

# Jonah

## Chapter 1

### *Jonah Flees From the Lord*

<sup>1</sup> The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup> “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” <sup>3</sup> But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup> All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. <sup>6</sup> The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish.” <sup>7</sup> Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup> So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?” <sup>9</sup> He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.” <sup>10</sup> This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.) <sup>11</sup> The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?” <sup>12</sup> “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.” <sup>13</sup> Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. <sup>14</sup> Then they cried to the LORD, “O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased.” <sup>15</sup> Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. <sup>16</sup> At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him. <sup>17</sup> But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

**1:1** *The word of the LORD came.* See 3:1; a common phrase used to indicate the divine source of the prophet’s revelation (see, e.g., 1Ki 17:8; Jer 1:2, 4; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Hag 1:1, 3; Zec 1:1, 7). (CSB)

It is important to note how Jonah was called, directly by the Lord Himself. This was also true of the other prophets in the OT and of the apostles in the NT. Such a call is said to be an immediate call, one issued by the Lord in person without going through a human agency. Today the Lord calls pastors, teachers and missionaries into His service mediately, that is, through the agency of His church acting in His name. (PBC)

In either case, the call is always connected with the word of the Lord. That gives the call its authority. The Lord alone knows whom He wants to call, what the person is to do and where he or she is to serve. (PBC)

The construct phrase **דְבַר־יְהוָה** (“the Word of Yahweh”) occurs around two hundred fifty times in the OT. With few exceptions it refers to a Word spoken by Yahweh to a prophet. Almost universally it is “a technical term for the prophetic word of revelation,” and it is the formula that gives the prophetic books their distinctiveness. Approximately one hundred fifteen of its occurrences are as subject of the verb **הָיָה**, “to be,” which in these instances is usually translated “came,” as here in Jonah 1:1. The expression “the Word of Yahweh came to . . .” is often called the “word-event formula” because “the advent of the divine Word causes events to take place, as is supremely true in the advent of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.” But just how exactly Jonah received this Word is not known. (CC)

*Jonah*. See Introduction: Title; Author. (CSB)

Jonah means “dove”; Amitti means “loyal” or “faithful.” Jonah proclaimed the Lord’s decision to all Israel to expand its borders under King Jeroboam II (793-753 BC). (TLSB)

Yahweh’s grace towards the Northern Kingdom is then intimately connected with Jonah’s proclamation of Yahweh’s Word in 2 Kings (“the Word of Yahweh, the God of Israel, which he spoke,” **דְבַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר**, 2 Ki 14:25). Despite the habitual wickedness of the king, Yahweh’s desire to help and save Israel is unquenchable. He does not override the wicked king, but rather uses the king’s personal ambition to bring deliverance for his people. When referring to the same situation, Amos 6:14 points to the ultimate ineffectiveness of Jeroboam’s strategy. Israel did not need expanded borders, but an expanded heart for Yahweh. (CC)

Jonah was a contemporary of Amos and Hosea and may even have been one of the “sons of the prophets” (2 Ki 2:3–7) who was a protégé of Elisha. (CC)

Jonah appears to function much like other prophets in 1 and 2 Kings. The account recorded in 1 Ki 22:6–28 shows that court prophets and true prophets were often at odds with each other. Court prophets, who prophesied in Yahweh’s name what the king wanted to hear, acted to uphold the existing social order. It was their task to secure the prerogatives of the king and to defend the realm against outside enemies by instilling confidence that God was on the side of the incumbent king. The true prophets, on the other hand, were typically allied with a secondary cultural group, a small band of believers (cf. 1 Ki 19:10–18; 2 Kings 2). The true prophets generally saw themselves as defenders of Israel’s older social and religious values, resting on the Torah of Moses. (CC)

That Yahweh’s Word came to Jonah (Jonah 1:1, as in 2 Ki 14:25–28) distinguishes him as a true prophet. (CC)

**1:2 Go/Arise.** אֲרִיב־מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם—From out of the blue, like a sudden bolt of lightning, a strange word is heard. Yahweh’s double command with the imperatives אֲרִיב and אֲלֶיךָ (from אֲלֶיךָ), “arise, go,” will be repeated in 3:2. Yahweh addresses other prophets with this same double command (Balaam in Num 22:20; Moses in Deut 10:11; Jeremiah in Jer 13:4, 6), notably Elijah (1 Ki 17:9). This connection and comparison of Jonah to Elijah will return in chapter 4 of Jonah. It is worth noting here, however, that among the prophets, only Elijah and Jonah are sent on missions to foreign lands. (CC)

*Nineveh.* Capital of Assyria, a powerful, ruthless nation more than 500 mi NE of Jonah’s hometown in Israel. Assyria posed a threat to the entire region including Israel. (TLSB)

Going to fierce, pagan Nineveh to preach is not a coveted assignment for a Hebrew prophet who likely enjoyed favor under the king of Israel, Jeroboam II. It appears that Jonah’s ministry was quite comfortable until Yahweh’s Word came, directing him to arise and go to address the most violent people in the ancient Near East. (CC)

*great city.* See 3:2; 4:11; see also note on 3:3. According to Ge 10:11–12, it was first built by Nimrod (perhaps along with Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen) and was traditionally known as the “great city.” About 700 B.C. Sennacherib made it the capital of Assyria, which it remained until its fall in 612 (see Introduction to Nahum: Background). Nineveh is over 500 miles from Gath Hopher, Jonah’s hometown. (CSB)

Nineveh’s fortified wall was c 8 mi in circumference. (TLSB)

The adjective גָּדוֹל, “great,” is the most frequent word in Jonah, used fourteen times. In the other eleven Minor Prophets this adjective occurs a total of only thirty-one times. Everything that is “great” in Jonah is produced by Yahweh or by Yahweh’s deeds. For example, in chapter 1 גָּדוֹל refers to the means Yahweh uses to carry out his purposes: a “great wind” and a “great storm” (1:4a, 4b, 12). (CC)

Thus it is ironic when the adjective גָּדוֹל describes Jonah’s response to Yahweh saving Nineveh: the prophet considered the city’s salvation to be “a great evil” (רָעָה גְדוֹלָה, 4:1). The only time Jonah expresses “great joy” is when he is comfortably couched under the qiqayon plant provided by Yahweh (שִׂמְחָה גְדוֹלָה, 4:6). Yahweh’s goal then becomes for Jonah to broaden his “great joy” to include the deliverance of the great city—but this appears to be a great challenge! (CC)

Nineveh’s glory was not long lived, as the Medes and Babylonians combined forces and besieged the city in August of 612 BC, utterly destroying it, just as Nahum predicts.

It was located on the bank of the Tigris River some 220 miles north and a little west of Bagdad in present Iraq. For 500 years, until 612 BC, it served as one of the capital cities of the mighty Assyrian Empire. (PBC)

We glean from this that God befriends not only the Jews but also the Gentiles. Thus St. Paul declares in Rom. 3:29: “Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also?” And there is no indication here that the people of Nineveh circumcised themselves and observed or adopted the laws of the Jews: they are commended solely because they believed the Word of God, repented, and became pious people. That strikes a mighty blow against the Jews and is a strong support of our Christian faith. (Luther)

*its wickedness has come up.* Cf. Sodom and Gomorrah (Ge 18:20–21). Except for the violence (3:8) of Nineveh, her “evil ways” (3:8, 10) are not described in Jonah. Nahum later states that Nineveh’s sins included plotting evil against the Lord (Na 1:11), cruelty and plundering in war (Na 2:12–13; 3:1, 19), prostitution and witchcraft (Na 3:4) and commercial exploitation (Na 3:16). (CSB) The ESV has “evil” which is a Hebrew term used nine times in a variety of ways. (TLSB)

Later Nahum would charge Nineveh with plotting against the Lord, wanton cruelty, prostitution, materialism, and arrogance. (TLSB)

In other sections of the OT, Assyria is described as idolatrous and full of pride. Isaiah’s vivid imagery of an advancing army describes a coming day of darkness and destruction (Is 5:25–30). Later in the book, it becomes clear that the military might is Assyria (e.g., Is 8:7; chapters 36–37). Assyria is featured as the force that devours the surrounding countryside, leaving Jerusalem tottering like a pathetic hut (Is 1:8); a swarm of killer bees from across the river for which Yahweh whistles (Is 7:18); the razor that he uses to shave the nations’ genitalia and expose them to shame (Is 7:20); the rod of Yahweh’s anger and the staff of his fury (Is 10:5). Assyria taunts the king of Judah, “I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able, for your part, to put riders on them” (Is 36:8), and proclaims to the inhabitants of Jerusalem—even in the Hebrew language—that they are destined to “eat their own dung and drink their own urine” (Is 36:12). (CC)

The Assyrians invented the idea of deporting entire populations to distant lands (2 Ki 15:29; 17:6; Is 36:16–17). (CC)

But notice what an important office God entrusts to Jonah when He orders this one man to preach against the mighty empire of Assyria, against the king and his princes. After all, great lords dislike and resent being chided and being taken to task; they do not want to be rebuked. And now God commands Jonah here to upbraid them for their wickedness. That surely calls for genuine courage. Jonah has to open his mouth and speak. He has to say to them: “You are evil, and you stand condemned. Your respectable conduct is nothing but sham that is misleading you.” For unquestionably there were also good people in such a large kingdom whose outward life was honorable and irreproachable. To reprove these and frighten them with God’s wrath is a big job, and it is ill received, especially among the bigwigs. In brief, we are inclined to disparage this story because we view it from afar and because it does not pertain to us. However, if anything similar were ever to befall us, or if we had participated in this at Jonah’s time,

we should think that we have never seen or heard of anything more preposterous or impossible than to have one single man attack such an empire. (Luther)

Well, God's work usually can begin in such an unreasonable and impossible way that reason must despair of them and sneer; but this is done for our good, that we might believe. For God carries out what He says and undertakes, no matter how foolish and impossible this may appear to us. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men," 1 Cor. 1:25. Jonah proves that nicely and convincingly here. (Luther)

**1:3** *ran away*. The reason is found in 4:2. The futility of trying to run away from the Lord is acknowledged in Ps 139:7, 9–10. (CSB)

Response was a jarring aberration for a servant of the Lord. Scripture nowhere reports that any other prophet disobeyed God's call. (TLSB)

Usually Yahweh's Word is the perfect performative: for him to speak is for him to create and accomplish what his Word says. The God who says, "Let there be light," and "There was light" (Gen 1:3), commands Elijah, "Arise, go to Zarephath" (1 Ki 17:9), and Elijah "arose and went to Zarephath" (1 Ki 17:10). Yahweh tells Jeremiah, "Arise, go to the Euphrates" (Jer 13:6), and Jeremiah arises and goes there (Jer 13:7). According to this normal biblical pattern, after Yahweh's command, "Arise, go to Nineveh" (Jonah 1:2), we expect the Jonah narrative to continue, "So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh." Instead, Jonah arises to flee. It's as though outside his door Jonah hangs a large sign with these words: Do Not Disturb! (CC)

In this way the biblical pattern of prophetic responsiveness is broken and a strong sense of shock is created. To compare Jonah with Moses, we would have to envision Moses throwing water on the burning bush or pawing the miraculous staff to Aaron to escape confrontation with Pharaoh! Normally prophets protest their inability to speak. Moses protests that he is not a "man of words" (Ex 4:10). Jeremiah fears that he does not "know how to speak" (Jer 1:6). Isaiah insists that his lips are unclean (Is 6:5). But Jonah goes the opposite direction—without saying a word! He arises and flees and makes the journey to Joppa, about sixty miles. In ignoring Yahweh's Word, Jonah appears to be a poor and pitiable excuse for a prophet. The satire is just getting started! (CC)

Jonah's silence is striking. It mimics that of Adam in Gen 2:15–25. After Yahweh warns Adam under the penalty of death not to eat from the tree of knowledge, his response is not recorded. Instead, the narrative moves on and in doing so makes his silence a prelude to his outright rebellion in Genesis 3. (CC)

Told to go to the northeast of his hometown of Gath-hepher, Jonah heads off in the opposite direction, toward the port of Joppa to the southwest. Here is another reminiscence of Elijah, who runs away to Beersheba because of a threat from Jezebel (1 Ki 19:2–3). However, unlike Elijah, Jonah ironically runs away before he delivers his message! (CC)

Jonah's refusal to go to Nineveh seems to reflect this warped thinking. "Lord, I'm not going to preach repentance to that good-for-nothing wicked city of Nineveh, because if they repent you will spare them. That's not fair! We're your chosen people, we're the

believers. Outsiders don't have any right to your blessings of love and mercy. They're ours, remember? Besides, Assyria is our worst enemy. Spare them and they'll come down hard on us. (PBC)

*Tarshish.* Perhaps the city of Tartessus in southwest Spain, a Phoenician mining colony near Gibraltar. By heading in the opposite direction from Nineveh, to what seemed like the end of the world, Jonah intended to escape his divinely appointed task. (CSB)

*Joppa.* Seaport on the Great Sea, the closest point of departure for Jonah. Joppa was later Peter's point of departure to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles (Ac 10:5). (TLSB)

Voting with his feet, Jonah hotfoots it to Joppa. Archaeological excavations reveal that the east Mediterranean port of Joppa (modern Jaffa, located at the southern boundary of modern Tel Aviv) was settled perhaps as early as the seventeenth century BC. There are several references to Joppa in Egyptian records of the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries BC. It was probably controlled for most of the early part of the first millennium BC by the Philistines who settled in the coastal region to the south of Joppa. As the only natural harbor on the coast of Palestine south of the Bay of Acco, it was an important seaport for the surrounding region, especially Jerusalem. (CC)

Joppa is first mentioned in the OT as being in the territory of Dan in the early fourteenth century BC, but Dan soon lost control of its allotted territory (Josh 19:40, 46–47). Subsequently, Joppa remained outside Israelite control. Therefore the point in Jonah (eighth century BC) might be that even before he boards his ship, Jonah is seeking to escape Yahweh's presence by going there. (CC)

*Found a ship.* Ships going to Tarshish are well-known in the OT. Tarshish ships are proud, noble structures (Is 2:16), a symbol of everything that is "proud and lifted up" against Yahweh (Is 2:12), carrying precious cargoes, and they are destined to be shattered "by the east wind" (Ps 48:7 to promptly break apart "in the heart of the sea" (Ezek 27:25–26). This means that at the outset of his scheming to flee from Yahweh, Jonah is doomed to fail! (CC)

*paid the fare.* Ships routinely carried passengers as well as cargo. (TLSB)

The idea expressed here is not that Jonah pays a fare, but rather that he hires or makes a payment for the services of the ship and its crew. The nuance underscores the magnitude of Jonah's action; he has financed an entire ship for his disobedience! Chapter 1 supports this. That Jonah has access to the ship's "innermost recesses" (1:5) makes sense if he has hired the entire boat. That also explains why the sailors hesitate to throw Jonah overboard (1:13–14) even after they discern that he has endangered the entire ship. Even the captain does not order Jonah off the ship, but merely asks him to pray (1:6). (CC)

*the presence of the LORD.* Repeated twice in v 3 and again in v 10 to emphasize Jonah's misconception that somehow he could escape from the Lord by getting out of Israel. (TLSB)

Jonah knows he can't escape from that (1:9). Rather, Jonah is fleeing from Yahweh's gracious, incarnational, sacramental presence, which in the OT era was centered in the tabernacle and then the Jerusalem temple. There Yahweh in his glory dwelt above the cherubim. To escape from that presence, Jonah must leave the land of Israel and the temple in Jerusalem. Supporting this interpretation is the fact that Jonah experiences no Word of Yahweh when he is on the ship, in the sea, or within the great fish (1:3–2:10). It is only after he is deposited again on the dry land, that is, presumably somewhere along the coast of Israel, that the Word of Yahweh comes to him a second time (3:1). (CC)

Also today God continues to be present in at least these two ways. God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, in whom resides the fullness of divine grace and truth (Jn 1:14–17). God promises that his grace in Christ is now present through his Word and the Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Indeed, since Christ is God, he can promise to remain with his disciples throughout the world and throughout earthly history as they teach and baptize (Mt 28:19–20), and in his Supper he gives his true body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins (1 Cor 10:16–17; 11:23–29). At the same time, God is also present everywhere, so that we can call upon him "at all times and in all places."<sup>86</sup> Luther's comments are helpful:

It is therefore possible to flee from God in the sense that we may run off to a place where there is neither Word, faith, and Spirit nor the knowledge of God. In that way Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, that is, he ran away from the people and the land of Judah, in which God's Word and Spirit and faith and knowledge were present; he fled to the sea among the Gentiles, where there was no faith, Word, and Spirit of God. (CC)

**1:4–5** Although Jonah's mission was to bring God's warning of impending judgment to the pagan world, his refusal to go to Nineveh brings these pagan sailors into peril. (CSB)

As Jonah flees, Yahweh goes with him by means of this storm. The prophet cannot get rid of Yahweh! He cannot hide, travel, sleep, or put himself in such a situation that Yahweh will ever give up on him. (CC)

Yahweh does not dialogue with Jonah here; that will ensue in chapter 4. Rather, he sends wind and storm, maneuvers the lots cast by the sailors, then commands a great fish to swallow and spit him out. All of this lays the groundwork for the discussion in chapter 4. Through it all, Yahweh's love never lets go of Jonah. As the "Hound of Heaven," Yahweh will not quit. He persists in seeking out his prophet in the hope that Jonah will come to embrace the Gospel, which is for everyone. Indeed, through the witness (1:9) and preaching (3:4) of his reluctant prophet, the Gospel will convert Gentiles (the sailors and Ninevites). (CC)

**1:4** *the LORD sent a great wind.* God's sovereign working in Jonah's mission is evident at several other points also: the fish (v. 17), the release of Jonah (2:10), the vine (4:6), the worm (4:7) and the wind (4:8). (CSB)

God knew Jonah's heart and saw his disobedience. He sent a storm to intercept his getaway. (TLSB)

Violent storms on the Mediterranean Sea are not uncommon, but this was a special storm. “The Lord sent [literally, hurled] a great wind on the sea.” It came from out of the clear blue sky with no forewarning. (PBC)

*his own god.* Apparently the sailors, who may have come from various ports, worshiped several pagan gods. (CSB)

These experienced sailors realized they needed supernatural help to survive this unusual storm, showing more religious fervor than Jonah did. Luther: “Reason is unable to identify God properly; it cannot ascribe the Godhead to the One who is entitled to it exclusively. It knows that there is a God, but it does not know who or which is the true God.... Reason never finds the true God, but it finds the devil or its own concept of God, ruled by the devil. So there is a vast difference between knowing that there is a God and knowing who or what God is. Nature knows the former—it is inscribed in everybody’s heart; the latter is taught only by the Holy Spirit” (AE 19:54–55). (TLSB)

*hurled the cargo.* Extreme step reflects the storm’s severity and the crew’s desperation. (TLSB)

According to Ezek 27:12–25, a ship on the Mediterranean might carry such cargo as precious metals, horses and mules, ivory, and various other products. The sailors’ action may be designed to lighten the ship and so help it ride out the storm. The cargo may also be intended as a sacrifice to appease the angry sea or another offended god. But their efforts are completely futile in accomplishing either purpose. (CC)

*inner part.* Probably a lower deck area set aside for crew or passengers. (TLSB)

When the sailors were crying to their god(s) and throwing cargo overboard, Jonah went down. This understanding throws the actions of Jonah into greater suspense. What kind of person would go down to the bottom of a ship to sleep deeply during such a storm at the same time others are scrambling for their very lives? (CC)

**FELL INTO A DEEP SLEEP** – Apparently he had gone to sleep shortly after the ship began to sail, even before the storm. The hurried sixty mile trip from Gath Hopher to Joppa might have exhausted him. But so would the mental and spiritual agony he underwent in his determination to defy the Lord’s call. So a tired and exhausted Jonah had gone below deck to sleep undisturbed. Did he also choose to sleep there hoping to remain unnoticed, hoping no one would remind him of his sinful disobedience? It’s quite possible, and the fact that he could sleep during the storm seems to indicate he also had a sleeping conscience. (PBC)

Jonah may have been rebelliously indifferent or perhaps depressed from the stress of running away from God. (TLSB)



o Jonah's deep sleep indicates that he is separated from the action on deck. And Jonah is not detached in a general way. By going down to the bottom of the ship and by falling into a deep sleep, he is completely disconnected. He has cut himself off from Yahweh and also from the needy people in the boat and in Nineveh. (CC)

**1:6** *The captain went to him.* The pagan captain's concern for everyone on board contrasts with the believing prophet's refusal to carry God's warning to Nineveh. (CSB)

*Arise.* Same word the Lord used to call Jonah (v 2; 3:2). (TLSB)

This means that Yahweh is still speaking to Jonah, now through the captain and the sailors. Yahweh will communicate with Jonah through other means throughout the narrative, including a great fish, a qiqayon plant, a worm, and a hot east wind. Elsewhere in the OT are examples of Yahweh speaking through animals (Balaam's ass in Num 22:28) and pagan foreign leaders (the Babylonian general Nebuzaradan in Jer 40:1–5), so these means of communication in Jonah are not unique. Indeed, God can use Assyria (Is 10:5), Babylon (Jer 1:15), and climactically, the Herods and Pilate to accomplish his redemptive purposes for the world in his Son (Mt 2:13–15; Lk 23:8–12, 24–25; Jn 19:19–22; Acts 4:27–28). (CC)

*Perhaps the god will give a thought to us.* The captain's hope was similar to that expressed later by the king of Nineveh (3:9). The captain and crew worshiped many gods and would seek help from every available one. (TLSB)

What irony! A heathen ship's captain must call upon a prophet of God to wake up and pray when Jonah should have been the first one to be alert to prayer. He was acting more like a heathen than the captain and his sailors! (PBC)

**1:1–6** Jonah turns his back on God, but God stops Jonah from his folly. God could punish Jonah or send someone else to Nineveh. However, God loves Jonah so much that He sends a storm to interrupt his flight and to eventually bring him back into a healthy relationship with his Savior. Our own disobedience merits punishment, but God in His love and mercy works to bring us to repentance and a restored relationship rather than closing the door on us. • Loving Father, hold me close and forgive my rebellion. If I try to slip away, please block my path. Rescue me from my folly, and restore to me the joy of salvation. Amen. (TLSB)

**1:7** It is safe to assume that the mariners would not have set sail on such a voyage had there been a hint of bad weather. They assume the unexpected storm has a supernatural cause and investigate who must have offended the divine. Someone's sin has to be responsible for this calamity! To the ancient mind, storms were not the products of impersonal meteorological forces but were directed to specific ends by specific wills. If the person at fault is found and dealt with, the danger may pass. (CC)

*let us cast lots.* The casting of lots was a custom widely practiced in the ancient Near East. The precise method is unclear, though it appears that, for the most part, sticks or marked pebbles were drawn from a receptacle into which they had been "cast." (CSB)

The practice continued into the NT. The Roman soldiers cast lots for the clothing of the crucified Christ in fulfillment of Scripture (Jn 19:23–24, citing Ps 22:19 [ET22:18]). The Eleven prayed and cast lots to select an apostle to succeed Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:26). (CC)

The crew wanted to know whom to blame for such a tempestuous storm. (TLSB)

*lot fell on Jonah.* By the lot of judgment the Lord exposed the guilty one (cf. Jos 7:14–26; 1Sa 14:38–44; Pr 16:33). (CSB)

God, who controlled the storm, also controlled the outcome of casting lots. Jonah thought he could run away from the Lord’s presence, but God demonstrated His reign over every detail of the situation. (TLSB)

**1:8** Crew peppered Jonah with questions, probing him to understand why this evil had come on them. (TLSB)

Once the lot falls to him, Jonah is immediately placed on trial, but this is no ordinary courtroom interrogation. The questions are not formulated by a ruminating attorney absorbed in the finer details of the case, but by terrified sailors clinging to their lives in the midst of a howling gale! A salvo of short questions is fired at Jonah. Their brevity is in keeping with the dire circumstances on the boat. (CC)

Jonah only responds to their questions about his identity: “A Hebrew I am, and Yahweh, the God of the heavens, I worship, who made the sea and the dry land” (1:9). (CC)

**1:9 Hebrew.** See note on Ge 14:13. (CSB)

This was the usual term by which an Israelite was known to foreigners. (PBC)

This expresses Jonah’s status exactly. He is fleeing from his own land and his own God. (CC)

*fear the LORD.* Jonah’s confession shows that he knew the true God but had disobeyed Him. Jonah described God as Creator and Lord, placing Him above the pagan gods that the sailors worshiped. Paul used a similar approach to introduce God to pagans in Athens (Ac 17:24). (TLSB)

At long last, Jonah breaks his silence and finally speaks. In any Hebrew narrative, the point at which the main character first speaks is worthy of special attention. In most instances the initial words are a key revelation of the person’s character. That Jonah answers the sailors, but incompletely, offers a key insight into who he is. Jonah confesses Yahweh, but he does not confess his sin. He declares that he is a worshiper of Yahweh, but he is on the lam from Yahweh—at the same time! Could hypocrisy be stated any more clearly? Jonah is fleeing from Yahweh, whom he confesses as omnipotent, on the very sea that he confesses that Yahweh has made. The creed is true doctrine, but in Jonah’s mouth, we have to wonder whether it is confessed in true faith. (CC)

Throughout the book Jonah never completely confesses his evil. It festers and grows until it becomes a “great evil” (4:1) and threatens to overcome him. Jonah spurns the counsel of King David in Ps 4:4. (CC)

*God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.* The sailors would have understood Jonah’s words as being descriptive of the highest divinity. Their present experiences confirmed this truth, since, in the religions of the ancient Near East generally, the supreme god was master of the seas (see note on Jos 3:10). This is Jonah’s first confessional statement, and, like those that follow (2:9d; 4:2), it is thoroughly orthodox. Though orthodox in his beliefs, Jonah refuses to fulfill his divine mission to Nineveh. (CSB)

Jonah may not have intended it this way, but his confession of faith would be used by the Lord to bring the heathen sailors to a saving knowledge of the true God. (PBC)

*What have you done?* This rhetorical question is really an accusation. (CSB)

Sailors were justly astounded at Jonah’s audacity in trying to run from the God he had just described as Lord of the entire earth. (TLSB)

“What is this you have done?” is the sixth question addressed to Jonah since his flight. The sailors will ask one more question in 1:11: “What shall we do to you?” Each of these questions in 1:8–11 concerns Jonah’s identity and responsibility. Their building intensity parallels the heightening intensity of the storm. Jonah’s failure to conform his life to his professed faith in Yahweh caused this external threat, both for himself and for those around him. As the English poet John Donne put it, “No man is an island, entire of itself.” (CC)

The sailors react in a way more indicative of faith than does the Israelite Jonah. He is reacting in a manner we would expect from an unbeliever. The sailors cannot imagine anyone treating his deity in such a fashion. They have a fear and respect for the divine that Jonah does not. This is an ongoing theme in the narrative: the Gentile outsiders display greater reverence and understanding than the Israelite insider, Jonah, who remains mostly clueless. (CC)

It was like they were saying, “Jonah, what’s wrong with you? You dared to disobey the Lord! How could you invite all this trouble on us and yourself by thinking you could run away from the Lord who is everywhere?” Jonah’s answer is not recorded. No doubt he had none, could give none. And just hung his head in shame. (PBC)

**1:11 WHAT SHOULD WE DO** – Jonah so impressed the sailors with his confession and disclosures that they asked him how to calm the storm. (TLSB)

With the sailors reeling from the howling storm, their sense of urgency escalates. They press Jonah for a solution, realizing that he alone knows how to respond to his own God in such a catastrophic situation. (CC)

**1:12** *throw me into the sea.* Jonah's readiness to die to save the terrified sailors contrasts with his later callous departure from Nineveh to watch from a safe distance while the city perishes—at least he still hoped it would perish (see 4:5). (CSB)

Jonah had so impressed the sailors with his confession and disclosures that they asked him how to calm the storm. (TLSB)

Somehow, perhaps through the chiding of the sailors, the Lord had aroused Jonah's sleeping conscience and corrected him. Here is the first sign of his repentance, the frank admission of his guilt. He knew it was his fault. He also knew death was a fitting punishment for his sinful disobedience – but only if the Lord so willed. (PBC)

He knew perfectly well his life was not his own. Not a suicidal death wish, not fatalism, but faith alone could move Jonah to say, "Throw me into the sea." He was no longer fleeing from the Lord. Now he was willing to commit himself fully, body and soul, to the Lord's gracious will and care. Jonah' was willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of others. (PBC)

**1:13** *did their best to row.* The Hebrew uses the picturesque word meaning "to dig" (with oars) to indicate strenuous effort. The ship could be driven by sails, oars, or both. The reluctance of the sailors to throw Jonah into the sea stands in sharp contrast to Jonah's reluctance to warn Nineveh of impending judgment. (CSB)

Not wanting to sacrifice Jonah's life, the sailors made one last attempt to return to shore. It seems the ship was still close to shore when the storm struck. (TLSB)

Caught between the devil and the deep blue sea—between Jonah's death and their own—the sailors are indeed in a catch-22. Normally it is the prophet's role to attempt to save people from some divinely inspired disaster or punishment (e.g., Amos 7:1–6). But here it is the pagan sailors who attempt to save a prophet of Yahweh who refused to preach—ironic indeed! (CC)

These positive actions of the mariners stand in stark contrast with the behavior of Jonah. They have been thrown into a life-threatening storm through no fault of their own. They have lost their cargo. Yet they still seek to save the life of the man responsible for all the chaos. The sailors are models of true forgiveness. Their actions demonstrate the Pauline diction in Eph 4:32: "Be kind unto one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ forgave you." (CC)

**1:14–16** Jonah's simple confession of faith (v 9) led these pagan sailors to realize that the Lord had sent the storm. They directed their prayers to the only One who could intervene and save them. Interpreters differ on whether the sailors were truly converted or simply added the Lord (Yahweh) to their list of deities, as clearly happened even in Israel (see notes, 1Ki 11:4, 5, 7). (TLSB)

**1:14 CRIED TO THE LORD** – In contrast to their previous frantic prayer to their false gods, the sailors now pray to the Lord with a remarkable degree of quiet confidence and faith. (PBC)

The sailors are in a double jeopardy, in a no-win situation. They are suffering because of Jonah's evil, yet placing themselves in a position to cry, "Man overboard!" may bring Yahweh's further wrath upon them for their own evil. The mariners will perish if Jonah stays on board; but they rightly may perish if they throw a man overboard! Their only recourse is to plead for acquittal from Yahweh. So unlike Jonah, the sailors do not flee from Yahweh (1:3), nor do they remain silent (throughout chapter 1 Jonah never speaks to Yahweh). Instead, they pray to the one true God. (CC)

This means that when the sailors confess Yahweh's omnipotence in 1:14, it functions as a polemic against the worship of anyone but Yahweh. They have come to know more than the fact that Yahweh is a mighty storm God, more powerful than Yamm; Yahweh is their only hope of salvation, both from the storm now and for eternity. The mariners have come to believe in Yahweh as the only God. The manmade idols of the nations are but nothing. (CC)

Ironically, Jonah did not care enough about the pagans in Nineveh to preach to them, but the pagan sailors cared enough about him that they did not want to be responsible for his death. (TLSB)

**1:15** Confirms God's control as well as Jonah's analysis of the situation (v 12). (TLSB)

The sailors throw Jonah overboard, thus making him the sacrifice. The sea becomes quiet (1:15), indicating that it is Yahweh, the God of Jonah (1:9) and now the God of the mariners (1:14), who controls the waves. (CC)

**1:16** *greatly feared the LORD*. There is no evidence that the sailors renounced all other gods (contrast Naaman, 2Ki 5:15). Ancient pagans were ready to recognize the existence and power of many gods. At the least, however, the sailors acknowledged that the God of Israel was in control of the present events, that he was the one who both stirred up and calmed the storm, and that at this moment he was the one to be recognized and worshiped. (CSB)

Just as later the people of Nineveh "believed God" (3:5), so these heathen sailors revered the Lord. (TLSB)

It is improbable that the sailors made burnt offerings on board a wooden vessel that earlier was emptied of most, if not all, of its cargo, and "thought itself to be broken" (1:4). They offered worship and made vows immediately while at sea, and those vows likely included promises to offer sacrifice. Then once on land, they offered their sacrifices and again worshiped Yahweh. (CC)

*sacrifice*. Sign of thanks to the Lord offered after the crew got back to shore. (TLSB)

*vows.* Religious commitment; cf Nu 30. Jonah concluded his prayer in the belly of the fish with a similar commitment (2:9). Luther: “What pure, God-fearing, and Christian consciences these people now have! The same people who prior to this did not hesitate to commit murder and who were entirely indifferent to obeying God now proceed to make sacrifices to God and to make vows. The various gods on whom they had called earlier are all forgotten. And this was all effected by Jonah and his dying. A servant of God must prove himself so useful that there is nothing about him that does not accrue to the benefit and the welfare of others. We stated earlier that the fear of God is just another term for the service of God; for true service of God is to fear and to honor God” (AE 19:69). (TLSB)

**1:7–16** God uses Jonah’s disobedience as a learning opportunity for him and for the ship’s crew. Jonah has an opportunity to compare his indifference and hostility toward Nineveh with the sailors’ concern for his life. And the sailors are able to learn of the true God through Jonah’s confession of faith and God’s control of the sea. Amazingly, even when we break God’s Law and receive punishment, He often turns the situation into a learning experience and an opportunity for us to confess and praise Him. “Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever” (Ps 136:1). • O Lord, You bring good out of evil circumstances. Lead me to confess Your name before others and testify to Your goodness. Amen. (TLSB)

**1:17** *the LORD provided.* This characteristic phrase occurs also in 4:6–8. (CSB)

Hbr *manah*, “to reckon,” “number,” or “ordain”; favorite term in Jonah. God not only designated this sea creature to rescue Jonah but also later appointed a plant, a worm, and a scorching east wind to further Jonah’s schooling (4:6–8). Irenaeus of Lyons: “He patiently suffered Jonah to be swallowed by the whale, not that he should be swallowed up and perish altogether, but that, having been cast out again, he might be the more subject to God” (ANF 1:449). (TLSB)

*great fish.* The Hebrew here and the Greek of Mt 12:40 are both general terms for a large fish, not necessarily a whale. This great fish is carefully distinguished from the sinister “serpent” of the sea (Am 9:3)—otherwise called “Leviathan” (Isa 27:1)—and the “monster of the deep” (Job 7:12; see Ps 74:13; Eze 32:2). (CSB)

We are not told specifically what kind of sea creature God selected to rescue Jonah. Most often people think of a whale, because the animal would need to be very large. Israelites, like other ancient people, did not use the modern classifications for animals (e.g., distinguishing ocean mammals from fish). Their classifications tended to focus on an animal’s habitat and locomotion (Gn 1:20–25; 9:2). Some interpreters saw in this beast an emblem of our eternal struggle. Irenaeus of Lyons: “From the beginning, did God permit man to be swallowed up by the great whale [Satan], who was the author of transgression” (ANF 1:449–50). (TLSB)

There are stories of swallowed sailors. One that appears in several commentaries recounts how in 1758 a man fell overboard from a frigate in the Mediterranean and disappeared into a shark’s mouth. A gun was discharged at the shark, which promptly spit out the man, shaken but unharmed. The shark was killed and preserved, and the man toured Europe with it on exhibition. Sasson notes that another such experience is related in the *Weekly World News* of June 16, 1987.

It reports: “Shark swallows fisherman—then spits him out alive!” Mikado Nakamura, the escapee, then gave an interview from his hospital bed in Kanazaw, Japan. (CC)

The fish, then, is provided by Yahweh as a “means of grace” to save Jonah from Sheol and return him to life, communion with Yahweh in worship (2:5, 8–10 [ET2:4, 7–9]), and the place (“dry land,” 2:11 [ET2:10]) where he can reassume the commission he had previously abandoned. (CC)

So the belly of the great fish appears to be a knife but is really a scalpel. This is the theology of the cross. Jonah’s torture is also his treatment, his imprisonment is also his care, his pain is part of his corrective reeducation program. So the great fish is not an instrument of Yahweh’s punishment, but rather a vehicle of deliverance that will enable him to continue his ministry and also save the Ninevites. Jonah is already delivered while in his watery grave, for there, in the place of certain death, Yahweh meets him with life (cf. 1 Sam 2:6; 2 Ki 5:7). The Lord of the sea in Jonah 1 is also the Lord of its creatures (cf. Ps 104:26), and he uses both to communicate his will and salvation to Jonah. (CC)

*swallow up Jonah.* This miracle causes some interpreters to regard the Book of Jonah as a saga, fiction, or folklore. When Jesus referred to the “sign of Jonah,” there is no indication that He considered this to be a parable, legend, allegory, or myth. Jesus spoke of the Book of Jonah as historical (as He likewise spoke of Solomon or of the queen of the South). (TLSB)

*three days and three nights.* The phrase used here may, as in Mt 12:40, refer to a period of time including one full day and parts of two others (see notes on Mt 12:40; Lk 9:28; 1Co 15:4). In any case, the NT clearly uses Jonah’s experience as a type (foreshadowing) of the burial and resurrection of Jesus, who was entombed for “three days and three nights” (Mt 12:40; see Mt 16:4; Lk 11:29–32). (CSB)

Jesus compared Jonah’s three-day stay in the belly of the fish to His own stay in the heart of the earth prior to His resurrection. (TLSB)

### **Summary of Scene 2 (CC)**

In contrast to Jonah, the sailors—these “paid extras” (hired in 1:3)—demonstrate remarkable self-restraint, concern for the safety and welfare of Jonah, and reverence toward Jonah’s God (cf. 1:6, 14) culminating in faith and worship of Yahweh (1:16). On the other hand, Jonah seems to be little concerned with the fate of those around him, his own responsibility as a prophet of Yahweh, or even his own well-being. Jonah sinks (!) in our estimation while the sailors rise, both figuratively and literally! (CC)

The second scene in the narrative (1:4–16) also suggests a pattern in the usage of terms for God. “Yahweh” is the covenant name of God, revealed to his redeemed people. It is “Yahweh” who calls his prophet (1:1–3). Elohim (translated “God,” “god,” or “gods,” depending on the context) is used for the gods of the non-Israelite sailors (1:5) and is the term used by their captain for Jonah’s “God” (twice in 1:6). The sailors hear about “Yahweh” from Jonah (1:9) and by 1:14–16 they are praying to and worshiping “Yahweh.” Jonah’s confession (1:9) connects the two terms

when he identifies “Yahweh” as the Elohim (“God”) who made the sea and the dry land. These important changes in terms for the divine prepare us for the nuances in the rest of the book.

**1:17** Jonah thinks he will die by drowning in the sea, and that should be the outcome of his refusal to obey God. But God has other plans for Jonah. The great fish saves him from drowning and gives him pause to consider his situation and his role in carrying out God’s will. Our life is like a tapestry woven by God. We are effective at making holes in that tapestry when we sin and follow our own will. God does not always protect us from ourselves so as to make the holes disappear, but He is skilled at reweaving the loose threads that we create and giving us a chance to move on with Him and His purposes. • God of grace, thank You for saving me, Your undeserving child. Give me eyes of faith to trust Your guidance and direction in my life. Amen. (TLSB)