

# “All the Prophets Testify”: Jonah 1:4-17

Midweek Bible Study – 2025 November 12

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<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions

Outline (*TLSB* p.1479):

- I. Account of Jonah’s Call and His Reaction (1:1-3)
- II. Onboard Ship in the Midst of a Storm at Sea (1:4-17)**
- III. Inside the Great Fish (2:1-10)
- IV. Yahweh gives Jonah His Assignment a Second Time (3:1-3)
- V. Jonah Delivers the Message; Nineveh’s Response (3:4-10)
- VI. Jonah’s Prayer in Nineveh (4:1-3)
- VII. Jonah Sits Outside the City of Nineveh; Yahweh Teaches a Lesson on Mercy (4:4-11)

Onboard Ship in the Midst of a Storm at Sea (1:4-17):

1:4 *But*: The Hebrew conjunction can be variously translated, but the adversative “but” is appropriate in this place. Note well the sharp contrast between Jonah’s twice-stated intentions to go to Tarshish (wherever that might have been) expressed in 1:3 and what God brings about in 1:4. With reference to the Hebrew text, Allen notes that Yahweh ends 1:3 and begins 1:4 and comments, “the passive victim of Jonah’s tactics...now intervenes in activity of his own.” *TLSB* comments, “God knew Jonah’s heart and saw his disobedience. He sent a storm to intercept his getaway.” We might reflect on whether or not—and, if so, how—God might similarly intervene when we are disobedient.

*threatened to break up*: Allen says the storm “well nigh shivers the timbers of the poor old ship”.

1:5 *Then the mariners were afraid*: *TLSB* comments, “These experienced sailors realized they needed supernatural help to survive this unusual storm, showing more religious fervor than Jonah did” (confer later in the verse).

*each cried out to his god*: we do not know what nationality or religion the mariners were, but we can see likely multiple gods reflected and not the contrast with Jonah also indicated in 1:6. Keil-Delitzsch speculates, “They were heathen, and probably for the most part Phoenicians, but from different places, and therefore worshippers of different gods.” *TLSB* quotes Luther on fallen human reason’s not being able to identify the true God on its own, and we think about Jonah’s role as a prophet among them, and we might reflect on our role among those whom God places in our lives who have strayed from the faith or never believed.

*hurled cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them:* Allen comments, “They try to deal with the storm God had thrown upon the sea with a counter throw.” *TLSB* comments, “Extreme step reflects the storm’s severity and the crew’s desperation.” (We might confer Acts 27:18, 19, and 38, when Paul was sailing to Rome as a prisoner before the ship wrecked.)

*But Jonah had gone down:* Keil-Delitzsch comments, “not, however, just at the time of the greatest danger, but before the wind had risen into a dangerous storm.” Laetsch suggests Jonah wanted to hide.

*into the inner part of the ship:* *TLSB* comments, “Probably a lower deck area set aside for crew or passengers.”

*had laid down and was fast asleep:* apparently a deep, stuporlike sleep or “dead sleep”. *TLSB* comments, “Jonah may have been rebelliously indifferent or perhaps depressed from the stress of running away from God.” Keil-Delitzsch discusses those options and others, including security of mind, concluding the truth may be somewhere in the middle. Roehrs-Franzmann refers to “the disciples in Gethsemane, who shut out the agonizing reality of the hour by sleeping, when the imperative of the hour is “Watch and pray” (Mt 26:41). There is a terrible irony in the fact that a pagan captain must summon the prophet (whose office is to intercede) to prayer.” (On the connection to the sleeping disciples and the heathen captain reminding God’s prophet to do his duty, confer Laetsch.)

1:6 *So the captain came and said to him:* *CSSB* comments, “The pagan captain’s concern for everyone on board contrasts with the believing prophet’s refusal to carry God’s warning to Nineveh”, and, we might add, endangering the sailors in the process (see *CSSB*). Of course, the captain’s interest in getting Jonah to call upon Jonah’s “god” could be the captain’s own interest in self-preservation. Allen suggests the captain was “going down into the hold to fetch up the cargo” and discovered Jonah to the captain’s “extreme annoyance”.

*Arise:* *TLSB* notes, “Same word the Lord used to call Jonah (v 2; 3:2).” So Allen suggests, “Jonah must have thought he was having a nightmare”.

*call out to your god:* Allen comments, “If only the captain knew how far spiritually Jonah was from God and what little claim he had upon Yahweh!” Luther says, “reason thinks that it will be saved by the intercession of another person. Faith, on the other hand, as it rejects no one, also trusts no human being but depends on God alone, on whom it calls in need”.

*Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish:* the captain’s words likely should not be taken as any sort of faith in the true God (perhaps compare 3:9 and Joel 2:14’s “who knows whether he will not turn and relent”). Note also the language of the mariners’ prayer in 1:14. *TLSB* comments, “The captain and crew worshiped many gods and would seek help from every available one.” Allen says Jonah did not pray. Luther refers to false gods’ being discovered as false in adversity and the God of the Jews being accepted even from a Jew when people were desperate enough.

1:7 *Come let us cast lots, that we may know ... so they cast lots ... and the lot fell:* Laetsch observes that prior to this point Jonah had not confessed but was willing to let them suffer and even die rather than confess, though Laetsch thinks Jonah already had told them he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. Luther refers to the mariners' own sin and deserving sentence of death. *CSSB* comments, "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'." Unclear is whether or not the mariners thought that some god was using the lots as a means of revealing truth to them, as the Israelites held regarding the Urim and Thummim, and was done in the New Testament in the case of choosing Judas's successor. *TLSB* comments, "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." In discussing contemporary use of lot for determining God's will, Laetsch notes, among other things, that "our choice on the basis of the lot" could "work out for our weal or woe."

*on whose account this evil has come upon us:* presumably the storm was so bad that the mariners regarded it as more than just a usual bad storm due to usual weather. Note the essential repetition of "on whose account this evil has come upon us" in 1:8 once the lot has fallen on Jonah, so really the lot only "tells" them whom to ask.

1:8 *Then they said to him, "Tell us:* commentators refer to a potential occupation that might have aroused God's wrath. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly the mariners do not ask what Jonah had done that the storm came upon them, but we find out in 1:10 that they already knew (if that is how that statement is to be taken; compare Keil-Delitzsch who thinks that that is when he tells them, and confer Allen who there translates "he had just told them").

1:9 *I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord:* we do not know how much the mariners knew about the Hebrews or the Lord, although the fact that they were sailing out of Joppa (1:3) would suggest they knew something of the Hebrews, and the fact that they were exceedingly afraid (1:10, and see 1:16) would suggest that they knew something of the Lord.

*the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land:* certainly a God Who created the sea could control the sea. Perhaps the mariners' gods were not thought to have been such a creator. *TLSB* comments, "Jonah described God as Creator and Lord, placing Him above the pagan gods that the sailors worshiped." Similar is *CSSB*, "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". Allen comments, "The wonder is that Jonah can recite such a creed and yet show disrespect to the commands of the God whose sovereignty it celebrates."

1:10 *What is this that you have done:* given that they already know, as the verse makes clear, this statement is an exclamation (Keil-Delitzsch says "of horror") and not a question. *TLSB* comments, "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." *CSSB* considers the statement an accusation. Keil-Delitzsch comments that "the storm preached the omnipotence of God more powerfully than words could possibly do". Kretzmann refers to the mariners' complicity in Jonah's sin by unwittingly aiding him in his flight. Allen notes "match" of "what you have done" with "what shall we do".

*fleeing from the presence of the Lord*: confer the intention expressed twice in 1:3 and our discussion previously there about what exactly might be meant, whether simply away from the land where God manifested His presence in a unique way in the temple or somehow to escape and hide himself from the omnipresent God.

1:11 *Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?":*

The mariners apparently rightly conclude a cause and effect relationship between Jonah's fleeing and the storm (confer Jonah's statement in 1:12). Presumably they at least hope that there is something they can do to satisfy God's wrath at Jonah, and presumably they figure that Jonah would have a better idea about what that would be than they would have. *TLSB* comments, "Jonah had so impressed the sailors with his confession and disclosures that they asked him how to calm the storm."

1:12 *Pick me up and hurl me ... then the sea will quiet down*: we are not told that God revealed to Jonah this course of action and its expected result (and actual result in 1:15), though perhaps God did so reveal it to Jonah (perhaps confer the "I know" that follows in this verse), or perhaps Jonah is inferring it (confer the "for" that follows in this verse).

Keil-Delitzsch comments that Jonah "pronounces this sentence, not by virtue of any prophetic inspiration, but as a believing Israelite who is well acquainted with the severity of the justice of the holy God, both from the law and from the history of his nation."

*TLSB* comments, "In resignation, Jonah was ready to forfeit his life so the crew could be saved." *CSSB* contrasts Jonah's willingness to die in this case with what it calls "his later callous departure from Nineveh to watch from a safe distance while the city perishes".

However, Laetsch sees repentance and heroic faith's committing himself, body and soul, to the Lord (perhaps to some extent confer Luther). Allen comments, "Verse 12 is neither Jonah's final solution to evade his mission...nor a gallant bid of vicarious sacrifice".

*I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you*: the mariners may have thought it, but Jonah claims to know it, whether by direct revelation or something else, we are not told.

1:13 *Nevertheless*: the Hebrew is a simple conjunction, but the context certainly suggests "nevertheless" (also KJV and ASV) or "instead" (NIV) or "however" (NASB), since the mariners who asked Jonah what to do immediately ignore what he told them to do, apparently not being able to bring themselves to pick him up and hurl him into the sea to what they must have thought would be certain death, and in a sense was (confer 1:14 and Jonah's prayer in 2:2-9 that arguably describes death and resurrection). Keil-Delitzsch refers to the mariners fear of God as preventing them from punishing His prophet.

*the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not*: as we discussed last time, we do not know how far out from dry land they were at the time, but the Lord seems determined to prevent anything other than what He brings about. *TLSB* comments, "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." Allen refers to the mariners' attempt to land Jonah and bring him back to the place where he can obey God's command, and Allen asks if the fish was not God's device to do just that, but Allen answers no, that Jonah deserves to die but is in fact to be saved "by a signal demonstration of the grace of Yahweh."

1:14 *Therefore they called out to the Lord*: the mariners arguably “pray” in some sense, whether from true faith or not is somewhat unclear. *TLSB* comments, “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”. If there are two distinct petitions, the first petition seems to be for their own deliverance from the storm cause by Jonah’s actions (confer the captain’s words in 1:6), and the second petition seems to be for their own innocence of Jonah’s blood. *TLSB* comments, “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.”

*for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you*: Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “because He had, through the casting of lots, pointed to Jonah as the guilty one”, and that may well be all or part of what is meant (confer Keil-Delitzsch on more than that).

1:15 *So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging*. All happened as Jonah said it would in 1:12. *TLSB* comments, “Confirms God’s control as well as Jonah’s analysis of the situation (v 12).” Perhaps notable is that God’s action is not explicitly stated though clearly perceived as indicated in what follows.

1:16 *Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly*: perhaps something different or more intense than what was expressed in 1:10’s “exceedingly afraid”. *TLSB* comments, “Just as later the people of Nineveh “believed God” (3:5), so these heathen sailors revered the Lord.” *CSSB* comments, “There is no evidence that the sailors renounced all other gods...Ancient pagans were ready to recognize the existence and power of many gods. At the last, 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.” Allen quotes from Jesus’s disciples’ statement after the stilling of a storm in the New Testament (Mark 4:41 and parallels): “Who is this that even wind and sea obey him?”

*and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows*: perhaps a thank-offering and fruits of faith, though Kretzmann refers to things people do “under the stress of such a sudden fear and emotion, although there is no real change of heart in them”. The text reads most easily as if the mariners did so right then and there. Of the sacrifice, *TLSB* comments, “Sign of thanks to the Lord offered after the crew got back to shore.” And, of the vows, *TLSB* comments, “Religious commitment; cf Nu 30. Jonah concluded his prayer in the belly of the fish with a similar commitment (2:9).” We might know of similar commitments, though people often wrongly offer them as a basis for God to do something good to them, rather than as a fruit of faith. We might reflect on Setting One and Two’s use of Psalm 116 as an Offertory, asking what we shall render to the Lord for all of His benefits and answering, in part, take the cup of salvation and pay my vows (confer Allen).

1:17 *And the Lord appointed*: the ESV marginal reading is “had appointed”, which perhaps better indicates God’s prior action (maybe think of Jonah struggling to stay afloat or sinking in the water and drowning). *TLSB* comments, “favorite word 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).” We likely should rule out the idea of a special fish created for this special purpose (confer Laetsch, though compare Kretzmann).

*a great fish*: We may think “whale”, but the Hebrew is “great fish”, not that the Hebrew’s use of the term necessarily does or must correspond to today’s classifications. *TLSB* comments, “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).” *CSSB* says, “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). Keil-Delitzsch says that whales are rare in the Mediterranean and have too small of a throat to swallow a person but that large sharks or sea-dogs are very common and have large throats and that large living things, including people, have gone in and come out. Allen comments, “an enormous fish plays the astounding part of a submarine to pick up Jonah from the murky seaweed at the bottom of the ocean and transport him safely to the mainland.”

*to swallow up Jonah*: Roehrs-Franzmann notes that even in this attempt at death Jonah does not escape from the Lord. There are various other accounts of such “swallowings”, apparently at least some false and arguably others true. Certainly our Lord seems to take the account as history (as with Solomon and the queen of the south), as we noted previously in our discussion of the book’s isagogics, especially as it pertains to what follows in this verse (Matthew 12:39-40; 16:4; Luke 11:29-30). Keil-Delitzsch says the miracle is not in the swallowing as much as the survival and return. Laetsch refers to Luther who said he would regard the narrative as a ridiculous lie if it were not written in Holy Scripture, and Kretzmann says, “It is for us to believe what the Lord has here recorded.”

*And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights*: we might say parts of three days, so not 72 hours but at least maybe 1 minute of a first day, 24 hours of a second day, and at least 1 minute of a third day (confer *CSSB* and Keil-Delitzsch, which uses another New Testament expression “on the third day”, and Laetsch). Confer the time of our Lord’s burial between His crucifixion prior to sundown Friday and His resurrection after sundown on Saturday (Sunday morning He is already risen and the tomb is empty before it is opened). Somewhat curiously, *TLSB* on p.1479 discusses the Sign of Jonah as the paradox of being under both God’s judgment and salvation and finds odd parallels. *CSSB* says, “the NT clearly uses Jonah’s experience as a type (foreshadowing) of the burial and resurrection of Jesus”. Allen considers the significance of the period for Jonah itself, noting possibilities of enhancing the miraculous nature of the episode, of corresponding to the time it was thought to take to travel to the underworld, and seemingly concluding with G.M. Landes that the period “emphasizes the great gulf between death and life and the difficulties God gloriously overcame in rescuing his servant from his merited doom”, which understanding certainly “fits” at least to some extent with the Lord’s use of it in the New Testament, as well.

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

*TLSB*’s Law and Gospel Application Note for 1:7-16 says, “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.”

*TLSB*’s Law and Gospel Application Note for 1:17 says, “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 skillful at reweaving the loose threads that we create and giving us a chance to move on with Him and His purpose.”

Next time, November 19, Jonah 1:4-17

(then hiatus for Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas, until January 7 or 21?).

Closing Prayer & Benediction