“Fasting,” “Sackcloth,” and “Ashes” – From Nineveh to Shushan

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Many scholars have noted the linguistic links and similarities in content between the books of Esther and Jonah, and other biblical books, and have discussed the meaning of these affinities.[[1]](#footnote-1) Among the many connections, a few scholars have raised the possibility of a connection between Jonah and Esther themselves.[[2]](#footnote-2) This article will focus on further establishing points of contact between these two books by comparing the descriptions of the fasting and mourning in the fortress Shushan, primarily in Esther chapter 4, and the fasting and mourning in chapter 3 of Jonah.

Analyzing connections between biblical stories to establish intra-biblical interpretations is a common methodology, widely used by scholars, yet its definition and boundaries, and more broadly the defining characteristics of inter-textual reading, are far from universally agreed.[[3]](#footnote-3) In this article, I will be basing the assumption of intra-biblical interpretation on the shared language, content and structure of two accounts.[[4]](#footnote-4) Below, I explicate several methodological issues directly related to the comparison between the stories under consideration: the possibility of a dynamic analogy (below, I will claim that the king of Nineveh, is analogous to both Esther and Mordecai), basing an analogy on linguistic connections that are not unique to the two texts being compared, and relevance of dating the texts for the meanings that emerge from the connections between them. From the outset, it should be mentioned that the inter-textual reading in this article focuses on the author and the meaning that the author intended to give the text.[[5]](#footnote-5) In the final section of the article, I will support the claim that the book of Jonah is earlier than Esther, and that the author of Esther intended to draw an analogy between descriptions of the mourning in Shushan and Nineveh.

# Esther 4 – Jonah 3: Similarities in the Progress of the Narrative, Content and Language

Esther 4 and Jonah 3 describe the mourning and distress of the public and its leaders in the face of a severe and sudden decree imposed upon them. In Esther, it is Haman who issues the decree, which is promulgated in a letter dispatched from Shushan, the capital of Persia, to the entire realm. In Jonah, the decree is issued by God, and the message is transmitted by his emissary Jonah who makes a declaration in the streets of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.[[6]](#footnote-6) Descriptions of mourning appear many times in the Bible after the occurrence of the distressing events (death, destruction etc.). They are an expression of remorse, and of the pain that emerges from the distress.[[7]](#footnote-7) Identical descriptions of mourning may also appear in a different context, as a response to calamity expected in the future. These expressions of mourning often reflect an attempt to forestall the impending misfortune by imploring with God, in what has been termed “petitionary mourning.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Because the customs of mourning for a disaster that has already occurred and those for attempting to forestall an anticipated future disaster are similar, sometimes even identical, context may be the only factor distinguishing between them.[[9]](#footnote-9) From this perspective, the mourning depicted in both Esther and Jonah can be understood as relating to a calamity yet to come, making it petitionary mourning.

In addition to the general context, the explicit statement of the king of Nineveh clarifies that the mourning described in the book of Jonah is petitionary. His statement, “Who knows but that God may turn and relent… so that we do not perish.” ‎(Jon. 3:9, NJPS throughout except when noted)‎clearly reflects the belief that the acts of mourning, together with remorse, have the potential to change the divine decree. Unlike the story in Jonah, the assumption that the mourning in Esther is an expression of petitionary mourning is problematic because the object of the petition, God, is not mentioned anywhere in the book. According to some scholars, Mordecai’s comment to Esther, “relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter” (Esth. 4:14) reflects the belief that the decree can indeed be repealed.[[10]](#footnote-10) Therefore, I think that the expressions of mourning in Esther should also be considered petitionary mourning despite the lack of an explicit address to God.

Expressions of petitionary mourning are scattered throughout the Bible.[[11]](#footnote-11) However, I shall demonstrate that there are many points of contact related to the expressions of mourning in Esther and Jonah: relating to plot, content and language. For ease of the discussion, I present the two descriptions in table form before addressing the principal connections in form and structure. Linguistic connections will be discussed separately.

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Esth. 3:13-4:17** | **Jon. 3: 3-10** |
| Decree of destruction | Accordingly, written instructions were dispatched by couriers to all the king’s provinces to destroy, massacre, and exterminate all the Jews, young and old, children and women, **on a single day**, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month—that is, the month of Adar—and to plunder their possessions. (Esth. 3:13) | Jonah went at once to Nineveh in accordance with the Lord’s command. Nineveh was an enormously large city a **three days**’ walk across. Jonah started out and made his way into the city the distance of **one day**’s walk, and proclaimed: “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jon. 3: 3-4)  |
| Double response of the people and the leader | When Mordecai learned all that had happened, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes. He went through the city, crying out loudly and bitterly, until he came in front of the palace gate; for one could not enter the palace gate wearing sackcloth. (Esth. 4:1-2)The queen was greatly agitated... Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law ‎(Esth. 4: 4, 16)  | The people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast, and great and small alike put on sackcloth. (Jon. 3: 5) |
|  | Also, in every province that **the king’s command and decree reached**, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and everybody lay in **sackcloth and ashes**. ‎(Esth. 4:3) | When the **news reached the king** of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, *took off his robe*,**put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes**. ‎(Jon. 3: 6) |
| Reference to the chance of rescue vs. the chance of loss | Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther: “Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king’s palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father’s house will **perish**. **And who knows**, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis. ‎(Esth. 4:13-14).  | **Who knows** but that God may turn and relent? He may turn back from His wrath, so that we **do not perish**. ‎(Jon. 3: 9)‎ |
| Leader command the group to expand the mourning customs | Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordecai: “Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast in my behalf; **do not eat or drink for three days**, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and **if I am to perish, I shall perish**!”(Esth. 4:14-15).  | And he had the word **cried** through Nineveh: “By decree of the king and his nobles: No man or beast—of flock or herd—shall taste anything! They shall not graze, and they shall **not drink water**!They shall be covered with sackcloth—man and beast—and shall cry mightily to God. Let everyone turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice of which he is guilty. ‎(Jon. 3: 6-8)‎ |
| Mordecai obeys Esther’s command | So Mordecai went about [the city] and did just as Esther had commanded him. ‎(Esth. 4:17). |  ------------------------------- |
| The decree is annulled | the very day on which the enemies of the Jews had expected to get them in their power, the **opposite** happened, and the Jews got their enemies in their power. ‎(Esth. 9:1) | God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And God renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out. ‎(Jon. 3: 10)‎ |

The responses of mourning and distress described in Jonah 3 and Esther 4 occurred in two kingdoms that are significant in biblical historiography, Persia and Assyria. The events in the book of Jonah occur entirely in Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, while in the book of Esther the fortress Shushan plays an important and distinctive role in the descriptions of mourning, but the mournful response spreads to all of the places in the kingdom where Jews resided. Their mourning was a reaction to the sudden threat of extermination that was imposed “from above:” the order to annihilate all of the Jews on a specific day, “the thirteenth day of the twelfth month” (Esth. 3:12-15) in the name of King Ahasuerus. The command regarding the overthrow of Nineveh in “forty days more” (Jon. 3:4) was delivered by God’s emissary Jonah. In both cases, the text describes the information reaching the leader and the people in parallel. In Jonah, it seems that news of the prophet wandering around the city reach the people directly, and only later does the text note, “When the news reached the king of Nineveh” (Jon. 3:6). Mordecai’s receipt of the information is described in these words, “When Mordecai learned all that had happened” (Esth. 4:1). The text seems to mean that Mordecai received the information about Haman’s decree because of his standing and connections in the palace.[[12]](#footnote-12) Esther will later hear about decree from Mordecai. The other Jews in the kingdom learn of it from the letter that is dispatched throughout the kingdom, to “every province that the king’s command and decree reached” (Esth. 4:3). The verbal combination “נג”ע דבר” describing the arrival of the information to the king of an investor and the Jews of Persia is unique, appearing only in these books, and nowhere else in the Bible.[[13]](#footnote-13)

As is evident from the above and the table, and as we will see below, there are parallels between the actions taken by the king of Nineveh, and those taken by Mordecai and Esther. In his attempt to establish methodological principles for claiming a narrative analogy, Noble states that analogies based on “interchangeable connections” between various characters are problematic, and it is essential to maintain, throughout the process of comparison, the identity of each character for whom connection is claimed.[[14]](#footnote-14) Grossman adopts the principles of Noble but simultaneously explicates the dynamic analogy between the book of Esther and the stories of Joseph and Daniel, and the links between the heroes (Joseph or Daniel) in one set of stories and the other (Mordecai and Esther).[[15]](#footnote-15) Sometimes the hero (Joseph or Daniel) is compared to Mordecai and sometimes to Esther. Grossman also identifies reversals of this type in the connections between the stories in Esther and other biblical stories, and states that the author of Esther uses what he calls “dynamic analogies” as an “intentional literary phenomenon.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Without disputing his principal findings, I would claim that comparison between various leaders (Joseph, Daniel and the king of Nineveh) and Mordecai and Esther is possible because in the story—as told in the book of Esther—the two characters share the role of leader, whether in turn, in parallel or jointly.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Further to the parallel descriptions of the news reaching the people and the leader, the stories of Esther and Jonah both describe two independent reactions to the decree, the response of the leaders (Mordecai and Esther, king of Nineveh) and the response of the people (the Jews of Persia, people of Nineveh). Only after the parallel descriptions of mourning do the leaders (Esther, and Mordecai acting as her emissary in Shushan, and the king of Nineveh) address the people with the call to expand the expressions of a mourning. At first, the mourning takes place on two parallel levels (people and leaders); later, in the second stage the leader commands additional mourning. These stages are unique and have no biblical parallels.[[18]](#footnote-18)

In each of the stories, the response of the people and the response of the leadership is similar but not identical. Mordecai’s responses include tearing his clothes, wearing sackcloth, and ashes, and “crying loudly and bitterly” (Esth. 4:1). After Esther becomes aware of the decree and responds positively to Mordecai’s demands, she order the Jews of Shushan to fast for three days (Esth. 4:16). Their mournful response includes not only fasting but also weeping, wailing, sackcloth, and ashes (Esth. 4:3). Comparing their responses, we see that Mordecai’s “crying loudly and bitterly” parallels the weeping and wailing of his people, the Jews. Both Mordecai and the people wear sackcloth and ashes. Their responses differ in that only Mordecai tears his clothing, and only the people fast. From Esther’s words, it emerges that she intends to fast, and it can be assumed that Mordecai joined the rest of the Jews in Shushan for the three-day fast.

In Jonah 3, the people of Nineveh, great and small, make do with fasting and wearing sackcloth (Jon. 3:6-8). Conversely the reaction of the king, includes removing his robe, sitting in ashes and decreeing that all people and animals should fast, cry to God, wear sackcloth and repent. As in the case of Mordecai, it is not explicitly said that the king of Nineveh fasted but it seems reasonable to assume from the fact that they asked their people to fast that the leaders did, too. In both stories, tearing or removing clothing is explicitly an act only of the leaders.[[19]](#footnote-19) Below I will discuss the significance of these acts, and of the roots זע"ק and עב"ר used in the responses of both leaders.

After the description of the parallel mourning of the people and the leader, the leader in both stories again decrees the people should intensify their expressions of mourning. Despite the fast already held throughout the kingdom, Esther again asks that all the Jews in Shushan fast, this time with specific focus, “on my behalf” and emphasizing that the fast should include abstention from drinking. Moreover, she sets the duration of the fast, “do not eat or drink for three days” (Esth. 4:16). Similarly, although the people of Nineveh fasted once, the king decrees another fast and expands the subjects of his decree to fast and wear sackcloth to include sheep and cattle. In addition to stressing that the fast includes abstention from eating and drinking, the king commands that the people cry out to God and improve their behavior: “let everyone turned back from his evil ways and from the injustice of which he is guilty” ‎(Jon. 3:7-8)‎. The specific language used to prohibit for drinking during the fast “אל שת"ה” is found in the Bible only in these stories.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The king of Nineveh concludes with the hope “who knows but that God may turn and relent? He may turn back from his wrath so that we do not perish” ‎(Jon. 3: 9)‎. Mordecai’s words to Esther also include the possibility of perishing and an expression of hope: “you and your father’s house will ‎perish. And who knows, perhaps you ‎have attained to royal position for just ‎such a crisis. ‎(Esth. 4:14). Below, I will discuss the meaning of the question of “who knows?” in the stories of Esther and Jonah. At this point, I will already note that nowhere else in Scripture does the verb‎ אב"ד – to perish—appears in proximity to the question “who knows?”

Immediately after describing the response of the people of Nineveh and their king to the decree “forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown,” the text reports that their plea was accepted and “God saw what they did… and renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon them” (Jon. 3:10). In Esther also, the Jews eventually escape the evil decree, and the story continues to narrate the actions Esther and Mordecai take to have it revoked. Shortly before the end of the story, the reader is told “the opposite happened, and the Jews got their enemies in their power” (Esth. 9:1).

# Linguistic Connections between the Stories

Although the linguistic connections between two texts are the foundation for all analogies, some scholars have noted that not all linguistic connections indicate that an analogy indeed exists. In an attempt to delineate when shared language supports an analogy, and when it simply emerges from parallel usage of common phrases, Garsiel established three principles:

If the parallels contain some distinctive point absent from similar formula elsewhere; if the extent of the linguistic similarity is considerable; or if in addition to linguistic similarity there is resemblance as to content, motif, etc. there are grounds of thinking in terms of direct literary dependence.

To wit: (a) if the parallels are unique in any way (for example using rare words or unique linguistic structures); (b) if there is extensive linguistic sharing between the texts under consideration, because the cumulative quantity of shared language has weight when considering the possibility of direct dependence between the selections being compared; (c) when similarity in language is accompanied by similarity in content, motives or other literary materials.[[21]](#footnote-21)

In Berman’s opinion, the validity of analogies’ linguistic conditions does not emerge specifically from the special nature of shared language but rather from functional identity. He wrote:

When we attempt to identify the shared elements of two narrative units, we must examine them according to one exclusive singular criterion: does the language used to fill the same purpose in both stories? If it does, then the shared language can be used to support narrative analogies. If the language does not serve the same function in both literary units then they cannot be used to establish the foundation for an analogy even if it is quite rare.[[22]](#footnote-22)

In light of these criteria, I will now consider the linguistic similarities between the stories of Esther and Jonah. First considered are unique phrases, followed by shared expressions related to mourning, and finally phrases that are not unique to these two stories but their cumulative presence might contribute to supporting the analogy. In all cases, I will relate to the function of each expression in the story, in accordance with the principle proposed by Berman.[[23]](#footnote-23)

## Unique Phrases

###  נג"ע דבר – Word reached

The descriptions of the decree reaching the king of Nineveh and the Jews of the Persia both use phrases with a verb from the root נג"ע (reach) and the noun “דבר” (word). This combination is unique to these stories.[[24]](#footnote-24) The verb “נג"ע” in Esther is in the *pi’el* construction, while in Jonah the *qal* is employed, but the phrase is used identically in both stories.[[25]](#footnote-25) The word דבר in both instances refers to the decree. In Jonah, it appears with the definite article “הדבר – the news (lit. ‘word’)” (Jon. 3:6), while in Esther it is the first component in a construct phrase “דבר המלך – the king’s command (lit. ‘word’)” (‎Esth. ‎ 4:3).

### מי יודע...? אב"ד – Who knows…? perish

The question “who knows?” is asked ten times in the Bible but only in Esther and Jonah is it found adjacent to the verb אב"ד. Crenshaw categorizes the ten questions into two groups.[[26]](#footnote-26) In the first group, he places five questions that, in his opinion, leave open the possibility of a change, with the meaning of “maybe” or “perhaps.” In the second group of five questions are, to use his terminology, “a closed door,” that casts doubt on, or even negates the possibility of human knowledge.[[27]](#footnote-27) The questions asked by Mordecai and the king of Nineveh naturally belong to the first group, which also includes questions asked by David, Joel and the psalmist. For present purposes, I focus only on those questions that appear in biblical narratives.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In three out of the four questions, the speaker addresses God, or encourages others to do so, in hopes that their petitions will have an impact and cause the fateful decree to be annulled. David begs for the life of his son despite the fact that God has decreed his death (2 Sam. 12:22), Joel asks that the people plead and request relief from the plague of locusts that God had decreed (Joel 2:14) and the king of Nineveh commands his people to call on God, and ask that the decree imposed on the city of Nineveh be annulled (Jon. 3:9).

At first reading it seems that the question asked by Mordecai is substantively different from the other three, because the decree in question was not imposed by God but rather by the king’s viceroy Haman. Moreover, God does not appear explicitly anywhere in the story.[[29]](#footnote-29) However, in the opinion of Crenshaw, Berg and others, Mordecai’s question is based on the theological assumption that God’s providence is active in the world, and God manages creation.[[30]](#footnote-30) According to this understanding, Mordecai’s question, “And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis” ‎(Esth. 4:14) reflects his belief that there is a guiding hand that leads people to their destiny. In the other three stories, people address God directly in hopes that God will rescind the decree. Mordecai turns to Esther and asks her to utilize the advantage that God has given her, while also hinting at the possibility that her elevation was intended *ab initio* to facilitate undoing the decree. The question ought to be understood as: “who knows, perhaps God helped you be chosen as queen so you can take advantage of your position to save the Jewish people from this evil.” Understanding the question this way creates a fundamental similarity between it and the other three “Who knows…?” questions listed above. The basic assumption in all these cases is that a person needs to take action in order for the decree to be annulled, and that this action relates to God whether through a direct appeal or by utilizing some God-given advantage.

Because of the hesitation she expresses, Mordecai threatens Esther that she will perish, implying, however, that if she uses her position as queen, she and the Jewish people are likely to be saved. Similarly, the king of Nineveh believes that a direct appeal to God may well prevent people from demise. The use of the verb אב"ד in close proximity to the question “who knows” is found only in Esther and Jonah. Furthermore, it ought to be noted that the King of Nineveh and Mordecai addressed the question to others (to the people of Nineveh and to Esther, respectively) in order to encourage them to act.[[31]](#footnote-31) In these stories, unlike those of David and the locusts in the book of Joel, the appeal to God is successful the people of Nineveh and the Jews Persia are saved from calamity.

### אל שת"ה – Do not drink

The command to abstain from drinking as part of a command to fast, spoken by Esther “do not drink” ‎(Esth. 4:15) and by the king of Nineveh “shall not drink” (Jon. 3:7), is unique to these two stories.[[32]](#footnote-32) The only other instances of a prohibition on drinking in the Bible relate to drinking wine.[[33]](#footnote-33) There are many descriptions of complete or partial extension from eating and drinking in the Bible, and they involve a variety of characters. However, unlike Jonah and Esther, these cases are not worded as a command.[[34]](#footnote-34)

## Shared Expressions of Mourning

The expressions of mourning in Esther and Jonah include some that are prevalent both within the Bible and beyond.[[35]](#footnote-35) However, we can identify some elements in these two descriptions that are less common than others. First, only in Jonah and Esther is mourning described in two stages: first, parallel, independent expressions of mourning among the people (the Jews of Persia and the residents of Nineveh) and the leader; then, in a second stage, the leader commands the people to mourn again, and intensify the external expressions of their mourning.

The other shared characteristics relates to the many (five or more) expressions of mourning concentrated in each story, compared to one to three expressions in most other biblical stories. This characteristic does appear in several other stories, particularly in books relating to the return from the Babylonian exile.[[36]](#footnote-36) The actions described in Esther are: tearing clothes, sackcloth, ashes, crying aloud, fasting (including an explicit prohibition on drinking) weeping, and lamenting. In Jonah, we find: fasting (including an explicit prohibition on drinking), sackcloth, removing clothing, sitting on ashes, and calling on God. Among the many expressions of mourning, the combination of fasting, sackcloth, and ashes is particularly conspicuous. Other than in Jonah and Esther, these are found together only in Dan. 9:1 and Isa. 58:5. For the command to refrain from drinking, see above.

Tearing or removing garments prior to wearing sackcloth is another characteristicshared by these two stories, although each uses a different expression (“Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes” (Esth. 4:1) and the king “took off his robe,‎ put on sackcloth” ‎(Jon. ‎‎3: 6)).[[37]](#footnote-37)‎ In both stories, the people wear sackcloth but only the leader tears or removes his garment before doing so. Tearing or removing clothing before wearing sackcloth is mentioned in four additional places in the Bible.[[38]](#footnote-38) In four out of these six instances, the person who tears their clothes before wearing sackcloth is a king or other high official.

Klaus believes that tearing garments is the main symbol of mourning in the Bible.[[39]](#footnote-39) In his opinion, tearing garments may symbolize, *inter alia*, a change in status.[[40]](#footnote-40) Certainly this possible understanding is particularly significant when the person rending the garment is a king or other leader who wears a garment that symbolizes their position. Tearing a royal garment may reflect an impairment of royal status. Indeed, it seems that this is how God interprets Ahab’s actions when he rends his garment, “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before Me?” (1 Kgs 21:29). Similarly for Hezekiah, “because your heart was softened and you humbled yourself before the Lord” (2 Kgs 22:19). It is also likely that the removal of his robe by the king of Nineveh symbolizes a reduction in royal status and surrender to God. Special attention should be given to the fact that the clothing removed by the king of Nineveh is referred to as his אדרת – robe. Although this is not mentioned as a royal garment in the Bible, the ancient translations and, following their lead, medieval commentators do understand it this way.[[41]](#footnote-41) Sasson thinks that this interpretation emerges from the context and from the similarly of the noun “אדרת” to the rootאד"ר –to aggrandize.[[42]](#footnote-42) If the book of Jonah did choose this word for the king’s garment because of its connection to aggrandizement, it seems that the choice is intended to emphasize the king’s surrender to God.[[43]](#footnote-43)

In the story of Esther, it also seems that there is a connection between Mordecai tearing the clothes he wears and his status as one who ists at the palace gate. It is likely that the statement that he approached “until he came in front of the palace gate” (Esth. 4:1) followed by the note “for one could not enter the palace gate wearing sackcloth” (Esth. 4:2) hints at a change in his status as senior official in the kingdom, after he tore his clothing.[[44]](#footnote-44) Below, I will return to the significance of Mordecai removing his clothes.

## Non-unique Shared Language

### וַיִּזְעַק – וַיַּזְעֵק – Call

 The verb “זע"ק – call” is used in the Bible in three different constructions: *qal, nifal* and *pi’el*. In the *qal* construction, it means to cry out in a loud voice. In the *pi’el* construction it means to summon, and gather together. In the *nifal* constructionit relates to the latter, meaning to respond to a summons or join a gathering. Seemingly, the stories use the same verb but it takes on different meanings. Mordecai cries, while the king of Nineveh summons. A closer examination of the verb “זע"ק” in the *pi’el* construction in the Bible reveals that usually takes a direct object (הזעיק את..), but there is no direct object in the book of Jonah, and Esther also does not mentioned who king summoned.[[45]](#footnote-45) This, therefore, may be the reason why the scholarly dictionaries define the word “זע"ק” in Jonah as a unique instance, in which the *pi’el* construction has the meaning of declaration rather than a summons.[[46]](#footnote-46) Sasson suggested that the use of the verb “זע"ק” to describe the action of the king of Nineveh relates to the many uses of this verb in the *qal* construction for addressing God.[[47]](#footnote-47) From the rest of the king’s statement, it seems that the unique usage of “זע"ק” in Jonah means calling on the public to cry to God as the king later makes explicit “shall cry mightily to God” (Jon. 3:8).[[48]](#footnote-48) This understanding of how “זע"ק” is being used in Jonah makes the verbs closer in meaning. The king of Nineveh “cries out,” that is, “proclaims” that the people should call on God; Mordecai voices a cry, as I claimed above and will support below, to God.

### וַיַּעֲבֹר – וַיַּעֲבֵר – Pass

The root “עב"ר” is common in the Bible, and it appears to have different meanings in the two stories under consideration. The king of Nineveh מעביר (in the *pi’el* construction) his robe, and it seems that the text intends to describe its removal before the king puts on sackcloth. Conversely, Mordecai עובר (in the *qal* construction), which ought to indicate moving from one point to another.[[49]](#footnote-49) However, these usages are not without difficulty.

The verbs usually used in the Bible to describe the removal of a garments are “סו"ר” and “פש"ט”. In cases of mourning, “קר"ע” is also used. This usage of the root “עובר” to denote the removal of a garment is unique. In Sasson’s opinion, its selection, in this context, relates to another meaning of the verb “עובר,” which in a theological context means the removal of sin.[[50]](#footnote-50)

In the case of Mordecai as well, the use of the verb “עובר” is problematic because the text does not make it clear from which point to which point Mordecai has moved. Some scholars have proposed that the verb refers to the fact that Mordecai crossed the river that surrounded the fortress on his way into the city.[[51]](#footnote-51) This interpretation assumes that readers of the book are knowledgeable about the existence of the river which is not mentioned elsewhere in the story. Based on the proposal made by Sasson in his commentary on Jonah (see above), I would like to propose the possibility that the use of the verb “עובר” in this case also has the theological meaning related to the removal of sin. Below, in the discussion of the analogy created between the stories, I claim that the story does indeed point to a sin.

### שלושת ימים – Three days

A period of three days is a frequent motif in many biblical stories. Many scholars consider it is the amount of time required to complete a task, and it seems that the phrase serves this function in the books of Esther and Jonah as well.[[52]](#footnote-52) In Esther 4, Queen Esther requests a fast of three days and three nights, prior to her approaching the king. In Jonah, three days represents the time required to walk across the entire city of Nineveh.

###  יום אחד – One day

The expression “one day” appears in the book of Esther not as part of the literary unit under consideration, but rather in the decree issued by Haman, “to destroy, massacre, and exterminate all the Jews, young and old, children and women, on a single day” (Esth. 3:13). However, this passage is adjacent to the unit we are examining, and the decree is the cause that motivates the mourning response in ch. 4. Therefore, I think it appropriate to include it when comparing the sections. In both stories, the temporal designation “one day” serves to emphasize the speed with which action was taken.[[53]](#footnote-53) Haman wants to complete the extermination of the entire Jewish population in a single day. Because the speed refers to the cruel decree of extermination, it can be said that speed, in this instance, reflects cruelty.[[54]](#footnote-54) In Jonah, the size of the city is “three days” across but its people repent only “one day” after the calamity has been proclaimed. This is evidence of the speed with which they responded.[[55]](#footnote-55)

### נהפכת – נהפך/נהפכו – Reversed

The verb “הפ"ך” is used dozens of times in the Bible to describe a significant change, whether real or metaphorical. In this function it appears in the *nifal* construction in both Jonah 3:4 and Esther 9:1, 22.[[56]](#footnote-56) Because of the distance between the descriptions of mourning in Esther 4 and the root “הפ"ך,” which appears only towards the end of the story in ch. 9, this parallel should not be considered hard evidence for a link between them. However, in both stories this root is used in reference to the decree. In Jonah, it appears as part of the decree describing the expected fate of the city of Nineveh, while in Esther it refers to the change that occurs in the decree that threatened to exterminate the Jews.[[57]](#footnote-57) In Peleg’s opinion, the prophet’s cry, “Nineveh will be overturned,” is ambiguous. Its primary meaning is to announce the punishment expected if Nineveh does not repent, while its secondary meaning hints at transformation that the people of the city and their king undergo as a result of the decree.[[58]](#footnote-58) Based on this interpretation it can be claimed that the two stories do use the verb “הפ"ך,” to describe an extreme plot reversal.

# Significance of the Connection between Stories

There are two principal approaches, significantly different from one another, in research dealing with intertextuality, and in studies based on this method. The first approach is reader-centered, concerning itself with the comparative links created in the consciousness of the reader while reading. The second approach is author-centered, attempting to identify links incorporated into the text in order to create a comparison to the other text.[[59]](#footnote-59) As noted in the introduction above, the present article is based on an author-centered reading, which takes a diachronic approach to the text and assumes that the later text intended to refer to the earlier one. It is worthy to note that according to this approach both the later text and the earlier text contribute to the reading because the link between them necessarily creates a mutual relationship. However, the question of the author’s intention in creating these links relates only to later text.

Adopting a diachronic approach requires us to consider the dates of the text being compared. This task is far from simple, and in most cases scholars are divided on the issue. My assumption that the book of Esther makes use of the description of mourning in the book of Jonah, is supported by the many scholars who consider the book of Esther late, coming from either the late Persian period or even the beginning of the Hellenistic period.[[60]](#footnote-60) Many scholars believe that Jonah is earlier, written in the fifth century BCE.[[61]](#footnote-61) Therefore, I think it is eminently reasonable to assume that the author of Esther intentionally create links between the description of mourning in Shushan and those in Nineveh. I shall now consider the possible meanings the author sought to convey by means of these connections.

One of the central questions occupying scholars and interpreters considering the book of Esther is God’s absence. The assumption that God is present behind the scenes is accepted by many scholars, although they disagree on other questions including exactly where God’s covert presence might be detected.[[62]](#footnote-62) In my opinion, the principal reason for the links between the descriptions of mourning in the book of Esther and those in Jonah is the desire to intimate God’s presence through these descriptions. Using the analogies discussed above, the author of Esther wants readers to understand that the expressions of mourning practiced by Mordecai, Esther and the Jews of Persia are expressions of petitionary mourning addressed to God, as is explicitly the case in Nineveh.[[63]](#footnote-63)

However, it seems to me that the meanings of these connections is even broader. Because descriptions of mourning in both Esther and Jonah are in response to a decree, it seems that the reader is being asked to compare the two. God is the source of the decree voiced by Jonah in Nineveh. On the surface, the origin of the decree in the book of Esther is human, Haman was insulted by Mordecai’s behavior, and wants to eliminate him and his people. In the opinion of Flusser, there is a connection between the two decrees with the intention of hinting at a divine origin for Haman’s decree.[[64]](#footnote-64) The conclusion derived from this analogy is consistent with the Bible’s fundamental assumption that the nations who harm the people of Israel are the rod of God’s anger and the staff of God’s fury (cf. Isa. 10:5). Note that the language “destroy… and exterminate” used in the decree in Esth. 3:13 is used many times in Scripture to describe the punishment that a sinful Israel will suffer at the hands of nations who attack it.[[65]](#footnote-65) The fact that the decree of Haman specifically uses these verbs may help us understand how it is incorporated into the system of reward and punishment between God, Israel and the other nations.

The assumption that the analogies hint at the understanding that God stands behind Haman’s decrees, requires the reader to consider what might have caused God to bring this calamity on his people.[[66]](#footnote-66) The evil done by the people of Nineveh is explicitly stated in Jonah, but did the Jews of Persia sin, and if so, how? Many scholars have noted the puzzling behavior of Mordecai and Esther at the beginning of the book.[[67]](#footnote-67) Their names are derived from the names of pagan gods, they hide their Jewish identity, and do not express any distress at Esther’s marriage to a gentile king. Taken together this creates the impression that the story begins by describing the lifestyle of Jews who are quite distant from their Jewish identity. The fact that the decree is aimed at the entire Jewish people may hint that this estrangement is not the exclusive domain of Mordecai and Esther; rather, they are a representative example of the process that the Jews of Persia are undergoing.

The tragedy visited upon the Jewish people leads Mordecai, and perhaps the other Jews as well, to seek a renewed connection to their Jewish identity. The dialogue between Esther and Mordecai in ch. 4 reflects, in the opinion of Grossman, “a shedding of Persian identity” and the “emergence” of their Jewish identity.[[68]](#footnote-68) This Jewish identity is expressed in the only sentence that Mordecai speaks in his own voice in the book: “Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king’s palace” ‎(Esth. 4:13). Moreover, the choice made by the author of Esther to mention the many gentiles who converted may hint at the similarity between the Jews of Persia and gentiles, perhaps as a way of criticizing Jews for choosing to live like the other peoples.[[69]](#footnote-69)

Finally, in the framework of defining the various types of mourning in the Bible, Olyan distinguishes between petitionary mourning that incorporates an element of remorse for sin, and mourning that lacks this element.[[70]](#footnote-70) The mourning in Jonah is presented as a clear example of mourning that includes an element of remorse, with an explicit mention of sin and call for improved behavior (“for their wickedness has come before Me” and “Let everyone turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice of which he is guilty” (Jon. 1:1; 3:8). In light of the above, it is likely that wearing sackcloth by the Jews of Shushan, and more clearly Mordecai’s tearing of his clothing, include an element of remorse.[[71]](#footnote-71) Above, I discussed Mordecai tearing his clothing as a change in his status. Following Beal, I think tearing of the garment should be considered not only a change in status but also a change in identity.[[72]](#footnote-72) Formerly a senior minister in the court of Ahasuerus, Mordecai becomes a Jew fighting to rescue his people.

By creating links between the description of mourning in Shushan and that in Nineveh, the author of the book of Esther adds to the story a level that is lacking in its explicit text, but common in other stories of calamity related to the people of Israel: sin, remorse, crying to God and redemption.

1. For a review of possible connections between Jonah and other books of the Bible see: J. Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1976), pp. 65-84; H.C.P. Kim, “Jonah Read Intertextually,” *JBL* 126 (2007), pp. 497-528. E. Greenstein, “Noah and Jonah: An Intertextual Interpretation,” in S. Freidman, M. Hirshman, M. Rosman, U. Simon, eds. *Ushmel Beqore’e Shemo*: Shemuel (Samuel) Leiter Memorial Volume, Ed. (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2016). For review of possible connections between Esther and other books of the Bible, see S.B. Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes, and Structure* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 124-151; J. Grossman, “‘Dynamic Analogies’ in the Book of Esther.” *VT* 59, 3 (2009), pp. 394-414. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A systematic comparison may be found in D. Flusser, “The Esther Scroll and the Book of Jonah,” *Mahanayim* 42 (1960), pp. 38-41. Flusser points out that both Jonah and Esther are novellas that have a touch of irony to them and below I will adopt some of his conclusions regarding the meaning that emerges from comparing the books. Flusser does not base his claims on linguistic connections, but rather focuses only on matters of content. Other scholars who have pointed out specific points of similarity between the books, of whom I mention a few: T.E. Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Publisher, 1977) pp. 33-34. Fretheim notes that Jonah is a short story and is, therefore. similar to other short stories such as Ruth, Esther and Daniel 1-6. He further notes parallels and similarities between Esther, Ruth, Daniel and Jonah (p. 71). Berg (*Book of Esther*, p. 148) raises the possibility of a connection between Esther and Jonah but does not develop the idea. J.M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation* (New York: publisher, 1990), pp. 108-109 compares the lots cast in Jonah and those in Esther 3. A. Berlin (*Esther, JPS Bible Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001) p. 37) notes the expression “they spoke to him” that appears in Esth. 3:4 and Jon. 1:10 but does not draw any conclusions on this basis. Kim (“Jonah Read Intertextually,” p. 526) compares the change that occurs in the king of Nineveh to the change in the decision of Ahasuerus regarding the Jews. J. Grossman (*Esther: Scroll of Secrets* (Jerusalem: Koren, 2013), p. 41) compares the expression “מגדול ועד קטן– high and low alike” in Esth. 1:5 and “מגדולים ועד קטנים– great and small” in Jon. 3:5, and discusses the meaning emerging from this comparison. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a discussion of the various basic assumptions and definitions found in the literature on intertextual reading, see the reviews in P.K. Tull, “Intertextuality and the Hebrew scriptures,” *Currents in Research, Biblical Studies* 8 (2000) pp. 59-90; G.D. Miller, “Intertextuality in Old Testament Research,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 9,3 (2011) 283-309;‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬ M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: publisher, 1985), p. 367‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. M. Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Ramat Gan: Revivim, 1985), p. 22; Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 367‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬‬. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For definition of the terms reader-centered and author-centered reading, see J.S. Vassar, *Recalling a Story Once Told: An Intertextual Reading of the Psalter and the Pentateuch*, (Georgia: publisher, 2007, p. 10). See also fn. 58, below. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Flusser (*Esther*, p. 40) and J.L. Crenshaw (“The Expression ‘*mî ‘yôdea*’ in the Hebrew Bible,” *VT* 36,3 (1986), p. 277 n.10) think that the decree of Haman was of direct divine origin. Below, I support this assumption based on the analogy between the stories. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For a list of terms expressing mourning see E. Kutsch, “*Trauerbräuche und Selbstminderungsriten im Alten Testament*,” in name (ed.), *Kleine Schriften zum Alten Testament,* (Berlin: publisher, 1986), p. 79; S.M. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford: publisher, 2004), pp. 28-34; Y. Shemesh, *Mourning in the Bible: Coping with Loss* (Bnai Brak:Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2015), pp. 83-92. N. Klaus, “The Tearing of Garments as the Main Symbol ‎of Mourning in The Bible,”‎‏ ‏*Beit Mikra*‏‏‎ 56, 2 (2011), pp. 71-99. For the connection between these verbs and those expressing joy, see G.A. Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1991), p. 49-53 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Kutsch (“*Trauerbräuche und Selbstminderungsriten*,” pp. 78-98) distinguishes between these two types of mourning, and considers mourning that does not relate to loss of distress that has already occurred an expression of self-debasement (“*Selbstminderung*”). Following Kutsch, several scholars have dealt with identifying and defining the characteristics of this type of mourning in the Bible, see Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*. pp. 19-23, 62-95; Shemesh, *Mourning in the Bible*, p. 15. Olyan‎ termed this “petitionary mourning,” which Shemesh translated as אבל של בקשה, literally “mourning of requests” (see Shemesh, *Mourning in the Bible*, p. 10). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Despite the great similarity, Olyan (*Biblical Mourning*, pp. 73-74) distinguishes between the two types of mourning: petitionary mourning has a purpose, namely for the disaster to be annulled, whereas mourning for the deceased expresses a mental state and has no other purpose. Petitionary mourning does not have a component of impurity while mourning for the dead does; mourning for the dead is limited in time but petitionary mourning could potentially continue until the decree is annulled, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Supporters of this position include M.V. Fox, “The Religion of the Book of Esther,” *Judaism*, 39,2 (1990), p. 139; Y. Elitzur, *Israel and the Bible: Studies in Geography , History and Biblical Thought*,Olyan,‎ *Biblical Mourning*, pp. 77, n. 32; Shemesh, *Mourning in the Bible*, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See for example 2 Kgs 19:1-4; Joel 1:13-2:17; Ezra 9:3-10:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The use of the ordinary past form, instead of usual biblical form, the vav conversive, hints that Mordecai knew what Haman was plotting even before the decree was issued. For this use of past, see Gerleman & Gillis, *Studien zu Esther: Stoff, Struktur, Stil, Sinn*, (city: Neukirchen-Vluyn Verlag, 1966), p. 35-36 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The combination is repeated twice more in Esther, both in the context of the king’s decree reaching the Jews (Esth. 8:17; 9:1). The repetition in ch. 9 describes the arrival of the letter written by Mordecai. Using the same linguistic form here as for the arrival of Haman’s letter might be part a tendency towards symmetry in structure that highlights the parallel reception of Haman’s letter and Mordecai’s letter. For more on this parallel structure see F. Polak, *Biblical Narrative Aspects of Art and Design*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1999), p. 218. Likely, the repetition in ch. 9 “when the king’s command and decree were to be executed” (v. 1) is intended to connect the events of that day to the two letters dispatched in this regard. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. P. R. Noble, “Esau, Tamar, and Joseph: Criteria for Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions’, *VT* 52 (2002), pp. 227-22 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Grossman, “Dynamic Analogies” pp. 307-399. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Grossman, ibid. pp. 413-414. For dynamic analogies as a literary phenomenon see also A. Frisch, “Comparison with David as a Means of Evaluating Character in the Book of Kings.” *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 11 (2011), pp. 16-19. For a study of additional examples, see A. Frisch, *Parashat Malkhut Shelomo be-Sefer Melakhim*, Doctoral dissertation, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan 1986, pp. 92-108. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In ch. 4, Mordecai encourages Esther to act and she is the one who sets out the plan of action, up to and including ch. 8. In ch. 8. Esther sends a response to Mordecai and he begins leading in parallel, until the end of the story. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Depictions of shared mourning involving the people and leaders are found in the Bible in a variety of contexts. For example, David orders his troops to mourn the death of Abner and he does likewise (2 Sam. 3:31), the ministers of Hezekiah tear their clothing in response to Rabshakeh’s demand as does Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:37-19:1), the people join Ezra’s mourning (Ezra 10:1) and more. However, the process described in Jonah and Esther is unique to these two books. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. From the fact that the Jews of Persia and the people of Nineveh wear sackcloth, we can assume that they did remove their clothing. Alternately, they might have worn it above their usual garments. Either way, removing the garments is mentioned explicitly only in the case of the leaders. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This unique usage is discussed below. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Garsiel, *First Book of Samuel*. p. 26 and note 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. J. Berman, “Establishing Narrative Analogy in Biblical Literature: Methodological Considerations,” *Beit ‎Mikra* 53:1 (2008), pp. 31-46.‎ [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. For additional principles used to test the validity of shared language in analogies see J.M. Leonard, “Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case.” *JBL* 127 (2008) pp. 246-257. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See note 14, above [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. HALOT, p. 668-669 interprets as “arrived at” in both cases. See also, BDB p. 619. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Crenshaw, “The Expression ‘*mî ‘yôdea,*’” pp. 274-275. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. In the first group, he includes the questions in Esther and Jonah, and those in 2 Sam. 24:22; Joel 2:14; Ps. 90:11. Belonging to the second group are Prov. 24:22; Qoh. 2:19; 3:21; 12:12; 8:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Beyond the fact that the fifth question, in Ps. 90:11, appears in poetry rather than prose, it seems that Crenshaw (“The Expression ‘*mî ‘yôdea,*’” p. 277) is correct in his claim that this question represents a transitional stage between the first group and the second. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Crenshaw, ibid. p. 277, emphasizes that in the three other cases the “who knows” question is asked in response to calamity that follows on the heels of sin, while the calamity in Esther is unrelated to any sin. Unlike Crenshaw, I will consider below the possibility that the book of Esther does hint at a sin. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Crenshaw, ibid., pp. 276-277, Berg (*Book of Esther*, p. 177) considers these verses the center point of the chapter, and claims that they voice the theological assumption that God manages the world and is responsible for all that happens therein. For the understanding that this question expresses a theological position, see also Fox, “Religion of the Book of Esther,” p. 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. In this, these questions are similar the one asked by Joel, and different from David’s request. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. A command prohibiting eating and drinking, appears one more time, in the story of the man of God (1 Kgs 13:16). However, the prohibition seems to be more a prohibition on remaining in Bethel and is not related specifically to fasting. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Lev. 10:9; Judg. 13:4; Ezek. 44:21, and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Exod. 34:28; Deut. 29:5; 1 Sam. 30:12; Ezra 10:6 and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See fn. 8, above. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Multiple acts of mourning are found in Dan. 9:3 (prayer, petition, fast, sackcloth, and ashes); Neh. 9:1-2 (fasting, sackcloth, earth, and confession); Ezra 9:1-10:1 (rending garments, tearing hair, fasting, prayer and weeping), in the mourning of David for Abner, who was murdered by Joab: rending clothes, sackcloth, lament, and weeping. If we consider Ahab’s “walking about subdued” as an expression of mourning, there are also four expressions of mourning in his response to Elijah’s prophecy (1 Kgs 21:27: rending clothes, sackcloth, fasting, and walking about subdued). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. For the unique usage of the verb עב"ר for removing a garment, see below. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Jacob when shown the Joseph’s torn cloak (Gen. 37:34); David and the people with him when they hear about the murder of Abner (2 Sam. 3:31); Ahab upon hearing the approach of Elijah (1 Kgs 1:27); Hezekiah when hearing the words of Rabshakeh (2 Kgs 19:1, and parallel Isa. 37:1). Shemesh (*Mourning in the Bible*, p. 89) notes that although Job rends his clothes without putting on sackcloth, it later says that he is wearing sackcloth. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Klaus, “The Tearing of Garments,” p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Klaus, ibid. p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Commentators that consider the “robe” a royal garment include Rashi and Rabbi Yosef Ibn Kaspi, following the ancient Aramaic translation “לבוש יקריה– garment of honor.” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Interpretation*. pp. 251, thinks that we can determine whether a particular garment is royal only from the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. For other double meanings in these verses, see Sasson, *Jonah: A New Interpretation*, pp. 205-252. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. According to Grossman (“Dynamic Analogies,” pp. 404-5) Mordecai, like Ahab wears sackcloth as a sign of distancing from the palace. See also Elitzur (*Israel and the Bible*, p. 125) who distinguishes between wearing sackcloth as an expression of mourning and wearing it to express submission. He claims that Mordecai and the King of Nineveh are expressing submission by tearing their garments. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See Judg. 4:10, 13; 2 Sam. 20: 4-5; Zech. 6:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. BDB, p. 277, proposes “have a proclamation made,” similarly in HALOT, p. 277, “make a proclamation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Interpretation*, p. 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. If this is correct, then as possible to discern a parallel between the double verb describing Jonah as (literally) “crying out and saying (“ויקרא ויאמר; Jon. 3:4), and the double verb “ויאמר ויזעק – cry out and say” (Jon. 3:7) describing proclamation of the king’s order. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. For meaning of the verb עב"ר, see HALOT, pp. 778-780 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation*, p. 251. For use of the verb “עובר,” with theological meaning, see for example, in 2 Sam. 12:13, 24:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See for example, M.V*.* Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (New York: Columbia, 1991), p. 64. C.A. Moore (*Esther*, AB 7B (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971) p. 51) translates this “Mordecai then left” and his commentary proposes that the meaning of the root here is “walk, pass” (as in Gen. 28:5). Moore does not discount the possibility that the verb denotes Mordecai moving from one place to another and suggested it might refer to Mordecai is coming from the city square (mentioned in Esth.r 4:6) or crossing the river that divided the fortress Shushan from the city itself. The rabbis and ancient traditions also sense the difficulty with this verb and gave it metaphorical meanings, as in saying that Mordecai violated the law of fasting on a holiday because he fasted on the first day of Passover when, according to their calculation, the decree was issued (see BT Megillah 15a). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. J. Stackert, “Why Does the Plague of Darkness Last for Three Days? Source Ascription and Literary Motif in Exodus 10:21-23, 27” *VT* 61,4 (2011) p. 675 f. 48. For an understanding of how “three days” is used to indicate a long time required to reach a destination, see D. Marcus, “Nineveh’s ‘Three Days’ Walk’ (Jon. 3:3)” Another Interpretation,” in S.L. Cook and S.C. Winter (eds.), *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes* (Atlanta: publisher, 1999, pp. 45-48). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. For other examples in which “one day” denotes speed, see *inter alia* Gen. 33:13; Isa. 6:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. For other examples in which speed reinforces cruelty, see 1 Sam. 2:34; Isa. 47:9; 2 Chron. 28:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. U. Simon (*Jonah Introduction and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, ‎‎1992) p. 680 points out that the speed of their response is highlighted by the contrast with the slow response of the prophet himself, he surrenders to God only after being “in the fish’s belly three days and three nights” (Jon. 2:1). For the position that “one day” is indication of speed see also Marcus, “Nineveh’s ‘Three Days’ Walk,’’ p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See BDB, pp. 245-246; Halot, pp. 253-254. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. In Esther, as in other places in the Bible, the root “הפ”ך” marks a transition from mourning to joy. For transitions of this type, see Anderson, *A Time to Mourn*, pp. 49-53. For use of the root in these contexts, see Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, pp. 17-19. ‎ [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Y. Peleg, “‘Yet Forty Days, and Nineveh Shall Be Overthrown’ (Jon. 4:3): ‎Two Readings ‎of the Book of Jonah,” *Beit Mikra* 44, (1999), pp. 226-243 (231-234). ‎ [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. The terms “author-centered” and “reader-centered” were coined by Vassar, *Recalling a Story Once Told*, p. 10. Miller, “Intertextuality in Old Testament Research,” p. 286 prefers “author-oriented” and “reader-oriented.” [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. For discussion of the various positions regarding the date of the book of Esther, and for various linguistic and theological aspects related to the dating, see Berg, *Book of Esther*, p. 169-173. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Sasson (*Jonah: A New Translation*, p. 26) believes that surveying the opinions presented in the research literature leads to the conclusion that the book could, theoretically, have been edited late in the period of the return from exile (438-586 BCE). This opinion is shared by Kim, “Jonah Read Intertextually,” pp. 520-527. However, Kim does not discount the possibility that Jonah was written towards the end of this period, or even later. For an attempt to date the final editing of Jonah more precisely, see Fretheim (*The Message of Jonah*, pp. 35-36) who would date it in 450-475 BCE. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. For a summary and analysis of the various opinions that identified the presence of God in the book of Esther, see Fox, “The Religion of the Book of Esther,” pp. 139-142 and the references there. The discussion of God’s presence in the book of Esther ought to be divided in two. First, why is the name of God absent from the book; and second, if God is present and if so, where hints of that presence can be detected. This article deals only with the latter question. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Other scholars who support this position are Olyan (*Biblical Mourning*, pp. 99-100) and Shemesh (*Mourning in the Bible*, p. 10) who do not base their understanding on analogies between Jonah and Esther. For a similar position based on overall similarity between Jonah and Esther, see Flusser, “Esther and Jonah,” ‎p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Flusser, “Esther and Jonah,” p. 40. This opinion is also shared by Crenshaw, “The Expression ‘*mî ‘yôdea,*’” p. 277 and note 10. ‎ [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. For use of the verbs “שמ"ד” and “אב"ד” in threats of punishment of Israel, see Deuteronomy chs. 4; 28; Joshua ch. 23. For the use of these terms to describe the punishment God sends through other nations, see: Deuteronomy 9; Isaiah 26, Jeremiah 48, Ezekiel 25 and elsewhere. This combination also is addressed to Israel as a command regarding the peoples of Canaan (see Numbers 33 and Deuteronomy 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. The assumption that the calamitous decree is caused by sin is shared by BT Megillah 12a. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. For a discussion of Jewish identity is presented in the book of Esther, see S. Talmon, “Wisdom in the Book of Esther,” *VT* 13 (1963), pp. 419-455, pp. 427–429; W.L. Humphreys, “A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel,” *JBL* 92, 2 (1973) 211-223, pp. 216-217; T.S. Laniak, “Esther’s ‘*Volkcentrism*’ and the Reframing of Post-Exilic Judaism,” in S.W. Crawford & L.J. Greenspoon (eds.) *The Book of Esther in Modern Research* (London: publisher, 2003) pp. 77-90 (78-79). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Grossman, *Esther: Scroll of Secrets*, pp. 127-132. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. As Fretheim (*The Message of Jonah*, p. 105) notes, the process of the decree, remorse and salvation in the Bible applies to the people of Israel in all cases except for the book of Jonah and Jer. 18:7-11. The comparison with the conversion process of the Gentiles is worthy of special attention. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, pp. 65-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. For the connection between wearing sackcloth and asking for atonement in the Bible and the Ancient Near East, see Kutsch, “*Trauerbräuche und Selbstminderungsriten*,” pp. 83-84. On tearing clothing as an expression of remorse during petitionary mourning, see Olyan, ibid. pp. 79-80. Grossman (*Esther: Scroll of Secrets*, pp. 125-126) points out possible connections between the descriptions of mourning in the book of Esther and those in Joel 2:12-14 and Isa. 58:5. These connections further reinforce the feeling that the acts of Mordecai and the other Jews reflect the process of remorse and return to Jewish identity. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. T.K. Beal, *Esther* (Collegeville, Minn: publisher, 1999), pp. 59-60, 70, and Grossman, “Dynamic Analogies” pp. 402, 404-405). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)