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PROCEEDINGS

The 8th Literary Studies Conference

(Dis)Empowering Discourses in Literature: Portraits of the Weak and the Marginalised throughout History

23-24 October 2020 | Universitas Sanata Dharma



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Universitas Sanata Dharma, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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Greetings from the Chair

The interplay between power relations and power struggles frames the portraits of the weak and marginalised parties concerning social class, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. Literature and criticisms from many periods might capture and provide clues for the portraits. Therefore, the 8th Literary Studies Conference “(Dis)Empowering Discourses in Literature: Portraits of the Weak and the Marginalised throughout History” attempts to discern the substantiation of the portrayal from various topic areas.

This conference has come to demonstrate persistence and collaboration. It faces an unexpectedly difficult situation due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The virus has weakened human beings in many aspects of life. It gives limitations to interact physically including holding a conference on-site. Longing for the fruitful discussion and reminiscing the good practices from the previous conferences, however, has given the committee a spark to hold the 8th LSC online. The presenters and participants have put their efforts into participating in the conference by submitting their papers and online presentation videos. The submitted papers and the videos are expected not only to enrich our repertoires on the topics but also to strengthen the relationship and collaboration.

The committee would like to express its gratitude to the plenary speakers, parallel session presenters, and all participants for their profound enthusiasm in the LSC. The discussion, ideas, and thoughts in this online conference have engraved a beautiful mark in the history that our yearning for meaning in life has overpowered the difficult situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you.

Yogyakarta, 1 October 2020

Simon Arsa Manggala, S.S., M.Hum.
Conference Committee, Chair



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A Merciful God in Jonah 3-4: Analyzing the Space and Time Aspects

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Abstract

The Book of Jonah is relatively short (4 chapters), but it is full of complexity - full of fascinating plots, ironies, and themes. In other hand, many scholars try to approach this book by analyzing the *genre* of the book. That approach tends to ignore contradictory evidence in the text and tries to fix it into “a category”. Thereby, this approach focuses on the features that are relevant to the question of genre (Klooster, 2019), but it can lose the important message of the book that was intended by the author. For that reason, in this article, we will not to apply the genre approach, but we will focus on the text itself by analyzing the *space* and *time* aspects in order to grasp the meaning of the text. Furthermore, we will focus on (1) the narrative text in Jonah 3-4 and (2) the explicit description of God in Jonah 4:2 which can be a guidance: “You are a gracious God and merciful” (-wxrw !wnx-la hta). From that point (4:2), we can focus on the question of “Merciful God”. We will try to identify and analyze *where* and *when* God shows his mercy in the text by examining the *space* and *time* aspects in Jonah 3-4. The main problem is “Why does God change his mind to save the Nineveh?” Nineveh is one of the most wicked cities of the ancient world. Therefore, based on the text, we can say, “God still loves *the marginalized* - Nineveh”.

Keywords: *Jonah, space, time, merciful, the marginalized, Nineveh*

Introduction

There is no clear evidence that can be used to determine when the book of Jonah has been written. We can only reconstruct the context of Jonah by analyzing the first verse on that book, “The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai” (Jonah 1:1). “Jonah son of Amittai” also appears in 2 Kings 14:25, “[...] his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher.” From this parallel text (2 Kings 14:25), we can reconstruct the historical and political background of Jonah. The context of 2 King 14:25 was in the period of King Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) (Allen, 1983). In his era, Israel (Northern Kingdom) was in the heyday period: (1) The International Trade with foreign countries was growing rapidly; (2) High officials, military figures, and important merchants had become immensely rich; (3) Samaria, the capital, had many luxurious buildings; (4) At the same time, the luxurious life became trend, even in the religious life (feasts, worships, prayers, etc.) (Gottwald, 2009). Jonah lived in this situation. Moreover, he people of his kingdom believed that they were the only one chosen by God.

The Book of Jonah is relatively short (4 chapters), but it is full of complexity (Antwi, 2013) - full of fascinating plots, ironies, and themes (Kim, 2007).

“In the critical overview of the book of Jonah, one can easily identify unanswered questions. Jonah is unique among the Minor Prophets in particular and the prophetic corpus in general. The book contains many ‘puzzles’, and it is difficult to determine its genre, date, author, social milieu and precise message. [...] It has been a difficult task identifying the main theme of the text, since its central message ‘is not made explicit within the book’. Many themes have been roposed but scholars do not agree on which of them should be recognized as the central theme of the book.” (Antwi, 2013)

For that reason, in this article, we will try (1) to explore a specific theme (not to pretend to find the central theme of the book), which can help us to understand Jonah more deeply in its context; and (2) we will focus on the narrative text in Jonah 3-4; Moreover, (3) the explicit description of God in Jonah 4:2 will be a guidance :

“You are a gracious God and merciful”
(-wxrw !wnx-la hta)

From that point (4:2), we can focus on the question of “Merciful God”. The main problem is “Why does God change his mind to save the Nineveh?” Even though Nineveh is one of the most wicked cities of the ancient world (Bolin, 2015; Lawson, 2001).

“Nineveh was feared for the cruelty with which its soldiers treated captives of neighboring nations. The Ninevites were infamous for sacrificing their children to pagan deities and were shameless in their disregard for human life. No wonder it was known as “the bloody city” (Nah. 3:1). Modern archaeology has documented the vile brutality of the Assyrians as a barbaric people, especially in their treatment of prisoners of war. They nailed their defeated foes to the city walls, leaving them to die agonizing deaths.” (Lawson, 2001)

Methodology

Many scholars try to approach this book by analyzing the *genre* of the book. That approach tends to ignore contradictory evidence in the text and tries to fix it into “a category”. Thereby, this approach focuses on the features that are relevant to the question of genre (Klooster, 2019), but it can lose the important message of the book that was intended by the author. For that reason, in this article, we will try to examine the *space* and *time* aspects in Jonah 3-4 to identify and analyze *where* and *when* God shows his mercy in the text. Then, we will try to answer these questions: (1) What does it mean of “Merciful God” according to Jonah?; (2) Are there some stages of God’s Mercy?; and (3) Is there any development idea about Mercy of God in Jonah 3-4?

Jonah 3-4 as a Narrative Text

Text of Jonah 3-4 (New Revised Standard Version)

Jonah goes to Nineveh

3 ¹The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” ³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. ⁶When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. ⁸Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. ⁹Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.” ¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Jonah’s Anger at the Lord’s Compassion

4 ¹But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. ²He prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting concerning evil. ³And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴And the Lord said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” ⁵Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. ⁶The Lord God appointed a plant [*qiqayôn*], and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the plant. ⁷But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

Jonah Is Reproved

⁹But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.” ¹⁰Then the Lord said, “You are concerned about the plant, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

Space

This text (Jonah 3-4) is placed in a context of “The Vocation of Jonah”. In chapter 1, we can find that Jonah tried to flee from the Lord. He went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to escape. He did not want to go to Nineveh. But in Jonah 3:1, Jonah was in Nineveh - he did the God’s will - after “three days three nights in the belly of the big fish” (Chapter 2). There is a shift of *place* in this three chapters: *on the sea* [ch. 1], *in the belly of the big fish* [ch. 2], and *in dry land* [ch. 3].

Focusing in Jonah 3-4, we can find three specific places:

(1) *Dry Land* (Jonah 2:11-3:2)

In 2:11, we can find the information that the fish “vomited Jonah up *onto the dry land* (hvbyh la)”. It is a signal that the following scene takes a place in *the dry land* (3:1-2). On the other hand, the dry land is still so mysterious for us. There is no information about its location. According to Lubeck, it refers to *terra firma* generically and to no place in particular (Lubeck, 2001). Nineveh cannot be textually proven as the place of that dry land, even it occurs frequently in the narrative. It just points to where Jonah has to go (Antwi, 2013). Thus, the dry land remains as the dry land.

(2) *Nineveh* (3:3-4:4)

In Jonah, the term “Nineveh” is used more frequently as a collective term for its people than as a place (Lubeck, 2001). But in Jonah 3:3, it is clear that “Nineveh” is used as a name of place. There are some indications that we can observe: (a) In 3:3, we can find two verbs, i.e. “arise” (-wq) and “go / walk” (γlh) (Fisher, 2013). It is a signal that Jonah makes a movement (γlyw hnwy -qyw). There is a spatial shift. He goes to another place, to Nineveh (hwnyn la). Therefore, in this case, Nineveh is used as a name of place. Then, (b) there are two explicit indications: “great city” (hlwdg-ryl) [as a predicative adjective (Antwi, 2013)], and “a three days’ walk” (-ymy tvl{v γlhm) [in the sense of a temporal adverb describing the dimension of Nineveh to indicate the extraordinary size of that city (Antwi, 2013)]. These descriptions



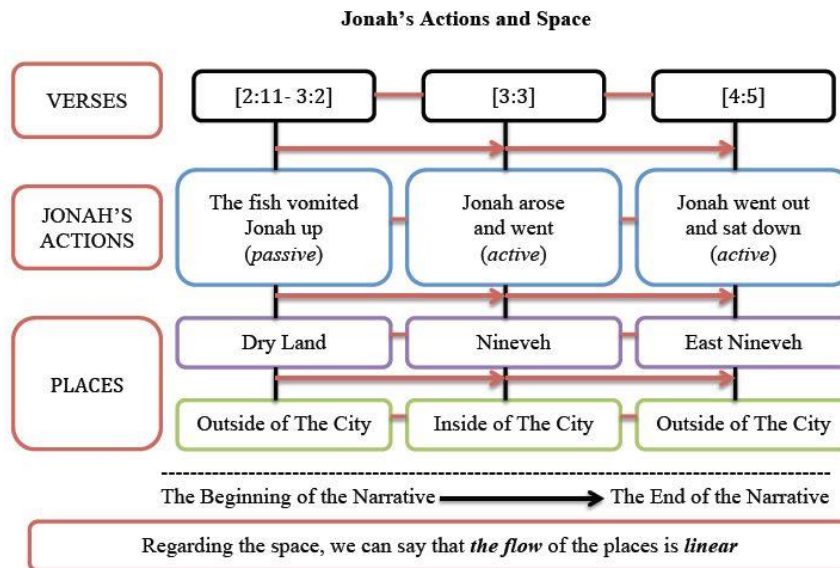
make us sure that Nineveh refers to a name of place. From these all information, we can say that in Jonah 3:3, there is a new place in the narrative - from the *dry land* to *Nineveh*, a great city, a three day’s walk.

(3) East Nineveh (4:5)

In Jonah 4:5, we can find Jonah’s departure to the east side of Nineveh (ry[l -dqm byyw ry[h !m hnwy acyw). From this verse, we have a new place in the narrative, i.e. *East Nineveh*. In that place, Jonah finds a spot to sit passively, wait, and see what will happen in Nineveh (Gaines, 2003).

Jonah’s Action and Space

Jonah’s actions also shift (*cause to move*) the places from one spot to another spot in the narrative. This diagram will describe it:



Time

In Jonah 3-4, there are five specific times, i.e. (1) Three Days and Three Nights (2:1,11; 3:1-3a), (2) Three and One Day’s Walk (3:3b-4), (3) Forty Days (3:5-9), (4) “The Day After Forty Days” (3:10-4:6), and (5) “A Sunny Day” (4:7-11).

(1) Three Days and Three Nights

Analyzing time aspects of the narrative part in Jonah 3-4, we have to return back to Jonah 2, especially in 2:1 and 2:11. These two verses become an inclusion of chapter 2. At the same time, they become a background time for the narration in chapters 3-4.

“And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights (2:1).
[...]
Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land (2:11).”

From those verses (2:1,11), we can find that after three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, Jonah is in the dry land (3:1-3a). In this case, “three days and three nights” (twlyl hvl{vw -ymy hvl{v) is a *narrated (narrative) time*. For Jean Louis Ska, “Narrated (narrative) time is the duration of the actions and event in the ‘story’. It is measured in units of ‘real’ time (seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years, centuries, millenaries).” (Ska, 1990)

(2) Three and One Day’s Walk

From the text, we are well-informed that in the dry land, (1) the word of the LORD came to Jonah for the second time (3:1), (2) to bring his message to Nineveh the great city (3:2), (3) a three day’s walk (-ymy tvl{v rhlhm) (3:3). (4) Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk (3:4a), and (5) he cried out and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” (3:4b).

From those four verses, we can find four aspects of time:

(a) Frequency: “The Second Time” (3:1)

tynv hnwy-la hwby-rbd yhyw
(The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time)

“The second time” (tynv) is about frequency. It means that before this event (3:1), (a) God has called Jonah for the first time (see 1:1) and (b) this action of God can be read as a repetition of the previous action.

(b) Gap: “The Lord’s message” (3:2b)

γyla rbd ykna rva hayrqh-ta hyla arqw
(Proclaim to it the message that I tell you)

There is a **gap** in this verse (3:2b), because we do not know the specific message of the Lord to Nineveh. But only in 3:4b, we will find the Lord’s message from the mouth of Jonah to fill the **gap** in 3:2b:

tkphn hwnynw -wy -y[bra dw[
(Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!)

(c) Duration:

A. “A three day’s walk” (3:3)

hwhy rbdk hwnyn-la γlyw hnwy -qyw
-yhla hlwdg-ry[htyh hwnynw
-ymy tvlv γlhm
(So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.
Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city,
a three days’ walk across)

In this case, the size of the city is measured by the duration of walking. Furthermore, the expression “a three day’s walk” (-ymy tvlv γlhm) is not only as a reference to the size of the city, but also to the length (**duration**) of Jonah’s tour of duty (hwhy rbdk hwnyn-la γlyw hnwy -qyw).

B. “One day’s walk” (3:4a)

dxa -wy γlhm ry[b awbl hnwy lxyw
(Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk)

From this verse, we can find that “one day’s walk” has a **duration** aspect - that describe the length of Jonah’s trip from the dry land to Nineveh.

(d) Narrated (Narrative) Time: “Forty Days” (3:4b)

rmayw arqyw
tkphn hwnynw -wy -y[bra dw[
(And he cried out,
“Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!)

In this case, the “forty days” is a **narrated (narrative) time**.

(3) Forty Days (3:5-9)

In 3:5-9, the narration goes to focus on what the Nineveh did after the proclamation of Jonah in 3:4b. These five verses describe the repentance of Nineveh as a response to the Lord’s message. But we cannot find the explicit sign about temporal aspect in those verses, “How long does the repentance happen?”

The answer can be found implicitly by analyzing verses 10 and 4:b. (a) In 3:10, the text describes that God changes his mind after seeing what the Nineveh did. And (b) in 3:4b, from the proclamation of Jonah, we know that God wants to destroy Nineveh in forty days. So, we can assume that Nineveh did the repentance in forty days and the text tries to describe what they did in five verses (3:5-9). After that, God changes his mind (in 3:10). In this case, (a) **the narrated time** is forty days and **the narration time** is described in five verses (3:5-9). It is based on Ska’s analysis, “The narration time is the length of the narrative and is measured in words, sentences, lines, verses, paragraphs, pages, and chapters.” (Ska, 1990)

(4) The Day After Forty Days

In 3:10-4:6, we can find “another time”. There is no explicit sign like seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, or years in those five verses, but the text allows us to assume “another time”. After forty days of the repentance of Nineveh (3:5-9), God changes his mind (3:10) and Jonah cannot accept it (4:1-6). And in 4:7, there is a sign of the change of time by the phrase “when dawn came the next day” (trxml rxvh twl[b), when God appointed a worm. Both of them (3:5-9 and 4:7) can be a delimitation, so we can find 4:1-6 in the midst of them and it has a “special time” - (a) after the repentance of Nineveh and (b) before God appointed a worm. We can call it “the day after forty days”.

In this part (3:10-4:6), we can find also a flashback in 4:2b-c, when Jonah prays to the Lord, saying, “O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning.” It is a clear signal of flashback.

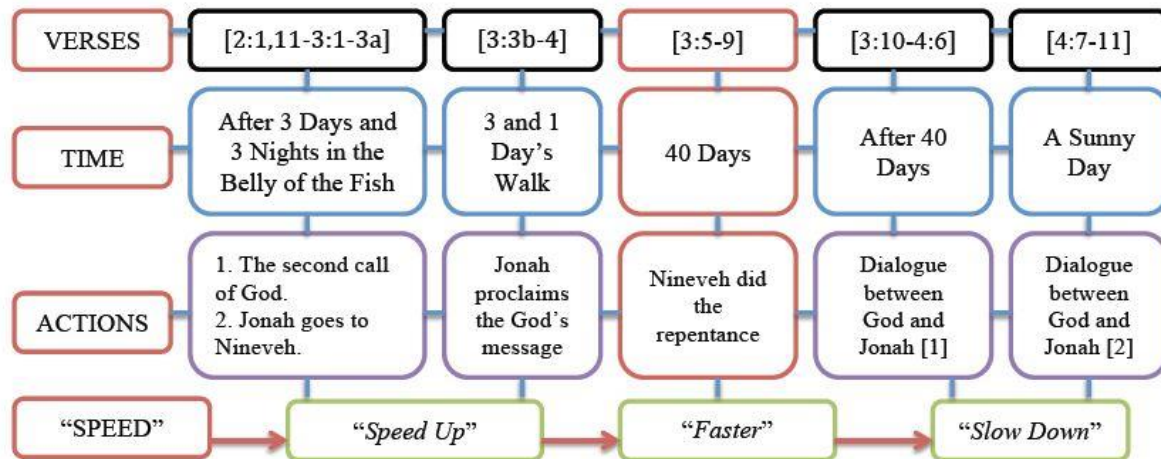


(5) A Sunny Day

The last part of the background of the time, in the narrative part of Jonah 3-4, is “a sunny day”. By observing the initial narrative marker *yhw* in 4:8, we can say that there is a new scene of the narrative in that verse. But the change of time is begun in 4:7 with the phrase “when dawn came the next day” (*trxml rxvh twl[b]*). This is an initial signal of the change of time. And in 4:8, the phrase “when the sun rose” (*vmvh xrzk*) becomes an emphasis for verse 7. So we can say that in 4:7-11, there is a “new time” in the narrative. The word “sun” (*vmv*) in v.8 becomes so essential where it has an important role in the narrative. For that reason, we can call it as “a sunny day”.

Jonah’s Action and Time

Jonah’s actions are placed in *the specific time* of the narrative. This diagram will describe it:



A Merciful God

After analyzing briefly, the space and time in Jonah 3-4. In this part, we will focus on “A Merciful God”. We try to understand it in every stage of the narrative - in the dry land, Nineveh and East Nineveh.

A Merciful God in the Dry Land

In 2:11, we know that after *three days and three nights* (*twlyl hvl{vw -ymy hvl{v}*), “the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land (*hvbyh-la*.)” It is a means of God’s *protection* and *deliverance* (Perry, 2006). It shows us that God gives Jonah the second chance. It is more emphasized in 3:1, where we can find explicitly that God calls him for the second time (*tynv*).

The form of the second call of God (3:1-3b) is similar (*identical*) with the first one (1:1-3a). On the other hand, we can also observe the different response of Jonah (Antwi, 2013):

verse	1:1-3a	verse	3:1-3b
1	The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai	1	Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time
2	Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it	2	Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you
3	But <i>Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish</i>	3	<i>Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh</i>

This *repetition* of God’s call to Jonah (3:1) emphasizes that all God wants is the participation of Jonah in his plan, voluntary or involuntary (Frolov, 1999) - to bring his message to Nineveh (3:2). It shows us that participating in God’s plan is a mercy itself. Moreover, Lubeck describes that Jonah’s journey from sea to dry land thus miniatures God’s deliverance of his people in the past. These descriptions can be found in Genesis 8:7,14; Exodus 14:16,22,29; 15:19; Joshua 2:10; Nahum 1:4; Psalm 66:6; Nehemiah 9:11; Joshua 4:22-23;5:1; and these are each followed by failure of God’s people in abiding by the stipulations of the land. Therefore, Jonah’s journey may evoke the expectation that Jonah too will subsequently fail, according to the typical pattern of his predecessors (Lubeck, 2001).

In this part, we can summary that God shows his mercy in the Dry Land by (1) Giving Jonah the second chance; (2) Giving Jonah protection and deliverance, and (3) Participating Jonah in his plan.

A Merciful God in Nineveh

Jonah tries to respond to God’s mercy in 3:3. It is marked by two verbs “arise” (*-wq*) and “go / walk” (*rlh*). There are movements and a spatial change. Jonah goes to Nineveh. It is a God’s mission, bringing his words to the entire city, Nineveh. The question is “What is the message of God?” Jonah says that the message of God is “Yet *forty days* (*-wy -y[bra]*) and Nineveh *will be overthrown* (*tkphn*) (3:4b).” In 3:5, Nineveh tries to respond it by doing the repentance - fasting and using sackcloth. In 3:6, there is a *zooming technique*: from the panorama of the city of Nineveh (*grassroots*) to the *throne-room* of the King of Nineveh (Lubeck, 2001). In this case, the repentance of the King (3:6-8) becomes an emphasis of 3:5.

However, Jonah does not visit the King of Nineveh directly. It is showed in 3:6, there is only a description that “When the word reached the king of Nineveh” (hwnyn \$lm-la rbdh [gyw). From that verse (3:6), we can assume that Jonah does not meet the King of Nineveh. In this case, Jonah 3 is different from the type-scene of a spokesperson of God before a foreign king (ex.: Joseph before Pharaoh (Genesis 41); Moses before Pharaoh (Exodus 5-10); Ehud before Eglon (Judges 3); David before Achish (1 Sam 21:10-15); Nehemiah before Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:1-8); David’s men before Hanun (1 Chronicles 19:1-4), etc.). But the interesting thing that the King of Nineveh does in fact receive the message and also does “a royal modeling of humble self-abnegation in repentance” (Lubeck, 2001).

Nineveh do the repentance while bringing hope that “God will be turn and repent” (-yhlah -xnw bwvy) from his anger (3:9). Finally, their hope is fulfilled in 3:10, God changed his mind (*repented*) (-yhlah -xnyw). But, another problem rises. Jonah becomes very angry (4:1). Jonah cannot accept the reality that God does not destroy (*overturn*) Nineveh.

God does Justice (?)

In 4:2, Jonah tries to remind God (*flashback*):

“O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country?
That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting concerning evil.”

From that verse (4:2), we can find some interesting points:

1. Jonah tries to *justify* his escape to Tarshish (in chapter 1).
2. Jonah feels like an *unsuccessful prophet* because his proclamation (oracle) does not happen. In other words, Jonah is a *false-prophet* (Frolov, 1999).
3. God is inconsistent (Guillaume, 2006; Ogrosky, 2014). In 3:4, God says (through Jonah), “Yet *forty days* and Nineveh *will be overthrown*”; but in 3:10, God changes his mind.
4. On the other hand, there is a statement from Jonah himself that God is “a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting concerning evil” (4:2). And all of them are true; we can find and prove it in chapter 3.
5. And now, the important questions of justice is rising, “In this case, does God do justice? Is possible mercy and justice walking together?”

We are interested in those questions (no.5). We want to find the logic of the action of God in 3:10 by elaborating the arguments of Lubeck and Lawson on the message of God in 3:4b, “Yet *forty days* (-wy -y[bra) and Nineveh *will be overthrown* (tkphn).”

(a) *Forty days* is not only about “time”. For Lubeck, in this case, “forty” is associated with *testing* and *judgment* (cf. Genesis 7:4,12; Exodus 24:18, 34:28; Deuteronomy 2:7, 8:2, 9:9-11; Numbers 13:25, 14:34; 1 Samuel 17:16; 2 Samuel 5:4; 1 Kings 2:11, 11:42, 19:8) (Lubeck, 2001). So Jonah brings the word of *testing* and *judgment* for Nineveh. In other words, Jonah wants to say, “You (Nineveh) *will be tested* (in *forty days*), and after that, you *will be judged!*”

(b) “[...] And Nineveh *will be overthrown* (tkphn).” This verb “\$ph” (overturn/turn) is often used to describe God’s *overturning* the wicked through *judgment*. For Lawson, it is primarily found in association with the expression of *God’s anger on the unrepentant* (Lawson, 2001).

Based on the arguments of Lubeck and Lawson, we can try to make a “new formula” of God’s message by following the logic of “The interaction between King and representative of God’s people (ex.: prophets) in the Hebrew Bible” (Lubeck, 2001).

Representative of God’s people before King	→ King <i>accepts</i> message or person	→ Representative <i>is rewarded</i> both by God and the King
OR		
Representative of God’s people before King	→ King <i>rejects</i> message or person	→ King <i>is humbled</i> by judgement of God

Therefore, we can make a “new formula” of God’s message:

“You (Nineveh) *will be tested* (in *forty days*),
and after that, you *will be judged!*
And I (God) will be *anger* (will overturn) on *the unrepentant.*”

From that point, we can reconstruct 3:4b-10 to find the logic of the narrative :

1. “Yet *forty days* (-wy -y[bra) and Nineveh *will be overthrown* (tkphn)” (3:4b). For Nineveh, that message can be read, “We will be tested in forty days and will be judged”.
2. Nineveh did the repentance in forty days. It means that Nineveh has been tested and it was success.
3. Now the question is “What is the foundation to judge (*reevaluate*) Nineveh?” The foundation is “*God will be anger on the unrepentant* (\$ph).



4. Therefore, (a) God’s action in 3:10, to change his mind toward Nineveh is *logic, right, and just*; because God does not have more reason to destroy (overturn) Nineveh. Nineveh is truly repentant for their wickedness. In this context (chapter 3), God can only destroy Nineveh if Nineveh is still in their previous status as *the unrepentant*. (b) For that reason, God is still consistent with “what he says before” (3:4b). Then (c) we can say that Jonah is still a (*successful*) prophet because his oracle *happened* - God still keeps “what he says”. And (d) the image of God as “a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting concerning evil” (4:2) is still *true* (exists). Finally, © Jonah can still *justify* his escape to Tarshish, because his reason is still reasonable - God is really a gracious and merciful.
6. From all those explanations, we can say that (a) God does justice; and at the same time, (b) mercy and justice can walk together. So the question of God to Jonah, in 4:4, is still relevant, “Is it right for you to be angry?” [where in 4:3, Jonah wants to die.]

Thus, in Nineveh, God shows his mercy by *giving time* to Jonah (3:3-4; 4:1-3) and Nineveh (3:5-9) *to respond his message*. At the same time, God is *so patient to them* (3:10; 4:4).

The Possibility of “God Can Change His Mind”

This possibility (God can change his mind) can be also observed in Jonah 4:2. We can try to interpret it by reading Joel 2:13. The formulations in Jonah 4:2 and Joel 2:13 are virtually identical (Kim, 2007):

Jonah 4:2

For I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting concerning evil.

H[rh-l[-xnw dsx-brw -ylpa \$ra -wxrw !wnx-la hta

Joel 2:13

For He (God) is a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting concerning evil.

H[rh-l[-xnw dsx-brw -ylpa \$ra awh -wxrw !wnx-yk

Paul Kim tries to analyze these two verses. And amazingly, only in Jonah and Joel, the phrase “relenting concerning evil” (h[rh-l[-xnw) occurs. In Psalms 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; and Nehemiah 9:17, we can find the same phrases “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love”, but without the phrase “relenting concerning evil” (Kim, 2007).

Paul Kim describes that “relenting concerning evil” (h[rh-l[-xnw) is underlined the divine mercy which emphasizes the possibility of “God can change the divine intention toward evil”. In Joel, is inserted in the context of the liturgical reform and repentance. In Jonah, this formula appears in complaining against God’s mercy (Kim, 2007). Therefore, from the beginning, Jonah knows that there is a possibility that God can change his mind. On the other hand, Jonah still cannot accept it. And God just gives Jonah a question, “Is it right for you to be angry?” (4:4). In this case, that question affirms what Jonah says in 4:2 that God is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” in the confrontation of Jonah’s anger. (1) That **question** (4:4) is a mercy itself; and (2) God gives **time** for Jonah to answer it.

A Merciful God in East Nineveh

In 4:5, Jonah goes out of the city and sits down in the east of the city, rather to respond the question of God in 4:4. Jonah is waiting what will be happen in Nineveh. Jonah is still curious with God, maybe God will change his mind for *the second time* - to destroy the Nineveh.

On the other hand, the narration goes to focus on Jonah (4:6-11). In these verses, God tries to initiate a new dialogue with Jonah. In 4:6, God appoints *qîqayôn* (!wyqyq) to comfort Jonah (Muldoon, 2010; Sasson, 1990). But the next day, (1) in 4:7, God appoints a *worm* (h[lwt) to attack the *qîqayôn*; (2) God prepares a sultry east wind, (3) the *sun* (vmv) beats down on the head of Jonah (4:8a). So Jonah falls so faint. For *the second time*, Jonah wants to die than to live (4:8b). And also for *the second time*, God asks the same question, “Is it right for you to be angry (about the *qîqayôn*)?” (4:9a). For Antwi, the repetition is transitional and it is a pedagogical style of narrator (Antwi, 2013). And surprisingly, in this case, Jonah makes an answer, “Yes, angry enough to die.” (4:9b). In this verse (4:9b), we can find that Jonah answers with the same vocabulary as God (Craig-Jr., 1993):

Lord	: Do you have good [reason] to be angry? [Lit.]	γl-hrx bjjyh
Jonah	: I have good [reason] to be angry. [Lit.]	yl-hrx bjjyh

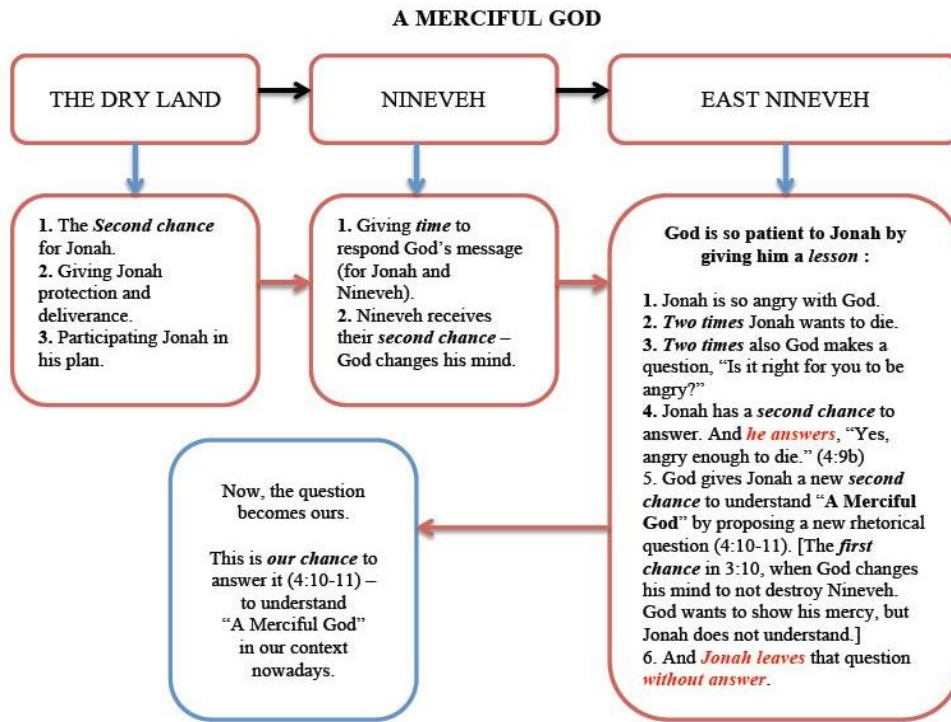
Then the dialogue goes further with the rhetorical question from God :

“You are concerned about the plant, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?” (Jonah 4:10-11)

In the East Nineveh, “A Merciful God” is shown by a *lesson* to Jonah, (1) which is given by God, through a *qîqayôn* (lwyqq), a *worm* (h[lwt), and *the sun* (vmv). Finally, (2) God shows his Mercy by giving a *new chance* to Jonah to answer his question - to understanding more deeply “what does it mean his mercy”. The rhetorical question of God brings to go *beyond* - beyond the human understanding and perceptions.

A Merciful God in Jonah 3-4

After observing “the mercy of God” in every stage of the narrative (in the dry land, Nineveh and East Nineveh), now we will put them together to grasp the message of the author from this narrative.



Conclusion

From the text, we can find three most important “actors”: (1) God, (2) Jonah, and (3) Ninevites. (a) The story begins with the message of God (in 1:1-2), in chapter 3 the same message comes to Jonah for the second time. (b) Jonah does the planning of God to come to Nineveh and proclaiming his message - a destruction of Nineveh. (c) Nineveh does the repentance. And (d) God changes his mind. In this point, a new problem raises. (e) Jonah cannot accept it. After that, (f) God tries to train Jonah with a *lesson* until the end of the chapter 4 - ending by proposing the rhetorical question. The main problem is “Why does God change his mind to destroy (*overturn*) the Nineveh?” Nineveh is one of the most wicked cities of the ancient world. There is a question about “justice”. By observing chapter 3, we can find that God does justice. At the same time, he shows us his mercy to Nineveh. Furthermore, God shows us his mercy in every place and in every situation - in the *Dry Land*, in Nineveh, and in East Nineveh.

From Jonah 3-4, we can find that (1) one of the most important characteristics of the mercy of God is “God always gives us a *second chance*”. This is a *special aspect* of God’s mercy. “A Merciful God” is described as a God who has a great patient for his people (Jonah and Nineveh). (2) Regarding the mercy of God, in every stage of the narrative, there is intensity with its proper *angle* (or focus) : (a) In the *dry land*, the mercy of God has a focus on Jonah for participating in God’s plan; (b) In *Nineveh*, the mercy of God has a focus [1] on Ninevites for their repentance, and [2] on Jonah for his anger; (c) In East Nineveh, God shows his mercy to Jonah by a “lesson”; and in the end, God proposes the rhetorical question (without answer). (3) Regarding to the idea of “A Merciful God” in Jonah 3-4, there is an *increasing intensity* from the beginning of chapter 3 until the end of the story in 4:11. The problem is increasing step by step. At the same time, the mercy of God becomes more intense. (a) In the *dry land*, the mercy of God is more *personal* (to Jonah himself), and (b) in Nineveh, the mercy of God becomes more *communal* (for Nineveh), and finally, (c) in East Nineveh, the mercy of God is described more *universal* (for all creation) by the rhetorical question. The most important message of the author of Book of Jonah is “God is always *beyond* of human understanding”. His mercy is bigger than what we can assume. God is *The-Really-Other*. To understand him, we can start by understanding Nineveh (and our *neighbors* today). Open ourselves to *the others*, at the same time, we try to open our-selves to *The-Really-Other* (A Merciful God) - “God still loves *the marginalized*, the most wicked cities of the ancient world, Nineveh”.

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