

Chanreiso Lungleng

Jonah's Motive

in the Light of
Exodus 32–34



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Chanreiso Lungleng



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*This volume is dedicated to Alice, my wife,
for her love and care,
and to Jared, our son,
for the joy he is.*

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D.N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
AJBI	<i>Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute</i>
AoF	Altorientalische Forschungen
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (ed. J.B. Pritchard; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 3rd edn, 1969)
ApOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BCT	<i>The Bible and Critical Theory</i>
BDB	Brown, F., S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907)
BHHB	Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible
BHK	<i>Biblia Hebraica</i> (ed. R. Kittel; Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1905–1906, 1925 ² , 1937 ³ , 1951 ⁴ , 1973 ¹⁶)
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1983)
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibB	Biblische Beiträge
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BRev	<i>Bible Review</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
BT	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BTS	Biblical Tools and Studies
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>

BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CanATR</i>	<i>Canadian-American Theological Review</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CJOD	Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
<i>ConJ</i>	<i>Concordia Journal</i>
CSCP	Cornell Studies in Classical Philology
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
ConcC	Concordia Commentary
<i>CTQ</i>	<i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>CTSR</i>	<i>Chicago Theological Seminary Register</i>
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
<i>DCH</i>	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> (ed. David J.A. Clines; 9 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2014)
EBC	The Expositor's Bible Commentary
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
<i>EHL</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics</i> (ed. Geoffrey Khan; 3 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2013)
<i>ErIsr</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FB	Focus on the Bible
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> (ed. E. Kautzsch; trans. A.E. Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, 1910)
GOT	The Gospel according to the Old Testament
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (ed. Ludwig Koehler, W. Baumgartner and J. Stamm; trans. and ed. under the supervision of M.E.J. Richardson; 4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999)
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HB	Hebrew Bible
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
<i>HS</i>	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>

HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IBHS	<i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> , by B.K. Waltke and M. O'Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990)
IBMR	<i>International Bulletin of Missionary Research</i>
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IJT	<i>Indian Journal of Theology</i>
ILBS	The Indiana Literary Biblical Series
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
IVP	InterVarsity Press
JAJSup	Journal of Ancient Judaism: Supplement Series
JANER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JANES	<i>The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JESOT	<i>Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JOTT	<i>Journal of Translation and Text-linguistics</i>
JPOS	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i>
JPS	Jewish Publishing Society
JPT	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>The Journal of Religion</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JTI	<i>Journal of Theological Interpretation</i>
KJV	King James Version
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
LXX	Septuagint
LXX ^A	Septuagint (Codex Alexandrinus)
LXX ^B	Septuagint (Codex Vaticanus)
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCB	New Century Bible

NCI	New Critical Idiom
NET	New English Translation
NLT	New Living Translation
NIBC	The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> (ed. W.A. VanGemeren; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997)
NIV	New International Version, 1984
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSBT	New Series in Biblical Theology
OBS	Oxford Bible Series
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
P&R	Presbyterian & Reformed
<i>Per</i>	<i>Perspectives</i>
<i>PRSt</i>	<i>Perspective in Religious Studies</i>
<i>QR</i>	<i>Quarterly Review</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RBJ</i>	<i>The Review of Rabbinic Judaism</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SBL	Studies in Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSym	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SCM	Student Christian Movement Press
<i>SEÅ</i>	<i>Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok</i>
SGRT	Study Guides in Religion and Theology
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SubBi	Subsidia Biblica
<i>TBei</i>	<i>Theologische Beiträge</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> (ed. G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren; trans. J.T. Willis, G.W. Bromiley and D.E. Green; 8 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2006)
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries

<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> (ed. R. Laird Harris, G.L. Archer Jr, and Bruce K. Waltke; 2 vols.; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980)
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>UniocC</i>	<i>Unio cum Christo</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WBCom	Westminster Bible Companion
<i>WesTJ</i>	<i>Wesleyan Theological Journal</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>WW</i>	<i>Word and World</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

All scriptural quotations are the author's translation unless indicated otherwise.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Jonah is one of the fascinating books of the Bible. It is ‘simple enough to delight a child and complex enough to confound a scholar’.¹ There has been a proliferation of books and articles on this tiny book. At the centre of the seemingly endless list of literature is the attempt to answer the elusive question triggered by or related to Jon. 4.2.

ויתפלל אל יהוה ויאמר אנה יהוה הלא זה דברי עד היותי על אדמדי על כן קדמתי
לברח תרשישה כי ידעתי כי אתה אל חנון ורחום ארך אפים ורב חסד ונחם על
הרעה

And he [Jonah] prayed to Yahweh, ‘O Yahweh, is this not what I said when I was in my country? Therefore, I made haste to flee toward Tarshish. For I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from evil.

Why does Jonah run away from Yahweh’s commission? If he knows that Yahweh is a gracious and compassionate God, why does Jonah react with anger and wish to die at the sparing of Nineveh?

1. *Why Another Book on Jonah?*

The narrator mentions ‘Jonah’ by name eighteen times. Its frequency in a book of only forty-eight verses underlines the importance of the character of Jonah. The book is also listed among the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible (HB from here on), but it is a narrative with an oracle of just one sentence, (HB from here on), but it is a narrative with an oracle of just one sentence, (‘Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown/turned over,’ 3.4b). While the message of other prophetic books (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah or Joel) can be inferred from the prophetic utterances, Jonah’s prophetic oracle is not only a brief ‘five-word’ oracle, but it is also bound up with the narrative in which it is found.² Though characters are key to

1. Janet Howe Gaines, *Forgiveness in a Wounded World: Jonah’s Dilemma* (SBL, 5; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. 8; see also Peter Weimar, *Eine Geschichte voller Überraschungen: Annäherungen an die Jonaerzählung* (SBS, 217; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009), p. 12.

2. For example, Yitzhak Peleg, “‘Yet Forty Days, and Nineveh Shall Be Overthrown’ (Jonah 3.4): Two Readings (*shtei krie’ot*) of the Book of Jonah’, in J. Harold

understanding a narrative, Jonah's character is enigmatic, complicating the process of inferring its message. Nowhere else in the HB does a prophet run away from God's commission. Therefore, investigating the motive of Jonah's unusual response is worthy of attention in interpreting the book's overall message.

Many scholars from the late twentieth century to date tend to view Jonah as an invariably caricatured character. Still, it is possible to look at Jonah sympathetically, a backwater approach, different from the mainstream.³ Such an approach can add new dimensions to the understanding of the intricate theological problems raised in Jonah. At least, from Jonah's perspective, his actions seem to be justified or mitigated by his motive (4.2). This is not to assume that Jonah is flawless but to highlight that his motive is sincere and that his actions do not necessarily make him an object of scorn.⁴

Noteworthy is the degree of ambivalence in the portrayal of Jonah. Jonah 1 depicts him as a prophet who runs away from God (1.3), and yet he appears eager to declare Yahweh's supremacy over the deities of the foreign sailors. Whether he is depicted as a pious worshipper of God or a hypocrite in chap. 2 is debated.⁵ In chap. 3, he appears to be a faithful prophet, only to see him become angry even to the point of desiring death over life after the success of his ministry. Even when Yahweh rebukes Jonah (4.4, 9), he

Ellens *et al.* (eds.), *God's Word for our World* (JSOTSup, 388; London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), pp. 262-74.

3. The language is borrowed from Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

4. Most scholars hastily move to see irony in Jonah's confessions, including 4.2, in order to paint Jonah in a bad light or even to satirise him. Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965), pp. 39-55; Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), pp. 337-40; James E. Robson, 'Undercurrents in Jonah', *TynBul* 64.2 (2013), pp. 189-215 (200). Over against the majority with an extremely negative view of Jonah, S.D. Goitein, 'Some Observations on Jonah', *JPOS* 17 (1937), pp. 64-77 (74), writes: 'The whole tenor of the story is much too earnest for a satire; Jonah is not painted with the brush of mockery or disdain, but drawn with the pencil of deep and sympathetic insight into human weakness'.

5. Among others, J.H. Potgieter, 'David in Consultation with the Prophets: The Intertextual Relationship of Psalm 31 with the Books of Jonah and Jeremiah', *OTE* 25.1 (2012), pp. 115-26 (122-24). See also Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 183, who argues that the intertextual association of Jonah 2 with the Psalter suggests that 'true believers in Israel were steeped, not only in the Torah, but also in many of the Psalms'.

attributes pity to him (4.10). In this scenario, how does one interpret the character of Jonah?

It is crucial to investigate Jonah's underlying motivation for his actions and attitudes to achieve a satisfactory understanding of the narrator's portrayal of Jonah. Although identifying Jonah's motive may prove difficult, neglecting to identify it will result in an inadequate understanding of Jonah's persona in the book and its message. While one may argue that the reason for his actions do not matter so much as the fact of his flight and attitude,⁶ the narrator underscores his motive in 4.2, making it imperative to investigate it. Moreover, Jonah's prominence in the narrative suggests that his persona is inextricably related to the book's message.⁷ Thus, this book will examine Jonah's motive and its impact on interpreting Jonah's message. It will be argued that Jonah's flight from God's commission to Nineveh and his response to Nineveh's salvation are motivated by his concern for God's glory.

The hypothesis recognizes the importance of the position of Jon. 4.2 in the book, which functions as the key to the interpretation of Jonah as a whole.⁸ It is an allusion to Exod. 34.6-7, which serves as a window to the world of Exodus 32-34. It will be argued that Jonah's allusion to the world of Exodus 32-34 reveals Jonah's motive, which is otherwise assumed in the narrative of Jonah.

Within the book, 4.2 occupies a pivotal locus, highlighting its hermeneutical value. It serves as a flashback and a flashforward. Sternberg points out that 1.3 functions as 'a surprising gap [that] controls the reader's progress over a whole book'; and with this 'master gap disclosed' in 4.2, the 'roles and portraits' formed hitherto are 'reversed'.⁹ Before this, the informa-

6. For instance, C. John Collins, 'From Literary Analysis to Theological Exposition: The Book of Jonah', *JOTT* 7.1 (1995), pp. 28-44.

7. Gregory Goswell, 'Jonah among the Twelve Prophets', *JBL* 135.2 (2016), pp. 283-99. Sherwood, *Biblical Text and its Afterlives*, pp. 11-48, in her review of the history of interpretation highlights how character judgment of Jonah impacts the tenor of the message of the book as a whole. See also David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible* (BJS, 31; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), p. 158, who writes, 'It is our contention that it is this negative portrayal of the prophet, not any ideological message, which is the principal "message" of the book'.

8. R.W.L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), p. 190; Philip Peter Jensen, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (LHBOTS, 496; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008), p. 82; Gaines, *Forgiveness*, p. 30; Douglas K. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC, 31; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), pp. 434-35.

9. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (ILBS; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 318-20. See also George M. Landes, 'The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah: The Contextual Interpretation of the Jonah Psalm', *Int* 21.1 (1967), pp. 3-31 (13-14).

tion about the reason Jonah flees Yahweh's call toward Tarshish (chap. 1) is withheld, either leaving the readers uninformed or forming a negative opinion about him. The retrospective explanation compels a re-reading of all the events leading up to it.¹⁰

Retrospectively, 4.2 fills this gap by providing an enhanced perspective to re-read the preceding chapters with dramatic and rhetorical impact. Such an information gap is not meant to mislead the readers, but the author seeks to make 'some point' that will add to readers' appreciation of the narrative as it unfolds or reaches its closure.¹¹ Moreover, the revelation of Jonah's motive casts his behaviours and interactions—with the sailors, the Ninevites, and, more importantly, God—in a new light. Prospectively, 4.2 highlights the critical issue in anticipation of the closure of the story (4.10–11).¹² It puts Jonah in conflict with Yahweh and sets the agenda for his education. Sasson notes the significance of the distribution of words in the direct speeches attributed to both Jonah and Yahweh, tabulating them as shown below:

Table 1. Distribution of Direct Speeches in Jonah 4

vv. 2–3	Jonah's monologue	39 words
v. 4	God's query (unanswered)	3 words
v. 8	Jonah's query (<i>sotto voce</i>)	3 words
v. 9	Dialogue: God	5 words
	Dialogue: Jonah	5 words
vv. 10–11	God's monologue	39 words

Sasson reckons that this symmetry is too developed to be accidental. Thus, he proposes that 'this balance and harmony are intended to keep us aware that God's responses are countermeasures to Jonah's utterances'.¹³ Moreover, Youngblood has pointed out that the book's structure displays symmetry and asymmetry to further this effect. For example, the book's two halves form an almost perfect symmetry, with three parallel episodes each; a stage setting episode, a pre-peak episode, and a peak episode (A B C

10. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979), p. 421; Stephen B. Chapman and Lacey Warner, 'Jonah and the Imitation of God: Rethinking Evangelism and the Old Testament', *JTI* 2.1 (2008), pp. 46–39 (53).

11. Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (London: Harper-Collins, 1992), p. 480.

12. So also Kenneth M. Craig, *A Poetics of Jonah: Art in the Service of Ideology* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), p. 180, who writes, 'God's final question to Jonah is ... at the ideological level, the most significant'.

13. Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation* (AB, 24B; New York: Doubleday, 1st edn, 1990), pp. 317–18.

A¹ B¹ C¹ D). This symmetry is broken by an additional episode, which he calls a post-peak episode (4.5-11). In this final episode, Yahweh dialogues with Jonah, incorporating an object lesson, and concludes with a rhetorical question. The post-peak episode (4.5-11), being the only section without parallel, is therefore more significant in determining the book's message.¹⁴

To a certain extent, the denouement of the book (4.4-11) recapitulates essential aspects from the previous chapters to deal with the relevant issue raised in 4.2. God educates Jonah in the form of an object lesson. In light of Jonah's allusion to Exodus 32–34, among others, the enigmatic plant (קִיקִיּוֹן) is primed to betray its symbolic meaning. The concluding section not only addresses Jonah's motive but also his subsequent extreme anger. Yahweh picks up the subject of Jonah's appeal to his grace, employing the word חֹס in 4.10-11. It does not displace the concept of Yahweh's magnanimous steadfast love (4.2), but it is a word that is generally associated with tears, the overflow of the compassionate heart.¹⁵ It captures the outcome of his compassionate character (Joel 2.13, 17; Neh. 13.22). In other words, Yahweh responds with pity according to his gracious and merciful nature, reaffirming Jonah's confession about Yahweh's character (4.2).

The virtue of pity is also attributed to Jonah by Yahweh, 'you pity the plant' (4.10). Yahweh's estimation of Jonah at the climactic point in the book is significant because it functions as a 'foolproof judgement [by] retrospective or last-minute clarification'.¹⁶ This evaluative comment further serves as a smaller premise to arrive at a greater one.¹⁷ Readers of Jonah must also take into consideration Yahweh's sympathetic attitude to Jonah in interpreting, particularly, the character of Jonah and generally, the book as a whole—Jonah's hesitation at his commission, his interaction with the sailors, his being thrown into the sea, his prayer in the fish, and his reaction to Nineveh's deliverance. Finally, the concluding question (4.10-11) takes for granted Jonah's confession (4.2) to subvert Jonah's percep-

14. Robert E. Longacre and Shin Ja J. Hwang, 'A Text-linguistic Approach to the Biblical Hebrew Narrative of Jonah', in Robert D. Bergen (ed.), *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), pp. 336-58; David A. Dorsey, 'Jonah', in David A. Dorsey (ed.), *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), pp. 290-95; Kevin J. Youngblood, *Jonah: Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament* (A Discourse Analysis of the Hebrew Bible, 28; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), pp. 36-45.

15. Gordon R. Clark, *The Word Heseḏ in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup, 157; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 263. See also Leipzig S. Wagner, 'חֹס', in *TDOT*, IV, p. 272; G.M. Butterworth, 'You Pity the Plant: A Misunderstanding,' *IJT* 27.1 (1978), pp. 32-34; G.M. Butterworth, 'חֹס' in *NIDOTTE*, II, pp. 50-52.

16. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 55.

17. Sasson, *Jonah*, p. 307; Youngblood, *Jonah*, p. 173.

tion about the relationship between Yahweh's mercy and his glory (limited point of view),¹⁸ inviting him to reflect or, more precisely, imitate Yahweh's character (4.11).

It is evident, then, that an examination of 4.4–11 vis-à-vis 4.2 is crucial for unlocking the book's overall message.¹⁹ The difficulty arises as to the identification of the precise issue(s) that 4.2 raises. Most scholars agree that 4.2 focuses on the compassionate character of Yahweh. Still, readers are left without any explicit understanding as to why Yahweh's mercy is a problem for Jonah. If Yahweh's interaction with Jonah intends to educate Jonah effectively (4.4–11), he must address the basis of Jonah's hesitation and anger at the conclusion of the section. Thus, a reading of Jonah in light of 4.2 is crucial for the understanding of Jonah's character and the book's overall message.

2. Preliminary Matters about the Book of Jonah

This section lays bare some of the presuppositions in reading the book of Jonah. It is a selective examination of the issues involving genre, historicity, historical contexts of the narrative world and the author and the audience, and the literary features. The analysis of these introductory issues is undertaken to underscore the pervasive nature of the motif of God's mercy in the book.

2.1 Genre of Jonah

The classification of the genre of the book is hotly debated. Alexander summarises the suggestions made by various scholars under the following categories; history, allegory, Midrash, parable, prophetic parable, legend, prophetic legend, novella, didactic fiction, and a satirical-didactic short story.²⁰ A growing number of suggestions may be added to this list, such as parody, satire, farce, and meta-prophetic book. These proposals indicate the complexity involved in the identification of the genre of the book. Cognisant of this multiplicity, Berlin posits that the search for the category of the genre, such as parody, satire and farce, is an anachronistic imposition of a modern or postmodern system onto the ancient text that resists a 'neat

18. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, 'Jonah and the Other: A Discourse on Interpretative Competence', in Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana Vikander Edelman (eds.), *Imagining the Other and Constructing Israelite Identity in the Early Second Temple Period* (LHBOTS, 456; London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 213.

19. A.A. Abela, 'When the Agenda of an Artistic Composition Is Hidden: Jonah and Intertextual Dialogue with Isaiah 6, the "Confession of Jeremiah" and Other Texts', in Johannes C. de Moor (ed.), *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 1–30 (29).

20. T. Desmond Alexander, 'Jonah and Genre', *TynBul* 36 (1985), pp. 35–39 (36–37).

pigeonholed' classification. She points out that the tripartite classification of the HB as the Torah, Prophets and Writings is significant, suggesting that the book's location in the Prophets indicates how the author intends it to be read. If this is true, it is 'essentially a prophetic book'.²¹ Nevertheless, this prophetic book is not a collection of prophetic oracles but a narrative about the prophet Jonah.

Alexander examines what scholars believe to be indicators that the book's genre is fictional, such as historical improbability, exaggeration and surprise, symmetrical structure, and didactic nature, concluding that it is a 'didactic historical narrative'.²² Such a view is in the minority now, but it is not without merits. The opening expression, וַיְהִי דְבַר יְהוָה אֵל, 'and the word of Yahweh came to' (or a related expression, דְּבַר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֵל, 'the word of Yahweh that came to'), is used in the majority of the prophetic books (Hos. 1.1; Joel 1.1; Mic. 1.1; Zeph. 1.1; Hag. 1.1; Zech. 1.1; Mal. 1.1) as a standard expression to introduce the prophet's message.²³ A similar expression is also employed to present specific instructions to the prophet in historical narratives (1 Sam. 15.10; 2 Sam. 7.4; 1 Kgs 6.11; 16.1; 17.2, 8; 21.17, 28; Isa. 38.4).²⁴ The expression is also used in the prophetic books to introduce Yahweh's message (Jon. 1.1; Jer. 1.4; Hag. 1.3). Sasson further observes that וַיְהִי opens many books with narratives that are deemed to be history (Josh. 1.1; Judg. 1.1; 1 Sam. 1.1; 2 Sam. 2.1), as well as Ezekiel, a prophetic book.²⁵

Linguistically, Longacre and Bowling note that the *wayyiqtol* form of the verb הָיָה is clearly perfective in certain contexts. It refers to a specific event at a particular time when it happens in the opening sentence (cf. 1 Kgs 13.20).²⁶ In such cases, the *wayyiqtol* of הָיָה is often translated as 'and it came to pass'. Although there is no preceding verse describing the event at a specific time in 1.1, the reader assumes the historicity of the event described. This standard opening formula orients the readers to identify the book's genre as a historical narrative.

21. Adele Berlin, 'Rejoinder to John A. Miles Jr with Some Observations on the Nature of Prophecy', *JQR* 66.4 (1976), pp. 227-35 (229-30).

22. Alexander, 'Jonah and Genre', pp. 44-59.

23. James Nogalski, *Interpreting Prophetic Literature: Historical and Exegetical Tools for Reading the Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015), pp. 19-20.

24. Alexander, 'Jonah', pp. 107-108; John H. Walton, 'Jonah', in Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (eds.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel–Malachi*, VII (12 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), pp. 459-90 (469).

25. Sasson, *Jonah*, pp. 66-67.

26. Robert E. Longacre and Andrew C. Bowling, *Understanding Biblical Hebrew Verb Forms: Distribution and Function across Genres* (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2015), p. 62n50.

This is not to say that the book is historical in a journalistic sense. It records miracles, such as the storm, Jonah being alive in the belly of the fish, a plant's sudden growth and demise. It also employs hyperbole and personification. These features are not meant to be investigated for their historical plausibility or probability. Instead, the factuality is assumed to make the ideological point. The fantastic elements of the narrative are intended to 'arouse the imagination and emotion' of the readers.²⁷ Moreover, the roughly symmetrical structure, intertextuality, information gap, omitted dialogue, rhetorical question, irony, wordplay, chiasm, and 'the growing phrase'²⁸ reveal the book's narrative quality. The literary features are, however, in the service of the ideology of the narrator.²⁹

The final scene of the book indicates the educational function of the book. The episode consists of Yahweh's dialogue with Jonah, the object lesson of the plant, and Yahweh's final rhetorical question. The rhetorical questions that Yahweh poses to Jonah in 4.4, 9, 10-11 encapsulate the book's pedagogical function. It will be argued that Yahweh's question, 'Are you rightly angry?' (4.5, 9),³⁰ is intended to make Jonah reflect on the moral uprightness of his extreme anger. Yahweh's final rhetorical question not only justifies his mercy to Nineveh but also invites Jonah to abandon his narrow view of mercy to embrace Yahweh's point of view.³¹ In short, the book is a prophetic, historical, and didactic narrative.

2.2 Historicity of Jonah

As long as the book is read, the debate on whether it is historical or fictional will continue. Without presuming to prove its historicity beyond a reasonable doubt, this section will seek to bolster the arguments for the factuality of the events described and highlight the significance of assuming its historicity.³²

27. Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, p. 435; see also David Noel Freedman, 'Did God Play a Dirty Trick on Jonah at the End?', *BRev* 6.4 (1990), pp. 26-31 (27).

28. Jonathan Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* (BLS, 8; Sheffield: Almond, 1983), pp. 31-33.

29. Craig, *Poetics of Jonah*, pp. 180-81.

30. Similarly, Alviero Niccacci, 'Syntactic Analysis of Jonah', *Liber annuus* 46 (1996), pp. 9-32 (25), who interprets the infinitive absolute adverbially, 'Is it rightly that you have become angry?'

31. Steven T. Mann, 'Performative Prayers of a Prophet: Investigating the Prayers of Jonah as Speech Acts', *CBQ* 79.1 (2017), pp. 20-40 (39); Tzvi Abusch, 'Jonah and God: Plants, Beasts, and Humans in the Book of Jonah', *JANER* 13.2 (2013), pp. 146-52 (148).

32. For a comprehensive and persuasive treatment of the historicity of the book see Aalders, *The Problem*; John H. Stek, 'The Message of the Book of Jonah', *CTJ* 4.1 (1969), pp. 23-50; Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, pp. 440-42; Daniel C. Timmer, *A Gracious and Compassionate God: Mission, Salvation and Spirituality in the Book of Jonah* (NSBT, 26; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), pp. 60-67; R. Reed Lessing, *Jonah: A*