

## 71. Jonah

*It is now grouped with the Twelve Minor Prophets. In reality,<sup>1</sup> it is a satire on prophecy, and a voice for a different future.*

The Jonah satire is directed at things like Nahum, a proper member of the “Book of the Twelve,” and the most extreme of all 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 of the same. So far Nahum, and his prophecy of doom.

### To Nineveh

Jonah is sent to preach to Nineveh, but he refuses:

**Jonah 1:1.** Now the word of Yahweh came unto Jonah the son of Amittai,<sup>2</sup> saying, [2] Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me. [3] But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh, and he went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh. [4] But Yahwe sent out a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest . . .

Then follows the shipwreck The cargo is cast overboard, but to no avail; each man calls upon his god to save him.

Jonah has been fast asleep inside the ship; he is wakened and asked to join in the prayers.

<sup>1</sup>There is other evidence that Jonah is not one of the Twelve. Nogalski **Twelve** 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.”

<sup>2</sup>The reference to Jonah in 2Kgs 14:25 adds “son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.” And sure enough, a village near Sepphoris contains the tomb of Jonah.

It is found by lot that the storm is being caused by Jonah's god . . .

**Jonah 1:11.** Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. [12] And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Yahweh brings "a great fish" to swallow Jonah. Jonah prays, in a Psalm of nine stanzas, declaring at the end that "Salvation is of Yahweh." At this, Yahweh speaks to the fish, and the fish vomits Jonah "upon the dry land."

### Jonah in Nineveh

**Jonah 3:1.** And the words of Yahweh came unto Jonah the second time, saying, [2] Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. [3] . . . Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city, of three days' journey. [4] And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

[5] And the people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. [6] And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. [7] And he made proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decrees of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water, [8] but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands. [9] Who knowest whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? [10] And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil which he said he would do unto them; and he did it not.

### A Word From Yahweh

Jonah is angry at this unexpected repentance; he waits for the destruction which he thinks must come. Jonah is angry. He is also hot. Yahweh sends a plant to shade him, but the next day, destroys the plant. Jonah is again angry, but Yahweh points out to him the absurdity of mourning the loss of a plant:

**Jonah 4:10.** And Yahweh said, Thou hast had regard for the gourd for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night; [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 trying to happen.

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Yahweh here invites Jonah to discover, not his hatreds, but his humanity. It is a voice for a different future, for a different sense of self.