

## THE “WEEPING PROPHET” AND “POUTING PROPHET” IN DIALOGUE: INTERTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN JEREMIAH AND JONAH

GARY YATES\*

**Abstract:** *Innerbiblical allusion is prominent in the book of Jonah and this study examines intertextual connections between Jonah and Jeremiah. This study will specifically explore how the connections between Jeremiah and Jonah contribute to the parody of Jonah as an “anti-prophet” and the special emphasis in both books on repentance as the proper response to the prophetic word. Comparison of Jeremiah and Jonah will also help to demonstrate the unique contribution of these two books to the theological emphasis on Yahweh’s concern for the nations in the prophetic canon of the Hebrew Bible.*

**Key Words:** *Jeremiah, Jonah, OT Prophets, Book of the Twelve, repentance.*

The study of intertextuality focuses on how biblical texts echo, allude to, quote, reapply, or even reconfigure other canonical passages for various rhetorical and theological purposes. Innerbiblical allusion is especially prominent in the book of Jonah, which is not surprising in light of the highly artistic nature of this short work. Hyun Chul Paul Kim argues that “intertextual allusions in the book of Jonah suggest its function and place” and that Jonah’s dialogue with other passages in the Hebrew Bible helps provide “expression to thematic emphases of the post-exilic communities in the Second Temple period.”<sup>1</sup> Salters comments, “In only 48 vers-

---

\* Gary Yates is professor of biblical studies and OT at Liberty University School of Divinity, 1971 University Blvd., Lynchburg, VA 24515.

<sup>1</sup> Hyun Chul Paul Kim, “Jonah Read Intertextually,” *JBL* 126 (2007): 499. In developing the intertextual components in Jonah, Kim focuses on parallels between Jonah and (1) the flood story in Genesis; (2) the historical narrative from 2 Kgs 14:23–29 that mentions the ministry of Jonah during the reign of Jeroboam II; (3) the complimentary message concerning Nineveh in the book of Nahum; and (4) the use of the nearly identical expression of the theological confession of Exod 34:6–7 in Joel 2 and Jonah 4:2 with Yahweh relenting from a judgment threatened by a prophetic messenger. In addition to noting correspondence between Jonah and other prophetic texts and figures, Katherine Dell (“Reinventing the Wheel: The Shaping of the Book of Jonah,” in *After the Exile: Essays in Honor of Rex Mason* [ed. John Barton and David J. Reimer; Mercer, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996], 85–102) highlights parallels between Jonah and Job. Jonathan Magonet (*Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* [2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Bible and Literature; Sheffield: Almond, 1983], 44–49, 65–84) notes correlations between Jonah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Psalms 107 (cf. the rescue of the sailors from the storm at sea in vv. 23–32) and 139 (cf. vv. 7–10 and the impossibility of escape from the presence of Yahweh). Anthony Abela (“When the Agenda of an Artistic Composition is Hidden: Jonah and Intertextual Dialogue with Isaiah 6, the ‘Confessions of Jeremiah,’ and Other Texts,” in *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist* [Oudtestamentische Studien 45; ed. Johannes C. de Moor; Atlanta: SBL, 2005], 1–30) calls attention to the intertextual dialogue between Jonah and the narrative of 2 Kgs 14:23–29; prophetic laments like Isaiah 6:9–10 and Jeremiah’s confessions in Jeremiah 12, 15, 17,

es ... there are so many connections with the Old Testament that one might begin to doubt if Jonah has anything new to say.”<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this study is to focus on potential intertextual connections between the books of Jonah and Jeremiah. In 1947, André Feuillet argued that the narrator in Jonah composed the book by reproducing material from other sources, particularly the book of Jeremiah.<sup>3</sup> The relationship between the two books is likely far more complex, and questions concerning the direction of influence between biblical texts are not easily answered. The amount of innerbiblical allusion in Jonah suggests that those responsible for the final form of the book did employ Jeremiah as a foil for Jonah, but the composition and editing of both books likely extended into the postexilic period, and it is possible that cross-pollination occurred between the two books as they reached their final forms.<sup>4</sup> Dialogue with other prophetic texts appears to have been part of the shaping of a prophet’s words as they were put into book form. As Douglas Stuart notes, some of the connections between Jeremiah and Jonah are to be “more generally attributable to the univocal nature of divine revelation throughout the Scripture.”<sup>5</sup> Literary linkages to Jeremiah are important to the message of Jonah, but specific connections to Jeremiah are only part of the larger tendency of the book of Jonah to use stock prophetic type-scenes and expressions from across the Hebrew Bible. Stories and episodes from figures like

and 20; and the story of Elijah. Alastair Hunter (“Jonah From the Whale: Exodus Motifs in Jonah 2,” in *Elusive Prophet*, 142–58) notes specific correspondences between Jonah 2 and “exodus motifs” that are found in passages like Exod 15:1–13; Pss 69:2–3, 14–19; 107:23–32; and Neh 9:9–11. J. Henk Potgieter (“David in Consultation with the Prophets: The Intertextual Relationship of Psalm 31 with the Books of Jeremiah and Jonah,” in “*My Spirit at Rest in the North Country*” (*Zechariah 6:8*): *Collected Communications to the XXth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the OT, Helsinki 2010* [BEATAJ 57; New York: Peter Lang, 2011], 153–63) has argued for an intertextual connection of Psalm 31 to both Jonah 2 and the book of Jeremiah (cf. Jonah 2:4 and Ps 31:22; Jonah 2:8 and Ps 31:6). The use of language from the Psalms in Jonah 2 as a whole (cf. Jonah 2:3 and Ps 42:7; Jonah 2:5; Ps 69:1) presents Jonah as a pious worshipper, perhaps somewhat ironically in light of the book as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> Robert B. Salters, *Jonah and Lamentations* (OTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 20.

<sup>3</sup> André Feuillet, “Les Sources du Livre de Jonas,” *RB* 54 (1947): 161–86. For an early response to Feuillet, see G. Ch. Aalders, *The Problem of the Book of Jonah* (London: Tyndale, 1948), 19–25.

<sup>4</sup> Exact dating of the prophetic books in the OT is extremely difficult. The differences between Jeremiah LXX and MT are reflective of the book’s complex compositional history. There are no prohibitive arguments against seeing most of the material in both versions as originating from Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch, even if redactional activity continued for a significant time after the prophet’s death. See Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the OT* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 330–31; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21A; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 92–101; Emmanuel Tov, “Some Aspects of the Textual and Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Le Livre de Jérémie: Le prophète et son milieu, les oracles et leur transmission* (ed. P. Bogaert; BETL 54; Louvain: Peeters, 1981), 145–67 and John Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 33–50. The exact dating of Jonah is not clear, though the scholarly tendency is to date the final form to the postexilic period, even as late as the third century BC. See Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation* (AB 24B; New Haven, CT: Yale, 1990), 20–26. For a response to the arguments for the late dating of Jonah, see Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC 31; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 432–33. For further discussion of the process involved in the formation of prophetic books, see Aaron Chalmers, *Interpreting the Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 22–33.

<sup>5</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 433.

Moses and Elijah have informed the portrayal of Jonah as much as or more than Jeremiah, and this linkage of Jonah to other prophetic figures appears to be part of the narrator’s attempt to satirize Jonah and to present Jonah as the parody of what a true prophet should be.<sup>6</sup> This study will specifically explore how the connections between Jeremiah and Jonah contribute to the parody of Jonah as an “anti-prophet” and the special emphasis in both books on response to the prophetic word. Comparison of Jeremiah and Jonah will also help to demonstrate the unique contribution of these two books to the theological emphasis on Yahweh’s concern for the nations in the prophetic canon of the Hebrew Bible. Even when direct intertextual links between Jeremiah and Jonah cannot be established, the uniquely biographical nature of these two books in the prophetic canon merits a comparative reading of the two books for the insights such a reading yields concerning the function and theological significance of the prophetic office in ancient Israel.

### I. JONAH, JEREMIAH, AND RESPONSE TO THE PROPHETIC WORD

Jonah engages in dialogue with pagan Gentiles in Jonah 1 (the sailors) and Jonah 3 (the Ninevites), and the prophet suffers by comparison with both groups because they are spiritually sensitive and attuned to God in ways that he is not. The episode with the sailors in Jonah 1 reflects several possible connections with the account of Jeremiah’s temple speech in Jeremiah 26.<sup>7</sup> In that narrative, the leaders and people of Judah seek to put Jeremiah to death for preaching judgment against Jerusalem and the Temple until they are reminded of Hezekiah’s response to the preaching of Micah a century earlier (Jer 26:17–19). The contrast between Jonah 1 and Jeremiah 26 is tinged with irony in that the sailors come to recognize Jonah as a true spokesman of Yahweh in spite of the fact that Jonah does everything he can to avoid his prophetic calling. In fact, the sailors are converted to some type of belief in Yahweh, and in the process of this conversion act more like prophets than Jonah does and must carry out actions that are typically associated with a true prophet proclaiming the word of Yahweh and executing the other duties of his calling.

The sailors are the ones who frantically cry out to the gods while the prophet who should be interceding is asleep (1:5). In Jeremiah 26, Yahweh sends Jeremiah to preach because of the possibility (“perhaps”—אולי) that the people would repent and be spared from judgment (26:3; cf. vv. 13, 19). In Jonah 1, it is the captain of the ship who raises the possibility (“perhaps”—אולי) of divine relenting from judgment to the prophet as a motivation for prayer (1:6). Jeremiah’s task as a prophet is to confront the people with the issue of the רעה they have committed against Yahweh (Jer 26:3). In Jonah’s case, it is the sailors who must raise the issue

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-Prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible* (BJS 301; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 93–159.

<sup>7</sup> Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 69–73. The episode in Jeremiah 26 most likely provides a variant account of the Temple sermon found in Jeremiah 7. Chap. 7 focuses on the content of the message; chap. 26 focuses more on the response to the message by various groups present at the Temple when Jeremiah delivers this message.

of רעה with the prophet. They inquire of Jonah regarding responsibility for the רעה that has befallen them (Jonah 1:7–8). By forcing the prophet to reflect on the consequences of his choices, the sailors are fulfilling the same role for Jonah that true prophets like Jeremiah had carried out for the peoples of Israel and Judah. The sailors confront Jonah by asking, “What have you done?,” but in this “prophetic” rebuke it is the sailors who are changed, not Jonah. Jonah never calls for repentance, faith, or prayer as the potential remedy for רעה as is typical of the Hebrew prophets. When Jonah fails to act as prophet, the sailors decide to cast lots as a way of determining the will of the gods, a Yahweh-approved practice for the people of Israel (cf. Num 26:55; Josh 7:14; 1 Sam 10:16–26; 14:42).<sup>8</sup>

Yahweh called the prophets to show concern for the welfare and wellbeing of the people, but here it is the sailors who demonstrate concern for the prophet. Sweeney observes, “Normally, it is the prophet’s role to attempt to save the people from some divinely-inspired disaster, or punishment, but here it is the pagan sailors who attempt to save a prophet of YHWH who refuses to speak.”<sup>9</sup> Jonah is not even concerned with his own life and would prefer to die than carry out his prophetic responsibilities. Instead of responding to Jonah’s directive to throw him overboard, the sailors do everything they can to row to shore and to spare his life. In Jeremiah 26, Jeremiah’s audience at the Temple sought to put him to death, and the prophet reminded and warned them of the consequences of having “innocent blood” (דם נקי) on their hands (26:15). In Jonah’s case, it is the sailors who are sensitive to the problem of culpability for “innocent blood” and who seek to spare the prophet’s life, only throwing him into the angry sea as a last resort. Without the benefit of prophetic intercession, the sailors once again cry out to Yahweh and pray not to be held accountable for Jonah’s death and the shedding of “innocent blood” (דם נקי; Jonah 1:14).<sup>10</sup>

With no positive direction from Jonah, the sailors come to a worshipful response to Yahweh. They move from “fear” of the storm (1:5) to “fear” of Jonah’s news that he has run from Yahweh (1:8), and then to “fear” of Yahweh himself (1:16).<sup>11</sup> The language of their prayer to Yahweh in 1:14 echoes the worship of pious Israelites in the Psalms.<sup>12</sup> The sailors worship by offering sacrifices and mak-

---

<sup>8</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 1: *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 313.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:315.

<sup>10</sup> Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 72–73. Magonet notes that the collocation of the verb נתן + נקי + דם appears outside of Jonah 1:14 only in Jer 26:15 and Deut 21:8. The phrase תתן עלינו דם נקי in Jonah 1:14 more closely replicates what is found in Deut 21:8, but Jonah 1 and Jeremiah 26 both use the concept of “innocent blood” in the context of the potential death of a prophet. References to “innocent blood” (דם נקי) also appear in Jer 7:6 and 22:3, 17. The pagan sailors are reticent to participate in an activity that the prophet must exhort the people of Judah not to practice.

<sup>11</sup> The cognate accusative of verb ירא + object יראה is used for emphasis in each of these verses with the addition of the adjective גדולה in vv. 10 and 16.

<sup>12</sup> Magonet (*Form and Meaning*, 70) notes that their statement to Yahweh that he had done “just as he pleased” recalls passages like Pss 115:3 and 135:6.

ing vows, actions that would be expected of orthodox worshippers of Yahweh (1:16; cf. Ps 66:13–16).<sup>13</sup>

The intertextual connections between Jonah 1 and Jeremiah 26 appear to highlight the surprising nature of the sailors’ response to Yahweh. These pagans respond to Yahweh in the same way that the Israelites did at the exodus when they “feared” (ירא) Yahweh and “believed” (ב + אמן) him (Exod 14:31).<sup>14</sup> Both Jonah 1 and Jeremiah 26 recount instances of positive response to the word of Yahweh in connection with the recognition of a prophet as Yahweh’s spokesman, but the sailors respond to Yahweh through the agency of a prophet who refuses to carry out his commission in direct contrast to the faithful Jeremiah. The leaders and people of Judah have a long history with their prophets but are disposed to kill Jeremiah until a group of elders intervene on the prophet’s behalf (Jer 26:17–19). The sailors have no history with Yahweh or his prophets but are reticent to put the prophet to death. Foreigners have more respect for the life of the prophet than the people of God. Jeremiah has to repeatedly encourage the people of Judah to turn from their sinful ways, but the sailors “fear” the Lord and offer him appropriate prayer and worship with no specific instructions from the prophet.

Ironically, the narrative of Jer 26:1–19 involving the positive response to Jeremiah is immediately followed by a brief account of how the evil king Jehoiakim put the prophet Uriah to death for preaching the same message of judgment as Jeremiah (Jer 26:20–24). This episode of the people and leaders of Judah acknowledging Jeremiah as a true prophet introduces a section of the book extending to chapter 45 that highlights Judah’s overall rejection of Jeremiah’s message of judgment that ultimately led to the fall of Jerusalem and the exile (cf. Jer 37:1–2). The surprising readiness of the sailors to believe and respond positively to Yahweh and even a defective prophet ultimately serves as a rebuke to the persistent unbelief and disobedience of Israel and Judah, an idea that emerges even more forcefully from the example of the Ninevites and their repentant response to the prophetic word in Jonah 3.

Perhaps the closest connection between Jonah and Jeremiah occurs with the account of Nineveh’s response to Jonah’s preaching in chapter 3. The repentance of Nineveh and God’s response to the Ninevites reflects the working out of the principle of Jer 18:6–7, which promises that if a nation “turns” (שוב) from its “evil” (רעה) in response to a prophetic warning of judgment, then Yahweh would “re-lent” (נחם) from sending the “calamity” (רעה) that he had threatened to bring.<sup>15</sup> The triad of שוב, רעה, and נחם is also prominent in Jonah 3. The king of Nineveh issues a proclamation that calls on all of the people to “turn” (שוב) from their “evil” (רעה) ways in light of the possibility that God might “turn” (שוב) and “re-lent” (נחם) from pouring out his burning anger (Jonah 3:7–9). When God sees that

<sup>13</sup> Cognate accusatives also appear with “sacrificed sacrifices” (זבח) and “vowed vows” (נדר) in v. 16 for further emphasis on the responses of the sailors to Yahweh.

<sup>14</sup> Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 70.

<sup>15</sup> Kevin J. Youngblood, *Jonah: God’s Scandalous Mercy* (Hearing the Message of Scripture; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 142.

the Ninevites have indeed “turned” (שוב) from their “evil” (רעה) deeds, he does “relent” (נחם) concerning the “disaster” (רעה) he had planned for them (Jonah 3:10). Jeremiah 18 and Jonah 3 are unique in the way that they apply this concept of repentance and divine relenting from judgment to nations outside of Israel and Judah.

Like the account of Jonah and the sailors, the narrative of Jonah 3 also appears to echo Jeremiah 26. The king of Nineveh raises the possibility of divine relenting in Jonah 3:9 with the question *מי יודע*, and as noted earlier, Yahweh sends Jeremiah to announce judgment at the Temple in Jer 26:3 because of the possibility (אולי) that his preaching might lead to repentance on the part of the people. The wording of Jer 26:3 is almost identical to Jer 18:6–7 and Jonah 3:7–10. If the people would “turn” (שוב) from their “evil” (רעה), then Yahweh would “relent” (נחם) from sending “calamity” (רעה). When Jeremiah preaches to the people, he offers the promise of divine “relenting” (נחם) if the people would “repent” (שוב) of their “evil” (רעה) in 26:13. In 26:19, the elders remember Hezekiah’s repentant response to Micah’s preaching that led to Yahweh relenting from the “disaster” (רעה) he had planned for Jerusalem (cf. Mic 3:9–12). Both Jeremiah 26 and Jonah 3 are texts that move from the possibility of repentance and relenting to an actual occurrence of God not sending judgment, but in Jeremiah 26, the incident of divine relenting is from a previous generation. The absence of any such response on the part of the nation to the preaching of Jeremiah would ultimately lead to the judgment of the Babylonian exile.

The parallels between Jonah 3 and Jeremiah 36 are even more specific. The possibility (אולי) of divine relenting stands behind the commissioning of the prophetic word in this episode as well (Jer 36:3). A religious fast provides the context for both narratives.<sup>16</sup> The people and king of Nineveh call for a fast as a sign of repentance (Jonah 3:5, 7–8). Jonah’s scribe Baruch goes to read the scroll of Jeremiah’s prophecies at the Temple when the people have proclaimed a fast to Yahweh, likely in response to the Babylonian crisis (Jer 36:9). The parallels between Jonah 3 and Jeremiah 36 once again highlight the contrasting responses of Jerusalem to the preaching of Jeremiah and Nineveh to the preaching of Jonah. The residents of Nineveh “turn” (שוב) from their “evil way” (רעה) even when there is no direct appeal for them to do so (Jonah 3:8, 10), but there is no such response from the people of Judah and Jerusalem in spite of the fact that the specific purpose of the reading of Jeremiah’s scroll was so that the people “might turn from their evil way” (וישב איש מדבר הרעה; Jer 36:7). The responses of the Ninevites to the preaching of Jonah include “the most severe fasting in the Old Testament” in addition to wearing sackcloth, sitting on ashes, calling on God, and changing their behavior (Jonah 3:5–7).<sup>17</sup> The repentance of the Ninevites is so complete that even the animals get in on the act (v. 7). In Jeremiah 36, there is no recorded response to

<sup>16</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 136.

<sup>17</sup> Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the OT* (Siphrut 1; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 316.

the reading of the scroll of Jeremiah’s prophecies from the people of Judah who have called a fast to seek Yahweh, and this silence seems to reflect that Jeremiah’s warnings of judgment are largely ignored.

The response of the Ninevites is remarkable for a variety of reasons. As with the sailors in chapter 1, there is positive and almost immediate response to Yahweh’s word in spite of Jonah’s less than stellar execution of his prophetic duties.<sup>18</sup> As Moberly notes, the Ninevites respond to “what is arguably the shortest sermon on record.”<sup>19</sup> The striking contrast in Jeremiah 36 is that there is minimal response to the prophetic words of Jeremiah found in the scroll that represent more than twenty years of faithful proclamation of Yahweh’s words. Gitay describes Jonah’s preaching as “the prophecy of anti-rhetoric.”<sup>20</sup> The narrative of Jonah 3 contributes to the parodying of Jonah as a prophetic figure in that, “Unlike the classical prophets, who desire to appeal to their audience, Jonah’s preaching to Nineveh (3:4) is limited to only five words, thereby revealing his desire to avoid a rhetorical speech that seeks to affect the audience’s behavior.”<sup>21</sup> Jonah proclaims the word of Yahweh, but his message is also “subversive of his calling.”<sup>22</sup> In his message, there is no introductory formula identifying the deity that is the source of the warning, no formal accusation or indictment brought against the Ninevites that provides the basis for the warning of judgment, and no call to repentance or offer of divine mercy.<sup>23</sup> Jonah simply states matter-of-factly that Nineveh would be “overturned” (הפך), and his lackluster effort at preaching here would seem to reflect his “implied desire” that the Ninevites “will dismiss his announcement as nonsense.”<sup>24</sup>

The responses of the kings of Nineveh and Judah (Jehoiakim) are at the center of the contrast between Jonah 3 and Jeremiah 36. The response of the Ninevite king is the direct opposite of what would be expected when looking at the stories of prophet-king confrontations in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>25</sup> Marcus comments, “Normally a prophet’s message is ignored. Kings do not usually listen to him.”<sup>26</sup> Examples of these unbelieving and sometimes violent confrontations between kings and prophets include Moses and Pharaoh, Elijah and Ahab, Micaiah and Ahab, and

---

<sup>18</sup> For the detailed correspondences between Jonah 1 and 3, see Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 110–11.

<sup>19</sup> R. W. L. Moberly, *OT Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 186.

<sup>20</sup> Yehoshua Gitay, “Jonah: The Prophecy of Antirhetoric,” in *Fortunate the Eyes that See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Astrid B. Beck et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 197–206.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>22</sup> Moberly, *OT Theology*, 186.

<sup>23</sup> Gitay, “Jonah: The Prophecy of Antirhetoric,” 201.

<sup>24</sup> Moberly, *OT Theology*, 186.

<sup>25</sup> See further Daniel C. Timmer, *A Gracious and Compassionate God: Mission, Salvation, and Spirituality in the Book of Jonah* (NSBT 26; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 105–9. Assyrian kings and military officials are noted in the Hebrew Bible for their arrogant and blasphemous stances toward Yahweh (Isa 10:7–19; 36:1–20 // 2 Kgs 18:19–35). The king of Assyria is specifically targeted as the object of Yahweh’s judgment at the close of Nahum’s oracle of judgment against Nineveh (Nah 3:17–18).

<sup>26</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 135.

Isaiah and Ahaz. Jeremiah's interactions with the hostile Jehoiakim and then the hesitant Zedekiah (cf. Jeremiah 37:1–2; 38) would follow this pattern as well.

In Jeremiah 36, King Jehoiakim hears the words of Jeremiah's scroll when concerned officials deem the prophet's warnings of judgment important enough to bring to the king's attention. Jehoiakim himself has no regard for Jeremiah's warnings of divine wrath and cuts up the scroll and burns it in his firepot (Jer 36:23–24). When God saw the repentance of the people and king of Nineveh, he relented from sending *רעה*, while Jehoiakim's destruction of the scroll brings a further word of judgment against the king and a warning of the *רעה* that will befall Judah and Jerusalem (Jer 36:29–31).<sup>27</sup> Jehoiakim's disobedience puts all of Judah, "both man and beast" (*אדם ובהמה*), in danger of divine judgment (Jer 36:29), in direct contrast to the sparing of Nineveh due to the fact that "both man and beast" (*אדם ובהמה*) had responded to the prophet's message (Jonah 3:7; cf. 4:10–11).<sup>28</sup>

## II. JONAH'S FAILURE TO CONFORM TO PROPHETIC EXPECTATIONS

Beyond those close parallels that seem to clearly connect Jonah and Jeremiah, there are other parallels that reflect similarities between the two books of a more general nature in light of common prophetic motifs or type-scenes. In some of these passages, Jonah reflects connections with several different prophetic figures or books. It would appear that various prophets from the Hebrew Bible have helped to shape or influence the portrayal of Jonah and have contributed to the parodying of Jonah as a prophetic figure.

1. *The prophetic call of Jonah.* The account of Jonah's call introduces the motif of Jonah as an anti-prophet at the very beginning of the book. Prophetic call narratives generally include a word from God and/or a vision from God, a commission to a specific task, an objection of unworthiness followed by a promise of divine protection and enablement, and a confirming sign.<sup>29</sup> The narratives depicting the calls of Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and to a lesser extent, Samuel and Elijah reflect this pattern. In light of this standard form, one expects protest or objections when the word of Yahweh comes to Jonah, especially in light of his unusual commission to go and preach to a foreign people. Jeremiah protested that he was too young and did not know how to speak (Jer 1:5). Despite his objection, Jeremiah faithfully fulfills his commission, and the pattern of protest-compliance

---

<sup>27</sup> The expression "from the greatest to the least of them" (*מגדלם עד־קטנם*) in Jonah 3:5 may also provide a connection with the book of Jeremiah. This exact expression appears nowhere else in the OT, but the related "from the least of them to the greatest" (*מקטנם ועד־גדולם*) appears only in Jer 6:13; 8:10; 31:34; 42:1, 8; 44:12. All of these examples except Jer 31:34 appear in contexts indicting the whole of Judah for sin or in a context where the collective group disobeys Yahweh and the prophetic word. Jer 31:34 looks forward to a time when all the people of Israel will know the Lord; the irony is that the collective people of Nineveh achieve that in some sense long before the final restoration of Israel.

<sup>28</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 136. Cf. Jer 14:5–6, where the animals experience the negative consequences of Yahweh's divine judgment on Judah, and Jer 4:23–26, where the judgment of Judah will bring about the undoing of creation itself and the return to the earth being "void and without form."

<sup>29</sup> See Norman C. Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *ZAW* 77 (1965): 297–323.

appears in the other prophetic call narratives as well. In contrast, Jonah offers no protest, but instead flees and refuses to carry out his prophetic assignment.

Yahweh’s response to Jonah’s refusal to comply with his commission also reflects a more specific connection to the book of Jeremiah. The “storm” (סער) that Yahweh sends in Jonah 1:4 provides an ironic echo of Jeremiah’s oracle condemning false prophets in Jer 23:18–22.<sup>30</sup> In that oracle, Jeremiah announces that the wrath of Yahweh will rage like a “storm” (סער) and that the prophets who fail to warn the people of the coming judgment give evidence that they are not those whom the Lord has sent. In contrast, Yahweh targets Jonah with the “storm” of his wrath because Jonah refuses to carry out his commission to warn Nineveh of its coming destruction. As Youngblood explains, Jeremiah’s oracle against the wicked and the false prophets “speaks just as powerfully to Jonah, who though given a message . . . refused to speak it. God did send Jonah and he did run—in the other direction. Therefore Jonah experienced the same manifestation of divine wrath prescribed for these false prophets—a life-threatening storm.”<sup>31</sup> As is true of the false prophets, Jonah’s refusal to go to Nineveh thwarts Yahweh’s intent of “turning” (שוב) evil people from their “wicked ways” (מדרכם הרע; Jer 30:22; cf. Jonah 3:8, 10). By “hurling” (טול) a storm in the direction of Jonah and the ship (1:4), Yahweh acts in the same way toward his wayward prophet that he would act against unfaithful Judah when he “hurled” (טול) them and their unbelieving king Jehoiakim into exile (Jer 16:13; 26:26–28).<sup>32</sup>

2. *Jonah’s and Jeremiah’s life-threatening circumstances.* In his article, “Jonah and Intertextual Dialogue,” Anthony Abela has noted parallels between Jonah and Jeremiah in that both prophets face great distress and life-threatening circumstances.<sup>33</sup> The prayer of Jonah 2 draws upon the language and imagery of the Psalter to portray Jonah as a righteous worshipper expressing his thanksgiving that Yahweh has delivered him from drowning in the sea.<sup>34</sup> The threats to Jeremiah’s life are reflected in his “confessions” where he laments the hardships and difficulties of his prophetic calling (cf. Jer 11:18–12:6; 15:10–21; 17:14–18; 18:18–23; 20:7–18) and in the various narrative accounts where Jeremiah’s enemies seek to put him to death (cf. Jer 11:19–23; 20:10–11; 26:1–15; 38:1–6). Both Jonah and Jeremiah experience great distress as prophets for Yahweh, but the irony is that they experience these

---

<sup>30</sup> Youngblood, *Jonah: God’s Scandalous Mercy*, 72. A doublet of this text also occurs in Jer 30:23, referring to Yahweh’s judgment of the wicked in general.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 1:311. The verb טול appears a total of seven times in Jonah and Jeremiah and only two other places in the prophets as a whole (Isa 22:17; Ezek 32:43). The repetition of the verb is rhetorically significant in Jonah 1. The human participants all act in response to Yahweh’s sovereign act of “hurling” the storm—the sailors “hurl” the cargo (1:5), Jonah instructs the sailors to “hurl” him into the sea so that the storm will cease (1:12), and then the sailors reluctantly carry out Jonah’s instructions (1:15).

<sup>33</sup> Abela, “When the Agenda of an Artistic Composition Is Hidden,” 22–25.

<sup>34</sup> Dell (“Reinventing the Wheel,” 94) notes the following connections between Jonah and the Psalms: Jonah 2:2a (Pss 18:6; 30:2; 118:5); 2b (Ps 130:1, 2); 2–3b (Ps 42:7b); 2:4a (Ps 31:22); 2:5a (Pss 18:4–5; 69:1); 2:6b (Pss 30:3; 71:20); 2:7a (Pss 142:3; 143:4); 2:7b (Pss 5:7; 18:6; 88:2); 2:8a (Ps 31:6); 2:9a (42:4; 50:14, 23; 66:13); 2:9b (Ps 3:8).

hardships for entirely different reasons. Jonah's downward "descent" of disobedience leads him to the brink of Sheol as he is engulfed by the waters of chaos.<sup>35</sup> Jonah suffers because he has rejected his prophetic commission and refuses to speak the word of Yahweh, while Jeremiah suffers because of his faithfulness to his prophetic commission and the compulsion to proclaim the word of Yahweh that he cannot escape (cf. Jer 20:7–9). In fact, the suffering of Jeremiah recalls that of the faithful "Suffering Servant" in Isaiah.<sup>36</sup> The Isaianic Servant and the prophet Jeremiah are beaten, shamed, and then vindicated (Isa. 50:4–9; Jer. 20:7–12). Both the Servant and Jeremiah are like sheep "led to slaughter" (Isa. 53:7–8; Jer. 11:19) so that they are cut off "from the land of the living." Adding to the irony, the disobedient Jonah is delivered from his life-threatening situation and his imprisonment behind the "bars" of the underworld in Jonah 2:6, but the faithful Jeremiah must rest in the promise of an eventual deliverance from the various forms of imprisonment that he experiences throughout the course of a long and difficult ministry (cf. Jer 1:17–19; 20:13).

Both prophets express angry complaints toward Yahweh, but the cause of their anger again demonstrates the disparity between the two characters. Jonah is angry (חרה; 4:1) that Yahweh has "turned" (שב) from his "fierce anger" (חרון אפו) and from bringing the "calamity" (רעה) he had threatened for Nineveh (3:9–10). The source of Jeremiah's anger is exactly the opposite of Jonah's. Jeremiah complains that willing faithfulness to proclaim the word of Yahweh has brought great misery into his life (15:16–18) and that he is divinely compelled to preach a message that the people refuse to listen to and persecute him for preaching (20:7–9). Unlike Jonah's anger that is at odds with Yahweh, Jeremiah is angry because Yahweh has filled him with indignation (Jer 6:11; 15:17). Jeremiah's anger at those who reject his message and his desire to see them punished (cf. Jer 11:20; 12:3; 15:15; 17:18; 18:21–23) are just as intense as Jonah's desire to see the punishment of Nineveh, but Jeremiah's anger is justified in that these people remain under Yahweh's wrath because of their refusal to turn from their sin (cf. Jer 7:20; 11:17; 12:13; 15:14; 17:4; 21:5; 23:19; 30:23; 32:31, 37; 42:12; 44:6).

As with Yahweh, Jeremiah's indignation at the people is balanced by his sorrow over their impending destruction. Beyond God's wrath and anger, Jeremiah also expresses Yahweh's grief and sorrow over the devastation that he inflicts upon Judah. Jeremiah is the weeping prophet because he speaks for the weeping God. This conjoining of divine and prophetic grief is most evident in passages such as 4:19–21; 8:18–9:3[4]; 10:17–21; 13:17–19; and 14:17–18, and it becomes practically

---

<sup>35</sup> Jonah "goes down" (ירד) (1:3, 5; 2:6) until he is surrounded by the "deep" (תהום) and is at the gates of Sheol at the bottom of the mountains when Yahweh then "brings him up" from his watery abyss (2:5–6). In the "belly of the fish," Jonah recalled how Yahweh had saved him from the "belly of Sheol" (2:1–2).

<sup>36</sup> See Gary E. Yates, "Intertextuality and the Portrayal of Jeremiah the Prophet," *BSac* 170 (2013): 290–92; and Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 64–66.

impossible to separate the voices of Yahweh and his prophet. The contrast between Jeremiah and Jonah could not be stronger.

The circumstances behind these two prophets asking Yahweh to die are a final point of comparison that helps to bring out the contrast between their two personas.<sup>37</sup> In the face of overwhelming opposition, Jeremiah curses the day of his birth and wishes that Yahweh had killed him in the womb (20:14–18). Jeremiah asks that the one who announced his birth share the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 that were “overthrown” (הפך) by Yahweh (Jer 20:16), the same fate that Jonah warns is about to befall Nineveh (Jonah 3:4). The repentance and sparing of the Ninevites from destruction is what leads Jonah to ask Yahweh to take his life (Jonah 4:3, 8–9). Nogalski also contrasts Jonah to other biblical figures who ask God to take their lives and notes that these characters “face far more drastic circumstances than did Jonah.”<sup>38</sup> Jeremiah desires death because of opposition and persecution; Jonah wants to die because there has been a positive response to his preaching.

3. *Jonah, Jeremiah, and prophetic intercession.* Jonah’s lack of intercession for those under the threat of divine judgment is another prominent motif that highlights the parodying of Jonah as a prophetic figure. One of the key roles of a prophet is to intercede for those under the sentence of divine judgment.<sup>39</sup> In Jonah 1, Jonah fails to intercede even as the sailors cry out to their gods and the captain of the ship implores him to pray on their behalf (vv. 5–6). Jonah also offers no intercession for the Ninevites in chapter 3 as they respond to the prophetic word in repentance and seek divine favor. Yahweh “relents” (נחם) from judgment (v. 10), but unlike with the prophets Moses and Amos (cf. Exod 32:14; Amos 7:3, 6), there is no prophetic intercession that helps to bring about this divine relenting. The two specific uses of the verb “to pray” (פלל) in the book of Jonah appear with reference to the prophet’s prayers for himself (2:1; 4:2). In Jonah 2, Jonah “prays” to Yahweh and offers his thanksgiving for Yahweh delivering him from drowning at sea; in chapter 4, he prays to express his displeasure that Yahweh has extended the same kind of mercy

---

<sup>37</sup> This noting of contrasts here stands *contra* the approach of Bruckner (*Jonah, Nabum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 24), who argues instead for the similarities between Jonah and Jeremiah: “Jonah resisted Yahweh to the point that he cried out for his own death ... much like Jeremiah.... This is an integral part of the life of prophets who are called to the most difficult tasks. Jonah’s flight from Israel was not moral rebellion as it is sometimes described. It was prophetic resistance, in the classical Old Testament tradition, to an extremely difficult word from Yahweh (forgiveness of the terror-mongers of Nineveh). God honored Jonah’s resistance, as he honored the resistance of Abram, Moses, and Jeremiah.” Bruckner is correct in noting the prophetic dissent in both figures, but the numerous dissimilarities between Jonah and Jeremiah argue against his reading.

<sup>38</sup> James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah* (SHBC 18a; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 446. Job asks that God take his life because of his losses and God’s lack of response to his cries for justice and explanation. Moses asks to die because of the constant burden of leading and caring for the stubborn Israelites in the wilderness (Num 11:1–15). Samson prays for death so that he might avenge his brutal treatment at the hands of the Philistines (Judg 16:28–31).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. the examples of Moses (Exod 32:9–14; Num 14:11–19), Samuel (1 Sam 8:6–9; 19–22; 12:18–25), and Amos (Amos 7:1–6). For discussion of these three figures as intercessors in the Hebrew Bible, see Michael Widmer, *Standing in the Breach: An OT Theology and Spirituality of Intercessory Prayer* (Siphut 13; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 57–223, 477–505.

to the Ninevites. The intertextual reference to Exod 34:6 in Jonah 4:2 particularly contrasts Jonah and Moses as prophetic figures.<sup>40</sup> The confession in Exod 34:6–7 concerning Yahweh’s mercy and compassion appears in the context of Moses’s intercession for Israel following their worship of the golden calf and reflects the reason why Yahweh was responsive to Moses’s prayers.<sup>41</sup> Jonah’s knowledge of Yahweh’s mercy does not lead him to intercede for the Ninevites; in fact, it is finally revealed that Jonah’s awareness of Yahweh’s inclination to show mercy and to relent from judgment was what led Jonah to refuse his prophetic commission in the first place.

Jonah’s failure as an intercessor provides a striking and ironic contrast to the figure of Jeremiah.<sup>42</sup> Yahweh specifically instructs Jeremiah not to pray for the people of Judah (Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11), and the appearance of these commands immediately following Jeremiah’s Temple sermon in Jeremiah 7 reflects divine judgment arising from the people’s refusal to respond to the prophetic calls to “return” (שוב) to Yahweh that are prominent in the first part of the book. Even in the context of Jeremiah’s laments in Jeremiah 11–20 over his own desperate circumstances and in spite of this divine injunction not to pray, Jeremiah intercedes twice on Judah’s behalf in Jeremiah 14. Jeremiah expresses a model confession on Judah’s behalf in 14:7–10, followed by a passionate plea for Yahweh to not reject his people with another confession of Judah’s sin in 14:17–22. In both cases, Yahweh rebuffs Jeremiah’s requests because of the people’s continued refusal to turn from their sinful ways (Jer 14:10–11; 15:1–4) and states that he would not pardon the people even if Moses and Samuel were to intercede on their behalf (Jer 15:1). After the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah returns to the role of prophetic intercessor (Jer 42:16), but the group of people he prays for reject his counsel and force him to accompany them to Egypt (Jer 43:1–7). What emerges from the contrast between Jonah and Jeremiah as intercessors is an unfaithful prophet who refuses to pray for his audience even when they “turn” (שוב) from their sinful ways and a faithful prophet who intercedes for a people who would not “turn” (שוב) from their sin, even when God has explicitly directed him not to pray.

### III. JONAH-JEREMIAH INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE ISSUE OF REPENTANCE

1. *Jonah, Jeremiah, and the call to repentance.* The intertextual connections between Jonah-Jeremiah and other prophetic figures in the book of Jonah move interpreta-

---

<sup>40</sup> For the larger significance of Exod 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve, see Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (ed. L. G. Perdue et al.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 31–49. Quotations of or allusions to Exod 34:6–7 appear also in Joel 2:13; Mic 7:16–20; and Nah 1:3. See also n. 54 below.

<sup>41</sup> Youngblood, *Jonah: God’s Scandalous Mercy*, 153–54.

<sup>42</sup> For Jeremiah as intercessor, see Widmer, *Standing in the Breach*, 329–441. Widmer notes that Jeremiah is remembered in 2 Macc 15:12–14 as a model intercessor and even a heavenly advocate.

tion away from viewing Jonah primarily as a representative of the nation of Israel.<sup>43</sup> The book of Jonah portrays Jonah as the “virtual caricature of a prophet” in both behavior and attitudes when compared to figures like Jeremiah, Moses, and Elijah.<sup>44</sup> For Marcus, these elements of parody in the book are not designed to advance an ideological message but merely to satirize poor prophetic behavior.<sup>45</sup> It seems clear, however, that the story of Jonah conveys more than simply a condemnation of bad behavior. The intertextual connections between Jeremiah and Jonah particularly place emphasis on the issue of response to the prophetic word and Yahweh’s desire to show mercy in relenting from judgment when people repent. The closest overlaps between the two books are in passages like Jeremiah 18:7–10; 26; 36; and Jonah 3 where the interaction between human repentance and divine relenting are prominent. On its own, the book of Jonah emphasizes the wideness of God’s mercy that is shown to the sailors, Jonah, and Nineveh in sparing them from death and destruction. God’s mercy is not contingent on repentance or guaranteed by repentance, because Jonah is spared without repenting, but divine mercy is often bestowed “in response to steps taken in the right direction.”<sup>46</sup>

The Jonah-Jeremiah intertexts serve as a rebuke of Judah’s unbelief and failure to repent. The immediate response and turning to Yahweh on the part of the pagan sailors and Ninevites contrasts to Judah’s overall lack of positive response to the preaching of Jeremiah. Jonah is a book about how Nineveh “turned” (שוב) to Yahweh; Jeremiah is a book about how Judah refused to “return” (שוב) to Yahweh.<sup>47</sup> As a result, Nineveh is the “great city” (עיר גדולה) that is spared from judgment (Jonah 1:1; 3:1–2). Jerusalem, on the other hand, is the “great city” (עיר גדולה) that will cause foreigners to ask why it is fallen because it ultimately refused to turn from its sinful ways (Jer 22:8). If the sailors and Ninevites could respond to a pathetic prophet like Jonah, then Judah is all the more guilty for not responding to the long and faithful preaching ministry of the prophet Jeremiah.

The repentance of the Ninevites and their experience of God’s mercy also serve as a motivation for Israel to positively respond to the prophetic calls to return to Yahweh. If Yahweh would extend his mercy to the Assyrians, he would certainly

---

<sup>43</sup> Terence E. Fretheim (*The Message of Jonah* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000], 69–70) rejects interpreting Jonah being swallowed and then vomited out by the fish as an allegory for Israel being taken into exile and then living among the nations as an overly simplistic reading of the book. Jer 51:34, 44 does portray Nebuchadnezzar and Bel the god of Babylon as sea monsters that have “swallowed up” (בלע) Israel, but the imagery in the passage is a dragon, not a great fish, and any correspondence to the story of Jonah here appears to be coincidental. See also Bruckner (*Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 106–109) for cautions against viewing the figure of Jonah as typological of Israel’s unwillingness to share the knowledge of God with Gentiles.

<sup>44</sup> Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 157.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 158. He sees a similar purpose behind the story of the lying prophet in 1 Kings 13 and of Elisha and the cursing of the youths in 2 Kgs 2:23–24.

<sup>46</sup> John H. Walton, “The Object Lesson of Jonah 4:5–7 and the Purpose of the Book of Jonah,” *BBR* 2 (1992): 55.

<sup>47</sup> Some form of the root שׁוּב appears 121 times in the book of Jeremiah. For the emphasis on repentance in the book, see William L. Holladay, *The Root šûb in the OT with Particular References to Its Usages in Covenantal Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 1958).

do so for Israel, his own people.<sup>48</sup> The even more encouraging point is that God responds to even the minimal repentance of the Ninevites. There is no mention of the Assyrians turning away from their pagan gods or of their conversion to an exclusive devotion to Yahweh.<sup>49</sup> The expression “they believed in God” (ב + האמן) in Jonah 3:5 simply conveys that they took God at his word in regard to the threats of judgment (cf. Gen 15:6; Num 20:12).<sup>50</sup> Impressive and surprising as their response to Jonah’s preaching is, it still essentially amounts to a “ritual response and ethical tidying up” that had little long-lasting effect.<sup>51</sup> The point then is that if Yahweh is merciful enough to respond to “shallow, naïve repentance ‘Assyrian-style,’” then he would be even more gracious if Israel would genuinely return to him or even if they would simply take small steps in the right direction toward him.<sup>52</sup>

This focus on repentance and response to the prophetic word in Jonah is reinforced by the larger message of the Book of the Twelve as a whole. LeCureux argues that the verb **שוב** provides the thematic key for the unity of the Book of the Twelve.<sup>53</sup> The closest intertext to Jonah 3 in the Book of the Twelve is found in Joel 2:12–17, and this close connection likely stresses that one of the few positive responses to the prophetic word in the Twelve comes from the hated Assyrians.<sup>54</sup> If Israel and Judah had only responded like the Ninevites, then many of the judgments detailed in the Book of the Twelve could have been avoided.

2. *Yahweh, the prophets, and the nations.* Reading Jonah and Jeremiah in light of each other also reveals that the two books share a unique rhetorical emphasis on

<sup>48</sup> Boda, *Severe Mercy*, 318.

<sup>49</sup> Walton, “Object Lesson of Jonah 4:5–7,” 54.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 53–54.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 53–54. For more on the minimal nature of the Ninevites’ response to the prophetic word, see also Timmer, *Gracious and Compassionate God*, 100–104. The same emphasis on God’s willingness to respond to even less than exemplary repentance is also conveyed in the Hebrew Bible by the stories of the repentance of Ahab in 1 Kgs 21:25–29 and Manasseh in 2 Chr 33:10–20.

<sup>53</sup> Jason T. LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the Twelve* (HBM 41; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> In Joel 2:12, Yahweh calls on the people to “return” (**שוב**) with fasting and weeping. The motivation for repentance is introduced by the question **מי יודע**, raising the possibility that Yahweh would “turn” (**שוב**) and “relent” (**נחם**) from sending judgment. All of these elements are found in Jonah 3 as well: (1) the Ninevites reflect their repentance through intensive fasting and mourning (3:5–8); (2) the king of Nineveh uses the question **מי יודע** to raise the possibility of divine relenting (**חישוב ונחם**) from judgment (3:9); and (3) it is the “turning” (**שוב**) of the Ninevites that leads Yahweh to “relent” (**נחם**) from destroying Nineveh as Jonah had warned (3:10). The phrase **מי יודע** only appears in these two passages in the Book of the Twelve and only six other times in the Hebrew Bible as a whole (2 Sam 12:22; Ps 90:11; Qoh 2:19; 3:21; 8:1; Esth 4:14). Also reflecting the close connection between Jeremiah 18 and 26 with Joel 2 and Jonah 3 is the fact that the verbs “to turn” (**שוב**) and “to relent” (**נחם**) only appear together in a total of nine verses. The two verbs together only refer to Yahweh’s actions four times (Exod 32:12; Ps 90:13; Isa 12:1; Jer 4:20), and the exact expression **שוב ונחם** appears only in Joel 2:14 and Jonah 3:9. Joel 2 and Jonah 3–4 are also linked together by an almost identical citation of the confession of Exod 34:6–7 in Joel 2:13 and Jonah 4:2. It is the basis for the appeal for repentance in Joel 2 and the reason for Jonah’s anger at the sparing of Nineveh in Jonah 4:2.

the leveling of Yahweh’s relationships with Israel and the nations.<sup>55</sup> The book of Jonah highlights positive responses by Gentiles to the prophetic word in Jonah 1 and 3. The A-B-A-B structure of the book highlights the incongruity of Jonah’s rejoicing over Yahweh’s mercy that led to his sparing Jonah from death (chap. 2) versus his anger over Yahweh’s mercy that led to the sparing of Nineveh (chap. 4).<sup>56</sup> The narrator’s deft strategy in waiting to disclose the reason for Jonah’s refusal to go to Nineveh at the end of the book (Jonah 4:2) turns the theme of the wideness of God’s mercy into the book’s punchline. The application of Exod 34:6 to Yahweh’s treatment of the Ninevites demonstrates that he deals with the nations in the same way that he does with his covenant people Israel. The object lesson of the plant and the worm in Jonah 4:5–11 also effectively results in Jonah trading places with the Ninevites.<sup>57</sup> Since Jonah desires to see God’s mercy withdrawn from the Ninevites so that they experience the “disaster” (רעה) Yahweh had planned for them, Yahweh uses the plant to provide relief for Jonah from his “discomfort” (רעה) caused by the excessive heat but then quickly takes away that relief when the worm devours the plant. The book of Jonah serves at least in part to put Jew and Gentile on more equal footing before God. As Youngblood observes, one clear implication of the message of Jonah is “that YHWH’s mercy is not exclusively for Israel’s benefit. God’s special relationship with Israel is not an end in and of itself, but a means to an end—the blessing of the nations (cf. Gen 12:1–3).”<sup>58</sup>

This idea of God’s leveling of his relationships with Israel and the nations also emerges from a reading of the book of Jeremiah. Like Jonah, Jeremiah is “a prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5). His prophetic role to the nations certainly involves proclaiming Yahweh’s coming judgment (cf. the message concerning the “cup of wrath” extended to the nations in Jeremiah 25 and the prophetic oracles in chapters 46–51 in Jeremiah MT being prime examples).<sup>59</sup> It was the judgment of

---

<sup>55</sup> Kevin J. Youngblood, (“Beyond Deuteronomism: *Jeremiah’s* Unique Theological Contribution,” a paper presented at Lipscomb University 2009, 6) notes how we see a “reduction of Judah’s status to one of the nations” and “a grouping” of Judah with other nations as theological components of the book of Jeremiah.

<sup>56</sup> The “A” panels in chaps. 1 and 3 involve Jonah interacting with pagans who respond positively to God, while the “B” panels in chaps. 2 and 4 depict Jonah in dialogue with Yahweh.

<sup>57</sup> Walton, “Object Lesson of Jonah 4:5–7,” 49.

<sup>58</sup> Youngblood, *Jonah: God’s Scandalous Mercy*, 144. The wideness of God’s mercy that includes both Jews and Gentiles trumps even Jonah’s concerns over the working out of divine justice. Walton (“Object Lesson of Jonah 4:5–7,” 56) is certainly correct to argue against the reading of Jonah as an indictment of Israel’s failure to be a missionary to the nations. Jonah is commissioned to preach only a message of judgment, and Israel is never directly called to go and evangelize the nations. See also Bruckner (*Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 106–9) for cautions against viewing the figure of Jonah as typological of Israel’s unwillingness to share the knowledge of God with Gentiles. Nevertheless, Jonah’s response to Yahweh’s mercy to the Ninevites does seem to serve as a rebuke of how Israel’s disobedience to Yahweh had presented an obstacle to Gentile blessing and perhaps even an indictment of Jewish ethnocentrism and failure to properly understand that any nation could become the recipient of Yahweh’s mercy. See also Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 460–62.

<sup>59</sup> Similar to the preaching mission of Jonah, Jeremiah even commissions Seraiah to read his oracles of judgment announcing the “disaster” (רעה) that Yahweh would bring against Babylon (Jer 51:59–64),

the oppressive Babylonians, however, that would open the way for Yahweh to “restore the fortunes” (שוב שבות) of Israel, and the message of Jeremiah extends that salvation to the nations in some significant ways. Jeremiah 3:17 announces that Yahweh would gather the nations at Jerusalem and that they would no more “follow their own evil heart.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, the nations would experience a heart transformation similar to what is promised to Israel and Judah in the new covenant in Jer 31:31–34. Jeremiah 4:1–2 calls upon Israel to “return” to Yahweh so that the nations might “bless themselves” by Israel in fulfillment of the promises of the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gen 12:1–3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4).<sup>61</sup>

Jeremiah’s dual message for Israel and Judah was a negative message of judgment that involved “plucking up” (נחש) and a positive message of salvation that included “building up” (בנה; cf. Jer 1:10; 12, 14, 17; 18:7; 24:6; 31:28, 40; 42:10; 45:5). Remarkably, Jeremiah promises this same kind opportunity for restoration and “building up” after judgment to the nations that turn to Yahweh in Jer 12:14–17, including the Canaanites who had taught Israel to worship Baal and had been under a decree of extermination when Israel had initially entered the land.<sup>62</sup> The phrase “restore the fortunes” (שוב שבות) is prominent in the Book of Consolation in Jeremiah 30–33, which focus on Israel’s restoration and return to the land following the exile (Jer 30:3, 18; 31:23; 32:14; 33:7, 11, 26). This same expression is also used to describe the restoration of Moab (48:47), Ammon (49:6), and Elam (49:6) following their time of divine judgment.<sup>63</sup> In multiple ways, the language of salvation applied to Israel is also extended to the nations in the book of Jeremiah.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The prophet Jeremiah applies the principle of divine “relenting” from “disaster” to any nation that “turns” from its evil ways (Jer 18:5–6). Judah’s refusal to “turn” despite the faithful preaching of Jeremiah meant that they would experience the full brunt of Yahweh’s judgment. Surprisingly, the positive example of “turning” and “divine relenting” comes from Jonah 3 as the Ninevites respond to the preaching of perhaps the poorest excuse for a prophet in the OT. The Ninevites’ response to the half-hearted preaching of Jonah even anticipates the promise of Isa 19:19–25 that Assyria, Egypt, and Israel would be the three peoples of God in the future kingdom, and this positive response angers Jonah and makes him want to die. The prophet Jeremiah can only lament that there was no such positive response to his preaching and look forward to the day that Yahweh would write his law on

---

though there is no evidence that the message was read to the Babylonians in order to give them an opportunity to repent. The sign act accompanying the reading that involved tying a rock around the scroll and throwing it into the Euphrates signifies the unalterable certainty of the message of judgment as well.

<sup>60</sup> Youngblood, “Beyond Deuteronomism,” 13.

<sup>61</sup> See Wright, *Mission of God*, 240–41, 351.

<sup>62</sup> Youngblood, “Beyond Deuteronomism,” 13–14.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

the hearts of the people so that they and the nations might know his blessing and salvation.