

## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 20**

### **Jonah**

#### **IV. Jonah**

##### **A. Jonah's Name and Writer**

Let's look at Roman numeral IV and A., "Jonah's name and writer." The book derives its name from Jonah son of Amittai. If you look at Jonah 1:1 you read there, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai." In 2 Kings 14:25 a prophet of the same name is said to have come from Gath Hepher, a place north of Nazareth in the Northern Kingdom. I want to look at that text 2 Kings 14:25 because it is significant in another connection. Here you read of Jeroboam II, "He was the one that restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah in accordance with word of the LORD of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher." So, Jeroboam II extended Israel's borders way to the North and down to the Sea of Arabah, the Dead Sea, in accordance with a prophecy of Jonah. It seems quite clear that Jonah son of Amittai during the time of Jeroboam II is the same as the author the book of Jonah. So, in 2 Kings 14:25 the prophet of the same name is said to come from Gath Hepher. According to this reference he must have come during or before the time of Jeroboam II. If it was during the time of Jeroboam, he was a contemporary of Amos and Hosea. He prophesied that Jeroboam would regain the ancient boundaries from Hamath in the north to the Sea of Arabah in the south. Other than this we know nothing of Jonah apart from what is told in the book.

Now we get to the story of his mission to go to Nineveh and his lack of desire to do that, the fish swallowing him, and eventual going to Nineveh. The author of the book is not specified, but there are no compelling reasons to assume Jonah was not the author. It should be added however, if the book was written by someone other than Jonah, that in no way affects its authenticity since the writer is not specified.

##### **B. The Nature of the Book: Historical or Non-historical -- Survey of Approaches**

B. is a discussion of how to understand this book, “The nature of the book: historical or non-historical.” This becomes a much-discussed issue. So let’s look at it. The book distinguishes itself much from the other minor prophets. Its content is not just a record of Jonah’s prophecies, but it is a narrative in which the prophet is a central figure. In this respect it bears more resemblance to the narratives connected with Elijah and Elisha; this is like a piece of narrative out of Kings. There is wide diversity of viewpoint with respect of the character of the narrative. Its religious value is recognized by almost everyone, while its historical value is often considered lacking. Since this book is one of the first to be cited by those who chose challenge the historical reliability of the Bible we should consider it in some detail.

It’s been said the author had a didactic purpose in mind when he wrote this story, that he told this story in order to teach certain things. From this premise it is then concluded that the purpose of this story is not to give historical information, but rather to teach certain lessons and that the author uses the story form to accomplish this didactic purpose. It is usually not recognized that there could be such a thing as didactic history just as well as didactic fiction.

See T.D. Alexander “Jonah and Genre,” it’s in your bibliography, page 17. If you’re interested in this topic we might look at this article. It’s quite a good article. But in it, Alexander says in surveying the ways in which Jonah has been classified and what label has been attached to it. He says even the partial survey reveals a wide variety of proposals, and he footnotes each of these labels. Some say it is history, some allegory, some midrash, some a parable, some prophetic parable, some legend, some prophetic legend, some novel, some didactic fiction, some satirical, some short story, and the list goes on. In other words, if you look at the people who work with this book and tried make a genre classification, you get this long list of possibilities.

Alexander himself classifies it as didactic history, or history that’s intended to teach something. Among the non-historical group there are differences of viewpoints concerning its nature. The most common are fiction, legend, allegory, and parable. See Alexander, page 36 and 37.

## Non-Historical Approaches

### 1. Jonah as Fiction, Legend, allegory and Parable

So let's look at each of them. One, fiction. Some think the author intended the story as a prose fiction. Two, legend. Others think the author made use of a prophetic legend that was in circulation among the people of Israel. This view accepts that there may be a real historical kernel behind this story. Perhaps someone named Jonah did indeed go to Nineveh. Perhaps a royal message or even a message of religious overtone, but this original kernel of historical facts is surrounded by all sorts of legendary expansions and accretions that were added, such as the story of the fish. I might say those three things: the fish, the gourd and the conversion of the Ninevites usually cause people the most trouble, for they are the things most often question its historicity. In some expressions, particularly with the story of the fish, some find a point of agreement with non-Israelite like legends of deliverance from sea monsters. The author is said to have used this legendary motif for his own purposes, including the teaching of such things as the mercy of God toward the heathen, and the rebellion and the sin of Jonah refusing to do God's will. That things of that sort are taught is not denied by those who see the story as truly historical. The question is: On what basis then can we say it is not historical? What are the implications of such a view?

The third approach among those who deny the historical events of the book is an allegorical view. The most usual form of this view sees Jonah as the people of Israel, Nineveh is the heathen world to whom Israel had the task of proclaiming the message of repentance. Jonah's unfaithfulness is thus Israel's unfaithfulness to be a light to the Gentiles. Jonah swallowed up by the fish is Israel's captivity, Jonah's cast up on land is Israel's return from captivity. Returned Israel is to make religious truth known to the heathen and they become recipients of God's grace by conversion. Israel is to be rejected because of the dissatisfaction over the Lord's mercy to the Gentiles. These are the general lines of the allegorical view.

The fourth category is the parable view. Others would not make the allegorical

elements so prominent but rather see the story as a parable invented to teach some lessons. Such a view would not necessarily deny the divine inspiration of the story but would be willing to deny its historicity. Now an example of that is Leslie Allen in the NICOT Commentary. If you look in your citations page 41 paragraph 2, there is a paragraph from Leslie Allen's commentary on the books of Joel, Jonah, and Micah, where Allen says, "For a long time the book of Jonah was interpreted in a strongly historical vein. Yet although the Church Fathers, who mostly used Jonah symbolically, admitted its historicity, there were those who doubted it, including in the fourth century Gregory of Nazianzus... Luther viewed the story as nonhistorical." I'm not sure where he gets that as there are no footnotes. "Today there are both Roman Catholic and Protestant circles that maintain the historicity of the book with a fervor that assumes that its inspiration and authority depend upon it: If the book of Jonah is history, it is part of the evidence for the most important truth imaginable, namely that the Almighty God seeks to bring men to repentance and will pardon those who truly repent." There is someone else who is pressing that view. Here is Allen's comment, "But if the book is not historical, then it is only the opinion of some singularly broadminded Jew that God ought to pardon even Gentiles if they truly repent." But is it inconceivable that "some singularly broadminded Jew" was inspired to teach this much-needed lesson? Such a viewpoint is in danger of restricting the Spirit of God and belittling the value of the parable as a genuine scriptural medium. To me he really begs the question of: is this a parable? Why would you conclude that this is a parable? And what does it mean? Certainly, God can inspire someone to tell a parable. But is that what this is?

### Comments on Non-Historical Approaches

Now get back to your handout of Jonah, I want to make some general comments on non-historical views first. Later over on the next page I'll make some more specific comments on non-historical views. But the first is the general broad issues involved. It seems to me there is insufficient basis for validation of these non-historical views and some strong reasons for rejecting them. I've listed three reasons here.

a. Book Itself Alleges it is Historical

One, the book itself gives is no good reason for taking it as anything other than historical, unless the presence of the miraculous is considered as evidence against that. Certainly, there is a strong element of the miraculous. Were the possibility of miracles not an issue the book itself gives no good reason to be taken as anything but historical. The reference to the leading personality in the narrative in 2 Kings 14:25 provides a solid basis for historicity for a prophet named Jonah. See, that's where 2 Kings 14:25 plays a pretty significant role. If we only had the book of Jonah we might wonder if this is a parable. We know that Jonah was a prophet who prophesied either during or before the time of Jeroboam II.

b. Jesus Understood it as Historical – Matthew 12:38-41

Two, Jesus' references to incidents in the book of Jonah in Matthew 12:38-41 are indicative that he understood it to be historical. Let's look at Matthew 12:38-41. "Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, 'Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.' He answered, 'A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'" Now most people that refer to this statement of Jesus with regard to the book of Jonah and discuss this historical issue connect it with verse 40, "As Jonah was three days in the belly so I will be three days in the heart of the earth." That is not where it seems to me the argument falls. It's with verses 41 to 42, notice what Jesus goes on to say, "The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.'" Now notice what Jesus does there with verses 41 and 42. Jesus places Jonah's historicity on the same

plane as that of the Queen of the Sheba. He places the response of the Ninevites on the same plane as that of the people of his own time. In other words, the Ninevites repented when Jonah came to preach to them. You are not repenting and I'm greater than Jonah. There is an historical analogy there. If the people of Nineveh did not repent historically at the preaching of Jonah, the analogy falls flat. It's assumed that these things happened. Jesus is using it to condemn the people of his own generation.

Now look at what Allen says about this, Allen says, "Yet does not the statement of Jesus concerning Jonah in Matthew 12:39-41 constitute a testimony to the historicity of our book? Von Orelli, who himself interpreted the story thus, admitted: 'It is not indeed proved with conclusive necessity that, if the resurrection of Jesus was a physical fact, Jonah's abode in the fish's belly must also be just as historical.'" But see that is not really the crux of the argument. "In this regard it is important to note a feature which will be shown in the later section on the sign of Jonah, that it is not strict exegesis that is reflected in Jesus' use of the narrative of Jonah and the fish, but the popular Jewish understanding, which the Lord took up and employed as a vehicle for truth concerning himself. If this is so, it is quite possible to maintain that his reference merely reflects the contemporary view without necessarily endorsing it for the student of the OT." In other words, people believed Jonah was historical and therefore Jesus speaks in those terms as if it were but it was not. "Moreover, allowance must be made for a figurative element in the teaching of Jesus, an element Western literalists have notoriously found difficulty in grasping. If a modern preacher would not be at fault if he challenged his congregation with a reference to Lady Macbeth or Oliver Twist, could not Jesus have alluded in much the same manner to a well-known story to reinforce his own distinctive message?" Now I think Allen there really misses the point. It's not so much that Jesus says Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and swallowed up by the fish. There is also a historical reference to the repentance at the preaching of Jonah by the Ninevites and that it is contrasted with the lack of repentance of the people of his own time when they hear his own preaching.

Look at G. C. Aalder's little book, *The Problem of the Book of Jonah*. He says,

“Finally, and this is of much greater importance, our Lord Jesus Christ himself undoubtedly accepted the events narrated in the book of Jonah as truly historical. This is manifest not only from the fact that he alludes to the stay of Jonah's sojourn in the whale's belly, but also from his reference to the repentance of the Ninevites: 'The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold a greater than Jonah is here.' Our Lord could not have made such a serious pronouncement unless he was firmly convinced that the Ninevites actually repented at the preaching of Jonah. A parabolic interpretation of this repentance is absolutely impossible in the light of this emphatic warning of Christ.”

“Now this may not mean much to many commentators, but it means everything to us who believe in him as our precious Saviour, the Son of the Father, faultless in his humanity. And perhaps it may mean something to those who share this belief, but do not fully and entirely agree with us in accepting the Old Testament as an integral part of the infallible, authoritative Word of God.” I think that Aalder's statement there adds to the response against a position like Allen's.

You see on your outline that Charles Harris says, “It is true that a preacher may cite illustrations fictitious or allegorical personages, but he must not cite them as analogical evidence. Let him try this before an audience of unbelievers and he will find them muttering, 'That proves nothing, the thing never happened.'” See that is the crux of it, it seems to me. Jesus uses this as an analogy and the analogy falls flat if there is not an historical reality of repentance. Dillard and Longman, in their *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pages 392-393, comment, “The most compelling argument in favor of the historical reading is that Jesus' reference to Jonah and Nineveh indicates that he believed the book was historical. The comment is, however, while this is possible, it is not certain.” After all, Jesus could refer to the event if he were preaching even if it were parable. In a similar way a preacher today exhorts the congregation to be like the Good Samaritan even though few believe that the good Samaritan was a historical person. The good Samaritan is not named, Jonah is named. In Kings we know he was an historical person who lived either during or prior to the time of Jeroboam II. But I don't think the

analogy holds that this may be parable. That doesn't seem to me to fit the demands of the historical analogy that Jesus was making in his statement. So that's a second general comment on the non-historical views.

### c. The Inclusion of Jonah in the Canon of Scripture

Thirdly, the inclusion of Jonah in the canon of Scripture and the most ancient references to it in Jewish literatures suggest that it was always understood as historical. Go to your citations, page 42—I have a more lengthy quote from H. L. Ellison, who says, “What really matters is the historicity of the book. It is abundantly clear that its literal truth was never questioned in Jewish tradition. Indeed, Philo of Alexandria, that great master of allegory, who would doubtless have eagerly seized on a symbolic or allegoric explanation had it been known to him, ‘took great pains to explain the marvel of the fish.’

“Equally the canonicity of the book seems never to have been questioned. Whether the modern scholar explains the book as prophetic legend, symbolic narrative or didactic fiction, he is faced by the impossibility of explaining how the Jewish people, and in particular our Lord, came to regard it as historically true. The difficulty is the greater when we realize that our spiritual explanation of it as a historically true account will be, to a greater or less degree, significantly different from that we should give it, if we regarded it as fiction. We are asked to believe that the Jews not merely forgot it was fiction, but even forgot its true meaning. It is not unfair to remember also that moderns are singularly in conflict as to its original purpose and meaning.

“Those then who deny the book's factual truth must bear the onus of explaining how a book so very different from the other prophetic books ever came to be included in the prophetic canon, how it was forgotten that it was symbolic or didactic fiction, and above all how our Lord was incapable of realizing its true nature.

“Let us face a simple fact. From Eichhorn onwards the denial of the book's historicity was in the first place the result of the then dominant rationalistic view of the world, in which there was no room for miracle or for Divine interference in things physical.



“The conservative must bear part of the blame, however. For him, all too often, the first half of the book is all that has mattered. He has tended to overlook that God's miraculous dealings with Jonah were but a preparation for the revelation of the Divine character. If we want the literal truth of the book to be taken seriously we must both give it an adequate spiritual interpretation and justify the exceptional miraculous element in it.” In other words, if you just focus on the historical details you may miss the real significance of the book.

#### 4. The Opinion of the Jew – They did not regard it as a parable

On top of page 4 of your handouts there is another reference to your citation on page 39 from Aalders' commentary on this latter point, paragraph 2 of Aalders when he's talking about the way the Jewish people understood the book. He said, “Such was also the opinion of the Jews. They did not regard the book of Jonah as a parable, but assumed it to be a record of real historical events. This is evident from the apocryphal book of Tobit. As Tobit is dying he calls to his son, Tobias, and commands him to go into Media, ‘for (says he) I believe the word of God upon Nineveh, which Nahum spake, that all those things will be, and will befall Assyria and Nineveh.’ This text is probably correct, but the Septuagint has Jonah instead of Nahum. This may be a false emendation, but it proves that the Jews certainly did not regard the book of Jonah as a parable. In the third book of Maccabees the priest Eleazar when praying refers to the deliverance of Jonah as follows: ‘And when Jonah was languishing unpitied in the belly of the sea-born monster, thou didst restore him, O Father, uninjured to all his household.’ This reference is preceded by similar recollections of the Pharaoh who was drowned together with his proud host, of Sennacherib, who was defeated in sight of the holy city, of the deliverance of the three friends from the fiery furnace, and of Daniel from the lions' den. This likewise is a firm proof that the Jews regard the book of Jonah as a record of actual historic events. And Josephus, who repeatedly emphasizes the historical character of his work, includes the contents of the book in his Antiquities. Though we may have good reason to question the actual value of his historical accuracy, there is no doubt at all that

he voices the view of his people,” that Jonah was an historical narrative. So those are general comments on non-historical views. I think those are three strong reasons for rejecting the non-historical view.

### Vannoy’s Analysis of the Non-Historical Approaches

Now we get to more specific comments. Seems to me first that those who hold non-historical views generally do so for two reasons. The first one, a., is that “the events described are viewed as either improbable or impossible.” In other words, the historicity of the book is denied on basis of the miraculous elements contained it. Some are of the opinion miracles do not happen, so reports of them cannot be historical. Others are willing to accept the miraculous in general, but feel that the multiplication of miraculous element in Jonah is so great that is best not to consider it historical. That’s basically what Allen says in his NICOT commentary. Allen says, “This element of surprise is a key factor throughout the book. A prophet’s journeying to Nineveh to deliver his message is an extraordinary phenomenon. Prophetic oracles against the nations are common place, but they were normally spoken on the prophet’s native soil for the benefit of his fellow nationals. The political mission of Elijah and Elisha to Damascus is the nearest parallel, but Jonah’s journey is of a different nature.” So it’s surprising the prophets are going to another nation. “Another surprise, a shocking one, is Jonah’s refusal to shoulder his prophetic burden. Moses, Elijah, and Jeremiah indeed shrank from their assignments, but Jonah’s blunt refusal goes far beyond their hesitation. In fact this little book is a series of surprises; it is crammed with an accumulation of hair-raising and eye-popping phenomena, one after the other. The violent seastorm, the submarine-like fish in which Jonah survives as he composes a song, the mass conversion of Nineveh, the magic plant--these are not commonplace features of OT prophetic narratives. While one or two exciting events would raise no question, the bombardment of the reader with surprise after surprise in a provocative manner suggests that the author's intention is other than simply to describe historical facts.” So it’s not the miraculous in itself, but “it’s accumulation of eye-popping phenomenon” that makes you begin to wonder if this is

really intended to be read historically. “Bold would be the man who ventured to say that this series of happenings was impossible, for who can limit the omnipotence of God and say categorically that anything could not happen? Not impossible but improbable is how they strike the ordinary reader. What if the author meant to arrest our attention and focus it on his message by means of a string of improbabilities?” So that’s the way Allen addresses that issue.

### John Stek’s Approach: Analogy of History

Look at page 42 and 43 for a response to that type of approach by Allen this statement from an article by John Stek. He was for many years the Old Testament professor who is now retired but wrote a book called *The Message of the Book of Jonah* which I think is very helpful for this question of the historicity of the book but also the message of the book of Jonah. But notice what Stek says, he says, “The writer assumes the historicity of the events narrated. This is an assumption which most readers...are strongly inclined to reject. Lifting this narrative from its own unique canonical and historical context, and consciously or unconsciously reading it in the context of general history where miracles such as are narrated here do not happen, except in myths, legends, and fairy-tales, the modern reader and scholar feel compelled by the analogy of history to find some explanation for the narrative other than that the events narrated actually happened.” See that reference to the “analogy of history” is that principle often used for historical purposes: If you cannot find analogous phenomena in your own experience then there’s a problem. The principle of what Stek is saying is that readers who do this tend to take this out of its own context, in the context of redemptive history in which God is at work, and put it in another context of general history and then conclude it didn’t happen. He says “Employing the principle of the analogy of history, recourse is generally taken, as does Eissfeldt, to “a mythological, fairy-tale motif which is found throughout the world, namely the motif of the swallowing and vomiting out of a man by a great fish, known, for example, in one form of the Perseus saga.

“The method here illustrated is insidious. It implies, if consistency be a virtue, that

the same must be done with every Biblical narrative of a marvelous event. The fatal result is that all Biblical wonders are explained away on the principle of the analogy of history.

“The present writer recognizes the validity of the principle of historical analogy, but insists that the only appropriate historical analogues for the marvelous events recorded in the book of Jonah are the similarly marvelous events belonging to that history of salvation to which the Biblical writers bear witness, viz., the history of the mighty acts of God. This is the only proper context for the reading of the Book of Jonah. Within this context, historical narrative takes historicity seriously, even when narrating the most unusual events—precisely because there are unusual events to narrate. And within Biblical literature, the Book of Jonah finds its nearest analogy as literature in prophetic historical narrative, as most scholars will admit.” In other words, you find the nearest analogy in historical literature of the Old Testament, the story of the Exodus and stories of the book of Kings.

### Repentance of Nineveh Questioned

Then the next paragraph is a footnote, 35, where Stek says, “The report of a repentance of the Ninevites has often been appealed to as a proof of the legendary character of this prophetic book. H. H. Rowley puts it bluntly: ‘That Nineveh was instantaneously converted is a thesis which will not convince any students of her history, unless the conversion was as ephemeral as it was swift—in which case it was worth-less, and hardly likely to deceive God.’ If the present writer rightly interprets the purpose of the book of Jonah, an ‘ephemeral’ repentance on the part of the Ninevites was sufficient to God's purpose. For even such a repentance, which began to manifest itself already when Jonah's preaching to Nineveh had hardly begun—‘And Jonah began to enter the city a day's journey’ (3:4)—stands in sharp contrast to Israel's callous dismissal long and miracle-filled ministries of Elijah and Elisha. By their response to a prophetic warning, however ephemeral it may have been, the Ninevites put hard-hearted Israel to shame,” I think that is the same thing Jesus is saying. The Ninevites repented, yet one greater than

Jonah is here and you're not repenting.

The Israelites did not repent at the ministry of Elijah and Elisha and the Ninevites responded with the response Israel should have had. "Moreover, that God responds graciously to even an ephemeral repentance is evidenced by his sparing of Ahab who similarly manifested what could only have been an ephemeral repentance in response to Elijah's threat of impending judgment." You remember when Ahab repented or postponed the judgment that was to come on his son.

### Multiple Miracles Problem

If you are going to go the direction of Allen and others, who say it is the multiplication of the miraculous elements of this short story that leads you to the conclusion that the author is not intending to describe history, you have to realize these things tend to happen elsewhere as well. What then do you do with 2 Kings chapters 4-7? In 2 Kings 4-7, you have 4 chapters. In Jonah you have 4 chapters. In 2 Kings 4-7, in 4:1-7, oil is multiplied in those jars of the wife of a member of company of the prophets to pay the debt. In 4:8-37 Elisha promises the Shunnamite woman a son and later raises him from the dead. In 4:8-34 Elisha purifies and multiplies food for the sons of the prophets. In chapter 5 Elisha heals Naaman. In chapter 6 an axe head is floated. In chapter 6:8 some of Israel were struck with blindness. In 6:24 to 7:20 he prophesied of the deliverance of Samaria during a siege. So I think what you can say is when you go to the narratives of 2 Kings you have 4 chapters that have equally "eye-popping" miraculous events, if that's going to cause you to say, "the book of Jonah is not historical." It seems to me, consistency should cause you to say 2 Kings 4-7 is also a prophetic legend. Once you have done that then where you go from there? Because it seems to me the kind of literature you find in Jonah is the very kind of literature you find in 2 Kings 4-7. I don't see how you can have 2 Kings 4-7 as historical but then say but I can't accept Jonah, or vice versa. So it seems to me, the question is not what someone thinks is possible or probable. Rather it is whether or not the writer here is intending to describe reality as he knows it. What is the intent of the writer as to whether it happened or not? Inclusion of

the miraculous events, even if these events are recorded in quick succession, is not a valid criteria against its historicity.

We go back now to the exodus as C.S. Lewis says, “Now of course we must agree with Hume that if there is absolutely 'uniform experience' against miracles, if in other words they have never happened, why then they never have. Unfortunately, we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we know all the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle.” I think ultimately we get pushed back to this question of worldview and whether or not you’re willing to admit the possibility of divine intervention. So that’s a little more detailed look at it.

### Fish Story and Ancient Sea Monsters

I’ve said there are non-historical views generally for two reasons. First would be the miraculous. The second reason being, the fish story is viewed to be derived from myths and legends of other peoples. Next when you examine the evidence for derivations I think you will find there is not is a great deal of correspondence between the Jonah story and the others. Most of the parallels are found in the idea of someone of being saved from a belly of the sea monster. In Greek literature Hesione, daughter of the Trojan king, was given to a sea monster to appease the gods but was saved by Hercules. But the reward was not given to Hercules. Also in Greek literature, Perseus rescued a damsel from a sea monster and married her. Herodotus tells of Arion, who was pushed out of a sea monster and was saved by dolphin.

Go to page 41 your citation for Aalders’ comments on page 41. He says, “A third argument which must be discarded is that based on the parallels, especially of the fish story. Many scholars have been engaged in collecting parallels from non-Biblical sources. Time and again it has been asserted that the author utilized ancient myths and folk tales to compose his story. It is, however, impossible to prove that he was even acquainted with such tales.” There is no reason whatsoever to assume the author borrowed from such sources. “The points of conformity which can be shown are so few

and insignificant, that it is impossible to prove from these that the author of Jonah used or even knew the heathen legends. And if acquaintance with such material cannot be clearly proved, how can these parallels contribute to the solution of the problem whether the author intended to give an historical record or to compose a didactic fiction?"

Note at the bottom of page 5 on the handout, even Abraham Kuenen said that the story of the fish miracle is entirely in agreement with the religious standpoint of the author and that therefore we have no right to ascribe some alien origin particularly derivation from myths or legends in which only a few points of agreement can be shown.

### Problems with the Allegorical Approach

Now some more specific comments. One was this discussion of reasons of the non-historical views: the miraculous. Two, the more specific comments on the allegorical approach. I think the difficulty with the allegorical approach is that it encounters difficulty when pressed to details. For example, Jonah's own urging the crew to cast him into the sea is hardly applicable to that of Israel going into captivity. In the story, the fish is the divinely ordained means of rescuing Jonah from drowning in death, which is also hardly applicable to the captivity. This is not to deny that in certain respects Jonah could be considered typical or representative of Israel. I think that is quite possible. In fact, I think it is probably best to understand it that way. But this is entirely different than maintaining that the narrative was designed as allegorical of Israel. A representative or typical significance of Jonah would assume certain analogies between Jonah and Israel. In an allegorical interpretation one would expect a detailed correspondence.

This becomes clearer when we compare the book of Jonah with other examples of Old Testament allegories. There are some allegories in the Old Testament. I'll give you two of them. In Ezekiel 17:2-10, Ezekiel says, "Son of man, set forth an allegory and tell the house of Israel a parable. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: A great eagle with powerful wings, long feathers and full plumage of varied colors came to Lebanon. Taking hold of the top of a cedar, he broke off its topmost shoot and carried it away to a land of merchants, where he planted it in a city of traders. He took some of the

seed of your land and put it in fertile soil. He planted it like a willow by abundant water, and it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine. Its branches turned toward him, but its roots remained under it. So it became a vine and produced branches and put out leafy boughs. But there was another great eagle with powerful wings and full plumage. The vine now sent out its roots toward him from the plot where it was planted and stretched out its branches to him for water. It had been planted in good soil by abundant water so that it would produce branches, bear fruit and become a splendid vine.’ Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Will it thrive? Will it not be uprooted and stripped of its fruit so that it withers? All its new growth will wither. It will not take a strong arm or many people to pull it up by the roots. Even if it is transplanted, will it thrive? Will it not wither completely when the east wind strikes it—wither away in the plot where it grew?’”

Now, the eagle in verse 3 with powerful wings is Nebuchadnezzar, and he came from Lebanon to the little country of Judah. Taking hold of the top of a cedar, he broke off its topmost shoot and carried it away.” That is Jehoiachin, who was taken “to a land of merchants, where he planted it in a city of traders,” that’s Babylon. “He took some of the seed of your land and put it in fertile soil,” that’s Zedekiah. “He planted it like a willow... and it became a low-spreading vine. But there was another eagle,” that was Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt. Going on, “And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briers and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house. You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious.”

Now that fits quite closely to the history of this time, and when you go down to verse 12 you get an interpretation in the text itself. Verse 15, “But the king rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt.” So the interpretation is there. It is introduced by the statement that it is a parable, it’s told, then there is an interpretation.

In Ezekiel 19 you have another allegory. Ezekiel 19:1, “Take up a lament concerning the princes of Israel and say: ‘What a lioness was your mother among the



lions! She lay down among the young lions and reared her cubs. She brought up one of her cubs, and he became a strong lion.”” The lion seems to be Israel. One of her cubs is Jehoahaz. “He became a strong lion. He learned to tear the prey and he devoured men. The nations heard about him, and he was trapped in their pit. They led him with hooks to the land of Egypt. He was taken by a prayer. When she saw her hope unfulfilled, her expectation gone, she took another of her cubs and made him a strong lion. He prowled among the lions.” That seems to be Jehoiachin. So we can trace that back again to the book of 2 Kings, and then read an allegorical description of the history of that time.

If you compare examples like this with the book of Jonah, what you find there is much shorter. They have an unmistakable indication of their allegorical character. You’re not going to read Ezekiel 17:19 and conclude that this is historical in the sense of the wording of what was said about eagles and cedars. So there is indication of the allegorical character. Such indications are not to be found in the book of Jonah, and it seems then we are justified in concluding that it is not to be understood in an allegorical sense.

### Problems with the Parable Approach

That brings us to “the parable,” and you can compare Jonah with examples of parables of the Old Testament. I think again you find that the parables are quite different than what you have in Jonah. I’ve listed three that are parables. You can look at Judges 9, the parable of Nathan in 2 Samuel 12:1-4, and the parable of the wise woman of Tekoa in 2 Samuel 14:6-7. If you look at them, I won’t take the time to, but when you look at those and read them, I think two things stand out. a., they are very short, simple, and pointed. The meaning is clear. In each case there is one basic point being made. Judges 9 points to the foolishness of making Abimelech king. 2 Samuel 12:1-4, that David is guilty with Bathsheba. 2 Samuel 14:12-14, David should allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem. And b., there is a direct indication there in the context making it quite clear. David was told it was a story. If you compare that with the book of Jonah, the book of Jonah is characterized neither by making a singular point nor by any indication of

application. And in addition, there is no explanation of why a real person is the primary personality in the story. It seems to me those things combined argue against a parabolic interpretation.

Look at page 43 of your citations where D. J. Wiseman gave a statement in an article that is in the *Tyndale Bulletin*. He says, “If this is a parable it is unique in its length and lack of explanation compared with others in the Old Testament and in the inclusion of 'miraculous elements', absent from all other ancient Near Eastern parallels. This is especially remarkable if 'the cogency of the parable depends on its verisimilitude as portraying a human situation.'” In other words, you wouldn’t expect to find miraculous elements in a parable. That’s not characteristic of the parable genre.

Page 43 paragraph 3 gives the response of Allen. He says, “Certainly the story is set out in a narrative form, but "all parables resemble a record of historical events... It is impossible to argue from the form of the book of Jonah that it must have been meant as a record of historical events.” In other words, parable forms are so close to historical form you can’t really distinguish.

“Another factor to be taken into account is the obviously intended identification of the hero or anti-hero with the prophet of 2 Kings 14:25,” so he does address this issue of Jonah’s mentioned outside the book of Jonah also in 2 Kings. “Here at least is a historical basis, which suggests that the incidents related in our book are historical.” And then he says, “There may well be a historical nucleus behind the story, but this is not relevant to its understanding in its present form. Behind the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) lies 2 Chronicles 28:15... Behind the parable of Dives and Lazarus may well lie the rabbinic tale of how Abraham's steward Eliezer, of which Lazarus is the Greek form, was sent to Sodom to test the hospitality of its citizens. But no one would fail to differentiate these parables from a straightforward recital of events. In each case an older theme has been used as raw material for the creation of something new and contemporary.” Now he makes a number of associations that are behind some of the parables. Get into this and discuss it and I think you can question some of those associations, but even beyond that none of the examples he gives treats a known

historical person by name in the parable. The book of Jonah does, so it seems to me the analogy there, although interesting, really doesn't carry the weight that he is trying to make it bear.

I see my time is up, we haven't gotten to "content." So let's stop at this point. Next time we will have to discuss a little bit about the content of Jonah and go on to Amos.

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