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Jonah

From Commentary on the Old Testament

C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch

adapted for Grace Notes training by Warren Doud

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Jonah

Introduction

The Prophet.

We know from 2 Kings 14:25 that *Jonah* the son of Amittai was born in Gath-Hepher, in the tribe of Zebulun, which was, according to Jewish tradition as given by Jerome, "*haud grandis viculus Geth,*" to the north of Nazareth, on the road from Sephoris to Tiberias, on the site of the present village of Meshad (see at Josh. 19:13); that he lived in the reign of Jeroboam II, and foretold to this king the success of his arms in his war with the Syrians, for the restoration of the ancient boundaries of the kingdom; and that this prophecy was fulfilled. From the book before us we learn that the same Jonah (for this is evident from the fact that the name of the father is also the same) received a command from the Lord to go to Nineveh, and announce the destruction of that city on account of its sins. This mission to Nineveh evidently falls later than the prophecy in favour of Jeroboam; but although it is quite possible that it is to be assigned to the time of Menahem, during the period of the first invasion of Israel by the Assyrians, this is by no means so probable as many have assumed. For, inasmuch as Menahem began to reign fifty-three years after the commencement of the reign of Jeroboam, and the war between Jeroboam and the Syrians took place not in the closing years, but in the very first years of his reign, since it was only the continuation and conclusion of the successful struggle which his father had already begun with these enemies of Israel; Jonah must have been a very old man when he was entrusted with his mission to Nineveh, if it did not take place till after the invasion of Israel by Pul. Nothing is known of the circumstances of Jonah's life apart from these biblical notices. The Jewish tradition mentioned by Jerome in the *Proaem.* to *Jonah*, to the effect that Jonah was the son of the widow at Zarephath, whom Elijah restored to life (1 Kings 17:17-24), which has been still further expounded by Ps. Epiph. and Ps. Doroth. (see Carpzov, *Introd.* ii. pp. 346-

7), is proved to be nothing more than a Jewish Hagada, founded upon the name "son of Amittai" (LXX υιοῦ Ἀμιθαί), and has just as much historical evidence to support it as the tradition concerning the prophet's grave, which is pointed out in Meshad of Galilee, and also in Nineveh in Assyria, for the simple reason adduced by Jerome (*l.c.*): *matre postea dicente ad eum: nunc cognovi, quia vir Dei es tu, et verbum Dei in ore tuo est veritas; et ob hanc causam etiam ipsum puerum sic vocatum, Amathi enim in nostra lingua veritatem sonat.*

The Book of Jonah resembles, in contents and form, the narratives concerning the prophets in the historical books of the Old Testament, e.g., the history of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 2:4-6), rather than the writings of the minor prophets. It contains no prophetic words concerning Nineveh, but relates in simple prose the sending of Jonah to that city to foretel its destruction; the behaviour of the prophet on receiving this divine command; his attempt to escape from it by flight to Tarshish; the way in which this sin was expiated; and lastly, when the command of God had been obeyed, not only the successful result of his preaching of repentance, but also his murmuring at the sparing of Nineveh in consequence of the repentance of its inhabitants, and the reproof administered by God to the murmuring prophet. If, then, notwithstanding this, the compilers of the canon have placed the book among the minor prophets, this can only have been done because they were firmly convinced that the prophet Jonah was the author. And, indeed, the objections offered to the genuineness of the book, apart from doctrinal reasons for disputing its historical truth and credibility, and the proofs adduced of its having a much later origin, are extremely trivial, and destitute of any conclusive force. It is said that, apart from the miraculous portion, the narrative is wanting in clearness and perspicuity. "The author," says Hitzig, "leaps over the long and wearisome journey to Nineveh, says nothing about Jonah's subsequent fate, or about his previous abode, or the spot where he was cast upon the land, or

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the name of the Assyrian king; in brief, he omits all the more minute details which are necessarily connected with a true history." But the assertion that completeness in all external circumstances, which would serve to gratify curiosity rather than to help to an understanding of the main facts of the case, is indispensable to the truth of any historical narrative, is one which might expose the whole of the historical writings of antiquity to criticism, but can never shake their truth. There is not a single one of the ancient historians in whose works such completeness as this can be found: and still less do the biblical historians aim at communicating such things as have no close connection with the main object of their narrative, or with the religious significance of the facts themselves. Proofs of the later origin of the book have also been sought for in the language employed, and in the circumstance that Jonah's prayer in Jonah 2:3-10 contains so many reminiscences from the Psalms, that Ph. D. Burk has called it *praestantissimum exemplum psalterii recte applicati*. But the so-called Aramaisms, such as הָטִיל to throw (Jonah 1:4, 5, 12, etc.), the interchange of סָפִינָה with אָנִיָּה (Jonah 1:5), מָנָה to determine, to appoint (Jonah 2:1; 4:6ff.), הָתַר in the supposed sense of rowing (Jonah 1:13), הִתְעַשֵּׂת to remember (Jonah 1:6), and the forms בְּשִׁלְמִי (Jonah 1:7), בְּשִׁלִּי (Jonah 1:12), and אָשֶׁר for שׁ (Jonah 4:10), belong either to the speech of Galilee or the language of ordinary intercourse, and are very far from being proofs of a later age, since it cannot be proved with certainty that any one of these words was unknown in the early Hebrew usage, and שׁ for אָשֶׁר occurs as early as Judg. 5:7; 6:17, and even שָׁלִי in Song of Sol. 1:6; 8:12, whilst in the book before us it is only in the sayings of the persons acting (Jonah 1:7, 12), or of God (Jonah 44:10), that it is used. The only non-Hebraic word, viz., טָעַם, which is used in the sense of command, and applied to the edict of the king of Assyria, was heard by Jonah in Nineveh, where it was used as a technical term,

and was transferred by him. The reminiscences which occur in Jonah's prayer are all taken from the Psalms of David or his contemporaries, which were generally known in Israel long before the prophet's day. Lastly, the statement in Jonah 3:3, that "Nineveh was an exceeding great city," neither proves that Nineveh had already been destroyed at the time when this was written nor that the greatness of Nineveh was unknown to the contemporaries of Jonah, though there would be nothing surprising in the latter, as in all probability very few Israelites had seen Nineveh at that time. הִיִּתָּהּ is the synchronistic imperfect, just as in Gen. 1:2. Nineveh was a great city of three days' journey when Jonah reached it, i.e., he found it so, as Staedlin observes, and even De Wette admits. The doctrinal objections to the miraculous contents of the book appear to be much more weighty; since it is undeniable that, if they were of the character represented by the opponents, this would entirely preclude the possibility of its having been composed by the prophet Jonah, and prove that it had originated in a mythical legend. "The whole narrative," says Hitzig in his prolegomena to the book of Jonah, "is miraculous and fabulous. But nothing is impossible with God. Hence Jonah lives in the belly of the fish without being suffocated; hence the *Qīqāyōn* springs up during the night to such a height that it overshadows a man in a sitting posture. As Jehovah bends everything in the world to His own purposes at pleasure, the marvellous coincidences had nothing in them to astonish the author. The lot falls upon the right man; the tempest rises most opportunely, and is allayed at the proper time; and the fish is ready at hand to swallow Jonah, and vomit him out again. So, again, the tree is ready to sprout up, the worm to kill it, and the burning wind to make its loss perceptible." But the coarse view of God and of divine providence apparent in all this, which borders very closely upon atheism, by no means proves that the contents of the book are fabulous, but simply that the history of Jonah cannot be vindicated, still less understood, without the acknowledgement of a

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living God, and of His activity in the sphere of natural and human life. The book of Jonah records miraculous occurrences; but even the two most striking miracles, the three days' imprisonment in the belly of the sea-fish, and the growth of a *Qīqāyōn* to a sufficient height to overshadow a sitting man, have analogies in nature, which make the possibility of these miracles at least conceivable (see the comm. on Jonah 2:1 and 4:6). The repentance of the Ninevites in consequence of the prophet's preaching, although an unusual and extraordinary occurrence, was not a miracle in the strict sense of the word. At the same time, the possibility of this miracle by no means proves its reality or historical truth. This can only be correctly discerned and rightly estimated, from the important bearing of Jonah's mission to Nineveh and of his conduct in relation to this mission upon the position of Israel in the divine plan of salvation in relation to the Gentile world. *The mission of Jonah was a fact of symbolical and typical importance, which was intended not only to enlighten Israel as to the position of the Gentile world in relation to the kingdom of God, but also to typify the future adoption of such of the heathen, as should observe the word of God, into the fellowship of the salvation prepared in Israel for all nations.*

As the time drew nigh when Israel was to be given up into the power of the Gentiles, and trodden down by them, on account of its stiff-necked apostasy from the Lord its God, it was very natural for the self-righteous mind of Israel to regard the Gentiles as simply enemies of the people and kingdom of God, and not only to deny their capacity for salvation, but also to interpret the prophetic announcement of the judgment coming upon the Gentiles as signifying that they were destined to utter destruction. The object of Jonah's mission to Nineveh was to combat in the most energetic manner, and practically to overthrow, a delusion which had a seeming support in the election of Israel to be the vehicle of salvation, and which stimulated the inclination to pharisaical reliance upon an outward connection with the chosen nation and a lineal

descent from Abraham. Whereas other prophets proclaimed in words the position of the Gentiles with regard to Israel in the nearer and more remote future, and predicted not only the surrender of Israel to the power of the Gentiles, but also the future conversion of the heathen to the living God, and their reception into the kingdom of God, the prophet Jonah was entrusted with the commission to proclaim the position of Israel in relation to the Gentile world in a symbolico-typical manner, and to exhibit both figuratively and typically not only the susceptibility of the heathen for divine grace, but also the conduct of Israel with regard to the design of God to show favour to the Gentiles, and the consequences of their conduct. The susceptibility of the Gentiles for the salvation revealed in Israel is clearly and visibly depicted in the behaviour of the Gentile sailors, viz., in the fact that they fear the God of heaven and earth, call upon Him, present sacrifice to Him, and make vows; and still more in the deep impression produced by the preaching of Jonah in Nineveh, and the fact that the whole population of the great city, with the king at their head, repent in sackcloth and ashes. The attitude of Israel towards the design of God to show mercy to the Gentiles and grant them salvation, is depicted in the way in which Jonah acts, when he receives the divine command, and when he goes to carry it out. Jonah tries to escape from the command to proclaim the word of God in Nineveh by flight to Tarshish, because he is displeased with the display of divine mercy to the great heathen world, and because, according to Jonah 4:2, he is afraid lest the preaching of repentance should avert from Nineveh the destruction with which it is threatened. In this state of mind on the part of the prophet, there are reflected the feelings and the general state of mind of the Israelitish nation towards the Gentiles. According to his natural man, Jonah shares in this, and is thereby fitted to be the representative of Israel in its pride at its own election. At the same time, it is only in this state of mind that the old man, which rebels against the divine command, comes sharply out, whereas his better *I* hears

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the word of God, and is moved within; so that we cannot place him in the category of the false prophets, who prophesy from their own hearts. When the captain wakes him up in the storm upon the sea, and the lot shows that he is guilty, he confesses his fault, and directs the sailors to cast him into the sea, because it is on his account that the great storm has come upon them (Jonah 1:10-12). The infliction of this punishment, which falls upon him on account of his obstinate resistance to the will of God, typifies that rejection and banishment from the face of God which Israel will assuredly bring upon itself by its obstinate resistance to the divine call. But Jonah, when cast into the sea, is swallowed up by a great fish; and when he prays to the Lord in the fish's belly, he is vomited upon the land unhurt. This miracle has also a symbolical meaning for Israel. It shows that if the carnal nation, with its ungodly mind, should turn to the Lord even in the last extremity, it will be raised up again by a divine miracle from destruction to newness of life. And lastly, the manner in which God reproves the prophet, when he is angry because Nineveh has been spared (Jonah 4), is intended to set forth as in a mirror before all Israel the greatness of the divine compassion, which embraces all mankind, in order that it may reflect upon it and lay it to heart.

But this by no means exhausts the deeper meaning of the history of Jonah. It extends still further, and culminates in the typical character of Jonah's three days' imprisonment in the belly of the fish, upon which Christ threw some light when He said, "As Jonah 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" (Matt. 12:40). The clue to the meaning of this type, i.e., to the divinely-appointed connection between the typical occurrence and its antitype, is to be found in the answer which Jesus gave to Philip and Andrew when they told Him, a short time before His death, that there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast who desired to see Jesus. This answer consists of two distinct statements, viz., (John

12:23, 24): "The time is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except the grain of wheat fall into the earth, and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit;" and (v. 32), "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." This answer of Jesus intimates that the time to admit the Gentiles has not yet come; but the words, "the hour is come," etc., also contain the explanation, that "the Gentiles have only to wait patiently a little longer, since their union with Christ, with which the address concludes (v. 32), is directly connected with the glorification of the Son of man" (Hengstenberg on John 12:20). This assertion of the Lord, that His death and glorification are necessary in order that He may draw all men, even the heathen, to Himself, or that by His death He may abolish the wall of partition by which the Gentiles were shut out of the kingdom of God, at which He had already hinted in John 10:15, 16, teaches us that the history of Jonah is to be regarded as an important and significant link in the chain of development of the divine plan of salvation. When Assyria was assuming the form of a world-conquering power, and the giving up of Israel into the hands of the Gentiles was about to commence, Jehovah sent His prophet to Nineveh, to preach to this great capital of the imperial kingdom His omnipotence, righteousness, and grace. For although the giving up of Israel was inflicted upon it as a punishment for its idolatry, yet, according to the purpose of God, it was also intended to prepare the way for the spread of the kingdom of God over all nations. The Gentiles were to learn to fear the living God of heaven and earth, not only as a preparation for the deliverance of Israel out of their hands after it had been refined by the punishment, but also that they might themselves be convinced of the worthlessness of their idols, and learn to seek salvation from the God of Israel. But whilst this brings out distinctly to the light and deep inward connection between the mission of Jonah to Nineveh and the divine plan of salvation, the typical character of that connection is first made perfectly clear from

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what Jonah himself passed through. For whereas the punishment, which he brought upon himself through his resistance to the divine command, contained this lesson, that Israel in its natural nationality must perish in order that out of the old sinful nature there may arise a new people of God, which, being dead to the law, may serve the Lord in the willingness of the spirit, God also appointed the mortal anguish and the deliverance of Jonah as a type of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to be the Saviour of the whole world. As Jonah the servant of God is given up to death that he may successfully accomplish the work committed to him, namely, to proclaim to the Ninevites the judgment and mercy of the God of heaven and earth; so must the Son of God be buried in the earth like a grain of wheat, that He may bring forth fruit for the whole world. The resemblance between the two is apparent in this. But Jonah deserved the punishment of death; Christ, on the contrary, suffered as the innocent One for the sins of mankind, and went voluntarily to death as One who had life in Himself to accomplish His Father's will. In this difference the inequality appears; and in this the type falls back behind the antitype, and typifies the reality but imperfectly. But even in this difference we may perceive a certain resemblance between Jonah and Christ which must not be overlooked. Jonah died according to his natural man on account of the sin, which was common to himself and his nation; Christ died for the sin of His people, which He had taken upon Himself, to make expiation for it; but He also died as a member of the nation, from which He had sprung according to the flesh, when He was made under the law, that He might rise again as the Saviour of all nations. This symbolical and typical significance of the mission of the prophet Jonah precludes the assumption that the account in his book is a myth or a parabolical fiction, or simply the description of a symbolical transaction which the prophet experienced in spirit only. And the contents of the book are at variance with all these assumptions, even with the last. When the prophets are commanded to carry out

symbolical transactions, they do so without repugnance. But Jonah seeks to avoid executing the command of God by flight, and is punished in consequence. This is at variance with the character of a purely symbolical action, and proves that the book relates historical facts. It is true that the sending of Jonah to Nineveh had not its real purpose within itself; that is to say, that it was not intended to effect the conversion of the Ninevites to the living God, but simply to bring to light the truth that even the Gentiles were capable of receiving divine truth, and to exhibit the possibility of their eventual reception into the kingdom of God. But this truth could not have been brought to the consciousness of the Israelites in a more impressive manner than by Jonah's really travelling to Nineveh to proclaim the destruction of that city on account of its wickedness, and seeing the proclamation followed by the results recorded in our book. Still less could the importance of this truth, so far as Israel was concerned, be exhibited in a merely symbolical transaction. If the intended flight of the prophet to Tarshish and his misfortune upon the sea were not historical facts, they could only be mythical or parabolical fictions. But though myths may very well embody religious ideas, and parables set forth prophetic truths, they cannot be types of future facts in the history of salvation. If the three days' confinement of Jonah in the belly of the fish really had the typical significance which Christ attributes to it in Matt. 12:29ff. and Luke 11:29ff., it can neither be a myth or dream, nor a parable, nor merely a visionary occurrence experienced by the prophet; but must have had as much objective reality as the facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. But if it follows from what has been said, that our book contains facts of a symbolico-typical meaning from the life of the prophet Jonah, there is no tenable ground left for disputing the authorship of the prophet himself. At the same time, the fact that Jonah was the author is not in itself enough to explain the admission of the book among the writings of the minor prophets. This place the book received, not because it

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related historical events that had happened to the prophet Jonah, but because these events were practical prophecies. Marck saw this, and has the following apt remark upon this point: "The writing is to a great extent historical, but so that in the history itself there is hidden the mystery of a very great prophecy; and he proves himself to be a true prophet quite as much by his own fate as he does by his prophecies."

For the exegetical literature on the book of Jonah, see my *Lehrbuch der Einleitung*, p. 291.

Jonah 1

Mission of Jonah to Nineveh—His Flight and Punishment

Jonah 1. Jonah tries to avoid fulfilling the command of God, to preach repentance to the great city Nineveh, by a rapid flight to the sea, for the purpose of sailing to Tarshish (vv. 1–3); but a terrible storm, which threatens to destroy the ship, brings his sin to light (vv. 4–10); and when the lot singles him out as the culprit, he confesses that he is guilty; and in accordance with the sentence which he pronounces upon himself, is cast into the sea (vv. 11–16).

Jonah 1:1–3. The narrative commences with וַיְהִי, as Ruth (Ruth 1:1), 1 Samuel (1 Sam. 1:1), and others do. This was the standing formula with which historical events were linked on to one another, inasmuch as every occurrence follows another in chronological sequence; so that the *Vav* (and) simply attaches to a series of events, which are assumed as well known, and by no means warrants the assumption that the narrative which follows is merely a fragment of a larger work (see at Josh. 1:1). The word of the Lord which came to Jonah was this: "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and preach against it." וַיִּשְׁמַע does not stand for וַיִּשְׁמַע (Jonah 3:2), but retains its proper meaning, *against*, indicating the threatening nature of the preaching, as the explanatory clause which follows clearly shows. The connection in Jonah 3:2 is a different one. *Nineveh*, the capital of the Assyrian kingdom, and the residence of the great kings of Assyria,

which was built by Nimrod according to Gen. 10:11, and by Ninos, the mythical founder of the Assyrian empire, according to the Greek and Roman authors, is repeatedly called "the great city" in this book (Jonah 3:2, 3; 4:11), and its size is given as three days' journey (Jonah 3:3). This agrees with the statements of classical writers, according to whom Νῖνος, *Ninus*, as Greeks and Romans call it, was the largest city in the world at that time. According to Strabo (16:1, 3), it was much larger than Babylon, and was situated in a plain, Ἀτουρίας, of Assyria i.e., on the left bank of the Tigris. According to Ctesias (in Diod. ii. 3), its circumference was as much as 480 stadia, i.e., twelve geographical miles; whereas, according to Strabo, the circumference of the wall of Babylon was not more than 365 stadia. These statements have been confirmed by modern excavations upon the spot. The conclusion to which recent discoveries lead is, that the name Nineveh was used in two senses: *first*, for one particular city; and *secondly*, for a complex of four large primeval cities (including Nineveh proper), the circumvallation of which is still traceable, and a number of small dwelling-places, castles, etc., the mounds (Tell) of which cover the land. This Nineveh, in the broader sense, is bounded on three sides by rivers—viz. on the north-west by the Khosr, on the west by the Tigris, and on the south-west by the Gazr Su and the Upper or Great Zab—and on the fourth side by mountains, which ascend from the rocky plateau; and it was fortified artificially all round on the river-sides with dams, sluices for inundating the land, and canals, and on the land side with ramparts and castles, as we may still see from the heaps of ruins. It formed a trapezium, the sharp angles of which lay towards the north and south, the long sides being formed by the Tigris and the mountains. The average length is about twenty-five English miles; the average breadth fifteen. The four large cities were situated on the edge of the trapezium, Nineveh proper (including the ruins of Kouyunjik, Nebbi Yunas, and Ninua) being at the north-western corner, by the Tigris; the city, which was evidently the later capital

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(Nimrud), and which Rawlinson, Jones, and Oppert suppose to have been *Calah*, at the south-western corner, between Tigris and Zab; a third large city, which is now without a name, and has been explored last of all, but within the circumference of which the village of Selamiyeh now stands, on the Tigris itself, from three to six English miles to the north of Nimrud; and lastly, the citadel and temple-mass, which is now named Khorsabad, and is said to be called Dur-Sargina in the inscriptions, from the palace built there by Sargon, on the Khosr, pretty near to the north-eastern corner (compare M. v. Niebuhr, *Geschichte Assurs*, p. 274ff, with the ground-plan of the city of Nineveh, p. 284). But although we may see from this that Nineveh could very justly be called the great city, Jonah does not apply this epithet to it with the intention of pointing out to his countrymen its majestic size, but, as the expression *gdôlâh lē'lohîm* in Jonah 3:3 clearly shows, and as we may see still more clearly from Jonah 4:11, with reference to the importance which Nineveh had, both in the eye of God, and with regard to the divine commission which he had received, as the capital of the Gentile world, *quae propter tot animarum multitudinem Deo curae erat* (Michaelis). Jonah was to preach against this great Gentile city, because its wickedness had come before Jehovah, i.e., because the report or the tidings of its great corruption had penetrated to God in heaven (cf. Gen. 18:21; 1 Sam. 5:12).

Jonah 1:3. Jonah sets out upon his journey; not to Nineveh, however, but to flee to *Tarshish*, i.e., *Tartessus*, a Phoenician port in Spain (see at Gen. 10:4 and Isa. 23:1), "*from the face of Jehovah*," i.e., away from the presence of the Lord, out of the land of Israel, where Jehovah dwelt in the temple, and manifested His presence (cf. Gen. 4:16); not to hide himself from the omnipresent God, but to withdraw from the service of Jehovah, the God-King of Israel. The motive for this flight was not fear of the difficulty of carrying out the command of God, but, as Jonah himself says in Jonah 4:2, anxiety lest the compassion of God should spare the sinful city in the event of its

repenting. He had no wish to co-operate in this; and that not merely because "he knew, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the repentance of the Gentiles would be the ruin of the Jews, and, as a lover of his country, was actuated not so much by envy of the salvation of Nineveh, as by unwillingness that his own people should perish," as Jerome supposes, but also because he really grudged salvation to the Gentiles, and feared lest their conversion to the living God should infringe upon the privileges of Israel above the Gentile world, and put an end to its election as the nation of God. He therefore betook himself to *Yāphō*, i.e., Joppa, the port on the Mediterranean Sea (vid., comm. on Josh. 19:46), and there found a ship which was going to *Tarshish*; and having paid the *skhârâh*, the hire of the ship, i.e., the fare for the passage, embarked "*to go with them* (i.e., the sailors) *to Tarshish*."

Jonah 1:4–10. Jonah's foolish hope of being able to escape from the Lord was disappointed. "*Jehovah threw a great wind* (i.e., a violent wind) *upon the sea*." A mighty tempest (סַעַר, rendered appropriately κλύδων by the LXX) arose, so that "*the ship thought to be dashed to pieces*," i.e., to be wrecked (הִשָּׁב used of inanimate things, equivalent to "*was very nearly*" wrecked). In this danger the seamen (*mallâch*, a denom. of *melach*, the salt flood) cried for help, "*every one to his god*." They were heathen, and probably for the most part Phoenicians, but from different places, and therefore worshippers of different gods. But as the storm did not abate, they also resorted to such means of safety as they had at command. They "*threw the waves in the ship into the sea, to procure relief to themselves*" (לְהִקֵּל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם) as in Ex. 18:22 and 1 Kings 12:10). The suffix refers to the persons, not to the things. By throwing the goods overboard, they hoped to preserve the ship from sinking beneath the swelling waves, and thereby to *lighten*, i.e., diminish for themselves the danger of destruction which was so burdensome to them. "*But Jonah had gone down into the lower room of the ship, and had there fallen fast asleep*;" not, however, just

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at the time of the greatest danger, but before the wind had risen into a dangerous storm. The sentence is to be rendered as a circumstantial one in the pluperfect. *Yarkthē hassphīnâh* (analogous to *harkthē habbayith* in Amos 6:10) is the innermost part of the vessel, i.e., the lower room of the ship. *Sphīnâh*, which only occurs here, and is used in the place of *אֲנִיָּה*, is the usual word for a ship in Arabic and Aramaean. *Nirdam*: used for deep sleep, as in Judg. 4:21. This act of Jonah's is regarded by most commentators as a sign of an evil conscience. Marck supposes that he had lain down to sleep, hoping the better to escape either the dangers of sea and air, or the hand of God; others, that he had thrown himself down in despair, and being utterly exhausted and giving himself up for lost, had fallen asleep; or as Theodoret expresses it, being troubled with the gnawings of conscience and overpowered with mourning, he had sought comfort in sleep and fallen into a deep sleep. Jerome, on the other hand, expresses the idea that the words indicate "security of mind" on the part of the prophet: "he is not disturbed by the storm and the surrounding dangers, but has the same composed mind in the calm, or with shipwreck at hand;" and whilst the rest are calling upon their gods, and casting their things overboard, "he is so calm, and feels so safe with his tranquil mind, that he goes down to the interior of the ship and enjoys a most placid sleep." The truth probably lies between these two views. It was not an evil conscience, or despair occasioned by the threatening danger, which induced him to lie down to sleep; nor was it his fearless composure in the midst of the dangers of the storm, but the careless self-security with which he had embarked on the ship to flee from God, without considering that the hand of God could reach him even on the sea, and punish him for his disobedience. This security is apparent in his subsequent conduct.

Jonah 1:6. When the danger was at its height, the *upper-steersman*, or ship's captain (*rabh hachōbhēl*, the chief of the ship's governors; *chōbhēl* with the article is a collective noun, and

a *denom.* from *chebhel*, a ship's cable, hence the one who manages, steers, or guides the ship), wakes him with the words, "How canst thou sleep soundly? Arise, and call upon thy God; perhaps God (*hâ'ēlōhīm* with the article, 'the true God') will think of us, that we may not perish." The meaning of *יִתְעַשֶׂה* is disputed. As *עָשָׂה* is used in Jer. 5:28 in the sense of shining (viz., of fat), Calvin and others (last of all, Hitzig) have maintained that the *hithpael* has the meaning, shown himself shining, i.e., bright (propitious); whilst others, including Jerome, prefer the meaning *think again*, which is apparently better supported than the former, not only by the Chaldee, but also by the nouns *עֲשָׂתוֹת* (Job 12:5) and *עֲשָׂתוֹן* (Ps. 146:4). God's thinking of a person involves the idea of active assistance. For the thought itself, compare Ps. 40:18. The fact that Jonah obeyed this awakening call is passed over as self-evident; and in v. 7 the narrative proceeds to relate, that as the storm had not abated in the meantime, the sailors, firmly believing that some one in the ship had committed a crime which had excited the anger of God that was manifesting itself in the storm, had recourse to the lot to find out the culprit. *בְּאֲשֶׁר לָמִי* = *בְּשֵׁלָמִי* (v. 8), as *שֵׁ* is the vulgar, and in conversation the usual contraction for *אֲשֶׁר*: "on account of whom" (*בְּאֲשֶׁר*, in this that = because, or followed by *לְ*, on account of). *הַרְעָה*, the misfortune (as in Amos 3:6),—namely, the storm which is threatening destruction. The lot fell upon Jonah. "The fugitive is taken by lot, not from any virtue in lots themselves, least of all the lots of heathen, but by the will of Him who governs uncertain lots" (Jerome).

When Jonah had been singled out by the lot as the culprit, the sailors called upon him to confess his guilt, asking him at the same time about his country, his occupation, and his parentage. The repetition of the question, on whose account this calamity had befallen them, which is omitted in the LXX (Vatic.), the *Socin.* prophets, and Cod. 195 of Kennicott, is found in

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the margin in Cod. 384, and is regarded by Grimm and Hitzig as a marginal gloss that has crept into the text. It is not superfluous, however; still less does it occasion any confusion; on the contrary, it is quite in order. The sailors wanted thereby to induce Jonah to confess with his own mouth that he was guilty, now that the lot had fallen upon him, and to disclose his crime (Ros. and others). As an indirect appeal to confess his crime, it prepares the way for the further inquiries as to his occupation, etc. They inquired about this occupation, because it might be a disreputable one, and one which excited the wrath of the gods; also about his parentage, and especially about the land and people from which he sprang, that they might be able to pronounce a safe sentence upon his crime.

Jonah 1:9. Jonah begins by answering the last question, saying that he was “*a Hebrew*,”—the name by which the Israelites designated themselves in contradistinction to other nations, and by which other nations designated them (see at Gen. 14:13, and my *Lehrbuch der Einleitung*, § 9, Anm. 2),—and that he worshipped “*the God of heaven, who created the sea and the dry*” (i.e., the land). אֱיָרָא has been rendered correctly by the LXX σέβομαι, *colo, revereor*; and does not mean, “I am afraid of Jehovah, against whom I have sinned” (Abarbanel). By the statement, “I fear,” etc., he had no intention of describing himself as a righteous or innocent man (Hitzig), but simply meant to indicate his relation to God,—namely, that he adored the living God who created the whole earth and, as Creator, governed the world. For he admits directly after, that he has sinned against this God, by telling them, as we may see from v. 10, of his flight from Jehovah. He had not told them this as soon as he embarked in the ship, as Hitzig supposes, but does so now for the first time when they ask about his people, his country, etc., as we may see most unmistakeably from v. 10*b*. In v. 9 Jonah’s statement is not given completely; but the principal fact, viz., that he was a Hebrew and worshipped Jehovah, is followed

immediately by the account of the impression which this acknowledgement made upon the heathen sailors; and the confession of his sin is mentioned afterwards as a supplement, to assign the reason for the great fear which came upon the sailors in consequence. מַה־זָּאת עָשִׂיתָ, *What hast thou done!* is not a question as to the nature of his sin, but an exclamation of horror at his flight from Jehovah, the God heaven and earth, as the following explanatory clauses כִּי אֲנִי יָדָעוּ וגו’ clearly show. The great fear which came upon the heathen seamen at this confession of Jonah may be fully explained from the dangerous situation in which they found themselves, since the storm preached the omnipotence of God more powerfully than words could possibly do.

Jonah 1:11–16. Fearing as they did in the storm the wrath of God on account of Jonah’s sin, they now asked what they should do, that the storm might abate, “*for the sea continued to rage*.” שָׁתַק, to set itself, to come to a state of repose; or with מָעַל, to desist from a person. הוֹלֵךְ, as in Gen. 8:5, etc., expressive of the continuance of an action. With their fear of the Almighty God, whom Jonah worshipped, they did not dare to inflict a punishment upon the prophet, simply according to their own judgment. As a worshipper of Jehovah, he should pronounce his own sentence, or let it be pronounced by his God. Jonah replies in v. 12, “*Cast me into the sea; for I know that for my sake this great storm is (come) upon you*.” As Jerome says, “He does not refuse, or prevaricate, or deny; but, having made confession concerning his flight, he willingly endures the punishment, desiring to perish, and not let others perish on his account.” Jonah confesses that he has deserved to die for his rebellion against God, and that the wrath of God which has manifested itself in the storm can only be appeased by his death. He 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.

Jonah 1:13. But the men (the seamen) do not venture to carry out this sentence at once. They try once more to reach the land and escape from the storm, which is threatening them with destruction, without so serious a sacrifice.

יִתְּתֵרֵם, lit., they broke through, sc. through the waves, to bring (the ship) back to the land, i.e., they tried to reach the land by rowing and steering. *Châthar* does not mean to row, still less to twist or turn round (Hitzig), but to break through; here to break through the waves, to try to overcome them, to which the *παρεβιάζοντο* of the LXX points. As they could not accomplish this, however, because the sea continued to rage against them (סַעַר עֲלֵיהֶם, was raging against them), they prayed thus to Jehovah: “*We beseech Thee, let us not (אָנָּס = אָל־נָפְשׁ) perish for the sake of the soul of this man (בְּנַפְשׁוֹ, lit., for the soul, as in 2 Sam. 14:7 after Deut. 19:21), and lay not upon us innocent blood,*”—that is to say, not “do not let us destroy an innocent man in the person of this man” (Hitzig), but, according to Deut. 21:8, “do not impute his death to us, if we cast him into the sea, as bloodguiltiness deserving death;” “*for Thou, O Jehovah, hast done as it pleased Thee,*”—namely, inasmuch as, by sending the storm and determining the lot, Thou hast so ordained that we must cast him into the sea as guilty, in order to expiate Thy wrath. They offer this prayer, not because they have no true conception of the guilt of Jonah, who is not a murderer or blasphemer, inasmuch as according to their notions, he is not a sinner deserving death (Hitzig), but because they regard Jonah as a prophet or servant of the Almighty God, upon whom, from fear of his God, they do not venture to lay their hand. “We see, therefore, that although they had never enjoyed the teaching of the law, they had been so taught by nature, that they knew very well that the blood of man was dear to God, and precious in His sight” (Calvin).

Jonah 1:15, 16. After they had prayed thus, they cast Jonah into the sea, and “*the sea stood still (ceased) from its raging.*” The sudden

cessation of the storm showed that the bad weather had come entirely on Jonah’s account, and that the sailors had not shed innocent blood by casting him into the sea. In this sudden change in the weather, the arm of the holy God was so suddenly manifested, that the sailors “*feared Jehovah with great fear, and offered sacrifice to Jehovah*”—not after they landed, but immediately, on board the ship—“*and vowed vows,*” i.e., vowed that they would offer Him still further sacrifices on their safe arrival at their destination.

Jonah’s Deliverance—Ch. 1:17–2:10 (Heb. Ch. 2)

Jonah 1:17–2:10. When Jonah had been cast into the sea by the appointment of God, he was swallowed up by a great fish (Jonah 1:17), in whose belly he spent three days and nights, and offered an earnest prayer to God (Jonah 2:1–9); whereupon, by command of Jehovah, the fish vomited him out upon the land (v. 10).

Jonah 1:17 (Heb. 2:1.) “*And Jehovah appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah.*” מִנְּהָ does not mean to create, but to determine, to appoint. The thought is this: Jehovah ordained that a great fish should swallow him. The great fish (LXX κῆτος, cf. Matt. 12:40), which is not more precisely defined, was not a whale, because this is extremely rare in the Mediterranean, and has too small a throat to swallow a man, but a large shark or sea-dog, *canis carcharias*, or *squalus carcharias L.*, which is very common in the Mediterranean, and has so large a throat, that it can swallow a living man whole. The miracle consisted therefore, not so much in the fact that Jonah was swallowed alive, as in the fact that he was kept alive for three days in the shark’s belly, and then vomited unhurt upon the land. The three days and three nights are not to be regarded as fully three times twenty hours, but are to be interpreted according to Hebrew usage, as signifying that Jonah was vomited up again on the third day after he had been swallowed (compare Esth. 4:16 with 5:1 and Tob. 3:12, 13, according to the Lutheran text).

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Jonah 2

Jonah 2:1–9. “Jonah prayed to Jehovah his God out of the fish’s belly.” The prayer which follows (vv. 2–9) is not a petition for deliverance, but thanksgiving and praise for deliverance already received. It by no means follows from this, however, that Jonah did not utter this prayer till after he had been vomited upon the land, and that v. 10 ought to be inserted before v. 2; but, as the earlier commentators have shown, the fact is rather this, that when Jonah had been swallowed by the fish, and found that he was preserved alive in the fish’s belly, he regarded this as a pledge of his deliverance, for which he praised the Lord. Luther also observes, that “he did not actually utter these very words with his mouth, and arrange them in this orderly manner, in the belly of the fish; but that he here shows what the state of his mind was, and what thoughts he had when he was engaged in this conflict with death.” The expression “his God” (אֱלֹהָיו) must not be overlooked. He prayed not only to Jehovah, as the heathen sailors also did (Jonah 1:14), but to Jehovah as his God, from whom he had tried to escape, and whom he now addresses again as his God when in peril of death. “He shows his *faith* by adoring Him as *his* God” (Burk). The prayer consists for the most part of reminiscences of passages in the Psalms, which were so exactly suited to Jonah’s circumstances, that he could not have expressed his thoughts and feelings any better in words of his own. It is by no means so “atomically compounded from passages in the Psalms” that there is any ground for pronouncing it “a later production which has been attributed to Jonah,” as Knobel and De Wette do; but it is the simple and natural utterance of a man versed in the Holy Scripture and living in the word of God, and is in perfect accordance with the prophet’s circumstances and the state of his mind. Commencing with the confession, that the Lord has heard his crying to Him in distress (v. 2), Jonah depicts in two strophes (vv. 3 and 4, 5–7) the distress into which he had been brought, and the deliverance out of that destruction which appeared

inevitable, and closes in vv. 8, 9 with a vow of thanksgiving for the deliverance which he had received.

2 I cried to Jehovah out of my distress, and He heard me;

Out of the womb of hell I cried: Thou heardest my voice!

Jonah 2:2. The first clause recalls to mind Ps. 18:7 and 120:1; but it also shows itself to be an original reproduction of the expression *מִצְרָה לִי*, which expresses the prophet’s situation in a more pointed manner than *בְּצֶרֶר־לִי* in Ps. 17 and *לִי בְּצֶרֶתָהּ* in Ps. 120. The distress is still more minutely defined in the second hemistich by the expression *מִבֶּטֶן שְׂאוֹל*, “out of the womb of the nether world.” As a throat or swallow is ascribed to *sh’ol* in Isa. 5:14, so here it is spoken of as having a *בֶּטֶן*, or belly. This is not to be taken as referring to the belly of the shark, as Jerome supposes. The expression is a poetical figure used to denote the danger of death, from which there is apparently no escape; like the encompassing with snares of death in Ps. 18:5, and the bringing up of the soul out of sheol in Ps. 30:3. In the last clause the words pass over very appropriately into an address to Jehovah, which is brought out into still greater prominence by the omission of the copula *Vav*.

3 Thou castedst me into the deep, into the heart of the seas,

And the stream surrounded me;

All Thy billows and Thy waves went over me.

4 Then I said, I am thrust away from Thine eyes, Yet I will look again to Thy holy temple.

Jonah 2:3, 4. The more minute description of the peril of death is attached by *Vav consec.*, to express not sequence in time, but sequence of thought. *Jehovah* cast him into the depth of the sea, because the seamen were merely the executors of the punishment inflicted upon him by Jehovah. *Mtsūlâh*, the deep, is defined by “the heart of the seas” as the deepest abyss of the ocean. The plural *yammîm* (seas) is used here with distinct significance, instead of the

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singular, “into the heart of the sea” (*yâm*) in Ex. 15:8, to express the idea of the boundless ocean (see Dietrich, *Abhandlung zur hebr. Grammatik*, pp. 16, 17). The next clauses are circumstantial clauses, and mean, so that the current of the sea surrounded me, and all the billows and waves of the sea, which Jehovah had raised into a storm, went over me. *Nâhâr*, a river or stream, is the streaming or current of the sea, as in Ps. 24:2. The words of the second hemistich are a reminiscence of Ps. 42:8. What the Korahite singer of that psalm had experienced spiritually, viz., that one wave of trouble after another swept over him, that had the prophet literally experienced. Jonah “does not say, The waves and the billows of the sea went over me; but *Thy* waves and *Thy* billows, because he felt in his conscience that the sea with its waves and billows was the servant of God and of His wrath, to punish sin” (Luther). V. 4 contains the apodosis to v. 3a: “When Thou castedst me into the deep, then I said (sc., in my heart, i.e., then I thought) that I was banished from the sphere of Thine eyes, i.e., of Thy protection and care.” These words are formed from a reminiscence of Ps. 31:23, נִגְרָזְתִּי being substituted for the נִגְרָזְתִּי of the psalm. The second hemistich is attached adversatively. אֲנִי, which there is no necessity to alter into אֲנִי = אֲנִי, as Hitzig supposes, introduces the antithesis in an energetic manner, like אֲנִי elsewhere, in the sense of nevertheless, as in Isa. 14:15, Ps. 49:16, Job 13:15 (cf. Ewald, § 354, a). The thought that it is all over with him is met by the confidence of faith that he will still look to the holy temple of the Lord, that is to say, will once more approach the presence of the Lord, to worship before Him in His temple,—an assurance which recalls Ps. 5:8.

The thought that by the grace of the Lord he has been once more miraculously delivered out of the gates of death, and brought to the light of the world, is carried out still further in the following strophe, in entirely new turns of thought.

5 Waters surrounded me even to the soul: the flood encompassed me,

Sea-grass was wound round my head.

6 I went down to the foundations of the mountains;

The earth, its bolts were behind me for ever:

Then raisedst Thou my life out of the pit, O Jehovah my God.

7 When my soul fainted within me, I thought of Jehovah;

And my prayer came to Thee into Thy holy temple.

Jonah 2:5-7. This strophe opens, like the last, with a description of the peril of death, to set forth still more perfectly the thought of miraculous deliverance which filled the prophet’s mind. The first clause of the fifth verse recalls to mind Ps. 18:5 and 69:2; the words “the waters pressed (בָּאוּ) even to the soul” (Ps. 69:2) being simply strengthened by אֶפְסוּנִי after Ps. 18:5. The waters of the sea girt him round about, reaching even to the soul, so that it appeared to be all over with his life. *Thôm*, the unfathomable flood of the ocean, surrounded him. *Sûph*, sedge, i.e., sea-grass, which grows at the bottom of the sea, was bound about his head; so that he had sunk to the very bottom. This thought is expressed still more distinctly in v. 6a. קִצְבֵי הָרִים, “the ends of the mountains” (from *qâtsabh*, to cut off, that which is cut off, then the place where anything is cut off), are their foundations and roots, which lie in the depths of the earth, reaching even to the foundation of the sea (cf. Ps. 18:16). When he sank into the deep, the earth shut its bolts behind him (הֶאָרְרָן is placed at the head absolutely). The figure of bolts of the earth that were shut behind Jonah, which we only meet with here (סָגַר הַדְּלֵת בְּעֵד from the phrase בְּעֵד סָגַר הַדְּלֵת, to shut the door behind a person: Gen. 7:116; 2 Kings 4:4, 5, 33; Isa. 26:20), has an analogy in the idea which occurs in Job 38:10, of bolts and doors of the ocean. The bolts of the sea are the walls of the sea-basin, which set bounds to the sea, that it cannot pass over. Consequently the

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bolts of the earth can only be such barriers as restrain the land from spreading over the sea. These barriers are the weight and force of the waves, which prevent the land from encroaching on the sea. This weight of the waves, or of the great masses of water, which pressed upon Jonah when he had sunk to the bottom of the sea, shut or bolted against him the way back to the earth (the land), just as the bolts that are drawn before the door of a house fasten up the entrance into it; so that the reference is neither to “the rocks jutting out above the water, which prevented any one from ascending from the sea to the land,” nor “*densissima terrae compages, qua abyssus tecta Jonam in hac constitutum occludebat*” (Marck). Out of this grave the Lord “brought up his life.” *Shachath* is rendered φθορά, *corruptio*, by the early translators (LXX, Chald., Syr., Vulg.); and this rendering, which many of the more modern translators entirely reject, is unquestionably the correct one in Job 17:14, where the meaning “pit” is quite unsuitable. But it is by no means warranted in the present instance. The similarity of thought to Ps. 30:4 points rather to the meaning pit = cavern or grave, as in Ps. 30:10, where *shachath* is used interchangeably with בּוֹר and שְׂאוֹל in v. 4 as being perfectly synonymous. V. 7a is formed after Ps. 142:4 or 143:4, except that נִפְשִׁי is used instead of רִוְחִי, because Jonah is not speaking of the covering of the spirit with faintness, but of the plunging of the life into night and the darkness of death by drowning in the water. הִתְעַטָּף, lit., to veil or cover one’s self, hence to sink into night and faintness, to pine away. עָלַי, upon or in me, inasmuch as the *I*, as a person, embraces the soul or life (cf. Ps. 42:5). When his soul was about to sink into the night of death, he thought of Jehovah in prayer, and his prayer reached to God in His holy temple, where Jehovah is enthroned as God and King of His people (Ps. 18:7; 88:3).

But when prayer reaches to God, then He helps and also saves. This awakens confidence in the Lord, and impels to praise and thanksgiving.

These thoughts form the last strophe, with which the Psalm of thanksgiving is appropriately closed.

8 *They who hold to false vanities*

Forsake their own mercy.

9 *But I will sacrifice to Thee with the call of thanksgiving.*

I will pay what I have vowed.

Salvation is with Jehovah.

Jonah 2:8, 9. In order to express the thought emphatically, that salvation and deliverance are only to be hoped for from Jehovah the living God, Jonah points to the idolaters, who forfeit their mercy. הַבְּלִי־שׁוֹא מִשְׁמְרִים is a reminiscence of Ps. 31:7. הַבְּלִי־שׁוֹא, worthless vanities, are all things which man makes into idols or objects of trust. הַבְּלִי are, according to Deut. 32:21, false gods or idols. *Shâmar*, to keep, or, when applied to false gods, to keep to them or reverence them; in Hos. 4:10 it is also applied to Jehovah. הַסֵּדָה signifies neither *pietatem suam* nor *gratiam a Deo ipsis exhibitam*, nor “all the grace and love which they might receive” (Hitzig); but refers to God Himself, as He whose government is pure grace (vid., Gen. 24:27), and might become the grace even of the idolatrous. Jonah, on the contrary, like all the righteous, would sacrifice to the Lord *bqōl tōdâh*, “with the voice or cry, of thanksgiving,” i.e., would offer his sacrifices with a prayer of sincere thanksgiving (cf. Ps. 42:5), and pay the vow which he had made in his distress (cf. Ps. 50:14, 23). These utterances are founded upon the hope that his deliverance will be effected (Hitzig); and this hope is based upon the fact that “salvation is Jehovah’s,” i.e., is in His power, so that He only can grant salvation.

Jonah 2:10. “Then Jehovah spake to the fish, and it vomited Jonah upon the dry land.” The nature of God’s speaking, or commanding, may be inferred from the words וַיִּקְרָא וְגוֹ. Cyril explains the thought correctly thus: The whale is again impelled by a certain divine and secret power of God, being moved to that which seems good to Him.” The land upon which Jonah was

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vomited was, of course, the coast of Palestine, probably the country near Joppa. According to v. 1, this took place on the third day after he had been swallowed by the fish. On the prophetic-typical character of the miracle, see the remarks at p. 385ff.

Jonah 3

Jonah's Preaching in Nineveh

Jonah 3. After Jonah had been punished for his disobedience, and miraculously delivered from death by the mercy of God, he obeyed the renewed command of Jehovah, and preached to the city of Nineveh that it would be destroyed within forty days on account of its sins (vv. 1–4). But the Ninevites believed in God, and repented in sackcloth and ashes, to avert the threatened destruction (vv. 5–9); and the Lord spared the city (v. 10).

Jonah 3:1–4. The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, to go to Nineveh and proclaim to that city what Jehovah would say to him. קְרִיאָה: that which is called out, the proclamation, τὸ κήρυγμα (LXX). Jonah now obeyed the word of Jehovah. But Nineveh was a *great city to God* (*lē'lohīm*), i.e., it was regarded by God as a great city. This remark points to the motive for sparing it (cf. Jonah 4:11), in case its inhabitants hearkened to the word of God. Its greatness amounted to "a three days' walk." This is usually supposed to refer to the circumference of the city, by which the size of a city is generally determined. But the statement in v. 4, that "Jonah began to enter into the city the walk of a day," i.e., a day's journey, is apparently at variance with this. Hence Hitzig has come to the conclusion that the diameter or length of the city is intended, and that, as the walk of a day in v. 4 evidently points to the walk of three days in v. 3, the latter must also be understood as referring to the length of Nineveh. But according to Diod. ii. 3 the length of the city was 150 stadia, and Herodotus (v. 53) gives just this number of stadia as a day's journey. Hence Jonah would not have commenced his preaching till he had reached the opposite end of the city. This line of

argument, the intention of which is to prove the absurdity of the narrative, is based upon the perfectly arbitrary assumption that Jonah went through the entire length of the city in a straight line, which is neither probable in itself, nor implied in בּוֹא בְעִיר. This simply means to enter, or go into the city, and says nothing about the direction of the course he took within the city. But in a city, the diameter of which was 150 stadia, and the circumference 480 stadia, one might easily walk for a whole day without reaching the other end, by winding about from one street into another. And Jonah would have to do this to find a suitable place for his preaching, since we are not warranted in assuming that it lay exactly in the geographical centre, or at the end of the street which led from the gate into the city. But if Jonah wandered about in different directions, as Theodoret says, "not going straight through the city, but strolling through market-places, streets, etc.," the distance of a day's journey over which he travelled must not be understood as relating to the diameter or length of the city; so that the objection to the general opinion, that the three days' journey given as the size of the city refers to the circumference, entirely falls to the ground. Moreover, Hitzig has quite overlooked the word וַיְהִי in his argument. The text does not affirm that Jonah went a day's journey into the city, but that he "began to go into the city a day's journey, and cried out." These words do not affirm that he did not begin to preach till after he had gone a whole day's journey, but simply that he had commenced his day's journey in the city when he found a suitable place and a fitting opportunity for his proclamation. They leave the distance that he had really gone, when he began his preaching, quite indefinite; and by no means necessitate the assumption that he only began to preach in the evening, after his day's journey was ended. All that they distinctly affirm is, that he did not preach directly he entered the city, but only after he had commenced a day's journey, that is to say, had gone some distance into the city. And this is in

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perfect harmony with all that we know about the size of Nineveh at that time. The circumference of the great city Nineveh, or the length of the boundaries of the city of Nineveh in the broadest sense, was, as Niebuhr says (p. 277), “nearly ninety English miles, not reckoning the smaller windings of the boundary; and this would be just three days’ travelling for a good walker on a long journey.” “Jonah,” he continues, “begins to go a day’s journey into the city, then preaches, and the preaching reaches the ears of the king (cf. v. 6). He therefore came very near to the citadel as he went along on his first day’s journey. At that time the citadel was probably in Nimrud (*Calah*). Jonah, who would hardly have travelled through the desert, went by what is now the ordinary caravan road past Amida, and therefore entered the city at Nineveh. And it was on the road from Nineveh to Calah, not far off the city, possibly in the city itself, that he preached. Now the distance between Calah and Nineveh (not reckoning either city), measured in a straight line upon the map, is 18 1/2 English miles.” If, then, we add to this, (1) that the road from Nineveh to Calah or Nimrud hardly ran in a perfectly straight line, and therefore would be really longer than the exact distance between the two parts of the city according to the map, and (2) that Jonah had first of all to go through Nineveh, and possibly into Calah, he may very well have walked twenty English miles, or a short day’s journey, before he preached. The main point of his preaching is all that is given, viz., the threat that Nineveh would be destroyed, which was the point of chief importance, so far as the object of the book was concerned, and which Jonah of course explained by denouncing the sins and vices of the city. The threat ran thus: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be destroyed.” נִהְרָפֵד, lit., overturned, i.e., destroyed from the very foundations, is the word applied to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The respite granted is fixed at forty days, according to the number which, even as early as the flood, was taken as the measure for determining the delaying of visitations of God.

Jonah 3:5-9. The Ninevites believed in God, since they hearkened to the preaching of the prophet sent to them by God, and humbled themselves before God with repentance. They proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth (penitential garments: see at Joel 1:13, 14; 1 Kings 21:27, etc.), “from their great one even to their small one,” i.e., both old and young, all without exception. Even the king, when the matter (*had-dâbhâr*) came to his knowledge, i.e., when he was informed of Jonah’s coming, and of his threatening prediction, descended from his throne, laid aside his royal robe (*’addereth*, see at Josh. 7:21), wrapt himself in a sackcloth, and sat down in ashes, as a sign of the deepest mourning (compare Job 2:8), and by a royal edict appointed a general fast for man and beast. וַיִּזְעַק, he caused to be proclaimed. וַיֹּאמֶר, and said, viz., through his heralds. מִטֶּעַם הַמֶּלֶךְ, *ex decreto*, by command of the king and his great men, i.e., his ministers (טֶעַם = טַעַם, Dan. 3:10, 29, a technical term for the edicts of the Assyrian and Babylonian kings). “Man and beast (viz., oxen and sheep) are to taste nothing; they are not to pasture (the cattle are not to be driven to the pasture), and are to drink no water.” אֵל, for which we should expect לֵא, may be explained from the fact that the command is communicated directly. Moreover, man and beast are to be covered with mourning clothes, and cry to God *bchozqâh*, i.e., strongly, mightily, and to turn every one from his evil ways: so “will God perhaps (כִּי יִדְעַ) turn and repent (*yâshûbh vnicham*, as in Joel 2:14), and desist from the fierceness of His anger (cf. Ex. 32:12), that we perish not.” This verse (v. 9) also belongs to the king’s edict. The powerful impression made upon the Ninevites by Jonah’s preaching, so that the whole city repented in sackcloth and ashes, is quite intelligible, if we simply bear in mind the great susceptibility of Oriental races to emotion, the awe of one Supreme Being which is peculiar to all the heathen religions of Asia, and the great esteem in which soothsaying and oracles were held in Assyria from the very

earliest times (vid., Cicero, *de divinat.* i. 1); and if we also take into calculation the circumstance that the appearance of a foreigner, who, without any conceivable personal interest, and with the most fearless boldness, disclosed to the great royal city its godless ways, and announced its destruction within a very short period with the confidence so characteristic of the God-sent prophets, could not fail to make a powerful impression upon the minds of the people, which would be all the stronger if the report of the miraculous working of the prophets of Israel had penetrated to Nineveh. There is just as little to surprise us in the circumstance that the signs of mourning among the Ninevites resemble in most respects the forms of penitential mourning current among the Israelites, since these outward signs of mourning are for the most part the common human expressions of deep sorrow of heart, and are found in the same or similar forms among all the nations of antiquity (see the numerous proofs of this which are collected in Winer's *Real-wörterbuch*, art. *Trauer*; and in Herzog's *Cyclopaedia*). Ezekiel (Ezek. 26:16) depicts the mourning of the Tyrian princes over the ruin of their capital in just the same manner in which that of the king of Nineveh is described here in v. 6, except that, instead of sackcloth, he mentions trembling as that with which they wrap themselves round. The garment of haircloth (*saq*) worn as mourning costume reaches as far back as the patriarchal age (cf. Gen. 37:34; Job 16:15). Even the one feature which is peculiar to the mourning of Nineveh—namely, that the cattle also have to take part in the mourning—is attested by Herodotus (ch. 9:24) as an Asiatic custom. This custom originated in the idea that there is a biotic *rapport* between man and the larger domestic animals, such as oxen, sheep, and goats, which are his living property. It is only to these animals that there is any reference here, and not to “horses, asses, and camels, which were decorated at other times with costly coverings,” as Marck, Rosenmüller, and others erroneously assume. Moreover, this was not done “with the intention of impelling the men

to shed hotter tears through the lowing and groaning of the cattle” (Theodoret); or “to set before them as in a mirror, through the sufferings of the innocent brutes, their own great guilt” (Chald.); but it was a manifestation of the thought, that just as the animals which live with man are drawn into fellowship with his sin, so their sufferings might also help to appease the wrath of God. And although this thought might not be free from superstition, there lay at the foundation of it this deep truth, that the irrational creature is made subject to vanity on account of man's sins, and sighs along with man for liberation from the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:19ff.). We cannot therefore take the words “cry mightily unto God” as referring only to the men, as many commentators have done, in opposition to the context; but must regard “man and beast” as the subject of this clause also, since the thought that even the beasts cry to or call upon God in distress has its scriptural warrant in Joel 1:20.

Jonah 3:10. But however deep the penitential mourning of Nineveh might be, and however sincere the repentance of the people, when they acted according to the king's command; the repentance was not a lasting one, or permanent in its effects. Nor did it evince a thorough conversion to God, but was merely a powerful incitement to conversion, a waking up out of the careless security of their life of sin, an endeavour to forsake their evil ways which did not last very long. The statement in v. 10, that “God saw their doing, that they turned from their evil ways; and He repented of the evil that He had said that He would do to them, and did it not” (cf. Ex. 32:14), can be reconciled with this without difficulty. The repentance of the Ninevites, even if it did not last, showed, at any rate, a susceptibility on the part of the heathen for the word of God, and their willingness to turn and forsake their evil and ungodly ways; so that God, according to His compassion, could extend His grace to them in consequence. God always acts in this way. He not only forgives the converted man, who lays aside his sin, and walks in newness of life; but He has mercy also upon the penitent who confesses and mourns

over his sin, and is willing to amend. The Lord also directed Jonah to preach repentance to Nineveh; not that this capital of the heathen world might be converted at once to faith in the living God, and its inhabitants be received into the covenant of grace which He had made with Israel, but simply to give His people Israel a practical proof that He was the God of the heathen also, and could prepare for Himself even among them a people of His possession. Moreover, the readiness, with which the Ninevites hearkened to the word of God that was proclaimed to them and repented, showed that with all the depth to which they were sunken in idolatry and vice they were at that time not yet ripe for the judgment of extermination. The punishment was therefore deferred by the long-suffering of God, until this great heathen city, in its further development into a God-opposing imperial power, seeking to subjugate all nations, and make itself the mistress of the earth, had filled up the measure of its sins, and had become ripe for that destruction which the prophet Nahum predicted, and the Median king Cyaxares inflicted upon it in alliance with Nabopolassar of Babylonia.

Jonah 4

Jonah's Discontent and Correction

Jonah 4:1-5. Jonah, provoked at the sparing of Nineveh, prayed in his displeasure to Jehovah to take his soul from him, as his proclamation had not been fulfilled (vv. 1-3). **וַיִּרַע אֱלֹהִים**, *it was evil for Jonah*, i.e., it vexed, irritated him, not merely it displeased him, for which **יָרַע בְּעֵינָיו** is generally used. The construction with **אֱלֹהִים** resembles that with **ל** in Neh. 2:10; 13:8. **רָעָה גְדוֹלָה**, "a great evil," serves simply to strengthen the idea of **יָרַע**. The great vexation grew even to anger (**יָחַר לוֹ**; cf. Gen. 30:2, etc.). The fact that the predicted destruction of Nineveh had not taken place excited his discontent and wrath. And he tried to quarrel with God, by praying to Jehovah. "*Alas* (**אָנָּה** as in Jonah 1:14), *Jehovah*,

was not this my word (i.e., did I not say so to myself) *when I was still in my land* (in Palestine)?" What his word or his thought then was, he does not say; but it is evident from what follows: viz., that Jehovah would not destroy Nineveh, if its inhabitants repented. *'Al-kēn*, therefore, sc. because this was my saying. **וַיִּדְרֹשׁ**, *προέφθασα*, *I prevented to flee to Tarshish*, i.e., I endeavoured, by a flight to Tarshish, to prevent, sc. what has now taken place, namely, that Thou dost not fulfil Thy word concerning Nineveh, *because I know that thou art a God gracious and merciful*, etc. (compare Ex. 34:6 and 32:14, as in Joel 2:13). The prayer which follows, "*Take my life from me*," calls to mind the similar prayer of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:4; but the motive assigned is a different one. Whilst Elijah adds, "for I am not better than my fathers," Jonah adds, "*for death is better to me than life*." This difference must be distinctly noticed, as it brings out the difference in the state of mind of the two prophets. In the inward conflict that had come upon Elijah he wished for death, because he did not see the expected result of his zeal for the Lord of Sabaoth; in other words, it was from spiritual despair, caused by the apparent failure of his labours. Jonah, on the other hand, did not wish to live any longer, because God had not carried out His threat against Nineveh. His weariness of life arose, not like Elijah's from stormy zeal for the honour of God and His kingdom, but from vexation at the non-fulfilment of his prophecy. This vexation was not occasioned, however, by offended dignity, or by anxiety or fear lest men should regard him as a liar or babbler (*ψευδοεπίης τε και βωμολόχος*, Cyr. Al.; *ψεύστης*, Theodoret; *vanus et mendax*, Calvin and others); nor was he angry, as Calvin supposes, because he associated his office with the honour of God, and was unwilling that the name of God should be exposed to the scoffing of the heathen, *quasi de nihilo terreret*, or "because he saw that it would furnish material for impious blasphemies if God changed His purpose, or if He did not abide by His word;" but, as Luther observes (in his remarks on Jonah's flight), "he was hostile to the city of Nineveh, and still held

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a Jewish and carnal view of God” (for the further development of this view, see the remarks above, at p. 265). That this was really Jonah’s view, is proved by Luther from the fact that God reproves his displeasure and anger in these words, “Should I not spare Nineveh?” etc. (v. 11). “He hereby implies that Jonah was displeased at the fact that God had spared the city, and was angry because He had not destroyed it as he had preached, and would gladly have seen.” Offended vanity or unintelligent zeal for the honour of God would have been reproved by God in different terms from those in which Jonah was actually reproved, according to the next verse (v. 4), where Jehovah asks the prophet, “*Is thine anger justly kindled?*” הֲיֵטִב is adverbial, as in Deut. 9:21; 13:15, etc., *bene, probe, recte*, δικαιῶς (Symm.).

Then Jonah went out of Nineveh, sat down on the east of the city, where Nineveh was bounded by the mountains, from which he could overlook the city, made himself a hut there, and sat under it in the shade, till he saw what would become of the city, i.e., what fate would befall it (v. 5). This verse is regarded by many commentators as a supplementary remark, וַיֵּצֵא, with the verbs which follow, being rendered in the pluperfect: “Jonah had gone out of the city,” etc. We grant that this is grammatically admissible, but it cannot be shown to be necessary, and is indeed highly improbable. If, for instance, Jonah went out of Nineveh before the expiration of the forty days, to wait for the fulfilment of his prophecy, in a hut to the east of the city, he could not have been angry at its non-fulfilment before the time arrived, nor could God have reproved him for his anger before that time. The divine correction of the dissatisfied prophet, which is related in vv. 6–11, cannot have taken place till the forty days had expired. But this correction is so closely connected with Jonah’s departure from the city and settlement to the east of it, to wait for the final decision as to its fate (v. 5), that we cannot possibly separate it, so as to take the verbs in v. 5 as pluperfects, or those in

vv. 6–11 as historical imperfects. There is no valid ground for so forced an assumption as this. As the expression וַיֵּרַע אֶל יְהוָה in Jonah 4:1, which is appended to וְלֹא עָשָׂה in Jonah 3:10, shows that Jonah did not become irritated and angry till after God had failed to carry out His threat concerning Nineveh, and that it was then that he poured out his discontent in a reproachful prayer to God (v. 2), there is nothing whatever to force us to the assumption that Jonah had left Nineveh before the fortieth day. Jonah had no reason to be afraid of perishing with the city. If he had faith, which we cannot deny, he could rely upon it that God would not order him, His own servant, to perish with the ungodly, but when the proper time arrived, would direct him to leave the city. But when forty days elapsed, and nothing occurred to indicate the immediate or speedy fall of the city, and he was reproved by God for his anger on that account in these words, “Art thou rightly or justly angry?” the answer from God determined him to leave the city and wait outside, in front of it, to see what fate would befall it. For since this answer still left it open, as a possible thing, that the judgment might burst upon the city, Jonah interpreted it in harmony with his own inclination, as signifying that the judgment was only postponed, not removed, and therefore resolved to wait in a hut outside the city, and watch for the issue of the whole affair. But his hope was disappointed, and his remaining there became, quite contrary to his intention, an occasion for completing his correction.

Jonah 4:6–11. Jehovah-God appointed a *Qiqayon*, which grew up over Jonah, to give him shade over his head, “*to deliver him from his evil.*” The *Qiqayon*, which Luther renders gourd (*Krbiss*) after the LXX, but describes in his commentary on the book of Jonah as the *vitis alba*, is, according to Jerome, the shrub called *Elkeroa* in Syriac, a very common shrub in Palestine, which grows in sandy places, having broad leaves that throw a pleasant shadow, and which shoots up to a considerable height in a very few days. The *Elkeroa*, however, which

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Niebuhr also saw at Basra (*Beschrieb. v. Arab.* p. 148) and describes in a similar manner, is the *ricinus* or *palma Christi*, the miraculous tree; and, according to Kimchi and the Talmudists, it was the *Kik* or *Kiki* of the Egyptians, from which an oil was obtained according to Herodotus (ii. 94) and Pliny (*Hits. n. xv. 7*), as was the case according to Niebuhr with the *Elkeroa*. Its rapid growth is also mentioned by Pliny, who calls it *ricinus* (see *Ges. thes.* p. 1214). God caused this shrub to grow up with miraculous rapidity, to such a height that it cast a shade upon Jonah's head, to procure him deliverance (לְהַצִּיל לֵי) "from his evil," i.e., not from the burning heat of the sun (*ab aestu solis*), from which he suffered in the hut which he had run up so hastily with twigs, but from his displeasure or vexation, the evil from which he suffered according to v. 3 (Rosenmüller, Hitzig). The variation in the names of the Deity in vv. 6–9 is worthy of notice. The creation of the miraculous tree to give shade to Jonah is ascribed to *Jehovah-Elohim* in v. 6. This composite name, which occurs very rarely except in Gen. 2 and 3 (see comm. on Gen. 2:4), is chosen here to help the transition from *Jehovah* in v. 4 to *Elohim* in vv. 7, 8. *Jehovah*, who replies to the prophet concerning his discontented complaint (v. 4) as *Elohim*, i.e., as the divine creative power, causes the miraculous tree to spring up, to heal Jonah of his chagrin. And to the same end *hâ-Elohim*, i.e., the personal God, prepares the worm which punctures the miraculous tree and causes it to wither away (v. 7); and this is also helped by the east wind appointed by *Elohim*, i.e., the Deity ruling over nature (v. 8), to bring about the correction of the prophet, who was murmuring against God. Hence the different names of God are employed with thoughtful deliberation. Jonah rejoiced exceedingly at the miraculous growth of the shrub which provided for him, because he probably saw therein a sign of the goodness of God and of the divine approval of his intention to wait for the destruction of Nineveh. But this joy was not to last long.

Jonah 4:8. On the rising of the dawn of the very next day, God appointed a worm, which punctured the miraculous tree so that it withered away; and when the sun arose He also appointed a sultry east wind, and the sun smote upon Jonah's head, so that he fainted away. *Chârishith*, from *chârash*, to be silent or quiet, is to be taken when used of the wind in the sense of sultry, as in the Chaldee (LXX συγκαίωv). The meaning *ventus, qualis flat tempore arandi*, derived from *chârish*, the ploughing (Abulw.), or autumnal east wind (Hitzig), is far less suitable. When Jonah fainted away in consequence of the sun-stroke (for *hith'allēph*, see at Amos 8:13), he wished himself dead, since death was better for him than life (see v. 3). וְיִשְׁאַל אֶת-נַפְשׁוֹ לְמוֹת, as in 1 Kings 19:4, "he wished that his soul might die," a kind of accusative with the infinitive (cf. Ewald, § 336, b). But God answered, as in v. 4, by asking whether he was justly angry. Instead of *Jehovah* (v. 4) we have *Elohim* mentioned here, and *Jehovah* is not introduced as speaking till v. 9. We have here an intimation, that just as Jonah's wish to die was simply an expression of the feelings of his mind, so the admonitory word of God was simply a divine voice within him setting itself against his murmuring. It was not till he had persisted in his ill-will, even after this divine admonition within, that *Jehovah* pointed out to him how wrong his murmuring was. *Jehovah's* speaking in v. 9 is a manifestation of the divine will by supernatural inspiration. *Jehovah* directs Jonah's attention to the contradiction into which he has fallen, by feeling compassion for the withering of the miraculous tree, and at the same time murmuring because God has had compassion upon Nineveh with its many thousands of living beings, and has spared the city for the sake of these souls, many of whom have no idea whatever of right or wrong. *Chastâ*: "Thou hast pitied the *Qiqayon*, at which thou hast not laboured, and which thou hast not caused to grow; for (אֲשֶׁר בָּן = שָׁבוֹן) son of a night"— i.e., in a night, or over night—"has it grown, and over night perished, and I should not pity Nineveh?"

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וְיִשְׁאָל is a question; but this is only indicated by the tone. If Jonah feels pity for the withering of a small shrub, which he neither planted nor tended, nor caused to grow, shall God not have pity with much greater right upon the creatures whom He has created and has hitherto sustained, and spare the great city Nineveh, in which more than 120,000 are living, who cannot distinguish their right hand from the left, and also much cattle? Not to be able to distinguish between the right hand and the left is a sign of mental infancy. This is not to be restricted, however, to the very earliest years, say the first three, but must be extended to the age of seven years, in which children first learn to distinguish with certainty between right and left, since, according to M. v. Niebuhr (p. 278), “the end of the seventh year is a very common division of age (it is met with, for example, even among the Persians), and we may regard it as certain that it would be adopted by the Hebrews, on account of the importance they attached to the number seven.” A hundred and twenty thousand children under seven years of age would give a population of six hundred thousand, since, according to Niebuhr, the number of children of the age mentioned is one-fifth the whole population, and there is no ground for assuming that the proportion in the

East would be essentially different. This population is quite in accordance with the size of the city. Children who cannot distinguish between right and left, cannot distinguish good from evil, and are not yet accountable. The allusion to the multitude of unaccountable children contains a fresh reason for sparing the city: God would have been obliged to destroy so many thousand innocent ones along with the guilty. Besides this, there was “much cattle” in the city. “Oxen were certainly superior to shrubs. If Jonah was right in grieving over one withered shrub, it would surely be a harder and more cruel thing for so many innocent animals to perish” (Calvin). “What could Jonah say to this? He was obliged to keep silence, defeated, as it were, by his own sentence” (Luther). The history, therefore, breaks off with these words of God, to which Jonah could make no reply, because the object of the book was now attained,—namely, to give the Israelites an insight into the true nature of the compassion of the Lord, which embraces all nations with equal love. Let us, however, give heed to the sign of the prophet Jonah, and hold fast to the confession of Him who could say of Himself, “Behold, a greater than Jonah is here!”