

## **JONAH**

### **The Importance of Jonah in the Biblical Story**

Jonah is unique among the prophetic literature. The story focuses on the failure of the prophet as its centerpiece. No other book focuses on the prophet as a main theme of the book. Jeremiah enters his prophecy as one who expresses the benefits and liabilities of his prophetic message, but he is not the point of the book . . . Israel is. Yet here Jonah, the prophet of YHWH, is the focus of the book. As such he will represent Israel in their function as National Mediator to the Gentiles.

### **The Book of Jonah as Representing Israel in the Biblical Story**

Ever since the pronouncement of the Abrahamic Promise in Genesis 12:1-3, the purpose of Israel was that they would be blessed as a nation, and subsequently that they would be a blessing to the Gentile nations.

This blessing was focused in the message of Genesis 3:15, the deliverance of the world through the message of the New Adam who would substitute for sins and rule the world from Israel. But the first thing Israel had to do was to embrace that message themselves before they could teach it.

They were delivered from Egypt through the Passover Lamb (picturing the sacrificed New Adam), given the Law (picturing the character of God in the New Adam), indwelt by God's Glory (the ultimate Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (John 1:14)), taken them to the Land of Canaan from which they were to rule, and finally they were given a King who was to be like this New Adam to come.

### **The Biblical Crisis**

God's intent was to bring forth His Messiah to substitute for mankind and rule (Genesis 3:15), thus fulfilling His mandate over creation (Genesis 1:26, 28). Yet in this promise was the continuation of the deceit of the serpent to disrupt God's plan. Thus throughout the Old Testament there is a continuing fight to bring forth:

1. God's Messiah: God's Messiah is the solution to any problem thrown to God and His purposes. Thus God is bringing Him forth in the Seed of the Woman.
2. The Nation as the Means by which the message of Messiah will go forth. While there is opposition to the Seed, the Nation as the mediator of blessing (Genesis 12:1-3) is unable to carry the message due to their own disobedience and rejection of God's mercy in the Messiah. The nation

rejects the message of Messiah for the deceit of Satan as they are tempted by the Gentiles' gods and their women (Deut. 7:3).

Thus "God is confronted with a problem" is the title of all these books as the serpent's deceit attacks the carrier (Israel) as those who carry the Seed. The Book of Jonah is "God is confronted by a problem . . . Jonah is, like Israel, the Carrier of the Message of Deliverance, yet he, like Israel, is deceived by the Serpent."

### Deuteronomy 29--32

The Nation's failure was apparent from the beginning. In Deuteronomy 29—32, standing on the Plains of Moab readying the nation to enter the Promised Land, Moses told them they would never succeed since they had an evil heart and until God changed that heart they would never obey Him.

<sup>4</sup> "Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear. (Deuteronomy 29:4)

"So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you,<sup>2</sup> and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons,<sup>3</sup> then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you.<sup>4</sup> "If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back.<sup>5</sup> "The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.<sup>6</sup> "**Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart** and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. (Deuteronomy 30:1-6)

So Moses prophesied a new Prophet, a Greater Prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15, 18 who would come and lead them in a New Exodus from the Gentiles and would speak the Word of God from His mouth. They must, and would, listen to Him or else judgment would fall. This One is the Word of God.

<sup>15</sup> "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. . . . <sup>18</sup> "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. <sup>19</sup> "It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him. (Deuteronomy 18:15-19)

Ever since then all the prophets have been assessed by the image of the Greater Prophet who would be the perfect image of God and speak His word, the message of judgment, but escape in the Seed of the Woman.

### **Jonah's (Israel's) Response to the Abrahamic Covenant**

Thus, a prophet with the character of God (mercy) is to emerge from a nation who is to represent the character of God (mercy) and take it to the Gentiles per Genesis 3:15 and 12:1-3. Yet Jonah rebels against God (His character) and flees to . . . the Gentiles (to whom he seeks refuge because he believes they are not under the influence of the Jewish God).

The imagery of the Gentile sailors spending more time fearing the Jewish God than Jonah is educational. This is a contrast to the belief of Jonah (Israel), who though directly related to the Jewish God, did not fear Him, nor His character, even rejecting the issue of mercy to the Gentiles, mercy that they had received in Egypt. Yet Gentiles (the sailors) recognize the fearfulness of this Jewish God and worship Him.

### **Jonah's (Israel's) Judgment in Exile**

Thus, Jonah's entry into the belly of an animal engulfed by the deep is representative of Israel's soon exile into the Gentiles nations. Jonah is moving through the cycles of the Judges (evil – judgment – repentance – restoration – evil, etc.) which were prophesied in Deuteronomy 4:25-31 and Deuteronomy 28--30. Because Israel's heart wasn't changed they would continually decline after every repentance cycle as demonstrated in Judges 2:10-19).

### **Do Evil**

<sup>10</sup> All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel. <sup>11</sup> Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, <sup>12</sup> and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from *among* the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. <sup>13</sup> So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.

### **Judgment**

<sup>14</sup> The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their

enemies around *them*, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.<sup>15</sup> Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

### **Deliverance**

<sup>16</sup> Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them.<sup>17</sup>

### **Evil**

Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as *their fathers*.

### **The Cycles: Evil – Judgment – Repentance – Deliverance – Evil**

<sup>18</sup> When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.<sup>19</sup> But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.

This was referenced by Jesus in Matthew 12:43-45 where He stated that a house inhabited by a demon removed the demon but the demon returned with seven others worse than himself. So it is with Israel (“this generation”). Their repentance would only make them worse as they lacked the change of heart prophesied by Deuteronomy 30:6.

<sup>43</sup> "Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find *it*.<sup>44</sup> "Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds *it* unoccupied, swept, and put in order.<sup>45</sup> "Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation" (Matthew 12:43-45).

Thus Israel will be like Jonah. Though they are evil, the message of Messiah still remains within them in their prophets and in the Pentateuch. As the Gospels appear, and the message of Messiah becomes flesh and appears within their nation (Matthew 10-12), they again reject this message of mercy in their Messiah (Matthew 12). Thus they continue like Jonah, heart unchanged, rejecting Messiah.

Yet since the Messiah has appeared as the New Jonah (Matthew 12), He then proceeds apart from Israel to go to the Gentiles, like Jonah went to Ninevah (Matthew 13—28, in the apostles). This was the Abrahamic Covenant for Israel to go to the Gentiles. Yet Jesus is going to take the Gospel to the Gentiles apart from Israel.

<sup>39</sup> But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and *yet* no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; <sup>40</sup> for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here" (Matthew 12:39-41).

Israel will continue in unbelief until they ultimately repent. Thus the story of Jonah has no response and the story of Israel awaits their response.

### **Israel's Repentance**

Israel will ultimately repent (Romans 11, Rev. 11) and proceed with the original purpose to take the Gospel of Messiah to the Gentiles, but until then she proceeds as the old Jonah, unchanged heart.

## Background

Jonah ministered to Nineveh in 760 BC, during the reigns of King Uzziah (Judah) and King Jereboam (Israel). Nineveh was later destroyed in 612 BC, 148 years after Jonah's prophecy. The Assyrians were known for the cruel subjection of their enemies. Decapitations, dismemberments, impaling their victims on stakes, removal of tongues, feeding of men, women and children to the dogs, was common to the Assyrians as they used fear as the great motivator for enemies to submit to their authority. Deportation for those not killed was also used in order to humiliate the victims, and escalate their own pompousness. The paying of tribute by the subjected was an important need of the Assyrians to continue their great building programs and the extension of their empire.

Other than the book that bears his name, the Old Testament mentions Jonah only in 2 Kings 14:25.

2 Kings 14:25 He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher. 26 For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, *which was* very bitter; for there was neither bond nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel.

Jonah is only mentioned in the New Testament in Matthew and Luke and always in conjunction with the 'sign of Jonah', that is, the death and resurrection of Christ (Matt. 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32)

Matt. 12:39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and *yet* no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; 40 for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 "The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Gath-Hepher was a town several miles northeast of Nazareth in the area of Galilee, of the territory of Zebulun.<sup>1</sup> Thus, when the Sanhedrin gathered to condemn Jesus in John 7:52, they appear to be wrong<sup>2</sup> when they stated, "Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee."

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<sup>1</sup> Some of this information is from 'Notes on Jonah by W. VanGemeren, R.B. Allen.'

<sup>2</sup> Of course, they could be indicating that no prophet was prophesied to arise out of Galilee since they use the present tense of "arise."

### **Literary Approach**

Normally the prophets are the message of God to a nation (usually Israel) and the book then examines the reaction of the people to the prophetic message. By contrast, the Book of Jonah examines the reaction of the prophet himself to the message. There is, however, the record in narrative literature of prophets who had a similar problem to Jonah. Elijah was dismissed from his ministry because of an inability to extend mercy on behalf of God (1 Kings 19), and of course, Moses did not enter the Promised Land because of his failure to represent God in the striking of the rock. Yet there is no prophetic book that examines the failure of the prophet as the main function of the book.

### **The Problem of Jonah**

The problem of the Book of Jonah involves recognizing the Main Character. The Protagonist is God. His purpose is to deliver His message of judgment/escape to Ninevah, a Gentile nation, through a righteous Israelite prophet, Jonah. The tension (conflict, problem) occurs when Jonah refuses. The tension is repeated and ultimately is the tension of the book when Jonah rejects God's mercy to Ninevah in Chapter 4. It is then that God responds to this conflict by explaining to Jonah His character of mercy, thus giving Jonah His philosophy. There is no response recorded, thus the resolution is not present. Jonah did not repent. He will not repent and Israel will not repent because they do not change their character. Ultimately a greater prophet must arrive whose character conforms to the message that He delivers.

The problem is quickly identified when one aligns this story with the Abrahamic Promise of Genesis 12:1-3. Israel was to be the Nation that represented God by bringing the message of deliverance (of Messiah) to the Gentiles. Yet the first thing that needed to happen was that Israel needed to receive the message of mercy through the Seed, themselves. Thus the Old Testament is the story of Israel who left Egypt under the blood of the Passover Lamb (picturing Christ from Genesis 3:15), yet would not embrace that grace for themselves, but preferred to adopt the practices and works of the Gentiles. Jonah, like Israel, is to take this message to the Gentiles, but the difficulty is seen when they do not embrace the mercy of God and thus cannot give it.

### **The setting**

Since the purpose of the book is to deal with the issue of Jonah and his character, the true tension does not occur until chapter 4. Thus the setting is the back and forth dealings with Jonah to accomplish God's purpose in sending Jonah to Ninevah and obtain Ninevah's repentance. It is this that God accomplishes and then Jonah rejects God.

That gives God a conflict as to how to deliver His message through a righteous prophet.

### **The Conflict**

God is on His way to bless Ninevah with His message, but Jonah provides the conflict since he will not take it. After he is chastised in the great fish, he continues to take the message but reluctantly. Only when Ninevah repents and is forgiven does the problem raise its head clearly. Jonah adamantly rejects God's character and repents of his earlier repentance. His character had not changed and would not change.

### **The Philosophy (of the Protagonist) in Response**

God then moves to turn Jonah by explaining regarding God's character and Jonah's in Chapter 4.

### **The Resolution**

The resolution to the book is missing. Since God is attempting to solve the problem of Jonah by having a righteous prophet (change Jonah's/Israel's heart), the resolution does not occur. God has not achieved the desired end, either in the change in Jonah's heart or the arrival of a prophet who does deliver the message from the proper character.

Thus, this book anticipates a greater than Jonah, One who will carry the message with a willing, God-like heart. Israel and Jonah were unwilling. This Greater Jonah will appear, yet Israel will not change and will continue with the heart of Jonah.

This Greater Moses/Jonah will appear and will offer mercy to the Gentiles (through His own death demonstrating the mercy God's character requires) totally unlike Jonah, who worried only about his own comfort against the lives of the Ninevites. Thus Jesus will go willingly to the Gentiles, while Israel will not recognize this merciful One.

### **Message**

The message of Jonah is focused around Jonah's inability to share the heart of YHWH to the nations, that of undeserved mercy and of bringing all men to Himself. What, of course, is ironic, is that for Israel to minister that mercy on behalf of YHWH, Israel herself had to receive it. Thus Jonah, who had received mercy, was unable to



minister it to the similar undeserving.<sup>3</sup> Jonah saw himself as deserving since he was a Jew, and saw others as undeserving since they were pagan.

This is Israel of the Old Testament. They would find themselves in distress (judgment) and cry out to God, who would deliver them. The problem was that they had had no change of heart and thus would not be any different when they were delivered. This was the cycle of Deuteronomy, and it would never change as long as there was no new heart (character) given to them. The New Testament refers to Israel's hardness in a similar vein in Matt. 12:43-45 ("the unclean spirit"), Luke 15:25-32 ("the lost son"). Thus Jonah is the story of O.T. Israel.

### **Themes**<sup>4</sup>

***Hesed*** (חֶסֶד) is a major component of the character of YHWH that is displayed in the book. God's one-way mercy given to the humble, simply on their request, is prominent. He demonstrated it to the sailors (helpless in the storm), to Jonah (helpless in the bottom of the sea in a fish's belly), to the Ninevites (helpless against impending doom) and finally again to Jonah (helpless against the sun). God's character is to bless and deliver the helpless, and in fact, he looks for the hopeless so that He might deliver them.

***Fear of God*** is also a major theme in the book. Jonah does not fear as he escapes from the presence of the Lord (but Jonah does say he "fears"), but the sailors fear the storm while Jonah lies asleep, unconcerned, and the Ninevites fear. By contrast Jonah responds by perceiving his own view as better than God's when he is angry at God.

***Evil*** is also a major word in the book. Jonah is to respond to Ninevah's evil (1:2), the sailors recognize that God has struck them with an evil (1:7,8; calamity), Ninevah repents of its evil (3:8), and then God turns from the evil (3:10; calamity) when they turn from their evil (3:10). Jonah's response was that it was a great evil (4:1) for he knew that God relented concerning evil (4:2; calamity) and then Jonah was relieved by the plant from his evil (4:6; distress). The multiple use of 'evil' seems to be saying Jonah reasoned that since the Ninevites did evil they should be given evil (calamity), but God gives them

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<sup>3</sup> This is a major message of the Bible as a whole, particularly to the Nation Israel, and then to the people of the Church. The story of the Prodigal Son is similar. The elder son (representative of Israel in the Pharisees) is upset at God for restoring his brother. He felt that he had earned his position before God and was thus unable to perceive the heart of God, since he himself had not sampled it. Yet God had, in fact, been willing to extend mercy to the elder son (going out of the house to beg him), yet the elder son did not perceive himself in need of it.

<sup>4</sup> Some of this interaction is from notes of Dr. Alan Ross, "Theology on Jonah" from Hebrew 103, Dallas Theological Seminary.

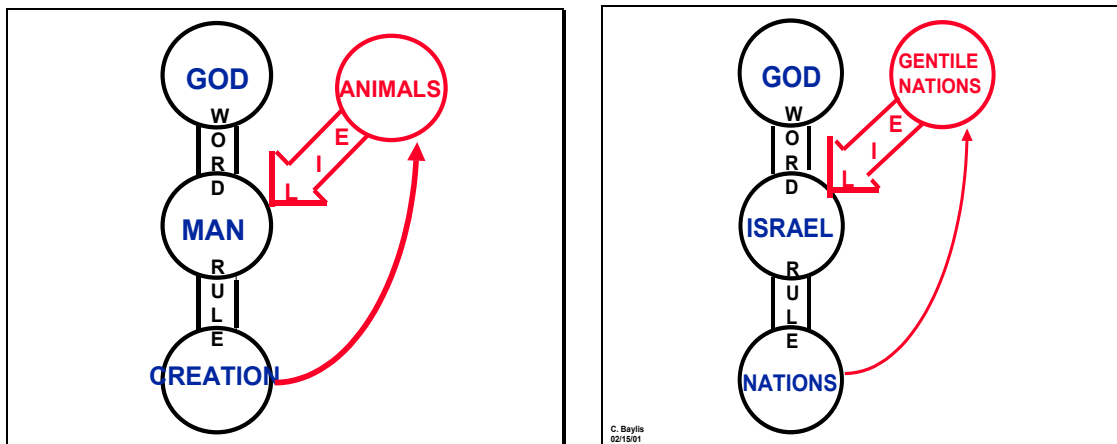
mercy. Then it is Jonah who does evil (disagrees, is displeased with God), yet God still shows him mercy. God had revealed his heart in the Pentateuch, yet Jonah did not want it displayed.

**The valuing of life versus death** is also prominent. Jonah tries to escape from the Lord (not represent God), the sailors do not want to perish or to have Jonah perish, the Ninevites do not want to perish, yet Jonah asks God to twice take away his life (representation). In fact, only Jonah is the one who is willing to face death in the storm. Jonah does not value representing God in life and thus prefers death to that alignment. God, of course, prefers to give men life.

Interestingly, Jonah runs to Tarshish to escape God and representing Him (life), but in essence has found death (not representing Him, submissiveness to the Gentiles). Also interesting is that Jonah fled for protection from God to the very people he rejected.

### **The Pattern of Jonah: (Representation of God):**

The rejection of life (representing God) for death (loss of representation).



- Jonah is told by God to go to Ninevah and represent Him to the Gentiles (Life)
- Jonah chooses to flee to Tarshish (Gentile) and hide from God under Gentile rule<sup>5</sup> (Death)
- The Gentile sailors seek life and find it by representing the Jewish God, ultimately throwing Jonah into the sea
- Jonah is dominated by a great fish (beast) and thus judged with symbolic death.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Israel frequently prefers Gentiles to God. They identify with them (no difference physically).

- Jonah chooses life (both physical and obedient) and is restored from death to life (representing God) to return to representing God to the Gentiles
- The Gentiles repent and choose life (representing God).
- Jonah rejects their choice of life and God's giving it to them and he thus chooses death by rejecting the representation of God and rejection of physical life.
- God gives life (under Jonah's dominion) to a plant and takes it away and Jonah rejects God's choice to remove that life, even though it was a vegetable and the Gentiles were people (both under the dominion of Jonah/Israel).

Summary: Jonah is a microcosm of Israel in their lack of a shared heart with God. Israel is Jonah. They are called to go to the Gentiles to give them the Abrahamic blessing (or judgment if they do not repent). However, the nation Israel, like Jonah, flees to the very Gentiles that they despise (are under judgment). Israel is thus judged, repents and is restored over and over (Judges) and their heart is not changed toward the mercy that they were extended. Note that while the preaching of the word goes through them, their own heart is not changed. So the question is, how is it that Israel (in Jonah) will ever preach the word to the Gentiles if their heart is not changed? - - In Christ. Jesus Christ bears the judgment for Israel and then is resurrected (restored) and then goes to the Gentiles on their behalf. Thus, Israel goes to the Gentiles against their own will. Note that in the Book of Acts (the book based on the preaching of the sign of Jonah) Israel tries to kill off the disciples because of their preaching of the sign of Jonah and its accompanying offering of mercy to the Gentiles. This is a problem throughout the book, but a particular chapter is 15 at the Jerusalem Council.

### **New Testament Fulfillment**

While most are familiar with the original story, almost as many are familiar with the use of the story in the New Testament by the Savior as the pattern for His death and resurrection. However, there is a major question as to whether Jesus used the O.T. format as an illustration (not based on the contextual message of Jonah) as opposed to a typological use (prophetic in its original message).

1. Ever since Deuteronomy 18:15 there was the Scriptural anticipation of a prophet like Moses, yet greater. Thus, all prophets in some manner fulfill the expectation of the Messiah and thus typify Him. However, their deficiencies also typify Him in that the ultimate Prophet would not have these (e.g., Moses misused vengeance, Elijah did not agree with mercy).

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<sup>6</sup> It is quite interesting that the sea frequently is symbolic of the great Gentile nations (e.g., Daniel 7). Jonah, who has fled to the Gentile nations from God is thrown into the sea. Recall that Israel, who served the nations of other Gods, is exiled into them.

2. The fact that Jonah was called to the Gentile Ninevites was nothing surprising. Israel's mission was always to extend the mercy shown to them to the Gentiles. It was part of their function of Gen 12:1-3. Thus the prediction that the Messiah would go to the Gentiles (as Israel, cf. Matt. 1—4) should have been expected.<sup>7</sup>
3. That the Gentiles would repent was also not unknown. While many Gentiles rejected the message (i.e., Pharaoh in Genesis 12) others would repent (Abimilech in Genesis 20). Thus the ultimate prophet would be expected to go to the Gentiles (as Jonah) willingly, since that would be the heart of YHWH, and they would repent, since God had clearly shown that would occur in at least some, if not many, Gentiles. But there is more. The heart of God was sacrificial mercy. Jonah was the opposite thinking he deserved mercy and being materialistic over valuing people. The Messiah/Greater Prophet, not only agrees with the message of mercy, but sacrifices Himself (non-materialistic) for the sake of the Gentiles (as well as Jews).
4. That Israel would reject the Messiah would also be clear. In fact it was clear from the Book of Jonah. For while Jonah has been appointed as a prophet (like Israel as priest to the nations (Ex. 19:5-6)), he fails in his understanding of mercy to the hopeless, perceiving himself as worthy and the Gentiles as undeserving. This demonstrates that the Jews would not function in their priestly role, and thus would reject God's mercy to the Gentiles in the Messiah, rejecting His heart. This could be no better illustrated than in the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15) where the elder son demonstrates the lack of heart, becoming angry with the father for forgiving the lost son.
5. The question of how Jonah's trip into the belly of the fish typifies Christ's death, and then the appearance on dry land, is part of the understanding that the Messiah was not only the perfect Man, but the perfect Israel. As such, He goes to the Gentiles, and also as such He undergoes their judgment (at the hands of Gentiles, just like Jonah in the sea, a symbol of the Gentile realm, as well as an animal swallowing him) as a substitute. Thus Jesus will be judged (undeservedly) on behalf of Israel (Jonah was justly judged in the belly of the fish, by Gentiles) and Jesus will be resurrected to the land (frequently a symbol for Israel as opposed to the Gentile sea (Dan. 7)) to minister to the nations (Jesus will be resurrected due to His just life, instead of Jonah through just repentance).
6. That Jonah went to the Gentiles but opposed his very going is just like Israel today. They are going to take the message to the Gentiles (in their rejected Son

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<sup>7</sup> It does not appear that the imperative to Israel was to "go", but the Gentile nations would come to them as it observed their behavior and the benefits of their God. However, Jonah is told to "go" and this seems to parallel the desire of this God, He "goes" in Jonah to pursue the deliverance of the Gentile nations. Note that in the "Lost Son" of Luke 15, God "runs" to the errant Israel and this would indicate that His character is to pursue the lost.

Jesus) but with an unchanged heart. In fact they oppose the taking of the gospel by killing those who do. One then sees the contrast between the Christ taking the message in lieu of Israel because Israel has opposed.

### **Matthew 8:23-27**

Jesus, as the Representative for God,<sup>8</sup> rebukes wind and waves to control the elements for the sake of His children (8:23-27).

24 And behold, there arose a great storm in the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves; but He Himself was asleep. 25 And they came to *Him*, and awoke Him, saying, "Save *us*, Lord; we are perishing!" 26 And He \*said to them, "Why are you timid, you men of little faith?" Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and it became perfectly calm. 27 And the men marveled, saying, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

This story is a recollection of Psalm 107:23-30 where the restoration of those in peril on the sea is appreciated.

<sup>23</sup> Those who go down to the sea in ships, Who do business on great waters; <sup>24</sup> They have seen the works of the LORD, And His wonders in the deep. <sup>25</sup> For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind, Which lifted up the waves of the sea. <sup>26</sup> They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths; Their soul melted away in *their* misery. <sup>27</sup> They reeled and staggered like a drunken man, And were at their wits' end. <sup>28</sup> Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, And He brought them out of their distresses. <sup>29</sup> He caused the storm to be still, So that the waves of the sea were hushed. <sup>30</sup> Then they were glad because they were quiet, So He guided them to their desired haven. <sup>31</sup> Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men! <sup>32</sup> Let them extol Him also in the congregation of the people, And praise Him at the seat of the elders.

It also recalls Jonah's peril on the sea as Jonah sleeps in the boat while the pagan sailors are dying. The captain asks there also about his lack of concern that they are perishing. There God caused the storm and removes it. However a greater than Jonah is here. The One is God who controls the storm. Note that the storm is not on account of the One who is sleeping but for His benefit to demonstrate His Person as God. Also, He, unlike Jonah is on His way to minister to the Gentiles on behalf of God (cf. Matt. 12).

### **Matthew 12:38-45**

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<sup>8</sup> This miracle is based on Psalm 107:23-30 where God stills the sea and guides them to a safe haven. Thus the point is here that Jesus is acting as the Representative of God. That is the answer to "What kind of man is this . . ."

Israel to be worse than Gentiles who receive Him (12:38-41).

In this section Jesus uses two examples from the Old Testament to demonstrate the magnitude of the rejection of Israel. As Gentiles (both Ninevah and the Queen of Sheba) repented at the call to repent and the observation of the glory of the King, so also Israel in their rejection of the Greatest will also incur contrastive judgment. Here is the announcement of the 'sign of Jonah' as the only sign to the Jews. This sign of resurrection will be offered to the Jews in the Book of Acts, and that book will chronicle, as a major theme, the rejection of Israel based on the preaching of resurrection.

<sup>38</sup> Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." <sup>39</sup> But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and *yet* no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; <sup>40</sup> for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> "The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

### **The Story of Jonah as the Story of Israel in the Biblical Story**

#### **Setting:**

- Jonah flees to the Gentiles, is sent into a fish/the deep, finally the message of compassion/judgment is taken to Ninevah who repents and receives compassion.
- Israel embraces the Gentiles, are sent into exile, finally the message appears in Messiah and the outcasts/remnant/apostles repent and receive compassion.
- The lost son embraces the Gentiles, is judged in exile, returns/repents and receives compassion.

#### **Conflict:**

- Jonah rejects the compassion God shows Ninevah when they repent.
- Israel rejects the compassion through Messiah to the remnant/apostles when they repent.
- The Elder Son rejects the compassion shown the younger son when he repents.

#### **Rising Action (Philosophy)**

- God pursues Jonah to get him to understand the character of God and repent.
- God pursues Israel in the Book of Acts to receive compassion based on the resurrection.
- The father leaves the house and begs the elder son to return based on his unchanging character.

## The Story of Israel in the Books of the Bible, Jonah and Luke 15

### **Israel to Represent the Father's Character (the Gospel) to the Gentiles**

- **Genesis – Joshua**: Israel to take the Message of the Seed (judgment/escape) to the Gentiles
- **Jonah 1**: Jonah to take the Message of the Seed (judgment/escape) to Ninevah

### **Instead of Taking Message to Gentiles, Israel Embraces the Gentiles and their practices**

- **Judges-2 Kings 16**: Israel follows Gentile practices, worships their gods, intermarries their women
- **Jonah 1**: Jonah flees to Gentile city to escape the Jewish God
- **Luke 15**: Lost Son leaves father for Gentile lands

### **God chastises Israel by Sending Out of Land into Gentile lands (Exile)**

- **2 Kings 17--25**: Israel is sent into Assyria (Israel) and Babylon (Judah)
- **Jonah 2**: Jonah is sent into belly of beast (animal dominion, Genesis 3), into sea (Gentile dominion, see Daniel 7)
- **Luke 15**: Lost Son is under judgment under Gentile oppression.

### **Israel Partially Returns to Land under Persia, but unrepentant**

- **Ezra, Nehemiah**: Israel returns to land and continues in land without repenting
- **Jonah 2--3**: Jonah is delivered out of belly of fish and the deep back to the land, but unchanged in heart
- **Luke 15**: Elder Son is in the field of the father, yet unchanged heart

### **Messiah appears in Land to the Unrepentant, Israel rejects, apostles and remnant receives**

- **Gospels**: Israel rejects the Messiah, forgiveness, the message in Human Form, continues unrepentant, a remnant of disciples accept.
- **Jonah 3--4**: Jonah rejects message of mercy/repentance that he carries, Gentile City of Ninevah repents.
- **Luke 15**: Elder Son (Pharisees) rejects message of Father's compassion, Lost Son (outcasts of Israel) repent.

### **Message of Compassion in/by Messiah Goes to Gentiles apart from Israel through Apostles**

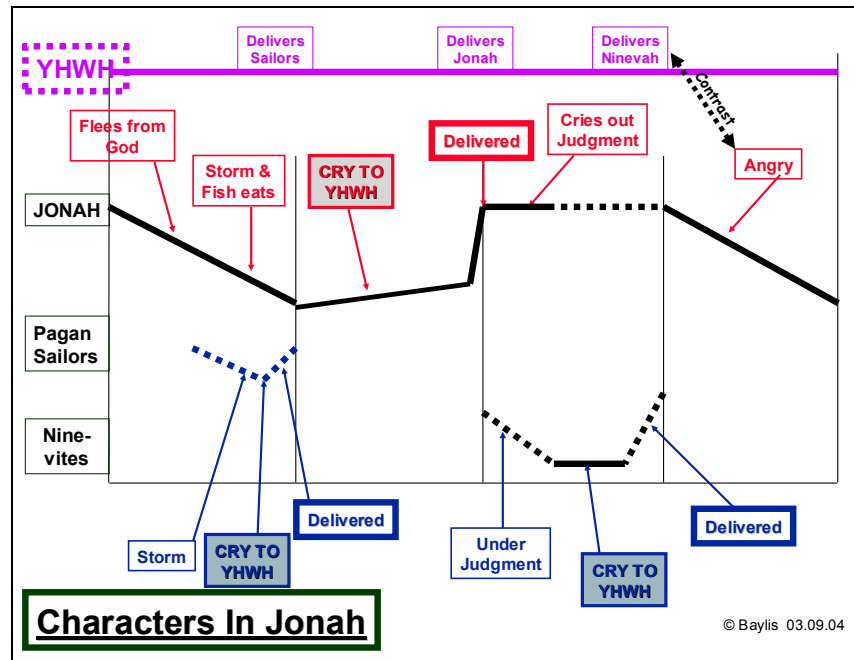
- **Gospels/Acts:** Israel opposes message of compassion from God through Messiah through the apostles from Jerusalem throughout Gentile lands to Rome, as a remnant of Israel receives the message of compassion in Messiah, as well as Gentiles.
- **Jonah 4:** Jonah opposes message of compassion to Ninevah, but Gentile city of Ninevah receives the compassion.
- **Luke 15:** Elder Son (Pharisees) opposes message of compassion from the Father, yet younger son (Jewish outcasts) receives mercy.

**Message of Compassion Through Messiah continues to pursue Israel for their repentance**

- **Acts:** God pursues Israel through the Apostles as they continue to take the message to a rejecting Israel from Jerusalem to the Gentile lands to Rome.
- **Jonah:** God comes to Jonah and explains His character of mercy so that Jonah might repent.
- **Luke 15:** The father leaves the house and begs the elder son (Pharisees) to join the celebration (i.e., repent), but the elder son continues in his self-righteousness.



- Commentary



## ARGUMENT

### SETTING

- I. God desires that Jonah take His message to the Ninevites, but he rejects it, was chastised and repented, goes to Ninevah and Ninevah repents (1—3).
  - A. Jonah rejected God’s call to take His message to the Ninevites and was chastised by God (1)
    1. YHWH gave direction for Jonah to take His word to the Gentile city of Ninevah and gave a proclamation against their wickedness (1:1-2).

1:1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me<sup>9</sup>."

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<sup>9</sup> Lit.: before (or to) My face. The phrase, though not exact, reminds the reader of Genesis 6, as the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and Sodom and Gomorrah, that their evil cry had come up before God.

2. Jonah responded to God by attempting to escape from His sight (and influence) to the Gentiles (1:3).

3 But Jonah rose up<sup>10</sup> to flee to Tarshish from the presence of<sup>11</sup> the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going<sup>12</sup> to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into<sup>13</sup> it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of<sup>14</sup> the LORD.

- B. God threw a storm to chastise Jonah; the pagan sailors tried to save Jonah's life and respect YHWH, while Jonah showed no interest in their lives and no response to God (1:4-16).

God's first action was to call Jonah. The second action now was to throw the storm. God controlled the storm and it responded, unlike Jonah. Then the pagan sailors responded to the storm and thus YHWH, while Jonah did not respond.

1. YHWH's Action: YHWH demonstrated His presence to Jonah by sending a storm to threaten Jonah's life (1:4)

4 And the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up.

2. Round #1 Responses: The sailors, the captain responded in fear to YHWH while Jonah slept (1:5-6).

- a. Sailor's response: was to fear the unseen Creator of the storm as they pray (spiritual) and lighten the ship (physical) (1:5a).

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<sup>10</sup> Lit. "arose", to be the same word as "arise" in 1:1.

<sup>11</sup> Lit. "from before the face of" to compare to 1:2. The evil of Ninevah had come before God's face and Jonah sought to flee from before His face. The point is that God's revelation is His face, and Ninevah had contradicted it, while Jonah sought to flee from it.

<sup>12</sup> Lit. "entering in"

<sup>13</sup> Lit. "to go into it" to match that he was "going in" to Tarsus.

<sup>14</sup> Again, "from before the face of". Apparently Jonah felt he had succeeded in escaping YHWH. Not only had he 'gone down'... 'gone down', but he had 'gone in' . . . 'gone in'.

5 Then the sailors became afraid, and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten *it* for them.<sup>15</sup>

- b. Jonah's response: was to sleep (still believing he had escaped the face of YHWH) (1:5b).

But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep.

- c. The pagan captain's response: was to question Jonah regarding his neglect of response to God (1:6).

As so often occurs in the Hebrew narratives it was the pagan who simply recited the obvious to the foolish Israelite. He recognized that the storm was in control of a God, and their physical and spiritual efforts had not paid off. Thus he moved to the only thing left, the person who had not called on his God. Note that he acknowledged that his god(s) did not seem to care about their plight.

6 So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on<sup>16</sup> your god. Perhaps *your* god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish."

- 3. Round #2 Responses: The sailors requested of the God of the storm to find the cause of the judgment so that they might rectify it, yet Jonah did not attempt to volunteer to save the men until he was found out (1:7-9).

- a. Sailor's response: they must appease the unseen Creator of the storm (1:7).

The narrative continues without a response from Jonah, but the next level of pagan efforts went into effect. They had surmised the storm was a judgment of God and thus attempted to find the one on whom the God is after.

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<sup>15</sup> Note here that the sailors' first attempt was to assume that the storm was of natural cause.

<sup>16</sup> The words of the captain "*qum qara*" ("Rise up and call" are parallel to God's in 1:2, "*qum ... qara*" "Rise up . . . cry out".

7 And each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity *has struck* us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.<sup>17</sup>

- b. Sailor's continued response: confront Jonah as to his relationship to his God (1:8).

The men, having determined through their pagan efforts that Jonah was the one whom this apparent storm God was pursuing, now tried to determine if in fact their assessment was correct. They question as to why this God was pursuing him.

8 Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account *has* this calamity *struck* us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

- c. Jonah's response: speaks of YHWH (claims that he fears Him but so far only the pagans have feared Him) (1:9).

In a somewhat ironic statement, Jonah identified with YHWH, the God of all, including the very sea which was threatening them. Unless Jonah had come to this realization in the present, he feared YHWH prior to this and should have known not to have tried to escape on the sea.

9 And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."

- 4. Round #3 Responses: The sailors regarded Jonah's life and tried to insure his safety through their own increased efforts (1:10-13).
  - a. Sailors' response: increase their response of fear when they hear of YHWH (1:10-11).

The pagan sailors now seem to have embraced YHWH in the same way as Jonah. Jonah used the word "yara" ("fear"), and now the sailors were recorded as

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<sup>17</sup> They are reasoning that if this storm is supernatural, a judgment of God, that God would reveal the problem so it could be corrected. Note that when the lot falls on Jonah they try to correct the problem by interrogating Jonah to see if it can be determined.

“...yara...yara..” (“feared with great fear”). Thus the fear that Jonah had mentioned (probably a statement of awe and submission to his God) was now taken by the men in extreme awe and submission to Jonah’s God. In other words they realized they were confronted by a God who controlled the storm, and they were on the wrong end of a relationship with Him. They realized that they, though seemingly innocent, would be taken along with this man in perishing before this God. Thus, their only avenue to understand this God was through the one who had revealed Him to them, Jonah. So they ask how He might be appeased.

10 Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. 11 So they said to him, "What should we do to you<sup>18</sup> that the sea may become calm for us?"-- for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy.

- b. Jonah’s response: in order to appease YHWH they must separate themselves from him by throwing him into the sea (1:12).

Jonah, realizing that the storm is specifically to bring him back to his mission, recognized that God would allow the pagans to be relieved when he is removed.<sup>19</sup>

12 And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm *has come* upon you."

- c. Sailor’s response: try to save Jonah’s life against the Creator’s storm (1:13).

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<sup>18</sup> This is quite interesting. While Jonah is clearly the cause of their plight, and it is Jonah who reveals this God of the storm to them, they are clearly ignorant of this God on their own. Thus, they must proceed to ask the man who has placed them in this trouble about how to get out of it. In other words, while the man is evil, he also is a prophet, the only means of their access to this God.

<sup>19</sup> Did Jonah think he would die or was he confident that God would continue to use him for the future mission to Ninevah? There is no hint here that Jonah felt that he could not avoid the mission. However, Jonah’s desire for death above the mission is frequent. It appears Jonah is simply looking for death instead of repenting.

However, the men seemed unconvinced by Jonah's interpretation of the storm and attempted to overcome what still might be superstition. Obviously they did not feel enough confidence in their probing into the truth (the casting of lots), nor in Jonah's ability to perceive truth.

It was very interesting that they are very concerned for Jonah's life, yet Jonah virtually seemed unconcerned (until questioned) that they might perish with him, a short insight into Jonah's view of pagans.

13 However, the men rowed *desperately* to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming *even* stormier against them.<sup>20</sup>

5. Round #5 Responses: The men were not able to accomplish deliverance of Jonah, nor themselves, so they sought YHWH themselves for the implementation of God's judgment of Jonah (1:14).

Having failed in their last effort at human responses, they now moved to the worship of Jonah's God. This phrase "call on YHWH" is a somewhat technical phrase of identification with YHWH (cf. Gen. 4:26, 12:8, 13:4).

They pray in several parts.

1. The first as to not let them perish on account of Jonah's sin (although this could be a preface to the next clause indicating that they did not want to perish if they killed him by throwing him into the sea.)
2. The second was that should Jonah be innocent (their perceptions and his are wrong), that their act of throwing him overboard would not be held against them (as murder).
3. Their final statement was one of submission. They were assuming that the storm was from God, that it was because of Jonah, and that they had frustrated all means to counteract otherwise, and it had not worked. Thus they blamed their move on God.

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<sup>20</sup> Again the men question that they might be wrong in perceiving God's justice on Jonah and again try to see if it might not be averted as a natural cause, especially since Jonah does not reveal a judgmental issue.

14 Then they called on the LORD<sup>21</sup> and said, "We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for Thou, O LORD, hast done as Thou hast pleased."

6. Round #6 Response: The sailors, having done everything they could to confirm the storm as a judgment on Jonah, having asked YWHH, now implemented YHWH's desires by throwing Jonah into the sea. The storm immediately ceased as a sign to them that YHWH was the God of the storm, and their response was that of fear and worship (1:15-16).

Having made the final prayer to cover all their bases, they threw Jonah into the sea, and again the statement was made that they feared ("yara...yara", "feared with great fear") YHWH. Then they made sacrifices and vowed to indicate their submission to this God of Jonah who controlled the sea. It was interesting that the same phrase, "feared with great fear" is used of them when they find out about YHWH from Jonah (1:10), but now they fear greatly based on experience. So they respond with sacrifices and vows.

15 So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. 16 Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

- C. Jonah was chastised by God and repented and was restored to dry land (1:17—3:10)
1. God executed judgment on Jonah (1:17).

God still controlling Jonah's life<sup>22</sup>, continued the judgment as Jonah was swallowed by a great fish<sup>23</sup>. The fish responded to God's call, and Jonah asked for deliverance.

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<sup>21</sup> This "call on YHWH" appears to be the standard formula for identification with YHWH and His deliverance, either in the Seed of the Woman or in the recognition that this God is the Deliverer of mankind in its various woes.

<sup>22</sup> Note that this God will not let Jonah go.

<sup>23</sup> The 'great fish' has always been a problem for those who question the authenticity of the book. There have been many attempts to show the possibility of a man being swallowed and living to tell about it. However valid some of these stories may be, it has nothing to do with the validity of this event. The God in this book is a God who 'threw' a storm and stilled it, who 'prepared' a fish that listened to His 'command', who 'prepared' a plant for shade and 'prepared' a worm who ate the plant. To try to establish through some 'natural' historically occurring phenomena that this event could

17 And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

2. Jonah repented (2:1-8)

The contrast has been shown in the pagans (they offered sacrifices and vows to YHWH) for their deliverance, recognizing the mercy shown them. Jonah, unconcerned for the pagan sailors, now was perishing himself. But his cry would also be to YHWH to deliver him, for he recognized, "Deliverance is from YHWH!"<sup>24</sup>. Thus Jonah is also mercifully given another opportunity to serve YHWH.

2:1 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish,

a. Summary of the cry of repentance, the deliverance of YHWH (2:2).

2 and he said,

"I called out of my distress to the LORD<sup>25</sup>, And He answered me.

I cried for help from the depth of Sheol<sup>26</sup>; Thou didst hear my voice.

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happen would deny the supernatural claims of the book. Jonah was being dealt with *supernaturally* by a very intense, specific, and personal God, not just one who is limited to dealing with existing creatures in natural ways. To try to justify in this manner is to try to find a natural explanation for the Red Sea crossing, which is a denial of the claims of the text; that this God is unlimited and in fact uses supernatural means to demonstrate beyond any doubt that these events are not coincidence, but are caused by the Great YHWH, the Creator of all things.

<sup>24</sup> While this is an argument from silence and needs more validation, it is interesting to note that Jonah's prayer is only for deliverance from the deep. There is no contrition, no rehearsal of past errors, no repentance of his disagreement with YHWH. His prayer is strictly for deliverance from the deep. In fact, 3:8 appears to give thanks that he is faithful to YHWH while pagans are not, a hint of self-righteousness may be there. (Robert Chisholm, Class Notes on Jonah is one source for this suspicion).

<sup>25</sup> Here, in comparison to 1:14 where the sailors call on YHWH, now Jonah calls on YHWH.

<sup>26</sup> "Sheol" is normally 'the grave' or 'death'. Notice here that Jonah is interpreting his time in the sea to that of death. Notice that in Jesus' use of this in the New Testament He refers to Jonah's time in the 'belly of the fish' as parallel to His death.



- b. The Lament described, with his response from the depths (2:3-7).

3 "For Thou hadst cast me into the deep,  
 Into the heart of the seas,  
 And the current  
 engulfed me.  
 All Thy breakers and  
 billows passed over  
 me.

4 "So I said, 'I have been expelled from Thy sight'<sup>27</sup>.  
 Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy  
 temple.'<sup>28</sup>

5 "Water encompassed me to the point of  
 death.

The great deep engulfed me,  
 Weeds were wrapped around my head.

6 "I descended to the roots of the mountains.  
 The earth with its bars *was* around me  
 forever,

But Thou hast brought up my life from the  
 pit<sup>29</sup>, O LORD my God.

7 "While I was fainting away, I remembered the  
 LORD; And my prayer came to Thee, Into Thy holy  
 temple.

- c. The expression of confident delivery was made to contrast  
 to the pagans (2:8).

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<sup>27</sup> Notice here the reference to 'from Thy sight' as compared to earlier when Jonah had fled from the 'face of YHWH'.

<sup>28</sup> "Thy holy temple" is the residence of God (cf. v. 7). Also see 1 Kings 8:42 for one who looks toward God's holy house for forgiveness (in that case a foreigner). Yet Jonah will disagree with that passage when Ninevah repents. The whole of the chapter of 2 Kings 8 recognizes repentance from Israel and from the Gentiles if they repent toward "this house", the temple.

<sup>29</sup> These words recall Psalm 16, et. al.

Jonah stated his own case in contrast to the pagans who did not regard the mercy of YHWH which they could obtain. The words of “sacrifice” and “vows” parallel the sailors’ in 1:14.<sup>30</sup>

8 "Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness<sup>31</sup>,

9 But

I will sacrifice to Thee With the voice of thanksgiving.

That which I have vowed I will pay.

Salvation is from the LORD. "

3. The LORD responded to Jonah’s cry and delivered him to the dry land (2:10).

10 Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

- II. Jonah went to the Ninevites, rejected God due to His compassion after the pronouncement of judgment (3:1-4:11)

In this final chapter God continued his control of the elements and people. The Ninevites responded to His call. The plant responded to His call. The worm even

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<sup>30</sup> There may be a hint of Jonah’s mocking the sailors and their attitude toward their gods, or perhaps he is mocking their consistency, that they will abandon YHWH even after their sacrifices and vows, while he will be the faithful one. Note that Jonah is not aboard the ship when they do these worship items, yet if this is the case, then he is aware of their acts, but considers them inconsistent with their character, their ability to actually turn. Note also however, while an argument from silence, there is no record of Jonah’s repentance of his failure.

<sup>31</sup> This is an interesting phrase. Literally it reads, “Those who keep vain (or empty, Heb.: *habel*) vanities (frequently translated “idols”) forsake their mercy (Heb.: *hesed*). The difficulty here is that of the third person plural possessive of *hesed*. *Hesed* is sourced from God, and is His one-way mercy to those who are helpless. It is sometimes a trait of His representatives, who imitate Him (giving the mercy that is given to them). However, in this context, it is not likely that he would be referring to *hesed* possessed by those who worship idols, and thus appears to be the *hesed* of God, which he offers to the pagans. Thus the statement becomes one of accurate realization of God. However, Jonah seemed to say that he realized the mercy of God toward himself and he will honor God, something that he later does not do well.

responded to His call. But Jonah rebelled against His Creator and the One who had delivered Him.

A. Round #1: Ninevite response: The Ninevites respond to God's call by repenting of their evi<sup>32</sup> (3:1-10).

1. YHWH called: YHWH gave direction for Jonah to take His word to the Gentile city of Ninevah and give a proclamation against their wickedness (3:1-2).

Again, YHWH issued the exact same proclamation that He had issued in 1:2, "qum lek...qara" ("arise, go...cry out").

3:1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you."

2. Jonah's response: Jonah responded according to God's instruction and preached the judgment on Ninevah (3:3-4).

- a. Jonah responded to God's call and went to Ninevah (3:3).

Jonah, now having realized the error of his ways (at least his alternatives are clear) proceeded to Ninevah.

3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD.

- b. Jonah preached imminent destruction of the city due to their sin (3:3b-4).

Jonah pronounced the soon destruction of Ninevah.<sup>33</sup> The delay in the proclamation indicated the possibility of escape.

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<sup>32</sup> Note here that the Ninevites rehearsed their wrong way before God, in comparison to Jonah's prayer of repentance that did not discuss his personal failure.

<sup>33</sup> The question arises whether God had intended the proclamation to be one of *sure* judgment, or an invitation to repent *or* there would be sure judgment. The issue of the 'forty days' delay indicates that God had intended it as a proclamation of sure judgment, but a delay for their repentance (or one imagines, their escape from the doomed city). Delay is part of God's program. Noah delayed 120 years while he built the ark (and thus proclaimed the judgment and the possible escape). Pharaoh's judgment was delayed while deliverance was preached through the plagues (Pharaoh had the opportunity to submit to the obviously superior Israelite God). Yet he determined that he

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. 4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown<sup>34</sup>."

3. Ninevah's Response: The people of Ninevah repent (3:5-9).

The theology of the people of Ninevah is interesting. They did not get it as the main message from Jonah, as he was intent on destruction and would not have gladly offered them a way out (although in the larger canonical context the reader must assume the message of Genesis 3:15 is inherent in the message somewhere). 1 Kings 8 is instructive (Solomon's prayer of dedication). The reference to the temple, though absent in the people of Ninevah's prayer is present in Jonah's in chapter 2. (cf. also 2 Chronicles 6:33<sup>35</sup>).

1 Kings 8:42 "Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Thy people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Thy name's sake 42 (for they will hear of Thy great name and Thy mighty hand, and of Thine outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, 43 hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to Thee, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Thy name, to fear Thee, as *do* Thy people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Thy name.

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would take the Israelite God in battle, and lost, not only his eldest son, but his whole army. Jonah later confirms that he knew that this would happen, since he knew the character of YHWH. However, he should have known it in his proclamation. The delay was clearly for the purpose of deliverance.

Delay allows escape, but also hardening. Jonah likely suspected hardening as in the Exodus while he (they) escaped. Jonah suspected God's character was consistent, but was not sure of the Ninevites' response. For instance, the short delay of judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah only allowed Lot, his wife and daughters to escape.

<sup>34</sup> The word here is used also in Gen. 19:25 for the overthrowing of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

<sup>35</sup> The reference in 2 Chronicles is interesting. In Solomon's dedicatory prayer the verb *qara* ("call") is only used once and it is in the verse concerning the foreigners repentance. It is not used regarding Israel's repentance. In 1 Kings 8 it is used one other time and that is in reference to Israel.

In addition the use of the word “turn” (Heb. “*shub*”) recalls Deut. 30:1-10 where the word is used repeatedly as a turn to YHWH. The verb “turn” is in the same contexts used for YHWH’s turning from their judgment to move to deliverance.

5 Then the people of Nineveh believed<sup>36</sup> in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. 6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered *himself* with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes.<sup>37</sup> 7 And he issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. 8 "But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men<sup>38</sup> call on God<sup>39</sup> earnestly that each may turn<sup>40</sup> from his wicked way and from the violence<sup>41</sup> which is in his hands. 9 "Who knows, God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish?"

4. God’s Response: God responded and turned from the judgment (3:10).

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<sup>36</sup> This is the same word that is used of Abraham in Gen. 15:6.

<sup>37</sup> The humility of the king is exactly what appealed to God to display His mercy.

<sup>38</sup> The subject “men” here has been added, the original text does not have a subject and thus would follow the original subject from the previous phrase, meaning both man and beast would “call”. This is difficult, of course, and thus the subject “men” has been assumed. However, R. Chisholm suggests it as hyperbole indicating the degree to which the king was serious about the repentance.

<sup>39</sup> Here is a variation of the “call on YHWH” (cf. 1:14, 2:2).

<sup>40</sup> The verb “turn” (Heb.: *shub*) is used frequently in Deut. 30:1-12 to reference Israel’s turning to God from exile and disobedience. It is also used in 1Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 6 to reference the return to YHWH and the resultant return of YHWH to the people’s restoration.

<sup>41</sup> This combination of “evil” and “violence” (הַרְעָה וּמִן־הַחַמָּס) recalls Genesis 6 where God saw that the wickedness of man was great . . . and violence was in the earth. If it is to be compared then “evil” would indicate the self-centeredness of man as opposed to representing God, and “violence” would probably be the violence done toward one’s brother instead of the love of God being represented.

10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented<sup>42</sup> concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

**CONFLICT: JONAH RECONFIRMS HIS REJECTION OF GOD'S MERCY TO GENTILES**

B. Round #2: Jonah's Response: Jonah disagreed with God's heart and God explained Jonah's error (4:1-11).

1. Jonah's Response: He had a different heart from YHWH, demonstrated in his anger and in a prayer for God to remove him from representing God (4:1-3).

Jonah was upset (lit.: "it was evil") at God. It was seen by the interplay between the uses of "evil" (calamity, wickedness, displeased) that the question of right and wrong in God's eyes was a difference to Jonah. The use of "anger" is evident in the King's statement of 3:9 where he perceived God as angry in judgment against Nineveh. But now that God had changed to mercy, Jonah continued the anger, insisting that it take place.

- a. Jonah disagreed with God oppositely and he now was angry, not with the Ninevites, but with God (4:1).

4:1 But it greatly displeased<sup>43</sup> Jonah, and he became angry.

- b. Jonah prayed to God to remove him from life since God did not represent justice as Jonah perceived it (4:2-3).

The prayer here is very revealing. After Jonah had determined God as wrong and was angry<sup>44</sup> toward God, he explained now why God was seen as wrong. Jonah, having

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<sup>42</sup> The word here "relented" (Heb.: *nacham*) recalls Gen. 6:6-7 where the wicked world of Noah's (Heb.: *Noach*) day were also in evil. It states that God "relented" that He had made man. The word "relented" is actually "was sorry" indicating a reversal of the curse on man, "in sorrow" he would eat of the fruit of the ground.

<sup>43</sup> The word here is "And it was evil to Jonah evil greatly". This same phrase was used of the sailors when they 'feared fearing greatly'.

<sup>44</sup> The "anger toward God" is not unknown in the Bible. Cain was angry at God when his work was not acceptable. The elder son was angry with the father when he showed mercy to the lost son.

repented in chapter 3, now went back on it to justify his initial disobedience. What is interesting was that Jonah well knew God's attributes and listed them in order, almost in a worshipful list. Jonah's request was to be removed from the representation of God, for his heart did not appreciate God's heart, and thus removal was superior. Everything had switched places. The Ninevites (and the sailors) had recognized God's gracious and compassionate deliverance as part of his character and had been saved from death, while Jonah had not displayed the heart of God (though he relied on it in the depths of the sea), and now wanted his own death.

Jonah, like Israel, rejects its deliverance from Egypt. Jonah rejects his deliverance in the fish.

2 And he prayed to the LORD and said, "Please<sup>45</sup> LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my *own* country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness<sup>46</sup>, and one who relents concerning calamity.<sup>47</sup> 3 "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

## RESPONSE TO THE TENSION: THE PHILOSOPHY OF GOD

2. God's Response: God pointed out that Jonah's reasoning is flawed (4:4).

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<sup>45</sup> This is a very interesting beginning to Jonah's point. It is a plea, literally, "I beseech Thee!", that is, 'entreaty'. Jonah is now taking the place of a one who is helpless and is begging the Lord to understand him, that is, to not show mercy to the helpless, something Jonah is himself in this instance.

<sup>46</sup> The Hebrew here is **חַסֵּד**.

<sup>47</sup> Dr. Robert Chisholm makes the point that these words are used in Exodus 34:6-7 during God's revelation of Himself to Moses. In a shorter form it appears in Numbers 14:18 where Moses pled on behalf of Israel following the incident at Kadesh-Barnea. Thus Jonah was aware of the mercy that God had shown Israel, and was afraid that He would express it to the undeserving Gentiles. Ninevah, of course, had a history of cruel subjugation of its enemies, including Israel, who were required to pay tribute.

God questioned that Jonah was looking after good (Godly) interests. (It was a question of whether God had acted in accordance with ‘right’ or the questioning of God’s actions with respect to appropriate or “good” behavior.

*4 And the LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?"<sup>48</sup>*

3. God’s continued response: God provided an illustration for Jonah (4:5-8).

a. Jonah’s response: left the city and searched for comfort from his humiliation, still hoping that the city might be judged (4:5).

Jonah rejected the word of YHWH in mercy and left the city, not wanting to be identified with their behavior, separating himself from them and God’s mercy.

5 Then Jonah went out<sup>49</sup> from the city and sat east<sup>50</sup> of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.

b. God provided a plant: Jonah received a plant to allow him shade in his irritation (4:6).

YHWH Elohim provided a plant for Jonah’s discomfort demonstrating YHWH’s graciousness to Jonah who was in distress in a very small area. Yet Jonah, though not happy about deliverance to people, was very happy about a plant.

6 So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.

c. God’s action and Jonah’s response: God then removed the plant and brought a wind and Jonah returned to discomfort and repeated his disagreement with God (4:7-8).

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<sup>48</sup> God is not angry but merciful. Jonah is angry.

<sup>49</sup> As Cain was angry with God for His treatment of Cain, and Cain went out from the presence of God, Jonah now ‘goes out’.

<sup>50</sup> Cain went and settled (sat) “east” of Eden. Jonah seems to be copying Cain. John Sailhammer notes that “east of . . .” (in the case of Babel) indicates an evil way.



Jonah's discomfort over God's removal of his shade returned Jonah to the same statement, that he desired to be removed. The worm's eating of the plant appeared to Jonah to be unfair. Thus the plant (like Ninevah) was removed (judged like Ninevah would have been) and yet Jonah argued against the removal of the plant. Thus Jonah wanted it both ways with God. He wanted Him to judge (remove Ninevah from life), yet he wanted God to not remove a plant. The point to Jonah was that he realized the plight of the plant since it had personal benefit to him, but he did not feel there was justification in keeping the Ninevites alive since they did not benefit him. Thus he misunderstood the heart of YHWH which was to benefit (from His graciousness, one way) the hopeless who recognize their plight and call on YHWH to give help.

7 But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant and it withered. 8 And it came about when the sun came up that God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with *all* his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life."

4. The final dialogue: God and Jonah discussed the differences in the illustration to identify the failure of Jonah (4:9-11).

- a. God questioned Jonah regarding his heart. (4:9a).

Now in a continuing parallel God repeated His former response to Jonah similar response.

9 Then God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?"

- b. Jonah disagreed with God and asked that he be removed from representation (4:9b).

Jonah defended his disagreement with God once more to that of not wanting to represent God any longer.

And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death."

- c. God explained that Jonah resented having the plant removed even though it had been given to him (of no value

which he had invested), yet he desired that God remove men and women and children as well as animals (4:10-11).

The Lord's message was very simple. Jonah had more feeling for a plant than he did people. The reason he felt pity on the plant was due to its personal benefit. Yet he did not understand God because he had no love for the Gentiles, certainly not the love that God has toward the hopeless.

10 Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work, and *which* you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. 11 "And should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know *the difference* between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Not only Jonah's obvious care for a plant above people, Jonah had cared for a plant with no breath which was originally for eating (Genesis 1—2). So the plant was the lowest of all living creation.