THE USES OF R** QAL AND THE MEANING OF JONAH IV 1 1)

The whole of Jonah iv 1 has traditionally been taken to refer to Jonah’s displeasure at the sparing of penitent Nineveh. Thus the Revised Version and the Revised Standard Version render it:

“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.”

This interpretation is also, in essentials, that of the Septuagint, the Targum, the Peshitta and the Vulgate 2).

In his Studien zum Jonabuch 3) H. W. Wolff has put forward a different interpretation of the opening words wayyera ‘rd ‘d ‘g ed ‘d, which is both based on and contributes to his contention that the word ra’tâ, in its different senses, is a Leitwort for the whole book. Wolff first notes the occurrences of ra’tâ in the book where it refers either to the wickedness (Bosheit) of the Ninevites or to some evil (Böse) or disaster which threatens. He continues:

“In iv 1 there is then mention of the great ‘wickedness’ (Bosheit) of Jonah, in clear antithesis to the ‘wicked’ (bösen) behaviour, from which Nineveh has by this time turned away, and in direct contradiction to Yahweh’s withdrawal of the evil (Bösen) which he had announced as a disaster to Nineveh.”

A page later he writes:

“But with Jonah Yahweh’s compassion on the great city produces the ‘great wickedness’ (Bosheit), which in a noteworthy way is only called ‘great’ in his case and not in that of Nineveh.” 4)

It is clear from these quotations that Wolff thinks that the author intends to characterise Jonah as “wicked” (ra’) at this point in the story, and not as merely “displeased” 5). In this Note it will be argued that this interpretation of the verse finds support neither in the language used in iv 1 itself nor in the wider context; but that Wolff’s

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conception of $r$' as a Leitwort has a useful contribution nevertheless to make to the elucidation of the verse's meaning.

There are 28 certain uses of the Qal forms of $R^c$ in the Old Testament. (In Is. viii 9 and Jer. xi 16 it is probable that either $R^c$ II ["break/be broken"] is involved or the consonantal text is corrupt [cf. BH$^2$].) The Qal, which has the meaning “was/is bad”, is used with several different constructions. The most common (15 instances) is with a following $b^e\hat{\e}_n\hat{\e}$, on which depends a noun standing for a person or persons (in 6 cases for God). An explicit subject appears in five cases—four times it is bad$\hat{\a}b\hat{\a}r$ (with additional qualification in 2 Sam. xi 27), once it is the clause $\hat{\e}_r\ 'd\hat{\a}$ (Gen. xxxviii 10). With the latter may be associated the instances where an infinitive (Jos. xxiv 14; Jer. xl 4) or a clause with $k\hat{\e}$ (Is. lix 15) may be regarded as effectively the subject. In the remaining seven cases there is no explicit subject. In four of these it is possible, in the light of the foregoing examples, to suggest that the subject is pronominal (“it”) and refers to an action or situation indicated by the immediate context: e.g. in Gen. xlviii 17 it is clearly the fact that Jacob had placed his right hand on Ephraim which (literally) “was bad in the sight of” Joseph. But in the others (Gen. xxi 12; 2 Sam. xi 25; 1 Chr. xxi 7) this interpretation is not possible, because the displeasing situation is referred to in the sentence itself in a different way: either by a prepositional phrase or by a noun governed by the nota accusativa. Here the verb is apparently used impersonally (in the grammatical sense: as will appear from a study of this whole group of passages, the subject is never a person, but always—when there is a subject—an action or situation), and the explanation for this is probably that $r^c\; b^e\hat{\e}_n\hat{\e}$—X had come to be regarded as a fixed expression for “X disliked, or was displeased”, so that the object of the displeasure could be expressed in the same way as it would be after a simple verbal form, e.g. q$\hat{\a}p$, t$\hat{\a}\hat{\e}$. In all the other examples of this construction an idiomatic translation would be “it displeased, or seemed bad to . . .”

Three times the Qal forms are used with a following noun governed by $L^e$, which refers to a person. In two cases there is an expressed subject (2 Sam. xix 8, xx 6), while in the other the verb seems to be used impersonally (Ps. cvi 32). The meaning in this group is “was/will be troublesome to” the person named. It is clear that when this construction is used it is a question of a person or a situation constituting an actual danger or threat to the life or security of the