

Research on: **The Story of Jonah**

Jonah 1:1-6, 12, 15, 17

“This little book stands alone amongst the writings of the prophets with which it is grouped. It does not contain any prophecies, except the message of Jonah to the Ninevites, yet it is placed with the books of Amos and Micah, which contain hardly anything else. It is written in prose, except the Psalm in chapter 2, and appears at first sight to be a simple narrative of fact.

“The hero of the story lived in the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, in whose time Amos’s work was accomplished.

“But the author of the book before us cannot have been the hero of the story. That is proved by 3:3: ‘Nineveh was an exceeding great city.’ The Hebrew makes it plain that the writer is looking back on a time already past, writing to those who are no longer familiar with the greatness of Nineveh. But as Nineveh was the metropolis of the world till its fall in 607 B.C.E., this book must have been written after that date. Further, no writer of the time when Assyria was the greatest of the world-powers would have described its ruler as ‘the king of Nineveh,’ any more than Napoleon at the height of his power could have been called king of Paris. The language of the book contains words and phrases which were unknown before the captivity. Hence it is generally agreed that the book was not written earlier than the 5th or 4th century B.C.E., in the period following the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, three centuries after Jonah’s day” (Dummelow 575).

1 NOW the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

“Jonah was apparently an older contemporary of Hosea and Amos” (MacLaren’s Expositions.)

“Jonah was the son of Amittai, of Gath-hepher in Zebulun, so that he belonged to the kingdom of the ten tribes, not to Judah.

“Jonah—means in Hebrew, "dove."

“Amittai—means in Hebrew "truth," "truth-telling"; appropriate to a prophet”

“**The word of the Lord**, which is a usual description of prophecy; what God had to speak against Nineveh, he here does reveal to Jonah, with command that he publish it to those concerned in it.” (Jamieson-Faussett-Brown).

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

“*Nineveh*] On the E. bank of the Tigris, the capital of the ancient kingdom and empire of Assyria, and “the most magnificent of all the capitals of the ancient world.” The building of it is mentioned as early as Genesis 10:11. In the time of Jonah, it appears to have been at the zenith of its glory” (Cambridge Bible).

“**Arise**; forthwith prepare thyself, and get all in readiness, and with hearty resolution set upon the work.

“**Go**; so soon as thou art ready, set forward on thy journey, make not any delay.

“**Nineveh**; the chief city or metropolis of the Assyrian kingdom. Nimrod was the founder and first builder.

“**That great city**: it may be easily conjectured a great city which was situated on such a river as Tigris is, had continued so many hundred years, about which time Jonah was sent to preach against it; during which long growth it may be conceived as great as it is ordinarily described, one hundred and fifty furlongs in length, that is, eighteen miles and three quarters of our English measure, and eleven miles and one quarter of the same measure in breadth. (Very great in power. Took 3 days to walk through it.)

“**Cry against it**; earnestly and publicly preach against the sins, and denounce the sudden ruin of that city unless they repent; so cry that all may hear, or at least all may come to the knowledge of what is threatened.

“**For their wickedness is come up before me**: their many and great sins” (Matthew Poole Commentary).

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish:

Joppa: well-known port of Israel on the Med. Sea

Hoped to go to Tarshish (in Cilicia or maybe Spain)

“Scene one begins with Yahweh speaking to Jonah (1:1-2) and ends with Yahweh speaking to the fish (2:10). Four episodes develop the plot. The first (1:1-3) reports Yahweh’s command that Jonah go to Nineveh and Jonah’s disobedient flight by ship to Tarshish” (*NIB*.7.492).

“Jonah seeks to escape from the unwelcome task, both because he hates the Ninevites and because he fears that, after all, God may spare them” (Dummelow 576).

Jonah goes not to Nineveh but to Tarshish – the opposite direction of Nineveh.

“Whether Tarshish is Sardinia, Carthage, a city in Spain, or a geographical metaphor is not known. Jonah’s flight subverts Yahweh’s command. All things appear to work well

for Jonah: an accessible seaport, a convenient ship, financial solvency, and available space. . . . He flees west instead of going east. The verb ‘went down’ begins a process of descent that deepens: first down to Joppa (a seaport on the Israelite coastline) and then down into the ship. The reference to the ship reappears in Jonah’s paying of her fare. . . . Even as he seeks to flee ‘from the presence of Yahweh,’ that presence surrounds him. What the structure shows, the story verifies. Jonah’s flight is futile” (NIB.7.494).

He fled from the presence of God (which he knew he could not do); He fled from standing before him as His servant and minister.

He removed himself as far as possible from being under the influence of God, where he could fulfill His commands.

Disobedient; rebellious, ran away; renounced his office; afraid; resistant;

4 But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

“Yahweh hurls a great wind upon the sea. . . . A chain of cause and effect ensues as the great wind produces a great tempest that threatens to destroy the ship. The portrayal of the inanimate ship as ‘thinking to break up’ is particularly poignant. The words sound like boards cracking from the force of water” (NIB.7.495).

“At least, such tempests often swept along that shore, and were known by their own special name, like the Euroclydon off Crete. Jonah too alone had gone down below deck to sleep, and, when the storm came, the mariners thought it possible to put back. Josephus says of that shore, "Joppa having by nature no haven, for it ends in a rough shore, mostly abrupt, but for a short space having projections, i. e., deep rocks and cliffs advancing into the sea” (Barnes’ Notes).

5 Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

“First comes an inward response [from the sailors]: They feared. Next comes an outward response in speech: They cried. Then comes an outward response in deed: they hurled. . . . As [Yahweh] hurled a wind ‘upon the sea,’ so they hurl their wares ‘to the sea.’” (NIB.7.495).

“The ship’s crew is composed of a blend of nationalities. Each man appeals to his own god” (Dummelow 577).

“The verb ‘went down’ continues Jonah’s direction of disobedient descent, from Joppa, to the ship, and now to the innards of the ship. The verb ‘lay down’ suggests that he intends neither words nor action. The verb in the phrase ‘fell into a deep sleep’ fulfills the

intention. . . . Most likely, the verb indicates a deep sleep, even a trance, that precedes death.” (*NIB.7.496*).

6 So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

“The captain of the ship intrudes upon Jonah’s space and sleep. This officer is the first human character: What’s with you, so soundly sleeping!’. . . . The captain orders Jonah to ‘arise’ and ‘call’ to the god whose own command, ‘arise . . . call,’ Jonah has already spurned. . . . If the gods of the sailors have not heeded cries for help, perhaps the god of Jonah will so that ‘we do not perish.’ Through the captain, the crew’s fear of perishing has awakened Jonah from the deathlike sleep he had embraced. Yet he remains silent” (*NIB.7.496*).

12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

“**Cast me forth into the sea.**—There was no need of prophetic inspiration to enable Jonah to pass this sentence upon himself. He is too manly not to prefer to perish without involving others in his ruin” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“Jonah, brought to a better mind, perhaps divinely inspired, pronounces his own sentence. "I know," he says, "that the fault is mine, and deserves death, therefore take me up, and cast me forth into the sea." He will not be his own executioner, but will patiently bear a death righteously inflicted by others, whose safety he was endangering by his continued presence (Pulpit commentary).

15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

“So they took up, Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea. They took him out of the hold or cabin where he was, and brought him upon deck; they took him, not against his will, but with his full consent, and according to the direction and advice he gave them: "they", for there were more than one employed in this affair; one or more very probably took him by the legs, and others put their hands under his arm holes, and so threw him into the sea:

“and the sea ceased from her raging; immediately, and became a calm; and the wind also ceased from blowing” (Gill’s Exposition).

“The sea ceased (literally "stood") from his raging - Ordinarily, the waves still swell, when the wind has ceased. The sea, when it had received Jonah, was hushed at once, to show that God alone raised and quelled it” (Barnes’ Notes).

17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

“It is a well-attested fact, that there are fishes, sharks, for instance, that grow to a size capable of swallowing and containing a man. The Scripture calls this a great fish in the general, and therefore there is no need to confine it to a whale;” (Benson Commentary).

“Cast into the sea, Jonah is swallowed alive by a great fish, in whose belly he remains unharmed three days and three nights.

“The fish was not created then and there, but God so ordered it that it should be at the place and should swallow Jonah. The prophet seems, to have sunk to the bottom of the sea before he was swallowed by the fish.

“**A great fish**; There is nothing in the word to identify the intended animal, and to call it "a whale" is simply a mistranslation. The white shark of the Mediterranean which sometimes measures twenty-five feet in length, has been known to swallow a man whole, and even a horse. This may have been the "great fish" in the text.” (Pupit Commentary).

The phrase, ‘three days and three nights,’ “marks the length of time it took for the fish to reach the place where it vomited Jonah” (*NIB.7.504*).

Note Jesus’ statement in Matthew 12:40: “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”