review. Linville's own position is that the book was probably composed by Jerusalem-based scribes in the Persian era based on a number of earlier sources and memories. (James Linville, "Rethinking the 'Exilic' Book of Kings," *JSOT* 22, no. 75 (1997): 21-42 and references there.) For an overview of the history of scholarship on the authorship and dating of the book of Kings see A. Graeme Auld, *Life in Kings: Reshaping the Royal Story in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 1-28. Auld's main thesis in this volume is the identification of material common to both Samuel-Kings and Chronicles, which he calls the "synoptic tradition," and which he argues once stood alone (Auld, *Life in Kings*, 21.) While Auld does not place the Jeroboam II and Jonah material in this synoptic tradition, my point in citing it is to demonstrate the possibility of pre-Deuteronomistic sources. See also James Linville, *Israel in the Book of Kings: the Past as a Project of Social Identity* (JSOTSup 272; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 38-73.

<sup>45</sup> David T. Lamb, *Righteous Jehu and His Evil Heirs: the Deuteronomist's Negative Perspective on Dynastic Succession* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

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writer's own negative evaluation of the kings suggests that he had respect for his sources and retained the positive material despite it being at odds with his own condemnatory agenda.

Jonathan Robker takes this position further and argues for the probability of “a royal narrative source covering the history of Israel from the time of Jeroboam I to the time of Jeroboam II, having been composed during the reign of Jeroboam II with the intention of supporting his dynasty and establishing the legitimacy of his son and successor in the face of rising criticism.”<sup>46</sup> He opines that this royal narrative source was taken from Samaria to Jerusalem, presumably at or after the conquest of the Northern Kingdom in 722 and incorporated into a Judean literary context “leading ultimately to the book of Kings in its Deuteronomistic context as we know it today.”<sup>47</sup> Robker is so confident that this source material can be identified in Kings that he attempts a reconstruction of it,<sup>48</sup> and regards the standard formula “He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin” as a Deuteronomistic addition.<sup>49</sup>

Cogan and Tadmor similarly suggest an Israel source for the book of Kings, and on 2 Kings 14:25-27 they comment:

Rather than taking vv. 25–27 as retrospective rationalization of Jeroboam's victories, they should be seen as an affirmation based upon contemporary eighth-century Israelite material. These verses are

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<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Miles Robker, *The Jehu Revolution: A Royal Tradition of the Northern Kingdom and Its Ramifications* (BZAW 435; Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 164. Robker dates the *terminus* for this source material to be during Jeroboam II's lifetime: “The absence of any notice of Jeroboam's burial and the ascension of his son is unique and suggests that this material about Jeroboam may have been written during his lifetime” (114).

<sup>47</sup> Robker, *The Jehu Revolution*, 164.

<sup>48</sup> Robker, *The Jehu Revolution*, 315-32.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, on the Deuteronomistic assessment of Jeroboam II in 2 Kings 14:24. Robker, *The Jehu Revolution*, 112.

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another example of the existence of a prophetic, pre-Deuteronomistic tradition, which included, as it seems, appraisals of Israel's kings and dynasties.<sup>50</sup>

The Israel source may very well be דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל *the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel* which the redactor of Kings acknowledges eighteen times throughout the book.<sup>51</sup> The phrase is often accompanied by other positive descriptors of the king's reign, such as: וְאֲשֶׁר נָלַחַם וְאֲשֶׁר מָלַךְ *how he fought and reigned* (1 Kings 14:19); וְאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וּגְבוּרָתוֹ *what he did, and his power* (1 Kings 16:5; 2 Kings 10:34; 13:8); וְגְבוּרָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה *and the might which he showed* (1 Kings 16:27); וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וּבֵית הַשָּׁן אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה וְכָל־הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה *and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built, and all the cities that he built* (1 Kings 22:39); וְגְבוּרָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר נָלַחַם עִם אֲמַצְיָה מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה *and the might with which he fought against King Amaziah of Judah* (2 Kings 13:12; 14:15); and וְאֲשֶׁר הֵשִׁיב אֶת־דָּמָשֶׁק וְאֶת־חֻמַּת לִיהוּדָה *and his might, with which he fought, and how he recovered for Israel Damascus and*

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<sup>50</sup> Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: a New Translation* (Anchor Bible 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988), 162-63. While I agree with Cogan and Tadmor that these verses come from a pre-Deuteronomistic tradition, their assertions that it is from a prophetic source, and that it included the appraisal of the king, is not supported by the evidence. Robker posits that this material is from a political rather than prophetic milieu (Robker, *The Jehu Revolution*, 113.) Gerhard von Rad argued that one of the standard features of the Deuteronomistic History is the fulfillment of prophecy and that every prophecy recorded in the History is eventually fulfilled. This is not to say that these verses were therefore *written* by the Deuteronomist, but rather that they were possibly *selected* for use from a primary source because they supported his case for the fulfillment of prophecy. Von Rad further argues that the Deuteronomist is not concerned about objectively judging kings on the balance of their achievements and failings, but on the sole standard of their perfect obedience to the statutes, commandments and ordinances of the LORD. Gerhard von Rad, "The Deuteronomic Theology of History in 1 and 2 Kings," in *From Genesis to Chronicles: Explorations in Old Testament Theology* (ed. K.C. Hanson; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 154-59.

<sup>51</sup> The phrase also occurs a further time in 2 Chronicles 33:18 where it is accompanied by other positive descriptors of Manasseh's reign: "Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, these are in the Annals of the Kings of Israel." This account is contrary to the current version of Kings where Manasseh is portrayed as evil and the cause of Israel's exile. This is further evidence for an earlier version of the tradition that was more positive to the kings who were condemned in Kings.

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*Hamath, which had belonged to Judah* (2 Kings 14:28). Occasionally a phrase with a negative or ambiguous connotation may also be included, such as *וְקִשְׁרוֹ אֲשֶׁר קָשָׁר* and *the conspiracy which he conspired* (or, *league which he made* 1 Kings 16:20; 2 Kings 15:15), but overall the association is positive and suggests that the Annals reported favourably about the kings' reigns. Whether it is the case or not that these Annals are one and the same as the Israel source, or whether they were an additional source, there is convincing evidence that there was a record (or records) of the kings of Israel which appraised some or all of them positively, especially the Jehu dynasty, and that the writer of Kings incorporated some of this material into his book. The scholarly consensus is that the book was composed or reached its final Deuteronomistic form during the exile.<sup>52</sup> Whether or not there was a pre-Deuteronomistic version of Kings or not is speculation,<sup>53</sup> however the evidence supports a

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<sup>52</sup> See for example Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 97-99; von Rad, "The Deuteronomistic Theology of History" 155-56; J. G. McConville, "Kings, Book of," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (eds. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M. Williamson; Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2005), 623. Noth's view is that the Deuteronomist rarely re-wrote anything, only glossing his sources. (Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 84-88.) The dominant position in Anglo-Saxon scholarship follows Frank Cross who distinguished between Josianic and exilic redactional layers. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 274-89; Thomas C. Römer, "The Current Discussion on the so-called Deuteronomistic History: Literary Criticism and Theological Consequences," no. 46 (2015): 46-47.

<sup>53</sup> Marvin Sweeney summarises what he considers to be the various "editions" of Kings through its stages of redaction thus: "There is evidence of earlier editions of 1-2 Kings and its role in the Former Prophets. These editions include a final exilic edition of the DtrH from the mid-sixth century B.C.E. that sought to address the problems posed by the Babylonian exile by pointing to the kings of Israel and Judah as a source for divine punishment; a Josianic edition of the DtrH from the late seventh century B.C.E. that sought to identify the sins of the northern kings of Israel as the source for divine punishment and the reigns of the righteous Josiah as the means to address that issue; a Hezekian edition of the DtrH from the late eighth century B.C.E. that sought to explain the suffering of northern Israel based on its inability to produce competent and righteous rulers and to point to Hezekiah as an example of the leadership needed; a Jehu edition of Samuel-Kings from the early eighth century B.C.E. that saw the rise of the house of Jehu as the means to ensure the security of the nation and to restore the past glories of the age of Solomon; and finally a Solomonic edition of Samuel-Kings from the late tenth century B.C.E. that sought to present to house of David as the key to the well-being of the united people of Israel and Judah." (Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 3-4.) Person also notes that the redaction history of the material in Kings spans a long period of

conclusion that a positive appraisal of the kings of Israel was known to the writer(s) of Kings, and this favourable record of the northern kingdom may also have been known to the writer of *Jonah*. Some scholars conclude that the absence of core Deuteronomistic elements in much of Kings means that “Deuteronomistic” is a misnomer for the book. Noll, for example, argues that “During the early stages of its evolution, Kings was a history narrative uninfluenced by Deuteronomy.” He concludes that “The stages of evolution seem reasonably clear and demonstrate that an original work of history that was not Deuteronomistic has begun to interact with Deuteronomy secondarily, as redactional additions moved the scroll away from history and toward what I have called an anthology or ‘reader’ of tales about fallible *nebi'im*. In other words, the scroll that we now call Kings began as a history and ended as a Deuteronomistic text.”<sup>54</sup> The fact that Jonah was a northern prophet does not of itself mean that the writer of *Jonah* was a northerner. However, the choice of a prophet from the north who was spoken of in favourable terms, during the reign of a king who was assessed positively, and who delivered a message of God’s favour to Israel, is significant.

The condemnation of Israel’s kings for their “evil” – which in Deuteronomistic terms almost certainly meant idolatry<sup>55</sup> – further implies the complicity of the people in this

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time and betrays a diversity of theological positions, and which he believes extends into the post-exilic period. (Raymond F. Jr. Person, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Book of Chronicles: Scribal Works in an Oral World* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 2-13.)

<sup>54</sup> Noll, “Is the Book of Kings Deuteronomistic? And Is It a History?,” 49-72 esp. 71.)

<sup>55</sup> The correlation of idolatry with doing evil in the sight of the LORD is well established in texts such as Deuteronomy 4:25 (“if you act corruptly by making an idol in the form of anything, thus doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God”), and Judges 2:11 (“Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and worshiped the Baals” [similarly 3:7; 10:6]). It is well established in scholarship that the book of Kings contains the classic elements of Deuteronomistic theology such as faithfulness to the LORD alone and obedience to the Mosaic covenant. However, Nathan Lovell has observed that the narrative falls into an “Outer Kings” (1 Kings 1:1-16:28; 2 Kings 16:1-25:30) and “Inner Kings” (1 Kings 16:29 – 2 Kings 15:38) and that elements such as the centralization of worship in Jerusalem are absent in Inner Kings. He notes, for example, that “Elijah’s call to repentance involves a sacrifice to Yahweh on Mt. Carmel, which would be illegal by the standards of Deuteronomistic centralisation.” Further, he finds “no apologia, explicit or implicit, for the North

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sinfulness, and therefore a need for repentance. However, this may be a Deuteronomistic emphasis but there is no reason to suppose that it was present in the Israel source. The possibility that the tradition available to the writer of *Jonah* did not condemn the northern kingdom or its kings for any evil associated with idolatry also resolves the question of why Kings does not record any call for Israel to repent in the light of the alleged evil. The only prophets on record in Kings as specifically preaching in the northern kingdom are Elijah, Elisha and Jonah, and Jonah's preaching was notably devoid of any call to repentance (I say "notably" because of his contrasting call to cry out against Nineveh and their subsequent repentance) but rather was a message concerning God's favour to Israel. The specific Jonah tradition, as reflected in Kings, is about an Israel that has the favour of God. Although not mentioned in Kings, Amos was contemporary with Jonah, prophesying in the reign of Jeroboam II (Amos 1:1). While his call to repentance was directed to both Israel and Judah, his prediction of Jeroboam's death by the edge of the sword (Amos 7:9, 11) is at odds with the record of Jeroboam's death in 2 Kings 14:29. I argue in the section "The 'historical Jonah' of 2 Kings 14:25" in chapter 3 that the inclusion of both *Jonah* and Amos in the

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to return to David" and Elijah and Elisha gather around themselves "a very distinctly non-Deuteronomistic community, including not only Northerners but foreigners." He concludes that a key concern of the book of Kings is that the Judean community in exile – without access to a temple, a David king, or a centralised cult – have the possibility of true worship. (Nathan Lovell, "Structure and Theology in Kings: Exilic Theology Explored through Literary Intercalation" (paper presented at International Organisation for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT) Conference. Stellenbosch, South Africa, 2016), 12-14.) Scholarship is becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the notions of Deuteronomism or that the book of Kings forms part of a Deuteronomistic History. See Richard J Coggins, "What Does 'Deuteronomistic' Mean?," in *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism* (eds. L. S. Schearing and S. L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 268; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 22-35; A. Graeme Auld, *Kings Without Privilege: David and Moses in the Story of the Bible's Kings* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 150-54; A. Graeme Auld, "The Deuteronomists and the Former Prophets, or What Makes the Former Prophets Deuteronomistic?," in *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism* (eds. L. S. Schearing and S. L. McKenzie; 268; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 116-126; Gary N. Knoppers, "Rethinking the Relationship between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History: the case of Kings," *CBQ* 63, no. 3 (2001): 393-415.

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Twelve is evidence that the Twelve was part of a dialogue, with conflicting views and opposing voices. I argue that *Jonah* may voice the concerns of a party which was familiar with the tradition behind Kings which did not condemn the northern kings and did not see a need for repentance of the type called for in the Deuteronomistic literature (such as in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple, 1 Kings 8:46-50). The concerns of the book suggest that the writer is engaged in a dialogue at a time when a Deuteronomistic version of Israel's history was gaining prominence, and that the writer was familiar with both the pre-Deuteronomistic traditions, and the Deuteronomistic perspective. The writer may have seen a disjuncture between the more positive tradition of Israel as a nation "under God" which was in a covenant-relationship with him, and the historical reality that they were treated harshly by a nation known for its evils. The writer of *Jonah* approves of the earlier tradition and his purpose is to critique the Deuteronomistic reframing of history, especially in the light of a belief that God sometimes shows compassion to his covenant people without their repentance.

I argue that *Jonah* reflects this sense of injustice, especially in Jonah's despair when he learns that God has relented and evil Nineveh will be spared. Behind Jonah's despair, and known to the story's initial audience, are the questions of divine justice and theodicy which are concerned with why God not only allowed Israel to suffer at the hands of the Assyrians, but treated Nineveh with more compassion than his own people.

### **Translation**

The Hebrew text used throughout this thesis is the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) unless otherwise indicated (such as from the Dead Sea Scrolls). I take responsibility for all translations as my own, unless indicated otherwise, although I generally follow the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV). As a general rule if I deviate from the NRSV I

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provide a reason for my preferred translation, such as when a more literal translation is needed, or for consistency. By ‘consistency’, I mean, for example, when comparing texts which use the same Hebrew word or root but where the NRSV uses different words in its English translation, I will generally use the same English word in both places to highlight the similarity or identity in Hebrew terminology.



## Chapter 1: The problem of the conclusion to Jonah

וְאֵיךְ לֹא אֶחָדִים עַל־נִינְוֶה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה

Regardless of how one reads *Jonah* the story ends suddenly, abruptly and surprisingly, perhaps even unsatisfactorily. How we read the conclusion may be determined by how we have read the story to that point, or the nature of the conclusion may compel the reader to re-read the story in a new light. So I begin where the story ends. Recent scholarship has challenged the reading of the final line of *Jonah* as a rhetorical question and understands it instead to be a declaration by God that he will *not* be concerned about Nineveh. This reading has been resisted by some who argue that it would make little sense for the book to end on a negative note that God does not care about people who repent. Instead, they read the story as a message about God's universal concern for all people, a reading which is governed by their understanding of the thematic concerns of the book rather than the grammatical considerations. In this chapter I question whether it is better, or even legitimate, to decide on the overall message of the book and then to interpret difficult phrasing in the story from that perspective. I argue instead that the overall message and themes should be determined by first resolving the difficulties, and begin by examining the grammatical issues to determine which of the interrogatory or declarative readings has the stronger case.

### **The grammatical and syntactical issues**

The book of *Jonah* is one of only two (or possibly three) biblical books which, in most English translations, end with a question.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The other books to end with a question are Nahum, which interestingly also deals with the subject of Nineveh, although it appears to handle the matter quite differently, and, in some translations, Lamentations (such as the *Revised Standard Version* and the NET as an alternative reading in a footnote). Similar to *Jonah*, as Robert Gordis puts it, "the closing verse in Lamentations is crucial for the meaning and spirit of the entire poem."



declaratory reading: *but I will not show pity on Nineveh*. Targum Jonathan similarly follows the MT with an Aramaic rendering which is semantically equivalent to the Hebrew, and lacking interrogatory markers: וְאֵינָא לָא אַחֵיס עַל נִינְוָה. The Vulgate does not use any interrogative markers either with *et ego non parcam Nineve* although the Douay-Rheims English translation of the Vulgate frames it as a question *And shall I not spare Ninive ...?* An indication of how a rhetorical question can be marked in Greek and Latin can be seen in how the translations deal with the question in Daniel 3:24 (3:91 LXX). The MT has הֲלֹא גִבְרִין הֲלֹא מְכַפְתִּין לְגֹאֲנֵרָא מְכַפְתִּין *did we not throw three men bound into the fire?* with the question being marked by הֲלֹא. While the Old Greek lacks this phrase, Theodotion's Greek text does not use the negative οὐ (as in Jonah 4:11) but rather uses οὐχί which Muraoka says is "positioned at the very beginning of a sentence which expects an affirmative answer."<sup>3</sup> The use of οὐ rather than οὐχί at the beginning of the sentence in Jonah 4:11 therefore suggests that the Greek translators most likely did not read it as a rhetorical question.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in the Vulgate while *non* can be used with rhetorical questions, *nonne* would be the more likely term to be used to introduce a question expecting an affirmative answer.<sup>5</sup> It is strange that Phyllis Tribble should say "All the versions rightly understood this sentence to be an interrogative although the Hebrew indicates it in no special way"<sup>6</sup> when, in fact, the ancient versions either do not understand it to be an interrogative, or, like the Hebrew, they do not indicate it in any special way.

Interestingly, and relevant to whether one should interpret this verse interrogatively, Jerome does not translate the two uses of חֵסֶם in Jonah 4:10-11 consistently. He translates the

<sup>3</sup> T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven [Belgium]: Peeters, 2009), 515.

<sup>4</sup> οὐ can be used with questions, but that is not the usual meaning. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 511, citing Jonah 4:11.

<sup>5</sup> P. G. W. Glare ed, *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 1189.

<sup>6</sup> Tribble, "Studies in the Book of 'Jonah'," 57.

first occurrence *על־הקיקיון חָסַתָּ אֶתָּהּ* in 4:10 as *tu doles super hederam* - *you grieved for the plant* - while translating *על־נינְוָה לֹא אֶחַס אֶתָּהּ* in 4:11 as *et ego non parcam Nineve* – *and I will not spare Nineveh*.<sup>7</sup> With respect to Jonah the verb *חָסַתָּ* in the Latin translation has the sense of *grieving* while with respect to God it conveys the idea of *sparing*, suggesting compassion or leniency. “The problem with this translation is that the ‘final question’ becomes something of a syllogism: it does not follow that because Jonah is concerned and dejected about the loss of the plant from which he benefitted that Yhwh must necessarily feel compassion for Nineveh.”<sup>8</sup> This raises the question of whether the apposition of *על־הקיקיון חָסַתָּ אֶתָּהּ* and *נֹאֲנִי לֹא אֶחַס* is meant to compare or contrast Jonah’s *חָסַתָּ* with God’s, and if the *waw* between them is disjunctive: *you are concerned about the plant but I will not be concerned about Nineveh*. I will discuss why a syllogistic reading of these verses is a considerable problem later in this chapter when I consider the *a fortiori* argument that if Jonah can pity a mere plant, how much the more so will God pity Nineveh.

In the absence of interrogatory markers, we should question an interrogatory reading over a statement that *I will not be concerned about Nineveh*. The omission of interrogatory markers does not necessarily disqualify an interrogative interpretation as the presence of unmarked questions is attested in Biblical Hebrew. Joüon-Muraoka note that “the omission of the interrogative *ה* is common after *ו* introducing an opposition” and add that “this type of sentence is particularly frequent with a pronoun, and surprised, rhetorical question,” citing

<sup>7</sup> The Septuagint translates *על־הקיקיון חָסַתָּ אֶתָּהּ* in Jonah 4:10 as *Σὺ ἐφείσω ὑπὲρ τῆς κολοκύνθης* and *נֹאֲנִי לֹא אֶחַס* in 4:11 as *ἐγὼ δὲ οὐ φείσομαι ὑπὲρ Νινευῆ*, in both lines using the verb *φείδομαι* *to spare*. Emulating Jerome in thinking that the Hebrew can have two distinct meanings using the same verb Sasson translates *אֶתָּהּ חָסַתָּ* as “you yourself were fretting over the *qiqayon* plant” and *על־נינְוָה לֹא אֶחַס* as “yet I myself am not to have compassion on Nineveh?” Sasson, *Jonah*, 300.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine L. Muldoon, *In Defense of Divine Justice: An Intertextual Approach to the Book of Jonah* (CBQMS 47; Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2010), 146.

nine examples (including Jonah 4:11).<sup>9</sup> Albert Kamp contends that similar constructs with *qatal* verbs followed by a *yiqtol* verb and connected by a ׀ provide evidence for the rhetorical character of this verse.<sup>10</sup> There are several questions scattered through the book of *Jonah* and all are marked in the usual ways with the interrogative particle ׀, or with the usual interrogative particles. The use of the interrogative ׀ in Biblical Hebrew is optional, and, if there is no other interrogative (such as ׀ה, ׀י or ׀מה) “one can determine only by context whether a sentence is a question.”<sup>11</sup> “The interrogative particles are not necessary; a question of fact need not be specially marked. Its character as a question was presumably signalled in speech by a change in intonation.”<sup>12</sup> Gesenius cites Jonah 4:11 as an example of the “natural emphasis upon the words” being regarded as sufficient to indicate an interrogative sentence, especially when the interrogative clause is connected with a preceding sentence by ׀.<sup>13</sup> While the interrogative ׀ is “sometimes” prefixed to the negative ׀ל to introduce a *rhetorical* question,<sup>14</sup> it is absent in Jonah 4:11. Commenting on a similar problem in 1 Samuel 11:12, Samuel Driver wrote: “The sense of the words is indicated by the tone in which they are

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<sup>9</sup> Judges 14:16; 11:23; 2 Samuel 11:11; Isaiah 37:11; Jeremiah 25:29; 45:5; 49:12; Ezekiel 20:31; Jonah 4:11. Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto biblico, 2006), §161a.

<sup>10</sup> Albert H. Kamp, *Inner Worlds: a Cognitive-Linguistic Approach to the Book of Jonah*. (trans. David Orton; Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 109 n.39.

<sup>11</sup> Duane A. Garrett and Jason Shane DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2009), 42.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Eisenbrauns, 1990), 316 n.1.

<sup>13</sup> Wilhelm Gesenius, et al., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (2nd English ed.; Oxford: The Clarendon press, 1910), 473. Gesenius' claim that the ׀ prefix is sufficient here to indicate a rhetorical question requires further examination beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>14</sup> Garrett and DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, 42.

uttered – either affirmatively, in a tone of irony, or, more probably, interrogatively.”<sup>15</sup> On similar constructs he wrote “the interrogation is indicated by the tone of the voice.”<sup>16</sup>

Commenting on 2 Samuel 11:11 אֶל-בֵּיתִי אָבוֹא וְאָנִי אָבוֹא *Shall I enter into my house?* – a text with a similar construct – Driver notes the similarity to Jonah 4:11 and says “the juxtaposition of two incongruous ideas, aided by the tone in which the words are pronounced, betoken surprise, and so suggesting a question.”<sup>17</sup> Driver does not explain how a reader could determine the “tone of voice” or the manner in which the words were intended to be pronounced by the authors. His comments, however, highlight that we cannot resolve *grammatically* whether such phrases should be translated as declaratives or interrogatives, and that the juxtaposition of incongruous ideas could suggest *irony*.

Hans Wolff argues that the *tone* of Jonah 4:11 demands that it should be read as a question:

The interrogative pronoun can be omitted in rhetorical questions; the context, the link with the previous sentence by way of the ך, and the *speech modulation* make it clear that the sentence is a question” (my italics).<sup>18</sup>

Norman Snaith too regards the interrogative “to be understood, presumably indicated by the tone of the voice.”<sup>19</sup> Neither, however, explain how one determines speech modulation or the tone of the voice from a written text. Ehud Ben Zvi notes that:

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<sup>15</sup> Driver was commenting on whether to translate אֶל-בֵּיתִי אָבוֹא וְאָנִי אָבוֹא as “Shall Saul reign over us?” or “Saul shall reign over us.” S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel* (Second ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 87.

<sup>16</sup> Commenting on אָבוֹא בְּשָׁלֵם (‘‘Do you come in peace?’’) in 1 Samuel 16:4. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, 133.

<sup>17</sup> Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, 289.

<sup>18</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 161.

<sup>19</sup> Norman H. Snaith, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of Jonah* (London: The Epworth Press, 1945), 40.

it is widely assumed that [unmarked] questions were marked by intonation in oral speech, but what about written texts? How to read them, with what intonation? The answer, of course, depends on what the readers think the text is saying and, to decide that, they depend on both the text before and the world of knowledge that informs and shapes their readings.<sup>20</sup>

While it may be true that the interrogative pronoun can be omitted in rhetorical questions, Wolff simply asserts that Jonah 4:11 is one and does not give a reason why the verse *must* be read this way.<sup>21</sup> The mere absence of the interrogative pronoun is not a compelling reason to insist on it being a rhetorical question, and he does not even discuss the possibility of reading it as a statement. His appeal to context is strange given that on the next

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<sup>20</sup> Ehud Ben Zvi, "Jonah 4:11 and the Metaphoric Character of the Book of Jonah," *JHS* 9, no. 5 (2009): 7. Saul Levin, however, argues that the custom in Israel was to read aloud, that the ancient Israelites are not known to have ever read silently, and that the written consonantal text was at first treated as a skeletal mnemonic device to help in reciting the full oral text. The written text was therefore an auxiliary to the oral reading. He thus further argues that any errors which may have been made in copying manuscripts, could have been corrected in their oral transmission – "Don't read this; read so-and-so" – and that this process accounts for the development of the distinction between *Qere* and *Ketiv* and the compulsory adherence to *Qere* in the liturgy of the synagogue. Levin claims that in the first half of the third century CE teachers were paid for showing people how to read the Hebrew Bible, including how to pronounce the words and how to give different accents or tones to the words. It could be inferred from this that the tone of voice which indicated a question which was not otherwise marked was transmitted orally, at least until the time when the Masoretes committed the reading tradition to written form. It could be argued that with the consequent dependence on a pointed text which noted the *Qere* in a written form there was less of a need to rely on oral transmission with a consequent impact on any tradition of modulation and intonation (Saul Levin, "The 'Qeri' as the Primary Text of the Hebrew Bible," *General Linguistics* 35, no. 1 (1997): 181-223.) Emanuel Tov refers to the view held by Levin and others that the *Qere* tradition originated in the reading tradition, but notes Gordis' position that "scribes at first wrote marginal corrections, but later this type of notation was also used for denoting optional variants, which in due course became obligatory" (Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 54-62, quotation from 58.) James Barr holds a similar view to Levin, arguing that because one never finds more than one *Qere* word in a manuscript this naturally points to a reading tradition rather than optional variants (James Barr, "A New Look at Kethibh-Qere," *OTS* 21 (1981): 19-37.)

<sup>21</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 161, 174.

page he refers to this dialogue as being “full of racy *satire*” (his italics) and irony, and yet he does not consider the possibility that in a context *full* of satire and irony this sentence could be read as a satirical or ironic asseverative.

If we accept the NRSV translation of  $\text{סָחַח}$  as *concerned about*, a declarative translation might read “I will not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city ...” or words to that effect. While the conclusion to the book of *Jonah* is translated in most English versions as a question, the NJPS is somewhat ambiguous in that it uses an exclamation rather than a question mark.

And should not I care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!

The grammar and syntax of this translation, however, regardless of the exclamation mark, makes it practically unavoidable to read this any other way than as question. The practical effect of the exclamation mark here emphasises that it is to be read as a *rhetorical* question and, just as an answer to a rhetorical question is not required, it appears that the translators thought the question mark was not required either. Waltke and O’Connor, however, note that exclamatory questions must be recognised from context, but usually follow a pattern of having the interrogatory pronoun  $\text{מִי}$  accompanied by a “non-perfective” verb, and the sense is desiderative, expressing a desire to do the act denoted by the root verb.<sup>22</sup> So, for example, in 2 Samuel 23:15  $\text{מִי יִשְׁקֵנִי מַיִם}$  with the interrogatory pronoun  $\text{מִי}$  could read as a question *Who will give me water to drink?* but is translated in the NRSV as an exclamatory *O that someone would give me water to drink!* The Hebrew of Jonah 4:11 does not follow this pattern for an exclamatory question and, in my view, the NJPS translation is therefore questionable.

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<sup>22</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 321.



The NJPS translation of Jonah 4:11 is novel, but somewhat clumsy in that the phrase *should not I* more naturally precedes a question than an exclamation. It is probable that the translators are somehow trying to capture the uncertainty of the Hebrew which lacks any clear interrogative markers, while their preferred translation has the sense of a rhetorical question. On the one hand, for a reader who is concurrently following the Hebrew text along with the English translation, the NJPS translation is a clever way of drawing their attention to the fact that while the translation reads as a rhetorical question the Hebrew lacks the interrogatory markers. On the other hand, a reader who is unfamiliar with the Hebrew may find the replacement of the question mark with an exclamation mark as somewhat ungrammatical and, therefore, jarring. In my view, the NJPS translation is somewhat clever while also confusing, and therefore an unsatisfactory solution to the problem of whether to render the Hebrew into English as a question or statement.

There is a consensus amongst scholars who read it as a question that it is to be understood as a *rhetorical* question, and such questions are well attested in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern cultures.<sup>23</sup> The function of rhetorical questions is not so much to *gain* information but rather “to *give* information with passion” (my emphasis).<sup>24</sup> They “are not asked, and are not understood, as ordinary information-seeking questions but as making some kind of claim, or assertion, an assertion of the opposite polarity to that of the question.”<sup>25</sup> Wolff says of Jonah 4:11 that “as a rhetorical question it is an intensified assertion” which calls for the reader’s agreement. The nature of rhetorical questions is to assert the opposite of what they ask, so that a question framed as a negative, such as “should I

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<sup>23</sup> For a list of examples from both the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern texts see Ben Zvi, “Jonah 4:11,” 5.

<sup>24</sup> Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 322.

<sup>25</sup> Irene Koshik, *Beyond Rhetorical Questions: Assertive Questions in Everyday Interaction* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2005), 2.

*not* be concerned for Nineveh?” is answered in the affirmative; yes, you should be concerned.<sup>26</sup> Wolff seems to be at odds with himself, however, in that he said earlier “since the final question (v. 11) is *left open*, the reader sees himself in the end challenged to think about the problem and to find his own answers” (my italics).<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to see how the question could be both “left open” and be an “intensified assertion” at the same time. Rhetorical questions by their very nature are assertive and not “open.” If the conclusion to *Jonah* is a question it is either rhetorical or “open” – it cannot be both – or it is not a question at all.<sup>28</sup>

Commenting on a possibly similar case where there is some uncertainty about whether a verse should be understood as a question or a declarative, John Wiebe has argued that Esther 4:14 should be read as an interrogative apodosis of a conditional statement. His conclusions are relevant to the question of how to determine if an unmarked phrase is interrogatory or declarative. After noting that in Biblical Hebrew interrogative clauses need not be introduced by any particle at all, Wiebe further notes that “theoretically, one can take any clause and construe it as an interrogative if the context allows for it.”<sup>29</sup> The final verse of *Jonah* is grammatically ambiguous and we simply cannot determine the intonation or speech

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<sup>26</sup> Koshik calls them “Reversed Polarity Questions.” A feature of negative rhetorical questions is that they have the force of a positive assertion, and a positive rhetorical question that of a negative assertion. Koshik, *Beyond Rhetorical Questions: Assertive Questions in Everyday Interaction*; Ben Zvi, “Jonah 4:11,” 6.

<sup>27</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 162.

<sup>28</sup> Ben Zvi defends the validity of reading the final verse as a rhetorical question, while recognising that an asseverative reading is grammatically and syntactically possible. While he accepts that either reading is possible, he also asserts that it “can only be understood as a rhetorical question.” In fact, he contends that to some extent the ambiguity may be intentional as “rhetorical questions in sophisticated literary texts may play on multiple layers of meanings and lack of certainty, and they may be used as both assertions and interrogatives at the same time.” Ben Zvi, “Jonah 4:11,” 2-5.

<sup>29</sup> John M. Wiebe, “Esther 4:14: Will Relief and Deliverance Arise for the Jews from Another Place?,” *CBQ* 53, no. 3 (1991): 414.

modulation from a written text. As Wiebe has observed, whether it should be read as a question or a statement can only be determined by context.

### The contextual issues

To resolve the matter we must analyse the immediate context. Some scholars have challenged the common reading on grammatical and contextual grounds and have argued that it should be read as a declarative statement.<sup>30</sup> The first scholar of recent times to propose a declarative reading was Alan Cooper who argued that the *a fortiori* reading of Jonah 4:10-11 makes no sense, calling it a specious analogy. An *a fortiori* reading is basically the same as the rabbinical principle of interpretation known as קל וחומר the first rule of Hillel and of Rabbi Ishmael, that if something applies in a less important matter it will apply even more so in an important one.<sup>31</sup> Applied to Jonah 4:10-11 the point would be that if Jonah was concerned about a simple plant *how much more* should God be concerned for a large city. Cooper argues against such a reading on the basis that it would contrast Jonah's self-absorption with God's magnanimity, which suggests that God likes big things more than little things, or that people have no right to grieve for things they did not make or plant themselves, and inevitably calls for the adoption of the "preposterous idea that God was responsible for

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<sup>30</sup> Including Alan Cooper, "In Praise of Divine Caprice: The Significance of the Book of Jonah," in *Among the Prophets: Language, Image, and Structure in the Prophetic Writings* (eds. Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines; Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993); Guillaume, "The End of Jonah is the Beginning of Wisdom.," Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*; Muldoon, *In Defense of Divine Justice*. For an interpretation which allows for both readings, interrogatory and declarative concurrently, see Ben Zvi, "Jonah 4:11."

<sup>31</sup> Muldoon (following Louis Jacobs) notes that although the קל וחומר rule is a typical rabbinical method of interpretation, they do not generally identify Jonah 4:10-11 as an instance of this type of argument. Muldoon, *In Defense of Divine Justice*, 144 n.90; Louis Jacobs, "The Qal Va-Homer Argument in the Old Testament," *BSOAS* 35, no. 2 (1972): 221-27.

the construction of Nineveh, and might regret its loss for that reason.”<sup>32</sup> He argues that the point of the contrast is that Jonah rightly cared about the plant, but God did not. After all, he destroyed it as quickly as he had caused it to grow, and for no apparently good reason except to cause Jonah grief. He says the interrogatory reading is “neither necessary nor inevitable” and adopts a declarative reading because the interrogatory “flies in the face of the parallelism.” The implication of the declarative reading is that “God cares no more about that huge city full of ignoramuses and beasts than he had about the *qîqāyôn*. Their repentance means nothing to him, and he has kept his real reason for sparing them (if, indeed, he had one) to himself.” I agree with Cooper’s argument and his conclusions. His stated preference for this interpretation is based on reading *Jonah* in the light of *Nahum*, and this relationship will be explored later in this thesis.<sup>33</sup>

Carey Walsh also sees considerable problems with reading these verses as an *a fortiori* argument of some kind.

It would be a stretch to see in his utilitarian outburst as anything resembling pity. Verse 10 yields the rather infelicitous portrait of Yhwh misreading his own prophet and then crafting a straw-man argument from it! Second, it posits that divine pity is scaled to size, and that determined by a recalcitrant prophet. Whatever the lessons about divine mercy, it is unlikely that the literati considered it tethered to a prophet (or prophecy). Third, the presumption of divine compassion here is in direct contradiction to preceding actions, where Yhwh has just killed a plant and scorched Jonah (vv. 7–8). While divine mercy is mentioned in v. 2 as a part of the divine attribute tradition, there is no actual demonstration of it in chap. 4. In fact, at the end, Jonah and the plant are left completely bereft of

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<sup>32</sup> Cooper, “In Praise of Divine Caprice,” 157.

<sup>33</sup> Cooper, “In Praise of Divine Caprice,” 158.

divine care, as Yhwh continues talking (vv. 10–11). Their abandonment by Yhwh has rather ominous implications for Nineveh.<sup>34</sup>

George Landes, observing that Cooper was “almost alone among modern scholars” on this point, also notes that “the usual understanding of it [Jonah 4:11] as a question does not resolve any of the problems” while reading it as a statement “does offer some intriguing though not ultimately satisfying possibilities.”<sup>35</sup> Opting for a declarative reading, according to Landes, confirms “what everyone reading the book of Jonah in the postexilic period knows, namely that Nineveh was destroyed with no signs of revival” and explains the “parable” of the קִיָּיִן as the plant’s ultimate purpose being its destruction, foreshadowing the final demise of Nineveh. “The point of the book, then, is not that God is capricious and unpredictable [*pace* Cooper], but on the contrary, that the deity is always faithful to the divine word, and the word is reliable. Adherents must only be patient and trustful.”<sup>36</sup> In the end, Landes opts for a reading consistent with a theological interpretation which has its basis in assumptions about the necessity and sufficiency of repentance.

Cooper’s declarative reading was taken up by Phillippe Guillaume who acknowledged his valuable contribution to understanding *Jonah* by saying that “apart from Alan Cooper, every one agrees that the book of Jonah ends with a rhetorical question” and then, in two articles, he argued in defence of Cooper against the interrogatory reading.<sup>37</sup> He approaches

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<sup>34</sup> Carey Walsh, “The Metaphoric God of Jonah,” in *History, Memory, Hebrew Scriptures: A Festschrift for Ehud Ben Zvi* (eds. Diane Gersoni-Edelman and Ian Douglas Wilson; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 270.

<sup>35</sup> George M. Landes, “Textual 'Information Gaps' and 'Dissonances' in the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah,” in *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine* (eds. Lawrence H. Schiffman, et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 291.

<sup>36</sup> Landes, “Dissonances,” 291.

<sup>37</sup> Guillaume, “The End of Jonah is the Beginning of Wisdom,” 243-50; Phillippe Guillaume, “Rhetorical Reading Redundant: A Response to Ehud Ben Zvi,” *JHS* 9, no. 6 (2009): 2-9.

the subject first grammatically, concluding that “either reading makes sense, but the choice impacts the understanding of the whole book.”<sup>38</sup> Having first noted that the presence of unmarked questions is well attested in the Hebrew Bible, Guillaume further notes that their identification generally presents no particular problem because an answer to the question will be evident within the immediate context. He then goes on to cite Jonah 4:11 as a case where a reply is missing and where its reading as a question or a statement has a significant impact on the overall meaning of the passage. He posits that “the straight-forward reading of the end of *Jonah* solves several contentious points within the book.”<sup>39</sup> Like Landes, Guillaume sees the destruction of the קִיקְיוֹן as foreshadowing the overturning of Nineveh.<sup>40</sup>

The sun that kills the plant and nearly kills Jonah illustrates the point in a vivid way. The issue is when Nineveh will be destroyed not whether it will be spared. The destruction of Nineveh is as certain as that of the *qiqayon*. The plant survived one night. Nineveh was granted a reprieve but YHWH states in no ambiguous terms “I will not spare Nineveh.”

Carolyn Sharp comes to a similar conclusion that although the absence of a direct flag of interrogation is not unusual in biblical Hebrew syntax, here “in this most ironic of prophetic books” a straightforward declaration would mirror the “thunderous divine negative” לֹא אֶחְיֶה I *will not spare* that occurs elsewhere in the prophetic corpus, most notably in a dense cluster in Ezekiel.<sup>41</sup> “Readers may postulate an unmarked interrogative here, but the semantic pressures from other prophetic usages render this a complicated utterance at best

<sup>38</sup> Guillaume, “The End of Jonah is the Beginning of Wisdom,” 244.

<sup>39</sup> Guillaume, “The End of Jonah is the Beginning of Wisdom,” 246.

<sup>40</sup> Guillaume, “Rhetorical Reading Redundant: A Response to Ehud Ben Zvi,” 2-3.

<sup>41</sup> In the negative form לֹא אֶחְיֶה Ezekiel 5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:10; 16:5; 24:14. Also Jeremiah 13:14; 21:7; Isaiah 13:18; Deuteronomy 19:13, 21; 25:12.

... Throughout the prophetic corpus, this expression, *lō'āhûs*, is coherent only in the implacable negation of its possibility."<sup>42</sup>

Catherine Muldoon acknowledges that she follows Cooper and Guillaume and foregoes the traditional interrogative rendering with her translation: *But I will not be concerned over Nineveh*. She comments that “for many commentators, to read 4:11 as a statement is theologically untenable”<sup>43</sup> but the concluding verses “make a strong, even terrifying, statement about Yhwh, but one which is necessary if Jonah – and the book’s readers – are to place their confidence in a deity who is both merciful *and* just.”<sup>44</sup> I agree with these scholars – Cooper, Guillaume, Sharp and Muldoon – that while Jonah 4:11 may be grammatically ambiguous the most straightforward reading of the Hebrew would be to read it as a declaration rather than a question, and that such a reading is consistent with, and in my view demanded by, the immediate context.

### The parallel structure of the concluding verses

The final two verses exhibit features of a parallelism. The most obvious indication of a possible parallelism is the repetition of the verb *חוס*, although in different forms, first as a *qatal* in verse 10 (*חָסַתָּ*) and then as a *yiqtol* in verse 11 (*אֶחֹס*).

אַתָּה חָסַתָּ עַל־הַקִּיקָיוֹן

וְאֲנִי לֹא אֶחֹס עַל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה

<sup>42</sup> Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 184.

<sup>43</sup> Muldoon, *In Defense of Divine Justice*, 141.

<sup>44</sup> Muldoon, *In Defense of Divine Justice*, 148-49.

Most translations translate the two forms of the verb consistently: for example, NRSV has *concerned*, NJPS has *cared/care*, and ESV has *pity*. Others, possibly following the lead of the Vulgate,<sup>45</sup> use different words: KJV has *thou hast had pity ... should I not spare*, NET has *you were upset about ... should I not be even more concerned*. The KJV's *spare* may have been influenced by the Septuagint which has the verb φείδομαι *to spare* in both places. The translation *pity* gives a false impression about Jonah's feelings, for reasons I will discuss, while *troubled about*<sup>46</sup> works better in the context. In striving for a consistent translation Wolff suggests that in the first occurrence Jonah is described as having a *compassionate grief* for the plant and in this way the writer "displays his skillful use of irony. For he actually means the very opposite of what Yahweh says: Jonah is not really suffering with the withered plant at all; he is simply missing his own comfort."<sup>47</sup> I agree with Wolff's assessment that the writer is using irony, for reasons which will be discussed later, and propose that an ironic reading should extend to the final verse as well. Jonah was troubled because of the plant incident; the parallel phrase relates to whether God was *troubled* about Nineveh.

The word *לֹא אֶחָזֵק* appears frequently in Ezekiel, often with the negative particle - *לֹא אֶחָזֵק* as in Jonah 4:11 – where God says *I will not be concerned* for Israel.<sup>48</sup> In Ezekiel 24:14, for example, there is a triple emphasis on the fact that God has turned his back on Israel: "I will not go back, *לֹא אֶחָזֵק*, *I will not be concerned*, I will not relent."<sup>49</sup> This frequent usage in the Hebrew Bible suggests that *לֹא אֶחָזֵק* has a similar meaning in both Ezekiel and *Jonah*, namely that God is not concerned about Israel (in Ezekiel) or about Nineveh (in *Jonah*). The two uses

<sup>45</sup> As earlier discussed, the Latin Vulgate translates the first occurrence *עַל־הַקִּיקִיּוֹן* in 4:10 as *tu doles super hederam* while translating *עַל־נִינְוֶה* in 4:11 as *et ego non parcam Nineve*.

<sup>46</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Study ed.; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 298.

<sup>47</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 173.

<sup>48</sup> In the negative form *לֹא אֶחָזֵק* Ezekiel 5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:10; 16:5; 24:14

<sup>49</sup> The writer of Ezekiel also uses another word in this verse which is significant in *Jonah* – *נָחַם* – to relent.



of חוס in Jonah 4:10-11 suggests an antithetic parallelism: *You were concerned ... but I am not concerned.*

A further indicator that we are dealing here with a parallelism is the occurrence of גדל which in this dialogue occurs first as a negated verb וְלֹא גִדְּלֵתוּ and *you did not make grow* and then adjectively describing Nineveh as הַגְּדוֹלָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה *the great city* – an expression occurring repeatedly throughout the story – “in which there are more than 120,000 persons.”<sup>50</sup> Even though the root occurs in two forms, as a verb (v.10) and subsequently as an adjective (v.11), the parallelism is striking as the *piel* verbal form is unusual in biblical Hebrew when describing the growth of a *plant*<sup>51</sup> and attention would therefore be drawn to it. The phrase reads most naturally as a statement that Jonah did not contribute in any way to the growth of the plant or to cause it to become גדול, whatever גדול means in that context.<sup>52</sup> The use of rare or unusual forms such as בֶּן-לַיְלָה literally *son of a night* or *one night old*<sup>53</sup> and בֵּין-יְמִינוֹ לְשִׁמְאֹלוֹ *between his right hand and his left* could be an indication that the writer is ‘playing’ with בֵּין and בֶּן as part of a parallelism.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> The Hebrew expression for “120,000” is also unusual. Although this number occurs elsewhere (Judges 8:10; 1 Kings 8:63; 1 Chron 12:37; 2 Chron 7:5) it is expressed there as מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים אֲלֶף. The term מִשְׁתַּיִם-עֶשְׂרֵה רַבּוֹ is unique to *Jonah*. The intention may have been for a wordplay on רַבּוֹ and הַרְבֵּה (*more than*), and רַבָּה (*many*) in the same verse.

<sup>51</sup> When God causes plants to grow the verb צָמַח is more typically used, as in Genesis 2:9.

<sup>52</sup> The only other place where גדל in the *piel* stem is used in the Hebrew Bible for the growth of a plant is, significantly, in Ezekiel 31:4, a text which uses the cedar as a metaphor describing the growth and then destruction of Assyria, and the significance of this usage will be discussed later in this thesis when I analyse inner-biblical allusions.

<sup>53</sup> Meaning, grown up in one night. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 138.

<sup>54</sup> בֶּן-לַיְלָה occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible. Sasson acknowledges that it could be an incorrect transmission and should be וְבֵין ... בֵּין and says “many Hebrew manuscripts” have this reading (citing Trible). Trible cites Kennicott and de Rossi saying “over 50 ms” have a preposition rather the noun *son*. (Sasson, *Jonah*, 313; Trible, “Studies in the Book of ‘Jonah’,” 56-7.) Gesenius notes that בֶּן- for *son* is also rare, occurring only in Deuteronomy 25:2, Proverbs 30:1, twice in Jonah 4:10, and always in the combination בֶּן-נוֹן, and in the proper name בְּנֵי-מִן. (Gesenius, et al., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, § 96, 285.) The occurrence of בֵּין-יְמִינוֹ in v.11 and its similarity to בְּנֵי-מִן may be insignificant, although the intriguing fact that all the left-handed people in the

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶתְּהָ חֶסֶתְ עַל־הַקִּיקַיִוֹן

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָמְלָתָ בּוֹ וְלֹא גִדְלָתוּ

שְׁבוּנֵי־לַיְלָה הִנֵּה וּבֹנֵי־לַיְלָה אָבָד:

וַאֲנִי לֹא אֶחֹס עַל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה

אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבֶּה הַרְבֵּה מִשְׁתִּים־עֲשָׂרָה רַבּוֹ אָדָם

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע בֵּין־יָמֵינוּ לְשִׁמְאֵלוֹ וּבִהְמָה רַבָּה:

Set out in this way<sup>55</sup> the first lines in each verse juxtapose the keywords חוס and גדל, and the four other lines all begin with אֲשֶׁר (or its equivalent שְׁ in line 3<sup>56</sup>). Although he finds

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Bible were from the tribe of Benjamin (*son of the right hand*) could be the reason the writer is using a term with a phonetic resemblance to בְּנֵי־מִן to comically play with the idea that the Ninevites did not know one hand from another, as the Benjaminites did not know they ‘should be’ right-handed. The possibility of this being a deliberate wordplay is strengthened by the mention in 1 Chronicles 12:2 of Benjaminites being ambidextrous using the similar phrase מִיְמִינֵיהֶם וּמִשְׁמָאלֵיהֶם *either the right hand or the left*: “They were archers, and could shoot arrows and sling stones with either the right hand or the left; they were Benjaminites, Saul’s kindred.” As the phrase in Jonah 4:10 contains two unusual forms (שְׁ and בֵּין־) it is also possible the writer has borrowed a common or proverbial saying, perhaps from Phoenician (especially as the other uses of שְׁ in *Jonah* are in the context of conversations with Phoenician sailors [see my footnote on שְׁ below]), meaning “came in a night, gone in a night” which I suggest is similar to the English expression “easy come, easy go.”

<sup>55</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 308.

<sup>56</sup> שְׁ is used three times in *Jonah*. Holmstedt and Kirk argue that שְׁ is most likely a foreign term employed for the sake of the story with the obvious source being Phoenician (due to the sailors most likely being Phoenician). The variation of אֲשֶׁר and the Phoenician-based שְׁ in *Jonah* is a case of code-switching which “signals the author’s view that Yhwh does not exclusively belong to (or care for) the Hebrew people.” Elsewhere Kirk calls this “a linguistic subversion of Jonah’s theological assumptions.” They admit, however, that their explanation of literary code-switching in *Jonah* does not necessarily explain the occurrences of שְׁ elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, with one exception in 2 Kings 6:11. (Robert D. Holmstedt and Alexander T. Kirk, “Subversive Boundary Drawing in Jonah: The Variation of אֲשֶׁר and שְׁ as Literary Code-Switching,” *VT* 66.4 (2016): 542-55; Alexander T. Kirk, “Speaking Like Sailors: The Use of שְׁ and אֲשֶׁר as Colored Speech in Jonah” (paper presented at Upper Midwest Region Society of Biblical Literature meeting. St. Paul, Minnesota, 2016).) The

it useful to place these verses in parallel, Sasson cautions that this method is risky and may be beyond the writer's intent.<sup>57</sup>

That a contrast is intended between the two verses is evident from the use of the pronouns אַתָּה and אֲנִי with the disjunctive ׀ in a semantic parallelism. Sasson posits that the opposition between אַתָּה *you [Jonah]* and אֲנִי *I [God]* is “evocative of (legal) disputations wherein individuals contrast their own situations to those of their opponents” and argues that the disjunctive ׀ widens the gulf between the two perspectives.<sup>58</sup> Thomas Bolin further argues that in order for the contrast between Jonah and God to be effective, the verb חָסַד needs to have the same meaning in both places or the contrast loses its force.<sup>59</sup> The difficulty is in finding a meaning which would work in both places. Both verses use the particle עַל־ to describe how Jonah was concerned about or over (על) the plant while there is a question as to whether God is concerned about or over (על) Nineveh. From the narrative verses in the pericope it is evident that Jonah was not concerned *for* the plant: his reaction to the initial provision of the plant was *great joy* (גְּדוּלָה) (שָׂמְחָה גְדוּלָה) (4:6) which turned to *anger* when the plant perished (חָרָה) (4:9). His concern was for himself and his own wellbeing, and his reaction to the plant depended on how it affected his immediate situation. Neither *pitied* nor *spared* would be suitable translations of חָסַד עַל־ to describe Jonah's reaction to the plant, while either *concerned for* or *troubled about* would work well. To be consistent with the translation the corresponding phrase לֹא חָסַד עַל־ is therefore best translated *not concerned* or *troubled about*. If Jonah's concern was *about* the plant the parallel phrase would suggest that the writer was thinking of God's concern – or lack of concern – *about* Nineveh, or the

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etymologies and usages of חָסַד and חָסֵד are complex and beyond the scope of this thesis. See Robert D. Holmstedt, “The Etymologies of Hebrew ḥāšer and ḥeC-\*,” *JNES* 66, no. 3 (2007): 177-92.

<sup>57</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 308.

<sup>58</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 308.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas M. Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness: The Book of Jonah Re-examined* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 159-61.

theological dilemma it presented for Jonah, and not *for* the city itself. The irony in reading the first verse of the pair in this way, rather than as Wolff's "compassionate grief" for the plant, is that Jonah was not concerned for the plant but for himself. In fact, why should Jonah be concerned for a plant? It is the nature of plants to come and go, to spring up rapidly and then be destroyed by hot winds or worms. The only concern he could have would be for the impact the plant's demise would have on himself. Jonah's initial reaction was שמחה גדולה *great joy* when the plant suddenly sprung up, possibly an exaggerated response as שמחה without the adjective would have been enough to express his delight; and his subsequent חרה *anger* also seems to be an over-reaction, a hyperbole possibly.<sup>60</sup> While Jonah's responses may have been somewhat extreme, there is nothing in the text which indicates the object of his anger. He was angry על-הקייאון *about the plant*, not that his anger was necessarily directed *to* the plant. So too was his concern *about* the plant. If there was any pity on Jonah's part it was only that he pitied himself, and his anger had to do with the actions of God rather than the plant. The shade of the plant was intended להציל לו מרעתו *to save him from his discomfort* (v.6) which arose because of his annoyance at God's compassion towards Nineveh on the one hand, and what seemed to be his capriciousness in taking away the plant and sending a hot east wind on the other hand. I will argue later that his חרה *anger* was most likely directed at God and the issue at stake was the nature of divine mercy and capriciousness.

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<sup>60</sup> I will discuss the meaning of חרה later, on pages 243-245. I will argue that *anger* is not necessarily the best way to translate חרה but in the meantime will use this traditional translation until I come to analyse it in detail.

## Interpretive issues: God's mercy and the conflict with other biblical literature

Until recently Biblical scholarship has tended to regard the final verse of *Jonah* as a *rhetorical* question because the answer is seemingly obvious – *of course* God takes pity on people who repent, and animals. As Douglas Stuart put it, this is the whole point of the story:

God reminds Jonah, via appeal to the commonsense hierarchy of life (plants, animals, humans), that if Jonah loved a plant and wanted it spared, it should be obvious, a fortiori, that God loves animals and people and desires that they be spared.<sup>61</sup>

But Stuart's claim that God "loves animals" and "desires that they be spared" is at odds with the biblical texts which have Joshua instructing Israel to devote Jericho to destruction "both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword" (Joshua 6:17–21), and Samuel ordering Saul to "go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" (1 Samuel 15:3).

It is also at odds with the total destruction of "animals and creeping things and birds of the air" (Genesis 6:7) in the great flood, because the wickedness of *humanity* grieved the LORD.<sup>62</sup> Elsewhere *Jonah* seems to deliberately draw on terminology and themes related to

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<sup>61</sup> Douglas Stuart, "Jonah, Book of," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (eds. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville; Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 464.

<sup>62</sup> Greenstein argues that the author of *Jonah* presents a different view of God's concern for animals than the author(s) of the non-priestly account in Genesis. The fact that God, in that account, was not concerned for animals is indicated by the sacrifice of some of them after the flood. The author of *Jonah*, on the other hand, according to Greenstein, views animals in such a way that they have significance and relevance in the world and are not merely for the benefit of humanity. Edward Greenstein, "Noah and Jonah: An Intertextual Interpretation," in *Shmue'el Beqore'e Shemo: Samuel Leiter volume [Hebrew]* (ed. Shama Friedman Jerusalem: Bialik, 2016), 26.

the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as well as the deluge in Genesis.<sup>63</sup> It would be strange indeed if the writer ended this work with a statement that God is “obviously” concerned with innocent animals, when the same writer is apparently aware of the total destruction of animals in the biblical literature.

This interpretation also overlooks the implications that if God was concerned for repenting Nineveh because of its size and the number of human and animal inhabitants this could suggest he was less concerned for smaller cities or communities which also repented. If the primary motivation for God’s relenting was the repentance of the people (and their animals), there would be no reason to mention the size or population of the city. The story of Abraham’s intercession on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:16-33), with which the writer of *Jonah* seems to have been aware, suggests that God would have relented from destroying the cities even if only ten righteous people could be found in them (v. 32). The overall number of inhabitants in these cities is irrelevant to the story and is not mentioned, while the emphasis is on the number who are righteous, even if they form only a small proportion of the total inhabitants. Yet the dialogue in *Jonah* says nothing about the number who repented, not even mentioning repentance at all, and focusses instead on the number of inhabitants. “God never says that he was merciful to the Ninevites because of their repentance. That is an inference derived from reading Jon. 3.10 as a statement of cause and

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<sup>63</sup> For example, there is a remarkable similarity to the narratives in Genesis which contain announcements of judgment. The story of Noah is the only other sea voyage in the Hebrew Bible and involves both a dove and the destruction of the wicked. Jonah’s five-word proclamation of the *overturning* of Nineveh (Jonah 3:4) is remarkably reminiscent of the language of destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah which uses the same word הפך (Genesis 19:25, 29). Joel Anderson argues that a narrative reading of Jonah reveals numerous intertextual connections to both the ancient Near Eastern imagery found in creation/Eden accounts of Genesis 1–3 and the re-creation/flood narrative of Genesis 6–9. (Joel E. Anderson, “Jonah’s Peculiar Re-Creation,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 41, no. 4 (2011): 179-88.) Antwi also sees common themes and motifs in both *Jonah* and the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah narratives. (Emmanuel Kojo Ennin Antwi, *The Book of Jonah in the Context of Post-Exilic Theology of Israel: an Exegetical Study* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2013), 121-24.)

effect, but that reading is not necessarily correct.”<sup>64</sup> The size or population of a city does not appear to have been of any concern in any of the oracles against nations or cities throughout the prophets. Nineveh was not the only large city in the world at the time, and there is no demonstrable concern in any biblical writings for other large cities which were destroyed. A reading of Jonah 4:11 as a rhetorical question raises more questions than it answers and pits this verse against the general thrust of prophetic literature. A better solution needs to be found.

It could be argued that the book ends with a question, although not a *rhetorical* one, a final conundrum leaving the reader or listener with an enigma rather than solid theology. Such a reading is implied by Wolff’s remark cited earlier that the final question is “left open” and the reader “is challenged to think about the problem and to find his (*sic*) own answers,”<sup>65</sup> or Ben Zvi’s conclusion that the writer “wishes the re-readers to ponder both understandings of the verse, so they may inform and balance each other.”<sup>66</sup> André and Pierre-Emmanuel LaCocque also remark about the open-endedness of *Jonah* “that it is one of the important features of the book that it does *not* bring the plot to a veritable end.”<sup>67</sup> The best reading however, in my view, is the explanation convincingly argued by Cooper, Guillaume, Sharp and Muldoon that the book ends with a statement rather than a question, and that it should be read in the context of the abundant ironies and satirical devices which permeate the book.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Elias Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 45-8; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 346-47. Followed by Cooper, “In Praise of Divine Caprice,” 156-57.

<sup>65</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 162.

<sup>66</sup> Ben Zvi, “Jonah 4:11,” 12.

<sup>67</sup> André LaCocque and Pierre-Emmanuel LaCocque, *The Jonah Complex* (Atlanta: The John Knox Press, 1981), 99-100.

<sup>68</sup> Notwithstanding the important contributions these writers have made to *Jonah* scholarship, none of them, in my view, adequately identify the possible target of satire in the story generally or in the conclusion specifically. Guillaume hints at the inability of Deuteronomistic theology to explain the fall of Jerusalem in light of

This is the view which I will maintain throughout the rest of this thesis, and I will hereafter demonstrate how such a reading is consistent with the ironic and satirical tone of the story.

### Irony markers in Jonah 4

There are several unusual features in the fourth and final pericope of *Jonah*, which should alert the reader that this is not a straightforward rhetorical question. There is a cluster of wordplays or soundplays here which should also alert us to the possibility that the author is deliberately being playful in this dialogue, and the “tone”, keeping Driver’s previously cited comments in mind, should be considered when translating and interpreting the final verse.

There is a wordplay in verse 6 where “the LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give צל *shade* over his head, לְהַצִּיל *to save* (*hiphil* of נצל) him “from his discomfort.” The similarity in sounds of words in close proximity is relatively common in *Jonah* and the writer is not simply being playful. The purpose seems to be to highlight what is to follow. God’s intention, according to the narrator, was to deliver Jonah “from his discomfort.” Translating מִרְעָתוֹ this way obscures a play on one of the important words of the book: רעה *evil*. The book begins by saying Nineveh’s *evil* had come up before God, and later the narrator plays with this word, and its homonyms, in various ways. In the immediate context, Jonah is said to have been “exceedingly displeased” (v.1) that Nineveh was not destroyed. The expression וַיֵּרַע אֶל־יְהוָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה is literally *it was evil to Jonah, a great evil*, and later (in v.6) God is said to be delivering Jonah from his evil. *Discomfort* would not be

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Hezekiah’s and Josiah’s reforms as a problem (Guillaume, “The End of Jonah is the Beginning of Wisdom,” 248.) However, he does not go beyond this passing mention to identify the target of the satire. Sharp focusses on the use of irony and does not deal specifically with satire, and therefore has no need to identify a target. She does, however, suggest that both the implied reader and God are implicated in the ironies, although not going as far as arguing that the irony is directly targeted at the readers’ theology (Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 181.) Muldoon does not deal in a considered way with either irony or satire.



the best translation in this context, if the author was hinting that the purpose of the dialogue between Jonah and God was to save Jonah from a *bad attitude* or an *annoyance* with God that his actions were capricious or unpredictable. Another example of playfulness in the text appears in the expression “God appointed a *worm* (תולעת) when dawn *came up* (בעלות) the next day, that attacked the bush, so that it withered” (v.7). There is almost a reversal of sounds in תולעת בעלות (תולעת backwards is very similar to בעלות).<sup>69</sup> Such a *cluster* of wordplays – although the wordplays are not necessarily ironic in themselves – is often associated with texts which are ironic or satirical, sometimes with comedic effect, as I will later demonstrate.

There is the irony that after the emphasis on Nineveh’s repentance and the king’s decree to people and livestock, there is no mention of Nineveh’s repentance in God’s final word. The question of Nineveh’s fate instead revolves around its size, its population, and the number of cattle in it. This emphasis in Jonah 4:11 suggests that Nineveh was spared because it was “big,” not because the city repented. If repentance is the central issue of the story, we should question why nothing is said about it at the end, and why these other matters are mentioned instead, as though they are the issues of primary importance. Finally, a post-exilic reader would be well aware that Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BCE and would therefore be unlikely to read the conclusion as a rhetorical question implying that the city would be spared because of its size, population, and abundance of cattle. They would know that the city *was* destroyed despite its size and would most naturally read the conclusion to *Jonah* as a prediction or announcement of God’s judgment that despite being a large city it would come under the judgment implied at the start in the imperative to cry against it because of its evil.

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<sup>69</sup> The fact that a different expression for *sunrise* is used in the next verse (פְּנֵי הַשָּׁמֶשׁ) may suggest that בעלות (when dawn [= the first light of the morning] *came up*) was chosen for its soundplay. The expression בעלות השחר occurs only here and in the *ketiv* of Judges 19:25.

There is a *situational* irony here in the knowledge that despite their repentance, in the long-term God was really not concerned about them.

### **Conclusion: the closing dialogue and the solution to the problem**

The conclusion to Lamentations (5:22) is similar to the end of *Jonah* in that it is somewhat enigmatic and a comparison of the two endings may provide an insight into how Jonah 4:11 should be interpreted.

כִּי אִם־מָאֵס מְאֹד־תִּנּוּ קִצְפָתְךָ עָלֵינוּ עַד־מְאֹד

unless<sup>70</sup> you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure.

Various translations and interpretations of the difficult opening particles כִּי אִם have been offered, including turning it into an interrogative in much the same way as Jonah 4:11.<sup>71</sup> Hence, the *Revised Standard Version* has “Hast thou utterly rejected us?” although this reading was not followed by the NRSV (which instead has “unless you have utterly rejected us ...”).<sup>72</sup> Tod Linafelt rejects it on grammatical grounds as there is no evidence elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible that כִּי אִם without any interrogatory marker should introduce a question.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> I have used the NRSV translation here for כִּי אִם but will discuss it more fully below.

<sup>71</sup> For a summary and analysis of the various interpretations see Linafelt, “The Refusal of a Conclusion in the Book of Lamentations,” 340-42.

<sup>72</sup> Westerman, however, follows the RSV’s reading in his commentary. Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation* (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1994), 210.

<sup>73</sup> Linafelt, “The Refusal of a Conclusion in the Book of Lamentations,” 340. Robert Gordis also rejects treating the verse as an interrogative as “there is no evidence for rendering *ki ïm* as ‘or,’ whether interrogatively or otherwise.” He notes that the dual conjunction “is used widely and rather loosely in biblical Hebrew” but prefers the rendering “even if, although” in this verse. (Gordis, “The Conclusion of the Book of Lamentations (5:22),” 289, 91.) A variety of interpretations have been provided for this verse by commentators. Johan Renkema responds to Gordis and points to the use of כִּי אִם in Deuteronomy 10:12 and Micah 6:8 and argues that the latter implicitly contains a question, so then Lamentations 5:21-22 contains two possibilities: either God will hear their prayer and renew them, or renewal is not what he wants, and although rejection might seem unthinkable

He argues instead that  $\text{לֹא־נָשַׁח}$  should be read as introducing the protasis of a conditional statement, and in this case it is a protasis without an apodosis, an “if” with the “then” left unstated.<sup>74</sup> He therefore translates 5:20-22 as:

Why have you forgotten us utterly,  
                   forsaken us for so long?  
 Take us back, O LORD, to yourself, and we will come back  
                   Renew our days as of old.  
 For if truly you have rejected us,  
                   raging bitterly against us –

Translated this way the book concludes abruptly, seemingly mid-sentence, which is precisely what Linafelt thinks the writer intended:

Rendered thus, the final line of v. 22 is a poignantly appropriate way to end the book of Lamentations, indicating by its very incompleteness a refusal to move – in the face of YHWH’s lack of response – beyond lament to praise, but also a refusal to conclude at all. The ending of the book is, then, a willful *nonending*. The poetry is left opening out into the emptiness of God’s nonresponse.<sup>75</sup>

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the possibility is also found in Jeremiah 14:19. He translates v. 22 as “Or do you prefer to reject us forever, to rage against us without measure?” (Johan Renkema, *Lamentations* (Leuven [Belgium]: Peeters, 1998), 630-34.) Hillers surveys several possible meanings before opting for the most usual adversative meaning “but you have utterly rejected us.” Delbert R. Hillers, *Lamentations: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 7A; New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 100-101.

<sup>74</sup> Linafelt, “The Refusal of a Conclusion in the Book of Lamentations,” 342.

<sup>75</sup> Linafelt, “The Refusal of a Conclusion in the Book of Lamentations,” 343. Adele Berlin thinks Linafelt’s solution may resonate with a modern reader, but is “likely too modern for the ancient author.” Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 125-26.

This conclusion is hardly hopeful, but by leaving the statement dangling, argues Linafelt, it defers the apodosis and allows the reader to imagine the possibility of a different “then” and therefore a different future. As Linafelt notes, there may very well be an allusion back to the assurance in 3:30-32 which he translates as:

For the Lord does not reject forever,  
but rather having afflicted he will show compassion  
according to his abundant kindness.

There is some sense of this in *Jonah* where, having *threatened* to destroy Nineveh, God relents because, according to the prophet, he is gracious and merciful (Jonah 4:1). Jonah was troubled by this, possibly because the continued existence of Nineveh would be a threat to the nation of Israel and compassion shown to Nineveh would therefore imply a lack of compassion to Israel. However, the conclusion contains a twist when God reveals that he will not be troubled about Nineveh, so the fate of Nineveh is left unresolved. It seems to me that the conclusion to *Jonah* bears some similarities to this ending of Lamentations, in that it too is a kind of abrupt *nonending*, leaving the reader to ponder its meaning. The post-exilic reader knew that Nineveh was eventually destroyed by the Babylonians and Medes, and if their reading of *Jonah* was followed by a reading of Nahum – and the Septuagint guides the reader to read the two consecutively – they might have concluded that this was always God’s plan. However, the unstated questions which can be inferred from Jonah’s distress remain unanswered: why is God compassionate to Nineveh, if only in the short term, for a long enough duration that they would be enabled to destroy the northern kingdom in the meantime? Where was God’s compassion in this for his own people? As will be seen later in this thesis, the idea of turning and returning, making use of the root שׁוּב, is a prominent theme

in the Twelve, including in *Jonah*, and there may very well be an inner-biblical allusion to Lamentations 5:21.

הָשִׁיבֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה

Turn us back, O LORD, to yourself, and we will turn back.

In *Jonah* not only do the people of Nineveh turn to God, there is a sense of God himself twisting and turning in his mind-changing, making it difficult (or impossible) to predict what he will do, so that at the end the reader is almost forced to ponder again the king's question – מי יודע *Who knows [what God will do]?* – perhaps wondering what the next turn will bring. Lamentations and *Jonah* seem to be dealing with similar questions, both using שׁוּב as a *Leitwört*.<sup>76</sup> There may be an irony in the fact that Lamentations leaves the reader hanging on the question of whether God will turn Israel back, and *Jonah* ending with some doubt as to the direction in which God will next turn, and whether he will at some stage turn to Israel. If *Jonah* is alluding to Lamentations, the allusion could well be one of irony.

As Driver suggested, the *tone* of the final verse may be one of *irony* rather than being a rhetorical question. There is a succession of ironies throughout the book which makes this possibility very likely.<sup>77</sup> These will be explored in subsequent chapters of this thesis. The

<sup>76</sup> The root שׁוּב occurs 15 times in four of the five poems of Lamentations and twice in the climactic penultimate verse: הָשִׁיבֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה (*Qere*) *Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored* (5:21). It occurs 5 times in *Jonah*. I deal further with שׁוּב as a *Leitwört* in the Twelve and in *Jonah* on pages 237-238. For discussion of penitence as a major agenda in Lamentations see Mark J. Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence: From Communal Lament To Penitential Prayer in the 'Exilic' Liturgy of Israel," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 25, no. 1 (2003): 51-75.

<sup>77</sup> Scholars who have written extensively about irony, satire or parody in *Jonah* include: Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 176-86; Good, *Irony in the Old Testament.*, passim; Millar Burrows, "The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah," in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honor of Herbert Gordon May* (eds. H.T. Frank and W.L. Reed; Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1970), 80-107; Miles, "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody," 203-16; Dell, "Reinventing the Wheel," 85-101.

story of Jonah is rich in paronomastic techniques,<sup>78</sup> comedy, wordplays, contradictions and the clever use of language. The twists and turns throughout the book should alert the reader to expect the unexpected. Everything is inverted: the man of God is disobedient; a fish becomes God's prophet; the prophet Jonah is silent while foreigners worship God; Jonah's theology (that he serves a sovereign God, 1:9) is clichéd, unexceptional, yet inconsistent with his behaviour; by contrast the foreign king, although mocked, asks the most sophisticated theological question in the book.

It should not be surprising then that the concluding dialogue has a cluster of wordplays and ironies and concludes unexpectedly. As absurd as it sounds, Jonah was grieved that God was compassionate. It is by realising this ultimate inversion that we are most likely to understand the purpose of the book. I will argue in subsequent chapters that the

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<sup>78</sup> When I refer to paronomasia in this thesis I use the term in its broad sense which has been defined as "The deliberate use of a word or combination of words as a rhetorical device designed to create within the hearer (or reader) feelings of ambiguity and curiosity. This use is primarily based upon resemblances of sound, but may also include willful exploitation of the meaning or written appearance of these expressions." (Russell T. Cherry III, "Paronomasia and proper names in the Old Testament: Rhetorical function and literary effect" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminar, 1988), 6.) In the opinion of Valérie Kabergs, Cherry's work on paronomasia is the first major systematic survey of Hebrew wordplay since the PhD dissertation by I.M. Casowicz in 1894 (Valérie Kabergs and Hans Ausloos, "Paronomasia or Wordplay? A Babel-Like Confusion Towards A Definition of Hebrew Wordplay," *Biblica* 93, no. 1 (2012): 1-20; Immanuel Casanowicz, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament" (John Hopkins University, 1894). See also Immanuel Casanowicz, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," *JBL* 12, no. 2 (1893): 105-167.) Rather than use "paronomasia" as an umbrella term for all types of wordplay, Kabergs proposes a definition of Hebrew wordplay as "an ambiguous interaction between both sound and meaning in a specific literary context," ruling out assonance, alliteration and other forms of rhyme which interact with sound but not with meaning. Edward Greenstein says that in biblical studies "paronomasia" is the term most often applied to perceived wordplay, which he defines as proximate words displaying similarity of sound with dissimilarity of meaning. (Edward Greenstein, "Wordplay, Hebrew," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 6 (ed. David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 968.) Whenever I refer to wordplay or paronomasia in this thesis I use it in the broader sense and endeavour to explain the ambiguity, whether its literary effect is humorous, and how it effects meaning. For paronomasia in *Jonah* see Baruch Halpern and Richard Elliott Friedman, "Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah," *Hebrew Annual Review* 4 (1980): 79-82.

## CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM OF THE CONCLUSION TO JONAH

writer is parodying a theology of divine justice with its rewards and punishments, which had no logical place for compassion, no answer for why God's people suffer, no solution to avoiding divine wrath or obtaining mercy, and no satisfying explanation for the exile.

## Chapter 2: Irony, parody and satire in Jonah

I noted in the previous chapter that several scholars have observed and commented on the frequent use of irony in *Jonah*. Some have characterised the entire book as ironic, satirical or parodic.<sup>1</sup> It is not uncommon for scholars to refer to irony, satire or parody without defining the terms, and sometimes they appear to be used interchangeably as though they mean the same thing. In this chapter I will define how these terms are used throughout this thesis, how irony, satire and parody can be identified in biblical texts, and I will provide examples of each in *Jonah*.

### Defining irony and identifying irony markers

Several scholars have noted the presence of irony in *Jonah* to varying degrees, and it is my impression that while some scholars resist a categorisation of the book as ironic, satirical or parodic, almost all recognise the presence of at least some irony. In my view, it is not

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars who read *Jonah* as primarily ironic include Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, passim; Landes, “The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah,” 3-21; Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 176-186. Those who read either it as satire or see significant satirical elements in the story include Burrows, “The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah,” 80-107; Ackerman, “Satire and Symbolism in the Song of Jonah,” 213-46; John C. Holbert, “Deliverance Belongs To Yahweh!: Satire in the Book of Jonah,” *JSOT* 6, no. 21 (1981): 59-81; LaCocque and LaCocque, *Jonah: a Psycho-Religious Approach*, passim; David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah - Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible* (Brown Judaic Studies; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), passim; Thomas M. Bolin, “Jonah as subversive literature? The Book of Jonah and its biblical context” (Ph.D., Marquette University, 1995), whole thesis; Virginia Ingram, “Satire and Cognitive Dissonance in the Book of Jonah, in the Light of Ellens’ Laws of Psychological Hermeneutics,” in *Psychological Hermeneutics for Biblical Themes and Texts: A Festschrift in Honour of Wayne G. Rollins* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2012), 140-55. Those who read it as parody include Miles, “Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody,” 203-16; Band, “Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody,” 177-95.



hyperbole when André and Pierre-Emmanuel LaCocque exclaim “irony in the book of Jonah is everywhere.”<sup>2</sup> It is important that we first establish a definition for understanding how the term is used throughout this thesis. David Marcus has noted that “one of the major problems with identifying irony in a text is that, unlike spoken irony which can use a wink or a nod, in literary irony there are no external indicators: irony is not indicated in the text with any special mark.”<sup>3</sup> He, and others, have identified several techniques for identifying irony in a text, which I will hereafter call “markers.”

### **Irony Marker 1: Reality and appearance**

One of the basic features of irony is a contrast between reality and appearance.<sup>4</sup> “An ironist seems to be saying one thing but is really saying something quite different.”<sup>5</sup> An example of such an ironic contrast between appearance and reality is in the pericope where news of Jonah’s preaching comes to the king. In response the king issued a decree that everyone – man and beast – should repent, put on sackcloth and fast (3:6-8). This decree gives the *appearance* that the king was in control and was leading effectively with a solution which would avert a calamity. The *reality* was the people had already repented, put on sackcloth, and commenced a fast (3:5). The *contrast* between the *appearance* of the king’s leadership on the one hand and the *reality* that the king was actually following the people on the other hand, is what creates the irony.

A further example which illustrates this contrast is in Jonah’s prayer from inside the fish. He promises, presumably upon his deliverance and possibly as a form of manipulation

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<sup>2</sup> LaCocque and LaCocque, *Jonah: a Psycho-Religious Approach*, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 14-15.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* (2nd ed. ed.; London, New York: Methuen, 1982), 33.

<sup>5</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 13-14.

or a way of negotiating with God for his rescue, that *וְאָנִי בְּקוֹל תּוֹדָה אֶזְבְּחָה לְךָ אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתִּי אֲשַׁלְמָה* *with the voice of thanksgiving I will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay* (2:9). As this is something he anticipates he will do at some time in the future we could say he is giving the *appearance* of piety. He contrasts his own piety with *מְשַׁמְרִים הַבְּלִי-שׁוֹא* *those who cling to empty folly* (NJPS) or *worship vain idols* (NRSV), giving the *appearance* that his religious practices were better informed and possibly more efficacious than the worshippers of other gods. The *reality* was that while Jonah was praying in the belly of the fish the sailors, who the reader has already been informed were such worshippers of other gods (1:5), were actually offering sacrifices and making vows to the LORD *וַיִּזְבְּחוּ-זִבְחָה לַיהוָה וַיִּדְרוּ נְדָרִים* (1:16). There is a contrast between the appearance that Jonah was pious by promising to make sacrifices and vows at some *future* time, and the reality that the foreign sailors were *already* and possibly *at the same time* making their sacrifices and vows. This contrast creates an irony. The pronoun *וְאָנִי* occurs three times in *Jonah* (2:4, 9; 4:11), all arguably in contexts where it is for emphasis. Rather than being pleonastic the combination of *וְאָנִי* with the pronominal suffix on *אֶזְבְּחָה* produces the emphatic *but as for me, I will sacrifice* which also serves to stress an implied contrast: *others* may worship vain idols, but *I* will sacrifice. The other occurrences of *וְאָנִי* in *Jonah* are similarly used for contrast. Earlier in his prayer Jonah uses a similar formula in 2:4-5 [3-4]:

וּתְשַׁלִּיכֵנִי מִצּוֹלָה בְּלִבֵּב יַמַּיִם וְנָהָר יִסְבְּבֵנִי כָּל-מִשְׁבָּרֶיךָ וְגַלְיָה עָלַי עֲבָרוּ:  
וְאָנִי אֲמַרְתִּי נִגְרַשְׁתִּי מִנְּגַד עֵינַיךָ

There is an interplay between the first and second persons in these verses: the threefold repetition of the second person in *וּתְשַׁלִּיכֵנִי* *you cast me* and in *כָּל-מִשְׁבָּרֶיךָ* *all your billows* and in *וְגַלְיָה* *your waves* (2:4) is immediately followed by a threefold repetition of the

first person in Jonah's rejoinder: וַאֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי נִגְרַשְׁתִּי *as for me, I said, I am driven away*. The juxtaposition of the pronouns has the effect of emphasising Jonah's place as the victim of God's action in driving him away and bringing about his near demise. This is both ironic and comical because the reader knows that rather than driving the prophet away Jonah set out לָרֶחַק *to flee* and it was Jonah's direction, not God's, to וַהֲטִילֵנִי אֶל־הַיָּם *pick me up and hurl me to the sea* (1:12). Jonah was not quite protesting his innocence, but he was certainly denying any responsibility for his situation. The *reality* was that Jonah was in trouble as a consequence of his decision to flee from God and the commission to preach in Nineveh, yet the *appearance*, at least from the way he describes his situation in the prayer, is that God was driving him away in an act of capriciousness.<sup>6</sup>

The third occurrence of וַאֲנִי in *Jonah* comes in the final line which is the focus of this thesis. I have argued that this line should be read as a declarative וַאֲנִי לֹא אֶחָיוֹם עַל־נִינְוָה *as for me, I will have no concern for Nineveh*. The contrast with אַתָּה חֹסֵף עַל־הַקִּיקִיּוֹן *you are concerned about the plant* is clear enough, and the reoccurrence of וַאֲנִי may well be for the reader or listener to make a connection with the contrasts highlighted by the pronoun in Jonah's prayer. In the two places where וַאֲנִי was used there, the contrast had the effect of producing an *appearance* which was different to the *reality*. First, Jonah attempted to give the appearance that he was more pious than those who worship vain idols, and even if he did not have the sailors in particular in mind the narrative makes that contrast by describing their actions in sacrificing and making vows using the same terminology as Jonah's prayer.

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 31:22 [23] has almost identical wording וַאֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי בְחַפְזִי נִגְרַזְתִּי מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ *I said in my alarm, I am driven away from your sight*. There is a difference insofar as *Jonah* has the *Niphal* נִגְרַשְׁתִּי from the root גִּרַשׁ *to drive away* whereas the Psalm has the *Niphal* נִגְרַזְתִּי from the root גִּרַז *to cut off*. Sasson suggests the difference, which is only in the sibilants, could be "due simply to dialect variations." Sasson, *Jonah*, 178. It is also possible, and more likely in my view, that *Jonah* was drawing on the Psalm but incorporated a wordplay by changing just one letter and thereby making Jonah accuse God of driving him away to strengthen the contrast between Jonah *fleeing* and God *driving*, the reality versus the appearance.

Second, Jonah attempted to give the appearance that he was an innocent victim pursued by an angry God, when the reality was that he was avoiding his prophetic call and duty by fleeing in the opposite direction. So, in the third occurrence of וַיִּשְׁחַח the narrator has God using the same formula to contrast appearance and reality. Jonah was *apparently* concerned about the plant, although there is nothing in the story to indicate that he was *actually* concerned except for his own wellbeing. God was also *apparently* relenting and not bringing about Nineveh's destruction. The *reality* was that Nineveh would be destroyed, although not immediately. In the two instances of וַיִּשְׁחַח in the prayer the understood premise was wrong: in the first instance, Jonah was no more pious than those he condemned; and in the second, God was no more responsible for Jonah's fate than was Jonah. It is important to note how the writer of *Jonah* uses וַיִּשְׁחַח to contrast appearance with reality as it should influence how we translate and interpret the third occurrence of the word in the final lines. In the first of the two lines connected by וַיִּשְׁחַח the writer has God saying that Jonah was concerned about the plant, while the reality was that he was not concerned. The next line develops the irony: with a dramatic twist, introduced by וַיִּשְׁחַח *but as for me*, God declares that he is no more concerned about Nineveh than Jonah was about the plant.

### **Irony Marker 2: Deferred significance**

Douglas Muecke describes irony as “a way of writing designed to leave open the question of what the literal meaning might signify: there is a perpetual deferment of significance ... irony is saying something in a way that activates not one but an endless series of subversive interpretations.”<sup>7</sup> On one level, the reader or listener may recognise something as ironic when they discover a *peripeteia* – a reversal in a character's fortunes or in their

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<sup>7</sup> Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, 31.

understanding of events, and *Jonah* introduces this very early with the opposing ideas in the words *רָם* *rise up*, *וַיָּקָם* *and he arose* with the contrasting and repeated *וַיֵּרַד* *and he went down* (1:1-3). The reader might recognise an irony in the choice of words to describe Jonah's change of fortunes as he goes through a series of descents but has no idea *why* Jonah chose to disobey God's instruction in the first place and knows nothing at this stage of Jonah's reasons or motivation for going in the opposite direction. This information is deferred until later in the story. Later, as part of the dialogue between God and Jonah which concludes the book, Jonah says:

Is not this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that you are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment (4:2).

Not only does the writer defer giving the reader or listener the reason for Jonah's decision, he reveals at the end that he knew this from the start but withheld it for an unstated reason. The deferment creates a second level of irony which is more subversive than the first. Jonah reveals that he knew all along what the reader may not have understood, namely that if he preached in Nineveh the city would repent, God would relent, and the enemy of Israel would not be destroyed.<sup>8</sup> By the time the reader or listener has this new information in the unfolding of the story, it is clear that Jonah was correct in his assumption that God would change his mind and Nineveh's fortunes would be reversed. Ironically, Jonah was right about this from the start, and the audience may have formed a different opinion of him had they had this information earlier. If the story as we have it was written in the exile or post-exilic period,

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<sup>8</sup> *Jonah* does not specifically name Assyria as Israel's enemy and "Nineveh" has to be read as a *synecdoche* for the Assyrian empire, of which it was at one stage the capital. An exilic or post-exilic audience could be expected to make the connection that Nineveh represents Assyria.

there is a kind of “deferment” in that the initial readers or listeners would know things that were unknown at the time in which the story was set centuries earlier. Neither Jonah nor anyone in the eighth century would know that Nineveh’s survival would make it possible for the Assyrian empire to destroy Israel. This irony is even more “subversive” insofar as it turns the anti-hero Jonah into a kind of hero who went against the command of God in order to protect his people from a foreign power. It also portrays God in a new light, one who was more compassionate to an evil foreign city than he was to his own people.<sup>9</sup>

This incident is not the only time the writer defers or withholds information in *Jonah*, possibly for dramatic or some other effect. When he commissioned Jonah a second time God said קום לך אֶל־נִינּוּה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וְקִרְא אֵלֶיהָ אֶת־הַקְּרִיאָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי דֹבֵר אֵלֶיךָ *Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation that I tell you* (3:2). His words are almost identical to the first commission (קום לך אֶל־נִינּוּה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וְקִרְא עָלֶיהָ) *Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim judgment upon it* 1:2), with the addition that this time God would tell him what to proclaim. The writer defers saying what that message would be. When Jonah does preach, his message was עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְנִינּוּה נִהְפָּקֶת *Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!* (3:4), yet the audience is left to wonder if this is the message God said he would tell him, or if it is one of Jonah’s own devising. In the first example, the reader or listener does not have the information about what Jonah said prior to departing for Tarshish, so the irony becomes evident only when that information is revealed. In the second example,

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<sup>9</sup> My argument here is based on my reasoning explained in the section “The relationship of Jonah to the book of Kings” beginning on page 20, that the writer and the audience are familiar with a tradition which regards the northern kingdom of Israel as part of the covenant people, before the Deuteronomistic history stereotyped all its kings as committing evil. *Jonah* does not offer a simple dichotomy between repentant Nineveh and sinful unrepentant Israel, but rather, a more complex dichotomy between God’s compassion to a city with a long history of and reputation for violence, and his use of the same people to violently annihilate the people with whom he had maintained a long covenant relationship. The issue here is not *repentance*, or lack of it, but God’s *compassion*, or apparent lack of it. See also my comments about whether or not repentance is the central theme of *Jonah* on page 53 and following.

the audience would reasonably expect the message to be revealed – *proclaim to it the proclamation that I tell you* – and is left in doubt as they could not be certain if the message Jonah preached was his own, or one given to him. There may be an expectation that this information will be revealed later. There is a clever ambiguity in Jonah’s oracle. The word translated *overthrown* from the *Niphal* of הפך can also mean *to be changed or altered*.<sup>10</sup> There may be a deliberate semantic ambiguity here that they could be either overthrown or transformed. There is a range of possible interpretations: if it was God’s message then there may be an incipient hint that he was about to change his mind and the city would be transformed rather than destroyed; if it was Jonah’s message then it may reflect his confidence in his own abilities as a preacher to turn the people around from their evil ways; and either interpretation would leave open the possibility that the city would be destroyed.<sup>11</sup> Serge Frolov, however, doubts this alternate reading which he thinks is “an attempt to get rid of its complexities.” He argues that הפך describes spiritual movements only in very rare cases where it is further qualified. “If there is a wordplay it is extremely subtle and probably

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<sup>10</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 253. See also Halpern and Friedman, “Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah,” 87. In the *Niphal* it can mean “to change oneself” and is used to denote any radical change from one extreme to the other, including that of the heart or mind. An example of the *Niphal* of הפך having this sense is Exodus 14:5 וַיִּגַד לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם כִּי בָרַח הָעָם וַיִּהְפֹּךְ לִבָּב פְּרַעֲהוּ וְעַבְדָּיו אֶל־הָעָם *When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people*. Similarly, in Lamentations 1:20 נִהְפַּךְ לִבִּי בְּקִרְבִּי *My heart is turned within me*. See also Hosea 11:8; 1 Samuel 10:9.

<sup>11</sup> Yitzhak Peleg argues that the ambiguity is intentional and is a key to understanding the story. “The narrator chose to couch his educational method in absurdity and irony in order to emphasize his message of grace and mercy, in order to encourage repentance. The Lord is, after all, a merciful God, and the task of his messengers, the prophets, is to return sinners from their evil ways. The Lord works by reward and punishment: If the people of Nineveh repent during the 40-day ‘grace period’ God will forgive and reward them; if not, their city will be destroyed and they will be punished.” Yitzhak Peleg, “‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown’ (Jonah 3:4): Two Readings (shtei krie’ot) of the Book of Jonah,” in *God’s Word for Our World: Volume 1, Biblical Studies in Honor of Simon John De Vries* (eds. J. Harold Ellens, et al.; JSOTSup 388; London, New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 274.

accidental.”<sup>12</sup> Raymond Person thinks “Jonah’s oracle is abbreviated by the narrator in order to heighten the ironic effect of his success” and that the actual words of God “would not be as vague and ambiguous as Jonah’s oracle was.”<sup>13</sup> Yehoshua Gitay argues that the use of the *Niphal* form here is unusual and as such, and without the traditional formula “thus says the LORD,” the announcement hides God’s role. He argues that by using the *Niphal* participle the phrase becomes “a bombastic and even ridiculing announcement” that the city will turn upside down, one which the people of Nineveh would be likely to dismiss as nonsense.<sup>14</sup> The words *עוד ארבעים יום* *yet forty days* (3:4) put a time limit on Nineveh’s transformation and creates a sense of urgency.<sup>15</sup> If this was Jonah’s devising, the intention may have been to lessen the possibility of genuine repentance and to force God’s hand. After all, such a short message, delivered briefly, was hardly likely to produce the kind of repentance needed to justify a change of mind on God’s part. If this was the case, then the irony would be that the city *did* repent despite Jonah’s best efforts to be a poor preacher.

### Irony Marker 3: Clash of style

One indicator of irony in a text is what Marcus calls “a clash of style,” where there is a notable departure from the normal or expected way of saying a thing. An example of this in

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<sup>12</sup> Serge Frolov, “Returning the Ticket: God and His Prophet in the Book of Jonah,” *JSOT* 24, no. 86 (1999): 91.

<sup>13</sup> Raymond F. Person, *In Conversation with Jonah: Conversation Analysis, Literary Criticism and the Book of Jonah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 149-150.

<sup>14</sup> Gitay, “Jonah: The Prophecy of Antirhetoric,” 203.

<sup>15</sup> The Septuagint has *ἔτι τρεῖς ἡμέραι* *yet three days* which is even more urgent. For a discussion of possible explanations for the differences between the Masoretic Text and Septuagint and which variant is likely to be the earlier reading see R. W. L. Moberly, “Preaching for a Response? Jonah’s Message to the Ninevites Reconsidered,” *VT* 53, no. Fasc. 2 (2003): 159-163. Moberly argues that the LXX’s *three days* has a sense of urgency which is missing in the MT’s *forty days* which is not particularly urgent. Yet even *forty days* is somewhat urgent insofar as it demands a response within a fixed period.



*Jonah* might be in 4:1-2 where Jonah was distressed because God changed his mind and did not bring on Nineveh the calamity he had pronounced, and then prayed and said: אָנָּה יְהוָה הֲלוֹא־נָּה דִּבַּרְי עַד־הַיּוֹתַי עַל־אֲדָמָתַי *O LORD, is this not what I said while I was still in my own country?* There is a “clash of style” here insofar as this is not the expected language of a prophet or of prayer. Jonah is effectively saying that he knows better than God, and his prayer amounts to a rebuke along the lines of “I told you so.” While there are precedents in the Hebrew Bible of humans challenging God (for example, Abraham interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah, and Moses reminding God of his promises to the patriarchs [Genesis 18:22-33], causing him to change his mind to destroy Israel [Exodus 32:11-14]) these encounters use the language of imploration while Jonah’s tone is one of confrontation and rebuke. His prayer is markedly different to the style of the imploratory prayer of the sailors (1:14) אָנָּה יְהוָה אַל־נָּא נִאֲבָדָּה *Please, O LORD, do not let us perish.* The contrast between the two prayers is primarily one of style, and while it would not be surprising or unexpected for sailors to implore God to save them, the contrast with the tone of Jonah’s prayer highlights his departure from the style one might expect of a man-of-God. It is also ironic that while the sailors were praying Jonah was sleeping, and it was the non-Israelite captain who urged the man-of-God to call upon his god (1:6). Ironically, the first time Jonah prayed in the story was when, for all intents and purposes, the storm was over and he called out מִבֶּטֶן שְׂאוֹל *from the belly of Sheol.*

#### **Irony Marker 4: Ridicule**

This departure from the normal or expected is sometimes portrayed as ridicule, which seems to be a frequent device in *Jonah* although the object of the mocking varies. Jonah himself is implicitly ridiculed when he is portrayed as sleeping during the storm (1:5-6), even

more so in the Septuagint which adds the words καὶ ἔρρηγγεν *and snored*.<sup>16</sup> He is ridiculed again when he is vomited by the fish on to land and Ackerman, who sees a great deal of satire in the song of Jonah, suggests that this action is intended to represent God's response to Jonah's prayer: "What does YHWH think of Jonah and his song? The great fish is commanded to vomit!"<sup>17</sup> Jonah's responses are extreme in every situation: he sleeps during a storm, he becomes incredibly angry when the plant is destroyed, and he sees death as the solution to both the storm and the destruction of the plant. Marcus sees these extreme and exaggerated responses as another form of ridicule.<sup>18</sup> Yet Jonah is not the only object of ridicule. The Ninevites' rapid response to Jonah's preaching and their eager repentance are of a type unknown in the Hebrew Bible and appears to be hyperbole. Such an enthusiastic response, in response to a foreigner whose god would be unknown in Nineveh, and apparently without specific details or a proper examination of his claims, seems to be

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<sup>16</sup> Muraoka defines ῥέγγω as *to snore*. (Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 612.) The MT says Jonah וַיִּרְדָּם *was in a deep sleep*. A cognate word is used to describe Adam's deep sleep when Eve was taken from his side (Genesis 2:9), Abraham's trance during which he received a vision (Genesis 15:12), and Daniel's deep sleep when he encountered an angel in a vision (Daniel 8:18; 10:9). The narrator of the *Jonah* story could be implying that Jonah was in a trance, which might not be unexpected for a prophet (although not dealing directly with this text in *Jonah*, for the phenomenon of trances in Israelite prophecy see Brad E. Kelle, "The Phenomenon of Israelite Prophecy in Contemporary Scholarship," *CurBR* 12, no. 3 (2014): 283, 301; Simon Parker, "Possession Trance and Prophecy in Pre-Exilic Israel," *VT* 28, no. 3 (1978): 271-85.) However, as Jonah was oblivious to what was actually happening the incident is humorous and Jonah is ridiculed. Gesenius says that דָּם means *to snore, to sleep heavily*, although the meaning *to snore* is not supported by either Koehler and Baumgartner or Brown, Driver and Briggs. Gesenius may very well have based his lexical interpretation of the word on the Septuagint, as *to snore* is not otherwise attested. The snoring prophet is a comical enhancement which appears to have been added by the Septuagint translators (or the writer of their *Vorlage*) based on the literary context rather than the meaning of the Hebrew word. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldean Lexicon of the Old Testament Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 758; Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 1191; Francis Brown, et al., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (BDB; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 922.

<sup>17</sup> Ackerman, "Satire and Symbolism in the Song of Jonah," 225.

<sup>18</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 120-21.

exaggerated and unrealistic. The people of Nineveh are later described (4:11) as people אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּ בְיָמֵינוּ לְשֵׂמְאלוֹ *who do not know their right hand from their left*,<sup>19</sup> almost certainly describing their ignorance or naivety, and coupled with the hyperbolic narration of their rapid and unquestioning repentance this description makes their naivety an object of ridicule. Steven McKenzie quite correctly observes that the idea of repenting cattle is ridiculous:

Imagine sheep, cattle, and other animals dressed in sackcloth refusing to eat or drink, preferring instead to lament their evil deeds and pray for mercy! The idea is ludicrous. No other scene in the book quite so clearly illustrates the satirical nature of the story with its ridiculous images and hyperbole.<sup>20</sup>

The king is likewise ridiculed in his issuing of decrees to livestock (3:7-9).

### **Irony Marker 5: Conflict of belief**

Marcus, following Booth,<sup>21</sup> sees a conflict of belief as another irony marker, where there is “an unmistakable conflict between the beliefs expressed and the beliefs we hold *and suspect the author of holding*” (his italics).<sup>22</sup> An example of this in *Jonah* is the belief

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<sup>19</sup> Literally, *who does not know his right hand from his left*, using singular forms. The formulation is unique to *Jonah*. The phrase may have a similar meaning to differentiating between good and evil as a sign of maturity (e.g. Isaiah 7:15-16; Jeremiah 4:22) as a reference to the Ninevites’ child-like lack of discernment. However, it is unlikely the writer would have referred to a city notorious for its violence (specifically mentioned in Jonah 3:8) in such a way. Sasson relates it to the preceding phrase about the size of Nineveh and suggests it means the city was so teeming with people they did not know who their neighbour was. (Sasson, *Jonah*, 315.) Barrett understands it to mean a “baby-like lack of discernment,” which in this context is the most reasonable interpretation. (Rob Barrett, “Meaning More than They Say: The Conflict between Yhwh and Jonah,” *JSOT* 37, no. 2 (2012): 250.)

<sup>20</sup> Steven L. McKenzie, “Jonah and Genre,” in *How to Read the Bible: History, Prophecy, Literature - Why Modern Readers Need to Know the Difference and What It Means for Faith Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 67.

<sup>22</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 15.

expressed by Jonah that the way to calm the storm would be **שְׂאוּנִי וְהִטִּילְנִי אֶל־הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁתַּקֵּם הַיָּם** *pick me up and hurl me to the sea so that the sea will calm down for you* (1:12). This kind of self-sacrifice is unprecedented in biblical narratives and “completely alien to Israel’s religious philosophy.”<sup>23</sup> Jonah’s quotation of, or allusion to, the rubric found in Exodus 34:6 (in Jonah 4:2) **אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְרַחוּם אַרְךָ אַפִּים וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְנָקָם עַל־הָרָעָה** *you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing* was expressed as the reason for his anger and therefore intended as a *rebuke* of God. From Jonah’s perspective, while other biblical prophets had spoken against foreign powers, there was no biblical precedent for a prophet to travel to a city or nation outside Israel or Judah with a message of repentance or offer of deliverance for *foreigners*, and to do so, in his mind, may simply have been going too far. But as a familiar rubric in the Hebrew Bible, attributed to God himself,<sup>24</sup> the inclusion of this covenant formula as a basis for Jonah’s displeasure – to effectively turn it against God and accuse him of being *too* compassionate (to some) – could conflict with commonly held views about God’s attributes. Used in this way it is a somewhat shocking yet unmistakable marker of irony.

### **Irony Marker 6: Contradictions**

Incongruities within a text, or between one biblical text and other biblical texts of a similar type, may be a possible clue to the presence of irony. One such text is Isaiah 15-16 which has the heartfelt **לִבִּי לְמוֹאָב יִצְעַק** *my heart cries out for Moab* in 15:5. Brian Jones regards this as irony: “The principal clue that Isaiah 15-16 is intended ironically is the conflict between the negative attitude toward Moab expressed nearly everywhere in the HB and the

<sup>23</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> Exodus 34:6 is either quoted verbatim or echoed in Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8; Nehemiah 9:17, 31; 2 Chronicles 30:9.

deeply sympathetic attitude expressed in Isaiah 15-16.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, God’s evidently sympathetic attitude toward Nineveh in *Jonah* in readily relenting from the disaster he had threatened against them is in stark contrast to the apparent delight at Nineveh’s destruction in *Nahum* and prophecies of Nineveh’s or Assyria’s fall scattered through Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zephaniah. The contrast is particularly evident in the ordering of books in the Septuagint which places *Jonah* and *Nahum* together. This incongruity is a strong indicator that any apparent concern for Nineveh on God’s part in *Jonah* is ironic and as such there is agreement between the opening imperative to cry against Nineveh כִּי־עָלְתָה רָעָתָם לִפְנֵי for *their evil has come up before me* (1:2), the closing declaration that לא אֶחָוִס עַל־נִינְוָה I *will not be concerned about Nineveh* (4:11) and the prophetic corpus which uniformly condemns the city.

### **Irony Marker 7: Abundance of ironies**

Muecke quotes from Jonathan Swift’s *Cadenus and Vanessa* to make the point that “irony is not irony unless it ‘fairly hints’ at its own nature”:

. . . those who aim at Ridicule  
 Shou’d fix upon some certain Rule,  
 Which fairly hints they are in jest. . . .  
 For, let a Man be ne’er so wise,  
 He may be caught with sober Lies.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Brian C. Jones, *Howling Over Moab: Irony and Rhetoric in Isaiah 15-16* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 137.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas C. Muecke, “Irony Markers,” *Poetics* 7, no. 4 (1978): 363.

He argues that if a writer does not see to it that his audience understands something to be irony, then what he or she communicates will be indistinguishable from deliberate deception, lies or hoaxes. In Swift's view, it is a necessary condition for "Ridicule" to be both intended and communicated as such, and the same could be said for irony. Muecke argues that it is not legitimate for something to be *read* ironically regardless of the author's intention, "reading it *as if* it were intended to be ironical," and that there must be evidence within the text itself which marks that it was intended to be read as irony.<sup>27</sup>

It is one matter to discuss authorial intention when dealing with a text with a single author, whether the author is known or unknown. It is quite another when dealing with texts which may have had several authors, or which developed as a community effort with multiple hands contributing to it. Texts of this nature may have been produced in response to dialogue about earlier stages in the development of the text, or by going through a process of editing and redaction, possibly over an extended period of time. These are some of the issues biblical scholars deal with in determining the "author" of a biblical text. As Carolyn Sharp puts it:

The vexed matter of authorial intention lies at the heart of current debates about reading ... Yet the question of author cannot be ignored when irony is seen to be involved, however complex our idea of author may become, even if 'author' is broadened to include readers' interactions with texts and communities rather than being strictly identified with the intentions of a single historical person.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Muecke, "Irony Markers," 364-65.

<sup>28</sup> Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 2. David Gunn also notes that "the problem of authorial intention is complicated enough with literature where the author is known." With respect to texts which may have composite authorship he says "one cannot simply speak of the author being the last redactor since the last redactor may not have been the last substantial redactor (and is a redactor really the same as an author?)" David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (A & C Black, 1980), 15.

An abundance of ironies in a text is a good indication that the author intended the work to be seen as ironic, rather than simply comedic. In the case of a biblical text which may have gone through a process of redaction, the fact that a text has an abundance of ironies is enough to establish that at some point in that process, perhaps even from its beginnings, the author(s) or redactor(s) decided that the text would be ironic. A literary text may include one or more ironies without the whole text being of an ironic nature. However, the presence of several ironies, or a cluster of irony markers will be good indications that the abundance of ironies is the result of an ironic style on the part of the writer(s) and may underlie and contribute to a central irony which is intrinsically linked to the main message of the book or story. As Sharp has observed, “the very fact that one passage or line or trope in a text may be clearly ironic can alert the reader to the textual context itself as ironic in more subtle ways as well.”<sup>29</sup> In support of this she cites Muecke’s observation that “the very presence of a number of recognized ironies may operate as a signal to look out for others.”<sup>30</sup> In the case of *Jonah* some details may or may not be ironic, and while some scholars may regard some aspects of the story as ironies, others interpret them entirely differently. Yet almost all scholars acknowledge the presence of irony to varying degrees. However, as ironies often present in a cluster which may also include ridicule, contradictions and other markers, the possibility that something in that context *may* be ironic is probably enough reason to take the possibility seriously and shift the balance of probabilities in favour of it definitely being irony. For example, in 1:13 we find אֶל־הַיַּבְשָׁה לְהָשִׁיב הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיִּהְיוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים הַהֵם *the men rowed hard to return to shore*. The verb וַיִּהְיוּ is strange in this context as it literally means “bored through,”<sup>31</sup> from a root

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<sup>29</sup> Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Muecke, “Irony Markers,” 367.

<sup>31</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 107.

meaning “to dig”<sup>32</sup> and is not a word one might expect for “rowed.”<sup>33</sup> Christopher Meredith concludes, convincingly, that the choice of a land-based word *חָתַר* *to dig through* in a maritime context is ironic and reverses natural expectations. If the phrase stood alone or appeared in a different context it might be considered to be strange or the wrong choice of word, but in a context where there is a cluster of ironies it reads naturally and convincingly as humorous at least – the men ‘digging’ through the water desperately and relentlessly trying to reach shore – and quite possibly points to yet another irony. Jonah was insisting on being hurled to the sea, the sailors were attempting the impossible by digging their way back to land, and ironically the deity whom readers might think would be keen to get Jonah back on land was the very reason the ship could not return to port.<sup>34</sup>

### Defining satire

Ze’ev Weisman, writing specifically about satire, although his comments apply to irony and parody as well, has cautioned that “the use of later and even modern terms for the study of ancient literature, and of the Hebrew Bible in particular, is permissible as long as the scholar is aware of the risk involved. These arise from the fact that the borrowed term was initiated and coined in an alien cultural milieu, remote in time and place.”<sup>35</sup> Keeping that caution in mind we need to use terminology to explain what is happening in the texts before us, even if such terminology is anachronistic or if the meaning has changed over the course of

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<sup>32</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 365.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Meredith, “The Conundrum of *חָתַר* in Jonah 1:13,” *VT* 64, no. 1 (2014): 148-9. He argues that the standard Hebrew word for *rowing*, or at least a more obvious one, would be שָׂוָה which occurs in a maritime context in Ezekiel 27:29 (the related word מִשָּׂוֶה *oars* occurs in Ezekiel 27:6; Isaiah 33:21) and in a variety of other books. There is no reason to think the writer of *Jonah* would be unfamiliar with it.

<sup>34</sup> Meredith, “The Conundrum of *חָתַר* in Jonah 1:13,” 152.

<sup>35</sup> Zeev Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1998), 1.



time. Marcus has provided a definition of satire which will be used throughout this thesis, highlighting that the main difference between irony and satire is that satire has a *target*:

A text may be identified as a satire if it has a target which is the object of attack, either directly or indirectly, and has a preponderance of the essential attributes of satire. These latter consist of a mixture of unbelievable elements (absurdities, fantastic situations, grotesqueries, and distortions), ironies, ridicule, parody, and rhetorical features. It is not enough for these techniques just to appear in a work in an isolated fashion, they must dominate it by being the very essence of the work.<sup>36</sup>

Some scholars are doubtful whether or not a generic definition of satire can actually be achieved. “It is unlike other important kinds of literature because it lacks a definable cathartic effect or at least so far no one has isolated a general effect closely enough for generic definition.”<sup>37</sup> Weisman maintains that the essential means of the satirist is wit, “which is the most sophisticated linguistic device for imparting double entendre and even paradoxical meaning to ordinary words.”<sup>38</sup> While wit is also employed in other genres, its purpose in satire is to evoke disdain and contempt rather than to simply arouse laughter. Weisman observes that the biblical *שְׁנֵינָה* *cutting word, taunt* and *מִשְׁלַּח* *proverb* which are sometimes coupled<sup>39</sup> to describe verbal weapons used against opponents, convey the idea of the kind of wit used in satire.<sup>40</sup> He further regards the nomenclature related to the characterisation of satire in scholarly literature as semantically equivalent to the biblical *לעג*

<sup>36</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 9-10.

<sup>37</sup> H. James Jensen and Malvin R. Zirker, *The Satirist's Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), IX.

<sup>38</sup> Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible*, 3. Weisman is here critiquing Gilbert Highet's eight rules according to which a satirical composition can be distinguished from other types. Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

<sup>39</sup> The hendiadys *לְמִשְׁלַח וְלְשְׁנֵינָה* *a proverb and a taunt* appears only in texts considered by several scholars to be part of the Deuteronomistic redactional layer: Deuteronomy 28:37; 1 Kings 9:7; Jeremiah 24:9 and in a parallel account in 2 Chronicles 7:20.

<sup>40</sup> Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible*, 3.

to scorn, mock תלל / תלל to mock, trifle with and שחק / צחק<sup>41</sup> laugh/laughter. Weisman argues that because לעג is “used in the Bible not only to depict a kind of attitude towards individuals or people, but also to reflect the way that this attitude is expressed” it therefore semantically matches *satire* “which in its very nature is a verbal expression of taunt and mockery.” It is therefore an appropriate term for describing biblical texts as “we do not impose an alien concept on the literary interpretation of the Bible; we merely explore literary and artistic elements inherent in it while using our own modern terminology.”<sup>42</sup>

Not all irony is satirical, although irony is an essential feature of satire. It is often difficult to distinguish between the two. Weisman notes the difficulty in distinguishing between irony and satire:

There is no clear-cut division between satire and irony, not even between satire and humour. The difference between them is in mood and tone, and these are mainly subjective. In humour and irony there is more a mood of forgiveness, whereas in satire the dominant tone is that of animosity and the insult.<sup>43</sup>

Determining whether *Jonah* is irony or satire is therefore subjective and depends on what mood or tone the reader detects, or perhaps reads into it. Several scholars regard the message of *Jonah* to be one of universal forgiveness, seeing – especially in the last lines – reassurance that God is concerned with the innocent, or the penitent. To them the book may contain several ironies, but the mood or tone is not necessarily satirical, unless it targets those (like

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<sup>41</sup> Brenner argues that while these two roots are usually regarded as etymological and semantic variants they are not fully interchangeable and that at some stage there might have existed a sense differentiation between them. Athalya Brenner, “On the Semantic Field of Humour, Laughter and the Comic in the Old Testament,” in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible* (eds. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 46-7.

<sup>42</sup> Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible*, 4-5.

<sup>43</sup> Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible*, 8.

the prophet Jonah in this reading) who were not ready to accept the message of universal forgiveness. They see Jonah as the object of ridicule and insult, and the target of satire, precisely because he was unwilling to accept that foreigners should be forgiven. However, if we read the final lines as a statement that God is *not concerned* about Nineveh, and the Ninevites' eventual fate as an indication that they were not ultimately forgiven, then the target of the satire is open and could conceivably be those who believed that God will always forgive those who repent.<sup>44</sup> The prophet's anger which is exhibited in the final dialogue, while initially seeming to be directed at God, may be aimed, for example, at a theodicy or a view of divine justice which bound God to either reward or punish based on the actions of individuals or communities. If God operated within a set of rules or ethics and could be predicted to act in certain ways in response to human behaviour then he could be manipulated because he could be expected to respond in accordance with those rules. On the other hand, if *Jonah* targets those who believed that God operates within fixed rules and is therefore predictable, then it effectively uses irony and parody to ridicule and satirise their view and emphasises that God is unpredictable, unable to be controlled or manipulated.

LaCocque and LaCocque consider satire – “the genre of serious comic art” – to be a “mixture of the elevated and the vulgar, the serious and the comical, prose and poetry, classic

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<sup>44</sup> Differences between the books of Kings and Chronicles, and tensions within these books which may be attributed to redactional influences, suggest that different views were held in exilic or post-exilic Israel about issues such as sin, punishment and repentance. One notable difference between Kings and Chronicles is that, unlike Kings in which sin was cumulative and the results transgenerational, in Chronicles Israel's fate was never sealed and reversals in their state of blessing or ruin could take place. Humility and obedience could bring restoration. (Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 160; R.K. Duke, “Chronicles, Book of,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (eds. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 172.) I argue that *Jonah* was written against this theological background and reflects the dialogue about these issues.

language and dialect.”<sup>45</sup> They regard *Jonah* as belonging to a specific strand of satire created by Menippos in the first half of the third century BCE, which will henceforth be referred to as *Menippean* satire, which also means they date *Jonah* to the Hellenistic period.<sup>46</sup> Ackerman also thinks that “the closest parallel to the Jonah story is Menippean satire,” noting that the “characters speak for themselves and are made to look ridiculous through their actions. In classical satire the events are wildly incongruous and distorted. The writer uses a mishmash of literary genres, often swinging from narrative prose to a song interlude and inverting those forms through parody.”<sup>47</sup> What makes Menippean satire distinct from satire in general is that it includes elements of several literary genres and tends to parody them.<sup>48</sup>

These classifications also rely on definitions of Greek literary forms – the English word *irony*, for example, has its origins in the Greek comic character εἶρων *Eiron* and *parody* derives from the Greek παρωδία meaning “counter song,” an imitation set against an original – and there is an inherent difficulty in applying terms coined to describe literary or dramatic devices used in Greek literature and theatre to biblical Hebrew texts. For this reason Virginia Ingram questioned whether “satire” is an appropriate term to apply to *Jonah*: “I am choosing to use the word satire when discussing the book of Jonah knowing that the origins of the genre are most probably in Greece or Rome after the first two collections of the biblical books were canonised. I believe that although applying this genre to the book of Jonah is imperfect (and may be considered anachronistic) it is still the best option we have.”<sup>49</sup> While there are difficulties in referring to satire as a *genre*, Ingram regards an identification of the story of *Jonah* as satire as essential for understanding it.

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<sup>45</sup> LaCocque and LaCocque, *Jonah: a Psycho-Religious Approach*, 31.

<sup>46</sup> LaCocque and LaCocque, *Jonah: a Psycho-Religious Approach*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Ackerman, “Satire and Symbolism in the Song of Jonah,” 228.

<sup>48</sup> Band, “Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody,” 191.

<sup>49</sup> Ingram, “Satire and Cognitive Dissonance in the Book of Jonah,” 141.

Identifying the book of Jonah as a satire is important as it informs us how we should read the narrative. Most saliently, it informs us that we should read the book as a work of fiction. In doing so the reader can accept the fantastic elements of the story as necessary for building the satire; and the reader can accommodate the oddities in the book which arise in the characters, for example, Jonah's flight from the call of God.<sup>50</sup>

While Menippean 'satire' was named after Menippus of Gadara in Coele-Syria who lived in the third century BCE,<sup>51</sup> some scholars do not regard Menippus as its originator and are of the view that satire was invented by the Romans in the first century BCE. They therefore dismiss the possibility of finding satire in the Hebrew prophets.<sup>52</sup> Ackerman, however, finds elements of satire in the story of Jonah "that bring it close to classical satire" (even though he assumes *Jonah* was written in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE). While he thinks "there is no evidence of cultural contact between the writer and the classical satire that was probably evolving in other parts of the Mediterranean world at that time," Ackerman is convinced that reading *Jonah* as satire gives the modern reader "the most useful handle on the story."<sup>53</sup> His use of the term "evolving" with regard to classical satire is significant, especially if *Jonah* was written later than he assumed. It is entirely possible that the writer of *Jonah* was familiar with an antecedent of what is now considered to be classical satire, or that Greek and Roman writers were familiar to some extent with the literary forms of the Hebrew prophets. *Jonah* is arguably more in the style of *Menippean* satire as an antecedent to

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<sup>50</sup> Ingram, "Satire and Cognitive Dissonance in the Book of Jonah," 142.

<sup>51</sup> Only fragments of Menippus' work survives. "The genre which bears his name arose two centuries later with the writings of Varro who consciously styled himself on his progenitor." Helen Paynter, *Reduced Laughter: Seriocomic Features and Their Functions in the Book of Kings* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), 41.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets* (Louisville KY: John Knox Press, 1992), 24.

<sup>53</sup> Ackerman, "Jonah," 234, 242.

classical satire. If *Jonah* was written in Persian Yehud, its authors were therefore relatively proximate both geographically and chronologically to the origins of Menippean satire. There may indeed have been cultural contact between the writer(s) of *Jonah* and the early influencers of classical satire.

Thomas Jemielity has given close attention to satire in the Hebrew prophets in several works.<sup>54</sup> He notes that narrative satire, a distinctive feature of Menippean satire, is rare in the Hebrew Bible, with *Jonah* being the notable exception.<sup>55</sup> He notes that this form of satire is essentially subversive, although he considers *all* biblical prophecy to be subversive:

The menippea stands outside the institution, even the literary institution, as it poses its challenge to the monologic voice. Prophet and satirist likewise stand outside the accepted, the customary, the usual: they seek to subvert the closed system of the institution.<sup>56</sup>

According to Jemielity, Menippean satire has several features in common with prophetic texts, including “sharp contrasts and oxymoronic combinations, abrupt transitions and shifts, ups and downs, rises and falls, unexpected comings together of distant and disunited things, mesalliances of all sorts.”<sup>57</sup> Menippean satire has been described as:

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<sup>54</sup> Including Thomas Jemielity, “Divine Derision and Scorn: The Hebrew Prophets as Satirists,” *Cithara* 25, no. 1 (1985); Thomas Jemielity, “Prophets or Projectors? Challenges to Credibility in Hebrew Prophecy,” *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 18 (1988); Thomas Jemielity, “Prophetic Voices and Satiric Echoes,” *Cithara* 29, no. 1 (1989); Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets*; Thomas Jemielity, “Ancient Biblical Satire,” in *A Companion to Satire* (ed. Ruben Quintero; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets*, 16, 63.

<sup>56</sup> Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets*, 63.

<sup>57</sup> Jemielity here draws on Mikhail Bakhtin’s terminology in his discussion of the characteristics of Menippean satire. Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets*, 65; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (trans. Caryl Emerson; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 114-19.

## CHAPTER 2: IRONY, PARODY AND SATIRE IN JONAH

A medley of alternating prose and verse, sometimes a jumble of flagrantly digressive narrative, or again a potpourri of tales, songs, dialogues, orations, letters, lists, and other brief forms mixed together. In theme, Menippean satire was essentially concerned with right learning or right belief. That theme often called for ridicule or caricature of some sham-intellectual or theological fraud.<sup>58</sup>

Jemielity sees a distinction between Menippean satire and the prophetic texts. “Menippean satire is concerned with intellectual folly; the prophets’ emphasis is moral. I know of no instance where a Hebrew prophet criticises an idea as such.”<sup>59</sup> I think he makes too much of this distinction: for the prophets, orthopraxy was based on and derived from orthodoxy; their moral emphasis was an inevitable consequence of their monotheistic belief, an intellectual idea; and their adherence to *Torah* was as much intellectual as it was moral, if, in fact, they even distinguished between the two. However, Jemielity has made a significant contribution to scholarship in demonstrating that satire and prophecy often intersect, and “how the fashioning of the prophet’s persona resembles the creating of a satirist’s mask.”<sup>60</sup> The LaCocques, Marcus, Ackerman, Jemielity and others have established that *Jonah* resembles classical satire in general and Menippean satire in particular in many elements. This does not necessarily mean that *Jonah* was influenced by classical or Menippean satire, and the similarity in styles is therefore not a certain determiner of the date of writing. It should be recognised that while Hebrew prophecy and classical literary styles probably developed independently and in different cultures, there may have been enough cultural contact for influence to have flowed in either direction, or both. The scholarly consensus is that *Jonah*

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<sup>58</sup> Eugene P. Kirk, *Menippean Satire: An Annotated Catalogue of Texts and Criticism* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1980), xi.

<sup>59</sup> Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets*, 66.

<sup>60</sup> Jemielity, “Prophetic Voices and Satiric Echoes,” 33.

was written in the Persian era,<sup>61</sup> and it is not necessary to date it as late as the Hellenistic period because of its ostensible similarity with Menippean satire, although there may be an argument that it should be dated *late* in the Persian era.

Joel Kaminsky has expressed his suspicion that many scholars do not recognise humour in biblical texts because they are more likely to be familiar with the Greek genres, and also because they presume that elevated religious works could not contain coarse forms of humour. “While this approach has produced some excellent readings, it has also compelled many critics to overlook ways in which the biblical text reveals a type of humour less related to Greek literary forms and more closely linked to the character of the schlemiel.”<sup>62</sup> It should be emphasised that a classification of a text as humorous, satirical or parodic does not mean it cannot convey a serious message. Aaron Schart, who reads *Jonah* as humour which takes on the shape of irony, satire and parody, adds a cautionary note:

Let me hasten to add that the notion of “satire” does not imply that the narrative excludes reliable and serious insights. Quite the contrary: a satire seeks to reveal the absurdity of the opponent’s position with a serious didactic intention.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> A Hellenistic dating of *Jonah* has been advocated by several scholars in addition to the Lacocques, including Wolff who argues for a date in the early Hellenistic period. Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 78. For a list of others see LaCocque and LaCocque, *Jonah: a Psycho-Religious Approach*, 47 n.36. See also the section on dating in my Introduction.

<sup>62</sup> Joel S. Kaminsky, “Humor and the Theology of Hope: Isaac as a Humorous Figure,” *Interpretation* 54, no. 4 (2000): 364-65.

<sup>63</sup> Aaron Schart, “The Jonah Narrative within the Book of the Twelve,” in *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Foundations - Redactional Processes - Historical Insights* (eds. Rainer Albertz, et al.; Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 111.



Kaminsky refers to the *schlemiel* – the bumbling idiot – as possibly a better characterisation of biblical humour than the Greek genres of satire, irony or comedy. However, even with this characterisation he has had to resort to a Yiddish word (שלימיל) rather than a biblical one.<sup>64</sup>

### Satire and genre

I have deliberately avoided using the term “genre” to refer to the literary style of *Jonah* or to satire in general. McKenzie makes the point that “the key to understanding the message of *Jonah* is recognising its genre” and clarifies this by adding that genre categories are not firm or fixed, a work can incorporate different genres with authors varying or mixing genres for creative ends, and there are no firm rules for determining a work’s genre.<sup>65</sup> He emphasises that *Jonah* has often been misconstrued as history and the satirical intention of the story is therefore missed, but cautions that “an ancient genre is not always, in fact almost never, identical to a modern one.”<sup>66</sup> He consequently does not give *Jonah* a particular genre-label beyond stating that the nature and meaning of a genre needs to be understood in its ancient setting, and hinting that it is a unique text which does not easily fit in the “prophecy” category. He is right that *Jonah* is distinctly different from other prophecy, although it resembles it in some ways. The resemblance may very well be the result of parody, or, as David Petersen puts it, because it is a satiric version of prophetic performance.

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<sup>64</sup> Rauber used the same term (*schlemiel*) to describe what he regards as the “distinctive kind of humour” found in *Jonah*, as does Carroll. D.F. Rauber, “Jonah - the prophet as Schlemiel,” *BT* 49 (1970): 29-38; Robert P. Carroll, “Is Humour Also Among the Prophets?,” in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible* (eds. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 180.

<sup>65</sup> McKenzie, “Jonah and Genre,” 13-16.

<sup>66</sup> McKenzie, “Jonah and Genre,” 20.

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The book has more to do with theology than prophecy. One might say that the author has created a satiric version of prophetic performance – Jonah is in some ways the most “orthodox” of Israelite theologians – to make a theological point. The book is full of satire ... By using such satire, the author challenges some fairly common theological notions in ancient Israel, such as the belief that those who do not comply with the deity’s will shall be punished and that foreign and sinful cities (Sodom, Nineveh) will be destroyed.<sup>67</sup>

There are difficulties with categorising satire as a *genre* and I have avoided referring to satire as such, and will continue to do so, although it seems that some biblical scholars do not have a problem with this terminology. Tribble, who believes *Jonah* fits best in the realm of satire, says of the genre:

The genre of satire uses irony, derision, wit, invective, and related phenomena to attack a specific target. Though the attack has a serious purpose, humor mediates it. In the process the grotesque, the absurd, and the fanciful may come into play. A preponderance of these features within a story confirms it as satire.<sup>68</sup>

Whether or not satire is a definable and identifiable *genre* is not the issue here. *Jonah* is different and yet similar to prophecy; it is satirical, although not necessarily in an identical way to classical Greek or Roman satire which it possibly predates; it resembles Menippean satire in many respects yet may have evolved independently as a literary style from the mocking ridicule common to the Hebrew prophets.

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<sup>67</sup> David L. Petersen, “The Book of the Twelve / The Minor Prophets,” in *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues* (eds. Steven L. McKenzie and M. Patrick Graham; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 113.

<sup>68</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 470.

## Parody – definitions

I have earlier referred to parody as an element of satire. Satire and parody are often confused. Miles explains the subtle nuance between them:

Satire is the exposure by comedy of behavior which is standardized and, to that extent, foolish. Parody is that breed of satire in which the standardized behavior to be exposed is literary.<sup>69</sup>

While satire shames a target audience, parody uses pre-existing texts as its ammunition. Miles regards *Jonah* as a parody rather than satire.<sup>70</sup> Arnold Band's distinction between satire and parody is also helpful:

Satire, even literary satire, does not necessarily incorporate materials from a text it is attacking; it may simply censure observed human behaviour, human "wickedness and folly." Parody must include a pre-text and is therefore more susceptible to "misunderstanding."<sup>71</sup>

He further considers parody to be so abundant in *Jonah* "that one can ignore it today only by hermeneutic contrivance."<sup>72</sup> Katharine Dell contends that "the book of *Jonah* can be classified as a 'parody' in terms of genre since it satirises and parodies the prophetic tradition with much use of irony and innuendo."<sup>73</sup> She approvingly cites Bruce Vawter's description of *Jonah* as "almost a buffoon of prophecy."<sup>74</sup> Dell considers *Jonah*'s prayer inside the fish to be a parody of psalms, his speeches to be caricatures of the prophetic tradition, and his wish for

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<sup>69</sup> Miles, "Laughing at the Bible: *Jonah* as Parody," 203.

<sup>70</sup> Miles, "Laughing at the Bible: *Jonah* as Parody," 205.

<sup>71</sup> Band, "Swallowing *Jonah*: The Eclipse of Parody," 192.

<sup>72</sup> Band, "Swallowing *Jonah*: The Eclipse of Parody," 191.

<sup>73</sup> Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1991), 153.

<sup>74</sup> Bruce Vawter, *Job and Jonah: Questioning the Hidden God* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983), 98.

death to be a liturgical cliché modelled on similar phrasing in the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:4. I would add to this list and include the king of Nineveh's allusions (3:9) to texts in Deuteronomy, Exodus and possibly Joel as further examples of parody in *Jonah*. Jonah's own reference to God's attributes (4:2) enumerated in Exodus 34:6-7 is arguably parody.<sup>75</sup> While there is a comic element to parody, and some would see it as parody's major characteristic, Dell says it is "not at the heart of the meaning of the word" and parody can operate as a tool of serious criticism.<sup>76</sup>

Like irony and satire, parody is generally considered to be an invention of the Greeks. Indeed, the term *παρωδία* is associated with Athenian drama where the same actors who performed in tragedies would wear grotesque costumes and follow their performance with a second play imitating the first. Linda Hutcheon refers to the parodies of mock epics such as *Batrachomyomachia*<sup>77</sup> and says: "The mock epic did not mock the epic: it satirized the pretensions of the contemporary as set against the ideal norms implied by the parodied text or set of conventions."<sup>78</sup> Her observation is also relevant when considering the purpose of parody in Hebrew texts: it was not the primary text itself which was being parodied or mocked, but rather the *use* of these texts by groups within the community, or the theology they derived from them.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> These texts will be analysed in chapter 3.

<sup>76</sup> Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*, 148-50. Carol Newsom disagrees "with her [Dell's] choice of an extremely broad definition of parody and would limit it to those misuses of form or discourse that have the force of ridicule." However, in my opinion, it is not necessary to limit parody to the ridiculous and Newsom's limitation is unwarranted. Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: a Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 280.

<sup>77</sup> The comic epic *Βατραχομυομαχία* (*Battle of the Frogs and Mice*) was a parody of Homer's *Iliad*. Authorship is disputed but regarded by many scholars to be an anonymous work from the time of Alexander the Great.

<sup>78</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 44.

<sup>79</sup> Hebrew literature, at least in translation, may have been known by Greek writers and may have had a direct or indirect influence on the Greek language, and gives some limited support to the possibility that cultural

## Target

One of the defining characteristics of satire and parody is that they have a target, and the target in *Jonah* is often understood to be Jonah himself. Marcus, for example, asserts “the target of the satire is the prophet Jonah.”<sup>80</sup> Spangenberg concurs: “The narrator is evidently a satirist, as he ridicules the prophet.”<sup>81</sup> Holbert says satire has “a definite target which must be familiar enough to make the assault meaningful and memorable.”<sup>82</sup> However, he rejects the notion that Jonah is a representative of anything or anybody other than himself, or that prophets in general, prophecy in general, or certain kinds of prophets or prophecies are under attack. “Jonah, the prophet, no more, no less, is the target.”<sup>83</sup>

While Spangenberg thinks the target is the prophet Jonah himself, he draws attention to the *purpose* of satire, which is helpful in determining its target. “The ridicule becomes evident in the contrasts and contradictions that abound in the narrative. It should not be forgotten that satire is a vehicle for social criticism and is aimed at ultimate societal

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influence may have been two-way. Romain Garnier refers to a post-classical construction in *Batrachomyomachia* which is also found in the Septuagint, where he thinks it is likely to be a Hebraism. The use of the verb ἰσχύω + infinitive as well as the verb κναιώ which are found in the Septuagint (2 Chron. 2:5 and 1 Chron 29:14) could suggest that this comic epic was written during or *after* the writing of the Septuagint and this Hebraism influenced the Greek language. However, we need to be cautious about drawing conclusions from Hebraisms in the LXX, since many of them may have developed as post-classical Greek without any Hebraic influence, as evidenced in non-literary papyri. Romain Garnier, “La Batrachomyomachie: un texte polyphonique,” in *Homère revisité. Parodie et humour dans les réécritures homériques. Actes du colloque international, Aix-en-Provence 30-31 octobre 2008* (Collection « ISTA »; Besançon: l'Institut des Sciences et Techniques de l'Antiquité, 2011), 117, 120.

<sup>80</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 96.

<sup>81</sup> Izak J.J. Spangenberg, “Reading the Old Testament in the 21st Century Using the Book of Jonah as Reference,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 2 (2013): 5.

<sup>82</sup> Holbert, “Satire in the Book of Jonah,” 62.

<sup>83</sup> Holbert, “Satire in the Book of Jonah,” 64. For scholars who read *Jonah* as a parody of prophets, see Alan J. Hauser, “Jonah: In Pursuit of the Dove,” *JBL* 104, no. 1 (1985): 21-37; Band, “Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody,” 177, 186 and references there.

improvement” adding that satire “ridicules, offends and humiliates, but with the hope of improvement on the part of those who are ridiculed.”<sup>84</sup> He describes the story of *Jonah* as:

a satirical novel which tried to bring about changes in the convictions and attitudes of Jews living in the 5th-century BCE in Yehud. The narrator tried to do this by reflecting the narrowness and unsympathetic behaviour of the elites in the society of Yehud. Satire often works with a hero and an anti-hero, or a type and an anti-type. Jonah is the anti-type of the ideal prophet the author longed for. But Jonah is also an anti-type of the ideal Jew the author envisaged.<sup>85</sup>

I will argue that the target, *contra* Holbert and Spangenberg, is not Jonah himself or prophets in general, or even the “elites in the society of Yehud” but rather a *Weltanschauung* which incorporated a view of God’s dealings with Israel which was at odds with the narrator’s own ideas and his exilic or post-exilic experience.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Spangenberg, “Reading the Old Testament,” 5-6.

<sup>85</sup> Spangenberg, “Reading the Old Testament,” 6.

<sup>86</sup> The LaCocques argue (unconvincingly) for a third century BCE date for *Jonah* and that it was a “time of party strife in Judea between the ‘Hellenised’ (or modernist) Jews, and the Hasidim (or orthodox), strongly opposed to foreign influence on ancestral tradition.” (LaCocque and LaCocque, *Jonah: a Psycho-Religious Approach*, 41-43.) They do not, however, provide any information for how they arrive at a *third* century date as this statement would be true of the *second* century BCE. As they see it, the debate centred around the practical outworking of the incorporation of foreigners into the eschatological utopia of the kingdom of God – foreseen in Third Isaiah and Zechariah – and they consider *Jonah* to be an instrument of propaganda for the party of opposition, the “ideologists.” The target, according to this view, was the Hasidim. They argue that *Jonah* advocates absolute universalism and opposes the particularism of Ezra, although they posit that the Hasidim were also far from condoning the isolationism of Ezra and Nehemiah. They think “the Hasidim demanded that the relationship with foreigners belong to the Jewish consciousness of their identity” yet this is vague language which does not explain precisely where they stood and why, or how, the writer(s) of *Jonah* opposed them. They come close to admitting as much when they say that the attitude of Jonah’s party with respect to the nations is “highly ambiguous.” They do, however, touch on an important question when they ask, “if God intends, conditionally, to forgive and save the wicked city, why did he not show the same compassion for his own people whom he submitted successively to the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Macedonians, thus chastising Israel and Judah without measure?” This is an important question, possibly *the* central question of the story, and it is a pity that they leave it without further discussion except to add that “in a certain sense, whatever

While the scholars mentioned above have identified Jonah himself as the target of ridicule, whether as satire or parody, there seems to me to be little purpose in ridiculing Jonah as a person, regardless of whether he is an historical or fictitious character, unless it serves some other purpose. I agree with Ingram's assessment:

To parody a prophet solely for the purpose of making fun of him has been suggested as a possible motive for the writing of the book of Jonah (Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 21). Such a suggestion reflects a limited assessment of the narrative, and misses the spiritual and central significance of the book as a mirror for society. It would seem reasonable to assume that by using satire the author had a political as well as a theological intention.<sup>87</sup>

Ingram suggests the actual target of the satire is a worldview of legalism and retributive justice and an erroneous view that God is responsible for the ills of the world. She observes a tension in the story with a growing realization of the nature of God's grace, and that in the story Jonah has an irrational commitment to the idea of retaliatory justice. I believe Ingram's contribution to the discussion of the message of *Jonah* is significant, yet I see no evidence in the story that Jonah is committed to the notions of retaliatory justice. What I do see is a character who is wrestling with divine justice and the unpredictability of mercy, and a narrative style which suggests the writer is in a dialogue about the matter but draws no satisfactory conclusions from it. Ultimately, his main point is found in the question posed by the king of Nineveh (3:9): מִי יֵדָע *Who knows [what God will do]?*

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God would do with the nations appears as nothing less than capricious injustice." God's apparent capriciousness in his dealings with both Jonah and Nineveh has already been mentioned in this thesis, and it is a subject which will receive further attention later precisely because it is central to the writer's problem with contemporaneous theodicy.

<sup>87</sup> Ingram, "Satire and Cognitive Dissonance in the Book of Jonah," 151.

## Conclusion

The story of *Jonah* is abundant in ironies, to the extent that the overall style of the story has been described as ironic. It also contains parodies of specific biblical texts, narratives and prophetic and poetic literary styles, to the extent that the story as a whole has been described as parody. Together with other elements such as mocking, ridicule, hyperbole and the comic, the story can be identified more specifically as satire, and has several elements in common with Menippean satire. As the dating of *Jonah* relative to the development of Menippean satire is problematic, it is best to think of the literary style of the story as similar to Menippean satire and possibly influenced by cultural contact with other literature which was produced in an early stage of the development of classical satire. *Jonah* is different to other biblical Hebrew prophetic texts in that it is a narrative text, although it makes similar use of irony, satire, ridicule and parody, and is arguably a later development of a prophetic genre, which evolved parallel to and possibly in connection with classical Greek and Roman satire. It is an unusual work, “a literary phenomenon which has few parallels” to quote Band’s summation.<sup>88</sup>

An essential element of satire is that it has a target for its ridicule, parody and ironies. There is considerable difficulty in determining the primary target of *Jonah*’s satire and scholars have consequently identified different and conflicting possibilities. An overlooked scenario is the possibility that *Jonah* has several targets, representing divergent voices in a contemporaneous dialogue. It is often suggested that Jonah himself is the object of ridicule, but for what purpose is not always clear. It is feasible that the writer is using the Jonah character as a representative of the prophetic voice in Israel. The story also mocks the Ninevites in general and their king in particular, although there would be little purpose in

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<sup>88</sup> Band, “Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody,” 194.



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ridiculing the king of a city or an empire which had long disappeared unless they represented something else. The king alludes to, and thereby parodies, biblical texts and the theological views of the hands which produced them. He may represent another voice in the dialogue. I propose that the voice of the LORD may represent a third voice. However, being a satire, it is feasible that even this voice is a parody. Rather than being an impartial observer it is possible that the narrator represents yet another voice. As satire, the purpose of the various voices in the story is to reflect, mimic and ridicule the conflicting views in the community the writer is addressing.

## Chapter 3: Intertextuality and the parody of Biblical texts in *Jonah*

### **Intertextuality – definition**

*Jonah* shares similar language with other parts of the Hebrew Bible, sometimes appearing to be directly “quoting” or drawing on earlier texts. Aside from the difficulty in determining which texts came first – and if these “earlier texts” existed in some form or other at the time of *Jonah*’s writing – there is also the possibility that the writer of *Jonah* was instead simply using the terminology and ideas which formed part of a contemporaneous dialogue. As I am arguing that *Jonah* was written in response to Deuteronomistic ideas about the reason for the exile, I will discuss its relationship to the literature with which it shares some similarities and analyse how intertextuality works in *Jonah* for the purposes of parodying earlier texts.

“Intertextuality” is a widely used term in literary theory in general, including in biblical studies, yet there is considerable disagreement and controversy over what the term means, what should be recognised as a “text,” and how relationships between texts can be viewed. For this study of *Jonah*, for example, I need to define whether or not allusions to orally transmitted traditions should be considered as intertextualities. In the context of analysing possible parodies, I also need to consider whether to refer to a parody of a liturgical ‘style’ as an intertextuality if there was no specific written text involved (a far as we know).

A useful and concise definition of intertextuality, which also suits the purposes of this chapter of my thesis, has been given by James Nogalski:

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Here, “intertextuality” means the inter-relationship between two or more texts which evidence suggests (1) was deliberately established by ancient authors/editors or (2) was presupposed by those authors/editors.<sup>1</sup>

As I will be analysing how intertextuality works in *Jonah* for the purposes of parodying earlier texts, I repeat here the definition of parody given by Miles which I quoted earlier: “Parody is that breed of satire in which the standardized behavior to be exposed is literary.”<sup>2</sup> Hyun Chul Paul Kim succinctly summarised the value of analysing possible intertextualities in *Jonah*:

The book of Jonah is clearly rich in internal literary plots, enfolding subtle complexity and irony. Reading and interpreting this book can be further enriched through an external reading, intertextually correlating, comparing, and contrasting interconnected texts, words, and motifs. This task helps tune the ears for reading this rather short book, which is replete with resonant pun, irony, and hidden implications. Assuredly, the composition is strewn with lengthy and bountiful citations, allusions, and echoes.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter I will analyse texts in the Hebrew Bible which appear to have been quoted or alluded to in *Jonah* as well as literary styles or genres such as historical and prophetic narrative, prophetic oracle, and cultic or liturgical prayer. I recognise that the dating of the texts which *Jonah* appears to cite or to which it alludes is uncertain and controversial. As some of these texts may have been composed, edited or redacted from

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<sup>1</sup> James D. Nogalski, “Intertextuality and the Twelve,” in *The Book of the Twelve and Beyond: Collected Essays of James D. Nogalski* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 217. Michael Fishbane, who takes an unapologetically diachronic approach, prefers the term “inner-biblical exegesis” and argues that when later writers or editors (which he calls *traditio*) cited or alluded to pre-existing biblical texts (which he calls *traditum*) they were re-interpreting them for their current audience. These later interpretations in turn entered the biblical canon. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 4-7.

<sup>2</sup> Miles, “Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody,” 203.

<sup>3</sup> Hyun Chul Paul Kim, “Jonah read intertextually,” *JBL* 126, no. 3 (2007): 528.

earlier sources during the Babylonian exile or the post-exilic Persian period, it is impossible to know with any certainty in what form they may have existed when *Jonah* itself was first composed (or when the final form was produced, if indeed *Jonah* went through a redactional process so that the first and final forms were different). Given what we know about textual fluidity, the writer of *Jonah* may have been drawing on an earlier form – whether oral or written – of the texts that we know. Consequently, in this thesis if I say that *Jonah* appears to be alluding to a certain text (such as Exodus 34:6) I am not suggesting that the writer had access to any written form of the text or texts we refer to as *Exodus*. I accept the argument of Ehud Ben Zvi that *Jonah* was most likely written by and for the literati of Yehud<sup>4</sup> and this scribal group produced, copied, preserved and most likely debated whatever written texts existed at the time. I also recognise that the writer of *Jonah* may have been drawing on oral rather than written material, so I make the qualification that when I suggest the writer was citing or alluding to earlier material I acknowledge that this material may have existed and circulated in an oral form.

### **The ‘historical Jonah’ of 2 Kings 14:25**

I will commence my exploration of intertextualities with an analysis of the connection with the ‘historical’ Jonah in the book of Kings. The historical narrative records that Jeroboam II:

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<sup>4</sup> Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud*, 100-1. Ben Zvi seems to think this was a single homogenous group. The non-biblical material amongst the Qumran documents is evidence of divergent views and strong opposition from some quarters to the authority and religious views of those in control of the Jerusalem Temple. Certainly by the time these texts were written Israel could not be described as ‘homogenous’ and it is likely that a similar situation prevailed in Persian Yehud and that there was more than one scribal group, each with their own texts or interpretations.

restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25).

This is the only reference in the Hebrew Bible to Jonah outside the book bearing his name, if it is in fact the same ‘Jonah.’ It is a reasonable assumption that the Jonah ben Amittai in the book of *Jonah* and the prophet bearing the same name in 2 Kings 14 are one and the same. There is a near consensus among the standard commentaries on *Jonah* that the historical personage behind the story is the prophet in the Kings narrative,<sup>5</sup> although several scholars argue that the character of Jonah is a literary invention with little or no connection to the prophet bearing that name in 2 Kings. Alistair Hunter, for example, writes that “While the prophet of the same name briefly referred to in 2 Kings 14:25 may have inspired the choice of name, there is no sign that even the minimal information given there is applied to the narrative of our book.”<sup>6</sup> Other than the name יוֹנָה בֶּן-אֲמִיטַי there seems to be no connection between the two texts. Alan Cooper, however, stands out as one of the few scholars to do more than simply note the likely connection between the two stories, and rejects the notion that *Jonah* should be divorced from the tradition in Kings. He regards it as hardly fortuitous that both stories include “astonishing instances of unpredictable role-reversal (*peripeteia*)” and that “*only* an intertextual reading can do justice to the book” (his italics).<sup>7</sup> In the first case there was a reversal of Israel’s fortunes when God permitted an expansion of its borders, and

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 431; Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 179; Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 98; Phyllis Trible, “The Book of Jonah: Introduction, Commentary and Reflection,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 493. But see Sasson’s discussion on “Jonah as History or Fiction” Sasson, *Jonah*, 327.

<sup>6</sup> Hunter, “Jonah from the Whale: Exodus Motifs in Jonah 2,” 143.

<sup>7</sup> Cooper, “In Praise of Divine Caprice,” 145-148. While Cooper is reading these texts canonically, I am reading them historically. That is, I read *Jonah* as drawing on an historical tradition which was incorporated into Kings and accept that Kings may not have reached its final form at the time *Jonah* was written.

in the second case when God reversed his decree against Nineveh.<sup>8</sup> In both cases God is merciful on the king and gives him success, after the intervention of Jonah. It is reasonable to infer that Jonah wanted God to be merciful on Israel even if they were evil, and not on Israel's enemies, even if they were repentant. The parallel is not so much between the characters or events in the two stories, but in the message that Jonah expected God to be more merciful to his covenant people than to foreigners.

Following the comment in 2 Kings that God had spoken through his prophet Jonah, the narrative adds *וְלֹא־דִבֶּר יְהוָה לְמַחֲוֹת אֶת־שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם* *but the LORD had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven* (v.27) and Cogan and Tadmor regard this additional comment as evidence of a prophetic word contradicting that of Jonah.<sup>9</sup> Cooper thinks the contrary prophetic word may very well have been the prophecies of Amos which rebuked Jeroboam and “must have been at variance with Jonah’s predictions.”<sup>10</sup> In particular,

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<sup>8</sup> Cooper notes that the Babylonian Talmud already noted this thematic link where Rabbi Naḥman b. Yīṣḥaq is quoted as saying “Just as evil was transformed into good for Nineveh, so was evil transformed into good for Israel during the days of Jeroboam b. Joash” (*b. Yeb.* 98a).

<sup>9</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 161, 164. The fact that the possibility of Israel being blotted out is mentioned at all implies that, in the context, it was a possibility that had been considered or announced by someone. While connecting two positive statements about Israel the conjunction is still best read as “but” as the words which follow are in opposition to the implied possibility that Israel could, or should, be blotted out. The second statement does not negate the first, but rather negates the unstated possibility of Israel’s end. Brueggemann also notes that the verse “is odd, because it is stated negatively. It is not claimed that Yahweh would protect Israel, but only that (so far!) Yahweh had refused, for the sake of a promise, to ‘blot out’ Israel.” Walter Brueggemann, *I & 2 Kings: A Commentary* (Macon, Ga: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 444-45.

<sup>10</sup> Cooper, “In Praise of Divine Caprice,” 146. As I read Cooper this implies that the text in Kings is therefore *contra* Amos. If so, I agree with this position and it reflects the diversity of opinion which existed amongst the writers of the biblical texts. Fritz argues that vv. 26-27 are probably the work of a later redactor, striking a positive chord as far as the judgment of Jeroboam is concerned, and revising and modifying the negative judgment of v. 24. However, he posits that “verse 27 is certainly not an allusion to the prophet Amos, who is otherwise ignored in the Deuteronomistic History.” (Volkmar Fritz, *I & 2 Kings: A Continental Commentary* (trans. Anselm Hagedorn; Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress, 2003), 325.) Scholars who discuss the absence of the “classical” prophets in the Deuteronomistic literature include Hans M. Barstad, “The Understanding of the Prophets in Deuteronomy,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 8, no. 2 (1994): 237; Gunther H.

the prophecies in Amos 7 were directed specifically against Jeroboam and predicted exile for Israel, especially the lines *וְקָמְתִי עַל-בַּיִת יִרְבֵּעַם בַּחֶרֶב I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword* (7:9) and *יָמוּת יִרְבֵּעַם וְיִשְׂרָאֵל גָּלָה יִגְלָה מֵעַל אֲדָמָתוֹ Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land* (7:11). We should also note the important observation by Kim that “2 Kings 14 leaves open the date of Jonah’s prophecy, while its primary interest is in the fulfillment of prophecy,”<sup>11</sup> suggesting that it is possible the historical Jonah pre-dated Jeroboam II and was not necessarily a contemporary.

We need to exercise caution when quoting Amos as a supposedly eighth century text as evidence for eighth century historical details. We cannot be certain that Amos was written in the eighth century, and, as Walter Houston put it, the idea that we can quote any of the books which are attributed to eighth century prophets as evidence for the eighth century is “distinctly dodgy.”<sup>12</sup> There is a considerable disagreement amongst scholars when it comes to dating Amos, and while many would not deny that parts of Amos may have originated with an historical prophet bearing that name in the eighth century, they would date the book to the fifth century or even later. Robert Carroll goes so far as to caution that we cannot know anything for certain about the origins of anything in the prophetic books, especially their date or social background.<sup>13</sup> Equally, we need to be cautious about dating the book of Kings and it should not be assumed that Kings reached its final form before *Jonah*. Hunter argues in fact

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Wittenberg, “Amos and Hosea. A Contribution to the Problem of the ‘Profetenschweigen’ in the Deuteronomistic History (Dtr),” *Old Testament Essays* 6, no. 3 (1993): 295-311; Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Why Does the Deuteronomistic History Make no Mention of the Prophets to Whom Books are Attributed?,” in *On Stone and Scroll: Essays in Honour of Graham Ivor Davies* (eds. James K. Aitken, et al.; BZAW 420; Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 343-56.

<sup>11</sup> Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomistic History,” 343-56.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Houston, “Was There a Social Crisis in the Eighth Century? Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar,” in *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel* (ed. J. Day; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 132.

<sup>13</sup> Robert P. Carroll, “Prophecy and Society,” in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (ed. R.E. Clements; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 203-226.

that the יִנְיָהּ of Psalm 55 formed the basis of the flighty character of Jonah in the book of *Jonah*, and that this character was later taken up by a contributor to Kings.<sup>14</sup> While I believe the connections he makes between Psalm 55 and *Jonah* are problematic, his argument serves as a reminder that we simply do not know the order in which these books were written or reached their final form.

While a prophet Jonah prophesied about Jeroboam II's military success and the prophet Amos prophesied of his defeat, we know little more about them than that. It is interesting, however, and this is one of the few things we can say with certainty, that *Amos* and *Jonah* are both found in the Twelve. We can only speculate about whether the editor or redactor of the Twelve deliberately included in his collection books about two contemporaneous prophets who delivered opposing messages about Jeroboam II, and if so, what his reasons might be. Having established that *Jonah* is ironic and satirical, it may not be that surprising that the editor or redactor's motives may have been similarly ironic. Based on the prediction that בְּחֶרֶב יָמוּת יִרְבֵּעַם וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל גָּלְיָהּ יִגְלֶה מֵעַל אֲדָמָתוֹ *Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land* (Amos 7:11) we could argue that Amos was a “failed” prophet as his prediction was not fulfilled.<sup>15</sup> It is true that Israel *eventually* went into exile, although not during the reign of Jeroboam II, yet there is nothing in the historical records to suggest that Jeroboam died “by the sword.” Jonah's prediction, on the other hand,

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<sup>14</sup> Alastair G. Hunter, “Inside Outside Psalm 55: How Jonah Grew Out of a Psalmist's Conceit,” in *Psalms and Prayers* (eds. H.G.L. Peels and B.E.J.H. Becking; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 129-40.

<sup>15</sup> I use the expression “failed” prophet against the background of Deuteronomy 18:22: “when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.” I agree with Carroll that the predictive element in a prophet's preaching was secondary to their critique of society and there is a complex relationship between prediction and its fulfillment. In the sense of Deuteronomy 18:22 several of the prophets' predictions failed to come true, but as Carroll argues, “it was more a case of the prophet failing to persuade the community to change rather than of the failure of prediction.” Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions* (SCM Press, 1979), 29-37.



came true, according to the writer of 2 Kings. Perhaps another irony is that having delivered a “true” prediction about Jeroboam, Jonah delivered a somewhat ambiguous message that “true” prediction about Jeroboam, Jonah delivered a somewhat ambiguous message that *נִינְוָה נִהְפָּקֶת* *Nineveh will be overthrown or transformed* (Jonah 3:4). The fact that Amos’s predictions about Jeroboam II and Israel were not fulfilled does not disqualify them from inclusion in the Twelve. This suggests to me that the Twelve was part of a dialogue, with conflicting views and opposing voices, and while there are clear signs of redaction or an overshadowing editorial hand it is not a single work with a consistent theme or message and there are no clear signs of any such editorial intention.<sup>16</sup>

The intertextual allusion to the record of Jonah and Jeroboam II in 2 Kings does not fall into the category of parody as there is no indication that the writer of *Jonah* is ridiculing the text or the tradition behind it, or a group which used these texts for their theology. The writer does not seem to be opposed in any way to the 2 Kings text or its theology. It does, however, explain why the writer may have chosen the prophet Jonah as his subject for exploring the randomness of God’s mercy. There seems to be conflicting messages in the book of Kings about the Jehu dynasty in general (of which Jeroboam II was a part) and Jeroboam II in particular. For example, on the one hand Jehu is commended for destroying the house of Ahab in accordance with “the word of the LORD” (2 Kings 9:7-10, 25-26), while on the other hand he is condemned for being overly-zealous in this (10:29-31). Similarly, Jehoahaz is commended and has his prayer for deliverance answered (2 Kings 13:4-5), while being condemned on the other hand in the standard formula “He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin” (2 Kings 13:2). Jeroboam II restored Israel’s borders “according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah” yet receives the

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<sup>16</sup> I deal with the scholarship on redactional processes in the Twelve later in this chapter, beginning on page 124.

same standard formulaic condemnation (2 Kings 14:23-27).<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that woven together with the standard condemnation of all northern kings are elements which are approving of these kings (especially of the Jehu dynasty) and express God's ongoing concern and compassion for the northern kingdom and his commitment to the covenant. Even when kings do evil God is sometimes compassionate to Israel.

Having said that, as the abundance of irony in *Jonah* establishes that it must have been intentional, it would not be surprising if the writer deliberately choose as his main character an historical prophet who prophesied favourably about a king judged by the writers of the historical account as one who *וַיַּעַשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה* *did what was evil in the sight of the LORD* (2 Kings 14:24), counter to the prophet Amos who prophesied his defeat, which might be expected of one who did evil. There is almost an echo of the Deuteronomistic formula *וַיַּעַשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה* *he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD* in God's judgment of Nineveh that *רָעָתָם לִפְנֵי* *their evil is before me* (Jonah 1:2). Israel was saved despite their king doing evil *כִּי־רָאָה יְהוָה אֶת־עַנְיֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מְאֹד מְרַחֵם* *because the LORD saw the distress of Israel was very bitter* (2 Kings 14:26), which suggests that God was compassionate to his people notwithstanding the evil.<sup>18</sup> For the initial reader of *Jonah* there may have been no expectation that compassion would similarly be shown to Nineveh as there was no covenantal relationship which would cause God to forgive the evil. Jonah's declaration that *יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם* *I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful* (4:2) is unexpected, and almost certainly ironic, as there would have been no reason based on any prophetic precedent to

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Leithart notes that according to Deuteronomy 28:7, "those who keep covenant can expect victory in battle." (Peter J. Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2006), 239.) The positive material in Kings about the Jehu dynasty, such as their success in battles, generally portrays them as keeping covenant.

<sup>18</sup> Brueggemann notes that the narrator here "is careful to give a theological basis for the military success of Jeroboam" and demonstrates Yahweh's commitment to Israel. (Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings: A Commentary*, 443-44.)

think that God would show compassion to a nation or city, other than Israel, which had been denounced for its evil.

## Jeremiah

In the context of “failed” prophecy and whether or not either Jonah or Amos should be classified as such, the criteria for determining a false prophecy laid down in Jeremiah 27-29 is relevant, especially as *Jonah* has several intertextual connections with Jeremiah. I am unaware of any reason to suspect that *Jonah* is directly parodying 2 Kings or Amos, although the question of divine justice and compassion in relation to evil is a theme in all three texts. Jeremiah, however, is another matter and needs to be considered here.

Several scholars have noted similarities between *Jonah* and Jeremiah, and some of these will be considered hereunder, but first Stuart’s cautionary note should be highlighted.

As to the possible dependence of Jonah on Jeremiah, it must be stated that the evidence is both minimal and ambiguous ... sharing of concepts is not the same as dependency of concepts. The widespread tendency of biblical scholars to think only in terms of the lineal generation of ideas (i.e., if two parts of the Bible say roughly the same thing, one part must have preceded and influenced the other part) has never had merit.<sup>19</sup>

Gary Yates also summarises the position well regarding the complexity of determining the direction of influence between *Jonah* and Jeremiah:

The amount of innerbiblical allusion in Jonah suggests that those responsible for the final form of the book did employ Jeremiah as a foil for Jonah, but the composition and editing of both books likely

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<sup>19</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 433.

extended into the postexilic period, and it is possible that cross-pollination occurred between the two books as they reached their final forms.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the considerable divergency between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint versions of Jeremiah,<sup>21</sup> chapters 27-29 are essentially the same in both versions although there are differences in style such as in the spelling of names and the use of formal titles.<sup>22</sup> These chapters are prose narrative describing a confrontation between Jeremiah and other prophets of the LORD including Hananiah which demonstrates:

the clash of two widely differing interpretations of the nature of Yahweh's action within Judah's present history. The message of Hananiah had its roots sunk deep in the promises of security, of Yahweh's

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<sup>20</sup> Gary Yates, "The 'Weeping Prophet' and 'Pouting Prophet' in Dialogue: Intertextual Connections Between Jeremiah and Jonah," *JETS* 59, no. 2 (2016): 224.

<sup>21</sup> Both versions are substantially the same up to 25:13a but differ markedly after this point. While LXX Jeremiah is approximately one seventh shorter than MT Jeremiah and differs in its arrangement of material, the texts which are analysed in the following pages are substantially the same in both the LXX and MT, unless otherwise noted. For an overview of the differences between MT Jeremiah and LXX Jeremiah see Shead, "The Text of Jeremiah (MT and LXX)," 255-79; Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 286-94. In what form Jeremiah was known to the writer of *Jonah* is impossible to determine. The substantial differences between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint versions of Jeremiah establish that there were at least two versions of the text from an early time. While fragments of Hebrew manuscripts from Qumran match the old Greek version and thereby attest to an earlier version of Jeremiah which is shorter than the MT, theories vary on the dating of the second and longer edition, with some scholars also arguing for a "Deuteronomistic edition." For an overview of the scholarship on the dating of the longer edition see J. Gerald Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 127-36; Emanuel Tov, "The Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah in the Light of its Textual History," in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism* (ed. Jeffrey H. Tigay; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 211-37; Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (New York: A&C Black, 1989), 21-31; Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Prophetic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 88-95. It is also possible that words attributed to the prophet Jeremiah were transmitted orally independently of the texts which came to their final forms as the MT and LXX.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas W. Overholt, "Jeremiah 27-29: The Question of False Prophecy," *JAAR* 35, no. 3 (1967): 242. The variations throughout this section of Jeremiah also include additional material in the MT which does not change the essential features of the text. The MT tends to add more material of a similar nature.

positive action on behalf of his people, embodied in the nation's cultic establishment. For him a nation like Babylon, which infringes upon Yahweh's eternal order, must fall.<sup>23</sup>

The issue at stake in these chapters is whether or not in God's dealings with his people they could rest assured that he was on their side and would preserve them in their land. In this respect these prophets "stood firmly within the tradition of the prophet Isaiah, who was convinced that Zion would never fall."<sup>24</sup> Yet Jeremiah spoke for God and condemned them as those who *spoke falsely in my name* (27:15) and specifically to Hananiah he said *you made this people trust in a lie* (28:15). Jeremiah's criterion for determining if a prophet speaks truthfully or falsely was:

הַנְּבִיאַ אֲשֶׁר יִנְבֵּא לְשָׁלוֹם בָּבֵא דְבַר הַנְּבִיאָה יִנְדַע הַנְּבִיאַ אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח וְהָיָה בְּאֵמֶת

As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that  
the LORD has truly sent the prophet (28:9).

Jeremiah's criterion referred only to a prophet who prophesied *peace*, and not to one such as Amos who prophesied *calamity*. It could be argued that a prophesy of impending disaster would give the recipients an opportunity to change their ways and avert destruction, and the prophet would therefore have fulfilled his primary duty: "the prophetic threat is never unconditional. Yahweh is always free to change his plans for his people."<sup>25</sup> The failure of his prediction in these circumstances was secondary. On the other hand, a prophecy of peace

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<sup>23</sup> Overholt, "Jeremiah 27-29: The Question of False Prophecy," 245.

<sup>24</sup> Overholt, "Jeremiah 27-29: The Question of False Prophecy," 245. Overholt cites Isaiah 1:7-8; 31:4-5; 33:17-22.

<sup>25</sup> Overholt, "Jeremiah 27-29: The Question of False Prophecy," 244.

might give false hope and produce no positive changes in community behaviour. By this criterion Jonah was “truly sent by the LORD” in his prediction of Israel’s expansion under Jeroboam II, and rather than Amos being judged as a “false” prophet it could be argued that his prophecy of impending defeat and exile produced sufficient change to *defer* the exile to a later time. In this way, Jonah’s message to Nineveh was similar to that of Amos, in that it deferred disaster but could not avoid it. The remaining issue was not whether God would change his plans for his people, but whether he would do so for a *foreign* city or nation, and for the Jonah character a possible question may have been whether God would spare a foreign city at the expense of his own people.

### Jeremiah 18:7-8

The question of whether God would change his plans for a *foreign* city or nation seems to be the subject of Jeremiah 18:7-8 and the terminology is so similar to Jonah 3:10 James Nogalski has suggested that *Jonah* is in fact a *Midrash* on this text in Jeremiah.<sup>26</sup>

רָגַע אֲדַבֵּר עַל-גּוֹי וְעַל-מַמְלָכָה לְנִתּוֹשׁ וּלְנִתּוּץ וּלְהֶאֱבִיד:

וְשֵׁב הַגּוֹי הַהוּא מִרְעֵתוֹ אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי עָלָיו וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל-הִרְעָה אֲשֶׁר חִשַּׁבְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ:

At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom,  
that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it,  
but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil,  
I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. (Jeremiah 18:7-8).

<sup>26</sup> James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2011), 403.

וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי־שָׁבוּ מִדֶּרֶכָם הַרְעָה וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה:

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways,  
 God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them;  
 and he did not do it. (Jonah 3:10)

While Jeremiah 18:7-8 speaks generally about a *nation* גוֹי it is clear from the context that the nation in view was none other than Judah as this section of Jeremiah is addressed to the בַּיִת הַיִּשְׂרָאֵל *house of Israel* (v.5) וְעַל־יְרוּשָׁלַם *the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem* (v.11). If Jonah 3:10 is alluding to this text, or if the Jonah-story is a Midrash on it, then the writer has re-interpreted it to the extent that it is applied to a foreign nation rather than the people of Judah. The specific language וְעַל־מַמְלָכָה *concerning a nation or kingdom* can refer to *any* nation, so to appropriate it to refer to Nineveh rather than Judah would be easy enough. An audience familiar with the Jeremiah text may recognise the allusion, but in doing so they would most likely notice the re-interpretation. If so, they would be faced with two possibilities: they might think that the writer of *Jonah* has ‘borrowed’ the Jeremiah text and given it a new relevance in applying it to foreign nations; or, they might consider the possibility that *Jonah* uses Nineveh as a foil for Israel and Judah. If the latter, then the underlying message of the story is about God’s dealings with *Judah* rather than Nineveh. The allusion to Jeremiah 18:7-8 therefore creates an ambiguity and the reader or listener may be uncertain whether the story is really about Nineveh or whether the foreign city is a guise for Judah or Jerusalem. This is a fundamental characteristic of irony: the audience up to this point thought the story was about Nineveh, but now they are not so sure. To this point the writer has given the *appearance* that he was referring to one city – Nineveh – but now the *reality* has become evident that he actually may have had another city in mind

– Jerusalem. If Judah was condemned to go into exile because of the sins of Manasseh, then the reformation in the time of his successor Josiah (2 Kings 23:1-27), would parallel the repentance of Nineveh, and the question becomes whether God will change his mind and show mercy, or if Judah will still be punished. This becomes increasingly evident when we consider Jeremiah 22:8 as another possible intertextual allusion.

### Jeremiah 22:8 – the great city: Nineveh and Jerusalem

Apart from its repeated use in *Jonah*, Jeremiah 22:8 is one of only two other places in the Hebrew Bible to employ the term העיר הגדולה *the great city*. A description of Nineveh as העיר הגדולה *the great city* occurs four times throughout *Jonah* (1:2; 3:2, 3; 4:11).<sup>27</sup> The fact that the first and last verses of the story (1:1; 4:11) contain the phrase could suggest that it has an important role in an *inclusio* and that the nature of *greatness* is one of the themes being considered. In the LORD's concluding words to Jonah the greatness of Nineveh is paralleled with the comment to Jonah that he לא גדלתו *did not make [the plant] to grow* using the *piel* of גדל in the only occurrence of גדל as a verb in the story (4:10). It is generally understood in the commentaries that גדל here refers to the size and importance of the city. It may be significant that an identical expression occurs in Genesis 10:11-12, also in connection with Nineveh, in a description of the legendary Nimrod:

מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַהוּא יֵצֵא אַשּׁוּר וַיִּבֶן אֶת־נִינְוָה וְאֶת־רַחֲבֹת עִיר וְאֶת־כַּלַּח

וְאֶת־רֶסֶן בֵּין נִינְוָה וּבֵין כַּלַּח הוּא הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה

<sup>27</sup> The root גדל appears in various forms to describe the wind (1:4), the storm (1:4, 12), the sailors' fear (1:10, 16), the fish (1:17), Nineveh's aristocracy (3:5), the nobles (3:7), Jonah's רָעָה *displeasure* (4:1), his pleasure concerning the plant (4:6), and, using a verb form (גדלתו) to describe the growth of the plant (4:10).



From that land he [Nimrod] went into Assyria, and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, and Resen  
between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

The identity of “the great city” here is uncertain, and Levin observes that “the syntax would indicate that Resen is meant. This city, however, is totally unknown.”<sup>28</sup> He notes that Nineveh is also a possibility (although not from the syntax), on the basis of the four references in *Jonah* to it as “the great city,” and suggests that Resen could be a corruption of *Dur-Šarru-kin*, the new capital built by Sargon II. Levin hypothesises convincingly that the biblical figure of Nimrod is modelled after the combined traditions about Sargon of Akkad and his legendary grandson Naram-Sin. He argues that these traditions reached their final form during the reign of Sargon II of Assyria, who added a hunting theme to the story (and hence the description of Nimrod as “a mighty hunter before the Lord” in Genesis 10:9).<sup>29</sup> Levin further notes that “strikingly, Sargon's Neo-Assyrian namesake, Sargon II, had his full title, ‘the Great King, the Mighty King, King of the Universe (*šar-kiššati*), King of Assyria, King of Babylon, King of Sumer and Akkad’ inscribed on numerous inscriptions all over his royal palaces.”<sup>30</sup>

It may also be significant that another prophet in the Twelve referred to Assyria as “the land of Nimrod” (Micah 5:5), no doubt referring to the same legend recorded in Genesis 10 with which the writer of *Jonah* appears to have been familiar. If the references in *Jonah* 1:2 to “the great city” are based on the Nimrod legend in Genesis 10, then what we have in these opening lines of *Jonah* may actually be a reference to the self-designation of the city and its kings as being “great.” It may also be parody and the writer may be saying something

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<sup>28</sup> Yigal Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad,” *VT* 52, no. 3 (2002): 352. Syntax could also suggest Calah is here indicated as “the great city.” Calah was the capital of the Assyrian empire from the ninth century BCE until the founding of *Dur-Šarru-kin* by Sargon II.

<sup>29</sup> Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty,” 366.

<sup>30</sup> Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty,” 362.

to the effect of “Go to Nineveh, that [so-called] ‘great’ city whose wickedness flies in my face.” Such an understanding may help us to understand the target of the parody, and I will return to this at various points in this thesis.

Jeremiah 22:8 is the only other use of the term הַעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה *the great city* in the Hebrew Bible outside the references in *Jonah* and Genesis 10. While the writer of *Jonah* almost certainly had the Genesis 10 phraseology in mind as that text mentions Nineveh specifically, it is also possible in view of his familiarity with Jeremiah and his appropriation of themes and terminology in that book that his use of הַעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה *the great city* is a double-entendre which can refer both to Nineveh and Jerusalem. “If Nineveh is a great city, Jerusalem is greater, even the greatest city of the world, set upon Zion, the tallest mountain in the world (Mic. 4.1; Zech. 14.10).”<sup>31</sup>

Mary Mills looks at the subject of the “great city” in *Jonah* “through the lens of moral geography,” exploring if an “urban morality” can be identified in the story. She follows the scholarly consensus that *Jonah* was written in the Persian era and accepts Lowell Handy’s position that the story was written by a trained scribe of the Jerusalem elite whose intended audience was “others who were of the similar background as himself,”<sup>32</sup> a view which had been earlier advocated by Ben Zvi and followed by several others.<sup>33</sup> Mills argues that, seen from the perspective of a reader in Persian era Yehud, aware that Nineveh had long before been destroyed by the Babylonians, Nineveh is no longer seen as a “great city” but as “a disordered community which has disrupted the lives of citizens in Jerusalem.”<sup>34</sup> From this

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<sup>31</sup> Barrett, “Meaning More than They Say: The Conflict between Yhwh and Jonah,” 251.

<sup>32</sup> Lowell K. Handy, *Jonah's World: Social Science and the Reading of Prophetic Story* (Routledge, 2014), 13.

<sup>33</sup> Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud*, whole book.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Mills, “Urban Morality and the Great City in the Book of Jonah,” *Political Theology* 11, no. 3 (2010): 456.

viewpoint, both Nineveh and Jerusalem are in the similar position of being subjugated cities under the control of a foreign power.

From a historical viewpoint, looking at Jonah's embodiment of urban worth would mean that the reader, while sympathizing with the originating stance of the province of Yehud, also accepts that both Jerusalem and Nineveh have become cities within the urban empire of another society. To that extent they are different, even potentially hostile, but in a parallel economic and political relation to the greater city. While both are viewed as under the aegis of a superior Great City, the result is that Jerusalem and Nineveh can share a perception of themselves as subject city-states. Sameness balances against difference in this perspective.<sup>35</sup>

There is an irony in the reality that by the time *Jonah* was written neither Nineveh nor Jerusalem were "great" cities, both having been subjugated by a more powerful nation.<sup>36</sup> Mills has not noted, however, that Nineveh and Jerusalem had something else in common: both cities are referred to in the Hebrew Bible as הַגְּדֹלָה הַעִיר *the great city*. There are further allusions to Jerusalem throughout *Jonah* which suggests to me that the writer has embedded a

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<sup>35</sup> Mills, "Urban Morality and the Great City in the Book of Jonah," 464.

<sup>36</sup> The writer of *Judith* used the term τῆ πόλει τῆ μεγάλης *the great city* anachronistically when referring to Nebuchadnezzar as the ruler of the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh (*Judith* 1:1) because, in fact, Nebuchadnezzar ruled in Babylon. Nineveh had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's predecessor Nabopolassar in 612 BCE and was extensively de-urbanized and depopulated by the time of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. The writer may have understood Babylon and Nineveh as a *continuum*, as one had succeeded the other as capital of the empire which occupied the land of Israel. The writer of the New Testament book of *Revelation* uses the term τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγάλης *the great city* with reference to Babylon (18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21 cf. 17:18), but also in a verse which appears to refer to Jerusalem as it describes it as the place where Jesus was crucified: "the great city that is prophetically called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified" (11:8). It is possible that the writer understood that the phrase was used in *Jeremiah* with reference to Jerusalem, and similarly to the writer of *Judith* may have seen Babylon as the inheritor of the title – at least in biblical usage – having conquered Nineveh.

sub-theme or secondary level of understanding into his story. One of these, a possible allusion to Psalm 48:2, will be discussed in Appendix 1: Jonah – a literary invention?

## Jeremiah 26

There are several possible innerbiblical allusions in *Jonah* to Jeremiah's temple speech (Jeremiah 26)<sup>37</sup> and the ironic contrast between them suggests the writer of *Jonah* may have been parodying the temple speech. For example, in Jonah 1 the sailors accept Jonah as a spokesman of the god of Israel in spite of the fact that Jonah has avoided his prophetic call to preach to Nineveh and has run from the presence of God. The sailors even show signs of converting as they offer sacrifices and make vows to Israel's god, and, in doing so, give the appearance of being more faithful than Jonah.

The stated purpose of Jeremiah's temple speech was that God might change his mind and avert the disaster that he intended to bring on Israel.

אולי יִשְׁמְעוּ וַיָּשׁוּבוּ אִישׁ מִדְרָכּוֹ הַרְעָה וְנִסַּמְתִּי אֶל־הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי חָשָׁב לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם מִפְּנֵי רָע מַעַלְלֵיהֶם

It may be that they will listen, all of them, and will turn from their evil way, that I may change my mind about the disaster that I intend to bring on them because of their evil doings. (Jeremiah 26:3)

This is remarkably similar to the stated intention of the decree of the king of Nineveh.

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<sup>37</sup> “The episode in Jeremiah 26 most likely provides a variant account of the Temple sermon found in Jeremiah 7. Chap. 7 focuses on the content of the message; chap. 26 focuses more on the response to the message by various groups present at the Temple when Jeremiah delivers this message.” Yates, “Intertextual Connections Between Jeremiah and Jonah,” 225 n.7.

וְיָשׁוּבוּ אִישׁ מִדְרָכּוֹ הַרְעָה וּמִן־הַחֲמָס אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפֵּיהֶם:

מִי־יִוָּדַע יָשׁוּב וְנָחַם הָאֱלֹהִים וְשָׁב מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְלֹא נֹאכַד:

All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish. (Jonah 3:8b-9)

The Ninevite king's words also echo the words of the captain of the ship when he called on Jonah to pray to his god because *אולי יתעשת האלהים לנו ולא נאכד perhaps (the) god will think of us so that we do not perish* (1:6). As well as the general intention of Jeremiah 26:3, Jonah 1:6 and 3:8-9 being similar, specific words in Jeremiah's speech are echoed in *Jonah*: *אולי perhaps*, *שוב turn*, *נחם relent*, and *רע disaster or calamity* (רעה occurs so frequently in *Jonah* in various conjugations as to be a theme-word, but especially in the context of the sailors' words in 1:7-8).<sup>38</sup> The *רעה + נחם + שוב* triad also echoes Jeremiah 18:7-8 which was discussed above. The sailors (1:14) and Jeremiah (26:15) both use the expression *דם נקיא innocent blood* with reference to the deaths of Jonah and Jeremiah.<sup>39</sup> The similarities between Jeremiah 26:3 and Jonah 3:10 are so striking that Peleg concludes that "it is possible that Jeremiah inspired Jonah."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> This could simply be the standard language of repentance although the similarity between these two texts is so striking it seems to me to be going beyond using formulaic terminology.

<sup>39</sup> Magonet notes that the combination of *תתן* with *דם נקי* occurs in the Hebrew Bible only in Deuteronomy 21:8, Jeremiah 26:15 and Jonah 1:14. He further notes that while the texts in *Jonah* and *Jeremiah* are similar, the structure of the sailors' phraseology is closer to that in Deuteronomy 21:8 (*וְלֹא־תִתֵּן דָּם נָקִי בְּקִרְבִּי עַמּוּד יִשְׂרָאֵל do not let [the guilt of] innocent blood remain in the midst of your people Israel*). He argues, however, that in *Jonah* there is "a synthesis made by the author ... between the two texts, i.e. taking the context of *Jeremiah*, but bringing it to the formula actually used in *Deuteronomy*." (Jonathan Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* (2nd ed.; Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 69-73.) *Jeremiah* 26:15 has the spelling *דָּם נָקִי*.

<sup>40</sup> Peleg, "'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown' (Jonah 3:4): Two Readings (shte'i krie'ot) of the Book of Jonah," 273.

**Jeremiah 36**

אוּלַי יִשְׁמְעוּ בַּיִת יְהוּדָה אֶת כָּל־הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי חָשִׁב לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם לְמַעַן יָשׁוּבוּ אִישׁ מִדְרָכּוֹ הַרְעָה וְסִלְחָתִי לַעֲוֹנָם  
וּלְחַטָּאתָם:

It may be that when the house of Judah hears of all the disasters that I intend to do to them, all of them may turn from their evil ways, so that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin (Jeremiah 36:3).

Parallels between Jonah 3:8-9 and Jeremiah 36:3 are even more striking, especially in the contrasting responses of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Nineveh to the prophetic message.<sup>41</sup> Marcus has observed that a religious fast provides the context for both narratives,<sup>42</sup> yet in every other respect the parallel is seen in the contrasts rather than the similarities. The response of Jehoiakim is noted in the negative: “Yet neither the king, nor any of his servants who heard all these words, was alarmed, nor did they tear their garments” (36:24). The contrast with the king of Nineveh is noteworthy: “When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes” (Jonah 3:6). The contrast is so apparent that Wolff regards the king of Nineveh as an “antitype to Jehoiakim” and adds that “the satirical tone cannot be overlooked in this antithetical picture to Jerusalem.”<sup>43</sup> While there was a minimal or negative response to

<sup>41</sup> Similar language occurs in Jeremiah 26:3, which I discussed earlier in this chapter. Parallels between Jeremiah 26 and 36 have been noted by several scholars. For an overview, and a discussion of the idea that the threat posed by Jehoiakim in chapter 26 is fulfilled in chapter 36, see William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 666.

<sup>42</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 136. Cf. Jeremiah 36:5, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 145-6. Rather than the king of Nineveh being *contrasted* with Jehoiakim, it is possible the writer is making a *comparison* with Josiah and the account of the discovery of “the book of the law” in the Temple. “When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes” (2 Kings 22:11). It could be argued that Jehoiakim, who tore the scroll rather than his garments, was an “antitype” to Josiah, and the king of Nineveh parallels Josiah in his actions.

Jeremiah's message which was proclaimed over a lengthy period, the Ninevites responded in an exaggerated manner to Jonah's brief and unenthusiastic preaching. The satirical tone which Wolff noted would be better categorised as *parody* as the writer of *Jonah* seems to be directly modelling his narrative on Jeremiah.

Yates thinks that the parallels between Jeremiah 36 and Jonah 3 parody Jonah himself ("The narrative of Jonah 3 contributes to the parodying of Jonah as a prophetic figure"<sup>44</sup>) but it would be better to say that Jonah is satirised, rather than parodied, and either way I would argue that Yates is mistaken. I noted earlier in chapter 2 that it seems to me that satire and parody are often confused, and I cited Miles who said that "parody is that breed of satire in which the standardized behavior to be exposed is *literary*" (my emphasis).<sup>45</sup> While satire shames a target audience, parody uses pre-existing texts as its ammunition. The extensive allusions to Jeremiah demonstrate that it was a pre-existing text<sup>46</sup> which was used by the writer of *Jonah* as ammunition against a target. Rather than parodying the character Jonah, the extensive allusions to the Jeremiah narrative suggests on the other hand that *Jonah* "satirises and parodies the prophetic tradition."<sup>47</sup> Despite his prolonged preaching Jeremiah was unable to facilitate any kind of repentance which would be sufficient to cause God to relent and thereby avert disaster for Judah and Jerusalem. The writer of *Jonah* was not necessarily targeting the prophet Jeremiah with his parody of the Jeremiah literature, but rather the Deuteronomistic ideologies of a group who revered Jeremiah as a hero. The contrast between Jeremiah's failure to bring about repentance and Jonah's outstanding success in converting first the sailors – without even trying – and then the city of Nineveh – despite a half-hearted effort – is a parodic and comical way of exposing the failings of a

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<sup>44</sup> Yates, "Intertextual Connections Between Jeremiah and Jonah," 229.

<sup>45</sup> Miles, "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody," 203.

<sup>46</sup> See footnote 21.

<sup>47</sup> Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*, 153.

retributive theodicy which Jeremiah championed. That theodicy failed because it was unable to satisfactorily explain how Judah, under Josiah (2 Kings 23:1-27), could repent of the sins of Manasseh yet still be destroyed. God's response to repentance, and therefore his mercy, was unpredictable. If the exile was a punishment for Manasseh's sins, the subsequent reformation and then the death of Josiah and the Babylonian exile posed significant problems of theodicy for the exilic and post-exilic generations.

**Jeremiah 51:34, 44**

אֶכְלְנִי הַמִּמְנִי נְבוּכַדְרֶאצַּר מִלֶּךְ בָּבֶל הִצִּיגְנִי כְּלִי רִיק בְּלַעַנִי כַּתְנִין מְלֵא כְרֶשׁוֹ מֵעֵדְנִי הִדִּיחָנִי :

King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon has devoured me,

he has crushed me;

he has made me an empty vessel,

he has swallowed me like a monster;

he has filled his belly with my delicacies,

he has spewed me out (Jeremiah 51:34)

וּפְקַדְתִּי עַל-בֵּל בְּבָבֶל וְהִצֵּאתִי אֶת-בִּלְעוֹ מִפִּי

I will punish Bel in Babylon,

and make him disgorge what he has swallowed (Jeremiah 51:44a)

These texts in Jeremiah 51 portray Nebuchadnezzar and Bel the god of Babylon as monsters that have “swallowed up” Israel and use the same word בָּלַע that occurs in Jonah 2:1 [1:17] for the fish swallowing Jonah. Jeremiah uses the verbs הִדִּיחָנִי *he spewed me out*



(v.34)<sup>48</sup> and וְהֵצֵאתִי אֶת־בִּלְעוּ מִפִּיו *I will make to come from his mouth what he has swallowed* (v.44) whereas *Jonah* has וַיִּקֶּא *he vomited* (2:11 [10]).<sup>49</sup> Yates follows Terence Fretheim who rejects interpreting Jonah's swallowing and being vomited out as an allegory for Israel being taken into exile "as an overly simplistic reading of the book" and therefore thinks that "any correspondence to the story of Jonah here appears to be coincidental."<sup>50</sup> However, an allusion by the writer of *Jonah* to Jeremiah 51 does not necessarily mean the story was intended to be interpreted allegorically, and the preponderance of allusions to Jeremiah should cause us to seriously consider the possibility that the writer had these texts in mind when devising his story.<sup>51</sup>

Magonet has noted a tendency for "the fusion of texts" in *Jonah* whereby the writer gathers into one place material from two separate places in the Hebrew Bible to create a synthesis of the words and contexts of these texts in the construction of his story.<sup>52</sup> If this device has been employed here there may be a further allusion in *Jonah*'s use of וַיִּקֶּא to Leviticus which refers to God driving out the previous inhabitants of the land as וַתִּקֵּא הָאָרֶץ *the land vomited out its inhabitants* (18:25) and threatens the same for Israel if they do not keep the statutes and commandments God has given them: וְלֹא־תִקִּיא הָאָרֶץ אֶתְכֶם בְּטִמְאֹתֵיכֶם *lest the land vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out*

<sup>48</sup> I have used the *Qere*. The *Ketiv* is וְהֵצֵאתִי.

<sup>49</sup> In chapter 4 (beginning on page 182) I will discuss the pejorative and possible paronomastic uses of this term as reasons for its selection.

<sup>50</sup> Yates, "Intertextual Connections Between Jeremiah and Jonah," 235; Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah*, 69-70. Some scholars see the *Jonah*-story as a kind of *midrash* on Jeremiah 51:34. For example, see Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (OBT, 2002), 130-35.

<sup>51</sup> It is noted that there are several lexicographical difficulties in the text of Jeremiah 51:34, with five occurrences of *Qere/Ketiv*, (the ancient versions follow *Qere*) and we cannot be certain about its meaning. For a discussion of the difficulties see McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 1323-25.

<sup>52</sup> Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 73-76.

*the nation that was before you* (18:28).<sup>53</sup> These texts in Leviticus use נִקָּח as a metaphor for expulsion from the land and a similar metaphor (although using a different verb) is used in Jeremiah 51 for the end of Israel’s exile in Babylon. If *Jonah* was written by and for the post-exilic literati it is likely that they would have “reminiscences” (to use a term favoured by Magonet<sup>54</sup>) of these metaphors. The fusion of the Leviticus and Jeremiah images in the *Jonah* story is an indication that it is parody. It recalls experiences of Israel being “spewed” from place to place as they go into exile and then, according to Jeremiah, being disgorged again by Babylon. The association of Nebuchadnezzar, described metaphorically as a תַּנִּינִי *sea monster*, with the לִידָּאָּ לִידָּאָּ *large fish* would not be a big leap for a post-exilic audience,<sup>55</sup> and while Jonah was vomited by the fish, Israel and Judah were disgorged from the land. While the story is not an allegory of exile, there are exilic undercurrents. “While Jonah is not a book about exile, the traumatic experience of expatriation and captivity casts a spectral shadow across Jonah’s narrative.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Jeremiah 16:13; 22:26-28**

I have been dealing with allusions in Jeremiah in the order of the chapters in the Masoretic Text, but I break that order here to deal with two earlier texts in Jeremiah as it relates to the shadow of exile referred to in the previous section.

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<sup>53</sup> See also Leviticus 20:22.

<sup>54</sup> Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 65. Assuming that *Jonah* was written after the P material, although I acknowledge that there are difficulties with dating P.

<sup>55</sup> The LXX of Jonah 2:1 translates לִידָּאָּ as κήτους which can mean a sea monster, whale, or huge fish. The same word occurs in 3 Maccabees 6:8 and Matthew 12:40.

<sup>56</sup> Downs, “The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah,” 27.

וְהִטַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתֶּם אֹתָם וְאַבֹּתֵיכֶם וְעַבְדְּתֶם־שָׁם אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי  
אֲחֵרִים יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־אֶתֶן לָכֶם חַנּוּנָה:

Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your ancestors have known,  
and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor (Jeremiah 16:13).

וְהִטַּלְתִּי אֶתְךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָתְךָ עַל הָאָרֶץ אַחֵרָה

I will hurl you [Jeconiah] and the mother who bore you into another country (Jeremiah 22:26).

The violent image of “hurling” is employed in these texts as a metaphor for exile where, as Carroll notes: “The trope of hurling captures well the aggression inherent in the savage acts which frequently accompanied deportation.”<sup>57</sup> *Jonah* used the same verb טול *to hurl* several times when describing God hurling the storm to the sea (1:4), the sailors hurling their cargo overboard (1:5) and then Jonah being hurled from the ship (1:12, 15). Yet, when Jonah prays from the belly of the fish he used the verb שָׁלַךְ *to cast* when accusing God of casting him into the sea (2:4 [3]). Interestingly, this verb also occurs in Jeremiah 22:28 in combination with טול and may be a case of what Magonet has identified as a frequent device in *Jonah*, namely the separation of texts so that material from a single source is divided and used in two separate chapters in *Jonah*.<sup>58</sup>

מִדּוּעַ הוּטְלוּ הוּא וְנָרְעוּ וְהִשְׁלָכוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ

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<sup>57</sup> Robert P. Carroll, “Deportation and Diasporic Discourses in the Prophetic Literature,” in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (ed. James M. Scott; JSJSup 56; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 65.

<sup>58</sup> Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 73-74.

Why are he and his offspring hurled out  
and cast away in a land that they do not know? (Jeremiah 22:28)

Downs has commented on this apparent innerbiblical allusion between *Jonah* and Jeremiah 22 and while he does not read *Jonah* as an allegory of exile he notes that it resonates with exilic motifs, of which this “hurling” is one example.

To the extent that Jonah’s dislocation from the security of the ship to the danger of the water is imbued with the language taken from the great crisis in Israel’s history, this trope of “hurling” may, in fact, lend support to those interpretations of the book that see Jonah’s experience in the fish as an allegory of Israel’s exile.<sup>59</sup>

While there is nothing specifically in these allusions of hurling to suggest that the writer of *Jonah* is satirising or parodying Jeremiah, they do contribute to the preponderance of exilic allusions in the story – especially those with violent connotations – which suggest that exile is an underlying issue for the writer and his audience. The writer seems to be deliberately echoing words and motifs in Jeremiah in such a way as to contrast the events in Jeremiah with those in the *Jonah* story and this contrast highlights the problem(s) the writer has with Jeremiah’s theodicy, Jeremiah being the Deuteronomistic prophetic book. He sees Israel as tossed about, spewed from one place to another, unable to control their destiny and, being the recipients of conflicting prophetic messages, the victims of divine injustice. I agree with Paul Kahn that exile raised immense theological issues for the writer.

I suggest that the seminal problem for the prophet Jonah is the threat of exile of the people of Israel. Specifically, Jonah’s flight is in response to the specter of the potential destruction of the northern

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<sup>59</sup> Downs, “The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah,” 35.

Kingdom of Israel at the hands of Nineveh/Ashur. The issue of exile raised immense theological issues for Jonah, involving the appropriateness of justice and mercy in God's world.<sup>60</sup>

### **Intertextual links with the Twelve**

Considerable attention has been given in scholarship to the relationship between the various "books" in the Twelve and whether each book should be read as an independent unit or if the collection has a thematic unity and intended to be read together.<sup>61</sup> My purpose in this section is to discuss if a reading of *Jonah* as satire or parody would be affected by a reading of the Twelve as a single unit.

Jewish tradition has counted the Twelve as one book from an early time. Ben Sira referred to "the Twelve prophets" comforting the people of Jacob and delivering them with confident hope (Sirach 49:10). While this mention refers to them as individuals it also suggests that the Twelve had begun to take shape as one book. 4 Ezra refers to "the twenty four books" to be made public (14:44), implying that the Twelve was counted as one book and that the selection of titles for the Hebrew canon was complete by the time of composition

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<sup>60</sup> Paul Kahn, "An Analysis of the Book of Jonah," *Judaism* 43, no. 1 (1994): 87. Kahn assumes a pre-exilic date for *Jonah*, with the exile of the northern kingdom still in the future. While I take the story to be post-exilic I agree with his point that the issue of exile is an important one for the writer and raises immense theological questions.

<sup>61</sup> See Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*; R. Rendtorff, "How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity," in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (eds. J. Nogalski and M. Sweeney; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 75-87; Schart, "Reconstructing the Redaction History of the Twelve Prophets: Problems and Models," 34-48; J. D. W. Watts, "A Frame for the Book of the Twelve: Hosea 1-3 and Malachi," in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (eds. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 209-18; Jason T. LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the Twelve* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012); Paul L Redditt and Aaron Schart, *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012); Schart, "The Jonah Narrative within the Book of the Twelve."; Mark J. Boda, et al. eds, *The Book of the Twelve and the New Form Criticism* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015); Nogalski, "Intertextuality and the Twelve," 217-40; Nogalski, "Recurring Themes in the Book of the Twelve," 181-94.

(generally regarded to be the end of the first century CE).<sup>62</sup> Scholarly consensus is tending to the view that the formation of the Twelve occurred in stages, with arguments for three to as many as seven stages of development and redaction.<sup>63</sup> Scholars generally date the first stage in the seventh century BCE although there is considerable disagreement about when the Twelve reached its final form with some dating the final stage as late as 175 BCE.<sup>64</sup> At each stage it is argued that books were added to the collection, the sequence was re-ordered, and changes made to existing books. While most scholars consider *Jonah* to be post-exilic there is little consensus as to when it entered the collection, with some thinking it was added in the final stage.<sup>65</sup> The different order of the books in the Masoretic Text, Septuagint and the

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<sup>62</sup> James A. Sanders, "The Issue of Closure in the Canonical Process," in *The Canon Debate* (eds. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders; Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 252.

<sup>63</sup> See for example Richard J. Coggins, "The Minor Prophets: One Book or Twelve?," in *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder* (eds. S.E. Porter, et al.; Biblical Interpretation Series 8; Leiden: Brill, 1994); James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney eds, *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (eds. J. Nogalski and M. Sweeney; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000); Redditt, "Recent Research on the Book of The Twelve as One Book.,"; Redditt and Schart, *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*. There are several scholars however who are unconvinced by the arguments for reading the Twelve as a single unified work and regard it as nothing more than an anthology. For example, Ehud Ben Zvi, "Twelve Prophetic Books or 'The Twelve': Preliminary Considerations," in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts* (eds. P. House and J. W. Watts; JSOTSup 235; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996), 131-38. See also David L. Petersen, "A Book of the Twelve?," in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (eds. J. Nogalski and M. Sweeney; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 3-10; Tchavdar S. Hadjiev, "Zephaniah and the 'Book of the Twelve' Hypothesis," in *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. John Day; New York, London: T & T Clark, 2010), 325-338.

<sup>64</sup> Redditt, "Recent Research on the Book of The Twelve as One Book," 50-51.

<sup>65</sup> See for example Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, 270-73. Fuller's reconstruction of 4QXII<sup>a</sup> has *Jonah* following Malachi at the end of the collection, which provides some supporting manuscript evidence for Nogalski's arguments. Fuller, "The Minor Prophets Manuscripts from Qumran, Cave IV," 151-52; Fuller, "The Text of The Twelve Minor Prophets," 83-84. See also Barry A. Jones, *The Formation of the Book of the Twelve: A Study in Text and Canon* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 6. Fuller's arguments, however, have been challenged by Guillaume, "The Unlikely Malachi-Jonah Sequence (4QXIIa)," 1-15.

Qumran manuscripts supports the view that there was some fluidity in the arrangement of the various books, although there was agreement about which books should be included.

My concern here is how a reading of *Jonah* as satire or parody relates to its inclusion in the Twelve. I should re-emphasise here the comment I made in my introduction that my approach to the Twelve in general and *Jonah* in particular is, to use the language of both Redditt and Sweeney, “a synchronic reading informed by diachronic markers.”<sup>66</sup> Even a cursory reading of the Twelve reveals that there are both recurring themes and conflicting messages. On the one hand some are inclined to think that the unity reflected in these recurring motifs, *Leitwörter* and various catchwords which appear to link books together, suggests a theological or literary agenda on the part of writers or editors which produced a consistency in the overall message. On the other hand, different voices can be heard through contrasting messages and diverse theological claims. Redditt cautions that “to ignore those [diachronic] markers would rob the text of historical rootedness and leave it at times irredeemably self-contradictory (e.g. what did God do to Assyria? Did God spare it, as *Jonah* implies, or destroy it, as *Nahum* celebrates?)”<sup>67</sup> Notwithstanding my argument that both *Jonah* and *Nahum* celebrated Nineveh’s destruction and that their message about the fate of Nineveh was substantially the same, I argue that the editors and redactors did not necessarily have a problem with self-contradictory messages or different voices, and, in fact there may have been a didactic purpose in preserving these conflicting views.

Several of the recurring motifs and catchwords which are embedded in various books within the Twelve are noticeably absent in *Jonah*. For example, the phrase יום־יְהוָה *day of the LORD* is more prominent in the Twelve than any other prophetic work and recurs in *Joel*,

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<sup>66</sup> Redditt, “Recent Research on the Book of The Twelve as One Book,” 72; Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, xxxix.

<sup>67</sup> Redditt, “Recent Research on the Book of The Twelve as One Book,” 72.

Amos, Obadiah, Zephaniah and Malachi<sup>68</sup> while the cognate *בַּיּוֹם* *on that day* occurs in Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Zephaniah and Zechariah.<sup>69</sup> Similar terms such as *יּוֹם צָרָה* *day of calamity* appear in Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah.<sup>70</sup> Only *Jonah* and Haggai lack any of these terms. Haggai's *הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וּמִעַלְמָה* *from this day on* (2:15, 18) which speaks of a time of blessing may be understood as a contrasting counterpart to the *יּוֹם-יְהוָה* motif, which leaves *Jonah* as uniquely devoid of this motif.

Another prominent theme in the Twelve which is missing in *Jonah* is the fertility of the land, which is impacted by calamity and the aftermath of war.<sup>71</sup> Also absent is the fate of God's people which is woven through the other books in the Twelve through various calls to repentance and eschatological promises of deliverance.<sup>72</sup> Some books in the collection are connected through catchwords – words or phrases which occur at the end of one book to be taken up at the beginning of the next.<sup>73</sup> An example of this phenomenon is in Joel 4:16 (3:16) which is repeated verbatim in Amos 1:2.

<sup>68</sup> Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:4 (2:31); 4:14 (3:14); Amos 5:18, 20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14; Malachi 3:23 (4:5). The phrase appears only 15 times in the Hebrew Bible, 13 times in the Twelve.

<sup>69</sup> Hosea 1:5; 2:18 (16), 20 (18), 23 (21); Joel 4:18 (3:18); Amos 2:16; 8:3, 9, 13; 9:11; Obadiah 8; Micah 2:4; 4:6; 5:9 (10); 7:11, 12; Zephaniah 1:9, 10, 15; 3:11, 16; Haggai 2:23; Zechariah 2:15 (11); 3:10; 9:16; 11:11; 12:3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11; 13:1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9; 14:13, 20.

<sup>70</sup> Obadiah 12, 14; Nahum 1:17; 3:16; Habakkuk 3:16; Zephaniah 1:15. Zephaniah combines even more terms together: *יּוֹם עָבָרָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְיָמֵי יְהוָה יוֹם צָרָה וּמִצְוָקָה יוֹם שָׁעָה וּמִשׁוֹאָה יוֹם חֹשֶׁךְ וּבְאִפְלָה יוֹם עָנָן וְעַרְפָּל יוֹם שׁוֹפָר וְתְרוּעָה* *That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry.* Nogalski has found more than 100 texts in the Twelve where he thinks idiomatic expressions have reference to the *יּוֹם-יְהוָה*. Nogalski, "The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve," 160.

<sup>71</sup> Nogalski, "Recurring Themes in the Book of the Twelve," 184-86.

<sup>72</sup> Nogalski, "Recurring Themes in the Book of the Twelve," 186-89.

<sup>73</sup> This phenomenon was the subject of Nogalski's ThM thesis (1987) and was presented further in James D. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993).



|                  |  |  |
|------------------|--|--|
| Joel 4:16 (3:16) | ויהנה מציון ישאג ומירושלים יתן קולו      | The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem              |
| Amos 1:2         | ויאמר יהנה מציון ישאג ומירושלים יתן קולו | And he said: The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem |

Nogalski suggested connecting catchwords linking Hosea with Joel, Amos with Obadiah, Zephaniah with Haggai, Haggai with Zechariah, and Zechariah with Malachi. He also identified the following catchwords between Obadiah and *Jonah*:

|            |   |   |
|------------|---|---|
| Obadiah 11 | ביום צמקך מנגד ביום שבות זרים חילו ונקרים באו שערי וועל-ירושלים ידו גורל גם-אתה כאחד מהם:       | On the day that you stood aside, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and <i>cast lots</i> for Jerusalem, you too were like one of them.        |
| Jonah 1:7  | ויאמרו איש אל-רעהו לכו ונפילה גורלות ונדעה בשלמי הרעה הזאת לנו ונפלו גורלות ויפל הגורל על-יונה: | The sailors said to one another, “Come, let us <i>cast lots</i> , so that we may know on whose account this calamity has come upon us.” So they <i>cast lots</i> , and the lot fell on Jonah. |

These connections between Obadiah and *Jonah* are weak and not convincing, especially as the two texts use different terms for casting lots. Nogalski himself argues that *Jonah* is an exception to the catchword phenomenon as “Jonah 4:1ff contains no significant repetition of words” which reappear in the opening sections of the next writing.<sup>74</sup> There is, however, a definite thematic connection between *Jonah* and Nahum (Nineveh), so the

<sup>74</sup> Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve*, 20.

Septuagint ordering of the books, with Nahum following *Jonah* is understandable.<sup>75</sup> Further evidence for the placement of Nahum immediately after *Jonah* are the *Stichwörter* which connect Jonah 4 and Nahum 1. The introduction to Nahum מִשָּׂא נִינְוָה *An oracle concerning Nineveh* (1:1) is an obvious connection, but so too is the repetition of the final word of *Jonah* רַבָּה which reappears in Nahum 1:12 וְעָבַר וְגָזַז וְכַן רַבִּים וְכַן שְׂלֵמִים *though they are full of strength and many they will pass away*. The connection here is especially strong if Jonah 4:11 is understood as a declaration that *I will not be concerned about that great city* as Nahum then celebrates the fall of the city in great detail. Nahum's description of God as וְגָדֹל-כֹּחַ *great in power*<sup>76</sup> may be a further repetition of the גדל *Stichwort* in Jonah 4:11 which also appears frequently throughout the story. Another ostensible connection between the two is Nahum's use of the "attributes" text of Exodus 34:6 in his introduction (1:3):

יְהוָה אַרְף אַפָּיִם וְגָדֹל-כֹּחַ וְנִקְמָה לֹא יִנְקָה

The LORD is slow to anger but great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty.

While *Jonah* names the 'positive' attributes of compassion, mercy, being slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing (4:2), Nahum chooses the 'negative' attributes from the same formula: "a jealous and avenging God is the LORD, the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies" (1:2). Jonah 4:11 concludes the story with a comment about Nineveh's size, population and number of cattle, and strikingly says nothing of the city's repentance. This would be strange indeed if the conclusion is read as a rhetorical question emphasizing

<sup>75</sup> The different placement of *Jonah* in the Masoretic Text, Septuagint and possibly 4QXII<sup>a</sup> may be evidence that *Jonah* was a late addition to the collection, possibly the last book to be added. Redditt, "Recent Research on the Book of The Twelve as One Book," 65-67.

<sup>76</sup> I have used the *Qere*. The *Ketiv* is וְגָדוֹל.

God's compassionate response to their repentance. Yet, if it is read as a statement that God is unconcerned about the city, Nahum's verdict against Nineveh that God will *by no means clear the guilty* reiterates the point that ultimately the city's evil was not forgiven and connects the two books.

While *Jonah* may not have the same emphasis on the aforementioned themes and motifs as the other books in the collection, there are other strong thematic connections. Jason LeCureux, for example, argues that the Twelve is unified around the theme of *שוב* *return*, in the sense of "return to me and I will return to you"<sup>77</sup> and *Jonah* certainly has this as a motif. There are also other links which suggest that even if it was a late addition the writers or editors of the other books were aware of it as a story which already existed independently, or some editorial work was done to make connections at the stage of its incorporation. Zephaniah includes an oracle against the nations, ending with condemnation of Assyria and Nineveh (2:13-15). This judgment upon the nations transitions into a condemnation of Jerusalem, although the city is not named. We can be confident that the writer is referring to Jerusalem, however, because he speaks of its judges, officials, prophets and priests and has the line *יהוה צדיק בקרבך* *The LORD within it is righteous* (3:5). The transition between condemnation of Nineveh and judgment against Jerusalem includes the line *הוי מראה ונגאלה* *Ah, soiled, defiled, oppressing city!* (3:1). That the writer is referring to Jerusalem is almost certain because of the following indictment: *לא ביהוה לא בטחה אל־אל־היה לא קרבה* *It has not trusted in the LORD; it has not drawn near to its God* (3:2). There seems to be a wordplay in the phrase *הוי מראה ונגאלה* *oppressing city* (3:1) which phonetically resembles *the Jonah city* and may have picked up on the ambiguity discussed above about whether *the great city* in *Jonah*

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<sup>77</sup> LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the Twelve*. The word *שוב* appears 84 times in the Book of the Twelve. For an overview of the theme of repentance in the Twelve, see also Mark J. Boda, *'Return To Me': A Biblical Theology of Repentance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 95-107.

was Nineveh or Jerusalem.<sup>78</sup> If the writer of Zephaniah was familiar with *Jonah* he may be alluding to it here as he transitions from his condemnation of Nineveh to one of Jerusalem with a wordplay on the name יְהוֹנָתָן. If so, then the ambiguity or confusion created by the transition from condemnation of Nineveh to Jerusalem without a clear break or any kind of marker that the object of judgment has changed, and with the addition of the wordplay, is also satirical in the style of *Jonah*.

### Joel, Exodus 34:6-7 and the problem of theodicy

A further major theme which runs through the Twelve is the problem of theodicy, and the role God played in allowing – or causing – his people to suffer through the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions and exiles. Central to this theme are the allusions in the Twelve to the attributes of God listed in Exodus 34:6-7.<sup>79</sup> This thematic allusion is so central to *Jonah* that Van Leeuwen suggests that the genre of the book of *Jonah* as a whole “is perhaps best taken as an early midrashic homily on Exodus 34:6.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> The adjective הַיּוֹנָה in Zephaniah 3:1 is a feminine singular participial form of the verb יָנָה *to oppress*. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 416. There may be similar puns on יוֹנָה in Hosea 7:11; 11:11 where the returning exiles are described as יִתְהַרְדּוּ *trembling* אֲשֹׁר אֶצְרֵץ כְּיוֹנָה *like a dove [or like Jonah] from the land of Assyria*. Similarly, the plural form is used in Nahum 2:7 where the prophet anticipates the destruction and exile of Nineveh and says its women will be led away יִנְיִם כְּקוֹל יוֹנִים *like moaning doves*. Kim’s caution is relevant: “Admittedly, a mere occurrence of one word cannot offer as convincing a case of intertextual connection as the recurrence of a phrase or more. However, the scarcity of this word in the Twelve calls for consideration.” Kim, “Jonah read intertextually,” 511.

<sup>79</sup> Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in memory of John G. Gammie* (eds. Leo G. Perdue, et al.; Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993), 31-49; James L. Crenshaw, “Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (eds. P. Redditt and Aaron Schart; Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 175-91.

<sup>80</sup> Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 44.

CHAPTER 3: INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE PARODY OF BIBLICAL TEXTS IN JONAH

Four texts in the Twelve take up the language of the Exodus text. Words in the texts from the prophets which also occur in the Exodus text or which mean substantially the same thing are underlined in the English translations.

| Exodus 34:6-7   | Joel 2:13  | Jonah 4:2  | Micah 7:18-20   | Nahum 1:3   |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| <p>וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוָה עַל-<br/>פְּנֵיו וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה<br/>יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי רַחוּם<br/>וְחַנוּן אֲרָף אַפַּיִם<br/>וְרַב-חַסְדֵּךָ וְאַמֶּת:<br/>נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים<br/>נִשְׂא עֵז וְכֹפֵשׁ<br/>וְחֹטְאָה וְנִקְהָה לֹא<br/>יִנְקָה פֶקֶד עֵזוֹן<br/>אֲבוֹת עַל-בְּנֵים<br/>וְעַל-בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל-<br/>שְׁלֵשִׁים וְעַל-<br/>רַבְעִים:</p> | <p>וּשׁוּבוּ אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה<br/>אֱלֹהֵיכֶם כִּי-חַנוּן<br/>וְרַחוּם הוּא אֲרָף<br/>אַפַּיִם וְרַב-חַסְדֵּךָ<br/>וְנִחָם עַל-הֲרָעָה:</p>   | <p>יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי<br/>חַנוּן וְרַחוּם אֲרָף<br/>אַפַּיִם וְרַב-חַסְדֵּךָ<br/>וְנִחָם עַל-הֲרָעָה:</p>  | <p>מִי־אֵל כְּמוֹךָ נִשְׂא<br/>עֵזוֹן וְעֹבֵר עַל-פְּשָׁע<br/>לִשְׂאֵרִית נַחְלָתוֹ<br/>לֹא-הִתְחַזֵּיק לְעַד<br/>אִפּוֹ כִּי-תִפֹּץ חֶסֶד<br/>הוּא:<br/>יָשׁוּב יִרְחַמְנוּ יִכַּפֵּשׁ<br/>עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ וְתִשְׁלַח<br/>בְּמַצְלוֹת יָם כָּל-<br/>חַטָּאוֹתֵם:<br/>תִּתֵּן אֶמֶת לִיַעֲקֹב<br/>חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם<br/>אֲשֶׁר-נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ<br/>לְאַבְתָּיִנוּ מִימֵי<br/>קָדָם:</p> | <p>יְהוָה אֲרָף אַפַּיִם<br/>וְגִדְלִיכָת וְנִקְהָה לֹא<br/>יִנְקָה:</p>  |
| <p>The LORD passed<br/>before him, and<br/>proclaimed, “The<br/>LORD, the LORD,<br/>a God merciful<br/>and gracious,<br/>slow to anger, and<br/>abounding in<br/>steadfast love and<br/>faithfulness,<br/>Keeping steadfast<br/>love for the<br/>thousandth<br/>generation,<br/>forgiving iniquity<br/>and transgression</p>                    | <p>Return to the<br/>LORD, your God,<br/>for he is <u>gracious</u><br/>and <u>merciful</u>,<br/><u>slow to anger</u>, and<br/><u>abounding in</u><br/><u>steadfast love</u>, and<br/>relents from<br/>punishing.</p> | <p>I knew that you<br/>are a <u>gracious</u><br/>God and <u>merciful</u>,<br/><u>slow to anger</u>, and<br/><u>abounding in</u><br/><u>steadfast love</u>, and<br/>relents from<br/>punishing.</p> | <p>Who is a God like<br/>you, <u>pardoning</u><br/><u>iniquity and</u><br/><u>passing over the</u><br/><u>transgression of</u><br/>the remnant of<br/>your possession?<br/>He <u>does not retain</u><br/><u>his anger</u> forever,<br/>because he<br/>delights in<br/><u>showing mercy</u>.<br/>He will again<br/>have <u>compassion</u><br/>upon us; he will<br/>tread our</p>     | <p>The LORD is <u>slow</u><br/><u>to anger</u> but great<br/>in power, and the<br/>LORD <u>will by no</u><br/><u>means clear the</u><br/><u>guilty</u>.</p> |

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| <p>and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”</p> |  |  | <p><u>iniquities</u> under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show <u>faithfulness</u> to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.</p> |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|

The Joel and *Jonah* versions are almost identical, and both also appear to include an allusion to Exodus 32:12, 14.

שוב מחרון אפך ונהינתם עליהרעה לעמך:

וינחתם יהוה עליהרעה אשר דבר לעשות לעמו:

Turn from your fierce wrath; relent and do not bring disaster on your people ... And the LORD relented from the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

The Joel and *Jonah* texts have three common denominators which set them apart from all other allusions in the Hebrew Bible to Exodus 34:6. First, they both make use of Exodus 32:12, 14 with their phrase עליהרעה ונהינתם *and relents from punishing*; second, they both have the phrase חנון ורחום *gracious and merciful* in a reversed order from that in Exodus 34:6; and third, neither quotes Exodus 34 verbatim, yet they are identical to each other. This third point could suggest that either Joel or *Jonah* are quoting from the other, or they are both quoting from another source which was either written or oral. For reasons which will be discussed

below my view is that *Jonah* was responding to Joel and takes this quotation from there rather than alluding directly to Exodus 34:6 and reworking it in precisely the same way as Joel.

I noted earlier that Magonet has argued that the writer of *Jonah* uses two devices when alluding to earlier texts. First, there is a tendency for “the fusion of texts” whereby the writer gathers into one place material from two separate places in the Hebrew Bible to create a synthesis of the words and contexts of these texts in the construction of his story. Second, there is a tendency for the separation of texts so that material from a single source is divided and used in two separate chapters in *Jonah*.<sup>81</sup> In Jonah 4:2 there is a “fusion” of Exodus 34:6 with Exodus 32:12, 14. The same fusion occurs in Joel 2:13. There is a further allusion to Exodus 32 in the court scene in Jonah 3:9.

מִי־יֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנָחַם הָאֱלֹהִים וְשָׁב מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְלֹא נֹאכַד

Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger,  
so that we do not perish.

This allusion resembles Joel 2:13-14 where, after referring to the attributes of God the writer adds *מִי יֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנָחַם* *Who knows whether he will not turn and relent*. Based on Magonet’s principle of “the separation of texts” the most convincing explanation is that the writer of *Jonah* has separated his allusion to Joel 2:13-14 and used the split material in two places, first in 3:9 from the mouth of the king of Nineveh and then in 4:2 on the lips of Jonah. The fact that both a foreign king and a prophet of God are using the same textual material from Exodus 32, 34 and Joel 2 suggests that the allusion is parodic. If so, the parody is not directly

<sup>81</sup> Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 73-76.

of Exodus but rather of Joel, or how those of whom Joel is representative used the Exodus text. The purpose for parodying Joel in this way could be because the writer of *Jonah* disagreed either with the sentiment behind the Exodus 32 text, or more likely that he opposed the way the text was behind interpreted and used by the writer(s) of Joel.

Nogalski thinks that *Jonah*'s allusion to Exodus 34:6 serves to satirise a theological position.

Jonah 4:2 (like Joel 2:13) draws upon YHWH's positive attributes described in Exod 34:6–7, but for yet another theological purpose. Jonah 4:2 uses Exod 34:6–7 to satirize the theological position that YHWH only exercises these positive attributes in relationship to Israel. The comic portrayal of Jonah, who would rather die from heat stroke than see Assyrians benefit from God's grace, mercy, and loving-kindness, upholds the appropriateness of YHWH's compassion "even for the nations" by satirizing the character of Jonah, thereby undercutting one reading of the theology of much of the Book of the Twelve.<sup>82</sup>

There is a consistent thread through Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah predicting the end of the Assyrian empire, and my reading of the conclusion to *Jonah* that God is not concerned about Nineveh thereby shores up the position of these prophets that those who oppress Israel will be judged. I agree with Nogalski that *Jonah* is satirising a theological position, but I do

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<sup>82</sup> Nogalski, "Recurring Themes in the Book of the Twelve," 190. Crenshaw notes that "by virtue of the initial position and the number of attributes related to compassion, the emphasis of this early confession seems to fall on mercy. One could argue, however, that the larger context and the lingering repercussions of the final attribute – an exacting punishment for every offense – shift the emphasis to the side of justice. The struggle to balance these qualities of justice and mercy in describing God's interaction with a covenanted people permeates much of the Bible – indeed, exposing a conflict within the soul of Israel." James L. Crenshaw, *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4. By referring only to the positive attributes the writers of Joel and *Jonah* ignore the juxtaposition with judgment in the Exodus formula which thereby "pushes aside the veil of darkness and discloses the split within the deity's being." Crenshaw, *Defending God*, 93.



not agree that it is the character of Jonah which is being satirised here, or the view that God's mercy extended only to Israel. A better explanation in my view is that *Jonah* is satirising Joel. Aaron Schart comes to a similar conclusion:

The verbal and thematic relationship of Joel and Jonah in respect to Exod 34:6 is by far more significant than that between Joel and the other writings. This can sufficiently be explained with the thesis that Jonah cited Joel because the author of the narrative of Jonah wanted to ridicule the writing of Joel, but that the redactor who alluded to Exod 34:6 in the other writings was a different person.<sup>83</sup>

Similar to Nogalski, Schart also argues that the message of *Jonah* was that God's compassion leads him to spare even Nineveh and "gives even the worst nations the chance to repent and wants God's prophets to take this task seriously."<sup>84</sup> Another option – a better one in my view – is that *Jonah* satirised the notion in Joel that the nations would be judged because they have done violence to the people of God (e.g. 4:19 [3:19]), and that Israel and Judah would be avenged. The reality, as opposed to the theology, was that evil prospers, oppressors continue to oppress, and there is no justice for the oppressed. Taking the words of Joel מִי יוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנִחָם *Who knows whether he will turn and relent* (2:14), and putting them in the mouth of the king of Nineveh – מִי יוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנִחָם הָאֱלֹהִים *Who knows? God may turn and relent* (Jonah 3:9) – the writer parodies them and in doing so effectively says we do not know, we cannot tell if and when God will turn and relent. From a post-exilic perspective the confident optimism of Joel was unfounded and unwarranted and irrelevant to the actual experience of Israel. Schart argues that "The book of Jonah brought an important idea into the Book of the Twelve, namely that the nations, even those with the worst behaviour, can experience the very same merciful imminence and essence of YHWH as Israel. The mercy of

<sup>83</sup> Schart, "The Jonah Narrative within the Book of the Twelve," 120.

<sup>84</sup> Schart, "The Jonah Narrative within the Book of the Twelve," 118.

God does not extend exclusively to Israel.”<sup>85</sup> The problem, however, was that God’s mercy to Israel and Judah was unpredictable. I have cited examples on the one hand from the book of Kings of God being compassionate and delivering Israel from its enemies while denouncing its kings for doing evil in the sight of God. I have also referred to the case of Josiah to demonstrate that his reforms, while undoing the sins of Manasseh, did not satisfy the requirement for punishment but only deferred it. The destruction of the nation at the hands of Assyria and Babylon and the exile of the people demonstrated that God’s compassion could be withdrawn. The Deuteronomistic literature explained this withdrawal of mercy in terms of retribution for Israel’s sins – or the sins of its kings – and so encouraged repentance as the means for gaining, or regaining, God’s favour. God’s mercy then was conditional, and so if even the worst behaved nations could experience the very same merciful imminence as Israel it would presumably have to be on similar conditions. Was Israel at their worst still worse than Nineveh at its best? If 2 Kings 17 is a guide the Deuteronomist may have thought so. The reality was that *Jonah* questioned whether anyone – Israel or Nineveh – could ever know what God would do and if they could rely on his mercy or justice. I will return to this issue and explore the question of the unpredictability of divine mercy and justice in my final chapter when I examine Deuteronomistic theodicies (see page 309) but in the meantime will flag that by satirising Joel’s theodicy *Jonah* effectively asks the question if one can ever “know” what God will do.

Several scholars argue that there is evidence of a Deuteronomistic layer in the redaction of the Twelve. Some argue that Hosea, Amos, Micah and Zephaniah formed a Deuteronomistic corpus as a precursor to the Twelve to which Haggai and Zechariah 1-8 (which probably existed together as a second precursor) were later added. According to this view a “Joel-related layer” merged Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Malachi with the

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<sup>85</sup> Schart, “The Jonah Narrative within the Book of the Twelve,” 124.

Deuteronomistic and Haggai/Zechariah 1-8 corpora. Finally, Zechariah 9-14 and *Jonah* were added to complete the work.<sup>86</sup> For Redditt, the primary redactor had an interest in Deuteronomistic theology and brought together a collection of their preaching.<sup>87</sup> According to Person the Deuteronomistic school<sup>88</sup> survived into the post-exilic period and produced Zechariah 9-14, drawing extensively from Deuteronomy.<sup>89</sup> If Nogalski is right that Zechariah 9-14 and *Jonah* were added to the Twelve at the same time,<sup>90</sup> and if Person is right that Zechariah 9-14 is Deuteronomistic, it is noteworthy that *Jonah* has a different perspective to Zechariah 9-14. There is little evidence of any shared themes or language. As several scholars have noted, *Jonah* is unique in its content and style and does not share many of the major themes of the Twelve. This suggests that it was included as part of a dialogue and in some ways offsets and counters points of view found in other parts of the Twelve.

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<sup>86</sup> Paul L. Redditt, "Zechariah 9-14, Malachi, and the Redaction of the Book of the Twelve," in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D.W. Watts* (eds. J.W. Watts and P.R. House: A & C Black, 1996), 249. There are several variations on this schema, which largely follows Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve*; Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*. For example, see Jones, *The Formation of the Book of the Twelve*, whole book. Joseph Kelly acknowledges the broad consensus that a relationship exists between Joel and *Jonah* but that the trajectory of the influence is contested. He accepts that both are generally regarded as being written in the exilic or post-exilic period but argues for the priority of *Jonah* over Joel, primarily on the grounds that the organisation of the individual lexemes in the creed of Exodus 34:6 are better preserved in *Jonah* than in Joel and the "more-plausible-scenario" therefore favours the priority of *Jonah*. He recognises that similar arguments are advanced for the priority of Joel. He does not consider the emerging trend in scholarship that *Jonah* is satirical or how this might affect any arguments about material in Exodus 34:6 which the writer of *Jonah* "excluded" such as the absence of the retributive aspects of God's character. His article also provides a good survey of scholarship and arguments which assign priority to Joel. Joseph R. Kelly, "Joel, Jonah, and the YHWH Creed: Determining the Trajectory of the Literary Influence," *JBL* 132, no. 4 (2013): 805-26.

<sup>87</sup> Redditt, "Zechariah 9-14, Malachi, and the Redaction of the Book of the Twelve," 255.

<sup>88</sup> Person holds the view that a Deuteronomistic 'school' during the exile preserved and promulgated the book of Deuteronomy, the Deuteronomistic history (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) and Jeremiah. He argues his position in Person, *The Deuteronomistic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature*, whole book.

<sup>89</sup> Raymond F. Person, *Second Zechariah and the Deuteronomistic school* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 31.

<sup>90</sup> Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, 278.

In my view the evidence is heading in the direction of *Jonah* being a late addition to the Twelve in order to engage in a dialogue about whether a retributive theodicy could adequately explain the experiences of the exile. Kim articulates this well in his comment that “diachronically the book of Jonah was written as a dialogue with the aforementioned correlated texts, giving expression to thematic emphases of the post-exilic communities in the Second Temple period.”<sup>91</sup> I agree to a large extent with Schart’s conclusion that any redactional traces in the Twelve that are connected to *Jonah* belong to the latest layers in that writing and that the inclusion of *Jonah* in the final redaction of the book significantly changed the message of the Twelve in several respects.<sup>92</sup> I agree too that *Jonah*’s allusion to Exodus 34:6 as a kind of proof-text – especially in the form in which it is used in Joel – provided “a new twist” to an understanding of God’s mercy. However, rather than the twist being that God’s mercy would be extended to the nations, it was that one could never know how or when, or even if, God’s mercy would be exercised, not even to his covenanted people.

## Nahum

A major turning point in *Jonah* comes after the repentance of the people of Nineveh when the narrator says:

וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי־שָׁבוּ מִדֶּרֶכָם הַרְעָה וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it (3:10).

<sup>91</sup> Kim, “Jonah read intertextually,” 499.

<sup>92</sup> Schart, “The Jonah Narrative within the Book of the Twelve,” 127.

The verb נָחַם *to relent* or *change his mind* occurs again at another critical moment in Jonah's accusation against God that he would עֲלֶה-רָעָה וְנָחַם *relent from punishing* (4:2). It seems to be an important thematic word throughout the Twelve.<sup>93</sup> The fact that it is the root of the name נָחוּם *Nahum* suggests it may have been intended as a pun.<sup>94</sup> It is perhaps ironic that there is no 'relenting' in Nahum.

Kim argues convincingly that *Jonah* and Nahum form a kind of chiasmic centre to the Twelve. Building on John Watt's argument that Hosea and Malachi build a frame for the Twelve sharing the motif of marriage and divorce,<sup>95</sup> Kim posits that *Jonah* and Nahum form the chiasmic core between the symmetrical *inclusio* provided by Hosea and Malachi. If these two books do form the thematic core, the Septuagint order preserves it. The placement of Micah between *Jonah* and Nahum in the Masoretic Text puts it at the chiasmic centre and, in Kim's view, this may have been because it is concerned, not with the fate of Assyria, but with the fate of the ultimate glory of Zion. In light of my proposal that *Jonah* uses certain wordplays and allusions to create some ambiguity about whether he is referring to Nineveh or Jerusalem, Kim's explanation is appealing. The redactor may have placed Micah after *Jonah* to highlight that *Jonah's* central concern was also Zion.

Kim thinks that *Jonah* "represents a dissenting attitude to its counterpart, Nahum."<sup>96</sup> In doing so, he reflects what is almost certainly the scholarly consensus. He admits that while both books are difficult to date, it appears likely that *Jonah* was finalised after Nahum. Kim

<sup>93</sup> נָחַם occurs in Hosea 13:14; Joel 2:13-14; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:9, 10; 4:2; Nahum 3:7; Zechariah 1:17; 8:14; 10:2.

<sup>94</sup> Zephaniah 3:1 has another example of a puns on a prophet's name which reaches across books within the Twelve. There the "oppressing city" is described as הָעִיר הַיּוֹנָה which looks like a pun on the name יוֹנָה *Jonah*. There may also be a pun on Zephaniah's name (צִפְנִיָּה) in Hosea 13:12 חֲטָאתוֹ חֲפִינָה *his iniquity is hid*.

<sup>95</sup> Watts, "A Frame for the Book of the Twelve: Hosea 1-3 and Malachi," 210.

<sup>96</sup> Kim, "Jonah read intertextually," 523.

summarised what he argues are the dissenting attitudes of the two books, and how they work together within the Twelve:

Both the MT and the LXX place Jonah before Nahum. Yet diachronically Jonah comes after Nahum.<sup>97</sup> What, then, would have been the implications of the book of Jonah for the Diaspora settings of the Second Temple period? Making a conceptual confrontation with Nahum, the book of Jonah proposes a radically subversive perspective ... Nahum states that Nineveh deserves to be punished, which did occur in 612 B.C.E. Jonah claims that Nineveh too could have been given divine mercy ... Jonah challenges and counterbalances Nahum, even as Jonah is placed before Nahum in the canon.<sup>98</sup>

In both the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint *Jonah* is positioned before Nahum. While it is generally agreed that chronologically *Jonah* was written after Nahum, this positioning suggests the redactor(s) intended *Jonah* to be read first and casts doubt on Kim's view that *Jonah* challenges Nahum. While I agree that *Jonah* proposes a radically subversive perspective, if that perspective challenged Nahum it would have made more sense for the counterbalancing views of *Jonah* to follow Nahum in the ordering rather than precede it. A reading of Jonah 4:11 וְאֲנִי לֹא אֶחָדִים עַל־נִינְוָה as a declarative statement that *I will not be concerned about Nineveh* changes the way we read the entire book and means that *Jonah* is not challenging Nahum or Obadiah. *Jonah's* point was that Nineveh was spared at some stage in its history because they repented (at least in the story of *Jonah* if not actually in history), although the city was later destroyed. In some ways this parallels Judah's experience with Josiah repenting, but later the kingdom was destroyed for both their sins and the weight of Manasseh's sins. In both cases – Judah and Nineveh – the reprieve was temporary and the end

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<sup>97</sup> In terms of composition date, although chronologically Jonah is placed before Nahum.

<sup>98</sup> Kim, "Jonah read intertextually," 524.

result was destruction.<sup>99</sup> Obadiah, *Jonah* and Nahum present a consistent message denouncing Nineveh and the nations that oppress God's people. *Jonah* does present a dissenting voice within the Twelve – it is not however against Nahum, but rather against Joel.

## Micah

Further to the suggestion above that the placement of Micah between *Jonah* and Nahum may have been to draw attention to the fate of Zion as a more central issue than that of Assyria, there is another possible intertextual link between *Jonah* and Micah 1:11 which has the unique term *בֵּית הַאֶצֶל*. This term is generally transliterated as a place name *Beth-ezel* or similar. In an article which argues that this verse forms part of a well-planned literary structure which reflects the work of an author who has transformed an oral prophecy into a

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<sup>99</sup> Nineveh's reprieve was temporary as the city was eventually destroyed in 612 BCE. Bernard Levinson and Jeremy Schipper account for the delay between sin and punishment in terms of "transgenerational punishment" (see my note and references on page 174). According to this view God punishes sinners vicariously, extending the punishment to three or four generations of their descendants, based on the formula found in Exodus 20:5; 34:7 and Deuteronomy 5:9 (which says God will punish children for the iniquity of parents, "to the third and the fourth generation"). If the same principle is applied to Nineveh/Assyria there are four generations of Neo-Assyrian kings from Sargon II who conquered the Kingdom of Israel in 710 BCE, to Ashurbanipal, during whose reign Nineveh was destroyed by a confederacy of former vassals including the Babylonians in 612 BCE. (The four generations of the Sargonid dynasty are Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal.) Schipper observes a definite pattern in the number of generations in the dynasties of Israel and Judah. (Jeremy Schipper, "Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Dynastic or Transgenerational Punishment," in *Soundings in Kings: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship* (eds. Mark Leuchter and Klaus-Peter Adam; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 97-104.) An example of this pattern is the Jehu dynasty which was Israel's last, and met its demise with the violent death of Zechariah. The narrator connects his death with the four-generation promise given to Jehu (2 Kings 15:10-12, referring to 2 Kings 10:30 "Because you have done well in carrying out what I consider right, and in accordance with all that was in my heart have dealt with the house of Ahab, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." Kings in the Jehu dynasty were Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II and Zechariah.) There is a kind of parallel between the house of Jehu whose dynasty came to an end with the assassination of Zechariah four generations after it was founded; Judah which was punished for the sins of Manasseh in the fourth generation (during the reign of Jehoiachin); and Assyria which was destroyed three generations after Sargon II destroyed Israel.

literary work, Nadav Na'aman has challenged the reading of *בֵּית הַיָּצֵל* as a place name. He argues that *בֵּית הַיָּצֵל* “must be construed together with the verbal form *yiqqah* [יָקַח] and hence can hardly be a place name.”<sup>100</sup> He proposes instead that it should be translated the “House-of-no-shade” which he sees as a mocking designation for the ruling house of Assyria. “The protective function of the ‘shade of the king’ is a widespread motif in the ideology of ancient Near Eastern kings, especially in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and finds vivid expression in Jotham’s parable (Judges 9:15).” He translates the whole phrase as “The House-of-no-shade shall take away its tax from you” and argues that the writer of Micah has selected names of towns which are suitable for wordplays. He illustrates his point with a quotation from a letter written by Sargon II, close to the setting of Micah’s prophecy, to the Assyrian governor of Que with a message for an Assyrian vassal:

Say to him as follows: “Before, you were afraid of the Phrygian, (but) now the Phrygian has made peace with us, so what are you afraid of? Now eat your bread (and) drink your water (under) the shadow of the king, my lord, (and) be glad. Have no anxiety with regard to the Phrygian.”

The shade or shadow of the king can be understood to be a designation of the king as a protector. Muldoon has developed this idea further and based on the frequent imagery in Assyrian art and literature of the king as an arboreal shade-giver has argued that this popular image is parodied in biblical texts such as Ezekiel 31.<sup>101</sup> Ezekiel uses the metaphor of a tree to describe the Assyrian (“the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon” v.3) and refers to *יָשְׁבוּ בְצֵלוֹ* *those who dwelt in its shade among the nations* (v.17). Muldoon proposes that the

<sup>100</sup> Nadav Na'aman, “‘The House-of-No-Shade Shall Take Away Its Tax from You’ (Micah 1:11),” *VT* 45, no. 4 (1995): 520.

<sup>101</sup> Muldoon, *In Defense of Divine Justice*, 130. This is not only an Assyrian image. See for example Lamentations 4:20 “Under his shadow we shall live among the nations” and Psalm 91:1 “You who live in the shelter of the Most High.”



prophet seems “to appropriate Assyrian imagery only to subvert it” and argues convincingly that the קִיקְיֹון episode in *Jonah* should also be read in the light of this Assyrian arboreal imagery.

[The קִיקְיֹון] like the cedar representing Assyria, provides shade for Jonah (4:6), as does the cedar for the ‘birds of the air’ (Ezek. 31:6). The modes of destruction for the cedar and the *qīqāyôn*, while different, have similar results. Each tree is undone, at least in part, by violent attacks.<sup>102</sup>

Admittedly the connection by Na’aman and Muldoon is making a great deal out of a possible reading of an obscure place name which most scholars think is in Judah, so to find a reference to Assyria there is quite striking and I would not rely on it to make a case for an intertextual link with *Jonah*. However, if the connection does exist Micah, Ezekiel and *Jonah* may all be sharing the same imagery of a tree providing shade as a metaphor for the Assyrian king who would be struck down. If *Jonah* ends with a declaration that God is not concerned about Nineveh, the placement of Micah between it and Nahum provides thematic continuity.

### **Psalms cited or alluded to in Jonah**

In chapter 5 I will consider various Psalms which are alluded to in Jonah’s prayer from the belly of the fish, so I will not deal with them in detail here. I will note, however, that Magonet has observed an allusion to certain Psalms in the sailors’ statement that אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ כִּפְאֵשׁר כִּפְצָתָ עֵשִׂיתָ *you LORD have done as it pleased you* (1:14). The phrase recalls two passages in Psalms.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Muldoon, *In Defense of Divine Justice*, 135-36. The verb נָכָה is used to describe how the worm *struck* the קִיקְיֹון rather than the usual verb אָכַל *ate* and has an undertone of a violent attack.

<sup>103</sup> Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 70.

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-רָחַץ עָשָׂה

He does whatever he pleases (Psalm 115:3).

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-רָחַץ יְהוָה עָשָׂה

Whatever the LORD pleases he does (Psalm 135:6).

The second reference specifically refers to God doing as he pleases *בַּיַּמִּים וְכָל-תְּהוֹמוֹת* *in the seas and all deeps* and adds strength to the possibility that it is being alluded to by the sailors. I will discuss in chapter 6 (beginning on page 228) the apparent allusion by the king of Nineveh to various texts in the Hebrew Bible implying that he was familiar with the theology of Deuteronomy, and possibly with Jeremiah, Chronicles and Joel. While acknowledging that the narrator was putting words into the king's mouth to make a major thematic point, the dramatic effect is comical as there would be no reason to reasonably expect that the king had any actual awareness or interest in these Hebrew texts. There are several parallels between the two scenes – on the ship and in the royal court – so the writer is almost certainly using the same device in 1:14 by putting words from the Psalms into the sailors' mouths and implying that they were either familiar with the Book of Psalms or with the liturgical style of the Hebrews. I have also noted the contrasts between the sailors and the prophet Jonah, so their use of Psalms contributes to the contrast: not only did they pray when the man of God was silent, they prayed using the words of the Hebrew liturgy!

### Allusions to other Biblical narratives

Several scholars have noted parallels between *Jonah* and the flood narrative in Genesis.<sup>104</sup> For example, the story of Noah is the only other sea voyage in the Hebrew Bible and involves both a *דֹּבָה* *dove* and the destruction of the wicked. Similarly, parallels with the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative have been well observed.<sup>105</sup> Notably, Jonah's five-word proclamation of the *overturning* of Nineveh (Jonah 3:4) is remarkably reminiscent of the language of destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah which uses the same word *הִפָּךְ* (Genesis 19:25, 29). The Septuagint translates the introductory phrase concerning Nineveh *כִּי־עָלָה הָרָעָה לְפָנַי* *for their evil has come up before me* (1:2) as ὅτι ἀνέβη ἡ κραυγὴ τῆς κακίας αὐτῆς πρὸς με *because the cry of its evil has come up to me*. A similar expression *הַצִּעָקָה* *the outcry of Sodom* in Genesis 18:20 is translated as Κραυγὴ Σοδομῶν in the Septuagint. Emmanuel Antwi thinks this is a further allusion to the Sodom and Gomorrah story. "It is possible that the LXX had a *Vorlage*, which had the longer form of the text, with the insertion of *הַצִּעָקָה* or it was a later interpretation based upon Jonah's dependence on the Sodom and Gomorrah motif."<sup>106</sup> Allusions in *Jonah* to the Elijah narrative in 1 Kings 19:3-10 have also been noted in scholarship. Jonah's wish for death, for example, seems to be a cliché modelled on similar phrasing in the story of Elijah. As these parallels and allusions have been well discussed by several scholars I will note here the two allusions to the Elijah narrative in 1 Kings 19:4 which seem to me to be the strongest.

<sup>104</sup> Including Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 65-84; Kim, "Jonah read intertextually," 499-504; Greenstein, "Noah and Jonah: An Intertextual Interpretation."

<sup>105</sup> For example, in Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 65-84.

<sup>106</sup> Antwi, *The Book of Jonah in the Context of Post-Exilic Theology of Israel: an Exegetical Study*, 14.

| Elijah   | Jonah   |
|--|---|
| <p>וְהוּא־הֵלֵךְ בַּמִּדְבָּר דֶּרֶךְ יוֹם<br/>                     And he went into the wilderness a day's<br/>                     journey.</p>  | <p>וַיִּהְיֶה יוֹנָה לְבוֹא בְעִיר מִהֵלֶךְ יוֹם אֶחָד<br/>                     Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's<br/>                     walk (3:4).</p>   |
| <p>וַיִּשְׂאֵל אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ לְמוֹת<br/>                     יְהוָה קַח נַפְשִׁי<br/>                     He asked that he might die.<br/>                     O LORD, take away my life.</p> | <p>וַעֲתָה יְהוָה קַח־נַפְשִׁי מִמֶּנִּי כִּי טוֹב מוֹתִי מֵחֲיִי<br/>                     O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is<br/>                     better for me to die than to live (4:3).</p> |

In alluding to or mimicking the Elijah story, *Jonah* was not necessarily referring to an actual written text (although it could have been), but equally could have been drawing on a prophetic tradition which had come down to the post-exilic generation orally. The purpose of the allusion would be to make a comparison between the two prophets and thereby highlight that Jonah's request to die may have been an attempt to obtain God's acknowledgment, similar to the one he gave Elijah, that God was with Israel because of those who were faithful to him (cf. 1 Kings 19:18). The allusion to the Elijah tradition suggests the prophets had some things in common, and if there were many in Israel who had "not bowed to Baal" in Elijah's time the same may have been true in Jonah's. So why was God punishing them with exile? However, Jonah's encounter with God does not go as well as he may have anticipated. Instead, God causes a plant to grow to provide shade for Jonah, but then abruptly and inexplicably takes it away (Jonah 4:6-8). If Jonah was to see any message in that it most likely was that God acts in ways which seem to be both merciful and capricious, without apparent reason, without warning or explanation, and there is no way to know what God will do, or why.

## Conclusion

The presence within the Twelve of both Amos and *Jonah* – contemporaneous prophets who both spoke of the fate of Jeroboam II, *Jonah*'s words coming true while Amos's predictions "failed" – suggests that the redactors who assembled this collection had no difficulty including conflicting messages or hearing the voices of opposing prophets. There are signs that editors or redactors made connections between the various works, introducing or strengthening thematic similarities, creating puns and wordplays, and using catchwords as linking devices. Yet the redactional efforts to make connections did not obliterate conflicting views and it appears that little or no attempt was made to "harmonise" the collection by altering them. The Twelve as a collection preserves a dialogue, or part of one, and at least one text in the collection – *Jonah* – questioned a theodicy upheld by other writers by parodying their texts and satirising their prophetic tradition.

*Jonah* is unique in several ways. Its narrative literary style is different from any other prophetic work, and it employs paronomasia, irony and satire to a greater degree than other prophetic texts. It should not be surprising then that its message is remarkably different from these other writings. As a late addition to the Twelve – which had already developed as a dialogue between various voices – it should also not be surprising that *Jonah*'s contribution to the dialogue would be unique, challenging, and in conflict with earlier voices. Amongst those scholars who read the Twelve diachronically there are a number who argue that the collection began with a corpus of Deuteronomistic texts, to which further Deuteronomistic texts were added as well as other 'layers' which offered different, although similar, perspectives. One of the purposes of dialogue is to develop existing ideas, devise new ones, change perspectives and challenge outmoded models. The story of *Jonah* comes at or towards the end of this particular dialogue as we have it in the redaction of the Twelve. It not only

adds some fresh insights, it also confronts and challenges some of the flaws of a retributive theodicy.

This challenge is primarily made by parodying theological foundations – such as the attributes formula in Exodus 34:6-7 – liturgical forms, and the Deuteronomistic prophetic corpus, especially Jeremiah, and satirising earlier heroes. The purpose would be to force an audience to rethink whether the earlier Deuteronomistic views were still relevant in light of the exile. The Deuteronomistic texts explained the exile on the basis that God punishes the sinful. *Jonah* does not necessarily take issue with whether sin should be punished, but questions why God should destroy Israel while showing leniency to Nineveh. The use of ambiguous images and allusions to texts which spoke of Jerusalem or Judah might cause the reader or listener to wonder whether the story was really about the city of Nineveh which no longer existed, and if foreign nations could come into a relationship with the God of Israel, at least theoretically, or if it was conveying a message about God's relationship with his own people. I have argued that the purpose of *Jonah* has little or nothing to do with foreign nations or cities but seems to be about how God deals with Israel and whether a retributive theodicy has an adequate explanation for it.

## Chapter 4: The flight to Tarshish

Having examined the use of irony, satire, parody and intertextual allusions in *Jonah*, I will demonstrate in the next four chapters how these elements come together in the text to convey a message about the unpredictability of God's mercy. This chapter considers the first of the four major divisions of the book, approximately equivalent to the four chapter divisions, which I refer to as four 'scenes.' I analyse the use of linguistic and literary devices in each scene, whether the writer employs these devices for a comic or some other effect, and whether the overall literary effect of each scene is predominantly one of irony, satire or parody.

### Relationship to the historical Jonah of 2 Kings 14

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יוֹנָה בֶן־אֲמִיטַי לֵאמֹר:

קוּם לֵךְ אֶל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וּקְרָא עָלֶיהָ

כִּי־עָלְתָה רַעְתָּם לְפָנָי:

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying,

“Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it;

for their wickedness has come up before me.” (1:1)

It is reasonable to assume that the prophet in the book of Jonah is the same “Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet” who is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:23-27 as prophesying during the reign of Jeroboam II (786-746 BCE) in Israel, and that the implied reader is familiar with the

story of Jonah in Kings. The connection between the character in *Jonah* and the prophet of the same name in Kings is important if the writer of *Jonah* had a literary purpose in making such a connection, and I will argue that the historical context as we have it in Kings forms a literary context for the writer's message in *Jonah*. There is a near consensus among all the standard commentaries on *Jonah* that the historical personage behind the story is the prophet in the Kings narrative,<sup>1</sup> although this is debated by some scholars who argue that the character of Jonah is a literary invention with little or no connection to the prophet bearing that name in 2 Kings.<sup>2</sup>

Jonah's message in 2 Kings was one of comfort and hope for Israel "for the LORD saw that the distress of Israel was very bitter; there was no one left, bond or free, and no one to help Israel" (2 Kings 14:26). Jeroboam II is depicted in the book of Kings as one who "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Kings 14:24)<sup>3</sup> but he is said to have "restored the border of Israel ... according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah" (2 Kings 14:25). Nothing is said in this text about Jonah's mission to Nineveh, nor is there any mention in the book of Jonah of his message concerning Jeroboam's military campaigns. The allusive intertextuality between 2 Kings 14 and *Jonah* is limited to the name "Jonah ben Amittai."

It is possibly ironic that the book of Kings specifically named Nineveh as the home city of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (705-681 BCE) who came against Judah during the reign of Hezekiah: "Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 431; Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 179; Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 98; Tribble, "The Book of Jonah," 493. But see Sasson's discussion on "Jonah as History or Fiction" Sasson, *Jonah*, 327.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1: Jonah – a literary invention?

<sup>3</sup> See "The relationship of *Jonah* to the book of Kings" in my introduction for a discussion of this phrase as a late Deuteronomistic redaction.



Nineveh” (2 Kings 19:36). The Assyrian Empire destroyed the Kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE. However, *Jonah* does not specifically name Assyria or any potential threat to Israel. Rendtorff has observed that “Jonah does not portray Nineveh as a real political power. Nineveh is not seen primarily as a danger for Israel but as the prime example of a Gentile city that is sinful thus deserving divine judgment.”<sup>4</sup> It is reasonable, however, to understand “Nineveh” in the story as a *synecdoche* for the Assyrian empire, of which it was at one stage the capital. An exilic or post-exilic audience could be expected to make the connection that Nineveh represents Assyria. One of the greatest ironies of the book is that if Nineveh had actually been overthrown in the time of Jonah and Jeroboam II, as the prophet foretold, then there may not have been a Sennacherib, or an Assyrian empire, and Israel may not have been destroyed, at least not by the Assyrians. Commenting on Jonah’s dilemma Sawyer says, “he was being asked in effect to sign his own people’s death warrant.” The dilemma for Jonah was that if the Assyrians repented they would have the opportunity to destroy Israel (which they eventually did). “With prophetic insight Jonah saw this all too clearly, and, torn between loyalty to his people and obedience to his God - a situation prophets frequently find themselves in - he ran away.” Sawyer observed that “the Assyrians represent Israel’s most barbaric and savage enemies, comparable with the technicians who ran the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Treblinka.”<sup>5</sup> The irony is immediately apparent. While *Jonah* is not history, the association of Jonah with Jeroboam II in 2 Kings 14 is interesting and relevant. Is Jonah being portrayed positively or negatively? As the initial audience was almost certainly

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<sup>4</sup> Rendtorff, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity,” 83.

<sup>5</sup> John F.A. Sawyer, *Prophecy and the Prophets of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 114-115. Brutal imperialists, however, are not the same as racially motivated perpetrators of genocide so the two are not equivalent. Sawyer’s point is that the Assyrian annihilation of Israel was at the time of writing of *Jonah* the most horrific experience in the history of Israel and Judah. I discuss reading *Jonah* in the shadow of the *Shoah* in chapter 8.

Judahite or the literati of Yehud,<sup>6</sup> a tension is created in the choice of a nationalistic northern prophet as the key character, who Allen regards as “ideal as the butt for an attack on religious nationalism.”<sup>7</sup>

Whether or not *Jonah* is based on an actual historical person, it should become evident in this thesis that the narrator is not writing history. A reader or listener would almost certainly detect from the outset of the story that there is something about the key character which is not right. For example, Jonah was commissioned to אֶל-נִיְנֹוּהָ לֵךְ קוּם לֵךְ *Arise, go to Nineveh* and the imperative to “rise” is repeated in the first of a series of repetitive wordplays throughout the story: וַיִּקָּם יוֹנָה לִבְרֹחַ but *Jonah arose to flee*. A series of *descents* then commence: Jonah first “went down (יָרַד) to Joppa” (1:3), then we find he “had gone down (יָרַד) into the hold of the vessel” (1:5), and eventually he “went down (יָרַד) to the base of the mountains” (2:7 [6]). The concepts of descending and ascending are intertwined throughout

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<sup>6</sup> See my Introduction, specifically the section “Dating – Determining the Likely Audience.”

<sup>7</sup> Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 179. Sasson, however, rejects the characterisation of Jonah as a nationalistic prophet. (Sasson, *Jonah*, 342-344.) Gary Rendsburg argues that there is evidence in biblical texts of a northern dialect of ancient Hebrew, which he terms “Israelian Hebrew” and lists a corpus of 149 chapters (or approximately 16% of the Bible). (Gary A. Rendsburg, “A Comprehensive Guide to Israelian Hebrew: Grammar and Lexicon,” *Orient* 38 (2003): 8.) One might reasonably expect to find evidence of Israelian Hebrew in the book of *Jonah*, if such a dialect can actually be detected in biblical texts. However, Rendsburg does not list any verses from *Jonah* in his corpus. This could suggest that the writer of *Jonah* did not draw on any northern texts for material. However, the lack of Israelian Hebrew in a book where it could be reasonably expected would challenge Rendsburg’s theory. Several scholars have challenged Rendsburg’s methodologies, including Daniel C. Fredericks, “A North Israelite Dialect in the Hebrew Bible?: Questions of Methodology,” *Hebrew Studies* 37 (1996): 7-20; Ian Young, “Evidence of Diversity in Pre-Exilic Judahite Hebrew,” *Hebrew Studies* 38 (1997): 7-20. In any case, distinctive linguistic features are not normally transmitted by scribes and the few features of Israelian Hebrew we can trace in inscriptions (such as the theophoric element in names -YW) are not represented in our current texts, so it is possible that the author could have drawn on northern sources and yet no linguistic evidence remains. Rezetko and Young, *Historical Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*, 112; Young, “Ancient Hebrew Without Authors,” 987.

the book, coming together in Jonah's prayer in 2:7 לְקִצְבֵי הַרִים יֵרְדֹתִי I went down to the base of the mountains ... וַתַּעַל מִשְׁחַת חַיִּי yet you brought my life up from the pit.<sup>8</sup>

Jonah's descent into the hold of the ship reinforces the point with a wordplay which elaborates the descent as a process and makes a comic reading almost irresistible. The story goes on to say that in the hold of the ship Jonah נִרְדַּם was in a deep sleep, using a word which contains the same letters as "to go down" (יָרַד) although from a different root (רָדַם). This choice of word creates a word play as it is not the usual word for sleeping,<sup>9</sup> but in the wayyiqtol has a phonetic resemblance to the verb to go down. Its associations elsewhere with trance-like sleep may imply that Jonah was in a trance, and if so, suggests a humorous meaning in this context since he was oblivious to what was actually happening. The Septuagint's addition of καὶ ἔρρηγγεν and snored is a further comical enhancement.<sup>10</sup>

From the beginning the reader would see in Jonah's refusal to follow the LORD's commission that something is wrong: prophets are meant to be the obedient servants of God. "Jonah is no hero: he is deliberately portrayed in a very poor light."<sup>11</sup> Other biblical literature refers to "my servants the prophets"<sup>12</sup> and in 2 Kings 14:25 Jonah is specifically mentioned as "his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet." Yet in this story he appears not to be an obedient servant. In biblical narratives prophets frequently raise objections to their calling, yet Jonah does more than *object* – he hears the imperative to "rise" and rises to go in the

<sup>8</sup> Contrasting words occur frequently throughout the book, such as those relating to ascent and descent, good and evil. Halpern and Friedman identify several key words in *Jonah* involving motion up and down and conclude that lexically "it is as though descent represents distance from YHWH, ascent movement towards him." Halpern and Friedman, "Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah," 81.

<sup>9</sup> Although רָדַם has the specific meaning of a *deep* sleep and occurs in contexts where a trance-like sleep may be meant.

<sup>10</sup> See my note on the Septuagint rendering and the association of רָדַם with a trance-like state on page 73.

<sup>11</sup> Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 175.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Kings 9:7; 17:13; Jeremiah 7:25; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; Ezekiel 38:17; Zechariah 1:6; 2 Esdras 1:32; 2:1.

opposite direction! “Moses, Elijah, and Jeremiah indeed shrank from their assignments, but Jonah’s blunt refusal goes far beyond their hesitation.”<sup>13</sup>

Based on the stories of Moses, Elijah and Jeremiah, the unwilling prophet could be considered to be a type-scene, and the author of the story of *Jonah* uses this theme to create suspense from the very beginning. The storm-tossed ship is a common enough motif in ancient literature that the ancient reader or listener may have been familiar with it. Bickerman has noted that according to the ideas of the ancients such a ship must be carrying an enemy of the gods, and he illustrates his point with reference to the case of a fifth century Athenian who argued before a court that his client, who was being prosecuted for murder, must indeed be innocent because his ship arrived safely.<sup>14</sup> The idea that tempests were instruments of the gods to punish evildoers was so familiar that several ancient commentators had to deal with the question that if Jonah’s ship was in distress because of his flight from God, what of other ships on the same sea? The fourth century Christian commentator Theodore of Mopsuestia, claimed that the storm struck Jonah’s ship only,<sup>15</sup> an argument that was also used by the Rabbinic sages.<sup>16</sup>

### The route to Tarshish

וַיֵּקֶם יוֹנָה לִבְרֹחַ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה

But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD (Jonah 1:3).

<sup>13</sup> Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 176.

<sup>14</sup> Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Meir Zlotowitz, *Yonah/Jonah: a New Translation with a Commentary from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (eds. Meir Zlotowitz and Nosson Scherman; Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1980), 87. The *Midrash Bereishis Rabbah* 24:4 argues from the definite article in והאניה חשבה להשבר that it was only Jonah’s ship that was in danger of breaking up.

The intended destination for Jonah’s flight may be an indication that the writer is employing hyperbole. While several elements in the story are described as being גדול *big*, or *great* the term is not specifically used in relation to the journey, although it is possibly the “biggest” conceivable journey that could be taken in the ancient near eastern world.

The word תַּרְשִׁישׁ *Tarshish* occurs in the Hebrew Bible as a person’s name,<sup>17</sup> a gemstone,<sup>18</sup> and as a placename. The etymological derivation is uncertain.<sup>19</sup> As a placename it is mentioned in Kings, Chronicles, the book of Psalms and the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Jonah. It sometimes appears as part of the construct chain אֲנֵי תַרְשִׁישׁ *fleet of Tarshish*<sup>20</sup> or אֲנֵי תַרְשִׁישׁ אוֹתָם *ships of Tarshish*.<sup>21</sup> It is not certain if this construct refers to a class of ships (*ships of the Tarshish type* as NRSV translates the phrase in 1 Kings 22:48) which were capable of travelling the distance to Tarshish or carrying a large cargo, or were named as such because they had a regular route to and from a place, or places, named Tarshish.<sup>22</sup> Tarshish is frequently mentioned in the context of trade. A reference in Ezekiel 27:12 as part of a lamentation over Tyre says תַּרְשִׁישׁ סִחֲרְתָּהּ מֵרֵב כָּל־הוֹן בְּכֶסֶף בְּרִזְלָה בְּדִיל וְעוֹפָרַת נִתְּנָה עִזְבוֹנָיִךְ *Tarshish did business with you out of the abundance of your great wealth; silver, iron, tin, and lead they exchanged for your wares*, and later אֲנֵי תַרְשִׁישׁ שָׂרוּתֶיךָ מֵעָרְבָהּ *the ships of Tarshish traveled for you in your trade* (v.25). The occurrence of the phrase סִחֲרֵי

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 10:4; 1 Chronicles 7:10; Esther 1:14

<sup>18</sup> Exodus 28:20; 39:13; Ezekiel 1:16; 10:9; Daniel 10:6; Song 5:14

<sup>19</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 1797.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Kings 10:22

<sup>21</sup> 1 Kings 22:47; 2 Chronicles 9:21; Psalm 48:7; Isaiah 2:16; 23:1, 14; 60:9; Ezekiel 27:25

<sup>22</sup> Wolff argues that “Tarshish ships” had become the usual term for deep-sea vessels in general, “a ‘round’ ship as distinct from the ‘long’ ships used for war.” (Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 101.) The *New English Translation* opts for it being a class of ship, and translates this construct as *large merchant ships*, or simply *large ship*. Somewhat surprisingly, after opting for a class of ship in other places, in Ezekiel 27:25 NET translates אֲנֵי תַרְשִׁישׁ as *ships of Tarshish*.

תְּרַשִׁישׁ *merchants of Tarshish* in Ezekiel 38:13 adds credence to the idea that Tarshish was either on, or the terminus of, a trade route, although it is unclear from these occurrences in Ezekiel if תְּרַשִׁישׁ סְחָרֵי refers to traders *from* Tarshish, merchants who travelled *to* Tarshish, or those who dealt in Tarshish commodities. Here these merchants are associated with שְׁבָא וְדֶדָן *Sheba and Dedan* which were almost certainly in south and south-western Arabia on the Red Sea,<sup>23</sup> and the association suggests that Tarshish may have been in the same area, or beyond.

Parallel accounts in Kings and Chronicles refer to Solomon sending ships to Tarshish every three years to bring זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וְשֵׁנֵהָבִים וְקַפִּים וְתַפְּסִיִּים *gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks* (1 Kings 10:22; 2 Chronicles 9:21). The last three items in this list are named only here in the Hebrew Bible and are of uncertain origin. Koehler and Baumgartner refer to Gray who thinks שֵׁנֵהָבִים *ivory* could be a hybrid loan word derived from שֵׁן *tooth* and a word of Sanskrit origin *ibhas* meaning *elephant* which made its way into Hebrew via Egyptian.<sup>24</sup> They suggest too that קוֹר *ape* has its origins in the Sanskrit *kapi*<sup>25</sup> and think תּוֹכַיִּים *peacock* is a loanword of foreign origin, with the Indian languages Malabar and Tamil being specifically mentioned as possibilities.<sup>26</sup> While all three, elephants, apes and peacocks, are indigenous to India and further east (elephants and apes are also indigenous to Africa, although not

<sup>23</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 1381, 214. Tarshish is also associated with Sheba and Seba in Psalm 72:10.

<sup>24</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 1602. Noonan argues for an Egyptian origin, saying “ivory was most often obtained from African sources in the ancient Palestine, which corresponds well with the fact that this word contains a foreign element meaning “elephant” found in Egyptian *ḡbw*.” Benjamin J. Noonan, “Foreign Loanwords and Kulturwoerter in Northwest Semitic (1400–600 B.C.E.): Linguistic and Cultural Contact in Light of Terminology for Realia” (Ph.D., Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion (Ohio), 2012), 20, 103-105. Muchiki thinks it is a loan word from northern Africa and postulates that both Hebrew and Egyptian borrowed the lexeme meaning “elephant” from a third source, which he proposes to be Nubian as Nubia and Punt were Egypt’s sources of ivory. Yoshiyuki Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords in North-West Semitic* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 257.

<sup>25</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 1089.

<sup>26</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 1731.

peacocks, if תרופים in fact means *peacocks* and not *apes* as Noonan suggests<sup>27</sup>), they may have been introduced to other areas well before the time *Jonah* was written, or changed hands along various trade routes. The origins of these words are problematic, and are not conclusive in identifying Tarshish.<sup>28</sup>

The Tarshish named in *Jonah*, however, appears to be in the west as Joppa was a Mediterranean port. If it was not for this *Jonah* reference, and based on the Chronicles and Kings references alone, scholars may have identified Tarshish with a location in the south or east rather than the west.<sup>29</sup> Some scholars maintain that Tarshish must be located along the commercial route of the Red Sea or at the terminus of that route in India. Commenting on Ulf Täckholm's work on Tarshish and Tartessos, Ogilvie says:

To identify the Tarshish of the Old Testament with the Greek Tartessos was natural and inevitable, although the etymological relationship of the names remains unexplained. But the difficulties are formidable. Southern Spain was never famous for its gold (what there was, was left for native use), precious stones, or ivory, let alone its apes and peacocks (I Kings 10:22): silver was its main export in classical times. Täckholm documents this well. Furthermore, to believe that in the tenth century Tarshish was trading with Solomon implies that the Phoenicians, as the shippers, were installed in the west, at Carthage and elsewhere, much earlier than either archaeological or literary evidence justifies. No support for such a view is given by inscriptions. The Nora inscription (*CIS* 1.144: 8th cent.) is quite obscure: an inscription of Assarhaddon (*ARAB* 2.170: c. 670 B.C.), mentions the Tarsisi, but, whoever or wherever they are, the context makes it clear that they were in the Near East, not the West.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Noonan, "Foreign Loanwords," 103.

<sup>28</sup> For further information on the possibility that 1 Kings 10:22 and 2 Chronicles 9:21 are employing loan words from Indian languages, see Appendix 3: Tarshish in the east.

<sup>29</sup> For a more detailed consideration of the feasibility of Tarshish being in India, Sri Lanka or along an Asian trade route see Appendix 3: Tarshish in the east.

<sup>30</sup> R. M. Ogilvie, "Opuscula Romana, Vol. X. (Skrifter Utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Rom, 4<sup>o</sup>, xxxiv.) Pp. 30; 13 figures. Lund: Berlingska Boktryckeriet, 1975. Paper, Sw. kr. 28," *The Classical Review* 27, no. 2 (1977): 313-14. There is no evidence for Esarhaddon having marched into Anatolia west of Cilicia, or that any kings in

While there is considerable evidence for locating Tarshish along the Red Sea, in India or somewhere in the east, there is a substantial problem with Jonah embarking at Joppa on the Mediterranean destined for Tarshish. Commentators seem to have overlooked the possibility that the author of the book of Jonah was referring to Tarshish hyperbolically, a comical way of saying that Jonah sought a ship going to India via the Mediterranean and circumnavigating Africa.<sup>31</sup> Remarkably, there is some evidence that the Phoenicians may have circumnavigated Africa. Herodotus recounted a journey instigated by Pharaoh Necho of a ship manned by Phoenician sailors which set out from Egypt and arrived back in Egypt via the Mediterranean after circumnavigating Africa.

Libya is washed on all sides by the sea except where it joins Asia, as was first demonstrated, so far as our knowledge goes, by the Egyptian king Necho, who, after calling off the construction of the canal between the Nile and the Arabian Gulf, sent out a fleet manned by a Phoenician crew with orders to sail west about and return to Egypt and the Mediterranean by way of the Straits of Gibraltar. The Phoenicians sailed from the Arabian Gulf into the southern ocean, and every autumn put in at some convenient spot on the Libyan coast, sowed a patch of ground, and waited for next year's harvest. Then,

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the Iberian Peninsula paid him tribute, which rules out the possibility of Tartessos being a candidate for Esarhaddon's *Tarsisi*, and Ahlström regards the identification of Tarshish with Tartessos as "philologically questionable." (Gösta W. Ahlström, "The Nora Inscription and Tarshish," *Maarav* 7 (1991): 48.)

<sup>31</sup> There is also a hint of this idea in Snaith's comment that "'To Tarshish' stands for 'to the farthest west', i.e. *to the ends of the earth*" (my emphasis). Snaith, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of Jonah*, 9. As further evidence that ships journeying as far as Africa or India could depart from Joppa, Wolff refers to an offshoot of the Perseus and Andromeda saga which was being told in Joppa in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, noting that "at that time there was a dispute about the location of the saga, some people believing that it had its setting in Ethiopia, i.e. on the Indian Ocean." (Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 102.) Paul Harvey refers to early attempts to explain the association of the myth with both Joppa and Ethiopia and refers to an argument that the name *Joppa* was derived from Aethiopia, which he says is "bad etymology" but "learned Greeks thought that such an etymology explained the location of Ethiopian Andromeda at Palestinian Joppa." Paul B. Harvey, "The Death of Mythology: The Case of Joppa," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, no. 1 (1994): 7.



## CHAPTER 4: THE FLIGHT TO TARSHISH

having got in their grain, they put to sea again, and after two full years rounded the Pillars of Heracles in the course of the third, and returned to Egypt. These men made a statement which I do not myself believe, though others may, to the effect that as they sailed on a westerly course round the southern end of Libya, they had the sun on their right - to northward of them. This is how Libya was first discovered by sea.<sup>32</sup>

Barry Beitzel lists several modern authorities who regard this seventh century voyage as historically viable.<sup>33</sup> Although this is considerably later than any period in which we might locate Jonah, the essential point is that Africa had been successfully circumnavigated in both directions by ancient seafarers.

Arcadio Del Castillo, however, argues for a different route for Jonah via the Nile Canal, contending “that Tarshish must have been close to the Red Sea, or at the furthest, somewhere near on the Indian Ocean, and this is true for all the texts that refer to this place.”<sup>34</sup> As this presents a problem for the port of Joppa being the departure point for a destination on the Red Sea or Indian Ocean, Del Castillo posits “So I think that the only real possibility of locating Tarshish referred to in the Book of Jonah somewhere on the Red Sea

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<sup>32</sup> *Histories* 4.42

<sup>33</sup> Barry J. Beitzel, “Was There a Joint Nautical Venture on the Mediterranean Sea by Tyrian Phoenicians and Early Israelites?,” *BASOR*, no. 360 (2010): 45 n19. Ciaran Branigan is one scholar who accepts Herodotus' story as conclusive proof that the Phoenicians' journey did indeed happen. (Ciaran Branigan, “The Circumnavigation of Africa,” *Classics Ireland* 1 (1994).) Alan Lloyd, however, is sceptical. (Alan B. Lloyd, “Necho and the Red Sea: Some Considerations,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 63 (1977): 148-54.) Although Eudoxus' attempted circumnavigations of Africa are much later, in the late to mid-second century BCE, (Strabo 2.98-100), a detail of interest for our purposes in identifying Jonah's route is Eudoxus' discovery of the remains of a vessel shipwrecked off the coast of Eritrean Ethiopia. The wreck was identified by sailors as a ship from Cádiz in the Iberian peninsula, based on its characteristic prow. “Encouraged by this finding, Eudoxus made two attempts at circling Africa by the Atlantic route [i.e. departing from Cádiz], the first one being successful.” (Luis A. Garcia Moreno, “Atlantic Seafaring and the Iberian Peninsula in Antiquity,” *Mediterranean Studies* 8 (1999): 6.)

<sup>34</sup> Arcadio Del Castillo, “Tarshish in the Book of Jonah,” *Revue Biblique* 114, no. 4 (2007): 485.

and at the furthest somewhere near on the Indian Ocean, would be to suppose that the writer thought the Nile canal to the Red Sea was already previously in use during the time of Persian sovereignty, around the 5-4<sup>th</sup> century BC.”<sup>35</sup> There is a further hint in Jonah 2:6 (5) where the prophet says סוּף תְּבוּשׁ לְרֵאשִׁי *the weeds were wrapped about my head*. The word סוּף can mean *reefs* and is part of the phrase יַם-סוּף referring the *Red* or *Reed Sea*, but does not mean *sea-weed* such as is found in the depths of the Mediterranean.<sup>36</sup> It is quite possible that the writer wants the audience to think that Jonah was swallowed by the fish in the Reed Sea, not the Mediterranean.<sup>37</sup>

There are early signs of exaggeration from the very beginning of the story, where Jonah נִימְצָא אֶנְיָה בָּאָה תְּרִשִׁישׁ וַיִּתֵּן שְׂכָרָה *found a ship coming from Tarshish and paid the fare*.<sup>38</sup> The phrase תְּרִשִׁישׁ בָּאָה lacks a preposition indicating whether the ship was going *to* or *from* Tarshish. While several translations render this as “a ship *going to* Tarshish” Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (“the Malbim”), in his commentary on Jonah, argues that if the ship was about to voyage *toward* Tarshish the text would read הוֹלֶכֶת לְתַרְשִׁישׁ, so the phrase implies that the ship was just returning *from* Tarshish,<sup>39</sup> although it is common in biblical Hebrew to express motion towards a place without preposition or the locative ה, and to express “from” with a preposition. This translation is also supported by a midrash in *Pirkei*

<sup>35</sup> Del Castillo, “Tarshish in the Book of Jonah,” 486. According to Herodotus the Nile Canal was commenced by Pharaoh Necho and completed by Darius I (*Histories* 2.158f). Five monumental inscriptions along the route describe the various stages of completion and its purpose to connect the Nile and the Red Sea to create a shipping link between Egypt and Persia.

<sup>36</sup> Maurice Copisarow, “The Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Hebrew Concept of the Red Sea,” *VT* 12, no. 1 (1962): 7-8.

<sup>37</sup> On the possibility of Jonah being a passenger on a Phoenician ship see Appendix 3: Tarshish in the east.

<sup>38</sup> For an overview of the use of exaggeration in *Jonah* see Terence E. Fretheim, “The Exaggerated God of Jonah,” *Word and World* 27, no. 2 (2007): 125-34.

<sup>39</sup> *Gei Chizayon*. This form, however, is not usual in biblical Hebrew.

*d’Rabbi Eliezer* (third century CE) and by Kimḥi.<sup>40</sup> Snaith notes that “it is unusual for this root [באָה] to be used of going away from the speaker.”<sup>41</sup> The text specifically mentions that Jonah paid the fare, which is somewhat surprising as we might expect that this would be the normal and obvious thing to do, and hardly seems deserving of a mention. However, the Talmud<sup>42</sup>, and the medieval scholars Rashi and Yosef Kara, argue that the words, וַיִּתֵּן שְׂכָרָה *he paid the fare* (literally, *her fare*), imply that Jonah paid the fare for the entire ship rather than just for his own passage.<sup>43</sup> In any case, it was customary to pay the fare at the end of a trip, rather than in advance, so the narrator’s point may simply be to emphasise that Jonah negotiated for a rapid departure.<sup>44</sup> They deduce from this that Jonah was so eager to leave in a hurry that he found a ship which had just arrived in port, and rather than wait for additional passengers and cargo, he paid the fares for the entire passenger load. The exaggeration would have a greater dramatic effect if it was known to the reader or listener that a ship arriving in Joppa from Tarshish may have taken two to three years to make the journey, and the mariners may not be eager to set off immediately. Miles has noted the irony, or rather parody, in the fact that Jonah paid for his passage: “By presenting a prophet who actually buys out of his vocation, the author drains the last trace of numinosity from this most numinous genre in the

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<sup>40</sup> Zlotowitz, *Yonah/Jonah*, 84-85.

<sup>41</sup> Snaith, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of Jonah*, 10. Duane Christensen captures the ambiguity by translating this phrase as “plying the Tarshish route.” Duane L. Christensen, “Narrative Poetics and the Interpretation of The Book of Jonah,” in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (ed. Elaine R. Follis; JSOTSup 40; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 33.

<sup>42</sup> *Nedarim* 38a.

<sup>43</sup> Zlotowitz, *Yonah/Jonah*, 85. The 3 f.s. suffix corresponds to the feminine שִׁיפָה *ship* which distinguishes a single ship from שִׁיפֹת *a fleet of ships* which is in the masculine form. Wolff agrees with the interpretation that Jonah paid the fare of the whole ship, noting that “the disobedient messenger must pay dearly for his flight all by himself . . . the impression is ironically conveyed that Jonah had to pay the price of the whole ship.” Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 102.

<sup>44</sup> LaCocque and LaCocque, *Jonah: a Psycho-Religious Approach*, 77 citing Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer 10. Steven McKenzie concurs that this detail suggests Jonah was in a hurry but notes that his choice of Joppa is strange in this context since it was not the closest port. McKenzie, “Jonah and Genre,” 5.

Bible.”<sup>45</sup> As the story unfolds mention is made of the crew and Jonah, but of no other passengers and as noted earlier Del Castillo thinks it extremely unlikely that a ship travelling to Tarshish would carry passengers. Rather than being an unnecessary detail in the story, this phrase may very well be an intended exaggeration with a comic effect.<sup>46</sup> The reader is invited to imagine Jonah anxiously waiting for an arriving vessel after a long journey to be unloaded of its cargo and the prophet then paying a considerable sum to ensure it departed almost immediately. If Jonah was intending to find a ship going to India or the far-east, he would at least be heading in the right general direction of Nineveh, able to disembark at or near the mouth of the Tigris on the Persian Gulf, to journey along the river to his destination in Nineveh.

The writer of *Judith* used place names unrealistically when describing Nebuchadnezzar’s military campaign against Arphaxad (Judith 1:1-16). Rather than being mere historical mistakes, this could be a deliberate device by the writer to ensure that the implied reader understood that it was unquestionably historical *fiction*. “Since the entire story of Judith is filled with irony, these historical mistakes signal playfulness by the author as the fictional storyline is set up. The massive size of the Assyrian army and their dizzying geographical routes continue the exaggerated presentation.”<sup>47</sup> It is therefore possible that the writer of *Jonah* was using a similar device, making it clear from the outset that this was a work of fiction, although possibly based on an historical personage. Regardless of where Tarshish was *actually* located, the references to it in Kings and Chronicles indicate that the implied reader probably *thought* it was in the direction of east Africa or India. As the detail

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<sup>45</sup> Miles, “Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody,” 207.

<sup>46</sup> Exaggeration, hyperbole and elaborate wordplays have been used for comic purposes from early times. Jared W. Ludlow, “Are Weeping and Falling Down Funny? Exaggeration in Ancient Novelistic Texts,” in *Reading and Teaching Ancient Fiction* (Jewish, Christian, and Greco-Roman Narratives: Society of Biblical Literature, 2018), 165.

<sup>47</sup> Ludlow, “Exaggeration in Ancient Novelistic Texts,” 167.

about Tarshish is within a context containing other unrealistic or exaggerated details, it is likely that it forms part of a cluster intended to have a deliberate comic or hyperbolic literary effect, implying that the prophet was intent on taking the longest route imaginable, circumnavigating Africa if necessary, taking years to complete, going in the right general direction, but giving God plenty of time to carry out his destructive plan before Jonah could arrive and warn them in time to repent and for God to change his mind.

### The storm

וַיִּהְיֶה הַטֵּיִל רוּחַ־גְּדוֹלָה אֲלֵהֶם וַיְהִי סַעַר־גְּדוֹל בַּיָּם וְהָאֲנִיָּה חֹשֶׁבֶת לְהִשָּׁבֵר

But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. (Jonah 1:4)

The narration of the storm includes several literary devices including repetition and paronomasia. In verse 4, for example, both the wind and the storm are described using the same adjective גְּדוֹלָה/גְּדוֹל *great*, a word which, as noted earlier, has already been used in the narrative to describe Nineveh הַגְּדוֹלָה הָעִיר *the great city* (four times) and will be used several times again throughout the story describing nine different items. In the immediate context of the storm it describes the sailors יִרְאָה גְּדוֹלָה *great fear* and the דָּג גְּדוֹל *great fish* which swallowed Jonah. The possible significance of this will be discussed when I come to this dialogue later in this chapter, but for now it should be noted that with the early and frequent repetition of this word and by applying it to various elements the writer is both indicating the “larger than life” quality of the story as well as possibly setting up the reader for the question of what it is to be great, or how one (or something) becomes great.

Another term which is repeated in this scene (although nowhere else in the story) is the *hiphil* of the verb טוֹל *to hurl* (1:4, 5, 12, 15). God hurled a storm to the sea, the mariners

hurled the cargo into the sea, Jonah told them to also hurl him into the sea, and then they respond by hurling him to the sea. Each time the hurling is אָל־הַיָּם *to the sea* so that both the verb and its object are repeated, perhaps for emphasis, although the subject shifts from God in the first instance to the sailors in the latter three occurrences. Jeanette Mathews claims the repetition of טול is used for comic effect “as several characters imitate each other.”<sup>48</sup> As Jonah later in his prayer from inside the fish says to God וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִצּוֹלָה *you cast me into the deep* (2:3 [4]) when it was, in fact, the sailors who did the hurling, it appears that the writer is setting up the reader for the inference that the sailors were acting as the *agents* of God and Jonah is portrayed as viewing their actions as acts of God. There is a likely wordplay with the Hebrew word שְׁלִיחַ *agent, emissary* from שָׁלַח *to send* which has a phonetic resemblance to the verb שָׁלַךְ *cast* in 2:3 (4).<sup>49</sup> Mathews offers the suggestion that the “piety of the poetry is deliberately disassociated from the comedy of the narrative.”<sup>50</sup> It could, however, be a deliberate allusive wordplay, recalling the theodicy behind Isaiah 10:5-6 that the Assyrians were *sent* (שָׁלַח) by God against Israel. This is further supported by the fact that the writer has Jonah saying that God שָׁלַךְ *cast* Jonah into the sea, using the more common term, rather than using the previously repeated word טול *hurled*.<sup>51</sup> While the repetition of a single word is not necessarily evidence that it is being employed as a literary device, the combination of several repeated words together with wordplays has a *cluster* effect which points strongly in the direction of irony, satire or humour.

An unusual expression occurs in verse 4: וְהַאֲנִיָּה חֲשָׁבָה לְהִשָּׁבֵר *the ship thought (she would) break up*. The *piel* verb חֲשָׁבָה personifies the ship as “thinking” and Holbert nicely

<sup>48</sup> Jeanette Mathews, “Jonah as a Performance: Performance Critical Guidelines for Reading a Prophetic Text,” *The Bible and Critical Theory* 12, no. 1 (2016): 27.

<sup>49</sup> שְׁלִיחַ is not attested in biblical Hebrew but is philologically plausible.

<sup>50</sup> Mathews, “Jonah as a Performance,” 27.

<sup>51</sup> There is a presumption here that the writer of the prayer of Jonah is the same as the narrator of the remainder of the story. That thorny issue will be dealt with in chapter 5.

puns on the personification with his ‘thinking ship.’<sup>52</sup> Some have repointed the verb to the *pual* form, meaning “it was thought [by the sailors that] the ship would break up.”<sup>53</sup> Sasson, however, says that “Hebrew is full of vocabulary in which inanimates are the subjects of verbs,” and argues that in many languages ships attract anthropomorphic vocabulary. He further argues that there is an even better reason to accept the Masoretic Text as it is, namely that *הַשִּׁבְתָּהּ* [*she*] *thought* “is singularly well placed in a story that easily shifts toward the fabulous. Its usage jolts readers, albeit temporarily, preparing them to expect the occurrence of the unexpected.”<sup>54</sup>

The sequence of events in verse 5 which is suggested by translations such as the NRSV is that (a) Jonah had previously gone down into the hold of the ship and fallen asleep, and then (b) the storm came, (c) the sailors were afraid and prayed to their gods, finally (d) throwing cargo overboard. This sequence is determined by reading the verb in the phrase *וַיֵּנֶה יוֹנָה יָרֵד אֶל-יַרְבֵּיתִי הַסְּפִינָה* as a pluperfect *Jonah had meanwhile gone down into the holds of the ship* and suggests that Jonah was “blissfully unaware of all the trouble he is causing.”<sup>55</sup> The *qal qatal* *יָרֵד* can be read this way as *qatal* verbs can be used to provide background information. However, Stuart as much admits that this translation is based on eisegesis rather than grammar: “Logically, the pluperfect tense is more appropriate to the chronology of the story than the simple pf (‘went’) would be.”<sup>56</sup> A more natural reading of the text suggests that Jonah went down into the hold of the ship only *after* the storm broke out and the situation became perilous. The point seems to be emphasised by the shift from the regular Hebrew

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<sup>52</sup> Holbert, “Satire in the Book of Jonah,” 65.

<sup>53</sup> For a list of scholars holding this view see Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 207.

<sup>54</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 96-7.

<sup>55</sup> Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 207.

<sup>56</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 454.

syntactical order of verb-subject-object/complement, reversing the verb and subject.<sup>57</sup> A contrast is created by two clauses beginning with the subject, thus: *וַיְהִינָה הַטֵּיִל רוּחַ־גְּדוֹלָה* *now the LORD hurled a big wind ...* [at the same time] *וַתִּשְׁבֶּה הַשִּׁפָּכָה לְהִשָּׁבֵר* *the ship thought to break up ...* [while] *וַיִּוָּנֶה יוֹנָה יָרֵד* *Jonah went down*. The LORD's action is therefore simultaneous with Jonah's, and hence he was aware of what was going on. It portrays Jonah as unconcerned. Even after he is aroused by the captain calling on him to pray (1:6), there is no hint in the text that Jonah responds to his demand in any way and the reader is left wondering about this. It may not be surprising that a passenger would leave the task of trying to save the ship to those who had the maritime skills, but for a prophet to not pray casts Jonah in a very poor light indeed. Step by step the writer has portrayed Jonah as disobedient, uncaring and callous in his lack of concern for his companions, declining to do even what he might be expected to do in difficult circumstances, namely to pray.<sup>58</sup> Further, there are three actions of Jonah in 1:5 (he went down, he laid down, and he fell asleep), corresponding to the three clauses describing the actions of the sailors (they were afraid, they cried to their gods, they hurled cargo to the sea), in what seems to be a direct symmetrical contrast. Ironically, "as the activity of the sailors increases, the activity of Jonah decreases."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> The sequence is broken "to show that Jonah acted differently from the rest." (Snaith, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of Jonah*, 13.) It "shifts the focus from the activity to the actor." Sasson, *Jonah*, 93. The same order is followed three times in this scene (a) in relation to God hurling the storm (1:4), (b) the ship thinking it would break up (1:4), and (c) Jonah going below deck (1:5), and elsewhere in *Jonah* only in the psalm in chapter 2 and in the royal proclamations in 3:4,7.

<sup>58</sup> I acknowledge that in Christian tradition Jonah is typically seen in a different light, undoubtedly due to the saying (in *Q*, if one accepts the two-source hypothesis) referring to "the sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matthew 12:39; 16:4; Luke 11:29) which has been interpreted by Christian writers from an early date as a reference to Jesus' resurrection. As a consequence, Jonah is often viewed favourably as a *type* of Christ. The story of Jesus sleeping in a boat during a storm (Matthew 8:24; Mark 4:36; Luke 8:23) gives weight to Jonah's sleeping being viewed as a confident reliance on God's protection.

<sup>59</sup> Tribble, "The Book of Jonah," 496.



### Conversion of the sailors

One of the most ironic inversions in this first scene is the response of the sailors to the storm. There is a reversal of expected roles between the sailors and the prophet: while he sleeps (1:6), they pray (1:5); while he promises (from inside the fish) to make vows and offer sacrifices (2:9 [10]), the sailors actually do (1:16); while he runs from the LORD (1:3), they call upon the LORD (1:14). This contradiction between reality and appearance, and between the expected and unexpected, is a strong indication of irony. Rauber identifies a further irony:

The irony and humour lie in the fact that this maverick prophet is successful in turning men toward the Lord even when he is not trying, even when he is in fact fleeing from his commission and his God.<sup>60</sup>

The conversion of the sailors to worship of the LORD, the god of Israel, is paralleled later in the story by the conversion of the people of Nineveh.<sup>61</sup> In their case their conversion was in response to Jonah's five words of preaching: to use Rauber's words again, "even when he is not trying." There is a double irony in both cases: not only is Jonah acting in a way which is the antithesis of what he was commanded and how a prophet should act, but he is successful in converting people to the worship of the god of Israel even when he is not trying.

The sailors' initial question to Jonah included the imperative *הַגִּידָהּ־נָא לָנוּ בְּאֲשֶׁר לָמִי* *tell us on whose account this evil has come to us* (1:8). Landes argues that by this question they were endeavouring to determine which *deity* was responsible for the storm: "While it is conceivable that they only want Jonah to confirm the result of their lot-casting, it is more likely that they are after something else."<sup>62</sup> Jonah answered the question with *וְאֵת־*

<sup>60</sup> Rauber, "Jonah - the prophet as Schlemiel," 32.

<sup>61</sup> There is nothing in the text to suggest by this that they turned away from worship of their foreign gods. They may have added the god of Israel to their pantheon.

<sup>62</sup> Landes, "Dissonances," 279.

יָרָא וְאֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אָנִי יָרָא *I fear the LORD the God of heaven* (1:9). The word order has the direct object (וְאֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם *the LORD the God of heaven*) preceding the verb (יָרָא *I fear*), emphasising that Jonah understood their question (לְמִי־הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ *on whose account has this evil come to us?*) to relate to his god, and so he answers by naming his god first before adding the verb which indicated that he worshipped or feared this god.<sup>63</sup> Jonah accepted no responsibility for the storm, and through this word order he implicitly shifts all responsibility to the LORD.<sup>64</sup> There was no confession in this statement of his own role, presumably because the sailors had not asked for a confession, the lots having already determined that he was the culprit.<sup>65</sup> His response to their questions is full of irony. From the outset the reader knows that Jonah is disobedient, so his self-description as one who *fears* the LORD is patently hypocritical. His response is almost creedal, even clichéd: עֲבָרִי אָנֹכִי וְאֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אָנִי

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<sup>63</sup> It should be noted that it has been argued by some that the term אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם may be an indicator of the date of writing, as Trotter has commented: “There are several strong parallels between Achaemenid imperial religion and Yehudite Yahwism in the Persian period. The title אלהי השמים or its Aramaic equivalent אלהא שמיא, is first used in the Persian period to designate the concept of supreme deity both in Yehud and the ancient Near East generally.” (James M. Trotter, *Reading Hosea in Achaemenid Yehud* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2001), 151.) Trotter cites Edelman but also notes that Thompson argues that the expression originates in the Neo-Babylonian period. (Diana V. Edelman, *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (Kampen, The Netherlands: Peeters Publishers, 1995), 21; Thomas Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archeological Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 417.) The use of the same phraseology in Genesis 24:3, in a passage usually considered “early,” is problematic for Trotter’s argument, given the nature of the sources. Language is extremely fluid in ancient texts, and every book is therefore a mixture of early and late features, no matter what its date of composition. Even if the expression is “late” it could simply be the result of late scribal copying. While I accept the near consensus for dating *Jonah* in the exilic or post-exilic period (see the section on dating in my introduction), I do so on other grounds rather than problematic linguistics.

<sup>64</sup> This is not necessarily an allusion to Genesis 3:12 although the idea is similar. There, in response to God’s question to Adam “Who told you that you were naked?” Adam responds by appearing to shift responsibility for his previous actions to the LORD: “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.”

<sup>65</sup> The narrator adds “the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them so” (1:10). Person describes this as evidence of “omitted dialogue” which “implies that Jonah answered their questions more fully, but the narrator chose to omit this fuller response.” Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 39.

יָרֵא אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה אֶת-הַיָּם וְאֶת-הַיַּבֵּשָׁה *I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land* (1:9). Edwin Good rightly observes that “Jonah’s theology is unexceptional, but, like so much theology, it seems to make no difference to his action.”<sup>66</sup> Edelman similarly notes that “while Jonah can recite liturgical statements about Yahweh Elohim and knows what are considered to be proper responses to the divine and accepted conventions of worship, he does not fully grasp their correct uses or their import.”<sup>67</sup>

It is at this point that the issue of theodicy is introduced in the story (and I will deal with it in depth in chapter 8.) For Jonah there was no doubt which god was responsible for the storm, as the God of Israel was the one who made the sea. The question was not as clear-cut for the sailors who had several gods to choose from. However, Jonah’s monotheism brought with it the problem that *all* evil was subject to God’s sovereignty and that he either allowed it or was directly responsible for it. There could be no doubt that the storm on the sea was the will of God, but so too was the suffering of God’s people. An unstated but implied dilemma for Jonah was the potential for Israel to be oppressed by the Assyrians if Nineveh was given an opportunity to repent, a dilemma which the narrator reveals later in 4:2.

There is an incongruity between Jonah’s declaration on the one hand that he “fears” the LORD and his wilful disobedience on the other. The point is emphasised by ascribing *יָרֵא* *fear* to the sailors three times: *וַיִּירָאוּ* *they were afraid* because of the storm and prayed to their gods (1:5); *וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יָרֵאָה גְדוֹלָה* *they feared with great fear, or they became more afraid* as a result of Jonah’s revelation to them that he was running from the LORD (1:10); after hurling Jonah into the sea *וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יָרֵאָה גְדוֹלָה אֶת-יְהוָה* *the men feared the LORD greatly* (1:16), using an almost identical phrase to the previous one, but with the addition that they feared *the*

<sup>66</sup> Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*.

<sup>67</sup> Diana V. Edelman, “Jonah Among the Twelve in the MT: The Triumph of Torah Over Prophecy,” in *The Production of Prophecy: Constructing Prophecy and Prophets in Yehud* (eds. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi; London; Oakville, Conn.: Equinox, 2009).

*LORD*. The contrast highlights the sailors' genuine fear, against Jonah's feigned fear. The third reference to their fear makes the contrast with Jonah's claim to fear the LORD even more obvious, as they moved *towards* a fear of the LORD while Jonah moved in the other direction.

Jonah's response to the question *מה-נעשה לך וישתק הים מעלינו* *What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?* (1:11) is unexpected. Jonah could have told the sailors to take him back to shore to complete his mission, or to set him adrift in a raft to make his own way back, so his instruction to throw him overboard is surprising. There are two possibilities about what is happening here. First, coupled with his repeated words in the final dialogue *טוב מותי מחי* *it is better for me to die than live* (4:3, 8, 9) it is understandable that some have regarded Jonah as having suicidal tendencies.<sup>68</sup> His suggestion that the sailors throw him

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<sup>68</sup> For example, for the case that Jonah was suicidal and depressive see LaCocque and LaCocque, *The Jonah Complex*, 48; LaCocque and LaCocque, *Jonah: a Psycho-Religious Approach*, 88; Etan Levine, "The Case of Jonah vs. God," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 62 (1996): 171; Y. Shemesh, "And Many Beasts (Jonah 4:11): The Function and Status of Animals in the Book of Jonah," *JHS* 10, no. 6 (2012): 15. Abusch thinks that Jonah "can only express his anger in a self-destructive fashion" and "the repeated use there of the verb *יָרַד* (*yārad*), 'to go down' suggests that Jonah's character is that of a depressive." (Tzvi Abusch, "Jonah and God: Plants, Beasts, and Humans in the Book of Jonah (An Essay in Interpretation)," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 13, no. 2 (2013): 148-9.) Tiemeyer acknowledges that "The idea that Jonah committed suicide on behalf of others is also alluded to in Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael 1.3 (7-8)" but argues that Jonah "offers himself up as a willing sacrifice and he expresses his trust in the power of this sacrifice: it will accomplish the desired effect, namely the calming of the sea. At the same time, Jonah demands of the sailors to 'lift' him up (*שאוני*) and 'throw' him (*והטילני*) into the sea. In other words, Jonah is not going to commit suicide; rather the sailors are ultimately the ones who have to perform the sacrifice." (Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Attitudes to the Cult in Jonah: In the Book of Jonah, the Book of the Twelve, and Beyond," in *Priests and Cults in the Book of The Twelve* (ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer; Ancient Near Eastern Monographs 14; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 118, 125.) Guillaume argues that Jonah despised his life, "not because of suicidal tendencies, but out of a deep consciousness of divine justice." (Guillaume, "The End of Jonah is the Beginning of Wisdom," 250.) Abusch argues "Were he [Jonah] not suicidal, he might have asked them [the sailors] to carry him back to shore, something that they then actually try to do; alternatively, he could have simply jumped into the sea, thereby taking responsibility for the act and not forcing the sailors to do something that they clearly did not want to do and that elicited strong feelings of guilt in them." (Abusch, "Jonah and God: Plants, Beasts, and Humans in the Book of Jonah," 148.)

overboard rather than take him back to shore shows that at this point in the story he would rather die than complete his mission. There could also be an irony in his words in that the prophet asserted that his God would be satisfied with a human sacrifice.<sup>69</sup> Someone hearing the story for the first time may have been equally shocked that the God of Israel was apparently satisfied with the offering of a human life and immediately stilled the tempest.<sup>70</sup> The repetition of the verb *טָוֵל* *to hurl* with reference first to the cargo (v.5) and subsequently to Jonah (v.12, 15), emphasises that the purpose of the hurling was the same: to appease a god, or gods. It is in contrast to the initial use of the verb (v.4) to describe God hurling the storm to the sea. It also suggests that it was the view of both the sailors and Jonah that the god's/gods' hurling of a storm could be appeased only by hurling something back at the god(s). There are several ironies here: Jonah's request imitates the actions of the foreign sailors in attempting to appease their gods; the sailors were apparently more open to alternative options which would have preserved life than was Jonah; the picture we are given of the sailors is that they worked hard, even if their efforts were futile, while Jonah did nothing; and, finally, Jonah's apparent belief that God would be appeased by a human sacrifice – if his voluntary death is understood that way – is in conflict with what we know of the priestly and Yahwistic attitudes to human sacrifice.<sup>71</sup> However, if we understand this

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<sup>69</sup> Although Frolov argues that while Jonah offered his life it could not be a *sacrifice* if he wanted to die anyway. (Frolov, "Returning the Ticket," 89.)

<sup>70</sup> Tribble has suggested that in the detail earlier in the narrative that *וַיִּטְלוּ אֶת־הַכֶּלִים אֲשֶׁר בְּאֹנִיָּה אֶל־הַיָּם לְהַקֵּל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם* [*the sailors*] *hurled the cargo to the sea to lighten it from over them* the implied meaning is that they were making an offering of their cargo to the gods of the sea. Throwing the cargo overboard so that the ship would ride higher in the water is, according to Tribble, a "questionable nautical procedure" (although Acts 27:18-19 records a similar practice during a storm) and "this explanation also founders on the sea of grammar." She argues that the object of the phrase *וַיִּטְלוּ אֶת־הַכֶּלִים אֲשֶׁר בְּאֹנִיָּה אֶל־הַיָּם לְהַקֵּל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם* *to lighten it from over them* is the sea, not the ship, and this suggests the cargo was hurled to the sea as a sacrificial offering. (Tribble, "The Book of Jonah," 495.)

<sup>71</sup> Stavropoulou, however, argues that "the Hebrew Bible contains a considerable volume of material directly associating YHWH with the sacrifice of children" and "offers, both implicitly and explicitly, a vivid portrayal of YHWH as a god of child sacrifice" although the biblical texts do not seem to be in favour of it. (Francesca

scene as being *satire* as well as irony, then the irony has a target. Thus far in the story it seems that Jonah himself is the target, although it is difficult to imagine that a prophet of the LORD has sunk so far into apostasy that he would believe in the efficacy of human sacrifice. The target is more likely to be one which is contemporary with the writer, and as I have discussed previously may well be a theological point of view rather than an individual. The Deuteronomistic literature places the blame for human suffering – and for the exiles – on human sin. Whether it was the sin of the people as a whole, or of an individual king, *someone* must have sinned for God to have abandoned them to destruction or exile, and 2 Kings 21:10-15; 23:26-27; 24:3-4 largely blames Manasseh for the exile, as does Jeremiah 24:4. The Chronicler, on the other hand, blames the exile on the people and a cumulative process of ignoring the prophets (2 Chronicles 36:15-16<sup>72</sup>). The differences between Kings and

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Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities* (BZAW; Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 179.) Exodus 13:1-2 and 22:28-29 (29-30) could be interpreted as suggesting the practice of child sacrifice, and 2 Kings 3:26-27 tells the story (not necessarily approvingly) of the king of Moab sacrificing his son to avert a defeat, apparently successfully. There may be parallels here with the *Akedah* (Genesis 22:1-19) and the questions of whether or not God called on Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and if God was pleased or displeased with Abraham's response, and Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter (Judges 11:29-40) but to pursue these cases here would be to go beyond the limits of this thesis. With respect to the *Akedah* I am inclined to agree with Curt Leviant that God "expected Abraham to initiate a bargaining dialogue similar to the one for the people of Sodom" and rather than God desiring a human sacrifice "Abraham was put to the great test **and failed**" (my emphasis). Curt Leviant, "Abraham's Failed Test," *Midstream* 56, no. 3 (2010): 31.

<sup>72</sup> Rather than blaming either Hezekiah or Manasseh for the exile, the Chronicler says of both kings *הִתְעַבְּרָה* *he humbled himself*, thus avoiding the destruction of their kingdoms (2 Chronicles 32:26; 33:12-13). For a discussion of why Manasseh is blamed for the exile see Baruch Halpern, "Why Manasseh is Blamed for the Babylonian Exile: the Evolution of a Biblical Tradition," *VT* 48, no. 4 (1998): 473-514; Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice*, 15-72; Ehud Ben Zvi, "The Account of the Reign of Manasseh in II Reg 21,1-18 and the Redactional History of the Book of Kings," *ZAW* 103, no. 3 (1991): 355-74; Steven L. McKenzie, *The Trouble With Kings: the Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 125-26. McKenzie points to the reforms of Josiah as being a correction of Manasseh's offences, and then makes the point that "It is not easy to understand how a single writer could be responsible for both the account of Josiah and the Manasseh theme. Why would a writer go to such lengths to show that Josiah corrected Manasseh's sins and then explain the exile as the result of those sins?" On the differences between the accounts

Chronicles, as well as the possible shifting of blame detected in Kings by Jeremy Schipper,<sup>73</sup> strongly suggests that this was an important issue for the exilic and post-exilic communities. Against the backdrop of this dialogue, the storm scene in *Jonah* portrays the sailors' lives as imperilled because of Jonah's disobedience – many suffering for the sins of one – and then being delivered when Jonah is hurled to the sea. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel refer to the proverb “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge” (Jeremiah 31:29; Ezekiel 18:2) when dealing with the question of whether or not it is just to punish the innocent for the sins of a prior generation. Both make similar assertions that “all shall die for their own sins” (Jeremiah 31:30) and “it is only the person who sins that shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). The discussion of this proverb by the writers of Jeremiah and Ezekiel demonstrates that at the time of writing there was an issue about the justice of one generation being punished for the sins of another.<sup>74</sup> Although this scene in *Jonah* is not directly

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of Manasseh's reign in Kings and Chronicles see Auld, *Kings Without Privilege: David and Moses in the Story of the Bible's Kings*, 73-86.

<sup>73</sup> Jeremy Schipper speculates that the texts in Kings which blamed Manasseh are Deuteronomistic additions which were inserted by “parties within the Jeremianic tradition” who wanted to downplay the emphasis in Kings on the neglect of Zion theology during the reign of Hezekiah as a primary cause for divine punishment. (Schipper, “Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Dynastic or Transgenerational Punishment,” 81-105.) Schipper sees a shift in the redactional processes which produced Kings towards a “democratization” of blame for the exile which allowed Israel to take ownership of both the dynastic promises and punishments. For an overview of various redactional layers in Kings see Thomas C. Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: a Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 13-43.

<sup>74</sup> Bernard Levinson deals with the issue of transgenerational punishment and the use of the formula found in Exodus 20:5; 34:7 and Deuteronomy 5:9 (which says God will punish children for the iniquity of parents, “to the third and the fourth generation”) in other parts of the Hebrew Bible. He argues that the use of this transgenerational formula to account for the Babylonian exile “may well have become commonplace right from the beginning of the exilic period” as the exile in 597 BCE took place in the fourth generation after Manasseh: Amon, Josiah, Josiah's three sons, and Jehoiachin. (Bernard M. Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 57-58. See also Schipper, “Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Dynastic or Transgenerational Punishment,” 97-98.) It is significant that *Jonah*'s use of the attributes formula of Exodus 34:6-7 (in *Jonah* 4:2) refers only to the first part of the formula and does not include the words about transgenerational punishment.



analogous to the situation of the exile where one generation was allegedly punished for the sins of an earlier generation, it touches on the principle of whether it is just for a group to suffer because of the sin of another.

It is in the various dilemmas faced by the sailors trying to determine the cause of the storm from their theological perspective, and what to do with Jonah from their moral perspective, and that faced by Jonah from his monotheistic perspective in advising the sailors what to do under these circumstances, that the writer begins to explore the dilemmas of theodicy and divine justice. Jonah's advice that the sailors should throw him overboard may be surprising, if not shocking, but it was consistent with a theodicy that needs to blame human sin for all evil and a view of retributive justice that demanded punishment for disobedience.

In a further irony, in the casting of lots by the sailors there is an implied communication from God. The polytheistic mariners called on their individual gods (1:5) and, when there was no response, they cast lots to determine on whose account the calamity was upon them (1:7). When the lots fell to Jonah they understood this to be a divine revelation.<sup>75</sup> Jonah apparently concurred with their assessment that his god had communicated through the lots, and the immediate cessation of the storm after the prophet had been thrown overboard suggests that the narrator wants the reader to agree. The irony is that God communicated with foreigners who worshipped other gods, they listened and responded, while the prophet ignored his message. At the end of the scene (1:16) the mariners *וַיִּזְבְּחוּ וַיִּזְבְּחוּ לַיהוָה וַיִּקְדְּרוּ נְדָרִים* *offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows*. A similar idea (although using different terminology) is found in the following places.

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<sup>75</sup> “The casting of lots in Scripture was generally considered to reflect Divine sanction.” (Zlotowitz, *Yonah/Jonah*, 92.) The incident of Achan's disobedience, discovery and execution includes a detail which suggests the use of lots to determine the divine will, *וְהָיָה אֲשֶׁר-יִלְכְּדוּ יְהוָה, הַשִּׁבְטָה אֲשֶׁר-יִלְכְּדוּ יְהוָה* *the tribe that the LORD takes* being understood to mean that God revealed the culprit through some means, such as lots (Joshua 7:14).



אָבואַ בֵּיתְךָ בְּעוֹלוֹת אֲשֶׁלֶם

*I will come to your house with offerings; I will pay you [my vows]*

Psalm 66:13

לְךָ־אֶזְבַּח זֶבַח תּוֹדָה

*I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice*

נִדְרֵי לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁלֶם

*I will pay my vows to the LORD*

Psalm 116:17-18

[The phraseology] specifically refers to sacrificial actions *in the Temple*. Therefore, since the actions of making sacrifices and fulfilling vows to YHWH were understood to be Temple actions, it is utterly surprising to find Gentile sailors, far removed from the Jerusalem Temple, doing things that only Jews did in the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>76</sup>

By using this terminology the narrator may be implying the conversion by the sailors to the god of Israel was complete.<sup>77</sup> However, as it is sometimes claimed that the main theme of *Jonah* is ‘repentance’ it should be noted that the story says nothing about the sailors ‘repenting’ and, in fact, no sin or evil was directly attributed to them from which they needed to ‘turn’ other than their idolatry. There is nothing in the story about them turning from idolatry either. The point of the story is that it was Jonah’s disobedience that was the catalyst for the storm and the sailors were innocent by-standers caught up in the consequences. There was no need for them to convert or repent from the perspective of the story-teller in order to

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<sup>76</sup> Anderson, “Jonah’s Peculiar Re-Creation,” 184.

<sup>77</sup> Zlotowitz discusses the form of the sacrifice and their conversion, and whether they *undertook* to sacrifice (as the Targum renders the phrase) or were circumcised. Zlotowitz, *Yonah/Jonah*, 104.

make this point. While the story has two ‘scenes’ with several parallels – the sailors turning to God in one and the Ninevites calling on God in the other – repentance is not a common element. In the first scene the sailors are caught up as innocent victims in the consequences of Jonah’s disobedience, and their deliverance from the storm was the result of Jonah being hurled to the sea and not as a consequence of their own prayers or behaviour. The sailors were recipients of God’s mercy despite doing nothing meritorious. In the second scene the Ninevites are condemned for their own evil and they are spared from calamity by turning from it. The two scenes contrast the innocent sailors who were the recipients of mercy with the guilty Ninevites who benefitted from God’s compassion in a similar way.

וַיִּזְחָרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה

The men rowed hard to return to the shore (1:13).

The sailors initially rejected Jonah’s request to hurl him overboard. “Their first move is to try to bring Jonah back to dry land, possibly sensing from their somewhat limited perspective that this is more in keeping with what Yahweh wants for Jonah than throwing him into the sea.”<sup>78</sup> As I noted earlier, the description of their actions includes an unusual expression for rowing: וַיִּזְחָרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה *the men bared through to return to shore* (v.13).<sup>79</sup> The cluster of unusual forms, irregular structures and inversions throughout this scene suggests the writer was deliberate in deviating from the expected and jolting the reader at every turn, so as to expect the unexpected. First, there is an irony in the writer using a land-based term to describe their futile attempts to find an alternative to hurling Jonah into the sea. Second, there is a further irony in the fact that the sailors were making a great effort to spare

<sup>78</sup> Landes, “Dissonances,” 281.

<sup>79</sup> See my discussion of this word on page 78.

Jonah's life while Jonah himself seemed eager to end it. Whether or not that is the case, Jonah's eagerness to die either as a suicide or a sacrifice is contrasted with the determination of the sailors to save him. Sasson, in endeavouring to explain the possible reasons for the sailors' decision, highlights an irony of a different sort: "steering a ship to shore when in the midst of a storm is a foolish, even suicidal enterprise."<sup>80</sup> The act of rowing towards shore in a storm and the unusual terminology used to describe it (וַיִּקְרָא), highlight both the futility and the desperation of their actions.

The medieval Midrash *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* elaborates on the casting of Jonah into the sea by exaggerating the compassion of the sailors:

They took him (and cast him into the sea) up to his knee-joints, and the sea-storm abated. They took him up again to themselves and the sea became agitated again against them. They cast him in (again) up to his neck, and the sea-storm abated. Once more they lifted him up in their midst and the sea was again agitated against them, until they cast him in entirely and forthwith the sea-storm abated, as it is said, "So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging."<sup>81</sup>

In a commentary on this midrash Adelman notes that "the author uses the repetitive, mechanical image of a man bobbing in and out of the surface of a raging sea to provoke laughter" further noting that the humour in the text enhances the satire.<sup>82</sup> While the humour here is not necessarily evident in the biblical text, but rather in the midrashic commentary, it demonstrates that elements in the biblical text were interpreted as comical from an early time.

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<sup>80</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 142.

<sup>81</sup> Gerald Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: according to the text of the manuscript belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1916), 69.

<sup>82</sup> Rachel Adelman, *The Return of the Repressed: Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer and the Pseudepigrapha* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 233.

Finally, realising the futility of their actions, the sailors surrendered to Jonah's demand that he be hurled into the sea, but not before praying to the LORD that the guilt for his death not be held against them:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי נָח נֹאכְדָה בְּנִפְשׁ הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וְאֵל־תָּתֵן עָלֵינוּ דָם נָקִיא כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה כְּאֲשֶׁר תִּפְצֹת  
עֲשִׂיתָ

Please, O LORD, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man's life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you (1:4).

Their plea that they not perish (אֱלֹהֵי נָח נֹאכְדָה) is echoed later in the story in the king of Nineveh's words *לֹא נֹאכְד* so that we do not perish. There is also a poignant theological insight in their final words, *יְהוָה כְּאֲשֶׁר תִּפְצֹת עֲשִׂיתָ* you, LORD, have done as it pleased you, in that they acknowledge God's sovereignty and his right to do as he pleases. God cannot be manipulated, but he may be negotiable. The sailors addressed their prayers directly to the LORD, while the king is less direct and perhaps less confident: *מִי־יֹדֵעַ יִשׁוּב וְנָחַם הָאֱלֹהִים* Who knows? God may relent and change his mind. In both cases they acknowledge that God will do as he pleases, yet express their belief that their prayers or actions may persuade him to change his mind. Jonah, on the other hand, did not try to persuade God to relent or forgive, and seemed to be of the view that God would not change, or that there was no point in trying to negotiate with him. His fate, at least in his own mind, was sealed.

The sailors' plea *דָם נָקִיא* do not make us guilty of innocent blood raises several important questions. First, in view of Jonah's disobedience to the divine call, was he actually innocent? The reference to *דָם נָקִיא* innocent blood suggests that there must have been something in Jonah's telling of his story to the sailors which implied that he regarded himself as innocent, and therefore not deserving of death. In his view, this was not a judicial execution or a just penalty for a crime committed but was unwarranted and undeserved.

Second, why did not Jonah simply jump overboard rather than making the sailors complicit in his death? As Abusch has said, “he could have simply jumped into the sea, thereby taking responsibility for the act and not forcing the sailors to do something that they clearly did not want to do.”<sup>83</sup> His demand that they hurl him to the sea suggests that Jonah saw himself as a victim. There may also have been an additional purpose in using the *innocent blood* phraseology as 2 Kings 21:16 notes that *וְגַם דָּם נָקִי שָׁפַךְ מִנְּשֵׂה הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד עַד אֲשֶׁר־מָלֵא אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם* *Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he caused Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the LORD* (cf. 24:3-4). Schipper observes that the verses in Kings which blame Manasseh for the exile (21:10-15; 23:26-27; 24:3-4) single out only the shedding of innocent blood as a sin which God was unwilling to pardon. By contrast, Josiah is said to overturn all of Manasseh’s sins, except the shedding of innocent blood (see 2 Kings 23:4-5, 10, 12, 24). Schipper further notes passages in Jeremiah which condemn practices associated with Manasseh’s reign and speculates that the Deuteronomistic historian’s charge that Manasseh shed innocent blood “would resonate with those in the Jeremianic tradition because Jeremiah expresses outrage at this particular offense in various oracles concerning various kings.”<sup>84</sup> *Jonah* does not use *innocent blood* in quite the same way, but in the literary context of a scene where Jonah is portrayed as being *guilty* of disobedience the description of him as *innocent* is noteworthy. Further to this, because the sailors are imperilled due to Jonah’s sin rather than their own, the *innocent blood* phrase may have acted as a trigger for *Jonah*’s audience to consider the story in the broader sociological context of the discussion about the causes of the exile.

<sup>83</sup> Abusch, “Jonah and God: Plants, Beasts, and Humans in the Book of Jonah,” 148.

<sup>84</sup> Schipper, “Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Dynastic or Transgenerational Punishment,” 94-96.

The use of the phrase *שָׂאוּנִי וְהִטְלֵנִי אֶל־הַיָּם* *pick me up and hurl me to the sea* (1:12 cf. v.14) echoes the phrases *יְהוָה הִטִּיל רוּחַ־גְּדוֹלָה אֶל־הַיָּם* *God hurled a great wind to the sea* (1:4) and *וַיִּטְלוּ אֶת־הַכֶּלִּים אֲשֶׁר בַּאֲנִיָּה אֶל־הַיָּם* *they hurled the cargo that was in the ship to the sea*. The point of the repetition may be that the sequence of events which was set into motion by an act of God culminated in Jonah being hurled to the sea and therefore, in Jonah’s mind, it was God who was ultimately responsible for it all.

### The fish

The *דָּג גָּדוֹל* *large fish* which swallowed Jonah (1:17 [2:1]) is undoubtedly the best-known feature of the Jonah story, and is also the most fantastical. It produces, as Tribble puts it, “a paradoxical, even ironic, message”<sup>85</sup> in that it saves Jonah from drowning but denies him the death he seeks. Tribble says that *בלע* *swallow* has only a negative meaning, being used elsewhere to describe the earth swallowing God’s enemies.<sup>86</sup> It is also used in Psalm 69:15 (16) in a phrase which is somewhat similar to Jonah’s prayer and which may have been one of the texts alluded to in that prayer<sup>87</sup> *אַל־תִּשְׁטַפְנִי שְׁבֹלֶת מַיִם וְאַל־תִּבְלַעְנִי מִצִּוְלָה* *Do not let the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up*.

<sup>85</sup> Tribble, “The Book of Jonah,” 504.

<sup>86</sup> Ackerman agrees that *בלע* “never has a positive meaning in the Hebrew Bible.” (Ackerman, “Satire and Symbolism in the Song of Jonah,” 220.) Tribble cites two references. The expression *תִּבְלַעְמוּ אֶרֶץ* *the earth swallowed them* is a strange one in the context of the “Song of the Sea” in Exodus 15:12, as the song is about the Egyptians drowning in the sea, and in this context *אֶרֶץ* may refer to the *underworld* (of the dead). A similar, and more appropriate expression in its context, *וּפָצְתָה הָאֲדָמָה אֶת־פִּיהָ וּבִלְעָה אֹתָם* *the ground opened its mouth and swallowed them*, refers to the ground splitting apart and Korah, Dathan and Abiram perishing in the abyss (Numbers 16:30, 32, 34). However, the claim that *בלע* “bears only a negative meaning” does not take into account Isaiah 25:7-8 *עַל־כָּל־הָעַמִּים הָלוֹט פְּנֵי־הָלוֹט הִנֵּה הָיָה וּבִלְע בְּהָר הַזֶּה* *he will swallow in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people* (v.7) and *בִּלְע הַמָּוֶת לְנֶצַח* *he will swallow up death forever* (v.8). The idea there is one of destruction, although not necessarily in a negative way. The *Jonah* text has a similar connection between death and swallowing in that Jonah’s plans for death were “swallowed” by the intervention of the fish.

<sup>87</sup> See chapter 5 for a discussion of allusions in Jonah’s prayer to the Psalter.

Rather than an instrument of his salvation, the narrator initially portrays the fish as a means of Jonah's utter destruction.<sup>88</sup> Later in the story, when the fish expelled Jonah on dry land (2:10), the verb which is employed  $\text{אָק}$  *vomit* has negative connotations, and conveys a "distasteful image."<sup>89</sup> Sasson thinks that the choice of the "loathsome" word  $\text{אָק}$  *vomit* in preference to other innocuous words which convey ejection was a deliberate act by the narrator "to heap upon Jonah one more indignity" in a humorous fashion which further ridicules the prophet.<sup>90</sup> Brent Strawn proposes another angle which should be considered. He thinks the verbal form used in 2:10 (11)  $\text{אָקַן}$  could be parsed as *hiphil*, that is, *he was caused to vomit*, and not *qal*, *he vomited*. "If it is *qal*, the fish is the one who vomits, sick of Jonah's hypocrisy. If it is *hiphil*, the text would be saying that 'the fish does not do so of its own volition, but under God's guidance ... In this view it is not the fish who is sick of Jonah and his prayer so much as *Yhwh!*'"<sup>91</sup> Halpern and Friedman have suggested two instances of wordplay related to  $\text{אָק}$ : first, the sailors implore God not to hold them guilty of  $\text{דָּם נָקִיאַ$  *innocent blood* (1:14) – a form which occurs only here and in Joel 4:19 (3:19) – and they suggest the phonetic resemblance may simply be a "fortuitous frolic" or the writer here is intentionally playing on  $\text{אָק}$  to produce a reference to Jonah as *the vomited one*; second, the word  $\text{קִיקִיּוֹן}$  *gourd* which appears later could even be a play on this word  $\text{אָק}$  with a phonetic

<sup>88</sup> It should be noted that by the use of the word  $\text{דָּג}$  *fish* rather than  $\text{תַּנִּין}$  *monster* (which appears in Genesis 1:21; Isaiah 27:1; 51:9; Jeremiah 51:34; Ezekiel 29:3; 32:2; Psalm 74:13; 148:7; Job 7:12) the narrator has chosen to portray the fish as somewhat *ordinary* rather than monstrous.

<sup>89</sup> Tribble, "The Book of Jonah," 504. The more "delicate" word, according to Tribble, would be  $\text{פָּלַט}$  which has a basic meaning *to escape* or *slip away*. (Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT, 930-31.) It occurs regularly in the *piel* with the meaning *to deliver* or *rescue* but is not attested in the HB in the way Tribble suggests (*to vomit*).  $\text{אָק}$  occurs 12 times in the HB.

<sup>90</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 220-222.

<sup>91</sup> Brent A. Strawn, "On Vomiting: Leviticus, Jonah, Ea(a)rth," *CBQ* 74, no. 3 (2012): 453-54. Gerhard Sauter also thinks the verb could be *hiphil*. Gerhard Sauter, "Jonah 2: A Prayer Out of the Deep," in *God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller* (eds. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 146-47. Cf. Sasson, *Jonah*, 220.

resemblance to *the vomiting of Jonah*.<sup>92</sup> Strawn goes further and suggests “the construction of the wordplay could be seen as evoking a common syntactical construction in Hebrew that is typically used for emphasis – namely, the use of the infinitive absolute of a particular verb followed by a finite form of the same verb.”<sup>93</sup> Hence he suggests the infinitive absolute קיא with the *qatal* אק followed by the object יונה could be “abbreviated ever so slightly” to produce קיא יון to form one word קיאיון which could be translated either as *Jonah has certainly vomited* or *he/it has certainly vomited Jonah*, which would be the superior option in the context.<sup>94</sup> Having already stated his preference for the *hiphil* parsing of the verb ויקאיון Strawn then argues that the subject in this construction of קיאיון is God, that is to say, *God has certainly vomited Jonah*. Negative or disdainful words are used to describe Jonah’s rescue which creates a somewhat comical aspect to him being hurled, swallowed and then spewed.<sup>95</sup>

The scene ends with the detail וישלשה ימים וישלשה לילות *Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights*.<sup>96</sup> Landes and Ackerman (following Landes) both argue that the phrase is a reference to the time needed to journey to or from the nether world, which Stuart understands to be “a popular notion or cliché of expression” meaning to *Sheol* and back.<sup>97</sup> Tribble finds their arguments unconvincing and I agree with her for the reasons

<sup>92</sup> Halpern and Friedman, “Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah,” 85-6. See also Yitzhak Berger, *Jonah in the Shadows of Eden* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2016), 21-2.

<sup>93</sup> Strawn, “On Vomiting,” 455. Arnold and Choi note that “by using the same root, the *emphatic* infinitive absolute becomes paronomastic; that is, it uses word play to create the emphasis.” Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 74 n.85.

<sup>94</sup> Strawn, “On Vomiting,” 456.

<sup>95</sup> I noted previously on page 165 that Mathews thinks the repetition of טול has a comic effect. Mathews, “Jonah as a Performance,” 27.

<sup>96</sup> The identical phrase וישלשה ימים וישלשה לילות *three days and three nights* appears in 1 Samuel 30:12, and only there, where it describes a journey of some considerable distance.

<sup>97</sup> George M. Landes, “The ‘Three Days and Three Nights’ Motif in Jonah 2:1,” *JBL* 86, no. 4 (1967); Ackerman, “Satire and Symbolism in the Song of Jonah,” 221; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 475.



she provides.<sup>98</sup> More noteworthy is the reoccurrence of the “three days” theme in the time taken to transverse Nineveh (3:3), and the time for Nineveh’s destruction *ἔτι τρεῖς ἡμέραι yet three days* (in the Septuagint version of 3:4).<sup>99</sup> The narrator may be making a connection between Jonah’s three-day journey inside the fish and his three-day journey across Nineveh, possibly that he needed to make the first in order to make the second.

## Conclusion

The first scene in this story is saturated with ironies and the overwhelming nature of the contrast between the “man of God” who runs from the presence of the LORD and the foreign worshippers of other gods who turn to the God of Israel suggests that the entire scene is satire. A satire must have a target, and the object of ridicule thus far in the story seems to be Jonah himself. But why? The answer unfolds, in my view, in subsequent scenes.

There are, however, several elements in the story which should be noted at this point. First, the story says nothing about the sailors ‘repenting’ and no sin or evil was directly attributed to them from which they needed to ‘turn’ – they were innocent bystanders caught up in the consequences of Jonah’s flight from the LORD. Yet they were spared death and subsequently worshipped the God of Israel, although there is no real evidence of a long-term conversion. Their fate seems to be secondary to the story. Ironically, Jonah is portrayed as guilty of disobedience, yet is indirectly described as “innocent.” The scene seems to hinge on

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<sup>98</sup> Tribble, “The Book of Jonah,” 504. Tribble says that Landes proposal “assumes what the narrative does not indicate: that Jonah was not swallowed by the fish immediately upon being cast into the sea but went instead into the netherworld.” Ackerman accepts Landes interpretation but reverses its direction, “yet this proposal says nothing about the time needed to bring Jonah back to dry land” and seems to require double the time span mentioned in the text.

<sup>99</sup> The LXX reading *ἔτι τρεῖς ἡμέραι yet three days* was discussed earlier in this thesis (page 71) and will be discussed again later (page 220) when I will argue that it is probably the earlier reading. In my view it is the preferred reading as it is thematically more in tune with the rest of *Jonah*.

this declaration by the sailors of Jonah's innocence. The specific choice of words with overtones of Manasseh's sin – which some contemporaries of the writer claimed was the very reason for the exile – may have created a word-association with the contemporaneous dialogue about sin, punishment and exile. If any target of satire can be identified thus far in the story, it could be the theological position which condemned the generation of the exile for the sins of their fathers.

## Chapter 5: From the belly of Sheol

### The psalm from inside the fish

Carolyn Sharp observes, correctly in my view, that those “who read the psalm [of Jonah] as awkward or unbelievable in its context tend to have difficulty integrating a theory of the rhetorical purpose of the psalm into their analyses.”<sup>1</sup> She adds that even for those scholars who take the presence of the psalm seriously “its force has not been adequately accounted for in the larger narrative.”<sup>2</sup> It should also be noted that others make sense of it by reading it as satire or parody. I agree with Dell’s assessment that Jonah’s prayer inside the fish is a parody of psalms.<sup>3</sup> It forms part of a parody of earlier texts which is typical of *Jonah*.

There has been considerable discussion in scholarship about the placement of Jonah’s prayer, or “psalm,” within the story. On the one hand, several scholars regard the prayer as out of character with the rest of the book, both in style and content, and regard it as a later addition. On the other hand, some consider it to be tied closely to the rest of the book, both structurally and thematically, and provides evidence of Jonah’s personal repentance. If it were not for this psalm, Nogalski argues the narrative could be read simply as a counterpiece to the views of Nahum whose bitter denunciation of Nineveh left no room for God’s salvific work among the nations.<sup>4</sup> However, the inclusion of the psalm, according to Nogalski, broadens the scope of the book beyond a concern with Nineveh’s repentance, or that of the nations in general, to also reflect the need for *Israel* to repent and return to God. I agree that

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<sup>1</sup> Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 177.

<sup>2</sup> Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 178.

<sup>3</sup> Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*, 153.

<sup>4</sup> Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, 270-71.

the psalm is integral to understanding the story as a whole, although I think he reads too much into it to conclude that it says anything about Israel's need to repent. Dell's observation of an incongruity in the psalm points to satire.

Jonah's effort to escape God's presence on the sea contrasts with passages where a storm on the sea is a sign of divine presence rather than absence (e.g. Psalm 29; 77:16f; 97:2-5; 107:23f; 148:7-8); there is incongruity between Jonah's confession of Yahweh as creator of the sea and his attempt to escape.<sup>5</sup>

Thomas Bolin rightly observed that:

The psalm that comprises Jonah 2 has been one of the most vigorously debated exegetical issues of the entire book. Perceived incongruence between the poem and the surrounding prose text has been remarked upon since antiquity, and it has served as the impetus for the critical study of the book in the last two hundred years.<sup>6</sup>

The stylistic shift in *Jonah* from prose to poetry is not a sufficient reason to infer that it is a later addition. It is not unusual for narrative texts to include poetry, and it is, in fact, as Ernst Wendland has noted, "a regular feature of Biblical literary style."<sup>7</sup> Duane Christensen

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<sup>5</sup> Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*, 156.

<sup>6</sup> Bolin, "Jonah as subversive literature? The Book of Jonah and its biblical context," 81. My purpose in this section is to demonstrate that a reading of *Jonah* as satire makes sense of many of the rhetorical difficulties encountered with the differences in style between the psalm and the narrative which interpolation theories seek to address. The arguments for and against viewing the psalm as an interpolation have been adequately summarised in Bolin's thesis and need not be repeated here. I accept the arguments for reading the psalm as part of the earliest version of *Jonah* and will consider its literary role in the story, how it has a bearing on whether or not the story of Jonah should be read as satire, and whether Jonah's prayer draws directly on the Psalter to parody other psalms or a particular genre.

<sup>7</sup> As examples Wendland cites Genesis 49; Exodus 15; Numbers 21:27-30; Deuteronomy 32:33; Judges 5; 2 Samuel 1:19-27; 22; 2 Kings 19:21-28; 1 Chronicles 16:8-36. Ernst Wendland, "Song From The Seabed – How

argues that “the entire book of Jonah belongs to the category of poetry as this term is normally used in the field of literature” and “the difference in structure between the so-called ‘prose’ narrative context is more a matter of degree in terms of ‘heightened language’ than it is a distinction between poetry and prose genres as such.”<sup>8</sup> While acknowledging Christensen’s point and his metrical reading of *Jonah* which distinguishes the psalm portion from its surrounding “narrative poetry” only by its degree of heightened language, I will hereafter follow the lead of those scholars who treat the narrative as prose and the psalm as poetry. The transition from prose to poetry carries with it an ostensible thematic change and a dramatic shift in Jonah’s temperament. The man who earlier wanted to die now thanks God for his deliverance; the disobedient prophet vows to worship God wholeheartedly. Some see this as an indication of the prophet’s repentance, yet Jonah does not use the language of repentance such as a confession of guilt or plea for forgiveness, and his prayer does not reflect his actual circumstances. It reads like the prayer of someone who is safely on shore rather than of one who is trapped within the belly of a fish. It obtrudes so jarringly from its literary context that the suggestion that it was a late addition is unsurprising.

There is a notable absence in the psalm of key words which are apparent in the narrative, such as ירד and רעה. When the psalm refers to similar ideas which are present in the prose it also tends to avoid using the precise terms to describe them. So, for example, the narrative says Jonah was בְּמִצֵּי הַדָּג *in the belly of the fish* (2:2 [1]) while in the psalm he describes himself as being מִבֶּטֶן שְׂאוֹל *in the belly of Sheol* (2:3 [2]). While a description of the belly of the fish as the belly of *Sheol* could be an interesting poetic metaphor, it is noteworthy that the writer uses different words for “belly,” and in the psalm Jonah never refers to being

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Sweet Does it Sound? Aspects of the Style, Structure, and Transmission of Jonah’s ‘Psalm’,” *Journal for Semitics* 11, no. 2 (2002): 222.

<sup>8</sup> Christensen, “Narrative Poetics,” 30.

inside the fish. While it would be natural to read the belly of the fish and the belly of *Sheol* as a catchphrase connecting the psalm to its narrative context, in its context *the belly of Sheol* refers to his situation *מְצוּלָה בְּלִבְבַּי יָמִים* *in the deep, in the heart of the seas* (1:4 [3]) and not inside the fish. The anatomical references to *מִבֶּטֶן* *from the belly* and *בְּלִבְבִי* *in the heart* appear to be metaphorical references to the sea as a living being. Similarly, the terms *שְׂאוֹל* and *מִשְׁחַת* *in the Pit* (2:7 [6]) appear to be references to the depths of the sea being the place of his near-certain death. In this context perhaps *בֶּטֶן* is best understood as *womb* rather than *belly* and Jonah’s deliverance could therefore be understood as a kind of birth or rebirth.<sup>9</sup> By using the different anatomical terms for “belly” – *מִבֶּטֶן* and *בְּמִעֵי* – the writer has drawn attention to Jonah’s transition from one state to another: he *was* in the belly of Sheol and is *now* in the belly of the fish, but they are not the same place.

A further example of the psalm and the narrative using different words to refer to similar ideas is the phrase *וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מְצוּלָה* *you threw me into the deep* (2:4 [3]). This also appears to be a catchphrase linking the psalm to the narrative description of Jonah being hurled to the sea: *וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת-יוֹנָה וַיִּטְלֵהוּ אֶל-הַיָּם* *and they picked Jonah up and hurled him to the sea* (1:15) which repeats a verb *טול* used previously (1:4, 5, 12) so that the writer has Jonah saying that God *שָׁלַךְ* *cast* him into the sea rather than using the previously repeated word *טול* *hurled*. We could easily infer from this the psalm and the narrative were by different hands, although as I noted in the previous chapter it was, in fact, the sailors rather than God who did the hurling, and one wonders if the writer is setting up the reader for the inference that the sailors were acting as the *agents* of God.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the writer has avoided the previously

<sup>9</sup> The idea which is found in several commentaries of Jonah undergoing a rebirth in terms of a spiritual transformation inside the fish is undoubtedly the influence of a Christian tradition based on a saying found in Matthew 12:39-40 which characterized Jonah as a “type” of resurrection and we should be careful not to read it back into the text of *Jonah*.

<sup>10</sup> As I noted on page 165, the Hebrew word *שְׁלִיחַ* *agent, emissary* from *שָׁלַח* *to send* has a phonetic resemblance to the verb *שָׁלַךְ* *cast* in 2:3 (4) and in the Jonah-psalm there may be a deliberate allusive wordplay, recalling the

used verb טול *to hurl* suggests either that there was no attempt to ‘harmonise’ the psalm with its narrative context, or the use of a different verb was a deliberate avoidance of the verb in the narrative for a poetic purpose.

A third example of different words being used to convey similar ideas is the mention in the psalm of מְשַׁמְרִים הַבְּלִי-שָׁוְא *those who keep vain idols* (2:9 [8]) which is a contrast with Jonah’s self-description as one who fears the God of heaven: וְאֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲנִי יָרָא (1:9). The notion that Jonah feared God seems to be mirrored in 1:16 when וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יְרָאָה גְדוֹלָה *the men feared the LORD with great fear*. The psalm appears to be drawing on the language of Psalm 31:7 (6),<sup>11</sup> but refers instead to those who *keep* idols rather than *fear* the gods behind them. The purpose behind the literary precursor<sup>12</sup> in Psalm 39:7 was almost certainly to paint the idols as worthless things merely to be kept rather than as divine beings, and the Jonah-psalm repeats this language. The terminology of the psalm does, however, create a contrast with its prosaic context, reinforcing the piety of the one praying while also avoiding the precise words in the narrative. This could serve a satirical or parodic purpose by reflecting the *ideas* or *themes* in the narrative but avoiding their terminology, thus suggesting an awareness of the prosaic context while distancing itself from it. This reinforces a perception that the language of the psalm while pious and lofty and seeming to somewhat match its circumstances is not quite relevant. The effect of this is to create the kind of disjuncture between prose and poetry which has led some scholars to think the psalm is a later addition. The very nature of parody is that it is ambiguous and the history of interpretation of *Jonah* reflects this ambiguity.

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idea behind Isaiah 10:5-6 that the Assyrians were *sent* (שָׁלַח) by God as his agents against Israel. שָׁלִיחַ is not attested in biblical Hebrew but is philologically plausible.

<sup>11</sup> שָׂנְאֹתֵי הַשְּׂמֵרִים הַבְּלִי-שָׁוְא *I hate those who pay regard to (or keep) worthless idols*.

<sup>12</sup> I use the term “literary precursor” in various places in this thesis to refer to earlier texts to which the writer of *Jonah* appears to be alluding and not to earlier stages of redaction or texts which have been incorporated into the final form. See also below, page 192.

Several scholars have argued for structural reasons that the psalm ‘belongs’ where it is found in the final form. George Landes argues that the psalm is important for the symmetry of the book and that several elements in it mirror other parts of the story: “the psalm as it now stands is in the proper position, of an appropriate type, and agrees quite harmoniously with the situation of Jonah in the narrative, both in terms of his physical and psychological portrayal.”<sup>13</sup> He further argues, however, that it is probable the psalm was not written by the author of the narrative sections of the book, but was selected and incorporated at a later stage, almost certainly by another hand, with the purpose of creating this symmetry. Allen and Ackerman both note a structural correspondence (and ironic contrast) between the two prayers of Jonah (in 2:2-9 and 4:2-3) which would be missing if the psalm was not part of the original composition.<sup>14</sup>

There is little scholarly consensus about the purpose of the psalm, if Jonah’s state of mind is reflected in it, and, if so, what it was. For those scholars who think the psalm was added later there does seem to be agreement that it was not by the same hand of the original writer(s), and that it was either penned or chosen by a redactor from another source simply because its language of near-drowning was appropriate for Jonah’s situation. There is agreement, however, that there is a great deal of similarity between this psalm and several psalms in the Hebrew Psalter, and that the writer either incorporated several phrases from the book(s) of Psalms directly and deliberately into this one, or that he was heavily influenced by them. For example, Wendland argues that the psalm is not “original in composition” – although he also describes it as “a masterfully composed poetic piece” – in the sense that “it is actually a pastiche consisting of bits and pieces of many psalms.”<sup>15</sup> However, the mere

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<sup>13</sup> Landes, “The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah,” 30.

<sup>14</sup> Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 199; Ackerman, “Jonah,” 238.

<sup>15</sup> Wendland, “Song From The Seabed – How Sweet Does it Sound? Aspects of the Style, Structure, and Transmission of Jonah’s ‘Psalm’,” 211, 217. For a listing of the intertextual parallels see James Limburg,



similarity between one text and another does not necessarily indicate a dependence on it. Alistair Hunter notes the several similarities between the psalm in *Jonah* and Psalm 69 and comments that “there is a general metaphorical relationship between Ps. 69 and Jonah, but arguably no literary dependence ... although the *tone* of ... Ps. 69 has similarities to Jonah, there is nothing to suggest anything beyond a general similarity of figurative language.”<sup>16</sup> This could also be said of the similarities between Jonah 2 and several other psalms.

The Jonah psalm has been classified as a thanksgiving psalm, or a declarative psalm of praise by an individual, “sung by the individual in the presence of all the people gathered for worship when the former came to the temple or shrine to present his offering of thanksgiving.”<sup>17</sup> Wendland sees an irony in that “Jonah's poetic technique fails him, for he intones his exultant song of thanksgiving in the [3+2] rhythm of a lament.”<sup>18</sup> Landes argues that it probably had some kind of cultic association before its insertion here.<sup>19</sup>

The evidence, in my view, supports Dell’s assessment that Jonah’s prayer inside the fish is a parody of psalms<sup>20</sup> or the language of psalms, and is consistent with a parodying of earlier texts which, as I have demonstrated in chapter 3, is typical of *Jonah*.

### Literary parallels

To understand how the psalm contributes to the overall satire or parody of the story, and therefore to an interpretation of the book which makes sense of the concluding

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*Jonah: A Commentary* (Louisville: John Knox/Westminster, 1993), 63-4; T. Desmond Alexander, *Jonah: an Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 113; Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 50.

<sup>16</sup> Hunter, “Jonah from the Whale: Exodus Motifs in Jonah 2,” 146.

<sup>17</sup> Landes, “The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah,” 7.

<sup>18</sup> Wendland, “Song From The Seabed – How Sweet Does it Sound? Aspects of the Style, Structure, and Transmission of Jonah’s ‘Psalm’,” 225-6.

<sup>19</sup> Landes, “The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah,” 8.

<sup>20</sup> Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*, 153.

declaration, I have previously analysed how the writer uses earlier texts. In this section I will examine the Jonah-psalm in particular. *Jonah* appears either to make extensive use of literary material from the book(s) of Psalms, or the writer of *Jonah* was drawing from a similar pool of language or prayer-clichés used by the writers of the Psalms. The following list of possible parallels in the Psalms to terminology in Jonah 2, drawing on several scholars who have listed a number of these allusions,<sup>21</sup> is illustrative rather than exhaustive and highlights the similarity in language between *Jonah* and Psalms.

| Jonah Psalm |   | Possible Parallels in Psalms |   |
|-------------|---|------------------------------|---|
| 2:3 (2)     | <p>קראתי מצרה לי אל־יהוה ויענני<br/>מבטן שאול שועתי שמעת קולי:<br/>I called out to the LORD, out of my<br/>distress, and he answered me; out of<br/>the belly of Sheol I cried, you heard<br/>my voice.</p> | 18:7 (6)                     | <p>בצר־לי אקרא יהוה<br/>In my distress I called upon the LORD<br/>מִן־הַמַּצַּר קראתי יְהוָה<br/>Out of my distress I called on the LORD<br/>אל־יהוה בצרתה לי קראתי<br/>In my distress I cry to the LORD<br/>מִמַּעַמְקִים קראתיך יהוה:<br/>אֲדַבֵּר שְׁמִיעָה בְּקוֹלִי תִהְיֶינָה אָזְנוֹיךָ קֹשֶׁבוֹת<br/>לְקוֹל תְּהַנּוּנָי:<br/>Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.<br/>Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be<br/>attentive to the voice of my supplications!</p> |
|             |   | 118:5                        |   |
|             |   | 120:1                        |   |
|             |   | 130:1-2                      |   |

<sup>21</sup> For example, Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 44-48; Dell, “Reinventing the Wheel,” 94; Sasson, *Jonah*, 168-201.

|                |  |   |   |
|----------------|--|---|---|
|                |  | <p>18:4-5</p> <p>116:3</p> <p>107:28-29</p> | <p>אֶפְפוּנֵי חֲבַל־מָוֶת וְנַחְלֵי בְלִיעַל יִבְעֲתוּנִי:<br/>חֲבַלֵי שְׂאוֹל סָבְבוּנִי קִדְמוּנֵי מוֹקְשֵׁי מָוֶת:<br/>The cords of death encompassed me; the<br/>torrents of perdition assailed me; the cords<br/>of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death<br/>confronted me.</p> <p>אֶפְפוּנֵי חֲבַל־מָוֶת וּמְצָרֵי שְׂאוֹל מְצָאוּנִי<br/>The snares of death encompassed me; the<br/>pangs of Sheol laid hold on me.</p> <p>וַיִּצְעֲקוּ אֶל־יְהוָה בַּצָּר לָהֶם וּמִמְצוֹקֹתֵיהֶם<br/>יֹוצִיאֵם:<br/>יָקָם סַעֲרָה לְדַמְמָה וַיִּחָשׂוּ גַלֵּיהֶם:<br/>(Some went down to the sea in ships<br/>...[23]) they cried to the LORD in their<br/>trouble (צָר), and he brought them out from<br/>their distress; he made the storm be still,<br/>and their waves were hushed.</p> |
| <p>2:4 (3)</p> | <p>וּתְשַׁלְּכֵנִי מִצוֹלָה בְּלִבְבַּי וַיִּמָּחַר<br/>יִסְבְּבֵנִי כָּל־מְשַׁבְּרֵיהָ וַיִּגְלִיף עָלַי עֲבָרוֹ:</p> | <p>42:7b</p>                                | <p>כָּל־מְשַׁבְּרֵיהָ וַיִּגְלִיף עָלַי עֲבָרוֹ:<br/>all your waves and your billows have gone<br/>over me.<sup>23</sup></p>  |

<sup>23</sup> Sasson says “This is the only line in Jonah’s psalm that finds an *exact* duplicate elsewhere in Scripture.” (Sasson, *Jonah*, 176.) Jonah 2:10 (9) is an *almost exact* mirroring of Psalm 3:9 (8), although see my note below on the variance which may simply be an insignificant embellishment.

|  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
|  | <p>For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.</p> <p>NOTE: Two words in Jonah 2 also occur in Ps 69. בלע (<i>swallow</i> once and in Jon 1:17) and מצולה (<i>deep</i> twice in vv. 3, 16 and in Jon 2:4). Both are relatively rare words.<sup>22</sup></p> | <p>69:2-3</p> <p>69:15-16</p> <p>88:7 (6)</p> | <p>הושיעני אלהים כי באו מים עד-נפש:<br/>טבעתי ביגון מצולה ואין מעמד באתי<br/>במעמקי-מים ושבֹּלֶת שִׁטְפוּתִי</p> <p>Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me.</p> <p>הצילני מטיט ואל-אֶטְבְּעָה אֲנַצְלָה מִשְׁוֹנָי<br/>וּמְעַמְקֵי-מַיִם:<br/>אל-תִּשְׁטַפְּנִי שְׁבֹלֶת מַיִם וְאל-תִּבְלַעְנִי מִצֹּלָה<br/>וְאל-תִּאָּטַר-עָלַי בְּאֵר פִּיהָ:</p> <p>Rescue me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters.</p> <p>Do not let the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the Pit close its mouth over me.</p> <p>שִׁתְּנִי בְּבוֹר תְּהוֹמוֹת בְּמַחְשָׁכִים בְּמַצְלוֹת</p> <p>You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep.</p> |
|--|---|---|---|

<sup>22</sup> Hunter, “Jonah from the Whale: Exodus Motifs in Jonah 2,” 146.

CHAPTER 5: FROM THE BELLY OF *SHEOL*

|         |   |                 |  |
|---------|---|-----------------|--|
|         |   | 88:8 (7)        | <p>וְכָל־מַשְׁבְּרֵיךָ עֲנִיתָ</p> <p>you overwhelm me with all your waves</p>   |
| 2:5 (4) | <p>וְאָנִי אָמַרְתִּי נִגְרַזְתִּי מִנְּגִד עֵינֶיךָ אֶדָּ</p> <p>אוֹסִיף לְהִבִּיט אֶל־הַיְכָל קִדְשֶׁךָ:</p> <p>Then I said, “I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.”</p>                    | 31:23<br>(22)   | <p>וְאָנִי אָמַרְתִּי בְּחִפְזִי נִגְרַזְתִּי מִנְּגִד עֵינֶיךָ</p> <p>I had said in my alarm, “I am driven far from your sight.”</p>  |
| 2:6 (5) | <p>אֶפְפוּנֵי מַיִם עַד־נֶפֶשׁ תְּהוֹם יִסְבְּבֵנִי</p> <p>סוּף חֲבוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי:</p> <p>The waters closed in over me to my neck; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head.</p>  | 18:5-6<br>(4-5) | <p>אֶפְפוּנֵי חֲבָלֵי־מָוֶת וְנַחְלֵי בְּלִיעַל יִבְעֲתוּנֵי:</p> <p>חֲבָלֵי שְׂאוּל סָבְבוּנִי קִדְמוּנֵי מוֹקְשֵׁי מָוֶת:</p> <p>The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of perdition assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me.</p> |
|         |   | 69:2 (1)        | <p>הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי אֱלֹהִים כִּי בָאוּ מַיִם עַד־נֶפֶשׁ:</p> <p>Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.</p>   |
| 2:7 (6) | <p>לְקַצְבֵי הָרִים יִרְדֹּתִי הָאָרֶץ בְּרִחְיָהּ</p> <p>בְּעַדִּי לְעוֹלָם וַתַּעַל מִשְׁחַת סִי יְהוָה</p> <p>אֱלֹהֵי:</p> <p>To the roots of the mountains I went down [to] the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you</p> | 30:4 (3)        | <p>יְהוָה הִעֲלִיתָ מִן־שְׂאוּל נַפְשִׁי חַיִּיתִנִּי מִיָּרְדֵי־</p> <p>בּוֹר</p>   |

CHAPTER 5: FROM THE BELLY OF *SHEOL*

|         |  |                 |  |
|---------|--|-----------------|--|
|         | brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.  |                 | O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit. <sup>24</sup>  |
| 2:8 (7) | <p>בְּהִתְעַטֵּף עָלַי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה זָכַרְתִּי<br/>וּתְבוֹא אֵלַי תְּפִלָּתִי אֶל־הֵיכַל קִדְשֶׁךָ:</p> <p>When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.</p> | 143:4-5         | <p>וּתְתַעַטֵּף עָלַי רוּחִי בְּתוֹכִי יִשְׁתַּמֵּם לְבִי:<br/>זָכַרְתִּי יָמִים מִקֶּדֶם הִגִּיתִי בְּכָל־פְּעֻלָּךְ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה<br/>יְדֶיךָ אֲשׁוּחָם:</p> <p>My spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled. I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands.</p> |
|         |  | 18:6            | <p>בְּצָר־לִי אָקְרָא יְהוָה וְאֶל־אֱלֹהֵי אֲשׁוּעַ יִשְׁמַע<br/>מִהֵיכָלֹו קוֹלִי וְשׁוֹעַתִּי לִפְנֵי תְבוֹא בְּאָזְנוֹ:</p> <p>In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.</p>  |
| 2:9 (8) | <p>מִשְׁמְרִים הַבְּלִי־שׁוֹא חֲסָדָם יַעֲזֹבוּ:</p>   | 31:7-8<br>(6-7) | <p>שָׁנְאֵתִי הַשְּׁמְרִים הַבְּלִי־שׁוֹא וְאֲנִי אֶל־יְהוָה<br/>בְּטָחָתִי:<br/>אֲגִילָה וְאֲשַׁמְחָה בְּחֲסָדֶךָ</p>   |

<sup>24</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, Magonet does not recognise any allusions to the Psalms in Jonah 2:6-7 (5-6) and sees a shift here “from familiar to unfamiliar language.” Following Magonet, Christensen argues that “at the very point where Jonah makes his ‘final descent’ to hell itself, he leaves the familiar world of the Psalter.” He regards these verses “from a metrical point of view” as “the structural centre of the book of Jonah.” (Christensen, “Narrative Poetics,” 43; Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 49.) However, the similarity in language between the Jonah-psalm and the Psalms which I have noted above seem strong enough to me to indicate that the writer was at least using the “familiar language” of the Psalms if not directly alluding to these specific psalms.



|  |  |         |  |
|--|--|---------|--|
|  |  | 3:9 (8) | <p>לִיהְנֶה הַיְשׁוּעָה<sup>26</sup></p> <p>Deliverance belongs to the LORD.</p> |
|--|--|---------|--|

Further to the above Psalm 139:7-8 also bears some similarities with *Jonah* in a more general way.

אַנְה אֵלֶּךָ מְרוֹמָיִךָ וְאֶנָּה מִפְּנֵיֶיךָ אֶבְרַח:

אִם-אֶסְקֶשׁ שָׁמַיִם שָׁם אַתָּה וְאֶצִּיעָה שְׂאוֹל הַנֶּגֶב:

Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

The phrase *וַיִּקַּם יוֹנָה לְבָרַח תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה* and *Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD* (Jonah 1:3) resembles *אֶבְרַח מִפְּנֵיֶיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ* *I will flee from your presence* (Psalm 139:7). Similarly, Jonah 2:3 (2) describes Jonah crying *מִבֶּטֶן שְׂאוֹל* *from the belly of Sheol* while Psalm 139:8 has the one fleeing from God finding him in *שְׂאוֹל*. Given that the word *יוֹנָה* can be either the name *Jonah* or *a dove* a further possible similarity is that Psalm 139:9 has the writer taking *כַּנְפֵי-יְשָׁר* *wings of the morning* in a bird-like manner and settling *בְּאַחֲרֵית יָם* *at the farthest limit of the sea* perhaps in a place like Tarshish. The similarities are too strong to be ignored and both the Psalm and *Jonah* use language which has their subject encountering

<sup>26</sup> The phrase is not quite identical, although the difference is only minor. On Jonah 2:10 and the ה ending of *יְשׁוּעָה*, Vern argues that this is “a poetic termination which is found to be common in biblical poetry where there is no definite article used with the noun ... being ornamental and having no meaning.” Robyn Vern, *Dating Archaic Biblical Hebrew Poetry: a Critique of the Linguistic Arguments* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 113.



God in the unlikeliest of places, in *שְׂאוֹל*. “Paradoxically, in response to Jonah’s attempt to run away as far as possible from YHWH’s presence, God will take him even further than he himself imagined: to hell – and there precisely is God waiting for Jonah!”<sup>27</sup>

Whether the writer was alluding to the specific psalms listed above, or drawing from a pool of psalm-language, the effect is the same. The extensive use by the writer of this material could suggest several things. It may indicate that the writer was very familiar with the Psalms or their cultic background and the Jonah-psalm was therefore subconsciously saturated with allusions to these texts or the language of the cult. Yet Jonah’s psalm was not necessarily simply an allusive echoing of earlier psalms; it could be inferred that the writer was endeavouring to convey a favourable impression that Jonah was a pious person intimately familiar with these texts and therefore quite naturally drew on them when in crisis. Ian Vaillancourt describes it “a model prayer.”<sup>28</sup> Another option, as Dell has suggested, is that the Jonah-psalm was a deliberate parody of *Psalms*, or that the prophet Jonah was being satirised as a person who was pious, drawing on familiar liturgical texts, although in a manner which was irrelevant to his actual situation and contrary to what has already been revealed about his character.

Read as satire or parody, the Jonah-psalm continues the mocking of the prophet which began in the first scenes with him “rising up” (1:3) in response to the imperative to *קום לך אֶל־* *רִיבָה* *rise up and go to Nineveh* only to begin a series of descents which culminated in his sinking to the depths of the sea. It mocks him by portraying him as unaware of his gruesome circumstances (being digested by a fish), yet thankful for not drowning (which arguably would have been a better way to die); trapped, yet praising God for his deliverance when

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<sup>27</sup> LaCocque and LaCocque, *Jonah: a Psycho-Religious Approach*, 76.

<sup>28</sup> Ian J. Vaillancourt, “The Pious Prayer of an Imperfect Prophet: The Psalm of Jonah in its Narrative Context,” *JESOT* 4, no. 2 (2015): 172.

deliverance was neither assured nor foreseeable; and using high-sounding pious language as though he was a faithful worshipper, when the story thus far has portrayed him as disobedient and reluctant to pray.

Parodies do not necessarily mock the original work. They may use these texts as a vehicle for their own satire.<sup>29</sup> Miles claims that though the immediate target of a parody is a *text*, it has an ultimate target in “a serious audience confronted on its home ground.”<sup>30</sup> Because a text is being parodied, that does not necessarily mean that any attempt is being made to *subvert* the text. The target may be elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> In fact, as Kynes notes, a writer alluding to an earlier text may be appealing to the literary precursors as the ideal standing in judgment over the situation the parody depicts.<sup>32</sup> In the case of the Jonah-psalm, the parody does not mock or subvert the texts in the Psalms, but rather the Jonah-character who drew on them so extensively, or a group that used (or misused) them for their own theological purposes. The writer is either mocking Jonah, or the group, or both.<sup>33</sup>

### **Is the Jonah-psalm satire or parody?**

As noted earlier, Miles has explained the subtle nuance between parody and satire: “Satire is the exposure by comedy of behavior which is standardized and, to that extent, foolish. Parody is that breed of satire in which the standardized behavior to be exposed is literary.”<sup>34</sup> While satire shames a target audience, parody uses pre-existing texts as its

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<sup>29</sup> Kynes, “Parody in the Hebrew Bible,” 285; Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 58.

<sup>30</sup> Miles, “Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody,” 203.

<sup>31</sup> Kynes, “Parody in the Hebrew Bible,” 287; Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 50.

<sup>32</sup> Kynes, “Parody in the Hebrew Bible,” 279.

<sup>33</sup> A significant example of an earlier text being parodied in a later writing elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, given other thematic and stylistic similarities between Job and *Jonah*, is Job 7:17-18 which appears to be quoting or alluding to Psalm 8:5 (4). See Appendix 4: Job 7:17-18 and Psalm 8:5.

<sup>34</sup> Miles, “Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody,” 203.

ammunition. Ben Zvi, in referring to “the burlesque tone of the book” overall, makes a general comment which is also relevant to a discussion of the tone of the Jonah-psalm:

If there is some mockery in the book, to some extent it is self-mockery, or more precisely, it is transformed into a discourse that sets the producers of the texts and readings and their world in perspective by hinting at and reflecting crucial questions of self-understanding.<sup>35</sup>

There are some significant ironies in the Jonah-psalm. First, and most strikingly, is the apparent irrelevance of the prayer to Jonah’s actual situation, inasmuch as the prayer is a thanksgiving for not drowning, ignoring the very real horrors of being slowly digested in a fish’s stomach. The dark, stinking, stifling confines of the fish’s belly might appropriately be described as *בֶּטֶן שְׂאוֹל* *the belly of Sheol* (2:3 [2]) yet the ensuing words describe his situation in the depths of the sea rather than inside the fish. For Jonah, the belly of Sheol and the *שְׁחַת* *pit* (2:7 [6]) were terms which meant the *תְּהוֹם* *deep* (1:6 [5]), the dark chaotic waters of the sea. The phrase *וַתַּעַל מִשְׁחַת הַיָּם* *you brought up my life from the pit* (1:7 [6]) would be an appropriate way of describing one’s deliverance from imminent destruction, in the same way

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<sup>35</sup> Ben Zvi argues that the reader of *Jonah* would be unable to identify with an author from a group whom they vehemently opposed, and he therefore reads it as “a message of inner reflection, and to some extent critical self appraisal of the group within which and for which this book was written.” (Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud*, 11, 99-101.) If the Jonah-psalm is parody, it may be, in Ben Zvi’s words, “self-mockery.” By this, I am not suggesting that the character Jonah is mocking himself in the story, but, as Ben Zvi suggests, the literati of Yehud (or whoever produced this work) may be mocking itself. If so, we need to understand what purpose such self-mockery would serve, but also if another target of the parody would provide a better explanation. Ben Zvi dismisses the idea that the book is a kind of satire which targets other contemporaneous groups in society, or society as a whole, and argues instead that *Jonah* carries a message of self-reflection and self-appraisal by a group which has an awareness of “the problematic character of the knowledge they possessed.” However, I think Ben Zvi dismisses too readily the idea that *Jonah* is satire.

as the similar (although not identical) phraseology of Psalm 30:4 (3) describes being rescued from life-threatening danger:<sup>36</sup>

יְהוָה הֶעֱלִיתָ מִן־שְׁאוֹל נַפְשִׁי חַיִּיתִנִּי מִיַּרְדֵּי־בֹר:

O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol,  
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

Yet there is nothing in Jonah's prayer which indicates any realisation that he had gone from a bad situation to a worse one, that he understood the fish to be a means of deliverance, or that he was aware of his situation at all. This incongruity between Jonah's prayer and his actual situation, probably more than any other factor, has no doubt influenced some scholars to regard the psalm as a misplaced late addition, composed under other circumstances and incorporated into *Jonah* simply because of the somewhat appropriateness of its drowning metaphors. The psalm may very well have come from another hand, but rather than being the result of 'misplacement,' its inclusion here is a strong indication that it should be read as something other than, or in addition to, thanksgiving, such as satire or parody.

A further problem with the Jonah-psalm is that it presents Jonah as a pious person, apparently disregarding his disobedience in the introductory scenes. In fact, James Watts has noted that Jonah is portrayed throughout the narrative and in the psalm as "an orthodox Yahwist."<sup>37</sup> He regards Jonah's confession to the sailors (1:9), his diagnosis of the reason for the storm (1:12) and the reason he gives for his disobedience (4:2) as orthodox and pious, and the psalm accords with this characterisation. Yet there are no words of contrition or repentance in the prayer and it is devoid of any utterance that would suggest a change of heart on Jonah's part. Jonah is presented first as disobedient, then as pious yet hypocritical, with no

<sup>36</sup> The context implies a deliverance from a disease or illness (esp. וַתִּרְפְּאֵנִי *you healed me* in v.3).

<sup>37</sup> James W. Watts, "Jonah's Psalm (Jonah 2.3-10)," in *Psalm and Story* (JSOTSup 139; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 138.

evidence of contrition. However, if it is satire then the narrator may be implying that it is possible to be disobedient and appear to be pious at the same time. If so, the prayer could form an integral part of a caricature of the prophet as a hypocrite or one who was completely out of touch with reality.

As a thanksgiving for deliverance the Jonah-psalm is inappropriate and its content irrelevant to Jonah's circumstances. The story thus far has caricatured the 'man of God' as disobedient and as one who appeared to be reluctant to pray (sleeping while the sailors were praying). Combined with the use of pious language., and saturated with allusions to biblical texts, the psalm creates an image of an apparently godly person; yet it ridicules him as a person whose language is pious while irrelevant, unaware of the true nature of his circumstances, mouthing words which *seem* to reflect his situation, although inappropriately. The purpose may be to ridicule Jonah as an individual, or possibly a class of people of which he is the typical representative: prophets perhaps, or religious leaders or scholars in general.

### **The fish as prophet**

The Jonah-psalm is framed by narrative which refers to Jonah's time inside the large fish.

וַיִּמַן יְהוָה דָּג גָּדוֹל לְבָלַע אֶת־יֹנָה וַיְהִי יֹנָה בְּמִעַי הַדָּג שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים וּשְׁלֹשָׁה לַיְלוֹת:

But the LORD provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights (2:1 [1:17]).

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְדָג וַיִּקְא אֶת־יֹנָה אֶל־הַיַּבְשָׁה:

Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land (2:11 [10]).

The story's introductory words (1:1) follow a standard narrative formula where the first word וַיְהִי opens a story. The same word introduces chapter 3, in typical narrative style, where it also serves as a separating marker. The words immediately prior, which conclude chapter 2, form an *inclusio* with the opening in 1:1 in a comic fashion so that the first part of the book begins with וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יוֹנָה *Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah* (1:1) and ends with וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְדָג *and the LORD spoke to the fish* (2:10). Jonah's response was to run, while the fish responded obediently, highlighting not only that even a fish could receive the word of God, but also inferring that, in contrast to the disobedient prophet, it knew obedience was the only appropriate response. Maimonides, and other rabbinic commentators, argued that actual speech to the fish is not meant here, because that would imply that God had transformed the fish into a prophet and sent it prophetic revelation.<sup>38</sup> However, that would be the precise point of the parody: God spoke to the fish as a prophet while his human prophet runs from his responsibilities. There are therefore three texts in the book which include the prophetic formulae: (1) the word of the LORD came to Jonah (1:1); (2) the LORD spoke to the fish (2:10); and (3) the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time (3:1). The second revelation – to the fish – is the *crux*, functioning as a further ridiculing of Jonah and enhancing the comic effect.

A common theme in anti-prophetic satires, according to Marcus, is the employment of talking or intelligent animals to shame disobedient humans.<sup>39</sup> As evidence of this he refers to Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22:28-30), the she-bears in the story of the bald prophet and some taunting boys (2 Kings 2:23-24), and the fish in our story.<sup>40</sup> Speaking to the fish as

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<sup>38</sup> Zlotowitz, *Yonah/Jonah*, 117.

<sup>39</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 75-6.

<sup>40</sup> To these we could add the talking snake in garden of Eden story, although this would seem to be a case of the opposite: rather than the faithful behaviour of the animal being contrasted with the disobedience of humans, the snake leads the humans into sin. Sharp, however, says that "ironies abound in this story on multiple levels" and

though it was an intelligent being – a prophet at that – and placing him on at least the same (or higher) footing as the human prophet, is a comic device. Magonet suggests there is also a comic element to the juxtaposition of the pious ending of Jonah’s prayer and the fish’s vomiting which should not be overlooked.<sup>41</sup> The inference is that the piety of Jonah’s prayer was so hypocritical and irrelevant it was nauseating, even to the fish.

### Gender of the fish

Attention has been drawn at various times to the difference between the masculine gender of the fish in the narrative which frames the prayer (2:1, 11), and its feminine gender in the introductory words וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל יוֹנָה אֶל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יָם מִמְעַי הַדָּגָה and *Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish* (2:2 [1]). It has been noted that in the narrative frame דָּג is in the masculine form while the introduction to the prayer uses the feminine form הַדָּגָה prompting various suggestions – some of them fanciful, including the fish changing gender or the appearance of multiple fish – for the seeming change in gender.

Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer argues that the form דָּגָה in Jonah 2:2 is a lengthened nominal form. These extremely rare forms often appear in the end of a clause. Other examples of such forms are attested in Job 34:13; 37:12; and Ezekiel 8:2, as well as in the geographical name Jahaz / Jahza.<sup>42</sup> Tiemeyer thinks the Masoretic accentuation of דָּגָה as a feminine singular form is a result of a misunderstanding of this ‘archaic’ longer form.<sup>43</sup> She agrees that while

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the snake’s role and words could be considered in this context as voicing truth. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 35-42.

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Magonet, “Review: ‘Jonah: A Psycho-Religious Approach to the Prophet’ by Andre LaCocque and Pierre-Emmanuel LaCocque 1990,” *Hebrew Studies* 33, no. 1 (1992): 143.

<sup>42</sup> The form דָּגָה occurs in Isaiah 15:4 and Jeremiah 48:34, while the form דָּגָהָה occurs in Numbers 21:23, Deuteronomy 2:32, and Judges 11:20.

<sup>43</sup> Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “A New Look at the Biological Sex/Grammatical Gender of Jonah's Fish,” *VT* 67, no. 2 (2017): 307-23.

there are definitely humorous elements in the book of Jonah, she is not fully convinced that the sex-change of the fish is one of them and opts instead for a grammatical solution.<sup>44</sup> She also notes the presence in the psalm in 2:2-10 of another example of a noun with a final ה that is not a feminine marker, namely the word *יְשׁוּעָתָהּ* (2:10 [9]), which I have also noted earlier, which she thinks is another example of the author employing archaic long forms.<sup>45</sup> However, there is a difficulty, as Tiemeyer herself has observed, with the occurrence of the word *נָךְ* in Jonah 2:11a where it is in a pausal position, yet there is no final ה.

Are we dealing with an inconsistent author? The answer is “yes” if we assume that the same author composed the material in Jonah 2:1 and 11 (the prose narrative) and Jonah 2:2 (the heading of the psalm). If we do not, as contended above, the answer is “no.” Rather, Jonah 2:2, 3-10 stem from a different author who, composing a poetic text, employed unusual forms (e.g. *יְשׁוּעָתָהּ*, *דגה*) with additional final ה.<sup>46</sup>

If Tiemeyer is correct, this suggests the writer deliberately chose an archaic, or at least ‘unusual’ form of the word, possibly with the intention of creating an archaic or more liturgical ‘tone’ for stylistic reasons for the psalm’s setting, perhaps in a similar way to how archaic or unusual forms of words are often employed in English liturgical settings. While I think Tiemeyer has made a valuable contribution to the discussion, I do not find this explanation any more convincing than Steven McKenzie’s suggestion that it alerts the readers to the fact that they are reading a *satire*.<sup>47</sup> According to McKenzie, the sex change of the fish

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<sup>44</sup> Tiemeyer, “Gender of Jonah’s Fish,” 312.

<sup>45</sup> Tiemeyer, “Gender of Jonah’s Fish,” 320. On Jonah 2:10 (9) and the ה ending of *יְשׁוּעָתָהּ*, see also Vern who calls this “a poetic termination which is found to be common in biblical poetry where there is no definite article used with the noun ... being ornamental and having no meaning.” Vern, *Dating Archaic Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, 113.

<sup>46</sup> Tiemeyer, “Gender of Jonah’s Fish,” 322.

<sup>47</sup> McKenzie, “Jonah and Genre,” 7.



is one of many farcical, exaggerated or nonsensical elements in the story: “the whole story is intended to be preposterous because its very purpose is to make fun of Jonah and his attitude.” There is definitely something ‘unusual’ happening with the text, but whether the writer’s intention was to add another element to the cluster of exaggerated and nonsensical features, or whether it was to produce an archaic tone, the ultimate effect is similar insofar as it best understood to be either humorous or parodic.

## **Conclusion**

The linguistic and thematic connections between the psalm and other parts of the book provide convincing evidence that its parodic tone plays an important role in reading the whole story as satire. The so-called anomalies which have led some scholars to conclude that the psalm is from a different hand to the rest of the work are so obvious that, according to this redactional hypothesis, the redactor either chose to ignore them because consistency was not an important issue, or the addition was a clumsy embellishment. I argue that, these anomalies are, in fact, important to the writer’s story. They are central to the ridiculing of the prophet and portray him as pious, well versed in the language of prayer, yet detached from reality, and as a ‘man of God’ whose prayer was irrelevant to his actual situation. In doing so, the writer is drawing a caricature of a pious person who speaks in high-sounding tones but whose words are not relevant to the actual situation. As such, the psalm is a parody which employs earlier psalm-texts, not to ridicule this literature or genre, but to ridicule the target of the story’s satire, either the prophet Jonah or the group he represents. It is parody, not of the literary parallels but of those who used these texts in theological ways which the writer opposed. There is no evidence in the psalm of contrition or repentance, and Jonah stands in stark contrast with both the sailors whose pleading with God in their calamity has the hallmarks of being genuine, and with the people of Nineveh who repented. If he represents

## CHAPTER 5: FROM THE BELLY OF *SHEOL*

certain religious or scholastic classes in Israel then the intended effect may be to portray them as hypocritical or out-of-touch, and their high-sounding theology as irrelevant to the actual needs or situation of the people they are addressing.

## Chapter 6: The court scene

The third scene in the story (Jonah 3:1-10) begins with Jonah preaching to Nineveh and ends in the court of the king of Nineveh. I have called this “the court scene” because the climax and central message of this scene, in my view, is in the royal court incident.

### The second commission to Jonah

The scene begins with the narrative comment that *וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יוֹנָה שֵׁנִית* *the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time* (3:1). This is a standard prophetic formula and corresponds to the introductory words “Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying ...” (1:1). An almost identical phrase occurs in the narrative of the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22:15), three times in Jeremiah (1:13; 13:3; 33:1) once in Haggai (2:20), and a similar phrase in Zechariah (4:12) but only in the case of Jonah did the message come a second time because the first was ignored. The second giving of the divine commission to Jonah differs from the first in its content although not in its intent:

Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me. (1:2)

Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you. (3:2).

There is no mention in the second commission of Nineveh’s wickedness, and the imperative to *וַיִּקְרָא אֶלְיָהּ וַיִּקְרָא עָלֶיהָ* *cry out against it* has become *וַיִּקְרָא אֶלְיָהּ אֶת־הַמְּקַרִּיאָהּ אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי דֹבֵר אֵלֶיךָ* *proclaim to it the message that I tell you*. Interestingly, and perhaps significantly, the

narrative says nothing about God telling Jonah what to proclaim, in either commission. Person regards this as a case of “omitted dialogue” which is relatively common in this narrative.<sup>1</sup> He argues that this is suggested by (1) the vagueness in 1:2 as to the specific nature of the Ninevites’ wickedness; (2) the vague language of the report that “the LORD changed his mind concerning the evil he had commanded against them” (3:10), suggesting, according to Person, that the LORD was more explicit about this evil; and (3) the omission of the words of the oracle from the imperative to preach in both 1:2 and 3:2. “The three observations taken together suggest that the LORD’s requests as ‘quoted’ in the narrative are simply abbreviated markers for requests that must have been more specific and elaborate.”<sup>2</sup> Further to this Person clarifies that the threatened punishment in 1:2 was vague, although presumably it was destruction as the king’s commandment was motivated by *לֹא נָאֵבָד* *so that we do not perish* (3:9). This suggests that Jonah’s oracle was longer than five words as the king apparently understood it to include an indictment and a less ambiguous threat of destruction. His commandment that “each person must turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in their hands” (3:8), is not specific but implies that Jonah’s oracle included an indictment referring to evil and violence in some form.

The omission in the text of any explicit instruction concerning the message Jonah was to preach, followed very soon after by Jonah’s oracle “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (3:4b) has a dramatic effect. As a result of this ‘gap’ in the narrative the audience does not know from the outset what Jonah was to preach, and the narrator does not confirm if this message is God’s words or Jonah’s. There is a “flashback” in 4:1 where Jonah refers to dialogue which is omitted from the earlier narrative in chapter 1. Wolff argues that

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Person, “Omitted dialogue in Jonah 3:10” (personal communication).

<sup>2</sup> Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 142-43.

there are similar flashbacks in 2:1 (1:17), 3:6 and 4:6.<sup>3</sup> This literary device has a dramatic effect in 4:1 whereby the reader might be surprised by this new information which was omitted earlier, learning for the first time Jonah's motivation for rejecting his commission. Person argues convincingly that in the second commission (3:4) there is further "omitted dialogue." However, whereas the reader learns about the first commission dialogue later in the narrative, there is no further revelation about the second commission and the question of the source of Jonah's oracle remains unanswered.

There is a slight difference between the commissions: in the first Jonah is required to *קרא עליה* *call against* Nineveh (1:2), and in the second *קרא אליה* *call to* Nineveh (3:2). Some commentators regard the shift in wording as significant, suggesting a shift in tone from the more confrontational *against* to a 'softer' *to*.<sup>4</sup> The difference amounts to a single letter and could easily be a scribal error, especially as the particles *על* and *אל* are sometimes used interchangeably in biblical Hebrew and therefore caution should be exercised.<sup>5</sup> The root *קרא* *to call* appears frequently throughout the story and, as Halpern and Friedman have well observed, "is used in its standard meaning by the author. But at the same time, he uses it with thematic consequence" suggesting an "undercurrent of verbal frolic."<sup>6</sup> Ironically, while Jonah

<sup>3</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 144. I deal with these texts elsewhere in this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Sasson, *Jonah*, 226; Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 139; Gerhard F. Hasel, *Jonah, Messenger of the Eleventh Hour* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Association, 1976), 44.

<sup>5</sup> Rendsburg regards this as a case of the phenomenon in the HB of "repetition with variation" agreeing with Landes that it simply a "stylistic variant" and noting that "from a purely stylistic viewpoint polyprosopon is operative in these two com- parable verses. Which is to say, while some readers may have intuited a semantic difference between 1:2 and 3:2, all discerning readers would have grasped the slight change from *קרא עליה u-qra* 'aleha 'and call upon it' in the former to *קרא אליה u-qra* 'eleha 'and call unto it' in the latter – in addition to the larger shifts in wording toward the end of the two verses (Gary A. Rendsburg, *How the Bible Is Written* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2019), 180; Landes, "Linguistic Criteria and the Date of the Book of Jonah," 158.) It should also be noted that the interchange of *על* and *אל* is a well-known phenomenon in biblical texts. See, for example, Young, et al., *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts*, Vol. 1, 40; Rezetko and Young, *Historical Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*, 208-10, 537-53.

<sup>6</sup> Halpern and Friedman, "Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah," 83-84.

initially ignores the call to call against Nineveh, in a striking contrast the sailors (1:14), the Ninevites (3:8) and finally Jonah himself (4:2) וַיִּקְרָא אֶל־יְהוָה *called out to the LORD*.

Jonah's response was immediate, although it would be wrong to presume that he was enthusiastic or that there was any change of heart and Person claims that the narrator's presentation of Jonah's actions implies he was acting under coercion: "So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh" (3:3).<sup>7</sup> The root קום is repeated throughout the story. The initial commission to Jonah was to קום לך אֶל־נִינְוָה *Arise, go to Nineveh* (1:2) and this was repeated verbatim in 3:2.<sup>8</sup> Between these occurrences the captain of the ship called on Jonah to קום קרא אֶל־אֱלֹהֶיךָ *Arise, call to your god* (1:6). Jonah's response to the two imperatives use the same verb in the *qal* stem, both in describing his reaction to the repeated divine commissioning: first, וַיִּקָּם יוֹנָה לְבָרֶחַ *but Jonah arose and fled* (1:3), and second וַיִּקָּם יוֹנָה וַיֵּלֶךְ *so Jonah arose and went to Nineveh* (3:3). Jonah's response to the captain's imperative was, apparently, to ignore him; at least the narrator does not report any response. There is, however, one other use of the *qal* stem of the verb in the narrative, in the response of the king to Jonah's preaching: he וַיִּקָּם מִמְּסָאוֹ *he rose from his throne* (3:6). The contrast between Jonah's unresponsiveness and the king's immediate response is almost certainly deliberate and is emphasised by the repetition of the verb. Whereas Jonah is told to arise three times before it is reported that he obeys, the king arises without any command at all. The repetition emphasises the irony.<sup>9</sup> In chapter 1 the imperative to *arise* is ironically contrasted with Jonah's *descent* to Joppa (וַיֵּרַד יָפוֹ 1:4), into the ship (וַיֵּרַד 1:3), and finally into the depths of the sea (וַיֵּרַדְתִּי 2:6). In 3:6 Jonah's descent is contrasted with the king's *ascent* from one

<sup>7</sup> Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 148.

<sup>8</sup> Where קום is used as an auxiliary verb it expresses encouragement to begin an action and is not necessarily to be taken literally as "arise". However, I have translated it as such in all these instances to emphasise the repetition of קום.

<sup>9</sup> Magonet also regards the repetition as ironic. Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 17.

about to perish to a reprieved repentant. I concur with Halpern and Friedman’s conclusion that by these key words involving motion up and down “it is as though descent represents distance from YHWH, ascent movement towards him.”<sup>10</sup>

### The great city

Nineveh is described rather awkwardly in 3:3 as עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה לְאֱלֹהִים מִהַלֵּךְ וְנִינְוָה הָיְתָה עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה לְאֱלֹהִים *Nineveh was a city great to God, a three days’ walk across* having previously been described in the narrative simply as הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה *the great city* (1:2; 3:2), an expression which is echoed in the concluding verse (4:11). The repetition of גְּדוֹלָה is one of the many repetitive wordplays used by the writer throughout *Jonah*. What the phrase עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה לְאֱלֹהִים *a great city to God* means is not certain. Some think it means “great, not only to man’s thinking, but to God’s.”<sup>11</sup> Wolff prefers the superlative meaning and translates it “Nineveh was then (even) for God a great city,”<sup>12</sup> Sasson prefers the construction *belonging to God*,<sup>13</sup> Stuart translates it “important to God” or, possibly, “extraordinarily important”<sup>14</sup> while Anderson translates it as a “great city for the gods” which he takes as a reference to its idolatry.<sup>15</sup> The description which follows מִהַלֵּךְ שְׁלֹשָׁת יָמִים *three days walk* suggests that the superlative meaning for לְאֱלֹהִים is to be preferred, although there is some doubt as to whether the writer means it took three days to travel there, or three days to walk through it. The description has been noted by several commentators as a gross exaggeration as Nineveh was probably no more than 5km

<sup>10</sup> Halpern and Friedman, “Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah,” 81.

<sup>11</sup> A. Cohen, *The Twelve Prophets* (London: The Soncino Press, 1974), 145.

<sup>12</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 143.

<sup>13</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 229.

<sup>14</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 486.

<sup>15</sup> Joel E. Anderson, “YHWH’s Surprising Covenant Hessed in Jonah,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 42, no. 1 (2012): 6.

across.<sup>16</sup> As Nineveh is repeatedly described as a great city, it is curious that at this point the writer needed a superlative, especially one as vague and unusual as לְאֱלֹהִים when there are other adequate ways of describing enormity.<sup>17</sup> The expression occurs occasionally elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible with the meaning *belonging to God*.<sup>18</sup> A similar term לִיהוָה *belongs to the LORD* occurs more than sixty times in the Psalms, Isaiah 44:5 (*I belong to the LORD*) and in Jonah 2:10 (9), all in poetic contexts. If the writer wanted to contrast Nineveh's obedient and submissive status with Jonah's disobedience, especially in light of Jonah's claim to worship the LORD, or be a servant of the Lord according to the Septuagint (Δοῦλος κυρίου ἐγὼ εἰμι *I am a servant of the Lord* 1:9), then to say the city belonged to God would be an appropriate satirical way to express this. This would, however, be an odd place to make that contrast as Jonah had not yet commenced his preaching nor had Nineveh repented, unless it was to foreshadow it. If we read Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 as parodic or satirical, and I have demonstrated in chapter 5 that this is the most compelling way to read it, then there may be a parallel in the term לְאֱלֹהִים to the vow in the concluding lines of the prayer in 2:9 (10) "But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs לִיהוָה *to the LORD!*" Sharp reads these words as a coercive manipulation

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<sup>16</sup> Alexander claims that Nineveh was no more than a mile (1.6km) across at its widest point, although other scholars give estimates of up to 5km (Alexander, *Jonah: an Introduction and Commentary*, 56.) Archaeological remains have provided evidence of city walls about 12km in circumference, with the total area of the walled city being approximately 750 hectares. James A. Armstrong, "Nineveh," in *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology* (ed. Neil Asher Silberman; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 489-90.

<sup>17</sup> For example, an absolute superlative could be expressed as הַגָּדֹל בְּעָרִים *the greatest among the cities*. Adjectives may occur as constructs with a superlative force (Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 261.) such as גָּדֹל בְּעָרִים *greatest of the cities*, which was almost certainly true of Nineveh during the reign of Sennacherib. This expression does not occur in the Hebrew Bible, but that alone would not be a reason for this writer to avoid it. Stuart cites Joshua 10:2 (עִיר גְּדוֹלָה גְּבֻעוֹן *Gibeon was a great city*) as evidence "that גדול (ה) could be used in connection with a city to indicate significance rather than size." Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 486-7.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Genesis 40:8. It occurs more frequently after the verb היה *to be* as in לְאֱלֹהִים לְכֶם *to be your God* (e.g. Leviticus 22:33; 25:38; Numbers 15:41).



on Jonah's part "even as a subtle form of bribery to God."<sup>19</sup> To fulfil his vows would require that he be back on dry land, and his promise to sacrifice almost certainly meant to sacrifice in the Temple, especially as he had already hinted in 2:5 (4) of his assurance that he would see the Temple again (אֵךְ אוֹסִיף לְהִבִּיט אֶל־הַיִּכָּל קִדְשְׁךָ) is best translated *Surely I will look again to your holy temple!*). He not only wanted to be back on dry land, he implied that he wanted to be in *the* land. But instead he finds himself in Nineveh. His coercive prayer ended with לְאֱלֹהִים לִיהוָה *salvation belongs to the LORD* but unexpectedly he is sent to a city לְאֱלֹהִים *belonging to God*, a subtle allusion to the fact that God wants to save the city which echoes Jonah's own prayer in 2:9 (10).

The description מֵהַלֶּךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים *three days walk* is a parallel reference to the size of the city, rather than the time taken for Jonah to arrive there, as it is followed immediately by וַיֵּתֵן לְיֹנָה לָבוֹא בְּעִיר מֵהַלֶּךְ יוֹם אֶחָד *and Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk.*<sup>20</sup> This is unlikely to be a reference to the time Jonah travelled to arrive there from the shore where he was vomited by the fish. In a book replete with repetition, the mention of שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים *three days* in connection with the size of Nineveh (3:3), וּשְׁלֹשָׁה לַיְלֹת, *three days and three nights* in the fish (1:17 [2:1]), and the threat (in the Septuagint of 3:4) of destruction in three days (ἔτι τρεῖς ἡμέραι *yet three days*) is interesting. Significant, from a literary perspective,

<sup>19</sup> Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 180.

<sup>20</sup> Stuart argues that there is no ground for assuming that size is the issue in this phrase, and cites Nehemiah 2:6 as an example where מֵהַלֶּךְ can mean "visit" without reference to the length of the journey. Following Wiseman, he argues that the phrase refers to "the ancient oriental practice of hospitality whereby the first day is for arrival, the second for the primary purpose of the visit and the third for return." He speculates that the narrator's point is that Jonah would have followed formal protocol and presented his credentials and message to city officials, but this seems to me to be reading too much into the text and Sasson describes it as "a fanciful recreation of the Assyrian context." (Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 487-8; D. Wiseman, "Jonah's Nineveh," *Tyndale Bulletin* 30 (1979): 38; Sasson, *Jonah*, 244.) As far as I am aware no commentator has noted a connection between Jonah's three days in Nineveh and three days and nights in the fish.

is the careful juxtaposition of the phrases “three days’ walk” and “a day’s walk” which provide an obvious contrast.

Now Nineveh was a great city to God,

three days’ walk.

Jonah began to go into the city,

going a day’s walk. (3:3-4)

Sasson reviewed possible meanings implied by this contrast and concluded that “the contrast in number means to sharpen our perception of a prophet who is very much in a hurry to do what God asks of him, whether earnestly and enthusiastically or just to get it over with.”<sup>21</sup> The most likely reason, in my view, is that Jonah may have made a half-hearted effort hoping that his message would fail to get a response. In his prayer from the depths he expressed an assurance that he would see the Temple again, and have an opportunity, on dry ground, to pay his vows to the LORD. Sharp describes this as “confidence in his own power to manipulate God into resolving the situation.”<sup>22</sup> Fuelled by such self-confidence at being able to manipulate God, although not quite according to plan, Jonah ventured confidently, although half-heartedly, into the city believing that he would somehow be able to manipulate God again. Jonah did not take his message to the king whose repentance on hearing his message second-hand adds a further unrealistic and comic element to the story; he did not, as far as we know from the story, attempt to cover the entire city with his warning, or even to seek out the administrative centre. By contrasting “three days’ walk” with “a day’s walk” the narrator is emphasising that Jonah was obedient to the divine commission yet his effort was

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<sup>21</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 236.

<sup>22</sup> Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 180.

half-hearted because he wanted it to fail and he would be able to convince God to carry out his initial plan to destroy the city.

**And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (3:4).**

There is a chiasm in the spoken words of Jonah throughout the book. He speaks seven times:

A. I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land. (1:9)

B. Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down **for you**, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you. (1:12)

C. Jonah prayed to the LORD ... you brought up my life from the pit ...  
When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD ...  
(2:2ff)

D. Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown! (3:4)

C. And he prayed to the LORD ... please take my life from me ... (4:2-3)

B. It is better for me to die than to live. (4:8)

A. Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die. (4:9)

The crux is the five-word prophecy (עוד ארבעים יום וְנִינְוָה נִהְפָּקֶת) *Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*). On either side of it Jonah prays, although the two prayers are a reversal: the first is a psalm of thanksgiving for his life which has been spared, and the second is a complaint, asking that God would take his life. The second and second-last sayings relate to Jonah dying: the first time he says his death would *enable* the sailors to live and his death would be better *for them*; and the second time he complains that he would rather die *because* the Ninevites now live, and his death would be better *for him*! The first and last statements also stand in stark contrast. In the first he fears God; in the last he is angry with God. The first words of this prophet are theologically sound and what we might expect, but his final words are the antithesis of what we would expect from a man of God.

The narrator has not revealed if this is the message which God said he would tell Jonah to proclaim, or if it was entirely Jonah's own creation. Nor do we know if it was the entire message or if the narrator has truncated it. As I noted earlier, Person deals at length with several cases of "omitted dialogue" in the Jonah story from a conversation analysis perspective, and he observes here the narrator's reporting of the *differing* responses by Jonah to the two calls by using *identical* words. Both Jonah's refusal (1:3) to obey the first call, and his acceptance (3:3) of the second, are reported as יָקָם יוֹנָה *and Jonah arose*. The reader discovers only later in the story (at 4:2) that Jonah did in fact respond verbally to the first call, although it was not reported by the narrator at that point. By analysing Jonah's reported response in the context of this and other omitted dialogue, Person speculates that Jonah also "voiced his reluctance and anger when he accepted, under duress of course, the Lord's request."<sup>23</sup> He interprets the brevity of Jonah's message and the fact that he was "hardly" in the city when he gave his oracle as evidence of "tremendous rage."

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<sup>23</sup> Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 149.

As the Ninevites, or at least their king, apparently understand from Jonah's oracle that the pronouncement of impending doom was due to "their evil ways" and violence (4:8), it is almost certain, as Person suggests, that we have merely a truncated version of it.<sup>24</sup> Yet the narrator reports it as though the five words are the entire message. This certainly has a dramatic effect. It also has a comic effect. What was it in Jonah's oracle as it is reported that prompted such a response? There was no "thus says the LORD;" no call for repentance; no offer of hope; and no reason is given for their impending destruction. This was described by one writer as "the most startlingly effective human communication in the whole Bible."<sup>25</sup> Jonah's five words led to what appears to be a virtually a model repentance by everyone in Nineveh without exception; a praiseworthy recognition of a true message from God. However, as *hyperbole* it would have a comic effect – an *overly* enthusiastic and unquestioning response to an unknown prophet lacking credentials from a foreign country seems quite unrealistic – and thus has the effect of ridiculing the people for their immediate acceptance of a questionable prophetic message.

It should be noted that the Masoretic Text of Jonah has עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם *yet forty days* (3:4) while the Septuagint has ἔτι τρεῖς ἡμέραι *yet three days*. I will argue that the Septuagint probably reflects an earlier version and is a better reading. It is unusual for a prophet to specify a time period at all, and the shorter time span would parallel more closely the almost immediate destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. After all, the proclamation of the *overturning* of Nineveh is remarkably reminiscent of the language of destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah which uses the same word הִפָּךְ (Genesis 19:25, 29). Forty days seems an unnecessarily long time and seems incongruous with the urgency of Jonah's prediction. The

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<sup>24</sup> Person suspects the idea of an abbreviated reading is unique to him, although noting that Tribble comes close. Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 150; Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 180.

<sup>25</sup> Moberly, "Preaching for a Response? Jonah's Message to the Ninevites Reconsidered," 156.

story has moved fairly rapidly to this point, and when Jonah sits down outside the city to “see what would become of the city” (4:5) the audience might expect that the story will continue to progress at the same pace, and *three days* would therefore probably fit the flow of the story better than *forty*. It would also be a further repetition of the phrase *שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים* which has occurred in 1:17 (2:1) and 3:3, and the writer’s penchant for repetition is well established.

The decree by the king of Nineveh that everyone in the city should fast, as well as the animals, would also fit better with three days rather than forty.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of possible explanations for the differences between the Masoretic Text and Septuagint and which variant is likely to be the better reading see Moberly, “Preaching for a Response? Jonah’s Message to the Ninevites Reconsidered,” 156-67. Moberly claims that there are two possibilities to account for the difference between *אַרְבָּעִים forty* and *שְׁלֹשֶׁת three*: either there was an unpredictable scribal error, or there was a deliberate interpretive move on the part of either the Greek translator or a Hebrew scribe. The most common approach amongst scholars, he says, is to dismiss the Septuagint reading as inferior, although he cites a number of scholars who offer explanations for why a tradent might have changed “three” to “forty” in the transmission of the Hebrew text and argues that a good case can be made for either reading in terms of narrative flow. Moberly’s own explanation is that the interpretation of Jonah 3:4 is inseparable from how one interprets the figure of Jonah subsequent to the fish incident. He notes that the prevailing view in the commentaries is that Jonah has learned his lesson and truly repented and subsequently faithfully fulfilled the task for which he was commissioned. Moberly, however, reads the story as Tribble and Fretheim do; namely, that Jonah proceeded reluctantly and half-heartedly (Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 180; Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah*, 107-8.) He argues that “three days” has a greater sense of urgency than “forty days” and that the Septuagint reading was probably the result of the translators viewing Jonah positively and delivering an urgent message which would facilitate a response. Moberly therefore regards the MT as “more original” on the basis that it is the “harder reading” and consistent with a portrayal of Jonah as unwilling to deliver a message which would engender Nineveh’s repentance. While I am inclined to agree with Moberly that the context suggests Jonah was reluctant to facilitate Nineveh’s repentance, and I understand his reasoning that “three days” would carry a sense of urgency which might produce the kind of response we see in the story, it is equally plausible that the shorter time span may, in Jonah’s mind, have been deemed insufficient time for the message, regardless of how urgent, to have produced a response in a city which was so large and so unlikely to respond to a foreign preacher. Either time period would work with my interpretation of *Jonah* and my preference for the Septuagint’s “three days” is based primarily on the recurrence of “three days” throughout the story. I am aware of the difficulty that if the Septuagint faithfully represents a *Vorlage* which is older than the MT, it is uncertain how the MT would come to have “forty” instead of “three.” The best explanation may be Van Leeuwen’s who has noted that it was forty years from the time of Amos’ prophecy of the Day of the LORD to its fulfilment in 722 BCE, and the “mere

Jonah's message is unusual in that it does not contain any of the expected prophetic formulae: there is no announcement that this is a message from the LORD; there is no explanation of the reason for Nineveh's destruction; and there is no call for repentance. I should mention again the ambiguity in Jonah's oracle which I discussed in more detail on page 70 where I noted that the word translated *overthrown* from the *Niphal* of  $\text{הפך}$  can also mean *to be changed* or *altered*. There may be a deliberate semantic ambiguity here that they might be either *overthrown* or *transformed*. This lack of clarity in Jonah's message suggests that it could be satirical: by preaching a confusing or uncertain message the prophet could almost guarantee there would be a poor response. Ironically, the message which seemed intended to fail was uncharacteristically successful.

### **In the royal court**

Scholars have discussed whether the use of the term "king" is an anachronism or whether it could be applied to governors or rulers prior to Sennacherib making Nineveh the capital of Assyria c.700BCE. Allen, for example, says "The reference to the 'king of Nineveh' instead of to 'king of Assyria' betrays a remoteness from historical actuality."<sup>27</sup> Lawrence thinks the reference to the proclamation by the "king and his nobles" (3:7) may refer to the King of Assyria who was the effective king of Nineveh in name only, ruling together with "powerful provincial governors, who acted as virtual monarchs in their own domains although generally professing allegiance to the Assyrian crown."<sup>28</sup> He concludes that the reference to the "king and his nobles" is consonant with an eighth-century date for

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forty *days*" of Jonah's prophecy sets up a retrospective theological contrast. Van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve," 45.

<sup>27</sup> Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 186.

<sup>28</sup> Paul J.N. Lawrence, "Assyrian Nobles and the Book of Jonah," *Tyndale Bulletin* 37 (1986): 130.

both the mission and writing of the book of *Jonah*.<sup>29</sup> Sasson comes to a different conclusion, arguing that imprecision of titles in biblical narrative is not infrequent.<sup>30</sup>

The actions of the king described in 3:6 may be a deliberate contrast with Jehoiakim's actions described in Jeremiah, as Wolff has noted.

The king of Nineveh is neither given a name nor assigned to any particular period. He seems rather to be portrayed as antitype to Jehoiakim, as we know him from Jeremiah 36 (A. Feuillet's view<sup>31</sup>). In Jerusalem there is no king who is prepared to rise from his throne in response to Jeremiah's prediction of disaster. Jehoiakim stays sitting in order to throw the prophet's words into the fire (Jer. 36:21ff). He does not cast off his royal robes (v. 24), nor does he order any fast. The disaster falls on "man and beast" (v.29; cf. *Jonah* 3:7f.). Jeremiah's hope that the people would listen afresh and repent, and that God would withdraw his word of judgment (vv. 3, 7) is not fulfilled. But all this is precisely what takes place in Nineveh, and it is described in vv. 8-10 in the same words. ... The satirical tone cannot be overlooked in this antithetical picture to Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup>

Sasson, on the other hand, sees a similarity between the king's penitence and Hezekiah's penitential acts in Jeremiah 26, and how the leader's penitence wards off a threat against a whole nation.<sup>33</sup> The fact that the threat against Judah in the time of Hezekiah came from the Assyrians under the command of Sennacherib of Nineveh makes for a tantalising connection. As I demonstrated in chapter 3, there are other allusions in *Jonah* to the prophecy of Jeremiah. John Sawyer argues that "the closest parallels to *Jonah* are to be found,

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<sup>29</sup> For a fuller discussion of the dating of *Jonah* see "Dating, the likely audience, and the target" on page 16.

<sup>30</sup> For example, "Pharaoh" is never used in Egyptian literature as a title of the ruler, the king of Israel is referred to as "king of Samaria" (1 Kings 21:1; 2 Kings 1:3), and Nebuchadnezzar is called "king of the Assyrians" (*Judith* 1:7, 11; 2:1, 4; 4:1). Sasson, *Jonah*, 249.

<sup>31</sup> André Feuillet, "Les Sources du Livre de Jonas," *Revue Biblique* 54, no. 2 (1947): 161-86.

<sup>32</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 145-6.

<sup>33</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 241.



not in short stories or moral instruction, but in the biographies of the prophets, especially Jeremiah and Elijah” and cites 1 Kings 19 and Jeremiah 20 as prime examples of prophetic biographies mimicked by the book of *Jonah*.<sup>34</sup> In the statement that “when God saw what they [the repentant Ninevites] did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it” we read an echo of the theme and terminology of Jeremiah’s prophecy in the potter’s house:

At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. ... Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings. (Jeremiah 18:7-8, 11b).

In fact, this text from Jeremiah is so important to understanding the book of *Jonah* that Nogalski thinks *Jonah* could be a midrash on the Jeremiah text.<sup>35</sup> The comparative superlative מִגְדוֹלָם וְעַד־קְטָנָם *from the greatest to the least* in 3:5 is not common in the Hebrew Bible and it inverts the phrasing of Jeremiah 6:13 מִקְטָנָם וְעַד־גְּדוֹלָם *from the least to the greatest*, which may suggest that the writer was not only familiar with Jeremiah but was deliberately alluding to it and perhaps parodying it.

In verse 6 כִּסָּהּ *he covered* is a *piel wayyiqtol* in the MT whereas in verse 8 the same root word is used as a *hithpael jussive* (וַיִּתְכַסּוּ *let them cover themselves*). This reverses the expected order. We might expect the king to cover *himself* but to call on humans *and animals*

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<sup>34</sup>Sawyer, *Prophecy and the Prophets of the Old Testament*, 114.

<sup>35</sup> Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, 403. Donald Stuart, however, cites scholars who argue for *Jonah* being a midrash on Obadiah, Amos or Joel, although he is of the view that it lacks the characteristics of later midrashim and cannot convincingly be demonstrated to be a didactic commentary on an earlier text, but appears to be primary material itself. (Stuart, “Jonah, Book of,” 458.) If *Jonah* was written or redacted later than these other prophetic books then there is a strong case for the writer to be alluding to or drawing on these earlier texts, even if it is not midrash.

to cover themselves highlights the ridiculous nature of the decree. The subject of the verb כִּסָּה in v.6 is unstated but can be inferred (i.e. he covered *himself*), although it would be grammatically better in this case to use the *hithpael*.<sup>36</sup> The opposite is the case, however, in v.8 where it would be grammatically more appropriate to use the *piel* when referring to the animals being covered by their owners. As part of a sequence which mocks the king and his proclamation, however, the reversal can be read as satire. There is a possible alliterative word play in the close placement of the words כִּסֵּא *throne* and כִּסָּה *cover*. There is a similar story of cattle wearing sackcloth in Judith 4:9-10 “And every man of Israel cried out to God with great fervour, and they humbled themselves with much fasting. They and their wives and their children and their cattle and every resident alien and hired labourer and purchased slave—they all put sackcloth around their waists.” As concerns within *Judith* “seem to reflect the trauma of the Maccabean revolt,” and is placed in Samaria “with no indication of sectarian strife within Judaism” it was probably written during the reign of John Hyrcanus (135-104 BCE).<sup>37</sup> It is therefore likely to have been written after *Jonah* and this text in *Judith* could have been influenced by the story in *Jonah* and should not be taken as evidence of an ancient near eastern practice of including cattle in acts of repentance.

There is, as we shall see, some scholarly debate about the sequence of events in this scene and whether or not they are recorded chronologically. If they are non-sequential it needs to be determined whether the re-ordering of events is due to redactional processes or scribal error, or if the writer has deliberately ordered the events for literary or rhetorical purposes. Magonet considers chapters 2 and 3 of *Jonah* to be “mirror images of each other” and detects a stepwise structure in each chapter so that whereas Jonah *descends* into the

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<sup>36</sup> The *piel* is common and is possibly used with the apparent meaning of *cover oneself* in six other places. The *hithpael* occurs in eight places. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 488.

<sup>37</sup> L.R. Helyer, “Judith,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (eds. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 625.

depths (both geographical and spiritual) the people of Nineveh *rise* to spiritual heights.<sup>38</sup> The narration of the sequence of events then is critical in order to have this literary effect. If we regard 3:6 as being in the appropriate place, as the textual evidence suggests, and that the verb should not be read as a pluperfect, as the grammatical evidence suggests,<sup>39</sup> then the sequence of events creates a comic impression of the king. The sequence is:

1. Jonah preaches (3:4)
2. The people believed God, proclaim a fast and put on sackcloth (3:5)
3. News reaches the king who also puts on sackcloth and sits in ashes (3:6)
4. The king proclaims a fast and commands that everyone puts on sackcloth (3:7)<sup>40</sup>

As the people proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth before news reached the king,<sup>41</sup> the king's proclamation would have merely ratified what they already done and would therefore have been superfluous. His proclamation though was not simply a repetition of the people's proclamation: it extended to the animals as well. This interpretation of the sequence

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<sup>38</sup> Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 60.

<sup>39</sup> Those who read the verb וַיָּבֵי in 3:6 as a pluperfect include Wolff who translates it rather awkwardly as [*For*] *the saying had (meanwhile) reached the king of Nineveh* (his brackets), calling it "a kind of flashback." (Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 144.) He finds similar "flashbacks" in 2:1 (1:17) and 4:6, following Lohfink's argument for the possibility of translating it as a pluperfect. (Norbert Lohfink, "Jona ging zur Stadt hinaus (Jona 4,5)," *BZ NF*, no. 5 (1961).) Ibn Ezra held the view that the decree in v. 7 preceded the events in v.5, probably reading the verb as a pluperfect. (Zlotowitz, *Yonah/Jonah*, 125.) However, see my later comments on the pluperfect in *Jonah* on page 242 in my section on the problem of 4:5.

<sup>40</sup> Sasson also thinks the reactions of Nineveh's citizens and its king are simply following a sequential order. (Sasson, *Jonah*, 247.) Cf. Stuart who thinks that the "king's decree adds impetus and official sanction to what is already well under way." Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 493.

<sup>41</sup> How this news reached the royal court is not detailed in *Jonah*. Couey notes that "Extrabiblical texts from Mari, Nineveh, and Lachish show that royal officials frequently monitored prophetic activity and sent reports to the king as appropriate." J. Blake Couey, "Amos vii 10-17 and Royal Attitudes Toward Prophecy in the Ancient Near East," *VT* 58, no. 3 (2008): 313.

of events portrays the king as powerless and an object of ridicule. The Ninevites' sudden and unquestioning repentance in response to a vague or ambiguous message from an unknown foreign prophet which, at least in the way the narrator presents it, did not include a call to repentance, is hyperbolic. If the writer is being satirical the use of hyperbole in such a context would suggest they are being mocked. However, the king of Nineveh is the main butt of the joke: after word has reached him that the people have "believed God"<sup>42</sup> and called for a fast, he responds with a proclamation merely formalising what the people had already decided but extending it to the animals as well. The king is thus made to appear to be powerless, governed by the mob but pretending to have regal power by issuing decrees to livestock. The penitence of the cattle is not simply hyperbolic: with one brush stroke the artist has painted an image of a king who is an ineffective buffoon.<sup>43</sup>

There is a further twist in the irony when the king explains his reasoning for his edict: "Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish" (3:9). Good describes this as "a piece of rather sophisticated theology."<sup>44</sup> It is not unknown in the Hebrew Bible for narrators to convey profound truths from the mouths of foreigners, and here it is probably a satirical device: the most profound statement in the story is not made by the prophet, or even by God, but by a foreigner who has just been mocked. Such a device has the effect of disarming the audience so they are receptive to the message: "See, this foreign fool understands it! Why don't you?" It stands in stark contrast with Jonah's later agitated response to God's compassion and suggests that the king of Nineveh is portrayed as having a better grasp of divine mercy and compassion than did the prophet. I

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<sup>42</sup> "Believed" is from the verbal root נָאֵם from which the name of Jonah's father is derived, possibly another word play.

<sup>43</sup> D.F.Rauber uses similar language, reading the whole scene as an exaggerated reaction bordering on buffoonery. Rauber, "Jonah - the prophet as Schlemiel," 33.

<sup>44</sup> Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 50.

argue that this is, in fact, the ‘punch line’ in the story. In this short pericope both the people of the city and the king are ridiculed. Is the writer therefore targeting foreigners in general, Assyrians in particular, or foreign rulers? David Valeta has argued that the book of Esther and the first six chapters of Daniel ridicule foreign leaders, and he suggests that Jonah has a similar satirical purpose.<sup>45</sup>

The decree of the king contains several wordplays. First, the noun טעם occurs in the phrase וּגְדָלְיָי מִטֶּעַם הַמֶּלֶךְ וּגְדָלְיָי *by the decree of the king and his nobles* (3:7) and has the meaning of an order or decree.<sup>46</sup> The root word appears a second time as a jussive, in the phrase אַל־יִטְעְמוּ מֵאֹמֶה *let them not taste anything*. The repetition of טעם, first as a noun and second as a jussive, with the meanings of *decree* and then *taste* is a clever ironic wordplay. Effectively the narrator is using an inversion and saying that what came from the king’s mouth was an order that nothing should enter the mouths of his subjects and their livestock.

There are several further indications of satire in the court scene. In addition to, or as part of, his “rather sophisticated theology,” the Ninevite king demonstrated an awareness of terminology and ideas found in the Hebrew Bible, or at least the theological issues which gave rise to or came out of those texts. When he explains his reasoning for his edict: “Who

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<sup>45</sup> David M. Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions: a Satirical Reading of Daniel 1-6* (ed. J. Cheryl Exum David J.A. Clines, Keith W. Whitlam; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 24-5. Brenner also cites this incident in *Jonah* as an example of an obtuse foreign ruler (Athalya Brenner, “Who’s Afraid of Feminist Criticism? Who’s Afraid of Biblical Humour? the Case of the Obtuse Foreign Ruler in the Hebrew Bible,” *JSOT* 19, no. 38 (1994): 42.)

<sup>46</sup> There is a similar usage of the word in Ezra 6:14 וְשָׂרְאֵל מִן־טֶעַם אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל *by decree of the God of Israel* in biblical Aramaic (similarly in Ezra 7:23 and repeatedly in Daniel, such as in Daniel 3:10 and 3:29). It has been argued that the noun טעם is an Aramaic word (see for example Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 152; Day, “Problems in the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah,” 34-36.) and that its appearance in *Jonah* is evidence of a late date of composition in the Persian era, although Landes argues for a Neo-Assyrian source and that Assyrian administrative customs and terminology “would doubtless have become known at least to some Israelites after 722 BCE, when Samaria fell to Assyria and the northern kingdom became an Assyrian province.” (Landes, “Linguistic Criteria and the Date of the Book of Jonah,” 156-57.) Koehler and Baumgartner suggest that טעם is an Aramaic word derived from Akkadian *tēmum*. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 377.

knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish” (3:9) he uses the specific language of several texts in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and Chronicles which are discussed below.

וְלֹא־יִדְבַק בְּיָדְךָ מְאוּמָה מִן־הַחֲרָם לְמַעַן יָשׁוּב יְהוָה מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְנִתְּנָה־לְךָ רַחֲמִים וְרַחֲמָה וְהִרְבָּה פְּאֻשָׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתָּיִךְ:

Do not let anything devoted to destruction stick to your hand, so that the LORD may turn from his fierce anger and show you compassion, and in his compassion multiply you, as he swore to your ancestors.  
(Deuteronomy 13:18 [17])

The terminology *the LORD may turn from his fierce anger and show you compassion* which is used in Deuteronomy is remarkably similar to that used by the Ninevite king. The expression *God may turn and relent from his fiery anger* in 3:9 contains the verb *שוב* to *turn* twice, first in the *yiqtol* and then in the *qatal*, and echoes the king’s commandment that the city should *turn from their evil ways* (v.8). The threefold repetition provides an emphasis which is developed further in v.10

וַיִּרְא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי־שָׁבוּ מִדְרָכָם הָרָעָה וַיִּנָּחַם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה:

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

The root *נחם* *changed his mind* appears again in 4:2 when Jonah refers to the attributes of God, alluding to Exodus 32:12, 14 and 34:6-7.

**Exodus 32:12, 14**

שוב מִתְּרוֹן אַפֶּךָ וְהִנָּחֵם עַל־הַרְעָה לְעַמֶּךָ

Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people.

וַיִּנָּחֵם יְהוָה עַל־הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לְעַמּוֹ

And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

**Exodus 34:6-7**

רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אֶרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חַסְדֵּךָ וְאֱמֻת

Merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

נֹצֵר חַסְדֵּךָ לְאַלְפִים נִשְׂא עוֹן וְפֹשַׁע וְחַטָּאת וְנִקָּה לֹא נִקָּה

keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet

by no means clearing the guilty,

Most strikingly, the phraseology of Jonah 3:10 is almost identical to Exodus 32:14.

**Exodus 32:14**

וַיִּנָּחֵם יְהוָה עַל־הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לְעַמּוֹ:

And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

**Jonah 3:10**

וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה

And God relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing upon them; and he did not do it.

The Exodus text refers specifically to a calamity upon the people of Israel which was averted due to Moses' intercession. In *Jonah* the disaster was averted, not due to any intercession, but to their *deeds*, emphasised by the threefold repetition of עָשָׂה. First we have וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־ *God saw what they did*, second וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם

םִלְּ God relented of the evil which he said he would do, and finally וְלֹא עָשָׂה and he did not do it. The first use of the verb refers to the deeds of the Ninevites, while the second and third refer to the proposed but averted deeds of God. In both cases the deeds related to הַרְעָה *the evil*, either to the evil of which the Ninevites repented, or the evil from which God relented. The reappearance of רָעָה in the next verse (4:1) with reference to Jonah (וַיִּרְעֶה אֶל־יֹנָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה) *and it was evil to Jonah, a great evil*) further emphasises the thematic importance of רָעָה which, in the space of two verses, is applied to the evil deeds of the Ninevites, the calamitous actions of God, and Jonah's state of mind. The Ninevites and God both repent or relent of the evil which they committed or threatened, while nothing is said of any change in Jonah's way of thinking. There are consequently two sets of contrasts in the use of Exodus 32:14 by the writer. First, God's relenting in the case of Israel against that of Nineveh highlights that the former was the result of the intercession of Moses on behalf of the people while the latter was the consequence of a change in behaviour. Second, there was a change of behaviour by the Ninevites and a concomitant change of mind by God, but no apparent change whatsoever in Jonah. The application of רָעָה to Nineveh, God and Jonah highlights the nuance of the word in Hebrew and by being used in close proximity calls into question the nature of *evil*. The רָעָה committed by Nineveh is how the story began (1:2) and what triggered this whole sequence of events. Yet the threatened actions by God as a consequence of their רָעָה is also described as רָעָה. The Ninevites vow to repent of their רָעָה, God therefore averts his רָעָה, and Jonah's reaction is to become רָעָה. The writer's decision to use the same word for all three parties forces the reader or listener to think about the nature of רָעָה. The writer could, for example, have used a different word for the calamity which God threatened to bring on Nineveh, such as אִיד, הָזָה or אֲבָד which all appear several times in the Hebrew Bible with reference to calamities or destruction. There is no suggestion that Jonah's רָעָה was on a par with Nineveh's or that God's רָעָה was justified while Jonah's was not. Rather, the writer seems to



be confronting his audience with an argument that the nature of רָעָה is questionable. This is further highlighted in 4:4-9 where two key words are טוֹב and יָטַב which also question what it is to be *good*, and I will discuss this in the next chapter. If one cannot determine what *evil* is, or what is *good*, then one equally cannot know what it is to *repent* or *relent* of the unknowable evil, and the king's question מִי יוֹדֵעַ *who knows?* (3:9) acquires a wider contextual relevance.

Joel 2:13-14 alludes similarly to the attributes in Exodus and combines phraseology from the two Exodus texts in a similar way to the writer of *Jonah*.

וְשׁוּבוּ אֵלַיִהוּנָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם כִּי־חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם הוּא אֶרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְנִחָם עַל־הַרְעָה

Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

מִי יוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנִחָם

Who knows whether he will not turn and relent?

Watts concluded from this that “both Joel and Jonah have read Exod 34:6 in light of 32:12-14. Joel sees the reprieve as a possibility depending on repentance. Jonah sees it as a fact based on its repentance.”<sup>47</sup> In doing so, Joel uses a phrase which is identical to one in *Jonah*: מִי יוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנִחָם *Who knows if he will turn and relent?* Interestingly, this question is asked by both the prophet Joel and the king of Nineveh. Is the writer implying that the Ninevite king was familiar with Joel as well as Deuteronomy, and possibly with Jeremiah and Chronicles? The idea is comical, which may very well be the point of the ridiculousness of the allusions. What he is almost certainly doing is using the Exodus and Deuteronomy texts

<sup>47</sup> Watts, “A Frame for the Book of the Twelve: Hosea 1-3 and Malachi,” 215. I argued earlier that it is more likely that *Jonah* was responding to Joel and takes the quotation from there rather than alluding directly to Exodus 34:6 and reworking it in precisely the same way as Joel. See page 134 and following.

in a similar way to the writers of Jeremiah, Joel and Chronicles, suggesting he was part of a conversation about the meaning of these texts.<sup>48</sup> The king of Nineveh would have had no knowledge of the prophet Joel, so by putting Joel's very question on his lips he is portrayed as being more knowledgeable than he actually is, and thus is ridiculed. The writer therefore simultaneously ridicules the foreigner and makes the Joel text the central issue of the story, as we shall see later in this thesis. By putting the precise terminology of these texts into the mouth of the king the narrator is creating a word-association in the minds of his audience who would have been aware of the theological discussion about them. The audience would realise that this is simply a device and have no expectation that the king was familiar with the actual texts or traditions which are attributed to him.<sup>49</sup>

There may be some kind of "prophetic drama" being played out in the king's removal of *אָרְרָתוֹ* *his robes* (3:6), which Stacey argues is a prophet's garment, being the word used for the rough garment of goat's hair worn by Elijah (1 Kings 19:13, 19; 2 Kings 2:8, 13f), and

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<sup>48</sup> The question of when *Jonah* was written is dealt with earlier in this thesis (page 16). It should be said here, on the question of whether *Jonah* and *Joel* were part of the same conversation, that Kim argues that "though one cannot rule out the possibility of Joel and Jonah as contemporary, Jonah in many ways responds to Joel, with corresponding literary and thematic similarities." Setting this against the background of the Diaspora of the Persian period, he understands *Jonah* to be demonstrating a religio-hermeneutical tension and struggle for survival for the people of Yehud. The possibility of piety and penance for outsiders offers hope for the disenfranchised Yehudim. Kim, "Jonah read intertextually," 527.

<sup>49</sup> We cannot be certain, of course, when *Jonah* was written in relation to the writing of Deuteronomy, Jeremiah or Chronicles, so the writer may not have been directly alluding to any of these texts. The similarity in language may very well reflect a contemporaneous discussion about the theological issues, and these other texts may have been written against the same background or around the same time. 2 Chronicles cites Hezekiah's reforms as designed "so that his fierce anger may turn away from you ... For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him." (29:10; 30:8-9). I am not suggesting that the writer of *Jonah* is implying that the king of Nineveh was familiar with Chronicles, and the relative dating of *Jonah* and Chronicles is irrelevant to this discussion. What these references do suggest, in my view, is that they were all part of a dialogue over a period of time arising from the terminology in Exodus 32 and 34.

other prophets (Zechariah 13:4), and possibly having cultic significance.<sup>50</sup> The more common word *מְעִיל* is used elsewhere of a robe worn by men of rank, and specifically of a king's robe (e.g. 1 Chronicles 15:27). An even more suitable word in the context of *Jonah* may have been *פְּתִיגִיל* which is used in Isaiah 3:24 to contrast rich robes with sackcloth.<sup>51</sup> An allusion to *prophetic* garb in Jonah 3:6 is therefore certainly possible. If I am correct that in the earlier flight scene the fish was caricatured as a prophet, then there may very well be a parallel in the court scene where the central theological issue of the story is articulated by the king. It is tempting to see a prophet's garment somehow playing a part in what could be described as a "prophetic drama" but to do so may be seeing an allusion to the *אֲדָרְתָּהוּ* of the prophets where none was intended. It would be a strange choice of word, however, if by the *removal* of these robes the narrator was casting the Ninevite king in some kind of *prophetic* role. Several ancient Mesopotamian texts reveal that Assyrian and Babylonian kings were seen as embodiments of divine revelation, having extraordinary knowledge and wisdom.<sup>52</sup> The writer of *Jonah* may have chosen *אֲדָרְתָּהוּ* as an appropriate term to imply that the king was removing the cultic symbol of his divine knowledge, as a precursor to an apparent agnosticism in his question *מִי יוֹדֵעַ* *Who knows?* (3:9).<sup>53</sup>

The cluster of paronomasia, the inversion of phrases, parodic allusions to other biblical texts such as Jeremiah, Deuteronomy and possibly Joel, the ridiculing of both the populace of Nineveh and the king, and the attribution of sophisticated theology to the king who has been ridiculed, all combine to strengthen the case for the reading of the court scene

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<sup>50</sup> Although it is also mentioned in a non-prophetic context in Joshua 7:21, 24. David Stacey, *Prophetic Drama in the Old Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1990), 85.

<sup>51</sup> *תַּחַת פְּתִיגִיל מִמְּגֵרַת שֵׁק* *instead of a rich robe, a binding of sackcloth*

<sup>52</sup> Leonidas Kalugila, *The Wise King: Studies in Royal Wisdom as Divine Revelation in the Old Testament and its Environment* (The Wise King; Lund: LiberLäromedel/Gleerup, 1980), 47-61.

<sup>53</sup> It is also possible that the portrayal is simply one of the king removing his symbols of authority or splendour, although this does not diminish the drama of the scene.

as satire. The target of the satire, however, is not immediately clear. Initial possibilities include the people of Nineveh, their king, the theology which is parodied in the kings' words, or all three. It will become more evident in the following scene that for Jonah the problem is a theological one, and God's compassionate response to Nineveh's repentance seems to him to be out of step with his overwhelming judgments on Israel. At that point it becomes more evident that the main target of the satire in this scene is not the repenting Ninevites, but a theology of repentance which does not adequately account for the unpredictability of God's mercy, and this is articulated in the question *מִי יֵדָע?* *Who knows?* (3:9).

## Chapter 7: “That is why I fled to Tarshish”

### The turning point

The fourth scene in *Jonah* sees the prophet move outside the city of Nineveh and enter into a dialogue with God. I regard it as the turning point as Jonah, for the first time in the story, articulates his frustrations and the reason for disobeying the first imperative to go to Nineveh, and God is portrayed in a new light as Jonah’s tormenter. The scene, in my view, has a series of twists and turns as the narrator subtly re-images Jonah as a heroic figure in confronting God and raises doubts about whether God is at times capricious. The scene includes a reference to a creedal formula emphasising God’s mercy and compassion, but in a final turn raises questions about the unpredictability of that mercy.

Jason LeCureux argues that the Book of the Twelve is unified around the theme of *שוב* *return*, in the sense of *יְהוָה יָחֵן וְיָשׁוּב אֵלֵיכֶם* *return to me says the LORD of hosts and I will return to you* (Zechariah 1:3) and points out that the theme appears in some form in each of the component books of the Twelve. In *Jonah* the word occurs five times, four of these clustered together in 3:8-10 in the section dealing with the repentance of Nineveh. LeCureux argues that the story of *Jonah* opens salvation to the nations, allowing them to repent and receive salvation, and denounces God’s people for their failure to repent.<sup>1</sup>

If Yhwh will be gracious towards a pagan nation as awful as Nineveh, then surely he would be gracious to his covenant people. The covenant of Exod. 34:6–7 is brought into the forefront and emphatically affirmed. Yes, Yhwh is compassionate and yes, Yhwh will relent and bless his people – if only they would heed his words.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the Twelve*, 143-44.

<sup>2</sup> LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the Twelve*, 144.

While I agree that *שוב* is an important *Leitwort* in *Jonah* I do not agree with this conclusion about the predominant message of *Jonah*, for several reasons. First, rather than Exodus 34:6-7 being emphatically affirmed, *Jonah*'s mimicking of the precise form of the attributes text by Joel (2:13-14), together with the repetition of Joel's question *מִי יוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנִחַם* *Who knows whether he will not turn and relent* in *Jonah* 3:9, is best understood as a parody of Joel rather than an affirmation of Exodus (see “Joel, Exodus 34:6-7 and the Problem of Theodicy” on page 131). Second, there is nothing in *Jonah* which specifically denounces Israel for their failure to repent, and this conclusion has to be read into the text rather than derived from it. Third, the conclusion to *Jonah* does not mention Nineveh's repentance and, combined with elements which ridicule the people (such as the description “who does not know his right hand from his left” in 4:11) and the declaration that God will not be concerned or troubled about them, questions the conclusion that the story is primarily one of repentance and salvation being offered to the nations. Having said that, LeCureux makes a helpful contribution to the discussion about the unifying features of the Twelve and drawing attention to the theme of *turning* or *returning*.

If *שוב* to *turn* or *return* is an important *Leitwort* in the Twelve then *Jonah* is no exception. The theme is introduced in the storm pericope: *וַיִּתְחַדּוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־הַיַּבֵּשָׁה* *the men rowed hard to return to land* (1:13). There the efforts of the mariners were frustrated *כִּי הֵיטֵב הַיָּם הוֹלֵךְ וְסַעַר עֲלֵיהֶם* *because the sea grew even more stormy against them*. By implication, because the storm had been caused by God hurling a wind to the sea (1:4), it was God who prevented their return to the shore.<sup>3</sup> If the storm scene was written in such a way as to parallel

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<sup>3</sup> The writer plays with *שוב* to *turn* in various ways. There is also a likely wordplay with the similar sounding *ישב* to *sit* in 3:6 and 4:5 where the penitent king sits in ashes while the angry Jonah sits in the shade waiting.

CHAPTER 7: “THAT IS WHY I FLED TO TARSHISH”

the Nineveh scene then there is a marked contrast in the way the word שׁוּב is used in both scenes.

|      |  |
|------|--|
| 1:13 | The sailors row hard to שׁוּב <i>return</i> to shore     |
| 3:8  | The king commands the people to שׁוּב <i>turn</i> to God |
| 3:8  | The king hopes God will שׁוּב <i>change</i> his mind ... |
| 3:9  | .. and שׁוּב <i>relent</i> from his fierce anger         |
| 3:10 | God saw the שׁוּב <i>turning</i> of Nineveh              |

In the storm scene the sailors turn to shore but are frustrated by the actions of God in the worsening of the storm. If there is a parallel between the storm and Nineveh pericopes, then the different uses of שׁוּב highlights a contrast between the mariners who could not *return* because they were prevented by God, and the people of Nineveh who acted out the imperative in Zechariah 1:3 – וָאֶשׁוּב אֶלֵיכֶם – *Return to me and I will return to you* – in the hope that God would also turn and relent. This may be an important clue to the cause of Jonah’s frustration. In the king’s precise use of the wording of Joel 2:14 – מִי יוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנִחַם *Who knows? He may turn and relent* – there is a direct challenge based on the promise in Zechariah in what appears to be an allusive parody of that text.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” And the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. (Jonah 3:10-4:5)

This sequence of events in this section of *Jonah* is problematic, and Sasson astutely notes that “how we apportion Jonah into integral units is more critical on this occasion than previously; for it can influence our very understanding of Jonah’s denouement.”<sup>4</sup> However, the difficulty is not only in how we divide the book into units, but also how we read the sequence of events in chapter 4. My interpretation of this pericope makes sense of the major difficulties, reinforces that the best way to read the book is as satire, and confirms the proposition that theodicy is a major underlying concern of the story.

The cause of Jonah’s displeasure is not immediately apparent. The narrator made two comments about Jonah’s state of mind: first, *וַיִּרַע אֶל־יְהוָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה* *but it displeased Jonah exceedingly* and second *וַיִּחַר לוֹ* *and he was angry*. Neither statement is without its difficulties. The first difficulty for the interpreter is determining the cause of Jonah’s displeasure. As I noted in the previous chapter (see page 230), the repetition of *רָעָה* in these verses (3:10; 4:1) further emphasises the thematic importance of *רָעָה* which, in the space of two verses, is applied to the evil deeds of the Ninevites, the calamitous actions of God, and to Jonah’s state of mind: *וַיִּרַע אֶל־יְהוָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה* *and it was evil to Jonah, a great evil*. The Ninevites and God both repent or relent of the evil which they committed or threatened, while nothing is said of any change in Jonah’s way of thinking. Sasson points out that the *וַיִּרַע אֶל־* occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, while *וַיִּרַע לְ* is better attested, and suggests that its function is to emphasise that Jonah endured, rather than initiated, the feeling of displeasure.<sup>5</sup> The narrator does not say explicitly what it was that displeased Jonah. It may have been the repentance of Nineveh, possibly because he thought that it was insincere, having been a reaction to a threat of calamity. Once the immediate danger had passed they might relapse into their previous evil

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<sup>4</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 270.

<sup>5</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 273.



ways. Alternately, Jonah may have been displeased that God relented from his plan to overthrow the city. Dell suggests that Jonah may have been annoyed that his prophecy was unfulfilled, and “there is the possibility that Jonah is about unfulfilled prophecy in general and so implicitly showing up the inadequacy of the prophetic word and of the prophetic view of God.”<sup>6</sup> The most likely reading is that the subject of the sentence is the whole of 3:10 and Jonah was displeased by both events.<sup>7</sup>

However, this raises an important question which is often overlooked in the commentaries: how did Jonah know that God had relented? If the threatened disaster was to occur *עוד ארבעים יום* *within forty days* without a direct revelation from God (about which the story is silent) Jonah must have waited for that period of time to know whether or not God had changed his mind. Yet it is not until later (4:5) that the narrator explains that “Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.” Unless this is a *flashback* as Wolff suggests,<sup>8</sup> the sequence of narrated events suggests that Jonah waited for some time in the city, long enough to know that God had changed his mind. He then went outside the city and waited again. This would mean there were two periods of “waiting.” I noted previously (see page 220) that the Masoretic Text of Jonah has *עוד ארבעים יום* *yet forty days* (3:4) while the Septuagint has *ἔτι τρεῖς ἡμέραι* *yet three days*. The narrator has already provided the detail that “Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth” (3:3) and that “Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey” (3:4) when he preached his message of Nineveh’s impending destruction. If we follow the Septuagint reading, by the time Jonah finished his traverse through Nineveh the three days had almost expired and he

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<sup>6</sup> Dell, “Reinventing the Wheel,” 95.

<sup>7</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 160.

<sup>8</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 151, 159-60, 169.

would not have had to wait very long to see that no calamity was to befall the city within that timeframe. The Septuagint reading therefore has considerable merit given this sequence in 3:10-4:5. Jonah would then have been still in the city when he prayed the prayer in 4:2 “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”

Before dealing with the issue of Jonah’s agitation we need to consider further some proposed solutions to the problem of 4:5 and the sequence of events.

### **The problem of 4:5**

Several scholars<sup>9</sup> have noted a problem with the sequence of events in the closing scene, with verse 5 seeming to be out of place or in conflict with its context. There are primarily two problems with this verse. First, it says Jonah built a booth to provide shade while he waited outside the city to see what would happen, yet the next verse says God provided the קִיקְיוֹן *plant* for shade, which made Jonah very happy. There is no hint, however, that Jonah’s booth was inadequate and therefore no explanation as to why God should provide shade for him. The second problem relates to the timing of this event. Verse 1 says that Nineveh had repented and Jonah consequently voiced his displeasure to God. What then was his purpose in subsequently יָרָאָה מֵהֶהָרָה בְּעִיר כַּעִיר *waiting to see what would become of the city?*

There have been two main approaches to resolving these problems. Tribble has argued that of the various solutions that have been proposed for the difficulties contained in 4:5, the most feasible is the proposition that this verse has been misplaced and rightly belongs after

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<sup>9</sup> Including Landes, “Dissonances,” 284-7; Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 231 n.16; Sasson, *Jonah*, 287-90; Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 118 n.33, 205-6.

3:4.<sup>10</sup> That is to say, between Jonah’s preaching that “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” and the people believing God and declaring a fast. There is, however, no textual evidence that this verse was ever positioned elsewhere, and no plausible explanation for why or how the verse came to be misplaced.

Wolff, and others, have argued that the *wayyiqtol* verbs in verse 5 are pluperfect and refer to events in the past. This idea goes back to at least Abraham Ibn Ezra in the twelfth century.<sup>11</sup> Neither explanation resolves the problem of why God should provide shade for Jonah when he had already built a booth for protection from the elements. Wolff prefers a “flashback” explanation and translates v.5 as a pluperfect: “(For) Jonah had gone out of the city and had sat down ...”<sup>12</sup> Tribble, however, claims that “to interpret the imperfect with *waw* consecutive as a pluperfect, falters seriously on a point of Hebrew grammar. It is a moot question whether the imperfect with *waw* consecutive ever denotes the pluperfect.”<sup>13</sup> Waltke and O’Connor admit that the interpretation of the *wayyiqtol* as a pluperfect is controversial, but it is going too far for Tribble to say that the argument “falters seriously on a point of Hebrew grammar” as scholars are not agreed on the grammar of the pluperfect. However, neither explanation is necessary if we accept the order of events as the narrator recorded them, and in my view this would be the preferred way to read the sequence.

From the writer’s point of view the chronological sequence of events in 4:1-6 may have been less important than the literary or rhetorical effect of ordering them in the manner

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<sup>10</sup> Tribble, “Studies in the Book of ‘Jonah’,” 102.

<sup>11</sup> *Mikraoth Gedoloth* cited in Tribble, “Studies in the Book of ‘Jonah’,” 96.

<sup>12</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 151, 159-60, 169.

<sup>13</sup> Tribble, “Studies in the Book of ‘Jonah’,” 97. Waltke and O’Connor, on the other hand, argue that: “Sometimes the situation represented by  $\text{ו}$  does not succeed the prior one either in time or as a logical consequence; rather it explains the former situation. In a sense, this *epexegetical* use of *wayyqtl* is the opposite of the summarising one. The major fact or situation is stated first, and then the particulars or details, component or concomitant situations are filled in.” Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 551.

he has. More important than discussing whether v.5 has been misplaced, or if the apparent problems in the sequence indicate levels of redaction, is to ask what is the *literary* purpose for its positioning here? The scene begins with an emphasis by way of repetition on the words *turned* and *evil*. Both Nineveh and God are said to *turn* while *evil* is also attributed to both parties. Later, God provided the קִיָּקִיּוֹן to save Jonah from **his** evil. The emphasis shifts to focussing on Jonah’s *anger* which is contrasted with God being *slow to anger*, and the question whether it is *good* to be angry or good to die. Jonah and God talk past each other: Jonah asserts that it would be good to die, while God questions if it is good to be angry. While Jonah initially avoids the question he eventually answers it while returning to his original assertion: it *is* good to be angry, enough to die. The underlying question is “what is good?” Set against the earlier statements that both Nineveh and God have turned from their respective evils, the dialogue about what is good brings into sharper focus the interplay between good and evil. Nineveh has turned from their evil behaviour and God has relented from inflicting evil-calamity on them – will Jonah turn from his ‘evil’?

### **Jonah’s state of mind**

The second part of the description of Jonah’s unhappiness says וַיִּהְיֶה לוֹ *and he was angry*. Sasson challenges this interpretation and says “It is important to assess what kind of emotion Jonah is experiencing as he is about to blurt out his thoughts.”<sup>14</sup> The verb derives from a root קָרָה meaning “to be hot” and is the standard biblical Hebrew word for anger which literally means “to be/become hot” (hence why anger can be *kindled* as in Genesis 44:18) and is frequently coupled with אָף (as וַיִּהְיֶה־אָף) with the literal meaning of “his nose

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<sup>14</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 273.



afflicted?”<sup>23</sup> Hebrew words describing emotions are often less nuanced than in English and have a greater scope for meaning than English words; that is to say, a Hebrew word often has multiple senses and meanings that in some other languages would be represented by different discrete emotions. These ancient versions lend support to the proposition that Jonah’s primary emotion which is described here was one of despondency, agitation or confusion, but not necessarily anger.

Such a state of mind makes it easier to understand Jonah’s plea וְעַתָּה יְהוָה קַח־נָא אֶת־נַפְשִׁי *Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live* (4:3). It is difficult to reconcile this with anger, but not so with despondency or confusion, although it is not immediately apparent why Jonah made this plea following on from his confession that he knows God to be gracious, merciful, slow to anger and one who relents from disaster (4:2). Jonah said כִּי יָדַעְתִּי *for I knew* that God is gracious. He could know this dogmatically, and his use of the wording of Exodus 34:6 suggests he was familiar with either that text, one of the other texts in the Hebrew Bible which alluded to it, or an oral tradition behind these texts. He could also know that God is gracious and merciful from his own experience. The narrative in 2 Kings 14:23-27 says that despite the sins of Jeroboam II God restored the borders of Israel, “according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet,” כִּי־רָצָה יְהוָה אֶת־עַנְיָ *because the LORD saw the distress of Israel was very bitter* (v.25). While the narrative does not use any of the words of the rubric in Exodus 34:6 or Jonah 4:2, the idea

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<sup>23</sup> et dixit dominus ad ionam: si uehementer contristatus es tu? uerbum hebraicum hadra lach, et iratus es tu, et contristatus es tu, transferri potest: quod utrumque et prophetae, et domini personae conuenit, quod uel iratus sit, ne uideretur apud niniuitas fuisse mentitus, uel contristatus, intellegens israel esse periturum. et rationabiliter non ei dicit, male iratus es, uel contristatus es, ne uideretur reprehendere contristatum. Translation of the Latin in the main text from Jerome, *Commentary on Jonah by Saint Jerome* (ed. John Litteral; trans. Robin MacGregor; Ashland, Kentucky: Litteral’s Christian Library Publications, 2014).

behind the story is that God acted for Israel’s benefit because they were in distress, which is a gracious and merciful response.

While Jonah knew both dogmatically and experientially that God could be merciful, his actions during the storm suggest on the contrary that he did not expect God to act in this way at all times. While the mariners prayed Jonah slept (1:5). Even when he was urged to pray by the captain (1:6) he apparently remained silent. When the lots fell to him his response was to direct the mariners to hurl him to the sea (1:12). These are not the actions of a person who “knows” God to be gracious and merciful without reservation. They are, on the other hand, the actions of one who expects that God will “by no means clear the guilty” (Exodus 34:7). Jonah’s despondency or confusion, therefore, was most likely the result of an inability to understand how God could be merciful to Israel at times but would yet allow its enemies to survive and prosper, even at Israel’s peril. The implied reader may also have had an expectation that, as a prophet, Jonah had an ability to foresee the future. This seems to be implied in the statement in the 2 Kings narrative that Israel’s borders were restored “according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah” (14:25). It suggests that Jonah received some revelation from God about the future. While a prophet would not necessarily know *everything* about the future, Amos 3:6-7 asserts that, at least as far as Israel is concerned, “Does disaster befall a city, unless the LORD has done it? Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.” If the writer of *Jonah* was familiar with the traditions contained in the book of Amos, as I argued in chapter 3, then this assertion may very well be behind the implication that Jonah was confused or depressed because he *knew* that Assyria would bring calamity to Israel in the future. Consequently, his confession that he knew God to be merciful could be both a criticism of God’s actions in being compassionate to an ungodly city that would bring about

Israel’s demise, and confusion as to why God would *not* be compassionate to his people at the same time.

God’s response to Jonah’s prayer was to ask *לָךְ הֲהֵיטֵב הָרָה לָךְ* *Do you do well to be depressed, confused or annoyed?* (4:4). Jonah’s answer, however, was not forthcoming and no explanation is provided by the narrator for his lack of response. It appears that he either had no answer, or he ignored the question. Perhaps he even treated it with contempt. Instead of answering he left the city, sat to the east of it, and made a booth for himself while he waited under its shade to see what would become of the city (4:5). This is somewhat puzzling as the narrator has already made it clear that God relented of the disaster he threatened to bring on Nineveh, and Jonah knew this. The whole point of Jonah’s prayer is that he knew this and was concerned by it. To have Jonah waiting to see if God would relent and spare the city would contradict what had immediately preceded it in the story. The only other possibility would be that Jonah waited to see if God would change his mind yet again, this time in response to Jonah’s prayer. Although he did not explicitly ask God to destroy the city, Jonah had made his point, and rather than answer God’s question he sat and waited to see if God would answer *him*. There is a resemblance here of Job’s plea for God to answer him (23:2-5) and his complaint that “I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me” (30:20).

The sequence of events in this scene can be outlined as follows. Repeated words are *italicised* and their thematic relevance will be discussed below.

1. Nineveh *turned* from their *evil*
  - a. God *changed his mind* about the *evil* he was about to do
    - i. This was “*evil* to Jonah a great *evil*”
      1. Jonah became *angry* (or *depressed*)



2. He prays to God complaining that he “knew” God to be
  - i. gracious
  - ii. merciful
  - iii. *slow to anger*
  - iv. abounding in steadfast love
  - v. ready to *relent* from punishing
3. Jonah asks God to take his life because it is (more) *good* to die (rather) than to live
  - a. God asks “Is it *good* to be *angry/depressed*?”
    - i. Jonah went out and sat down *east* of the city, made a booth for himself, sat under it in the *shade*, and waited to see what would happen
4. God *provided* the plant as *shade* for Jonah, to save him from his *evil*, so Jonah was happy
5. God *provided* a worm to attack the plant so that it withered
6. God *provided* a sultry *east* wind
7. Jonah becomes faint and asks God (a second time) to take his life because it is (more) *good* to *die* (rather) than to live
  - a. God asks “Is it *good* to be *angry/depressed*?”
    - i. Jonah replies “It is *good* to be *angry/depressed*, enough to *die*”
8. God says: You are concerned/troubled about the bush ... and/but I am not concerned/troubled about Nineveh

### **Under the קִיקִיּוֹן**

In the final pericope the LORD God appointed a קִיקִיּוֹן *plant* to provide additional shade for Jonah and “to save him from his discomfort.”

## CHAPTER 7: “THAT IS WHY I FLED TO TARSHISH”

The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. (4:6-7)

The identity of the קִיקִי is uncertain and is translated variously as “bush” (NRSV), “plant” (ESV), “gourd” (KJV), “vine” (NIV) and quite specifically as “castor oil plant” (JB). Koehler and Baumgartner identify this plant as “most probably the castor oil plant” (*rucinus communis*), suggesting that the Greek κίκι *castor oil* is derived from the same source as קִיקִי, while noting that Aquila and Theodotion differ from other ancient Greek versions with κικεών.<sup>24</sup> Sasson suggests that with κικεών Aquila and Theodotion “found it prudent just to approximate a transcription of the Hebrew.”<sup>25</sup> A similar Greek word κικεών *kukeon* is derived from κικάω *to mix, stir* and referred to various drinks made by mixing or brewing a number of ingredients, most commonly water, barley and herbs.<sup>26</sup> There is, however, no connection between κικεών, κικεών and κίκι and castor oil is not listed as an ingredient in the brew. The Greek κίκι itself is almost certainly a transliteration of an Egyptian word with a similar sound and meaning:

This identification is supported by the likelihood that Hebrew קִיקִי is derived from Egyptian *k3k3*, *kyky*, which is attested beginning with the Middle Kingdom and clearly denotes the castor-oil plant.

The individualizing suffix קִי-, a common ending of Hebrew plant terms (cf. קִימִן, “rush, reed”), is a

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<sup>24</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 1099.

<sup>25</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 292. Theodotion has displayed a tendency throughout his translation of the Hebrew Bible for transliterating Hebrew words of uncertain meaning, especially plants, animals, vestments and regalia, rather than adopting a Greek rendering.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Homer’s *Iliad* lists its ingredients as Pramnian wine, barley flour, and grated goats cheese (XI, 638–64). The Homeric hymn to Demeter describes the potion as made from barley, water and “the tender leaves of *glechon*” (or pennyroyal *Mentha pelegium*). Homeric Hymn to Demeter, line 207 ff; in R Gordon Wasson, et al., *The road to Eleusis: Unveiling the secret of the mysteries* (North Atlantic Books, 2008), 74.

subsequent development. Greek κίκι, described and glossed by classical writers as the castor-oil plant (cf. Herodotus, Hist. 2.94; Dioscorides, Mat. med. 4.161; Pliny, Nat. 15.7), 725 is also a loan from Egyptian.<sup>27</sup>

One thing in favour of the identification as *ricinus* is an intriguing possibility that the worm which attacked it was larvae of *Olepa schleini*, a spectacular species of tiger moth recently rediscovered along some ravines close to Tel Aviv. These larvae feed on *Ricinus* shrubs and with their great numbers they cause extensive damage that may kill the plant in a short time. It “is the only insect which regularly infests *Ricinus communis* in the homeland of the redactor of the book Jonah.”<sup>28</sup> This presupposes, of course, that the קיקיין was a *ricinus* plant, but if the supposition is correct it suggests that the writer was drawing on memories from his native Israel.<sup>29</sup>

The Septuagint of Jonah 4:6, however, has κολοκύνθη *kolokynthi* for the Hebrew קיקיין, which is the origin of the English colocynth (*Citrullus colocynthis*), a prostrate vine which is relatively small and possibly the bitter-tasting wild vine referred to in the story in 2 Kings 4:39-40 known in Hebrew as פקעת תשדך.<sup>30</sup> This plant does not provide much shade and is an unlikely contender for the plant in *Jonah*. Muraoka identifies the κολοκύνθη as the

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<sup>27</sup> Noonan, “Foreign Loanwords,” 151. Robinson comes to a similar conclusion: “There seems no doubt that the Egyptians called the *ricinus* by the name *kiki* and that the name was borrowed by the Greeks. What is not established, however, is that קיקיין is a Hebraized version of the Egyptian name.” Bernard P. Robinson, “Jonah’s Qiqayon Plant,” *ZAW* 97, no. 3 (1985): 401.

<sup>28</sup> Axel Hausmann and Gunter C. Muller, “The Biblical Worms on Jonah’s *Ricinus* were *Olepa Schleini* larvae,” *Mitt. Munch. Ent. Ges* 95 (2006).

<sup>29</sup> This proposition also suggests that if the writer was “drawing on memories from his native Israel” that the story was written *outside* Israel and was therefore more likely to have been written in Babylon during the exile rather than in post-exilic Yehud. For reasons which I argue elsewhere in this thesis it is more probable, in my view, that *Jonah* was written in the post-exilic period. If Hausmann and Muller are right, then this may be evidence of a redactional layer or precursory material from the time of the exile.

<sup>30</sup> Jules Janick and Harry S. Paris, “Jonah and the ‘gourd’ at Nineveh: consequences of a classic mis-translation,” in *Proceedings of Cucurbitaceae* (2006), 351.

round gourd, *Cucurubita maxima*.<sup>31</sup> The calabash or bottle gourd (*Lagenaria siceraria*) is a better contender. It is a fast-growing climber generally grown for its fruit, is widely dispersed across the world, and was one of the first cultivated plants.<sup>32</sup>

Probably the most thorough attempt to analyse the various contenders for Jonah’s קִיקְיֹון and to correctly identify it was done by Bernard Robinson.<sup>33</sup> After looking at all the ancient versions and classical literature he concludes that if the choice is between *ricinus* and a gourd of some variety then “the gourd has perhaps the stronger case.” He also noted that some Assyrian texts refer to a plant called *kukkānītu(m)* found in a royal garden, but which has not yet been identified. He argued that the writer of *Jonah* may have used this Assyrian plant name, thinking it was appropriate to the geographical context of his story, or to give it an exotic flavour.<sup>34</sup>

Gildas Hamel argues that there are several linguistic and thematic connections between the story of Jonah and the epic of Jason and the Argonauts, possibly in jest to recast

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<sup>31</sup> Citing Liddell, Scott and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1940). Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 405.

<sup>32</sup> The Quran (Sura 37:139–146) uses the Arabic word *yaqtin* for the plant and while the identification is uncertain some Quranic scholars have asserted that it refers to the gourd *Lagenaria siceraria* and that “the identification of the Hebrew *qiqayon* as *Ricinus communis*, Arabic *kharua*’, is not accepted in Islamic tradition.” (Hamid Reza Younesi and Morteza Yoosofzadi, “Philosophy of Growing Up a Gourd Tree Over the Prophet Yonah (PBUH),” *Interdisciplinary Quranic Studies* 2, no. 4 (2011).) See also Zohar Amar, “[Scriptural plant identification mirrored in Qur’an commentary] זיהוי הצומח המקראי בראי פרשנות הקוראן,” *Beit Mikra* 43, no. 1 (1998): 67-77. Robinson notes that a gourd of some kind is the majority view amongst Quranic scholars, but notes that some take the word *yagtin* to mean a *mauz* which could be a banana or fig tree. (Robinson, “Jonah’s Qiqayon Plant,” 390.)

<sup>33</sup> Robinson, “Jonah’s Qiqayon Plant,” 390-403.

<sup>34</sup> Robinson, “Jonah’s Qiqayon Plant,” 402. Also Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 1099. Noonan, however, questions this association: “Possibly also related is Akkadian *kukkānītu*, which appears in Standard and Neo-Babylonian texts with reference to a medicinal plant (*CAD* K 498; *AHw* 500). However, the correspondence between Akkadian *k* and Hebrew *ק* is unusual. The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary contends that *kukkānītu* means “*kukku*-like plant,” Akkadian *kukku* being a type of bread or cake with a characteristic shape (*CAD* K 498; *AHw* 500).” Noonan, “Foreign Loanwords,” 151.

the story to entertain, or as part of a more complex irony. “No one seems to have noticed” says Hamel “that this word [*qiqayon*] sounds very much like the brew prepared by Medea, *kukeon* or *kukaon* (from the verb *kukao* to stir up, to create confusion), in Apollonius' version and in the *Argonautica Orphica*.”<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that Hamel is not arguing that *Jonah*'s קִיקַיֹּן and Jason's κυκεών are identical, but rather that the similarity is one of many between the two works and may be an intertextual wordplay, suggesting that the *Jonah* story was influenced by the Jason myth.

Several scholars<sup>36</sup> have proposed that the κυκεών used in the Eleusinian Mysteries contained a psychoactive substance, an hallucinogen, produced by ergot in the barley or the addition of certain mushrooms or plants. At least in this context, and probably others, κυκεών had magical properties and was associated with the ability to prophesy or to foretell the future. If the writer of *Jonah* is making a deliberate allusion to the brew of Greek epic literature, then the timing within the story may contain a further irony. While Jonah was sitting and “waiting to see what would become of the city” the provision of a plant with magical properties to enable one to see the future suggests that as far as the writer was concerned the *prophet* Jonah lacked this *prophetic* ability and the need for a magical plant emphasised this irony. Having said that, there is nothing in the narrative which suggests that the plant was intended to be consumed rather than, or in addition to, providing shade. It would be wrong to read קִיקַיֹּן here as equivalent in meaning to the κυκεών of the Eleusinian Mysteries. However, it is possible that the writer understood the Greek word as referring to a magical (or psychoactive) *plant* which was used in producing prophecy, rather than the *brew*

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<sup>35</sup> Hamel, “Taking the Argo to Nineveh: Jonah and Jason in a Mediterranean Context,” 5.

<sup>36</sup> Including Wasson, et al., *The road to Eleusis: Unveiling the secret of the mysteries*, 161; Peter Webster, et al., “Mixing the kykeon,” *Eleusis: Journal of Psychoactive Plants and Compounds* 4 (2000): 55-86; Ivan Valencic, “Has the mystery of the Eleusinian Mysteries been solved?,” in *Yearbook for Ethnomedicine and the Study of Consciousness* (1994), 325-36.

of which it was a constituent. It is also possible that by the time or in the context of writing *Jonah* the meaning of the word had developed beyond its original etymology. Hamel suggests that some of the original meaning is retained in the *Jonah*-writer’s use of the word.

The problem is that the *kikayon* of the Hebrew story is obviously a fast-growing plant, not a potion or brew. Yet, the Greek magic mixture is clearly made with pharmacological plants. Furthermore, whatever the Hebrew *kikayon* denotes, it acts as an emetic or aims at making Jonah rid himself of his anger, in a punning parallel with his disgorgement from the fish. I would like to suggest, then, that the *kikayon* of the book of Jonah may have lost its original meaning but has retained the idea of a magic act, perhaps together with the emetic or purging virtue of the original, suggested by the Hebrew sound (*wayaqe* in Jonah 2.11, from the verb *qi'*) associated later with other plants, such as the *ricinus*.<sup>37</sup>

Hamel’s suggestion that there is a possible complex irony underlying the similarities between *Jonah* and *Jason* is tantalising, especially as the wordplay between קיקיִון and κικεών would be consistent with the Jonah-writer’s predisposition for wordplays. The questions we need to ask, if there is a deliberate allusion to the *Jason* story, are (a) what is the purpose and (b) who is the target of the irony? I will return to this later.

A solution which hitherto has not been proposed in the scholarly literature on *Jonah* is that what we have here is a lexical blend, also known as a portmanteau, which combines the phonology and meaning of two source words into one word.<sup>38</sup> The writer may have

<sup>37</sup> Hamel, “Taking the Argo to Nineveh: Jonah and Jason in a Mediterranean Context,” 6. The Hebrew word he refers to in Jonah 2:11 is ויקא from the root קאה or קיה “to vomit.” Robinson suggests that etymologically קיקיִון may be “a sort of *Pilpel* noun” derived from קאה or קיה and therefore mean “the nauseous plant.” *Ricinus* has been used for centuries as an emetic. Robinson, “Jonah’s Qiqayon Plant,” 401.

<sup>38</sup> Noonan offers this explanation for the word שַׁעֲטָנָה in Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:11, citing other examples of lexical blends in Biblical Hebrew and other ancient Semitic languages. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the word *portmanteau* was coined with this meaning by Lewis Carroll. In a scene from *Through the Looking Glass* Humpty Dumpty explains a word to Alice: “You see it’s like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word” (*portmanteau, n.*” *Oxford English Dictionary, third edition*).

blended two source words - the Egyptian *kiki* and Greek *κυκεών* – to create קִיקְיוֹן with the satirical meaning of a castor oil plant with prophetic properties.

While the precise identification of the plant remains uncertain, the main contenders suggest that the writer was either (a) drawing on memories of native plants and insects in his homeland Israel, (b) using an Assyrian plant name to match the geographical context of his story to give it authenticity or an exotic flavour, (c) using a Greek loan-word or a lexical blend of Egyptian and Greek words in a satirical manner, or (d) using a combination of these devices. To determine which of these is the most likely we need to consider the rhetorical function of the קִיקְיוֹן within the story.

### The purpose of the קִיקְיוֹן

There is an apparent wordplay in Jonah 4:6 where God appointed the קִיקְיוֹן and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade (צַל) over his head, to save (לְהַצִּיל) him from his discomfort. The previous verse introduces us in this narrative to the word צַל *shade*. There Jonah built a booth (סֹכָה) and sat under it in the shade to see what would become of Nineveh. There is nothing in the narrative, incidentally, to suggest that the shade from Jonah’s booth was inadequate and the appointment by God of a plant to provide additional shade seems to be overly generous, if not unwarranted. Mathews makes the interesting point that by using the term סֹכָה, a word associated with the joyful harvest festival of *Sukkot* recalling God’s provision for Israel in the wilderness, “the audience is led to expect an attitude of thankfulness.”<sup>39</sup> The repetition of צַל (from the root עלה) has a certain repetitiveness which seems to be emphasising the point of God’s generous provision of additional shade:

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*Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2010.*) Prior to Carroll, the word *portmanteau* simply referred to a suitcase with two compartments. Benjamin J. Noonan, “Unraveling Hebrew שָׁעָנָה,” *JBL* 135, no. 1 (2016): 98.

<sup>39</sup> Mathews, “Jonah as a Performance,” 30.

וַיִּמֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים קִיקְיוֹן וַיַּעַל מֵעַל לַיּוֹנָה לְהִיּוֹת צֶלַעַל־רֹאשׁוֹ לְהַצִּיל לוֹ מִרְעָצוֹ וַיִּשְׂמַח יוֹנָה עַל־הַקִּיקְיוֹן שִׂמְחָה  
גְדוּלָּה:

The LORD God appointed a plant, and made it **come up over** Jonah, to give shade **over** his head, to save him from his discomfort; **so** Jonah was very happy **about** [over] the plant.

וַיְמַן הָאֱלֹהִים תּוֹלַעַת בְּעֹלֹת הַשָּׁחַר לַמָּחָרֶת

But when dawn **came up** the next day, God appointed a worm.

The repetitive emphasis reinforces the purpose of the plant to provide a protective covering for Jonah and introduces us to the idea which is stated in a parallelism in the concluding lines that while Jonah was concerned about or over (על) the plant there is a question as to whether God is concerned about or over (על) Nineveh. The synonyms “go up” and “over” are used as antonyms against ירד “go down” throughout the book<sup>40</sup> and there may be a hint early in the story that the writer also uses these terms playfully. In 1:5 the sailors threw cargo overboard to lighten the ship מֵעֲלֵיהֶם *from upon them*, and in 1:11 they ask what they should do that וַיִּשְׁתַּק הַיָּם מֵעֲלֵינוּ *the sea will quiet down upon us*. While there is a different verbal root in each case, the presence of מעלי in both verses may indicate either that the sea was the subject of the verb in both cases (i.e. in 1:5 it was the sea, not the cargo, which was being lightened from upon them), as Landes suggests,<sup>41</sup> or that the writer is using a playful form of repetition.

<sup>40</sup> Repetition and paronomasia have been noted by many scholars, but see especially Halpern and Friedman, “Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah.” On the intertwining of “go up” and “go down” see p. 80-81.

<sup>41</sup> Landes, “Dissonances,” 275.



Having stated the purpose of both the booth and the *qiqayon* to provide shade (צל) for Jonah, it is not surprising then that the translators of the Septuagint vocalised להציל as a *Niphal* infinitive construct of צלל “to shade” (להציל) rather than as the Masoretic Text’s *Hiphil* infinitive construct of נצל (להציל) and translated it as τὸ σκιάζειν “to shade him” rather than “to save him.”<sup>42</sup> Whether or not the Septuagint correctly read the verb as *to shade* rather than *to save*, it at least reflects the ambiguity, or, rather, highlights what may have been a deliberate wordplay. Stuart calls it “a sort of *double entendre*” and notes that the “Hebrew word הציל ‘relieve,’ ‘deliver’ is so close to הצל ‘to provide shade’ as to be, in all probability, a further evidence of paronomasia on the part of the narrator.”<sup>43</sup> Mathews’ translation “attempts to replicate this sound play by rendering ‘shade’ and ‘save’ respectively: ‘. . . to be shade over his head to save him from his evil’.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> NET footnote: The consonantal form להציל is vocalized by the MT as להציל (*léhatsil*), a *Hiphil* infinitive construct from נצל (*natsal*, “to deliver, rescue”; BDB 664-65 s.v. נצל). However, the LXX’s τὸ σκιάζειν (*tau skiazein*, “to shade”) reflects an alternate vocalization tradition of להציל (*léhatsel*), a *Niphal* infinitive construct from צלל (*tsalal*, “to shade”; see BDB 853 s.v. צלל). The MT vocalization is preferred for several reasons. First, it is the more difficult form with the assimilated nun. Second, the presence of the noun צל (*tsel*, “shadow”) just two words before helps to explain the origin of the LXX vocalization which was influenced by this noun in the immediate context. Third, God’s primary motivation in giving the plant to Jonah was not simply to provide shade for him because the next day the LORD killed the plant (v. 7). God’s primary motivation was to create a situation to “rescue” Jonah from his bad attitude. Nevertheless, the narrator’s choice of the somewhat ambiguous consonantal form להציל might have been done to create a wordplay on נצל (“to rescue, deliver”) and צלל (“to shade”). Jonah thought that God was providing him shade, but God was really working to deliver him from his evil attitude, as the ensuing dialogue indicates. (*The NET Bible, New English Translation*).

<sup>43</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 505.

<sup>44</sup> Mathews, “Jonah as a Performance,” 28. Alter translates it similarly. (Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 2, 1298.) Sasson regards the MT’s *hiphil* form as “fine theological language” but notes that “we have no scriptural equivalent for construing this verbal form with the preposition *le-* and that dittography may obtain here. If so, the dittography is very old, for *Murabba’āt* also has *lō*, and the versions saw one there too.” (Sasson, *Jonah*, 292.) As an aside, *Murabba’āt*, however, is not evidence of antiquity since by the time of the *Murabba’at* text, the MT had emerged as the standard text of Judaism, this scroll has barely any variants, and is actually late in the history of the text. Sasson further notes that the *Niphal* stem of צלל is poorly attested and that it would be better to assume that the Septuagint was “influenced by the preceding clause” rather than reading an obscure stem. Wolff is conscious of the narrator’s disposition for wordplay in his

The similarity in sounds of words in close proximity is relatively common in *Jonah* and the writer is not simply being clever. Was the purpose of the plant to *shade* Jonah, or to *rescue* him מִרְעָתוֹ *from his evil*? The purpose seems to be to highlight what Elata-Alster and Salmon call the “semantic distractor” which is to follow.

Since the initial verb of the phrase echoes the root *tzll* (shade) which has just occurred twice, we tend to read *lhatzeel* as 'to shade'. The fact that it is followed by the indirect object pronoun reinforces this reading grammatically. However, the final word—the oft repeated root *ra*—functions as a semantic distractor. Since we anticipate a shading from the sun, the combinations of shade and *ra* points to a non-literal reading.<sup>45</sup>

God’s intention, according to the narrator, was to deliver Jonah “from his רע *evil*.” By translating מִרְעָתוֹ here as “from his discomfort,” the NRSV translators have obscured a play on one of the important words of the book: רעה *evil*. The book begins by saying Nineveh’s *evil* had come up before God, and later the narrator plays with this word, and its homonyms, in various ways. In the immediate context, Jonah is said to have been “exceedingly displeased” (v.1) that Nineveh was not destroyed. The expression וַיֵּרַע אֶל-יְהוָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה is literally “it was evil to Jonah, a great evil,” and now (in v.6) God is said to be delivering Jonah from his evil. “Discomfort” is not the meaning in this context, as the author is implying that the purpose of the dialogue between Jonah and God was to save Jonah from an evil attitude or displeasure that Nineveh was not destroyed. Yet, if the object of causing the plant to grow was to rescue Jonah, or to give him some remarkable prophetic abilities, there is no indication in the narrative that it had any effect whatsoever. All the narrative says is “Jonah

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comment regarding “our narrator’s pleasure in the alliteration” in the phrase לְהַצִּיל ... לְהַיִּיט צַל (Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 171.)

<sup>45</sup> Gerda Elata-Alster and Rachel Salmon, “The Destruction of Genre in the Book of Jonah: Towards a Theological Discourse,” *Literature and Theology* 3, no. 1 (1989): 51.

was very happy about the plant” (4:6). Early the next morning it was attacked by a worm and withered. It was as though it served no purpose other than to give Jonah some momentary pleasure before it was cruelly taken from him. But perhaps that is the very thing it was designed to do. It is reminiscent of the words in Job that “the LORD gave and the LORD has taken away” (Job 1:21), and even if the writer was not interacting with the book of Job there may very well be an intertextual thematic connection.

The appointment of the plant in this pericope is attributed to God using the composite name יהוה־אֱלֹהִים. This is the only occurrence of this form of the divine name in the book,<sup>46</sup> and the only place in the Hebrew Bible outside the garden of Eden narrative of Genesis 2-3 where it is used other than as form of addressing God directly. I will return to possible intertextual allusions to the Genesis narrative shortly. Sasson and Magonet both note a variety of divine names used in connection with the four occurrences of the word וַיִּמֶן *he provided*. In 1:17 (2:1) it was יהוה who provided the fish; in 4:6 יהוה־אֱלֹהִים provided the plant; in 4:7 הָאֱלֹהִים provided the worm to consume the plant; and finally, in 4:8 אֱלֹהִים provided the east wind. The first two occurrences which are attributed to יהוה or יהוה־אֱלֹהִים prove to be for Jonah’s benefit, while the latter two which are attributed to הָאֱלֹהִים or אֱלֹהִים. Sasson proposed that the different names suggested a progression, or regression, from the most to the least personal of God’s names, which reflected the deterioration in Jonah’s relationship with the divine, and suggested that the composite form in 4:6 serves as a transition, although he does not elaborate further on this.<sup>47</sup> Tribble asks why the composite name occurred precisely at this point in the text and nowhere else. The fact that it occurs between a set of יהוה passages and a

<sup>46</sup> There are three occurrences of the construct form or with pronominal suffixes: יהוה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם: “YHWH (the) God of heaven” (1:9); יהוה אֱלֹהָיו: “YHWH his God” (2:1); יהוה אֱלֹהָי: “YHWH my God” (2:6).

<sup>47</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 291. Magonet thinks the change in names “exemplifies precisely the change-over in God’s dealings with Jonah.” Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 35-6.

set of אֱלֹהִים passages may suggest that “it was used consciously by the author as a literary transition in what appeared otherwise to be a too abrupt shift from one name to the other.”<sup>48</sup>

Böhme regarded the use of differing divine names throughout the book as strong evidence for composite authorship, finding at least four distinct authors as well as redactors.<sup>49</sup> It should, in addition, be noted that the Syriac retains the אֱלֹהִים-יְהוָה combination throughout vs 6-9 (ܐܠܘܗܝܢ ܝܗܘܘܐ) but that other versions vary from the MT in their rendering of the divine names in this chapter.<sup>50</sup> While the criterion of divine names is no longer a strong or conclusive argument for the existence of sources, from the evidence of the ancient versions it should be accepted that the composite name in 4:6 may also be a copyist’s error or the result of the compilations of two recensions and have no particular literary or theological significance.<sup>51</sup>

In the absence of any clear intertextual allusions to the Genesis narrative it would be wrong to confidently assert that the writer was making a connection to the composite form of the divine name in the Eden account. There are hints elsewhere in *Jonah* that the writer was familiar with some of the Genesis legends, such as the flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. To my knowledge the commentaries and scholarly literature have generally not made any strong connections between the creation or Eden narratives and Jonah 4,<sup>52</sup> most

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<sup>48</sup> Tribble, “Studies in the Book of ‘Jonah’,” 87.

<sup>49</sup> W. Böhme, “Die Composition des Buches Jona,” *ZAW* 7, no. 1 (1887).

<sup>50</sup> Tribble, “Studies in the Book of ‘Jonah’,” 84.

<sup>51</sup> Tribble assessed various source analysis theories and concluded that none of them seem totally convincing and that a solution for the problem of the divine names in Jonah has not yet been found. Tribble, “Studies in the Book of ‘Jonah’,” 84-5.

<sup>52</sup> With the exception of Yitzhak Berger, who reads the story as satire, and writers who take an allegorical approach to the story, such as Pinchas Kahn, “The Epilogue to Jonah,” *JBQ* 28, no. 3 (2000): 146-55; Berger, *Jonah in the Shadows of Eden*.

probably because no clear intertextual allusions have been recognised.<sup>53</sup> There are, however, several possible allusions which should be considered.

### Good and evil

In the dialogue (4:2-5, 8b-11) there is an interplay between *good* and *evil*. The table below shows the occurrences of the verb and adjectival forms of the word for “good” (טוב and יטב) in *Jonah*.

|     |       |  |  |
|-----|-------|--|--|
| 4:3 | Jonah | טוב מותי מחי                               | It is better [good] for me to die [rather] than to live                              |
| 4:4 | God   | ויאמר יהוה הטיב חרה לך                     | And the LORD said, “Is it right [good] for you to be despondent?”                    |
| 4:8 | Jonah | טוב מותי מחי                               | It is better [good] for me to die [rather] than to live                              |
| 4:9 | God   | ויאמר אלהים אל־יונה הטיב חרה־לך על־הקיקיון | But God said to Jonah, “Is it right [good] for you to be despondent about the bush?” |
| 4:9 | Jonah | ויאמר הטיב חרה־לי עד־מנת                   | And he said, “Yes [it is good to be] despondent, enough to die.”                     |

In his first two statements Jonah says “It is good to die.” God’s repeated reply is to ask if it is good to be despondent. Jonah’s third statement responds to the question about anger, but maintains his point about dying: “It is good to be angry enough to die.” The question about being despondent uses the word חרה which I discussed on page 243 where I argued (following Sasson) that without an accompanying אף it can mean despondency, agitation or

<sup>53</sup> Berger, however, sees strong intertextual connections with the Genesis narrative and the Eden imagery in Ezekiel. Berger, *Jonah in the Shadows of Eden*.

confusion, but not necessarily anger. The expression here recalls the anticipation by the king of Nineveh of *תרון אפו* *his [God’s] hot anger* in 3:9 (where *אפו* indicates that anger is meant). There is an irony in the fact that Jonah was *חרה* *despondent* precisely because he knew God would relent because he is *אָרֶךְ אַפַּיִם* *slow to anger* (4:2)!<sup>54</sup>

The east wind which beat down on Jonah’s head is described as *תְּרִישִׁית*, *sultry* or *scorching*, and while there is no linguistic connection between *תְּרִישִׁית* and *תְּרַה* the alliteration as well as similarity of ideas is possibly a deliberate wordplay.<sup>55</sup> There could be an allusion here, by way of contrast, to *לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם* *the cool of the day* in Genesis 3:8. While *רוּחַ* does not of itself suggest *cool* a cooling breeze can be inferred from the expression *wind of the day*. It is the same word that is used in Jonah 4:8 to describe the east wind, where its meaning is modified by both “east” and “sultry.”<sup>56</sup> On both occasions there was a wind: in Genesis it has been inferred that it was a pleasant breeze, while, by contrast, *Jonah’s* wind was far from pleasant. The allusion could be to the wind as a precursor to a theophany or communication from God.

It has been noted above that *רעה* *evil* is an important word in *Jonah*. It describes the wickedness of the Ninevites (1:2; 3:10), the calamitous storm at sea (1:8), the disaster which God had threatened to bring on Nineveh (3:10), Jonah’s attitude to Nineveh’s repentance (4:1), the punishment of Nineveh from which God relented (4:2), and Jonah’s state of mind while watching to see what would happen to Nineveh (4:6). Wolff summarises nicely the

<sup>54</sup> Nogalski argues that Jonah 4:2 uses the reference to Joel 2:13 *satirically*, indicating the two have entirely different interests. Intertextual links with the Twelve, including Nogalski’s argument that Jonah here uses Joel satirically, are further discussed in chapter 7 of this thesis. Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, 272-3 n.79.

<sup>55</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 353. Wolff thinks *תְּרִישִׁית* is derived from *חַרַשׁ* “to plough, cut, stab” citing 1QH 7:4f where it is used to describe a wild, stormy wind which endangers a ship on the sea. Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 161.

<sup>56</sup> It also occurs in 1:4 to describe “a great wind upon the sea.”

relationship between these incidents: “Chapter 4 is now shaped and determined by the question whether Jonah’s רעה can be overcome like the רעה of the Ninevites and the רעה of God.”<sup>57</sup> Its homonyms also occur in *Jonah*: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ *they said to one another* (or, to their companions 1:7); אֶל־יִטְעַמּוּ מֵאוֹמָה אֶל־יִרְעוּ וּמִיָּם אֶל־יִשְׁתּוּ *they shall not taste anything, they shall not feed* (or graze), *and they shall not drink water* (3:7).

While רעה *evil* and its homonyms are scattered through the book, the טוב/יטב *good* occurrences are clustered together in the dialogue in the final pericope suggesting perhaps that while *evil* was an important theme from the beginning the question of what is *good* does not arise to the end, and then it only arises in relation to whether it is good to be angry, or good to die. In the context of other possible allusions to the Genesis 2-3 narrative it is reasonable to explore the possibility that there could also be an allusion to the עֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, especially as eating from this tree brought death. The pericope opens with Jonah declaring his certain knowledge of what God would do יָדַעְתִּי I *knew* ... (4:2) in marked contrast with the king in the previous scene who is less sure, yet hopeful: מִי־יֹדֵעַ *Who knows* [what God will do]? Whichever plant the writer had in mind with קִיקְיוֹן, the fact that it grew sufficiently to provide shade suggests it was either a vine/gourd or a *tree*. After Jonah left Nineveh the writer says וַיֵּשֶׁב מִקְדָּם לְעִיר *he sat down east of the city* (4:5) and God sent רוּחַ קָדִים חַרְיִשִׁית *a sultry east wind* (4:8). The repetition of קדם *east* is reminiscent of “a garden in Eden in the east” (גֶּן־יְרֵדֶן מִקְדָּם Genesis 2:8). The importance of the word *east* in the story is suggested by both its repetition and the possibility of a word-play in 4:1 where Jonah says he fled to Tarshish from the beginning using a

<sup>57</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: a Commentary*, 160.

*piel* verb also derived from קָדַם.<sup>58</sup> Both repetition and paronomasia are common in *Jonah* and appear to be indicators of important or thematic words.

Alistair Hunter has pointed to a likely ironic wordplay in the word קָדַם:

The repeated use of קָדַם (beforehand/eastward) in Jon. 4:2,5,8 could be understood ironically in relation to its use in Ps. 55:19[20]: ‘God, who is enthroned *from of old*, will hear and humble them—because they do not change, and do not fear God’. The transformation is ironic because it is precisely Jonah’s point that God has refused to humble the Ninevites on the basis of what he (Jonah) deems to be a spurious conversion, thus revealing God’s fickleness. It is *God* who has changed, thus denying God’s unchanging character ‘from of old’. From this derives Jonah’s protest that he had to flee ‘beforehand’ to Tarshish, his deliberate decision to sit ‘east’ of the city, and the significance of the ‘east wind’ that causes him to faint.<sup>59</sup>

## The final word

At the end of the dialogue the writer reveals another aspect to the question of divine justice. At first the provision of the plant appears to be an act of divine unwarranted generosity which made Jonah happy (4:6), even though he did not ask for it and apparently had no real need for it as he had already built a booth for himself to provide the required shade (4:5). But then, and for no apparent reason, God did two things: first, he ‘appointed’ a worm to destroy the plant (4:7); next he sent a ‘sultry east wind’ to make matters worse for

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<sup>58</sup> Landes notes the paronomasia and writes: “Thus קָדַם in v.5 plays especially on the adjective קָדַם in v.8, for the purpose of placing Jonah east of Nineveh so that he is appropriately situated to feel the blast of the easterly wind and the heat of the sun when it rises.” He seems to miss the paronomastic connection with 4:1. Landes, “Dissonances,” 286.

<sup>59</sup> Hunter, “Inside Outside Psalm 55,” 134.



Jonah (4:8). No explanation is given for providing the plant one day to make Jonah happy and then taking it away the next, or for adding to Jonah’s misery by sending a hot wind. If it was to somehow punish Jonah for ignoring God’s question (“Is it right to be grieved?” 4:4), it seems to be an extraordinary and unwarranted act of capriciousness and forces the reader to ask if God really cares.

The cluster of wordplays in this pericope, and the echoing of words used earlier in the story although with new meanings, has the effect of creating a confused discordant sound, coming to an abrupt end with the parallel statements:

אַתָּה חֹסֵת עַל־הַקִּיקָיוֹן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עֲמַלְתָּ בּוֹ וְלֹא גִדַּלְתָּו

You are concerned about the plant for which you did not labour and which you did not grow (4:10)

וְאֲנִי לֹא אֲחֹס עַל־נִינְוֵה

But I will not be concerned about Nineveh (4:11)

The conclusion has a sudden and dramatic twist and there is no logical connection between the two statements “you are concerned about the plant ... but I will not be concerned about Nineveh.” First, there is nothing in the story to suggest that Jonah was in any way concerned about the plant and, although he was unhappy that the plant was taken away, his concern was for himself and the treatment he was receiving at the hand of God. But even if he had any concern for the plant, it does not logically follow that his concern was comparable in any way to God’s concern, or lack of concern, for Nineveh. The statement that Jonah did not work for the plant or make it grow resembles the theme of two Deuteronomistic texts which refer to Israel taking possession of trees which they had not planted:

CHAPTER 7: “THAT IS WHY I FLED TO TARSHISH”

וְהָיָה כִּי יִבְיָאֵךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלִיַּעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר לְךָ עָרִים גְּדֹלוֹת וְטַבַּת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־בָנִיתָ:

וּבָתִּים מְלֵאִים כָּל־טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא־מְלַאתָ וּבְרֹת תְּצוּבִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תְצַבֵּתָ כְּרָמִים וְזֵיתִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־נִטְעַמְתָּ

When the LORD your God brings you into the land that He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to assign to you—great and flourishing cities that you did not build, houses full of all good things that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant ... (Deuteronomy 6:10-11).

וְאַתָּה לָכֶם אָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִגְעַתְּ בָּהּ וְעָרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־בָנִיתֶם וְתִשְׁבּוּ בָהֶם כְּרָמִים וְזֵיתִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־נִטְעַמְתֶּם אֲתָם אֲכָלִים:

I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built ... vineyards and oliveyards that you did not plant (Joshua 24:13).

A third text uses similar language to describe Israel as a nation which God planted in the land.

וְשָׂמְתִי מָקוֹם לְעַמִּי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִטְעַמְתִּיו

I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them (2 Samuel 7:10).

The emphasis on Jonah being concerned about the קִיקִיּוֹן which he did not cause to grow, may be an allusive contrast to God laboring over Israel and causing the nation to grow, yet apparently showing no concern for her in the end. By the same token, God has no concern for Nineveh. If there is a universalism in *Jonah* it is this, namely that God’s *lack* of concern appears to be universal! The provision of the קִיקִיּוֹן (4:6-7) only to take it away again, brings to mind Job’s comment that “the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away” (1:21). In Job, God is incited “to destroy [Job] for no reason” (Job 2:3). Similarly, in *Jonah*, God destroys

the  $\text{לִּי־קִיָּין}$  for no good reason, and then uses language to describe Jonah’s concern for the plant which is reminiscent of terminology used to describe God’s concern for Israel. The parallel lines could be read as a protasis and apodosis, not necessarily because of any grammatical construct, but logically. The first line has the logical force of an antecedent and the second as its consequence, so that it would have the meaning:

[Because] you were concerned about the plant which you did not grow [as I have grown Israel],  
[therefore] I will not be concerned about Nineveh ...

This reading suggests that God relented in the face of Jonah’s complaint, being reminded by Jonah’s concern for the plant that he should be concerned about Israel, and not for Nineveh.

I agree with Serge Frolov that in the end the author wanted his intended audience to sympathise with Jonah, not with God, and that the negative attitude to the prophet which persists in the academy and in communities of faith stems for the most part from uncritically assimilated stereotypes, not from unbiased interaction with the text.<sup>60</sup> Modern commentators frequently view Jonah as a predominantly negative figure. Like Frolov, David Noel Freedman also treats the prophet in a completely different way and tries to vindicate him.<sup>61</sup> I too see Jonah, not as the ‘villain’ of the story, but as the hero who confronts God and his apparent lack of concern or compassion for Israel, and wins.

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<sup>60</sup> Frolov, “Returning the Ticket,” 105.

<sup>61</sup> David N. Freedman, “Did God Play a Dirty Trick on Jonah at the End?,” *BR* 6, no. 4 (1990): 26-31; Frolov, “Returning the Ticket,” 87.

## Conclusion

Clustered towards the end of the scene and the story as a whole are descriptions of three things which God is said to have provided for Jonah: a plant to provide shade; a worm to attack the plant and rob him of his shade; and a sultry east wind which caused him great distress. An earlier use of the same word (מִןּ the *Piel* of מָנָה) in 2:1 (1:17) with reference to the large fish which God provided to swallow Jonah may not be accidental. The final three come in quick succession: three events in three verses. It could be that the repetition is to remind the implied reader, or Jonah, of the providential nature of God; that behind every act of nature was a sovereign God controlling circumstances to bring Jonah to a certain position. Yet, of the four occurrences of the word, the first two are for Jonah’s immediate benefit while the latter two cause him considerable distress. The purpose for God appointing the worm and then the scorching wind is not immediately apparent and might appear to be capricious, worsening Jonah’s situation for no good reason. They are reminiscent of the afflictions of Job which were incited by Satan: “You have incited me against [Job] to destroy him for no good reason” (Job 2:3). From the final verses of the book of Jonah one could find similarities with Job and understand an important issue for the writers of both books to be a question of theodicy. This even-handedness with God providing benefits with one hand and inflicting suffering with the other, clustered with the questions about the nature of good and evil, leaves several unresolved questions at the end of the book. The final phrase, even as a declaration, creates a dilemma for the audience: is God troubled (or not) by what happens in Nineveh, or anywhere else for that matter?

There is considerable evidence of irony and satire in this scene. The repetition of *evil* with it being attributed to all the key characters – Nineveh, God and Jonah – is ironic. The dialogue about what is *good* is starkly set against God’s actions towards Jonah, a combination of beneficial, somewhat generous gestures, and capricious actions with no clear purpose. In a

further irony, the implied reader is forced to question whether God is good or evil in his dealings with his prophet. It appeared from the outset of the story that the prophet was being ridiculed. Later the Ninevites and their king were ridiculed in the scene about their repentance. In this final scene, interwoven with questions about what is good and evil, perhaps the greatest irony is that God himself appears to act with both good and evil intentions. While 4:6 may appear to some commentators to be out of place as it jars with the preceding verse(s), in a satirical reading of the story it fits perfectly, especially with what follows. The main point of the verse is that God provides, generously, with good intent, and for the benefit of his servant. But in the next verse he takes it away, apparently for no good reason. The contrast is ironic, deliberate and a clear indication that what we are reading is satire. With so much irony and satire in this scene a reading of the final lines as satire is inescapable.

## Chapter 8: Reading Jonah after the Shoah

### Post-exilic theodicy

I outlined earlier my reasons for agreeing with the trend in scholarship to date the writing of *Jonah* in the Persian era, acknowledging that the writer(s) may have drawn on oral or written traditions related to the historical Jonah who was a prophet in the time of Jeroboam II. As a Persian era text, the story was written in the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem together with its temple and institutions and the calamitous loss of life, culture and memories. According to Daniel Smith-Christopher, the archaeological evidence of destruction together with population estimates draws “a picture of horrific events that not surprisingly becomes permanently etched into the historical lore of the Hebrew Bible.”<sup>1</sup> He argues that the impact of the Babylonian exile on both those who remained in the land as well as the exiles would have been traumatic and that this continued well into the Persian and Hellenistic eras and that any discussion of post-exilic theology “must first contend with the enormity of the physical, social and psychological trauma of this experience in the life of Ancient Israel, and only then proceed to an assessment of theological themes that are part of the recovery process of a frankly heroic survival of domination in the ancient Near East.”<sup>2</sup>

The return to the land under Persian sovereignty and the re-creation of a nation, together with the opportunity to rebuild its culture and institutions, restoring what was considered to be good or essential while jettisoning anything considered to lack relevance in the new era, has certain similarities with other events in Jewish history. In terms of exile and

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “Reassessing the Historical and Sociological Impact of the Babylonian Exile,” in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions* (ed. James M. Scott; JSJSup 56; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Smith-Christopher, “Historical and Sociological Impact of the Babylonian Exile,” 36.

restoration, the near annihilation of Jewry in Nazi Europe and the consequent creation of the State of Israel possibly bear some similarities with the horrific events which were permanently etched into the collective memory of post-exilic Israel. However, other calamities in the history of the nation and people, and subsequent efforts to either rebuild the nation or to preserve the culture and to adapt to new circumstances, also provide parallels which may be helpful in terms of understanding the dynamics and relationship of calamity and rebuilding. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman Empire in 70 CE was thought by some at the time to be so strikingly similar to the Babylonian captivity that subsequent texts such as 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch used the events of 587 BCE as the setting for narratives to frame apocalypses dealing with the events of 70 CE.<sup>3</sup> The commemoration in Jewish tradition of *Tisha B'Av* – the traditional date of the destruction of both the first and second temples, the defeat of the Bar Kochba revolt in 135 CE, and the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290 and from Spain in 1492, and other events – almost certainly reflects the view that these calamities share more in common than a date. The archetypes of destruction, exile, martyrdom and redemption in the biblical texts were understood transtemporally and re-enacted, reinterpreted and reinforced with each successive calamity, becoming the basis of Jewish collective memory and persisted even in the absence of faith in the covenantal scheme of sin-retribution-and-restoration.<sup>4</sup>

There is evidence of discussion in the affected communities regarding the questions of theodicy and divine justice in allowing these calamities to happen. The Babylonian exile and its aftermath produced a considerable body of biblical literature which addressed these issues in various ways. Job is regarded by some scholars as post-exilic theodicy (I will

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<sup>3</sup> The dating of these two books is discussed below.

<sup>4</sup> David G. Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988), 4-5.

discuss this further later in this chapter). Similarly, theodicy is a major theme in Jewish texts after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, including 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch. It could also be argued that the expulsions from Spain and Portugal gave birth to movements in Judaism such as Lurianic Kabbalah as a means of interpreting and overcoming the disaster.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the major issues which arise in *Jonah* and which are, in my view, unanswered in the text itself, also occur in other post-exilic texts, especially Job.<sup>6</sup> The historical irony which constantly underpins *Jonah* is that the destruction of the northern kingdom at the hands of the Assyrian empire may not have happened if Nineveh had actually been destroyed earlier in the eighth century, as God initially threatened. Their repentance as a result of Jonah's preaching, and God's relenting of his plan to destroy them, therefore enabled the exile of the northern kingdom.<sup>7</sup> While some interpretations of *Jonah* claim that the primary message of the story is God's universal concern for the nations, the question of

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<sup>5</sup> Irving (Yitzchak) Greenberg, "The Third Great Cycle of Jewish History," in *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust* (eds. Steven T. Katz, et al.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 531.

<sup>6</sup> The dating of Job is controversial although "the cumulative evidence may tend to suggest a post-exilic date" (Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1985), 40-42.). Janzen argues that the book "was written in the exile and that the problems with which it deals arose in the existential tension between the historic upheaval and Israel's religious traditions" (J. Gerald Janzen, *Job* (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox Press, 1986), 5.) Wolfers argues for a date between 701 BCE and the exile, primarily on the basis of its dependence on Deuteronomy and his proposal that the setting was Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE, although he accepts that the dating of Deuteronomy is also uncertain. If his dating is correct then the background is the Assyrian exile rather than Babylonian exile. (David Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 51-73.) Wilson notes that "any discussion of the dating of Job needs to take into consideration that the structure of the book implies different stages" and argues that a date for the final form in the exilic or post-exilic period seems most appropriate. (Gerald Wilson, *Job* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 1-3.) For an overview of the arguments see Marvin H. Pope, *Job: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 15; Third ed.; New York: Doubleday, 1974), xxxii-xl.

<sup>7</sup> Fretheim opines that "the connection between Nineveh and a prophet from the northern kingdom is certainly not fortuitous. Jonah, who had announced the greatness of Israel's future (II Reg 14 25), is now called upon to offer a future to the very country that had put an end to Israel." Terence E. Fretheim, "Jonah and Theodicy," *ZAW* 90, no. 2 (1978): 227.



how to explain the destruction of Israel as a consequence of this concern for the nations remains unanswered. Similar questions underpin Job, which never addressed the issue of the lack of justice in the killing of Job's ten children simply because God wanted to prove a point in his wager with Satan.

In a later example of literature of destruction Elie Wiesel drew inspiration from discussions taking place in Auschwitz and in his play "*The Trial of God (as it was held on February 25, 1649, in Shamgorod)*" placed them in the context of a seventeenth century pogrom in a Ukrainian village. Each of these calamities could be called a *Shoah*, in the way Sweeney refers to "the Shoahs that faced ancient Israel and Judah, namely the destruction and exile of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722/1 B.C.E. and the destruction and exile of Jerusalem and Judah in 587/6 B.C.E."<sup>8</sup> The same questions were undoubtedly raised after each *Shoah* – including the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, the European pogroms and expulsions, and the Nazi mass murders – and similar discussions must have taken place each time as the survivors and succeeding generations endeavoured to come to terms with their anguish and the theological implications of theodicies which offered little comfort. Each of these crises had their own unique circumstances, and the theological responses therefore varied. It can be inferred on the one hand from the Hebrew Bible that some people were satisfied with the explanation of the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles as due to sins such as idolatry. On the other hand, the problem in 4 Ezra was that the Jewish people before the Roman destruction of 70 CE did not easily fit the model of idolatrous Israel. The solution proposed by 4 Ezra combined a radical view of the near impossibility of keeping the Law and an eschatological theodicy which

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<sup>8</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, *Reading the Hebrew Bible After the Shoah: Engaging Holocaust Theology* (Fortress Press, 2008), 148. For an explanation of how I use the terms "Holocaust" and "Shoah" see Appendix 5: Holocaust or *Shoah*?

deferred justice to an afterlife or ‘the age to come’. However, between the retributive view that suffering is the consequence of sin, and the eschatological theodicies of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch where justice is deferred and meted out in the future, Job and *Jonah* represent a stage or stages in the dialogue where there was dissatisfaction with the retributive view but before ideas of resurrection and future rewards were fully developed.<sup>9</sup>

The similarities between these *Shoahs* could have been the starting point for some of these dialogues. William Crouch, commenting on the conclusion to *Jonah*, wrote: “The closest thing I can imagine to the atrocities of Nineveh is Hitler’s Germany.”<sup>10</sup> His suggestion is frankly troubling as one cannot compare genocide inspired by modern racist theory and a long history of European anti-Semitism with ancient imperial aggression and such a comparison runs the risk of trivialising the *Shoah*. However, the point of Crouch’s analogy was to emphasise the horrors of Assyrian aggression and the consequent social upheaval in terms which could be understood by a modern audience. The impact of the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles on the development of Judaism should not be understated. I argue that it is legitimate to approach a text from two directions. Later writers may draw ideas or inspiration from earlier events or traditions, particularly if the circumstances are similar to both settings. The writers of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, for example, framed their apocalypses with narratives which placed their characters in the Babylonian exile, but with a message for an audience living in the shadow of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. Similarly, Wiesel’s *Trial of God*, although set in a seventeenth century Ukrainian village, was dealing with questions which arose (again) at Auschwitz and after. Although Crouch may be equating Nineveh and Hitler’s Germany too closely in his comparison, it is true to say that a book set against the atrocities

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<sup>9</sup> For an overview of the development of the idea of resurrection in late Jewish thought see the as yet unpublished work by Nicolas Wyatt, “Immortality and the Rise of Resurrection,” (2018): 1-31.

<sup>10</sup> Walter B. Crouch, “To Question an End, to End a Question: Opening the Closure of the Book of Jonah,” *JSOT* 19, no. 62 (1994): 112.

of Nineveh would be a legitimate base for discussing the atrocities of Nazi Germany. It is also legitimate to come to a text from the other direction; so that the experiences of later generations can inform one's reading of earlier texts. The questions which 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch dealt with were issues for a first or second century CE audience, yet by setting their narratives in the sixth century BCE the writers were suggesting, at least on a subliminal level, that sixth century BCE survivors of the Babylonian exile most likely had a similar dialogue amongst themselves. Our reading of a post-exilic *Jonah* can therefore be informed by texts and traditions which came out of subsequent *Shoahs* and can be informed by a consideration of other "literature of destruction" and catastrophe, to use Roskies' phrase. This is the approach I am taking in interpreting *Jonah* as dealing with issues of theodicy, or antitheodicy (a term I will discuss later), and divine justice after the Babylonian *Shoah*.

My reading of *Jonah* sees it as a text which questions, in the aftermath of exile, the unpredictable mercy of God. Yet, despite its serious message the story contains comical elements. Its use of puns, wordplays, ridicule, irony, twists and turns were undoubtedly at least intended to make the reader or listener smile if not to laugh. Jared Ludlow thinks this is a feature of Jewish literature after a calamity.

Humor can prod a reader into thinking about issues being cleverly displayed in a comic fashion.

Presumably these images will remain with the reader longer than bland exhortations ... When deducing the purposes for humor in ancient Jewish literature, the fact that Jews were often in exile or in bondage to a strong empire are important factors to take into consideration. Often humor in these situations 'emerged as a weapon of an oppressed and marginalized people to help its survival amidst the perilous conditions'.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ludlow, "Exaggeration in Ancient Novelistic Texts," 176. Citing J. William Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

**Jonah's theodicy**

Van Leeuwen has noted, correctly in my view, that Exodus 34:6-7 is a “base text” for the Twelve and expresses “the bipolar attributes of mercy and retributive justice.”<sup>12</sup> He regards the first six books in the collection as “wisdom theodicy” and sees a general movement in the Twelve from judgment to salvation. He reads *Jonah* as a late addition which functions as an afterword, particularly to Amos, and thinks it is best taken as a *midrashic* homily on Exodus 34:6.<sup>13</sup> However, Van Leeuwen posits that *Jonah* demonstrates that even the most wicked Assyrians are able to receive forgiveness through repentance and appeal to God’s mercy, and that the book is therefore “a bitterly ironic indictment of Israel’s presumption of divine grace and mercy that it wishes to possess for itself only.”<sup>14</sup> In taking this stance Van Leeuwen has missed the point of the irony: the indictment is not against Israel’s presumption of divine grace, but rather, as in Job, it is against the ostensible double-standardness or inconsistency of divine justice which rewards the ungodly while punishing the covenant people.<sup>15</sup> From a Deuteronomistic perspective it was the idolatrous sins of the ‘covenant people’ and their lack of repentance which led to their punishment by exile, yet having declared that Jeroboam II וַיַּעַשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה *did what was evil in the sight of the LORD* (2 Kings 14:24) the Deuteronomistic history paradoxically presents the incident of the restoration of Israel’s borders in terms of God’s covenantal concerns for the nation: כִּי־רָצָה

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<sup>12</sup> Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 32.

<sup>13</sup> Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 44.

<sup>14</sup> Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 45.

<sup>15</sup> *Jonah* never uses the term בְּרִית *covenant* yet rudiments of a covenantal relationship are present, including the reference to Exodus 34:6. The use of אַתָּה־בְּיָדְךָ־יָדַעְתִּי *You only have I have known* in Amos 3:2 is said to be covenant language, and the use of יָדַעְתִּי in Jonah 4:2 may be a satirical reference to this covenant relationship. See Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 137; Herbert B. Huffmon, “The Treaty Background of Hebrew Yāda’,” *BASOR*, no. 181 (1966): 31-37; Herbert B. Huffmon and Simon B. Parker, “A Further Note on the Treaty Background of Hebrew Yāda’,” *BASOR*, no. 184 (1966): 36-38.

:לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: *For the LORD saw that the distress of Israel was very bitter; there was no one left, bond or free, and no one to help Israel* (v.26), וַיִּשְׁעֵם *so he saved them* (v.27). There is also something of a paradox in the explanation of why God saved Israel וְלֹא־דָבַר יְהוָה לְמַחֲוֹת אֶת־שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּשְׁעֵם בְּיַד יִרְבֵּעַם בֶּן־יֹאָשׁ: *But the LORD had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Joash* (v.27). This is somewhat paradoxical because within a generation or so God *did* “blot out the name of Israel,” at least as far as the northern kingdom was concerned. It could very well be that this incident prompted the writer of *Jonah* to choose the prophet Jonah as the character for his story as Israel’s deliverance on this occasion was prophesied כְּדִבַּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּיַד־עַבְדּוֹ יוֹנָה *according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah* (v.25).

In a similar manner to Van Leeuwen, Crenshaw argues that, having experienced God’s readiness to forgive: “Jonah resents this same compassion being extended to a city guilty of horrific malice directed at his own people.” However, Crenshaw thinks that the point of the dialogue in Jonah 4 is “to persuade Jonah that truly repentant creatures deserve a second chance, regardless of their ethnicity or pedigree.”<sup>16</sup> I think Crenshaw too is mistaken, as repentance is not the issue in the dialogue and when God has the final word in 4:11, regardless of whether we read it as a question or a statement, the focus is on the size and population of the city, and the number of their cattle, but says nothing of their repentance. It could be argued that ‘repentance’ did not need to be listed as a reason for sparing Nineveh as this had already been established in the preceding pericope; however, this does not account for why the narrator would obfuscate the matter and detract from the centrality of repentance as a thematic concern by listing *other* things (such as size and population of the city) at a

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<sup>16</sup> Crenshaw, “Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 188.

critical point in the story. Crenshaw does, however, list several questions that can be inferred from the dialogue between Jonah and God.

Jonah has a point. Should guilty individuals escape responsibility for the calamities they have brought to others? Should repentance, even if genuine, remove the punishment demanded by their atrocities? Where is the justice in letting guilty people escape the recompense due them? Who wants to live in a world devoid of justice, one in which evildoers can sin with impunity? The operative word here is evildoers, not foreigners, for elsewhere the book describes foreign sailors in admirable terms. Readers of the book would probably have known that Nineveh eventually fell to Babylonian soldiers, making Jonah's objection a moot point.

Crenshaw thinks that through their dialogue God was trying to persuade Jonah that compassion will be shown to the repentant. I am convinced that Crenshaw is right when he argues that theodicy is a primary concern and theme of the Twelve, and one cannot read *Jonah* after the exile – as post-*Shoah* literature – without the atrocities committed by the Assyrians looming over every mention of Nineveh. These atrocities would have been so well known to the reader that there was no need for the writer to specifically mention them; the post-exilic reader would have been unable to excise them from their memory when they read that Nineveh was spared destruction because God is compassionate. To say that Assyrians should be forgiven because God is compassionate, without answering the question of why God seems to be compassionate to the oppressor but not to the oppressed, is to leave the question of God's obligations to his covenanted people unresolved.

This apparent injustice is at the root of the dialogue between God and Jonah. Crenshaw expresses it well when he says the prophets of Israel “experienced an intolerable discrepancy between the anomalies of life and theological belief.”<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere he relates this

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<sup>17</sup> Crenshaw, “Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 191.

specifically to Jonah and says it seemed to the prophet “a gross miscarriage of justice for YHWH to turn away from the deafening cry of spilled blood and to pardon a guilty multitude of hated foreigners.”<sup>18</sup> Historical events threatened their understanding of God’s essential character and they wrestled with this in various ways. Jonah was affronted by the injustice and a theology which declared God to be compassionate, because such a claim was preposterous. At times God was clearly not compassionate, while at other times his compassion seemed to be unwarranted. Fretheim argues that “the book of Jonah is concerned with the question of theodicy in a fundamental way” and it questions if God’s *compassionate* actions are just.<sup>19</sup> By his own experience, and perhaps by an implied ability to know the future, Jonah knew that God’s mercy and compassion was unpredictable, and he articulated this in frustration. His complaint directed to God אלהים אל-הַמֶּלֶךְ פִּי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה לֵאלֹהִים רַחוּם *for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful* (4:2) is full of satire: he does not “know” this at all! The narrative of 2 Kings 14:23-27 suggests Jonah knew that God could act compassionately for his people, yet his failure to pray at any point during the storm and his belief that only his death could save the mariners from perishing suggests that he also had reservations about God’s willingness to forgive. His use of the Exodus 34 ‘attributes’ creedal formula<sup>20</sup> in this context is, in effect, really saying “I do not understand you! You are prepared to forgive these barbarous brutes, but not your own people!” In fact, by saying יָדַעְתִּי *I knew* Jonah may have been speaking ironically: “I do not know you at all” or “I do not know how your compassion works!” Good argues as much when he suggests that Jonah was using a liturgical cliché: “He

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<sup>18</sup> Crenshaw, *Defending God*, 91.

<sup>19</sup> Fretheim, “Jonah and Theodicy,” 227.

<sup>20</sup> I use the term “creedal” in the sense described by Walter Brueggemann: “Scholars believe this [Exod. 34.6-7] is an exceedingly important, stylized, quite self-conscious characterization of Yahweh, a formation so studied that it may be reckoned to be something of a classic, normative statement to which Israel regularly returned, meriting the label ‘credo’.” Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 216.

speaks the pious and well-worn words but he thoroughly disapproves of their being true.”<sup>21</sup>

The divine response was to question the validity of Jonah’s emotions: הַיֵּטֵב הָרָה לְךָ *is it good for you to be angry?* (4:4). Jonah did not answer but left the city and waited to see what would happen. The prophet’s silence suggests he treated the question with contempt as it should have been self-evident why he was emotional, and that his emotion was legitimate.

### **Theodicy and antitheodicy**

In its classical sense, as a feature of ethical monotheism, theodicy holds to three sets of fundamentals: a belief in God’s goodness, his power and the real occurrence of suffering.<sup>22</sup> In the Deuteronomistic literature theodicy is closely linked with the idea of retribution,<sup>23</sup> whereby evil is explained in terms of people being rewarded or punished according to what their actions deserve. The Deuteronomistic writers account for the collapse of Israel and Judah’s monarchies as the result of the sins of the people, or their kings. In fact, Whybray asserts:

The Deuteronomistic History is a work whose aim is to justify God’s punitive behaviour toward his people. Viewed from a standpoint subsequent to 587 B.C., Israel has sinned and rejected Yahweh; and

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<sup>21</sup> Good, *Irony in the Old Testament.*, 50.

<sup>22</sup> Laato and Moor, *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, x. Following Ronald M. Green, “Theodicy,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. M. Eliade; New York: Macmillan, 1987), 431.

<sup>23</sup> Some scholars, such as Klaus Koch, have denied that a doctrine of retribution exists in the Hebrew Bible. Koch argues instead, primarily from material in Proverbs 25-29, that the writers of the Hebrew Bible expressed the idea of “fate-producing deeds” and that God is the “guarantor of the moral order” rather than one who inflicts rewards or punishments. (Klaus Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?,” in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (1983), 57-87. This is a translation of the major portion of Koch’s original article in German: Klaus Koch, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?,” *ZTK* 52 (1955): 1-42.) For a summary of scholarly reactions to Koch’s article see John G. Gammie, “The Theology of Retribution in the Book of Deuteronomy,” *CBQ* 32, no. 1 (1970): 1-5 and the literature cited there.



its punishment, which took the form of material destruction, foreign rule, and exile, has been inflicted only after many warnings. Hence it was fully justified.<sup>24</sup>

Whybray goes on, however, to deal with the problems of individual suffering and the “dark side” of God and argues that the Deuteronomistic history includes a number of stories “where it is not difficult to demonstrate unfair treatment of individuals and some in which God is represented as making innocent persons suffer.” He cites several examples, including the death of Josiah which was “an occurrence completely at variance with the principle followed elsewhere in the book of Kings that those who did what was good in the sight of God were appropriately rewarded.” He regards Josiah’s death as “not only unjust but was a personal and national tragedy that hastened the demise of the kingdom of Judah.”<sup>25</sup>

As Zachary Braiterman has noted, “While theodicy constitutes a relatively recent term in the history of Western philosophy, the problems it touches upon are perennial.”<sup>26</sup> It is therefore an appropriate term to apply to the intra-biblical dialogue after the exile about the possible or theoretical reasons for it. For Braiterman, theodicy comprises “any utterance that attributes positive spiritual or moral ‘meaning’ to genuine evil, any attempt to redeem suffering.”<sup>27</sup> However, in the shadow of the horrors of Auschwitz many of the earlier

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<sup>24</sup> R. N. Whybray, “Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just?,” in *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Right? Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw* (eds. David Penchansky and Paul L. Redditt; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 9.

<sup>25</sup> Whybray, “Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just?,” 12.

<sup>26</sup> Zachary Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 19. Tom Willett argues that “a theodicy can range from a rational explanation to the complete abandonment of finding a rational explanation” and regards all biblical theodicies as being on a rational-irrational *continuum*. It is at the ‘irrational’ end of this *continuum* that we find what Braiterman calls ‘antitheodicy’ where there is an inability or refusal to justify suffering. I find Braiterman’s distinction between what Willett might regard as the ends of a *continuum* to be helpful and so will continue to use his term. Tom W. Willett, *Eschatology in the Theodicies of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1989), 12.

<sup>27</sup> Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 4-5.

theological explanations for the existence of evil are manifestly inadequate and even unbearable, leading Braiterman to refer to them as “the scandal of theodicy”<sup>28</sup> and to coin another term to address the problem: antitheodicy. “By antitheodicy we mean any religious response to the problem of evil whose proponents refuse to justify, explain, or accept as somehow meaningful the relationship between God and suffering.”<sup>29</sup>

Antitheodicy mirrors theodicy in reverse but should not be confused with atheism. In both theodic and antitheodic discourse, religious believers address the relation that they see between God, providence, evil, and human suffering. However, by definition, antitheodic statements do not do what theodic statements do. They neither justify, explain, ascribe positive meaning, account for, resolve, understand, accept, or theologically rectify the presence of evil in human affairs. The authors of antitheodic statements do not assume that suffering represents a necessary or acceptable price for certain goods. Rather, they express anger, hurt, confusion. They do not try to silence suffering people.<sup>30</sup>

Braiterman argues that Job lends itself to three basic forms of antitheodicy: complaint, solidarity with suffering people, and bewildered incomprehension. Referring to Braiterman’s work in a post-Holocaust reflection on Job, Dan Mathewson also argues that Job is an antitheodicy, “a biblical book that exists on the theological margins of the biblical texts due to its non-traditional and problematic accounting of evil and suffering.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, I suggest that *Jonah* shares some of the distinguishing features of Job and is also an antitheodicy, a satirical attack on the inadequacy of contemporaneous views of providence. Job and 4 Ezra are often seen as the classic biblical theodicies written in response to catastrophes, and

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<sup>28</sup> Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 37.

<sup>31</sup> Dan Mathewson, “Between Testimony and Interpretation: the Book of Job in Post-Holocaust, Jewish Theological Reflection,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 41, no. 2 (2008): 35.

Michael Knibb argues convincingly that there is a parallelism between the two books which suggests that “Job was in the mind of the author of 4 Ezra” and there was “a conscious modelling on Job” by the author of 4 Ezra.<sup>32</sup> Lydia Gore-Jones has observed several similarities between Job and the first three episodes in 4 Ezra: “these three episodes show many parallels with Job in their dialogue form, the question of theodicy, and their words and imagery.”<sup>33</sup> I will examine *Jonah* against both 4 Ezra and Job, to determine if it can be categorised as theodicy, or antitheodicy.

### Theodicy in 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch

The scholarly consensus is that 4 Ezra, also known as 2 Esdras 3-14, was written after the destruction of Jerusalem, probably at the end of the first century CE, but set against the background of the Babylonian exile.<sup>34</sup> Richard Choi describes the time of writing as a time when “the tension-filled history of Israel – a frustrating history of promise and nonfulfillment – had finally collapsed.”<sup>35</sup> The book portrays the character Ezra asking the questions:

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<sup>32</sup> Stone provides several examples of similarities between Job and 4 Ezra. For example, he argues that the questions in 4 Ezra 4:7 “are clearly patterned on Job 38:16-17.” (Michael E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (ed. Frank Moore Cross; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 84.) Knibb also refers specifically to the close similarities between 4 Ezra 4:7-8; and Job 38, as well as 4 Ezra 5:36-7 and Job 36:26-7. (Michael A. Knibb, “Apocalyptic and Wisdom in 4 Ezra,” *JSJ* 13, no. 1-2 (1982): 65, 73.)

<sup>33</sup> Lydia Gore-Jones, “The Unity and Coherence of 4 Ezra: Crisis, Response, and Authorial Intention,” *JSJ* 47, no. 2 (2016): 232.

<sup>34</sup> “Stone and Henze argue for a date in the last decade of the first century CE, based on the identification of the eagle’s heads in the Eagle Vision (chapters 11-12) as the Flavian emperors, and conclude that the work was composed in the latter part of the reign of Domitian (81-96 CE).” Michael E. Stone and Matthias Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: Translations, Introductions, and Notes* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), x. For further references on the question of dating and language see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (3rd ed.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 146 n.7.

<sup>35</sup> P. Richard Choi, “The Intra-Jewish Dialogue in 4 Ezra 3:1-9: 25,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (2003): 239.

why Israel has been given over to the Gentiles in disgrace; why the people whom you loved has been given over to godless tribes, and the law of our ancestors has been brought to destruction and the written covenants no longer exist. We pass from the world like locusts, and our life is like a mist, and we are not worthy to obtain mercy (4 Ezra 4:23-24).

James Crenshaw says 4 Ezra “rivals the biblical book of Job in posing the question of divine justice” and thinks in these two books “theodicy finds its purest expression.”<sup>36</sup> As 4 Ezra exhibits several similarities with 2 Baruch, which was almost certainly written around the same time, it appears that these two apocalyptic works came out of a dialogue about this tension in the light of the fall of Jerusalem. The anguished tone of 4 Ezra reflects the writer’s “own mental turmoil at the realization of how inadequately traditional Jewish theodicy explains the problem of evil, sin, and justification”<sup>37</sup> and how the Jewish community was “processing the theological and emotional grief of 70 C.E.”<sup>38</sup> It is not unexpected that Jews would have been discussing these issues after the traumatic experience of 70 CE, or that they would have seen themselves mirroring similar discussions which took place against the background of the Babylonian captivity.<sup>39</sup> In a similar way, 2 Baruch deals with the question of God’s justice in not only allowing the destruction of Jerusalem but actually initiating it, and the corollary matter of why the nations were not judged in the same way or to the same standard. In this first half of the book Baruch’s major concern is with the nation, and he then

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<sup>36</sup> Crenshaw, “Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 178.

<sup>37</sup> A.P. Hayman, “The Problem of Pseudonymity in the Ezra Apocalypse,” *JSJ* 6, no. 1 (1975): 55.

<sup>38</sup> Choi, “The Intra-Jewish Dialogue in 4 Ezra 3:1-9: 25,” 241.

<sup>39</sup> Christopher Rowland, “The Parting of the Ways: the Evidence of Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic and Mystical Material,” in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 221.

shifts his concern to dealing with the righteous within the nation as he struggles with individual versus collective retribution.

What profit did those have who had knowledge before you and did not walk in emptiness like the rest of the nations, and they did not say to the dead: ‘Give us life!’ but were always fearing you and did not leave your ways. And see, they were striving – and not even for their sake did you have mercy on Zion. If others committed wicked deeds, Zion should have been forgiven on account of the works of those who did good, and it should not have been overpowered on account of the works of those who did wrong (2 Baruch 14:5-7).<sup>40</sup>

At this point Baruch complains that God’s judgment is incomprehensible (14:8) but finds some comfort in believing that the righteous will receive a reward “in the world [or: age] that you have promised them” (14:13). This is a deferred or eschatological theodicy – the sufferings of the righteous will be recompensed in the age to come – and represents what seems to be a late stage in the development of theodicy.

Eschatological ideas play a major role in 2 Baruch. The presentation of these ideas does not intend, however, to supply esoteric data about the eschaton, but rather to offer help to the person struggling with the problem of evil.<sup>41</sup>

In the Hebrew Bible there are hints of an afterlife or resurrection as a reward for the righteous in texts such as Isaiah 26:19<sup>42</sup> but the idea is not fully developed, if at all, until

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<sup>40</sup> Translation by Stone and Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: Translations, Introductions, and Notes*.

<sup>41</sup> Willett, *Eschatology in the Theodicies of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra*, 118.

<sup>42</sup> “Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead.” There is considerable disagreement within biblical scholarship as to whether Isaiah 26:19 and to a lesser extent Daniel 12:2, 13 refer to physical resurrection or if they are metaphors for something else, such as a revival of national Israel or a pious group

Daniel 12:2, 13.<sup>43</sup> If there is a progression in the development of theodicy with an afterlife or resurrection providing a reward or justification for suffering as a late stage, then *Jonah* represents a stage which rejected explanations or justifications of God's actions in terms of rewards or punishments for human behaviour, but had not developed to the deferred or eschatological theodicies of later texts. It can be seen from 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch that eschatological theodicies probably developed in response to a frustration with or rejection of previous attempts to justify God's actions based on ideas of rewards and punishments. *Jonah* (and *Job*) seem to reflect an intermediate stage in the development of theodicy.

In a dialogue between Ezra and the angel Uriel in 4 Ezra, the angel speaks for God and says:

For indeed I will not concern myself about the fashioning of those who have sinned, or about their death, their judgment, or their destruction; but I will rejoice over the creation of the righteous, over their pilgrimage also, and their salvation, and their receiving their reward (8:38-39).

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within Israel. On the side of reading these texts as references to resurrection, Stephen L. Cook asserts: "Far from mere metaphor, Isaiah 26 anticipates a vision of actual resurrection that forms a basis for the well-known resurrection faith of Daniel 12:1-3. Israel was long familiar with the idea that the dead could be awakened (cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:8-37, 13:21; Hosea 6:2; Ezekiel 37; Isaiah 53:9-10). So too, from early on, a core biblical ideal entailed the joy and fulfillment of embodied human community. In the Second Temple period, in texts such as Daniel 12:1-3, these ideas and ideals joined up and surfaced in Israel's conscious faith. Deep currents within Israelite tradition flowed together and poured forth in an explicit expectation of eschatological resurrection. God's reign would only come in fullness, the scriptures now declared, when earth finally beholds a collective end-time raising of the dead..." (Stephen L. Cook, "Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel," *Religion Compass* 1, no. 6 (2007): 669.)

<sup>43</sup> "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt ... you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days."



ὅτι ἀληφῶς οὐ μεριμνήσω ἐπὶ τὸ πλάσμα

which bears little resemblance to the Septuagint of Jonah 4:11a:

ἐγὼ δὲ οὐ φείσομαι ὑπὲρ Νινευη *and I will not spare Nineveh*

It is possible that the writer of 4 Ezra was alluding here to Jonah 4:11 although the Latin and Syriac are both so far removed from the original language that we cannot be certain and any attempted reconstruction of the Greek of 4 Ezra from the Latin must be speculative.

This remark by Uriel is not surprising in the context of 4 Ezra as the author presents God as impersonal and indifferent, rather than compassionate and forgiving.<sup>48</sup> Similar to Van Leeuwen's view that *Jonah* may have been a *midrashic* homily on Exodus 34:6, Simonsen also treats 4 Ezra 7:132-140 as a *midrash* on Exodus 34:6.<sup>49</sup> Choi posits that the intention of the author is to "move beyond the soteriological straightjacket and find an altogether new way of thinking" largely because the fall of Jerusalem defied all rational and ethical explanations for how God deals with Israel.<sup>50</sup> The author can only articulate his theodicy in the language of apocalyptic visions and defers justice for the righteous to the *eschaton*: "the age is hurrying swiftly to its end. It will not be able to bring the things that have been promised to the righteous in their appointed times, because this age is full of sadness and infirmities" (4:26-27). The angel encouraged Ezra to consider "what is to come, rather than

<sup>48</sup> Choi, "The Intra-Jewish Dialogue in 4 Ezra 3:1-9: 25," 241.

<sup>49</sup> D. Simonsen, "Ein Midrasch im IV. Buch Esra," in *Festschrift I. Lewy* (eds. M. Brann and J. Elbogen; Breslau: M. and H. Marcus, 1911), 270-78; Van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve," 44.

<sup>50</sup> Choi, "The Intra-Jewish Dialogue in 4 Ezra 3:1-9: 25," 243. Collins holds a similar view. J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (Second ed.; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 201.



what is now present” (7:16). In some ways the author of 4 Ezra is simply building on the theodicies of those prophets in the Hebrew Bible who sought a rational explanation for the suffering of the righteous in eschatological terms, yet was unable to make sense of such a time and felt “compelled to reject the rational, cause-to-effect construct of the covenant language.”<sup>51</sup> Relatively early in the book God told Ezra “you cannot discover my judgment, or the goal of the love that I have promised to my people” (5:40) and no answers to Ezra’s questions are forthcoming. God’s responses are remarkably similar to the voice from the whirlwind in Job which are designed to reinforce how little the questioner understands rather than providing answers.<sup>52</sup> Overall the portrayal of God in 4 Ezra is that he lacks compassion, while Ezra is deeply concerned for the fate of both his own people as well as for the nations.<sup>53</sup> In my view, *Jonah* portrays God in a similar way and although the two works are far from contemporaneous – although both are post-*Shoah* texts – the treatment of divine justice and compassion in 4 Ezra demonstrates that challenging a covenantal theology of a compassionate God was a possible, legitimate and perhaps inevitable response for post-*Shoah* Judaism. I argue that *Jonah* was responding to the Babylonian exile in much the same way as 4 Ezra reacted to the destruction of Jerusalem, in portraying God as lacking compassion for Israel, and in challenging the inadequacy of Deuteronomistic paradigms to provide rational, or at least somewhat satisfying, answers. The authors of both works wanted to divest Judaism of their day of the Deuteronomistic framework as a basis for hope.<sup>54</sup>

Unlike Job and *Jonah*, however, 4 Ezra proposes that meaning can be found in the observance of *Torah*. In this way it is resembled by later post-*Shoah* texts written in response

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<sup>51</sup> Choi, “The Intra-Jewish Dialogue in 4 Ezra 3:1-9: 25,” 244.

<sup>52</sup> Gore-Jones, “The Unity and Coherence of 4 Ezra,” 232-33; Knibb, “Apocalyptic and Wisdom in 4 Ezra,” 65-66.

<sup>53</sup> Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 212.

<sup>54</sup> Choi, “The Intra-Jewish Dialogue in 4 Ezra 3:1-9: 25,” 253.

to catastrophe. Wiesel's play, *The Trial of God*, tells the story of the survivors of a pogrom in a Ukrainian village who put God on trial in its aftermath. The idea for the play came from an event that Wiesel witnessed as a boy in Auschwitz, when three erudite and pious rabbis decided one evening to indict God for allowing his children to be massacred. In the play, after several days of hearing evidence and listening to the accounts of witnesses, the judges were unanimous in their verdict: God was found *guilty* of crimes against creation and humanity. After what Wiesel describes as an "infinity of silence" one of the Rabbis looked at the sky and said, "It's time for evening prayers" and the members of the tribunal recited the evening service. This is somewhat similar to Richard Rubenstein's personal experience. There is consensus among theologians and scholars that Rubenstein's book, *After Auschwitz*,<sup>55</sup> initiated much of the contemporary debate on the meaning of the *Shoah* in religious thought. Rubenstein felt that the only honest response to the death camps was to reject the presence of God at Auschwitz rather than believe that Hitler was God's instrument. He argued that no sin committed by Israel could have been so great as to justify such a retribution.<sup>56</sup> For Rubenstein the only possible response was to conclude that there is no God and no covenant with Israel. Yet he further argued that for the Jew it is in the traditional forms of life that the community participates in its shared predicament and there is no paradox in denying the existence of God and continuing to practice traditional forms of Judaism. The writer of 4 Ezra came to a similar conclusion:

Written at a time when Israel's identity as the chosen people of the Most High was threatened and her covenant relationship with God was thrown into question, 4 Ezra was written to convey a specific message. Faithfulness to the torah and the Mosaic tradition is the author's answer to the crisis. The law shows people the lessons of the past and provides the key to their present life and to future salvation.

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<sup>55</sup> Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (2nd ed.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Jewish Studies, 1992). (First published in 1966).

<sup>56</sup> Steven T. Katz, "Jewish Faith After the Holocaust," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 9:392.

However, the Mosaic tradition is also modified and expanded to include eschatological revelations about the future when Israel's covenant with God will be fully realized.<sup>57</sup>

The post-*Shoah* writings of 4 Ezra, Wiesel, Rubenstein and others have this in common: although they have no rational explanation which justifies God's role in allowing atrocities to be committed against his people – in other words, no theodicy – they find meaning for life in the observance of the traditional forms of Judaism.

### **Job as antitheodicy**

Job, on the other hand – a text which commentators sometimes describe as a masterpiece of theodicy – has no call to observe *Torah* or to find meaning in traditional practices. Having challenged the theories of retributive justice, the writer (through Job) calls on God to explain himself. Yet the divine response provides no explanation or justification and the book concludes rather abruptly, perhaps unsatisfactorily to some readers. I agree with the conclusion of Braiterman and Matthewson that Job is antitheodicy, expressing anger, hurt and confusion, but offering no hope. There are several similarities between Job and *Jonah*. The provision of the *קִיקְיֹן* (Jonah 4:6-7) only to take it away again, echoes Job's comment that "the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away" (1:21). No explanation is given in the text as to why God "provided" a sultry east wind to beat down on Jonah (4:8), echoing the LORD's own judgment that the sufferings inflicted on Job were *בְּרֵחַ* for no reason (Job 2:3). Neither book has a satisfying conclusion. God does not provide an explanation or enter into any discussion about the reasons for Job's suffering, he simply asserts his sovereignty; nor does he offer an explanation to Jonah for why he destroyed the *קִיקְיֹן* and sent a hot wind to torment him, or for his decision regarding Nineveh. Both books end with the key questions

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<sup>57</sup> Gore-Jones, "The Unity and Coherence of 4 Ezra," 234-35.

unanswered. Job also contains some troubling contradictions. At the end God approves of Job by saying to his three friends *לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדֵי אֵיִב* *you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has*, contradicting his earlier rebuke that Job was *בְּמַלְיוֹן בְּלִי-דַעַת* *speaking without knowledge* (Job 38:2). Although God condemned Job's friends because they had *לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה* *not spoken the truth about me* (42:7), he later confirmed their theological arguments by restoring Job's wealth and blessing "the latter years of Job's life more than the former" because of his piety (42:12), as his friends had predicted when they said *וְהָיָה רֵאשִׁיתְךָ מְצַעֵר וְאַחֲרֵיתְךָ יִשְׁגָּה מְאֹד* *though your beginning be small, in the end you will greatly increase* (8:7).

So, on the one hand, God's approval goes to the one who questioned him, challenged him, and charged him with injustice and murder, but, on the other hand, his rebuke goes to those who resolutely supported the same theological system that God ultimately upholds, and whose predictions about God's actions God ultimately proves to be true.<sup>58</sup>

Mathewson goes on to suggest that these contradictions in Job actually ensure that the dialogue and inquiry amongst readers will continue long after the story has ended. The end of *Jonah* may serve a similar purpose: the conclusion is dissatisfying and this, rather than grammatical considerations, is probably the most compelling reason for translators and interpreters to impose on the text a rhetorical question which, by the very nature of a rhetorical question, implies an answer which is not stated in the text; namely, that God is concerned about a city with a population as large as Nineveh. To end with an implied statement that God is concerned about foreigners who repent (although the conclusion is awkwardly silent about the issue of repentance) is more satisfying than to conclude with a

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<sup>58</sup> Mathewson, "Between Testimony and Interpretation: the Book of Job in Post-Holocaust, Jewish Theological Reflection," 26.

statement that God is not concerned about them. Yet, the less satisfying conclusion almost compels the reader or listener to recall the king's earlier question, "Who knows?" and to therefore end the story with an invitation to continue the dialogue, much like the conclusion to Job.

The use of terminology and allusions in Job to themes which are abundant in the book of Deuteronomy suggest that the work was primarily intended as a polemic against the kind of retributive worldview found in Deuteronomistic literature. It shares many of these elements in common with *Jonah*. Abounding irony, satire and parody provide evidence that it contained comic elements which were not intended simply to entertain but were intended to ridicule particular targets. The frequent use of legal terminology suggests that it had a forensic setting and is best viewed as a courtroom drama which put the Deuteronomic views of providence on trial.<sup>59</sup> The work was probably intended to appeal to an initial audience which was wrestling with issues related to God's relationship with his covenant people against a background of exile and the prospect of annihilation.

There are several noteworthy similarities between expressions in the book of Job and those in Deuteronomy, especially in chapters 28 and 32, which suggest that Job was written in response to the claims of Deuteronomy. The language of exile in both Job and

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<sup>59</sup> Examples of forensic terminology in Job include הַשָּׂטָן *the Adversary* or *the Prosecutor* in the Prologue (Job 1-2), and the Prosecutor's counterpart in גֹּאֲלִי *my Vindicator* and אֶקְרֹן *Guarantor* (19:25, cf. Isaiah 44:6 and see Pope, *Job*, 146.) There is "a sudden explosion of legal terminology" commencing in Job's third speech in the first cycle, including references to "a trial in court" (9:19) and God being "summoned" (9:16). (See Robert Sutherland, *Putting God on Trial: The Biblical Book of Job* (Victoria B.C.: Trafford Publishing, 2004), 51.) Habel uses forensic terminology when translating several Hebrew words, such as rendering מִשְׁפָּט as *lawsuit* (13:18), and argues in fact that the whole of the book of Job is a legal metaphor. (Habel, *The Book of Job*, 54-57.) I have argued elsewhere that Job is best read as "theatre," a kind of courtroom drama. Stephen D. Cook, "A Reading of Job as a Theatrical Work: Challenging a Retributive Deuteronomistic Theodicy," *Literature & Aesthetics* 24, no. 2 (2014): 39-62.

Deuteronomy further supports the proposition that Job was written after the Babylonian exile.

Wolfers has compiled a convincing list of these intertextualities, of which the following are the most impressive.<sup>60</sup>

| <b>Deuteronomy</b>  | <b>Job</b>  |
|---|---|
| <p>Your <b>ox</b> shall be butchered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it. Your <b>donkey</b> shall be <b>stolen in front of you</b>, and shall not be restored to you. Your sheep shall be given to your enemies, without anyone to help you. <b>Your sons and daughters</b> shall be given to another people, while you look on; you will strain your eyes looking for them all day but be powerless to do anything. (28:31, 32)</p> | <p>“The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell on them and <b>carried them off</b>, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword ... The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them ... <b>Your sons and daughters</b> were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house, and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead. (1:14-19)</p> |
| <p>The LORD will strike you on the knees and on the legs with <b>grievous boils</b> of which you cannot be healed, <b>from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.</b> (28:35)</p>   | <p>So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted <b>loathsome sores</b> on Job <b>from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.</b> (2:7)</p>  |

<sup>60</sup> Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness*, 112-14.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>In the morning you shall say, “<b>If only it were evening!</b>” and at evening you shall say, “<b>If only it were morning!</b>”—because of the dread that your heart shall feel and the sights that your eyes shall see. (28:67)</p> | <p>When I lie down I say, ‘<b>When shall I rise?</b>’ But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn. (7:4)</p> <p>LXX adds: When I rise, I say “<b>when will it be evening?</b>”</p> |
|---|---|

The fact that the writer of Job draws so heavily on the language of Deuteronomy 28 suggests that Job’s miseries are used as metaphors for the invasion, destruction and degradation of the population under foreign assaults. Habel also notes that the mention of כַּשְׁדִּים *Chaldeans* in 1:17 “may have been intended to evoke associations with the organized destruction wrought by the Babylonian army on Israel.”<sup>61</sup> Some of the speeches, especially those of Bildad, also use the language of exile and alienation,<sup>62</sup> which suggests that the intended audience were still smarting from the pain of a recent exile. Job’s first speech concludes with the words: “I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest; but trouble comes” (3:26). This is restated in a Midrash which says: “I had no ease from Babylon, no peace from Medea, no rest from Greece, and agony from Edom.”<sup>63</sup> This indicates that this text has been interpreted metaphorically and applied to exiled Israel and Judah for a considerable period.

The epilogue includes the phrase: שָׁבַ אֶת-שְׁבוּת אֵיּוֹב and *the LORD turned the captivity of Job* (or, *the LORD restored the fortunes of Job* 42:10). In thirty biblical contexts this phrase recurs with slight variations with reference to Israel or Judah’s return from captivity.<sup>64</sup> Wolfers argues that:

<sup>61</sup> Habel, *The Book of Job*, 92.

<sup>62</sup> Janzen, *Job*, 87.

<sup>63</sup> *Exodus Rabbah*, chapter 26. Translation by Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness*, 116.

<sup>64</sup> Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness*, 103.

The fact that this explicit phrase occurs elsewhere so often, and only in connection with a people or a country, never an individual, is the most convincing evidence that Job in the Prologue-Epilogue at least is not an individual.<sup>65</sup>

He concludes that the person Job is “surely no more than an allegorical mask” for an exiled nation obsessed with the fear of its final extinction.<sup>66</sup> It could also be argued that the writer is deliberately using Deuteronomic language in order to target a theodicy which was further articulated in Deuteronomistic literature. The returning exiles, or a remnant left in the land, would undoubtedly be troubled by the teaching of one religious school that the nation was being, or had been, punished for their sins, which was contrary to their alternate tradition which viewed their history and their kings more positively; or a difficulty in comprehending the justice behind the notion that their generation had been punished for the transgressions of their forefathers. The purpose of the writer was to challenge this theodicy and to reassure them in the face of potential annihilation.

Wolfers argues that the key character in the book of Job is actually the nation of Israel which suffers the torments predicted by Moses in his curses for disobedience listed in Deuteronomy 28. Israel, as Job, argues that it is being unjustly punished. Job, or the writer of the book, is therefore (according to Wolfers) a “heretic” disagreeing with the theodicy of the Deuteronomistic literature. Wolfers’ list of Deuteronomic quotations or allusions suggests that the writer of the book of Job was familiar with Deuteronomy; but he did not necessarily allude to it because he was influenced by it, but rather because he disagreed with it. The presence of comic elements in Job may suggest that the writer is making a parody of the theodicy of the Deuteronomistic literature, with which he apparently disagrees.

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<sup>65</sup> Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness*, 104.

<sup>66</sup> Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness*, 106.



A foundation of Deuteronomistic theology is a cause-and-effect relationship between sin and suffering, articulated first by Moses in Deuteronomy: “If you will obey ... all these blessings shall come upon you ... But if you do not obey ... all these curses shall come upon you and take effect” (Deuteronomy 28:1, 15). This is precisely what the Adversary argues in the prologue: “Does Job not have good reason to fear God? Why, it is you who have fenced him around ... You have blessed his efforts” (Job 1:9f). It is also the argument advanced by Job’s three friends and Elihu: Job’s sufferings *must* be the result of sin, and if he repents he will prosper again. It is a theme which is elaborated through the Deuteronomistic history, culminating in Israel and Judah’s captivity because of disobedience. I am conscious of the risk of over-simplifying the complexities of Deuteronomistic theology, which are further exacerbated by the complexities of untangling the redactional layers in the Deuteronomistic literature. Scholars are aware of these issues and there is little consensus on what is undoubtedly “Deuteronomistic.” There does seem to be considerable agreement, however, that the editing process, and the treatment of issues such as the death of Josiah (which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter), were attempts to deal with some of these complexities.

It is a consistent theme of the Deuteronomistic literature that God blesses the upright and punishes evildoers. Job’s three friends agree with this (for example, in Job 5:10-13); so too does the Adversary (1:9-10). However, the Adversary implies that this policy is foolish, as the LORD can never know who is truly serving him without the motivation of a reward, or a threat of punishment. In fact, by his question “Does Job fear God for no reason?” (1:9) he may be arguing that no one ever serves God without an incentive. The writer of the book of

Job appears to be “testing” this theology.<sup>67</sup> Is it possible to be upright, blameless or righteous without an incentive? The way the writer tests this is to reverse the situation: make a righteous person suffer for no cause, and remove all the blessings, *לְרֵעָה לְבַלְבָּלָהּ* *for no reason* (2:3). Job undergoes the “test” and maintains his innocence while denouncing the injustice. In doing so he challenges the Deuteronomistic view that obedience and prosperity, disobedience and suffering, are cause-and-effect. The writer of Job not only *tests* the theodicy of the Deuteronomistic literature, I argue that he *disagrees* with it.

The purpose of irony, as Janzen puts it, is to subvert an attitude, conviction or set of beliefs indirectly and from within, rather than attacking it directly.<sup>68</sup> As the book abounds in irony, he reads it as “an essay in the reversal of long-held views.”<sup>69</sup> Gerald Wilson concurs and identifies the target as “the predominant Deuteronomic stream of thought that played such a significant role in shaping canonical Scripture.”<sup>70</sup> The book provided an alternative which would have resonated with the experiences of the exilic and post-exilic generations. If Wolfers is correct then this was not just an academic argument. The author was writing for a nation that had gone into exile and was questioning the justice of their fate; a nation that was turning to its religious leaders for answers. On the one hand they were being told that their suffering was the result of sin,<sup>71</sup> while on the other hand the writer of Job challenged the idea that their suffering was the result of sin and promised a restoration of their fortunes.

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<sup>67</sup> Habel comments along similar lines insofar as he suggests the Satan is questioning the theology: “The Satan thereby not only signals doubts about Job’s piety as an individual but also questions a basic tenet of a wisdom theology which assumes an inevitable nexus between reward and righteousness.” Habel, *The Book of Job*, 90.

<sup>68</sup> Janzen, *Job*, 17.

<sup>69</sup> Janzen, *Job*, 22.

<sup>70</sup> Wilson, *Job*, 10.

<sup>71</sup> But we could ask, whose sin? The second book of Kings seems to place the blame for the captivity on the shoulders of Manasseh. See my discussion of this on pages 173 and 180.

Jack Sanders posits that the crisis of the Wisdom literature is one of theodicy<sup>72</sup> and “when one reads through the main Judaic wisdom texts chronologically, one sees the rise of the problem of theodicy and the resultant attempt to solve the problem” and goes on to conclude “one can follow a course from the awareness of the problem in Job to its complete solution in the book of Wisdom and in 4QInstruction,<sup>73</sup> where versions of a belief in an existence beyond death finally make their way into the tradition.”<sup>74</sup> The problem of theodicy was not resolved however by Wisdom or 4QInstruction. The “intra-Jewish dialogue taking place in 4 Ezra” (and elsewhere) is evidence that the discussion was far from over and these later texts were making a “systematic and highly intellectual contribution ... to the self-understanding of Judaism.”<sup>75</sup> Sanders argues that the hope of an eternal after-life – which he thinks first raised its head in Job, but was rejected, and again in Qoheleth and Ben Sira, where it was also rejected – was finally accepted by the authors of the Wisdom of Solomon and 4QInstruction who saw the reward of the righteous in a post-mortem existence as a resolution of the theodicy problem. However, I disagree with Sanders that a post-mortem reward was regarded as a “complete solution” in the later texts: if it was, there would have been no need for 4 Ezra or 2 Baruch.

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<sup>72</sup> Jack Sanders, “Wisdom, Theodicy, Death, and the Evolution of Intellectual Traditions,” *JSJ* 36, no. 3 (2005): 264. I use the term “Wisdom literature” cautiously, cognizant of the debate about whether or not such a genre can be categorised, but when I do so it is with reference to those texts generally regarded in scholarship to be Wisdom texts (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, Sirach). For a critique of the categorisation of “Wisdom literature” see Will Kynes, “The ‘Wisdom Literature’ Category: An Obituary,” *JTS* 69, no. 1 (2018): 1-24; Mark R. Sneed, “Is the ‘Wisdom Tradition’ a Tradition?,” *CBQ* 73, no. 1 (2011): 50-71; Mark R. Sneed ed, *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies (Ancient Israel and Its Literature)*; ed. Thomas C. Romer; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), whole book.

<sup>73</sup> Also known as 4Q415-18, Sapiential Work A, and מוסר למבין *Instruction to a student*.

<sup>74</sup> Sanders, “Wisdom, Theodicy, Death, and the Evolution of Intellectual Traditions,” 263.

<sup>75</sup> Choi, “The Intra-Jewish Dialogue in 4 Ezra 3:1-9: 25,” 239.

***Jonah as antitheodicy***

Jonah's reaction to Nineveh's repentance was threefold: first he considered both their repentance and God's relenting to be a "great evil" (וַיִּרַע אֶל־יְיֹנָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה) which caused him to be despondent, annoyed or confused (וַיִּחַר לוֹ);<sup>76</sup> second, he took his complaint to God in prayer; and finally, after being questioned by God about the appropriateness of his emotions he ignored the question and waited to see if his complaint would make any difference. This section of *Jonah* has a very Joban feel to it. Dell highlights several similarities in style between the two books and suggests that they both stood at the end of their own traditions and the time was therefore ripe for the use of techniques such as irony, parody and satire directed at one's own culture.<sup>77</sup> She elsewhere rejects the propositions that *Jonah* was directed at the particularism of Ezra and Nehemiah as proof for this is lacking, or that it was a thinly veiled attack on nationalistic prophets, as this is clearly not the whole story. Instead, she sees the book "acting as a foil for a more serious theological encounter, rather in the manner of the prose sections of the book of Job" and refers specifically to the airing of the theme of theodicy as a concern of both books.<sup>78</sup> I think Dell is right, and while there are no direct citations by one of the other the striking thematic similarities between the two books suggests that they were written to meet similar needs, or in similar circumstances, or even that they arose from the same literary or scribal community, which Dell thinks may have been "a sceptical group on the fringe."<sup>79</sup>

If we accept Braiterman's definition of anitheodicy as any religious response to the problem of evil whose proponents refuse to justify, explain, or accept as somehow

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<sup>76</sup> For an explanation of this interpretation of וַיִּחַר לוֹ see page 243.

<sup>77</sup> Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*, 157.

<sup>78</sup> Dell, "Reinventing the Wheel," 96-98.

<sup>79</sup> Dell, "Reinventing the Wheel," 100.

meaningful the relationship between God and suffering, then it is possible to argue that both Job and *Jonah* meet the criteria. While the book of Job is structured in such a way as to present various explanations – presented by Job’s three friends and by Elihu – of the possible reasons for his suffering, Job maintains his innocence to the end. In the long speeches by God – a voice from the whirlwind – no reason is given for the calamities which have fallen on him and his family, and even at the end Job has no knowledge of the wager between God and Satan which triggered it all. In the book’s forensic context the epilogue implicitly declares that the LORD, rather than the Adversary, was “guilty” in bringing misfortune on Job. The number of Job’s animals were doubled (and possibly also his sons<sup>80</sup>), and this emphasis on economics and doubling at the end of the epilogue is reminiscent of the Mosaic laws of restitution. The doubling of Job’s possessions and sons implies legal compensation was paid for the damages incurred. However, as Philippe Guillaume puts it, divine culpability is not an easy theological point to swallow.<sup>81</sup> Having been presented with various arguments about Job’s guilt despite his protests of innocence, the reader is finally left with the disturbing verdict that it was really God who was on trial, and he has ultimately pleaded guilty! I am convinced that this meets Braiterman’s criteria as antitheodicy.

The story of *Jonah* leads the reader or listener along a similar path. At first Jonah appears to be culpable because he disobeyed God’s call to go to Nineveh and preach against

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<sup>80</sup> Job 42:13 says Job was given seven (שִׁבְעֵינָרְשָׁ) sons and Philippe Guillaume argues that this is the dual form (i.e. fourteen), quoting Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (London: Nelson, 1967), 651-52; Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 1401; Alfred Guillaume, *Studies in the Book of Job* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 140. In 1:2 Job had שִׁבְעֵינָרְשָׁ (seven) sons, so the later dual form suggests his sons were doubled (in the same way as his herds). Philippe Guillaume, “Dismantling the Deconstruction of Job,” *JBL* 127, no. 3 (2008): 492.

<sup>81</sup> Guillaume, “Dismantling the Deconstruction of Job,” 497. Without using the legal terminology of compensation or restitution Habel comes close to the same conclusion: “After Job has been tested to the limit, Yahweh restores his fortunes twofold, as though he ought to be given some consolation for undergoing an unwarranted trial initiated as a wager between Yahweh and his adversary in the council of heaven.” Habel, *The Book of Job*, 585.

it. Jonah is even ridiculed in a series of comical ‘descents’ until he is unceremoniously spewed onto the shore by the fish. However, in a final confrontation between God and Jonah – akin to the legal dispute between God and Job – God is challenged by Jonah about the matter of his compassion. At the end of Job the LORD’s response from the whirlwind is both dramatic and unexpected, yet in many ways it is also disappointing. Using an authoritative tone the LORD asserts his authority and his right as creator to do with his creation whatever he pleases, a theme which recurs in *Jonah* when the sailors declare כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה כְּאַשְׁרֵךְ חָפְצָתָּ הַיָּם וְיָבֵשׁוּ לְפָנֶיךָ *for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased* (1:14). In Job he effectively affirms that he *does* inflict suffering, and he *does* have a reason for it; but by keeping silent with regard to his reasons he denies by implication that he has to provide an answer except to say that suffering is *not* necessarily a punishment for sins. The voice from the whirlwind is more intimidating than comforting. God’s response to Jonah is similar: rather than answer the prophet’s complaint he instead questions his attitude – again, more intimidating than comforting. Finally, after further confrontation, God ends the discussion by saying he will not be troubled about Nineveh. Without declaring God to be guilty, the writer has created a situation where God neither condemns Jonah, nor answers his concerns, and leaves it unresolved. As with Job, I am convinced that this too meets Braiterman’s criteria for antitheodicy. Neither book justifies, explains or accepts as meaningful the relationship between God and the suffering of his people.

### **The purpose of satire in *Jonah***

As antitheodicy, it seems to me that the writer has chosen irony, parody and satire as the most appropriate vehicles for conveying his message. Frolov has observed that “modern scholars for the most part recognize that there are ‘funny’ passages in *Jonah*, but when it comes to their identification and assessment of the role of laughter in the book, this near-

consensus collapses.”<sup>82</sup> The same could be said of irony, satire and parody in *Jonah* as scholars often agree that these elements are present to varying extents, although there is little consensus on their purpose. In this chapter I offer an interpretation of *Jonah* which accounts for the preponderance of these elements.

A reading of *Jonah* as satire or parody needs to answer the primary question of who the satire targets are. Irony can serve several functions, including providing a comedic effect, but satire – in order for it to be satire – must have a target as this is one of satire’s defining characteristics. It is not always possible for a later audience to properly identify the target, but it has to be recognised that it must have one, and that the initial audience was capable of identifying it. For *Jonah* to be read as satire does not require the modern reader to be able to identify the target; to know that it has one is sufficient, but to be able to identify one or more possibilities strengthens the case for such a reading. In this section I will analyse some targets which have been identified by scholars and will argue my case for identifying the target as a retributive theodicy which did not, or could not, adequately answer the questions imposed by the experiences of exile.

The target of the satire is more likely to be a contemporary of the writer, rather than someone in the historical past. To answer the question we need to consider the historical and social setting of the writer(s) and the *Sitz in der Literat* of the story as at least equally although probably even more important than the setting of the story – its *Sitz im leben* – and to therefore determine the likely date of its writing.

The character Jonah in our story is almost certainly based on the ‘historical’ Jonah named in 2 Kings 14:25. The Jonah in 2 Kings may not only have inspired the writer of *Jonah* to name his main character after him, but the circumstances related to Israel and Jeroboam II’s *good fortune* “according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he

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<sup>82</sup> Frolov, “Returning the Ticket,” 86.

spoke by his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet” provided an ideal *Sitz im leben* for the later writer to raise questions related to Israel’s *misfortune* during and after the exile. Amos was a contemporary of Jonah, at least as far as the book bearing his name places him “in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel” (Amos 1:1). Insofar as the prophecies of Amos related to Jeroboam II were not fulfilled, and in the context of Jonah’s implied ‘dilemma’ about whether the potential repentance of Nineveh and God’s subsequent relenting would put him in the category of a ‘failed prophet’ as well, the writer may have been targeting Amos in particular or prophets in general and their ability to predict the future, or the impact their failed prophecies may have on Kings and the people. He may equally have been targeting a Jeremianic group or Deuteronomistic ‘school’<sup>83</sup> or some other group which praised such prophets for their pronouncements about divine justice.

We can be certain that the target of *Jonah*’s satire is not the prophet Jonah himself. There would be no point to satirising an historical figure, and what little is known of Jonah from the historical narrative in 2 Kings 14 provides no basis for why a later generation, or even a contemporaneous one, would want to ridicule him. What is remarkable is that Jonah progresses in the book bearing his name from a prophet who is initially seemingly ridiculed for being disobedient, to an ‘heroic’ figure in the end who confronts God about the partiality of divine justice and mercy. The reader is cleverly moved by the writer from a position which might judge Jonah as being disobedient, hypocritical and a buffoon, to one of sympathy for and identification with the man who courageously confronts God in a Job-like manner about his compassion for Israel’s enemies. In the end Jonah has confounded God who is unable to

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<sup>83</sup> I use this term cautiously, recognising that the existence of such a group has been theorised but is yet unproven and is controversial in biblical scholarship. I use it here simply to acknowledge the theoretical possibility that such a particular scribal community “that was active in the Babylonian exile and Persian period and had its origins in the bureaucracy of the monarch” may have existed and been a target of *Jonah*’s satire. Person, *The Deuteronomistic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature*, 7.



answer his questions, and who changes his mind yet again to declare he will have no concern for Nineveh. Yet the writer does not really target God, in the same way that Job does not target God. To put God on trial (in Job) is a theatrical device which actually tests a theodicy which explains God in certain terms. The writer of the book of Job does not caricature God; instead, he caricatures his opponents' image of God which they advanced by portraying God in a certain way. Similarly, in raising doubts about God's partiality and consistent application of compassion, *Jonah* does not judge the Divine as much as it targets the views of those who created this God in their own image. My task now is to attempt to identify this group.

### **Target of the attack and the target audience**

Scholars have proposed several different groups as the targets of *Jonah's* satire. Ackerman accepts Fretheim's arguments<sup>84</sup> for a mid-fifth century date for *Jonah* and thinks the target of *Jonah's* satire is the Zadokite priesthood. He sees *Jonah's* theological problem as "the reverse of Job's" in that Job was dealing with divine caprice while the sparing of Nineveh was the other side of the same concern.<sup>85</sup> For Ackerman the central issue for both writers is "a well-ordered universe" and "Jonah sees mercy as a threat to God's order." While he acknowledges that the story can have several levels of meaning he sees it as primarily a subtle critique of the re-establishment of the emphasis in post-exilic Judaism on Zion and the temple, and consequently the Zadokite priesthood. Ackerman bases this conclusion largely on some subtle allusions in the story, such as the ship being like *רִכְתֵּי צָפוֹן* *the heights of Zaphon* (in 1:5).<sup>86</sup> As I discussed earlier, this connection is somewhat tenuous and we need to consider other possibilities.

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<sup>84</sup> Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah*, 13-38.

<sup>85</sup> Ackerman, "Satire and Symbolism in the Song of Jonah," 245-46.

<sup>86</sup> Discussed on pages 321-324.

Gitay argues that “the book of Jonah is a response to current theological debates that have taken place since the early Babylonian exile in order to shape the religious-political policy towards the foreign ruler.”<sup>87</sup> The issue, as he sees it, was how Israel should relate to its enemies against the background of the prophets who called for divine revenge yet in the new circumstances of restoration dominated by the Persian empire. He thinks the aim of the book was to “pave the way for cooperation with foreign rulers and the normalization of life under the theological frame of God’s dominion and universal care.” However, the king of Nineveh is ridiculed in the court scene by portraying him as a ruler who responds to a decision made by the people, not simply by ratifying it but by going to a ridiculous extreme and requiring the city’s cattle to also repent, put on sackcloth and call upon God. If the writer wanted to pave the way for cooperation with foreign rulers he has certainly gone about it in a strange way.

Antwi argues that the “central theme of the book is the nature of God and his dealings with mankind and the cosmos in graciousness and mercy. Jonah presents God as a universal and impartial God and not belonging to a specific group of people.”<sup>88</sup> In taking this position Antwi is following those scholars who see the target of *Jonah* to be the particularism of Ezra and Nehemiah and read the book as taking a universalist worldview. Yet the overwhelming irony of *Jonah* is that God seemed to favour the foreign city at the expense of his own people, and that his justice – at least from Israel’s perspective – did not seem to be impartial. If the city did repent – and there is no historical evidence for this outside of *Jonah* – then it did not produce a lasting change. The subsequent Assyrian invasion of Israel displayed a hostility to God’s people that would be incompatible with any awareness of God’s requirements for repentance as they are detailed in the prophets. It also raises the question of why God set such

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<sup>87</sup> Gitay, “Jonah: The Prophecy of Antirhetoric,” 206.

<sup>88</sup> Antwi, *The Book of Jonah in the Context of Post-Exilic Theology of Israel: an Exegetical Study*, 299.

a high standard for Israel while Nineveh was spared without any lasting or meaningful change. On this point Chesung Justin Ryu makes a helpful comment from the perspective of a citizen of a colonised country:

The colonized Jewish audience had two unchangeable historical facts about Nineveh: one was that Nineveh had destroyed Israel, and the other was that Nineveh had never repented for what they had done to Israel and had never restored Israel. Whatever the repentance of Nineveh was in 3.5-8, the colonized Jewish audience knew that Nineveh's repentance was not about their predatory activities to foreign countries. If it had been, Nineveh should have stopped its historical oppression and destruction of weak neighbors like Israel! <sup>89</sup>

Nogalski also thinks that *Jonah* was targeting particularist attitudes. He argues that "Jonah's canonical form must be classified as one of the latest prophetic writings."<sup>90</sup> He further argues that it finds parallels (although not necessarily a direct relationship) in Malachi 1:11-14 and Zechariah 8:20-23 in castigating particularist attitudes in Israel. In terms of redactional stages or "layers" he postulates *cautiously* that *Jonah* entered the *Book of The Twelve* at the same time as the "corrective layer" of Zechariah 12:2-13:6 and possibly at the same time or prior to Zechariah 14:1ff.

Ben Zvi argues that the reader of *Jonah* would be unable to identify with an author from a group whom they vehemently opposed, and he therefore reads it as "a message of inner reflection, and to some extent critical self appraisal of the group within which and for which this book was written."<sup>91</sup> His argument is based on several assumptions. First, he takes

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<sup>89</sup> Chesung Justin Ryu, "Silence as Resistance: A Postcolonial Reading of the Silence of Jonah in Jonah 4.1-11," *JSOT* 34, no. 2 (2009): 206. Ryu's perspective is valuable but it should also be noted that we do not know if an ancient culture would have felt similarly in a world where imperialism was accepted.

<sup>90</sup> Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, 272.

<sup>91</sup> Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud*, 100-1.

it for granted that the book was *read* and its audience was therefore literate. It is unquestionable that it was read by some, but we should not exclude the possibility that it may also have been *performed* and therefore seen and heard by a non-literate audience. Several of the soundplays in the text seem intended to appeal to a *listening* audience, although I do not exclude the possibility, in fact likelihood, that texts were read *aloud*. Ben Zvi seems to limit the audience to a group who read it aloud, excluding a non-literate audience. Second, he argues that only a small number of people at the time (the *literati*) could read, and therefore supposes that the reader and the author must have been from the same group. He seems to treat the *literati* as a homogenous group, while the scholarly consensus has tended to follow the lead of E.P. Sanders and Jacob Neusner that there were several ‘Judaisms’ in the post-exilic period and that there were a number of scribal communities which had their own texts and traditions, although they almost certainly shared some writings. There is considerable evidence from Qumran, the Enochic literature and elsewhere of opposing groups and divisions *within* or *among* the *literati*. Rather than being a message of inner reflection for self-appraisal, *Jonah* may have been written by one scribal community as a polemic against another, or a critique of views held by some within the community but opposed by others. Its satirical tone is better suited to a polemic rather than for inner reflection.

Band regards *Jonah* to be a parody but thinks that at a relatively early stage its parodic and satirical style was misunderstood.

We should not be troubled by A. Berlin's argument - often advanced by traditional readers - that readers from the second century BCE until the twentieth century CE did not read it as parody. Berlin finds it absurd to imagine “that the canonizers of the Bible did not understand the message of the book.” I would argue that it is entirely possible that a sage involved in the canonizing process could “misunderstand” a text; it may, in fact, be his sacred mission to “misunderstand” the text so that it could conform to his world view. The text originally produced in the fifth century as a parody of prior

texts would have been understood as such by many, but not all contemporary readers. During the next two or three centuries, the audience changed and its capacity to grasp the parodistic elements in the text diminished, even disappeared. Certainly, the type of text produced in the early second century, notably Ben Sira, reflects a world remote from parodistic impulses.<sup>92</sup>

Given what we know of the Jewish community in the second century BCE it is reasonable to assume that the audience and its horizons had changed markedly. They had become more pious and could not perceive the parodic signals which former generations could appreciate.<sup>93</sup>

Amongst these scholars there is agreement that *Jonah* is targeting a theological position, although there is less agreement about which position that is. There is also agreement amongst several scholars, cited above, that *Jonah* deals with theodicy, similar in some respects to Job. It follows that if *Jonah* is dealing with theodicy and it is targeting a theological position or group, then it is most likely that the writer is either targeting a theodical view contrary to his own, or he is taking a position against *any* attempt to justify or accept as meaningful the relationship between God and suffering. The satirical tone, the frequent parodying of texts and traditions, and the similarities with Job in standing against God, convince me that the writer is opposed to all existing attempts to explain or justify the role of God in Israel's oppression by empires such as Assyria and Babylon. This is not to say he is against any theodicy, but rather against the prevailing views which were current at the time. As antitheodicy he is dissatisfied with the current theodicies at least, and perhaps all theodicy in principle. Equally, he may be calling for a new theodicy which would satisfy a desire for both justice and compassion.

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<sup>92</sup> Band, "Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody," 191.

<sup>93</sup> Band, "Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody," 193.

## Deuteronomistic theodicies

The theodicies of the Deuteronomistic literature incorporate the ideas of free-will and retribution: if human beings fail to fulfil the will of God they receive punishment, while if they are loyal to God they will be blessed.<sup>94</sup> Yehezkel Kaufmann insists that without sin there was no other way to account for the collapse of Israel's monarchy for the Deuteronomistic historiographer.<sup>95</sup> This is not to say that suffering is simply punitive, as the Deuteronomistic literature (for example, in Jeremiah 24) also has a place for what Green calls "educative theodicy;" that is, suffering can enrich life by providing a deeper understanding of it.<sup>96</sup> While later theodicies such as 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch present the hope of an afterlife as an eschatological solution to the problem, this is not found in Deuteronomistic literature. Laato argues that the Deuteronomistic literature also contains the concept of theodicy deferred and uses the death of Josiah – a central figure in Deuteronomistic literature – as an example.<sup>97</sup> According to this argument the death of the righteous king Josiah was experienced as a national trauma in Judah (Jeremiah 22:10-12) and mourning songs were still being sung for him in the time of the Chronicler in the Persian period (2 Chronicles 35:24-25). His death would have presented considerable theological difficulties for the proponents of Deuteronomism as Josiah was credited with being a hero of religious reformation (2 Kings 23:24-25). Despite his righteousness and reforming zealotry, the sins of his forebear

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<sup>94</sup> Antti Laato, "Theodicy in the Deuteronomistic History," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (eds. Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 183.

<sup>95</sup> Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From its beginnings to the Babylonian exile* (trans. Moshe Greenberg; University of Chicago Press Chicago, 1960), 135.

<sup>96</sup> Green, "Theodicy," 430-41; Laato, "Theodicy in the Deuteronomistic History," 184.

<sup>97</sup> Laato, "Theodicy in the Deuteronomistic History," 225-35. See also Whybray, "Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just?," 12.

Manasseh were so great that Judah could not escape God's punishment. The death of Josiah and Judah's exile were the consequences of his sin.

Still the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. The LORD said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; and I will reject this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there" (2 Kings 23:26-27).

This paradox of the retributive theodicy – a righteous king suffering a catastrophic death – was somewhat resolved by the Deuteronomistic Jeremiah who claimed that in spite of the fact that Josiah was a righteous king the people did not turn to God wholeheartedly (Jeremiah 25:3; 36:2-3) and that it was *their* sins that brought about the catastrophe of the exile. A difficulty with this theodicy is that Josiah and Judah were punished because of the sins of Manasseh, or Josiah was punished for the sins of Judah, yet the notion that one person can be punished for the sins of another presents difficulties for any reasonable concept of justice. The possibility of any explanation that had a place for vicarious suffering was denied by Ezekiel (18:1-20), although Laato thinks it looms behind Isaiah 53.<sup>98</sup> If Josiah's defeat was ever considered to be vicarious it was deemphasised by the time the Chronicler asserted that Josiah's death was the result of his own disobedience to the word of the LORD that came through Pharaoh Necho (2 Chronicles 35:21-22). The differing voices of the Deuteronomistic history, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel and the Chronicler demonstrate that the death of Josiah and the Babylonian exile posed a problem of theodicy for the exilic and post-exilic generations. Punishment for the sins of another is unjust, yet sin is at the root of all suffering. Someone has to be blamed, or everyone.

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<sup>98</sup> Laato, "Theodicy in the Deuteronomistic History," 231-34.

There is a possibility that *Jonah* takes up the discussion about vicarious death in the storm scene, where the disobedience of Jonah puts the lives of all the mariners at risk – not only for the sailors on his ship but for any sailors and ships caught up in the storm – while his being hurled to the sea brought about their deliverance. The narrator is even careful to describe Jonah as נָקִי *innocent* (1:14), at least in the estimation of the sailors. Even then this was not a vicarious death, because the sailors were innocent – at least insofar as the storm was not hurled against *them* and they were simply caught up by it – and Jonah did not die. So even if the writer of *Jonah* was playing with the idea of vicarious suffering he does it in such a way that the notion is turned on its head. The innocent sailors suffer for the disobedience of one man, and then they are saved by the (seeming) death of the same man, yet the man escapes with his life. Those who were saved had not sinned – at least not as far as the immediate crisis was concerned – and the one who sinned gets off without paying with his life. On the one hand, compassion seems to have been shown to the sailors, although removing the cause of their peril (in the abatement of the storm) could be seen more as an act of justice (they should not have been punished for Jonah’s offence) rather than an act of compassion. On the other hand, compassion seems to have been shown to Jonah by saving him from drowning, when it could be argued that justice demanded it. If he did die by drowning, it would have been for his own sins, not the sailors, so it is hard to see how his death might be vicarious. If the writer is contributing to the discussion about sin and its consequences he is making it clear that the matter is not clear!

### **Jonah as Wisdom literature**

While Job is traditionally classified as “Wisdom literature” James Harding questions the conventional definition of the book as an example of a “wisdom” text, which he thinks unhelpfully closes off other possibilities, and argues that it is best read as “metaprophecy.”



The book of Job should be read as “metaprophecy,” that is, a work that draws on themes and ideas present in the prophetic books, in order to wrestle with the assumptions underlying them. It shares this strategy most obviously with the book of Jonah.<sup>99</sup>

Ben Zvi also reads *Jonah* as metaprophecy.<sup>100</sup> However, several scholars do read *Jonah* as a wisdom text, or at least recognise it has some affinities with certain wisdom texts. Bolin posits that the emphasis on God’s freedom to do as he pleases, articulated in *Jonah* by the sailors as כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה כְּאַשֶׁר תִּפְצֹתָ עָשִׂיתָ for you LORD have done as you pleased (1:14), “is found in other such other ‘late’ biblical texts as Job and Qoheleth.”<sup>101</sup> Dell argues that Job parodies received sapiential, forensic, and psalmic traditions in the same way *Jonah* parodies prophetic traditions.<sup>102</sup> I would add that *Jonah* also parodies forensic and psalmic traditions and therefore stands firmly in the satirising tradition of Job.

Carolyn Ratcliffe’s PhD thesis argues that reading *Jonah* as a text in the wisdom tradition offers a method for understanding its theology and concludes that the book of *Jonah* is a didactic wisdom narrative, positing that the author was a wisdom sage in a post-exilic ‘school’ addressing a religiously depressed audience.<sup>103</sup> I agree with another of her conclusions, that it is not ‘prophecy’ which is at stake in *Jonah*, or any antagonism between Jews and foreigners, but rather “the problem in the book is the justice of God. The divine justice *Jonah* addresses, by the standards of the old Deuteronomistic theology of ancient Israel, is judged unjust. In *Jonah*, as in *Job*, humankind has the right to question why the good suffer and the bad prosper.”<sup>104</sup> Ratcliffe also concludes that theodicy is an issue in *Jonah*:

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<sup>99</sup> James E. Harding, “The Book of Job as Metaprophecy,” *Studies in Religion* 39, no. 4 (2010): 528.

<sup>100</sup> Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud*, 80-98.

<sup>101</sup> Bolin, “Should I Not Also Pity Nineveh?” *Divine Freedom in the Book of Jonah*, 119-20.

<sup>102</sup> Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*, 153-57.

<sup>103</sup> Carolyn R. Ratcliffe, “The Book of Jonah in the Tradition of Ancient Israelite Wisdom” (Baylor University, 1995), 220-22.

<sup>104</sup> Ratcliffe, “The Book of Jonah in the Tradition of Ancient Israelite Wisdom,” 225.

The world is in chaos for Jonah and his readers because of the exile. The author of the book seeks to make sense of that chaos of suffering and evil ... Divine justice is questioned in the chaos of evil over and against righteousness ... What has always been taught and believed is no longer valid. The book of Jonah addresses this chaos in much the same way as the book of Job does, in terms of divine creatorship.<sup>105</sup>

I agree that Job and *Jonah* both address the chaos of exile, and both reject the traditional theodicy of Deuteronomistic theology. However, for both books divine creatorship is not a solution and, in fact, is part of the problem as the authors struggle to reconcile a monotheistic theology of an omnipotent God with the injustices done to his people. Divine justice is indeed the problem, but asserting the sovereignty of a creator is not a solution. Both Job and *Jonah* know this. However, neither book has a solution, neither presents a theodicy which resolves the difficulty and as they both conclude with the matter unresolved I conclude that they are best read as antitheodicy.

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<sup>105</sup> Ratcliffe, "The Book of Jonah in the Tradition of Ancient Israelite Wisdom," 225.

## Conclusion

I began this thesis at the end by looking at the concluding lines of *Jonah* and the issue that the most straightforward reading of the Hebrew text asserts that God was unconcerned about repentant Nineveh and this therefore implies that he was lacking in compassion towards them. My examination of the grammatical and literary issues resolved the problem by finding that *Jonah* is a satire of theodicies, it responds to calamities by asserting no one can know why God acts in the way he does and that his mercy is unpredictable, and that this declaratory ending is therefore consistent with the purpose of the book.

I have demonstrated that this declaratory reading is not only grammatically possible, but that it should be preferred as the most natural way to read the verse, supported by the ancient versions. I have also argued that in the context of the story – full of ironies, satire and parody – the final lines should also be read as satire, a sudden and dramatic twist which confirms that God’s mercy is unpredictable and unknowable. This is the main concern of the story. While the repentance of Nineveh is important to the plot, it is not a ‘model repentance’ and is not the story’s main concern. Rather, the writer is more concerned that the actions of God do not relate in any measured way to the behaviour of individuals, cities or nations. Repentance may or may not bring about mercy. The overriding concern of the story is therefore a question of divine justice, that is to say, it is a question of whether God is unfair in the way he dispenses mercy. I have further argued that the writer consistently parodies other biblical texts in order to subvert or challenge ideas about retributive justice.

The story does not deal with the question of why Israel and Judah went into exile, or why Assyria and Babylon were permitted by God to inflict evil on his people, but instead responds to calamities by asserting that no one can know why God acts in the way he does. It

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does not propose a theodicy, but rather in making this assertion it satirically challenges theodicies and can be categorised as antitheodicy.

I have argued that it is characteristic of Jewish texts after a calamity to question the role of God in it and his relationship with his covenanted people, and that *Jonah* is best read as post-exilic literature of destruction. Analysed against similar literature it can be seen that *Jonah* represents a stage in theodicy which rejected explanations or justifications of God's actions in terms of rewards or punishments for human behaviour, but had not developed to the deferred or eschatological theodicies of later texts. I have argued that eschatological theodicies probably developed in response to a frustration with or rejection of previous attempts to justify God's actions based on ideas of rewards and punishments, and that *Jonah* reflects this intermediate stage.

The problem which *Jonah* addressed was that sometimes God is compassionate, and sometimes he is not. He was merciful to Assyrian Nineveh, but not always to Israel whose destruction came at the hands of Assyria. The various scenes in the story reveal different aspects of the problem. The calamity facing the sailors was the result of Jonah's disobedience, not their own sin, and they were saved because "the LORD does as he pleases." Jonah "knew" God to be compassionate, but during the storm he made no appeal for mercy and instead expected only retributive justice. Then, in the belly of the fish, he used absurdly pious language which was not appropriate to the reality of his situation, showed no sign of contrition, and yet he was delivered by God from his predicament. The Ninevites on the other hand were over-the-top in their repentance, implying that they did not really understand what they were doing, yet this brings about mercy. Finally, Jonah confronted God about his mercy, although his appeal to a creedal formula about God's attributes tellingly removed the elements about transgenerational punishment, indicating that his real issue was God's mercy, and less so his punishment of evil-doers. Running through these scenes is a thread about

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human knowledge of divine behaviour. The sailors apparently knew that God does as he pleases; the king of Nineveh on the other hand declared that he could not be sure what God would do; Jonah was certain that he “knew” God to be compassionate, dogmatically at least if not experientially, yet one moment God is merciful by providing Jonah with shade, and the next moment, for no apparent reason, he is not merciful because he takes the shade away and sends bad weather. No one can predict what God will do. In a sudden turn at the end – again confirming that God is unpredictable – God declares that he is really not concerned about Nineveh, leaving some hope that he *is* concerned about Israel which he ‘planted.’ It is by realising that this is an ironic twist that we are most likely to understand the purpose of the book as a satire challenging a theology of divine justice with its rewards and punishments. The application of mercy to one may simultaneously be an act of caprice to another, making God merciful and capricious at the same time. Such a theology had no satisfying explanation for why the covenant people suffered while the wicked prospered, no solution to avoiding divine wrath and obtaining mercy, and no satisfying explanation for the exile.

The conclusion to Jonah is not satisfying. Yet, in the silence that follows the declaration that God has no concern for Nineveh we can almost hear the Ninevite king’s question still lingering, unanswered: מִי־יֹדֵעַ *Who knows?* This conclusion implies an answer to the question: no one knows, or can know, what God will do.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Jonah – a literary invention?

Alistair Hunter asserts that “While the prophet of the same name [Jonah] briefly referred to in 2 Kings 14:25 may have inspired the choice of name, there is no sign that even the minimal information given there is applied to the narrative of our book.”<sup>1</sup> Hunter elsewhere argues that the *יונה* *dove* of Psalm 55 (מִי־יְתוּרֵי אֶבֶר כִּי־יֹנֵה אָעוּפָה וְאֶשְׁפָּנָה) *O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest* Psalm 55:7 [6]) formed the basis of the flighty character of Jonah in the book of *Jonah*, and that this character was later taken up by a contributor to Kings.<sup>2</sup> The word *יונה* *dove* appears in the Psalms only here, in 68:14 (13) and in the superscription to Psalm 56 עַל־יֹנֵת אֲלֵם רְחֻקִים, which may mean something like *concerning a dove on distant oaks*. While scholars have sometimes noted the ‘coincidence’ that the word occurs in 55:7 (6) and again in the following psalm (56:1), James Thirtle argued convincingly that some parts of the superscriptions to several psalms have been misplaced and properly belong as a postscript to the preceding psalm. These psalms are a case in point and therefore the references to a dove occur in the same psalm.<sup>3</sup> Thirtle’s argument has been reviewed and defended by Waltke.<sup>4</sup> Thomas Staubli has also argued for some superscriptions being read as subscripts to preceding psalms.<sup>5</sup>

Hunter suggests that there is “a good case for reconstructing, as a plausible sequence of events, a process by means of which Psalm 55 sparked a literary response in the form of

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<sup>1</sup> Hunter, “Jonah from the Whale: Exodus Motifs in Jonah 2,” 143.

<sup>2</sup> Hunter, “Inside Outside Psalm 55,” 129-40.

<sup>3</sup> James W. Thirtle, *The Titles of the Psalms: their Nature and Meaning Explained* (London: Henry Frowde, 1904).

<sup>4</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, “Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both,” *JBL* 110, no. 4 (1991).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Staubli, “Archaeological Views: Performing Psalms in Biblical Times,” *BAR* 44, no. 1 (2018): 62-63.

Jonah, which was in turn taken up by a later contributor to Kings.”<sup>6</sup> He regards *Jonah* as a satirical work, as do many scholars (see chapter 2 of this thesis) and while his conclusions about the primacy of Psalm 55 as the basis for *Jonah* and then the Kings narrative are radical, he makes several important points which should be considered in our analysis of the literary effects of the story. First, he stresses that “even allowing the most generous meaning to the term ‘historicity’, it is difficult to find much of that quality in the figure of Jonah.”<sup>7</sup> Second, he argues that “‘Jonah’ is slightly odd as a personal name. It belongs to a small group of proper names whose meaning seems to relate to the narrative in which they are placed rather than to the usual range of theophoric possibilities.” As Jonah’s father’s name (in both *Jonah* and 2 Kings) is Amittai, which Hunter reads as something like “truthful”, “the result seems so apt to the ironic aspect of the book of Jonah as to set one’s sceptical alarm bells ringing.”<sup>8</sup> On the basis that both “Jonah” and “Amittai” are both satirical forms, he then argues that it is hard to explain why a historical account such as 2 Kings would use such names for historical characters. It is then a small step for him to postulate that *Jonah* preceded 2 Kings and the satirical names were incorporated into the historical narrative in the Persian period. As tantalising as his theory is, there are problems with it. First, the use of satirical names in biblical historical narratives is not unusual, as demonstrated by scholars such as Carolyn Sharp who has written extensively on irony and satire in biblical narrative.<sup>9</sup> The incident in 1 Samuel 25:25 concerning Nabal should be enough to confirm that the writers of historical narrative were well aware of the satirical nature of names in their records: “My lord, do not take seriously this ill-natured fellow, Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name,

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<sup>6</sup> Hunter, “Inside Outside Psalm 55,” 138.

<sup>7</sup> Hunter, “Inside Outside Psalm 55,” 129.

<sup>8</sup> Hunter, “Inside Outside Psalm 55,” 131.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*.

and folly is with him.” נָבָל *Nabal* means “foolish”, “worthless” or “good for nothing.”<sup>10</sup>

Weisman deals specifically with the case of Nabal as one of several pejorative names which ridiculed and smeared the bearers, noting that there is also a phonic association between the name *Nabal* and the word נֶבֶל *wineskin* which may be behind the account of Nabal’s death: “In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him” (Vv. 36-37).<sup>11</sup> Since it is unlikely parents would name a son “fool,” the name might also be understood according to an alternative Semitic root meaning “to be noble”<sup>12</sup> and thus be a play on the double meaning of the name. David Gunn also discusses whether this is a real name and if it really has the meaning of “fool” and argues that while we may not know the original meaning of *Nabal*, “names which come to equate morphologically with what seem to be inappropriate words are not an uncommon feature of languages.” He reads this name as an “overt characterization” to manipulate the reader’s evaluation of the character.<sup>13</sup> Berlin argues for the name being employed as part of a stereotype.<sup>14</sup> There appears to be a word play in our story on Jonah’s name, which means “dove,”<sup>15</sup> and Weisman has noted several scurrilous uses of appellations in the Bible, noting that “only when the nicknames are intermixed with a note of ridicule and scorn towards a certain individual, or point up his or her flaw, may they be defined as satirical.”<sup>16</sup> He refers specifically to people being given the names of animals to ridicule them because of a discernible trait, behaviour or physical defect. He qualifies this by citing Porten who considers the employment of animal names as the most common genus of secular names in Israel, especially in the pre-monarchic

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<sup>10</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 663.

<sup>11</sup> Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible*, 15-6.

<sup>12</sup> *HALOT*, 663

<sup>13</sup> Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story*, 155 n.9.

<sup>14</sup> Berlin, “Characterization in Biblical Narrative,” 83 n.18.

<sup>15</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 402.

<sup>16</sup> Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible*, 9.



period, although Porten also provides an example of one which is post-exilic.<sup>17</sup> Ackerman has identified two major characteristics of doves in the Hebrew Bible: (1) they are easily put to flight; and (2) they moan and lament when in distress.<sup>18</sup> There is an irony here as the prophet turns out to be “flighty” and later bemoans the withering of the plant. There is a third characteristic of doves mentioned in the Hebrew Bible which is also relevant to Jonah: נִיָּהּ *Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria* (Hosea 7:11). In the ridiculing of the prophet by the narrator a comparison might also be being made to his “silliness.” In further plays on names throughout the book Halpern and Friedman noted the relative similarity in the names of Nineveh and the primary character יוֹנָה / יוֹנָה, as well as the resemblance of Nineveh to the Semitic *nun* “fish” (Akk. *nūnu*, Aram. *nūnā*).<sup>19</sup>

While Hunter has noted several linguistic connections between *Jonah* and Psalm 55 which are fascinating, his reasons for why the psalm would spark a literary response in the form of *Jonah* and then be taken up by a later contributor to Kings are unconvincing. As my analysis of the prayer of Jonah in chapter 2 demonstrates in chapter 5 of this thesis, the writer of *Jonah* was very familiar with the Psalms and made several verbal allusions to them. Hunter has made a convincing case for similar connections to Psalm 55 specifically, but this does not warrant a conclusion that the story of Jonah was a literary response to it. It also does not explain why a contributor to Kings would adopt the story as part of an historical narrative.

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<sup>17</sup> B. Porten, “Name, personal names in Israel,” in *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Israel: Bialik Institute, 1982), 42 (Hebrew).

<sup>18</sup> Ackerman, “Jonah,” 234.

<sup>19</sup> Halpern and Friedman, “Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah,” 86.

## Appendix 2: צָפוֹן (Psalm 48:2) and הַסְּפִינָה (Jonah 1:5) – an Excursus

I have included a consideration here of a possible allusion in Jonah 1:5 to Psalm 48:2 as an appendix rather than in the body of the thesis. An argument for an intertextual allusion is less certain in this case, although worth consideration.

The reader learns that at the height of the storm Jonah had gone down to הַסְּפִינָה *the hold* or *nethermost part of the vessel* (1:5). In the three other references to the ship throughout 1:3-5 the writer consistently uses the standard term אֲנִיָּה but here uses a *hapax legomena* סְפִינָה. In combination with הַסְּפִינָה the phrase evokes an association with an expression הַסְּפִינָה צָפוֹן which can mean *farthest north* (as in Ezekiel 38:15; 39:2)<sup>20</sup> but can also mean *heights of Zaphon* referring to the mountain to the north of Israel in the vicinity of Ugarit which is mentioned in Ugaritic literature as a sacred place where Baal lived and where the gods gathered in the divine assembly.<sup>21</sup> This imagery is behind a rebuke of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14:13.

וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְבְּךָ הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶעֱלֶה מִמֶּעַל לְכוֹכְבֵי־אֵל אֲרִים כְּסֵאִי וְאֶשֶׁב בְּהַר־מוֹעֵד בֵּין־קַתֵּי צָפוֹן:

You said in your heart,

“I will ascend to heaven;

I will raise my throne

above the stars of God;

I will sit on the mount of assembly

on the heights of Zaphon.

<sup>20</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 1046.

<sup>21</sup> A. Robinson, “Zion and Šāphôn in Psalm XLVIII 3,” *VT* 24 (1974): 118, 120.

This imagery may have been appropriated by Israel and used in connection with Mount Zion in Psalm 48:2b-3 (1b-2).<sup>22</sup>

הַר־קְדְּשׁוֹ: יִפֶּה נוֹף מְשׁוֹשׁ כְּלִי־הָאָרֶץ הַר־צִיּוֹן יִרְבְּתִי צָפוֹן קִרְיַת מְלֹךְ רֹב:

His holy mountain,  
beautiful in elevation,  
is the joy of all the earth,  
Mount Zion, in the far north,  
the city of the great King.

As it is strange to refer to Zion as “in the far north” some scholars have rejected this translation in favour of *Mount Zion the heights of Zaphon*.<sup>23</sup> The imagery of mountains as sacred places appears in biblical literature with reference to both Mount Zion and Mount Sinai.<sup>24</sup> Ezekiel’s oracle against the king of Tyre (28:11-19) uses the imagery of *עֵדֶן גֶּן־אֱלֹהִים Eden the garden of God* (v. 13) but also says he was *בְּהַר קְדֹשׁ אֱלֹהִים on the holy mountain of God* (v.14) almost certainly drawing on similar ideas of sacred mountains. Sacred mountains also appear in Akkadian literature and in 1 Enoch 18:6-14; 24:2-25:5. The view that as a sacred mountain Zion was inviolable and immune from conquest probably has its background

<sup>22</sup> James S. Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark US, 2015), 88-89; Berger, *Jonah in the Shadows of Eden*, 3-4.

<sup>23</sup> Rather than this being a reference to the Ugaritic Mount Zaphon, Robinson thinks it is “more likely that holy mountains were customarily called Zaphon and that Zion and the holy place of Ugarit were just two examples of this tendency.” Robinson, “Zion and Ṣāphôn in Psalm XLVIII 3,” 119.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Psalm 68:18b-19a (17b-18a) *עָלִיתָ לְמָרוֹם בְּקֹדֶשׁ: The Lord came from Sinai to the holy place. You ascended to the height.*

in these myths about the mountains of the gods and hence Zion was mythologically in the north.<sup>25</sup>

Although it is a *hapax legomenon* the phonetically similar expression יִרְכָּתִי הַסְּפִינָה undoubtedly refers to the lower parts of a ship. The root סִפַּן *to cover* is found in a number of Semitic languages in relation to ships “and probably refers to a covered ship, that is, a ship with a deck.”<sup>26</sup> It may have been a technical term, possibly a Phoenician one, specifically for a ship of this type. For some reason the writer deviates from his preferred אֶנְיָה if only for variety. In a context where there is an abundance of wordplay and paronomasia, the suggestion that on a secondary level the writer may have been making an association with יִרְכָּתִי צְפוֹן *the heights of Zaphon* is tantalising.

It is not clear, however, why the writer would make an association with צְפוֹן at this point in the story. Yitzhak Berger draws together the images of the sacred mountain and the Edenic garden in arguing that the central theme of *Jonah* is the prophet’s “escapist quest for an idyllic, Eden-like existence.” He sees Jonah’s sleep in the bottom of the ship as an indication of his pursuit of an Edenic sanctuary, a “secure, paradisiacal” location.<sup>27</sup> A more convincing explanation in my view is that the writer has employed the paronomasia in a parodic way: as Jonah endeavours to run from the presence of God he progresses through a series of descents and the use of יִרְכָּתִי הַסְּפִינָה starkly *contrasts* his situation with יִרְכָּתִי צְפוֹן where God was thought to be present, ultimately sinking further to אֶבְטוֹן הַבֶּטֶן *the belly of Sheol*

<sup>25</sup> John H. Hayes, “The Tradition of Zion’s Inviolability,” *JBL* 82, no. 4 (1963): 419-26; R. E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 63-76; Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972), 98-181; Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: an Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 151-76; Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11.

<sup>26</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 101. Sasson refers to Numbers 5:21ff as evidence that יִרְכָּה and אֶבְטוֹן (2:3) can be used synonymously and on this basis suggests that there is a wordplay between the ship’s *hold* and the *belly* of Sheol. Sasson, *Jonah*, 172. See also Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 764.

<sup>27</sup> Berger, *Jonah in the Shadows of Eden*, 1-4.

## APPENDICES

(2:3 [2]). In view of the previously mentioned literary connection between Jerusalem and Nineveh – with both being described as הַעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה *the great city* – the parodic allusion to the sacred mountain of Zion is a further indication that the writer has woven expressions into his story which steer the reader or listener's thoughts towards Jerusalem. These are hints that a secondary or additional subject of the story is Jerusalem and that Nineveh is an artifice or ploy so that on one level the audience is compelled to think through issues related to the God of Israel's compassion to foreigners, while on another level they are invited to think about their own relationship as a nation with the same God.

### Appendix 3: Tarshish in the east

#### Ivory, apes and peacocks

While agreeing that תַּרְשִׁישׁ is a loanword, Benjamin Noonan thinks it probably means “ape” while he prefers “monkey” for קֶלֶק. He does not, however, provide any evidence or cite any authority for this claim.<sup>28</sup> David Schulman, who is regarded as an authority on the languages of India but also has a Hebrew connection being formerly Professor of Indian Studies and Comparative Religion at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, follows Chaim Rabin and considers תַּרְשִׁישׁ to be a Dravidian – probably early Tamil – loan word “originally taken from Tamil *tokai*, the male peacock’s tail, thus metonymically signifying peacocks.” He regards שֵׁן־הַבַּיִת to be “derived from Semitic *shen*, ‘tooth,’ and Sanskrit *ibha*, ‘elephant,’ though other etymologies have been proposed; *kofim*, monkeys,’ certainly derived from Sanskrit *kapi*, itself a Munda loan word in Sanskrit (like many other Sanskrit nouns beginning with the prefix *ka-* signifying the yellow-brown-gray color of monkeys and elephants).” He also points to other Dravidian-based words which appear in the Hebrew Bible as loan words as evidence of trade between India and Israel in the biblical era.<sup>29</sup> Against this, Powels argues that the Hebrew שֵׁן־הַבַּיִת, the Greek ἐλέφας and the Latin *ebur* hail from an Egyptian source where the word has been documented since the Old Kingdom of Egypt, and that Sanskrit *ibha-* seems to be a loan word in the Indian language which made it there by way of the ivory trade (“dass hebr. *šenhebbîm*, griech ἐλέφας und lateinisch *ebur* aus

<sup>28</sup> Noonan, “Foreign Loanwords,” 103.

<sup>29</sup> David D. Shulman, *Tamil: a Biography* (Cambridge, MA; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 19-21; Chaim Rabin, “Lexical Borrowings in Biblical Hebrew from Indian Languages as Carriers of Ideas and Technical Concepts,” in *Between Jerusalem and Benares: Comparative Studies in Judaism and Hinduism* (ed. Hananya Goodman; Albany N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994), 25-32; Chaim Rabin, “Loanword evidence in Biblical Hebrew for trade between Tamil Nad and Palestine in the first millennium BC,” in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies 1968* (ed. R.E. Asher; Madras: International Association of Tamil Research, 1971), 432-40.

einer äg. Quelle stammen, wo das Wort seit dem Alten Reich *beluga* ist. Sanskrit *ibha* - scheint im Indischen ein Lehnwort zu sein und ist auf dem Wege des Elfenbeinhandels dorthin gelangt.”) She thinks the Sanskrit *kapi*- “monkey” might have spread in a similar fashion as a *Wanderwort*. As for the etymology of תּוֹכַיִם, Powels acknowledges that it is problematic and notes that in Dravida-languages similarly sounding forms existed, like Tamil *tōkai*; Malayālam *tōka*; Kannaḍa *tōke*; Telugu *tōka* although all these forms describe a peacock tail rather than the bird itself. While a loan from an Indian language cannot easily be dismissed, Powels also suggests the word could be derived from an old-Egyptian word *ky* “baboon” and that the initial Hebrew ת could be the Egyptian feminine article.<sup>30</sup>

### **Ezion-geber as a base for ships of Tarshish**

2 Chronicles 20:35-36 refers to Jehoshaphat king of Judah joining forces with Ahaziah king of Israel to build ships to travel to Tarshish. These ships were built in Ezion-geber, a seaport on the northern extremity of the Gulf of Aqaba which is mentioned in *Kings* as the place where Solomon built a navy of ships to travel to Ophir for gold (1 Kings 9:26). This suggests a location accessible from the Red Sea or Indian Ocean.

It is possible that there was more than one location named “Tarshish”, or that Tarshish was a generic name for a distant location which was the source of valuable commodities. The Esarhaddon inscription refers to “all the kings in the midst of the sea, from Cyprus and Ionia to Tarshish (*tar-si-si*)” which may support the view that Tarshish was at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, although the formula *from ... to ...* could equally suggest it was in the opposite direction. Ogilvie is convinced that this inscription clearly places Tarshish in the

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<sup>30</sup> Sylvia Powels, “Indische Lehnwörter in der Bibel,” *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik* 5, no. 2 (1992): 194-96 (German).

Near East.<sup>31</sup> Frank M. Cross proposed Sardinia based on his reading and translation of an eight-line Phoenician dedicatory inscription known as the Nora Stone.<sup>32</sup> The Nora inscription is problematic as the top of the stone may be missing (Cross proposes two lines in fact), although Nathan Pilkington argues that it is complete.<sup>33</sup> As there is no word division on the inscription, various scholars separate them differently. The first line is *btršš* which Cross reads as *ba-taršiš* and translates as *at Tarshish* and proposes that it is most easily understood as the name of a refinery town in Sardinia, presumably Nora or an ancient site nearby. His suggestion that it was a “refinery town” is based on William F. Albright’s hypothesis that *Tarshish* could be a cognate from the Akkadian root *rashashu to melt* and would denote any place characterized by mining exploitation.<sup>34</sup> Gesenius, however, associates Tarshish with the semitic root *רשש to break, shatter* which he took to refer to a city in Spain “shattered” by the Phoenician colonists.<sup>35</sup> Others, however, read *btršš* as *from Tarshish* (as Phoenician uses *b* for *from*) or divide it as *bt-rsh-sh*, (vocalized *bet-rosh-‘ash*) *house / temple of the headland*.<sup>36</sup> Pilkington argues that the first words are *בַּת רִשְׁשׁ* which he translates as *a house he beat down*, referring to the destruction of a Sardinian Nuraghic village, Nuraghe Antigori.<sup>37</sup> The suggestion by Edward Lipiński that biblical *תַּרְשִׁישׁ Tarshish* refers to Tartessos in the Iberian

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<sup>31</sup> Ogilvie, “Opuscula Romana, Vol. X. (Skifter Utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Rom, 4<sup>o</sup>, xxxiv.) Pp. 30; 13 figures. Lund: Berlingska Boktryckeriet, 1975. Paper, Sw. kr. 28.”

<sup>32</sup> Frank M. Cross, “An Interpretation of the Nora Stone,” *BASOR*, no. 208 (1972): 13-19.

<sup>33</sup> Nathan Pilkington, “A Note on Nora and the Nora Stone,” *BASOR*, no. 365 (2012): 45.

<sup>34</sup> William F. Albright, “New Light on the Early History of Phoenician Colonization,” *BASOR*, no. 83 (1941): 21-22.

<sup>35</sup> Wilhelm Gesenius, *Thesaurus Philologicus Criticus Linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae Veteris Testamenti* (2nd ed.; Leipzig, 1853), 1316b.

<sup>36</sup> See for example Carolina López Ruiz, “Tarshish and Tartessos Revisited: Textual Problems and Historical Implications,” in *Colonial Encounters in Ancient Iberia : Phoenician, Greek, and indigenous Relations* (eds. Michael Dietler and Carolina López Ruiz; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 260.

<sup>37</sup> Pilkington, “A Note on Nora and the Nora Stone,” 47-9.



Peninsula has been accepted by several scholars.<sup>38</sup> This correlation is also not without its difficulties and Ahlström rejects it on archaeological and philological grounds.<sup>39</sup> Proposed candidates for the biblical Tarshish “range from the Red Sea to Ethiopia or India in the East to a place within the Mediterranean basin, be it Tartessos, Tarsus in Cilicia, Carthage, or just an indefinite place in the western Mediterranean.”<sup>40</sup> With so many options it is conceivable that there was more than one place named *Tarshish*. Lipiński rejects the suggestion of an Ethiopian or Indian Tarshish and dismisses the account in 1 Kings 22:49 with the line that “it is inconceivable that these ships ran aground near Ezion-geber.”<sup>41</sup> It might be equally inconceivable that Solomon obtained ivory, apes and peacocks from Spain!

On the possibility of Jonah being a passenger on a Phoenician ship Del Castillo says “It is impossible to accept that there were passenger ships sailing to the Far West before 612 BC, and to Tartessos in particular. But, in any case, it was a ship that took on passengers. The context implies, moreover, that it was not an Israelite ship; so it must be assumed that it was probably Phoenician.” Citing the case of the arrival in Tartessos of Colaeus of Samos c.640 BCE,<sup>42</sup> and the circumstances leading up to it, Del Castillo asserts “that it would have been impossible for there to be ships prepared to take passengers to even the Far West in this period. It is obvious that the Phoenicians took great care to ensure that they were not deprived of their primacy in the lands that they had discovered and naturally exploited. They would not even have been prepared to let the Israelites know about them as allies, far less allow the arrival of ships that would have accepted passengers.” He cites Briquel-Chatonnet who

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<sup>38</sup> Edward Lipiński, *Dictionnaire de la civilisation phénicienne et punique* (Paris: Brepols, 1992), 441. See also Edward Lipinski, “Tarshish,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, et al.; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Ahlström, “The Nora Inscription and Tarshish,” 45, 48.

<sup>40</sup> López Ruiz, “Tarshish and Tartessos Revisited: Textual Problems and Historical Implications,” 258.

<sup>41</sup> Lipinski, “TDOT,” Vol XV, 792.

<sup>42</sup> Herodotus, *Histories* 4.152

“considers it highly improbable that the Phoenicians would have collaborated with the Israelites on any kind of expedition through the Mediterranean and demonstrates, basing herself on 1 Kings 5:23 (cf. 2 Chron. 2:15) that on the contrary they wanted to reserve the monopoly of these sea routes for themselves, but they were nevertheless aware that their access to the Red Sea depended on the good will of the kingdom of Israel.”<sup>43</sup> Powels comes to a similar conclusion and says it is known that the Phoenician and Arabic merchants closely guarded the secret of the origin of their articles of trade. Strabo, for example, reported that the Phoenicians even sank their ships so as to not disclose the secret of the sources of their tin and lead on the islands northwest of the Spanish coast.<sup>44</sup>

The cumulative evidence is that there may have been more than one location known as *Tarshish* and that India, Sri Lanka, or a location along an Asian trade route may have been known to biblical writers as *Tarshish*. From ancient sources it can be determined that it would have been possible for Jonah to depart from Joppa with the intention of travelling to an eastern location via the Nile canal or by circumnavigating Africa, and that either route may have been in the mind of the writer who was disposed to hyperbole.

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<sup>43</sup> F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Les relations entre les cités de la côte phénicienne et les royaumes d’Israël et de Juda* (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 275, 278; Del Castillo, “Tarshish in the Book of Jonah,” 498.

<sup>44</sup> “Es ist bekannt, dass die phön. und arab. Kaufleute das Geheimnis der Herkunft der von ihnen gehandelten Waren strengstens hüteten. In diesel Zusammenhang berichtet beispielsweise Strabo, dass die Phönizier sogar ihre Schiffe versenkten, um nicht das Geheimnis der Herkunft ihrer Zinn- und Bleiquellen auf den nordwestlich der spanischen Küste gelegenen Inseln preiszugeben.” Powels, “Indische Lehnwörter in der Bibel,” 194.

### Appendix 4: Job 7:17-18 and Psalm 8:5

A significant example of an earlier text being parodied in a later writing elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, given other thematic and stylistic similarities between Job and *Jonah*, is Job 7:17-18 which appears to be quoting or alluding to Psalm 8:5 (4).

| Job 7:17-18  | Psalm 8:5 (4)   |
|--|---|
| <p>מִה־אֲנוֹשׁ כִּי תִגְדָּלְנוּ וְכִי־תִשִׁית אֲלֵינוּ לְבָרָה:<br/>וּתְפַקְדְנוּ לְבָקָרִים לְרִגְעִים תִּבְחָנְנוּ:</p>                     | <p>מִה־אֲנוֹשׁ כִּי־תִזְכְּרוּנוּ וּבְן־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדְנוּ</p>                      |
| <p>What are human beings, that you make so much of them, that you set your mind on them, visit them every morning, test them every moment?</p> | <p>What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you visit them?</p> |

Kynes posits that the lexical similarities between them are too numerous to be a coincidence.<sup>45</sup> Christian Frevel notes that almost all scholars recognise that in these verses “the positive sense of the statement [in Ps 8:5] is overturned word for word and the reference to Ps 8 is transformed into a parody.”<sup>46</sup> Frevel further notes that “parody” is the word used most frequently by scholars to describe the reuse of Psalm 8:5–6 in Job 7:17–18.<sup>47</sup> Van Leeuwen, however, questions the well-established tradition that Job 7 is “a bitter parody” of

<sup>45</sup> Will Kynes, *My Psalm Has Turned into Weeping: Job's Dialogue with the Psalms* (BZAW; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 64.

<sup>46</sup> “Damit ist Wort für Wort der positive Sinn der Aussage gekippt und die Aufnahme von Ps 8 zur Parodie unter der Hand mutiert” Christian Frevel, “Eine kleine Theologie der Menschenwürde. Ps 8 und seine Rezeption im Buch Ijob,” in *Das Manna fällt auch heute noch: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theologie de Alten, Ersten Testaments* (eds. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger; Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 260.

<sup>47</sup> So, for example, Jonathan G. Kline, *Allusive Soundplay in the Hebrew Bible* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2016), 46-47; Newsom, *The Book of Job: a Contest of Moral Imaginations*, 131; Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 130; Frevel, “Eine kleine Theologie der Menschenwürde,” 260.

Psalm 8, quoting Driver's phrase.<sup>48</sup> Noting that this idea was found already in the 1864 commentary of Delitzsch, he says "such scholarly traditions are passed from commentary to commentary and become a lens which can restrict fresh exposition of the text." He argues on the other hand that "visiting" or "remembering" of the inferior by the superior was simply conventional language and there is no literary allusion to Psalm 8 in Job 7, but rather "free literary use of a common oral formula."<sup>49</sup> Van Leeuwen cites a variant of the "what is man" formula in Job 15:14 (repeated in 25:4-6) and 21:15 as evidence that this is a traditional formula, but admits that in both cases the term is used ironically. George Coats also disputes the view that Job 7:17 is a parody of Psalm 8:5 and instead argues that "Job 7:17 parodies the concept of man presented in Ps 8:6-9, although not directly an imitation of the style or formal structure" of the psalm.<sup>50</sup> The ironic use of the formula in these texts, however, strengthens a reading of Job 7:17 as a parody of Psalm 8:5 or 144:3, or both. The formula is used in Job 21:15 ("What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?") in a way which *inverts* the relationship suggested in Psalm 8, further strengthening a parodic interpretation of this text. Kynes counters Van Leeuwen's assertions and argues that Job 7:17-18 is indeed a parody of Psalm 8:5 (4) but notes that a "lingering eighteenth century understanding of parody, which assumes that it must ridicule its literary precursor, may have misled commentators into believing Job is mocking Psalm 8. However, Job's antithetical allusion to the psalm need not necessarily indicate that he is subverting its authority."<sup>51</sup> As he argued elsewhere, and cited earlier, parodies do not necessarily mock the original work; they may use these texts as a vehicle for their own satire.<sup>52</sup> Job's use of Psalm 8 establishes that it is not

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<sup>48</sup> Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Psalm 8.5 and Job 7.17-18: A Mistaken Scholarly Commonplace?," in *The World of the Aramaeans: Studies in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion* (2001), 205-15.

<sup>49</sup> Van Leeuwen, "Psalm 8.5 and Job 7.17-18: A Mistaken Scholarly Commonplace?," 211.

<sup>50</sup> George W. Coats, "Self-Abasement and Insult Formulas," *JBL* 89, no. 1 (1970): 25.

<sup>51</sup> Kynes, *My Psalm Has Turned into Weeping: Job's Dialogue with the Psalms*, 63-79, here 70.

<sup>52</sup> Kynes, "Parody in the Hebrew Bible," 285.

## APPENDICES

unthinkable for one biblical text to parody another, and can be used as a guide for interpreting the Jonah-psalm.

## Appendix 5: Holocaust or *Shoah*?

This appendix provides an explanation for how I have used the terms “Holocaust” and “Shoah” in this thesis. The systematic extermination of six million Jews by Nazi Germany during the Second World War is commonly called “the Holocaust” although the term is also qualified and used in other contexts to refer, for example, to any genocide such as “the Armenian holocaust” or more generally of destruction, as in “nuclear holocaust.” When used of the mass destruction of European Jewry, however, the term is generally capitalised and attracts the definite article – *the* Holocaust – the preeminent archetypal case against which others are measured.<sup>53</sup> The English word is derived from the Greek *λόκαυστος* from *όλος* *whole* and *καυστός* *burnt*, which initially had reference to a sacrifice completely consumed by fire (as in Leviticus 1:1-10) but came to mean “total destruction.” In this secondary sense it is apt for the near annihilation of European Jewry. “The connotation of not merely massacre, but destruction by fire seems to give the term appropriately tangible overtones: The horror of the event may be said to be properly emphasized by a term that evokes the smell of burning corpses in the Nazi furnaces.”<sup>54</sup> However, as the Septuagint uses *λόκαυστος* (and its variants) as the standard translation for *להֵב* *burnt offering* the word also has religious sacrificial connotations which may be offensive to some, possibly implying that the destruction of European Jewry was a “sacrifice” to placate God or could have some kind of propitiatory effect. Frolov makes this point: “As a Jew born after World War II, I refuse to believe that the genocide of my brethren was the only way to make Europe repent and renounce the abomination of anti-Semitism. Those who chose the word ‘Holocaust’ as the English designation of Shoah either shared this understanding or were totally ignorant of the

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<sup>53</sup> Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman, “Why Do We Call the Holocaust ‘The Holocaust’? An Inquiry Into the Psychology of Labels,” *Modern Judaism* 9, no. 2 (1989): 197.

<sup>54</sup> Garber and Zuckerman, “Why Do We Call the Holocaust ‘The Holocaust’?,” 198.

word's original meaning. In the Hebrew Bible, holocaust (*'ôlâ*) is by no means a crime; it is a perfectly legitimate, and even obligatory, cultic act."<sup>55</sup> A considerable number of Jewish writers, however, seem to have no difficulty with the word "Holocaust" and, whether the attribution is accurate or not, its initial employment to refer to the industrialised murder of European Jews has been attributed to Auschwitz survivor Elie Wiesel.<sup>56</sup> However, the modern Hebrew term for the Nazi genocide is *שואה* *destruction, calamity, ruin* (coming into modern Hebrew from biblical Hebrew), which has no religious or sacrificial overtones. It is the preferred term for many and is the term I generally use in this thesis. As a biblical term *שואה* refers to calamity or ruin of various kinds, but especially of destruction about to fall on Israel or Judah, as in the following:

ליום פְּקֻדָּה וְלִשְׂוֹאָה מִמְּרָחֵק תָּבוֹא

on the day of punishment, in the *calamity* that will come from far away (Isaiah 10:3)

יום עֲבָרָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יוֹם צָרָה וּמִצְרִיקָה יוֹם שֹׂאָה וּמִשְׂוֹאָה יוֹם חֹשֶׁךְ וְאֶפְלָה יוֹם עָנָן וְעֶרְפָּל:

That day [the *day of the LORD* v.14] will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of *ruin* and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. (Zephaniah 1:15)

Of the twelve occurrences of this word in the Hebrew Bible three are in Job, more than any other book. (Job 30:3, 14; 38:27.) In these three places the word is used in the sense of being desolate or of desolation.) The word is not used in *Jonah*, and for that matter there is no explicit language of destruction or calamity with the exception of the ambiguous *עֹד*

<sup>55</sup> Frolov, "Returning the Ticket," 104 n.78.

<sup>56</sup> Garber and Zuckerman, "Why Do We Call the Holocaust 'The Holocaust'?", 202.

אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְיָנֻחַ נְהַפְּקֶת *Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown* (Jonah 3:4). Yet it would be impossible for a Jewish audience after the destruction and exile of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians to read of Nineveh and not think of the Assyrian captivity. The failure to recognise how heavily this shadow of the Assyrian *Shoah* looms over *Jonah* has led to commentators misinterpreting the book as a message of God's universal compassion and as a criticism of the prophet Jonah, and by implication Judaism as a whole, as particularist and exclusivist. Marvin Sweeney makes an important observation that interpretations which view Jonah's attempt to escape the divine commission and his later anger at God for forgiving the Ninevites as signs of his petulance and refusal to accept that God should show mercy to Gentiles, both draw on and advance anti-Semitic stereotypes. Such an interpretation characterises Jews as misanthropes who hate their Gentile counterparts.<sup>57</sup> I agree with Sweeney that it also overlooks the actual underlying interest in the question of theodicy in *Jonah*.

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<sup>57</sup> Sweeney, *Reading the Hebrew Bible After the Shoah: Engaging Holocaust Theology*, 156.



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