Jonah Tries to Run from the LORD

1:1 The LORD said to Jonah son of Amittai, “Go immediately to Nineveh, that large capital city, and announce judgment against its people because their wickedness has come to my attention.”

1:3 Instead Jonah immediately headed off to a distant seaport to escape from the commission of the LORD. He traveled to Joppa and found a merchant ship heading to a distant seaport.

1:4 But the LORD hurled a powerful wind on the sea. Such a violent tempest arose on the sea that the ship threatened to break up!

1:5 The sailors were so afraid that each cried out to his own god and they flung the ship’s cargo overboard to make the ship lighter. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold below deck, had lain down, and was sound asleep.

1:6 The captain of the crew approached him and said, “What are you doing asleep? Get up! Cry out to your god! Perhaps your god might take notice of us so that we might not die!”

1:7 The sailors said to one another, “Come on, let’s cast lots so that we might find out whose fault it is that this disaster has fallen upon us.” So they cast lots, and Jonah was singled out.

1:8 They said to him, “Tell us, whose fault is it that this disaster has fallen upon us? What’s your occupation? From where do you come? What’s your country? And who are your people?”

1:9 He said to them, “I am a Hebrew! And I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

1:10 Hearing this, the men became even more afraid and said to him, “What have you done?” The men said this because they knew that he was trying to escape from the LORD because he had previously told them.

1:11 Because the storm was growing worse and worse, they said to him, “What should we do to you so that the sea might calm down for us?”

1:12 He said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea to make the sea quiet down, because I know it’s my fault you are in this severe storm.” Instead, they tried to row back to land, but they were not able to do it because the storm was growing even worse and worse.

1:14 So they cried out to the LORD, “Oh, please, LORD, don’t let us die on account of this man! Don’t hold us guilty of shedding innocent blood.” After all, you, LORD, have done just as you pleased.

1:15 So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped raging.

1:16 The men greatly feared the LORD, and earnestly vowed to offer lavish sacrifices to the LORD.
Jonah Prays

1:17 The LORD sent a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights. 2:1 Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish 2:2 and said, “I called out to the LORD from my distress, and he answered me; from the belly of Sheol I cried out for help, and you heard my prayer.

2:3 You cast me into the deep waters, into the middle of the sea; the ocean-current engulfed me; all the mighty waves you sent swept over me.

2:4 I thought I had been banished from your sight, that I would never again see your holy temple!

2:5 Water engulfed me up to my neck; the deep ocean surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.

2:6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the gates of the netherworld barred me in forever, but you brought me up from the Pit, O LORD, my God.

2:7 When my life was ebbing away, I called out to the LORD, and my prayer came to your holy temple.

2:8 Those who worship worthless idols forfeit the mercy that could be theirs.

2:9 But as for me, I promise to offer a sacrifice to you with a public declaration of praise; I will surely do what I have promised. Salvation belongs to the LORD!

2:10 Then the LORD commanded the fish and it disgorged Jonah on dry land.
The People of Nineveh Respond to Jonah’s Warning

3:1 The LORD said to Jonah a second time, “Go immediately to Nineveh, that large city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” 3:3 So Jonah went immediately to Nineveh, as the LORD had said. (Now Nineveh was an enormous city—it required three days to walk throughout it!) 3:4 When Jonah began to enter the city one day’s walk, he announced, “At the end of forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!”

3:5 The people of Nineveh believed in God, and they declared a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 3:6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robe, put on sackcloth, and sat on ashes. 3:7 He issued a proclamation and said, “In Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles—Let neither human nor animal, cattle nor sheep, taste anything; let them not eat and let them not drink water. 3:8 Let every person and animal put on sackcloth and let them cry earnestly to God, and let every one turn from their evil way of living and from the violence that they do. 3:9 Who knows? Perhaps God might be willing to change his mind and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we might not die.”

3:10 When God saw their actions—they turned from their evil way of living!—God relented concerning the judgment he had threatened them with and he did not destroy them.

Jonah Responds to God’s Kindness

4:1 This terribly displeased Jonah and he became very angry. 4:2 He prayed to the LORD and said, “Oh, LORD, this is just what I thought would happen when I was in my own country. This is what I tried to prevent by trying to escape to Tarshish!—because I knew that you are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in mercy, and one who relents concerning threatened judgment. 4:3 So now, LORD, kill me instead, because I would rather die than live!”

4:4 The LORD said, “Are you really so very angry?” 4:5 Jonah left the city, sat down east of the city, made a shelter for himself there, and sat down under it in the shade to see what would happen to the city. 4:6 The LORD God appointed a little plant and caused it to grow up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to rescue him from his misery. Now Jonah was very delighted about the little plant.

4:7 So God sent a worm at dawn the next day, and it attacked the little plant so that it dried up. 4:8 When the sun began to shine, God sent a hot east wind. So the sun beat down on Jonah’s head, and he grew faint. So he despaired of life, and said, “I would rather die than live!” 4:9 God said to Jonah, “Are you really so very angry about the little plant?” And he said, “I am as angry as I could possibly be!” 4:10 The LORD said, “You were upset about this little plant, something for which you have not worked nor did you do anything to make it grow. It grew up overnight and died the next day. Should I not be even more concerned about Nineveh this enormous city? There are more than one hundred twenty thousand people in it who do not know right from wrong, as well as many animals!”
Jonah was intending to obey God. But Jonah did not “arise to go” to Nineveh; he “arose to flee” to Tarshish. Jonah looks as if he was not interested in doing what God asked him to do.

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The Aramaic Targum interprets the Hebrew as “There was a word of prophecy from the LORD” (ywy rbd hwhy rbd hwhw), cf. Tg Hos 1:1.

The term wickedness is personified here; it is pictured as ascending heavenward into the very presence of God. This figuratively depicts how God became aware of the evil—they had ascended into heaven right into his presence.

The phrase “great city” (lwdgh) can refer to a wide variety of qualities: (1) size: “large,” (2) height: “tall,” (3) magnitude: “great,” (4) number: “populous,” (5) power: “mighty,” (6) influence: “powerful,” (7) finance: “wealthy,” (8) intensity: “fierce,” (9) sound: “loud,” (10) age: “oldest,” (11) importance: “distinguished,” (12) position: “chief, leading, head” (HALOT 1:177-78; BDB 152-53). The phrase “great city” may designate a city that is (1) large in size (Josh 10:2; Neh 4:7) or (2) great in power: (a) important city-state (Gen 10:12) or (b) prominent capital city (Jer 22:8). The phrases lwdgh ryul and lwdgh ryul lwdgh ("the great city") are used four times in Jonah (1:2; 3:2, 3; 4:11). This phrase is twice qualified by a statement about its immense dimensions (3:3) or large population (4:11), so lwdgh may denote size. However, size is not the issue in 1:2. At this time in history, Nineveh was the most powerful city in the ancient Near East as the capital of the mighty Neo-Assyrian Empire. It is likely that God was fully aware of the evil of the Ninevites.

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The phrase "cry out against it." The basic meaning of arq is “to call out; to cry out; to shout out,” but here it is a technical term referring to what a prophet has to say: “to announce” (e.g., 1 Kgs 13:32; Isa 40:2; 6; Jer 3:12; see HALOT 3:1129.8). When used with the preposition ley (“against” [in a hostile sense]; HALOT 2:826.5.a), it refers to an oracle announcing or threatening judgment (e.g., 1 Kgs 13:2, 4, 32; BDB 895 s.v. 3.a). This nuance is reflected in several translations: “proclaim My judgment against it” (NLT) and “proclaim judgment upon it” (JPS, NJPS). Other translations are less precise: “cry out against it” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASV, RSV, NRSV), “denounce it” (NEB, REB). Some are even misleading: “preach against it” (NIV, NAB, NVB) and “preach in it” (DRA). The Aramaic Targum nuances this interpretively as “prophesy against it” (mrbl lbk).
though he was about to obey, but he does not. This unexpected turn of events creates strong irony. The narrator does not reveal Jonah's motivation to the reader at this point. He delays this revelation for rhetorical effect until 4:2-3.

In Heb “Tarshish.” The place-name שורש, “Tarshish,” refers to a distant port city or region (Isa 23:6; Jer 10:9; Ezek 27:12; 38:13; 2 Chr 9:21; 20:36; 37) located on the coastlands in the Mediterranean west of Palestine (Ps 72:10; Isa 33:6, 10; 66:19; Jonah 1:3; see BDB 1076; HALOT 4:1798.E.a.). Scholars have not established its actual location (HALOT 4:1797.B). It has been variously identified with Tarsus in southwest Asia Minor (Herodotus, Hist. 1:163; IV:152; cf. Gen 10:4), Carthage (LXX of Isa 23:1, 14 and Ezek 27:25), and Sardinia (F. M. Cross, “An Interpretation of the Nora Stone,” BASOR 208 [1972]: 13-19). The versions handle it variously. The LXX identifies שורש as related to Carthage/קפריסיה (Isa 23:1, 6, 10, 14; Ezek 27:12; 38:13). The place name שורש is rendered “Africa” in the Aramaic Targum in some passages (1 Kgs 10:22; 22:49; Jer 10:9) and elsewhere as “sea” (Isa 2:16; 2:21, 14; 50:9; 66:19; Ezek 12:27; 25; 38:13; Jonah 4:2). The Jewish midrash Canticles Rabbah 5:14.2 cites Jonah 1:3 as support for the view that Tarshish = “the Great Sea” (the Mediterranean). It is possible that שורש does not refer to one specific port but is a general term for the distant Mediterranean coastlands in general (Ps 72:10; Isa 23:6, 10; 66:19). In some cases it seems to mean simply “the open sea”: (1) the Tg. Jonah 1:3 translates שורש as ארץ [“he arose to flee] by to sea”; (2) Jerome’s commentary on Isa 2:16 states that Hebrew scholars in his age defined שורש as “sea”; and (3) the gem called שורש II, “topaz” (BDB 1076; HALOT 4:1798) in Exod 28:20 and 39:13 is rendered ארץ ים (“the color of the sea”) in Targum Onqados (see D. Stuart, Hosea-Jonah [WBC], 451). The designation שורש שורש ([“Tarshish-ships”] referred to large sea-going vessels equipped for the high seas (1 Chr 9:21; Ps 48:8; Isa 2:16; 23:1, 14; 60:9; Ezek 27:25) or large merchant ships designed for international trade (1 Kgs 10:22; 22:49; 2 Chr 9:21; 20:36; Isa 23:10; HALOT 4:1798.E.b). The term שורש ([“Tarshish”] is derived from the Aramean تارشش, with the Aramaic suffix -šosšesos, resulting in Tarsos (BRL2 332a); however, the etymological meaning of שורש is uncertain (see Albright, BASOR 83 [1941]: 21-22 with note 29; HALOT 4:1797.A). The name שורש ([“Tarshish”] appears in sources outside the Hebrew Bible in Neo-Assyrian 491 Tar-si-si (R. Binger, Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, 86, §57 line 10) and Greek Ταρσός (HALOT 4:1797.C). Most translations render שורש as “Tarshish” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, NEB, NJB, JPS, NJPS), but CEV renders it more generally as “to Spain.” One translation emphasizes the rhetorical point: “in the opposite direction” (NLT).

sn in Heb “Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish away from the LORD.”

sn in Heb “away from the presence of the LORD.” The term רכש (away from the presence of) is composed of the preposition רכש (in front of, before the presence of) and יצא (“away from”). The term רכש is used with יסל (“to flee”) here only in biblical Hebrew so it is difficult to determine its exact meaning (HALOT 3:942.4.h.iii; see Ernst Jenni Orientalia 47 [1978]: 357). The most likely options are: (1) Jonah simply fled from the LORD’s presence manifested in the temple (for mention of the temple elsewhere in Jonah, see 2:5,8). This is reflected in Jerome’s rendering fuggle in Tharsis a facie Domini (“he fled to Tarshish away from the face/presence of the LORD”). The term יסל is used in this sense with יסל ("to go out") to depict someone or something physically leaving the manifested presence of the LORD (Lev 9:24; Num 17:11, 24; cf. Gen 4:16). This is reflected in several translations: “from the presence of the LORD” (KJV, NJKV, RSV, NRSV, ASV, NASV, NVI, NEB, NJB, JPS, NJPS) and “out of the reach of the LORD” (REB). (2) Jonah was fleeing to a distant place outside the land of Israel (D. Stuart, Hosea-Jonah [WBC], 450). The term צאת (“before the presence of”) is used in various constructions with יצא (“away from”) to describe locations outside the land of Israel where YHWH was not worshiped (1 Sam 16:19-20; 2 Kgs 13:23; 17:20, 23; Jer 33:39). This would be the equivalent of a self-imposed exile. (3) The term יסל can mean “out of sight” (Gen 23:4,8), so perhaps Jonah was trying to escape from the LORD’s active awareness—out of the LORD’s sight. The idea would either be an anthropomorphism (standing for a distance out of the sight of God) or it would reflect an inadequate theology of the limited omniscience and presence of God. This is reflected in some translations: “ran away from the LORD” (NIV), “running away from Yahweh” (NJB), “to get away from the LORD” (NLT) and “to escape” (CEV). (4) The term יסל can mean “in front of someone in power” (Gen 43:33; HALOT 3:942.c.i) and “at the disposal of” a king (Gen 13:9; 24:51; 34:10; 2 Chr 14:6; Jer 40:4; HALOT 3:942.f.i). The expression would be a metonymy: Jonah was trying to escape from his commission (effect) ordered by God (cause). This is reflected in several translations: “to flee from the LORD’s service” (JPS, NJPS). Jonah confesses in 4:2-3 that he fled to avoid carrying out his commission—lest God relent from judging Nineveh if its populace might repent. But it is also clear in chs. 1-2 that Jonah could not escape from the LORD himself.

sn Three times in chap. 1 (in vv. 3 and 10) Jonah’s boat ride is described as an attempt to escape away from the LORD—from the LORD’s presence (and therefore his active awareness; compare v. 2). On one level, Jonah was attempting to avoid a disagreeable task, but the narrator’s description personalizes Jonah’s rejection of the task. Jonah’s issue is with the LORD himself, not just his commission. The narrator’s description is also highly ironic, as the rest of the book shows. Jonah tries to sail to Tarshish, in the opposite direction from Nineveh, as if by doing that he could escape from the LORD, when the LORD is the one who knows all about Nineveh’s wickedness and is involved in all that happens to Jonah throughout the book. Compare Jonah’s explanation when talking with the LORD (see 4:2).

sn in Heb “he went down.” The verb יבש (“to go down”) can refer to a journey that is physically downhill. This suggests that Jonah had started out from Jerusalem, which is at a higher elevation. He probably received his commission in the temple (see 2-4, 7 for mention of the temple).

The verb יבש (“to go down”) is repeated four times in chs. 1-2 for rhetorical effect (1:3a, 3b, 5; 2:7). Jonah’s “downward” journey from Jerusalem down to Joppa (1:3a) down into the ship (1:3b) down into the cargo hold (1:5) and ultimately down...
into the bottom of the sea, pictured as down to the very gates of the netherworld (2:7), does not end until he turns back to God who brings him "up" from the brink of death (2:6-7).

17. Joppa was a small harbor town on the Palestinian coast known as Eyu in the Amarna Letters (14th century B.C.) and Eyu in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions (9th-8th centuries B.C.). It was a port through which imported goods could flow into the Levant (Josh 19:46; 2 Chr 2:15 [16]; Ezra 3:7). It was never annexed by Israel until the Maccabean period (c. 148 B.C.; 1 Macc 10:76). Jonah chose a port where the people he would meet and the ships he could take were not likely to be Israelite. Once in Joppa he was already partly "away from the LORD" as he conceived it.

18. Heb "going to.""

19. Heb "to Tarshish." See note on the phrase "distant seaport" at the beginning of the verse."

20. Heb "its fare." The 3s suffix on the noun probably functions as a genitive of worth or value: "the fare due it." However, it is translated here simply as "the fare" for the sake of readability. The NLT's "bought a ticket" is somewhat overtransliterated, since the expression "paid the fare" is still understandable to most English readers.

21. Heb "he went down into it." The verb יריע ("to go down") is repeated for rhetorical effect in v. 3a, 3b, 5. See note on the word "travelled" in v. 3a.

22. Them refers to the other passengers and sailors in the ship.

23. Heb "to Tarshish." See note on the phrase "distant seaport" at the beginning of the verse.

24. Heb "away from the presence of the LORD." See note on the phrase "from the commission of the LORD" in v. 3a.

25. The disjunctive construction of ו + non verb followed by a non-preterite (יְהוָה יֵלֶדֶת לְשָׁם) marks a strong contrast in the narrative action.

26. The Hiphil of בָּלוּ ("to hurl") is used here and several times in this episode for rhetorical emphasis (see vv. 5 and 15).

27. Heb "great."

28. Heb "great."

29. The non-consecutive construction of ו + non verb followed by non-preterite (יְהוָה יֵלֶדֶת לְשָׁם) is used to emphasize this result clause.

30. Or "gods." The plural noun אלים might be functioning either as a plural of number ("gods") or a plural of majesty ("god").—the form would allow for either. As members of a polytheistic culture, each sailor might appeal to several gods. However, individuals could also look to a particular god for help in trouble. The Aramaic Targum interpretively renders the line, "Each man prayed to his idols, but they saw that they were useless."

31. Heb "hurled." The Hiphil of בָּלוּ ("to hurl") is again used, repeated from v. 4.

32. The plural word rendered "cargo" (<יִלָּקָה) is variously translated "articles, vessels, objects, baggage, instruments" (see 1 Sam 17:22; 1 Kgs 10:21; 1 Chr 15:16; Isa 18:2; Jer 22:7). As a general term, it fits here to describe the sailors throwing overboard whatever they could. The English word "cargo" should be taken generally to include the ship's payload and whatever else could be dispensed with.

33. Heb "into the sea."

34. Heb "to lighten it from them."

35. Heb "but Jonah." The disjunctive construction of ו + non verb followed by non-preterite (יְהוָה יֵלֶדֶת לְשָׁם, "but Jonah had gone down...") introduces a parenthetical description of Jonah's earlier actions before the onset of the storm.

36. Following a ו + disjunctive introducing parenthetical material, the suffixed-conjugation verb יריע functions as a past perfect here: "he went down into it." (see IBHS 30.5.2.b). This describes Jonah's previous actions before the onset of the storm.

37. Or "stern." There is some question whether the term יָדַע refers to the ship's hold below deck (NIDOTTE 3:282) or to the stern in the back of the ship (HALOT 2:439.2.b). This is the only use of this term in reference to a ship in biblical Hebrew. When used elsewhere, this term has a two-fold range of meanings: (1) "rear," such as rear of a building (Exod 26:22, 27; 36:27, 32; Ezek 46:19), back room of a house (1 Kgs 6:16; Ps 128:3; Amos 6:10), back of a person's body (figurative for rear border; Gen 49:13); and (2) "far part" that is remote, such as rear of a cave (1 Sam 24:4), the bottom of a cistern (Isa 14:15), the lower recesses of a well (Ezek 32:23), the remotest part of a mountain range (Judg 19:1, 18; 2 Kgs 19:23; Isa 37:24), the highest summit of a mountain (Ps 48:3), and the north—viewed as the remotest part of the earth (Isa 14:13; Ezek 38:6, 15; 39:2). So the term could refer to the "back" (stern) or "remote part" (lower cargo hold) of the ship. The related Akkadian expression اکرت اکتپ ("stern of a ship") (HALOT 2:439.2.b) seems to suggest that יָדַע means "stern" (HALOT 2:439.2.b).

"However, the preceding יָדוּעַ ("he went down into") suggests a point below deck. Also the genitive noun יָדַע refers to a "ship" with a deck (BDB 706; HALOT 2:764; NIDOTTE 3:282).

38. Or "of the ship." The noun יָדַע refers to a "ship" with a deck (HALOT 2:764). The term is a hapax legomenon in Hebrew and is probably an Aramaic loanword. The term is used frequently in the related Semitic languages to refer to ships with multiple decks. Here the term probably functions as a synecdoche of whole for the part, referring to the "lower deck"
rather than to the ship as a whole (NIDOTTE 3:282). An outdated approach related the noun to the verb חָלָה ("to cover") and suggested that the dual describes a ship covered with sheathing (BDB 706).

The a-class theme vowel of בָּא means indicates that this is a stative verb, describing the resultant condition of falling asleep: "was sound asleep."

The participle בָּא (Niphal from בָּא, "to sleep") functions here not as a vocative use of the noun (so KJV, NKJV, ASV: "O sleeper,") but as a verbal use to depict uninterrupted sleep up to this point. The expression לֹא נָשָׁפֵה ("what to you?"

"cry out") + the preposition ל ("to") often depicts a loud, audible cry of prayer to God for help in the midst of trouble: "to call on, to shout to" (HALOT 3:1129.9; BDB 859 s.v. בָּא 2a; e.g., Judg 15:18; 1 Sam 12:17, 18; 2 Sam 22:7; Hos 7:7; Pss 3:4 [5 HT]; 4:3 [4 HT]). Jonker notes: "The basic meaning of בָּא is to draw attention to oneself by the audible use of one's voice in order to establish contact with someone else. The reaction of the called person is normally expressed by the verbs...answer and...hear" (NIDOTTE 3:971).

The imperatives בָּא ("arise!") and בָּא ("cry out!") are repeated from v. 2 for ironic effect. The captain's words would have rung in Jonah's ears as a stinging reminder that the Lord had uttered them once before. Jonah was hearing them again because he had disobeyed them before.

The article on בָּא denotes previous reference to בָּא, "your god" (see IBHS 13.5.1.d). The captain refers here to the "god" just mentioned, that is, whatever god Jonah might pray to ("your god.")

Or "give thought to us." The verb is found only here in the OT. Related nouns are in Job 12:5 and Ps 146:5. The captain hopes for some favorable attention from a god who might act on behalf of his endangered crewmen.

And they said, a man to his companion. The plural verb is individualized by "a man."

The English word lots is a generic term. In some cultures the procedure for "casting lots" is to "draw straws" so that the person who receives the short straw is chosen. In other situations a colored stone or a designated playing card might be picked at random. In Jonah's case, small stones were probably used.

In the ancient Near East, casting lots was a custom used to try to receive a revelation from the gods about a particular situation. The Phoenician sailors here cried out to their gods and cast lots in the hope that one of their gods might reveal the identity of the person with whom he was angry. The CEV has well captured the sentiment of v.7b: "Let's ask our gods to show us who caused all this trouble.' It turned out to be Jonah."

On whose account this calamity is upon us.

The questions delivered in rapid succession in this verse indicate the sailors' urgency to learn quickly the reason for the unusual storm.

The verb בָּא has a broad range of meanings, including "to fear, to worship, to revere, to respect" (BDB 431). When God is the object, it normally means "to fear" (leading to obedience; BDB 431 s.v. 1) or "to worship" (= to stand in awe of; BDB 431 s.v. 2). Because the fear of God leads to wisdom and obedience, that is probably not the sense here. Instead Jonah professes to be a loyal Yahwist—in contrast to the pagan Phoenician sailors who worshiped false gods, he worshiped the one true God. Unfortunately his worship of YHWH lacked the necessary moral prerequisite.

The Hebrew word order is unusual. Normally the verb appears first, but here the direct object "the Lord, the God of heaven, I fear." The Hebrew word order is unusual. Normally the verb appears first, but here the direct object "the Lord, the God of heaven" precedes the verb. Jonah emphasizes the object of his worship. In contrast to the Phoenician sailors who worshiped pagan polytheistic gods, Jonah took pride in his theological orthodoxy. Ironically, his "fear" of YHWH in this case was limited to this profession of theological orthodoxy because his actions betrayed his refusal to truly "fear" God by obeying him.

The word fear appears in v. 5, here in v. 9, and later in vv. 10 and 16. Except for this use in v. 9, every other use describes the sailors' response (emotional fear prompting physical actions) to the storm or to YHWH. By contrast, Jonah claims to fear God but his attitude and actions do not reflect this. It is clear that Jonah does not "fear" in the same way that they do.

The "God of the heavens." The noun ברוֹאָם ("heavens") always appears in the dual form. Although the dual form sometimes refers to things that exist in pairs, the dual is often used to refer to geographical locations, e.g., יְרוּסָלֵם ("Jerusalem"), יִבְנָי ("Ephraim"), and בֵּית יִשָּׂרָא ("Egypt," but see IBHS 7.3.d). The dual form of ברוֹאָם does not refer to two different kinds of heavens or to two levels of heaven; it simply refers to "heaven" as a location—the dwelling place of God. Jonah's point is that he worships the High God of heaven—the one enthroned over all creation.

Then the men feared..." The vav-consecutive describes is supplied by the consequence of Jonah's statement. The phrase "Hearing this" does not appear in the Hebrew text but is supplied in the translation for the sake of clarity.
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57 Hb “The men feared a great fear.” The cognate accusative construction using the verb הָרָע ("to fear") and the noun רָע ("fear") from the same root (דַּרְעַ) emphasizes the sailors’ escalating fright: “they became very afraid” (see IBHS 10.2.1.g).

58 Hb “fleeing.”

59 sn The first two times that Jonah is said to be running away from the LORD (1:3), Hebrew word order puts this phrase last. Now in the third occurrence (1:10), it comes emphatically before the verb that describes Jonah’s action. The sailors were even more afraid once they had heard who it was that Jonah had offended.

60 Hb “because he had told them.” The verb יָדַע ("he had told") functions as a past perfect, referring to a previous event.

61 Hb “the sea was walking and storming.” The two participles הָלַךְ הקְצֹר ("walking and storming") form an idiom that means “the storm was growing worse and worse.” When the participle מִרְמַס (ḥalak) precedes another participle with וַיַּשְׁפָּ mimetype="text" data-mimetype="text">לָכַר (hakasar), it often denotes the idea of “growing, increasing” (BDB 233 s.v. מִרְמַס 4.d; e.g., Exod 19:19; 1 Sam 2:26; 2 Sam 3:1; 15:12; 2 Chr 17:12; Esth 9:4; Prov 4:18; Eccl 1:6). For example, “the power of David grew stronger and stronger (םִלֹֽא) (Ezra 8:10, hklh, "was walking and becoming strong")”, while the dynasty of Saul grew weaker and weaker (םִלֹֽא) (2 Sam 3:1; see IBHS, 37.6.d).

62 sn The וַיִּשָּׁפְּר ("to quiet") denotes purpose/result (see IBHS, 38.3).

63 Hb “become quiet for us.”

64 Hb “quiet for you.”

65 sn The word translated now is used in Ezekiel to describe digging through a wall (Ezek 8:8; 12:5, 7, 12). Its use in Jonah pictures the sailors digging into the water as hard as they could.

66 sn The word for land here is associated with a Hebrew verb meaning “to be dry” and is the same noun used in v. 9 of dry ground in contrast with the sea, both made by the LORD (see also Gen 1:9-10; Exod 4:9; 14:16, 22, 29; Jonah 2:10).

67 Hb “but they were not able.” The phrase “to do it” does not appear in the Hebrew text but is supplied in the translation for stylistic reasons.

68 Hb “the sea was walking and storming.” See the note on the same idiom in v. 11.

69 Hb “Do not put against us innocent blood,” that is, “Do not assign innocent blood to our account.” It seems that the sailors were afraid that they would die if they kept Jonah in the ship and also that they might be punished with death if they threw him overboard.

70 sn Pss 115:3 and 135:6 likewise use these verbs (םֵשָׁת and הָלַךְ) in speaking of the LORD as characteristically doing what he wishes to do.

71 Hb “they feared the LORD with a great fear.” The root מַרְע ("fear") is repeated in the verb and accusative noun, forming a cognate accusative construction which is used for emphasis (see IBHS, 10.2.1.g). The idea is that they greatly feared the LORD or were terrified of him.

72 tc The editors of BHS suggest that the direct object רָעָה רַע ("the LORD") might be a scribal addition, and that the original text simply read, “The men became greatly afraid….” However, there is no shred of external evidence to support this conjectural emendation. Admittedly, the apparent “conversion” of these Phoenician sailors to Yahwism is a surprising development. But two literary features support the Hebrew text as it stands. First, it is not altogether clear whether or not the sailors actually converted to faith in YHWH. They might have simply incorporated him into their polytheistic religion. Second, the narrator has taken pains to portray the pagan sailors as a literary foil to Jonah by contrasting Jonah’s hypocritical profession to fear YHWH (v. 9) with the sailors’ actions that reveal an authentic fear of God (v. 10, 14, 16).

73 Hb “they vowed vows.” The root יָדַע ("vow") is repeated in the verb and accusative noun, forming an emphatic effected accusative construction in which the verbal action produces the object specified by the accusative (see IBHS, 10.2.1.f). Their act of vows produced the vows. This construction is used to emphasize their godlessness and zeal in making vows to worship the God who had just spared their lives from certain death.

74 Hb “they sacrificed sacrifices.” The root נִסַּי ("sacrifice") is repeated in the verb and accusative noun, forming an emphatic effected accusative construction in which the verbal action produces the object (see IBHS, 10.2.1.f). Their act of sacrificing would produce the sacrifices. It is likely that the two sets of effected accusative constructions here (“they vowed vows and sacrificed sacrifices”) form a hendiatris; the two phrases connote one idea: “they earnestly vowed to sacrifice lavishly.” It is unlikely that they offered animal sacrifices at this exact moment on the boat—they had already thrown their cargo overboard, presumably leaving no animals to sacrifice. Instead, they probably vowed that they would sacrifice to the LORD when—and if—they reached dry ground. The Aramaic Targum also takes this as a vow to sacrifice but for a different reason. According to Jewish tradition, the heathen are not allowed to make sacrifice to the God of Israel outside Jerusalem, so the Targum modified the text by making it a promise to sacrifice: “they promised to offer a sacrifice before the LORD and they made vows” (see B. Levine, The Aramaic Version of Jonah, 70; K. Cathcart and R. Gordon, The Targum of the Minor Prophets, The Aramaic Bible, 14:106 n. 29).

75 Hb “The men feared the LORD [with] a great fear, they sacrificed sacrifices, and they vowed vows” (cf. v. 10). By pairing verbs with related nouns as direct objects, the account draws attention to the sailors’ response and its thoroughness.

76 sn Beginning with 1:17, the verse numbers through 2:10 in the English Bible differ from the verse numbers in the Hebrew text (BHS), with 1:17 ET = 2:1 HT, 2:1 ET = 2:2 HT, etc., through 2:10 ET = 2:11 HT.

77 sn Or “appointed.” The Piel verb נִסַּי means “to send, to appoint” (Ps 61:8; Jonah 2:1; 4:6-8; Dan 1:5, 10-11; HALOT 2:599.2; BDB 584). Baldwin notes, “Here, with YHWH as the subject, the verb stresses God’s sovereign rule over events for
the accomplishment of his purpose (as in 4:6-8, where the verb recurs in each verse). The 'great fish' is in exactly the right place at the right time by God's command, in order to swallow Jonah and enclose him safely" ("Jonah," in The Minor Prophets, ed. Thomas McComiskey [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993], 2:566).

The eight verses of Jonah's prayer in Hebrew contain twenty-seven first-person pronominal references to himself. There are fifteen second- or third-person references to the LORD.

The plene form of the interrogative would be translated, "How shall I again look at your holy temple?" (cf. NRSV). Jonah expresses hope that he will live to return to worship in Jerusalem. It may be a way of saying, "I will pray for help, even though I have been banished" (see v. 8; cf. Dan 6:10). The Aramaic Targum renders this interpretively: "and he heard my prayer." The eight verses of Jonah's prayer in Hebrew contain twenty-seven first-person pronominal references to himself. There are fifteen second- or third-person references to the LORD. The plene form of the interrogative would be translated, "How shall I again look at your holy temple?" (cf. NRSV). Jonah expresses hope that he will live to return to worship in Jerusalem. It may be a way of saying, "I will pray for help, even though I have been banished" (see v. 8; cf. Dan 6:10). The Aramaic Targum renders this interpretively: "and he heard my prayer."
sn Both options for the start of the line (“how?” and “yet” or “surely”) fit the ironic portrayal of Jonah in the prayer (see also vv.8-9). Jonah, who had been trying to escape the LORD’s attention, here appears remarkably fond of worshiping him. Is there perhaps also a hint of motivation for the LORD to rescue this eager worshiper? Confession of disobedience, on the other hand, is absent. Compare Ps 31:22, where the first half (describing the plight) is very similar to the first half of Jonah 2:3, and the second half starts with “nevertheless” ([תַּנְיָא]) and is a positive contrast, a report that God heard, using four words that appear in Jonah 2:2 (cf. Job 32:7-8; Ps 82:6-7; Isa 49:4; Zeph 3:7).

**tn** Heb “Will I ever see your holy temple again?” The rhetorical question expresses denial: Jonah despaired of ever seeing the temple again.

**tn** Heb “as far as the throat.” The noun שִׁכְנָא refers sometimes to the throat or neck (Ps 69:1[2]; 105:18; 124:4, 5; Isa 5:14; HALOT 2:712.2). The water was up to Jonah’s neck (and beyond), so that his life was in great danger (cf. Ps 69:1).

**tn** Or “the deep; the abyss” (ןַחַל). The simple “ocean” is perhaps too prosaic, since this Hebrew word has primeval connections (Gen 1:2; 7:11; 8:2; Prov 8:27-28) and speaks of the sea at its vastest (Job 38:16-18; Ps 36:6; 104:5-9).

**tn** The consonantal form פַּחַד is vocalized by the MT as פַּחַד (‘reed’) but the LXX’s εἰκόνα (‘end’) reflects a vocalization of פֵּשֶׁךְ (‘end’). The Aramaic Targum uses פַּחַד as a reference to the Reed Sea (also known as the Red Sea). In fact, the Jewish midrashim in Pirke R. El. 10 states that God showed Jonah the way by which the Israelites had passed through the Red Sea! The MT vocalization tradition is preferred.

**tn** The noun פַּחַד normally refers to “reeds”—freshwater plants that grow in Egyptian rivers and marshes (Exod 2:3,5; Isa 10:19)—but here it refers to “seaweed” (HALOT 2:747.1). Though the same freshwater plants do not grow in the Mediterranean, the name may be seen to fit similarly long plants growing in seawater.

**tn** Jonah began going “down” ([יתנִי]) in chap. 1 (vv. 3, 5; see also 1:15; 2:2-3).

**tn** The MT נַחַלָּא (‘to the extremities [i.e., bottoms] of the mountains’) is a bit unusual, appearing only here in the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, the BHS editors suggest a conjectural emendation of the MT’s נַחַלָּא (‘to the extremities’) to נַחַלָּא (‘to the ends [of the mountains]’) based on orthographic confusion between וּ (“and”) and בֶּא (“the”). However, the phrase נַחַלָּא does appear in the OT Apocrypha in Sir 16:19; therefore, it is not without precedent. Since Jonah emphasizes that he descended, as it were, to the very gates of the netherworld in the second half of this verse, it would be appropriate for Jonah to say that he went down “to the extremities [i.e., bottoms] of the mountains” (נַחַלָּא נַחַלָּא). Therefore, the MT may be retained with confidence.

**tn** The noun בִּצְקָא is used only twice in the Hebrew Bible, and this is the only usage in which it means “extremity; bottom” (BDB 891 s.v. 2). The exact phrase נַחַלָּא בִּצְקָא (“the extremities [bottoms] of the mountains”) is used in the OT Apocrypha once in Sir 16:19.

**tn** Some editions and translations (e.g., NEB, NRSV) have connected the “bottoms of the mountains” with the preceding—“seeds were wrapped around my head at the bottoms of the mountains”—and connect “I went down” with “the earth.” Such a connection between “I went down” and “the earth” is difficult to accept. It would be more normal in Hebrew to express “I went down to the earth” with a directive ending (נַחַלָּא בִּצְקָא) or with a Hebrew preposition before “earth” or without the definite article. The Masoretic accents, in addition, connect “ends of the mountains” with the verb “I went down” and call for a break between the verb and “earth.”

**tn** Heb “As for the earth, its bars…” This phrase is a rhetorical nominative construction (also known as causa pendens) in which the noun נַחַלָּא stands grammatically isolated and in an emphatic position prior to the 3s suffix that picks up on it in נַחַלָּא נַחַלָּא (its bars”; see IBHS 8.3). This construction is used to emphasize the subject, in this case, the “bars of the netherworld.” The word translated “bars” appears elsewhere to speak of bars used in constructing the sides of the tabernacle and often of crossbars (made of wood or metal) associated with the gates of fortified cities (cf. Exod 36:31-34; Judg 16:3; 1 Kgs 4:13; Neh 3:3; Ps 107:16; 147:13; Isa 45:1-2).

**tn** Heb “the earth.” The noun נָחַל usually refers to the “earth” but here refers to the “netherworld” (e.g., Job 10:21, 22; Ps 139:15; Isa 26:19; 44:23; BDB 76 s.v. 2.g). This is parallel to the related Akkadian term istum used in the phrase “the land of no return,” that is, the netherworld. This refers to the place of the dead (along with “belly of Sheol,” v. 2, and “the grave,” v. 6), which is sometimes described as having “gates” (Job 38:17; Ps 107:18).

**tn** Heb “behind me.” The preposition אֶתָ with a pronominal suffix and with the meaning “behind” is found also in Judg 3:23. Jonah pictures himself as closed in and so unable to escape death. Having described how far he had come (totally under water and “to the ends of mountains”), Jonah describes the way back as permanently closed against him. Just as it was impossible for a lone individual to walk through the barred gate of a walled city, so Jonah expected it was impossible for him to escape death.

**tn** Heb “As for the earth, its bars [were] against me forever.” This line is a verble clause. The verb in the translation has been supplied for the sake of clarity and smoothness. The rhetorical nominative construction (see the note on the word “gates” earlier in this verse) has also been smoothed out in the translation.

**tn** Heb “my life.” The term מֵי (“my life”) functions metonymically as a lcs pronoun (“me”).

**sn** Jonah pictures himself as being at the very gates of the netherworld (v. 6b) and now within the Pit itself (v. 6c). He is speaking rhetorically, for he had not actually died. His point is that he was as good as dead if God did not intervene immediately. See Ps 7:15; 30:3; 103:4; Ezek 19:3-4, 8.

**tn** Heb “my soul.” The term מִשְׁמָא (“soul”) is often used as a metonymy for the life and the animating vitality in the body: “my life” (BDB 659 s.v. 3.c).
“fainting away from me.” The verb הָרָה (‘to faint away’) is used elsewhere to describe (1) the onset of death when a person’s life begins to slip away (Lam 2:12), (2) the loss of one’s senses due to turmoil (Ps 107:5), and (3) the loss of all hope of surviving calamity (Ps 77:4; 142:4; 143:4; BDB 742). All three options are reflected in various translations: “when my life was ebbing away” (JPS, NJPS), “when my life was slipping away” (CEV), “when I felt my life slipping away” (TEV), “as my senses failed me” (NEB), and “when I had lost all hope” (NLT).

The verb רָדָה (‘remembered’). The verb רָדָה is often used to mean “to remember, to call to mind” but it can also mean “to call out” (e.g., Nah 2:6) as well as in the related Akkadian verb șakum, “to name, to mention.” The idiom “to remember the LORD” here encompasses calling to mind his character and past actions and appealing to him for help (Deut 8:18-19; Ps 42:6-8; Isa 64:4-5; Zech 10:9). The Aramaic Targum glosses the verb as “I remembered the worship of the LORD,” which somewhat misses the point.

For similar ideas see 2 Chr 30:27; Ps 77:3; 142:3; 143:4-5.

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are both consistent with emphases elsewhere in the book (Jonah 4:11 again puts attention on size—of population). If "great" idiomatic "exceptionally great/large/important" could both be amplified by focus on physical size in the following phrase and threatened judgment all along (4:2). people repented from their sins (3:8-10). Jonah later complains that he knew that God was likely to relent from the threatened judgment all along (4:2).

The greatness of Nineveh has been mentioned already in 1:2 and 3:2. What is being added now? Does the term יחידיים ("to God/gods") (1) refer to the LORD's personal estimate of the city, (2) does it speak of the city as "belonging to" God, (3) does it refer to Nineveh as a city with many shrines and gods, or (4) is it simply an idiomatic reinforcement of the city's size? Interpreters do not agree on the translation. To introduce the idea either of God's ownership or of dedication to idolatry (though not impossible) is unexpected here, being without parallel or follow-up elsewhere in the book. The alternatives "great/large/important in God's estimation" (consider Ps 89:41b) or the merely idiomatic "exceptionally great/large/important" could both be amplified by focus on physical size in the following phrase and are both consistent with emphases elsewhere in the book (Jonah 4:11 again puts attention on size—of population). If "great" is best understood as a reference primarily to size here, in view of the following phrase and v. 4a (Jonah went "one day's walk"), rather than to importance, this might weigh slightly in favor of an idiomatic "very great/large," though no example with "God" used idiomatically to indicate superlative (Gen 23:6; 30:8; Exod 9:28; 1 Sam 14:15; Ps 36:6; 80:10) has exactly the same construction as the wording in Jonah 3:3.

The adverbial use of והנה ("yet") denotes limited temporal continuation (BDB 728 s.v. 1a; Gen 29:7; Isa 10:32). The Aramaic Targum rendered it as בהנה המַעֲשֶׂה "at the end of [forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown]."

The term "required" is supplied in the translation for the sake of smoothness and clarity. Requiring a three-day walk. Although this phrase is one of the several indications in the book of Jonah of Nineveh's impressive size, interpreters are not precisely sure what "a three-day walk" means. In light of the existing archaeological remains, the phrase does not describe the length of time it would have taken a person to walk around the walls of the city or to walk from one end of the walled city to the other. Other suggestions are that it may indicate the time required to walk from one edge of Nineveh's environs to the other (in other words, including outlying regions) or that it indicates the time required to arrive, do business, and leave. More information might also show that the phrase involved an idiomatic description (consider Gen 30:36; Exod 3:18; a three-day-journey would be different for families than for soldiers, for example), rather than a precise measurement of distance, for which terms were available (Ezek 45:1-6; 48:8-35). With twenty miles as quite a full day's walk, it seems possible and simplest, however, to take the phrase as including an outlying region associated with Nineveh, about six miles in length.

The verb יָרֵא ("proclaim") is repeated from 1:2 but with a significant variation. The phrase in 1:2 was the adversative לֹא יָרֵא ("to proclaim against"), which often designates an announcement of threatened judgment (1 Kgs 13:4, 32; Jer 49:29; Lam 1:15). However, here the phrase is the more positive יָרֵא ("to proclaim to") which often designates an oracle of deliverance or a call to repentance, with an accompanying offer of deliverance that is either explicit or implied (Deut 20:10; Isa 40:2; Zech 1:4; HALOT 3:1129.8; BDB 895 s.v. יָרֵא 3.a). This shift from the adversative preposition לֹא ("against") to the more positive preposition ל ("to") might signal a shift in God's intentions or perhaps it simply makes his original intention more clear. While God threatened to judge Nineveh, he was very willing to relent and forgive when the people repented from their sins (3:8-10). Jonah later complains that he knew that God was likely to relent from the threatened judgment all along (4:2).
114 sn The king expresses his uncertainty whether Jonah’s message constituted a conditional announcement or an unconditional decree. Jeremiah 18 emphasizes that God sometimes gives people an opportunity to repent when they hear an announcement of judgment. However, as Amos and Isaiah learned, if a people refused to repent over a period of time, the patience of God could be exhausted. The offer of repentance in a conditional announcement of judgment can be withdrawn and in its place an unconditional decree of judgment issued. In many cases it is difficult to determine on the front end whether or not a prophetic message of coming judgment is conditional or unconditional, thus explaining the king’s uncertainty.

115 tn “he might turn and relent.” The two verbs הָעַל (ha’al, “be willing to turn”; see IBHS 32.3.b). The imperfect הָעַל (ha’al) and the perfect with prefixed וַיֶּעַל (w‘al) form a future-time narrative sequence. Both verbs function in a modal sense, denoting possibility, as the introductory interrogative suggests (“Who knows…!”). When used in reference to past actions, בָּשַׁל (bushal) can mean “to be sorry” or “to regret” that someone did something in the past, and when used in reference to future planned actions, it can mean “to change one’s mind” about doing something or “to relent” from sending judgment (BDB 997 s.v. 6). The verb בָּשַׁל can mean “to be sorry” about past actions (e.g., Gen 6:6, 7; 1 Sam 15:11, 35) and “to change one’s mind” about future actions (BDB 637 s.v. 2). These two verbs are used together elsewhere in passages that consider the question of whether or not God will change his mind and relent from judgment he has threatened (e.g., Jer 4:28). The verbal root בָּשַׁל (“turn”) is used four times in vv. 8-10, twice of the Ninevites “repenting” from their moral evil and twice of God “relenting” from his threatened calamity. This repetition creates a wordplay that emphasizes the appropriateness of God’s response: if the people repent, God might relent.


117 tn The imperfect verb רָכָל (rakal) functions in a modal sense, denoting possibility. The king’s hope parallels that of the ship’s captain in 1:6. See also Exod 32:7-14; 2 Sam 12:14-22; 1 Kgs 8:33-43; 21:17-29; Jer 18:6-8; Joel 2:11-15.

118 tn This clause is introduced by בִּי (”that”) and functions as an exephegetical, explanatory clause.

119 tn Heb “from their evil way.”

120 tn Heb “calamity” or “disaster.” The noun הָעַל (“calamity, disaster”) functions as a metonymy of result—the cause being the threatened judgment (e.g., Exod 32:12, 14; 2 Sam 24:16; Jer 18:8; 26:13, 19; 42:10; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; HALOT 3:1263.6). The root הָעַל is repeated three times in vv. 8 and 10. Twice it refers to the Ninevites’ moral “evil” (vv. 8 and 10a) and here it refers to the “calamity” or “disaster” that YHWH had threatened (v. 10b). This repetition of the root forms a polysemantic wordplay that exploits this broad range of meanings of the noun. The wordplay emphasizes that God’s response was appropriate: because the Ninevites repented from their moral evil God relented from the “calamity” he had threatened.

121 tn Heb “the disaster that he had spoken to do to them.”

122 tn Heb “and he did not do it.” See notes on 3:8-9.

123 tn Heb “It was evil to Jonah, a great evil.” The cognate accusative construction הָעַל הָעַל (ha’al ha’al) emphasizes the great magnitude of his displeasure (e.g., Neh 2:10 for the identical construction; see IBHS 10.2.g). The verb הָעַל הָעַל functions “to be displeasing” (BDB 949 s.v. 1; e.g., Gen 21:11, 12; 48:17; Num 11:16; 22:34; Josh 24:15; 1 Sam 8:6; 2 Sam 11:25; Neh 2:10; 13:8; Prov 24:18; Jer 40:4). The use of the verb הָעַל הָעַל (“to be evil, bad”) and the noun הָעַל (“evil, bad, calamity”) here in 4:1 creates a wordplay with the use of the noun הָעַל in 3:8-10. When God saw that the Ninevites repented from their moral evil (הָעַל), he relented from the calamity (הָעַל) that he had threatened—and this development greatly displeased (הָעַל) Jonah.

124 tn Heb “it burned to him.” The verb הָעַל (”to burn”) functions figuratively here (hypo catastasis) referring to anger (BDB 354). It is related to the noun הָעַל הָעַל (”heat/burning”) in “the heat of his anger” in 3:9. The repetition of the root highlights the contrast in attitudes between Jonah and God: God’s burning anger “cooled off” when the Ninevites repented, but Jonah’s anger was “kindled” when God did not destroy Nineveh.

125 tn Heb “my saying!” The 1cs suffix on הָעַל (“my saying”) functions as a subjective genitive: “I said.” The verb הָעַל (“to say”) here refers to the inner speech and thoughts of Jonah (see HALOT 1:664; BDB 56 s.v. 2; e.g., Gen 17:17; Ruth 4:4; 1 Sam 20:26; Esth 6:6; Jonah 2:4). There is no hint anywhere else in the book that Jonah had argued with God when he was originally commissioned. While most translations render it “I said” or “my saying,” a few take it as inner speech: “This is what I feared” (NEB), “It is just as I feared” (REB), “I knew from the very beginning” (CEV).

126 tn The phrase “would happen” does not appear in the Hebrew text but is supplied in the translation for the sake of clarity and smoothness.

127 tn Heb “Is this not my saying while I was in my own country?” The rhetorical question implies a positive answer (“Yes, this was the very thing that Jonah had anticipated would happen all along!”) so it is rendered as an emphatic declaration in the translation.

128 tn Or “This is why I originally fled to Tarshish.” The Piel verb נָלָק (nolak) has a broad range of meanings and here could mean: (1) “to go before, be in front of” (1 Sam 20:25; Ps 68:26); (2) “to do [something] beforehand,” (Ps 119:147); or (3) “to anticipate, to do [something] early, forestall [something]” (Ps 119:148). The lexicons nuance Jonah 4:2 as “to do [something] for the first time” (HALOT 3:1069.4) or “to do [something] beforehand” (BDB 870 s.v. 3). The phrase נָלָק (”I did the first time to flee”) is an idiom that probably means “I originally fled” or “I fled the first time.” The infinitive construct נָלָק (”to flee”) functions as an object complement. This phrase is translated variously, depending on the category of meaning chosen for נָלָק (see above): (1) “to do [something] for the first time, beforehand”: “That is why I fled beforehand” (JPS, NJPS), “I fled before” (KJV), “I fled previously” (NKJV), “I fled at the beginning” (NRSV), “I first tried to flee” (NJB), “I fled at first” (NAB); (2) “to do [something] early, to hasten to do [something]”: “That is why I was so quick to
Jonah's bad attitude.

sn The narrator skillfully withheld Jonah's motivations from the reader up to this point for rhetorical effect—to build suspense and to create a shocking, surprising effect. Now, for the first time, the narrator reveals why Jonah fled from the commission of God in 1:3—he had not wanted to give God the opportunity to relent from judging Nineveh! Jonah knew that if he preached in Nineveh, the people might repent and as a result, God might more than likely relent from sending judgment. Hoping to seal their fate, Jonah had originally refused to preach so that the Ninevites would not have an opportunity to repent. Apparently Jonah hoped that God would have therefore judged them without advance warning. Or perhaps he was afraid he would betray his nationalistic self-interests by functioning as the instrument through which the LORD would spare Israel's main enemy. Jonah probably wanted God to destroy Nineveh for three reasons: (1) as a loyal nationalist, he despised non-Israelites (cf. 1:9); (2) he believed that idolators had forfeited any opportunity to be shown mercy (cf. 2:9-10); and (3) the prophets Amos and Hosea had recently announced that God would sovereignly use the Assyrians to judge unrepentant Israel (Hos 9:3; 11:5) and take them into exile (Amos 5:27). If God destroyed Nineveh, the Assyrians would not be able to destroy Israel. The better solution would have been for Jonah to work for the repentance of Nineveh and Israel.

tn Or “know.” What Jonah knew then he still knows about the LORD's character, which is being demonstrated in his dealings with both Nineveh and Jonah. The Hebrew suffixed tense accommodates both times here.

Heb “long of nostrils.” Because the nose often expresses anger through flared nostrils it became the source of this idiom meaning “slow to anger” (e.g., Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Jer 15:15; Nah 1:3; BDB 74).

Heb “great.”

Heb “calamity.” The noun הָרֶס (calamity, disaster) functions as a metonymy of result—the cause being the threatened judgment (e.g., Exod 32:12, 14; 2 Sam 24:16; Jer 18:8; 26:13, 19; 42:10; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). The classic statement of God's willingness to relent from judgment when a sinful people repent is Jer 18:1-11.

sn Jonah is precisely correct in his listing of the LORD's attributes. See Exod 34:6-7; Num 14:18-19; 2 Chr 30:9; Neh 9:17; 31-32; Ps 86:3-8, 15; 103:2-13; 116:5 (note the parallels to Jonah 2 in Ps 116:1-4); 145:8; Neh 9:17; Joel 2:13.

Heb “take my life from me.”

Heb “better my death than my life.”

Heb “Rightly does it burn to you?” Note this question occurs again in v. 9, there concerning the withered plant. “Does it so thoroughly burn to you!” or “Does it rightly burn to you!” or “Does it burn so thoroughly to you!” The Hiphil of הָרֵשׁ (“to do good”) here may mean: (1) “to do [something] rightly” in terms of ethical right and wrong (BDB 406 s.v. 5.b; HALOT 2:408.3.c; e.g., Gen 4:7; Lev 5:4; Ps 36:4; Isa 1:17; Jer 4:22; 13:23). This approach is adopted by many translations: “Do you have any right to be angry?” (NRSV, NLT); “Do you have good reason to be angry?” (NASV, NAB, NBV); “Do you do well to be angry?” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, RSV); “Do you have any right to be angry?” (NIV); “Are you right to be angry?” (REB, NJB); “Is it right for you to be angry?” (TEV, CEV). (2) The Hiphil of הָרֵשׁ (“to do good”) here may be used as an adverb meaning “well, utterly, thoroughly” (BDB 406 s.v. 5.a; HALOT 2:408.3.e; e.g., Gen 4:7; Lev 5:4; Ps 36:4; Isa 1:17; Jer 4:22; 13:23). This approach is adopted by many translations: “Do you have right to be angry?” (NIV). “Are you right to be angry?” (REB, NJB); “Is it right for you to be angry?” (KJV, NJKV, ASV, RSV); “What right do you have to be angry?” (TEV, CEV). (3) The Hiphil of הָרֵשׁ (“to do good”) here may be used as an adverb meaning “well, utterly, thoroughly” (BDB 406 s.v. 5.a; HALOT 2:408.3.e; e.g., Gen 4:7; Lev 5:4; Ps 36:4; Isa 1:17; Jer 4:22; 13:23). This approach is adopted by many translations: “Do you have right to be angry?” (NIV). “Are you right to be angry?” (REB, NJB); “Is it right for you to be angry?” (KJV, NJKV, ASV, RSV); “What right do you have to be angry?” (TEV, CEV). (2) The Hiphil of הָרֵשׁ (“to do good”) here may be used as an adverb meaning “well, utterly, thoroughly” (BDB 406 s.v. 5.a; HALOT 2:408.3.e; e.g., Gen 4:7; Lev 5:4; Ps 36:4; Isa 1:17; Jer 4:22; 13:23). This approach is adopted by many translations: “Do you have right to be angry?” (NIV). “Are you right to be angry?” (REB, NJB); “Is it right for you to be angry?” (KJV, NJKV, ASV, RSV); “What right do you have to be angry?” (TEV, CEV).

sn The use of the term הָרֵשׁ (rightly, good”) which is used in 4:1 of Jonah's bad attitude.

tn “Does it burn to you?” The verb כָּרֵשׁ (“to burn”) functions figuratively here (hypocatastasis) to refer to strong anger (BDB 354). The verb is repeated from v. 1 and will be used again in v. 9.

tn Heb “from the east” or “from the front.” When used to designate a location, the noun יָבָשׁ may mean “front” (BDB 869 s.v. 1.a) or “east” (BDB 869 s.v. 1.b). The construction יָבָשׁ + preposition מ means “from the front” = “in front of” (Job 23:8; Ps 139:5; Isa 9:11) or “from the east” = “eastward, on the east side” (Gen 3:21; 12:8; Num 34:11; Josh 7:2; Ezek 11:23). Because the morning sunrise beat down upon Jonah (v. 8) and because the main city gate of Nineveh opened to the east, the term probably means “on the east side” of the city. But “in front of” the city would mean the same in this case.

sn Apparently Jonah hoped that he might have persuaded the LORD to “change his mind” again (see 3:8-10) and to judge Nineveh after all.

tn The Piel verb יהלָך is used elsewhere in Jonah meaning “to send, to appoint” (Jonah 2:1; 4:6-8; HALOT 2:599.2; BDB 584).
The noun הָרֶשׁ ("plant") has the suffixed ending גּ (which denotes a diminutive (see IBHS 5.7.b), so it can be nuanced “little plant.” For the probable reason that the narrator used the diminutive form here, see the note on “little” in v. 10.

The consonantal form הָרֶשׁ is vocalized by the MT as הָרֶשׁ, a Hiphil infinitive construct from הַרֶשׁ ("to deliver, rescue"); BDB 664-65). However, the LXX's του σκιαζείν ("to shade") reflects an alternate vocalization tradition of הָרֶשׁ, a Niphal infinitive construct from הַרֶשׁ ("to shade"); see BDB 853). The MT vocalization is preferred for several reasons. First, it is the more difficult form with the assimilated narrator's choice of the somewhat ambiguous form הָרֶשׁ (v. 7). God's primary motivation was to create a situation to "rescue" Jonah from his bad attitude. Nevertheless, the narrator's choice of the somewhat ambiguous form הָרֶשׁ might have been done to create a wordplay on הָרֶשׁ ("to rescue, deliver") and הָרֶשׁ ("to shade"). Jonah thought that God was providing him shade, but God was really working to deliver him from his evil attitude, as the ensuing dialogue indicates.

Or "evil attitude." The meaning of the noun העָנָה is intentionally ambiguous; the author puts on its broad range of meanings to create a polysemic wordplay. The noun העָנָה has a broad range of meanings: (1) "distress, misery, discomfort" (2) "misfortune, injury," (3) "calamity, disaster," (4) "moral evil," and (5) "ill-disposed, evil attitude" (see BDB 949; HALOT 3:1262-63). The narrator has used several meanings of העָנָה in 3:8-4:2, namely, "moral evil" (3:8, 10) and "calamity, disaster" (3:9, 10; 4:2), as well as the related root עָנַע ("to be displeasing" (4:1). Here the narrator puns on the meaning "discomfort" created by the scorching desert heat, but God's primary motivation is to "deliver" Jonah—not from something as trivial as physical discomfort from heat—but from his sinful attitude about God's willingness to spare Nineveh. This gives the term an especially ironic twist: Jonah is only concerned about being delivered from his physical "discomfort," while God wants to deliver him from his "evil attitude."  

Or "appointed." The Piel stem הָנַע means "to send, to appoint" (Ps 61:8; Jonah 2:1; 4:6-8; Dan 1:5, 10-11; HALOT 2:599.2; BDB 584).

Or "appointed." See preceding note on v. 7.

The MT adjective הָשָׁרָה ("autumnal") is a hapax legomenon with an unclear meaning (BDB 362); therefore, the BHS editors propose a conjectural emendation to the adjective הָשָׁרָה ("autumnal"); see BDB 358). However, this emendation would also create a hapax legomenon and it would be no more clear than relating the MT's הָשָׁרָה to חָרֶשׁ I ("to plough" [in autumn harvest]).

Heb "autumnal" or "sultry." The adjective הָשָׁרָה is a hapax legomenon whose meaning is unclear; it might mean "autumnal" (from חָרֶשׁ I, "to plough" [in the autumn harvest-time]), "silent" = "sultry" (from חָרֶשׁ IV, "to be silent"; BDB 362). The form חָרֶשׁ might be an alternate spelling of חָשָׁרָה from the noun חָרֶשׁ ("sun") and so mean "hot" (BDB 362).

Heb "attacked" or "smote." Heb "he asked his soul to die." Heb "better my death than my life."  

Jonah repeats his assessment, found also in 4:3.

Heb "Does it burn so thoroughly to you?" or "Does it burn rightly to you?" See note on this expression in v. 4.

Heb "It thoroughly burns to me" or "It rightly burns to me."

Heb "unto death." The phrase רָעַע נוּנָה ("unto death") is an idiomatic expression meaning "to the extreme" or simply "extremely [angry]" (HALOT 2:563.1.c). The nouns רָעַע ("death") and נוּנָה ("Shed") are often used as an absolute superlative with a negative sense, similar to the English expression "bored to death" (IBHS 14.5.b, p. 269). For example, "his soul was vexed to death" (רָעַע נוּנָה) means that he could no longer endure it (Judg 16:16), and "love is as strong as death" (הָלַע נוּנָה) means love is irresistible or exceedingly strong (Song 8:6). Here the expression "I am angry unto death" (רָעַע נוּנָה) means that Jonah could not be more angry. Unfortunately, this idiomatic expression has gone undetected by virtually every other major English translation to date (KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, ASV, NASV, NIV, NJB, JPS, NJPS). The only translation that comes close to representing the idiom correctly is BBE: "I have a right to be truly angry."

Heb "were troubled." The verb שָׁנַע has a basic three-fold range of meanings: (1) "to be troubled about," (2) "to look with compassion upon," and (3) "to show pity, to spare [someone from death/judgment]" (HALOT 1:298; BDB 299). Clearly, here God is referring to Jonah's remorse and anger when the plant died (vv. 7-9), so here it means "to be troubled about" (HALOT 1:298.1.c) rather than "to pity" (BDB 299 s.v. c). Elsewhere שָׁנַע ("to be troubled about") describes emotional grief caused by the loss of property (Gen 45:20) and the death of family members (Deut 13:9). The verb שָׁנַע is derived from a common Semitic root which has a basic meaning "to pour out; to flow" which is used in reference to emotion and tears in particular. This is seen in the Hebrew expression צְמִית שָׁנַע ("the eyes flow") picturing tears of concern and grief (e.g., Gen 45:20; Deut 13:19). The verb שָׁנַע will be used again in v. 11 but in a different sense (see note on v. 11).

The noun הָרֶשׁ ("plant") has the suffixed ending גּ which denotes a diminutive (see IBHS 5.7.b); so it can be nuanced “little plant.” The contrast between Jonah's concern for his "little" plant (v. 10) and God's concern about this...
“enormous” city (v. 11) could not be greater! Jonah’s misplaced priorities look exceedingly foolish and self-centered in comparison to God’s global concern about the fate of 120,000 pagans.

182tn Heb “which was a son of a night and perished [as] a son of a night.”

183tn The emphatic use of the independent pronouns “you” and “I” (נָתַן and נָתַן) in vv. 10 and 11 creates an ironic comparison and emphasizes the strong contrast between the attitudes of Jonah and the LORD.

184tn Heb “You…Should I not spare…?” This is an a fortiori argument from lesser to greater. Since Jonah was “upset” (שָׁרַע) about such a trivial matter as the death of a little plant (the lesser), God had every right to “spare” (שָׁרַע) the enormously populated city of Nineveh (the greater). The phrase “even more” does not appear in Hebrew but is implied by this a fortiori argument.

185tn Heb “Should I not spare?” or “Should I not show compassion?” The verb שָׁרַע has a basic three-fold range of meanings: (1) “to be troubled about,” (2) “to look with compassion upon,” and (3) “to show pity, to spare (someone from death/judgment)” (HALOT 1:298; BDB 299). In v. 10 it refers to Jonah’s lament over the death of his plant, meaning “to be upset about” or “to be troubled about” (HALOT 1:298.1.c). However, here in v. 11 it means “to show pity, spare” from judgment (BDB 298 s.v. b; HALOT 1:298.1.a; e.g., 1 Sam 24:11; Jer 21:7; Ezek 24:14). The verb שָׁרַע (“to spare [from judgment]”) is often used in contexts which contemplate whether God will or will not spare a sinful people from judgment (Ezek 5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:19; 9:5, 10; 20:17). So this repetition of the same verb but in a different sense creates a polysemantic wordplay in vv. 10-11. However, the wordplay is obscured by the appropriate translation for each usage—“be upset about” in v. 10 and “to spare” in v. 11—therefore, the translation above attempts to bring out the wordplay in English: “to be [even more] concerned about.”

186tn Heb “the great city.”

187tn Heb “their right from their left.” Interpreters wonder exactly what deficiency is meant by the phrase “do not know their right from their left.” The expression does not appear elsewhere in biblical Hebrew. It probably does not mean, as sometimes suggested, that Nineveh had 120,000 small children (the term נַפְלֵים ["people"] does not seem to be used of children alone). In any case, it refers to a deficiency in discernment that Jonah and the initial readers of Jonah would no doubt have considered themselves free of. For partial parallels see 2 Sam 19:35; Eccl 10:2; Ezek 22:26; 44:23.

188tn Heb “and many animals.”