



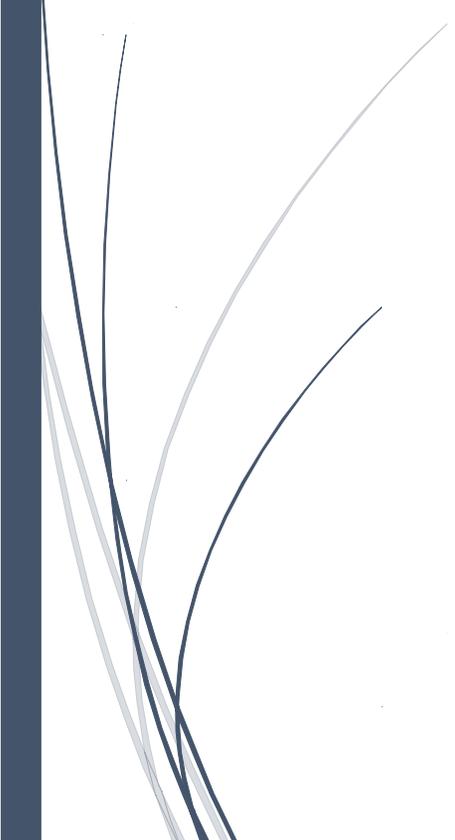
4/28/2020

Exegesis Paper: Option #2

Genre: Prophetic Narrative

Topic: A Reluctant
Prophet on a Mission

Text: Jonah chapter
3 verses 1-10.



Judy Pilgrim-Hector

According to Fee exegesis is a study of the historic content of a text.¹ This is an exegesis study of a prophet's journey to an ancient city called Nineveh. Christopher Eames suggests Jonah was a prophet who was given a command from God to travel to Nineveh which was an Assyrian city located near Mosul in modern-day Iraq.² Nineveh was a wealthy city with good agricultural land that was located near trade routes along the Tigris river. According to Cooper Abrams, Jonah lived in Gath-Hepher near Nazareth so he was a Hebrew man.³ The mission to travel to Nineveh was an unusual assignment because Hebrew people did not associate with Gentiles and this Hebrew prophet was required to travel a far distance to proclaim a gloomy message in a foreign nation. As I examine the cultural and socioeconomic landscape of Nineveh one can understand Jonah's ambivalence regarding proclaiming an objectionable message of death and destruction in a prosperous Gentile city. Jonah's possible human apprehension may have caused him to redirect his attention away from Nineveh. As a result, God called Jonah a second time to go to Nineveh. Jonah 3 verses 1-2 states "the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city."⁴ This was God's distinct command for Jonah to travel and Jonah's hesitant response to accept the responsibility to prophesy in Nineveh. God is a God of second chances because it took a second appeal from God, for Jonah to respond to the command to go to Nineveh. I am proposing that Jonah was a reluctant Prophet who was sent by God on a mission of mercy to give the people a chance to repent.

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 19-20.

² Christopher Eames, *The Antiquity of the Scriptures*: 11/252017/<https://watchjerusalem.co.il/21>

³ Cooper Abrams, *Commentary on the book of Jonah*. <https://www.bible-truth.org/Jonah.html>

⁴ Jonah 3:1-2 <https://www.biblegateway.com.KJV>

Cooper suggested the city of Nineveh was a famous city in the seventh century BC and King Sennacherib (705-681) was believed to be the individual who made Nineveh the capital of Assyria⁵ A review of the history of Nineveh suggest the people believed in polytheistic religion so they worshiped many deities including the fertility goddess and the Babylonians had built many images of gods in the city.⁶ Trumbull indicated that the people of Nineveh were familiar with myths of Babylonian images of gods so they were not surprised by Jonah's explanation of how he was swallowed by a big fish and brought to Nineveh to preach.⁷ Trumbull suggests the King wanted to maintain the wealth of his country so he opted to please God and repent. In contrast, to the book of Genesis 18-19, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for continuing in sin.⁸ The book of Jonah was a prophetic narrative and the book describes the journey of the prophet in Nineveh. The theological consequence of the text includes the people of Nineveh were aware of the possibility that the city would be destroyed in 40 days if they ignore the warning from the prophet. The King demonstrated good leadership skills by declaring a citywide period of fasting and prayer for all transgressions and Nineveh was redeemed from destruction. According to Jonah 3 verse 10, “¹⁰ And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not”.⁹

⁵ Cooper Abrams Commentary on the book of Jonah. <https://www.bible-truth.org>

⁶ History of Nineveh. <https://www.bible-history.com>

⁷ ClayTrumbull, "Jonah in Nineveh." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 11, no. 1 (1892): 53-60. doi:10.2307/3259078.

⁸ Genesis 18-19 King James Version (KJV) <https://www.biblegateway.com.KJV>

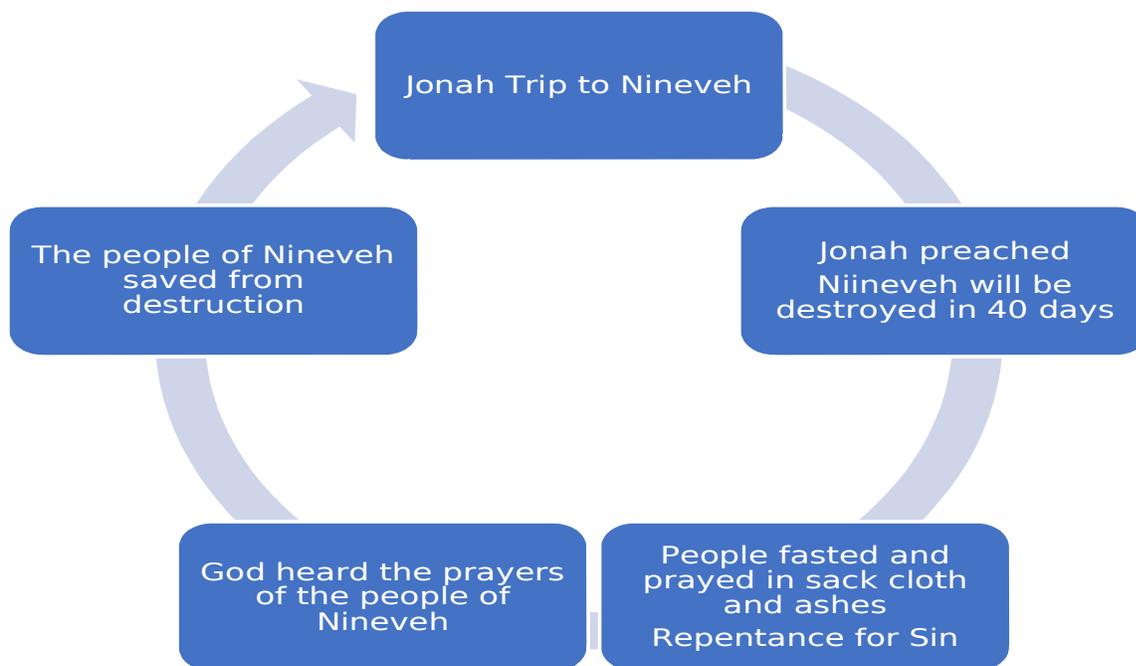
This exegesis study focused on Jonah 3 verses 1-10. The text indicates

“And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying” (3:1). This was used as a declarative communication from God and it was the beginning statement for the next action that was required. “Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee” (3:2). For example, the word came to Jonah then the message or communication statement was to go to Nineveh. Jonah was a prophet so it was expected that he would receive messages and commands from God for the people. So, Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey” (3). The narrative in this text highlights the period when Jonah received another chance to go to Nineveh to preach to the people.

.⁴ And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried and said Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.⁵ So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.⁶ For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.⁷ And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water:⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.⁹ Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? ¹⁰ And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.¹⁰ (4-10) These verses outline the sinful behavior of the people of Nineveh and the call for

¹⁰ Jonah 3:1-10 <https://www.biblegateway.com.KJV>

accountability. In the text, the people were given specific instructions from the king to dress in sackcloth and ashes including the animals and they were required to fast and repent for past sinful behavior. According to Christopher Eames, who reviewed the work of historian Herodotus and it was indicated that the Assyrian tradition of having their animals participate in mourning was common in the fifth-century B.C.¹¹ The humanity of the people was examined in the text and it was evident that they desired the forgiveness from the power of God. They received forgiveness and the city was saved from destruction. The text presented a narrative to explain that Jonah had a second chance to travel to the city of Nineveh to preach and the people received a second chance to change their sinful behavior.



¹¹ Christopher Eames, The Antiquity of the Scriptures: 11/252017/<https://watchjerusalem.co.il/21>

After reviewing the preparation in the exegesis notebook, I can infer that the narrative shows repentance and forgiveness as a common theme. Jonah was forgiven and the people of Nineveh were forgiven when they repented for their sinful behavior. Jonah running from God's presence could be considered an allusion. The allusion was used in the text to hint to the readers that God was persistent in the call to get the attention of Jonah. The text indicated that the word came to Jonah a second time was hyperbole to demonstrate a sense of urgency for Jonah to preach a message of destruction to the people of Nineveh. The sense of urgency was noted because the King responded to the call for change in behavior by decreeing a city-wide fast. The narrative appears to be a moral lesson that encouraged the people of Nineveh to change their social behavior. The sackcloth and ashes could be considered a symbolic act of giving up luxuries and material things for spiritual opportunities that included prayer, fasting, and making sacrifices. The goal was a chance to have a relationship with the spiritual being called God.

David Guzik has written a commentary to outline Jonah's ministry in Nineveh¹² David suggested that Jonah was called to go to Nineveh and he refused the call by traveling to Tarshish. God showed grace to Jonah by giving Jonah a second chance to preach the message of repentance to the city of Nineveh. It appears that Jonah was the voice that God had chosen to present this message and God used every possible option to refocus Jonah's attention to travel to Nineveh and present this important message. The message was simple "Nineveh will be overthrown in 40 days" David suggested that the word "overthrown" was a term that was synonymous with judgment and destruction, for example, it was used when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. David also suggested that when the people of Nineveh heard the message, they believed that it was a serious message. It appears that the people prayed sincerely

¹²David Guzik. *Enduring Word 2018*, <https://enduringword.com/>

and God showed mercy on the people of Nineveh and they were not destroyed. This was an incredible narrative of God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness. The narrative shows that God's mercy can be extended to anyone including Jonah, the people of Nineveh, and the present world population can also ask for forgiveness for inappropriate behaviors. According to Steven M. Bob, the word "chamas" was used to describe a violent type of sinful behavior that was committed by the people of Nineveh.¹³ Jonah 3 verse 8 summarizes the need to turn from the kind of violent, evil behavior that was prevalent in Nineveh. Johann Bugenhagen emphasized that forgiveness does not come from doing good deeds but it comes from the righteousness of God and a repentant heart that seeks compassion from a forgiving God.¹⁴ Steven emphasized that the response of the people was exaggerated when it was suggested that everyone and everything must be adorned in sackcloth and ashes to pray for forgiveness for past transgressions. However, the people of Nineveh understood that their salvation depended on their repentance and God's forgiveness so they responded to the King's order to prayer and fast in sackcloth and ashes. Their commitment to repent was honored and the people of Nineveh experienced the gift of transformation and their country was not destroyed.

David Downs explained Assyria was a vicious oppressor of the Northern Kingdom and now Jonah is doing a mission of mercy to bring a message from God to the people of Nineveh.¹⁵

¹³ Steven M. Bob, *Jonah and the Meaning of Our Lives: A Verse-by-Verse Contemporary Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, (2016)
<http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.nyack.edu>

¹⁴ Johann Bugenhagen, "A Newly Discovered Report of Luther's Reformation Breakthrough from Johannes Bugenhagen's 1550 Jonah Commentary." *Lutheran Quarterly* 22 (3) (2008): 324–30. <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.nyack.edu>

¹⁵ Downs, David J. 2009. "The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah." *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 31 (1): 27–44. doi:10.1163/187122009X419934.

The people surprisingly receive the message and their country was not destroyed. This shows the grace and mercy of God to the most wicked people. This demonstration suggests that God can transform the vilest of people if they are willing to hear his message of love and forgiveness. According to Jenson, Jonah was believed to be a prophet who lived in the 8 century and God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh which was considered an evil city in Assyria.¹⁶ Jenson suggested that Nineveh was possibly ruled by a weak king called Ashurdan111 (773-56 BC) during the time of Jonah. The King was concerned about the wellbeing of the people of Nineveh, so he responded to the call for repentance. Jenson proposed that repentance is a Jewish concept that is common around Yom Kippur which is the day of atonement, so the people of Nineveh may have used that model of repentance in chapter 3 to pray, fast and ask for forgiveness. According to Sandy Habib, Jonah was a Hebrew man from Gath-Hepher who did not want to travel to a gentile nation to present a prophetic word to a wicked city.¹⁷ Sandy suggest Jonah had a personal conflict with the people of Nineveh for political reasons. According to Sandy, Nineveh was an enemy of the Northern kingdom, and Jonah was afraid to proclaim the city will be destroyed. Eventually, God spoke to Jonah a second time and Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh. Raphael Dascalu explained that biblical issues can be explained from a human perspective or a spiritual or soul view.¹⁸ Raphael suggested that Jonah had a limited concept of who God was, so

¹⁶ Jenson, Philip Peter. 2008. *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary*. T & T Clark Library of Biblical Studies. New York: T&T Clark.
<http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.nyack.edu>

¹⁷ Sandy Habib, "Who Converts Whom? A Narrative-Critical Exegesis of the Book of Jonah." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 44 (2): (2014) 67–75. doi:10.1177/0146107914526522.

¹⁸ Raphael Dascalu, "Between Intellect and Intoxication: An Exploration of Tanhum Ha-Yerushalmi's Commentary to the Book of Jonah." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 105 (1) (2015): 42–71. <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.nyack.edu>

when he got the first prophecy to go to Nineveh, he allowed personal fear to cause him to run away from the call. However, once Jonah realized that he was unable to run from an omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God he decided to redirect his focus to preach the message to the people of Nineveh. According to Raphael, Jonah was fearful that either the people would not respond to the message especially since Assyria was enemy territory. Jill Salberg used a psychoanalytic approach to suggest that Jonah was possibly in a depressed state of mind because he was disconnected from God.¹⁹ Jill suggests that rather than entering into a time of prayer to reconnect with God, Jonah decided to escape from the presence of God by fleeing to Tarshish which was a pagan worshiping country. Jill explains that the paradox is Jonah wanted to get God's attention by attempting to run away from God's presence and God was attempting to get Jonah's attention by redirecting Jonah a second time to Nineveh, Jill proposes that this was also a symbolic human story where humans need God, but humans usually make their own decisions, then life circumstances will redirect humans to pray and reconnect to God so that they can develop a closer relationship.

According to Gary Yates, the life of a prophet should reflect a person who listens to the voice of God and present the message of God to the people.²⁰ In contrast, Jonah's behavior reflected someone who heard the message but was rebellious and disobedient to the call of God. Gary Yates suggests that Jonah heard the message to go to Nineveh and Jonah's first plan was to run to Tarshish. God redirected Jonah to Nineveh and Jonah was reluctant to preach. Eventually,

¹⁹ Jill Salberg, "Jonah's Crisis: Commentary on Paper by Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg." *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 18 (2) (2008): 317–28. doi:10.1080/10481880802073504.

²⁰ Gary E Yates, (Gary Eugene) "The 'Weeping Prophet' and 'Pouting Prophet' in Dialogue: Intertextual Connections between Jeremiah and Jonah." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59 (2) 2016: 223–39. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.nyack.edu/login>.

Jonah preached an uninspiring message that told the people their city will be devastated in 40 days. Gary Yates suggests that God showed tremendous restraint towards Jonah and the people of Nineveh during this episode. Jonah was not killed by the people of Nineveh even though Nineveh was known to be a wicked city and Assyria was not a supporter of the Northern or Southern Kingdom. Instead, God softens the heart of the King of Nineveh and the people of Nineveh. They prayed, they fasted and they gave up regular vanity to dress in sackcloth and sat in ashes to show God their desire to change. According to Gary Yates, God heard the prayers and God was responsible for the transformation in Nineveh. One can propose that clearly, God is always the one who makes the final decision. Peter Philip Jenson suggested that the narrative of Jonah being swallowed by a big fish was a possible fiction because it was challenging to find written documents to prove the narrative.²¹ I believe in antiquity oral presentation was used to pass on many biblical accounts so there may not be actual written documents for each oral chronicle. I believe that the narrative presented in the book of Jonah was essential to show that God can use anyone or anything to accomplish his plan. Even if it means using a storm or a fish to redirect Jonah to complete the mission to proclaim the need for repentance in Nineveh and God's mercy to all people. Steven M. Bob suggested that the idea that everyone and everything including animals should fast and they should be covered in sackcloth and ashes were exaggerated.²² I believe the King was serious that everyone and everything should present an image of sincere repentance so that God will forgive the people of Nineveh for past transgressions. This idea was started in Jonah 3:7-8. Also, in Jonah 3:9 it was indicated that the King was adamant to proclaim fasting for all to prevent people from experiencing death and

²¹ Peter Philip Jenson. *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary*.

²² Steven M. Bob. *Jonah and the Meaning of Our Lives: A Verse-by-Verse Contemporary Commentary*.

destruction.²³ So, the King's declaration can be viewed as a desperate cry for forgiveness and not necessarily an exaggerated scenario. Raphael Dascalu suggested that Jonah allowed personal fear to influence his decision to travel to Tarshish.²⁴ This could be a controversial proposal because there is no specific reason why Jonah diverted his attention to travel to Tarshish. I understand the rationale for the "fear proposal". I believe that a person can feel the need to protect himself if there is a threatening or stressful situation. As a result, the hormone Adrenaline will cause the person to either manage the situation(fight) or react like Jonah to protect himself (flight). It is just an assumption that Jonah felt fear which is a normal human emotion so he reacted by fleeing to Tarshish. God was able to redirect Jonah's attention to travel to Nineveh to preach a message of repentance to the people of Nineveh. Ultimately Jonah's fear was conquered and he was able to preach to the people of Nineveh. The people of Nineveh received the message and they repented from past transgressions and they were saved from destruction and the wrath of God. The controversial articles provided thought-provoking information with a different perspective on the topic of Jonah. It allowed the reader to develop a critical analysis of the topic. The information presented by the authors has stimulated my desire to research, read, and understanding the Jonah narrative. I was able to assess the data and develop a critical understanding of the story.

The passage is a narrative in Jonah chapter 3 verses 1-10. The text has provided information on the significance of accepting responsibility for inappropriate behavior, deciding to be contrite for past behaviors, and making the choice to confess wrongdoing, repenting for the past behavior, and receiving forgiveness. The people of Nineveh including the King was willing

²³ [https://www.biblegateway.com/Jonah 1-4](https://www.biblegateway.com/Jonah%201-4) =KJV

²⁴ Dascalu. "Between Intellect and Intoxication: An Exploration of Tanḥum Ha-Yerushalmi's Commentary to the Book of Jonah.

to accept the warning from the prophet and they choose to pray and fast as a nation. Jonah appeared to be fearful to travel to Nineveh and maybe he thought that if the city was not destroyed, the people would believe that the message was a baseless threat. Ultimately, Jonah understood that he was just the vessel that was used to bring the warning from God. God was the one who was in charge of the results. The results were the salvation of everyone and everything in the land of Nineveh and the country was not destroyed. I also have a great appreciation for the different perception presented by each author and the insight that was presented in each narrative. Despite the different initial interpretations, each author was able to narrate the fundamental issues of Jonah's rebellion, God redirecting his steps to travel to Nineveh, Jonah preaching, the people responding with repentance and God showing mercy and forgiveness to the people of Nineveh. I believe each author provided great insight that helped to improve my understanding of the Jonah narrative. This text is applicable today as humans can have a chance to communicate with God by keeping our confession current by asking God daily for forgiveness. Jonah was a reluctant Prophet but he accomplished his mission to preach in Nineveh. Every human has a chance for forgiveness as long as we ask God for forgiveness.

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