On Implicitly Conditional Prophecy: What are You Trying to Imply by That?

Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics
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I am very honored to be invited to this Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics and I am especially humbled to be presenting this paper before you today (I am also a little nervous considering the high quality of scholars assembled to listen to it). While very few of you probably know who I am, I have benefited greatly from many of you as professors and writers throughout my studies. Thank you for working so diligently to pass on a legacy for young traditional dispensationalists like me.

This paper addresses some of the issues in my forthcoming dissertation in fulfillment of the requirements of my Ph.D. program in Biblical Studies at Baptist Bible Seminary. I look forward to interacting with you on this topic and learning from your feedback.

As many of you know, traditional dispensationalism considers prophecy to be the key to determining how literal one's hermeneutic is. Amillennialists and dispensationalists have both often argued that they possess a literal interpretation of the Bible. However, the source of disagreement has consistently revolved around prophecy. Stallard summarizes the dispensational approach as follows, "An interpreter can not pick and choose what he wants to be literal and what is figurative when there is no evidence of a figure of speech or extended metaphor…To do so is inconsistency at its best. One of the reasons that dispensationalists focus on prophecy is that its interpretation almost becomes a

barometer by which one's overall approach to the text can be stabilized."[1] Thus, in a dispensational hermeneutic, prophecy should not be interpreted metaphorically unless the text clearly indicates so. Ryrie writes regarding the role of literal hermeneutics in prophetic interpretation, "The hermeneutical principle is basic to the entire dispensational system including its eschatology…dispensationalism is the only system that practices the literal principle consistently. Other systems practice literalism but not in every area of theology or on all parts of the Bible…Consistent literalism is at the heart of dispensational theology."[2]

Recently, some both inside and outside of the dispensational camp have questioned this assumption regarding prophecy. Due to time limitations, this paper will focus on two individuals who identify themselves as dispensationalists but argue that most prophecy is implicitly conditional: D. Brent Sandy and Robert Chisholm. This paper will discuss their assertions, evaluate them and propose an alternative methodology for identifying implicitly conditional prophecies by using Jonah 3:4 as a test case.

D. Brent Sandy

One representative of the functional view of prophecy is D. Brent Sandy. Sandy and others who espouse this view believe that most prophecy is implicitly conditional. While discussing the conditional nature of prophecy Sandy writes, "Unfortunately it is not always clear even in retrospect what parts of the covenant were unconditional, what parts were conditional, and what parts will hyperbolic. At least from the surface level of the text,

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[1] Mike Stallard, "Why Are Dispensationalists So Interested in Prophecy?," in *Conservative Theological Society* (Fort Worth: August 2005) 4.

[2] Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, Eighth ed. (Chicago,: Moody Press, 1973), 158.

God can appear to change his mind, but conditionality is not always stated."[3] He raises the question of whether all prophecy may be considered conditional. Rather than answer the question he concludes, "Actually it [prophecy] would be less of a problem if we could determine when promises of blessing were subject to being conditional, if we knew when prophecies were given in hyperbole, if we knew when to take the words at face value."[4]

Sandy's belief in the metaphorical nature of prophecy affects how he views the fulfillment of prophecy. He considers prediction to be only one type of prophecy, and the most important function of a prophet was to enforce the covenant between God and the Israelites. He writes, "If the primary point of prophecy is that God's patience has a breaking point and his wrath has a beginning point, how much of prophecy is really predictive? Though the ferocity of God's wrath is incomprehensible, the prophets sketched ways in which the teeth of his wrath would take savage bites out of the disobedient. Since the intent of the sketches was striking prosecution rather than interesting information, perhaps the lead in prophets' pencils was too thick to spell out details about the future."[5]

While researching prophecy that has already been fulfilled, Sandy concludes, "The already fulfilled prophecies demonstrate a pattern of translucence rather than transparency. The intent was apparently not to give specific information about the future. Rather than predict with precision, the prophets sought to prosecute with power. In some

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[3] D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 47.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 133.

cases pronouncements were fulfilled explicitly. But even then it had not been possible to know before fulfillment what would be fulfilled transparently."[6]

D. Brent Sandy also argues that Jonah 3:4 has unstated conditions. He believes that conditionality is inherent in the language of blessing and judgment because it is rooted in the language of the covenant.[7] Regarding Jonah 3:4, he writes:

> Illocution is especially pertinent to stereotypical language in the prophets. Using virtually identical language announcing the destruction of city after city suggests formulaic terms designed for their effect (cf. Amos 1:3–2:16). In the case of Jonah, he should not be considered a false prophet because he announced the destruction of Nineveh in forty days. The illocution of his language was to call for repentance.[8]

Hence, Sandy argues that the nature of the speech act makes the prophecy conditional.

Sandy's emphasis of the performative nature of language leads him to argue that the majority of prophecies in the Bible are implicitly conditional. He believes statements in human language are often implicitly conditional, so one should not be surprised that God makes similar statements. Furthermore, he considers there to be tension between some of the covenantal promises and some of the prophets' declarations of judgment.

Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.

Chisholm is a strong advocate of the view that prophetic language is functional and most prophecies are conditional. He discusses Jonah 3 in two main areas. In his article

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[6] Ibid., 146.

[7] D. Brent Sandy, "Plowshares and Pruning Hooks and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, California, 14–16 November 2007), 7.

[8] Ibid., 11.

"Does God Change His Mind?"[9] He uses Jonah 3-4 as an example of a time when God retracts an announcement. In his paper entitled "When Prophecy Appears to Fail, Check Your Hermeneutic,"[10] Chisholm uses Jonah 3-4 as an example of a contingent prophecy that has unstated conditions.

Chisholm's View of Whether God Changes His Mind

In Chisholm's article "Does God Change His Mind?" he states this thesis:

> The thesis of this article is that the question, "Does God change His mind?" must be answered, "It all depends." This study begins with a lexical survey of the Niphal and Hithpael stems of נחם. The article then defines and illustrates the four kinds of forward-looking divine statements in the Old Testament: (a) marked or formal decrees, (b) unmarked or informal decrees, (c) marked or explicitly conditional statements of intention, (d) unmarked or implicitly conditional statements of intention. The article then argues that if God has issued a decree, He will not change His mind or deviate from it. However, the majority of God's statements of intention are not decrees. And God can and often does deviate from such announcements. In these cases He "changes His mind" in the sense that He decides, at least for the time being, not to do what He had planned or announced as His intention.[11]

Chisholm rejects the traditional anthropomorphic view of the passages that seem to suggest that God has changed His mind because it is "an arbitrary and drastic solution that cuts rather than unties the theological knot."[12] In this article, he interprets Jonah 3:4 as follows, "Jonah's seemingly uncompromising declaration ("Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown," Jonah 3:4) remained unfulfilled when the people of that pagan city

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[9] Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Does God Change His Mind?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152, no. 608 (1995): 387-400.

[10] Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "When Prophecy Appears to Fail, Check Your Hermeneutic," in *Evangelical Theological Society National Meeting* (Atlanta, GA), 1-12.

[11] Chisholm Jr., "Does God Change His Mind?," 387-88.

[12] Ibid., 387

repented."[13] He notes that although Jonah's announcement of judgment on Nineveh "sounded unconditional, it was accompanied by no formal indication that it was a decree (3:4)."[14] He theologically distinguishes a decree from an announcement by saying that a divine decree (or oath) is "an unconditional declaration" that is "certain to come to pass" and "the response of the recipient cannot alter it" even though "the exact timing of its fulfillment can be conditional."[15] According to Chisholm, a formal decree is usually marked as such. In contrast, an announcement is "a conditional statement of divine intention which may or may not be realized, depending on the response of the recipient or someone else whose interests it affects."[16] As a result, since it was not a decree, God could change His mind in response to the Ninevite repentance. Jonah did anticipate this change and he fled as a result of this. He then writes, "With words almost identical to those of Joel 2:13, he observed that God is 'a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness; and one who relents concerning calamity' (4:2)."[17]

Chisholm then evaluates the reason for the prophecy in Jonah 3 and the subsequent change of mind by referring to the words of an advocate of the open view of God, Richard Rice, "As Rice argues, this passage makes it clear that many warnings of judgment, rather than being unalterable decrees, are actually designed to motivate repentance and in turn, enable God to retract the announced punishment (Richard Rice,

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[13] Ibid., 39.

[14] Ibid., 398

[15] Ibid., 389.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985], 79–80)."[18] Thus, Chisholm agrees with Richard Rice that the purpose of Jonah's prophecy is to motivate to repent so that God can retract the promised punishment. Chisholm believes that this ability to change His mind, is one of God's "fundamental attributes."[19] He reiterates once again the importance of the label of Jonah 3 as an announcement, "In every case where such a change is envisioned or reported, God had not yet decreed a course of action or an outcome. Instead He chose to wait patiently, hoping His warnings might bring people to their senses and make judgment unnecessary."[20]

<center>*Chisholm's View of Implicitly Conditional Prophecy*</center>

In a similar vein, in his article entitled "When Prophecy Appears to Fail, Check Your Hermeneutic," Chisholm considers Jonah's prophecy in chapter three to be an example of the functional nature of implicitly conditional prophecy. In this category of language, Chisholm argues that God announces judgment in vivid, seemingly uncompromising language in order to evoke a response of repentance. The implications for prophecy according to Chisholm are:

> The language is not simply informative, but motivational. When the intended response comes, God relents and does not bring the judgment. In other words the prophecy, rather than being a fixed decree of what the future holds, is really a conditional threat or warning. God mercifully shows the addressees what the future will look like if the situation addressed, which usually involves moral and ethical failure, does not change. This is how 'foretelling' and 'forthtelling,' traditionally thought to be the two primary functions of prophecy, are linked. The foretelling of a

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 399.

[20] Ibid.

conditional future (consisting of announcements of judgment) supports forthtelling (consisting of accusations and calls for repentance) by motivating the addressees to change their ways and escape the threatened disaster...However, one must not think that once disaster was averted these prophecies were no longer relevant. Though these prophecies were contingent, they reflect God's unchanging moral standards and demands.[21]

Chisholm's principle argument regarding prophecy is that the details of the prophecy are not as important as the effect. In a sense, God uses prophecy in order to motivate His audience to repentance so that He will not have to act upon the prophecy that he gave. Chisholm points out how this works with respect to Jonah 3 as follows:

The Book of Jonah illustrates this. Jonah announced in seemingly unconditional terms that Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days (3:4). Uncertain if the message was unconditional or not (3:9), the king and the entire city repented. After all, the inclusion of a time limit might imply a window of opportunity for repentance. Sure enough, Nineveh's response prompted God to withhold the threatened judgment. Jonah pouted about this; he explained that this was why he had refused to go to Nineveh in the first place. He knew that God is merciful and that he characteristically relents from sending judgment when people repent of their sin (4:2).[22]

This quotation reveals several important points. Although he considers the prophecy in Jonah 3:4 to be "seemingly unconditional," he acknowledges some key textual indicators that point to why the text may be implicitly conditional. Chisholm notes how the Ninevites were uncertain of the conditionality of the prophecy. According to Chisholm the time limit might leave open the possibility of repentance. Additionally, he points out that even Jonah recognized the possibility of the Ninevite repentance prior to going to Nineveh.

Based on Jonah 3 and other circumstances, Chisholm concludes that prophecy is often implicitly conditional, "God sometimes makes unconditional pronouncements about the future, but more often than not his statements of intention are conditional. Sometimes conditions are explicitly stated (e.g. Isa. 1:19-20), but often they are unstated and

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[21] Chisholm Jr., "When Prophecy Appears to Fail, Check Your Hermeneutic," 5.

[22] Ibid., 4.

implicit."[23] Chisholm believes that his view will help interpreters avoid two extremes: the modern critical approach that discounts the supernatural revelatory nature of Old Testament prophecy or the typical popular approach that places fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy in the eschaton.[24] He considers Jeremiah 18 to be a foundational text for answering the question of whether most prophecy is implicitly conditional.[25]

Evaluation

Time will not permit an extensive discussion on areas of agreement. I agree with Sandy and Chisholm on the following:

1. Implicitly conditional prophecies do exist in the Bible.
2. Some prophecies assume a background of conditionality as a result of their relationship with the conditional Mosaic covenant.
3. Consistent with Exodus 34:6-7 and Jeremiah 18:7-10, God is a compassionate God who relents regarding calamity for the repentant and does not leave the guilty unpunished.

Having said that, there are some significant areas of disagreement that require elaboration. The primary areas of disagreement are:

1. The method by which they determine that most prophecies are implicitly conditional.
2. Their misuse of the term implicit.
3. Chisholm's misuse of the term decree.

This evaluation will focus on these three issues.

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[23] Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Can God Be Trusted? Problems with Prophecy," in *Evangelical Theological Society Northwestern Regional Meeting* (Tacoma, WA), 3.

[24] Chisholm Jr., "When Prophecy Appears to Fail, Check Your Hermeneutic," 1.

[25] Ibid., 4.

Of particular concern is the process by which Sandy and Chisholm come to their conclusions. With little biblical warrant, they argue that most prophecy is conditional based on the use (or misuse) of certain narrative texts.

While Jeremiah 18 is an important text regarding the potentially contingent nature of prophecy, it should not drive this discussion for several reasons. The first of which is that if one assumes that the events in Jeremiah 52 were part of the original text, then the date of the book is in the 6th century BC. That date is very late for establishing a normalizing principle for all prophecy. For example, if one accepts the early date of Jonah as being written in the 8th century BC, then the book of Jonah was probably written nearly two centuries before Jeremiah. Thus, Jeremiah 18 cannot be the interpretive key to Jonah 3:4 because the original audience of Jonah would not have been familiar with it.

Contra claims of a late date of Jonah due to alleged dependence on Jeremiah and Joel, the greater likelihood is that the author of Jonah depended on Exodus 34:6-7. In fact, the audience would also have been more familiar with Deuteronomy 18 which set the norms for the true prophet instead of Jeremiah 18. Regarding this passage, Chisholm says:

> In Deuteronomy 18:21-22 Moses gives a criterion by which the people can determine whether or not a prophet has truly spoken the word of the Lord. The test seems to be quite simple: If a prophetic word does not come to pass, then one can safely assume that it was not from the Lord. One may assume that the opposite is true (if the word does come to pass, it is from the Lord), though other texts suggest this may not necessarily be the case (see Deut. 13:1-3). At any rate, this criterion would seem to leave no room for contingency in prophecy. After all, if a contingent prophecy spoken in seemingly unconditional terms did not come to pass, the prophet, though called by the Lord and commissioned to preach the message, could be labeled an imposter. Yet the evidence for contingent prophecy seems incontrovertible (see the classic texts discussed in the paper—Jer. 18; Jon. 3-4; Mic.3:12/Jer. 26:17-19—as well as many others, including 1 Sam. 2:30 and Isa. 38). So how does one resolve the problem? Can the criterion of Deuteronomy 18:21-22 be harmonized with texts demonstrating that genuine prophecy is sometimes (usually?) contingent? .... The briefly stated test of Deuteronomy 18:21-22 must be qualified in light of common sense and the totality of biblical evidence. The test must apply to short range prophecies, not prophecies of the distant future. Otherwise it would have been irrelevant to those who needed to know now, not

later, if a prophet could be trusted. The biblical evidence supports this. In texts where the Deuteronomic test seems to be in the background, a true prophet is in conflict with false prophets. He puts his authority to the test by making a short range prediction (1 Kings 22:28; Jer. 28). In qualifying the Deuteronomic test, one must also make room for essential, as opposed to exact, fulfillment. Analysis of prophetic fulfillment in Kings shows that a prophecy could be understood as fulfilled even if some details were not realized exactly (for example, compare 1 Kings 21:19 with 22:38).[26]

There are several problems with this argument regarding Deuteronomy 18. First, one must question why Chisholm chooses to submit the Deuteronomy 18 passage to a qualification in light of "common sense and the totality of Scripture." First, with respect to common sense, one would imagine that Chisholm's own application of Deuteronomy 18 would be extremely difficult for the original audience to apply. Wouldn't it be possible for every prophet who had been accused of a false prophecy to state that there were unstated conditions in their prophecy in order to escape stoning? How would the original audience know when to stone a prophet? While Chisholm notes that Deuteronomy 18 might be a test to distinguish true from false prophets, many of the false prophets in the Old Testament were disqualified by Deuteronomy 18:9-14 because they attempted to encourage the Israelites to follow false gods. The test of Deuteronomy 18:15-22 seems to apply to individuals who claim to be true prophets of Yahweh. The only possible test in that case is to test the 100% fulfillment of the words of their prophecy.

Methodologically speaking from a purely objective view, Deuteronomy 18 is prescriptive in nature and it is directly related to testing of a prophet. Most of Chisholm's examples are descriptive in nature and subject to interpretation. As a result, one must question some of the methodological assumptions Chisholm relies on while making his claim. One would think that several of the passages Chisholm refers to should be

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[26] Chisholm Jr., "When Prophecy Appears to Fail, Check Your Hermeneutic," 12.

interpreted in light of the earlier and foundational work of Deuteronomy rather than

reinterpreting Deuteronomy 18 in light of later narrative writings that the original audience

of Deuteronomy 18 would have been unfamiliar. The following survey will show that

much of his "incontrovertible" evidence does not seem to be sufficient to make the

argument that most prophecy is inherently contingent.

> One passage he discusses is Malachi 3:12 and Jeremiah 26:17-19:

> Another classic example of an implicitly conditional prophecy is Micah's warning that Jerusalem would be left a heap of ruins (Mic. 3:12). Despite the seemingly unconditional tone of the prophecy, this did not happen because Hezekiah repented, prompting God to relent from sending the calamity (Jer. 26:17-19). An examination of Micah's prophecy shows that he revised his vision of the future in light of Hezekiah's response. In chapter four he predicted that Jerusalem would be delivered from the Assyrian threat in the immediate future (vv. 11-13), only to be conquered at a later time by Babylon (v. 10). ....

> However, one must not think that once disaster was averted these prophecies were no longer relevant. Though these prophecies were contingent, they reflect God's unchanging moral standards and demands. Micah's prophecy of Jerusalem's demise, though unrealized in the historical context in which it was given (Jer. 26:17-19), was essentially fulfilled at a later time, when the Babylonians destroyed the city, an event anticipated by Micah in the revised version of his prophetic message (Mic. 4:10). The sin denounced by Micah reappeared, making Micah's ancient prophecy relevant again. In resurrecting their sin, as it were, the people resurrected God's response to it. This time no Hezekiah interceded to prevent disaster and the prophecy was fulfilled in its essence. One sees from this example that a prophecy, even when it has been seemingly rendered obsolete, can reappear when the conditions that originally prompted it resurface. While prophecy may be contingent, God's standards pertaining to covenantal loyalty and justice remain firm.[27]

First of all, Chisholm's argument assumes a revision of the prophecy within Micah's

writing that is exegetically difficult to prove from the book of Micah. Secondly, he assumes

the prophecy must have an immediate fulfillment in the immediate historical context. The

prophecy itself was general in nature and could be fulfilled at any time according to the

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[27] Ibid., 5.

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obedience or disobedience of the people. Thus, the fact of fulfillment is not contingent but the timing of the fulfillment is. This is no different from the Davidic or Palestinian covenants in which blessings (or in the case of the Palestinian covenant curses) were given but the application of those curses was related to the obedience or disobedience of the generations. However the fact that the land promises of Deuteronomy 30 would ultimately be fulfilled is not in any way contingent. In fact if one sees Micah 4 as being related to Micah 3 and not a revision of chapter 3 (if the prophecy was revised one must wonder why Micah still kept the original prophecy in chapter 3), then the author of Micah accurately predicted the fulfillment. Thus, one cannot use this passage to argue for the contingent nature of all Old Testament prophecy in the way that Chisholm is defining it

One may note a similar challenge in Chisholm's appeal to the prophecy of Huldah to Josiah to support his view:

> The prophetess Huldah, having announced the downfall of Jerusalem, commended Josiah for his efforts and assured him that he would die in peace and not have to witness the devastation of the city (2 Kings 22:15-20). However, the next chapter tells how Josiah attempted to prevent Pharaoh from marching to the aid of the Assyrians. Josiah was killed in battle (2 Kings 23:29-30), seemingly contradicting what Huldah had promised. If one views prophecy as fixed, we are faced with a serious problem and forced to conclude, with Cogan and Tadmor, that "these words of Huldah remain a striking example of unfulfilled prophecy." However, if we view the prophecy as implicitly conditional to begin with and make room for human freedom in the equation, we can conclude that Josiah's decision to become embroiled in international politics compromised God's ideal. Even so, the promise was fulfilled in its essence for Josiah went to the grave without having to see Jerusalem's downfall.[28]

Chisholm determines implicit conditionality by the results of the prophecy rather than the actual text itself.

The problem with Chisholm's argumentation is his assumption that the promise of peace was individual and not national. A similar use of the word is found in 2 Kings 20:19, "Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'The word of the LORD which you have spoken is

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[28] Ibid., 5-6.

good.' For he thought, 'Is it not so, if there will be peace and truth in my days?'" The

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia defines what happened afterwards:

> That was also the year of Hezekiah's deadly illness (2 K 20; Isa 38), when for a time we know not how long he would be incapacitated for active administration of affairs. Not unlikely on his recovery he found his realm committed beyond withdrawal to an alliance with Egypt and perhaps the leadership of a coalition with Philistia; in which case personally he could only make the best of the situation. There was nothing for it but to confirm this coalition by force, which he did in his Philistine campaign mentioned in 2 K 18 8. Meanwhile, in the same general uprising, the Chaldean Merodach-baladan, who had already been expelled from Babylon after an 11-year reign (721-710), again seized that throne; and in due time envoys from him appeared in Jerusalem, ostensibly to congratulate the king on his recovery from his illness, but really to secure his aid and alliance against Assyria (2 K 20 12 – 15; Isa 39 1 – 4). Hezekiah, flattered by such distinguished attention from so distant and powerful a source, by revealing his resources committed what the Chronicler calls the one impious indiscretion of his life (2 Ch 32 31), incurring also Isaiah's reproof and adverse prediction (2 K 20 17 f; Isa 39 6 f). The conflict with Sennacherib was now inevitable; and Hezekiah, by turning the water supply of Jerusalem from the Gihon spring to a pool within the walls and closing it from without, put the capital in readiness to stand a siege. The faith evoked by this wise work, confirmed by the subsequent deliverance, is reflected in Ps 46. That this incurring of a hazardous war, however, with its turmoils and treacheries, and the presence of uncouth Arab mercenaries, was little to the king's desire or disposition, seems indicated in Ps 120, which with the other Songs of Degrees (Pss 120 through 134) may well reflect the religious faith of this period of Hezekiah's life.[29]

Hezekiah did have individual battles in his time of prophesied peace. However, he would not be alive when the nation experienced the national curses of the loss of land or to his seed on the throne who would be overtaken by a foreign power due to national disobedience according to Deuteronomy 28. In a similar way the essence of the prophecy to Josiah of going to the grace without seeing Jerusalem's downfall was all there was to the prophecy. This was not an example of contingent unfulfilled prophecy but of prophecy that was completely fulfilled in its original intended meaning.

One aspect of prophecy that is underemphasized in Sandy and Chisholm's arguments is the apologetic value of prophecy. In fact, the fact that God can make

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[29] James Orr, John L. Nuelson, and Edgar Y Mullins, eds., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Fully rev. ed., 4 vols., vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1960), 1386.

14

predictions and bring them to pass is one of the things that makes Him greater than all false gods. Isaiah 46:9-11 in the New American Standard Translation says, "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it." Note in this passage, that God will bring everything that He has predicted to pass. He does this by His authority and it is not conditioned on man's response.

Once again, it is not clear why they see a few passages in narrative contexts as being sufficient to justify an argument that most prophecy is implicitly conditional. Clearly most of the prophecies about Christ were literally fulfilled and we still await a literal fulfillment of any messianic prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled. This literal fulfillment has great apologetic value. Additionally, there are many New and Old Testament prophecies that have yet to literally be fulfilled. Thus, Peter encourages believers in 2 Peter 3:11-16 to look for "the coming of the day of God" and to believe in a promise of a "new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." He argues that this expectation will result in believers being "found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless." However, if most prophecy is metaphorical and conditional, one will have difficult time applying this command. Furthermore, if one cannot be certain of the fulfillment of prophecy until after it is fulfilled, how can anyone truly place hope in the fulfillment of the prophecy if it may be implicitly conditional?

This brief review of Chisholm's view of implicitly conditional prophecy indicates that one cannot make sweeping statements that most prophecies were implicitly contingent or conditional based on the anticipated human response. The few examples of allegedly unfulfilled prophecies do not in any way outnumber the large number of literally fulfilled prophecies in order to allow Chisholm to make such a claim. The allegedly implicitly

conditional prophecies must contain either textual warrant to demonstrate their conditionality or the repentance may delay the timing of the prophetic fulfillment. However, neither of these two issues substantiate an argument based on the allegedly functional nature of prophetic language should not anticipate a literal fulfillment. If anything, the very examples that Chisholm cites point to a literal fulfillment in kind and extent.

<p style="text-align:center">*The Misuse of the Term Implicit*</p>

Sandy and Chisholm both argue that most prophecy is implicitly conditional. However, considering their methodology, they might be better served by using the words "unstated" and "inferred." Truthfully they are actually inferring that prophecy is conditional based on examples of how it was fulfilled rather than textually proving that the divine or human author's intent was to make the prophecy implicitly conditional. This distinction is born out by a discussion on the difference between to infer and imply in *the American Heritage Book of English Usage*:

> People sometimes confuse *infer* with *imply,* but the distinction is a useful one. When we say that a speaker or sentence implies something, we mean that information is conveyed or suggested without being stated outright: *When the mayor said that she would not rule out a business tax increase, she implied* (not *inferred*) *that some taxes might be raised.* Inference, on the other hand, is the activity performed by a reader or interpreter in drawing conclusions that are not explicit in what is said: *When the mayor said that she would not rule out a tax increase, we inferred that she had been consulting with some new financial advisers, since her old advisers were in favor of tax reductions.*[30]

Chisholm and Sandy's view of prophecy would be better categorized as an inferred conditionality of the prophecy rather than an implicit one. In order for something to be

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[30] *The American Heritage Book of English Usage: A Practical and Authoritative Guide to Contemporary English* "Infer/Imply" (Boston: Houghton Miffin Company, 1996) 108-109. All emphasis in original text.

implicit, the original author must have intended for it to be implicit. The best way to identify implicit conditionality is from textual and conditional indicators. Sandy and Chisholm reverse this process by assuming that because the fulfillment was not as originally stated by the author that the prophecy must have been implicitly conditional.

The implications (pun intended) of this distinction are important for this discussion. Bach states the reason as follows, "Why is the difference important? One obvious reason is that the audience can take the speaker to be implicating something when in fact he isn't…Equally obviously, a speaker can implicate something even if the audience doesn't make the intended inference. Of course, this will be a case of not *successfully* conveying the implicature but that doesn't mean that the speaker didn't implicate anything, just as a speaker can hint at something without the audience getting the hint."[31] Hence, whereas the conclusions of Chisholm and Sandy are theologically necessary as a result of the perceived non-fulfillment of certain passages, in order to categorize them as being implicitly conditional, they must demonstrate that the human and divine author originally intended for them to be so. The only way to do so is to exegetically demonstrate implicit conditionality from the textual and contextual evidence of the prophecy itself.

Chisholm's Misuse of the Term Decree

While Chisholm provides an insightful explanation of how God might change His mind, one must question whether his view is any less arbitrary and it does not tie additional theological knots. Chisholm basically argues that the decree must have a clear indication or one could categorize it as a changing announcement. However, one must wonder if it is not less arbitrary to state the reverse. Perhaps everything should be

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[31] Kent Bach, "The Top 10 Misconceptions About Implicature," (San Francisco State University, accessed August 30, 2008); available from http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~kbach/TopTen.pdf

17

considered a decree unless a specific conditional statement is included in the announcement itself. For instance, under Chisholm's category, Daniel 7:23-27 would have to be an announcement instead of a decree since there is no language of oath in the kingdom promise. The promise of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16-20 would have to be an announcement instead of a decree since there is no language of an oath (in fact, one might interpret 14:15 and 14:21 as conditions of obedience in order to receive this helper). If an oath is required for God to not change His mind, one must wonder how many New Testament promises He is going to change His mind about. Chisholm's categories do not seem to be any less arbitrary or theologically challenging then the traditional anthropomorphic view.

As is often the case with Progressive Dispensationalists, Chisholm uses an orthodox term in an unorthodox way. For instance, it is interesting to contrast Chisholm's use of the word "decree" with Ryrie and Chafer's. For instance, Ryrie writes:

> The decree of God is His plan for everything. The decree contains many decrees. Decreeing and foreordaining are synonymous theological concepts, but they obviously emphasize the sovereignty facet rather than the free will aspect. The word "design" is less weighted toward sovereignty, while the word "drawing" seems almost neutral.
>
> Scripture teaches clearly that God's plan includes all things (Eph. 1:11), but it also reveals that the degree and directness of God's relationship to specific events is varied. Sometimes He directly ordains something (Deut. 32:39; Acts 5:1–11). Almost always He works through the natural laws He has ordained and does not lift them to make exceptions even for believers (Phil. 2:30). Sometimes He decides to allow people to give full expression to their sinful natures almost without restraint (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). Sometimes He expects us simply to make choices on the basis of what seems right or what we desire to do (1 Cor. 10:27).[32]

Chafer states:

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[32]Ryrie, C. C. (1999). *Basic Theology : A popular systemic guide to understanding biblical truth* (359). Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press.

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"The term *Divine Decree* is an attempt to gather up in one designation that to which the Scriptures refer by various designations-the divine *purpose* (Eph 1:11), *determinate counsel* (Acts 2:23), *foreknowledge*, (1 Pet 1:2, cf. 1:20), *election* (1 Thess 1:4), *predestination* (Rom 8:30), the divine *will* (Eph 1:11), and the divine *good pleasure* (Eph 1:9). When reference is made to divine counsels it does not suggest conference on the part of God with other beings, but that His counsels are consummately wise. In like manner, the reference to the divine will does not suggest capricious or unreasonable action. Infinite wisdom directs the divine determination. In this sense His decree is said to be the "counsel of his will." These terms certainly signify that God acts only according to an eternal purpose which incorporates all things."[33]

He also writes:

In its theological implications, the term *Decree* betokens the plan by which God has proceeded in all His acts of creation and continuation. That He has such a plan is not only the justified deduction of reason-He being perfect in wisdom-, but is the clear testimony of the Bible. Those numerous passages which assert the *decree*, the *purpose*, the *determinate counsel*, the *foreknowledge*, the *foreordination*, and the *election*, by which God is said to act, combine to establish the truth that, either directly or indirectly and as stated in the Westminster Confession, He originates and executes "Whatsoever cometh to pass." No deductions concerning God could be more dishonoring or misleading than the suppositions that He is not sovereign over His works, or that He is not working according to a plan which articulates the dictation of infinite intelligence. Could the imagination of man picture a situation before any creative act of God was wrought, when God, as it were, had before Him an infinite variety of possible plans or blueprints from which to choose-each and every one of which represented a possible program of divine action as far-reaching and elaborate as the one now being executed-, it would be reasonable and honoring to God to conclude that the present plan as ordained and as it is being achieved is, and in the end will prove to be, the best plan and purpose that could have been devised by infinite wisdom, consummated by infinite power, and that which will be the supreme satisfaction to infinite love.[34]

Thus, in Chisholm's usage, a decree is a category of God's stated plans while Chafer and Ryrie consider a decree to encompass all of God's sovereign plans that consist of several decrees.

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[33]Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Biblical Theism Divine Decrees," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (96:147), 148. All emphasis in original text.
[34]Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Biblical Theism Divine Decrees," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (96:147), 139. All emphasis in original text.

How Does One Detect Implicitly Conditional Prophecy?

As previously mentioned, the major debate is not whether implicitly conditional prophecy exists but how one must detect it. Bach's work indicates that one must establish that the author intended an implicature in order for it to serve as one. This section will discuss how prophecy is interpreted and most importantly how implicit prophecy is detected.

Prior to discussing implicitly conditional prophecy, one must establish the rules for prophecy in general. Walvoord's article entitled "Interpreting Prophecy Today Part 1: Basic Considerations in Interpreting Prophecy" gives several principles for interpreting prophecy:

> 1. Words are to be understood in their normal, natural sense unless there is firm evidence in the context that the word is used in some other sense.
>
> 2. Each statement of Scripture should be interpreted in its context. This usually means that a word should be interpreted in its immediate context, although sometimes usage in other passages is also relevant. A common fallacy, however, is to read into a passage something that is found elsewhere in the Bible instead of allowing the immediate context to have primary weight.
>
> 3. A text of Scripture must always be seen in its historical and cultural contexts, and the intended meaning of the author is important. Conservative scholars, however, recognize that the Bible is not only a work by human authors, but is also inspired by the Holy Spirit, and in some cases even the human author did not understand entirely what he was writing.
>
> 4. Scripture should be interpreted in the light of grammatical considerations including such important matters as tense and emphasis.
>
> 5. If the language of Scripture is figurative as is sometimes the case, this should be clearly established by the context itself and not by a priori considerations.[35]

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[35] John F. Walvoord, "Interpreting Prophecy Today Part 1: Basic Considerations in Interpreting Prophecy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139, no. 553 (January 1982): 7-8.

20

From the beginning, one can see some distinctions between Sandy and Chisholm's interpretive method compared to Walvoord's method. Walvoord argues that the natural sense is to be preferred unless there is firm evidence to the contrary. He also says that the context alone and not a priori considerations determine whether the language is figurative. In contrast, Sandy and Chisholm assert on the basis of speech act theory that prophecies are generally metaphorical and one cannot be certain whether or not they were to be taken literally until after their fulfillment (which once again would be difficult for the original audience to be certain of).

These basic rules apply to detecting implicitly conditional prophecy. The historical grammatical method must be given first priority. The focus must be on the author's original intent. The conditions must be determined contextually.

What makes implicitly conditional prophecy a little more difficult to determine is that the implicit aspects are not explicit in the text. Implicit conditions must be determined from the words, tone, shared cultural values and the context of the statements. Carston summarizes important considerations in identifying implicature:

> According to the standard interpretation of the Gricean account, what is said (the truth-conditional content of the utterance) is very closely related to the conventional meaning of the linguistic expression employed. Of course, that linguistic expression may include ambiguous or indexical elements, so that contextual considerations have to be brought to bear for a full determination of 'what is said' (Grice 1975: 44-45). However, it seems that Grice conceived of the role of his Cooperative Principle and system of conversational maxims (quality, quantity, relevance and manner) as confined to the determination of conversational implicatures; that is, these maxims come into play in resolving the issue of why a speaker, who is assumed to be a rational agent, has said what she has said, or, in other words, what she means (intends to communicate) by having uttered a particular linguistic expression.[36]

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[36] Robyn Carston, "Truth-Conditional Content and Conversational Implicature," (San Francisco State University, accessed August 30, 2008); available from http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/robyn/pdf/woc.pdf

21

This analysis demonstrates that when an author implies something he typically utilizes shared conventional meanings of linguistic expressions (which may include ambiguous elements such as puns). Conversational maxims such as quality, quantity, relevance and manner help the audience understand why the author may imply something. In other words, the author may have a purpose in not explicitly stating all conditions in the prophecy but there should be textual indicators that help identify implicit conditionality.

Test Case: Jonah 3:4

Jonah's prophecy was used by both Chisholm and Sandy as an example of an unstated implicitly conditional prophecy. While the author is not negating the possibility of the existence implicitly conditional prophecies in general, this paper intends to demonstrate that Jonah 3 does not necessarily have to be taken as an unstated conditional prophecy because the context, message, and lexical features demonstrate that the message was implicitly conditional. The primary contention of this author is that both repentance and destruction were possible. This section will evaluate some of the textual evidences for the implicitly conditional view of Jonah 3 as well as presenting an alternative view.

Contextual Indicators of Implicit Conditionality

The first textual indicator of the possibility of condition is the way the original audience received it. While it is true verse 9 shows that the king believed that destruction was actually prophesied, he also believed in the possibility of this destruction being avoided. Otherwise if the Ninevites thought that destruction was inevitable, why should they repent? Jonah seemed to believe in the possibility that God might relent from destroying the Ninevites. Jonah 4:2 says, "He prayed to the LORD and said, 'Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my *own* country? Therefore in order to

forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.'" Jonah knew from the very beginning that His message would include the possibility of repentance. The appendix of this paper provides a linguistic analysis of הָפַךְ (*haphak*) to show that the possibility of repentance was not an unspoken intent but it was inherent within the word itself. For now, it must be noted that the word is in the niphal (passive) and that the prophecy's fulfillment did not primarily depend on the Ninevites but on God.

Forty Days

As previously mentioned, the time element of this prophecy demonstrates implicit conditionality. Jonah stated that fulfillment of this prophecy would occur in forty days. Deuteronomy 18:22 states whatever was prophesied must take place in the presence of the hearers or the word was spoken presumptuously. The Bible never portrays the prophecy as being unfulfilled. Jonah did not accuse God of changing His mind or leaving the prophecy unfulfilled. Instead, he accused God of intending to deliver the Ninevites all along. It seems that he would have gladly died in that large fish in Tarshish if it would have saved him from delivering this message (cf. Jonah 4:8).

Wolff also comments on the significance of the forty day period in Jonah 3:

> Forty days are a long time. It is the time conceded for a comprehensive world judgment (Gen. 7:4, 12); it is the time Yahweh needs to instruct Moses fully (Exod. 24:18; 34:28; Deut 9:9) and the time required for Moses' great vicarious repentance, which he took on himself in order to turn away Yahweh's wrath from his people (Deut 9:18). These forty days are granted to Nineveh. According to the narrator's intention, the time is required, first, so that the message may reach all the inhabitants of the huge city; also, and especially, that it may be brought to the notice of the king and his great men, and may bring out the necessary decisions (v. 6f); and finally, to make possible the ritual of repentance and a new way of life for every individual in the metropolis (vv. 8, 10).[37]

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[37] Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah : A Commentary*, 149-50.

Wolff provides an exceptional explanation for the forty day period. He correctly notes that it was to afford the opportunity for repentance. If God's original intent was to destroy people, why would he offer so much time for the message to reach them and why would they repent? Since this time often connoted the opportunity for repentance it appears that part of God's intent in giving the prophecy to provide an opportunity for repentance. If God intended to destroy Nineveh unconditionally, why would He send Jonah and why would He give them forty days to respond to the prophecy? Even Chisholm acknowledges, "After all, the inclusion of a time limit might imply a window of opportunity for repentance." [38] This paper argues that this opportunity was an implicit condition as intended by the human and divine author.

It is important to know that הָפַךְ is a niphal participle in Jonah 3:4. With respect to the grammatical function of the participle, Waltke and O'Connor write:

> With reference to situations which are in fact *future,* the participle may denote merely a circumstance accompanying a future event (# 31). Usually, however, it denotes the full range of ideas connoted by English 'I am going to…,' namely, certainty, often with imminency—the so-called *futurum instans* participle (## 32–37). In this function it also occurs in a main clause with some logical connection to other clauses (## 38–41) or in a temporal/conditional clause in connection with a future event (## 42–44).[39]

Hence, in the futuristic context, the participle usually indicates immediate fulfillment. The use of the adversative עוֹד as well as the temporal indicator of forty days

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[38] Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Can God Be Trusted? Problems with Prophecy," in *Evangelical Theological Society Northwestern Regional Meeting* (Tacoma, WA), 5.

[39] Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 627.

would also support that conclusion.[40] In light of this immanent expectation of future

fulfillment, the only immediate action is the repentance of the Ninevites in Jonah 3:5. It

happened well within the forty day period of time. However, the participle also can serve as

a temporal/conditional clause. Thus, the participial use can indicate an implicit condition.

In Jonah 4:5, he is sitting waiting to see what would happen to the city. If he believed that

the repentance in and of itself avoided God's destruction why would he wait? Before

waiting for the destruction of Nineveh, Jonah states that he recognized that God was

compassionate and that he expected for him to relent concerning the calamity. However,

his reaction seems to suggest that he recognized that both the possibility of repentance and

destruction were found in the prophecy. Either way, Jonah apparently expected an

immediate fulfillment of the prophecy.

The Word of the Lord Given to Jonah

In 1:2, the word of the Lord is for Jonah to "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city,

and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." In Jonah 3:2 God says,

"Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going

to tell you." These passages reveal that the word that Jonah proclaimed was the word that

God intended. In English, as well as the Hebrew the cautious reader can note that there is a

shift from the proclamation against in verse 1:2 to proclaim to.[41] This shift from the

adversative phrase to a more positive position demonstrates God's intentions to forgive the

Ninevites if they were willing to repent.[42] After hearing God's word in 3:2, the narrator

says that Jonah went "according to the word of the Lord" (Jonah 3:2). While the phrase

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[40] Special thanks to Dr. Alan Ingalls for pointing this out to me. I also consulted Biblical Studies Press, *NET Bible: New English Translation*, Second Beta Edition. ed. (Spokane, Wash.: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 1617.

[41] Biblical Studies Press, *NET Bible: New English Translation*, 1663.

[42] Ibid.

"word of the Lord" is not used, Jonah 4:2 also gives an indication of what God asked Jonah to do, "And he prayed to the LORD and said, 'Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.'" Jonah 1:1 demonstrates that God had told Jonah to cry against Nineveh because of their great wickedness. When Jonah received this word, he fled because he wanted to forestall God's gracious act of mercy on the Ninevites. Jonah would have been aware of this aspect of God's character because it was revealed in Exodus 34:6-7. Perhaps he believed that if the Ninevites did not have the opportunity to repent, they would be considered guilty and punished. Jonah 3:1 shows that the content of the word of the Lord for the Ninevites would be revealed when Jonah proclaimed the message God would tell him.

Three important exegetical observations can be made from this analysis. First, Jonah 1:1 demonstrates that a rebuke of the Ninevites' wickedness was part of this message. Jonah 3:8 shows that the Ninevites certainly got the message that they should turn from their wicked ways. Second, the possibility of mercy in light of repentance must have been a condition of the word of the Lord because Jonah fled. Jonah would not flee from announcing irrevocable destruction. His poor track record of obedience would also not have caused him to run from proclaiming a message of destruction. He probably would have been rather excited to deliver such a message. However, a message that offered a hint of a possible merciful response on the part of God would be unattractive to Jonah.

The Message of the Book of Jonah

The message of the book supports the polysemantic wordplay view of Jonah's prophecy. While the book of Jonah is often used as a demonstration of why Christians should evangelize, interpreters must remember that the book was written to Israel for Israel. Spender writes:

26

During the eighth century Israel was enjoying unprecedented growth and prosperity, but the people had forsaken God. They were facing His judgment. Few believed that they were on the threshold of ultimate disaster. God in His mercy was trying to reach His people before it was too late. He raised up Hosea, a native of Israel, and sent Amos, a prophet from Judah; but people were not listening. Jonah was a prophet from Israel who went to Nineveh, but his message was intended for the ears of the Northern Kingdom. God, in His grace, was employing yet another method to reach His wayward people.[43]

Thus, the book was written to a group of Israelites who were in need of the same repentance that the Ninevites demonstrated because they were just as likely to be destroyed in the same potential manner that the Ninevites were almost destroyed. To a certain degree, the dual audience (the Ninevites of the original prophecy and the Israelites of the book of Jonah) gives a valid reason for double entendre. The Ninevites responded to the possibility of repenting while the Israelites chose not to repent and were subsequently destroyed.

In a sense, the Gentiles in the book serve as a foil to Jonah (and by implication the Israelites). Spender summarizes this aspect of the message of the book when he says:

The message for Israel was an indicting one. If a foreign, Gentile, people like the Assyrians could repent and seek God why couldn't Israel? If God had compassion on Nineveh would He not have compassion on His own people? The answer to that question is of course "yes" but the condition of repentance remains. Israel needed to turn and repent but in the eighth century B.C. they were still running away from God. For years, the recipients of His grace, they had turned their backs on Him and fled to idols. Jonah's realization that "those who cling to worthless idols forsake the grace that could be theirs," (2:8, NIV) was equally meant for Israel.[44]

This message would have been a great indictment for Israel since they did not have the same willingness to repent that the Ninevites demonstrated. Stuart says:

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[43] Robert Spender, "Reading Jonah Again for the First Time," *Emmaus Journal Volume* 10 (2001): 75-76.

[44] Ibid., 90.

Jeremiah 36:9–31 makes clear that Jehoiakim of Jerusalem was notably unmoved by Jeremiah's words and therefore was denounced for his obstinace. But his pagan predecessor, the king of Nineveh, acted quite differently. Though as the despot of a vast empire he might be expected, of all people, to remain aloof from the vicissitudes of popular religious trends, in this case "even" (נגע אל) he was affected. And even he donned sackcloth and left the throne to sit humbly in ashes in the Semitic posture of mourning and penitence. The emperor of the Assyrian empire abjectly appealed for mercy from the God on whose authority a vassal Israelite prophet had preached![45]

The essence of the message of Jonah argues for the possibility of **both** repentance and destruction for Israel. The book of Jonah was not written to show that God can change His mind but to prove that God can and will show mercy to those who repent. Therefore, the possibility of repentance in this prophecy is essential to this purpose.

Polysemantic Wordplay

Wordplay is defined by Petrotta as "a sophisticated linguistic and literary endeavor that collates sound, sense, and syntax in such a way as to exploit similarities and ambiguities in an effort to suggest relationships, both cognitive and affective, that go beyond the ostensive reference of the individual phonological, semantic and syntactical units."[46] It is important to note that that the term "ambiguity" does not necessarily mean a lack of clarity. One possible meaning of the word "ambiguous" as defined in *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* is "capable of being understood in two or more possible senses or ways" [47]

According to Petrotta, the primary function of wordplay is to "hook the audience."[48] Watson concurs when he argues that wordplay requires quick-wittedness on the part of both the author and audience in order to expose the underlying relationships that are

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[45] Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 490.

[46] Anthony J. Petrotta, *Lexis Ludens: Wordplay and the Book of Micah* (New York: P. Lang, 1991), 25.

[47] *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary,* Eleventh ed., s.v. "ambiguous."

[48] Petrotta, *Lexis Ludens: Wordplay and the Book of Micah*, 20.

connected through wordplay. He gives several general functions of wordplays in oral poetry (some of which can apply to prophetic literature): to amuse and sustain interest, to assist composition, to lend authenticity, to link a poem or its parts, to denote reversal of fortune, to show appearance can be deceptive, to equate two things, as well as other functions (e.g., to distract mourners in lament psalms, to assist in audience memory, etc).[49] The most significant for the study of Jonah are: equating two things, denoting reversal of fortune, as well as showing that appearance can be deceptive.

According to Chisholm, one category of wordplay includes: single words that are repeated in the same semantic sense, repeated with a different sense (explicit polysemantic wordplay) and words that are used once with two senses implied (implicit polysemantic wordplay).[50] According to Gordon, polysemantic wordplay was one of the highest forms of Hebrew artistry, "The skillful exploitation of twin meanings, providing through a single word twofold parallelism, is artistry of a high order."[51] While polysemantic wordplay was commonly understood and appreciated by the ancient Hebrews, it is often missed by contemporary scholars who insist that a word must only have one meaning in a given context. However, singular meaning does not exclude the possibility that the original author was meaning to use more than one meaning of a word as part of the original meaning in order for his work to have more meaning for his audience (puns intended). Even the English phrase "pun intended" shows that our culture accepts the fact that occasionally a speaker intends to use a word in multiple ways at the same time for ironic purposes. In his

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[49] Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2005), 245-46.

[50] Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Wordplay in the Eighth-Century Prophets," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144, no. 573: 44.

[51] Cyrus H. Gordon, "New Directions," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* xv, no. 1-2, 60.

dissertation entitled "Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible" Walter Herzberg evaluates the traditional approach to polysemy as follows:

> Words often have more than one meaning, resulting from the fact that languages contain many homonymous and polysemous words. Scholars throughout the ages have pointed out words in the Hebrew Bible capable of one meanings. However, the traditional approach to solving the problem of translating these ambiguous polysemous words has been to choose one meaning and eliminate the other in any given passage. Therefore the researcher decided to examine a select group of polysemous words to show that often the best solution is double meaning." [52]

As previously mentioned, implicit conditionality requires shared usage of cultural and linguistic conventions. As anyone who has studied a Hebrew name in the Old Testament or an ironic use of a pun would understand, polysemantic wordplay was commonly understood by the original audience of Jonah.

Chisholm makes some very important observations about the use of wordplay in prophetic literature when he writes, "While wordplay has numerous functions, its most exegetically significant uses are to indicate correspondence and contrast (or reversal). The prophets frequently used wordplay to bring out the relationship between events that on the surface might seem unrelated or only loosely connected. This is especially true with respect to the themes of sin and judgment. The prophets used wordplay to draw attention to the appropriate or poetic nature of divine justice."[53] It is important to note that wordplay often indicates contrast or reversal. Jonah 3 and 4 employs wordplay to describe the reversal of fortunes of the Ninevites in light of the possibility of both repentance and destruction in light of Yahweh's divine justice. It connects the seemingly unrelated events of Jonah's experiences with the sailors, his experience in the large fish, the Ninevite repentance and

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[52] Walter Herzberg, "Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible" (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1978), abstract.

[53] Chisholm Jr., "Wordplay in the Eighth-Century Prophets," 52.

30

Jonah's anger with God in Jonah 4. Yahweh's willingness to offer both repentance and destruction to the Ninevites (and by implication the Israelites) provides the irony that the reader recognizes throughout the book. Rather than containing a long discourse by the narrator on how this was possible, the author of Jonah uses repetition of key words and polysemantic wordplay to cause the reader to make connections between situations and circumstances. These connections enable the narrator to evaluate the characters of the book according the divine and human authors' intention.

Chisholm also cites a theological purpose for wordplay:

> Theologically speaking, wordplay often highlights the sharp distinction between the divine and human perspectives. God's erring people fell short of His holy standard (Amos 5:10, 15) and failed to evaluate properly His sovereign actions (Micah 6:3–4). Consequently they failed to achieve their own ambitions (Amos 3:12; Micah 2:5, 10). In spite of His people's sin, which brings harsh divine judgment, God still promised to restore Israel and reverse their situation, a fact highlighted by wordplay (Hos 13:7; 14:9 , Eng. v. 8 ; and Isa 32:9, 11, 18). In this way one gains insight into the gracious character of divine salvation. The same God who appropriately judges sin promises to reverse completely the effects of that judgment.[54]

This same statement could have been made about the book of Jonah. Chisholm shows that wordplay is used in prophetic literature to indicate contrast or reversal in judgment oracles. Jonah 3:4 occurs in the midst of a contrast between the heart of God and the heart of Jonah as revealed in his response to the repentance of the Ninevites. Jonah is filled with contrasts between Jonah and the Gentile sailors and Ninevites. The Gentiles fear God and repent in light of his impending judgment while Jonah (representing the Israelite nation) pridefully gloats in his covenant position and prefers death over adopting the character of Yahweh.

Hence, not only is it important to demonstrate that polysemantic wordplay was used in the Hebrew Bible, it is critical to show that polysemantic wordplay was used in Jonah. The probability of wordplay in Jonah 3:4 increases significantly if one can demonstrate ironic

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[54] Ibid.

polysemantic wordplay occurs in other parts of Jonah. In their article entitled "Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah" Halpern and Friedman argue that the book of Jonah is "replete with word-play" that can serve as a "sampler of paronomastic techniques" and it is a "unique example of the contribution that formal artistry makes to the impact of the final work."[55] The appendix details several uses of wordplay in Jonah. In the interest of time, this paper can only discuss one.

The author of Jonah repeatedly uses the word רָעָה in an ironic way. Magonet notes that this word is used in relationship to all three main characters of the book: God, Jonah and the pagans.[56] In fact, in one instance, the author makes a play on words on two different occasions in the same verse. Page writes regarding Jonah 4:6, "The verb for 'deliver,' נָצַל, is a play on the word for 'shade,' צֵל. There also is intentional ambiguity in the use of רָעָה, for while God's immediate purpose for the vine was to relieve Jonah's discomfort, his real purpose was to deliver Jonah from his sinful attitude."[57] Once again, the concept of calamity and deliverance is contrasted. However, on this occasion, Jonah is the recipient of mercy as a potential object lesson to reveal his evil.

Page describes the relationship between Jonah's sinful attitude and comfort as follows, "The phrase 'to ease his discomfort' is literally 'to deliver him from his evil' (רָעָה). The latter word is the term occurring throughout the book with its two senses, 'wickedness' or 'trouble, calamity.'"[58] Page's assertion regarding the use of רָעָה in Jonah 4:6 is critical for the argument of this paper because it demonstrates another clear instance in which polysemantic wordplay is employed by the author of Jonah. Regarding the larger context of the book, the word does occur in several circumstances throughout the book

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[55] Baruch Halpern and Richard Elliott Friedman, "Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah," *Hebrew Annual Review* 4 (1980): 79-80.

[56] Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah*, 22.

[57] Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 278.

[58] Ibid.

(Jonah 1:2, 7-8; 3:8, 10; 4:1-2, 6). In some cases it does carry the sense of calamity or trouble (cf. Jonah 1:7-8) while in others it means evil (Jonah 1:2 and 3:8). In one case, both uses are found in the same verse (Jonah 3:10). In this passage the Ninevites repented of their evil and God relented on the calamity they deserved. One can see the irony in Jonah 4:1 when the same word that described the evil of the Ninevites now describes Jonah. Page writes, "The NIV speaks of Jonah's great displeasure and great anger. The literal translation is, 'It was evil to Jonah with great evil.' There is a play on words here with the root רָעָה, which can refer to wickedness on the one hand (see 1:2) or to disaster, trouble, or misery as here. The evil that was characteristic of the people of Nineveh here described the prophet of God."[59]

        Chisholm agrees that this instance is an example of polysemantic wordplay:

> An initial reading of the statement [in Jonah 4:6a] suggests that רָעָה, 'distress,' refers to Jonah's physical discomfort, caused by the hot sun beating down on his head. Jonah is happy about the plant, but God quickly destroys it, prompting one more complaint from Jonah and the book's final dialogue, which is designed to show Jonah why God has been merciful to Nineveh. At this point, the statement in verse 6a takes on deeper meaning. If God were just concerned about Jonah's physical comfort, he would not have destroyed the plant he made. Through the object lesson of the plant, he really wants to purge Jonah of his morally wrong attitude. One can detect a double meaning in the word רָעָה. On the surface, it means 'physical discomfort,' but it also has a deeper meaning. God made the plant grow to give Jonah some temporary relief from his physical discomfort, but his larger purpose in making the plant was to use it as an object lesson in ridding Jonah of his moral 'evil,' another attested nuance of this noun.[60]

Chisholm's arguments are very helpful. Once again, it must be emphasized that the polysemantic wordplay was intended by the author and that the use of a phrase like "deeper meaning" does not imply an allegorical method of interpreting the passage. If the author intends the polysemantic wordplay, then a literal interpreter must interpret it as such.

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    [59] Ibid., 271.

    [60] Robert B. Chisholm, *From Exegesis to Exposition : A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 52.

Having said that, Jonah appears to lack an understanding of the deeper purposes of God throughout the book. The polysemantic wordplay in Jonah 4:6 demonstrates the contrast between Jonah's selfish focus and Yahweh's justice in judging sin in order to eliminate it.

Not only this, but while God is slow to anger and relents from calamity (note the use of רָעָה in Jonah 3:10 and 4:2 to describe what God relents from), Jonah angrily becomes displeased in an evil way (4:1) because of God's mercy (Jonah 4:1-2). The mercy that the Ninevites hoped to see was resented by Jonah (although he happily received mercy when he was delivered from the large fish). Page writes, "As God's anger and judgment were averted in chap. 3, Jonah's anger was incited."[61] The irony of Jonah 4 is inescapable.

Lexical Features of Jonah 3:4-10

Certain lexical features of Jonah 3:4 also point to the possibility of repentance. Stuart notes that both the Hebrew and Assyrian has some ambiguity (i.e. double entendre).

> In Assyrian the full sentence would be rendered *adi arbât ūmē ninua innabak,*as simple and as ambiguous as the Hebrew. The ambiguities would be threefold. First, as this word was passed around among the populace, it would not automatically be clear whether Jonah had warned only the enclosed city (*ᵃˡninua*) or the entire district (*ninuaᵏⁱ*) that it would be overthrown by God. Second, the people might wonder whether the mention of "forty days" was to allow time for or simply to assure that the divine judgment repentance, was not far off. Third, by nature Heb. הָפַךְ /Assyrian *abāku* carries a certain ambiguity. The term can signify an overthrow, a judgment, a turning upside down, a reversal, a change, a deposing of royalty, or a change of heart (Wiseman, *TynB* 30 [1979] 49). In other words, Jonah's words in Assyrian, just as in Hebrew, could mean both "In forty more days Nineveh will be overthrown" and "In forty more days Nineveh will have a change of heart" (cf. Good, *Irony in the* OT, 48–49). It must be remembered that these words are not what Jonah composed, but are exactly what Yahweh told him to say (3:2). The alert hearer/reader who would catch the ambiguity would begin to sense what 3:5 then reports.[62]

It is important to note that הָפַךְ (*haphak*) can mean **both repentance or destruction**. It is not the author's contention that the word only means repentance. The possibility of

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[61] Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*.

[62] Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* 489.

destruction is clearly present (cf. Jonah 3:10). However, the fact that the word can also describe repentance supports the argument that the prophecy of Jonah 3:4 was implicitly conditional and therefore 100% fulfilled within the forty day period of time when the Ninevites repented. A lexical study of הָפַךְ validates Stuart' claims. *Brown Driver Briggs* defines this word as:

> haphak vb. turn, overturn -- Qal 1. trans. a. turn, turn about, turn over, c. acc. b. overturn, overthrow. c. turn = change, transform (1) sq. acc. = alter; (2) pervert; (3) sq. acc. c. Inf.; (4) turn to, into, sq. two acc.; usu. sq. acc. + l. 2. intrans. a. turn, turn back; b. turn = change, change into, sq. pred. adj. Niph. 1. reflex. & intrans. a. turn oneself, turn, turn back (cf.Qal 2 a); turn against sq. B.. b. turn = change (oneself) sq. pred. adj.; sq. pred. noun; no pred. expressed. c. be perverse, only pt. used subst. 2. pass., a. be turned, turned over to sq. l.. b. be reversed. c. be turned, changed, sq. l.. d. be overturned, overthrown. e. be upturned. Hithp. reflex. & intrans.: 1. turn this way & that, every way. 2. transform oneself. Hoph. (pg 245) change, change into, sq. pred. adj. Niph. 1. reflex. & intrans. a. turn oneself, turn, turn back (cf.Qal 2 a); turn against sq. B.. b. turn = change (oneself) sq. pred. adj.; sq. pred. noun; no pred. expressed. c. be perverse, only pt. used subst. 2. pass., a. be turned, turned over to sq. l.. b. be reversed. c. be turned, changed, sq. l.. d. be overturned, overthrown. e. be upturned. Hithp. reflex. & intrans.: 1. turn this way & that, every way. 2. transform oneself. Hoph. (pg 245)[63]

Lubeck notes that in all but one of the 33 OT occurrences of haphak in the Niphal it means "turned" or "changed," but never "destroyed."[64]

Thus, the word Jonah used left the possibility for repentance or destruction. In that sense, Jonah could not have chosen a better Hebrew word. Nixon writes:

> There are two things to note about the word "overthrown" (הָפַךְ). First, it is indissolubly linked in the biblical tradition with the overthrow of cities of Sodom and Gomorrah described in Genesis 19:21, 25, 29. By using this particular word, the story-teller reminds the hearers of an earlier cataclysmic event. It may awaken them a sense of justice having been done: as the cities of the plain got what was coming to them, so Nineveh deserved to be overthrown for her wickedness. However, the word equally means a turning upside-down, a reversal, a change, a deposing of royalty, or a change of heart. Deuteronomy 23:5 reads, "The LORD your God

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[63] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003; reprint, Seventh), 245-46.

[64] Lubeck, "Prophetic Sabotage: A Look at Jonah 3:2-4," 44.

35

turned (הָפַךְ) the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you." There are other examples of the word being used in this way. The message of Jonah could therefore be understood as meaning, "In forty days Nineveh will have a change of heart." As the Jewish expositor Rashi comments, "The word 'overthrown' has two senses, good and bad. If they do not repent they will indeed be 'overthrown', for they will have changed from evil to good."[65]

As Nixon states, there is sufficient lexical evidence to support the polysemantic wordplay of הָפַךְ intended by the author in Jonah 3:4. The same word is used in 1 Samuel 10:9, "Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day." The definition in *Brown Driver Briggs* demonstrates the possibility of הָפַךְ meaning transforming oneself or destruction.

What is interesting is that both of the Hebrew words commonly used for repent are used in other places within Jonah. For instance, the word שׁוּב (*shuwb*) is used in four instances (Jon. 1:13; Jon. 3:8-10). נָחַם (*nacham*) is used of God three times (3:9-10, 4:2) even though it obviously does not mean repent (a better translation would be relent which will be discussed in the application section of this paper). Similarly, the narrator used the word for destruction within the book as well. For instance, Lubeck notes that Jonah uses the term אָבַד (*abad*) in Jonah 1:6 and 1:14 to connote perishing or destruction. Forms of the root are also used in Jonah 3:9 and 4:10.[66] However, in 3:4, he uses a completely different word that is only used this time within the entire book. Consequently, if the narrator intended to write a word that only meant destruction, he would have probably elected to use אָבַד (*abad*) as he did before.

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[65] Rosemary A. Nixon, *The Message of Jonah: Presence in the Storm* (Leicester, England ; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 165.

[66] Lubeck, "Prophetic Sabotage: A Look at Jonah 3:2-4," 44.

Stuart notes some literary indicators that repentance was in view in Jonah 3:4:

> Jonah's message mentioned 'forty days.' In spite of its potential ambiguity, this must have seemed to many Ninevites to be an invitation to repentance, giving hope that they and their city or land might not be destroyed. 'Forty' (אַרְבָּעִים) is a term which is often used in the sense of 'a good many' or 'dozens.' It does not necessarily connote a literal forty, i.e., one more than thirtynine (cf. Num 13:25; Josh 4:13; Judg 3:11; 5:8; 13:1; etc.). Its association with time for purging, in the OT at least (e.g., the wandering in the wilderness for forty years which eliminated the unfaithful; the forty days of rain which began the flood and thus eliminated the wicked; the forty years of Egypt's desolation prior to its restoration, in Ezek 29:11–16, etc.), and at least once with fasting (Deut 9:18, 25; cf. Matt 4:2) might reflect a similar association elsewhere in the ancient Near East (cf. also 1 Kgs 19:8; Exod 24:18; Num 13:25). To the original Israelite/Judean audience the multiple implications of 'forty' would be heard; to Jonah they would be evident, and apparently the point was not lost on the Ninevites, either.[67]

As previously mentioned, the use of forty brought to mind a message of repentance in the minds of the Jewish audience of the book of Jonah. Since one of the purposes of the book was to demonstrate that they too could avoid destruction if only they would repent, the literary implications of the use of forty would be apparent to the audience. As Israel Loken pointed out in a personal conversation, this is especially true when one considers that Israel may have been destroyed forty years after Jonah's ministry. Israel was destroyed in 722 BC and Jonah ministered between 793 and 755 BC. Thus, Jonah could have been written in 762 BC, which would have been forty years before the destruction of Israel.

Also, God may have implied both repentance and destruction because Jonah would be less likely to give a message that did not even include the possibility of destruction. Jonah may have decided to preach in hopes that the Ninevites would be destroyed. However, God elected to show mercy on them instead. Hence, the potential calamity that could have resulted from this prophecy was avoided. Much to Jonah's dismay, the Ninevites' hearts were changed instead of their city destroyed. Stuart writes about how they beat Jonah to the punch by repenting:

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[67] Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 489.

Jonah was just beginning to warm up, just starting the process, and they were already believing God *en masse* (v 5). Thus the mention of the first day of the visit and the silence about the other days eloquently makes the narrator's point. Jonah only had to start to go Jonah (xּוֹבָל לֶחָיַּו) into the city with his message that first day. The Ninevites needed only that initial word, so ready were they to turn from their evil practices. Jonah's words reached eager ears right away. And the Ninevites themselves repeated the message all over the city until it touched even the king (v 6). Three days of preaching by Jonah himself would not even be needed. Like the Hebrew women who gave birth before the midwives could arrive (Exod 1:19), the Ninevites responded to God's message almost before the preacher could finish his speech![68]

Stuart makes a good point. While the Israelites had many prophets and they refused to repent, Jonah only had to deliver God's message to see repentance in the lives of the Ninevites. It is similar to his deliverance of the message to the sailors that led to their repentance.

From a theological perspective, this view best reconciles the issue of how God gave Jonah a prophecy that was 100% accurate and 100% fulfilled. Whether he liked it or not, Jonah faithfully communicated God's word. Good translated Jonah's prophecy in Jonah 3:4 as "Forty days hence and Nineveh will be a different place."[69] Good points out that this prophecy was fulfilled in Jonah 3:5 when as he translates it "the men of Nineveh turned faithful [וּנִימֲאַיַּו] towards God."[70] This would make God completely faithful and immutable while preserving Jonah as a true prophet. From the perspective of Jonah, God's desire was to not bring calamity on Nineveh (Jonah 4:2). The Ninevites realized that they must turn from their wicked ways to avoid this calamity (cf. Jonah 3:8-9). It would be the equivalent of walking into a New Testament church and saying, "In forty days, this church will be broken." Although it is unlikely that anyone has the biblical authority to prophesy in this nature in this dispensation, this illustration shows how the word broken could either

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[68] Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 488.

[69] Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia,: Westminster Press, 1965), 49.

[70] Ibid.

describe a destruction of the physical church building or a turning of the heart. The Aramaic and the Hebrew carry the same ambiguity in Jonah 3:4. Furthermore, the need for repentance of the nations to avoid destruction was revealed not only to Jonah but also to Jeremiah (cf. Jeremiah 18:7-10). Therefore, as always, God's word remains consistent throughout. Jeremiah and Jonah are not in disagreement.

The Sign of Jonah

While the New Testament does not change the meaning of the text in the Old Testament, it can at least inform the church on how it was interpreted, especially when Jesus did the interpreting. One case that contributes to this situation is Jesus' reference to the "sign of Jonah" in Matthew 12:39-41, Matthew 16:4 and Luke 11:29-32. Of special interest is Christ's reference in Luke 11:29-32. Merrill's article "The Sign of Jonah" has many exceptional insights on this matter. This passage not only is proof to establish the book of Jonah as describing true historical events, but it further elaborates on the sign of Jonah. For instance, Merrill defines σημεῖον as "a miraculous act produced to authenticate its agent and to induce faith in God on the part of the observer."[71] What is important about this fact is that Jesus refers to Jonah as a sign that was intended to induce faith and **not necessarily destruction only**. This is especially true in light of the fact that Jesus argues that the repentance of the Ninevites was a result of Jonah's preaching and his presence in the belly of the sea monster for three days and three nights. However, Jesus also demonstrates that the sign of Jonah was a sign of judgment (and ultimately destruction) to

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[71] Eugene H. Merrill, "The Sign of Jonah," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23, no. 1 (1980): 23.

the unbelieving Jews because they did not respond to His sign in the same way that the Ninevites did to Jonah's.

Some may argue that the sign of Jonah is limited to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. However, Merrill makes some very important points about distinctions between Matthew's account and Luke's. Whereas Matthew focuses on Jonah's experience in the fish and his preaching, Luke also notes that Jonah himself "became a sign to the Ninevites" (Luke 11:30).[72] Therefore, Merrill concludes, "The point that Luke, especially, is making is that Jonah was in some way such a powerful sign to the people of Nineveh that they repented at his preaching."[73]

How was Jonah a sign to the Ninevites? Merrill makes some very interesting observations. He points out that Nineveh's name "was formed of the composite Sumerian logogram NINUA (=NINA), the interior sign of which is KU_6 or, in Akkadian, nūnu, 'fish'" and that "a town of identical name (Nina) near Lagash worshipped the fish-goddess Nanshe, so it is suggested that she was also the chief deity of early Nineveh."[74] He also elaborates on an Assyrian tradition that "Assyria's arts and sciences were brought from the Persian Gulf by a half-fish, half-man deity called in the Greek Oannes."[75] Merrill notes that all these facts give further insight into Jesus' statement that Jonah himself was a sign to the Ninevites. If Jonah had survived in the belly of a large fish and came to pronounce a message of potential judgment and deliverance, this would clearly captivate their attention.

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[72] Ibid., 24.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid., 26.

[75] Ibid.

In fact, Merrill credits this as one of the reasons he considers for Jonah receiving such a captive audience (even among royalty) in such a short period of time "since Luke specifies that Jonah was a sign to Nineveh that experience in the fish must have been communicated to the Assyrian capital and have become to the Ninevites a sign that Jonah was a divine messenger. Such a sign would be particularly convincing to a people whose aetiology taught them that their city had been founded by a fish-god. The spectacular and timely arrival of Jonah among them created a curiosity and receptivity to his message that would have been possible in no other way. When the truth of the message of Yahweh was then proclaimed, the response was the repentance and faith."[76]

Therefore, Jonah himself was a sign to the Ninevites that resulted in repentance and faith. However, he is also a sign to the Israelites of the destruction that awaits them if they do not repent like the Ninevites. This also speaks to the possibility of repentance and destruction in Jonah's original prophecy. Why would God send a sign that would perfectly convey His only intent was to destroy them? It seems more likely that God sent Jonah because He knew Jonah's experience in the fish as well as his preaching would be extremely persuasive evidence that would lead them to repentance (not ultimately destruction). This reflects God's sovereign plan and not a last minute change of mind on God's part at seeing the attitude of the Ninevites. It also reflects the intent of the author of Jonah to communicate to the Israelite nation that they too faced both possibilities: repentance or destruction. They had enjoyed prosperity under Jeroboam but that prosperity would not lest if they did not repent of their wicked ways.

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[76] Ibid., 29-30.

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Furthermore, Jonah accurately preached the word of Yahweh to the Ninevites because Jesus accredits Jonah and his preaching as being the primary reason for their repentance. In fact, Jonah is the only Old Testament character with whom Jesus Christ compared Himself directly.[77] Finally, it is also apparent that Jesus notes the irony of Gentiles repenting at the preaching of one Jewish prophet when the nation of Israel would not repent at the messiah who was greater than Jonah. Thus, the repentance of the Ninevites as well as the possibility of their destruction was an essential aspect of the sign of Jonah.

Conclusion

This paper reviewed the issue of implicitly conditional prophecy. While I agree with Sandy and Chisholm that implicitly conditional prophecy exists, I do not believe that most prophecy is implicitly conditional. Furthermore, because implication rests on the intent of the original author, it must be textually indicated. I applied the methodology of Walvoord and Grice to detecting implicitly conditional prophecy. This methodology was applied to Jonah's prophecy to the Ninevites. A review of Jonah 3:4 demonstrated textual indicators for implicitly conditional prophecy. The Hebrew word הָפַךְ (*haphak*) could either mean to destroy or to change. All but one of the 33 instances of haphak occurring in the niphal mean change or turn instead of destroy. Thus, it is appropriate to conclude that the divine and human author of Jonah utilized polysemantic wordplay in order to communicate the blessings of repentance and the curses of disobedience. This view is not only consistent with the context but the overall purpose of the book. On this basis, one cannot use Jonah's prophecy to the Ninevites to infer that unstated conditions are common in Old Testament prophecy.

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[77] Thomas Constable, *Notes on Jonah*, 2004 edition [Internet] (Sonic Light, accessed January 6, 2004); available from http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/jonah.pdf.

Appendix: Expanded Lexical Analysis of Polysemantic wordplay in Jonah 3

Summary of the Polysemantic Wordplay of Jonah 3:4

This appendix is advocating the polysemantic wordplay of the use of הָפַךְ in Jonah 3:4. The word "ambiguous" is defined in *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* as "doubtful or uncertain esp. from obscurity or indistinctness" as well as "capable of being understood in two or more possible senses or ways."[78] Thus, the term can be an intended double meaning by the author of a word that can be understood in two ways. This is related to the term "double entendre" which is defined as: "ambiguity of meaning arising from language that lends itself to more than one interpretation" and **"**a word or expression capable of two interpretations..."[79] Therefore, double entendre is a form of ambiguity. Based on these definitions, this appendix argues that the word הָפַךְ in Jonah 3:4 was intended by both the human and divine author to serve as a double entendre because of the fact that the word could mean both repentance and destruction in the same context. The ambiguity of the word choice was due to the fact that neither Jonah nor the Ninevites knew which definition would apply to the specific situation (although they both understood the intended double entendre of the term). Since both repentance and destruction were possible meanings of the word, the prophecy itself was implicitly conditioned upon the Ninevites' response to the prophecy.

The polysemantic wordplay has been advocated by several authors. Stuart supports this view when he writes:

> In Assyrian the full sentence would be rendered *adi arbât ūmē ninua innabak*, as simple and as ambiguous as the Hebrew. The ambiguities would be threefold. First, as this word was passed around among the populace, it would not automatically be clear whether Jonah had warned only the enclosed city (*al*ninua) or the entire district (*ninua*ki) that it would be overthrown by God. Second, the people might wonder

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[78] Merriam-Webster Inc., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 2006), 39.

[79] Ibid., 374.

whether the mention of 'forty days' was to allow time for or simply to assure that the divine judgment repentance, was not far off. Third, by nature Heb. הָפַךְ/Assyrian *abāku* carries a certain ambiguity. The term can signify an overthrow, a judgment, a turning upside down, a reversal, a change, a deposing of royalty, or a change of heart (Wiseman, *TynB* 30 [1979] 49).In other words, Jonah's words in Assyrian, just as in Hebrew, could mean both 'In forty more days Nineveh will be overthrown' and 'In forty more days Nineveh will have a change of heart' (cf. Good, *Irony in the* OT, 48–49). It must be remembered that these words are not what Jonah composed, but are exactly what Yahweh told him to say (3:2). The alert hearer/reader who would catch the ambiguity would begin to sense what 3:5 then reports.[80]

Page agrees with this assessment when he writes, "Also the word for 'destroy' (*hāpak*) carries a certain vagueness, since it can mean either 'turn' or 'overthrow'... It can signify 'judgment, a turning upside down, a reversal, a change, a deposing of royalty, or a change of heart.' In other words, Jonah's words could mean either that in 'forty more days Nineveh would be destroyed' or that 'in forty more days Nineveh would have a change of heart.' Therefore the ambiguity in these words given by the Lord may have been what opened the door of understanding for the Ninevites and led to their positive response."[81] Both of these authors make strong arguments for the consideration of the polysemantic wordplay of Jonah 3:4.

Method

The key method for evaluating the possible double meaning in Jonah 3:4 is to establish a basis for identifying wordplay in the Old Testament. Once that is established, the book of Jonah will be examined for the frequency with which the author employs wordplay. The likelihood of the author utilizing wordplay in Jonah 3:4 increases if the author employs this technique in other parts of the book. A key aspect of the argument is to show that wordplay is common in prophetic literature and especially in Jonah. Once that is

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[80] Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 489.

[81] Billy K. Smith and Frank S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Nashville , TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 259.

established, a word study will be undertaken in order to evaluate the semantic range of the word הָפַךְ. The analysis will demonstrate that both a change of heart and destruction are within the semantic range of the word הָפַךְ. Since authorial intent must be proven in order to establish intentional ambiguity, the surrounding context of Jonah will be evaluated. Specific attention will be given to indicators in chapters two, three and four that point to a recognition on the part of both Jonah and the Ninevites of the possibility of repentance and destruction.

Analysis of Wordplay in the Hebrew Old Testament

This section defines wordplay and provides categories of wordplay in the Old Testament. The definition and categories of wordplay will set the parameters around which the analysis of wordplay within Jonah and ultimately in Jonah 3:4 will be established.

Definition and Categories of Wordplay

Wordplay is defined by Petrotta as "a sophisticated linguistic and literary endeavor that collates sound, sense, and syntax in such a way as to exploit similarities and ambiguities in an effort to suggest relationships, both cognitive and affective, that go beyond the ostensive reference of the individual phonological, semantic and syntactical units."[82] As Petrotta observes, wordplay includes utilizing similar sounds (e.g. alliteration), sense (repetition and visual similarities) as well as syntax. In general, wordplay connects people, ideas and words together so the reader evaluates the connection between the two. He also states, based on the work of Kelly, that wordplay often leads the reader to take a

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[82] Anthony J. Petrotta, *Lexis Ludens: Wordplay and the Book of Micah* (New York: P. Lang, 1991), 25.

45

second look at the material. In the case of puns, double meaning occurs and one or the other meaning comes to the forefront. However, he sets the stipulation that both must be evident in the text itself.[83] In fact, according to the present author, one must be able to establish that both meanings were intended by the original author himself and the contextual clues make this intention evident.

As a result, wordplay is categorized in many different ways.[84] Time and space do not allow for an in-depth analysis. This appendix will focus on the classifications provided by Chisholm in his article "Wordplay in the Eighth-Century Prophets" because of its simplicity and direct application to prophetic literature.[85] Chisholm describes his overall perspective in classifying wordplay as follows, "Wordplay can be based on repetition, various meanings expressed by an individual word (polysemy), identity in sound between two or more words (homonymy), or similarity in sound between two or more words (paronomasia)."[86] Chisholm classifies wordplay according to wordplay involving a single word and wordplay involving two or more words.

The first category includes: single words that are repeated in the same semantic sense, repeated with a different sense (explicit polysemantic wordplay) and words that are

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[83] Ibid., 29.

[84] For example see I.M. Casanowicz, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 12 (1893). Although it is primarily about poetry the following has some helpful information on classifying wordplay: Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2005), 239-50. For a history of the classification of wordplay and an in-depth discussion of different linguistic theories regarding wordplay see Petrotta, *Lexis Ludens: Wordplay and the Book of Micah*, 1-58.

[85] Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Wordplay in the Eighth-Century Prophets," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144, no. 573: 44-53.

[86] Ibid.: 44.

used once with two senses implied (implicit polysemantic wordplay).[87] The next section

will primarily focus on this category of wordplay. The author of Jonah heavily utilizes

repetition of the same word with different nuances in order to highlight the relationships of

the main characters. Some cases, such as the use of הָפַךְ in Jonah 3:4, involve implicit

polysemantic wordplay. This category is occasionally called double entendre or pun.

Watson prefers labeling it as polysemantic pun because it "denotes a word which can have

two or more meanings."[88] He describes their function as follows, "Such puns are the most

effective kind because they demand quick-wittedness from both poet and audience since

the operative word occurs once only. They exemplify the principle of thrift operative in

oral poetry—although many polysemantic puns are strictly literary in nature."[89] First,

Watson notes that the pun itself is in the quick-witted mind of the author. Additionally,

puns can be an efficient, sometimes ironic and artful way of analyzing the narrative by

using a few words.

   Chisholm describes a second category of wordplay that involves two or more

words. His subcategories for this are those that are identical in sound (homonymy) and

similar in sound (paronomasia). According to Chisholm, paronomasia includes similarity in

consonants (alliteration) and/or vowels (assonance).[90] While the author of Jonah uses some

examples of this type of wordplay, this study will not focus on this function as extensively

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[87] Ibid.

[88] Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, 241.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Chisholm Jr., "Wordplay in the Eighth-Century Prophets," 44.

as the first. Since the primary focus of the study is on the author's intended double entendre of הָפַךְ in Jonah 3:4, the first category will be emphasized throughout the work.

<center>Purpose of Wordplay</center>

According to Petrotta, the primary function of wordplay is to "hook the audience."[91] Watson concurs when he argues that wordplay requires quick-wittedness on the part of both the author and audience in order to expose the underlying relationships that are connected through wordplay. He gives several general functions of wordplays in oral poetry (some of which can apply to prophetic literature): to amuse and sustain interest, to assist composition, to lend authenticity, to link a poem or its parts, to denote reversal of fortune, to show appearance can be deceptive, to equate two things, as well as other functions (e.g., to distract mourners in lament psalms, to assist in audience memory, etc).[92] The most significant for the study of Jonah are: equating two things, denoting reversal of fortune, as well as showing that appearance can be deceptive. For instance, the wordplay of רָעָה in Jonah 4:6 appears to reveal a cure for Jonah's discomfort, the analysis in the next section will show that it really is intended to reveal Jonah's evil or sin.

Casanowicz argues that wordplay occurs most frequently in prophetic literature, "Plays upon words are especially frequent in the prophets. As an element of the daily speech, with their biting, ironical, or sarcastic force, they are best suited to the prophetic sermons, which adhere closely to living speech and aim to reach the mind and conscience

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[91] Petrotta, *Lexis Ludens: Wordplay and the Book of Micah*, 20.

[92] Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, 245-46.

of the hearer, and to bring home to him directly and vividly a truth or fact."[93] Casanowicz rightly argues that the nature of the prophetic genre makes wordplay more frequent. He cites that it most likely occurs in prophetic sermon (which Jonah 3:4 is) because of the desire of the prophet to bring home a truth or fact. These observations increase the likelihood that wordplay is being used in Jonah 3:4.

Chisholm makes some very important observations about the use of wordplay in prophetic literature when he writes, "While wordplay has numerous functions, its most exegetically significant uses are to indicate correspondence and contrast (or reversal). The prophets frequently used wordplay to bring out the relationship between events that on the surface might seem unrelated or only loosely connected. This is especially true with respect to the themes of sin and judgment. The prophets used wordplay to draw attention to the appropriate or poetic nature of divine justice."[94] It is important to note that wordplay often indicates contrast or reversal. Jonah 3 and 4 employs wordplay to describe the reversal of fortunes of the Ninevites in light of the possibility of both repentance and destruction in light of Yahweh's divine justice. It connects the seemingly unrelated events of Jonah's experiences with the sailors, his experience in the large fish, the Ninevite repentance and Jonah's anger with God in Jonah 4. Yahweh's willingness to offer both repentance and destruction to the Ninevites (and by implication the Israelites) provides the irony that the reader recognizes throughout the book. Rather than containing a long discourse by the narrator on how this was possible, the author of Jonah uses repetition of key words and polysemantic wordplay to cause the reader to make connections between situations and

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[93] Casanowicz, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," 121.

[94] Chisholm Jr., "Wordplay in the Eighth-Century Prophets," 52.

49

circumstances. These connections enable the narrator to evaluate the characters of the book according the divine and human authors' intention.

Chisholm also cites a theological purpose for wordplay:

> Theologically speaking, wordplay often highlights the sharp distinction between the divine and human perspectives. God's erring people fell short of His holy standard (Amos 5:10, 15) and failed to evaluate properly His sovereign actions (Micah 6:3– 4). Consequently they failed to achieve their own ambitions (Amos 3:12; Micah 2:5, 10). In spite of His people's sin, which brings harsh divine judgment, God still promised to restore Israel and reverse their situation, a fact highlighted by wordplay (Hos 13:7; 14:9 , Eng. v. 8 ; and Isa 32:9, 11, 18). In this way one gains insight into the gracious character of divine salvation. The same God who appropriately judges sin promises to reverse completely the effects of that judgment.[95]

This same statement could have been made about the book of Jonah. This statement shows that wordplay is often used in prophetic literature in order to indicate contrast or reversal in judgment oracles. Jonah 3:4 occurs in the midst of a contrast between the heart of God and the heart of Jonah as revealed in his response to the repentance of the Ninevites. Jonah is filled with contrasts between Jonah and the Gentile sailors and Ninevites. The Gentiles fear God and repent in light of his impending judgment while Jonah (representing the Israelite nation) pridefully gloats in his covenant position and prefers death over adopting the character of Yahweh.

<center>Summary</center>

This section defined wordplay as "a sophisticated linguistic and literary endeavor that collates sound, sense, and syntax in such a way as to exploit similarities and ambiguities in an effort to suggest relationships, both cognitive and affective, that go beyond the ostensive reference of the individual phonological, semantic and syntactical

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[95] Ibid.

units."[96] Two categories of wordplay were described: wordplays involving a single word or wordplays involving two or more words. The first category was emphasized due to its relationship with Jonah 3:4. After categorizing the forms of wordplays the purpose of wordplays were emphasized. The key purpose related to the book of Jonah was the tendency of prophets to use wordplays in judgment oracles to indicate reversal of fortune as well as to direct the reader's attention to God's divine justice.

The Frequency of Wordplay as Used by the Author of Jonah

The author of Jonah uses wordplay frequently. Magonet says that the author of Jonah uses wordplay in order to draw out "dimensions of meaning in a single root by varying the context and the subject, thus allowing once again the contrasting aspects of his characters to emerge, and deepening the nature of their interrelationships."[97] Like Magonet, many commentators have argued that the author of Jonah skillfully uses ironic wordplays throughout the book in order to contrast characters and provide implicit evaluation of their actions. The author's frequent use of wordplays throughout the book lends greater probability that the author intended a polysemantic wordplay of הָפַךְ in Jonah 3:4.

Specific Examples of Wordplay in Jonah

Magonet describes the author of Jonah's strategy in using words with multiple meanings in the same verse as follows, "Although the author could have chosen a different word each time to express different shades of meaning, by retaining this one, he allows each usage to interact with the other, multiplying levels of correspondence and contrast

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[96] Petrotta, *Lexis Ludens: Wordplay and the Book of Micah*, 25.

[97] Jonathan Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* (Heidelberg: Herbert Lang, 1976), 28.

51

between the respective subjects and contexts related to the word."[98] One example he gives of this situation is the word קָרָא. He notes that in Jonah 3:2 קְרָא is used by the command of God for Jonah to call out or proclaim. While this proclamation may imply a certain level of confidence, it is also used in the book to describe crying out to God. Jonah was called to cry against (וּקְרָא עָלֶיהָ) the city of Nineveh, he left his calling. However, it is the sailor who instructs Jonah to cry out to his God (קְרָא אֶל־אֱלֹהֶיךָ) and they themselves cry out to him in prayer. The Ninevites also perform the same task in Jonah 3:5 and 8. Jonah himself did so in his psalm in Jonah 2:3. Thus, the same word carries two shades of meaning in the book. One is a proclamation as a representative on behalf of God. The second is from a disobedient individual who is crying out to God for mercy.

Magonet also finds irony in the use of יָדַע throughout the book. While it is a relatively common word, it provides an interesting interchange between the Gentiles and Jonah throughout the book. In Jonah 1:7, יָדַע is used to describe the process the sailors undertook to identify the individual who brought the calamity upon them. They then come to know that it is Jonah who was fleeing from God (1:10). Jonah himself knows that he is the one who is responsible for this great tempest coming upon them (1:12). However, in Jonah 3:9, the Ninevites ask "who knows?" (מִי־יוֹדֵעַ) whether God will relent from the promised destruction. Magonet says the following regarding this ironic statement, "With this statement he [the king of Nineveh] goes one step further than the captain of the ship, whose parallel perhaps (1:6) is limited to a hope that God will 'think of them.' The king speculates on the inner workings of the mind of God, which as a pagan in this story, he can only guess at. We are thus ready for the next transition of meaning, when Jonah speaks yet again of what he knows (4:2)."[99] In this regard, Jonah has all the knowledge of God but he does not reflect the character of God. The Gentiles who have little or no knowledge of God,

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[98] Ibid., 22.

[99] Ibid., 27.

52

seem to know the right responses that God is requiring in order to avoid destruction. Spender notes the irony as follows:

> The message for Israel was an indicting one. If a foreign, Gentile, people like the Assyrians could repent and seek God why couldn't Israel? If God had compassion on Nineveh would He not have compassion on His own people? The answer to that question is of course 'yes' but the condition of repentance remains. Israel needed to turn and repent but in the eighth century B.C. they were still running away from God. For years, the recipients of His grace, they had turned their backs on Him and fled to idols. Jonah's realization that 'those who cling to worthless idols forsake the grace that could be theirs,' (2:8, NIV) was equally meant for Israel.[100]

Thus, the Israelites ironically needed to imitate the actions of the wicked Ninevites.

In Jonah 4:2, Jonah proclaims his knowledge of God's gracious and compassionate character. However, rather than praising him for that, he justifies his fleeing to Tarshish because of God's character. Magonet remarks on the irony of this knowledge:

> Thus here the root יָדַע takes on the peak of its meaning, the transcendent knowledge of the nature of God, obtained through revelation, and confirmed in the experience of Israel—and at the same time in the mouth of Jonah, that knowledge becomes absurd! Because it is spoken in the middle of Jonah's complaint about the very qualities of God, and, in addition, because of the ironic fact that but for this very patience and compassion of God, Jonah himself would not be alive to complain about them![101]

This ironic wordplay points to a key theme in the book of Jonah. The Israelites, represented by Jonah, who have the very revelation of God and claim to know God, are unwilling to repent and turn to God in order to avoid the imminent destruction that awaits them. However, the worst of Gentile nations, who received less revelation, repented at the first promise of destruction.

In their article entitled "Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah" Halpern and Friedman argue that the book of Jonah is "replete with word-play" that can serve as a "sampler of paronomastic techniques" and it is a "unique example of the

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[100] Spender, "Reading Jonah Again for the First Time," 90.

[101] Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah*, 28.

53

contribution that formal artistry makes to the impact of the final work."[102] They find repeated instances of word repetition and wordplay throughout the book of Jonah. For instance, they note the repeated use of the words קום as well as יָרַד ("go down") throughout the book. In Jonah 1:2 Yahweh commands Jonah to arise (קום) because the sins of the Ninevites have arisen (עָלֶיהָ) to Him. Instead, Jonah got up (וַיָּקָם) and went down (וַיֵּרֶד) to Joppa and later descended into a boat. It was there in Jonah 1:6 that the sailors told Jonah to arise and call out (קום) to his God. Eventually, by Jonah's own admission, he later descended (יָרַדְתִּי) to the very bottom of the mountains into a pit. However, it was from there that Yahweh brought him up (וַתַּעַל). In Jonah 3:2, God reiterated his command for Jonah to arise (קום) and go to Nineveh. Jonah did arise and go to Nineveh (וַיָּקָם) as God requested. When the king of Nineveh heard Jonah's prophecy, he arose from his throne (וַיָּקָם) and sat in the ashes in repentance. Later God appointed a plant that came up over Jonah (וַיַּעַל) as well and the worm attacked the plant as the dawn came up (בַּעֲלוֹת).[103]

What is the significance of this wordplay? Halpern and Friedman point out the purpose of this ironic wordplay as follows, "It is worth noting that the term [יָרַד] surfaces again in Jonah's metaphor of his distraint in the fish's belly ('I went down to the bases of the mountains' -2:7); this represents both his deliberate and his enforced alienation from the deity, a fact that is obvious from the sequence, but it can be drawn out more objectively from a structural analysis of the book."[104] They later assert "Lexically, then, it is as though descent represents distance from YHWH, ascent movement toward him."[105] This point

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[102] Baruch Halpern and Richard Elliott Friedman, "Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah," *Hebrew Annual Review* 4 (1980): 79-80.

[103] Ibid., 80-81

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., 81.

reflects the beauty of the use of wordplays in the Hebrew Old Testament. Through the use of repetition of key words one notes the author's evaluation of the actions of the characters without the narrator actually having to make formal declarations of his evaluation of the characters. Thus, the words serve the purpose of describing the situation and giving the narrator's analysis of the actions at the same time.

Halpern and Friedman also find irony in the use of the word גָּדוֹל which occurs thirteen times in the book of Jonah. The word is used to describe the great city Nineveh (1:2 and 3:2-3 and 4:11), the great wind (1:4), the great storm (1:4), the great fear of the sailors (1:10, 16), the big fish (2:1), the largest Ninevite who is contrasted to the smallest (3:5), and etc. Regarding the use of this word Halpern and Friedman state, "Everything that is 'big' in the story is produced by YHWH, or by YHWH's deeds. The implication is that Nineveh's grandeur stems from YHWH as well, a point made directly in 4:10-11. YHWH raises; YHWH enlarges. This dovetails so fully with the use of the ascent/descent terminology in the story that it becomes difficult to regard the pattern as accidental."[106]

Perhaps one notable exception from Halpern and Friedman's point is the reaction of Jonah (which technically could be classified under something that is produced by Yahweh's deeds). In 4:1, Jonah experiences extreme displeasure or evil (רָעָה גְדוֹלָה) in reaction to Yahweh's mercy. He also experiences extreme joy (שִׂמְחָה גְדוֹלָה) when God graciously provides the plant. Thus, while Yahweh is doing big things, Jonah is having big reactions. The likelihood of this ironic use of גָּדוֹל being purely coincidental is greatly remote (pun intended).

According to Halpern and Friedman, some additional words in Jonah are utilized to emphasize Yahweh's sovereignty. The two specific words they believe emphasizes this notion are מָנַה and אָבַד. The Hebrew word מָנַה is used to describe Yahweh's sovereign preparation of the large fish (2:1), the gourd (4:6), the worm (4:7) and

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[106] Ibid., 82

55

the east wind (4:8). In all of these passages, Halpern and Friedman argue that the word is used to describe Yahweh's "manipulation of phenomena in the account."[107] The word אָבַד which is translated as perish and is used by the sailors (1:6 and 1:14), the king of Nineveh (3:9) and of the destruction of the gourd (4:1).[108] According to Halpern and Friedman the word is consistently used to describe "perishing at YHWH's hand."[109] The purpose of this consistent repetition is to "reinforce the important theme of YHWH's control of objects and events, his mastery of fate."[110]

As previously mentioned, the point of emphasizing the wordplay within Jonah is to demonstrate the strong likelihood of a polysemantic wordplay in Jonah 3:4. The polysemantic wordplay in Jonah 3:4 does not escape Halpern and Friedman's notice either. They write, "Apart from meaning 'physical overthrow,' the verb *hpk* denotes a change of character (1 Sam 10:6, 9; cf. Exod 14:5; Hos 11:8; Lam 1:20; and the nuance of transformation in Deut 32:6; Jer 31:13; Amos 5:7; Ps 30:12; Neh 13:2, e.g.). Nineveh's transformation fulfills profoundly Jonah's prophecy."[111]

Jonah is also one of the books featured in Good's monograph *Irony in the Old Testament*. Good describes several ironic wordplays within Jonah. In Jonah 1:1, Jonah is described as "the son of Amittai" which literally means "son of faithfulness" or "truth" (and can sometimes mean "son of valor") even though Jonah "abandons faithfulness at the first opportunity and speaks truth only under duress, even then not understanding it."[112] Similar

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[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid., 87.

[112] Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 42.

56

to Halpern and Friedman, Good finds irony in the fact that Jonah is told to arise and go to Nineveh (קוּם) and instead Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish (וַיָּקָם) in 1:3.[113] Jonah claims to fear the Lord (יָרֵא) in 1:9 even though the sailors were the ones who truly knew what fearing the LORD was truly about (וַיִּירְאוּ) in 1:10 and 1:16. Good also recognizes the polysemantic wordplay in Jonah 3:4.[114]

Page argues that certain words within the book of Jonah are used in different ways to provide a contrast. For instance, he writes:

> The word 'blazed' is the same Hebrew word translated 'chewed' in v. 7. It is a general word (נָכָה) meaning to 'strike.' Having been deliriously happy, Jonah was being struck down by a series of natural 'calamities' until his misery was complete. The blazing sun beat down on Jonah's head, which was lacking any helpful shade. The verb translated 'grew faint' (עָלַף) is almost identical in form and meaning to the word Jonah used in 2:7 (עָטַף, Heb 2:8) of his life 'ebbing away.' Jonah probably felt that God was finally answering his prayer in 4:3 by taking his life. So, since nothing has changed, he repeated the prayer. At his wits' end, Jonah was completely exhausted; the text says literally, 'He asked his life to die.'[115]

One can see how the wordplays in Jonah 4 provide a startling contrast to his poem of deliverance in chapter 4. Whereas he once praised God from delivering him from the pit and the certain death of the surrounding water, now Jonah asks for death.

Additionally, the author of Jonah repeatedly uses the word רָעָה in an ironic way. Magonet notes that this word is used in relationship to all three main characters of the book: God, Jonah and the pagans.[116] In fact, in one instance, the author makes a play on words on two different occasions in the same verse. Page writes regarding Jonah 4:6, "The verb for 'deliver,' נצל, is a play on the word for 'shade,' צל. There also is intentional

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[113] Ibid., 47.

[114] Ibid., 48-49.

[115] Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 280.

[116] Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah*, 22.

ambiguity in the use of רָעָה, for while God's immediate purpose for the vine was to relieve Jonah's discomfort, his real purpose was to deliver Jonah from his sinful attitude."[117] Once again, the concept of calamity and deliverance is contrasted. However, on this occasion, Jonah is the recipient of mercy as a potential object lesson to reveal his evil.

Page describes the relationship between Jonah's sinful attitude and comfort as follows, "The phrase 'to ease his discomfort' is literally 'to deliver him from his evil' (רָעָה). The latter word is the term occurring throughout the book with its two senses, 'wickedness' or 'trouble, calamity.'"[118] Page's assertion regarding the use of רָעָה in Jonah 4:6 is critical for the argument of this paper because it demonstrates another clear instance in which polysemantic wordplay is employed by the author of Jonah. Regarding the larger context of the book, the word does occur in several circumstances throughout the book (Jonah 1:2, 7-8; 3:8, 10; 4:1-2, 6). In some cases it does carry the sense of calamity or trouble (cf. Jonah 1:7-8) while in others it means evil (Jonah 1:2 and 3:8). In one case, both uses are found in the same verse (Jonah 3:10). In this passage the Ninevites repented of their evil and God relented on the calamity they deserved. One can see the irony in Jonah 4:1 when the same word that described the evil of the Ninevites now describes Jonah. Page writes, "The NIV speaks of Jonah's great displeasure and great anger. The literal translation is, 'It was evil to Jonah with great evil.' There is a play on words here with the root רָעָה, which can refer to wickedness on the one hand (see 1:2) or to disaster, trouble, or misery as here. The evil that was characteristic of the people of Nineveh here described the prophet of God."[119]

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[117] Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 278.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid., 271.

58

Chisholm agrees that this instance is an example of polysemantic wordplay and he adds the following purpose for the polysemantic wordplay:

> An initial reading of the statement [in Jonah 4:6a] suggests that רָעָה, 'distress,' refers to Jonah's physical discomfort, caused by the hot sun beating down on his head. Jonah is happy about the plant, but God quickly destroys it, prompting one more complaint from Jonah and the book's final dialogue, which is designed to show Jonah why God has been merciful to Nineveh. At this point, the statement in verse 6a takes on deeper meaning. If God were just concerned about Jonah's physical comfort, he would not have destroyed the plant he made. Through the object lesson of the plant, he really wants to purge Jonah of his morally wrong attitude. One can detect a double meaning in the word רָעָה. On the surface, it means 'physical discomfort,' but it also has a deeper meaning. God made the plant grow to give Jonah some temporary relief from his physical discomfort, but his larger purpose in making the plant was to use it as an object lesson in ridding Jonah of his moral 'evil,' another attested nuance of this noun.[120]

Chisholm's arguments are very helpful. Once again, it must be emphasized that the polysemantic wordplay was intended by the author and that the use of a phrase like "deeper meaning" does not imply an allegorical method of interpreting the passage. If the author intends the polysemantic wordplay, then a literal interpreter must interpret it as such. Having said that, Jonah appears to lack an understanding of the deeper purposes of God throughout the book. The polysemantic wordplay in Jonah 4:6 demonstrates the contrast between Jonah's selfish focus and Yahweh's justice in judging sin in order to eliminate it.

Not only this, but while God is slow to anger and relents from calamity (note the use of רָעָה in Jonah 3:10 and 4:2 to describe what God relents from), Jonah angrily becomes displeased in an evil way (4:1) because of God's mercy (Jonah 4:1-2). The very mercy that the Ninevites hoped to see was resented by Jonah. Page writes, "As God's anger and judgment were averted in chap. 3, Jonah's anger was incited."[121] The irony of Jonah 4 is inescapable.

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[120] Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 52.

[121] Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*.

Summary

Based on the use of wordplays throughout Jonah, it should be no surprise that

God commanded Jonah to use the word הָפַךְ in 3:4 that Good believes means to be

changed in a positive sense from something bad to good[122] or a city that is doomed or

overthrown.[123] This is not to say that a text can have multiple meanings, but that the

intended meaning of the passage was an ironic polysemantic wordplay that God intended to

use from the lips of Jonah to the Ninevites.

Lexical Analysis of הָפַךְ

This lexical analysis will show that הָפַךְ (*haphak*) can mean **both repentance**

and destruction. It is not the author's contention that the word only means repentance. The

possibility of destruction is clearly present (cf. Jonah 3:10). However, the fact that the word

can also describe repentance supports the argument that the prophecy of Jonah 3:4 utilizes

polysemantic wordplay.. As a result, this prophecy was fulfilled within the forty day period

of time when the Ninevites repented.

Proposed Translation of Jonah 3:1-10

This is the author's proposed interpretive translation of Jonah 3:1-10 that

incorporates some of the ideas discussed in this paper:

> And it happened the second time the word of THE LORD *came* to Jonah saying,
> "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and announce to her the message which I am
> speaking to you." And Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of
> THE LORD and Nineveh was a city of importance (or greatness) to God, and *it was* a
> visit of three days. And He caused Jonah to begin to go into the city for a one day visit

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[122] Ibid., 48-49. As evidence, Good points to the Qal form used in Zeph 3:9, 1 Samuel 10:9, Jer 31:13, Nehemiah 13:2 and the Niphal in Hosea 11:8 and Exodus 14:5.

[123] Ibid., 48. For evidence on this passage, Good cites Genesis 19:25, 29; Amos 4:11 and Isaiah 1:7.

and he spoke, "Yet in forty days and Nineveh will be overturned." And the people of Nineveh believed in God and they called a fast and they put on sackcloths from the greatest to the least *of them*. And the word arrived to the king of Nineveh and he stood from his throne and he removed his robe from upon himself and he really covered *himself with* a sackcloth and he sat on the ashes. And the king caused it to be proclaimed by saying, 'In Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles, let neither human nor animal, cattle nor sheep, taste anything; let them not eat and do not let them drink water.' 'And let the man and the beast cover themselves with sackcloths and let them cry mightily to God and let every one turn from their evil ways and from their violence which is in each one's hands. Who knows if God will be moved to pity and show favor and he will turn back from his fierce burning anger and we will not perish?' And God really saw their works, namely that they repented from their evil ways, and God was moved to compassion because of the calamity which He spoke to do to them and He did not do *it*.

This translation best preserves the causative nature of God's speaking through Jonah by translating the the hiphil תחל in verse four literally. It also emphasizes the translation of the passive *nacham* as "being moved to pity or compassion" in verses 9-10.

Initial Word Study of the Use of הָפַךְ in the Niphal

A lexical study of הָפַךְ validates these claims. *Brown Driver Briggs* defines this word as follows (emphasis added in definition is mine):

> haphak vb. **turn, overturn** -- Qal 1. trans. a. turn, turn about, turn over, c. acc. b. overturn, overthrow. c. turn = change, transform (1) sq. acc. = alter; (2) pervert; (3) sq. acc. c. Inf.; (4) turn to, into, sq. two acc.; usu. sq. acc. + l. 2. intrans. a. **turn, turn back; b. turn = change, change into**, sq. pred. adj. Niph. 1. reflex. & intrans. a. turn oneself, turn, turn back (cf.Qal 2 a); turn against sq. B.. b. turn = change (oneself) sq. pred. adj.; sq. pred. noun; no pred. expressed. c. be perverse, only pt. used subst. 2. pass., a. be turned, turned over to sq. l.. b. be reversed. c. **be turned, changed, sq. l.. d. be overturned, overthrown. e. be upturned.** Hithp. reflex. & intrans.: 1. turn this way & that, every way. 2. **transform oneself. Hoph. (pg 245) change, change into**, sq. pred. adj. Niph. 1. reflex. & intrans. a. turn oneself, turn, turn back (cf.Qal 2 a); turn against sq. B.. b. **turn = change (oneself)** sq. pred. adj.; sq. pred. noun; no pred. expressed. c. be perverse, only pt. used subst. 2. pass., a. be turned, turned over to sq. l.. b. be reversed. c. **be turned, changed**, sq. l.. d. **be overturned, overthrown.** e. be upturned. Hithp. reflex. & intrans.: 1. turn this way & that, every way. 2. **transform oneself.** Hoph. (pg 245)[124]

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124 Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 245-46.

61

Note that the definition in *Brown Driver Briggs* includes both the possibility of transformation and destruction. In fact, Lubeck notes that in all but one of the 33 OT occurrences of הָפַךְ in the Niphal it means "turned" or "changed," but never "destroyed."[125]

An examination of the usage of הָפַךְ in the Niphal validates Lubeck's claims. Since the word appears in the Niphal in Jonah 3:4, this study will begin with the uses in the Niphal prior to expanding the word study to include other forms of the word as well as possible derivatives. This word study of the use of הָפַךְ in the Niphal will demonstrate that the primary uses describe (1) a turn or change of objects or parts of the body (2) a turning or changing of people or God (3) a change of mind (i.e. repentance) or a transformation of person.

First, there are several instances when the Niphal of הָפַךְ that describe the turning or changing of objects. In the Exodus accounts it describes the turning of the staff to a serpent and the water to blood (Exodus 7:15, 17 and 20). In Leviticus 13:16, 17 and 25 the word is used of the changing of the skin in the examination of leprosy. Joel 2:31 discusses the changing of the sun to darkness and the moon to blood. Lamentations 5:2 describes the turning over of inheritance and houses to strangers. The book of Job uses the word five times (more than any other book) and three of those uses fall into this category: the turning of food in the stomach (Job 20:14), the turning of the earth by fire (Job 28:5), as well as the turning of slingstones to stubble (Job 41:28). Isaiah 34:9 also describes a change of the land. Isaiah 60:5 describes the turning of the sea. Proverbs 17:20 describes a person with a perverse or turning tongue. Jeremiah 30:6 uses the word for a face that turned pale. Lamentations 1:20 describes a heart that is turned within the author. Hosea 11:8 uses a similar expression for the turning of the heart within God as his compassion is kindled. Ezekiel 4:18 discusses God's prohibition of his prophet from turning from one side to the

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[125] Lubeck, "Prophetic Sabotage: A Look at Jonah 3:2-4," 44.

other as part of an illustration for Israel. First Samuel 4:19 describes how Phinehas' wife's pain had overcome her. Thus, the semantic range allows for being overcome as part of the change. One instance of the Niphal form of הָפַךְ in the Psalms describes the vitality of the author being turned in the heat of the summer (Psalm 32:4).

The second major use of הָפַךְ in the Niphal describes a change of direction of people. In Joshua 8:20 הָפַךְ is used in the Niphal to describe a people who fled in the wilderness only to turn back from their pursuers. Esther 9:1 describes how the enemies' plans were turned to the contrary and in Esther 9:22 and how their emotions turned from sorrow to joy. Lamentations 5:15 has a similar use with the reverse effect: their dancing is turned to mourning. Daniel 10:8 and 16 use הָפַךְ to discuss the painful effects that overcame him when he had his vision. The book of Job uses הָפַךְ in the context of his friends turning against him (Job 19:19) as well as persecution from God (Job 30:21).

The third use of הָפַךְ describes a change of mind. This can imply positive or negative repentance. While it really is a subcategory of the second use, it has been separated because this use is the most relevant for this study. Psalm 78:57 and Jeremiah 2:21 describe how the rebellious Israelites turned away from God (Psalm 78:57). This instance is almost like a reverse repentance away from God. Exodus 14:15 describes the fact that Pharaoh's mind "was changed toward the people." This usage directly describes a change of mind. Another use that confirms the notion of transformation as part of the semantic range of הָפַךְ is 1 Samuel 10:6 "Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed [וְנֶהְפַּכְתָּ] into another man." This shows a prophesied transformation that would take place when the Spirit of the LORD came upon Saul.

This analysis of the use of הָפַךְ in the Niphal confirms Lubek's conclusion that the Niphal never specifically means destroyed in the Old Testament. While a word study like this one should not be the basis of an illegitimate totality transfer, one must note that

dismissing the possibility of repentance from the use of the word in Jonah 3:4 would go against the majority of the uses of the word in the Niphal throughout the Hebrew Bible. In order to assert that the word only means destruction, one will need to have irrefutable lexical and contextual proof to validate that claim. The next section will expand the discussion to the other uses of the word outside of the Niphal in order to evaluate the semantic range of the word so that the author's intended meaning can be ascertained.

<p style="text-align:center">Analysis of the Use of הָפַךְ as a Participle</p>

In addition to being in the Niphal form, הָפַךְ appears in Jonah 3:4 as a participle. הָפַךְ occurs several times in the Bible as a participle (cf. Genesis 3:24; Judges 7:13; Job 37:12; Psalm 114:8; Proverbs 17:20 and Amos 5:7f). In the majority of those cases, it means "to turn." Genesis 3:24 describes how the cherubim turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. Judges 7:13 depicts a tent that turned upside down. Job 37:10 illustrates the turning of the lightning by the guidance of God. Psalm 114:8 portrays God's turning the rock into a pool of water. Amos 5:7 describes those who turn justice into wormwood. Amos 5:8 explains the change from deep darkness into morning. Proverbs 17:20 describes an individual with a perverted (or turned) mind. Thus, each use of הָפַךְ in the participle form points to turning or changing direction while none of them indicate destruction.

With respect to the grammatical function of the participle, Waltke and O'Connor give the following description:

> With reference to situations which are in fact *future*, the participle may denote merely a circumstance accompanying a future event (# 31). Usually, however, it denotes the full range of ideas connoted by English 'I am going to…,' namely, certainty, often with immanency—the so-called *futurum instans* participle (## 32–37). In this function it also occurs in a main clause with some logical connection to other clauses (## 38–41) or in a temporal/conditional clause in connection with a future event (## 42–44).[126]

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[126] Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 627.

Hence, in the futuristic context, the participle usually indicates immediate fulfillment. The use of the adversative עוֹד as well as the temporal indicator of forty days would also support that conclusion.[127] In light of this immanent expectation of future fulfillment, the only immediate action is the repentance of the Ninevites in Jonah 3:5. It happened well within the forty day period of time. However, the participle also can serve as a temporal/conditional clause. Thus, the participial use can indicate an implicit condition. This is evidenced by the fact that Jonah waits in chapter four in order to see whether destruction will still take place. When it does not, Jonah states that he recognized that God was compassionate and that he expected for him to relent concerning the calamity. Either way, Jonah apparently expected an immediate fulfillment of the prophecy.

<div align="center">Word Study in Additional Forms</div>

The Hebrew word occurs over 90 times in the Hebrew Bible. The root and its derivatives occur 118 times in the Old Testament.[128] The word occurs most often in the qal stem (55 times) with the niphal as the second most frequent usage (34). The word occurs in the hophal and hithpael as well. This expanded word study will show that the use of הָפַךְ in the entire Old Testament leaves both the possibility of repentance and destruction.

The Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament lists the following categories for the word הָפַךְ:

- Qal: 1) to turn 2) to turn upside down, overthrow 3) to turn back to the front 4) to change or to alter 5) intransitive to turn around

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[127] Special thanks to Dr. Alan Ingalls for pointing this out to me. I also consulted Biblical Studies Press, *NET Bible: New English Translation*, Second Beta Edition. ed. (Spokane, Wash.: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 1617.

[128] R. Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 221.

- Nifal: 1) to turn against 2) to be demolished, overthrown [citing Jonah 3:4 as a reference] 3) to be changed, altered in heart 4) miscellaneous (e.g. to come upon, to fail to function, agile with tongue
- Hofal: 1) to be turned upon
- Hitphael: 1) to turn round and round 2) to transform oneself[129]

One will notice that the basic meaning of is הָפַךְ to turn or change but the implications of the word can focus on either repentance or destruction (as indicated by the verses listed in the *Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*).

For instance, הָפַךְ is used with a polysemantic wordplay in the qal form in 1 Samuel 10:9 to illustrate how God changed Saul's heart. 1 Samuel 10:9 can literally be translated as, "As Saul turned (כְּהַפְנֹתוֹ) his back to leave Samuel, God turned (וַיַּהֲפָךְ־לֹו) his heart. Psalm 105:25 shows how God turned the Egyptians heart to hate his people. With respect to destruction, הָפַךְ is used in the qal form in Genesis 19:21 and 25 to explain God's plans to overthrow Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 19:29 is very interesting because it says that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (בְּשַׁחֵת) and overturned it (בַּהֲפֹךְ). Lamentations 4:6 and Amos 4:11 also discuss the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. Deuteronomy 29:23 portrays the cities of Admah, and Zeboim which God overthrew (הָפַךְ) in His wrath. Second Samuel 10:3 depicts a city that David intended to overthrow (cf. 1 Chron. 19:3). Jeremiah 20:6 uses the word הָפַךְ while discussing the towns that the Lord overthrew without pity.

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[129] Ludwig Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Study ed., vol. 1, 2 vols. (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2001), 253-54.

There are several key derivative forms of the word הָפַךְ: הֶפֶךְ, הֲפֵכָה, מַהְפֵּכַת, הֲפַכְפַּךְ, מַהְפֶּכֶת, and תַּהְפּוּכָה. The derivative forms have a semantic range of a difference or turning, destruction, perversity and an exception use of stocks. The first word, הֶפֶךְ, is used twice in Ezekiel 16:34 to describe a woman who was different from most prostitutes in that she paid to be the harlot whereas most harlots are paid to be a harlot. The concept of perversity can also be found in that use. Isaiah 29:16 uses the word to describe how Israel turns or reverses things in that the clay is disputing with the potter with regard to how the nation was formed. The second word, הֲפֵכָה, clearly communicates destruction when showing how Lot was sent in the midst of the overthrow in Genesis 19:29. The same is true of מַהְפֵּכַת which consistently means to overthrow or destroy and most often refers to Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Isaiah13:19, Jeremiah 50:40, Amos 4:11, et al.). The next word, הֲפַכְפַּךְ, is used in Proverbs 21:8 to describe a man whose way is crooked. Another word, מַהְפֶּכֶת, refers to stocks or blocks for prisoners (cf. Jer 20:2–3; 29:26; 2 Chr 16:10). The final word, תַּהְפּוּכָה, occurs eight out of nine times in the book of Proverbs (cf. 2:12; 10:31–32; 16:30) and it primarily carries the connotation of perversity. Perhaps one of the more famous uses of this word is in Deuteronomy 32:20 which speaks of the perverse generation in whom there is no faithfulness. Thus, a summary of the related derivative words does not include the concept of repentance but primarily focuses on destruction and perversity. The most consistent cases of destruction relate to Sodom and Gomorrah.

Word Study in Other Languages

The Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament lists several related words in other languages. The related Ugaritic word is *hpk*. The Arabic word *Àafaka* means to distort or lie. The Akkadian word *abâku* means "to carry away." The related word in the *abiktu* means to defeat.[130] The Arabic word seems to relate to the concept of perversity or

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130 Ibid., 253.

distortion found in the derivative forms. The related words in the Akkadian lend themselves more to the possibility of destruction.

The Septuagint version of Jonah 3:4 uses the word καταστραφήσεται which is a form of καταστρέφω. This word is used to translate the Hebrew word הָפַךְ on several occasions (cf. Gen. 19:21, 25, 29; Deut. 29:22; 2 Ki. 21:13; Job 9:5; 12:15; 28:9; Amos 4:11; Jon. 3:4; Hag. 2:22; Jer. 20:16; Lam. 4:6). In each of those occasions to concept of destruction is implied. This word is used several times in the Septuagint with regards to the overthrow or destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gen. 13:10; 19:21, 25, 29; Deut. 29:22; Lam. 4:6, et al.). The word is used throughout the Septuagint to describe the destruction of cities (e.g., 2 Kings 21:13, Malachi 1:4, Isaiah 1:7, etc). In the New Testament, καταστρέφω is used to describe Jesus' overturning of the moneychangers' tables (Matt. 21:12 and Mk. 11:15). Within the Apocrypha, the Greek word also implies destruction (cf. Sir. 10:13, 16; 27:3; 28:14, 2 Maccabees 9:28, etc). One interesting use occurs in Tobit 14:4 which is translated in the King James Version of the Apocrypha, "Go into Media my son, for I surely believe those things which Jonas the prophet spake of Nineve, that it shall be <u>overthrown</u>; and that for a time peace shall rather be in Media; and that our brethren shall lie scattered in the earth from that good land: and Jerusalem shall be desolate, and the house of God in it shall be burned, and shall be desolate for a time." Thus in Tobit 14:4 the Greek word καταστρέφω is used to imply destruction and the prophecy in Jonah 3:4 as pointing to destruction. Thus the Greek translations tend to support the meaning of destruction for הָפַךְ.

Audience Recognition of Polysemantic wordplay

One might get the impression from Tobit 14:4 that the Jewish audience would have only understood the prophecy of Jonah 3:4 as pointing to destruction. According to Wiseman, the possibility of both repentance and destruction implied by the word הָפַךְ would not have been lost upon a Jewish audience. He writes that this prophecy would

"remind his Jewish hearers of the sudden overthrow of a city such as Sodom (Gen. 19:21,25,29; cf. Deut 29:23), or of a people (Ammon, 2 Sam. 10:3) or of the wicked in general (Amos 4:11). They would realize that the word is primarily used of a change whether of throne (Hag. 2:27) or of attitude, heart or situation. Only the niphal נֶהְפְּכָה is used of the overthrow of a city and its use may involve overtones or even a play of meanings with 'upheaval' and 'change of heart', of which the prophet was later to accuse Yahweh."[131] An interesting statement is made in the Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 89B regarding Jonah's situation, "Had they repented, all prophets would have been informed. But in the case of Jonah they did repent, yet Jonah himself was not informed! — Jonah was originally told that Nineveh would be turned, but did not know whether for good or for evil."[132] Although Tobit 14:4 points to a Jewish recognition of destruction, the Babylonian Talmud picks up on the possibility of polysemantic wordplay in Jonah 3:4. If this is the case, one should not be surprised if the original Jewish audience picked up on the same.

Not only would the Hebrew audience have understood the polysemantic wordplay, but Wiseman argues that the Assyrians would have as well. He writes:

> An Assyrian hearer would also interpret Jonah's prophecy or omen (adi arbât ūmē ^{āl}ninua^{ki} innabak) in a similar ambivalent way. Abāku was used for both 'to overthrow, bring judgment, take away (of men and animals)' and 'to turn upside down'; in the Niph'al 'to be reversed, change of behaviour and judgment on sin'. It is so used in an apodosis relating to a solar eclipse ('the king will be driven from the throne') and in the latter sense 'I forgave (changed, reversed) his countless sins and disregarded his offence'. Such a double meaning or word play on 'overturn' and 'change of heart' of which that prophet was to accuse Yahweh (ch. 4) would also be in the minds of the Assyrian wise men. This old view has much to commend it and it is not for us today to think it 'oversubtle.'[133]

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[131] D.J. Wiseman, "Jonah's Nineveh," *Tyndale Bulletin* 30 (1979): 48-49.

[132] *Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Sanhedrin* (accessed March 16, 2007 2007); available from http://www.come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin/sanhedrin_89.html.

[133] Wiseman, "Jonah's Nineveh," 49.

This insight (which was also mentioned by Stuart) makes the irony of the situation even more likely. Not only could the Hebrew author have recorded the polysemantic wordplay but the original audience of the prophecy as well as the Hebrew audience of the book would have perfectly understood it.

<center>Alternate Words Used in Jonah</center>

Thus far, this study has argued that the word Jonah used in Jonah 3:4 (הָפַךְ) left the possibility for repentance or destruction. The use in the niphal throughout the Old Testament points to transformation or change. The other uses as well as the derivate words and the other languages indicate destruction. This study will investigate the other words used throughout Jonah that directly mean repentance or destruction. If the author of Jonah solely intended to imply either meaning, he could have used other words that previously occur in the book.

It is important to note that both of the Hebrew words commonly used for repent are used in other places within Jonah. For instance, the word שׁוּב (*shuwb*) is used in four instances (Jon. 1:13; Jon. 3:8-10). נָחַם (*nacham*) is used of God three times (3:9-10, 4:2) with the idea of relenting. There is a very interesting wordplay that makes up Jonah 3:8-4:2. In Jonah 3:8, the Ninevite king gives a proclamation that everyone should turn (שׁוּב) from his wicked and violent ways. His hope is that God will turn (שׁוּב) and relent (נָחַם) and relent from his anger so they do not perish (אָבַד). God sees the Ninevites repentance from their actions (שׁוּב) and he relents (נָחַם) from the disaster (רָעָה) that He said would come upon them. In Jonah 4, he gets angry at God for being so compassionate and relenting (נָחַם) from disaster.

Similarly, the narrator uses the word for destruction within the book. For instance, Jonah uses the term אָבַד (*abad*) in Jonah 1:6 and 1:14 in the dialogue that the sailors have of their hope to receive God's deliverance from perishing. In Jonah 3:9, the Ninevites express their hope that perhaps God will also deliver them from perishing in response to their perishing. In Jonah 4:10, Yahweh describes how Jonah expressed pity for the plant which perished in the night. However, in 3:4, he uses a completely different word that is only used this time within the entire book. Consequently, if the narrator intended to write a word that only meant destruction, he would have probably elected to use אָבַד (*abad*) as he did before.

Summary

This appendix has attempted to provide a word study of the Hebrew word הָפַךְ in Jonah 3:4 in the same form throughout the Bible (Niphal), multiple forms, derivative forms, other languages and by contrasting it with words that were used in the book. The basic conclusion is that the word הָפַךְ can mean either repentance or destruction. The most common use in the niphal is to turn, change or transform. The concept of repentance occurs in select circumstances. Aside from the consideration of Jonah 3:4, הָפַךְ never means destroy in an exclusive sense in the niphal form. In other forms, the semantic range goes from repentance, transformation, change to destruction. The word basically connotes the idea of turning. In derivative forms and other languages the concept of repentance is not readily identified. However, according to Stuart and Wiseman, the original Assyrian word abāku would have implied both repentance and destruction. In light of the other Hebrew words within Jonah that mean repent or destroy, this word which was only used one time seems to have been selected for its ability to serve as an ironic polysemantic wordplay.

Therefore, based on the lexical meaning, the possibility of a polysemantic wordplay in Jonah 3:4 is strong. The next section will evaluate whether the immediate and larger context will allow for this possibility.

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