

64. Jonah

Jonah, a *satire* on prophecy, was at the last minute added to eleven minor prophets to create a Book of the Twelve.¹ Adding it made a nice total number, but it did not show a very deep understanding on the part of the compiler.

The satire is directed at Nahum, the most extreme of the prophetic books in its hatred for another people. Of the Assyrian capital Nineveh, Nahum says:

Nah 3:1. Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and rapine; the prey departeth not. [2] The noise of the whip, and the noise of the rattling of wheels, and prancing horses, and bounding chariots, [3] the horseman mounting, and the flashing sword, and the glittering spear, and a multitude of slain, and a great heap of corpses, and there is no end of the bodies; they stumble upon their bodies – [4] because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favored harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts. [5 Behold, I am against thee, saith Yahweh of hosts, and I will uncover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will show the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. [6] And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazing-stock. [7] And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste, who will bemoan her? Whence shall I seek comforters for thee?

And more to the same effect.

Jonah is sent to preach to Nineveh, and after one evasion, does so. He then waits for the destruction of the city. But meanwhile, the city has repented, and Yahweh accepts that repentance. Jonah is angry. He is also hot. Yahweh sends a plant to shade him, but next the day, destroys the plant. Jonah is again angry, but Yahweh points out to him the absurdity of mourning the loss of a plant:

Jonah 4:11. And should I not have regard for Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?

This is not the hating and destroying spirit of Nahum, but something different. What, after all, is the purpose of prophecy? Not to condemn, but to produce repentance among the nations, bringing them too into the family of the saved. A larger definition of "Israel" is here trying to happen.

Then far from being "one of the Twelve," Jonah is a rejection of everything in that collection. A voice for a different future; for a different sense of self.

¹There is other evidence that Jonah is not one of the Twelve. Nogalski **Beyond 25** notes that there are catchword links between several adjacent prophets in the Book of the Twelve, but that "the system breaks down" at Jonah 4 and Zech 14. ". . . if Jonah is removed . . . a strong connection exists between Obadiah and Mic 1."