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The word of God comes to Jonah telling him to go to Nineveh, and he flees to Tarshish (Spain) from the presence of the Lord. En route, the ship is hurled about by a storm upon the sea; the mariners first cry to their own gods then remember that Jonah, asleep below, may be able to invoke a more responsive presence. Desperate, the sailors implore Jonah, "call on your god! perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish" (1. 6). Casting lots, they next determine that Jonah is the cause of the calamity; they demand to know his occupation, his origin, his people, and Jonah answers honestly that he is Hebrew, that he worships the God of heavens, who made the sea and the dry land" (1.8, 9). The mariners become even more afraid, for now they remember that Jonah had told them earlier that "he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord" (1.10). The sea is tempestuous, and Jonah, more suicidal than redemptive, asks the mariners to "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you" (1.12). They pick Jonah up and cast him into the sea; Jonah is in the belly of the fish three days and three nights (1.17)

To understand God's call to Jonah, one must find out something about Tarshish, Nineveh, and the Assyrians. First, however, the reader should note that Jonah is fleeing from the presence of God. Recalling that Adam and Eve also ran from the presence of God in Eden will alert the reader to the trouble which is brewing for Jonah. Recall that human beings have been created bearing the image of God: *1. 27: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.* This image of God, though, quickly reveals his human dimension: *8: And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.*

9: And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

10: And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

11: And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of

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the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

Tarshish may be debated but probably is to be associated with Ezekiel 27.12 and Jeremiah 10. 9:

12: Tarshish was thy merchant by reason of the multitude of all kind of riches; with silver, iron, tin, and lead, they traded in thy fairs.

9: Silver spread into plates is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the workman, and of the hands of the founder: blue and purple is their clothing: they are all the work of cunning men.

This association suggests Tarshish is a smelting place of silver, iron, tin, and lead; ships of Tarshish carried smelted metals to the Phoenician ports of Joppa, the place one will recall where Peter was commanded to go (Acts 10.5) in his mission to the Gentiles. If one looks at Jonah as a missionary of God's mercy, should it not also be remarkable that a hint of the universalism already extends in the mention of Joppa here to Peter's revelation: "You yourselves know it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean" (10.28). It's further remarkable that the Holy Spirit is "poured out" here upon the Gentiles, and they are baptized (10.47) Jonah, though, is a reluctant missionary and is bent upon going in the opposite direction, 2000 miles west in the wrong direction! He seems hell-bent on getting as far away from his call as possible.

Assyria has a long history in relation to the Israelites, a history recounted by the *Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Reviewing Genesis 10 and 11 reminds the reader that the Assyrians were not always the enemy, that they, too, are part of the regeneration of humankind following the flood: Assyria is founded by Cush and Nimrod, the first warriors, responsible for both Babel and Nineveh. In *Amos*, this role of Assyria extends to being a nation that afflicts Israel in all its borders (6). During the greater part of Jeroboam II's reign in Israel, Assyria had been weak; but under new leadership, it regains expansionary powers and sets forth to conquer the world. *Amos* prophesies the coming invasion.

What we know of Nineveh is this history of war; this "great" city is Nineveh and its satellites; again, from the *Oxford Companion* the following:

Nineveh (Map 6:H3). The capital of Assyria in the seventh century bce, when that empire had annexed the northern kingdom of Israel and forced Judah to pay tribute. Most biblical references reflect this time, when Nineveh was the center of the Assyria they knew. The book of Jonah, even if written long afterward, remembers this period of Assyrian glory and Israelite humiliation. Nahum prophesies the destruction of this enemy ([Nahum 1.1](#); [Nahum 2.8](#); [Nahum 3.7](#)), as does Zephaniah ([Zephaniah 2.13](#)). Sennacherib is said to have withdrawn to Nineveh after Yahweh inflicted a plague on his army besieging Jerusalem ([2 Kings 19.36](#); [Isaiah 37.37](#)). Otherwise, Nineveh appears in the description of Assyria in [Genesis 10.11–12](#), where its association with Calah reflects early-first-millennium geography, when Calah (Akkadian KalÆu) was a major complement to Assur and Nineveh. Archaeological evidence shows that Nineveh already existed in the fifth millennium bce, and contacts with Sumer and Akkad to the south are recorded in third-millennium texts. Nineveh remained an important Mesopotamian city for the next two thousand years, though it only became capital of Assyria under Sennacherib.

Daniel E. Fleming

Like any individual running from the presence of God, we should expect what we discover in Jonah: once on the ship, Jonah has gone down into the hold and is fast asleep. This is a return-to-the-womb symbolism; we can imagine Jonah curled up into a fetal protectiveness of self. We are reminded of the disciples of Jesus first upon the sea just after Jesus has told them that to them "has been given the secret of the kingdom of God" (Mark 4.10); this time, Jesus is sleeping, and the disciples cry out, "Teacher, do you care we are perishing?" This is the same concern the captain voices to Jonah: "What are you doing sound asleep?" (1.6) Both Jonah and Jesus carry with them the mercy and compassion which can prevent others from perishing. Jonah is next asked about his occupation, his origin, his people to which he replies, "I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (1.9). Hearing Jonah acknowledge this God of creation makes the sailors more fearful, especially when they recall that Jonah has already told them that he is fleeing from his God. The mariners want the sea to quiet down; Jonah wants rest from having caused the tempestousness: "Pick me

up and throw me into the sea... I know it is because of me that the great storm has come upon you" (1.12). As the sailors relent and toss Jonah overboard, they pray, "do not let us perish on account of this man's life" (1.15). Despite fleeing from God, Jonah or Mercy, is picked up and put back on course--but only after three days and nights in death itself.

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1: Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

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

3: But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

4: But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

5: Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

6: So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

7: And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

8: Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?

9: And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

10: Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

11: Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

12: And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

13: Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

14: Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.

15: So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

16: Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

17: Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

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1: Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,
2: And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.

3: For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.

4: Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.

5: The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

6: I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.

7: When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.

8: They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

9: But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

10: And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

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1: And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

2: Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

3: So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

4: And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

5: So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

6: For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

7: And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

8: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

9: Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

10: And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

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

2: And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

3: Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

4: Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

5: So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

6: And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

7: But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

8: And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

9: And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

10: Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

11: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

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(*Oxford Companion to the Bible*) **Names of God in the Hebrew Bible.** The Bible often refers to God by his proper name, which was probably pronounced Yahweh (See [Tetragrammaton](#)). In the Hebrew Bible, the consonants *yhwh* are usually to be read as Adonai (<#d; n#y), "my Lord," for the sake of reverence, and English versions represent the word by "Lord" or (less often) "God" in capital letters. The Hebrew word is a plural of majesty (with a singular meaning) of <#d#n, which is translated "Lord" (e.g., [Isaiah 1.24](#); [Isaiah 3.1](#)). The name Yahweh often appears in the phrase "Yahweh of hosts," as the Hebrew is probably to be translated (cf. "Yahweh of Teman" or "of Samaria" in the Kuntillet >Ajrud inscriptions of ca. 800 bce), or the longer "Yahweh the God of hosts" (e.g., [2 Samuel 5.10](#)). Some have thought that the hosts, Sabaoth (™b#<#t), are the armies of Israel (cf. [1 Samuel 17.45](#)), but a reference to these human armies is inappropriate in, for instance, prophetic denunciations of Israel (e.g., [Isaiah 1.24](#)), and the word probably denotes heavenly or angelic armies. Some maintain that Sabaoth is an epithet in apposition to Yahweh and that it means something like "the Mighty One," but there is no evidence in Hebrew for such a meaning.

The usual Hebrew word for God is Elohim (<#l; #m), another plural of majesty with a singular meaning when used of Yahweh. The singular form Eloah (<#l; ah) appears, mainly in the book of Job, but the most common singular noun for God is El (<#l), which has cognates in other Semitic languages and whose Ugaritic counterpart is used both for the chief god and as a general word for any god. The Israelites adopted this common Semitic word (cf. [Genesis 33.20](#): El-Elohe-Israel, "El the God of Israel"), and some of the divine names compounded with El in the Hebrew Bible were probably originally used of non-Israelite deities. In [Genesis 14.18–20](#); [Genesis 14.22](#), we find El Elyon (<#l >ely#n), "God Most High," whose priest is Melchizedek but who is identified by Abram with Yahweh. The word Elyon is used of Yahweh in other places in the Bible (e.g., [Psalm 18.13](#); [Psalm 87.5](#)). In the fourth century ce, Philo of Byblos is cited by Eusebius of Caesarea as referring to Elioun, the Most High (Greek *hupsistos*), as a Phoenician god (*Praeparatio Evangelica* 1.10.15). The Aramaic cognate of Elyon is >lyn (perhaps >ely#n), and a god with this name appears alongside El in a treaty of the eighth century bce from Sefire in Syria.

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The element El is found in divine names in Genesis, sometimes in connection with various places, such as Bethel, "the house of God" (cf. [Genesis 28.19](#); [Genesis 28.22](#)), and we find El-Bethel, "God of Bethel" ([Genesis 35.7](#); cf. [Genesis 31.13](#)). Thus, at a place in the desert there is El-roi ("a God of seeing," [Genesis 16.13](#)), and at Beer-sheba there is El Olam ("the Everlasting God," [Genesis 21.33](#); cf. *špš >Im* in a Ugaritic letter, and *šmš >Im* in a Phoenician text of ca. 700 bce, both of which mean "the eternal sun" god or goddess). Another name is El Shaddai, usually translated "God Almighty," and the Priestly writer (P) in the Pentateuch maintains that God first made himself known by that name before revealing his name Yahweh ([Exodus 6.3](#); cf. [Genesis 17.1](#); [Genesis 35.11](#); [Genesis 43.14](#); [Genesis 48.3](#)). The name is not restricted to P, for it is found in a number of places ([Numbers 24.4](#), on the lips of Balaam, a non-Israelite; [Ruth 1.20–21](#); [Job 5.17](#); etc.), and it is part of the names Zurishaddai and Ammishaddai ([Numbers 1.6](#); [Numbers 1.12](#)). It is perhaps related to an Akkadian word for "mountain."

It is uncertain whether El-berith ("God of the covenant") in [Judges 9.46](#) refers to Yahweh, for this deity seems to be the same as Baal-berith in [Judges 8.33](#); [Judges 9.4](#), and may be a Canaanite god. On the other hand, Baal, which means "lord," was sometimes used of Yahweh in early times without necessarily always identifying him with the Canaanite god Baal. In [1 Chronicles 12.6](#), there is the personal name Bealiah, "Yah is Baal" (cf. *yhw>l* on an unpublished seal). Saul and Jonathan, who were worshipers of Yahweh, had sons named, respectively, Esh-baal and Merib-baal ([1 Chronicles 8.33–34](#)), which were changed by editors to Ish-bosheth and Mephibosheth ([2 Samuel 2.8](#); [2 Samuel 9.6](#); etc.), in which "bosheth" ("shame") was substituted for "Baal." Jerubbaal (Jerubbesheth in [2 Samuel 11.21](#)), Gideon's other name, is probably to be explained similarly, notwithstanding the forced explanation in [Judges 6.31–32](#). David also had a son named Beeliada (*b>lyd>*, [1 Chronicles 14.7](#)), probably identical with Eliada in other lists. [Hosea 2.16](#) says that Israel will call God "my husband" (lit. "my man") and no longer "my Baal" (i.e., "my lord," another word for husband), which may imply that some Israelites addressed God in the latter way.

Both God's holiness and his relation to his people are reflected in the phrase "the Holy One of Israel," which is characteristic of the book of Isaiah. Although it is not strictly a name, it is relevant to mention this title here.

Yahweh is frequently described as *melek*, "king" (e.g., [Deuteronomy 33.5](#); [Psalm 29.10](#); [Psalm 98.6](#)), "a great king over all the earth" ([Psalm 47.2](#); cf. [Psalm 47.7](#); [Psalm 48.2](#)) or "above

all gods" ([Psalm 95.3](#)), "my" or "our king" ([Psalm 5.2](#); [Psalm 47.6](#); [Psalm 68.24](#); [Psalm 74.12](#)), or "the King of glory" ([Psalm 24.7–10](#)). He "reigns" or "has become king" ([Psalm 47.8](#); [Psalm 93.1](#); [Psalm 96.10](#); [Psalm 97.1](#); [Psalm 99.1](#); [Isaiah 52.7](#)), and he "will reign forever" ([Exodus 15.18](#)). Personal names include Malchiel ([Genesis 46.17](#); [Numbers 26.45](#); [1 Chronicles 7.31](#)) and Malchiah ([Jeremiah 21.1](#); [Jeremiah 38.1](#); [Jeremiah 38.6](#)), meaning "El" or "Yah is king." Isaiah sees a vision of "the King, Yahweh of hosts" ([Isaiah 6.5](#)).

Various epithets and figures of speech are applied to God, but they cannot all be described as names or titles. In [Genesis 15.1](#), Yahweh says to Abram "I am your shield" (cf. [Psalm 84.11](#)), but that does not prove the theory that "the Shield of Abraham" was a title. On the other hand, God is described as "the Fear of Isaac" ([Genesis 31.42](#); [Genesis 31.53](#))—the suggested alternative translation, "the Kinsman of Isaac," lacks sufficient evidence—and as "the Mighty One of Jacob" ([Genesis 49.24](#); etc.); these may be titles reflecting the special relationship of God with particular individuals. His relationship with people is also shown by names containing the element *<Æb*, "father," such as Abijah, Abiel, and Abra(ha)m. Yet although God was viewed thus ([Jeremiah 31.9](#); [Malachi 2.10](#); cf. [Malachi 1.6](#)), and could be addressed as "my (or our) Father" ([Jeremiah 3.4](#); [Isaiah 63.16](#); [Isaiah 64.8](#)), it is doubtful whether the evidence suffices to justify the claim that "Father" was a title, let alone a name.

See Also [Jehovah](#).

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1: In the second year of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel reigned Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah.

2: He was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem.

3: And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David his father: he did according to all things as Joash his father did.

4: Howbeit the high places were not taken away: as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places.

5: And it came to pass, as soon as the kingdom was confirmed in his hand, that he slew his servants which had slain the king his father.

6: But the children of the murderers he slew not: according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

7: He slew of Edom in the valley of salt ten thousand, and took Selah by war, and called the name of it Joktheel unto this day.

8: Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face.

9: And Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle.

10: Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thine heart hath lifted thee up: glory of this, and tarry at home: for why shouldest thou meddle to thy hurt, that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee?

11: But Amaziah would not hear. Therefore Jehoash king of Israel went up; and he and Amaziah king of Judah looked one another in the face at Beth-shemesh, which belongeth to Judah.

12: And Judah was put to the worse before Israel; and they fled every man to their tents.

13: And Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh, and came to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim unto the corner gate, four hundred cubits.

14: And he took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's

house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria.

15: Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

16: And Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his stead.

17: And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years.

18: And the rest of the acts of Amaziah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

19: Now they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem: and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish, and slew him there.

20: And they brought him on horses: and he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David.

21: And all the people of Judah took Azariah, which was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah.

22: He built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers.

23: In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years.

24: And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

25: He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher.

26: For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel.

27: And the LORD said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

28: Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered Damascus, and Hamath, which belonged to Judah, for Israel, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

29: And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, even with the kings of Israel; and Zachariah his son reigned in his stead.

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1: In the three and twentieth year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years.

2: And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.

3: And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, all their days.

4: And Jehoahaz besought the LORD, and the LORD hearkened unto him: for he saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them.

5: (And the LORD gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians: and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as beforetime.

6: Nevertheless they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin, but walked therein: and there remained the grove also in Samaria.)

7: Neither did he leave of the people to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing.

8: Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

9: And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria: and Joash his son reigned in his stead.

10: In the thirty and seventh year of Joash king of Judah began Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years.

11: And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD; he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin: but he walked therein.

12: And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might wherewith he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

13: And Joash slept with his fathers; and Jeroboam sat upon his throne: and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

14: Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.

15: And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows.

16: And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands.

17: And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them.

18: And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed.

19: And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.

20: And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year.

21: And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.

22: But Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz.

23: And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet.

24: So Hazael king of Syria died; and Ben-hadad his son reigned in his stead.

25: And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael the cities, which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel.

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1: Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood.

2: The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras.

3: And the sons of Gomer; Ashkenaz, and Riphath, and Togarmah.

4: And the sons of Javan; Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim.

5: By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.

6: And the sons of Ham; Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan.

7: And the sons of Cush; Seba, and Havilah, and Sabtah, and Raamah, and Sabtecha: and the sons of Raamah; Sheba, and Dedan.

8: And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth.

9: He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.

10: And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

11: Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah,

12: And Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city.

13: And Mizraim begat Ludim, and Anamim, and Lehabim, and Naphtuhim,

14: And Pathrusim, and Casluhim, (out of whom came Philistim,) and Caphtorim.

15: And Canaan begat Sidon his firstborn, and Heth,

16: And the Jebusite, and the Amorite, and the Girgasite,

17: And the Hivite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite,

18: And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite: and afterward were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad.

19: And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza; as thou goest, unto Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lasha.

20: These are the sons of Ham, after their families, after their tongues, in their countries, and in their nations.

21: Unto Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, even to him were children born.

22: The children of Shem; Elam, and Asshur, and Arphaxad, and Lud, and Aram.

23: And the children of Aram; Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Mash.

24: And Arphaxad begat Salah; and Salah begat Eber.

25: And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg;

for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name was Joktan.

26: And Joktan begat Almodad, and Sheleph, and Hazar-maveth, and Jerah,

27: And Hadoram, and Uzal, and Diklah,

28: And Obal, and Abimael, and Sheba,

29: And Ophir, and Havilah, and Jobab: all these were the sons of Joktan.

30: And their dwelling was from Mesha, as thou goest unto Sephar a mount of the east.

31: These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations.

32: These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.

1: And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

2: And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

3: And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

4: And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

5: And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

6: And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

7: Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

8: So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

9: Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

10: These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood:

11: And Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.

- 12: And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah:
13: And Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters.
14: And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber:
15: And Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters.
16: And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg:
17: And Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters.
18: And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu:
19: And Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters.
20: And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug:
21: And Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters.
22: And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor:
23: And Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.
24: And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah:
25: And Nahor lived after he begat Terah an hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters.
26: And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.
27: Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot.
28: And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees.
29: And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah.
30: But Sarai was barren; she had no child.
31: And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.
32: And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.

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"Then Jonah prayed..." (2.1). Why must it be that human beings turn to God only from the depths of despair? Jonah admits, "I called to the Lord out of my distress, " (2.1), and lo and behold, "he answered me." What we expect in chapter two of *Jonah* is a complaint; what we hear is a psalm of thanksgiving. With respect to Jonah himself, one could always wonder about the psychology involved; here is a man in the depths of human despair, and what we hear is thanksgiving. This should be hint enough that the book of *Jonah* is about bigger things: it is about the kingdom of God which extends beyond the Israelites.

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Yes, Jonah will pay what he has vowed: he will learn that "Deliverance belongs to the Lord" (2.9). This chapter begins with "Jonah prayed," and it ends with "Jonah...spewed." Jesus says to Nicodemus, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the spirit" (3.5). The combination of water and spirit here is far from accidental; immediately before Jesus, John comes baptizing with water; Jesus is baptized by water but anointed by the Spirit of God descending upon him in the form of a dove. This combination of water and Holy Spirit is found again in Acts 10, at Joppa, where Peter reveals what God has shown him : "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean" (28). While Peter is yet speaking, the Holy Spirit falls upon the uncircumcised; "The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even onto the Gentiles" (45). How short of marvelous is it that Joppa is where Jonah, fleeing from the presence of God, departs for Tarshish; God's universal plan for the non-exclusionary redemption of humankind is already present. For Jonah and Jesus, the message to humankind is "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him [them]" (3.17). John tells the story most completely, returning again to the water and spirit motif; at the crucifixion, the soldiers did not break the legs of Jesus, but "Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out" (19.34).

John tells his readers that this had to occur in order that the scriptures be fulfilled. One needs to remember that John wrote for entirely one purpose: to convince his readers that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God" (20.31).

Even as he finds his "life ebbing away," Jonah is mercifully rescued from his distress: he "remembered the Lord." and his prayers came before God in the temple. Jonah resolves, "what I have vowed, I will pay" (2.9). God holds us to our vows, and Jonah is no exception. He must, as God tells him, "Get up and go to Nineveh" (3.3). Even Jesus in Gethsemane prayed, "Abba, Father, remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (Mark 14.36). Jesus well knew the weaknesses of flesh: "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14.39).

Jesus himself experienced the utmost in human alienation, blackness, and despair: "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani," translated becomes, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (15.34). Jesus, unlike the reluctant Jonah, really did sacrifice himself; Jonah could only make an about-face and proclaim I will pay my vows. The Roman centurion watching Jesus die can only exclaim, "Truly, this man was God's Son" (Mark 15.39). As much as the reader may extend allegorically the comparison between Jonah and Christ, one startlingly important difference must be noted: Jesus willingly embraced the reality of self-sacrifice, embodying and leaving his example; Jonah's selfish offering of himself is "spewed out," revealing its insincerity and self-motivated concern.

One needs to recall that the Pharisees in John 7:52 missed entirely the pattern of God's redemptive history: they speak derisively, sarcastically, to Jesus: "Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee." How wrong could scholars be: not only Jonah, in whom God's mercy extended itself to the Ninevites, but also Nahum, who prophesied Nineveh's destruction and God's sure justice, are prophets from Galilee; they are followed by Jesus who combines prophet, priest, and king into God's redemptive plan for humanity. As Nahum says, "The Lord is slow to anger but great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty" (1. 3). In time, the people shown God's mercy under Jonah are to know "a shatterer has come up against [them]" (2.2) and they will not have escaped: "For who has ever escaped?" (3.19). Through it all though, all the piles of the dead and heaps of corpses 3.3), "the Lord is restoring the majesty of

Jacob, as well as the majesty of Israel" (3.2).

History culminates as Paul knows in universal mercy: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Romans 9.14). As Jonah pouted and felt God resentment for God's delivering the Assyrian enemy of Israel, Paul asks, "Has God rejected his people" (Romans 11.1), then answers himself: "By no means! I myself am an Israelite." Paul goes on to say that it is only through a sluggish spirit (11.7) and stumbling of Israel that "salvation has come to the Gentiles" (11.11); he goes on to say this has happened to "make my own people jealous and to save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead" (11.15).

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The entire key to Jonah 3 is verse 10: "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would them" (3.10). The question is, what does one make of a God who seemingly, at whim, arbitrarily, changes His mind? Beyond this complicated theological question, one other pattern in this chapter is very important: "the people of Nineveh believed God" (3.5), and as a result of this mass common belief, news reaches the king of Nineveh, who petitions that his people turn from their evil and violent ways.

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The reader should recall Jeremiah's potterer:

1: The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

2: Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words.

3: Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels.

4: And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.

5: Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

6: O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

7: At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it;

8: If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.

9: And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it;

10: If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.

11: Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.

12: And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices,

and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.

13: Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such things: the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing.

14: Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken?

15: Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up;

16: To make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head.

17: I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.

God speaks at once of a nation and a kingdom: 7: At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it;

Justice must be meted out in the scheme of history only because "My people have forsaken me" (15). Given people's choice, in history, they can expect that God will sometimes show them "the back and not the face" 17).

Jonah reluctantly and grudgingly finally preaches to the common Ninevites the message that God's justice for their wickedness is close at hand: "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (4). Israel in its prosperity under Jeroboam has apparently forgotten much of what they must be reminded of by Amos, who follows Jonah. Just as Jonah preaches that God will hold the Assyrians to a strict account for doing wrong, Judah and Israel should both have known that as a people committed to Yahweh, they would be held to an even higher standard: after all, they had the law and the prophets to help guide them in their social and moral lives. Amos will call them into account with these words: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities" (3.2). What Amos hears in his soul is God's righteous wrath against Israel. "Justice will roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (5.16).

The Ninevites heard Jonah and repented. A wave of repentance swept from the common population into the leadership. Just as God relents in relation to Ninevites, showing mercy, just as surely, He will hold Israel to justice. Such is the prophecy of Jeremiah: "At one

moment I may declare concerning a nation or kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind... and at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sights, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it" (18.7-10).

The *Oxford Handbook to the Bible* says the following concerning justice:

God's righteousness means that he is a just and reliable judge ([Psalm 9.4](#)) who keeps his side of the covenant and who thus delivers Israel from her enemies, so that they experience that righteousness as punishment, while Israel experiences it as salvation and vindication ([Judges 5.11](#)). Indeed in some places God's righteousness and salvation are virtually synonymous ([Isaiah 51.1-3](#)), and from the exile onward we find God's righteousness as an object of hope ([Jeremiah 23.5](#); [Daniel 9.24](#)).

Jonah was very much accustomed to this formula for justice internally, but he was apparently very much unprepared for God's righteousness manifest in mercy for Israel's enemy. It should not be difficult to see, however, that short-sighted human beings will often mistake eternal patterns in their temporal clothes: for the Assyrians, mercy in the present must yield to justice in its long-term manifestation: they are defeated by the Babylonians and Medes. Israel, too, make no mistake, is equally subject to God's righteousness: they are utterly run over and defeated by the Assyrian rod of God's anger.

Inextricably, mercy and justice must play themselves out in a creation of imperfection readying itself for transformation into the kingdom of God. In *Revelation*, "the sea [is] no more;" this symbol of turbulence and unrest must yield to a new heaven and a new earth where the "home of God is among mortals" 21.3). Death will exist no longer (21.4). The waters which have symbolized death ironically reverse themselves just as they did in the flood, in the Red Sea, and in baptism; they become the "river of the water of life, " and from the depths, from the belly of Sheol, Jonah's are returned from self-willed courses according to the mercy of God.

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The final chapter of *Jonah* is a haunting reminder of human selfishness: Jonah responds to God's mercy extended to the Ninevites with anger (4.1). Jonah does not want the Assyrians spared! He next confesses, "I knew from the beginning that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishment" (4.2). What's wrong with Jonah? The answer is quite simple: in chapter one, Jonah has been instructed to "cry out against Nineveh," (1.1), and as a prophet, he is now dangerously threatened that he may "lose face." When the king of Nineveh has seen his people repent, he has "covered him with sackcloth and sat in ashes" (3.6). Jonah, quite humanly even if unforgivably, indulges himself in bigotry: he does not want to see God spare the Assyrians; he becomes angry: the Lord asks him, "Is it right for you to be angry?" (4.4). God follows the pouting Jonah out of Nineveh, first mercifully protecting him and then justly allowing the sun to "beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die" (4.8). Jonah is happy about the bush God sends to protect him but angry about the worm which causes the bush to wither. How characteristic of the human being: thanks when life is going well; bitterness when the worm gnaws at its core! God reminds Jonah that the bush had been provided for him; he had neither to labor for it nor cultivate its growth. God then asks Jonah the question, "Should I not be concerned about Nineveh?" (4.11). The answer is, of course, that God is concerned about Nineveh and, indeed, about all people "who do not know their right from their left" (4.11). What a powerful metaphor of human life unanchored in the sea of time, tossed about and swallowed up until "the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head at the root of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever" (3.6). Yet, even as life ebbs away, prayers come before God, are heard, and life is rescued from the pit. Time and time again, Jonahs are mercifully "spewed upon the dry land" and given a second chance.

In the long run, one asks, is *Jonah* fact or fiction? History, allegory, or romance? *Jonah* provides a moral lesson for the reader: God relents when Nineveh repents. How wicked is Nineveh? Its barbarities

were incredible: pyramids of human heads marked the conqueror; boys and girls were burned alive; men were impaled, flayed, blinded, deprived of their hands and feet, of their ears and noses: the Assyrians evidenced a mania for blood. But even here, God relented, sparing mercifully a people who would later sack the northern kingdom of Israel. One might well ask: would a human being write the history of God in such a fashion? God spares a kingdom which will destroy his own chosen people? The answer is quite clear: God used the Assyrians as his own rod of anger; even under brutal defeat, the children of Israel did not repent; God took His chosen destiny to the second-born Gentiles. [Nineveh](#)

Jonah is ultimately a record of Divine compassion. In the end of the book, Jonah learns that God's purpose is much more extensive, much more inclusive than Israel: the message is simply, God's love for His people Israel does not mean a lessened love for other people; rather, the heart of God reveals itself to be one of showing tender mercies to all of creation.

Jonah is often acknowledged to be part of the minor prophets but also to be quite different in nature; all too often, this difference leads to *Jonah's* importance in the canon being overlooked. Jonah is characterized as being a missionary rather than a prophet. This difference is the very heart of *Jonah*. In the Hebrew Yahweh, justice and mercy work together in the history of human beings; as a missionary of mercy, Jonah's very essence is revealed in his name symbolism linking him with the dove; Jonah, though, is evidencing human rather than God-likeness when he is angry that God withholds judgment once the Ninevites repent.

How serious the omission of *Jonah* can be demonstrated in analyses of the eighth-century prophets; together, Amos, Micah, Hosea, and Isaiah look about them, see wrongdoing, and social injustice; the prophet then denounces wrongdoing, telling sinners that unless they repent, they will be destroyed. Within this people, the prophet holds out hope that if the people repent, God will relent and restore a remnant of his people to a good life in their homeland. *Jonah* had no such message to preach; after all, he was a prophet during the relatively prosperous times of Jeroboam II. The prophetic message, even when taken to the Ninevites, would have included denouncement of wrongdoing; that, of course, is the job of another Galilean prophet, Nahum. The entire book of *Nahum* is a poem extolling the downfall of Nineveh with the reason given being that

God was exacting judgment upon an unscrupulous, defiant nation (NRSV notes). Nahum is silent relative to this same divine justice for Israel itself. Recall Nahum 1. 1-3:

2: God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.

3: The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.

Once again, God is viewed as a "Shatterer," and the Ninevites are warned by Nahum to guard the ramparts (2.1).

Jonah certainly did cry out Nineveh's fate: "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3.5). Jonah behaves, though, like a selfish and petulant child when the Ninevites do exactly the unexpected: they hear from Jonah that if they repent, God may relent. With their own Assyrian defenses weakened internally and with the Medes and Babylonians pressing in, the Ninevites had good reason to reconsider their ways. Jonah's message was timely, and they responded.

In the final analysis, Jonah offers a foreshadowing of the history of the people of God, a vivid picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; Jonah resists extending God's mercy and is angry when God performs as he expected by relenting and saving the Ninevites; Jesus, on the other hand, embraced and continues to embrace humankind in a non-exclusionary, egalitarian mercy. The NRSV says Jonah was both disobedient and bigoted in not wanting God to redeem the Assyrians; divine love, however, extends beyond Jonah and the covenant he represented.

Jonah's importance in the Bible canon is affirmed by Christ, who acknowledges Jonah by name: consider Matthew: 12.38-42:

38: Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

39: But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

40: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

41: The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

42: The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

Jesus points out that Nineveh will condemn the present generation: why? they repented, and the present generation, the Hebrew people themselves, are not doing so. Jesus tells them one greater than Jonah is among them. Jesus has referred to this generation as an "evil and adulterous" generation. The Old Testament formula cannot be missed: Jesus is speaking of Israel's turning away from God. Jesus has earlier uttered "something greater than the temple is ... I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (12. 6, 7). Even as the Pharisees are conspiring how to destroy Jesus, he speaks of the destiny he has come to fulfill:

17: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

18: Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles.

19: He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

20: A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

21: And in his name shall the Gentiles trust. (Matthew 12)

In the Gospels, as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem, he instructs his disciples; "he explained everything in private to his disciples" (Mark 4.33). His disciples, however, miss much of what Jesus has to say. Twice, both including a storm narrative on the waters, the faith of the disciples to trust God to achieve His purpose, even through apparent destruction, is tested:

34: But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.

35: And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.

36: And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.

37: And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.

38: And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?

39: And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

40: And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?

41: And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? (Mark 4)

Can it be anything but part of the universal outreach of mercy which brings the disciples from the storm to the other side of the sea and the country of the Gerasenses? Who are these people? This was a land largely populated by Gentiles; the Romans had a huge legion in Gerasene.

The next storm comes as the disciples makes their way across the lake to Bethsaida:

47: And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land.

48: And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.

49: But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out:

50: For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

51: And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.

52: For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.

53: And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore.

54: And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him,

(Mark 6)

Clearly, the disciples often lack faith and miss much of what God's mercy come among them means. The *Oxford Companion* describes a general pattern by which that mercy evolves. Jesus is sure of his role

in the kingdom of God and rebukes Peter severely when, after he has been told that the Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, killed, and rise again, Peter rebukes Jesus:

8. 33: But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

Not understanding the workings of God leads to one of the world's oldest paradoxes: *But the more profound paradox of a God believed to be merciful and forgiving on the one hand and ultimately just on the other remains unresolved. (Oxford Companion).*

While some view the New Covenant as largely about God's mercy and the Old Covenant about God's justice, this simplistic thinking misses the entire complexity of God's mercy and justice evolving hand in hand with each other in human affairs. Just as a simple obedience-disobedience formula missed the complexity of God's system of rewards and punishment, the mercy-justice polarity is equally inadequate.

Jonah's anger and questioning of God is as old as Cain and Abel: recall the story:

And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:

5: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

6: And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?

7: If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him

Much like Jonah, Cain is angry that God has extended mercy to Abel; while several conjectures have been made about the preference of one sacrifice to another (blood versus grain offering, motive), the issue of mercy and justice is not anymore resolved here than it is with Jonah: the answer seems to be that God will show mercy to whom He will. The reader may want to review a search of merciful in the [Old Testament](#) and then again in the [New Testament](#).

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From the Oxford Annotated Bible, the introduction has this to say about the prophetic book of *Jonah*:

Genesis 10,11Interpretation1

The book of Jonah is unique among the prophetic books. It contains no collection of oracles in verse against Israel and foreign nations, but presents a prose narrative about the prophet himself. Instead of portraying a prophet who is an obedient servant of the Lord, calling his people to repentance, it features a recalcitrant prophet who flees from his mission and sulks when his hearers repent.

Interpretation2

The book is a didactic narrative that has taken older material from the realm of popular legend and put it to new, more consequential use. Its two parts, [Jonah 1–2](#) and [Jonah 3–4](#), are now united by having in common a central character (Jonah), a similar plot (the ironical conversion of the heathen), and an identical theme (the breadth of God's saving love).

Interpretation3

The principal figure of this artful story is an obscure Galilean prophet from Gath-hepher who counseled Jeroboam II (786 - 746 b.c.) in a successful conflict with the Syrians ([2 Kings 14.25](#)) and with whom some of the earlier traditional material was probably associated. Its author, however, probably lived in the post-exilic period because he shows the influence of Jeremiah and Second Isaiah, and opposes the type of a narrow sectarianism and exclusivism. Although the linguistic evidence is indecisive, a date sometime in the fifth or fourth century b.c. seems indicated.

Interpretation4

With skill and finesse this little book calls Israel to repentance and reminds it of its mission to preach to all the nations the wideness of God's mercy and forgiveness ([Genesis 12.1–3](#); [Isaiah 42.6–7](#); [Isaiah 49.6](#)). In spirit, therefore, the book remains truly prophetic and justifies its place in the Book of the Twelve Prophets.

To read *Jonah* is to read the direction of God's evolving Kingdom, to understand the workings of mercy among humankind; strikingly, one who reads *Jonah* with only an ear for the controversies surrounding the book and no or little appreciation for God's intricate plan revealed in the smallest subsection of His written word will miss entirely how early an insight *Jonah* provides for the foundation work of Jesus in the Gospels. *Jonah*, like Jesus, proclaims God's mercy; like Jesus, too, *Jonah* takes a message of compassion outside a chosen and covenanted people; in both worlds, the world of *Jonah* and that of Jesus, a strict formula for justice would say the people deserved punishment, yet in both cases, God relents: the Ninevites repent and are saved; Gentiles see the light that is the glory of God's people. Both *Jonah* and Jesus bear authority recognized in the symbolism of the dove: for *Jonah*, his Hebrew name meaning dove, suggests he may run but not escape his

providential destiny; Jesus came to announce the kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit descends upon him in the form of a dove. Symbolism uniting Jonah and Jesus extends even farther: both are sacrificed in order to save others, and both endured lots being cast: Jonah, to determine who was responsible for the calamity, and Jesus, to determine who would take his clothes. The sea narrative is common to both: Jonah is cast into the sea at his own request in order to save the sailors; Jesus, preaching to his disciples, revealed that he knew his destiny: "*The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again*" (Mark 9.31). Finally, no one should miss the buried into death and resurrected into life symbolism: "Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and nights" (1.17); Jesus said, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days, I will build another not made with hands" (Mark 14.58). Both Jonah and Jesus entered into death: Jonah says, "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried" (2.2); the body of Jesus was granted to Joseph, who "wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock" (15.46) Both Jonah and Jesus were elevated to original and rightful place. Jonah found himself back in route to Nineveh, "spewed out upon the dry land" (2. 10) and told a second time to "Get up and go to Nineveh" (3.3); Jesus "was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God" (16.19).

To understand *Jonah* as an exciting proclamation of God's mercy among humankind, the reader will need some background. First, exactly, who is Jonah? Read 2 Kings 14. We must recall that the reign of Jeroboam II was a long and prosperous one. We learn that Jonah is a prophet from Galilee (Gath-hepher) who counseled Jeroboam II in his successful conflict with the Syrians; this would make our date for the prophet Jonah to be that of 786-746 B.C.E. During Jeroboam II's reign, the boundaries of Israel reached the former limits of David's kingdom. On the horizon, though, a new threat exists in the move of Assyria once again as it expands and swallows up kingdoms. Jonah has come from Galilee to prophesy during expansion of Israel under Jeroboam II. Verse 26 reveals God as responding compassionately, mercifully, to Israel: "the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, son of Jehoash."

We can read even farther back and gain yet more insight. Elisha the prophet has just died (20) and has been buried. We learn that King Hazael of Aram has been oppressing Israel all the days of Jehoahaz with the Lord having compassion on them and turning to them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God did not destroy Israel but through Joash, God permits Hazel to be defeated three times with Joash beginning the work of reclaiming Israel's land. God's evolving mercy is farther underlined in

chapter 14 when the writer explains that justice is to be meted out to the individual: "The parent shall not be put to death for the children, or the children for the parents: but all shall be put to death for their own sins," a law evolving as early as Deuteronomy 24.16.

What then is one to make of Jonah? Hazael of Damascus and his son and successor Benhadad II have been constant enemies of Israel. Assyria has captured Damascus in 805 B.C.E.; Jonah appears announcing the coming victories of Jeroboam II, a prophecy fulfilled in a dramatic reversal of fortunes which brings both Judah and Israel prosperity unknown since David and Solomon. Assyria was itself under attack from Ararat to the north; from 783 B.C.E. to 746 B.C.E., it has weak and ineffectual rulers. Jonah's voice is the only prophetic voice recorded between Elisha and the prophecies of Amos and Hosea; both of these prophets speak of coming judgment against God's sinful people: Amos prophesies destruction, and Hosea speaks of judgment. Thus, until we read again of Jonah in his own book, we have the story of a prophet speaking the easy message of God's compassion and mercy for his people during a time of expansion and prosperity. In *Jonah*, the message will still be that of mercy and compassion, but Jonah's mission is to the Ninevites, a people threatening the security of Israel. At the same time, though, the reader should recognize that Assyria is also being threatened and the idea that Nineveh could be overthrown is no longer a vague possibility. Jonah's message, though, is that God's judgment, even if prophesied, can be averted by genuine repentance. What gives here?

The *NRSV Oxford Annotated Bible* reveals the meaning of the name Jonah as being "dove." Here is a hint of what is to come in the Gospels. All four Gospels tell the same story: the spirit of God descends upon Jesus at His baptism in the form of a dove.

Consider: Matthew 3 (Also, see *Mark* 1. 9-11; *Luke* 3.21-22; and *John* 1. 32-34)

21: Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,

22: And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

One does well to recall what has been said about Jesus in Matthew just prior to this baptism:

25: And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy

Ghost was upon him.

26: And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27: And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

28: Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29: Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

30: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

31: Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

32: A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

33: And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him.

34: And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

35: (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

36: And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Panel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

37: And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

38: And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Jonah's name ties him with Jesus: the mission is that of mercy; Jonah is to go to the Ninevites; what Simon reveals is that the Kingdom of God in Jesus extends out from Israel to the Gentiles: Jesus is to be "*32: A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*"

That Jonah is linked to Jesus and the mission of mercy becomes even clearer in the repeated sea-going narratives: Jonah flees the presence of God, the mandate to go to Nineveh and tell the great city that its wickedness has come before God. Fleeing, Jonah goes by ship in the direction of Tarshish, a destination at odds with God's command. He endangers the ship which carries him: going beneath to sleep, he is awakened by the sailors who demand to know who he is (Jonah), what his country is (Galilee), of what people he is (Hebrew), and what his occupation is (prophet). They are afraid, but draw lots to determine who has brought the storm at sea upon them; Jonah is identified and is thrown over into the sea that none of the rest of them should perish. God repeats the command to Jonah in the second chapter: he is to proclaim the message God gives him. And what is that message: God may relent and change his mind (3.9). The parallel in the Gospels is clear. Jesus, too, has something that He came into the world to do (Mark 1.38); He sets out to do it with his disciples: "*To you has been given the*

secret of the kingdom of God." But did they understand, even when Jesus explained everything to them in private (4.33). No, the storm at sea narrative is repeated twice: Mark 4. 37-41 and Mark 6:47-52):

34: But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.

35: And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.

36: And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.

37: And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.

38: And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?

39: And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

40: And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?

41: And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

47: And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land.

48: And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.

49: But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out:

50: For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

51: And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.

52: For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.

53: And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore.

54: And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him,

These enveloping waters, the flood that swallows up in death, form a motif that the reader reencounters in the Bible: Noah in the flood evidencing God's granting a second chance to sinful humanity; Moses in the Red Sea, heeding God's provision of an escape route for his people. On the other side is a new world, a new commission to a new people, a new realization of covenant promise. Like Jonah, the disciples on the other side in the first narrative in Mark find themselves among the Romans, Gentiles, in the lands of the

Gerasenes. With only the preemptive wisdom of God can every detail in book after book repeat the same good tidings: that God's kingdom is the kingdom of humankind, extending to all, both Hebrew and Gentile. It's quite without accident that Jesus says to his family who take offense at him that "Prophets are not without honor, except in their own hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." Jesus means something quite different here than is normally understood: Jonah's message was to go to the Ninevites, to walk among them, and realize God's mercy in their lives; Jonah, quite understandably, questioned God's extending mercy to a people who had rightfully earned the leveling hand of justice for their violence among God's people. If Jonah had remained recalcitrant, he would have been a prophet in his own land or a prophet fleeing God; his dishonor would have been to have done so, to have remained a prophet in his own country. Jesus, as we know, walked among his own people, the Hebrew, and was not received by them; they wanted a kingdom on earth, but Jesus was not in the business of overthrowing kingdoms of the world simply to expand the Jewish kingdom. What Jesus wanted was for people to return to the Lord; as Hosea reminds us, "Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he who will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up; After two days, he will revive us; on the third day, he will raise us up that we may live before him..." (6.1-2). The irony revealed in Jonah and Christ among his own is that the Ninevites repented and the Kingdom of God was received by the Gentiles, the Israelites continuing a long tradition of not repenting in spite of prophetic warnings.

The reader will also want to revisit [Genesis ten and eleven](#) and the account of Noah's sons and their contribution to the rebuilding of civilization after the flood; it helps to remember, too, Abram is bluntly told, "Go from your country and your people" (Genesis 12.1).

One wonders, too, about other aspects of the improbable unity unfolding in the Scripture. For example, Exodus 6:2-3 has God say to Moses: "I am Yahweh; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh, I did not make myself known to them." Under the name El-Shaddai, God interacts with the patriarchs and accomplishes a progressive revelation of His nature. In Moses' generation, relatively long-term, God comes to be experienced as Yahweh. Abraham and Jacob both experience God as both Shaddai and Yahweh. Yahweh is first in both cases Yahweh is associated with an initiation into an agreement concerning the promise of a land and people (*Genesis* 15.7-17; 28.13-15); El Shaddai marks an acceptance or participation in this agreement or covenant (17.1-8; 35.11-12). Yahweh is always connected to the long-term fulfillment of God's promises; El Shaddai is connected with descendents, names changes, and allegiances made by

individuals. In the *Old Testament*, God is often identified El with the last part of the compound name serving as epithets to God's activity.

How does one take a discussion of God's name to *Jonah*? Jonah uses a compound name for God in 4.6: *6: And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.* This is Yahweh-Elohim. *Oxford* says of the superscription used in the prophetic address for 'the word of the Lord' "The conviction that the word of the Lord comes to a prophet is fundamental to Hebrew prophecy: it asserts that the prophet's inspiration and authority is not self-generated but come from God whose will is disclosed through the prophet whose personal agent the prophet is and whom alone the prophet must obey." Is it preemptive foresight that has Jonah use Yahweh and the Ninevites use God? Jonah is fleeing from the word of the Lord; the Ninevites urge him to call on his God. When asked his occupation, country, and people, Jonah replies he is Hebrew and worships "the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (1.9). Certainly, the Ninevites cry eventually to Jonah's Lord. The word of Yahweh comes again to Jonah (3); Nineveh, repenting, believed God (3.5). It is God who may relent (3.9). The Lord speaks to Jonah again in chapter 4; Jonah acknowledges "I knew that you are a gracious God" (4.3); and it is the Lord Yahweh who then asks Jonah whether it is right for him to be angry (4.4). The Lord-God then appoints the bush that comes up as protection over Jonah's head, but it is God who appoints the worm and the sun. It is, however, Yahweh who is concerned about Nineveh. Is it appropriate to see the Hebrew Yahweh as involved with the total course of humanity and the God El as intimately connected with people in the historical moment? Is there mercy in the moment and justice in the long run? Jeremiah 13.14 is unrelenting: "*And I will dash them one against another, parents and children together, says the Lord. I will not pity or spare or have compassion when I destroy them, but even here, the plea remains, "Hear and give ear; do not be haughty, for the Lord has spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God before He brings darkness."* In God's nature, one finds united both the Messianic and the apocalyptic; *Habakkuk* speaks the word of Yahweh: *There is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come" (2.3).*