


# ARAMAIC BIBLE COMPANION

## JONAH

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### CHAPTER 1

#### JONAH'S FATHER A MAN OF FIRM CONVICTION 1

And the word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai saying. "*Jonah*" means "*dove*" and "*Amittai*" means "*firm truth*". The name for "*maid-servant*" which is almost identical would seem to signify "*my true one*". "*Amittai*" is a masculine noun -a Patronymic reflecting on one of Jonah's parents as a true servant of the LORD.

#### FOLLOWING A RABBINIC TRADITION

*The really interesting surprise is the long held Rabbinic background in respect of Jonah's mother. Rabbinic tradition makes Jonah the son of the **Widow of Zarephath** (cf 1 Kings 17)-there is in this crisp introduction that which could correlate with that tradition. In 1 Kings 17.24 the widow says to Elijah "I know that the word of your mouth is **Emeth**"(Truth). The old tradition is of interest insofar as Zarephath was on the coast between Tyre & Sidon so it is possible that Jonah who was familiar with the Tyre-Sidon ports could access them from Gath-Heper -north of Nazareth (cf 2 Kings 14.25) and that he "flowed down" by ship to Joppa from there embarking for Spain. Traders probably called at the northern ports and plied along the coast before returning to the Western Mediterranean. However sewing tradition to scripture is like sewing old garments & new together and interest aside we can be sure that whether by land or sea Jonah was headed in disobedience for Tarshish (Spain or other metal producing nation)*

#### GOD'S COMMAND 2-3

Arise and travel or walk to Nineveh (1) THE GREAT CITY. *The site of Nineveh is in the vicinity of Mosul Iraq today. And proclaim against her for their wickedness... [h[r can be used of "intercourse" and Nineveh's sin may have been adultery. The Hebrew term is also used in Hosea 10.15 of the idolatry and other evils performed at the Bethel shrine in those days...has mounted before my face. And Jonah arose to shoot away like a fugitive to Tarshish from being close to the LORD'S face and "he flowed down" to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish and was paying the fare and he was "flowing down" into it to go with them to Tarshish from being close to God's face. The word used for going down shows that his journey was taking him **down** to the world and not **up** to God. It also can be used for "tears". **Could it be that Jonah cried all the way to Joppa and shed tears as he entered the ship?** It was probably the first time in his life he had deliberately stepped so far out of the will of God. He was not a happy bunny-that's for sure. Jonah had stopped praying-he had lost contact with God. He was in turmoil*

#### THE CAPTAIN CALLS JONAH TO PRAY AMID WIND & STORM 4-6

But the LORD sent out

(2) A GREAT WIND with the velocity of a spear [*Hiphil of l[wf*] upon the sea and

(3) A GREAT TOSSING STORM occurred at sea and the ship was taken prisoner to be broken in pieces. And the high sea sailors were terrified and each man was calling on his god and they caused the equipment or weapons or boats that were in the ship to be thrown out into the sea to lighten the burden from above them but Jonah **went down to the hinder parts or lower deck** [*literally "floor planks of the ship*] and was lying resting and he was snoring. And the captain of the company was gradually coming near him and he said to him "What a snorer you are! Get up call upon your God. Perhaps Elohim will have something done for us and we will not perish.

#### JONAH'S CONFESSION AND WITNESS 7-10

And they talked man with friend "Let us each take lots and throw down together-then we will know for sure for whose recompense this calamity is ours" and they cast lots and the (final) lot fell on Jonah. And

they said to him "Please let us know through what and belonging to whom this calamity is ours?" What is your public office or work and from where have you come? What is your home land? And are you from this people? And he said to them "I am a Hebrew... *This answer could mean (a) a stranger from beyond or east of the Euphrates or (b) a native of the land this side the Jordan. The latter use came with Joshua (cf. Joshua 5.1, 9.1, 12.7 & 1Chronicles 26.30). Actually a Hebrew was both a "stranger" from ancient Aramaen and beyond that Chaldean Semitic stock but also as truly at home in the land of promise...and I reverence Yahweh God of the heavens who made the sea and the dry land.*"

And the men...

(4) ...FEARED A GREAT FEAR... *I am highlighting the "Great things" of this prophecy because they are from the hand of God. This awe is a divinely given conviction of sin which may well have surprised Jonah-but there can be no doubt that when he spoke his ministry was attended by the Holy Spirit and this occurrence is no exception. These men were trembling before the Living God.*

...and they said to him "What is this you have done? For the men knew that he was bolting away from being close to the face of God for he had made that explicit to them.

### **THE SAILORS SEEK AN ANSWER SHORT OF DROWNING JONAH 11-15**

And they said to him "What shall we do about you so that the sea will **settle down** or be calm from being upon us"? [*qtv-this is the exact equivalent Hebrew to the Aramaic that is used in Mark 4.39 where we read that after the Master spoke "there was a great calm". Matthew (8.26) and Luke (8.24) use the word "Silence" [hmd].It is of special interest to N.T. scholarship that Mark who recorded what Peter said retains the term that directly connects with Jonah. In Luke 5.8 Peter confessed in another dangerous seascape scene "Depart from me for I am a sinful Man O LORD". Peter displayed the **Jonah factor** of deep loyalty to the Master alongside the desire to maintain his ambitions for his life and his vision for how Jesus should do things.*

For the sea was streaming on them and tossing tempestuously [*literally "walking all over and agitated"*] And he said to them "Lift me and cause me to be cast like a spear to the sea... [*lwf*]We might fancy Jonah thinking "This will kill the tempest" and I will swim around and soon be rescued". It would be more consistent with his attitude that he was rather acting in absolute faith trusting not to the sea but to God. If the LORD had done with him this was the end. He still knew of the mission God held out for him and that it was not accomplished. Had his hours in the ship all been undisturbed sleep? If this is the son of the widow of Zarephath did he still believe against all that he could see that the LORD could overrule and raise him from what seemed certain death? Things like that don't usually happen a second time. Did Jonah say "Where is the God of Elijah? His whole demeanour so far as we can gauge it would suggest that he did not-but we must not underestimate that other greatness-the GREATNESS OF CHARACTER that God was working in this mans life in the same manner that the LORD worked in the life of Peter in New Testament days. Jonah like Peter tells "the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth" about his life in this most candid of biblical testimonies.

...and the sea will become settled for you for I know too well that because of me

(5) THIS GREAT TEMPEST is come upon you. But the strong men rowed valiantly [Literally "dug deep" in the waves] to make a return to dry land and they were not capable for the sea was going against them and was tempestuous [*Literally was "walking" over them and was "agitated"*] And they were calling out to Yahweh and they were saying "We plead O Yahweh please do not destroy us for the soul of this man and do not place on us the blood of the innocent for you O Yahweh have done your pleasure.[*Literally "You have carried out your wish" or "accomplished your desire (about him)"*] The men were not so much pleading for the prophet but they were interpreting his willingness to die as a sign that he was resigned to the will of God and willing to be a votive offering.

So they lifted Jonah and tossed him to the sea and the sea stood or ministered from its fierce anger. And...

### **THE CONVERSION OF SAILORS 16-17**

(6) ...THE STRONG MEN FEARED THE GREAT LORD and they continued to offer sacrifice to the Lord(*Poel or Kal past continuous tense of jbz i.e. "they have come on to be worshippers" and "were (even then)* in awe of God a future tense of ary "to fear" and they were

making vows. *From this statement we know that the men made vows there and then to worship Yahweh and the Piel of the verb for "offerings" accompanying the future promise of the verb on vows indicated that Jonah followed the merchant sailors lives afterward and found them making sacrifice. They may even have been with him at the temple in later years!*

## CHAPTER 2 v1

(7) BUT THE LORD HAD BEEN LONG PREPARING [*Piel of hnm "to get ready"*] A GREAT FISH ...*We often sing of the fish and loosely call it a whale because that is the largest animal known to man and it is a sea-going animal and capable of swallowing a human being.*

*Come Listen to my tale of Jonah and the whale  
'Way down in the middle of the ocean.  
How did he get there, whatever did he wear?  
'Way down in the middle of the ocean.*

*James Bartley -a whaler-was reported to fall overboard whilst a sperm whale was being harpooned in 1891 in the waters of the south Atlantic. The whale apparently swallowed him but when it was later dissected James was found alive but unconscious. James' widow later denied the story. The narrative of Jonah, however, though not embellished, is confirmed by much internal evidence besides the wider context of his second call and the Nineveh revival. Jonah's tomb in Nineveh has a relic of a swordfish associated with it. This relic link triggers a certain curiosity. Did the prophet himself upon emerging from the fish after washing himself in the sea take any memento of his unique voyage with him? Whilst it is unlikely if it was the case that he did his testimony in Nineveh would have been the more cogent.*

**THE LORD WAS PREPARING A GREAT FISH** to swallow Jonah. *The mission of this fish and the purpose of its life was not to recreate more of the species but to deliver Jonah back to where he could take up his own mission again. And Jonah was living in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. This statement does not give us liberty to say "one day and parts of two others"" because there are 3 nights involved as well. It appears from the statement that Jonah entered the fish on the first day and was disgorged at night. I judge the briefest stay Jonah might have had in his underwater mobile home is from teatime on the first day (assuming the fish was ready for a meal at that time) to about 7pm on the third night-making a total of over 50 hours. The full term of whole days would prolong his stay to 72 hours.*

And Jonah was continually praying to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish. *The apostle Paul in 2Timothy 2.12 sets out for us an early creed which it is apt to quote in this connection,*

*If we die with Him we shall also live with Him  
If we suffer we shall also reign with Him  
If we deny Him He will also deny us  
**If we stop trusting, yet He abides faithful***

*For a time Jonah lost touch with God. It was only a matter of days-perhaps as little as one or two days whilst he found a ship and some hours aboard the vessel. He would have made up for his lack of prayer by continual prayer inside the fish. He was restored to communion post haste by a rare but long-prepared divine stratagem.*

## GOD ANSWERS THE BACKSLIDER'S PRAYER 2-3

He said "I called from my adversity to the LORD and He answered me from the belly of Sheol... *Jonah believed he was in that place where the Spirit of man is active and where the body may be subject to punishment-the sort of place where Dives arrived after his affluent life...I continually cried for salvation. You heard my voice. Not until modern days of nuclear submariners did man ever cry to God from so far under the sea and receive salvation. So He caused me to be cast to tumbling depth [It is used of a corpse tumbling into the grave] into the heart of the seas and a bright stream surrounded me It would appear that Jonah could see a sort of bright fluorescence in his confinement. All your breakers*

and swirling billows passed over me. So I said "I have been cast out or **I have expelled myself** from the presence of your eyes [*dgn God's central focus*]

## **THE SUPPORT OF SCRIPTURE IN A CRISIS 4B-5**

I will definitely add to look in faith toward your holy temple. **The waters surrounded my soul** *Jonah uses the "poetic" word ppa for surround because he is remembering a psalm-Psalm 42. There could not be a more appropriate psalm to recall when he dived with his fish to **the depths** (as David at Engedi or the Roe in the Jordan valley pampas) and rose to **the heights** (as David who stood like a lonely stag atop chill Hermon) or somewhere in the midst of the sea-on **uncertain middle ground** Jonah felt exposed to what was thrust at him (as David like the Deer stood exposed to archers on the little hill Mizar) *nr b[ yl [ Jyl gn Jyr bvm l k "All your breakers and tossing billows have gone over me" The words of Jonah are an exact quotation from Psalm 42. 3. How often this psalm could pull us back from despair to worship teaching us to look to God whatever our circumstances -uplifting us with its bright tune "Hind of the Morning". It will revive the spirit and urge us back to fellowship and worship as soon as the storm is past. The depths of the ocean enclosed me Jonah uses the **Poel intensive**-one of the rarer uses-to define the intensity of his experience-it was a prison within a prison. The Sea sedges or reeds are wound around my head. The Prophet on looking back thinks of it in gently humorous terms. He had a fine new underwater green turban. Within the Prayer twelve hints or notices of the psalms are traceable. I have styled actual quotations using the bold font.**

(1) v.3 PSALM 88 6-7 PSALM 42.7

(2) v.4 PSALM 31.22 PSALM 84

(3) v.5 PSALM 69.1

(4) v.7 PSALM 107.5 PSALM 142.3 PSALM 18.6

(5) v.8 PSALM 144.2

(6) v.9 PSALM 42.4 PSALM 50.14 PSALM 50.23

*The roots of Jonah's thinking concerning after-life and Sheol appear clearly to be derived from the psalms and that is in line with much Jewish contemplation of these themes.*

## **JONAH NOT FEELING OR SMELLING GOOD 6**

I flowed down to the undersea base of the mountains [*bxq literally the "bottom end"-as land contours progress downwards toward the sea bed*] Earth and the bars (of its gates) were shut behind me for an age [*or conceivably "for ever" mlwl*] But You O LORD **my God** were bringing up my life from corruption **putridity and being spoiled** [*Literally "rotting" tjv*] Jonah recognises that even during 3 days and over only 72 hours at the most his flesh was beginning to rot. *It was a sign of corruption and death and another proof to him on top of the ministries of Elijah and Elisha which he may well have benefited from of Yahweh who raises the dead.*

## **FAITH UNDAUNTED-MISSION ACCOMPLISHED 7-10**

In the enfeebling or languishing of my life about me I remembered the LORD and my prayer came to You at Your holy temple. Those who watch or tend the vane or impotent (idols) of storm or calamity forsake their own mercy or covenant love. But I will sacrifice to You with voice of thanksgiving-what I have vowed I will recompense-SALVATION BELONGS TO THE LORD. So the LORD spoke to the fish and it threw up Jonah on to dry land. At the close of his prayer Jonah thinks back to the sailors who consigned him to the sea. He states that their worship of idols exposes them to judgment but grace shields the worshipper of the LORD. Had the storm blown up upon them and sunk their craft without his presence they WOULD HAVE BEEN DOOMED AND WITHOUT ETERNAL HOPE. JONAH WAS CONTEMPLATING THE WAYS OF THE MARINER-HE HAD been talking to them as 1.10 shows. It is even possible that he had talked over worship of the true God in the light of the subsequent worship of some of these men. Jonah's mission to seamen was we might say an unqualified success.

## CHAPTER 3 GOD'S RENEWED CALL-NINEVEH REPENTS 1-2 A SECOND DESIRE-THE DESIRE TO DO THE LORD'S WILL

*The first matter to observe from comparing the two statements of the LORD on mission is that the second entitled Jonah to "cry against Nineveh" whereas the first appointed him the mission of proclaiming to it the very same message of God's wrath for sin and of the judgment consequent upon its sin. The message had not changed but Jonah was first commissioned to get his message "right into Nineveh" and go in and among the people. It was to be very much like gospel evangelism with an accent on sin. The element of detachment of the second commission seemed to occasion an even fiercer chastisement and something of an illustration of God's "stand-off" on account of the city's gross sin. James M Gray observes that there is nothing more appropriate than that God should send a prophet from the sea to a nation who worshipped a "fish God"(Dagon)-God witnessed to them in terms they understood. Oannes became one of the later incarnations of the Fish God. Thus the nation incorporated the prophet into their religious life. In scripture we find that God answers our evil with His punishment of calamity, our penitence with his turning around. We are made in His image. It is not that God is a man that he should act as we act-but in His judgment and mercy he mirrors our responses.*

But the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time. **The gender of "second" does not agree with the gender of "word"** so that it is not a second oracle-that was exactly the same. The feminine agrees with the nominal of "occurrence" which word hwh has connections with "that which breathes after" or "that which lives." Jonah got a "second breathe"-a "second life"-a "second desire." The second desire was God's original desire but it was Jonah's "second life" and "second wish". His first wish was to run away from speaking to his nation's enemies-now his second wish or desire was to bravely go to these cruel enemies with the judgment of God. "Rise up go to Nineveh THE GREAT CITY and proclaim to it the proclamation or preaching [hayrq] that I am speaking by oracle to you. *All the time God was reminding Jonah of his word which had not been proclaimed to the Ninevites.*

## JONAH SHORTENS THE GOD-GIVEN TIME FOR REPENTANCE 3-4

And Jonah rose up and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was A GREAT CITY belonging to idols [myhl al] a city of three days journey. *Travelling by camel to Hamath Haran and Nineveh and covering over 100 miles per day for four hours in the morning and three hours starting again at three o'clock it would be theoretically possible to reach Nineveh with night rest and siesta daily. However the easier journey from Galilee to Jerusalem took three days normally and it is under a third of the distance so it is agrees better with the narrative that we have a calculation about the extent of the circuit of the environs of Nineveh.* And Jonah expected to or **delayed to enter the city in a walk during the first day** but he was calling out and he was saying "There are yet forty days and Nineveh will be overturned. *Jonah spent some considerable extra-mural time it would appear-introducing his prophecy to those at the main gate and being quite reticent to enter the city. He probably was aware and way of the palace that he must pass just inside the gate. The prophet's word Jph is a remarkable choice. It means "turned back" or turn itself over" or "to be changed and "converted". The fate of Nineveh was now in its own hands-Judgment was pronounced-"overturned or converted"-which was it to be?*

## A SIGNAL CASE OF THOROUGH-GOING REPENTANCE 5

But the great and carnal men of Nineveh believed in God and they proclaimed a fast and from the great to the little ones they put on sackcloth.

## THE KING GOES BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY 6-8

And the word was explained to the king of Nineveh and he rose from this throne and caused his beautiful robe to pass from him and continually [i.e for the four days] covered himself in sackcloth and repented under ashes [i.e. He put ashes on his head] And he caused a crying our[i.e appointed criers] and said "Through Nineveh the edict or judgment of the king and his mighty men says that both man and beast heard or flock shall not taste what or whatever-they shall not pasture or drink water. But they shall have covered man **and beast** with sackcloth and they shall call upon God in might [strongly] and they shall repent each man from his evil or ruinous way and from the violence which their hands pursue.

*Herodotus supplies a similar example from Persian history of horses being shorn to palliate divine anger.*

## **THE KING THROWS HIS CITY ON GOD'S MERCY 9-10**

Who knows if **God will turn and have pity** and turn from His fierce anger and we will not be destroyed? So God saw their doings for they turned from their evil ways and God repented or pitied them on account of the evil which He continually [*The Piel of DIBER indicates a continuing refrain of judgment but this city came as near surprising Almighty God as ever man did*] said He would do to them and He did not do it.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **JONAH'S ANGRY OUTBURST DISCLOSES HIS "DOCTRINE OF GOD" 1-2**

But Jonah was broken sad hurt [*[[r NKJ "displeased"]*] it was (8) A GREAT CALAMITY and he was burning with anger or wrath. **HE WAS PRAYING TO THE LORD** while the term of the impending disaster was not expired. In Jeremiah 18.8 we find Jeremiah quoting this truth from Jonah. The third person narrative does not require a later writer. Third person reportage is usual in Hebrew writing. Jonah as might be expected in an angry man continued to pray -in an imprecatory style. This phrase is one which covers most if not all of the 40 days! And he said "Alas LORD did I not say this when I was still living upon my native soil?

For this reason I constantly anticipated fleeing to Tarshish for I knew well that You are

- (1) A God of grace
- (2) And mercy,
- (3) Taking long to become angry and
- (4) Great in covenant mercy
- (5) And one who repents or grieves over calamity or sending evil.

*Jonah states his "doctrine of God" in what approaches New Testament terminology. He puts grace first and exalts the mercy of God to the sinner. He recognises the "longsuffering" of God and his "covenant type" love that houses even the Ninevites under his covenant with Adam and Noah. But most of all he is frustrated that the LORD can respond so readily and so immediately to genuine repentance. This is our God for ever and ever! This is our Saviour the same yesterday today and for ever.*

### **THE UNTAMED TIGER OF ANGER MESSES THINGS UP 4-5**

And at this time [*ht[ -not "soon" not at a "fit time" but "right now"]*] O LORD take my life from me for my death is better than my life. But the LORD said "Does your burning anger cause it to be any better for you? And Jonah was shooting away and settling down away on the east of the city. He made himself a booth and was settling down underneath in its shade until he would see what would take place in the city.

### **FOOD & SHELTER-THE KIKI SENDS JONAH INTO RAPTURES 6**

And the LORD **GOD WAS DESTINING OR APPORTIONING A KIKI PLANT** [*Piel Future of nny*] [*Described by Diodorus Siculus-a tall bi-annual the succulent stock of which is easily harmed with devastating results*] and it came up high over Jonah to be a shade over his head to cause him to escape break-down or hurt Presumably since it was a garden plant producing castor oil-but more to the point it had leaves as wide as a broad brimmed hat. In this matter Jonah was being cared for much as Elijah and Elisha-men of God in the previous generation(s). No doubt his mind turned to these great prophets and to the idea of "fire from heaven" which was probably what Jonah awaited so fervently. And Jonah was radiantly happy over the Kiki -there was (9) GREAT JOY. He could not believe his good fortune but the text does not indicate any prayer of gratitude for it. It was like a festival for him and he seemed to be back in the paradise of the east whilst Nineveh sweltered under the sun and awaited its due judgment.

## **GOD PREPARED A WORM. JONAH FORFEITS COMFORT & THINKS THINGS OVER 7**

And the LORD **GOD WAS PREPARING OR APPOINTING A WORM** [*Piel Future of nmy*] at sunrise of the very next day and it smote or injured the Kiki and it was withering away

## **A BOISTEROUS WIND JONAH WISHES FOR DEATH 8**

And it happened as the sun arose high the LORD **GOD WAS PREPARING** [*Piel Future of nmy*] **A TURBULENT EAST WIND** [*crj-one like a plough which turns over the soil-it was turning over trees and much else*] Quite clearly the wind made havoc of his hastily erected shelter and his precious Kiki had gone too. It appeared that Nineveh had got off Scot free and Jonah was under judgment. This ironic reversal deeply annoyed Jonah. Any passers by would speak of the misfortune of this prophet whilst their lives in the city continued comparatively safe. So he was becoming faint and he asked his soul for death and he said "My death is better than my life".

## **THE CONCLUDING EXCHANGE WITH THE LORD 9-11**

And the LORD said to Jonah Does "Does your burning anger over the Kiki cause it to be any better?" But he said "It is good for me to be angry to the point of death." And the LORD said "You grieved for the Kiki which you did not toil over... [*lm*] That luscious garden plant grew by divine providence exactly where Jonah decided to erect his shelter. It was as if God planted his garden umbrella for him and he expressed no gratitude-only anger when it wilted. This is characteristic of us. Our blessings we accept without thanks and their loss we bemoan with anger... and you did not keep (10) **MAKING IT GREAT**. It existed in prosperity built in a night and survived for a night "**the building**" or family was destroyed. The use of the Hebrew *hmb* suggests a family home-which was very short-lived. It served as a magnificent contrast to Nineveh which God oversaw in its growth and Israel which He founded. The LORD could contemplate Nineveh's people becoming His family before its fall in 612B.C. and its small children becoming aware of His salvation and asking their parents about the God of the prophet and learning the truth about repentance and forgiveness. This profoundly affected Jonah Ought not I to be grieved over Nineveh that great city where there exist in rich abundance one hundred and twenty thousand of mankind who cannot discern between their right hand and their left and a great number of beasts or animals? Taking the estimate that young children represent a fifth of the overall population Nineveh's population would have been of the order of 600,000. The divine grace plentifully bestowed on the new generation of Ninevites may be compared with the blessing of Christ in Matthew 18.1-7 & 19.13-14; in neither case did the favoured generation take advantage of proffered grace. The divine compassion shown toward the dumb animal may be compared with the Pauline conception in 1Corinthians 9.9 The LORD'S loving kindness is over all His works. The message of this book is from first to last a message of divine grace and compassion.

*THE END*

**Bob Coffey L'shuvkha Marya**  
To the glory of the Lord  
Aramaic Bible Companion