

EXEGETICAL PROCESS NOTEBOOK¹

NAME: Linnette Pilar

PASSAGE: Jonah 4:1-11 (Jonah's Anger and the LORD's Compassion)

“The aim of exegesis is to make as explicit as possible the precise meaning of a text. This is done when the proper connotation of the words and concepts is found and when the text is placed in the context of the presuppositions, questions, and concerns of its author.”

--A. Malherbe

Instructions: Use this template for your investigation of a biblical text and answer the questions thoroughly and with supporting evidence. Include scriptural references for easy referral later when you begin to write your projects. There are no page limits for any of the steps, just be satisfied that you have adequately gathered all that you can (time permitting).

This “Exegetical Process Notebook” is your *WORK PRODUCT* that lays the foundation for the final course project. It is *NOT* the project itself, but it contains everything you need to know about your passage before you decide (1) which theological connections to make in a sermon, (2) key points to explain in a bible study, emphasize in staff training, or include in support of a conference topic, and (3) what private and public attitudes/behaviors best reflect the character of Christ.

Important Working Assumptions:

1. Always start with “what” questions before attempting to answer “why” or “how.”
2. Always do your own close reading first before referring to a commentary or secondary scholarly resource.
3. Recognize that what you think initially about a text (without prayerful critical reflection) is not the same as what the Holy Spirit intends. Let each author and each passage have its own voice within its own context before ever attempting to apply it to yourself or a ministry context.
4. The original audience is different from us in most every way possible except for their basic human condition and need of Christ. This includes language, culture, social values and norms, religious worldview, politics, family structure, etc. Consider this notebook as your *PASSPORT* into the foreign country of the original human author and recipients. Do not assume you will understand the language or customs of these ancient peoples without preparing for this journey.
5. The nature of inspiration is such that God used every day, flawed individuals to preserve a trustworthy/true authoritative message that is efficacious for salvation. Thus, eventually shift your attention *from* solving the identity of the original author *to* understanding the message being conveyed.
6. With every interpretive act you are creating sacred space in which to encounter a free and living God.
7. Do not assume the message will simply reaffirm cherished beliefs. Surprisingly at times, God’s message is just as much a word *against* us as a word *for* us.

STEP 1. SURVEY THE GENERAL HISTORICAL CONTEXT

¹ Adapted from Dr. William Barclay, Gordon Conwell <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/charlotte/current/documents/chareg-nt502-barclay-su12.pdf> Accessed Sept. 1, 2016. Also, from Gordon Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. Third edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002. Refer to the appropriate sections of Fee’s text for further clarifications and discussions.

Read the entire document through in English in one sitting (aloud), considering the specific prompt questions in the syllabus (Week 1): YES X NO

1.1 AUTHOR. (a) What do you observe about the identity of the author and his circumstances? (b) What else do you know about the life of the author and his situation at the time of writing that might influence the exegesis of this text?

Always start with the biblical book in front of you. You can learn quite a bit about the author from his own words (e.g., does his language skill reflect a high level of education, does he appear to quote the Scriptures directly from the Hebrew Bible or has he altered the text in some way (may indicate the use of the Greek Septuagint), is he in prison or under duress of some kind, etc.). Make your own observations; then check the secondary literature (New Testament and Old Testament Introductions, Critical Commentaries, Critical Bible Dictionaries) to see what they add to your initial observations.

According to the ESV Study Bible, Jonah is the son of Amittai, a prophet, born in the region of Gath-hepher under the rule of Jeroboam II (son of Joash, king of Israel) who ruled in Samaria 41 years and he “did evil in the sight of the Lord.” (2 Kings 14:23-25) Gath-hepher was a town belonging to the 10th tribe of Jacob, Zebulun in the lower region of Galilee and it’s believed that Jesus did pass through this town since He was from Galilee during his earthly ministry (Eerdman’s Dictionary). *Gath* means “winepress” and *hepher* means “pit or well,” which may indicate the primary industry or profession of the townsmen (Ibid).

As the son of an Israelite prophet, I assume he too is a prophet since (a) the Lord gave him a specific message of judgement for the “great city” of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria (Jonah 1:2) and (b) His prophetic call may have been passed down generationally through Amittai, his father. As we read further in 2 Kings 14, during Jeroboam II’s reign, Israel endured much suffering and affliction with no one to rescue them since they had allowed evil to prevail in their land by the hands of past monarchs who also did “evil in the eyes of the Lord.” Yet, the LORD in His compassion, saved Israel through Jeroboam II and chose to keep His covenant by not blotting out their name from the face of the earth (2 Kings 14:27). So, Jonah is enjoying peace in the land and is in for a rude awakening when God commands Him to deliver a message of judgement to the Ninevites.

The book of Jonan is the fifth book of the twelve minor prophets. Jonah’s name means “dove” and “son of Amittai” literally means “son of my faithfulness.” (ESV Study Bible 1687). Jonah’s time period spans approximately from 782-753 B.C. during a politically and economically prosperous time when the Assyrians were conducting business in other parts of the Mediterranean allowing King Jeroboam II to capture Samaria for Israel and expand its borders. Jonah prophesied this expansion and prosperity during a relatively peaceful and thriving time for to the people of Israel.

Nineveh is located on the east bank of the Tigris River about 220 miles north of present-day Bagdad and over 500 miles northeast of Israel (Ibid.). See map below:



(ESV Study Bible, 1685)

According to the ESV Study Bible, prior to Jeroboam II's reign, Israel experienced severe oppression by the Arameans (2 Kings 13:3) and because of the sins of King Jeroboam. Those sins included leading Israel into idolatry by erecting two golden calves in Dan and Bethel as “centers for worship at high places” and installing non-levitical priests to perform the cultic ceremonies” (1 Kgs. 12:26-32; cf. 2 Chr. 11:13-16; 13:8-9) and blaspheming against the LORD by declaring these idols as the ones who brought Israel out of the land of Egypt (1 Kings 12:28) (Eerdman's Dictionary on Jeroboam, 692) Historians regard Jeroboam's cultic decrees as the reason the northern kingdom collapsed. In essence, these pagan worship practices are in direct violation of the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3, NIV). However, the Lord in His faithfulness delivered Israel, possibly via the Assyrian king, Adad-nirari III (810–783 B.C.) (ESV Study Bible, 1683). Therefore, Jonah experienced God's love and compassion over Israel despite their refusal to rid themselves of their foreign idols.

Tarshish is seaport located in the Western Mediterranean that exported “silver, iron, tin, and lead to Tyre (Ezek. 27:12)” and located far away from Phoenicia and the land of Israel (Isa. 66:19; Jonah 1:3; Ps. 72:10). Though it's exact location is unclear, some scholars believe its located in Africa along the coast of the Red Sea (Eerdman's Dictionary).

Jonah's response to God's mandate is so extreme. He is a deeply emotional man who runs away (Jonah 1:3), praises and worships God when he comes to his senses in the belly of a fish (2:1-9), and then battles anger (4:1,9) and suicidal ideation (4:3,8-9). There is no evidence at the beginning of the book that he even attempted to talk to or (rather) argue with God about this command. He simply took matters into his own hands and sought to go to Tarshish instead of Nineveh thinking he would escape his responsibility. He had extreme mood swings...one minute he's prideful, arrogant, and rebellious taking extreme measures to get away from the “presence of God” and then the next he's worshipping Him and praising Him, then he becomes angry again at God's goodness towards the people of Nineveh and then is “exceedingly glad” at the plant that gives him shade and then is angry again at the worm that eats it so he wants to die. I hadn't realized how emotional he was.

It's incredibly interesting to me that Jonah's response towards the Ninevites was also very hypocritical despite he himself having experienced the grace, favor, compassion and deliverance of the Lord. And what's even more interesting is that Israel's salvation may have come from an Assyrian and Nineveh was part of the Assyrian empire. I would think Jonah would have felt somewhat indebted to the Ninevites and would want to reciprocate the goodness of God that he himself has experienced. It reminds me of the parable of the two debtors (Luke 7:36-50) when the one debtor received mercy and refused to give grace to the second debtor.

1.2. RECIPIENTS: (a) **What are your observations about the identity of the recipients?** *Be careful to base your observations on what the text says, not what you have always heard.* (b) **Are there any hints about their ethnicity or socioeconomic and cultural contexts?** (c) **Where do the recipients live?** *Are there direct or indirect hints that help you identify the geographic region?* (d) **What are their present circumstances?** (e) **What historical situation occasioned this writing?** (f) **What is the relationship between the author and the recipients?**

Hypothesize about the answers to these questions from your observations. If you are unable to answer any of these questions give an initial reason why not. Perhaps the text only provides suggestive clues with gaps you will need to fill in with caution.

It is unclear to me who the recipients are at first glance since Jonah does not make a formal greeting as in a letter, rather he gives dramatic account of his interactions with the LORD, the sailors on the ship to Tarshish and the Ninevites through a series of circumstances. I perhaps can deduce that Jonah has written this account for the people of Israel to provide evidence of the abundant mercy of God even on pagan or enemy nations if they repent – something the Israelites have not done completely in terms of idol/pagan worship. What we do know is that this story takes place in the Mediterranean with references to Nineveh, Joppa (a seaport), and Tarshish.

I'm going to go on a limb here and say that perhaps Jonah kept emphasizing his indignation and longings for death in response to his recipients – his own countrymen. Perhaps, they would have viewed him as a traitor for delivering this message of judgment, therefore he repeats how angry he is and how often he wants to die. Since the Israelites were conducting pagan rituals and sacrifices, they would not be as sensitive to realize that it was God Almighty who sent Jonah to do this nor would they have had compassion themselves. Prophets have tough jobs. They cannot be people-pleasers, but God pleasures and it's a lonely, often unpopular profession. In addition, Jonah may have wanted to die before being killed by his own countrymen for the salvation and deliverance of the Assyrians. I say this in light of his strong reaction and decision to move to a different country altogether and leave behind his home, vocation, family, etc.

The Ninevites were, descendants of Nimrod, “the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD” (Genesis 10:8-11), who was a descendent of Cush, the son of Ham who was one of the sons of Noah (Genesis 10). It's interesting to note that Nimrod also built Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah and it is referred to as “the great city” (10:12) in the same way the LORD in the book of Jonah refers to Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and was geographically centered “on the great highway between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, thus uniting the East and the West,” which brought great wealth from various sources and earning the reputation as the “greatest of all ancient cities” (Easton's Bible Dictionary on Nineveh).

Jonah relationship to the Ninevites appears to be one of archenemies since he is adamant about delivering the prophetic word to Nineveh. Towards the end of the book, he confesses to God, “for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and a relenting from disaster (Jonah 4:2b, ESV). God's commandment to Jonah is an example of illocution (Brown 111) and Jonah fleeing to Tarshish is an example of unintended perlocutionary intent (Ibid.) in terms of textual development.

1.3 PURPOSE: (1) **What can you discern about the author’s purpose for writing?** Does the author explicitly say anything about it, or is the purpose implied (through suggestive clues)? *Be attentive here. Authors share certain preunderstandings with their audience that need not be stated (i.e., the author and recipients are privy to information well-known to each that we would have no way of knowing). Your job will be to make the implicit clear, i.e., what is implied needs to be explained carefully.* (2) **What is the overall theme or concern?** *Did you notice words or ideas that were frequently repeated? Did you notice special word choices or exhortations/ideas that fit the overall presentation? What might these repetitions, vocabulary, or ideas tell you about the purpose of the writing?* (3) **Does the argument or narrative have an easily discerned outline, or does it seem to be a loose, thematic collection of sayings or teachings** (e.g. Sermon on the Mount or James)? *You need not work out the outline here, just observe!*

Jonah’s purpose for writing is implicit because he never states the reason for the book or who the actual recipients are. As I’ve mentioned in the previous section, perhaps his reasoning may be to show that God is merciful to all who would repent of their sins and turn from their wicked ways including their enemies (as the overall theme). Not only did the Ninevites repent, but the sailors also recognized that Jonah’s God was bigger than their little gods when faced with the storm. In fact, they “called out to the Lord, ‘O Lord, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you’” (Jonah 1:14, ESV). After they threw Jonah overboard and saw how God stopped the raging sea, “the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows” (Jonah 1:16). In other words, they acknowledged Yahweh’s sovereignty, repented of their sins and demonstrated their allegiance to Him through godly fear, sacrifices and vows. They used the name of the LORD (Yahweh) for the first time. They recognized that their puny little gods were no match for Him.

Another possible reason Jonah may have written this book was to bring conviction upon the Israelites who knowing who the true and living God is, refused to repent and destroy their idols, tear down their high places and centers of worship, and return to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

I believe there are several lessons that can be extracted from this book:

1. Full obedience upon hearing the Word of God brings deliverance and salvation to others
2. God is gracious, merciful and abounding in steadfast love (Jonah 4:2b) to all who repent with all their heart
3. Leaning on our own understanding leads to trouble in life (Jonah took the initiative to disobey God and head in a completely different direction to Tarshish away from the Middle East and towards the continent of Africa)
4. Running from God’s call is pointless
5. “It’s Not About You” – A Lesson on Humility

I believe the book of Jonah is a dramatic narrative with clear outlines that make it easy to follow:

- A. The Call of Jonah
 - a. God commands Jonah to deliver a message to the great city of Nineveh
- B. Jonah’s Disobedience
 - a. Jonah hops on a ship to Tarshish to escape his mandate
 - b. Trouble in the Mediterranean Sea
 - c. The mariners/sailors draw lots to find who is causing the storm
 - d. The mariners/sailors discover who the LORD is and repent
 - e. Jonah is thrown overboard and is swallowed up by a fish
- C. Jonah’s Repentance
 - a. He spends 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of a fish
 - b. Jonah comes to his senses and offers God a psalm of praise

- D. “Back to Square One” – Jonah Goes to Nineveh
 - a. God repeats the original mandate to Jonah word-for-word (Jonah 3:2)
 - b. Jonah Journeys to Nineveh
 - i. He declares judgment over the Ninevites
 - ii. The Ninevites, including the king, proceed to fast, put on sackcloth and ashes and repent
 - iii. God relents from judgment and disaster upon Nineveh
- E. Jonah’s Angry Towards God
 - a. “The Truth Comes Out” – Jonah’s Confession
 - i. God is merciful, gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Jonah 4:2b)
 - b. The metaphor of the plant and the worm
 - c. God confronts Jonah using rhetorical questions

There are numerous repetitions in this book, but I believe the most significant are God’s command for Jonah to go to Nineveh (2x), escaping the presence of the Lord in Chapter 1 (3x), Nineveh referred to God as the “great city” (5x). I believe the heart of this book is in Jonah 4:2b that describes God’s heart posture towards the people of Nineveh and is a lesson for us.

STEP 2. CONFIRM THE LIMITS OF YOUR PASSAGE.

Decide where your *pericope* [i.e., “self-contained unit”] begins and ends. *Examine whether or not the paragraphs and divisions in your bibles correctly reflect the limits of your chosen passage.*

For non-language students, it is best to compare the paragraphing of several modern translations (e.g. NRSV, TNIV, NET, AV, NASB, NKJV, etc. Fee, p. 12). Where do the translation differ as far as paragraph length and divisions? Then decide for yourself what the basic unit is. (Your conclusions should be based on your own observations from these texts). *The final decision is part of the exegetical process. Choose passages approximately 5-10 verses for a project this size.*

“The passage I intend to investigate is Jonah 4:1-11 (Jonah’s Anger and the LORD’s Compassion) (E.g. John 2:1-11, the narration of the wedding at Cana)

STEP 3. BECOME THOROUGHLY ACQUAINTED WITH YOUR PARAGRAPH/PERICOPE (Fee, 12).

3.1. Read the paragraph through in 5-7 translations and *note the differences* among the translations. Copy these translations and mark well these differences using colored highlights. *List the differences here.* (WHY DO THIS STEP? Without knowledge of biblical languages one can miss the different options translators have when moving from one language to another. *THERE IS NO ONE TO ONE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN LANGUAGES.*)

For example:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, (Phil. 2:5 NRS)

You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had (Phi 2:5 NET)

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, (Phi 2:5 ESV)

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: (Phi 2:5 NIV)

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, (Phi 2:5 NAB)

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. (Jonah 4:1 ESV)

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. (Jonah 4:1 KJV)

But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. (Jonah 4:1 NASB)

But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. (Jonah 4:1 NRSV)

Jonah was very unhappy about this and became angry. (Jonah 4:1 GNB)

But to Jonah, this seemed very wrong and he became angry. (Jonah 4:1 TNIV)

And Jonas was exceedingly troubled, and was angry: (Jonah 4:1 DRA)

Differences:

- Jonah's reaction to the Ninevites' salvation is described as "displeasing, greatly displeasing, very displeasing, very unhappy, very wrong and exceedingly troubled."

And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. (Jonah 4:2, ESV)

And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. (Jonah 4:2 KJV)

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 4:2 NASB)

He prayed to the Lord and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. (Jonah 4:2 NRSV)

So he prayed, "LORD, didn't I say before I left home that this is just what you would do? That's why I did my best to run away to Spain! I knew that you are a loving and merciful God, always patient, always kind, and always ready to change your mind and not punish. (Jonah 4:2 GNB)

He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. (Jonah 4:2 TNIV)

Differences:

- In some translations (i.e. KJV and NASB) Jonah initiates his prayer to God with respect and humility by using cue words like "please" and "I pray thee O LORD" while the other translations get right to the point with Jonah's entitled framework and accusations against

God as in the TNIV, “Isn’t this what I said...” “Is not this what I said” (NRSV) You can almost feel the “snippy” attitude coming from Jonah in this verse.

Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” (Jonah 4:3 ESV)

Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. (Jonah 4:3 KJV)

Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.” (Jonah 4:3 NASB)

And now, O LORD, I beseech thee take my life from me: for it is better for me to die than to live. (Jonah 4:3 DRA)

Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” (Jonah 4:3 NIV)

Now then, LORD, let me die. I am better off dead than alive.” (Jonah 4:3 GNB)

Differences:

- In the GNB, it appears that Jonah wants to be left alone to die while in others (i.e. ESV) Jonah wants God to personally take his life.

Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. (Jonah 4:6 ESV)

And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. (Jonah 4:6 KJV)

So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. (Jonah 4:6 NASB)

And the LORD God prepared an ivy, and it came up over the head of Jonas, to be a shadow over his head, and to cover him (for he was fatigued): and Jonas was exceeding glad of the ivy. (Jonah 4:6 DRA)

Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. (Jonah 4:6 NIV)

Then the LORD God made a plant grow up over Jonah to give him some shade, so that he would be more comfortable. Jonah was extremely pleased with the plant. (Jonah 4:6 GNB)

Differences:

- The plant is translated 4 ways (leafy plant, ivy, gourd, and plant)
- There are different verbs the translations use for how God handled the plant (either by divine selection of a plant already present or he created one on grow over Jonah).
- The adjectives used to describe Jonah’s pleasure over the plant are “extremely pleased, very happy, exceedingly glad.

When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” (Jonah 4:8 ESV)

And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. (Jonah 4:8 KJV)

When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life." (Jonah 4:8 NASB)

And when the sun was risen, the Lord commanded a hot and burning wind: and the sun beat upon the head of Jonas, and he broiled with the heat: and he desired for his soul that he might die, and said: It is better for me to die than to live. (Jonah 4:8 DRA)

When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4:8 NIV)

After the sun had risen, God sent a hot east wind, and Jonah was about to faint from the heat of the sun beating down on his head. So he wished he were dead. "I am better off dead than alive," he said. (Jonah 4:8 GNB)

Differences:

- The description of the wind that God either appointed, prepared, commanded, sent or provided "scorching east wind," "vehement east wind," "a hot and burning wind," and "hot east wind."
- The description of Jonah's condition: "he was faint" and "broiled with the heat."
- Death is used as either the subject of the last sentence or in action.

And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night." (Jonah 4:10 ESV)

Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: (Jonah 4:10 KJV)

Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which [h]came up overnight and perished overnight." (Jonah 4:10 NASB)

And the LORD said: Thou art grieved for the ivy, for which thou hast not laboured, nor made it to grow, which in one night came up, and in one night perished. (Jonah 4:10 DRA)

But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight." (Jonah 4:10 NIV)

The LORD said to him, "This plant grew up in one night and disappeared the next; you didn't do anything for it and you didn't make it grow—yet you feel sorry for it!" (Jonah 4:10 GNB)

Differences:

- The array of adjectives used to describe how Jonah felt about the plant: "sorry," "concerned," "grieved," "compassion" and "pity."
- God's rebukes Jonah over his lack of participation in the creation of the plant by not making it grow, not doing anything for it and not laboring over it.

And should not I **pity** Nineveh, that **great city**, in which there are **more than 120,000 persons** who do not know their right hand from their left, and also **much cattle**?” (Jonah 4:11 ESV)

And should not I **spare** Nineveh, that **great city**, wherein are **more than sixscore thousand persons** that **cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand**; and also **much cattle**? (Jonah 4:11 KJV)

Should I not have **compassion** on Nineveh, the **great city** in which there are **more than 120,000 persons** who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, **as well as many animals**?” (Jonah 4: 11NASB)

And shall not I **spare** Ninive, that **great city**, in which there are **more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons** that **know not how to distinguish between their right hand and their left**, and **many beasts**? (Jonah 4:11 DRA)

And should I not have **concern** for the **great city** of Nineveh, in which there are more than a **hundred and twenty thousand people** who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also **many animals**?” (Jonah 4:11 NIV)

How much more, then, should I have **pity** on Nineveh, that **great city**. After all, it has **more than 120,000 innocent children** in it, as well as **many animals!**” (Jonah 4:11 GNB)

Differences:

- The 120,000 inhabitants of Nineveh are described as “innocent children,” “people,” and “persons.”
- God’s treatment over Nineveh is one of “pity,” “compassion,” “concern,” and “sparing.”

3.2 Determine which of these differences are exegetically significant (e.g. are the differences a matter of synonyms, grammar, stylistic or theological preference, or textual criticism? Do these differences alter the meaning in any way? Does a particular translation have slightly different theological implications? Which is closer to the original author’s meaning given the overall argument?)

In the above example, notice the difference between the choice of “same mind,” “same attitude,” “same mindset,” or “this mind.” Do these synonyms mean the same thing? What does each add to the meaning of the text? Notice the words in green: What is the difference between “in you,” “toward one another,” “among yourselves,” and “in your relationships with one another”? What difference might these observations make in a sermon?

Explain these differences as far as you can (develop a hypothesis of which translation you think is the best rendering of the passage and explain why this hypothesis best explains these differences based on supporting evidence). *Pay particular attention to marginal notes that usually refer to matters of textual criticism. NET translator notes (included in the Accordance package) are particularly helpful.*

You will be coming back to these initial observations to check your initial ideas with a good critical commentary for deeper insight. Hypotheses can always be revised the more you investigate.

I believe the three descriptions of Nineveh as “innocent children,” “people,” and “persons” in verse 11 of Jonah 4 is theologically significant because referring to them as a people groups them as one. However, “persons” implies individual souls. Even more significant theologically is GNB’s translation of “innocent children,” which makes sense in light of the fact that the people do not know their right from their left. This is a metaphor for someone who is confused or lost. God is saying here that the Ninevites are innocent because they do not know any better. God knew that if He sent a messenger then it would completely change the trajectory of the people’s hearts, minds and behaviors.

Verse 10 uses various adjectives to describe how Jonah felt over the plant that provided him shade and how strongly he felt for this plant when it died: “sorry,” “concerned,” “grieved,” “compassion” and “pity.” I find this extreme that he would feel so strongly for a plant. Perhaps he is the first recorded “tree hugger” of the Bible? Perhaps some environmentalist may resonate with Jonah’s compassion for nature.

In verse 6 we are introduced to the plant and I perhaps the plant is a metaphor for the people of Nineveh. It’s interesting to note that gourds (KJV) have hard, dry skin yet it provided shade to Jonah. Perhaps this is how the Assyrians were viewed, as hard-hearted people yet doesn’t history point to an Assyrian King that God used to deliver Israel? So in essence it was the Ninevites who had at one point brought “shade” to the Hebrew people which they are enjoying right now.

I think the GNB conveys the message of Jonah the best, in my opinion, though I’m willing to be corrected if otherwise. I say this especially in verse 4:2 because some historians say that Jonah could have been on his way to either Africa or Spain and this is the key verse that sums up God’s essence: “you are a loving and merciful God, always patient, always kind, and always ready to change your mind and not punish.” It’s theologically significant to consider that the sovereign God of the universe would be willing to change His mind if people sincerely repent of their sins and that He is always willing to extend compassion, mercy, patience and kindness. This reminds me of Romans 2:4 that says it is the Lord’s kindness that leads us to repentance. This is exactly what God demonstrated to the people of Nineveh yet Jonah in his self-righteousness and pride was not receiving that.