

Jonah, the Reluctant Prophet

Jonah Chapter One

The Jonah 1 commentary offers my translation of Jonah 1:1-16 with Hebrew keywords and phrases in bold letters.

Jonah 1:1

The Word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai:

- **LORD** = Yahweh (Exodus 3:14). This is God's personal name revealed first to Moses.
- Jonah son of Amittai (2 Kings 14:25). This reference to Jonah proves his historical existence.
- Jonah and the **LORD** had a detailed dialogue about **the Word** in 1:1 even though he doesn't record much about it (Jonah 4:2).

Jonah 1:2

"RISE. GO to Nineveh the GREAT city. CRY OUT against it for their EVIL has risen before me."

- Nineveh, the **GREAT city** (Genesis 10:12), is populous with many under judgment.
- **CRY OUT** against Nineveh. Later, God tells Jonah to **CRY OUT** to it (Jonah 3:2).
- **EVIL** describes the **GREAT** storm Jonah causes later in the chapter.
- The verb for **has risen** carries the imagery of a sacrificial offering before God.
- Ironically, **EVIL rises up** while Jonah goes down.

Jonah 1:3

Jonah ROSE to flee to Tarshish away from the presence of the LORD. He WENT DOWN to Joppa. He found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid her fare and WENT DOWN onto it.

- Jonah only partially obeys. He **ROSE** but did not **GO to** Nineveh.
- Instead he fled **away from** the **LORD**.
- The ship is personified. Jonah pays **her** fair. The ship seems to accept money.
- Geographically, Jonah **WENT DOWN** to Joppa, **WENT DOWN** onto the ship, and sets sail down to Tarshish.

Jonah 1:4

But the LORD HURLED a GREAT wind onto the sea. A GREAT storm came upon the sea. The ship thought it was going to be smashed into pieces.

- Since Jonah didn't want to **CRY OUT** to the **GREAT city**, the **LORD HURLED** a **GREAT** wind.
- The **LORD** caused a **GREAT** storm.
- The ship has the ability to think (personification).

Jonah 1:5

The Sailors were AFRAID (FEARED). Each one CRIED OUT to his gods. They HURLED the cargo which was on the ship to lighten it from upon them. But Jonah WENT DOWN into the guts of the ship. He lay down. He slept deeply.

- The sailors **FEARED** the storm, **but** Jonah didn't.
- They **CRIED OUT** to their gods, **but** Jonah wouldn't **CRY OUT** to Nineveh. The contrast between Jonah and the Pagan Sailors is evident.
- They **HURLED** the cargo, just as the **LORD HURLED** the storm earlier in Jonah 1:4.
- Geographically, Jonah **WENT DOWN** into the **guts** of the ship. The ship has **guts** (personification).
- Jonah **slept deeply**. The Hebrew Bible uses the noun derivative of this verb in Genesis 2:21 to describe the **deep sleep** God put Adam in while removing his rib.

Jonah 1:6

The ship captain approached and said to him, "What are you doing, O' Sleeper? RISE. CRY OUT to your God! Perhaps, your Deity will notice us, so that we will not PERISH.

- Ship Captain literally translates as the captain of the ropes.
- The Captain's speech "**RISE. CRY OUT!**" echoes Jonah 1:2. Jonah wakes up to these words that the **LORD** spoke to him before concerning Nineveh.
- God speaks to Jonah about his rebellion through the Ship Captain.
- Jonah, however, has no more concern for the Sailors than he does for the Ninevites. Both are pagans.
- But the Sailors worry that they will **PERISH**.

Jonah 1:7

Each Sailor said to his companion, "Come. Let us cast lots, so that we might know on whose account this EVIL is upon us." They cast lots. The lot fell on Jonah.

- See a commentary on the ancient practice of **casting lots** in Israel.
- The Sailors want to know why this **EVIL** (the **GREAT** storm) has come upon them.
- The lots point the blame on Jonah. His sin has affected the people all around him.

Jonah 1:8

They said to him, "Do tell us. Please! on whose account this EVIL is upon us. What is

your occupation? From where are you coming? What is your native land? From what people are you?

- The Sailors now directly question Jonah with urgency. "Do tell us! Please!"
- They question Jonah to find out what gods he worships, so they can discern how to appease them.
- Again the **GREAT** storm is described as "this **EVIL**."
- This is also the second time "**on whose account this EVIL is upon us**" appears as well.

Jonah 1:9

He said to them, "I am a Hebrew. I fear the LORD the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."

- Jonah answers the Sailors. I'm a **Hebrew**. Opposed to Gentile Pagans.
- He claims to **fear** the **LORD**. Yahweh is **his** God, contrary to pagan gods.
- **Fear** is an adjective in this verse meaning reverence for the **LORD**.
- Jonah cannot escape the **LORD**. He is the **God of heaven, sea, and dry land**.
- Now the Sailors know the God of the **sea** or Yahweh brought "this **EVIL**" (the **GREAT** storm) upon them. Now they can pray directly to the **LORD**.

Jonah 1:10

The men FEARED with a GREAT FEAR. They said to him, "What is this you have done?" The men knew that he was fleeing away from the Presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

- **FEARED** with a **GREAT FEAR** translates as "extremely afraid" in English Bibles.
- Both the verb **FEARED** and the noun **FEAR** are Hebrew keywords.
- The narrator explains that the Sailors already knew Jonah's plight.
- Jonah had already told them he had fled **away from** the **LORD**. It's pointless to run from the **God of heaven, sea, and dry land**.

Jonah 1:11

They said to him, "What should we do to you, so that the sea may calm down?" The sea was becoming increasingly stormy.

- The Sailors want to know what the **LORD** of the **sea** demands of them.
- They knew that something needed to happen to Jonah to calm the storm.
- The narrator says that the storm continues to grow **increasingly** worse by the moment.

Jonah 1:12

He said to them, "Lift me up and HURL me into the sea. Then the sea will calm down, for I know that on account of me this GREAT storm has come upon you."

- Jonah tells the Sailors to **HURL** him overboard.
- In the same way the **LORD HURLED** the **GREAT** wind (Jonah 1:4), and the Sailors **HURLED** the cargo (Jonah 1:5).
- Jonah admits that he is the reason for the **GREAT** storm. Note earlier the Sailors asked twice, "on whose account this **EVIL**" had come upon them.
- The keyword **GREAT** has ties with God's judgment on evil behavior; for example: **GREAT city, GREAT wind, GREAT storm, GREAT fish.**

Jonah 1:13

But the men rowed desperately to return to dry land. They were not able for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy.

- The conjunction **but** indicates the Sailors didn't heed Jonah's advice. They cannot escape the **LORD of dry land** either.
- The narrator makes it clear the intensity of the storm continues to escalate. Twice now we notice **the sea was becoming increasingly stormy** (Jonah 1:11).
- Unlike Jonah's lack of concern for the Pagan Sailors (**deep sleep** in the **guts** of the ship), they didn't want the prophet to die.

Jonah 1:14

They CRIED OUT to the LORD and said, "Please O' LORD, Let us not PERISH for this man's life. Do not put upon us innocent blood, for You O' LORD have done as You pleased."

- Since Jonah finally revealed the **LORD's** name to the Sailors in Jonah 1:9, they can pray to Yahweh.
- The narrator states that the Sailors repeatedly **CRY OUT** to the **LORD**. In contrast, Jonah doesn't pray.
- The Sailors beg the **LORD** not to charge them with the murder of **innocent blood**.
- They don't want to **PERISH** (Jonah 1:6; 3:9).

Jonah 1:15

They lifted Jonah up. They HURLED him into the sea. The sea ceased its raging.

- The Sailors pick Jonah up and **HURL** him overboard.
- The raging **sea** calms its anger (personification). The **sea** becomes placid.

Jonah 1:16

The men **FEARED** the **LORD** with a **GREAT FEAR**. They offered a sacrifice to the **LORD**. They vowed vows.

- Jonah claimed to **FEAR** the **LORD** in Jonah 1:9. But the narrator clarifies that the Sailors truly **FEARED** the **LORD** with a **GREAT FEAR**.
- Their **FEAR** of the **LORD** compares with the size of Nineveh and the intensity of the storm, both deemed **GREAT**.
- This chapter began with imagery of a sacrifice of **EVIL**, but it ends with a sacrifice of obedience to the **LORD** by Pagan Sailors.
- Perhaps the narrator foreshadows the Ninevites repentance already here in Jonah chapter one.

Summary of Jonah 1

The character of Jonah unfolds in chapter one. Yahweh tells the prophet Jonah to **RISE** and **CRY OUT against** that **GREAT city** (Jonah 1:2). But instead he **WENT DOWN** to Joppa and **WENT DOWN** onto the deck of the ship (Jonah 1:3). Since Jonah doesn't want to **CRY OUT against** the **GREAT city**, God **HURLED** a **GREAT** wind on the **sea** (Jonah 1:4). The Pagan Sailors **CRIED OUT** to their gods while Jonah **WENT DOWN** below deck and fell into a **deep sleep** (Jonah 1:5). The Ship Captain found Jonah and said to him, "**RISE. CRY OUT!**" The prophet awoke from a **deep sleep** hearing the first words that God had spoken to him concerning Nineveh's judgment in Jonah 1:2. Interestingly, in verse two, the Ninevites are described as **EVIL** (wicked), but the same Hebrew word characterizes the storm Jonah caused (Jonah 1:7-8). Moreover, the **LORD HURLED** the **GREAT** wind onto the **sea**, the prophet Jonah tells the sailors to **HURL** him overboard for it is **on account of him** that the **GREAT** storm has come upon them (Jonah 1:12). He reluctantly tells them the name of his God. Only now are the Pagan Sailors able to **CRY OUT** to the **LORD**, the **God of heaven, sea, and dry land** (Jonah 1:14). The pagan men **HURL** Jonah into the **sea** and make sacrifices to Yahweh; the storm calms (Jonah 1:14-15).