



JONAH



An Exegetical Commentary
by Nate Wilson ©1999

*Dedicated to my neighbor, friend, and
Hebrew professor, Andrew Zeller!*

Introduction to the Book of Jonah

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

According to the Jewish Soncino Commentary on the Minor Prophets, “The essential teaching is that the Gentiles *should not be grudged* God’s love, care, and forgiveness.” (Son. 137) A secondary purpose is to emphasize the sovereignty of God and his control over all things (Hailey 64, Taylor, Zodhiates). Jews still read the book of Jonah on the Day of Atonement because of the prominent theme of repentance and forgiveness. (Son. 137)

Verkuyl (40) also notes that, “The book of Jonah is...significant for understanding the biblical basis of mission because it treats God’s mandate to his people regarding the Gentile peoples and thus serves as the preparatory step to the missionary mandate of the New Testament... Israel has become so preoccupied with herself that she no longer directs her eyes toward the world of the nations. Israel, the recipient of all God’s revelation, refuses to set foot in alien territory to tell the other peoples God’s message of judgment and liberation. But the message of the book also is addressed to the New Testament congregation which tries various ways of evading her Lord’s command to speak His message to the world.”

VIEWS ON HISTORICITY OF JONAH

Some take the book of Jonah as merely an entertaining story while others take it as an allegory, perhaps of the Garden of Eden, of Job, of Israel’s exile (Son. 137, Hail.63), or even as a mere vision. But I take it as real history – this seems to be the way in which Jesus took it when He referred to Jonah’s story in the Gospels (Matthew 12:40, Luke 11:29). Some objections raised are answered as follows:

- ◆ The miracles make the story incredible, but history has proved that men can survive being swallowed by fish in more than one modern case. Objections can also be raised about the plant springing up in one day, too, but “as suggested by M^cCartney, the ability or inability to accept a

miracle depends on whether or not one spells his God with a capital ‘G’” (Hail.64) .

- ◆ The lack of detail in the story can lead to the speculation that it is fictitious, but this is not a warranted assumption, for the story is definitely written in the style of a narrative history with all the vav consecutives, and it may have been written late enough after the event that Jonah could focus on a main point and leave out details that didn’t contribute to his main point (K&D 381, NAW, Gil.).
- ◆ Likewise, some say that it was all a dream and not a real happening, but, Keil & Delitzsch (387) point out that a vision could not have typological significance and that Jonah would not have run away in a vision.
- ◆ Finally, the claim that Jonah contains late-dating Aramaic words that wouldn’t match the proper time period is outright false (K&D 381).

JONAH, THE MAN

Jonah: Means “Dove” or even “carrier pigeon” (AZ) Although it is stated that Jonah came from Gath-hepher, in the SW of Israel, there is a conflicting tradition that Jonah was the child whom Elijah revived in Zerepath. In support of this tradition, some Jewish Rabbis point to the fact that “Amittai “ means “truth” (i.e. “a son of truth”) and that the widow of Zerepath made a big deal about Elijah’s “truth” in I Kings 17:24 (Son. 137).

Jonah, son of Amittai, is mentioned in 2 Kings. 14:25 as having prophesied the extension of the political boundaries of Israel under Jeroboam II and is also credited with anointing Jehu, son of Nimshi to be king in II Kings. 9:1 (Son. 137).

Jonah also apparently was educated enough to know a good bit of the Davidic Psalms, as he quotes from them frequently in his prayer. As for where Jonah was buried, there are two graves said to be his: one in Meahal of Galilee, and one in Nineveh, Assyria (K&D 380).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Chart of the time period (approx. years B.C. across the top):

806	800	793	790	782	— .	767	765	763	759	753	— .	— .	722
As- syria in- vades Israel	Un- rest be- gin- s in As- syria Jonah Born ?	Co- re- gen- cy of in Jeho- ash & son Jere- boam in Israel	Co- re- gen- cy of Ama- ziah & son Uz- ziah in Judah	Jeho- ash dies.		Ama- ziah dies.	Plague in As- syria Amos proph- ecies	e- clipse	Plague in As- syria Jonah proph- ecies	Jere- boam II dies			As- syria takes Israel into exile

The exact date is uncertain; commentators differ widely, placing it anywhere from 800BC to 250BC. Actually, the controversy in the date is less a matter of when the events in the book took place and more a matter of when the book itself was written, some people placing it in various points in the time of the Israelite Northern Kingdom and others putting it after the exile (Hail. 22). Dr. Paul Gilchrist believes that the book was written by Jonah about 30 years after his experiences – around 760BC – after he had told the story many times and had time to distill his experiences into a lesson form (Gil.).

In 806BC (perhaps about the time Jonah was born) the Assyrian king Ahad Nirari III invaded Israel, so the Israelites had reason to dislike the Assyrians and were probably having to pay tribute to them. It was not long after that, however that the Assyrian empire came upon hard times due to plagues in 765BC and in 759BC. (Gil.) and due to internal political unrest and conflict with the powerful country of Utaru near the Caspian Sea (Hail. 63). Jonah probably prophesied late in the reign of Ahad Nirari III (810-782BC) or early in Assurdan III's rule (771-754BC) when the Assyrians worshipped Nebo – a practice approaching monotheism (Unger 705). All this no doubt prepared the Assyrians of Nineveh to respond well to Jonah's message.

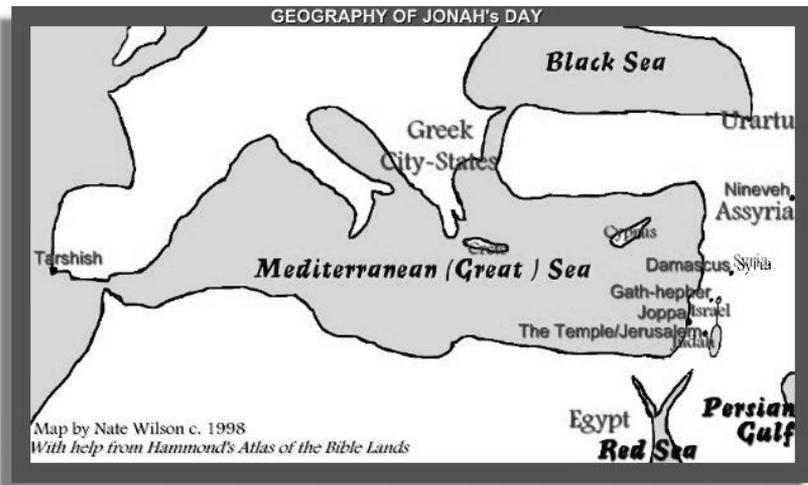
Jonah's ministry (as well as the ministry of the prophet Amos), took place during Jeroboam II's reign over the Northern kingdom of Israel. During this time, Assyria wasn't as much a

problem for Israel as was Syria, but after Jeroboam subdued Damascus in battle, Israel came out more prosperous than ever with a renewed sense of patriotism and disdain for foreigners – not unlike the United States in the 1800's. However, Nineveh, the capitol city of Assyria, would eventually recover and take the Northern kingdom of Israel into exile in 722BC. Later, the prophets Nahum and Zephaniah would prophecy against it, and in 612BC, an alliance of Medes, Babylonians, and Scythians would destroy it completely (NAW, Unger 925).

At this time in world history, Greek City-states were well-established, and they were starting the first Olympics. Rome and Carthage were just being founded, and Aesop was writing his fables. Although the Suez Canal was first cut during this time period to link the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean, Egypt was overcome by Ethiopia and was waning as a world power. China was experiencing its “Spring and Autumn Period” under King Ping Vang and the dominant Chou people. Buddha and Lao-Tze, the founders of Buddhism and Taoism were born soon thereafter. Europe and the Americas were populated with tribes under leaders such as King Rivallo in England and Chavin de Huanter in Peru. But Jonah and his Jewish kinsmen didn't care much about what was going on in the wider world around them.

The Jews were ethnocentric. Jonah typified Israel's disgust for Gentiles. As Luther put it, “he would rather not preach, yea, would rather die, than that the grace of God, which was to be the peculiar privilege of the people of Israel, should be communicated to the Gentiles also... it was very hard for the Jews to believe that there were any other people outside Israel who helped to form the people of God...” He goes on to say that this attitude prevailed right through the times of the apostles, who required the prodding of visions, signs, and wonders and the deliberation of a church council before they accepted God as embracing the Gentiles! (K&D 392)

GEOGRAPHY



TYOLOGY IN JONAH

In Matthew 12:40 and Luke 11:29, Jesus is recorded as giving the “sign of Jonah” to the Jews. The implication was that just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days, so Jesus would be in the tomb for three days. Keil ties this concept to the Gentile-inclusive purpose of the book of Jonah in an interesting way: “Jonah was entrusted with the commission to proclaim the position of Israel in relation to the Gentile world in a symbolico-typical manner, and to exhibit both figuratively and typically not only the susceptibility of the heathen for divine grace, but also the conduct of Israel with regard to the design of God to show favor to the Gentiles... As Jonah the servant of God is given up to death that he may successfully accomplish the work committed to him, namely to proclaim to the Ninevites the judgment and mercy of the God of heaven and earth; so must the Son of God be buried in the earth like a grain of wheat, that He may bring forth fruit for the whole world (K&D 384-387).

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

A prophet shares a lesson he learned about God in the process of two missionary journeys.

I. FIRST CYCLE: Chapters 1-2

- A) God's Call for Jonah to preach in Nineveh (1:1-2)
- B) The Sea-Voyage (1:3-17)
 - 1) Jonah's Flight from Duty (1:3, 5b)
 - (a) by ship
 - (b) by slumber
 - 2) God's Responsive discipline (1:4-2:1)
 - (a) God hurls a storm at the boat (1:4)
 - (i) Sailor's pagan response to the storm and discovery of Jonah's culpability (1: 5-11)
 - (ii) Jonah's confession (1:9, 12)
 - (iii) Sailor's response to Jonah's confession (1:13-15)
 - initial resistance
 - prayer to God
 - "man overboard"
 - (b) God has Jonah swallowed by a fish (2:1)
- B) Results of God's discipline (1:16-2:11)
 - 1) The sailors see the storm stop and fear God and offer sacrifices to Him (1:16)
 - 2) Jonah is restored to relationship with God
 - (a) Restored to communication with God by prayer (2:1-10)
 - (i) Jonah recounts sinking to the depths (2:4, 5a, 6, 7a)
 - (ii) Jonah hopes for God's deliverance (2:3, 5b, 7b, 8-10)
 - (b) Restored to ability to obey God by being spit onto dry land (2:11)

II) SECOND CYCLE: Chapters 3-4

- A) Second Commission for Jonah to preach in Nineveh (3:1-2)
- B) Jonah's Obedient Response (3:3-4)
- C) Impact on Nineveh (3:5-10)
 - 1) People mourn and fast
 - 2) The king humbles himself
 - 3) The counsel issues a proclamation for repentance
 - 4) God withholds judgment
- B) Impact on Jonah (4:1-5)
 - 1) Jonah rebels against God's mercy shown to Nineveh
 - (a) by anger
 - (b) by pouting/sulking
 - (c) by seeking death
 - 2) God's rebuke to Jonah (4:4-11)
 - (a) gentle question
 - (b) drama of the plant and the worm
 - (c) forthright rebuke for misplaced compassion

Introduction to this Commentary

This project is an assignment for a seminary course in Hebrew Exegesis. Therefore, it will be focused on the Hebrew text of Jonah, commentary on the text, and applications which can be used for the purpose of teaching. Since this is my first such project, I will concern myself more at the morphological (word) level than at the syntactical level, so there may be idiomatic Hebrew phrases that I deal with at the word-level rather than as a phrase simply because I am just gaining familiarity with Hebrew writing.

The Hebrew text in this volume was copied from the <http://he.wikisource.org> website. It is not copyrighted and may be freely copied, modified, and published according to the GNU Free Documentation License copied at the end of this book. I have modified the Hebrew text by numbering the verbs and removing quotation marks and question marks.

I have put a number in superscript next to every verb or participle in the Hebrew text, also marking my translation of that verbal in my English translation with the corresponding number. In the “VERBALS” section, I give the morphology of the verbal, using the same numbering. So as not to be cumbered with three-digit numbers, I start over at (1) with each new chapter. In the morphology, I give the verb stem, its aspect, its formatives, and then the root word, followed by any phonetic weakness and then the root meaning. The final word in italics is a syntax label. Following are some abbreviations and nomenclature I used:

TRANSLATIONS

NAW = My translation (Nathan A. Wilson)

KJV = King James Version

NKJV = New King James Version

ASV = The American Standard Version of 1901

NASV = New American Standard Version

NIV = New International Version

L.B. = Living Bible

As I compared the various translations, I faded to grey the words which were not accurate to the Hebrew text. Sometimes it was a word translated inaccurately, sometimes there was a significant omission which I marked with a grey “X,” and sometimes it was extra words not found in the Hebrew text. Where the translation italicized a word which had been added to make the English flow better, I left it alone.

I found the KJV and the ASV to be almost word-for-word the same, with the NKJV following the KJV almost as slavishly as the ASV, but they provided the most literal and classic translation (although there were times when the KJV took minor liberties I felt were unwarranted). There were occasional words or phrases that the NASV or NIV improved upon, but as a general rule I felt that the NIV pushed the limits of improvisation on the text beyond accurate scholarship. The Living Bible, however, is forthright in its claim not to be a translation but a paraphrase, so it cannot be judged as harshly. In the L.B. the words of Scripture are combined with the author’s running commentary, but the running commentary was right on target the whole time! To be honest, not one of these English translations was as technically precise as I would have hoped, but they all did an adequate job, and they are all worth reading – although I believe you’d get a more accurate picture by reading it in Hebrew! Every one of the English translations has strengths, so I believe that there is real value in laying them all out side-by-side, so that you can take them all together and see the range of meaning of the Hebrew text and understand it more fully.

VERB STEMS:

Qal = Simple verb where the subject is acting

Niphal = Simple verb where the subject is acted upon

Piel = Intensive action where the subject is acting (May not always be intense action, though)

Pual = Intensive action where the subject is being acted upon
(Not used in the book of Jonah)

Hitpael = Reflexive action, where the subject is acting on itself

Hiphil = Causal verb where the subject is causing an action to happen (May not always be by indirect action)

Hophil = Causal verb where a third party has caused an action to happen to the subject (Not used in the book of Jonah)

VERB ASPECTS:

Perf. = Perfect (completed action usually in past time)

Impf. = Imperfect (Incomplete action usually in future time unless prefixed by a vav, in which case it is a narrative/consecutive past-tense.)

Inf. = Infinitive (noun form of an action)

Ptc. = Participle (adjective form of an action, often translated as an English Gerund - “ing”)

Imptv. = Imperative (Command)

VERB FORMATIVES

This would include prefixes (such as prepositions) and suffixes (such as indicators of the subject or object of the verb).

3ms/fs, etc. = If there is a number in the combination, it is speaking of first, second, or third person. The m/f indicates male or female. And the s/p indicates singular or plural.

Const. = Construct form (the word is linked to a preposition - “to” - or to the next word as a genitive - “of”)

Abs. = Absolute (stands by itself without a construct link)

v.c. or consec. = Vav Consecutive (When a series of Imperfect verbs are prefixed with a Vav, I take it as a consecutive sequence of events in the past.)

WEAKNESSES

This has to do with the spelling of the Hebrew word. Hebrew verbs generally have three root letters, but certain letters of the Hebrew alphabet are “weak” and either change or disappear. The first word in parenthesis gives the place of the weakness: “Pe” designates the first letter of the Hebrew root word; “Ayin” designates the second letter of the word, and “Lamed,” the third letter of the word. The second word in parenthesis indicates the actual letter of the alphabet in that place – the letters corresponding to our English “A,” “H,” “ch,” and “” are lumped together as Gutturals and abbreviated as “Gut.”

SYNTAX

The use of the verbal in the context of the sentence:

M.V. = Main Verb

Adj. = Adjectival use of a verb

Cause. = Causal (A circumstance which caused the action)

Compl. = Complimentary verb (dependent on another – usually volitional – verb)

Cond. = Conditional

D.O. = Direct Object

Dir. Disc. = Direct Discourse or Quote

Explan. = Explanatory

Hort./Cohort. = Hortatory/Cohortative “let us”

Id. Act. = Identical Action as previous verb

Juss. = Jussive “let them”

Pred. Nom. = Predicate Nominative (Usually w/ verb of being)

Purp. = Purpose (The end which the subject had in mind when he did the action)

Rel. Cl. = Relative Clause (beginning with “who,” “which,” etc.)

Res. = Result (The result of an action)

Temp. = Temporal (time of action)

COMMENTARIES

I used a variety of study aids to write the commentary, including lexicons, atlases, dictionaries, classical exegetical commentaries, a Jewish commentary (Soncino), and modern Christian commentaries. Next to any thought that wasn't my own, I reference the source by an abbreviation of the author's name and a page number in parenthesis. This may not be the thought's original source, but it is where I first heard it. When I came up with an idea on my own that I wasn't sure about and later saw it confirmed in another commentary, I give the cross-reference in the other commentary with a “c.f. ...”. Almost all of my verbal etymological work came from BDB; the reader can take it for granted that BDB is the reference on all my translations of root words in the Verbal sections. Although the classic Keil and Delitzsch commentary was helpful in exegesis and background and the Soncino commentary was particularly helpful in understanding the Jewish perspective on translation, I most appreciated Ajith Fernando's 1997 exposition of the book of

Jonah in drawing practical applications from the text (although sometimes he seemed to find applications that weren't necessarily in the text of Jonah!). My abbreviations are as follows:

AZ = Andrew Zeller, my Hebrew Professor at Sangre de Cristo Seminary

DFZ = Dwight Zeller, my Biblical Exegesis professor at Sangre de Cristo Seminary

Gil = Paul Gilchrist, my Prophets professor at Covenant College

Son = Soncino Commentary

K&D = Keil & Delitzsch's commentary

Hail = Homer Hailey's commentary on the Minor Prophets

Ung. = Unger's Bible Dictionary

BDB = Brown, Driver, & Briggs' Lexicon

Urban= Ajith Fernando's exposition of Jonah during Urbana'87

NAW = myself, when only part of the thought was original
(Nathan A. Wilson)

Full documentation can be found at the end of this paper in the Bibliography.

Chapter 1

1:1 וַיְהִי¹ דְבַר יְהוָה
אֶל יוֹנָה בֶן אַמִּיטַי לֵאמֹר²:

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 1 And it was¹ the word of Jehovah to Jonah, son of Amittai to say²:

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

ASV 1 Now the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

VERBALS

1. Qal Imperfect 3ms + vav consecutive, from היה (All weak) “be, exist, happen, come to pass” *Main Verb/temporal*
2. Qal Infinitive construct + lamed, from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *Purpose/Identical Action*

COMMENTARY

Jonah begins with a Vav Consecutive which means it is continued from something previous. The question is “WHAT?” Apparently, it simply is showing continuity with the other books of the Bible (AZ).

I will be using “Jehovah” rather than LORD, because this Hebrew word is evidently the proper name for the true God. Jonah was operating in a cross-cultural setting, and this word would be preferred over a generic name like “god” or “lord” in such a setting to distinguish Jehovah from other gods. However, in order to avoid the possibility of taking the name of the Lord in vain, the Jews later on quit pronouncing the name “Jehovah/Yahweh” and substituted another word which we translate

as “Lord.” But the fact remains that the proper name of the true God was pronounced in O.T. days, and it is a different word altogether from the word “Lord,” the root of it’s meaning having to do with “existence” rather than “lordship,” so I prefer to use “Jehovah.”

The phrase “the Word of Jehovah” sets the following text off as a prophetic oracle (AZ):

1:2 קוים³ לך⁴ אֶל נִינְוֵה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה
וּקְרָא⁵ עָלֶיהָ, כִּי עָלְתָה⁶ רָעָתָם לִפְנֵי.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 2 Get up³, go⁴ to Nineveh, the great city, and call⁵ upon her, / for their evil has gone up⁶ before my face.

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

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

VERBALS

3. Qal Imperative ms, from בּוּק (Ayin Vav) “Stand, arise”
M.V. of Direct Object (quote) clause.
4. Qal Imptv. ms, from הֵלֵךְ (Pe Gut.) “go/walk” *M.V. of D.O. (quote)*
5. Qal Imptv. ms +vav conjunctive, from קָרָא (Lamed Aleph)
“call, proclaim, cry out, read aloud, meet, encounter” *M.V. of D.O. (quote)*
6. Qal Perfect 3fs, from עָלָה (Pe Gut./Lamed He) “go up” *Causal*

COMMENTARY

God gave three commands: “Get up,” “Go,” and “Call.” Jonah had to remove himself from whatever he was involved in at the time (“Get up”), then he had to take himself over to where God had commanded him to go (“GO”), and then he had to deliver this message from God (“Call”). This is a good model for considering missionary work or ministry of any kind. The first step

is to disengage from whatever we were doing that God considers unimportant now, then He often requires us to go out of our way to do His task. The Septuagint translates this word “go” in Jonah as the same word used by Jesus in the Great Commission of Matthew 28 (Verkuyl 41). Then we have this phrase “Call upon” or “preach against.” The way I translated it gives a more positive connotation that Jonah was to visit the people and plead with them out of a concern for them, but other translators render it “preach against,” as though it was an antagonistic pronouncement of doom. I suppose it can technically be interpreted either way, depending on how the author feels about Nineveh (NAW, AZ), but the context of Jonah’s understanding that this pronouncement was for the purpose of reconciling Nineveh to God makes the antagonistic rendering improbable to me. However, Fernando makes a good point about the negative sense of this phrase, “We preach to people not only because we have good news that God loves people – that is our primary message – but also because people’s sins have come up against God, because they are lost and headed for judgment. We must not forget this fact” (Urban 27).

NINEVEH was situated about 200 mi. North of present-day Baghdad, was the Capitol of Assyria, and was built by Nimrod just after the flood (Gen. 10:8-12) – thus is one of the oldest civilizations. Greek and Roman authors called it Ninos and said it was the largest city in the world in its time. Archaeologists have actually discovered Nineveh to be a complex of 4 cities 60 miles in circumference. It was indeed a GREAT city! (K&D 389-90, Hail. 67)

Nineveh would have been about 750 miles by foot from Jonah’s town, and once Jonah got there, how would he, a lowly Jew go about announcing the doom of this powerful city?? God was calling Jonah to a very difficult task! (Urban 26)

The word for “Wickedness” here, says the Jewish commentator, means “moral and social sins [including *violence* in 3:8], rather than idolatry” (Son.138) the word can indeed have a variety of meanings, including “calamity” and “distress,” and so

this phrase could alternatively be rendered “their distress has come before me.” Nineveh was indeed experiencing some distress, what with wars and plagues and the economic hardships on the people of ungodly rulers. Evil in civil government is closely linked to the distress of the people. This evil has come up “lepanay” – literally “to my face.” Later I render this same root word “presence.” God is always up on the news. He is omnipresent – nothing happens that doesn’t happen right in His presence.

APPLICATION

- ◆ God Sees what all people are doing and cares to respond
- ◆ Missionaries must GET UP, GO, and CALL ON the people who need to hear
- ◆ God’s call often seems humanly impossible at first.

3: 1 וַיִּקָּם⁷ יוֹנָה לְבָרוּחַ⁸ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה
 מִלְּפָנֵי יְהוָה, וַיֵּרָד⁹ יָפוֹ, וַיִּמְצָא¹⁰
 אֲנִיָּה בָאָה¹¹ תַּרְשִׁישׁ, וַיִּתֵּן¹² שְׂכָרָהּ
 וַיֵּרָד¹³ בָּהּ לָבוֹא¹⁴ עִמָּהֶם תַּרְשִׁישָׁה
 מִלְּפָנֵי יְהוָה.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 3 But Jonah got up⁷ to flee⁸ to Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah. / He went down⁹ to Jopo and found¹⁰ a ship going¹¹ to Tarshish. And he paid¹² her passage-money / and went down¹³ in her to go¹⁴ with them to Tarshish, from the presence of Jehovah.

KJV 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: so he paid the fare thereof, / and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

ASV 3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah; / and he went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, / and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah.

VERBALS

7. Qal Impf. 3ms + vav consec., from מוּקַם (Ayin Vav) “stand/arise” *Result/M.V.*
8. Qal Inf. const. + lamed, from בָּרוּחַ (Lamed Gut.) “flee” *Purpose*
9. Qal Impf. 3ms + vav consec., from יָרַד (Pe Yod) “go down” *M.V.*
10. Qal Impf. 3ms + vav consec., from מָצָא (Lamed Aleph) “find” *M.V.*
11. Qal active participle fs, from בּוֹא (Lamed Aleph/Ayin Vav) “go” *Attributive Adjective.*
12. Qal Impf. 3ms + vav consec., from נָתַן (Pe Nun) “give” *M.V.*

13. Qal Impf. 3ms + vav cons., from ירד (Pe Yod) “go down” *M.V.*
 14. Qal Inf. const. + Lamed, from בא (Lamed Aleph/Ayin Vav) “go” *Purpose*

COMMENTARY

It is so difficult to tear ourselves away from our habits, our familiar territory, and our traditions when God says go, but this is the first command God gives Jonah. Jonah obeyed this first command, but he didn't intend to obey the second and third commands to go and call on Nineveh! He fled to Joppa from the presence of the Lord. How can one go “from the presence of God?” You can't! God's very command made this patently clear, for if the secret sins of a foreign nation were “before His face,” surely there was nothing His own prophet could do to get away from God's presence! Keil (K&D 391) maintains that this phrase meant more to withdraw from the *service* of the God of Israel. Fernando doesn't actually come out and say it, but seems to imply that this “leaving the presence” was leaving the PEOPLE of God. He notes that “when people are living in disobedience, they often avoid close contact with Christians” because it can be downright convicting! (Urban 28).

Jonah ran in the opposite direction of that which God had called him – Nineveh was on the Eastern edge of the world the Jews knew about, and Tarshish was on the Western edge of their world. “Jonah wanted to be a safe distance from anything that reminded him of God (Urban 27).

JOPO: (I transliterated it more precisely) was Israel's only decent port on the Mediterranean (mentioned in Josh. 19:46 – K&D), about 60 miles from Gath-Hepher (Hail.68). When it says Jonah “went down” it probably just refers to elevation, seeing as he was going to the seacoast. Unger notes (707) that Joppa was assigned as a border city for the tribe of Dan in Josh. 19:46, and archaeological evidence dates the city at least a thousand years before Jonah. Solomon and used the port to receive cedar logs from Lebanon for the temple in Jerusalem (II Chron 2:16). It was also the place where the Apostle Peter stayed for a time with Simon the tanner (Acts 9&10).

SHIP: This appears to be a generic term for a large ship used for carrying things from one port to another. II Chron. 9:21 (Solomon) and 20:36 (Jehoshaphat) also speak of ships to Tarshish. Later in v.5, another word for ship is used which speaks of its paneling. That later word looks to be a rare use and makes me wonder if the word actually refers to a part of the ship (deck/hold) rather than the ship itself. The Soncino commentary confirms this (139) as does Keil (K&D 393).

TARSHISH: Unger (1252) says that the word “Tarshish” is Phoenician for “smelting plant” or “refinery” and thus the boat could have been going anywhere to transport smelted metal – perhaps Sardinia or Spain. If this were the case, it would have indeed lightened the ship considerably to throw out its cargo! Most others seem to think, however, that Tarshish refers to a specific city in Spain (not to be confused with the Apostle Paul’s hometown of Tarsus in Asia Minor) – perhaps the modern-day Tartessus near Gibraltar (Packer 186). “This town, which maintained a mineral trade with Tyre, was most likely an ancient Semitic colony – c.f. Isa 23 (Son.138). Keil (K&D 391) says that it was a Phoenician port in Southwest Spain as per (Gen. 10:4). The Mishnah mentions that it took a year to travel one way to Spain – a remote location indeed! (Son.138)

Jonah was in a hurry; when he paid the fare, Jewish commentators say that it is implied that he paid the fare of the entire ship so they would set sail right away without waiting for any more merchants to fill up the rest of the ship! (Son. 139). And when Jonah boards this ship to Tarshish, he is exchanging the company of the true and living God for the company of a bunch of pagan sailors. Notice that it says “with them” and “from... God.” When we chose to disobey God, we are trading company for the worse! (Trent Compton)

Why did He do it? “Jonah recognized that his mission had a redemptive purpose... The fact that he had to go to Nineveh and announce its overthrow to the inhabitants [rather than making a prophecy in Israel] could only mean that God wished to give

them the opportunity of repentance and redemption. Jonah did not wish that they should be saved” (Son.138).

APPLICATION

- ◆ When God calls, we should obey entirely.
- ◆ If we chose to disobey, we are trading the best for the worst.

1: 4 וַיְהִי הַטֵּיִל¹⁵ רוּחַ גְּדוֹלָה אֶל הַיָּם,
וַיְהִי¹⁶ סֵעַר גְּדוֹל בַּיָּם, וַהֲאַנְיָה חֲשָׁבָה¹⁷
לְהִשָּׁבֵר¹⁸.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 4 So Jehovah hurled¹⁵ a great wind to the sea / so that there was¹⁶ a great storm in the sea, and the ship was going¹⁷ to be broken in pieces¹⁸.

KJV 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.

ASV 4 But Jehovah sent out a great wind upon the sea, / and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

VERBALS

15. Hiphil Perf. 3ms, from טיל (Ayin Vav) “hurl, cast” *M.V.*
16. Qal Impf. 3ms + vav cons., from היה (All Weak) “be, exist, happen, come to pass” *Purpose/Result*
17. Piel Perf. 3fs, from חשב (Pe Gut.) “think, account, mind, consider, threaten” *Result*
18. Niphal Inf. Const. + Lamed, from שבר (Strong) “Shatter, break in pieces” *Compliment*

COMMENTARY

Interesting personification of the ship “her fare...the ship was thinking” – although could be extended to the ship’s crew (NAW, AZ). The contrast between the two subjects in the verse

– “God” and “the ship” is also brought out by the emphatic word order that emphasizes the two subjects (hence my underlining).

God is the cause of this storm. He is God over wind and sea – not Castor & Pollux, Poseidon, or Proteus, as sailors might have thought.

APPLICATION

- ◆ If you disobey, God cares enough about you to send a storm and bring you back in line.
 - ◆ You can run, but you can't hide from God!
 - ◆ God is in control of the natural elements
- 

1: 5 וַיִּירָאוּ¹⁹ הַמַּלְחִים, וַיִּזְעְקוּ²⁰ אִישׁ אֶל
 אֱלֹהָיו, וַיִּטְלוּ אֶת הַפְּלִים אֲשֶׁר בְּאֹנִיָּה
 אֶל הַיָּם לְהַקֵּל²² מֵעֲלֵיהֶם, וַיּוֹנֶה יָרֵד²³
 אֶל יַרְכְּתֵי הַסְּפִינָה וַיִּשְׁכַּב²⁴ וַיִּרְדָּם²⁵.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 5 And the sailors feared¹⁹ and they cried out²⁰, every man to his god, / and they threw out²¹ the cargo which was in the ship to the sea to lighten²² them up, / but Jonah had gone down²³ to the lower deck and he laid down²⁴ and had fallen into a deep sleep²⁵.

KJV 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* X of them. / But Jonah was gone: down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

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

VERBALS

19. Qal Impf. 3mp + vav consec., from ירא (Pe Yod/Lamed Aleph) “fear” *M.V.*
20. Qal Impf. 3mp + vav consec., from זעק (Ayin Gut.) “cry out, call” *M.V./Result*
21. Hiph. Impf. 3mp + vav consec., from טול (Ayin Vav) “hurl, cast” *M.V./Result*
22. Hiph. Inf. const. + Lamed, from ללק (Double Ayin) “make light” *Purpose*
23. Qal Pf. 3ms, from ירד (Pe Yod) “go down” *M.V.*
24. Qal Impf. 3ms + vav consec., from שכב (strong) “lay down” *M.V.*
25. Niph. Impf. 3ms + vav consec., from רמד (strong) “fell into heavy sleep” *M.V.*

COMMENTARY

“Sailors” comes from the root-word “salt” – maybe could be translated “the salty dogs.” They are probably Phoenician (K&D 392). This wording may also indicate that these guys were experienced sailors who knew the seas (AZ). If they were afraid and crying out, then it was no small gale!

“Cry out” here is different from the command God gave to Jonah in v.1. The word here in v. 5 is generally used in times of trouble whereas the former is used more in the sense of communicating a message to other people. They were so desperate that they ceased to care whether they made any money off the trip and were merely concerned for their survival.

God had “hurled” this storm at them (v.4) so the sailors “hurled” (same verb) their payload out of the ship to “Lighten them up” – Although my translation is not supported very well by the English translations, the Soncino and K&D commentators agree with me.

But Jonah was oblivious to it all. When did Jonah go down? This verb is a different form which interrupts a bunch of narrative consecutive verbs, so it is likely that this is going back in time before the storm was whipped up. (Other commentators agree: Son. 139, K&D 393) Now, Jesus slept in a boat too during a gale, but this was very different; Jesus was sleeping out of a sense of peace and trust in His father whereas Jonah’s sleep was out of apathy (Ron Kruis, NAW). “What a sad sight! The people of the world are looking desperately for an answer..., and the one who knows the answer is asleep!” (Urban 30).

APPLICATION

◆ Indifferent sleep does not become followers of God. We should be aware of the needs of the people around us.

1: 6 וַיִּקְרַב²⁶ אֵלָיו רֵב הַחַיִּל²⁷ וַיֹּאמֶר²⁸
 לוֹ : מַה לָּךְ נִרְדָּם²⁹ קוּם³⁰ קְרָא³¹ אֶל
 אֱלֹהֶיךָ, אוּלַי יִתְעַשֶׂת³² הָאֱלֹהִים לָנוּ
 וְלֹא נֵאבֵד³³.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 6 Well, the chief of the sailors approached him and said to him, / “What’s with you, sleeper?? Get up; call to your god! / Perhaps the god will think favorably toward us and we will not be killed.”

KJV 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;

ASV 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.

VERBALS

26. Qal Impf. 3ms + vav consec., from קרב (strong) “approach” *M.V.*

27. Qal Act. Ptc. ms from לבה “bind” Subj./P.O.

28. Qal Impf. 3ms + vav consec., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *M.V.*

29. Niph. ptc. ms from רדם “fall into deep sleep” *Vocative Address*

30. Qal Imperative ms, from מוק (Ayin Vav) “Stand, arise”

M.V. of Direct Object (quote) clause.

31. Qal Imptv. ms, from קרא (Lamed Aleph) “call, proclaim, cry out, read aloud, meet, encounter” *M.V. of D.O. (quote)*

32. Hitp. Impf. 3ms, from עשת “think / smooth, bright, rich”

M.V. / Result

33. Qal Impf. 1cp, from אבד “perish” *Result*

COMMENTARY

The chief of the sailors now finds Jonah in the hold and yells at him. The word for “sailors” in this verse has to do with “binding” as perhaps in rope-work or in the bound-together company of the crew. Literally the phrase is “chief of the sailors,” but all the other English versions translate it idiomatically.

“What’s with you?” The phrase is literally “what to you.” In Hebrew, they say that something is “to you” when they mean it belongs to you, so it’s possible that the captain is saying something to the effect of “What do you have to offer us to help in our trouble? What about your god? Get up and call on him!” Now, Jonah had heard that command before “Get up...call...!” God had used the same two commands in His commission in v.2!

Should the word “god” be capitalized here? The English version translators appear to be divided, but my commentaries assume that the sailors had some concept of the true God of Israel. I disagree, however. The Greek mythology of Homer and Hesiod paint a picture of the superstitious pagan mind of the Mediterranean in the first millennium B.C. Pagans believed that gods were directly responsible for anything out of the ordinary. The sailors were superstitious. The captain seems to suspect that Jonah’s god is the source of the storm.

“Perhaps the god will *think favorably* toward us” The root word for this verb primarily has to do with being smooth or shiny, and, by implication, rich. For this reason Calvin translates the verb in terms of God shining his favor. There is another meaning of the root that warrants interpreting the word in terms of “thinking”, so I tried to combine the two meanings, rendering it “think favorably” (BDB, K&D 394, NAW).

It is humiliating to be rebuked by a non-Christian over issues of morality. We are sinners, and it will happen, but it is humiliating all the same. The Bible mentions this in a couple of different places besides Jonah, for instance: Matt. 12: 41-42 “The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.” God sometimes uses the world to

shame us, but our goal from Matt. 5:16 is to “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Urban 31).

APPLICATION

◆ The pagan captain didn't think too much of Jonah sleeping through the storm. What do non-Christians think about our life?



1: 7 וַיֹּאמְרוּ³⁴ אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ: לָכוּ³⁵
 וְנִפְּלָה³⁶ גּוֹרְלוֹת וְנִדְעָה³⁷ בְּשׂלְמֵי
 הַרְעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ, וַיִּפְּלוּ³⁸ גּוֹרְלוֹת,
 וַיִּפֹּל³⁹ הַגּוֹרֵל עַל יוֹנָה.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 7 And each man said³⁴ to his companion, “Let’s go³⁵ and cast³⁶ lots, / that we may know³⁷ on whose account this evil came to us.” / So they cast³⁸ lots, and the lot fell³⁹ upon Jonah.

KJV 7 And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, / that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. / So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

ASV 7 And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, / that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. / So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

VERBALS

34. Qal Impf. 3mp +vav cons., from אָמַר (Pe Aleph) “say” *M.V.*

35. Qal Impvtv. mp from הָלַךְ (Pe Gut./Nun) “walk” *Direct Discourse, Cohortative M.V.*

36. Hiph. Impf. 1cp + v.c. + cohort. He, from לָפַן (Pe Nun) “fall” *Direct Discourse Cohortative Compliment*

37. Qal Imp. 1cp + v.c. + cohort. He, from יָדַע (Pe Yod, Lamed Gut.) “know” *Direct Discourse Purpose*

38. Hiph. Impf. 3mp + v.c., from לָפַן (Pe Nun) “fall” *M.V.*

39. Qal Impf. 3ms + v.c., from לָפַן (Pe Nun) “fall” *Result*

COMMENTARY

When a pagan of that time faced a problem, they assumed that the gods had caused it, so they would seek some kind of guidance or oracle. These gods were capricious and unpredictable, so they needed divine guidance to understand what the gods were doing and respond appropriately. These sailors started by casting lots, trusting that the outcome would be divinely directed to help them solve the mystery... and in the case of this

story, the lot was indeed guided by Jehovah, who guides all things according to His sovereign will. (Prov. 16:33 “The lot is cast into the lap, but the outcome is the LORD’s.”) “Cast lots” literally means “cause stones to fall.” So the Living Bible isn’t all that more idiomatic than the other versions when it says “draw straws.”

The question invariably comes up, “Should we, therefore, cast lots in making decisions?” My answer is that there can be two reasons to cast lots: one is based upon the superstition of entrusting decisions to a force beyond our control (this goes both for atheists who would call it “chance” and for those who believe in a sovereign God) and the other is based upon mathematics as a way to get a random result in an unimportant choice. Because God promises to guide His people and give them wisdom when we ask Him for it, we should never go about making decisions without careful thought; to roll dice without thinking should therefore be avoided. However, only when reason is unimportant (as in choosing the flavor of a candy) or when reason leads to the conclusion that there is no advantage or disadvantage of one choice over another, it may be appropriate to use a random procedure such as casting lots to finish the decision so that you don’t waste time on an unimportant choice.

APPLICATION

- ◆ We can rest assured that God is in control of all things.
- ◆ We must deal with our sin, because it hurts not only us, but others as well.

1: 8 וַיֹּאמְרוּ⁴⁰ אֵלָיו : הֲגִידָה⁴¹ נָא לָנוּ
 בְּאֲשֶׁר לָמִי הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ? מֶה
 מְלַאכְתֶּךָ וּמֵאֵין תָּבוֹא⁴² מָה אֶרְצְךָ
 וְאִי מְזֵה עִם אֶתָּה.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 8 And they said to him, “Please make known to us / on whose account this evil *came* to us! What’s your occupation? / And from where do you come? What’s your country, and where are your people in it?”

KJV 8 Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, / for whose cause this evil *is* upon us; What is thine occupation”? / and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what X people *art* thou?

ASV 8 Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, / for whose cause this evil *is* upon us; what is thine occupation? / and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what X people art thou?

VERBALS

40. Qal Impf. 3mp +vav cons., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *M.V.*

41. Hiph. Imptv. ms from נגד (Pe Nun) “conspicuous” *M.V. of Direct Discourse*

42. Qal Impf. 2ms from בא (Ayin Vav, Lamed Aleph) “go” *M.V. of Direct Discourse*

COMMENTARY

It’s possible that this repetition of the sailors’ question of who is at fault after the casting of the lot is a gloss, not in the original Hebrew text, but even if it is, it’s in order, since the sailors want to hear a confession from Jonah’s own mouth (K&D 394).

The sailors are firing questions at Jonah now that the lot has given them someone to concentrate on. The word which the NAV, KJV, and ASV translate “tell” doesn’t just mean to

speak, but rather to reveal something and make it understood (usually through verbal communication). It may be that they didn't expect Jonah to know exactly what was going on with the unpredictable gods, but rather were just trying to ask some questions to diagnose the problem. Goldman expounds on "occupation" as "the business that brings you on this ship" (Son. 140). Perhaps they thought he was involved in some crime or was from some family cursed by the gods...

It is also interesting to note the distinction the sailors make between Jonah's homeland and his people. The last question could be literally rendered "where in this [land are] people of you?" All too often Americans disregard this distinction, not realizing that there are multiple people groups with distinct languages, dress, customs, etc. in any given country. This is an important principle, however, in mission work – if one church is established in a certain country, we cannot consider the entire country reached, because there may be very different people groups who will never be touched, humanly speaking, by that church because the church is composed of only one of the many different people groups.

1: 9 וַיֹּאמֶר⁴³ אֵלֵיהֶם : עִבְרִי אָנֹכִי,
וְאֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲנִי יִרָא⁴⁴
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה⁴⁵ אֶת הַיָּם וְאֶת הַיַּבְשָׁה.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 9 And he said⁴³ to them, “I am a Hebrew, / and I fear⁴⁴ Jehovah, the god of the heavens / who made⁴⁵ the sea and the dry land.”

KJV 9 And he said unto them, I *am* a Hebrew; / and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, / which hath made the sea and the dry *land*.

ASV 9 And he said unto them, I am a Hebrew; / and I fear Jehovah, the God of heaven, / who hath made the sea and the dry land.

VERBALS

43. Qal Impf. 3ms + v.c., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *M.V.*

44. Qal Act. Ptc. ms, from ירא (Pe Yod, Lamed Aleph) “fear” *M.V. of Dir. Disc.*

45. Qal Perf 3ms, from השע (Pe Gut., Lamed He) “make” *Direct Discourse, Rel. Adj.*

COMMENTARY

Jonah cuts to the heart of the matter, not getting off on his occupation and everything, but answering their fourth question and proceeding to answer a question they did not ask, namely who his god was!

The word “Hebrew” means “one from beyond.” The Jews didn’t seem to use it much themselves, but it identified them to foreigners. It may refer to Abraham’s initial migration from one side of the fertile crescent to the other. (AZ, Son. 140)

Even when he had been caught in sin, Jonah did the right thing, and that was to tell them the truth about God. He starts with the concept of God as the Creator. This is also where the apostles

start in the N.T. when they are witnessing, and it is where we should start, too. And we must not be intimidated by evolutionists into hedging on this point! Just like Christians, Evolutionists hold to a religious faith which is not scientifically provable. Christians believe that there is a God who created, and evolutionists believe that the world created itself. Neither assumption can be scientifically proven, so we should not be embarrassed to proclaim that God created the world. The value of establishing the supremacy of God from creation is great, because when a person becomes a Christian, they have to face a lot of scary circumstances, and having the assurance of a totally sovereign God is the greatest reassurance! (NAW, Urban 32).

The word for Jehovah/the LORD is in an emphatic position in the Hebrew text here. Jonah puts it early in his sentence rather than later on, where a direct object would normally go. He is focusing on God so that the sailors can't miss the point.

“I fear Jehovah” The word is literally “fear” rather than “worship,” but a healthy fear of God is essential for worshiping God properly! It is also an active participle indicating continuing action – fearing/ worshipping God is not just a Sunday morning activity but should permeate every hour of every day! Jonah still has this regard for God despite his disobedience, so he hasn't gone totally apostate – there's hope for him!

APPLICATION

- ◆ Let us tell people about our God who created the whole world rather than carrying on small talk with unbelievers!
- ◆ The sailors “feared” God, Jonah says he “fears” God... do you fear God?

10:1 וַיִּירָאוּ⁴⁶ הָאֲנָשִׁים יְרָאָה גְדוֹלָה,
 וַיֹּאמְרוּ⁴⁷ אֵלָיו: מַה זֶּאת עָשִׂיתָ⁴⁸,
 כִּי יָדְעוּ⁴⁹ הָאֲנָשִׁים כִּי מִלְּפָנַי יְהוָה
 הוּא בָרַח⁵⁰, כִּי הִגִּיד⁵¹ לָהֶם.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 10 Now the men feared⁴⁶ with a great fear and said⁴⁷ to him, / “What is this you’ve done⁴⁸??” For the men knew⁴⁹ / that he was fleeing⁵⁰ from the presence of Jehovah because he had made *it* known⁵¹ to them.

KJV 10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him. // Why hast thou done this? For the men knew / that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told X them.

ASV 10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, / What is this that thou hast done? For the men knew / that he was fleeing from the presence of Jehovah, because he had told X them.

VERBALS

46. Qal Impf. 3mp +v.c., from ירא (Pe Yod, Lamed Aleph) “fear” *M.V.*

47. Qal Impf. 3mp + v.c., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *M.V.*

48. Qal Perf. 2ms, from עשית (Pe Gut., Lamed Aleph) *Direct Discourse Pred. Nom.?*

49. Qal Pf. 3mp, from ידע (Pe Yod, Lamed Gut.) “know” *Causal*

50. Qal Act. Ptc. ms, from ברח (Lamed Gut.) “flee” *D.O.*

51. Hiph. Pf. 3ms, from הגיד (Pe Nun) “conspicuous” *Causal*

COMMENTARY

It would be hard to find a more intense way in Hebrew to describe how afraid the sailors were at this point. They were “scared spitless!” Whether Jonah had just told them now that he was running from God (as the L.B. states) or whether he had told them when he boarded the ship at the beginning of the

journey, the Bible doesn't state clearly, but Keil states pretty emphatically that it was NOT when he embarked on the ship (K&D 395).

The sailors' fear of a storm on the sea was now compounded by fear of an unknown god who was very powerful and was now very angry at them! The sailors were justifiably angry at Jonah now that they knew he had disobeyed this God and brought calamity upon the whole crew! Goldberg says that the quote "What is this that you have done?" is not a question but rather an exclamation of horror (Son. 140/K&D 395). They were beginning to realize that this God was more than just the personal god of one of the passengers but was a very great God that everyone was going to have to deal with!

APPLICATION

- ◆ Sin will ultimately be exposed. We must choose the path of obedience no matter what the cost to avoid this.
- ◆ When confronted with your sin, tell the truth, just like Jonah did.

1: 11 וַיֹּאמְרוּ⁵² אֵלָיו :
 מִה נַעֲשֶׂה⁵³ לָךְ וַיִּשְׁתַּק⁵⁴ הַיָּם מֵעַלֵינוּ,
 כִּי הַיָּם הוֹלֵךְ⁵⁵ וְסֹעֵר⁵⁶ .

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 11 And they said⁵² to him, “What *shall* we do⁵³ to you in order / that the sea may cease⁵⁴ from *tossing* us up, for the sea is rolling⁵⁵ and storming⁵⁶!”

KJV 11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, / that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

ASV 11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, / that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea grew more and more tempestuous.

VERBALS

52. Qal Impf., 3mp + v.c., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *M.V.*

53. Qal Impf., 1cp, from השע (Pe Gut., Lamed He) “do” *M.V.*
of Direct Discourse

54. Qal Impf., 3ms + vav, from תקש (strong) “be silent/quiet”
Purpose

55. Qal act. ptc., ms, from הלך (Pe Gut.) “go” *Explanatory*

56. Qal act. ptc., ms + vav conjunction, from סער (Ayin Gut.)
 “storm, move violently or quickly” *Explanatory*

COMMENTARY

Right now the sailors aren’t so concerned about who this God is; they just want to save their skins. Since the word which the KJV and ASV translated “unto” literally means “from up,” I translated that phrase using a “from” and an “up” rather than going with tradition.

The phrase describing the storm at sea at the end of this verse could literally be translated “the sea was going and moving violently.” The general consensus among translators is that these two participles linked together indicate progression, thus

the ASV inserts the words “more and more” although the word “more” is not literally in the Hebrew text. Whether this phrase about the sea getting stormier is part of the quote or is a parenthesis from the storyteller is hard to tell – Most translators go for the latter, but I went for the former, since it is a dialogue using direct quotes from Jonah and the sailors in these verses.

God is using this natural disaster to reveal Himself to them, as He often does in natural disasters. What a humbling thing for these salty-dog sailors to have to ask advice from Jonah, a land-lubber, on how to deal with a storm at sea! This humility was the next step in God’s dealing with those pagan sailors to bring them into a confrontation with Himself. The sailors assume they will have to do something to Jonah to appease God – maybe even kill him – but they’re uncertain.

1: 12 וַיֹּאמֶר⁵⁷ אֲלֵיהֶם :
 שְׂאוּנִי⁵⁸ וְהִטִּילְנִי⁵⁹ אֶל הַיָּם
 וַיִּשְׁתַּק⁶⁰ הַיָּם מֵעֲלֵיכֶם, כִּי יוֹדַע⁶¹ אָנִי
 כִּי בְשָׁלִי הַסַּעַר הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה עָלֵיכֶם.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 12 So he said⁵⁷ to them, “Pick me up⁵⁸ and throw me⁵⁹ into the sea, / that the sea may cease⁶⁰ from *tossing* you up, for I know⁶¹ that *it is* on my account that / this great storm *came* upon you.”

KJV 12 And he said unto them, Take me 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.

ASV 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.

VERBALS

57. Qal Impf., 3ms + vav con., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *M.V.*

58. Qal Imptv., m.p. + 1cs, from אָשׁוּ (Pe Nun, Lamed Aleph) “lift/carry/take” *M.V. of Direct Discourse*

59. Hiph. Imptv., m.p. + vav conj., from טִיל (Ayin Vav) “hurl, cast” *M.V. of Direct Discourse*

60. Qal Impf., 3ms + vav, from תקַשׁ (strong) “be silent/quiet” *Purpose*

61. Qal act. ptc., from יָדַע (Pe Yod, Lamed Gut.) “know, learn” *Causal/Explan.*

COMMENTARY

Jonah may not at first have realized that the storm was God’s judgment on him. Storms just happen at sea sometimes, right? It may not have been until the lot fingered him that he “put two and two together” and realized that this was God’s punishment for disobeying. It is in this verse that Jonah first admits that he is the cause of it all. When he says, “I know that it is on my

account,” the words could also be accurately translated “I am realizing that it is on my account...” It’s possible that since Jonah was a prophet, God had already revealed all this to him, but I prefer to look at Jonah as a man struggling with God and having the realization of God’s chastisement dawning on him as he is in this big mess. This makes it much easier for me to relate to Jonah in my circumstances, since I am often clueless about what God is doing in my life!

Jonah gives the sailors something to do to him all right – throw him into the sea! Where did Jonah come up with this idea? Did God tell him to say this? The Bible doesn’t say exactly, but I’m guessing that this was not God’s idea (Keil agrees – K&D 396). Jonah had the option to repent by asking God to forgive his rebellion and purposing to go to Nineveh. Had Jonah taken this option, God would probably have stopped the storm, and Jonah would have had time to further teach the sailors about God’s ways before taking his leave of them. But that’s not what Jonah did; he was stubbornly ignoring God’s rebuke and was seeking to be thrown into the sea simply to distance himself from the sailors so they wouldn’t get hurt. He may have been thinking that it would better to die by drowning in the sea than for him to obey God and go to Nineveh.

My postulation of Jonah still being unrepentant should be taken with a grain of salt. Other commentators see this as the beginning of Jonah’s turnaround. Keil says that Jonah, realizing the wrath of God against sin, announces that he should be thrown overboard because he realizes that his punishment for disobeying God should be death (K&D 396). Fernando paints Jonah in nobler strokes, as one who realized he must give up his life in order to save his fellow men – Hailey even compares Jonah to Jesus in this aspect.

APPLICATION

◆ We should respond to God’s chastisement by recognizing it as God’s coaching and by repenting rather than by being un-sensitive to God and stubborn like Jonah!

13: 1 וַיַּחֲתְרוּ⁶² הָאֲנָשִׁים לְהָשִׁיב⁶³ אֶל
הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ⁶⁴, כִּי הָיָה הַיָּם הוֹלֵךְ⁶⁵
וְסֹעֵר⁶⁶ עֲלֵיהֶם.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 13 But the men rowed⁶² to return⁶³ to the land, / yet they could⁶⁴ not, for the sea was rolling⁶⁵ and storming⁶⁶ against them.

KJV 13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring *it* to the land; / but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

ASV 13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to get them back to the land; / but they could not: for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

VERBALS

62. Qal Impf., 3mp + v.c., from חתר (Pe Gut.) “break into, dig, row” *M.V.*

63. Hiph. Inf. Const. + Lamed, from ובש (Ayin Vav) “turn back, return” *Purpose*

64. Qal Pf., 3cp, from יכל (Pe Yod) “able to, could” *M.V.*

65. Qal act. ptc., ms, from הלך (Pe Gut.) “go” *Explanatory*

66. Qal act. ptc., ms + vav conjunction, from סער (Ayin Gut.) “storm, move violently or quickly” *Explanatory*

COMMENTARY

The word for “row” here has to do with breaking into or through the surface of something, hence the description of digging into the ocean with oars. I would like to know why all the main English translations have the adverb “hard” to describe the intensity of the sailor’s rowing; the word simply isn’t in the Hebrew text. (The Jews translate it “row hard” – Son. 141, and Keil says that this is not the normal word for “row” – K&D 396.) I can, however, explain the differences in the phrase about the sailor’s intent to row to the land: The Hebrew here literally says “to cause to return to the land.” Obviously, by rowing, they were trying to cause the ship and the crew to re-

turn to land, but the text doesn't actually have the word "ship" or any such object. That's why the older versions insert an object (it/them) but the newer ones don't insert an object at the expense of lessening the sense of causality which is in the verb.

The sailors asked Jonah what to do, and Jonah told them what to do, but the men decided they didn't like that idea. They were sensible enough to not kill a man just because it was storming. Perhaps they saw through Jonah – that he was wanting to die rather than to obey God, and they knew it wouldn't be right to drown him just because he wanted to die. (Dr. Kevorkian, take notes!) It would be stretching things a bit, in my opinion, but perhaps the sailors were even impressed by Jonah's courage and self-sacrifice and wanted to do all they could to save him (Hailey 40). Whatever the case, the sailors did a sensible thing to try to take Jonah to the nearest shore so he could obey his God and go to Nineveh. Goldman notes that ships in those days normally sailed close to the coast, so the ship probably wasn't all too far from land (Son. 141).

There was, however, one problem with this plan: they couldn't row to shore in a storm that bad! Perhaps it was God's plan after all that Jonah be thrown into the sea. Perhaps God didn't feel like he had shaken Jonah up enough – maybe Jonah wouldn't have the resolve he would need if he was just let off at the nearest port. Fernando states that this would have been too much of a shortcut to repentance, for Jonah needed to face up to the full implication of His sin (Urban 34).

The Bible doesn't say what God was thinking at this point, and it doesn't say where Jonah got his idea from, but the circumstances designed by the sovereign God prevented what seemed to be the most reasonable course of action to the sailors (and to me as well). The sailors would now have to give in to Jonah's unreasonable wish to be thrown overboard.

APPLICATION

- ◆ Sin is very serious and nothing to be trifled with. Often we can't make a shortcut for grace around the consequences of sin.
- ◆ God's ways are not our ways. Are we trying to live our lives according to our own reasoning, or are we willing to obey God even when His word tells us to do things which we can't understand by human reason?

14: 1 וַיִּקְרְאוּ⁶⁷ אֶל יְהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ⁶⁸ :
 אָנָּה יְהוָה, אֵל נָא נֹאבְדָה⁶⁹ בְּנַפְשׁ הָאִישׁ
 הַזֶּה, וְאַל תִּתֵּן⁷⁰ עָלֵינוּ דָם נָקִיא, כִּי
 אַתָּה יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר חִפַּצְתָּ⁷¹ עֲשִׂיתָ⁷² .

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 14 So they called⁶⁷ to Jehovah and said⁶⁸, “O please, Jehovah, / don’t let us die⁶⁹ with this man’s life, / and do not put⁷⁰ innocent blood upon us, / for you, Jehovah, have done⁷² as you pleased⁷¹ .”

KJV 14 Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, / we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man’s life, / and lay not upon us innocent blood: / for thou; O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.

ASV 14 Wherefore they cried unto Jehovah, and said, We beseech thee, O Jehovah, / we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man’s life, / and lay not upon us innocent blood; / for thou, O Jehovah, hast done as it pleased thee.

VERBALS

67. Qal Impf. 3mp + v.c., from קרא (Lamed Aleph) “call” *M.V.*

68. Qal Impf. 3mp + v.c., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *Id. Act.*

69. Qal Impf. 1cp, + Cohortative He, from אבד (Pe Aleph) “perish” *M.V. of dir. Disc.*

70. Qal Impf. 2ms, from נתן (Pe Nun) “give” *M.V. of Dir. Disc.*

71. Qal Perf. 2ms, from חפצ (Pe Gut.) “bend, incline, favorably disposed, please, delight, value” *Comparative*

72. Qal Perf 2ms, from השע (Pe Gut, Lamed He) “make, do” *Explan./Causal?*

COMMENTARY

ANNAH could be translated “Oh please;” it is a strong particle of entreaty. These sailors are desperate; God has them where He wants them!

There is another Hebrew word used in the book of Jonah for “on account of,” but the word here is normally translated “in” or “with” and it’s perfectly understandable that they are simply asking God not to kill them along with Jonah. The other English translations are right, however, in giving the connotation of guilt for killing Jonah (NAW, Son. 141, K&D 397). It’s hard to translate literally and give this connotation, but it’s there. It is interesting to note the difference between these pagan sailors, who cried to God NOT to hold them guilty as they threw Jonah supposedly to his death, and the Jews of Israel in Matt. 27:25, who cried, “His blood be on us and our children,” when they crucified Jesus!

The sailors are struggling to comprehend this new god. They don’t really understand Him, and they certainly don’t want to offend Him more by killing one of His people! They’re unsure what this God really wants, but they want to appease Him. This concept of incomprehensible fate was quite familiar to the pagan mind – they didn’t understand the ways of any of the gods, but one thing they did know, and that was that it was important to appease the gods. Thus they say of God, “as you please, you do!” Keil takes this further, however, stating that this means that the sailors are saying, “inasmuch as, by sending the storm and determining the lot, Thou hast foreordained that we must cast him into the sea as guilty, in order to expiate Thy wrath” (K&D 397).

APPLICATION

◆ Are we aware of any “seekers” who are beginning to understand some things about God and need to be assured of how to be in right relationship with Him? Let us not leave them hanging like Jonah did!

1: 15 וַיִּשְׂאוּ⁷³ אֶת יוֹנָה וַיִּטְּלוּהוּ⁷⁴.
 אֶל הַיָּם, וַיַּעֲמֵד⁷⁵ הַיָּם מִזְעִפּוֹ.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 15 Then they picked up⁷³ Jonah and hurled⁷⁴ him into the sea... / and the sea stopped⁷⁵ from its rage.

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

ASV 15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea; / and the sea ceased from its raging.

VERBALS

73. Qal Impf. 3mp + v.c., from אָשַׁן (Pe Nun, Lamed Aleph) “lift up” *M.V.*

74. Hiph. Impf. 3mp + v.c. + 3ms dir. obj., from טָוַל (Ayin Vav) “hurl” *M.V.*

75. Qal Impf. 3ms, + v.c., from עָמַד (Pe Gut.) “stand [still], stop, stay” *Result*

COMMENTARY

Tossing Jonah overboard is just what God wanted, so God responds by stopping the storm. The sea is personified here, as though it was emotionally angry and then suddenly stood still, no longer in a rage.

APPLICATION

◆ God has the power not only to create a storm, but also to still it!

1: 16 וַיִּירָאוּ⁷⁶ הָאֲנָשִׁים יְרָאָה גְדוֹלָה
 אֶת יְהוָה, וַיִּזְבְּחוּ⁷⁷ זֶבַח לַיהוָה,
 וַיִּדְרוּ⁷⁸ נְדָרִים.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 16 Well, the men feared⁷⁶ Jehovah *with* a great fear, / so they offered⁷⁷ a sacrifice to Jehovah and they vowed⁷⁸ vows!

KJV 16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, / and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

ASV 16 Then the men feared Jehovah exceedingly; / and they offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows.

VERBALS

76. Qal Impf. 3mp + v.c., from ירא (Pe Yod, Lamed Aleph) “fear” *M.V.*

77. Qal Impf. 3mp + v.c., from זבח (Lamed Gut.) “sacrifice” *Result*

78. Qal Impf. 3mp + v.c., from נדר (Pe Nun) “vow” *Result*

COMMENTARY

Imagine Jonah floating a little ways from the boat, watching as this change comes over the raging sea and then straining to see the sailors in the boat as a holy terror comes over them and they feverishly make preparations to offer animal sacrifices to this God who has such awesome control over the sea upon which they sail!

What about the vows? BDB says that this word typically meant either a commitment to personal service or a promised gift. Goldman quotes Jewish sources as saying that the sailors “offered a sacrifice when they returned to land and made vows to give charity to the poor,” or that they “vowed to convert to the worship of Israel’s God” (Son.142). The vow was generally a voluntary thing offered to God, not imposed by God, but God held people strictly accountable to fulfill their vows (Unger). It was also a common practice among the pagans to promise something in return for a favor from a god.

Does this mean that the sailors were converted? It sounds like it, but we don't know for certain. The Greeks had a story about a poet named Arion who lived during Jonah's time period. ("Arion" could have the same meaning in Greek as Jonah does in Hebrew, and Jonah could indeed be called a poet because his prayer is a great work of poetry.) The story goes that this man, Arion, was sailing across the Mediterranean and ran into trouble, went overboard and was carried safely to land by fish as a result of praying to his god. The similarities are striking, yet if this Greek story speaks of Jonah, the differences raise questions as to whether the sailors (or the Greek storytellers) got the point, for the story says that Arion was voyaging home from a music competition in Corinth, and that he jumped overboard because the sailors were trying to steal the award he got in the competition, and it credits Apollo for sending a school of dolphins to carry the man to land. Maybe there's no connection with Jonah... or maybe it *is* about Jonah, but the story got garbled by pagan minstrels who heard the story from the sailors; or maybe the sailors themselves didn't really get converted. I think we'll have to look up those sailors when we get to heaven to resolve this one.

APPLICATION

- ◆ God WILL bring glory to Himself from the nations, just as He brought these pagan sailors to the point of making vows to Him!
- ◆ Do we fear God as much as those sailors did?

Chapter 2

1: 2 וַיִּמַן¹ יְהוָה דָּג גָּדוֹל לְבָלַע² אֶת יוֹנָה
וַיְהִי³ יוֹנָה בְּמֵעֵי הַדָּג שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים
וּשְׁלֹשָׁה לַיְלוֹת.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 1 Now Jehovah appointed¹ a great fish to swallow up² Jonah / And Jonah was³ in the innards of the fish three days and three nights.

KJV 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.

ASV 17 And Jehovah prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah; / and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

VERBALS

1. Piel Impf., 3ms + v.c., from מנה (Lamed He) “count, reckon, assign, appoint, ordain” *M.V.*
2. Qal Inf. const., + Lamed prep., from בלע (Lamed Gut.) “swallow (up/down), engulf (quickly, suddenly)” *Purpose?/Compliment*
3. Qal Impf., 3ms + vav consecutive, from היה (All weak) “be, exist, happen, come to pass” *M.V./Temporal*

COMMENTARY

At this point, we have a discrepancy between the verse numbers in the Hebrew Bible and the verse numbers in the English Bible. The Jews put everything about the fish in one chapter (2), while the English have one verse about the fish at the end of ch.1. In the verses that follow, I'll go by the verse numbers in the Hebrew text, but will also indicate the English Bible verse numbers.

God's sovereignty is the focus in this verse, as it says God "appointed" this fish. It is an intense verb which seems more proactive than "prepare" or "provide," in the sense of God's sovereignty over this fish to choose it and use it. Goldman, however, prefers the word "prepared" because of the sense that God had worked to get it ready for just this occasion (Soncino 142).

The "innards" is the generic word for whatever is inside the body, not even necessarily within the abdomen (as "belly" implies – there is another word for the abdomen used in v.3). In like manner, "fish" is the common word for fish – the same as what fishermen catch, so it doesn't seem to be a special descriptor word. Unger (704) says, "The species of marine animal is not defined, and the Greek *ketos* is often used to specify not the genus whale but any large fish or sea monster... Since the days of Bochart it has been a common opinion that the fish was of the shark species, *Lami canis carcharias*, or 'sea dog.' Entire human bodies have been found in some fish of this kind." To the shark theory, Goldman adds the possibility of a sperm whale as being capable of swallowing a man whole (Soncino 142), but Keil says whales are rare in the Mediterranean and opts for one of the common species of large sharks. "*Squalus carcharias*... reaches... the length of 25 feet..., and has about 400 lance-shaped teeth in its jaw, arranged in six rows, which the animal can either elevate or depress... It is common in the Mediterranean, where it generally remains in deep water, and is very voracious, swallowing everything that comes in its way... it sometimes gets into the fishermen's net on the coast of Sardinia, and is caught. As many as a dozen undigested tunny-fish have been found in a shark weighing three or four hundredweight; in one a whole horse was found, and its weight was estimated at 1500 hundredweight... [I]n the year 1758, a sailor fell overboard from a frigate, in very stormy weather, into the Mediterranean Sea, and was immediately taken in to the jaws of a sea-dog (*carcharias*), and disappeared. The captain, however, ordered a gun, which was standing on the deck, to be discharged at the shark, and the cannon-ball struck it, so that it vomited up again the sailor that it had swallowed, who was then taken up alive, and very little hurt, into the boat..." (K&D 398).

A lot of time could be taken up discussing this fish, but that would only distract us from the point that whatever this fish was, it was an instrument under God's sovereign control to accomplish His perfect will. God could have used a piece of driftwood to transport Jonah back to land, but He used this great fish to further show His sovereignty over all things in the sea – even the dreaded sea monsters! “God is more powerful than all of the forces of evil in the world, and he can use even the forces of evil to fulfill His purposes” (Urban 36).

Certain Jewish scholars note significance in the fact that it doesn't say, “and the fish swallowed Jonah,” but rather says “to swallow Jonah.” They say that the infinitive indicates that the fish didn't immediately swallow Jonah, but waited until he had sunk into the deep (Soncino 142).

Jesus focuses in on the "three days and three nights" theme in Matthew 12:40. He says that just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish (The word in the Greek text of Matthew is κητους), so the son of man would be in the earth three days and three nights. This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was crucified and buried. His stay in the tomb spanned three calendar days. (I'm not sure how to explain the three nights unless you count from the Thursday night of Passover, when he was arrested, to the Sunday of the resurrection.)

APPLICATION

◆ God has plans for us. If He appointed a fish for Jonah, can you even imagine what He has prepared for us?

2: 2 וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל⁴ יוֹנָה אֶל יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו מִמְעֵי הַדָּגָה.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 2 Then Jonah prayed⁴ to Jehovah his God from the inwards of the fish.

KJV 1 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD X out of the fish's belly;

ASV 1 Then Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his God out of the fish's belly.

VERBALS

4. Hitp. Impf., 3ms + v.c., from פלל (Double Ayin) Hitp: “pray” *M.V./ Result?*

COMMENTARY

Most of chapter 2 is a beautiful poetic prayer by Jonah. It borrows many lines from Davidic Psalms (no quotes from later Psalms). Since it is in the Perfect tense (roughly equivalent to our English Past tense: “you heard...you saved”), it is argued that he could not have prayed it from the belly of the fish, since he wasn’t actually delivered until later, when the fish deposited him onto land. However, this need not be so, for ancient Hebrew tenses did not necessarily indicate Past, Present, or Future, but more of a sense of whether the author looked upon it as incomplete, in process, or as a whole. Rabbi Ibn Ezra argued against the past-tense understanding of this prayer, maintaining that these verbs are to be understood as “prophetic perfects” - vivid anticipation of future deliverance (Son. 142). It could be further countered that Jonah saw God’s deliverance in being taken by the fish rather than being left to drown (most evangelical commentators assert this). At any rate, the Bible tells us he prayed this prayer from the belly of the fish, so I am not going to assume otherwise.

This is the first point in the book at which Jonah prays. He’s been running from God since the beginning, but now he is ready to talk to God again! In this predicament, there is no

where else he can turn for help! (NAW, Hailey 72) He is ready to call the Lord “his God” once again (K&D 399).

In the following verses, there are three cycles where Jonah’s predicament is described and his prayer to the Lord is given, these cycles follow approximately every other verse in ch. 2. According to Fernando, this follows a typical Psalm format with an introduction summarizing the occasion for praise (v.2-3), a description of the time of need (v.3-6), a report of deliverance (v.6-7), praise to God for His qualities (v.8-9), and a renewed vow to praise God (v.9) (Urban. 39ff).

APPLICATION

- ◆ Whatever circumstances you are in, pray to God!
- ◆ Memorize some Psalms, just as Jonah did; they will really help your prayer life!

2: 3 וַיֹּאמֶר⁵ קָרָאתִי⁶ מִצָּרָה לִי אֵל
 יְהוָה וַיַּעֲנֵנִי⁷ מִבֶּטֶן שְׁאוֹל שְׁוַעֲתִי⁸
 שָׁמַעַתָּ⁹ קוֹלִי.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 3 And he said⁵, “I called⁶ from my tight spot to Jehovah, and He answered⁷ me; / From the paunch of Sheol I shouted⁸ for help – You heeded⁹ my voice.

KJV 2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; / out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice

ASV 2 And he said, I called by reason of mine affliction unto Jehovah, And he answered me; / Out of the belly of Sheol cried I, And thou heardest my voice.

VERBALS

5. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “said” *M.V./Id. Act.*
6. Qal Pf., 3ms + 1cs, from קרא (Lamed Aleph) “call” *M.V. of dir. quote*
7. Qal Impf., 3ms + 1cs, from ענה (Pe Gut., Lamed He) “answer” *Result (Dir. Quote)*
8. Piel Pf., 1cs, from ועש (Lamed Gut) “cry out for help” *M.V. of quote (Parallel #6)*
9. Qal Pf. 2ms, from שמע (Lamed Gut.) “hear, heed” *Result, direct quote (Parallel #7)*

COMMENTARY

What follows is typical Hebrew poetry, marked by parallel statements rather than by the rhyming end-words typical of English Poetry. Often there is alliteration or plays on words in Hebrew poetry, but these devices are often lost because they are not easy to translate. The three main words in the second line of this couplet all start with “sh” in Hebrew, followed by a glottal stop [“uh”]. This appears to be a definite case of alliteration, so I tried to get a repetition of fricative blends and diphthongs in my translation “paunch... Sheol... shout.”

Jonah uses two parallel statements in this verse to describe the situation he's in. First, he calls it "my tight spot." The Hebrew word here literally has to do with crying out, being tied or bound up, tightness, squeezing, or being in a pinch, the meanings of "adversity," "distress," or "anguish" are derived from this. If you think of what it would be like to be squeezed inside the intestines of an animal, Jonah is in a tight spot both figuratively and literally, so I chose to depart from the figurative-only words which the standard English translations used.

Jonah goes on to describe his predicament in the second line literally as the "belly of Sheol." Sheol is the Biblical word for the place of the dead. It is not necessarily indicating whether the dead are in heaven or hell – more that they are in the "unseen/nether" world (NAW, Hailey 72, K&D 400). Modern English translators use the word "death" rather than the transliteration "Sheol." The word for "belly" is not the same one used in the previous verses, but means close to the same thing: Jonah is not in the mouth – half-in-half-out – no, he's right in the middle, totally engulfed in this place of death. O.K., maybe Jonah is exaggerating a little bit, since he's not actually dead, but, given the circumstances, we can easily forgive him! Those who believe Jonah to be the child brought back from the dead by Elijah say that Jonah is speaking of that experience of his childhood here, but I think this is a little far-fetched (Son. 143).

In the first couplet, Jonah quotes from Psalm 18:6 and 120:1 "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me" (K&D 381). Both of the words used for God's response are ACTIVE. God didn't just passively "hear;" rather He "answered" and "heeded," taking an active response to Jonah's prayer! When we pray to God, His response is not passivity ("Oh yes, I hear Johnny praying over there."); it is ACTION! Our physical eyes cannot see Him moving heaven and earth in answer to our prayers, so we are often deceived into thinking that God does not hear us or that He is not responsive. Perhaps we've prayed for something He does not want to give us. But believe it, Christian, God hears us whenever we pray, and He actively responds to our prayers.

APPLICATION

- ◆ God hears us when we pray, and His response is action!

2: 4 וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי¹⁰ מִצּוֹלָה בְּלִבַּב יַמַּיִם וַנְהַר
 יִסְבְּבֵנִי¹¹ כָּל מִשְׁפָּרֵיךְ וְגַלְיֶךָ עָלַי עָבְרוּ¹².

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 4 For You threw¹⁰ me *to* the deep – into the heart of the seas, and a current swirled around¹¹ me; / all Your breakers and Your waves went over¹² on me.

KJV 3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas and the floods compassed me about: / all thy billows and thy waves passed over me

ASV 3 For thou didst cast me into the depth, in the heart of the seas, And the flood was round about me; / All thy waves and thy billows passed over me.

VERBALS

10. Hiph. Impf., 2ms, לָדַשׁ (strong) “threw” *M.V.*

11. Pual Impf., 3fs + 1cs, from סָבַב (Strong) “turn about, surround, envelop” *Result/M.V.?*

12. Qal Pf., 3mp, from עָבַר (Pe. Gut.) “pass over” *M.V. see #10*

COMMENTARY

God’s sovereignty is still the focus, for it was GOD who threw Jonah in, and the elements of the sea are GOD’s breakers and waves! Jonah recognizes God’s sovereignty in causing the sailors to throw him in (K&D 400). The Hebrew words for “breakers” and “waves” have to do with shattering, heaping, and rolling – these are not gentle swells! (BDB) Jonah is overwhelmed by all the pounding and tumbling!

The word translated “flood” in most English versions is more commonly used in Hebrew to mean a stream or a river, so I like the NIV’s rendering “current,” which would indicate a river within the depths of the ocean (cf. BDB, Son. 143, K&D 400). There also seems to be some root play in the similarity of the Hebrew words for “heart” [“Lv”] and “swirled” [“Sv”], but I can’t think of a way to translate that into English.

I can't help but be reminded of a Psalm which uses the same words and phrases for "heart of the sea" and "current/river." In Psalm 46, David says that even though the mountains should fall into the heart of the sea, he will not fear, for God is his refuge and strength. The "river" in Psalm 46, however, rather than overwhelming a man, "makes glad the city of God." Do you think this Psalm was jerking through Jonah's head as he tumbled among the breakers? There is a more direct quote, however from Ps. 42:7 "all thy breakers and thy waves passed over me" (K&D 381).

Hailey brings out the point that "there are times when we must be made to go into the lowest depths that we may regain a living faith" (72).

APPLICATION

- ◆ When the storms of life are overwhelming, remember that God is in control – He put you there, and the waves belong to Him.

2: 5 וַאֲנִי אֶמְרָתִי¹³ נִגְרַשְׁתִּי¹⁴ מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ
 אֶךְ אוֹסִיף¹⁵ לְהִבִּיט¹⁶ אֶל הַיְכָל קֹדֶשְׁךָ.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 5 And I said¹³, “I have been driven away¹⁴ from before
 Your eyes, / but I will again¹⁵ look¹⁶ to Your holy temple.

KJV 4 Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; / yet I will look
 again toward thy holy temple.

ASV 4 And I said, I am cast out from before thine eyes; / Yet I
 will look again toward thy holy temple.

VERBALS

13. Qal Pf., 1cs, from אמר (Pe Aleph) “said” *M.V.*

14. Niph. Pf. 1cs, from גרש (strong) “be driven/cast away”
M.V. of Dir. Quote

15. Hiph. Impf. 1cs, from יסף (Pe Yod) “do again/more” *M.V.*
of Dir. Quote

16. Hiph. inf. const., from נבט (Pe Nun) Literally: “look,” Fig:
 “show regard, pay attention” *Compl.*

COMMENTARY

The focus switches from God in v.4 to Jonah here in v.5 – the verse begins with an emphatic “I.” The Hebrew text says literally, “driven away from before Your eyes,” but most English versions translate it idiomatically as being expelled from God’s “sight” – His protection and care (K&D 401). The parallelism in this verse is not as strong, but both halves of the verse center on *sight* – being cast from before God’s eyes/sight and looking with the eyes toward the temple.

Jonah has been trying to leave God’s presence (1:3), but he realizes now that it’s not such a desirable thing to be out of God’s sight! He has decided he doesn’t want to flee from God’s presence any more, and he is praying to God once again. When the Jews prayed, they faced in the direction of the temple in Jerusalem, as Solomon says in II Chron. 6:36-39. When Jonah looked to God’s holy temple, he was doing so in *prayer*. As he prays, more Psalms of David come to his lips: Psalm

31:22 “I am cut off from before thine eyes” and 5:8 “I will bow in reverence toward Thy holy temple” (NAW, K&D 381). He prays in faith that God really does hear and answer prayer. “True penitence is always rewarded by hope” (Hailey 73).

When we pray today, we don’t have to face in a particular direction – the temple has been destroyed, and God’s special presence is no longer there, but we can still carry on the principle of “looking to God’s holy temple” by keeping the figurative meaning of “paying attention to” God’s presence when we pray. We are praying to a real person in a real place when we pray. Simply repeating certain holy words in a certain order when you pray is a violation of this principle. Be real when you pray; pay attention to the God you are praying to!

There are people who turn their backs on God when they feel that God has failed them. This is not the thing to do. Jonah does the right thing; he seeks God all the more when it seems God has turned His back! The Hebrew words have the connotation that he has prayed before and he’s going to make himself do it one more time.

APPLICATION

- ◆ “Pay attention” to God’s presence when you pray.
- ◆ When it seems God has failed you, **KEEP PRAYING!**

2: 6 אֶפְפוּנִי¹⁷ מֵיִם עַד נַפְשׁ
 תְּהוֹם יִסְבְּבֵנִי¹⁸ סוּף חֲבוּשׁ¹⁹ לְרֹאשִׁי.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 6 Waters drowned¹⁷ me – even *my* life; the deep swirls about¹⁸ me. / Seaweed was wrapping¹⁹ around my head.

KJV 5 The waters compassed me about *even* to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

ASV 5 The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; The deep was round about me; / The weeds were wrapped about my head.

VERBALS

17. Qal Pf. 3cp + 1cs obj., from אָפֵף (Pe Aleph) “surround, encompass” *M.V. of Direct Quote*

18. Pual Impf., 3fs + 1cs, from סָבַב (Strong) “turn about, surround, envelop” *M.V. of Direct Quote*

19. Qal Psv. Ptc., ms, from שָׁבַב (Pe Gut) “bind, cling, wrap, wind” *M.V. of Direct Quote*

COMMENTARY

Jonah quotes Psalm 18:4 “The cords of death encompassed me and the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.” (K&D 381), but deepens the imagery of the water with repeated words for water and its actions (“depths... sea... current... breakers and waves” from v.4, now “waters... the deep...” and the two verbs here describing how the water was “swirling around,” “encompassing,” and “drowning.”) The word I translated “swirl around” is identical to the word in v.4 (English v.3). There seems to be a little alliteration between that word and the word immediately following it in the Hebrew text (“seaweed”) – both start with “s” and are followed by a fricative consonant. I chose the English words “swirl” and “seaweed” partly to preserve this little bit of alliteration with their repeated “sw” sounds.

The Hebrew phrase describing the extent to which the waters “drowned/ encompassed” Jonah is difficult. It could literally be

translated “until soul;” it’s easy to understand how different people would translate it differently, but the idea is that Jonah was drowning and dying.

In criticizing the book of Jonah, Wellhausen said, “weeds do not grow in a whale’s belly.” In the book’s defense, Young answered, “Of course weeds do not grow in a whale’s belly. It is rather a song of thanksgiving for deliverance from drowning. The figures of speech employed in this psalm have reference to drowning, not a whale’s belly...” (Unger 705) On the contrary, I’ve gutted enough fish to know that aquatic plants are about all that fish bellies ever contain, and the verb describing the seaweed’s “wrapping” is in the participial form, which generally indicates action *in progress*, so, although it seems odd that a song of deliverance should be sung from a fish’s belly, I will not contradict the statement of 2:1 that this prayer was prayed from the belly of the fish.

The word for “seaweed” is singular (not plural), and is the same as the word used for sea-grass or reeds that grew alongside the Red Sea and the rushes that grew along the Nile (BDB, K&D 402). Perhaps it could refer to any aquatic plant. The description of these weeds wrapping around Jonah’s head caps off a most vivid picture of the sickening plight of Jonah.

There is value in recalling and recording the depths of the misery you have experienced, just as Jonah did. This process should never be done in an effort to harbor bitterness, but Godly men of the Bible have often used it to contrast the difficult experiences with the marvels of God’s grace (Urban. 39-40).

APPLICATION

- ◆ Take time to remember what you were like (or what you would be like) without God’s salvation and praise God for His saving grace!

7: 2 לְקַצְבֵי הַרִים יֵרְדֹתִי²⁰
הָאָרֶץ בְּרַחֲמֶיהָ בְּעַדִי לְעוֹלָם
וַתַּעֲלֵנִי²¹ מִשַּׁחַת חַיִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 7 To the extremities of the mountains I went down²⁰; the earth's bars were behind me forever, / but You brought²¹ my life up from destruction, Jehovah, my God!

KJV 6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars *was* about me for ever: / yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.

ASV 6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed upon me for ever: / Yet hast thou brought up my life from the pit, O Jehovah my God.

VERBALS

20. Qal pf., 1cs, from ירד (Pe Yod), “went down” *M.V.*

21. Hiph. Impf., 2ms, from עלה (Pe Gut., Lamed He) “cause to go up” *M.V.*

COMMENTARY

Jonah links Verse 6 with verse 7 by carrying over a word with the same root meaning: the word for “seaweed” and the first word of this verse both have the root meaning of “end.” The poetry evokes powerful images of deep places – “the roots of the mountains” and “the bars of the earth.” The latter phrase is hard to translate; it could be literally translated “the earth, bars of her, behind me.” The Hebrew word for “bars” here has a root meaning of “straight through” which is applied to spears, ribs in a city wall, or cross-bars in a gate. It could perhaps refer to the structural girding of the earth deep at the bottom of the sea, or the water pressure that prevents the land from encroaching upon the sea (NAW, K&D 402), but BDB (and most English translators and commentators) prefer to interpret it in terms of Jonah standing “outside the gates,” as it were, feeling totally shut out from life on earth. The word translated “behind/ about/ upon” is generally used in the Bible to indicate separation from

something – you close the gates behind you/around you/upon your enemy, to separate yourself from them. Job 38:17 and Isa. 38:10 use similar phraseology to indicate being shut out of the land of the living by gates of Sheol (Son. 144). The L.B., although it does not carry over any of the original Hebrew words, conveys this concept well.

In the first half of the verse, Jonah “went down;” now in the second half, he is “brought up!” Jonah had been down to the bottom of the earth and locked out of the land of the living; he was facing certain “destruction/corruption/the pit/the grave” (BDB doesn’t mention “pit” as a translation for this word, but it is used by the Jews – Son. 144, and Keil 402 vouches for it.), but God rescued him. In this sense, Jonah was a “type” of Christ, who died and was raised again before his body saw “corruption” (Acts 2:25-32, 13:37).

APPLICATION

- ◆ God is all-powerful! He rescued Jonah from a watery death and He brought Jesus alive from the dead, so He is certainly powerful enough to save you, too!

2: 8 בְּהִתְעֵיטֹף²² עָלַי נִפְּשִׁי אֶת יְהוָה
 זָכַרְתִּי²³ וַתָּבוֹא²⁴ אֵלַיךָ תְּפִלָּתִי אֶל
 הַיְכָל קֹדְשְׁךָ.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 8 While my life was fading²² out over me, I remembered²³ Jehovah; so my prayer came²⁴ to You – to your holy temple.

KJV 7 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.

ASV 7 When my soul fainted within me, I remembered Jehovah; And my prayer came in unto thee, into thy holy temple.

VERBALS

22. Hitp. Inf. const. + temporal Bet, from עִטַּף (Pe Gut.) “faint”
Temp.

23. Qal Pf., 1cs, from זָכַר (strong) “remember” *M.V.*

24. Qal Impf., 3fs, from בּוֹא (Lamed Aleph, Ayin Vav), “go, come (in)” *M.V.* – *either Result or \#23*

COMMENTARY

This verse ends the third cycle of describing Jonah’s predicament and his turning in prayer to God. Jonah states once again that he was dying, but that he remembered God and prayed. The verb translated “fainting/fading” has to do literally with covering over oneself with darkness – Jonah was “sinking into the night of death” (K&D 403). The word “Jehovah” is in the emphatic position here, so I underlined it; Jonah remembered God, and Jehovah became the focus of his thoughts!

The last part of this verse is descriptive of the prayer. I am not going to take a dogmatic position on whether the preposition should be “toward” or “into” the temple. Verse 5 (English v.4) has stated that Jonah is praying while facing toward the temple, but the concept of tracing the path of the prayer as it goes into God’s presence is also biblical, for in Psalm 18:6 David says, “From His temple he heard my voice, my cry came up before

him, into his ears,” and the verb describing the motion of the prayer here in Jonah (“came/went”) can mean more than simply “going” but carries a connotation of “entering in.” The “holy temple” is not speaking of the physical temple building in Jerusalem, but of going into the presence of God in heaven. “The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord’s throne is in heaven...” Psalm 11:4 (Son. 144).

When we pray, our prayers never “bounce off the ceiling,” they always enter into God’s ears – whether we realize it or not. That’s one reason for the Commandment not “use the name of the Lord our God in vain” – Whenever anyone mentions God’s Name, God bends down to listen, and if He hears that the person was just cursing and was not really praying, it makes God angry. Sometimes, however, a desperate man or woman will call upon God with a sincere (though not very pious-sounding) prayer; God hears that too and welcomes it, just as he welcomed the cry of the wayward Jonah as he was in the throes of death (Urban. 41). Whenever we call on the name of the Lord, our prayer enters His presence and He hears it!

APPLICATION

- ◆ How often do *you* “remember” to pray?
- ◆ There is no such thing as a prayer God does not hear.

2: 9 מְשַׁמְרִים²⁵ הַבְּלִי שְׁוֹא
חֶסֶדָם יַעֲזֹבוּ.²⁶

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 9 Those who are paying regard²⁵ to vanities of evil shall forsake²⁶ their grace.

KJV 8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy

ASV 8 They that regard lying vanities Forsake their own mercy.

VERBALS

25. Piel Ptc., mp, from מָרַשׁ (strong) “keep, watch, preserve, paying regard to” *Subj.*

26. Qal Impf., 3mp, from עָזַב (Pe Gut.) “forsake” *M.V.*

COMMENTARY

Jonah pulls from Psalm 31:7 “I hate those that cling to worthless idols” (K&D 381), making a contrast between those who do not worship God and those who do. Those who pay regard to the vanities of evil are in stark contrast to those who pray to the true God. God will save the latter, but not the former.

There are a wide range of synonyms with which the words in this verse can be translated, so it is understandable that translators have come up with a wide variety of translations. It could be amplified as “Those who are paying regard to [clinging to/ intensively keeping] breaths [vanities/ vapors/ idols] of a lie [evil/ wickedness/ destruction/ vanity], they shall forsake [leave/ forfeit] their kindness [mercy/ grace].” I tried to translate this verse literally – all the other English translations make an adjective out of “lie/ evil/ vanity” but I kept it as a noun since it is a noun in Hebrew, and I also tried to reflect the intensiveness of the first word of the sentence (“pay regard to/cling to”) since the Hebrew uses an intensive verbal here.

Looking beyond the technical aspects to the meaning of the verse, I think that the NIV captures it best: “*Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.*” Perhaps Jonah was thinking back to the sailors on the boat and how

they were frantically praying to all their idols. By clinging to the vanities of their idols, the sailors almost drowned – they turned away from the grace that could have been theirs when they ignored Jonah and tried to row for land. All their idols were false gods – like a mist that disappears when the sun of truth rises.

The sailors, however weren't the only ones to cling to vanities like this, everyone today pays regard to something or other which is false and fleeting. I think of the fashions of clothes that we pay so much attention to and spend so much money on, but which go out of style so quickly. I think of philosophies and scientific theories and sporting events which make headlines in the magazines and consume people's thoughts... and then are forgotten a year later. Whatever time and money we spend on these sorts of things is WASTED time and money. Whatever regard we pay to these sorts of things impoverishes us of the Grace of the true and unchanging God.

I realize that this verse could be taken to mean that inasmuch as people pay attention to falsehood, they make themselves uncouth and lose their inherent goodness (and I suppose there is a grain of truth in this), but the Bible makes such a strong connection between grace/ lovingkindness (“chesed”) and God, that I think it is best to view the consequences in terms of distancing yourself from the grace of God. “Those who follow the emptiness and impotency of idolatry do so at the price of their only source of mercy and kindness” (Heil. 74). Even Jews concur on this, noting that David, in Ps. 144:2, calls God “my lovingkindness” (Son. 144). (c.f. K&D 403) When we cling to that which is false and fleeting – no matter how fascinating or popular or lucrative it is – we distract ourselves from the true source of goodness and grace: Jehovah God.

APPLICATION

- ◆ Are there any vain things that you are clinging to? Do you realize that they suppress the grace of God in your life?

10: 2 וַאֲנִי בְּקוֹל תּוֹדָה אֶזְבְּחָה לְךָ²⁷
 אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתִּי²⁸ אֲשַׁלְּמָה²⁹ יְשׁוּעָתָה לִיהוָה.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 10 But I will sacrifice²⁷ to You with a voice of thanksgiving; what I vowed²⁸, I will *fully* pay²⁹. Salvation *belongs* to Jehovah!

KJV 9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay *that* that I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the LORD.

ASV 9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation is of Jehovah.

VERBALS

27. Qal Impf., 1cs + paragoric He, from זָבַח (Strong) “Sacrifice” *M.V.*

28. Qal Pf., 1cs, from נָדַר (Pe Nun) “vow” *Rel. Cl. D.O.*

29. Piel Impf., 1cs + paragoric He, from שָׁלַם (Strong) “complete, finish, make safe, restore, pay, reward” *M.V. I#27*

COMMENTARY

The fact that God hears prayer and saves brings thanksgiving and praise to Jonah’s lips – just as it should do to ours! (K&D 403) This, however, isn’t necessarily a giddy excitement, but rather a decision made with the will to praise God. Often we don’t *feel* like worshipping God, but if we discipline our will to worship Him, the joyful emotions come in line. Jonah probably didn’t *feel* too great when he offered this prayer from the belly of the fish, but he offered it anyway because he *knew* the realities of God’s grace and salvation! (Urban. 42)

The comparison from the previous verse is completed here as Jonah commits himself – unlike the pagans who follow fleeting falsehoods – to follow the Biblical guidelines for worshipping Jehovah, the true God. The acts of worshipping God mentioned in this verse imply formal worship at the temple. The word for “thanksgiving” is generally used in the context of temple worship in the O.T., as are “sacrifices” and “vows.”

Private worship and prayer is good, but it must be complemented by public worship with the rest of the church.

There seems to be some significance in the fact that the words for “sacrifice,” “pay,” and “salvation” all have an extra Hebrew letter “H” tacked on to the end of them. I could think of no way to carry this into English, but there are two other words which receive even more emphasis, and I commend the NIV for bringing out both of these emphases. First is the word “I,” which begins the verse (hence my underlining) and emphasizes the contrast between “those who cling to vain idols” and Jonah as a follower of God. The second emphasis is given in the phrase “what I vowed.” The Bible makes a big deal of the importance of making good on whatever promises you make to the Lord (cf. Ecclesiastes 5:1-7). Jonah says, in effect, “I know I’ve made promises to You, Lord; I’m going to remember them and make sure every one of them is completely fulfilled.”

The word for “pay” carries more than the concept of transferring money; it means to make complete, whole, or good – that’s why I added the word “fully” to my translation, and it also explains the NIV’s translation “make good.” Jonah was not just going to make a show of goodwill by putting a little money down; he was going to be sure to pay in FULL. Because of the poetic structure of this passage, this concept of paying what was vowed is probably synonymous in meaning to the parallel phrase about sacrificing with thanksgiving in the first half of this verse. Perhaps Jonah’s vow was to offer God a Thanks Offering as per Leviticus 3:1-17 – a perfect male or female from the herd (livestock) or flock (sheep), plus unleavened bread given to the priest in the temple – as a “Thank You” note to God for saving him! We don’t offer animal sacrifices anymore, but it is perfectly legitimate to sacrifice something of value (time, food, money, supplies, labour), giving it to a church or Christian ministry out of thanks to God for His salvation. Psalm 50:23 (ASV) says, “Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me; And to him that ordereth his way aright Will I show the salvation of God” (K&D 381).

Jonah ends his prayer with the exclamation, “Salvation to Jehovah!” Grammatically, translators use a wide variety of prepositions (from, with, to, of) here. Theologically, we know that Jehovah specializes in saving us. Salvation is entirely His possession, because there’s nothing we can do to save ourselves. Technically the wording of this phrase doesn’t emphasize so much the fact that God saves US, but that salvation is a specialty of HIS. The focus is not on who was *saved*, but on who is the *Savior*. Jesus is our Savior (His very name is derived from the Hebrew word here meaning “salvation!”)

Some commentators mark this verse as the turning point in Jonah (Hail. 74, Son. 145) while others wonder if God ever did get through to him (Verkuyl 44). Maybe this was a “foxhole conversion,” but God is going to keep working on his man, Jonah!

APPLICATION

- ◆ Are you participating in praising God during church worship services, whether or not you feel like it?
- ◆ Are you seeking to abundantly fulfill all your promises to God? Do you make sacrifices to thank Him for His salvation?
- ◆ When you speak of your salvation, do you emphasize yourself as the recipient, or do you emphasize your Savior, Jesus?

11:2 וַיֹּאמֶר³⁰ יְהוָה לַדָּג וַיִּקְא³¹ אֶת
יוֹנָה אֶל הַיַּבֵּשָׁה.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 11 Then Jehovah spoke³⁰ to the fish, and it vomited³¹
Jonah to the dry land.

KJV 10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out
Jonah upon the dry *land*.

ASV 10 And Jehovah spake unto the fish, and it vomited out
Jonah upon the dry land.

VERBALS

30. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “said, spoke” *M.V.*

31. Hiph. Impf., 3ms, from קוא (Ayin Vav, Lamed Aleph)
“vomit, spit out” *Result*

COMMENTARY

Jonah could have said simply that the fish vomited him onto the beach and that he went back too Nineveh, but no, Jonah continues to emphasize God’s sovereignty in this story by saying that the fish spit Jonah toward land *as a result of a word from God*.

We are not told the details of where Jonah was spit up or of his journey to Nineveh. Such omission of detail may be frustrating to us as readers, but, Jonah apparently left them out because they did not contribute to the lesson of his book. (Hailey 74, NAW)

APPLICATION

- ◆ God is in control. He has perfect command of all the scary things that are beyond your control, just as He was over Jonah’s fish!

Chapter 3

1:3 וַיְהִי¹ דְבַר יְהוָה אֶל יוֹנָה שֵׁנִית
לְאמֹר².

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 1 And it was¹ the word of Jehovah to Jonah a second time to say²

KJV 1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying

ASV 1 And the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

VERBALS

1. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from היה (All weak) “be, exist, happen, come to pass” *Main Verb/temporal*
2. Qal Inf. const. + lamed, from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *Purpose/Identical Action*

COMMENTARY

God is patient with us. He doesn't have to repeat Himself; He doesn't have to give a second chance. Fernando reminds us that some other prophets in the Bible didn't get a second chance (Urban. 45) – they were dismissed from office or even killed! Yet here God gives a second chance to Jonah! “There is no remonstrance and no mention of Jonah's former call and flight. The Lord passes over this in gracious silence; the prophet had learned his lesson, and with this God is satisfied” (Hail.74)

APPLICATION

- ◆ Don't give up when you sin. Seek a second chance to obey God!
- ◆ Better still to obey the first time than run the risk of not getting a second chance!

2: 3 קוּם³ לֵךְ⁴ אֶל נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה
 וְקִרְא⁵ אֵלֶיָּהּ אֶת הַקְּרִיאָה
 אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי דֹבֵר⁶ אֵלֶיךָ.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 2 Get up³; go⁴ to Nineveh, the great city, / and announce⁵ to her the proclamation which I say⁶ to you.

KJV 2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, / and preach unto it the preaching that I bid X thee.

ASV 2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, / and preach unto it the preaching that I bid X thee.

VERBALS

3. Qal Imptv., ms, from מוּק (Ayin Vav) “Stand, arise” *M.V. of Direct Discourse*.
4. Qal Imptv., ms, from הֵלֵךְ (Pe Gut.) “go/walk” *M.V. of Direct Disc.*
5. Qal Imptv., ms + v.c., from קִרָּא (Lamed Aleph) “call, proclaim, cry out, read aloud, meet, encounter” *M.V. of Direct Disc.*
6. Qal act. ptc, ms, from דִּבֵּר (strong) “speak” *Rel. Adj. Clause*

COMMENTARY

The word for “announce/proclaim” is built from the same root word as the word for “proclamation/message,” thus the KJV, ASV, and NASV quite accurately use the same word in verbal form, then noun form, despite our modern aversion to using the same word twice!

We have the same three imperatives that were in 1:2, “Get up, Go... and “call/proclaim,” but this second time, it is a little different – Jonah is to proclaim a particular message this time that God either had already given him the first time ‘round, or which God gives him at that time – the participle “say/bid” may indicate an action in present time, but not necessarily. No mention of such a particular message was given the first time around in chapter one.

Jonah is to say exactly what God tells him to say now. “One of the tragedies of today – and of all time since the beginning of preaching – is that men are prone to substitute what their own wisdom dictates instead of preaching what God bids.” (Hail.75) I even see this trend in the Bible story books I read to my children – so few of them are really faithful to the Bible text! However, if we know God’s word, and are faithful to deliver it, we can have the CONFIDENCE that it is not *our* message; it is *God’s* own words, and He will be responsible to make it effective! “This is the real romance of missions,” says Fernando, “We take a message to created people from their Creator” (Urban. 47).

Why does God include mention of the greatness of the city of Nineveh in this repeated command? “It places emphasis on the immensity of the task... this wasn’t going to be an easy job. The Bible never downplays the difficult aspects of God’s call. Whether you follow Christ into the business world, or whether you’re going to the mission field, it’s going to be hard... John Calvin says that the reason that the character of the city was mentioned was that Jonah might gird up himself for the contest, so that he might not afterward fail in the middle of his course.” (Urban. 47)

APPLICATION

- ◆ God will give us the words to say when He calls upon us to exhort someone else.
- ◆ Are you ready to take on a “great city” for God?

3: 3 וַיִּקָּם⁷ יוֹנָה וַיֵּלֶךְ⁸ אֶל נִינְוֶה כְּדָבַר
 יְהוָה וְנִינְוֶה הָיְתָה⁹ עִיר גְּדוֹלָה
 לֵאלֹהִים מִהֵלֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 3 So Jonah got up⁷, and he went⁸ to Nineveh, according to the word of Jehovah. / Now Nineveh was⁹ a great city to God, a walk of three days.

KJV 3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. / Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

ASV 3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of Jehovah. / Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city, of three days' journey.

VERBALS

7. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from מָוַק (Ayin Vav) “stand/arise” *Result/M.V.*
8. Qal Impf., 3ms, from הָלַךְ (Pe Gut.) “go/walk” *M.V./Result?*
9. Qal Pf., 3fs, from הָיָה (all weak) “be/was” *M.V. of Explan. clause*

COMMENTARY

Now Jonah is finally on track! He’s going “according to the word of Jehovah!”

Where commentaries go hog-wild on this verse is with the two descriptive phrases concerning Nineveh: “a city great to God,” and “a going of three days” (to render the phrases absolutely literally). So we enter the fray:

Usually Hebrew will repeat the word a second time in a participle form to intensify it’s meaning, but apparently the phrase “great to God” is another way of making a superlative – something like “as great as the gods!” (cf. Son. 145) On the other hand, it could mean that it had great *value* in God’s estimation -

“should I not have concern for this great city?” - 4:11 (cf. K&D 404).

According to BDB, this phrase “going/walk/journey” is consistently used to measure distance in the Bible, such as the number of cubits in the temple of Ez.42, and the distance from Babylon to Jerusalem in Nehemiah 2:6. I have to agree that the NIV stretches things too far in talking about how long you have to visit. But in what way was Nineveh a 3-day journey? Did it only take that long to walk from wherever Jonah was spit out onto dry land? or from the border of Israel? Perhaps it was the amount of time it took to walk across the city (diameter)? or around the city (circumference)? Does this include neighboring towns or suburbs, as the LB indicates?

Nineveh was approximately 500 miles from Jonah’s hometown in Galilee, and still 300 miles from the nearest coastline where the fish could have spit him out. Three days of walking would only get a person 50 to 100 miles. So I think we can rule out the possibility that the “three day’s journey” is describing the time it took to walk TO Nineveh.

An ancient Roman author says Nineveh was about 12 miles in circumference (K&D 390), but it may have been even shorter, for “Excavations reveal that the wall of Nineveh was 8 miles in circumference [three miles in length and less than a mile-and-a-half in breadth] (Compare to Babylon at 11 miles...) and there was a suburban area outside the walls. It would not have taken more than about one day to walk around the urban area. [Should we therefore rule out the possibility that “three day’s walk” described the time it took to walk ACROSS or AROUND Nineveh? Perhaps not –] it would have taken three days to stop at all its significant squares and major buildings and proclaim the judgment of God... [and besides] the Hebrews... were in the habit of including other cities under the name Nineveh...” (Unger 750, 924) so the distance around the city could have been much more than 8 miles if you counted the suburbs.

Commentators, however, insist that it is a measurement of *diameter*, not circumference. “It is suggested by those who defend the historicity of the narrative that the satellite towns of Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, and Resen... are included in the measurement... in Genesis [10:11-12], the four towns together are called *the great city* (Son. 145-146). Even if it was only the smaller, central walled city, it could still have taken three days to wander up and down its streets. (K&D 405).

I think it is entirely plausible that the three day’s walk refers to the time it took to walk all around the city of Nineveh, proclaiming the message. Most of the Jews of this day had never seen a city this large, so Jonah took the extra time in his story to give some idea of the great size of this city.

APPLICATION

- ◆ Are you “going according to the word of the Lord?”
- ◆ Great cities are significant in God’s sight.

3: 4 וַיֵּחַל¹⁰ יוֹנָה לְבוֹא¹¹ בְּעִיר מִהַלָּךְ
 יוֹם אֶחָד וַיִּקְרָא¹² וַיֹּאמֶר¹³ עוֹד
 אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַיִּנְוֶה נְהִפֹּכֶת¹⁴ .

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 4 Then Jonah began¹⁰ to go¹¹ into the city a walk of one day, / and he called out¹² and said¹³ continuously, “Forty days and Nineveh is overturned¹⁴.”

KJV 4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, / and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

ASV 4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, / and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

VERBALS

10. Hiph. Impf., 3ms + v.c., from ללה “bore, pierce, profane, pollute” *M.V.*

11. Qal Inf. Const. + Lamed, from בוא (Ayin Vav, Lamed Aleph) “go” *Compl.*

12. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from קרא (Lamed Aleph) “call, preach” *M.V.*

13. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from אמר (Lamed Aleph) “speak, say” *Id. Act.*

14. Niph. Ptc., fs, from הפך (Pe Gut) “turn, overturn” *M.V. of Dir. Disc.*

COMMENTARY

The first word, which most English translations render “began/started,” literally has to do with boring a hole in something or introducing some kind of foreign matter into an environment. If it were not for the awkwardness of the wording, I’d go with the literal translation, “He penetrated to go into the city.” This adds some color to the story – Jonah was not just walking, He was penetrating into a new environment, infiltrating the city with a message from God!

The word for “one” here is not an ordinal, so it isn’t technically accurate to translate it “first.” The text leaves it ambiguous as to whether the events of the first day are going to be described (cf. K&D 405), or if Jonah spent the first day walking around before he began proclaiming the message on the second day. Niebuhr advocates for the latter, as he says that the circumference of the cluster of cities was “nearly ninety English miles... and this would be just three day’s travelling for a good walker on a long journey...” (Donald Robinson, Anglican Archbishop of Sydney says in the *New Bible Commentary* that it was more like 61 miles, but agrees that it was a good three-day’s journey - Urban 49). At any rate, Niebuhr goes on to say that Jonah would have “entered the city at Nineveh [and proceeded] from Nineveh to Calah [where the king’s citadel was]... he may well have walked twenty English miles, or a short day’s journey, before he preached” (K&D 406).

Although it was a three day’s journey to get all the way through the city, Jonah apparently only spent one day doing his prophetic business. As the Living Bible points out, the people responded right away, and Jonah doesn’t mention ever having to spend the other two days going through the rest of the city to preach. (He doesn’t have to go out the next day saying, “Now it’s only 39 days and Nineveh will be destroyed!”) In one day, the city of Nineveh is transformed!

I hope the reader can forgive me for taking a detour from the standard English translations in the placement of quote marks in this verse. The placement of the quotes determines whether Jonah is saying over and over again, “40 days...” or whether Jonah’s message is, “Yet 40 days...” The verbs for him speaking are repetitive “and he cried out and said,” and the primary meaning of the word translated “yet” by most English versions has rather to do with continuance or repetition. So I translated that word “continuously” and took it to describe the verbs concerning Jonah’s action of proclaiming this message. He said over and over again, “Fourty days and Nineveh is overturned!”

But wait, you say, that's the wrong message! God is LOVE, isn't he? Why didn't Jonah preach love? "Hebrews 6:2 says eternal judgment is one of the basic foundations of Christianity. The writer says we must build on that foundation, but I wonder if we've even laid it! ...[W]hen Paul preached to the Athenians, who were the most sophisticated audience he ever preached to, he preached about judgment (Acts 17:31)" - Urban.50. But "Warnings of this nature are conditional; this should be understood. A principle of divine sovereignty was later recorded by Jeremiah: when God speaks to destroy a nation, if that nation turns from its wickedness, God will repent of the evil He had determined against it... (Jer.18:7-10)" (Hail. 75) God is holy, and so we must speak of His judgment, but He is also gracious, and thus we can also speak of His love!

Maybe I'm off-base, but it seems that the word describing Nineveh's fate in 40 days is not describing fire and brimstone destruction, but rather a transition or change – something is going to be "turned around" – like maybe a coup d'état or something. Goldman concurs, adding that the concept of an "overturn" could carry both a positive and a negative dimension: "If they would not repent, it would be destroyed. But if they did repent, they would be "overturned," i.e. their hearts would change from evil to good" (Son. 146). So, whether there was a political changeover or a change of heart, God's word predicting a "turn-over" in 40 days would be true either way! But, whatever it was, this fate is considered "evil" in v.10, and is the sort of thing Jonah wants to see from a safe distance (4:5).

Can you imagine what this experience was like for Jonah? There he was in an utterly foreign country – among lifelong political enemies, wandering the streets of the biggest city in the world with this outrageous message from God. This was the adventure of a lifetime – maybe even the adventure that would end his life for sure. He survived the fish's belly, but he may not have been so sure he'd survive the streets of Nineveh after telling them they were about to be overthrown!

APPLICATION

- ◆ If God has burdened your heart to share a message, be brave, just as Jonah was, and share it!
- ◆ Balance God’s love with God’s judgment when you witness to others.

3: 5 וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ¹⁵ אַנְשֵׁי נִינְוָה בַּאֱלֹהִים
וַיִּקְרְאוּ¹⁶ צוֹם וַיִּלְבְּשׁוּ¹⁷ שָׂקִים
מִגְדוֹלָם וְעַד קְטָנִים.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 5 Well, the men of Nineveh believed¹⁵ in God, / so they proclaimed¹⁶ a fast and they dressed¹⁷ in sack-cloth, from their great even to their small.

KJV 5 So the people of Nineveh believed X God, / and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

ASV 5 And the people of Nineveh believed X God; / and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

VERBALS

15. Hiph. Impf., 3mp + v.c., from אָמַן (Pe Aleph) “confirm, support Hiph: trust, believe” *Result/M.V.*
16. Qal Impf., 3mp + v.c., from קָרָא (Lamed Aleph) “call, proclaim” *Result/M.V.*
17. Qal Impf., 3mp + v.c., from לָבַשׁ (strong) “put on” *Result/M.V.*

COMMENTARY

Hailey brings up the Luke 11:30 passage at this point, where Jesus said, “For even as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.” “Jesus’ resurrection from the dead would be the sign to His generation, and to all generations since. So Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh. This indicates that the report of the experience of

Jonah at sea, being swallowed by the fish and released on dry land, had preceded him to the great city... This would have a tremendous effect upon the people. The man who had been in 'Sheol' and had been raised as it were from the dead, would be a tremendous 'sign.'" (Hail. 76) Stories of other men who had been swallowed by fish report that their skin was bleached white and their hair was discolored. The very sight of Jonah after his stay in the fish may have gotten him an audience!

The beginning phrase of this verse could be hyper-literally translated "men of Nineveh caused support in god." This could be taken to mean that not all the Ninevites believed, but most of the men did (c.f. Son. 146). The verb for belief is interesting in that it comes from the causal form of the word for "confirm/support" – these men caused confirmation of this God by their action of belief – they decided to find God faithful and confirm that to other people. It's also interesting that the object of that faith is "Elohim/God" – not the "Jehovah" that has been the focus of Jonah to this point! Perhaps this is because Jonah may have tried to contextualize his message by using a common Semitic word for the great God rather than going into the minefield of naming an Israelite deity. When he was with the sailors, Jonah still had enough ethnocentric pride and God was working in mighty enough ways that he was happy to identify this deity as his hometown God, "Jehovah," but here in Nineveh, where he isn't so sure of himself, and where he is declaring a message from a God whose nation the Assyrians had conquered, and where Jonah is not sure that God is even going to show His power, he felt safer using a generic word for "god."

The people of Nineveh provide a tremendous example of repentance. They "believed," they "called a fast," and they all "wore sack-cloth." Sack-cloth is a rough, loosely-woven cloth used in making sacks. It looks very drab and is very uncomfortable. This is what people would wear when they were mourning. First, they believed – they took God at His word and trusted that He was telling the truth. Then their response was to deny themselves by fasting and wearing sack-cloth. Fasting is a

private sign to God that we prize Him over our physical sustenance. Wearing Sack-cloth is a *public* sign to show everyone that you are broken-hearted. Does this kind of behavior reflect the way we ourselves respond when we realize we need to get right with God? We say we believe in God, but do we REALLY believe everything in the Bible? We hear of revivals where people get excited and stay in church longer than usual, but I wonder if they would do better going home to mourn over their sins and fast... We need to be brokenhearted over our sins and make real changes in our lives rather than treat our offenses to God with offhandedness or even with temporary conviction.

“from their great even to their small” - Keil coincides with my translation and explains this to mean “both old and young, all without exception” (K&D 407). This was a prophet’s dream-come-true! How many prophets in Israel’s history ever saw such a tremendous response? And here it is happening among “goyim!” Can you imagine what it would be like if the mayor of New York City was able to successfully command every living soul in the whole city to fast and mourn for their sins? I can’t; it’s too unbelievable. But that’s the equivalent of what happened in Nineveh that day! It has happened since then. Check out the following article from the Denver Post, JANUARY 20, 1905:

“For two hours at midday all Denver was held in a spell ... The marts of trade were deserted between noon and two o’clock this afternoon, and all worldly affairs were forgotten, and the entire city was given over to meditation of higher things. The Spirit of the Almighty pervaded every nook. Going to and coming from the great meetings, the thousands of men and women radiated this Spirit which filled them, and the clear Colorado sunshine was made brighter by the reflected glow of the light of God shining from happy faces. Seldom has such a remarkable sight been witnessed – an entire great city, in the middle of a busy weekday, bowing

before the throne of heaven and asking and receiving the blessing of the King of the Universe.”

Do you think it could happen again? I pray that God would raise up modern-day “Jonahs” as His instruments to do it again!

APPLICATION

- ◆ We should repent from our sins by believing in God, fasting, and mourning.
- ◆ Pray for true revival to sweep our cities as it did Nineveh!

6: 3 וַיִּגַע¹⁸ הַדָּבָר אֶל מֶלֶךְ נִינְוָה
וַיָּקָם¹⁹ מִכִּסְאוֹ וַיַּעֲבֵר²⁰ אֶדְרָתוֹ
מֵעָלָיו וַיִּכֶס׃²¹ שֶׁק וַיֵּשֶׁב²² עַל הָאֵפֶר

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 6 And the word impacted¹⁸ the king of Nineveh, so he got up¹⁹ from his throne / and had his robe taken off²⁰ of him and put on²¹ sack-cloth, and he sat²² upon the ashes.

KJV 6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, / and he laid his robe from him, and covered *him* with sackcloth, and sat in X ashes.

ASV 6 And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, / and laid his robe from him, and covered *him* with sackcloth, and sat in X ashes.

VERBALS

18. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from נגע (Pe Nun, Lamed Gut.) “touch, reach, strike” *M.V.*
19. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from סוק (Ayin Vav) “stand, rise” *Result*
20. Hiph. Impf., 3ms + v.c. from עבר (Pe Gut.) “cause to pass over” *Result*
21. Piel Impf., 3ms + v.c., from כסה (Lamed He) “cover, clothe” *Result*
22. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from בשׁי (Pe Yod) “sit” *Result/M.V.*

COMMENTARY

Verses 6-8 are, I believe an expansion on what Jonah has told us briefly in v. 5 about fasting and putting on sackcloth. In this verse, and later in v.8, we see a little more detail about the wearing of the sackcloth:

I'd like to take issue with two of the verbs in this verse. English translations consistently render the first verb "came/reached," and I suppose that is not an illegitimate translation, but the Hebrew word has to do with physical impact, as in touching or hitting. There are other Hebrew verbs for "come" (as in 2:7/8, "my prayer came to you"), but this one has more of a connotation of the impact that the word had on the king. News like this that the mightiest kingdom in the world will be overthrown in 40 days goes over like a lead balloon. Jaws drop. It has impact!

The second verb I'd like to take issue with is more subtle: the mightiest king in the world doesn't take off his own clothes, he has a servant do it for him. The Hiphil stem is a causative indicator which lets us know that he *caused* his robe to be removed from him, not necessarily that he did it himself. But that's as far as this king's dignity goes. His next step is to do about the least dignified thing a king could do – exchange royal attire for sack-cloth and exchange a throne for an ash-heap. Jonah's message had truly impacted this king, and this king truly humbled himself.

Historically, revivals begin with public confession of sin. It took real character for the king of Nineveh to humble himself like this and admit that he had done something wrong! Most leaders would have kept their dignity and shifted the blame. Most people want to be seen as important and respectable by everyone else. But what is important is to be holy before God, and that takes humility and confession of sin. And that sparks revival! (Urban. 52-53, NAW)

It's possible that this whole verse is an explanation for why everybody in Nineveh, "from the greatest to the least of them," put on sack-cloth: the king did it, so everybody followed suit.

On the other hand, this verse could be in chronological order – the people in the town heard it, and then it reached the king, and their response happened to be the same (This is Hailey’s interpretation). I don’t know. But the point is that the greatest king on earth humbled himself at God’s word.

APPLICATION

- ◆ How do you respond to a rebuke for sin? Defensiveness? That’s prideful. Respond as the king of Nineveh did; humble yourself and confess your sin!

3: 7 וַיִּזְעַק²³ וַיֹּאמֶר²⁴ בְּנִינְוָה
 מִטַּעַם הַמֶּלֶךְ וּגְדָלָיו לֵאמֹר²⁵
 הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה הַבֶּקָר וְהַצֹּאן
 אֵל יִטְעֲמוּ²⁶ מֵאוֹמָה
 אֵל יִרְעוּ²⁷ וּמִים אֵל יִשְׁתּוּ²⁸.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 7 Then he called a council²³ and then declared²⁴ in Nineveh, from the decision of the king and his great men to say,²⁵ / “The human and the animal, the herd and the flock should not taste anything. / They should not eat; they should not even drink water.”

KJV 7 And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, / Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: / let them not feed, nor drink water:

ASV 7 And he made proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, / Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; / let them not feed, nor drink water;

VERBALS

23. Hiph. Impf., 3ms + v.c., from זעק (Ayin Gut.) “cry [out], call [together] for aid in time of need” *M.V.*

24. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *M.V.*

25. Qal Inf. Const. + Lamed, from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *Id. Act.*

26. Qal Impf., 3mp + negative (Jussive), from טעם (Ayin Gut.) “taste, discern” *M.V. of Direct Discourse*

27. Qal Impf., 3mp + neg. (Juss.) from רעה (Ayin Gut., Lamed He) “pasture, tend, graze, feed, take pleasure in, regard” *Explan.*

28. Qal Impf., 3mp + neg. (Juss.) from תהש (Lamed He) “drink” *Explan.*

COMMENTARY

After pondering the words in this verse for a while, I believe that it is describing an emergency council of the king of Nineveh and his “big men” (that what the word rendered “nobles” in most English translations literally means). I realize that this is a departure from the standard English translations, but let me explain why. The first verb (#23) seems to have less to do with giving a proclamation and more to do with calling people together to help in a time of need. A king would naturally call for his counselors in a crisis like this. “‘Fourty days and this city will be overthrown,’ the bleached Hebrew prophet says... and everybody believes it! What should we do???” The king and his noblemen come up with a statement, and the king told it to the pages. (The second verb #24 also has less to do with proclamation and more to do with simply speaking.) The king and the noblemen wouldn’t have done the proclaiming – that was the messenger’s job! – c.f. K&D 407).

This declaration concocted by the king and his council is actually called by the same root word that comes later on describing *tasting something* (#26). It is not simply a decree, but something that they thought about and “chewed on” for a while before coming out with it. After deliberation, these leaders decided to take a stand for righteousness in their legal system. “Revival often results in laws which are conducive to holiness.. and righteous laws make it easier for people to follow the path of righteousness” (Urban. 54-56).

It is a very poetic statement, using parallel structure in its lists, repetition in its verbs, and even emphasis in its word order. Nouns usually come after verbs in Hebrew/Aramaic, but here the nouns (“man and beast”...”water” to drink) are placed in an emphatic position before the verbs. The gist of the decision is that it is time for a radical fast. No one should eat or even drink anything, and this fast should apply not only to the people but also to their animals. A distinction is made among the domesticated animals between large livestock like oxen (“herd”) and smaller animals like sheep and goats (“flock”) – none of them

are even to be put out to pasture, as the next-to-last verb (#26) in this verse connotes.

“The practice of making animals join in mourning is not unusual. A parallel is found in the apocryphal Book of Judith 4:10, and Herodotus reports it of the Persians. The reason is not that the animals, too, are in need of forgiveness, but that the withholding of food from beasts is an added grief and penance for their owners” (Son. 146). Keil adds a focus on the “biotic rapport between man and his larger domestic animals...that just as the animals which live with man are drawn into fellowship with his sin, so their sufferings might also help to appease the wrath of God” (K&D 409).

The NASV and NIV have a good point in marking the quote as beginning earlier than the older translations do, for the messengers probably let it be known that this is the decision of the king and his council. However, I decided to go with the later placement of the quotes because it fits the punctuation and wording of the Hebrew better, for it says literally “And he called and he said in Nineveh, from the discernment of the king and the great men to say,” Perhaps you can see from this literal English translation that there is no other subject in this verse besides the king (in other words, the proclamation or the decree are not subjects) and that the whole phrase leads up to the last verb “to say,” which usually indicates that a quote will follow.

We were told in verse 5 that they people of Nineveh fasted. Now we see a little more detail about how the fast came about and how radical it was. You can go without food for 40 days before you die, but if you don’t drink water you won’t last much more than just a few days! And, hey, if nobody’s drinking milk or eating meat, there’s no point in feeding the livestock either. These people meant business with God. They were going to get right with Him or die trying!

APPLICATION

- ◆ When you know God is trying to tell you something, call for help and get council like this king did.

- ◆ If you have the power to make rules calling people to righteousness, exercise that power!
- ◆ Respond to God's anger by fasting.
- ◆ When you fast, be radical (i.e. not merely a fast from desserts), but realize how serious a radical fast is – you can die from it!

8: 3 וַיִּתְכַסּוּ²⁹ שָׁקִים הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה
 וַיִּקְרְאוּ³⁰ אֶל אֱלֹהִים בְּחִזְקָה
 וַיִּשְׁבוּ³¹ אִישׁ מִדַּרְכוֹ הַרְעָה
 וּמִן הַחֲמָס אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפְיָהֶם.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 8 And with sack-cloths, the human and the animal should clothe themselves²⁹, / and they should cry out³⁰ to God with *all their* might, / and each man should turn away³¹ from his evil way and from the violence which is in their hands.

KJV 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, / and cry mightily unto God: / yea, let them turn every one from his evil way and from the violence that *is* in their hands.

ASV 8 but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, / and let them cry mightily unto God: / yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands.

VERBALS

29. Hitp. Impf. 3mp + v.c., from כָּסָה (Lamed He) “cover, clothe” *M.V. of direct discourse*

30. Qal Impf. 3mp + v.c., from קָרָא (Lamed Aleph) “call/cry [out]” *M.V. of direct discourse*

31. Qal Impf. 3mp + v.c., from וָשַׁב (Ayin Vav) “turn” *M.V. of direct discourse*

COMMENTARY

Here we learn a little more about the repentance of the people of Nineveh. Not only did the King put on sack-cloth, but he commanded every person *and animal* to also put on sackcloth! (It is postulated that the “man and beast” phrase was not part of the original book of Jonah, but whether or not it was in the original, it tells us nothing new, for the same phrase is already in v. 7.) This was not just an outward sign of mourning, they were also to pray forcefully and insistently that God would relent, and they were to quit doing all the wrong things they were doing. This was real, radical repentance!

When was the last time you cried out to God with all your might? When was the last time you put on clothes that showed the world that you were mourning? When was the last time you fasted? These are the things that go with true, effectual repentance. Let’s do them!

An interesting point about the animals: Although Goldman, in the Soncino Commentary, denies that the “crying out” had to do with the animals, animals can nevertheless make a racket when they go unfed! Keil notes that Romans 8:19 says that *all* of creation groans to be liberated from the corruption of sin, and Joel 1:20 shows precedent for the beasts of the field panting for God, to say that the Ninevites’ animals could well have participated with the humans in their own way of crying to God! (K&D 409).

“violence that is in their hands” - Some people take this to mean “the wrongful gains of violence” or “robbery” (Son. 147, L.B.). The word doesn’t refer so much to the hand as a unit as it does to the “palm” or “hollow” of the hand which is used for grasping and holding objects. The idea here is that they have been grasping and holding onto violence that was physically hurting other people, so they must let it go! Now, how did the Ninevites know that their ways were evil and that there was anything wrong with holding violence in their hands? Perhaps it was their own moral conscience (Rom 2:12-16 “...Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the

law... their conscience bearing witness...”). Perhaps the sight of Jonah – someone from one of their conquered nations – made them remember that they were unnecessarily cruel in conquest and that perhaps the god of that country was out for vengeance. Or perhaps they asked Jonah why his god was angry, and he told them what some of their sins were, using the law of the Bible as a standard. Whatever, the case, these people had some sense that they had done wrong things, especially regarding their violence against others, and part of their repentance was to quit doing these wrong things.

APPLICATION

- ◆ When you pray, do you pray “with all your might?”
- ◆ We can put on all the outward show of repentance and even pray a lot, but if we don’t actually turn away from doing what we know is wrong, it’s not true repentance (See Romans 6).

9: 3 מִי יוֹדֵעַ³² יָשׁוּב³³ וְנָחַם³⁴ הָאֱלֹהִים
 וְשָׁב³⁵ מִמְּחָרוֹן אָפוּ וְלֹא נֶאֱבַד³⁶.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 9 Who knows³²? The god may turn back³³ and be sorry³⁴
 / and turn away³⁵ from his burning anger, and we will not
 perish³⁶.

KJV 9 Who can tell *if* God will turn and repent, / and turn
 away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

ASV 9 Who knoweth *whether* God will not turn and repent, /
 and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

VERBALS

32. Qal Act. Ptc., ms, from ידע (Pe Yod, Lamed Gut.) “know”
Exclamation?
33. Qal Impf. 3ms, from ושב (Ayin Vav) “turn [back]” *M.V. of
 direct discourse*
34. Niph. Perf., 3ms + Vav Conjunction, from נחם (Pe Nun,
 Ayin Gut.) “sigh, be sorry, have compassion, repent, con-
 sole oneself” *M.V. of direct discourse*
35. Qal Perf., 3ms + Vav Conjunction, from ושב (Ayin Vav)
 “turn” *Id. Act.*
36. Qal Impf., 1cs, from אבד (Pe Aleph) “wander, be lost, per-
 ish” *Result/Purpose*

COMMENTARY

Here is a pagan king, trying to do the best he can to please an unknown and apparently irate deity. He reasons that if he and his nation “turn away” from what this god hates, then the god just might sigh and “turn away” (same verb) from his anger towards them. The verb “be sorry/ repent/ relent” has to do with a sigh of relief for yourself, or a sigh of empathic concern for someone else, or a sigh of remorse for what you’ve done. The king of Nineveh perceives that God is so upset that He really is going to do something dreadful, and the king wants to do everything he can to appease God so that he and his city won’t be lost and perish in whatever judgment Jonah is predicting.

This isn't the first time, God's anger was perceived by a man to be burning against people and where that man tried to cool off God's anger. It happened when the Israelites worshipped the golden calf after God had delivered them from Egypt. God told Moses to stand back and let him destroy the whole nation of Israel, but Moses interceded for the people, giving reasons why God should not kill off the people associated with His name before the watching eyes of the nations. The result was that God did not destroy them. But the kings of Israel hadn't been doing so well lately. They didn't have the righteousness of Moses. "What Israel continually refused to do, the heathen Gentiles did do: the cruel king of Nineveh stands as anti-type to the disobedient kings of Judah." (Verkuyl 42)

The question is, "Does the eternal, all-knowing God change His mind?" Does God really get irrationally angry and need some sense talked into Him? I don't think so, although I believe He does get angry about sin. Sometimes He lets people realize that He's angry and that they deserve punishment so as to bring *them* to their senses and cause them to do what is right. John Bunyan characterizes this in his book, *The Pilgrim's Progress* through Christian's fear of the judgment to come over his hometown which drove him to seek for the truth. I think that this is what God is doing to Nineveh. He already knows that they will repent, but, to bring this repentance about, He's letting them know that their evil deeds have angered Him and that they deserve to be the object of His wrath. The Ninevites were concerned with whether or not God would repent, but God was concerned with whether or not they (and Jonah) would repent!

I should make one caveat here. Simply stopping a sinful habit is not enough to save you from God's wrath. We have to look at the whole Bible rather than just this account to build our understanding of salvation. "All have sinned," says the Bible, and "the wages of sin is death." Every person on earth has done some sort of sin, and that sin damns them. There is no way around it. You can't start doing good things and win God's favor. Somebody HAS to die, or else your sin is still stuck to you, and you will be damned, no matter how good you try to

be. That is what's so great about Jesus – the death of God-become-Man by Roman crucifixion in the first century A.D. was the ultimate death by which the sin could be justly punished and done away with. What saves us from God's fair punishment for our sin is not our good works, but the death of Jesus, who took on himself our sins as well as the punishment of death for our sins.

APPLICATION

- ◆ Rather than worry about esoteric arguments such as whether God can change His mind, look at yourself and deliberate over whether or not you have repented enough from your sin!
- ◆ Do we realize how angry our sin causes a holy God to be?

10: 3 וַיִּרְא³⁷ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם
כִּי שָׁבוּ³⁸ מִדְרָכָם הָרָעָה
וַיִּנָּחֵם³⁹ הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הָרָעָה
אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר⁴⁰ לַעֲשׂוֹת⁴¹ לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה⁴².

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 10 Well, God saw³⁷ their behavior, that they had turned away³⁸ from their evil way. And God was made sorry³⁹ over the evil which He had promised⁴⁰ to do⁴¹ to them, so He did not do⁴² *it*.

KJV 10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not.

ASV 10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil which he said he would do unto them; and he did it not.

VERBALS

37. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from רָאָה (Lamed He, Ayin Gut.) “see” *M.V.*

38. Qal Pf., 3cp, from שָׁבַע (Ayin Vav) “turn [back]” *D.O./Explan.*

39. Niph. Impf., 3ms + v.c., from נָחַם (Pe Nun, Ayin Gut.) “sigh, be sorry, have compassion, repent, console oneself” *M.V.*

40. Piel Pf., 3ms, from דָּבַר (strong) “say, speak, promise [followed by Lamed]” *Rel. Adj.*

41. Qal Inf. Const. + Lamed, from עָשָׂה (Pe Gut., Lamed He) “do, make” *Compl.*

42. Qal Pf., 3ms, from עָשָׂה (Pe Gut., Lamed He) “do, make” *M.V.*

COMMENTARY

Well, just as the king and nobles of Nineveh had hoped, God did indeed “turn away” and “repent/be sorry!” The Niphthal stem indicates not so much that God *expressed* sorrow/regret, but that He was *made* sorry by the Ninevites’ actions. The reason given is that He “saw their behavior/works.” God looks down and sees our how we act – whether we are obedient to Him – and blesses or curses us as a

result of what He sees. He blessed Abraham for his action of (almost) sacrificing his son (Gen.22/James2:21ff). God made it clear in the Mosaic law that He would reward obedience and give curses for disobedience (Lev. 26). And The Psalmists consistently call God to follow through on His promise to bless the righteous and punish the wicked based upon their actions (Psalm 18:20-27). Despite the fact that it is only Jesus who saves us and not our works, there are still real consequences from God which are based upon our works. The Ninevites truly repented, and so God rewarded their action by withholding the punishment they deserved.

To borrow from Luther, who loved to preach from the book of Jonah, “The left hand of God’s wrath is replaced by His right hand of blessing and freedom” (Verkuyll 42). This same kind of blessing is available to any nation which will turn from wickedness (as defined by the laws of the Bible) and do what is right. Matthew 12: 41 holds up Nineveh, not as a special case, but as an example that other nations should have followed. It was a shame to God’s people in Israel who were so idolatrous that they were about to receive God’s judgment themselves, when the pagan nation of Assyria repented so thoroughly that God preserved Assyria for longer than He did the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Zodhiates 1093, NAW). I am concerned that my own country of the U.S.A., as well as most other countries I see today, have kindled God’s wrath by our violence and wickedness. Is there any hope that our nations could repent like Nineveh did and escape God’s judgment?

One last thought: the agent of this spectacular revival was a most unlikely person. Jonah had plenty of character faults. He wasn’t the ideal follower of God, yet God used him. If God could use Jonah, he can certainly use you! (Urban.57, NAW)

APPLICATION

- ◆ We must live righteous lives, because God sees our actions and rewards them!
- ◆ When we do sin, we must repent; God responds to repentance!
- ◆ Might God be calling you to be a “Jonah” to call a whole nation to repentance?

Chapter 4

4: 1 אֶל יוֹנָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה וַיַּחַר לוֹ.²

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 1 But to Jonah, it was displeasing¹ - a great evil- and it was infuriating² to him!

KJV 1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry X.

ASV 1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry X.

VERBALS

1. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from רעע (Double Ayin) “break, be evil/ sad/ displeased/ hurtful” M.V.
2. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from חרה (Pe Gut., Lamed He) “burn, be kindled [with anger]” *Result*

COMMENTARY

Jonah’s perspective was not God’s perspective. God saw the repentance of the Ninevites and thought it was a good thing to withhold His wrath. However, Jonah saw the repentance of the Ninevites and thought it was a “great evil” for God to still withhold His wrath!

The “to Jonah” at the beginning, the “a great evil” in the middle, and the “to him” at the end are a literal rendering of the Hebrew in this verse. I was surprised at the paraphrasing of even the older translations, but their rendering is fine. Jonah felt wronged and he was mad!

Hailey (79) quotes Farrar in showing how this ethnocentric hoarding of God’s mercy had been typical of God’s people all along: It was present in the spirit of Job’s three friends who were “willing to torture Job in order to save their own orthodox tradition. It is the spirit of the elder brother who was angry that his younger [prodigal] brother had returned home alive to en-

joy the father's favor and forgiveness... It is the very spirit of the Pharisees who condemned Jesus for the mercy He manifested to sinners, publicans, and harlots." "The greatest hurdle to overcome in discharging the missionary mandate," writes Verkuyl (42), "was not the sailors, nor the fish, nor Nineveh's king and citizenry, but rather Jonah himself – the recalcitrant and narrow-minded church... This is Jonah's sin, the sin of a missionary whose heart is not in it. He who once pleaded with God for mercy from the desolate isolation of a fish's belly now is angry that this God shows mercy to the nations."

Even in recent history, we have run into the same sort of ethnocentricity. In Indonesia, natives have pillaged and raped Chinese immigrants. In Africa, there have always been bickerings between tribal groups. In Eastern Europe wars break out between Muslims and Christians. And In the United States, we have had our own problems with anti-Japanese sentiment after the first two World Wars, anti-Russian sentiment during the "Cold War," tensions between Northerners and Southerners which have persisted since the mid 1800's, and mutual hatred between some whites and some blacks in the South. And, looking beyond ethnic tensions, I'm sure all of us have experienced some form of tension between the poor and the rich. Sometimes we feel justified in hating those who have oppressed us or our friends and family, but we have got to let it go! We must not begrudge God's love to them!

APPLICATION

- ◆ Are you mad at God for wronging you? Maybe you need to understand His perspective.
- ◆ We should repent of being like Jonah if we begrudge God's mercy being shown to anyone!

2: 4 וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל³ אֶל יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר⁴ אָנָּה
 יְהוָה הֲלוֹא זֶה דְבָרֵי עַד הַיּוֹתֵי⁵ עָלַי
 אֲדַמְתִּי עַל כֵּן קִדְמָתִי⁶ לְבָרַח⁷ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה
 כִּי יָדַעְתִּי⁸ כִּי אַתָּה אֵל חַנוּן וְרַחוּם אַרְךָ
 אַפַּיִם וְרַב חַסֵּד וְנָחָם⁹ עַל הָרָעָה.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 2 So he prayed³ to Jehovah, and said⁴, “Oh please, Jehovah, wasn’t this / my saying while I was⁵ still on my turf? Because of this I went ahead⁶ / to abscond⁷ to Tarshish: for I knew⁸ that you are a gracious and compassionate god, / slow to anger, and full of kindness, and you are made sorry⁹ over the evil.

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

ASV 2 And he prayed unto Jehovah, and said, I pray thee, O Jehovah, *was* not this / my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I hastened / to flee unto Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, / slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

VERBALS

3. Hitp. Impf., 3ms + v.c., from פלל (Double Ayin) “pray” *M.V.*
4. Qal Impf, 3ms + v.c., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *Id. Act.*
5. Qal Inf. constr. + 1cs, from היה (all weak) “to be” *Temporal*
6. Piel Pf., 1cs, from קדם (strong) “precede, be in front, meet, anticipate, forestall” *Causal*
7. Qal Inf. Const. + Lamed, from ברח (Lamed Gut) “flee” *Compl.*
8. Qal Pf., 1cs, from ידע (Pe Yod, Lamed Gut.) “know” *Causal*
9. Niph. Part. ms, from נחם (Pe Nun) “be sorry, sigh, moved to pity, have compassion, repent” *D.O. or Causal*

COMMENTARY

If you were to read my translation out loud, you should read the “Oh please” at the beginning with sarcastic exasperation. Jonah was infuriated with God’s response to Nineveh. But at the same time, he knew in the back of his mind that God would respond this way. The phrase to follow which enumerates God’s character traits is a phrase out of the Pentateuch (Ex. 34:5, Num. 14:18) which Jonah had “said” many times throughout his life in Israel. (I know that I deviated from the other English translations by saying “on my turf”, but I believe I have rendered the Hebrew more literally, since the preposition here is the one for “on” and the object has more to do with dirt or land than with the political boundaries of a country.)

Jonah confesses that his understanding of God’s gracious character is the whole reason why he “went ahead to abscond to Nineveh.” This phrase is very difficult to translate accurately and make sense in English! I think that the Old American Standard Version is the best with this verse. There are two verbs here, one having to do with “being out in front” followed by an infinitive “to flee.” The idea is that he presumed to get ahead of God and run away.

So what are these character traits of God which caused Jonah to get so mad and run away?

- **A GRACIOUS GOD:** God has mercy on people, not punishing them when they deserve to be punished. This mercy is not universal (not shown to all people), but is based on His own choice (“I will show mercy upon whom I will show mercy” Ex. 33:19). It would be one thing if this were just a man who was gracious/merciful, but this is God, and for God, the ruler and judge of the universe to show mercy, it is AWESOME! However, this wasn’t pleasing to Jonah, for Jonah wanted justice shown to Nineveh rather than grace.
- **& COMPASSIONATE:** God is moved by the sorry state that people are in and has compassion on us, wanting to help us in our misery and sin. What a glorious thing to have a God who is not indifferent, like the god of the Hindus or the Muslims, but a God who is tenderhearted toward us!

All the same, Jonah wished God would just harden His heart and wipe out all those Ninevites in cold blood.

- **SLOW TO ANGER:** This phrase in Hebrew is literally “long of nostrils.” In Hebrew, anger is associated with the flaring of the nostrils. Well, it takes a long time for God to flare His nostrils, as it were. He is patient, long-suffering, and not in a hurry to damn us for sins which would justly make Him angry.
- **FULL OF KINDNESS:** This word, “Chesed” has to do with benevolence – the way God showers blessings and kindness upon us. He doesn’t do this so much because we’re worthy of His kindness, but rather because He’s a nice person! He loves us, and therefore He does good things for us!
- **SORRY OVER THE EVIL:** There is a definite article “the” here which seems to indicate a particular evil, although it is not fully explained what that particular evil is. The verb “made sorry/repent” is the same one used in 3:10, describing God abandoning his intention to overturn Nineveh, so it’s likely that the definite article is pointing back to this particular instance of God turning back His wrath from Nineveh. The fact that we have a new verb here (whereas all the qualities in the list above are linked to an unstated verb of being) makes it plausible that this is a new phrase and not a continuation of the list, but I have included it in this list of God’s qualities anyway.

Some say that the God of the New Testament is different from the God of the Old Testament, but here is proof in black and white that mercy and grace have always been God’s *modus operandi* – even in the Old Testament!

Ajith Fernando makes a good point that although Jonah knew the words of this tremendous passage from Exodus, he hadn’t really internalized its truth. He still felt that somehow he had EARNED his favor with God by virtue of his Jewishness, and since the Ninevites had hardly done anything, it would be unjust for God to FREELY show His grace to Nineveh. If, however,

we embrace the truth that all of God's grace is unmerited favor, it can fill us with gratitude that God has shown us any grace at all, undeserving as we are, and thus we can be joyful to see Him show that same undeserved grace to others (Urban 61-63).

APPLICATION

- ◆ Praise God for his attributes: grace, compassion, patience, kindness
- ◆ We must repent for any way in which we have been like Jonah, avoiding being an instrument of God's mercy toward others.

3: 4 וְעַתָּה יְהוָה קַח¹⁰ נָא אֶת נַפְשִׁי
מִמֶּנִּי כִּי טוֹב מוֹתִי מִחַיִּי.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 3 And now, Jehovah, please take away¹⁰ my soul from me, / for better my death than my *life!*”

KJV 3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; / for *it is* better for me to die than to live.

ASV 3 Therefore now, O Jehovah, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; / for it is better for me to die than to live.

VERBALS

10. Qal Imptv., ms, from לקח (Lamed Gut.) “take away/in/to/from, carry off, procure in marriage” *M.V. of Dir. Disc.*

COMMENTARY

Once again, Jonah expresses his wish to die rather than to see God's purposes fulfilled. (He did it once before in asking to be thrown overboard from the boat to drown in the sea.) What a tragic mindset! Not only is it a patent lie that any person would ever be better off killing themselves, it is an awful thing to actively oppose God's clearly-revealed will!

Now, there were other devout men in the Bible who brought a similar request to God. Moses (Num.11:15) and Elijah (I Kings 19:4). While neither of them were in the right with such a request, at least their requests were a little more noble. Moses was so stressed out from his huge burden of governing millions of former Hebrew slaves in the wilderness that he knew he was about to crack, so he asked to die before he started making mistakes that would hurt the whole nation. Elijah's reason was, "for I am not better than my fathers;" he had obeyed God fully and was so discouraged at the lack of results he despaired and wanted to die. Jonah, on the other hand just didn't want to live anymore because his enemies didn't get torched like he wanted (Son. 148, K&D 411). In all three cases, the root of the problem was a lack of trust in God. In Moses' case, he didn't believe God could sustain him through the stress. Elijah didn't believe God could bring good results from his work. And Jonah couldn't trust God's judgment in deciding not to overthrow Nineveh. It is never appropriate to ask God to take your life, although we may get so exasperated or tired or afraid that we may want to request it. Whenever we feel this way, we need to return to faith in God. He is all-knowing to make the best decisions, and He is all-powerful to carry out what is best.

Some things can be said in Jonah's favor, however. At least He's still talking to God. So many people might avoid any communication with God while they are in the throes of a bad attitude like this. If you are one of God's children and if you stay in communication with Him through prayer and Bible reading, He will get you back on track! The second thing that can be said in Jonah's favor is that his choice of words appears to indicate that he still counts himself as one of God's people. His request is not that his life be extinguished, but that God would "take away" or "carry off" his soul. This verb is used to speak of sales, where a buyer carries the merchandise home with him – it is also used of marriage, where the groom takes the bride to be with him. Jonah is asking to be like Enoch or Elijah whom the Lord took up to heaven to be with Him. A childish request, perhaps, but at least better than committing suicide.

I also ought to comment that the Hebrew text uses Nouns for “death” and “life” rather than Infinitives (“to live...to die”), and it also uses a different noun for “life/soul” in the first half from the word for “life/to live” in the second half, so that’s why my translation differs from the standard English ones. I’d be curious to know, though, why the Hebrew text makes “death” singular and “life” (literally “lives”) plural.

APPLICATION

- ◆ Are you frustrated with God? Keep talking!
- ◆ Yield to God’s will; it’s pointless to oppose it and immature to try to escape it.
- ◆ Daily affirm your faith in God so as to prevent wrong attitudes from shutting you down like it did to Jonah.

4: 4 וַיֹּאמֶר¹¹ יְהוָה הֲהֵיטֵב¹² חָרָה¹³ לָךְ.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 4 Then Jehovah said¹¹, “Does it make *things* right¹² for it to anger¹³ you?”

KJV 4 Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

ASV 4 And Jehovah said, Doest thou well to be angry?

VERBALS

11. Qal Impf, 3ms + v.c., from אָמַר (Pe Aleph) “say” *M.V.*

12. Hiph. Inf. Abs. + Interrog. He, from יָטַב (Pe Yod) “make glad, cause to rejoice, do good to, deal well with, make a thing good/right/beautiful” *M.V. of Dir. Disc.*

13. Qal Pf., 3ms, from חָרָה (Lamed He, Pe Gut.) “burned, kindled [with anger]” *Subj.?*

COMMENTARY

Literally, this verse says, “Does-to-make-right he-burned to-you?” It’s difficult to translate precisely and make sense in English. There are two things which come into play which caused me to differ from the other English translations here.

First, the main verb (to make good) is causative (Hiphil), so I set aside the modern translations' connotation of things *being* right in favor of wording that indicated *causing* things to be right. Secondly, the verb having to do with anger is an active verb in the third person, so its subject should be "it" or "he," not "you." I'm still not satisfied with my translation, but this is the best I've come up with so far.

Jonah had a choice. He could accept God's plan or he could rebel against it. He chose the latter, and God gently chided him for it. "Is it going to cause anything good to happen for you to get angry when you see Me show mercy?" God asks. The obvious answer is, *No, it doesn't do any good!* It doesn't cause good things to happen when we get angry over God's will.

Now, there is a place for righteous, just anger expressed over things that are *not* God's will. Righteous anger can cause good to happen, just as Jesus was angry at the moneychangers in the temple and cleared the court out, so that the Gentiles could once again worship God there. Likewise, it is righteous anger which causes pro-life advocates to pass legislation banning abortion procedures. That sort of anger causes good, but anger expressed against God's will does not cause good. Admittedly, it was difficult for Jonah to reconcile himself to the fact that God wanted to show mercy to Israel's enemy, but he had a choice to either accept this fact and work with God or to become angry at God and rebel against Him. He knew about God's character trait of mercy, but he rebelled against it and stomped off to fume about it.

Implied in God's question is the principle that emotions should be in submission to our will. Before letting an emotion wash over us, we should first evaluate whether it is good for that particular emotion (such as anger) to be expressed. If after evaluation, we realize that the emotion is not going to cause good, we must choose to deny it so that it will not cause problems! If every time we got angry, we could hear a voice in the back of our head saying, "Will it make things right for you to get angry about this?" we'd probably live much happier lives!

APPLICATION

- ◆ When God doesn't do what we want Him to do, it is wrong for us to get angry at Him.
- ◆ We must control our emotions so that we become angry about the right things rather than the wrong things, so that the outcome of our anger may be to cause GOOD.

4: 5 וַיֵּצֵא¹⁴ יוֹנָה מִן הָעִיר
 וַיֵּשֶׁב¹⁵ מִקֶּדֶם לָעִיר
 וַיַּעַשׂ¹⁶ לוֹ שָׂם סֶכֶה וַיֵּשֶׁב¹⁵ תַּחְתֶּיהָ בַצֵּל
 עַד אֲשֶׁר יִרְאֶה¹⁷ מַה יִּהְיֶה¹⁸ בְּעִיר.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 5 But Jonah went out¹⁴ from the city and he sat¹⁵ to the east of the city / and he made¹⁶ a shelter for himself there, and he sat¹⁵ under it in the shade / until such time as he might see¹⁷ what would happen¹⁸ in the city.

KJV 5 So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, / and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, / till he might see what would become of the city.

ASV 5 Then Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, / and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shade, / till he might see what would become of the city.

VERBALS

14. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from יצא (Pe Yod, Lamed Aleph) “go out” *M.V.*
15. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from ביש (Pe Yod) “sit” *M.V./Explan.*
16. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from אשע (Pe Gut., Lamed Aleph) “make/do” *M.V./Explan.?*
17. Qal Impf., 3ms, from יראה (Pe Yod, Lamed Aleph) “see” *Purp.*
18. Qal Impf., 3ms, from יהיה (All weak) “be, happen” *D.O.*

COMMENTARY

The phrase “to the east of the city” could just as well be translated “in front of the city” but I didn’t want to be cantankerous and disagree with all the other English translations again! I’d be curious to know more about why “in front of” is synonymous with “East of” - did city gates always face East? Anyway, Jonah steps outside the city and begins a vigil. If he’s in front of the city, then everyone who comes in or out can probably see him. (“Who’s that?” “Oh, that’s the Hebrew prophet who said that the God was so angry He would destroy our city... I wonder what he’s up to now?”). Keil (412) adds that there were mountains on the East side of Nineveh which would have provided a good vantage point from which Jonah could overlook the city.

He builds a “shelter/booth,” weaving together sticks to make a canopy. This word (Succah) is the same word used for the booths the Israelites made for their annual Autumn feast when they remembered their pilgrimage from Egypt and how they dwelt in tents. Jonah was used to weaving a shelter out of twigs for the Succoth feasts, but he should have remembered what Succoth was all about – deliverance! Just as the act of building a shelter for the Succoth feast reminded the Israelites of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, so Jonah’s act of building a shelter outside of Nineveh should have reminded him that God can deliver other people too!

Twice this verse mentions that Jonah “sat.” He was sitting and waiting. What was he waiting for? Hasn’t he already stated that He knew God would (and did) relent? What was the purpose of his vigil outside Nineveh? The verse says that he was specifically watching to see what might happen inside the city. Perhaps he was just waiting out the 40 days. Perhaps he was waiting to see what else the people of Nineveh would do – would they follow through on the fast? Would they ask Jonah to read the law to them? Would they make more reforms? Would they give up and return to their idolatry? Would God still overturn the city at a later date? I’m not sure what questions were going through Jonah’s mind. There is a legitimate place for waiting

and watching to see the results of preaching in people's lives, but somehow I don't think Jonah was hoping for positive results. There are preachers who are this way still today, who really hope that their sermon condemns everybody and that the congregation gets the punishment they deserve. This is the totally wrong attitude. If we are ambassadors of Christ, we should hope that our audience is *reconciled to God* as a result! (II Cor. 5:20)

APPLICATION

- ◆ When we deliver God's word to other people, we should anticipate positive results from God rather than hoping that our audience will be condemned.
- ◆ We should seek the deliverance of *all* people from their bondage to sin and Satan, not just *our* people. We must be involved in *missions*, not just *church*.

6: 4 וַיִּמֶן¹⁹ יְהוָה אֶל־הַיָּם קִיקְיֹון
וַיַּעַל²⁰ מֵעַל לְיוֹנָה לְהִיּוֹת²¹ צֶלַעַל רֹאשׁוֹ
לְהַצִּיל²² לוֹ מִרְעָתוֹ וַיִּשְׂמַח²³ יוֹנָה
עַל הַקִּיקְיֹון שְׂמִיחָה גְדוֹלָה.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 6 So Jehovah-God appointed¹⁹ a plant, and it grew up²⁰ over Jonah / to be²¹ a shade over his head to relieve²² him from his misery. / And Jonah rejoiced²³ over the plant *with* great rejoicing.

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

ASV 6 And Jehovah God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, / that it might be a shade over his head, to deliver him from his evil case. / So Jonah was exceeding glad because of the gourd.

VERBALS

19. Piel Impf. 3ms + v.c., from מָנָה (Lamed He) “reckoned, assign, appoint, ordain” *M.V.*
20. Qal Impf. 3ms + v.c., from עָלָה (Pe gut, Lamed He) “go up” *M.V./Result?*
21. Qal Inf. Const. + ל, from הָיָה (All Weak) “be, become” *Purpose*
22. Hiph. Inf. Const.+ ל, from נָצַל (Pe Nun) “snatch away, deliver” *Purpose.*
23. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from שָׂמַח (Lamed Gut.) “shine cheerfully, be joyful/glad, rejoice, take pleasure in” *M.V./Result*

COMMENTARY

Jehovah God is still the one in control of all things. Just as He “appointed” the fish in 1:17, so He “appointed” this plant for a specific purpose: to shade Jonah. What sort of plant was it? The Septuagint says it was a bottle-gourd, but others say it was

a Castor-oil tree (BDB) which also goes by “Elkeroa,” a common plant in Palestine which grows in sandy soil (K&D 414), and also by the Latin name *Ricinus Communis* or Palma Christi, or (in Egypt) the Kiki plant. This species “has large leaves... and it grows and withers rapidly” (Son. 149). The point is that God got a shady plant to grow there for Jonah.

The verb describing the growth of the plant could either be Hiphil (causative) or Qal (simple action). The KJV, NKJV, ASV, and NIV all use the Hiphil/Causative to say that God “made” the plant come up. The problem with translating it in the Hiphil stem (which only the KJV admits by its italics) is that there should be an object (the plant), but there is no object stated. That’s why the NASV, LB, and I went with the Qal/simple action verb “it grew up.” The Hiphil translation emphasizes God’s sovereignty over the plant’s growth – God “caused” it to grow up. The Qal translation emphasizes the plant’s obedience to God’s appointment. Unlike Jonah (and other humans I know) who are supposed to obey God in a particular task and yet who rebel, this plant unquestioningly, dutifully, and with perfect obedience sprung up for the purpose for which God had ordained it: to shade Jonah’s head. The Hebrew text actually uses four prepositions describing the plant: “up,” “from,” “over,” and “to” Jonah. Perhaps this indicates a lot of spreading growth and leaves shading Jonah all over, as the LB indicates. Additionally, the fact that the plant grew up in one night is considered a miracle (Hail. 79).

Keil (414-415) makes much of the different names of God used in this passage: The tree’s existence is attributed to “Jehovah-God,” whereas it is “Jehovah,” who talks to Jonah, “god” who sends the wind, and “The God” who prepares the worm, connoting different manifestations or aspects of character of the one true God.

What boggles my mind is the grace and mercy God shows to Jonah through this. God did the right thing to spare Nineveh from destruction, yet God recognized the misery that resulted to Jonah – even though Jonah was in the wrong – and God

takes steps to comfort Jonah. What a gracious God to seek to allay even an imaginary injury such as Jonah felt! He was actually kind-of going along with Jonah, meeting him where he was – Jonah built a shady shelter, so God added to the shade with a plant. I think of the times I see my children doing something which is really just frivolous play and yet I join with them, just to be with them and deepen my relationship with them. Just last Sunday, I helped my boys find strips of bark to cover the roof of a little fort they were building. The bark will all blow off in the next storm, but my boys thought it was the coolest thing to “dry in” their fort! When I act like this, I am following in the footsteps of our God who stoops to join us in silly things just to make us happy and build relationship with us. What a wonderful God we have!

In the previous verses, Jonah was extremely angry and wanting to die. Now he has a huge mood swing to the opposite extreme. He is not just pleased or satisfied or happy with this plant, he literally “rejoiced over the plant rejoicing great.” He was so happy, he was partying! (The connotation of the word for “re-joyce” actually has connotations of a noisy festival.) These kind of mood swings, notes Fernando, “show the insecurity of one whose confidence and trust is in himself and not God. Those who trust in God have a quiet confidence, for their hope is not based on their abilities but on God’s mercy and care. Isaiah 26:3-4 says, ‘You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you...’” (Urban. 65)

Perhaps Jonah thought that this shade-plant proved God’s favor on his intentions to sit and wait for the destruction of Nineveh (cf. K&D 415). What a jerk Jonah was to get all excited when God provided him with a little shade. And yet, how often we are so self-absorbed that all we think of is how happy we are when God blesses us with a little something. Let us learn a lesson from Jonah’s self-absorption and callousness toward Nineveh and realize how reprehensible it is for us to care only about God’s blessings on us while disregarding the rest of the world.

APPLICATION

- ◆ God is sovereign even over the botanical world. Even the plants do His will.
- ◆ We should praise God that He cares so much for us that He does little things just to be nice to us, such as making the plant grow up to shade Jonah.
- ◆ We should not be like Jonah, who was so self-absorbed that he rejoiced over getting a bit of shade while still angry at God for not destroying Nineveh.

7: 4 וַיִּמֶן²⁴ הָאֱלֹהִים תּוֹלַעַת
 בְּעֵלוֹת²⁵ הַשָּׁחַר לַמַּחֲרָת
 וַתִּךְ²⁶ אֶת הַקִּיקָיוֹן וַיִּבֹשׁ²⁷.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 7 Then God appointed²⁴ a worm at the rising²⁵ of the dawn the next day, / and she attacked²⁶ the plant and it withered²⁷.

KJV 7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, / and it smote the gourd that it withered.

ASV 7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, / and it smote the gourd, that it withered.

VERBALS

24. Piel Impf., 3ms + v.c., from מנה (Lamed He) “reckoned, assign, appoint, ordain” *M.V.*

25. Qal Inf. Const., + Beth, from עלה (Pe Gut., Lamed He) “going up” *Temporal*

26. Hiph. Impf., 3fs + v.c., from נכה (Pe Nun, Lamed He) “smite, knock down, strike, kill, destroy, attack, punish” *M.V./Result*

27. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from יבש (Pe Yod) “dry up, wither” *Result*

COMMENTARY

Just as God ordained the fish and the plant, so He also ordained a worm. This was apparently a species of worm used to make a red dye for cloth. But Jonah wasn't dying cloth, he was proba-

bly just sleeping. In the early hours of the morning (literally “in the rising of the blackness to the morrow”) that worm chewed up the plant, and when Jonah woke up, the plant was already drying up.

Just in case there is any question about the subjects of the two verbs at the end of this verse, the first (“attacked/smote”) has a feminine subject, referring back to the worm (which is feminine gender), and the second (“withered”) has a masculine subject, referring to the plant/gourd (which is masculine in gender).

Jonah could have gotten mad at the worm (I can just imagine him yelling, “You stupid worm!” and squishing it between his fingers and the red juice squirting out of the poor bug.) But at some point, Jonah recognized that God was doing this on purpose. God sent the worm to destroy this shade plant to teach Jonah a lesson.

APPLICATION

- ◆ When disappointing things happen, rather than getting angry at the thing that caused you disappointment, consider that God may be trying to teach you something.

8: 4 וַיְהִי²⁸ כַּזְרוֹחַ²⁹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
 וַיִּמֶן³⁰ אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ קָדִים חַרְיִשִׁית
 וַתֶּד³¹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עַל רֹאשׁ יוֹנָה וַיִּתְעַלֶּף³²
 וַיִּשְׂאֵל³³ אֶת נַפְשׁוֹ לָמוּת³⁴
 וַיֹּאמֶר³⁵ טוֹב מוֹתִי מִחַיִּי.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 8 And it happened²⁸ at the rising²⁹ of the sun, / that God appointed³⁰ a cutting east wind / and the sun beat down³¹ over the head of Jonah so that he fainted³². / Then he asked³³ for his soul to die³⁴, for he said³⁵, “Better my death than my *life!*”

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

ASV 8 And it came to pass, when the sun arose, / that God prepared a sultry east wind; / and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, / and requested for himself that he might die, and said, *It is better for me to die than to live.*

VERBALS

28. Qal Imperfect 3ms + vav consecutive, from היה (All weak) “be, exist, happen, come to pass” *M.V./Temp.*
29. Qal Inf. Const. + Kaph, from זרח (Lamed Gut.) “rising” *Temp.*
30. Piel Impf., 3ms + v.c., from מנה (Lamed He) “reckoned, assign, appoint, ordain” *M.V.*
31. Hiph. Impf., 3fs + v.c., from נכה (Pe Nun, Lamed He) “smite, knock down, strike, kill, destroy, attack, punish” *M.V./Result*
32. Hitp. Impf., 3sm + v.c., from לעף (Pe Gut.) “veil/wrap oneself, faint, languor” *Result*
33. Qal Impf. 3ms + v.c., from שאל (strong) “asked” *M.V.*
34. Qal Inf. Const., + Lamed, from תומ (Ayin Vav) “to die” *D.O./Compl.?*
35. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *Id. Act.*

COMMENTARY

In the wee hours of the morning, the worm attacked the plant, then the sun rose and Jonah really felt the heat! Not only is the sun beating down on his head, he is also feeling this east wind. Now whether the wind is “cutting/vehement” (KJV, NKJV) or “quiet/sultry” (ASV, Hail. 79, Son. 149, K&D 415) I don’t know – according to BDB the word, oddly enough, can be translated both ways. I don’t see where the modern translations got the idea of “scorching” from this word except from the context that this east wind was probably “the sirocco, a wind of oppressive heat and dust, aggravating the discomfort of a hot summer’s day” (Son. 149). Whatever this wind was, Jonah recognized that God had ordained it, just as He had ordained the fish, the plant, and the worm. “Normally when a sirocco comes, people run for shelter,” says Fernando (Urban. 67), “but Jonah’s shelter is gone. The only place he could go was back to Nineveh – but he was not about to return there!” This made Jonah want to die!

The word describing the sun as it “beat” down on Jonah’s head is the same word used in the previous verse about the worm as it “smote/attacked” the plant – the plant is dying, and Jonah is dying, too, he thinks! It says that he “fainted.” Now, whether he fainted from the heat and then came back to and asked God to die or whether he was just *growing* faint (as the modern translations say), I don’t know.

Since the word for “soul/self” in Hebrew has a Direct Object indicator on it, I tried to translate it more as the object of the verb “He asked” rather than as a prepositional phrase like a lot of the other English translations did, and again, since there are no verbals in his quote, “better my death than my life,” I avoided the verbal infinitives “to live” and “to die.”

Jonah is perfectly miserable, and, what’s worse, he realizes that it is God who is making him miserable! I think Jonah was smart enough to know that it was his rebellion against God’s grace toward Nineveh that was the problem. But he was so stubborn that, rather than repent and get right with God and

leave this uncomfortable situation by getting on with life, he instead wanted to die right there on the spot so he wouldn't have to admit that he was wrong. Oh that we were different from Jonah, but really how often we are so stubborn in our pride that we won't admit that we're wrong! So often we persist in our rebellion, settling to live under God's punishment rather than humbling ourselves, confessing our sin, and living under God's blessing! The solution for Jonah was not death, but reconciliation with God, yet Jonah is so stubborn that he would rather die!

APPLICATION

- ◆ Choose today between persisting in stubborn rebellion (living under God's animosity) and humbly submitting to God (living under His blessing)!

9:4 וַיֹּאמֶר³⁶ אֱלֹהִים אֶל יוֹנָה
 הֲהֵיטֵב³⁷ חָרָה³⁸ לְךָ עַל הַקִּיקָיוֹן
 וַיֹּאמֶר³⁶ הֵיטֵב³⁷ חָרָה³⁸ לִי עַד מָוֹת.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 9 Then God said³⁶ to Jonah, / “Does it make *things* right³⁷ for you to be angry³⁸ about the plant?” / And he said³⁶, “It **does** make *things* right³⁹ for me to be angry³⁸ – even to death!”

KJV 9 And God said to Jonah, / Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? / And he said, I do well to be angry, *even* unto death

ASV 9 And God said to Jonah, / Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? / And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

VERBALS

36. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *M.V.*

37. Hiph. Inf. Abs. + Interrog. He, from יטב (Pe Yod) “make glad, cause to rejoice, do good to, deal well with, make a thing good/right/beautiful” *M.V. of Dir. Disc.*

38. Qal Pf., 3ms, from חרה (Lamed He, Pe Gut.) “burned, kindled [with anger]” *Subj.?*

39. Hiph. Inf. Abs., from יטב (Pe Yod) “make glad, cause to rejoice, do good to, deal well with, make a thing good/right/beautiful” *M.V. of Dir. Disc.*

COMMENTARY

This is virtually a repeat of verse four. Perhaps in a similar way to which Jesus asked Peter the same question multiple times (“Do you love me?”) to get Peter to repent for denying his Lord, so God is asking Jonah the same question (“Does it make things right for you to be angry?”) in hopes that Jonah will catch himself and straighten out his attitude.

In v.4, God asked if it was right to be angry over the preservation of Nineveh; now in v.9, God asks if it is right to be angry over the death of the shady plant. Jonah didn’t answer the first

time God asked the question in v.4 because he knew better than to complain about God not killing the Ninevites. This time, however, he feels justified in complaining that God killed the plant (Son. 149).

Jonah is so bent out of shape, however, that he doesn't get the point. Instead, Jonah repeats his request to die. He is so mad that Nineveh didn't get destroyed and he is so mad that his shady plant died that he is beyond reason. We humans get so exasperated sometimes that we let our emotions obscure our reason. It's generally pointless to reason with someone who is this upset, and if we find *ourselves* getting this upset, we need to step back and take some time to cool off and pray rather than getting ourselves into trouble with our angry words and actions!

“Man can become greatly concerned and disturbed when that which directly affects him is touched by the finger of providence; but he can be utterly indifferent, even hard, to that which may be of infinitely greater value when this does not affect him. He may murmur greatly over an immediate personal discomfort, but wish for the destruction of those who may in time affect him. If man is so affected by the immediate, though ever so small, should not God be concerned over Nineveh with its teeming thousands?” (Hail. 80)

APPLICATION

- ◆ Don't allow your anger to make you unreasonable like Jonah!

41 40 10: 4 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶתָּה חֲסַתָּ
 עַל הַקִּיקִיּוֹן אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָמַלְתָּ בּוֹ
 וְלֹא גִדַּלְתּוֹ שָׁבַן לַיְלָה הִיָּה
 וּבֹן לַיְלָה אָבַד .

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 10 So Jehovah said⁴⁰, “You have been compassionate over the plant, / with which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow⁴³, / which was⁴⁴ a *product* of a night and *in* a night it perished⁴⁵.”

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

ASV 10 And Jehovah said, Thou hast had regard for the gourd, / for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; / which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

VERBALS

40. Qal Impf., 3ms + v.c., from אמר (Pe Aleph) “say” *M.V.*

41. Qal Pf., 2ms, from חוּס (Pe Gut., Ayin Vav) “pity, look upon with compassion” *M.V. of Dir. Disc.*

42. Qal Pf., 2ms, from עמל (Pe Gut.) “labour, toil” *Rel. Adj.*

43. Pi. pf., 2ms + 3ms object, from גדל (strong) “cause to grow, become great/powerful” *Rel. Adj.*

44. Qal Pf., 3ms, from היה (all weak) “was, became” *Rel. Adj.*

45. Qal Pf., 3ms, from אבד (Pe Aleph) “perished” *Rel. Adj.*

COMMENTARY

Jonah has proved that he is capable of having compassion because he has gotten so extremely excited and then so extremely angry over the growth and subsequent death of the plant. God’s object lesson is now ready to be unpacked: “If you were so sympathetic about the plant,” asks God, “should you not also be sympathetic about much more important things such as animals and people?” (The latter half is yet to come in the next verse, however.)

God emphasizes the fact that this plant was not deserving of much sympathy by two relative adjective clauses. The first clause says that the plant was undeserving of sympathy by virtue of a lack of *relationship* between Jonah and the plant. Jonah didn't plant the seed and he didn't water it; he did absolutely nothing to make the plant grow next to him, so he really didn't have a compelling interest in it. The second relative adjective clause says that the plant was undeserving of sympathy because of its *transience*. Literally it says, "which-a-son-of-a-night it-was, and-a-son-of-a-night it-perished." The emphasis is on the fact that this plant was very insignificant if it could grow in a single night and die the next day. For these reasons, the plant was not deserving of a whole lot of thought and sympathy.

APPLICATION

- ◆ We should not get bent out of shape over something that is not important!
- ◆ We should not allow ourselves to get preoccupied with our personal interests and concerns, we should consider the needs of other people!

11: 4 וַאֲנִי לֹא אָחוּס⁴⁶ עַל נִינְוֵה
הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ בָּהּ הַרְבֵּה⁴⁷
מִשְׁתִּים עֲשָׂרָה רְבוֹ אָדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא
יָדַע⁴⁸ בֵּין יְמִינוֹ לְשִׂמְאֵלוֹ וּבִהֶמָּה רַבָּה.

TRANSLATIONS

NAW 11 And I, should I not be compassionate⁴⁶ over Nineveh, the great city / when there exist in her more⁴⁷ than one hundred twenty thousand humans who don't know⁴⁸ their right hand from their left, and many cattle.

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

ASV 11 and should not I have regard for Nineveh, that great city, / wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons / that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

VERBALS

46. Qal Impf., 1cs, from חוּס (Pe Gut., Ayin Vav) “pity, look upon with compassion” *M.V. of Dir. Disc.*

47. Hiph. Infin. Abs., from רַבָּה (Lamed He) “make great/many/much, multiply, increase” *Rel. Adj.*

48. Qal Pf., 3ms, from יָדַע (Pe Yod, Lamed Gut.) “know, discern, perceive, distinguish” *Rel. Adj.*

COMMENTARY

This verse is the punch-line - the main point - of the whole book of Jonah. *God is justified in having compassion for the people of Nineveh!* The comparison/contrast between this verse in the previous verse is striking. The “YOU” (speaking of Jonah) which begins God’s quote in v.10 is emphatic, contrasting with the emphatic “I” (speaking of God) which starts v. 11. The main verb in both verses is the same, too: “have compassion/pity.” The object of that compassion is also contrasted

with two relative adjective clauses describing the plant in verse 10 - the object of Jonah's greatest compassion, and two relative adjective clauses in v.11 describing Nineveh - the object of God's compassion. Stated this way, we see the absolute ludicrousness of Jonah's misplaced compassion over the plant when he should have aligned himself with God and had compassion on Nineveh.

God even explains why the people of Nineveh were deserving of compassion. I think it's interesting to note that God's explanation contains no hint of the grounds for His compassion being the fasting and sackcloth repentance of the Ninevites. His explanation here has more to do with what Nineveh IS rather than what the Ninevites DID.

The first reason given is the population of the city. In Hebrew it says literally, "which there-exist-in-her increasing from-twelve myriad-of human... and-cattle many." A "myriad" is commonly understood to be 10,000 (although this number was so mind-bogglingly huge to people before the modern age that it often meant simply an undefined, vast number). The numbers from the older English versions also match up - "six-score thousand" = $6 \times 20 \times 1,000$, or 120,000. And it says that there were actually "increasing/more" than 120,000! In fact, as we'll see later, many commentators believe this number only counted the children in the city aged seven and under, making the total population five times the 120,000 figure! (This is plausible according to geographical and agricultural studies of the area K&D 416.) Nineveh was the largest city in the world during the seventh century B.C. There were a vast number of infinitely precious human souls gathered in this city, and for that reason alone, God said He was justified in having pity on them.

Nowadays we might not consider that many people a particularly big city, but the point is that Nineveh WAS a big city and that cities are deserving of God's compassion. When I think of big cities, I find it so overwhelming that I want to put it out of my mind. I've seen disturbing things in cities where I've lived, like Birmingham, AL, and Denver, CO, but it is mind-boggling

to think of cities like Tokyo, New York, Sao Paulo, and Mexico City, which have 15 to 30 MILLION people each! The poverty, the filth, and the crime can reach such huge proportions in cities like those that it is understandable why people like Jonah would want to just destroy the city and start over again. But that's not how God thinks. Each soul is valuable to Him and He is about the business of redemption. We should not despise the cities, we should align ourselves with God and REACH the cities! 50% of the world's population lives in urban areas, and urban areas are more accessible than rural ones, so if you're thinking strategically, it makes good sense to target cities for ministry!

God goes on to give his second reason to have pity on Nineveh: This vast number of human souls "cannot discern their right hand from their left." Commentators take this phrase literally to mean that there are 120,000 "individuals not yet of accountable age" (Hail. 80), in other words, children who were so young they hadn't learned the concept of "Left" and "Right" yet, who were, for all practical purposes, undeserving of judgment (Son. 150). They interpret this to be all one reason rather than two, namely that there were morally innocent parties in Nineveh (the children and the cattle), and so it would be unjust for God to destroy them in the act of overturning Nineveh (K&D 417). Although I realize that I am going out on a limb to disagree with Jewish commentators and classic Christian commentators, I wish to respectfully disagree on two grounds. First, I do not believe that children are morally innocent. I happen to have five children of my own between the ages of seven and one, and I can attest that most of them already know their right hand from their left hand and also that none of them are morally innocent! All of them – even my not-quite-one-year-old – have knowingly broken at least one of the 10 Commandments ("children, obey your parents"). Secondly, God had destroyed children and cattle before in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah and had instructed His people to slaughter every man, woman, child, and beast in some of the battles Joshua led against the cities in Canaan, so it cannot have been unjust for God to kill or cause the slaughter of children and animals in those cases,

and therefore it wouldn't necessarily have been unjust for Him to do so in the case of Nineveh either. No, I do not think it was a matter of justice (killing innocent children and cattle) but rather a matter of mercy (holding back judgment that the city rightly deserved).

I believe that this phrase, "cannot discern their right hand from their left" should be taken figuratively, meaning that the people in Nineveh were absolutely clueless about right and wrong (cf. L.B., K&D 415, Urban. 68). It might have been prompted by God's observation of their repentance – they probably did some unorthodox things in an attempt to appease God because they just didn't know any better (perhaps sacrificing some of their children or something? – the Bible doesn't say). "The emphasis," says Fernando (Urban. 68), "is on the helplessness of the Ninevites. This brings us to the heart of the gospel. We are helpless, under the power of sin. We have no hope, no ability to save ourselves. But God looked down on us in mercy and provided a way for our salvation." Perhaps this very phrase was also a challenge to Jonah – "They don't know right from wrong, Jonah, (Hint, Hint) why don't you get in there and TEACH them my Word so that they can learn right from wrong!"

Nowadays, the numbers of people who are spiritually clueless are just as many as ever. There are still some two billion people who do not even have access to hear God's Word even if they wanted to hear it! The fact that there are people out there in the world who are so lost that they have no hope of ever hearing the Gospel should be a powerful motivation for us to exercise compassion, and yet, for every dollar you tithe to your church, the odds are that ninety-nine cents of it will be spent right back on your own church and less than a penny will make it out to do good for unreached people. The same goes for Christian workers: for every thousand people who go into full-time ministry, only about three will actually make it out to reach people who have not been reached with the Gospel already before! Our modern church is much like Jonah, concerned with its own "needs," and not truly concerned about the needs of people far away from us who are utterly lost. The book of Jonah is a pow-

erful call to God's people to align themselves with God's redemptive purposes and exercise compassion for the utterly lost throughout the world!

The most surprising thing to me in this verse, however, is the ending words, "and many cattle." CATTLE? The dumb beasts were also a reason for God's compassion! Perhaps this was prompted by the Ninevites' action to include their animals in the fasting and sack-cloth-wearing, but in truth, humans were not God's only creation. He made the cattle too – and also the rest of the environment – and He cares about them. Our environment is not something we should lightly dispose of and waste. God was intimately involved in the formation of each hill and stream and in the creation of each plant and animal. To treat nature and the physical universe with disdain is to slap its Maker in the face. Of course, we can go overboard and "worship the creature rather than the creator," but I'm talking about keeping a healthy balance of care for God's creation. We should make use of natural resources, but we should not needlessly destroy them, as Jonah wanted done to Nineveh. Our care of and compassion for the world should extend beyond the souls of the lost to also embrace their physical needs and environment.

Verkuyl quotes Thomas Carlisle's poem, "You Jonah" on page 44, and it is fitting to close with these lines:

*And Jonah Stalked
to his shaded seat
and waited for God to come around to his way of thinking.
And God is still waiting for a host of Jonahs
in their comfortable houses
to come around to his way of loving.*

APPLICATION

- ◆ We should exercise compassion toward urban populations.
- ◆ We should direct the Gospel toward those who are spiritually lost
- ◆ We should care for God's creation, too.

Oh God,

Please give us

Your heart to love those who are different,

Your grace to obey you in difficulty,

and Your compassion to reach the lost in all
their needs.

Please preserve us from the sins of Jonah,

and help us to persevere in faithfulness to You and

to your redemptive purposes throughout the
world.

~Nate Wilson

Syntactical-Logical Flow

JONAH CHAPTER 1

1 And it was
the word of Jehovah
to Jonah, son of Amitai
to say:

2 (QUOTE)

- a) **Get up**,
- b) **Go** to Nineveh (the great city)
- c) and **Call** upon her,

REASON: for their evil has gone up before my face.

3 **BUT** Jonah

- a) **got up**

PURPOSE: to flee to Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah.

and he **went down** to Jopo
and he found a ship going to Tarshish.
and he paid her passage-money
and he went **down** in her

PURPOSE RESTATED: to go with them [Sailors of v.5] to Tarshish, from the presence of Jehovah.

4 So Jehovah

hurled a great wind to the sea

PURPOSE/RESULT: so that there was a great storm in the sea,

and the ship

was going to be broken in pieces.

5 And the sailors

feared

and they cried out — every man to his god,

and they threw out the cargo **I** to the sea to lighten them up,
which *was* in the ship

but Jonah

went **down** to the lower part of the hull

and he laid **down**

and fell into a deep sleep.

6 Well, the chief of the sailors

approached him

and said to him,

QUOTE: “What’s with you, sleeper??

Get up; call to your god!

PURPOSE: Perhaps the god will think favorably toward us

RESULT: and we will not be killed.”

7 And each man

said to his companion,

QUOTE: “Let’s go and cast lots,

PURPOSE: that we may know on whose account this evil *came* to us.”

So they cast lots,

RESULT: and the lot fell upon Jonah.

8 And they said to him,

QUOTE: “*Please make known to us
on whose account this evil came to us!*

- a) What’s your occupation?
- b) And from where do you come?
- c) What’s your country,
- d) and where are your people in it?”

9 And he [Jonah]

said to them,

d) “I am a Hebrew,

*) and I fear Jehovah—

the God of the heavens who made the sea and the dry land.”

10 Now the men [sailors]

feared with a great fear

and said to him,

“*What is this you’ve done??*”

CAUSE: For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of Jehovah

CAUSE: because he had made *it* known to them.

11 And they [Sailors]

said to him,

QUOTE: “*What shall we do to you*

PURPOSE: *in order that the sea may cease from tossing us up,*

REASON: for the sea is rolling and storming!”

12 So he [Jonah]

said to them,

QUOTE: “Pick me **up** and throw me into the sea,

PURPOSE: that the sea may cease from *tossing* you up,

CAUSE: for I know that *it is* on my account that this great storm *came* upon you.”

13 But the men [sailors]

rowed to return to the land,

yet they could not,

CAUSE: for the sea was rolling and storming against them.

14 So they [Sailors]
 called to Jehovah and said,
 QUOTE: “O please, Jehovah, don’t let us die with this man’s life,
 and do not put innocent blood upon us,
 REASON: for you, Jehovah, have done as you pleased.”

15 Then they [Sailors]
 picked **up** Jonah
 and hurled him into the sea...
 RESULT: and the sea
 stopped from its rage.

16 Well, the men [Sailors]
 feared Jehovah *with* a great fear,
 RESULT: so they offered a sacrifice to Jehovah
 and they vowed vows!

CHAPTER 2

1:17/2:1 Now Jehovah
 appointed a great fish
 PURPOSE: to swallow up Jonah

And Jonah
 was in the innards of the fish 3 days and 3 nights.

1/2 Then Jonah
 prayed to Jehovah his God from the innards of the fish.

2/3 And he said, [synonymous parallelism follows]
 “I called from my tight spot to Jehovah, and He answered me;
 From the paunch of Sheol I shouted for help — You heeded my voice.
 3/4 For You threw me *to* the deep — into the heart of the seas,
 and a current swirled around me; [development]
 all Your breakers and Your waves went over on me. [synonymous]

4/5 And I said,
 “I have been driven away from before Your eyes,
 but I will again look to Your holy temple. [development]

5/6 Waters drowned me — even *my* life;
 the deep swirls about me. Seaweed was wrapping around my head.
 [Synonymous]

6/7 To the extremities of the mountains I went **down**,
 the earth’s bars were behind me forever, [Synonymous]
 but You brought my life **up** from destruction, Jehovah, my God! [Contrast]

7/8 While my life was fading out over me, I remembered Jehovah;
so my prayer came to You – to your holy temple. [development]

8/9 Those who are paying regard to vanities of evil shall forsake their grace.

9/10 But I will sacrifice to You with a voice of thanksgiving;
what I vowed, I will *fully* pay. [Contrast]

Salvation *belongs* to Jehovah!

10/11 Then Jehovah
spoke to the fish,

RESULT: and it
vomited Jonah to the dry land.

CHAPTER 3

1 And it was
the word of Jehovah to Jonah
a second time
to say [compare with 1:1]

2 QUOTE:
“Get up;
go to Nineveh, the great city,
and announce to her
the proclamation which I say to you. [compare with 1:2]

3 So Jonah
got up,
and he went to Nineveh,
according to the word of Jehovah. [contrast with 1:3!]

Now Nineveh
was a great city to God,
a walk of three days.

4 Then Jonah
began to go into the city a walk of one day,
and he called out and said continuously,
QUOTE: “Forty days and Nineveh is overturned.”

5 Well, the men of Nineveh
believed in God,
RESULT: so they

1. proclaimed a fast
2. and they dressed in sack-cloth,
from their great even to their small.

6 And the word
impacted the king of Nineveh,

RESULT: so he

1. got up from his throne
2. and had his robe taken off of him
3. and put on sack-cloth,
4. and he sat upon the ashes.

7 Then he

5. called a council
6. and then declared in Nineveh,

PREFACE: from the decision of the king and his great men to say,

ADDRESSEES: “The human and the animal, the herd and the flock

A. should not taste anything.

They should not eat; they should not even drink water. [synonymous]

B. 8 And with sack-cloths, the human and the animal should clothe themselves,

C. and they should cry out to God with *all their* might,

D. and each man should turn away from his evil way

and from the violence which is in their hands. [synonymous]

REASON: 9 Who knows? The god may turn back and be sorry and turn away from his burning anger, and we will not perish.”

10 Well, God

saw their behavior,

EXPLANATION: that they had turned away from their evil way.

And God

was **made sorry** over the evil

EXPLANATION: which He had promised to do to them,

so He

did not do *it*.

CHAPTER 4

1 But to Jonah, it

was **displeasing** - a great evil- and it was **infuriating** to him!

2 So he

prayed to Jehovah, and said,

QUOTE: “Oh please, Jehovah,

wasn't this my saying

TIME: while I was still on my turf?

Because of this I went ahead to abscond to Tarshish:

for I knew that

you are
a gracious
and compassionate god,
slow to anger,
and full of kindness,
and you are **made sorry** over the evil.

3 And now, Jehovah, please take away my soul from me,

REASON: for better my death than my life!”

4 Then Jehovah said,

QUOTE: “Does it make *things* right for it to **anger** you?”

5 But Jonah

1. went out from the city
2. and he sat to the east of the city
3. and he made a shelter for himself there,
4. and he sat under it in the shade

PURPOSE: until such time as he might see what would happen in the city.

6 So Jehovah-God

appointed a **PLANT**,

and it grew up over Jonah

PURPOSE: to be a shade over his head

PURPOSE: to relieve him from his **misery**.

RESULT: And Jonah

rejoiced over the plant *with* great rejoicing.

7 Then God

appointed a worm

TIME: at the rising of the dawn the next day,

and she

attacked the **PLANT** and it withered.

8 TIME: And it happened at the rising of the sun,

that God

appointed a cutting east wind

and the sun

beat down over the head of Jonah

RESULT: so that he fainted.

Then he

asked for his soul to die,

for he said, “Better my death than my *life*!”

9 Then God

said to Jonah,

QUOTE: “Does it make *things* right

for you to be **angry** about the **PLANT**?”

And he

said, “It **does** make *things* right

for me to be **angry** — even to death!”

10 So Jehovah said,

“You

have been *compassionate* over the **PLANT**,

- with which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow,
- which was a *product* of a night and *in* a night it perished.

11 And I,

should I not be *compassionate* over **NINEVEH**, the great city

- when there exist in her more than 120,000 humans
- who don't know their right hand from their left
and many cattle

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The Anger Song/Jonah 4

©1999 Nate Wilson

A recording of this song can be found on Nate's CD entitled *No Rock*. Further information about this CD can be found at <http://nathan.wilson.home.att.net/norock.htm> . A sound byte of this recording can be heard at <http://home.att.net/~natesmusic/jonah4.wav> .

When Jonah preached in Nineveh, he was a great success
 The people fasted and the king removed his royal dress
 But Jonah wasn't happy – He wanted them destroyed!
 When God looked down and blessed that town,
 then Jonah was annoyed!

CHORUS:

STOP! Think about it!
 Will it really make things right?
 Don't scream and fuss or whine and pout,
 And don't put up a fight!
 Just remember Jonah
 Whose anger did him in
 And when the anger boils inside
 You must beware of sin.

Jonah stomped outside the gate and he began to pout,
 And so God made a Kiki plant upon that spot to sprout.
 The plant grew up and shaded Jonah, making him so glad –
 Next night a worm ate up that plant and he got very mad!

CHORUS

The sun beat down on Jonah; he fainted dead away.
 When he came to, he prayed that God would take his life away.
 Then God asked Jonah, "Is it right for you to fret and stew?"
 Nineveh is what I love, and really so should you!

CHORUS

