

Jonah 1:1-16

- What if... -

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Introduction

- ❖ The title of this study employs an exegetical method by asking the question “what if this or that would have happened” in search of meaning and the significance of a story for today's readers.
 - What if there was no violent storm at all? In that case, Jonah would have reached Tarshish safely and his goal, to flee from the LORD. New questions will arise. Is He really “the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land”? The identity of the LORD would be at stake.
 - What if the lot did not fall on Jonah? If you do not believe in divine guidance but in mere chance, this would have been an equal possibility. In that case, there are no gods, including the LORD. For the narrative, the lot must fall on Jonah. The story requires faith in divine guidance, both by the sailors and Jonah, Jonah foremost.
 - What if there was no great fish to swallow Jonah? The sea had become calm again and the sailors could have continued their voyage to Tarshish. The wrath of the LORD was upon Jonah and he was drowned in the sea as a warning for all readers. The story could have ended here, followed by a short epilogue. In that case, the main message "Salvation comes from the LORD" (Jon 2:9) had to be conveyed otherwise. The same is true for: "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jon 4:2).
- ❖ The book of Jonah is different compared to the other minor prophets because it tells a story about the prophet narrated by somebody else. He preached to the people of Assyria only these words: “Forty days from now Nineveh will be overthrown” (Jon 3:4). The book

narrates his actions and words in connection with an assignment that he found difficult to accept from the Lord: to preach to an enemy nation (Nineveh, the capital of Assyria) with the possibility that they would respond in such a way as to be shown mercy by God, an outcome that Jonah was determined to resist.¹

- The reader gets the message of the book mainly by evaluating what happened to Jonah and what he, and the other characters, did in response rather than by analyzing what God told Jonah to say.²
- ❖ The main thought is found in Jonah 2:9: "Salvation comes from the LORD." But this was a lesson for Jonah to apprehend. It permeates his personal experience.
 - Jonah knew this before when he prayed to the LORD (Jon 4:2): He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Book of Jonah. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a "stand-alone". You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons. There are four available.

Form and structure

- ❖ The Book of Jonah can be divided into two parts: the first and the second commission to preach against Nineveh. See below.
 - Each part has different scenes at different locations.
 - Scene 2 has subdivisions marked by the nature of the sea: a. a violent storm; b. getting rougher and tougher; c. growing even wilder; d. becoming calm again.
 - Scene 3 has a subdivision marked by the result of the preaching of Jonah: a. the preaching; b. the effect on the people of Nineveh and consequently the compassion of God; c. Jonah displeased.
 - It is interesting to note that the two discourses together feature an ABB'A'-structure:

¹ Stuart, D. (2012, p. 455). *Jonah, Book of*. In M. J. Boda & G. J. McConville (Eds.).

² Stuart, D. (2012, p. 456). *Jonah, Book of*. In M. J. Boda & G. J. McConville (Eds.).

- A. The mercy of God (4:2);
 - B. The angriness of Jonah (4:3);
 - B'. The angriness of Jonah (4:9);
 - A'. The mercy of God (4:10-11).
 - Between both discourses, the growth and the withering of the vine is told.
 - The prayer of Jonah has several features resembling the Psalms.
- ❖ **The book ends with a question, the reader needs to answer.**

PART I. First commission to preach against Nineveh (Jon 1-2)	
On the run (Jon 1:1-3)	
Scene 1 <i>(verse 1:1-3)</i> LORD – Jonah	The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.
At Sea (Jon 1:4-17) – the violent storm	
Scene 2a <i>(verse 1:4-10)</i> LORD sailors – gods Jonah – LORD	Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish.” Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?” He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.” This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

<p>Scene 2b (verses 1:11-12) Sailors – Jonah</p>	<p>The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?” He replied, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea, and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”</p>
<p>Scene 2c (verses 1:13-14) Sailors – LORD</p>	<p>Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. Then they cried to the LORD, “O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased.”</p>
<p>Scene 2d (verses 1:15-16) Sailors – LORD</p>	<p>Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.</p>
<p>Inside the fish (Jon 2) – the prayer</p>	
<p>Scene 3 (verses 1:17-2:1) LORD (his God) – Jonah</p>	<p>But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights. From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said:</p>
<p>The prayer (verses 2:2-9)</p>	<p>“In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry.</p> <p>You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.</p> <p>I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’</p> <p>The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever.</p> <p>But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God. “When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD,</p>

<p>(verse 2:10)</p>	<p>and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.</p> <p>“Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD.”</p> <p>And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.</p>
<p>PART II. Second commission to preach against Nineveh (Jon 3-4)</p>	
<p>At Nineveh (Jon 3:1-4:4)</p>	
<p>Scene 3a (verses 3:1-4) LORD – Jonah</p>	<p>Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”</p> <p>Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh.</p> <p>Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days. On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.”</p>
<p>Scene 3b (verses 3:5-10) God – Ninevites</p>	<p>The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.</p> <p>When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”</p> <p>When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.</p>
<p>Scene 3c (verses 4:1-4) LORD – Jonah The first discourse:</p>	<p>But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding</p>

<p>prayer and answer by question</p>	<p>in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” But the LORD replied, “Have you any right to be angry?”</p>
<p>East of Nineveh (Jon 4:5-11) – the lesson</p>	
<p>Scene 4 (verses 4:5-</p> <p>The second discourse: outcry and answer by question</p>	<p>Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.</p> <p>Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.</p> <p>But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint.</p> <p>He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.” But God said to Jonah, “Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?” He said, “I do. I am angry enough to die.” But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”</p>

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

Author

- ❖ The author of this book is not known. He is very skilled in story-telling.

Date of writing and setting

- ❖ The date of writing is not known.
- ❖ The date of the setting is also not exactly known. The book refers to cities, and the king of Nineveh but doesn't mention his name. The opening verses do not refer to any reign of the kings of Israel and Judah, like some other prophetic books:

- “The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah” (Isa 1:1).
- ❖ The only reference we have is 2 Kings 14:25. Based on the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel (793–753 BC or 786–746 BC). Jonah's ministry as a prophet could have occurred in the first half of the eighth century B.C. plus ten years (740 B.C.). This is a mere indication.
 - Nahum, who also prophesied against Nineveh, must be dated several decades later when Assyria had waged war against Israel and Judah.

Jonah

- ❖ His name means “Dove.”
- ❖ Little is known about the prophet himself. He is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25:
 - “He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher.”
 - “He” is Jeroboam II, King of Israel.
 - This word of the LORD might answer the question of why Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh.
 - A weak or even destroyed Nineveh was no threat to the restored boundaries of Israel, whereas a strong Nineveh and Assyria could become a threatening power to these boundaries. This indeed has happened (734–722 BC).

LORD (Yahweh)

- ❖ “The divine names vary (‘Yahweh,’ ‘Elohim,’ ‘ha-Elohim,’ ‘Yahweh-Elohim’), for the most part according to who is addressing the deity (generally, the pagans use ‘Elohim,’ and Jonah uses ‘Yahweh,’ as might be expected).”³ See also Psalm 95:3-5.
- ❖ He is the God of heaven: “He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, **the God of heaven**, who made the sea and the land” (Jon 1:9). This designation is especially used in pagan contexts:
 - Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (Dan 2:18, a.o.);
 - Cyrus king of Persia (2 Chron 36:23; Ezr 1:2, a.o.);
 - Darius king of Persia (Ezr 6:8);
 - Artaxerxes (Ezr 7:12; Neh 1:4, a.o.).
 - Interesting are also Revelation 11:13 and 16:10, 11:

³ Stuart, D. (2012, p. 459). *Jonah, Book of*. In M. J. Boda & G. J. McConville (Eds.).

- "At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven."
 - "The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done."
- ❖ The LORD is described as governing his creation (the sea; a storm (heaven); dry land; a fish; the sun; a scorching east wind, a vine, a worm). "He provided a great fish" (Jon 1:17; see also 4:6, 7, 8). Jonah knew that the LORD had sent this storm, and he was thankful to God for his salvation by the fish but seems to have forgotten all this when he was angry about the withered vine.
- He is not only the LORD of the natural world but also the nations, and the sailors were instruments in his hands.
- ❖ Three statements of Jonah are important:
- "I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land" (Jon 1:9).
 - "But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD" (Jon 2:9).
 - "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jon 4:2).
 - They reveal also the contradictions found in the belief system of the believer.
- ❖ Person notes: "Jonah, the helmsman, and the king of Nineveh all suggest (at least implicitly) that the Lord is compassionate:"⁴

The captain/helmsman:	Call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish" (1:6).
Jonah:	Salvation comes from the LORD" (2:9).
The King	"God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish" (3:9).
Jonah	"You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (4:2).

⁴ Person, R. F., Jr. (1996, p.60).

- The LORD is also depicted as a God who gives a second chance, especially to Jonah.

Geography

- ❖ The Book of Jonah mentions several geographical names.
 - Home (Jon 4:2) This is probably Gath Hepher (2 Kgs 14:25), a fortified town in Israel, the Northern Kingdom. Jerome, in his commentary on the book of Jonah, locates Gath-Hepher two miles from Sepphoris, on the road to Tiberias. This fortified city was occupied until the Assyrian conquest. In the Persian period, the site was again inhabited.⁵
 - Joppa (Jon 1:2). A town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It was an important harbour. Timbers from Lebanon were shipped to Joppa, where they were unloaded and carried overland to Jerusalem (2 Chr 2:16; Ezra 3:7; see also Acts 9:36).⁶
 - Tarshish (Jon 1:2). The location of this port is not clear. A tentative conclusion, based on the story, might point to the south of Spain (Tartessos). There existed trading contacts between the Phoenicians (Tyre, Lebanon; Ez 27:12) and the people of Tartessos. Instead of going to the east (Nineveh), Jonah wanted to travel to the West as far as possible. But, “because of the ambiguity regarding the identification of Tarshish, we are not able to say with confidence where Jonah was heading when he set sail from Joppa. All we can be sure of is that he was going west, and that he thought he would be leaving his God behind.”⁷
 - These ships could carry a sail and sailed close to the coastline.
 - They set sail during the spring and the summer season (April-September). During the autumn and winter season the weather could become rough and travelling at sea was impossible.
 - Nineveh was one of the major cities of the Assyrians located on the east bank of the river Tigris, opposite modern Mosul, and very populous by the standards of those days. It became the capital of Assyria by the decision of King Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.).

Historicity

- ❖ For a discussion pros and cons of the historicity of the Book, see D. Stuart.⁸

⁵ Greenberg, R. (1992, Vol. 2, pp. 909–910). *Gath-Hepher (Place)*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

⁶ Kaplan, J., & Kaplan, H. R. (1992, Vol. 3, p. 946). *Joppa (Place)*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

⁷ Baker, D. W. (1992, Vol. 6, p. 333). *Tarshish (Place)*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

⁸ Stuart, D. (2012, p. 460). *Jonah, Book of*. In M. J. Boda & G. J. McConville (Eds.).

Exposition

PART I. First commission to preach against Nineveh (Jon 1)

- ❖ This chapter reveals three ways of communication by the LORD God:
 - The word (language) – Jonah;
 - Casting the lots (oracle) – the sailors;
 - The sea (creation) – the sailors.
- ❖ To understand the behaviour of Jonah and the sailors, it is helpful to distinguish between “informed knowledge” and “experiential knowledge.” It is one thing to know that fire is hot (informed knowledge) and another thing to have experienced a burnt hand (experiential knowledge).
 - The sailors were already informed that Jonah was running away from the LORD (because he had told them so; Jon 1:10) = informed knowledge.
 - Jonah informed them in addition that he is “the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land” = informed knowledge.
 - Because “the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose,” the sailors became afraid (Jon 1:5) and terrified (Jon 1:10) = experiential knowledge. They experienced the great power of the LORD.
- ❖ The story is often well-known, therefore try to read it, and identify with one of the sailors, or to watch the story with imagination, like watching a movie, not knowing the outcome.

Verse 1-3 (Scene 1 – Jonah runs away)

- ❖ **“The word of the LORD came to”**
 - “This kind of formula became the standard form of introduction to the prophetic books when the individual messages were collected.”⁹
 - **“The word (...) came to”** indicates an official commission by the LORD.
 - **“The LORD”** – This Name refers to the revelation of God to Moses (Ex 3:14-16):
 - “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.’ God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you. This is my name

⁹ Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 49).

forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”

- He is the creator, He is the eternal one, who is present, who is faithful to himself, He is the Almighty God. He entered into a covenant with Abraham from generation to generation.

❖ **“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”**

- This is the actual commission, followed by a reason, by which the LORD reveals himself as the Judge of heaven and earth.
 - The LORD is not only concerned with the behaviour of his people of Israel but also with the surrounding peoples and countries. His prophets had occasionally to prophesy and preach against them. An example:
 - “This is the word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations:” (Jer 46:1; Egypt (46:2-28); Philistines (47:1-7); Moab (48:1-47); Ammon (49:1-6); a.o.).
- **“Go to the great city of Nineveh.”** “The Hebrew verb *qum*, which precedes “go”, is frequently used with a so-called ‘inceptive’ force to mark the beginning of an enterprise **or to indicate that the action required is to take place immediately.**¹⁰ NASV translates: **“Arise, go to Nineveh.”**
- **“preach against it.”** The actual words Jonah had to speak are not revealed here, only a very short message is found in Jonah 3:4: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” As we know from the other prophets, the word of God was preached against all surrounding nations. For Nineveh, see especially Nahum.
- **“its wickedness has come before me.”** Compare Revelation 18:4, 5 (about Rom, the capital of the Roman Empire in the first century AD):
- “Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; **for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.**”
 - The LORD said to Abraham concerning the promised land: “In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, **for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.**” See also Genesis 18:20.
 - There is a certain measure to sin before the LORD will judge a city, a people.
 - See also Acts 17:29, 30, Paul preaching in Athens: “we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s

¹⁰ Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 50).

design and skill. **In the past God overlooked such ignorance**, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”

❖ **“But Jonah ran away from the LORD (...) and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.”**

This part of the narrative is beautifully structured:¹¹

- “Jonah, however, started out to flee.
 - **to Tarshish, away from the service of the LORD.**
 - He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to **Tarshish.**
 - He paid the fare and went aboard to sail with the others
 - **to Tarshish, away from the service of the LORD.”**

This construction shows he was determined not to go to Nineveh. The central part is told vividly and with pace. He wants to travel as far as possible to the west. See above for the possible location of Tarshish. In addition, Tarshish is mentioned three times over against Nineveh one time.

- He was not the first one to object to God’s commission. Moses went into a discussion with the LORD and asked him to send someone else (Ex 4:1-17; especially verse 13; compare Isaiah 6:4-7).
- Elijah was tired and afraid:
 - “Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. (...) He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. ‘Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors’ (compare Jonah 4:3, 8). Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat.” (1 Kings 19:3, 4). Compare Jonah 4:3, 8.

Jeremiah said:

- “‘Ah, Sovereign LORD,’ I said, ‘I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.’ But the LORD said to me, ‘Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.’”
- Did Jonah think that he could run away from the LORD? Psalm 139:7-10 speaks otherwise:

Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence? (...)

If I rise on the wings of the dawn, (*to the east, where the sun rises*)
if I settle on the far side of the sea, (*to Tarshish, to the west, where the sun sets*)

¹¹ Based on: Jewish Publication Society. (1985). *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures (Jon 1:3)*. Jewish Publication Society.

even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

- ❖ **“sailed for Tarshish.”** This ship might have been rather large. Price and Newman refer to the expression “ships of Tarshish.” This was sometimes used to indicate large “ocean-going” vessels.¹²
- ❖ **Why did Jonah run away?** At this point the narrator, does not tell the reader. Was he afraid? Was he hoping for the impending destruction of the city? The reader will be informed later on in the story (Jon 4:1-2).

Verse 4- 10 (Scene 2a – At sea)

- ❖ Scene 2 (verse 4=16) can be divided into four subsections:
 - 1. A violent storm hits the ship at sea (verses 4-10);
 - 2. The sea was getting rougher (verses 11-12);
 - 3. The sea grew even wilder (verses 13-14);
 - 4. The raging sea became calm (verses 15-16).
- ❖ **“Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose”**
 - The creation (wind/storm) obeys the LORD, whereas Jonah disobeys. “But”¹³ as translation is preferred: **“But the LORD.”** Emphasis on **“the LORD.”**
 - During spring and summer storms occur but in general it was a safe period to travel at sea. Therefore the storm must have surprised the sailors.
 - “sent”, “hurled” or “threw” (Jon 1:4, 5, 12, 15) = “טָוֹל”: **hif. to throw far.**¹⁴
 - In this first chapter, this word is a pun:
“the LORD **sent** a great wind on the sea” (1:4);
“they **threw** the cargo into the sea” (1:5) (to no avail);
“**throw** me into the sea” (1:12);
“they took Jonah and **threw** him overboard” (1:15).
- ❖ **“that the ship threatened to break up.”** The ship did not break apart because the LORD had other purposes. The force of the storm is restrained.
 - Psalm 48:7 refers to the dangers at sea: **“You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind.”**

¹² Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 52).

¹³ Jewish Publication Society. (1985). *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures (Jon 1:4)*. Jewish Publication Society.

¹⁴ Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 373).

- ❖ **“All the sailors were afraid”** Their lives were threatened. They could not swim, and there were no life jackets or other life-saving means aboard.
- ❖ They can do two things:
 - To throw **“the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.”** The waves then hit the ship less hard. The ship will move easier and faster along the waves.
 - To cry **“out to his own god”** or **“out to his own gods”** for salvation, rescue, and help. **“God”** or **“gods”**? The plural is more realistic because the sailors came from societies where they worshipped multiple gods. They don't know which god is responsible.
 - The sailors came from different countries and peoples. Sea trade was already an ‘international’ business.
 - It makes the story a bit humorous. The reader knows what the sailors don't know yet. The LORD is responsible for this storm. They are in a sense at random crying to their ‘personal’ gods.
 - Besides, the believer also knows that “all who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame” (Isa 44:9).
- ❖ **“But”** contrasts Jonah with the sailors. The order of telling the story is insightful. Compare:
 -

Original Story (Jon 1:4-6)	Rearranged Story (Jon 1:4-6)
<p>1. Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.</p> <p>2. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.</p> <p>3. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.</p> <p>4. The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish.”</p>	<p>1. Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.</p> <p>2. Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.</p> <p>3. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.</p> <p>4. The captain went to Jonah and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish.”</p>

- ❖ In the rearranged story, the order of events is as follows:

- ❖ 1. Jonah boards the ship, he is tired and wants to get some sleep. 2. The LORD sends a great wind. 3. The sailors start crying to their gods. 4. The captain, amazed that Jonah could sleep during this storm, wakes him up and summons him to pray to his God.
- ❖ In the rearranged story, Jonah is not aware of the dangers.
- ❖
- ❖ In the original story, the order of events is shocking. 1. The LORD sends a great wind. 2. Instead of praying to God, like the sailors, 3. Jonah had gone below deck. **He withdraws from prayer and doesn't take responsibility.** 4. The captain is looking for Jonah and angrily he wakes him up and summons him to pray to his God.
- ❖ Jonah is aware of the dangers. Did he risk the lives of the sailors? Did he trust the LORD that the ship would not sink?
- ❖ **"How can you sleep?"** With emphasis on **"how."** How is it possible that you sleep while the waves are hitting the ship? The question carries the connotation of rebuke as is implied in the Hebrew text.¹⁵
 - Jonah climbs back onto the deck.
- ❖ **"Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish."**
 - **"your god."** To the captain, the god of Jonah must be like all the other gods to whom the sailors pray. "What a scene! The heathen sailor admonishes the Hebrew prophet to pray!"¹⁶
 - But Jonah didn't start praying at all! And none of the gods responded to the prayers of the sailors.
 - Jonah is an anti-type of Jesus, who was asleep in the boat during the storm (Mk 4:37–41). "Even the winds and the waves obey him."
- ❖ Now, they will try the casting of the lots, a kind of divination. It was widely practised, also in Israel:
 - "Saul then said to all the Israelites, 'You stand over there; I and Jonathan my son will stand over here.' 'Do what seems best to you,' the men replied. **Then Saul prayed to the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Give me the right answer.'** And Jonathan and Saul were taken by lot, and the men were cleared. Saul said, 'Cast the lot between me and Jonathan my son.' And Jonathan was taken" (1 Sam 14:40-42).
 - **"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD"** (Prov 16:33).

¹⁵ Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 58).

¹⁶ Smith, J. M. P., & Bewer, J. A. (1912, p.33).

- “Once when Zechariah’s division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense” (Lk 1:8, 9).

❖ **“So they asked him.”** Five questions follow, this shows the urgency and the hazard of the moment.

So they asked him,	He answered,
“Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”	“I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.”

- The first question is: **“Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us?”** They do not accuse Jonah: “You are responsible!” Do they wish “to have Jonah himself admit his blame and thus confirm what the process of divination had already indicated?”¹⁷

- **“What do you do?”** or **“What are you doing here *on this ship*?”**

- This is the first time Jonah is speaking. He answers only to the final question. He doesn’t say: “I am responsible,” although he knows better. He adds **“I worship...”** Indirectly, he indicates that he is responsible. Note that the sailors didn’t ask about the identity of his god!

❖ When Jonah answers their question, he reveals the identity of the LORD: **“He answered, “I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.”**

- **“He is the God of heaven.”** See above. This revelation of the identity of the LORD implies that He is greater than all the other gods to whom the sailors prayed.
- Compare Exodus 20:11: **“For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea.”** See also Exodus 31:17, Psalm 146:5, 6 and Revelation 10:6, 14:7.
- Jonah 1:8 follows the order of events:
- **the God of heaven** > he has sent a great wind, a violent storm
- **who made the sea** > threatening the ship to break up at sea

¹⁷ Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 60).

- **and the land** > they could not reach the land (Jon 1:13).
- **“worship”** = “לָרַץ”:
- 3. *fear, reverence, and honour*, of God.¹⁸
- The same verb is used in verse 5: “All the sailors **were afraid**” and in verse 10: “Then the men **were** exceedingly **afraid**.” (ESV). **“Were afraid”** is intensified by “exceedingly,” literally “with great fear.”
 - The sailors now realize that this storm is caused by the LORD, the God of heaven! And because of Jonah.
- ❖ The following question of the sailors is understandable: **“What have you done?”** Why is the LORD angry with you? **“(They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)”** But Jonah didn't tell them why he had run away from the LORD. The reader knows.
 - Again, Jonah doesn't answer their question. He remains silent. Is he so reluctant to mention his commission to preach against Nineveh? That would be the solution. The sailors could have dropped him at the nearest port, and Jonah was convinced of the power of the LORD.
 - **“What have you done?”** can also be translated as **“That was an awful thing to do!”**¹⁹ as an exclamation.

Verse 11- 12 (Scene 2b – At sea)

- ❖ **“The sea was getting rougher and rougher.”** The LORD is pressing the situation, and forcing Jonah to make a decision.
 - The narrative order in the Hebrew Bible is different: “They said to him, ‘What must we do to you to make the sea calm around us?’ **For** the sea was growing more and more stormy.” The Knox Translation has a better option: “Even as they spoke, the waves grew more angry yet.”²⁰ This translation shows the urgency to act.
- ❖ **“So they asked him, ‘What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?’”**

¹⁸ Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977, p. 431).

¹⁹ Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 65).

²⁰ Online, C. B. (n.d.). Knox Bible. <https://catholicbible.online/knox/OT/Jon>

- Price and Newman comment: “The sailors, having learned not only that Jonah was the person who was to blame for the storm, but also that he had done something to arouse God’s anger, now ask how the situation can be saved.”²¹
- Note that the sailors don’t ask “What should we do?” but “What should we do **to you?**” What are the options? There are only two options:
 - 1. Bring me to the nearest harbour or shore and drop me there. This could be a serious option if Jonah was impressed by the power of the LORD and decided to go to Nineveh to perform his prophetic task.
 - 2. Throw me into the sea. This would be the end of Jonah, offering himself as a kind of guilt offering. He would drown.
 - Note in advance that later on in the story he says twice: “Now, O LORD, **take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live**” (Jon 4:3, 8).
- ❖ **“Pick me up and throw me into the sea.”** Jonah chooses the second option. He realizes that his plan to run away from the LORD was a mission impossible. This was confirmed when the lot fell on him.
 - Smith and Page remark: “It is interesting that Jonah did not offer to jump overboard on his own. Perhaps he was too frightened, or perhaps at this point he was merely asking for them to be the instrument of God’s punishment.”²²
- ❖ **“and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault.”** The reader knows the outcome within a few moments of reading, the sailors do not. Jonah knows the LORD. He knows that the LORD will calm the storm, for it is not the fault of the sailors.

Verse 13- 14 (*Scene 2c – The sea becomes wilder*)

- ❖ **“Instead, the men did their best to row back to land.”** The sailors choose option 1 to save the life of Jonah and their lives.
 - **“land”** is also used in verse 9: “I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea **and the land.**”
 - **“to row back”** indicates that the shore was in sight.
- ❖ **“But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.”** The LORD prevented them that they could reach the seashore. There is only one option left. The sailors do not know the outcome. Will the LORD be satisfied when they throw Jonah into the sea? Or will the LORD become angry when they take the life of a man?

²¹ Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 65).

²² Smith, B. K., & Page, F. S. (1995, p. 236).

- ❖ **“Then they cried to the LORD.”** They are desperate. Jonah is passive again. He could have jumped into the sea as a self-sacrifice. He has caused all this trouble, not the sailors. They are innocent men.

Line 1	‘O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man's life.
Line 2	Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man,
Line 3	for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased.”

- **“O Lord”** see also Psalm 118:25, Jonah 4:2 and other prayers of Moses (Ex 32:31), Daniel (Dan 9:4), and Nehemiah (Neh 1:5, 11). It introduces a supplication.
- Line 2 intensifies Line 1. The sailors fear any form of retaliation, although their action will be at the instigation of Jonah himself. Caution: for killing an **innocent** man. Because Jonah has not explained what he has done, which could have aroused the wrath of the LORD, they still keep open the possibility that Jonah is an innocent man. Compare Deuteronomy 21:7, 8. As for contrast, see Jeremiah 26:15.
 - They respect both the LORD and human life.
- The sailors have no choice left. They submit themselves to the mercies of the LORD when they pray: **“You have done as you pleased.”** He has sent this storm, which became stronger and stronger.
 - Price and Newman comment: “Whether in these terms or in some other way, the first two elements in the prayer link up with the third, in which the sailors remind God that they are only acting in accordance with his revealed will.”²³

Verse 15- 16 (*Scene 2d – The sea becomes calm again*)

- ❖ **“Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm.”**
 - Try to compare the narrative with a webcam. The sailors are part of the story in real time. The reader is watching and listening. What will happen now?
 - **“and the raging sea grew calm”** The reader knows that it is the LORD who calmed down the sea.
- ❖ **“At this the men greatly feared the LORD.”**
 - The sailors feared the LORD. They stood in awe of the LORD. It reached a climax:
 - **“All the sailors were afraid....”** (Jon 1:5);

²³ Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 70).

- "This terrified them..." (Jon 1:10);
- "At this the men greatly feared the LORD.... (Jon 1:16).
- Their (religious) fear led to activity:
 - before Jonah had revealed the identity of the LORD:
 - praying to their gods;
 - casting the lot.
 - And afterwards:
 - rowing to the coastline, after Jonah had told them to throw him into the sea;
 - praying to the LORD.
- Jonah feared the LORD. His fear led to passivity after he had run away:
 - Running away from the LORD;
 - going down into the ship, while the sailors, try to save the ship and pray to their gods;
 - not praying to the LORD;+
 - not confessing his sin;
 - even his advice to throw him into the sea is a sign of passivity as the story will show when it unfolds.
- ❖ **"and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him."**
 - How great must be their fear and relief? The reader can only imagine. The sacrifice, as a sign of awe and thanksgiving, and the vows are not specified, and therefore not important for us to know. Compare Naaman in 2 Kings 5:17.
 - Jonah 2:9: "But I, with a song of thanksgiving, **will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good.** Salvation comes from the LORD."
 - Sacrifice in combination with vows as a sign of thanksgiving was part of the personal religious practices (Lev 22:17-21).
 - Remember, the sailors are unaware of Jonah's fate. As far as they know, he drowned and died and served as a sacrifice to appease the anger of God.

Verse 17

- ❖ Jonah was saved by God. This verse is a transition to the following scene.

Application

Before

- ❖ Tell the story vividly as is indicated above. Be aware that the listeners already know the story and its outcome but Jonah and the sailors don't.
 - Refrain from telling the outcome of the story.
 - At the end of chapter 1 (verse 16), Jonah and the first reader do not know that Jonah will be saved.
 - In addition, the reader still does not know the reason why Jonah ran away from the LORD. It is important, therefore, not to include Jonah 4:2 in the exposition of chapter 1.
 - This leaves room for the question that is open to all readers: "Why and when did you run away from the LORD?"
 - Do you think that you can escape from the omnipresence of the LORD?
 - Do you think that you can withdraw from your responsibilities given by the LORD?
 - And “what is Tarshish?... In the story it is anywhere—anywhere but the right place; it is the opposite direction, the direction a person takes when he turns his back on his destiny ... it is the excuse we give—our rationalizations”²⁴ not to obey the LORD.
- ❖ In telling the story, the contrast between the fear of the sailors and the fear of Jonah must be felt in the light of the power of the LORD, creator of heaven, the sea and the earth.

Praise

- ❖ Praise the LORD for his power and his strength as the LORD, the God of heaven, creator of the sea and the (dry) land).
 - “Many people in the world today ignore God and assume that he also ignores them. Many believe that God set the world into motion and allows it to continue along unnoticed. This text portrays God as one who notices, as a God who is active, and as a God who takes sin seriously,”²⁵ and not only of his people but also of other peoples (Niveveh).

²⁴ Nixon, R. A. (2003, p. 67) refers to Sheldon H. Blank, rabbi and biblical scholar.

²⁵ Smith, B. K., & Page, F. S. (1995, p. 226).

- ❖ Note the sovereignty and the wisdom of God in handling the storm in response to the actions of the sailors and Jonah:
 - Jonah runs away – God sends a storm, but the ship won't break up, although the sailors don't know this.
 - The sailors take their responsibility. They lighten the ship. They pray to their gods. They try to find out, who was responsible. Jonah keeps silent on this – the storm becomes rougher (by God), forcing Jonah to offer the solution.
 - The sailors want to save the life of Jonah – but God prevents the wind that they can reach dry land, so they have to, being desperate, throw Jonah in the sea.
 - The sea becomes calm again. The storm has performed his duty.
- ❖ The contrast between the gods and the LORD is obvious.

Jonah

- ❖ Sometimes a commentary depicts Jonah as a rebellious unwilling prophet: “Jonah has standing in the tradition mainly because of his ongoing resistance to God’s call. He opposed God. The story-teller shows that Jonah’s response leads to chaos, storm, death, compromise, hypocrisy, self-regard and logical but irresolvable anger. Only the continuing presence of the Lord could restore to Jonah the peace and joy he had lost by running away from God.”²⁶
 - Nixon quotes in addition: “LaCocque describes Jonah as one who is ‘loaded’ with the cowardice and the treason of all.”²⁷
 - Using such judgments will give the reader the impression that he or she is not like Jonah and is doing fine as a believer.
 - Other prophets have been initially unwilling to perform their God-given task. See above.
- ❖ Jonah is just as human as we are.
 - He knows his calling and acts contrary to the grain, ignores the possible consequences, endangers the lives of others (sailors), arouses the wrath of God, and in the end, it is better to choose death than to live.
- ❖ Jonah’s faith was informed faith and knowledge. “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land” (Jon 1:9). This faith was changed into

²⁶ Nixon, R. A. (2003, p. 70, 71).

²⁷ Nixon, R. A. (2003, p. 71).

experiential faith. Now he knows what it means to worship the LORD. But at the same time, this faith didn't change his heart.

- ❖ The church today has a similar call as Jonah: to preach the Gospel among the nations (Mt 28:19). The apostle John was told: "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings" (Rev 10:11). He knew that he would meet resistance and face persecution.
- ❖ Note the questions the sailors ask Jonah. How would you respond?
 - (1) "How can you sleep?"
 - (2) "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us?"
 - (3) "What do you do?"
 - (4) "Where do you come from?"
 - (5) "What is your country?"
 - (6) "From what people are you?"
 - (7) "What have you done?"
- ❖ (8) "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

The sailors

- ❖ The sailors are religious people. They understood the signs as signs of the divine world. They pray. They cast lots. They are aware of guilt in the light of the divine. They offer vows and sacrifices to the LORD. They did fear the LORD, but they cannot be characterized as converts.
 - In a modern sense, they show respect to the God of Israel.
 - Do you notice respect for the LORD and the heavenly Father of Jesus Christ?
 - They also show respect for human life.
- ❖ Furthermore:
 - "There is extreme irony here: a "heathen sea captain" pleaded with a Hebrew prophet to pray to his God. It is sobering to see one who might be termed an "unbeliever" pleading for spiritual action on the part of a "believer." The "unbeliever" saw the gravity of the situation while the prophet slept. It is a sad commentary when those who are committed to the truth of God's word have to be prodded by a lost world into spiritual activity."²⁸
 - There is no fear of the LORD, in comparison with the sailors. They are impressed by the power and the omnipresence of the LORD.

²⁸ Smith, B. K., & Page, F. S. (1995. p. 231).

Fear/worship

- ❖ Fear is a recurring theme in this chapter. Nixon refers to Martin Buber: 'Fear of God' ... never means to the Jews (and Christians) that they ought to be afraid of God, **but that, trembling, they ought to be aware of His incomprehensibility** ... It is the dark gate through which man must pass if he is to enter into the love of God. He who wishes to avoid passing through this gate, he who begins to provide for himself a comprehensible God, constructed thus and not otherwise, runs the risk of having to despair of God in view of the actualities of history and life, or of falling into inner falsehood. Only through the fear of God does man enter so deep into the love of God that he cannot again be cast out of it."²⁹
 - The fear of the sailors changed into reverence. The fear (worship) of Jonah didn't change at all.

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²⁹ Nixon, R. A. (2003, p. 104, 105).

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