

THE MERCIFUL AND COMPASSIONATE GOD: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF  
JONAH IN THE CONTEXT OF ISLAM

by

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## ABSTRACT

“The Merciful and Compassionate God: A Biblical Theology of Jonah in the Context of Islam”

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This dissertation aims to develop a biblical typological theology of the book of Jonah in the context of Islam. As the research is focused toward this goal, a reception history approach will be employed to investigate how the book of Jonah was received by Jesus and Muhammad’s community. Both communities, as will be argued by this study, distinctively read the narrative of Jonah typologically. For Jesus’ community as reflected in Matthew’s and Luke’s writings, Jonah functions as a type of a suffering prophet and preacher of a prophetic ministry of judgement. For Muhammad’s community as reflected in Islamic literature, Yūnus functions as a man of prayer, an impatient yet repentant prophet. Informed by such a conclusion, this study moves to read the book of Jonah typologically following three major hermeneutical endeavours: analysing the book of Jonah exegetically in its own context in light of the character of God as it is revealed in Jonah 4:2; interpreting the text typologically in light of God’s redemptive work in history in both Testaments; and finally, engaging with the context of Islam through the typological reading of Islamic literature of the narrative of Yūnus. The hermeneutical spiral between all these elements will be present throughout this study.

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Emad Botros

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDB	Brown, Francis, et al. <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 1907.
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cornerstone Biblical Commentary
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
ConBot	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
<i>DCH</i>	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HTS</i>	<i>Hervormde Teologiese Studies</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JANER</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>

<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën, Old Testament Studies
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament Studies</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>

<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Description of Topic and Its Importance**

The purpose of this study is to develop a Middle Eastern biblical theology of the Book of Jonah in the context of Islam. In order to describe the topic under investigation and to show its importance, this section will address three major points. First, it discusses the socio-religious challenges of reading the Old Testament (hereafter OT), in the context of Islam, with particular focus on the Book of Jonah. Second, it surveys Arab theologians' attempts of reading the Bible in the Islamic context. Finally, it examines Western scholarship on studies between the Bible and the Qur'an. To the first we now turn.

#### 1.1.1 The Socio-Religious Challenges of Reading the Old Testament and the Book of Jonah in the Arab-Islamic Context

Growing up in a Middle Eastern Islamic context as a Christian shaped who I am today. I grew up in a very rich culture, particularly in terms of its history and religious heritages. The latter plays an influential role in shaping the lives of many, of whom I am one. Religion is, indeed, an indispensable element of our identity. These religious heritages are both unique and challenging. They are unique because of their shared themes and prophetic figures; they are challenging because they offer different worldviews. Although I should be celebrating the uniqueness of my heritage as a Christian, the history among these religions—namely Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—is partially characterized by political and religious clashes that created a

negative perception of the Other. This, needless to say, has also produced, relationally and religiously, unhealthy dynamics among these communities of faith.

Relationally speaking, the majority of Christians withdrew from society, attempting to avoid interaction with Islam and Muslims, adopting the mentality of minority—of persecuted communities. They saw in Islam, and consequently the Qur'an and Muhammad, the reason for their suffering. The church, thus, became their “safe haven,” and Muslims became the “strangers.” This new reality gave birth to unhealthy emotions towards the Other. It, moreover, expressed itself in various forms: ministering only to similar Christian communities, witnessing or “evangelising” to Christians from other denominations (Protestant to Coptic and Catholic), and reading Scripture with a focus on spiritual-individual Christian welfare. Scripture in this light, then, was seen as if it was only written to Christian communities, and not to the world.

Religiously speaking, this unpleasant reality gave also rise to the Church's ignorance not only of Muslims but also of Islamic literature.<sup>1</sup> The Qur'an, in particular, is considered by many Christians as “the source of evil,” and sadly, many cannot see any value in reading it until now. On the other hand, the Muslim attitude towards Christian Scripture, particularly the OT, as the focus of this study, can be characterized as negative. According to Riad Kassis, there are four major challenges that contributed to this critical perception of the OT: the political, the ethical, the exegetical, and the historical dilemmas.<sup>2</sup> The political dilemma resulted from the Arab Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In this context, the OT is seen as the Jewish sacred book that promises the land from the Nile to Euphrates to the current State of Israel, and

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this study, the term “Islamic literature” is used to refer to the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic classic and contemporary commentaries, as well as the Stories of the Prophet material.

<sup>2</sup> Kassis, لماذا لا نقرأ الكتاب (*Why Do not we Read*), 15–23.

thus Israel becomes the “first” enemy to all Arabs. Consequently, some churches in Arab countries avoid reading the OT, and even when they do, they replace the term “Israel” with “God’s people” every time it occurs. Moreover, God is seen as a racist, who sides with a particular nation against the others. The ethical dilemma, on the other hand, appears in the Muslim critique of the “violence/war” passages (e.g., the book of Joshua) as well as the “unethical” narratives (e.g. where a prophet like David commits adultery, or Jonah who runs away from God). The interpretive dilemma, third, emerges from the difficulty of understanding the OT and how it can be relevant to our contemporary context. Finally, in the historicity dilemma is based on the negative depiction of the Israelites in the Qur’an as untrustworthy people who corrupted their own scripture. As a result, Muslims critique the historical authenticity of the biblical history of Israel, claiming that the OT is “historically fabricated” in order to serve Israel’s own colonial and political agenda.

This negative attitude towards the OT, moreover, seems to be more intensified toward the book of Jonah. In the Arab-Islamic viewpoint, Jonah’s bitter attitude toward the non-Israelites is seen as a reflection of the current State of Israel’s attitude towards its neighboring Arab countries. In this scenario, it is noted that Jonah represents the “real” Israelite of today. In other words, if you desire to understand how the current people of the State of Israel “think and feel” about other Arab countries, just read the book of Jonah. Some popular Assyrian and Chaldean voices, for example, who used to live in Nineveh before the occupation of the city by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, reject the book of Jonah. They believe that this book should not be part of the Christian canon since it reflects the attitude of hatred of the current State of Israel toward Nineveh. These voices also question and critique how Assyrian and Chaldean priests in the current city of Nineveh encourage the “three-day

fasting” of Jonah.<sup>3</sup> The recognition of these challenges by Arab theologians has recently produced a few admirable attempts in this area, as we will see next.

### 1.1.2 Middle Eastern Theologians and the Reading of the Bible in the Context of Islam<sup>4</sup>

In this section, I will survey various Middle Eastern theologians who mainly attempt to engage with the context of Islam. Our survey does not attempt to cover all theologian, nor underestimate other valuable attempts in this area. This decision is made based on how relevant these writings to our purpose and also because of the limitation of space and time. To begin, Mazhar Mallouhi’s work, *The Genesis of the World and Humanity: Contemporary Reading of the Book of Genesis*, attempts to reflect the interest among the believers of all religions to understand each other, attempting “to recognize the Jewish and Islamic understanding of Genesis’ stories as well as to present the Christian viewpoint of the same accounts.”<sup>5</sup> Like other readings of Genesis and the Qur’an, Mallouhi underlines the importance of the character of Abraham, and how Christians, Muslims, and Jews find wisdom in this story as they offer various interpretations for us today.

A close reading of this work leaves the reader with mixed feelings. The book begins with a very helpful introduction to the book in order to orient the Arab reader. It is also important to note how this work speaks openly about the challenges of

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Ziea Odishou, سفر يونان التوراتي تحت المجهر, *Book of the Torahic Jonah*. In classical ecclesial communities of Syriac, for example, the book of Jonah is more appreciated. A good example is Jacob of Seroug Mēmrā on the book of Jonah, where he applies a typological reading of the narrative in a verse by verse style. For a recent treatment of this Mēmrā See Robert Kitchen, “Jonah’s Oar: Christian Typological in Jacob of Seroug’s Mēmrā 122 on Jonah,” 29–62.

<sup>4</sup> Here I will mainly engage with Evangelical Arab theologians who focus on the OT and Jonah. For more details about the history of the nature of Middle Eastern theology, specifically in relation to Muslims, see Accad, “Middle Eastern Theology in Evangelical Perspective,” 148–62.

<sup>5</sup> Mallouhi, ed., *Genesis of the World*, 11.



reading Genesis, i.e., how we can understand the similarities between Genesis and the Near East religions.

The second section of the book includes articles related to common figures (i.e., Abraham and Ishmael) and theological themes (i.e., promised land, revelation, covenant, God's elected people) as they appear in Genesis. For example, a thematic reading of Abraham is offered around four main themes: the character of God, the purpose of God, believers' response to God, and how believers relate to life. In this reading, the character of Abraham shows how similar all three religions are around these themes, though differences are noted as well. The similarities, though, should encourage the people of all three religions to find "common ground" to live together in harmony.<sup>6</sup> This work, thus, attempts to create a theological conversation between Genesis and Islam and offers helpful insights into the Christian faith through Genesis.

This work, however, is more of a translation than a commentary. The reader will find brief comments on selected parts of the book. This work, moreover, is selective in its treatment of the issues discussed. Though this could be a common phenomenon when one reads the Bible in a specific context, one hoped to see more commentary on the text itself, even if it does not relate directly to the Qur'an. While the method of using articles is of a great help to the reader, it would have been more appropriate if these articles were written in the body of the text, and not in a separate section, particularly those related directly to the text of Genesis (i.e., the story of Abraham). Finally, it is striking to notice the absence of a conversation between the biblical and Quranic story of creation, as well as how we can understand the biblical story of creation in light of science.

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<sup>6</sup> Mallouhi, ed., *Genesis of the World*, 52–62.

It is very interesting, moreover, to see Arab-Muslim writers contributing to this work. For example, Ahmad Meshraqi, after his critiques of how Genesis studies have focused on the composition of the book and its date, offers a cultural reading of Genesis.<sup>7</sup> Meshraqi considers Genesis as “a historical document that could help reflect aspects of the Middle Eastern culture, with particular reference to Abraham and Lot as they appear in Genesis.”<sup>8</sup> He identifies specific virtues in the lives of Abraham and Lot that are similar to that of the Middle East today (i.e., hospitality, magnanimity, family welfare and honor of the person and the family).<sup>9</sup>

Another valuable attempt toward reading the Bible in an Arab-Islamic context is a multi-essay volume titled, *Towards a Contemporary Arab Theology*. In this work, a group of Arab theologians addresses some of the current issues related to the Middle East (i.e., “How do Arabs Approach the OT?”; “Covenant: Between the Evangelical Understanding and its Impact on the Middle East”; “Religion and Politics: Old Prophecies and the Current Affairs”). Magdi Sedeque, in his article, asks: “How do Arabs View the Old Testament?”<sup>10</sup> As he explores the answer to this question, Sedeque refers to the existence of the current State of Israel as a major turning point in how Muslims and Christians approach the OT. According to Sedeque, both groups begin searching the OT in order to understand the reasons behind the violence that is practiced by Israel towards Palestine. This search, however, leads Arab Christians to the conclusion that the OT is an aggressive and violent book, and the God of the OT encourages this type of violence for the sake of his chosen people, Israel. Consequently, Arab Christians struggle with the OT, attempting to focus more on the NT, as they think that God in the NT is more loving and gracious than God in the OT.

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<sup>7</sup> Meshraqi, “Middle Eastern Culture in Genesis,” 63–75.

<sup>8</sup> Meshraqi, “Middle Eastern Culture in Genesis,” 63.

<sup>9</sup> Meshraqi, “Middle Eastern Culture in Genesis,” 73–75.

<sup>10</sup> Sedeque, “How do Arabs,” 19–37.

This misunderstanding of the OT, as Sedeque continues, is the result of applying “bad hermeneutics” in reading these biblical texts.<sup>11</sup> In order to challenge all these misperceptions, Sedeque offers a sound biblical picture of God in the OT with a major focus on three attributes of God as the Creator, the Judge, and the Redeemer. He also discusses issues that concern the Arab reader, i.e., war, violence, and God’s relationship to other nations.

Some other attempts have focused on presenting the Bible in terminology understood by Arab-Muslims. The translation of the Gospels by Mallouhi, *The True Meaning of Jesus’ Gospel*, is one of them. This work begins by observing the limitation of using Islamic religious terminology in Arabic Bible translations. It is important to note that although both Muslims and Christians use the Arabic language as a medium of communication, each group developed its own set of religious terminology. This, however, was not the case in early Christian-Muslim relations. The history of Christian-Muslim relations, according to this work, shows that early Christian translators learned the language of Arabs in their attempt to translate the Bible into Arabic. Both Christians and Muslims used, for example, the expression: *بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ* (“In the Name of the Merciful and most Gracious God”), which is considered as Islamic religious terminology by many Christians today. This work aims to encourage Arab-Christian communities to reconsider what we call today “Islamic religious terminologies” in order to tell their story in a way that Arab Muslims can understand. Mallouhi’s work accomplishes this goal by following four methodological steps. First, this translation attempts to offer a meaning, which goes beyond the literal-lexicon meaning of the original word. Second, it attempts to provide a contemporary meaning of the text. By doing so, this reading functions as a

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<sup>11</sup> Sedeque, “How do Arabs,” 11.

bridge between what was written a long time ago and the current culture. Third, this work offers a cultural background for the Gospel. It does so by adding footnotes, an introduction to each book, and some articles specifically addressing relevant issues for the contemporary reader (i.e., the concept of revelation). Fourth, it employs colloquial Arabic terms (expressions) that are acceptable, understandable, and used daily by the majority of Arab readers.

Arab-Palestinian theologians have accomplished more in reading the Bible in an Arab-Islamic context, particularly the OT, due to the long-standing conflict with Israel. This type of Arab-Christian-Palestinian theology, one can expect, is mainly developed around the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.<sup>12</sup> With the explanation provided above in relation to this dilemma, our focus here will be particularly on an interpretation of Jonah provided by an Arab-Palestinian theologian, Mitri Raheb. Interestingly enough, Raheb does not read Jonah in relation to the current State of Israel, but rather in the larger Arab context of the Gulf War. The story begins a few months after the Gulf War in 1990, when a group of young people approached Raheb asking to study the book of Revelation in order to understand the crisis of the Gulf War. After pondering the reasons for such an interest in the book of Revelation, and, specifically, how young people were drawn to make the connection between the book of Revelation and the Gulf War, Raheb's theological orientation led him to reject such an interpretation of the book of Revelation. For Raheb, the book of Jonah seemed to be "the proper message" to be read in these circumstances—the message that he preached on the first Sunday after the war had started.

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Katanacho, *تحدث/ي إليه: صلوات من المزامير* (*Talk to Him: Prayers from the Book of Psalms*); *أرض المسيح: صرخة من فلسطين* (*Land of Christ*); Ateek, *Palestinian Christian*.

In this setting, Nineveh represents Iraq of today, and Jonah's attitude is akin to that of the State of Israel, the United States, and their allies. Raheb portrayed Jonah as "The 'convinced Zionist', who believed in Israel's election, objected to presenting the Word to Nineveh the enemy."<sup>13</sup> He, moreover, attempted to identify the "real" goal of this war, that is, not the liberation of Kuwait, but rather the destruction of Iraq and the killing of Saddam. All this scenario, according to Raheb, was for the sake of the survival of Israel in the Middle East. He explains:

So Iraq was to be destroyed, for only one nation has the right to be powerful in the Middle East; only one nation is allowed to be equipped with weapons of destruction; only one nation is permitted to occupy territory—Israel. Could this be a new version of the election of Israel? Just as Jonah denied Nineveh the right to live, so did Israel, the United States, and their allies deny Iraq the right to live.<sup>14</sup>

Raheb, then, shows how Jonah's sympathetic attitude over the bush, but not over the Ninevites, reflects the attitude of the world's sympathetic attitude over the seabird, but not over the Iraqis:

Pity on Iraq was not evident. Pity on sea birds, yes. The picture of the seabird that could no longer move because it was covered with oil touched the world's sentiments, just as Jonah had pity on the bush . . . Who cares about Iraq? Everyone was drunk with victory. That was glory for the West. Only the God who loves humanity cares about Iraq. God is not indifferent to the Iraqi population. God has compassion for that great nation in which eighteen million persons live "who do not know their right hand from their left" (Jonah 4:11).<sup>15</sup>

Raheb closes with a series of questions to challenge his readers, as the book of Jonah also closes with a question to challenge Jonah: "How many Ninevehs must yet be destroyed before we human beings learn? Are we capable of learning at all? When will we grasp the fact that God's compassion really has no limits, that it encompasses everyone, and that no one is excluded from it?"<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Raheb, *Palestinian Christian*, location 1268.

<sup>14</sup> Raheb, *Palestinian Christian*, location 1297–98.

<sup>15</sup> Raheb, *Palestinian Christian*, location 1300–1302.

<sup>16</sup> Raheb, *Palestinian Christian*, location 1311–13.

Raheb's devotional, contextualized reading of the book of Jonah reflects the perspective of many Christians in their understanding of the book of Jonah today, particularly Palestinians. In this view, Jonah is a national Zionist, who represents the current Israel in their relation to the Arab countries. However, this approach also reflects the so-called "conspiracy theory" and its impact on one's reading of the Bible; that is, Israel is behind everything that happens in the Middle East. This is evident when Raheb includes Israel among the nations who fought against Iraq. This contextualized reading, however, allows the book of Jonah to speak into the contemporary Arab-Islamic context. At the end of this devotion, Raheb questions and challenges the world's unjust attitude towards a nation like Iraq. It is important to notice here how the book of Jonah is employed by Arab Christians to question and challenge the attitude of other nations towards them. Arab Christians, however, do not allow the same book to question and challenge their own attitude towards, for example, Israel and Islam. The question then is: would Middle Eastern Christians allow the book of Jonah to challenge their attitudes towards others as they expect the same book to challenge the attitude of others towards them?

Other Arab-Christian readings of Jonah reflect more the individualistic, spiritual, didactic approach to the book. Two examples are necessary here: those by the Pope of the Coptic church of Egypt, Shenouda III and the Lebanese Maronite priest, Boulos Feghali. In his book, *Contemplations on the Book of Jonah the Prophet*, *تأملات في سفر يونان النبي*, Shenouda approached the book with a mere spiritual focus, rather than a controversial, theological one. Although he captured the main themes of the book, he applied them in a limited manner. Shenouda begins by praising the Orthodox Church of Egypt for its choice of this book as an introduction to Lent (الصوم الكبير) so that people can begin their 40-day fast with repentance. He then

moved to explain Jonah's running away from God as follows: "Jonah worries about his integrity as a prophet, since he will preach judgment and destruction, while God will show compassion and mercy."<sup>17</sup> While Jonah is described as an arrogant, stubborn prophet, God, on the other hand, is humble, compassionate, and slow to anger for all nations. Jonah, Shenouda continues, was worried about his image as a prophet, while God was willing to "relent" and not worry about His image. When Shenouda speaks about "a God for all nations," he addresses the issue of "individual repentance" and how God's kingdom welcomes everyone. He then encourages individuals to repent regardless of their "different personalities."<sup>18</sup>

Boulos Feghali, a Maronite priest, reads the story in its post-exilic context.<sup>19</sup> The book of Jonah, according to Feghali, addresses the issue of "narrow nationalism." God appears in this book as the God of the gentiles. Hence, we can understand the reason behind Jonah's escape as God asked him to act against the surrounding traditional theology of narrow nationalism. Feghali, then, moves to discuss the Christian reading of Jonah and how this little book prepares the way for the person of Jesus Christ. For example, both the theme of mercy and the universal message of the book find its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Jesus, thus, is the new Jonah. We can see here how Feghali attempts to understand the book of Jonah in its historical context but at the same time applies a Christian-typological reading to the book.

Our discussion, up to this point, identified four key challenges with reading the OT and the book of Jonah in the Arab-Islamic context: the political, the ethical, the exegetical, and the historical. These challenges led to the negative perception of the OT in the Arab-Islamic context. As we have observed, Arab theologians

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<sup>17</sup> Shenouda, تأملات في سفر يونان النبي (*Contemplations on the Book of Jonah the Prophet*), 5.

<sup>18</sup> Shenouda, تأملات في سفر يونان النبي (*Contemplations*), 23.

<sup>19</sup> Feghali, اقوال الله في شعبه (*The Words of God*), 145–58.

employed various approaches to respond to these challenges. One approach adopted by Mallouhi is the thematic, theological, comparative approach in the form of a commentary. The focus of this approach is to encourage people from different faiths to celebrate their “common ground” and to live together. The other approach used by Arab theologians is the contextualized, thematic, theological approach. This approach is seen in the work of Sedeque, who examines the misunderstanding of God’s character in the OT, attempting to offer a biblical image of God the Creator, the Judge and the Redeemer. In addition, Arab-Palestinian theologians employ a thematic, contextualized approach that focuses mainly on themes related to their conflict with Israel.

We have also observed how the book of Jonah in particular received a negative evaluation in this context by particular communities, such as the Assyrian Christian community in Iraq. We then examined three major Christian approaches to the book of Jonah. First, Raheb employs a devotional, sociopolitical contextualized reading to the book of Jonah, where Jonah represents a national Zionist whose attitude reflects those who invaded Iraq. Second, we saw how Shenouda’s devotional, spiritual approach to the book mainly focuses on interpretations for the Christian community, encouraging the life of repentance. Finally, Feghaly interprets the book of Jonah using a Christian typological approach, where the book prepares the way for Jesus as the new Jonah.

Our survey shows the lack of serious engagement of Arab theologians with their Arab-Islamic context and Islamic literature.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Arab theologians must re-examine their exegetical and hermeneutical practices towards biblical

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<sup>20</sup> Even the work of Mallouhi is insufficient as a commentary since it mainly focuses on common figures and themes.



interpretations, and to work towards developing an Arab biblical theology that is characterized as follows.

Arab biblical theology should move beyond addressing particular themes and comparing common figures to intentionally embrace the whole biblical text as its source for writing theology. As we have seen, the attempt to write a commentary on Genesis in an Islamic context, for example, limits itself to address particular subjects, while overlooking some important passages (i.e., the creation account). Christians ministering among Muslims, moreover, have used particular parts of the OT as an “entry point” in order to speak of Christ. For example, some only focus on OT prophecies to point to Christ, while others have attempted to employ allegorical approaches to common biblical figures (e.g., Abraham, as a type of Christ-figure). These narrow approaches to the OT show the need to reclaim the whole OT as Christian Scripture and to examine our understanding of its relationship to the New Testament (hereafter NT). These exegetical and hermeneutical concerns will be addressed more in our methodology below. The importance of this study thus is that it addresses the interpretive dilemma of reading the OT in the context of Islam.

A Middle Eastern biblical theology should seriously take into consideration Islamic thinking and literature. In order to accomplish this task, Middle Eastern Christian theologians must first develop a biblical view of Islam and Muslims. This biblical view, first, attempts to deal with the historical negative attitudes toward the Other, which has resulted from political and religious agendas as well as harmful practices throughout history. In this sense, Scripture is not used to examine and rebuke the attitudes of others, as we have seen in the case of Raheb’s reading of Jonah, but to challenge our own perception of the Other. The hope of this research is to draw on Jonah/Yūnus to help with this dilemma, as his story challenges all of us to

reflect the character of a Merciful and Compassionate God towards the Other. Our knowledge of God and His character, thus, influences the way we live. Michael Lodahl explains: “Our primary goal will be to interpret and reflect upon what the text either implies or directly claims about God and God’s relation to the world. To engage in such interpretation is also to wonder about the practical implications these theological claims have for the way we live.”<sup>21</sup> Second, this biblical view of Islam and Muslims encourages more attempts towards understanding the Other. This understanding requires a sincere desire to listen to one another, and equally important, to appreciate what the Other can offer us as they challenge, by their questions, our own understanding of Scripture. These questions could be of a great help as they point to certain “blind spots,” where we attempt to explain ourselves better by telling our biblical story in a way that communicates. This view, however, does not ignore the fact that there is a distinctive worldview each one of us presents. It rather attempts to “read, carefully and sympathetically yet also critically, the sacred texts of religious traditions not our own.”<sup>22</sup> Third, this biblical view of Muslims and Islam values the ethics of welcoming and prompting the plurality of meanings and thoughts produced by Muslims in Islamic literature. It also values how this plurality of meanings could aid the biblical interpreter to communicate his or her own story better. Indeed, it was a challenge to accept this notion at the early stage of the current research. This is due to the resistance of accepting the fact that one could benefit or receive help from any Islamic interpretations of the Bible. The reason for this resistance was based on the common notion that the Qur’an and all Islamic literature “misuse” and offer “contradictory” perspectives to that of the Bible. This negative view of Islamic

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<sup>21</sup> Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham*, 2.

literature and Muslims prevents the biblical interpreter from seeing any value or receiving any help from such materials. Consequently, the majority of Christians, and I was one of them, have decided to avoid any interaction with Islamic literature. Our hope is that this study will motivate other Middle Eastern Christians to see the value of reading the Bible in the Middle Eastern Islamic context by engaging with Islamic literature in a meaningful way. Western scholars, however, conduct more studies than their Middle Eastern counterpart on the Bible and the Qur'an. To this we now turn.

### 1.1.3 The Study of the Bible and the Qur'an in Western Scholarship

Reuven Firestone begins his investigation of the relationship between the Bible and the Qur'an by tracing its polemical nature before the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> This polemical relationship took on different forms for various reasons. For Firestone, it begins with the emergence of Islam. Like any new religion, Islam "preaches the failure of the establishment religions to meet the spiritual or social needs of the new generation."<sup>24</sup> Second, though there are many parallels between Islamic, Jewish and Christian traditions, particularly the referential nature of the Qur'an to biblical figures and the incorporation of central motifs of Judaism and Christianity, the Qur'an "records the tension between the new religion it represents and the establishment religions."<sup>25</sup> Third, the historical, political and military realities between Islam and Europe added to the tension and shaped the way in which Christians viewed the Qur'an. This polemical relationship remained until the nineteenth century, when some scholars attempted to critically read the Qur'an and the Bible. This early phase of scholarship focused on *the search for the sources of the Qur'an and the Jewish*

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<sup>23</sup> Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*.

<sup>24</sup> Firestone, "The Qur'an and the Bible," 2.

<sup>25</sup> Firestone, "The Qur'an and the Bible," 2.

*Christian environment for the emergence of Islam*, as seen in the work of Abraham Geiger, Richard Bell, John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, and Michael Cook.<sup>26</sup> John Wansbrough, for example, employs a form redactional approach to argue for Rabbinic origins of the Qur'an. He states that, "Qur'anic allusion presupposes familiarity with the narrative material of Judaeo-Christian scripture."<sup>27</sup> Reuven Firestone, moreover, examines the Abraham-Ishmael legends in Islamic exegesis. He employs literary theories and a comparative religions approach to his investigation, with the recognition of the influence of one text over the other, but this is not to claim that older texts are the sources for the text in question.<sup>28</sup> He concludes that there are three main sources that make up the Abraham-Ishmael story: communities organized around biblical Scripture, pre-Islamic Arabian lore, and Islam.<sup>29</sup> As we can see, the early scholarship of the nineteenth century on the Qur'an and the Bible is mainly interested in examining the sources of the Qur'an and the origins of Islam, as they argued for Judeo-Christian origins of the Qur'an.<sup>30</sup>

Other studies on the Bible and the Qur'an argue for the significant use of both traditions for Qur'anic and biblical interpretations. Gabriel Reynolds, for example, argues for the importance of the Bible for Qur'anic interpretation as he challenges the traditional method of only interpreting the Qur'an in light of the Prophet's life.<sup>31</sup> Instead, he argues that "the Qur'an should be appreciated in light of its conversation with earlier literatures, in particular the biblical literature," and that "the exegetes had to turn to the Jews and Christians in order to make sense of their own scripture."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For a superb survey of these attempts, see Firestone, "The Qur'an and the Bible," 7–22.

<sup>27</sup> Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> See also Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism*; Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment*.

<sup>31</sup> Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*.

<sup>32</sup> Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, 1–3.

Reynolds' suggestion is not something new. It is rather a call for Muslim scholars today to re-consider how early Muslims exegetes approached the sacred Jewish and Christian books. Early exegetes used to seek "Jewish and Christian texts that would explain the Qur'anic biblical references, enhance a broad understanding of the history of revelation in general, and show in particular how the Qur'an stood at the end of a series of revelations from God to humankind."<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, recent scholarship began to stress the importance of the Qur'an for biblical interpretation. Scholars of this school argue for the need to take into consideration the Qur'an as an essential element for reading the Bible in the Islamic context. Ida Glaser, for example, recognized how the biblical materials in the Qur'an function as a "commentary/midrash" on the biblical text, and that any reading of the Bible in the context of Islam must take into consideration the nature of this commentary. Glaser explains:

We move towards seeing the Qur'anic versions, as they are read and discussed by Muslims, as theological discourse within the framework of the stories that can function as comment on the biblical and Judeo-Christian interpretations of it. That is, we can treat them as an Islamic midrash, but with an important difference. Where midrash is but human discussion of the authoritative text, the Qur'an claims absolute authority in itself. In Muslims' eyes, it therefore challenges all our commentaries and, where the Qur'anic versions contradict Genesis, they challenge our thinking about our own Scripture.<sup>34</sup>

Much attention of scholarship on the Bible and the Qur'an is also given to particular OT books. Scholars devoted more studies to Genesis as it shares common figures (Adam, Abraham, Joseph . . . etc.) and themes (creation, sin, flood . . . etc.) with the Qur'an.<sup>35</sup> Marilyn Waldman and Abdel Al Haleem attempt to read the Joseph story in the Qur'an and Genesis in their respective contexts.<sup>36</sup> Christian theologians,

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<sup>33</sup> Robbins and Newby, "Prolegomenon," 24.

<sup>34</sup> Glaser, "Qur'anic Challenges for Genesis," 4.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Glaser, *Thinking Biblically about Islam*.

<sup>36</sup> See Waldman, "New Approaches"; Abdel-Haleem, "The Story of Joseph."

however, read the Bible and the Qur'an with more interest in theological conversations between both traditions. These conversations focus on common figures and themes. Lodahl studies the Bible and the Qur'an side by side focusing on common figures (i.e., Adam, Abraham, Jesus) and themes (i.e., the revelation) to show how both traditions offer different worldviews.<sup>37</sup> John Kaltner approaches the relationship between both traditions as that of a family, where its members attempt to tell their own story of the family's history that starts with Abraham.<sup>38</sup> Outside of Genesis, Moses and David received a considerable attention, while little is given to, for example, Jonah.<sup>39</sup> However, the Scriptural Reasoning project devoted a full volume of seven articles to the story of Jonah. This project focuses on the study of scriptures among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The purpose of this project is to gather participants from different faiths (Jews, Christian and Muslims) to deeply discuss selected passages related to common figures and themes. Participants attempt to offer their own perspectives on the passage under discussion, aiming to understand and respect each other in a friendly environment.<sup>40</sup> Asma Mermer and Umeyye Yazicioglu, for example, study the prayer of Jonah in the Qur'an.<sup>41</sup> They begin by giving an overview of the story, identifying key principles in interpreting the stories of the prophets, and then examining a contemporary understanding of the story by a contemporary Muslim scholar, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. In their analysis of Nursi's interpretation, they observe how this prayer in the Qur'an reveals the sovereignty of

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<sup>37</sup> Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham*.

<sup>38</sup> Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac*.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an*; Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur'an*; Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*; Khaleel Mohammed, *David in the Muslim Tradition*. Reynolds, for example, approaches the story of Jonah in the Qur'an showing how Muslim exegetes struggle to interpret it, particularly when the Qur'anic text claims Jonah's fault. Reynolds shows how the concept of prophetic infallibility influences Muslim interpretations of the event as they attempt to defend the image of the prophet. Reynolds therefore suggests that Muslim exegetes should return to the biblical account in order to make sense of the Qur'anic narrative.

<sup>40</sup> See Ford, "An Interfaith Wisdom," 1–22.

<sup>41</sup> Mermer and Yazicioglu, "An Insight Into the Prayer of Jonah."

God, and then they attempt to show how the prayer of Jonah can be applied to us. The prayer of Jonah, they claim, is often invoked in times of distress. The event of Jonah, moreover, “points to a universal truth, namely that a needy human being can only be delivered from the threatening vicissitudes of life through forming a connection with his/her Omnipotent and Merciful Maker.”<sup>42</sup>

Stephen Vicchio, moreover, investigates the character of Jonah in the Judeo-Christian traditions and Islam. The work begins with what the Qur’an and Hadith have to say about Jonah, moves to discuss the character of Jonah in Islamic iconography and closes with demonstrating the importance of the life of Jonah for the life of Muslims. This work also discusses the difference between Jonah in the Judeo-Christian traditions and Yūnus in Islam. Vicchio observes how the Qur’an emphasizes the moral role of the prophet as the man of repentance, a virtue that is absent, according to Nicchio, from the biblical account. He also discusses the similarities and the differences between the OT and the Qur’an, where he sees a considerable “difference” between both accounts.<sup>43</sup>

#### 1.1.4 Conclusion

While Middle Eastern theologians have limited contributions to studies on the Bible and the Qur’an, Western scholarship shows the opposite. The history of research shows a genuine change in the way in which scholars approached the Bible and the Qur’an by the nineteenth century, as these studies mainly focused on the investigation of the origins of Islam and the sources of the Qur’an (Worsborough, Bell, Reuven, Crone, and Cook). While scholars, like Reynolds, stressed the importance of the Bible

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<sup>42</sup> Mermer and Yazicioglu, “An Insight Into the Prayer of Jonah,” para. 20.

<sup>43</sup> Vicchio, *Biblical Figures in the Islamic Faith*, 65–88.

for the interpretation of the Qur'an, others, like Glaser, emphasized the significance of the Qur'an for biblical interpretation. Interfaith dialogue attempts to study the sacred scripture of the three faiths with the goal of understanding and respecting the Other for common good (i.e., Scriptural Reasoning). There were other theological dialogues between the Qur'an and the Bible that were conducted by Christian theologians; some studies focused more on the similarities (Lodahl and Kaltner) while others on the differences (Bristow). Western scholarship also gave more attention to studying common figures (i.e. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, and Jesus), themes (i.e. God and revelation), and to the book of Genesis. However, other books and figures were given less attention, i.e., Jonah. This could be due to the fact that the length of Jonah's story in the Qur'an is shorter than those of other prophetic figures.

This survey shows where the focus of Western scholars mainly remains. While Middle Eastern scholarship neglected Islamic literature, with the exception of a little attention given to the Qur'an, its Western counterpart contributed significantly to studies on the Bible and the Qur'an, with little attention given to Islamic literature. This history, moreover, lacks any engagement of biblical scholarship with Islamic studies. Glaser questions this neglect of the Qur'an, and suggests two reasons for this neglect: "firstly, perhaps, because Old Testament scholars have not seen the Qur'an as a commentary on the Bible, and, secondly, because of the nature of such Islamic comment as there is."<sup>44</sup> The importance of this study, thus, emerges from its emphasis on calling for biblical scholars to not leave the dialogue with Islamic literature, as has been the case, to missiologists, comparative religions, religious studies, or to those who are "just interested." It is an invitation to get biblical scholars involved in reading the Bible with the second largest religious group in mind, that is, Muslims.

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<sup>44</sup> Glaser, "Qur'anic Challenges," 3.



Therefore, this study will argue for developing a biblical typological theology of Jonah in the context of Islam that requires examining the reception history of the narrative of Jonah by Jesus' and Muhammad's communities as reflected in Matthew, Luke, and Islamic literature, and how both communities distinctively employed and interpreted the narrative of Jonah in their respective literary contexts. This examination informs our own reading of the biblical Jonah, reshapes our hermeneutical practices, and re-contextualizes our theological proclamation.

## 1.2 Research Methodology

Scholars noticed long ago the intertextual relationship between the Bible and the Qur'an, and they devoted considerable effort as they employed various approaches to the studies of both traditions. It is important to start with a survey of the various approaches employed in studies that bring together the Bible and the Qur'an. Our survey will highlight the lack of considering Islamic literature as part of the reception history of the Bible, arguing for a reception history approach to biblical interpretation and how it could aid in developing an Middle Eastern biblical theology in the context of Islam.

To begin with, scholars have employed various comparative methods to study the Qur'an and the Bible. As a Christian minister, a theologian, and a university professor, Lodahl uses a thematic, comparative, theological approach "to interpret and reflect upon what the text either implies or directly claims about God and God's relation to the world."<sup>45</sup> Lodahl, however, raises critical questions when the Qur'an and the Bible are read side by side. Hermeneutically speaking, Lodahl questions the basis of the choice of a selected text, calling for a conscious decision about the way in

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<sup>45</sup> Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham*, 3.

which a text is selected. According to Lodahl, it is a mistake to select a Qur'anic text out of its own "context" to serve one's own agenda, overlooking its function and purpose in the Qur'an, "as though in each case the passage in question were serving comparable purpose for their faith communities."<sup>46</sup> This is often the case, particularly when one reads the biblical material in the Qur'an. Yet, studying each text in its own context led Lodahl to recognize how both traditions represent different views of God in His relationship with creation and the world.

While Lodahl employs a thematic, comparative, theological approach, Kaltner uses an "intercanonical criticism" method, where he attempts to "study texts from different canons or religious traditions in relationship to each other."<sup>47</sup> The goal of his work is "to lay the foundation for a family reconciliation" among all three Abrahamic religions.<sup>48</sup> The image of all three Abrahamic religions as a "family" is based on Kaltner's view that all three religions trace their roots to the father of Ishmael and Isaac. It seems, Kaltner continues, that the history of the relationship between the family members and their usage of each other's Scripture has been a challenging one, since they "frequently begin and often end with one or more parties citing or implicitly relying upon the material found in these two bodies of sacred writing in a way that declares 'the winner.'"<sup>49</sup> This history thus reveals a misuse of each other's sacred text, which prevents the recognition of the undeniable fact that the two texts have much in common, though each offers its own view. Kaltner therefore invites the

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<sup>46</sup> Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac*, 23. Kaltner, in his other work *Inquiring of Joseph*, also uses a comparative approach to study the Joseph story between the Qur'an and the Bible, but he applies two different methodologies there: narratology and rhetorical analysis. Though Kaltner values the literary, historical approach and observes how it dominated the field of biblical studies for years, he prefers to use a narrative methodology approach applied on both the Qur'an and the Bible by dividing the story into six narrative sequences: Beginnings, Narrators and Characters, Events, Repetition, Gaps, and Endings.

<sup>48</sup> Kaltner, *Ismael Instructs Isaac*, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac*, 20.

ancestors of both brothers to gather around a campfire where each group tells its own story of the family religious history. He explains:

That common ground is the ideal place to set up a camp, sit down around the hearth, and begin to heal the centuries-old rift that has divided the family for too long. Nothing brings family together like reminiscing and remembering days gone by. The wonderful thing about such gatherings is that no two family members recall the same event in exactly the same way, and as each person shares his or her own memories, the complexity and richness of the family history are revealed to all. The Bible and the Qur'an are, in a sense, the written record of one such family history told from different perspectives. Imagine a reconciliation between Ishmael and Isaac in which they sit around the fire swapping family stories and telling their own versions of what happened. How much they would learn about themselves and each other.<sup>50</sup>

While Kaltner listens to the ancestors telling their own stories, he adopts a comparative approach, where he focuses on “what does it mean?” rather than “where did it come from?” After the comparative process takes place, Kaltner explores how this method could help the Bible reader discover new insights into their own text in each chapter under the title “The Cooperating Revelations.” Kaltner explains the aim of this section:

[It explores] how the Qur'an might be used to help the Bible reader discovers new things about his or her own text . . . by rereading a biblical passage in light of its counterpart in the Qur'an . . . [this reading] does not attempt to read anything into the biblical text that is not already there . . . It is, rather, a method that can shed light on things present within the Bible that are easily missed due to the subtle nature of their pretense or the fact that the reader's attention is directed elsewhere in the story.<sup>51</sup>

While Kaltner attempts to reconcile family members, George Bristow challenges the classical notion of “Abrahamic religions” by showing how the character of a common figure, like Abraham, represents a different theological view from that of the Bible. Bristow employs a comparative theological approach to the study of both accounts, where he develops a relationship between the narratives as

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<sup>50</sup> Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac*, 20.

<sup>51</sup> Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac*, 22–23.

they reflect the worldviews of both traditions. He begins by briefly summarizing the biblical account of Abraham and then creates one narrative from the repeated, but distinctive, four-key accounts of Abraham in the Qur'an. While Bristow recognizes the common grounds between both narratives, his approach focuses more on the elements that are absent. This, according to Bristow, could aid biblical interpretation in Islamic contexts to recognize that "the Muslim perspective on Abraham is significantly shaped by a story which is not found in the Qur'an."<sup>52</sup> Though Bristow attempts to interpret the Qur'an in its own right, the interreligious dialogue for him aims to serve "the interests of persuasion and/or apologetics,"<sup>53</sup> since "the very 'DNA' of these faiths [Muslim and Christian] calls for mission/*da'wah*, [invitation]," and if this is the case, "how can deeper encounter avoid it?"<sup>54</sup> While reading, one can hear the voice of a confessional theologian, who is committed to his faith, attempting to show how the Bible is theologically different from, and to some degree, superior to the Qur'an.

While some scholars employ comparative methods, others attempt to move towards literary approaches in order to study common narratives in their respective literary contexts. Marilyn Waldman shows dissatisfaction with historical approaches to these traditions, as they investigate the transmission of materials between them assuming that "earlier materials are normative and later ones derivative."<sup>55</sup> Waldman goes on to say that this approach, "makes it difficult to appreciate either earlier or later materials in and of themselves; and it affects scholars' attitudes to the whole of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition and each of its various parts."<sup>56</sup> This tendency,

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<sup>52</sup> Bristow, "Abraham in Narrative," 35.

<sup>53</sup> Bristow, "Abraham in Narrative," 35.

<sup>54</sup> Bristow, "Abraham in Narrative," 40.

<sup>55</sup> Waldman, "New Approaches," 1.

<sup>56</sup> Waldman, "New Approaches," 1.

she continues, has also led scholars to assume that the biblical materials in the Qur'an are a later "version" of the same account. Waldman sees the term "version" as a negative description of the relationship between both traditions, as she states that, "[w]hen non-Muslims look at this sura, or any other Qur'anic chapter containing a story that appears in another scripture, they naturally tend to place it in a dependency relationship, to see it as a 'version,' as something passed on in altered, if not debased, form."<sup>57</sup> According to Waldman, it is not helpful to think of the Qur'anic Joseph story, for example, as a version of the biblical one since "it precludes us from approaching both as equally 'basic' tellings whose 'real' form logically can never exist apart from a given telling."<sup>58</sup> Applying a narratological approach, Waldman attempts to focus on the shape and function of characters in each narrative in their respective literary context as well as to understand the art of Qur'anic narrative. This way we can still, according to Waldman, compare the two narratives with an emphasis that differs from that of the historical approach.

Muhamad Abdel-Haleem also calls for a study of both traditions that attempts "to identify the differing functions and preoccupations of the two accounts in their respective contexts, to show how these differences affect the choice of material and the treatment given to it."<sup>59</sup> In his treatment of the story of Joseph in the Qur'an and the OT, Abdel Haleem encourages both Muslims and non-Muslims to "approach the two versions with this difference in mind in order to appreciate the message and the qualities of each."<sup>60</sup> This approach challenges the non-Muslim readers of the story of Joseph, particularly Christians who are familiar with its biblical counterpart, to abstain from filling the gaps of its twenty-eight scenes in the Qur'an. Abdel Haleem

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<sup>57</sup> Waldman, "New Approaches," 1.

<sup>58</sup> Waldman, "New Approaches," 13.

<sup>59</sup> Abdel-Haleem, "The Story of Joseph," 171.

<sup>60</sup> Abdel-Haleem, "The Story of Joseph," 171.

believes that these scenes are sufficient for the purpose of the story. It is then clear that Abdel Haleem calls for the appreciation of the Islamic version of Joseph's story in its own context, challenging Christians to understand the story of Joseph in Genesis in its own context rather than comparing it with the Qur'anic story.

Recent studies attempt to employ methodologies that aid readings of the Bible in Islamic contexts. Glaser offers a "multi-layered approach to reading the Bible,"<sup>61</sup> that is, looking at the world behind the text, the world of the text, and the world in front of the text.<sup>62</sup> The first world is defined as the world in which the text has been written, looking "for parallels between the Bible's historical background and Muslim societies."<sup>63</sup> The second is to "*pay attention to the composition of the text itself . . . [where] we need to consider what a passage means in the context of the book it is in and in relation to the rest of the Bible . . . [and looking] carefully at the nature and structure of the text.*"<sup>64</sup> The third is "to ask the significance of the message to ourselves and our world and to how we relate to it."<sup>65</sup> The Islamic world in front of the text, however, is different than any other context, as it has a sacred text, that is the Qur'an, attached to it. Glaser, moreover, observes how scholars have recognized the intertextual relationship between both traditions, but these conversations took place between *texts*, not people. Glaser therefore calls for a move beyond conversations between texts to conversations with persons and communities,<sup>66</sup> as the biblical text was read by many, including Muslims, throughout history and we should consider such readings.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Glaser, *Think Biblically* 21.

<sup>62</sup> Glaser, *Think Biblically*, 21–24.

<sup>63</sup> Glaser, *Think Biblically*, 22.

<sup>64</sup> Glaser, *Think Biblically*, 22.

<sup>65</sup> Glaser, *Think Biblically*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Glaser, "Biblical Interpretation," 5.

<sup>67</sup> Glaser, *Think Biblically*, 23.

For this conversation to take place, as this study suggests, there is a need for a wider engagement with Islamic literature as it reflects the values of the Muslim community and how it viewed itself in light of other texts (or traditions). In other words, *there is a need to consider Islamic literature as a vital element of the reception history of the Bible in order to understand how the Muslim community received, interacted, and was influenced by the biblical text.* Though biblical scholarship investigates the reception history of biblical texts in many different contexts, one can observe the lack of considering Islamic literature in the reception history of the Bible. Martin O’Kane and Talha Bhamji notice two particular challenges regarding this matter. First, few biblical scholars “have a working knowledge of Arabic and consequently feel more comfortable working within the linguistic boundaries of Rabbinic Hebrew, Greek or Latin when exploring how biblical texts and traditions were received in later communities.”<sup>68</sup> Second, biblical scholars also acknowledge the complexity of working through Islamic literature. With the ability of the current study to navigate through Islamic literature, it will employ a reception history approach, as a form of reader-response theory, to facilitate a conversation between the biblical text and the Islamic community. The following discussion will investigate the history of this approach and how it will be employed by this study to accomplish its task.

The history of this approach goes back to Hans Georg Gadamer and Hans Robert Jauss.<sup>69</sup> Gadamer shows dissatisfaction with the traditional, scientific, historical approach to texts, which attempts to discover the original intention of the author in order to achieve the state of objectivity in interpreting texts. He rather argues that people are historically positioned, and that they come to the text with their

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<sup>68</sup> O’Kane and Bhamji, “Islamic Tradition,” 163.

<sup>69</sup> For a full survey on the history of this school, see Beal, “Reception History and Beyond,” 261–64; England and Lyons, “Exploration in the Reception of the Bible,” 3–16; Roberts, “Introduction,” 1–8.

historical and cultural backgrounds. Scholars thus are invited to explore how the text influences readers as it fuses with their own context. Gadamer, therefore, uses the German concept *Wirkungsgeschichte*, which translates as “effective history” or “history of influence.” Jauss, following Gadamer, suggested a move from the production of the work towards the reception of the work, examining the impact of this work on those who encounter it. Jauss thus calls for “the fusion of horizons” of meanings. The first horizon of meaning is the original socio-historical world of the author and audience, and the second horizon of meaning is produced by later generations of readers. Meaning thus is produced through a dynamic relationship between a reader and a text “through the interaction of author and public.”<sup>70</sup>

Scholars since Gadamer and Jauss have shown more and more interest in reception history theories.<sup>71</sup> This interest generated a discussion on issues related to reception history, i.e. terminology, its relation to historical approaches and biblical studies, its significance and its challenges. Speaking of terminology, Ulrich Luz investigates the relationship between the history of interpretation and reception history. The former, for Luz, is a subcategory within the latter. He also distinguishes between reception history and *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Reception history refers to the people who receive the text, while the “effective history” suggests the effectiveness and the influence texts have over people.<sup>72</sup> Caroline Stichele proposes “to replace the notion of ‘history’ with that of ‘impact’,” and thus the focus would be on the cultural impact of Scriptures rather than on their history.<sup>73</sup> Timothy Beal also challenges the use of the term “reception history.” He says that it rather posits a “cultural history of

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<sup>70</sup> Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic*, 15.

<sup>71</sup> For a list of new projects in this area of research, see Beal, “Reception History and Beyond,” 360.

<sup>72</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 61.

<sup>73</sup> Stichele, “The Head of John and its Reception,” 80.



Scripture” since it offers more room and incorporates “all materials and media forms of scripture.”<sup>74</sup> It is, moreover, a shift “from hermeneutical reception to cultural production . . . from interpreting scripture via culture to interpreting culture, especially religious culture, via scripture.”<sup>75</sup>

The debate over the concept of reception history is not the only challenge. Scholars also question the possibility of understanding reception history as what comes after the original. Christiane Joynes wonders if we can speak of reception history of the Bible at all, “given that there are so many different biblical versions?”<sup>76</sup> She argues that “the story of the Bible’s emergence in its variant forms and translations should be regarded as part of the story of its reception.”<sup>77</sup> Brennan Breed also questions the definition of reception history as studying what comes after the original, since there was nothing original in the first plan. For Breed, “everything is reception history if reception history is understood as studying how unoriginal audiences take unoriginal texts and give them unoriginal meanings, which is simply to say if it is understood as ‘people taking a text and doing something with it’.”<sup>78</sup>

The relationship between reception history and biblical scholarship is another challenge addressed in this debate. Biblical scholarship seemed to be more reluctant to welcome the new arrival of reception history to the discipline. Reception history was called, according to Susan Gillingham, “biblical studies on holiday.”<sup>79</sup> This

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<sup>74</sup> Beal, “Reception History,” 370. Beal also observes how the concept of Reception history is broader than the history of interpretation. He explains: “embracing the broadest possible definition of ‘interpretation’ to include not only academic and theological readings but also biblical appearances in visual art, literature, music, politics, and other works of culture, from ‘high’ to ‘low.’ At its best, it also focuses on the historically and culturally particular hermeneutical rules that shape and govern the creation of meaning from biblical texts in particular contexts” (359).

<sup>75</sup> Beal, “Reception History,” 371.

<sup>76</sup> See Joynes, “Reception of the Bible,” 155.

<sup>77</sup> Joynes (“The Reception of the Bible,” 155) also questions “the principle of selection” as some scholars give “priority to ecclesial traditions of interpretation, classic readings, and authoritative interprets.”

<sup>78</sup> Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 115.

<sup>79</sup> Gillingham, “Biblical Studies on Holiday?,” 17.

description of reception history could be, for Gillingham, a “commendation rather than criticism . . . [since it encourages the exploration of] a new culture, a new language, a different history” while a person is on “holiday.”<sup>80</sup> As Gillingham defines the term, she attempts then to show how reception history has a place in biblical scholarship. She begins by stressing that it is reception *history*. With the emphasis on history, Gillingham argues that reception history as a historical investigation is “closely related to the historical concerns of biblical studies.”<sup>81</sup> She begins with the text in its biblical setting and traces it forwards from there, and thus employs methodologies that are similar to other biblical scholars who work on the text in its biblical context.<sup>82</sup> Gillingham then moves to speak of *reception* history. With the emphasis on *reception*, she means that, “it belongs as much to the more recent rhetorical and reader response methods used in biblical studies.” Gillingham concludes by observing how biblical studies can be “the uncomfortable” home for reception history. She explains:

So although reception history studies might sometimes sit uncomfortably in the domain of biblical studies, especially when the latter is defined predominantly by particular historical and literary concerns, this, I contend, is its home base. Its presence is, at times, uncomfortable for the status quo; it challenges historical critical methods when they are too exclusively focussed on just the ancient meaning, and it asks equally awkward questions of more recent ‘readerly’ methods when they are too confined by the words of the text and its subsequent literary impact as the only resource for meaning.<sup>83</sup>

As this study adopts Gillingham’s view on the relationship between biblical studies and reception history, it will proceed to develop its own hermeneutical understanding of reception history, explaining how it contributes to the development of a Middle Eastern biblical theology in the context of Islam while potentially

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<sup>80</sup> Gillingham, “Biblical Studies on Holiday?,” 17.

<sup>81</sup> Gillingham, “Biblical Studies on Holiday?,” 19.

<sup>82</sup> Gillingham, “Biblical Studies on Holiday?,” 19.

<sup>83</sup> Gillingham, “Biblical Studies on Holiday?,” 23.

bridging the gap between biblical scholarship and Islamic studies. Reception history, thus, could be, using Beal's terminology, "potentially revolutionary," as it "has the potential to bring biblical scholarship into more significant conversation with other fields of academic religious studies."<sup>84</sup>

*Reception history begins with the earlier history of the text in its biblical context.* In this sense, our investigation begins not with the reception history of a particular text in a particular culture by moving backwards, but rather with the earlier history of the text in its biblical context and moving forwards. There are various elements to undertake this historical task. It begins with recognizing that biblical texts are "particularized to a unique historical situation in language and forms understandable to that audience."<sup>85</sup> The interpretation of the biblical text then requires understanding of the historical referential context. This historical examination invites the readers to be part of the story as they draw parallels between the "world behind the text" and their contemporary context. It also helps the reader to avoid "wrong reading" or "readings into the text," when they ask: how does the culture of the contemporary context relate to those in and behind the text?<sup>86</sup> Second, our examination is not limited to "the world behind the text," otherwise it would be similar to that of the historical critical approaches. It also seeks an understanding of the *text itself*: structure and language, plot and characterization, the development of theme(s), patterns, motifs, images, etc. This approach, further, requires a reading of the biblical text in its final-canonical form, since readers interact with the text, not in its pre-canonical form but rather in its present shape.<sup>87</sup> Speaking of the book of Jonah,

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<sup>84</sup> Beal, "Reception History," 264.

<sup>85</sup> Boda, "Biblical Theology," 129.

<sup>86</sup> See Glaser, *Thinking Biblically*, 15.

<sup>87</sup> The two principal practitioners of this approach are Brevard Childs and James A. Sanders. Even though both are practitioners of the same approach, they practice it differently. James A. Sanders' canonical criticism is similar to Childs' in that it emphasizes the interpretation of the biblical text in

this study will explore how the world of Jonah and his context is similar to our contemporary Islamic context. It will also read the book of Jonah as a narrative and in its final form, though it welcomes the possibility of seeing chapter two as a later addition to the book.

*Reception history aims to examine how the text influences readers as it speaks into their context. Texts speak, and they generate a response within our own context.*<sup>88</sup>

This is particularly the case with the biblical text a theological discourse. Scholars have observed the historical separation between biblical studies and theology for a long time as a result of the domination of historical critical approaches within the field of biblical studies.<sup>89</sup> Scholars, like Brevard Childs, have attempted to bridge the gap between both disciplines. Childs attempts to employ “the common historical critical tools of our age in the study of the Bible while at the same time doing full justice to the unique theological subject matter of Scripture as the self-revelation of

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relation to the canon. However, it differs from Childs by emphasizing a broader understanding of canon. While Childs emphasizes the Masoretic text as the basis to understand the Old Testament, Sanders notices “the plurality of canon, including not only the Jewish Tanakh represented by the MT, but the various forms in Protestant Christianity, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and others, as well”; (Sweeney, “Canonical Criticism,” 47). Contrary to Sanders, Childs does not seek to determine the hermeneutic employed in the canonical process. Rather, the stance developed by Childs focuses on the shape and function of the final canonical text; (Soulé, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 38). Cranford (“Modern New Testament Interpretation,” 148) notes that “Childs advocates the canon as final product as adopted by the early Christian community of faith, whereas Sanders insists on the canon as process as his canonical context.” Though Childs and Sanders (Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 18) agree that their “common concern with canon cannot be reduced to another technique,” Childs is unhappy with the term “canonical criticism,” which he appends to Sanders. Childs (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, 82) states that, “I am unhappy with this term because it implies that the canonical approach is considered another historical critical technique which can take its place alongside of source criticism, form criticism, rhetorical criticism, and similar methods. I do not envision the approach to canon in this light. Rather, the issue at stake in relation to the canon turns on establishing a stance from the Bible can be read as sacred scripture.” It is worth noting two observations of our brief discussion. First, one of the major challenges to this approach is the disagreement between canonical critics on their understanding of the canon. As mentioned above, while Childs defines the canon as the MT, Sanders takes a broader understanding of the canon. Second, while Childs and Sanders have a common concern not to reduce the canonical approach to another technique, and challenge historical methods to some degree both make significant use of the historical-critical method.

<sup>88</sup> For more on this, see Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 130–32.

<sup>89</sup> Boda (“Biblical Theology,” 130) explains this tension, wondering whether the discipline of biblical theology “is concerned with reflection on the shape of the theology of the Old Testament or delineation of the history of religion depicted in the Old Testament text itself.”

God.”<sup>90</sup> Many other voices have issued the call for theological interpretation of the biblical texts, emphasizing the theological nature of the Bible and “striving to connect the Bible to theology once again.”<sup>91</sup>

Biblical texts as a theological discourse are more than a source for reconstructing human history and religion. Rather, they are texts that testify to God’s revelation of Himself in history and His relationship with his own people and the world. Throughout the Bible, God speaks in various times and in various ways (Heb 1:1–3). Biblical texts are “God-breathed” and authoritative to correct, reprove, and instruct (2 Tim 3:16).<sup>92</sup> Thus, reading biblical texts means that one must come to hear God’s voice throughout their pages, rather than to find a history of religion. To read the Bible as a historical human text is to search for a better understanding of religion in history. To read the Bible as Scripture is to search for the self-revelation of God in history. Vanhoozer accurately states:

Readings that remain on the historical, literary, or sociological levels cannot ultimately do justice of what the texts are actually about . . . We believe that the principal interest of the Bible’s authors, of the text itself, and of the original community of readers was theological: reading the Scripture therefore meant coming to hear God’s word and to know God better. Our aim is . . . to recover the Bible’s original governing interest.<sup>93</sup>

While hearing God’s voice in Scripture, we are invited to know God’s character as it appears throughout its pages, and examine ourselves in light of such revelation. Thus, the text inherits its revelatory character from a God to whom the text bears witness.

William David Kirkpatrick explains:

In other words, in Christian theology God is not a philosophical problem or a discovered actuality to be spoken about in some general manner. To think in this way is to identify God as an object of

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<sup>90</sup> Childs, “Critical Reflections,” 8. Childs’ commentary on Exodus is a good example of this approach, where he uses historical critical tools, while he also speaks of the link between the Book of Exodus, on the one hand, and the NT, theology, and the church, on the other hand.

<sup>91</sup> Trimm, “Evangelicals,” 312.

<sup>92</sup> Boda, “Biblical Theology,” 130.

<sup>93</sup> Vanhoozer, “What is Theological Interpretation,” 21–22.

conceptual certainty, making God an objective reference that could be captured by reason's logic or a projection of reason's arrogance. Instead of projecting the idea of God as a general presupposition, evangelical theology references the activity of God in history and primarily in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The biblical narrative of God's activity and wisdom revealed ultimately in Jesus Christ is the primary source for theology's hermeneutical reflection and construction.<sup>94</sup>

Kirkpatrick, moreover, defines the primary objective of Christian theology and its task as follows: "because its primary objective is to make the Christian faith pertinent to each new generation, the task of reappropriating, restating even refocusing the past so that it speaks ever again with a contemporary voice is absolutely necessary."<sup>95</sup> This way, our theology is not just operating at a cognitive level, but also characterized as being relevant. This characterization of theology echoes the theological narrative of the text, that God spoke and acted in history in many various ways that it is relevant to a particular place, time, and circumstance. The text spoke into the life of God's people and the nations, and it must continue to function in the same way today. This hermeneutical principle is key in order to keep *theology open for dialogue* where we ask questions, as Kirkpatrick suggests,

not only of the biblical text, but also of the Christian community and the world . . . [this] process of theological thinking involves interpretation and reinterpretation in differing contexts and at different levels of understanding, and as a reflective discipline, Christian theology accepts the challenge of understanding faith's practical and future implications.<sup>96</sup>

If the biblical text aims to speak into the life of the Church and the world, this then means that the exegetical method employed should not be the end-object throughout the process of interpretation. By doing so, "the original meaning of the text is being applied to a context other than its own . . . Theological hermeneutics is, therefore, the process of thinking about God, thinking after the event of revelation in the context of its textual world as well as the world of the interpreter."<sup>97</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>94</sup> Kirkpatrick, "From Biblical Text," 365.

<sup>95</sup> Kirkpatrick, "From Biblical Text," 356.

<sup>96</sup> Kirkpatrick, "From Biblical Text," 357.

<sup>97</sup> Kirkpatrick, "From Biblical Text," 372.

whatever method one would employ to study the biblical text, it must be an instrument that aims for a theological interpretation of it.

In this sense, reception history is not a quest for the history of the exegesis of the text. It is rather an investigation of how the theological message of a particular text influenced communities and addressed their context. This understanding of reception history allows us to explore, as Joynes observes, the relationship between “different interpretive traditions from across the centuries, bringing them into dialogue. It therefore has significant ecumenical potential, enabling religious communities to better understand their differences and current situations.”<sup>98</sup>

*Reception history aims to focus on meanings produced through an interaction between text, reader, and context.*<sup>99</sup> One hermeneutical question scholars have discussed is the relationship between the interpreter and the text in the process of interpretation, and whether meaning is “discovered” or “produced” by the interpreter. If meaning exists in the text, we then should all “discover” the same meaning. But this is not the case. Readers come to the text with their own presuppositions and conduct the exercise of interpretation in a specific historical and cultural context. Thus, meaning is produced through a process of engagement between interpreter, text, and context. *Reception history* as a form of reader response theory thus emphasizes the role of the reader in the process of interpretation as it “aims to understand the interaction between a text, a context, and an audience’s response.”<sup>100</sup> This search for the meanings of a particular text in different times and various contexts is a key contribution offered by reception history to our understanding of the text since it “can enlarge our own horizons, offering fresh perspectives on biblical texts and alerting us to the limitation of our own readings.”<sup>101</sup> This understanding of reception history welcomes the plurality of meanings and presupposes that the text functions differently in various contexts, and its meanings cannot be discovered in isolation from the

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<sup>98</sup> Joynes, “The Reception of the Bible and its Significance,” 163.

<sup>99</sup> Lyons, “Hope for a Troubled Discipline,” 362.

<sup>100</sup> Lyons, “Hope for a Troubled Discipline,” 362.

<sup>101</sup> Joynes, “The Reception of the Bible,” 165.

interpreter's own context. Therefore, our investigation will begin with the examination of the reception history of the narrative of Jonah in Islamic literature. Our goal, on the one hand, is to examine how Muhammad's community employed and interpreted the narrative of Jonah as it is reflected in Islamic literature. As we conduct this examination, we attempt to address what Accad calls, "the hermeneutical questions of the rhetorical Islamic context."<sup>102</sup> As we address those question, we open ourself up to allow those questions to inform our own reading of the biblical Jonah. We will then move to examine how Jesus' community employed and interpreted tne narrative of Jonah in their own context as reflected in Matthew and Luke. In this sense, this study assumes that the texts under examination in both traditions reflect the values and beliefs of those particular communities that shaped them in particular times and situations. Our examination of the reception history of Jonah as described will lead to the conclusion that Jesus' and Muhammad's community distinctively read the narrative of Jonah typologically.

With this in mind, we then need to define reception history before we move further to explain the methology of this study. Here this study adopts Riches' definition as follows:

Reception history of the Bible is not just a repository of readings, more or less interesting, more or less able to inform our understanding of the text (though it is certainly that); it is the record of a lived history, of the life of communities for whom these texts have provided direction and a sense of meaning, and who have discovered new meanings in them as they have lived with them and sought to make sense of their lives. And it is precisely with in this historical process of engagement between text and community (and not in some supratemporal encounter) that these texts come alive, that new dimensions are discovered that were perhaps uncoverable before.<sup>103</sup>

If we apply this definition to the reception history of the biblical text, and particularly of Jonah, on Jesus' and Muhammad's community, we then attempt to examine how the story of Jonah has "provided a direction and a sense of meaning" to those

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<sup>102</sup> Accad, "Middle Eastern Theology in Evangelical Perspective," 157.

<sup>103</sup> Riches, "Reception History as a Challenge to Biblical Theology," 185.



communities and how they “discovered new meanings and new dimensions” in it as they sought to “make sense of their lives.” We, thus, can explore how such an engagement of the reception history of Jonah changes the way in which we interpret the biblical narrative of Jonah. Reading the Bible in the context of Islam thus is not just interested in how the biblical stories function in the Qur’an. It rather asks, as Glaser puts it, “How might this affect biblical interpretation . . . ?”<sup>104</sup> As we can see, this approach moves beyond comparing two versions of a story in two different texts to observe how this intertextual work might affect one’s own interpretation of one’s own sacred texts.

After examining the reception history of Jonah in both communities, we then will move to interpret the narrative of the biblical Jonah. This process of interpretation will begin by dividing the narrative of Jonah into four sections. In each section, we will begin with the exegetical analysis of the text in its own biblical terms. We will, second, have a thematic summary, where we will reflect theologically on this text in light of both Testaments. Third, we will move to re-read this text taking into consideration the typological function of the narrative of Jonah in Islamic literature as well as addressing the hermenetical questions of the rhetorical Islamic context. Here we will also bring the biblical and the Qur’anic narrative of Jonah/Yūnus into conversation. Fourth, we will conclude each section with theological, yet practical, implications for reading the narrative of Jonah in the context of Islam nowadays. Therefore, this study will argue for developing a biblical typological theology of Jonah in the context of Islam that requires examining the reception history of the narrative of Jonah by Jesus’ and Muhammad’s communities as it is reflected in Matthew, Luke, and Islamic literature, and how both

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<sup>104</sup> Glaser, “Biblical Interpretation,” 5.

communities distinctively employed and interpreted the narrative of Jonah in their respective literary contexts. This examination informs our own reading of the biblical Jonah, reshapes our hermeneutical practices, and re-contextualizes our theological proclamation.

## CHAPTER 2: THE RECEPTION OF JONAH IN ISLAMIC LITERATURE

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we will examine the reception history of the character of Jonah in Islamic literature. As we have explained in the Introduction, the term “Islamic literature” will include the Qur’an, Hadith, classical commentaries, and Stories of the Prophets’ literature. This chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section will focus on hearing the classical Muslim Mufassirun (interpreters) as they represent the classical interpretations of the narratives of Yūnus in Islamic literature. Our choice of these Mufassirun seeks to include major sects of Islam, Sunni, Shait, Suffi and contemporary voices. It can be observed at the outset, however, that one exegetical feature of classical commentaries is that it will exegete the narratives of Yūnus in light of Muhammad’s life, that is Hadith. Therefore, the Hadith literature on Yūnus will not be discussed separately, as they are already included in classical commentaries.

The Stories of the Prophets’ literature, moreover, adds very little, if any, to our comprehension of the narratives, as they attempt to offer a full account of the story of Yūnus based on Qur’an and Hadith. The classical work of The Stories of the Prophets by Ibn Kathīr, for instance, reports similar traditions to that of classical commentaries. It is noteworthy, however, to observe that the section on Yūnus in this work appears under the section titled, the Remembrance of Nations Destroyed Completely (ذكر أمم (أهلكوا جميعاً)). This shows where the emphasis of the narratives of Yūnus is placed. Therefore, such classical work will not be considered unless it adds valuable insights

in the story. Other contemporary works of the Stories of the Prophets will be considered as they attempt to read those stories with present-day applications in mind. The work of Amr Khaled, *A New Reading and a Vision for the Stories of the Prophets* (قراءة جديدة ورؤية في قصص الأنبياء), suits this category.<sup>1</sup> For Khaled, the main lesson of the story of Yūnus is to learn to be patient in order to accomplish Allah's call on the person's life. As Khaled speaks to the university age group, he applies the narrative of Yūnus to their daily life. The importance of this work for our discussion is that it shows how the contemporary Muslim reader would apply the narrative of Yūnus into their life nowadays.

As we have mentioned in the introduction, the character of Jonah appears six times in the Qur'an. Four of those occurrences will be discussed below in detail as they provide narrative sections about Yūnus: Al-Qalam (68:48–50), Al-Anbiyā' (21:87–88), Al-Sāffāt (37:139–148), and Yūnus (10:98). Al-Sāffāt will function as the main narrative, as it contains the “full” account of the narrative of Yūnus in the Qur'an. Other texts for Jonah are found in 4:163 and 6:86. In these passages, Yūnus is mentioned along with a number of other prophets. In the former, the Qur'an shows how Muhammad received a revelation like other former prophets, including Yūnus: “We have indeed revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him, and We revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, Jesus and Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, —and We gave David the Psalms” (4:163). In this sense, Yūnus is defined as a prophet and a receiver of Allah's revelation. It is important here to mention that the following two verses (4:164–165) identify two key principles related to prophets in the Qur'an. First, Muhammad is introduced to only some of the

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<sup>1</sup> Khaled, *A New Reading and a Vision for the Stories of the Prophets*, 425–34. Khaled is considered one of the most contemporary influential Egyptian Muslim preachers in the Arab world today.

prophetic stories, as the Qur'an narrates only some of them, while omits others as they are many, "And messengers We have narrated to you earlier and messengers We have not narrated to you—and to Moses Allah spoke directly" (4:164).<sup>2</sup> Second, Allah's messengers are bearers of good news and warners, as it says, "And messengers delivering good news and bringing warnings so that people do not have any excuse before Allah after the coming of the messengers. Allah is powerful and wise" (4:165). As to Yūnus in 6:86, he was guided by Allah to the truth with other former prophets, and favored over the people of the world particularly with Ishmael, Elijah, and Lot (6:86).

The second section of this chapter will focus on a literary reading of the narratives of Yūnus in their Qur'anic literary context. Though classical Mufasssirun exegete the narratives of Yūnus based on the Qur'anic text, it will be argued that classical Mufasssirun ignore to take into consideration the Quranic literary context as they attempt to accomplish three main tasks: first is to create a basic sequence of all these narratives; second is to "fill the gap" as they attempt to search for more details to aid their exegetical work; and third is to illuminate obscure statements by employing the hermeneutical principle of interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an. As we attempt to take the Qur'anic literary context seriously, each narrative will be discussed separately in light of the literary context of the whole surah. This literary narrative approach to the narratives of Yūnus is based on the fact that the Quran uses various methods to deliver its message, and one of them is the allusion to the stories of former prophets. Muhammad Abdel Haleem precisely observes how the histories of former prophets before Muhammad "is a salient feature of the Qur'anic

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<sup>2</sup> According to Islamic traditions, there are thousands of prophets and messengers. Some mention a hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets, while others three hundred and thirteen messengers (Al-Zuhayli, *Concise Interpretation*, 105).

discourse.”<sup>3</sup> Except in a few cases, these prophetic narratives appear, in general, in the form of a chain, and they share common themes as each chain as a whole attempts to serve a particular purpose and address particular situations related to the surrounding literary context. Such literary features, therefore, requires the interpreter to discuss all other prophetic narratives in this chain, even when he or she seeks to focus only on a particular figure like Yūnus. As illustrations, the examination of how these narratives in a particular chain relates to the whole literary context of the surah is necessary.

Therefore, our analysis of each narrative will begin by briefly introducing the literary Qur’anic context, which is polemical in nature, focusing on the main themes running throughout the surah and then examining how the narratives of the prophets relate to this polemical context. Though we will not be entering the scholarly debate on the unity and coherence of the surah in the Qur’an, our analysis, as we will see, assumes some type of unity and coherence in the surah particularly where the stories of the former prophets occur. The term “former prophets” is used in this context to refer to the prophets who came prior to Muhammad as the Qur’an suggests, and it is not meant to express any theological convictions regarding Muhammad’s prophethood. We will refer to the surrounding community of Muhammad as the Qur’anic community. By using this term, I am not trying to enter the scholarly debate regarding the historicity of the community in Muhammad’s time, nor the debate regarding the geographical location associated with each surah, whether it is Mecca or Medina. The terms “believers” and “unbelievers” will be used as well where the Qur’an uses them to describe the surrounding communities of Muhammad.

As I attempt to hear the Qur’an on its own terms, I will adopt Qur’anic terminology throughout to speak of Allah as the Qur’anic reference to God and Yūnus

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<sup>3</sup> Abdel-Haleem, “The Qur’anic Employment of the Story of Noah,” 38.

when referring to Jonah. Here, I will not be expressing any personal conviction about the theological nature of the divine character referred to in the Qur'an in comparison with the Bible. Rather, I allow the Qur'an to speak of Allah on its own terms, attempting to hear and learn from Qur'anic claims of Allah as it appears in the accounts of Yūnus. As I observe these Qur'anic claims, I came to the conclusion, which I will argue later in this chapter, that the author of the Qur'an certainly speaks of the same divine and prophetic characters that are in the Bible, but both function differently in their respective literary context. Our literary approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an and the fact that this study considers the Qur'an as part of the reception history of and commentary on Jewish Christian traditions, furthermore, as I develop this argument below, will support such a conclusion. In a sense, I follow Jack Miles' approach, where he speaks of Allah as the central character in the Qur'an.<sup>4</sup> Miles claims that, "no attentive literary interpretation of the Qur'an can fail to conclude that its divine speaker certainly does identify Himself as the God whom Jews and Christians worship and as the author of their scriptures."<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, our goal is not to defend the character of God against the character of Allah, nor to argue that Yūnus and Jonah are different characters. Rather, to use Accad's terminology in his comparative analysis of the divine character in Islam and Christianity, "the difference between the Christian and Muslim understandings of God is far more a matter of emphasis than one of nature."<sup>6</sup> In other words, each tradition has its own emphasis on various aspects of the character that suits its own purpose within its literary context. In terms of divine character, though we speak of different emphases in both traditions, these emphases, however, reveal different understandings

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<sup>4</sup> For a superb literary reading of Allah as a character in the Qur'an, see Jack Miles, *God in the Qur'an*, 1–22.

<sup>5</sup> Miles, *God in the Qur'an*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Accad, *Sacred Misinterpretation*, 79–80.

among various Christian and Muslim groups in regard to divine nature. Therefore, our literary approach will observe both the similarities and the differences. A good example that we will discuss later in detail is the divine character of mercy and compassion, where some Muslims (e.g., Ghazali) resist speaking of divine emotion as they are concerned that emotion may take over control of Allah's other attributes, and thus emotion may impact Allah's decisions. As we observe the similarities and the differences in each tradition, our goal is to recognize how each community of faith has its own understanding of divine and prophetic characters.

The final section of this chapter will conclude with a summary of how the character of Yūnus is received by the Muslim community as it is reflected in the Qur'an and classical commentaries. This chapter will argue that the character of Yūnus is interpreted typologically by the early Muslims community. In this sense, Yūnus functions as a man of prayer, a repentant prophet, and a source of encouragement to Muhammad and his community. To the first section we now turn.

## 2.2 Classical Islamic Interpretations of the Narratives of Yūnus

(139) And Yūnus was one of the messengers. (140) He escaped to a fully loaded ship. (141) And then he drew lots and he was one of the losers. (142) And the whale swallowed him and he was blameworthy. (143) If he had not been one of those who glorify (Allah), (144) he would have stayed in the belly (of the whale) until the Day of Resurrection. (145) We then rejected him (from the belly of the whale) to a deserted land and (Yūnus) was sick. (146) And We caused to grow a gourd plant over him. (147) And we sent him to more than a hundred thousand. (148) And they believed and We blessed them for a while (Al-Sāffāt 37: 139-148).<sup>7</sup>

"وَإِنَّ يُونُسَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (139)، إِذْ أَبَقَ إِلَى الْفُلِّ الْمَشْحُونِ (140)، فَسَاهَمَ فَكَانَ مِنَ الْمُدْحَضِينَ (141)، فَالْتَقَمَهُ الْحُوتُ وَهُوَ مُلِيمٌ (142)، فَلَوْلَا أَنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُسَبِّحِينَ (143)، لَلَبِثَ فِي بَطْنِهِ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ (144)، فَنَبَذْنَاهُ بِالْعَرَاءِ وَهُوَ سَقِيمٌ (145)، وَأَنْبَتْنَا عَلَيْهِ شَجْرَةً مِّنْ يَقْطِينٍ (146)، وَأَرْسَلْنَاهُ إِلَى مِائَةِ أَلْفٍ أَوْ يَزِيدُونَ (147)، فَآمَنُوا فَمَتَّعْنَاهُمْ إِلَى حِينٍ (148)" (الصافات 37: 139-148).

<sup>7</sup> All English renderings of Qur'anic and Hadith texts are my own translation, unless otherwise stated.



### 2.2.1 The Identity of Yūnus

In Al-Sāffāt, the narrative of Yūnus begins by introducing him as one of the prophets. The term “لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ” literally means “one of those whom we have sent.” It is used in the same chapter for Elias (v. 123) and Lot (v. 133). Yūnus is also defined in the Qur’an as the Man of the fish “ذَا النُّونِ” (21:87) and the Companion of the Whale “صَاحِبَ الْحُوتِ” (68:48). These names are given to Yūnus because of the period he spent in the belly of the fish or whale. It seems that the most known part of Yūnus’ narrative in Muhammad’s time is related to the time he spent in the belly of the whale, and this is the case in Jesus’ time as well. Classical Mufasssirun agree that Yūnus was the son of Matti (Matthew), but it seems that they are dissatisfied with such brief definition of Yūnus. Therefore, Al-Qurtubi, for example, reports a tradition to elaborate more on the identify of Yūnus:

Yūnus is the son of an old lady, who received Elias (Elijah) in her house while he was running away from his own people. Yūnus’ mother generously welcomed and served Elias until he left to live on the mountains. After a while Yūnus died and his mother went searching for Elias, hoping that Elias will come back to pray for the dead Yūnus and to bring him alive once again. When Yūnus’ mother found Elias, she begged him to return and to pray for Yūnus. After about fourteen days, Elias returned. He prayed for Yūnus and called upon Allah. Allah heard his prayer and brought Yūnus to life.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.2.2 Yūnus’ Flight

While Yūnus is a prophet, the Qur’an records a remarkable, shameful, and blameworthy act of Yūnus the prophet: Yūnus escaped to a fully loaded ship (37:140). As the Qur’an is silent about the reason for Yūnus’ flight, Mufasssirun,

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<sup>8</sup> Al-Qurtubi on 37:139–48.

therefore, offer various reports to explain such silence. Four scenarios are given to explain from whom Yūnus ran away: Allah, king, Gabriel, or his people.

To begin, Al-Ṭabarī reports a tradition where Yūnus runs away from Allah.

According to Al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Abbas reported that,

Allah sent Yūnus to his own township but they rejected his message. Allah then revealed to Yūnus that He will punish these people. After Yūnus delivered his message, the people said to themselves, “If Yūnus will leave the city this means that Allah will bring judgment on us.” So, they waited to see whether Yūnus would leave. As soon as the people found out that Yūnus had left the city, they undoubtedly knew that Allah will bring His judgment on them, and promptly they repented. Yūnus otherwise was waiting to hear about what had happened to the city and the people. He surprisingly heard the news that the people repented and that Allah accepted their repentance. Yūnus grew angry with Allah. He was ashamed when Allah spared the people and decided to not go back as a liar, particularly when the people will receive him as a deceitful prophet since he promised judgment while Allah showed mercy, and he went on his way angry.<sup>9</sup>

Al-Rāzī rejects the whole notion of a prophet running away from Allah. This notion, Al-Rāzī states, is far away from being true, as this cannot be true unless someone purposely disobeys Allah and this cannot be applied to prophets. Therefore, Al-Rāzī reports another tradition, which is also reported by Ibn Abbas, where Yūnus is angry at a king:

Yūnus was living with his own people in Palestine when a king invaded the county and captured nine and a half tribes. Later, the king chose Yūnus to be sent to his own people since he is strong and faithful. Yūnus was wondering whether the king was inspired by Allah for this choice. The king’s answer was “no.” Yūnus attempted to convince the king to find someone else to accomplish this task. When the king insisted on sending Yūnus, he ran away in anger from the king to a loaded ship. As soon as Yūnus boarded on the ship, it started to sink. The only explanation that sailors came up with was that there is one person who is guilty. The sailors decided to throw a lot and it fell on Yūnus. At this point, Yūnus threw himself into the sea, where Allah ordered a whale to swallow him. Later the fish threw Yūnus into a dry land, where Allah grew a plant to be a shade over his head, and that he can eat from its fruit. The plant, however, withered the next day. Yūnus became very sad and began to complain to Allah saying, “O Lord, the

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<sup>9</sup> Al-Ṭabarī on 37:139.

plant was a shade for me.” Allah replied, “Yūnus grieves for the plant and not for a city that has more than one hundred (thousand?) people. Go to them.<sup>10</sup>

Al-Rāzī, moreover, argues against those who attempt to defend the character of Yūnus by claiming that Yūnus was not a prophet when he ran away from the king, since the king is the one who sent Yūnus in the first place. Later, Allah sent Yūnus after the fish threw him into a dry land, and this is when Yūnus became one of Allah’s messengers. Yūnus’ flight, thus, was before he became a prophet. Al-Rāzī responds by suggesting that “the description of Yūnus as one of the messengers at the beginning will be with no value unless Yūnus was a prophet when he ran away.”<sup>11</sup>

Al Qurtubi refers to a different tradition, where Jonah is angry at Gabriel.

According to Al-Qurtubi,

Gabriel revealed to Yūnus that he has to go to Nineveh to warn them of Allah’s judgment. Yūnus replied, ‘I need my ride.’ Gabriel said, ‘The matter is very serious (which means that Yūnus cannot wait until his ride is ready).’ Yūnus said, ‘I need my shoes.’ Gabriel again replied, ‘The matter is very serious.’ Then, Yūnus ran in anger into a ship. When Yūnus was on board, the ship was restrained. In order to find the reason for this, the sailors threw a lot and it fell on Yūnus. Then a fish swallowed Yūnus and later it threw him in Nineveh. At this point of the story, Allah appears to commission Yūnus to warn the people of Nineveh.<sup>12</sup>

Ibn Kathīr reports another narrative where Yūnus was angry at his people: Yūnus the son of Matti (Matthew), peace be upon him, Allah sent him to the people of Nineveh, and this is a city in Mousel. Yūnus invited them to worship Allah but they refused, and insisted to continue in their unbelief. Yūnus then left in anger promising them Allah’s punishment after three days. After the people found out that Allah’s punishment is real and knew that the prophet is not a liar, they went to the desert with their children and animals and they prayed to Allah showing all signs of repentance. Allah then forgave them (رفع عنهم العذاب).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Al-Rāzī on 37:139–40.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Rāzī on 37:139–40.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Qurtubi on 21:87–88.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Kathīr on 21:87.

While Al-Sāffāt reveals only Yūnus' escape, Al Anbya' discloses his feelings, as it says, "Dhou Al Noun (the Man of the Fish) went in anger" (21:87). Al-Qalam also describes Yūnus as someone who is angry as he calls upon Allah, ". . . for he cried out while he was in anger" (68:48). Al-Ṭabarī, moreover, reports a tradition that reveals Yūnus' angry personality. This tradition reveals another reason for Yūnus' anger, that is, the burden of prophethood. He states:

Yūnus the son of Matti is a righteous servant, but he was impatient (خلقه ضيق). When the burden of prophethood became severe, Yūnus ran away from its burden. Allah tells his prophet (Muhammad) peace be upon him, be patient as the previous resilient prophets were patient. Be patient for Allah's judgement and do not be as the Companion of the Whale.<sup>14</sup>

Al-Anbiya' also reveals the thoughts of Yūnus during his flight. Al-Anbiyā' states that, "while Yūnus escaped in anger he thought that Allah has no control (power) over him" (21:87). Al-Rāzī, like Al-Ṭabarī, argues against the notion that Yūnus was ignorant of Allah's power. He states that if someone is ignorant, he or she is characterized as an unbeliever or an infidel. Then he asks: how can we describe Yūnus as an unbeliever when Allah chose him to be a prophet? Al-Rāzī suggests that Yūnus mistakenly thought he had the freedom to choose. But the truth is that Allah has the power to limit his choices by allowing Yūnus to go through this trial to prove his point.<sup>15</sup> As it can be seen, Al-Rāzī, interprets the incident of the whale as a trial rather than a punishment, since the prophets must not be punished.

The narrative of Al-Sāffāt continues by giving us a glimpse of the scene on the ship, which only occurred here. It describes Yūnus as one of the losers (v. 141) and that the incident of the whale took place as a result of his blameworthy act (v. 142).

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<sup>14</sup> Al-Ṭabarī on 21:87.

<sup>15</sup> Al Rāzī on 21:87.

The Mufasssirun give various scenarios for the scene on the ship. Ibn Kathīr, for example, reports:

The ship was struggling in the midst of the waves (السفينة تلعبت بها الأمواج) and it began to sink. Then they drew lots, agreeing that whoever the lots will fall upon will be thrown into the sea. The lots fell on the prophet of Allah Yūnus (peace be upon him) three times. So, Yūnus took his clothes off and threw himself into the water. Allah commanded a whale to swallow Yūnus so that none of his bones will be broken nor his body will be injured. The whale came to Yūnus, and then Yūnus threw himself and the whale swallowed him. When Yūnus settled in the belly of the whale, he was considered dead. Then he moved his head and legs, which means he is alive. Yūnus began to pray in the belly of the whale, and one of his prayers was that, ‘Lord I bow down in the place no one before reached.’ There was a disagreement on the period Yūnus spent in the belly of the whale: Qatada says ‘three.’ Gafaar says ‘seven.’ Abou Malek says “forty days.” Mougahed says, the whale swallowed him early morning and threw him out in the evening.<sup>16</sup>

Al-Rāzī explains the meaning of the word “مُليم (blameworthy)” as someone who deserves the blame for something blameful he has done.<sup>17</sup> The Mufasssirun suggest that the term “he was blameworthy” shows in grammatical sense that the incident of the whale is a result of Yūnus’ guilt (مُذنب). Al-Qalam also makes a similar statement that describes Yūnus as a guilty prophet: “If the mercy (نعمة) of his Lord had not reached him, surely he would have been thrown into the wildness while he was guilty (مذموم)” (68:49). The Arabic term “مذموم” is defined by almost all Muslim Mufasssirun as “guilty,” or as a synonym of the same term in Al-Sāffāt “مُليم (blameworthy).”<sup>18</sup> Al-Rāzī offers three possible interpretations to the term “مذموم (guilty)”: First, the Arabic term “لولا (if)” could mean that the guilt did not occur. Second, the term may denote not opting for “the better” (ترك الأفضل). Third, this incident could have taken place before Yūnus became a prophet, or before he was sent

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Kathīr on 37:141.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Rāzī on 37:142. See also Al-Zamakhsharī on 37:142; Al-Mizan on 37:142; and Al-Ṭabarī on 37:142.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Ṭabarī on 68:49.

by Allah, as it says, “His Lord chose him.”<sup>19</sup> Al-Rāzī, thus, attempts to defend Yūnus from being a sinner. Tantawi affirms the first suggestion that Al-Rāzī offered, seeing in the Arabic term “لولا (if)” and “تَدَارَكَهُ” (reached him)” a sufficient support to state that when the mercy of Allah reached Yūnus, it guided him to go back to Allah and protected him from being guilty. Otherwise, Yūnus would have continued in his running away from Allah.

### 2.2.3 Yūnus’ Experience in Darkness

While the Qur’an records the shameful and blameworthy act of Yūnus, it also summarizes Yūnus’ experience in the belly of the whale. This experience is characterized and interpreted in various ways. First, Yūnus cried out to Allah while he was in a state of grief and distress. It says, “So wait patiently for the judgment of your Lord, and do not be like the Companion of the Whale for he cried out (from the belly of the fish) while he was in distress” (68:48). The Arabic term “مكظوم” means in distress, sad, or grieving.<sup>20</sup> It could also be understood as “anger.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, Yūnus called upon Allah while in the belly of the whale in a state of anger, distress, and grief. Ibn Kathīr, however, reports the following hadith, which shows how the weak voice of Yūnus reflects his state of distress and sadness:

When Yūnus said, “There is no Allah but you, glory be to you, I was one of the wrongdoers,” these words came to the throne. The angels said, “Oh Lord, this is a very well-known weak voice that is coming from a strange land. Allah said, “Do you now know who this is? They said, “no.” Allah said, “this is Yūnus.” They said, “Oh Lord, is this your servant whose good deeds and answered prayer are still counting? He said, “yes.” They said, “do you not have mercy because of what he has done in prosperity (في الرخاء) in order to save him? Allah then commanded the whale to throw Yūnus in the desert, and that is why it says, “Allah has chosen him and he became one of the righteous.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Al-Rāzī on 68:49.

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Kathīr on 68:48.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Mizan on 68:48.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Kathīr on 68:48

This hadith also reveals the reason for Allah’s mercy over Yūnus in that the angels interceded on his behalf, reminding Allah of Yūnus’ righteous acts in the past and his answered prayers. In other words, the angels are asking Allah to consider what Yūnus has done in the past as a means of atonement to show mercy and to rescue him from disaster.

Second, this cry seems to come from a place that is described as dark (21:87). The darkness is a metaphor that may describe the belly of the whale or the seabed at night. Al-Ṭabarī reports from Amrou ibn Maymoun, as he said, darkness of the belly of the fish, the darkness of the sea, and the darkness of the night.<sup>23</sup> Third, in the midst of this distressed state and dark place, Al-Sāffāt, nonetheless, describes the cry of Yūnus as of the one of those who glorified, literally praised, Allah (37:143), but the nature of this praise is absent. Al-Anbiyā’, however, explicitly declares Yūnus’ praise: “there is no Allah but You, glory be to you, I was one of the wrongdoers” (21:87). According to some traditions, this cry of praise was motivated by the living creatures of the sea. Al-Ṭabarī explains:

When Allah needed to imprison Yūnus in the belly of the whale, Allah told the whale: ‘take him but do not injure his body nor break any of his bones.’ The whale then took him and went to its home in the sea, and when the whale took him to the bottom of the sea, Yūnus heard a voice. Yūnus said to himself, ‘what is this?’ Allah then inspired Yūnus while he is in the belly of the whale, ‘this is praise of the living creature in the sea.’ It says, ‘he began to praise while he is in the belly of the whale.’ The angels heard his praise and they said, “we are hearing a weak voice coming from strange land. He said, ‘this is my servant Yūnus, he disobeyed me and I imprisoned him in the belly of the whale in the sea.’ They said, ‘Is this the righteous servant from whom you used to receive good deeds every day and every night? He said, ‘yes.’ It says, ‘they interceded to Allah on his behalf, Allah then commanded the whale to throw him at the shore,’ as Allah says, ‘he is sick.’<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Al-Ṭabarī and Al-Mizan on 21:87.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Ṭabarī on 21:87.

Al-Rāzī views Yūnus’ praise, “there is no other Allah but you, glory be to you,” as a confession of Allah’s power against Yūnus’ early thought that Allah has no power over him (21:87).<sup>25</sup> Ibn Abbas, according to Al-Zamakhshari, defines “every praise in the Qur’an as an act of prayer.”<sup>26</sup> Ibn Kathīr reports on the authority of Ouf Al-E’rabi another tradition that declares another praise of Yūnus: “When Yūnus settled in the belly of the whale, it was thought that he was dead. Then Yūnus moved his legs and called: Oh Lord, I bow down in a place no one reached before.”<sup>27</sup> We also learn from Al-Ṭabarī that Yūnus in the midst of his distress remembered Allah through prayers. This act of remembrance of Allah during this disaster granted Yūnus a way out from the belly of the whale, otherwise he would have stayed there until the Day of the Resurrection.<sup>28</sup>

Third, it is remarkably significant to notice how Yūnus obtained deliverance from such intense adversity. Al-Sāffāt reports that the shameful and blameworthy act of Yūnus was forgiven by praise, as it says, “If he had not been one of those who glorify, he would have stayed in the belly until the Day of Resurrection” (Q 37:143). In this respect, the belly of the whale is metaphorically seen as Yūnus’ grave. According to Al-Anbiyā’, when Yūnus called upon Allah, moreover, his prayer was answered and Allah relieved him from grief (21:87). Al-Qalam, however, attributes the deliverance of Yūnus to Allah’s mercy, as it says, “If the mercy of his Lord had not reached him, surely he would have been thrown into the wilderness while he was guilty” (Q 68:49). Al-Ṭabarī, like Al-Zamakhshari, interprets the term “نعمة” as an act of mercy that led Yūnus to repent.<sup>29</sup> Tantawi believes that without Allah’s mercy

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<sup>25</sup> Al-Rāzī on 21:87.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī on 37:145.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Kathīr on 21:87.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Ṭabarī on 37:145.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Ṭabarī on 68:49. See also Al-Zamakhsharī’s comment on the same verse.



reaching Yūnus and accepting his repentance, he would have been thrown into the wilderness.<sup>30</sup>

Fourth, while Al-Anbiyā' emphasizes Yūnus' cry of praise, it also shows a cry of confession and repentance. Yūnus, according to Al-Rāzī, regrets his shameful act of running away from his people and confesses that "I was one of the wrongdoers" (Q 21:87). He also reports on the authority of Al-Hassan, "Allah would not deliver him unless he made self-affirmation (or confession) of injustice" (ما نجاه الله تعالى إلا بإقراره) (عن نفسه بالظلم).<sup>31</sup> Al-Ṭabarī also reports other traditions that show when Yūnus praised Allah, he also confessed his guilt and repented of his sin saying, "I was one of the wrongdoers in disobeying you." This confession granted comfort to the prophet since Allah had heard his cry and lifted up his grief and distress (21:88).<sup>32</sup>

The prayer of Yūnus is a common widely known prayer that Muslims are encouraged to pray in times of distress. It receives its importance because the prophet himself encourages Muslims to pray the prayer of Yūnus. The following tradition demonstrates this:

He said, 'Saad Ibn Makel says: I heard the prophet of Allah (peace be upon him) say': 'the name of Allah, that if we call by His name, He will answer, and if we ask by his name, he will give, the call of Yūnus ibn Matti.' I said, 'Oh Messenger of Allah, is this particularly for just Yūnus ibn Matti or for the Muslim community? He said, 'this is particularly for Yūnus ibn Matti and for the believers in general if they pray it. Did you not hear what Allah says, 'He called in the darkness, there is no Allah but you, I was one of the wrongdoers. We heard his call and we rescued him from distress, and this is how we rescue the believers. This is Allah's condition for those who call upon him.'<sup>33</sup>

Two other traditions reported by Ibn Kathīr affirm the fact that Muslims' prayers will be heard if they call upon Allah using Yūnus' prayer. Ibn Kathīr reports

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<sup>30</sup> Tantawi on 68:49.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Rāzī on 21:87.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Ṭabarī on 21:87.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Ṭabarī on 21 :87.

on the authority of Ismael ibn Omar on the authority of the prophet that if Muslims call upon Allah using Yūnus' prayer, “there is no Allah but You, I was one of the wrongdoers,’ then Allah hears their prayers.”<sup>34</sup> Al-Bukhārī also reports a similar hadith. It says, “The supplication of Dhun-Nun when he supplicated, while in the belly of the whale was: ‘There is none worthy of worship except You, Glory to You, Indeed, I have been of the transgressors.’ So indeed, no Muslim man supplicates with it for anything, ever, except Allah responds to him.”<sup>35</sup>

Ibn Kathīr also reports that, “Ibn Gareer said, I have heard the messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) say, “When the name of Allah is called upon, He answers, and when he is asked, he gives, as in the prayer of Yūnus ibn Matta.”<sup>36</sup> Al-Rāzī reports another tradition on the authority of the prophet, “No distressed person will pray this prayer but his prayer will be answered.”<sup>37</sup> In this sense, Yūnus' prayer becomes “Allah's condition” to grant deliverance from distress.

Therefore, Yūnus' prayer and Allah's response became an example, or a common Muslim prayer, to all Muslims during times of distress. In this sense, Muslims are promised deliverance from distress if they pray Yūnus' prayer, as it says, “this is how we will rescue the believers” (21:87). Al-Ṭabarī comments, “as we delivered Yūnus from the grief of prison in the belly of the whale when he called upon us, this is how we will deliver the believers if they seek refuge and call upon us.”<sup>38</sup> Yūnus' prayer in the midst of distress, moreover, gave him a special place among all prophets, including Muhammad himself. As it says, “Nobody should say, ‘I

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<sup>34</sup> Ibn Kathīr on 21:87.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Bukhārī, Chapters on Supplications, Chapter 81 on the Dhun-Nun.

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Kathīr on 21:87. Here we can remember Jesus' saying, “. . . Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you” (John 16: 23).

<sup>37</sup> Al-Rāzī on 21:78.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Ṭabarī on 21:88.

am better than Yūnus the son of Matti who praises Allah in the darkness.”<sup>39</sup> Al-Rāzī reports the previous tradition, but in a different form, as he states, “Do not favor me [Muhammad] over Yūnus ibn Matta” (لا تفضلوني على يونس بن متى).<sup>40</sup> Al-Bukhārī also reports: “Narrated ‘Abdullah: The Prophet (PBUH) said, "None of you should say that I am better than Yūnus (i.e., Jonah)." Musadded added, "Jonah bin Matta." Another report by Al-Bukhārī follows: “Narrated Abu Hurayra: The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whoever says that I am better than Yūnus bin Matta is a liar.”<sup>41</sup>

Though Yūnus was granted deliverance from this intense experience and was set free from distress, it seems that Yūnus’ adversity was severe enough that when he was thrown out of the belly of the whale to a dry land he was physically exhausted and sick (37:145). Al-Zamakhshari describes Yūnus’ body as a body of a new born baby.<sup>42</sup> Ibn Kathīr, however, gives a different metaphor of Yūnus’ sickness. He narrates, “Ibn Massoud said, Yūnus’ body is like a chick without any feathers.”<sup>43</sup> In the midst of this barren land, Allah, once again, grew a gourd plant to shade over Yūnus (37:146). This gourd plant is understood as Allah’s extended mercy to Yūnus. Al-Zamakhshari, and Al Bukhārī under a chapter on food, reports a tradition where Muhammad shows why he liked to eat pumpkin. It narrates: “it was said to the prophet peace be upon him: ‘You indeed like pumpkin.’ He said, ‘Yes indeed, it is the fruit of my brother Yūnus.’”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibn Kathīr on 21:87.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Rāzī on 21:87.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Bukhārī, Chapters on Supplications, Chapter 81 on the Dhun-Nun.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī on 37:145. See also Al-Rāzī on the same verse.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn Kathīr on 37:145.

<sup>44</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī on 37:146.

### 2.2.4 Yūnus and His People

The narrative then continues with Yūnus being sent to a people of more than a hundred thousand (37:147).<sup>45</sup> This census might be recorded, as it is suggested by some traditions, to rebuke Yūnus for his unconcerned attitude towards those people. Al-Ṭabarī reports: “In the midst of the desert environment, Yūnus was joyfully refreshed by the shade, the fruit, and the milk of the gourd tree. Over time, the gourd tree withered. When this happened, Yūnus began to complain. Allah rebuked Yūnus for his concern for the plant rather than for more than a hundred thousand repented, and he forgave them.”<sup>46</sup>

Al-Sāffāt, similarly to the verse in Yūnus (10: 98), mentions the belief of the people of Yūnus and its reward: “They believed and We granted them prosperity for a time (for a while)” (37:148). Indeed, the example of the people of Yūnus is unique since they stand as an example of the people of faith at the end of a list of examples of those who refused to believe (10:98). The Qur’an reports that, “Why was there not a town that believed and profited from its belief, except the people of Yūnus? When they believed, we removed from them the punishment of disgrace in the present life and We made them prosper for a while” (10:98).

" فَلَوْلَا كَانَتْ قَرْيَةٌ آمَنَتْ فَنَفَعَهَا إِيمَانُهَا إِلَّا قَوْمَ يُونُسَ لَمَّا آمَنُوا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمْ عَذَابَ الْخِزْيِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَمَتَّعْنَاهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ " (يونس 10:98).

While there was no community that believed and was consequently saved from punishment, the people of Yūnus believed and this act of faith saved them from the punishment of disgrace and granted them prosperity until they died. Classical Mufassirun disagree on whether the people of Yūnus believed before or after seeing

<sup>45</sup> Al-Qalam, however, shows that Yūnus is chosen to be sent to his people and this is considered as a sign of acceptance by Allah and therefore he became one of the righteous (86:50).

<sup>46</sup> Al-Ṭabarī on 37:146.

Allah's punishment. If the people of Yūnus believed before seeing Allah's punishment, their faith was thus unlike Pharaoh's, who believed after seeing Allah's punishment (v. 90). Al-Qurtubi, for example, cites the example of Pharaoh to argue that if the punishment had taken place, or its signs, the people of Yūnus, like Pharaoh, would not have benefited from their repentance. The Qur'an, according to Al-Qurtubi, presents the story of the people of Yūnus against the example of Pharaoh to show how the people of Yūnus believed before the punishment took place. He quotes Ibn Massoud to argue that after Yūnus promised punishment, he left the city. When the people found out that Yūnus left the city, they repented—as they thought that the reason behind Yūnus leaving the city is that what he had promised of Allah's punishment was true. This means that they believed before they saw any sign of punishment on the city.<sup>47</sup> If the people of Yūnus believed after seeing Allah's punishment, they were then the only community to believe after seeing Allah's punishment and Allah accepted their belief. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, proposes that the people of Yūnus benefited from their belief after the punishment took place. Thus, there were no people who benefited from their belief after Allah brought down His misery except the people of Yūnus.<sup>48</sup>

Al-Rāzī reports a tradition that is similar to the biblical narrative. According to Al-Rāzī, Yūnus went to Nineveh but they did not believe him and therefore he got angry at them and left the city. When he left, they were afraid, thinking that the punishment would be coming because Yūnus left the city. So, they planned to put on sackcloth for forty days as Yūnus told them. After 35 days, the sky was very dark and a black smoke covered the whole city . . . when the people saw this they repented and

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<sup>47</sup> Al-Qurtubi on 10:98. See also Zamakhsharī, Tabtabae, and Qutub on 10:98.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Ṭabarī on 10:98.

cried to Allah and he forgave them, and this day was Friday, the Day of Ashura. Rāzī then reports two types of prayer that they prayed: First, “Oh, the Living who raises the death, Oh the Living, there is no god but You, then Allah forgave them”; second, “Oh, Lord, our transgressions are great but you are greater than them. Do to us according to who you are, and do not deal with us according to who we are.”<sup>49</sup>

The Qur’an thus portrays the people of Yūnus as a source of encouragement to the prophet and as a model for the Qur’anic community. To the prophet, as Tantawy suggests, the example of the people of Yūnus is a message of encouragement to the disappointed prophet because of those who rejected him. The prophet should know that “if it was the will of the Lord, surely all those who are in the earth would have believed . . .” (v. 99). But since this is not the case, the prophet is encouraged to not act against the will of Allah, and to not “force men to become believers?” (v. 99). It is expected that the prophet will act in accordance to Allah’s will. To the Qur’anic community, however, the story functions as a model of those who believe, in whose steps they must follow.<sup>50</sup>

### 2.2.5 Conclusion

Our survey of the classical commentaries on the narratives of Yūnus reveals the fact that those classical Mufassirun are not limited by a specific literary context as they exegete the narrative of Yūnus. In their search for a comprehensive understanding of these narratives, they first attempt to create a basic chronological sequence of all the Qur’anic narratives of Yūnus. In order to accomplish this task, they move freely between all accounts. They, in other words, employ a hermeneutical principle of

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<sup>49</sup> Rāzī on 10:98. Zamakhsharī on the same verse repeats the same prayer. Baydāwī (10:98) also reports that the repentance of the people of Nineveh took place on the Day of Ashura.

<sup>50</sup> Tantawy on 10:98.

explaining the Qur'an by the Qur'an to exegete those narratives. Classical Mufassirun thus attempt to exegete the four narratives under one particular narrative, while in the other three they briefly comment on them and then refer the reader to the longest version of their exegetical work on those narratives. Classical Mufassirun, secondly, exegete those narratives in light of Muhammad's life, that is Hadith. As it can be observed in our analysis, Hadith is the basic element of exegesis used by the Mufassirun. Another major exegetical element used by the Mufassirun is the external non-Muslim tradition, which is usually referred to as the *Isrā'īliyyāt*. This type of literature is used to "fill the gap" where classical Mufassirun search for more details on a specific part of the narrative. This leads some scholars, like Reynolds, to suggest the use of the Bible as a subtext in order to make sense of the Qur'an.<sup>51</sup>

While some classical Mufassirun allow the Qur'an to speak for itself, others allow their dogmatic views to lead their exegetical practices. Some classical Mufassirun, therefore, attempt to defend the character of Yūnus as a sinful prophet. As we have seen, they reject the whole notion of a prophet running away from Allah. They also argue against the notion that Yūnus was ignorant of Allah's power (e.g. Al-Rāzī and Al-Ṭabarī). This record of a sinful prophet is indeed foreign to the Qur'anic dogmatic view concerning prophets. Reynolds explains, "the idea of a sinful prophet is hardly felicitous to the Mufassirun, all of whom are influenced to different degrees by the dogmatic principle of prophetic infallibility."<sup>52</sup> As it will be suggested later at the end of this chapter, a biblical reading of the book of Jonah in the context of Islam should consider such dogmatic views.

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<sup>51</sup> See Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*.

<sup>52</sup> Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, location 2797–98.

While hearing the voices of classical commentators is essential, such a reading seems insufficient, as it mainly interprets those narratives separately from their literary Qur'anic contexts. Therefore, our discussion now will move to a more literary reading of the narratives of Yūnus in their respective Qur'anic literary contexts.

### 2.3 Literary Reading of Yūnus in the Qur'an

In the following discussion, we will conduct an exegetical analysis of the accounts of Yūnus in the Qur'an. We will discuss each account in its own literary context. Our analysis will proceed according to the following order: Al-Sāffāt (37:139–148), Al-Qalam (68:48–50), Al-Anbiyā' (21:87–88), and Yūnus (10:98).

#### 2.3.1 Yūnus the Rescued Prophet: Al-Sāffāt (37:139–48)

The name of the surah is taken from the first verse in the surah which begins with an oath taken by Al-Sāffāt, that is a group of angels standing in rows ready to perform Allah's command. The introductory section (vv. 1–11) displays Allah's manifested power as it appears in creation (vv. 5–6) and its protection from the destruction of the rebellious *Shaitan* (Satan) (v. 7). The surah begins, however, with an oath, which is usually made by significant characters and serves for emphasis. The oath here is made by angels who stand in rows to drive the clouds and to recite the Qur'an (vv. 1–3). In the heavenly spiritual realm, these angels seem also to be charged with the tasks of guarding the stars and keeping at a distance the rebellious devils (شياطين) who attempt to hear the conversation of the High Council (v. 8). Allah's rhetorical question at the end of the prolegomenon (vv. 1–11), "Are they more difficult to create than those whom We created? We created them from a sticky clay" (v. 11), shows how insignificant and powerless the disbelievers and devils (شياطين) are compared to other



created beings by Allah. The purpose of this question is to show the arrogance of those who question Muhammad's prophethood and the Qur'an. This pericope prepares the way to the debate that follows and it declares beforehand Allah's manifested power. A. H. Johns explains: "This prolegomenon shows them [the unbelievers] how puny they are in the great scheme of things. They should look at Allah's manifested power in the creation of the heavens, and reflect on the humility of the angelic beings who are much greater than they."<sup>53</sup>

As the surah continues, we learn about those disbelievers who reject the message of the prophet and deny its divine source (vv. 12–17). As the disbelievers mock the prophet, he wonders as they refuse to learn from the Qur'an and reject any sign that proves the authenticity of the prophet's message (vv. 12–14), claiming that "this [the Qur'an] is obvious magic" (v. 15).<sup>54</sup> This latter accusation is based on their rejection of the whole notion of resurrection after death, as they wonder: "if we have died and became dust and bones, will we be resurrected?! Will our ancestors (be resurrected as well)?" (vv. 16–17). Thus, these verses reveal the intense context in which Muhammad experienced rejection and received mocking from the surrounding Qur'anic community.

While the disbelievers declare their claim, indicated by the words "they say," Allah instructs the prophet as to how he should respond by using the term "you say" in indicative form. This argumentative formula "they say-you say" highlights the matter under discussion and elucidates the Quranic response to such accusation. The prophet, therefore, answers the question regarding the resurrection with a strong "yes"

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<sup>53</sup> Johns, "Jonah in the Qur'an," 56.

<sup>54</sup> It is hard to accept the suggestion that the word translated "magic" may be understood in a positive way to show "the confession of the enemy upon the wonderful and extraordinary influence of the Qur'an and the miracles of the Prophet" (*An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur'an*, vol. 15, commentary on Q 37: 15).

(v. 18), there is the Resurrection Day, when the disbelievers will be judged as they and their leaders confess their disbelief (vv. 19–34). This confession is expressed in the form of a conversation between the disbelievers in heaven and hell, “telling how those in hell quarrel with and blame each other for their fate, and reporting what those in heaven say to each other about the unbelievers (cf. 37:27–30, 50–8).”<sup>55</sup>

While the rejection of the whole concept of resurrection led to the ultimate rejection of the Qur’an and its being described as magic, the debate over the worship of one Allah led to the rejection of the prophet who is described as a possessed poet. As Muhammad invited the people to worship one Allah by saying, “if it was said to them, ‘there is no Allah but Allah,’ they acted arrogantly “يستكبرون,” saying, “shall we abandon our gods for the sake of a possessed poet?” (v. 36). The following statement claimed by Allah affirms the authenticity of the message of the prophet: He came with the Truth and confirms the message of previous prophets (v. 37). While the unbelievers will be judged by Allah, the “sincere servants of Allah,” will be rewarded in heaven since they believed the prophets’ message, and a description of this reward is given (vv. 41–49). As the surah continues, the unbelievers’ fate is discussed in a story-telling form among those who are in heaven (vv. 50–71). The concluding statement of this discussion reminds the prophet of the fact that many nations in the past “went astray,” as the surrounding rebellious community of the prophet also does (v. 71), despite the fact that Allah sent many prophets to warn them (v. 72). This last verse reveals one aspect of prophetic office, that is “warning.” The prophet, however, is encouraged to take note of the consequences of those who have been warned (v. 73) and how Allah saved the “sincere servants of Allah” (v. 74). This later expression, “the sincere servants of Allah (عباد الله المخلصين),” appears five times throughout the

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<sup>55</sup> Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an,” 56.

surah (vv. 40, 74, 128, 160, 169) to compare the sincere servants with the unbelievers. It is important to note that this theme is echoed throughout the following section of the narratives of the prophets, but using synonymous expressions, such as addressing one of the prophets as “one of our believing servants (إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ)”: Noah (v. 81), Ibrāhīm (v. 111), Moses and Aaron (v. 122), Elias (Elijah) (v. 132). In this context, the life stories of the former prophets are narrated: Noah (vv. 75–82); Abraham (vv. 83–113); Moses and Aaron (vv. 114–122); Elias (Elijah) (vv. 123–132); Lot (vv. 133–138); and Yūnus [Jonah] (vv. 139–148).

The narratives of those former prophets share common themes and common literary features. Literarily speaking, the stories open with an introductory phrase where the name of the prophet is mentioned. Those introductory phrases “serve as headlines that disclose the relationship between Allah and his chosen messengers.”<sup>56</sup> Three prophets (Elias, Lot, and Yūnus), moreover, are identified as the messengers “المُرْسَلِينَ” of Allah at the beginning of their narratives (vv. 123, 133, 139). The stories show similarities of wording throughout the chain of former messengers, which usually revolves, as we will see below, around particular themes. The stories close with a refrain of similar words, which suggests an effective didactic feature of the Qur’an.<sup>57</sup> The narratives of Noah, Ibrāhīm, Moses and Aaron, Elias (Elijah) conclude with similar formula of honor and reward: “We (Allah) left (this blessing) for him (one of the prophets) among the nations (vv. 78, 108, 119, 129), peace be upon (the prophet) among the nation (vv. 79, 109, 120, 130),<sup>58</sup> and this is how we reward those who do right (vv. 80, 110, 121, 131),<sup>59</sup> He (the prophet) is one of the believing

<sup>56</sup> Koloska, “The Sign of Jonah,” 88.

<sup>57</sup> Watt and Bell, *Introduction to the Qur’an*, 72.

<sup>58</sup> Al-Zuhayli (*Concise Interpretation*, 450) views this “greeting of praise” from Allah as an honor to the prophet, and it will be used among the nations when the name of the prophet is mentioned

<sup>59</sup> This didactic formula functions as an example of how Allah will reward the faithful ones.

servants (vv. 81, 111, 122, 132).” This latter phrase is a declaration of affirmation by Allah, and is understood by Abdel Haleem as “a phrase which gives a touch of graciousness to the messengers and which is used as a refrain after each story.”<sup>60</sup> The refrain, moreover, “underline[s] Allah’s help and blessing for those who trust and believe in him and operate as a commentary on the stories.”<sup>61</sup>

The narrative of Noah begins with his call upon Allah in a time of disappointment with his people and his prayer was heard. Noah, his family and descendants were rescued from a great disaster,<sup>62</sup> but those who disbelieved him were punished by drowning, “ثم أغرقنا الباقين.” The formula of honor and reward of praise among the later generations is pronounced upon Noah, and he is described as one of the believing servants. Ibrāhīm is described as someone who has a sincere heart (v. 84). He critiques his own father and community for worshiping gods other than Allah (vv. 85–87). Later, he goes to the temple and smashes their idols. As soon as the community discovers what Ibrāhīm has done, they decide to burn him. Their plan, however, fails as Allah saves him (vv. 88–98). The narrative continues with Ibrāhīm asking for a son. Allah hears his prayer but put Ibrāhīm to the test of sacrificing his own son. At the last moment, Allah rescues his son (vv. 99–107). Then come Moses and Aaron: Allah graciously “مَنَّأَ” rescued both of them from their great calamity “الكرب العظيم”<sup>63</sup> and gave them victory over pharaoh and his people (vv. 114–16). Allah also granted Moses and Aaron the “book,” that is the Torah, and guided them to the straight path (vv. 117–18). Elias (Elijah) is next. He is introduced, similarly to Lot

<sup>60</sup> Abdel-Haleem, “The Qur’anic Employment of the Story of Noah,” 41.

<sup>61</sup> Koloska, “The Sign of Jonah,” 88.

<sup>62</sup> The term “great disaster” may refer to the flood or “to the mockeries of the proud faithless people, and their oral hurts, such as their violation and affront to him and his followers” (*An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur’an*, vol. 15, commentary on Q 37:76). The former is preferred here as the punishment of the unbelievers was drowning.

<sup>63</sup> This term is also used before in Noah’s narrative (v. 76).

and Yūnus later, as one of the messengers. Like Ibrāhīm, Elias questions the peoples' worship of idols, as they call upon Baal and ignore Allah, "Do you call upon Baal and ignore the Best of Creators" (v. 125). As the people deny his message, Allah consequently punishes them but saves the sincere servants of Allah (v. 127). Next, Lot's prophetic identity is revealed at the beginning of his story (v. 133). Lot and his people too were saved by Allah, but his wife and the unbelievers from the other nation were destroyed (v. 134). The remains of their destruction functions as a reminder for the Qur'anic community, seen as they pass by them while they travel by morning and night (v. 138).<sup>64</sup> As can be seen, the stories of former prophets share common themes: all prophets endured rejection, called upon Allah, had their prayers answered, resulting in their deliverance along with their people, and they saw their opponents punished, while the sincere servants of Allah were rewarded, honored, and granted victory. In this context the narrative of Yūnus is recorded as follows:

"(139) And Yūnus was one of the messengers. (140) He escaped to a fully loaded ship. (141) And then he drew lots and he was one of those losers. (142) And the whale swallowed him and he was blameworthy. (143) If he had not been one of those who glorify (Allah), (144) he would have stayed in the belly (of the whale) until the Day of Resurrection. (145) We then threw him (from the belly of the whale) to a deserted land and (Yūnus) was sick. (146) And We caused to grow a gourd plant over him. (147) And we sent him to more than a hundred thousand. (148) And they believed and We blessed them for a while" (Al-Sāffāt 37:139–48).

"وَإِنَّ يُونُسَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (139)، إِذْ أَبَقَ إِلَى الْفُلِّ الْمَشْحُونِ (140)، فَسَاهَمَ فَكَانَ مِنَ الْمُدْحَضِينَ (141)، فَالْتَقَمَهُ الْحُوتُ وَهُوَ مُلِيمٌ (142)، فَلَوْلَا أَنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُسَبِّحِينَ (143)، لَلَبِثَ فِي بَطْنِهِ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ (144)، فَنبَذْنَاهُ بِالْعَرَاءِ<sup>65</sup> وَهُوَ سَقِيمٌ (145)، وَأَنْبَتْنَا عَلَيْهِ شَجَرَةً مِّنْ يَفْطِينِ (146)، وَأَرْسَلْنَاهُ إِلَى مِائَةِ أَلْفٍ أَوْ يَزِيدُونَ (147)، فَأَمَنُوا فَمَتَّعْنَاهُمْ إِلَى حِينٍ (148)" (الصافات 37:139–148).

<sup>64</sup> Johns ("Jonah in the Qur'an," 57) suggests that the remains of their destruction is a reminder "to warn the Meccans of the fate of Lot's people."

<sup>65</sup> Koloska ("The Sign of Jonah," 89) discusses the suggestion that "the phrase *bi-l-'arā'i* could be read as in nakedness' and not 'on a desolate place.' He states that "it is appealing to read the description as "we cast him off in nakedness" in view of the Christian imagery where Jonah is almost always presented naked. But perhaps it is a pun that allows for both interpretations."

The literary features of Yūnus' narrative above deserve some analysis. To begin, the narrative deviates from other prophetic stories, with the exception of its opening line where Yūnus, like Lot and Elias, is described as one of the messengers. Despite this similarity, the Yūnus narrative differs from others in that the full account of his story is narrated, though it is brief and condensed. In other prophetic narratives, only portions of their stories are mentioned. Torrey accurately observes that, "The account of Jonah and his experiences given in 37:139–48 is unique in the Koran. The whole Biblical narrative, without any external features, is told in a single breath, a noteworthy example of condensation. Even the hymn of prayer and praise from the belly of the whale receives mention in vs. 143."<sup>66</sup> Johns, moreover, observes how the verses are brief, presenting a unique verbal picture. He explains:

Each has a caesura: Jonah flees—to the heavily laden ship; he draws lots - he is condemned; the great fish swallows him—he is blameworthy (*mulīm*). There is a shift in pace in v. 143 which has no caesura. The first part of the sense unit, a conditional clause had he not been . . . fills the verse, and thus receives emphasis. The mid-verse caesura recurs in the following verse, he would have remained in its belly—till the Day all are to be raised (v. 144). We cast him on the bare shore - and he was sick; We made a tree grow over him—a tree supporting a gourd; We sent him to one hundred thousand—or more than that; then they believed—so We gave them of life a further span.<sup>67</sup>

Though it is condensed and brief, the narrative does answer many questions and provide more details than the other Qur'anic accounts of Yūnus. It, moreover, outlines and summarizes the main events of the biblical narrative. The narrative can be divided into two main sections: indirect and direct speech. The former tells about Yūnus (vv. 139–44), revealing more of Yūnus' shameful act. The latter shows Allah directly speaking in a plural form "We," indicating His sovereignty at each stage of the action (vv. 145–48): "We threw him into a barren land" (v. 145), "We caused to

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<sup>66</sup> Torrey, *Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 115.

<sup>67</sup> Johns, "Jonah in the Qur'an," 55.

grow a gourd plant over him” (v. 146) “We sent him to more than a hundred thousand” (v. 147), “We blessed them for a while” (v. 148).

Additional distinctives in the Yūnus narrative include the absence of the traditional closing formula of honor/reward of the prophets, though the reward of the believers is mentioned (v. 148). Yūnus’ commendation, instead, comes in 68:50 where he is described as one of the righteous. While other prophets were saved from their opponents when they called upon Allah, Yūnus was saved from the belly of the whale, which was described as his eternal grave (v. 144). Other prophets were blameless, or at least nothing was mentioned about their guilt, while Yūnus is declared guilty “مُذْنِبٌ” (v. 142).<sup>68</sup> Consequently, Yūnus receives Allah’s punishment as the whale swallows him (v. 144). This is contrasted to other prophetic narratives, where the punishment falls upon the disbelievers. Any harm or threat from the surrounding community toward Yūnus is absent from his story and his people believed in his message; this is very different from the other prophetic narratives. Yūnus’ conflict was within himself, or with Allah, while other prophets faced opposition from the surrounding community while their message was rejected.

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<sup>68</sup> In Islamic tradition, the phrase is frequently read *wa-huwa malūm*; see ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Khaṭīb, *Mu‘jam al-qirā’āt* (Damascus: Dār Sa‘d al-Dīn, 2002), 8:59–60. The passive participle (form I) *malūm* is used several times in the Qur’ān (17:29, 39; 23:6; 51:54; 70:30), whereas the active participle (form IV) *mulīm* can be found only in 37:142 and 51:40. Angelika Neuwirth, in a discussion, underlined that the difference of active and passive is fundamental and that both words are not interchangeable. It should therefore be understood as *mulīm nafsahu* (“blaming himself”). The object is omitted, perhaps because of the rhyme pattern. Al-Khaṭīb also gives this interpretation (*Mu‘jam al-qirā’āt*, 59–60). Following this argument, the gradual change of Jonah from a blameworthy person (Q 68) and a person blaming himself (Q 37) to an angry but fully penitent person (Q 21) would be even more explicit. But according to Ullman’s extensive lexicographical compilation, in all instances from pre-Islamic sources, *mulīm* is to be understood as “being/acting blameworthy.” See Manfred Ullmann, *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache*, 1:1841–43. It anyhow remains doubtful to assume a simple synonymic reading of *mulīm* and *malūm*. Special attention should be drawn to Q 51:40 in which Pharaoh – cast into the sea – is also described as *wa-huwa mulīm*. His penitence represented in 10:92–94 shows similarities to Jonah’s repentance in 21:87–88. The motif of penitence relates Jonah to Pharaoh. The phrase *wa-huwa mulīm* in Q 51 could thus already hint at the change of Pharaoh’s behavior that is explicitly stated in the later sura, Q 10. The Jonah story in Q 37 refers to the story of Pharaoh and draws either a parallel between the two’s behavior (“they blamed themselves”) or comments on their actions (“they were blameworthy”) (Koloska, “The Sign of Jonah,” 100).

Though Yūnus' narrative differs from other prophetic narratives, it still shares common themes with them. Like other prophets, Yūnus is mentioned as a messenger of Allah (v. 139), that he called upon Him and his prayer was answered (v. 134), that he was sent to more than a hundred thousand (v. 147), and the believers were rewarded (v. 148). Though the missing formula of honor and reward may raise questions regarding the motivation behind such silence, yet Allah's mercy still reaches Yūnus as he calls upon, or praises, Allah. This mercy appears in the actions that Allah takes toward Yūnus: "We caused to grow a gourd tree and We sent him to a hundred thousand or more" (vs. 146–47).

The surah concludes with a summary that serves multiple purposes. It highlights key themes that occurred throughout the chapter. The unbelievers are promised judgement (v. 170) contrary to the reward promised to "the sincere worshiper of Allah" (vv. 74, 81, 111, 122, 128, 160). Though the disbelievers expressed their desire to have a book like Christians and Jews before the birth of the Qur'an in order to be "the devout worshipers of Allah," their wish was unauthentic as they reject the Qur'an as a divine holy book (v. 169). The prophets promised victory, which Allah has spoken before (vv. 172–173), explicitly to Moses and Aaron (v. 116) and implicitly to other prophets as it is seen in the punishment of their opponents. This affirmation of victory sends a message of hope to the frustrated prophet. The formula, "peace be upon the messengers" (v. 181), affirms, moreover, Allah's honor and reward to the mocked prophet. Second, the conclusion shows Muhammad the path that he should take in the face of severe criticism. Allah instructs Muhammad twice—for emphasis—to be patient as he turns away from the disbelievers for some time and wait until he sees the punishment of those who reject his message (vv. 174, 178, 179). This direct speech feature, in a firm imperative tone towards Muhammad,



functions as the highlight of the whole surah.

Johns, however, makes a comparison between Yūnus and Muhammad:

“Finally, the command to Muhammad to leave the matter to Allah highlights a point of comparison with Jonah. Jonah had been frustrated and fled in anger because the punishment he threatened did not occur. Yet in the lee-time that Allah gave his people, they repented. Muhammad is ordered to turn aside and wait. His people too may repent.”<sup>69</sup> It is hard, nonetheless, to accept such a comparison as there is no mention of possible repentance of Muhammad’s opponents. What is promised there is that the day will come when Muhammad will see their punishment, not repentance (vv. 175–179). The point of comparison between Muhammad and Jonah is, however, twofold: First, Jonah, like other prophets, was rescued by Allah when he called upon him while in the belly of the whale. Here we can see that Muhammad, like Jonah, will be rescued from this severe criticism as he calls upon Allah. Second, the people to whom Yūnus was sent believed in his message and they were rewarded. The latter functions as a message of hope to Muhammad, that the opponents may repent, and as a positive example for the Qur’anic community to follow. The prophet Yūnus and his people thus were an example of those sincere and devout servants of Allah.

To the Qur’anic community, Yūnus functions as a model of the repented person to those who should repent, otherwise the belly of the whale will metaphorically be their eternal punishment. Here we can see the theme of the Day of Resurrection reappears once again. Only Yūnus functions among all prophets as a person of repentance. Indeed, it was not only Yūnus who was repentant but also those to whom he was sent. In this latter sense, this repentant community functions as a positive example for the Qur’anic community to follow and it gives hope to the

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<sup>69</sup> Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an,” 56.

prophet himself.

### 2.3.2 Yūnus: The Impatient Prophet: Al-Qalam (68:48–50)

The first section of the surah (vv. 1–8) functions as a source of affirmation and a guidance to the prophet as he faces severe criticism. Muhammad receives what Neal Robinson calls “words of solace” (vv. 2–7).<sup>70</sup> Robinson explains the structure of this section as follows: “[It comprises] reassurance that hurtful statements made by opponents are untrue (vv. 2, 4), promises (v. 3), exhortation to be patient (vv. 48–50), and watch how Allah deals with the unbelievers (vv. 5–7).”<sup>71</sup> As the surrounding community alleges the prophet to be insane or possessed, Allah affirms the opposite in a direct intense speech: Muhammad is not a possessed person, and this is by the mercy of Allah “You, by the mercy of your Lord ‘بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ’, are not possessed” (68:2). It is important to pay close attention to the term “نعمة-mercy” as it will be used later as a description of Allah’s gracious act of saving Yūnus from the belly of the whale (v. 49). However, it is not clear from this verse in which way specifically the prophet is accused of being a possessed person.<sup>72</sup> Verse 51, however, illuminates more the nature of this accusation. Those who disbelieve the prophet would almost cause his death with their eyes, as they hatefully look at him when they hear the recitation of the Qur’an, and say, “he is a possessed prophet.”<sup>73</sup> Against this accusation, the

<sup>70</sup> Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an*, 121.

<sup>71</sup> Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an*, 121.

<sup>72</sup> For a full conversation on the term “مجنون-possessed” see Watt and Bell, *Introduction to the Qur’an*, 77–78.

<sup>73</sup> The metaphor of the eye causing harm in this verse is not easy to translate, and it will not be understood if translated literally. It says, “those who disbelieve you would almost cause you fall with their eyes when they hear the Qur’an and they say: he is insane (mad)” (v. 51). Though the root of the Arabic verbal form-z-l-q denotes the idea of someone falls down or slip, it takes a different meaning when it associates it with the word “eye,” namely someone hatefully looks at the other in order to underestimate his/her worth. However, Muslims exegetes have different opinions. “There are some Qur’an exegetes maintaining that upon hearing the Majestic Qur’anic Verses, the Noble Prophet’s (S) enemies get into such rage and look daggers at him as if they would intend to make him slip and destroy him. Some hold that the blessed Verse makes a reference to the evil eye in which some people

prophet is promised an everlasting reward (v. 3). Since the accusation is related to his character, Allah, moreover, exalts and affirms the noble character of the prophet by stating, “you are of a great moral character” (v. 4). Allah continues by saying that on the Day of Judgement the prophet and the disbelievers will “see,”<sup>74</sup> or “know,” who the real possessed person is, as only Allah knows those who have gone astray “ضل” and those who are following his path “مهتدين” (vv. 5–7).<sup>75</sup> Therefore, the prophet is instructed to not obey those liars, indicating that he is the one following the path (v. 8).

It seems that mocking the prophet is far from being the only approach that the disbelievers attempted to use to manage the conflict with the prophet. The disbelievers attempt to come to a common ground with the prophet, asking him to compromise by following the beliefs of their ancestors, namely polytheism and idolatry.<sup>76</sup> Allah instructs the prophet to not obey those skeptical people, nor to believe those who make false oath (vv. 9–10). Further description of such people and their punishment is given in verses 11–16.

The chapter continues with the parable of the owners of the garden (vv. 17–34).<sup>77</sup> The purpose of this parable is that the Qur’anic community the pericope addresses “were guilty not only of rejecting Muhammad, but of oppressing the poor,

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believe and say that some eyes have certain secret powers through which they may cause ailment and death. Some also maintain that the expression connotes wrathful looks, though such light headed people are unaware of the truth and accord contradictory ascriptions to him” (AN Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur’an, vol. 15, commentary on Q 68: 51).

<sup>74</sup> Johns (“Jonah in the Qur’an,” 53) observes the state of the unbelievers when they “see” in the last day of judgement: their eyes will be casted down as a sign of shame and humiliation (v. 43).

<sup>75</sup> In the parable of the owners of the garden the term “ضل-went astray” appears again in a plural as a confession of the owners of the garden. In this sense, the parable could serve as illustration to define who are the misguided whom went astray.

<sup>76</sup> (An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur’an, vol. 18, commentary on Q 68:9).

<sup>77</sup> For a full analysis on the structure of this parable and its purpose see Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an*, 106–9.

and for this too they will be punished.”<sup>78</sup> However, the believers are promised, in contrast to the owner of the garden at the beginning of the parable, the gardens of abundance with their Lord.<sup>79</sup> A series of rhetorical questions follow the parable, arguing against the disbelievers’ dispute of the equality between the believers and unbelievers, “would we treat those who submit themselves [to Allah] as those who do evil?” (v. 35). Such questions serve to further critique the source of the dispute: Is it a book (v. 37)? Is it an oath by which Allah made to guarantee the privilege of being equal to the believers (v. 39)? Is it their allies who support this claim (v. 41)? Whatever the source of their claim, the Day of Resurrection will prove the opposite (vv. 42–43).

The last pericope (vv. 43–52) offers counsel to the prophet as it reveals Allah’s plan to deal with those who deny the authenticity of the revelation and the virtue which Muhammad should embrace. It begins by Allah assuring that though He may be patiently addressing their rejection, He alone, and not Muhammad, will punish those who disbelieve (vv. 44–45). Two rhetorical questions follow to dispute the claims of the unbelievers regarding the reasons behind their rejection of the message of Muhammad: “Are you asking a payment from them and it is a burden to then? Or do they have [knowledge] of the unseen, so they write about it? (vv. 46–47). Then the example of Yūnus is given:

“So wait patiently for the judgment of your Lord, and do not be like the Companion of the Whale for he cried out (from the belly of the fish) while he was in

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<sup>78</sup> Johns (“Jonah in the Qur’an,” 50–51) also observes a number of literary features in this parable that aims to enhance its message. “The direct speech, with the chiasmus between shouting and whispering, highlights the contrast between the openly proclaimed good act of going to harvest, and the concealed wicked intention of depriving the poor of their right to glean.”

<sup>79</sup> Comparison between evil and good is a didactic literary feature of the Qur’an (Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an,” 51); (An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur’an, vol. 18, commentary on Q 68:34).

distress. If the mercy of his Lord had not reached him, surely he would have been thrown into the wildness while he was guilty. But his Lord chose him and placed him among the righteous.”

" فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تُكِنِّ كَصَاحِبِ الْخُوْتِ إِذْ نَادَى وَهُوَ مَكْظُومٌ (48)، لَوْلَا أَنْ تَدَارَكَهُ نِعْمَةٌ مِّنْ رَبِّهِ  
لَنُذِبَ بِالْعُرَاءِ وَهُوَ مَذْمُومٌ (49)، فَاجْتَبَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَجَعَلَهُ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (50)" (القم 48:68–50).

In the midst of this intense criticism of the prophethood of Muhammad and his message, the example of the Man of the Whale<sup>80</sup> is given to urge the prophet to wait patiently for the judgment of the Lord on the disbelievers. In the latter sense, Muhammad is encouraged to “not be like Yūnus” type of prophet, as Yūnus called upon Allah in anger while in the belly of the fish “إِذْ نَادَى وَهُوَ مَكْظُومٌ” (v. 48). According to Koloska, “Nādā [called] can be employed in the Qur’ān to describe the call for help by Allah’s chosen messengers or people who are in distress, such as Noah (Q 37:75), Lot (Q 27:83; 38:41), and Zecharia (Q 21:89).”<sup>81</sup> This term can also mean “calling people to repent.” In this latter sense, it can be suggested that Yūnus was angry when he called the people of Nineveh to repentance. Koloska, however, argues against this

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<sup>80</sup> Johns (“Jonah in the Qur’an, 49) understands this term as “a *laqab* [Title] that both identifies Jonah and serves to evoke the events of the Jonah story.” Koloska (“The Sign of Jonah, 99), moreover, argues against Schreiner’s assumption that this term is a later addition to the surah. He explains: “Schreiner assumes the reference to Jonah as a later addition to the sura and sees these verses as the chronologically latest text. He argues that the passage presupposes the other qur’ānic texts about Jonah and serves as a summary. He argues mainly that verse 48 refers to Q 21:87, which contains the determination of *nādā* (Jonah confesses his faith and calls for Allah’s help). The epithet *‘āib al-ūt* according to Schreiner is, moreover, the arabicized version of *dhū n-nūn* (Q 21:87), and verses 49–50 refer to Q 37:143–48. See Schreiner, “Muhammads Rezeption,” 164–66. A later expansion of the sura might not be excluded, but the argument has to be supported by philological arguments like unusual verse length or terminology. It should also be asked which reasons could have generated such an insertion: Does a new motive or discourse change or support the existing text, or is there a need for harmonizing the text with later qur’ānic proclamations? Philological analyses as well as the thematic structure of the sura, however, do not disclose any reason for a later insertion of the verses. In contrast to Schreiner, the passage in Q 68 seems to be the first mention of Jonah in the Qur’ān and thus serves as a reference point, as will be shown. Interestingly, however, the usage of the letter *nūn* at the beginning of the sura may be referring to the Aramaic word for “fish” (*nūn*).” Torrey (*Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 115) suggests that “Jonah is the only one of all the fifteen *Nebiim Acharonim* to receive mention in the Koran. The name of the Hebrew prophet is given (here as elsewhere) in a form ultimately based on the Greek; seeming to indicate-as in so many other Cases-an origin outside Arabia.”

<sup>81</sup> Koloska, “The Sign of Jonah,” 99.

latter interpretation.<sup>82</sup> Otherwise, the prophet may face the destiny of Yūnus.<sup>83</sup>

Patience, therefore, is needed as the prophet is promised to “see” the judgement of Allah on the unbelievers (v. 5). Jonah, thus, is a prophet offering an example that Muhammad is not to follow.<sup>84</sup>

Yet, the Qur’an reports how Allah’s mercy reached Yūnus in a time of distress. Without the mercy of Allah, Yūnus would have been thrown into a barren land as a sign of being guilty. By the mercy of Allah, however, Yūnus is chosen by his Lord as a prophet and sent to his own people, and this act of mercy granted Yūnus the status of righteousness (v. 50). Koloska observes that,

Particularly striking is the designation of Jonah as among the righteous (*min al-ṣāliḥīn*) and not explicitly as a prophet or messenger so that he may serve as a general example and not just as a parallel to the prophet in salvation history. That he is not named, but referred to by an epithet, might also stress his role as an afflicted person instead of as one on a prophetic mission. Thus, Jonah serves as a model for a wrongdoer whose prayer, uttered in despair, was answered.<sup>85</sup>

Johns, moreover, observes another parallel between Yūnus and Muhammad: Jonah received mercy from his Lord and because of this mercy he was not cast to a barren land. In the same way, Muhammad received mercy from his Lord and because of this mercy he is not possessed as the unbelievers describe him.<sup>86</sup> Thus, if Muhammad patiently waits for the judgement of his Lord, and believes in the mercy granted to him, he will be rewarded, like Yūnus, as one of the righteous. In other words, Muhammad by the mercy of Allah is considered one of the prophets and given the status of the righteous.

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<sup>82</sup> Koloska, “The Sign of Jonah,” 99.

<sup>83</sup> Al-Rāzī on Q 86:48.

<sup>84</sup> Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an,” 53.

<sup>85</sup> Koloska, “The Sign of Jonah,” 87.

<sup>86</sup> Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an,” 53.

The chapter ends in a similar way as it begins. It describes once again how the Qur'anic community hatefully looks at the prophet while listening to the Qur'an, claiming that Muhammad is a possessed prophet. It then concludes with the affirmation that the Qur'an is indeed a reminder to all nations (v. 52).

### 2.3.3 The Prophet of Prayer: Al-Anbiya' (21:87–88)

The context of this chapter is, to some extent, similar to Al-Qalam and Al-Sāffāt. The chapter begins with a tension between objections to Muhammad and Allah's response to them. Particularly, Johns suggests, the chapter addresses “the period of respite between the threat of divine punishment and its execution, leading unbelievers to regard it as empty.”<sup>87</sup> This is explained later when the Qur'anic community questions the authenticity of Muhammad's message, particularly as they ask: when will this threat [of punishment which Muhammad has proclaimed occur] if you speak the truth?” (v. 38). Therefore, the chapter begins with the affirmation that the Day of Judgement draws near (v. 1). The dispute thus is related to eschatological issues.<sup>88</sup> Rather than paying attention to that Day, the Qur'anic community question the prophethood of Muhammad, claiming that Muhammad is just a human like them, and what he claims to be a revelation is indeed magic, a collection of dreams, and poetry from a poet. In order for Muhammad to prove his prophetic identity, they ask for a sign similar to that of the former prophets (vv. 3–5). The divine response affirms the uselessness of providing a sign as the Qur'anic community did not believe when Allah sent his punishment as a sign in the past (v. 6). It, moreover, affirms the fact that Allah has sent prophets who were human beings, and if they are not sure of this

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<sup>87</sup> Johns, “Jonah in the Qur'an,” 61.

<sup>88</sup> Koloska, “The Sign of Jonah,” 90.

latter fact, they can ask the people of the book (v. 7). Those prophets, moreover, were rescued and the unbelievers were punished (v. 9). The punishment of the unbelievers resulted in self-examination, which led to confession “when they saw the sign, then they believed” (v. 14).

The theme of mocking the prophet by the unbelievers reappears later (vv. 36–46). If the unbelievers are mocking the prophet because of the delay of the divine punishment, Allah claims the responsibility of approving the authenticity of the message which Muhammad has been preaching when He punishes the unbelievers (v. 37), though He warns the people not to quickly expect it before its time (v. 37), and to see Allah’s patience as a sign of mercy (v. 44). Allah also informs Muhammad of the fact that former prophets were also mocked (v. 41). This is a message of assurance that aims to encourage the prophet to be patient in the face of their criticism.

The narrative of Yūnus appears in the middle of a chain of former prophets. There are several common themes between these prophets and Yūnus. There were four prophets who called upon Allah (نادى ربه) and Allah answered them (فاستجبنا له): Noah (v. 76),<sup>89</sup> Job (vv. 83–84), Yūnus (vv. 87–88) and Zechariah (vv. 89–90). And four who were saved by Allah (نجيناه): Abraham (v. 71), Lot (v. 74), Noah (v. 76), and Yūnus (v. 88).<sup>90</sup> Johns, moreover, observes the emphasis on patience. He explains:

After the two verses telling of Job (Q. 21:83–4), Ishmael, Idris and Dhū'l-Kifl are mentioned in a single verse. It is said of them: All were of those who endured in patience (Q. 21:85). Job is proverbial for his patience. There is thus a delicate emphasis on the fact that patience, when Jonah departed enraged (mughādiban, Q. 21:87), was a quality in which Jonah had fallen short.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Abdel-Haleem (“The Qur’anic Employment of the Story of Noah,” 44) comment on the narrative of Noah in this chain as follow: “Rather than being a ‘punishment story’ this passage reflects the overarching focus of the sura, Allah’s aid of His prophets, who call on Him in their distress, accounts of which are related in order to reassure the Prophet Muhammad and strengthen his heart against the accusations the disbelievers level at him in ayas 3-5, and 112 of this sura.”

<sup>90</sup> Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an,” 60.

<sup>91</sup> Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an,” 60.



With Job, Ishmael, Idris, and Dhū'l-Kifl, moreover, there is emphasis on Allah's mercy. Allah appears as the Most Merciful (vv. 83, 86). Though the narrative of Yūnus does not explicitly speak of Allah's mercy, we can see Allah's answered prayer and Yūnus' deliverance as a sign of his mercy (vv. 78–88).<sup>92</sup> We can thus conclude that there are major themes appearing in the narrative of Yūnus: calling upon Allah, Allah answers prayer, Allah saves, patience, and Allah's mercy. In the middle of this chain, the narrative of Yūnus is recited:

The Man of the Fish, he went in anger thinking that we have no power over him. He then prayed, “lit. called,” in the darkness, “there is not Allah but you, glory be to you, I was one of the wrongdoers.” We heard him and delivered him from grief, and this is how we save the believers (21:87–88).

وَدَا النُّونِ إِذْ ذَهَبَ مُغَاضِبًا فَظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ فَنَادَى فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ (٨٧) فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْعَمِّ وَكَذَلِكَ نُنْجِي الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (٨٨).

The narrative of Yūnus in this surah begins with his name: Dhu al-Nun. This name is unique as it is equivalent to the Arabic letter “Nun-ن.” Here we can observe external influence on the narrative of Yūnus. This name may have come from Hebrew or Aramaic.<sup>93</sup> Though Hebrew uses- ‘dag- דָּג’ for fish in the book of Jonah, and many other places, it does use “Nun” as a proper name for the father of Joshua in Numbers 27:18 “יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן-נֹון” which means fish.<sup>94</sup> In Aramaic, the word “nun” means fish, and this might be the source for the word in Hebrew as well. In any case, the name given to Yūnus as Dhu al Nun refers to Yūnus, and most classical commentators understand the term to mean “the Man of the Whale.” Our narrative thus defines and even names Yūnus in terms of the most-known event in his life.

<sup>92</sup> “It (the surah) emphasizes Allah's mercy often, by the use of the divine epithet “*ar-rāḥmān*” (Koloska, “The Sign of Jonah,” 90).

<sup>93</sup> Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, 129.

<sup>94</sup> HALOT 681.

The narrative continues by revealing Yūnus' thoughts while he was running away in anger. Yūnus thought that Allah had no power over him (v. 87). Yūnus' line of thought may reflect the thought of the disbelievers early in the chapter, as they thought that Muhammad's threat of punishment had no value because of the period of respite between the threat and its fulfilment, "The time of judgement is near for the people, but they turn away heedlessly-unmindful" (v. 1). In other words, the disbelievers, like Yūnus, thought Allah has no power over them to fulfil his threat as proclaimed by Muhammad. In this sense, Yūnus reflects/represents the attitude of the disbelievers toward Allah, and toward his messenger Muhammad. The call and the prayer of Yūnus here clarify other Qur'anic references to Yūnus' prayer (37:144; 68:48). The prayer came from a dark place, that is from the belly of the whale and the bottom of the sea. This prayer declares, in contrast to his early thought, the inimitable sovereignty of Allah, "There is no Allah but You, glory be to you" (v. 87a). In this prayer, Yūnus is not only confessing the glorious qualities of Allah, but also his own guilt, "I was one of the wrongdoers" (v. 87b). This is a self-declared confession, while in two other narratives (37:144; 68:48) it is in a third person narration/indirect speech. This confession, moreover, challenges, among other things, the whole concept of prophetic infallibility, which will be discussed in detail as we explore classical interpretations and commentaries of the same chapter. Allah hears Yūnus' prayer and delivers him from grief (v. 88a). Yūnus, thus, becomes a model of a man of prayer for all Muslims, and particularly for Muhammad. It is important to notice how the narrative of Yūnus ends with a didactic formula: "and this is how we deliver the believers" (v. 88b). Yūnus' prayer, therefore, plays a major role not only because of its occurrence in the other two narratives that speak of Yūnus, but because it becomes a typical daily prayer, or a "formulaic prayer," for all Muslims during the time of

distress, which grants a hearing from Allah, and thus serves as “an archetype for a penitent and saved person.”<sup>95</sup>

In summary, Yūnus’ thought reflects the skeptical attitude of the unbelievers towards Allah’s power to fulfil his threats declared by Muhammad. As Yūnus thought Allah has no power over him, the unbelievers also assumed Allah had no power to judge them. The declaration of the inimitable sovereignty of Allah and the self-declared confession by Yūnus from the darkness, however, reveals the opposite to this group of people, that is, Yūnus mistakenly underestimated the power of Allah, and his judgement is closer than what he thought. This group, thus, should reconsider the whole notion of questioning Muhammad in terms of his threat of Allah’s judgement (v. 1). On the other hand, Muhammad, like all believers, is invited to become like Yūnus in the midst of emotional and physical distress by calling upon Allah, trusting that the One who delivered Yūnus will deliver him and all the believers. This deliverance is a sign of Allah’s mercy towards his prophet Muhammad, as it was to Yūnus. As Allah showed his mercy to Yūnus, Job, Ishmael, Idris, and Dhū’l-Kifl, Muhammad will also experience the hand of the Most Merciful.

The chapter, moreover, closes with three affirmations claimed by the prophet, beginning with the imperative term “قل-قل”. The divine command to the prophet is to first affirm that the essence of the revelation claimed by him is monotheism, namely, Islam (v. 108). But if this message was rejected, the prophet then accomplished his task (v. 109). After this, the prophet states the obvious, that is, he does not know whether the Day of Allah’s judgement is near. Allah knows. The people, however, should think of the period of respite as a test from Allah to see whether the people

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<sup>95</sup> Koloska (“The Sign of Jonah,” 91) also states that, “The passage reveals a strong relation to the Jewish and Christian image of Jonah as known from liturgical traditions and from pictorial representations, but at the same time, Jonah is transformed into a more Qur’ānic figure due to increased inner-textual references and the solace of the believers (v. 88).”

may repent (vv. 109–111). The prophet finally calls upon Allah to judge between him and those who reject the message of the prophet since, “Most Gracious is the One Whose assistance should be sought against the blasphemies ye utter” (v. 112).

#### 2.3.4 The Belief of the People of Yūnus (10:98)

It is remarkable to note that though this Surah bears Yūnus’ name, it has only one verse that speaks of the people of Yūnus.<sup>96</sup> This makes our task unique, as we have to navigate through the whole chapter in order to understand the function of the narrative of Yūnus and his people. Though it is a single verse, it is a key to its structure and purpose. It stands in contrast to the other two prophetic narratives of Noah and Moses, and it functions as the climax of the surah. Johns, however, overstates the case as he views the narrative of Yūnus as a subtext that informs the chapter as a whole, as he states, “Nevertheless, the story of Jonah and the fact that his people believed is embedded in the sura as a sub-text, underpins it, and is a key to its structure. Once it is realized that the Jonah verse (Q. 10:98) is the climax of the sura, cues to this sub-text become apparent.”<sup>97</sup> It is one thing to see the example of the people of Yūnus as the climax of the surah and a key to its interpretation, and totally another to attempt, like Johns, to read the narrative of Yūnus into the whole surah. In the following analysis, however, we will be limited to sections and themes that serve our focus on the example of the people of Yūnus. The repetitive expression throughout the chapter, “they [Arabs, Jews, and Christians] say” and “you [Muhammad] say” (e.g., vv. 15, 16, 20, 38) also shows an argumentative characteristic (attitude) as a unique rhetorical feature of the Qur’an. Paying attention to this rhetorical feature helps the reader to

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<sup>96</sup> On the relationship between the surah and its name, see Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an,” 65–67.

<sup>97</sup> Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an,” 65.

identify the matters being addressed, the community(ies) that raised these matters, and how the Qur'an presents its own perspectives to such claims. This thus shows how the Qur'an was in dialogue with the surrounding communities regarding particular matters.

To begin, Surah Yūnus argumentatively deals with the rejection of the unbelievers of Muhammad and his message. It is indeed a response from Allah to a series of the unbelievers' accusations against the prophet and the Qur'an (vv. 2, 15, 20, 38). The rhetorical question at the beginning of the chapter reads, "Is it a matter of wonder to the people that we have sent our revelation to a man like them?" (v. 2), setting the tone and explaining the reason for what will be revealed next. Al-Sutti, in his book *أسباب النزول* (The Reason for Revelation), narrates the hadith of ibn Abbas to explain the reason for the revelation of this verse: Ibn Abbas reported, "When Allah sent Muhammad as a messenger (*Rasul*) the Arabs rejected him saying, "Allah is greater than to have a human being to be His messenger." Then Allah revealed the rhetorical question, "Is it a matter of wonder . . ." <sup>98</sup> The Qur'an responded to this claim by demonstrating how Allah, the Creator, made the heaven and the earth and He who has full authority, He is governing all things. These creation activities are a sign of Allah's existence, unity and power to those who fear Allah (vv. 3–6).

It seems, moreover, that there are those who reject the whole notion of the Day of the Resurrection, as it appears in the way in which they live.<sup>99</sup> The Qur'anic community is more interested in the "here and now" and they live their life

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<sup>98</sup> Al-Asutt, *The Reasons for the Revelation*, 147. Al-Wahdy (*the Reason for the Revelation of the Qur'an*, 275) also cites the same Hadith of Ibn Abbas to explain the reason of revelation of this chapter.

<sup>99</sup> The day of Resurrection is a major theme in the Qur'an. It is the Day when people will face judgement. It seems that the Day of Resurrection is always mentioned to remind people of their eternal destiny if they do not accept the message of the prophet. It seems as it has the tone of threat, and this may help people to "rethink" their rejection of Allah (v. 3). The question (and this is personal) is that why the Qur'an uses such threatening tone as it responses to Arabs?

accordingly: “Indeed, those who do not expect meeting us (on the Day of Reckoning), and are satisfied with the life of this world and feel secure, they are heedless of our signs” (vv. 6–7). It seems, however, as they sarcastically hasten the Day of Reckoning (v. 11), asking: “When is (the fulfillment of) this promise, if you were truthful?” (v. 48). This rhetorical question critiques the authenticity of Muhammad’s message as they wonder about the delay of Allah’s punishment, which Muhammad has promised. On the other hand, this calls into question the reason for the desire to hasten Allah’s punishment, wondering: would they really believe when Allah’s punishment comes to pass? (v. 51). This latter rhetorical question is essential as it contributes to our understanding of the story of the people of Yūnus, as whether they believed before or after Allah’s punishment. The prophet affirms that the promises of Allah’s punishment are genuine (vv. 53, 55). “Those who do not expect meeting” Allah, moreover, demand from Muhammad to “bring another Qur’an or to change it” (v. 15). Such a request is rejected since Muhammad cannot change the Qur’an as he just follows what was inspired to him (vv. 15, 64). There is, thus, an emphasis throughout the chapter on those skeptical opponents of Muhammad, those who deny the whole notion of meeting Allah on the Day of Resurrection. Those people are promised hell (v. 8), in the same way that Allah destroyed in the past those who rejected the messages of former prophets, for this is how Allah punishes the disbelievers (v. 13). On the other hand, we have those who believed in the prophet’s message and are promised heaven (v. 9). This thus paves the way to what comes later, that is, the comparison between the believers and non-believers in the prophetic narratives of Noah, Moses, and Yūnus.

Another argument raised by the Qur’anic community is that of requesting a sign from Mohammad similar to that of previous prophets (v. 20). Even though the

Qur'anic community has experienced Allah's signs and mercy, that is being rescued from crisis, they returned quickly to their evil ways and forgot the promises they made to Allah. They insist on disbelieving regardless of whether Allah fulfilled his promises to previous prophets (vv. 21–33). The allegations continue as the unbelievers claim that the prophet is the one who fabricated (created) the Qur'an (v. 38). The Qur'an uses the reason-logic argument to refute such claims. For example, if the unbelievers claim that Mohammad is the one who fabricated the Qur'an, the Qur'an challenges them to "bring a surah [chapter] like it" (v. 38). If they can, which is doubtful, then it is Muhammad who fabricated the Qur'an. But if they cannot, which is expected, then the Qur'an is inspired by Allah. A dialogue between Allah and Muhammad shifts to address the allegation of the Jews and Christians as "they are saying" that Allah gave birth to a son (v. 68). Those who allege such slander and spread such myths (lies) about the Creator will not prosper, though they may temporarily prosper, or appear to in this life, but they will eternally face severe punishment (v. 70).

The Qur'an then offers a series of prophetic stories as an example of how Allah previously punished those who rejected the message of the former prophets (Noah and Moses), but rewarded those who believed (Yūnus). The prophet is commanded to recite "واتل عليهم" those stories, starting with Noah. The story of Noah is usually included under the category of the stories of punishment. The reason for such reading, Bell states, is that "In the Qur'an the people of Noah are frequently referred to as having been destroyed for unbelief."<sup>100</sup> David Marshall, speaks of the purpose of these stories as follows: "It is to be noted that these stories depict a punishment inflicted by Allah in this world rather than in the afterlife . . . their

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<sup>100</sup> Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, 129.

primary purpose was to warn of a punishment from Allah that would fall upon the Meccan unbelievers if they did not repent and accept Muhammad's message."<sup>101</sup>

Abdel Haleem, however, argues against this notion as he states that, "A close reading of the Qur'anic accounts of the Noah story shows that this view of accounts of the prophet Noah and the Qur'anic approach to prophetic history is, in reality, divergent from that found in the actual text of the Qur'an."<sup>102</sup> Though Abdel Haleem was successfully able to challenge this notion as he studies various Qur'anic accounts of Noah, in other cases he fails. For example, in Abdel Haleem's analysis of Noah's narrative in Yūnus (10:71–73), he defines the main theme there to be "the prophet's challenge to the disbelievers, as is befitting the context of this passage within the surah."<sup>103</sup> Abdel Haleem, thus, misses the didactic formula at the end of the narrative, which functions as a comment at the end that contributes to our understanding of the main theme there. After the punishment of Noah's people was stated, it says, "See how was the punishment of those who were warned" (10:73). This didactic formula suggests that the purpose of the Noah's narrative in this context is to serve as a story of punishment to warn those who oppose Muhammad.

As Noah preached to his own people and reminded the people of the signs of Allah "تذكيري بآيات الله" they planned to cause harm to him (v. 71). Noah, however, submitted this situation to Allah, believing that Allah will save him (v. 72). As they insist to reject his message "فكذبوه", Allah saved Noah and those who were with him by the ark, but punished those who rejected Allah's signs by flood "كذبوا بآياتنا" (v. 73). The prophet, then, is invited to reflect on the way in which Allah punished those who rejected Noah's message, and this, on the one hand, should comfort the prophet, and

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<sup>101</sup> Marshall, "Punishment Stories," 318–20.

<sup>102</sup> Abdel-Haleem, "The Qur'anic Employment of the Story of Noah," 38.

<sup>103</sup> Abdel-Haleem, "The Qur'anic Employment of the Story of Noah," 47.



on the other hand, it is a warning and a threat to the unbelievers (vv. 71–73).<sup>104</sup> After Noah, prophets were sent to their own people with authentic signs to prove their calling, but they also were rejected (v. 74). Then the long narrative of Moses and Aaron follows, with a major focus on Pharaoh’s encounter with Moses.

It begins with the theme of rejected signs performed by Moses and Aaron in the court of Pharaoh and his people (v. 75). The arrogance of Pharaoh and his people led them to deny the Truth. Despite the fact that Moses and Aaron performed signs to prove the divine characteristics of Moses’ message, the people described those signs as “obvious magic-سحر مبين” (v. 76).<sup>105</sup> They, moreover, resist Moses’ message as they chose to follow the tradition of their forefathers (v. 78a). The nobles also accuse Moses of attempting to drive them out of the land (v. 78b). This shows the type of accusation the early Quranic community faced, and “can be typologically read to indicate growing tensions between the believers and certain elements within the Meccan socio-political elites.”<sup>106</sup> It is important to note that the description of Moses’ signs as “obvious magic” is the same term that the Qur’anic community used early (v. 2) to describe the Qur’an. By doing so, Pharaoh and his people function as a prefigure or a type to the Qur’anic community. Thus, Smith states:

The auditors of the narrative are situated as needing to make a conscious choice as to which character represents them typologically or categorically: either the magicians (uninformed pagans who, when faced with the truth, choose to submit), or the hard-hearted nobles, or Pharaoh (rejecting the truth when it is presented to them) . . . By choosing specifically the model of the development of the Children of Israel from a community bound in servitude to Pharaoh, who are liberated and eventually become a holy community devoted to the service and worship of the One Allah, the Qur’an appropriates such a discursive development for its own audience, casting them as the benighted masses who will be saved from bondage by adhering to the

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<sup>104</sup> Al Zuhayli, *Concise Interpretation*, 218.

<sup>105</sup> The nobles here are the ones who accused Moses. Such observation shows how the nobles of Muhammad’s community began to accuse him.

<sup>106</sup> Smith, “Moses and Pharaoh’s Magicians,” 76.

Prophetic instruction and trusting in the revelatory message presented.<sup>107</sup>

Few of Moses' offspring accepted his message, but the rest refused as they were afraid of Pharaoh (v. 83). Those who believed are encouraged to rely on Allah and His mercy (vv. 84–86). As Allah hears the prayer of Moses and Aaron against Pharaoh and his people—that to lose their wealth and to harden their hearts (v. 88)—they were brought under Allah's judgment of death in the sea while they were following the people of Israel. During the time of the drowning in the sea, the Qur'an reports Pharaoh's confession of belief in the Allah of the people of Israel: "He (Pharaoh) said: I believe that there is no Allah but the One who the people of Israel believe in, and we are Muslims. I was one of the disobedient and lost (lit. corrupters)" (v. 90). This confession of faith, however, will not benefit Pharaoh, nor will it save him from Allah's judgment. Allah, therefore, is not finished with Pharaoh yet; He will bring his body from the sea as a sign and a lesson before those who still ignore Allah's warning (v. 92). Pharaoh's illustration, thus, functions as a backdrop to the example of the people of Yūnus later in the surah.

It seems however that the challenge before Muhammad was not only his opponents, but a battle within himself about the message he received. Therefore, the dialogue between Allah and the prophet shifts to focus on the inner struggle of the prophet regarding "what was revealed to him" (v. 94). If the prophet was in doubt about what was revealed to him, he is encouraged to "ask those who read the Book (Jews and Christians)" before him (v. 94). Allah yet affirms to the prophet that what he has received is the Truth. The warning of the prophet to not deny the signs of Allah is also necessary lest he will be one of the losers (v. 95). The prophet therefore is

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<sup>107</sup> Smith, "Moses and Pharaoh's Magicians," 78–79.

neither to be like those who have doubted nor to be like those who denied the signs of Allah. Those unbelievers deserve what Allah has spoken against them, for they would not believe, even if Allah showed them all His signs, unless they see, like Pharaoh, the painful punishment (v. 97, 101).

On the contrary to the latter disputed groups of people, Noah's and Pharaoh's, is the idealistic example of the belief and deliverance of the people of Yūnus:

“Why was there not a township that believed and profited from its belief, except the people of Yūnus? When they believed, we removed from them the punishment of disgrace in the present life and We made them prosper for a while” (Yūnus 10:98).<sup>108</sup>

" فَلَوْلَا كَانَتْ قَرْيَةً آمَنَتْ فَتَنَفَعَهَا إِيمَانُهَا إِلَّا قَوْمَ يُونُسَ لَمَّا آمَنُوا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمْ عَذَابَ الْخِزْيِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَمَتَّعْنَاهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ " (يونس 98:10).

Indeed, the example of the people of Yūnus is unique since it functions as a model of the people of faith in contrast to those who refused to believe. What is unique about the faith of the people of Yūnus is that they believed before seeing the severe punishment of Allah. The faith of the people of Yūnus was thus unlike Pharaoh's who believed after seeing Allah's punishment (v. 90); it was rather a response to Allah's warning of punishment.<sup>109</sup> The Qur'an, according to Al-Qurtubi, presents the story of the people of Yūnus against the example of Pharaoh to show how the people of Yūnus believed before the punishment took place.<sup>110</sup> He cites the example of Pharaoh to argue that if the punishment took place, the people of Yūnus, like Pharaoh, would not benefit from their repentance. Al-Ṭabarī, however, proposes

<sup>108</sup> Reynolds (*The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, 129) has pointed out that the verse resembles the interpretation of the “sign of Jonah” in Matthew and Luke: “the Qur'an refers to the Jonah story in precisely the same way: to contrast the repentance of Jonah's people with the stubbornness of its audience.”

<sup>109</sup> Zuhayli, *Concise Interpretation*, 221.

<sup>110</sup> Al-Qurtubi on 10:98.

that the people of Yūnus benefited from their belief after the punishment took place. Thus, there were no people who benefited from their belief after Allah brought down His misery except the people of Yūnus.<sup>111</sup> The Qur'an thus portrays the people of Yūnus as a source of encouragement to the prophet and as a model for the Qur'anic community that they should follow.<sup>112</sup> Koloska states that,

The verse forms a climax within the sura because the Ninevites form an exception from the warned people who always turn their backs. They constitute an exemplar of another possible behavior than the attitude of the adherents of the prophet and his community . . . [Moreover] The people of Jonah serve as an example; they are a 'sign' (v. 97) in the sense that they confirm the truth of the message, but they do not serve as accusant on Judgment Day. The opposite is the case: they are spared punishment in this world, but they will be judged in the world to come. Thus the 'sign of Jonah' is a positive sign, stressing also Allah's forgiveness.<sup>113</sup>

Though the narrative of the people of Yūnus gives hope to the disappointed Muhammad, it helps him to realize how the history of the former prophets affirms the fact that while many rejected their message, few did accept it. Indeed, this simple fact corresponds with Allah's will, as it says: "if it was the will of the Lord, surely all those who are on the earth would have believed . . ." (v. 99). But since this is not the case, the prophet is encouraged to not act against the will of Allah, as the rhetorical question posed to Muhammad by Allah suggests: "would you compel the people in order that they become believers?" (v. 99). It is expected that the prophet will act in accordance to Allah's will, particularly when he knows that "it was not for a soul to believe except by the will (lit. permission) of Allah" (v. 100).

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<sup>111</sup> Al-Ṭabarī on 10:98.

<sup>112</sup> Tantawi on 10:98. Johns ("Jonah in the Qur'an," 66), however, wonders: "Is there perhaps concealed within this sura a yearning that this people of Muhammad might be as the people of Jonah, who after first rejecting their prophet, accepted him, and were spared the final punishment? There is still time for the Meccans to believe, and their faith to avail them."

<sup>113</sup> Koloska, "The Sign of Jonah," 92.

The surah concludes with a series of divine imperative instructions, “قل-*say*,” to Muhammad as he responds to the series of criticism that he faces throughout the surah. At first, Muhammad is inviting the disbelievers to meditate on Allah’s work in creation, though these creational signs and the warnings of the former prophets may not help those who do not have the desire to believe (v. 101). Second, in response to a question of whether the disbelievers are waiting to see the punishment similar to that of the previous generations, Muhammad is sarcastically encouraging the disbelievers to wait on Allah’s judgement as he too waits (v. 102). Third, if the people are in doubt of the religion Muhammad claims, he insists to not worship their gods but Allah (v. 104). Fourth, Muhammad affirms that what he brought is the truth from their Lord, but he acknowledges his role and gives them the freedom to choose: whoever believes only believes for himself, and whoever goes astray only goes astray for himself, and Muhammad is only a messenger (v. 108). This shows Muhammad’s growing awareness of his prophetic role. Finally, rather than focusing on whether people would believe, Muhammad is instructed to follow Allah’s revelation and to be patient until the Day of Judgement (v. 109).

## 2.4 Conclusion

Our analysis of the four Qur’anic accounts of Yūnus in their respective literary contexts shows that the overall socio-religious context, as reflected in the Qur’anic text, can be described as that of polemical hostile nature. The repetitive questions/criticisms raised by the Qur’anic community in each surah reveal the fact that common major issues were raised by the community related to the identity of Muhammad’s prophethood, his character and message: the rejection and refutation of the Qur’an, the description of signs as obvious magic, the denial of the whole notion

of the Day of Resurrection, the questioning of Muhammad's moral character and his description as a possessed poet, the fate of the unbelievers. The Qur'anic community adopted various strategies as they raised those questions: mocking of the prophet and the attempt to come to a common ground. The Qur'an reveals also the inner struggle and the feelings of Muhammad during this time. As Johns wonders in which sense Muhammad should be patient, he suggests that the reason that Muhammad was instructed to be patient is because of the "pain of rejection that Muhammad shares with Jonah."<sup>114</sup> This is not the only struggle, as it seems that Muhammad was "forcing" the people to believe in his message. Such a conclusion is drawn largely by Allah's rhetorical question: "would you compel the people in order that they become believers?" (v. 99).

In this socio-religious polemical environment the stories of the former prophets are narrated, and the narratives are thus closely related to this context. In other words, the narratives of the former prophets correspond thematically to the literary polemical sections. Therefore, the author of the Qur'an made conscious choices regarding which tradition, or part of tradition, to incorporate in each surah. Smith describes those choices as of narratological nature involving how each story is told, what elements are included, and which words are chosen. All of this reflects how the text is received by the nascent community.<sup>115</sup> Those conscious choices produced what Neuwirth calls, "the phenomenon of recurring narratives" in various forms, and contributes to the way in which the Qur'an retells those narratives in various contexts.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, it is hard to accept the description of these recurring narratives as mere arbitrary repetitions. Our analysis of Yūnus' four accounts in the Qur'an

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<sup>114</sup> Johns, "Jonah in the Qur'an," 67.

<sup>115</sup> Smith, "Moses and Pharaoh's Magicians," 68.

<sup>116</sup> Neuwirth, "Form and Structure," 261.

shows the opposite: each account has “a rhetorical function” within the surah and the Qur’an as a whole.<sup>117</sup> For example, the use of the term “نعمة-mercy,” at the beginning of Al-Qalam to affirm Muhammad’s unpossessed personality (68:2) and at the end to describe Yūnus’ redemptive experience, creates a “literary correspondence” between Muhammad and Yūnus as both experience Allah’s gracious act reaching them. The use of the term “يوم يبعثون- the Day of Resurrection” (37:144) to describe the final judgement of Yūnus if he had not repented echoes the whole argument related to the unbelievers’ denial of the Day of Resurrection that spread throughout Al-Sāffāt. This type of “thematic correspondence” shows how Yūnus functions as a warning to the Qur’anic community who questions the whole notion of the Day of Resurrection (37:16–7).

As the accounts of Yūnus are situated in the middle of a chain of former prophets, we have seen not only a literary and thematic correspondence with the wider context of the surah but also with the immediate literary context of other prophetic narratives. In Al-Anbiyā’, for example, the terms “نادى ربه- he called upon Allah” and “فاستجبنا له-Allah answered him” are shared with four other prophets: Noah (21:76), Job (21:83–84), Jonah (21:87–88) and Zechariah (21:89–90). The term “نجيناه-we saved him” shared with four other prophets: (نجيناه): Abraham (v. 71), Lot (v. 74), Noah (v. 76), and Jonah (v. 88). In Al-Sāffāt, it is hard to trace any literary correspondence between the narrative of Yūnus and other prophetic narratives, other than Yūnus, like Elias and Lot, is called as a prophet. The narrative of Yūnus, however, shares common themes with them. Like other prophets, Yūnus is the messenger of Allah (139), who called upon Him and his prayer was answered (v. 134), sent to a particular community (147), and the believers were rewarded (v. 148).

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<sup>117</sup> Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an,” 67.

It can, however, be observed that there is an implicit literary contrast between various prophetic narratives. In Yūnus, the narrative of the people of Yūnus functions in contrast to the other two prophetic narratives of Noah and Moses. There, while the people of Noah and Pharaoh and his elites refuse the message of the prophets, the people of Yūnus accepted his message. All these examples of literary features of the accounts of Yūnus shows how prophetic narratives in general, and Yūnus is particular, is purposely situated in their literary context and they function accordingly. It is clear thus that the repetition and variation of these narratives as told in the Qur'an serve a social and moral function for Muhammad and the earliest Qur'anic community. The Qur'an, thus, Reynolds states, "has no intention of proceeding through an organized or logical re-telling of well-structured narratives. Instead it brings those narratives to the audience's mind (or better, conscience) whenever such a move corresponds to the task of reminding and warning."<sup>118</sup> The question now is that how those narratives, and particularly the narratives of Yūnus, function in the life of Muhammad and the surrounding Qur'anic community?

For Muhammad, Torrey explains, the wonders and the experiences of the old heroes can inspire the new prophet. Mohamad was not only interested in the old stories personally, but he saw in the history of the past "the story of his own predecessors."<sup>119</sup> Torrey, moreover, states two more reasons for this parade of former prophets in the Qur'an:

First, the wish to give the new Arabian religion a clear and firm connection with the previous "religions of the Book," and especially with the Hebrew scriptures; and second, the equally important purpose which Mohammed had of showing to his country—men how the prophets had been received in the former time; and how the religion which they

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<sup>118</sup> Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, 238.

<sup>119</sup> Torrey, *Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 64.



preached (namely Islam) was carried on from age to age, while the successive generations of men who rejected it were punished.<sup>120</sup>

In this latter sense, the stories meant, as Reynolds explains, to serve as a warning to the non-believers and it shows them that Allah has the power to destroy them and therefore “the Quran has the Prophet aptly describe himself as a “warner” (e.g., Q 7:184; 11:12; 29:50).”<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, these stories are meant to exemplify moral behaviors as it informs the community of how to live and “to illustrate—again and again—how the true Believer acts in certain situations.”<sup>122</sup> The messengers, and Muhammad is one of them, are charged with “relating and with interpreting for their people the history of Allah’s dealing with humanity—the history of prophecy and the fate of the nations that have passed away before them.”<sup>123</sup>

The narratives of Yūnus are not different. Those narratives contribute to our understanding of the mission of Muhammad and the challenges he faced. They also show Muhammad’s response to those challenges and how Allah instructs him to deal with them.<sup>124</sup> In *Al-Sāffāt*, Yūnus, like other prophets, was saved by Allah and his prayer was answered. In the midst of this severe crisis, Allah cared for Yūnus after he had been thrown sick to a barren land (37:146) and thus “was given the means to recover his strength before he was sent to preach.”<sup>125</sup> In *Al-Qalam*, Muhammad sees in Yūnus an impatient prophet who should not be followed; a repented prophet whom Allah’s mercy reached as it will reach Muhammad; and a chosen righteous person. It seems that at the early stage of Muhammad’s life he saw in himself a righteous

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<sup>120</sup> Torrey, *Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 105. Torrey (*Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 106) also believes that Muhammad used the narratives of the former prophets in order to attract and gain a hearing from the surrounding Jewish community.

<sup>121</sup> Reynolds, “The Qur’an and Its Message,” 105.

<sup>122</sup> Reynolds, *The Qur’an and Its Biblical Subtext*, 238.

<sup>123</sup> Madigan, “Themes and Topics,” 79–96.

<sup>124</sup> Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an,” 69.

<sup>125</sup> Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an,” 68.

person, rather than a prophet, who enjoys Allah's merciful hand. In *Al-Anbiyā'*, Yūnus calls upon Allah, Allah hears his prayer, and saves Yūnus. In the same way, Muhammad in the midst of this severe criticism is encouraged to see in Yūnus a model of a man of prayer, whom Allah will hear and save. Once again, Yūnus is characterized as an impatient prophet, compared to Job, Ismael, and Dhū'l-Kifl, who experiences Allah's mercy as he was delivered from distress. In Yūnus, Muhammad also saw in the people of Yūnus a picture of the believing community he is longing for.

For the Qur'anic community, the narratives of Yūnus function as a model of how they should respond to Muhammad and his message. In *Al-Sāffāt*, Yūnus and his people function as a model of the repentant community. In the same way, the Qur'anic community should respond as a repentant community to the message of Muhammad. Otherwise, they will experience eternal punishment, as Yūnus would have experienced if he had not repented, in case they had rejected his message. In *Al-Anbiyā'*, Yūnus' line of thought, as he imagined that Allah has no power over him, reflects that of the unbelievers, as they thought that Muhammad's threat of judgement will have no effect. The example of Yūnus thus challenges the attitude of the Qur'anic community toward Muhammad's threat of judgement. As a man of prayer, Yūnus, however, encourages the new nascent community to trust in Allah as He hears their prayer and saves them. In Yūnus, the people of Yūnus provide an alternative response to Muhammad and his message to their current hostile attitude. Smith suggests that "the content, form, and function of the Qur'an's narrative stories should be viewed as integral portions of the development of the nascent community's identity."<sup>126</sup> If we are to follow Smith's suggestion, the new nascent community is faced with choices

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<sup>126</sup> Smith, "Moses and Pharaoh's Magicians," 69.

and decisions to make: whether they follow Muhammad and earn Allah's rewards or they continue in their unbelief and face Allah's judgement. This nascent community is invited to follow the example of the people of Yūnus rather than their current hostile attitude that is similar to that of Pharaoh and his people. As the community insists in following their own gods, they are invited to repent as Yūnus did, and thus Allah will hear their prayers and save them. They are mistaken if they follow Yūnus' line of thought, thinking that Allah's threat of judgement is empty. For Muhammad and his followers, they are promised deliverance from their grief and great disasters as He will hear their prayers when they call upon Him, and he will save them. Muhammad and the believers are instructed to be patient and to wait for the Day of Judgement.

If we to follow the chronological order of the surah, we can also trace the developing notions of prophethood among the early Qur'anic community. Koloska explains:

The story serves special purposes in the context of each sura in which it is mentioned as well as within various inter-qur'ānic contexts. Jonah develops from a blameworthy (Q 68) to a fully repenting person (Q 21). Whereas he was saved, at first, solely because of Allah's grace, he is later rescued because of his strong repentance. Thus, he evolves in the Qur'ān from a rather negative example (Q 68) into a quite positive figure (Q 21). This transformation reflects, moreover, the community's own re-examination, through its appropriation and exclusion of other interpretations, of the Jonah story in the course of its own development.<sup>127</sup>

It is important to not miss how the narratives of Yūnus reflect how Muhammad and the nascent community view Allah. In Al-Qalam, Allah's gracious character appears as He saves Yūnus, giving him a second chance to be one of the righteous. In Al-Anbiyā', the sovereignty of Allah is reflected in contrast to the negative line of Yūnus' thought regarding Allah as having no power over him. Allah is the one who hears the prayer of the repented Yūnus. Allah also is portrayed as the

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<sup>127</sup> Koloska, "The Sign of Jonah," 92.

Deliverer. In Al-Sāffāt, the merciful character of Allah appears as He responds to Yūnus' prayer. His mercy is also expressed in his care for the sick Yūnus. Finally, Allah is the one who rewards the faithful ones, and this is the case with the people of Yūnus.

As it can be seen, the narratives of Yūnus invite the comparison between Yūnus and his people, on the one hand, and Muhammad and his people on the other, recasting them as types of one another: As a prophetic figure of impatience, prayer, and repentance. The character of Yūnus and his people serve as a typological rendering in light of the life and circumstances of Muhammad. We can see in Yūnus' narratives how Muhammad and the Qur'anic community relive the experiences of Yūnus and his people. Yūnus and his people thus turn out to be the prefiguration of that of Muhammad and his community. Neuwirth observes how this hermeneutical feature of typology in Qur'anic narratives is familiar to that of the Bible: she states that, "It is little surprising to find a particular hermeneutic trait familiar from the Bible and especially the Gospels prominent again in Qur'anic narrative: typology. 'Types' are exemplary representations in scripture of more momentous events or more significant figures still expected to come."<sup>128</sup> In this sense, we can suggest that Muhammad functions as the antitype of Yūnus. Neuwirth, in her discussion of the narrative of Moses, explains how "the paradigm of typology at work" is different from that of the Bible as Muhammad did not come to fulfill a biblical promise. But she sees in the story of Moses, for example, *ta'dīq* (validation), "where the older tradition comes to confirm the new."<sup>129</sup> In the case of Yūnus, the paradigm of typology at work is that of imitation, where the type serves as antitype that invites to

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<sup>128</sup> Neuwirth, "Qur'an and History," 15.

<sup>129</sup> Neuwirth, "Qur'anic Studies," 9.

learn from the type. The type, as in our case, can function as a source of encouragement, a moral figure, and a guidance. Insofar as Yūnus becomes the example of an impatient figure that Muhammad should not follow, at the same time he is an example of prayerful and repented figure who Allah saves, a guidance of how Muhammad and the community should respond in the face of severe criticism, and a source of encouragement to the disappointed prophet, as the people of Yūnus believed his message. Those typological categories suit the Qur'anic use of the stories of the prophets as it says: "Everything We narrate to you of the history of the messengers is to strengthen your heart. The truth has come to you in this, and a lesson, and a reminder for the believer" (11:120); "In their stories is a lesson (moral) for those who possess intelligence. This is not a fabricated tale, but a validation to what came before it, and a detailed explanation of all things, and guidance, and mercy for people who believe" (12:111).

The didactic features of the narratives themselves, moreover, represent the Qur'anic prophetic narratives as a typological representation of the former prophets. We have seen in *Al-Qalam*, for example, how the narrative of Yūnus introduced an imperative phrase where Muhammad is instructed to be patient and to wait for the judgement of his Lord (68:48). In *Al-Anbiyā'*, the didactic formula, "and this is how we save the believers" (21:88), shows how Yūnus became a type of those who were saved by Allah in the past and functions as an example to Muhammad and his community. We can thus conclude, as Smith suggests in his comment on Moses and Pharaoh's magician's narrative, that,

It is clearly the case that many (if not all) of the Qur'anic prophetic narratives are typological re-presentations of prophetic history. They were meant to re-tell the stories of ancient prophets in such a way as to increase the faith and religiosity of the community. But they were also meant to legitimate and, as part of the political context, corroborate the political

reality and religious significance of Muhammad's mission and revelation.<sup>130</sup>

Thus, we can conclude that the Qur'anic allusion to the narratives of Yūnus is a typological interpretation of earlier accounts. This typological rendering of Yūnus narratives shows how Muhammad and the Qur'anic community received and interpreted Jonah's character to their context. The experience of Yūnus and his people becomes, or we can say reflects, the experience of Muhammad and his community.

As we conclude this chapter, the question then to be asked is this one: how does this understanding of the reception narrative of Yūnus in Islamic literature inform our own reading of the book of Jonah? In other words, this Qur'anic homiletic function of Yūnus must be taken into consideration as we move forward to develop a reading of the book of Jonah in the context of Islam. The following outline will serve this purpose.

*First, the use of the prophets in the Qur'an suggests that a biblical reading of Jonah should be homiletic and morally oriented.* As we have argued, the repetition and variation of these narratives as told in the Qur'an serve a social and moral function for the earliest Qur'anic community. The Qur'an is thus interested in former prophets morally, not historically. As we have seen, these prophetic narratives are narrated to strengthen the heart of the prophet, as a lesson and a guidance. Fred Donner explains the difference in the functionality of stories between the Old Testament and the Qur'an:

The purpose of stories in the Qur'an, then, is profoundly different from their purpose in the Old Testament; the latter uses stories to explain particular chapters in Israel's history, the former to illustrate- again and again-how the true Believer acts in certain situations. In line with this purpose, Qur'anic characters are portrayed as moral paradigms, emblematic of all who are good or evil. Moreover, as stories, they are not imbued with much, if any, development-which is why they can appear as

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<sup>130</sup> Smith, "Moses and Pharaoh's Magicians," 68.

detached fragments. In this sense, the Qur'an can be seen to be profoundly ahistorical; it is simply not concerned with history in the sense of development and change, either of the prophets or peoples before Muhammad, or of Muhammad himself, because in the Qur'anic view the identity of the community to which Muhammad was sent is not *historically* determined, but *morally* determined.<sup>131</sup>

Therefore, our analysis of the book of Jonah in the following chapter will mainly focus on the theological homiletical message of the book and its interpretation in the context of Islam. This, however, is not meant to ignore the historical context of the book of Jonah, but it rather helps in defining the kind of topics that will be addressed and discussed throughout the chapter. Major common themes will be discussed as we move forward: the prayer of Yūnus/Jonah, the deliverance of the Lord as it appears in both narratives, the repentance of Ninevites in light of the repentance of the people of Yūnus, Allah's gracious and merciful character as it appears in the gourd tree parable.

*Second, a biblical reading of Jonah should take seriously into consideration the textual literary differences between the biblical Jonah and the Qur'anic Yūnus, as they reflect a different theological perspective to that of the Bible.* Stephen Vicchio highlights some of those differences:

First 37:142 tells us that Jonah “had done acts worthy of blame,” a judgment not found in the Hebrew text. Secondly, the Arabic text suggests that if he had not been spewed up, Yūnus “certainly would have remained inside the fish till the Day of Resurrection.” In a third major difference between the Hebrew and Arabic accounts, the latter argues that the prophet ministers to “a hundred thousand men or more,” while the Hebrew text says: And I should not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals. (4:11).<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 84. For more on the Qur'an as homily, see Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its biblical Subtext*, 230–258.

<sup>132</sup> Vicchio, *Biblical Figures in Islamic Faith*, 68.

Though our own literary reading of the Qur'anic narratives of Yūnus showed how the Qur'anic text affirms the fact that Yūnus is a blameworthy figure, some of the classical *Mufasssirun*, nonetheless, are struggling to explain Yūnus' blameworthy act, as the concept of prophetic infallibility led them to defend the character of Yūnus when he, first, ran away and second his description as a guilty person, a comment that is missing from the biblical Yūnus. Engagement with such interpretations is necessary as well.

*Fourth, a biblical reading of Jonah should reread the biblical narrative of Jonah, rethinking the "silent sections" of the narratives in Islamic literature.* For example, Islamic literature is silent about the whole conversation between Jonah and Allah in Chapter 4, where Jonah reveals his understanding of the merciful and gracious character of Allah (4:2). The question that needs further examination in the following chapter is how one would interpret those "silent sections."



## CHAPTER 3: THE RECEPTION OF JONAH IN MATTHEW: THE SUFFERING SON OF MAN

In these next three chapters, we will examine the reception history of Jonah in Matthew and Luke. The thesis of these chapters is that in a dispute-judgement context, Matthew and Luke employ a Christological typological approach to the interpretation of the narrative of Jonah to present the person of Jesus as the suffering Son of Man who will rise and return in glory as a judge and preacher of a prophetic ministry of judgement. Thus, the life and ministry of Jesus is rooted in and seen in continuity with God's historical act revealed in the Old Testament (OT). This section is divided into three chapters. The first chapter will focus on the reception history of Jonah in Matthew, while the second will deal with Jonah in Luke. In both chapters, I begin by offering an overview of the literary structure and context of the passage in view. I then will conduct an exegetical analysis of the literary context of Matt 12:1–50 and Luke 11:14–54. The third chapter argues for a Christological typological reading of Jonah in Matthew and Luke and will also highlight some implications for the reading of Jonah in the context of Islam.

### 3.1 Literary Structure and Context

Many scholars have offered various suggestions to the Gospel of Matthew's structure, with the majority of scholars placing the text in the view of a long judgement/dispute discourse.<sup>1</sup> This is primarily due to a key distinctive characteristic of Matthew in

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<sup>1</sup> For a superb survey on the structure of Matthew, see Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, I–xiii. After a survey of various proposals, Hagner concludes that scholars offer no overall structure of the book. Gundry (*Matthew*, 11), moreover, came to the conclusion that the Gospel of Matthew is structurally mixed.

which his writing highlights “anti-Pharasaism,” or polemic and apologetics, in the interactions with Jews.<sup>2</sup> As Jesus’ ministry continues in Galilee (4:12–15:20), Jesus teaches his disciples about the persecution they will face, as he himself will face serious opposition from the religious Jewish leaders (Matt 10:24–25). The teaching on mission (Matt 10), moreover, “predicts rising opposition to the message of Jesus and the Twelve, which chaps. 11–12 illustrate both implicitly and explicitly. While Nolland observes how the conflict with the Pharisees is the unifying motif of chapter 12, Hagner’s view is that the tone of hostility dominates the whole chapter.<sup>3</sup> Turner, Gundry, Morris, and Blomberg, moreover, view 11:2—12:50 as a time of growing opposition to Jesus and his message.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.2 Exegetical Analysis of Matthew 12:1–50

The heightening of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees begins when they accuse Jesus and his disciples of not observing the Sabbath (12:1–14). After a short statement describing the setting (v. 1), the Pharisees formulate an accusation against the disciples that stems from their oral tradition—that plucking grain was one of the works which is forbidden on the Sabbath.<sup>5</sup> Jesus, first, appeals to Scripture as he defends the disciples and himself by referring to the story of David’s visit to Ahimelech (1 Sam 21:1–6). There, though David broke the law (Lev 24:5–9), he was blameless. Jesus then appeals to Num 28:9–10, where the priests were required to offer sacrifices on the Sabbath. Jesus judges the priests’ work on the Sabbath as guiltless. Jesus’ response, therefore, is intended to not just defend the disciples’

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<sup>2</sup> See Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 5; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 34.

<sup>3</sup> See Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 480; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 327.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Turner, *Matthew*, 8–10; Gundry, *Matthew*, 203; Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 272; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 165.

<sup>5</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 196; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 180–81.

behaviors, but rather to reveal “his very nature and authority which can transcend the law and make permissible for his disciples what once was forbidden.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus, moreover, recites Hos 6:6, to show God’s real concern for humanity: mercy. Jesus thus reveals, as Luz states, that “Mercy is the center of God’s will,” which he fulfills with his behavior.<sup>7</sup> In Jesus’ response two main themes will be taken up in the following debate: Jesus’ superiority over the temple (v. 6), and later Jonah (v. 41) and Solomon (v. 42), and Jesus’ sovereignty over the Sabbath (v. 8). As the Lord of the Sabbath, the Son of Man does not abolish the law, but has authority to interpret the law to show its real purpose: the law is for humanity (Mark 2:27), something which was clearly demonstrated by Jesus’ merciful acts.

After claiming his superiority and sovereignty, Jesus leaves and enters the “territory” of the Pharisees, that is “their” synagogue. One can hear a harsh tone in Matthew’s description of Jesus’ move entering “their” synagogue, in a sense of “them vs. us,” as if the synagogue belongs to them, not to the Jews, which might show also the authority of this religious group over the synagogue. This serves to heighten the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees. This controversy is made clear by Matthew’s explicit comment on the motivation behind the Pharisees’ question regarding healing on Sabbath: that “they might accuse him” (v. 10). This is made even more clear after the healing takes place by Matthew’s note: “the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him” (v. 14). Thus, we can agree with Luz’s definition of the genre of this pericope as “that of a controversy dialogue.”<sup>8</sup> The Pharisees take the initiative to start this controversy dialogue by asking whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath (v. 10). Jesus responds with a short parable that

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<sup>6</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 197. Luz (*Matthew 8–20*, 182), however, argues against a Christological interpretation of v. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 182.

<sup>8</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 186.

addresses a previously discussed dispute of saving an animal in danger on the Sabbath.<sup>9</sup> It seems from Jesus' second question, one which is rhetorical in nature, "how much more valuable is a human being than a sheep," that his answer is clear to his hearers. Jesus, clarifies his point even further by contrasting the value of human life compared to that of animals and stressing the importance of doing good on the Sabbath (v. 12). As the Lord of the Sabbath and the one who is "greater than" the temple, Jesus re-emphasizes a previous early real concern for showing mercy over sacrifice on the Sabbath. Though the controversy dialogue takes much of Matthew's attention, he reports briefly the healing miracle: Jesus' command, "stretch out your hand"; the man's obedience, "he stretched out"; and the healing, "and it was restored."<sup>10</sup>

While the Pharisees began to plan to take Jesus' life (12:14), the crowds, on the contrary, seem to take a different stance, "as many followed him" seeking healing (12:15). Matthew records Jesus' response to the Pharisees' threat in two ways: by Jesus's departure (v. 15) and by silence (v. 16). This withdrawal is far from being out of fear, nor out of a reservation from claiming injustice, as Jesus indeed came to proclaim justice (v. 18). Matthew explicitly interprets this silence as a characteristic of the Suffering Servant proclaimed by Isaiah and thus to fulfill Scripture (Isa 42:1–4). Therefore, as Childs claims, the emphasis of the passage in its Isaiah's context is "quite specific in nature," as it demonstrates "the servant's designation, his task, his approach, and his success." Childs states that,

[The Suffering Servant] is designated as God's elect in whom he delights and on whom his spirit resides. He will bring forth justice (*mišpāṭ*) to the nations who await his teaching (*tôrātô*). He will act unobtrusively in his dealing with those who are fragile and suffering.

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<sup>9</sup> On the discussion of the rescue of a sheep in Jewish religious circles, see Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 187; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 198.

<sup>10</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 188.

Finally, he will not fail or turn back until he has accomplished his mission.<sup>11</sup>

Here, this formula quotation suits the context of the Suffering Servant well, but this conclusion is against Luz's conclusion who state that the formula quotation "contains a whole series of statements about the 'servant' of God that go far beyond the context."<sup>12</sup> The "Suffering Servant" is chosen, beloved, and anointed by the Spirit (v. 18). Jesus, when he was later accused of performing exorcism by Beelzebul (v. 24), claims that it is "by the Spirit of God" that he casts out demons. Thus, Jesus the "Suffering Servant" is anointed by the Holy Spirit "to exercise that power" in exorcism.<sup>13</sup> The "Suffering Servant," moreover, will be sent to proclaim justice and in his name all people will find hope, but this will not be achieved by violence but rather through suffering and sacrifice. In verse 19, Matthew, as Blomberg states, "may also see here a rejection of the overtly revolutionary or Zealot perspectives of his day."<sup>14</sup> In verse 20, Matthew speaks figuratively about the gentleness of the "Suffering Servant." Thus, Matthew's depiction of Jesus's withdrawal/silence/gentleness (vv. 15–16, 19–20) functions to show the proper reaction of Jesus, "the Suffering Servant," in the face of the Pharisees' threat at this particular time of his ministry (v. 14).<sup>15</sup> In summary, the formula quotation suits Matthew's context well, as it highlights a fulfillment of Isaiah's "Suffering Servant" prophecy in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the "Suffering Servant," who proclaimed justice to the

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<sup>11</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 324.

<sup>12</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 188. See Neyrey ("The Thematic Use of Isaiah 42 in Matthew 12," 467) who, on the other hand, argues for a thematic use of this formula quotation in Matt 12.

<sup>13</sup> Neyrey, "The Thematic Use of Isaiah 42 in Matthew 12," 467.

<sup>14</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 200.

<sup>15</sup> It is important to remember that this is not the only way Jesus dealt with Pharisees' threats and accusations. As we have seen, Jesus went early to the Pharisees' synagogue and was willing to dialogue with them (v. 9), and also, later on in his ministry Jesus submitted himself to the will of God and went to Jerusalem to face the Pharisees' threat. Therefore, Jesus' withdrawal was, as Blomberg (*Matthew*, 200) states, "to avoid premature arrest and execution."

people and in whom all people find hope in His name, performs his role through a quiet and gentle prophetic ministry of proclamation, rather than violence.

Matthew then revisits Jesus' ministry of exorcism (see Matt 9:32–34), but this time he reports the controversy dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees regarding this matter. Matthew begins this section by introducing the scene: the crowds bring to Jesus a blind and mute person, whose afflictions are ascribed to demonic activities. Matthew then briefly tells us that this person was cured by Jesus, but in Matt 9:33 this healing took place through the casting out of a demon. After the demon leaves, this person is made anew: he can speak and see. Jesus' exorcism ministry, therefore, aims at "restoring the state of the world as God created it; they are signs and protests against the subjection of human life to the powers of evil."<sup>16</sup> In reaction to the healing of this blind person, the crowds amazingly wondered about Jesus' identity saying, "Can this be the Son of David?" (12:23). This question indicates that the crowds were thinking of Jesus in messianic terms, as the "Son of David" is clearly "a messianic title in Jewish thought."<sup>17</sup> In the person of the "Messiah", the Jews were awaiting "a promised figure who would perpetuate David's throne, *thereby pointing to Messiah's lineage and royal expectation of an eternal throne*"<sup>18</sup> Jesus' exorcism ministry, therefore, stirred up a messianic hope (v. 21) and the arrival of God's kingdom, which Jesus announced later in the same chapter (v. 28). The Pharisees, however, had a different opinion on the matter of exorcism, renewing the dispute between them and Jesus, by again ascribing this act of healing to Beelzebul (v. 24; see also Matt 9:34). By such a label, the Pharisees are describing Jesus as possessed by the ruler of

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<sup>16</sup> Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, 128.

<sup>17</sup> Chow, *The Sign of Jonah*, 56.

<sup>18</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 26. See also Blomberg, *Matthew*, 28.

demons who performs black magic.<sup>19</sup> According to Blomberg, this was a common label ascribed to Jesus by the Jews as early as the Christian era.<sup>20</sup>

Following the aforementioned pattern of Matthew's gospel, Jesus makes a series of arguments to refute their dispute. Key points related to our argument must be made from Jesus' words. First, it is impossible for the ruler of demons to cast out demons, otherwise his kingdom will be divided (12:25–32). The convincing logic behind Jesus' argument is displayed by two images: a kingdom and a city. Neither a kingdom nor a city will stand if a civil war takes place, for instance. Thus, by a simple analogy, Jesus has revealed a discrepancy in the argument of the Pharisees. Second, the Pharisees accuse their own practices by their accusation of Jesus (v. 27). According to Matthew, exorcism was practiced among the Pharisees, and by condemning Jesus' exorcism they condemn their own Jewish exorcists. Third, Jesus' exorcism, practiced through the given Spirit of God (v. 18), demonstrates the arrival of God's kingdom (12:28). Regardless of how one interprets the Greek word φθάνω ("has already arrived" or "has come near"), the conclusion is the same, God's kingdom is made manifest to the people and they have experienced its presence in the ministry of Jesus, who is inviting them to continue to experience it if they believe.<sup>21</sup> The announcement of the arrival of God's kingdom in the person of Jesus, moreover, can be recognized in a Messianic-Christological sense. Fourth, Jesus presents the parable of a house and a strongman. A more powerful "hero" is needed to enter the well-protected home. Therefore, by providing this short parable, Jesus interprets his

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<sup>19</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 203.

<sup>20</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 201.

<sup>21</sup> On the interpretation of the Greek word φθάνω, see Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 204; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 202.

own exorcism: “The exorcisms demonstrate that God in Christ is decisively defeating the devil.”<sup>22</sup>

After a well-developed argument, Matthew surprisingly presents Jesus as the person who heightens the scene and brings the dispute to its climax. Jesus now takes the initiative to call for a more serious encounter with the Pharisees as he asks the crowds and the Pharisees, though it seems that it is more directed at the Pharisees, to make a decision: Gather with Jesus or scatter against him. These two metaphors of “gathering” and “scattering” call to mind the analogies “of either shepherd or harvester.”<sup>23</sup> The notion of “gathering” could also have brought to memory an imagery common in the OT of the hope that “God will again gather his scattered people” (Ezek 34:11–16).<sup>24</sup> The audience, thus, is left with a decision to make: to follow Jesus or to be against him.

Matthew then comes to a final conclusion regarding ascribing the work of the Spirit to Beelzebul (vv. 31–37). This final conclusion is introduced by the word *διὰ τοῦτο* “therefore,” and with “a threatening character.”<sup>25</sup> In the first part of this conclusion (vv. 32–34), Jesus warns the Pharisees of blasphemy and its eternal judgement. This warning is intensified by the repetition of the phrase, “will not be forgiven,” and with the final statement of “either in this age or in the age to come.” This warning bears a harsh tone of eternal judgement for those who speak against the Spirit by ascribing the powerful work of the Spirit to Satan.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the Pharisees must be very careful as they will give account for every careless word they utter, and by those words they will be justified or judged, as the concluding words of this final

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<sup>22</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 203.

<sup>23</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 203.

<sup>24</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 205.

<sup>25</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 206.

<sup>26</sup> For a survey on the history of interpretation and the various suggestions of the interpretation of blasphemy, see Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 206.



section reveal (vv. 36–37). Jesus uses a familiar metaphor of fruit (Matt 7:16–17), revealing that false prophets should be known by their fruit (v. 33). Jesus then recalls John the Baptist’s description of the Pharisees as a “brood of vipers” (3:7), rhetorically questioning their essence. He also wonders how the Pharisees reveal good character on the outside, while they are evil on the inside. A well known saying explains Jesus’ speculation: the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart (v. 34). Another metaphor of “treasure” is employed to emphasize and develop further verse 34.<sup>27</sup> Here again, what people bring out of a treasure, depends on its quality: bad or good. In other words, what comes out of people’s mouth depends on their essence, whether it is bad or good. Therefore, the Pharisees must take Jesus’ word seriously, as they will be judged by their words, which reflect their essence. If they insist on ascribing the work of the Spirit through Jesus to Satan, they will commit blasphemy, which leads to eternal judgement.

### 3.3 The Sign of Jonah

This section continues with “a series of judgment words” as a response to the Pharisees and the scribes as they gather to continue their dispute with Jesus by demanding a *sign*.<sup>28</sup> Both groups recognize Jesus as a “teacher.” This title is used mainly by those who oppose Jesus, and one can find it in a similarly hostile context by the Pharisees and Herodians in 22:15–16 and the Sadducees in 22:23–24.<sup>29</sup> The term in this context suggests “a resistance to Jesus and his proclamation and refusal to follow in discipleship to him.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See Matt 6:19–21 where the metaphor of the treasure is used to compare between heavenly and earthly treasure.

<sup>28</sup> Luz, *Matthew*, 213.

<sup>29</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 200; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 364.

<sup>30</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 353. Turner (*Matthew*, 326) also agrees with Hagner on the fact that those who reference Jesus as “Teacher” they do not believe in him, and their tone may reveal sarcasm.

The request for a sign is very common, as it is legitimate in Jewish tradition to ask for a sign from the one who claims to be a prophet (Exod 4:1–9; Deut 18:20–22; 13:1–4). In biblical traditions, there are also other types of “signs,” e.g., the exodus and the prophetic sign-act. The latter, for example, was a regular part of the way prophets communicated their prophetic message.<sup>31</sup> As prophets attempt to effectively communicate their message, they intentionally employed nonverbal actions and familiar objects. Jeremiah and Ezekiel, for example, “are not presented within the narrative as *doing* sign acts, but as commanded to do them.”<sup>32</sup> The prophets themselves, however, can also be a sign. Ezekiel’s ministry is a good illustration, where the prophet himself is called “a sign to the community of Israel” (Ezek 4:3; 12:6, 12).<sup>33</sup> Linguistically speaking, Lewellen suggests that in many instances NT authors use a particular Greek word that corresponds with the Septuagint translators’ renderings of a particular Hebrew word. Here, for example, the Greek term σημεῖον (“sign”) is dominantly used for *’ôl*, and τέρας (“wonder”) for *môpēt*.<sup>34</sup> In the OT, Boda states, the word *môpēt* is used alongside the term *’ôl* “to refer to God’s visible signs before humanity.”<sup>35</sup> “The word, however,” Boda continues, “does not necessarily refer to miraculous demonstrations of divine power, for it is used in connection with the sign-act or object lessons of the prophets.”<sup>36</sup> Luz also suggests that “signs are not simply identical with miracles (δύναμις, τέρας). They can but do not have to be miracles.”<sup>37</sup> With these wider usages and understanding of the term “Sign” in the OT, we can continue our exegetical analysis where the request for a sign

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<sup>31</sup> Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 92.

<sup>32</sup> Mayfield, *Literary Structure and Setting in Ezekiel*, 147.

<sup>33</sup> See Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 65, 180–81; Luz, *Matthew*, 219.

<sup>34</sup> Lewellen, “Miracles,” *Lexham Theological Wordbook*.

<sup>35</sup> Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, 253.

<sup>36</sup> Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, 253; Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, 256. See for example Exod 7:3; Deut 13:2.

<sup>37</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 216.

could be miraculous in nature, but Jesus' response does not necessarily reflect the same thing.

Since this request is coming from the Pharisees and the scribes, it seems inauthentic, and obviously a challenge, since Jesus has already performed many. The Pharisees, for example, just witnessed Jesus' miraculous healing of a withered hand on the Sabbath (12:13), and their concern there was not about Jesus' ability to heal, but rather whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath (12:10). In Matt 16:1, we have a parallel request for a sign "from heaven," and there Matthew describes the purpose of their request is to "test" Jesus, and this is similar to Luke.<sup>38</sup> It seems that the request for a sign aims toward confirming Jesus' credibility in a miraculous way (Deut 13:1–2; 2 Kgs 20:8–11; John 6:30–31).<sup>39</sup> For Luz, this group is probably thinking "of a special sign that makes clear Jesus' identity."<sup>40</sup> Similar to Luz, Hagner also suggests that the request to see a sign "is not for an ordinary miracle but for a legitimating sign that would provide compelling proof" of Jesus' identity.<sup>41</sup> It is used, Hagner continues, elsewhere in Matt 16:4, 24:3 and 30, where it refers to the sign of the coming of the Son of Man, and finally in 26:48, the "sign" of Judas' kiss.<sup>42</sup> With all these attempts to define the meaning of the Pharisees' and scribes' request for a sign, it is more important to hear how Jesus responds to their request. What is obvious is that the sign request is subsequently a further indicator of Jesus' rejection. They have witnessed many miracles in the past and yet they insist not to believe. The root problems, as Blomberg states, are thus "unreceptivity and unbelief."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Luz (*Matthew 8–20*, 216) suggests that, "the expression [from heaven] is not technical. The immediate background is probably provided by the cosmic signs that apocalypticism expects for the end-time."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 510.

<sup>40</sup> Luz, *Matthew*, 216.

<sup>41</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 353.

<sup>42</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 353.

<sup>43</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 46.

Therefore, the response from Jesus bears the same harsh tone that we hear throughout this chapter. Jesus addresses the scribes and the Pharisees as an “evil and adulterous generation” (v. 39). The term “adulterous” is “metaphorical rather than literal, referring, as commonly in the OT, to an unfaithfulness in relation to God. Jerusalem is described as adulterous woman in Ez. 16:38; 23:45; Ho. 3:1.”<sup>44</sup> By such a description Jesus condemns his audience, and thus Matthew takes one step further toward the escalation of the conflict, “making Jesus’ following words a counter reply to the reply of the scribes and Pharisees.”<sup>45</sup> In this context, Jesus will thus give a sign which may lead to the judgement of this generation, and the only sign they will receive is that of the prophet Jonah.

Matthew elaborates further to elucidate Jesus’ obscure response to the sign-request by making a scriptural intertextual reference to LXX Jonah 2:1 in 12:40.<sup>46</sup> This elaboration is unique to Matthew, and therefore, scholars attempt to offer various suggestions to its source and “original” meaning. Scholars attempt to understand Matthew’s elaboration in light of its sources, that is Q and Luke. Knowles sees Matt 12:40 as an expansion of Q,<sup>47</sup> while Nolland reads Matthew’s quotation as “an interpretive development” in light of Luke 11:30.<sup>48</sup> Hagner, moreover, states that, “The analogy with Jonah may well have originally concerned only the preaching of

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<sup>44</sup> On the use of this term in the OT, see Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 354 and Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 510.

<sup>45</sup> Gundry, *Matthew*, 242.

<sup>46</sup> Luz, *Matthew*, 217. Hays (*Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 10) speaks of three terms that describe the scriptural intertextual reference in the Gospels: “quotation,” “allusion” and “echo.” Though a quotation is “introduced by a citation formula (e.g., “as it is written),” which is not the case here, it features, as Hays states, “verbatim reproduction of an extended chain of words, often a sentence or more, from the source text.” Here we see more than an allusion or an echo. Hays defines allusion as it usually “embeds several words from the precursor text, or it at least in some way explicitly mentions notable characters or events that signal the reader to make the intertextual connection,” and echo is understood to “involve the inclusion of only a word or phrase that evokes, for the alert reader, a reminiscence of an earlier text.”

<sup>47</sup> Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 242.

<sup>48</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 509.

Jesus and Jonah (as in Luke 11:30; cf. Luz) and then later have been elaborated by the post-resurrection Church to refer to the burial (and resurrection) of Jesus.”<sup>49</sup> Behind such suggestions is the assumption that Matthew was written after Luke. France argues against the notion that Matt 12:40 is a later “Christian midrash.” He considers Matthew 12:40 the most authentic.<sup>50</sup> Matt 12:40 and 41, France continues, provide two separate points of historical correspondence between Jesus and Jonah: the ‘imprisonment’ of both men and the preaching of repentance.<sup>51</sup>

Others attempt to understand the meaning of the sign by appealing to the psalm of Jonah 2 as the background of Matthew’s text. Rudman sees in the psalm “a further interpretive link between the OT and the NT passage.”<sup>52</sup> For Rudman, the imagery of death provided in the psalm links “Jonah’s marine adventure and the Son of Man’s death.”<sup>53</sup> With this understanding of the psalm, Rudman argues that the focus of Matthew is more on “the shared experience of Jesus and Jonah when they descend into the realm of chaos and emerge later in accordance with the will of the Creator.”<sup>54</sup> Keener, moreover, examines more the wider biblical use of the imagery of being engulfed by water and its relation to death in Sheol, suggesting that engulfing by water and Sheol represents a place of chaos, which is seen as the opposite of creation and thus it is against God’s order and the will of God. By using the chaos imagery, the psalm views Jonah’s experience as an experience of chaos’ power taking over Jonah’s life, while at the end the will of the Creator has the final say. Andrews also sees in the Psalm “the obvious antecedents” of the meaning of the sign. By using the story of Jonah, “Jesus was describing himself as one who must suffer, but that he

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<sup>49</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 354.

<sup>50</sup> France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 80–82.

<sup>51</sup> France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 45.

<sup>52</sup> Rudman, “The Sign of Jonah,” 326.

<sup>53</sup> Rudman, “The Sign of Jonah,” 326.

<sup>54</sup> Rudman, “The Sign of Jonah,” 328.

was depending upon his Father to rescue him from his descent into death.”<sup>55</sup> But he also assumes the relationship between Matt 12:1-13, where he identifies Jesus as “God’s ‘servant’ who prophesied in Isa 42.”<sup>56</sup> Based on Jonah 2 and Isa 42, Andrews comes to the conclusion that “the sign is described in terms of the suffering rather than rescue.”<sup>57</sup> While Andrews emphasizes the theme of suffering, others have argued more for the theme of the resurrection.<sup>58</sup> This latter argument is partially based on the assumption that resurrection is what the original audience of Matthew would have heard and thought, since they knew that after three days in the belly of the fish God intervened and appointed the fish to spit Jonah out. Indeed, Matthew’s scriptural intertextual reference to Jonah must first be read in light of its current literary context, taking into consideration verse 41, where there is another correspondence between Jesus and the preaching of Jonah. Thus, Matthew recalls a historical event from the memory of his audience by appealing to their Scripture, particularly to the book of Jonah. Though one can argue that Jonah’s stay in the belly of the fish was the most memorable event during the time of Jonah, it is obvious that Jonah’s mission to the Ninevites had a special place as well.

Matthew, therefore, creates, first, a particular correspondence between Jonah’s three days and three nights’ experience (a period that presents Jonah’s suffering, death, and salvation) and the Son of Man’s three days and three nights’ experience, a (period that presents also Jesus’ suffering, death, and salvation). By doing so, Matthew attempts to create, as Rudman suggests, “the experiential parallel” between Jonah and Jesus.”<sup>59</sup> In order to understand this “experiential parallel, one should keep

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<sup>55</sup> Andrews, “The Sign of Jonah,” 105.

<sup>56</sup> Andrews, “The Sign of Jonah,” 107.

<sup>57</sup> Andrews, “The Sign of Jonah,” 108.

<sup>58</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 326. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 44.

<sup>59</sup> Rudman, “The Sign of Jonah,” 325.

an eye on the re-called event of Jonah 2 and the other eye on the context of Matt 12:40. Back to Jonah 2, the theme of death is vividly described. The psalm opens with a summary of a personal testimony of an answered prayer from the depth of adversity, that is the belly of Sheol. Simon notices that Sheol here is personified as having a belly; elsewhere in the Bible we find that its mouth gapes to swallow the lawless (Isa 5:14).<sup>60</sup> By doing so, Jonah considers “being in the belly of the fish” analogous to “Sheol,” a place where all the dead descend. For Jonah, the belly of the fish is his own grave. Jonah thus suffers as he attempts to escape proclaiming Gods’ judgement against Nineveh. Parallel to Jonah, the Son of Man will be in “the heart of the earth,” and thus Jesus speaks about his own death. In its current context, and by the use of the term “the Son of Man” we can interpret this death as a sign of the suffering Son of Man.

The term “the Son of Man” is central to Matthew’s view of Jesus. It is the second major title used by Jesus after the Christological title “the Son of God.” Scholars speak of three major usages of the term “the Son of Man” in Matthew: the human Jesus, the suffering servant, and the exalted and glorious figure of Dan 7:13–14.<sup>61</sup> Turner also speaks of Matthew’s use of the term, which occurs thirty times in his Gospel, with three primary nuances: Jesus’ present power and authority, Jesus as the glorious coming king, and Jesus’ suffering and humility.<sup>62</sup> For Wilkins,

the title *Son of Man* may be the most significant to get at Jesus’ clarification of his self-identity . . . [It] is for Jesus a convenient vehicle to convey his messianic identity . . . The Son of Man is the humble Servant, who has come to forgive sins of common sinners in his earthly ministry (8:20; 9:6; 11:19; 12:8; 12:32; 12:40). The Son of Man is the Suffering Servant, whose atoning death and resurrection will redeem

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<sup>60</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 19.

<sup>61</sup> See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 28; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 219; Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 147–57; Luz, *Matthew* 8–20.

<sup>62</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 36.

his people (16:13, 27–28; 17:9, 12, 22; 20:18, 28; 26:2, 24, 45). The Son of Man is the glorious King and Judge, who will return to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth (10:23; 13:37, 41; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:64).<sup>63</sup>

There is, however, an overlapping between those categories, and Matt 12:40 is a case of this type of overlapping. As Schreiner explains, “the suffering of the Son of Man overlaps with his future triumph, for he will not only suffer but also be raised from the dead (see also Matt 17:9; Mark 9:9). We see the same phenomenon in the saying about Jonah (Matt 12:40; Luke 11:30).”<sup>64</sup>

The term “the Son of Man” occurs here more in the context of suffering and judgement. The Son of Man will suffer through his death. From Jonah’s point of view, and maybe many other Jewish people, the period in the belly of the fish is that of suffering, but it is also a period of salvation.<sup>65</sup> The psalm, as we will discuss in more detail in chapter 3 of this study, is a thanksgiving psalm (Jonah 2:9) for the salvation that comes from the Lord. In Jonah 2:6, Jonah praises God for bringing his life from the pit, and declaring with thanksgiving that, “deliverance belongs to the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). God’s sign to this “evil and adulterous” generation is thus presented as Jesus’ suffering death and salvation (resurrection).

In light of understanding the use of the term “Son of Man” in its eschatological-judgement sense, Matthew continues with this theme by the

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<sup>63</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 27–28. Blomberg (*Matthew*, 28), however, argues that Matthew prefers the description of Jesus as the Son of Man as the glorious King and Judge.

<sup>64</sup> Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 67. On the conversation on whether those sayings are authentic, that it is Jesus’ historical words, see Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 223. Our starting point here is that we are reading Matthew and Luke in their final form, considering all the sayings that are attributed to Jesus. Like Jonah, Schreiner continues that the Son of Man can be rescued from death. One here can quote Schreiner (*New Testament Theology*, 225), who states that, “my task in this work is to explicate what the Gospels themselves say, and clearly the term ‘Son of Man’ refers to Jesus himself and functions as a title.”

<sup>65</sup> The other issue raised in this discussion is that Jonah did not die while in the sea, while Jesus did. Keener (*Matthew*, 367), speaks of the sign the seekers would be given is “Jonah’s restoration after three days on the edge of death.” Harrington (*The Gospel of Matthew*, 188) also speaks of “apparent” death.



announcement of the judgement of this generation. In order to accomplish his purpose, Matthew recalls two OT gentile figures: The Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba. While there is parallel correspondence between Jesus and Jonah, Matthew here creates contrast between this generation and the Ninevites-Queen of Sheba. This contrast is shocking to the eyes of the Pharisees and scribes as they picture the gentile Ninevites and Queen of Sheba on the seat of the judgment at the last day. According to Jewish expectations, it is the chosen people who will judge the gentile, not the reverse, but the picture here presents “this generation sit[ting] in defendant’s chair and [being] condemned.”<sup>66</sup> The qualification of the Ninevites to undertake this task is their positive response to Jonah’s preaching. It is hard, however, to argue that the Ninevites accepted Jonah’s message on the basis of their knowledge of his deliverance, as France states: “Jonah was a ‘sign’ to the Ninevites in that he appeared as one delivered from death.”<sup>67</sup> Nothing indeed in the book of Jonah supports such a hypothesis. France’s suggestion is a good example where scholars believe that Matthew’s reference to Jonah in verses 40 and 41 is the same. Here, Matthew recalls another reference to the book of Jonah, Jonah’s prophetic ministry to the Ninevites. Matthew, moreover, is more interested here in the Ninevites as this is the main theme of this verse. Finally, Matthew, as we have mentioned above, creates a contrast between “this generation” and the Ninevites: while the gentiles heard the prophetic message of Jonah and repented, this generation will be judged because it rejected the prophetic message of Jesus. One, however, cannot ignore the parallel between Jonah and Jesus who is greater than Jonah. Both provide a prophetic ministry of preaching,

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<sup>66</sup> Luz, *Matthew*, 220.

<sup>67</sup> France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 44.

and this is similar to Luke 11:30, but Matthew gives Jonah the title of “prophet”, and thus stresses the prophetic identity of both Jonah and Jesus.

The counsel of judgement will also include the Queen of Sheba, another gentile figure who will judge this generation. Here we can see the exact parallel between verses 40 and 41 in both form and content: the rise of a gentile at the judgement, their qualifications, the announcement of judgement, and the presence of someone greater. Again, the qualification of the Queen is that she came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. But the Jewish audience, again, have someone who is “greater than Solomon,”<sup>68</sup> and yet reject him. Blomberg precisely summarizes:

The fate of Jesus’ contemporaries proves all the more tragic and ironic because the Gentiles in Jonah’s and Solomon’s time believed after hearing God’s “lesser” spokesmen, while ‘this generation’ refused to believe even after hearing ‘one greater’ (vv. 41–42). Matthew has now shown Jesus as greater than the priestly cult, prophets like Jonah, and kings like David and Solomon (cf. 12:3–8).<sup>69</sup>

We can assume that the scribes and Pharisees caught the message: the repentance of this “evil and adulterous generation” is the only anticipated response, particularly when they have something greater than Jonah and Solomon in their midst. This means that if the Ninevites accepted the message of Jonah the prophet, this “evil generation” then should take advantage of the opportunity of having Jesus himself as the one who came first and foremost to Israel.<sup>70</sup> The key point, as Nolland explains, is that “Jesus’ generation has not repented at his preaching, and this is despite the fact

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<sup>68</sup> “Greater than Jonah”: Matthew stresses the prophetic identity of both Jonah and Jesus, and their common suffering. It is an experience of death and at least near death. According to Edwards, “Both Jonah and Jesus suffer for the good of God’s work, on behalf of Israel and for the Gentile.” [CITATION]. Jesus exceeds Solomon’s wisdom; that “the climactic revelation of God’s wisdom is found in him” (Grindheim, *Christology in the Synoptic Gospels*, 111). “Like God’s wisdom, he transcends history, reveals God’s will, and communicates with God’s people” (Grindheim, *Christology in the Synoptic Gospels*, 114).

<sup>69</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 207.

<sup>70</sup> The mention of the Ninevites, and the Queen of Sheba later, as Luz (*Matthew*, 220) observes, may offer a double “signal” to the church’s future realities and mission after Easter.

that . . . they are experiencing something greater than what was available to the Ninevites.”<sup>71</sup>

### 3.4 A Parable of Warfare (12:43–45)

Jesus now returns to the debate on exorcism that he began earlier with a parable of warfare (vv. 43–45). This parable addresses “this evil generation” (v. 45), and it continues with the theme of judgment. In this judgement discourse, the parable aims to demonstrate the severe and final consequences of “the hardened unbelief” of this evil generation.<sup>72</sup> On the one hand, the religious leaders earlier had accused Jesus of being “under” Satan’s power as he practiced exorcism. Jesus, on the contrary, now reveals the fact that it is this “evil generation” who is indeed under the power of Satan. The parable begins by showing how demons operate. Demons “come out” of a person through an exorcism to seek “rest.” But they function best in “an embodied state.” Therefore, as demons persist to have ownership of the entire person, they come back bringing “with [them] seven other spirits more wicked than [themselves]” (v. 45). “The number seven,” Wilkins explains, “is linked in Scripture with completion, fulfillment, and perfection. Here it may point to the completeness of demon-possession once the demon returns.”<sup>73</sup> The parable continues with a strong warning of the final state of this person “and the final condition of this man is worse than the first.” Addressing this “evil generation” (v. 45), this parable thus draws a parallel between the final stage of the possessed person and the people of Israel. If the latter persists in rejecting Jesus the Messiah and continues to work alongside Satan against the presence of God’s kingdom, their final judgment will be worse than before the

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<sup>71</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 512.

<sup>72</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 327.

<sup>73</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 453.

coming of Jesus. We can thus see in the final judgement day a tragic picture and an ironic twist: The Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba on the judgement seats, while the “chosen” people of God, Israel, under the power of Satan in the judging court. By this point, the differences between Jesus’ teaching and the convictions of the religious leaders of Israel is beyond question: If gentiles will judge the “chosen” people of God and their judgement is indeed severe, the question must be asked, “who is the true family of God?”

### **3.5 Jesus’ True Family (12:46–50)**

While Jesus was still in conversation with the crowds and their religious leaders, Matthew moves to discuss a real life situation where Jesus’ family appears on the scene. Someone from the crowds, however, informs Jesus of his family’s request to speak to him (v. 47). While Matthew does not tell us the reason of this “family conversation,” it seems also that his family did not believe in him, and in few occasions in they actually opposed him (John 7:5). Mark, moreover, tells us that Jesus’ family tried to seize him, claiming that he was out of his mind (Mark 3:20–21). The family scene thus brings the hostile discourse to its climax by showing that it was not only the scribes and Pharisees who opposed Jesus, but his family too. The purpose of this transition is to show a striking contrast between those who oppose Jesus (the crowd and the religious leaders) and the those who responded positively (the disciples). Jesus takes advantage of this family’s request to make a point. He makes his point “by means of a question (v. 48), an answer (v. 49), and an explanation (v. 50).”<sup>74</sup> The question, “who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”, addresses the issue under discussion. Jesus answers the crowd with the act of stretching out his arms

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<sup>74</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 329.

around his disciples, stating that, “Here are my mother and my brother.” The explanation begins with the term “Whoever,” which introduces a new meaning of what it means to be a member of the heavenly spiritual family. The door now is open not just to the Jews, like before, but also to all who walk in the ways of the Lord, those who are willing to obey the will of God by following and serving the Master (12:50). This proclamation of the Gospel of the kingdom has various effects on Jesus audience: The crowds who follow the Master from afar need to examine their desire whether they want to become members of the family of God and become followers of the Master. The religious leaders will remain “outsiders” if they continue to reject the Master. The disciples, thus, became the true family, and this may comfort them in the middle of severe opposition facing their Master.<sup>75</sup>

### 3.6 Summary

Our analysis of Matt 12:39–42 shows that it is set within a long dispute-judgement discourse, where Jesus faces serious opposition from the religious leaders of Israel. This opposition took different forms and shapes. It began with an accusation of not observing the Sabbath as the disciples began to pluck heads of grain and ate (v. 1), and whether healing can take place on the Sabbath. Matthew makes explicit the motivation for the latter question of healing on the Sabbath, namely to accuse Jesus (v. 10). Matthew, moreover, reveals the future plan of the Pharisees toward Jesus after the healing of the man with a withered hand, that is to take his life (v. 14). With such explicit description of the Pharisees’ opposition toward Jesus, expressed by Matthew in a form of polemical-controversy dialogues, Matt 12:1–14 shows the heightened controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees.

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<sup>75</sup> Gundry, *Matthew*, 250.

As we will discuss later, the issue of Jesus' identity is central to Matthew. But for now, Matthew reveals Jesus's superiority over the temple (v. 6), Jonah (v. 41), Solomon (v. 42); The Son of Man's sovereignty over the Sabbath (v. 8); and that he is the silent Suffering Servant (vv. 18–21; Isa 42:1–4). As Jesus continues to perform miracles, moreover, the question of Jesus' identity is raised by the crowd, by wondering whether Jesus is the Son of David (v. 23). The Pharisees, on the other hand, raise more suspicions about the identity of Jesus: He is not the Son of David, but a demon possessed person (v. 24), and later that Jesus is just a teacher. With formal description, Matthew explains the division between Jesus and the Pharisees is made clear (v. 30), and Jesus then begins to announce judgement and condemnation against anyone who speaks against the Spirit, that is blasphemy (vv. 36–37).

While Matthew continues his judgement-dispute discourse, the Pharisees *and* scribes request to see a “sign.” The request is not authentic, but a legitimate one that aims toward confirming Jesus own credibility in a miraculous way, again a question of identity. With its wider usages in the OT, the term “sign” does not necessary mean only a miraculous sign. Jesus' response promises a sign that may lead to the judgement of this generation, that is the sign of Jonah. Matthew's unique elaboration provides further light on what Jesus meant by creating a parallel-correspondence between Jonah's “three days and three nights” experience in the fish and Jesus' “three days and three nights” experience in the tomb. While some scholars attempt to understand this elaboration in light of Matthew's sources, that is Q and Luke, others appealed to the psalm in Jonah 2. Since Matthew recalls an event from the history of Israel to create a correlation between Jonah and Jesus, we suggest a reading that takes into consideration the entire book of Jonah, particularly Jonah 2 and 3:4–10, and the literary context of the text. Such a reading leads to the conclusion that Matthew

creates a correlation between Jonah and the Son of Man in terms of their experiential suffering and death. The use of the term “Son of Man” as the suffering servant in Matthew supports such an interpretation. However, it is hard to not hear the notion of resurrection, particularly with salvation as a major theme in Jonah 2. The belly of the fish thus is not only Sheol, a place of death, but also a means of salvation. This, however, is more in terms of the sign of Jonah than Jesus’ death and resurrection. There is an element of judgement. As Jesus refuses to offer a miraculous sign, the sign of Jonah will be rejected and it will bring judgement on this evil and adulterous generation. The pericope is loaded with judgement terminology through which Matthew recalls two gentile examples in Israel’s history to rebuke this generation and to announce its judgement. Matthew follows the same pattern in both cases: a gentile on the seat of judgement (a picture opposite to the OT expectations), their qualification (the Ninevites repented and the Queen heard the wisdom of Solomon), the announcement of judgment (this evil generation will be condemned), and the presence of someone greater than Jonah and Solomon. Regarding Jonah, Matthew explicitly identifies him as a prophet of proclamation and declares Jesus as greater than him. Both Jonah and Jesus have a prophetic ministry of preaching, though the latter is greater. The Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba function as contrary examples: where the Ninevites and the Queen repented, this generation did not. The rejection of the Son of Man’s life and ministry will bring judgement on this generation, and it is worse than before the coming of Christ (vv. 43–45). Those who will obey the will of God, on the other hand, are the true family of God (vv. 46–50).

Finally, our analysis of the Gospel of Matthew shows that the life and ministry of Jesus is clearly rooted in the Scripture of Matthew’s Jewish audience. Matthew 12:1–50 is loaded with the following elements: 1) OT terminology and titles (Son of

David, Son of Man, the Suffering Servant); 2) OT echoes and allusions (e.g., the notion of gathering and scattering in Ezekiel); 3) OT fulfillment quotations (Isa 42:1–4); and 4) OT figures (David, Solomon, the Queen of Sheba, the Ninevites and Jonah). While Matthew's use of OT Scripture will be discussed in the third section of this chapter, with particular emphasis on Jonah, let us now turn to examine how Luke uses the narrative of Jonah.



## CHAPTER 4: THE RECEPTION OF JONAH IN LUKE: THE PROPHETIC MINISTRY OF PREACHING OF THE SON OF MAN

### 4.1 Literary Context (Luke 11:14–54)

Our analysis of the text in view (Luke 11:29–32) is also placed in the immediate literary context of a dispute-judgement discourse (Luke 11:14–54). Though Luke 11:14 marks the beginning of a new section and a new theme, Luke continues here the motif of the journey to Jerusalem started in 9:51: that the Son of Man will suffer and be rejected before he will be glorified. This motif, however, was predicted even earlier by Jesus himself (Luke 9:21–22). As we will see, Luke 11:14–54 highlights a new development of this theme. Here Jesus will discuss a variety of controversial issues with the audience, e.g. exorcism, and the concluding statements (vv. 53–54) mark the climax of the growing hostilities of the scribes and the Pharisees.<sup>1</sup> Luke, thus, attempts to stress that “rejection is a part of the journey theme and that it is a key, consistent part of Jesus’ ministry.”<sup>2</sup>

Luke 11:14–32 is parallel to Matt 12:22–50, where Luke shares with Matthew the incident of an exorcism performed by Jesus, the parable of the unclean spirit, and the sign of Jonah, but Luke presents a different order of the material, a matter that we will discuss later in its proper place. Luke, moreover, records the account of a woman praising Jesus (Luke 11:27–28) in correspondence with the material of Jesus’ family (Matthew 12:46–50). Since our purpose is to understand Luke in its own terms, we will not conduct an extensive exegetical analysis of the shared material (Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> See Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 635; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 470.

<sup>2</sup> Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1087.

exorcism and the unclean spirit) but only of the text under discussion (Luke 11:29–32). We, nonetheless, will comment on the shared materials between Matthew and Luke when it serves our purpose. More exegetical attention will be paid to the praise of the woman (vv. 27–28), the parable of the lamp (vv. 33–36), and the woes against the Pharisees and the scribes (vv. 37–54).

#### 4.2 Jesus' Exorcism (Luke 11:14–26)

As Jesus continues his ministry, Luke reports briefly, in a very intense style, the incident of Jesus' exorcism (v. 14). The miraculous act of healing the mute person generated the "awe moment" from the crowd. But this amazement is also associated with two other negative responses, which provide a setting for the following disputes. The first response questions the source of Jesus' power to exorcise (v. 15) and the second demands a sign to test him (v. 16).<sup>3</sup> The former is a response more of accusation, directed, "not against the effect of the work of Jesus, but against the source of his power," while the latter challenge is implied in the demand for a legitimate sign to "authenticate his message."<sup>4</sup> By questioning Jesus' source of power, the audience seems to have thought that Jesus might be no more than "an agent of the Evil One's deceitful miracles."<sup>5</sup> The name of Beelzebul is "originally the name of a Canaanite god [the name means 'Ba'al, the prince' or 'Ba'al of the Exalted Abode'], it came, after these gods were identified with the demons, to be used for the prince of the demons, Satan himself."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On the use of signs to validate Jesus' prophethood see our comments above on Matt 12.

<sup>4</sup> Chow, *The Sign of Jonah*, 106, 112. See also Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 637.

<sup>5</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 643.

<sup>6</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 643. See also Bovon, *Luke 2*, 117–18. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 470, 472.

Jesus will later respond to their demand for a sign (vv. 29–32), but first answers their the question about exorcism through parables: the divided household (vv. 17–21), the strong man (vv. 21–23), and the unclean spirit (vv. 24–26). The first parable makes two solid arguments. Jesus, first, questions the logic of their accusation by stating the obvious, that every kingdom is divided against itself will be destroyed (v. 17). The same principle is applied to Satan’s kingdom, and therefore if Jesus’ exorcism is attributed to Satan, how will his kingdom stand? Jesus, second, questions the source of all other Jewish’s exorcists (v. 19). From Jesus’s question one can conclude that exorcism was practiced by other contemporary Jewish exorcists (Mark 9:38; Acts 19:13–14). Ironically, Jesus “returns the favor” to the crowd. In other words, if the crowd desires to judge Jesus’ exorcism, they must judge their own exorcising activities first. Here we can see how Jesus’ response implicitly contributes to the theme of judgement of this generation and their activities.

Jesus then shifts the conversation to offer his own interpretation on exorcism as an alternative to the crowds’ own interpretation. Jesus affirms that the act of exorcism is exercised by the “finger of God,” as compared with the Holy Spirit in Matt 12:28, and it displays the arrival of God’s kingdom (v. 20).<sup>7</sup> The expression “finger of God” appears a few times in the Hebrew Scriptures: Exod 8:15; 31:18; and Deut 9:10. In the plural (cf. Ps 8:4), it corresponds to the common expression “hand of God” and suggests the idea of power.<sup>8</sup> If it is linked to Exod 8:15, Nolland argues that the “finger of God” metaphor here suggests that “what Jesus does is akin to what Moses did when the plagues in Egypt cleared the way for deliverance of God’s people from their national slavery.”<sup>9</sup> By doing so, Luke interprets elements of Jesus’ ministry

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<sup>7</sup> For a full discussion on Luke’s “finger of God” and Matthew’s “spirit of God,” see Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 639; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 475.

<sup>8</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 121.

<sup>9</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 643.

as “a heightened reiteration of elements from earlier phases of the history of God’s dealing with his people.”<sup>10</sup> The powerful presence of God’s kingdom as experienced by the crowds is not only attributed to the “finger of God,” otherwise it would be similar to that of the other Jewish exorcism, but also “involves the role of Jesus himself” as he uses the emphatic “I.”<sup>11</sup> Luke is thus saying that though the operative power here is the “finger of God,” the person of Jesus and the announcement of the arrival of God’s kingdom reveal the fact that Jesus’ power to exorcise is thus part of the long-awaited for Jewish hope of God’s kingdom.

### 4.3 Woman’s Praise (Luke 11:27–28)

In the midst of this confrontational setting between Jesus and the Pharisees, however, emerges a voice of praise that “breaks the ice,” as a woman praises the mother of Jesus (Luke 11:27–28). Though the response to Jesus’ exorcism produced two negative responses earlier, Luke here reports yet a different response from a woman. It was natural in the culture of Jesus’ day for people to praise a mother for the success of her children (Gen 49:25; Prov 23:24–25). The praise of this woman, as Bock states, is “an expression of gratitude” for Jesus’ ministry since “a mother was valued in the accomplishments of her son.”<sup>12</sup> By pronouncing those words, the woman’s praise can be seen as fulfilling Mary’s prediction in 1:48.<sup>13</sup> It is obvious, therefore, that some among the crowds were on Jesus’ side, rejoicing and welcoming the coming of the Son of Man and the arrival of God’s kingdom. Playing on words and with ironic twist, Jesus uses the woman’s blessing as an opportunity to pronounce his own beatitude: blessed are those who respond positively to the preaching and teaching of Jesus by

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<sup>10</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 636.

<sup>11</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 641.

<sup>12</sup> Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1094.

<sup>13</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 649.

obeying the Word of God (v. 28). By pronouncing his own beatitude, Jesus reveals the precise response to Jesus' prophetic ministry of preaching, that is obedience.

#### 4.4 The Sign of Jonah (11:29–32)

Luke reports that more and more people gathered to hear Jesus. Luke then states that Jesus “began to speak” (v. 29). Though Luke indicates a “new literary unit has begun” by stating that Jesus “began” (ἤρξατο) to speak, Jesus indeed is not starting a new topic, but rather addressing an earlier request for a sign (v. 16). While Matthew reports that the request came from the Pharisees and the scribes (Matt 12:39), Luke references “others” (v. 16). Luke, moreover, explains the motivation behind their request, that is to “test” Jesus (v. 16).<sup>14</sup> Similar to Matthew, the demand for a sign aims at “divine authentication of Jesus’ message and work.”<sup>15</sup> Jesus’s description of this generation as “evil” shows, moreover, this generation’s resentment to the many early miracles Jesus had already performed, including the recently mentioned one of exorcism. Therefore, Jesus refuses to respond to their request, but offers them the sign of Jonah. However, by offering them the sign of Jonah, Nolland states, “the full tradition was in any case a denial of the sign requested.”<sup>16</sup>

Three main approaches are offered to the interpretation of the sign of Jonah in Luke. The first approach attempts to understand the meaning of the sign of Jonah in light of Matthew’s “three days and three nights” saying (Matt 12:40), concluding that Luke and Matthew mean the same thing, that is, the sign of Jonah refers to the death and resurrection of the Son of Man. Stein, for example, represent this school of

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<sup>14</sup> Bock (*Jesus According to Scripture*, 224) defines the term “test” as “an attempt to dictate what should be provided as evidence that God really was at work.”

<sup>15</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 325. See also Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 473; Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*.

<sup>16</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 651.

thought. He interprets Luke in light of Matt 12:40.<sup>17</sup> He defines the term “sign” in terms of a miracle and thus interprets the sign of Jonah as the miraculous act of Jonah’s being swallowed by a fish. Stein then questions those who define the sign as the preaching of Jonah to the Ninevites asking: “but how could Jesus’ present preaching have been interpreted as a ‘sign’ in the present context refers to a miracle.”<sup>18</sup> Marshall, also, claims that “Matthew’s interpretation was essentially the same as Luke’s.”<sup>19</sup> This conclusion is based on the assumption that Matthew “expanded the saying to bring out the correlation between the experience of Jonah and that of Jesus,” since it is difficult for Marshall to believe that Luke may “have deleted a clear reference to the death of Jesus from his sources . . . and produced a somewhat enigmatic statement.”<sup>20</sup> In this sense, and according to this view, Matthew was written after Luke, and that it is considered as a midrash on Luke as he explains the “ambiguous” meaning of the sign of Jonah is in Luke.

Scholars have offered countering arguments against this approach. Luz, for example, argues against the notion that the “sign” in Luke refers to the death and resurrection of Jesus, since “in the Jewish tradition Jonah’s rescue did not become a sign for the Ninevites, who were not even present.”<sup>21</sup> Nolland, moreover, considers the assumption that “the prophet could be a sign to Nineveh precisely because the Ninevites are assumed to have access to the experience of Jonah with the whale” as “a naive reading of Jonah.”<sup>22</sup> It is also suggested that Luke as a historian would not have accepted the allegorical interpretation of Matthew of the sign of Jonah as he desires to

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<sup>17</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 335.

<sup>18</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 335.

<sup>19</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 485. See also Stein, *Luke*, 325.

<sup>20</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 485. See also Stein, *Luke*, 325.

<sup>21</sup> Luz, *Matthew*, 219.

<sup>22</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, 652.

avoid being mistakenly understood if he uses the term “three nights,” as Jesus was in the tomb for just two nights.

As we can see, the literal absence of “the three days and three nights” expression did not prevent scholars from arguing that the “sign of Jonah” in Luke also meant the death and resurrection of the Son of Man, since it is not important, according to this view, what the “original” audience, the Ninevites, understood when Jonah preached to them. Rather, what is important is the imagery that Jonah brought to the minds of Luke’s audience. The challenge with this view, however, is that it gives the reader the impression that Luke is not self-contained and needs Matthew to explain it. Rather than reading Luke in its literary context, moreover, this view attempts to search for Luke’s sources employing a diachronic approach to the interpretation of this text. This view thus ignores the immediate literary context, where Luke offers more on the account of Jonah in the following verses (vv. 30, 32) to interpret what he means by the sign of Jonah. If we read Luke 11:29–32 as a self-contained account of Jonah and interpret the term “sign” in this literary context, as we will do later, the term can hardly be described as “ambiguous.” Marshall misses the point that the prophet and his ministry, as we have argued above, could be seen as a sign. Thus, Jonah’s prophetic call could be seen as the sign.

The second approach argues for the eschatological judicial meaning of the sign of Jonah. This meaning of the sign is mainly based on the function of the term “the Son of man” in its eschatological correlative sense and on the use of the future tense in its true function. Edwards, for example, employs a redaction critical approach to argue that the meaning of the “Sign of Jonah” could be understood by the examination of the meaning of the term the “Son of Man” in older traditions or sources, that is by the early community of Q. The community of Q, Edwards suggests,

understood the term the Son of Man in an eschatological correlative sense, and thus the Son of man will be functioning, like Jonah, as the preacher of judgement.<sup>23</sup>

Higgins, moreover, emphasizes the eschatological judicial sense of the term at the end time. He explains

While Jonah the prophet was a sign to his Gentile contemporaries during his own lifetime, the Son of man *will only be recognized* as a sign by Jesus' contemporaries when they find themselves confronted by him exercising judicial functions associated with the Son of man, the judge at the end-time in the heavenly court . . . [thus] the Son of man is the personification of God's judgement.<sup>24</sup>

Pao and Schnabel, moreover, offer two functions of the future tense in this passage as they explain the use of Jonah in Luke:

First, implicit in the reference to the future (cf. *estai*, "will be" [11:30]) act of the Son of Man as a sign is a reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus, which are yet to come. Jesus' preaching, therefore, should not be considered as the primary reference of this symbol. Second, moving beyond the vindication of the righteous, this symbol also focuses on the judgement of Israel.<sup>25</sup>

Powell, however, sees the future tense functioning differently. He explains:

Luke's use of the future tense ("so the Son of Man *will be* to this generation" [v. 30, italics mine]) points inevitably to the parousia. Thus, for Luke the "sign of Jonah" seems to have become a multivalent symbol for Jesus himself and for the mission of Jesus that began with his earthly preaching and would conclude with his glorious return.<sup>26</sup>

Though Bock finds much support for this view "including the context of Luke 11:31–32,"<sup>27</sup> he, however, challenges it because the original audience, "this generation," did not experience the Parousia or judgment. This view, Bock argues, "runs counter to

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<sup>23</sup> Edwards, *The Sign of Jonah*. For a full engagement of Edwards' approach, see Higgins, *The Son of Man in the Teaching of Jesus*, 92–100.

<sup>24</sup> Higgins, *The Son of Man in the Teaching of Jesus*, 104. Hare (*The Son of Man Tradition*, 61) also agrees with Higgins on this interpretation.

<sup>25</sup> Pao and Schnabel, "Luke," 324.

<sup>26</sup> Powell, "Echoes of Jonah in the New Testament," 162.

<sup>27</sup> Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1096.



Luke's emphasis on present eschatological fulfilment and on Jesus' current authority."<sup>28</sup> It seems from the context that the Son of Man expected to be recognized as a sign to his contemporaries. If the term has its future function in the OT, moreover, the contemporaries of Jesus must have understood the term in its fulfillment sense, that the Son of Man, Jesus, is here now, and that God's kingdom has arrived in their midst as they witness its power impacting their daily life. Marshall, too, sees a difficulty with the suggestion that the sign may refer to the future coming of Jesus as the Son of Man at the Parousia as the sign will, "come too late to confirm belief in the message of Jesus."<sup>29</sup>

The third approach interprets the sign of Jonah in terms of Jonah's prophetic preaching of judgement. Nolland argues that prophets and their prophetic calls or preaching can be seen as a sign (Luke 2:34–35; Isa. 8:18; 20:3; Ezek. 12:6), and thus Jonah's prophetic call can be seen as a sign.<sup>30</sup> In the same way, Nolland continues, Jesus speaks of himself as a sign, rather than a sign that he performs. The only "sign" then Jesus is offering here is "the announcement of coming Judgement."<sup>31</sup> It is hard for Bock to make sense of v. 29 without looking closely to verses 30 and 32. For Bock, "verse 32 makes it clear that Jonah's preaching is the issue here (Jonah 3:6–10). The sign is therefore the call to repent."<sup>32</sup> While Bock argues for a prophetic call to repentance, Nolland suggests a call of judgement. Tyson, moreover, starts rather from the book of Jonah itself to explain the meaning of the sign. He states:

Inasmuch as the story of Jonah itself reveals that the only "sign" to the men of Nineveh consisted in the authority with which he spoke, as of one sent from God, and which the people, convicted by their own consciences as worthy of punishment, most truly accepted, believing

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<sup>28</sup> Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1096.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 485.

<sup>30</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 650.

<sup>31</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 650.

<sup>32</sup> Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 325.

the threats which he uttered in God's name, an inquirer must inevitably reach the conclusion that Jesus means that his own work and teaching constituted a sufficient "sign" to the Jews of his day, and as such, were the antitype of the work of Jonah... [thus] Christ's ministry itself was a sufficient sign and origin. No heavenly portent was necessary.<sup>33</sup>

If we compare between Jonah and Jesus, Tyson continues, we will find that both are messengers sent from God and who speak with authority about the Word of God.

Even if we assume that Jonah has not been in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, "*he still would have been a sign to them*, for the sign lay in his authoritative commission from God, which at his very first preaching they recognized."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the third approach is the most satisfactory as the following analysis of Luke 11:29–30 suggests.

Structurally speaking, it is important to begin with the assumption that Luke 11:29–32 as a whole forms a complete unit. As we have mentioned, Luke starts in v. 29 a new literary unit, though he is addressing an earlier request for a sign (v. 16). This unit, moreover, must be interpreted in its current literary context with Luke's order of verses 31 and 32 held in perspective, rather than comparing it with Matthew's order.<sup>35</sup> As it stands, Nolland aptly suggests, "The Lukan order allows the whole pericope to be a comparison with Jonah (with a comparison with Solomon embedded in it for the sake of the wisdom note thereby injected)."<sup>36</sup> Luke's order also

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<sup>33</sup> Tyson, "The Sign of Jonah," 97–98.

<sup>34</sup> Tyson, "The Sign of Jonah," 97.

<sup>35</sup> Marshall (*Luke*, 486), for example, suggests that "Matthew has reversed the original sequence in order to bring the reference to Jonah and the Ninevites together." Bock (*Luke 9:51—24:53*, 1099) suggests two possibilities: "Either Luke made a change to put the reference in their chronological order . . . or Matthew placed the Jonah reference together . . . or both writers used different sources for the same event." Bock, however, slightly prefers the originality of Matthew's order, though he acknowledges that it is hard to support either position.

<sup>36</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, 654. Tyson ("The Sign of Jonah," 98) also suggests that for a historian like Luke, the order of verses 31 and 32 is "for the sake of chronological order." See also Howton, "The Sign of Jonah," 290.

leads to the climax of Jesus' main point of the proper response of repentance in verse 32, "as against merely hearing Solomon."<sup>37</sup>

Luke elaborates to explain the "sign of Jonah" by a correspondence between Jonah and the Son of Man (v. 30). The future tense, ("will be," ἔσται), can be understood in two different ways: logical or true future.<sup>38</sup> The former "allows the Son of Man to be already a sign to the present generation," while the latter denotes "the coming of the Son of Man in judgement at the Parousia."<sup>39</sup> Nolland, however, sees in these two alternative views no satisfactory solution. He, rather, sees in the clause "Jonah *became* a sign" the possibility that "the future verb should be related to Jesus' ministry seen as a whole, and to that degree as (partially) future."<sup>40</sup> The challenge with limiting the meaning of the future tense to its true sense is that it neglects the clear correspondence between Jonah and the Son of Man who is greater than Jonah as a preacher, and not a judge.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Luke emphasizes that the Son of Man will be a sign to "this generation." Therefore, the future tense should be understood more in its logical sense. If Luke meant the logical future sense, he then creates a picture of eschatological fulfillment of the OT Son of Man in the person of Jesus in the mind of his audience, and thus Jesus' ministry becomes a segment of God's act of salvation in Israel's history.<sup>42</sup> It is hard, however, to miss the role of the Son of Man in its judicial sense at Parousia. Particularly, the term "the Son of Man" is used in the gospel in this

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<sup>37</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 486.

<sup>38</sup> See Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 484.

<sup>39</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, 653.

<sup>40</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, 655.

<sup>41</sup> The future tense, which seems to be a challenge for this understanding of the sign, should not be a problem if this future tense is not understood only in its eschatological sense. For more on this see Chow, *The Sign of Jonah*, 116; Powell, "Echoes of Jonah in the New Testament," 162; Luz, *Matthew*, 218.

<sup>42</sup> For a survey on the meaning of the term "Son of Man" and its backgrounds and use in the Gospels, see Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, 468–74. "The reference to the Son of Man may suggest Jesus' authority, since Jesus will later connect the title to his right to rule at God's right hand (22:69)"; Bock, *Luke 9:51—24:53*, 1096.

sense (e.g., Matt 22:69). The pericope also is loaded with judgment terminology (rise up, at the judgement, and to condemn). Therefore, we may suggest with Nolland here the possibilities of both logical and true future, with less emphasis on the latter.

Luke then brings to the memory of his audience two gentile examples from Israel's history to rebuke their potential rejection.<sup>43</sup> Those examples offer a picture that is opposite to the OT expectations, that is gentiles judging Jews. The Queen of the South who came to *hear* the wisdom of Solomon refers to the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10:1–29; 2 Chr 9:1–12). In the OT context, the queen came to “test” Solomon with hard questions (2Chr 9: 1), and thus her attention was similar to the crowd who came to “test” Jesus (Luke 11:16). It is important to note that the Queen came all the way from “the end of the earth,” a term that is hyperbolic and reflects biblical idiom (i.e., Pss 2:8; 22:28; 59:14).<sup>44</sup> According to Edwards, the term in the OT, and particularly the Psalms, is used to refer to “the universal scope of the faith of Israel” which extended to and gathered people from “the end of the earth.”<sup>45</sup> After discussing all kinds of questions with Solomon, the queen responded positively as she listened to the wisdom of Solomon. But One who is “greater than” Solomon is here. By saying this, Jesus, according to Grindheim, “takes wisdom’s place in addressing Israel.”<sup>46</sup> According to Vorster, moreover, Jesus in Luke, “was regarded as a sage who was even wiser than Solomon . . . Both the form and the content of the teaching of Jesus make it possible to view him as a wisdom teacher.”<sup>47</sup> As we can see, the Queen’s response to Solomon serves as a contrast to the position of the contemporary “evil

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<sup>43</sup> Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1099.

<sup>44</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 654.

<sup>45</sup> Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 350.

<sup>46</sup> Grindheim, *Christology in the Synoptic Gospels*, 142.

<sup>47</sup> Vorster, “Jesus,” 563–64.

generation.” Because of her positive response, compared to theirs, the Queen will be their judge.

Another elaboration by Luke on the sign of Jonah appears in verse 32. Luke appeals to the book of Jonah to recall a historical event in Israel’s history: the Ninevites’ response of repentance to Jonah’s prophetic message of judgement (Jonah 3:6–10). Jonah’s ministry is presented by Luke as a “preacher” of the Word of God. It is remarkable to note the relationship between Jonah’s ministry and its “double effects” on the Ninevites according to Luke. On the one hand, Jonah’s prophetic call led to repentance. That the Ninevites repented of their miserable acts when they heard the message of judgement on the lips of the prophet Jonah. On the other hand, Jonah’s prophetic ministry generated a positive response from the Ninevites which impacted their destiny of being judges at the last-day. Now the Son of Man is identified as “greater than” Jonah. Though both the Son of Man and Jonah are preachers of a prophetic message of judgement, the Ninevites’ positive response contrasts the response of the crowd, as they continue opposing Jesus and rejecting his message. Thus, Luke announces the judgement of this generation as it, unlike the Ninevites, did not respond with repentance to the Son of Man’s prophetic ministry of preaching. In this sense, Jonah’s prophetic ministry and the Ninevites correspond with Jesus’ prophetic ministry and the crowd. The Queen came to *listen* to the Wisdom of Solomon and the people of Nineveh *repented* at the proclamation of Jonah. In both cases, we see a summary of how Gentiles responded: listening and repenting. Therefore, listening and repenting are the proper responses to the One who is greater than Solomon and Jonah.

Indeed, the closing verse of this unit makes a solid summary of Luke’s overall arguments throughout the chapter: the proclamation ministry of Jonah-Jesus, the

appropriate response to Jonah's-Jesus' message, superiority of Jesus over Solomon and Jonah, and thus the crowds are indeed witnessing the arrival of God's kingdom in their midst. By this conclusion, Luke is indeed offering a new type of a "sign." It is not a miraculous "sign" Jesus performs, but his prophetic ministry of preaching in itself is the sign. Jesus thus successfully shifts the attention of his audience to something greater than miraculous signs: "his teaching."<sup>48</sup> The Gospel of Luke therefore affirms to the readers "Jesus' prophetic role, assures the defeat of Satan, and admonishes them to stick to the Word of God, in order not to slide back to the power of darkness and be judged."<sup>49</sup> In this context, Jesus, the Son of man, "was set as a sign before human beings during his ministry and not through his death."<sup>50</sup>

#### 4.5 The Lamp Metaphor (11:33–36)

As Jesus refuses to offer any sign but the sign of Jonah, Luke continues with the parable of the lamp to identify the *real* reason for their resentment: it is not the lack of signs, but of sight. The imagery of the lamp serves "to identify as willful blindness the failure" to correctly accept the ministry and the message of Jesus and to be "appropriately transformed by it."<sup>51</sup> Jesus' pronouncement of the arrival of God's kingdom in their midst through the powerful ministry of Jesus is like a light that shines out brightly, and it is obvious to those who want to see it. The lack of "seeing" the light depends on the recipient's own eye: if his eye is healthy, it will let the light shine into the whole person, but if the eye is unhealthy, it will let no light come in, and the whole body will be a dark place (v. 34). Bock aptly observes that the eye is a

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<sup>48</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 325.

<sup>49</sup> Chow, *The Sign of Jonah*, 106.

<sup>50</sup> Bovon, *Luke 2*, 140.

<sup>51</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 656.

metaphor referring to the heart.<sup>52</sup> Here we can see again that Jesus challenges the crowd to examine their hearts (eyes) in order to experience the light of God's kingdom into their lives (v. 35). What the crowd needs is to open their eyes and hearts accepting His message and to let it shine into their whole life (v. 36), otherwise they will continue to live in darkness if they insist in not seeing. By doing so, Jesus identifies clearly the reason for their unbelief and hostilities against him: not the lack of signs, but the blindness of the heart.

#### 4.6 Woes against Pharisees and the Scribes (11:37–54)

Luke now moves to the final unit in this section, where the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees and the scribes reaches its climax.<sup>53</sup> Luke introduces this unit with the statement “when he was speaking” (v. 37). This expression provides the link between the previous section and what comes after. Luke here continues by describing the controversy between a Pharisee and Jesus over a meal in a home setting regarding ritual ablutions.<sup>54</sup> After receiving a generous invitation of a Pharisee, the host observes Jesus' failure to wash his hands before eating (v. 38). It is obvious that the Pharisee and Jesus have different religious views regarding what is pure and what was impure. Luke here again is concerned with the essence of the human being more than ritual obligations. In this setting, Luke uses the metaphor of washing the *outside* of the cup to show the Pharisee's concern for *outward* ritual purity, but neglecting what is *inside* the person, that impure heart full of greed and wickedness (v. 39). Greed and wickedness refers to the moral integrity of the religious leaders. Jesus severely

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<sup>52</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 325.

<sup>53</sup> Scholars have discussed the parallel text in Matthew 23. On this discussion, see for example, Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 661–72; Bock, *Luke*, 330; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 490–93.

<sup>54</sup> Many other discussions in Luke had the same setting (e.g., 5:29; 7:36; 10:38; 41:1; 22:1; 24:42). Regarding ritual ablution, see Bovon, *Luke 9:51–19:27*, 158.

criticizes the Pharisees with a harsh language, “You fools,” asking a rhetorical question in a negative tone to show the real concern of God, inside *and* the outside (v. 40). Luke continues by giving a practical example of where the Pharisees’ focus should be by encouraging them to give alms.<sup>55</sup> Though giving alms is an outward expression, it is an authentic expression of what is inside (v. 41). This use of “inside” and “outside,” Nolland explains, “does not make a dualism of the inner and outer life of a person: the inner life expresses itself in outward actions and is to be contrasted to that which is only an outward display.”<sup>56</sup>

Luke then continues by pronouncing three woes against the Pharisees, in which the tone is again characterized by judgement and condemnation. Those woes are characterized by a contrast between speaking and doing. The first woe (v. 42) is characterized by a contrast between speaking and doing: The Pharisees are concerned with the tithing of all kinds of herbs but neglect justice and the love of God. Luke uses the imagery of washing the outside of the cup but leaving the inside dirty. In the same way, Luke explains, the Pharisees care for their outward ritual purity but neglect justice and the love of God. Thus, the Pharisees’ outward purity stands in contrast to their inner evil desires. The final clause, “it is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others,” serves to emphasize the importance of both: the pure *inner* self which expresses itself in *outwards* practices. Otherwise, the Pharisees are characterized as hypocrites. By not neglecting the importance of the tithing, Luke is thus reluctant “to criticize the place of the law” in the lives of his readers.<sup>57</sup> The second woe is concerned with the outward appearance of the Pharisees in a setting of public social places. In those settings, the Pharisees seek honor and respect in the

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<sup>55</sup> On the Jewish practices of alms, see Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 664.

<sup>56</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 665.

<sup>57</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 665.



markets and places of worship. While in the first woe Jesus reveals their neglect of the love of God, he here reveals their true love: honor and respect, and thus it addresses the issue of pride. In the third woe, Jesus ironically critiques the Pharisees by describing them as unmarked graves: something which appears beautiful on the outside but inside is unclean. In the Old Testament, to touch a dead body makes one unclean (Num 19:11). With this metaphor, Jesus depicts the Pharisees as being the very source of impurity. The Pharisees' outwards deeds seem attractive to the crowd, but these outward expressions do not reflect what is inside, resulting in "people walk[ing] over them without realizing it" (v. 44). In summary, though the Pharisees attempt to show publicly that they care about applying the law of purity, their hearts are indeed impure.

Upon hearing Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees, one of the scribes protested, as he felt as if Jesus was addressing them as well (v. 45). Jesus affirms the scribe's suspicions by pronouncing three more woes. In the first woe, Jesus rebukes the scribes for not being more considerate and compassionate, but rather strict in their application of the law. The second woe is even stronger as it references a historical act of the past. Here Jesus uses "a rhetorical picture" of being builders of tombs, an act that refers to their approval of what their father did.<sup>58</sup> As this generation continues the pattern of their ancestors, it fulfills the Wisdom of God, as He has continued to send prophets and apostles who will be killed and persecuted (v. 49).<sup>59</sup> The reference to prophets and apostles, and particularly the latter, may refer not just to the future persecution and killing of Jesus, but also to those apostles who will act in his name.<sup>60</sup> This generation, consequently, will be judged as they will be charged with all the

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<sup>58</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 332.

<sup>59</sup> On the meaning of the Wisdom of God and its personification in the OT, see Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, 668.

<sup>60</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, 668.

blood that has been spilled in the world, beginning with Abel and ending with Zechariah. Those two figures of the OT represent the first murder (Gen 4:10) and the one who probably came last in the OT.<sup>61</sup> It is important to notice the two major themes of persecution and of judgement. For the former, it is expected, as we will see in the following verses of 53–54, that this generation will continue the pattern of their ancestors by persecuting the prophets. The judgement theme here is escalated to another level by the proclamation that this generation will be judged not just because they insist on opposing Jesus, but because they will follow the pattern of their ancestors by killing him. Bock aptly states, “It is a terrible thing to be a generation responsible for creating an environment of rejection around Jesus. As 19:41–44 indicates, judgment of the nation is the first major consequence.”<sup>62</sup> The final woe makes a strong contrast between what the scribes think of themselves and who they really are. They think that they have the key to knowledge, but in fact have locked themselves and others out.<sup>63</sup> Luke here uses the imagery of a palace, a city, or a temple that one needs a key to enter. The scribes have ownership of this key, or have stolen it. The result is that they cannot enter, nor those who follow them. It seems that they are actually blocking access to knowledge. As religious leaders, the scribes being an obstacle to Jesus’ ministry, rather than helping people to accept the arrival of God’s kingdom in their midst and the ministry of Jesus, is a tremendous irony. While the Pharisees are accused of being the source of uncleanness, the scribes are accused of generating more opposition against Jesus. Both groups of religious leaders fail to lead and guide the people. The woes against the Pharisees and scribes provide a strong rebuke to the religious leaders for their opposition of Jesus’ ministry. This

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<sup>61</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 668.

<sup>62</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 330.

<sup>63</sup> On the image of the key of knowledge, see Weiss, “Φαρισαῖος,” *TDNT*, 9:48.

section, therefore, challenges the religious leaders to focus and reexamine their inner motivation of opposing Jesus. If those religious leaders think that they help their people by opposing Jesus' teaching and ministry, they are mistaken. After presenting Jesus' severe criticism of the Pharisees and scribes, Luke finally moves to his closing statement, showing the extreme opposition of the Pharisees and scribes toward Jesus that was incurred because of his remarks toward them (vv. 53–54). After recording this tense conversation over a meal, Luke reports that Jesus left, but the situation is worse than it was. The relationship between Jesus and the religious leaders is escalating to a new level of opposition. Both groups begin to follow Jesus closely attempting "to catch him in something he might say" (v. 54). Thus, the conversations between Jesus and the religious leaders and the crowds did not lead to repentance as hoped, but to more hardness of the hearts.<sup>64</sup>

#### 4.7 Summary

Our analysis of Luke 11:29–32 shows that the text in view is set within a dispute-judgement discourse. Luke 11:14–54 is a new development of the suffering Son of Man's motif that began early in Luke 9:51. Though Luke seems to highlight more of the crowd's positive response to Jesus ministry than Matthew (vv. 14, 27–28), he reports, along with Matthew, the rise of opposition against Jesus. But this opposition, according to Luke, is coming rather from the crowd, rather than specifying particular religious groups as Matthew does. The crowd in Matthew, for instance, questioned Jesus' source of power, attributing his power to exorcise to Beelzebul (v. 15) and then demanding a sign "to test" him. Luke, however, creates a discourse where the encounter is less between Jesus and the crowds, and more between the crowds and the

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<sup>64</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 333.

word of God. Jesus's response to the woman's announcement of blessing supports this view: While the woman praises Jesus, Jesus shifts the focus off of himself by announcing the blessing of those who obey the word of God. With Luke's emphasis on obedience to the Word of God, he thus continues with a judgement theme where the focus is on those who hear and repent (the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites), compared to those who do not (this evil generation). Luke accomplishes this purpose by returning to the early request of a "sign," and the given "sign" we have argued, is to be understood in light of Luke's emphasis on the word of God, particularly hearing it and obeying it.

Luke, similar to Matthew, depicts Jesus incorporating two gentiles into the discourse to illustrate his emphasis. The first is the Queen of Sheba who came to *hear* the Wisdom of Solomon. The second is the Ninevites who *repented* at the proclamation of Jonah. Jonah is identified here in terms of his prophetic call of judgement. Jonah's prophetic call of judgement became the sign to the Ninevites. Sign here is not a miraculous sign performed by the prophet. Jonah's prophetic call is rather in itself the sign. As we have seen, prophets themselves can be a sign. By creating a correlation between Jonah and the Son of Man, Luke thus identifies Jonah and the Son of Man as preachers of prophetic message of judgement. Yet, Luke portrays Jesus the Son of Man as "greater than" both Solomon and Jonah. By doing so, Luke shows this "evil generation" the appropriate response to Jesus the Son of Man's prophetic message, by announcing their judgement and condemnation as they fail to respond appropriately to the Word of God revealed through Jesus. In this sense, the prophetic ministry of Jesus the Son of Man is the sign before this generation, and their response will determine their eternal destiny. Therefore, Luke invites them to

examine their hearts to experience the light of God's kingdom in their lives, lest they live in eternal darkness.

The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees reaches its climax when Jesus severely criticizes the Pharisees of being hypocrites. As we have seen, Jesus uses explicitly harsh language, addressing them by saying, "You fool." With a series of woes and vivid imageries, moreover, He condemns their concern for outward ritual purity, while neglecting the real concern of God: justice and the love of God. The scribes also are described as religiously strict, killers of prophets, and a stumbling block to their followers. Luke's conclusion (vv. 53–54), therefore, is not surprising after a series of severe judgements proclaimed against both religious groups. What we thought was the climax of the tensions between Jesus and those religious groups, seems to be only the beginning of the extreme opposition of the Pharisees and scribes toward Jesus.

In summary, for Luke, Jesus is the suffering and persecuted Son of Man, who faces severe opposition from Jewish religious groups and the crowd. While Luke depicts various aspects of the hostility of this "evil generation," he stresses their resistance to hear and obey the Word of God. While the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites are blessed because they heard and obeyed the word of God, this "evil generation" deserves the prophetic message of judgement on the lips of Jesus the Son of Man.

## CHAPTER 5: TYPOLOGICAL READING OF JONAH IN MATTHEW AND LUKE

### 5.1 Matthew's and Luke's Christology

Our exegesis of the accounts of Jonah in Matthew and Luke has revealed that Matthew and Luke have situated the tradition in a similar dispute-judgement discourse. We have seen in both Matthew and Luke that Jesus faces serious opposition, particularly from religious leaders, who accuse him of not observing the Sabbath, question him about exorcism, consider Jesus as a teacher, and request from him a sign to validate his credibility. Matthew and Luke reveal explicitly the motivations and the ultimate future plans of those religious leaders, namely that they will continue to test and accuse him in order to find enough evidence to take his life. Such resistance from the crowd and the religious leaders to Jesus' ministry and teaching deserves a prophetic call of judgement. We have observed how Jesus announces this judgement by using very harsh language, describing this generation as adulterous and evil, foolish, and by equating them to a brood of vipers. He, moreover, severely criticizes the hypocritical behaviors of the Pharisees' and the scribes' with a series of woes. Jesus, finally, challenges Jewish religious expectations by announcing that two gentile figures would judge them: The Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites. Though Matthew and Luke describe the controversy as mainly between Jesus and the religious leaders of the Pharisees and scribes, both also include the crowd in this dispute. In addition, both show the response of the crowd as being "less" aggressive against Jesus than the religious leaders. The crowd is amazed as Jesus performs miracles, wondering whether Jesus is the Son of David.

The question of Jesus' identity is not just a concern for the crowd, but it is indeed a concern for both Matthew and Luke. In general, the question of Jesus' identity is a fundamental theological theme in the Gospels. The writers of the Gospels attempt to answer the question of who Jesus is by representing his life and ministry as rooted in and a sign of God's redemptive historical act. The intentions of Matthew and Luke are, thus, Christological in focus. Our analysis of the dispute-judgement discourse revealed that both authors attempt to portray the person and ministry of Jesus in various ways: by Jesus's superiority over the temple, Jonah, and Solomon; by the Son of Man's sovereignty over the Sabbath; by Jesus as the silent Suffering Servant; by the overarching theme and distinct possibility of him being the Son of David; by the suffering and resurrected Son of Man; and by the Son of Man as a preacher of judgement. Since the focus is on Jonah in Matthew and Luke, however, we can argue that Matthew and Luke interpret the narrative of Jonah Christologically: While Matthew represents Jesus as the suffering, rejected and resurrected Son of Man, both Matthew and Luke represent Jesus as a preacher of judgement and Nineveh as a gentile nation which repented and which will judge the evil generation of Israel.

### 5.1.2 The Suffering and Rejected Son of Man

The use of the term "the Son of Man" is varied in Jewish literatures. Many scholars have written on the use of the term in Second Temple Judaism, and therefore, we see no need to repeat it here, but to discuss briefly what is related to our text and purpose.<sup>1</sup> Particular interest is given to the eschatological figure in Dan 7:13.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the history of the term and its background in Second Temple Judaism, see, for example, Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus*, 15–21; Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, 34–43; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 213–18; Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 145–47.

<sup>2</sup> See, Marshall, "Son of Man," 776.

Scholars, however, see other traditions behind Dan 7 (e.g., Enoch and 4 Ezra).<sup>3</sup>

Walck, for example, sees possible influence of the Parables of Enoch on the Gospel writers.<sup>4</sup> A careful reading of Second Temple Judaism reveals that the figure of the Son of Man is seen as a suffering figure who will face defeat and oppression, but at the same time serves as the eschatological judge. Even though a study of the background of the term in that literature can illuminate our understanding of the term, Allison is correct in stating that, “Jesus redefines and enlarges and so transforms the titles more than he conforms to them.”<sup>5</sup> Luz also argues that it is not the use of the term “Son of Man” as a title which can clearly identify who Jesus is. “Rather,” Luz continues, “the history of Jesus makes clear who Jesus the Son of the Man is. The history of Jesus, narrated by Matthew, determines the significance of the expression ‘Son of the Man’ entirely anew.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the term “Son of Man” should be interpreted in light of Jesus’ life and ministry; by what he does or by what he will do in the future. In other words, it should be interpreted in light of Jesus’ narrative. Therefore, our focus here will be mainly on the use of the term in the context of the narrative of Jonah in Matthew and Luke.

To begin, it is important to remember that the term, as we have mentioned before, is used in different settings by Jesus himself, and thus it is “Jesus’ chosen self-designation” to indicate various aspects of his life and ministry.<sup>7</sup> The elevated frequency with which the term “Son of Man” is used by Matthew, compared to other evangelists, shows Matthew’s interest in and focus on the use of this term. According

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, 34–43; Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus*, 15–21. According to Fuller, the Son of Man in Ethiopic Enoch appears as a judge and a ruler in glory over the elect. Fuller also suggests that the figure of the Son of Man “was established in pre-Christian Jewish apocalyptic as the eschatological agent of redemption” (42).

<sup>4</sup> Walck, *The Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch*, 299–337.

<sup>5</sup> Allison, “The Embodiment of God’s Will,” 118.

<sup>6</sup> Luz, *Matthew*, 111.

<sup>7</sup> Matera, *Christology*, 47. See also Fuller, *The Foundation of New Testament Christology*, 120.



to Matera, the use of the Son of Man in Matthew can be viewed from two vantage points:

*[W]ithin the narrative, it is the distinctive way that Jesus refers to himself when speaking of his destiny to suffer, die, be raised from the dead, and return at the end of the ages as God's royal eschatological judge . . . From the point of view of Matthew's audience, however, Son of Man has become a technical term which can now be used as a title to identify Jesus as God's eschatological judge.<sup>8</sup>*

There is thus an emphasis, particularly in Matthew, that the Son of Man will suffer, die, and on the third day will be raised from the dead (17:12–13, 22–23; 20:18–19). Knowles, who investigates the rejected prophet motif in Matthew, concludes that, “In Matthew's Gospel Jesus is a suffering and rejected prophet.”<sup>9</sup> We have also argued that Matthew highlights a correspondence between the experience of suffering and death in Jonah and Jesus for three days and three nights. Matthew, moreover, identifies Jonah as a prophet and Jesus as “more than a prophet.” Knowles states, “Matthew demonstrates that [Jesus'] ministry and Passion bear all the hallmarks of the Deuteronomistic vision of a prophet's destiny.”<sup>10</sup> We, however, argue also that it is hard to ignore the theme of salvation-resurrection in Matthew. Though Matthew does not explicitly mention the salvation and resurrection of Jonah, our reading of Jonah 2 and also the use of the term of the Son of Man in Matthew revealed that salvation and resurrection is part of the experience of Jonah.

This theme of salvation-resurrection is important to stress here, particularly when Matthew also seems to have a special interest in the future of the “Son of Man,” namely that the Son of Man will return in glory as a Judge to repay everyone for what has been done (16:27; 19:28).<sup>11</sup> Without resurrection there is no return or glory. Also,

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<sup>8</sup> Matera, *Christology*, 39.

<sup>9</sup> Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel*, 148.

<sup>10</sup> Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel*, 132.

<sup>11</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 28

the theme of the Son of Man's return as a judge suits well with his ministry as a preacher of judgement. Like Jonah, Jesus for both Matthew and Luke is a preacher of judgment. In this sense, judgement is a great deal of the Son of Man's earthly and eschatological ministry.

## 5.2 Matthew's and Luke's Typological-Figural Reading

Matthew and Luke interpret the narrative of Jonah not just Christologically, but also employ a typological-figural approach to accomplish their purpose.<sup>12</sup> Both authors represent the person and ministry of Jesus as rooted in OT Scripture and within God's ongoing redemptive historical act. It is important first to briefly discuss Matthew's and Luke's use of OT Scripture, and then to define and argue for Matthew's and Luke's typological-figural reading of the narrative of Jonah.

### 5.2.1 Matthew's and Luke's Use of Old Testament Scripture

Matthew uses the OT more than any other Gospel to narrate the life and ministry of Jesus. This pattern is far from being random, "but a reasoned practice that assumes a divinely intended correspondence between God's saving activity at different times in the history of redemption."<sup>13</sup> We can also note that Matthew is not only limited to formula quotations ("it is written") and prediction and fulfillment (to fulfil). Indeed, Jonah is a precise example of this fact. He rather, as Hays states, "takes pains to shine a spotlight on certain points where he discerns a providential correspondence between Jesus' career and earlier mysterious prophetic oracles. The story of God's dealing with Israel is a comprehensive matrix out of which Matthew's Gospel narrative

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<sup>12</sup> In the following discussion we will use typology and figural as synonyms.

<sup>13</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, lvi.

emerges.”<sup>14</sup> Among the various approaches Matthew employs to interpret the OT is the use of Scripture as prefiguration of the Christ. Hays speaks of a “figural pattern” that discerns “narrative correspondences” between Jesus and many OT figures. This is grounded on the fact that all stories of the OT are designed to “disclose something about the identity of God.”<sup>15</sup> Since we have the One who is “greater than” all his prefigurations in Israel’s story, these prefigurations are woven typologically into Matthew’s story to disclose something about the central figure of his Gospel. France, moreover, observes how Jesus uses the OT figures as a type of himself.<sup>16</sup> In the case of Jonah, he uses the “three days and three nights” to explain what would happen to him.

Like Matthew, Scripture is key for Luke as he represents the story of Jesus. Scholars have debated Luke’s methods of using Scripture, but whatever methodology Luke used Evans aptly observes that Luke is seriously engaged with Israel’s Scripture. Scripture for Luke, Evans states, “has a systemic function in the Lukan narrative—its presence is neither superficial nor secondary. The explicit citation, the verbal allusion and thematic similarities invite the reader to compare the Christian narrative with the words of Israel’s ancient prophets.”<sup>17</sup> Two scholars argue for Luke’s typological reading of the OT. Bock, who argues that Luke’s use of Scripture is that of proclamation rather than proof, pays attention to scriptural citation and allusions, and those literary devices belonging to the category of “typological-prophetic”; meaning that “God’s pattern of salvation is being reactivated in a present

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<sup>14</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 226.

<sup>15</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 230.

<sup>16</sup> France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 75.

<sup>17</sup> Evans, “Prophetic Function of the Pentecost Sermon,” 218. For a comprehensive survey of recent scholarship on Luke’s use of the OT, see Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke-Acts*, 8–30; Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy*, 13–54. For major works on this issue, see also Evans and Sanders, *Luke and Scripture*; Denova, *The Things Accomplished Among us*; Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy*; Kimball, *Jesus’ Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke’s Gospel*.

fulfillment.”<sup>18</sup> Denova, who also argues against describing the structural pattern in Luke-Acts as an apologetic from prophecy, reads Luke as “a whole narrative that typologically re-cast[s] the story of Israel.”<sup>19</sup> Denova defines Luke’s use of typology as a literary device of a parallel pattern.<sup>20</sup> Litwak challenges Denova’s approach by arguing that typology “cannot cover all of Luke’s use of the Scripture.”<sup>21</sup> He rather suggests a, “continuity between the events recorded in the Scriptures and the event surrounding Jesus and his first followers,” rather than proof from prophecy or for Christology.<sup>22</sup>

### 5.2.2 Typological-Figural Reading

With this emphasis on OT Scripture, Matthew and Luke employ a typological-figural reading of the narrative of Jonah. It is important here to briefly provide our definition of typological-figural approach. A typological-figural interpretation is defined as an *explicit* real theological and historical *correspondence* between two *historical* events, persons, or things within the biblical narrative. The characteristics of this definition must be explained with a scholarly discussion on this issue.

First, a typological and figural reading emphasizes the historical dimensions of both correspondences. This emphasis on history is usually focused on the separation of the long-confused association between allegory and typology, where the latter is more interested in discovering the hidden meaning of the text. We can see this emphasis in Child’s definition of typology as, “an extension of the literal sense of historical events in a subsequent adumbration and served to signal the correspondence

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<sup>18</sup> Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy*, 49.

<sup>19</sup> Denova, *The Things Accomplished Among Us*, 37.

<sup>20</sup> Denova, *The Things Accomplished Among Us*, 81–104. Litwak (*Echoes of Scripture*, 24) challenges Denova’s approach since typology “cannot cover all of Luke’s use of Scripture.”

<sup>21</sup> Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture*, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture*, 32.

between redemptive events in a single history of salvation.”<sup>23</sup> For Von Rad, typology is “bound to a much greater degree by the historical sense,” while allegory is more concerned with the very letter of the text.<sup>24</sup> Woollcombe, moreover, distinguishes between allegory and typology as follows:

Typological exegesis is the search for linkages between events, persons, or things within the historical framework of revelation, whereas allegorism is the search for secondary and hidden meaning underlying the primary and obvious meaning of a narrative [Which] . . . does not necessary have any connection at all with the historical framework of revelation.<sup>25</sup>

Second, typological-figural interpretation is theological in its focus. Therefore, discerning the theological correspondence is key as the interpreter attempts to observe the explicit historical correspondences. In a sense, typology is the theological reflection on the relationships between these explicit real historical correspondences as they are recorded in both testaments. Baker, for example, aptly stresses this point by stating that, “there must be correspondence in history and theology.”<sup>26</sup> Knowles, moreover, states that, “the relationship of type to antitype is not inherent in the events or individuals themselves, but exists only insofar as both reflect the larger working of a divine economy of salvation.”<sup>27</sup> At the same time, France makes this point clear when he defines typology as “an *explicit* drawing of both *historical* and *theological parallels* between Old Testament persons and events . . . [it] is essentially the expression of a conviction of *the unchanging principles of the working of God*, and

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<sup>23</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Von Rad, “The Interpretation of the Old Testament,” 177.

<sup>25</sup> Woollcombe, “The Biblical Origins and Patristic Development of Typology,” 39–75. On more comparisons between typology and allegory, see Wright, *Rhetoric and Theology*, 60–64; Parker, “Typology and Allegory,” 57–83. Other scholars distinguish between allegory, typology, and OT predictions. See for example, France, *Jesus and the Use of the Old Testament*, 39–40, 83. Woollcombe (“The Biblical Origins and Patristic Development of Typology,” 42) also distinguish between allegory, typology, and prophecy as the similarities between them are not so close “as to justify ignoring the differences between them, and using one of the terms to cover them all.”

<sup>26</sup> Baker, *Two Testaments*, 180.

<sup>27</sup> Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 228.

the *continuity* between His acts in the past and in the present.”<sup>28</sup> Typology, thus, functions as a hermeneutical theological principle to understand the relationship between the OT and NT, which is based on the conviction that God consistently acts in a similar historical pattern. The theological dimension of typology, however, goes beyond a mere understanding of the relationship between both testaments to an understanding which includes the person and ministry of Jesus. Typology, as Knowles states, “delineates a similar relationship between the events described in Scripture and those of the messiah's life—that is, sacred history past and present.”<sup>29</sup> For the NT writers, the person and ministry of Jesus is seen typologically as part of salvation and as a continued pattern of God’s redemptive acts. Through this typological interpretation of the OT, “Jesus and his community were able to explain the decisive messianic redemption,” and see themselves as part of God’s redemptive history.<sup>30</sup>

Third, typology is Christological in its focus. In their definition of typology, scholars make a linkage between typology and fulfilment. LaRondelle speaks of “fulfillment in salvation history” as the motivation for NT typology. In this sense, typology is understood as “a theology of the progression of God’s act of salvation through Jesus Christ.”<sup>31</sup> While Galdon views persons, events, incidents and narrative in the OT as “realities which are also at one and the same time prophetic signs and foreshadowing of the persons and events in God’s redemptive plan,” those correspondences are, “fulfilled and revealed” in the NT.<sup>32</sup> For Clowney, the history of the OT is a prophetic history, “describing covenant blessings, the covenant curse, and the wonder of God’s great salvation to come in the latter days.”<sup>33</sup> This prophetic

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<sup>28</sup> France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 76–77; Italic is mine.

<sup>29</sup> Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 226–28.

<sup>30</sup> Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic*, 166.

<sup>31</sup> LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 44.

<sup>32</sup> Galdon, *Typology of Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, 19.

history, Clowney continues, shows the wonders of God's plan and promise," and that God's promise, "becomes the key to typology."<sup>34</sup> Knowles, moreover, understands the correspondences between type and antitype, "either as an anticipation or as a fulfillment of the other."<sup>35</sup> For Knowles, "scriptural fulfillment [e.g., Matt 2:15 & Hos. 11:1] establishes a typological relationship . . . For whereas scriptural fulfillment looks for a relationship of promise and fulfillment between the words of the sacred text and the life of the messiah, typology delineates a similar relationship between the events described in Scripture and those of the messiah's life—that is, sacred history past and present."<sup>36</sup> Knowles, however, disagrees with France's distinction between typology and fulfillment exegesis, claiming that, "such distinction cannot be maintained. For the Evangelist's OT texts are only rarely cited from overtly "prophetic" passages. Rather, NT typology and fulfillment exegesis are both retrospective, reinterpreting features of the OT text and history from a Christological and eschatological perspectives."<sup>37</sup> Davidson, though, defines typology in terms of fulfillment; he brings to the conversation the whole debate of prospective vs. retrospective readings of correspondences. For Davidson, typology is more of a "hermeneutical endeavor" of the study of the OT's realities, "which God has specifically designed to correspond to, and be prospective/predictive prefiguration of, their ineluctable (*devoir-être*) and absolutely escalated eschatological fulfillment aspects (Christological/ecclesiological/apocalyptic) in NT salvation history."<sup>38</sup> Hays, on the other hand, argues that figural reading avoids the assumption that the authors

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<sup>34</sup> Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel*, 223.

<sup>36</sup> Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel*, 226.

<sup>37</sup> Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel*, 227.

<sup>38</sup> Davidson, *Typology in Scripture*, 405. Dawson (*Christian Figural Reading*, 155, 210), as he speaks of figural reading, also suggests a reading "*from figure to fulfillment*," a reading that looks forward or prospective in its nature.

of the OT were predicting or anticipating Christ.<sup>39</sup> The correspondence between the OT and NT is necessarily to be “retrospective rather than prospective.”<sup>40</sup> The correspondence, as Hays precisely states, “can be discerned only after the second event has occurred.”<sup>41</sup> For Foulkes, moreover, typological interpretation is not interested in OT predictions of Christ, but its history. He explains:

Typological interpretation, strictly speaking, is not concerned with those parts of the Old Testament which have the form of Messianic prediction in the narrower sense . . . It is thus the NT interprets the OT. It interprets not only its prediction but also its history, which is itself revelation because it describes the acts of God, in the light of the revelation of Him who is the Word Incarnate.<sup>42</sup>

With this understanding of typology in mind, we turn now to Matthew and Luke to discuss how it functions in their texts.

First, Matthew and Luke avoid discovering any hidden meaning in the narrative of Jonah, but rather acknowledge the historical meaning of the text and they create a correspondence between the narrative of Jonah and Jesus. By making an intertextual reference to Jonah 2:1, Matthew recognizes Jonah’s experience of three days and three nights before he signals its correspondence to the Son of Man’s three days and nights. This linkage to the psalm of Jonah 2 leads us to examine the text in its own context and to conclude that the experience of Jonah’s three days and three nights is that of death and salvation. This death-salvation theme is understood in Jesus’ context in terms of suffering and resurrection of the Son of Man, while for the disciples suffering and salvation will characterize their journey of following and

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<sup>39</sup> A careful reading of Hays two valuable works, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* and particularly *Reading Backwards*, will come to the conclusion that typology and figural reading function as synonyms.

<sup>40</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 3. Hays (“Reading the Bible Intertextuality,” 3–21) also understands the figural reading as “a form of intertextual reading that focuses on an intertextuality of *reception* rather than of *production*.”

<sup>41</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Foulkes, “Acts of God,” 34.



serving the Master. Matthew and Luke, moreover, bring back to memory the preaching of Jonah and the repentance of the Ninevites (Jonah 3:4–10). Again, as we examined this text in its own context, we came to the conclusion that Jonah’s ministry is seen as a ministry of a prophetic call of judgement that generated the repentance of the Ninevites. The parallel between Jonah and Jesus is that both are preachers of judgement. We have observed, however, a contrast between the Ninevites and Jesus’ audience: while the former accepted Jonah’s prophetic warning of judgement and repented, the latter did not.

Second, this correspondence leads to observing a pattern in the way in which God consistently acts in history. While God’s prophets go through a journey of suffering and death, God saves them, as salvation comes from the Lord (Jonah 2:10). In the same way, the suffering Son of Man will rise from death and will return in His glory as judge. God, moreover, sends a prophetic message of judgement through prophets to call people to repentance, as He is a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing (Jonah 4:2). God also sent Jesus as a preacher of judgement calling people to repentance. We thus can notice two features of typology: correspondence and patterns.<sup>43</sup> But Jesus, according to Matthew and Luke, is “greater than” Jonah. Though we have observed correspondence between Jesus and Jonah, and that this correspondence reveals a pattern of God’s redemptive act of history, typology is Christological in the sense that it shows Jesus’ superiority over Jonah and thus all OT prophets. As we have seen, Matthew and Luke also report Jesus’ superiority over the temple, Solomon and Jonah, and thus Jesus is superior than the priestly cult, prophets and kings of Israel. We cannot observe in the narrative of Jonah in its historical context either prediction or

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<sup>43</sup> For more on these aspects of typology, see Baker, *Two Testaments*, 175–78.

promise in order to speak of Jonah and Jesus in terms of promise-fulfillment. But we can observe that Jesus, the Son of Man himself, is the ultimate revelation of God's prophetic sign of judgement. No more prophets or signs will be given, but only Jesus, the Son of Man.

Typological and figural reading, third, is more than a hermeneutical endeavour to observe correspondences and patterns. It is indeed illustration, that is, "the way in which almost any biblical text . . . addresses us."<sup>44</sup> As we have argued, Matthew and Luke bring to memory the illustration of the Ninevites' repentance to not only encourage Jesus' contemporaries to hear and obey God's Word, but also to warn them from the everlasting consequences of rejecting Jesus, the Son of Man. For the disciples, moreover, the journey of suffering and death of Jonah and the Son of Man is the expected journey as they preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, and that there is hope that the suffering Son of Man will rise and return back in glory. Thus, suffering and rejection is part of the journey but not its destiny. The book of Jonah, thus, is in a sense *the* text in which Matthew, Luke, and their communities typologically called to memory to address their context.

### **5.3 Conclusion: Typology and Development of Biblical Theology of Jonah in the Context of Islam**

In this chapter we have argued that in a dispute-judgement context, Matthew and Luke employ a Christological typological approach to the interpretation of the narrative of Jonah to represent the person of Jesus as the suffering Son of Man who will rise and return in glory as a Judge and a prophetic preacher of judgement. Thus, the life and ministry of Jesus is rooted in and seen in continuity with God's historical

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<sup>44</sup> Baker, *Two Testaments*, 178.

act revealed in the OT. As we draw this chapter to conclusion, we now turn to address the main question of this study by asking how our investigation of Luke and Matthew's use of Jonah contributes to developing a biblical theology of Jonah in a Middle Eastern/Islamic context. In the following conversation will highlight some characteristics:

First, developing a biblical theology of Jonah in a Middle Eastern-Islamic context must *take both Testaments into consideration*. As we heard the voices of Matthew and Luke and their use of the narrative of Jonah, this study suggests taking the NT seriously as we develop a reading of the book of Jonah in the context of Islam, and thus our reading is in a sense taking into consideration the whole of God's redemptive history, not a theology that is limited only to an OT theology of the book of Jonah. As we will see in chapter 3, approaches to the book of Jonah, like any other book in the OT, are varied with much focus on historical critical approaches to the book that neglect its relation to the NT. Wolff aptly questions the basic hermeneutical principle that a section of an OT text can only be understood in its own context, as he pushes forward to think of "the total meaning of the OT" and to search for the context in which the Old Testament as a whole belongs. According to Wolff, there are three conflicting perspectives on this issue of interpreting the OT. He explains:

The first affirms that the Old Testament can be understood only as a document of a folk religion in analogy to the neighboring cultures of the ancient Orient; the second, its peculiar character is grasped only in its historical connection with late Judaism and the synagogue, where it is also conceived of as canonical; the third, the New Testament is the obvious context where the total meaning of the Old Testament is first discovered. So general history of religion, synagogue, and church strive with one another for the Old Testament.<sup>45</sup>

Wolff observes how the OT itself resists any attempt to understand it in its cultic

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<sup>45</sup> Wolff, "The Hermeneutics of the OT," 444.

environment. The OT, Wolff continues, cannot only be interpreted in light of the community which has gathered, selected and edited its books. Though he values the aid of these approaches to the interpretation of the OT, he stresses the importance of the NT in order to understand the OT as a whole. He explains:

So we are confronted by the conclusion that the old oriental environment and the Jewish successors of the Old Testament Israel, while presenting us with numerous aids to understanding details, still do not provide anything comparable to the essential total meaning of the Old Testament. *Only the New Testament offers the analogy of a witness of faith to the covenant will of God—a witness founded on historical facts—who chooses out of the world a people for himself and calls it to freedom under his Lordship.* I stress, *an analogy.* This is not identity, for while covenant is covenant, old is not new.<sup>46</sup>

Wolff observes the unique historical relationship between the Old and the New, which he calls typology. As we understand the historical relationship between the Old and the New and the importance of the NT to the interpretation of the OT, it can then be argued, Wolff continues, that “the typological approach is indispensable for an exegetical methodology that seeks to understand the historical context of the Old Testament texts and is concerned to eliminate arbitrary interpretations.”<sup>47</sup>

Typology, as we have mentioned, assists the reader to re-consider the theological relationship of both Testaments.<sup>48</sup> It reaffirms the OT as a Christian Scripture as it is read alongside the New. Therefore, it is no longer possible to only interpret the OT as a document to study the history of the Jewish religion nor to only apply historical critical methods to its interpretation. As Christian Scripture, these schools of interpretations, though they could present numerous aids to the interpretation of the OT, will fail to give a full meaning of the OT without the New.

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<sup>46</sup> Wolff, “The Hermeneutics of the OT,” 456.

<sup>47</sup> Wolff, “The Hermeneutics of the OT,” 457.

<sup>48</sup> Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 515.

In a sense, a typological-figural approach creates deep theological coherence between the Old and New Testaments as we hear the voices of NT writers as they create theological correspondence between the two Testaments.<sup>49</sup>

As we start from the book of Jonah attempting to hear the voices of the NT writers, we are indeed employing a *prospective reading of the book of Jonah*. By doing so, we will interpret the book of Jonah attempting to discern *the ways in which God acted in history in the book of Jonah and how it continued in Christ*. Such a reading will create a continuity and a unity between both Testaments, particularly in the ways in which God acts in history. Frei, as he speaks of a figural reading, states that the figural reading, “sets forth the unity of the canon as a single cumulative and complex pattern of meaning. This pattern is ingredient in the unitary temporal sequence and its stages, and it depends on the successive narrative rendering of the sequence.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, our interpretation of the book of Jonah in chapter 3 will take into consideration how the NT writers typologically used the book of Jonah.

As we have stated before, there are many prophetic narratives which appear in the Qur’an, and Jonah is one of them. The Qur’an uses those stories in various ways and for various purposes. What makes our reading of the book of Jonah distinctive to that of the Qur’an is that it is a reading that takes the coming of Christ seriously to understand God’s redemptive acts in history. It is noteworthy here to mention that we attempt to move the conversation from mere hermeneutical endeavour and the interpretation of the book of Jonah toward a more theological understanding of God’s redemptive work in history. And in order to understand this history it must take into consideration the redemptive act in history through Christ.

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<sup>49</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 33–34.

Second, developing a Middle Eastern biblical theology of the book of Jonah must be Christological in its focus. We have emphasized here the importance of a *biblical* theology over an OT theology, which takes into consideration both Testaments and creates theological coherence as we attempt to understand God's redemptive acts in history. Moving forward, we take one step further to stress that a biblical reading of the book of Jonah must be Christological in its focus. This is simply what Matthew and Luke attempt to accomplish as they read the book of Jonah typologically. As we have argued above, Matthew and Luke created a theological correspondence between Jonah and Jesus and thus used the person and ministry of Jonah to represent the person and ministry of Jesus the Son of Man. While creating this theological correspondence between Jonah and Jesus the Son of Man, both Matthew and Luke stress more Jesus' superiority over Jonah and thus all the prophets. By doing so, Matthew and Luke witness to God's redemptive revelation in history and how that points forward towards its ultimate purpose in Christ. While Jonah was a preacher of a prophetic ministry of judgement, Jesus, as the "sign of Jonah" himself, becomes the ultimate prophet of judgement, and, thus, will return back in glory as judge.

This Christological reading of the Old Testament is challenging in a Middle Eastern Islamic context, particularly where Muslim traditions represent Muhammad in line with other former prophets and as the "Seal of the Prophets." The story of Jonah thus can be used to address the issue of, "Jesus' superiority" in a Middle Eastern-Islamic context over Muhammad, and more importantly, to address the whole conversation of whether Muhammad is to be considered as part of God's redemptive act in history. Also, Christological interpretation of the book of Jonah can be a challenge in a Middle Eastern-Islamic context as it is used by Matthew to create a

correspondence between Jonah's death and salvation and Jesus' death and resurrection, where the latter is rejected by the majority of, if not all, Muslims.

Indeed, Matt 12:40 is commonly used by Muslims to refute the whole notion of Jesus' death and resurrection. It could however be a tool to speak about Jesus' suffering and rejection.

Those challenges will be dealt with later in this study, but it is important here to note that while our reading of the book of Jonah is Christological, it is also used to represent the person of Christ in a polemical-judgement context. Thus Matthew and Luke's Christology is rooted in the OT.

Third, developing a Middle Eastern theology in an Islamic context must be rooted in the Old Testament. In the previous discussion we have emphasized that a biblical theology of Jonah must be biblical and Christological. Such a reading of the OT is more of *prospective* in nature. However, Matthew and Luke employ rather a *retrospective* reading of the OT to represent the person of ministry of Jesus Christ, and thus for both, Christology is rooted in the Old Testament. We can, thus, observe that those who call for a prospective reading of the OT usually start from the OT reading forward, revealing perhaps that they are OT scholars. Those who call for a retrospective reading of the OT usually start from the NT, reading backwards, revealing perhaps that they are predominately NT scholars. As we suggest a biblical reading of the book of Jonah we indeed suggest a spiral reading between the OT and NT.

As we emphasized the importance of the NT earlier, here we will stress the importance of the OT. As we have argued before, Matthew and Luke represent the person and ministry of Jesus in light of the OT witnesses. Wolff accurately states that, "no New Testament writer felt he was in a position to witness to Jesus Christ without

constantly opening and quoting the Old Testament . . . Both the proclamation of Jesus and the preaching of the early church are unthinkable without the Old Testament.”<sup>51</sup>

This emphasis in the context of Islam is twofold. First, in modern Christian practice there is more emphasis on the NT as we present the person and ministry of Jesus Christ in the context of Islam, and less on the OT. Second, this presentation of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ devoid of the OT scriptures neglects how the Gospels’ writers themselves represent the person and ministry of Jesus as being rooted in the OT. It is important to note that Matthew and Luke represent the person of Jesus in a polemical context similar to that of the Middle East-Islamic context where Muslims question the identity of Jesus and Christians struggle to respond. Our argument, therefore, is that any presentation of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ that is NOT rooted in the OT is destined to fail. If we desire to present Jesus as he is put forth by the Gospels to Islam, which is inherently polemic in nature, we must represent Him as the Gospels represented Him: namely that through his life and the ministry, the Christ is shown as rooted in God’s consistent act of salvation in the OT. Simply put, the coming of Christ, his death and resurrection, cannot be understood without the OT. For example, when we consider that the Word which, “dwelt among us,” as used in the context of the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14), we observe a parallel with God’s consistent act in the past, as He dwelt among his people in the tabernacle (Exod 25:8). The same *pattern* can be observed throughout the Scriptures, though the new is not similar to the old. Therefore, if the Muslim reader recognizes the fact that God is known from the beginning as the One who dwells among his people, the whole conversation around the incarnation of Jesus Christ will take a different direction. In this sense, the OT will be no longer used as “an entry point” or

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<sup>51</sup> Wolff, “The Hermeneutics of the OT,” 462.



“bridge” to share Jesus with Muslims. Its understanding in its historical context will be foundational to speak about the Christian biblical faith. This understanding of typology and its contribution to our understanding of the OT will help the church to see how relevant and foundational the Old Testament Christian Scripture is to the proclamation of the gospel. The OT thus, “prevents the witness to Christ from being corrupted into philosophy about Christ.”<sup>52</sup>

We can also observe that the Qur’an also represents the person and mission of Muhammad in light of mainly former prophets of the OT. In a sense, our suggestion here to represent the person and ministry of Jesus, who is rooted in the OT, is not foreign to the Qur’an and, thus, not foreign for Muslims. While we recognize the challenge associated with such a suggestion, it takes seriously the context of Islam as we attempt to represent the person and ministry of Jesus Christ to Muslims. In other words, as we share with Muslims a rich heritage of OT traditions, it would be incredibly engaging to use this heritage in our proclamation of Jesus.

In summary, we have argued that in a dispute-judgement context, Matthew and Luke employ a Christological typological approach to the interpretation of the narrative of Jonah to present the person of Jesus as the suffering Son of Man who will rise and return in glory as a Judge and a preacher of a prophetic ministry of judgement. Thus, the life and ministry of Jesus is rooted in and seen in continuity with God’s redemptive work revealed in the OT. As we have gained some insight from Matthew and Luke in how typologically they approached the narrative of Jonah, they also, as Hays states, encourage us to “[work] out our own fresh ways of engaging Israel’s Scripture.”<sup>53</sup> As we will see in the following chapter, it seems that

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<sup>52</sup> Wolff, “The Hermeneutics of the OT,” 468.

<sup>53</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, (slid 403).

Muhammad and the Qur'an engaged well with Jewish and Christian traditions, and it will allow us in the following chapter to work out our own fresh way of interpreting the narrative of Jonah in the context of Islam.

## CHAPTER 6: TYPOLOGICAL READING OF THE BOOK OF JONAH IN THE CONTEXT OF ISLAM

### 6.1 God's Commission and Prophetic Protest (1:1–3)

The book of Jonah begins with the formula “and the word of the Lord came to . . .” (וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה). The Hebrew conjunction and verb וַיְהִי is often translated as “and it happened” or “and/now it came to pass.”<sup>1</sup> The book of Jonah is unique among other prophetic books within the Twelve because it primarily tells a story *about* the prophet himself, rather than mainly preserving the message that he preaches. Though other prophetic books do provide a little information about the prophet, such as Hosea, Haggai, and Zechariah, they primarily preserve the message of the prophet.<sup>2</sup> The book of Jonah only preserves five Hebrew words that he preached to the people of Nineveh: “Forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed” (Jonah 3:4). This story represents Jonah’s actions and words in relation to the task that the Lord assigned to him. To be more precise, this story, as we will see, is not only about Jonah, it is about God’s didactic lesson to Jonah and is expressed through a series of interactions between God and Jonah.

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<sup>1</sup> Limburg (*Jonah*, 30) observes the similarity between this formula and those that are found in 1 Sam 15:10; 2 Sam 7:4; 1 Kgs 6:11; 12:22; 13:20; 16:1; for Limburg, this formula is typical in the Deuteronomic History (37). It occurs frequently in the stories of Elijah (1 Kgs 17:2, 8; 21:17). The connection between the opening words of Jonah and Elijah, in addition to other features between both stories, has inspired scholars to suggest the connection of Jonah with other biblical material as well. For instance, another link between Jonah and Elijah is seen by ancient exegetes through their homiletics on the name of Jonah’s father, Amittai. Sasson (*Jonah*, 86) explains that ancient exegetes “searched Scripture for a candidate who would be suitable as a father to the prophet Jonah and settled on the story of the widow from Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:24). It might be recalled that when Elijah resuscitated this widow’s son, she said: ‘God’s word is truth in your mouth’ (*ûdebar-YHWH bepîkâ ’emet*). Hence, these exegetes reasoned, the child was known as *ben-’amittay* or ‘child of Truth.’”

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Hos 1:3, 6, 8; 3:2; Hag 1:12–15; Zech 4:1; 11:13–14.

Though the book itself lacks any identification of Jonah as a prophet, the narrator introduces him by his full name, Jonah son of Amittai, and thus links our prophet to the Jonah mentioned in 2 Kgs 14:25.<sup>3</sup> There, Jonah is identified as a prophet and a servant, and thus the narrator creates the setting for our narrative.

For Jonah, the word of Yahweh came with an assignment and a reason for it: “Arise and go to Nineveh the great city and call against it for their evil has come up before me” (1:2). As far as the style is concerned, the imperative tone of the verse is made clear by three imperative Hebrew verbs קום, הלך, קרא. “Arise and go to” (קום לך) is a standard divine command, which appears, for example, in 1 Kgs 17:9, Jer 13:6, and Jonah 3:2. The clause “and call against it” (וקרא עליה) gives the sense that the message that Jonah will be preaching is “against” Nineveh, and this means that it is a message of judgement.<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew clause כי-עלתה רעתם לפני (“for their evil has come up before me”) explains the reason for such a command, particularly with the use of כי introducing a “clause of reason,” that the evil of Nineveh reaches to the point where God has to deal with it.<sup>5</sup> The word רעה (“calamity”) occurs twice as an adjective to describe the behavior of Nineveh (3:8, 10).<sup>6</sup> Though the nature of this evil is not specified here, Nahum describes the brutality of this empire in detail (Nah 3:1–3), while Isaiah speaks about the arrogance of its king (Isa 10:12–14).

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<sup>3</sup> On the etymological significance of the name “Jonah” see Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 71.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. 1 Kgs 13:2, 4. For a full survey of the use of על with קרא and its interpretation in the book of Jonah, see Sasson, *Jonah*, 72; Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah*, 34–39.

<sup>5</sup> See Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 657.

<sup>6</sup> The word רעה (“calamity”) is used by the sailors as they describe the dire situation they are in (1:7, 8). The narrator also describes Jonah’s displeasure of the Ninevites’ repentance in 4:1 as a “great evil” (רעה גדולה), and it is God who protects Jonah from evil (4:6). The use of the term throughout the narrative occurs at various points and with different characters and places, in order to draw a close connection between Nineveh’s evil, Jonah’s evil / displeasure, and Yahweh’s threat of punishment against both Jonah and Nineveh. Youngblood (*Jonah*, 40) explains: “The play on this word in Hebrew, however, is clear and serves to tie the book together. The fact that the same word describes both Jonah and Nineveh may indicate that there is less of a moral distinction between the prophet and the Assyrians than Jonah imagined. Furthermore, the fact that the same word also describes YHWH’s response to both Jonah’s sin and the Assyrians’ sin may indicate that Jonah and Assyria deserved the same fate.”

Nineveh is described as a “great city” (1:2), and this description appears two more times in the narrative (3:10; 4:11).<sup>7</sup> In 3:10, it is the narrator’s description of Nineveh as a great city, which is a reference to its power and size. However, the significance of Nineveh is emphasized in God’s last speech in 4:11. There, God demonstrates to Jonah the reason for his concern for this great city: it has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals. Nineveh is thus more than a powerful and evil nation in the eyes of the Lord. It has a huge number of lost creatures. For Jonah, however, Nineveh is the capital of the evil empire, the Assyrians. The name of this city and God’s reference to its evil “was enough to prompt the memory of a bitter and long-lasting yoke”<sup>8</sup> and fueled Jonah’s emotion to the point that he decided to flee. The contrast between God and Jonah is obvious: God has compassion and Jonah has bitterness. This bitterness is later expressed in Jonah’s anger of God being merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and relenting to a wicked nation like Nineveh (4:1–2).

As the narrative continues, it reports the tension between Jonah and God regarding Nineveh (1:3). The verse begins with the “apparent” positive response of a prophet to the word of God, “Jonah arose” (ויקם יונה). Obedience is the expected norm of how a prophet will respond to God’s word (cf. Amos 3:8). Prophets, however, do protest against God’s commission and reason with him, and this is usually expressed through words rather than actions, as we can observe in the stories of Moses (Exod 4:1), Jeremiah (Jer 1:6), and Isaiah (Isa 6:5). In the case of Jonah, nonetheless, he arose *but* “to flee to Tarshish from God” (לברח תרשישה מלפני יהוה). The use of ל demonstrates the purpose of his flight and is made clear by the repetition of the phrase

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<sup>7</sup> “Nineveh” (נינוה) appears 16 times in the Hebrew Bible, almost half of which are found in Jonah: Gen 10:11, 12; 2 Kgs 19:36; Isa 37:37; Nah 1:1; 2:9; 3:7; Zeph 2:13; Jonah 1:2; 3:3a, 4, 5, 6, 7; 4:11.

<sup>8</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 70.

מלפני יהוה. Jonah's unexpected and dramatic response thus breaks the pattern of a prophetic response to God's commission. It is similar, in many ways, to Elijah's flight in 1 Kgs 19. The expression "from before the Lord" (מלפני יהוה) is meant to convey, according to Stuart, that Jonah's goal is to escape to a place where God is not worshiped, and also where he will hear another word from the Lord (Gen 4:16; 1 Sam 26:19–20; 2 Kgs 5:17; 13:23; 17:20, 23; Jer 23:39).<sup>9</sup> It seems difficult to Simon to ascribe such an idea to Jonah, since the Lord speaks to Jonah in Nineveh at the end of the book (4:5, 9)—a place, according to Stuart's definition, where God is not worshiped nor where a prophet would hear from the Lord.<sup>10</sup> In any case, Tarshish becomes the best geographical choice for Jonah, a far, remote location in the very opposite direction from Nineveh.<sup>11</sup> The details of Jonah's plan to accomplish running away begins with a move to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship heading to his ultimate far-reaching location.<sup>12</sup>

Scholars speculate what was in Jonah's mind during his flight.<sup>13</sup> Stuart argues that it is impossible for someone like Jonah to think that physical escape is possible. Jonah's statement in 1:14 reveals the opposite: he confesses God's sovereignty over nature (cf. Ps 139:7–8; Amos 9:2–4). Jonah, rather, "wanted no part of something so horrible as mercy shown to a brutal, oppressing, enemy nation" as suggested by 4:2.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 450; Allen, *Jonah*, 105.

<sup>10</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 100. See also Sasson, *Jonah*, 79. On the location of Tarshish, see Castillo, "Tarshish in the Book of Jonah," 481–98; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 451; Allen, *Jonah*, 104; Walton, *The Minor Prophets*, 105. For the location of Tarshish being located in the area of Southern Spain, see especially, Day, "Where Was Tarshish?" 359–69; López Ruiz, "Tarshish and Tartessos Revisited," 255–80.

<sup>12</sup> Joppa was the main Judean port and is mentioned also in 2 Chr 2:16[15] and Ezra 3:7 (see ABD 3:946–49). The alternative, especially if Jonah here is associated with 2 Kgs 14:25 and hailed from Gath-Hepher, would probably have been the port of Tyre. In this case, Joppa would be a Judean port even farther away from Nineveh. The movement to the port of Joppa initiates a series of movements "downward" for Jonah marked by the four-fold use of ירד (see Jonah 1:3, 5; 2:7).

<sup>13</sup> For a survey on various views on the reason for Jonah's flight see Bruckner, *Jonah*, 52.

<sup>14</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 453.

Though the narrator is silent here about the reason behind the tension between the divine command and Jonah's refusal (1:2–3), he gives Jonah a chance to speak about the reason for this protest at the end of the story (4:1–2).<sup>15</sup> If we also consider Jonah's prophetic advanced warning (3:4) and the kings' hope of God's relenting (3:9), the problem for Jonah was not the repentance of the Ninevites as if God would not respond to this penitential act, but rather, God's relenting character opens the door for the possibilities of repentance and God's forgiveness. This is true, too, if Jonah understood his commission in light of Jer 18:7–10 (a text we will discuss in detail later). When the Ninevites repented, God relented and this was not pleasing to Jonah and he became very angry at God, for he knew that God is “a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (4:2). Is this not what he said to the Lord when he was in his own country? Therefore, to make the story short, Jonah decided to flee. For the reader, this appears to be the end of the story for Jonah, but God has a different plan in store. This is what the following section reveals.

## **6.2 Thematic Summary: Prophetic Protest and Disobedience**

Our analysis shows that the introductory section of the book (1:1–3) introduces the main characters and the central concern in the narrative: a tension between God and the prophet Jonah regarding Nineveh's evil. The book begins with God revealing his words to Jonah. The prophetic command formula at the beginning of the book and the link to 2 Kgs 14:25 affirm Jonah's prophetic role. As we have observed, Jonah is identified in 2 Kings as God's “servant” and “prophet.” These two titles for the

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<sup>15</sup> On prolonged gaps as a strategy for reading the book of Jonah see Craig, “Jonah and the Reading Process,” 103–14.

prophet Jonah occur together in plural form, עבדי הנביאים, in 2 Kgs 17:13–14; 21:10; and 24:2. In these texts, it is Yahweh who puts his words in their mouths and commissions them to call Israel to repentance. Their role reflects the old tradition of Deut 18:15–18, and is similar to other texts in Jeremiah, for example (Jer 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 35:15; 44:4).<sup>16</sup> In particular, Deut 18:18 emphasizes the fact that the prophetic role is entirely Yahweh’s initiative, as it appears in the first person form: “*I* will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And *I* will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that *I* command him.” In this sense, a prophet, like Jonah, is an agent of delivering God’s words. Barstad precisely defines the major role of a prophet as “the essential communicative organ linking YHWH and the people, so that the people will be able to know the will of YHWH and follow it.”<sup>17</sup>

The prophetic role in Deuteronomy is to be understood in the context of a “prophet like Moses.”<sup>18</sup> As Moses’ journey approaches its end, the main concern is then the search for his successor: Who will lead God’s people in their journey after one of the great prophets in Israel’s history? To address this concern, Yahweh promises through Moses’ lips to take the initiative to raise up a prophet like Moses. As Moses continues his last speech, he warns such a prophet of falsely using God’s name or the name of other gods to communicate a message of his own. Such false prophets deserve the severest sentence of death (v. 20).<sup>19</sup> Moses, furthermore, addresses in his speech another question regarding the legitimacy of prophecy: How

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<sup>16</sup> On a discussion of the term עבדי הנביאים see Nicholson, “Deuteronomy 18:9–22,” 151–71.

<sup>17</sup> Barstad, “The Understanding of the Prophets in Deuteronomy,” 249.

<sup>18</sup> On the understanding of prophecy according to Deuteronomy, see Barstad, “The Understanding of the Prophets in Deuteronomy,” 236–51; Jeppesen, “Is Deuteronomy Hostile Towards Prophets?” 252–56.

<sup>19</sup> Speaking in the name of other gods is explained further in Deuteronomy 13:1–5. There, as Barstad (“The Understanding of the Prophets in Deuteronomy,” 242) precisely observes, Deuteronomy is mainly concerned “with apostasy from YHWH, the worship of other gods and the possibility that prophets might lead the people to decline from YHWH.” In this context, the word of the prophet as a revelation of God’s will is examined in light of the law.



should the people know whether a prophet speaks God's word? (v. 21). The answer to this question is based on the predictive accuracy of prophetic words (v. 22). It is, however, hard to establish criteria to distinguish between true or false prophecy, particularly if we read this text alongside Jer 18:7–10, where Yahweh is open to relent (נחם). In this latter sense, Hibbard precisely concludes, “the outcome of divinely announced plans is contingent on human response.”<sup>20</sup>

In light of this understanding, two observations are to be made regarding the book of Jonah. First, the relationship between the repentance of Nineveh and Jeremiah has long been observed, and this will be discussed later in our analysis of Jonah 3:5–10.<sup>21</sup> In light of this relationship between Jonah and Jeremiah and Jonah's own confession of the reason for his flight (4:2), it is, second, hard to accept the hypothesis that Jonah escaped because he was worried about being received as a false prophet. It is evident that Jonah understood God's commission in light of his character (4:2). In light of this creed, Jonah anticipated in advance the possibility of the “repentance of God” (נחם יהוה) as he responds to the Ninevites. God's commission is thus understood as an act of God's mercy and grace expressed in his relenting to the undeserved nation of Nineveh and explains the reason for Jonah's flight.

Jonah's flight can be understood in terms of both protest and disobedience to God. As we have observed, other biblical prophets struggled with God's commission (Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah), and their struggle offers insights into the prophet-God relationship. What is unique about biblical prophets is that they have the freedom to express their struggles regarding God's command and decision (e.g., Moses and Jeremiah), or even to flee as in the case of Jonah. Though these behaviors can be seen

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<sup>20</sup> Hibbard, “True and False Prophecy,” 355.

<sup>21</sup> On the relationship between Jonah and Jeremiah, see Sasson, *Jonah*, 357–64.

as if prophets are challenging God's sovereignty, it actually reveals deeper insights into God's character. In the case of Jonah, we have observed how Jonah understood his commission in light of God's relenting character. A similar example is that of Moses' mediating activities in Exod 32–34. There, the narrative of the golden calf shows how Moses successfully mediates on behalf of Israel to seek the renewal of the covenant and to secure God's presence in their midst. This is seen in Moses' relentless negotiation with the Lord (Exod 32:11–14, 30–34; 33:12–16). Though God's sovereignty is clearly expressed throughout the narrative (Exod 33:19 and 34:6–7), God welcomes his prophets to intercede on the behalf of the people. This God-Moses negotiation reflects God's relenting character (Exod 32:14). In sum, God in his sovereignty does not "change his mind." He rather graciously welcomes a conversation with Moses regarding his people, while He also allows a prophet like Jonah to protest. God is open to negotiate possibilities according to his character and purpose. It is, therefore, self-evident that God's relenting character expresses another aspect of his attributes: of being slow to anger and patient.

This understanding of the prophetic role and the prophet-God relationship, particularly as it relates to Jonah, raises its own challenges in the context of Islam. The following discussion will take up those challenges and bring them into a conversation between Jonah and Yūnus.

### **6.3 Yūnus' Protest and Prophetic Infallibility**

In the Qur'an, Yūnus is not only the messenger of God (37:139), but also defined in association with the most well-known event in his story as Man of the fish (ذا النون) (21:87) and the Companion of the Whale (صاحب الحوت) (68:48). Classical *Mufasssirun*, moreover, elaborates more to identify Yūnus as the son of an old lady whom the

prophet Elias (Elijah) raised from death.<sup>22</sup> Both the Qur’anic and the biblical narratives report that our prophet escaped on a loaded ship (Jon 1:3; Q 37:140). While the biblical narrative twice affirms that Jonah escaped *from* God (1:3), the Qur’an is silent about the reason for Yūnus’ flight, but reveals Yūnus’ thought during the time of his flight. As we have noted in our discussion in Yūnus in the Qur’an, this silence encourages classical *Mufasssirun* to offer various explanations: either Yūnus ran away from God, the king, Gabriel, or his people. The last three explanations are retained against the whole notion of Yūnus’ disobedience to God, as this notion cannot be applied to prophets.<sup>23</sup> As we can see, this latter description of Jonah’s disobedience to God raises a challenge in the context of Islam, and therefore classical *Mufasssirun* allows their dogmatic view of prophetic infallibility to lead their exegetical practices. It is important here to be reminded once again of the fact that the Qur’an itself, on the lips of Yūnus, reports a self-declared confession (Q 21:87), while in two other narratives (Q 37:144; 68:48) it is a third person narration / indirect speech. A reading of Jonah in the context of Islam, thus, requires taking into consideration (a conversation with) the theme of prophetic infallibility in Islamic traditions. It is essential however to understand this dogma in the context of the prophetic role in the Qur’an. Therefore, we will begin with a brief survey of the prophetic role in the Qur’an and then move to discuss the dogma of prophetic infallibility.

### 6.3.1 Prophetic Role in the Qur’an

Prophets play a major role in communicating Allah’s message to humanity, though they were mainly sent to their own people. This explains the Qur’anic use of the term

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<sup>22</sup> Al-Qurtubi on 37:139–48.

<sup>23</sup> Rāzī on 37:139–40.

“the people of Yūnus” (10:98), rather than to the people of Nineveh as in the biblical narrative. As we have discussed in our analysis of Yūnus in the Qur’an, we have learned from prophetic stories that Allah’s messengers are bearers of good tidings and warners (4:165). Those stories, moreover, contribute to our understanding of the mission of Muhammad and the challenges he faced, namely the rejection of the surrounding community. In a polemically hostile context, Muhammad is accused of being a sorcerer (e.g., 52:29; 69:42), demon-possessed (e.g. 68:2, 51), and a poet (e.g., 21:3–5). These charges, in fact, accuse Muhammad of being a false prophet. In response to these accusations, the Qur’an affirms that Muhammad is not a mad prophet, nor does he lie, but he does certainly speak of what he saw (e.g., 53:5–18; 81:19–24). He is sent as a warner to those non-believers (Q 7:184; 11:12; 29:50), and as a mercy to the whole world (21:107).

Muhammad was also accused of being a human like any other member in his community, and the question raised by his opponents is simply how can a human like us call himself God’s messenger? The Qur’an emphasizes that prophets are humans (Q 14:11; 18:110; 17:93–94), and if Muhammad’s opponents doubt this truth, they can ask the people of the book (21:7). In this polemically hostile context, it is expected that a prophet should have some kind of qualification in order to be a prophet. Therefore, the Qur’an affirms the fact that Muhammad is a man of a noble character (e.g., 68:2–4), and thus, also confirms the inimitability of his message. The concept of prophetic infallibility began as early as the time of Muhammad.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> On the history of the doctrine of prophetic infallibility, see Muhammed, *David in the Muslims Tradition*, 15–18. Meir Bravmann (“The Origin of the Principle of Ismah,” 221–25), however, argues that the Muslim community imported this idea from the pre-Islamic era.

### 6.3.2 Prophetic Infallibility: Definition

As Muhammad was receiving a revelation from God, the fact that the vessel of revelation is pure and worthy of receiving a message from God needed to be affirmed. In other words, if the prophet is sinful, how can God trust such a person to communicate his holy word? The main theological challenge this dogmatic view addresses, as Daniel Brown observes, “is the problem of human-ness of all sources of religious knowledge.”<sup>25</sup> The purpose of this dogmatic view, Brown continues, “is to assure the believer that human involvement in the transmission of revelation, or in the interpretation of revelation, will not undermine its authority, and to give the interpreters of revelation a powerful justification for their own authority.”<sup>26</sup> Later, however, Muslim scholars and sects became divided around this issue, particularly where the Qur’anic text explicitly reports prophetic stories, including Jonah, that refers in one way or the other to an act of prophetic guilt.<sup>27</sup> Daniel Brown precisely observes, “In spite of its early origins and widespread acceptance, the idea of Prophetic infallibility does not sit well with Sunni orthodoxy . . . But the idea of infallibility makes sense in the context of the Shia’s ideas about charismatic human authority.”<sup>28</sup> In any case, a new series of literature has been developed around the theme of prophetic infallibility, where the stories of those prophets are discussed, including Yūnus, who appears in all of them.

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<sup>25</sup> Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, 61.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, 61. Meir Mikhael Bar Asher (*Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shiism*, 160) asserts that the doctrine of infallibility in Shia’s thought is not restricted to prophets, but to the Imams.

<sup>27</sup> On various views on prophetic infallibility in Islam, see Hasan, “The Concept of Infallibility in Islam,” 4–5; Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 56; Rizvi, *The Infallibility of the Prophets in the Qur’an*, 2–3; Rāzī, *Prophetic Infallibility*, 39–40. Rāzī, moreover, states fifteen reasons for the infallibility of the prophets during the time of prophecy (40–48).

<sup>28</sup> Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, 60. Brown also suggests that this dogmatic view started with the Shia.

The Arabic term *'ismah*, infallibility, is defined in terms of God's protection.<sup>29</sup> Rizvi, for example, defines the term *'ismah*, quoting Al-Mufid, as "a spiritual grace (*lutf* لطف) of God to a person which enables him to abstain from sins by his own free will."<sup>30</sup> Brown defines the person who is *ma'sum* as someone who is "protected by God from making mistakes or falling into sin."<sup>31</sup> For Rizvi, a *ma'sum* "is able to abstain from sins because of (a) highest level of righteousness, and (b) ever-present consciousness and love for God, and (c) certain knowledge about the consequences of committing sins."<sup>32</sup> Sobhani adds that there is a divine spirit that enables a *ma'sum* to sustain his infallibility based on Q 42:52. It is in a sense, Sobhani continues, "a gift from God for those who have a pure heart."<sup>33</sup>

The doctrine of prophetic infallibility deals mainly with the infallibility of doctrine, of inspiration and revelation, of major and minor sins, and of unintentional sin.<sup>34</sup> Some of those categories apply to Yūnus. First, classical Mufassirun speak of Yūnus' infallibility of doctrine. As we have seen, classical *Mufassirun* argues against Yūnus' ignorance of God's power (Q 21:87), because if someone is ignorant of God's power, that person is a disbeliever or infidel (كافر).<sup>35</sup> It is against the belief of the infallibility of doctrine to denote such a description to a prophet like Yūnus. Therefore, Sobhani, for example, interprets Q 21:87 as follows: Yūnus thought God would not make it too difficult for him.<sup>36</sup> Second, in terms of the prophetic

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<sup>29</sup> Rizvi, *The Infallibility of the Prophets in the Qur'an*, 1; Sobhani, *The Infallibility of the Prophets*, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Rizvi, *The Infallibility of the Prophets in the Qur'an*, 1; for a survey on Muslims' views on the topic, see pp 2–3.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, 60.

<sup>32</sup> Rizvi, *The Infallibility of the Prophets in the Qur'an*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Sobhani, *The Infallibility of the Prophets*, 34.

<sup>34</sup> Al Maki, *Informing Muslims of the Infallibility of the Prophets*, 17. For Rāzī (*Prophetic Infallibility*, 21–24), prophets are immune from intentionally committing minor or major sins, but they may unintentionally commit minor mistakes.

<sup>35</sup> Ṭabarī and Rāzī on 21:87. See also Rāzī, *Prophetic Infallibility*, 129–30.

<sup>36</sup> Sobhani, *The Infallibility of the Prophets*, 193–202.

infallibility of sin, we have seen how Rāzī interprets the incident of the whale as a tale, rather than a punishment, since prophets must not be punished. Regarding Yūnus' confession in Q 21:87, Sobhani interprets the Arabic word *Mazlūm* ("wrongdoers") to mean that Yūnus' anger and disappointment were directed at his people, and this is not a cause for guilt.<sup>37</sup> Rizvi translates the word *zalimeen* as "to make haste" or "to come to harm." He then claims that, "Any of these two meanings are compatible with the concept of *'ismah* and also correct in the case of the prophet Yūnus."<sup>38</sup> Another debatable issue in this discussion is whether the prophetic infallibility of sin was before or after prophets reached their office.<sup>39</sup> The latter could be applied to Yūnus. According to some interpretations, *Al-Saffat* (37:146) reports that Yūnus became a prophet when he was sent to his own people after God accepted his repentance. In this respect, Yūnus' blameworthy act took place before he became a prophet.

In terms of Yūnus' flight from his people, it was *unintentional*. When Yūnus ran away in anger from his people, he thought that such a response was pleasing to God. Yūnus was not aware of the fact that he should have been more patient with his people.<sup>40</sup> Sobhani offers that Yūnus was not angry at God, but rather he was angry at the stubbornness of his people when they refused to repent.<sup>41</sup> Yūnus' anger reflects his compassionate heart toward his people since he was keen to guide them to the path of God. Yūnus thought that God would not guide his people to the right path after he faced rejection and opposition from them. Another explanation is offered by

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<sup>37</sup> Sobhani, *The Infallibility of the Prophets*, 202.

<sup>38</sup> Rizvi, *The Infallibility of the Prophets in the Qur'an*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> Al Maki, *Informing Muslims of the Infallibility of the Prophets*, 20. Sobhani (*The Infallibility of the Prophets*, 34) states that, "prophets were from the righteous before they receive a message from God."

<sup>40</sup> Al Maki, *Informing Muslims of the Infallibility of the Prophets*, 64.

<sup>41</sup> Sobhani, *The Infallibility of the Prophets*, 193–202.

Muhammad Shikhou, that Yūnus confessed his guilt of what he has done against himself: Yūnus denied himself from doing the right thing toward his people.<sup>42</sup>

In sum, the conversation between Jonah and Yūnus has focused on their prophetic role and their struggle with their commission. Both biblical and Qur'anic traditions affirm their prophetic role as agents of delivering God's word. Jonah received God's commission to go to Nineveh, while Yūnus was to go to his own people. In both narratives the people repented, and thus God's commission to Nineveh or to the people of Yūnus were acts of God's mercy and grace to humanity.

Both biblical and Qur'anic traditions address the issue of false prophecy, and warn against it. The latter is mainly concerned with the legitimacy of prophecy in the context of searching for "a prophet like Moses" (Deut 18:15–21). A warning is issued against a prophet or a dreamer who will lead people astray to worship other gods (Deut 13:1–5). As we have observed in our analysis of Matt 12, Jesus was also accused of being a false prophet in a polemically hostile context. The Qur'an reflects both traditions, Deuteronomy and Matthew, where Muhammad is accused of being a false prophet in a severely polemically hostile context.

We have noted, furthermore, that prophets in both traditions struggle with God's commission. In their struggle they respond differently. The biblical tradition affirms Jonah's flight from the Lord, while the Qur'an affirms Yūnus' flight from his own people. We, however, came to the conclusion Jonah's flight can be better understood in light of the character creed of God (Jonah 4:2), the king's hope of God's relenting character (Jonah 3:5–10 and Jer 18:7–10), rather than Deuteronomy. Biblical God-prophet relationships, particularly in the case of Jonah, raise some challenges to the Muslim readers, particularly if they interpret Jonah's flight and

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<sup>42</sup> Shikhou, *The Prophetic Infallibility*, 96.



Yūnus' self-confession in light of the dogmatic view of prophetic infallibility.

Therefore, we have suggested that as we read Jonah in the context of Islam, the focus on the relenting character of God to interpret Jonah's flight may shift the conversation between Muslims and Christians regarding prophets to focus on God's character, rather than on a prophet's character.

This is not a foreign idea for Muslims, however, if we interpret Muhammad's own struggle in light of Allah's character. We have argued previously that Surah Yūnus deals mainly with the rejection of the unbelievers to Muhammad and his message and the inner struggle of the prophets (10:94). It is indeed a response from God to a series of the unbeliever's accusation against Muhammad and the Qur'an (vv. 2, 15, 20, 38). The example of the people of Yūnus, we argued, functions as a model of the people of faith in contrast to those who refused to believe. The history of former prophets in the Qur'an thus affirms the fact that while many will reject the message of the prophets, few will accept it. The lesson Muhammad learns from the history of those former prophets corresponds with Allah's will: "if it was the will of the Lord, surely all those who are on the earth would have believed . . ." (v. 99). As the history of former prophets affirms this saying, Muhammad is encouraged not to compel people to believe in his message (10:99), and to act according to God's will, particularly when he knows that "it was not for a soul to believe except by the will (lit. permission) of Allah" (v. 100). While Jonah struggles with God's relenting character, Muhammad struggles with God's freedom of choice. In their struggle, Jonah ran away and became angry at God, while Muhammad attempted to force the people to believe his message and became impatient.

It is expected however that both Jonah and Muhammad understand their commission in light of God's character and act accordingly. Jonah becomes slow to

anger, relents from his bitterness, and has compassion towards the people of Nineveh. Muhammad becomes more patient and understands his role as just a messenger, and thus gives people the freedom to believe. Muslims and Christians alike struggle with their commission in the world. In their struggle they are encouraged to understand their commission in light of God's character and serve accordingly.

#### **6.4 Jonah's Attitude Re-Examined in the Context of Islam**

As soon as this current research began, The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) took over Nineveh-Mousel. The wicked behavior of this extremist group is indescribable. Its brutal behavior towards the various groups of people, including Chaldean and Assyrian Christians is similar to that of the Assyrian empire. People have suffered greatly under the hands of this group. Can we imagine for a moment that God commissions us to go and preach a message of mercy and forgiveness towards this wicked group when we know in advance, like Jonah, that they may repent and God will forgive their evil behavior toward humanity, in general, and Christian ethnic groups in particular? To be more precise, what if God commissions a Chaldean or Assyrian Christian to preach a message of warning and judgement with the possibility of repentance and God's forgiveness? How would we / they respond? Would not such a commission from God fuel our own anger, and cause us to question God's "theology" toward ISIS? Would we not book the first flight to go as far as Tarshish, or search for the closest western embassy to immigrate to? Would Middle Eastern Christians not hate to hear the word "Islam" and "Muslims," like many Christians nowadays in the Middle East? Indeed, Middle Eastern Christians would have shared Jonah's struggle and ran away from this call. Let me explain.

As Jonah ran to Tarshish in order to not hear another message from the Lord, the tendency of Middle Eastern Christians is this: to run towards groups of Christians who negotiate with God in terms of their prophetic witness to the Arab world, supporting their position with biblical texts such as Acts 1:8, where they apply it as follows: let us begin in Jerusalem (nominal Christians) and when all nominal Christians are saved, then we can go further to other nations, that is, the Muslim nation. Others live with the mentality of minority and persecuted groups. This way of thinking allows fear to take over their lives and consequently live as victims in a state of survival. Accordingly, they see themselves as an unproductive minority that cannot produce fruit. As we read Jonah, we need to run not to a culture where such unbiblical beliefs exist, but to communities where the followers of Jesus Christ are willing to hear God's call on their lives of sharing God's love and mercy in Christ with others. The followers of Christ should remember their prophetic call to build reconciled and restored communities in Christ.

God still calls his followers to preach the message of mercy and forgiveness, rather than judgement. The prophetic role of the followers of Christ is to denounce "evil" behaviors in the Islamic context. Particularly, when a religious, fundamental, and hostile group like ISIS exists and claims that they act in the name of Islam, the followers of Christ are encouraged to partner with those Muslims who also denounce such brutal behaviors against humanity, regardless of their religious and ethnic backgrounds. Such a move by Muslims and Christians alike expresses the nature of a God who does not tolerate such evil behavior and calls his followers to repentance.

Put differently, our prophetic role in the world of Islam today seeks to reflect the nature of the God whom we worship. Knowing the character of God, therefore, impacts the way in which we understand his word and commission to the Islamic

world. In other words, our mission to the Islamic world should be examined to reflect who God is. In some Middle Eastern Christian circles, for example, the language of the condemnation of Islam is very judgmental and aggressive. The justification of this approach is based on the belief that though we condemn Islam and Muslims, we still love them. If we examine such an approach in light of God's character as it appears in Jonah, should we judge the other? Or should we pronounce God's word of judgement and warning as a message that reflects God's character of being slow to anger and that he is willing to accept the repentance of anyone who comes to him including Muslims?

As we have seen, some Chaldeans and Assyrians think of Jonah as a racist, who hates the Ninevites, that is the people of Nineveh and Mosul nowadays, because they are not Jews. They see in Jonah a national Zionist of the Israelites today who hates the people of Iraq. Indeed, the text does not support such a socio-ethnic reading of the text. Jonah ran away, but not because the Ninevites were not Jews. It is obvious that Jonah's struggle is with Nineveh's *evil*, rather than their ethnic background. If the Ninevites were comprised of Assyrians, Egyptians, Palestinians, or Canaanites, Jonah would have maintained the same stance, which is theologically based rather than cultural racism in nature.

### **6.5 Conclusion**

Our discussion in this section focused mainly on the prophetic role and a prophet's struggle with their commission. As prophets struggle, they respond differently. We have seen how Jonah struggled with God's relenting character and decided to flee from God. This raises a challenge in reading Jonah in the context of Islam, and thus have argued that a reading of the introduction of the book in the context of Islam

should address the dogma of prophetic infallibility. As we entered into the conversation between Jonah and Yūnus, we have observed how prophets function in a similar fashion in both traditions: they are agents of delivering God's message and their commission should be seen as a mercy and grace from God to humanity.

As we discussed the infallibility of the prophets in the context of their prophetic role, we have concluded that the concept of a false prophet is common in biblical and Qur'anic traditions. The latter tradition indeed reflects the traditions of Deuteronomy and Matthew, as the language and the setting of the polemically hostile context of Muhammad's accusations reveals. This led us to suggest that focusing on the relenting character of God to interpret Jonah's flight may move the conversation between Muslims and Christians to focus on God's character, rather than the prophets' character. We also proposed a similar approach to the prophets' struggle in the Qur'an, and concluded that prophets in both traditions should understand their commission in light of God's character, and this should impact the way in which they respond to their struggles as they imitate God's attributes. We finally concluded by re-examining the attitude of Jonah in the context of Islam and offered some practical implications of how Middle Eastern followers of Christ can reflect the character of God as they engage in their ministry to the Arab world.

## CHAPTER 7: GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY: JONAH’S DISCIPLINE AND THE SAILORS’ SALVATION (1:4–16)

### 7.1 Jonah 1:4–16

As the narrative continues in Jonah 1, we move to a new scene (1:4–16): Jonah on the ship in the middle of the sea, while God, in his sovereignty, is at work behind the scene. As Jonah began his journey of running away from God, the author reveals God’s disciplinary response in powerful language (v. 4). The narrator leaves no doubt that the powerful raging of the sea is God’s response to Jonah’s flight. The narrator departs from the dominant Hebrew narrative syntax where the sentence begins with a verb, and rather begins where the previous verse ends by placing the subject יהוה before the verb. This rhetorical approach, Tribble states, creates “emphases and contrast,” and it affirms the divine course and seriousness of the situation.<sup>1</sup> In response to Jonah’s flight, it is Yahweh who sent the great wind, which caused a great storm and impacted the ship to the point where it will be destroyed. The Hebrew word טול (Hifil; cf. vv. 5, 12, 15), translated as “he hurled,” shows the powerful action of God expressed through the double use of the adjective גדול (“great”) to describe the wind and the storm.<sup>2</sup> The powerful force of Yahweh’s hurling is first felt by the ship. The narrator skillfully uses השב (“intended to”) to give the sense of serious danger as the ship is about to be broken.<sup>3</sup> The powerful roaring of the sea reflects God’s rage towards Jonah, and its initial result is destruction. God, moreover, reveals his

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<sup>1</sup> Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 131. On the syntactical construction of this verse, see also Sasson, *Jonah*, 93; Simon, *Jonah*, 8; Bolin, *Freedom*, 77.

<sup>2</sup> The term טול is used elsewhere of throwing an object such as a spear (e.g., 1 Sam 18:11; 20:33; Isa 22:17; Jer 22:26–28).

<sup>3</sup> On the various translations and interpretations of this verb (השב), see Sasson, *Jonah*, 96.

sovereignty over nature in a series of events throughout the book: the storm (1:4), the fish (2:1, 10), the vine (4:6), the worm (4:7), and the east wind (4:8). As we continue, it is interesting to note that it is the sailors, not Jonah, who recognize first the anger of a deity.

The sailors have noticed the sea's roaring and their reaction demonstrates how they understand that this sea's "anger" is a divine reaction of some offence (v. 5).<sup>4</sup> The narrator reports their emotional feelings as being "afraid" (ירא, Qal) before the action they have taken. This fear generated a common religious response from everyone on the ship, that "each cried out to his own god" (ויזעקו איש אל-אלהיו).<sup>5</sup> It appears that people, regardless of their religious background, call upon a divine power to save them in times where their human attempts fail, and the sailors are no different.<sup>6</sup> Each one is calling for help and deliverance. But as they did not reach their gods, the sailors, in turn, decided to hurl the cargo (ויטלו את-הכלים).<sup>7</sup> The narrator uses the same Hebrew word used earlier (טול) that describes God's action to describe the sailors' reaction, and thus the response of the sailors suits the seriousness of the situation. The purpose is clear: throw out the goods carried on the ship in order to lighten it for themselves.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> If we consider a Canaanite religious deity bringing such storms, as Walton (*The Minor Prophets*, 106) suggests, it would most likely be Yamm, the god of sea and chaos.

<sup>5</sup> The Hebrew word זעק has the meaning of a loud calling for help in times of panic (cf. HALOT 277).

<sup>6</sup> This notion is attested in the ancient Near East; see Brody, *Each Man Cried Out to His God*, 82–83; Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 35. Here the theme of crying out to a divine power begins, but it appears throughout the narrative (1:14; 2:3; 3:8).

<sup>7</sup> It is impossible to understand the Hebrew כלי in terms of equipment; DCH (4:420) identifies the semantic breadth of כלי as "vessel, container, utensil, tool, implement, object, furniture, furnishings, goods, equipment, baggage." In such circumstances, the sailors need the ship's equipment, but they first need to lighten the ship.

<sup>8</sup> Tribble (*Rhetorical Criticism*, 136) argues that the Hebrew word קלל appears in the infinitive form, "without a specified object." As the reader is left to determine the object, "it" in this sense should refer to the sea, not the ship, as she concludes that, "thus the syntax implies that the sailors try to appease the sea (a deity?) by sacrificing their wares." Sasson (*Jonah*, 93) also argues for the same view, while Bolin (*Freedom*, 79) offers a critique of this view.

While the sailors work hard in a panic for survival, Jonah is acting in a surprising manner: he is laying down in a deep sleep (רדם).<sup>9</sup> The narrator thus brings Jonah back to the scene, but in a passive state. Jonah descended (ירד, Qal) to a far part of the ship (אל־ירכתי הספינה; “inner part of the ship”).<sup>10</sup> This is the third use of the verb ירד (used twice in v. 3), and is understood as a spatial metaphor that denotes the notion of descending to death via sleep.<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere in the OT, the term at times refers to a descent to the pit and the underworld (cf. Job 33:24; 1 Sam 26:10), and this is its use in Jonah 2:6. Jonah’s deep sleep (רדם, Nifal) has been interpreted as a psychological phenomenon of depression, spiritual sleep, exhaustion, prophetic sleep accompanied with revelation, or a state of death.<sup>12</sup> The latter is preferred if one takes into consideration the metaphorical meaning of the verb ירד mentioned above.

The captain approaches Jonah in his deep sleep and asks in surprise: “How can you sleep?” The captain then reminds Jonah of what he is supposed to do in such circumstances: he should call upon his God like anyone else: “Arise, call out to your god” (קום קרא אל־אלהיך) (v. 6). It seems from these latter words that the captain assumes that everyone has his own “personal” god (v. 5). Therefore, if their cry did not have any effect, the cry of Jonah might. Two points can be made here. First, the language of the sailors and the use of the name Elohim suggests that the sailors do not know Yahweh yet, and they think of Yahweh as Jonah’s god. Second, the narrator slowly shifts the focus of the sailors toward Jonah’s God, who may hear Jonah’s

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<sup>9</sup> Stuart (*Hosea-Jonah*, 458) refers to depression as a cause for a deep sleep, while Achtemeier (*Minor Prophets 1*, 264) sees “a picture of a man who is content with his decision and who therefore is able to fall asleep.”

<sup>10</sup> On the term ספינה see Sasson, *Jonah*, 101.

<sup>11</sup> Wolff (*Obadiah and Jonah*, 112) notices the link between ירד (“descend”) and שכב (“lie down”) as metaphorical language about death. Here Al Sharif gives this sense of the word by using the Arabic past tense رقد (“lie down”) which is usually used in the context of speaking about a deceased person.

<sup>12</sup> Scholars, like Simon and Wolff, note the similarity between Jonah and Elijah (1 Kgs 19:14) as both preferred sleep and death over life (cf. Simon, *Jonah*, 9; Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 113).



prayer and save the whole ship from destruction. This latter notion is affirmed by the captain's hope, as the Hebrew word אולי ("perhaps") suggests, in some sort of hearing from a god.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the captain anticipates that Jonah's prayer will reach god's attention (עשת, Hitpael; "to have a second thought"/"remember us") and they will not perish.<sup>14</sup> The theme of "not perishing" (cf. וְלֹא נִאֲבֹד; "so we will not perish") appears again in 1:14 and 3:9. Again, it is impossible at this point of the narrative that the captain would have had hope in Yahweh. He rather hopes for "salvation" from the foreign god of Jonah, if Jonah prays. But the silence of any report of any form of prayer suggests that Jonah did not respond to the captain's request.

As the hope in Jonah's prayer to save them vanishes, the sailors gather to suggest another possibility: seeking divine guidance through casting lots (v. 7).<sup>15</sup> Walton speaks of lot casting as one form of divination in the ancient Near East. It is used to seek divine assistance in a decision-making process. He explains, "The intention of the sailors in casting the lots is simply to get divine direction as to who can help resolve their dilemma."<sup>16</sup> Strawn, on the other hand, views this practice as purely an Israelite practice, though he speaks of five passages where foreigners employ this practice (Esth 3:7; 9:24; Joel 3:3; Obad 11; and Nah 3:10). According to Strawn, "the sailors' lot casting can (and should) be seen as participating in the larger theological point of the book of Jonah with regard to the nations. These sailors cast, after all, rather than engage in other kinds of ancient Near Eastern divination."<sup>17</sup> In this sense, Strawn continues, the book of Jonah portrays foreigners in a positive way

<sup>13</sup> The captain's hope is similar to the king's question, מִי יֵדֵעַ ("who knows") in 3:9.

<sup>14</sup> The Arabic translation here uses يفتكرنا ("to have a second thought"). Cf. HALOT 898: "to recollect, bear in mind"; DCH 6:624: "bear in mind, give a thought to."

<sup>15</sup> For a full treatment of the Hebrew term and usage of lot casting in the Old Testament, see Kitz, "The Hebrew Terminology of Lot Casting," 207–14; Lindblom, "Lot-Casting in the Old Testament," 164–78.

<sup>16</sup> Walton, *Minor Prophets*, 107. See also Sasson, *Jonah*, 108–10.

<sup>17</sup> Strawn, "Jonah's Sailors and their Lot Casting," 74.

as they adopt to Israelite ritual practices, compared to its negative portrayal of Jonah.<sup>18</sup> One can agree with Strawn on the narrative's positive treatment of non-Israelites, though it is hard to affirm that casting lots is a purely Israelite practice. Therefore, whether this practice is an Israelite one or not is a secondary issue, particularly when the text does not offer much help to make such a conclusion. What the text, however, states clearly is the purpose of this practice, that is to know the person behind the current crisis (רעה) and that the lot was unmistakable as it fell on Jonah. It seems that the narrator is very comfortable with the sailors' usage of this practice to affirm God's judgement on Jonah. In this sense, God's sovereignty is affirmed one more time: the lot is under God's domain.

As soon as the sailors find out that Jonah is the guilty person, they, in a panic, shower Jonah with very short and straightforward questions, aiming to identify what wrong Jonah has done, as well as his nationality, work, and ethnic group (1:8).<sup>19</sup> Jonah's single response addresses, mainly, the last question. He identifies himself as a "Hebrew" (עברי), a term used elsewhere for Israelites in relation to foreigners (cf. Gen 14:13; 40:15; Exod 1:19; 1 Sam 4:6).<sup>20</sup> Jonah then declares his "religious affiliation"<sup>21</sup> by introducing the deity he worships: "Yahweh, the God of the Heaven, I fear, who made the sea and the dry land." In Jonah's confession (v. 9), Yahweh, the covenant God, is introduced to the sailors for the first time. But since the sailors do not know Yahweh, the elaboration on the covenant name is necessary. Yahweh is "the God of

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<sup>18</sup> Strawn, "Jonah's Sailors and their Lot Casting," 76.

<sup>19</sup> The meaning and the reliability of the first phrase is questioned by scholars, particularly after the sailors already knew from the previous verse that Jonah was the guilty man. Regarding the reliability of this phrase, Simon (*Jonah*, 11) argues against the omission of some Greek and Old Hebrew manuscripts, denoting the copyists' responsibility for such an omission. In terms of interpretation, the repetition of this phrase aims not to be an inquiry from Jonah, but in the context of a severe crisis and a panicked mood, to give Jonah a chance to affirm or deny the finding of the lot casting.

<sup>20</sup> See Bolin, *Freedom*, 84; Sasson, *Jonah*, 115–19; Simon, *Jonah*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> The concept of "religious affiliation" is used by Simon (*Jonah*, 12) and Wolff (*Obadiah and Jonah*, 116).

heaven” (אלהי השמים), a term that typically occurs more in postexilic writings and became an identification of Yahweh to foreigners in the Persian period (cf. Ezra 5:11–12; 6:9–10; Neh 2:20; 2 Chr 36:23) and thus precisely suits this context.<sup>22</sup> It reveals Yahweh’s domain over the whole universe. This is reinforced by the fact that Yahweh is also the One who made the sea and the dry land. In Canaanite religion, Baal Shamem (“the master of Heaven”) is the Phoenician god, whom Jonah is perhaps contrasting with Yahweh.<sup>23</sup> Jonah’s statement affirms to the sailors that Yahweh, as the Lord of the sea, is *the* God behind this severe storm, and thus he speaks about Yahweh in a direct way that is related to the situation, and implicitly addresses the religious worldview of the sailors.<sup>24</sup> In other words, what the sailors are witnessing is nothing but Yahweh Elohim, the supreme God of the whole universe.<sup>25</sup> Jonah thus identifies Yahweh to a foreign people in a very unique way: the sovereign yet relevant Yahweh Elohim. The sailors thus will experience Jonah’s God, Yahweh Elohim, through his active involvement later in their life.

In the midst of Jonah’s declaration, he confesses his devotion and loyalty to Yahweh, the God whom Jonah worships (“fears”). Here we can see the irony between Jonah’s description of his relationship to the God of Heaven and his actual reality of trying to escape from the same God. Jonah’s fear here is empty of any sincere reverence of Yahweh, compared to what the sailors’ experienced earlier (1:5) and what they will experience next (1:10).

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<sup>22</sup> Bolin, *Freedom*, 84. See also, Simon, *Jonah*, 12. Wolff (*Jonah*, 115) also affirms the use of this term in Aramaic texts (Dan 2:18; Ezra 5:11; 7:12).

<sup>23</sup> Walton, *Minor Prophets*, 107.

<sup>24</sup> Some scholars interpret this statement as a “confession”: Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 122; Sasson, *Jonah*, 118–19; Limburg, *Jonah*, 52–53; and Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 141.

<sup>25</sup> Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 35. In Allen’s view (*The Book of Jonah*, 110), this term identifies Yahweh as “no mere local deity, but one to whom all people may look for help.”

As soon as the sailors (איש) know (ידע) the source and the reason for this crisis, the narrator immediately reports their reaction, that “they were exceedingly afraid” (וייראו האנשים יראה גדולה) (v. 10). As we have mentioned, it is hard for the reader to miss the repetition of the word ירא, and like many scholars, make the link between its occurrence. This latter “informed fear,” as Wolff explains it, is different from when they first faced the “great storm” (v. 5).<sup>26</sup> Earlier, Yahweh showed his power, yet the sailors ascribed its source to a deity. Now, they know that it is Yahweh, the Lord of the Heaven and the creator of the sea, who is behind this storm. The question of the sailors, מה־זאת עשית (“what you have done?”), is not a question of inquiry to the nature of Jonah’s guilt, but rather a cry of horror as “he informed them” (כי הגיד להם) of his flight from the presence of the Lord “for he was fleeing from the presence of Yahweh” (כי־מלפני יהוה הוא ברח). Jonah’s explanation is a confession from Jonah’s own words; but this does not mean, as Person suggests, that the phrase “implies that Jonah admitted his guilt.”<sup>27</sup>

As the sailors recognize what Jonah has done, they now explore some possibilities to end the dilemma (v. 11). Since the sailors now know the reason for Jonah’s flight, they turn to Jonah to tell them what would be required by him to redeem the situation: “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” As he is the only one who knows the religious requirements in such circumstances, the search for a remedy was necessary as Yahweh once again continues to show his power and sovereignty over the sea. The situation gets more intense, for the sea continues to be stormy; their goal is that the sea would quiet down (וישתק הים).

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<sup>26</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 116.

<sup>27</sup> Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 39.

Jonah offers a remedy for the situation, that is his own death, and therefore asks the sailors to throw him in the sea (v. 12). On the one hand, the reader can hear in Jonah's proposal the same word טול (Hifil) that was used to describe God's "hurling" of the storm (v. 4). Jonah's proposal thus can be interpreted as Jonah's submission to God's disciplinary act as it appears in v. 4. On the other hand, death becomes Jonah's wish (4:3, 8), and this may reinforce the fact that Jonah prefers death over the possibility of Nineveh's repentance. Jonah's proposal, moreover, reflects the character of a stubborn, rebellious prophet who continues to disobey God and is willing to bear the consequences, even if it means the end of his life. Jonah's proposal will meet the sailors' needs in two different ways. First, Jonah's proposal will help the sailors to reach their goal of saving the whole ship. We can hear in Jonah's proposal here, וישתק הים מעליכם ("and the sea will quiet down from upon you"), an echo of the sailors' wish, וישתק הים מעלינו ("and the sea will quiet down from upon us"). Second, this proposal will meet the sailors' most needed answers to the dilemma: "Tell us on whose account this crisis has come upon us" (v. 8). Jonah here defines clearly the reason for the dilemma: "for I know it is because of me" (כי יודע אני כי (בשלי).<sup>28</sup> This recognition is far from being a confession of his guilt, as Allen suggests.<sup>29</sup> It is rather a confession of responsibility for the crisis. In this confession, Jonah thus makes the connection between his fault and the storm, and also affirms that the sea was Yahweh's domain for punishment.

Though Jonah offers his own belief as a way to solve the dilemma, it seems that the sailors are not convinced as they attempt to work toward their goal of saving

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<sup>28</sup> William J. Horwitz interprets the אֲנִי as "fish"; for an argument against this interpretation, see Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 118; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 462.

<sup>29</sup> Allen, *The Book of Jonah*, 211; another view is to see Jonah as a sympathetic person who avoids letting the innocent sailors pay the price for his guilt as Landes ("The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah," 22) proposes.

the whole ship, “but the men rowed hard (ויהתרו) to go back (להשיב) to the dry land” (v. 13).<sup>30</sup> The reader may sense that the sailors recognize Yahweh’s sovereignty but they struggle, like Jonah, to obey. For a moment, they walk in Jonah’s steps trying to fight against Yahweh’s will. On the contrary, their reaction may reflect the narrator’s positive treatment of non-Israelites throughout the narrative. In this sense, the sailors are portrayed as “good people” who work, like any other crew in their situation, towards saving the lives of everyone on the ship during a violent storm in the middle of the sea. The sea, as Yahweh’s domain and device, is not cooperating. Since God is in control of the whole creation, He resists the sailors’ effort to save Jonah by making the sea more and more stormy as the narrator states, “but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them” (1:13).

The failure of the sailors in rowing back led them to acknowledge and confess Yahweh’s sovereignty (v. 14). In contrast to Jonah, the sailors turn to Yahweh in prayer, “They then cried out to Yahweh” (ויקראו אל־יהוה). The captain earlier used the same term (קרא) to encourage Jonah to call upon his God (קרא אל־אלהיך) (v.6), and later the term is used by Jonah when he prays to the Lord (2:3). But indeed, it was the sailors, not Jonah, who called upon Yahweh first. In their prayer, they address Yahweh by his name “Oh, Lord” (אנה יהוה) and thus acknowledge the fact that their deliverance will come from Yahweh, the Lord of the Heavens and the sea, not from Baal Shamem or any other gods. Therefore, they begin their appeal by expressing their desire not to perish. Their plea, “Do not let us perish” (אל־נא נאבדה) echoes the vocabulary and the hope of v. 6b. As the lot fell on Jonah, and at this point of the narrative becomes clear to them that Jonah is the guilty person, they believe that they

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<sup>30</sup> The Hebrew word *חתר* has the meaning of someone who works his own way through by rowing (cf. HALOT 365).

do not deserve to die “for this man’s life” (בנפש האיש הזה). The sailors thus appeal to Yahweh’s justice and mercy, seeking not to perish for a guilt they have not committed.<sup>31</sup> This is reinforced by the second part of their appeal, “Do not place on us innocent blood” (ואל־תתן עלינו דם), affirming that they are unwilling to take responsibility for the shedding of Jonah’s blood since they have not witnessed Jonah’s guilt (Deut 21:1–9; Jer 26:15). In this sense, the term נקיא, as Sasson and Wolff rightly state, refers mainly to the behavior of the sailors regarding the shedding of Jonah’s blood, rather than the sailors trying to judge him.<sup>32</sup> Their final declaration reveals their belief in Yahweh’s sovereignty and power: “For you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you” (Isa 46:9–10; Pss 115:3–4; 135:6). The sailors thus witness to the fact that the sea is Yahweh’s domain and the storm is Yahweh’s device to discipline Jonah, the disobedient prophet. With this declaration, the narrator thus prepares the reader for what comes next: the execution of Jonah being hurled into the sea and the belief of the sailors in Yahweh.

The execution of Jonah’s request earlier (v. 12) takes place here by the hands of the sailors, and consequently they are saved (v. 15). The reader can observe similar vocabulary between both verses (v. 12 and 15). The sailors carried (נשא) Jonah and hurled him into the sea (ויטלהו אל־הים). This is the third use of the verb טיל (Hifil) in this section (vv. 4, 5). The link between the sailors’ hurling of Jonah here and Yahweh’s hurling of the sea in v. 4 leads to the conclusion that Yahweh’s disciplinary act found its fulfillment here. It is important to note that while Yahweh disciplines Jonah, the non-Israelites got “saved” as “the sea ceased from its raging.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, through Yahweh’s disciplinary act related to Jonah, the non-Israelites

<sup>31</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 132.

<sup>32</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 134; Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 120.

<sup>33</sup> This is different from saying that Jonah’s “missionary” work, using Wolff’s expression (*Obadiah and Jonah*, 105), was fruitful even when he ran away.

witnessed Yahweh's power, experienced Yahweh's deliverance, and got to know him more. Here one can hear the echoes of Yahweh's words to Moses in Exod 6:1–9, but those words are now applied here to the non-Israelites. There, Yahweh heard "the groaning of the Israelites" and promised to redeem them "with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment" (Exod 6:6). As Israel experiences Yahweh's redeeming act, they will know (ידע) that "Yahweh is the Lord" (Exod 6:7). The judgement of the Egyptians leads Israel to know Yahweh. Here, on the other hand, it is the sailors who experienced the mighty hand of Yahweh and his judgement on Jonah. Thus, the judgement of Jonah leads the sailors to know Yahweh.

As the sailors experienced Yahweh's deliverance and witnessed his sovereignty, the reader reaches the climax of this section where the narrator reports the sailors' genuine response to Yahweh. First, "the sailors feared Yahweh greatly" (וייראו האנשים יראה גדולה) (v. 16). As we have seen, the term ירא is used first to describe the sailors' fear of the possible destruction of the ship (v. 5). As the sailors recognize that Jonah is the reason and the source for this dilemma, they, moreover, were exceedingly afraid (וייראו האנשים יראה גדולה; v. 10). What is unique here is that the sailors' fear comes at the end of a series of the sailors' encounters with Yahweh, which links their fear explicitly to Yahweh. It is impossible for the reader to not compare Jonah's fear (v. 9) and the sailors here. While Jonah describes his relationship to Yahweh as that of fear, he ironically acts in rebellion to Yahweh. On the one hand, Jonah's fear of Yahweh becomes the sailors, and thus it describes a new relationship between Yahweh and the sailors. This "fear of Yahweh," according to Wolff, "is not merely the term for worship, in the sense of a permanent religious affiliation, but even more describes a living relationship of obedience and trust."<sup>34</sup> For

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<sup>34</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 120.



Sasson, this verse “is the heart of Jonah’s first chapter, for it catches the moment in which illumination finally strikes the sailors.”<sup>35</sup> Though the language used here describes a new relationship between Yahweh and the sailors, it does not necessarily mean a conversion to Yahwism. Brent A. Strawn, for example, states that the language of 1:16 “makes it hard to avoid the impression that the sailors are presented as converts to Yahwism.”<sup>36</sup> Timmer, however, states that ironically “Jonah’s anti-missionary activity has resulted in the conversion of non-Israelites.”<sup>37</sup> The language of “conversion” limits the non-Israelites’ experience of Yahweh to just that of moving from one system of belief to another. This will be discussed later as we reflect on the the sailors as a type of Muslim.

In any case, the fear of the sailors is expressed through acts of worship: the sailors “offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows” (וַיִּזְבְּחוּ וַיִּנְדְּרוּ לַיהוָה וַיִּדְרוּ נְדָרִים). Two main points of discussion are raised: first, whether the sailors offered a sacrifice on the ship and, second, the relationship between sacrifice and vow. One explanation is offered by Walton in light of ancient Near East practices, where the pagan sailors offered sacrifices during the dangerous and long journey on the ship.<sup>38</sup> Simon makes a reverse order of the two clauses, where the sailors made a vow to offer sacrifices when they reached their destination.<sup>39</sup> Wolff, however, disagrees with the latter interpretation as it is different from what we see, for example, in Pss 50:14; 66:13; 116:17.<sup>40</sup> There, according to Wolff, the offering is the fulfillment of the vow, but here the vows “were made as the second act . . . [and] are paid by the sailors after the

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<sup>35</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 131.

<sup>36</sup> Strawn, “Jonah’s Sailors and Their Lost Casting,” 72.

<sup>37</sup> Timmer, “Jonah and Mission,” 165; Timmer, *The Non-Israelite Nations*, 81.

<sup>38</sup> See Walton, *Minor Prophets*, 108.

<sup>39</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 15. See also Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 41.

<sup>40</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 122.

sacrifice . . . [which] point to a lasting bond of trust with Yahweh.”<sup>41</sup> Vows, in a general sense, were usually made to a god under a condition: if a god fulfilled a request, the maker of the vow is obligated to fulfil his promise, and vice versa. A vow, moreover, can be driven by personal or national/public hope. In biblical contexts, Tony W. Cartledge suggests that vows take place “within the context of prayer in addressing Yahweh . . . And made conditional promises to God to be fulfilled only when and if God answers the petitioners’ request.”<sup>42</sup> Vows thus could have the sense and the wrong motivation of manipulating God, where the petitioner may think that by making vows he or she can have “easy” access to God’s ear.<sup>43</sup> In our passage, however, the context is different from the one just described. Vows here are made in the context of the celebration of a thank offering and they are made in response to Yahweh’s deliverance.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, the sailors offered a sacrifice and made vows as a part of thanksgiving worship for experiencing Yahweh’s deliverance, and thus the non-Israelites expressed their gratitude in the same manner as that of the Israelites.

## 7.2 Thematic Summary: Yahweh’s Sovereignty over Nature

As we continue reading the narrative of Jonah typologically, we learn, based on the scene on the ship, about Yahweh’s sovereignty and freedom. As we learn about Yahweh’s character in the book of Jonah, it is important to understand it in light of the wider context of God’s redemptive work in history, whether in the life of his people, Jonah, or the nations, the sailors, and later, the Ninevites. In light of this, the

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<sup>41</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 122.

<sup>42</sup> Cartledge, *Vows in the Hebrew Bible*, 12. For a full discussion on the terminologies and definitions of terms used in the OT, see Cartledge, *Vows in the Hebrew Bible*, 11–25.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Gen 28:20; Num 21:2; Judg 11:30–31; 1 Sam 1:11; 2 Sam 15:8.

<sup>44</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 122.

scene on the ship, one can argue, witnesses to Yahweh's sovereignty over nature as revealed in disciplining the disobedient prophet, while also serving as a sign of revelation to the non-Israelite sailors. In other words, as Yahweh disciplines Jonah, he saves the sailors.

As we have observed, Yahweh's sovereignty over nature is displayed as he sends a mighty storm, which is seen by both Jonah and the sailors as a divine disciplinary act. Jonah admits here that the roaring of the sea is because of his flight from God (1:12), and in his prayer that the waves and billows are Yahweh's (2:4). For the sailors, this disciplinary act is in harmony with Yahweh's will (1:14). It is thus obvious that each character in this scene has no doubt that Yahweh in his sovereignty uses nature to discipline the disobedient prophet. This divine disciplinary act, moreover, reveals one of Yahweh's ways in dealing with sin. Though Yahweh appears throughout the narrative as merciful and gracious, and even later with Jonah, here we can hear the "unconfessed negative aspects" of the creed, that Yahweh by no means clears the guilty (Exod 37:7).<sup>45</sup> We are reminded here of the very lesson that Yahweh taught Moses in the narrative of the golden calf (Exod 32–34), that God does not tolerate sin, and if he is to continue the journey with his people, discipline is key throughout this journey. This is thus not new to Jonah, but Israel's own history witnesses to such disciplinary acts where Yahweh brings disaster on Israel in its rebelliousness (cf. Amos 4:12–13; 5:8–9; 9:5–6). This disciplinary act aims to return Jonah back to the very role of the prophetic office, which is obedience in delivering the word of God. Even if Jonah struggles with his prophetic office, he needs to learn

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<sup>45</sup> Using the term "unconfessed" here compared to the "confessed" positive citing of the creed by Jonah in 4:2.

that flight as a form of protest fails to limit Yahweh's freedom to dispense his grace. This will be discussed more in our discussion of Jonah 4.

God's sovereignty over nature can be not only a means of discipline but also of revelation.<sup>46</sup> This revelation begins, as we have mentioned, with the roaring of the sea, and ends with the quietness of the same sea. In between, we have Jonah's creed which introduces Yahweh to the Non-Israelites: "Yahweh, the God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land" (1:9). While Jonah's proclamation witnesses to Yahweh's sovereignty (1:9), the sailors experience such sovereignty in action and submit to it: "for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you" (1:14). This confession echoes that of the psalmist (Pss 135:6; 115:4–7), where Yahweh's sovereignty is expressed within the context of contrasting Yahweh with other gods.<sup>47</sup> Though the contrast between Yahweh and other gods is not explicitly expressed in the context of Jonah, it is neither hard to miss: the sailors prayed to their own gods with no response (1:5), but they experienced Yahweh's sovereignty and submitted to it (1:14). In this sense, Tiemeyer states that the sailors "are pious men who call to their deities in times of need, yet are open to the possibility that the God of Israel may be more powerful than their own gods. When they experience his power, they worship YHWH in thankfulness through sacrifice and vow-making."<sup>48</sup> The sailors thus join the psalmist in his proclamation that "our Lord is above all gods" (135:5).

In light of this, the sovereignty of Yahweh over nature becomes a *sign* of revelation to the sailors, as it was for Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Ps 135:9). Pharaoh and the Egyptians, however, did not recognize those signs, while the sailors did. In

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<sup>46</sup> Goldingay, *Israel's Faith*, 656.

<sup>47</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 121. Based on this reading, Timmer (*The Non-Israelite Nations*, 81) comes to the conclusion that the sailors recognize Yahweh's sovereignty and their religious transformation is more likely authentic.

<sup>48</sup> Tiemeyer, "Jonah and the Foreigners," 263.

Exodus, as we have mentioned, the purpose of these signs and wonders is that Israel will know and confess that “Yahweh is the Lord” (Exod 6:7). In light of this reading, the sailors are portrayed like Israel while Jonah is like Pharaoh and the Egyptians. This depiction will be discussed in more detail below as we observe how the Qur’an thinks of Pharaoh as a type of Jonah.

In the context of polytheism, it is noteworthy to pay attention to the use of divine names, Yahweh and Elohim. God’s names in Jonah have been the subject of several studies.<sup>49</sup> These studies have reached different conclusions: two different sources behind the composition of the book (Yahwist and Elohist); based on tracing the literary technique employed by the author, two different systems are employed in Jonah—when the name Yahweh is used, it denotes the merciful and gracious covenant God, while the name Elohim denotes the powerful and strict disciplining Creator; and finally, Yahweh is used by Israel to refer to their covenant God, while Elohim is used to refer to the deity in the context of the non-Israelites.

Indeed, one cannot ignore the use of the two names throughout the narrative, particularly when there are non-Israelite characters in the narratives. Therefore, our focus should be on how both names are employed to help the non-Israelite sailors come to the recognition that Elohim is Yahweh, and there is no other elohim, but Yahweh *the* Elohim whom the sailors respond to with fearful awe. This conclusion is based on the fact that the sailors begin their journey by calling upon one of their local gods (elohim), and this informs the reader that the sailors do not know Yahweh. Throughout the scene, both names are employed to help the sailors come to realize that there is only one Elohim and this Elohim is Yahweh. We have seen how Jonah

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Limburg, *Jonah*, 45–46; Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 35–38; Kamp, *Inner Worlds*, 125; Berger, *Jonah in the Shadows of Eden*, 87–88; Goldstein, “On the Use of the Name of God in the Book of Jonah,” 77–83.

reveals his religious affiliation by introducing Yahweh as the Elohim, the Creator who made the heavens, the sea, and the dry land (1:16). By making such a confession, Jonah announces to the sailors that the Creator and Supreme Elohim is the covenant Yahweh whom Jonah worships. By the end of the scene, the sailors experience the realities of Jonah's confession and make vows to Yahweh, Jonah's God. Our author thus does not only exhibit a contrast between Yahweh and other gods, but also reveals that there is only one Elohim, and this Elohim is Yahweh to whom the sailors respond in fearful awe, offer a sacrifice, and make vows.<sup>50</sup> In light of this, the use of divine names thus reveals how the context of the audience impacts the ways in which one can speak about God, which we will discuss in more detail in the following section.

The theme of God's sovereignty over nature as a means of revelation appears in two key passages in the NT. First is the scene on the ship (Matt 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25), where Jesus rebukes the disciples for their "little faith," while at the same time he reveals his authority over the sea.<sup>51</sup> This authority over nature led the disciples to rhetorically question the identity of Jesus (e.g., "who is this man?") but at the same time claim in awe his sovereignty, for "even the wind and the sea obey him." The second passage speaks about God's revelation through nature to the world (Rom 1:18–32), but though the world can recognize God through nature, they, in their foolishness, reject him and became the subject of his wrath. In light of the latter passage, the sailors function as wise people who recognize God's sovereignty and power over nature and submit to him.

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<sup>50</sup> The scene of nations offering sacrifices and making vows can be seen in light of the eschatological restoration of the nations. Vows and sacrifice, for example, are also used by Isaiah to describe Egypt's eschatological restoration (Isa 19:16–25); see Brueggemann, *Theology of The Old Testament*, 524.

<sup>51</sup> On the parallels between both scenes see Powell, "Echoes of Jonah in the New Testament," 157–61; Goppelt, *Typos*, 72–73; Menken, "The Minor Prophets in John's Gospel," 94.

### 7.3 Yūnus' Flight Journey on the Ship

As we have seen in our analysis of the narrative of Yūnus in Islamic traditions, the Qur'an very briefly comments on the scene on the ship: "He [Yūnus] escaped to a fully loaded ship. And then he drew a lot and he was one of those losers" (Q 37:140–41).<sup>52</sup> Classical Mufasssīrun, however, have more to say about the scene on the ship. In the account of Ibn Kathīr, he reports a tradition that shares many elements with other classical Mufasssīrun: the ship struggles in the middle of the sea and it begins to sink, the sailors throw lots, the lots fall on the prophet Yūnus three times, Yūnus takes his clothes off and throws himself into the water.<sup>53</sup> The biblical account of the scene on the ship reports the sailors' one time throwing of lots, not three. It also emphasizes that it is the sailors who threw Jonah into the sea.

It is noteworthy to mention the absence of wind or any clear reason for the ship to sink, but, according to the belief of the folks on the ship, the only reason for the ship to sink is because there is a sinner among them. Rāzī, for example, reports that when the ship began to sink, the folks on the ship believe that there is someone under Allah's wrath because of his sin, for there is no wind nor clear reason for what happens to the ship.<sup>54</sup> Rāzī, however, reports the merchants' hesitance to throw Yūnus in the sea when the lots fell on Jonah for the first time, as they somehow knew that Yūnus is a prophet, and therefore declare that, "We are sinners rather than the prophet of Allah." When the lots fell on Yūnus for the second and third time, he confesses: "I am the sinner."<sup>55</sup> Tabatabai reports another tradition where a whale intercepted the ship, and therefore the sailors decided to throw one of them to be swallowed by the

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<sup>52</sup> The phrase "He was one of the losers" (فكان من المدحضين) denotes the notion of someone who lost the lots in a negative sense of the term.

<sup>53</sup> Ibn Kathīr on 37:141. See also Ṭabarī, Rāzī, Zamakhshary, Tabatabai, Qutb on 37:139–47.

<sup>54</sup> Qutb on 37:139–47.

<sup>55</sup> Rāzī on 37:139–47.

whale so that the ship could continue its journey. When the sailors threw lots, it fell on Yūnus, and therefore they threw him into the sea. It is interesting to see how some Mufassirun refer to Yūnus as a sinner, but this reference is based on the sailors' belief, and in one report as a confession on Yūnus' lips. This latter report is similar to that of Jonah (1:12). It is also important to mention the similarities between the biblical account and Rāzī's report of the sailors' hesitancy of throwing Yūnus.

Our literary reading between both accounts affirms Yūnus' (in terms of the Qur'an) and Jonah's (in terms of the OT) responsibility of putting the whole ship in danger. This danger, moreover, reflects divine wrath directed at the prophet. Interestingly enough, the sailors' failed attempts to rescue the prophet appear in both traditions. In the biblical account, the sailors attempt to row back, but the sea grows more stormy; in Islamic traditions, the sailors attempt to throw lots for the second and third time with the hope that it falls on someone else. As these attempts fail, divine resistance to such attempts is affirmed, and thus the discipline of the prophet is required. The Islamic traditions, moreover, seem to stress Yūnus' responsibility by allowing him to throw himself into the sea. As we have observed in our discussion of prophetic infallibility between the biblical and Islamic traditions, it is obvious here that while some reports affirm Yūnus' responsibility, others attempt to avoid it. This indeed reflects the interpreter's own dogmatic view on the issue of prophetic infallibility, which we have discussed fully before.

#### **7.4 Yūnus, Jonah, and the Sailors: Interreligious Relations**

Our analysis of the scene on the ship has mainly focused on Yahweh and his relationship to Jonah and the sailors. We interpreted the scene in the context of interreligious relations between the Israelite Jonah, and the non-Israelite sailors, or,



more generally, between the people of God and the nations. In light of this, we can read the scene in light of interreligious relations and dialogue between followers of Christ and Muslims.<sup>56</sup> The sailors thus could function as a type of a Muslim, while Jonah functions as a type of a follower of Christ. It is not necessary to limit the function of Jonah and the sailors to this designation, but we can shift their role since the sailors are actually treated positively in the narrative and they, regardless of their ethnic and religious background submit to Yahweh, while his prophet Jonah does not. This will take us to the first lesson we can learn in the context of interreligious dialogue.

We learn from the scene here, and indeed the whole book, that all religious affiliations and titles are worthless when the “fear of the Lord” is absent; what really counts is obedience and trust in Yahweh. This obedience and trust express themselves when a person or a group respond to God’s revelation of himself by confessing him as the Lord of Lords (cf. Jonah’s confession as the Lord of “heaven and the dry land”). In this respect, the confession of faith coincides with practical obedience to the Lord. The lesson that Israel, Muslims, and followers of Christ need to learn is that Yahweh is a God that is gracious and merciful to those who respond in obedience and submission to his revelation of himself.

Indeed, Muslims can be described as sincere seekers of Allah/God who “fear Allah.” As followers of Christ focus more on the love and grace of God and their “friendly” relationship with him, they unconsciously downplay the importance of “fearing God.” The Muslims’ fear of Allah therefore is understood negatively by followers of Christ. This latter group critiques Muslims for their emphasis on Allah’s

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<sup>56</sup> Tiemeyer (“Jonah and the Foreigners,” 261–81) explores the interreligious relations found in the book of Jonah.

sovereignty and their fear of him, while the former group critique the followers of Christ for their emphasis on God's love and grace. In interreligious dialogue between Muslims and followers of Christ, we can see both aspects of God's character: a merciful and gracious God who also disciplines (Exod 34:6–7). Any emphasis on either aspect of God's character gives a distorted image of God. This claim does not go without saying that followers of Christ see this full picture of God on the Cross, where God's justice and love converge.

The sailors thus correspond with Muslims in that both have hope in God, are open to the possibility of fearing him, and they honor him through sacrifice and vow-making. This hope in God by Muslims appears in various occasions. Some seek God in times of trouble, believing that God hears the prayers of his followers. Others have faith in Jesus in terms of his power to cast demons, and when it happens, they honor him by offering some type of a sacrifice and making vows (نذر). This does not necessarily mean that they “converted” to Christianity, though some do, but they do honor God by giving to the poor or offering a sacrifice to feed those who are in need. In any case, the Muslims' sincere “fearing of God” must be respected and taken seriously by followers of Christ, regardless of the outcome.

This leads us to the matter of “conversion” as analysed earlier when the question was posed whether Gentiles (the sailors) committed themselves to worship Yahweh or whether they just added him to their gods; however, these distinctions are, to some extent, irrelevant in the context of Islam. This conclusion is based on the fact that Muslims worship one Allah, the Creator of heaven and earth. Rather, the question we should consider in light of this reading is whether the sailors/Muslims' sincere fearing is the *appropriate response*. To answer this question, we need to go back to the sailors. As we have argued, the irony between Jonah and the sailors is obvious: the

identity of the prophet's religious affiliation as someone who fears Yahweh did not lead to submission, while the pagan sailors "feared the Lord greatly" and worshiped him through offering a sacrifice and making vows. Even if we assume that the sailors did not enter into a covenant relationship with Yahweh, they yet witnessed his power and majesty and *appropriately* responded in submission to him (in whatever way one interprets this submission). It is then between Yahweh and the sailors to decide whether their "fear" has a lasting impact on their relationship with Yahweh.<sup>57</sup> But even if the sailors feared Yahweh but did not enter fully into a covenant relationship with him, the question raised on the ship remains possible: "who knows?" Yahweh, "perhaps," in his abundant mercy and grace, continues his work in their lives on another sea journey. What we know for sure is that Jonah and the sailors met in a particular moment in history for a particular purpose, and as the scene ends, their role in each other's life ends, but God's redemptive work in history does not end. In the same way, when Muslims experience and witness to the powerful work of God through Jesus Christ in healing or casting demons, some of them become followers of Jesus Christ, while others do not. For the latter group, "who knows?" God, in his gracious mercy, may continue his redemptive work in their lives in an unimaginable way. This way of reading our text contributes to the interreligious dialogue and to the theology of mission in various ways. First, the followers of Christ should honor the Muslims' sincere fearing of Allah/God regardless of their lasting commitment and conversion. A positive attitude towards Muslims reflects the portrayal of a positive attitude towards the sailors and unlocks the doors for more conversations between both faiths. Second, as far as the theology of mission is concerned, reading this scene

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<sup>57</sup> Certainly, the case of the sailors is different from that of the Ninevites, which we will discuss later, particularly when we know from the book of Nahum that they were disciplined by Yahweh.

in light of God's redemptive work in history reveals how the God of redemptive history, especially in his sovereignty, can even use our disobedience to reveal himself to the nation of Islam. Such a reality teaches us to operate humbly before the Lord with a deep conviction in God's sovereignty in redemptive history.

## CHAPTER 8: SALVATION BELONGS TO THE LORD (2:1–11)

### 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, Jonah 2 will be read in light of the character of God, as it is revealed on the lips of Jonah in 4:2. Through the psalm of Jonah, which is set within a narrative framework (2:1, 11), God is revealed in dealing with Jonah as the One who is sovereign, gracious, hears prayers, and relents. This chapter will begin with an exegetical analysis of Jonah 2. It will then move to read the psalm of Jonah in light of the NT. Finally, this study will revisit the psalm taking into consideration its reading in the context of Islam.

### 8.2 God's Sovereignty (Jonah 2:1–3)

The narrative in Jonah 2 moves to a new scene, where Jonah is in the belly of a great fish (2:1).<sup>1</sup> While the sailors were “worshiping,” thinking with the reader that Jonah is sinking to death (1:16), God had a different plan. The narrative begins with the phrase “And God” to demonstrate once again the fact that God, who controls the course of actions throughout the narrative, is still in control as He “appoints” (וימן יהוה) a large fish to swallow up Jonah. Here, we can see how creation (the fish) is in service of its

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<sup>1</sup> There has been some debate among scholars in terms of the dating and place of the psalm (Jonah 2:2–9[3–10]) within the narrative of Jonah; see McKenzie et al., “Underwater Archaeology,” 83–103. In this debate, previous scholarship predominantly viewed the psalm as an interpolation; for an overview of these arguments, see Bolin, *Forgiveness*, 98–99; Wolff, *Jonah*, 128–31. However, there are several scholars that have challenged the order, claiming that the psalm is original to Jonah and the prose narrative was added later; see Hunter, “Jonah From the Whale,” 142–58; Pyper, “Swallowed By a Song,” 337–58. As well, other scholars follow along the lines of Landes’ (“Kerygma,” 3–31) study approaching Jonah as a literary whole; see Bühner, “Der Gott Jonas und der Gott des Himmels,” 65–78; Limburg, *Jonah*, 31–33.

Creator. This great fish functions as God's vehicle of deliverance to save the disobedient Jonah. Indeed, the narrator does not provide "unnecessary" information of the type of fish that might be able to sustain the life of a human for three days and three nights.<sup>2</sup> Nor does it tell us how Jonah spent his time there. What it does tell us though is that the fish is "great / big" (גדול), a term that is used throughout the narrative to describe objects (1:2, 4, 16), and leaves the reader to imagine the kind of fish.<sup>3</sup> Since the fish is God's miraculous intervention to rescue Jonah, the means of how God provided this miraculous intervention does not have to make sense to the reader nor does it have to be explainable. If a miracle can be explained logically and scientifically, it will not be a miracle. A miracle, Stuart states, "is a divine act beyond human replication or explanation."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the emphasis is on God's miraculous act which kept Jonah alive in the belly of the fish.

Jonah stayed there for three days and three nights. Landes argues that the "three days and three nights" refers to the journey from the underworld back to life, and in this sense the period Jonah spent inside the fish is a period of returning from death to life.<sup>5</sup> The fish thus is a divine medium to return Jonah to a place where he can resume his mission once again. The psalm captures critical moments of Jonah's experience later, however, it is this psalm that tells us even more. So, it is not the narrator who tells us what happened, but Jonah.

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, exegetes have long speculated about the cause for "gender switching" of the fish; see Tiemeyer ("Jonah's Fish," 307–23) for different explanations provided on the gender/sex of the fish (גד) as it appears in the MT in 2:1, 2, and 11, with her suggestion that the "additional" ה in 2:2 is a result of nominal lengthening in pausal form (e.g., at the end of a clause), usually appearing in poetry, and thus, for her the fish remains "male" throughout the chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, 270.

<sup>4</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 474.

<sup>5</sup> Landes, "Three Days and Three Nights," 449.

### 8.3 God Who Hears Prayers (Jonah 2:3–5)

The narrator, however, does describe one of Jonah's activities inside the fish, highlighting his prayer. Though Jonah ran away from God, God, in a sense, did not abandon his prophet, and for Jonah, the Lord is still his God. This is made clear through Jonah's prayer, where the belly of the fish is the temple and where this act of worship took place. Indeed, the narrative of Jonah is full of "unusual" places where sacrifice and worship take place: the deck of the ship for the sailors (1:16) and the inside of a fish for Jonah (2:1). This prayer, moreover, reflects Jonah's convictions about what happened to him, and how he viewed God in the middle of this crisis (2:3):

And he said: (A) Out of my distress I called out to the Lord, (B) and he answered me;

(C) I cried out of the belly of Sheol, (D) and you heard my voice.

The prayer opens with a personal testimony of an answered prayer from the depth of distress. It summarizes the entire experience of Jonah and offers his own interpretation of what happened to him. The prayer begins with the verb "he said" that is "marking the transition from narrative to direct speech."<sup>6</sup> The first line of the prayer contains a prepositional phrase that describes the circumstance surrounding the cry of Jonah and the whole prayer (2:3a). The Hebrew preposition *min* (מִן) is usually used in relation to a location, but it is used in this context with "distress" as a state of being. The call to God thus came from a state of adversity. The parallel between 3a and 3c is clear, suggesting that Jonah repeats his cry with specification as to the nature of the distress and the identification of its place: "Sheol's belly" (מִבֶּטֶן שְׂאוֹל).<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew

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<sup>6</sup> Youngblood, *Jonah*, 104.

<sup>7</sup> Three Psalms speak of a rescue from Sheol (Pss 30:3; 86:13; 116:3–8), but they are referring to rescue *before* death, not after.

phrase “I cried” (שועתי) in its Piel form intensifies the nature of this call to denote a cry from a needy person for help during a time of disaster.<sup>8</sup> Simon notices that “Sheol here is personified as having a belly; elsewhere in the Bible we find that its mouth gapes to swallow the lawless (Isa 5:14).”<sup>9</sup> By doing so, Jonah interprets the current threat of drowning, which will be described in more detail below, as analogous to “Sheol,” a place where all the dead descend. The Al-Shareef Bible captures the meaning of the Hebrew word “Sheol” (שאול) and translates it as أعماق القبر (“the depths of the grave”), whereas the NIV, for example, translates it as “the realm of the dead.” This is a dispersive translation, as in a traditional sense, “a grave was dug in the earth or carved out in rock.”<sup>10</sup>

God graciously gave an ear to such prayers. While very little is recorded regarding what Jonah said in his prayer, Jonah affirms God’s response to his prayer (2:3). The parallel synonyms between 3b and 3d stress the fact that God hears and answer prayers, though they may come from the far-off realm of the dead. Youngblood notices another aspect of Hebrew parallelism: difference within similarity. In v. 3d, Jonah addresses Yahweh directly in the second person, instead of speaking about Yahweh (2:3b). This direct speech to Yahweh is an expression of praise and gratitude for the salvation offered for the present adversity. Simon accurately observes that the prayer has “the power to save the supplicant from a situation that would have been irreparable without divine intervention.”<sup>11</sup> In sum, God hears the prayers of those who call upon him in their time of distress (cf. Pss 18:6 and 34:17).

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. HALOT 1443: “to utter a successive series of screams.”

<sup>9</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 19. See Wildberger (*Isaiah 1–12*, 204) where Sheol is “still being thought of as a real creature which is in control of the deep.”

<sup>10</sup> Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets 1*, 272.

<sup>11</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 19.



1. Description of Past distress (vv. 4–5):

4a. For you cast me into the deep,

4b. into the heart of the sea,

4c. and the streams surrounded me;

4d. all your waves and your billows passed over me.

5a. Then I said, “I am driven away from your sight;

5b. how shall I again look upon your holy temple?”

Literarily speaking, this stanza demonstrates Jonah’s interpretation and description of past distress, using the imagery of drowning in the sea. The imagery of drowning is used in the Psalms in a figurative way to draw a vivid picture of a dire situation, e.g. Ps 69:1–2. Here, however, the imagery is more literal and suits the context well. It draws a vivid picture of Jonah’s drowning experience after the sailors threw him into the sea. Jonah reached the deep—the heart of the sea (v. 4). This vivid picture of drowning reflects Jonah’s hopeless state where he reached the depths, away from the safety of dry land. A further description of drowning is expressed in the parallelism of the other two lines (c and d): Jonah was surrounded by streams of water (נהר) and swept by waves and billows. This vivid picture of drowning is intensified in vv. 5 and 6, where a more detailed description is given, describing the physical parts of the body: water reaches the throat (גפש) as a sign of not being able to breath and is imprisoned completely by water (which is similar to verse 4c); furthermore, Jonah’s head (לראשי) is wrapped by weeds (סוף). Again, Jonah’s drowning experience is further explained, but this time using figurative imagery. The drowning is figuratively explained as a descent to “the foundation of the mountains” (v. 7a). This biblical imagery, according to Simon, “reach all the way to the bottom of the sea” (cf. Ps

46:3) in biblical cosmography.<sup>12</sup> The image of a land with closed gates is unique in the Bible and it refers to the underworld. In biblical texts, we find that the underworld is described as having doors; e.g., the gate of Sheol (Isa 38:10) and the gate of death (Ps 9:14). The land described here refers to the land of the underworld, or the land of the dead that closes its gates forever.<sup>13</sup> The use of עולם (“forever”) here stresses the hopeless state of no return at this moment. Walton captures the scene here as follows: “Here Jonah views himself as having arrived at the gates of the netherworld by passing through the level of the chaos waters.”<sup>14</sup> All these vivid images give the full impression that death is unavoidable.

For Jonah, however, it is God who threw him to the depth of the sea, while the sailors merely carried it out. The Hebrew verb שלך (“to cast”), according to Simon, has two meanings: “the literal sense of being cast into the water and the figurative senses of being loathsome and rejected.”<sup>15</sup> It is God who cast Jonah out. Jonah, moreover, attributes the waves and the billows to God (your waves and your billows). In other words, they are God’s instruments, which he owns. Here, again, Jonah’s recognition of the Creator’s sovereignty is shown and He alone determines the course of actions throughout Jonah’s story.

Jonah interprets this experience as he reveals the terrible thought that passed through his mind during this time of drowning. It is expressed in a conversation between Jonah and himself, and the language of this conversation in v. 5a captures Jonah’s despairing feelings and thoughts. As Jonah realized the fact that his death was nearer than ever as he reached the bottom of the sea, he came to the conclusion that he

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<sup>12</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> See Paul (“Jonah 2:7,” 131–34), for further discussion between the psalm of Jonah and its association to the netherworld by comparing this text with phrases from other ancient Near Eastern languages, such as Akkadian and Sumerian

<sup>14</sup> Walton, *The Minor Prophets*, 110.

<sup>15</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 20.

was cut off from God's presence, having been "driven away" from His sight (v. 5a). Here, Jonah experiences what it truly means for the Lord to give him the desire of his heart: to run away from the face of the Lord completely (Jonah 1:3).<sup>16</sup> In this mood of despair and separation from God, Jonah, moreover, questions the possibility of ever returning to God (v. 5b).<sup>17</sup> It is hard to hear any sense of hope and confidence in Jonah's cry, as suggested by Simon.<sup>18</sup> Neither is there a commitment to persist in prayer as suggested by Youngblood.<sup>19</sup> As Jonah draws near to death, the only voice that is heard up to this point in the psalm is one of doubt and wonder.

#### 8.4 God's Deliverance (Jonah 2:6–8)

While Jonah sinks towards death, however, it seems that God's preferred option for Jonah is not death, but salvation. The Hebrew *תַּחַת* can be translated as "pit," which "signifies the grave or realm of the dead."<sup>20</sup> Jonah describes his deliverance from this trial metaphorically as the rising of life itself from the grave. It is a sign of God's mercy and grace. Simon notices the parallelism between the lines "You cast me" (v. 4a) and "You brought my life up" (v. 6) stating that "the One who cast him [Jonah] down into the depth of the sea is the same God who raises him [Jonah] up and redeems him from death."<sup>21</sup> The person who saved Jonah is the Lord his God, a term

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<sup>16</sup> To live in *hesed* is to live in God's care (before his sight), and to decide to "run away" from *hesed*, is to run away from the face of the Lord. However, when we try to run away from the face of the Lord, his *hesed* still follows us. Here we can see how Jonah experienced *hesed* in a very unique way.

<sup>17</sup> As Limburg (*Jonah*, 67) summarizes this verse, "Jonah says in effect: 'I have been driven away from your eyes, Lord; and how will my eyes ever again see your temple?'"

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Simon, *Jonah*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Youngblood, *Jonah*, 108.

<sup>20</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 477; cf. Limburg (*Jonah*, 68) where he notes that "'The Pit' is the place where one goes at death." The Hebrew word *תַּחַת* appears elsewhere in the OT as associated with a "grave" in Isa 38:17; 51:14; Ezek 28:8; Pss 16:10; 30:10; 49:10; 55:24; 103:4; Job 17:14; 33:18, 22, 24, 28, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 22.

used early by the narrator in v. 2 to describe the special relationship between Jonah and God.

Though the narrative of Jonah does not record what Jonah said to the Lord, Jonah tells us here that he remembered the Lord when his life reached its end in the bottom of the sea, and this act of remembrance expresses itself in a form of an active prayer, as the parallel in v. 8b demonstrates. In the midst of death, Jonah remembers the One who can save him, and thus he seeks God's favor through prayer. God graciously responded to the hopeless Jonah. We can see here that Jonah returns again to the theme of answered prayer mentioned at the beginning of the psalm (2:3). This prayer, however, reached the Lord's holy temple.<sup>22</sup> This "holy temple" is simply a synonymous parallel to the word "you," suggesting that the holy temple is the heavenly sanctuary where God resides.<sup>23</sup> While Jonah earlier questions in a moment of doubt whether he can ever reach God's holy temple (v. 5b), here, he confirms that his prayer reached God's holy temple from the heart of the grave.<sup>24</sup>

### 8.5 God's *Ḥesed* (Jonah 2:9–11)

9a. Those who worship worthless idols,

9b. forsake their steadfast love

10a. But I, with a voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you;

10b. what I have vowed I will pay.

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<sup>22</sup> This may reflect Solomon's prayer in 1 Kgs 8:28–30 // 2 Chr 6:19–21, where he pleads for Yahweh to hear the prayers that are directed "toward" the Temple.

<sup>23</sup> As Wolff (*Jonah*, 135) says, "How could the petitioner be sure of the end of this rejection? Through the fact that he was allowed to see Yahweh's holy temple again."

<sup>24</sup> Sasson (*Jonah*) points out that "Here there may be irony, for Jonah, who had sought to escape God by reaching the furthest land of the known earth, Tarshish, recovers his senses and begins to plead with his maker upon reaching the nethermost side of the cosmos."

10c. Salvation belongs to the Lord.<sup>25</sup>

The fifth stanza is a declaration of praise by Jonah about the One who delivered him. It begins with a contrast between those who worship idols and those who put their trust in the Lord. As Jonah experienced God's powerful deliverance and his *ḥesed* toward him, he laments those who put their trust in idols.<sup>26</sup> From experience, idols would have been useless to someone like Jonah, as this was the case with the sailors (1:5). They do not have ears, nor do they have the power to save as Jonah's God does. If they follow the path of idols, they will have no hope in receiving God's *ḥesed*. On the contrary, as Jonah puts his trust in the Lord his God (vv. 2:1, 7) through remembrance and prayer, he will rejoice in God's *ḥesed* that he experienced when his God saw his affliction and knew about the distress of his soul and came down to save him (Ps 31:7–8). Simon aptly captures the sense of this verse when he states that “those who cling to false God's will abandon their expectation of receiving their bounty.”<sup>27</sup> Wolff translates the second part of the verse as follows: “they forsake the one who is faithful to them.”<sup>28</sup> Jonah thus laments those who exchange God's faithfulness with empty and worthless things.

Both Simon and Youngblood rely on Ps 31:7–8 to understand this “difficult” verse: “I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the Lord. I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have known the distress of my soul.” Simon explains:

It seems unlikely that the scorn for idolators in both passages is intended to express the Psalmist's superiority to them . . . More plausible is that it is meant

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<sup>25</sup> God is the main actor throughout, from the deliverance of Noah's family to the great multitude who shout, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev 7:10); see Arnold, “Salvation,” 701.

<sup>26</sup> For a superb survey study on *ḥesed* see Clark, “*Hesed*” in *the Hebrew Bible*. On *ḥesed* where God is the subject, see Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, 161–68; Glueck, *Ḥesed in the Bible*, 70–102.

<sup>27</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 23–24. See also Youngblood, *Jonah*, 111–12. On the relationship between *חסד* and *עֲזָרָה* see Clark, “*Hesed*” in *the Hebrew Bible*, 200.

<sup>28</sup> Wolff, *Jonah*, 138.

to glorify the Lord, who alone merits praise and gratitude. In the parallel passage in Psalms, *hesed* should be understood as having its normal sense of a bounty or boon; hence it seems likely that here it denotes the bounty of the “empty folly.” If so, the sense of the verse is that those who cling to false Gods will abandon their expectation of receiving their bounty.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to those who worshiped idols, Jonah proclaims his gratitude with a voice of thanksgiving, offering a sacrifice and promising to carry out his vow as he experiences God’s *hesed* shown in his own salvation. It seems that Jonah in his prayer promised a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord, and “by offering the thanksgiving sacrifice he is fulfilling what his lips uttered in his affliction (Pss 66:13–14 and 116:17–18).”<sup>30</sup> Shouting with a voice of gratitude is common among a group of people who praise and worship God (Pss 11:15 and 26:7). Here we can see how Jonah’s response is similar to that of the sailors. As both Jonah and the sailors experience salvation, they respond by offering a sacrifice and making a vow. Both the sacrifice and the vow are common in the individual song of thanksgiving (cf. Pss 66:13 and 116:14).<sup>31</sup> The vow Jonah made could be the thanksgiving itself or the promise to continue praising the Lord. This is the biblical norm, as Allen states, “deliverance creates the obligation of worship.”<sup>32</sup>

The climax of the psalm is expressed as Jonah shouts with joy acknowledging from experience that salvation comes from the Lord. The expression “salvation belongs to Yahweh” is found twice in the Psalms (Pss 3:3 and 80:3), and has a similar poetic form to that of Exod 15:16. It is “an extraordinarily concise summation of the content of the whole prayer.”<sup>33</sup> Jonah’s declaration means that Yahweh is the sole

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<sup>29</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 23–24. See also Youngblood, *Jonah*, 111–12.

<sup>30</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 44.

<sup>31</sup> Wolff, *Jonah*, 138.

<sup>32</sup> Allen, *The Book of Jonah*, 219.

<sup>33</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 24.

source for his deliverance; it belongs only to the Lord.<sup>34</sup> Stuart, however, sheds new light on the meaning of this expression in its current context by asking: “Can this expression not also connote that Yahweh is in charge of salvation, i.e., that he decides whom he will save and how?”<sup>35</sup> This means, Stuart continues, that God alone is in charge of salvation and makes the decisions.<sup>36</sup> In this sense, this expression is important to the story of Jonah, “since one function of the psalm is to voice Jonah’s own gratefulness for undeserved rescue, thereby exposing the inconsistency of his unwillingness that Nineveh should experience the same gratefulness.”<sup>37</sup>

Once salvation is pronounced, the narrator reverts from poetry to narrative to close with the assertion that Jonah is now back safely on the dry land (2:11). The fish obeys the command of its Creator and accomplishes its mission as it spewed this “indigestible object.”<sup>38</sup> The reader up to this point of the story might wonder if anything further will happen. Jonah is now back on the dry land, and this is the irony of exactly what happens if a person attempts to run away from God: This person’s attempt fails, asserting that God is still sovereign and in control.

### 8.6 Thematic Summary: Sovereignty and Salvation

This analysis shows that Jonah’s prayer is similar to the language and the genre of a thanksgiving psalm, and it is set within a narrative framework (2:1, 11). The psalm reflects Jonah’s own interpretation of his drowning experience and how he experienced God’s gracious deliverance. Jonah recognizes the Creator’s sovereignty

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<sup>34</sup> As Limburg (*Jonah*, 72) points out, “The Christian reader who hears this conclusion to Jonah’s prayer in its original language cannot miss this word that sounds so much like the Hebrew name of Jesus, which has meant deliverance and salvation for the peoples of the world.”

<sup>35</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 478.

<sup>36</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 478.

<sup>37</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 478.

<sup>38</sup> Allen, *The Book of Jonah*, 220.

and He alone determines the course of actions throughout his own story: God is the one who puts Jonah near to death, and He alone is the one who delivers him. This undeserved deliverance, moreover, shows how God graciously responded to the cry of the disobedient Jonah in the middle of his adversity. While disobedience deserves death, God nonetheless shows grace and mercy, granting life to Jonah.

It is hard to miss how the psalm relates to the whole narrative in many various ways. First, it functions ironically to show a contrast between Jonah's attitude toward his own deliverance and his attitude towards the Ninevites. Both Jonah and the Ninevites deserve death, but both experience deliverance. At the climax of the psalm (v. 10), one can hear Jonah's shout of rejoicing about his own deliverance, but anger and frustration with the Ninevites' deliverance (4:1, 3, 9). Indeed, the Ninevites are in a better place than Jonah: they responded positively to God's word, while Jonah had ignored it. This irony serves the whole purpose of the narrative, that Jonah, the Israelites, and readers today must examine their attitude towards other nations and imitate God's compassionate heart toward them. Indeed, Jonah represents the attitude of some Middle Eastern Christians who self-righteously brag about their own salvation and religion, though they claim to know by heart that it is by God's grace alone that they are saved. They always have a sense of entitlement because their God is better than the Muslim's God. Their culture is more civilized and superior to the Muslims'. And Christianity as a religion is better than the religion of Islam. This sense of entitlement produces the sense as if we, as Christians, deserve God's grace. On the one hand, we celebrate when a Muslim makes the decision of following Jesus Christ. On the other hand, we blame the Muslim world and the Qur'an for all the conflict in our world today and unconsciously feel that they deserve God's punishment when they experience unjust treatment from a particular group of people.



Therefore, Jonah and Middle Eastern Christians need to be reminded of the fact that their salvation is an expression of God's gracious *ḥesed*. Paul's message to the church of Ephesus comes to mind, that we were all a dead people living in our transgressions and deserving God's wrath, but it is by his grace that we are saved (Eph 2:1–10).

Second, the narrative framework of Jonah's psalm (2:1, 11) contributes significantly to the theme of God's sovereignty that runs throughout the book (1:4; 2:1, 11; 4:6–8). In those passages, God is in control of the whole of creation, and in the case of Jonah, in Chapter 2, the great fish serves as God's vehicle to deliver the undeserved prophet. It is God who appoints the fish to swallow and to vomit Jonah, and thus God's salvation is set within the framework of his sovereignty. In other words, God's sovereignty expresses itself graciously to save the disobedient prophet from his death sentence. Here we can see a clear example of how the characteristics of God work in harmony for the service of humanity. This fact works against the notion that God's power is unleashed violently for the purpose of punishment and destruction. As in the case of Jonah, God in his sovereignty relents when people call upon him, seeking his mercy. In this sense, God's relents from wrath in order to save from disaster (4:2). Jonah's own story is an authentic testimony to a God who relents and thus saves Jonah from deserved death.

As we attempt to interpret Jonah in light of the character of God revealed in 4:2, our reflection shows that the psalm, within its narrative framework, is a testimony of God's characteristics in action. When Jonah called upon God, his prayer was heard and God relented from sending Jonah to his death sentence. Jonah, moreover, experiences God's *ḥesed* through salvation. In other words, salvation is a genuine expression of God's *ḥesed*. In this context, therefore, *ḥesed* can be defined as God's gracious commitment to the undeserved prophet Jonah, and thus takes on the meaning

of grace. In contrast to those who worship idols and neglect their commitment—  
 hesed—to worship God, Jonah lives in the realm of God’s hesed, which generates a  
 commitment to worship God as he offers a sacrifice of praise and makes a vow. In  
 this sense, those who worship idols lose the privilege of living in God’s hesed.  
 Therefore, we can hear in Jonah’s voice a song of hesed, where he testifies to God’s  
 hesed in his own life. God’s hesed is experienced in Jonah’s own delivery. Salvation  
 is thus a real experience where a person experiences God’s hesed in this life. All of  
 this reveals the heart of the compassionate and merciful God.

### **8.7 Jesus the Suffering Son of Man: Typological Assessment**

While our exegetical analysis attempts to read the psalm in its literary context, it also  
 reads it in light of the NT in two various ways: typologically and thematically. The  
 former will address Jesus’ use of Jonah’s three days and three nights, and the latter  
 will address the main theme of God’s hesed as it expresses itself here in terms of  
 hearing the prayer and the salvation of Jonah. Regarding the former, we concluded in  
 our previous discussion that Matthew uses Jonah’s experience in the belly of the fish  
 to explain the suffering of the death of the Son of Man, and also his resurrection. In  
 other words, this death-salvation theme in Jonah is understood in Jesus’ context in  
 terms of the suffering and the resurrection of the Son of Man. Following Matthew’s  
 steps, it is then possible to use Jonah’s experience to speak to Muslims about Jesus’  
 death as the suffering Messiah, rather than attempting to argue with Muslims whether  
 Jesus spent three literal days and nights in the tomb. Jonah experienced rejection and  
 suffering through drowning and staying in the belly of the fish for three days and  
 three nights, thus Jesus, the Son of Man, experienced rejection and suffering from  
 people that led to his death.

Though Muslims reject the whole notion of Jesus' death, it is unavoidable to raise this matter as we read the story of Jonah in the context of Islam. However, speaking of Jesus not only as the Son of Man who suffers but also who was raised and who will come back as a victorious judge can perhaps help navigate the conversation. In this latter sense, resurrection is seen as God's redemptive victorious act for the suffering Son of Man who will come back again victoriously to judge those who rejected him. Thus, the coming back of the Son of Man as a judge in Matthew shows not only the suffering journey of Jesus, but also his vindication-victorious return as a judge. In summary, therefore, this typological reading of the experience of Jonah shows conformity with the theme of death and resurrection, and reveals in both accounts that while God allows his prophets to go through a journey of suffering and death, He also guarantees their salvation. This idea is reinforced by what Jonah announces at the end of his psalm: "salvation belongs to the Lord" (2:11).

As we have observed, suffering and salvation will also characterize the journey of followers of Jesus as they follow and serve the Master. Particularly, the followers of Jesus from a Muslim background suffer, and in some countries face the penalty of death, for their faith. They walk through a journey of rejection by and suffering from their families and communities. The theme of salvation, however, assures them that God will save them as they live in the realm of God's gracious *ḥesed*.

### **8.8 Yūnus and Jonah: Deliverance and Prayer**

The well-known event of Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish appears in Islamic traditions. As we have seen, Yūnus' name, for example, is associated with this experience so that the Qur'an calls Yūnus "the Man of the Fish" (37:148; 21:87). The

Qur'an uniquely shows how Yūnus obtained deliverance through prayer (Q 37:143), repentance (Q 21:87), and "mercy from his Lord" (نعمة من ربه) (Q 68:49). The Hadith offers even more details on the scene of God's counsel during Yūnus' prayer. There, the angels report that Yūnus prayed in a weak voice, and this reflects his state of distress. As they intercede for Yūnus and remind God of his good deeds, Yūnus receives God's mercy.

As we bring Yūnus and Jonah into conversation we observe that both Yūnus and Jonah were in distress when they cried out to God. While the prayer of Yūnus is that of praise and repentance, the prayer of Jonah is that of thanksgiving: Yūnus confesses his guilt and repents, while Jonah offers a thanksgiving for his deliverance. In other words, Yūnus repents and obtains deliverance, while Jonah thanks God for his deliverance. By doing so, the Qur'an refers to Yūnus' repentance as the basis for his deliverance, while the psalm (Jonah 2) reports no sign of Jonah's repentance.

All these observations lead to the conclusion that the biblical psalm reports Jonah's own interpretation of the drowning experience, while the Qur'an and Hadith offer more details concerning the activities that took place during Yūnus' time in the belly of the fish. It is thus reasonable to conclude that the Qur'an and Hadith reflect deep Islamic convictions of how a person, like Yūnus, obtains deliverance. The psalm, on the other hand, reflects a deep biblical conviction of how a person, like Jonah, obtains deliverance through God's grace. This will lead to a conversation between Yūnus and Jonah regarding the concept of deliverance, and the role they both play in the lives of their followers as examples of being men of prayer. To the first we now turn.

For Yūnus and Jonah, Allah/God is the Deliverer. As we have observed, the story of Yūnus is part of a series of a prophetic chain, where it is revealed through

story how God was actively present in the history of the former prophets when he delivered them. The Qur'an then promises that God will deliver Muhammad and the Muslim community believers as he delivered former prophets. Although "The Deliverer" is not one of the ninety-nine beautiful names of Allah, one might derive a name for Allah based on his activity. In this respect, Allah is the Deliverer in times of distress for Yūnus, Muhammad, and the Muslim community.

When the Qur'an speaks of Allah's *ni'mah* reaching Yūnus (Q 68:49), it is mainly understood in terms of mercy. The term *ni'mah* is understood in this passage as follows. First, when Allah had mercy (*ni'mah*) on Yūnus, He led him to repentance and accepted it.<sup>39</sup> Second, Allah's mercy (*ni'mah*) is shown in Allah's response to Yūnus' call as He rescued him.<sup>40</sup> Finally, it is a merciful-gracious act of Allah.<sup>41</sup>

In the Qur'an, the term *ni'mah* has various meanings based on its literary Qur'anic contexts. The term implicitly denotes Allah's bestowed act of mercy to all humanity. It is his favor expressed in action to show his goodness. The Qur'an and prophecy are themselves *ni'mah* from Allah to all human beings (Q 68:2; 93:11). Allah will punish the children of Israel if they "change / replace" Allah's *ni'mah* (يبدل (نعمة الله), that is the signs that were given to the people of Israel to believe (Q 2:211). The people of Israel are encouraged to remember Allah's *ni'mah* (نعمة الله) when he saved them from Pharaoh (14: 6). They should also remember Allah's *ni'mah* when he chose them over the world (Q 2:122). The well-being of men is a life lived in Allah's *ni'mah* (نعمة الله), otherwise they need to call upon God when adversity touches them (16:53). God's bestowed favor expresses itself in the lives of those whom Allah guides, unlike those who go astray (Q1:7). Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya speaks of ten

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Ṭabarī and Rāzī on 68:49.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Tabrī on 68:49.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Qeshari on 68:49.

characteristics of the term *ni'mah* in the Qur'an: gracious giving, religion, Muhammad, rewarding, prophecy, mercy, benevolence, prosperity, Islam, and liberation.<sup>42</sup>

The debate over the meaning and the translation of the term *ni'mah* as “grace” is an important one for two particular reasons. First, the Arabic term *ni'mah* is usually translated as “grace.” With this translation in mind and the meaning of the word “grace” with its loaded biblical Christian meaning, second, there is the argument that the concept of “grace” is foreign to the Qur'an. In terms of translation, William Graham defines “grace” linguistically as follows:

[I]n terms of the basic Latin meaning of *gratia* as, ‘favor’ or ‘kindness,’ and in light of similar terms in other languages: the Hebrew *hesed*, ‘lovingkindness,’ the Greek *charis*, ‘grace,’ ‘favor,’ ‘kindness,’ and the Arabic *ni'mah*, ‘bounteous blessing, favor.’ Grace in its fullest religious sense, however, goes still farther, and thus we must understand it as a favor or mercy from God that betokens ‘a divine activity in human history and in human lives,’ not something earned by human effort.<sup>43</sup>

Graham goes on to speak of God's grace as the second major theme of the Qur'an when it speaks about Allah. For Graham, the term grace in the context of the Qur'an overlaps with and is interrelated to other divine characteristics and attributes. He thus defines grace as follows:

God's provision of necessary sustenance (*rizq*) to his creature; His bountifulness (*fadl*), generosity (*lutf*), and beneficence (*ni'mah*) in meeting so abundantly the physical needs of life—with rain, crops, domestic animals, the alternation of day and night, raw materials for shelter or boats, much more; and the mercy (*rahmah*) that He also freely dispenses, in His having created nature with its dependable blessings and benefits, in His gifts of reason and intelligence that set

<sup>42</sup> نزهة الأعين النواظر لابن الجوزي ص 597 – 599

<sup>43</sup> Graham, *Islamic and Comparative Religious Studies*, 121. Yasien Mohamed (“Grace,” 223) also makes the link between *ni'mah* and grace. He explains: “The word ‘grace’ refers to God's favour and mercy . . . [it] is expressed in al-Rahman, which implies that he granted the creation favours (*ni'mah*), irrespective of whether they believe in him or not, but he has granted special favours to those servants who have submitted to him with sincerity and love.

human beings apart from nature and in His forgiveness for sin and errancy to those who repent.<sup>44</sup>

Graham thus captures various terminologies in the Qur'an which contribute to the theme of grace. One of these terminologies is the word *ni'mah*, which he translates "beneficence." With this understanding of the theme of "grace" and with our survey of the various meanings of the term *ni'mah* in the Qur'an, one can argue, linguistically speaking, the term "grace" does not do justice to the various appearances of the term *ni'mah* within the Qur'anic contexts. Therefore, the term *ni'mah* should be translated based on its literary Qur'anic context. This suggestion comes out of the conviction that what defines the meaning of a particular word is the literary context within where it appears.

This understanding of the term *ni'mah* and its relation to grace, however, challenges the suggestion that Islam and the Qur'an have no concept of the term "grace." A good example of this approach is presented in the following words, where Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Fethi Caner attempt to offer suggestions of how to speak about the Christian faith with Muslims:

Second, we suggest a clear presentation of grace. Though the Qur'an calls God gracious, Islam has no concept of grace. Remember, grace is not the same as mercy. Mercy is when God chooses not to punish me. The Qur'an is filled with teachings of the prevention of disaster if the person does good. However, the Qur'an has no concept of grace. Grace is when God shows favor to the undeserving soul. We do nothing to earn grace. We do not 'clean up' in order to receive grace. Grace is given to the sinful person, not because he is good, but precisely because he knows that he is not good. This is the true nature of repentance.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Graham, *Islamic and Comparative Religious Studies*, 115.

<sup>45</sup> Caner and Caner, *Unveiling Islam*, 242.

This “clear” presentation of the Christian biblical definition of grace indeed does not take into consideration the fact that the Qur’an speaks about Allah’s grace, but the Qur’an uses the term in ways that are not limited only to the more NT concept of the term. As we have seen, the theme of grace is present in the Qur’an but it is captured by other and various terminologies and concepts, which may not be similar to that of the NT; as Graham may well be arguing against Caner and Caner, here he suggests the following:

I argue here for a Muslim analog in the Qur’an’s preaching about God’s dealing with humankind to the concept of God’s grace in the Christian tradition. This can be seen, I argue, primarily in the emphasis on God’s bountiful mercy to his creatures in the blessings of creation: from crops or rainwater that sustain life to the wonders of His handiwork in the heavens or any all of the physical beauties of the natural worlds.<sup>46</sup>

Jonah, on the other hand, announces that deliverance comes from God (2:10), and this means that God is the sole source and the Lord of deliverance. However, deliverance here is more concerned with physical deliverance from distress, rather than from sin. In the OT, salvation is usually described in terms of physical deliverance of individuals or nations. It is always experienced through God’s involvement in historical events. It began with the historical experience of the exodus, an event that became foundational in telling God’s redemptive work in Israel and a main subject of praise (Exod 14:13; 15:1–18; Pss 3:8; 9:14; 21:1). Often, God’s redemptive act was a response to a cry of an individual (Jonah 2) or of the nation (Exod 2:23). The prophets, however, speak of another important aspect of salvation, that salvation from sin will be achieved in its eschatological sense through the victorious suffering Servant who will bear the sins of many (Isa 53). This act of

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<sup>46</sup> Graham, *Islamic and Comparative Religious Studies*, 107.



salvation will last forever (Isa 45:17; 51:6).<sup>47</sup> As we have seen in Matthew and Luke, Jesus' life and ministry are presented as a continuation of God's redemptive work revealed in the OT. Consequently, the concept of deliverance is clearly seen as a continuation of God's work in the OT through Christ. In other words, the prophetic eschatological expectations of salvation are applied to and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Son of Man will suffer and experience death, but will rise on the third day and death will have no authority over him. Through resurrection, the rejected-suffering Son of Man will thus experience salvation from death. The author of the book of Hebrews calls Jesus the "author" (ἀρχηγός) of salvation, and then makes clear that this redemptive act of God, "for whom are all things and by whom are all things," is accomplished through the suffering of death (Heb 2:10). The followers of Christ, moreover, will also experience this victorious redemptive act of God; they are the heirs of salvation, regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds. Through the suffering of death, the author of salvation will bring many members to the family of God to be His children (Heb 2:11–13).

For Yūnus and Jonah, Allah/God is the One who hears their prayers. The Qur'an reports that Allah heard Yūnus' prayer (Q 21:87–88; 37:134). Jonah cries out to God from the belly of Sheol and his prayer was answered (Jon 2:3). One of the Ninety-Nine beautiful names of Allah in Islamic traditions is the All-Hearing (السميع).

Ghazali comments:

So He heard secrets as well as whispers, and even what is subtler and more concealed than these; 'indeed he perceives the crawling of a black ant on a massive rock in the dark night'. He hears the praise of those praising Him and rewards them, as well as the entreaties of those praying and responds to them. He hears without any auditory organs or ears, as He acts without limbs and speaks without a

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<sup>47</sup> In the NT, "the verb *sōzō* 'to save' and noun *sōtēria* 'salvation' are used for the concept of 'rescue,' 'deliverance' or 'salvation, and even 'well-being' or 'health.' The Septuagint most frequently uses *sōzō* to render the Hebrew *yasha* ('to save') and the NT primarily employs *sōzō* and its derivatives for the idea of salvation" (Elwell and Beitzel, "Salvation," 1884).

tongue; and His hearing is free from accidents which could befall it.<sup>48</sup>

Ghazali then compares man's hearing to Allah's, where the latter is deficient. He goes on to encourage the Muslim community to realize that, "God . . . hears, so that he [a man should] watches his tongue . . . [and] He only created hearing for him [man] to hear the word of God."<sup>49</sup> According to Hadith, the prayer of Yūnus is a widely known prayer that Muslims are encouraged to pray in times of distress. It also receives its importance because the prophet himself encourages Muslims to pray the prayer of Yūnus. Yūnus thus functions as a man of prayer in Islamic traditions. Yūnus accordingly encourages Muhammad and the Muslim community to trust in Allah as He hears their prayers and saves them.

This has a crucial implication for the Muslim community today, as it was during the life of Muhammad. As we have observed, when Muhammad faced rejection and suffering, the Qur'an instructed him, through the example of Yūnus, to trust and call upon Allah, and wait patiently for his deliverance. The rejected and suffering Muslim community thus receives the same message: when they face rejection and suffering they are invited to call upon Allah and wait patiently for his deliverance, rather than attempting to respond with aggression to those who reject their invitation (دعوة) to accept the message of the Qur'an.

The words of Jonah (2:3) do not concentrate on what he said in prayer, but rather they testify to an answered prayer. These words "connote the gracious accession of God to the supplicant's situation."<sup>50</sup> In biblical traditions, God is the One who hears prayer and to him (in prayer) shall come all creation (Ps 65:2). The Psalms are full of prayers that seek God's help in the face of adversity. The followers of Jesus

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<sup>48</sup> Ghazali, *On the Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 83.

<sup>49</sup> Ghazali, *On the Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 84.

<sup>50</sup> Stuart, *Jonah*, 476.

Christ from a Muslim background also face rejection and suffering for their faith. Jonah teaches them, and us, to call upon God and to trust that He is the One who hears our prayers. We, however, should wait patiently, not just for his deliverance but also to reveal his will to us in order to respond and live accordingly.

In sum, both Jonah and Yūnus invite the reader to trust in Allah/God, to call upon him in a time of distress, and to believe that Allah/God, in his gracious mercy, will respond to humans' prayers.

## CHAPTER 9: JONAH'S SECOND COMMISSION (3:1–10)

### 9.1 Introduction

After Jonah was saved by God in Jonah 2, God's second commission to Jonah is announced (3:1–3b). In terms of form and structure, the close parallel between this scene and the opening one (1:1–3) demonstrates the fact that this is a new beginning. This parallel leads to the conclusion that the book is equally divided into two halves.<sup>1</sup> The language of v. 1 is similar to 1:1 except for the lack of mentioning “the son of Amittai” (3:1). Otherwise, we read the same words, but now (3:1) Jonah is told for the “second time” (שנית). This time, however, is also different in that Jonah knows well that his flight had no effect, and he is now given a second chance by Yahweh to accomplish His mission. It thus takes Yahweh's attribute of being “slow to anger” (patience) to bring Jonah back on track, and also shows that Yahweh is insistent on delivering his message to Nineveh.

The imperative divine commands, “Arise and go” (קום לך) (1:2), are repeated here in 3:2, and Nineveh “the great city” is still the ultimate destination. The focus in 1:2 is on Nineveh's evil (רעה), but here in 3:2 it is on the message itself and Jonah's obedience to that message. This emphasis appears in the repetition of the Hebrew cognates דבר three times (once as a participle [“declare/tell”] and twice as a noun [“word”]) along with the duplication of the cognates קרא (as a verb [“proclaim”] and noun [“proclamation”]) in 3:1–3b. It is “the word of Yahweh” (דבר־יהוה) that came to Jonah (3:1), and it is the prophet's obligation to deliver exactly what Yahweh tells the prophet: וקרא אליה את־הקריאה אשר אנכי דבר אליך (“and proclaim to it the proclamation

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Simon, *Jonah*, 25.

which I tell you”) (2b).<sup>2</sup> Jonah’s obedience is expressed as he went to Nineveh “according to the word of the Lord” (כדבר יהוה) (3:2). This latter phrase makes the link between the word of Yahweh and its implementation by the prophet. The phrase ויקם יונה (“and Jonah arose”), moreover, is similar to that in 1:3, but this time when Jonah arises, he does not flee; rather, he obeys the Lord and “went to Nineveh” (וילך אל-). (בנינה).

The content of Jonah’s proclamation is expressed later (3:4b), and is similar to that announced in 1:2. It is difficult, however, to make the case that the content here is softer than when it is first announced based on the different prepositions that appear (cf. על in 1:2 and אל in 3:2). Such an interpretation ignores the fact that the structure and the subject of each clause is different. Wolff rightly observes that, “the wickedness of Nineveh is the reason why Jonah is to speak ‘against’ the city (על); the message itself has to be carried ‘into it’ (אל).”<sup>3</sup> As the reader learns about Jonah’s obedience in terms of delivering Yahweh’s word to Nineveh, the scene now shifts, with a sense of anticipation, to Nineveh’s reception of the word of Yahweh.

## 9.2 Nineveh’s Repentance and Yahweh’s Relenting (3:3b–10)

The narrator begins the scene by offering a unique description of Nineveh beyond being a “great city” (1:2; 3:2; 4:11). Three additional pieces of information are offered in relation to Nineveh.<sup>4</sup> First, the narrator speaks of “Nineveh of the past” (ובנינה היתה; cf. Qal היה), and this has led some scholars to argue that the book was

<sup>2</sup> This emphasis also appears in Yahweh’s commission to Moses to speak to Pharaoh (Exod 6:26).

<sup>3</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 139.

<sup>4</sup> Nineveh (בנינה) appears in other places in the Hebrew Bible, but the majority of these occurrences are found in Jonah: Gen 10:11, 12; 2 Kgs 19:36; Isa 37:37; Nah 1:1; 2:9; 3:7; Zeph 2:13; Jonah 1:2; 3:3a, 4, 5, 6, 7; 4:11.

written at a later exilic or post-exilic period.<sup>5</sup> Second, Nineveh is described in terms of its importance to God: ונינוה היתה עיר גדולה לאלהים (“And Nineveh was a great city to God” or “in the eyes of God”) (v. 3). When the preposition ל takes a divine name as its object, “the superlative is intended.”<sup>6</sup> In this sense, the clause brings Nineveh into a superlative relationship with God in terms of its importance.<sup>7</sup> This superlative relationship can be explained further when the reader arrives at the end of the narrative where God describes Nineveh as a great city which has a huge number of those who are created in God’s image (4:11). Simply put, God cares for Nineveh because the massive number of people who live there. In this sense, Wolff aptly states that, “Nineveh’s size, that is to say, is measured against the incomparable yardstick of God.”<sup>8</sup>

Third, the reader begins to imagine the city where Jonah will announce Yahweh’s message, for it is a “three days’ journey” (מהלך שלשת ימים). Based on archaeological records, some scholars question those numbers and understand them in light of the author’s use of exaggeration throughout this pericope.<sup>9</sup> Halton, for example, in an attempt to “bridge” these understandings suggests that Nineveh’s size should be understood as “literally figurative.”<sup>10</sup> Though Nineveh was not the capital

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<sup>5</sup> See for example, Bewer, *Jonah*, 28–29; Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 208; Stuart, *Jonah*, 432; Allen, *Jonah*, 221.

<sup>6</sup> Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 114. See also Thomas, “A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew,” 210–15. Sasson (*Jonah*, 228–29), on the other hand, understands the term to mean that Nineveh belongs to God. Wiseman (“Jonah’s Nineveh,” 36) speaks of a city that has many temples for gods.

<sup>7</sup> Simon (*Jonah*, 28) suggests that the term refers to a city that is “on a godly scale,” which means that when the author’s desire is to glorify something, he associates it with God.

<sup>8</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 148.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Halton, “How Big,” 196; Castillo, “Tarshish,” 485. For a good summary of the various discussions on this matter, see Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 208; Stuart, *Jonah*, 487; Wiseman, “Jonah’s Nineveh,” 37.

<sup>10</sup> Halton, “How Big,” 203–06. Halton defines “literally figurative” in this way, “An author can intend for a figure of speech to be understood quite literally, that is, the author intends for the audience to receive the full force of the idiom’s relative and emotive value. Furthermore, figures of speech in no way imply a distortion of facts, which underlies an ‘exaggeration.’ Therefore, in *Jonah* 3:3, if the author of *Jonah* used the expression ‘three-day walk’ as a figure of speech, the author likely intended the audience to understand and emotionally sense the huge size of the city of Nineveh. This

of Assyria until the reign of Sennacherib, Holloway concludes that, “Akkadian, Greek, Aramaic, and Demotic sources ‘remember’ Nineveh as the capital of an Assyria at the acme of its military success.”<sup>11</sup> Others, like Wiseman, Stuart, and Smith, understand this description as a diplomatic visit that takes three days.

Wiseman, for example, explains:

[A three-day’s journey] could refer to the day of arrival in the city, followed by the customary day of visiting, business and rest, then the day of departure. This suggestion would accord with the ancient oriental practice of hospitality whereby the first day is for arrival, the second for the primary purpose of the visit and the third for return.<sup>12</sup>

Wiseman, moreover, suggests a second possibility, that the three-day journey could also refer to the size of the administrative district, “a metropolitan district comprising Nineveh itself, Assur, Calah (Nimrod) and even Dur-Sarrukan (Khorsabad)”<sup>13</sup> Simon, on the other hand, suggests that “we must conjecture that the reference is not to the duration required to cross the city in a straight line but to the period needed to traverse its streets and byways so that all the inhabitants can hear his proclamation.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, any attempt to understand the dimensions historically misses the point, particularly when the narrative in general lacks any historical and geographical data, and furthermore, the reader needs to understand these dimensions in relation to the events that follow. According to this later suggestion, the narrator attempts to prepare the reader for what comes next: that after Jonah’s one-third journey into the city (v. 4a), the reader will learn about the extraordinarily rapid response of the people of Nineveh

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idea is in no way diminished with the use of an idiom. In fact, the emotive aspect of this expression might correspond even more closely to the impression of Nineveh's grandeur than relaying a mathematically correct measurement of the city walls” (205–06).

<sup>11</sup> Holloway, “Nineveh,” 290.

<sup>12</sup> Wiseman, “Jonah’s Nineveh,” 37. See also Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 208; Stuart, *Jonah*, 487.

<sup>13</sup> Wiseman, “Jonah’s Nineveh,” 38.

<sup>14</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 28.

(vv. 5–10).<sup>15</sup> They repented before he even walks through the whole city. The irony, moreover, is not only seen in terms of spatial measurement, but also in light of the exceptionally short nature of the prophetic message: עוד ארבעים יום ונינוה נהפכת (“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overturned”) (3:4b).

The word עוד (“yet”) shows the time span between the announcement of judgement and its occurrence. The term “forty days” (ארבעים יום) is, moreover, a traditional time span referred to throughout Scripture (e.g., Exod 24:18; Num 13:25; 1 Sam 17:16; 1 Kgs 19:8). It is the period given for the world’s judgement (Gen 7:4, 12); the time Moses spent before Yahweh to intercede on behalf of Aaron (Deut 9:18–20); and the time Moses spent with Yahweh on the mountain after renewing the covenant and transcribing the Ten Commandments (Exod 34:28). For Simon, the “forty days” is “the period of grace,” rather than punishment as in the flood story.<sup>16</sup> Here it reveals a God who is slow to anger and willing to offer the Ninevites time to repent, and they did.

Two main views are offered as to whether Jonah’s announcement is that of both judgment and transformation or solely judgement. Those who argue for the former view see a deliberate double meaning in the term הפך (“overturn”) in its *nif'al* form: whether it is passive or reflexive (e.g., “Nineveh will be overturned” or “will overturn itself”). Lubeck, for example, states that the city is doomed for destruction (as per Jonah’s wish), or, alternatively, that the city is certain to experience complete transformation and is to be turned upside down, as it were, from bad to good.<sup>17</sup> Others

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<sup>15</sup> Wolff (*Obadiah and Jonah*, 148–49) contradicts himself when he states that after a one-day journey into the city Jonah will arrive at its center where he is able to spread the message in every direction, while earlier he critiques those who attempt to understand the dimensions of the city literally. So, how can he know that after one-day journey Jonah arrived at the center of the city?

<sup>16</sup> Simon, *Jonah*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Lubeck, “Prophetic Sabotage,” 44. Of those who have a similar view, see Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 109; Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 184; Tribble, “Divine Incongruities in the Book of Jonah,” 203; Sasson, *Jonah*, 233–37; Ackerman, “Satire and Symbolism,” 225–26; Good, *Irony*, 48–49. In the narrative of Ahab, king of Israel, he calls his servants to turn him away (הפך) from the battle



have limited the meaning of הפך to just destruction and judgement.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it is hard to imagine Jonah's message as follows: "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be transformed by itself." It is important to remember that Yahweh sent Jonah in the first place because he has taken notice of Nineveh's evil (1:2). The king's hope (e.g., "Who knows?"), moreover, reflects his desire to avoid God's judgement "so that we may not perish" (v. 9). This announcement of judgement, however, opens the door for both possibilities—repentance or destruction—without any prior emphasis on one over the other.

Immediately, the narrator discloses the unpredictably rapid outcome of the short but precise message that Jonah delivered: ויאמינו אנשי נינוה באלהים ("And the men of Nineveh believed in God") (3:5). Various interpretations are offered in regard to the Ninevites' belief. For Boda, the Ninevites believed in God's threat rather than ignoring it.<sup>19</sup> Allen, moreover, stresses that the Ninevites believed in "the divine source of Jonah's message, believing its author has the power to carry out his threat."<sup>20</sup> Magonet, furthermore, draws a parallel between the faith of the men of Nineveh and the men who "feared" Yahweh (1:16), and treats both terms as synonymous.<sup>21</sup> This view is linked to the use of both terms in Exod 14:31, where there, the Israelites feared and believed in Yahweh in response to Yahweh's miraculous deliverance. Wolff offers a different view than that of Magonet. For Wolff, ירא ("feared") is understood in the context of obedient relationship, while אמן

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after he is struck by an arrow (1 Kgs 22:34 // 2 Chr 18:33). Though symbolic of defeat, in this sense, the king is seeking to be "turned away" from further destruction. There is an "overturning" in Esth 9:1 of the decreed destruction of the Jews. Cf. also, Isa 60:5 (reversal of fortunes) and Amos 5:8 (darkness turning into morning and day turning into night).

<sup>18</sup> See Allen, *Jonah*, 222; Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 149; Bolin, *Freedom beyond Forgiveness*, 236.

<sup>19</sup> Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 316.

<sup>20</sup> Allen, *Jonah*, 223. See also Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets 1*, 276.

<sup>21</sup> Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 134.

(“believed”) expresses more a relationship of trust.<sup>22</sup> In my judgement, following Wolff’s distinction, אמן (“believed”) stresses more the notion of trust and believing, while ירא (“fear”) expresses reverence to Yahweh, since ירא, as expressed here and in Exodus, is a fearful response to witnessing God’s power. The ritual of repentance, fasting, and putting on sackcloth are expressions of their belief, which will be discussed later as part of the king’s decree. This ritual is practiced by the entire city regardless of their position, “from the greatest of them to the least of them” (3:5). This massive return to the Lord will be explained in more detail next, and thus what follows can be understood as a flashback to an event that has already taken place earlier.<sup>23</sup>

It is the king of Nineveh who first responds to Jonah’s message, and then he leads the whole city, its people and animals, into repentance (vv. 6–9).<sup>24</sup> If we consider דבר (“word”) as a specific term used for God’s prophetic word, as we have discussed in 3:1–3, what reached the ears of the king is then Jonah’s prophetic word. The king’s subsequent humble act is expressed in various forms: he arose from his throne (ויקם מכסאו); threw aside his royal robe (ויעבר אדרתו); *hiph’il* is sometimes used for things which are offensive to Yahweh—cf. 1 Kgs 15:12; Zech 3:4; 13:2); covered himself with sackcloth (ויכס שק); cf. 1 Kgs 21:27; 2 Kgs 19:1; Isa 37:1); and finally sat on ashes (וישב עליהאפר); a sign of repentance and humiliation—cf. Job 42:6; associated with fasting [Isa 58:5] and mourning [Esth 4:1; Neh 9:1]). As the king performs all these ritualistic acts of repentance before issuing his decree, he becomes a model to his people, and to other kings of Israel (for example, the king’s act of repentance is understood in contrast to Jehoiakim’s response in Jer 36). As an

<sup>22</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 150.

<sup>23</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> It is hard to identify the identity of the king of Nineveh, taking into consideration the fact that the whole narrative lacks any historical and geographical data.

exemplary royal figure, he and “his great men” (גדליו) issue a “decree” (טעם). This decree includes fasting, crying out to God, and repentance, all which are associated with a prayer of hope that longs for God’s mercy and forgiveness.

In terms of fasting, it is expressed here in detail as the people and beasts being forbidden to taste anything (v. 7). In general, fasting is an external physical expression that reflects a state of humility and weakness, and is frequently performed in times of mourning and lamentation of seeking, for example, God’s mercy and forgiveness. Here it is particularly practiced as a sign of mourning and repentance (cf. 1 Sam 7:6; Neh 9:1–2). The call for fasting includes both “people” (אדם) and “beast” (בהמה).<sup>25</sup> But it is obvious that the emphasis is placed on the fasting of the beasts, as the writer explains in even more detail what he means by beasts including “cattle and flocks” (הבקר והצאן). The repetition of the negation אל twice after אל-יטעמו (“they must not taste”) shows the seriousness of the king’s order, and explains once again in detail what it means for animals to fast: neither food (אל-ירעו; “do not drive out to pasture”) nor water (ומים אל-ישתו; “and they are not to drink water”).<sup>26</sup> Fasting is usually associated with other external expressions such as tearing clothes, putting on sackcloth, and sitting in ashes (Dan 9:3; Esth 4:3; Joel 1:8). Like the king, both the people (אדם) and the animals (בהמה) are required to put on sackcloth (v. 8). These physical expressions are practiced with sincerity to God by both men and beasts (v. 8b). The theme of crying out to God that was present earlier in the narrative (1:16; 2:3) occurs here again, where the king invites all creatures to cry out to God. But this time, they need to cry out “mightily” (חזקה), which expresses the sincerity of seeking God’s mercy. It is not surprising here to include the animals, for elsewhere in

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<sup>25</sup> The participation of the animals in fasting was a known practice in Persia, which has led some to argue for the possibility of a Persian setting for the book of Jonah; see Allen, *Jonah*, 224.

<sup>26</sup> The severity of the situation challenges the notion of any sense of humor intended by the narrator. In support of such view, see Bewer, *Jonah*, 54–55; Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, 292–94.

Scripture God provides for the animals when they cry out for help to feed their young ones (cf. Job 38:41).

The final element of the king's decree demands a real acknowledgement and change of their wicked behaviors and practices (v. 8b). Though the narrator describes the Ninevites in a positive way as a people who are willing to repent and are indeed recipients of God's mercy, he does not ignore their misdeeds as an evil nation, and thus provides even more detail about their evil than what Yahweh addressed earlier (1:2). Interestingly, the narrator allows the king to provide those details and to identify the reasons for God's wrath, namely, that the evil ways are identified in terms of "the violence in their hands" (ויִשְׁבוּ אִישׁ מִדְּרָכּוֹ הַרְעָה וּמִן־הַחֲמָס אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפְיָהֶם) (cf. "Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in their hands"). The term אִישׁ ("everyone") in v. 8 emphasizes the responsibility of one's own immoral practices, while the term דְּרָךְ ("way") denotes the behavior of every Ninevite individual. This recognition is an explicit confession of the nation's social injustice attributed to, and potentially practiced by, each and every Ninevite. These words remind the reader of the Ninevites' aggressive behavior against other nations as expressed, for example, by Nahum (Nah 2:11, 12; 3:1). Therefore, the king requires each one "to turn away" (שׁוּב) from all these unjust behaviors and cleanse their bloody hands in order to show their sincere repentance to God. The term שׁוּב appears four times in vv. 8–10, which creates a close link between the Ninevites' turning way and God's turning away (v. 10). The Ninevites' turning away is practiced with a cry of hope in God's turning from anger (e.g., מִי־יֹדֵעַ; "who knows?") (v. 9). This cry of hope reveals, on the one hand, the king's lack of confidence in all these requirements. On the other hand, it reveals the king's belief in God's sovereignty and freedom to

dispense his mercy and compassion. In other words, though the people repent, it is God who has the final decision.

The term שׁוּב is used here twice with God as the subject. The “turning away” (שׁוּב) of the Ninevites (v. 8) is thus exercised with the hope of God’s “turning” (שׁוּב) “from his fierce anger” (מַחֲרוֹן אַפַּי). The king thus understood Jonah’s prophecy of judgment as an expression of God’s fierce anger that leads to destruction. While שׁוּב expresses God’s turning away, the term נָחַם (“relent”) shows a God who may refrain from the disaster that was promised to be brought on Nineveh. The term נָחַם does not involve only the cognitive meaning associated with changing one’s mind, but rather shows sympathy in response to a particular action. In its biblical usage, the term נָחַם is used in a sense of “being sorry” or in terms of “regret.” For example, the Lord was “sorry” (נָחַם) for making humans (Gen 6:6, 7); for making Saul king (1 Sam 15:11, 35); and for the evil done to the people (Jer 42:10). It also refers to disasters that occur without the Lord having “pity” or “relenting” (cf. Jer 20:16; Zech 8:14). But here (vv. 9 and 10), נָחַם is used with the sense of changing the course of actions as God withdraws the threat of destruction pronounced earlier (v. 4).

The only hope then for the king and his people is for God to turn away and relent so that they “do not perish” (לֹא נִאֲבֵד). This is the ultimate hope of the king and his people, which also echoes the same hope expressed earlier by the sailors (1:6). Here we can clearly hear in the king’s cry of hope the echo of Moses’ intercessory prayers on behalf of Israel (Exod 32:12). There we see the same combination of terms (שׁוּב מִמַּחֲרוֹן אַפַּי וְהִנָּחַם; “turn from your fierce anger and relent”) whereas Moses pleaded for Yahweh’s forgiveness on behalf of the people of Israel for worshiping the golden calf (Exod 32:1–6). As God responded to Moses’ intercessory prayer and relented (Exod 32:14), here too he responds to the repentance of the Ninevites and relented

(3:10). Thus, the authentic repentance of the Ninevites is immediately observed by God as revealed in the phrase, “And God saw their deeds” (וירא האלהים את־מעשיהם) (v. 10a). What God actually observes is that “they turned from their evil ways” (כִּי־שָׁבוּ (מִדְרָכָם הַרְעָה), rather than their rituals and prayers. By using the same words expressed earlier, the narrator creates a link between the repentance of the Ninevites and God’s relenting of the disaster which he announced on the lips of his prophet (v. 4). As such, God must be true to his character as is revealed later in the prayer of Jonah (4:2), which we will discuss further in our analysis in the following chapter.

### **9.3 Thematic Summary: Prophetic Word and Repentance**

As we have observed, it is hard to miss the parallel between the beginning scene of Jonah (1:1–3) and the opening section that appears later (3:1–3), but also important not to ignore the uniqueness and the emphasis that appears in the latter. Our analysis of Jonah’s fruitful journey to Nineveh demonstrates the role of the prophetic word of God and its relation to repentance: a prophetic warning of judgement reveals a patient, gracious, and merciful God; it is one of God’s ways to deal with sin and it invokes a change of behavior.

To begin, Yahweh’s second commission reveals a patient and gracious God who is willing to give the disobedient prophet a second chance. Yahweh commands the prophet for the second time to “arise and go” (3:2) and Jonah functions not as a disobedient prophet but rather in a typically prophetic manner: obeying the command of the Lord and delivering His message (cf. Amos 3:8). Yahweh’s slowness to anger and gracious character is also revealed through the prophetic warning of judgement given to Nineveh. Yahweh offers Nineveh a “grace period” of forty days before destruction takes place. In this respect, the prophetic warning opens the door for

further possibilities and provides Nineveh with the opportunity to respond to God's word. Yahweh's first response to the evil of Nineveh here is not destruction, but warning.

In light of this, a prophetic warning of judgement is one of God's ways to deal with the social injustices of the Ninevites.<sup>27</sup> Prophetic warnings of judgement are understood in terms of warning of a potential coming punishment. Judgement, thus, is not immediately applied, nor is it constantly God's first option to deal with sin. The purpose of a prophetic warning, as Sweeney states, is not to announce "irrevocable judgement," but rather to help the wrongdoers to rethink their behaviors, as the Ninevites did, so that punishment can be averted.<sup>28</sup> House states another purpose of prophecy, as he points out that "prophecy is not offered simply to relieve God of the responsibility to warn before punishing. It intends to effect change in hearers and to make them part of God's faithful remnant."<sup>29</sup> As thus, we can understand Yahweh's prophetic warning of judgement as a key element of his redemptive work throughout history to redeem people from their evil behavior and to reconcile them once again with himself. Simply put, Yahweh's prophetic warning of judgement aims at invoking repentance, and this is precisely how Yahweh's prophetic word functions in the lives of the Ninevites. In sum, Yahweh's second commission to Nineveh reveals a patient and slow to anger God, who in his gracious mercy sends his prophetic word of warning through his prophet to invoke real change in peoples' lives.

As far as the repentance of the Ninevites is concerned, it expresses itself in a very practical way and goes beyond physical ritual expressions to the real

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<sup>27</sup> Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 318. One would thus agree with Boda when he comes to the conclusion that the remedy of sin, according to the book of Jonah, is not always destruction. Rather, Yahweh sends his prophetic warning and this may invoke changes in people's behavior.

<sup>28</sup> Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 332.

<sup>29</sup> House, "The Character of God," 135.

transformation of a person's behavior toward others. Repentance thus is more than just penitential rituals and authentic prayers, but involves a real change in behavior. This notion is reinforced by the fact that this latter expression of repentance as a real change of behavior is what Yahweh notices, and what, in response to, shows him relenting.

The narrative of the Ninevites experiencing God's relenting echoes Israel's experience throughout its history, particularly as shown in Exod 32:14 and Joel 2:11–16. In the former, God relents in response to the intercessory prayer of Moses on behalf of Israel (cf. Amos 7:1–6). Soza precisely notes that “the canonical position of this episode makes God's own repentance and his forgiveness a key to the rest of the OT. This first impression of Israel's God as a forgiving God in the context of their first national covenant violation speaks to his character beyond the scope of the Pentateuch, reaching to the Prophets, Writings and even the NT.”<sup>30</sup> In the case of Joel, God's relenting is in response to repentance, which is very similar to that found in Jonah. In all these occurrences (Exod 32:14, Joel 2:12–14, and Jonah 3:10), God's relenting is understood in the context of the self-revelation of God in Exod 34:6–7, where the positive aspects of this revelation is recited, with the addition of God's relenting character as seen in Exod 32:14. Though one cannot underestimate the role of repentance in relation to God's relenting, God's sovereignty and gracious character is the basis for such a response. In this sense, Boda rightly states that God's freedom to sovereignly dispense his grace “is protected” by the phrase “who knows.”<sup>31</sup>

It is important here to stress that there is a sense of “fear” when emphasis is placed on repentance as the basis for God's relenting, as if to say that God is

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<sup>30</sup> Soza, “Repentance,” 685–86.

<sup>31</sup> Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 317.



controlled by human actions. Indeed, one cannot either ignore the fact that God exposes (opens up) himself to human engagements with his prophetic warning of judgements. As a living and dynamic God, gracious and merciful, he welcomes such engagements. We see this clearly in the case of the intercessory prayer of Moses (Exod 32:12–14) and later in Amos (7:1–6), where God responds to the intercessory prayer of his people. Actually, one can even argue that God invites his prophets into conversation regarding his word of judgement. This can be affirmed, for example, in Yahweh’s word to Moses, “Now, let me alone” (Exod 32:10). When Yahweh relents, moreover, he is true to himself and to his word according to the prophet Jeremiah (18:7–10). There, the metaphor of the potter articulates not only Yahweh’s judgment, but also shows Yahweh’s relenting character. In other words, Yahweh teaches Jeremiah in the house of the potter about his sovereignty and relenting character in relation to Israel and the nations: if a nation turns from its evil, God will relent (נָחַם) and not bring the disaster which was promised. God’s response to Nineveh as read in light of Jeremiah shows the fact that God is obligated to be true to himself and relents on the disaster he promised to bring. Indeed, this dynamic and living depiction of the character of Yahweh is unique, though it may remain difficult to understand. It shows clearly a living God who is very active throughout the history of the lives of his creation. This is indeed a unique aspect of God’s character as we read the character of God in the context of Islam.

The repentance of Nineveh, moreover, contributes to and changes the message of the Twelve as a whole significantly, particularly in relation to Israel’s and the nations’ response to Yahweh.<sup>32</sup> It is not hard to argue that the theme of repentance (שׁוּב) is key to the message of the Twelve. LeCureux, for example, supposes that the

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<sup>32</sup> Schart, “The Jonah-Nineveh,” 127.

Twelve is unified around the theme of שׁוּב (“return”), particularly as demonstrated by the phrase, “return to me and I will return to you” (Mal 3:7; cf. Hos 14:1–4; Joel 2:12–14).<sup>33</sup> This call of repentance is met with no response on the part of Israel (Hos 6:1–3; 13:1–16; Amos 4:6–13; 9:1–10). If Israel does not repent, moreover, they cannot escape the day of the Lord, which is a major theme particularly in Joel, Amos, Obadiah, and Zephaniah.<sup>34</sup> The repentance of the Ninevites functions as a positive showcase of those who respond to the call of repentance (שׁוּב), and rebukes Israel for its lack of response to the word of God. In this way, LeCureux states that “Jonah stands as a denunciation of Yhwh’s own people.”<sup>35</sup>

However, reading the repentance of Nineveh in light of its destruction in Nahum (1:1–15) suggests that the repentance of Nineveh is seen as temporary within the Twelve.<sup>36</sup> Such a reading can lead in different directions. On the one hand, as Brueggemann suggests, the repentance described in Jonah did not spread or last. The purpose then, Brueggemann continues, is that “Nineveh cannot argue that God is patient with the Jews but not with them. The problem is that God’s mercy has not been met with long-term commitment.”<sup>37</sup> This conclusion carries a special message to Israel, that repentance is not a one-time action, “but a constant struggle between Yhwh and his people.”<sup>38</sup> It is, however, important to not underestimate the authentic repentance of the Ninevites as this moment in history. Knowing about the destruction of Nineveh justifies, in many ways, Timmer’s conclusion that the repentance of the

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<sup>33</sup> LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the Twelve*.

<sup>34</sup> Rendtorff, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity,” 75–87. See also (LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Twelve*, 143).

<sup>35</sup> LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Twelve*, 143. It is not only LeCureux who interprets Jonah as Israel, but others have made the link between Jonah 2:9 and Mic 7:19b, “which alludes backward to Jonah [to] interpret the fate of Jonah in light of the fate of Israel”; Nogalski, *Redactional Processes*, 278.

<sup>36</sup> Timmer, *The Non-Israelite Nations*, 85. See also Ryu, “Silence as Resistance,” 207.

<sup>37</sup> House, “The Character of God in the Twelve,” 138.

<sup>38</sup> LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Twelve*, 145.

Ninevites is “a less thoroughgoing way” compared to the wholehearted faith of the sailors.<sup>39</sup> The only difference between both the Ninevites and the sailors is that we do not know the end of the story of the latter.

But our reading of the repentance in light of Nahum can shed more light on the character of God, particularly when the negative part of the creed is cited by Nahum in relation to Nineveh (1:2–3). In this respect, the one who forgives Nineveh is the same God who destroys it. Brueggemann precisely observes that we can see Israel’s entire core creed about Yahweh as seen in the life of Nineveh, though Israel throughout its history uses one part or the other with no problem.<sup>40</sup> This conclusion leads to the fact that there are no competing elements in Yahweh’s character, as Jonah thinks when he struggles with the positive side of the creed in relation to Nineveh. He just missed the end of the story. Indeed, one can also see in the life of Jonah Israel’s entire core creed: while Jonah recites the positive part of the creed (4:2), which he personally experiences (2:1–11), the “un-recited” negative part of the creed is easily observed in Jonah’s discipline as we have mentioned above.

A reading of the repentance of Nineveh in light of Nahum, however, can easily lose sight of the unique contribution of the book to the theme of nations in the Twelve. First, Jonah extends Yahweh’s call to repentance, which occurs throughout the Twelve, to a non-Israelite nation. Whereas the nations are exclusively the recipient of divine wrath in Hosea-Obadiah, Jonah allows them to repent and receive salvation.<sup>41</sup> Jonah, moreover, stands in a contrary position to Obadiah’s theology, which is to say that it is not only the house of Jacob or the house of Joseph that will be saved but also the nations. For Rendtorff, Jonah offers a critical rebuttal to the

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<sup>39</sup> Timmer, *The Non-Israelite Nations*, 89.

<sup>40</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 270.

<sup>41</sup> LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the Twelve*, 144.

dominate view in the Twelve that only Israel will be saved.<sup>42</sup> Zechariah–Micah, however, speak about the possible redemptive future of the nations, but Jonah speaks about the nation, Nineveh, in the past. In this sense, Nogalski’s conclusion is particularly apt and serves as a precise summary of Jonah’s role within the nations, for “Jonah provides a more positive orientation toward the fate of the nations in YHWH’s plans than was contained in much of the corpus prior to that point. Thus, Jonah supposes deliverance for nations who recognize YHWH’s sovereignty.”<sup>43</sup>

#### **9.4 Repentance: The Ninevites and the People of Yūnus**

As we have observed in our discussion of the reception history of the narrative of Jonah in Matthew, Luke, and Islamic traditions, the mission of Jonah to Nineveh and the repentance therein are key elements in this history. We also came to the conclusion that all these traditions read the narrative of Jonah typologically. The repentance of Nineveh functions as antitype of those who reject Jesus the Son of Man and Muhammad, and to challenge those opponents to follow the example of the people of Nineveh. In the following conversation between these traditions, we will limit our discussion to the role of the prophetic ministry of Jonah to Nineveh in the life of Jesus and Muhammad. We will then move the conversation to discuss the repentance of Ninevites and the people of Yūnus with key emphasis on repentance in relation to Allah’s returning and God’s relenting.

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<sup>42</sup> Rendtorff, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity,” 82.

<sup>43</sup> Nogalski, *Redactional Processes*, 278.

### **9.5 Prophetic Mission of Jonah and Jesus: A Typological Assessment**

It is worth being reminded of the fact that when we hear the voices of Matthew and Luke, their typological reading of the account of the Ninevites reveals to us the way in which God acted in history through the account of the Ninevites, and how it continued in Christ. In this respect, we will continue exploring God's redemptive work in history through the prophetic ministry of Jonah-Jesus and its implications for us today. We will then move to discuss the theme of repentance in light of the account of Nineveh between these traditions. As we discuss the theme of repentance, we will focus on the character of a God that returns and relents in response to the return-repentance of people.

In our analysis of Matthew's and Luke's typological reading of the narrative of Jonah, we came to the conclusion that both represent the person and ministry of Jesus the Son of Man as rooted in OT Scripture and a sign of God's redemptive revelation in history. In this respect, Jesus the Son of Man is a preacher of a prophetic message of judgement and Nineveh is as a gentile-repentant nation who will judge the evil generation of Israel. This view of Jesus offers a new window into understanding the life and the ministry of Jesus the Son of Man. In this respect, the scope of Jesus' prophetic ministry thus moves beyond ethnic and religious boundaries and opens the door to those who obey and respond in repentance, like the people of Nineveh, to his prophetic message. The emphasis on obedience to the Word of God and repentance is more emphasized, as we have seen, by Luke. This notion is reinforced by Luke when he identifies the true family of God as those members who obey the word of God (11:46–50). Luke's conclusion, one can argue, is thus in continuity with the message of Jonah 3:1–10, where emphasis is placed on the word of God and the response of the non-Israelite nation to the prophetic message of Jonah.

Before we proceed further we do well to keep two important points in mind as we link our conversation with Islam. First, the prophetic ministry of Jonah and Jesus the Son of Man has its implications for reading the OT in the context of Islam. As we have observed in our introduction, one of the major challenges in reading the OT in the context of Islam is political in nature—that viewing the OT as a Jewish Scripture where God appears as racist God who favors Israel over any other nation and serves the political agenda of the current state of Israel. In a kerygmatic response to this notion, rather than polemic, the prophetic ministry of Jonah and Jesus the Son of Man reveals the boundless scope of God’s redemptive work in history. Second, Jesus the Son of Man’s polemical context is to some extent similar to the context of the followers of Christ living in the context of Islam. As it was in Jesus’ context, religious affiliation plays a key role in this context. While Matthew emphasizes clearly the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders, we learn from Luke about the growing opposition from the crowd. The response to the prophetic ministry of Jonah and Jesus the Son of Man reveals where God’s attention is focused: obedience and repentance regardless of any ethnic and religious affiliations. Consequently, the prophetic ministry of a follower of Jesus Christ in the context of Islam should reflect such attentiveness: its focus and scope should move beyond ethnic and religious afflictions with a major emphasis on obedience and repentance.

Though we have observed correspondence between Jesus and Jonah, and that this correspondence reveals a pattern of God’s redemptive acts through history, the typology is Christological in the sense that it shows Jesus’ superiority over Jonah and thus all OT prophets. As we have seen, Matthew and Luke also report Jesus’ superiority as being “greater than” the temple, Solomon, and Jonah, and thus Jesus is superior to the priestly cult, prophets, and kings of Israel. We cannot observe in the

narrative of Jonah, at least not in its historical context, either prediction or promise in order to speak of Jonah and Jesus in terms of promise-fulfillment. But we can observe that Jesus, the Son of Man himself, is the ultimate revelation of God's prophetic sign of judgment. No more signs or prophets will be given, but only Jesus, the Son of Man. In this sense, the prophetic ministry of Jesus the Son of Man is the sign before this generation, and their response will determine their eternal destiny. The people of Nineveh, in this context, function as an antitype to those Jewish leaders who reject the sign of the preaching ministry of Jesus the Son of Man. For this group of people, Jesus the Son of Man will come back in glory as the Judge, with the Ninevites to judge those who reject his prophetic ministry.

#### **9.6 Prophetic Mission of Yūnus and Muhammad: A Typological Assessment**

As we have noted in our analysis of the people of Yūnus (10:98), their example functions as the climax of the surah, for it stands in contrast to the two other prophetic narratives of the people of Noah and Pharaoh. As we have argued, these narratives appear in a polemically hostile context where the unbelievers reject Muhammad and his message. In this polemic context, the unbelievers, moreover, request a sign of Muhammad similar to that of previous prophets (Q 10:20). Two examples are given, the people of Noah and Pharaoh, to show that people in the past did not believe when they saw Allah's signs. The only people who believed, however, are the people of Yūnus (Q 10:98). The reality, that Muhammad should recognize, is that not everyone will believe in his message. Indeed, few will believe (e.g., the people of Yūnus), while the majority will not believe even if Muhammad performed signs to prove his prophetic identity. The example of the people of Yūnus functions, on the one hand, as a source of encouragement to the disappointed struggling prophet. On the other hand,

the example of the people of Yūnus reveals the fact that not everyone will believe in Muhammad's message, but few. This fact helps the struggling prophet to acknowledge more the complexity of the nature of mission, particularly in terms of his role, and how he should respond in the midst of such severe criticism. First, Allah in his sovereignty can make every person on earth become a believer, but this is not the will of Allah (Q 10:99). Indeed, Allah thus gives freedom to whether they believe or not. Muhammad, therefore, needs to recognize Allah's role and act accordingly. Second, Muhammad, like other prophets, is a warner and a messenger. In light of those two facts, Muhammad is asked to recognize the freedom that Allah gives to people and not to act against the will of Allah by forcing people to believe. As a warner, he needs to encourage his audience to realize the consequences of their decision, but also to provide the space and allow freedom for such a decision-making process to take place. Muhammad thus is instructed as to what Allah has revealed to him and to be patient, a quality that we will discuss later.

In the context of interreligious relations, the example of the people of Yūnus is indeed a necessary reminder, particularly where the context is polemical and hostile. Certainly, one cannot ignore the fact of the missional dimension of both the Christian and the Islamic faiths. As both faiths continue their missional work, they need to recognize the complexity and nature of their mission. The repentance of the people of Yūnus/Nineveh reminds us of the fact that while some will respond positively, others will reject our mission. If both faiths believe that God in his sovereignty gives people the freedom to believe, the followers of both faiths should act accordingly.



### **9.7 Repentance and God's Relenting: A Typological Assessment of the Ninevites and the People of Yūnus**

As we have seen in our analysis of the narrative in the Qur'an, the Ninevites appear in the Qur'an as the people of Yūnus (Q 10:98), a population of more than a hundred thousand (Q 37:147). Though the identity of those people is associated with the name of the prophet Yūnus in the Qur'an, some classical Mufassirun, we have noted, identify them as Ninevites based on traditions that are close to the biblical narrative. We can, therefore, suggest some possibilities for these Qur'anic identities of the people of Yūnus. First, it is common in the Qur'an that prophets are sent to their own people, and therefore the identity of those people is linked to the prophet. Second, in light of 2 Kgs 14:25, Jonah was sent to his own people, Israel. Indeed, the latter could be a possibility if we did not have other accounts in the Qur'an that speak about the people of Yūnus in relation to the event of the whale—unless the Qur'an in 10:98 speaks about a different group of that in 37:147. In either case, it seems the identity of the people is not key to the interpretation of the Qur'anic text, but for a biblical interpretation it shows how a non-Israelite nation repented, while Israel, represented by its prophet Jonah, did not. It also shows that God's mercy and compassion are extended to other nations other than Israel. Another possibility is to follow Reynold's hypothesis that the prophetic narratives were known to Muhammad's audience and therefore those narratives are short and concise. Therefore, we can assume along with the majority of classical Mufassirun that the people of Nineveh were in mind when the Qur'an speaks about the people of Yūnus. In regard to the number of the population, the Qur'anic estimate is, indeed, similar to that of the Biblical narrative. The latter, however, gives a further description of the people of Nineveh in terms of their ignorance of God's command. But this will be further discussed in our analysis of Jonah 4 below.

In both Qur'anic accounts of the people of Yūnus, they are portrayed in a positive manner: a believing, forgiving, rewarded people. The belief of the people of Yūnus is compared to the disbelief of the people of Noah and Pharaoh. The latter believed after the punishment of Allah reached him, but his belief did not help him to earn Allah's mercy (Q 10:90, cf. 10:51). The belief of the people of Yūnus, on the other hand, helped them to earn Allah's mercy and forgiveness, which is expressed in Allah's return from the anticipated punishment: "when they believed we removed the punishment of disgrace in this world" (10:98). In this respect, we see a mutual dependence between the belief of the people and Allah's mercy and forgiveness. This is similar, as we have noted, to the mutual dependence between the "return" of the people of Nineveh and God's relenting (Jonah 3:9–10). This observation naturally leads to a conversation between the concept of repentance in the Qur'an and the Bible mainly in relation to the narrative of Yūnus/Jonah.

The belief of the Ninevites involves fasting, a sincere cry to God, and turning away (שוב) from their evil ways. In the Qur'an, the Arabic term تاب-يتوب ("return") is used to express the notion of repentance in terms of "returning" to Allah.<sup>44</sup> In this respect, we can observe a similar definition of repentance in terms of turning away from evil and returning to Allah/God. Though this term is not used in the narrative of Yūnus in the Qur'an, the concept is nonetheless present: Yūnus himself and his people returned to Allah.

In the biblical narrative, God relents in response to the "returning" of the Ninevites. In the biblical narrative, moreover, "return" (שוב) is used for God on the lips of the king (Jonah 3:9). In the Qur'anic narratives, Allah also returns to Yūnus (Q

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<sup>44</sup> For a full discussion on the terminology on repentance in the Qur'an, see Ayoub, "Repentance in Islamic Tradition," 97–98; Rubin, "Repentance and Penance," 426–30. For a full survey of various types of repentance in the Qur'an, see Reynolds, *Allah-God in the Qur'an*, 104–07.

21:88) and his people (Q 10:98; 37:147). In the Qur'an, Allah is التواب ("the oft turning"). This is one of Allah's ninety-nine beautiful names, and it occurs many times in the Qur'an where Allah is the accepter of repentance (Q 9:104; 42:25; 40:3).<sup>45</sup> The active participle of تواب ("the oft turning"), as Ayoub states, implies "an attitude of constant turning."<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, the Qur'an uses the term تاب ("returned") for Allah with the preposition على (3:128; 33:24; 4:26–27) to signify God's returning from wrath to anger.<sup>47</sup> Other terms express the notion of Allah's returning, for example, توبه من الله ("a return from Allah") (Q 9:102) and يتوب عليهم ("return to them") (Q 4: 17–18; cf., 5:39).<sup>48</sup> We further observe this mutual dependence between God's mercy and repentance in Allah's promise to Moses when the people of Israel worshiped the golden calf (Q 7:153). There, Allah demands the people of Israel repent and believe and then Allah will be merciful and gracious. God's returning can also generate a person's returning (Q 4:26–27).<sup>49</sup> In this respect, Allah is the one who initiates the repentance, and this expresses Allah's gracious and merciful character towards humanity. There is thus a mutual dependence between God's mercy and repentance in both traditions. It is interesting to note that elsewhere God's returning is closely linked to his merciful and forgiving character (33:24; 3:128–129). The similarity here with the biblical account is striking, where God's relenting is also linked to his merciful and gracious character (Jonah 4:2).

The mutual dependence between Allah's/God's mercy and repentance is understood in both traditions in light of divine sovereignty and freedom. In the biblical narrative, the king's cry of hope demonstrates his confession of God's

<sup>45</sup> Rubin, "Repentance and Penance," 426.

<sup>46</sup> Ayoub, "Repentance in Islamic Tradition," 98. Interestingly, Ayoub understands Allah's constant turning in terms of Allah's covenant.

<sup>47</sup> Rubin, "Repentance and Penance," 426.

<sup>48</sup> Ayoub, "Repentance in Islamic Tradition," 99.

<sup>49</sup> On this discussion, see Reynolds, *Allah-God in the Qur'an*, 105.

sovereignty and freedom to forgive: “who knows?” (Jonah 3:9). Other biblical passages express God’s sovereignty to dispense his grace and mercy, such as in Exod 33:19: “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy to whom I show mercy.” In the Qur’an, Allah’s freedom to dispense his mercy appears in the context of Allah’s sovereignty as the Creator (Q 2:117; 3:47; 19:35; 40:68). As the Qur’an invites people to offer “sincere repentance” (توبة نصوحاً), this invitation is associated with hope (“perhaps” [عسى]) in Allah’s gracious forgiveness as seen in the phrase, “perhaps your Lord forgives your transgressions” (عسى ربكم أن يغفر عنكم سيئاتكم) (Q 66:8). The term عسى (“perhaps”) expresses the notion of giving hope to someone, and this is applied to Allah (Q 9:102; 28: 22; 66:5). Since Allah is generous (كريم), he will not give hope to a person and then not have it come true. In this respect, the term عسى (“perhaps”) denotes the notion of hope and trust in Allah’s gracious mercy and forgiveness. Another term that is used in Islamic literature is الله أعلم (“Allah knows”), which conveys the notion of Allah’s complete knowledge and sovereignty. It is used sometimes in the context where a person does not comprehend Allah’s purpose in a certain situation.

It seems, however, that the Qur’an emphasizes absolute transcendence and freedom in relation to repentance in two different ways: first, even if people repent Allah will not forgive, and second, no one can believe or repent without Allah’s permission. For example, we have seen in our analysis of 10:99–100 that there is a relationship between Allah’s sovereignty and repentance, where it states, “if this is the will of your Lord, all on earth would have believed . . . and no soul can believe except by the permission of Allah.”<sup>50</sup> There is moreover a well-known Qur’anic verse that

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<sup>50</sup> Reynolds (God in the Qur’an, 27–28), based on this verse, states that the repentance of Nineveh serves a different purpose in the Qur’an, that “God has the power to make people believe or disbelieve.” Though this verse, as cited by Reynolds, speaks of God’s power, it seems that the

stresses this notion, where Allah “leads stray whom he wills and guides whom he wills” (Q 16:93; 474:31). Here we can sense the echo of God’s own revelation of his sovereignty to forgive (Exod 33:19), but the emphasis in the latter is more on God’s gracious character. The challenges with the notion that Allah leads people astray is that it is not clear from the Qur’an itself how he can punish those whom he himself led astray, or how Allah can be the source of evil. In addition, even when people repent, it is Allah’s decision on the day of judgement to decide whether a person will inherit paradise or hell. Frolov states the matter as follows: “still, there is no decisive answer or unequivocal answer to the question of final responsibility for these deeds: are they the result of one’s free choice or of God’s predetermination of those acts and choices?”<sup>51</sup> Here we can observe the Muslims’ struggle between two major dogmas: human free will and predestination. Two different perspectives are offered here. The first group believes in “predetermination” (قدر) and attributes complete sovereignty to Allah while downplaying the role of the individual (e.g., Asharites), while the other group (e.g., Mu‘tazila) emphasize the free will of human beings and challenges the previous position on the basis that such a position places Allah’s justice in question. Others see the development of this notion of predestination as a later development in contrast to that offered by Christianity.<sup>52</sup> Though we have argued that God’s sovereignty and freedom is protected, for example, by the king’s cry of hope (“who knows”) and God’s own proclamation of his sovereignty and freedom (Exod 33:19), we have shown also that God’s relenting character is equally emphasized as we have

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emphasis is more on revealing to Muhammad the reality of his “mission” field, and that there are those who will accept and believe in the message of Muhammad and there are those who will not.

<sup>51</sup> Frolov, “Freedom and Predestination,” 270. Reynold also asks the same question and comes to the conclusion that the Qur’an does not answer those types of questions; see Zamakhshari’s comments on 2:7.

<sup>52</sup> For the development of predestination in Islamic tradition, see Frolov, “Freedom and Predestination,” 267–71.

seen in the event of the Ninevites' repentance and also by other prophetic texts (Jer 18:7–10; Joel 2:12–14).

In the end, the repentance of the people of Nineveh has become a good example for both Christians' and Muslims' interpretation of those who believe and repent. As we have observed in our introduction, the majority of Middle Eastern Christians observe three days of Jonah's fasting, which is closely linked with repentance. In the Muslims calendar, the repentance of the people of Yūnus, and their fasting according to classical Mufassirun, is preserved through the Day of Ashura. In both traditions (Qur'an and the Bible), as we have discussed, repentance expresses itself in relation to others as it aims towards making real ethical changes in society. Sincere repentance, therefore, must go beyond physical ritual expression to a real transformation of each person and thus the society. Ayoub precisely observes that this act of sincere repentance "can be the voice of more conscience in society."<sup>53</sup> In this respect, the people of Nineveh function, on the one hand, as a type of Muslim and Christian that practice the virtue of fasting with sincere repentance of the social injustices enacted towards one another. This is the fast God chooses (Isa 58:6–7). Otherwise, the fast associated with Yūnus/Jonah, or any other type of fast, is merely another meaningless religious outward expression questioned by God (Isa 58:1–6; Matt 5:16–18). In this latter sense, the people of Nineveh function as an antitype.

To summarize, repentance in both traditions is understood in terms of "returning." This act of "returning" is very practical and manifests itself in relation to a change in ones' behavior as it relates to others. Allah and God also return to people when people return to them. This act of divine "returning" is related to the divine character traits of being merciful and forgiving. Though the similarity is striking

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<sup>53</sup> Ayoub, "Repentance in Islamic Tradition," 96.

between both traditions in terms of their understanding of repentance, the emphasis in the Islamic tradition on Allah's absolute sovereignty and predetermination of all human behaviors including belief and repentance stands in contrast to the dogma of human free will and, in turn, questions Allah's justice.

## CHAPTER 10: JONAH'S STRUGGLE: GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND COMPASSION (4:1–11)

### 10.1 Jonah's Struggle (4:1–4)

While Jonah 3 focuses mainly on Nineveh and its reaction to God's call, Jonah 4 shifts its focus to Jonah's angry response to God's mercy granted to Nineveh (3:10) and to the dialogue between Jonah and God, where the latter challenges the attitude of the former in order to teach him a lesson. This pericope is divided into two parts: vv. 1–4 where Jonah reveals the reason for fleeing and expresses his feelings toward God; and vv. 5–11 which is the climax of the narrative where God addresses the issue of Jonah's angry attitude. The vocabulary and the syntax of the first verse show that Jonah's anger is associated with the repentance of Nineveh and God's relenting. It begins with the repeated catchword רעע ("evil/catastrophe") that appeared in the previous verse, 3:10b.<sup>1</sup> Cognates of this term appear throughout the book of Jonah. The term רעה גדולה ("great catastrophe") is employed to serve the intensification of Jonah's displeasure.<sup>2</sup> Here, there is a play on words, or catchwords, as the narrator uses a cognate word for God's description of Nineveh's *behaviors* (רעה; 1:2) in contrast to Jonah's description of God's *behavior in relenting* (רעה; 4:1), not of the prophet Jonah as suggested by Smith and Allen.<sup>3</sup> While Nineveh's unjust deeds were displeasing in God's eyes, Nineveh's repentance was likewise displeasing in the eyes

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<sup>1</sup> On this, see Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 165; Sasson, *Jonah*, 270; Simon, *Jonah*, 36; Davies, "The Uses of R," 105–11. On the various suggestions for determining the subject of this verb, see Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 197.

<sup>2</sup> We have observed the use of "cognate accusative" forms in 1:10, 16; 3:2; 4:6. Tribble (*Rhetorical Criticism*, 241) and Sasson (*Jonah*, 272) agree that this vocabulary stresses the main themes in the book of Jonah.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, *Jonah*, 271; Allen, *Jonah*, 227.



of Jonah.<sup>4</sup> The act of Nineveh's repentance fueled Jonah's anger (ויחר). A synonymous phrase (מהרון אפו) is used earlier to describe Yahweh (3:9), and thus when Yahweh turns from his anger, Jonah's emotions are fueled. Though the narrator gives us a glimpse into Jonah's anger problem, God will address the issue in more detail later (4:4, 9).

Though speculations have been offered by scholars regarding the reason for Jonah's flight and anger, the narrator allows Jonah to offer his own self-explanatory motive of fleeing in the form of a prayer to Yahweh (ויתפלל אליהוה ויאמר) that desires death (4:2–3).<sup>5</sup> The prayer begins with the address to Yahweh, "Oh, Lord" (אנה יהוה; see 1:14). This self-expression takes the reader back to the beginning of the journey when Jonah was in his own country, revealing what he said to the Lord back then, הלוא-זה דברי עדה-יותי עלי-אדמתי ("Is this not what I said when I was still in my country?").<sup>6</sup> The following clause, עלי-כן קדמתי לברח תרשישה ("That is why I hastened to flee to Tarshish"), explains the reason for his flight to Tarshish. Tribble, however, understands the function of this latter clause as self-justification for Jonah's flight, while Sasson, more appropriately, considers both clauses as a long explanation of Jonah's justification for his flight.<sup>7</sup> Jonah anticipated in advance the outcome of his journey and therefore he hastened to flee earlier (קדם Piel) to Tarshish.<sup>8</sup> This

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<sup>4</sup> Other scholars have argued that Jonah's anger could be a narrow-minded nationalistic attitude (see Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 150), Jonah's worries about the future attack of the Assyrian army on Israel, the prophet's reputation, or the misunderstanding of God's plan for Jonah's people and the nation (see Smith, *Jonah*, 272; Stuart, *Jonah*, 501–2).

<sup>5</sup> Tribble (*Rhetorical Criticism*, 195) argues that Jonah 4 parallels Jonah 2 as both of them offer Jonah's prayer to God.

<sup>6</sup> Bolin (*Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 151) unconvincingly makes the link between those words and the ones in 2 Kgs 14:25–27 to argue that the Jonah mentioned in this book references the Jonah found in 2 Kgs.

<sup>7</sup> Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 200. Sasson, *Jonah*.

<sup>8</sup> According to Bruckner (*Jonah*, 110), "A key to understanding this verse is found in the Hebrew behind the words, 'I was so quick [*qiddamti*] to flee to Tarshish.' The verb *qadam* in the Piel means 'I anticipated' or 'I was in front' of the action. It is an advantage for a prophet to know how things will turn out!" Cf. Sasson, *Jonah*, 278: "Normally, *qiddēm* tells of making something come in front of another, whether in terms of time or in terms of space."

anticipation is “because” Jonah knew (cf. כי ידעתי; “because I knew”) who God is and how he would respond to Nineveh if they repented.<sup>9</sup>

The Hebrew word pair חנון ורחום (“gracious” and “compassionate”) appears in other similar contexts of praise, but in a reverse order (Exod 34:6; Pss 86:15; 103:8), while in other contexts is found in a similar form as here (Joel 2:13; Ps 145:8; Neh 9:17, 13). As we continue reading the narrative of Jonah, one cannot help but hear the echoes of Exod 32–34 in Jonah. While Moses desires to know the ways of the Lord (Exod 33:13), Jonah knew them (Jonah 4:2).<sup>10</sup> Yahweh is the one who relents (Exod 32:14) due to Moses’ intercessory prayer on behalf of the people (32:11–13), while in Jonah Yahweh relents in response to the Ninevites’ repentance (Jonah 3:10). Moses’ knowing results in a greater understanding of who Yahweh is and aids Moses in his intercession on behalf of the people, while Jonah’s knowing led our prophet to flee from Yahweh and even to avoid delivering his message to Nineveh. Finally, Yahweh reveals his sovereignty to Moses in response to his request to “see” (הראני) Yahweh’s glory (Exod 33:19). In Jonah, on the other hand, Yahweh challenges Jonah to teach him a lesson about his sovereignty (Jonah 4:11). Jonah’s recitation, however, takes us back to Exod 34:6–7. In the context of the golden calf narrative (Exod 32–34), Yahweh’s attributes reveal not only the merciful and gracious character of Yahweh, but also his justice.

Jonah’s prayer in 4:2 reveals that it was his understanding of God’s gracious and compassionate character that motivated his flight to Tarshish.<sup>11</sup> In this prayer,

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<sup>9</sup> For Tribble (*Rhetorical Criticism*, 200) the clause “because I knew” expresses the motivation for Jonah’s flight. She, moreover, suggests that “The sequence *kī yāda’ tī kī* produces rhythmic emphasis.” Wolff (*Obadiah and Jonah*, 166) differentiates between the term “I knew,” as he sees Jonah as “someone totally sure of himself” compared to the “desire for hope” of the king of Nineveh in Jonah 3:9.

<sup>10</sup> See also Simon (*Jonah*, xxxvii), for a comparison between Jonah and Moses. This is however not to say that the narrative of the golden calf is the source of the author of Jonah, but indeed the similarities cannot be ignored either.

<sup>11</sup> Boda, *Severe Mercy*, 317.

Jonah echoes the character creed of Exod 34:6–7. It is important to note that the terms appearing in Exod 34:6–7 in the Old Testament function “as references utilized in the different theological contexts of the various biblical books in which these citations appear.”<sup>12</sup> In this context, the declaration of God’s attributes by Jonah contains no reference to punishment, but rather focuses on Yahweh’s gracious character. The source of these materials in Jonah, as well as in Joel, “should not be restricted to Exod 34:6–7, but the broader context of Exod 32–34.”<sup>13</sup> Jonah cites the first half of Yahweh’s character that is mentioned in Exod 34:6–7, but uses an additional phrase from Moses’ plea to God in Exod 32:12–14.

In Jonah, the character traits of a merciful and gracious Yahweh are only recited in relation to nations other than Israel. Recitation of partial attributes is common throughout the biblical text (Joel 2:13; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17). But in Nah 1:3, the recitation of Yahweh’s character attributes focus more on his justice in order to take revenge on the Assyrian empire. Those attributes appear almost word for word in Joel 2:13–14.<sup>14</sup> While in Joel, and all other occurrences, those attributes are recited in the context of hope and praise, here in Jonah it is in the context of anger, and serves as a declaration of accusation against Yahweh.

Though Yahweh’s attributes work in harmony and cannot be separated, aspects of those attributes are more manifested than others throughout Jonah’s narrative. Regarding Nineveh, two main aspects of Yahweh’s character appear in the Ninevites’ experience. The character of Yahweh as the One who is “slow to anger” (אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם) can be seen in the length of the period given to Nineveh “forty days” before its destruction (cf. 3:4). Yahweh’s being slow to anger contrasts Jonah’s

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<sup>12</sup> Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 165.

<sup>13</sup> Boda, “Penitential Innovations within the Twelve,” 6.

<sup>14</sup> On the relationship between Joel and Jonah, see Simon, *Jonah*, xli; Kelly, “Joel, Jonah, and the Yahweh Creed,” 805–26.

burning anger. Jonah, however, is the one who claims that Yahweh being slow to anger replaces the king's claim of Yahweh's fierce anger (3:9). The character of Yahweh as the one who "relents" (וַיִּנְחַם עַל־הַרְעָה) is also pronounced in the king's words of hope (3:9) and further affirmed by the narrator (3:10). As we have seen before, the Ninevites' experience of God's compassionate character fueled Jonah's anger, and after this long introduction and justification of his flight, Jonah's plea, "And now Lord" (וַעַתָּה יְהוָה), takes the reader to the conclusion of his prayer of desiring death (4:3).<sup>15</sup> In this angry and unpleasant mood, Jonah prefers to die (קָח־נַפְשִׁי מִמֶּנִּי; "take my life from me") rather than to live in the social reality of a forgiven Nineveh.

As the narrator allows Jonah to express his own concerns regarding the Ninevites' repentance, he also allows God to address the real issue with Jonah by using a rhetorical question, "Do you do any good to be angry? (הֲהֵיטֵב חָרָה לְךָ)." Yahweh, by asking this question, refuses to respond to Jonah's request of death and instead deals with the real issue of חָרָה ("anger") in v. 1. This question, moreover, aims to help Jonah to conduct a self-examination of a proper and right attitude. Sasson, however, suggests that this statement can convey an exclamation.<sup>16</sup> Sasson understands Yahweh's words as an exclamation, "you are really angry!" and in this sense could be a source of comfort to Jonah.<sup>17</sup> The challenge with this interpretation, as Wolff argues, is that it does not take into consideration the "precise parallel" in v. 9, which receives an answer. This parallel led Wolff to consider this statement as a question.<sup>18</sup> For Sweeney, "YHWH does not question whether or not it is right for Jonah

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<sup>15</sup> Scholars draw a parallel between Jonah's and Elijah's request of death in 1 Kgs 19:4. See, for example, Simon, *Jonah*, 38; Sasson, *Jonah*, 285.

<sup>16</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 286.

<sup>17</sup> Sasson, *Jonah*, 286.

<sup>18</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*.

to be angry; as the narrative indicates, he has ample reason. Instead, it questions whether or not his anger will do him any good. In all events, Jonah's anger is not justifiable, and yet God is deeply concerned about it. With no direct answer to this question, at least this time, the narrator creates a level of anticipation for the reader/hearers to what comes next.

### **10.2 God's Sovereignty and Compassion and the School of Creation (4:5–11)**

The narrative continues with the final didactic scene of the whole book (vv. 5–11). This final scene is a conversation between Yahweh and Jonah, where creation once again is employed in the service of its Creator to help the angry prophet rethink the ethical implications of his confession of faith pronounced earlier in 4:2.<sup>19</sup> The scene begins with Jonah's silent response to Yahweh's question in v. 4; such a response is no longer shocking, particularly after Jonah's earlier protest of fleeing in 1:3. Though Jonah "obeyed" Yahweh and went to Nineveh (3:3), this outward action does not reflect the realities of Jonah's inner struggle that Yahweh addresses in the preceding verse (cf. 4:4). In reaction to Yahweh's authentic question, we read that "Jonah went out of the city and sat down to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade until he would see what would happen in the city" (v. 5). The repetition of the word עיר ("city") three times here emphasizes the fact that Jonah's focus is still on the city. While Yahweh "saw" (ראה) the repentance of Nineveh and relented (3:10), Jonah is still waiting in anger to "see" (ראה) whether this

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<sup>19</sup> Scholars attempt to reconstruct the final scene for "what happened in the city" already reported in 3:5–10. Therefore, Simon (*Jonah*, 137), for example, attempts to reconstruct the sequential events of the book by placing v. 5 after 3:4. Person (*In Conversation with Jonah*, 45), moreover, argues that the repentance of the Ninevites and the changing of Yahweh's mind did not occur according to the narrative's timeframe. Stuart (*Jonah*, 500), on the other hand, views these verses as a flashback. He explains: "In this regard vv. 5–11 function as a concluding coda, being a flashback to a time when the outcome of the Ninevites' attempt at repentance was not yet evident." Indeed, it is hard to believe that the scene is misplaced by the author, and therefore attempt to "fix the problem" by reconstructing the whole scene after 3:4.

repentance will last long enough to correspond with the warning period of forty days.<sup>20</sup> Though סכה (“booth”) is used in Isaiah figuratively as a sign of Yahweh’s promised protection (Isa 4:6), here it is the self-made booth (סכה) that aims to provide shade over Jonah. It is clear from the following words that this booth did not provide the necessary needed shade for the angry Jonah (4:8).<sup>21</sup>

While Jonah’s attention is on Nineveh, Yahweh Elohim’s attention is on Jonah himself. The Creator uses creation to teach Jonah a lesson (vv. 6–8). The Hebrew term מנה (Piel; “appointed”) appears in this passage three times (vv. 6, 7, 8) where Yahweh Elohim is the active subject and creation is the object (guord plant, worm, and wind). The term מנה is also used earlier where Yahweh “appointed” the great fish (1:17). The reader thus observes the emphasis on Yahweh’s sovereignty over creation and that he controls the course of action throughout the narrative (1:9, 17; 2:4; 4:6–8). The emphasis on Yahweh Elohim as the active agent here affirms the fact that it is Yahweh who purposely appoints his creation in the service of his involvement in human affairs, and in our case, that is Jonah. In the first occurrence, Yahweh Elohim appointed a guord plant (קיקיון) to provide shade and protection over Jonah’s head (להיות צל על־ראשו) and to deliver him from his discomfort (להציל לו מרעתו). The guord plant is thus a gift from Yahweh, as we will be told later that Jonah contributed nothing to its creation (v. 10). Thus, there is a twofold purpose involved with the guord plant. The first is the physical well-being of Jonah, that is to provide protection. Even though the guord plant was mainly employed to serve the purpose of Yahweh’s didactic lesson to Jonah, it also shows Yahweh’s concern for Jonah. This shows Yahweh’s care for the exhausted prophet. Second, the Hebrew word רעה is the same

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<sup>20</sup> Scholars have noticed the similarities between Jonah’s “seeing” of Nineveh and YHWH’s “seeing” of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 18:21; see, for example, Smith, *Jonah*, 276.

<sup>21</sup> On the nature of this “booth,” see Simon, *Jonah*, 40.

word used earlier to describe Jonah's interpretation of Nineveh's repentance as "displeasing" (4:1). As the reader observes the narrator's play on words, a method that is used throughout the narrative, the purpose of the guord plant is indeed to deliver Jonah from his angry attitude expressed in v. 1. The term רעה is also used to describe Nineveh's deeds (1:2). Jonah's displeasure is thus similar to that of Nineveh, and both need deliverance.<sup>22</sup> Yahweh's deliverance plan is invoked successfully, and the complete opposite emotion is expressed as earlier: While it was *exceedingly distressing* to Jonah because of the repentance of Nineveh (v. 1), he was *exceedingly rejoicing* because of the guord plant (v. 6).

This state of rejoicing, however, will not last long, as the Creator appoints (twice) a worm and the east wind to drive the lesson home (vv. 7–8). The use of מנה ("appointed") in its second and third occurrences, affirms Yahweh Elohim as the driving force not only for the growing of the plant, but also for its "death." The worm "chews through the guord plant so that it withered" (ותך את־הקיקיון וייבש), while the scorching east wind and the sun "beat on Jonah's head so that he was faint" (ותך (השמש על־ראש יונה ויתעלף). It is important to note the parallel sequence of these two verses: Time ("dawn" [שחר]; "the sun arose" [כזרח השמש]); Elohim's appointing of creation ("worm" [תולעת] and "east wind" [רוח קדים]), and consequences (the plant "withered" [יבש], while Jonah was "faint" [עלף]). It is noteworthy that the only "death and destruction" in the whole narrative is not of Nineveh but of something that is very valuable to Jonah and brought him great joy, the guord plant. The result of this severe, hot, and windy climate, moreover, led to the exhaustion of Jonah (עלף Hithpael). The character of Jonah as it has been presented up to this point of the narrative offers a

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<sup>22</sup> See Kaplan ("Moral Agency," 158) who points out that Jonah and Nineveh have switched places, though for Jonah this is not in terms of his sinfulness, but rather in terms of his "emotional state."

clue to Jonah's response: When Jonah struggles with life he gets very angry and depressed to the point that he desires death. The clause וישאל את-נפשו למות ("and he begged with all his being to die"), is in the form of a prayer in a time of distress, repeating the same desire of death over life expressed earlier, saying, "It is better for me to die than to live" (טוב מוּתִי מַחֲיִי).<sup>23</sup> When Jonah experiences deliverance, he praises the Lord (2:3–11). When Jonah experiences distress, he desires death rather than praying (4:8). While heaven was open to hear the prayers of the sailors, the Ninevites, and Jonah, it is now closed to the prayer of death as Yahweh's preferable choice is life over death. Therefore, Yahweh's questions aim to help Jonah recognize his compassionate character.

Elohim's repetitive questions are meant to emphasize the main point Elohim is making: whether Jonah's anger has any merit regarding Yahweh's response to the repentance of Nineveh. While the first question was prompted by Jonah's anger over the repentance of Nineveh, the same question is promoted here by Jonah's anger over the plant (4:9): "Is it right there is anger for you over the guord plant?" The emphasis on the plant here is to help Elohim carry the conversation in order to show the inconsistency of Jonah's attitude towards Yahweh's ways in dealing with his creation. Yahweh's pity is thus to be understood in light of his compassion toward creation. This is further affirmed by Jonah's response when he says, "it is right for me to be angry" (היטב חרה-לי). On the one hand, Jonah attempts to justify his own anger over the plant, rejecting the whole notion of its death. On the other hand, God's didactic lesson for Jonah continues. Even if Jonah's answer was "no," he would have admitted Yahweh's sovereignty in having pity over Nineveh. In any event, Jonah is not only

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<sup>23</sup> The Hebrew clause וישאל את-נפשו למות is also found in the story of Elijah's flight (1 Kgs 19:4).



angry because of the “death” of the plant, but he also expresses his repeated wish of death (“even to death” [עַד־מוֹת]; vv. 4:3, 8, 9). In sum, Jonah claims the right to be angry even to death over Yahweh’s free gift of the plant. Jonah’s claim will lead Yahweh to make a comparison between Jonah’s pity over the plant and Yahweh’s pity over Nineveh.

While the narrative begins with Yahweh’s words to Jonah (וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי), the final words in the whole narrative are also given to Yahweh, וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה (“and the Lord said”; v. 10). Yahweh’s words interpret Jonah’s attitude towards the plant as that of pity: אַתָּה חָסַת עַל־הַקִּיקִיּוֹן (“You pity the plant”), using the same word (חָסַת) to describe Yahweh’s attitude towards Nineveh. The death of the plant thus invokes Jonah’s “compassionate anger.” Jonah’s pity over the plant is indeed a self-pity over losing his own comfort. It is, however, hard to ascribe Jonah’s self-pity here to also be the reason for his flight earlier, contrary to Wolff’s suggestion.<sup>24</sup> Jonah’s pity over the plant is questioned by Yahweh for the fact that the plant is Yahweh’s free gift to Jonah, as was the deliverance of Jonah’s death by the great fish. Jonah “did not labor” (לֹא־עָמַלְתָּ), nor did he “make it grow” (וְלֹא גִדַּלְתָּו).<sup>25</sup> The repetition of the negative adverb לֹא affirms the fact that the plant is completely a result of Yahweh’s hard labor and that Yahweh is the sustainer of its growth; Jonah, on the other hand, contributed nothing to its genesis and growth. This fact is stressed even more by the fact that Yahweh was the driving force of all the activities that take place in vv. 6–8. The clause שֶׁבַן־לַיְלָה הָיָה וּבֶן־לַיְלָה אָבַד (“which came into being in a night and perished in a night”) denotes the rapid birth and death of the plant regardless of whether the narrator meant for the event to take place in the same night or in two consecutive

<sup>24</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 173.

<sup>25</sup> In the *piel* form גִּדַּל is used for the cultivation of plants. It is the rain that makes the cedar grow (Isa 44:14). In the context of using a figurative image of the cedar of Lebanon to refer to Assyria, it is the water that makes the cedar grow (Ezek 31:3–4).

nights.<sup>26</sup> In either case, the “rapid” sense further confirms the whole notion of Jonah’s lack of involvement in the creation and growth of the plant. In other words, Jonah did not spend any time to help with the growth of the plant. The contrast between life and death is clear here, and the latter אבד (“perished”) echoes the earlier prayerful requests of both Jonah’s and the Ninevites’ desire to not perish (1:6, 14; 3:9).

After interpreting Jonah’s desire of death over life as an expression of pity over the loss of Yahweh’s free gift of the plant, Yahweh now elucidates for Jonah his position towards Nineveh. The language of contrast in the form of a question that calls for reflection is hard to dismiss. The shift from the independent subject pronoun in the second person form (אתה), which emphasizes the topic of pity in v. 10, to the independent subject pronoun in the first person form (אני) serves to show, on the one hand, a contrast between Jonah and Yahweh, and, on the other hand, the emphasis on the subject matter of “pity” (חוס). The term חוס is used in passages where Yahweh is not moved by his pity (Ezek 5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:10; 24:14), while in another passage the term does show Yahweh’s pity (Ezek 20:17). In his prayer in Neh 13:22, Nehemiah asks the Lord to remember him and to have compassion (חוס) according to his abundant steadfast love (כרב חסד). The link between the terms חוס and חסד in Nehemiah led Wolff to make the connection here between חוס (4:11) and חסד (4:2), concluding that Jonah “is being moved to take up a new attitude to that acknowledgment of faith.”<sup>27</sup> In this sense, Yahweh’s “pity” (חוס) (4:11) came out of Yahweh’s “steadfast love” (חסד) confessed early by Jonah (4:2). For Yahweh to use the same Hebrew word, חוס (“pity”), is to suggest that Yahweh’s compassion for Nineveh is what Jonah had insisted he has the right to show over the death of the

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<sup>26</sup> Sasson (*Jonah*, 313) speaks of two separate evenings to express the gap between life and death. Wolff (*Obadiah and Jonah*, 160) speaks of two successive nights but they describe “the belonging together of the growing up and the fading away” of the plant.

<sup>27</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 174.

plant. If Jonah argues he has the right to be angry for the death of the plant, how can he now argue with Yahweh that it is right to see the death of Nineveh?

Yahweh's pity is over Nineveh, "the great city in which there are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons" (העיר הגדולה אשר ישבה הרבה משתים-עשרה (רבו אדם).<sup>28</sup> The use of the relative conjunction אשר indicates further information to explain in which way Nineveh is a great city. Yahweh's pity over Nineveh is because it has a big population of his creation. Here the reader observes a key difference between Yahweh's and Jonah's pity. That while the plant is not Jonah's "creation," as he contributed nothing to its existence (v. 10), the Ninevites, on the other hand, are God's creation, those whom he "made" (עשה) and "created" (ברא) (cf. Gen 1:26–27). Bruckner precisely observes how Yahweh's primary argument is creational: if Jonah was moved by pity over the destruction of a plant that Jonah did not create, should not Yahweh have pity over the destruction of the people and animals he did create?<sup>29</sup> God loves all his creation, for he is "gracious and compassionate" (4:2). But this creation is ignorant of the knowledge of Yahweh for they "do not know their right from their left" (4:11). It is hard to accept the suggestion that this expression refers to children and infants. For instance, Wiseman argues that the number in v. 11 stands for the whole population, but his suggestion that the phrase ("they do not know their left from their right") denotes those who cannot make decisions is not precise enough (e.g., the phrase suggests a complete lack of understanding), nor is his conclusion that the people accordingly cannot bear responsibility since they lack the knowledge of the

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<sup>28</sup> For a study specifically focused on the animals in Jonah (e.g., Jonah 4:11), see Shemesh, "And Many Beasts," 1–26. Also, see Abusch ("Jonah and God," 146–52) who argues that the animals were God's way of trying to persuade Jonah to care for the Ninevites, for as Abusch notes, although Jonah does not display a sense of identification with other humans, he does identify with God's non-human creation. In other words, although Jonah does not care about humans, he does care about God's creation (e.g., the guord plant); God is trying to teach Jonah that he cares for both.

<sup>29</sup> Bruckner, *Jonah*, 109.

law of Yahweh.<sup>30</sup> For the people can be ignorant, but still responsible. Otherwise, how will Yahweh judge an irresponsible nation? It is noteworthy to observe the irony between Yahweh and Jonah affirmed by Yahweh's use of the term יָדַע ("to know") in a negative sense (4:11), which Jonah used earlier in his accusation of Yahweh's being merciful and compassionate towards Nineveh (4:2). The Ninevites' lack of knowledge (e.g., "who knows?") invoked Yahweh's mercy and compassion (3:9–10), while Jonah's knowledge of Yahweh's mercy and compassion invoked Jonah's anger (4:1–2).

Yahweh's question in 4:11 thus invites Jonah to examine the ethical invalidity of his theology.<sup>31</sup> In other words, Jonah's confession of faith (theology) has ethical implications, and both must go together. The knowledge of Yahweh that justifies unethical behaviors and attitudes is not justified. The message is clear: It is not right for Jonah to be angry because Yahweh is merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast love, and slow to anger and relents.

### 10.3 Jonah's Struggle with the Merciful and Compassionate God

As we arrive at Jonah 4, it is certainly not difficult to argue that this chapter is the climax of the whole narrative for the following reasons. First, Jonah reveals the reason for his struggle with God regarding Nineveh, that of God's relenting related to Nineveh's repentance. In other words, it is God's gracious and merciful character that Jonah struggles with particularly as he deals with a non-Israelite and oppressive people like Nineveh. Second, God addresses Jonah's real struggle expressed as anger:

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<sup>30</sup> Wiseman, "Jonah's Nineveh," 40. See also HALOT 391.

<sup>31</sup> As to whether the final phrase in Jonah 4:11 is a (rhetorical) question or a statement (or, both), including discussions of the "missing" interrogative ׀ that otherwise marks questions in Jonah 4:2, 4, 9, see Guillaume, "End of Jonah," 243–50; Ben Zvi, "Jonah 4:11," 1–13; Berger, *Jonah in the Shadows of Eden*, 61; Van Heerden, "Shades of Green," 459–77.

is Jonah's anger right? In other words, God's repeated questions (4:4, 9) do not only address Jonah's struggle but also rebuke Jonah's attitude of anger. Indeed, this is what the narrative really addresses. Finally, God's didactic lesson to Jonah through the illustration of the plant, and particularly his final question (4:11), brings the whole narrative to its conclusion and drives the lesson home: God affirms to Jonah that He has the absolute freedom and sovereignty to be concerned for the Ninevites, and indeed all creation, without discrimination. The narrative, however, leaves readers to draw this conclusion themselves. Thus, God's final question in 4: 11 is indeed a key to the interpretation of the whole book and serves the didactic point of the narrative. O'Brien states, "The climax of the prophecy and key to its interpretation is Yahweh's question of Jonah, 'Should I not be concerned about the great city?' (4:11)."<sup>32</sup> So, as the reader learns early on in the narrative (1:1–3) about the struggle between Jonah and God regarding Nineveh, here the reader learns more about the reason for Jonah's struggle and God's response.

In terms of the contribution of chapter 4 to the argument of this work, as we have observed in the introduction of this work, our main focus in writing a biblical theology of the book of Jonah in the context of Islam is on the character of a merciful and gracious God who is at work in history as revealed in the narrative of Jonah. In Chapter 3, we have addressed the issue of God's relenting in relation to human repentance. In conversation with Islam, we have discussed Allah's sovereignty in relation to his mercy, with a major emphasis placed on Allah's oft returning in the Qur'an. Here, we will continue the conversation regarding God's character with an emphasis on mercy and compassion. Our focus in this discussion aims to address Jonah's struggle in terms of dealing with a sovereign but gracious and compassionate

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<sup>32</sup> Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 45.

God. This emphasis in the context of Islam is important particularly when an Islamic view of Allah places more emphasis on strict sovereignty. We will also discuss how Yūnus functions as a type of Muhammad during his struggle with rejection, and how Allah responds to Muhammad's struggle. Our conversation, moreover, will also focus on God's attributes as they are lived out and experienced throughout redemptive history by his people, and now the nations. In conversation with Islam, this emphasis will further affirm who God is in terms of his engagement in the history of humanity. In other words, God's attributes, we will argue, are more than a list of abstract names, but they indeed reveal Israel's testimony of its encounter with God through the narrative of what he has done in Israel's life and the world. With this in mind, we will move to our conversation of Jonah's struggle.

Jonah's struggle appears early on in the story where the tension between God and Jonah becomes obvious in the form of protest, where Jonah decides to flee from God (as discussed in more detail in our analysis of Jonah 1). Though the reader can speculate as to the reasons for Jonah's flight early in the story, it becomes clear to the reader now as Jonah states his reason: he "knew" that God is gracious and merciful and he will respond to repentant Nineveh. In other words, Jonah struggles as God extends his mercy to the oppressive Assyrian empire. As Jonah recites God's attributes, it becomes obvious that Jonah struggles not just with a list of abstract names of God, but rather with how God has revealed his attributes, and character, through the narrative of what he has done in the event of the Ninevites, and even as Jonah himself has experienced them. Jonah's struggle with God is indeed the struggle of Israel itself from the beginning of its history.

Jonah struggles with God's sovereignty and freedom to show mercy and compassion, but this struggle is as old as the history of God's early encounter with

Israel. Indeed, Moses' struggles as he intercedes on behalf of the people of Israel as they commit their first national violation of the law by worshiping the golden calf (Exod 32:1–6). There, Moses also struggles as he attempts through his relentless intercessory prayer to secure forgiveness, the presence of the Lord, and the renewal of the covenant.<sup>33</sup> Though God relents in response to Moses' request (Exod 32:12–14), he refuses Moses' offer of himself so that God lets the people of Israel go unpunished (32:33). As the conversation between God and Moses is taking place, Yahweh continues with “a statement of his sovereignty” (33:19).<sup>34</sup> By this statement, God affirms his sovereignty as including having mercy and compassion (Exod 33:19).<sup>35</sup> As God's sovereignty is proclaimed, the question remains: how God will continue his journey with such a sinful stubborn nation? It is thus Moses' desire to know God's way as he leads the people on the journey, and here God affirms his presence throughout the journey (33:14). In response to Moses' appeal to see God's glory (Exod 33:18), and with an affirmation of God's sovereignty to forgive, God will reveal to Moses how he will continue the journey with the sinful nation of Israel by a proclamation of his goodness and naming through the self-revelation of his attributes (Exod 34:6–7).<sup>36</sup> Indeed, one can argue, this is the core of Israel's belief about God, which needs further discussion, particularly in relation to our conversation of God's sovereignty and freedom to be gracious and merciful.

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<sup>33</sup> On the role of Moses' intercessory prayer, see Widmer, *Moses*, 185; Miller, *They Cried*, 273.

<sup>34</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 452.

<sup>35</sup> Knowles (*The Unfolding Mystery*, 37–38) recalls Exod 3:14 here and suggests that the simple tautology “I will be who I will be” now becomes “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” In this way, God's statement in Exod 33:19b helps clarify “this otherwise puzzling statement” of Exod 3:14.

<sup>36</sup> Laney, “God's Self-Revelation,” 36–51. Hyatt (*Exodus*, 317) gives two general meanings of the use of the word: (a) “beauty, fairness in appearance,” or (b) “the goodness of Yahweh in bestowing good things upon his people.” But he suggests that in this context the “goodness of Yahweh refers to his forgiveness of Israel and his willingness to save Israel by leading them out of Egypt.” It is possible to suggest that God's goodness refers partly to his forgiveness since it is a significant aspect of who God is in 34:5–7.

It is important to note that Exod 34:6–7 is an elaboration of Yahweh’s name (Exod 33:19a).<sup>37</sup> By revealing his attributes, God shares with Israel, as Eichrodt states, “a very part of his being and given them a means of access to himself . . . in the Name of the covenant God they encountered him in person and experienced his activity.”<sup>38</sup> In this respect, what God revealed to Moses and Israel is thus more than just an abstract list of his attributes; it indeed reflects Israel’s testimony of God’s activity throughout its history. In this sense, Routledge explains:

God is not a subject for study and speculation, but the living One who reveals himself through his activity in the world and his encounter with the people. Their understanding of God is expressed primarily through the narrative of what God has done (through the stories in which he involves himself in the life of the people) rather than through lists of attributes and abstract propositional statements, which attempt to set out who God is.<sup>39</sup>

The God Israel will meet throughout its history is thus a merciful and just God, a God who forgives but also disciplines. Such testimony begins right there when Israel experiences God’s mitigated punishment and forgiveness in response to their sin. This first testimony of God reveals furthermore the fact that Israel is a restored forgiving nation. In this way, Eichrodt states, “the faith of Israel sets its face against both an abstract concept of deity and a nameless ‘ground of being.’ Both the intellectualist and the mystical misunderstandings of God are rejected.”<sup>40</sup> Israel’s testimony moreover reveals its experience of a personal God in the sense that though God is sovereign and transcendent yet he is close and active in the life of his people. Brueggemann explains, “Israel insisted that God is to be understood, not as a

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<sup>37</sup> Childs (*Exodus*, 69) suggests that Moses’ inquiry “was understood as a request not for information, but rather for an explanation of the significance of the name.” On the relationship between a name and the self-revelation of God, see Knowles, *The Unfolding Mystery*, 37; Childs, *Exodus*, 596; Durham, *Exodus*, 452–53.

<sup>38</sup> Eichrodt, *Theology*, 207.

<sup>39</sup> Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 101.

<sup>40</sup> Eichrodt, *Theology*, 206.



transcendent sovereign who is unimpinged upon, but rather as a fully personal God who is known to be related to Israel and whose own life and power are relative to Israel and the life of the world.”<sup>41</sup>

As we move to the Twelve, the character creed (Exod 34:6–7) appears in various contexts with a particular emphasis on either positive or negative parts of the creed.<sup>42</sup> In the case of Nineveh in Jonah and Nahum, for example, we see both sides of the character creed: the forgiving and just God. Within the book of Jonah, moreover, we see both sides of God’s character, though Jonah only recites the positive side of the creed (4:2). God’s attributes cited by Jonah are all expressed through what God has done in the narrative. As we have observed, Jonah’s prophetic ministry to Nineveh is in itself an expression of God’s mercy and compassion, as well as it shows a God who is slow to anger as he sends his prophet to warn the people and give them time (forty days) before punishment takes place. The sailors experience a sovereign God who is merciful and compassionate as expressed through deliverance of a major storm. Though Jonah experiences God’s discipline, he also experiences God’s covenant commitment of steadfast love through deliverance (2:10). The people of Nineveh’s testimony is that of a God who in his sovereignty relents (3:10) and is compassionate (4:11). The unspoken part of the character creed is not only seen in Jonah’s discipline but also seen by a God who destroys (4:7).

Trible speaks about “the theological tension” within the book of Jonah itself, as we see a God who threatens but also relents, the one who saves and also destroys.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith*, 139. See also Knowles, *The Unfolding Mystery*, 20.

<sup>42</sup> On the character of God in the Twelve, see House, “The Character of God,” 125–45; Tribble, “Divine Incongruities in the Book of Jonah,” 198–208. On the relationship between the prophets and the law see the superb bibliography in Boda, *Severe Mercy*, 251. On the role of Exod 34:6–7 in development of the Twelve, see Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 31–49.

<sup>43</sup> Tribble, “Divine Incongruities in the Book of Jonah,” 208.

The book of Jonah thus reflects what Brueggemann calls the disjunctions that derive Israel's testimony. He states,

Yahweh is a Character and Agent who is evidenced in the life of Israel as an Actor marked by unlimited sovereignty and risky solidarity, in whom this sovereignty and solidarity often converge, but for whom, on occasion, sovereignty and solidarity are shown to be in an unsettled tension or in an acute imbalance. *The substance of Israel's testimony concerning Yahweh, I propose, yields a Character who has a profound disjunction at the core of the Subject's life.* This disjunction, moreover, is the engine that derives Israel's testimony; it is the splendor of Israel's odd faith and the source of the deep vexation that mark Israel's life. The disjunction is a theological datum of substance. It is not a mark of erroneous, primitive religion that later "concepts of God" can leave behind.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, it does not go without saying that Israel, and its prophet Jonah, must struggle as they live and serve such a God. On the other hand, Israel and Jonah should celebrate God's sovereignty and freedom since such attributes operate within the realm of a merciful and gracious God. Jonah's life itself is a real testimony of such a God. Thus, the formula of God's sovereignty and freedom (Exod 33:19b), and the king's and the sailors' "perhaps" (Jonah 1:6; 3:9), open the door for possibilities, and indeed contribute more to the struggle of humanity in general and Jonah in particular, as it leaves "open the freedom of Yahweh to be merciful as he chooses in a way that cannot be presumed upon."<sup>45</sup> This is precisely the struggle of our prophet Jonah.

Since God's attributes are expressed through what God has done, Jonah's struggle with God is not a mere theological struggle but, rather, relates to Nineveh. Indeed, one cannot ignore the fact that Nineveh is a non-Israelite and oppressive people, and this fact is reinforced by God himself as he addresses its evil behavior (1:2). In a sense, God shares Jonah's concern about Nineveh's evil, and it is for this very reason that he sent Jonah to announce God's judgement (3:4). In this respect,

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<sup>44</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of Old Testament*, 268.

<sup>45</sup> Moberly, *At the Mountain*, 87.

Jonah struggles to see God's mercy extended to undeserved, oppressive Assyria (3:10). For Jonah, the justice of God quoted by Nahum (1:2–3) is what Nineveh deserves. The question then for Jonah becomes: how can God forgive such an oppressive nation? However, Jonah certainly knows the answer to this question as he recites the positive element of God's character (4:2). The real struggle of Jonah is then this tension between what he knows of God (theology) and how to translate this knowledge into active ministry (application).<sup>46</sup> With this tension in mind, we can understand Jonah's struggle, which is expressed in a form of anger to the point where he desires death. God himself twice addresses the issue of Jonah's anger (4:4, 9), with no sign of returning on Jonah's part. Such an angry and stubborn character certainly struggles with a God who is slow to anger and relenting. The difference in character and perspective is further addressed as God takes Jonah to the school of creation in order to seek another conversation where God attempts to help the angry Jonah see the very central part of his merciful and gracious being.<sup>47</sup>

In the school of creation, God affirms to Jonah that God has the absolute freedom and sovereignty to be concerned for the Ninevites, and indeed all creation, without discrimination. As we have observed, Jonah affirms to God that he has the right to be angry to death for the death of the plant. God, on the other hand, describes Jonah's anger as that of compassion over the plant, though Jonah contributed nothing to its creation (4:10). God then compares Jonah's compassion over the plant to his compassion over Nineveh. In this respect, the Ninevites are God's created people. God, however, acknowledges Nineveh's ignorance but he, unlike Jonah, does not respond in anger but with compassion and mercy. Jonah, on the other hand, shows a

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<sup>46</sup> House, "The Character of God," 135.

<sup>47</sup> Bruckner, *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 113. House ("The Character of God," 135) also speaks of the implication of creation theology in interpreting the book of Jonah.

lack of compassion towards God's creation, including the animals. Jonah's struggle is partially theological as he questions God's external mercy to the undeserved Nineveh, but partially his struggle is also ethical as he lacks compassion towards God's creation.

Finally, it is important to highlight another aspect of the God-Jonah relationship. As God witnesses Jonah's struggle, he invites him into conversation to address his struggle. In this conversation, God opens a very central part of his being and invites Jonah to see a glimpse of a heart full of compassion and mercy towards creation. Indeed, the evil of humanity generates sympathy on the part of God towards those who do not know their right from their left. When these ignorant people repent, God relents. Thematically, we can recall Luke 15, where Jesus reveals to the angry religious leaders God's true heart towards sinners: a God full of compassion who is at work throughout redemptive history to find those who are lost, and when he does find them, he does not get angry at them, but rather rejoices at their return. Of course, the character of God in this parable is compared with the older angry son, who does struggle to rejoice with his father. Is it possible to draw any parallels between this older son and Jonah?

#### **10.4 Conclusion: Yūnus as the Impatient Type of Muhammad**

As we have mentioned, the Qur'an portrays Yūnus as an angry prophet (Q 21:87; 68:48). While Jonah was angry at God according to the biblical narrative, various scenarios were given by classical Mufasssirin regarding Yūnus' anger: Yūnus was angry at God, Gabriel, people, angels. Thus, in both traditions, the prophets experience struggle expressed in anger and this struggle is related to their prophetic office. The Qur'an also reports that Yūnus was physically exhausted and sick

(37:145). Allah showed his care and mercy for the exhausted prophet through the gourd plant as it offers shade over Yūnus (37:146). The majority of classical Mufasssirun, moreover, report similar accounts of the narrative of the gourd plant to that of the biblical narrative. Al-Rāzī is a good example, where he uses the illustration of the gourd plant to show Yūnus' lack of compassion towards the "more than one hundred thousand" people to whom he was sent. We will discuss this account further below.

Our focus in this section is mainly found in Al-Qalam 68:48–50, where Yūnus functions as a type of Muhammad. As we have observed in our discussion on this account, the socio-religious context is described as polemically hostile in nature. In this context, the Qur'an reveals Muhammad's struggle as he faces severe criticism from the surrounding community. In response, the last pericope (Q 68:43–52) offers counsel to the prophet in terms of his response to such criticism and the virtue which a prophet like Muhammad should embrace. As the burden of prophethood became severe, Muhammad is instructed to leave the matter to God as he patiently awaits God's judgement (اصبر لحكم ربك) (Q 68:48; c.f. 10:109) and not to be like Yūnus. Muhammad is also instructed in other places to be patient (e.g., 10:109; 40:55; 50:39). In Al Saffat, Muhammad, moreover, is instructed to turn away from his opponents, wait patiently for God's judgement upon those who reject Muhammad's message, and for the victory of his prophet (Q 37:174–179).

As we can see, the Qur'an offers moral instructions to Muhammad's struggle in dealing with criticism by using Yūnus as a type that Muhammad should not follow. This Qur'anic typological reading of the example of Yūnus reveals the Qur'anic emphasis on using prophetic narratives to offer moral instructions, even to Muhammad. It is important here to highlight the differences in how Allah and God

deal with the struggle of both characters, Muhammad and Jonah: Allah gives moral instructions to Muhammad, while God invites Jonah into conversation to reveal a very central part of his being in relation to those who are ignorant. Indeed, these two different approaches of dealing with the prophets' struggle is not only related to the Qur'anic literary use of prophetic narratives, but it also tells the reader where the emphasis in each story is and serves to reveal aspects of the character of Allah/God. If one hears Allah correctly as he instructs Muhammad, it seems there is more emphasis on God's strict sovereignty where Allah asked Muhammad to leave the matter to God, and Muhammad is then expected to submit to Allah's moral requirements of being patient, rather than angry.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, God attempts, through the illustration of the gourd plant, to show Jonah his compassionate character as related to his creation. Indeed, such an emphasis on compassion raises a challenge in the context of Islam, where more emphasis is placed on mercy, and less on compassion. This, in turn, takes us back to the conversation regarding the character of God in Islam.<sup>49</sup>

Allah's attributes and beautiful divine names are simply regraded as epithets or names which describe Allah's very being.<sup>50</sup> Unlike God's attributes in the biblical narratives, there is more emphasis on the Qur'an on Allah's sovereignty and transcendence, and less on the personal Allah.<sup>51</sup> Rahman, for example, states that,

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<sup>48</sup> Here one can revisit a similar yet different biblical example of the relationship between God and his prophet: Moses and God in the context of the golden calf narrative (Exod 32–34). There God asks Moses to leave him alone so that he can deal with Israel's violation of the law, "Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them" (Exod 32:10); Moses did not. Rather, Moses intercedes on behalf of the people throughout the rest of the narrative. Scholars see in the phrase, "let me alone" an invitation from God to Moses to "not leave alone" and enter into a conversation with God regarding Israel's idolatry of worshipping a calf. See, for example, Widmer, *Moses*, 333; Hamilton, *Exodus*, 538; Stuart, *Exodus*, 670.

<sup>49</sup> On the character of Allah in Islam, see Reynolds, *Allah*; Rahman, *Major Themes in the Qur'an*, 1–16; Böwering, "God and his Attributes," 313–16; Accad, *Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching across the Christian-Muslim Divide*; 90.

<sup>50</sup> Böwering, "God and his Attributes," 319.

<sup>51</sup> On the theme of a personal God in the Qur'an, see Reynolds, *Allah*, 201. Reynolds, however, argues more for a picture of a personal Allah based on a rereading of the Qur'an itself. For a full study on the character of God as personal, see Clements, *Old Testament Theology*, 58–62;

“the Qur’an is no treatise about God and His nature: his existence, for the Qur’an, is strictly functional—He is Creator and Sustainer of the Universe and of man, and particularly the giver of guidance for man and he who judges man, individually and collectively, and metes out merciful justice.”<sup>52</sup> Al-Ghazali, furthermore, is a good representative of those Muslims scholars who attempt to defend a sovereignty and transcendence Allah against a personal Allah as he, for example, see a tension between mercy and compassion. According to Al-Ghazali, Allah is not subject to emotion and his mercy is not based on compassion.<sup>53</sup> The reason for such an emphasis is that emotion stems from weakness. If we speak of Allah who has emotion, moreover, this emotion may take over control of Allah’s other attributes, which means that this emotion moves Allah and it may impact his decision. On the other hand, Ghazali states, “Mercy is not without a painful empathy which affects the merciful, and moves him to satisfy the needs of the one receiving mercy. Yet the Lord—praise be to Him Most High—transcends that, so you may think that this diminishes the meaning of mercy.”<sup>54</sup> Ghazali argues that Allah’s mercy in Islam is perfect. He presents a threefold argument:

1. Although God’s mercy is not based on compassion, it perfectly achieves its aims; that is, it meets our needs: “the perfection of mercy depends on the perfection of its fruits.”
2. God is powerful; hence he does not suffer: “the suffering of the merciful only stems from a weakness and defects in himself.”
3. God’s mercy is pure mercy, it is only concerned with the sufferer: “[the] one who is merciful out of empathy and suffering comes close to intending to alleviate his own suffering and sensitivity by his actions, thereby looking after himself and seeking his own goals.”<sup>55</sup>

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Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:206–10; Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 102–3; Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, 44–47; Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith*, 139.

<sup>52</sup> Rahman, *Major Themes in the Qur’an*, 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ghazali, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 53–54.

<sup>54</sup> Ghazali, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 53.

<sup>55</sup> Ghazali, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 53–54.

Souaiaia contributes such an Islamic view of Allah to the decline of Mu'tazilite theology. He explains:

The decline of Mu'tazilite theology and the emergence of Ash'arite doctrinal thinking have reduced Muslims' understanding of God [Allah] to a quasi-negative theology. It is negative in the sense that it emphasizes what God [Allah] is not rather than affirms what He is. It is true that for Muslims God [Allah] is not exactly known by what He is not. However, He remains an unknown who is recognized only through attributes; this distinction makes the end result of the theological endeavors undertaken by Muslim scholarship fundamentally different from that in Christian traditions.<sup>56</sup>

It is interesting, though, to see classical Mufassirun use a similar account of the gourd plant to that seen in the narrative of Jonah. Al-Rāzī, for example, uses this account to show Allah's rebuke of Yūnus for his lack of compassion towards the "more than one hundred thousand" people to whom he was sent, while emphasizing Allah's compassion toward the people of Nineveh. On the other hand, the gourd plant is seen as an act of Allah's mercy towards Yūnus—mercy in the sense of caring for the exhausted prophet. Here, we have a good example of how the biblical narrative of the account of the gourd plant, for example, aids the interpretation of the Qur'an. Such an account, moreover, clearly says more about God's compassion and care than what the Qur'an does not say about Allah in terms of his concern over Nineveh. In this respect, the biblical narratives could be *employed in the service of Qur'anic interpretation being done by Muslim interpreters*. As the biblical narrative reveals to us a God who is very active in the life of his people, these narratives can say what the Qur'an does not say about Allah in terms of his attributes. Qur'anic interpretation thus does not have to be developed in a polemically hostile context against the biblical text, but rather in conversation with the biblical text. As this study attempts to use Islamic tradition to inform our interpretation of the biblical narratives of Jonah, Muslim

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<sup>56</sup> Souaiaia, "Reasoned and Inspired Beliefs," 233.



interpreters are invited to use the biblical narratives in the service of Qur'anic interpretation. As such, both the Muslim and the Christian faith do not have to flourish separately, where each faith attempts to separate itself from the other to show its distinctive nature. Rather, as Jonah and Yūnus continue their conversation with one another, they offer even more insights into God and his work in the life of his creation.

As we come to the conclusion of this chapter, what can we learn as we read about Jonah's struggle with God and the Qur'anic typological reading of such account? First, the character of God as it appears in 4:2 is key to the interpretation of the book of Jonah. As we discussed these attributes, we came to the conclusion that God's attributes reflect the testimony of Israel about a God who is very active in the life of his people and the world. Indeed, the recitation of God's gracious character in relation to the nations is truly unique in that it reveals the very being of a merciful and compassionate God to all creation, not only to his people. This is the message of all Scripture, which sees its fulfilment in Christ. The followers of Christ are invited to examine their attitude towards the Muslim world and to imitate the character of a gracious and merciful God.<sup>57</sup> The school of creation is a good place to start, where we learn the fact that Muslims are God's created people, created in his image. As God shows concern for the nations, the followers of Christ can share God's concern for the Islamic world, but this concern must invoke compassion and sympathy, rather than anger.

As Yūnus functions as a type of Muhammad—that as an angry person Muhammad should not follow his example—neither are the followers of Islam

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<sup>57</sup> For more on different attitudes towards Muslims and Islam, see Accad, "Christian Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims: A Kerygmatic Approach," 29–47.

required to be like Yūnus. Anger is thus forbidden; rather, the virtue of patience is esteemed. One example related to patience is how Muslims respond in their struggle to spread Islam in the face of rejection and criticism. According to the narrative of Yūnus, they are required to be patient and to leave the matter to Allah and to accept his will of giving human beings the freedom to believe. Indeed, as Jonah and Yūnus continue their conversation, one clear message that we learn from both prophets is that the attitude of anger is rebuked by both the biblical and the Qur'anic narratives.

## CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

As we began our investigation, this study pointed out several challenges of reading the OT in the context of Islam: ethical, political, exegetical, and historical. As we conducted our research, some of those challenges were addressed. In terms of ethical challenges, we have discussed the concept of prophetic infallibility in relation to Jonah's flight from God. This discussion led to the conclusion that the divine-prophet relationship dynamics are different between both faiths. Given the example of prophetic struggle expressed in anger, we have observed how God addresses Jonah's anger in a different manner than the way in which Allah deals with Muhammad's anger. In terms of the exegetical challenges, our discussion of the character of God served two purposes. First, it shows God as a living dynamic character who is very involved in human affairs. Second, as God's attributes are cited in relation to a nation other than Israel, our exegetical analysis reveals a merciful and compassionate God, not just to his people, but to the nations. Though we did not address directly the political challenge, where God is revealed as the one who is in conflict with all the nations other than Israel, God's gracious and merciful character as directed towards all of creation does, nonetheless, indirectly address this matter. In this respect, the Assyrian Christians' negative assessment of the book of Jonah is challenged, particularly when we attempt to "defend" the book of Jonah by focusing on the character of God in relation to Jonah and the nations. In this respect, Jonah's anger is addressed and rebuked by Yahweh, and the narrative of Jonah, then, reveals a God who in his sovereignty extends mercy and shows compassion to the whole creation.

As far as the historicity of the OT is questioned within the context of Islam, though we did not speak directly to this dilemma, we have reclaimed the OT as being Christian Scripture, rather than being associated as only Jewish Scripture. This fact is reinforced by the major contribution provided by reading the book of Jonah typologically where the emphasis is placed on God's redemptive history as revealed in both Testaments, where Christology is the heart of this hermeneutical endeavour. As this study addresses these challenges, it attempts to avoid a polemical approach, where we defend the OT, and rather use a kerygmatic approach to the challenges of reading the OT as we participate in the text's own proclamation journey and we allow the text to speak on its own.

In terms of methodology, considering Islamic literature on Yūnus as being part of the reception history of the book of Jonah allows it to inform our own reading of the book of Jonah in the context of Islam. As such, we have accomplished various tasks. First, as we have assessed the Qur'anic typological reading of the narrative of Yūnus and how it serves its homiletic nature and moral focus, we were able to take this into consideration as this study conducted its exegetical analysis of the book of Jonah in its own context. After this exegetical exercise, this study moved to read each section of the book of Jonah typologically by taking into consideration how Islamic literature is engaged with such sections. Such an exercise, however, does not ignore the differences, as each community of faith offers its own interpretation, and which reflects a variety of theological perspectives. Where the Islamic literature is silent (e.g. the conversation between God and Jonah), this study entered into a thematic conversation between both faiths and attempted to imagine scenarios where such "silent sections" correspond and address similar situations in the context of Islam nowadays.

The reception history approach to Islamic literature thus aids the hermeneutical programme of reading the Bible in the context of Islam. This certainly challenges the negative attitude of Christians towards Muslims and Islam. Furthermore, it views Islamic literature, and particularly the Qur'an, not as a threat in competition with the biblical text, though this approach does not ignore the differences between both faiths. Reception history, also addresses, what Accad calls, "the hermeneutical questions of the rhetorical Islamic context." In other words, reception history welcomes the opportunity to hear Muslims' questions and challenges in regard to the biblical text, and thus releases the biblical text to be relevant to them. Such an attitude shows a sincere desire to listen and also appreciates what Muslims and Islamic literature can offer to biblical interpretation within the context of Islam, especially as we hear an interpretation of the biblical text other than our own. Finally, as we consider the literary nature of the Qur'an as homiletic, the reception history of such a literary device indeed impels us to reconsider how relevant Scripture must be to life. This conclusion is reinforced by how God's attributes are more than an abstract list of names, but rather reflects a God who is very active and an agent in the history of humanity.

Our investigation of the reception history of Jonah in Matthew and Luke provides another key element in our hermeneutical endeavor of developing a biblical theology of Jonah in the context of Islam. This investigation led to the conclusion that Matthew and Luke employ a kerygmatic Christological typological approach to the interpretation of the narrative of Jonah to present the person of Jesus as the suffering Son of Man who will rise and return in glory as a judge and preacher of a prophetic ministry of judgement. Thus, the life and ministry of Jesus is rooted in and seen in continuity with God's redemptive work revealed in the OT. As such, this suggests that

developing a biblical theology in the context of Islam must be rooted in the OT, and therefore, this study conducted an exegetical analysis of the book of Jonah in its own historical and literary context. Our reading of Jonah in this study, therefore, argues also for the character of the merciful and compassionate God as being key to the interpretation of the book. In this respect, we attempt to learn from the book of Jonah about God's redemptive work in history through the narrative of Jonah and how it continued into the NT. By doing so, this study challenges the common practices of presenting the person and the ministry of Jesus in the context of Islam without seriously taking the OT into consideration as being part of God's redemptive work in history. Such a typological Christological reading, moreover, questions the allegorical approach to the book of Jonah written in the context of Islam. Though Matthew uses the phrase, "three days and three nights" to denote the suffering and death of Christ, this phrase is not meant, as we have argued, to be the window for interpreting the whole book.

In summary, this study aimed to develop a biblical theology of the book of Jonah in the context of Islam. As we focused our research toward this goal, we employed a reception history approach to investigate how the book of Jonah was received by Jesus and Muhammad's community. As we conducted our research, we came to the conclusion that both communities distinctively read the narrative of Jonah typologically. Informed by such a conclusion, this study moves to read the book of Jonah typologically following three major hermeneutical endeavours: the exegetical analysis of the book of Jonah in its own context with a major focus on the character of God; reading each text typologically in light of God's redemptive work in history and Christologically; and finally, engaging with the context of Islam through the

typological reading of Islamic literature of the narrative of Yūnus. The hermeneutical spiral between all these elements has been present throughout this study.

The contribution of this study is key to the development of biblical theology in a Middle Eastern-Islamic context. As we have observed, developing such a theology takes different and various forms: thematic, theological, comparative, and contextualized approaches. While these works (e.g. Mallouhi) are engaged with Islam, they limit the conversation to only being between common figures, themes, or to a particularly controversial topic between both faiths. Though one appreciates such sincere attempts, this study, however, sets itself apart as it attempts to emphasize the key role of the biblical text in writing a biblical theology in the context of Islam. Though this study intentionally has taken the Islamic context into consideration, it allowed the biblical text to set the agenda for the overall theology. This study is an attempt of how one intentionally embraces the whole biblical text as we develop a biblical theology in the context of Islam. By employing a reception history approach to the interpretation of the book of Jonah, this study, moreover, allows Islamic literature to inform our own interpretation of the book of Jonah. The reception history approach reinforced the importance of reading the narrative of Jonah and Yūnus in its own respective context in order to hear the unique voice of each narrative. As such, we respect the authenticity of the Qur'anic literary technique in employing a prophetic narrative to serve its homiletic and moral orientation. Consequently, we intentionally suspended our own judgement on the question of the sources of Islamic literature and the Qur'an. Such an intentional suspension will indeed lead us to offer our suggestions in terms of further and necessary research.

Regarding the question of the sources of Islamic literature, and particularly the Qur'an, two areas related to the book of Jonah need further research. First, as we

employed a reception history approach to the book of Jonah in Matthew, Luke and Islamic literature, we have observed how the socio-religious literary context of all these texts are quite similar. We have also observed how the surrounding community of both Jesus and Muhammad raise similar accusations for both of them, such as being a mad person, magician, and asking for a sign to affirm their prophetic identities. As we observe these similarities, the question that needs further research is whether we can assume, using Reynolds hypothesis, the biblical text as the sub-text of the Qur'an, with a major focus on the narrative of Jonah/Yūnus?

In terms of classical Mufassirun, we have engaged with their reported traditions that used the interpretation of the Qur'anic narrative of Yūnus. It is clear that some of these traditions are not found in the biblical text, but our initial suggestion is that these traditions are found in other Jewish and Christian traditions other than the biblical text. A clear example of this occurs, for instance, when classical Mufassirun report a tradition where Yūnus is identified as the son of a widow that Elias raised from death. Such investigations may yield the way for further fruitful engagements with the interpretation of the Qur'anic text. As such, Jewish Christian traditions in general, and the prophetic narratives in particular, can aid Qur'anic interpretation in that these traditions can be employed "in the service" of the interpretation of the Qur'anic text. It is important, however, to note that such approaches to the interpretation of the Qur'an cannot be imposed on the Islam and Muslims; it comes as a suggestion and recommendation, which one must patiently and sympathetically wait for more growing interest in order to see the biblical text in the service of the Qur'an rather than a threat! With such respect and sympathy, both Jonah and Yūnus can continue the conversation.



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