

Prophet Tradition and Cognitive Dissonance: Jonah's Anger(4:1) and the Evolution of Divine Perception

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Abstract: This article examines the perspective of the implied reader, the early Hellenistic Jewish prophet community, in the understanding of Jonah's anger (Jonah 4:1) after Jonah witnessed YHWH repent the divine punishment to Nineveh. Through the interpretive lens of cognitive dissonance theory in psychology, it will explore the reason for the psychological discomfort, which is a form of suffering experienced due to inconsistency between two beliefs: (a) The nationalistic views rooted in the prophetic tradition as a national deity to Israel; (b) The newly witnessed of divine repent towards Nineveh, portraying YHWH as a universal deity. As literature is always embedded with human struggle, the article will continue to examine how the historical context contribute to the construction of the divine repentance narrative. It suggests that the community struggled with the reality of coexisting with other nations while being unable to bypass their long-held beliefs in the prophetic traditions. When increasing consonance that the divine sovereignty of YHWH will win over another nation does not cohesive with the reality. The narrative with divine repentance has introduced a new cognitions in idea that serve as a rationalization mechanism to reduce the cognitive discomfort. The article intends to conclude this whole process of suffering cognitive dissonance has pushed the understanding of YHWH as universal deity approaching another level of monotheism, in which overcome the religious challenge at the time and also offering hope to the community in YHWH's enduring faithfulness.

Keywords: Jonah's Anger, Cognitive Dissonance, Hellenistic Judaism, Divine repentance, Prophetic Tradition

Introduction:

In this exploration of the Book of Jonah, I intend to delve into the profound psychological conflict experienced by the Hellenistic Jewish community who subscribed to the Latter Prophetic tradition. I argue that the narrative in Jonah reflects the cognitive dissonance confronted by the readers of the time, as they attempted to reconcile their understanding of YHWH as a national deity faithful to Israel with the developing depiction of a God whose mercy extends far beyond their national boundaries. This exploration aims to elucidate the complex interplay between the inconsistencies in the prophetic tradition and the realities of Greek dominance, a juxtaposition that strained their cognitive framework.

This paper will examine Jonah's anger, analyzing how the Book of Jonah interacts with the Latter Prophetic tradition, such as the narratives of Elijah and Elisha, blending nationalist perspectives with universal themes. In doing so, I will reveal the tension between the entrenched nationalistic conception of the divine and the more universal attributes that the narrative espouses. This tension is not merely a theological debate but also a reflection of the shifting identity and beliefs during a time of cultural and political change.

By situating the Book of Jonah within its Hellenistic context, I will illustrate how its message offered a bridge between the old and new depictions of the divine. I argue that Jonah's anger stems from suffering cognitive dissonance, experiencing inconsistency between two thoughts in his belief: (a) the nationalistic views rooted in the prophetic tradition of YHWH as a national deity for Israel, and (b) the newly witnessed divine mercy toward Nineveh, portraying YHWH as a universal deity. As literature embedded with human struggle, this paper will further demonstrate how this inconsistent divine nature could lead to dissonance for the implied Jewish reader, who had to navigate the reality of coexisting with the Greeks while grappling with the contrast between this reality and their long-held belief in a national deity.

Furthermore, in my analysis of the intertextuality of the text in Jonah, set against the backdrop of the Hellenistic era, I intend to show how the evolution of YHWH from a national god to a universal one not only presented a psychological challenge but also provided hope in YHWH's enduring faithfulness, especially as His people navigated coexistence with a dominating Gentile empire. Through the lens of the readers, this

shift from a nationalistic to a universalist deity highlights that divine sovereignty over other nations could unfold mercifully without destruction.

The Interpretation of Jonah's Anger – A Review in The Past

The narrative of Jonah, especially from Jonah 3:10 to 4:11, has undergone various interpretations within the Christian tradition. Jonah's hesitation and subsequent anger are traditionally viewed as symbolic of human rebellion and disobedience to divine will.¹ In this context, Christian commentaries often portrays Jonah's reluctance to prophesy to Nineveh and his anger at God's mercy towards the Ninevites as indicative of a prophet who simultaneously fears for his prophetic credibility and lacks compassion for most of the God's creation.²

These interpretations describe Jonah as self-centered, arrogant, and childlike in behavior. However, such readings may be insufficient to grasp the context in which the book was intended to be understood. Contemporary psychological approaches, such as those utilized by Lasine, examine why readers have historically arrived at divergent conclusions about Jonah's character, suggesting that these assessments might reflect the readers' own psychological frameworks as much as Jonah's actual behaviors.³ This focus highlights the importance of understanding the character within the context of the reader's reality, aiming to avoid anachronistic analyses of Jonah.

In contextualizing Jonah, some scholars have observed that Jonah's anger may stem from an identity crisis, fearing the stigma of being labeled a false prophet due to the non-realization of his prophecy concerning Nineveh's ruin.⁴ This perspective is dissected within the wider domains of biblical theology and narrative criticism, where

¹ Turner Mary Donovan, "Jonah 3:10–4:11," *Interpretation (Richmond)* 52, no. 4 (1998): 412–15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096439805200408>.

² Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *Jonah through the Centuries*, Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2022), 204–5.

³ Stuart Lasine, "Jonah's Complexes and Our Own: Psychology and the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 41, no. 2 (December 1, 2016): 240–43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089215641397>.

⁴ Tiemeyer, 204.

harmonistic interpretations enhance coherence in our comprehension of Jonah's prophetic role and the interplay between YHWH and humanity.

Additionally, some scholars suggest that Jonah's anger arises from God's pardon of the evil, Gentile Ninevites.⁵ For instance, Bolin interprets as representing the ethnocentric, selfish, and narrow-minded Israel of the post-exilic era. It is believed that Jonah have comes to recognize that the divine mercy has become universal which the divine nature is no longer confined within the boundaries of Israel.⁶ This viewpoint also shared commonly among the scholars in the understanding the significant change of nature of YHWH in Jonah.⁷

In this matter, Ingram borrowing the lens of psychological hermeneutics, which point out there is possibility the author of Jonah experienced a considerable degree of cultural and cognitive dissonance in the divine nature.⁸ However Ingram has not go in-depth into the understand of Jonah's anger(4:1). Yet, his work provided a valid ground to understand the Jonah in the framework under cognitive dissonance.

⁵ Bolin M. T., *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness: The Book of Jonah Re-Examined* (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997), 150–51.

⁶ Bolin M. T., "Eternal Delight and Deliciousness: The Book of Jonah After Ten Years," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 9 (2009).

⁷ Detail see Jerome, *Commentaire*, edited by Duval, 287; Keil and Delitzsch, *Minor Prophets*, Vol. 1, 411; Bewer, *Jonah*, 57; Craig, "Poetics," 43. Note in *The Catholic Study Bible*, 1990, "Jonah becomes angry 'because of his narrowly nationalistic vindictiveness'." Tabari as cited in Komlos, "Jonah Legends," 57.

⁸ Ingram V., *Satire and Cognitive Dissonance in the Book of Jonah, In the Light of Ellens' Law of Psychological Hermeneutics*, *Psychological Hermeneutics for Biblical Themes and Texts: A Festschrift in Honor of Wayne G. Rollins* (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012), 152–54.

Unpacking Jonah's Psychological Discomfort with His Prayer

While the aforementioned interpretations integrate the prophetic tradition with the narrative, they may not completely capture the depth of psychological tension manifest in Jonah's response to God's decisions with his prophet identity significantly (4:1). The juxtaposition of divine mercy and prophetic authority embodies both theological dilemma and also personal crisis for Jonah. Consequently, with this mixed nature of the issue, the literature signals a necessity to delve into the psychological dimensions of Jonah's experience more profoundly. The intent of this paper is induct an in-depth analysis to Jonah's psychological discomfort through the lens of cognitive dissonance theory. It is expected that this theoretical approach will shed light to understand Jonah's inner conflict and offer broader insights into the inconsistency cognitive that Jonah equipped in his knowledge from the prophetic tradition.

By following the text in the Book of Jonah I believed that its can offer insights into a profound perspectives.⁹ By integrating Carroll's insights into the psychological analysis of Jonah, this study aims to reveal distinctive elements within the prophetic tradition as depicted in the text.¹⁰ In the following section of the paper, I will delve into the concept in Jonah's prayer (4:2) from preceding traditions and a new provoked prophetic idea contributing to divine figure, which I believed the prayer is a significant action that show Jonah is suffering cognitive dissonance. This psychological discomfort is the result of a pair of inconsistent cognition¹¹. And one belongs to Jonah's expectation in the divine punishment rooted into his prophetic tradition theology, and the other is the action of divine mercy happens in reality which lay outside the cognitive of Jonah.

⁹ One assumption of the article is that the nature of Jonah's source is depend to the Deuteronomistic theology of the time.

¹⁰ Carroll P. R., *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions*, New edition (SCM Press, 1996), 147.

¹¹ Beauvois J., *A Radical Dissonance Theory*, European Monographs in Social Psychology. (Basingstoke [Eng.]; Taylor & Francis, 1996).

Locate the Inconsistency in Jonah's Prayer

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance posits that the condition arises when individuals perceive that two of their psychological beliefs or attitudes are inconsistent.¹² This leads to psychological discomfort stemming from the inconsistency between a pair of cognitions, particularly when one belief logically contradicts the other.¹³ With the help of Festinger's dissonance theory, the following passage tends to unpack the psychological discomfort of Jonah by addressing his prayer in Jonah 4:2.

To begin with, Jonah's response to the sparing of Nineveh is characterized by the Hebrew verb רעע, coupled with a cognate accusative רעה, articulating his displeasure.¹⁴ This phrase establishes a connection between Jonah's reaction and the Ninevites' repentance in chapter 3. There, the Ninevites turn away from evil (רעה), prompting Yahweh to relent (נָחַם) from the calamity he intended to bring upon them. For readers, it is evident that Jonah's immediate anger in 4:1 stems from both the repentance of the Gentile Ninevites and Yahweh. However, one thing that piques curiosity is the prayer from Jonah in 4.2.

Jonah's prayer is followed by the articulation of his emotions, a pivotal passage in understanding his anger. Jonah's invocation exposes a profound inner conflict, anchored in his perception of God's essence. In 4:2, Jonah acknowledges the divine attributes he is intimately familiar with—graciousness (חַנּוּן), compassion (רַחוּם), patience (אֲרָךְ), abundant in love (רַב־חֶסֶד), and a disposition to retract punishment.¹⁵

¹² Festinger L., *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), 50–53.

¹³ Eddie H. and Mills J., "An Introduction to Cognitive Dissonance Theory and an Overview of Current Perspectives on the Theory.," in *Cognitive Dissonance: Reexamining a Pivotal Theory in Psychology (2nd Ed.)*, ed. Eddie Harmon-Jones (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2019), 3.

¹⁴ Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 149.

¹⁵ This reversal also occurs in Exodus 34:6, Psalm 145:8, and Neh 9:17 Bolin, 149. Scholars have many debate in the function of the intertextuality between Jonah, Exodus, and Joel. This paper later will discuss the intertextuality with Exodus 34:6-7. As I have assumed the priority of Exodus which it is the primary referred and quoted (no matter it is chorological, literary, or theological) by other text in the cannon. The compilation of texts that explicitly echo Exodus 34:6-7 is subject to variation, largely because definitive criteria to categorize intertextual references have not been established. The ensuing list encapsulates the citations most commonly acknowledged by scholars: Num 14:18; Psalms 86:15,

Yet, this cognition of God's merciful nature is at odds with the reality he is facing. During his prayer, he reflects on his initial impulse to escape to Tarshish, in response to YHWH's command to decry Nineveh's iniquity (נִפְרָן) as narrated in Jonah 1:3. His prayer shows he is deeply disturbed when his cognitions are no longer consonant.

However, some may believe that Jonah already knew YHWH would have mercy on the Ninevites in the first place. Biblical commentaries attempt to interpret Jonah 4:2, suggesting that Jonah, despite recognizing the compassionate nature of the YHWH, failed to acknowledge YHWH's glory.¹⁶ Instead, he paradoxically uses this awareness as a charge against the Lord, wishing for the Ninevites' downfall while cognizant that the Lord's mercy might spare them. Given that the Assyrians are the enemy of the Israelites, such interpretation could be valid. However, this view may not fully appreciate Jonah's prayer nor consider his emotions.

Furthermore, this interpretation seemingly fills the narrative gap in Chapter 1 about the unindicated reason explaining Jonah's fleeing. It not only fails to account for Jonah's intense anger in Chapter 4 but also suggests that the new experience of YHWH pardoning the Ninevites contributes to the anger. This mismatch between Jonah's expectations and the new reality provides further reason to believe that YHWH's merciful action is a key factor prompting Jonah to present his disordered prayer.

From a narrative criticism perspective, one would expect Jonah's emotional turmoil to arise when Nineveh begins to repent, given his awareness of YHWH's forgiving nature. Yet, the narrative structure elicits Jonah's emotional response only after YHWH has made his decision. With a closer reading, Jonah also mentioned his previous experience in his "own country," (Jonah 4:2) which refers to a past experience that shapes his perception of YHWH's nature.

103:8, 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:3; and Nehemiah 9:17.

¹⁶ See Turner, "Jonah 3," 412.

These literary clues demand curiosity and raise the question: if Jonah was aware of YHWH's inclination to save Nineveh in the first place, what has prompted his psychological discomfort?

It appears that there is an inconsistency between Jonah's cognition and his emotional reaction, highlighting a dissonance that underscores his understand of YHWH and the reality of YHWH's actions. Therefore, the dissonance arising between the reality of divine mercy in sparing the Ninevites and the expected destruction of Israel's enemy showcases Jonah's internal struggle. Essentially, from the prayer, we understand that the subject leading to Jonah's psychological discomfort is rooted in the inconsistency between his previous cognition and the new cognition of the merciful nature of God.

The Nationalistic Divine Image in Jonah's Cognition: YHWH as the Patron Deity

In the following passage, I will continue to demonstrate how prophetic traditions manifested a merciful divine figure exclusively to Israel in Jonah's prayer and how this new merciful nature conflict with the nationalistic concept. This is crucial in substantiating my claim that Jonah experiences cognitive dissonance due to the introduction of a provocative new concept of YHWH, contributing to the distinct message in this piece of prophetic literature. Since the prayer (4:2-3) intertextually engages with several texts from the Hebrew Bible, we must delve into these to uncover any attributes that may relate to Jonah's prayer.

To begin with, the intertextuality present in introducing Jonah provides the backdrop for understanding the character's ideological perspective. Intertextual references offer valuable insights into a prophet's possible chronological, socio-political, and geographical context.¹⁷ As we learn that Jonah is the son of Amittai (Jon 1:1) who is the only other northern prophet mentioned, a direct connection is established with 2 Kings 14:25, which also mentions the prophet's name during the reign of Jeroboam II.

¹⁷ Kim H. C. P., "Jonah Read Intertextually," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 3 (2007): 504.

This cross-referencing constructs a conceivable link between the narrative in the Book of Jonah and the account in 2 Kings 14:23-29.¹⁸ It draws the implied reader's attention to consider both texts in conjunction, suggesting this Jonah is the familiar Hebrew character related to the Deuteronomist account¹⁹, and ties it back to the era of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom monarchy.²⁰

As the text establishes the linkage between Jonah and the Northern Kingdom, it could believe that Jonah shared the same prophet tradition with Elijah. In the Book of Kings, Elijah and Elisha dominate most of the section of the Prophetic Legend. The tradition that Elijah follows is commonly related to Latter Prophet.²¹ Within this tradition, one of the significant characteristic is about the covenantal relationship made between YHEW and Israel, which always consider ethnically exclusive to the Jewish community.²²

The resonance between Jonah and Elijah in terms of their perception of YHWH as a deity with an exclusive covenant with Israel becomes apparent when considering the ancient Near Eastern culture. There was a concept call "Patron-client relationship" of the era defined the interaction between deities and mortals, where gods acted as sovereign protectors in exchange for faithfulness.²³ This arrangement was distinct to each nation, with deities like Marduk for Babylon and Ashur for Assyria.

Similarly, YHWH was the patron god for Israel, primarily concerned with the benefits of his privileged subject.²⁴ This "one patron god per nation" thought, clearly matches the element of the nationalistic paradigm that typically excluded divine concern for

¹⁸ Kim, 504.

¹⁹ Ben Z. E., *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 367 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2003), 46.

²⁰ Baham M., "The Book of Jonah: Understanding a Reluctant Prophet," June 19, 2020, 4.

²¹ McKenzie S., "The Prophetic History and the Redaction of Kings," 1985.

²² Versluis A., "Covenant in Deuteronomy: The Relationship between the Moab, Horeb, and Patriarchal Covenants," in *Covenant: A Vital Element of Reformed Theology* (Brill, 2021), 79–80.

²³ Noll K. L., "The Patron God in the Ancient Near East," 197.

²⁴ Noll, 196.

foreigners.²⁵ In Elijah's narrative, this concept is also easily recognized. His contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) starkly demonstrates YHWH's power over foreign gods, reinforcing the idea of a deity zealous for his people. Similarly, Elisha's miracles and his political interventions, like the anointing of Jehu (2 Kings 9), underline YHWH's direct involvement in the nation's destiny. These stories frame the cognition of YHWH within the prophet tradition as a national deity.

In this context, the psychological discomfort of Jonah can be interpreted as stemming from the cognitive dissonance triggered by a direct challenge to his deeply held nationalistic conception of divine nature. According to Jonah's beliefs, the fate of Nineveh should have been irrelevant to YHWH. However, Jonah 3 presents a radical departure: YHWH demonstrates compassion to the Assyrians, who are outside the covenant, thereby overturning the conventional paradigm. This gesture not only reveals YHWH's mercy towards a historical enemy, but also marked a significant shift from the understanding of the divine to the Jewish community.

Furthermore, YHWH's indifference to Jonah's psychological discomfort further enhances the inconsistent cognition of Jonah in the upcoming narrative in 4:4. Jonah, who would typically be the primary recipient of YHWH's concern, is seemingly neglected in the narrative in favor of extending mercy to an enemy nation. This portrays to a nature of YHWH that is inconsistency in the context of Jewish tradition. Here, Jonah's understanding of divine nature, so different from the Latter Prophets and the Deuteronomist perspective, depicts YHWH with an unconventional grace prioritizing the welfare of non-Israelites, thereby reshaping the divine narrative to encompass a broader, more universal scope of mercy.²⁶

²⁵ Yet we could find some reference from the biblical literature about exception in Deut. 6:10-15; 7:1 or Zephaniah 2 and 14.

²⁶In the Deuteronomy's perspective is not exclusively ethnic in nature, as it acknowledges that even 'strangers' can be integrated into the covenant (Deut 29:10; 31:12). Despite this inclusivity, the time when Deuteronomy was composed saw a strengthening of collective identity, where traces of nationalism began to appear as the text emphasized Israel's distinct identity. Jonah as a prophet should be familiar with the covenant that lifting Israel "high above all nations that He has made"

Situating Jonah in Hellenistic Period with Cognitive Dissonance Theory

One hint that provided an important understanding of Jonah's dissonance is the intertextuality in borrowing Exodus 34:6-7 in his prayer. Understanding Jonah's background and his encounter with the inconsistent divine nature offers a direct explanation for linking his psychological discomfort to YHWH's nature.

The Inconsistency With The Merciful Nature of YHWH

Drawing upon the intertextual connections with Exodus 34 provides a poignant backdrop to understanding Jonah's cognitive dissonance.²⁷ Many scholars have focused on the uniquely identical credo formula of Jonah's prayers in Exodus 34, and it will be important what's Jonah referring to in his cognition.²⁸ Bring it back to the portrayal of YHWH in Exodus 34, during the renewal of the law after the idolatry involving the golden calf, is one of the most comprehensive descriptions of YHWH's character in the Hebrew Bible. The self-declaration of YHWH suggesting himself as merciful, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. The covenant relationship with Israel is juxtaposed with his justice in visiting iniquity across generations, forms a core element of the divine attribute tradition reflected throughout the prophetic tradition in the Israelite's history.²⁹

A noteworthy alteration in the Exodus reference supports my claim that Jonah's psychological discomfort is tied to the inconsistency of divine nature in his cognition. Jonah reaffirms four of the divine attributes ascribed to YHWH, although in a

(Deut 26:19; 4:6-8), as stated by YHWH. Detail see Markl D., "Does Deuteronomy Promote a Proto-Nationalist Agenda?," in *Political Theologies in the Hebrew Bible* (Brill Schöningh, 2023), 136.

²⁷ Many scholars see Exodus 34:6-7 as the seminal articulation of God's nature, with subsequent references in the biblical text serving as allusions or echoes of this foundational passage. The complex layering of these attributes, especially as they are quoted or adapted in later texts, illustrates the evolving understanding of God within the Israelite tradition. This is not just a repetition of a formula but a nuanced engagement with the living character of God as experienced by the community.

²⁸ Kim, "Jonah Read Intertextually," 512; Joseph Ryan Kelly, "Is YHWH Faithful to Israel? Joel and Jonah's Use and Non-Use of Exodus 34:6-7," 2009.

²⁹ Baham, "The Book of Jonah: Understanding a Reluctant Prophet," 4.

different order. The fifth attribute, "relenting from disaster," does not originate from Exodus 34:6 but aligns with the prophetic tradition. This is seen in Exodus 32:12, where Moses implores YHWH not to destroy Israel, pleading, "Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people." If we have a closer look into the Hebrew, the primary textual distinction between Exodus 32:12 and Jonah 4:2 lies in the verb form's shift from a Niphal imperative to a Niphal participle.³⁰ This shows YHWH restraint from sending disaster in Exodus and shortly thereafter reveals Himself as compassionate and merciful. This underscores that Jonah's conception of YHWH's character is shaped by His propensity to relent from dispatching disaster, which having mercy upon the Nineveh.

By emphasizing the credo formula in Jonah's prayer that reflects the portrayal of YHWH in Exodus 34 as merciful and patient, which historically, was a mercy believed to be reserved for Israel.³¹ The inconsistent nature that YHWH choose to pardon Nineveh contradict to the prophet tradition which Jonah had subscribe in his cognition. Israel no longer an uniquely chosen and singularly recipient of divine forgiveness.³² There are a new cognition arisen which also presents a significant theological shift which broadening the discourse to a more universal scope of YHWH's compassion. It is something Jonah's cognitive dissonance could not reconcile, contributing to his psychological discomfort with this inconsistency.

³⁰ Kelly, "Is YHEW Faithful to Israel? Joel and Jonah's Use and Non-Use of Exdous 34:6-7," 7.

³¹ As there are ancient Jewish literature, the divine mercy is only shown to the Israel. In many places the eternal character of Israel's holiness is attributed to God's endless 'mercy' and 'compassion' for Israel. Israel is the people that God loved and chosen by taking from all the multitude of people. Therefore there would be only redemption to Israelite but not Nineveh(other nation) . And the divine forgiveness only happens within the nation of Israel. Detail see, S. Leyla Gurkan, *The Jews as a Chosen People: Tradition and Transformation*, 23, accessed December 20, 2023, <https://www.routledge.com/The-Jews-as-a-Chosen-People-Tradition-and-transformation/Gurkan/p/book/9781138780125>.

³² Gurkan, 23.

Reading Jonah With Dissonance Theory in Hellenistic Period

As literature is always embedded with human struggle, I will continue to examine how the historical context contributes to the meaning of Jonah. It is believed that the implied readers in the Hellenistic period (3rd and early 2nd centuries) would have related to Jonah, suffering from a certain extent of cognitive dissonance when they perceived a reality that inconsistent their religious cognition.³³ I will continue to present my argument by suggesting how Jonah, as a narrative character, reflects the cognitive dissonance experienced by Hellenistic Jews who upheld a nationalistic view, as they grapple with the contradiction between their beliefs and reality.

Historical and Social Milieu – Dissonance in Coexistence with Other Nation

The Book of Jonah is not merely an account of prophetic obedience and divine mercy, it is a reflection of its historical and social milieu. At the time of Jonah's composition, the Palestinian area was under the control of various political and military threat and experiencing several shifts in governance.³⁴ Due to the instability and dominance between the greater political power and the Jews, they found it impossible to look for vengeance to their oppressors. Rather, they might find it compelling to seek coexistence.³⁵

Challenge YHWH's Faithfulness in Jonah's Cognition in the Prophetic tradition

However, the prophetic tradition trouble this coexistence idea, especially to the Jews who could not bypass the deeply rooted notion of a nationalist deity constructed in their beliefs.³⁶ The narrative of Jonah' anger captured the psychological description of Jonah which also describing the struggle to many Jews, grapple with a reality that contrasts their long-held convictions in the nationalistic prophetic traditions. As some of them still suffered under oppressive circumstances, anticipating a day when

³³ Erich S. Gruen, *The Construct of Identity in Hellenistic Judaism: Essays on Early Jewish Literature and History* (De Gruyter, 2016), 21, <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/28250>.

³⁴ Gruen, 21.

³⁵ Gruen, 21.

³⁶ Moses instance of the same in Exodus when Yahweh intended to end the Jewish community. Moses begging for divine mercy which stopped the punishment.

YHWH would win over the gentile nations and restore Israel's sovereignty. However, the unexpected pardon of Nineveh in Jonah narrative would very similar with the connive of other nation in dominating the Palatine area at the time. And this reality would make many perceived as a divine betrayal in questioning YHWH faithfulness to his subject.

The Omission of YHWH's Faithfulness in Jonah's Prayer

Since YHWH in the Jonah narrative violates the patron system and created tension and psychological discomfort for Jonah, the narrative continues by showing how Jonah copes with this divine behavior that contradicts his expectations in 4:2-3.

One notable aspect is the omission of the fifth attribute, "faithfulness", from Jonah's prayer, as described in Exodus 34:6, which is replaced with "relenting from disaster." If we acknowledge a significant dependence of Jonah on the Exodus text, this change cannot be regarded as a mere oversight but rather as a deliberate revision. Through McGrath's lens, we could suggest that Jonah, faced with a divine action that contravened his expectations, engaged in a cognitive strategy to reduce the resultant dissonance.³⁷ This strategy involved shifting focus from the challenging attribute of faithfulness to the more comfortable idea of YHWH relenting from disaster, which better conformed to Jonah's cognition in consistency with the nationalist character of YHWH opposing Nineveh.

In the omission of YHWH's faithfulness, we could understand this selective focus as a manifestation of cognitive dissonance reduction strategies in his inconsistent cognition.³⁸ This psychological process, rooted in the prophetic tradition presents a scenario where Jonah omits the attribute of faithfulness, possibly to align his prayer with his internal beliefs for Nineveh's punishment and to reconcile the conflicting nature of YHWH's character as an universal deity.

³⁷ McGrath, 9–12.

³⁸ April McGrath, "Dealing with Dissonance: A Review of Cognitive Dissonance Reduction," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 11, no. 12 (2017): 3–4, <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12362>.

This shift reflects the broader psychological unrest that Jewish readers of the time might have felt when they grappled with their understanding of YHWH during periods of foreign oppression and cultural upheavals that seemed to contradict their deep-seated beliefs in divine faithfulness to Israel. In a time when political focus increasingly became Hellenocentric, a prevailing sentiment emerged that YHWH's favor was perhaps not as assured in Jewish concerns. They were thus compelled to reconcile a reality that seemed at odds with their longstanding beliefs in YHWH's faithfulness.

Therefore, this redefined divine character could be the way out for the reality in explaining YHWH transformation in his nature, but at the same time likely elicited cognitive dissonance in the Jewish readers, alike Jonah's experience. The prophet's intense emotional response, prompted not by Nineveh's penitence but by YHWH's compassion mercy, echoes the inconsistency between reality and prophetic tradition. Through Jonah's experience, the text may thus be providing the readers with a narrative tool to manage their cognitive dissonance by inviting them to view YHWH's actions through the prism of a broader, more inclusive divine plan that transcends national boundaries.

The Evaluating Divine Perception in Jonah

However, the paper cannot conclude here in understanding the implied reader's condition. Since Nineveh was once a great city in history and had been destroyed, the implied reader would have known that the narrative of Jonah intricately weaves a tale of paradoxes. The merciful actions of YHWH towards a foreign nation are only the surface meaning. The suggested shift from a nationalistic understanding of YHWH to a more universalist deity could have a profound meaning for them.

Reflecting on the ancient Near Eastern concept of patron gods, the narrative of Nineveh's repentance in the Book of Jonah presents a profound shift. We observe the Assyrians relinquishing their allegiance and the sovereignty of their chief god, Ashur,

in favors of YHWH. This narrative maneuvers subtly reveals a layer of divine mercy infused with universalism, conveying a dual message to its ancient audience. On the surface, the text appears to extend YHWH's mercy to the Assyrians, yet, on a deeper level, it suggests a divine conquest over Nineveh. The narrative of Jonah offers a unique perspective trying to break through the nationalistic understanding of divine mercy and sovereignty. In the attempt in challenging the boundaries of the nationalistic idea, it tends to provoke an idea that the divine sovereignty could be happened in an universalist way. An idea that YHWH does not have to show up in a warrior figure, but still win over other patron deity and their nation.

Although the narrative does not explicitly state that Nineveh submitted solely to YHWH in order to be spared, this omission makes it difficult to tie the conclusion directly say it have something to do with monotheism. However, the emphasis on universalism from a Jewish perspective is evident. YHWH's ability to act in foreign nations is a significant theme. It began in Egypt in Exodus and now extends to Nineveh in Jonah. The Book of Jonah suggests that the dominion and power of YHWH extend worldwide, and even that His favor and self-revelation are becoming universal.

The Hope from Rationalization in Divine Perception

Furthermore, from the perspective of an early Hellenistic Jewish reader encountering the Book of Jonah, Nineveh emerges as a symbol of a formidable city from the distant past. The Book of Jonah skillfully invokes the shared memory of Assyria's historical enmity while also acknowledging that Nineveh was ultimately destroyed. This portrayal resonates deeply with the Hellenistic Jews' contemporary reality under Greek dominance, reinforcing the idea that, despite the overwhelming power and oppression from gentile nations, YHWH's sovereignty remains unchallenged over all nations and deities. This subtext within Jonah's narrative reassures readers of YHWH's unwavering faithfulness towards His people, offering a sense of continuity and hope amidst the shifting tides of political power.

Thus, the Book of Jonah addresses the cognitive dissonance experienced by its audience by reframing the concept of divine conquest and sovereignty. It suggests that YHWH's rule is not solely displayed through acts of dominance but also through compassion and inclusion. This reframing serves as a rationalization for the audience, resolving the dissonance between their subjugation under foreign powers and their enduring belief in divine faithfulness. It reaffirms that YHWH's sovereignty is not undermined by foreign dominance but can also be demonstrated through merciful interactions with all nations. The universalist perspective of divine mercy and sovereignty presented in Jonah invites the Jewish audience to reconcile their expectations of a nationalist deity with the experience of a God whose sovereignty is affirmed through mercy.

This theological formulation provides a response to the crisis, with Jonah offering a model for navigating the tension between long-held nationalistic beliefs and the emerging understanding of a universalist God. This entire process of experiencing and resolving cognitive dissonance advances the understanding of YHWH, presenting His divine sovereignty as capable of being magnificently expressed in a universal way while still being consistent with the familiar prophetic tradition. In doing so, it helps the Jewish community overcome the religious challenges of the time while offering hope in YHWH's enduring faithfulness, particularly during the Hellenistic period.

Conclusion

The paper explores the psychological discomfort and cognitive dissonance experienced by Hellenistic Jews, as portrayed in the anger and prayer of Jonah (4:1-3). I argue that this narrative reflects a shift in the understanding of YHWH, from being a national deity devoted solely to Israel to a more universal God extending mercy beyond national borders. I demonstrate that this theological transition significantly addresses the psychological condition—cognitive dissonance—of the time. The Jewish community, longing to actualize their religious beliefs amidst the politically depressed situation, struggled to reconcile this with the nationalist view of their deity rooted in the Latter Prophetic tradition.

Through the intertextual analysis explored in the article, the narrative of Jonah is seen as extending the understanding of the Latter Prophetic tradition. It reflects the inner conflict and cognitive dissonance within the Jewish community as they attempted to reconcile their traditional beliefs with new realities. This shift provided hope to ancient readers. Particularly, the narrative of Nineveh's repentance challenges traditional views of divine mercy. It resonates with the Hellenistic Jews under Greek influence, affirming YHWH's sovereignty and faithfulness towards His people amidst political changes. Essentially, it highlights the merciful way in which divine sovereignty rules over other nations.

In conclusion, the Book of Jonah serves as a symbolic narrative that captures the cognitive dissonance of its time. It invites readers to rethink their understanding of divine mercy and sovereignty, marking a transition in the prophetic tradition from a strictly nationalist deity to a more inclusive and universal God. I believe Jonah not only contributes to the Latter Prophetic tradition but also has broader implications for how other literature of the time broke through existing beliefs and reflected their evolution over time. Further investigation could explore this idea more deeply.

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