

The Flight of Jonah: A Practical Reading of the Book of Jonah from the Perspective of Ecological Hermeneutics¹

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Introduction

Since the argument by Lynn White Jr. that the Judeo-Christian worldview can be seen as the historical root of the current environmental crisis, many scholars have discussed and argued about this issue from various perspectives. More specifically, scholars of Ecological Hermeneutics have sought and suggested ways of reading in which we approach Scripture from a non-anthropocentric perspective. This study proposes a reading of the book of Jonah from an ecocentric perspective.

One conventional interpretation says that the book of Jonah has a message that criticizes exclusivism and speaks of God's salvation and mercy extending to all people. The scene where the large fish spits Jonah out has long been read as a scene that speaks not only of Jonah's repentance, but also of death and rebirth (= “new life”) especially by Christians. What new perspective could be opened to us with an ecocentric reading? A suggestion from the field of ecofeminism and a well-known idea from Judaism will give important hints for our reading. The central question for this study will be “Why did Jonah flee from the Lord’s command?”

1. The Flight of Jonah and the Reason for the Flight

But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD hurled a great wind

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upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. (Jonah 1:3-4; NRSV)

The book of Jonah contains many characters other than human beings: a great wind, a mighty storm (1:4), the sea (1:4-15), the ship (1:4), a large fish (2:1, 11), animals in Nineveh (3:7-8, 4:11), a bush (4:6-10), a worm (4:7), a sultry east wind (4:8), the sun (4:8), etc. These are described in personified forms, as subjects of action, for example, “the sea was becoming increasingly violent” (1:11) and “the ship thought to break up” (1:4).² These depictions in the book of Jonah have often been perceived as “allegorical” or “fairy-tale” depictions, as personifications of the natural world. Some previous interpreters have understood the book of Jonah to criticize the exclusive nationalism of the Jewish people and to speak of God’s salvation and mercy extending beyond the nation of Israel.³ However, such interpretations are limited only to the equality of the world of “human beings”, where non-human characters are excluded from consideration.

1.1. Belief in One God and God as Creator since the Exile

First, I would like to examine the way the book of Jonah, which has been labeled as “allegorical,” is portrayed, comparing it with the portrayal of the Bible and its related texts. Above, I mentioned the theme of God’s universal salvation as one of conventional interpretations of the book of Jonah. This perspective is related to a common trend in ancient Israel after the Babylonian Exile. Although it is difficult to determine exactly when the book of Jonah was created, it is certain that its final form contains a post-exilic perspective.⁴ The period after the Exile was a time in which the foundations of Judaism were being developed and formed,⁵ as the ancient Israelites had experienced a crisis of national survival during the Exile: the loss of the land, the royal system, and the temple, all of which had been important elements of their previous existence.

² See Raymond F. Person Jr. “The Role of Nonhuman Characters in Jonah,” in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, eds., Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008), 85–90 (here 86).

³ 土岐健治「ヨナ書—新約聖書と旧約聖書を結ぶもの」『初期ユダヤ教研究』、新教出版社、2006 年、115-137 頁。

⁴ Susan Niditch, *Jonah: A Commentary* (David Vanderhooft, ed., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2023), 9–10.

⁵ Marianne Grohmann, “Purity/Impurity: Identity Maker and Boundary Maintenance in Postexilic Discourse,” in *Ṣedaqa and Torah in Postexilic Discourse* (S. Gillmayr-Bucher and M. Häusl, eds., London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017), 103–121 (here 103).

Beginning in the period of the Exile narrowly defined monotheistic beliefs and monotheistic views of God were established.⁶ The older, ancient Israelite view of God, was monolatry, worshipping the Lord YHWH as the national god of Israel, but after the period of national crisis, the monotheistic views of God as a universal God who also exercised power over other peoples as tools was established.⁷ This one God, YHWH, is then spoken of as the “Creator” of the world.⁸ This view of God and the viewpoint that everything, including the natural world, is “God’s creation” are two sides of the same coin. It is clear that this belief in God as Creator is also behind the words of the declaration spoken by Jonah in 1:9: “the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” Beyond this belief in One God, the possibility opens up for not only the Israelites but also for other peoples to enter into the salvation of the One God.⁹ Hence, the theme of God’s universal salvation, which has been previously highlighted as the message of the book of Jonah, may also be placed in such an emerging tradition.

1.2. Depiction of Nature and Human-beings

The eco-justice debate goes back to an issue raised by Lynn White in 1967¹⁰ which suggests that the Judeo-Christian worldview can be seen as the historical root of the current environmental crisis. It has been pointed out that the Judeo-Christian worldview, as seen in Gen 1:26-27, which says that human beings were created in the “image of God,” assumes the superiority of human beings over other creatures. But moving on to our main argument, we should note that it is not always the case that the biblical accounts portray human beings as superior to nature. As one example, let us look at a common pattern of contrasting depictions of nature and human beings in the Bible.

There are a number of passages in the Bible and related texts that contrast the natural world’s obedience to God’s commands as opposed to the disobedience of human beings (Jer 5:20-29, etc.). Although this perspective exists in some documents from the pre-Second Temple period,

⁶ Isa 43:10-12; 44:6-8; 45: 5-7, 14, 18, 21-22; 46:9. For more detailed information, see 大澤香「第二神殿時代ユダヤ教の他者受容の基盤としての『創造』」『神戸女学院大学論集 (KOBE COLLEGE STUDIES)』第 69 巻、第 1 号、2022 年、49-61 頁 (here 57-58 頁)。

⁷ 樋口進『古代イスラエル預言者の特質—伝承史的・社会史的研究』、新教出版社、2013 年、244 頁。

⁸ Isa 45:5-7, etc.

⁹ 山我哲雄『一神教の起源—旧約聖書の「神」はどこから来たのか』、筑摩書房、2013 年、355 頁。

¹⁰ Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967), 1203–1207 (here 1205–1206).

it appears to have been further developed after the Second Temple period (1 Enoch 2-5, etc.).¹¹ The pattern that can be seen there is the contrast between the elements of creation, such as stars, oceans, and rivers, faithfully observing the order and laws of nature (i.e., the Creator's laws), and the human figures not obeying the Lord's commands. Given this pattern, we notice that the depictions of non-human characters in the book of Jonah who are working with God (the sea, large fish, insects, etc.) in contrast to Jonah's attempt to escape the command of God are similar in some respects to the contrasting depictions in the texts mentioned earlier.

1.2.1 Two Ways of Receiving some Leviticus Texts

Let us now look at two specific passages in the book of Leviticus. Lev 18:24-30 contains words of admonition to the Israelites who are about to enter the promised land, that they must keep the laws and statutes of the Lord and not be spit out by the earth like the nations before them. Leviticus 25-26 also describes the Sabbatical year, which states that every seven years there must be a complete rest in the land, and in the 50th year there must be a year of Jubilee. This passage encourages keeping the Lord's Sabbaths (26:2) and following His laws and keeping His commandments (26:3) while warning that if they do not obey Him, the Lord will scatter the people of Israel among the nations (26:33) while "the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbath years" (26:34). Here we see a contrast of human beings who do not observe the laws of the Lord and an anthropomorphic earth that observes the laws of the Sabbatical year. In this depiction, too, we see the contrast between a nature obedient to God's commands and human beings disobedient to them.¹² From the perspective of an ecological hermeneutics of the Bible, it is argued that the Sabbath Law, Sabbath Year Law, and Jubilees Year Law send a message that rejects an anthropocentric worldview.¹³

It seems that there were at least two groups who received very different messages from the above Leviticus text. We can see the two positions in the books of Ezra and Jonah.

¹¹ Jer 5:20-29; 1 En. chs. 2-5, 101; Sir 16:24-30; 1QS 3:15-4:26; T. Naph. 3:2-4:1; 1Q34bis 3 2:1-4; Pss. Sol. 18:10-12; Sifrei Devarim 32 (par. 306); 1 Clem. chs. 19-20. Cf. George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36; 81-108*. (Klaus Baltzer, ed., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 152-155.

¹² See 大澤香「地（אֶרֶץ）のイメージの所産と捕囚後イスラエルの自己理解」『関西学院大学キリスト教と文化研究』第22号、2021年、1-22頁（here 8-15頁）。

¹³ See 大宮有博「安息日のエコロジカル解釈」『関西学院大学キリスト教と文化研究』第24号、2023年、1-23頁。

(1) The Book of Ezra

As mentioned earlier, the post-exile period was also a time when the foundations of Judaism were being formed. The book of Ezra, which describes the return from the Exile and the rebuilding of the community under Ezra's reforms, cites the words of the earlier Levitical admonition (Ezra 9:11-12) to make themselves "the holy seed" (Ezra 9:2) and draws a line between themselves and the gentiles who do not observe God's laws.¹⁴ From the standpoint of the book of Ezra, it could be said that the Israelites are positioned on the side of nature, "obedient" to God's law, while the gentiles are depicted as "disobedient" human beings by contrast.¹⁵

(2) The Book of Jonah

What about the book of Jonah then? The book of Jonah also seems to be very much related to the text of Leviticus. For example, in Leviticus, the earth "spits out" the inhabitants of lawlessness (Lev 18:25), and the great fish in the book of Jonah performs the same act on Jonah (Jonah 2:11).¹⁶ In terms of the pattern of contrast with nature, Jonah, an Israelite, is portrayed on the side of contrast with the natural world as a human being who does not obey God's commands. And the gentiles in the book of Jonah (the crews of the ship and the people of Nineveh), who feared the Lord (Jonah 1:16) and appear faithful to God's word (Jonah 3:5-8), are described as siding with obedient nature (the sea, large fish, etc.).¹⁷ Perhaps it is a parody of Ezra's depiction as the previous interpretation has pointed out the message of the book of Jonah as a critique of Jewish exclusive nationalism and an affirmation of God's universal salvation that extends to the gentiles.

But in this study, we would like to proceed with our interpretation of the message in relationship with the entire natural world from an ecological perspective.

¹⁴ See 大澤香「地（אֶרֶץ）のイメージの所産と捕囚後イスラエルの自己理解」『関西学院大学キリスト教と文化研究』第22号、2021年、5-6頁。

¹⁵ Ezra 9:11-12 connects the text of Leviticus 18, which speaks of the defilement of the land of Israel by the people who lived there before, with the defilement of the gentiles, as the basis for the prohibition or dissolution of intermarriage with the gentiles. See 大澤香「地（אֶרֶץ）のイメージの所産と捕囚後イスラエルの自己理解」『関西学院大学キリスト教と文化研究』第22号、2021年、6-8頁。

¹⁶ As Esias E. Meyer points out, of the Hebrew Bible uses of the verb קיא (Lev 18:25, 28[x2]; 20:22, Jonah 2:11; Job 20:15; Prov 23:8; 25:16) which is the verb when the anthropomorphic earth "spits out" its inhabitants in Leviticus, the only use outside of Leviticus in which a nonhuman is the subject is the great fish in Jonah. See Esias E. Meyer, "People and Land in the Holiness Code: Who is YHWH's Favourite?" *OTE* 28/2 (2015), 433–450 (here 439). Brent A. Strawn points out that this verb is also implied in the name of a bush (קִיָּין) in the book of Jonah, which serves as a warning against Jonah's exclusive self-centeredness. See Brent A. Strawn, "On Vomiting: Leviticus, Jonah, Ea(a)rth," *CBQ* 74-3 (2012), 445–464 (here 456–458).

¹⁷ See Raymond F. Person Jr. "The Role of Nonhuman Characters in Jonah," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, eds., Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008), 89.

1.3. "Why Did Jonah Flee from the Lord's Command?"

If we only look at it from the perspective of "nature and gentiles obedient to God vs. the disobedient Israelite Jonah," we will miss an important message of the book of Jonah. The book of Ezra, which, unlike Jonah, had received the text of Leviticus, sanctified Israelites and excluded others, superimposing Israelites on the "obedience" of the natural world to God's laws. If the book of Jonah is critical to the view of Ezra, does it appear to challenge the view of "obedience" itself? Perhaps this could be the reason why Jonah fled from the Lord's command.¹⁸

2. The Belly of the Fish

But the LORD provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land. (Jonah 1:17-2:10; NRSV)

2.1 Not Only for Punishment But Also for "New Life"

Even if we were to reconsider the structure of "obedience" to God, as described earlier, the relationship between God as "Creator" on the one hand and God's "creatures" on the other would seem to indicate that the relationship of subordination to the absolute Creator is difficult to alter. Here we would like to propose a new reading of the scene of the large fish that spit out Jonah. Earlier, we saw in this scene of the great fish spitting out Jonah an overlap with the Levitical land that spits out the unrighteous people. The large fish may also have felt unbearable discomfort at Jonah in his own body.

On the other hand, however, unlike the scene in Leviticus, it seems possible to read a positive meaning into the scene where the great fish spits out Jonah.¹⁹ In fact, this scene in the book of Jonah has long been read not only in terms of Jonah's repentance, but also as a scene that speaks of death and rebirth or "new life". In the New Testament, Matt 12:39-40 speaks of "the sign of the prophet Jonah." Jonah, who spent three days and three nights "in the belly of the sea

¹⁸ Ernst Conradie points out that the book of Jonah is a book against an exclusivist preoccupation. See Ernst Conradie, "An Ecological Hermeneutics," in *Fishing for Jonah (anew): Various Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Louis Jonker and Douglas Lawrie, eds., Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2005), 219–228 (here 226).

¹⁹ See Brent A. Strawn, "On Vomiting: Leviticus, Jonah, Ea(a)rth," *CBQ* 74-3 (2012), 454, 459.

monster” is superimposed on Jesus, who spent time “in the heart of the earth” from his death on the cross until his resurrection.

2.2 *The God of Mercy*

The “belly” of the great fish can also be understood as the “womb” of a mother.²⁰ In fact, the following interpretation by Ernst Conradie superimposes the belly of the fish in the book of Jonah on the idea of a mother's womb.

This mercy is not manifested at a distance; it is one that enfolds Jonah like a mother's womb. It is from this nourishing and protective womb that Jonah emerged in order to meet the God of unfathomable mercy, again, in Nineveh.²¹

This interpretation is that God's mercy, which extends to the entire creation, is symbolized in the belly of the great fish. Here, the belly of the fish that spits out Jonah is superimposed on the image of a mother's womb, and the fish that spits out Jonah is spoken of in terms of a “birth” image where Jonah is given birth in order to let him meet the God of mercy again.²²

2.2.1 *God and Maternity*

In connection with this interpretation, we are reminded of the following thoughtful words about God from the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas:

First, what is the meaning of the word Merciful (*Rakhmana*), which comes back constantly in this text? It means the Torah itself or the Eternal One, the Eternal One who is defined by Mercy. But this translation is altogether inadequate. *Rakhamim* (Mercy), which the Aramaic term *Rakhmana* evokes, goes back to the word *Rekhem*, which means uterus.

²⁰ In Matt 12:40 “the belly of the sea monster,” the word “belly (κοιλία)” also means the “womb” of a mother.

²¹ See Ernst Conradie, “An Ecological Hermeneutics,” in *Fishing for Jonah (anew): Various Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Louis Jonker and Douglas Lawrie, eds., Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2005), 226–227.

²² One midrashic interpretation speaks of a female fish, based on the fish with feminine form in Jonah 2:2. However, there the belly of the female fish is depicted as an unpleasant environment for Jonah. See James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 110–113.

Rakhamim is the relation of the uterus to the *other*, whose gestation takes place within it. *Rakhamim* is maternity itself. God as merciful is God defined by maternity.²³

2.2.2 God's Self-Contraction

The Jewish Kabbalah has a famous idea that prior to creation God contracted, became smaller, in order to provide place for creation.²⁴ The Creator imagined in this interpretation is God who “retreats” for the sake of his creatures. Here we see a hint that could overturn the image of a God who demands absolute obedience. Such a figure of God could be considered to lie behind Levinas’ “maternity” image above. It is the figure that empties itself and makes room for others.²⁵

2.2.3 Reception by Christianity

Such an understanding of God has also influenced Christian thought. Simone Weil wrote, “Creation is abdication. God has abandoned God. God has emptied Himself. This means that both the Creation and the Incarnation are included with the Passion”,²⁶ and “For God, the Creation consisted not in extending himself but in withdrawing. The Creation, the Passion, the Eucharist – always the same movement of withdrawal. This movement is love.”²⁷ It can be inferred that the concept of God’s self-contraction prior to creation is also behind Weil’s words mentioned here. Sallie McFague, quoting Weil’s words, suggests that “emptying oneself” might be at the heart of reality.²⁸ “To empty” (=kenosis) is spoken as Jesus’ way of living in Phil 2:7 as “emptied himself (ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν)”.²⁹ Christianity also sees in Jesus a God who is *not* a monarch demanding absolute obedience.³⁰

²³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings* (Annette Aronowicz tr., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 183.

²⁴ About God’s self-contraction in Kabbalah, see “zimzum” in “Kabbalah” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. vol. 11 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, in association with Keter Pub. House, 2007), 641–644.

²⁵ See 根無一行「アウシュヴィッツの記憶と神の自己性—レヴィナス的倫理の可能性の条件の探求」『宗教学研究紀要』第9号、2012年、68-87頁 (here 80-82頁)。

²⁶ Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks* (Richard Rees, tr., London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 120.

²⁷ Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks* (Richard Rees, tr., London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 81.

²⁸ See Sallie McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 59.

²⁹ One meaning of the verb “κενόω” is “make a place empty by leaving it.” See Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Sir Henry Stuart Jones, rev. 9th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940).

³⁰ Jurgen Moltmann says that “the new christology must take up the elements of truth which are to be found in *kenoticism* (the doctrine of God’s emptying of himself).” See Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of*

3. Solidarity with Creation and the “Law” for All to Live in Peace

Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.” (Jonah 3:7-8; NRSV)

3.1 The “Law” for All to Live in Peace

What is the Law? “Law” can be described as “the form of order necessary for all to live in peace”. The people of Nineveh listen earnestly to the word of God delivered by Jonah, who was spat out by a large fish, and change their ways. In the above proclamation by the king, all are commanded to “turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.” Although there is no specific mention of the evil of the city Nineveh (Jonah 1:2), the word “violence (חַמָּס)” can also be translated as “iniquity.” There is a wide range of biblical usage of this word, but in most cases the word means oppression of the afflicted and the poor. The injustice of enriching only a few through oppression and exploitation is denounced by the prophets (Amos 3:10, etc.). The targets of this violence are not only human beings. Violence against the land, the towns, and the animals is also denounced (Hab 2:8, 17).

At the proclamation of the king of Nineveh, both human beings and animals are to be covered with sackcloth and they are to fast together.³¹ This combination of human beings and animals can also be seen in the flood narrative of Genesis 6 in the expression “people together with animals (מֵאָדָם עַד-בְּהֵמָה)” (Gen 6:7) describing what the Lord would blot out from the earth by the

Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology (R.A. Wilson and John Bowden, trans., Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 205. See also Sallie McFague, “Jesus the Christ and Climate Change,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change* (Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster, eds., London: T&T Clark, 2019), 513–523 (here 513–517).

³¹ The description of people (הָאָדָם) and animals (הַבְּהֵמָה) in Jonah 3:7-8 is connected to the description of animals (בְּהֵמָה) mentioned at the end of Jonah, along with more than 120,000 people (אָדָם) in the city of Nineveh. James Limburg states that “This is one of many biblical illustrations of the solidarity between humans with animals.” Limburg refers to the following other biblical passages: Joel 1:18, 20; 2:21-22; Jer 27:6; Jdt 4:9-10; Pss 104:27-30; 145:15-16; 147:9; Job 38:41; Jonah 4:11; Luke 12:24, etc. See James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1933), 82–83. See also Willie van Heerden, “Ecological Interpretations of the Jonah Narrative: Have They Succeeded in Overcoming Anthropocentrism?” *Journal for Semitics* 23/1 (2014), 114–134 (here 129).

flood.³² The repentance of the people of Nineveh, where both human beings and animals fasted together, can be read as the people of Nineveh ceasing their unlawful ways and wishing for the peace of all creation, not just human beings.³³ Seeing this, God decided not to destroy Nineveh.

3.2 The Law of Love of Neighbor

The Law is the form of order necessary for all to live in peace. But if we think in terms of obeying the Law through the model of “obedience,” it may lead to self-justification and exclusion of others. In contrast to such an understanding of the law, let us look at Paul's understanding of the law as an example of God's law from the perspective of acceptance of others. Paul says “the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal 5:14). And in Paul's words from Romans below, we see a sense of solidarity with the creatures:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; (Rom 8:19-22; NRSV)

If we recognize that the law of love of neighbor has the whole creation in view, then the law of love of neighbor could be “the order necessary for all to live in peace”.

4. A New Understanding of the “Image of God”

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

³² Also see Gen 7:23. This expression “from human to animals (מֵאָדָם עַד-בְּהֵמָה)” is also used in Num 3:13 for the firstborn of Israel who is delivered in the plague of the firstborn, and in Ps 135:8 for the firstborn of Egypt who were struck down in the plague of the firstborn.

³³ See Phyllis Trible, *The Book of Jonah: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, vol. VII of *NIB* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 483.

4.1 *Love of Friends*

The book of Jonah concludes with God's spoken words to Jonah.³⁴ The depiction of God soothing, questioning, and admonishing Jonah, who repeatedly becomes angry and complains to God; also deviates from the subordinate model that assumes God as an absolute sovereign. The relationship between God and Jonah is more like that of "friends."

McFague raises the need to view the relationship between God and the world in a model other than the monarchy. The new model proposed by McFague is that of "friends."³⁵ McFague says that "Friendship is the purest, most disinterested kind of love" and that "one can be friends with anyone, even insentient objects such as mountains, libraries, gardens, and organizations."³⁶ If we read the book of Jonah with eyes free from the subordination model, it is possible to read the sea, the great fish, the wind, and the insects not merely as obedient followers of God's commands, but as figures that are in harmony with and enjoying the "friendship" of a merciful (רחום) God (Jonah 4:2) toward the world.

4.2 *The Image of God*

Gen 1:26-27, which speaks of human beings made in the "image of God," has long been read as a basis for distinguishing human beings from other creatures and giving human beings superiority.³⁷ But once we are freed from this subordination model, the "image of God" can no longer be the basis for such superiority.

As we saw earlier Jesus' "emptying himself" in Phil 2:5-8 as the reversal of the monarchical model. It is clear that this perspective of divine kenosis is also relevant to the understanding of human beings as the "image of God." As we saw in the first place, the eco-justice

³⁴ Strawn writes of "This 'ecological theme,'even and perhaps most especially, maybe even climactically, in the final words of God's final speech in the book." See Brent A. Strawn, "On Vomiting: Leviticus, Jonah, Ea(a)rth," *CBQ* 74-3 (2012), 457-458.

³⁵ See Sallie McFague, "Jesus the Christ and Climate Change," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change* (Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster, eds., London: T&T Clark, 2019), 518-520.

³⁶ Sallie McFague, "Jesus the Christ and Climate Change," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change* (Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster, eds., London: T&T Clark, 2019), 519.

³⁷ See 小原克博 「『神の像』に関する一考察—フェミニズムとエコロジーへの応答」『日本の神学』37号、1998年、33-54頁(here 42頁)。See also Sallie McFague, "Jesus the Christ and Climate Change," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change* (Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster, eds., London: T&T Clark, 2019), 517-518.

debate goes back to an issue raised by Lynn White that the Judeo-Christian worldview can be seen as the historical root of the current environmental crisis.

In Christianity, there is the understanding that “the *crucified* Jesus is the ‘image of the invisible God’.”³⁸ We can assume that such a concept came from reading separated verses from the Scripture together:

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image (κατ’ εικόνα; LXX), according to our likeness; So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God (κατ’ εικόνα θεου; LXX) he created them..... (Gen 1:26-27; NRSV)

He is the image (εἰκὼν) of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; (Col 1:15)

As Colossians says, Christians see an image of God in Jesus’ way of life. Regarding Jesus’ way of life, let’s look again at Philippians 2. Paul delivers the following words, probably a confession of faith from an early Christian community:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself (ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν),
taking the form of a slave (μορφὴν δούλου),
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form (Phil 2:5-7)

Jesus’ way of life was to take the form of a slave (δοῦλος). Why a slave? Slave for what? We can again go back to Genesis:

³⁸ Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of God*, vol. II, Part 2 of *Church Dogmatics* (G.W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, eds., Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1957), 123. (The emphasis on “*crucified*” is Barth’s.) See also Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (R.A. Wilson and John Bowden, trans., Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 69.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it (לעבדה) and keep it. (Gen 2:15; NRSV)

The Greek word δοῦλος for “slave” is often עֶבֶד in Hebrew. And in its verb form, it means to serve someone, but it also means “to till the ground” as we see in Genesis 2.³⁹ Thus, we could read from these texts that human beings were created to serve the earth and all creatures. And we should serve for each other as Jesus Christ who took the form of a slave and “he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”⁴⁰

Conclusion

In this study, we sought a way to read the book of Jonah from an ecocentric perspective. In section 1 we analyzed the depiction of the book of Jonah where we saw a pattern in previous scholarship of drawing contrasts between nature and human beings based on certain specific passages in the Bible and related texts. It seemed that in the book of Jonah, there is a contrast between nature and gentiles obedient to God on the one hand, and the disobedient Israelite Jonah on the other hand. But we were forced to question more fundamentally the model of “obedience” itself. In section 2 we discussed the God of mercy, taking as our cues the interpretation that the belly of a fish is like a mother’s womb and the Jewish concept of God’s self-contraction. Then in sections 3 and 4 we sought a new model for understanding relationship to God from an ecocentric perspective. Through this study, we have rediscovered the meaning of being in the image of God as serving each other with all of creation in view and the meaning of the Law for all to live in peace.

³⁹ See 石川立「聖書を耕す—聖書との新たな出会いのために—」『聖書事業懇談会講演録 1』、日本聖書協会、2017 年、7-25 頁 (here 24 頁)。

⁴⁰ Liedtke asserts the need for a change in Christians’ attitude in the same direction as that of Christ in Phil 2:7ff, who became one in solidarity with humankind, that is, the need for solidarity with creation. See Gerhard Liedtke, *Im Bauch des Fisches: Ökologische Theologie* (Stuttgart-Berlin: Kreuz Verlag, 1979), 177–178.