

JONAH — A Drama in Five Acts

by Hans Walter Wolff

First Act

Commission and Escape

Characters : Yahweh **and Jonah**

Place: **On the way to Joppa**

Text: 1:1-3

'There once came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, the word of Yahweh, saying:

 'Rise and go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim against it. For its wickedness has come to my attention."

'Then Jonah rose to escape to Tarshish, away from Yahweh. He went down to Joppa, located a ship heading to Tarshish, paid for his passage, and went (down) aboard to go with them to Tarshish, away from Yahweh.

Second Act

Jonah's Fear of God and the Sailors' Fear of God

Characters : Yahweh, sailors, Jonah, the captain

Place: On the sea

Text: 1:4-16

(Scene 1 - Yahweh and the Sailors)

'Now, as Yahweh threw a great wind upon the sea so that there was a mighty tempest upon the sea and so that the ship threatened to break up, 'the sailors fell into fright (feared). Everyone cried to his own god. They threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten its load.

(Scene 2 - Sailors, Captain. Jonah)

'Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the inner part of the ship, had lain down, and had fallen fast asleep, as the captain came to him and said:

 "How can you sleep' Get up! Call upon your God! Perhaps the god will take interest in us so that we don't perish."

'Then they said to one another:

 "Come on! Let's cast lots so that we might learn on whose account this evil has come upon us."

They cast the lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 'Then they said to him: "Tell us! On whose account this evil has come upon us' What is your profession? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what nation are you?"

He said to them:

 "I am a Hebrew, and I fear Yahweh, the God of heaven who made the

'For the English translation of the text of Jonah and the lectures, thanks are due to Elisabeth Kohl and Rod Hutton.



Drawing by Judy Oerring

sea and the dry land."

"Then the men feared greatly (were exceedingly afraid) and said to him:

"Why have you done this?"

You see, the men had learned that he was trying to escape from Yahweh, for he had told them so. "They said to him:

"What shall we do with you, so that the sea will calm down for us?"

For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. "He said to them:

"Take me and throw me into the sea; then the sea will calm down for you. For I know that this great storm has come upon you because of me.

¹But the men rowed hard to reach dry land, but they were unable, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. "Then they called upon Yahweh and said:

"Oh Yahweh! Let us not perish because of this man's life. Do not lay on us innocent blood, for you, Yahweh, have done as it pleased you." "Then they took Jonah and threw him into the sea.

(Scene 3 - Yahweh and the Sailors)

Then the sea ceased its raging, "and the men feared Yahweh greatly. They offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows.

Third Act

Turn-About and New Commission

Characters: **Yahweh and Jonah**

Place: On the way to Nineveh

Text: 2:1-3:3a

(Scene 1)

²But Yahweh had appointed a large fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. "Then Jonah cried out to Yahweh from the belly of the fish. "Then Yahweh spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto dry land.

(Scene 2)

"Then the word of Yahweh came to Jonah a second time, saying:

"Rise and go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I am now giving to you!"

"Then Jonah rose up and went to Nineveh, according to Yahweh's word.

Fourth Act

Jonah's Sermon, Nineveh's About-Face, and God's Compassion

Characters: Jonah, the men of Nineveh, the king, Yahweh

Place: Nineveh

Text: 3:3b-10

(Scene 1 - Jonah and the People of Nineveh)

³'At that time Nineveh was a large city (even) for God, a three days' journey in breadth. 'And Jonah set about to enter the city, walking a day's journey. Then he proclaimed saying,

"Forty more days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed."

(Scene 2 - The People of Nineveh and God)

"But the people of Nineveh believed in God. They proclaimed a fast and donned sackcloth, everyone from the greatest to the least. For the word had reached the king of Nineveh. He stepped down from his throne, threw off his regal vestments, donned sackcloth and sat down in the dust. 'And then he had proclaimed in Nineveh:

"This is an edict of the king and his nobles: Men and beast, cattle and sheep shall refrain from eating. They shall not graze, they shall not drink; rather they shall don sackcloth, men and beasts, and shall call upon God mightily. And they shall turn about, each and every one, away from their wicked ways and from the violence which is in their hands. Who knows whether the God will once more regret (his decision), and then turn from his burning anger, so that we do not perish."

(Scene 3 - God and the People of Nineveh)

"And the God saw their deeds, how they turned away from their wicked ways. Then the God regretted the evil he had said he would do to them. And he did not do it.

Fifth Act

Jonah's Anger and God's Compassion

Characters: Jonah and Yahweh

Place: East of Nineveh

Text: 4:1-11

'Then a great wickedness overcame Jonah and he became angry. 'He cried out to Yahweh and said:

"Oh, Yahweh! Was not that just as I thought while I was still in my own country? That is why I at first wanted to flee to Tarshish. For I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, patient and abounding in love, who regrets the evil. "So then, Yahweh, take my life from me! For I am better off dead than alive."

'But Yahweh said:

"Is it right for you to be angry?"

'For Jonah had left the city and had sat down east of the city. There he had built himself a shack and had sat down in its shade until he would see what might happen in the city. "'Then Yahweh-God appointed a castor-oil bush. It grew up over Jonah in order to provide shade for his head, in order to pry him out of his wickedness. Jonah rejoiced greatly because of the castor-oil bush. 'But God appointed a worm, just as dawn was breaking the next morning. It attacked the castor-oil bush, and the bush withered away. ⁸And as the sun rose God appointed a burning east wind. Then the sun beat down on Jonah's head, and he became terribly faint. So he begged that he might die, and he said :

"I am better off dead than alive."

`But God said to Jonah:

"Is it right for you to be angry because of the castor-oil bush?"

'Then Yahweh said :

"You feel sorry for the castor-oil bush, which you have neither cared for nor nurtured, which grew up within one night and perished away within one night. "Should I then not feel sorry for Nineveh, the great city, in which there live more than one hundred and twenty thousand people, who do not know how to distinguish between right and left, and much cattle?"

