

# **Jonah:**

## the Reluctant Prophet

### (Whose Story Nevertheless Points to Christ)

### **Explanation of Satire**

Satire uses folly or ridicule in order to expose wrongs and correct them. As satire always has a sting, we should examine the story to see where we find ourselves in the story. In this book we see Jonah as the reluctant prophet who also stands for God's people as a whole. Look for many inversions, subversions, and aversions as we go through the story. Jonah also uses many examples of wordplay to show the ridiculousness of the situation, such as fleeing from God, God's people being the only creatures to not obey their creator, etc.

### **Explanation of this Guide**

The text of Jonah is written in Optima while my notes are in Hoefler Text. The paragraphs between the Biblical text give some commentary while the footnotes go more in depth, including cross-references.

### **Outline of Jonah**

- 1 Jonah's Decent
  - 1.1 Jonah's Call and Rejection
  - 1.2 Jonah at Sea in the Storm
  - 1.3 Jonah Prays from the Deep
- 2 Jonah in a Foreign Land.
  - 2.1 Jonah in Nineveh
  - 2.2 Jonah Under the Gourd

## Sources

I once told my daughter that often the bibliography is one of the most interesting parts of a book. She responded 'Then you must read boring books'. To which I clarified that if I liked a work or wanted to get more information regarding an author's argument the bibliography would be the place to find more information. Some sources I used are:

The text of Jonah is mostly from the Lexham English Bible (LEB) and Lexham English Septuagint (LES), altered with insight from the English Standard Bible (ESV) and the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS). The notes of the New English Translation (NET) (not related to the NETS) were helpful in my footnotes.

Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament XIV: The Twelve Prophets

St Augustine, *City of God*

Jonathan Pageau has an excellent article (<https://orthodoxartsjournal.org/jonah/>) and YouTube video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loL7O49iPDE>) on Jonah.

An overview on Jonah from the Bible Project:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLIabZcoO4c>

Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)

# 1. Jonah's Decent

What to look for:

Jonah's descent, deeper and deeper, in these two chapters.

Where does he start and where does he end up? What are the steps along the way?

## 1.1 The Calling of Jonah, and Jonah's Rejection of that Call

What to look for:

The similarities and differences between Jonah's call and the other prophets.

Jonah's rejection of the call.

What is absent? Why did Jonah flee?

**Chapter 1** And the Word of the LORD came<sup>1</sup> to Jonah the son of Amittai<sup>2</sup>, saying, **2** "Get up!<sup>3</sup> Go to the great city Nineveh and cry out<sup>4</sup> against her, because their evil has come up to my face [gloss: come to my attention]." **3** But Jonah got up to flee toward Tarshish away from the face of the LORD. And he went down to Joppa and found a merchant ship going to Tarshish, and paid her fare, and went on board her to go with them toward Tarshish away from the face of the LORD.

This starts out in a typical fashion of the prophets who receive a call.<sup>5</sup> However, while most prophets obey immediately or after a mild quibble, Jonah flat out disobeys God and runs away from his presence toward the West<sup>6</sup>. And where is God's presence at this time in history? Some of the Church Fathers say Jonah was in the Temple, which might also be indicated by his prayer in chapter 2. So the evil/disaster<sup>7</sup> of Nineveh has come before the face of the Lord, the Lord tells Jonah, who is before his faith, to get up cry out against them. (This call is unusual in itself because the Lord usually sent his prophets to his people, but we see that he has compassion on all people. His people were meant to be a light to the

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<sup>1</sup> We should interpret this as the second person of the Trinity, not as some disembodied voice. See the call for other profits but especially Samuel (1 Kingdoms/1 Samuel 3) where the Word of the Lord stands in front of the young Prophet Samuel.

See [https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/lordofspirits/the\\_word\\_of\\_the\\_lord/](https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/lordofspirits/the_word_of_the_lord/) for more details.

<sup>2</sup> Jonah son of Amittai is referenced in 2 Kings (4 Kingdoms) 14.25 as a prophet to Northern Kingdom king Jeroboam II.

<sup>3</sup> Literally 'arise' which in addition to the contrast with Jonah getting up to go further and further downward is also the word used for the 'Resurrection'. Psalm 67/68.1 'Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered' which we sing at Pascha.

<sup>4</sup> This phrase 'cry out' is often used in the Old Testament (OT) in the context of injustice seeking to be remedied.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1.4 ff, Ezekiel 2.3 ff. All variants of the calling of Moses in Exodus 3.

<sup>6</sup> The West is the direction the sun sets and is a symbol of darkness. In our baptism we faced to the West and renounced the devil before turning toward the East and declaring we are uniting ourselves to Christ. Additionally, Christians pray facing the East and churches are built with the altars on the east end.

<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew word means both and the author playfully uses both meanings throughout the text.

nations.) Jonah initially gets up, appearing to obey this call, but only to disobey and run from the face of God, as far as he can to Tarshish in (what is now) Spain.

## 1.2 Jonah at Sea in the Storm

What to look for:

The repeated use of several words such as “hurl” and “fear” in the description of the storm.

**4** And the LORD hurled<sup>8</sup> a great wind upon the sea, and it was a great storm surge on the sea, and the merchant ship threatened to break up.<sup>9</sup> **5** And the mariners feared, and each cried out to his god<sup>10</sup>. And they hurled the stuff<sup>11</sup> that was in the merchant ship into the sea to lighten it for them. Meanwhile Jonah went down into the belly<sup>12</sup> of the vessel and lay down and fell asleep and was snoring.<sup>13</sup> **6** And the captain of the ship approached him and said to him, “Why are you in a deep sleep?<sup>14</sup> Get up! Call on your god! Perhaps your god will take notice of us and we won’t perish!”

The sea is regarded as chaotic in the Bible (or even a manifestation of chaos), it was unpredictable and full of monsters. But in the first verse of this section we see God is in control. Like in the Genesis story and Psalm 103, the Lord commands the waters and they obey. (There is no battle between God and Chaos as in the pagan myths.) The pagan mariners are shown to be more pious than the prophet as they call out to their false gods, but he is sound asleep, oblivious to his own destruction. Jonah went down into the hold (or ‘belly’ in Greek) of the ship, further showing his descent in the first half of the book. The pagan captain of the ship, echoes God’s call to Jonah in the beginning of the book, ‘Get up!’ The comment ‘Perhaps your god will take notice...,’ is echoed in 3.9 and will be discussed there.

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<sup>8</sup> In Greek ‘raised/aroused’ but it is a different word than ‘arise’.

<sup>9</sup> In Hebrew the ship is personified, in that it considered shattering or threatened to shatter.

<sup>10</sup> Wisdom 14.1-4 “Again [this is in a section about the uselessness of idols], someone preparing a voyage and about to travel through raging waves calls on wood more fragile than the ship bearing him. For desire for gain planned the ship but wisdom the craftsman made it. But your provision, Father, pilots the ship because you have made a way in the sea and as safe path in the waves.”

<sup>11</sup> Usually translated ‘cargo’ the word is more general like ‘objects’; its use here indicates the mariners were not picky about what they threw overboard, but whatever they could find. Of course there were also throwing over the cargo, indicating the storm was so severe they’d trade their livelihoods for their lives.

<sup>12</sup> Usually ‘hold’ but it’s the same word used (in Greek) for the belly of the sea beast in 2.1 (1.17)

<sup>13</sup> The Greek states the snoring while the Hebrew states it was a deep sleep.

<sup>14</sup> “My soul, O my soul, rise up! Why art thou sleeping? The end draws near and soon thou shalt be troubled. Watch, then, that Christ thy God may spare thee, for He is everywhere present and fills all things.” —Kontakion of the Great Canon of Repentance.

During Lent, in the Great Canon of Repentance we call our souls to awaken, which echoes the line here and in St Luke's Gospel (22.46) where at the Mount of Olives, after Jesus prays before his crucifixion he rebukes his disciples for sleeping.

This episode shows reminds us of the episode in St Mark's Gospel (4.35-41)<sup>15</sup> where Jesus is asleep in the stern of the boat in a great windstorm. His disciples call on him to awake and do something. But of course Christ acts differently than Jonah, as we discuss below.

7 And the mariners said each to another, "Come, let us cast lots<sup>16</sup> so that we may know on whose account this disaster has come on us!" And they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 So they said to him, "Please tell us whoever is responsible that this disaster has come upon us! What is your occupation? And from where do you come? What is your country? And from which people are you?" 9 And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, a slave of the LORD<sup>17</sup>, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." 10 Then the men feared with great fear, and they said to him, "What is this you have done?" because they knew that he was fleeing from the face of the LORD (because he had told them). 11 So they said to him, "What shall we do to you so that the sea may quiet down for us?" because the sea was growing more and more tempestuous. 12 And he said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea so that the sea may quiet down for you, because I know that I am responsible that this great storm has come upon you all." 13 But the men rowed hard<sup>18</sup> to bring the ship back to the dry land, and they could not do so because the sea was growing more and more tempestuous against them. 14 So they cried out to the LORD, and they said, "O LORD! Please do not let us perish because of this man's life, and do not make us guilty of innocent blood, because you, O LORD, did what you wanted." 15 And they picked Jonah up and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 So the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

The pagan mariners recognized the Lord's hand in the lots and inquire of Jonah. Jonah who doesn't want to preach against the evil/disaster that will befall Nineveh brings evil/disaster upon the ship. He answers he's a slave to the God of heaven who made both the sea and the dry land. While this is a common truth expressed in the Scriptures it is comedic in the mouth of Jonah, for it marks him as a runaway slave. But where is he running to? He confesses God made everything, the **sea** and the **dry land!** Psalm 138/139 states "Where should I go from your Spirit, and where would I flee from your face? If I should go up to the Heavens, you are there. If I should go down to Hades/Sheol, you are present. If I were to take up my wings at dawn, and dwell at the ends of the sea, indeed, even there your hand will guide me and your right hand will hold me."

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<sup>15</sup> Also Matthew 8.23-27 & Luke 8.22-25 but the wordplay in Mark more closely echoes Jonah.

<sup>16</sup> "The lot is cast into the lap, but the outcome is of the Lord." Proverbs 16.33 (Hebrew). In the OT, lots are often cast to pick out a person. See Joshua 7.10-26, 1 Samuel (1 Kingdoms) 10.20-24, 14.36-46, 2 Ezra 2.63, Luke 1.9, Acts 2.12-26, etc.

<sup>17</sup> Hebrew: 'I am a Hebrew', Greek: 'I am a slave/servant of the Lord'.

<sup>18</sup> Literally 'digging [their oars] in'

Does Jonah truly fear the LORD as he says? If the ‘fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom’ (Proverbs 9.10) is Jonah living wisely?

The sailors don’t want to be guilty of Jonah’s life and are now beginning to fear the Lord (v. 10) so they row hard to get back to dry land, but we are again told that the sea was growing more and more tempestuous. So they listen to Jonah and hurl him overboard into the deep. And immediately the sea was calmed and the mariners feared and worshiped the true God.

In the Markan passage (4.35–41) Christ commands the storm to be still, and it is instantly calmed. The disciples imitate the mariners here and are filled with great fear, wondering who it is that can command the winds and waves.

### 1.3 Jonah Prays from the Deep

What to look for:

The culmination of Jonah’s descent and his first steps at repentance.

**Chapter 2 (1.17)**<sup>19</sup> And the LORD appointed a large sea monster<sup>20</sup> to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the beast three days and three nights.<sup>21</sup>

Just as the sea was considered chaotic, creatures in the deep were manifestations of this chaos. Leviathan (the sea dragon) was chief among them. However, here we see that unlike in pagan mythologies, God does not struggle with chaotic creatures but commands or appoints them. Even the chaos is subject to him. Psalm 103/104.26 states God formed the sea dragon/leviathan and is played with by him.<sup>22</sup>

Jonah’s three-day sojourn in the sea serpent is taken up by Christ, when he advises an evil and adulterous generation that the only sign they will be given is that of Jonah (Matthew 12.38–40, Luke 11.29–30). Just as Jonah was three days in the deep, in the belly of the monster, in the belly of Hades, so Christ was three days in the belly of the earth in the tomb. But Christ harrowed (distressed) Hades and released all the righteous from its clutches.

The prayer that follows is the basis for Ode 6 in the Matins/Orthros canon.

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<sup>19</sup> In most English Bibles this verse is numbered 1.17, but in Hebrew and Greek Bibles it’s 2.1.

<sup>20</sup> Hebrew, “great fish”, Greek “great sea monster” (sometimes rendered “whale” as in later Greek; the term came to mean “whale”. But this is a representation of chaos.

<sup>21</sup> Hosea 6.1–2 “Come, let us return to the LORD; because it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck us down and will bind us up. He will revive us after two days; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live in his presence [literally: before his face].

<sup>22</sup> Job 40–41 (depending on the translation) also describes a fearsome leviathan/sea serpent. While often people try to identify leviathan with a real-world animal like a crocodile, plesiosaur, or colossal squid, this is a modernist mindset. It is more keeping with the text and ancient mindset to understand leviathan as an archetype of chaos and not associate it with a mundane animal.

2 And Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the sea monster<sup>23</sup> 3 and said,

“I called from my distress to the LORD,  
and he answered me;  
from the belly of Sheol<sup>24</sup> I cried for help—  
you heard my voice.

4 And you threw me into the deep,  
into the heart of the seas,  
and the sea currents surrounded me;  
all your breakers and your surging waves<sup>25</sup>  
passed over me.

5 And I said, ‘I am banished  
from your sight;  
how will I continue to look  
on your holy temple?’

6 The waters encompassed me up to my neck;  
the deep surrounded me;  
seaweed was wrapped around my head.

7 I went down to the foundations of the mountains;  
the Underworld—its bars were around me forever.<sup>26</sup>  
But you brought up my life from the pit,  
O LORD my God.

8 When my life was ebbing away from me,  
I remembered the LORD,  
and my prayer came to you,  
to your holy temple.

9 Those who worship vain idols  
forsake their loyal love.

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<sup>23</sup> Psalm 129/130 A song of ascents.

Out of the depths I call to you, O LORD. “O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If you, O LORD should keep track of iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

But with you is forgiveness, so that you may be feared. I await the LORD; my soul awaits, and I wait for his word. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning. Yes, more than watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope for the LORD. For with LORD there is loyal [steadfast] love, and with him there is abundant redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.”

<sup>24</sup> Hebrew, “Sheol”, and Greek “Hades” also sometimes translated “Grave” are the same place/state, the realm of the dead, conceived as being under the earth.

<sup>25</sup> Psalm 41.8/42.7 “Deep calls to deep at the sound of your waterfalls. All your breakers and waves have passed over me.”

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 17.5-7/18.4-6 “The ropes/pains of death encircled me, and torrents of ruin overwhelmed me. The ropes of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my trouble I called on the LORD and to my God I cried for help. He heard my voice from his temple, and my cry for help reached his ears.”

**10** But I, with a voice of thanksgiving,  
will sacrifice to you;  
I will fulfill what I have vowed.  
Salvation belongs to the LORD!"

In verse 3 we see that Jonah has continued his descent, from the belly of the ship to the belly of the fish to the belly of Hades. And in this depth he prays to the Lord. And because the Lord is everywhere present (Psalm 138), he hears Jonah. Notice this prayer of Jonah resonates with many of the Psalms, some of which are noted in the footnotes. In verse 5 Jonah realizes how far he has fallen, from the presence of the Lord in the temple to the depths of Hades. He continues this theme through verse 8, poetically stating he was bound fast in seaweed and the bars of the Underworld held him in. In verse 7 he recognizes the Lord brought him up from the pit, clearly he hadn't done anything to deserve it.

Verse 9 appears to be an indictment against the pagan mariners, but more pointedly it's directed as those in Israel who forsake their God to worship the gods of the nations. The pagans had not experienced the steadfast love of the true God.

The last line of the prayer indicates that Jonah recognizes salvation/deliverance comes from God, but we'll see how he reacts when this is given to the Ninevites.

As a practical application, note that no matter how far we have fallen from God, he is near to us. We can always call upon him, for as the hymns state, he is the lover of mankind.

**11** And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out on the dry land.

Much as the Lord appointed the fish initially, he merely has to speak and it obeys. In this first half we see God's creatures: the wind, the waves, even the pagan mariners, and now this beast obey God, but his prophet does not.

## **2 Jonah in a Foreign Land**

What to look for:

Does Jonah ascend as he once descended?

What is his attitude to the inhabitants of Nineveh?

### **2.1 Jonah in Nineveh**

What to look for:

Parallels between chapters 3 & 1

What is Jonah's message?

How is Jonah's message received?

**Chapter 3** And the Word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, **2** "Get up! Go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to it the message that I am telling you." **3** So Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to the Word of the LORD.



Here we see the Lord is gracious and again speaks his word to Jonah. This time Jonah gets up and goes to Nineveh. The text sets up an expectation of Jonah's ascent. His ascent in this second part would correspond to his descent in the first two chapters. The watery narrative also calls to mind the Flood of Noah's day which unmade the world, but the world was remade after the waters receded. Will we find a similar arc with Jonah?

Now Nineveh was an extraordinarily great city—a journey of three days.<sup>27</sup> **4** And Jonah began to go into the city a journey of one day, and he cried out and said, "Forty<sup>28</sup> more days and Nineveh will be overthrown!" **5** And the people of Nineveh believed in God, and they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth—from the greatest of them to the least.

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<sup>27</sup> There are various ways interpreters explain this phrase. Let's say that it idiomatically indicates Nineveh was an important city. Note the parallel with other parts of the book mentioning three.

<sup>28</sup> Greek 'three', Hebrew 'forty'.

St Augustine explains how we may derive benefit from this seeming contradiction in *The City of God*: Book 18: Chapter 44:

How the Threat of the Destruction of the Ninevites is to Be Understood Which in the Hebrew Extends to Forty Days, While in the Septuagint It is Contracted to Three.

But some one may say, "How shall I know whether the prophet Jonah said to the Ninevites, 'Yet three days and Nineveh shall be overthrown,' or forty days?" [1219] For who does not see that the prophet could not say both, when he was sent to terrify the city by the threat of imminent ruin? For if its destruction was to take place on the third day, it certainly could not be on the fortieth; but if on the fortieth, then certainly not on the third. If, then, I am asked which of these Jonah may have said, I rather think what is read in the Hebrew, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Yet the Seventy, interpreting long afterward, could say what was different and yet pertinent to the matter, and agree in the self-same meaning, although under a different signification. And this may admonish the reader not to despise the authority of either, but to raise himself above the history, and search for those things which the history itself was written to set forth. These things, indeed, took place in the city of Nineveh, but they also signified something else too great to apply to that city; just as, when it happened that the prophet himself was three days in the whale's belly, it signified besides, that He who is Lord of all the prophets should be three days in the depths of hell.

Wherefore, if that city is rightly held as prophetically representing the Church of the Gentiles, to wit, as brought down by penitence, so as no longer to be what it had been, since this was done by Christ in the Church of the Gentiles, which Nineveh represented, Christ Himself was signified both by the forty and by the three days: by the forty, because He spent that number of days with His disciples after the resurrection, and then ascended into heaven, but by the three days, because He rose on the third day. So that, if the reader desires nothing else than to adhere to the history of events, he may be aroused from his sleep by the Septuagint interpreters, as well as the prophets, to search into the depth of the prophecy, as if they had said, In the forty days seek Him in whom thou mayest also find the three days,—the one thou wilt find in His ascension, the other in His resurrection. Because that which could be most suitably signified by both numbers, of which one is used by Jonah the prophet, the other by the prophecy of the Septuagint version, the one and self-same Spirit hath spoken. I dread prolixity, so that I must not demonstrate this by many instances in which the seventy interpreters may be thought to differ from the Hebrew, and yet, when well understood, are found to agree. For which reason I also, according to my capacity, following the footsteps of the apostles, who themselves have quoted prophetic testimonies from both, that is, from the Hebrew and the Septuagint, have thought that both should be used as authoritative, since both are one, and divine.

**6** And the news reached the king of Nineveh, and he rose from his throne and removed his royal robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in the ashes.

Many Church fathers note that the message of God came to the nations/gentiles only after Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster 3 days and nights, just like after Christ was in the earth the message of the Gospel was preached to the nations.

According to the text, Jonah's message was only 'Forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.' No message of repentance or that they could avoid this judgement. But even with this little information, like the pagan mariners in Jonah 1, the pagan Ninevites believe in God and repent. In the Gospels, Jesus says the generation of Nineveh will rise up and judge those who had more Light and did not follow it (Matthew 12.41 & Luke 13.32). Given that Nineveh repents, there is some humorous irony here that Jonah is made to look like a false prophet.

The Oxford English Study Bible notes an interesting play on words with 'overthrown' stating that in addition to the obvious meaning it can also mean 'turned about' or 'turned around'. As such the repentance of the city involved an upheaval of their wicked way of life and their lives being turned around to live before the face of God.

**7** And he had a proclamation made, and said, "In Nineveh, by a decree of the king and his nobles: "No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything! They must not eat, and they must not drink water! **8** And the human beings and the animals must be covered with sackcloth! And they must call forcefully to God, and each must turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. **9** Who knows? God may relent and change his mind and turn from his blazing anger so that we will not perish." **10** And God saw their deeds—that they turned from their evil ways—and God changed his mind about the evil that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it.

In the satirical exaggerated style of Jonah, even the cattle are called on to fast and wear sackcloth as part of the repentance of Nineveh. The last sentence echos what the mariners said as they were facing destruction in the deep and reflects Joel 2.14<sup>29</sup>. In the book of Joel, God has sent an army of locust to devastate the land in judgment. At the end of that plague, the Lord calls his people to repentance "rend your hearts and not your garments"<sup>30</sup> and the prophet states, "Who knows whether he will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, an offering and a libation, for the LORD your God?" This is reflected in our Liturgy where the priest lifts up the offering saying, "Thine own of thine own, we offer unto thee in behalf of all and for all." Even our ability to worship God comes from him.

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<sup>29</sup> As far back as we have records all the Minor Prophets have been bound together on one scroll/book—The Twelve. They have been received as a unit and should be studied as one, but we don't have the space to explore this in depth here.

<sup>30</sup> That is, perform true repentance and not merely go through the outward signs.

In Jeremiah 18, we see that if the Lord declares judgment on a nation but they repent and turn from their evil he will relent of the calamity<sup>31</sup> he intended. St John Chrysostom uses this passage to point out even as evil as Nineveh was, God is exceedingly gracious and accepted their repentance after only three days.

## 2.2 Jonah Under the Gourd

What to look for:

Parallels (anti-parallels) between chapters 4 & 2

Contrast between God and Jonah.

**Chapter 4** And this was evil to Jonah, a great evil<sup>32</sup>, and he became blazingly angry.<sup>33</sup>  
2 And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, were these not my words<sup>34</sup> while I was in my homeland? Therefore I originally fled<sup>35</sup> to Tarshish<sup>36</sup>, because I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and having great steadfast love, and one who relents concerning calamity<sup>37</sup>. 3 And so then, O LORD, please take my life from me, because for me death is better than life!" 4 And the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be blazingly angry?"

Now we hear why Jonah ran from the Lord, he hated—it was exceedingly evil to him—that the Lord was compassionate and forgiving. While Jonah was fine with the Lord saving him from the depths of hades in chapter 2, when he does to the great city of Nineveh he is grieved. He also quotes Joel, (2.13) the verse immediately preceding what the King of Nineveh quoted, but he throws it in God's face. While God is concerned about the nations, Jonah only wants salvation for his people.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Remembering 'evil' and 'calamity' are the same word in Hebrew.

<sup>32</sup> This is the literal translation from Hebrew, which continues the evil/calamity wordplay throughout the book. Or 'exceedingly evil', or 'displeasing with great displeasure' or from the Geek, 'Jonah was grieved with great grief'.

<sup>33</sup> Literally 'it was hot for him'. Contrast with 3.9 referring to God's anger, God's question to Jonah in 4.4 and the heat of the desert in 4.8-9. Greek 'confounded' or 'confused'.

<sup>34</sup> Contrast with the Word of the Lord in 1.1 & 3.1.

<sup>35</sup> The Hebrew is difficult here. Alternately as in LXX 'had the foresight to flee' or 'anticipated to flee'.

<sup>36</sup> "Jonah fled to Tarshish, foreseeing the conversion of the men of Nineveh; for as a prophet he knew the loving-kindness of God, but he was jealous that his prophecy should not be proved false....All the names of the Old Testament have I set before thee, my soul, as an example. Imitate the holy acts of the righteous and flee from the sins of the wicked." —From Ode 8 of the Canon of Repentance.

<sup>37</sup> Joel 2.13: Rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the LORD your God, because he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and great in loyal love, and relenting from harm.

<sup>38</sup> There is a contrast here between Jonah who flees Nineveh when God spares it and Elijah who flees to the wilderness when the Queen Jezebel threatens his life (1 Kings [3 Kingdoms] 19.4-5).

5 And Jonah went out from the city and sat down east of the city,<sup>39</sup> and he made for himself a shelter there. And he sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would happen with the city. 6 And the LORD God appointed a plant, and he made it grow up over Jonah to be a shade over his head, to save<sup>40</sup> him from his misery. And Jonah rejoiced with great joy<sup>41</sup> about the plant. 7 So God appointed a worm at daybreak the next day, and it attacked the plant, and it withered. 8 And when the sun rose, God appointed a scorching<sup>42</sup> east wind, and the sun attacked Jonah's head and he grew faint. And he asked that he could die and said, "My death is better than my life!" 9 So God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be blazingly angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be blazingly angry enough to die!"

While Jonah sinks into his hot anger, the Lord seeks to save him from his misery. Parallel to him appointing a sea monster in chapter 2, God appoints a plant to grow overnight to shade Jonah. But as God appoints a worm to smite the plant and appoints the hot east wind and the sun to smite Jonah. We see the pattern continuing of everything in God's creation obeying God without complaint except his prophet. Let us who are the people of God take note and not emulate Jonah.

10 But the LORD said, "You are troubled about the plant, for which you did not labor nor cause it to grow. It grew up in a night and it perished in a night! 11 And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than one hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know right from left, plus many animals?"

How gracious is the Lord, in that he confronts Jonah in his sin! The Lord tells Jonah it is bizarre for him to be troubled about a plant that he did not work for and yet not care at all about the great city of Nineveh, in which 120,000 people don't know left from right, up from down, or good from evil. The concluding statement (plus much cattle) plays on Jonah's concern for the plant, perhaps he'd also be concerned about the cattle that would perish with the city, after all they fasted and put on sackcloth too.

So is Jonah a saint in the Orthodox Church? Why is he painted on our dome?

"Now what do you think? A man had two sons. He approached the first and said, 'Son, go work in the vineyard today.' And he answered and said, 'I do not want to!' But later he changed his mind and went. And he approached the second and said the same thing. So he

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<sup>39</sup> Genesis 4.16 "And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and he settled in the land of Wandering, east of Eden." And Genesis 2.8 "And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden to the east, and there he put the man he had formed."

<sup>40</sup> "shade" and "save" sound similar in Hebrew. Also 'misery' can be rendered 'discomfort', or 'evil' as the NET Bible notes indicate, there is a lot of 'polysemantic wordplay' going on here.

<sup>41</sup> Note the contrast to 4.1.

<sup>42</sup> The scorching wind paralleling Jonah's anger. But also possibly a reference to Genesis 3.8 with the Lord coming in the Spirit/wind of the Day (usually rendered 'cool of the day' for obscure reasons we don't have the space to address here).

answered and said, 'I will, sir,' and he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going ahead of you into the kingdom of God! For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did believe him. And when you saw it, you did not even change your minds later so as to believe in him. —Mathew 21.28–32

Jonah prefigures the death and resurrection of Christ, and traditionally wrote the book with his name, showing his understanding of his situation in hindsight.

But also where do we see ourselves in the Book of Jonah? Are we the prophet, with correct knowledge of God but not his compassion. Are we the Ninevites who quickly repent on hearing the Gospel?

*Through the prayers of the Prophet Jonah, O Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy upon us and save us.*