'îr hayyônâ: Jonah, Nineveh, and the Problem of Divine Justice

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JONAH, NINEVEH, AND
THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE JUSTICE

a dissertation

by

CATHERINE LANE MULDOON

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for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Conventional interpretations of Jonah hold that the book’s purpose is to endorse the power of repentance in averting divine wrath, or to promote a greater appreciation among readers for divine mercy rather than justice, or to dispute “exclusivist” attitudes that would confine divine grace to the people of Israel/Judah. This dissertation argues, in contrast to these interpretations, that the book of Jonah should best be understood as an exploration of the problem of a perceived lack of divine justice.

In light of the Jonah’s composition well after the historical destruction of Nineveh, the use of Nineveh in Jonah as an object of divine mercy would have struck a discordant note among the book’s earliest readers. Elsewhere in the prophetic corpus, Nineveh is known specifically and exclusively for its international crimes and its ultimate punishment at the hands of Yhwh, an historical event (612 B.C.E.) that prophets took as a sign of Yhwh’s just administration of the cosmos. The use of Nineveh in Jonah, therefore, is not intended to serve as a hypothetical example of the extent of Yhwh’s mercy to even the worst sinners. Rather, readers of Jonah would have known that the reprieve granted Nineveh in Jonah 3 did not constitute “the end of the story” for Nineveh. To the contrary, the extension of divine mercy to Nineveh in Jonah, which is set in the eighth century B.C.E., would have been seen as only the first of Yhwh’s moves in regard to that “city of blood.”

The central conflict of the book resides in Jonah’s doubt in the reliability of divine justice. In the aftermath of Nineveh’s reprieve in Jonah 3, the prophet complains that the merciful outcome was inevitable, and had nothing to do with the Ninevites’ penitence. The episode of the growth and death of the qîqâyôn plant in Jonah 4:6-8, and its explanation in 4:10-11 comprise Yhwh’s response to Jonah’s accusation. The images employed in the growth and death of the plant, and in the events that follow its demise, connote destruction in the prophetic corpus. When Yhwh explains the meaning of the qîqâyôn to Jonah in 4:10-11, the deity makes no mention of either penitence or mercy. Rather, having established that the qîqâyôn represents Nineveh, Yhwh asserts that, although he has spared Nineveh at present, he will not regret its eventual destruction in the future.
'Indeed, indeed, the times are troubled, Sir Edmund,’ he said, ‘but we must remember that we are all in God’s hands.’

‘I know we are,’ said Mrs. Brandon earnestly, ‘and that is just what is so perfectly dreadful.’

This appalling truth drove everyone into a frenzy of unnecessary conversation which lasted until Sir Edmund went.

-Angela Thirkell, *Cheerfulness Breaks In*
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation attests to “what a Woman’s patience can endure and what a Man’s resolution can achieve.” With apologies to Wilkie Collins, the woman in question is my Mom, Barbara J. Muldoon, and the man, my Dad, Robert J. Muldoon, Jr. I dedicate this project to them with love. They were so helpful, enthusiastic, and supportive that I plan to enter another doctoral program post-haste.

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September 10, 2009
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Chapter One: Premises and Problems in the Interpretation of Jonah

Jonah ben Amittai is a *rara avis* among biblical protagonists. Drawn irresistibly to the symbolic potential in the name *yônā* (dove), scholarly and popular commentators alike have characterized the prophet with avian epithets ranging from, “the wayward dove”\(^1\) to “the wrathful dove.”\(^2\) Unlike Noah’s dove, (Gen 8:8-12) which acts as a “messenger of hope,”\(^3\) Jonah’s name, it is claimed, belies his nature, which is “sinister,”\(^4\) “good-for-nothing,”\(^5\) and “selfish and absurd.”\(^6\) Indeed, in light of his “moaning”\(^7\) and “unappealing” speech,\(^8\) Jonah ben Amittai might be more plausibly described, in Henry Higgin’s phrase, as a “bilious pigeon.”\(^9\) Where Jonah should rejoice at the repentance of

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9 "Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and the Bible; and don’t sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon."
the wicked people of Nineveh, commentators claim, he “pouts.” 10 Where he should be grateful for divine mercy, they assert, Jonah instead wallows in a morbid death-wish. Though precise identification of the genre of the book of Jonah varies widely, 11 interpretive consensus on the book’s disagreeable protagonist has produced the widely held conclusion that its purpose is didactic. 12 In this view, the book of Jonah is about the reeducation of the eponymous prophet, who is notably slow to transform. The lesson that the prophet must draw varies among interpreters, but a common thread binds them.

As Barbara Bakke-Kaiser puts it,

most mainstream interpretations … offer monologic conclusions that confirm and console with hackneyed moral lessons ‘that have clung to the text like limpets.’ 13 We are supposed to laugh sardonically as the narrow-minded Jonah learns lessons about justice versus mercy, Jew versus Gentile, xenophobia versus universalism. 14

According to these “monologic” distillations of the tale, Jonah, unlike other scriptural lonely men of faith, is no religious role model; rather, if interpreters have read his character aright, he is a negative example whose “vindictiveness” 15 and/or “xenophobia,” 16 (or other unpleasant qualities) attentive readers must observe and reject.

11 See overview and bibliography in Thomas M. Bolin, Freedom Beyond Forgiveness: The Book of Jonah Re-Examined (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 46-53. The book has been designated as fable, parable, midrash, satire and allegory, among others, but the book resists all such neat categorization. As Jack M. Sasson, puts it, while each designation has its proponents, “each position appeals fully only to a small fraction in scholarship.” Sasson, Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary and Interpretation (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 326. Sasson also provides a synopsis of issues relating to Jonah’s genre, 331-40.
16 Warshaw, 195.
In recent years, however, a cadre of dissenters has argued that, longstanding though they may be, the mainstream, monologic readings of the book of Jonah do not withstand scrutiny. Ehud Ben Zvi,17 Alan Cooper,18 Etan Levine,19 Philippe Guillaume,20 Thomas Bolin,21 and Yvonne Sherwood,22 all of whose work has influenced my own approach to the book of Jonah, have argued that the book’s inner-biblical allusions, rampant wordplay and complex narrative artistry argue against interpretations that reduce the book to a simple, unambiguous story with a lesson.

At present, then, the interpretation of Jonah is in flux: as it turns out, it is a great deal easier to say what the book of Jonah is not than to establish what it is, or what it was originally intended to accomplish. Nevertheless, the current project seeks to gain interpretive ground, by presenting a coherent, methodologically sound reading of the book that surmounts the reductive tendencies to which so many recent critics have objected. In the pages that follow, I illustrate some of the major interpretive difficulties

22 Sherwood, Afterlives and "Crosscurrents."
by reviewing the major features of the “monologic” interpretations and bringing to bear several points made by their recent critics.23

As for the rest of the project, my goals are twofold. First, I want to demonstrate that acute attention to the book’s intertextual phenomena can yield new insights into some of its most baffling passages and shed light on its provenance. Moments of resonance between Jonah and other prophetic texts have proven particularly fruitful in this regard. Indeed, the manifold links between Jonah and the rest of the prophetic corpus that I uncover, reveal why the book belongs “among the prophets.”

The allusive artistry of the book will thus be an ongoing concern of this work, but the primary point that I seek to make is that the negative judgments lodged against the prophet Jonah, to which Christian readers in particular have long given full cry, miss the central point of the story. The tale, I argue, is not solely about the character of Jonah, but the nature of Yhwh. The book is concerned with the tension between a theological premise, namely, the universal sovereignty of Yhwh, and a theological problem, Yhwh’s apparent quiescence in the face of evil. The prophet Jonah, in classic prophetic style, “stands in the breach” against Yhwh (Ezek 22:30) and demands an explanation for Yhwh’s inaction. Jonah, indeed, is the only creature in the book—human, animal or vegetal—willing to attempt to resist either the divine hand or the divine policy, a quality that establishes Jonah as prophet in the mold of Abraham (Gen 18:25) and Moses (Ex 32:11-12). To be sure, there is a difference between Jonah and his predecessors. Where

23 For similar overviews, see Bolin, Freedom, 57-62, and Levine, “Jonah as a Philosophical Book,” 236-240.
Abraham and Moses try to turn Yhwh from excessive wrath, Jonah protests against the excessive extension of divine mercy. Jonah is much maligned; but I argue that he gives voice to grave and reasonable doubt with regard to Yhwh’s reliability as an arbiter of justice (4:2). In turn, in the book’s dénouement, Yhwh employs typically prophetic imagery—the growth and death of a plant—as a defense against the prophet’s accusation. Yhwh asserts that justice is indeed forthcoming, but according to the deity’s own timeframe (4:6-11). Thus, in my view, the book of Jonah functions not as a theological tract that denounces its own main character, but as a debate, in which two protagonists, Yhwh and Jonah, are afforded equal time. While the book ultimately vindicates Yhwh, neither the author nor the deity condemn Jonah.

Throughout the project, I incorporate the insights of historical criticism and literary analysis, in ways that securely anchor my novel interpretation of the book to the text itself. In biblical studies, as in war, methodological grunt work wins battles. This is why, in chapter two, I present an analysis of issues relating to the date of the book’s composition. This discussion, which includes extensive consideration of the diachronic linguistic evidence of the book of Jonah, provides the historical-critical basis on which to build a case for a new interpretation of the book as a whole. In chapter three, I discuss thematic parallels between Malachi and Jonah that illuminate questions about the latter’s

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24 Bolin, *Freedom*, 149, demonstrates that over the course of Jonah 4, the alternating speeches of Yhwh and Jonah use exactly the same number of words, 47 each. Moreover, “when Yhwh is given a remark of exactly 3 or 5 words, Jonah also has a dialogue of the exact same length, and both utter speeches of 39 words.” On the parity of dialogue, see also Sasson, 317.
putative “universalism” and its treatment of the question of divine justice, while bolstering the case for Jonah’s origin in the early Persian era.

Chapters two and three, then, are intended to provide the historical foundation for the literary studies that I offer in chapters four and five. In short, in chapter four, I present an analysis of the character of Jonah which attempts to do justice both to the prophet’s theological position, and to the complexity of the book’s two major inner-biblical allusions. To anticipate, by the beginning of Jonah 4, it is apparent that the prophet is beset by רעה (Jonah 4:1): this is indeed the main conflict of the plot. Jonah’s anger and displeasure are directed toward Yhwh in 4:2, where he invokes the “Divine Attributes Formula,” the primary articulation of which occurs in Exodus 34:6-7. In order to understand what Jonah means when he accuses Yhwh of being ורחום ורחום אל־חנון, I consider the significance of the narrator’s identification of Jonah as “ben Amittai,” which links Jonah to a character with the same name, who is mentioned elsewhere only in 2 Kings 14:25. These two allusions, I argue, provide an implicit back-story for “our” Jonah, revealing the roots of his רעה: he doubts that Yhwh can be counted on to render justice.

Finally, in chapter five, I address the resolution of Jonah’s רעה which is provided by the episode of the growth and death of the qiqayôn plant in Jonah 4:6-8, and by Yhwh’s ambiguous, yet ominous, comparison of the plant to the city of Nineveh. In sum, I argue that Jonah’s position is not pilloried by the author. While the end of the book of

25 Hebrew goes here.
Jonah certainly is intended to communicate something about the nature of Yhwh to Jonah, I argue that interpretations that view the final scene as Yhwh’s attempt to convince Jonah to delight in divine mercy, miss its true purport entirely. Rather, the book’s final scene indicates that Yhwh “does not always acquit” (Exodus 34:7).

That, then, is the game-plan. In the present chapter, in the interests of providing a level playing field, I summarize three major “monologic” interpretations that have held or continue to hold interpretive sway in the literature on Jonah, and rehearse some of the recent critics’ arguments against them. These overviews are not exhaustive, but are presented with an eye toward accurately representing their strengths and weaknesses, and toward indicating the ways in which the “dissenters’” interpretations diverge from more mainstream opinion. Many of the issues and problems which garner only a brief treatment in the present chapter are considered in much greater depth subsequently.

**Message 1:** “From the book of Jonah itself it is evident that Jonah was an ardent nationalist, pro-Israel and anti-foreign…”

Interpretations that see the prophet Jonah as a xenophobe or a proponent of an “exclusivist” religion originated among Christians during the late patristic era and dominated critical scholarship from the Enlightenment until the final decades of the twentieth century. Earliest Christians saw Jonah as a type for Christ, connecting Jonah’s sojourn in the fish to Christ’s descent into and return from the grave.

century, artistic depictions of the “Jonah cycle” outnumber other images drawn from the Hebrew Bible by a wide margin. Augustine inaugurated a shift away from this interpretation by seeing Jonah as the “image de l’Israël charnel qui ne veut pas voir libérer les Nations.” This interpretation, which proved highly influential almost up to the present, was rooted in Jonah’s protest against Yhwh’s decision to spare Nineveh (4:1-2): the allegorical meaning, evidently, would be that “Israel” resents the extension of salvation to “the Nations.” Martin Luther later saw the character of Jonah in two lights, positively, as a prophet to the gentiles, on the one hand, but also, as “the first to make Judaism contemptible and superfluous,” because he wanted to “snub the gospel of grace.”

As biblical criticism evolved, Christian interpreters began to make distinctions between the character of Jonah and the author of the tale: indeed, the author of Jonah began to be seen as a critic who stood apart from and inveighed against the negative aspects of Judaism for which the prophet Jonah was said to be a type. Sherwood provides a catalog of indictments of the prophet Jonah by nineteenth century, German biblical scholars who concurred that the far-sighted author of the book of Jonah was

30 Luther, “Lectures,” 81. This “snubbing” of grace, for Luther and for other commentators who saw Jonah as a repudiation of Judaism, was manifest in Jonah’s flight from Yhwh in Jonah 1, and especially, in his display of anger in chapter 4.
engaging in the “naked exposure of Jewish prejudice”\(^3\) and/or confronting the “stubborn, particularist, principle” as represented by the character of Jonah.\(^2\)

During the last century, biblical scholars who saw the prophet Jonah as an exemplar of Jewish xenophobia sought a specific historical grounding for their interpretation. They situated the book’s composition in the era of Ezra and Nehemiah, whose reforms, they held, insisted upon Judean exclusivity that was, by definition, characterized by hostility toward non-Judean peoples. Thus, like their predecessors, such readers saw the book of Jonah as a universalistic author’s salutary attempt to refute opponents, represented by the character of Jonah, who adhered to a “particularist ethic.”\(^3\)

Millar Burrows, for example, argued that Jonah is directed against “extreme advocates of zealous conservatism and rigid exclusiveness, [who were] dedicated to the preservation of the ways of the fathers and the purity of their own Hebrew descent (Ezr 9-10; Neh 13:1-3, 25-38).\(^4\)

The “Jonah as xenophobe” interpretation prevailed until the final decades of the twentieth century, when advances in scholarship on Ezra-Nehemiah made the historical basis of the interpretation increasingly problematic. Indeed, among mainstream contemporary scholars, the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah are seen less as a “xenophobic drive toward exclusion” than a “perfectionist (and probably unsuccessful) program to

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33 Ibid.
maintain *religious* identity." Moreover, many recent commentators have pointed out that the book of Jonah treats none of the specific issues associated with the putative ethnic/nationalistic “particularism” of Ezra and Nehemiah. As George M. Landes noted, the separatist tendencies that were developing were not primarily aimed at distinguishing Jew from Gentile but at specifying the requirements of a holy and righteous life among Jews themselves. The issues that these requirements were designed to combat—the maintaining of cultic holiness over against Gentile uncleanness, the problems of mixed marriages, and intermarriage—are not in any way or even obliquely alluded to in the book of Jonah.

The “particularism” of Ezra and Nehemiah, then, was primarily concerned with making distinctions among Judeans, which would seem to make the book of Jonah’s apparent commendation of gentile piety singularly irrelevant to the internal Judean debate. A loss of historical naïveté with regard to the Ezra-Nehemiah corpus has also undermined the “Jonah-as-xenophobe” interpretation: despite the assumption of earlier scholars that Ezra-Nehemiah reflect historical circumstances, there is no way to corroborate that the purported “worldview regarding ‘foreigners’ reflected in Ezra-Nehemiah….governed the Yehudite polity and its discourse for any substantial period.”

As dependence on Ezra-Nehemiah as a historical setting for Jonah’s composition began to wane, a more generalized view of Jonah as “a corrective against a hypothetical Jewish provincialism” continued to be propounded.

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38 Bolin, *Freedom*, 60.
of Jonah “wants to teach the narrow, blind, prejudiced, fanatic Jews of which Jonah is but the type that ‘the love of God is wider than the measure of man’s mind, And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.’” More recent readers tend to tone down their rhetoric, asserting merely that the book of Jonah “stand[s] outside the particularist election traditions of Israel.”

David Marcus critiques this position as follows:

> the message to the reader would be that if a prophet of God does not understand that God’s mercy extends also to foreigners, then how much more does the reader, or community of readers not understand it! The readers are admonished that they, like Jonah, do not know the truth about everything. Consequently, they should emulate God’s compassion with the Ninevites and exercise more tolerance with people of contrary or different views.

As Marcus indicates, readers for whom the “Jonah as xenophobe” reading continues to be influential tend to emphasize the potentially salutary moral lessons evinced by the dichotomy they see between Jonah and the gentile characters, who are “more humane, more active, wiser and also more devout,” than the prophet. The gentile characters are seen as positive exemplars of obedience, faith and tolerance; the progression of the plot must therefore be to compel Jonah to assimilate these qualities.

For these reasons, it is easy to understand the continuing attraction of interpretations that rely on the contrast between the Judean protagonist and the unnamed gentile characters. There can be no question, moreover, that the narrative “set-up” of the

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39 Julius A. Bewer, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jonah*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 64. Bewer’s resort to light verse puts one in mind of another famous couplet: “Oh, how I love humanity, with love so pure and pringlish/ But how I hate the horrid French, who never will be English.”


42 Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 123.
book of Jonah—Judean protagonist reluctantly sent as a divine emissary to a gentile city—is, at first glance, highly unusual and worthy of comment. Other such divinely appointed representatives who find themselves in diaspora milieus, such as Moses, Ezekiel, or Daniel, do indeed work among gentiles, but their efforts tend to be directed toward the improvement of the lot of their fellow Judeans. The Elijah and Elisha cycles feature several stories in which the prophets provide aid and comfort to gentiles who ultimately conclude that “there is a God in Israel” (2 Kgs 5:15). But only the book of Jonah (and according to some commentators, the book of Ruth) seems actively to promote a kind of “radical inclusiveness” that presumes that “the nations outside Israel would be accepted as equal and would…share in the worship and privileges of belonging to the Yahwistic faith.” In this interpretation, the plot of Jonah, although it begins with a divine decree to proclaim an Oracle against a Nation, i.e., “an announcement of future doom on a specific foreign nation, city, or ruler,” actually undermines the “voice of exclusion” that is purported to have been “the norm until the time of Christ.”

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44 Grant-Henderson, xix. Grant-Henderson’s term “inclusiveness” is intended as an alternative to the term “universalism” which, as she notes, can be ambiguous, indicating either the sovereign power of Yhwh in the cosmos, or the idea that Yhwh, in L.C. Allen’s definition, “throws open to Gentiles the covenant relationship that hitherto was Israel’s privilege.” Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), 190. Grant-Henderson is interested in the latter connotation, as her primary purpose is to argue that the examples of “inclusiveness” that she perceives in the Hebrew Bible, such as Ruth, Jonah, and Isaiah 19, provide an ethical principle that values inclusion over against “law” that promotes exclusion.
46 Grant-Henderson, xxi.
sentence of doom, in this reading, becomes, over the course of the narrative, a voice of invitation, a paradigm for readers—and for Jonah himself—to imitate.

To us it’s evident that these intentions are well meant. But I want to raise several substantive objections against the widespread perception of the gentile characters’ moral supremacy and the notion that the author of Jonah is promoting unparalleled “inclusivity.” First, although Jonah is sent on a mission to Nineveh, this does not necessarily imply that the author, Yhwh, or the character of Jonah, are urging a program of increased dialogue between Israel and the nations. The scenario is more complex: the prophet’s proclamation against Nineveh while in Nineveh is the first of several occasions in which the narrative of Jonah actualizes or makes literal those things which, in other prophets, are confined to the realms of poetry and rhetoric. In the classical prophets, “Oracles against the Nations,” (henceforth, OAN) are, let us concede, two-a-penny, appearing in every prophetic book except Hosea. Prophetic figures such as Amos, Nahum, Zephaniah, or others inveigh against Assyria, for example, or Edom, as part of a rhetorical strategy directed toward an Israelite or Judean audience. The purpose of these OAN is (usually) to console Israelites or Judeans by anticipating an end to “the hubris of the nations,” the downfall of which “will reveal…the futility of trusting…that nation,” and simultaneously underscore “Yahweh’s power and authority.” Regardless of the putative object of the oracle, “Israelites were the real addressees.”

47 Raabe, 241.
48 Raabe, 242.
49 Ibid.
50 Raabe, 249.
intended to imagine Amos on a circuit tour of neighboring gentile polities, making successive announcements of doom, or Obadiah popping up in Edom to give its citizens an advance screening of their downfall. Yet Jonah actually wends his way laboriously to Nineveh, where, in 3:4, he employs the term הפה, “a linguistic coin that functions as an oracle against a foreign nation or city” in as concise an OAN as we are likely to find in the prophetic corpus:osiærשביםיהנמיהפה, “forty days and Nineveh overturns!”

When the author of Jonah embeds the rhetorical device of the OAN into the narrative, compelling the prophet Jonah actually to do what the other classical prophets only purport to do, the result is a “deliberate flouting of genres, an ironic use of traditions” that precludes an entirely straight-faced interpretation of the scene. Such “literalization” occurs frequently within the book: Jonah’s underwater travails, in Jonah

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51 In Jer 51:62 the prophet himself dispatches an envoy to Babylon, but the envoy addresses not the Babylonians, but Yhwh, reminding the deity of his promise to destroy that city.
52 Gitay, 202.
53 All translations from the Hebrew Bible are mine unless otherwise noted. Some recent commentators, such as R.E. Clements and Halpern and Friedman have suggested that the nip’al participle נפכת “overturns” foreshadows not Nineveh’s destruction but its moral reform. See R.E. Clements, “The Purpose of the Book of Jonah,” VT Sup 28 (1975):24; Halpern and Friedman, “Composition and Paronomasia,” 87. However, to attribute such a meaning to the verb is insupportable; there are indeed a few instances in biblical Hebrew in which הפה is used in a figurative sense, such 1 Sam 10:9 and Hos 11:8. In the former, when God "gave [Samuel] a new heart," the verb (gal) seems to refer to the ecstatic spirit that overtakes Samuel prior to his anointing of Saul. Thus, הנפכת does not indicate a change in Samuel's internal orientation, but rather, the application of an external, "driving" force, that produces his newly "frenzied" state. In Hos 11:8, we find a nip’al perfect verb used to signify that the heart of the deity is revolted against planned action against Israel: לבי עלי נפכת certainly does not indicate a “change of heart.” It is almost as though deity is divided against himself, preventing the policy of intended destruction from being carried out. In both of these usages, then, נפכת carries a sense of imposed domination of a former spirit by a new spirit (literally, in Samuel, and figuratively in Hosea). There is a sense not of willing reorientation, but of imposed change. In light of these instances, the “overturning” of the hearts of the Ninevites might be seen as illustrating not willing reformation, but involuntary subjugation to Yhwh.

2, seem to embody or act out the language of lament psalms, in which the hero is engulfed by waters, and “swallowed up” by Sheol. Similarly, the Ninevites’ immediate comprehension of and response to Jonah’s proclamation—unparalleled elsewhere in the scriptures—seems the narrative embodiment of Ezek 3:6, in which the prophet is informed that, had he been sent to “a people of unintelligible speech and difficult language… they would listen to you.”

The refraction between narrative episodes in Jonah and poetic/rhetorical material elsewhere in the biblical corpus creates “a critique and a denial of univocal meaning” that confounds “normal expectation.” As in a fun-house mirror, events in the narrative, when juxtaposed with their figurative or rhetorical counterparts, become both appropriate and absurd. The very idea of a prophet entering the precincts of Nineveh, Nahum’s “mistress of sorceries” (Nah 3:4) borders on the ludicrous. In light of this manifest absurdity, to read Jonah as simply promoting missionary outreach to generic gentiles is not appropriate.

Similarly, readers who focus on the ostensible Judean versus gentile dichotomies among the characters of Jonah 1 and 3 frequently fail to recognize that the prophet does not insist at any place in the book on the exclusivity of Israel’s relationship with Yhwh or its exclusive right to divine mercy. On the contrary, when the sailors of chapter 1 interrogate the prophet as to his identity, Jonah’s response is thoroughly non-

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55 My thanks to David Vanderhooft for drawing my attention to this instance of literalization.
56 Cooper, 144-5. The phrase “critique and denial of univocal meaning” quoted by Cooper, is from S. Stewart, Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 77.
57 Contra Stuart, above, note 27.
nationalistic: he describes himself as a worshipper of Yhwh, the God who “made the sea and dry land.” (1:9) Jonah’s focus is on Yhwh the creator of the whole world, not on Yhwh, “the God of Israel.” The prophet’s use of the term yabbāšā echoes Yhwh’s separation of sea and land in Genesis 1:9-10 and underscores the sovereignty of Yhwh not over polities or nations but over the natural elements themselves—the earth and its fullness.

We search in vain for a word, a hint, of “any manifestation of [Jonah’s] hatred for gentiles,” but find none.58 As Uriel Simon has pointed out, the prophet’s interactions with the sailors of Jonah 1 place Jonah in the position of savior of his gentile shipmates: “instead of trying to force his pursuer to drown all those aboard the ship on account of his transgression, [Jonah] acts to prevent their being dragged into his quarrel with God” and insists that the sailors throw him into the sea in order that they might be spared from his quarrel’s consequences.59

Jonah is certainly disgruntled and disaffected after the reprieve given Nineveh in chapter 3. But readers who see his complaint in 4:2 as motivated by anti-gentile or exclusivistic sentiments do not extract this interpretation from the text; rather, they supply it. If Jonah had wanted to protest the bestowal of mercy on non-Jews in particular, why not choose a more apposite biblical quotation than the Divine Attributes Formula, which expounds on the divine traits of mercy and compassion? As Simon remarks, “had Jonah intended to protest the scope [i.e. to gentiles] of God’s mercy he

58 Uriel Simon and Lenn J. Schramm (translator), Jonah (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999), x.
59 Ibid.
would not have mentioned the attributes of compassion and kindness but used a phrasing similar to that of Psalm 145:9: ‘The LORD is good to all and his mercy is upon all his works’ (my italics).

Neither narrative analysis nor historical-critical scholarship supports the view that Jonah’s xenophobia/exclusivism is the object of the narrative’s didactic intent. Moreover, as I shall discuss below, in chapter three, the tendency to see the Ninevites and sailors as moral paragons, as opposed to Jonah, the moral low-achiever, requires readers to overlook or downplay more nuanced elements of the characterizations of all parties. Only by engaging in the demonization of Jonah and hagiography of the other characters, can the Jewish-gentile dichotomy be maintained.

A final word should be said on the topic of “Jonah the xenophobe.” Despite the good intentions of commentators who see the book of Jonah as a plea for tolerance and universalism, the long shadow of Christian anti-Judaism continues to tinge such “universalist” readings. For example, Augustine’s remark that “Jonah prefigures the carnal people of Israel who were sad at the redemption and deliverance of the nations” echoes in the words of some modern commentators, who see Jonah as a type, the embodiment or exemplar, of all Jews/Judeans/Judaism. When commentators remark, for example, “how much more trouble God has with his own people than with the worst of the heathen world!” or, “Jonah may represent the people of Israel, who, in their belief as

60 Simon, Jonah, x.
61 The discussion here is indebted to Sherwood, Afterlives, 28-87.
63 Fretheim, “Jonah and Theodicy,” 57.
the chosen ones, have become self-centered instead of God-centered,\textsuperscript{64} we are not very far from J. D. Michaelis’ remark, published in 1782, that the book of Jonah confronts “the Israelite people’s hate and envy towards all the other nations of the earth.”\textsuperscript{65}

There is a deep and unpleasant irony at work here, namely, that even while commentators seek to celebrate “universalism,” they “postulate a non-ideal, particularistic,” (“sinister,” “petty,” “hateful”) opponent, “a psychological and religious monster,”\textsuperscript{66} who all too frequently is characterized as “Jonah the Jew.”\textsuperscript{67}

In light of these observations, it cannot be gainsaid that, critical Biblical Studies, for all its disavowals of the pre-critical past, is also its meek inheritor, and a clear line of continuity can be traced between Augustine’s description of Jonah as an embodiment of ‘carnal Judaism,” Luther’s idea that Jonah had a ‘Jewish, carnal idea of God,’ and modern sketches of Jonah as a representative of \textit{die fleishlichen Juden}.\textsuperscript{68}

The book of Jonah has much to say about Yhwh’s interactions with “the nations”; chapter three of the current project is devoted to that subject. But the historical, exegetical, and theological foundations on which “Jonah the xenophobe” interpretations stand are weak at best, and distorted by prejudice at worst; as Elias Bickerman puts it, “the opposition between Israel and the Gentiles is introduced by commentators who see more than is really there.”\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{65} J.D. Michaelis, \textit{Deutsche Übersetzung des Alten Testaments mit Anmerkungen für Ungelehrte} (Göttingen: Vanderhoech and Ruprecht, 1782), 106. Quoted in Sherwood, \textit{Afterlives}, 25.
\textsuperscript{66} von Rad, \textit{God at Work}, 66.
\textsuperscript{67} Sherwood, \textit{Afterlives}, 30.
\textsuperscript{68} Sherwood, \textit{Afterlives}, 29.
\textsuperscript{69} Bickerman, 28.
Message Two: The qualities of mercy

“No ceremony that to great ones 'longs, not the king's crown nor the deputed sword, the marshal's truncheon nor the judge's robe, become them with one half so good a grace as mercy does.”

--- Measure for Measure, Act II, scene II.

The “Jonah as xenophobe” characterization has lost ground in most recent critical scholarship, in part for many of the reasons sketched above. Among readers who have abjured readings that focus on religious or national identities of the characters, many have offered character analyses of Jonah that attempt to show that it is the prophet’s theological perspective that is in need of rehabilitation. A frequent starting point of such interpretations is that Jonah’s major flaw is his inflated concern for justice at the expense of divine mercy. When the prophet invokes the “Divine Attributes Formula” in Jon 4:2 in order to *complain* about the mercy shown Nineveh, many readers assert that Jonah’s own words indict him: he is oblivious “to the whole meaning of the prophetic enterprise,” the purpose of which was “to reconcile creation with its creator.” Thus, the book is said to contrast “the broad vision and love of God with the pettiness of those who would inflict wrath rather than grant forgiveness.”

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asks, “you pitied the [insignificant] plant; should I not therefore pity Nineveh, that great city, full of people and animals?” An affirmative answer to this question, according to a great many interpreters, is almost unavoidable. Jonah, at this point, should abjure rough justice, and admit that the granting of divine mercy is indeed the better course.

Unfortunately for this elegant and theologically attractive conclusion, the last verses of Jonah provide nothing like a clear-cut resolution to Jonah’s theological fix. Jon 4:6-11 is fraught with linguistic and semantic difficulties which complicate the passage’s interpretation considerably. Indeed, to pass lightly over the problems inherent in the phrasing and purport of the book’s final verses is to risk caricaturing the theological position of the prophet and, worse, to misconstrue the author’s intent. For example, Alan Jon Hauser, representing a mainstream view of the book’s “final question,” asserts that Jonah’s “pity” for the insignificant plant reflects only concern for his “own fleeting needs and desires.”72 Jonah, Hauser claims, is selfish and preposterous in feeling pity for a lowly plant which he “had no role in creating.”73 Further, this misplaced pity underscores the prophet’s warped perspective; unlike the deity, Jonah had “no pity . . . on a city that contains many of God’s highest creatures.”74

Hauser seems to take as his starting point “an argument from creation to compassion.”75 That is, Hauser’s argument requires that “compassion is supreme in God’s way with his creatures; and it is a universal compassion, extending to all of them

72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Fretheim, Jonah and Theodicy, 231.
equally.” Divine pity for the created order, in this interpretation, surmounts all other considerations; in light of the weakness and vulnerability of creation, Jonah’s concern for justice is seen as “petty” and “inappropriate.” Thus, for readers who see Jonah’s protest as intrinsically blameworthy, the message of the qîqâyôn episode is that the prophet, in James Crenshaw’s words, must “learn to live with justice unresolved.”

Under cross-examination, however, the flaws in the interpretation appear. For example, Alan Cooper asks, regarding the contrast between “God’s highest creatures,” the people and animals of Nineveh, and the lowly plant: “is the idea that God likes the big things he makes more than the little things? Or that people have no right to grieve for the loss of good things that they did not make for themselves?” Phyllis Trible, noting the final historical fate of Nineveh (it was destroyed by the ascendant forces of Babylon and Media in 612 B.C.E.), wonders, “if the plant is pitied only after it withers, then what does pity for Nineveh imply about the future of the city?” Trible herself does not follow up on this question, despite its ominous overtones, but Philippe Guillaume advances Trible’s question to its logical conclusion: “the destruction of the qîqâyôn foreshadows the demise of Nineveh.” Such a reading is necessary, Guillaume asserts, in light of the “growing

76 Burrows, 102.
77 Hauser, 37.
79 Cooper, 157.
awareness that the end of *Jonah* must make a point other than simply stating divine mercy since in Jon 4:2 Jonah is all too aware that God is merciful and repents of evil.”

This point merits underscoring: if Jonah *objects* to the all-too-merciful nature of Yhwh, an effective response to his objection must do more than insist that Yhwh is indeed very, very merciful. In the final chapter of this project, I explore and build on Guillaume’s insights. At present, it should be noted that the interpretive questions raised by Cooper, Trible, and Guillaume arise not solely from an impulse to play devil’s advocate, but from recognition of several grammatical/syntactical issues that bedevil Jon 4:10-11. For example, why is the deity’s description of Nineveh so awkward, focusing apparently on the great numbers of people “who don’t know their right from their left” and their livestock? Where in the biblical corpus is demography an effective defense against divine wrath or a useful means for tapping into the reserves of divine mercy? Moreover, should be 4:11 be interpreted interrogatively or declaratively? If, as Cooper and Guillaume have argued, there is no grammatical necessity to render 4:11 “should I not care?” rather than “I do not care!” the basis for the “quality of mercy” interpretation is strained to the breaking point. A final problem involves the semantic implications of the verb חוס in 4:10-11. As Terence Fretheim points out, to translate חוס as “to pity” or “to have compassion” as if it were synonymous with רחם or as if חוס has “reference to a fixed attribute of Yahweh… would not be appropriate.” The verb, which “has reference

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82 Guillaume, “The End of Jonah,” 246.
83 Philippe Guillaume, “The End of Jonah,” 244-6; Cooper, 158.
less to a subjective ‘compassion’ than to an objective ‘sparing,’”86 does not support Hauser’s argument from creation to compassion. As Fretheim puts it, “such an argument would have to presume that, because God has created, nourished and known the needs of all creatures, he would always act in a pitying way.”87 But חוס, which denotes “concrete actions grounded either in love or anger…cannot carry that sort of freight.”88

Finally, some commentators take exception to the implied theological foundation on which the divine preference for mercy argument is often based, namely, that if Yhwh pursues a course of action, its appropriateness cannot be questioned. Etan Levine, a prominent voice in this area of the discussion, notes that proponents of this interpretation often seem to be occupied with “theodicy” in its most literal sense; that is, they seek to justify the ways of God to man, and therefore presuppose that since Jonah opposes Yhwh’s decision to retract Nineveh’s punishment, the prophet’s position must be overthrown and demolished in the “object lesson” of the qîqāyôn.

The foregone conclusion that Yhwh’s actions (or inactions) vis-à-vis Nineveh are both praise-worthy and sensible, while Jonah’s protest is both offensive and, in Fretheim’s phrase, “psychologically almost incomprehensible,”89 arises, Levine remarks, from the same hermeneutical tendency that sometimes attends the interpretation of Job: “the assumption that [the book of Job’s] purpose was to justify the ways of the Lord.”90 Levine’s point is that when readers downplay the divine directive that provokes Job’s

86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah*, 118.
90 Etan Levine, “Reopening the Case of Jonah vs. God,” 78.
suffering, they “obfuscate [the book of Job’s] intellectual honesty and complexity.” 91

Similarly, Levine contends, in their desire “to support the interpretation that Yahweh is teaching Jonah about the breadth of a divine compassion which is beyond Jonah’s narrow and rigid concept of justice,” readers are so predisposed to defend Yhwh against Jonah’s charge that they fail to reckon with the essential moral problem of the book, the acquittal of the guilty by the deity. 92 The problem of an incomprehensibly over-merciful deity evokes the same theological dissonance, Levine says, as does Job’s portrait of a deity who allows the innocent to suffer. The dissonance is resolved by selective misreadings which famously (and inaccurately) praise the patience of the sufferer, or castigate the prophet’s pretensions. In either case, readers’ predispositions to protect Yhwh determine the course of their interpretations.

Message 3: The Power of Penitence

“Who after his transgression doth repent, Is half, or altogether, innocent.”

—Robert Herrick

Closely related to the justice/mercy interpretation is the idea that Jonah must learn that penitence is an effective and valid way to avert divine wrath. This interpretation has inspired the liturgical use of Jonah on Yom Kippur as well as much pastoral commentary on the book in both Jewish and Christian traditions. Guided by the apparent adherence of

Jonah 3 to the formula of reciprocal repentance, as articulated by Jeremiah, many interpreters identify the message of Jonah to be, “if you repent, God will repent [from wrath].”

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)

Ancient Israel and Judah were continually beset by potential disasters, of both the political and natural varieties, which many prophets read as the natural consequences for unrepented sin. Repentance, on the other hand, could cause wrath to be restrained, or could provoke a revival, even after divine punishment had been wrought. Thus, for George M. Landes, Jonah’s purpose must have been to commend penitence to a sixth century B.C.E. Judean audience struggling to understand and recover from its defeat and exile at the hands of Babylon: “if exilic Israel is not too deadened to hear and change, it can realize that God awaits her with open, forgiving arms.”

Certainly, as many readers have noted, Jonah 3 plays out precisely according to the script of reciprocal repentance; this indeed seems yet another instance of narrative literalization in Jonah.

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95 So closely, in fact, does Jonah 3 seem to hew to the “doctrine” of reciprocal repentance, that Ben Zvi, , argues that an intertextual reading of the passage must be intended: “...Jonah if (re)read on its own is more of a theological (or ideological) comment and a personal interpretive key for the (re)reading of other prophetic books--- including Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel—than a prophetic book in itself.” Ben Zvi, “Twelve Prophetic Books or the Twelve? A Few Preliminary Considerations” in John W. Watts and Paul R. House (eds.) _Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D.W. Watts_, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 127. For Ben Zvi, Jonah’s use of Jeremiah 18 does not indicate the author’s embrace of that text’s premises. As Ben Zvi puts it, “Twelve Prophetic Books,” 127, note 5: “the fact that the book does not conclude in ch. 3 but continues in ch. 4 clearly disallows a reading that centers mainly on the issue of repentance.” Elmer Dyck argues that the theme of the threat of imminent destruction and the hope for renewal brought about by “quick and genuine repentance” is a _sine qua non_ for prophetic books; it is Jonah 3 that
declares imminent doom to the citizens of Nineveh (3:4). Immediately, the people (3:5), king (3:6), nobles, and livestock (3:8) of Nineveh repent *en masse*, plunging into customs that indicate mourning, and giving up the violence that was in their hands and presumably, their hooves (3:8). Technical penitential vocabulary is pointedly employed: the construction of שׁוֹב plus מָן connotes the Ninevites’ “withdrawing, returning, retreating, recanting” from their “evil way(s).” 96 In so doing, they hope, as the king of Nineveh puts it, that the deity too will engage in a kind of *teshuvah* and “turn from (שׁוֹב plus מָן) his anger,” and not enact the threatened punishment.

At first, it seems that the Ninevites are wholly successful. “God saw their deeds—that they had turned from their evil way—and he retracted the punishment that he had planned to bring against them, and did not do it” (3:10). The use of the verb נחם (in the nip’al) plus the preposition על is often translated, “to be sorry, regret, repent.” I translate the verb in concert with other biblical uses in which a subject departs from a preceding course. For example, Amos 7:3 states, לִעַל־זאת יְהוָה יְהוָהנחם אמרתהיה וַיִּהְיֶה א. Yhwh retracted this [sentence]: ‘it shall not happen,’ said Yhwh.” Similarly, Job 42:6 has the protagonist declare, וַיַּחַמֵּם עָלֵי אֶרֶץ, which Richard Clifford translates, “I retract and give up my dust

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and ashes…" The verb in these instances thus indicates a change of policy, not repentance *per se*.

If the book of Jonah were intended only to *illustrate* the doctrine of “reciprocal repentance” the curtain should fall at this point (3:10). Instead, just as the retraction of punishment in Amos 7 is not the last word on Israel’s fate in that book, in Jonah 4 a new act begins. In the aftermath of Nineveh’s reprieve, Jonah expresses his dismay at Yhwh’s invariably merciful character (4:2); Yhwh deflects or redirects the prophet’s objections with questions about his state of mind (4:4); and finally, as noted above, Yhwh asserts his divine prerogative to decide Nineveh’s fate, using the withered *qîqāyôn* as a teaching tool or analogy for the city (4:10-11).

It is important to note that neither actor in Jonah 4 refers in any way to the role of Nineveh’s penitence in securing its reprieve. In his protest at the turn of events, Jonah takes no notice whatever of Nineveh’s repentance, even to point out the possibility that its

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98 Jonah 4 introduces so many awkward elements that many authors of children’s Bible stories simply omit it, as Russell W. Dalton notes: “One common strategy that children’s bible storybooks use ...is simply to leave out chapter four of the book of Jonah. First of all, by ending the story of Jonah at Jonah chapter 3 verse 3, with Jonah finally obeying God and going to Nineveh, or at the end of chapter 3 with the Ninevites also obeying God and repenting, the story is given a tidy satisfying conclusion with no open-ended questions or gaps in the story...” Russell W. Dalton, “Perfect Prophets, Helpful Hippos, and Happy Endings: Noah and Jonah in Children’s Bible Storybooks in the United States,” *Religious Education* 102 (2007), 307.
showiness might be matched only by its shallowness.\footnote{99}{John W. Walton explores the possibility that the Ninevites' penitence, though quick, was not wholly genuine. He notes that “the reform of the Ninevites makes no mention of putting away their other gods or in any way fearing, honoring, worshiping or even recognizing Yahweh...ritual response and ethical tidying up are precisely what one would expect from pagan Assyrians.” John W. Walton, “The Object Lesson of Jonah 4:5-7 and the Purpose of the Book of Jonah,” \textit{BBR} 2, (1992) 47-57: 54. Walton argues further (ibid.) that readers’ “failure to recognize the shallowness of Nineveh’s response has obscured the purpose of the book.” Several midrashim hint that that there is less to the Ninevites' penitence than meets the eye. See e.g. \textit{The Pesikta de Rab Kahana}, William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, (eds) (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1975). Piska 24 envisions the Ninevites achieving their pardon through coercion: the Ninevites "put their calves inside the cattle folds and the calves’ dams outside ...so that the lowing [of each for the other] could be heard...” At the same time, the people of Nineveh were “moaning and crying... if you do not... show mercy to us, we shall not heed the cries of our cattle...”. The pitilessness of the move may not be apparent until one considers that the moaning of the cows and calves is produced by hunger and pain: the Ninevites deprive the calves of their mothers' milk, and refuse to milk the dams. Similarly, the rabbis interpret the exhortation to the Ninevites to give up the "violence that is in their hands" as follows: “of the objects that the people of Nineveh had taken by violence, they returned only those that were in plain sight [those that were ‘in their hands’], but those they had put away...they did not return.”} He does not point out the absurd elements of the Ninevites’ penitence, such as the king of Nineveh enjoining his subjects to “do what they were already doing”\footnote{100}{Judson Mather, “The Comic Art of the Book of Jonah,” \textit{Soundings} 65 (1982), 282.} and his extension of “the ban on food and drink [to say nothing of the donning of sackcloth] to cattle\footnote{101}{The question of the animals’ involvement in the penitential activity causes much vexation in the literature on Jonah. Phyllis Trible asserts that "the royal decree [which includes animals in the injunction to fast and don sackcloth] posits a high theology for the animal world, and in this marvelous story, the animals are equal to the task.” Phyllis Trible, “A Tempest in a Text: Ecological Soundings in the Book of Jonah” in George M. Landes and Stephen L. Cook (eds.), \textit{On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes} (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 192. She continues, 193, “Nineveh cares for its nonhuman population even as it cares for its people.”} as well as humans.”\footnote{102}{Judson Mather, “Comic Art,” 282. \textit{Contra} Trible, note 108, many commentators, including those who do not subscribe in other respects to humorous interpretations of Jonah, agree with Mather’s assessment of the Ninevites' penitence as excessive. Moberly, 157, note 4, admits that the scene is “surely...a humorous one from an Israelite perspective...the king of Nineveh...greatly overdoes things.” So also Thorardson, 229-31. cf. Hyun Chul Paul Kim, “Jonah Read Intertextually,” 507: “the receptive and pious act of the king of Nineveh is elucidated in persuasive details.”} Clearly, if Jonah wished to protest the success of Nineveh’s penitence, reference to its more burlesque aspects might be an effective argument. But the Ninevites’ actions play no role in his evaluation of events; rather, he invokes the "Divine Attributes" of
“compassion” and “mercy” as his sole way of accounting for the fact that the deity 뉘מס retracts רעשה (here, “punishment”). Essentially, Jonah implies that Nineveh’s escape from the proffered doom was inevitable: Jonah,

prayed to Yhwh, “O Yhwh, isn’t this what I thought while I was still on my own ground? That’s why I fled to Tarshish in the first place; I know that you are ‘a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,’ who retracts punishment” (Jonah 4:2, my italics).

In brief, Jonah asserts that he knew in advance that Nineveh would dodge the divine bullet, not because of the Ninevites’ merits or their responses to the threatened doom, but because the gun was never loaded.103 Evidently, Jonah believes, as Alan Cooper puts it, that “… mercy arises out of God’s character,” not as a result of the divine response to human penitence.104 Indeed, Cooper argues, the “doctrine” of reciprocal repentance presents serious theological problems in that it places the deity under compulsion to act according to a strict formula:

He [God] condemns the Ninevites for their wickedness (Jon 1.2), but then he must spare them because of their (and his) adherence to the formula in Jeremiah 18….if the Ninevites were saved because of their repentance, what hope is there for those who do not repent? The logic of Jeremiah 18 ineluctably condemns them. The author of Jonah, in turn, condemns that logic.105

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103 Terry Eagleton, “J.L. Austin and the Book of Jonah” in David Jobling, Tina Pippin, and Ronald Schleiffer (eds.), The Post-Modern Bible Reader (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 178, puts this sentiment provocatively: “the fact is, he refused to obey God because he thought there was no point, and tells God as much...God is a spineless liberal given to hollow authoritarian threats, who would never have the guts to perform what he promises. Jonah understands divine psychology far too well to take such tetchy humblings seriously.”

104 Cooper, 148. Eagleton concurs, characterizing the events of Jonah 3 as a pretext—useful but not really necessary—for a “massive climb-down” by Yhwh: “God can now carry on persuading himself that he’s a tough guy underneath.” Eagleton, 179.

105 Cooper, 151. See also Bickerman’s interesting comment, 43: “The question is...whether all sins are canceled through repentance ...in his commentary on Jonah, Jerome attacks this teaching of Origen, which, if accepted, would destroy the fear of God... in the end, would there be no difference between the Virgin Mary and a streetwalker, between Gabriel and the Devil...?”
The reason that chapter 3 is not the end of the book of Jonah, Cooper says, is because the author’s goal is not to commend Jeremiah 18, but to critique it as an attempt to confine or limit the sovereign freedom of Yhwh. The author of Jonah, Cooper says, solves the problem presented by “the formula in Jeremiah 18” by attributing Nineveh’s reprieve in 4:11 to the divine freedom to spare or not to spare guilty parties. The use of the verb חוס in 4:10-11, Cooper says, frees Yhwh from either the obligation to respond positively to penitence or inevitably to condemn the unrepentant: “God’s actions are uncanny and inexplicable; he is absolutely free to do as he chooses.” This undermining of the formula of reciprocal repentance, Cooper notes, is “for the postexilic author of the Book of Jonah…the only alternative to the failed conditional covenant—the covenant that had literally compelled God to destroy Israel.”

Cooper’s observation provides a convincing explanation for Yhwh’s comparison in Jonah 4:10-11 of Nineveh to the withered qîqâyôn plant that he, apparently arbitrarily, had first caused to grow and then caused to die (4:6-9). Yhwh’s “exegesis” of the plant’s life and death does nothing to promote or uphold the doctrine of reciprocal repentance. Rather, Yhwh explains that he simply decided to spare a city that teemed with oblivious people and their animals. As Jack Sasson notes, “God uses none of the vocabulary

106 A complete discussion of the semantic range of the verb חוס and the problems associated with the purported qal va’ homer comparison in 4:10-11 is provided in the final chapter. Bickerman’s comment on the verb, is useful: “The word “spare”…does not bring about the mental association with forgiveness or repentance. It indicates a sovereign and arbitrary action: the enemy may or may not “spare the population of a captured city (Jer 21:7).” Bickerman, 44.
107 Cooper, 150.
108 Ibid.
crucial to chapter three …God has chosen to deny Jonah the simple and perhaps even natural reason for containing divine wrath: the sincere penitence of the Ninevites…” \(^{109}\) Is Yhwh simply inexplicably denying Jonah the true explanation for the cancellation of the punishment as Sasson implies, or is he giving Jonah insider information about the true (non)effect of penitence? David Noel Freedman suspects the latter:

> even after everything that has happened, including their repentance, God says the Ninevites don’t know their right hand from their left…God in effect says, so what? I pitied them… the whole repentance business was just a charade.\(^ {110}\)

We have marshaled several pieces of evidence against the argument that the primary purpose of the book of Jonah is to enjoin penitence upon its readers. A final point against this interpretation lies in the particular use of *Nineveh* as a theoretical exemplar of successful penitence. The primary problem lies in the fact that Nineveh’s historical destruction in 612 B.C.E. (according to the prophet Nahum, at the command of Yhwh), would have been well known to Judean readers of Jonah, as Nahum and Zephaniah (2:13-15) amply illustrate.\(^ {111}\) Nineveh’s destruction at the hands of the Babylonian and Median armies was so complete, indeed, that as David F. Payne observes “no reader from the sixth century onwards can have failed to know of it.”\(^ {112}\) The demise of Nineveh, as Peter Machinist has shown, echoes in the historiography of

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\(^{109}\) Sasson, 318-19.

\(^{110}\) Freedman, 31. Yhwh’s attitude toward Nineveh, Sasson, 25, observes “shift[s]” from “strongly condemnatory (1:3) to barely contemptuous (4:11).”

\(^{111}\) Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 425-26, remarked that there is no question but that “the author of Jonah has in his canon the book of Nahum.” I engage the evidence for Jonah’s date of composition thoroughly in chapter two.

Mesopotamian, classical, and “Israelite-Jewish” sources. In the latter, the decline and fall of the Neo-Assyrian empire, which culminated in the annihilation of Nineveh, bore theological importance. Machinist points out that, “the Assyrian pressure on the Levant” in the late eighth and seventh centuries tested and tried Judeans’ “understanding of the special covenant between Yahweh and Israel.” But when Assyria crumbled, Judeans understood the event as attesting to their god’s status as, in fact, a “cosmic sovereign.”

Nineveh’s demise, then, was not a cause for mourning; to the contrary, for Judeans who had suffered under the Assyrian yoke, Nineveh’s obliteration was richly deserved, irreversible, and long overdue. Thus, as Ben Zvi points out, “the choice of Nineveh [in Jonah]…is significant. It… evokes the image of a great city that has been ‘removed’ from the world forever.”

Moreover, Nineveh’s association with crime, as well as punishment, would have made the possibility of its reprieve much more complex and potentially troubling for Judeans than for later readers, for whom “Nineveh” had no meaning. As William Whedbee remarks,

> the divine decision to turn aside the decree of destruction [in Jonah] is not guaranteed to be viewed with equal favor by Israelites who saw Nineveh as an incarnation of evil and worthy of total destruction, a view that is presented with rare and awe-ful power in the book of Nahum.

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115 Ben Zvi, Signs of Jonah, 16.
It could be argued that the book of Jonah asks readers to imagine an alternative history, one in which the dominant historical biblical paradigm of the “conquerer conquered” never took root. If such was the book’s original purpose, it must be said, it does not seem to have succeeded until such time as the memory of Nineveh had receded from the Judean memory. Indeed, a brief overview of three ancient treatments of Jonah reveals that Nineveh never constituted a “generic gentile” city, or a semi-legendary place, stripped of all historical or theological associations. The three ancient treatments of Jonah—the Targums of Jonah and Nahum; Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews*; and the book of Tobit—reveal that the themes of divine mercy or repentance, which provide the foundation for so much modern commentary, held little importance for some of the book’s early readers. On the contrary, all of these interpretations of Jonah seem wholly shaped by the final verdict against Nineveh in Nahum. For example, the Targum of Nahum uses a quite expansive incipit to underscore that the relationship of Jonah to Nahum is sequential, thus accounting for the apparent contradiction (Nineveh saved in Jonah v. Nineveh condemned in Nahum) between the two books:

The oracle of the cup of malediction to be given to Nineveh to drink. Previously Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath-hepher, prophesied against her and she repented of her sins and when she sinned again there prophesied once more against her Nahum of Beth Koshi, as is recorded in this book (Tg. Nah 1:1).  

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117 The translation is that of Kevin Cathcart and Robert P. Gordon, *The Aramaic Bible: The Targum of the Minor Prophets* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1989), 131. The Targum of Jonah, significantly, adds the phrase “finally” ( Undefined ) to Jonah 4:5, revealing that the true ending of the story of Nineveh had not yet arrived.
Thus, for the Targumist, in order for Jonah and Nahum to coexist without contradiction, the Ninevites must have returned to their sinful ways; their penitence was temporary, a brief digression from an overall trend toward wickedness.

Josephus excises Nineveh’s successful penitence entirely from his version of the book, making the issues of divine mercy or human repentance moot; the historian’s whole concern is with the fulfillment of the divine word.

[Jonah] was directed by God to go to the kingdom of Ninuos, and once there to proclaim in the city that it would lose its rule…He went off to the city of Ninos…he proclaimed that, after a little [while], they would in a very short time forfeit their rule of Asia. Having disclosed these things, he departed.

By interpreting נופכת in Jonah 3:4 as referring to the erosion of Nineveh’s political fortunes (a fact familiar to readers of Herodotus), Josephus exploits the inherent ambiguity of the oracle against Nineveh in Jonah, and interprets the meaning of the 40 day timeframe specified in Jon 3:4. Josephus’ Jonah, having fulfilled his commission, leaves the city, which, presumably, then begins its period of decline. When the historian turns to the book of Nahum, he boils that book down to its essence: Nineveh will be utterly destroyed by water and fire. In keeping with his tendency to show the truth of Israel’s prophets, Josephus points to the fulfillment of Jonah and Nahum’s predictions: “…all the things that had been foretold concerning Nineveh came to pass after a hundred and fifteen years” (my italics). Thus, as for the Targumist, for

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118 Josephus, Judean Antiquities, 9.208.
119 Josephus, Judean Antiquities, 9.214.
120 Herodotus 1.102 recounts that Assyria lost hegemony when former allies/vassals rebelled: “those Assyrians I mean who dwelt at Nineveh, and who formerly had been rulers of the whole [of Asia], but at that time they were left without support their allies having revolted from them…”
121 Josephus, Judean Antiquities, 9.242.
Josephus, Jonah and Nahum belong on the same prophetic continuum, in terms of their messages and targets. In Josephus, “all…tension…disappears: both [prophets] announce a definitive and irrevocable doom for Nineveh.”¹²² The city experiences an interval of decline that is initiated by Jonah’s oracle and brought to an end by that of Nahum. Both prophets’ messages are true, and can be verified (as far as Josephus is concerned) by reference to external sources.

The “twinning” of Jonah and Nahum occurs yet again in variants of the two major Greek textual traditions of the book of Tobit, which like Jonah and Nahum, deals explicitly with the fate of the city of Nineveh. These two witnesses diverge at Tobit 14:4: the first (designated GII, primarily attested by Codex Sinaiticus) claims that Nahum accurately foretold Nineveh’s destruction: “…I believe the word of God…about Nineveh, which He spoke to Nahum.” The other witness, (GI, the “short” version represented by Vaticanus, Alexandrinus and Venetus) attributes the same prophecy to Jonah, (“…I believe what the prophet Jonah said about Nineveh, that it will be overthrown”)¹²³ not only in 14:4 but again in 14:8 (“what the prophet Jonah said will all come true”).¹²⁴ Most scholars see GII (the “Nahum version”) as prior to GI (“the Jonah version”).¹²⁵

Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine whether GI’s inclusion of Jonah was present in the scribe’s Vorlage, or whether the use of “Jonah” in 14:4 and again in 14:8

¹²³ Joseph S. Fitzmyer, Tobit, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 325. The translations provided above are Fitzmyer’s. See Fitzmyer’s discussion of the Greek manuscript evidence, 3-6.
¹²⁴ Regrettably, the relevant passages have not survived in either the Hebrew or Aramaic manuscripts of Tobit from Qumran. However, Fitzmyer’s publication of the Qumran versions demonstrates that these texts tend to agree much more with GII than GI. It should be noted that Tobit 14:8 of GI has no parallel in GII.
¹²⁵ See Carey Moore, Tobit, 56-57.
constitutes an intentional scribal change. Several scholars concur that there is no compelling reason why a scribe would have changed “Nahum” to “Jonah.” As Fitzmyer notes, Nahum seems to be a far more “fitting allusion,” particularly given that the book of Tobit concludes with word of Nineveh’s destruction (Tob14:15). Explanations for the possible substitution of Jonah for Nahum in GI tend to rely on scribal ignorance; the scribe of GI either didn’t know Nahum or could not read the “elevated” Hebrew of Nahum. Befuddled by the perplexing allusion, he removed Nahum and inserted “Jonah” a prophet with which he was better acquainted, and who was also associated with Nineveh.

This line of reasoning is dissatisfying on several levels, in particular given the scholarly consensus that most of GI’s changes were made to “improve [GII’s] literary character.” A sudden plunge into such ham-handed alteration of the text seems suspicious. Far more likely, in my view, is that GI’s mentions of “Jonah” are intended to enhance the narrative impact of Tobit. After all, both tales are set largely in Nineveh, at a time prior to its destruction. Nahum, on the other hand, seems to report on the demise of the city as it occurs. Jonah’s timeframe (“forty days…”) for Nineveh’s downfall allows for a gap between prophecy and fulfillment, just as in Tobit. The character of

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126 Fitzmyer, 325-6.
128 Ibid.
130 The use of the “40 day” timeframe for Nineveh’s overturning in Jonah 3:4 need not be taken literally, given the frequent symbolic usage of the number 40 to indicate either “a long period of time” or the expectation of “a major change” (Sasson, 233).
Tobit, on his deathbed, warns his son Tobias to leave Nineveh on the basis of Jonah’s warning; but the destruction does not occur until Tobias himself is a very old man.

The character of Tobit, moreover, is from the northern kingdom, as is the character of Jonah ben Amittai (assuming that scribe is alert to the customary connection between the character of Jonah and the eponymous prophet from Gath-Hepher of 2 Kings 14:25). Other links between the books include the semi-comical attack on Tobias’ foot by a “big fish,” an obvious echo of Jonah 2:1, and the use of the verb καταστρεφομαι in Tobit 14:4 to denote Nineveh’s “overturning,” a usage which closely echoes the language of Jonah 3:4 in the LXX, καταστραφήσεται.131

Thus, whether the use of “Jonah” in GI is a secondary substitution for Nahum, or whether it was original to the book, “Jonah” fits well into Tobit’s narrative. The scribe-author of GI sees Nineveh primarily as the target for divine comeuppance, which accounts for the lack of mention in Tobit of Nineveh’s penitence or reprieve. Presumably, for the tradent of Tobit, as for Josephus and the Targumist, these elements of Jonah were mere way stations on the path to Nineveh’s destruction.

Modern readers would likely look askance at a story that employed Sodom and Gomorrah as exemplars of successful penitence and divine compassion, for the obvious reason these cities’ reputation for having met a fiery end precedes them. Similarly, for Josephus, the Targumist, and the author of Tobit (or the scribe of GI), Nineveh in Jonah

131 כנס is by far the most frequent equivalent used for καταστρεφεῖν. According to Hatch-Redpath, καταστρεφεῖν reflects forms of כנס 22 times, outstripping ten other verbs (including תבש, השר, שחת, and others) by a margin of 2:1.
could only be read through the prism of the knowledge of Nineveh’s fate. For all of these readers, Jonah is not at all “about” repentance but rather is about the ultimate reliability of Yhwh’s word. It could be argued, of course, that these readers were constrained by their knowledge of history (and Nahum), and so distorted the “original” meaning of Jonah. But the same extra-textual repertoire that informed the later readers is also likely to have belonged to Jonah’s author as well, and so it is incumbent on contemporary readers to try to make sense of the author’s decision to set a tale of survival in a city he knew was doomed.

Message 4: Reading Jonah anew.

A story with a moral appended is like the bill of a mosquito. It bores you, and then injects a stinging drop to irritate your conscience.

-- O. Henry, “Strictly Business”

We have established that the “monologic” interpretations of Jonah sketched above are inadequate on several grounds; the “Jonah as xenophobe” interpretation, I suggested, is based on ahistorical, (in some cases, anti-Jewish), premises, and fails to convince on the basis of narrative evidence. Close readings of the narrative also undermine the other two putative “messages” of Jonah, regarding divine mercy and penitence.

The monological interpretations, moreover, have had a dulling effect on the book of Jonah and its readers. Sherwood captures the complacent tone of much of the commentary:

the role of the book is not to teach, to surprise, or even less to dislocate us….God is on our side, the plot flows in our interests, it vindicates our position, and God, throughout, is demonstrating his love for us, his Ninevites.132

132 Sherwood, Afterlives, 85.
What I seek to contribute to the revived debate on the book of Jonah is a new analysis of the character that attempts to read the narrative from Jonah’s perspective, rather from that of complacent contemporary readers. I intend to offer a new interpretation of the book that reexamines the prophet within the confines of the narrative, and in light of the intertextual glints that continually catch the attentive reader’s eye. While I do not propose to set forth an apology for or an encomium of the character of Jonah, I will, insofar as it is possible, fill in the blanks of the character’s theological make-up, and seek out and acknowledge the aspects of the book that defy “univocal” meanings. But to accomplish such a project requires that we begin from the ground up, by examining the text for evidence of its origins, in its historical referents, literary allusions, and, not least, in the very fabric of its language.
Chapter Two: Dating Jonah: Historical and Linguistic Analysis

In the preceding chapter, I argued against the “monologic” interpretations of Jonah that debate “the relative values of justice and mercy, universalism and xenophobia, with special reference to the Jews and the gentiles.”¹ The next task for the project is to articulate a viable alternative interpretation of the book of Jonah —its purpose and its intended message—that can gain support by being credibly situated on the diachronic spectrum of ancient Israelite thought.

This, however, is no simple task: when a plurality of readers relinquished the long-held view that the book of Jonah responds to Ezra-Nehemiah’s “exclusivism,” many simultaneously advanced the conclusion that further diachronic study of the “strange book” would be futile.² Consequently, other problems, such as the question of Jonah’s place within the corpus of the minor prophets,³ the identification of the book’s genre,⁴ and analysis of the book’s narrative artistry have attracted increased scholarly attention in

¹ Sherwood, Afterlives, 64.
² Simon, xli: “we have no way to determine whether it should be dated as early as the late sixth century or the fifth or even the fourth century B.C.E.” Sasson, 27-28, seeking a silver lining for the inconclusive state of scholarship on the question of Jonah’s composition, remarks “the process of assigning a date for Jonah may be less useful an enterprise than is generally assumed.”

With its dearth of useful historical referents, its utter lack of firmly established loanwords from Greek or Persian, and its plethora of literary allusions and strategems, Jonah poses a web of problems to the diachronic critic.\footnote{It should be noted therefore that my diachronic efforts are directed toward establishing a date for the whole literary unit we now describe as the book of Jonah. There is no question but that, as Sasson puts it, 28, that "centuries may separate the invention and oral circulation of stories about errant holy men from the artfully narrated and theologically sophisticated book we now call 'Jonah.'" While many scholars have argued that redactional layers may be discerned within Jonah, for example, based on the varied use of the name Yhwh or the term Elohim, or based on purported "redundancies” or contradictions in the narrative, literary solutions can account for all but the first problem, the apparently indiscriminate variation between Yhwh/Elohim. I will not, therefore, engage in a discussion of possible redactional layers in the book as it now stands. For discussion of these issues and bibliography, see Sasson, 16-20.} Nevertheless, as the discussion below demonstrates, lexical and syntactic elements do provide a temporal anchor for Jonah’s prose sections.\footnote{I exclude the poetic section of Jonah 2 from my study, primarily because the methodologies employed to gauge diachronic indicators of date have been primarily intended for prose. The language of Hebrew poetry differs dramatically from prose in syntax and diction, but these differences are not necessarily indicative of date.} Indeed, I argue that a preponderance of evidence suggests the book derives from the late sixth or early fifth century B.C.E. This chapter builds the technical case for situating Jonah in this timeframe, while the chapters that follow examine the interpretive implications of this conclusion.
Historical Referents and the Date of Jonah

Few anchors exist by which to date the final text of Jonah with assurance. Its only potentially useful historical referents, the name of the protagonist, Jonah ben Amittai, and the object of his mission, Nineveh, contribute to the task in only limited ways.8 The name of the protagonist provides an implied temporal setting for the narrative: in 2 Kings 14:25, “Jonah ben Amittai” is named as a prophet active in the reign of Jeroboam II, circa 787-745 B.C.E. In the reception history of the book of Jonah, identification of the two Jonahs as one and the same figure stretches back at least to Josephus.9 Although earlier generations of scholars sometimes presumed both the historicity of the work and its origin in the era it depicts, several factors militate against so early a date.10

Arguments for and against the composition of Jonah in the eighth century B.C.E.

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8 The passing mention of the port city of Jaffa in Jonah 1:3 provides little practical assistance in determining the date of Jonah’s composition, due to that city's continual habitation since the late Bronze Age, but see discussion in Lowell K. Handy, *Jonah’s World: Social Science and the Reading of Prophetic Story*, 25-7. Similarly, Tarshish, Jonah’s intended destination, does not provide useful datable information; many have tried, but no one has yet provided a secure identification for Tarshish. As Handy puts it, 27, “serious proposals have stretched from the subcontinent of India to the Atlantic coasts of either Europe or Africa and pretty much everywhere in between.” For a general picture, see “Arcadio del Castillo, “Tarshish in the Esarhaddon Inscription and the Book of Genesis” in *BeO* 46 (2004), 193-206; André Lemaire, “Tarshish-Tarsisi: Problème de topographie historique biblique et assyrienne” in G. Gailil and M. Weinfeld (eds.), *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography: Presented to Zecharia Kallai*, VT Sup 81 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 44-62; Philip King and Lawrence Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 183-84.
9 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 9.10.2 makes the identification explicit by inserting a revised version of the tale of Jonah into the passage that relates the reign of Jeroboam II.
10 Only a few scholars today argue for the historicity of the book of Jonah *in toto*, or for the possibility that it contains a nearly-lost historical memory of an episode of penitence in Nineveh. For an example, however, see Paul J. N. Lawrence, "Assyrian Nobles and the Book of Jonah," *TynBul* 37 (1986), 121-32.
A few contemporary scholars argue for an eighth century date of composition for Jonah,¹¹ but the combined weight of historical, literary, and linguistic data argue against locating the narrative in this period. First, it is highly unlikely that an author working before Sennacherib’s promotion of Nineveh as the Assyrian Empire’s capital in 704 B.C.E. would portray Nineveh as governed by its own “king,” given that several other cities—but not Nineveh—acted as the royal seat in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E.¹² An Israelite author working in the middle of the eighth century (i.e. the time period in which the “historical Jonah” is placed in 2 Kings 14) would more likely have set the tale in Calah, the capital of Assyria from the ninth century through the reign of Shalmaneser V (d. 722 B.C.E.). Sargon II then built the city of Dūr Šarrukîn (“Fort Sargon,”)¹³ and

¹¹ B. Porten 42, links the two Jonahs and ascribes a date to the book of Jonah on the basis of the identification: ”Jeroboam II is commonly dated from 793-753 (and it is assumed from this text that Jonah is to be dated to that period as well.).” Porten, “Baalshamem and the Date of the Book of Jonah,” in M. Carrez et al (eds.), De la Torah au Messie: Etudes d’exegese et d’hermeneutique bibliques offertes a Henri Cazelles pour ses 24 annees d’enseignement a l’Institut Catholique de Paris, octobre 1979 (Paris: Desclee, 1981), 237-244. Also see Jay Lemanski, “Jonah’s Nineveh,” Concordia Journal 18:1 (1992). Lemanski’s dating of the book may be influenced by his confessional framework, which appears to presume the historicity of Jonah.

¹² Sasson, 248, points out that “cuneiform documents never use this phrasing for the reigning Assyrian monarch,” and that with the exception of Jonah, biblical sources unanimously use the phrase “king of Assyria.” (A search for the term using biblical software yielded 71 occurrences of “king of Assyria,” not counting instances that occur more than once in a single verse.) In a forthcoming article that he kindly shared with me, David Vanderhooft argues that a possible derivation for the otherwise unparalleled term “king of Nineveh” in Jonah might be found if we posit that the author of Jonah operated, as it were, under the poetic influence of the later formula “king of Babel” in which reference to the royal seat, Babel, refers to the whole dominion of the Babylonian Empire (see 2 Kings 24 for multiple uses of “king of Babylon”). Thus, ‘Jonah’s ‘king of Nineveh’ may have been a novel formulation influenced by the usual title of Babylonian kings in the period of the late Judean monarchy or even in the Persian era.” David S. Vanderhooft, “Biblical Perspectives on Nineveh and Babylon: Views from the Endangered Periphery,” Bulletin of the Canadian Society of Mesopotamian Studies.12, (2009), 86. Another possibility: it may be that the unusual phrase “king of Nineveh” forces readers to keep their focus specifically on Nineveh, reference to whose destruction was used in the ancient world as shorthand for the slower decline and more gradual fall of Assyria. Sasson, 248, notes that “occasional laxity as regards titles is not limited to Jonah” and points out that the politically inapt title “king of Samaria” is found in 1 Kings 21:1 and 2 Kings 21:3.

appointed it his imperial seat (721). It remained such until Sennacherib (704-681),
perhaps in response to his father’s “inauspicious death in battle,” designated Nineveh as
his capital and embarked on an ambitious campaign of urban renewal. Thus the earliest
likely date for an Israelite/Judean author to envision a king in Nineveh, would be at the
tail end of the eighth century.

Moreover, for an Israelite/Judean author to write a tale featuring Nineveh’s
jeopardy at the hands of Yhwh before “Nineveh” had gained a specific place in the
Judean historical memory would be highly unlikely. As I argued briefly in chapter one,
the book of Jonah’s efficacy, both literary and theological, owes much to the fact that its
tale of Nineveh’s (apparent) salvation is undercut by the audience’s knowledge of
Nineveh’s actual eventual destruction, making a date of composition after 612 B.C.E.
highly probable, even necessary. Jack Sasson argues this point: to date the book earlier,
he says, “would miss a main thrust of the story that requires Nineveh to be a logical
choice for divine sanction and an absurd choice for God’s change of mind” (my italics). A main reason why an eighth century date of composition is still occasionally proposed
for Jonah resides in the fact that so early a date would account for the apparent lack of
enmity toward Nineveh evidenced by the book (in marked contrast to antipathy displayed
toward Nineveh by Nahum, passim, and Zeph 2:13-14 in the late seventh century

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15 Vanderhooft, “Biblical Perspectives,” 84 makes the case that Genesis 10’s catalog of Assyrian cities,
Calah, Nineveh, and Resen, (which Vanderhooft, following A. Horowitz, argues represents Dur
Šarrukîn) reflects their status as capitals of the Neo-Assyrian empire in the ninth through seventh
centuries B.C.E.
16 Sasson, 21.
However, recognition of the temporal fictive setting of the book of Jonah, which is established by the link to 2 Kgs 14:25, solves the question of why the author of Jonah does not depict Nineveh as the “city of bloodshed” (Nah 3:1). It is not, for the author of Jonah, that time has healed all wounds, in terms of Judean outlook on Nineveh; rather during the implied temporal setting of the book, which is established by use of the name Jonah ben Amittai, Assyria was not a major player in the fortunes of Israel and Judah.

Thus, within Jonah’s fictive timeframe, Assyrian assaults on Israel/Judah still lie in those kingdoms’ future. The dramatic irony engendered by readers’ knowledge of what is to come—Assyria’s violent domination of the Levantine and Mesopotamian lands, after which it was itself engulfed by Babylon—is actually enhanced by the author of Jonah’s restrained, understated presentation of Nineveh. Readers of Jonah may have viewed Nineveh, in Andre and Pierre Lacocques’ phrase, “as *gemütlich* (nice and cute) as a Gestapo torture-chamber,” but, within the narrative, only hints of Nineveh’s future horrors come through. The author requires alert readers to supply meanings for the terse terms used for Nineveh’s crimes. For example, Nineveh’s רעה reaches the deity (עלתא)

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17 Dates for Nahum range from 663 B.C.E., the sack of Thebes, to which the prophet refers in 3:8, through the years immediately before or after 612, when Nineveh fell. See discussion in D.L. Christensen, “The Book of Nahum: A History of Interpretation,” in J.W. Watts and P.R. House (eds.), *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D.W. Watts* (JSOT Sup235: Sheffield, 1996), 187-94. For Zephaniah, see Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah* (AB 25A; New York, 1994), 33-43. Berlin points out that while Zephaniah is set in the late seventh century, probably during the reign of Josiah, it may have been composed later. She dates the book between 630-520 B.C.E, and acknowledges that its interpretation will vary greatly depending on “which side of the divide” of the events of 586 and following, that the book is supposed to have originated. Berlin, 42.

18 Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah*, 51 notes that “the first reference to Assyria in the book of Kings is in 2 Kgs 15.19...within the world of Kings, the main foe of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam...was Aram. Assyria is simply not mentioned.”

לפני רעתם 1:2), language that echoes the description of the outcry against (doomed) Sodom that reaches the deity in Gen 18:20:

Similarly, in the penitential scene of Jonah 3, the king enjoins the citizenry to renounce the חמס that is in their hands (3:8). Elsewhere in the prophets, this term denotes “violence” particularly “in the context of hostility among nations” (as in Joel 4:19 and Hab 1:3). As early readers of Jonah likely knew, Nineveh in the eighth century had as yet only begun to achieve the heights of the transnational violence for which it would become infamous. By using the term חמס, the author foreshadows Nineveh’s blood-stained future, at the same time avoiding a wholly anachronistic portrait of eighth century Nineveh.

Thus, given the fictive setting of the book during the reign of Jeroboam II (787-745 B.C.E.), just prior to the era of Assyria’s incursions against Israel/Judah, the lack of hostility displayed to Nineveh makes sense. The restraint shown with regard to

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21 Vanderhooft points out that in Habbakuk, חמס is only used in reference to the depredations of the Chaldeans; see Hab 1:2-3a; 1:9; 2:8b; 2:17. David S. Vanderhooft, The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 153.
22 Against the frequent portrait of biblical authors as helpless prey to anachronism, Victor Avigdor Hurowitz recently proposed that the mention of Resen in Gen 10:12, which discusses the founding of Assyrian cities by Nimrod in hoary antiquity, is an indirect allusion to Đūr-Šarrukîn, Sargon’s capital. Hurowitz argues that the author of Gen 10 avoids anachronistic mention of that comparatively new city, but alludes indirectly to it by mentioning Resen= Assyrian Ṯēšēnî, a town close to the location of what would become Đūr-Šarrukîn. See Hurowitz, “In Search of Resen (Genesis 10:12): Đūr-Šarrukîn?” in C. Cohen, V. A. Hurowitz, A. Hurvitiz, Y. Muffs, B. J. Schwartz, and J. Tigay (eds.), Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 521.
Nineveh’s (future) depredations helps anchor the setting of the tale of Jonah in the mid-eighth century.

**Arguments for and against a Hellenistic era date of composition**

We have excluded a very early, i.e., eighth or seventh century date of origin for Jonah, on several grounds. On the other end of the spectrum, several scholars have argued that the book’s composition was very late, dating to the Hellenistic era. Again, the lack of outward hostility toward Nineveh expressed in Jonah has figured prominently in these dating schemes. For example, Thomas Bolin has argued that Jonah reflects the city’s “literary afterlife” in the centuries following its destruction at the hands of ascendant Babylonian and Median armies, when presumably, specific memories of Nineveh’s cruelties had faded.\(^23\) Nineveh’s historic identity, as the capital city of a feared empire, faded, and was replaced in subsequent centuries by portraits of Nineveh as an “idyllic great city of long ago, full of gross excess and exotic opulence. And, unequivocally destroyed.”\(^24\)

The portrait of Nineveh in Jonah does cohere, to a certain extent, with the depiction of Nineveh by Greek authors, who, influenced by tales of its foundation by

\(^{23}\) Thomas M. Bolin, “Should I Not Also Pity Nineveh? Divine Freedom in the Book of Jonah,” *JSOT* 67 (1995): 109-120. Also see Machinist, “The Fall of Assyria,” 188-90, on commonalities between classical and biblical traditions regarding the mode of Nineveh’s destruction, i.e., by flood.

\(^{24}\) Bolin, “Should I Not,” 109. That the author of Jonah was fully aware of Nineveh’s extinction may be found, according to Uriel Simon’s interpretation, *Jonah*, 27, in the phrase \(כֹּלֶה יָשָׁר עַר נִינֹוה \) (3:3) which Simon says betrays that “‘was’ indeed means that, in the narrator’s present, Nineveh is no longer a thriving metropolis.” This is asking the verb to bear too much weight; as Sasson, 228, points out, “the conjugation is not necessarily attached to past time…” In point of fact, Nineveh’s demise is somewhat exaggerated in the Hellenistic sources, most probably for literary effect. Four levels of post-Assyrian occupations adjacent to the site have been documented (see David Stronach, “Excavations at Nineveh,” in *Sumer* 46, 1990:108), but the city never regained its former prominence. See Stephanie Dalley, “Nineveh after 612 B.C.E.,” *AoF* 20, 134-37, and J.E. Reade, “Greco-Parthian Nineveh,” *Iraq* 60 (1998), 65-83.
Ninus, focused on the “great city’s” “inordinate size.” Diodorus Siculus reports that back in the mists of time, Ninus “was eager to found a city of such magnitude that not only would it be the largest of any which then existed in the whole inhabited world…” According to Diodorus, working in the first century C.E., the original dimensions of the city were “one hundred and fifty by ninety stades in circumference.” Much earlier, Herodotus reckoned the area of Nineveh at about 8,000 acres. Recent surveys of the site estimate neo-Assyrian Nineveh’s area to have covered about 1853 acres, thus revealing the inflation of Nineveh as it underwent the sea change from historical site to legendary toponym.

In Jonah, the great size of Nineveh is indicated, if with somewhat less precision than the Greek sources provide. The author notes repeatedly that that Nineveh was כָּל נִינְעֶה (1:2, 3:3, 4:11), perhaps reflecting the use of the same phrase in Gen 10:12. The second mention of Nineveh as “great” (3:3) expands the description to

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25 Sasson, 230. It is worth noting that the Greek authors to whom I refer were separated from Nineveh in both space and time; not having been subject to Assyrian imperialism, the Greeks saw in the destruction of Nineveh an opportunity for moral instruction. For Judeans, however, as Tobit attests, “Nineveh” had a quite different set of connotations.


27 These dimensions are in Bolin, 111. One stadium= approximately 185 meters.

28 Herodotus 1.178.

29 David Stronach and Stephen Lumsden, "UC Berkley's Excavations at Nineveh," BA 55 (1992) 227-33:227. See also Stronach, "Excavations,"107-8. 1 hectare= 2.4710 acres. A.K. Grayson, "Nineveh," ABD V, 1118-19 , reports the circumference of Nineveh to have been 7.75 miles. The tendency of classical sources to exaggerate the size and grandeur of Mesopotamian cities and structures is not confined to Nineveh. I regret that I have not been able to confirm a report that Edward Gibbon made a marginal note in his copy of The Histories, regarding Herodotus' description of Babylon, to the following effect: “These dimensions, which have been devoutly swallowed by the voracious herd, are gigantic and incredible ... Thirteen cities of the size of Paris might have stood within the precincts of Babylon ... I much doubt whether he ever saw Babylon.”

30 The exact referent of this phrase in Gen 10:12 cannot be determined. Vanderhooft, “Biblical Perspectives,” 84, points out that if the organizational scheme behind the sequence of the Assyrian cities in Gen 10— Nineveh, Calah, and Resen — is the same as that for the Babylonian cities in 10:10, in which Babylon, “the capital,” takes precedence, then the mention of Nineveh at the head of the...
The use of לאלים in this manner is a unique construction that probably should convey a superlative, hyperbolic, sense: Nineveh was “a godawful big city”\(^31\) that required a three days’ journey to traverse.\(^32\)

The grand scale of the city in Jonah is part and parcel with the other fantastically large creatures or unusually intense events that pervade the book, such as the ever increasing storm wind that batters the ship in 1:11; the fish that swallows Jonah whole in 1:17; and the plant that grows over his head in record time in 4:6. For this reason, it seems more likely that Nineveh’s inflated dimensions in Jonah exemplify the author’s hyperbolic tendencies, than that they reveal an author privy to Hellenistic era legends about the city.

\(\text{Assyrian list may reflect its status as the greatest of the three cities. See also Vanderhooft, “Biblical Perspectives,” note 7.}\)


\(^{32}\) The word \(מהלך\) (journey, walk) is used, like \(דרך\), to indicate either a physical measurement, as in the case of Nineveh’s diameter in Jonah 3:3, or duration of time, as in Neh 2:6, where Artaxerxes’ use of \(מהלך\) indicates his interest in the duration of Nehemiah’s upcoming absence. I follow most commentators in reading the phrase a “three day’s journey” as a hyperbolic description of the spatial length or breadth of the great city. However, David Marcus reads the phrase “a three days’ walk” in Jonah 3:3 as indicating the duration of time that Jonah should have travelled in order to reach Nineveh proper. Thus, he says that the reference in 3:4 to Jonah’s “one day’s walk” refers to the duration of time it actually took the prophet to cover the ground: “in accordance with the exaggerated techniques of the satire, Jonah can cover this great distance ‘lickety split’ in an exceptionally short amount of time, namely in... ‘a one day’s walk.’” For Marcus, this turbo-powered journey is a caricature of Elijah’s one day journey from Beersheba to the wilderness (1 Kgs 19:4): “Elijah thus performed an extraordinary feat by covering a great distance within a short period of time.” See Marcus, “Nineveh’s ‘Three Days’ Walk’ (Jonah 3:3): Another Interpretation,” in S.C. Cook and Stephen Winter (eds.), \textit{On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes}, 47.
Bolin’s argument that Jonah’s Nineveh reflects features of the “Nineveh” imagined by Hellenistic authors fails to convince on other levels as well. The deity’s evaluation of the citizens of Nineveh as people who “do not know their right from their left” (4:11) may agree in essence with Phocylides’ sixth century epigram which describes Nineveh as “senseless,” although the meaning of the description in Jonah is a matter of much debate. Unlike Hellenistic sources, however, the author of Jonah does not paint the king of Nineveh, as given over to every kind of luxury and indulgence. According to Diodorus, Sardanapallus, the last king of Nineveh, outdid all of his predecessors “in luxury and sluggishness” and was notable primarily for his refined palate, interest in cosmetics, and sexual open-mindedness.

He also took care to make even his voice to be like a woman's, and at his carousals not only to indulge regularly in those drinks and viands which could offer the greatest pleasure, but also to pursue the delights of love with men as well as women; for he practiced sexual indulgence of both kinds without restraint, showing not the least concern for the disgrace attending such conduct...Because he was a man of this character, not only did he end his own life in a disgraceful manner, but he caused the total destruction of the Assyrian Empire, which had endured longer than any other known to history (Diodorus Siculus 2.23.1-2).

It is possible that the king of Nineveh is painted in Jonah as something of a comic figure, but this is a far cry from the Hellenistic portrait of Sardanapallus. While the use

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33 Bolin, “Should I Not,” 110, quoting Phocylides' Sentences 4:2: “A city on a peak ruled in accordance with nature is more powerful than senseless Nineveh.” The point of the axiom, according to M.L West, “Phocylides,” in The Journal of Hellenic Studies 98 (1978), 166, is that “eunomia is more important than magnificence,” and that Nineveh’s fall, after 612, “made it suitable as a moral paradigm.” A city on a peak, though necessarily circumscribed in terms of its physical dimensions, can outstrip enormous Nineveh in its adherence to the principles of good order. Similarly, Walter Donlan “The Tradition of Anti-Aristocratic Thought in Early Greek Poetry,” Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte 22:2 (1973), 149: “a small polis, well-ordered, is preferred over luxurious Nineveh.” See the discussion of the problematic description of Nineveh’s ignorant population in chapter five below.


35 Diodorus Siculus 2.23.1-2 (Oldfather, LCL), 427, 429.
of the word רתאד (3:6) for the king of Nineveh’s cloak may be intended to convey the splendor of the garment (as in Joshua 7:24), this is too fine a thread by which to draw firm links between Jonah’s Nineveh and that of the Hellenistic authors.36 Lacking any concrete connections between the characterizations of Sardanapallus and the king of Nineveh, Bolin’s contention that the “king of Nineveh” in Jonah reflects the “wealthy but witless Sardanapallus” of Hellenistic lore is unconvincing.37

Other efforts to locate Jonah’s origin in a Hellenistic milieu are also ultimately unsatisfying. Gildas Hamel has pointed out shared motifs between Jonah and several Hellenistic (literary and iconographic) versions of Jason and the Argonauts.38 Hamel remarks on the swallowing and “disgorging” of the protagonists of each work,39 and argues for phonetic similarities between the word קיקיון in Jonah 4 and Medea’s magical potion, kukewn, which “put[s] to sleep the serpent…guarding the tree” on which hung the Golden Fleece.40

The usefulness of these purported links for dating purposes is limited, in light of the likelihood of Israel’s early exposure to Greek culture. The iconographic record of

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36 The usual meaning of רתאד is simply “cloak,” or “mantle” unless otherwise qualified.
39 Hamel, 349, points out that although Jason is not “swallowed and disgorged” in any literary version of the tale of the Argonauts, he is depicted in several vase paintings emerging “from a coiled, upright serpent or monster.” The famous red-figured cup from Cerveteri is a striking example of such iconography. The image may be viewed online: http://mv.vatican.va/1_CommonFiles/media/photographs/MGE/059_MGE_16545_BS_go.jpg.
40 Hamel, 350. A. and P.E. Lacocque, 156-8, also argue for a link between Greek κυκεων and Hebrew קיקיון, but, despite the Lacocques’ attempts to create symbolic parallels, the similarities between the terms are merely phonetic. In function and essence, the two substances (κυκεων is “a mixed drink consisting of grated cheese, wine, honey, and a sprinkle of barley groats”) are not at all comparable; see Margo Kitts, “Why Homeric Heroes Don’t Eat Quiche, or The Perils of Kukeon,” in Literature & Theology 15 (2001), 307-325: 308. The word for the mixture, κυκεων, derives from κυκαω, to stir, mix up: LSJ 24719.
Jason variants stretches back to the eighth century B.C.E., and tales of Jason are likely a great deal more ancient. Given that contact between ancient Israel/Judah and peoples of the Aegean probably began with the arrival of the Philistines to the Levant in the late Bronze Age, it is likely that Israelites and Judeans began to absorb “Hellenic” motifs at a very early period. Further, Wolff’s contention that that “nonbiblical sea motifs” only took root in Yehud “after the campaigns of Alexander the great” must be rejected, as ample literary and archaeological evidence points to the existence of a sea-faring industry long before the Hellenistic era.

Other hypotheses for Jonah’s origin in the Hellenistic era have found little support. André and Pierre E. Lacocque have argued that Jonah is generically similar to

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41 Walter Burkert, Babylon:Memphis: Persepolis: Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004), passim, traces cultural interactions between Ionia and the Ancient Near East from about 800-the early Persian era. Burkert adduces several examples of Greek cultural borrowing from Semitic peoples, including the adoption of the Phoenician alphabet at the beginning of the Assyrian period (Burkert, 18 ff), and of “orientalizing features” found in Homeric episodes, including episodes that parallel Ancient Near Eastern tales, and stylistic devices, such as the use of formulaic epithets (Burkert, 21ff). Othniel Margalith argues in a series of articles that the Samson stories derive from ancient Greek tales of heroes and demi-gods. See, inter alia, Margalith, “Where Did the Philistines Come From?” ZAW 107 (1995):101-109; Margalith, “The Legends of Samson/Hermes,” VT 37 (1987), 63-70. Finally, the archaeological record attests to connections between Hellenic and Levantine cultures already established in the Iron Age II. See Nicholas Coldstream and Amihai Mazar, “Greek Pottery from Tel Rehov and Iron Age Chronology,” IEJ 53 (2003), 29-48: passim.

42 Hans Walter Wolff, Obadiah and Jonah: A Commentary, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 78. See, e.g. Ezek 27, Ps 107:23-30, 1 Kgs 9:26-28, Jdgs 5:17, for biblical seafaring terminology and motifs. For discussions of Solomon’s fleet (שֶׁמֶשׁ תֵּרֶשׁ, 1 Kgs 10:22) and Ezekiel’s knowledge of technical nautical vocabulary, see Philip King and Lawrence Stager, Life in Biblical Israel, (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 182-85. Aaron Brody argues that nautical imagery pervades Job 40:25-32, but has gone largely unrecognized. See Aaron Brody, Each Man Cried Out to His God: the Specialized Religion of Canaanite and Phoenician Seafarers (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 17, note 33. The fact that the term מָלוֹחַ, sailors, (Jon 1:5, Ezek 27:29) derives ultimately from Sumerian does not indicate that sailing was foreign to Hebrew speakers. As Sasson, 97, points out, a derivation from Sumerian is common to “almost all words in Hebrew that refer to professions.” Finally, the discovery of an eighth century B.C.E. Hebrew seal impression depicting a merchant sailing ship establishes that sea-faring was not foreign to ancient Israel. See Nahman Avigad, “A Hebrew Sail Depicting a Sailing Ship,” BASOR 246 (1982), 59-62.
Menippean satire of the third century B.C.E. This proposal has found no support that I am aware of given the lack of Greek loanwords in Jonah and the paucity of extant works by Menippus.

Finally, the book of Tobit, a Judean literary work that deals directly with the fate of Nineveh (and that can be securely dated to the Hellenistic era, if not later), reveals that even centuries after its disappearance, Nineveh’s reputation as a place of chaotic violence endured. The temporal setting of that book establishes the hero, Tobit, as one of the victims of the Assyrian annexation of Israel (722 B.C.E.). Despite the passage of time between the historical annexation of Israel by Assyria (with which the book of Tobit begins) and the composition of Tobit, the portrait of Nineveh in Tobit coheres in essence with Nahum’s vivid, impressionistic, depiction of a city filled with, “…heaps of corpses, dead bodies without number” (Nah 3:3).

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43 Lacocque and Lacocque, 35-45.
44 Bolin, Freedom, 48-9, points out that the Lacocques' analysis relies on genre characteristics articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin which have not found support among classical scholars. Further, Bolin, Freedom, 49, lists the manifold ways in which Jonah does not align with those features of Menippean satire that have found wide scholarly support. See also George M. Landes' review of A. and P.E. Lacocque, Jonah: A Psycho-Religious Approach to the Prophet (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), JBL 111 no. 1 (1992):132-4.
45 While estimates vary, a date of composition for Tobit between 225-175 B.C.E seems likely. See discussion in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Tobit (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 50-54.
47 While Nahum’s style is “impressionistic,” his command of the facts, apparently, was spot-on: Stronach and Lumsden, 230-33, and Stronach, 315-18, report the discovery of several corpses, including one of a child, in their excavation of the Halzi gate at Nineveh. Thanks to David Vanderhooft who drew my attention to this finding.
Tobit’s Nineveh would not have been ranked among the most livable cities of the Ancient Near East; the unburied corpses are those of the hero’s Israelite compatriots (Tob 2:3); wickedness abounds (Tob 1:19-20); and the righteous suffer without cause (Tob 2:10). However, after many plot twists, the justice of God and the reliability of the prophets are heartily affirmed by the eventual destruction of Nineveh (Tobit 14:4, 14).48 Straight through the Hellenistic era, then, there seems to have been no rehabilitation of Nineveh’s image among Judeans. Rather, the great city maintained its reputation of having charity to none and malice toward all (Nah 3:19) even centuries after its demise.

**Arguments for a Persian era date**

Since neither the Assyrian nor Hellenistic eras offer a wholly satisfying context from which Jonah might derive, we turn now to the possibility that the book originated either in the very late monarchic or Persian eras. As noted above, the only reliable indicators of Jonah’s date are based on two inferences, namely that a story about Nineveh’s jeopardy at the hands of Yhwh is most likely to have been composed well after both Nineveh’s promotion by Sennacherib circa 700 B.C.E., and its obliteration in 612.

Having plumbed the historical referents for all they are worth, we turn now to Jonah’s securely datable allusions to other biblical texts. George M. Landes has argued, on the basis of the author of Jonah’s knowledge of the doctrine of “reciprocal repentance” first

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48 It is on this basis especially that I disagree with Handy’s assertion, 34, that Nineveh is presented in a relatively “benign” way in Tobit. Certainly the character of Tobit experiences ups and downs while in Nineveh, but the city’s destruction, reported in 14:15, is indubitably presented as Yhwh’s just response to evil.
articulated by Jeremiah and Ezekiel that a sixth century provenance for Jonah is likely.⁴⁹ Yet, as the discussion below demonstrates, the processes of identifying and understanding the phenomena that fall under the heading “intertextuality” present methodological problems of their own.

**On intertextuality and diachronic analysis: a brief aside.**

A definition of terms and modes used in intertextual analyses is necessary before we approach Jonah’s web of allusion, echo, and literary influences. One of the main difficulties with the term intertextuality is that its connotations encompass “elusive and multifaceted” phenomena.⁵⁰ Much like its sister term, “inner-biblical exegesis,” “intertextuality” occurs when one biblical text alludes to or quotes another text in a reasonably recognizable way. In such cases, intertextuality can be said to originate with the author or editor of the dependent or secondary text, who invokes the primary text with the intent of creating a conceptual link between the two in the minds of readers.

The dominant mode of intertextual scholarship is the identification of verbal parallels between texts, ranging from direct quotation, to allusion, to echo.⁵¹ Study of Jonah’s intertextual ties to other scriptural texts has tended to focus either on specific verbal parallels (such as Jonah’s rendition of the Divine Attributes Formula in 4:2, or on the interplay between Psalm 107:23-30 and Jonah 1:4-16, or that between Jeremiah 18:7-11 and Jonah 3), or on more general allusions to other biblical characters or narratives.

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(e.g., implicit comparisons of the prophet Jonah to Elijah, or the qîqayôn plant’s similarity to the Tree of Knowledge of Genesis 3).\textsuperscript{52} The direction of dependence in such cases can sometimes be established by determining which text functions as the “playful,” and therefore secondary, text. For example, even the most creative scholar would be unlikely to propose that the episode of the worm “attacking” the qîqayôn plant in Jonah 4 could have been the base text for tale of the serpent and the Tree of Knowledge in Genesis 3; it is far more likely that the brief vignette of the worm and the plant might playfully invoke the more fully drawn narrative of Genesis. In cases in which the primary text is “securely datable,” then both direction of dependence and relative dates of composition can be determined.

Recent scholars of intertextual phenomena have pointed out that there is a difference between “allusion” and “influence.” This differentiation has a direct bearing on the present study of Jonah because both allusion and influence posit diachronic relationships between specific texts or groups of texts….nonetheless… noting allusions belongs to the project of interpretation and is more focused on a specific text, while studying influence connects to wider, less text-specific issues.\textsuperscript{53}

Katharine J. Dell has identified one such type of “less text specific” intertextuality, which she describes as the “misuse of forms.”\textsuperscript{54} By “misuse” Dell means


\textsuperscript{53} Sommer, \textit{A Prophet Reads Scripture}, 15.

that a traditional form—woe oracle, petition, etc.— is used in such a way that its content and context make the use of the form ironic, or subversive. Dell notes that

a clear distinction should be made… between places where the prophets are imitating or borrowing a form (giving it a new context) and those places where they are employing a form with not only a new function, but an opposite meaning as well (the content is changed to contradict the form’s original use and to make a new point). In the latter, the newness of the prophets’ message is emphasized but within the forms of tradition.55

For example, Dell says, Amos 5:1-13, a qînah for Israel while it yet lives, provides a new context and content for a traditional form, with the result that the form conveys an ironic and ominous overtone.56 Dell’s analysis of misuse of forms in Job, Jonah, and Amos has contributed to my argument (in chapter five) that Jonah exhibits an intertextual technique somewhat similar to Dell’s “misuse of forms.” There I demonstrate that in Jonah 2 and 4, the author draws on figurative tropes and motifs well-known to us from the Hebrew Bible’s poetic and prophetic sections, and integrates these images into the narrative of Jonah to advance—and resolve—its plot. The effect of this type of intertextuality, I suggest, is, in Fishbane’s phrase, to answer “the abiding and underlying critical question...will the divine word, on which so much is based, be fulfilled?”57

Another type of intertextuality, designated as “reader-centered,” occurs when readers draw connections between disparate texts based on identification of shared themes, “catchwords,” or motifs. Scholars who assert that the Twelve Prophets should be seen as “a book,” in which originally separate prophetic texts have been knit together via

57 Fishbane, 445.
redaction and sequential organization to form a literary unity, essentially are proposing that the editor-redactors of “the Twelve” engaged in reader-centered intertextuality to construct “the Twelve.” Links between and among texts thus were not original to the texts at their earliest levels of composition, but were identified and enhanced at a secondary redactional stage, by reader-editors. \(^{58}\)

The possibility of such redactional pluses complicates efforts to identify directions of literary dependence between individual books of the Twelve, or between the Twelve and the Major prophets. Many scholars of the “Book of the Twelve” therefore tend to concentrate on understanding the Twelve synchronically rather than diachronically. They seek to determine how Jonah functions within the “Book’s” purported plot arc; \(^{59}\) or how it coheres with or departs from identifiable sequences of themes within the Twelve; \(^{60}\) or how “catchwords” establish that twelve originally independent prophetic texts were ultimately redacted into a single coherent work. \(^{61}\) A major complicating factor in such endeavors is the fact that the sequence of the Twelve differs in the MT and LXX. The book of Jonah’s position varies, appearing in the fifth


\(^{60}\) Rolf Rendtorff, "How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity" in James Nogalski and Marvin Sweeney, (eds.), Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 75-87.

and sixth slots respectively, either in a sequence of Obadiah-Jonah-Micah-Nahum (MT) or Joel-Obadiah-Jonah-Nahum. The variable placement of Jonah in the two major text traditions provides a window into the interpretive processes of early scribes, redactors, and interpreters, even as it frustrates contemporary efforts to define the elements that make the Twelve “One Book.”

The charm and the challenge of intertextuality resides in the fact that whether intertextual links originate with authors or with readers, the result is that “vertical-context systems” are created in which “a surface context [is] charged with additional meaning by contact with a deep context….bearing some kind of verbal similarity to the surface context.” Thus, in the case of Jonah, audiences’ knowledge of, for example, Psalm 69, could have provided a deeper context for Jonah 2, effectively providing readers with clues and background by which to interpret Jonah’s psalm. In effect, “the meaning of the surface context is modified, amplified, reinforced or brought into contrast by the infracontext.”

That, at any rate, is the ideal: the risk, however, is that “infratexts” may cease to be recognized as times and readers change. Many an allusion, one suspects, fails to hit its

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64 Schaar, 382.
target, because the markers that signal the presence of an intertextual link are not recognized, or because the “infratext” is no longer extant or no longer understood.\(^\text{65}\) Thus, an “infratext” may exist in the shadows of a surface text, “potentially present, bearing all its meaning,” but, like an unexploded bomb, not performing its intended function.\(^\text{66}\)

**Securely datable allusions in Jonah**

I noted above that Jonah’s plot, and in 3:8, its language, owe much to Jeremiah 18:7-11 and 36:3-7.\(^\text{67}\) The previous chapter examined briefly the content of the allusion; here I will consider its use in establishing the date of Jonah’s composition. The theme of reciprocal repentance, and its characteristic diction, originated in early-mid sixth century Judah, as evidenced by the fact that its initial articulation occurs in Jeremiah. According to George M. Landes, Jonah’s “emphasis…on the repentance theme…expressed in the same form and with similar insight about the efficacy of repentance…does not occur in either earlier or later texts” than those of the sixth century B.C.E.\(^\text{68}\) Yet how do we know that the depiction of Nineveh’s penitence in Jonah 3 did not give rise to Jeremiah 18? As I argued in the previous chapter, the “deconstruction” of the doctrine of reciprocal repentance in Jonah 4, that is, the failure of Jonah 4 to endorse the doctrine, attests to Jonah’s secondary status relative to Jeremiah. Thus, a mid-sixth century *terminus a quo* for Jonah can be established with reasonable certitude.

\(^\text{65}\) Mettinger, 264.
\(^\text{66}\) Mettinger quoting Jenny 1982: 45.
\(^\text{68}\) Landes, “A Case,” 111.
The allusion to Jeremiah 18, combined with the fact that “the author of Jonah quotes from none of the prophets which are normally assigned a latter sixth-century or fifth-century date...”69 contributes to Landes’ argument in favor of a sixth century date for Jonah’s composition. However, Jonah’s emphasis on Israel’s monarchical-era literary heritage may be analogous to other late prophets’ appropriation of the language and theological insights of their predecessors, the truth of whose oracles, they asserted, had been validated by Judah’s historical experience.70 In order to “enhance their prophetic authority,” later prophets quoted, adopted, and “borrowed” “language and concepts from traditions that had been distinct in the pre-exilic period.”71

Regrettably, despite the plethora of scriptural echoes embedded in Jonah, including the allusion to (and deconstruction of) Jeremiah 18, the highly probable “tie-in” to 2 Kings 14:25-27, the psalmic pastiche of Jonah 2,72 and the multiple correspondences between Jonah 1 and Psalm 107:23-30, none but the first two are useful for advancing the question of Jonah’s date. However, the presence of so many echoes argues for an author

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69 Landes, “A Case,”107. The direction of dependence between Joel 2:13 and Jonah 4:2 is a crux, but it is likely, in my view, that the author of Jonah here is putting ‘prophetic’ speech in the mouth of the Ninevite king to produce an ironic, or even ludicrous, effect. Additionally, if we translate Jonah 3:9, ישוב ונחם, idiomatically, “he may again repent...” it is clear that the sense of the phrase fits the context of Joel better than that of Jonah’s narrative, suggesting that its use is secondary in Jonah.

70 See e.g. Matthias Henze, “Invoking the Prophets” in Michael H. Floyd and Robert D. Haak, (eds.), Prophets, Prophecy and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism (London; New York: Clark, 2006), 129: “One would assume that [Second] Zechariah’s interest in the former prophets wanes... yet precisely the opposite is true. These six brief chapters abound with citations of and allusions to other prophetic books...” Henze continues, “the time was ripe to reread the prophecies of old, in part because their fulfillment was imminent...”

71 Schultz, In Search of Quotation, 100-01, quoting Robert R. Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel (Fortress Press, 1980), 291-2.

possessed of a “canonical consciousness” that included at least some materials from both
the Former and Latter prophets, and psalms.\(^73\) Indeed, both author and protagonist
certainly “know texts that are authoritative”: when the prophet declares in 4:2 that the
“compassionate and gracious” character of Yhwh predetermined the outcome of his
mission, Jonah “is presented to the readers as one who quotes Joel 2:13; Pss 86:15; 103:8;
145:8,” or, at the very least, Exodus 34:6-7.\(^75\)

A final possible reason for the lack of allusions in Jonah to very late texts may lie
in the author of Jonah’s literary strategy. Given the implied eighth century setting of
Jonah, the author might have deliberately drawn on Israel’s well established monarchic
era prophetic works in order to drive home the point that “our” Jonah ben Amittai is
indeed to be identified with the character of the same name who appears in 2 Kings
14:25. Indeed, in several places, literary and linguistic devices connect Jonah to his
prophetic forebear, Elijah; whether these links effectively reinforce Jonah’s \textit{bona fides} as
a true prophet, or whether they point up Jonah’s prophetic inadequacy is, however, a
subject for another chapter.

Its frustrating lack of historical referents and its evident literary and theological
sophistication make Jonah elusive indeed, in terms of discerning its era of composition.

\(^73\) Weitzman, \textit{Song and Story in Biblical Narrative: The History of a Literary Convention in Ancient
Israel}, (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997), 112-13. Weitzman remarks that Jonah's
“tendency to evoke stock biblical texts and...motifs” is consistent with “canon-conscious literary
compositions” reliably dated to the Second Temple Era. On the other hand, such reworking of earlier
material is certainly not unknown in earlier texts. Machinist, “The Fall of Assyria,” 183-84,
elucidates several places where Nahum adapts First Isaiah’s language and themes for his own
purposes.

\(^74\) Ben Zvi, \textit{Signs of Jonah}, 107.

\(^75\) Ben Zvi is right to qualify his statement. I concur with Machinist, “The Fall of Assyria,” 180, that
Exodus 34:6-7 preserves the “basic form” of the divine attributes, but the relationships among the
other variants of the DAF are not diachronically traceable.
Nevertheless, in some ways, the author of Jonah tips his hand. For example, as Lowell Handy points out, this author is likely an urban, educated scribe:

the vision of a distant…capital of empire suggests someone working within an imperial hierarchy. A certain knowledge of the sea and of the city of Nineveh would conform to a local Judean education in the wider world…[Jonah’s world is] hardly the imaginative world of an ancient barley farmer or sheep grazer.76

This sketch of the author is of little avail however, when we consider the span of centuries during which Judean scribes worked “within an imperial hierarchy.” We now turn to diachronic analysis of the text of Jonah to see whether are able to break the impasse by situating Jonah solidly on the linguistic continuum of Biblical Hebrew.

**Linguistic Analysis of Jonah: some methodological considerations.**

The phenomenon that a literary language betrays—in written records—traces of historical development is by no means rare or exceptional and is well attested in various literatures.77

Avi Hurvitz’s remark, above, is confirmed in the experience of every high school student who has read Romeo and Juliet; that language “is artifactual in nature”78 is a truth almost universally acknowledged. The tools of diachronic linguistic analysis are used to determine, more effectively than any other methodology yet devised, the relative temporal provenances of biblical works. In the case of biblical Hebrew, the combined testimony of epigraphic and literary “artifacts” has enabled scholars to discern two linguistic epochs (“Standard Biblical Hebrew” or “Classical Biblical Hebrew” and “Late Biblical Hebrew”) separated by a transitional period. Hurvitz is at the forefront of the

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76 Handy, 19.
field, and given the extent to which his methodologies shape my linguistic analysis of
Jonah, it is worth quoting him at length:79

our evidence indicates that the closest parallels to the Hebrew inscrip-
tional materials dating from pre-exilic times are to be found specifically in that linguistic
layer which is commonly categorized as "Classical BH" and widely assigned to
the First Temple period. Furthermore, in many cases the isoglosses shared by the
epigraphical and biblical sources are altogether missing from the linguistic
layer known as "Late BH", which flourished in the Second Temple Period. We have,
therefore, to conclude that "Classical BH" is a well-defined linguistic stratum,
indicative of a (typologically) distinctive phase within biblical literature and a
(chronologically) datable time-span within biblical history.80

Hurvitz argues, essentially, that the sixth century B.C.E. was the era of transition between
Classical and Late Biblical Hebrew (henceforth to be denoted SBH and LBH).

As in the case of Jonah, the provenance of many biblical texts cannot be
determined on the basis of literary or historical-critical analysis alone. However, the shift
from SBH to LBH can be traced even in these hard-to-date works via semantic changes
in individual words; by displacement and replacement of words or idioms with
neologisms or new turns of phrase; and through novel syntactic constructions and
variations.

Since linguistic analysis is the critic’s last best hope to ascertain the relative era of
a text’s origin, several internal controls are necessary to ensure methodological soundness
and consistency. For example, to determine if a word or a construction in a work of
uncertain provenance is late, the word or construction must be distributed across works

79 Avi Hurvitz’s methodology and conclusions are presented in A Linguistic Study of the Relationship
between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel, (Paris: J Gabalda, 1982). Hurvitz also discusses
his methodology in great depth also in “The Recent Debate on Late Biblical Hebrew: Solid Data,
Quest,” passim.
80 Hurvitz, “The Historical Quest,” 303.
that are demonstrably late, such as Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles or Daniel. This “control” will henceforth be denoted as “linguistic distribution.” Further, to be deemed late the word must also appear in securely late extra-biblical sources such as the Dead Sea Scrolls or Ben Sira, or in epigraphic sources. In the best case scenario, if it can be demonstrated that the apparently late word has in fact taken over the semantic range and usage previously occupied by an early equivalent, then we may use the word as a rough indicator of a text’s date relative to other texts.

**Ian Young’s critique of diachronic analysis of Biblical Hebrew**

Hurvitz’s methodologies and conclusions have not met with unanimous assent. In the recent debate over the traditional dating of the sources of the Torah, proponents of theories which place the Yahwist source, for example, in the Persian era, have found that “linguistic dating is the Achilles heel” of their endeavors. In an attempt to resolve the problem, Ian Young has offered a new interpretation for the linguistic hallmarks that Hurvitz et al., have deemed late. Young argues that putative “early” and “late” linguistic elements do not actually indicate their relative diachronic usage, but rather, are the result of “conservative” or “non-conservative” stylistic choices of authors across the works usually designated as “Early” or “Standard”: “between these poles there was a continuum

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of openness to linguistic variety.”82 Thus, for Young, “LBH is EBH plus extra linguistic choices.”83

For example, as part of his critique, Young disputes the oft-cited conclusion that in LBH, there is no assimilation of the letter ב in the preposition ב when it is attached to an anarthrous noun.84 In usual SBH practice, the ב can be counted on to assimilate. Yet, Young notes, in the (securely late) book of Esther, ב also “never fails to assimilate” before an anarthrous noun.85 In this case, then, Esther’s use of ב coheres with typical SBH usage. This provokes Young to ask whether “preference for unassimilated ב” is really “a symptom of lateness or simply a stylistic choice only brought to prominence by scholars because it happens to appear in some ‘late’ texts”?86 Or does the author of Esther use an intentionally “archaistic” construction, thus intentionally bucking the late trend for the unassimilated form of the preposition?87

While proponents of diachronic linguistic analysis of Hebrew according to Hurvitz’s model tend to discount late authors’ abilities successfully to replicate early forms and lexemes without falling into anachronism, Young argues, based on “early” features in Pesher Habbakuk, that late authors could not only imitate “early” prose, but

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83 Young, “Late Biblical Hebrew,” 7. Young designates as EBH (Early Biblical Hebrew) the corpus that Hurvitz calls CBH (Classical Biblical Hebrew) and that I, following more widespread usage, designate SBH (Standard Biblical Hebrew).
86 Young, 9. Rendsburg, "Late Biblical Hebrew," 72, argues that the unassimilated ב is certainly characteristic of Late Biblical Hebrew, citing its occurrence in Manual of Discipline 7:3.
87 Young, "Late Biblical Hebrew," 33.
indeed could master it and employ it as a stylistic choice.\textsuperscript{88} If this is so, then, as Young notes, “our ability to tell early from late compositions on the basis of language is negated.”\textsuperscript{89}

**Response to Young’s critique**

Young is correct that archaistic or imitative uses of SBH lexical items can hinder the diachronic analyst’s progress. An example of the problem of possible archaizing/“early” usage as a stylistic choice may be found in the prophet Jonah’s emphatic request for death in 4:3: הָעָתָן יְהוָה הָשַׁבֵּית נַפְשִׁי. Robert Polzin has argued that the use of the particle \textsuperscript{נָא} (“please” or “come now!”) “appears very infrequently” in “the late language in general.”\textsuperscript{90} By Polzin’s count, the particle appears only “9 times in Qoh, Dn, Ezr, and Neh-Memoirs.”\textsuperscript{91} In contrast, in Jonah, the particle, whose incidence across BH is confined to petitionary or hortatory speech, is used three times. In fact, it occurs in every case of petition in the book: when the sailors address Jonah in 1:8, when they pray to Yhwh in 1:14, and by Jonah to Yhwh, as noted above, in 4:3. There are several possible explanations for the uses of \textsuperscript{נָא}: first, if Jonah was written during the “transitional stage” of BH (which the terminus post quem of Nineveh’s destruction in 612 makes possible), then the use of \textsuperscript{נָא} may be attributed to the fact that Jonah has “a foot” in SBH, in which \textsuperscript{נָא} is used commonly in entreaties.\textsuperscript{92} On the other hand, there is nothing to prohibit later,

\textsuperscript{88} Young, “Late Biblical Hebrew,” 33-34.
\textsuperscript{89} Young, “Late Biblical Hebrew,” 5.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, 24, points to two uses of \textsuperscript{נָא} in Lamentations as attesting to that book’s "transitional" linguistic status, which he assigns to the sixth century B.C.E.
archaistic usage of נָא for literary effect, such as to establish that the story is set well back in Israel’s past, or to make the characters sound authentic, hailing from days gone by.

If lateness were determined only by the use or non-use of individual items, as the cases of מָן and נָא illustrate, our linguistic analysis of Jonah might never leave the gate. Fortunately, two additional controls, the identification of imported loanwords, and analysis of syntax, provide a defense against archaism, in that, like the unconscious adoption of loanwords, “changes in syntax are less evident than lexical ones.”93 Thus, an author who attempts to establish his work’s antiquity by means of archaic vocabulary or morphology may undercut his own goal by unconsciously employing anachronistic syntax or loanwords: “it would have been much harder for an ancient writer to distinguish earlier and later syntax than to do so with earlier and later vocabulary. Attention to syntax, then, can help prevent the problem of archaizing.”94

With regard to syntax, my study of Jonah is shaped by the work of Robert Polzin, who examined the non-synoptic portions of 1 and 2 Chronicles for syntactic features that depart from the norms of SBH syntax, as established by his control corpora, J/E and the Court History.95 By identifying 19 possible “markers” of Late Biblical Hebrew syntax, Polzin established a chronological continuum against which syntactical elements of the

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94 Ibid. So too Schniedewind, “Steps and Missteps,” 383, on Qumranic Hebrew: “to be sure, linguistic ideology can also play a role in creating an archaizing Hebrew language, but archaizing is quite transparent because later authors did not have the tools and training to replicate the classical language. For example, the Qumran writers attempted to use the so-called ‘waw-consecutive’ but employed it more as a tense converter (i.e., ‘a waw conversive’) than as a narrative tense.”
95 Polzin, 18-22.
contested “Priestly” source could be compared.\textsuperscript{96} Subsequent scholars have since refined and applied Polzin’s criteria to other contested texts. Notable for my purposes is the work of Mark Rooker, who has demonstrated that several of the syntactic items deemed late by Polzin appear in the “transitional” book of Ezekiel, which dates, in most scholars estimates, to the middle of the sixth century.\textsuperscript{97} Thus, Rooker has provided invaluable data by which we may discern more precisely just how “early” or “late” some of Polzin’s “late elements” really are. Further, it should be noted that I have not adopted Polzin’s criteria wholesale. George Landes, in his overview of issues relating to Jonah’s date, remarks that “not all of the 19 linguistic features” identified by Polzin “have withstood critical scrutiny” and must be used with caution.\textsuperscript{98} The admonition is well taken; using both Landes’ and Gary Rendsburg’s critiques of Polzin’s criteria, I have determined that five of these are both reliable indicators of relative date, and are relevant for the analysis of Jonah.\textsuperscript{99} Therefore, in the discussion of syntax below I present the use of these five features in Jonah in comparison to usage of the same elements by demonstrably “transitional” or “late” texts, as identified by Rooker, Polzin, and other scholars whose application of critical methodologies “look at the totality of the linguistic evidence, including the text as a whole, its literary context, and rhetorical purpose.”\textsuperscript{100}

A final word in support of the methodological soundness of diachronic linguistic analysis: in a welcome recent development, Frank Polak and other students of the field of

\textsuperscript{96} Polzin, 28-69.
\textsuperscript{97} Mark F. Rooker, \textit{Biblical Hebrew in Transition: the Language of the Book of Ezekiel} (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), \textit{passim} but see especially 45-53.
\textsuperscript{99} See Landes, \textit{Ibid.}, and Rendsburg, “Late Biblical Hebrew and the Date of P,” \textit{passim}.
\textsuperscript{100} Schniedewind, “Steps and Missteps,” 380.
sociolinguistics have provided additional external support for Hurvitz and Polzin’s methodologies by showing that in some cases, “there is a relationship between linguistic features and the sociopolitical situation.”\textsuperscript{101} Thus, Polak has noted that many Aramaic words (or Aramaisms, Hebrew words whose use or meanings change under Aramaic influence) that occur in Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther tend to belong to the “scribal/administrative register.” This is no coincidence, Polak argues, for in the “provincial chancery” of Yehud, Aramaic was “the official language.”\textsuperscript{102} The word אגרת, which denotes a written document, is one instance in which Hurvitz’ observations and Polak’s analysis meet and mesh. Hurvitz has demonstrated that אגרת, which derives from Aramaic אגרה, replaces SBH ספר.\textsuperscript{103} Polak, in turn, has theorized that the lexical items that characterize LBH, such as אגרת, were a direct result of cultural interactions between Yehud and Persia:\textsuperscript{104}

the new socio-political conditions and social networks that were dominated by Aramaic and the vernacular, exposed the bilingual scribes and the socio-cultural ‘elites’ to many external influences that impeded the preservation of the classical language.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{102} Polak, “Sociolinguistics,” 115.
\textsuperscript{104} Polak, “Sociolinguistics,” 120-21.
\textsuperscript{105} Polak, “Sociolinguistics,” 124. More evidence of change in the sixth century can be seen in the change by Judean scribes to the Aramaic lapidary script. See David Vanderhooft, “’el-mĕdînâ ūmĕdînâ kiktăbāh: Scribes and Scripts in Yehud and in Achaemenid Transeuphratene,” in Gary Knoppers, Oded Lipschits, and Manfred Oeming, forthcoming, \textit{The Judeans in the Achaemenid Age: Negotiating Identity in an International Context}. (Eisenbrauns). The changes that Polak identifies in the scribal lexicron find a graphic parallel in the sudden change from Hebrew to Aramaic script in the sixth century.
Regrettably, Jonah, our target corpus in the present exercise, is relatively small.\textsuperscript{106} this means that a certain degree of restraint and humility are necessary when we seek to draw conclusions (statistical or otherwise) from our analysis of Jonah. Nevertheless, the combined testimony of Jonah’s lexicon (including loanwords) and its syntax do allow us to situate Jonah in relation to Ezekiel, as well as to definitively late texts such as Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. While the conclusions I reach below will not end the conversation about Jonah’s date, I hope they will contribute in a useful way to the ongoing debate.

A few final statements of methodological prudence may prove beneficial. First, it is crucial to recall that lateness is not determined on the basis of a work’s consistent and unexceptional embrace of all late forms or usages; rather, linguistic heterogeneity even among securely dated texts is the norm.\textsuperscript{107} While usage can shift quickly, it does not generally shift so uniformly as to demarcate a clear “before and after” line in literary texts. Rather, a transitional period of co-existence is expected and typical. Lateness is therefore not indicated not by individual exemplars but by trends across disparate

\textsuperscript{106} Only 40 verses; we are attempting to evaluate Jonah’s prose, and so have excluded the “psalm” of Jonah 2:2-10 from the corpus. Rooker, 186, note 14, points out that the “restricted size” of Jonah is reason for caution. He quotes Eugene Nida, ”Implications of Contemporary Linguistics for Biblical Scholarship,” \textit{JBL} 19 (1972), 79: “one must have a far larger corpus to be certain of statistical analyses of isolated features.”

categories; only the accumulation of late syntactical, lexical, and morphological items indicates relative lateness.\footnote{Schneidewind, “Steps and Missteps,” 380: lateness can only be determined by “a concentration of linguistic evidence, rather than one isolated word or phrase that can be explained in a variety of ways.”}

**LBH words or idioms that displace SBH equivalents**

§1. The noun מָהֲלָך in Jon 3:3,4 is an LBH equivalent of רֹודֶד, when the latter word denotes a journey. While מָהֲלָך appears elsewhere in the biblical corpus only in Ezek 42:4 (apparently the “first attestation of this late term”\footnote{Rooker, 169.}) Zech 3:7 and Neh 2:6, only the instance in Nehemiah uses it in reference to the temporal length of a journey as in Jonah.\footnote{Rooker, 167.} While מָהֲלָך did not wholly displace רֹודֶד in LBH, uses of רֹודֶד to denote the length of a journey only appear in relatively early works.\footnote{That is, in late works רֹודֶד continues to be used its figurative SBH sense, “way, manner, custom” as in “the way of evil,” but I have found no instances in LBH works in which רֹודֶד is used temporally, as in the phrase רֹודֶד...ימים.} In Mishnaic Hebrew מָהֲלָך is used to interpret רֹודֶד, which indicates the eventual obsolescence of רֹודֶד to denote the length of a journey.\footnote{Rooker, 167, cites m. Roš Haš 1.11 (9) and t. Pesah 8:3 as interpreting the phrase רֹודֶד רְדֵךְ from Numbers 9:10 as מָהֲלָך רְדֵךְ. Also, the Targums to Ex 3:18 and 2 Kgs 3:9, which speak of the length of journeys, render מָהֲלָך רֹודֶד with מָהֲלָך.} The exclusive use of מָהֲלָך in this sense in Jonah suggests that the work originated, at the earliest, during the transitional period from CBH to LBH, possibly at the later end of the spectrum.
§2. While the verbs צעק and זעק are “true synonyms” in biblical Hebrew, in securely late works, the use of the latter term “clearly predominates.”¹¹³ This is true in Jonah, in which צעק appears twice (1:5, 3:7) but does not appear. However, the exclusive use of the late term also occurs in Ezekiel, indicating that the preference for צעק has its roots as far back as the middle of the sixth century.¹¹⁴

§3. The use of the phrase כאות התפתת עשת in Jon 1:14, Hurvitz argues, reflects a late shift from the SBH phrase, לאות התフトי, “to do what is good in [one’s] eyes.” According to Hurvitz, in both Hebrew and Aramaic texts, the phrase found in Jonah “makes its first appearance only after 500 B.C., apparently replacing the classical alternative.”¹¹⁵

Semantic changes that indicate relative lateness

§1. Jonah’s four-fold use of the Pi`el form of the verb מניח “ordain, appoint, assign” (2:1, 4:6, 4:7, 4:8) is reflected in similar usages in Daniel 1:5, 10, 11; in 1 Chronicles 9:29, and in Mishnaic Hebrew. This usage does not appear the early control corpora, or in Ezekiel, where the meaning of מניח is “allot, number, reckon.”¹¹⁶ Landes notes that

¹¹³ Rooker, 134. The reason the shift from צעק to זעק is described as lexical rather than phonemic lies in the fact that there is no documented late trend in which צ converts to צ. See Rooker, 134, note 28, in which he concludes that “lexical preference” alone can account for the change.
¹¹⁶ Possible occurrences of מניח in the factitive sense are in Job 7:3 and Ps 61:8, but both instances present too many difficulties to make this designation certain; the usage in Job is better translated “allot” than appoint, as in SBH usage, while the word מניח in Psalm 61:8 cannot even be identified with certainty as deriving from מניח. See discussion in Landes, “Linguistic Criteria,” 149-50.
the root...is common Semitic, though its occurrence in the factitive formation with the meaning ‘appoint, assign, ordain’ is predominately [sic] attested in Imperial and later Aramaic, invariably referring to the action of a king or some other high official in appointing something or someone.\textsuperscript{117}

While מנה does not displace a SBH equivalent such as the Hiphil form of פקד,\textsuperscript{118} its semantic expansion to include the senses, “appoint, ordain, command” is securely dated to definitively late biblical works.

**Loanwords that date to the Persian era**

Analysis of the semantic evolution of individual Hebrew words is not the only tool by which to ascertain a rough estimate of a text’s origin; the presence of loan-words whose importation into Hebrew is likely to have coincided with cultural mingling produced by those civilizations’ incursions into Judah, may also provide a relatively solid anchor by which to deduce a text’s date of origin. Thus, Persian or Greek loanwords in biblical texts are invaluable in providing firm strata on which to base discussions of date.

The book of Jonah is thoroughly lacking in Persian or Greek imports; this is typical of the book’s quiet yet determined resistance to scholarly deciphering. However, the book does contain several apparent Aramaisms, but the presence of these words is problematic, as far as providing anchors by which to date the text. Although use of Aramaic by Judeans certainly increased in the post-monarchic age, not every Aramaism in Hebrew can be assigned a late date.\textsuperscript{119} Moreover, Landes argues that for several putative Aramaisms in Jonah, “a plausible case” may be made “for their Canaanite-

\textsuperscript{117} Landes, “Linguistic Criteria,” 149.
Phoenician origin" in the monarchic era.\textsuperscript{120} It is interesting to note, moreover, that in the two instances of solidly datable Aramaisms in Jonah below, both occur in the speech of non-Judean characters, namely the sailors (1:6) and the king of Nineveh (3:7).\textsuperscript{121} In this case, one wonders if the use of the words is part of the author’s characterization of foreigners, which might indicate that the \textit{full} assimilation of the Aramaisms into Hebrew had not yet occurred at the time of Jonah’s composition.

\textbf{§1.} The verb יתעשׂת, “give a thought to” in Jonah 1:6 is a \textit{hapax} in Hebrew that appears to derive from the Aramiac root עשה the “positive sense” of which is not attested in “in any text clearly datable prior to the 5\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.E.”\textsuperscript{122}

\textbf{§2.} Additionally, while the use of the word טעם in Jonah 3:7 in the sense of “order” or “decree” is unique in Biblical Hebrew, the Aramaic sections of Daniel and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{120} Landes, “Linguistic Criteria,” 147. Landes cites the arguments of O. Loretz, “Herkunft und Sinn der Jon-Erzählung,” \textit{BZ} 5 (1961), 24. An example of one such putative Aramaism is the use in Jonah 1:5 of ספינה, the morphology of which may be related to the Aramaic feminine passive participle form; against this, Landes, “Linguistic Criteria,”152-53, points out first, that the root ספין is not attested in Aramaic, but that (extrapolating from the Phoenician noun מספין) it may have existed in Phoenician and been absorbed thence into the Hebrew lexicon. Secondly, Landes argues that nouns that reflect the Aramaic \textit{qatil} formation occur in both SBH and LBH texts, making ספינה useless for dating Jonah.
\item \textsuperscript{121} On such bilingual “style-switching” for the sake (or appearance) of verisimilitude, see Gary Rendsburg “Bilingual Wordplay in the Bible,” \textit{VT} 38, 3 (1988): 355. Rendsburg argues that the pun involving the noun טעם and the command אל¬יטעמו in Jon 3:7 is an instance of bilingual wordplay.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Landes notes that while עשת appears in the Sefire inscription II B5, it lacks the “positive” connotation of “take favorable thought for” which it exhibits in the Elephantine papyri. Equivalent phrases, such as לחשב (Ps40:18) and לזכור (Neh 13:14, 13:22) were available in SBH and LBH.
\end{itemize}
Ezra use alternating multiple times in this sense. While Landes argues that the more frequent connotation of “judgment” may be reflected in Jonah 3:7, this seems like special pleading.

An epithet that may indicate lateness.

§1. The title אֱלֹהִי השֹּׁמֶשׁ in Hebrew very likely reflects the Aramaic phrase אֲלֹהִי השֹּׁמֶשׁ. The prophet Jonah’s use of this divine epithet (Jon 1:9), which appears in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah in Hebrew (Ezr 1:2, Neh 1:5) and Aramaic (Ezr 5:11; 6:9, 7:12) iterations, may indicate a Persian-era provenance for Jonah. Landes remarks that the phrase אֱלֹהִי השֹּׁמֶשׁ אֲלֹהִי הָאֵוֶרֶת as a title for Yhwh in Gen 24:3 should be noted, given the early date generally assigned the Yahwistic source. However, Gary Rendsburg’s argument that Genesis 24 is intentionally tinged with Aramaicisms for the sake of narrative realism is convincing. (Abraham’s servant is, after all, on a mission to Aram to procure a wife for Isaac.) In terms of its frequency of distribution, the phrase is indubitably late, as Landes himself admits.

Syntactic analysis based on Polzin’s criteria

§1. (=Polzin criterion A.1): Reduced use of את w/pronominal suffix; increased preference for verbal direct object suffix.

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123 Dan 3:10; 3:29; 4:3; 5:2 (here טעם could mean “tasting” as in Jon 3:7); Ezr 4:19; 4:21; 5:3; 5:9; etc.
In constructing a pronominal direct object, SBH authors display a tendency to prefer verbal suffixes to the use of את with a pronominal suffix. In LBH texts, the preference becomes more pronounced. Thus, whereas the ratio of verbal suffix use versus use of את with pronominal suffix is 2:1 in the (relatively early) Court History, in demonstrably late texts such as Ezra and Chronicles, the ratio is 5.53:1 and 10.07:1 respectively. In the prose portions of Jonah, there are 4 uses of the verb plus pronominal suffix, but no uses of את with a pronominal suffix. Despite the small sample of material, it is evident that Jonah “follows the postexilic tendency.” The dramatic reduction in the use of the direct object marker with suffix is indeed a late phenomenon, as attested by the fact that in Ezekiel, the ratio is a slender 1.53:1 in favor of verb plus object suffix. Jonah’s usage, then, is a firm indicator of relative lateness.

§ 2. (Polzin A.5) Preference for the plural form of words and phrases where SBH uses singular.

The sole pertinent example of this LBH tendency occurs in Jon 1:7, in the phrase גורלות נפל rather than singular גורל; in this, Jonah coheres with similar usage in Neh 10:35, 11:2, and multiple examples in Chronicles. The appearance of the plural form “plus the Hiphil of נפל in Jonah is more in keeping with post-exilic than pre-exilic practice.” However, it should be noted that this “pluralizing tendency” is abundant in Ezekiel (though there is no occasion for the specific “pluralization” of גורלות in that

128 Rooker, 45.
130 Rooker, 45.
131 Polzin, 42. Of the words/phrases that Polzin identifies as exhibiting the change from singular to plural in LBH, only גורלות is relevant to Jonah.
book), so we cannot exclude the possibility that Jonah preserves a relatively early instance of this particular change.

§3. (Polzin A.6) Decreased use of infinitive absolute used in connection a finite verb of the same stem or used as an imperative or jussive verb.

Polzin describes this phenomenon as “a certain feature of the late language,” based on the non-use of these infinitival constructions in “Qoheleth, Ezra and Daniel” and their relative scarcity in “…Nehemiah, and Chronicles.”133 While Polzin admits that Esther “extensively uses the infinitive absolute” in accordance with SBH practice, he attributes this usage to the book’s “many archaizing tendencies.”134 Esther does appear to be an exception to the overall trend within LBH toward “the sparse use of the infinitive absolute in paronomasia of the type: inf. abs. immediately followed by the finite verb.”135 The downward trend in the use of the infinitive absolute can be seen in Ezekiel, which uses the construction at a rate of 26.69 times per 1000 verses, as compared to rates of 64.83 in JE and 51.36 in CH.136 In the late prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the use of the infinitive absolute in conjunction with a finite cognate verb occurs only in Zechariah, and then only five times.137 The total absence of the infinitive absolute in Jonah is particularly striking when one considers the frequency and verve with which

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133 Polzin, 43.
134 Polzin, 74. Esther’s language presents unique problems which Polzin perhaps too readily attributes to attempted archaism.
136 Rooker, 47. It is regrettable that different analysts use different qualitative measures. Rooker adopts Polzin’s technique of calculating the rates of syntactic uses per 1000 verses, while Hill (below) counts instances per 1000 words, which is undoubtedly methodologically preferable. Unfortunately, to convert Rooker and Polzin’s data into Hill’s metric would be the work of another dissertation.
Jonah’s author engages in many other forms of paronomasia; it is likely that the non-use of this construction indicates the relative lateness of Jonah’s composition.

§4. (Polzin A.7) LBH shows reduced use of בָּלָה with infinitive construct preceded by והיה or והיה; the infinitive construct appears alone.

In Jonah 4:8, there is a single instance in which SBH construction is maintained: והיה הਸּמשׁכ. There is no instance of an unmodified infinitive in Jonah. Although Jonah seems to cohere more closely to SBH than to LBH, the paucity of data precludes a firm conclusion.

§5. (Polzin B.3) In LBH, מַן often does not assimilate before an anarthrous noun.

Of ten occurrences in Jonah of מַן before an anarthrous noun, the מַן assimilates in every case, reflecting SBH usage. Polzin argues that the phenomenon of the non-assimilating מַן is a result of “Aramaic influence” during the Persian era, which accounts for the phenomenon’s “gradual popularity and density in LBH.”¹³⁸ This datum, and the fact that of 44 possible occasions in “the post-exilic prophets,” not a single assimilated מַן occurs,¹³⁹ suggests that Jonah’s syntax may belong at the early end of the Persian period. By far the greatest density of the unassimilated מַן phenomenon is in Chronicles (51 of 98 uses), but examples also occur in other late works.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Polzin, 66.
¹⁴⁰ Polzin, 66, counts 98 occurrences of unassimilated מַן of which two-thirds of the occurrences are in “Chr, Jerem, Prov, Dan and Neh.” About 50% of the occurrences are from Chronicles, according to Polzin, but he does not reveal the distribution of the phenomenon in the other late works. More vexing still is his inexplicable inclusion of Jeremiah among the late works.
§6. (Polzin B.6.) Use of dual prepositions דע plus ל “signifying a spatial or temporal limit.”

This “piling up” of דע plus ל 141 which appears in securely datable texts initially in Ezra and Chronicles, could have been employed, according to Landes, in Jonah 2:1, 3:3-4, or (this is less likely) in 4:9. 142 In Landes’ analysis, this non-use of the dual prepositions indicates Jonah’s agreement with normative SBH practice, and thus suggests that Jonah is anterior to Ezra and Chronicles. However, the relatively infrequent distribution of the “dual prepositions” even in late books should be acknowledged; 143 there seems to be no decisive switch to דע plus ל. 144

Other elements (not among Polzin’s criteria) that indicate lateness

§1. The captain’s question to the soundly sleeping Jonah, נרדָךְ לךְ וכמה (1:6) may bear a Late Biblical hallmark in its use of the participle rather than a qātal form; usual SBH practice would render the phrase נרדָךְ כְּ לךְ כִּמה. 145 However, the construction may appear for the first time in Ezek 18:2, meaning that, as Landes suggests, the possibility exists that “stylistic variation” in this interrogative formula “was already possible within pre-exilic Hebrew.” 146

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141 Rendsburg, “Late Biblical Hebrew and the Date of P,” 73.
143 Hill, “Dating Second Zechariah,” 127, notes that “the formation occurs 16 times in Chronicles and Ezra, but does not occur in the post-exilic prophets.”
145 See Eskhult, 88. In addition, A. Niccacci, “Syntactic Analysis of Jonah,” Liber Annuus, 46 (1996), 20, note 9, affirms that “this construction, also present in Ezek 18:2... and Qoh 6:8 is characteristic of post-exilic language, in contradistinction from the old kî + yiqtol construction.” Alexander Rofe, Prophetic Stories, 156, citing A. Bendavid, Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew, Vol 1. (Tel Aviv, 1967), 61, formulates “classical [i.e., “standard’”] Hebrew” interrogative (direct discourse) sentences as מִמה לְכִי followed by a finite verb, as in Judges 18:23, and 1 Samuel 11:5.
§2. Another LBH grammatic-syntactic element which Jonah exhibits is its use of the construction بين...ל (4:11) rather than the SBL equivalent בין...בין. Rooker has demonstrated that “the formula בין...ל first begins to occur on par with the more ancient…formula in the book of Ezekiel…and is used to the exclusion [of בין...בין] in Jonah, Malachi, Daniel and Nehemiah.” Again, since we only have one occasion of the phrase in Jonah’s prose, it would be a bit grandiose to declare Jonah definitively late on this basis. Nevertheless, this datum contributes to the overall picture of Jonah’s prose, and is therefore worth noting.

§3. It is worth noting that the syntagma “hyh plus participle” which occurs “chiefly in LBH” “as signifying durative or iterative meaning” does not appear in Jonah. Such a usage could have occurred, for example, in Jonah 1:13, והם הול꧀уютו, but as above, absence of a late diachronic marker is not necessarily evidence for a text’s earliness.

Miscellaneous linguistic features

§1. The only significant morphological variation that Jonah presents is its use of both אני for the first person pronoun, and אנכי, an equally ancient form of the pronoun whose use became increasingly dominant in the mid-to-late sixth century. In Jonah אנכי appears 3 times (1:9, 1:12, 4:11), against 2 occurrences of אני (1:9, 3:2). Mark

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147 Rooker, 117.
149 This excludes two occurrences of אני in Jonah 2. The exclusive use of the shorter form of the pronoun in Jonah 2 coheres with usage of this form in the book of Psalms. (See Rooker, 82.) Thus, it is possible that the use of אני in Jonah 2 is a stylistic decision by the author to make Jonah’s prayer as “psalmic” as possible.
Rooker has demonstrated that אָנכִי does not occur at all in Haggai, Zechariah 1-8, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Ezra, or Esther, and only one time in Ezekiel, Malachi, Daniel, Nehemiah and Chronicles.150 There is no evident stylistic purpose for the free variation between forms in Jonah. The very inconsistency prevents our deeming the use of אָנכִי as attempted archaism, and therefore we must be content in this case to allow the text and its author their secrets.

§2 Diachronic Chiasmus

Another possible indicator of Jonah’s era of origin may be found in the “diachronic chiasmus” עֲלִיָּתַנְיָה וֹחָדְשׁ (Jon 4:1), which, as Avi Hurvitz has shown, reverses the sequence of the adjectives found in “early” examples of the Divine Attribute Formula (Ex 34:6, Ps 86:15, and Ps 103:18 all have וֹחָדְשׁ רַחֲמִים). Landes acknowledges that Jonah’s version of the phrase “can be confidently dated to the sixth century B.C.E. or later” on the basis of the prevalence of the וֹחָדְשׁ רַחֲמִים sequence in reliably “late” works (Neh 9:17, 2 Chr 30:9).151 It is not clear why Landes confidently dates this usage to the sixth century given that its other earliest attested usages do not occur until the fifth century.

An additional example of such “diachronic chiasmus” appears in the use of the merism מַעֲרַד וּמַעֲרַד in Jonah 3:5. Hurvitz has shown that “in early biblical literature the order of the terms is consistently מַעֲרַד preceding מַעֲרַד, whereas in late writings, the order is the reverse.”152 Landes argues that in Jonah 3:5 the “reversal” “was most likely

150 Rooker, 72‐73.
determined by what follows in the narrative,” namely, that “the total national repentance described in 3:5 is thus explicated in vss 6-8, beginning with the king … and moving to the people and animals.” However, the plain sense of the story indicates that Jonah’s brief proclamation runs like wildfire through Nineveh, prompting immediate repentance in all who hear it. The dramatic success of Jonah’s meager oracle in 3:4 *climaxes* with the depiction of the king of Nineveh enjoining on the people what they have already begun to do on their own account. Thus, the sequence מִנָּטֵו וְשָׁרֵד כְּנֶפֶשׁ does *not* match the sequence of events described, in that “the king and his great ones” (3:7) seem to be the final boarders on the Penitence Express. Therefore, the likelihood that the merism in 3:5 is the product of diachronic chiasmus cannot be dismissed.

**Sociolinguistic analysis: hallmarks of Polak’s “Corpus A”**

Like the Aramaic contracts and epistolography of the Achaemenid Period, these texts [Ezra Nehemiah, Chronicles and Esther] stand out by the frequency of long noun groups, elaborate sentence structures and often highly complex hypotaxis.154

For the most part, Jonah does *not* cohere with the characteristics of Polak’s “Corpus A” (Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles and Esther). As Alexander Niccacci remarked, “if…Jonah is a late composition imitating the language of the 8th century prophet…one has to say that the imitation is superb from the point of view of syntax.”155 The royal decree in Jonah 3:7-9 cannot be said to be an exception, although it contains a “long noun group” that “serve[s] for specification and detailed introduction of the participants.”156

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154 Polak, 115.
155 A. Niccacci, 32.
156 Polak, 128.
3:7, the long noun group הבהמה הבהמה המקר והבאת indicates, somewhat comically, which members of the animal kingdom are included in the policies of fasting and donning sackcloth. Domesticated ruminants are “in,” while horses, donkeys, and cats and dogs are “out.”157 However, the division of הבמות into flocks and herds is stereotypical language which appears in LBH and SBH alike.

Conclusions

Like a trout in the milkpail, the available linguistic evidence points circumstantially toward a conclusion about the diachronic provenance of the prose of Jonah. The book exhibits two of Polzin’s four definitively late syntactic criteria (A.1, the increased preference for verb plus direct object suffix, and A.6, the decreased use of the infinitive absolute). Additionally, Jonah contains several examples of lexical, linguistic, or stylistic indicators of lateness, namely, the two Aramaisms (יתעשׂת and טעם), the use of the phrase חפצתכ אشهد עשׂית, the instances of diachronic chiasmus, and the connotation of מננה as “ordain/appoint.” All of these usages appear in securely dated texts no earlier than the fifth century. On the other hand, as seen above, Jonah also contains several elements that would be better described as transitional than as late; that is, belonging to the sixth century at the earliest. Given the book’s relative densities of standard, transitional, and definitively late linguistic features, it is logical to conclude that Jonah belongs more to the late end of the transitional spectrum of Biblical Hebrew than to the “standard” end. On this basis, a late sixth century date, or fairly early fifth century date for Jonah seems most plausible. The prose of Jonah, moreover, in terms of the

157 Sasson, Jonah, 255, notes that “it may be trivial for the narrator so to limit הבמות, but it does spare us from imagining Ninevites draping camels in sackcloth, let alone lions and elephants.”
density of its indicators of lateness, is similar to that of the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, which also exhibit “a low density of LBH features …and a relatively high density of classical BH features.” It is reasonable, therefore, to assign a date to Jonah within the same general timeframe that produced the Persian era prophets, namely the late sixth through mid-fifth centuries.

The preponderance of accumulated evidence, including the author of Jonah’s probable knowledge of Nineveh’s historical demise, the book’s literary allusions and indications of its author’s “canonical consciousness,” and its linguistic hallmarks, thus argue for a date of composition within the early Persian era. As the next chapter will demonstrate, an examination of thematic parallels between Jonah and Malachi will provide additional warrant for locating Jonah’s composition in this timeframe. By situating the book of Jonah over and against its prophetic contemporary, Malachi, I argue, new insight becomes available with regard to Jonah’s original purpose and its message.

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Chapter Three: Jonah and Malachi: And Justice There Is None?

Methodological Considerations

A preponderance of linguistic evidence leads to the conclusion that the book of Jonah is fundamentally a product of the late sixth-early fifth centuries. Our next task is to interpret the book against the backdrop of the intellectual positions that characterized the time and place in which Jonah may have originated. However, to measure a text against its putative contemporaries can be methodologically problematic. Indeed, the ability of a given work to speak in its own voice, as it were, can be severely circumscribed if a predetermined sense of what positions are “appropriate” governs its readers. For example, in discussions of the Persian era, earlier scholars exhibited a tendency to see the issues confronted in Ezra-Nehemiah as representing the dominant or mainstream intellectual positions of the Persian period, while the insights or worldviews of Chronicles, the postexilic prophets, and the Wisdom literatures were implicitly viewed as of secondary or marginal value. A reductionist view of Ezra-Nehemiah, moreover, tended to skew further the scholarly portrait of Judean thought in the Persian period.

Certainly, scholars have to pick their battles and their texts. However, overly reductive approaches risk lapsing into generalizations about the intellectual positions of the period which do not serve either the reader or the text. Beth Glazier-McDonald’s comment on the need to strike a balance between what seems chronologically/historically “correct” and the uniqueness of individual texts is apt:

it is axiomatic that a prophet must be understood… against the background of the historical, political, and religious circumstances in which he was active….At the same time, a prophet must be permitted to speak out in his own terms, thereby providing a
check against arbitrary, and sometimes subjective, interpretations of history.¹

Thus forewarned, a fresh attempt to understand the book of Jonah within the possible context of early Persian-era Yehud is a desideratum. The question is, which texts may most profitably inform a reading of Jonah, and what are the methodological benefits and limitations of engaging in such a comparative study of roughly contemporaneous works?

First, the comparative text should act as a control against which the experimental text is read.² The “control” text should provide sufficient historical anchors to ensure that we are not trying to solve a riddle by means of an enigma, at least in terms of diachronic literary origin.³ Next, in addition to displaying a common linguistic profile, the two texts should share thematic, generic, or stylistic points of contact so that fruitful comparisons may be made. Lastly, although the two texts will be juxtaposed in the hope that insights may be gained, as it were, by refraction, it is necessary nevertheless to interpret each book on its own terms so as not to skew the results of the comparison. The control text should provide new directions by which to consider the experimental text, but must not be allowed to dictate the meaning of the experimental text.

Of biblical works generally thought to have originated in early Persian-era Yehud, the book of Malachi is a good candidate for a control text with the potential to shed light on certain issues in Jonah. To paraphrase John Barton’s observation about Amos and Joel, I will argue that “readers of [Jonah] can be better prepared to understand the book if they have already read”

² Or to apply the terminology of diachronic linguistic analysis, we must use control corpora as anchors for the analysis of “target corpora.”
³ Sasson, 23. He notes the problem of dating Jonah by means of Joel: “it makes little sense to solve a difficult problem (the dating of Jonah) by relying on an intractable issue (the dating of Joel).”
Therefore, I do not seek to demonstrate specific literary or allusive relationships that link the books at the levels of composition or redaction. Rather, I wish to show that by considering the matters of divine justice and treatment of “the nations” in Malachi, we gain new perspective on the same well-trodden issues in Jonah. Indeed, the methods by which Malachi confronts theological, moral, and eschatological problems in his society provide a kind of comparative key that illumines the “textual gaps and dissonances” of Jonah, as well as that book’s essential message.

There are several reasons why Malachi in particular is an appropriate control text for the purposes of this study. First, although the “strange book” of Jonah might seem much more comfortably situated among the “diasporanovellas” of the Writings, its identification of its protagonist as the eighth century prophet Jonah ben Amittai and its canonical placement among the prophets argue for reading Jonah in the context of other prophets. Despite its dissimilarities in form and tone from its prophetic brethren, the book of Jonah has manifold connections—verbal, thematic, and theological— which reveal that the book was intended to be perceived, in some way, as prophetic.

Secondly, the discussion of the language of Jonah argued that Jonah and Malachi, based on syntactic and grammatical markers, appear to have originated in roughly the same time

While there is some variation among scholars with regard to the date of Malachi, a majority situate the text (with the possible exception of the Moses-Elijah coda in 4:4-6) between 500-450 B.C.E. If, as seems likely, the two books originated in the same period, then it may be that the circumstances reflected in Malachi also influenced the composition of Jonah.

Thirdly, in terms of content, both works show a strong interest in the problem of divine justice and in the responses of “the nations” to Yhwh. The task of the present chapter is to

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6 In the main, an early-mid fifth century date has been proposed for Malachi. Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1998) 83, summarizes the results of his prose analysis of Malachi as follows: “Malachi’s linguistic affinity to Haggai and Zechariah 1-8...support a date of near 500 B.C./E...it effectively eliminates those positions dating Malachi after Nehemiah.” Glazier-McDonald, *The Divine Messenger*, 17, places Malachi somewhat later, but still prior to Nehemiah: “A date shortly before Nehemiah’s arrival suits Malachi with regard to the content of his message (i.e., 470-450 B.C.)....the poor economic circumstances to which both Malachi and Nehemiah attest appear to have become prevalent during the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-25 B.C.). As a result, it is likely that Malachi was active sometime after 460 B.C.” The archaeological record, though limited, provides some corroboration for Glazier-McDonald’s portrait of Judean society. Oded Lipschits, 28, notes that, in contrast to the dramatic economic development of the coastal regions [which were under Phoenician control] to its east, the Judean hill country was notable for the “marked process of attenuation of urban life” in the early Persian period. Moreover, Lipschits, 31, the utter lack of “traces of rich tombs around the city and...signs of rich material culture in or around the city,” indicate that “Jerusalem was wretchedly poor, not just in the period after the Babylonian destruction but also at the height of the Persian Period.” Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century B.C.E.” in Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

7 See Hill, *Malachi*, Appendix A, which presents a catalog of scholarly opinion on the date of Malachi, according to the categories already set forth by A. von Bulmerinq, *Einleitung in das Buch des Propheten Maleachi*, (Dorpat: Mattiesen, 1926), 87-97. Von Bulmerinq’s category 2a. places Malachi before Ezra and Nehemiah: proponents of this scheme include von Bulmerinq himself, K. Budde (1906), B. Duhm (1911), D.N. Freedman (1991), and P.R. Ackroyd, (1970). A great many other readers, including S.R. Driver (1922), P.A. Verhoef (1987), and P. Redditt (1994), place Malachi contemporary with either Ezra or Nehemiah (or both). David L. Petersen, 5, summarizes evidence arguing for an early Persian era date for Malachi. There are several indications that Malachi “postdates the rebuilding of the second temple...” including his reference to the pehāh, “governor,” “the term used for the ruling regional official during the Persian period...” Moreover, “the prominence of Edom in the first diatribe would fit with what we know of the territory known as Edom during the early Persian period...” *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi: A Commentary* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995). Hill, *Malachi*, notes further that the phrases pesek ḥāṭer (3:20) and pesek ḥemāh (3:16) may be Persianisms. Arguments for dating Malachi based on the prophet’s purported “intertextual dependence” on pentateuchal sources are too vexed to be of much use; see Hill, *Malachi*, 79 n. 2.
examine these common themes. I begin with a discussion of the mentions of worship of Yhwh by gentiles in Mal 1:11 and 1:14, passages which have been favorably compared in the scholarly literature to the depiction of the sailors in Jonah 1 for their positive portrayal of pious gentiles. However, elsewhere in the book of Malachi, we find much more negative mentions of non-Judeans, so 1:11 and 1:14 require explanation. I will propose an interpretation of these verses that requires neither emendation of the text nor an adjustment of their logic, and will then examine the ways in which Malachi’s interests and strategies with regard to “the nations” resonate with the depiction of the gentile sailors in Jonah 1.

To anticipate, I shall demonstrate that in both Malachi and Jonah, the putatively “universalistic” materials are intended to underscore Yhwh’s complete dominion over “the earth and all it contains.” Both Malachi and the author of Jonah refer to Yhwh’s greatness as part of their wider rhetorical or literary strategies of asserting the universal supremacy of Yhwh. Both, indeed, envision a kind of “cultic imperialism” manifested by gentile submission to the God of Yehud. Emphasis on the subjection of the nations to Yhwh seems to provide

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9 Other texts that emphasize the trope of Yhwh’s sovereignty over the nations include Ps 98:2-6, which employs the distinctive title יהוה המלך (v.6), Ps 102:16, and Isa 60:2-14.

10 David Vanderhooft coined this phrase, which I have found most helpful as I have sought to articulate the meaning behind the expressions of Yhwh’s sovereignty and the depictions of gentiles in Malachi and Jonah. G. Ernest Wright expressed a related notion, conceiving of the phenomenon of prophecy as deriving from a divine imperium, by which he meant “an effective exercise of personal power...conceived to control all things in the universe, as universal in its exercise of power as was the divine council of every polytheistic structure.
politically/militarily oppressed Judeans access to an alternate understanding of reality, in which their god is king over all nations and peoples. To recognize the theme of Yhwh’s sovereignty in each work, I argue, leads to a new understanding of the depiction of the sailors in Jonah, and a renewed appreciation for the complexity with which the characters and plot of Jonah 1 are drawn.

Next, I will examine the lack of divine justice that Malachi’s audience appears to have perceived and the prophet’s response to his discontented audience. In particular, I will discuss the solution that Malachi proposes to resolve his audience’s anxiety, namely, proclamation of the imminent “yôm Yhwh.” The literary dialogues in Malachi between the deity and his so-called interlocutors, who fear that Yhwh has abdicated his role in the administration of justice, are, like the speech of Yhwh to Jonah in Jon 4:10-11, didactic in intent.11 It is evident that the deity’s hearers in Malachi perceive a dispiriting and pervasive cultic inefficacy: Yhwh makes no distinction between “the one who serves [Yhwh] and the one who does not serve him” (Mal 3:18). Similarly, Jonah expresses concern that Yhwh is indiscriminate in the extension of divine mercy. For Jonah, Yhwh’s willingness to retract punishment, עֲלֹ-רַעַת נַחַם (4:2), results in an

of the ancient Near East.” G.E. Wright, “The Nations in Hebrew Prophecy,” *Encounter* 26 (1965), 231. Thus, “because God is Suzerain and his government is universal, the peoples and nations of the world are bound together in various ways by law. God as Lord, Judge and leader of both the earthly and heavenly armies is actively at work maintaining world order, taking all the actions appropriate to such an imperium.” Ibid., 235-36. Wright’s formulation owes much to G.E. Mendenhall, who first described divine sovereignty using the metaphor imperium; see Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: the Origins of Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 70, 82-83.

11 Hill, *Malachi*, 82, notes that Rex Mason has argued that “use of the rhetorical question form and disputation are clearly stylistic features of postexilic preaching.” See Mason, *Preaching the Tradition: Homily and Hermeneutics After the Exile* (Based on the "Addresses" in Chronicles, the "Speeches" in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the Post-Exilic Prophetic Books), (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990), 235.
existential crisis. In each case, the purpose of the work is not to condemn the objectors, but to persuade them that Yhwh is indeed ultimately reliable.

Finally, I argue that the books’ implicit or explicit allusions to Elijah as the forerunner of the Day of Yhwh show a common interest in demonstrating the validity of the prophetic word over time. By invoking Elijah, both works provide a guarantee of sorts for the reliability of both prophecy and Yhwh.

**Gentiles in Malachi 1:5, 11, 14.**

Readers of Malachi and Jonah have occasionally linked the approving mention of “the nations,” in Mal1:11 and 1:14 with the portrayal of the gentile sailors of Jonah 1, and have asserted that the authors of Jonah and Malachi are advocating “universalistic” positions *vis-à-vis* the relationship of Yhwh to non-Judeans.\(^{12}\) We run into trouble with the term “universalism” as its use in the literature can refer to two distinct, and indeed, opposing, phenomena. In its first sense, “universalism” refers to the nations’ “movement towards Israel’s God” and eventual participation in “Israel’s redemption.”\(^{13}\) On the other hand, the term also is used to indicate passages which envision “the universal recognition and exaltation of Israel’s God” by subjugated nations, recognition which implies that Israel’s God is sovereign and unopposable. This latter type of “universalism” is what I mean by the phrase “cultic imperialism.”\(^{14}\)

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\(^{12}\) Nogalski, *Redactional Processes*, 272. See note above for other discussions that link Malachi 1:11 and Jonah 1.


\(^{14}\) Ibid.
The former connotation of universalism, which allows the nations to enter “fully and equally into the privileges of Israel”  is sometimes invoked by readers of Malachi and Jonah to describe these works’ representation of the interactions between Yhwh and gentiles. For example, Jonah’s “openness to the inclusion of foreigners” according to James Nogalski, “finds its closest parallels in Trito-Isaiah, Zech 8:20-23, Mal 1:11-14 and Zech 14:16ff.” Of these, Nogalski claims that Mal 1:11, with its “highly positive and highly unusual attitude toward the nations” is “the closest parallel to Jonah in the entire Book of the Twelve.” For the author of Jonah, “the core of true YHWH worship comes not from belonging to a specific holy place or a chosen people, but comes from the recognition of YHWH.”

A frequent corollary of the contention that Jonah 1 and Mal 1:11 exhibit “highly positive” attitudes toward gentiles holds that these portrayals are intended, in part, to redound to the discredit of the Israelite/Judean characters in each book, whether the Jerusalemite priesthood addressed in Malachi, or the prophet Jonah. As Nogalski says of Jonah, “no other prophetic writing so consistently portrays foreigners positively at the expense of the prophet around whom the story revolves.” Similarly, Bernard P. Robinson sees the authors of Malachi and Jonah as offering salutary criticisms of “narrow” Jewish beliefs or practices. Mal 1:11, which Robinson

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16 Nogalski, Redactional Processes, 198, 272.
17 Nogalski, Redactional Processes, 272.
sees as referring to diaspora worship of Yhwh, “implies an enlightened outlook, rejecting the centrality in Jewish life of the Jerusalem Temple,”21 while the book of Jonah intimates that “gentiles have a part in the divine plan…whatever Jewish nationalists thought.”22

Such evaluations of Malachi’s “inclusiveness,” however, derive from decontextualized reference to the relevant passages. In Åke Viberg’s phrase, “the universalistic view appears merely to provide readers with an argument for a universalism they have already accepted.”23 Malachi by no means abjures traditional language or concepts relating to Yhwh’s preference for Israel. As David L. Petersen notes, the purpose of the famous “Edom” passage in Mal 1:1-5 (the only reference to a specific gentile nation in Malachi) is to show

that Yahweh will discriminate on behalf of Israel as he had done in the past… since the issue is really that of covenant relationships, the punishment of a foe…serves to sustain Yahweh’s original contention, “I love you.”24

The permanent devastation of Edom, in fact, attests to the love (or perhaps more accurately, the covenant fidelity25) of Yhwh for Israel:

If Edom says, “We have been beaten, but we will rebuild the ruins,” thus says Yhwh of hosts: “They may build, but I will tear down. They will be called ‘wicked territory with whom Yhwh is angry.’ Your eyes will see, and you will say, “Great is Yhwh beyond the land of Israel!” (Mal 1:4-5).

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24 Petersen, Malachi, 172-3.
According to Deut 2:5, Yhwh “had given Mount Se’ir to Edom.” Thus, Mal 1:4-5 “focuses on Yahweh’s willingness to void an earlier grant to Esau/Edom and to act in a way wholly favorable to Israel.”

In Mal 1:4-5, then, it is clear that Yhwh’s loyalty is to Israel: the deity has no interest or concern for Edom, except in discussing the significance of its permanent ruin. Here, then is the crux: how can the treatment of Edom in 1:4-5 jibe with the purportedly positive portrait of “the nations” in general in 1:11? In the latter passage, the prophet asserts that while “the nations” venerate Yhwh with “pure offerings,” the deity’s own priesthood in Jerusalem profanes the divine name with faulty and flawed worship.

Because, from the rising of the sun to its setting, my name is great among the nations, in every place incense is brought to my name, a pure offering. For my name is great among the nations says Yhwh of hosts. You profane it when you say the table of the lord is polluted, and its food, its fruit, may be despised. (Mal 1:11-12)

The incongruity between the sentiments of 1:4-5 and 1:11, as many scholars read it, thus presents an exegetical stumbling block. The difficulty may arise in part from the fact that Malachi 1:11 is “one of the most difficult texts in the OT, both exegetically and theologically.”

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26 Petersen, 170, 172. Hill, Malachi, 169, concurs with this interpretation: “...the event of Edom’s downfall...lends concrete reality to Malachi’s message of Yahweh’s love.”
27 Åke Viberg, “Wakening a Sleeping Metaphor: A New Interpretation of Malachi 1:11,” TynBul 45.2 (1994), 297. The juxtaposition of two hop’al participles, incorporates, has elicited many attempts at emendation: see Glazier-MacDonald, The Divine Messenger, 56 and Hill, Malachi, 188. The extent to which Malachi 1:11 has bedeviled interpreters is illustrated by Nogalski’s treatment of the passage. Nogalski, Redactional Processes, 198, asserts that Mal 1:11 “provides for the possibility of offerings in a way which explicitly avoids Jerusalem, and treats the nations as better examples of proper attitudes than YHWH’s own people.” Thus, Nogalski at
Not least among the interpretive obstacles is the successive use of two hop’al participles, מָכֵּסָר and מַשָּׁ, a sequence, as Hill notes, “both awkward and rare.” A plurality of interpreters, following LXX, θυμίαμα προσάγεται, read מָכֵּסָר as a substantive with מַשָּׁ as its predicate: “incense is brought forward.” Considerable debate remains, however, with regard to the temporal orientation of the phrase, whether present or future. In the scholarly literature on the verse, five interpretations compete for dominance. All seek to provide historical or theological explanations for the claim that “my name is great among the nations, and in every shrine incense is brought” (Mal 1:11), while reconciling this apparent commendation of “the nations” with the indictment of Edom in 1:5.

For the sake of clarity, I shall first summarize each of the main scholarly approaches to the verse, and then discuss their relative merits.

**Interpretation 1:**

Mal 1:11ff is a late “universalistic” interpolation into an originally wholly “exclusivistic” text.

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first identifies a possible prescription for cultic worship of Yhwh outside of Jerusalem. At the same time, by saying that the prophet holds up the nations as “better examples of proper attitudes” in comparison with the prophet’s audience, Nogalski intimates that the passage is polemical. In his estimation, it is intended to “castigate particularists in Israel.” The picture becomes even more complicated when Nogalski asserts that Malachi 1:11 does not simply “provide for the possibility” of Yhwh worship outside of Jerusalem, but actually anticipates expansion of Yhwh-worship to “the nations.” As he says, “…Malachi 1:11… presumes YHWH’s name will be honored ‘among the nations’ who will make offerings to Yhwh in their land.” Nogalski, *Redactional Processes*, 272. It is not clear from Nogalski’s brief treatment of the passage whether he thinks Malachi envisions such expansion to the nations as an historical reality, or as an eschatological prospect, or why, for that matter, the prophet uses the participle muggāš rather than a finite verb with a future orientation.

28 Hill, *Malachi*, 188.

29 Ibid.

Interpretation 2:
Mal 1:11 reflects a territorial expansion of monotheism/worship of Yhwh into “the nations” in the fifth century B.C.E., a development the prophet wholly approves: “the passage seems to identify Yahweh, in His role as the one, Universal God, with all the deities of all nations, to represent Him as the sum-total of all gods. It is for this reason that all sacrifices, in all sanctuaries throughout the world, regardless of the names of the gods which the worshipers employ and to whom they thus direct these sacrifices, are actually offered to Yahweh-God. He is thus one with each foreign deity individually and with all of them collectively.”31 Perhaps Edom is evaluated differently than “the nations” in general because of the historic enmity between Judah and Edom.

Interpretation 3:
Mal 1:11 could refer to the offerings of diaspora Jews to Yhwh, that is, offerings brought by Judeans among the nations, “among the nations,” not by actual gentiles.32

Interpretation 4:
Mal 11:1 has a future, eschatological orientation, so there is no conflict between present enmity with Edom, and the future “cultic expansion” of Yhwh-worship to the nations.33

Interpretation 5:
The cultic offerings of the nations in honor of Yhwh in 1:11 indicate not the nations’ piety, but, as it were, the tribute owed by subject peoples to an “imperial” ruler. This reading eliminates the apparent contradiction between the deity’s treatment of Edom (1:5), and his acceptance of the nations’ sacrifices, and provides a more satisfying explanation for the specific cultic language used in 1:11. The power of Yhwh, not the commendable piety of gentiles, is the essential interest of the author of Malachi.

32 C.J. Swetnam argues “on the supposition that the synagogue was a functioning institution in the time of Malachi’s prophecy, Mal 1,11 would then fit naturally into an intelligible Sitz im Leben. It is a prophetic affirmation that the cult of the Diaspora Jews worshipping in their synagogues retains its value in relation to the temple sacrifices even when the temple sacrifices themselves are offered unworthily in Jerusalem.” C. J. Swetnam, “Malachi 1,11: an Interpretation” CBQ 31 (1969), 207.
33 Glazier-McDonald, Divine Messenger, 60.
Interpretation 1, the “later interpolation” explanation, falls short on grounds of lack of
evidence: the proponents of this view provide no textual or redactional basis on which to assert
that 1:11 is not original to the text other than its purported incongruity with 1:5 (the Edom
passage). Moreover, several recent studies of Mal 1:6-2:9 (the so-called “second disputation” of
Malachi) have demonstrated that the passage functions well as a literary unity. Fishbane in
particular has argued that the passage alludes to and interprets the Priestly Blessing of Numbers
6:23-27, “transforming the sacerdotal blessing into a curse…a veritable contrapuntal inversion of
the sound and sense of the official Priestly Blessing.”

“Interpretation 2” historicizes the reference to the ritual actions of “the nations,” asserting
that during the Persian era, a “growing tendency toward monotheistic belief” occurred in nearby
nations and that Malachi viewed this trend positively as “tantamount to the belief in the one true
God.” Lindblom summarizes this view, asserting that, in the Persian period,

worship of only one god, of the most high god, of the god of heaven, was widespread.
This tendency was observed by Malachi and he identified the worship of this god with
the worship of Yahweh, the god of Israel, regarded as the god of the universe.

The possibility that Malachi is commending those who worship a (to them) unknown
god, has fallen out of favor in recent years. Peter Verhoef points out that “the pure sacrifices are
being offered lišmî, ‘to my name,’ and this statement cannot be made applicable to the idolatry of

34 Fishbane, 334.
35 Viberg, 300.
“expansion of monotheism” theory differ on whether specifically Yahwistic monotheism is meant, or whether
the prophet commends the development of a sort of generic, more or less monotheistic, interest in “the God of
heaven” during the Persian era.
the heathen,” even those who worshipped the “god of heaven.” Similarly, the possibility that Malachi is commending the expansion of proselytism by the adherents of Yhwh is equally dubious.

With regard to the possibility that Malachi invokes the worship of diaspora Jews in 1:11, (“Interpretation 3”) several objections must be raised. First, the vocabulary employed is not normal sacrificial terminology. The hiphil form of נָבַשׁ “is never used for the presentation of offerings of incense” to Yhwh, a cultic practice in which diaspora Jews may or may not have engaged. Might the prophet here refer to worship of Yhwh in diaspora temples, as the word מַעֲלָה might intimate, e.g., at Elephantine, Mt. Gerizim or in Lachish? Possibly; but this sprinkling of sites of worship would hardly seem to merit the use of the geographical merism, “from sunrise to sunset.” With regard to the possibility that the cultic terms are metaphors for synagogue prayer in the diaspora, the paucity of evidence for such practices or for the institution of the synagogue as early as the fifth century, undermines the interpretation. Finally, גוים refers not to

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38 See the extensive critique in Verhoef, 224-32.
39 Viberg, 302. On the other hand, Malachi does use the hip‘il of נבשׁ to refer to the bringing forward of (non-incense) sacrifices (1:7, 8, 3:3), so the usage may simply be the prophet’s idiosyncrasy.
40 David Vanderhooft argues for the meaning of מַעֲלָה as “sanctuary” or “sacred place” in 2 Sam 7:10 and adduces a plethora of biblical and comparative examples for this understanding of the noun. Vanderhooft, “Dwelling Beneath the Sacred Place: A Proposal for Reading 2 Samuel 7:10,” JBL 118 (1999): 628-30.
41 The meaning of the phrase is “from east to west.” See Pss 50:1; 113:3; Isa 45:6, 59:19. Temporal interpretations of the phrase (“from sunrise to sunset,” i.e., “from age to age”) do not take into account the parallel phrase מַעֲלָה מַעֲנָה, which must refer to geographic locations.
42 See Lee I. Levine, The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 33-34: “the emergence of the Judean synagogue was not the outcome of any specific event or crises, but rather a gradual development during the Persian and Hellenistic periods. It is impossible to offer a specific date for what was a process that transpired in various locales sometime between the fifth and the first centuries B.C.E.” Similar difficulties apply to discussions of the synagogue in the diaspora. The earliest epigraphic and papyrological evidence for the proseuche (house of prayer) in Ptolemaic Egypt dates to the
geographical territories, but to non-Judean polities, effectively excluding the likelihood that 1:11 refers to the practices of geographically dispersed Judeans.43

“Interpretation 4” reads Mal 1:11 as referring to an eschatological reality. Proponents of this interpretation assert that the use of the passive participles may intimate that a future, not present, orientation is intended. The prophet, such interpreters claim, envisions an eschatological era when “all nations will acknowledge Israel’s greatness.”44 Thus, the worship by gentiles of Yhwh belongs to the future age of Israel’s vindication and political/religious ascendance. It should be noted, however, that the passage as a whole, which remonstrates against the slipshod treatment of sacrificial rituals at the Temple in Jerusalem by the Jerusalem priesthood, is entirely concerned with present behaviors. The hop’al participle מַשְׁמַג can imply a future orientation, but there is no convincing basis within the passage for a shift from an indictment of present priestly inadequacy to an eschatological vision of the worship of Yhwh by the nations. The only reason to read an eschatological orientation into the passage is that to attribute such openness to gentiles by Malachi in “the present” is even more preposterous. As Viberg puts it, “it is…mere ideological improbability…that has forced some scholars to place these offerings in the future.”45

The fact that, unlike other such projections, Mal 1:11 contains no notion of the nations’ pilgrimage to Jerusalem also argues against the eschatological interpretation. When “the nations” worship Yhwh (or entreat his favor) in other prophetic eschatological texts, they

[footnotes]
44 Glazier-McDonald, Divine Messenger, 56, note 37.
45 Viberg, 306.
invariably do so in Jerusalem (e.g. Mic 4:2, Isa 2:3, Jer 3:17, Zech 8:22). Moreover, the identification of the passage as eschatological may derive in part from some readers’ tendency to interpret Mal 1:11 by way of the New Testament, as in R. Pautrel’s comment that the universal veneration of Yhwh envisioned in 1:11, “ne deviendra possible que par la substitution d’une loi nouvelle à l’ancienne, disons au temps de l’ère messianique.” 46

The unsatisfactory interpretations of Mal 1:11 described above illustrate a weakness in the historical-critical approach to the prophets, namely, the frequent tendency to overlook the “metaphorical character… of prophetic texts.” 47 As Roy Melugin has remarked, “poetic discourse,” such as appears in Mal 1:11, “[shapes] a world of its own… strikingly independent in its referential function.” 48 When interpreters “cannot discover the historical situations which lie behind” prophetic texts, it is frequently because the prophet has created “a fictive ‘world’ markedly different” from the “real world.” 49 Desire to assign a historical reality to Malachi’s description of “incense brought forth among the nations,” I suspect, has caused readers to ask the wrong questions. Interpretations that seek to identify about whom Malachi is speaking—diaspora Jews? gentile proselytes? worshippers of Ahura Mazda?—fail to ask the more pertinent question: why is Malachi speaking about the proper disposition toward Yhwh “among the nations” in the course of his withering criticism of the priestly class of Jerusalem?

49 Ibid.
When Mal 1:11 is read within its immediate context, the main issue is not who is worshipping Yhwh where, but how Yhwh is worshipped in Jerusalem, with ritual propriety or not (see Mal 1:7, 8, 10, 12-14). The prophet here seeks to impress on those who skimp on or profane Temple offerings that they are wholly in the wrong. Nogalski is, therefore, to some extent correct when he describes Mal 1:11 as “intended to castigate.”50 The question we must ask, however, is whether, as Nogalski and others hold, the purpose of the verse is merely to shame the Jerusalem priests by pointing out the present good behaviors of the nations. Given that there is no evidence for the expansion of Yhwh-worship “among the nations” in the early Persian era, or for the idea that the prophet might have viewed worship of “the God of heaven” as roughly equivalent to worship of Yhwh,51 it seems that such a contrast would ring hollow. Indeed, an assertion of the nations’ piety might well evoke more ironic laughter than examination of conscience. Even if the contrast is intentionally hyperbolic, and intended merely to convey that the nations, at least, “are dedicated and sincere in their religion and in this respect serve as an example to Israel,”52 it is difficult to imagine that sincere worship of other gods would evoke a positive notice from Malachi under any circumstance.53 How then, might the reference to the nations have been intended and apprehended?

52 Viberg, 307.
We now turn to “Interpretation 5” which approaches the verse (and indeed, the whole topic of prophetic universalism) from a different angle. Åke Viberg argues that the references to reverence for Yhwh by gentiles in Malachi 1:11,14, are intended to command the increased allegiance of the Jerusalemite priesthood by emphasizing the deity’s sovereignty.\textsuperscript{54} In all of the material relating to gentiles in Malachi 1, the supremacy of the deity is continually underscored: Malachi 1:5 and 1:11 extol the “greatness” of Yhwh’s name either “beyond the borders of Israel” (1:5) or “among the nations” (1:11) respectively.\textsuperscript{55} In every case, reference is made to the nations’ recognition of Yhwh’s greatness using verbal or adjectival forms of the root נָבַל: the form of the verb employed in 1:5, נודל, specifically connotes the deity’s “demonstration of power in an international mode.”\textsuperscript{56} A further indication of Yhwh’s international dominion appears in Malachi 1:14, in which, having indicted the priests’ neglect of their offices, the deity returns to the subject of “the nations”: “because I am a great king, says the LORD of hosts, my name is revered among the nations.”\textsuperscript{57} The metaphor of Yhwh as “great king,” in verse 14, specifically denotes the deity’s international “authority and dominion.”\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{54} Viberg, 308-314.
\textsuperscript{55} Viberg, 309-10.
\textsuperscript{56} Petersen, Malachi, 173.
\textsuperscript{58} Viberg, 310. The sanction for Yhwh’s “international dominion” lies in ancient Israel’s creation theology. J.J.M. Roberts provides a succinct overview: “Yahweh’s imperial rule is rooted in creation; it is anterior to and, therefore, not dependent on Israel, the Davidic monarchy, or the fate of Jerusalem. God’s authority over the
In Viberg’s analysis, the purport of the references to the nations is that, “Yhwh is the great king who should be worshipped as such… verse 11 provides the basis for the demands that YHWH makes regarding proper cultic practice in vv. 7-10” (Viberg’s italics). That is, the clauses which correlate the nations’ acknowledgement of Yhwh’s greatness, and their consequential pious actions, (“because my name is great among the nations…a pure offering is brought forward”(1:11) and “…because I am a great king…my name is reverenced among the nations.” (1:14), provide a warrant for Yhwh’s total sovereignty over the Jerusalemite priesthood.

One might even translate מָגשׁ as “should be brought forward.” That is, if the priestly class plays its proper role, then international acknowledgment of Yhwh should be forthcoming. If the Jerusalemite priestly class abdicates its responsibilities, the sovereignty of Yhwh is, as it were, subverted from within. As Viberg puts it, “the all-encompassing dominion of YHWH…functions as the authoritative basis for the…demands regarding the cult.”61 In Viberg’s reading, then, Malachi 1:11 functions as “a sleeping metaphor”62 in which the other nations arises out of the fact that he created the whole world, including these nations, not out of Israel’s historical conquest of them (Pss 95:2-5; 96:3-10). The implication of this theology is that God as creator allotts to the nations their places in the world and continues to guide their destinies quite apart from any direct connection between them and Israel (cf. Deut 32:8-9 and Psalm 82).” See Roberts, “The Enthronement of Yhwh and David: The Abiding Theological Significance of the Kingship Language of the Psalms,” CBQ 64 (2002):680.

59 Viberg, 315.
60 Significant controversy surrounds how to understand the two instances of כי, as Viberg acknowledges, 309, note 29. A minority of scholars take כי emphatically; several have proposed to emend כי to כְּ, as Petersen,176, does.
61 Viberg, 309.
62 By “sleeping metaphor,” Viberg, 308 means that when the phrase about incense offerings brought by the nations is taken literally, “some sort of incongruity emerges” the solution to which may reside in “recognizing that the author is using the figurative language of metaphor.” When a literal interpretation becomes
greatness of Yhwh is reflected in the behaviors of “the nations,” whose actions establish them, metaphorically, as loyal, or, more accurately, submissive, subjects of “the king.” Thus, the mention of the nations’ offerings to Yhwh is wholly rhetorical: “the nations are merely used as an instrument to enhance the image of YHWH as the reigning God”63 who “deserves the cultic recognition of all mankind,”64 not least that of his own priestly adherents. Anything less than the full allegiance of the Jerusalemite priesthood undermines the dominion of the deity from within.

Viberg’s interpretation accounts for the comments about “the nations” in Mal 1:11 and 14 within the immediate context of the critique of the Jerusalemite priesthood. It does not depend on dubious assertions about increasing monotheism among gentiles in the Persian era, or on reference to Judean shrines in diaspora locales. Indeed, Viberg’s work on Malachi 1 leads to the conclusion that the “inclusivism” that readers frequently point to in Mal 1:11 might really be better characterized as an idealized, rhetorical vision of “cultic imperialism,” intended to impel Malachi’s audience toward a fuller embrace of its own status as Yhwh’s particular vassal.

**Yhwh’s sovereignty and the sailors in Jonah 1**

This understanding of the question of Malachi’s treatment of the nations proves useful for understanding the depiction of the gentile sailors of Jonah 1. Just as Nogalski (and others) discern in Malachi an intimation of a “universalistic” theology with a “positive attitude” toward gentiles, so with regard to Jonah, a major interpretive trend has been to remark on the author’s

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63 Viberg, 315.
64 Viberg, 316.
openness to gentiles as revealed by the piety of the sailors. A subset of that interpretation holds that the putative positive portrayal of the gentile sailors in particular is intended to contrast with the negative depiction of the prophet Jonah; the sailors are said to “provide the reader with images which contrast with the prophet’s stubborn and ultimately self-serving attitude.” The purport of the putative contrast is to “confront the narrow nationalism of the Jews and [show] that God’s mercy and forgiveness were offered to the Gentiles, the enemies of Israel.”

What I wish to argue, however, is that the same misapprehension that underlies many of the prevailing interpretations of Mal 1:11 is also operative in much of the scholarship on “Jonah’s gentiles.” That is, as demonstrated above, readers of Mal 1:11 have sometimes seen the references to gentiles as Malachi’s actual interest. In fact, however, it is contextually evident that these positive references are subordinate to the prophet’s main purpose, namely, to impress upon the audience the awesome extent of Yhwh’s sphere of influence, which the noncompliant priesthood threatens to undermine or diminish. The “nations” serve merely as a rhetorical foil, not as an actual exemplar of proper service to Yhwh.

The function of the sailors in Jonah 1 is similar: their purpose in the narrative is to act as vehicles through whom the power of Yhwh is displayed, and against whom the struggle between

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65 Kenneth M. Craig, Jr., *A Poetics of Jonah*, 67. The tendency to castigate Jonah by means of the sailors’ purported piety and selflessness recurs very frequently in the literature on Jonah.
66 Grant-Henderson, 101. Barbara Bakke Kaiser, 5, remarks on the long-term implications of the overly general “Bad Jonah v. Good Sailors” interpretation in much Christian commentary on Jonah: “the sailors and Ninevites coalesce as ‘Gentiles’ and then ‘proto-Christians.’ The generalizing reader proceeds to magnify the positive qualities of the sailors and the Ninevites so they can function as the representatives of ‘good’ in a dualistic morality tale: Jonah the Other, the narrow-minded Jew who rejects mercy, versus the saintly Gentiles who convert to the gospel of universal love.”
67 As also in Ezek 3:2-6.
Yhwh and Jonah is cast into high relief. Indeed, as Judson Mather has observed, “...sailors...are not actors; they are (like the big fish) props.”68 The sailors, despite their sympathetic portrayal, are forcefully subjected to the sovereignty of Yhwh, not to show that “the Jew and non-Jew are equals, turning to the same god...and experiencing his saving acts,”69 but to underscore Jonah’s unique independence within a world wholly dominated by Yhwh. Indeed, as Mather has remarked, “God appears only to Jonah. Other figures who appear in the story—sailors and Ninevites—are related to God’s activity only through Jonah.”70 Keller observes similarly that

les marins prient avec ferveur et ils offrent des sacrifices—mais Dieu rest muet....Jonas prie—et Dieu lui répond....Jonas seul peut entendre Dieu...Jonas est l’unique intermédiaire entre Dieu et les hommes.”71

In a narrative world in which human beings, fish, plants and animals conform to the power of Yhwh, Jonah alone resists the divine activity. In this light, a new way of perceiving the prophet emerges, one that sees Jonah as the only true “actor” (other than Yhwh) in the story.72 The question naturally occurs, then, whether in his flight (1:2) and subsequent journeys, the prophet Jonah exhibits obnoxious, blameworthy disobedience to Yhwh, or “utter fidelity to himself ...

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68 Mather, 284.
69 Syrên, 14.
70 Mather, 287.
72 Serge Frolov’s article, “Returning the Ticket: God and His Prophet in the Book of Jonah,” JSOT 86 (1999), 85-105, is a remarkable instance of what might be described (with no disrespect intended) as a revisionist portrait of Jonah and of Yhwh. Frolov, 92, describes interactions between Jonah and God as follows: the deity "treats Jonah as an impersonal device, a useful but expendable flesh-and-blood robot; when this robot refuses to obey, troubleshooting measures are taken, but not of a verbal nature. Not a single attempt is made to explain, to reassure, to persuade, or at least to deliver a threat... Jonah’s ‘word’ of refusal (4:2) falls on deaf ears.” The ironic result is that Frolov sees Yhwh as ruthless and violent in his pursuit of mercy.
meant to arouse the reader’s sympathy rather than derision.”73 We will consider that matter below. First, however, an examination of several features of Jonah 1 will support my contention that the sailors’ essential function is to reflect the power of Yhwh. Contrary to interpretations that see the sailors as Jonah’s superiors in theological understanding and moral behavior, I argue that the inner lives of the sailors are never revealed, and their actions are ambiguous.

The divine display of force is frequently deemed to have had an improving effect on its objects, the sailors.74 Readers frequently commend the sailors for their “sudden conversion to Yahwism”75 and for their recognition that “only Jonah’s God has the power to give them peace.”76 The term “conversion” is highly problematic; there is certainly no implication in Jonah 1 that the sailors, at the end of Jonah 1, are henceforth going to abjure other gods, or adopt Judean practices or beliefs. Rather, in the aftermath of the storm, when the sailors fulfill their vows and offer sacrifices to Yhwh, the sailors behave as conscientious, pragmatic polytheists, worshipping the god who brought them out of — and into—peril.

Readers who perceive “Jonah’s God” primarily as the one who “gives [the sailors] peace” (rather than the one who hurled a terrific stormwind at them) are unlikely to acknowledge that

73 Simon, xxi.
74 Phyllis Trible is an exception, commenting that, in the course of the storm in Jonah 1, “divine wrath misses its target, and the innocent suffer.” Trible, “A Tempest in a Text,” 188.
75 Arnold J. Band, “Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody,” Proof 10 (1990), 186. See also Kim, 504. Blenkinsopp, 270, also applies the term to the Ninevites, asserting that “they underwent a thorough conversion...that involved the acceptance by the entire city of the Jewish religion.” Terence E. Fretheim’s assertion, Message of Jonah, (Augsburg, 1977), 83, that, “the heathen respond...just as good Israelites would, praying and offering sacrifices” fails to recognize that “the heathen” had as finely tuned responses to perceived divine action as did “good Israelites.” Cultic activities were universal in the ancient Near East, particularly in response to distressing circumstances, such as imminent death by drowning. See discussion of ancient nautical religious practices in Sasson, 138-40.
76 Sasson, 105.
the deity is “both unnerving and unthwartable,” two qualities I see as essential to the depiction of Yhwh in Jonah.⁷⁷ Indeed, to say that “the sailors listened to Jonah with “an earnestness and a sensitivity that would not have been the case if the sea were calm and all was well,” is to put a charitable spin on the events of Jonah 1.⁷⁸ When readers begin with a hermeneutic of “theological idealization,”⁷⁹ the sailors’ terror and confusion becomes the catalyst for their laudable “earnestness and sensitivity,” and the “unthwartable” portrait of the deity that the author of Jonah is at pains to convey is glossed over.

In contrast to the rose-colored interpretations of Jonah 1 described above, Wolff remarks that the hallmarks of the sailors’ experiences are “dread,” “terror” and “horror,” of both the prophet whose action has brought the full force of divine wrath upon them, and of the deity who desists from wrath only when the sailors have delivered Jonah to the sea.⁸⁰ Indeed, the sailors’ initial fear at the outbreak of the storm (1:5), intensifies into “great dread” in Jon 1:10, when Jonah admits his identity, and, perhaps more importantly, reveals the name of his god. Ironically, the stilling of the sea after the ejection of Jonah from the ship evokes yet greater terror of the deity among the sailors in 1:16:

Although this final instance of the sailors’ fear is sometimes characterized as

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⁷⁷ Mather, 286-87.
⁷⁸ Ibid.
⁷⁹ Ibid.
⁸⁰ Wolff, 116-17.
⁸¹ Brettler, God is King, 95, points out that fear is the appropriate reaction of subjects to human kings: “the king was extremely powerful; anyone who made him unhappy could anticipate banishment (Amos 7:12), imprisonment (Jer 37:21; 38:5) or at worst, could be killed (1 Sam 22:16 et al.).”
As Sasson puts it, “the sailors now understand everything about God and divine power,” an understanding that, perforce, goes beyond that connoted by the term “reverence.”

The submission of the sailors to Yhwh is underscored through several additional narrative details. Their prayer, as they prepare to cast Jonah overboard, intimates that even as they accede to the apparent will of Jonah’s God, they are far from certain that their action will not evoke further divine displeasure: "Please, Yhwh, we pray, do not let us die on account of this man's life…" (Jon 1:14). Two particles of entreaty occur in quick succession (אלהי/אלהים יוהי), one of which, אנה, “frequently appears at the opening of laments.” The sailors’ language thus emphasizes the compulsion under which they act. Finally, as they lower Jonah into the waves, the sailors indicate that essentially, they are vehicles through whom Yhwh’s will is accomplished: “…for you, Yhwh, have done as you have wished” (כיהוה חפצתי את אתה עשית). In our final glimpse of the crew, in the calm after the storm, we find the sailors engaging in formal recognition of Yhwh’s role in the recent unpleasantness: “they offered a sacrifice to Yhwh and made vows.” (1:16) In light of the sailors’ considerable duress, it is evident that these cultic actions do not constitute “conversion,” so much as they represent an

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82 Sasson, 120.
83 Sasson, 138.
85 My translation does not reflect the Masoretic punctuation of the verse. Sasson’s rendering, 134-35, “Indeed you are the Lord, and whatever you desire, you accomplish” adheres to Masoretic punctuation, and turns the final clause into a confessional statement. I take the כי as causal, underscoring the sailors’ insistence on their innocence: “do not hold innocent blood against us, for you, Yhwh, have done as you have wished.”
86 Contra Mather, 285, who argues that the prayers, sacrifices and vows that the sailors offer constitute a “burlesque of piety...attributed to foils and non-Israelites.”
acknowledgement of the deity’s greatness and gratitude for their narrow escape. The sailors recognize that Yhwh, in the words of Malachi 1:14, is a “great king,” but not because he gives great garden parties.

Several other elements in Jonah 1 emphasize the incomparable—and intimidating—sovereignty of the deity. For example, Jonah’s flight westward toward Tarshish, (1:3) when he has been directed eastward to Nineveh, can indicate not only his absolute opposition to the deity’s plan, but also the extent of the divine reach. In effect, these toponyms provide a literal rendering of the merism “from west to east,” which denotes the universal extent of divine power in Malachi 1:11.87 Similarly, when Jonah himself describes Yhwh as the god “who made the sea and the dry land,” the phrase is not only an ironic reference to the futility of Jonah’s attempted escape by sea, but “can merismatically refer to all that is found on this planet… Jonah is telling the sailors that God is…the ruler over the whole universe.”88

The power of Yhwh—over wind, sea, people, and inanimate objects—is intended to be seen as incontrovertible in Jonah. The force of Yhwh’s stormwind is such that, even the inanimate ship, briefly anthropomorphized, "thought it would break up" (1:4).89 It is worth noting in this context that Psalm 48, a “Zion hymn”90 that emphasizes that Yhwh is a

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88 Sasson, 119.
89 Another interesting anthropomorphic, or perhaps theomorphic, moment occurs in Jonah 1:15; the use of the verb יזעף for the "raging" of the sea “denotes emotions attributed to kings and to God.” Sasson, 137. Trible, “A Tempest in a Text,” 189, remarks on the strangeness of this characterization: “the sea...responds to human sacrifices...” by becoming still when Jonah is submerged. The sea thus seems to be more of an independent actor than are the fish of Jonah 2 or the plant of Jonah 4, both of which are directly controlled by the deity. However, 1:4 makes clear that Yhwh is the force behind the sea’s raging.
90 Roberts, 685.
“great king” (48:2), compares the panic of other kings to ships of Tarshish shattering under the force of the east wind: בורח קדים תבשר אוניא תרשיש (48:8). Jonah 1 thus seems to be almost a dramatization of this simile: the gentiles run amok in panic and terror, while only Jonah, the original “God-fearer” is unfazed—and possibly unimpressed—by the show of force.

Only with respect to their reaction to the divine storm can a dichotomous portrait be drawn between the sailors and Jonah. Otherwise, ambiguity inheres in the characterization of Jonah and the sailors. Thus, Simon views Jonah’s request to be thrown overboard as heroic self-sacrifice,91 while Wolff describes it as “a strange and sinister death wish.”92 Does Jonah wish to be thrown overboard to save the sailors, as Simon contends?93 Or does he engage in a “final self-serving act, a grand finale to a life of disobedience”?94 Both motives are possible because the author simply does not supply sufficient information to answer the questions. The “inner world” of the sailors is similarly impenetrable: when they attempt to row to shore, is their action motivated solely by their desire to save Jonah’s life, as is frequently maintained?95 Or are they, like bail bondsmen, seeking to return Jonah to the jurisdiction he has fled? Or do they attempt to

91 Simon, xxi.
92 Wolff, 119.
93 See also Mather, 287, “Jonah’s choice is not one of looking out for himself or looking out for others” but “is one of whether or not to bring others down with him.” In contrast, Trible, “A Tempest in a Text,” 189: “with a seeming altruism that masks the ulterior motive to flee from God, Jonah recommends that the sailors toss him overboard.”
94 J.C. Holbert, “Deliverance Belongs to Yahweh: Satire in the Book of Jonah,” JSOT 21 (1981), 68: “Jonah’s request to be thrown into the sea is hardly an offer of self-sacrifice. His escape from Yahweh is being foiled; death, the final descent, is the only option now.”
reach shore solely to avoid incurring bloodguilt, as their prayer in 1:14 seems to indicate, even though to row toward shore in a storm is itself a kind of deathwish? 96

In each case, self-interest and altruism are equally possible motives for Jonah’s and the sailors’ actions. The purpose of these observations is to show that the narrative of Jonah provides only about half of the story, while readers’ responses fill in the “gaps and dissonances” in very disparate ways. The sole important contrast between the sailors and Jonah resides in the fact that only Jonah seeks ultimately to countermand the will of Yhwh, even, apparently, to the point of death, while the sailors seek to appease the unknown god at any cost. The question is whether readers are intended to perceive in Jonah’s actions a character possessed of “moral grandeur” and “fundamental seriousness,” whose objections are treated seriously,97 or a myopic underachiever whose lamentable “disobedience” has arisen because “his theology has gone bad.”98 The answer will depend on what each reader brings to the text (my own consideration of this question appears in the following chapter).

**Divine Justice in Malachi**

The depiction of Yhwh as king takes as a given that the deity has both the right and the responsibility to administer justice: Yhwh, “because of [his] vast power,” can “rectify wrongs and unfairness.”99 Whether Yhwh punishes the accused or vindicates the victimized, Yhwh’s

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96 Sasson, *Jonah*, 141-2: “the sailors hit upon another stratagem by which to save their skin...but...steering a ship to shore when in the midst of a storm is a foolish, even suicidal enterprise...The sailors...could have been reasoning that...it would prove them no longer willing to shelter God’s errant prophet.”

97 So Simon, xxii.


99 Brettler, 115.
abilities “vastly exceed that of any mortal.”\textsuperscript{100} Brettler asserts that “in no text which questions God’s justice is he depicted as a king.”\textsuperscript{101} However, I want to argue that both Malachi and Jonah hold the image of Yhwh as king in tension with the problem of the perceived lack of divine justice, setting up an implied question that requires resolution: we know Yhwh is king, so why is Yhwh not just?

Readers of Malachi and Jonah have long noted that both books exhibit a passionate interest in the question of divine justice. Even a brief encounter with the book of Malachi reveals that for prophet’s audience, despair and hopelessness, generated in part by a lack of confidence in Yhwh, seem to have been the prevailing moods. According to Andrew E. Hill, Malachi’s oracles reflect an era of “pre-Ezran decline,” when “the despair and doubt triggered in the restoration community by the apparent failure of the prophetic visions of Haggai and Zechariah soon characterized the ‘intellectual disposition’ of the era.”\textsuperscript{102} While Hill is somewhat dismissive of “a disposition that pouted that Yahweh had forgotten his covenant with Israel,”\textsuperscript{103} he admits that there were immediate causes for such disillusionment: “the stark reality of Persian domination and the problems of mere survival in a city surrounded by hostile foreigners” were very likely contributing factors to the societal malaise reflected in Malachi.\textsuperscript{104} More specifically, Petersen cites the “militarization” of Judah by Persia which “represented a drain on Judahite

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Hill, 83, note 5.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. The domination of Yehud by “hostile foreigners” was not the only cause for woe in the early-mid fifth century; lack of economic development also is likely to have contributed to Judean malaise: see note 6 of this chapter.
\textsuperscript{104} Hill, 83. See also Hill, 75: “hardship and poverty precipitated by the sagging local economy apparently persisted well into the governorship of Nehemiah...”
resources.”105 In light of such circumstances, it is little wonder that “post-exilic Yehud feels little compulsion to affirm Yahweh as sovereign while they languish under the Persian yoke.”106 We find reflections of the mood of the populace in the questions and exclamations that the prophet/Yhwh quotes his interlocutors as saying: “‘why should we walk around like mourners?’” (Mal 3:14) and, “‘those who do evil are built up—they test God and get away!’” (Mal 3:15) and, “‘all who do evil are good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them’” (Mal 2:17).

The last assertion is remarkable in that “the author of Malachi...” has “taken formulae” about Yhwh’s justice and “turned them inside out,”107 exactly inverting the sentiments expressed in, for example, Deut 25:16: (“all who do these things, all who do injustice, are repugnant to Yhwh your God”). Wordplay underscores the vehemence of the accusation. As Petersen observes, where we would expect to find that “everyone who does evil is an abomination to the Lord,” we have in Mal 2:17, not tôbēbh, abomination, but tôbh, good: “the purport of the transformation is to characterize Yahweh as perverse.”108 Fretheim asserts that these outbursts exhibit “a basic cynicism regarding the Word of God” arising from the non-fulfillment of the oracles of Haggai and Zechariah.109 But to characterize the speakers as merely cynical is to fail to appreciate the contrast between “what is” and “what should be” that Malachi’s audience appears to have experienced. Fishbane captures

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105 Petersen, 19-20.
106 Hill, 170.
107 Petersen, 208.
108 Ibid.
the nature of the problem: “cognitive crises [arise] when valued oracles have not been actualized, when their manifest meaning is cast in doubt, or when events seem to refute them.”

It is evident that confidence in basic theological premises about the nature of Yhwh, was, for Malachi’s audience, at an all-time low. In the course of his brief oracle, the prophet confronts questions about “the permanence of Yahweh’s care for Israel, the need to venerate Yahweh alone, the justice of Yahweh, the importance of tithing, justice and hope for those who fear Yahweh.”

The underlying bond among these specific matters is the audience’s concern that the deity makes no distinction “between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him” (Malachi 3:18). The “cynicism” of Malachi’s audience is thus rooted in their apparent sense that commitment to Yhwh is unavailing: they’ve tried it and it doesn’t work.

Malachi’s interlocutors are not alone in their discontent. The deity too is disgusted by moral and ritual chaos exhibited in Jerusalem, and appalled at the questioning of his credibility:

‘A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is the awe of me?’ says Yhwh of Hosts (Mal 1:6).

Both parties, the people (the priests of the Jerusalem temple in particular) and the deity, are depicted as addressing each other in tones of aggrieved disappointment. Petersen characterizes the form of this “immediate verbal encounter between the deity and other parties” as

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110 Fishbane, 445.
111 Petersen, 33.
“diatribe.”112 Petersen’s description of Hellenistic diatribe captures the modes of address and indignant tenor that we find in Malachi:

the other party was quoted or referred to in imaginative ways by the primary speaker. Questions were prominent, used as a way to allow the speaker to make a point. Hyperbolic claims were often put into the mouth of the persons presumably being quoted…the discourse was brief, the language vivid, and the intention often didactic.113

In Malachi, such stylized discourse paints a picture of total covenantal breakdown. Mal 1:13 illustrates the point: Yhwh, the speaker, begins by quoting the collective voice of the priests of Jerusalem:

‘How tiresome,’ you say, and you sigh. You bring stolen, lame, and sick animals—you bring them for minḥah—and I’m supposed to be pleased? (Mal 1:13)

What we have in Malachi, apparently, is a failure to communicate. The priests refuse, or perhaps, are unable, to provide the proper offerings, and the deity refuses to accept what they do bring.114 The result is a dangerous impasse: Yhwh says, “I will curse your blessings!” (Mal 2:2). There is a certain ironic circularity here: the priests’ sense of futility (“How tiresome…”) seems to contribute to their dereliction of duty. Their sins of omission have begun to evoke the consequences inherent in “disobedience to the stipulations of Israel’s covenant,” namely, even greater futility than that which they currently perceive.115

112 Petersen, 29.
113 Petersen, 31. Petersen, 31 note 90, makes clear that he is not claiming Greek influence on Malachi’s use of this form: “the claim is one of generic similarity. Two societies in the eastern Mediterranean region used similar forms…to address important topics.”
114 Glazier-McDonald, Divine Messenger, 14, accounts for the “contempt” of the priests for the altar of Yhwh: “poor harvests, (Mal 3:11), trouble from neighbors (Neh 4:2f), and the general poverty induced by Persian economic policy (cf. Neh 5) were the factors directly responsible…” It is salutary to remember that what we have in Malachi is not the “direct speech” of the priests, but the deity’s characterization (as delivered by the prophet) of the priests’ speech.
115 Hill, Malachi, 18. See Deut 28 on “futility” curses.
The job of the prophet was not merely to observe and record events, but to intervene and mediate between Yhwh and Yehud. Since prophets, like the books that eventually bore their names, attempted to “educate or better socialize the communities that accepted them,” Malachi’s purpose must have been actively to resolve the gridlock between priests/people and Yhwh. He must refute the positions that the interlocutors express, and propose a viable alternative to their worldview that will persuade his discouraged Judean audience that Yhwh is reliable, just, and fully worthy of their wholehearted veneration and commitment, including adherence to the stipulations of the covenant.

Malachi has two main strategies by which to effect the necessary changes in his audience’s attitude and behavior. First, he offers “a theology of Yahweh” that emphasizes the deity’s sovereignty (see above), his selection of Israel, and his “faithful and unchanging” nature (see 3:6). Secondly, as his oracle nears its finale, he invokes the prophetic trope of the “yôm Yhwh,” (3:17, 21, 23) making clear that, although the vindication of the righteous will come to pass, “the message of Yahweh’s love is not so much one of comfort as it is a warning.”

The Day of Yhwh has many and varied uses within prophetic literature. Amos provides the earliest reference to “the Day,” warning that the “Day” for which the people long will be

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116 Ben Zvi, Signs of Jonah, 2.
117 Hill, Malachi, 47.
“darkness not light” (5:18). Evidently, Amos is reworking an already current concept of “the Day” as a time of Yhwh’s intervention that would produce positive results for Israel:

if Amos condemns people in Northern Israel in his time who were looking forward to an occasion or event they referred to as ‘the Day of Yahweh’, then it must have formed part of a widespread popular expectation—otherwise his condemnation would have made no sense to his hearers.¹²⁰

Amos’ refutation of these expectations, John Barton notes, would have been like saying that “some terrible disaster was going to strike on Christmas Day.”¹²¹

Amos’ treatment of the Day, however, is atypical: indeed, (certain exceptions notwithstanding, such as Isaiah 2:12-17 and Joel 1:15), the “Day,” in the prophets, tends to connote “the transformation of the present world order into a state much more favourable to Israel.”¹²² Malachi’s probable near contemporary, Second Zechariah, depicts the Day in line with this mainstream understanding: the prophet anticipates that the “Day” will bring about the destruction of Israel’s enemies, and a subsequent eschatological pilgrimage of survivors from “the nations” to Jerusalem (see Zech 14, passim).¹²³
Malachi, however, is closer to Amos’ view. He proclaims a Day that will be “a time of scrutiny within Israel, a refinement and judgment with regard to cultic and social behavior (Mal 3:2b-5).” Unlike Amos, Malachi envisions not wholesale destruction, but separate treatment of the righteous and the unrighteous. Thus, in classic prophetic style, Malachi interprets “the Day” according to the specific needs and goals of his discourse.

To better grasp the purport of the “Day” passage in Mal 3:17-21, it is worth examining the narrative aside that precedes the introduction of the topic. Here the undifferentiated group of people previously beset by the conviction that “evildoers not only prosper…they escape!” (3:15) divides into factions: “those who feared Yhwh” set themselves apart from the larger group.

At that time, those who feared Yhwh spoke to each other; Yhwh took note, and heard. A book of remembrance was written before him for those who feared him and took thought for his name. And Yhwh of hosts said, ‘They will be mine on the day which I make my own, and I will take pity on them’ (Mal 3:16).

There are two important points to be made: first, it is evident that the despairing community initially includes even “those who feared Yhwh.” As Petersen puts it, “the ‘fearers’ are part of those who were in dialogue earlier.” To fear Yhwh, Hill remarks, here “connotes especially loyalty to Yahweh as the God of the covenant, moral response, obedience, and right

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125 Petersen, 222.
worship,” but these salutary qualities evidently have not conferred immunity from the doubt and despair that the times have produced. It is only through interaction with Yhwh, and conversation amongst themselves, that those who “fear Yhwh” appear to relinquish their reservations about the deity. Indeed, the “disputation” form vanishes at this point. The plaints and mutterings of the malcontented audience recede, and henceforth, only the voice of Yhwh speaks.  

Aaron Schart’s analysis of “the Day” in Malachi is cogent:

What Malachi really wants is to encourage a life according to the norms of the Torah. But he also needs to address the claim that such a life is futile. If Malachi cannot answer those questions, his demand to follow the Torah will go unheard. The coming day of Yahweh is not a single event in the far future and therefore irrelevant, but an event that in the dimension ‘before Yahweh’ already is reality.

Thus, the “Day,” which is already dawning, assures the righteous that “nothing escapes the just sentence of Yahweh.” Since the appearance of lack of distinction is the major issue that Malachi confronts, he emphasizes “refinement and judgment”—and vindication— within Yehud. The effect is that those who are now righteous begin proleptically to experience the differentiation for which they yearn. The utterance of Yhwh itself brings the “Day” into the present, i.e., initiates the process of judgment and vindication so that “the Day” becomes both

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126 Hill, 338.
127 Petersen, 222: “the mode of discourse is abandoned. Human conversation and divine admonition replace divine-human dialogue.”
128 Schart, 342.
129 Ibid.
130 Robert Carroll, When Prophecy Failed: Cognitive Dissonance in the Prophetic Traditions of the Old Testament (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 49: Prophets “provided their own interpretations of the traditions [they] inherited and often these interpretations conflicted with popular beliefs about them.”
“soon” and “now.” If the prophet’s strategy vis-à-vis “the Day” succeeds, it will “resolve the religious and moral issues central to” his audience.131

A closer examination of Malachi’s “Day” imagery in 3:18-20 is now possible. Addressing “those who fear” him, the deity asserts that on the “coming day” that “blazes like an oven” the justice of Yhwh will not be in doubt. On “that day” having identified the wicked, the deity will then dispose of them in such a way that their utter destruction will be assured:

כירה הנה הים בא בער повторי ויהי כליזים וכליעש רעשה קש ולו תאי אלהים הזה אמר יהוה צבאות:

Asher לארבון הזה שרש ואנה׃

‘For right now the day is coming, blazing like an oven-- and all the arrogant, and all who do evil, will become stubble. The coming day will consume them.’ says Yhwh of hosts, who will leave them neither root nor branch. (Malachi 3:19)

The central metaphor here, that of קש, “stubble,” may refer to any of three events or processes in the ancient Judean agricultural cycle. First, stubble is what would remain from the process of reaping a cereal crop with a sickle. These stalks would be available to grazing livestock, and so be “consumed.”132 Secondly, stubble may refer metaphorically to immature crops blasted by a scorching east wind; these plants would wither, turn black, die, and be swept away by the wind.133 Finally, the word קש is also used for the straw produced from the

132 King and Stager, 113.
133 Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Iron Age Israel: The Evidence from Archaeology and the Bible (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 159. This seems to be the use of קש meant in Isa 40:24: “They have hardly been sown, hardly been planted, hardly formed root or stem, when he blows upon them, and they dry up, and wind carries them away like stubble.”
The winnowing of harvested grain, which would be collected, dried, and used for kindling. The two latter connotations of הָשָׁם, both of which involve complete destruction of the plant by means of devouring heat, occur frequently in prophetic rhetoric. (See Isa 33:11, 47:14; Nah 1:10; Obad 18.) Isa 5:24 is representative: “Therefore, just as when a tongue of fire consumes stubble, as dry grass sinks to a flame, so their root will be like rot, and their bloom will go up like dust.”

It is difficult to say which kind of stubble is described in Malachi 3:19. The reference to flame conjures the image of stubble as kindling, while the reference to the destruction of the wicked “at the root” calls to mind the stubble created by the scorching east wind that desiccates young plants. That both modes of destruction may be operative in the same vision underscores the totality of devastation with which the wicked are threatened. These images, with their terrifying implications for the unrighteous, act both as a salve and a goad for Malachi’s Yhwh-fearers, assuring them of Yhwh’s justice and inspiring them to continued endurance.

**Divine Justice in Jonah**

The discussion thus far has established that Malachi used the image of the “Day of Yhwh” to console and motivate his audience, particularly those designated as “Yhwh-fearers.” It is now possible to ask how the topics explored above contribute to the interpretation of Jonah. First, the correspondences between the prophet Jonah and Malachi’s interlocutors are worth noting. Jonah asserts, in a “disputational” tone, that because the deity (apparently habitually) there seems to be no distinction drawn by Yhwh between the righteous and

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134 Borowski, 69.
unrighteous (4:2). It is notable as well that, in the course of lodging their complaints against Yhwh, the speakers in both Malachi and Jonah ironically appropriate conventional formulae about the nature of Yhwh. Malachi’s interlocutors rework the language found in Deuteronomy 25:16, while Jonah retains conventional terms of the “Divine Attributes Formula” to indict, rather than to exalt, the deity. The significance of such Torah literacy (I use the phrase loosely) in the depiction of Jonah and Malachi’s interlocutors should not be overlooked, as it demonstrates the status of the speakers as religious “insiders.” Indeed, just as “Yhwh-fearers” in Malachi are among those who question Yhwh’s faithfulness, so in Jonah, the prophet, in full flight from Yhwh, nevertheless identifies himself as one who “fears Yhwh” (Jon 1:9). Moreover, like the priests who offer blemished animals in Mal 1:12, Jonah refuses to comply fully with the demands of his role: in addition to the reluctance indicated by his initial flight (1:2), several commentators interpret Jonah’s “laconic and unappealing call… to the Ninevites” in 3:4 as indicating that the prophet complies with his commission in the most minimal way possible.

Despite Jonah’s initial resistance to Yhwh’s command, the deity seeks to resolve the prophet’s distress by means of an admonishing “last word” (Jon 4:10-11). Indeed, as I remarked in the introduction, the very existence of Jonah 4 and its sole focus on interactions between

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135 See also Hab 1:12 for another such ironic appropriation of cultic epithets.
136 Yehoshua Gitay, 201, 203, even suggests that the grammatically bizarre use of the nip’al participle in Jonah’s oracle (3:4) is intended to sabotage his chances of provoking the Ninevites to penitence; “the implied desire is that the Ninevites will dismiss his announcement as nonsense. In my view, Gitay exceeds the bounds of the evidence. That Jonah is unenthusiastic is certain; that he attempts to subvert the message commanded him by means of an odd grammatical construction is highly unlikely. Indeed, there is no indication that Jonah is doing anything other than proclaiming “the proclamation that I speak to you” (3:2).
Yhwh and Jonah, reveal that the heart of the book lies not in the scene of penitence in Jonah 3, but in the subsequent debate in Jonah 4. It should be noted as well that the day that greets Jonah in the book’s final scene includes the destruction of the unusual qîqāyôn plant (apparently) at its root, per the implied command of Yhwh (4:6); blazing heat driven by an east wind (4:8); and the withering of the plant’s leaves above Jonah’s head (4:8). The dual means of the plant’s destruction resonate with those described in Mal 3:19 (and Isa 5:24). These details, taken together, lead to the somewhat disorienting realization that Jonah 4:6-8 contains a literal rendition of the kind of yôm Yhwh envisioned by Malachi: a yôm Yhwh in microcosm. Like the “Yhwh-fearers” of Malachi, whose foretaste of the Day is conveyed verbally to them through prophetic pronouncements, Jonah also encounters “the Day”; the difference is that what is for the “Yhwh-fearers” figurative speech is for Jonah lived experience.

It is evident that Malachi’s yôm Yhwh is intended to support and encourage the “Yhwh-fearers,” and to fully resolve their concerns about Yhwh’s just governance. In the case of Malachi, it is evident that those harboring doubts about the deity or who are reluctant to comply with the requirements of Yhwh’s cult are not simply condemned or cast aside. To the contrary, Malachi seeks to persuade his audience, by a variety of techniques, to realign themselves with the divine program. Similarly, the prophet Jonah, while undoubtedly subjected to pressure to comply with his mission, is not simply indicted and condemned by means of an unflattering contrast with “pious gentiles.” Rather, as I will discuss in the two chapters that follow, close readings of Jonah’s רעה and of the qîqāyôn imagery provide an implied addendum to the sailors’ comment, “you, Yhwh have done what you wished.” (1:14) As I shall demonstrate, Jonah 4 adds
a temporal element to the statement of divine sovereignty—“you, Yhwh, do what you wish when you will”—that corresponds to the now/soon eschatological expectations of the Yhwh-fearers in Malachi.

**The Elijah Connection**

A final point of commonality between Malachi and Jonah lies in their allusions to the prophet Elijah. In Malachi 3:1, “the Elijah figure of forerunner announces the final installment of the eschatological plan ushering in the complete and permanent residence of Yahweh with his people.”\(^{137}\) However, the coda of Malachi, (3:22-24) which invokes Elijah by name (3:23), includes a threat against “the land” in which ןָה stands metonymically for the people of the land.\(^ {138}\) Thus Elijah is cast in Malachi as both agent of consolation and as enforcer. As herald of the eschaton, Elijah’s return will initiate the final opportunity for Judeans to reconcile “fathers to sons and sons to fathers, lest I strike the land with a curse.”\(^ {139}\)

There is little explicit connection in Malachi between the Elijah who will inaugurate the yôm Yhwh, and the prophetic figure known from Kings. In contrast, concrete allusions to the Elijah narrative suffuse the book of Jonah. Indeed, “there is no escaping the fact that the narrator is putting words into Jonah’s mouth taken from the Elijah tradition.”\(^ {140}\) Both prophets undertake a one day’s journey to a destination (the desert, in 1 Kgs 19:4; Nineveh, in Jon 3:4).

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\(^{139}\) There may be an indication in Zechariah 13:4 of the continued memory of Elijah in Yehud. Here it is predicted that in the day to come prophets will no longer put on “hairy mantles in order to deceive.” Petersen, *Malachi*, 127, thinks the phrase refers to the mantle that Jacob donned in order to deceive Isaac in Genesis 25:25, but an echo of Elijah’s mantle that was transferred to Elisha in 2 Kings 2:13 may also be present.

\(^{140}\) Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 168.
Both prophets benefit from the shade from a convenient shrub (Jonah 4:6; 1 Kings 19:4). Both lie down and sleep (1 Kgs 19:5; Jon 1:5), and both, when discouraged, use almost identical language when asking Yhwh to “take their lives” (Jon 4:3; 1 Kgs 19:4). Further, both prophets are twice questioned by the deity. (“What are you doing here Elijah?” in 1 Kgs 19:9 and 13. “Does it help to be angry?” in Jon 4:4, and “Are you really that angry about the plant?” in Jon 4:9.) Between each questioning episode, the deity provides or manipulates a variety of natural phenomena (1 Kgs 19:11-23; Jon 4:6-8), apparently for didactic purposes. When Elijah/Jonah fail to understand or respond to the proffered non-verbal lessons, Yhwh spells them out, instructing Elijah to “work in the mundane world” (1 Kings 19:15-18) and comparing Nineveh to the qîqāyôn (Jon 4:11).

Many readers conclude that the correspondences between Jonah and Elijah underscore Jonah’s negative qualities in comparison to his predecessor: “Jonah’s sullen death wish is surely a parody of Elijah’s profound discouragement.” Wolff’s take is more generous: “Elijah is suffering from persecution; Jonah suffers from success he did not want. Elijah views himself as being ‘no better than his fathers’; Jonah suffers from God’s incalculable vacillation.” Wolff’s acknowledgement of Jonah’s suffering is atypical. The more usual tendency of many scholars to judge Jonah as an “anti-Elijah” figure tends to be rooted in their perception that the “mantic

141 See Magonet, Form and Meaning, 67-8.
142 Interestingly, Lives of the Prophets identifies Jonah ben Amittai as the son of the widow of Zaraphath, revived by Elijah. A further possible connection between the two prophets may be drawn in the LXX of Jonah 3:4, where the “40 day” deadline finds its match in 1 Kings 19:8, Elijah’s 40 day (and night) journey to Horeb.
143 Halpern and Friedman, “Composition and Paronomasia,” 90.
145 Wolff, Obadiah & Jonah, 168.
bumpkin,” Jonah, is opposed to the inclusion of gentiles in the plan of divine salvation or, more generally, to the mercy of God for people other than himself.

The parallels between the stories of Elijah and Jonah are inescapable, but I would argue that the significance of the points of contact between the two deserve further consideration. Comparative focus on the two prophets’ attitudes, relative piety, etc., overlooks the fact that both prophets deliver words of doom whose fulfillment is deterred, or at any event, delayed, by penitential acts (fasting, donning of sackcloth) performed by the objects of the projected punishment(s): Ahab, in 1 Kings 21:27-29, and the king of Nineveh, in Jonah 3:6-9. The scene of Ahab’s repentance in 1 Kings does not include a view into the divine deliberative process; the postponement is simply announced as a *fait accompli*. Instead of annihilating Ahab’s “house” in the king’s lifetime, Yhwh will “consume” Ahab’s male descendants and household after Ahab’s death, so that the effect of the sentence against Ahab will be visited on that king’s son (1 Kgs 21:29). As events play out, it is not, in fact, until 12 years into the reign of Ahab’s son Joram that the sentence against Ahab is recalled and thoroughly enacted (2 Kings 9:8).¹⁴⁷

In contrast, in Jonah, the narrator does provide a “behind the scenes” glimpse of the deity’s change of heart:

²שׁר־דב על־הרעה האלהים וינחם הרעה מדרם כי בו את מעשיהם האלהים וירא רעש׃

לעתותילום לא צעך.

¹⁴⁶ Credit for the evocative phrase “mantic bumpkin” goes to Halpern and Friedman, 89.
¹⁴⁷ Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic, Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ Press, 1973), note 6, 281: “the word of Yahweh was in part delayed (1 Kings 21:29), in part fulfilled in Ahab’s death (1 Kings 22:37) and in Ahaziah’s death. The prophecy was roundly fulfilled in the revolution of Jehu in which the king (Ahab’s son Joram) together with the “seventy sons of Ahab” and Jezebel the queen mother were slaughtered in Jezreel and Samaria.” Also see David S. Vanderhooft and Baruch Halpern, “The Editions of Kings in the 7th-6th Centuries B.C.E.,” HUCA 62 (1991):56.
The “retraction” by the deity of the planned רעה is usually understood to mean that the verdict pronounced earlier against Nineveh has been permanently overturned. However, a different conclusion is warranted: Thomas Bolin has pointed out that the use of the verb נחם in Jonah 3:10 does not guarantee that the Ninevites’ reprieve is permanent: “given [the] juxtaposition…of divine repentance with the carrying out of acts of destruction…it cannot be assumed that when Yahweh repents he will forego an act of destruction.”148 For example, in Amos 7:3 and 7:6, the deity retracts threatened punishment after the prophet’s intercession, which tamps down the threatened wrath, but does not extinguish it. When the impulse toward requital arises again in Amos 7:9, the prophet remains silent, and the countdown to the yôm Yhwh begins. Although the verb נחם is not used in 1 Kgs 21:27-28, when Yhwh alters his decree against Ahab in response to that king’s self-abnegation, the divine action precisely fits Robert Chisolm’s definition of נחם:

God can and often does deviate from [divine decrees]. In these cases He ‘changes His mind’ in the sense that He decides, at least for the time being, not to do what He had planned or announced as His intention (my italics).149

The deity can and often does alter when he alteration finds, but, as in the cases of Amos 7 and Ahab, I will argue that in Jonah, the alteration amounts to a temporary digression, rather than a total reversal of the original purpose. Indeed, given the extra-textual knowledge of Jonah’s author and audience of Nineveh’s historical destruction, the possibility that Nineveh is intended to be seen as a temporary beneficiary of postponed punishment should be considered. The

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148 Bolin, Freedom, 143.
plethora of Elijah-Jonah connections in Jonah might impel readers to “spin out” the analogy of Ahab and the king of Nineveh to its logical conclusion, namely that, like the house of Ahab, those who ruled from Nineveh eventually met the obliteration predicted for them by the Israelite prophet: “40 more days and Nineveh overturns” (Jonah 3:4).

Thus, whereas in Malachi, Elijah himself will stand at the dividing line between the era of “present unfulfilled” prophecy and the future time of judgment, in Jonah, the Elijah figure of Jonah ben Amittai occupies the same liminal position between present forbearance and future requital. Moreover, by harking back to Elijah, the authors of Jonah and Malachi attain a scriptural warrant for the idea that a “delay factor” does not invalidate the divine word.\(^{150}\) The necessity to look for eventual fulfillment of prophecy is a major achievement of post-exilic Judean religious thought. As Rex Mason puts it,

> after the exile, therefore, earlier prophecy had to be reinterpreted by various means and devices. A ‘delay’ factor was introduced into it, often said to be because of the people’s sins. Or its predictions were ‘adapted’ to refer to different, and still future, events. Sometimes it was said to have been ‘realised’ in some way other than that originally envisaged by the prophet and so on.\(^{151}\)

Re-readings of prophecies thus validated the divine word by interpreting “unrealized” prophetic texts or tropes in such a way that fulfillment was still possible in new historical or social contexts. This theme of divine reliability, I will argue in the final two chapters, lies at the heart of the book of Jonah, in the characterization of the aggrieved prophet, and in the piling up of figurative imagery in the book’s final scene.

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\(^{151}\) Ibid.
Chapter 4: What’s in a Name: Jonah ben Amittai

In the previous chapter, I discussed three major thematic parallels between Jonah and Malachi. First, both seek to demonstrate the universal sovereignty of Yhwh by depicting the submission of gentile characters to Yhwh. In a reversal of the political reality of the Persian era, both texts envision gentiles acknowledging and becoming subject to the god of the Judeans, a phenomenon I characterized as “cultic imperialism.” Secondly, both are explicitly concerned with the theological dissonance engendered by an apparent lack of divine justice, despite the undoubted kingship of Yhwh. Malachi solves the problem of justice by referring his auditors to the yóm Yhwh, imagery of which, I noted, also appears in the qīqāyôn episode in Jonah 4. Finally, the figure of Elijah features prominently in each book’s conclusion and functions, (I suggested), as a cipher that represents the ultimate reliability of Yhwh over time, thus resolving the conflict between the image of Yhwh as a king and the problem of the deity’s apparent tolerance for miscreants.

By situating the Jonah’s composition within the early Persian era, and by reviewing its areas of commonality with Malachi, I have tried to construct a foundation on which to build a close reading of Jonah that provides an historically grounded, viable alternative to the prevailing “monologic” interpretations of the book. In this chapter, I want to conduct an examination of the character of the prophet Jonah. Just as a forensic anthropologist can reconstruct human features from skeletal evidence, so too, I will argue, the book of Jonah provides the structures by which to flesh out the cause of Jonah’s dissatisfaction with Yhwh. By understanding the roots of Jonah’s experience of
I argue, it will be possible to achieve greater clarity regarding the original purpose and meaning of the book’s denouement in Jonah 4:6-11, the essential passage for any interpretation of the book.

Two scriptural allusions provide the basic evidence on which my interpretation of the character of Jonah will rest. First, I shall investigate Jonah’s plaintive invocation of the Divine Attributes Formula (DAF) in 4:2, which indicates that the prophet operates under a different moral calculus than that promulgated by Jeremiah, i.e. that human beings’ “turning” from sin assures a divine relenting from punishment. In contrast, the use of the DAF by Jonah reveals that the prophet perceives divine mercy and compassion as invariably trumping threatened wrath, regardless of penitence, thus accounting for the escape of the guilty. Ironically, then, Jonah, like many of his modern detractors, exhibits a “monologic” view of the deity. Unlike his detractors, Jonah’s view of Yhwh’s merciful character is cause not for his own comfort but for despair, a fact that has been grist for the mill for interpreters who see Jonah as hateful and his position as indefensible. The level of interpretive opprobrium, however, is far in excess of what the narrative itself allows. Indeed, in order to understand Jonah’s position, it is necessary to discern what “qualities of mercy” are implied in Jonah’s version of the DAF. I will then demonstrate that the identification of Jonah as “ben Amittai” creates an intertextual link to 2 Kings 14:25, and

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1 It should be noted that there seems to be nothing provisional in Jeremiah’s view of penitence. Many commentators insist that the divine response to penitence is not automatic but is based in Yhwh’s sovereign freedom to respond or not respond as he deems appropriate; see for example Terence E. Fretheim, “Jonah and Theodicy,” ZAW 90 (1978), 231-2. This “freedom” is something of a theological fig leaf, however, because it is axiomatic for Fretheim that “God will always act in ways that are consonant with his ultimate salvific purposes,” and “God’s will is to save his creatures.”
explains why the prophet is so convinced that divine mercy aids and abets divine injustice.

**Jonah’s response to the reprieve of Nineveh**

To set the scene, let us begin with Jonah’s response to the reprieve of Nineveh. Information about Jonah’s reaction is confined to the narrator’s observation that

(4:1), and to Jonah’s speech, in which he accounts for Nineveh’s salvation by reference to the Divine Attributes. Jonah's invocation of the Divine Attributes for the purpose of criticizing the deity is unique among the biblical invocations of the DAF. Indeed, Jonah's reaction to Nineveh’s reprieve, and his “testimony” have been variously characterized as an indictment of the prophet’s vitriolic, unstable temperament, his theological cluelessness, or his vindictive desire to see gentiles brought to doom. In part, these interpretations are the result of a somewhat reductive translation of Jonah 4:1, which takes the noun רעה and its cognate verb as denoting “evil” or “wickedness.” Terence Fretheim thus sees the prophet Jonah reacting “violently” and with “shocking” hubris: “Jonah is here placing God’s action under judgment!

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2 Fishbane, 347, notes that “the theme of divine mercy is generally stressed in inner-biblical reuses of the divine attribute formulary.” The reason for the imbalance is rather obvious; in almost every case the biblical writers are either praising praising Yhwh’s compassion in the past, or seeking it in the present, so there is a clear disincentive to bring up the parts of divine nature that holds sinners to account. See, e.g. Pss 86:15, 103:8, 145:8, Neh 8:17, and Joel 2:13. Nahum is an exception to the trend; he emphasizes the qualities of divine retribution, reworking the DAF for the obvious reason that he praises Yhwh’s vindication of those oppressed by Nineveh:峡ה אפכ אפכ אפכ ווא אפכ נקח נקח כל קמנ תוקן. For a recent treatment of the DAF in the Book of the Twelve, see Ruth Scoralick, *Gottes Güte und Gottes Zorn: die Gottesprädikationen in Exodus 34,6f und ihre intertextuellen Beziehungen zum Zwölfprophetenbuch* Herders biblische Studien 33 (Freiburg: Herder, 2002). More generally, Thomas B. Dozeman, "Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Yahweh’s Gracious and Compassionate Character," *JBL* 108 (1989): 207-223.
God’s...saving action is seen by Jonah to be a great evil...Jonah has set himself as judge over God.”

Fretheim’s negative evaluation of Jonah’s actions and attitude is very much a product of his translation. By consistently reading רעה in Jonah 3-4 as “evil,” Fretheim can posit a chain of wickedness that links the human characters’ actions. The moral failings that the Ninevites abjure in 3:8 and 3:10 are essentially adopted by Jonah, whose protest against “God’s saving action” is itself, in Fretheim’s eyes, wicked. Therefore, Fretheim sees in Jonah’s response a warped understanding of evil that produces misplaced anger, which the rest of the chapter works to resolve.

In contrast to Fretheim’s reading of Jonah’s reaction, many earlier translators, as well as recent students of Hebrew grammar and syntax, agree that Jonah’s response reflects more angst than anger. Or to put it more plainly, his anger, which is certainly present, arises from something more resembling pain. The LXX translator of Jonah used the verb λυπειν to render רעה. Similarly, the Vulgate emphasizes the prophet’s affliction: “adflictus est Iona adflictione magna et iratus est.” Further, a grammatical case may be made against Fretheim’s argument that Jonah views Yhwh’s actions as evil, and consequently becomes a party to evil. G.I. Davies has noted, regarding Jonah’s reaction in 4:1, that when the verb רעה (qal) appears “without a subject and is followed

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4 So Robinson, “Intimations of Universalism,” 29-30: “the most troublesome evil of all is that in the heart of Jonah.”
by ל or הנ or noun or suffix, the subject is always an implied impersonal pronoun and רעע does not denote wickedness.” By comparison with other uses of the construction, Davies concludes that,

there is in the use of the verb רעע no explicit condemnation of Jonah, any more than there is of Nehemiah in Neh. xii 8, or for that matter of Sanballat and Tobiah in Neh. ii 10—it is simply a verb that can be used to express the fact that a person is displeased, whether that displeasure meets with the author's approval (as presumably in Neh. xiii 8, since Nehemiah himself is the author) or not (as in Jon. iv 1 and Neh. ii 10).

Thomas Bolin concurs with Davies’ findings, and argues therefore that 4:1 is properly rendered “but this displeased Jonah greatly, and he was grieved.” But Jonah is not simply grieved, he is aggrieved: I therefore translate the verse, “but it was greatly displeasing to Jonah, and he was incensed,” so as to project the sense of heated indignation that the prophet will display in what follows.

The lack of a clear antecedent for Jonah’s רעה in 4:1 means that we cannot be certain what exactly Jonah finds so provoking. However, since Jonah’s use of the phrase על-הערה נחמ about Yhwh in 4:2 links with the narrator’s description of Yhwh’s decision not to punish Nineveh in 3:10, it would appear that the decision of the deity to “retract punishment” is at the heart of Jonah’s protest. For a great many readers, the next question is whether the source of Jonah’s aggravation lies his anti-gentile prejudice as

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6 Davies, 107.
7 Ibid.
8 Bolin, Freedom, 151.
9 Bolin, Freedom, 150, notes that the 1990 Catholic Study Bible attributes Jonah’s anger to “his narrowly nationalistic vindictiveness.”
many readers have held, or because Jonah has been made to appear a false prophet, or in the notion that the deity can simply choose not to punish the guilty.

The content of Jonah’s complaint in 4:2 indicates that the latter interpretive option is the most likely. He does not express any concern about gentiles, or about his own reputation. Rather, Yhwh’s flawed administration of justice is at the center of Jonah’s outburst. While many commentators argue that for Jonah the problem is that divine caprice makes Yhwh unnervingly free, this is not quite accurate. Rather, what really irks Jonah is Yhwh’s consistency. According to Jonah, Yhwh has acted in the most predictable way possible: “that is why I fled to Tarshish in the first place—I knew that you are a gracious God…” (4:2). Yhwh, according to Jonah, is all too dependable in refraining from punishing the wicked. Indeed, despite the display of divine force in Jonah 1, the course of the narrative thus far justifies the idea that universal sovereignty notwithstanding, the deity’s bark is worse than his bite:

upon reflecting, the readers would realize that, while there has been a great deal of blustering on God's part, no ships have been sunk, no cities have been destroyed, and no lives have been lost.

Jonah’s aggrieved invocation of the Divine Attributes to criticize Yhwh has garnered a great deal of scholarly disapprobation. To “misappropriate” the Divine

Attributes Formula for the purpose of blame rather than praise of the deity, is, for many readers, the summit of self-regard, callousness, and obliviousness: “Jonah turns the confession into an accusation, so that the hope for prolonged life, which is implicit in the confession, now becomes the motivation for his own death wish.”\textsuperscript{14}

Yet Jonah is hardly unique among the prophets in his desire to express a conscientious objection to a divine course of action or to criticize the deity’s inaction.\textsuperscript{15}

As Yochanan Muffs writes,

prophetic prayer is the most characteristic indication of the prophet's total intellectual independence and freedom of conscience. The divine strong hand does not lobotomize the prophet's moral and emotional personality.\textsuperscript{16}

Indeed, while Jonah is unusual in actually attempting to flee his prophetic commission, other prophets express their desire to escape the “hand of Yhwh,” if only that were possible:

When I say, ‘I will forget about him, I will not speak anymore in his name,’ there is something like a fire burning inside me, inside my bones. I get worn out trying to keep it in, but I can't. (Jer 20:9)

Although many readers sympathize with prophets' discontent with their resistant audiences, they express much less sympathy with the compulsion and frustration that frequently characterize prophets' relationships with their director, Yhwh. For Jonah, as for Jeremiah, resistance is futile, and escape, though desirable, is impossible. Yet

\textsuperscript{14} Dozeman, 207.
\textsuperscript{15} As in Hab 1:2: “How long, Yhwh, will I cry for help and you will not listen, shout, “Violence!” and you will not save?”
interpreters only characterize Jonah’s resistance and objections as constituting “naïve obduracy” and the like.\textsuperscript{17} One can only conclude that it is the perceived content of Jonah’s complaint produces that produces such discomfiture.

Many readers, basing their interpretation on their distaste for Jonah’s use of the DAF, suggest that the balance of the book is intended to “take the ego out of Jonah,”\textsuperscript{18} that is, to lambaste Jonah’s disobedience, bloodthirstiness or hubris. But if Jonah’s despair really resides in his perception that Yhwh is toothless in the face of sin, it would behoove interpreters to ask if Jonah’s perception of the deity is accurate or is mistaken: is he right about Yhwh or not? In the great expanse of commentary on Jonah, readers almost invariably avoid dealing with this question. Only Ehud Ben Zvi, to my knowledge, takes it on, declaring, “Jonah was absolutely wrong in imagining Yhwh as a deity who cannot be expected to carry out a massive destruction of human (and animal) life.”\textsuperscript{19}

The biblical record confirms Ben Zvi’s point: from Noah to Nahum, the willingness (even, as in the reworking of the Divine Attributes Formula in Nahum 1:2, “zeal”) of Yhwh to “carry out a massive destruction of human [and animal] life” in response to human wickedness is well attested. But when Jonah invokes the qualities that comprise the Divine Attributes, he, like some of the proponents of the monologic interpretations described in chapter one, mentions only mercy and compassion. Other epithets that appear in Exodus 34:6-7, such as אמת (trustworthy), and נקهة לא נוקה

\textsuperscript{17} Kim, 503.
\textsuperscript{19} Ben Zvi, Signs of Jonah, 21.
(indicating that Yhwh “certainly does not acquit”) do not appear in the prophet’s prayer, nor, apparently, in his understanding of Yhwh.

The Meaning of the DAF

Jonah’s omission of the traits of the DAF that bespeak eventual requital is important and telling. As generally understood, the apparent function of the recitation of divine traits in Exodus 34:6-7 is to underscore the unequal vicarious after-effects of righteous and unrighteous behavior:

the divine attributes of forgiveness and compassion…are set against those of retributive punishment…The result is not symmetrical, since it is stated that the merit of a father can extend divine forgiveness vicariously to the thousandth generation of his descendants, whereas a father’s iniquity may be requited only to the third or fourth generation that follow him.20

However, this interpretation of the DAF, which envisions both divine favor and wrath extended through successive generations, does not accurately capture the purport of the DAF. As Yochanan Muffs has demonstrated, in contrast to many interpreters, in ancient Israel, “visiting of iniquity” on later generations did not imply the infliction of punishment as it were, מָזוּד́ לָדוֹר. Rather, Muffs argues, the phrase refers to a particular manifestation of divine mercy that allows punishment to be suspended for at least one generation: forbearance. Thus, “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons” was

20 Fishbane, 336. A similar interpretation seems to underlie a comment on the phrase אֲפֶן אֲרָך ("slow to anger," one of the attributes of the DAF) in Pesikta de Rab Kahana, Piska 24, which relates to the book of Jonah. R. Samuel bar Nahman, citing R. Johanan, says אֲפֶן אֲרָך implies that “God exercises patience before deciding to requite the wicked,” and when he does requite them, does so “for only one wicked deed at a time.” Thus the Piska conveys the idea that while Yhwh’s patience is not infinite, Yhwh’s justice, when delivered, is not disproportionate or vengeful. “The truth,” R. Hanina concludes, “is that God long exercises patience but finally makes requital.”
seen as a provision that allowed for the deferral of punishment and provided wiggle room for Yhwh to deal mercifully with the wicked.

While contemporary readers might see deferral of punishment to later generations as constituting divine injustice, in that the innocent are punished, in ancient Israel, some requital or consequence for sin was seen as necessary: “as the dispenser of good and evil, [Yhwh] must punish, as well as reward.”\(^{21}\) Thus for Muffs, “in the day that I punish, I shall punish,” is "the key to understanding the divine revelation [i.e. the pronouncement of the Divine Attributes Formula] in Exodus 34."\(^{22}\) The “day” might not occur within the lifetime of the sinner himself, but the DAF guarantees that it will occur.

Muffs supports his reading of the DAF in Exodus 34:6-7 via reference to Moses’ later invocation of the Formula in Numbers 14:17-19. The meaning of the phrase עון נשא, which appears in Exodus 34:7, is generally translated as reflecting Yhwh’s general willingness to put up with or forgive sin. In contrast, Muffs argues that the phrase reflects Yhwh’s willingness to “hold back the punishment from the fathers and require it from their sons and their sons' sons to the fourth generation.”\(^{23}\)

Such an interpretation, Muffs says, is required by Moses’ reuse of the verb נשא in Numbers 14:19. In his prayer for mercy, Moses first requests divine patience, then rehearses the “retributive” aspects of the DAF: “he punishes the sins of the fathers on the children.” Finally, Moses alludes to Yhwh’s previous deferral of punishment after the

\(^{21}\) Etan Levine, “Reopening the Case of Jonah vs. God,” 84.

\(^{22}\) Muffs, 20.

\(^{23}\) Muffs, 20, 21.
Golden Calf episode, when “you carried this people,” (יְנַשֵׁה) “from Egypt until now” (Num 14:19).

This sequence of argument, Muffs asserts, reveals that “punishing the sins of the fathers on the children,” cannot be anything but an expression of…it at least partial forgiveness.”24 If the “retributive” traits of the DAF referred, as is usually thought, only to “strict justice,” then Moses’ “not quite sane” use of it would threaten to “exacerbate [Yhwh’s] anger beyond all forgiveness.”25 What Moses is asking for, then, is another postponement of punishment. The strategy succeeds: Moses' own generation loses access to the Promised Land, but its children are assured of inheriting it. At first glance, this seems to belie the idea that the deity is here visiting the iniquity of the parents on the children. However, the reward cannot be gained until after the death of the “wilderness generation” meaning that that the children temporarily “suffer for [their parents’] faithlessness” (Num 14:31). Measured against the punishment originally threatened, namely to “strike this people with pestilence and disinherit them” (Num 14:12), it is evident that the claims of mercy are fairly well represented in the scene's resolution. The guilty parents are spared the most grievous possible consequences of their actions, but their children are subject to an extended period of deprivation and wandering.

Thus, the mechanism of deferral of punishment, Muffs says, “allows God to treat the wicked in a kind fashion: God bears their sin but does not expunge it entirely.”26

While modern readers might object to such kindness, this doctrine of delayed punishment

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24 Muffs, 21.
25 Muffs, 22.
26 Muffs, 24.
appears frequently in the biblical anthology, and plays out in several ways. Most significant for the purposes of the present study is the fact that the “doctrine of delayed punishment is one of the main elements in the philosophy of history of the editor of the book of Kings,” which attributes the terrible events of the last days of monarchic Judah to the debt incurred by Manasseh's sinfulness several generations previously (2 Kgs 23:24-26). Penitence, in the view of the Deuteronomistic Historian, is only partially effective: while Josiah's emphatic and heartfelt “turn” toward Yhwh makes it possible for the destruction of Judah to be postponed until after his death (2 Kgs 22:16-20), the sentence decreed as retribution for Manasseh’s sins cannot be averted. Although there is no explicit verbal allusion to the Divine Attributes Formula in the explanation of Judah’s fall, the idea that Yhwh “carries sins” over several generations, before finally exacting retribution, is certainly the underlying premise.

“Punishment deferred” is also a frequent theme in the Historian’s accounts of dynastic changes in Israel and Judah: in several cases, a king gains a merciful postponement of punishment, so that it falls on a following generation. There are two ways, in Kings, by which Israelite or Judean monarchs may temporarily alter a sentence of doom. They may "humble" themselves before Yhwh (Ahab, 1 Kgs 21:27-29), or they may actively reinstate Yahwistic practices (Hezekiah, 2 Kgs 20:17-18; Josiah, 2 Kgs 23:15-24).

27 Muffs, 20, offers a disconcerting contemporary analogy which may or may not convince readers: "The atom bomb will destroy us and our family now, in our lifetime; or we will die at a ripe old age, and our children will die in an atomic holocaust. Which of the two alternatives will the sensitive person choose? I think one would prefer the second option, and so, its seems, did the ancients.”

28 Ibid.
Alternately, in lieu of penitential action on the part of the accused, Yhwh may postpone punishment in consideration of covenants made with ancestral figures. Thus, Solomon retains his kingdom intact thanks to the divine commitment to David. It is in the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, that the consequences of Solomon's sin are felt. At any rate, whatever the mechanism by which a king secures a postponement of punishment, it is clear that the possibility of transferring the effects of sin to one's descendants was not cause for moral qualms. As Hezekiah says to Isaiah, “The word of Yhwh that you have spoken is good, if only there will be peace and security in my days.” (2 Kgs 20:19).

We have thus far established that divine mercy, in many cases, consists of forbearance, rather than forgiveness, of sin, and that this formula resides in the articulation of the Divine Attributes Formula in Ex 34:6-7. While individuals (or generations) may gain a temporary reprieve from the consequences of sin, eventual punishment for later generations is assured. Turning once again to the book of Jonah, it will now be possible to search out the significance of Jonah’s rendition of the DAF.

The author of Jonah and its earliest readers were well aware that there was a historical “ending” of Nineveh that took place beyond the confines of the narrative of Jonah. This knowledge is attested in the early retellings of Jonah that deemphasize all of the events of Jonah 3 except Jonah’s proclamation against Nineveh in 3:4, which was

29 Muffs discusses each instance, 17-20. Similarly, the "merit of the ancestors" acts as a temporary lifeline in 2 Kings 13:22-23: "Yhwh was gracious...and had compassion on [Israel]; he turned toward them for the sake of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and was not willing to bring them to ruin."

29 Bolin, *Freedom*, 143.
eventually fulfilled, according to Josephus and others, in the time of Nahum. But within the narrative, we must ask whether the character of Jonah, when he incorporates certain select elements of the DAF into his prayer, knows that Nineveh’s present reprieve may not be permanent. That is, does Jonah’s knowledge of the DAF and of Israel’s history provide him with the assurance that Yhwh would eventually requite Nineveh’s wickedness? It seems not. In light of the character’s omission of the “punitive” traits of the DAF, and his emphasis on the traits that exhibit divine mercy, there is no indication that Jonah anticipates that Nineveh would *eventually* pay a price for its sins. The question now is, with so many instances of delayed punishment on the biblical record, why does Jonah seem to assume that Nineveh has gained not just a temporary stay of execution, but a true cancellation of punishment?

**Jonah ben Amittai**

Here the identification of Jonah as “ben Amittai” (Jon 1:1) becomes significant. In all of the cases of reprieve or deferral which we have mentioned, three mechanisms allow Yhwh to defer punishment. First, the accused may enact a “turn” or express remorse; secondly, the accused may tap into the merit accrued by the patriarchs; or finally, they may benefit from effective prophetic intercession (as in Num 19). An exception to this pattern occurs in 2 Kgs 14:23-27, in which the good fortune granted Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II is explicitly said *not* to have any connection to that king's merit, nor to anyone else’s:
In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam became king of Israel in Samaria and reigned for forty-one years. He did evil in the sight of Yhwh: he did not turn from all the sins which Jeroboam son of Nebat had caused Israel to take part in. He restored the boundary of Israel, from Lebo Hamat to the Sea of Arabah, according to the word of Yhwh which he spoke through his servant Jonah ben Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher. For Yhwh saw the very bitter affliction of Israel: none left, minor or adult, no helper for Israel. Yhwh resolved not to blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by Jeroboam son of Joash (2 Kgs 14:23-27).

What motivates this unprecedented display of divine favor? This is not an easy question to answer: it has long been noted that the passage “bristles with difficulties.”30

Upon first reading, the condition of the people of Israel seems to be the compelling factor. Yhwh’s perception of Israel’s affliction (עני) in 2 Kgs 14:26 is highly reminiscent of Ex 3:7: ראה ראית אמי את עני ואת עני. In that case, the deity’s purpose was to rescue the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob from the tyranny of Pharaoh. But in Kings 14, the ruler is not Yhwh’s opponent, but, despite his perpetuation of the sin of Jeroboam I, Yhwh’s agent, through whom he “saves” Israel, apparently by expanding its territory.

Stranger still, Kings provides no cause for the putative national suffering. Indeed, the portrait of a vulnerable and miserable country would seem better to fit Judah, whose Temple, the Historian reveals, (2 Kgs 14:11-14) was plundered by Jeroboam’s father.

30 Cooper, 147, note 1.
Joash, who also captured Amaziah, the king of Judah, in battle. (If this were not bad enough, Amaziah was eventually murdered by his own subjects, (2 Kgs 14:19)).

Israel, in contrast, enjoyed something of a respite during the same era. Although Israel had lost territory to Aram during the reign of Jehoahaz (2 Kgs 13:3-7), by the reign of Joash, Israel’s fortunes seemed to be turning. In 2 Kgs 13:25, Joash regained the Israelite cities lost to Aram, and thoroughly dominated Judah, Israel’s rival kingdom to the south. Yet with the advent of the kingship of Jeroboam II, the Historian portrays Israel as a shadow of its former self: it is full of bitter, עני, and there is no one to help it (אמ בערל). What is going on? Why does the Historian describe Israel as so totally abject with so little reason?

I think the key to the problem lies in the use of the phrase, אפ עזר ואפ זוט, which has nothing to do with Israel’s historical situation, and everything to do with the Historian’s shaping of his narrative. The exact connotation of this colloquial phrase is much debated; “bond and free” is a frequent translation. Freedman and Anderson suggest that it means “him that is shut up and him that is left behind,”31 while E. Kutsch suggests that in the context of passages that deal with dynastic succession, the phrase is a merism which refers to males of all ages, those under parental authority, and independent adults alike: “‘unmündig’ und ‘mündig.’”32 Kutsch’s interpretation is borne out by closer examination. In the course of divine imprecations against the “houses” of Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 14:10) and Ahab (1 Kgs 21:21) the phrase is used in conjunction with the

32 Ernst Kutsch, “Die Wurzel עזר im Hebräischen,” VT 2 (1952), 64.
dysphemism for male persons, “those who urinate against a wall.” Thus, the phrase seems to refer to the annihilation of the king’s line as a consequence for his misdeeds. Rather than founding enduring dynasties, Jeroboam I and Ahab’s “seed” becomes extinct upon the death not only of their sons, but other male relatives as well (1 Kgs 15:25, 29; 2 Kgs 9:24, 10:7, 10:11).33

Yhwh, balancing Jehu’s service against his perpetuation of the sin of Jeroboam I, decrees that his royal house will endure until the fourth generation (2 Kgs 10:30). Accordingly, in the third generation after Jehu, i.e. the reign of Jeroboam II, the phrase that signals dynastic extinction appears: יָסַ֫פְת עֶזֶר עָמַ֫ס אָוָ֫ב. Lo and behold, the house of Jehu meets its end right on schedule, six months into the reign of Jeroboam II’s son Zechariah (2 Kgs 15:8-10).

Thus, I suspect that in the case of Jeroboam II, as in the cases of Jeroboam I and Ahab, the phrase יָסַ֫פְת עֶזֶר עָמַ֫ס אָוָ֫ב functions as a signal for the end of a royal house in the next generation. Just as Jeroboam I and Ahab’s “houses” (read: dynasties) are destroyed in the generation after their reigns, so the Jehuïde line ends in the generation after Jeroboam II. After the end of the line of Jehu, Yhwh plays no further role in Israel’s royal politics: Israel is on its own. Perhaps, then, what Yhwh “sees” in 2 Kgs 14:25 is not the present relative prosperity of Israel, but its future affliction under first incompetent, and then foreign, rulers: its עֶֽנֶּי to it. Certainly, the last kings of Israel were truly no help (עזר) to it. The Historian recounts that that six kings took the throne after

33 Ahab’s sin, his complicity in the murder of Naboth so as to appropriate his vineyard for use as a vegetable garden, reaps a gruesome harvest: Jehu orders the heads of the 70 sons of Ahab to be collected in baskets and piled in a heap (2 Kings 10:7).
Zechariah in a whirlwind of plots, assassinations, and palace coups, before Assyria annexed the weakened kingdom and exiled its population (2 Kgs 17:21-22).

To return to 2 Kgs 14:23-27, I want to posit that Yhwh, foreseeing the onrush of Israel’s end, tries a different tactic by which to save it. Jehu’s line must certainly come to an end; but perhaps a demonstration of the effects of divine favor could bring the people of Israel around at last. Perhaps, that is, “Yhwh resolved not to blot out the name of Israel,” i.e., the future generations of all Israel, without one final effort. Yhwh throws his full weight behind Jeroboam II: the signs of divine favor are unmistakable. The inhabitants of the northern kingdom, without having resorted to penitence, indeed, continuing to commit the sin of their first king, nevertheless experience unparalleled internal security and prosperity. This reading accounts for the apparently baseless description of Israel’s suffering in 2 Kgs 24:16, which in turn supplies a motive for Yhwh’s unprecedented outreach to Israel just prior to its downfall. And Jonah ben Amittai is there to announce and witness it all.

There can be little doubt that “the same” Jonah is meant to be depicted in the book of Jonah as in 2 Kings, given that there is no case of two separate characters in the Hebrew Bible that carried the same name, the same father’s name, and who both fulfilled the same social role, namely, to be prophets at seemingly more or less the same time, that is, the monarchic period and within it the time before the destruction of Nineveh.34

34 Ben Zvi, Signs of Jonah, 43. Contra Y. Gitay, “Jonah: The Prophecy of Anti-Rhetoric,” 198. Gitay thinks the protagonist of the book of Jonah is a successor to the Jonah of Kings, but provides no convincing evidence to back the assertion.
Further, the book of Jonah opens in *media res*, in that a *wayyiqtol* form opens the narrative. Since this form usually occurs in sequential chains of verbs that begin with a *qatal* form, the phrase, רה יבר יהוה אליהוה (1:1) may hint, as Ben Zvi argues, that the author of Jonah sought to create a question in the minds of readers as to “what is ‘missing’…perhaps some reference about temporal background? Or perhaps some other story?” A link in the diction of the two narratives is created in Jonah 3:2-3, when Jonah speaks (3:3) in accordance, דברכ, with “what I tell you” דבריך.  (3:2)

Similarly, in 2 Kgs 14:25, Jonah’s message about the expansion of Israel’s borders corresponds with the divine command: דברי יהוה בן-אמת דברי יöne. Finally, in both cases, the deity observes the condition of the populace: in 2 Kings 14:26, “Yhwh saw,” and generated the short-lived boom years of Jeroboam II, while in Jonah 3:10, האלהים ירא, “God saw” the Ninevites’ repentance and retracted the projected punishment.

Thus, there are clear signals that the author of Jonah intends to connect his tale with the episode in Kings which features “Jonah ben Amittai.” The question is why the

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36 An interesting, though probably secondary, connection between the “two Jonahs” may be found in the description of Jonah ben Amittai in 2 Kgs 14:25 as “the servant of Yhwh” and in the LXX version of Jonah 1:9, in which Jonah describes himself as δουλος κυριου = עבד יהוה rather than MT’s אנכי עבדי. Given that other witnesses are unanimous in agreeing with the MT’s reading, it is possible that the Hebrew scribe in whose hand the orthographical change from ר to ד originated may have been influenced by a reminiscence of the Jonah of Kings.

37 Most scholars of the Deuteronomistic History situate its completion in the middle of the 6th century B.C.E., making it prior to the composition of Jonah and therefore available for allusive use to the author of Jonah.
author of Jonah would want to “activate in the memory of its intended readers”\(^{38}\) the “other” Jonah story.

Adherents of the “Jonah as xenophobe” school describe Jonah ben Amittai of 2 Kings 14 as a nationalistic prophet, whose message to Israel of good times ahead is evidence for “our Jonah’s” “anti-Assyrian attitude.”\(^{39}\) Hyun Chul Paul Kim has offered a recent example of this type of interpretation. Despite the statement in 2 Kings 14:25 that Jonah ben Amittai’s oracle was “according to the word of Yhwh the God of Israel,” Kim asserts that Jonah ben Amittai is depicted by the Deuteronomistic Historian as “a questionable prophet” possessed of a “pro-Israelite attitude” and characterized as a “less-than-ideal servant.”\(^{40}\) Given the paucity of information provided in 2 Kings 14 about Jonah ben Amittai, it seems likely that Kim’s analysis of the character of Jonah in that passage is colored by his interpretation of the “disobedient” and “stubborn” Jonah that he perceives in the prophetic book.\(^{41}\)

At any rate, scholarly attempts to harmonize the personalities of the two Jonahs overlook the fact that the real commonality between the two passages resides in the resolution of their plots. As the discussion of the Elijah imagery in the previous chapter

\(^{38}\) Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah*, 46.

\(^{39}\) Kim, “Jonah Read Intertextually,” 507. Terence E. Fretheim, “Jonah and Theodicy,” 229, does not subscribe to the “Jonah as xenophobe” school, but he nevertheless characterizes Jonah ben Amittai’s prophecy in 2 Kings 14 as “highly optimistic and nationalistic, thus belonging to a type of prophecy condemned by Amos.” It should be pointed out, however, prophets do not choose their oracles, and there is no indication in 2 Kings that the oracle of Jonah ben Amittai lacked divine sanction. Whether the Jonah of Kings should be envisioned as welcoming the word that he brings or as despairing over it simply cannot be determined since no description of his reaction is provided. We know only that he complies with his commission.

\(^{40}\) Kim, “Jonah Read Intertextually,” 505-06.

\(^{41}\) Kim, 528.
intimated, the fates of Israel and Nineveh will prove strangely analogous: as Cooper puts it, “the destinies of the two beneficiaries of divine ‘mercy’ were… intertwined until the demise of both…in each case, “the redemption… was abortive.”

To unpack Cooper’s point: the two biblical sources that feature Jonah ben Amittai depict the prophet as a (possibly reluctant) witness to divine mercy. Yet in each case, the true “ends” of the stories of Nineveh and Israel nullify the endings of narratives in which Jonah ben Amittai appears. Elmer Dyck rightly points out that Jonah ben Amittai’s prophecy in 2 Kings “though fulfilled, must have sounded hollow in the extreme….to those who not too many years later experienced Samaria’s collapse at the hands of the Assyrians.” Similarly, I suspect, ancient readers, who were aware both of Nineveh’s violent domination of Judah and its eventual destruction, must viewed the events of the book of Jonah through the prism of later events.

Dramatic irony abounds: in fact, only Jonah is in the dark about the respective futures of Israel and Nineveh. If my reading of 2 Kgs 14 is correct, Yhwh, in that passage, “sees” what Jonah does not, namely that, (barring a major shift in behavior), after the reign of Jeroboam, Israel’s serenity, security, and prosperity will be subject to assault. Yhwh’s intervention in the time of Jeroboam II, I suggested, amounts to a last-ditch attempt to provoke change in Israel. The attempt, however, was unsuccessful, as the omniscient Historian points out. By his account, within a quarter of a century of the end

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42 Cooper, 148. Cooper quotes R. Nahman b. Yizhaq’s succinct summation of the interconnection of Israel and Nineveh: “just as evil was transformed into good for Nineveh, so was evil transformed into good for Israel during the days of Jeroboam b. Joash.”

of Jeroboam II’s reign, time ran out: “the people of Israel perpetuated the sin of Jeroboam… until Yhwh removed Israel from his presence, as he had promised through all his servants, the prophets. He exiled Israel from its land to Assyria, until this day” (2 Kgs 17:21, 23). As Kings has it, Yhwh promised Israel requital through all his servants. All, that is, but one: Jonah ben Amittai.

In its larger context, then, Kings characterizes the word of Jonah ben Amittai in 2 Kgs 14:25, and the divine intervention on behalf of “helpless” Israel, as anomalous, temporary, and ultimately, if it was intended to inspire a religious reformation, unsuccessful. In the end, the Historian asserts, Yhwh fulfilled his word against Israel in every particular.

For the purpose of this study, the episode recounted in 2 Kings 14 is useful because it reveals why Jonah is persuaded (in the book of Jonah) that Yhwh’s merciful nature trumps threatened repercussions for sin. Given that Jonah ben Amittai’s only function in 2 Kings is to announce the Yhwh-sponsored flourishing of a sinful people, it is evident why the prophet Jonah might be portrayed as having a very strong sense of the positive side of the “Divine Attributes” to the exclusion of punitive traits. Thus, like another eighth century prophet, Jonah seems to view Yhwh as one whose “heart overturns” from wrath and whose “compassion grows warm and tender” (Hos 11:8). The “overturning” of Yhwh’s heart, Jonah thinks, is not provoked by human actions, such as penitence or self-abnegation, but is innate to the deity, who, motivated from within simply “turns from” his anger (Hos 14:5). In 2 Kings 14:25, then, we unearth the origins
of Jonah’s foregone conclusion: “I knew that you are a compassionate God…who cancels punishment!” (Jonah 4:2).

Can it be any wonder that Jonah ben Amittai in Jonah 4:2 excises from his rendition of the DAF all mention of Yhwh’s reliability as an arbiter of justice? From his perspective, the events of 2 Kgs 14:23-27 undermine and belie a basic tenet of the DAF, namely, that sin requires an eventual response from Yhwh. Not only is such requital not forthcoming, but the Jonah of Kings brings tidings to Israel that directly contradict the national consequences Yhwh promised for Jeroboam I’s sin. 1 Kgs 14:15-16 asserts,

הכה יוהו אתישראל כאשר יוצק הכהה מבמות יהוה אתישראל מעיל הארץ והשלום והאהבה:

Yhwh will strike Israel, as when a reed is shaken in water; he will uproot Israel from this good land.

But in the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel was not shaken but secured. Instead of losing territory, Israel expanded; instead of being scattered among foreign peoples, Israel regained its footing in cities lost to it since the age of Solomon. Perhaps, for Jonah ben Amittai, as for Amos, Israel’s very success in the face of its sin was only so much wormwood and gall.

Having provided back-story for Jonah’s character by reference to 2 Kgs 14:23-27, we may now ask why his (mistaken) knowledge causes the character such grief. After all, what is so terrible about the fact that, as far as Jonah knows, the deity can be relied on to err on the side of compassion, mercy, and long-suffering forbearance? Simply this: Jonah’s incorrect perception that divine compassion on sinners is inevitable leads him to

44 1 Kgs 8:65.
the conclusion that the deity has abdicated responsibility for the administration of justice. If so, the result is a return to chaos: human existence becomes “random, inchoate, meaningless, and amoral.” 45 Thus, when Jonah exclaims, “I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing” (Jon 4:2), “at issue was the very nature of justice and the justification of punishment.” 46

If Jonah believes that the deity can or will follow no other course than to retract threatened punishment, then Yhwh, with all his power, becomes unreliable and impotent. 47 As Eagleton writes, “if God just goes around forgiving everybody all the time, what’s the point of doing anything? If disobedience…goes cavalierly unpunished, then the idea of obedience also ceases to have meaning…which is why Jonah ends up in the grip of Thanatos.” 48 Prophecy and penitence, commandments and consequences become empty charades, and Jonah sinks into despair: “Please, Yhwh, take my life: I would rather die than live” (4:3).”

Jonah’s request for death has been much maligned in the literature on the book, I think, because of the essential misunderstanding of the character’s point of view. Jonah’s putative “stubbornness and dogmatism,” 49 his purported preference for justice in every

45 Etan Levine, “Reopening the Case of Jonah vs. God,” 90.
46 Etan Levine, “Reopening the Case,” 78.
47 Cooper also envisions Jonah as seeing Ninevah’s reprieve as inevitable. Cooper, 154, note 3, follows Eliezer de Beaugency, who argued that “[Jonah] cannot have been ascribing God’s mercy to [the Ninevites’] repentance” because he did not know about it.” (On how Jonah can be imagined not to have known about the repentance of Nineveh, see Cooper, 152-54). de Beaugency therefore envisions Jonah saying, “I realized that you would renounce the evil even without repentance.”
48 Eagleton, 180.
49 Fretheim, “Jonah and Theodicy,” 229.
case over mercy, might better and more accurately be viewed as a valid crisis of confidence in a basic tenet of Yahwism, namely that the “judge of all the earth” will ever “act with justice” (Gen 18:24). Wolff’s comment is apt: “for Jonah the problem of the validity of God’s word and God’s justice has become an existential problem.”

The whole arc of the plot of Jonah has led to this climactic moment: in Jonah’s perception, the deity has sovereign power over everything but himself, allowing sin to flourish unchecked, and even to reap rewards. The events of Jonah 3 affirm the prophet’s belief that displays of divine sovereignty constitute only so much sound and fury, and that policy statements, such as the DAF, that purport to define the ways that Yhwh responds to human sin, are far from binding. As we progress toward the book’s final scene, we find Jonah sitting to the east of Nineveh, burning up with רעה. But the growth and death of the qîqāyôn plant of Jonah 4:6-9, and the deity’s explanation of its significance in 4:10-11 will resolve the prophet’s crisis, and will reveal to him that Yhwh’s interaction with Nineveh has only just begun.

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50 H.W. Wolff, Obadiah and Jonah, 168.
Chapter Five: The Qîqāyôn, the Cedar, and the Question of Justice

The two prior chapters have argued that Jonah’s dilemma relates to his perception of the nature of Yhwh. I argued that the character of Jonah should be understood in light of 2 Kgs 14:23-27, which explains Israel’s success in the time of Jeroboam II as a final, unsuccessful, effort by Yhwh to alter Israel’s disastrous trajectory. However, this explanation of Yhwh’s action seems to remain confined to Yhwh alone. The “word” which Jonah receives and conveys relates to the outcome of the divine favor, but there is no indication that the prophet has access to the motive behind the deity’s sudden, apparently contradictory, intervention in Israel’s fortunes. The result is a prophet baffled: by prophecy not only unfulfilled but contradicted, and by a perception of sin rewarded rather than requited. If the book of Jonah relates the further adventures of Jonah ben Amittai of Kings, the prophet from Gath-Hepher, then a new understanding of Jonah’s раם in Jon 4:1 becomes available. From that Jonah’s limited perspective, Yhwh’s retraction of Nineveh’s punishment is objectionable primarily because it seems inevitable.

The final scene of the book of Jonah, therefore, pertains to the resolution of Jonah’s theological distress. The growth and death of the qîqāyôn (Jon 4:6-9), and Yhwh’s explication of that episode (Jon 4:10-11), are didactic, and do indeed instruct Jonah about the divine nature. But unlike interpretations that see the passage as an attempt to convince Jonah to welcome Yhwh’s extension of mercy to Nineveh, I want to argue that the passage offers the prophet new insight into the operation of divine justice.
To anticipate: a brief discussion in chapter three pointed to general similarities between Malachi’s eschatological images of vegetal desiccation and the withering of the qîqāyôn. Such an interpretation, however, only scratches the surface of the metaphorical potential of the image. The events surrounding the demise of the qîqāyôn evoke a wide range of tropes that connote destruction, all of which point to the fact that the comparison in 4:10-11 of the qîqāyôn to Nineveh does not work to that great city’s advantage.

Further, when Yhwh declares that unlike Jonah, who regrets the loss of the qîqāyôn, Yhwh will be unaffected by the eventual loss of Nineveh, the ominous implications of the qîqāyôn imagery become clear. The qîqāyôn episode and Yhwh’s comments in the aftermath of its demise correct the prophet Jonah’s mistaken assumption that Yhwh’s predisposition toward mercy precludes his acting in accordance with the demands of justice.

The literalization of imagery in Jonah 2

Readers have long acknowledged, with regard to Jonah 2, that the author of Jonah draws on figurative tropes and motifs from the psalms, in effect literalizing them within the events of the narrative. That is, Jonah’s plunge into the deep and his ingestion by the “big fish” meld his literal circumstances with the (usually) figurative expressions which he employs to describe his distress. The result, as Brevard Childs remarked, is that the prayer of Jonah “describes the threat to his life in the language of the complaint psalm, which… because of the context of the ongoing narrative works to provide a new

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1 On this subject, see John R. Miles, “Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody,” Jewish Quarterly Review 65 (1975), 173-74.
and remarkable dimension of… specificity….”

The conceit of overwhelming floodwaters presents no challenge for interpreters; the image is so familiar as hardly to need interpretation. The innovation of the book of Jonah is to associate Jonah’s language with his circumstances in an unusually literal way, thus allowing readers of Jonah to revisit stock metaphors and experience them afresh. As John A. Miles puts it, “[Jonah’s] troubles are not like waves washing over his head, his troubles are waves washing over his head.”

Again, when, having literally been swallowed up by the fish, (2:1) Jonah speaks from its belly, noting that “from the belly of Sheol I cried out” (Jon 2:2) the prophet’s circumstances and his language are nearly interchangeable.

The fish scene “moves with relish into the realm of the ludicrous and ridiculous and seeks to elicit laughter that can have a complex or ambivalent meaning.” The literalization of psalmic images, while comic, produces multivalent intertextual possibilities. Hugh Pyper suggests, for example, that the fish is actually a downgraded Leviathan, described in Ps 104:26 as God’s maritime plaything. As Pyper puts it, “what has a big belly, swallows people, swims in the sea at God’s behest, and could play the role of a rescuer while evoking Sheol? Ps 104.26 gives a clear answer.”

I would suggest, moreover, that the recasting of the psalmic image of the maw of Sheol as

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3 Miles, 174.
4 Contra Landes, “The Three Days and Three Nights Motif of Jonah 2:1,” 450. Landes contends that the fish does not “personify” Sheol, because the function of the fish is essentially beneficent.
creature actually lurking at the bottom of the sea echoes Amos’ hyperbolic description of
the fate of those who attempt to “evade my sight on the bottom of the sea” (Amos 9:3): “I
will command the sea-serpent there, and it will bite them” (Amos 9:3) Whether the דָּג
וִירָב echoes images of Leviathan, the sea-serpent, or Sheol, the image impresses upon
readers, (and presumably on Jonah), the extent of the deity’s sovereignty: Jonah can
neither run nor hide.

Although some readers assert that the very ridiculousness of Jonah’s situation
underscores the prophet’s negative qualities,⁷ the resolution of the scene reveals that the
narrator does not portray Jonah as merely a comic stock character, that is, as a “buffoon,
clown, fool or simpleton.”⁸ On the contrary, Jonah’s prayer, as Cooper says,
appropriately “manifests the ethos of personal religion,” and Yhwh responds by
delivering the prophet from his peril.⁹ Indeed, by having Jonah “disgorged” by the fish
(2:11), the author of Jonah reshapes the metaphor of Sheol as an open gullet into a semi-
logical (and distinctly humorous) comment about divine power and the efficacy of
Jonah’s prayer: since Yhwh wills it, what has gone down must also come up.

The collision of language and plot in Jonah 2 is the most well known example, but
other uses of the literalization technique abound in the book. Jonah 1 seems almost a
narrative embodiment of the storm at sea envisioned in Ps 107:23-30. Jonah’s reception
in Nineveh enacts Ezek 3:5-6, where the deity comments that in baneful contrast to the
Judeans, even foreigners who speak a different language would listen to Ezekiel were he

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⁸ Van Heerden, 79. Miles, 179, compares Jonah to Charlie Chaplin or Shalom Aleichem's Tevye;
characters who are beset by ridiculous circumstances, but are nevertheless sympathetic.
⁹ Cooper, 156.
sent to them. And, as I argued in chapter one, Jonah’s initial commission, which requires him to proclaim against Nineveh to the Ninevites themselves, is an unparalleled prophetic scenario, which imagines what would happen if the distinction between prophetic rhetoric and reality were to disappear.

What I wish to demonstrate in the present chapter is that Jon 4:6-9 also “embeds” figurative imagery into its narrative to advance and resolve the plot of the book. Jonah experiences a series of natural phenomena which, in prophetic literature, connote divine wrath. These echoes and adaptations of prophetic imagery, I argue, act as guarantors of the divine word and of the reliability of Yhwh. In particular, arboreal imagery found throughout the prophetic corpus is, as it were, transplanted into prose form in Jon 4:6-8, in which the mysterious qîqâyôn plant experiences a surge of growth and sudden death at the behest of Yhwh. Like arboreal imagery elsewhere in the prophetic corpus, the qîqâyôn illustrates or foreshadows the rise and fall of nations and kings. Once readers recognize the qîqâyôn as the literal instantiation of a prophetic trope, several new “elements of meaning” become available by which to understand the episode. Indeed, the scene is so suffused with destructive implications that Jonah, and readers of the book of Jonah, realize, however belatedly, that although Yhwh is אפים ארך, he also holds the wicked to account, an insight which Yhwh confirms in his final words on the subject in 4:10-11.

The literalization of prophetic imagery in Jonah 4:6-9

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10 My thanks to David Vanderhooft for the phrase, which perfectly expresses the concept I am trying to convey.
11 Kirsten Nielsen, There Is Hope for a Tree, 31.
Jonah 4 is acknowledged by readers attentive to the narrative art of the book to be the structural counterpart of Jonah 2. In each, Yhwh “appoints” (מנה) fantastic creatures, the big fish of Jon 2:1, and the fast-growing qiqayôn plant of Jonah 4:6, both of which alter the direction of the narrative (or, in the case of Jonah 2, the direction of the prophet). Both chapters find the prophet praying to Yhwh, وיתפל אל־יהוה (2:2, 4:2) in the traditional language of Israel’s religious heritage, but in each case, the prophet uses this received material in novel ways. In Jonah 2, Jonah’s prayer is a pastiche of psalmic expressions, while in Jonah 4, he invokes the “Divine Attributes Formula,” not to praise the forbearance of Yhwh, but to critique it. Lexical links also underscore the similarities in plot and structure between the two chapters in Jonah. As Phyllis Trible has noted, “the sound of the verb ‘wither’ (יובש) in Jonah 4:7 echoes the sound of the noun ‘dry land’ (היבש; 2:11) to evoke association with the fish episode.” Further, Halpern and Friedman have pointed out the assonance between the action of the fish, which “vomits Jonah” (宿迁 את־יונה) and the name of the mysterious plant, the “qiqayôn,” which, they say, “resembles nothing so much as the sound of the words, ‘the vomiting of Jonah.’ The chapters also exhibit a tight focus on the interactions between Jonah and God to the exclusion of other characters (contrast the tumultuous crowd scenes of chapters 1 and 3).

12 Jonathan Magonet, Form and Meaning, 55. Cooper, 145.
13 Versification alert: in many English versions the fish appears in Jon 1:17; in BHS, however, it surfaces in 2:1.
16 Halpern, and Friedman, “Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah,” 86.
My interest in the correspondences in diction, plot and theme between the two chapters became the basis for an inquiry as to whether the literalization technique that appears in Jonah 2 also plays a role in the final chapter. I have discovered that just as Jonah experiences many of the “figurative” elements of psalms of lament in Jonah 2, so in Jonah 4, the sudden intrusion of the qîqāyôn and its attendant phenomena cause the prophet to experience first-hand (and in rapid succession) a series of prophetic “images” that connote divine justice.

**Setting the scene for the qîqāyôn**

Before discussing the qîqāyôn imagery, I want to situate the episode within the course of Jonah’s narrative. The narrator assigns two purposes to the qîqāyôn: it grows, at Yhwh’s command, over Jonah “to be shade for his head, to save him from his distress” (4:6). Many readers hold that the two clauses should be read together, as if excessive sun exposure were the cause of Jonah’s distress, i.e., “the qîqāyôn was shade for Jonah’s head, to save him from his distress.” This reading has engendered a great many pious remonstrations of Jonah’s “self-serving” interest in his own comfort.

However, the two clauses should be understood to refer to two distinct causes of discomfort to Jonah. First, the qîqāyôn will provide external relief for Jonah from the sun, and second, it will assist in the resolution of Jonah’s internal רעה. As Sasson notes,

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17 Wolff, 159, has “to give his head shade, so as to wrest him out of his displeasure.” T.A. Perry, 53, has: “to act as a shade over his head, to save him from his distress.” Thomas A. Perry, *The Honeymoon Is Over: Jonah's Argument with God* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006).
18 Hauser’s comment, 36–7, is representative: “Jonah is insensitive to the possibility of great suffering by others but leaps for joy when a mild annoyance is removed from him.”
the use of the verb הָצִּיל “is fine theological language, referring to God’s rescue of individuals from enemy, guilt, or death” but not, generally, from sunstroke. Moreover, “because inanimates do not control this verbal form, the qîqāyôn cannot be responsible for rescuing Jonah from his misery.” Indeed, as I have argued previously, Jonah’s רעה originates not with his inability to endure excessive heat (he builds a הָסָכֶה in 4:5), but with his aggrieved sense that the reprieve of Nineveh was predetermined, regardless of the Ninevites’ response to his oracle (4:1). Therefore, the qîqāyôn becomes an instrument by which Yhwh may save Jonah from the רעה provoked by Yhwh’s previous actions (or inaction) vis-à-vis Nineveh.

It is not immediately clear what effect the growth of the qîqāyôn might have on Jonah’s internal רעה. Although Jonah’s gladness about the qîqāyôn (4:6), like his distress in 4:1, is “great,” it does not seem to provoke any great change in Jonah’s disposition with regard to Yhwh, Nineveh, or events up to this point. Interestingly enough, however, Thomas Perry quotes Maimonides’ remark that “prophecy does not come upon a prophet while he was in a stupor or in a state of melancholy, but only in a state of joy.” If, as I shall argue, the episode of the qîqāyôn is essentially prophetic, that is, intended to provide insight into present and future events, then Jonah’s joy, by Rambam’s definition, may be a prerequisite for the oracular material that follows. What I wish to suggest therefore, is that it is not the qîqāyôn’s growth, but its destruction—and Yhwh’s

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19 Sasson, Jonah, 292.
20 Ibid. It is Yhwh, not the plant, that provides the saving action, contra LXX, τὸν σκιαζέντα αὐτῷ απὸ τὸν κακὸν αὐτοῦ.
22 Perry, 59.
subsequent explanation—that provide relief for Jonah’s complaint about the apparent failure of divine justice.

Previous intertextual studies of Jonah 4:6-11 have tended to compare the episode to Elijah’s sojourn under the broom tree (1 Kings 19),23 or contrast it, a scraggily bush destroyed by a worm, with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:3-4), which was populated by an infamous serpent.24 The present approach is more encompassing: since the qîqāyôn’s ephemerality is at the centerpiece of Yhwh’s explanation of it in Jonah 4:10-11, the intertexts for the qîqāyôn should also feature a plant or tree’s growth and death. I will argue that by reading the qîqāyôn scene in light of both its prophetic counterparts and Assyrian royal propaganda that employs arboreal imagery, a new understanding of the scene takes shape.

The Use of Arboreal/Horticultural Symbolism in Assyria and Its Successors

The following overview seeks first to show, briefly, the ways in which Assyrian royal propaganda associated its kings with images of trees or gardens, depicting them as “good gardeners” who planted trees, and as heroic wood-cutters who felled them. These motifs had a very long pedigree in the ANE, but we will confine ourselves to their use in the Neo-Assyrian period and thereafter.

According to David Stronach, by the ninth century B.C.E., “the garden” became a “potent vehicle for royal propaganda” of Neo-Assyrian kings.25 Assurnasirpal II (883-
859) is famous for his zealous participation in the Neo-Assyrian royal practice of collecting cuttings and seeds from the indigenous plants and trees of conquered territories and planting them in a royal garden.\textsuperscript{26} In this respect, clearly, a royal garden acted as an “emblem of conquest.”\textsuperscript{27} In their abundance and lushness, royal gardens also conveyed messages about divine favor and royal benevolence.\textsuperscript{28} Assurnasirpal II, moreover, seems to have brought his enthusiasm for the garden motif into his palace iconography: at the Northwest Palace, 96 carvings of stylized trees line the walls of a single room.

The meaning of the palace tree iconography is a matter of much debate, but Barbara Nevling Porter suggests that, like the royal garden, its purpose was to emphasize “the abundance that Assurnasirpal’s rule could provide with the gods’ help.”\textsuperscript{29} While the use of the tree scene diminished in subsequent centuries, Porter notes that Assurbanipal (668-631 B.C.E.) is represented wearing a garment decorated with a stylized tree.\textsuperscript{30} (Another carving depicts the same king reclining on a couch beneath a vine-arbor, enjoying a bowl of wine, and beaming at the head of Teumman, the king of Elam, which dangles from a nearby pine tree.\textsuperscript{31} This image is somewhat arresting not only for its intrinsic interest, but given the setting of Jonah 4, in which the prophet sits beneath his סכה, over which the qîqāyôn plant grows.)

Another metaphor that denotes the king’s protective and benevolent presence is

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Porter, 20.
\textsuperscript{31} R.D. Barnett, \textit{Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh 668-626 B.C.} (London: British Museum Publications, 1976), 57; Plate LXIII: Slab A.
that of shade. Nadav Naaman has observed that “living ina silli šarri (“under the shadow of the king’) was a central element in the ideology of the Assyrian kings.” Naaman remarks, further, that the description of the king as a giver of shade also finds expression in the Hebrew Bible:

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 (Judg. ix 15).

There are several other instances of biblical use of the shade motif, prominent among them Lam 4:20, which bemoans the failure of the “anointed one” under whose “shade we thought we would live,” (בגוים נחיה בצלו אמרנו). Ezek 31:17 which seems to allude to and mock this important royal metaphor, merits close examination, given that the object of the oracle is the “king of Assyria” represented there by a mighty cedar. In Ezek 31:17, those who formerly “lived in [the king of Assyria’s] shade” “go down to Sheol with him.” As Moshe Greenberg notes, “the idea might be that the protection of the shadow put the clients beyond the reach of enemies; departing from the shadow is in this respect a descent.” Greenberg’s comment is apt, except in one particular: the “clients” have not “departed” from the shadow; rather, the shadow has been lost due to the destruction of the tree. Thus, two connotations reside in a single image. The tree’s shadow at first connotes its power, while the loss of shade at the destruction of the tree bespeaks the transitory nature of the “tree’s” dominion, and the vulnerability of those who formerly

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32 Nadav Naaman, “The House of No-Shade Shall Take Away Its Tax From You,” VT 45 (1995), 520. See also A. Leo Oppenheim, “Assyriological Gleanings IV: The Shadow of the King,” BASOR 107 (1947):7-11. Oppenheim points out that in several iconographic instances, the king’s shade is cast by his umbrella, not by a leafy canopy.

33 Hos 14:7 depicts Yhwh as providing the shade necessary for Israel to flourish like plants in a garden.

took refuge in it. When the tree’s substance is destroyed, those who grasped at its shadow are doomed. Ezekiel’s exploitation of the shade metaphor here is but a single instance in which prophets seem to appropriate Assyrian imagery only to subvert it.\(^{35}\)

Finally, it is important to note that Neo-Assyrian kings also made much of their destructive capabilities *vis-à-vis* trees.\(^{36}\) For example, Shalmaneser III (858-824) describes himself as a heroic hewer of forests, an act which underscores his sovereignty: “I went up to the mountains of the Amanus and cut down logs of cedar and juniper. My royal image I set up before the Amanus.”\(^{37}\) The fact that this inscription appears on the base of the ruler’s throne makes the connection between the wood-cutter image and its intended meaning quite clear: the tale of Shalmaneser’s adventure in Amanus demonstrates “the heroism of the king and the long reach of his might.”\(^{38}\)

Assyria’s dominion eventually collapsed, but royal use of arboreal imagery continued in the Babylonian and Persian periods.\(^{39}\) The symbolic connection between kings and trees was so strong in the minds of subjugated peoples during the Persian era that, “the first hostile act of the revolt by the Phoenicians against Artaxerxes III was ‘the cutting down and destroying of the royal park in which the Persian kings were wont to

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\(^{37}\) Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image,” 723. Machinist points out that Isaiah 37:24 which “quotes” Sennacherib’s boasting claim that he has “cut down the loftiest cedars” of Lebanon, seems actively aware of Assyrian propaganda of this type. Machinist cites P. Hulin, *Iraq* 25 (1963), 51-52:21-22, whose translation is substantially the same.

\(^{38}\) Ibid.

take their recreation.”40 The symbolic message of such an attack is clear: “the felling of
the trees in the paradise was considered an affront to the sovereignty and majesty of the
Great King.”41

Prophetic use of trees as symbols

Prophetic use of arboreal imagery to represent kings or polities is thus squarely
rooted in the Ancient Near Eastern contexts in which the Israelite/Judean prophets
worked. Not only did the prophets appropriate tropes and motifs drawn from Assyrian
royal propaganda and turn them against that empire, they also, as it were, took possession
of the same images, applying them to Yhwh, rather than to an earthly king.42 By
adapting Assyrian material in this way, the prophets asserted that Yhwh’s sovereignty
exceeded even that of the kings of Assyria.

The major point of contact between Assyrian and prophetic arboreal imagery is
the “wood-cutter” motif, but Ezek 17:24 establishes that Yhwh, like the kings of Assyria,
both “plants and hews” as a demonstration of sovereignty:

כָּל־עַצֵּי הָאַרְבָּאֹיכָא וְיַדְוָהוֹ וַיֵּפָרֹחַ הַלִּי רֵעֶה הַשֵּׁפֶל הָאְץ הַגָּבֶה הָאְץ הַשֵּׁפֶל וַיְשָׁבַט הַשֵּׁפֶל הָאְץ הַגָּבֶה וַיַּזְמוּ עַל בֵּית הַשֵּׁפֶל וַיֵּזַמְלָכֶה הָאֶם הַשֵּׁפֶל
יְהוָה אֶנֶּנָּךָ יְהוָה אֲנֵךְ
וַיִּעַשֶּׁה יִבֶשֶׁה עַל עַצֵּי הָאַרְבָּאֹיכָא וַיִּנְשִׁיטֶה דְּבָרִי יְהוָה אֶנֶּנָּךָ

All the trees of the field will know that I, Yhwh, bring high trees low, make lowly
trees high, make well-watered trees wither and make withered trees bloom. I,
Yhwh, have spoken, and I will do it! (Ezek 17:24)

41 Ibid.
As its wider context makes clear, the “trees of the field” represent nations of the earth which rise and fall at Yhwh’s behest. Such figurative use of trees as nations or peoples recurs frequently in the prophetic corpus. Trees that Yhwh fells can experience one of two fates: they can revive and produce new growth, or they can remain well and truly dead. Isaiah’s famous claim that “a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse” (Isaiah 11:1), is the marquee example of the first type,\(^43\) while Amos 2:9 represents the latter category. There, Yhwh says that although the Amorites’ “height was like the height of cedars and… [he was] as strong as oaks, I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath.” For the purpose of this study, texts that end with the death of a tree are the most useful, since there is no indication whatever in Jonah of any regenerative potential for the \(q\textit{iqqûyôn}\).\(^44\)

Kirsten Nielsen captures the purpose of prophetic “tree-felling” imagery; through it, she says, prophets demonstrated

to the audience that the correlation to be found [in] the world of nature… is also to be found in the political world… By seeing the political situation through the tree image, [the audience] will receive new understanding of the reality surrounding them.\(^45\)

By depicting Yhwh as the prime mover behind “tree/nations”’ destruction, the prophets conveyed to their audiences that

\(^{43}\) See also Jeremiah 23.5.

\(^{44}\) Ezekiel 19:10-14 exhibits the flexibility of the trees-as-nations trope, occupying a “middle ground” between the two major categories. Here, the “vine,” representing Judah, suffers all the violence of being "brought to the ground,” ("she was hurled to the ground, the east wind withered her branches"). Nevertheless "she" survives, diminished and weak, “planted…in ground that is arid and parched” (19:14). Similarly, Psalm 80:8-16 envisions Yhwh’s people as a vine whose prodigious early growth has been undone by violence and depredations.

\(^{45}\) Nielsen, 143.
Yahweh is the master of the political events, both when they denote misfortune and when they denote success; similarly, Yahweh can use foreign nations to accord with his plans...history is not therefore fortuitous; it has its own coherence...it was possible to use the tree images to argue that this coherence is righteous.\(^{46}\)

Thus, the prophets attached a moral dimension to the “tree” that Yhwh plants and (frequently) strikes down. The defining characteristic of the tree figure is its prodigious growth; its height is commensurate with the arrogance of the person or nation represented. “This creates a new way of looking at the high, upright trees. The uprightness is interpreted as pride, and the positively connotated trees now become negatively connoted.”\(^{47}\) The “tree” begins to have an inflated sense of its place in the created order. It overreaches, and must therefore be brought low by the offended sovereign: “as owner of the trees, Yahweh has the right to do what he pleases with them; ...the tree-felling is seen as a just punishment.”\(^{48}\) Isaiah presents a succinct summary of this concept:

יוהו כocha נשתיא על树木ים וגו על כל נשתיא שמך: על כל אזור hài הבמות הרמי והמשואים

\(^{46}\) Nielsen, 224. Her italics.

\(^{47}\) Nielsen, 226.

\(^{48}\) There are a great many correspondences between Ezekiel’s use of the prophetic tree motif in chs. 17 and 31 and Isaiah 14, the mocking “dirge” against the “king of Babylon” in Isa 14:12. See Nielsen, 161. Stephanie Dalley argues that the oracle about the rise and fall of the “son of the dawn” actually refers to Assyria. Further, she argues that Isaiah 13 and 21:9 also target Assyria, although they use “Babylon” metonymically—and stereotypically, in concert with the city lament genre— to stand for Nineveh. See Dalley, “Babylon as a Name for Other Cities Including Nineveh,” in Proceedings of the 51st Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale: held at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, July 18-22, 2005, 32. The reverse, however, does not hold, according to Dalley,33, who rejects the suggestion that Nineveh in Jonah is intended to represent Babylon. Vanderhooft disputes Dalley’s interpretation, remarking that the title “king of Babylon” is never used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to the king of Assyria, but in the great majority of cases refers specifically to Nebuchadnezzar. While it is extremely difficult to determine the original referent of the dirge, Vanderhooft suggests that “sixth century writers” had in view “the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar.” Vanderhooft, The Neo-Babylonian Empire, 129.

\(^{49}\) Nielsen, 225.
For Yhwh of hosts has a day against all the high and mighty and against all that are raised up: he brings low; ... against all the high cedars of Lebanon, and all the tall oaks of Bashan (Isa 2:12-13).

Nielsen points out, additionally, that felling is not the only method by which Yhwh may destroy a metaphorical tree.⁵⁰ In Ezek 19:4, indeed, the “vine” of Judah “was plucked up in fury... dried up by the east wind and consumed by fire.” Similarly, Isaiah envisions the nations as subject to hot, fiery winds. Where once the nations “crashed like great waters,” after Yhwh’s rebuke, they will become as desiccated and powerless as “chaff before the wind, tumbleweed before a tempest” (Isa 17:3).

**Assyria as a great tree in the prophets**

The fate of Nineveh is of course at the heart of the book of Jonah, and so it will behoove us, before we confront the particular characteristics of the qîqāyôn episode, to draw attention to the fact that the identification of Assyria/the king of Assyria⁵¹ as a mighty tree doomed to destruction occurs in several places in the prophetic corpus. In Isa 10:24ff, Assyria, which is explicitly identified as the object of a divine offensive in verse 24, and is apparently the unnamed subject of 10:28 and 10:32, will suffer complete (metaphorical) deforestation: “Look, the Lord, Yhwh of hosts, lops off branches with a crash! The [trees] highest on the hill are split, and even the tall ones come to earth. He clears the thicket and underbrush with an ax, and he fells the Lebanon” (Isa 10:33). Ezek

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⁵⁰ Nielsen, 85.
⁵¹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37 AB 22A* (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 637, notes that in Ezekiel 31:3, “Assyria” refers to “the Assyrian, i.e. the king of Assyria, recognizing...the personification of the people in its king.” The “king” thus functions as a metonym for Assyria itself.
31 not only targets the king of Assyria, it is also the most fully drawn version of the prophetic tree trope. It begins, “Assyria was a cedar of Lebanon with beautiful branches, the highest tree of the shady forest” (Ezek 31:3).  

Despite this promising beginning, hubris sets in and in Ezek 31:10-14, the “cedar” meets its end. Indeed, the cedar seems to be doubly destroyed, both by the “foreigners, violent nations” who hack it down, and by Yhwh, who “on the day of its descent to Sheol… covered the deep over it…held back the rivers, and imprisoned the cosmic waters.” The restraint of the waters of the deep deprives the cedar of the sources of water by which, previously, Yhwh had “made it beautiful in its abundant foliage” (31:9). The implied results of the dual methods of destruction are that the cedar is destroyed “root and branch:” by the “cruel strangers” above, who operate under divine sanction, and by Yhwh, below and behind-the-scenes.

**The qiqāyôn in light of prophetic and ANE arboreal imagery**

Armed with the background provided by the previous discussion, it is now possible to examine the figurative connotations inherent in Jonah’s qiqāyôn episode (4:6-9). As the scene opens, Jonah experiences a high degree of inner turmoil, reflected, Sasson suggests, by his stop-and-start activity: “Jonah exits, sits, builds, sits, then stares at the city. The effect is…as if Jonah is… not sure how best to proceed.” It is as though the director has failed to call “cut” after the scene that should have ended the

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52 Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 645. Smend, Zimmerli, and others propose to emend ‘aššur in Ezek 31:3 to ta’aššur (cypress). Greenberg, 646-47, has argued convincingly against the change, not least on the grounds that the reading of “cypress” “goes against the confirming witness of all versions.”

53 Sasson, 287.
book, if Nineveh’s effective penitence were truly the author’s main interest. The narrative gaze, however, now shifts to the growth and death of the qîqāyôn, wherein, I argue, information about the eventual fate of Nineveh is contained.

As Jonah sits and stew, the qîqāyôn suddenly grows up over his head, at the command of Yhwh, and the points of contact between the qîqāyôn and the prophetic tree trope begin to appear.\(^{54}\) As in Ezek 31:7, 9, 11, the spectacular growth and ignominious decline of the tree/plant are ordained by Yhwh (Jon 4:6,7) without human participation. Further, the qîqāyôn, like the cedar representing Assyria, having achieved extremely impressive height, 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 qîqāyôn, while different, have similar results. Each tree is undone, at least in part, by violent attacks. As noted above, in Ezekiel 31, the tree is hewn down by “violent strangers.” In Jon 4:7 the part of the “violent strangers” is played by a worm, which “struck” (נכה) the qîqāyôn.\(^{55}\) The oddity of the use of the verb נכה creates a violent undertone: usually worms simply “eat” (אכל) their objects of interest.\(^{56}\)

\(^{54}\) I do not claim that the qîqāyôn must be identified as a tree according to botanical taxonomies, only that it has the characteristics of metaphorical prophetic trees. Whether the qîqāyôn is to be identified as a castor plant (which seems most likely), a gourd, or an athbash for the phrase דָּוִד כִּי יְהוֹ (see Duane Christensen, “Jonah and the Sabbath Rest in the Pentateuch,” \(^{57}\)), is not essential to the argument, but see below for a brief discussion of the purgative effects of castor seeds. For an overview of the main arguments for and against the above identifications, see Bernard P. Robinson, “Jonah’s Qiqayon Plant,” ZAW 97 (1985), 390-403.

\(^{55}\) Trible “A Tempest in a Text,” 195, notes that “the worm mediates not between Yhweh and Jonah but between God and the plant. It shields the deity from directly perpetrating botanical death.” Thus in both Ezek 31 and Jon 4, the deity acts only as the delegator who ordains the destruction of the plants, whether by removing the cedar’s water source or by “appointing” the worm.

\(^{56}\) The word תולעה is used interchangeably to refer to insects that feed destructively on valuable objects, such as moths that eat clothing (Isa 51:8); “maggots” as above, Isa 14:11, and also probably in Ex 16:20,24 (maggots in the manna); and crop-devouring caterpillars, as in Deut 28:39 and Jon 4:7.
The negative connotations attached to the “worm” should not be overlooked.

Sasson rightly points out that “elsewhere it is cited as an instrument of God’s disfavor (Deut 28:39) and as a voracious consumer of human remains (Isa 14:11, 66:24).” The context of Isa 14:11 is of particular interest in the present case, for the worms (תולעה) that cover the corpse of the “king of Babylon” like a shroud are the consequence of that monarch’s overweening pride. Indeed, in an interesting correspondence, the “king’s” rise and fall has many of the elements of the tree trope, except the tree imagery itself. Like the cedar of Ezek 31, which lies abandoned on the ground, the king’s body is also left to the depredations of nature; the tyrant becomes food for worms. In light of Isaiah 14, then, the “worm” in Jonah takes on increased (and grisly) metaphorical freight.

In both Ezekiel 31 and Jonah 4, the destruction of the tree is followed by the suffering of those who previously enjoyed its shade. In Ezek 31:15, “all the trees of the field,” deprived of the shade cast by the mighty cedar, languish miserably (עלפה). Similarly, in the aftermath of the qiqayôn’s demise, Jonah, deprived of its shade, struck by the sun, and subjected to the blistering east wind, “grew faint” and “wished he would die” (4:8).

The translation “to grow faint” may connote for many readers a hapless, helpless

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57 Sasson, 301.
58 More likely the king of Assyria is meant, see above, note 47.
59 The only explicit mention of trees in the Isaiah passage occurs in 14:8, which seems to allude to the Neo-Assyrian imagery of kings as lumberjacks: “even the juniper trees rejoice... since you have lain down, the woodcutter comes no more against us.” (The translation is that of John D.W. Watts, Isaiah 1:33, WBC 24 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 205. For a recent thorough study of this mashal, see R. Mark Shipp, Of Dead Kings and Dirges: Myth and Meaning in Isaiah 14:4b-21 (Brill: Leiden; Boston, 2002).
quality, as in Jane Austen’s advice to young ladies: “run mad as often as you please; but do not faint.” The inadequacy of the term to describe Jonah’s condition is illustrated by Amos 8:13 and Isa 51:20, in which the verb עלה describes the utter physical prostration of young, strong men brought low by the Day of Yhwh. In the latter, they “lie at the head of every street… like an antelope in a snare, overcome by the anger of your God” (Isa 51:20). Jonah does not simply become woozy; rather, subjected to the full force of the khamsin, or sirocco, Jonah is reduced to a pitiable state indeed, perhaps enduring the discomforts that W.M. Thomson reported regarding his own experience of the khamsin: “the eyes inflame, the lips blister, and the moisture of the body evaporates under the ceaseless pertinacity of the persecuting wind: you become languid, nervous, irritable, and despairing.”

A review of occurrences of the קדים רוח in the Hebrew Bible establishes that it is no zephyr. Rather, this wind literally causes scorched earth, a quality that likely contributed to its metaphorical appropriation by biblical writers. The קדים רוח is “the wind of Yhwh” a hot, dry, sirocco, which in prophetic usage can represent either the advance of a conquering army sent by Yhwh (Jer 4:11-12) or Yhwh, the warrior god, advancing via theophanic siroccos or stormwinds (Nah 1:3, Hos 13:15). The קדים רוח of

60 W.M. Thomson, The Land and the Book II (1882), 262, quoted in Fitzgerald, 17. Other symptoms of exposure to the sirocco include, according to T. Chaplin M.D., (quoted in Fitzgerald, 18), “headache, with a sense of constriction as if a cord were tied round the temples, oppression of the chest, burning of the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, accelerated pulse, thirst, and sometimes actual fever.” Aloysius Fitzgerald, Lord of the East Wind (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2002). See also Sasson, 303, note 6, who notes that the east wind “plays havoc with the human cooling mechanism.” Sasson, 302 note 5, also directs attention to the east wind’s job description in 1 Enoch 76:1-6, which includes (but is not limited to) “extirpation, drought, pestilence and destruction.”

61 Fitzgerald, 25.
Exodus 14:21 is clearly a “tool of Yahweh,” used against the Egyptians, who are “consumed like stubble” (15:7). The east wind, then, settles any question with regard to Yhwh’s sovereignty; nothing and no one can withstand it. The sirocco’s advance causes bodies of water to dry up, as in Ex 14:12; vegetation to wither (Ezek 17:10, 19:12); and pasturelands to become arid wastes (Nah 1:4). Civilization itself, the prophets assert, is unmade by the divine sirocco: in hyperbolic, theophanic use of the image, formerly inhabited cities become ruins, home only to “desert beasts and demons.”

The presence of the east wind in Jonah is of particular interest because Nahum 1 and Zeph 2:13-14 both employ motifs related to the theophanic sirocco within their treatments of Nineveh’s devastation. In Nahum, the deity proceeds against Nineveh in a divine super-sirocco, described fantastically as able to “dry up the sea” (Nah 1:4) and “melt hills.” (Nah 1:5). The fate of Yhwh’s opponents is sealed by the wind: they will be “consumed like desiccated stubble” (Nah 1:10).

If Nahum gives a “play-by-play” as the theophanic sirocco unfolds, Zephaniah provides a glimpse of its aftermath, when Yhwh has “stretched out his hand” (Zeph 2:13) against Nineveh: “he will make Nineveh desolate, a wasteland like the wilderness… Herds, every kind of beast, shall stretch out exhausted in it, while both the desert owl and the screech owl will nest among its capitals” (Zeph 2:13-14). Thus, in the three prophetic texts that have the fate of Nineveh in their sights, the east wind, either implicitly or explicitly, is present.

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Fitzgerald, 67.
Fitzgerald, 181.
The assault by Yhwh in the east wind emphasizes the deity’s power, the “heat” of his anger, and the utter vulnerability of the whole earth. Indeed, the divine sirocco causes collateral damage: in Nahum, the pastures of Carmel and Bashan — Yhwh’s home turf, as it were — cower and languish under the effects of the sirocco (Nah 1:4). Similarly, in Jonah, the prophet himself is the first victim of the scorching wind. But, as in Nahum, Nineveh is the wind’s true target: the prophet, the narrator takes pains to inform us, has decamped to the east of the city (Jonah 4:5), which establishes that Nineveh, as in Nahum, lies next on the wind’s path.

To rehearse the results of our study thus far, the qîqāvôn’s growth and death echoes prophetic imagery used to chart the rise and justified fall of nations, while the worm and the wind likely convey defeat and imminent death at the hands of an angry god. There is, we must admit, a certain diminishment of the prophetic motifs (with the exception of the wind) in Jonah 4. The scraggly qîqāvôn is surely no mighty cedar of Lebanon, in much the way that the big fish of Jonah 2 is a far cry from such cosmic monsters as Leviathan. Perhaps there is something literally “prosaic” in the ways the author of Jonah appropriates and installs these images in the context of his narrative.

What I mean is, in their transition from the grandiose expressions of prophetic poetry, to their “appointments” in the narrative prose of Jonah, the figures of the fish, the tree and the worm (if not the wind), become more functional than fearsome: they are role-players in a didactic narrative. The question is, what is the lesson?
The meaning of the images in the qîqāyyôn episode

Having demonstrated that the plant episode contains many elements of the prophetic trope of trees as nations, and that the worm and the wind connote divinely ordained destruction, I want to advance the argument that the events of Jonah 4:6-9 point toward the eventual fate of Nineveh.

Thomas Perry came close to expressing this possibility when he argued that the qîqāyyôn acts “as a sign or ‘ot,” the function of which is to “point to something…. some understanding between humans and God.”64 Concluding that the qîqāyyôn is intended to play some specific communicative purpose, Perry observed, point by point, the correspondences between the plant and Nineveh. Both were “God’s creation,”65 and both experienced “prodigious growth.”66 In Perry’s final point of comparison, however, there is no match in the “Nineveh column” for the death of the qîqāyyôn.67 Rather, Perry uses dual exclamation points, “!!”68 to convey the unexpected implications of the Nineveh- qîqāyyôn comparison.

Perry then spells out the cause of his surprise: “is Jonah to learn that Nineveh too is ephemeral?... is [the function of the episode]...to intimate that Nineveh too can be struck down?”69 I think this is indeed the most likely meaning of the qîqāyyôn scene: just as Yhwh set the boundaries for the life and death of the plant, so too Nineveh will

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64 Perry, Honeymoon, 154, n. 48.
65 Perry, 154.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Perry, 154-55.
flourish and wither according to Yhwh’s timetable and on his command. When it
becomes evident that the prophet does not “get it,” however, Yhwh offers an explication
of the qîqāyôn that concludes the book on an ominous note.

Jonah 4:10-11: the meaning of the qîqāyôn

In the aftermath of the qîqāyôn episode, Yhwh checks in with Jonah to find out
its effect: “Are you really so angry about the qîqāyôn?” (4:9) After all, if Jonah has
deciphered the rampant symbolism, perhaps his anger should diminish. But no: Jonah is
“so angry I could die” (4:9). Yhwh then embarks on an explanation of the qîqāyôn’s
significance, in which he associates Nineveh with the plant by means of two parallel
sentences:

אנה חסת על kapsחא אاصر לא שמלת ב א לא נדלוה שבכ לילה יה ובין לילה אבך: ואני
אוהל על־נינהה 국יר הנורה אשיר ישיבת הרבח مشתמי בשחרה רבו אמס אشرح לא ידיע ברימתי
לשמאלא והמה רבח:

You regretted the loss of the qîqāyôn, which you didn’t work for or cause to
grow, and which was here today and gone tomorrow. But I will not regret the loss
of Nineveh, that great city, which teems with 120,000 people who don’t know
their left from their right, and their animals too (Jon 4:10-11).

The differences between my rendition of 4:10-11 and the mainstream reading
should be readily apparent. First, I propose to dispense entirely with the interrogative
interpretation to which commentators almost universally adhere, with the result that 4:10-
11 is frequently rendered, “you, Jonah pitied the plant... so shouldn’t I, Yhwh, pity
Nineveh, the great city and its animals, even more?”

Unlike the questions in 4:4 and 4:9, Jon 4:10-11 is not marked as such: it does
not contain an interrogative ḫ. The omission does not definitively disqualify the
interrogative interpretation. Guillaume points out that in other examples of unmarked rhetorical questions, “the omission of ה interrogative is common after a ו marking an opposition”70 and that the sequence of forms, “similar combinations of qatal forms followed by a yiqtol linked with a ו” can indicate the verse’s “rhetorical character.”71 In most cases, the interrogative nature of these constructions is confirmed by context: “there is no other way to make sense of the verse in which they stand.”72 However, Guillaume argues, there are some instances where neither grammar nor context definitively establishes whether an interrogative or declarative sense is intended:

Jon 4,11 belongs to this ambivalent category, but stands out, with Job 2,10 as the choice between question and affirmation entails particularly sensitive theological issues (11). “And I should not have pity over Nineveh?” is as different to “as for me, I will not have pity over Nineveh!” than “Shall we receive the good from God and not receive the bad?” differs from “Although we receive the good from God, the evil we shall not receive!” Either reading makes sense, but the choice impacts the understanding of the whole book.73

In view of the lack of grammatical or syntactical basis by which to determine the proper interpretation, Guillaume and Cooper agree that only an “exegetical a priori” prevents 4:11 from being translated “as a simple declarative.”74 The point is difficult to dispute. For many commentators, to read 4:11 as a statement (“I will not regret the loss of Nineveh’s people and animals…”) is theologically untenable. Trible, for example, takes the mention of “much cattle” in 4:11 as an indication that in the divine moral

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71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
74 Cooper, 158. Guillaume, “The End of Jonah,” 246: “Reading a question where the context does not support it suggests that the interrogative rendering of Jon 4,11 is pure dogma.”
economy depicted by Jonah’s author, “animals matter alongside people.” Trible wants Yhwh to care about/pity animals as well as people and to be motivated by their presence to pity/spare Nineveh. But in the large majority of instances drawn from the prophetic corpus, when the deity refers to this pair, it is to announce their shared doom (e.g. Ezek 14:13,17,19, 21; Ezek 29:8; Hos 4:1-3, Zeph 1:3, Jer 51:62). Nowhere does the presence of animals safeguard human beings from divine wrath. More typically, the presence of sinful human beings causes suffering and death in the rest of the animal kingdom. As Qohelet said of human beings and animals, “as one dies, so dies the other” (Eccl 3:18).

Yhwh’s description of Nineveh’s people in 4:11 certainly does not betray a strong sense of compassion for them. Rather, as Bolin notes, the phrasing of 4:11 establishes that the “witless Ninevites exhibit a foolishness that puts them on an equal footing with their beasts.” The phrase “do not know their left from their right,” seems (based on its near parallels) to indicate the Ninevites’ lack of judgment. In 2 Sam 19:36, Barzillai’s fading sensory perceptions make him unable to know (יָד, i.e., distinguish) “good from bad.” Qohelet may make a left-right/good-bad correspondence when he asserts, in Eccl 10:2, “the mind of the wise is to the right, but that of the blockhead is to the left.” It seems, then, that Yhwh characterizes the Ninevites as undiscerning, a description that echoes Isa 27:11, in which the prophet asserts that Assyria has forfeited Yhwh’s continued care and protection:

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76 In Exodus, moreover, “man and beast” alike are subject to the several of the plagues: Ex 8:17, 18; 9:9-10, 22.
77 Bolin, Freedom Beyond Forgiveness, 163.
Because this people has no understanding, he does not have compassion on them. The one who made them and formed them will not be gracious” (Isa 27:11). Cooper, rightly, in my view, summarizes the implications: “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.”

The point is well taken: not only are the Ninevites on an equal footing with their livestock, they seem also to be on equal footing with a dead plant. In Jon 4:10, Yhwh comments that Jonah has earned no sweat equity in the qîqāyôn: “you did not work for it or make it grow.” The latter verb, grandi, in the pi`el, “refers to the raising of plants only in highly literary contexts” such as in Ezek 31:4, where it refers metaphorically to the “growth” of the Assyria-cedar engendered by the waters of the deep. Indeed, Jon 4:10 and Ezek 31:4 are the only instances in which this use of grandi occurs in reference to plants. More frequently, the verb, in this stem, refers to Yhwh’s promotion of kings (or kings’ promotion of minions). It implies an increase of status, rather than physical growth. Used metonymically, moreover, as in Gen 12:2 “I will make your name great,” or 1 Kgs 1:37, “may Yhwh make Solomon’s throne greater than the throne of… David,” grandi can refer to the increase of descendants and dominions.

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78 See Sasson, 319. The same passage (Isa 27:6) says, “Jacob will take root, Israel will blossom.”
79 Cooper, 158.
80 Sasson, 310. More typically, when Yhwh causes growth of plants, we find the verb צומח, as in Gen 2:9. Elsewhere in the same passage (2:8), Yhwh the gardener “plants” (נטע) the garden of Eden.
81 The only other use of grandi used in reference to plant growth occurs in Isa 44:14, where an idol-maker “lets a tree grow” to a good height before chopping it down.
82 Jos 4:14, Est 3:1.
In light of the applicability of לגד to polities as well as plants, I want to follow Bolin’s suggestion to “see the mutual applicability of each statement [in 4:10-11] in both parts of the argument.”\(^83\) What I am arguing is that although the qîqāyôn is Yhwh’s ostensible referent in the לגד clause, Nineveh is his true subject. Thus, “just as the qîqāyôn’s lifespan has been completed without the care of Jonah, so too has Nineveh grown large apart from Yahweh’s care— and so too are its days numbered.”\(^84\)

### Problems with the \textit{a fortiori} interpretation

Obviously, by eschewing the interrogative sense so often applied to 4:10-11, I am also departing from the prevailing interpretation of the verse, which holds that 4:10-11 should be read as an \textit{a fortiori} argument, “characterized by the analogous application of an argument that obtains in one case to a second case seen to be more significant than the first.”\(^85\) The \textit{a fortiori} argument is intended to convince the reader/audience that, “if such reasoning applies in this case, how much more so does it apply in this other case of greater importance.”\(^86\) Under the influence of the \textit{a fortiori} interpretation, many commentators render Jon 4:10-11 as, “you, Jonah, pitied the short-lived qîqāyôn-- so isn’t it even more proper that I, Yhwh, have pitied Nineveh, which is really big and full of people and animals?”

The brief life and sudden death of the qîqāyôn, by this reading, are intended to force Jonah to cast off his reservations about the course of events vis-à-vis Yhwh and Nineveh and to rejoice in Nineveh’s survival. Thayer S. Warshaw captures this

\(^{83}\) Bolin, \textit{Freedom Beyond Forgiveness}, 163.
\(^{84}\) Ibid.
\(^{85}\) Bolin, \textit{Freedom}, 159.
\(^{86}\) Ibid.
sentiment: “the implied logic is typical of the rabbis: if pity is due the lowly plant, how much more is pity due the far more valuable and numerous inhabitants of Nineveh!”87 Many commentators also identify a related *a fortiori* comparison of Jonah and Yhwh, in which “Jonah’s self-absorption is contrasted with God’s magnanimity.”88 In Hauser’s summary, “God is clearly portrayed as one eager to forgive his creatures, while Jonah is seen to be excessively self-serving.”89 In either case, a contrast is drawn between “minor” personages or entities whose emotions or existence are of comparatively little importance (Jonah and the *qîqāyôn* respectively), and “major” personages or entities whose grandeur commands respect and/or demands continuance (Yhwh and Nineveh respectively).

Despite their ubiquity, however, the *a fortiori* interpretations pose many difficulties. First, although the “implied logic” of the *a fortiori* comparison is typical of the rabbis, it may be worth noting that in rabbinic lists of scriptural instances of “*qal va*-*homar*” argumentation, Jonah 4:10-11 does not appear.90 Moreover, although interpreters frequently supply a phrase such as “*how much more* will I, Yhwh, pity Nineveh…” the indicators that typically signal that a “from minor to major” analogy is intended are absent in Jonah 4:10-11. When biblical authors wish to indicate such a meaning, they almost invariably employ הָנה at the start of the initial (“minor”) clause,

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87 Warshaw, 198.
88 Cooper, 157.
89 Hauser, 37.
and either והן or והנ or to signal the beginning of the final (“major”) clause. 91 Indeed, in Louis Jacobs’ collection of 29 scriptural examples of “a fortiori” biblical argumentation, 24 contain at least one of the grammatical elements mentioned; the great majority includes both markers. 92

With the exception of Jonah 4:10-11, passages that Jacobs deems to have an a fortiori sense (Ezek 33:24, Numb 12:14, Est 9:12, Neh 13:26-27), though lacking explicit grammatical indicators, are structurally and lexically straightforward, so that their meaning is clear. For example, Ezek 33:24 contains the prophet’s auditors’ specious claim, “Abraham was one man,” who gained title to the land, “but we are many,” so we must inherit the land. The argument here might not be convincing, but the rhetorical device is evident: “if the ‘minor’ has this or that property, then the ‘major’ must undoubtedly have it.” 93 Similarly, in Est 9:24 Ahasuerus yelps, “the Judeans have killed so many thousands of people in the capital; what have they done in the provinces?” In this case, the a fortiori sense is implicit but apparent. The structuring particles that typically demarcate the concluding clause are replaced by the open-ended, somewhat panicky interrogative, המ. The comparison intended between the (relatively small) capital and the (relatively large) provinces is clearly evident. In Jon 4:10-11, however,

91 Jacobs, 226, on the grammatical markers of a fortiori arguments: “its use is generally of a formal nature, beginning with והן or והנ and concluding with והן or והנ.” Variants include Genesis 17:20-21 which has והנ in the prefatory clause, and a disjunctive וה in the concluding clause, while Gen 4:24 has והנ ...

92 The examples include nine that appear in Genesis Rabbah 92:7, and a further twenty adduced by Jacobs, 222-25.

93 Jacobs, 221.
an array of semantic and structural problems make the *a fortiori* interpretation a much more vexed issue.

First, the parallelism on which the purported *a fortiori* comparison of 4:10-11 is based is “less than perfect.” Thomas Bolin has pointed out that the *a fortiori* interpretation requires that the verb חוס bear the same meaning consistently because, “it is the word which designates the issue at stake, the reactions of Jonah and Yahweh, and is the only term common to both parts of the argument.” The verb חוס is, as it were, the pivot which makes the two clauses into a comparison; to translate חוס differently in each case is to lose the basis on which the comparison rests. But if there is no “establishment of correspondence between the two examples,” i.e. no lexical pivot, the *a fortiori* interpretation founders. In order to create such a pivot, translators must choose among four options by which to render the term חוס, including “pity,” “spare,” “be sorry to lose,” or “be concerned about/over/for,” a meaning not found elsewhere for חוס in the biblical corpus, but which appears in Mishnaic Hebrew.

**How to translate חוס**

The frequent reliance of translators on the noncommittal, unparalleled, and unconvincing “be concerned about” option bespeaks the difficulty of finding a meaning of חוס that makes sense in both clauses.

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94 Perry, *Honeymoon*, 152.
96 Bolin, *Freedom*, 159.
97 See Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 436-37; for this meaning of the verb in rabbinical sources, see Rofé, *Prophetic Tales*, 164, note 71.
98 See NRSV, JPS Tanakh (1985), NAB, among others.
To illustrate: there is no question but that “pity,” referring to an internal feeling of compassion for a sufferer, can be an accurate translation of חוס. Such is the case, for example, in Ps 72:13, and Isa 13:18, where חוס is closely paired with רחם. On the whole, divine “pity” is inspired not by “great cities,” but by individual sufferers or marginalized groups within wider populations, such as the poor or oppressed, as in Psalm 72:13. The problem with applying this meaning of the verb to Jonah 4:11, is that the Ninevites, at the moment of the discussion between Yhwh and Jonah, are not suffering. In this light, it is worth recalling Trible’s question: “if the plant is pitied only after it withers, then what does pity for Nineveh imply about the future of the city?” If “pity” is the preferred translation, it cannot spell good news for Nineveh.

To interpret Jonah’s response to the dead qîqâyôn as “pity” is even more problematic. As Sasson notes, it is no more accurate to say that Jonah “pities” the plant, than it would be appropriate to attribute to Joseph’s brothers “compassion or pity regarding their baggage” in Genesis 45:20.

To be precise, Isaiah 13:18 refers to the Medes’ lack of pity for children and infants.


It could be argued that all human beings and animals, given their vulnerable mortality must always be objects for divine pity, but this finds only tentative biblical support. Bolin, Freedom, 159-60, suggests that the tendency of some translators to translate the verb as “pity” in the case of Jonah 4:10-11 derives from “theologically motivated semantic myopia.” That is, in their desire “to support the interpretation that Yahweh is teaching Jonah about the breadth of a divine compassion which is beyond Jonah’s narrow and rigid concept of justice,” translators read ħûs as referring to the deity’s default inner orientation toward humanity.

Sasson, 310. Trible, Rhetorical Criticism, 222 disagrees, insisting that Jonah “pitted the withered plant qua withered plant...in and for itself.”
Another possibility: Fretheim has demonstrated that the use of חוס in reference to a ruler or the administration of justice\textsuperscript{103} connotes not an internal state or emotional response (such as “pity”), but rather, “total renunciation of what one is empowered to do.”\textsuperscript{104} When an authority exhibits חוס, pity or compassion may or may not be the underlying motivation; the verb חוס denotes only the action which the sovereign takes or refrains from taking. The English word that comes closest to capturing this sense of חוס, then, is “spare,” which refers to a subject’s action, not his emotions. But if the author intends to make an \textit{a fortiori} link between Yhwh and Jonah’s חוס, and if the sense of the verb in the second clause is Yhwh’s renunciation of the sovereign authority to punish, then we should translate the חוס shown by Jonah to the plant in the same way. Yet it need hardly be said that plants, frustrating or time-consuming though they may be, are nevertheless not subject to judgment, acquittal, or amnesty. They can be nurtured or neglected: they cannot be “spared.”

The final possible meaning for the verb חוס is “to regret the loss of” an object or thing.\textsuperscript{105} This, as intimated above, is the connotation of the verb in Genesis 45:20, when Pharaoh tells Joseph’s brothers not to worry about their lost luggage. Such a translation would be perfectly acceptable to describe Jonah’s response to the dead qîqāyôn. Jonah

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\textsuperscript{103} Bolin, 161, paraphrasing Fretheim, “Jonah and Theodicy,” 236.
\textsuperscript{104} S. Wagner, TDOT, "חוס", 277.
\textsuperscript{105} G.M. Butterworth, “You Pity the Plant: A Misunderstanding,” 33-4, argues that this specific meaning of חוס as “regret the loss” applies only to “things” whereas the primary meaning, “spare,” refers “to persons.” Sasson, 309-10, concurs with this semantic division, and translates the verb as “fretting” and “have compassion” in 4:10-11 respectively.
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regrets the loss of shade, just as Joseph’s brothers might have regretted the loss of their possessions.

Given that “regrets the loss” is the only interpretation that seems likely to fit the “Jonah” clause, let us try it out on the “Yhwh” clause. Does Nineveh provide something to Yhwh, the loss of which the deity would regret? Certainly, as many commentators have remarked, Yhwh might be *sorry* for the loss of life of people and animals that the destruction of Nineveh would incur; but few would say that Yhwh would be adversely affected or diminished by the loss of Nineveh in the way that Jonah suffers as a result of the plant’s destruction.\(^{106}\)

G.M. Butterworth is among the few to argue that Jonah 4:11 indicates that Yhwh would “regret the loss of” Nineveh. The implication, Butterworth says, is “you feel sorry to lose the plant only because you have lost your relief from the sun; if Nineveh is destroyed, I lose much more than that.”\(^{107}\) It seems, then, that although Butterworth offers a new *translation* for חוס in 4:11, his *interpretation* immediately reverts to the traditional understanding of the verse, according to which Jonah’s slight loss primarily affects his unimportant physical well-being while the deity’s suffering is more “significant:” it is regret and grief for Nineveh *qua* Nineveh.

**Regrets Only**

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106 Abravanel, quoted in Cooper, 157, envisions the deity claiming such a loss: “Nineveh provides me with acknowledgement and glorification that are like the shade.” Sherwood, *Afterlives*, 272, asserts that Yhwh “needs” Nineveh to act as the “rod of his anger” against Israel/Judah in the following centuries, making its temporary reprieve in Jonah a necessity.

107 Butterworth, “You Pity the Plant,” 33.
Although there is a qualitative difference between regretting one’s lost luggage and regretting one’s lost loved ones, the semantic range of the English word “regret” accommodates both senses without difficulty. The semantic range of חוש in biblical Hebrew, however, does not extend to mean “regret” in the sense of “grief.” It would appear, then, that under the *a fortiori* line of interpretation, all of the options for a consistent translation of חוש have come up short.

However, if 4:10-11 is read as a simple *statement* that Yhwh will *not* regret the loss of Nineveh, the obstacles to a consistent, lucid translation fall away: “You, Jonah regretted the loss of the plant, even though you had no investment in it and it was short-lived. But I will *not* regret the loss of Nineveh, despite its teeming population, and its animals.”

As disturbing as this reading might seem, to read 4:10-11 declaratively resolves several potentially confounding problems. It accounts for Yhwh’s somewhat scathing description of the Ninevites, which is jarring in readings that emphasize the deity’s compassionate and gracious character. It ascribes a consistent and apt meaning of חוש in each of the parallel clauses; Jonah regrets losing the plant, but Yhwh will have no regret about the loss of Nineveh. Finally, and most importantly, Yhwh’s statement has the potential to resolve the prophet Jonah’s perception that Yhwh cannot be counted on to requite evil. As Bolin points out, in the other instances in which Yhwh proclaims, לא חוש, in Ezek 24:14 and Jer 13:14 (in which the deity proclaims the same treatment for parents and children), there can be no doubt that the statement inaugurates the end of Yhwh’s endurance of sin, and the countdown to requital of sinners. Therefore, when
Yhwh asserts אָחֵס לָא אָשֵׁר in 4:11, Jonah can finally take him at his word. An intimation of Nineveh’s eventual requital, combined with a demonstration of weapons in the divine arsenal as represented by the wind and the worm, constitute a guarantee, as it were, of Yhwh’s ultimate reliability in administering justice.

As the book of Jonah comes to an end, then, Nineveh survives and thrives, but its future, from the perspective of Jon 4:11, looks dim. While some readers assert that the description of Nineveh as a “great city” should “elicit the divine…compassion,” it is worth noting that the only prophetic use of the phrase “great city,” apart from its appearances in Jonah, refers to Jerusalem, when its devastation is imminent, and which will be turned into a “desert, an uninhabited city” whose “choicest cedars” will be cut down and thrown “into the fire” (Jer 22:8-9).

This interpretation may strike readers as off-putting, or even appalling. But Bolin is largely correct that among those commentators who…opt to see Jonah as a work dealing with God’s sovereign freedom, that divine license…is limited to mercy and forgiveness, and the divine right to change of mind only in order to save.

Such commentators read Jonah from the perspective of the Ninevites. That is, they focus on the hope that they may be spared in spite of wickedness, and that Yhwh will not enact threats of requital. But for ancient Judean readers, who lived under the thumb of several foreign powers in succession, and were subject to economic exploitation

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108 George M. Landes, “Textual ‘Information Gaps’ and ‘Dissonances’ in the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah” in R. Chazan, W.W. Hallo, and L.H. Schiffman (eds.), Ki Baruch Hu: Essays in Honor of Baruch A. Levine (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999): 290. It is rare to see expressions of concern, for example, for the women, children, and animals of Sodom, probably, again, because of an “exegetical a priori”: when Yhwh “spares” he is seen as right to spare, and when he destroys, he is right to destroy.

109 Bolin, “Should I Not Also Pity Nineveh?,” 117.
and cultural pressure, the message that Yhwh could “turn from” punishment of oppressive regimes would not be cause for consolation but for distress. Divine mercy, while a valued attribute of Yhwh, cannot have been, for Judean readers, Yhwh’s only attribute. Rather, Judeans held out hope that Yhwh would use his sovereign power to vindicate his people, and to hold “Ninevites” to account. This is why “Nineveh” was so attractive to Nahum, Zephaniah, and the author of Tobit: it provided a sure and certain example that, though he might tarry, Yhwh would be true to his people.

**Concluding Remarks**

I have tried to show that the invocation of prophetic imagery in Jonah 4:6-9, and the final statement of Jonah 4:10-11, act as “a signal to a contemporary audience and a communication about the future.”110 The qîqāyôn does indeed have a communicative purpose, namely to induce readers to make the connection between the fates of the withered qîqāyôn and the long dead “great city.” Indeed, if Jonah was addressed to an early Persian-era audience disaffected by continued foreign domination of Yhwh’s land and people (all the more upsetting given the indisputable universal sovereignty of Yhwh), the implication of the qîqāyôn-Nineveh correspondence becomes clear. Yhwh, Jonah’s readers knew, had previously brought oppressive foreign regimes low. The fall of Assyria and the permanent devastation of Nineveh are the prime example of such righteous and unambiguous divine vindication. The “message” of the qîqāyôn episode, then, is “wait and watch.” That Yhwh “retracts punishment” at one period, as in Jon 3:10, is no guarantee that the reprieve is permanent.

The concluding verses of Jonah, then, make a strong, even terrifying, statement about Yhwh, but one which is necessary if Jonah (and the book’s readers) are to consider the deity both merciful and just. Nineveh’s devastation was at the same time the salvation of those who had suffered under her yoke— in Nahum’s words, “I have afflicted you; I will afflict you no longer” (Nahum 1:12). When the sun rises on the yôm Yhwh, the end of Jonah implies, it will set on the cities of affliction, as it did on Nineveh, הָיוֹן הַיָּרָה (Zeph 3:1) so many years before.
Conclusion

I am very much aware that I have come uncomfortably up against scholarly consensus at several points in this dissertation. Indeed, I wonder if I have envisioned in the book of Jonah, characters, who, as Jane Austen said of Emma Woodhouse, “no one but myself will much like.” When I see the sailors of Jonah 1 more as pragmatists under divine duress than as proselytes acting like “good Israelites,” they lose their putative function as gentile exemplars and become like anyone who ever prayed in a foxhole. When I seek to show that Yhwh in Jonah lives up to his billing in the Divine Attributes Formula as the arbiter of mercy and justice, I clash with interpretations that insist that the quality of divine mercy is never strained. Finally, in my examination of the character of Jonah, I have been acutely aware of the prophet’s frequent use as a straw man/whipping boy in interpretations that ask readers to choose between what I suspect are false dichotomies. “Are you for mercy or Jonah? Yhwh or Jonah? Penitence or Jonah? Good gentiles (and their animals) or Jonah?”

Whether from a contrarian spirit or from a suspicion of settled questions, I have tried to eschew these non-choices, and to reconstruct the events of the tale from the prophet’s perspective. My goal throughout has been to avoid the trap of anti-Judaism that has clung to so much commentary on Jonah; to advance an interpretation that acknowledges the complexity of the book; and to build on the insights of my fellow readers, even while seeking my own path.

Instead of starting with the premise that Jonah is wrong and it is the book’s purpose to prove it, I take Jonah as a character whose position we can understand. The book’s
allusion to 2 Kgs 14:23-27 reveals that the author’s use of the name Jonah “ben Amittai” (son of truth) is not an ironic slur on a faithless prophet, but a key to understanding the character’s true theological dismay.

Reading the book of Jonah from this perspective has opened several new avenues in the book’s interpretation. To read Jonah in light of Malachi, I suggested casts the prophet Jonah’s despair over the lack of divine justice into high relief. Further, while many scholars credit the book of Jonah with one kind of universalism, namely, that which commends the extension of Yhwh worship to gentiles, Jonah’s characterization of “the nations” belongs more properly to the category of “cultic imperialism,” which anticipates not the welcome inclusion of gentiles, but their submission to the sovereign deity of Yehud.

Finally, I read Jonah 4:6-11 as the deity’s considered response to Jonah’s accusation. Like the other instances of literalization in the book, Yhwh’s response demands a keen awareness of the prophetic tradition’s use of metaphor to communicate divine messages. Just as Pharaoh in the Joseph Cycle sees images of parched grain and famished cattle and seeks to know what the symbolic messages communicate about his kingdom’s future, so Yhwh, as a character in the story of Jonah, presents Jonah with images laden with symbolic portent. Amos 3:7 claims that “Yhwh does nothing without revealing it to his servants, the prophets.” The prophets, in turn, provide the key to the qiqayôn episode. Their metaphorical images of trees, wind, and even worms, unlock the enigma of the qiqayôn and reveal to Jonah—and to readers—that ultimately, Yhwh, יְהוָה יִצְכָּר לְךָ, “does not acquit forever.”
Appendix: the contested Malachi-Jonah sequence of 4Q76

Russell Fuller’s reconstruction of a possible Malachi-Jonah sequence in the collection of scroll fragments designated 4Q76 (also known as 4QXIIa) presents the tantalizing prospect that in addition to the variant sequences represented by LXX and MT, another equally ancient but hitherto unknown version of “the book of the Twelve” formerly existed.¹ If Jonah indeed followed Malachi in 4Q76, a different interpretive model may have inspired that scroll’s arrangement than the models that produced MT and LXX.² Moreover, such a sequence may lend support to the theory I advanced in chapter three that Jonah and Malachi may profitably be read together. However, Fuller’s identification of the sequence, which initially found scholarly consensus, has been subject in recent years to increased scrutiny, with the result that it is necessary to examine the material evidence for and against the Jonah-Malachi sequence in 4Q76.³

² The first six books of the Twelve in the LXX sequence diverge from MT. The sequence of LXX, attested earliest by the Washington Papyrus (250-300CE), is Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, followed by Nahum et al. The MT has Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, followed by Nahum et al. For discussions of the variations in sequence between MT and LXX, see Barry A. Jones, The Formation of the Book of the Twelve: A Study in Text and Canon (SBLDS, 149; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) passim; Barry A. Jones, “The Book of the Twelve as a Witness to Ancient Biblical Interpretation” in James D. Nogalski, and Marvin A. Sweeney, (eds.), Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve. SBL Symposium Series 15 (SBL, Atlanta, 2000); Rolf Rendtorff, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity” in Nogalski and Sweeney, (eds.), Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve. SBL Symposium Series 15.SBL, Atlanta, 2000; Christopher R. Seitz, “What Lesson will History Teach?: The Book of the Twelve as History” in Craig Bartholomew (ed.), "Behind" the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation. The Scripture and Hermeneutics Series, 4 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2003).
³ See Russell E. Fuller, “The Form and Formation of the Book of the Twelve,” in James W. Watts and Paul R. House (eds.), Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays in Honor of John D.W. Watts (JSOTSup 235; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996). Fuller’s own language with regard to the sequence has evolved since his initial work on the question in his dissertation, completed in 1988. In more recent years, Fuller has qualified and reworked his original conclusions. In “Form and Formation,” 91-92, Fuller says that the link "may preserve the unique transition/order Malachi—Jonah."
In addition to the fact that Malachi was certainly not the last “occupant” of the scroll now reconstructed as 4Q76, what can we say with certainty of the texts that remain? First, according to Fuller, a single hand produced the extant fragments of Malachi and Jonah. The script should be dated to about the middle of the second century B.C.E on the basis of its semicursive, formal characteristics, making 4Q76 one of the oldest extant biblical witnesses. 4 Indeed, of the seven Qumran scrolls of the Twelve, only 4Q77, which contains highly fragmentary sections of Zephaniah and Haggai, may be contemporary with 4Q76. 5 In addition, it should be noted that the preserved texts are not clearly related to any of the recensions that took shape during the Hellenistic era, 6 and that the fragments do not contain the hallmarks of what Emanuel Tov calls “texts written in the Qumran practice” such as notably full orthography, lengthened forms of pronouns and pronominal suffixes, or characteristic scribal marks such as the use of cancellation dots for corrective purposes, or supralinear additions of letters or words for the same purpose. 7 Given the antiquity and unusual characteristics of 4Q76, I surmise that 4Q76 did not originate among scribes associated with Qumran. 8

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5 Fuller, *DJD XV*, 221.

6 Ibid.


8 Whether it is proper to posit a “scribal school” at Qumran (as distinct from “texts written in the Qumranic practice”) is a different can of worms. “Qumranic” biblical texts are so designated because their distinctive “orthography, morphological features and special sectarian practices” are mirrored in sectarian documents, which may or may not have been produced at Qumran. For a brief but useful discussion see Emanuel Tov, “Copying of a Biblical Scroll” *JRH* 26, (June 2002), 194-196. For a
Turning now to the possible Malachi-Jonah sequence itself, two central points need to be addressed: first, the identification of a physical join between Malachi and Jonah fragments as reconstructed by Fuller; and, secondly, the identification of three letters that indisputably follow the ending of Malachi. The book of Malachi in 4Q76 appears to end in column IV of the reconstructed manuscript (the words הרכה...הכיתו, from the final verse of Malachi, are preserved). Fragment 9, which contains the partial text of Malachi 3:8-13, extends across the left margin of column IV, and preserves three letters from column V, clearly indicating that “something followed the Book of Malachi.” This is unusual in that Malachi is the final “book” of the Twelve in the MT and LXX recensions, a position it has held for nearly two millennia. However, given the partial nature of the evidence available, it is impossible to say at what point Malachi began consistently to occupy the final slot of the Twelve. The earliest reference to “the twelve prophets,” is in Ben Sira 49:10. Unfortunately, this datum does not establish in what sequence the Twelve were known to the sage. Among non-scriptural witnesses, the twelve prophets are listed in 4 Ezra 1:39-40, and in The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 4:22, both of which, despite other differences in sequence, assign the last position to Malachi. Additionally, the sequence of the prophets’ pseudepigraphical biographies in The Lives of the Prophets accords with the sequence of the MT.

Among the earliest extant manuscripts, neither the Greek minor prophets scroll, 8 Ḥev XIIgr, dated to 100-50 B.C.E., nor the later (and even more damaged) Hebrew thorough treatment of scribal issues, see Tov, Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts found in the Judean Desert (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
9 Fuller, DJD XV, 228. The italics are mine.
witness from Wadi Murabba’at, (Mur 88, dated to about 50 C.E.), preserve Malachi.\textsuperscript{10} Both 8 Ḥev XIIgr and Mur 88 end—one might more accurately say disintegrate—at different points in the book of Zechariah, the penultimate book in the sequence of MT and LXX.\textsuperscript{11} It is possible therefore that the text of Malachi was not omitted from these scrolls but was destroyed over time, such being the frequent fate of the innermost and outermost layers of ancient scrolls.\textsuperscript{12} Of the fragments of minor prophets texts from Qumran cave 4, Malachi is represented only by 4Q76 and a small fragment (4Q35) that “probably belongs to a separate, otherwise unknown manuscript of the Twelve.”\textsuperscript{13} Thus, of the most ancient evidence available, only 4Q76 can provide any relative information as to Malachi’s placement in the Twelve. Whether or not the identification of Jonah following Malachi in 4Q76 is correct, the three letters that follow Malachi attest that the practice of placing Malachi at the end of scrolls of the Twelve was not universally followed by scribes before the turn of the era. The existence of 4Q76 thus casts doubt on the widely held contention that the ending of Malachi (3:22-24) was composed to be an epilogue, “part of a macrostructural inclusio encompassing the entire prophets, from Joshua to Malachi.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10}Emanuel Tov, The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll: Scroll from Nahal Ḥever (8ḤevXIIgr), DJD VIII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 8, reports that the fragments of Micah and Jonah fit together by a physical join, which suggests that 8ḤevXIIgr followed the sequence of the MT. Similarly, Mur 88 preserves the transition from Jonah to Micah. For discussions of these manuscripts, see Fuller, “Form and Formation,” 88-92.

\textsuperscript{11}Jones, Formation, 4-5. In both 8 Ḥev XIIgr and Mur 88, the location of Jonah coheres with the sequence of MT. The placement of Jonah in Lives of the Prophets (compiled at approximately the turn of the era, or at the end of the first century C.E.), reflects the sequence of the MT.

\textsuperscript{12}Tov, “Copying of a Biblical Scroll,” 204, notes that of the Qumran scrolls, the beginnings of only 5.5% are extant. Ends of scrolls fare even worse, with a 3.5% survival rate.

\textsuperscript{13}Fuller, DJD XV, 251.

\textsuperscript{14}Jones, “The Book of the Twelve as a Witness to Ancient Biblical Interpretation,” 69. Jones here is summarizing Steck’s conclusions about Malachi 3:22-24. See also Odil Steck, “Zur Abfolge Maleachi -
Did the scribe of 4Q76 intentionally diverge from the sequence he had inherited? Or did recognition of the possible *inclusio*, which ultimately determined the placement of Malachi, occur later in the process of transmission, after the production of 4Q76? Before such vexing questions can be dealt with, we must consider the material evidence for the proposed link.

The fragments identified as belonging to 4Q76 include a single verse from Zechariah (14:18), a significant portion of Malachi, with fragments ranging from 2:10-3:24, several fragments of Jonah comprising about 50% of Jonah 1, and a few remnants of Jonah 2 and 3. It is significant, for the purpose of this study, that the end of Malachi and parts of the beginning of Jonah are preserved, a factor which makes Fuller’s reconstruction of the books’ sequential relationship possible.

With regard to the putative link, Fuller has identified a physical connection between fragment 9ii, (that bridges columns IV and column V, which Fuller posits contained Jonah 1,) and fragment 15 (which preserves words securely identified as coming from Jonah 1:5). This is where “the rubber meets the road” for the proposed Malachi-Jonah sequence in 4Q76. Several scholars of the Twelve, including, among others, Hannes-Odil Steck,15 Marvin Sweeney,16 and Barry Alan Jones17 have accepted

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15Steck, 249, cites the opinions of Dr. H. Stegemann, Dr. Annette Steudel and A. Maurer that Fuller’s “reading” of the Malachi-Jonah sequence is accurate. However, Steck relies on the results of Fuller’s dissertation, which Fuller later revised in *DJD XV*. The disorienting result is that Fuller’s identification of the three letters on fragment 9ii in *DJD XV* as belonging to Jonah 1:5 are not the “same” three letters (previously identified by Fuller as deriving from Jonah 1:3 and 1:4) upon which Steck’s approval of the reading rests.

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Jona in 4Q76 (4QXIIa)” in ZAW 108.2 (1996), 250. Andrew Hill, *Malachi*, 286, concurs: “the appendixes (sic) of Malachi mitigate, in part, this eschatological crisis for the restoration community by asserting that the divine presence is manifest in “canonized” documents associated with the traditions of the ideal figures of Moses...and Elijah.”
Fuller’s reconstruction of 4Q76 without qualification, and have offered a variety of scenarios by which to account for the presumed position of Jonah at the “end” of the Twelve. G.J. Brooke, while accepting the sequence of Malachi-Jonah, does not concur that these works would have occupied positions 11 and 12 in a “Book of the Twelve.” Basing his argument on the pattern of damage to the texts, Brooke posits that Malachi-Jonah may have been placed in the middle of the original scroll. H.J. Fabry and Philippe Guillaume, however, dispute altogether the existence of the putative link between Malachi and Jonah.

Guillaume’s objection to the Malachi-Jonah sequence is based on several factors. First, with regard to the physical join between the two books, (see *DJD XV*, plate XLI), Guillaume cautions that

the joint may be less perfect than it looks since the scale indicated on Plate XLI only applies to frgs 11–18. Since no scale is provided for frgs 7–10, it is possible that the fragments of the last column of Malachi were reproduced on the same plate at a different scale than the fragments of the first column of Jonah.

Guillaume is correct with regard to the differences in the scale of the reproductions of fragments 9 and 15. The former was reproduced at a ratio of 1:1.

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16 Marvin A. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* vol.1 (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2000), xxvii. Sweeney accepts the accuracy of Fuller’s reconstruction but disputes that this single example of a Malachi-Jonah sequence represents a “third major version of the Book of the Twelve.”
22 “The attempt was made to reproduce the photographic plates on a scale of 1:1….where this has not been possible, scales are provided.” *DJD XV*, 6.
while the latter, going by the scale provided, seems to have been reproduced at a 9:10 ratio, meaning that the reproduced image is slightly smaller than the original. The join between Malachi and Jonah, as reproduced in *DJD XV*, is 4.5 millimeters in length, meaning that the original edge of fragment 15 would be, at most, only .5 millimeters larger than it appears in the plate.\(^{23}\)

Guillaume also notes the “difference in the colouration” of fragments 9 and 15 as shown in DJD XV Plate XLI but admits that the difference “may be due to the way the two fragments were photographed and thus may not be significant.”\(^{24}\) At any rate, such variations in the coloration of the parchment occur even within individual fragments, meaning that the difference in color between fragments 9 and 15 by no means precludes the possibility of their original contiguity.

Questions of physical evidence aside, Guillaume rightly points out that only supporting textual evidence can conclusively prove the validity of the Malachi-Jonah sequence. The question is whether the letters of fragment 9ii —that is, the three letters that indisputably follow Malachi in 4Q76— can be soundly identified as belonging to the phrases from Jonah written on fragment 15. Fuller’s own thinking as to the correct readings of the letters has evolved over time. In his dissertation, he identifies the three letters as *hê, ūt* and *lāmed*, deriving respectively from Jonah 1:3 and 1:4, לאôt and לוותא.\(^{25}\) In *DJD*, however, Fuller identifies the first two letters as *wāw* and *hê*. Fuller theorizes

\(^{23}\) At a 9:10 ratio, the reproduction is 4.5 millimeters, while the original was 5 millimeters, a difference of .5 millimeters.

\(^{24}\) Guillaume, “The Unlikely Jonah-Malachi Sequence,” 3-4.

that the third letter may be kāp (the letter “cannot be confidently identified”).26 The wāw in this reconstruction derives from the initial wāw of the word ירייא (Jonah 1:5), while the hê and tentative kāp are attributed to הכהים.27 The revised identification of the letters is in part a consequence of Fuller’s realization that, if Jonah does indeed follow Malachi in 4Q76, then in accordance with frequent scribal practice, a gap of 1-2 lines would likely have indicated the break between books. There is sound textual basis for reconstructing such a gap. For example, 4Q77, which was likely produced contemporaneously with 4Q76, leaves a gap of 1.1 cm between the end of Zephaniah and the beginning of Haggai, whereas the normal distance between lines is .8 cm.28

Guillaume concurs with the readings of wāw and hê in lines 10 and 11 of column V respectively, but asserts that the lacuna between fragments 9ii and 15 argues against the original congruity of the fragments: “the photograph...shows the trace of a second letter after the initial waw on frg. 9 line 10 but then the lacuna extends all the way to the lāmed on frg. 15.”29 Of Fuller’s reconstructed phrase on line 10, ויריאו הכהים only ולחים is extant on the two fragments connected by the join. The missing letters could possibly fit in the lacuna; but given the irregular script exhibited on the other fragments of 4Q76, Fuller’s reconstruction cannot be regarded as conclusive.30

Guillaume raises several other objections. He remarks that the fragment Fuller identifies as deriving from Jonah 1:1, on the basis of the letters הגד (from הגדולה) might

26 DJD XV, xiii, Abbreviations and Sigla.
27 See Fuller, DJD XV, 229.
28 See Fuller, DJD XV, 235.
30 The lacuna separating the hê of line 11, fragment 9ii from the final mêm of line 11, fragment 15, seems possibly too large for the reconstructed word ירייא.
have derived from other instances of the same word elsewhere in the text. In this case, the evidence for the beginning of the book of Jonah in the column following Malachi is not conclusive.\textsuperscript{31} Guillaume also argues that the positioning of the fragments of Jonah 1 depends on the reconstructed join.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, instead of using the textual evidence to confirm the physical join, Guillaume says, Fuller presupposes the join and aligns the other fragments accordingly.

These cautions are salutary, but in my view, Guillaume does not succeed in disproving the physical join upon which so much depends. In the best of all possible worlds, editions of the DSS would include more information about both the provenance of scrolls and the processes by which they have been reconstructed. Until then, in light of the fragmentary state of the evidence, overly confident interpretations of a sequence based on a five millimeter possible join and two and a half letters should certainly be avoided.\textsuperscript{33} 4Q76 can tell us nothing about whether “the Twelve” as a discrete collection existed at the time of its production, or whether Jonah was the final book of that scroll.

\textsuperscript{31} Guillaume, “The Unlikely Jonah-Malachi Sequence,” 6.
\textsuperscript{32} Guillaume, “The Unlikely Jonah-Malachi Sequence,” 6.
\textsuperscript{33} For example see James D. Nogalski, “Intertextuality and the Twelve,” in James W. Watts and Paul R. House, (eds.), \textit{Forming Prophetic Literature} JSOTSup 235 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 102. Nogalski’s interpretation of the significance of 4Q76 oversteps the evidence: “ancient traditions irrefutably establish that the writings of the twelve prophets were copied onto a single scroll and counted as a single book from at least 200 B.C.E.” In contrast, Marvin A. Sweeney, \textit{Twelve Prophets} vol. 1, xxvii, overstates the case for scribal creativity: “it is well known that the Qumran scribes frequently rearranged and rewrote biblical texts to suit their own purposes. Consequently, 4QXII\textsuperscript{a} cannot be considered as definitive evidence for a third major version of the Book of the Twelve.” Leaving aside the general question of whether we can or should speak of “Qumran scribes” with the certainty Sweeney evinces, it should be said that although works that may be described as “rewritten Torah” were among the finds of the Judean desert, “rewritten prophecy” as such is not represented among the Qumran texts. Pesharim are to be considered sectarian works that should not be categorized as “rewritten scripture.” Eugene Ulrich has remarked that although “prophetic books appear the most fertile sources for possible sectarian variants,” the treatment of prophetic texts by the ancient scribes was very conservative. “The Absence of ‘Sectarian Variants’ in the Jewish
Nevertheless, having acknowledged the problems that prevent absolute confirmation of the reconstructed sequence, to seek viable explanations that may account for the motives behind the possible sequence remains a worthy endeavor. Fuller’s reconstruction is a viable explanation for the presence of the three letters after Malachi, a fact which requires explanation. The textual evidence for the Malachi-Jonah join is indeed provisional, and partial; but rather than “[burying] anew the evidence available from the Qumran manuscripts,” we should examine proposals advanced thus far to account for the possible link to see whether they lend credence to its possibility.

The proposed Malachi-Jonah join presents a problem similar to a textual lectio difficilior and has given rise to several hypotheses that seek to identify a context in which such a sequence might have been produced, ranging from Qumran to Hasmonean Jerusalem. For example, Hannes-Odil Steck has argued that Malachi 3:22-24 originally closed the prophetic canon but that the scribes of 4Q76 placed Jonah after Malachi to achieve a specific goal relating to Jewish-Gentile relations in the second century B.C.E. Steck attempts to establish that Malachi was indeed the original end of the Prophets; the mention of the return of Elijah by Malachi provides a bridge of sorts, Steck claims, between the Former and Latter Prophets. Manuscript evidence being unavailable, Steck bases his argument for Mal 3:22-24 as the original end of the prophetic canon on the two references in Ben Sira. The first of these, in 48:10, is a clear allusion to Malachi’s

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Scriptural Scrolls Found at Qumran,” in Edward Herbert and Emanuel Tov (eds.), The Bible as a Book: The Hebrew Bible and the Judean Desert Discoveries (London and Newcastle: The British Library & Oak Knoll Press, 2002), 183. Ulrich, 187, concludes that “in my working through all the Cave 4 biblical manuscripts for publication in DJD and in a recent review of their variants, I found nothing that I would categorize as a sectarian variant, except for the variant in 4QJosh about Gilgal as the location of the first altar.”

34 Jones, Formation, 48-49.
prediction of the return of Elijah, “to turn the hearts of parents to their children” (Mal 3:24), while the second is Ben Sira’s mention of the twelve prophets in 49:10. Steck argues that these allusions reveal that the MT sequence of the Twelve may already have been established by that time.\textsuperscript{35} In that case, the presence of Jonah after Malachi in 4Q76 (approximately 175-150 B.C.E, if the hypothetical placement of Jonah as the ultimate book originated with the production of the scroll) would have been a departure from established custom.\textsuperscript{36}

What circumstances might give rise to a reworking of the established sequence? Steck theorizes that scribes sought to provide a prophetic basis for the positive interactions with “the Nations” that Israel experienced during the reign of Antiochus III (223-187 B.C.E).\textsuperscript{37} Indeed, Steck argues that a theme of sequential repentance, first of Israel and then of the nations prior to the final judgment of Yhwh, appears in Tob 14:6-7. He argues that the sequence of Mal 3:22-24 followed by Jonah, also reflects this theme.\textsuperscript{38}

While Steck’s interpretation of the sequence in 4Q76 is intriguing, the grounds on which he concludes that the Malachi-Jonah sequence is secondary to an already established arrangement are shaky. The evidence which he proffers from Ben Sira has no bearing on the question of the “original” internal sequence of the Twelve. If a repositioning of Jonah in 4Q76 did occur at the time of the scroll’s production, one

\textsuperscript{35} H.-O. Steck, 250.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.: “Sir kennt, auch wenn ihm für die interne Bücherabfolge direkt nichts zu entnehmen ist, die Grosse Nebiîm in der MT-Bucherabfolge mit XII am Ende und kennt auch den bei Elia (48:10) verarbeiteten Mal-Schluss 3.23,... der Befund bei Sir legen also nahe, dass Nebiîm in der Abfolge JosJdc-Sam-Reg gefolgt von Jes, Jer, Ez, XII (mit XII naheerin mit der MT-Abfolge) bereits von Sir formiert war.”
\textsuperscript{37} Steck, 251.
\textsuperscript{38} Steck, 252.
wonders whether Judean scribes would have emphasized the prospective repentance and salvation of well-behaved Gentiles *after* the reign of Antiochus IV (175-164)?! For that matter, it is difficult to accept that any Judean scribe would have understood Hellenistic rule over Judea, however benign, as being in any way comparable to or a fulfillment of the eschatological era envisioned by Tobit:

‘Then all nations on earth, all peoples will turn and worship God truly. They will cast away all their idols and those who deceitfully led them into error. In righteousness they will praise the God of eternity. *All the Israelites who are spared in those days and are truly mindful of God will be brought together. They will come to Jerusalem and will dwell forever in the land of Abraham in safety, and it will be given over to them*’ (Tobit 14:6-7; my italics).39

The notion, moreover, that scriptural books would be rearranged to provide an *ex eventu* warrant for or explanation of political circumstances seems highly dubious. It conjures a picture of scribes continuously forced to respond to the tumultuous events of the Hellenistic era by cutting and pasting their texts to achieve ongoing relevance.40 That scribes attempted to create an “internal dynamic amongst the members of the Twelve” by means of the books’ sequence is certain,41 but Steck’s hypothesis suffers for

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39 Fitzmyer’s translation, Tobit, 322, reflects GII.
40 Philippe Guillaume, "A Reconsideration of Manuscripts Classified as Scrolls of the Twelve Minor Prophets (XII)," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 7 (2007), 11, engages in similar speculation with regard to the composition and placement of Jonah in LXX (next to Nahum), and in MT (Jonah-Micah-Nahum): “Jonah could have been composed in the wake of the formation of the XII and their translation and for the position it holds in the LXX. It is a lot easier to visualize the universalism and positive assessment of the foreigners in Jonah if it reflects the situation of Alexandrian scholars. Moreover, the assertion in Jon. 4.11 that Yhwh will *not* spare Nineveh followed by Nahum’s gloating over its destruction made sense in Alexandria in regard to the ongoing rivalry with the Seleucids.” While I concur with Guillaume’s interpretation of Jon 4:11 as declarative, I have argued extensively against attributing to the author of Jonah the kind of “universalism” and “positive assessment of the foreigners” which Guillaume accepts as given.
a paucity of supporting evidence. His identification of a theme of repentance in the Malachi-Jonah sequence is both too subjective and too broad to warrant support. Hyun Chul Paul Kim has offered an alternative hypothesis with regard to the sequence’s origin, namely, that it was the product of Qumran scribes, who “… placed [Jonah] toward the end in the Qumran manuscript” because of the book’s “conceptual incompatibility with the views of the Qumran sect on outsiders.” Notwithstanding the lack of textual evidence for such placement “toward the end,” it is not clear how such a relocation would ameliorate the purported problem of Jonah’s “conceptual incongruity.” As Ben Zvi remarks, “the concluding slot is often allocated to textually inscribed, interpretative keys for the understanding of the literary unit…or corpus.” Thus, far from marginalizing Jonah, the book’s placement in the ultimate position might actually have been intended to emphasize its role as the “last word,” which was intended to clarify the Twelve as a whole. For that matter, the placement of Jonah immediately prior to Nahum, as in LXX, would seem much better geared to underscore the certain doom of gentile oppressors. Moreover, as mentioned above, there is no indication that 4Q76 was sectarian in origin. Whether the book of Jonah posed interpretive problems to the Qumran covenanters is difficult to determine given the fact that “no quotations or exegetical writings” dealing with Jonah “have been located so far” in the Qumran

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42 Malachi’s eschatology is dramatically different from that of Tobit. As noted above, Malachi does not envision an ingathering at Jerusalem of the gentiles, or anyone else. His forecast is limited to the events immediately preceding the yōm Yhwh, and to the Day itself.
43 Kim, “Jonah Read Intertextually,” 524, note 71.
44 Ben Zvi, Signs of Jonah, 86.
All of these factors refute Kim’s hypothesis with regard to Jonah’s “conceptual incompatibility” with Qumranic ideology.

Barry Alan Jones has argued that the placement of Jonah in the ultimate position in 4Q76 attests to the lateness of Jonah’s composition and its late addition to a still-evolving collection of the minor prophets. Jonah’s variant placement across manuscript traditions (MT, LXX and 4Q76), Jones says, “indicate[s] either an uncertainty about the proper sequence…or a degree of fluidity and scribal creativity in the placement of the latest books to enter the collection.” Scribes, Jones argues, inherited early prophetic collections whose long established pedigree made them effectively off-limits as the objects of scribal creativity. In contrast, relatively late, hitherto independent prophetic works were eligible objects of such creativity and could be inserted among the prior collected books. Placement of the late books (according to Jones, they include Obadiah, Joel and finally Jonah) was determined by the perceived content/meanings of each book: “the arrangement… may provide interpretive clues for how these texts were read by the compilers of the Twelve, clues which may in fact have been inscribed within the books themselves.” Jones argues that, because Jonah’s position is the most variable of the Twelve, it was the last book to be added to the collection: “since the addition of the book of Jonah to the end of the corpus did not possess the authority of established scribal

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45 Armin Lange, “The Status of the Biblical Texts in the Qumran Corpus and the Canonical Process” in Herbert and Tov, (eds.), The Bible As a Book, The Hebrew Bible and the Judean Desert Discoveries (London and Newcastle: The British Library &Oak Knoll Press, 2002), 23. It seems likely, however that the Qumran covenanters possessed no fewer than three copies of the work (4Q124, 4QXII, and 4QXIII), a factor which undermines the case for Jonah’s “conceptual incompatibility.”
46 Jones, Formation, 139.
47 Jones, Formation, 138.
tradition, it afforded an opportunity for scribes of the Book of the Twelve to interpret the contents of Jonah in relation to the other writings of the prophetic corpus.”

Thus, when Jonah appears at the end of the Twelve, the book acts as “a postscript or an epilogue to Israel’s prophetic literature” and conveys the message that prophets or prophecies notwithstanding, “…the god of heaven…does whatever the god pleases, including turning away from divine wrath.” Seen in this light, Jones remarks that

the message of Jonah provides something of an apologetic for prophets of doom, such as Nahum, when their threats against the nations do not come to fruition. Divine freedom and not prophetic deceit may be responsible for the delay.

Indeed, such an interpretation seems to have informed the ways Josephus and the Targumist (and the scribe of Tobit Gi) understood the book of Jonah. The oracle of Jonah 3:4, for these readers, found eventual fulfillment. The plot twists and divine turns internal to the book were for them of little moment, because the divine word was fulfilled, as it were, externally, in the historical destruction of Nineveh. It is this notion of what we might call “expanded fulfillment” that guaranteed the ongoing relevance of prophecy, whether originally pre or post-exilic.

Jones’ conclusions are convincing and well argued. Additionally, the areas of commonality between Jonah and Malachi that I outlined in chapter three provide additional warrant for the possible Malachi-Jonah sequence. That is, their shared interest in the sovereignty of Yhwh and the certainty of divine justice, and their relatively late composition in comparison to the other prophets, could have inspired their grouping in

49 Jones, Formation, 168.
50 Jones, Formation, 167.
51 Jones, Formation, 155.
52 Jones, 214.
4Q76. Perhaps improvements in technology and future discoveries will confirm the
tentative link that Fuller has identified. Until that happy day, the two books may be more
properly said to be intertextually than textually joined.
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