

Scott A. Starker for Kiel Cooper

June 10, 1988

Jonah 1:15-17

Translation and Emendations:

¹⁵ And they carried Jonah and they cast him^a to the sea and the sea ceased from its raging^b. ¹⁶ And the men feared the LORD with a great fear and they slaughtered a sacrifice to the LORD and they vowed^c vows. 2:1 And the LORD appointed a great fish^d to swallow up^e Jonah and it came to pass that Jonah was in the belly^f of the fish three days and three nights.

No Emendations

Textual Notes:

^a, ^b This is the only occurrence of this form of the word found in the Old Covenant. Even though the form in the text seems to be defective (see parsing sheets) there is no evidence of the expected form anywhere in the Old Covenant. Therefore, the text was not emendated.

^c, ^d, ^e, ^f This is the only occurrence of this form of the word found in the Old Covenant.

Translation of Apparatus and Implications:

In verse 16 the reader is lead to the apparatus to consider the words “the LORD” which occur immediately after the word “feared” in the above translation. The apparatus cites no textual evidence but suggests (though still questioning) that the phrase was a latter addition to the original text. If it were left out of the sentence, “the LORD” could still be the implied object of the great fear that the men experienced. Their fear could also have resulted from the whole event in general. Even so, they were still moved to make a sacrifice to the LORD which shows that they did have at least an element of fear (reverence) for the LORD. Considering that there is no textual evidence that the words were added to the original text and that the difference it would make is so subtle as to escape me, I will have to stay with the text as it is.

Comparison of Translations:

NASB: ¹⁵ So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.
ASV: ¹⁵ So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging.
RSV: ¹⁵ So they took up Jonah and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging.
NIV: ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm.
JPS: ¹⁵ So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging.
GNB: ¹⁵ Then they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea, and it calmed down at once.
LXX: ¹⁵

NASB: ¹⁶ Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.
 ASV: ¹⁶ Then the men feared Jehovah exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows.
 RSV: ¹⁶ Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.
 NIV: ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.
 JPS: ¹⁶ Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.
 GNB: ¹⁶ This made the sailors so afraid of the LORD that they offered a sacrifice and promised to serve him.
 LXX: ¹⁶

NASB: ¹⁷ And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish
 ASV: ¹⁷ And Jehovah prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish
 RSV: ¹⁷ And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish
 NIV: ¹⁷ But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish
 JPS: ^{2:1} And the LORD prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish
 GNB: ¹⁷ At the LORD's command a large fish swallowed Jonah, and he was inside the fish
 LXX: ^{2:1}

NASB: three days and three nights.
 ASV: three days and three nights.
 RSV: three days and three nights.
 NIV: three days and three nights.
 JPS: three days and three nights.
 GNB: for three days and three nights.
 LXX:

Abbreviations:

NASB = New American Standard Bible
 ASV = American Standard Version
 RSV = Revised Standard Version
 NIV = New International Version
 JPS = Jewish Publications Society (1962)
 GNB = Good News Bible
 LXX = Septuagint

Grammatical Notes from GKC:

See the parsing sheets for all the references to GKC that were found to be non-trivial. There were two listings for these verses (Jonah 1:15-2:1) but there was no identical forms listed. Jonah 1:15 was cited in paragraph 61c which indicates that GKC understands as a Qal infinitive with a 3MS suffix. Both AES and BDB take the same word in Jonah 1:15 as a masculine singular noun with a 3MS suffix. Since both options seem to be legitimate and since the translations do not differ significantly as far as my knowledge goes, I have chosen to let the majority rule and go with AES and BDB and translate it as a preposition + masculine singular noun + 3MS suffix. Jonah 2:1 was cited in paragraphs 122s,t which say that “the feminine form of substantives is sometimes used... to indicate a single example of a class which is denoted by the masculine form.” This is used to explain why the masculine form of “fish” appears in 2:1 and 2:11 while the feminine form appears in 2:2.

Translation Notes:

A comparison of the different translations helps to see where the issues are and how they are (or in some cases, are not) being dealt with. The first difference is seen for the first word in verse 15 where NASB, ASV, RSV, and JPS translate the *waw* as “So” while NIV and GNB translate it as “Then.” “So” indicates that their action was a result of the previous situation while “Then” just states the next

event in a series of events. The next issue concerns the two words for “ceased from its raging” as NASB, ASV, RSV, and JPS read. The NIV changed “from its raging” to the adjective “raging” and then changed the verb “ceased” to “grew calm.” The changes seem acceptable in that the original idea is translated but with a more modern phrase. The GNB, as is typical, uses the pronoun “it” instead of the noun “sea” and, as with the NIV, translates “ceased” as “calmed down.” It does not translate “from its raging” at all but adds “at once” to emphasize the time aspect which is certainly implied by the response the men show in verse 16. The next issue comes at the beginning of verse 16 where the NIV translates the *waw* as “At this” to show that the men were responding to what happened in verse 15. The GNB accomplishes the same thing with “This made... so... that...” The GNB also changes “men” to “sailors” and does not translate “exceedingly” but implies it as it translates the next *waw* as “that” to show that their fear was so great that it prompted them to do something because of it. The next issue is that the ASV translates as “Jehovah” while the others, except the GNB which used the characteristic pronoun “him”, use “LORD.” The GNB also interprets the “vowed vows” to mean “promised to serve him.” The next issue involves the numbering of the next verse. The JPS and LXX follow the BHS and call it chapter 2 verse 1. The others call it chapter 1 verse 17 apparently because the content is so closely related to the previous material. Next, the NIV translates the *waw* as “But”, the GNB translates it as “At” while the others translate it as “And.” Also, the GNB interprets “appointed” as “command.”

Interaction with Commentaries:

Both Keil and Calvin agree that “The sudden cessation of the storm showed that the bad weather had come entirely on Jonah’s account, and that the sailors had not shed innocent blood by casting him into the sea.” (Keil, p. 397) Indeed, the men had only “executed the judgment which the Lord had openly demanded and required from them.” (Calvin, p. 63) In verse 16 Calvin points out the change in the men that occurred as a result of the sudden calming of the sea. He compares their earlier behavior of crying each to his own god with their response now to the true God. They must have concluded that “the God of Israel was the supreme King of heaven and earth, that he held all things under his hand and government... they cannot exempt themselves from his power and authority.” (Calvin, p. 64) He says that their sacrifice was the result of their desire “to bear witness that he was the true God.” (Calvin, p. 66) There is some controversy about what the sacrifice was and when it was made. Keil says that it was immediately and on board the ship. (Keil, p. 397) Jerome says that their sacrifice was that of praise. A Jewish Rabbi named Jonathan (also followed by Grotius) says they “said” they would sacrifice to Jehovah. Elieser says that “they returned immediately to Joppa, went up to Jerusalem, and were circumcised!” (Calvin, p. 66) The next issue is how to understand “and they vowed vows.” Keil says that “they would offer Him still further sacrifices on their safe arrival at their destination.” (Keil, p. 397) Calvin writes, “for we know that the object... in making vows, has ever been this - to bind themselves to God, and also to express their gratitude, and to make it evident, that they owed to him both their life and every favour bestowed on them.” (Calvin, p. 69-70) Thus, they renounced their idols knowing that their lives were in the hands of the only true God. He also writes, “...so they testified, that when they came safe to shore, they would make it known that the God of Israel had showed mercy to them.” Calvin, p. 70) Both Keil and Calvin take the last verse as chapter 1 verse 17. For Keil the main issue in verse 17 is the great fish. He says it was not a whale but a large shark or sea-dog which apparently is very common in the Mediterranean and has such a large throat that it can easily swallow a whole man! (The footnote cites a story about a man who fell overboard during a storm, was swallowed by one of these sharks, then later, with the help of a cannon-ball, was forced to vomit up the man who was then recovered alive and well!) Keil writes, “The miracle consisted therefore, not so much in the fact that Jonah was swallowed alive, as in the fact that he was kept alive

for three days in the shark's belly, then vomited unhurt upon the land." (Keil, p. 398) Calvin, although citing some sources on how the fish could have been that big and could have swallowed a whole man, focuses more on how Jonah must have felt about the whole experience and what he must have thought about during his stay in the belly of the fish! Calvin also agrees with Keil that the miracle was that God had prepared the fish for a purpose which was to swallow Jonah and to keep him alive. (Calvin, p. 72-73) The focus is on the Lord who arranged the whole thing! Lastly, the "three days and three nights" need not mean three full twenty-four hour periods but that Jonah was vomited up on the third day after he had been swallowed. (Keil, p. 398)

Suggestions for Preaching:

Calvin offers a number of practical suggestions for apply the story of Jonah to this point. One could talk about the different ways one can "fear" the Lord and what the motivation for true worship should be. One could even make an evangelistic point by noting that no good deed no matter how great will be found acceptable to God if the heart of the doer is impure. (Calvin points out the relationship between the fear of God and wisdom in Job 29:28.) One could also talk about the sin of mixing today's "idol worship" (materialism, etc.) with worshiping the true God. Calvin also suggests that we learn to vow nothing but what God approves. There is a danger in vowing this and that "to God indiscriminately" and not regarding what the Lord requires or approves. Perhaps the main theological point of the passage is expressed by Calvin in his closing prayer: Jonah is "an awful example of thy wrath against all who are rebellious and disobedient to thee..." (Calvin p. 71) This includes those he has chosen as his own as was the case with Jonah! Another point might be how God is able to accomplish his purpose even when we are not faithful. This is to the glory of God and not a reason to be careless and disobedient!

Summary and Conclusion:

No emendations were made because there was no textual evidence to base it on. Also, there was no textual evidence to allow agreement with the suggestion that "the LORD" in verse 16a should not be included as part of the text. Also, I have chosen to parse as a preposition + masculine singular noun + 3MS suffix instead of a preposition + Qal infinitive + 3MS suffix even though the translations would be the same. I found no great disagreements in the comparison of translations. It is interesting to see how some have handled the division of the chapters. I could see where following the same procedure of changing the numbering could cause confusion if done too often.

There is a lot of Theology in this passage especially in the last verse. The response of the men in Jonah 1:16 is similar to the response of the disciples in Mark 4:41 ("Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!") Also, there are a number of passages that refer the temple being destroyed and then rebuilt in three days (Matt. 26:61, 27:40, Mark 14:58, and 15:29). There are also passages that predict that Jesus will rise from the dead after three days (Matt. 27:63, Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:34). In John 2:19-22, however, these two events are said to be referring to the same thing. However, perhaps the most relevant are Matt. 16:4 ("A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah..."), 12:39-41 and Luke 11:29-32. The question is what does Jesus mean by the "sign of Jonah?" Matt. 12:40 gives us the answer, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Therefore, the sign will be Jesus' resurrection from the dead! (I Corinthians 15:4)

For implications and applications see above ("Suggestions for Preaching").