

# Jonah 1:17-2:10

- Salvation comes from the LORD -

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## Introduction

- ❖ The Book of Jonah can be read and understood at different levels of understanding.
  - It is one of the favourite stories in children's Bibles with funny illustrations.
  - Adults who are familiar with the Bible, know often the story very well.
  - At a theological level, the story reveals the character of the LORD, his grace and compassion (Jon 4:2). It also reveals the character of a servant of the LORD, who has difficulty in accepting that the grace and compassion of the LORD are not meant for himself and the people of God, but extends far beyond its borders.
  - At a literary level, the author, not Jonah, exploits all kinds of literary devices to produce a short novel as a piece of art.
  - At the reader-response level, the final question is important: "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?" Jonah does not answer. It is the reader who must give the answer.
- ❖ The Book of Jonah is an appeal to the reader. Again there are different reader-reception levels. Two mention three:
  - The first readers but probably they were listeners in the seventh century (see dating) and later who were familiar with the great city of Nineveh.
    - The following words serve as a warning:

- "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs." It was not necessary to include these words in the prayer. What is its message? How does it relate to Jonah 4:2?
  - The readers in the first century knew the story. Jesus referred to it (Mt 12:41, 16:4) and applied Jonah 2 (Jonah in the belly of the fish) to his death burial in the grave, and resurrection ("Salvation comes from the LORD"; Jon 2:9).
  - The twenty-first-century reader. The question of Jonah 4:10, 11 is also a question for readers today.
- ❖ The central thought is found in Jonah 2:9: "Salvation comes from the LORD." But this testimony was a hard lesson for Jonah to accept, and to grant it to the Ninevites. 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 structure of chapter 2 is interesting. It reveals that the prayer consists of two parts. See below. A part of the first prayer resembles the second half of Psalm 42. The narrator knew the Book of Psalms probably very well.
- ❖ 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:

- A. The mercy of God (4:2);
    - B. The angeriness of Jonah (4:3);
    - B'. The angeriness of Jonah (4:9);
  - A'. The mercy of God (4:10-11).
  - Between both discourses, the story of 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	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?”
Jonah – LORD	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.)

Scene 2b  
(verses 1:11-12)  
Sailors – Jonah

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.”

Scene 2c  
(verses 1:13-14)  
Sailors – LORD

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.”

Scene 2d  
(verses 1:15-16)  
Sailors – LORD

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.

### Inside the fish (Jon 2) – the prayer

Scene 3  
(verses 1:17-2:1)  
LORD (his God) –  
Jonah

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:

**The prayer(s)**  
(verses 2:2-9) – See  
below for a  
detailed analysis

“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.

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.

I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight;  
yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’

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.

But you brought my life up from the pit,  
O LORD my God.

“When my life was ebbing away,  
I remembered you, LORD,  
and my prayer rose to you,  
to your holy temple.

“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.”

*(verse 2:10)* And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

## **PART II. Second commission to preach against Nineveh (Jon 3-4)**

### **At Nineveh (Jon 3:1-4:4)**

Scene 3a  
*(verses 3:1-4)*  
LORD – Jonah

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.”

Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh.

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.”

Scene 3b  
*(verses 3:5-10)*  
God – Ninevites

The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from  
the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

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.”

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.

Scene 3c  
*(verses 4:1-4)*

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the  
LORD,

LORD – Jonah

**The first discourse:  
prayer and answer  
by question**

“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. 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?”

**East of Nineveh (Jon 4:5-11) – the lesson**

Scene 4  
(verses 4:5-

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.

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.

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.

**The second  
discourse: outcry  
and answer by  
question**

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?”

**Jonah saved. Prayer of Thanksgiving.**

**Narrative (1:17-2:1.a)**

Jonah Saved

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.

**Jonah narrates (2:1a)**

“In my distress I called to the LORD,  
and he answered me.

<b>His prayer of hope. (2:1b-6)</b>	
A. 'Into the pit'	From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry.
B. From the deep	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.
C. Prayer of Hope	I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'
B'. From the deep	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.
A'. 'From the pit'	But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God.
<b>Prayer of Thanksgiving (2:7-9)</b>	
D. Looking back	"When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.
E. Idols cannot save	"Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.
D'. Looking forward	But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD."
<b>Narrative (2:10)</b>	
Jonah Saved	And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

❖ The analysis of this passage shows the following.

- The prayer(s) are embedded within the frame of the narrative: Jonah is rescued by a great fish which is provided and commanded by God.
- The prayer(s) are introduced by a short introduction. The reader knows in advance that the LORD answered Jonah's prayers (1:2a).
- The first prayer reveals an ABCB'A' structure, which images the events:
  - Jonah is thrown into the sea, he fears death.

- The waters surround him. If nothing happens he will drown.
- The central verse C is thematically a chiasm:
  - I said,
  - 'I have been banished from your sight;
  - yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'
  - 
  - The first line talks about < running away from God's presence.
  - In the second line, Jonah expresses his hope that he might return to God's presence.
- The second prayer is also constructed according to a ABA'-pattern. Above it is shown as DED' to avoid confusion with the first prayer.

The first prayer of Jonah 2:3-6 and Psalm 42:7-9, 11

❖ Compare:

	Jonah 2:3-6	Psalm 42:7-9, 11
<b>Distress:</b>	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.	Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers (have) swept over me. <sup>1</sup>
<b>Hope:</b>	I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'	By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me— a prayer to the God of my life.
<b>Distress:</b>	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.	I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"  (...)
<b>Hope:</b>	But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God.	Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

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<sup>1</sup> The yellow-marked text is in Hebrew exactly the same, whereas the NIV added have in Psalm 42:7.



## 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).”<sup>2</sup> 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:
    - "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).

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<sup>2</sup> Stuart, D. (2012, p. 459). *Jonah, Book of*. In M. J. Boda & G. J. McConville (Eds.).

- 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:”<sup>3</sup>

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).

- 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.<sup>4</sup>
  - 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).<sup>5</sup>
  - 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

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<sup>3</sup> Person, R. F., Jr. (1996, p.60).

<sup>4</sup> Greenberg, R. (1992, Vol. 2, pp. 909–910). *Gath-Hepher (Place)*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

<sup>5</sup> Kaplan, J., & Kaplan, H. R. (1992, Vol. 3, p. 946). *Joppa (Place)*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

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.”<sup>6</sup>

- 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.<sup>7</sup>
- ❖ It may be interesting to debate the historicity of the fish and the species that may have swallowed Jonah, but the answers remain hidden.

### Parallellismus membrorum

- ❖ Parallellismus membrorum is a special feature of Biblical literature, especially of the Old Testament Wisdom Literature, i.e. The Book of Job, Psalms and Proverbs. It “is also present, although less prominent, in biblical prose. It can be defined as the repetition of the same or related semantic content and/or grammatical structure in consecutive lines or verses.”<sup>8</sup>
- ❖ There are several forms of parallellismus membrorum found in Jonah 2:
  - Synonymous parallelism.
    - Two (or three, or four) lines express the same thought. Verse 3 is an example. Lines 3a and 3b state the same thought, and lines 3c and 3d:
      - 3a. You hurled me into the deep,
      - 3b. into the very heart of the seas,
      - 3c. and the currents swirled about me;
      - 3d. all your waves and breakers swept over me.
    - The second line is the climax of the first:
    - the deep (1a) > the very heart of the seas (1b)

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<sup>6</sup> Baker, D. W. (1992, Vol. 6, p. 333). *Tarshish (Place)*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

<sup>7</sup> Stuart, D. (2012, p. 460). *Jonah, Book of*. In M. J. Boda & G. J. McConville (Eds.).

<sup>8</sup> See for more information: Berlin, A. (1992). *Parallelism*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.)(Vol. 5, p. 155).

- the currents swirled about me (1c) > all your waves and breakers swept over me (1d).
- Another feature can be noticed. Line 3c completes Line 3a and line 3d completes line 3b.

See also verse 5.

- Syntactical parallelism
  - The second line completes the first line (verse 8):
  - 8a. Those who cling to worthless idols
  - 8b. forfeit the grace that could be theirs.
- Antithetical parallelism
  - The second line contrasts the first line (verse 4):
  - 4a/b. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight;
  - 4c/d. yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'

## Exposition

### Jonah 1:17-2:1 Narrative

#### ❖ “But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah”

- “**But the Lord.**” this contrasts the fear of the sailors who cried to the LORD before they threw Jonah overboard: “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.” The sailors were convinced that they had sacrificed the life of a man. But the LORD saved Jonah.
- “**provided**” = “**פָּרַח**”: pi. 2. to send, appoint,<sup>9</sup> provide.
- "sent a great fist" (1:17);
- "provided a vine" (4:6);
- "sent a worm" (4:7);
- "sent a scorching east wind" (4:8).
  - The creation obeys the LORD whereas Jonah ran away from the LORD.

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<sup>9</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 599).

- Price and Nida remark that “this is the first of several occasions in the book where this verb is used to suggest that God arranged events in the course of Jonah’s mission to fit in with the divine purpose.”<sup>10</sup>
  - As stated above, it is not helpful to identify the fish with a known species like a whale. According to modern knowledge, a whale is not a fish but a mammal.
    - Nixon quoting Smith<sup>11</sup> writes: “And this is the tragedy of the Book of Jonah, that a Book which is made the means of one of the most sublime revelations of truth in the Old Testament should be known to most only for its connection with a whale.”<sup>12</sup>
  - “swallowed” = “בלע”: to **swallow**, to **engulf**.<sup>13</sup> If we did not know the rest of the story, this would imply the end of Jonah and of the story. See for instance Proverbs 1:12: “Let’s swallow them (sinners) alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit.” (See also Ex 15:12; Nu 16:30-34; Ps 106:17).
- ❖ **“and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.”**
  - “**three days and three nights**” serves probably also as a metaphor for the grave and death. It cannot be equated with seventy-two hours, which is a modern concept of time.
    - Three days and three nights? How did Jonah, and the narrator know this? By looking at the phases of the moon, Jonah could have assessed this duration. In those days people in the Middle East used a lunar calendar.
  - The question can be asked: “and what happened after these three days and night?” The answer will be given.
- ❖ **“From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.”**
  - In his prayer, Jonah doesn’t show any awareness of the fact that he was inside the belly of a fish who saved him. The narrator does know.
  - Note that Jonah did not engage in the prayer of the sailors when they were in distress (Jon 1:4-6). Compare “**his God**” with “**his own god**” (Jon 1:4). This is the first time in the context of the story that Jonah prays.

Verse 2 Jonah narrates.

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<sup>10</sup> Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 72).

<sup>11</sup> (Smith, G. A., The Book of the Twelve Prophets (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901, p. 492)

<sup>12</sup> Nixon, R. A. (2003, p. 127-128).

<sup>13</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 134 ).

- ❖ **“He said: ‘In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me.’”** See also Psalm 120:1.
  - **“In my distress.”** This distress is eloquently worded in verses 3, 5 and 6. It does not refer to the storm nor to the moment that he said: "Pick me up and throw me into the sea" (Jon 1:12). This would imply his drowning and death. **“In my distress”** refers to the short moment he was struggling with the water, till the moment he was miraculously saved.
    - This indicates that Jonah reflects at a later time on what had happened to him after he was hurled into the sea.
    - He became fully aware of what he already had known before: “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 only thing he could do was to pray. Nothing else was left. He could not escape from the belly of the fish. If he could do so, there was again the deadly sea waiting for him.

verse 2b-6 *A Prayer of distress and hope*

- ❖ For the structure of this prayer, see above. For a comparison with Psalm 42:8-11, see above.
  - Remember that Jonah could not swim. Price and Nida write: “What follows are six statements introduced by expressions **which suggest movement down or away from the Lord or loss of life.**”<sup>14</sup>
- ❖ **“From the depths of the grave.”**
  - **“grave” = “גִּיאַת מוֹת”**: **wasteland, void, underworld.**<sup>15</sup> Price and Nida write: “The worshiper is pictured as having “one foot in the grave,” to use an English idiom, or in “the jaws of death,” as Luther expresses it. The word occurs often in the Psalms and the book of Job to refer to the place to which all dead people go. It is represented as a dark place, in which there is no activity worthy of the name.”<sup>16</sup> See also Psalm 18:5; 30:3; Job 7:9; 17:13-16;
- ❖ **“I called (....) and he answered.”** This is an introduction and summary of what follows. See also Psalm 118:5, 18:6 and **120:1**.
- ❖ **“I called for help.”** Jonah could not expect help from anyone else. "Salvation comes from the LORD" (Jon 2:9d).

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<sup>14</sup> Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 75).

<sup>15</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 1369).

<sup>16</sup> Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 77).

- ❖ **“and you listened to my cry”** For Jonah, his salvation was God’s answer to his cry but the great fish was already there when Jonah was thrown into the sea by the sailors. **The LORD anticipated the cry of Jonah.**
- ❖ **“You hurled me into the deep.”** Interesting to see that Jonah attributes all that had happened to him to the LORD. The strong winds, the waves **“your waves and breakers”**, the sailors, they were utensils in the hands of the LORD.
  - **“Into the very heart of the seas (...) and breakers swept over me.”** Jonah no longer knows what is up and what is down. He is sinking deeper and deeper into the sea.
    - **“You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves”** (Ps 88:6, 7; see also Psalm 69: 1, 2, 14, 15).
- ❖ **“I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight.’”** This contrasts Jonah 1:3: **“But Jonah ran away from the LORD (...), he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.”**
  - **“I said”** to myself, because nobody was listening at that moment.
  - He could not flee from the LORD. Now he realizes that the LORD can banish him from his sight, although this is from a human perspective. Also at the deep, the LORD is there.
    - **“If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there”** (Ps 139:8). **“At his weakest point he now discovers that God’s presence embraces even death itself. He cannot divest himself of Yahweh, the great ‘I AM’”**<sup>17</sup>
- ❖ **“Yet I will look again toward your holy temple.”** Is it based on the fact that he was not drowned? The contrast between the previous lines and the next verse is great. See also verse 7. Because Jonah addressed the LORD as the God of heaven, **“your holy temple”** might be not the temple in Jerusalem, but the heavenly sanctuary.
  - Because of these contrasts the Tanakh translates: **‘I thought I was driven away Out of Your sight: Would I ever gaze again Upon Your holy Temple?’**
  - Price and Nida prefer **“yet”**: Jonah **“brings out the contrast between his fears that God had banished him from his sight and the confident assurance that in spite of everything he has been able to enjoy worship in the Temple.”**<sup>18</sup> Psalm 42 employs the same contrasts. See also Psalm 31:22.
- ❖ **“The engulfing waters threatened me, (...) seaweed was wrapped around my head.”**

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<sup>17</sup> Nixon, R. A. (2003, p. 129).

<sup>18</sup> Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 81).



- It seems that Jonah had been struggling to survive but to no avail.
- ❖ **“To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever.”**
  - Jonah was almost drowned. He sank to the bottom of the sea. The earth beneath is the earth of the grave. **“Barred me in forever,”** there is no point of return to the living.
- ❖ **“But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God.”** This is the turning point. Jonah was rescued. The contrast with the previous line is sharp.
  - “pit” = “תַּיִט”<sup>19</sup>: **pit, grave,** the place of corruption and decay (Ps 16:10; 30:10; 49:10; 55:24).
  - Smith and Page write: “The God from whom Jonah thought he was banished had reached down and pulled him out of death and despair, showing that he was still ‘Yahweh my God.’ Jonah was overcome with praise for his God, who had shown him such compassionate grace.”<sup>20</sup>

Verse 7-9 prayer of thanksgiving

- ❖ See for the structure above.
- ❖ **“When my life was ebbing away,”** This summarizes Jonah 2:3, 5, 6a. He was losing consciousness. *“I was dying.”*
- ❖ **“I remembered you, LORD,”**
  - **“remember”** = “זָכַר”<sup>21</sup>. **to remember, to call to mind.** The opposites of “to remember” are: **“fail to remember,” “forget,” “neglect,” “fail to think of.”**
    - It is revealing, that Jonah remembered the LORD at the time his life was ebbing away.
    - In chapter 1, he ran away from the LORD, he didn’t pray to the LORD when he was asked to do so, still he was talking about the LORD as creator.
- ❖ **“and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.”**
  - What is meant by **“your holy temple”**? There are two options:
    - The temple in Jerusalem.
    - The heavenly sanctuary.

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<sup>19</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 1473).

<sup>20</sup> Smith, B. K., & Page, F. S. (1995, Vol. 19B, p. 250).

<sup>21</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 270).

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- Jonah came from the northern kingdom. His ministry was not confined to this area. While praying, it was not in the direction of Jerusalem. He even didn't know what was up and what was down, when he was surrounded by water and darkness (the belly of the fish). While the story unfolds, Jonah becomes increasingly aware that the LORD is the God of heaven, the creator of the sea and the land (Jon 1:9). Jonah even had a discussion with the LORD, while he was sitting east of Nineveh.
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- See also Micah 1:2 and 1 Kings 8:27-30:
- "But will God really dwell on earth? Even the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain You, how much less this House that I have built! (...) give heed in Your heavenly abode—give heed and pardon."
  - Psalm 123:1: "I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven."
  - John 17:1: "After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed."

❖ **"Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs."**

- Note the contrast with the sailors in Jonah 1:4-16 and especially the verses 13 to 16.
  - See also Psalm 31:7.
- **"those who cling to"** = "חֲסִידֵי אֱלֹהִים": to be a follower of, be an adherent of.<sup>22</sup>
- **"forfeit the grace that could be theirs."** The translation of this line poses some difficulties. Price and Nida note that "the variety of interpretations that are found in modern translations is clear evidence that it is not only the meaning of the word which is in doubt, but also whether it refers here to a divine or a human quality."<sup>23</sup>
- The NIV takes the "grace" as a divine quality. If you adhere to the idols, you will forfeit the grace of the LORD ("**that could be theirs**" / "**forsake their hope of steadfast love**"; ESV). The NASB translates: "**Forsake their faithfulness.**" In this case, it is a human quality towards God. See also the Today's English Version: "**have abandoned their loyalty to you.**"

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<sup>22</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 1584).

<sup>23</sup> Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 86).

- Who are “those”? Not the sailors, who experienced God’s mercy and salvation after they had thrown Jonah into the sea.
  - It is not a general statement about the fate of pagan peoples. They are not in view. Even the people in Nineveh will experience God's grace and compassion after they have turned from their evil ways (Jon 3:10).
  - The people in view must be the people of Israel, as a call to worship the LORD again. The “but” of verse 9 has the same force as in Joshua 24:15: “But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” If this understanding of Jonah 2:8 is correct, it serves as a warning and call, after Jonah expressed his deep trust in the LORD that he would save him.
- ❖ “But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good.” This verse parallels Jonah 1:16.
- ❖ “Salvation comes from the LORD.” This is a very important statement of faith. Although the story does not tell this: Jonah had a very personal experience of the grace and compassion of the LORD (Jon 4:2). He knew this before. And he wanted to deny this to the Ninevites later on.

#### Verse 10 Narrative

- ❖ “And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.”
- Now it is enough. Jonah has learned a very important lesson: “Salvation comes from the LORD.”
  - “vomited” = “וִוָּרַע”: hif: to vomit something: of a person, who has been eaten the food of a stingy man (Prov 23:6-8); who has eaten too much honey (Prov 25:16); who has gained his wealth by oppression (Job 20:15); of the fish and Jonah (Jon 2:11); of a land, to spew out its inhabitants.<sup>24</sup> To vomit is not used in a neutral sense, describing what happened, but probably in a negative sense. The fish must get rid of Jonah.
  - Try to imagine. Jonah stumbles ashore, recovers himself, and tries to remember all the things that had happened to him.

## Application

### A historical account?

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<sup>24</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 1069).

- ❖ Is the fish a historical fact or fiction? Trying to answer this question will distract our attention from the main significance of this narrative. The story of Jonah is “theologically and morally orientated. History is viewed in the Bible as being under God’s control. Biblical history is therefore confessional; it acknowledges God’s intervention and leads, first, to praise for what he has done and, second, to faith in the God who is revealed in the event. Scripture itself, however, asserts that the Creator God is greater than human history. He engages with it, intervenes in it and reveals himself through it; he shapes it and uses it as an instrument of his saving purposes for individuals and nations.”<sup>25</sup>
- ❖ Nixon tries to understand the narrator: “The writer is not simply writing a newspaper report of what happened to an Israelite prophet. He is grappling theologically with human experience. The experience is that of a person who seeks to avoid the call of God. In particular the person in question (Jonah) is a religious person, familiar with Scripture, worship and the core beliefs of his faith tradition. What happens when such a person, or such a nation as Israel, runs away from God? To run away from the source of life and love is to run towards death. We see that God gives Jonah the freedom to run away, but even as he reaches his destination God is waiting to meet and deliver him.”<sup>26</sup>
- ❖ This is a story which must told and retold.

### Praise

- ❖ Praise God. He rules the creation, the winds, the sea, the fish.
- ❖ Praise God for his mercy and compassion.
- ❖ Praise God, because salvation comes from the LORD.
  - Praise Jesus Christ, who is the embodied salvation, who came from the LORD.

### The sign of Jonah and Jesus Christ

- ❖ Jesus replied to the Pharisees and teachers of the Law when they asked for a miraculous sign: "He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."
  - They asked Jesus for legitimization, proof, and evidence of his mission and authority. Jesus points to his burial and hints already to his resurrection, while not mentioning it. He refers to Jonah and calls it the sign of Jonah. The sign is the miraculous saving of Jonah with the significance: “Salvation comes from the LORD” (Jon 2:9). Jesus

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<sup>25</sup> Nixon, R. A. (2003, p. 230).

<sup>26</sup> Nixon, R. A. (2003, p. 149).

performed the saving acts of God, calling people to repent, healing the sick, and raising the dead.

### Salvation

- ❖ Nixon remarks: "Salvation is not, in the first instance, the Lord God taking us 'out' of our mess, but God meeting us 'within' it. Jonah will find salvation within his watery grave, for there, in the place which eloquently speaks of death, God will meet him."<sup>27</sup>
  - Jonah sacrificed his life because he knew that it was because of him that the sailors were hit by a storm. At the same time, he underwent the judgment of the LORD, his God, and he was miraculously saved by God.
- ❖ Forgiveness is not mentioned in the Book, but implied by giving Jonah a second chance to fulfil his mission. Jonah knew this: "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).

### Prayer

- ❖ This narrative also shows some aspects of the prayer:
  - 1. To remember God!
  - 2. To express distress and fear;
  - 3. To express hope;
  - 4. To gain wisdom;
  - 5. To confess the justice of God;
  - 6. To teach others, as Jonah does in verse 8;
  - 7. To thank God for his salvation.

### The believer and Jonah

- ❖ Jonah knew the LORD, he was listening when the LORD spoke to him. He resisted the LORD and imagined that he could run away, which was impossible. Finally, he exclaims: "Salvation comes from the LORD."
  - The result of salvation in the case of Jonah, was not only survival, but he also experienced the grace of the LORD, his omnipotence and omnipresence. Probably, he also grew in wisdom, which he expressed in his prayer, and he saw the power of hope.

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<sup>27</sup> Nixon, R. A. (2003, p. 127).

- Salvation can teach many lessons about the grace of God and Jesus Christ, our Saviour, his patience, his power, and his mercy.
- Salvation also obliges to share the experience of salvation with other people, if possible.

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