

The Book of Jonah

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Unit 1: Our Assumptions About the Story of Jonah

SESSIONS: 1—5



Session 1: Relearning the Story of Jonah

Key Question

What has your experience been like with the story of Jonah? Are there parts of the story you have typically overlooked or have questions about?

Session Quote

“Biblical stories come to us preprogrammed. Part of learning how to read the Bible is both an unlearning and a relearning [of] what these texts have to say.”

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 2: How to Read a Text Like the Hebrew Bible

Key Question

Why do you think followers of Jesus should invest time and energy into reading an ancient text like the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)?

Session Quote

“The Hebrew Bible, what Christians call the Old Testament, was not just important to Jesus, it defined reality for Jesus. Jesus sees the story of the Hebrew Bible making sense of who he is and what he is doing.”

How to Read a Text Like the Hebrew Bible - Jonah

The Hebrew and Greek Scriptures that Jesus and the apostles would have studied consisted of a three-part collection, called TaNaK in later Jewish tradition.

TaNaK Compared with the English Bible

Torah	Pentateuch
Genesis - Exodus - Leviticus - Numbers - Deuteronomy	Genesis - Exodus - Leviticus - Numbers - Deuteronomy
Nevi'im — The Prophets	History
Former Prophets Joshua - Judges - Samuel - Kings	Joshua - Judges - Ruth 1-2 Samuel - 1-2 Kings 1-2 Chronicles Ezra - Nehemiah - Esther
Latter Prophets Isaiah - Jeremiah - Ezekiel Hosea - Joel - Amos - Obadiah - Jonah - Micah - Nahum - Habakkuk - Zephaniah - Haggai - Zechariah - Malachi	Poetry
	Job - Psalms - Proverbs - Ecclesiastes - Song of Solomon
Ketuvim — The Writings	Prophets
Psalms - Job - Proverbs Ruth - Song of Songs - Ecclesiastes - Lamentations - Esther [The Megillot] Daniel - Ezra-Nehemiah - Chronicles	Isaiah - Jeremiah - Lamentations Ezekiel - Daniel Hosea - Joel - Amos - Obadiah - Jonah - Micah - Nahum - Habakkuk - Zephaniah - Haggai - Zechariah - Malachi



Session 3: Old Testament 101 According to Jesus (Q&R)

Key Question

What questions do you have on this topic?

Session Quote

"The Hebrew Bible is a kind of literature that doesn't bonk you over the head with its meaning. It asks you to give a lifetime of reflection to what it might mean."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 4: The Main Message of the Hebrew Scriptures

Key Question

Jesus and Paul teach that the Hebrew Bible is all about a Messiah who must pass through death, come out the other side, and create a new humanity (see Luke 24:44-47 and 2 Timothy 3:14-16). What do you think people in your context think the Hebrew Bible is about? Are there common objections people might have to the idea that it is about the Messiah and his mission?

Session Quote

"The Old Testament is messianic wisdom literature that leads people to understand that they need to be rescued by what someone else has done for them, and that someone else is the Messiah Jesus."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 5: How to Read the Bible (Q&R)

Key Question

Think about your context (e.g. ministry, church, neighborhood, family, etc.). Reflect on what it might look like for you to embody, reflect, and model the importance of the Hebrew Bible to the people in your context? How could you invite other people into the story that defined reality for Jesus?

Session Quote

“The Bible still exerts an immense amount of influence. The question is: What kind of influence? The Bible shapes people in communities and cultures but the question is: Are they being shaped in a way that is faithful to what the authors are actually trying to communicate and to what Jesus said?”

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Unit 2: The Literary Context of Jonah

SESSIONS: 6—9

Session 6: Introduction to the TaNaK Order

Key Question

What are the three parts of the ancient TaNaK order, and what are the main differences when compared to our English Bible?

Session Quote

“Somehow this three-part shape of the TaNaK is connected to its content, namely, a story about the Messiah’s suffering, rising, repentance, and forgiveness to the nations.”

Ancient Evidence for the Shape of the TaNaK

When Jesus alludes to the order of the Hebrew Bible, he assumes a three-part design, which agrees with other contemporary Jewish authors who allude to the ordered sections.

- Luke 24:44: “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the **Torah** of Moses, the **Prophets**, and the **Psalms**.”
- Luke 11:51: “Therefore, this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary.”
 - Abel was murdered by Cain in Genesis 4, and Zechariah, son of Jehoiadah, was murdered by Joab in 2 Chronicles 24.
- Prologue to the Wisdom of Ben Sirah: “Many great teachings have been given to us through the Law [*Torah*], and the Prophets [*Nevi'im*], and the others that follow them [*Ketuvim*]... So my grandfather Yeshua devoted himself to especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our ancestors.”
- Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMT): “The scrolls of Moses, the words of the prophets, and of David.”
- Philo of Alexandria (*De Vita Contemplativa*, 25): “The laws and the oracles given by inspiration through the Prophets and the Psalms, and the other books whereby knowledge and piety are increased and completed.”

The Editorial Design of the TaNaK

The three-part shape of the Hebrew Bible isn't simply a matter of arrangement. Rather, the books themselves have been designed to fit into this particular shape. If you look at the editorial seams of the major sections (remember, the book technology was papyrus or leather scrolls), you'll find intentional design clues at the beginning and ending of these sections.

Seam #1: The final sentences of the Torah and opening sentences of the Prophets

- Deuteronomy 34:10-12: Anticipation of a coming Moses-like prophet who was promised but never came.
- Joshua 1:1-9: To enter the promised land, one must meditate on the Torah day and night to find success.

Seam #2: The final sentences of the Prophets and the opening sentences of the Ketuvim

- Malachi 4:4-6: Anticipation of a coming Elijah-like prophet who will call the people back to the Torah and restore the hearts of Israel before the Day of the Lord.
- Psalm 1: To be among the righteous in the final judgment, one must meditate on the Torah day and night to find success.

The Hebrew Bible is meditation literature (Joshua 1, Psalm 1) that is designed to foster:

- Daily reading and pondering about the meaning of these texts
- Future hope in the promised prophet who will herald the messianic Kingdom
- A covenantal way of life that is countercultural to the prevailing world systems



Session 7: Reflection on Jonah and the TaNaK Order (Q&R)

Key Question

What reflections or questions do you have on this topic?

Session Quote

"The way our Bibles are structured does not detract from seeing the Hebrew Bible as mimicking Jesus' rise, fall, and resurrection. However, the way that Jesus reads his Bible will more easily help us to see what he sees if we think about its organization."

Notes

No notes included in this session.



Session 8: The “Seams” of the TaNaK

Key Question

The “seams” of the TaNaK describe the kind of leader humanity really needs.
What is this person like?

Session Quote

*“By the time we leave the Hebrew Scriptures, we’re supposed to have in our minds:
We need an anointed one who will go through death on behalf of everyone else,
who is creating a world of death, and then out the other side so that eternal life can
be announced to the nations.”*

Notes

No notes included in this session.



Session 9: The Biblical Pattern (Q&R)

Key Question

What reflections or questions do you have on this topic?

Session Quote

"The pattern: Humans are constantly trying to scheme up our own way of bringing God's Kingdom and blessing to the world. The kinds of characters who become the vehicles of his Kingdom are those who precisely come to the end of themselves and undergo a kind of death."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Unit 3: Hyperlinks and Patterns Between Jonah and the Rest of Scripture

SESSIONS: 10—14

Session 10: Hyperlinks in the Text

Key Question

The biblical authors often use words that are meant to recall, or “hyperlink,” to other parts of Scripture. In this way, one word or image can be loaded with meaning. What are some of the ways that Jonah seems to be hyperlinked to other parts of Scripture, and what effect does that have on the story of Jonah?

Session Quote

“Recognizing the ways the authors pattern and hyperlink things is a skill set. The most important skill to develop is learning to spot repeated words.”

Notes

No notes included in this session.



Session 11: Nineveh (Q&R)

Key Question

What reflections or questions do you have on this topic?

Session Quote

"The point is to follow the hyperlinks to the relevant spots, and you'll see what you're supposed to see."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 12: Biblical Patterns the Author Assumes You Know

Key Question

As we begin to see this pattern of a chosen one who is meant to intercede for the wicked, think about who the chosen one is meant to be in the book of Jonah. How does his story fit or not fit this pattern?

Session Quote

"The storyline: God's chosen people are meant to be a blessing to the nations. In response to the outcry of the violent city of blood, they are rescued through the waters because of somebody's evil, and what they're supposed to do is offer intercession so that God's covenant blessing can go out to the nations."

Notes

No notes included in this session.



Session 13: God's Character Summarized

Key Question

How do you think people in your context view the character of God in the Old Testament?

Session Quote

"Exodus 34:6-7 is the most dense and condensed statement of the character of God that you see displayed in the story."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 14: God's Character (Q&R)

Key Question

What reflections or questions do you have on God's character? Do you struggle with the tension between God's justice and mercy? Why or why not?

Session Quote

"Justice on evil is also an expression of khesed. If I love somebody and I see something that harms them—especially if they're doing it to themselves—then khesed will mean confronting it, dealing with it—not to destroy them but to heal them or help them on their path of becoming more human, more an image of God."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Unit 4: Links Between Literary Units

SESSIONS: 15—21

Session 15: Noticing Repeated Words

Key Question

Although the stories in the Hebrew Bible were written over a long period of time, they are intricately connected to one another. How is this similar or different from how you and others you know typically view the Bible?

Session Quote

“We have to create a space for the inspiration of Scripture not just happening in moments of writing to individuals but in a chain of tradition of prophets happening over the whole course of Israel’s history.”

How to Read the Hebrew Scriptures

The Old Testament is an ancient text. **A text is an act of literary communication.**

Author →	Text	→ ← Reader/Audience
Encyclopedia of production		Encyclopedia of reception

Where is the meaning located in the text? The text is the literary embodiment of an author’s purposed communication.

A text-focused approach sets out to understand not the realities behind the text but the text itself as a pattern of meaning and effect. What does this piece of language...signify in context? What are the rules governing the transaction between the storyteller or poet and the reader? ...What image of a world does the narrative project? Why does it unfold the action in this particular order and from this particular viewpoint? What is the part played by the omissions, redundancies, ambiguities, alternations between story and summary or elevated and colloquial language? How does the work hang together? In what relationship does each part stand to the whole? To pursue this line of questioning is to make sense of the work as an act of communication, always goal-directed on the writer’s part and always requiring interpretive activity on the addressee’s. The author wields certain linguistic and literary tools with an eye to certain effects on the reader, while the reader

infers a coherent message from the signals, and it is the text itself that mediates between these two, embodying the author's intent and guiding the reader's response. — MEIR STERNBERG, *THE POETICS OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE: IDEOLOGICAL LITERATURE AND THE DRAMA OF READING*, P. 15.

"Encyclopedia of production" and "Encyclopedia of reception" [cf. Stefan Alkier, *Reading the Bible Intertextually*, 3-21]

Our "encyclopedia" is the mental storehouse of words, ideas, images, and stories that we are gathering and storing in our memories from our first waking moments. Every text we read will be interpreted and understood in light of our current operating encyclopedia. Authors have their encyclopedias from which they produce texts, and readers have encyclopedias through which they process and understand texts.

The model reader who wants to understand an author on their own terms will adapt their encyclopedia of reception by learning about the author's encyclopedia of production.

Text vs. Event

A text provides a literary representation of an object that helps the reader grasp its meaning and significance from a particular perspective.

Rene Magritte: "The Treachery of Images"

"Ah, the famous pipe. How people reproached me for it! And yet, could you stuff my pipe? No, it's just a representation, is it not? So if I had written on my picture 'This is a pipe,' I'd have been lying!"

— HARRY TORCZYNER, *MAGRITTE: THE TRUE ART OF PAINTING*, P. 85.



A Hubble space telescope photo (left) and Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* (right)

Both images are representations of the starry universe, portrayed through different media, for different purposes, and with different effects on the viewer.

Neither one is the starry universe itself (“This is not a pipe.”), though the Hubble photo represents a maximal realism, while *Starry Night* employs an impressionistic style.

Starry Night conveys the impression and feeling of the night sky as it’s relevant to a small human community. It communicates much through minimal detail and uses juxtaposition and contrast (swirling skies vs. geometric human buildings) as well as similarity (blue tones in the sky and on land).

Key Points

1. The Hebrew Bible offers a literary representation of Israel’s history that claims to be a divinely inspired, prophetic interpretation of Israel’s history within the larger context of God’s cosmic purposes. It is not a history of Israel (or “chronicle of Jonah’s exploits”); rather, it is a theological interpretation of Israel’s (and Jonah’s) story designed to elicit a response from the reader.
2. The Old Testament is a collection of collections, made up of textual materials from all periods of Israel’s history, religion, and literature.

How does an author make a collection of collections *mean* something? We must first understand the actual materials at the biblical authors’ disposal. Ancient Israelite tradition literature came into existence through a multi-step process that is still discernible by looking at literary evidence within the texts themselves.

Events	The life of Abraham, the Exodus, the wilderness wanderings, settlement in the land of Canaan, etc...			
	Oral Traditions	The family history of Abraham’s ancestors, the wilderness wanderings		
		Early Written Traditions	“This is the scroll of the generations of humanity” (Gen. 5:1) “The scroll of Jashar” (Josh. 10:13, 2 Sam. 1:18)	
			Early Collections of Written Traditions	“The proverbs of Solomon that the men of Hezekiah compiled” (Prov. 25:1) “The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended” (Ps. 72:20)
				Proto-Editions of Biblical Books
				The “Mosaic” Torah (Exod. 21-23, Deut. 12-26, or Jer. 36)
				TaNaK Editions of Biblical Books

Each of these stages is worthy of study for historical interest. However, classical, orthodox Jewish and Christian theology (i.e. biblical theology) has been based on the final edition of the biblical text, that is, the text of the Hebrew Scriptures in the time of Jesus.

The Family Quilt Metaphor: A quilt made of many pre-existing materials can both retain the integrity of the earlier materials while giving the new layers meaning when they are set within a larger context and frame of reference.

So now we can ponder the question: What is the matrix of themes and motifs that the author of Jonah assumes I already know?



The Story Behind the Story of Jonah

- Genesis 3-4: Adam, Eve, Cain, and Cain's city of blood
- Genesis 6-11: The generation of the flood and the chosen one (comforter Noah) rescued through the waters to offer intercession through sacrifice. God relents, but humanity goes on to make another city.
- Genesis 12, 18-19: Abraham brought out of Babylon, offers intercession on behalf of Sodom.
- Exodus 2-3, 14-15: God rescues Moses through the waters (in an ark), and he meets with God on Sinai (in fire) and is commissioned to confront the king of Egypt. He resists but eventually goes. Israel flees and is rescued through the waters on dry land, and they come to fear Yahweh and believe in him.
- Exodus 32-34: God's rescued people make an idol. God threatens to bring a flood of judgment upon them, but Moses steps in to offer intercession, appealing to Abraham and then offering his own life as a sacrifice of atonement. God forgives, and so Moses sees Yahweh and learns of his character in Exodus 34:6.
- 1 Kings 17-19: In Ahab's sinful generation, God sends Elijah to announce the opposite of a flood (a drought). He leads all Israel to meet God in fire on Mount Carmel, but he is ultimately unsuccessful in turning Israel back. He goes to the wilderness, and instead of interceding and offering himself, he asks God to kill him. Then he goes to Mount Sinai and has a pity party in a dialogue with God. He's an anti-Moses.
- Jeremiah 18, 26: Jeremiah is sent as a prophetic intercessor to Israel, who says that if they (or any nation) repents, God will relent and not bring disaster. But the Israelites reject him and bring down innocent blood upon themselves.

All of these stories are hyperlinked in the story of Jonah because they revolve around a core set of themes that run throughout the entire TaNaK.

- Humans are violent and destructive and bring the blood guilt of the innocent upon themselves, compelling God to bring judgment.
- However, God wants to bless humanity not destroy them, so he makes and fulfills his promise to rescue humanity by raising up a deliverer/intercessor (Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah) who will appeal to his mercy.
- But human intercessors are problematic, sometimes doing their job (Noah, Abraham, Moses) but other times failing to persuade their audience (Jeremiah) or failing personally (Elijah).
- These stories point forward to the hope for an ultimate prophetic intercessor like Moses.
- The book of Jonah also points forward to this hope (as Jesus understood in Matthew 12:40), but it does so by creating an inverted parody portrait of Jonah as the anti-Moses prophet.

Session 16: How to Read an Ancient Text

Key Question

What kinds of things should we pay attention to in order to understand a text's literary design? Which of these would be most helpful for you or others in your context?

Session Quote

"The three strategies discussed in this session for understanding a work's literary design include: identifying the contextual anchors (what does the author assume I know?), identifying the literary units, and identifying repeated words."

How to Read an Ancient "Mosaic" Text like the Hebrew Bible

Lessons in Literature

What is Literature?

It's a form of literary communication through which an author conveys a "what" (the message) through a carefully and intentionally crafted "how" (an artistically formed/shaped literary work).

The poetics of biblical literature are the "how" of Israelite literature.

The unique set of literary techniques, conventions, and strategies employed by the biblical authors (narrative, poetry, and discourse) all have a particular stylistic profile that is both similar to and different from other ancient Near Eastern literature.

[See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, and Shimon bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*].

The Epic Literary Genre

This genre can be defined as a larger collection of smaller narratives, interwoven with poems and genealogies and arranged into movements that exhibit a high degree of repetition and patterning.

How to Study a Work's Literary Design

1. **Identify the Contextual Anchors:** What does the author assume I know before I even start reading this work? The opening words of biblical literary works usually give some indicator of the context within which to understand the text.
 - Jonah 1:1-2 invites the reader into a set of hyperlinks related to the backstory of Jonah and also of Nineveh.
2. **Literary Analysis** (Dorsey, *Literary Structure*, ch. 2): Studying the literary features in order to determine the boundaries of literary units.

- **Defining Literary Units:** Read carefully and identify introductions, conclusions, and changes of setting, character, or time that demonstrate the words that give clues to the narrative's design on the micro-level.
- **Identifying Repeated Words:** Read, re-read, use multiple translations (especially more literal ones) or an inter-linear or a concordance, then re-read some more!
 - i. *"A 'lead-word' is a word that repeats significantly in a text or group of texts, and by following these repetitions, one is able to decipher or grasp a meaning of the text... The repetition may not be of the same exact word, but of the word-root...which intensifies the dynamic action of the repetition... if you imagine the entire text stretched out before you, you can sense waves moving back and forth between key words, matching the rhythm of the text... it is one of the most powerful means of conveying meaning." — MARTIN BUBER, SCHRIFTEN ZUR BIBEL, P. 1131.*
 - ii. An example of repeated words in Jonah is the use of "fear" and "hurl" in chapter 1 and the use of "call out" in chapters 1-3.
 - iii. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 96-97 [adapted quote]: One of the most imposing barriers that stands between modern readers and the imaginative subtlety of the biblical authors is the prominence of repetition. We are accustomed to stories in which repetition is far less obvious, and so this is probably the feature of biblical narrative that looks most "primitive" to the modern eye.... In order to appreciate the artfulness of this kind of repetition, a modern reader has to cultivate a new, even opposite, set of expectations than what they bring to literary works. Modern stories usually attempt to mimic reality by giving us large amounts of information that is not crucial to the plot, so that one is expected to detect the repetition of key themes and words among lots of other background noise. Biblical narrative is the opposite. Here we are confronted with an extremely spare narrative with a high degree of repetition and similarity, and what we are expected to notice is the small but revealing differences among the sea of similarities. This is how new meanings emerge in pattern of expectations created by explicit repetition."
- **Wordplay and Paronomasia** [Garsiel]
 - i. *"Biblical authors often employ wordplays upon a name or a play made with sounds, but they also have significant links between stories offered by names and puns.... there is a wide scope of possibilities: sound effects, alliteration, word play, riddles, concealed meanings, key-word motifs. The biblical writers utilize these potentialities within literary units in different ways... The biblical authors are creative and very imaginative with this technique, pushing their word and sound associations far beyond the norms of spoken language. Here "poetic license" is indeed the name of the game." — MOSHE GARSIEL, MIDRASHIC NAME DERIVATIONS, 19-20.*
 - ii. An example of this type of wordplay in Jonah is the use of "go down/sleep/make vows" in chapter 1.

3. Techniques of Biblical Composition (Dorsey, *Literary Structure*, ch.3):

- **Juxtaposition:** Placing two narratives side-by-side so that their proximity encourages the reader to *compare* and *contrast* their content (Zakovitch).
 - i. An example of juxtaposition from Jonah can be seen in how the phrases “call out” (sailors vs. Jonah in chapters 1-3) and “go down” (sailors’ vows in chapter 1 vs. Jonah’s vows in chapter 2) are used in the story.

Genesis 3-4 as Mutually Interpreting Temptation Narratives

	Genesis 2-3: Adam and Eve	Genesis 4: Cain and Abel
Human given a significant choice for an unstated reason	2:14: From any tree of the garden you may eat, but from the tree of knowing good and evil you should not eat, because the day you eat from it you will surely die.	4:5-6: But Yahweh did not regard Cain’s offering, and Cain was very angry... Yahweh said “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? Isn’t it the case that if you do good , you will be lifted up?”
Human tempted by an animal	3:1: Now the snake was more crafty than any creature of the field...and he said to the woman, “Did God really say not to eat from any tree in the garden?”	4:6: But if you don’t do good, sin is crouching at the door , and its desire is for you.
Human gives into temptation with destructive consequences	3:6: When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and desirable to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom...she took...	4:5, 8: And Cain was very angry...And Cain spoke to Abel his brother, and while they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel his brother and murdered him.
God shows up to ask a question	3:9: And God called out to the human, and said “ Where are you (איכה)? ” 3:12: And God said to the woman, “ What have you done (עשית מה)? ”	4:9: And God said to Cain, “ where is your (אי) brother Abel? ” 4:10: And God said, “ What have you done (מה עשית)? ”
The human dodges the question	3:12: The human said, “The woman who you set with me, she gave to me and ate.”	4:9: “I don’t know! Am I my brother’s keeper?”
The perpetrator is cursed	3:14: God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, you are cursed from every beast and from every creature of the field.” 3:17: Cursed is the ground because of you.	4:11: And now you are cursed from the ground...
Working the ground will now be more difficult	3:17b: In pain you will eat from the ground . 3:23: And God sent him from the garden of Eden to work the ground .	4:12: For you will work the ground , and it will no longer give its strength to you.
The human is banished from the divine presence	3:24: And [God] banished the human and he camped east of the garden of Eden...	4:14: Behold, you have banished me from the face of the ground and from your presence. 4:16: And Cain settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden .

Alter's quote of Eisenstein in H2R Poetry notes on montage; Sergei Eisenstein [famous Russian film director], *The Film Sense* [p. 24], quoted by Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*: "It remains true to this day, that the juxtaposition of two separate shots by splicing them together resembles not so much a simple sum of one shot plus one shot. Rather, it resembles a new creation. The result is qualitatively distinguishable from each of the elements viewed separately... This is the effect of the montage: each piece exists no longer as something unrelated, but as a given particular representation of a larger common theme that now penetrates all of the shot-pieces. This juxtaposition of these partial details calls to life and forces into light any general qualities that each piece expresses that might bind them together into a single whole, a single image that the spectator experiences."



Session 17: Repeated Words and Implications for Literary Design

Key Question

What are some of the words (wordplays or themes) that are repeated in Jonah 1? Which might be the most significant and helpful to highlight for your audience?

Session Quote

“Maximal characterization through a very minimal technique—welcome to biblical narrative! They are doing a lot with a little, which is why everything matters.”

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 18: Hyperlinks in the Hebrew Bible

Key Question

How is Jonah like Elijah or Moses? How is he not like them? How do you think these similarities or differences affect our perspective on the character of Jonah?

Session Quote

"The reason things are where they are is always intentional. Nothing is ever random. Every word, every episode, every scene. The Hebrew Bible is meditation literature for a lifetime. You're never done noticing everything."

Literary Symmetry

This same kind of juxtaposition happens between literary units that are not side-by-side, but rather related to one another by literary symmetry and key word links.

- An example of this from Jonah can be seen in the use of "arise, go call" in chapters 1 and 3, in the use of "pray" in chapters 2 and 4, and in the use of "perish" in chapters 1 and 3.
- *"Prose narrative naturally expects linear reading, i.e. progressive reading from one unit to the next (from A to B to C, etc.) as the story unfolds through the text. Symmetrically organized narrative offers additional avenues for interpretive access as well... because it invites multi-level comparison. We can examine why units are placed next to one another (A and B), but also are invited to mentally juxtaposed symmetrically paired units (A and A'). This pattern also invites comparison between entire matching sequences (ABC and A'B'C'). Different symmetrical patterns can indicate reversal (ABCD C'B'A'), progression (ABC/A'B'C'), or even intensification (ABC/A'B'C'D)." — JEROME WALSH, STYLE*

AND STRUCTURE IN BIBLICAL HEBREW NARRATIVE, 12.

Chapter 1

God - Jonah - The Sailors

- 1:1-2 *"And the word of Yahweh came to Jonah...Arise, go to Nineveh..."*
- 1:3 *"And Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish."*
- 1:5 *Sailors: They were afraid and every man cried out to his god.*
- 1:6 *Captain: "Call out to your God; perhaps God will consider and we will not perish."*
- 1:9 *Jonah: "I fear Yahweh, the God... who made the sea and the dry land."*

Jonah "went down" 3X

The sailors "sacrifice" and "vow vows"

- 1:13 *The sailors rowed to turn back to land.*
- 1:15 *They picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.*
- 1:16 *And the men feared Yahweh a great fear...*

Chapter 2

Jonah's Prayer to God

- 2:1 *"And Jonah prayed to God..." from the deep abyss.*
- 1:17 *God "appoints" a fish to swallow Jonah.*
- 2:1 *Jonah is "delivered" by the fish's belly.*

"I went down to the underworld."

"I will sacrifice to you; I will pay my vows."

- 2:2-9 *Jonah offers thanks to God for saving his life.*
- 2:9 *Jonah praises God for offering his salvation.*
- 2:10 *The fish responds to Jonah's prayer by vomiting.*

Chapter 3

God - Jonah - The Ninevites

- 3:1-2 *"And the word of Yahweh came to Jonah...Arise, go to Nineveh..."*
- 3:3 *And Jonah arose and went to Nineveh.*
- 3:5 *Ninevites: The people believed in God and called a fast.*
- 3:8-9 *King: "Let them call out to God..he may turn and relent... and we will not perish!"*
- 3:4 *Jonah: "Forty days and Nineveh will be turned over!"*

Will God repent from his heat-anger?

They turned back from their evil ways.

- 3:8 *"Let each one turn back from his wicked way..."*
- 3:10 *"And God relented concerning the evil which he said he would do to them, and he did not do it."*
- 4:1 *"And it was evil to Jonah, a great evil."*

Chapter 4

Jonah's Prayer to God

- 4:2, 5 *"And Jonah prayed to God..." in the east of the city.*
- 4:6-8 *God "appoints" the plant, worm, and wind: to shade Jonah, eat a plant, and burn Jonah.*
- 4:5 *Jonah is "delivered" by his "shelter."*

And Jonah had heat-anger.

I knew that you'd repent concerning evil!

- 4:3, 8 *Jonah asks God to take his life.*
- 4:2 *Jonah criticizes God for offering his compassion.*
- 4:7 *The worm responds to Jonah's prayer by eating.*

Literary Techniques for Analyzing Literary Design and Thematic Development

Intertextual Hyperlinks and Dynamic Analogies

Biblical authors regularly invite comparison and analogies between different sections of the Hebrew Scriptures. They do this in a manner similar to hyperlinks on a webpage, where a key word or well-known allusive phrase will signal to the reader that the other text is meant to be recalled and its context brought to bear on the present text.

Narrative Analogy Between Elijah and Jonah

Elijah in 1 Kings 19	Jonah in Chapters 1-4
Elijah flees from Jezebel after defeating the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel	Jonah flees from God's call to go to Nineveh
Elijah walks one day into the wilderness (19:4a)	Jonah walks one day into Nineveh (3:4) Jonah goes east of Nineveh (4:5)
Elijah asked for "his life, to die (נפשו את וישאל) (למות)." (19:4)	"And now, Yahweh, please take my life (נפשי) from me, for good is my death more than my life." (4:3) "And he asked for his life to die (נפשו למות וישאל את)." (4:9)
"And he lay down and he slept (ויישן וישכב), and look, an angel touching him, and he said, "Arise (קום), eat!" (19:5)	"And [Jonah] lay down and he slept (וישכב וירדם)..." And the captain said... "Arise (קום) call on your God!" (1:5-6)
Elijah journeys 40 days to Mount Horeb (Mount Sinai) (19:8)	Jonah announces 40 days until Nineveh's destruction (3:4)
God asks Elijah two times why he has come to Mount Horeb (19:9, 13)	God asks two times if it is good that Jonah is angry at his mercy (4:4, 9)
Elijah gives the same exaggerated, self-pitying answer two times (19:10, 14)	Jonah gives the same pathetic and selfish answer two times (4:4, 9)
God communicates with Elijah through symbolic natural phenomena (wind, earthquake, lightning) (19:11-12)	God communicates with Jonah through symbolic natural phenomena (plant, worm, wind)
God counters Elijah's self-pity. "You are not the only faithful Israelite. I have 7,000 others." (19:18)	God counters Jonah's self-pity: "You had pity on this plant. Shouldn't I have pity on a great city?" (4:10-11)

Dynamic Analogy between the Rescued Israelites, Jonah, the Sailors, and the Ninevites

Exodus 14:31	The Sailors and Ninevites
After the Israelites are rescued from the sea...	Jonah is rescued from the sea
And the Israelites saw the great hand which Yahweh acted against Egypt, and the people feared Yahweh (את וייראו יהוה) and they believed in Yahweh (ב ויאמינו-) and in Moses his servant.	1:16: And the sailors feared Yahweh (את וייראו יהוה) a great fear...
	3:5: And the men of Nineveh believed in God (ויאמינו באלהים).

Criteria for identifying intertextual hyperlinks [Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions."]

1. Clusters of shared words or phrases
2. Shared language that consists of distinct vocabulary
3. Shared language within thematically similar contexts
4. Shared language between units that are united by other literary strategies (similar plot, themes, settings)

Inversion/Reflection Stories [Zakovitch]

This is "a strategy used by biblical narrators to aid the reader in evaluating characters... It's one of the many instances of intertextuality so common in biblical literature. The narrators' use many overt allusions to other narratives known to them and to their audience...in order to shape a character as the antithesis of a character in another narrative. The new creation awakens in the reader undeniable associations to the source-story; the relationship between the new narrative and its source is like that between an image and its mirrored reflection: the reflection inverts the storyline of the original narrative... The discerning reader will consider the implicit relation between the two narratives—the original and its reflection—and observe how the new character behaves contrary to the character upon which he or she is modeled. The reader is being asked to evaluate the new hero in light of the model, both with regard to action and to lack of action. In addition, the comparison created between the two stories sheds new light on the source story and its protagonist. I call these 'inverted' 'stories reflection stories."

— YAIR ZAKOVITCH, "THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: REFLECTION/INVERSION STORIES IN GENESIS."

Narrative Analogy and Design Patterns [Alter, Postell]

Robert Alter gives the example of Cowboy Western films. What if 1,200 years from now, post-apocalyptic archaeologists discover in the ruins of an old Hollywood film vault with dozens of old Western films. They'd watch and analyze them and notice patterns.

"In eleven films, the sheriff hero has the same anomalous neurological trait of hyperreflexivity- no matter what the situation in which his adversaries confront him, he is always able to pull his gun out its holster and fire before they can, even if they're already poised with their own weapons... But, in the twelfth film, the sheriff has an injured arm and instead of a pistol he uses a rifle that he carries, slung over his back... Contemporary viewers of westerns recognize the convention without even having to name it as such. Much of our pleasure in watching westerns derives from our awareness that the hero, however sinister the dangers looming ahead, leads a charmed life that he will always in the end prove himself more successful than his enemies... For us, the repetitive pattern across all these cinematic works is not an enigma to be explained, but a necessary condition for telling a story within expected conventions of the film medium. With our easy knowledge of the patterns, we naturally see the point of the 12th sheriff, and we can spot the pattern of the quick-draw sheriff by its absence." — ROBERT ALTER, THE ART OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE.

Symphonic Development of Themes through Narrative Analogy [Miles Davis, "So What?"]

*"A musical approach to Scripture encompasses a number of aspects, each of which can help us see Scripture in a fresh light.... One aspect of the music metaphor is the relationship between melody and harmony. The Bible has a clear storyline, a melody, but it also has a range of individual and corporate stories that run together, sometimes taking center stage, sometimes fading into the background, providing harmony and counterpoint, treble and bass, height and depth, in such a way that no single writer (or musician) could possibly represent it all. Studying the Bible is about exploring the detail of the harmony—Why is the oboe, or Obadiah, doing that, and how does it contribute to the whole piece?—without losing sight of the melody.... Another (and more subtle) aspect is the interplay between rhythm and meter. **Meter** is the underlying time structure of a piece—one, two, three, four, one, two, three, four—and although it may vary within the piece, it provides a grounding in time, a sense of orientation, for the listener. **Rhythm** is the structure of the sound you actually hear—boom, ba-cha, boom, boom, ba-cha— which may involve a number of notes in one beat, or a number of beats without notes. The rhythm rides the meter like a surfer rides a wave, playing, doing its own thing, but always mindful of and constrained by the steady movement underneath.*

As the Bible commences with its overture, we hear a melody, and a regular rhythm begins. As things develop, various harmonies and disharmonies arise... leaving us listeners to wonder what the Composer is doing. And a good Composer allows dissonance to create anticipation for the right time to heal it. Then the melody returns, cutting through the cacophony and bringing a temporary sense of resolution. To someone who has never heard the piece before, some moments can even sound like the symphony is fully resolved and is about to finish (a new reader of the Bible could easily think the tension is resolved, for instance, upon the entrance into the Promised Land or David's coronation). Yet these temporary resolutions produce tensions of their own, which point forward to more complexities, and beyond them, to further resolutions. Throughout the Bible, as time metronomically marches on, the rhythms of Scripture continue to be accented, with particular days and festivals highlighting rest and freedom, law and atonement. But every bar, every cadence, every pause, heightens the sense that the piece is still incomplete. Eventually, after an uncomfortably long silence, the score builds to a massive crescendo in Jesus the Messiah, as the various themes come together and resolve in a fashion that nobody could have quite imagined, but yet seems completely natural... Only at the finale, when the Christ-crescendo is recapitulated and the instruments are joined by earthly and angelic choirs, do we ultimately see the full scope of the Composer's vision. As such, a musical reading of Scripture does more justice to the way Scripture actually works. Scriptural typology is more like a piece of music: familiar themes like temple, kingdom, exodus, judgment, and sacrifice keep recurring, but always slightly differently. The judgment of Jerusalem is not just a "picture" or "shadow" of the last day; nor is it simply a dramatic "event" that happens once and then is no more. It is somehow a part of the future judgment, a foretaste of it, and yet at the same time historically distinct from it. The final resolution, when it comes, is both familiar and new at the same time. It is, in that sense, musical. — ALASTAIR ROBERTS & ANDREW WILSON, ECHOES OF EXODUS: TRACING THEMES OF REDEMPTION THROUGH SCRIPTURE.

An Approach: A Series of Questions to Put to Every Literary Unit

1. What is the literary design of the unit?
2. What are the key words and wordplay within each literary unit?
3. What are the relationships and links to the juxtaposed literary units?
4. What are the relationships and links to symmetrically paired units?
5. What are the intertextual relationships and links within the unit?
6. What are the relationships and links to inner-book patterns?
7. What are the relationships and links to inner-TaNaK patterns?

Session 19: Seeing the Hyperlinks (Q&R)

Key Question

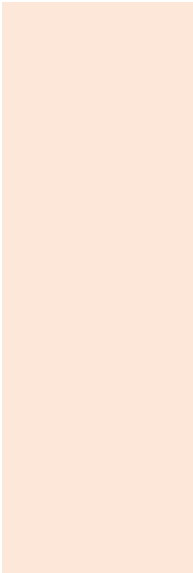
What are different ways you can invite the people in your life into an honest recognition of their desperate need for someone to do for them what they cannot do for themselves?

Session Quote

"The Hebrew Bible is trying to give us a very realistic portrait of the human condition. It consists of a long litany of developments of what happens at the tree with Adam and Eve."

Notes

No notes included in this session.



Session 20: Hyperlinks in Star Wars and in Jonah

Key Question

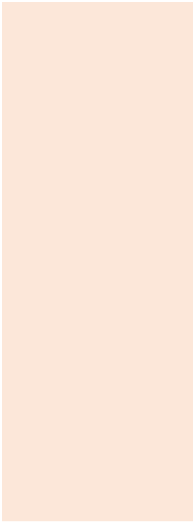
Tim uses examples from Lord of the Rings and Star Wars to illustrate how different characters can be hyperlinked to convey meaning, similar to how the sailors and the Ninevites are linked in the book of Jonah. Are there other examples that would be helpful for your own context?

Session Quote

“What universal narratives do is get you to identify with characters and their stories, which helps you to think about your story. Biblical authors are constantly doing this as well.”

Notes

No notes included in this session.



Session 21: Characterization and Setting in Biblical Narrative

Key Question

What reflections or questions do you have on this topic?

Session Quote

"The instinct is right to want to understand what's being communicated in a text. But what we have to reckon with is what's being communicated is multi-layered, sophisticated, and designed not to give you everything on the first reading."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Unit 5: Jonah 1

SESSIONS: 22–28

Session 22: Why Does Jonah Flee to Tarshish?

Key Question

In the biblical story, what kind of a place is Tarshish? What does it mean that Jonah is fleeing there? Do you think this is a point that would be helpful for your audience?

Session Quote

“The author of Jonah wants you to recall and upload the fact that Jonah was the last prophet who prophesied the restoration of Israel’s borders to an Eden-like proportion, but that it was within the next generation all reversed by Babylon.”

Jonah’s Commission (1:1-3)

Translation and Literary Design

The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, “**Arise**, go to Nineveh the great city and call out against it, for their wickedness has come up before me.”

- A - And Jonah **arose** to flee **to Tarshish** from before the face of Yahweh.
- B - **And he went down** to Joppa,
- C - and he found a shop
- D - which was **going** to Tarshish
- C’ - and he paid the fare
- B’ - **and he went down** into it
- A’ - to **go** with them **to Tarshish** from before the face of Yahweh.

Jonah’s Name (1:1)

“Jonah, son of Amittai” = “dove, son of faithfulness”

- יונה / yonah = “dove” / אמת / ameth = faithfulness

Jonah, Prophet of God’s Mercy and Israel’s Restoration

Jonah first appears in 2 Kings 14:25-26, where it’s noted that he prophesied that the borders of Israel would be restored to their original borders from the days of Solomon, and this happened during the reign of Jeroboam II. However, the narrator also makes clear that Jeroboam II “did evil in the eyes of Yahweh” in perpetuating the sins of Jeroboam I (2 Kings 14:24). There is more than meets the eye here.

Jonah's Prophecy as an Expression of God's Mercy on Sinful Israel

	Reign of Jehoahaz - 2 Kings 13	Reign of Jeroboam II - 2 Kings 14
Apostate King of Northern Israel	<p><i>[Jehoahaz] did evil in the eyes of Yahweh and he followed the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin.</i></p> <p>2 KINGS 13:2</p>	<p><i>[Jeroboam II] did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin.</i></p> <p>2 KINGS 14:24</p>
Yahweh's Response	<p>Judgment and Oppression</p> <p><i>And the anger of Yahweh was hot against Israel and he gave them into the hand of Hazael king of Aram and into the hand of Ben-Hadad son of Hazael...</i></p> <p>2 KINGS 13:3</p> <p><i>Now Hazael king of Aram had oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz.</i></p> <p>2 KINGS 13:22</p>	<p>Blessing and Victory?!</p> <p><i>He 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 through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.</i></p> <p>2 KINGS 14:25</p>
Repentance of the King	<p><i>Then Jehoahaz appeased the face of Yahweh and Yahweh listened to him.</i></p> <p>2 KINGS 13:4A</p>	<p>No repentance!</p>
Divine Mercy	<p><i>Because [Yahweh] saw the oppression of Israel, which the king of Aram oppressed them.</i></p> <p>2 KINGS 13:4B</p> <p><i>But Yahweh was gracious to them and had compassion on them and turned toward them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he would not destroy them...</i></p> <p>2 KINGS 13:23A</p>	<p><i>For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel, which was very bitter; for there was neither bond nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel. The Lord did not say that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven...</i></p> <p>2 KINGS 14:26-27A</p>
Provision of a Deliverer	<p><i>And Yahweh provided for Israel a deliverer and they went out from under the hand of Aram and the sons of Israel sat in their tents as in former times.</i></p> <p>2 KINGS 13:5</p>	<p><i>But he delivered them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.</i></p> <p>2 KINGS 14:27B</p>

In the sequence of 2 Kings 13-14, we have two contrasting generations of Israelite kings. Jehoahaz is wicked, but he appeals to Yahweh's mercy (in the language of Exodus 34:6), so Yahweh delivers Israel in his generation. Contrast this with Jeroboam II, who is also wicked but does not repent, yet Yahweh blesses him with victory and divine mercy with the prophetic support of Jonah ben Amittai.

The author of Jonah assumes a knowledge of this section of 2 Kings and builds his portrait of Jonah in light of this story of undeserved divine mercy to sinful kingdoms.

"If God just goes around forgiving everybody all the time, what's the point of doing anything? If disobedience goes cavalierly unpunished, then the idea of obedience ceases to have meaning, and this is why Jonah ends up in the grip of a deathwish in Jonah ch. 4... [I]n Jonah's perception, the deity has sovereign power over everything but himself, a situation that allows sin to flourish unchecked and sinners (like Jeroboam or the Ninevites) to reap rewards."

— CATHERING MULDOON, IN DEFENSE OF DIVINE JUSTICE: AN INTERTEXTUAL APPROACH TO JOHN, 120-121.

Jonah's Prophecy and the Garden of Eden

The restoration of the borders in 2 Kings 14:24-26 links back precisely to the borders of Israel realized only in the time of Solomon, which themselves go back to the land borders promised to Abraham in Genesis 15, and even further back to the borders of Eden in Genesis 2.

Now **a river flowed out of Eden** to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. The gold of that land is good; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is **Gihon**; it **flows around the whole land of Cush**. The name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the **fourth river is the Euphrates**.

GENESIS 2:10-14

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, **from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates**.

GENESIS 15:18

Your territory will extend **from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates**—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west.

JOSHUA 1:4

Now Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms **from the river to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt**; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.

1 KINGS 5:1

So Solomon observed the festival at that time, and all Israel with him—a vast assembly, people **from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt**.

1 KINGS 8:65

[Jeroboam ben Joash] was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel **from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea**, in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher.

2 KINGS 14:25

These links are all connected to the promise to Abraham, that his seed would inherit a land whose borders resemble the land encompassed by the rivers of Eden in Genesis 2. These borders are what Joshua is told to possess and what Solomon reigns over for a short period until losing the north to Aram (1 Kings 11:23-25). And so it ironically turns out to be Jeroboam II who restores the Eden-like borders of Israel as was prophesied by Jonah son of Amittai.

Jonah's Prophecy and Jeroboam's Victory Reversed

It's crucially important to note that Jeroboam's border restoration and Jonah's prophecy are intentionally reversed by an oracle from the prophet Amos. So whatever positive associations we had in 2 Kings 14 must be tempered by the eventual reversal of Jonah's prophecy because of Israel's apostasy.

Jeroboam did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin. He 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 through his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.

2 KINGS 14:24-25

*You who rejoice in Lodebar,
And say, "Have we not by our own strength taken
Karnaim for ourselves?"
"For behold, I am going to raise up a nation against
you, O house of Israel," declares the Lord God of hosts,
"And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath
To the brook of the Arabah."*

AMOS 6:13-14

The nation that God will use to reverse Jonah's prophecy and fulfill Amos' warning is none other than Assyria, who will eventually destroy the entire northern kingdom of Israel.

In the fifty-second year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah son of Remaliah became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned twenty years. He did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin. In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon and Abel-beth-maacah and Janoah and Kedesh and Hazor and Gilead and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria.

2 KINGS 15:27-29

[Then] ... the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and captured it and carried the people of it away into exile to Kir, and put Rezin to death.

2 KINGS 16:9

Nineveh, the Great City (1:2a)

The phrase "Nineveh, the great city" appears four times in Jonah (1:2; 3:2, 3; 4:11) and only elsewhere in Genesis 10 in a crucially important story about the founding of Babylon and Nineveh.

The beginning of [Nimrod's] kingdom was Babylon and Erech and Akkad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land Asshur went out, and he built Nineveh and the wideness-of-city and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

GENESIS 10:10-12

Asshur's kingdom consists of four cities, just as Nimrod's Babylon. From this point on, these two empires will loom in the background until Assyria appears in 2 Kings 15 (right after Jonah) as a precursor to the Babylonian threat.

“The deliberate association of Assyria with Babylon (in Gen 10:11-12) is significant; otherwise, in the lists of names which follow, Assyria is associated with the sons of Shem (Gen 10:22). By means of this narrative insertion, then, the author has not only introduced a key city, Babylon, but has also taken Assyria out of its natural associations with Shem and given it a new identification with Babylon. Thus the author has opened the way for an association and identification of other cities with Babylon. These appear to be the initial stirrings of a larger-than life symbolic value for Babylon, one known in a fully developed sense in the book of Isaiah (chs. 13-14 where Assyria is identified with Babylon), and in Micah 5:6, where the prophet could speak of Assyria as the “land of Nimrod.” — JOHN SAILHAMER, THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE, 132.

Rising Evil (1:2b)

The phrase “their evil has risen up before me” connects to an important biblical design pattern of the evil human city whose violence forms an outcry that rises up to God.

Cain and Abel and Cain’s city of violence - Genesis 4:13 The blood of your brother is crying out to me (אלי צעקים) from the ground.	Nineveh in Jonah 1:2 For their evil has risen up before me.
The generation of the flood - Genesis 6:13 The end of all flesh has come before me (לפני בא).	
Sodom and Gomorrah - Genesis 18:20-21 The outcry (זעקה) against Sodom and Gomorrah, it is great and their sin is extremely heavy. I will go down now and I will see if its outcry (צעקה) which has come to me (אלי הבאה) they have done, totally.	
The Israelites in Egypt - Exodus 2:23 And they cried out (זעק) and their outcry rose up to God (אלהים) from their slavery. (ותעל... אל)	

In each of these stories, God raises up a deliverer/intercessor who either (1) confronts the evil-doers and calls them to repent (Moses in Egypt), or (2) pleads with God on behalf of the wicked (Noah’s sacrifice, Abraham’s intercession). But this is not the case with Jonah!

Jonah’s Flight from God (1:3)

1:3: “And Jonah arose to flee... from before the face of Yahweh” (יהוה מלפני). The phrase “from before the face” refers to the divine presence and appears 16 times in the Hebrew Bible. The first time is in the story of Cain’s exile east of Eden after his brother’s blood cries out from the ground. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that the author returns to a series of very clear analogies between Jonah and Cain in Jonah chapter 4.

Cain's Exile from Eden	Jonah's Flight from God
Gen 4:16: And he went out from before the face of Yahweh (מלפני יהוה).	Jonah 1:3: And Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before the face of Yahweh (יהוה מלפני).

Cain in Genesis 4	Jonah in Chapter 4
4:4b-5: And Yahweh regarded Abel and his offering, but Cain and his offering he did not regard, and there was heat-anger to Cain (ל ויחר).	4:1: And [God's showing mercy to Nineveh] was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and there was heat-anger to him (ל ויחר).
4:6-7: Why is there heat-anger to you (לך חרה)? Isn't it the case that if you do good (תיטיב) there is exaltation?	4:4: And Yahweh said, "Is it doing good that there is heat-anger to you?" (חרה ההיטב לך).
4:16: And Cain went out (ויצא) from before the face of Yahweh and he sat (וישב) in the land of Nod, to the east of Eden (עדן קדמת). 4:17: And he built a city and called the name of the city according to the name of his son Enoch.	4:5: And Jonah went out (ויצא) from the city and he sat from the east of the city (מקדם וישב) and made for himself a sukkah and he sat (וישב) under it.

The phrase "from before the face of Yahweh" also refers to the divine presence in the tabernacle (Num. 17:24; 20:9; 1 Sam. 21:7), divine judgment/fire (Lev. 9:24, 10:2), and incense (Num. 17:11; Lev. 16:12). This instance in Jonah matches Cain's closely, especially in light of the Cain analogies at work in chapter 4.

Going to Tarshish

Tarshish has two main associations:

- An exotic, distant nation
 - The name appears for the first time among the sons of Japeth (Gen. 10:4) among the distant island nations (with Elisha, Kittim, Dodanim).
- A place of gold and precious gems
 - The name also refers to a precious stone that, according to Ezekiel, endowed the garden of Eden with its majestic splendor (Ezek. 28:13).

When these associations are combined, Tarshish is a pseudo-Eden that appears throughout the Bible as a source of wealth and resources that people use to create their own versions of Eden, which then subjects them to judgment.

For the king had at sea the **ships of Tarshish** with the ships of Hiram; once every three years the ships of Tarshish came **bringing gold and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks**.

SOLOMON - 1 KINGS 10:22

Jehoshaphat made **ships of Tarshish** to go to Ophir for **gold**, but they did not go for **the ships were broken** at Ezion-geber [just as in Jonah 1:4].

JEHOSHAPHAT - 1 KINGS 22:48

The “ships of Tarshish” are a source of wealth, idolatry, and pagan influence in Israel and, therefore, a target for Yahweh’s justice.

*For Yahweh of armies has a day...
against all the ships of Tarshish, and
against all the desirable ships.*

ISAIAH 2:12-16

*The kings assemble
themselves together...
They saw and were stunned...
With the east wind you break the
ships of Tarshish [just as in Jonah 1:4].*

*Wail, O ships of Tarshish, for [Tyre] is
destroyed without house or harbor...*

ISAIAH 23:1

PSALM 48:4-6

But Tarshish is eventually redeemed. The new Jerusalem will receive the gold from the ships of Tarshish (Isa. 60:9, 72:10). In the messianic age, the witnesses will go out to the islands, including Tarshish (66:19).

Tarshish plays the role of a pseudo-Eden, a place for precious stones that is exploited by human scheming (ships and trade routes). The destroyed ships of Tarshish become an image of God’s defeat of humanity’s search for Eden life on their own terms.

Jonah flees to Tarshish just as all biblical characters attempt some kind of “return to Eden” by their own power and scheming.

The Resistant Prophet

Jonah’s flight is an extreme behavior for a resistant prophet, bringing to mind other resistant prophets in the Hebrew Bible, like Moses, Elijah, and Jeremiah. This opens up the large-scale comparisons and contrasts with these three prophets.

Moses the Resistant Prophet (Exodus 3-4)

The Commission: Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt. (Exodus 3:10)

Objection #1: Who am I? (3:12)

Objection #2: Who are you? What is your name? (3:15-15)

Objection #3: What if they don’t believe me? (4:1-2)

Objection #4: Please, my Lord, I’m not a man of words... (4:10-12)

Objection #5: Please, my Lord send someone else! (4:13-17)

God’s Response: Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say. (4:12)

Jeremiah the Slightly Less Resistant Prophet (Jeremiah 1:1-10)

The Commission: Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jeremiah 1:4-5)

Objection #1: Look, I don't know how to speak! (1:6a)

Objection #2: I am too young! (1:6b)

God's Response: "Do not say, 'I am too young,' because everywhere I send you, you shall go. And all that I command you, you shall speak..." Then the Lord stretched out his hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth." (1:7-9)

Elijah the Disillusioned Death-Wish Prophet (1 Kings 17-19)

The Commission: Now Elijah the Tishbite, was of the settlers of Gilead...The word of the Lord came to him... (1 Kings 17:1-2).

After his Unsuccessful Mission on Mount Carmel:

Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested his life, that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." (1 Kings 19:1-4)

Jonah the Utterly Rebellious Prophet

The Commission: The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah **arose to flee to Tarshish** from the presence of the Lord (Jonah 1:1-3).

After his Successful Mission in Nineveh:

"Take my life, for better is my death than my life!" And he **requested his his life to die**" (Jonah 4:3, 9).

Jonah is an extreme character among the prophets. He takes the motif of the resistant prophet to the next level. He is more resistant to his call than Moses or Jeremiah, and he is more comic than Elijah, in that he too wants to die, but only after an outstanding success in his prophetic calling!



Session 23: Identifying Repeated Words

Key Question

What about you? What questions do you have on this topic?

Session Quote

"Jonah is an extreme among the resistant prophets."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 24: The Symmetry of the Ship Scene

Key Question

So far in chapter 1, what evidence do you see that Jonah's motives are positive? What evidence do you see that Jonah's motives are negative? Why do you think the author decides not to tell us what Jonah's motives are?

Session Quote

"Another purpose of a chiasm is to help the reader mentally put together the parallel movements and to compare and contrast them just like he or she would with the hyperlinked scenes, like Elijah and Jonah."

Jonah, the Storm, and the Sailors (1:4-16)

Literary Design

A	Now, Yahweh had hurled a great wind to the sea and there was a great storm on the sea, and the ship considered breaking apart. And the sailors feared and each cried to his god, and they hurled the cargo which was in the ship to the sea to make it lighter from upon them. Now, Jonah went down into the far reaches of the ship, and he laid down and fell asleep.
B	And the chief of the sailors approached him and said, "what is it with you, sleeping? Get up, call to your god. Perhaps a god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish." And each man said to his companion, "Come, let us cast lots, so that we can know on whose account this evil is to us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.
C	And they said to him, "Please tell us, on whose account is this evil to us? What is your work? And from where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear Yahweh God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."
D	And the men feared a great fear and they said to him, "What is this you have done?!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from before the face of Yahweh because he had told them.
C'	And they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?" for the sea was going and storming. And he said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me to the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm is to you."
B'	And the men dug in to return to land but they could not, for the sea was going and storming against them. And they called to Yahweh and said, "Please Yahweh, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and don't set innocent blood against us; for you, O Lord, have done as you have pleased."
A'	And they picked up Jonah, and they hurled him to the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. Then the men feared the Lord a great fear, and they offered sacrifices to Yahweh and they vowed vows.

Session 25: Jonah's Motives (Q&R)

Key Question

The biblical authors don't always give you all the information that you need to make sense of people's motives in the stories. What thoughts or questions do you have regarding Jonah's motives?

Session Quote

"The author is opening up Jonah's motives for us to ponder. It's an invitation to think about our own experiences and to wonder until later information in the narrative can help."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 26: Jonah's Upside-Down Character

Key Question

We are beginning to see how the book of Jonah constantly subverts the reader's expectations. We refer to it as the upside-down world of Jonah. In this session, Tim shows a page from the children's magazine Highlights called "What's Wrong?" Here readers are challenged to find everything that's not quite right in the picture. What do you find helpful about this example? Is there a different example or illustration that would help your audience understand that the author is subverting or playing with reader expectations in Jonah?

Session Quote

"In the book of Jonah, everything is upside-down. Everybody does the opposite of their stereotypes, including the pagans and including Jonah. The only person who seems true to form is God."

Jonah's Flight to a Pseudo-Eden (1:3-6)

Jonah's flight in 1:3 begins a major theme in chapter 1 that comically inverts a standard biblical motif: humans exiled from Eden because of their attempt to recreate their own version of Eden in high places or gardens and with wealth or wisdom.

Jonah, on the other hand, goes down instead of up, and he runs toward death instead of life.

Jonah's "Descent" into Death

- 1:3a: Jonah **went down** (*yarad*) to **Joppa** (*yapho*)
 - "went down" = יֵרֵד
- 1:3b: Jonah **went down** (*yarad*) into the ship
- 1:5: Jonah **went down** (*yarad*) into the **uttermost parts of the ship** (*yarketey-sephinah*), and he lay down and went into a **deep sleep** (*yeradam*)
 - "deep sleep" = וִירְדָם
 - "far reaches" = יִרְכָתִי

The triple repetition of "went down" (יֵרֵד) is echoed by Jonah's "deep sleep" (וִירְדָם) and by the location he seeks upon the ship (יִרְכָתִי). All three of these terms connect to Jonah's inverted Eden.

“Deep sleep” is associated with a lifeless slumber caused by Yahweh when he does something for the sleeper that they could not do for themselves. This prompts one to wonder: Is Jonah’s deep sleep a kind of judgment? Is Yahweh’s providence taking Jonah “all the way to the bottom”?

Adam’s “deep sleep” in Eden - Genesis 2:21

So the Lord God caused *a deep sleep* to fall upon the man, and he slept.
Then he took one of his sides and closed up the flesh at that place.

Abraham’s “deep sleep” when he’s given the Eden-blessing - Genesis 15:12

Now when the sun was going down, *a deep sleep* fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.

The phrase “the uttermost parts of the ship” is a clever wordplay on a well-known name for the cosmic mountain of God that is associated with Eden, “the uttermost reaches of the north.”

“Uttermost parts of the ship” — *yarketey hasephinah* - הספינה ירכתי

“Uttermost reaches of the north” — *yarketey hatsaphon* - הצפון ירכתי

“Zaphon, a mountain to the north of Israel, represented a divine abode in the ancient period. Accordingly, Zaphon in the Bible signifies either a heavenly divine location (“I will rise up into the heavens...I will sit on the mountain of divine assembly, in the upper reaches of Zaphon,” Isaiah 14:13) or to the sacred mountain in Jerusalem (“Mount Zion, the upper reaches of Zaphon,” Psalm 48:3). The divine mountain, for its part, constitutes a secure, paradisaical location, one that Ezekiel...likens to “the garden of God” (Ezek 28:13-14). Based on the biblical and comparative evidence, scholars characterize the garden of Eden as an archetypal sanctuary, a place where God dwells and where humans worship him.” Correspondingly, the Israelite temple on Mount Zion is identified with the primeval hill, paradise, the cosmic mountain.”

— YITZHAK BERGER, JONAH IN THE SHADOWS OF EDEN, 3-4

“The uttermost reaches of the North” is a biblical phrase with rich overtones of the cosmic mountain range in the far north (Mount Hermon and beyond). This was the mythological realm of the Canaanite deities (see Richard Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*). It was an exotic, snowy, high place of the divine realm, where Heaven and Earth were one. The biblical authors adopted this phrase and image to describe the temple in Jerusalem, which was an image of Eden, the true cosmic mountain (as in Psalm 46).

*Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,
In the city of our God, his holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion, the uttermost reaches of the north,
The city of the great King.*

PSALM 48:1-2

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
The holy dwelling places of the Most High.
God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.*

PSALM 46:4-5

Isaiah depicts the spiritual power behind Babylon as a divine rebel who attempted to ascend God's throne in Eden, which is called "the uttermost reaches of the north." Isaiah inverts the phrase to describe the "uttermost parts of the grave."

*But you said in your heart,
"I will ascend to the heavens;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
And I will sit on the mount of assembly
In the uttermost parts of the north. (yarketey tsaphon)
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High."
Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol,
To the uttermost parts of the pit. (yarketey bor)*

ISAIAH 14:13-15

This phrase "uttermost parts of the pit" taps into a wide-spread motif of descent into the grave as an anti-Eden.

Son of man, wail for the hordes of Egypt and bring it down, her and the daughters of the powerful nations, to the underworld, with those who go down to the pit. The strong among the mighty ones shall speak of him and his helpers from the midst of Sheol, "They have gone down, they lie still, the uncircumcised, slain by the sword."

Assyria is there and all her company; her graves are round about her. All of them are slain, fallen down by the sword, whose graves are set in the uttermost parts of the pit and her company is round about her grave.

EZEKIEL 32:18, 21-23

The author is portraying the prophet as fleeing the call of Yahweh to the nations only to seek his own self-made version of Eden by, ironically, turning to the nations. In boarding a ship bound for Tarshish, Jonah is actually beginning his descent unto death, and so the author cleverly calls Jonah's bed "the uttermost parts of the ship" (that is, north).

This phrase also prepares us to expect a storm, which will humble and threaten to break apart ships of Tarshish.

God's Judgment on the Ships of Tarshish (1:4-6)

In Isaiah 2 and especially Ezekiel 26-27, God brings judgment on the nations for building false Edens with the wealth of Tarshish.

For Yahweh of armies has a day...against all the ships of Tarshish and against all the desirable ships.

ISAIAH 2:12-16

Wail, O ships of Tarshish, for [Tyre] is destroyed without house or harbor...

ISAIAH 23:1

The kings assemble themselves together...

They saw and were stunned...

With the east wind you break the ships of Tarshish [just as in Jonah 1:4].

PSALM 48:4-6

Jonah 1 and 3 have been designed to echo the divine judgment on Tyre and the ships of Tarshish in Ezekiel 26-27.

The Sailors for Tyre in Ezekiel 26-27	The Sailors to Tarshish in Jonah 1	The Ninevites in Jonah 3
<p>26:16 And the princes of the sea will go down from upon their thrones (כסאותם מעל) and they will remove their robes (והסירו מעליהם) and their garments of embroidery they will strip off; with trembling they will clothe themselves; they will sit upon the ground (ישבו הארץ על) and shudder nonstop, and they will be appalled at you.</p>		<p>The king rises from his throne (מכסאו), removes his robe (אדרתו ויעבר), and sits in the dust (וישב על האפר).</p>
<p>27:3-4 Tyre, perfect in beauty (יפי)...they perfected your beauty.</p> <p>27:11 They perfected your beauty (יפיר).</p> <p>28:7 Foreigners will...defile your beauty (יפעתך), while the king of Tyre was perfect in beauty (28:12 יפי), which gave rise to arrogance in your beauty (28:17 יפיר).</p>	<p>Jonah flees to Joppa (יפו) in Jonah 1:1-3.</p>	
<p>27:8B Your wise ones, O Tyre, were among you, they were your sailors.</p> <p>27:9B All the ships of the sea and their sailors (אניות ומלחיהם הים) were among you.</p>	<p>The chief of sailors (החבל רב) and sailors (מלחים) in Jonah 1:5-6, these words appear only in Ezekiel 27 and Jonah 1.</p>	
<p>27:12 Tarshish was your trader (סחרתך) due to the greatness of your wealth (See סחר, "trade" in 27:15, 16, 18, 21, 36).</p>	<p>Jonah paid the "fare" (שכר) in Jonah 1:3.</p>	
<p>27:23 Haran, Caneh, and Eden, traders of Sheba, Assyria, Kilmad, were your traders.</p> <p>27:25 Ships of Tarshish were carriers of your merchandise, and they were filled and very heavy in the heart of the seas.</p>	<p>Jonah found a ship (אניה) going to Tarshish (תרשיש).</p> <p>2:4 You cast me into the heart of the seas (ימים בלבב).</p>	
<p>27:26 An east wind broke you in the heart of the seas (רוח הקדים שברך בלב ימים).</p>	<p>JONAH 1:4 God hurled a great wind (גדולה) upon the sea...so that the ship considered breaking up (והאניה חשבה להשבר).</p>	<p>4:8 And God appointed an east wind (הקדים רוח), a burning one.</p>

27:27 Your wealth, your wares, your merchandise, Your sailors and your pilots, Your repairers of seams, your dealers in merchandise And all your men of war who are in you, With all your company that is in your midst, Will fall into the heart of the seas On the day of your downfall.	JONAH 1:5 And the sailors...hurled the cargo in the ship into the sea to lighten from upon them.	
27:28-30 At the sound of the cry of your sailors (חבלִיךָ זעִקֶתָּ) (חבלִיךָ זעִקֶתָּ) The pasture lands will shake. All who handle the oar, the sailors and all the pilots of the sea will come down from their ships. They will stand on the land, and they will make their voice heard over you, and will cry (ויִזְעִקוּ) bitterly. They will cast dust on their heads. They will wallow in ashes (בִּאֲפֹר).	JONAH 1:5 And the sailors cried out (ויִזְעִקוּ) (ויִזְעִקוּ) each to his god.	JONAH 3:6 The king of Nineveh sat upon the ashes (הַמֶּלֶךְ) and he cried (וַיֵּעֲזָב) out.
27:31 Also they will make themselves bald for you and gird themselves with sackcloth (שִׁקְיָם). And they will weep for you in bitterness of soul with bitter mourning.		JONAH 3:7-8 Let human and animal...clothe themselves with sackcloth (שִׁקְיָם).

These hyperlinks bring perspective to Jonah’s flight and the portrayal of the sailors and Ninevites.

Tyre and its Sailors

In Ezekiel 26-27, Tyre was using the sailors and ships of Tarshish (among other places) to bring Eden-like wealth, security, and abundance to her “rock” (צֶרֶם = Tyre) in the “heart of the seas” (Ezek. 27:4). But God will reverse all of her wealth, sending storms to break her ships so that all the sailors cry out in grief, sit in the dust, and mourn over Tyre’s lost wealth.

Jonah and the Sailors

Jonah is fleeing to his own pseudo-Eden by heading to Tarshish (on Tyre’s fleet) and paying its fare, but God sends a storm to humble his wayward prophet so that the sailors cry out in fear.

The Sailors and the Ninevites

Because the design of Jonah sets the response of the sailors in parallel with the response of the Ninevites, and both of these groups contrast with Jonah, it makes perfect sense that the grief and crying out of Tyre’s sailors could be applied to the sailors of Tarshish and to the Ninevites. Both imitate the crying and grief of the sailors in Ezekiel 26-27.

“In this sequence of prophecies [Ezekiel 26-28], the prophet compares the glamorous Tyre, a kingdom supplied and signified by ships of Tarshish, to the divine mountain and the garden of Eden. If, accordingly, Jonah occupies a Tarshish-bound vessel that stands in parallel to those ships, this yields... evidence that our protagonist seeks an Eden-like realm of the kind that Ezekiel describes.” — YITZHAK BERGER, JONAH IN THE SHADOWS OF EDEN, P. 5.

"As for Jonah having provided the sakar of the vessel ("its fare")...consider the familiar motif of treasure laden ships of Tarshish... Every biblical reference to the ships of Tarshish signal this luxuriant motif, none more emphatically than Ezekiel 27. [With these associations] the clause in Jonah "he provided its fare," much like the place name "Joppa" (יָפוֹ // יָפִי "beauty"), gives rise to a highly consequential secondary meaning: in "stockieng/providing the vessel's fare, a fleeing Jonah, pursuing the idyllic realm that ships of Tarshish supply and signify, hastily provided the ship with the fortune it is destined to carry. The text suggests that the prophet, seeking to escape toward that paradisiacal domain of Tarshish, started out in pursuit of that "beautiful" (יָפוֹ) location." — YITZHAK BERGER, JONAH IN THE SHADOWS OF EDEN, PGS. 6-7.

Session 27: Relationships Between Jonah and the Story of the Bible

Key Question

In this session, we focus on how the story of the Bible paints a portrait of a prophetic figure who dies for the sins of others to bring salvation to the nations. What are some of the ways Jonah interacts with the overarching story of the Bible? How important do you think it is to help your audience understand how the story of Jonah interacts with this broader biblical portrait?

Session Quote

"Jonah's death—his rebellion—becomes the instrument of Yahweh's purpose to bring salvation to the nations. That's what Jonah 1 is about."

Jonah Prophetic Failure vs. the Sailor's Spiritual Intuition (1:5-15)

Jonah is portrayed as selfish and slow to understand the reality of his situation while the sailors are depicted as spiritually aware and more in tune with Jonah's God than Jonah is!

1:5 The sailors discern divine power at work in the storm so they call out to their gods and sacrifice their livelihood to survive.	Jonah goes below deck to take a nap.
1:6 The captain notices Jonah's non-participation and urges him to call on his god.	Jonah has to be reminded by a pagan sailor to pray to his God for a sea rescue.
1:7 Jonah's ignorance forces the sailors to cast lots to discern who is the cause of the storm. 1:8 They have to ask many questions to get Jonah to offer any kind of response.	Jonah only indirectly answers their questions by hypocritically quoting from his tradition.
1:9-10 The sailors actually "fear" Yahweh and have to inform Jonah of the madness of his flight.	Jonah seems unaware of the contradiction of his words and actions.
1:11 The sailors have to suggest that Jonah do something to change their situation.	Jonah's idea is to force them to kill him, placing them in danger of blood-guilt.
1:13-15 The sailors try to "repent" back to land and earnestly call on God to forgive them for killing God's prophets.	Jonah does not repent nor does he seem concerned of the danger he has brought upon others.

Jonah and the Sailors Quote from the Psalms (1:9 and 1:14)

Jonah's hypocritical confession in 1:9 shows that he is totally unaware of the contradiction between his actions and his words.

*I fear Yahweh, the God of the heavens,
who made the sea and the dry land.*

JONAH 1:9

*Yahweh is a great God...
the sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, his hands formed it.*

PSALM 95:3-5

The irony is that Jonah's confession of his "beliefs" is likely based on the formulation of Psalm 95, but this psalm is a call for Israel not to rebel against their God precisely because he is the creator and ruler of all, the very thing Jonah is doing as he quotes these words.

Interpretive Ambiguity

Is Jonah's confession in 1:9 an indirect admission of guilt?

"This is not an empty declaration that Jonah worships the Lord ("fear" or "awe" in the conventional meaning of fealty and obedience)... It is rather implicit acknowledgment of his personal responsibility for their predicament because he falls under the direct jurisdiction of the God of sky and sea, therefore the punitive action—the storm—is clearly directed against him."

— URIEL SIMON, JONAH, JPS BIBLE COMMENTARY, P. 12.

Or is Jonah's confession in 1:9 an ironic critique of his behavior?

"The implication of the confession of faith is that the source of the storm is none other than Yahweh who made the sea. The wonder is that Jonah can recite such a creed and yet show disrespect to the commands of the God whose sovereignty it celebrates."

— LESLIE C. ALLEN, THE BOOKS OF JOEL, OBADIAH, JONAH, AND MICAH, P. 210.

In contrast, the sailors' prayer to God in 1:14 that quotes from the psalms has the opposite effect.

*Please Yahweh, don't let us perish on
account of this man's life...for just as you
have purposed, you have done."*

JONAH 1:14

*Why should the nations say,
"Where now is your God?"
Our God is in the heavens,
And everything which he purposes, he does.*

PSALM 115:2-3

*I know that Yahweh is great,
And our lord is greater than all gods
Everything which he purposes, Yahweh does
In the heavens, on the land
In the seas, and all the depths.*

PSALM 135:5-6

The irony is that Jonah confessed to believe in the “God of the heavens,” yet it is the sailors who actually understand the implications of such a belief. They recognize the storm as God’s purpose and a result of his power over the sea.

“In both psalms, the confession of faith contrasts Yahweh with other, impotent gods (135:5) and idols (115:4-7)... In this way—through the prayer in general and through its individual phrases—the narrator depicts the heathen sailors as people who turn to Yahweh like model Israelites, at least where Jonah’s affairs are concerned, and when they are in danger of shipwreck”

— HANS WALTER WOLFF, A CONTINENTAL COMMENTARY: OBADIAH AND JONAH, P. 120.

Deceptive Prophet, Fearful Pagans (1:9-13)

Jonah’s deception of the sailors—not telling them he was running from Yahweh—is discovered. And the irony of this is made clear by two hyperlinked design patterns that compare Jonah to Pharaoh in Exodus 14 and then to Achan in Joshua 7.

Jonah as Pharaoh

Pharaoh’s Deception and the Israelites Fear	Jonah’s Deception and the Sailor’s Fear
<p>When the king of Egypt was told (ויגד) that the people had fled (ברח), Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done (עשינו זאת מה) that we have let Israel go from serving us?”</p> <p>EXODUS 14:5</p>	<p>1:5 And the sailors were afraid (וייראו) and they cried out (ויצעקו) each to his god...</p> <p>1:9 I am a Hebrew, and I fear (ירא) Yahweh, the God of the heavens who made the sea and dry land.</p>
<p>As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very afraid (מאד ויראו) and the sons of Israel cried out (ויצעקו) to the Lord.</p> <p>EXODUS 14:10</p>	<p>1:10 And the men were afraid, a very great fear (גדולה ויראה...וייראו), and they said, “What is this you have done to us?!” (לנו עשית זאת מה), for the men knew that he had fled (ברח) from Yahweh, for he told (הגיד) them.</p>

Note that in this analogy, Jonah has been paired with Pharaoh as the deceiver, while the sailors have been paired with the helpless Israelites who are at the mercy of the deceiver. The main difference (perhaps) is that Jonah has not premeditated on his deception, whereas for Pharaoh, it is the culmination of a long series of deceptions.

Jonah as Achan

The Eden Deception in Genesis 3	Jonah's Deception in Jonah 1	Achan's Deception in Joshua 6-7
<p>3:6 "And the woman saw that the tree was good (העץ טוב כי)...and desirable (נחמד) for becoming wise, and she took from its fruit and she ate and she gave to her husband."</p> <p>3:11 God to Adam: "Who told you (הגידמי לך) that you were naked?"</p> <p>3:13 God to Eve: "What is this you have done (מה זאת עשית)?"</p>	<p>1:7 Jonah is selected by lot for his sin.</p> <p>8:1 Sailors to Jonah: "Please tell us now (הגידה נא לנו)."</p> <p>Sailors to Jonah: "What is this you have done (מה זאת עשית)?"</p>	<p>7:14-18 Achan is selected by lot for his sin.</p> <p>7:19 Joshua to Achan: "Please tell me now (לי נא הגד) what have you done (מה עשית)?"</p> <p>7:21 Achan: "I saw among the spoil a cloak of Shinar, a good one (טובה) and two hundred Shekels...and I desired them (ואחמדם) and I took them (ואקחם)."</p>

Jonah as the Scapegoat

There is only one other figure in the Hebrew Bible that has "lots" cast over them and is then "cast out" so that others may experience Yahweh's blessing, and that is the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16.

Jonah 1	Leviticus 16
<p>1:7 And they cast lots and the lot fell concerning Jonah.</p>	<p>16:8 And Aaron will give lots concerning the two goats, one lot for Yahweh, and one lot for going away (azazel).</p> <p>16:10 And the goat which the lot went up concerning it for going away (azazel), it will stand alive before Yahweh for making atonement for it, by sending it for going away (azazel) into the wilderness.</p>
<p>1:14 Please Yahweh, don't let us perish for the life of this man, and don't place innocent blood upon us!</p>	<p>16:21A And Aaron will rest his two hands upon the head of the living goat and will confess over it all of the iniquities of the sons of Israel.</p>
<p>1:12 Take me up (נשא) and hurl me into the sea...</p> <p>1:15 And they took up (נשא) Jonah and they hurled him into the sea. And the sea stopped its wrath.</p>	<p>16:21B And all their transgressions and all their sins, and he will place them on the head of the goat... and the goat will take up (נשא) all their iniquities to a land of isolation, and he will send the goat into the wilderness.</p>

Notice the personification of the sea as "wrathful" (Heb. *za'aph* / זעף), which is elsewhere used of Yahweh's anger at humanity's evil (Micah 7:9) and even likened to a storm. "Yahweh will cause people to hear his voice of majesty, and he will display the descent of his arm, with *wrathful* (זעף) anger, and flame of devouring fire, and hail and storm clouds and rain and hail" (Isaiah 30:30).

The Sailors as Ideal Israelites

In contrast to Jonah, who replays the deception of Eve and Achan, the sailors are portrayed as the humble and repentant Israelites from the structurally significant Psalm 107.

Psalm 107 begins with an opening call for those who have returned from the exile to praise Yahweh for his covenant loyalty (vv. 1-3). This is followed by four mini narratives that portray various acts of divine deliverance from chaos environments that are set in analogy to the Babylonian exile. They are arranged symmetrically.

A vv. 4-9: Wanderers in the **desert** without food or water

B vv. 10-16: **Prisoners** in the **dark** because of their sins

B' vv. 17-22: People with **illness** unto **death** because of their sins

A' vv. 23-32: Sailors on the **sea** threatened by a storm

In each episode, people cry out to Yahweh with the identical line: "And they cried out to Yahweh in their distress, and from their afflictions he delivered them" (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28).

The fourth episode is the longest, and it portrays an iconic sea storm that threatens human wisdom and power that is represented by ships and their navigation.

Psalm 107:23-31	The Sailors in Jonah 1 and 2
Those who go down to the sea in ships Who do business on great waters; They have seen the works of Yahweh, And his wonders in the deep.	1:3 And he went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish...and he went down into it to go with them to Tarshish.
And he spoke and raised up a stormy wind, Which lifted up the waves of the sea.	1:4 And Yahweh hurled a great wind onto the sea and it became a great storm.
They rose up to the heavens, They went down to the depths; Their soul melted away in calamity.	2:5 Waters surrounded up to my neck, the deep encircled me...I went down to the underworld
They reeled and staggered like a drunken man, And all their wisdom was swallowed up.	1:17 And Yahweh appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah.
Then they cried to Yahweh in their trouble, And he brought them out of their distress.	1:5 And they cried out each to his god. 1:14 And they called out to Yahweh. 2:2 I called out to Yahweh from my distress.

<i>He caused the storm to be still, So that the waves of the sea were hushed.</i>	1:15 <i>And the sea stood from its raging.</i>
<i>Then they were glad because they were quiet, So he guided them to their desired haven.</i>	1:11-12 <i>What may we do for you, so that the sea will become quiet?</i>
<i>Let them thank Yahweh for his covenant love, And for his wonders to the sons of men!</i>	1:16 <i>And they offered sacrifices to Yahweh and they fulfilled their vows.</i> 2:9 <i>And I will with a voice of thanks, I will sacrifice to you, what I have vowed I will repay.</i>

Both Jonah and the sailors are set in analogy with those rescued in Psalm 107, though Jonah undergoes an additional descent unto death from which he needs to be rescued.

Most significantly, the storm rescue in Psalm 107 is set in analogy with being lost in the wilderness, imprisonment, and sickness unto death. All together these are metaphorical analogies to the Babylonian exile. This makes Jonah's story resonate with meta-themes of the Hebrew Bible: sin and rebellion among God's covenant people, a self-imposed exile away from the true temple in a search for pseudo-Eden that draws one near to chaos and death, only to cry out and be rescued from the domain of death. All of these are brought into the orbit of exile and restoration themes, and Jonah's story now resonates with those larger biblical themes.

Jonah's Death Wish and Innocent Blood (1:12-15)

Why does Jonah's solution to the problem involve placing blood-guilt on the sailors? Why doesn't Jonah just cry out to Yahweh like the sailors did to their gods? Why is he making them "repent" on his behalf?

Is this a moment of noble self-sacrifice? Or is this another moment of Jonah's selfish lack of awareness? Would he rather die than try to save the lives of others, much less his own? The answers to these questions seems to lie in understanding the design patterns being activated by the hyperlinks in this scene.

The Suffering Prophetic Intercessor

Noble Moses: When Moses is at his best, he intercedes for idolatrous Israel when they least deserve it, and he even offers his own life in place of theirs.

*On the next day Moses said to the people, "You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord, **perhaps I can make atonement for your sin**." Then Moses returned to the Lord, and said, "Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if you will, **forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from your book which you have written!**"*

EXODUS 32:30-32

Not-so-Noble Moses: When Moses finally loses his patience, he inverts his self-sacrifice by asking God to kill him instead of having to lead these people.

I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. So if you are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in your sight, and do not let me see my evil.

NUMBERS 11:14-15

Elijah’s Death Wish: Once Elijah realized that he couldn’t bring lasting change to Israel, he fled into pity-party mode and ran back to Mount Sinai where Israel’s covenant with Yahweh began. However, instead of interceding for Israel and offering his own life in their place, he acts like *not-so-noble* Moses and asks God to take his life.

But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested his life, that he might die, and said, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.”

1 KINGS 19:4

The City of Bloodshed

Cain’s Murder, Sodom, Egypt, and Nineveh: Recall the design pattern activated in Jonah 1:2, where the city’s violence and oppression activates a network of biblical portraits of the city of blood.

<p>Cain and Abel and Cain’s City of Violence</p> <p><i>The blood of your brother is crying out to me</i> (אלי צעקים) <i>from the ground.</i></p> <p>GENESIS 4:13</p>	<p>Nineveh in Jonah 1:2</p> <p>For their evil has risen up before me.</p>
<p>The Generation of the Flood</p> <p><i>The end of all flesh has come before me</i> (לפני בא).</p> <p>GENESIS 6:13</p>	
<p>Sodom and Gomorrah</p> <p><i>The outcry</i> (צעקה) <i>against Sodom and Gomorrah, it is great and their sin is extremely heavy. I will go down now and I will see if its outcry</i> (צעקה) <i>which has come to me</i> (אלי הבאה) <i>they have done, totally.</i></p> <p>GENESIS 18:20-21</p>	
<p>The Israelites in Egypt</p> <p><i>And they cried out</i> (צעקו) <i>from their slavery and their outcry</i> (צעקה) <i>rose up to God</i> (ותעל אל אלהים).</p> <p>EXODUS 2:23</p>	

Israel's City of Bloodshed: In Deuteronomy 21:1-9, Israel is given guidelines to prevent any of their towns from becoming like these cities of bloodshed. If a murdered corpse is found, there is a ritual for purifying its reputation before God.

All the elders of that city which is nearest to the slain body...and they shall answer and say, "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it." Provide atonement for people Israel whom you have redeemed, O Lord, and do not place innocent blood in the midst of your people Israel. And the bloodshed shall be atoned for them. So you shall remove innocent blood from your midst, when you do what is right in the eyes of the Lord.

DEUTERONOMY 21:6-9

Jeremiah and Jerusalem's Bloodshed: Jeremiah warns the leaders of Jerusalem that their city will come under God's judgment for shedding the blood of the innocent, just as the cities of Cain, Sodom, Egypt, and Nineveh have in times past.

Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and to all the people, saying, "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this temple and against this city all the words that you have heard. Now therefore make good your ways and your deeds and listen to the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will relent concerning the evil he has spoken concerning you. But as for me, behold, I am in your hands; do with me as is good and right in your sight. Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will place innocent blood on yourselves, and on this city and on its inhabitants; for truly the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."

JEREMIAH 26:12-15

"Whereas Jeremiah in chapter 26 pleads for his life on the grounds that with his death, 'innocent blood' will be on the heads of the people of Jerusalem, it is not Jonah who tells this to the sailors, but the sailors themselves who pray to God, and thus remind Jonah of this dangers. The two-way effect of this inversion is to diminish Jonah in comparison with Jeremiah and to elevate the moral sensitivities of the sailors. It also brings a fourth party into the picture, the citizens of Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day, their reaction to Jeremiah being contrasted to the Ninevites and their king.... Thus, Jeremiah is compared with Jonah in an inverted way." — ADAPTED FROM JONATHAN MAGONET, FORM AND MEANING: LITERARY TECHNIQUES IN THE BOOK OF JONAH, 102-103.

Deuteronomy 21:8	Jonah 1:14	Jeremiah 26:15
<p><i>The prayer of the elders of the city of potential blood-guilt :</i></p> <p><i>“Provide atonement for people Israel whom you have redeemed, O Lord, and do not place innocent blood (אל תתן דם נקי) in the midst of your people Israel.”</i></p>	<p><i>The prayer of the sailors who could incur the blood-guilt of the prophet that rejected his mission to the city of blood-guilt:</i></p> <p><i>“Please Yahweh, don’t let us perish on account of this man’s life, and don’t place innocent blood upon us (אל תתן דם נקי), for you, Yahweh, have done just as you have purposed.”</i></p>	<p><i>The warning of the prophet that Jerusalem not incur the blood-guilt of the prophet sent to them:</i></p> <p><i>“Know that if y’all kill me, that you will be placing innocent blood upon yourselves, (נקי דם נתנים אתם) and upon this city...”</i></p>

These are the only three texts in the Hebrew Bible where the phrase “place innocent blood” (נקי דם + נתן) is used.

“The significant fact [in Deuteronomy 21] is that someone’s blood has been shed, and atonement must be made for the death by the symbolic killing of a calf...the elders of nearest town are not literally responsible for the murder, but they are in a sense ritually responsible, hence the rite of atonement. [This indirectly connects] with the situation of the sailors, who are the concerned with the murder they are about to commit, to a man who is actually the guilty one (at least before God)...In Jeremiah the “bad” people wish to kill the “good” prophet, and he pleads for his own life, not for his own sake, but because his death will bring the stain of ‘innocent blood’ upon Jerusalem. In contrast to both of these scenarios, Jonah, the “bad” prophet, faced with the “good” sailors asks that he be thrown overboard, and it is the sailors who try to prevent this act. Ironically, it is they, not the prophet, who are aware of the significance of shedding innocent blood and pray that God not hold this against them.. The author of Jonah has synthesized the two texts, taking the context of Jeremiah while using the language of Deuteronomy.” — ADAPTED

FROM JONATHAN MAGONET, FORM AND MEANING: LITERARY TECHNIQUES IN THE BOOK OF JONAH, 72-73.

Session 28: Jonah 1 (Q&R)

Key Question

What about you? What questions or reflections do you have on Jonah 1?

Session Quote

"Human evil is horrific and introduces horrific pain into our world. That's what God is dealing with here. But he doesn't deal with it with a hand wave. He will let people sit in the mess that they've made but not forever. And not as the end of the story. Even our evil can become the instrument of his purposes."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Unit 6: Jonah 2

SESSIONS: 29—35

Session 29: The Meaning of the Great Fish

Key Question

What kinds of things does the author want us to understand when we read that Jonah is swallowed by a fish? In other words, what are some biblical ideas related to large sea creatures that the author is assuming we know?

Session Quote

“That’s the surprise moment of this portrait. His death is his salvation unto new life. Whether or not this passage through death into new life changes him, that will be our discussion in Jonah chapter 4.”

Jonah’s Prayer from the Belly of the Fish (2:1-10)

The Narrative around the Poem

A	And Yahweh appointed a great fish to <u>swallow Jonah</u>	1:17a
B	And Jonah was in the inner-parts of the fish for three days and three nights.	1:17b
B’	And Jonah prayed to Yahweh from the inner-parts of the fish.	2:1
Jonah’s Prayer in 2:2-9		
A’	And Yahweh spoke to the fish and it <u>vomited Jonah</u> to the dry land.	

The Great Fish

The biblical authors were well aware of great, monstrous creatures in the deep sea. They were considered deities among Israel’s neighbors, but for the biblical authors, they were extremely powerful creatures who were under the rule of their Creator.

Great Sea Creatures in the Hebrew Bible

Sea Monster/Sea Dragon (Heb. *tanin* / תנין) and Leviathan as Sea Creatures

Then God said, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens." God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind...

GENESIS 1:20-21

Note, later in Genesis 1:26, God commissions his human images to "rule over the **fish** (Heb. *dag* / דג) of the sea." Thus, in the narrative sequence of Genesis 1, the sea monsters are associated with the "fish of the sea." This explains why the author of Jonah has him swallowed by a "great fish" instead of a "great sea monster."

In the Old Greek translation, "sea monster" in Genesis 1:21 was translated as κῆτος (sea monster), precisely the same way the Greek translators of Jonah 1:17 translated the phrase "the great fish" (Heb. גדול הדג) "the great sea monster" (κῆτος μέγας).

*O Lord, how many are your works...
There is the sea, great and broad,
In which are swarms without number,
Animals both small and great.
There the ships move along,
Leviathan, which you have formed to play in it.*

PSALM 104:24-27

*Praise the Lord from the earth,
Sea monsters and all the depths
[Heb. tannin / Old Greek: δράκον] Fire and hail,
snow and clouds;
Stormy wind, fulfilling his word;*

PSALM 148:7-8

"Leviathan" (Heb. לויתן) and "tannin" were adopted from the mythological imagery of Israel's neighbors to refer to human and spiritual forces of evil and chaos. The biblical authors adopted this imagery and applied it to their conviction that Yahweh alone is the one who defeats the powers of evil and chaos.

*Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord;
Awake as in the days of old, the generations of long ago.
Was it not you who cut **Rahab** in pieces,
Who pierced the **sea monster**?
Was it not you who dried up the sea,
The waters of the great deep;
Who made the depths of the sea a pathway
For the redeemed to cross over?*

ISAIAH 51:9-10

*Yet God is my king from of old,
Who works deeds of deliverance in the midst of the earth.
You divided the sea by your strength;
You broke the heads of **the sea monsters** in the waters.
You crushed the heads of **Leviathan**...*

PSALM 74:12-14

"The great fish is a comic version of an ancient nightmare, the great monster of the deep that represent chaos and destruction, the flooding and undoing of the world... In bearing witness to the power of the God of Israel, Scripture often reckons with the nightmares of ancient near eastern mythology and puts the images to its own uses... In Jonah the nightmare is turned into comedy. The creature that swallows Jonah up is not on the terrible monsters of the deep...but just a great big fish... Call it a monster if you wish, it's no big deal. Wherever you go in the world, the LORD who created it is there before you and can prepare a way for you, even if the way is a great big fish." — PHILIP CARY, JONAH, 76.

There are two other biblical texts that depict Israel's ancient enemies as the sea monster, and one of them provides the only other passage where a great sea creature swallows someone alive.

<p>Egypt - Ezekiel 29:3</p> <p><i>Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, The great sea monster that lies in the midst of his rivers."</i></p> <p>Babylon - Jeremiah 51:34</p> <p><i>Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, has devoured me, crushed me, he has set me down as an empty vessel; he has swallowed me like a sea monster; he has filled his stomach with my delicacies; he has washed me away.</i></p>	<p>Babylon and Egypt - Psalm 124:2-5</p> <p><i>If the Lord had not been on our side When humans attacked us, They would have swallowed us alive When their anger flared against us; The flood would have engulfed us, The torrent would have swept over us, The arrogant waters [see Exodus 18:11] would have swept us away.</i></p>
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This fits with other images of Israel being "swallowed up" in biblical poetry, which is consistently an image of being overcome by enemy nations.

*All your enemies have opened their
mouths wide against you;
They hiss and gnash their teeth;
They say, "**We have swallowed her up!**"*

LAMENTATIONS 2:16

***Israel is swallowed up**; they are now among the
nations, like a vessel in which no one delights.*

HOSEA 8:8

See also Psalm 35:25 and Isaiah 49:19.

The story of Jonah has drawn together all of these images, specifically of Egypt and Babylon as great sea monsters that swallowed God's people into exile and slavery. But God's power can protect his people despite their "submarine death" so that a re-created people can emerge out the other side (as in Ezekiel 37).

"The original readers of Jonah would have seen these connections right away: long ago Israel passed safely through the sea in their exodus from Egypt, and more recently Israel was swallowed up by the greatest beast of them all, Babylon the great, which the prophet Jeremiah calls "the great monster that has swallowed me up" (Jer 51:34)... And yet, after being swallowed up by Babylon, the remnant of Israel was kept safe in the belly of Babylon (see the stories of Daniel or Jeremiah 29). Jonah swallowed up by a sea monster is a parallel image to the Jewish people going into exile, yet still alive and still having a future as they sing songs in the belly of the beast..."

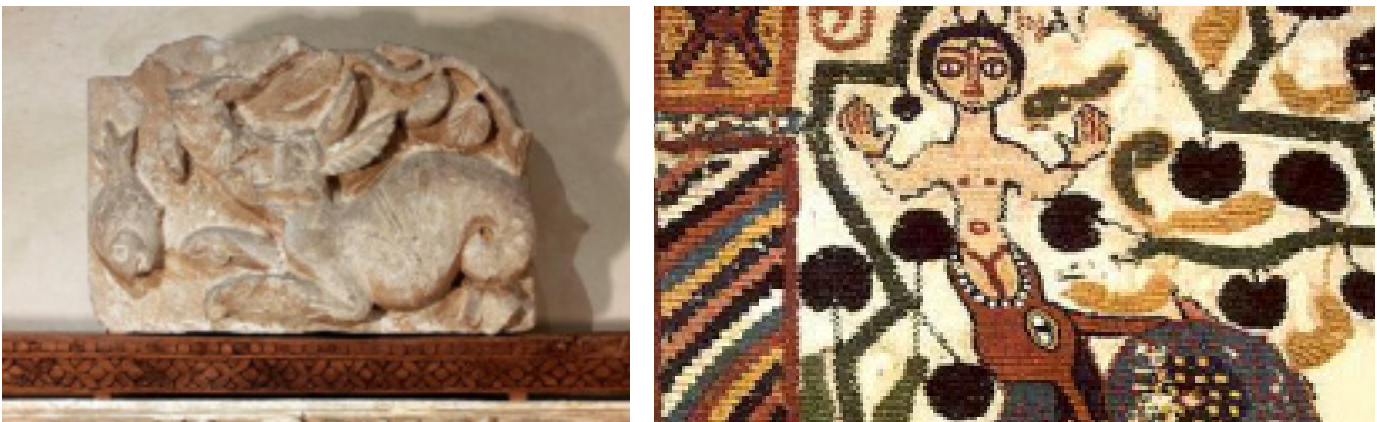
— ADAPTED FROM PHILIP CARY, JONAH, 76-77.

Early Artwork of Jonah's "Great Fish"

[4th cent. A.D., Basilica Patriarchale in Aquileia, Italy]

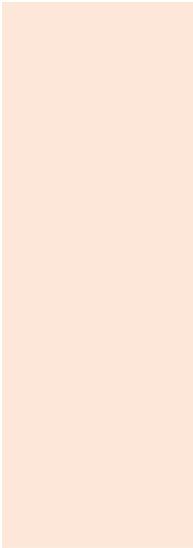


4th century Coptic tapestry and 6th century stone-carved door lintel from Monastery of Bawit in Upper Egypt [Louvre, Paris]



From the catacomb of St. Priscilla, Rome [2nd-4th century A.D.]





Session 30: Swallowed by the Sea Monster (Q&R)

Key Question

Some might say that because the Bible is the word of God, the biblical authors can't be wrong in their descriptions of the world. What are some of your thoughts, questions, or reflections on this?

Session Quote

"This isn't security camera footage of what happened to Jonah. The point is the meaning of what happened to him."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 31: The Meaning of Three Days and Three Nights

Key Question

What's the significance of Jonah being in the fish for three days and three nights?
What are we supposed to understand?

Session Quote

"In Jonah 2, Yahweh is the real agent behind a terrifying animal (great fish). And while being devoured by this animal would be certain death in normal circumstances, with the Creator of life, even apparent death can become a strange vehicle for ultimate humbling that leads to new life."

A Fishy Womb? (2:1-2)

In Jonah 2:1, the word "fish" is a masculine noun *dag* (דג), but in 2:2, it is unexpectedly a feminine noun "from the belly of the fish" *dagah* (דגה).

"Interpreters have noted that the Hebrew term for 'the fish' changes from the masculine form haddāg in verse 1 to the feminine form haddāgā in verse 2 [nrsv: 1]. Although this shift remains problematic, Jonah's presence in the belly of the fish suggests the imagery of pregnancy for the fish and new birth or new creation for Jonah." — MARVIN A. SWEENEY, *THE TWELVE PROPHETS: VOL. 1*, BERIT OLAM STUDIES IN HEBREW NARRATIVE AND POETRY, 317.

"[T]he male fish (dag) that devoured Jonah in 2:1 becomes a female (dagah) for Jonah once he enters her entrails. The point is forced upon us further as we hear Jonah, from the belly of a female fish, sing a misguided song from the womb of Sheol." — JAMES ACKERMAN, "SATIRE AND SYMBOLISM IN THE SONG OF JONAH," 235-256.

Three Days and Three Nights (2:2)

The landmark study on this phrase was made by George Landes, "The Three Days and Three Nights Motif in Jonah 2:1," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 86 (1967), pages 446-450.

Within the Hebrew Bible, the time span of "three days and nights" or arriving somewhere "on the third day" appears in two main connections:

- It is used to refer to a time of testing, danger, or nearness to death (1 Samuel 30:12; 2 Kings 20:5, 8; Hosea 6:1-2).
 - "In each case, the time period is specified not to imply the still present possibility of a deliverance but to emphasize the comparative duration of the affliction under the circumstances." (Landes, p. 448)
- It is used to describe the time of an ominous journey.
 - The journey of the Israelites from Egypt, through the waters, to Mount Sinai is to take "three days" (Exod 3:18; 5:3; 8:27; 15:22).
 - The first three day journey in the Bible is Abraham's journey to Jerusalem to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22:4).
 - See also Joshua 2:16 and 9:17; 1 Samuel 30:1; 2 Samuel 20:4; 2 Kings 2:17.

The most ancient appearance of the phrase "three days and three nights" is in a Sumerian (ca. 1800 B.C.) mythological text, where the goddess descends into the underworld of death to visit her recently dead sister Ereshkigal. The time of her "virtual death" is described as "three days and three nights."

"The three days and three nights are intended to cover the time of Inanna's travel to the depths of the underworld... This appears to be a most promising clue for understanding the full import of this phrase to ancient near eastern scribes and readers, including the author of Jonah. In Jonah 2:1 the phrase indicates the period of time it took the fish to bring Jonah back from the Deep, understood more explicitly in the following poem as the netherworld (2:2 "from the belly of Sheol")... Jonah's residence in the fish is therefore not the same thing as being in the Deep or in Sheol, and the fish is not employed as a personification of the chaotic waters or the realm of the dead. It is clearly before Jonah is swallowed by the fish that he is threatened by the sea and in danger of permanent residence in the nether world." — LANDES, 450.

Hosea 5:13-6:3 is also relevant to our understanding of “three days” in the Hebrew Bible.

When Ephraim saw his sickness,
And Judah his wound,
Then Ephraim went to Assyria
And sent to the great king.
But he is unable to heal you,
Or to cure you of your wound.
For I am like a lion to Ephraim
And like a young lion to the house of Judah.
I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away,
I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver.
I will go away and return to my place
Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face;
In their distress (לו בצר) they will earnestly seek me.

HOSEA 5:13-15

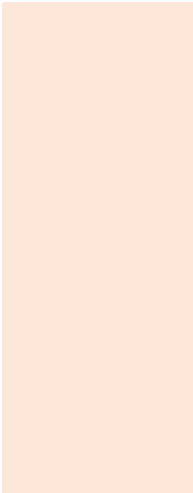
Come, let us return to the Lord.
For he has torn us, but he will heal us;
He has wounded us, but he will bandage us.
He will bring us life **after two days**; he will raise
us up **on the third day**,
That we may have life in his presence.
So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.
His going forth is as certain as the dawn;
And he will come to us like the rain,
Like the spring rain watering the earth.

HOSEA 6:1-3

[Jonah 2:2 “from my distress I call...”]

Notice that both here and in Jonah 2, Yahweh is the real agent behind a terrifying animal (lion/great fish). And while being devoured by this animal would be certain death in normal circumstances, with the Creator of life, even apparent death can become a strange vehicle for ultimate humbling that leads to new life.

It is this network of “three days” passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus is drawing upon when he uses the phrase “three days” or “on the third day” to describe his liberation from death into resurrection life (Matthew 12:40, 16:21; also Luke 24:21, 46).



Session 32: Three Days and Three Nights (Q&R)

Key Question

What about you? What questions do you have on this topic?

Session Quote

"Meditation literature has a different framework than the way we might conceive of sequence, yet sequence does still matter in some way."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 33: Metaphors for Death in Hebrew Poetry

Key Question

What are some of the images or metaphors used for coming near to death in Hebrew poetry? Which of these occur in Jonah's poem?

Session Quote

"The biblical authors are going to place poems at key moments in the story where God brings a little gift of Eden to his people—sometimes in the form of rescue, sometimes in the form of a blessing."

The Prayer of Jonah (2:2-9)

Jonah's Song Compared with Other Songs of Deliverance

Jonah's prayer has much in common with the many other inset prayers in the Hebrew Bible that take place either after or right before a deliverance. The key study here was done by James Watts, *Psalms and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative*.

Notably, all of these examples contain either images of "rescue from dangerous waters" or "ascent from the grave into the land of the living."

Poems of Thanksgiving After a Deliverance

*Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang
this song to the Lord, and said,
"I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted;
The horse and its rider he has **hurled into the sea**.
The Lord is my strength and song,
And **he has become my salvation**;
Pharaoh's chariots and his army **he has cast into the sea**;
And the choicest of his officers are **drowned in the Sea of Reed**.
The **deeps cover** them;
They **went down into the depths** like a stone."*

EXODUS 15:1-5

*At the blast of your nostrils the waters were piled up,
The flowing waters stood up like a heap;
The deeps were congealed in **the heart of the sea**.
You blew with your wind, the sea covered them;
They sank like lead in the mighty waters.
You stretched out your right hand,
The **underworld swallowed them**.
In your lovingkindness you have led the people
whom you have redeemed;
In your strength you have guided
to your holy habitation.*

EXODUS 15:8-13

I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,
 And I am saved from my enemies.
 For the waves of death encompassed me;
 The torrents of destruction overwhelmed me;
 The cords of Sheol surrounded me;
 The snares of death confronted me.
 In my distress I called upon the Lord,
 Yes, I cried to my God;
 And from his temple he heard my voice,
 And my cry for help came into his ears.

2 SAMUEL 22:4-7

The kings came and fought;
 Then fought the kings of Canaan
 At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo;
 They took no plunder in silver.
 The stars fought from heaven,
 From their courses they fought against Sisera.

JUDGES 5:19-20

Then the channels of the sea appeared,
 The foundations of the world were laid bare
 By the rebuke of the Lord,
 At the blast of the breath of his nostrils.
 He sent from on high, he took me;
 He drew me out of many waters.
 He delivered me from my strong enemy,
 From those who hated me,
 For they were too strong for me.

2 SAMUEL 22:16-18

The river of Kishon swept them away,
 The ancient river, the torrent Kishon.
 O my soul, march on with strength.

JUDGES 5:21

Poems of Thanksgiving Right Before the Deliverance

Those who were full hire themselves out for bread,
 But those who were hungry cease to hunger.
 Even the barren gives birth to seven,
 But she who has many children languishes.
 The Lord kills and makes alive;
 He brings down to Sheol and raises up.
 The Lord makes poor and rich;
 He brings low, he also exalts.

1 SAMUEL 2:5-7

He raises the poor from the dust,
 He lifts the needy from the ash heap
 To make them sit with nobles,
 And inherit a seat of honor;
 For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,
 And he set the world on them.

1 SAMUEL 2:8-9

I said, "In the middle of my life
 I am to enter the gates of Sheol;
 I am to be deprived of the rest of my years."
 I said, "I will not see the Lord,
 The Lord in the land of the living;
 I will look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world..."
 For Sheol cannot thank you,
 Death cannot praise you;
 Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.
 It is the living who give thanks to you, as I do today;
 A father tells his sons about your faithfulness.
 The Lord will surely save me;
 So we will play my songs on stringed instruments
 All the days of our life at the house of the Lord.

ISAIAH 38:10-11, 18-20

The Cosmology of Biblical Poetry

These inset poems of the Hebrew Bible all occur in stories of Yahweh providing some kind of deliverance and rescue for his people. But notice that each poem magnifies the scope of the rescue to cosmic proportions. In this way, the biblical authors show their interests in telling us the story, namely as an example of God's wider purposes to rescue all humanity and all creation.

Notice also that each poem assumes the cosmology of Genesis 1-2, namely the three-tiered world of sky-land-sea, and that each realm is associated with unique theological themes.

Sky: The Divine Realm of Life (Mountains, High Rocks, the Temple, God's Heavenly Temple)

*The Lord is in his **holy temple**;
The Lord is on his **heavenly throne**.
He observes everyone on **the land**;
His eyes examine them.*

PSALM 11:4

*The **heavens are my throne**
And **the land is my footstool***
ISAIAH 66:1

Land: The Human and Animal Realm (Land), Floating by God's Power Above the Sea and Bordered by the Sea * Note: also remove comma after "sea" in title.

*I was there when he set the heavens in place,
when he marked out the horizon on the face
of the deep, when he established the clouds
above and fixed securely **the fountains of the deep**,
when he gave the sea its boundary, so
the waters would not overstep his command.*

PROVERBS 8:27-29

***The land** is the Lord's, and all it contains,
The world, and those who dwell in it.
For **he has founded it upon the seas**
And established it upon the rivers.*

PSALM 24:1-2

***The land...**
It is I who have **set it upon its pillars***

PSALM 75:3

Wilderness: The Uncultivated Land is the Realm of Death and Hostile to Human Flourishing

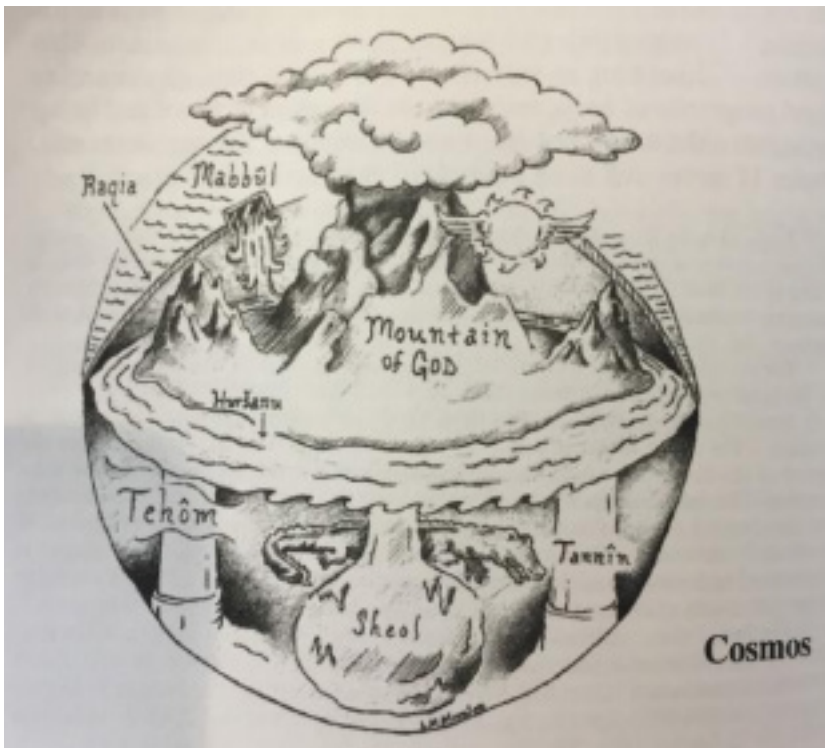
Sea: The Realm of Death and Disorder (The Deep, Waters under the Land, the Grave/Sheol, Sea Monster)

*Save me, O God,
For the **waters** have threatened my life.
I have sunk in **deep mire**, and there is no foothold;
I have come into **deep waters**, and a **flood** overflows me.
May the **flood** of water not overflow me
Nor **the deep** swallow me up,
Nor **the pit** shut its mouth on me.*

PSALM 69:1-2, 15

*For my soul has had enough troubles,
And my life has drawn near to **Sheol**.
I am reckoned among those who go down to the **pit**;
I have become like a man without strength,
Forsaken among the **dead**,
Like the slain who lie in the **grave**,
Whom you remember no more,
And they are cut off from your hand.
You have put me in the lowest **pit**,
In dark places, in the **depths**...
And you have afflicted me with all your **waves**.*

PSALM 88:3-7



From Michael Morales,

Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?

"Mabbul" = waters above the dome

"Raqia" = the dome

"Hurshanu" = the encircling sea

"Tehom" = the deep waters under the land

"Sheol" = the grave

"Tannin" = the sea monster

Session 34: Jonah's Prayer: Oddities and Observations

Key Question

What strikes you as odd in Jonah's poem?

Session Quote

"The image of a prophet composing a poem in the belly of a beast is odd to be sure, but just as strange is the prayer's content. Why is it a thanksgiving for deliverance instead of a confession of guilt or a plea to be released from the fish?"

Oddities and Observations About Jonah's Poem

The image of a prophet composing a poem in the belly of a beast is odd, but just as strange is the prayer's content. Why is it a thanksgiving for deliverance instead of a confession of guilt or a plea to be released from the fish?

The prayer is a thanksgiving for a rescue that has already happened, though it seems that Jonah is still in danger of death by a monster. But notice that the "great fish" is actually the vehicle of salvation from death and the underworld. The "vehicle of death" is paradoxically his salvation. Jonah describes his peril as death by drowning, not by fish digestion.

The tone of Jonah's words (praise, gratefulness, humility) contrasts his oblivious hypocrisy (1:9) and self-consumed anger (ch. 4) elsewhere in the book.

"These two Jonah figures [the rebel of chs. 1, 3, and 4; and the grateful of ch. 2]. . .do not simply separate into two. It is quite possible that the righteous one enters into the disobedient one and lends him his voice. And when such thanksgiving, strange though it be, comes from lips that are otherwise impious—even when that praise is seriously contradicted by the life of the person in question who does not, perhaps, really understand at all what he is saying—there the sun of divine comfort does shine, even though behind clouds." — GERHARD VON RAD, "THE PROPHET JONAH," P. 70.

"[I]n the context of chapter 1 and the remainder of the book it can only be seen as another inappropriate, hypocritical, pious-sounding affirmation like 1:9 before it and 4:2 after it. By it, Jonah shows the reader more clearly his true colors. His phrases sound good and right, but in the event they turn out to be empty. The negative character portrayal of Jonah in chapter 1 is sharpened in 2, as he is further and further separated from those around him by his appalling behavior. This separation is not complete until the book's end, where Jonah is in fact physically separated from everyone." — JOHN HOLBERT, "DELIVERANCE BELONGS TO YAHWEH! SATIRE IN THE BOOK OF JONAH," 74-75.

"The psalm does present Jonah as an orthodox and pious Yahwist who responds to salvation with appropriate thanksgiving. Through its vivid description of the experience and emotions of drowning, it provides readers intimate insight into Jonah's thoughts and feelings, thereby casting him in a more sympathetic light. Simultaneously the context highlights Jonah's lack of reflection on his conflict with Yahweh. The tension between the sympathetic portrait in the psalm and the judgment implied by the book as a whole is acute, but not inherently contradictory. The psalm simply elicits reader identification with Jonah to such a degree that the confrontation with Jonah's true motivations in ch. 4 forces them to share his discomfort." — JAMES WATTS, "JONAH'S PSALMS," P. 139.

Literary Design and Flow of Thought

A	<p><i>I called out from my distress <u>to Yahweh</u> and he answered me.</i></p> <p><i>From the belly of the grave I shouted for help and you heard my voice.</i></p>
B	<p><i><u>And you cast me to the deep, to the heart of the seas.</u> And <u>a river</u> surrounded me. All your waves and breakers passed over me.</i></p>
C	<p><i>And I said: I am banished from before your eyes. However, I will continue to gaze <u>to your holy temple.</u></i></p>
B'	<p><i>The waters encircled me up to the neck. The deep surrounded me, kelp wrapped to my head.</i></p> <p><i>To the bases of the mountains I went down the underworld, its bars around me, forever, <u>but you raised up my life from the pit, Yahweh my God.</u></i></p>
C'	<p><i>When my being was fainting within me, I remembered Yahweh and my prayer came to you <u>to your holy temple.</u></i></p>
A'	<p><i>Those who keep idols of worthlessness forsake the covenant love shown them</i></p> <p><i>but I, with a voice of thanksgiving, I will sacrifice <u>to you.</u> What I have vowed I will pay in full.</i></p> <p><i>Rescue belongs <u>to Yahweh!</u></i></p>

The prayer begins and ends (A and A') with Jonah's orientation "To Yahweh," first crying out from his distress, and then vowing allegiance after his deliverance. Inside of this is Yahweh's action of first casting him into the seas (B), which is reversed in B' as God draws him up from the pit. Matched with the descent is his final hopeful glance up to Yahweh's temple (C), which is matched by his prayer ascending to Yahweh's temple (C'), which leads to his deliverance.

Jonah's descent is marked in two stages. In B, Jonah is sinking into the deep waters, while in B' he has "hit bottom" in reaching the underworld. It is precisely at this moment that his descent converts into an ascent from the pit.

Notice how B begins with Yahweh's initiative in casting him down into the deep, but then the conclusion of B' makes Yahweh's action central in raising him up from the pit. Jonah's double descent is matched by a twin "upward" orientation. In C, all he can manage is to "look to" God's temple. But after he is assured of deliverance in C', he can know that his prayer has actually "ascended to" God's temple.

"The stages of descent in the poem are described with almost geographical exactitude: at first the "flood," the breakers and waves pass over him; he descends further to the base of the mountains till the very earth closes over him. Every other description of "danger from the waters" in the book of Psalms consists of a series of synonymous phrases which are interchangeable, but no other examples of such a prolonged, consecutive descent are described... It displays essentially a narrative technique that has organized the symbolic terminology of the 'underworld' into a coherent pattern of the continuing descent." — MAGONET, FORM AND MEANING, 40-41.

Metaphorical Imagery of the Poem

Notice how all of the various metaphors for death in biblical poetry have been associated.

Images of Death in Verse 3:

- "From the **belly of Sheol**": the grave in the underworld
- "The **deep**" (Heb. *metsulah*): the depths of the open oceans
- "The **heart of the seas**": the depths of the opens ocean
- "A **river**": the ocean currents

Images of Death in Verse 5:

- "The **waters**": general term for rivers, oceans, or underworld waters
- "The **deep**": the waters under the earth
- "**Kelp**": the vegetation at the bottom of the sea
- "The **bases of the mountains**" + "the **underworld**": the base-bottom of the cosmic dome

Key Hyperlinked Psalms in Jonah's Prayer

Nearly every line in Jonah's prayer has been adapted from poems that span the entire book of Psalms. In each case, an image of danger, death, or exile has been associated with the narrative context of Jonah sinking into the sea.

A	<p><i>I called out from my distress to Yahweh and he answered me.</i></p> <p><i>From the belly of the fish</i></p> <p><i>I shouted for help and you heard my voice.</i></p>	<p><i>To Yahweh in my distress I called, and he answered me.</i></p> <p>PSALM 120:1</p> <p><i>You heard the voice of plea when I shouted to you for help.</i></p> <p>PSALM 31:22B</p>
B	<p><i>And you cast me to the deep, to the heart of the seas.</i></p> <p><i>And a river surrounded me.</i></p> <p><i>All your waves and breakers passed over me.</i></p>	<p><i>You lifted me up and cast me away.</i></p> <p>PSALM 102:10</p> <p><i>At the wind of your nostrils, waters congealed... deep in the heart of the sea.</i></p> <p>EXODUS 15:8</p> <p><i>All your waves and breakers passed over me.</i></p> <p>PSALM 42:8</p>
C	<p><i>And I said: I am banished from before your eyes. However, I will continue to gaze to your holy temple.</i></p>	<p><i>And as for me, I said, I am cut off from before your eyes.</i></p> <p>PSALM 31:22A</p> <p><i>I will bow toward your holy temple.</i></p> <p>PSALM 138:2</p>
B'	<p><i>The waters encircled me up to the neck.</i></p> <p><i>The deep surrounded me.</i></p> <p><i>Kelp wrapped to my head,</i></p> <p><i>To the base of the mountains I went down.</i></p> <p><i>The underworld, its bars around me, forever.</i></p> <p><i>But you raise up my life from the pit, Yahweh my God.</i></p>	<p><i>Cords of death encircled me.</i></p> <p>PSALM 18:4, 116:3</p> <p><i>The waters...up to my neck.</i></p> <p>PSALM 69:2</p> <p><i>He redeems my life from the pit.</i></p> <p>PSALM 103:4</p>
C'	<p><i>When my being was fainting within me, I remembered Yahweh.</i></p> <p><i>And my prayer came to you, to your holy temple.</i></p>	<p><i>When my spirit was fainting within me...I remember.</i></p> <p>PSALM 143:4-5</p> <p><i>May my prayer come before you.</i></p> <p>PSALM 88:3</p>
A'	<p><i>Those who keep idols of worthlessness forsake the covenant love shown them.</i></p> <p><i>But I, with a voice of thanksgiving, I will sacrifice to you.</i></p> <p><i>What I have vowed I will pay in full.</i></p> <p><i>Rescue belongs to Yahweh!</i></p>	<p><i>I hate those who keep idols of worthlessness, but I...rejoice in your covenant love.</i></p> <p>PSALM 31:6</p> <p><i>To you I will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving...I will pay my vows.</i></p> <p>PSALM 116:17-18</p> <p><i>Rescue belongs to Yahweh!</i></p> <p>PSALM 3:8</p>

Because we can trace the source texts, Jonah's prayer provides a fascinating window into the methods of biblical composition.

The poem's opening line is adapted from Psalm 120:1

Psalm 120:1 יהוה אל ויענני קראתי לי בצרתה	To Yahweh - in my distress - I called - and he answered me
Jonah 2:2 קראתי ויענני יהוה אל לי מצרה	I called - from my distress - to Yahweh - and he answered me

The word order has been changed so that in Jonah 2, the speaker's call to Yahweh is now emphasized by being placed at the beginning.

The prepositional phrase has been adapted from "in my distress" (לי בצרתה) to "from my distress" (לי מצרה), aligned with the context as Jonah prays "from the innards of the fish" (הדגה ממעי) and cries out "from the belly of the grave" (שאול מבטן). [Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 47]

Jonah 2:3	Source Texts
And you cast me into the deep (מצולה),	<p>Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Sea of Reeds.</p> <p>EXODUS 15:4</p> <p>Because of your indignation and your wrath, For you have lifted me up and you cast me away (מפניזעמך וקצפך כי נשאתני וזית שליכני).</p> <p>PSALM 102:10</p> <p>Don't let the flood of water not overflow me And don't let the deep (מצולה) swallow me up Nor the pit shut its mouth on me.</p> <p>PSALM 69:15</p>
Into the heart of the seas ...	<p>At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up...the deeps congealed in the heart of the seas.</p> <p>EXODUS 15:8</p> <p>Ezekiel 27:4, 25, 26, 27; 28:2, 8 - all applied to Tyre</p>
And the river surrounded me.	<p>The river of Eden "surrounds" Havilah and Cush</p> <p>GENESIS 2:10-14</p>
All your breakers and billows passed over me .	<p>O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember you from the land of the Jordan And the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep at the sound of your waterfalls; All your breakers and your waves have rolled over me.</p> <p>PSALM 42:6-7</p>

Notice how images of the defeat of Pharaoh in the seas (Exodus 15) have been adapted into imagery to describe a personal crisis (Psalms 102 and 69) or the downfall of a city (Tyre in Ezekiel 27) or of exile from the Jerusalem temple (Psalm 42).

Jonah 2:4: “And I said ‘I am **banished** from before your eyes.’”

Jonah 2:4 ואני אמרתי — נגרשתי מנגד עיניך אך...	And as for me, I said: I am <u>banished</u> from before Yahweh, Nevertheless...
Psalm 31:22 ואני אמרתי בחפזי נגרזתי מנגד עיניך אכן...	And as for me I said in my alarm I am <u>cut off</u> from before Yahweh, Nevertheless...

Note that this line verbatim adapts Psalm 31:22, except for the phrase “in my alarm.” The absence of “in my alarm” (בחפזי) from Psalm 31:22 can be explained as unnecessary to the author’s portrayal of Jonah. In Psalm 31:22, the poet portrays his distress as one in a city under siege, which causes “alarm” until he calls out for deliverance. In Jonah 2, Jonah’s inner-shift of orientation only happens after his total “descent” into death, which has not yet happened in the sequence of the poem.

The replacement of “I am cut off” with “I am banished” (נגרשתי) ties Jonah’s “descent” into the exile pattern based on Genesis 3-4.

Jonah 2:5

אפפוני מים עד נפש	Water have encompassed me unto my neck.
תהום יסבבני	The deep has surrounded me,
סוף חבוש לראשי	Reeds bound to my head.

The author has brought together phrases from multiple texts.

“They have encompassed me” (אפפוני) comes from either Psalm 18:4 or 116:3.

The cords of death encompass me;
The torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.
The cords of the grave surrounded me;
The snares of death confronted me.

PSALM 18:4-5

“Waters...unto my neck” comes from Psalm 69:2

Save me, O God,
For the waters have come up to my neck,
I have sunk in mire of the deep, and there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me.

PSALM 69:2

The composition of Jonah 2:6 then is a combination of two distinct texts:

The cords of death **have encompassed me.**

PSALM 18:4 OR 116:3

**...have encompassed me
waters...up to my neck**

JONAH 2:5

The waters have come up to my neck.

PSALM 69:2

But why the avoidance of the phrase “cords of death” in Psalm 18:4? Though the word death may seem appropriate to our poem, this word would be out of place here, as it seems to be a key word restricted to the final chapter of Jonah. Although Jonah has approached symbolic death and implied that he wished to die by being cast overboard, it is still too soon in the writer’s purpose to spell out the prophet’s wish, for it would destroy the tension in his argument with God in chapter 4.

Jonah 2:8: “Those who keep empty idols abandon the covenant love of them.”

What does “empty idols” (שוא הבל) mean? Both words are associated with derogatory vocabulary for idols, asserting their inability to help because they are only statues and not deities.

- Zechariah 10:2: “For idols speak deceit, and diviners conjure lies, and dreams speak falsehood (שוא), they offer empty (הבל) comfort.”
- Deuteronomy 32:21: “They ignited my passion with what is not-god, they provoked me with their nothings (הבל).”

What about “their covenant loyalty” (חסד)? The third-person masculine plural suffix on “their covenant love” could be subjective or objective.

Subjective: “Their covenant love toward God.” Maintaining allegiance to idols is a violation of one’s covenant obligations toward God.

“[I]dols represent not only ineffectiveness; worshiping them also shows a lack of faith in Yahweh. For any Israelite to trust in idol worship was a violation of the covenant. Covenant loyalty (חסד) (was a mutual obligation both of God, the initiator of the covenant (Exod 20:6, etc.), and of the Israelites to whom the covenant was given. Accordingly, one who broke the covenant’s first commandment by having other gods had “abandoned” (עזב) (his or her loyalty to Yahweh.” — DOUGLAS STUART, HOSEA-JONAH, 478.

Objective: “God’s covenant love toward them.” Giving allegiance to idols forfeits the divine covenant commitment that God shows to his faithful people.

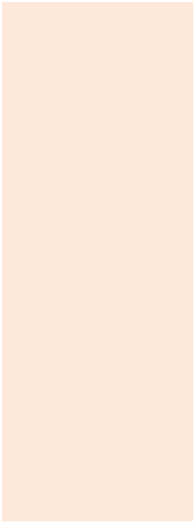
“Here (חסד), “steadfast love,” does not mean human faithfulness. It means the divine attitude which in the Psalter is continually extolled as God’s faithfulness, goodness, and graciousness, which is the one true help for human beings. The third person plural suffix does not refer to the subject of the faithfulness; it means its object (cf. Ps. 59:17; 144:2*), i.e., those to whom the dependable help is given. In 4:2* חסד, as almost always, is one of the divine attributes.” — HANS WALTER WOLFF, A CONTINENTAL COMMENTARY: OBADIAH AND JONAH (MINNEAPOLIS, MN: AUGSBURG PUBLISHING HOUSE, 1986), 138.*

The source of the quotation in Psalm 31:7 clarifies that “God’s covenant loyalty” is likely in view (the “objective” view).

<p><i>I hate those who keep worthless idols, and as for me I trust in Yahweh, I rejoice and am glad in your covenant loyalty for you have seen my affliction you have known my distress.</i></p> <p>PSALM 31:6</p>	<p><i>Those who keep hold of worthless idols abandon their covenant loyalty, and as for me, I will sacrifice to you with a voice of thanksgiving.</i></p> <p>JONAH 2:8</p>
<p>Psalm 31:7: שונאתי השמרים הבלי שוא ואני אל יהוה בטחתי ואשמחה בחסדך</p> <p>Jonah 2:10: משמרים הבלי שוא חסדם יעזבו ואני בקול תודה אזבחה לך</p>	

“This statement by the poet at this point...must be a summation of his experience and the lesson he has learned from it... Yet the sentence by itself, a generalized impersonal statement about the fate of those who ‘regard lying vanities’ tells us nothing... The sentence surprises us by its appearance, and puzzles us by having no obvious relationship to the experienced described in the poem. So we are forced to go to the only other place where an answer might lie, namely the original source of the phrase in Psalm 31. And here we have a clue in the form of a first person statement: “I hate,” which is significantly absent in our poem. We are thus led to conclude that the speaker in our poem no longer hates the worshippers of idols but accepts instead that if they continue to regard their idols (the Piel form suggesting a repeated action or a more intense form of attachment), then they will ultimately exhaust the mercy which is bestowed upon them by Go, they will forsake their חסד. Thus, the speaker has come to accept a more tolerant, though still rather grudging, view of idolators.” — JONATHAN MAGONET, FORM AND MEANING, 46.

“To ally oneself with idols is folly, for they can give no help. Other gods are contemptuously dismissed as useless idols, worthless nonentities. The contrast in ch. 1 between the ineffectual prayer each to his own god and the answered prayer to Yahweh, sovereign over the sea, is echoed in the declaration and denial of vv. 7, 8. In its original setting this section of the psalm envisaged Israelites who betrayed the covenant by resorting to the worship of other gods, and recorded the speaker’s dissociation from them in a profession of complete loyalty and so accessibility to Yahweh’s favor. Cutting themselves off from Yahweh’s aid, they only “multiply their sorrows” (Ps. 16:4). His grace, the loyal love that rushes to the aid of his own at their first cry, in the psalm’s present context not only glances back to Jonah’s deliverance but hints at that of the sailors who abandoned their own gods and relied upon Yahweh. This hint is to be taken up in ch. 4.” — LESLIE C. ALLEN, THE BOOKS OF JOEL, OBADIAH, JONAH, AND MICAH, 218–219.



Session 35: What's Going on With Jonah's Prayer? (Q&R)

Key Question

What about you? What questions or observations do you have about what's happening in Jonah's prayer?

Session Quote

"So what is Jonah's idol? It's not a molten calf (Exodus 32). It's a vision of the good life that doesn't include God's authority over him."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Unit 7: Jonah 3

SESSIONS: 36—39

Session 36: Jonah’s One-Day Walk Into Nineveh

Key Question

In the beginning of Jonah 3, we read that “Nineveh was a going of three days.” But we also read that Jonah goes into the city “one day.” The biblical authors are intentional and selective about what they include in their stories. What are some possible reasons for the author’s inclusion of this detail? What might the author want us to understand?

Session Quote

“At this point in the book, we should be suspicious of any interpretation that says, “Well, there’s probably nothing important there.” This author uses every syllable to the advantage of advancing the message of the story.”

Jonah’s Sermon and Nineveh’s Response (3:1-10)

Literary Design

A	3:1-4 God’s Actions Toward Nineveh through Jonah <i>“The word of Yahweh came to Jonah...call out the message that I speak to you.” [3:1-2]</i>		
B	I	3:5 The Ninevites Respond <i>“And the Ninevites believed in God and called a fast, and clothed with sackcloth.”</i>	
		II	3:6 The King of Nineveh Responds <i>“He arose from his throne...covered with sackcloth...and sat in the dust.”</i>
	I	3:7-9 The King’s Edict to the Ninevites <i>“Don’t eat anything...or drink water...cover with sackcloth...turn from his evil way.”</i>	
A	3:10 God Responds to the Ninevites Actions <i>“And God saw their actions...and he repented of the evil which he spoke to do to them...” [3:10]</i>		

Observations About this Design

The outer frame (A and A') focuses on God's action in confronting Nineveh and then responding to their response. The inner sections (B) consist of three scenes of repenting, each intensifying the drastic response from (I) all the people to (II) the king, then (III) to the king's edict to all of the people.

Jonah Travels to Nineveh (3:1-4)

Literary Design

- | | |
|---|---|
| A ¹ And <i>the word of Yahweh</i> was to Jonah a second time, saying: | I Now, Nineveh was a great city to God, |
| B ² Arise, go to <i>Nineveh the great city</i> , | II a walking of three days. |
| C and <i>call out</i> to it the calling-out which <i>I am speaking</i> to you. | I' ⁴ And Jonah began to go into the <i>city</i> |
| B' ³ And Jonah arose and he went to <i>Nineveh</i> , | II' a walking of one day, |
| A' according to <i>the word of Yahweh</i> . | III and <i>he called out</i> , and he said, |
| | IV "Forty days, and Nineveh is overturned." |

3:1-3a is designed as a symmetry, with a focus on Yahweh's "word" and "speech." All forms of the Hebrew word דבר punctuate the opening, middle, and concluding lines (A, C, A').

3:3b-4 is designed as a stair-step series.

- I and II introduce Nineveh's metaphorical greatness to God, followed by its physical greatness in size.
 - I' shows Jonah going by God's commission to the great city.
 - II' shows his entrance into the huge city.

But notice the difference between II and II'. We're told that the city was "three day's walking," but then we learn that Jonah only walked "one day's walking" into the city. This disconnect between God's command and Jonah's response should alert our suspicions that all is not well in Jonah's response.

"Nineveh was a city great to God" (3:3): Jonathan Magonet (*Form and Meaning*, 32-33) discusses this as one of many "growing phrases" in the book. This is a technique of thematic repetition that adds words to phrases as they appear throughout the book, each addition giving further clarification to the theme's significance in the book.

1:2: "Go to *Nineveh, the great city*."

3:2: "Go to *Nineveh, the great city*."

3:3: "And *Nineveh* was a *great city* to God."

4:11: "Shouldn't I have pity on *Nineveh, the great city*,
which has in it more than 120,000 people...?"

"At first we know only of Nineveh's size and its wickedness that has arisen to God... But when in chapter 3 Jonah comes to the city, then it is revealed as being a great city 'to God.' As yet we don't know whether this only concerns its great evil (as in 1:2) and its imminent punishment, or if the phrase implies some other relationship to God. It's only in chapter 4, which ends with God's question, that the fullness of the implications of the city's relationship to God and even its size is spelled out: the myriads who don't know their right from left hand and all their cattle." — MAGONET, FORM AND MEANING: LITERARY TECHNIQUES IN THE BOOK OF JONAH, 32-33.

"Three days walking" (3:4a):

"About Nineveh's size, Bewer (1912: 50-52) gives ample citations from classical sources, most of which accentuate its inordinate size. R. D. Barnett (1968) and L. C. Allen (1976: 221-22) refer to archaeological and cuneiform sources showing that at its zenith Nineveh was about three miles on its widest axis, almost eight miles in circumference, and occupied about 1,850 acres. Because in a three-day march individuals normally cover thirty to forty miles, some scholars imagine that the narrator is referring to 'greater' Nineveh, that is, the city and its outlying territories and cities (as in Genesis 10:11-12). Be that as it may, we are not likely to gain much by testing the validity of Jonah's 'three-day walk/journey' against Nineveh's actual dimensions. 'Three-day' merely establishes that a large space separates two positions (see especially Gen 30:36 and Exod 3:18). Strikingly similar in vocabulary and spirit is the way the Greeks remembered Babylon's size. Herodotus tells us (1.191) that it took a long time before news reached the town's center that the Persians had captured Babylon's fortifications. Aristotle apparently embellishes the same tradition by specifying that the city 'had been taken for three days before some part of the inhabitants became aware of the fact.' In Jonah, the phrase also prepares us to learn about Nineveh's immense population (4:11). More immediately, however, 'three-day walk' sets up an obvious contrast with the 'one-day walk' of the next." — JACK M. SASSON, JONAH, 230-231.

The mention of "three days" also recalls Jonah's "three days/three nights" journey in the belly of the fish. In fact, the name "Nineveh" in popular Akkadian (the semitic dialect used in ancient Assyria) sounds like "Nina," a river goddess symbolized by a fish.

"If the thesis of a link between the name of the city and the fish is correct, the story incorporates an ironic play on words that enhances readers' enjoyment: Jonah tries to flee in the opposite direction, to get as far as possible from 'Fish City' and avoid performing his mission. But the Lord intervenes and sees to it that he winds up in a fish all the same—first a marine creature and then the metropolis." — Yael Shemesh, "'AND MANY BEASTS' (JONAH 4:11): THE FUNCTION AND STATUS OF ANIMALS IN THE BOOK OF JONAH," P. 12.

Jonah's Five-Word Sermon (3:4)

3:4: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh is overturned (*nehpaket* / נהפכת)."

The root *hapak* (הפ"ך) is overwhelmingly connected to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction throughout the Hebrew Bible.

*Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah
brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven,
and he overthrew those cities, and all the valley,
and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what
grew on the ground.*

GENESIS 19:25

*Thus it came about, when God destroyed the
cities of the valley, that God remembered
Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the
overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in
which Lot lived.*

GENESIS 19:29

*All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning
waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass
grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and
Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord
overthrew in his anger and in his wrath.*

DEUTERONOMY 29:23

*And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory
of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God
overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.*

ISAIAH 13:19

*Edom will become an object of horror; everyone
who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss at
all its wounds. "Like the overthrow of Sodom
and Gomorrah with its neighbors," says the
Lord, "no one will live there, nor will a son of
man reside in it."*

JEREMIAH 49:18

*"I sent a plague among you after the manner of
Egypt... Yet you have not repented to me,"
declares the Lord. "I overthrew you, as God
overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah... Yet you have
not repented to me," declares the Lord.*

AMOS 4:11

However, the verb *hapak* can also be used in a more general sense of "turned over" = "transformed/changed."

*The Lord your God would not listen to Balaam
but changed the curse into a blessing for you.*

DEUTERONOMY 23:6

*You changed my wailing into dancing;
You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.*

PSALM 30:11

*He who made the Pleiades and Orion,
And changes deep darkness into morning,
Who also darkens day into night.*

AMOS 5:8

*Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you
mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be
changed into another man.*

1 SAMUEL 10:6

Interpretive Challenges with Jonah's Short Sermon

Jonah obeys the *second* divine commission to go to Nineveh, but does he announce the message God intended for him?

Jonah predicts the "overturning" of Nineveh within forty days, which he clearly intends as an announcement of destruction. If this was in fact Yahweh's message given to Jonah, it was either inaccurate or it failed to be fulfilled. If Yahweh's truthfulness is to be protected, then there are a few logical options for interpretation (see Ray Lubeck, "Prophetic Sabotage: Another Look at Jonah 3:2-4," 37-38):

1. Jonah did deliver Yahweh's message exactly as he received it, but both he, Yahweh, the Ninevites, and we as readers are meant to understand it as something else, namely, that it is a conditional threat which will not be carried out if Nineveh repents.

That this was [Yahweh's] message ... is self-evident since it was the message which Jonah actually delivered." — M. ZLOTOWITZ, YONAH: A NEW TRANSLATION WITH A COMMENTARY (BROOKLYN: MESSORAH, 1980) 119.

[T]hese words are not what Jonah composed, but are exactly what Yahweh told him to say." — DOUG STUART HOSEA-JONAH (WBC 31; WACO: WORD, 1987) 489.

Problem: the king clearly understands the oracle as an irreversible prediction of judgment (3:8-9: "Let each man turn from his wicked way! Who knows, God might turn and relent!"). While prophets do recognize that oracles of judgment might be averted by repentance (Jeremiah 18:7-10), those oracles are almost always accompanied by a call to repent.

2. Jonah delivered the message as given to him by God, but he knew beforehand that it was false (and thus he fled as he says in 4:2). Yahweh never intended to execute it, but his threat is justifiable on the grounds that it achieved a higher good, the repentance of the Ninevites.

"[T]he biblical story is not about a prophet but about an unfulfilled prophecy. God's wonderful graciousness here explains the failure of Jonah's prediction."
— E. BICKERMANN, FOUR STRANGE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE (NEW YORK: SCHOCKEN, 1967) 38, CF. 32.

"This is the mysterious paradox of Hebrew faith: The All-wise and Almighty may change a word that He proclaims." — A. J. HESCHEL, THE PROPHETS (NEW YORK: HARPER & ROW, 1962) 286

Problems: This interpretation technically makes Jonah a false prophet (a big deal in Deuteronomy 18), intentionally proclaiming a word he knows is not true. It also portrays God as bearing false witness.

3. Jonah did not utter the message Yahweh gave him but altered or abbreviated it to suit his own purposes. Instead of delivering an original, conditional message of judgment and repentance, Jonah stated the oracle so that the Ninevites would understand it as a pronouncement of irrevocable judgment.

Problems:

- This portrays Jonah as being in a state of continued rebellion and disobedience to God, which is entirely possible.
 - “This portrays Jonah as distorting God’s word.” Exactly! Jonah is consistently portrayed as an unreliable character whose words evade every person who speaks with him (the sailors in 1:8-9, and God in 4:3-4 and 4:8-9).
4. Jonah faithfully uttered the message, but God is continuing to “teach a lesson” to Jonah. The message is worded ambiguously, so that Jonah will think “overturned” means “destroyed,” whereas God knows that it means “changed,” anticipating Nineveh’s response.

Problems (and solutions):

- This view depicts God as a “trickster” who knows Jonah will be motivated by a message of destruction. But by capitalizing on the potential double meaning, God can be faithful to the word of the prophet while also overcoming Jonah’s hatred.
- This “divine trick” prepares us for the next lesson for Jonah in chapter 4: the vine, the worm, and the wind.

“The ambiguity of ‘overturned’ amounts to a kind of pun. The word can mean to overthrow and destroy, but also to turn over, around, so that one thing becomes another... Some such transformation or conversion...seems to be what the Lord had in mind, if indeed these are the exact words given to Jonah to speak. So it may be that the Lord has fooled Jonah, giving him a message containing more good news than Jonah realizes. We need not suppose that the God of the Bible is above such fooling. Think of how he plays Pharaoh in the story of the Exodus, by at first proposing just a brief trip of three days for the Israelites (like Jonah’s time in the fish!) to worship their God... God outwits and out maneuvers him, luring him into a trap to overcome his evil... So too with Jonah, and we can imagine ancient Israelites telling this story aloud and chuckling. It’s not as if Pharaoh, or Jonah, didn’t deserve it.” — PHILIP CARY, JONAH, 109.

“By the end of the third chapter (in fact, as soon as v 5 tells us that the Ninevites “believed in God”), God becomes more playful with Jonah, more tolerant of his caustic responses, more willing to indulge his stubbornness. As we shall also see, the narrative itself becomes more whimsical; more indulgent, I may say, in that it veers from attacking issues frontally. As we observe this shift in character, mood, and temper, we begin to wonder whether God’s great deeds at sea, below waters, and within Nineveh are but mere exhibits for a prophet’s education. All these modifications will be necessary because, to the last, the narrator needs to keep Jonah oblivious of the little games that Hebrew words can play.” — JACK M. SASSON, JONAH, VOL. 24B, ANCHOR YALE BIBLE, 268.



Session 37: Jonah's Five-Word Sermon to the Ninevites

Key Question

What do you make of Jonah's short sermon to the Ninevites? What does Jonah not say to the Ninevites that we might expect him to say?

Session Quote

"Everybody's awake to God except Jonah in the story."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 38: Does God Change his Mind?

Key Question

How do you understand the idea that God changes his mind or relents (*nikham*)? How does this understanding affect how you and others in your context view God and interact with him?

Session Quote

"This word (nikham) invites us into the deep mystery of the creator's purpose to genuinely partner with humans in the course of history."

The Repentance of Nineveh (3:5-10)

Literary Design

A	⁵ And the men of Nineveh believed in God, and they called a fast, and they were clothed with sackcloth, from the great of them and to the small of them.			The Ninevites Respond
	I	⁶ And the word reached to the king of Nineveh		
B	II	and he arose from his throne		The King Responds
		III	and he removed his robe from upon him	
		III'	and he covered with sackcloth	
		II'	and he sat in the dust.	
	I'	⁷ And he cried out and he said:		

A'	"In Nineveh, from order of the king and his great ones, saying:		The King's Edict
	I	the human and the beast, the cattle and the flock, don't let them taste anything;	
	II	don't let them graze; and don't let them drink water, ⁸and let them cover themselves with sackcloth,	
	I'	the human and the beast, and let them call to god with force,	
	II'	and let each man turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.	
	⁹Who knows? The god may turn and repent and turn from the heat of his anger, so that we will not perish.		
C	¹⁰And God saw their doings, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented concerning the evil which he spoke to do to them, and he did not do it.		God's Response to the Ninevites Repentance

Observations

The actions of the Ninevites (A) anticipate the edict of the king (A'). They fast before they're told to, and their "belief" is a forward fulfillment of the king's call to "turn and repent." This characterizes the people as so eager to repent that the king's edict only states explicitly what they are already inclined to do without being commanded.

In B, notice how the king's actions are a symmetrical mirror. A word comes to the king (I) and then goes out from him (I'). He rises from his throne (II) and then sits down in ashes (II'). And at the center, he takes off his royal robe (III) only to put on sackcloth (III'). It's a complete reversal of his words, his role in society, and his symbols of high status.

In A', there is a forward symmetry so that in I and I', the king's edict addresses human and beast, while in II and II', we have an increasing series of deprivations ("don't let them..."), leading up to the ultimate prohibition: "let each turn from his evil way..."

In C, there is a climactic ending as God responds to the Ninevites' response. His actions match the actions of the Ninevites. They repent, so he relents.

Faithful Ninevites (3:5)

The depiction of the Ninevites' faith in God activates an analogy with the Israelites immediately after their rescue from the sea. Recall that the first half of this analogy was applied to the sailors in Jonah 1:16, and now the second half is applied to the Ninevites in Jonah 3:5.

Exodus 14:31	The Sailors and the Ninevites
After they are rescued from the sea...	After they are rescued from danger, as Jonah is rescued from the sea.
And the Israelites saw the great hand which Yahweh acted against Egypt and the people feared Yahweh (וַיִּירָאוּ אֶת יְהוָה) and they believed in Yahweh (ב' וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ) and in Moses his servant.	1:16 And the sailors feared Yahweh (וַיִּירָאוּ יְהוָה) a great fear...
	3:5 And the men of Nineveh believed in God (וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ בֵּאלֹהִים).

This analogy creates an ironic contrast, as Jonah is the one being rescued from the sea. But unlike the Exodus story, it is the pagan sailors and Ninevites who fear and believe in God!

Repenting Ninevites and a Relenting God (3:9-10)

The king's edict to the Ninevites activates analogies with both Moses and Jeremiah.

Moses	The Ninevites	Jeremiah
<p>Moses to Yahweh: Turn from the heat of your anger (שׁוּב מִחֲרוֹן אַפֶּיךָ) and relent concerning the evil (הַרְעָה...הַנָּחֵם) toward your people.</p> <p>EXODUS 32:12B</p>	<p>Let each man turn from his evil way (הִרְעֵהוּ וּשְׁבוּ אִישׁ מִדְרָכּוֹ)... Who knows, God may relent and turn from the heat of his anger (מִחֲרוֹן אִי) and we will not perish!</p> <p>JONAH 3:8-9</p>	<p>I may speak concerning a nation...to destroy it, but if that nation turns from its evil (תִּמְרָעוּתוֹשֵׁב), then I will relent concerning the evil I planned to do to it (לַעֲשׂוֹת לָאוֹנוֹחַמִּתִּי עַל־הִרְעָה אֲשֶׁר) (חֲשַׁבְתִּי).</p> <p>JEREMIAH 18:7-18</p>
<p>And Yahweh relented concerning the evil which he spoke to do to his people. (דִּבְרֵי וַיִּנָּחֵם) (לַעֲשׂוֹת לְעַמּוּיָהוּ עַל־הִרְעָה אֲשֶׁר).</p> <p>EXODUS 32:14</p>	<p>And God saw...that they turned from their evil way (מִדְרָכָם הִרְעָה שְׁבוּ) and God relented concerning the evil which he spoke to do to them (אֲשֶׁר וַיִּנָּחֵם אֱלֹהִים עַל) (דִּבְרֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם הִרְעָה).</p> <p>JONAH 3:10</p>	<p>Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way (וּשְׁבוּ אִישׁ מִדְרָכּוֹ הִרְעָה), and I will relent concerning the evil which I am planning to do to them. (אֲנִי נִיחָמְתִּי) (חֲשַׁבְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם אֲלֵהִרְעָה אֲשֶׁר).</p> <p>JEREMIAH 26:3</p>

In both the stories of Moses and Jeremiah, the prophet plays the role of mediator. Moses appeals to God to "turn" from his just anger and not do "evil" to the people. Jeremiah appeals to the people to "turn" from their "evil" so God will relent from the "evil" he plans to do.

The irony is that Jonah, unlike Moses and Jeremiah, has abdicated his role as prophetic mediator, yet unlike the Jerusalemmites, the Ninevites do repent!

God's Repentance (3:10)

In Jonah 3:10, God sees the repentance of the Ninevites, so he “relents” of the disaster he had spoken to do to them. This vocabulary of human and divine repentance permeates the Hebrew Scriptures and gives us important insight into the purposes and ways of God in his dealings with humans.

The Vocabulary

When humans “repent” from evil, they *shuv* (pronounced *shoove*). It literally means to “turn around.”

When God “repents” from bringing evil on evil people, he can *shuv*, but there is an additional word used, *nikham*, which means “to relent, be satisfied.”

The root *nikham* is capable of different nuances based on context. In the active/causative form (*piel*) it can mean to comfort or change someone’s emotional or mental state.

*And Isaac married Rebekah...and he was
comforted after his mother's death.*

GENESIS 24:67

*Jacob's sons and daughters came to comfort him,
but he refused to be comforted.*

GENESIS 37:35

In the reflexive form (*niphal*) it can mean to regret a past action or to change one’s mind about a future action.

*And Yahweh regretted that he had made humanity
on the land, and his heart was deeply pained.*

GENESIS 6:6

*And the angel stretched out his hand to destroy
Jerusalem, and Yahweh relented concerning the
evil and said...“Stop your hand.”*

2 SAMUEL 24:16

In each example of Yahweh’s relenting, it concerns his purpose to bring judgment or blessing on violent people.

At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it. If that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the evil I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it. If it does evil in my sight by not obeying my voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I had promised to bless it.

JEREMIAH 18:7-10

The God of the Bible has partnered himself with humans (Genesis 1:26-28), and he experiences emotional pain over their evil (Genesis 6:6). God is portrayed as carrying out his ultimate purposes for history and all creation, regardless of what humans do. This is what is meant in texts that portray God as not changing his mind, even in the midst of situations where he is clearly responding to human decisions.

15:10-11: *Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: “I **nikham** that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from following me and has not carried out my commands.”*

15:28-29: *Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you. **He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or nikham; for he is not a human being, that he should nikham.**”*

15:35: *Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord **nikham** that he had made Saul king over Israel.*

1 SAMUEL 15

****The statement in 15:29 is matched by Numbers 23:19: **God is not a human, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he would nikham;** has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not make it good?**

The “relenting” of God because of the Ninevites’ repentance is a hyperlinked inversion of the golden calf story in Exodus 32. There Moses stepped into his role as mediator (unlike Jonah), and his intercession is what compels God to relent.

Then Yahweh said to Moses... “Now then let me alone (הניחה lit. “give me rest”), that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.” But Moses entreated the Lord his God.

EXODUS 32:10-11

Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, adapted quote from pages 78-79:

This story explores the mystery about prayer in general and intercession in particular, and raises questions: Was God really serious in this declared threat? If Moses had not interceded, would God have carried out the destruction of Israel? If God was not really planning to destroy the people, did God only “pretend” to listen to Moses’ prayer? Did Moses actually change God’s mind?

It seems important first of all to say that there is not much point in wrestling with these alternative hypothetical scenarios posed by such questions. Both God and Moses appear to be behaving straightforwardly. There is nothing in the text to suggest that God’s anger was overdone for mere effect. The threat of destruction was real, and Moses recognized that this was a sincere threat that could be countered only with appeal to prior words and actions of the same God.

The real paradox is that in appealing to God to change, Moses was actually appealing to God to be consistent, which may be a significant clue to the dynamic of all genuine intercessory prayer. Yet perhaps there is a hint of the divine intention in God’s fascinating words, “Leave me alone...” The discussion of this line in Jewish scholarship has sensed deep meaning here. After all, God need not have spoken such words, or indeed any words at all, to Moses. In wrath God could have acted “immediately” without informing or consulting Moses in any way. God pauses and makes the divine will “vulnerable” to human challenge.

The fact is that, far from human intercession being an irritating but occasionally successful intrusion upon divinely prefabricated blueprints for history, Moses' prayer becomes an integral part of the way God's sovereignty in history is exercised. That does not totally solve the mystery, but it puts it in its proper biblical perspective. God not only allows human intercession, God invites it and builds it into the decision-making processes of the heavenly council in ways we can never fathom. Intercessory prayer, then, flows primarily not from human anxiety about God but from God's commitment to covenant relationship with human beings. Moses was not so much arguing against God, as participating in an argument within God. Such prayer, therefore, not only participates in the pain of God in history, but is actually invited to do so for God's sake as well as ours. This is a measure of the infinite value to God of commitment to persons in covenant relationship.



Session 39: God's Response to the Ninevites (Q&R)

Key Question

What about you? What questions do you have on this topic?

Session Quote

"What Paul makes really clear is that, on the cross, we see God killing off the thing that's killing us, precisely so that humanity can become what it's called to be. But we're not passive in the process. We have to choose."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Unit 8: Jonah 4

SESSIONS: 40—45

Session 40: Jonah as Similar to the Disbelieving Israelites

Key Question

Why is Jonah so angry? What clues does the text give us? How might we be guilty of similar attitudes in our modern-day context?

Session Quote

“The hyperlink with the disbelieving Israelites makes Jonah’s response even more ridiculous than it already is. He’s acting like he hasn’t been rescued.”

Jonah Criticizes God’s Mercy (4:1-11)

Literary Design

The macro-design of verses 1-11 has a symmetrical design.

A	And it was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and there was heat-anger to him. And he prayed to Yahweh and he said, “Please, Yahweh! Was not this my word while I was upon my land? Therefore I acted beforehand to flee to Tarshish, because I knew that you are a God, gracious and compassionate, long of anger, and great of covenant love, and who repents concerning evil.	Speech of Jonah 39 Words in Hebrew
B	a And now, Yahweh, please take my life from me, b for good is my dying more than my living. c And Yahweh said, “Is it good that there is heat-anger to you?”	Jonah and God Dialogue
C	And Jonah went out from the city, and he sat from the east of the city, and he made for himself there a tent, and he dwelt under it in the shade, until he might see what would happen to the city.	Jonah’s Shelter from the Sun
D	And Yahweh Elohim appointed a qiqayon and it arose from over Jonah, to be a shade upon his head, to deliver him from his evil, and Jonah rejoiced over the qiqayon, a great rejoicing.	God Provides Shelter

	D'	<i>And God appointed a worm at the rising of the dawn on the next day, and it struck the qiqayon and it withered.</i>	God Ruins Shelter
	C'	<i>And it came about as the sun shone and God appointed an east wind, a hot one, and the sun struck the upon the head of Jonah.</i>	No Shelter from the Sun
	B'	<i>a and he fainted, and he requested his life, to die, b and he said, "Good is my dying than my living." c And God said to Jonah, "Is it good that there is heat-anger to you over this qiqayon?" b' And he said, "It is good that there is heat-anger to me, unto death!"</i>	Jonah and God Dialogue
A'		<i>And Yahweh said, "You had pity over this qiqayon, which you did not labor for it, nor did you make it great, which a son of the night it was, and a son of the night it perished. And I, should I not have pity over Nineveh, the great city, which there is in it more than twelve ten-thousand humans, who don't know between their right and their left, and many animals?"</i>	Speech of God 39 Words in Hebrew

Jonah's Anger at His Success (4:1-4)

Literary Design

A	<i>And it was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and there was heat-anger to him.</i>	Genesis 4 Hyperlinks
B	<i>And he prayed to Yahweh and he said, "Please, Yahweh (יהוה אנה) was not this my word while I was upon my land?"</i>	Exodus 14 Hyperlinks
C	<i>Therefore I acted beforehand to flee to Tarshish, because I knew that you are a God, gracious and compassionate, long of anger, and great of covenant love, and who repents concerning evil.</i>	Exodus 34:6 Hyperlink
B'	<i>And now, Yahweh (יהוה ועתה) take please my life from me, for good is my dying more than my living.</i>	Exodus 14 Hyperlinks
A'	<i>And Yahweh said, "Is it good that there is heat-anger to you?"</i>	Genesis 4 Hyperlinks

Observations

This section begins and ends focused on Jonah's hot-anger, which was caused by God showing mercy to the Ninevites (A and A'). The shift from narrative statement (A) to God's question (A') generates a new plot conflict now that Jonah's mission to Nineveh has been fulfilled. Jonah's own stubbornness must be dealt with.

The center sections contain Jonah's three-part response to Yahweh. It includes an appeal (B), the basis of the appeal (C), and a request (B').

Hyperlinked Portraits of the Angry Jonah

Jonah and Cain in Genesis 4

And [God's showing mercy to Nineveh] was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and there was heat-anger to him (ל ויחר-).

JONAH 4:1

And Yahweh regarded Abel and his offering, but Cain and his offering he did not regard, and there was heat-anger to Cain (ל ויחר-).

GENESIS 4:4B-5

And Yahweh said, "Is it doing good that there is heat-anger to you (להיטב לך חרה)?"

JONAH 4:4

"Why is there heat-anger to you (לך חרה)? Isn't it the case that if you do good (תיטיב), there is exaltation?"

GENESIS 4:6-7

In Genesis 4, Cain is angered by God's choice to show favor to Abel instead of himself. This leads to anger, murder, and a further exile east of Eden. In Jonah's case, he too is angry by God's mercy on Nineveh, which leads to anger and a desire for his own death (because the death of his enemies is now impossible) and an exile further east.

Jonah and the Exodus Generation in Exodus 14 [cf. Kelly, "Jonah, Joel, and Exodus 34:6-7"]

Exodus 14:12-13	Jonah 4:2-3, 5
Is this not the word which we spoke to you in Egypt? saying, "Leave us alone, and let us serve the Egyptians!"	And Jonah prayed to Yahweh and said: "Please, Yahweh. Was this not my word while I was still on my own land?" Therefore I initially fled to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a God, gracious and compassionate, long of anger, and abundant in covenant love, and relenting concerning evil,
For it is good (טוב) for us to serve Egypt rather than we die (מותנו מן) in the wilderness.	And now, Yahweh, please take my life from me, for good (טוב) is my death more than (מן מותי) my life.
And Moses said to the people: "Do not fear, stand by and see the salvation of Yahweh which he will accomplish for you today, for Egypt which you see today, you will not see again, ever."	And Jonah went outside of the city, and he sat east of the city, and made himself a shelter and sat under its shade, until he could see what might happen in the city.

In Exodus 14:11-13, the people have escaped into the wilderness and are seeing the armies of Pharaoh drawing near. They accuse Moses of leading them out to the desert to die ("What is this thing you've done to us?"). And absurdly, they wish for their death in the wilderness. Moses assures them that despite their whining, Yahweh will save them and overcome their enemies as they go through the waters of the sea.

In Jonah 4:2-5, Jonah, who was saved through the waters of the sea, has just left the city of Nineveh, and he also absurdly wishes for death. In contrast to Exodus 14, Yahweh is changing and saving his enemies instead of destroying them.

Jonah and Yahweh in Exodus 34:6

Exodus 34:6	Jonah 4:2	Joel 2:12-14
<p><i>Then Yahweh passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "Yahweh, Yahweh, compassionate and gracious, long of anger, and great of covenant love and faithfulness..."</i> <i>[Exod 32:14] And Yahweh relented concerning the evil he spoke to do to them.</i></p>	<p><i>Therefore I acted beforehand to flee to Tarshish because I knew that you are a God gracious and compassionate, long of anger, and great of covenant love, and who relents concerning evil.</i></p>	<p><i>"Yet even now," declares Yahweh, "Return to me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning; And rend your heart and not your garments."</i> <i>Now return to Yahweh your God, For he is gracious and compassionate, Long of anger, abounding in covenant love And relents concerning evil. Who knows if he might turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him.</i></p>

In Exodus 32-34, Israel was spared from divine judgment because of Moses' intercession. God's forgiveness of Israel and his renewal of the covenant is summarized in this dense list of God's attributes. These are precisely the character traits of God displayed in the story of the golden calf, and they are paradigmatic for the following history of Israel. Notice how both Jonah and Joel have merged the list from Exodus 34:6 with the narrative statement about Yahweh "relenting concerning evil." God's relenting is precisely due to Moses' intercession.

In Jonah 4, the prophet ironically criticizes God for the very attributes that have sustained his existence in the family of Israel. He is angered that God would show the same mercy to his enemies. Also ironic is that the Ninevites repented as Israel did in the golden calf story, but this time without any intercessor because Jonah has been an anti-Moses!

"We must be clear where Jonah gets it wrong. It's not as if we should never desire justice... It is good news when an oppressor is toppled, the terrorist caught, and the torturer brought to justice. The Lord does indeed "take vengeance on his enemies" (as Nahum says of Nineveh in Nah 1:2), for he is the enemy of all who destroy his world. But the great danger is that instead of simply rejoicing at the vindication of the oppressed, we self-righteously identify ourselves as the oppressed, taking pity on ourselves and not on others. In our imaginations, the Lord becomes a weapon in our campaign to destroy our enemies, an instrument of our own revenge rather than the righteous judge of all the earth... But the biblical theme of God's "repentance concerning evil" means that the God of Israel is more inclined to save his enemies than destroy them... This has particular consequences for God's covenant people... It creates a two-sidedness to their calling...to be the vehicle of God's blessing to all the nations (Genesis 12:1-3)... so that their enemies are not necessarily God's enemies... The repentance of God is not about God changing his mind, but is the fulfillment of his intention to save the wicked, which brings about a new and surprising relation between him and his enemies—surprising to us, but not to him." — PHILLIP CARY, JONAH [BRAZOS THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE], 160-161.



Session 41: Why is Jonah so Angry? (Q&R)

Key Question

What about you? What questions do you have on this topic?

Session Quote

"What makes Jonah so mad? God's favor shown toward other people and God not bringing the kind of justice that I think he ought to bring."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 42: A Tale of Two Shelters

Key Question

In chapter 4 of Jonah, we are presented with an object lesson where Jonah builds a shelter, then God provides shelter, then Jonah's shelter is taken away, then God removes his shelter. What is the point of this lesson? Why are these object lessons so helpful for teaching?

Session Quote

"The sukkah was something that the Israelites built once a year, not to provide their own Eden but to remind them of the gift of Eden's blessings that God provides for them. The whole point of the sukkah was to remind you of God's provision of Eden."

Jonah's Shelter and God's Worm (4:5-8)

Literary Design

This section has a symmetrical design.

A	a	and Jonah went out from the city ,	Jonah's Shelter from the Sun
	a'	and he sat from the east of the city ,	
	b	and he made for himself there a tent,	
	b'	and he sat under it in the shade ,	
B	a''	until he might see what would happen to the city .	God Provides Plant Shelter
	a	And Yahweh Elohim appointed a qiqayon	
	b	and it arose from over Jonah,	
	b'	to be a shade upon his head,	
B'	b'	to deliver him from his evil,	God Ruins Plant Shelter
	a'	and Jonah rejoiced over the qiqayon , a great rejoicing.	
		And God appointed a worm	
		at the rising of the dawn on the next day,	
A'		and it struck the qiqayon	No Shelter from the Sun
		and it withered.	
		And it came about as the sun shone	
		and God appointed an east wind , a hot one,	
		and the sun struck the upon the head of Jonah.	

Observations

A and A' provide the outer frame that contrasts Jonah's provision of his own shelter with his lack of shelter that exposes him to the burning sun.

B and B' provide a two-step sequence for the provision of a divine shelter and then God's destruction of that shelter. Jonah's experience of building and then losing his shelter frame the inner scenes where God provides and then ruins the plant.

Jonah's Journey East and His Self-Made Shelter

The opening line in 4:5 recalls the analogies with Cain in Genesis 4:1 and 4:4 and develops them further. Jonah's departure from Nineveh is depicted as a self-inflicted exile like Cain's.

Jonah in Jonah 4	Cain in Genesis 4
4:1 <i>And [God's showing mercy to Nineveh] was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and there was heat-anger to him (ל ויחר).</i>	4:4B-5 <i>And Yahweh regarded Abel and his offering, but Cain and his offering he did not regard, and there was heat-anger to Cain (ל ויחר).</i>
4:4 <i>And Yahweh said, "Is it doing good that there is heat-anger to you (לך חרה ההיטב לך)?"</i>	4:6-7 <i>"Why is there heat-anger to you (לך חרה)? Isn't it the case that if you do good (תטיב), there is exaltation?"</i>
4:5 <i>And Jonah went out (ויצא) from the city and he sat from the east of the city (מקדם וישב) and made for himself a sukkah and he sat (וישב) under it.</i>	4:16 <i>And Cain went out (ויצא) from before the face of Yahweh and he sat (וישב) in the land of Nod, to the east of Eden (עדן קדמת).</i> 4:17 <i>And he built a city, and called the name of the city according to the name of his son "Enoch."</i>

Jonah is being likened to Cain, who rejected Yahweh's offer of forgiveness and protection and journeyed east of Eden and built his own protection in the form of a city (this is itself a wordplay hyperlink contrast to God "building help" for the man in Genesis 2:18: "city" עיר / "help" עזר).

Jonah's *sukkah* (סככה) activates a whole network of associations with God's provision of Eden-protection for his people in the wilderness.

The Feast of Sukkot

From the 15th to the 21st of the seventh month, the Israelites were to celebrate an extended seven-day Sabbath. The ritual practice is about a self-imposed symbolic “exile” from their homes to dwell in a *sukkah*. The description is packed with Eden imagery and symbolizes how God provided Israel with “bits of Eden” during their sojourn in the desert.

And you will take for yourself...from the fruit of the tree (עץ פרי), a majestic one, branches of palm leaves, and a bough of a tree of leaf and poplars by a river, and you will rejoice before Yahweh your God for seven days... In sukkot you will sit (ישב) for seven days.

LEVITICUS 23:40-42

“Taking from the fruit of the tree” (GEN. 3:6)

“Fruit trees” (GEN. 1:11 AND 2:9)

The tree of life is next to the river of life (GEN. 2:9-10).

Creation is completed within seven days (GEN. 2:1-3).

God placed humanity in the garden (GEN. 2:15).

GENESIS 1-3

In Deuteronomy 16, the feast of *Sukkot* was a time for extreme hospitality for outsiders to Israel. This explains why in Zechariah 14, the ingathering of the nations to worship Yahweh in the new Jerusalem takes place during the feast of *Sukkot*.

You shall celebrate the feast of Sukkot seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat; and you shall have joy (שמח) in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the immigrant and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful (שמח).

DEUTERONOMY 16:13-15

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the feast of Sukkot.

ZECHARIAH 14:16

Moses directed Israel to gather during every seventh feast of *Sukkot* and read aloud from the Torah. This practice was carried out by the returnees from the exile to Babylon in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

They found written in the law how the Lord had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, “Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of other leafy trees, to make sukkot, as it is written.” So the people went out and brought them and made sukkot for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made sukkot and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was great rejoicing (גדולה שמחה) He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day.

NEHEMIAH 8:13-18

Then Moses commanded them, saying, “At the end of seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the feast of Sukkot, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place which he will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing.”

DEUTERONOMY 31:10-12

Note: recall Jonah’s “great rejoicing” (גדולה שמחה) over the plant that God provides in Jonah 4:6.

Sukkot, the Temple, and God's Presence

The ark of the covenant dwelt in a "tent" (אהל) (אהל), also called a "shelter" (*sukkah* סכּה).

Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God sits (ישב) in the midst of a (אהל) tent.

2 SAMUEL 7:2

Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are sitting (ישב) in shelters (sukkot סכּוֹת), and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field."

2 SAMUEL 11:11

In the Psalms, God's provision of protection is called a shelter.

How great is your goodness...for those who take refuge in you...you conceal them in the secret place of your face-presence...you hide them in a shelter (סכּה).

PSALM 31:19-20

Sukkot as Jerusalem and the Messianic Jerusalem

Jerusalem as the seat of David's kingdom is likened to a shelter in the Prophets. Thus, the new Jerusalem of the messianic age is called a shelter, which God will build after the full restoration from exile.

The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter (sukkah סכּה) in a vineyard.

ISAIAH 1:8

"In that day I will raise up the fallen shelter (סכּה) of David, And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins And rebuild it as in the days of old; That they may possess the remnant of Edom And all the nations who are called by my name," Declares the Lord who does this.

AMOS 9:11-12

In that day, the branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel. It will come about that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem. When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by a wind of judgment and a wind of burning, then the Lord will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy (חפּה). There will be a shelter (סכּה) for shade (לצל) from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain.

ISAIAH 4:2-6

Note: These texts make very clear that the renewal of Jerusalem in the messianic age will be an act of God, when he creates the ultimate *sukkah* for his people to protect them from the heat of the sun, which is likened to threats from Israel's enemies (see Isaiah 25:4-5 for a development of the metaphor of "enemies as heat from the sun").

Conclusions

These key themes surrounding *sukkot* (celebrating a new Eden, ingathering of the nations, restoration of God's presence in the temple, the renewal of the Davidic kingship) are all brought together in Jonah 4.

When we consider Jonah's appearance in 2 Kings 14:25-26, we recall that he prophesied the restoration of Israel's borders to their Eden-like proportions. Assyria was the nation that reduced those very boundaries (as Amos prophesied in 6:14), so it makes perfect sense that Jonah would leave Nineveh to create a "pseudo-Eden" that rekindles the hopes for a new David and a new Jerusalem. But this messianic age is for himself only, a last resort to thwart or counter Yahweh's plans.

God Provides Jonah with a Plant (4:6)

*a And Yahweh Elohim appointed a **qiqayon**
and it arose from over Jonah,
b to be a **shade** (צל) upon his head,
b' to **deliver** (להציל) him from his evil,
a' and Jonah rejoiced over the **qiqayon**, a great rejoicing.*

4:6a: In all of ancient Hebrew, the *qiqayon* plant name appears only here (קִיקְיֹון). Certainty about the species of plant has eluded scholars for the entire history of interpretation, and one suspects that the real point of its mention is not to discover its botanical identity!

Attempts to Identify the Plant [see Robinson, "Jonah's Qiqayon Plant"]

The oldest translations render the Hebrew term with "gourd."

- Old Greek: κολόκυνθα
- Old Latin: *cucurbita*
- Syriac Peshitta: *qar'a'*

This was adopted in older English translations (eventually KJV, RV).

Some ancient translations rendered it as some kind of ivy.

- Symmachus: κισσος

There is evidence that Jerome's Vulgate, *hedera*, refers to a castor oil plant.

Tyndale, the first English translation, rendered the term "as it were a wild vine."

- Coverdale Bible: "wylde vyne."

There was an Akkadian term used in Assyrian texts (Assyria!), to refer to plants in the royal garden, *kukkanitu*. It is more than likely that our author chose a real botanical term, one that sounds like the language of the Assyrians. But there may be more to it.

The plant's name sounds exactly like words in two related texts from earlier in Jonah.

1:14

Sailors who throw Jonah into the sea:
"Don't put **innocent** blood upon us."

naqî' (נָקִי'): "we will vomit"

1:17 + 2:10

And Yahweh appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah...
and Yahweh spoke to the fish and he vomited Jonah."

יוֹנָה + קָא - yonah' + qa

4:6

And Yahweh Elohim appointed a **qiqayon**

Qi-qa-yon = "vomiting, he vomited Jonah"

"Qiqayon may be a extremely rare word used here to give an exotic flavor to the story. In Jonah 2:11 the author had described how the great fish that God had deployed...had spewed Jonah out (qa'). The plant in Jonah chapter 4 has a similar function to the fish, and this fact may have suggested to the author the rare plant name that is visually similar to the word 'spew.'" — BERNARD

ROBINSON, "JONAH'S QIQAYON PLANT," 402.

4:6b: "And it went up from over Jonah, to be shade over his head, and to deliver him from his evil."

What is Jonah's "evil"? This is most likely a reference back to 4:1. "And it [God's mercy toward the repentant Ninevites] was *evil* to Jonah, a *great evil*." This plant is God's strategy for relieving Jonah of God forgiving his enemies. But how exactly? We have to keep reading.

The two phrases, "to be shade over his head" and "to deliver him from evil," are two parallel lines in the central symmetry of the entire verse: A **B B' A**. This prompts the reader to ponder a conceptual analogy between them: *shade // deliverance*.

4:6c: "And Jonah rejoiced a great joy over the qiqayon."

This is the only time Jonah is happy in the entire story, and it concerns a plant that benefits only him as he sulks in his pitiful anger.

Jonah's "great joy" (גְּדוּלָה שִׂמְחָה) echoes a phrase commonly associated with the feast of Sukkot, which is to be accompanied by "great joy" (Ezra 8:17; also Deut. 16:15).

"Jonah... crawl[s] under the sukkâ that he builds in order to benefit from its shade. Soon, however, God directs the qîqâyôn to shade him from above his head. The pun is directional, depending on a contrasting location for this "shade" (šēl), but it is also versatile: through this divine act meant "to deliver him from his distress," Jonah acquires a satisfying response to his complaint. This plant, marvelously rising above his head, is a sign of a new equilibrium between him and God, of a renewed understanding between the two... From Jonah's perspective, the story can end now on this happy note: Nineveh and its fate are no longer central to Jonah; his difference with God is now resolved. From God's standpoint, however, there is still the matter of educating a prophet on divine mercy. Now that Jonah has turned the issue into a personal, if not physical, problem; now that he has come out from his deep funk, God will readily turn to pedagogic instruments that are too obvious to be misunderstood by Jonah, and by us as well."

— ADAPTED FROM JACK M. SASSON, JONAH, VOL. 24B, ANCHOR YALE BIBLE, 298.

God Appoints a Worm to Eat the Plant (4:7)

And the Elohim appointed a worm

*at the rising of the dawn on the next day,
and it **struck** the **qiqayon**
and it withered.*

4:7a: The “worm” (תולעת)

- There are only two other texts in the Hebrew Bible about worms eating and causing ruin, and both are relevant hyperlinks in Jonah 4.

Exodus 16:20: This phrase appears in the *manna* story, where the Israelites gather much or little but are not to leave any for the next morning.

*The sons of Israel gathered, one very much, and one very little...And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it unto morning." But they did not listen to Moses, and they left from it unto morning, and it was infested **with worms** (תולעה).*

EXODUS 16:17

Deuteronomy 28:39: This phrase appears in a section of “inverted-Eden” curses that will come upon the land because of Israel’s obedience.

*You will bring much seed out to the field, but you will gather little, for the locust will eat it away. You will plant vineyards, and work them, but you will drink no wine and you will not gather, **for the worm** (תולעת) **will eat it.***

DEUTERONOMY 28:38-39

Conclusion: In both of these texts, the worms are sent by God to reverse an Eden blessing. In Exodus 16, the *manna* is called “the bread from the heavens” (Exod. 16:4), and in Deuteronomy 28, the blessings of 28:1-14 are all Eden-like blessings of abundance. And the “worms” are the result of being exiled out of Eden, where animals become hostile instead of peaceable with humans. Worms are also associated with death and decomposing corpses (Isa. 14:11 and 66:24), and so they are the ultimate icon of post-Eden mortality and loss. In this way, the worm is a much more clear instrument of divine judgment than the fish, which plays a more positive role both in Genesis 1 (day 5) and here in this story.

4:7b: The withered vine

The image of a healthy growing vine that quickly withers as a sign of God’s judgment is a common motif in the Prophets for rulers and their kingdoms that grow and quickly pass away.

*All flesh is grass, and all its covenant loyalty like a flower of the field. The grass **withers** and the flower fades, **for the wind of Yahweh blows upon it...***

*...He makes rulers into nothing, and makes the judges of the land like nothingness. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely do they take root, their stock in the ground, and then he **blows** on them and they **wither**, and a storm lifts them away like chaff.*

ISAIAH 40:7-8, 23-24

Israel's monarchy is likened to a flourishing vine that is blown by the east wind so that it withers.

Son of man, propound a riddle and speak a parable to the house of Israel...[an eagle] took some of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil. He placed it beside abundant waters; he set it as a willow. Then it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine with its branches turned toward him, but its roots remained under it. So it became a vine and yielded shoots and sent out branches...Behold, though it is planted, will it thrive? Will it not completely wither as soon as the east wind reaches it—wither on the beds where it grew?

EZEKIEL 17:2-10

*Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard,
Planted by the waters;
It was fruitful and full of branches
Because of abundant waters.
And it had strong branches fit for scepters of rulers,
And its height was raised above the clouds
So that it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches.
But it was plucked up in fury;
It was cast down to the ground;
And the east wind dried up its fruit.
Its strong branch was torn off, so that it withered;*

EZEKIEL 19:10-12

See also Psalm 80; Isaiah 5:1-7; Hosea 10; Joel 1:12-20;

If Jonah's joy over his vine and his subsequent loss of it is a parable to teach him about God's mercy, the royal associations with a ruined vine point in the direction of Israel's history. Just as God provided the line of David for Israel (out of nowhere, like the vine), so too will he take it away (exile).

God Appoints the East Wind to Strike Jonah (4:8a)

*And it came about as the sun shone
and Elohim appointed an east wind, a silent one,
and the sun struck the upon the head of Jonah...*

After Jonah made his own shelter "for shade," God provided a superior shade, namely an Eden-like plant whose name recalls Jonah's own rebellion and its consequences ("vomit"), which have continued to this moment. God continues to muster the forces of creation to bring his own prophet to a similar posture of repentance as the king of Nineveh. So God takes the plant away so that Jonah is exposed to the hot wind and the heat of the sun.

Notice that the east wind and the sun are distinct elements in this scene, and while the function of the sun is clear (it "strikes" Jonah's head), the purpose or result of the east wind is not mentioned.

Sasson (*Jonah*, 304) notes that the east wind does not kill the plant (the worm did that), nor is it associated with the heat (the sun is). Given all of the associations of the east wind with acts of divine judgment (see below), it makes most sense that the purpose of the east wind is to sweep away Jonah's shelter, leaving him open to the bright heat of the sun in the following sentence.

The "east wind" has ominous associations of divine judgment that are drawn upon here.

- Famine is caused by the east wind (Gen. 41:6)
- The locusts are brought to Egypt by an east wind (Exod. 10:13)
- God sends an east wind to part the waters (salvation) and destroy the Egyptians (judgment) (Exod. 14:21)
- Israel's scattering to Babylonian exile is metaphorically caused by the east wind (Jer. 18:16)

- The line of David is like a vine withered by the east wind and carried to Babylon (Ezek. 17:10; 19:12)
- The ships of Tarshish are broken by the east wind (Ezek. 27:26; Psalm 48:7)

“An east *harishit* wind”

The word חרישית occurs only here in ancient Hebrew. Its root ש.ר.ח could mean “silent” or “plow.”

It is likely that the word was chosen on the basis of a network of wordplay with various intertexts.

- Elijah’s experience of God’s “silence” after the wind on Mount Sinai (1 Kgs. 19:11-12)
- God’s “wind” that appears “in the beginning” (בראשית // חרישית Gen. 1:2)
 - The consonants ש/ר/ח are densely packed in Jonah 4:6-8

“And the sun struck Jonah’s head”

This phrase appears twice elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, Isaiah 49:10 and Psalm 121:6. Both are relevant to Jonah 4.

Psalm 121:6 appears in a poem where Yahweh’s role as deliverer is described with images rich with association with Jonah.

*Yahweh is your keeper [unlike Cain!]
 Yahweh is your shade on your right hand
 [contrast Jonah’s self-made shade-shelter!]
 The sun will not strike you by day [contrast
 Jonah’s “beating” from the sun]
 Nor the moon by night.
 Yahweh will keep you from all evil; [unlike Jonah’s
 “evil” that he can’t escape!]
 He will keep your soul.*

PSALM 121:5-7

Isaiah 49:10, within the context of 49:8-13, details how the newly appointed servant will lead the exiles out of prison/darkness and into a restored Eden by way of the wilderness. On that journey, the sun will not “strike” them as God provides pools of water as they journey home.

Jonah's Second Death Wish and God's Second Question (4:8-9)

Literary Design

This second dialogue has been designed on the model of the first dialogue in 4:3-4a, but this second round intensifies the conflict between Jonah and God, especially after the loss of the shelter and the heat of the sun.

Round One: 4:3-4a

B	<i>a And now, Yahweh, please take my life from me, b for good is my dying more than my living. c And Yahweh said, "Is it good that there is heat-anger to you?"</i>	Jonah and God Dialogue
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Round Two: 4:8-9

B'	<i>a and he fainted, and he requested his life, to die, b and he said, "Good is my dying more than my living." c And God said to Jonah, "Is it good that there is heat-anger to you over this qiqayon?" b' And he said, "It is good that there is heat-anger to me, unto death!"</i>	Jonah and God Dialogue
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Key Hyperlinks

Jonah's fate east of Nineveh is likened again to Israel in the wilderness.

Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

EXODUS 14:11-12

The sons of Israel said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

EXODUS 16:3

All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

NUMBERS 14:2-3

In all of these narratives, the Israelites desire for death appears irrational and the result of self-delusion. In defiance of the creative power of Yahweh, this shows the ultimate lack of trust.

This second dialogue creates a more explicit analogy between Jonah and Elijah in 1 Kings 19, both of which activate hyperlinks to two stages of Moses' leadership of Israel.

Exodus 32:30-32: Noble Moses on Mount Sinai

On the next day Moses said to the people, “You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” Then Moses returned to the Lord, and said, “Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if you will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from your book which you have written!”

Numbers 11:11-15: Disillusioned Moses in the Wilderness

So Moses said to the Lord, “Why have you done evil to your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you have laid the burden of all this people on me?...I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. So if you are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness.”

Elijah in 1 Kings 19	Jonah in Chapters 1-4
Elijah flees from Jezebel after defeating the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.	Jonah flees from God’s call to go to Nineveh.
Elijah walks one day into the wilderness (19:4a).	Jonah walks one day into Nineveh (3:4). Jonah goes east of Nineveh (4:5).
Elijah “asked for his life, to die (למות וישאל את־נפשו).” (19:4b)	“And now, Yahweh, please take my life (נפשי) from me, for good is my death more than my life” (4:3). “And he asked for his life, to die (וישאל את־נפשו ללמות).” (4:9)
“And he lay down and he slept (וישכב וישן), and look, an angel touching him, and he said, ‘Arise (קום), eat!’” (19:5)	“And [Jonah] lay down and he slept (וישכב ויורדם)... And the captain said... ‘Arise (קום) call on your God!’” (1:5-6)
Elijah journeys 40 days to Mount Horeb (= Mount Sinai) (19:8).	Jonah announces 40 days until Nineveh’s destruction (3:4).
God asks Elijah two times why he has come to Mount Horeb (19:9, 13).	God asks two times if it is good that Jonah is angry at his mercy (4:4, 9).
Elijah gives the same exaggerated, self-pitying answer two times (19:10, 14).	Jonah gives the same pathetic and selfish answer two times (4:4, 9).
God communicates with Elijah through symbolic natural phenomena (wind, earthquake, lightning) (19:11-12).	God communicates with Jonah through symbolic natural phenomena (plant, worm, wind).
God counters Elijah’s self-pity. “You are not the only faithful Israelite, I have 7,000 others.” (19:18)	God counters Jonah’s self-pity: “You had pity on this plant, shouldn’t I have pity on a great city?” (4:10-11).

Reflections on the Jonah/Elijah Analogy

The large-scale comparison with Elijah is crucial to the portrayal of Jonah's character. Both prophets played their role in communicating the divine word. (Elijah did so willingly; Jonah, not so willingly). However, both prophets fundamentally misunderstand the bigger picture of God's purpose, and they respond in a self-oriented way.

Neither prophet takes it upon themselves to intercede for Israel the way Abraham did for Sodom or as Moses did for Israel. Neither prophet can see beyond their own life circumstances, despite the fact that God patiently invites them into a conversation (two times!).

Both prophets invert the Moses model of the prophet who offers his own life in the place of God's enemies. They would rather die for their tiny narrative instead of giving their life for God's larger purposes in the world. Both prophets seek Eden-like shelters in order to evade their real responsibilities.



Session 43: The Meaning of Terms in Jonah (Q&R)

Key Question

What about you? What questions do you have on this topic?

Session Quote

"In chapter 4, the evil is Jonah's distorted world where good is evil and where his enemies finding mercy is evil to him. Yahweh wants to deliver Jonah from that mindset, and the plant is somehow going to act as the vehicle for God's attempt to do that."

Notes

No notes included in this session.

Session 44: God's Pity vs. Jonah's Pity

Key Question

Based on chapter 4 and the ending of Jonah, how do you think the author wants the audience to respond to the book? How can you help your audience have this same response?

Session Quote

"If Jonah is a symbolic image of the whole story of Israel, God gives them the Eden gift (vines), and then, when that gift is not appreciated or gets co-opted, God takes it away in the form of exile."

God's Final Question for Jonah (4:10-11)

Literary Design

A	And Yahweh said, "You had pity	
	B	over this qiqayon,
	C	which you did not labor for it, nor did you make it great, which a son of the night it was, and a son of the night it perished.
A'	And I shouldn't I have pity	
	B'	over Nineveh, the great city,
	C'	which there is in it more than twelve ten-thousand humans, who don't know between their right and their left, and many animals?

Observations

God's purpose in the vine is to create a parable-like experience for Jonah so that his pity for the plant is likened to God's pity on the nations, embodied in the iconic evil city of Nineveh.

- Jonah's pity // God's pity
- The plant // Nineveh the great city
- The plant's greatness // Nineveh's greatness

These comparisons between Nineveh and the plant provided by God are connected to a series of hyperlinked texts that lay in the background.

The Plant and the City (4:10)

God's emphasis that Jonah did not labor (עמל) for the plant or make it great (גדול) recalls a key motif in the Torah and Prophets that the abundance of the promised land was not the result of Israel's power or labor.

*Then it shall come about when the Lord your God brings you into the land which he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, **great** and good **cities** which you did not build, and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, **vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant**, and you eat and are satisfied.*

DEUTERONOMY 6:10-11

*I gave you a land on which **you had not labored**, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves **which you did not plant**.*

JOSHUA 24:13

Humans Who Don't Know (4:11)

Verse 11 ("more than 120,000 humans") is worded in Hebrew in a strange way. The normal phrase would be "one hundred and twenty-thousand" (אלף ועשרים מאה) (see Judges 8:10; 1 Kings 8:63). But in Jonah 4:11, we find "twelve-ten-thousand" (רבו עשרה שתיים). This is the only time 120,000 is phrased this way in the Hebrew Bible. This way of expressing the number highlights the number twelve.

In Genesis, when God makes his choice upon a certain lineage extending from Abraham (Isaac and then Jacob), God promises to give his blessing also to the non-chosen line of Ishmael.

Of Ishmael, God says "I will make him a great nation" (Gen. 16:18), "I will make him fruitful and multiply, and he will be the father of twelve rulers and a great nation." In Genesis 25:12-16, Ishmael's descendants have "twelve tribal rulers" (Gen. 25:16).

It's likely that in Jonah 4:11, the author is presenting Nineveh "the great city" as yet another divinely blessed nation consisting of "twelve-ten-thousands" and therefore equally worthy of his attention and mercy.

“...Human, who doesn’t know between his right from his left”

In Hebrew, the word “human” is singular (אָדָם *adam*), which evokes the *adam* / humanity figure from Genesis chapters 1-3. The depiction of *adam* not having access to true knowledge is a key motif in the role of the tree of knowing good and evil in Genesis 2:9 and 15-16.

To “go/turn right or left” is a turn of phrase in Hebrew that means to know the straight, or correct, way. It can be used literally as people go on a journey (Gen. 24:49; Num. 20:17), or metaphorically where “right or left” is the opposite of the “straight” path that is morally good (Deut. 5:32; 17:11).

“To know between good and evil” is a key phrase used in divine wisdom texts built on the design pattern from Genesis 2-3. The phrase refers to moral discernment, the ability to discriminate between the morally good and beneficial and the morally bad and harmful. This is a trait connected with moral maturity.

...Your *little ones*... and your *sons*, who today *do not know good or evil*, shall enter there, and I will give it to them and they shall possess it.

DEUTERONOMY 1:39

[Immanuel] will eat curds and honey at the time he *knows* to refuse *evil* and choose *good*. For before *the boy* will *know* to refuse *evil* and choose *good*, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.

ISAIAH 7:15-16

Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, yet *I am but a little child*; I do not know how to go out or come in. So give your servant a heart that listens, to judge your people, *to discern between good and evil*. For who is able to judge this great people of yours?

1 KINGS 3:7-9

This was the knowledge of good and evil that Adam and Eve “took” on their own terms instead of learning it from God (as Solomon did, see 1 Kings 3:9 above). This was the divine wisdom given to Israel in the Torah, which taught moral discernment about “good and evil,” which is also associated with the phrase “right and left.”

Torah Teaches “Right and Left”	Torah Teaches “Good and Evil”
<p>So you shall observe to do just as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be good with you, and that you may live long days in the land which you will possess.</p> <p>DEUTERONOMY 5:32-33</p> <p>According to the terms of the Torah which [the priests] teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left...[the Torah] shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may live long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.</p> <p>DEUTERONOMY 17:11</p> <p>The Lord will make you abound in goodness... in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. The Lord will open for you his storehouse of the good...if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I charge you today, to observe them carefully, do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you today, to the right or to the left...</p> <p>DEUTERONOMY 28:11-14</p> <p>Be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the Torah which Moses my servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left...</p> <p>JOSHUA 1:7</p>	<p>Then the Lord your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, just as he rejoiced over your fathers. If you obey the Lord your God to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this scroll of the Torah.</p> <p>See, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil; in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it.</p> <p>DEUTERONOMY 30:9-10, 15-16</p>

In the theology of the Torah, the true way to wisdom and discerning between good and evil is found in the Torah, which teaches us how to go straight and not to the “right and left.” The Torah was Israel’s source of wisdom, which was not given to any other nation.

Conclusions About “Knowing Between Right and Left” in Jonah 4:11

Jonah 4:11 has merged the phrases “know between good and evil” with “no turning to the right or left” so that the pagan nations are characterized as those who haven’t been given the special revelation into God’s will that Israel has. And notice, this is precisely what makes them objects of God’s mercy.

Session 45: The Ending of Jonah (Q&R)

Key Question

Congratulations! As you think through the end of Jonah, what questions, thoughts, or reflections do you have?

Session Quote

"The mercy of God is remarkable—for my enemies and for me—when I struggle with the fact that he loves my enemies."

The Sense of an Ending

"The narrative of Jonah's story lacks closure, a sense of completion, and a sense that nothing necessary has been omitted from the work. The book ends without a resolution to the major conflict of the narrative's plot. The reader experiences the greatest sense of closure at the end of the third chapter as Nineveh repents and God forgives. Even the fourth chapter begins by providing closure regarding Jonah's flight, but the book's final scene immediately reopens that closure just experienced by the reader. God's question concludes the book, leaving Jonah's response in the minds of the reader. This lack of closure at the end of the narrative is a literary device used to involve the reader in the ideological conflict that propels the real plot of the book: Jonah's sense of justice versus God's boundless mercy. The final scene blurs the narrative frame, so that the world of the text reaches out and envelops the world of the reader, forcing them to ask whose perspective they will adopt." — WALTER CROUCH, "TO QUESTION AND END, TO END AND QUESTION: OPENING AND CLOSURE IN THE BOOK OF JONAH," P. 112.

"[T]he final scene is so skillfully designed that when Jonah insists on Yahweh's free pity, he cannot really avoid simultaneously conceding to his God the forgiving mercy he has extended to the pagans. But the narrator leaves the readers to draw this harmonizing conclusion themselves. Even the most morosely obstinate of them can hardly do other than—in Jonah's place—respond with gratitude to their God's final question." — HANS WOLTER WOLFF, JONAH, 88.

"The 'surprise' gap" at the beginning of the story, with regard to Jonah's motive for running away, is filled in at the conclusion, when Jonah impeaches the Lord's grace and compassion as the reason for his flight (4:2), and even more so in the last verse of the book, in which the Lord justifies His decision to show mercy for Nineveh. As Meir Sternberg argues, the impression conveyed by the start of the story is that God is wrathful and punitive. As for Jonah and his flight, we mistakenly believe that the recalcitrant prophet "is too tenderhearted to carry a message of doom to a great city. He obviously

protests against a wrathful God not with words, like Abraham or Moses or Samuel, but with his feet.” But the last verses of the book show that we had it backwards: Jonah does not flee because God is a wrathful God, but because He is a merciful God. The Lord’s reaction to the Ninevites’ penance—“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” (3:10)—clearly echoes “the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people” (Exod 32:14). Thus the book of Jonah teaches us that the Lord’s mercy is not reserved exclusively for “His people” but extends to all of His creation, including its animals, who (unlike Jonah) are not only obedient agents of his will in this story, but also, along with humans, objects of his mercy.” — Yael Shemesh, “‘AND MANY BEASTS’ (JONAH 4:11): THE FUNCTION AND STATUS OF ANIMALS IN THE BOOK OF JONAH,” JOURNAL OF HEBREW SCRIPTURES, VOL. 10 (2010), P. 22.

*And Jonah stalked
to his shaded seat
and waited for God
to come around
to his way of thinking.
And God is still waiting
for a host of Jonahs
in their comfortable houses
to come around
to his way of loving.*

— THOMAS JOHN CARLISLE