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**THOMAS M. BOLIN,
ETERNAL DELIGHT AND DELICIOUSNESS: THE
BOOK OF JONAH AFTER TEN YEARS**

ETERNAL DELIGHT AND DELICIOUSNESS: THE BOOK OF JONAH AFTER TEN YEARS

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In January 1997 a lightly revised version of my doctoral dissertation, completed two years earlier, was published in the JSOT Supplement series.¹ The book was a re-examination of the book of Jonah and, by means of this analysis, a critique of several methodologies then at work in Hebrew Bible studies. One such methodology was the circular practice of providing a historical reconstruction for biblical texts of an unknown date by appeal to other biblical texts whose dates were equally unknown. In the case of Jonah, this was done by combining the negative portrayal of Nineveh as the quintessential enemy of the Israelites in Nahum with a reading of Ezra-Nehemiah as a depiction of xenophobic, insular, mean-spirited Jewish nationalism. With this construction in place, scholars now had a target against which the author of Jonah had written his fable of God's love for evil Gentiles.² Besides the methodological slipperiness of this reading of Jonah, I also strongly critiqued it for being informed by a Christian caricature of post-exilic Judaism informed by a deeply ingrained anti-Jewish reading that goes back

¹ T. Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness: The Book of Jonah Re-Examined* (JSOTSup 236; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) a published version of "Jonah as Subversive Literature? The Book of Jonah and its Biblical Context" (Ph.D. Diss., Marquette University, 1995). The dissertation was directed by John Schmitt.

I am grateful to Dr. Philippe Guillaume for inviting me to be on the panel at the EABS meeting in Lisbon and further, when circumstances prevented my attendance at the conference, for asking me to contribute this essay to this published collection of papers. The title refers to Father Mapple's description of the book of Jonah in Chapter 9 of Melville's *Moby Dick*.

² Added to this is the problem that proposed historical contexts for biblical writings have a tendency to equate each writing with a particular (hypothetical) group, which then allows for differing groups to square off against one another by means of their writings. This most closely resembles the modern scholarly guild, where one's work is often equated with that of other scholars, and textual output is subjected to sustained critique by readers who often belong to other scholarly traditions. This anachronism goes unnoticed for the most part.

at least 1600 years, to Jerome's commentary on Jonah.³ As an alternative, I investigated datable traditions about Nineveh from outside Israel—the majority of these extant in Greek texts—and argued that Jonah's portrayal of Nineveh is informed by traditions about Nineveh similar to those ubiquitous in Classical and Hellenistic Greek texts, i.e., as a once magnificent city long since destroyed.⁴ This view of Nineveh does not allow one to see the Ninevites' most important quality in the Book of Jonah as their non-Jewishness, nor to understand the divine pardon of the city in Jonah as a straightforward account of mercy or forgiveness, given that the author and readers would have known about the city's ultimate fate.

The author and original readers, living in a culture informed by traditions which do not fail to mention Nineveh as a city that no longer exists, do not see a loving God who is free to forgive whom he wills, but rather a God who may forgive at will and revoke that forgiveness as well.⁵

Another methodological analysis demonstrated how the book of Jonah exhibited striking similarities with marginalized biblical texts such as Job and Ecclesiastes in its understanding of God while at the same time it interacted substantively with texts and traditions ranged widely throughout the Hebrew Bible. In light of this, the use in biblical scholarship of externally imposed criteria in the determination of the so-called “normative” or “mainstream” or “theological core” of the Hebrew Bible was strongly critiqued. As with the case of the traditional reading of Jonah as a tract of universal divine love based on faulty assumptions regarding post-exilic Judaism, here too most modern scholarly understandings of the center and periphery in the Hebrew Bible were in actuality modern (and decidedly Christian) theological biases inscribed into the text.

[I]n the observation that Jonah exhibits affinities with Job and Qoheleth and also draws heavily upon traditions found in all parts of the canon, using them in fundamentally the same manner, an entry point is gained which warrants and compels a re-examination of the theology of the Old Testament.⁶

³ Cf. Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 58-60, 179-82; the opening line of Jerome's commentary has set the tone for how Jonah has been read ever since: “*In condemnationem Israelis Jonas ad gentes mittitur*” (PL 25. 1119D).

⁴ *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 129-40.

⁵ *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 145-46, building on A. Cooper, “In Praise of Divine Caprice: The Significance of the Book of Jonah,” in P.R. Davies and D.J. Clines, eds., *Among the Prophets: Language, Image and Structure in the Prophetic Writings* (JSOTSup 144; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 144-63.

⁶ Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 186; cf. the larger discussion in *ibid.*, 182-86.

Most importantly, as stated in the book's final chapter, these critiques and their articulations were not a product of my own intellectual efforts. In the early 1990's, Hebrew Bible studies were in the midst of a prolonged, intense and often acrimonious discussion about the ongoing validity of the so-called assured results that had guided scholars for a generation or more.⁷ My awareness of these seismic disturbances in the discipline were heightened by the fact that during my doctoral studies (1991-1995) I was the graduate assistant for both Thomas Thompson and Philip Davies while both men were completing their highly influential books that issued formidable challenges to the unstated theological assumptions at work in historical reconstructions of ancient Israel.⁸ Of course, Thompson and Davies were not the only authors asking these questions,⁹ but my proximity to both men as they worked on their respective contributions provides the context of my discussion of assumptions and methods in biblical studies.¹⁰

⁷ No one who attended sessions dealing with the historical books of the Hebrew Bible, or with the results of archaeological excavations and their bearing on biblical texts at SBL Annual Meetings during those years can forget the highly-charged atmosphere and often heated exchanges among participants.

⁸ T. L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From Written and Archaeological Sources* (SHANE 4; Leiden: Brill, 1992); P. R. Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel"* (JSOTSup 148; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

⁹ Here the bibliography is immense, but suffice to note by way of example G. Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (New York: Crossroad, 1988); K. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1997) and several volumes of essays by the European Seminar in Historical Methodology edited by Lester Grabbe. The appearance of John Van Seters's two massive studies on the Yahwist (J. Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992]; *idem, The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994]) also directly overlapped with the period that I was working on *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*.

¹⁰ Partly because I had firmly placed my work alongside that of scholars who have been tarred with the epithet, "minimalist," reviews of *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness* were, understandably, lukewarm (among published reviews are J. Galambush *JBL* 117 [1998] 350-51; P. Tribble *CBQ* 60 [1998] 713-14; E. Eynikel *Bib* 79 [1998] 280-83; and T. D. Alexander *JETS* 42 [1999] 498-99). In particular, reviewers claimed a naïveté on my part regarding attempts to discern authorial intent, and while I grant that in the early to mid-90's the author was still *persona non grata* in biblical studies, such excesses have since been curbed; see e.g., S. Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992); R. Ricci, "Morphologies and Functions of Self-Criticism in Modern Times: Has the Author Come Back?" *Modern Language Notes* 118 (2003) 116-46; and J. Goodman, "Defending Author Essentialism," *Philosophy and Literature* 29 (2005) 200-8. Nevertheless, I freely acknowledge that some of the book's methodologi-

Looking at how the discussion has progressed in *Jonaforschung* over the last decade, it is gratifying to see that significant advances have been made regarding several important issues that have heretofore bedeviled readers. The days when Jonah's Nineveh was equated with the bloodthirsty city of Nahum, when the prophet Jonah was seen to represent a fictive post-exilic Judaism obsessed with ethnic purity or hatred of Gentiles,¹¹ and when the author of Jonah was extolled as a preacher of universal divine love and tolerance are gone forever.¹² Scholars working in Jonah must now deal with a Persian period Yehud which is much more complex and interesting than paraphrases of Ezra-Nehemiah have allowed for. Perhaps more importantly, scholars can no longer claim ignorance of the heretofore tacit theological assumptions that too often drive modern interpretations of biblical texts. What follows is discussion of some important studies on Jonah and how they have advanced our knowledge of and ability to read the biblical book.¹³

Serge Frolov rightly points out the fact that practically all modern readings of Jonah pit the book's author against his main character something which, given the wide variety of methodologies practiced on Jonah must be ascribed to "uncritically accepted stereotypes."¹⁴ When one attempts to take Jonah's part in his dispute with Yahweh, while also taking seriously Jonah's role as a prophet, then Jonah's reluctance and subsequent consternation vis-

cal broadsides regarding genre analysis or literary-critical approaches to Jonah—while in the main valid—overlooked important distinctions. I was at the time, like Tyndale's Jonah: "a young scholar, weak and rude" (David Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992] 631).

¹¹ J. Sasson (*Jonah* [AB 24B; New York: Doubleday, 1990]) had already provided strong exegetical arguments against a negative portrayal of Jonah in the book that bears his name. Yet Jonah's character is still maligned by exegetes. For an extreme example, see S. McKenzie, "The Genre of Jonah," in H. Wallace and M. O'Brien, eds., *Seeing Signals, Reading Signs: The Art of Exegesis: Studies in Honour of Antony F. Campbell, SJ for His Seventieth Birthday* (JSOTSup 415; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2005) 159-71. Among other things, McKenzie describes Jonah as "ridiculous," "pathetic," "obstinate," possessed of "prejudice and hatred;" to round out the picture, McKenzie notes that the sailors and the Ninevites are "the opposite of Jonah." McKenzie's reading has a long pedigree in Christian supersessionism. Early Christian exegetes used these same characterizations in order to cast Jonah as the representative of Judaism rejected by God and replaced by non-Jewish (i.e., Christian) believers.

¹² For the persistence of reading Jonah as a book about forgiveness, see J. H. Gaines, *Forgiveness in a Wounded World: Jonah's Dilemma* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

¹³ For another survey of significant scholarship on Jonah in the 1990's, see the brilliant *tour de force* of Barbara Bakke Kaiser, "Five Scholars in the Underbelly of the *Dag-Gadol*: An Aqua-Fantasy," *WW* 27 (2007) 135-48.

¹⁴ S. Frolov, "Returning the Ticket: God and his Prophet in the Book of Jonah," *JSOT* 86 (1999) 85-105 (87).

à-vis Yahweh can be understood in connection with Jonah being branded as a false prophet because of Yahweh's propensity to forgive. Moreover, when one sees that the logic of the book requires Jonah's prophecy to remain unfulfilled in order for the Ninevites to be saved, then Jonah becomes an example of the atoning, vicarious suffering of the righteous on behalf of the wicked.¹⁵ For Frolov, Jonah's resistance to Yahweh's plan to make a patsy of him makes him worthy of emulation. In this reading, Jonah becomes a figure very similar to Job, who is also made to suffer needlessly in order to prove a point about God.

In looking at analyses of the interpretive biases at work in modern readings of Jonah, pride of place belongs to Yvonne Sherwood's masterful analysis of the history of Jonah's interpretation, which is not only required reading for anyone working in Jonah, but richly rewards the careful study of anyone working in biblical studies.¹⁶ With precision and flair, Sherwood deftly exposes and dissects the roots of the anti-Jewish readings of Jonah and situates them in the larger context of Christian anti-Judaism.¹⁷ There exists a deep tension at the heart of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, the manifestation of which in the historically Christian field of modern biblical exegesis Sherwood aptly describes as a "huge neo-Marcionite hangover." Under the influence of this tension on Jonah

[t]he Jew stands at the origin of Christianity *and* represents the dangerous possibility of its denial; the Christian narrative of Self depends on "him," and yet, if "he" retains his distinctiveness then that same narrative is under threat . . . The small stage of Jonah criticism demonstrates how Christianity links itself with *and* expels its Jewish Other, because its identity paradoxically depends on both annexing and expulsion.¹⁸

Sherwood also notes the centripetal and centrifugal forces that biblical scholarship exerts on the canon. Consequently, works deemed not to fit the already determined theological heart of the Hebrew Bible are pushed to the margins, while privileged texts and interpretations are held at the center.¹⁹ Using a different metaphor,

¹⁵ "To salvage both Nineveh and God's credibility, this intermediary, Jonah, had to take upon himself the unenviable role of a false prophet. To put it more bluntly, Jonah's disgrace is shown in the book as the *conditio sine qua non* of Nineveh's salvation" ("Returning the Ticket," 96).

¹⁶ Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Note also B. Green, *Jonah's Journeys* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005) which provides a history of Jonah interpretation in Christianity, along with special attention on the kind of questions asked of the text by readers.

¹⁷ Sherwood, *Biblical Text*, 21-32, 64-74.

¹⁸ Sherwood, *Biblical Text*, 73-74.

¹⁹ Sherwood, *Biblical Text*, 188; I had argued this in *Freedom Beyond For-*

Sherwood speaks of “inner-biblical, or inter-testamental colonisation,”²⁰ in which texts that do not fit what has been determined to be the dominant (in this case, Christian) paradigm are reinterpreted until they do.²¹ In her own reading of Jonah, Sherwood sees a book that, in its wrestling with ambiguity, escape from death, the search for shelter, and an inscrutable, omnipotent deity is “not the maverick misfit in the canon, but the most typical of biblical and prophetic texts.”²²

While Sherwood’s work focuses on the readers of Jonah throughout Jewish and Christian history, Ehud Ben Zvi’s book, while a reception history of Jonah, tries to reconstruct the original readers of the book as a means to reconstruct the history of ancient Israel.²³ However, while Ben Zvi is, strictly speaking, looking at how Jonah was first read, the very nature of investigating an author’s first or intended audience opens up questions concerning the author’s own historical and cultural contexts. Consequently, his discussion of what can be known about Persian period Jerusalem literary elites and on the basis of this knowledge what these same elites would have known and brought to their reading of Jonah helps to discard some interpretive red herrings. Foremost among these are that Jonah deals with divine forgiveness of non-Israelites, represented by the Ninevites. Against this, Ben Zvi carefully shows how the paradox of Jonah’s literary Nineveh being forgiven when the historical Nineveh had already been destroyed would not have been lost on Jonah’s first readers. Rather, the ambiguity between Nineveh’s dual and diametrically opposed fates would help foster theological reflections that privilege neither the absolute efficacy or worthlessness of repentance, or that assert divine prerogative over

givenness, but in a much less sophisticated way. Sherwood notes my argument and uses it to incisively demonstrate the overlap between those centrifugal forces exerted on the canon by dominant scholarly paradigms and those that determine what constitutes “mainstream” scholarship: “All too aware of centripetal disciplinary forces that work to keep maverick biblical voices to a minimum, Bolin adds that he hopes that Jonah (or indeed, by implication his own work) will not be confined to a disciplinary ghetto, in ‘quarantine’ with these overtly odd biblical texts” (*ibid.*, 228 n. 95).

²⁰ Sherwood, *Biblical Text*, 80.

²¹ “As Jonah the prophet is coerced towards conformity, so the text is steered towards the norm, made to fit with a perceived biblical and prophetic standard. The misfit prophetic text, narrative without diatribe, odd-man-out in the canon, is urged to be more like Zechariah, Habakkuk, and its fellow-prophets.” (Sherwood, *Biblical Text*, 62).

²² Sherwood, *Biblical Text*, 284; cf. Bolin: “[T]he hanging end of Jonah and the precarious nature of human existence which it metaphorically represents remain a haunting biblical witness to a theology that defies easy expression or analysis” (*Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 178).

²³ E. Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup 367; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003) 3.

all else.²⁴ Ben Zvi also demonstrates that, rather than representing some kind of anti-hero or negative example, the characterization of Jonah as a figure who engages in critical reflection on the divine nature based on the testimony of authoritative texts reflects those Jerusalem literati who constituted the book's first readers. As such, Jonah asks those readers to engage in critical self-reflection about their own understanding of those authoritative texts and traditions to which they were committed.²⁵

Building on and extending Ben Zvi's examination of the social setting of the author and first readers of Jonah, Lowell Handy's excellent social-scientific reading of Jonah shows how post-exilic Jerusalem elites, as functionaries of the Persian authority, would have seen in Jonah a bit of themselves—often unwilling messengers speaking on behalf of an omnipotent sovereign.²⁶ Handy deftly brings together literary-critical issues, e.g., the role of space in narrative, with the social and historical data about marine travel and urban trade in the late first millennium BCE to offer a compelling historical and social context for Jonah that, instead of flattening the book's meaning to a one-dimensional message, or a diatribe of some putative faction or party in ancient Israel, reflects rather the complex intersections between local/international, ethnic/cosmopolitan, and center/periphery that bureaucratic functionaries negotiated in a regional capital of the Persian *imperium*.²⁷ Given this social backdrop, God in Jonah is seen as part and parcel of the wisdom tradition represented by Job and Ecclesiastes, portrayed in all three books in a fashion analogous to the ideological claims of the Persian king.²⁸

Finally, T.A. Perry's creative reading of Jonah recasts the conflict between the prophet and God in terms of an exclusive (as opposed to exclusivist) relationship between Jonah as an individual and God.²⁹ In other words, Perry reads the conflict as a lover's quarrel. In support of this, Perry cleverly teases out the erotic undertones at work in Jonah as they echo with other biblical texts, e.g., the wish for death rather than separation from the beloved, or

²⁴ Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah*, 14-39.

²⁵ Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah*, 99-128.

²⁶ L. Handy, *Jonah's World: Social Science and the Reading of Prophetic Story* (London: Equinox, 2007) 11-22, 110-22; cf. the discussion of this in Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah*, 65-79.

²⁷ Handy, *Jonah's World*, 32-41, 61-82.

²⁸ Handy, *Jonah's World*, 56-58; Handy places these texts in a category he calls "Wisdom on its Head," and characterizes their portrayal of God as "arbitrary if not downright evil . . . mysterious, dangerous, omnipotent, and beyond human ken" (58).

²⁹ T. A. Perry, *The Honeymoon Is Over: Jonah's Conflict With God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006). According to Perry, God's love is for Jonah "a *unique* and essentially private relationship" (96) which is endangered by God's willingness to allow the Ninevites entrance into a similar relationship.

of the desert as a place of lovers' reconciliation. Even the סכה that Jonah builds in 4:5 calls to mind nuptial ritual.³⁰ Perry also provides one of the more plausible arguments for the integral role of the psalm in Jonah 2 with the book as a whole, seeing it as Jonah's "uncle" after God has granted his wish for death, expressed in 1:12 and alluded to in the first half of the psalm.³¹

Turning to Yahweh's final words in Jon 4:10-11, his reference to the Ninevites' animals has consistently provided exegetical fodder for the book's interpreters. Most commentators connect the בהמה in v. 11 to those included in the king's decree ordering repentance and supplication in 3:7-8. What is often overlooked, however, apart from the fact that God notices the animals in Nineveh is why he would be interested in them at all. Some have tried to make the connection between the reference to animals in 4:11 with Yahweh's description of the Ninevites as people "who do not know their right from their left" to say that the author is implying that the Ninevites are no better than dumb animals.³² Still others see the animals as some sort of comic element in the book.³³ One potential answer and often overlooked answer is that Yahweh, like all his divine colleagues in the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds, feasted on a daily diet of roasted animal flesh and that his reference to the animals is made in the context of forthcoming sacrifices from the newly pardoned (and grateful) Ninevites.

The role of sacrifice in Jonah has not been extensively analyzed. The practice is mentioned explicitly twice: in 1:16 the sailors are said to have made sacrifices to Yahweh along with vows after the storm has been quieted, and in 2:10 Jonah promises Yahweh a sacrifice, also connected with a vow, if he is rescued from the fish's belly.³⁴ The verb used in both instances, זבח, occurs throughout the Hebrew Bible in specific reference to animal sacrifice; there is no chance that this term can mean a cereal offering or libation. Important here is the fact that both of these references to sacrifice are understood as an expression for gratitude to the deity in response to an act of divine beneficence.³⁵ Such thank-offerings are but one portion of the larger—and seemingly endless—dance of

³⁰ Perry, *The Honeymoon Is Over*, 85-96.

³¹ Perry, *The Honeymoon Is Over*, 3-40.

³²Cf. the discussion in Sasson, *Jonah*, 319-20.

³³ E.g., McKenzie, "The Genre of Jonah," 167; for a critique of this position see Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 127-28.

³⁴ Some believe the sailor's jettisoning of cargo during the storm in 1:5 to be a kind of offering made to the raging ocean, but this appears to be more a practical strategy to keep the ship from being swamped; see Handy, *Jonah's World*, 67-74 but cf. W. Burkert, *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) 34-55.

³⁵ Noted by Handy, *Jonah's World*, 54-55; cf. Lev 7:12, 22:29 for use of the phrase זבח תודה.

reciprocity that characterizes ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern religious practices.³⁶

Consequently, one may validly inquire whether or not Yahweh's mention of the animals in 4:11—and note his pointing out in particular how many of them there are—is motivated by his anticipation of numerous thank-offerings on the part of the Ninevites in response to his pardon of their sinfulness. Jon 4:11 would thus constitute the Hebrew Bible's counterpart to the Greek hecatomb, as it were. We might expect a reference to the Ninevites' offerings, given that this would parallel the sailors' offering made in chapter 1 and, as has been well demonstrated, the author of Jonah has consciously constructed parallel portrayals of the sailors and the Ninevites.³⁷ Moreover, in keeping with the fact that the only two explicit mentions of sacrifice in Jonah deal with thank-offering, it would not make sense for the Ninevites to have offered their cattle as part of the repentance process, what the Bible calls a "sin-offering." Rather, after changing their ways and calling out to God for mercy, the Ninevites would then make offerings to God from their numerous animals in gratitude for having averted destruction. In other words, the time for offering can only come at the end of the story, or beyond the end, given that the author shifts his focus away from Nineveh and onto Yahweh and Jonah in chapter 4.

Looking at Yahweh's reference to Nineveh's animals in 4:11 in this way opens a new interpretive possibility for reading Jonah, namely, as a book that describes the inexorable will of Yahweh to extend his sovereignty over the whole world. From this perspective, Yahweh's command that Jonah go to Nineveh isn't motivated by any kind of universal, non-sectarian concern for all the peoples of the earth, but rather is the action of a ruler—for what are gods in antiquity but kings writ large?³⁸—doing what all rulers in the ancient Near East did: trying to extend his sphere of influence.³⁹ This was the practice of the Persian monarchs under whose rule the author of Jonah most likely lived. The reliefs on the ruins of the *Adapana* at Persepolis show happy, docile client kings walking

³⁶ This is discussed more in T. Bolin, "The Role of Exchange in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and its Implications for Reading Genesis 18-19," *JSOT* 39 (2004) 37-56.

³⁷ Recently in J. Jeremias, "Die Sicht der Völker im Jonabuch (Jona 1 und Jona 3)," in J. Barton et al., eds., *Gott und Mensch im Dialog: Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag* (BZAW 345; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004) 555-67 (557-59).

³⁸ See L. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon As Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994). Two modern novels, Terry Pratchett's *Small Gods* and Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*, creatively explore the idea of gods actively seeking out worshippers.

³⁹ Although dealing with the Late Bronze-Early Iron Ages, M. Liverani's *Prestige and Interest: International Relations in the Near East 1600-1100 B.C.* (Padua: Sargon, 1990) describes the universal scope of ancient Near Eastern royal ideology which obtained in the region for centuries.

hand-in-hand up the stairs into the presence of the Great King, and once every schoolchild knew Herodotus' stories of Persian emissaries arriving in Greece demanding earth and water as signs of submission to their master. For those luckless peoples put in the situation of having been made an offer that could not be refused, the proper response is immediate submission followed by perpetual servitude. This of course is exactly what we find in the book of Jonah. Both the sailors and Jonah are given pithy expressions of Yahweh's ultimate power (1:14 and 2:10, respectively). Each expression coincides with the only two references to sacrifice in the book. Similarly, the Ninevites' submission to Yahweh, narrated in detail in 3:5-9, serves as a prelude for their ongoing servitude to Yahweh, situated outside the narrative frame of the story, but doubtless to be expressed by animal sacrifice—to which Yahweh looks forward in his final remark to Jonah.⁴⁰

Looked at in this way, Jonah's role as a prophet is more closely connected with the basic meaning of "spokesman" which the Hebrew term **נביא** carries than has heretofore been noticed. In many ways his role is more akin to that of the *rabshakeh* Isaiah 38, the voice of the all-powerful king who has come to dictate terms to the city and offer it the choice between life and death. We may thus also understand the Ninevites to have grasped the ambiguity of **נהפכת** in Jonah's oracle of 3:4 and hence to have understood that their actions will determine which of the two outcomes will ensue—destruction or repentance. This is an idea that rests comfortably in the theology of the Hebrew Bible, with its most well-known expression in Deut 30:15-19.

⁴⁰ In this regard, Étan Levine rightly notes that "the innocence of the children and livestock is not a compelling reason to absolve the evildoers from punishment, witness that God had originally planned their destruction along with the evildoers if the city would not repent." ("Justice in Judaism: The Case of Jonah," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 5 [2002] 170-97 [180]).