

## Expansions on the book of Jonah

### Introduction

This text follows upon the heels of two similar biblical-related documents posted on this home page, *Expansions on the Book of Genesis* and *Expansions on the Book of Exodus*. Both are not so much commentaries but a fleshing out of the scriptures. That's the reason why the word "expansions" is found in all three titles. This document, like the other two, starts with an exploration of the original Hebrew words within the Book of Jonah and elaborates upon them while at the same time remaining within the text's parameters. Please note that frequent mention will be made of verbal roots which is important for understanding how a text is expressed in Hebrew. Nouns are derived from these verbal roots which can have multiple layers of meaning, direct and indirect, and enrich the text in a way different from non-Semitic languages. When it comes to Greek, prepositions (either free-standing, if you will or prefaced to nouns and verbs) are a principle means by which the text is expanded. All this may not seem important when it comes to divine revelation but actually is quite vital, for we're dealing with texts fundamentals to the Christian faith. Hopefully the approach taken here will be an aide, not a burden. Care has been taken to present the material in a manner which presupposes no knowledge of the Hebrew, thereby demonstrating that a person unfamiliar with the language can do *lectio divina* in it. The real intent is to introduce the reader to a deeper level of spiritual understanding and union with God in prayer, nothing else. If this is not the goal, the reader should look elsewhere. That's another reason why "expansions" in the title is important: to help expand one's mind and heart.

An interaction between *lectio divina* and prayer is vital. In *lectio* a person can focus on a verse or two or of scripture, even a phrase or just a word, for an indefinite period of time. The length of time thus is irrelevant which makes this practice more difficult that at first glance. Always the aim is to "leave" the text and enter God's presence while returning to the text if so inspired in order to continue praying with it. And so over a period of time one will find an alteration that establishes its own rhythm. As for the broader field of *lectio divina* or "divine reading," it had been spelled out in introductions to the Genesis and Exodus documents. Thus further discussion about *lectio divina* won't be made. Certainly plenty of good information exists relative to the Book of Jonah which may supplement the material at hand.

Slowing oneself down sufficiently to absorb any biblical text takes effort, and in the case of Jonah it is more challenging. The narrative moves quickly and decisively which means the reader has to take extra caution not to get caught up in this rapid advancement. It was observed with regard to Genesis and Exodus that most sentences begin with the Hebrew *v-* ('and,' 'now' or 'but') which makes one verse stream into another in fairly rapid succession. That's fine for a lengthy book of scripture...you have plenty of time to get into the rhythm...but when applied to a book just four short chapters long, it is another matter. That's why some precaution is required with the Book of Jonah which can be read in a matter of minutes.

The Hebrew Bible used is **Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia** (Stuttgart, 2001). The English translation is from the **New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha** (the RSV). Please note, too, that another text on the Book of Jonah exists on this home page which is entitled *Notes on the Book of Jonah*. In light of the current

newer document, it may be taken as a kind of supplement which examines various uses of the Hebrew words and similar references without expanding upon them.

## Chapter One

### Vs 1: "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying."

The text starts off with the conjunctive *v-* ('now') which the reader into the action immediately. It is as though one enters the text running where you need to pay close attention so as not to be caught up in the rapid-fire sequence of events that follows and overlook their significance. One could almost say that keeping in mind from the beginning the conjunctive *v-* is important in order to lay hold of general plan of the book. Since Jonah ends rather abruptly...with a question by the Lord himself... *v-* has that question as an ultimate aim as we begin with the very first verse. Perhaps that is what the author is attempting to accomplish: introduce the person of Jonah and bring him to that question asked by the Lord which is left unanswered and must be worked out by each person who takes up this book. Actually one can intimate this result fairly on, given the cantankerous nature of Jonah. And so a lot is crammed in between the *v-* of 1.1 and 4.11. Where the reader goes from the end of the book depends upon how he or she responds to the divine question.

*V-* is prefaced to the common noun *devar* or "word" which brings us to this divine utterance with astounding rapidity requiring the reader to be prepared to maintain a quick pace in order to keep up with the unfolding of *devar*. As for this *devar*, it comes to Jonah not unlike an angel making his appearance: "In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth" [Lk 1.26].

Instead of the English verb "came," the Hebrew has "to be." That means the *devar* "was to Jonah," more intimate and more indicative of a short distance between the two. As soon as this proper name is mentioned (the preposition *el* or 'to') is prefaced to it, we have *ben* or "son" similarly prefaced to Jonah's father, Amittai. Thus a close connection exists between the divine *devar*, Jonah and Amittai or his family line. The only other reference to Amittai is 2Kg 14.25: "He (King Jeroboam II) 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 by his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher." Apparently the historical Jonah was a prophet who foretold King Jeroboam's territorial expansion against the Syrians yet with Israel, endured affliction: "For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter [vs. 26]." Compare this with Jonah's anger in 4.1: "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry." We don't know which one came first, that is, whether or not Jonah went to Nineveh before or after his association with King Jeroboam II. Nevertheless, his role in both instances ranks among the most important by any prophet.

Verse one begins with a noun (*devar*) and concludes with a verb (*amar*). Both apply to speech: the former had multiple meanings such as to lead, to guide, to plot against whereas the latter applies to speaking in the sense of bringing something to light. Both are very common throughout scripture. In the case at hand we have the divine *devar* bringing to light (*amar*) something of which Jonah had been ignorant up to this point. The rest of the fast-paced story plays out Jonah's response which proves mostly negative compared with most other prophets.

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

Actually this is one of the few verses in the Book of Jonah which lacks the conjunctive *v-*. Such an important two-fold statement precludes the need for a conjunctive because it is aimed directly at the recipient, Nineveh.

First the Lord says "arise" or *qum* which implies that Jonah had been laying down. Perhaps not exactly that but more along the lines of not being attentive to the divine *devar*. See Jer 1.17 which is similar: "But you, gird up your loins; arise and say everything that I command you." In the same breath the Lord continues with "go" or the common verb *halak*. And so both the arising and going communicated here forms an integral part of the *devar* (word) and *'amar* (the saying of this word).

The Hebrew texts lacks the pronoun "that" and reads instead "the great city."

The destination is Nineveh, now northern Iraq and not terribly far from Israel and one of the largest, most cosmopolitan cities of the ancient world. Just above it was noted that we are uncertain whether Jonah dealt with Nineveh before or after his association with King Jeroboam II. With this in mind, we could take mention of Nineveh by the Lord as indicative that indeed Jonah gained some notoriety under the local king. He could use this as credentials when entering the greatest city in the world.

Once at Nineveh, Jonah is to "cry against it," the verb being *qara'* which fundamentally means to call out pretty much in desperation as in Mic 6.9: "The voice of the Lord cries to the city, and it is sound wisdom to fear your name." So in order to fulfil this *qara'*, Jonah will have to find the means of being the center of attention in the midst of countless thousands of people coming and going, most of whom probably won't pay attention to him anyway. That must have been in his mind all along while resisting the Lord's summons. Better to stay with King Jeroboam II and enjoy a lesser though secure role there than to set off to places unknown, even to a cosmopolitan center like Nineveh. Prefaced to the verb *qara'* is the preposition *hal* translated here as "against" but more basically as "upon." Jonah may have been more responsive to the Lord if he received a simple *qara'*; the verb prefaced with *hal* intimates that he will have to stand on some high place fully exposed, if you will, and address the citizens of Nineveh. While some might respond positively, chances are most will ignore him.

*Rah* is the noun for "wickedness" which here ascends (*halah*) to the Lord. Many times the Lord had become aware of such human *rah*, the first instance being just before the flood: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" [Gen 6.5]. This is the first time we get a clear distinction between the Lord (in heaven) and man (on earth). Though something of the sort existed between the Lord and Cain after the latter had slain his brother, the distinction doesn't appear that great. Some of that down-to-earth intimacy continued to linger from the garden of Eden. In the case at hand, it is as though the Lord wanted to remove himself as far as possible from human sinfulness with *rah* (evil) following closely upon his heels. What's unusual is that it is a rare instance when *rah* actually makes its way to the Lord, as though it had a life and energy of its own. Indeed, the appearance of evil at his doorstep must

have surprised the Lord after his earlier experiences with evil stemming from the human race. Chances are it did not *halah* gradually but sprang up at once like a coiled snake releasing itself to strike.

How long *rah* remained in the divine presence isn't recorded but long enough for the Lord to summon Jonah to remedy the situation. Anything to drive away this *rah* which had the presumption of ascending to the Lord. He knew Jonah would be rebellious but saw in him a stubborn streak that would be put to good use. Even though the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah couldn't help but get the Lord's attention, he didn't go down to these cities. However, some years later he made an exception under less violent circumstances, when people sought to place the tower of Babel "with its top in the heavens" which was another way for them to "make a name for themselves" [Gen 11.4]. From that position upon earth, the Lord—he preferred being incognito in preparation for his incarnation—was present among the builders gazing up at the incomplete tower. From that position the Lord was able to determine the ramifications of the collapsed tower and even worse, the confusion of their language that would ensue. Nineveh resembled this city called Babel in the land of Shinar, so immediately it must have come to Jonah's mind. If he were to be among the inhabitants incognito as the Lord had been, no problem. However, he was bidden to stand out there in full public view asking for repentance.

**Vs. 3: But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare and went of board to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.**

It was relatively easy for Jonah to reach Nineveh compared with Tarshish, the other end of the known world, most likely southern Spain. Despite the uncertain location of this place, it's important that without responding to his summons Jonah sets off for Tarshish despite the perils of a trans-Mediterranean voyage (here is where the conjunctive *v-* or 'and' comes into play, indicative of quickly moving from one verse to another). One only has to recall the lengthy voyage of St. Paul to Rome with all the dangers and near-misses that happened along the way, that voyage being approximately half the distance to Tarshish. Vs. 3 has the second instance of the verb *qum* (to rise). The distance, if you will, between the Lord and Jonah is further than the distance between Nineveh and Tarshish. This second *qum* may not so much be indicative of a rebellious spirit but fear of losing influence with King Jeroboam II with whom Jonah enjoyed patronage and renown. Nineveh was terra incognita even though Jonah must have known of its glory. So why risk going to the largest city on earth? Then again, perhaps Jonah had visited Nineveh due to its fame and relative proximity. But Tarshish? That was as far as you could go without falling off the earth. As for Nineveh, some people may recognize Jonah because of King Jeroboam II and thus spoil his anonymity. Certainly this was not the case in Tarshish where this anonymity would be guaranteed.

A contrast exists between "Tarshish" and "presence of the Lord." The preposition *-h* is attached to the end of this proper name instead of being in front as *'el* is to Nineveh in vs. 1. That gives a heightened urgency to Jonah's flight (the verb *barach* connotes reaching across). Obviously Tarshish is the destination Jonah has in mind. The preposition *-h* contrasts with *milipney* or "from the presence of." Since the Lord himself did not come to Jonah but his *devar* or word, Jonah figured it might be easier to make good his flight to distant Tarshish. As the text unfolds, the *devar* proves to be more unescapable than Jonah had imagined. Because the *devar* is of the spirit and not confined to space nor time, it can be anywhere at anytime, all the while speaking to Jonah not unlike a constant echo in his head. Mistakenly Jonah thought he could flee from being before or *milipney* the Lord. He may have

been able to get away with that, but certainly not the more pervasive *devar*. All the while Jonah must have pondered the wonders he had done under the aegis of King Jeroboam II. Although we have no record of them, presumably Jonah was not reluctant to be in the Lord's presence which had the added feature of being acknowledged by the king.

"He went down to Joppa." Such words are often employed at the beginning of a story and set the tone of what is to follow as in opening words of Plato's **Republic**: "I (Socrates) went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon." Jonah must have been familiar with ships that plied the Mediterranean, Tarshish being the furthest destination available. It was at Joppa that he found a ship headed to where he wished to go, all the while hounded by the Lord's *devar*. And so Jonah's short trip to that seaport was a harrowing, inescapable experience, a taste of what was to come. It intensified while waiting around Joppa for a ship, and undoubtedly people must have sensed him being so hounded and avoided him like the plague. Word spread quickly, and the crew and passengers headed towards Tarshish were filled with a profound sense of foreboding.

"To go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord." Here is the second mention in one verse of "from presence of" or *milipney* which, of course, means from the Lord's *devar*. One can just imagine the picture Jonah presented first to those on shore and once on board ship, a kind of hunted look about him as the invisible *devar* continued its pursuit. Even the person receiving Jonah's payment for the voyage felt something ominous was about to happen, so he processed the transaction to get rid of Jonah as quickly as possible.

**Vs. 4: But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.**

The verse at hand is prefaced with that familiar conjunctive *v-* which here translates as "but." Although nothing is said when and where the storm strikes, given the fast-paced narrative of this book, it's almost certain the calamity hit not long after the ship had departed Joppa. *Tul* is the verb for "hurled" and means a throwing down or casting as a spear. That means the Lord cast a *ruach* or wind with considerable violence, smashing it against the surface of the sea, scattering anything upon it. *Tul* is also used in vss. 12 and 15, the former being noted here: "Take me up and throw me into the sea." For another example, see Ezk 32.4: "And I will cast you on the group, on the open field I will fling you." Since Jonah had been haunted by the divine *devar* right from the beginning, *devar* assumes the form, if you will, of a *ruach* from the Lord. Since *ruach* is the same word for spirit, it's as though the Lord hurled his *ruach* down upon the sea to get at Jonah.

*Sahar* is the noun for "tempest" which derived from the verbal root (same spelling) meaning to shake violently, to rush upon. For another use (pual form), see Hos 13.3: "Like chaff that swirls from the threshing floor or like smoke from a window" [Hos 13.3]. And so the divine *devar* "incarnates" itself in both *ruach* and the more formidable *sahar* making it virtually impossible for Jonah to escape. Note that the preposition 'el ('upon' but more specifically 'to') is used with *ruach* and the preposition *b-* ('in') with *sahar* resulting in the *ruach* "to" the sea and the *sahar* "in" the sea.

*Chashav* is the verb for "threatened" which means to think, to meditate, to reckon and can intimate, albeit indirectly, that the sailors on board were pondering their situation. "I consider the days of old, I remember the

years long ago” [Ps 77.5]. The object of *chashav* is *shavar* or “to break up” or better, “to break into pieces.” Actually both words are similar in sound which lends greater drama to this verse. “And your images shall be broken” [Ezk 6.4].

**Vs. 5: Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god; and they threw the wares that were in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.**

The noun “mariner” is *malach* which derives from salt as salt in the ocean. Use of the word “god” or *‘elohym* can apply to the Lord himself or to other deities, the latter usually in the pejorative sense which seems to be the case here. Mention of *‘elohym* here can be indicative that the sailors are foreigners, perhaps natives of Tarshish itself, or from other areas scattered around the Mediterranean. In an emergency as the one at hand, it’s easy to visualize each sailor breaking out his own portable altar or image and worshiping fervently as best he can while being tossed about with considerable violence. A whole group of sailors from various countries must have made a cacophonous noise amid the roar of wind and waves as each worshiped a different god. However, they do this spontaneously without an order from the captain because their lives are at stake. Because the ship had been in port at Joppa, the sailors discreetly tucked away their *‘elohym* so the Israelites did not discover them. But now that they were in extreme peril, they brought them out for all to see.

*Zahaq* is the verb for “to cry out” and intimates the calling of an assembly which is fitting for the situation at hand. And so the ship resembled a babel of voices but with one goal in mind. A few passengers may have gathered around a sailor, each with his little shrine while another group did the same with another and so forth. All, if you will, were assembled...*zahaq*...together with one aim in mind, to be delivered from the storm. “And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out” [1Sam 4.13].

While some sailors engaged in crying out to their respective *‘elohym*, others were busy tossing overboard unessential baggage and equipment. Both must have been going on at the same time which only added to the confusion. *Kely* is the noun for “wares” which applies to any implement, piece of clothing or even a weapon. In other words, they tossed overboard not just baggage and freight but all non-essentials. “And they will hang on him every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons” [Is 22.24]. As for the verb at hand, it is *tul* as in vs. 4 (‘hurled’). Thus the sailors’ frantic efforts mirrored the Lord’s fury at his *tul* of the “great wind upon the sea.” While the Lord seemed intent at causing shipwreck through his *tul*, the sailors sought to lighten their ship, *qalal* being the verb which has the alternate meaning of to curse. “The Lord of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth” [Is 23.9]. One can almost hear the sailors cursing...*qalal*...as they were attempting to lighten...*qalal*...their ship.

While all this frenzied activity was transpiring, Jonah decides to go below deck. He sensed, as will become clear shortly, that the crew realized what they had feared from the beginning, that indeed the divine *devar* was after Jonah and finally caught up with him. They and the other passengers appeared destined to share the same fate as Jonah. Nothing is said about passengers; they had to rely upon the crew’s skill and so were more passive to the unfolding tragedy. On the other hand, the ship bound for Tarshish could have been carrying cargo only and

intended to make numerous stops en route. *Yarkah* is the noun for “inner part” which usually applies to the side of something as well as a remote region. “But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit” [Is 4.15]. Jonah took special care to go down inside the ship, presumably to a cargo hold, once the crew had emptied it of wares. However, he realized they would discover him rather quickly once he heard the activity on the deck above as they completed their tossing of the cargo overboard. That means the cargo-hold was completely empty. While in the ship’s *yarkah*, Jonah “had lain down and was fast asleep.” First he lay down to keep as quiet as possible and did this for an extended period of time. Finally he fell asleep, having been worn out by the excitement and perhaps even resignation that eventually he would be discovered. Doing this while a storm was raging on the sea intimates to this near total exhaustion on Jonah’s part.

**Vs. 6: So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call upon your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we do not perish.”**

*Rav chovel* is the phrase for “captain” which consists of two words: the adjective *rav* (many) and *chovel* (pilot). The latter has four other biblical references, all in Chapter Twenty-Seven of Ezekiel, one of which is vss. 29-30: “The mariners and all the pilots of the sea stand on the shore and wail aloud over you and cry bitterly.” As head of the ship, the captain knew all the details of his crew, vessel and any passengers. His responsibility was primarily to the ship’s owners and the cargo on board. Surely before leaving Joppa he must have felt there was something not quite right about Jonah and now was the time to investigate. One of the crew informed the captain about Jonah sneaking below amid the confusion, so he went down to check it out. Note that the captain calls Jonah a “sleeper” which derives from the verb “fast asleep” in vs. 5 (*radam*) and means to snore heavily. Thus *radam* shows that Jonah was not simply nodding off but fell in a deep stupor from which it was difficult to rouse him. “As I was speaking to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground” [Dn 8.18]. Also note that the noun *tardemah* derives from this verbal root and is used in preparation for creation of the first woman from the man’s side: “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man” [Gn 2.21]. With Jonah in such a deep sleep, the captain had some doing to wake up Jonah, this despite the continuous tossing and turning of the ship in the storm.

In vs. 1 the Lord himself bade Jonah to “arise” and go to Nineveh whereas here the captain orders him to rise, another instance of the verb *qum*. The reason for the second *qum* is for Jonah to “call (*qara*) upon (his) god” not entirely unlike vs. 1 again, “cry against it (Nineveh).” Clearly the captain was a non-Israelite using *‘elohym* as it pertains to the mariners who were engaged in fervent *qara*’ to their gods.

*Hashath* is the verb for “will give a thought” which fundamentally means to shine and has one other biblical reference where it applies to being sleek: “Therefore they have become great and rich, they have grown fat and sleek” [Jer 5.28].

**Vs. 7: And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.**

This dialogue among the sailors must took place after each man had prayed to their respective gods. They seemed to have arrived at a consensus rather quickly as what to do next, either feeling that they were inspired or that their attempts at appeasement to their gods had failed. The words “And they said to one another” read literally as “each

man to his neighbor (*reheh*.)” Interestingly, the noun “evil” (*rah*) sounds similar but derives from a different verbal root.

Given their dangerous predicament and failure of their gods to save them, casting “lots” or *goral* was the next...last...option. Doing this on a storm-tossed deck must have been difficult, but it was worth the effort to keep the dice or whatever they had at hand as steady as they could. Furthermore, it was dark and any type of lighting was unavailable which means the lots must have been made hastily of material that was visible. “They divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots” [Ps 22.18]. *Naphal* is the verb for both “cast” and “fell.” Use of the preposition *hal* (‘upon’) with respect to Jonah brings home the severity of the fate revealed by casting lots. There is no indication that Jonah did pray to his “god,” understandable now to the sailors by the unceremonious and sudden way he fled his presence. Among all on board there was tacit knowledge that right from the beginning Jonah’s presence on board was trouble, especially painful to accept with the prospects of a trans-Mediterranean passage.

**Vs. 8: Then they said to him, “tell us, on whose account this evil has come upon us? What is your occupation? And whence do you come? What is your country? And of what people are you?”**

Before proceeding further as what to do about their mysterious passenger, the sailors ask Jonah a series of five short questions in rapid succession. They are quick to identify the storm as “evil” or *rah* (see vs. 7) which they assume is due to his presence among them. If it had been a storm minus Jonah’s presence, the sailors wouldn’t make the connection, and their gods would have quelled the sea. *Mela’kah* is the noun for “occupation” and is related closely to *mal’ak* or “angel” which, in turn, applies to a messenger. “Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters” [Ps 107.23]. In sum, the crew believes Jonah is some kind of messenger of evil among them.

The other questions posed to Jonah are uttered more in desperation and fear. Because the sailors must have come from all around the Mediterranean, chances are they had no solid information as to Jonah’s identity. They figured he was a Hebrew who at the last minute had bought passage for the Tarshish, as far as one could go, and this added to their suspicion. It should be kept in mind that the drama at hand was taking place on the ship’s deck in the midst of a violent storm.

**Vs. 9: And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”**

Jonah says nothing of his rather famous association with King Jeroboam II. The crew made up of foreigners or most likely natives of Tarshish or other areas of the western Mediterranean, would not have been familiar with that connection. Even though Jonah comes right out and claims to be a Hebrew or native from the land the ship had departed, it turns out to be insufficient to quell their fear as subsequent verses reveal. In fact, Jonah’s claim frightens them since they had just prayed to their respective gods (cf. vs. 5). Certainly the sailors have heard of Israel’s long history of conflict between their Lord and the gods of peoples living in their midst, let alone what prophets had done to their fellow countrymen who disobeyed the Lord. Since apparently they weren’t terribly far from Joppa and if they survived and got back there, Jonah might report them for worshipping their gods.

“Fear” (the noun is *yir’ah* from the verbal root *yare’*) with respect to the Lord involves reverence and piety as Prov 1.7 states: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Jonah must have uttered this statement tongue-in-cheek, not willing to admit he was fleeing the Lord and was haunted by the presence of the divine *devar* (‘word’) noted earlier. By claiming allegiance to the Lord, creator of heaven, the sea and dry land, Jonah was hoping this would spare what he knew was inevitable. As for the “dry land” or *yabashah*, most biblical references refer to it in the context of either creation or Israel’s exodus through the Red Sea. For the former, cf. Gn 1.9: “Let the dry land appear, and it was so.” Perhaps Jonah was hoping that the sailors, even though they were foreigners, might grasp what he was saying by the mention of *yabashah*, an immanent rescue from the sea by the God of Israel. Anything he might say could help now when his life was on the line.

**Vs. 10: Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord because he had told them.**

Here the verb *yare’* (‘were afraid’) is used with the noun *yir’ah* as noted in vs. 9 which renders the opening words of this verse literally as “the men feared a great fear.” Such fear caused the sailors to attribute blame for the storm to Jonah, asking the question “What his this that you have done?” which has no real answer under such dire circumstances. All they knew was that a direct correlation existed between the storm and Jonah’s flight to Tarshish.

While vs. 10 says that Jonah had informed the sailors about his reason for going to the other end of the Mediterranean, they intuited this as soon as he got on board their ship. Jonah felt compelled to talk and figure he might as well share his story with men he would share confined quarters for an extended period of time. The sailors could not help but feel the presence of this *devar* pursuing Jonah. At first you’d think it wise to keep quiet your intent. However, Jonah was so hounded by the Lord that he had to blurt out the reason for being onboard in order to get it out, nothing more. If the captain and crew had any sense, they would have refused passage Jonah and even if they discovered this a day or two out of Joppa, they would have turned back. Then again, they were eager to reach distant Tarshish, being under pressure from merchants and other passengers who paid dearly for such a lengthy voyage.

**Vs. 11: Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous.**

Jonah knew all along this question was inevitable, for he picked up the sailors’ collective wariness of his presence among them through the conversations he had. The verb for “quiet down” is *shataq* and has three other biblical references, one of which is in vs. 12. “Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven” [Ps 107.30]. Consideration of a human sacrifice, if you will, is rather unusual, and they had to resort to such a desperate measure as quickly as possible. “For us” reads literally “from upon (*hal-*) us,” that is, that the turbulent waters may cease from being upon the ship.

*Sahar* is the verb for “tempestuous” as found in 1.4 (‘there was a mighty tempest on the sea’) which intimates a violent onrush or shaking, the exact opposite of *shataq*. This second sentence is added, if you will, to highlight the sailor’s question and desperation. What that was being debated, the sea continued with its violent ways, even

growing worse.

**Vs. 12: He said to them, "Take me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you."**

This sudden, straight-forward answer to the sailors must have caught them off guard. *Tul* is the verb for "throw" as in vs. 4 for "hurled." Jonah responds in a matter-of-fact manner which is not uncommon for a person with no other options. In other words, hurl me with the same force you can must to match the Lord's fury at sending his wrath upon the sea. The result of the sailor's *tul?* The sea will quiet down or *shataq* as noted in the previous verse.

Again note use of the preposition *hal* in two instances: as "for you" and as "upon you." Both intensify the sense of the peril being experienced.

**Vs. 13: Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous.**

The decision to hit the oars must have come from the captain. It indicates suspension of the dialogue between the sailors and Jonah with the hope that rowing will save them and therefore preclude the need to sacrifice Jonah. As for Jonah, he knew the men were reluctant to sacrifice him which increased his admiration of these foreigners from Tarshish and all around the Mediterranean. They were endowed with a sense of morality that surprised him and would have made the prospect of being in Tarshish more attractive. Perhaps Jonah had some last minute hesitation at this point, but it was too late.

As for the sea becoming increasingly tempestuous (*sahar* again), we have yet another use of the preposition *hal*, "upon them." Though not mentioned, we can presume the crew was attempting to avoid rocks and thus breaking up.

**Vs. 14: Therefore they cried to the Lord, "we beseech you, O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood; for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you."**

One can only imagine what was going through Jonah's mind as he heard these ominous words being uttered. Yet as vs. 12 clearly indicates, Jonah was ready and willing to be sacrificed. At least (he hoped) it would bring to an end his being haunted by the divine *devar*. As for the crying (*qara'*) by the sailors, compare it with their earlier one to their gods in vs. 5. Perhaps as a result of not being heard or of listening to Jonah speaking about the singular God they decided to beseech the Lord. Of course, the danger of imminent death had a lot to help this along. No one had to tell them how to pray, they simply cried out as best they could.

The Hebrew for "beseech" is the interjection *'ana* which translates as something like "ah, I pray!" or "Would that!" Thus *'ana* gives greater immediacy and urgency to the sailors beseeching...crying out to...the Lord whose side Jonah claimed he was on. The same may be said of "let us not perish" where the verb *'avad* is used, having *'al-na'* preceding it which is the negative equivalent or parallel to *'ana*: "would that not," for example.

*Nephesh* is the noun for "life" and more fundamentally refers to the soul or principle by which a man or any

animate being lives. While the gesture of throwing Jonah overboard is not bloody, nevertheless the sailors use words which could apply to the offering of a sacrifice. They beg the Lord (again, not their gods) of Jonah to be spared of blood which is innocent or *naqy'*. For the record, it should be said that one other adjective with the letter aleph is found in the Bible; the rest lack it but mean the same. As for that second reference, see J1 3.19: "because they have shed innocent blood in their land."

The verb "lay" is *natan* which generally means to give and here is used with the preposition *hal* or "upon" us.

The sailors end with a recognition that the Lord is free to act as he wishes or more accurately, "have done" (past tense). This is more than wishful thinking, for after having prayer to their own gods (no result) and then moving on to casting lots followed by Jonah's willingness to be tossed overboard, it was clear that they were following the Lord's wishes. If they knew Jonah balked at being sacrificed, they would not have uttered these words. *Chaphats* is the verb for "pleased" and fundamentally means to bend or to incline, indicative of someone leaning over to give consent. The verb also suggests an intense form of joy or pleasure. "Whatever the Lord pleases he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps" [Ps 135.6].

**Vs. 15: So they took up Jonah and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging.**

Because this was a voluntary sacrifice, the sailors bound Jonah's hands and feet mostly out of precaution or in case he changed his mind or even attempt to swim ashore once tossed in the water. The act of raising Jonah suggests first they had to lift him over the railing of the ship. Note that the verb *tul* is used as in vs. 4: "But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea." In other words, the sailors hoped their *tul* of Jonah would counter the *tul* of the Lord upon the sea.

*Hamad* means "to stand," "to endure" and translates as "ceased" which suggests that after the sudden, continuous *tul* or tempestuous tossing of the ocean, it came to a screeching halt, not a simple or gradual cessation of wind and waves. "You covered it (the earth) with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains" [Ps 104.6]. *Hamad* is used with the noun *zahaph* which means to be angry, to be sad, and five other uses of it are found in the Bible, one of which being Prov 19.12: "A king's wrath is like the growling of a lion, but his favor is like dew upon the grass."

**Vs. 16: Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made VOWS.**

The opening words of this verse ('the men feared a great fear') are identical to those of vs. 10 when the sailors had learned why Jonah was on board, that is, to flee the Lord. However, the grave circumstances compelled the sailors to fear the Lord, the same Lord whom Jonah claims to fear in vs. 9.

This sudden conversion of the sailors, if you will, is followed by an offering of a sacrifice to the Lord, *zavach* being the verb used with the noun *zevach*. In other words, we have a situation similar to the verb *yare'* and the noun *yir'ah* (to fear and fear). Compare this offering of sacrifice with vs. 5 or when "each cried to his god." That was a situation when the sailors were too terrified to offer sacrifice; besides, the ship was too unstable for such activity.

Now with the sudden cessation of the storm when Jonah has been identified as responsible for their fate, it was possible to offer sacrifice. They did it not to their gods but to the Lord. Sacrifice is accompanied with the making of vows, the verb being *nadar* with the noun *neder* derived from it along the lines of the above-mentioned “the men feared a great fear,” that is, “they sacrificed a sacrifice.” *Nadar* is also found in 2.9: “But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay.”

Once the sailors cast Jonah into the now calmed sea, we hear nothing of them. Were they able to continue their voyage to Tarshish? Most likely not, for they had thrown overboard all the wares (cf. vs. 5) or cargo to lighten the ship and so avoid being crashed upon the rocks. Once done, they made their way to the nearest port or even limped back to Joppa. Once safely ashore they recounted the incredible story to people though those who had put cargo on board were less than pleased at the loss. And so it would take some time for the ship owner to recuperate his loss and refit the vessel. Once this was settled, the crew set sail, possibly the same one which managed to save the ship. Certainly they were eager to spread the tale of Jonah not only to far-off Tarshish but in every intervening port along the Mediterranean. In these various places the story took root and spread retaining the essential facts. Once this story had been re-enforced with the conversion of Nineveh later on, Jonah’s renown grew even stronger, and his memory never left the sailors who had accompanied him. They even may have reverted to worship of their non-Israelite gods and on later voyages, prayed and made sacrifice to their new protector god, Jonah. As for Tarshish itself, the inhabitants must have wished that Jonah had completed his trip after they heard about Nineveh. At their invitation, Jonah himself could have taken a second, uneventful voyage there later in life.

**Vs. 17: And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.**

In the Hebrew text, this verse is 2.1.

*Manah* is the verb for “appointed” which fundamentally means “to number,” “to be divided,” “to allot” as well as “to make ready.” Such *manah* was determined beforehand as part of “the word (*devar*) of the Lord,” and most likely Jonah had an intimation of it which is why he felt especially hounded by the divine *devar*. Actually this is the first of three later instances of *manah*: the gourd (4.6), the worm (4.7) and a strong east wind (4.8), all in rapid succession. The basic meaning as it applies to numbering is found in Ps 147.4: “he determines the number of the stars, he gives to all of them their names.”

*Dag* is a general word for “fish” which here is “great” (*gadah*), applicable to one great in size, traditionally a whale as used in Matthew’s Gospel cited in the next paragraph. “For you make men like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler” [Hab 1.14]. Easily one can imagine this *dag* waiting in the sea below with its mouth wide open ready to receive Jonah. Now that the sea had calmed down, the *dag* emerged gradually until its outline was clearly visible just below the surface awaiting the sacrificial victim. *Dag* is quite different from *liwyatan* or the serpent of Ps 104.26: “There go the ships and the serpent which you formed to sport in.” Presence of this *dag* was the unexpected result of the sailors’ sacrifice and vows of vs. 16. *Balah* is the verb for “to swallow up” which suggests devouring or even destroying. “Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up or the pit

close its mouth over me” [Ps 69.15].

“And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” These words serve to make a transition from the drama that just unfolded to the one at hand which, in turn, paves the way for the conversion of Nineveh. The way the sentence is put gives time to pause for reflection before moving on to the experience of Jonah within the fish’s belly. It is here that the connective *v-* (‘and’) noted earlier plays its most important role. Jesus takes this example as applicable to his forthcoming suffering, death and resurrection: “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” [Mt 12.40–41]. Jonah was in the midst of the sea whereas Jesus was in the mist of the earth. Note two similar Greek nouns used here: “belly” and “heart” or *koilia* and *kardia*, the former being equivalent to the Hebrew *meheh* which more specifically means intestines and can refer to the inmost part of the soul as in Is 49.1: “The Lord called me from the womb, from the body (*meheh*) of my mother he named my name.” With Jonah the image tends not so much as being within the fish’s womb or even an empty stomach but as entwined and therefore caught helplessly within its intestines, a less than pleasant image.

In vs. 16 it was noted that when the sailors finally resumed their voyage to Tarshish with stops along various Mediterranean ports, enthusiastically they spread word about Jonah and more important, the intervention of the God of Israel. Thus when Jesus speaks of Jonah as a foreshadowing of his suffering, death and resurrection, he may have had access to more resources from tradition than we are aware of. That is to say, westward all the way from Tarshish through the Mediterranean and eastward on to Nineveh or northern Iraq, a very large swath of territory. Despite the long-held tradition of Jonah’s exploits, rightly Jesus says “behold, something greater than Jonah is here” [vs. 41]. Jesus uses the same words with respect to King Solomon in vs. 42 to whom the “queen of the South” came to listen to his wisdom. At the same time, this unnamed queen came to the land of Israel as Nineveh came to the word of the Lord proclaimed by Jonah. The lesson gained first from Jonah and amplified by Jesus is that any preaching of the word of the Lord requires becoming hidden and obscure...not just outwardly but quite dramatically as in Jonah’s case, entwined within the fish’s entrails.

## Chapter Two

**Vs. 1: Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying,**

An incomplete sentence but a fitting one insofar as it offers an opportunity to reflect upon the role of the conjunction *v-*, indicative of continuous action and connectivity between events. *V-* is especially important here because it shows both the distress and faith of Jonah. As for “saying,” it begins chapter three in the Hebrew text.

*Palal* is the verb which intimates prayer as supplication and is found a second time in 4.2; the fundamental meaning centers around judging. “They will make supplication to you” [Is 45.14]. Jonah’s prayer continues to vs. 9, almost the end of Chapter Two. All the while the sailors on board were watching the “great fish” [vs. 17] sink further beneath the surface until it disappeared from sight. Nevertheless, they could somehow feel the prayer of Jonah ascend from below them up to the Lord, quite unlike the wickedness of 1.2 (i.e., of Nineveh) which “has come up

before me.”

**Vs. 2: I called to the Lord out of my distress and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.**

*Qara*’ is the verb for “called” as noted in 1.2 (‘cry against it’ or Nineveh). There *qara*’ is a divine command whereas here it comes from Jonah as profound distress, all tangled up in the fish’s intestines...complete darkness..in the midst of the ocean. And so at the very beginning of his three days and three nights within the fish, Jonah learned with frightening immediacy what the Lord had intended him to do.

In the verse at hand, Jonah called “from distress” or *tsarah*, a noun describing profound affliction. For a similar verse, see Ps 120.1: “In my distress I cry to the Lord that he may answer me.” Despite his *tsarah*, Jonah states joyously that the Lord did answer (*hanah*) him which means these verses were composed after the event, most likely after having been “vomited out” [vs. 10]. Surely Jonah must have thought of Israel’s passage through the Red Sea and Moses’ song of triumph in Chapter Fifteen of Exodus. If the Lord could bring an entire nation from Egypt, why can’t he deliver Jonah?

Jonah identifies the “great fish’s” belly as that of Sheol or *beten* which translates as womb or the inmost part of anything and stands in sharp contrast to *meheh* of 1.17 or intestines. Such is the general description of Sheol or land of the dead which essentially isn’t a land at all, a word to designate a kind of non-existence. “You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol” [Ps 86.13]. With Sheol described not only as abode of the dead but with the implication that souls are all twisted up in *meheh* or intestines, it is even a worse place than traditionally described. Sheol’s location is beneath the earth whereas Jonah is in the midst of the sea, just as bad, because the sea is an image of the primordial waters of Gn 1.2: “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.”

Instead of using the now familiar verb *qara*’ (‘I cried’), we have the verb *shawah* which suggests being broad or wide and hence intimates the type of crying Jonah does here. “But I, O Lord, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you” [Ps 88.13]. From the confined...twisted...place of the fish’s *meheh* the cry of Jonah has to be such, that is wide, in order to escape. Not only that, it had to reach the surface of the ocean after which it ascended to heaven. And so the *shawah* uttered by Jonah is especially strong and representative of his sorrow for disobeying the Lord. Surely the sailors on board the ship which recently had been in distress saw this *shawah* emerge from the ocean’s depths, crash through the surface and then ascend into heaven. They realized that Jonah was still alive and had the possibility of escaping after all.

**Vs. 3: For you did cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood was round about me; your your waves and your billows passed over me.**

*Shalach* is the verb for “cast,” used commonly as to send, doesn’t have the same force as, for example, *tul* in 1.4 (to hurl). The object of *shalach* is *metsulah* or “deep” and derives from the verbal root *tsul* (‘to sink’). Seven other biblical uses exist, mostly related to the sea, one of which is Ps 68.22: “I will bring them back from Bashan, I will bring them back from the depths of the sea.” Equivalent to this *metsulah* is the “heart” (*lev*) of the sea, the plural *yamym* being used, indicative of all the waters on the earth, not the sea into which Jonah had been cast.

While Jonah is fully accurate about this *shalach* into the ocean, he was shielded from it by reason of being inside the “great fish.” Despite this protection (otherwise he couldn’t live), Jonah could feel the waves and billows press upon the fish, thereby adding to the horror of his experience.

Jonah attributes his misfortune to the Lord for having cast him into first the deep and second, into the heart of the seas. The remaining three forces (flood, waves and billows) are more a result of this *shalach* or casting and are auxiliaries, if you will. *Nahar* is the word for “flood” and more properly applies to a river or anything flowing. What’s significant about *nahar* in the verse at hand is that they are *savav* Jonah or surround him pretty much like the fish’s *mehel* or intestines which entwined him. To top off this dire situation, waves and billows which Jonah attribute as belonging to the Lord “passed over” him, *havar* being the common verb but in the context suggest repeated assault by them.

*Mishbar* is the noun for “billows” with four other biblical references and refer to waves which break upon the shore compared with the common noun *gal*. “Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves” [Ps 88.7]. As for *gal*, that word suggests a heap as in Gn 31.46: “And they took stones and made a heap.”

**Vs. 4: Then I said, 'I am cast out from your presence; how shall I again look upon your holy temple?'**

“Then I said:” a repeat of vs. 2 (‘saying’) after Jonah had made his desperate plea to the Lord and is a way of making this plea continue in the divine presence. He presents it in two phases, the first that he is “cast out” or *garash*, a verb which intimates being thrust out forcibly as well as being plundered. The following from Am 8.8 has the same verbal form: “And all of it (the land of Israel) rise like the Nile and be tossed about and sink again like the Nile of Egypt?” This *garash* is “from your presence” or better, the preposition *neged* which is prefaced with another preposition *m* (*min-*) making it read “from before.” As for “presence,” the noun is “eyes” or *hayin*. The eyes Jonah has in mind belong more properly to the Lord’s word or *devar* which had hounded him right from the beginning. Despite the constancy of being badgered, Jonah now misses the *devar*.

The second phase consists of a question, of an intense longing to “look upon” the temple where the verb is *navat* which means having respect for the object of one’s gaze. “Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments” [Ps 119.6]. The object of *navat* here is the temple or *heykal*, presumably the one in Jerusalem which is *qadash* or holy. Given Jonah’s status as part of King Jeroboam II’s retinue, frequently he must have visit this *heykal* and was familiar with the celebrations there. Perhaps more specifically he had in mind the Passover. Right now Jonah was in his personal Red Sea trying to get through to the other side, as it were. The sacrifice and liturgical ceremonies surrounding that major event in Israel’s history was especially real to him entangled in the fish’s entrails. Jonah’s only wish is to *navat*...to look at this temple, even if were from afar. “To behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple” [Ps 27.4].

As for “again” rendered in English, it is the verb *yasaph* which means to add or to increase. “And you shall no longer (*yasaph*) be haughty in my holy mountain” [Zeph 3.11].

**Vs. 5: The waters closed in over me, the deep was round about me; weeds were wrapped about my head**

This sentence had no period at the end because it continues into the next verse.

After having paused for just one verse (4) to complain of his dire situation, Jonah continues his lament over the waters which “closed in” or *‘aphaph*, a verb which means to surround and has four other biblical references, one of which is 2Sam 22.5: “For the waves of death encompassed me, the torrents of perdition assailed me” [2Sam 22.5].

Even more ominous than the waters (obviously the ocean) is the “deep” or *tehom* which pertains to a wave or great quantity of water. “On that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened” [Gn 7.11]. What sets *tehom* in a category of its own is association with the primordial waters before creation: “The earth was without form and void” [Gn 1.2]. There a very similar word is used, *tohu*, and the oceans today were considered to be made of the same stuff. Another way of putting it is made of the same not-stuff because *tohu* was an indefinite something prior to the act of creation. While Jonah was entangled within the fish’s intestines, he was unable to see the water outside but certainly knew he was in that environment.

As for “weeds” or *suph* (more usually as reeds), they are an added insult to Jonah. Perhaps by *suph* he could be identifying the slimy mass of the fish’s *meheh* (intestines) which were wrapped not just around his head but his entire body. Because *suph* is the name of the Red Sea or Reed Sea, Jonah in his distress may have used his situation to remind him yet again of divine action at bringing Israel from Egypt through the Reed/Red Sea. “Then Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur” [Ex 15.22].

*Chavash* is the verb for “wrapped” and suggests putting on a saddle or a binding tightly, again, a way to describe Jonah entangled in the fish’s intestines. “Clothes of blue and embroidered work, and in carpets of colored stuff, bound with cords and made secure” [Ezk 27.24].

**Vs. 6: at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you did bring up my life from the Pit, O Lord my God.**

Because this verse continues from the previous one, the first letter is not capitalized.

*Qetsev* is the word for “roots” and connotes something that had been cut or sheared and has two other biblical references, 1Kg 6.25 and 7.37, the former being cited here (as ‘form’): “both cherubim had the same measure and the same form.” In the verse at hand, the idea seems to be that the mountains, high as they are, extend just as far if not more below the surface of the ocean invisible to sight and are, as it were, “portioned off” from the *tehom* (‘deep’). In other words, despite their stability and seeming eternal nature, the mountains are founded upon the even more ancient waters.

After speaking in terms of images pertinent to the ocean, Jonah shifts gears to the “land” or *‘erets*, a common term which can apply to country. This *‘erets* seems located at the bottom of the sea or below the just-noted *tehom* and

contains the “Pit” or *shachat* which can be either a cistern or an underground prison. Thus *shachat* is a place even more foreboding than *tehom* or the *qetsev* (‘roots’ of the mountains). Even the “great fish” avoids it while depositing Jonah there and getting away as quickly as possible. How else could Jonah get such information about places where no one has ever gone? “But you, O God, will cast them down into the lowest pit” [Ps 55.23]. As for the “bars” or *beryach* (singular), they complete the utterly dismal picture and symbolize that no escape is possible. “And prescribed bounds for it (the sea) and set bars and doors” [Job 38.10].

For the Lord to rescue Jonah from this, the worst of all possible fates, is not only a miracle but determination on the Lord’s part that he is set upon Jonah to convert Nineveh. And so this rescue mission is (‘you did bring up my life’), as it were, less for him and more for that city.

**Vs. 7: When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to you into your holy temple.**

*Nephesh* means “soul” which Jonah now speaks as having “fainted” or *hataph*, a verb meaning to cover, to be wrapped in darkness, to languish. Although not mentioned throughout Chapter Two, it should be noted that Jonah was in complete darkness within the fish’s *meheh* or intestines. Certainly this slimy darkness causes Jonah to *hataph*. “As they faint like wounded men in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out on their mothers’ bosom” [Lam 2.12]. Yet at this very point of blacking out, as it were, Jonah remembers (*zakar*) the Lord. This *zakar* occurs only when Jonah’s soul is wrapped in darkness with regard to the verb *hataph*. During this time he recalls the divine *devar* or word which has hounded him from the beginning of his summons by the Lord. “Like one forsaken among the dead, like those whom you remember no more” [Ps 88.5].

At this lowest point (literally), in the Pit beneath the earth at the bottom of the *tehom* or deep remembrance of the Lord allow Jonah’s prayer or *tephilah* reaches him. *Tephilah* pertains more to an entreaty or supplication as well as a sacred song. Again, see another verse from Psalm 88 which aptly fits the situation: “Let my prayer come before you, incline your ear to my cry” [vs. 2]! More specifically, the *tephilah* of Jonah enters the Lord’s “holy temple” or *heykal* noted in vs. 2. There Jonah is in despair about looking upon the *heykal* whereas here he is confident that his prayer actually entered it. Thus we have two extreme points, spatially speaking: Jonah in the Pit at the ocean’s bottom or below the primal waters and the *heykal* (in Jerusalem). It is his entreaty (*tephilah*) that provides the bridge between the two extremes. This *tephilah* turns out to be just as relentless in its goal as the relentless divine *devar*.

**Vs. 8: Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their true loyalty.**

Surely Jonah must have had in mind the sailors who “each cried to his god” [1.5] as well as the captain who bade him to “call upon your god” [vs. 6]! *Shamar* is the verb for “pay regard” and connotes keeping watch. It occurs frequently throughout lengthy Ps 119 with respect to the divine law or Torah though the form here (piel, participle) is the only use in the Bible. Obviously Jonah had in mind *shamar* of the Torah and mocks what he saw as idolatry practiced on the ship from which he had just been tossed as a sacrificial offering.

Here *hevel* is a noun which translates as “idol” and more fundamentally means breath, exhalation (It stands in contrast to *ruach*, also as breath but with spiritual implications). The idea lying behind *hevel* is that human pride or vanity is fleeting as a breath. It is associated famously with the opening of Ecclesiastes (second verse): “Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity!”

As for “vanity,” the word is *shawe’* which means calamity, destruction, nothingness. “Everyone utters lies (*shawe’*) to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak” [Ps 12.2]. Surely Jonah had in mind the sailors who worshiped their gods in a time of distress but at the same time did not wish their destruction.

*Chesed* is the noun for “true loyalty” and is found again in 4.2: “abounding in steadfast love and repenting of evil.” This term is difficult to translate adequately, for often it applies to the love God has for us and therefore is equivalent to the New Testament notion of *agape*. “Slow to anger and of great kindness” [Jl 2.8]. So if a person “guards” (*shamar*) vain idols, he forsakes (*hazav*, to abandon) the *chesed* proper to the Lord.

**Vs. 9: But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the Lord!”**

And so concludes the chapter long prayer of Jonah begun in vs. 2. As with most verses, it begins with the conjunction *v-* translated here as “but,” and in this instance it signals a shift from the despair of earlier verses to a conclusion where Jonah praises the Lord. Immediately afterwards he is set free by being vomited up on the seashore.

*Todah* means “thanksgiving” and connotes the utterance of a confession. “My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and render praise to him; and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me” [Jos 7.19]. The type of sacrifice is not stated, but given Jonah’s stature as a prophet, it will be in accord with the Mosaic law or Torah. Compare this sacrifice (*zavach*) with that of the sailors when they threw Jonah overboard: “and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows” [1.16]. Also compare Jonah’s vow (*nadar*) which goes unspecified again in reference to 1.16. Perhaps Jonah wished to leave this vow unspecified, given his reluctance to go to Nineveh, a task of conversion he wished to complete as quickly as possible and return home. Despite his journey there being on foot and the hazards involved, it is certainly a welcome change from being on the storm-tossed sea followed by being swallowed up by a fish. We don’t have information as to this *nadar* which Jonah had made, but chances are it was during the three days and three nights he was in the “great fish.” *Shalam* is the verb for “pay” which means to be whole, to finish, to complete and from which is derived *shalom* (peace). “I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows” [Ps 66.13]. Being an observant Jew, this Psalm verse gives a hint as to both the type of sacrifice and vow Jonah had in mind.

*Yeshuhah* is the noun for “deliverance” (the verbal root of the proper name Jesus). “O Lord, my Lord, my strong deliverer, you have covered my head in the day of battle” [Ps 140.7]. *Yeshuhah* is prefaced with the preposition *L-* (‘to’), indicative of direct divine intervention” Deliverance is *to* the Lord.”

**Vs. 10: And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.**

*'Amar* is the common verb for “spoke” and is found in the very first verse of this book (‘saying’) as a preface of sorts to vs. 2. Although the fish was not endowed with speech, the type of *'amar* involved signifies divine sway over all creation. “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” [Gn 1.3].

*Qy'* is the verb for “vomited” which means the “great fish” had to be fairly close to shore to discharge Jonah there. “He swallows down riches and vomits them up again; God casts them out of his belly” [Job 20.15]. Jonah knew he was about to be discharged, for the *mehh* or intestines in which he was entangled contracted tighter than ever which in itself was frightening but with the promise that soon he will be discharged. The fish must have been some distance from the shore, else it risked becoming stranded. *Yabashah* is the word for “dry ground” (from the verbal root *yavash*, to dry: “Let the dry ground appear” [Gn 1.9]). Because the fish listened to the Lord speaking to it, most likely the place where Jonah was vomited was considerably further north of Joppa, towards what now is Turkey, so he was closer to Nineveh. The preposition *'el*, translated as “upon,” more specifically means “to,” hence it would be more accurate to say that the fish had vomited Jonah *to* the dry ground.

### Chapter Three

**Vs. 1: Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying,**

An incomplete saying not unlike 1.1 where the word (*devar*) is speaking (*'amar*) a second time. The *devar* which had been described above as continuously hounding Jonah finally relented while he was entangled within the “great fish’s” entrails and now is waiting upon the shore to greet him. There’s a sense that despite Jonah’s repentance in Chapter Two he really hasn’t had a change of attitude as Chapter Four reveals. He accomplishes his task of preaching repentance to Nineveh which exceeds all expectations and that’s it. Surely some inhabitants must have picked up on Jonah’s reluctance, even his I’d-rather-be-somewhere-else attitude but were careful to make a distinction between the message and the Messenger.

**Vs. 2: “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.”**

As with vs. 2, the one at hand mirrors the original purpose of Jonah’s mission in 1.2. This *qum* or “arise” is even more important (and to be taken literally), for Jonah had just been vomited from the “great fish” and for some time was laying prone on the seashore. As with 1.2, the relative pronoun “that” is lacking in the Hebrew text.

The English of 1.2 as “cry against it” sounds strong, *qara'* being the verb with the preposition *hal* (‘cry upon’) Nineveh but the verse at hand has the same verb for “proclaim” coupled with the preposition *'el* or “to” it. “Message” is derived from *qara'*, that is, *qery'ah* which is the only use of this term in the Bible. One can surmise that such a message is more a calling (from the Lord) which makes a clear distinction from the person of Jonah so anyone listening to him won’t be captivated by his personality, his delivery or anything else...just the divine *qara'* or calling. Note the *qery'ah* is not given to Jonah immediately after having been vomited by the “great fish.” That has to wait until he reaches Nineveh which was a perilous land journey from the Mediterranean coastline. Most likely Jonah didn’t go it alone but joined a caravan or other group of travelers. At least he wouldn’t have something to resemble his ill-fated sea journey. So during all that time Jonah anticipated the *qery'ah* while being

guided...not hounded as before...by the divine *devar*.

**Vs. 3: So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth.**

This verse counters Jonah's refusal of the Lord in 1.3, "But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." Both verses contain the verb *qum* ('arose'); both were done quickly but for two entirely different purposes. In the section above, the perils of a land journey from the Mediterranean coast to inland Nineveh were considerable. Also it was noted that Jonah may have joined a caravan or other travelers for protection, but this verse seems to preclude that. The divine *devar* guided Jonah safely all the way. En route the two became reconciled, if you will, having been at odds earlier. During those several weeks (it must have taken some, at least) Jonah and the *devar* had an opportunity to formulate what that "message" (*qery'ah*) might be.

*Elohyim* is a noun for the English adjective "exceedingly" and is noted in 1.6 as "god;" also it is applicable to the Lord as God. Thus the verse at hand reads literally, "great city to God." For the Lord to identify himself with Nineveh, the grandest metropolis of its time, must have impressed Jonah considerably. This shows how much the Lord is willing to concede to his unwilling prophet and will have to do so again in the next and final chapter.

As for the "three days' journey," that applies to a straight-forward walk across the breadth of Nineveh without making any detour, stopping to see the sights as well as not speaking with anyone along the way. Mention of such a breadth possibly comes from Jonah himself who wanted to check out Nineveh before proclaiming that "message" or *qery'ah*. In this way he would know better what he was up against. There was no problem of being perceived as an outsider. Nineveh was full of people from the known world, even some from Tarshish.

**Vs. 4: Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he cried, "yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"**

*Chalal* is the verb for "began" which also means to perforate, to loose, to lay open. We could say by this that Jonah had to enter Nineveh by loosening its gates not so much by force—to the local population he was just another foreigner—but by actually starting to preach then and there. At this juncture the "message" of 3.2 was not clear to him, so perhaps he decided to recount his adventure of being almost shipwrecked, his offer to be sacrificed and being swallowed up by the "great fish." If he had no success at the city's entrance, he would not succeed at all within its gates. "Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah" [2Chron 3.1]. Also in the verse at hand *chalal* gives added force to the conjunctive *v-* prefaced to it.

Once inside, Jonah goes one day's journey of the three days it takes to cross the entirety of Nineveh (cf. 3.3). He needed this time to access the situation, meet people and discern that "message" the Lord wished to communicate to the inhabitants. Given that Nineveh was so cosmopolitan, quite a few foreigners were present either as residents, visitors or traders. Thus Jonah's audience comprised a widely assorted group of people who worshiped an equally assorted amount of deities. This was no surprise to Jonah, for everyone knew about the city, even the sailors on board the ship from which he had been thrown. In a sense, Nineveh was a microcosm of the ancient world, a much wider audience for Jonah he encountered than working under King Jeroboam II.

And so after one day's journey within the gates of Nineveh that "message" became clear: the city "shall be overthrown," the verb being *haphak* which means to turn as well as to change, and here is a participle. Up until this one day's presence within Nineveh Jonah kept preaching about his recent adventure until the Lord changed that "message" into one of destruction, *haphak*. Jonah had no clear idea what this *haphak* consisted of, even when he completed his preaching mission and left Nineveh where he sat at a safe distance to "see what would become of the city" [4.5]. Being a prophet, Jonah was well acquainted with Israelite history, so the first image that must have come to mind was the Lord's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: "And he overthrew (*haphak*) those cities" [Gn 19.25]. But before this Jonah thought to himself, "So this is what those two cities must have looked like prior to their fall." It was as though history were repeating itself. The text gives no account of the sins of Nineveh, just that each inhabitant (native and foreign) "turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands" [3.8]. As for the *haphak* the Lord had in mind, surely it would be as disastrous as for those two cities. Furthermore, failure to warn Nineveh and its subsequent destruction would benefit Jonah just as much as its conversion. He would end up as a Second Abraham and his memory for future generations would be assured.

The message Jonah delivers is one he does by crying, *qara'*, that verb found towards the beginning of this book ('and cry against it') again in 3.2 ('and proclaim to it the message that I tell you'). As for the "forty days," it is not unlike a *kairos* event, and implies not so much a length of time but suggests that which is done within time and here it is believing in God as the next verse says. "Forty days" can be a few hours, weeks or even months but doesn't seem to extend beyond that into and up to a full year.

**Vs. 5: And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them.**

The noun '*anshey* is used for "people" which means men and women individually and thus fits the eclectic population of Nineveh compared with *ham* or people collected together and having an identity such as a nation. Despite their disparate backgrounds, the '*anshey* "believed God," the verb being the common '*aman* which also means to support, to trust and to stand firm. Note that this '*aman* is directed "in (*b-*) God" compared to the multitude of deities within the city. Thus we have a two-fold conversion, as it were: accepting the fact that Nineveh will be overthrown and believing in God, not in a multitude of gods. Just the fact that all the inhabitants believed in God within a short span of time is a miracle. In fact, when these good people approached Jonah, he hadn't a clue as how to handle them. He must have fleshed out the message of Nineveh's impending destruction though it is left to the reader to fill in the blanks. Perhaps the readiness to convert was guided more by economic ends than religious ones. The non-residents were just as eager to repent, for if they lost Nineveh, they and their own countries would suffer from the loss of trade. That may be why even the king himself got involved.

The verb *qara'* again is used with a different nuance, as "proclaimed," and has the same sense of urgency as originally discussed in 1.2 ('cry against it'). Despite the enormity of Nineveh, word about its impending doom and the remedy to ward it off spread very quickly.

**Vs. 6: Then tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.**

*Davar* (alternate spelling to *devar*) is the word for “tidings” which has been noted throughout as the divine word that pursued Jonah from his ill-fated voyage to Tarshish all the way to his going to Nineveh in 3.3 (‘according to the word of the Lord’). There *devar* assumed the form of *qery’ah* (‘message’). Instead of taking this verse as Jonah’s preaching catching the attention of people...spies or police...who relayed it to the (anonymous) king, we can take *devar* as having a life of its own and reaching the king himself. After all the *devar* was relentless in its pursuit of Jonah. *Nagah* is the verb for “reached” which also means to touch as well as to strike. “But he touched me and set me on my feet” [Dan 8.18]. With this in mind, the *devar* had a greater impact upon the king than it did upon Jonah.

*’Adereth* is the word for “robe” which fundamentally applies to something wide or ample and here is a garment proper to royal majesty. For a king to take off this *’adereth* virtually means that he has abdicated his power. “And when Elijah heard it (‘still, small voice’), he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave” [1Kg 19.13]. Apparently the divine *devar* reached the anonymous king while he was upon his throne officiating at some business which means that others in the court witnessed the event. Not only did the king take off that symbol of royal authority, he “sat in ashes.” The preposition *hal* is used making these words read more dramatically as “sat upon ashes” instead of sitting upon his throne.

**Vs. 7: And he made proclamation and published through Nineveh, “by the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed or drink water,**

This verse continues into the next to form a complete sentence with the decree itself continuing through vs. 9.

Note that while Jonah had preached about the impending destruction of Nineveh and nothing else, it is the king who spelled out the necessary response. Most likely he or some of his nobles mentioned as in his court had consulted Jonah as what to do.

*Zahaq* is the verb for “made proclamation” which means to cry out, to exclaim (often in an assembly) and thus has a certain urgency to it. Surely this king didn’t want to end up like Sodom and Gomorrah. It is found in 1.5: “Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god.” *Zahaq* is followed by a publishing or *’amar*, the common verb meaning “to speak.” Thus *zahaq* is urgent whereas *’amar* is not which means that once the king uttered his *zahaq*, naturally it flowed out to the city’s inhabitants who spoke... *’amar*...about the decree at hand regarding Nineveh’s impending ruin. Obviously such news got around quickly, even in a city that required three days to traverse.

*Taham* means “decree” and fundamentally means “taste,” the verbal root from which it is derived. That means every inhabitant of Nineveh—native or foreign—got a full “taste” of what the king handed down. For another use: “Like a gold ring in a wine’s snout is a beautiful woman without discretion” [Prov 11.22]. In the verse at hand, the royal *taham* is carried out by not engaging in *taham* or by not tasting food, man and beast alike. Even though foreign traders were under this *taham* and relied upon Nineveh as a key trading center, they were freer to leave than the natives. Thus some may have opted to return home instead of abiding by this *taham*.

**Vs. 8: but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them cry mightily to God; yea, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands.**

“Man” (*adam*) is included with “beast” (*behemah*), the second time the latter is mentioned and usually applies to large quadrupeds or domestic animals. Once each person has made his or her own sackcloth, they are to do the same for the *behemah*, not the herd nor flock of vs. 7. *Baqar* is the word for “herd” which applies to cattle and the like, similar to *behemah* but not as inclusive as that term. Wealth is considered in terms of ownership of animals, and Nineveh is no exception. Perhaps they weren’t as vital, however, within the city proper because a large amount of non-agricultural enterprises were situated there. As for the *behemah*, for the most part they were kept outside the city gates except when going to slaughter, so that means the Ninevehites had to go out into the local fields, gather the *behemah* and cloth them with sackcloth. Due to the large size of such animals, even more fabric was required for the task than for humans, so there was a rush on vendors who sold it and quickly made a profit, more than anyone else in the city.

Once so clothed, man and *behemah* are to “cry mightily,” the verb being the familiar *qara*’ noted so often in the Book of Jonah. As for Jonah himself, we hear nothing until the beginning of Chapter Four. He had done his duty, proclaimed a simple yet stark message, and now stood there stunned at the incredible response by Nineveh’s inhabitants. Suddenly Jonah was out of a job and no longer the center of attention which contributed to his sullen attitude. As for the *qara*’ at hand, it is to be done “mightily” or literally “in (*b-*) strength (*chezqah*).” This noun has five other biblical references, one of which is Ezk 34.4: “and with force and harshness you have ruled them.” The *qara*’ is directed to (*el-*) God (*Elohym*) which as noted above was itself a marvel since Nineveh was a city filled with innumerable deities.

The king demands that each of his subjects and as well foreigners “turn from” (*shuv*) his “evil way,” the same verb used in the next verse: “God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger.” Actually this second *shuv* is the intended aim else Nineveh be destroyed. *Derek* is the noun for “way,” the common noun for road or path which is applicable to the spiritual and moral realms. The second *shuv* is with respect to “violence” or *chamas* which connotes gain by wrong-doing. “Violence had grown up into a rod of wickedness; none of them shall remain nor their abundance nor their wealth” [Ezk 7.11]. More specifically, *chamas* is associated with hands, the doing of it. Since Nineveh is a city, mention of hands can apply to the immoral use of money, not necessarily physical *chamas*.

**Vs. 9: Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger so that we perish not?”**

This verse contains the end of king’s proclamation begun in vs. 7 and concludes with a question.

“Who knows” (*yadah*) is more rhetorical as well as part of the exhortation by the king of Nineveh. It is intended to soften a harsh but necessary decree in order to save the most cosmopolitan city of its day. At the same time the *yadah* at hand may not work. The Lord may simply go ahead and destroy Nineveh as he had done with Sodom and Gomorrah (‘their sin is very grave,’ Gn 18.20).

As mentioned in the last verse, the verb *shuv* is used for “repent” and implies a turn from the destruction prepared for Nineveh. It is used twice here, the second relative to “fierce anger.” Similar to the meaning of *shuv* is *nacham*, basically as to pant or to groan and more commonly as to lament, to take vengeance. “Let that man be like the cities which the Lord overthrew without pity” [Jer 20.16].

*Charon* means “anger” and is used with *‘aph* or “face” thereby with the literal reading “anger of his face” which intimates that somehow the divine countenance is visible, and what people see through the medium of prophets like Jonah is not welcoming. In vs. 4 Jonah mentioned “forty days” until the destruction of Nineveh, and as noted there, that is not necessarily a literal span of time. The king of Nineveh had to know this from Jonah so that he could make known publically what is involved in the people’s repentance.

**Vs. 10: When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it.**

Whether or not the deeds of repentance by the Ninevehites are satisfactory is contingent upon the divine *ra’ah*, the common verb for seeing, and we can take the *ra’ah* at hand to be done by God on site, if you will. As he had done with regard to the land of Shinar, the Lord “came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built” [Gn 10.6]. As with Jonah, God did not have to take three days to traverse Nineveh but could do so in an instant, a fact which Jonah perceived and made his resentful. Surely during his visit the Lord had penetrated every corner of Nineveh and was especially moved by the sackcloth put over the larger animals. That meant they were serious.

Here we have a second use of the verb *nacham*, “repented” which meant that Nineveh was spared. Still, that message had to be conveyed to the king, his nobles and everyone else, foreigners included. They didn’t know it outright but had to rely upon Jonah. As the next chapter reveals, he is less than happy with the outcome but was careful not to reveal this to the king and his court. That would spoil anything for the future, including any prophetic work he might take up with his protector, King Jeroboam II. Compare this spiteful and rather petty attitude with Abraham in his intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah: “Will you indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked” [Gn 18.23]?

## Chapter Four

**Vs. 1: But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.**

The conjunctive *v-* at the beginning of this sentence is important in that it contrasts the recent conversion of Nineveh and Jonah’s inner disposition.

*Yarah* is the verb for “displeased” and is quite strong insofar as it means to be evil, to be malignant. “They angered him at the waters of Meribah, and it went ill with Moses on their account” [Ps 106.32]. The verb also has the preposition *‘el-* or “to” prefaced to the proper name which serves to intensify its meaning. The adjective *gadal* (great) is used for the English adverb.

A second conjunctive in this short sentence is just as important as the first one in that it shows the result of Jonah's attitude described by the verb *charah*, "was angry." *Carah* is just as vehement as *yarah* and means to be burn, to be kindled. "And the anger of the Lord was kindled" [2Kg 13.3].

The repentance by the Ninevehites occurred while Jonah was in their midst, perhaps when he was engaged in preaching their city's immanent destruction. It seemed that everyone "turned from their evil way" [3.10] simultaneously, almost as though they were one person. Surely this took Jonah by surprise. Up to this point he was center-stage but suddenly found himself to be just another man in the midst of a huge city. No one came up to congratulate Jonah which rubbed him the wrong way. He would return to King Jeroboam II with no credit to his name. It wasn't that the people ignored him deliberately; they were too overjoyed to notice anything else.

**Vs. 2: And he prayed to the Lord and said, "I pray Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and repent of evil.**

*Palal* is the verb for "prayed" as in 2.1 which means more to make supplication, and the supplication at hand continues into the next verse which invites a response from the Lord.

Jonah begs off his mission to Nineveh, for his disposition is indicated through the interjection '*anah* ('I pray'). "O (*'anah*) Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God" [Neh 1.5]. On the surface it may sound impudent and argumentative but is dear to the Lord because it reveals Jonah's humanness and willing to go along with him just to get the mission of repentance to Nineveh over and done with. That means Jonah had much more on his mind which ultimately remains unfulfilled as the Lord's question at the conclusion of this chapter intimates.

Jonah didn't want to bother going to Nineveh but remain in his own "country" or '*adamah*, that is, he would rather be functioning as a prophet under King Jeroboam II despite his recent smashing success. Besides, getting involved with the largest city of its time was intimidating by any standards compared with the smaller field of activity at home or '*adamah*. As for Jonah's direct statement to the Lord about fleeing (*barach*: cf. 1.3) to Tarshish, he knew it was a lame excuse inviting a swift response by the Lord sending his *devar* or word to pursue him. Jonah is admirable for his truthfulness here, for not only did he attempt flight to Tarshish, he "made haste" to flee there, the verb being *qadam*, to come or to be in front. *Qadam* therefore gives insight into Jonah's impetuous character, that while he enjoyed being a prophet, he wanted it his own way. For another reference to this verb, see Ps 110.147: "I rise before dawn and cry for help, I hope in your words." Even though he might at the other end of the known world (Tarshish), word of Nineveh's conversion by the Lord alone would reach him quickly, given that city's importance and the trade between both ends of the Mediterranean.

Jonah attributes five qualities to the Lord which he himself had experienced over the course of three days and three nights in the "great fish's" belly; prior to that, his knowledge of the Lord was more or less superficial even though he had engaged in prophetic work. The first attribute is "gracious" or *chanun* which derived from the verbal root *chanan* and that, in turn, suggests inclining towards being gracious or showing pity...i.e., a continuous process

indicative of one's attitude. "And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate" [Ex 22.27]. *Rachum* is the second divine quality and derives from the root *racham*, to behold with tenderness. This adjective is like *chanun* in that it is indicative of an attitude and therefore is constant. On the other hand, *chanun* is more affectionate. See Ps 103.8 which also has *chanun* as many proclamations of the sort: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." The third divine quality is "slow to anger," *'erek* being the adjective which is indicative more of length and is also found in Ps 103.8. The "anger" attributable to the Lord is *'aph* which here is plural signifying an intensity of anger which is not a divine characteristic over an extended (*'erek*) period of time. *'Aph* also means "face" which implies its manifestation is seen on a person's countenance. Again, *'aph* is found in Ps 103.8. The fifth and final divine attribute is "repent" or the verb *nacham* which had been noted in 3.9: "Who knows, God may yet repent." In the verse at hand, *nacham* is used with respect to "evil" or *rah* as in 1.7: "that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us."

**Vs. 3: Therefore now, O Lord, take my life from me, I beseech you, for it is better for me to die than to live."**

The words "I beseech you" are summed up in the particle *-na'* which comes after the verb "take" or *laqach*. *-Na'* is short and sweet, right to the point, as it expresses a desire beyond words. "I beseech you, show me your glory" [Ex 33.18].

*Nephesh* is the word for "life" and commonly refers to soul as noted in 1.14.

"Than to live:" the preposition *min* or *m-* is prefaced to the verb *chayay* ('to live') or literally, "from living."

**Vs. 4: And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"**

A question by the Lord put to Jonah as to his anger, *charah* being the verb as in 4.1. The preposition *l-* ('to') is used, "to you." Jonah is unable to give a response but leaves the city.

**Vs. 5: Then Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade until he should see what would become of the city.**

"Went out" has the preposition *min*, "went out from the city." Jonah exited Nineveh amid shouts of rejoicing that the Lord has spared both native and foreigner living within it. This, followed by the Lord's question in vs. 4, really angered him and those about Jonah saw this anger and distress written all over his countenance. Obviously he had been forgotten amid all the joy and celebration and was very sullen about not being recognized as Nineveh's savior.

Jonah went to the east of Nineveh for what he believed was a safe distance for any destruction the Lord may send from above as he had done with Sodom and Gomorrah. As with those two cities, destruction came at dawn (cf. Gn 19.15), so chances are the same would happen with Nineveh. By taking his position east of Nineveh the rising sun would be at his back and not interfere with his line of sight. Contrary to Sodom and Gomorrah, there was no divine prescription not to look at Nineveh. First Jonah sat down and after a while, figuring brimstone and fire

from heaven had been delayed, he constructed a “booth” or *sukah*. This shelter is made from leaves and branches which are interwoven and therefore is temporary. “Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm and other leafy trees to make booths” [Neh 8.15]. Once Jonah had hastily made this shelter, he sat in the opening to await Nineveh’s annihilation. In the meanwhile, he could not help but hear cries of joy arising from the city which angered him even more. All the while Jonah pondered the Lord’s question in vs. 4, “Do you well to be angry?”

**Vs. 6: And the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.**

*Manah* is the verb for “appointed” as in 1.16 with regard to the “great fish” which had swallowed Jonah and is the first of three uses in the next two verses. *Qyqayon* is the word for “plant” which probably means the castor oil plant and is found only on the Book of Jonah. In the verse at hand, this *qyqayon* “comes up over (*hal*, ‘upon’) Jonah. The *sukah* or “booth” he had just built was insufficient for his needs since he had to sit at the entrance and be subject to the harsh sun as it continued to rise in the eastern sky. And so the shade offered by this divinely appointed plant, coupled with the booth, offered ample protection from the sun. Jonah would be saved (*natsal*) from his “discomfort” or *rah* which had been noted several times above as “evil.” In other words, the Lord is attempting to save Jonah from himself, almost a task greater than saving Nineveh. Without realizing it, he was in danger of destruction, not Nineveh, which had turned to the Lord. *Natsal* implies a pulling away, rather violent, and is a sign of the Lord’s concern for his prophet. “That he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine” [Ps 33.19].

Both the verb *simchah* and the noun *samach* derived from it are suggestive of gladness: “Jonah rejoiced a great joy.” “We will exult and rejoice in you” [Sg 1.4].

**Vs. 7: But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm which attacked the plant so that it withered.**

Mention of next day’s dawn means that Jonah had been at the entrance of his booth one full day as well as the following night. During this time he grew increasingly angry at no divine wrath sent down upon Nineveh. Those shouts of joy celebrating their repentance reached him, especially galling at night while Jonah was on the hilltop all alone.

Here we have the next use of the verb *manah* or “appointed” with regard to a “worm,” *tolahath*. Such a worm is associated with purification, perhaps even a maggot. It also means the color scarlet and is used frequently in the Book of Exodus to describe the color of cloth made for the tabernacle: “They shall receive gold, blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen” [28.5]. This *tolahath* “attacked” the plant, *nachah*, a verb meaning to strike or to pierce through. *Nachah* is also used in vs. 8, “and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah.” As noted above, Jonah sat eagerly at the entrance to his make-shift booth with the castor oil plant providing additional shelter. After having spent a restless night listening to the constant celebrations wafting up from Nineveh, Jonah was so perturbed, he didn’t notice that the plant had withered overnight. He figured today was the day for Nineveh’s destruction, that the day before was not wasted but allotted by the Lord for him to prepare himself for it.

**Vs. 8: When the sun rose, God appointed a sultry east wind, and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah so that he was faint; and he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."**

"When the sun rose:" most likely the next day instead of the day after as indicated by the words of vs. 7, "But when dawn came up the next day."

Here we have the third and final mention of *manah* ('appointed'), this time with respect to a "wind" or *ruach* (it also means spirit) which comes from the east and is noted especially as being "sultry" or *charysh*, the only use of this adjective in the Bible. *Charysh* derives from the verbal root *charash* meaning to plow, to be silent. Perhaps the idea is that such a wind "plowed" its way over marshland east of Nineveh and then into the city, reducing everything to near silence by reason of the oppressive humidity.

As noted in vs. 7, this is the second use of the verb *nachah* ('beat') with respect to the sun upon Jonah. It resulted in him quickly becoming "faint" or *halaph* which means to be covered, to languish, and has four other biblical references. "His body is ivory work encrusted with sapphires" [Sg 5.14]. Jonah was too preoccupied with watching Nineveh and hoping that its destruction would happen any moment now. To turn his attention away from it would mean he would be missing the biggest event in his life.

Finally the heat got the best of Jonah, especially as it rose higher in the horizon, and he wished for death. Probably he had second thoughts about this, for when the Ninevites discovered him some days later all withered by the sun, they would revile him, knowing that the Lord had taken vengeance upon his spitefulness and not their sins.

**Vs. 9: But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "I do well to be angry, angry enough to die."**

*Charah* is the verb for "to be angry" last noted in 4.4 and similar as far as God asking a question. Jonah responds somewhat childishly that his anger is so intense he wishes to die or in Hebrew "unto (*had-*) death."

**Vs. 10: And the Lord said, "You pity the plant for which you did not labor nor did you make it grow which came into being in a night and perished in a night."**

The Lord speaks to Jonah again in this verse and continues into the next which brings this book to a conclusion.

This verse shows remarkable tolerance for such an ingrate as Jonah, a tolerance that runs throughout the entire book. Instead of focusing upon the miracle of Nineveh's conversion, the Lord considers Jonah's pity for a mere plant, the verb being *chus* which also means to be grieved and is found in the next verse. "No eye pitied you to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you" [Ezk 16.5].

**Vs. 11: And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also much cattle?"**

The second use of the verb *chus* ('pity'), the first one being in the previous verse, which here the Lord extends to

Nineveh which is called for the fourth and final time “that great city” to set it off from all other cities of its time. The amount of people living there—a hundred and twenty thousand—refers to permanent residents, excluding travelers, traders and foreign residents who were in Nineveh for a limited amount of time. The Lord is careful to mention this large number to Jonah, reminding him that his preaching had reached them all, and that far exceeded anything he had done under King Jeroboam II.

The preposition *beyn* is used for “from” with respect to the right and left hands. This less than flattering remark can still apply to the newly converted inhabitants of Nineveh who, despite their sophistication and recent conversion, require ongoing support else they slip back into the same wickedness as before. Jonah would love that, a second chance at preaching to Nineveh, but given his track record, is disqualified.

*Behemah* or “cattle” is mentioned in vs. 8 as “beast” and is a kind of put-down upon the supposed sophistication of Nineveh.

It is significant that the Book of Jonah concludes with a question by the Lord which goes unresolved. We don’t know if Nineveh was able to sustain its new-found faith in the Lord, but the fact that the story ends on a question implies it does not. Jonah is left hanging, as it were, with the Lord wishing to show mercy to the Ninevehites which went against his will, hence the reason why he had built a booth on a hilltop some distance from the city. And so the dialogue ends there without resolution and with Jonah facing a return trip home. That land voyage must have been more trying for him than being in the “great fish’s” belly, for he had to live with the unresolved question for the rest of his life. Clearly a return trip to Nineveh was out of the question.

+ The End +