

Jonah: The Comedy Among Prophets

Week One: A Fish Story

A Prophetic Story Gone Wrong

- Compare Jonah 1:1-2 with Jeremiah 14:1-2, Ezekiel 15:1-2, and Micah 1:1-2. What common features and formulas do you see?
- Now look at 1:3. What goes wrong?



God has to Chase a Prophet

- Here's where the comedy starts. Jonah, the prophet of the Lord, refuses to do as he's told and prophesy to Nineveh. Who obeys the Lord in verse 4? Who shows the Lord respect in verse 10? What inanimate objects readily tell the truth in verse 7? Who, so far, is the only disobedient person or object in the story?
- When Jonah advises that they destroy him in verse 12, what is the pagan sailors' reaction in verse 13? What does this say about the relative moral character of the pagans and the God-worshipper in this story? Who does the praying in verse 14? Who worships the Lord in verse 16? What obeys God to save the prophet in verse 17? Who in the story still has not striven to save a life, prayed, or made sacrifice, much less obeyed the direct command, of the Lord? Which entity or entities have the reputations for being against God, and which entities or entity actually operates against God?
- Just a pet peeve: if anyone ever calls this story "Jonah and the whale," make a sour face and say, *ha-dag ha-gadol!*, and walk away muttering. Whale indeed.

Singing from the depths

- Compare translations of Jonah 2:1. Whose belly does Jonah sing about? The Hebrew word here is *Sheol*, a notoriously slippery word that can mean the proper name for the underworld, the grave as an abstraction, or any deep place geographically.
- In verses three through six, who is the subject of most of the verbs? What kind of story is Jonah telling here? When we think of struggles in life, what characters other than the individual and God do we sometimes include? What does those characters' exclusion do to this particular poem?
- In verse seven, who does the remembering? Compare this to Exodus 2:24-25. How do those stories differ, literarily, psychologically, theologically, or otherwise?
- Take a look at verses nine and ten. Have those boasts borne any fruit yet? Why or why not?
- Once again, in verse ten, what character exhibits perfect obedience?