

TEXT ANALYSIS AND THE GENRE OF JONAH (PART 2)

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V. AN OVERVIEW OF THE DISCOURSE STRUCTURE OF JONAH

The structural outline presented below is only partial—in two respects. (1) It does not include all of the patterned arrangements (or possible variations) that are evident in the text of Jonah, especially those that are relatively minor in scope or hypothetical in nature. In this latter respect each of the linear and concentric patterns selected for display must be evaluated in terms of the criteria of credibility given in part 1 of this paper.¹ (2) Not all of the pertinent evidence in support of a given structure has necessarily been cited. Such information reduction is needed due to the present restrictions of space. It is hoped, however, that the sample provided is sufficient to indicate the outstanding care and craft that this literary work manifests in its local as well as global construction. The semantic and hermeneutical significance of such a masterfully designed format will be considered later.

1. *Jonah as a whole.* The overall plot structure (i.e. task/problem > complication > crisis/climax > resolution/denouement) consists of seven scenes that are marked by patterns of recursion (see below) as well as by major shifts in setting (time/place), circumstances, the participants involved, the (sub-)genre, and/or the nature of the action (eventive/dialogic)—namely: 1:1–3, 1:4–16, 1:17–2:10, 3:1–3, 3:4–10, 4:1–4, 4:5–11.² This linear sequence in turn manifests two parallel panels of plot-related topical arrangement with a climactic structural addition at the end: Yahweh has the final as well as the first word. These two divisions, or narrative cycles, may be diagramed as follows:³

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² A similar breakdown of the text (i.e. almost the same divisions, but rather different criteria for segmentation) is presented in J. Limburg, *Jonah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) 28.

³ This scheme may be compared with the more detailed binary outline proposed by P. Tribble (*Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1994] 110–111) and the less detailed one of R. Longacre and S. J. Hwang (“A Textlinguistic Approach to the Biblical Narrative of Jonah,” *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* [ed. R. Bergen; Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics] 342). The variations in these three formats are a result of different methods of analysis and different perspectives on the compositional organization in relation to the message of the text. The principal differences (e.g. where a/the first major break occurs in chap. 3—i.e. Wendland, v. 4; Tribble, v. 4b; Longacre and Hwang, v. 5) may be evaluated

Figure 1

- I. A. (1:1–3) Yahweh calls Jonah the first time and he flees from Nineveh
 - B. (1:4–16) A life/death crisis; exhortation by the captain; Jonah’s unwilling message to the pagan sailors of the ship; result: they all repent and pray
 - C. (1:17) Surprising transition: Yahweh saves Jonah by means of a great fish
 - D. (2:1–9) Jonah’s response, a pious prayer: thank you—for letting me live
 - E. (2:10) Instruction: Yahweh’s miraculous object lesson is complete—Jonah is safely delivered
- II. A’. (3:1–3) Yahweh calls Jonah the second time and he travels to Nineveh
 - B’. (3:4–9) A life/death crisis; Jonah’s unwilling message to the pagan people of the city; exhortation by the king; result: they all repent and pray (an even greater number)
 - C’. (3:10) Surprising transition: Yahweh saves Nineveh by “repenting” himself
 - D’. (4:1–4) Jonah’s response, a peeved prayer: please—just let me die
 - E’. (4:5–9) Instruction: Yahweh’s miraculous object lesson in the plant, worm and wind—Jonah is sorely afflicted
 - F. (4:10–11) Conclusion (thematic peak): Yahweh’s last word to Jonah and to every current listener: “Salvation belongs to Yahweh” (cf. 2:9)

2. *Chapter 1.* The first scene of the narrative (1:1–3) is strongly linear (diachronic) in construction. There is a rapid forward progression of events that is matched—with certain significant variations—by those in scene 4 (3:1–3; see below). The action-packed forward movement of the second scene (1:4–16) features a series of alternating sets of story and speech that highlights the unfolding cause-effect sequence that pervades the entire unit. This pericope is further distinguished by a complementary concentric overlay that serves to foreground its ironic core—namely, the prophet’s rote confession of faith that results in the pagans’ superstitious fear:

Figure 2

- A. (1:4–5a) Story: Yahweh “hurls” a great storm upon the sea, and the sailors “fear” (cause → effect)
- B. (1:5b) Speech (indirect): the sailors “cry out” to their “gods”

either by formal reanalysis or by one’s intuitive impression of the story’s main eventive flow. The establishment of such break points is often a subjective, selective procedure, to a greater or lesser extent. But it affects one’s perception of both the narrative progression and the text’s rhetorical argument.

- C. (1:5c–d) Story: the sailors feverishly try to save the ship from “the sea,” while Jonah does nothing but sleep (contrast)
- D. (1:6) Speech: the captain commands Jonah to do something to save the ship (means → purpose)
- E. (1:7a–b) Speech: the sailors decide to find out who is guilty of causing the life-threatening calamity (cause → effect)
- F. (1:7c) Story: the apparent reason is revealed by lot—Jonah is implicated
- G. (1:8) Speech: the sailors interrogate Jonah to find out who he is and what he has done wrong
- H. (1:9) Speech: Jonah professes his belief in Yahweh (cause)
- H'. (1:10a) Story: the sailors react in “great fear” (effect)
- G'. (1:10b) Speech: the sailors ask, “Why have you done this?”
- F'. (1:10c–d) Story: the underlying reason for the calamity is revealed in an aside—Jonah has run away from Yahweh
- E'. (1:11) Speech: the sailors ask Jonah what they can do to him to rid them all of his life-threatening guilt (cause → effect)
- D'. (1:12) Speech: Jonah tells the sailors how they can save the ship (means → purpose)
- C'. (1:13) Story: the sailors try their best to save the ship (and Jonah too), but nothing helps; “the sea” only gets worse (contrast)
- B'. (1:14) Speech (direct): the sailors “cry” to “Yahweh”
- A'. (1:15–16) Story: the sailors “hurl” Jonah into the sea, and the storm ceases; therefore they “fear” Yahweh even more and worship him (cause → effect)

Similar introverted structures are posited by other commentators.⁴ While these may differ in detail and general plausibility, they all by and large point to the peak of semantic attention in the center, which contrasts Jonah’s conventional creedal response (a pious platitude, H) with the unexpectedly “reverent” (“fear”-ful) reaction of the heathen mariners (H'). The

⁴ See for example J. Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Technique in the Book of Jonah* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983) 57; W. vanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 147; R. Pesch, cited in D. Alexander, *Jonah* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988) 107. Tribble objects to the selectivity of such broad concentric schemata (presumably including my own as well), citing their tendency to “impose or invent structure by themes, summaries, and omissions” (*Rhetorical Criticism* 154). Readers may judge for themselves on the basis of their own analysis of the text. In any case her structuration of “the *ipsissima verba*” (ibid. 152) also presents problems relating to subjectivity—e.g. the positing of a new narrative episode at 1:7 (i.e. 1:7–15), which is supposedly matched by a corresponding segment encompassing 3:10 alone (ibid. 110).

cohesiveness of this construction is strengthened by the correspondences that link the middle with its beginning and end points—i.e. A, H and H': reference to "Yahweh," maker and Lord of "the [stormy] sea," which immediately subsides when Jonah is thrown into it according to the divinely established will; H, H' and A': Jonah's expression of "fear" in "Yahweh God" sparks an initial "fear" within the suspicious sailors, one that reaches a climax, now in relation to "Yahweh," when the sea suddenly calms down. The medially highlighted disparity in religious attitude and action between Jonah and the pagans is evident elsewhere in the first chapter and runs throughout the entire book, thus indicating its overall thematic significance.

3. *Chapter 2.* Scene 3 begins at 1:17–2:1 (note the debatable chapter division), thus forming a chiasmic narrative frame with 2:10 around the psalm of Jonah.⁵ As in scene 2, this typical individual song of thanksgiving (for Yahweh's act of deliverance)⁶ also displays a mutually reinforcing linear as well as concentric structural development. The abstract sequential structure of the psalm is as follows (verse numbers follow the English text):

Figure 3

- A. Introduction (2:2): the psalm is summarized
(problem → prayer → provision)
- B. Lament (2:3–6a): the psalmist's problem/crisis is poetically described
- C. Appeal (2:7): Yahweh was called upon for help
- D. Proclamation (2:6b): Yahweh's mighty act of deliverance is lauded
- E. Testimonial (2:8): a recital of Yahweh's greatness and glory (here altered to a condemnation of the ungodly)
- F. Thanksgiving and vow (2:9): praise of God and a promise of some concrete act of worship/devotion

As is characteristic of many of the laments and individual songs of thanksgiving, a broad semi-narrative progression is evident in the text as it moves from problem (v. 3a) through a point of ultimate crisis (v. 6a) to a final resolution (vv. 6b–7). Several minor variations from a strictly conventional sequence appear, thus serving to highlight the content that is being enunciated—i.e. an unexpected confession of hope (v. 4b) within the lament; a displacement (front-shifting) of the proclamation (v. 6b); and a modification of the testimonial (v. 8) to heighten the irony of Jonah's admirable words in contrast to the actual deeds of the heathen sailors (1:16; cf. figure 4 below). These serve to illustrate the importance of certain deliberate alterations to basic generic patterns as a means of augmenting the artistic appeal and rhetorical impact of the discourse. In the hands of the Hebrew composers (cf. 1 Chr 6:31), literary structure was never a straitjacket but

⁵ For a diagram and discussion of this intricate cause-effect oriented "ichthyic" chiasmus see *ibid.* 157–160.

⁶ C. Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980) 72. Westermann concludes that "it is in this psalm genre that the solid structure of a genre can be seen by anyone" (*ibid.* 73).

was always a flexible tool whereby subdued as well as powerful communicative effects could be achieved when the need arose.⁷

Jonah's song of thanksgiving may also be viewed as an introverted arrangement that functions to draw attention to its key thematic components (the text is that of the NIV):

Figure 4

- A. At this the men greatly feared the Lord,
and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord
and made vows to him. (1:16)
- B. But the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah,
and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights. (1:17)
From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. (2:1)
He said:
- C. "In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.
From the depths of Sheol I called for help,
and you listened to my cry. (2:2)
- D. You hurled me into the deep,
into the very heart of the seas, (2:3a)
- E. and the currents swirled about me;
all your waves and breakers swept over me. (2:3b)
- F. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; (2:4a)
F'. Yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' (2:4b)
- E'. The engulfing waters threatened me,
the deep surrounded me;
seaweed was wrapped around my head. (2:5)
- D'. To the roots of the mountains I sank down;
the earth beneath me barred me in forever. (2:6a)
- C'. But you brought my life up from the pit,
O Lord my God. (2:6b)
When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, Lord,
and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple. (2:7)
- A'. Those who cling to worthless idols
forfeit the grace that could be theirs. (2:8)
But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you.
What I have vowed I will make good.
Salvation comes from the Lord!" (2:9)
- B'. And the Lord commanded the fish,
and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. (2:10)

⁷ To designate such subtle structural modifications by the term "symmetrophobia" (Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism* 117) suggests a certain artificiality or undue arbitrariness in this compositional strategy. On the contrary it was skillfully exercised to accomplish specific rhetorical objectives within the text—that is, in addition to the general aim of using formal difference to enhance similarity (ibid. 118).

As one notices from the preceding figure, the psalm of Jonah, which is a pastiche of various excerpts from the Psalter,⁸ forms only a part of the elaborate structure as a whole—namely, its major medial portion (2:2–9). It is enclosed by two obviously corresponding narrative frames that describe the prophet's initial predicament (B: being swallowed by a great fish) and his later deliverance (B': the fish deposits him on dry land). In between, Jonah's song of thanksgiving first portrays in graphic poetic detail his progressive descent into the depths of the sea—moving farther and farther away from Yahweh—and then lauds his divinely initiated “resurrection” from “the pit” (C'; cf. “Sheol,” C). Verse 4 constitutes the nucleus of the introversion, expressing in emphatic direct (included) speech the essential content of v. 2 on the one hand and v. 7 on the other (the midpoint of the entire book in terms of word count occurs in the immediately preceding bicolon, v. 3b). On one side of the poetic structural break (F) Jonah laments his removal from Yahweh's benevolent presence. On the other side (F') he confidently looks forward to entering that same presence again through prayer directed to the “holy temple” of Yahweh—its earthly locus (v. 4b) as well as its heavenly epitome (v. 7b).

Verses 8–9 express Jonah's joyous reaction to his miraculous rescue and bring his hymn to an end in a triumphant shout of victory: “Salvation belongs to [i.e. is the prerogative of] the Lord [alone]!”—which is the song's thematic and emotive peak. At first glance this final segment (A') does not appear to fit the overall structural pattern—that is, not until one observes the artful manner whereby it is linked, both lexically and semantically, with the closing narrative portion of chap. 1 (A; 1:16). Jonah's ethnocentric prejudice seems to shine through even his pious prayer as he cursorily dismisses “those who cling to worthless idols,” contrasting their religious behavior with his own righteous acts of “sacrifice” and “vows.” His ritualized words recall, with considerable irony, the reverent response of the heathen seamen as they fearfully witnessed Yahweh's impressive dealing with his unwilling messenger. So thematically important is this contrast that the structural pattern is reversed at the end in order to draw attention to it—i.e. A' and B' (cf. A and B). In addition, this third scene of the drama is effectively tied into the second by means of the correspondence between 2:8–9 and 1:16, a masterful compositional interlocking device. The final, soteriological line of the song is followed by the subtly satiric anticlimax: Jonah's “salvation” was effected by an ignominious expectoration.

4. *Chapter 3.* In a sense, the plot returns to its point of initiation at the onset of chap. 3 and the second half (or cycle) of the account. But of

⁸ Limburg, *Jonah* 63–64. Due to the heavy ironic overlay of chap. 2, from a rhetorical perspective I would prefer to call it an “Anti-peak” rather than a “Peak episode” (Longacre and Hwang, “Textlinguistic” 342). I do not discern any height of tension here, for the psalmic genre (i.e. individual thanksgiving) has implicitly resolved the issue of “Jonah's fate” (ibid. 344). Furthermore within a literary-structural framework Jonah's psalm corresponds only with his disputatious prayer of 4:2–3, not the entire chapter (ibid. 342).

course things are not the same in the interpersonal relations between Yahweh and his prophet due to the dramatic events that have transpired since the start of the story. The narrator's prominent cue that we are now hearing a new beginning—with significant variation—lies in the extensive, linearly-patterned lexical recursion that permeates this fourth scene (3:1–3). The following literal reproduction clearly displays the differences as well as matters of special interest (especially direct contrast). This figure does not include the final comment that closes the unit, a parenthetical remark pertaining to the setting—i.e. the size of Nineveh—which was a matter of great salvific significance to God, as Yahweh himself later points out (4:11, the latter forming an *inclusio* to enclose the book's second half).⁹

Figure 5

- 1:1: And it came the word of Yahweh to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying
 3:1: And it came the word of Yahweh to Jonah a second time, saying
 1:2: “Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and preach *against* it, because their evil has come up before me.”
 3:2: “Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and preach *unto* it the preaching that I am giving you.”
 1:3: And Jonah arose to *run away* to Tarshish *from before* Yahweh.
 3:3: And Jonah arose and *went* to Nineveh *according to* the word of Yahweh.

Scene 5 (3:4–10) also appears to be purposefully organized in the shape of a general chiasmus of content as shown below (figure 6). This complements another alternating linear pattern of speech and story segments (cf. scene 2, 1:4–16) that features a shift—and a dramatic surprise—in the middle (C; v. 6). Here the king of Nineveh takes center stage, a fact that is emphasized by a chiasmically contrastive arrangement of actions: (a) the king rises from his throne, (b) he doffs his royal robes, (b') he dons sackcloth, (a') he sits in the dust. Verse 5 may represent an introductory synopsis of what is subsequently reported in vv. 6–9, an instance of the common Hebrew recursive technique of panoramic → scenic narration (which is analogous to the [narrative] preview → [enunciated] report sequence where direct speech is involved, e.g. 4:8b).¹⁰ The thematic peak of the unit occurs at the very

⁹ The formatting problem of whether to set v. 3b at the conclusion of a narrative unit (paragraph), at the beginning of one, or within one arises in part due to the Janus-like nature of this segment. The book of Jonah is characterized by such strongly transitional hinge verses (e.g. 1:17; 2:10; 3:10; 4:4). According to my method of analysis, whether they open or close a larger section depends on the book's overall discourse arrangement based on patterns of continuity and points of discontinuity (cf. E. Wendland, “Continuity and Discontinuity in Hebrew Poetic Design,” *Discourse Perspectives on Hebrew Poetry in the Hebrew Scriptures* [ed. E. Wendland; New York/Reading: United Bible Societies, 1994]).

¹⁰ I discuss the latter technique in “Biblical Hebrew Narrative Structure,” *Selected Technical Articles Related to Translation (START)* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1984) 15. Notice that the king's royal proclamation functions implicitly as a basic tripartite prayer to God: invocation (the appellants named, v. 7b), motivation (grounds for the appeal, vv. 7c–8), petition (a plea for forgiveness, v. 9) (cf. 1:6, 14).

end (v. 10) when Yahweh overturns his decision to destroy the city, a reversal that is reinforced by the chiasmic shape in which it is reported: God saw (a) their doings, (b) their evil way; God repented of (b') the evil, (a') to do to them/he does not do it.¹¹ The first and minor problem of the story—that concerning the “evil” of Nineveh (cf. 1:2)—has now been resolved, and the stage is set for chap. 4 and the major problem, the “evil” of Jonah himself (cf. 4:1). The following putative concentric introversion coincides with the forward-moving development of the narrative account. This overlapping but integrated mode of composition is present in all of the proposed chiasmic formations of Jonah by virtue of the diachronic progression of events (including a few reversals) that advances the plot to its final climax and resolution at the end of the book.

Figure 6

- A. Story + speech: Jonah’s crusade—an ambiguous synopsis of the sermon: “Nineveh will be overturned,” i.e.
 - [+] the people will “turn over” in heart/repent, or
 - [-] the city will be completely destroyed (3:4)
- B. Story: the Ninevites believe the message and repent with fasting and sackcloth, presumably following the king’s speech of B’ (3:5)
- C. Story: the extreme/ultimate instance—even the king repents, wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes (3:6)
- B’. Speech: the royal proclamation—the motive and means of the general repentance are specified, reiterating the word “call” [*qārā*ʔ] of B and featuring the key word “turn” [*šûb*] (3:7–9)
- A’. Story: Yahweh’s reaction on seeing the penitence of Nineveh—no ambiguity: [+] he has compassion on the “turned over” people, and [-] he does not “overturn” the city (3:10)

5. *Chapter 4.* A cluster of key thematic terms—“turn,” “have compassion,” “evil,” “God”—clearly signals the initial peak that occurs at the end of scene 5. The final verse also acts as a transition to scene 6 in that it provides the motivation or occasion for Jonah’s surprising and severe response that is foregrounded in the following passage (4:1–4). The boundary-overlapping function here (i.e. anadiplosis) is also signaled through a fourfold reiteration of the term “evil” (*rāʿâ*) in 3:10–4:1. This word also participates in an *inclusio* that structurally bounds and emotively colors the entire unit—namely, the “burning” anger of Jonah, which the narrator calls “evil” (4:1) and Yahweh condemns as not being “good” (4:4). The center of the scene focuses upon Jonah’s bitter speech to Yahweh, a contentious complaint in the form

¹¹ Tribble gives a concise summary of the key lexical correspondences that exist between the king’s prayer (3:7–9) and God’s response (3:10) (*Rhetorical Criticism* 189).

of a prayer.¹² Structurally this piece corresponds in terms of the dramatic narrative progression to the song of thanksgiving in chap. 2. It also matches stylistically in a general way with respect to both similarity (e.g. its self-centeredness) and contrast (e.g. its emotive tone). Again, but quite openly this time, Jonah condemns himself before Yahweh with his own words.

The simple linear but cumulatively contrastive development of chap. 4 is as follows:

Figure 7

- 4:1–4: Jonah's burning anger over Nineveh (Yahweh spared it—life)
- 4:5–9: Jonah's anger over a plant (Yahweh burned it—death)
- 4:10–11: Yahweh teaches Jonah a lesson by contrasting the plant with the people of Nineveh: life and death are in the hands of a completely sovereign but gracious God; (sin is serious, but) mercy triumphs over judgment

The true chronological position of 4:5 in the account is debatable. It may well be a narrative flashback (i.e. to follow 3:4 in time; cf. 1:5, 10), but this does not require actual textual transposition.¹³ Yahweh's attention shifts from Nineveh to Jonah as he tries to instruct his errant prophet by means of a three-staged supernatural object lesson (4:6–8a; cf. 1:17/2:10) that concludes in another expression of Jonah's ire followed by a divine rebuke (4:8b–9; cf. 4:3–4, i.e. structural epiphora). As in the case of chap. 3, Yahweh rounds out the narrative development by making the crucial thematic point of the unit—there by action (mercy), here by word (mercy again).¹⁴ Verses 10–11, which embody an *a fortiori* argument, culminate in a pointed, admonitory rhetorical question.¹⁵ This final pair of passages is distinguished structurally (i.e. falling outside the preceding general linear pattern) as being the expository epilogue of the book—thus appropriately articulated to any hard-hearted “Jonah”-type by Yahweh, the divine Teacher himself.

¹² Tribble does a good job of pointing out the irony, intratextual lexical recursion, syntactic structure, and gap-filling function of Jonah's prayer in 4:2–3 (ibid. 199–204). But she overlooks an important intentional gap in its internal construction—that is, a rhetorically motivated lacuna designed to facilitate Jonah's argument: “this” (= what has happened here at Nineveh [today]) + “my word” (= you [Yahweh] will surely show mercy to the Ninevites [if they repent]).

¹³ As proposed for example in ibid. 119, 205.

¹⁴ Tribble presents an excellent, if elaborate, structural argument in favor of the translation “have pity” in 4:10 (ibid. 216–223). She mars this, however, by several unwarranted implicational comments, for example: “Two theologies account for the salvation of Nineveh: the theology of repentance and the theology of pity. . . . Ironically, Jonah becomes the model for Yahweh” (ibid. 223).

¹⁵ This last question does not really “leave the plot open-ended” (ibid. 108), nor does it give Jonah a “hold over the divine argument [through] the power of an answer” (ibid. 217). True, we do not know what or how Jonah may have answered (or, indeed, any contemporary respondent). But the emphatically affirmative reply that is desired—yes, demanded—by Yahweh to press the story/prophesy home is unequivocal.

Another concentric overlay heightens the interpersonal interaction of these final two scenes (6 and 7) and also intensifies the incongruity of Jonah's indefensible anger:

Figure 8

- A. (4:1–2) Revelation of the problem—Jonah's anger and consequent lament: the prophet confesses why he ran away from Yahweh and his mission to Nineveh (flashback)—he anticipated (flashforward to 3:10) what Yahweh would do—i.e. have mercy, forgive and save
- B. (4:3–4) Request and response—Jonah asks to die, but Yahweh asks why he is angry
- C. (4:5–6) Reprieve—Yahweh “provides” a plant to shade Jonah from the heat of the sun and his own anger
- C'. (4:7–8a) Retribution—Yahweh “provides” a worm to kill the plant and the wind to fan Jonah's anger again
- B'. (4:8b–9) Request, response and retort—Jonah wishes to die, and Yahweh again asks why he is angry
- A'. (4:10–11) Resolution of the problem—Yahweh explains by a lesser-to-greater analogy why he showed mercy and spared the people of Nineveh (according to his essential attributes as summarized by Jonah in v. 2)

The two dialogue portions of this chapter (A + B; B' + A') combine to form a tense disputation on the issue of divine sovereignty. The locutionary turns balance each other perfectly as shown below—that is, both quantitatively (in the number of words) and qualitatively (according to the speaker and type of speech):¹⁶

Figure 9

- A. (4:2–3) Jonah's monologue—a prayer-lament (39 words in Hebrew)
- B. (4:4) Yahweh's query (3 words)
- (4:8b) Jonah's response (3 words)
- B'. (4:9a) Yahweh's query (5 words)
- (4:9b) Jonah's response (5 words)
- A'. (4:10–11) Yahweh's monologue—a disputation-reproof (39 words)

To conclude this section on the purposeful compositional patterning of Jonah, I present the following chart that summarizes some (but not all) of the book's main features of structurally significant repetition. This device both demarcates the text into discrete segments and also unifies them all

¹⁶ J. M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1990) 417. Tribble feels that this “impressive symmetry suggests that Jonah and Yhwh are evenly matched and that each emulates the other” (*Rhetorical Criticism* 224). But this proposal misses the coterminous linear progression that builds to a predominant peak in the clinching divine argument of 4:10–11. Thus the “ending of the book” is by no means “irresolute” (ibid. 224), for Yahweh is firmly in control, rhetorically as well as regally.

into a complete, coherent discourse (i.e. *anadiplosis* = adjacent recursive overlap, *inclusio* = similar unit beginning and ending, *anaphora* = similar unit beginnings, *epiphora* = similar unit endings):¹⁷

Figure 10

1:1/3; 3:1/3	<i>anaphora</i> :	Jonah's divine commission and reaction
1:2/3:2; 3:3/4:11	<i>inclusio</i> :	Yahweh and Jonah in relation to "Nineveh the great city"
2:1-2/4:2	<i>anaphora</i> :	"And Jonah prayed to Yahweh and said"
1:17/2:10	<i>inclusio</i> :	the "great fish" narrative framework
1:17/2:10/3:10/4:11	<i>epiphora</i> :	divine deliverance of Jonah and of Nineveh
3:9-10/4:2	<i>anadiplosis</i> :	Yahweh's compassion is appealed to, applied and argued against in relation to Nineveh
1:17/2:1	<i>anadiplosis</i> :	"Jonah . . . inside the fish"
1:16/2:9	<i>epiphora</i> :	the sailors/Jonah "sacrifice and make vows"
1:2/2:2/3:2/4:2	<i>anaphora</i> :	"preach/pray" [qārāʾ]
1:3/4:2	<i>anaphora</i> :	Jonah tried to "flee to Tarshish"
4:1/4:4	<i>inclusio</i> :	focus upon Jonah's anger
4:3b-4/4:8b-9a	<i>epiphora</i> :	Jonah says, "I am angry enough to die!" Yahweh asks, "Is it good to be so angry?" (closure)
1:4-5a/1:9; 1:10/1:16	<i>inclusio</i> :	"Yahweh" + "fear"
1:2/4:1	<i>anaphora</i> :	problem of the "evil" [rāʿā] of Nineveh/Jonah
3:1/4:2	<i>anaphora</i> :	"the saying of Yahweh was to Jonah" versus "the saying" (of Jonah) to Yahweh
1:6/3:9	<i>epiphora</i> :	close of the captain/king's prayer "that we not perish"
1:2/4:11	<i>inclusio</i> :	Yahweh is moved to punish/spare Nineveh

There are other significant instances of lexical and topical recursion within the book,¹⁸ but the ones listed above include most of those that happen to occur on a structural boundary and thus help to segment the discourse even as they also cement the various parts together to form a cohesive whole. In addition the various larger arrangements and parallel patterns that are thereby constructed call aural attention to points of special emphasis in the development of Yahweh's unique prophetic message to his people via the experience of his privileged but perverse messenger Jonah.

¹⁷ I define these four compositional terms more fully with reference to Psalm 30 in *Discourse Perspectives* 45, 49-50.

¹⁸ These intricate compositional micropatterns are best elucidated in Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism* passim.

VI. SOME HERMENEUTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE PATTERNED,
INTERLOCKING STRUCTURE OF JONAH

The symmetrically fashioned discourse of the book of Jonah raises as well as answers a number of interesting hermeneutical questions that I will briefly explore in this final section. The discussion is organized according to three general areas of attention that occupy one during the related activities of Biblical exegesis and exposition—namely, text, context and cotext. How can a recognition of the structural patterning and other stylistic features of the book's larger organization help us to better understand and in turn explain its essential message to a contemporary constituency?

1. *Structure in relation to text.* One of the major controversies in modern Jonah studies involves the scope of the text itself—that is, the discourse as originally composed. The reliability of the MT is not at issue, for this seems to be rather well preserved and the variants are not all that significant.¹⁹ Rather, the question concerns whether the psalm of chap. 2 is original. In other words, was it composed by the author of the rest of the book, or was it incorporated at a later stage of textual transmission?²⁰ The following are several macrotextual principles that would argue for the retention of this poetic pericope as an integral and important constituent of the complete book.²¹

(1) The citation of poetry within a narrative prose cotext is a regular feature of Biblical literary style (e.g. Genesis 49; Exodus 15; Num 21:27–30; Deuteronomy 32–33; Judges 5; 1 Sam 2:1–10; 2 Sam 1:19–27; 2 Kgs 19:21–28; 1 Chr 16:8–36).

(2) The finely wrought symmetrical organization of the text as a whole would be undone were the psalm to be excluded, in particular the structural correspondence (and ironic contrast) between the two prayers of Jonah (2:2–9; 4:2–3).²² These two antithetical pericopes even begin in exactly the same way: “And he (Jonah) prayed to the Lord . . . and said.” Furthermore both units incorporate traditional religious (cultic) diction²³—with this funda-

¹⁹ The integrity of the Hebrew text is supported by commentators as diverse as L. C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 191; H. L. Ellison, “Jonah,” *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. F. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985) 365; Limburg, *Jonah* 33; Sasson, *Jonah* 10.

²⁰ For a survey of the opposing opinions see Alexander, *Jonah* 63–69.

²¹ There is no evidence that the text “ever circulated without the psalm” (G. M. Landes, “The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah,” *Int* 21 [1967] 10). For additional supporting evidence see the discussion in D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1987) 470–473; H. C. Brichto, *Towards a Grammar of Biblical Poetics* (New York: Oxford, 1992) 73; Limburg, *Jonah* 32.

²² This has also been noted by J. S. Ackerman, “Jonah,” *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. R. Alter and F. Kermode; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1987) 238. Tribble arrives at quite a different evaluation. Her “analysis supports source critical findings that deem the psalm a secondary addition to the narrative” (*Rhetorical Criticism* 172). Even in terms of her own study, however, it is difficult to see how “the psalm disrupts symmetry” (*ibid.* 173). On the contrary, a careful reading of her work would lead one to just the opposite conclusion (e.g. *ibid.* 110–111)—namely, that Jonah's prayer of 4:2–3 is “juxtaposed to the psalm in the external design” (*ibid.* 199).

²³ Cf. Landes, “Kerygma” 17–18.

mental difference: "The themes that drew forth Jonah's praise in the psalm are ironically the very ones that cause him grief in his second prayer."²⁴

(3) There is a major and deliberate intratextual contrast developed also between Jonah's self-centered prayer of thanksgiving in chap. 2 and the surrounding appeals of the pagans with whom he comes into coerced contact, notably the fervent exhortations of the captain in 1:6 and the Ninevite king in 3:7-9. For self-righteous Jonah, on the other hand, no act of penance or confession of sin or guilt was apparently required to repair his supposed standing before Yahweh.

(4) Brichto also notes the psalm's function as the narrative's "peripeteia"—that is, "the hinge, the point of change or reversal in the drama's action."²⁵ In this case it provides a dramatic pause (in addition to the character contrast noted above) before the onset of the second and climactic half of the story.

(5) The narrative development of 1:17 and 3:1 is not properly motivated and executed if the psalm is excised. Thus Yahweh "appoints" the great fish to swallow Jonah in the former passage and "tells" the fish to expel Jonah in the latter. But what is the point? Jonah simply becomes a passive participant having no interaction with Yahweh, which is such a crucial aspect of the final stages of the book in terms of both plot and theme. Besides, without the words of the psalm ringing in the background the subsequent obedience of Jonah to the divine commission (i.e. paying his vow; cf. 2:9b) seems quite arbitrary and out of character.

(6) There are a surprising number of topical and plot-related motifs that tie Jonah's song to the rest of the text.²⁶ This is significant because it is characteristic of the psalms of Scripture to be rather general in their reference and hence universal in their potential applicability. The concluding utterance, "Salvation belongs to Yahweh," is especially noteworthy in this regard. Indeed it is highly ironic that Jonah did not realize the full implications of what he was praising God for here—whether with regard to a sinking ship, a transient plant or a teeming metropolis (4:10-11). This short exclamation of closure, which occurs near the book's structural center, summarizes the entire narrative and "being an apt commentary on the significance of the adjacent narrative . . . is basic to the meaning of the book."²⁷

To summarize: While "excisability has never been a legitimate criterion for questioning the integrity of a pericope,"²⁸ compositional compatibility as outlined above is a valid criterion for supporting such textual integrity. Thus I would disagree with the suggestion that "interpolators also have strong stakes in neatly balanced books."²⁹ Such a hidden agenda of the Biblical "interpolator" (perhaps the interpolating scribe/copyist is a better

²⁴ Allen, *Jonah* 199.

²⁵ Brichto, *Biblical Poetics* 74.

²⁶ For a summary see Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* 471-472; Limburg, *Jonah* 32. Tribble too points out many of these correspondences in her analysis (*Rhetorical Criticism* 160-171).

²⁷ Allen, *Jonah* 185.

²⁸ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* 470.

²⁹ Sasson, *Jonah* 203.

analogy) is much more likely to be theological and explanatory in nature rather than artistic and/or compositional.

An adequate grasp of the forward-moving but backward-reflecting discourse organization of the text of Jonah helps one to discern focal (pressure) points of special semantic significance within the whole. Structural centers and conclusions in particular are likely to indicate prominent aspects of the book's principal religious theme and rhetorical (prophetic-hortatory) purpose—for example, the incipient irony of Jonah's self-incriminating creedal confession in 1:9 (at the core of an extended introversion), or the indicting interrogation of Yahweh at the very end of the book (4:10–11). Examples of this sort of macrotextual highlighting are evident in all of the longer passages displayed above. Similarly an understanding of the larger, patterned arrangement of the composition can sometimes aid one in the interpretation of certain included passages of a problematic nature. For example, does the slight difference in lexical form that exists between the two accounts of Jonah's commissioning have any thematic importance—in particular with regard to the Hebrew preposition that follows the central verb “proclaim”: *ʿal* (1:2) and *ʿel* (3:2)? “Most scholars . . . follow the LXX in sensing no perceptible difference and argue that [the two prepositions] are basically interchangeable, especially in ‘late’ Hebrew.”³⁰ As was pointed out earlier, however, the carefully constructed parallels between 1:1–3 and 3:1–3 would seem to indicate that even such a minor disparity is significant (i.e. why make a shift at this very spot amid so much other verbal recursion?). The difference should therefore be reflected in one's translation—e.g. “preach against it” (1:2) versus “proclaim to it” (3:2; NIV).³¹

2. *Structure in relation to context.* Another controversial issue in current research on Jonah is contextual or situational in nature and concerns the relative historicity of the book, a subject that was already briefly touched upon in part 1. In relation to the present section, then, the basic question is this: Does the text's intricate discourse structure lend any special evidence either one way or the other in the debate? For most scholars the principle is obvious: The more overtly a work is fashioned in a literary-like manner—including the use of symmetrical compositional patterns, but also incorporating such rhetorical devices as hyperbole, intensification, lexical repetition, free direct speech, Scriptural allusion, syntactic movement, and temporal displacement (e.g. flashbacks)³²—the less likely it is to be historical or factive in essence. For example, in T. E. Fretheim's estimation

the carefully worked out structures in the book . . . suggest a non-historical intention on the author's part. Such a concern for structure and symmetry is

³⁰ Ibid. 73.

³¹ Sasson presents a very detailed and convincing lexical argument in favor of such an interpretation (ibid. 74–75).

³² I discuss a number of these literary devices in a forthcoming article in *AUSS* entitled “Recursion and Variation in the ‘Prophecy’ of Jonah: On the Rhetorical Impact of Stylistic Technique in Hebrew Narrative Discourse, with special reference to irony and enigma.”

not as characteristic of straightforward historical writing and is more suggestive of an imaginative product.³³

But how valid is such an evaluative equation? Is Jonah “written in a style that impedes historical inquiry”³⁴ or not—or does literary style *per se* have nothing to do with the issue? While agreeing with Sasson on the point that “whether Jonah is history or fiction . . . is likely to be debated as long as Jonah is read,”³⁵ I feel that it is important for a Biblical exegete, commentator, or literary critic to come down on one side or the other due to several larger, cotextual implications that arise as a result, particularly in relation to the key NT passages that refer to Jonah’s Ninevite crusade and its results.

As argued in part 1, I prefer to regard Jonah as being fundamentally an historical account that dramatizes for didactic-hortatory purposes an incident that actually happened to the prophet of the same name mentioned in 2 Kgs 14:25. The narrator obviously used a number of effective literary techniques in selecting and shaping the events that are reported (in addition to those mentioned above, irony and enigma) and in spotlighting certain specific ones with a rhetorical (persuasive) objective in mind. But the presence of such poetic features does not in itself necessarily contradict the book’s facticity. As D. Alexander correctly observes:

The fact that the author of Jonah employs particular literary devices tells us more about his skill as an author than about the historicity or non-historicity of his account. . . . There is no reason why a skillful author could not use these [literary structures and patterns] and still present an accurate account of what took place.³⁶

There are, in fact, several structural and stylistic features that would encourage (but not prove) such a perspective on the book’s basic historicity.

(1) The place to begin is in the beginning, and at this initial juncture the author clearly signals the compound nature of the discourse that he is about to present—i.e. narrative + prophetic: “And the word of Yahweh came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying” (cf. 1 Kgs 17:8–9, 16, 24). Significantly this formulaic indication of a factual text type is given twice for emphasis (cf. Jonah 3:1). Of course this might possibly be only the parody of a prophetic commission, but I find such an explanation to be inconsistent with the recognized Hebrew reverential regard for both the name of Yahweh and also his proclaimed word in such contexts involving a divine verbal inspiration.

(2) Many modern commentators view the book as being a parable,³⁷ but both the length of the text as well as its undeniable generic, structural and thematic complexity would argue against such a classification. No Biblical

³³ T. E. Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) 66.

³⁴ Sasson, *Jonah* 328.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Alexander, *Jonah* 73.

³⁷ For example Allen, *Jonah* 177; P. C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) 213.

parables are as long or as intricately composed in terms of either form or meaning as is Jonah. There is nothing comparable even in the longer parables of Christ in the NT.³⁸ Furthermore the characters of a parable are generally anonymous and the events obviously fictional, having little or no connection with any concrete historical reality.³⁹ That is simply not the case with Jonah, a narrative in which arguably the main character is Yahweh himself, and an account in which the historicity of Nineveh is a feature that contributes a great deal to the credibility, relevance, and hence also the impact of the message.

(3) Parables and parable-like texts in the OT are usually explained or interpreted after their telling (e.g. Nathan's indictment of King David, 2 Sam 12:1–9).⁴⁰ The apical divine pronouncement (stated in the form of a question) in 4:10–11 is not an interpretation of the preceding "parable" of Jonah, "for nothing in these verses suggests that the narrator is shifting into another sphere of comprehension."⁴¹ On the contrary: The literal, objective meaning and the didactic, affective (not hermeneutical) purpose are foregrounded by the elaborate rhetorical (argumentative) form of the utterance itself, by its final structural position in the discourse (outside the bifid parallel construction of the book as a whole as earlier illustrated [figure 1]), and also by its summary nature (i.e. concisely tying together the content of chaps. 3–4). There is in addition a reversively antanaclastic *inclusio* that extends to the very beginning of the narrative: Yahweh is indeed concerned "about" (*al*) "the great city of Nineveh" which Jonah was told to preach "against" (*al*) in 1:2.

(4) The narrative texture in general is similar to that manifested by the Elijah and Elisha stories—for example, in the account of Elijah's travels in 1 Kings 17, which similarly presents a record of Yahweh's supernatural power over nature (including its creatures), even death itself, in conjunction with the conversion experience of a pagan family. If these are regarded as being (largely) factual records, then why not the story of Jonah, which just happens to fit into this particular time frame of Israelite history? Thus a careful comparative reading of the narratives in Kings would clearly lead one to a conclusion that is the exact opposite of the following:

Every aspect of the story is so different from the conventional prophetic narratives that one suspects a different approach to the text is more appropriate.⁴²

The meaningful connection between Jonah and Elijah is reinforced by the strong contrast that is implicit in their respective death-wish accounts (Jonah 4:3, 8–9; 1 Kgs 19:4) and their associated complaints to Yahweh (Jonah 4:2; 1 Kgs 19:10).

³⁸ Contra Allen, *Jonah* 178.

³⁹ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* 436.

⁴⁰ The text-hermeneutical procedure for NT parables is not really pertinent here, contra Allen, *Jonah* 178.

⁴¹ Sasson, *Jonah* 336.

⁴² Craigie, *Twelve Prophets* 213.

(5) Hebrew narrative composition often turns out to be very intricately constructed, despite having a deceptively simple surface structure.⁴³ Such patterning is not primarily esthetic in purpose (mere artistic embellishment) but is essentially pragmatic—that is, it functions to alert the attentive audience to boundaries and peaks within the text so that they can follow the development of the account (and its theological implications) aurally, despite the absence of visual signs present in the typography and design structure of a well-formatted printed page (see further below).

Thus the overall structure and style of Jonah tend to substantiate the earlier conclusion that the book may be classified as an instance of dramatic, didactic, factive, typological narration. Like any one of the chosen prophets of Yahweh who brought a divine word to his people, the author had an urgent faith-life-related lesson for his audience. He accordingly conveyed this message to them in dynamic, hortatory fashion—in a most vivid manner that stimulated their imagination, engaged their emotions,⁴⁴ and thereby also enabled them to more fully participate in the rhetoric of the book's underlying religious argument. Moreover the discourse is clearly more tragic than comic, for despite its subtle humorous elements and pervasive irony the dominant focus is upon Jonah himself (in overt contrast to the merciful character of God) and the prophet's recalcitrant reaction to a serious divine test of his faith and faithfulness. In the end the prognosis for Jonah is not good as he had passed through the typical "six phases of Old Testament tragedy—dilemma, choice, catastrophe, suffering, perception or realization of one's error, and death."⁴⁵ Certainly the intimation of Jonah's imminent demise—psychologically and perhaps also spiritually, if not physically—is intense (cf. 4:3, 9b) as the narrative draws to its pointed, all-(receptor)-embracing conclusion.

The book's historical basis also renders its central message—its particular word of Yahweh—all the more urgent and theologically relevant today (as is true also for its illustrative use by Christ in Matt 12:39–41; Luke 11:29–30). Yahweh's penetrating question must eventually be confronted and answered by everyone who claims to be his follower, whether professionally so engaged (like Jonah the prophet) or not (i.e. all nonvocational witnesses). The rhetorical form of the query gives a clear indication of the wholehearted assent that Yahweh expects—more so in deeds rather than creeds (which Jonah knew so well). To be sure, God has every right to graciously show mercy to, just as he has every sovereign right to inflict punishment upon, any segment of his creation at any time (4:2, 10–11; cf. 1:2). Furthermore he expects all of his called, saved (2:9–10) and sent (3:1–2) servants to adopt the same preeminently compassionate attitude, and to act accordingly—especially toward those who most need it.

⁴³ Cf. Wendland, "Hebrew Narrative" *passim*.

⁴⁴ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* 438.

⁴⁵ B. L. Woodward, "Jonah," *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. L. Ryken and T. Longman III; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 352; cf. also L. Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 145.

Thus the enduring message of Jonah is as multifaceted as its overall structural organization is dense,⁴⁶ and there is no special value in trying to narrow the possibilities down to a single dominant theme or emphasis. Rather, the book speaks to assumed adherents in various religious situations and sociocultural settings, particularly in their relationship to the non-believers with whom they come into contact. To be somewhat more specific, the tragic personal experience of this prophet is a type of that which awaits all those self-proclaimed disciples who, whether individually or corporately, set their will and way in opposition to Yahweh's word and his saving program with respect to any aspect of its challenging social, moral, evangelistic and/or edificational obligations over against their fellow human beings.

3. *Structure in relation to context.* In terms of priority, the relevant context of Jonah as a whole constitutes all of the Hebrew documents of Scripture that the book either cites, paraphrases, or alludes to during its telling—or singing/chanting, in the case of his psalm. A number of perceptive commentators have called attention to the extent of such intertextuality in Jonah.⁴⁷ The special concern of the present discussion is to suggest some possible structural significance for this important component of cross-textual resonance. As it turns out, most of the key compositional junctures in the text are reinforced by this very feature—namely, a double articulation as it were of the text on two levels: present (the current setting) and past (the prior occurrence of the citation or allusion in Hebrew religious literature). There follows a selective summary of the more noteworthy of these instances.

(1) 1:9—In his structurally centered confession of faith (“the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land”), Jonah mentions three definitive points of the Hebrew cosmos in a manner reminiscent of the panegyric psalms (e.g. Pss 95:5; 115:3; 121:2; 135:6; 146:6 [cf. also Exod 20:11; Neh 9:6]).

(2) 1:14—In the highly emotive prayer of the pagan sailors, which initiates the climax of scene 2, the words they use call to mind the prohibition concerning “innocent blood” found in Deut 21:8 and Jeremiah's warning about the taking of his life in Jer 26:15. Furthermore in this prayer we have “almost a miniature *cento*, that is, . . . a composition that draws together, if not always known biblical passages, at least perfectly recognizable Hebraic sentiments.”⁴⁸ It thus sets up a poignant contrast with the personally introverted thanksgiving prayer of Jonah soon to follow.

(3) As has already been noted, the psalm of Jonah is permeated with near (for the most part not exact) quotations from the Psalter.⁴⁹ Among

⁴⁶ For a good summary of the various thematic possibilities see J. H. Walton, “The Object Lesson of Jonah 4:5–7 and the Purpose of the Book of Jonah,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2 (1992) 50; for more detail see Magonet, *Jonah* 90–112.

⁴⁷ See for example the listing in Limburg, *Jonah* 29–31; Sasson, *Jonah* 23, 168–200, 280; Magonet, *Jonah*, chap. 4. The last mentioned includes a helpful discussion of methods for dealing with such “quotations” (pp. 66–67) and “reminiscences” (p. 65).

⁴⁸ Sasson, *Jonah* 136.

⁴⁹ See Alexander, *Jonah* 113; Ellison, *Jonah* 364; Magonet, *Jonah* 50.

other things (e.g. contributing to the general contrastive irony of the text) such a concentration of traditional and undoubtedly well-known religious language would suggest the importance of this pericope (2:2–9) within the overall structure of the book (cf. discussion above). It helps to set the fickle character of Jonah as a person who is thoroughly cognizant of the immutable word of Yahweh that came to him, but who is reluctant, if not unwilling, to put it into practice in trying or unwelcome circumstances (i.e. from his biased perspective). Scriptural citation and paraphrase also serve to highlight critical thematic elements within the song, notably its final exultation: “Salvation is to/for Yahweh!”—a close echo of Ps 3:8, which also stresses the ultimate salvific activity of Yahweh.

(4) In a literary piece such as Jonah’s thanksgiving that is characterized by intertextuality, any perceptible lapse in the pattern or procedure may be significant. Thus just after the poem’s structural-thematic midpoint in v. 4 (cf. figure 4), as Jonah apparently experiences his deepest psychological and spiritual demise (“going down”), there are no psalmic citations evident in the text. This may be an indication that “Jonah’s descent from conventional experience is matched by a move beyond conventional language.”⁵⁰

(5) 3:9–10—The language found in the final and peak point of chap. 3—namely, the king of Nineveh’s reverential appeal for mercy and Yahweh’s merciful response—closely resembles that of Jer 18:7–8; 26:3, 13, 19, which set forth the divine principle for which the Jonah text seems to be an apt illustration.⁵¹ Another significant parallel lies in Exodus after the golden calf incident. Moses pleads with Yahweh to “turn from [his] fierce anger” and to “repent of the evil” he is about to inflict upon faithless Israel (Exod 32:12). With amazing grace, Yahweh does so (32:14). As far as the passage in Jonah is concerned, here we have “an idea that was formerly restricted to the relationship between God and Israel [being] expanded to embrace the ‘pagan’ world.”⁵² The similarity of Jonah 3:9 to Joel 2:13–14a is most likely a result of the reverse process, where the latter makes partial reference to the former, yet also for the purpose of accentuating his message at that point. But there is another apparent allusion here—namely, to Israel’s protest to Moses (really Yahweh) in Exod 14:12. These words form a sandwich around the confessional middle, one irony reverberating off another. As Magonet observes: “The effect is to set up a series of very powerful ‘echoes’ in which each text interacts with the other, and both react within the ‘Jonah’ context itself.”⁵³

(6) 4:2—This verse, the heart of scene 6, concatenates a series of OT textual analogues, most of which are helpfully set out for comparative purposes and discussed in Sasson.⁵⁴ The original expression of this list of divine attributes appears to be uttered by Yahweh himself (Exod 34:6–7), and

⁵⁰ Limburg, *Jonah* 68, quoting J. Magonet.

⁵¹ Limburg, *Jonah* 30; cf. also David’s appeal in 2 Sam 12:22.

⁵² Magonet, *Jonah* 71, 77–79.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 75.

⁵⁴ Sasson, *Jonah* 280–282.

this heightens the irony as Jonah in effect uses the citation in his argument against the loving-kindness of Yahweh. A reiteration of the term “compassionate” (*niḥam*) establishes the emphatic contrast between this prayer and that of the king, just recounted (3:9). It also signals the thematic importance of these words in relation to the final climactic portion of the narrative that has just begun (chap. 4).

(7) 4:3, 8b/9b—The affinity of these two passages to a similar morbid wish expressed by the prophet Elijah has already been noted (cf. 1 Kgs 19:4). Each is followed by Yahweh’s concerned corrective (cf. 19:5–8) and concludes, the second more strongly than the first, a corresponding segment of the account that highlights the self-pitying pique and religious unreasonableness of Jonah. This sets into relief the opposite attitude demonstrated by Yahweh, as articulated in the story’s epilogic peak (4:10–11). On the surface of it Elijah did have a reason to be despondent unto death. Jonah definitely did not, and the intertextual resonance here plays a great part in the text’s overall communicative effectiveness.

(8) 4:10–11—In this case the verbal correspondence with an external text is not so evident and therefore may well be debated. At any rate, Yahweh’s words exemplify an ancient and widespread method of argumentation—namely, *a fortiori* or *qal wāḥōmer*, from the lesser (minor premise) to the greater (major premise)—e.g. Gen 44:8; Deut 31:27; 2 Kgs 5:13. Somewhat closer to home intertextually and thematically much more relevant, however, is Ezekiel 15, which features a similar interrogative disputation style that is based on a prominent botanical figure of comparison. Both passages are also pointedly contrastive along two crucial semantic planes, involving the particular object of divine concern and the outcome of his sovereign activity. The various correspondences and contrasts are displayed in the following figure:

Figure 11

MINOR PREMISE	Ezek 15:1–5	Jonah 4:10
Figure of comparison	(grape)vine	(castor-bean) vine
Focal characteristic	useless wood	short lifespan
Expected consequence	burned by fire	simply disregarded
MAJOR PREMISE	Ezek 15:6–8	Jonah 4:11
Topic of comparison	Jerusalem	Nineveh
Focal characteristic	unfaithful to Yahweh	ignorant of Yahweh
Expected consequence	total ruin (“set face against”)	timely reprieve (look with “pity” on)

A powerful irony naturally comes to the fore in the disparate fates of the two opposing peoples, as symbolized by their capitals: Jerusalem, Yahweh’s chosen city, lies desolate, while the epitome of ancient Near Eastern iniquity is given a divine reprieve (even their domestic animals). Whether this is a genuine case of intertextuality in operation cannot be determined with certainty. But the obvious foregrounding of “the great city” of Nineveh typifies the uniqueness of this prophetically narrative discourse. It is proph-

ecy turned upside down as it were—the (hi)story of an unwilling prophet sent out to an odious, pagan land, which unexpectedly receives great blessing from a generous application of all the familiar covenantal qualities of Yahweh, the great God of Israel (4:2 → 4:11).

Another important cotextual implication needs to be noted in closing, and this concerns the text as it exists in translation—an interlingual context, as it were. It is one thing to discuss and display the results of a comprehensive discourse analysis of a given Biblical book, but what are the practical results as far as ordinary readers and hearers of the text are concerned? Of what possible benefit can all this detail be for them? In the first place, the exegetical insights arising from such a study need to be applied in the act of translation itself, with regard to such aspects as discourse prominence, semantic equivalence, thematic emphasis, emotive impact and esthetic appeal. But this is a wide-ranging subject that merits separate consideration.⁵⁵

Finally then I wish to point out one prominent feature of the text of Scripture that is not usually accorded the attention it deserves in the field of contemporary translation and publication. This has to do with the compositional symmetry and segmental demarcation of the discourse itself as displayed on the printed page. Most modern versions now at least indicate what appear to be the basic paragraph divisions and by means of a distinctive lineation also suggest where poetry most likely occurs in the original. But is this all that can or ought to be done? What about all the structural patterns that have been exemplified and described above? Surely at least some of these are credible enough to be regarded as part of the authorial intended meaning that was conveyed by his text and hence worthy of being transmitted also to current readers. But this leads to a rather difficult practical question: How can such an endeavor best be carried out—that is, in view of an extremely conservative, profit-orientated publishing tradition, coupled with a relatively unsophisticated reading public?

The issue cannot be developed here,⁵⁶ and only a single extended example from Jonah can be given in order to illustrate the point—and with that also the meaning-potential that such graphic design procedures have for enhancing one's awareness of the significant structural dynamics of (most) Biblical literature, prose as well as poetry. The following portion at least suggests what might be done (with or without modification) to increase a reader's visual comprehension of a given text's artistic and functionally-motivated construction. Via a more informed reader, perhaps also listeners will benefit as well—that is, through a more correct and convincing oral elocution of the discourse. This concern for the medium of message transmission was certainly an important aspect of the rhetoric of the original

⁵⁵ I discuss some of these issues in a forthcoming article in *BT* entitled "Five Key Aspects of Style in Jonah and (Possibly) How to Translate Them."

⁵⁶ For a detailed treatment of this important topic, see J. P. Louw and E. R. Wendland, *Graphic Design and Bible Reading: Exploratory Studies in the Typographical Representation of the Text of Scripture in Translation* (Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1993).

(i.e. *pronunciatio*)⁵⁷ —a factor that undoubtedly led, under inspiration, to the creation of such intricately patterned arrangements in the Scriptures and that in turn supports the interest in their communication also today.⁵⁸

The sample text chosen is that of Jonah 4. Of course only several of the most important compositional qualities of this pericope can be effectively displayed (due to the processing limitations noted above). But perhaps this is sufficient to exemplify yet one more of the advantages of a comprehensive, genre-oriented, text-analytical approach. The English translation reproduced below in modified format is that of the NRSV (used by permission):

Figure 12

- (4:1) But this was very displeasing to Jonah,
and he became angry.
- (4:2) He prayed to the Lord and said,
“O Lord! Is not this what I said
while I was still in my own country?
That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning;
for I knew that
*You are a gracious God and merciful,
slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast love,
and ready to relent from punishing.*
- (4:3) And now, O Lord, please take my life from me,
for it is better for me to die than to live.”
- (4:4) And the Lord said,
“Is it right for you to be angry?”
- (4:5) Then Jonah went out of the city
and sat down east of the city,
and made a booth for himself there.
He sat down under it in the shade,
waiting to see what would become of the city.
- (4:6) The Lord God appointed a bush,
and made it come over Jonah,
to give shade over his head,
to save him from his discomfort.
So Jonah was very happy about the bush.
- (4:7) But when dawn came up the next day,
God appointed a worm that attacked the
bush,
so that it withered.

⁵⁷ Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism* 8–9. In *pronunciatio*, the least often considered oratorical technique, the other four components of ancient rhetoric (i.e. *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria*) find their ultimate manifestation.

⁵⁸ Cf. E. R. Wendland, “Duplicating the Dynamics of Oral Discourse in Print,” *Notes on Translation* 7/4 (1993).

