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Silence as Resistance: A Postcolonial Reading of the Silence of Jonah in Jonah 4.1-11

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Abstract

Established readings of the book of Jonah have criticized Jonah as the personification of a narrow-minded Jew and emphasized God's universal and inclusive love and mercy. However, embedded in this inclusivity of universalism is a working system of exclusivity which silences the voice of the weak. Through a postcolonial reading of Jonah 4, this article explores fallacies of the established readings and suggests an alternative reading for Jonah's anger and silence. It argues that Jonah's anger (Jon. 4.1-11) can be recognized as legitimate given the power differential between the Israelites and the Ninevites. In addition, Jonah's silence functions as resistance on the part of the weak over against the rhetoric of the strong, which ignores unbalanced power structures in human relationships in the name of universalism.

Keywords: Jonah, Nineveh, anger, silence, resistance, colonized audience, postcolonial, rhetoric of the strong.

Introduction

Established readings of the book of Jonah[1] have praised God's universal and inclusive love and mercy, emphasized the importance of repentance,

1. By the term 'the book of Jonah' I mean the book in its present form and at the same time the book that the historical Jewish audience had read and heard. Although

and criticized Jonah as the personification of a narrow-minded Jew.[2] In these readings, Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, which destroyed Israel, was also honored for its repentance, while Jonah, a true prophet of Israel, who poured out his anger to God over God's treatment of Nineveh, has been blamed for his nationalism or particularism. However, these readings are akin to Christian theological readings which do not consider any historical context of the colonized Jewish author and audience.[3] Given the power differential between the Israelites and the

what the original audience heard or read is not exactly the same as the present form of the book of Jonah, I will read the book of Jonah assuming that whichever form of the story the historical Jewish audience received from written sources or oral transmissions, it would not have been much different from what contemporary faithful communities are reading now. This is not only a way to make the Bible meaningful for contemporary readers but also a convenient way to avoid energy-wasting debates about unverifiable and uncertain redaction and transmission histories. In his recent study of the book of Jonah, Ehud Ben Zvi (*Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud* [JSOTSup, 367; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003], p. 1 n. 1) also takes this position: 'By the term "Book of Jonah" I refer to the book in its present form. Hypothetical forerunners, whether in the form of written sources or orally transmitted stories, do not qualify as the particular social product we call "the book of Jonah".'

2. For example, Augustine regarded Jonah as the personification of Jewish narrow-minded particularism or the embodiment of the begrudging Jew against the salvation of the nations. See Yves Marie Duval, *Le Livre de Jonas dans la littérature chrétienne grecque et latine: Sources et influence du commentaire sur Jonas de Saint Jérôme* (Paris: Etudes augustiniennes, 1973), p. 515. See also E.J. Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 17-18; George L. Robinson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (New York: George N. Doran, 1926), p. 75; Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 22. For the history of these readings, see Etan Levine, 'Jonah as a Philosophical Book', *ZAW* 96 (1984), pp. 235-45; Sherwood, *A Biblical Text*, pp. 10-48.

3. Considering the vocabulary, linguistic features, and social and theological consciousness, it is basically agreed among the vast majority of scholars that the book of Jonah was composed no earlier than the exilic period. Scholars who date the book of Jonah to the postmonarchic or postexilic period include: James S. Ackerman, 'Jonah', in *Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987), pp. 235-43; Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (NICOT: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 186-87; Karin Almbladh, *Studies in the Book of Jonah* (Uppsala: Academia Ubsaliensis, 1986), pp. 41-46; Arnold J. Band, 'Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody', *Prooftexts* 10 (1990), pp. 177-95; Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah*, p. 7; J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 3rd edn, 1981), p. 431; R.E. Clements, 'The Purpose of the Book of Jonah', in J.A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume: Edinburgh, 1974* (VTSup, 28; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), pp. 16-28; Terence E.

powerful neighboring nations in this period and the continuous sufferings of the Israelites in contrast to the prosperities of the powerful nations, the Jews and their ancestors often argued and wrestled with the issue of God's justice rather than unanimously praising God's work.[4] Established readings of the book of Jonah have barely explored the possibility that the colonized Jewish audience[5] would have challenged God's justice

Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), pp. 34-36; Yehoshua Gitay, 'Jonah: The Prophet of Antirhetoric', in Astrid B. Beck *et al.* (eds.), *Fortunate the Eyes that See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 197-206; F.W. Golka, 'Jonah', in G.A.F. Knight and F.W. Golka (eds.), *Revelation of God: The Song of Songs and Jonah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 70-72; Anna L. Grant-Henderson, *Inclusive Voices in Post-Exilic Judah* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), pp. 99-101; André Lacocque and Pierre-Emmanuel Lacocque, *Jonah: A Psycho-Religious Approach to the Prophet* (Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament; Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), p. 44; James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 29; Jonathan Magonet, 'Book of Jonah', in J.H. Hayes (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), p. 621; James Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 255-62, 270-73; A. Rofé, *The Prophetical Stories* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), pp. 152-59; Robert B. Salters, *Jonah and Lamentations* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), p. 25; Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretations* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), pp. 22-28; Uriel Simon and Lenn J. Schramm, *Jonah: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1999), pp. xli-xlii; Marvin A. Sweeney, David W. Cotter, and Jerome T. Walsh, *The Twelve Prophets* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), pp. 306-307; Phyllis Trible, 'Studies in the Book of Jonah' (PhD dissertation, Columbia University; Ann Arbor: University Microfilm, 1963), pp. 104-16; Hans Walter Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: A Commentary* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), pp. 76-78.

4. Walter Brueggemann (*Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997], p. 385) says, 'In any case, circumstance provides an acute form of the crisis [*theodicy crisis*], precisely around the events of 587 BCE and the consequent exile... Yahweh's governance and guarantees were no longer reliable in Israel. The crisis of theodicy is voiced sharply in the tradition...' For more comprehensive discussion, see Anson Laytner, *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition* (Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1990).

5. As far as dating the book of Jonah to the postmonarchic or postexilic period, I regard the historical audience of the book of Jonah as the colonized Jewish audience. By the term, 'colonized Jews', I mean Jewry as a whole from 586 to 63 BCE. Colonized Jews include not only the Jewish community in Palestine but also communities of Jews widely spread abroad. Jewry includes all Jews who continued to live in Palestine and who were never in exile, as well as the Jews who were exiled and returned from exile, and the Jews

through the voice of Jonah, identifying Jonah's anger with their own. In this study, therefore, I will argue that *Jonah's anger (Jon. 4.1-11) can be recognized as legitimate given the power differential between the Israelites and the Ninevites. In addition, Jonah's silence functions as resistance on the part of the weak over against the rhetoric of the strong, which ignores unbalanced power structures in human relationships in the name of universalism.*

From the experience of my own Korean people, who, like the Israelites, have suffered under powerful nations and have experienced colonization,[6] I cannot easily take part in condemning Jonah's anger; nor can I easily praise God's universal love. As long as the oppression or colonization and its painful memories are ongoing, how can the oppressed hide their anger in learning that their oppressors and colonizers are saved by their God—the God of the oppressed? As the oppressed community for whom God's special favor and chosenness functions as the main strength of their survival, how can the Israelites understand that their God shows this same favor to their destroyers and oppressors? How is it possible that the oppressed could write a book whose theme is to praise God's universal salvation toward their oppressor (a heinous destroyer of their country)? How can the oppressed rebuke their own nationalism or particularism by blaming their renowned patriotic prophet? As far as I know, we do not have this type of literature in Korea, and I cannot imagine that any people who have suffered colonization could write such

who were deported or emigrated to foreign countries and never returned to Palestine. According to Norman Gottwald (*The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], p. 421), although their geographic, social, and cultural locations varied, during this period, 'all Jews, whether restored to Judah or colonized abroad, were subject to the sovereign power of the great empires that successively ruled them'.

6. Korea was invaded by nations and suffered at the hands of such nations as China, Russia, Japan, and the US because of its geographical location as a peninsula in far-east Asia. Korea had been occupied under Japanese imperialism for 38 years at the beginning of the twentieth century and suffered under the Cold War between communism and capitalism (even post-Cold War, Korea still suffers due to the division of the country). My interpretation is formed with the plight of the Korean and other oppressed people in mind, 'people who once were colonized by European powers—or, in the case of Korea, by imperial Japan—but who now have some political freedom, while continuing to live with the burdens from the past and experiencing forms of economic and cultural neocolonialism' (R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* [The Bible and Liberation Series; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998], p. 17).

a story. If God shows the same love to two different power groups, one of which is oppressing the other, where is the God of justice?

Although there have been some interpreters who have tried to propose positive reasons for Jonah's anger considering the historical Jewish audience,[7] most of these studies merely result in finding a pretext for Jonah's anger rather than justifying or praising it.[8] In such readings, Jonah's silence after God's universal claim at the end of the book has not been addressed. At best, the silence is interpreted as obedience or agreement. At worst, the anger and the silence of Jonah have been used to support anti-Judaism and to chastise the natural responses of the weak (i.e. anger) to their marginalization and colonized status. Most interpreters have failed to justify the anger of Jonah and to hear the implication of the silence of Jonah because of their prejudice against the Jews, because of their privilege as the dominant culture, and because of the fixed theological presumption of God's inclusive love and mercy as the universal truth.[9] However, embedded in this inclusivity of universalism is a working system of exclusivity which makes the voice of the weak and the marginalized disappear. That which lies behind the claim of universalism might well be the dominance of First-World interpreters. Most Western Christian readers of the book of Jonah who herald God's universal love as the theme of the book of Jonah, may well be

7. Two commonly proposed positive reasons for Jonah's anger are that either Jonah is angry because he realized that Israel would be hurt (an emotion based on his patriotism) or because he would be viewed as a liar by the Ninevites (stemming from his concern for the preservation of his dignity). See Sasson, *Jonah*, p. 274.

8. There are only a few interpreters who vindicate Jonah by reading the book not from their theological presumption, but from their experience as the oppressed. See Serge Frolov, 'Returning the Ticket: God and his Prophet in the Book of Jonah', *JSOT* 86 (1999), pp. 85-105. Frolov insists God is absurd and Jonah's responses are perfectly normal, and refuses to blame Jonah's anger to preserve his dignity, saying, 'As a former Soviet national, I know too well that whenever sacrifice of an individual for the sake of a collective...becomes permissible, oppression and terror ensue, making life miserable for all or almost all members of the very entity that was supposed to benefit in this way. And as a Jew born after World War II, I refuse to believe that the genocide of my brethren was the only way to make Europe repent and renounce the abomination of anti-Semitism' (p. 104).

9. Frolov ('Returning the Ticket', p. 87) says, 'Such impressive unanimity of writers with quite different backgrounds, agendas and hermeneutic preferences is suspicious enough *per se*: if divergent premises and methodologies produce strikingly convergent results, it may be due to replacement of sound reasoning by uncritically assimilated stereotypes'.

participating unknowingly in this working system of exclusivity. By contrast, the oppressed, such as the colonized Jewish audience during the postmonarchic and postexilic period, whose natural response to their marginalization might be anger, find it difficult to raise their voice. Thus they remain silent. What reading of Jonah's anger and silence might emerge if the situation of the colonized Jewish audience is taken seriously? This study will attempt to address it. In the following sections, after reviewing unsolved incongruities of the established readings of Jonah, I will conduct a close reading of Jonah 4, imagining the mindset of the colonized Jewish audience.

Unsolved Incongruities in the Book of Jonah

In the established readings of the book of Jonah which praise God's salvific decision toward Nineveh and criticize Jonah as the personification of Jewish particularism, there are some critical problems or incongruities. First of all, if Jonah plays a negative role in the book, why would the historical author of the book choose the honorific prophet Jonah as the protagonist of the book? J.D. Smarts notes, 'What would be the nature of such a history whose aim lay in demeaning a prophet of Israel? Who would write this, and for what purpose?'[10] Etan Levine, who sees the essential question of the book as the nature of justice, also asks, 'Why does the author give his protagonist such an honorific name?'[11] The image and the reputation of the prophet Jonah before he appeared in the book of Jonah can be found in 2 Kgs 14.25.[12] According to that text, Jonah, son of Amittai from the town of Gath-hepher near Nazareth, prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (786–746 BCE). He was titled 'the servant of the LORD, God of Israel',

10. James D. Smart, *The Interpreter's Bible*, VI (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), p. 871.

11. Levine, 'Jonah', p. 244. Levine, who regards the book of Jonah as a philosophical book, also says, 'all [the historical-national school, the mystical school, the Christian polemics, the Jewish polemics, the monotheism-universalism school, the human school] are *fundamentally inadequate*' (p. 241).

12. Including Josephus, all of the rabbinic readings identify Jonah in the book of Jonah as the prophet Jonah in 2 Kgs 14.25. See Thomas M. Bolin, *Freedom beyond Forgiveness: The Book of Jonah Re-Examined* (JSOTSup, 236; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 17. See also p. 15 n. 11. For a list of references in rabbinic literature, see Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Jonah* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1975), pp. 105-106. See also G. Charles Aalders, *The Problem of the Book of Jonah* (London: Tyndale Press, 1948), p. 23.

and he proclaimed the word of God regarding the extent of Jeroboam's kingdom as follows:

> He [Jeroboam II] restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. *For the LORD saw that the distress of Israel was very bitter; there was no one left, bond or free, and no one to help Israel. But the LORD had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Joash.* (2 Kgs 14.25)[13]

Some scholars, who read Jonah as the personification of Jewish narrow-minded particularism against God's universal love, insist that Jonah was selected because the historical Jonah in 2 Kgs 14.25 lived in a period during which the Assyrian empire was growing to great power.[14] However, this explanation is unsatisfactory because Jonah's prophecy in 2 Kings is not against Assyria but against the kingdom of Aram. Moreover, as G.C. Aalders points out, 'If the author of the book of Jonah was looking for a prophet with a particular prejudice against Nineveh, he might have made a better choice; why did he not select as his hero Nahum the Elkoshite?'[15] Besides, considering that most true prophets of Israel had prophesied against evil kings in Israel, this Jonah is a unique true prophet who proclaimed restoration and salvation even to the evil king of Israel. Therefore, since the Israelites were destroyed and dispersed after 586 BCE, the colonized Jews would have awaited a patriotic prophet like Jonah who could proclaim God's salvation to Israel again, despite their evil kings and sins. Or, when the Israelites found that their name was about to be blotted out in history after their country's destruction, they might have questioned God through this Jonah as a reminder of God's promise in 2 Kgs 14.25: 'But the LORD had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven'. The author of the book of Jonah would have considered this honorific and patriotic image of Jonah

13. Biblical quotations are from the NRSV, unless indicated otherwise. Emphasis is mine.

14. W.O.E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson, *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1934), p. 376. They insist that no other prophet had the same contact with the land of the north-east as Jonah. Aalders (*The Problem*, pp. 23-24 n. 76) says, 'It was shortly before his activity that the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III came for the first time into direct contact with Israel. The result was humiliating to the Israelites, who had, therefore, no reason to love the Assyrians.'

15. Aalders, *The Problem*, p. 24.

among his audience when he selected the prophet Jonah in 2 Kgs 14.25 as his main protagonist. And when the historical Jewish audience heard stories in which Jonah was the main protagonist, or when they found books titled with Jonah's name, even before opening the first page, they would have been excitedly expecting God's promise of the salvation of Israel. In this sense, Jonah might have been one of the most desirable prophets to the suffering Jews during the period of colonization as they awaited the hopeful message of restoration. Therefore, it does not make sense at all that the historical colonized Jewish author and audience wrote and read the book in which their heroic prophet was blamed or mocked as the personification of their own narrow-minded particularism. Instead of praising God's universal or inclusive love, which reached even their colonizer, a colonized audience would have challenged or mocked any voice which would try to justify God's love or mercy to their enemy. This point becomes clearer if we see how much the image of Nineveh was extremely negative or evil to the colonized Jews.

The second critical problem or incongruity of the established Jonah readings, therefore, is about their justification of Nineveh's salvation. How could the colonized Jewish audience have praised God's salvific mercy toward their archenemy, Nineveh? E.J. Bickerman says, 'Seen from this point of view [God spoke to the prophets (and they prophesied) only because of the merits of Israel], Jonah's mission does not make sense. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrians, which, like Rome in the days of the rabbis, imposed its yoke upon the Holy Land and the holy people'.[16] There is no doubt that the colonized Jews had an extremely negative image of Nineveh, which had destroyed Israel in 722 BCE. Negative and hateful images of Nineveh can be found in many biblical passages and books, such as 2 Kgs 17.6; 2 Chron. 32.9-32, the entire book of Nahum, and Zeph. 2.13-15. The book of Nahum clearly testifies to the image of Nineveh among the Israelites: 'Ah! City of bloodshed, utterly deceitful, full of booty—no end to the plunder!' (Nah. 3.1). Scholars have made various negative observations regarding Israelite attitudes toward Nineveh, casting the city as 'the most despised foreign city',[17] the memory of which was 'a bitter and longlasting yoke'[18]

16. Bickerman, *Four Strange Books*, pp. 15-16.

17. David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-Prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible* (BJS, 301; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), p. 94.

18. Sasson, *Jonah*, p. 70.

evoking 'thoughts of anger and retribution',[19] and 'the archenemy',[20] serving as 'a most poignant example of a great city, a capital of a powerful empire, that was not only utterly destroyed but also never rebuilt'.[21] Furthermore, 'No regime in the ancient world was more brutal, even granted the pervasive brutality of ancient (and modern!) warfare'.[22] Because of the extremely negative images of Nineveh[23] among the colonized Jews, some scholars, in serious consideration of the historical Jewish audience, have tried to suggest a different time of composition of the book of Jonah or a two-place model for Nineveh. B.D. Eerdmans and Y. Kaufmann have attempted to date the composition of Jonah as earlier, before the negative image of Nineveh was created in Israel. Eerdmans argues that '[T]o make sense of the story Nineveh must still have been in existence when it appeared, because a fallen Nineveh contradicts its being spared in the story'.[24] Kaufmann also insists that the book of Jonah was written before Sennacherib, that is, before Nineveh became 'a symbol of the heathendom despised by postexilic Judaism, but a legendary "great city" with its own king'.[25] Others, such as P. Trible, suggest a two-place model, the Nineveh in Jonah being the legendary Nineveh of Gen. 10.8-12, separate from the historical Nineveh which destroyed Israel.[26] These theories have not received much support as

19. Grant-Henderson, *Inclusive Voices*, p. 105.

20. André Lacocque and Pierre-Emmanuel Lacocque, *The Jonah Complex* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), pp. xiv-xv.

21. Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah*, pp. 15-16.

22. John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), pp. 325-26.

23. See also Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, pp. 85, 99-100; Gitay, 'Jonah', pp. 197-206 (200); Terence E. Fretheim, 'Jonah and Theodicy', *ZAW* 90 (1978), pp. 227-37 (227); N. Rosen, 'Jonah: Justice for Jonah, or a Bible Bartleby', in David Rosenberg (ed.), *Congregation: Contemporary Writers Read the Jewish Bible* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), pp. 222-31. For more comprehensive lists of Jonah research, see Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah*, p. 15 n. 5.

24. Bernardus Dirk Eerdmans, *The Religion of Israel* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1947), p. 176.

25. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel, from Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 83.

26. Trible, 'Studies', pp. 271-72. It is implausible that the postexilic Jews understood Nineveh in the book of Jonah as the ancient legendary city and ignored the image of the despised city of their more recent and painful history. This city is already described as a wicked city by the story itself in Jon. 1.1: 'the wickedness of its [Nineveh's] citizens is obvious to me [YHWH]'.

most scholars agree on the late composition date.[27] However, their efforts to find an earlier composition date or other city model show their serious historical sense of the incongruity between Nineveh's salvation in the story and its hated image among the colonized Jewish audience. Although the scholars who date the book of Jonah to the postmonarchic period were right at least for the date of composition, they have easily or intentionally ignored this incongruity in the nuance of 'Nineveh was distant from the narrator's (and audience's) memory'.[28]

Though some scholars have been unable to solve or ignore the incongruities in Jonah, they have accepted these incongruities as the device used to maximize the theme of the book, namely, that God's universal and inclusive love reaches to all people, *even to the archenemy of Israel*, and that Israel, *unlike Jonah*, should accept it.[29] However, although 'outsider' Christian interpreters could accept the salvation of Nineveh in order to emphasize God's universal love, it must have been impossible for the colonized Jews, who were still suffering under the oppression of their powerful neighbors, to forget what Nineveh did or to accept God's salvific decision toward Nineveh. After all, Nineveh had destroyed Israel and killed or deported thousands of Israelites! Even when the passing years separated the Jewish audience ever further from the events of 722 BCE, it would be hard to imagine that the oppressed would forget their painful history. Indeed, several hundred years later, in such works as Tobit (which is probably the most ancient extant reading of Jonah) and in the *Antiquities* of Josephus, the image of Nineveh was still negative, the salvation of Nineveh being still unimaginable.[30] Even to such contemporary interpreters as Lacocque and Lacocque, Nineveh is as '*gemütlich* as a Gestapo torture-chamber' and 'the concentration camp for God's

27. See the date of composition in n. 3.

28. Sasson, *Jonah*, p. 21.

29. For example, Grant-Henderson (*Inclusive Voices*, p. 106) says, 'The employment of Nineveh as the place is important theologically because it demonstrates God's care for a hated enemy of the Israelites'. Sasson (*Jonah*, p. 70) also states, 'Nineveh's reputation as a center of savage power is reason enough for Jonah to have made out of it a paradigm for utter wickedness reprieved by utter mercy'.

30. In the book of Tobit in the Septuagint, Tobit commends his son, Tobias, to go into Media, 'for (says he) I believe the word of God upon Nineveh, which the prophet Jonah spoke, that all those things will be, and will befall Assyria and Nineveh' (Tob. 14.4). Although Tobit in the Hebrew scripture records 'Nahum' instead of 'Jonah' in this passage, we can see the negative image of Nineveh in Jonah among many Jews who read the Septuagint.

people'.[31] As A. Grant-Henderson points out, 'The writer could have used a wicked city within Israel [instead of Nineveh] as an example' for 'emphasizing the compassion and freedom of God'.[32]

In sum, the established readings of Jonah do not explain at all the special functions of characters such as Jonah and Nineveh in the story. If the historical author had aimed to emphasize God's universal love and the importance of repentance and to rebuke Jewish particularism, s/he should have used different characters instead of Jonah and Nineveh. To interpret that the author hired these characters so as to be able to maximize the theme of God's inclusive love is too naïve an interpretation, an interpretation ventured by those who clearly do not understand the feelings of the colonized people. If God's salvific decision toward Nineveh was not acceptable to the ancient readers, could not they regard Jonah's anger as legitimate? If Jonah's anger can be justified, how can we read the silence of Jonah in the fourth chapter of the book differently?

A Postcolonial Reading of the Silence of Jonah

For effectiveness in a limited space, in order to reveal the rhetoric of the strong, to examine the justification of Jonah's anger, and to explore the meaning of the silence of Jonah, I will concentrate my reading on ch. 4, a chapter in which Jonah starts pouring out his anger to God, and God and Jonah discuss it.

Jonah's anger starts at 4.1. It is said,

> This was a great evil to Jonah, and he was angry.[33]

Jonah 4.1 begins with 'an elliptical sentence whose implicit subject was stated explicitly at the end of the previous scene',[34] namely, 'the Ninevites' return from their evil ways and God's repenting'. The subject of the sentence is the whole of 3.10,[35] which says,

31. Lacocque and Lacocque, *The Jonah Complex*, pp. 56, 80.
32. Grant-Henderson, *Inclusive Voices*, p. 102.
33. In this close reading of Jon. 4, I will mainly cite Jonah passages from Uriel Simon and Lenn J. Schramm, *Jonah: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999). For other biblical passages, I will continue to use NRSV.
34. Simon and Schramm, *Jonah*, p. 36.
35. See Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, p. 160.

> God saw what they did, how they had turned back from their evil ways. And God repented (נחם) of the evil which he had said to do to them, and did not do it.[36]

The words 'what they did, how they had turned back from their evil ways' indicates Nineveh's repentance in 3.5-10. Since Jonah proclaims doom at 3.4, the Ninevites believe God, call a fast, and put on sackcloth. The king of Nineveh also puts on sackcloth, sits in ashes and proclaims a fast. The king of Nineveh says in 3.8-9: 'Let every person turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice which is in his hand. Who knows, God may turn and repent, and turn back from his wrath, so that we do not perish.' How would the colonized Jewish audience have understood this passage? Unlike established scholars who have emphasized the theme of repentance or God's universal love from these passages,[37] there are a few crucial things about Nineveh's repentance that the colonized Jewish audience would have felt. When a colonized audience heard Jonah's message of doom and Nineveh's repentance event in 3.4-9, considering the historical events they knew already, they would not in all probability have thought that what Nineveh did was genuine repentance. The colonized Jewish audience had two unchangeable historical facts about Nineveh: one was that Nineveh had destroyed Israel, and the other was that Nineveh had never repented for what they had done to Israel and had never restored Israel. Whatever the repentance of Nineveh was in 3.5-8, the colonized Jewish audience knew that Nineveh's repentance was not about their predatory activities to foreign countries. If it had been, Nineveh should have stopped its historical oppression and destruction of weak neighbors like Israel! A colonized audience would have thought that the character of Nineveh's repentance was *hypocritical* repentance, lacking the compensatory actions to the people that they had sinned against, or repentance only for an *internal* matter,[38] or repentance which

36. Simon and Schramm, *Jonah*, p. 33.

37. See n. 29. See also G.I. Davis, 'The Uses of *Rʿʿ* Qal and the Meaning of Jonah IV 1', *VT* 27 (1977), pp. 105-11. In his interpretation on Jonah's response on God's repenting, Davis says, the narrator presents Jonah as 'out of line with the nature and will of Yahweh as he (the narrator) knows them, and out of line with the conception of Yahweh's mercy which found expression in Israelite tradition' (p. 110).

38. Sasson (*Jonah*, p. 259) says, 'The violence to which the king is alluding is internal to Nineveh's citizenry and need not, therefore, pertain to Nineveh's predatory activities against its foreign nations'. B.A. Levine ('The Place of Jonah in the History of Biblical Ideas', in George M. Landes, Stephen L. Cook, and S.C. Winter [eds.], *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999],

was *temporal* and could not last long,[39] or even repentance of *deception*.[40] To many Christians who have overemphasized spiritual repentance ignoring physical restitution, and to the oppressors who want their predatory actions to be forgotten without paying anything for what they have done, the repentance of Nineveh might seem to make sense. However, to the oppressed and the colonized whose lands had been plundered and who were still suffering because of what the colonizer had done to them, this repentance without restitution to the victimized could not be accepted.

Regardless, the shocking point for the colonized audience was when God took Nineveh's repentance seriously and 'repented' (נחם) of the former plan to destroy Nineveh at 3.10. First of all, theologically, 'Everybody knew that the word of God which is gone forth does not come back (Isa. 45.23), and that the Lord changes not (Mal. 3.6). "God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent (נחם)" (Num. 23.19).'[41] Certainly there are some exceptions to this claim, such as Ezek. 33.12-15, which reports a change of the divine mind because of the repentance of the wicked. However, it is difficult to compare God's changing mind in Ezekiel to that in Jon. 3.10. In Ezek. 13.14-15, the wicked are saved by God not only because of their repentance, but also because of their restoration of the victimized. As Israel knew, Nineveh's repentance in Jonah 3 was not true repentance with restoration of the foreign lands and peoples Nineveh had devastated. Moreover, the fundamental problem is that to any Jewish audience during the post-monarchic period, Nineveh's repentance and God's sparing of Nineveh could never be good news. God's sparing of Nineveh is different from the inclusiveness issue, which means that Israel needs to accept

pp. 201-17 [211-12]) also insists the wickedness of Nineveh was 'an internal matter primarily affecting the people of these towns themselves'.

39. To interpret why Jonah made a booth while he waited to see what would become of the city in Jon. 4.5, some scholars, among them, M.M. Kalisch, T.E. Bird, and John B. Gough Pidge, have explained that Jonah might think that the repentance of Nineveh was not really genuine and that in time the city would revert to evil again. See Trible, 'Studies', p. 98.

40. In the Palestinian Talmud, the excessive repentance of Nineveh becomes, according to Sherwood (*A Biblical Text*, p. 107), 'a pantomime farce, a "repentance of deception", a cynical exercise in divine blackmail (instant repentance: just add sackcloth)'. 'In the Targum, the repentance of the Ninevites is short-lived, as in *Yerushalmi*, and they soon relapse into bloodshed and violence' (p. 107 n. 56).

41. Bickerman, *Four Strange Books*, p. 36.

foreigners in their community or that God's special love for Israel can spread to other people. Nineveh's survival would imply the fall of Israel! Certainly when they heard God's changing mind in Jon. 3.10, the colonized audience would have immediately asked why God spared the detestable foreign county, thereby forsaking the future of Israel. This was not an issue between 'Israel is God's chosen people' and 'foreigners can be included in this chosenness'; rather, the issue was between 'God chose Israel as God's people' and 'God withdraws God's favor of Israel and instead shows that favor to the enemy of Israel'. It must have been very clear to the colonized Jews that Nineveh's salvation was the doom of Israel.

Moreover, to forgive sins by repentance without any punishment was unusual in the Hebrew Bible. In other words, the forgiveness of sin does not include a total exemption of punishment. When David finds his son born by Bathsheba about to die because of his sin in killing Uriah in 2 Sam. 12.16, David fasts and has the same expectation as the king of Nineveh in Jon. 3.9, asking 'Who knows...?' (מי־יודע):

> He said, 'While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, "*Who knows* (מי־יודע)? The LORD may be gracious to me, and the child may live."' (2 Sam. 12.22)

> *Who knows* (מי־יודע)? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish. (Jon. 3.9)

The result in David's case was the death of the innocent child, while the result in Nineveh's case was the saving of their lives. Also, when the northern Israelite king Ahab was criticized by Elijah for depriving Naboth of his vineyard at 1 Kings 21, his actions at that time were very similar to those of the king and people of Nineveh in Jon. 3.6. The verses read as follows:

> When Ahab heard those words, *he tore his clothes and put sackcloth over his bare flesh; he fasted, lay in the sackcloth, and went about dejectedly*. (1 Kgs 21.27)

> When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, *removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes*. (Jon. 3.6)

Despite his show of repentance being equal to, if not more impassioned than, that of the king of Nineveh, did God forgive Ahab completely, as was done for the Ninevites? No. What Ahab received was only the delaying of the disaster until his son's generation—disaster itself was still determined (1 Kgs 21.28-29). Although Ahab was a notorious king

in Israel, could his image be worse than that of Nineveh, the ancient arch-villain who had brutally destroyed Israelites? How could the colonized Jewish audience have understood God, who had only deferred the disaster of Ahab to his sons when Ahab fasted and repented, who had not listened to David's fasting for his son, but who had accepted the fast and repentance of Nineveh (which did not include the restoration of the victimized), forgiving them without punishment? How can this God continuously be called the God of Israel or the God of the oppressed? Where is God's justice and love for Israel or the weak in this case? An emphasis on the theme of repentance in Jonah sets up the shallow readings in which interpreters keep their preconception of God's universal love for all people without considering the historical context of the colonized Jewish audience. Jonah's anger in 4.1 might be negative or absurd to Christian researchers, but it would have been reasonable and natural for the understanding of the colonized audience.

Jonah's anger continues in the next verses. In 4.2-3, Jonah prays to the LORD:

> Please, O LORD! Was not this my word when I was still in my own land? That is why I hastened to flee to Tarshish. For I knew that you are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, repenting of evil. Now LORD, please take my life, for I would rather die than live.[42]

In this verse, Jonah at last reveals the reason for his flight in 1.3. Magonet suggests[43] five possible explanations for why Jonah ran away:

(i) Is he shocked at a miscarriage of justice—that evil Nineveh was let off so lightly? Jonah fighting for justice against God's mercy.[44]

(ii) Is he concerned at the specific relationship of Nineveh to Israel, anticipating that destruction will come at the hands of the Assyrians?[45]

(iii) Is he worried that his reputation will suffer if his prophecy is not fulfilled, or generally reluctant to make a prophecy which he knows will not come true?

(iv) Is he angry that this compassion of God, once exclusively Israel's, has now come to be applied to all nations, including enemies? Seen in this light, the book reflects an inner Jewish struggle between a narrow nationalistic outlook and a broader universalistic one.

42. Simon and Schramm, *Jonah*, pp. 36-38.

43. Jonathan Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 2nd edn, 1983), p. 87.

44. See Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah*, p. 33.

45. The Rabbis unanimously read the anger of Jonah as a result of his patriotism. They trusted what Jonah said at 4.2 as the reason for his anger.

(v) Or has the author deliberately, or unconsciously, left the question open, so that the problem here is less a specific issue than the nature of the psychological type that Jonah represents whom the reader is asked to study, laugh at, and learn from?

Magonet says that reason '(iv)'—that Jonah reflects an inner Jewish struggle between a narrow nationalistic outlook and a broader universalistic one—is 'by far the commonest interpretation'.[46] However, scholars who support '(iv)' have not seriously considered the power structure. As long as we regard the date of composition of Jonah as the postexilic period and consider the power structure between Israel and Nineveh, it is implausible that the weak blamed their own efforts to keep their national identity exclusively, and recommended being inclusive to the strong who had destroyed them. It is possible for the weak to be inclusive to the weaker, as when Israel was inclusive to Ruth. It is also possible for the weak to be inclusive to others when they are not that weak relatively, as when Israel proclaimed a universal God in Deutero-Isaiah while they were victoriously returning from exile. However, it is neither possible nor healthy for the weak community to be inclusive of their strong enemy during their suffering; this is because, by this inclusiveness, the weak will be assimilated to the strong and lose their identity.

Considering the context of the colonized Jewish audience, both '(i)' and '(ii)' should be bound together as the reason for Jonah's flight. The issue is not justice alone, but also justice in special relationships. These special relationships include those between Israel and Nineveh, and between Israel and God. In this sense, when the colonized Jewish audience read Jonah's flight from God's order in 1.3, they would have expected Nineveh to be spared by God. In the Hebrew Bible, most judgment proclamations intended to be heard by the recipients of that judgment are not curses for imminent judgment, but warnings to invoke repentance. When God makes a firm and unchangeable decision to destroy a people or place, God does not give direct warnings to them. Did God proclaim judgment to people before the flood? Or did God send a judgment sentence to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah to be heard in their ears before destroying them?[47] Whether people successfully

46. Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, p. 87.

47. Ben Zvi (*Signs of Jonah*, p. 17 n. 10) says, 'There is no hint in the former [Sodom and Gomorrah] that YHWH will relent from punishment even if the inhabitants of these cities will repent, and certainly not if they do not repent at all, that is, because YHWH will spare God's creatures (cf. Jon. 4)'.

repent after hearing the judgment or not, the judgment proclamation itself implies the possibility of salvation. When Israelite prophets proclaim a judgment about foreign countries, the audience is not the foreign countries, but rather Israelites. Most of the judgment oracles against foreign countries were 'to be heard' by the ear of Israel[48] to give hope to the people who are suffering under those evil countries or to give a warning to Israel, who can be judged by the same judgment sentences. Therefore, the judgment proclamation about Nineveh in Nahum is totally different from what God ordered Jonah to proclaim about Nineveh. The former is for Israel, who is not the object of the judgment but the real audience for that judgment, whereas the latter is for Nineveh who is the object as well as the audience. Thus, when Jonah was ordered to preach about the destruction of Nineveh 'to Nineveh', Jonah knew immediately the possibility that Nineveh could be saved 'by his preaching'. In God's order to Jonah in 1.3, God, who is supposed to be God of Israel alone and to speak to the prophets only because of the merits of Israel,[49] is now sending Israel's prophet to the foreign country for the merit of the foreign country. This could be a serious violation to the traditional covenant theology in which God chose Israel as God's people. Before and after Jonah, God has never sent a prophet to prophesy to any foreign country because of the merits of that foreign country. As the patriotic prophet who proclaimed salvation even to the evil king of Israel in 2 Kgs 14.25, Jonah could never perform such a mission. Also, when the colonized audience found that their 'most-wanted patriotic prophet', who could have proclaimed their glorious future in the midst of a miserable situation regardless of their sins, was ordered to preach salvation to their enemy, they would have been shocked and would have run away from God alongside Jonah.

In Jon. 4.2b-3, after revealing the reason for his flight, Jonah remembers Israel's old confession of God, 'You are a compassionate and

48. As far as I know, there is one exception in the Hebrew Bible. In Jer. 51.59-64, Jeremiah sent Seraiah to Babylonia to read the judgment oracle against Babylonia. However, in this case, still the audience of this judgment is not Babylonian. The event described in Jer. 51 was a kind of curse ritual in which the curse was supposed to be heard in that land. There is no sign or clue that people heard this curse. Right after reading it, Seraiah is even ordered to throw the scroll into the river (for the effectiveness of the curse on the land or in order to hide it from the people). See Gerald Lynwood Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52* (WBC, 27; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1995).

49. See Simeon ben Azzai's assertion in Bickerman, *Four Strange Books*, p. 15.

gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, repenting of evil'. This is a renowned 'credo', as a memory of Exod. 34.6b-7. According to W. Brueggemann, 'Scholars believe this [Exod. 34.6-7] is an exceedingly important, stylized, quite self-conscious characterization of Yahweh, a formation so studied that it may be reckoned to be something of a classic, normative statement to which Israel regularly returned, meriting the label "credo"'.[50] Trible insists that Jonah's confession in 4.2 is the theme of the book of Jonah. She states:

> It is proclaimed that Yahweh is a God of love and of mercy. It is found with variations in Num. 14.18, Deut. 7.8ff, Neh. 9.17, Joel 2.13, Pss. 85.5, 15; 103.8; 111.4; and 145.8. The author of Jonah has taken over this proclamation, in one of its forms, as the text upon which he wishes to comment. As a method of teaching he has fashioned around this text a miraculous story which extols the acts of Yahweh. In Jonah an ancient credo is re-stated anew. This credo provides the major key for understanding the message of the book.[51]

However, scholars including Trible fail to find the unique context of the credo in Jon. 4.3 when compared to all other credo passages in their lists. Unlike all other credo passages in Trible's list, the credo in Jon. 4.3 is the only confession in which God's love for a foreign country is praised. In all other passages, such as Num. 14.18, Deut. 7.8-10, Neh. 9.17, Joel 2.13, Pss. 85.5, 15; 103.8; 111.4; and 145.8, *God's love and mercy are praised because Israel is the recipient of those good characteristics of God.* God's attributes of compassion, mercy, slowness to anger, abundance in kindness, repentance from evil, and so on are meaningful to Israel when Israel is the recipient of those characteristics of God, and they could be the 'credo of Israel' because these characteristics are confessed by and for Israel. Only in Jonah is Israel's core credo used to describe God's treatment of a foreign country, and again, not just any foreign country but Israel's archenemy, Nineveh. In this context, how can the credo in Jonah be treated like the credo of other passages in the Hebrew Bible? Moreover, if the colonized audience knew the book of Nahum (as scholars date Nahum much earlier than the postexilic period),[52] the credo in Jonah would have been much more absurd and

50. Brueggemann, *Theology*, p. 216.

51. Trible, *Studies*, p. 168.

52. Although they have different opinions of the exact year of composition, most scholars agree that Nahum was written right before or after the fall of Nineveh (612 BCE). See Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi* (WBC, 32; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), pp. 64-67.

ironic to the audience than the credo in Nahum. In his credo, in Nah. 1.2-3a, Nahum describes God as the one who does not leave the guilty enemy of Israel unpunished, as follows:

> A jealous and avenging God is the LORD, the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger but great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty.

According to R.L. Smith, 'Since Israel was Yahweh's covenant people, he was acting in her behalf in destroying Nineveh (1.13; 2.1). Yahweh is a jealous God who pours out his wrath and brings vengeance (judgment) against his enemies'.[53] In Nahum, God is praised for being wrathful to Israel's enemy, Nineveh. However, in Jonah, this avenging God forgives Nineveh and gives up taking vengeance on Israel's adversaries. Jonah says, 'God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, repenting of evil'. While Trible says, 'In Jonah an ancient credo is re-stated anew',[54] is this credo really eulogy and commendation? Or is it a mocking or challenging or complaint[55] of what God did to Nineveh?

When Jonah finds that the God of Israel has made a decision to spare the archenemy Nineveh, the destroyer of Israel, and that Jonah himself is the one who has contributed to this decision[56] by preaching a judgment

53. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, p. 73.

54. Trible, *Studies*, p. 168.

55. If the author of Jonah calls to mind Yahweh's covenant through this credo, it is important to note that the claim of most of the complaint psalms is also based on Yahweh's covenant as well. Brueggemann (*Theology*, p. 375 [emphasis in original]) says, 'The complaint psalms are committed to the general claim that Yahweh has not been faithful to Yahweh's covenant commitments, either by neglect and inattentiveness, or by direct negative action. This assumption of the complaint psalms is the same tight world of covenant sanctions to which the prophets appeal. *Whereas the prophets hold to the sanctions and consequent indictments in asserting that Israel has betrayed the covenant, the complaint psalms hold to the sanctions accusing Yahweh of not having honored the covenant.* For if Yahweh had honored covenant, it is argued, bad things would not have happened to Israel. Bad things would not have been received from the hand of Yahweh. Or bad things would not have been received at the hand of the enemy if Yahweh had not been negligent.'

56. Fretheim (*The Message of Jonah*, p. 23) says, 'Jonah, who had announced the greatness of Israel's future (2 Kgs 14.25), was now being called upon to offer a future to the very country that had put an end to that glorious vision of Jonah's (see 2 Kings 17)'. He continues, 'To Jonah this must have been sheer madness. Such a circumvention of all that goes by the name of justice!... For Jonah, God, if he is to be truly God and if Israel's faith is to be meaningful, must conform to canons of righteousness that relate divine

proclamation which caused Nineveh's repentance, what could Jonah say? He asks to die in 4.3: 'Now, LORD, please take my life, for I would rather die than live'.[57] Lacocque and Lacocque say, 'When Jonah wants to die (chapter 4), it is no childish whim... Where is the Auschwitz survivor who would go to Berchtesgaden or Berlin carrying God's salvation?'[58]

To Jonah's desperate plea God's answer is simple; 4.4 reads: 'Is it right for you to be angry?' Scholars such as J. Sasson believe that this sentence 'satisfied Jonah enough that he does not give an answer'.[59] However, when God asks Jonah this question, God does not seem to have effective rhetoric to subdue Jonah's anger. If Jonah had been satisfied with God's question, the second round of conversation between God and Jonah in 4.5-9 would be unnecessary. In fact, it was God who prepares and starts the second round of conversation using the *qiqayon* tree. The crucial point in God's question in 4.4 is that there is no indication of the reason for Jonah's anger. Did God not know why Jonah was angry? God knew. Thus God tries to persuade Jonah in 4.10 in connection with the sparing of Nineveh. God knew that Jonah was angry about God's work in changing Nineveh's fate. Then, why did God not ask Jonah directly, 'Is it right for you to be angry *at my repenting and sparing Nineveh*?' If God had asked that, God and Jonah would have started their debate directly at that time. However, God in the text seemed to know that God could not hold the dominant position at that moment of the debate. If God had asked, 'Are you that deeply angry at my repenting and sparing Nineveh?', Jonah would have pointed out the negative implications for Israel in God's decision to save Nineveh because of the power structure between Nineveh and Israel. Jonah could also have reminded God of the special relationship between God and Israel in covenant tradition and God's promise of Israel's chosenness. Moreover, Jonah might have raised the issue of justice as the reason for his anger. Maybe both Jonah and the colonized audience of Jonah were ready and

response to human conduct in ways that are consistent, if not predictable. The good life should be rewarded, and the bad life should be made to reap its proper fruit. That's only fair!' (pp. 23-24).

57. According to Sasson (*Jonah*, p. 283), 'Hebrew literature cites very few occasions on which individuals ask God to shorten their lives'. Sasson (pp. 284-86) finds four examples of the occasions in which each suits different aspects of Jonah's own request: 'Testimonial (Tobit)', 'Grievance (Job)', 'Depression (Elijah)', and 'Frustration (Moses)'.

58. Lacocque and Lacocque, *The Jonah Complex*, p. 68.

59. Sasson, *Jonah*, p. 286.

could have raised their voices at that point. However, God in the text did not ask any reasons for Jonah's anger, but only the legitimacy of anger—'Is it right for you to be angry?'—and thus Jonah left the place without expressing the reason for his anger at that time. Maybe Jonah would have felt no necessity to answer such a palpable question from God, and hoped that his anger might influence God to reconsider the decision. So we have a new scene.

In 4.5-8, a new situation is introduced before Jonah pours out his anger a second time:

> Then Jonah left the city and sat to the east of the city, and made a booth there and sat under it in the shade, until he should see what would happen in the city. The LORD God appointed a *qiqayon* plant, which grew up above Jonah, to provide shade over his head and save him from his distress. Jonah felt great joy at the *qiqayon* plant. But God appointed a worm at dawn on the next day, which attacked the plant so that it withered. And when the sun rose, God appointed a quiet east wind; the sun beat down on Jonah's head, and he fainted. He wished to die, saying, 'I would rather die than live'.

Without any more conversation with God, Jonah leaves the city and waits, sitting under the booth to see what would happen.[60] Just as the colonized audience would understand the repentance of Nineveh as hypocritical or internal or temporal, Jonah may also think that Nineveh's repentance was not genuine and that God's mind would change again. The Targums support this idea, 'for it expands the last clause to read, "[Jonah sat] in order to see what *finally* would happen to the city"'.[61]

In vv. 6-8, God sets up the scene for the next conversation. God appoints (מנה) the plant and appoints (מנה) the worm and appoints (מנה) the east wind. In fact, throughout the book of Jonah, while God is

60. Scholars have debated for what Jonah waited at v. 5, since things had happened already. Some of them have thought 'this statement betrays a confused chronology' and have tried to find the reason for this chronological confusion of the story, regarding this verse as '*textual reconstruction*' or '*grammatical readjustment*' (Bewer, Winckler Wolff). Others have tried to explain the sequence of events in the structure of the given text by insisting that Jonah's flight in 4.5 is parallel to his flight to Tarshish in 1.3 (Magonet). Traditional interpretations thought that Jonah expected that Nineveh's repentance would not last long, and, therefore, waited for retaliation (so the Targums). See Sasson, *Jonah*, pp. 287-89.

61. Sasson, *Jonah*, p. 89. Trible says, 'But this idea receives no support from what we are told in the narrative itself' (Trible, 'Studies', 98). In this work, however, I hope to challenge what Western scholars have read in 'the narrative itself'. See the further reading of the conversation between Jonah and God in this work, paying attention to the rhetoric of the strong and the false claim of universal love.

appointing all by Godself—God orders Jonah to preach judgment to Nineveh, God appoints the storms, God appoints the fish, and God repents of the decision—Jonah is passive, although what God does critically influences Jonah. In some sense, what God does to the *qiqayon* plant can be seen as an image of what God does to Israel. God treats the plant arbitrarily, giving it life and making it grow and then wither for a bigger and more universal purpose. God treats Israel arbitrarily as well, making a covenant with Israel as God's people and choosing Israel among many nations. God gives them suffering, but God is not concerned about Israel's fate when God saves Nineveh. All God does between Israel and Nineveh is arbitrary, and established studies have praised these arbitrary actions as God's freedom. However, would the colonized audience have regarded God's arbitrary treatment of Israel and Nineveh as an expression of God's freedom? If God is free to be arbitrary, where is the God who entered into the covenant with Israel to set up a special relationship?[62] Jonah was still angry at God's mistreatment. Maybe the *qiqayon* plant was angry at God's mistreatment, too. The colonized Jewish audience would also still have been angry at God through all these events. However, the text only describes what God does—God's appointments for all settings—and most established readers have not read the unheard feelings of a colonized audience into the story. Jonah wants to die again in 4.8 when God killed the *qiqayon* plant, and God now utilizes what he has set up. In 4.9, God asks, 'Is it right for you to be angry *about the plant*?', and Jonah replies impetuously from his anger, 'Yes, angry enough to die'.

Here in 4.9, unlike in 4.4 where God does not mention the reason for Jonah's anger, God clarifies the reason for Jonah's anger as '*about the plant*'. Was Jonah really angry to death because of the plant? Since becoming vexed in 4.1, his anger has not subsided. He is in his angry mood not just because of the plant, but because of all the events which had happened to his people and God's treatment of his people and Nineveh. However, God sets up a new circumstance and makes everyone, including Jonah and the audience, pay attention to the new situation about the plant. This is another example of the rhetoric of the strong,

62. 'God of the covenant' has been suggested as one of the most important themes of the Old Testament, one which provides structural consistency through all of the books of the Old Testament. See W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. J.A. Baker; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), pp. 36-45.

who like to de-historicize and de-contextualize. Whatever the oppressor did to the oppressed in the past, the oppressor wants to wipe out shameful past events and to demand that the oppressed talk only about current situations. However, the present of the oppressed is not just present, but an extension of their painful past, a past that includes, among other things, slavery or colonization. The dark shadow of those histories follows the oppressed and they cannot be of the same voice as the oppressor. Jonah's anger toward the plant is not just for God's treatment of the plant, but it is an extension of his anger for God's mistreatment of Israel and Nineveh. However, God makes Jonah focus only on the plant: 'Is it right for you to be angry *about the plant*?' The weak do not have other options but to follow the rhetoric of the strong—not only because the strong make the social and rhetorical norms for conversation, but also because the weak have urgent needs for which they have to deal with demands of the strong without much consideration of the aftereffects. The weak do not have the skill to negotiate or to invent their own rhetoric.[63] In Jonah's case, the sun is beating down on Jonah's head while he talks with God (Jon. 4.8). From that current urgency, the weak cannot help answering in an impetuous mood, and it is the moment that they are 'trapped'. The situation dramatically changes from 4.4, when Jonah pours out his anger at God about sparing Nineveh. In 4.9, Jonah's anger loses its basis when it is uprooted from his historical context, and God sees that it is the right moment to overturn the conversation. God starts to speak with dignity about God's universal love in 4.10-11:

> You cared about the plant, which you did not work for and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and perished overnight. And should I not care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than twelve myriad persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well?[64]

God's question at the end of the book parallels God's order at the beginning of the book, and it shows clearly what God is concerned with. In 1.1, when God orders Jonah to go to 'Nineveh, the great city', to preach against it, God's purpose was the salvation of Nineveh, 'the great city', which was wicked. In 4.11, the reason that God is concerned about

63. Karl Marx explains that proletarians cannot make ideological rhetoric because they do not have time to manipulate it. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1995), p. 64.

64. Simon and Schramm, *Jonah*, pp. 44-46.

Nineveh is because there are a great number of people there. Their wickedness, in fact, does not diminish despite their repentance in ch. 3—the people of Nineveh are still the people 'who cannot discern between their right and left hands', that is, between 'good and evil'.[65] To Jonah and to a colonized audience, it is again confirmed that Nineveh's repentance is not that effective, not only because there is no real historical repenting action in Nineveh of what they did to other nations, including Israel, but also because God states the city's inability to do good at the end of the narrative. From the beginning, God's intention to save the great city is clear, whether or not it repents effectively. Then why does God try to save it? God's consistent concern and description of Nineveh is that it is 'the great city' in which there are 'a great number of' people. In the Hebrew Bible, *when and where is God concerned about people's numbers? To God, are not justice and righteousness always more important than the numbers?* Were Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed because their population was small? What about Israel? Were there not thousands of people who did not know their right hand from their left when it was destroyed by Nineveh? Is God not traditionally supposed to be the God of the few underdogs of Israel, rather than the God of the many? When does God start loving the great city and the great number of people while ignoring justice and the fate of the weak?

All these questions would have been boiling in the heart of Jonah and a colonized audience of Jonah, but they cannot say a word because *Jonah is trapped in the rhetoric of the strong and his anger is now connected exclusively to the plant—Jonah confirmed as much to God in his impetuous angry mood because he had urgent needs!* The only thing he could do was to remain silent. This silence has long been interpreted by established Christian scholars as obedience or agreement to God's universal love for all. However, a colonized audience would have understood what the silence of Jonah meant because they were with Jonah there, in silence. Some weak, oppressed, and colonized people will continue to explore their own locations of silence or resistance in the silence of Jonah.

65. See Simon and Schramm, *Jonah*, pp. 46-47.

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