

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

YHWH DID THE WORM
AN EXPOSITION OF JONAH 4:6-8

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I. Introduction: The Realms of Chaos and the Need for Divine Assurance

.....Despite the large variety existent in the human race, people throughout history in every single culture around the world make efforts towards ascertaining control over the chaotic world. The realms of foci, whether land, sky, or sea, all display a characteristically uncertain condition. The ocean near Mombasa swells, pitches, and storms without any semblance of order. The sky withholds rain for years in Sudan, and then suddenly deposits a torrential fury of such rain that it serves few any benefit. The fertile Kenyan highlands offer rich crops of coffee and tea, yet a single crop disease or hungry swarm of locust can end the growing season in a few days. Such occurrences descend upon the world with little or no obvious pattern of just cause. To many, they are simply the random nature of the world.

However, the African and biblical cultural understanding of such events leans on causality. Drought in the bible is from the very hand of God and not from any sort of chaotic random series of events. *“The LORD will afflict you with consumption, fever, inflammation, with fiery heat and drought, and with blight and mildew” (Deut 28:22 NRSV)*. The biblical culture understood calamity and blessing to source from God himself, and thus the lesson of asserting control over these elements was petition to YHWH. The eighteenth chapter of Kings is one example: *“After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year of the drought saying, ‘Go, present yourself to Ahab; I will send rain on the earth’” (1 Kings 18:22 NRSV)*.

Yet the understanding of YHWH as master of the created chaotic realms is not a lesson easy to learn, especially for a fickle insolent prophet such as Jonah son of Amittai. For the lesson to be learned by Jonah was not God’s sovereignty over the chaotic realms but God’s desire for his people to submit to his ways. Jonah knew quite

well that God had the power to adjust the seas, as evidenced by his explanation of the storm in the first chapter of the Book of Jonah. He explains that once he is tossed into the sea to die, the sea will again “quiet down” (Jonah 1:12). Jonah needed no lesson of YHWH’s superiority of the created order.

This begs the question then as to why the Book of Jonah was so important within the canon of the Hebrew people. Why would a book highlighting God’s control of the elements depict a man who, from the first chapter, already understands this fact? The answer is complex, but mostly regards to submission of the prophet Jonah within this chaotic order. The Jews upheld the canonization of the book of Jonah because it was so essential for people to understand that (1) not only does YHWH control the elements but he also (2) is one to submit to within this realm.

The lesson for Jonah is to know that God has the ability to control the elements (weather, environment, and the natural realm) in such a way as to humble and pull rededication from his people. Thus the goal and scope of this paper is to examine the manifestation of YHWH’s control over the created realm in a way that is for the benefit of the Jews, even if this means their displeasure.

The opening of this paper will seek to give a short but comprehensive understanding of how God assigns the created realm to work, specifically the grammar the Hebrew text highlights when a motion is made by YHWH to intervene in the world. The most obvious example will be looked at first, which is the summoning of the fish which swallows Jonah for three days, and which holds prominence within the narrative of Jonah. This example will be compared alongside other occurrences in scripture where God summons different facets of the created order to do his bidding. This act of summoning or assigning is not, as Balaam’s donkey, working within something already

present. Instead this study will seek to examine motions of God's appointment which enter the scene directly on behalf of YHWH, and which would not have been present if not for a mission. Subsequently, the study will begin examining three verses in the fourth chapter of Jonah which bring YHWH to assign specific elements an entrance and a work on His behalf. Each verse will be examined for grammar and nuance in regard to the lesson of the Book of Jonah. Finally, the conclusion will seek to pull these elements together in a way that highlights the overall theme of this narrative, seeking to reflect on the understanding of YHWH as master, not only of the created order (fish, plants, worms, winds), but also of the Jews as his chosen people.

II. Divine Assignments in the Book of Jonah Versus the Scriptures

The most obvious example of YHWH's intervention into the narrative of Jonah remains the fish. Even children in Sunday school are taught about "Jonah and the Whale". The fish remains Jonah's sole identity, and the subsequent distress later in his story regarding his prophesy and frustration towards the lack of retribution on Nineveh remains almost forgotten by the wider body of Christian laypeople.

The act of God summoning the fish (גָּד) in Jonah 2:1 (BHS) gives a fantastic understanding of the grammar the writer of Jonah used when illustrating appointment of elemental subjects. I deem this act the first assigning, with the following three assignments to come within the passage (4:6-8) as seen in the subheadings of this paper.

The verb to be examined in all three assignments is *manah* (מָנָה), since this is the verb used whenever God brings in elements of the created order to intervene in the Jonah narrative. It is important to spend a small amount of time discussing the semantic range of this verb, since it holds the key to understanding how YHWH brings forth these different elements within Jonah's story.

Manah (מנה) is the verb examined in this paper, and is defined by *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages* by James Swanson as a verb to mean “to count, to be counted or numbered, to take a census, to be counted among, determine, destine, assign, or to be assigned”¹. Furthermore, additional insight can be gained by understanding words that are semantically related to *manah*. According to Swanson, *maneh* (מנה) was a unit of measurement, the noun *manah* (מנה) was a portion or a present, a *moneh* (מנה) was a distinct occurrence. Furthermore, the Israelites walking in the desert on their Exodus from bondage in Egypt ate *man* (מן) which again seems also to signify apportionment from YHWH during their times of desert desperation.

Thus the verb used by the writers of Jonah to display God’s summoning or appointment of the fish, as well as the rest in chapter four, is one that displays deliberate motion. This is not using something already existent, nor is it using these objects lightly. Instead the author is displaying that YHWH used these objects *specifically* and *completely*. At no point does the fish leave, nor does the worm crawl (in chapter 4:7) to a different plant to eat. It is as if the fish or the worm have no history before this event, and play no importance once this event is finished. Even if the worm lived after Jonah left, its place in this story is *deliberate* motion by YHWH to use the worm to its completion. The semantic range displays measurement, and so the picture we are given by the authors is showing God placing the worm or the fish as he would pour a portion of rice. It is a motion of exactness.

¹ Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.) (DBLH 4948, #3). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

This motion is seen elsewhere in scripture. YHWH, in Psalm 147:4, *manah(s)* the number of stars in the sky. Again is seen the image of deliberate allotment. God *manah(s)* judgment of His people by the sword in Isaiah 65:12. Job is *manah(ed)* months of vanity in Job 7:3, complaining that God has given him nights of uselessness as a hired man who is waiting around to be paid. Aside from YHWH, the Israelite rulers *manah* people responsible for furniture in 1 Chronicles 9:29, and the king in the book of Daniel *manah(s)* rations in Daniel 1:5. Obviously this verb is mostly used towards designation and allotment.

Therefore it seems good to settle on an English verb through which *manah* can be read as it appears throughout God's work in the Book of Jonah. I believe the best translation of this verb is 'assign', an option included in Swanson's semantic domain. 'Assign' holds the greatest understanding because it does a variety of different tasks better than the more traditional options of 'prepared a fish' (King James Version), 'provided a fish' (New Revised Standard Version), or the most common version by the New American Standard Bible 'appointed a fish'. 'Assigned a fish' balances better with the choice of Greek verb used in the Book of Jonah of the Septuagint, which says God προσέταξεν κύριος κήτει μεγάλῳ "[the] Lord commanded a very big fish". The Greek verb used in place of *manah* is 'προσέταξεν' (verb 3p sing. aor.) coming from 'προστάσσω', which means to "command, order, or arrange,"² and is often used elsewhere in the Greek Old and New Testaments when God commands people to do tasks, like in the Book of Acts when Cornelius begs the apostles to preach "All that the Lord commanded [προσ τεταγμένα > προστάσσω] you to say." (Acts 10:33 NRSV). 'Assigned' also works better as a transitive verb toward conscious sentient objects like a

² Swanson, J. 1997. DBLG 4705, #2.

fish or a worm, including a plant or wind. This choice of verb better highlights the *agency* of the object being assigned, which is the theological lesson again in this story, that the entire world is under the agency of YHWH's hand.

Now that the semantic range of *manah* has been examined, and now that a suitable translation of the word has been ascertained, the relevant text will be examined towards coming to a better understanding of God's superiority and rule of the chaotic earthly realm.

III. Jonah 4:6 – YHWH Assigns a Bottle Gourd

The Second Assignment - Jonah 4:6a

וַיִּמַן יְהוָה-אֱלֹהִים קִיקְיֹון³

Translation: And YHWH assigned a bottle gourd.

A note of contextualization is necessary to understand what is happening in this verse. At this point in the Book of Jonah, the protagonist prophet Jonah has rebelled from YHWH's call to preach doom to the town of Nineveh. Jonah fled towards Tarshish, but was stopped by a storm caused by God throwing wind upon the water. Sailors aboard his craft cast lots to determine the *cause* of the storm, and the lot fell on Jonah. The sailors followed Jonah's orders to cast him into the sea, and Jonah was subsequently swallowed by the fish, staying in the belly of the animal for three days, where Jonah sang a song of repentance and asked for mercy. He was then regurgitated on land and headed towards Nineveh. At this verse (4:6) he had already preached YHWH's judgment and wrath upon the city of Nineveh. Jonah is waiting for the fire to fall from the sky and burn the city alive, which would fulfill his identity as a harbinger of God's power and

³*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia : With Westminster Hebrew Morphology*. 1996, c1925; morphology c1991 (electronic ed.) (Jon 4:6). Stuttgart; Glenside PA: German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary.

retribution. Yet Jonah has just recently seen that God's wrath is not coming, and is frustrated at God's turn of heart. The prophet has told God to take his life he is so angry, and hearing a sentence of God's correction has constructed a shelter to shade himself from the hot sun, still awaiting a spectacular judgment to befall the city.

God sees the prophet angry and sweating, and thus *manah*(s) a bottle gourd, using the verb in the third person masculine singular piel construction with a waw consecutive. The function of the verbal form piel is to give the verb a denominative meaning⁴, similar to the common piel form of the verb *cohen* (to act as a priest). The piel construction displays appointment and assignment, proper to the context of the story.

The bottle gourd (קִיקְיֹון) is not a Hebrew word, but is rooted in the Assyrian word *kukkânîtum*. This bottle gourd is of the type that grows rapidly, so perhaps the plant grew in such a way to surprise Jonah. A note needs to be made that this word (קִיקְיֹון) does not exist anywhere else in the Old Testament or in any pseudoapocrypha of the time. The word is only found within Assyrian writings, and the word used in the Septuagint is equally mysterious (κολοκύνθη) because it means squash or pumpkin, and is used no where else in the Old or New Greek Testaments. It seems as if one can notice a specific relationship between the Hebrew and Greek words used for bottle gourd, that they both have a double-*k* within their usage, however this is where the relationship stops. Other writings deem this word equally ambiguous, as seen in the English variety of translation. The KJV appropriately uses 'gourd', while the NRSV uses the slightly less specific 'bush', and the NASB uses the even more ambiguous word 'plant'.

⁴ Seow, Choon-Leong. *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995. page 174.

The two foci within this section are that (1) God has *manah*(ed) a plant of some sort to grow, and that (2) it did grow. This I deem the ‘second assigning’, seen in the subheading of this section. The importance to be seen is the distinction between this appointment or assignment of God and those given to people. With assigning people there always remains a possibility of unfaithfulness on behalf of the human race, whereas God assigning a work of the created elements contains no possibility of unfaithfulness. Nowhere would you read, ‘but the plant refused’. The distinction seen here, and in verses 2:1, 4:7, and 4:8 is the subservience contrasted with Jonah’s rebellion. YHWH summons the fish, the plant, the worm, and the wind, and these agents follow God completely. On the other side is the prophet Jonah who is summoned and who fails to follow through. The verb *manah* is not used with Jonah, but it may as well have been, considering he is also assigned by God.

The Gourd and the Man - Jonah 4:6b

וַיַּעַל⁵ מִיַּעַל לְיוֹנָה לְהִיזֹת צֵל עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ לְהַצִּיל לוֹ מִרַעְתּוֹ

Translation: And it grew above Jonah to be a roof over his head to save him from his discomfort.

At this point is highlighted the function as to why the gourd was brought forth, which was to soothe the prophet and to *deliver* him from his agony. There is almost exact mirroring of this verse and that in 2:1, since both highlight Jonah in the midst of agony only to be saved by a *manah* which YHWH brings out of no where. The gourd, similar to the fish, has no previous presence, but appears when it is needed functionally. Only here is the word deliver (נָצַל) used, whereas in the summoning of the

⁵ *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.*

fish there is no sense of deliverance. The fish simply swallows him, and the reader (at first read at least) has no indication as to whether the swallowing is to kill or save Jonah. Only once Jonah's song is finished and the regurgitation complete does the reader understand that the fish was salvific in nature.

A note needs to be made regarding the function of the gourd. The text says quite clearly that the gourd was provided for shade, yet we are told in the preceding verse that Jonah had already constructed a shelter with which he could ascertain shade. The previous shelter was probably "like a thicket made of interwoven boughs and branches."⁶ It is unknown as to why YHWH would create a miraculous gourd to provide shade if Jonah did not have this need. I suspect that this may give an indication to the problem of the previous section, which held confusion as to the identity of the bottle gourd considering its lack of prevalence in either Greek or Hebrew terminologies. I wonder if the additional shade of the bottle gourd provided both additional shade and also food for Jonah, which brought about the reaction seen in the next section.

Jonah is Very Happy - Jonah 4:6c

וַיִּשְׂמַח יוֹנָה עַל־הַקִּיקְיוֹן שְׂמִיחָה גְדוֹלָה:⁷

Translation: And Jonah was very happy about the bottle gourd.

At this point Jonah begins to gain happiness from the presence of the gourd. If the gourd was truly a squash or pumpkin (as reported in the Septuagint) then perhaps some of the happiness is coming from a provision of food as much as additional shelter, but this conclusion is purely speculation based on limited grammatical evidence.

⁶ Banks, William L. *Jonah the Reluctant Prophet*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1966. Pp 111.

⁷*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

Jonah is very (גְּדוּלָהּ) happy about the gourd, and a word needs to be said regarding the depths to Jonah's happiness. This word (*gadol*) occurs thirteen times throughout the Jonah narrative. It is used to four distinct times describe Nineveh (1:2; 3:2; 3:3; 4:11), to describe the wind towards the water (1:4), twice towards the sailors fear (1:10; 1:16), in regards to the storm (1:12), the fish (2:1), inhabitants in Nineveh (3:5), the Nineveh king's proclamation (3:7), Jonah's anger (4:1), his happiness in this verse (4:6). Anger, happiness, and fear are the three times it is used in regards to human emotion as seen in 1:10 when the sailors are *very scared* (יִרְאָה גְּדוּלָהּ) of Jonah's proclamation of faith to YHWH.

The emphasis here is in contrast to the verse in 4:1 where Jonah is *gadol* angry. A picture is being painted of Jonah as temperamental and moody, greatly again drawing a distinction between him and the obedient elements that YHWH *manah(s)* throughout the narrative. This specific *manah*, the bottle gourd, is the last time that the prophet is appointed something salvifically. From this point onward, starting with the worm, YHWH *manah(s)* difficult things.

IV. Jonah 4:7 – YHWH Assigns a Larva

The Third Assignment - Jonah 4:7a

וַיִּמֶן הָאֱלֹהִים תּוֹלַעַת בְּעֵלּוֹת הַשָּׁחַר לַמַּחֲרָת⁸

Translation: But YHWH assigned a larva when dawn came the following day

YHWH has *manah(ed)* a larva, the third assignment, and this does not come without reference to various other points of scripture. Never, in the breadth of the Testaments, is a worm or larva referenced in a positive manner. Instead the worm is always a harbinger of misfortune and decay. Deuteronomy 28:39 says, “You shall plant

⁸*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.*

vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink the wine nor gather the grapes, *for the worm shall eat them*” (NRSV). Isaiah 14:11 describes the nation of Israel in judgment with “maggots are the bed beneath you and worms are your covering” (NRSV). In fact, the very final verse of the megalith of Isaiah describes an undying worm eating the bodies of the judged nation (Is 66:24). Psalm 22:6 is the most severe, saying “I am a worm ... despised by the people.” Obviously the bible’s connotations of *worm* are not positive in any aspect.

Swanson’s *Dictionary of Biblical Languages* describes this word as describing “any of several species of creeping animal which consumes organic matter, the species may vary according to context”⁹. The Septuagint uses the Greek word σκόληξ, which means maggot or worm larvae. Overall, it can be assumed that the worm was probably a larva that would later grow into a flying insect, and that the worm in its larvae state was the type that would consume plants so that it might be used in this particular need of YHWH to consume the gourd.

Again, the larva is held in distinction to Jonah as one completely subservient to YHWH. Jonah rebelled and the larva obeyed. The larva, a symbol typical of ruin and pestilence, and an image upheld even of death and decay, is instead held up in contradiction to the heart of Jonah. Even a worm, it seems, is more faithful and true to YHWH than himself. A worm, and not Jonah, goes with immediacy to the task it is sent. Additionally, the point needs to be made regarding the timeliness of the larva. It seems that Jonah had waited outside Nineveh through the night, and is still asleep at dawn when this worm is summoned.

The Larva and the Bottle Gourd – Jonah 4:7b

⁹ Swanson, J. 1997. DBLG 9357, #2.

וַתִּקַּח אֶת־הַקִּיקִיּוֹן וַיִּבֶשׁ:¹⁰

Translation: And it attacked the bottle gourd and it withered.

This *manah*, similar to the bottle gourd, has connotations of the fish, because its primary function is consumption. The fish was summoned to swallow Jonah to save Jonah, but the larva is summoned to swallow the gourd and thus condemn Jonah to misery.

The larva does not use the verb to eat (אָכַל) in regards to its consumption of the gourd. Instead it uses the verb to destroy or to strike (נָכַח). The nuance of the verb is towards the immediacy of the action. The larva does not eat slowly as a normal larva would, but instead it consumes the gourd ferociously, as a *manah*(ed) larva would. It is, again, showing its agency here as a subject under the almighty YHWH. The hiphil construction is used, like most hiphil verbs, in a causative manner to add emphasis to the eating larva's ferocity.

Baldwin makes the observation that the larva was probably of the type that fed on roots and not on stems or leaves. "Even this small, lowly creature is appointed by God," she observes.¹¹ Such a distinction can be held up alongside the fish, that the initial great *manah* is of the largest animal in the natural realm, and the final animal *manah* is of the smallest animal in the natural realm. YHWH is certainly using this breadth of agents to highlight his power over the greater natural chaotic realm, as seen of his giving of agency from great and powerful (fish) to small and insignificant (larva).

V. Jonah 4:8 – YHWH Assigns a Sultry East wind

¹⁰ *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

¹¹ McComiskey, Thomas Edward, editor. *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical & Expository Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993. Pp 587.

The Fourth Assignment - Jonah 4:8a

וַיְהִי | בַּזְרֹחַ הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּמַן אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ קָדִים חַרְיִשִׁית¹²

Translation: When the sun came up God assigned a sultry East wind.

The fourth and final *manah*, the fourth assignment, is simply more pain. It is not salvific in the immediate sense of relief. YHWH has assigned a ferocious and painful Easterly wind to sweep down upon Jonah and to make his situation intolerable.

It is important to illustrate that this is YHWH's final physical motion in the Book of Jonah. From this point on, all there remains is dialogue. Interestingly, a violent wind (רוּחַ) is also the first physical act of YHWH in the Book of Jonah, as seen in 1:4. Thus wind serves as a bookend for this entire narrative, displaying YHWH's control over arguably the most chaotic element – wind.

11th CE Jewish authority Joseph Kara opened up the idea that this wind was related to the barrier that Jonah erects in 4:5.¹³ Following biblical scholars believe this may also be the case¹⁴, and so the prophet's own attempts to save his life, similar to fleeing towards Tarshish, have been thwarted by God's retribution.

This example also contains credence with Genesis 41:23 of Joseph interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh. In both Jonah's and Pharaoh's situation an Easterly wind is scorching their situation. This may result from the Easterly wind being a direction not from the sea, and thus the air of that direction was dryer. A Westerly wind may have blown off the Mediterranean area, and may have been more moist and comforting.

¹²*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.*

¹³ Sasson, Jack M. *The Anchor Bible – Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretations.* New York: Doubleday, 1990. Pp 304.

¹⁴ Person, Raymond F., Jr. *In Conversation with Jonah: Conversation Analysis, Literary Criticism, and the Book of Jonah.* Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1996. Pp. 129.

Achtemeier discusses that the wind from the East would be from a harsh desert region, and thus would be full of choking painful dust.¹⁵

The Sun and the Man - Jonah 4:8b

וַתֵּךְ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עַל-רֹאשׁ יוֹנָה וַיִּתְעַלֶּף וַיִּשְׁאַל אֶת-נַפְשׁוֹ לָמוּת¹⁶

Translation: And the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with his soul to die.

At this point the story displays Jonah at his absolute worst. The city, which Jonah expected to burst into flames, is sitting secure and unmoved. The shelter that Jonah erected for himself was possibly blown to the ground by the wind. The larva has eaten the gourd, so he is exposed to the elements and potentially without food. Finally, a wind and sun has come to beat down upon Jonah, and he is fully exposed. Jonah, the prophet chosen to be sent on behalf of YHWH, is sitting pathetic and dismal by himself with nobody around. It is at this point that Jonah even goes to the length to beg with his soul to die. The *manah* of YHWH has brought calamity and pain, not deliverance and salvation. The fish was uncomfortable, but at least it was deliverance. The sun, on the other hand, is giving him supposedly “death within life”.¹⁷

Another mention of the dawn and the sun needs to be examined, that the previous day potentially ended with Jonah at perfect comfort, and the morning began with Jonah at potentially perfect torture. When he went to sleep, Jonah was not hot and was at ease. The larva, as mentioned by the text, comes at the onset of the day. “We presume that the assault occurs while Jonah sleeps (so too, byzantine artistic depictions

¹⁵ Achtemeier, Elizabeth. *New International Biblical Commentary: Minor Prophets I*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999. Pp 282.

¹⁶ *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

¹⁷ Fretheim, Terence E. *The Message of Jonah*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977. Pp 125.

of the occasion).”¹⁸ Thus it is totally probable that Jonah awoke to the gourd eaten, the shelter knocked down, and the sun beating on his head, not to mention that he has just woken up. This situation obviously had the potential to put Jonah in a bad mood, as evidenced by the reaction he gives in the following section of verse 8.

Kamp makes a fantastic observation with the wind and the sun at this point in the narrative, highlighting that the wind and the sun are not particularly hurtful on their own, but by their “attributive characteristics. The east wind is *scorching* while the sun is *striking*.”¹⁹

Jonah is Very Unhappy - Jonah 4:8c

וַיֹּאמֶר טוֹב מוֹתִי מִחַיִּי:²⁰

Translation: And he said, “Better death for me than life.”

Now is revealed again the temperamental prophet Jonah and his moods. I am surprised that *gadol* is not used in this final sentence because Jonah is again being dramatic about his situation. He says it is better for him to die than to live, all because a pumpkin or a squash is no longer at his disposal and he is getting sunburned. This certainly paints the prophet in a bad light, and mirrors the happiness that Jonah expressed earlier when he found the bottle gourd providing him with shelter, making him very happy. In one day he has gone from being exceedingly happy to exceedingly depressed.

This desire to die is significantly different than the one in 4:3. Sasson describes that, “The contrast between the two occasions in which death attracts Jonah itself generates interesting queries regarding his states of mind before and after the creations

¹⁸ Sasson, Jack M. 1990. Pp. 301.

¹⁹ Kamp, Albert. *Inner Worlds: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach to the Book of Jonah*. Boston: Brill, 2004. Pp 129.

²⁰ *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

of the *qiqayon* plant.”²¹ Noticeably, in the first time Jonah desires death, he does so petitioning God to kill him. This second time the same desire to die is there, but no longer is God asked to take his soul. The difference is a lack of petition, that Jonah feels he has given up YHWH as the source of his hope, and this all occurs from a simple plant dying and revealing him to the elements. Certainly, Jonah is one reviled by his readers.

The fish obeyed completely, as did the gourd, larva, and wind. Jonah has not displayed the same faithfulness. Instead Jonah seems to be at odds with YHWH, at odds with the elements, and not much better off from where he started.

As the Book of Jonah draws to a close three verses later, Jonah remains outside Nineveh, sitting angry and hateful. The Book of Jonah therefore does not end with resolution (apart from the side plot of Nineveh), but ends with tension and unresolved circumstance. “Jonah 1-4, as a whole, has at its forefront the confrontation between YHWH and Jonah, the two man characters in the book.”²² Indeed, this book is unlike other prophetic books in that it is not focusing on the object of the prophesy, but on the subject of the prophet. Jonah remains unlessoned. “Jonah did what God wanted, but God did not do what Jonah wanted.”²³ The reader is left with a choice drawn by such distinctions as the larva (who fully obeyed YHWH) and the prophet.

VI. Conclusion: The God Who Sustains and Heals the Chaotic World

The final picture of Jonah displays the truth regarding the nation of Israel at the time of its authorship. The reign of Jeroboam II shows that Jonah son of Amittai was a prophet who spoke for YHWH to the sinful nation (2 Kings 14:25). The world of the Jews

²¹ Sasson, Jack M. 1990. Pp 306.

²² Zvi, Ben. *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003. Pp. 151.

²³ Boice, James Montgomery. *The Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary – Volume 1 Hosea-Jonah*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983. Pp. 244

had remained unchanged, yet the nation of the Jews had fallen into sin and disrepair. At this point God called Jonah to save a Gentile city of Nineveh. Perhaps Jonah was angry because he knew of the nation back home, and how it needed judgment more than the Gentiles.

Whatever the case, the verses of the Book of Jonah identified in this passage (4:6-8) highlight the struggle that Jonah had with God's use of the created elements of the world. Just as the Gentiles were desired by God to be saved, despite Jonah's best efforts to kill them, the larva was appointed by God to destroy, despite Jonah's desire for the gourd to remain his comfort. The overall lesson for the Jewish reader and for today's reader is regarding the submission to divine will. "Jonah seems to show the tragic rebellion of a man who, down to the very end, would rather die than submit"²⁴. Neighboring lands, like the Philistines and the Hittites, contained deities that observed the desires of mankind. They were housed in statues and offered the right combination of respect that would garner the deity's allegiance towards the follower's success in traversing the chaotic order of the world.

YHWH is creating distinction of himself from these other gods by highlighting that his people (the Jews), the rest of the nations (the Gentiles), and the elements of nature are *his*, and he is not subject to them. Each level of the elemental order was represented in this story: the wind, the worm (land animals), the gourd (plants), and the fish (sea animals). Considering such a diversity of control highlights the ability of YHWH to truly be in charge, there is yet one element of creation which seems to fall outside of YHWH's desire – mankind. Jonah is not unique, but is representative towards his entire people. Many Jews, not just Jonah wish YHWH was one who they could use to

²⁴ Pickard, William M. *Rather Die than Live – Jonah*. New York: United Methodist Church, 1974. pp28.

control the chaotic order. Many Jews, not just Jonah, needed to understand that it was YHWH's desire to be met, and not their own. It was YHWH's desire to reach the Gentiles, and showcased by Jonah, it was not their desire in this regard either.

Thus the lesson given by Jonah, and highlighted by these verses, is one of submission and control. As Israel sinned under the fallen banner of Jeroboam II, the people needed to ensure their security in a chaotic world of storms, wind, and harsh sun. Their provision would come, not by demanding salvation from YHWH, but from seeking to follow his desire for the world. Ultimately, it was the failure to learn this lesson which was responsible for the nation's downfall to the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The Old Testament itself has the Jews sad and waiting, like Jonah, for resolution to come to them.

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