



Gutenberg College Summer Institute 2015
REUNION: Tanakh and the Gospel of Matthew
Talk 19: Reunion of Jonah and Matthew 12:40
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Earle's Interpretation of Matthew 12:38-42

The Jewish leaders ask Jesus to prove that he has been chosen by God to speak on His behalf as a prophet and even to prove that he is the Messiah, if they are aware of his claims to be such. Jesus responds to them by accusing them of being evil and then goads them to think more carefully about their immoral condition by saying two things to them.

1. He tells them that the sign that they should be looking for is his own death and resurrection that will be similar to Jonah's three day experience in the stomach of the fish. Just as Jonah was confined to the fish's stomach for three days and then released by God, Jesus will be confined to death for three days and then released back into life by God.

2. Jesus also tells the Jewish leaders that Gentile "dogs," i.e., the *goyeem* of Nineveh, who repented of their evil at the teaching of Jonah, will be more acceptable to God than them at the final judgment by virtue of their attraction to truth, which will, in contrast, put the Jewish leaders in a condemnable position before God.

In fact, by virtue of offering a second example of a Gentile's condemning the Jewish leaders, i.e., that of the Queen of the South (a woman!), the "sign of Jonah" appears currently to be more about Jesus' warning the Jewish leaders to repent of their moral depravity, while pointing to a later opportunity for them to be granted their request of a sign through the three day experience of his death and resurrection.

Matthew 12:22-45

- 22 Then, a demon-possessed man, who was blind and deaf, was brought to him. And he healed him, with the result that the blind and deaf man both spoke and saw.
- 23 All the crowds were amazed and were saying, "Is this not the **Son of David?**"
- 24 But when the Pharisees heard them, they said, "This man does not cast out demons except by Beelzebul, the leader of the demons."
- 25 And understanding their inner thoughts, he said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is destroyed, and any city divided against itself will not stand.
- 26 "Therefore, if the adversary casts out the adversary, he is divided against himself. So how will his kingdom stand?
- 27 "In addition, if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? As a result, they will be your judges.
- 28 "Instead, if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the **Kingdom of God** has reached as far as you.
- 29 "Or how can someone enter into a strong man's house and steal his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then, he will plunder his house.
- 30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.
- 31 "Consequently, I say to you, any evil and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.
- 32 "Thus, whoever makes a statement against the **Son of Man**, it will be forgiven him. But, whoever makes a statement against the Set Apart Spirit, it will not be forgiven him—either in this age or in the future one.
- 33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree rotten and its fruit rotten, because a tree is known by its fruit.
- 34 "You children of snakes, how can you speak good things when you are evil, because the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart?
- 35 "The good man sends good things out of a good repository, and the evil man sends evil things out of an evil repository.
- 36 "And I say to you that every useless word which men speak, they will give an accounting of it in the judgment day.
- 37 "For by your words you will be justified/forgiven, and by your words you will be condemned."
- 38 Then, some of the scribes and Pharisees replied to him, "Rabbi, we want to see a **sign (σημείον)** from you."
- 39 **But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation/race seeks after a sign, but no sign will be given them except the sign of Jonah the prophet.**
- 40 "**For just as Jonah was in the stomach of the sea monster for three days and three nights <Jonah 1:17>, so also the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.**¹
- 41 "**The men of Nineveh will rise up with this generation/race at the judgment, and they will condemn it, because they repented when Jonah spoke. And, behold, something greater than Jonah is here.**²
- 42 "The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation/race at the judgment, and she will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And, behold, something greater than Solomon is here."³
- 43 "Whenever an unclean spirit goes out from a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and it does not find it.
- 44 "Then, it says, 'I will return to my domicile, from which I came.' And, when it comes, it finds it standing empty, having been swept and made tidy and neat.
- 45 "Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there. Thus, the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. So will it also be with this evil generation/race."⁴

¹ ὡσπερ γὰρ ἦν Ἰωνᾶς ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ τοῦ κήτους τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας, οὕτως ἔσται ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας – LXX, καὶ ἦν Ἰωνᾶς ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ τοῦ κήτους τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας.

² ἄνδρες Νινευίται ἀναστήσονται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ κατακρινουσὶν αὐτήν, ὅτι μετενόησαν εἰς τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰωνᾶ, καὶ ἰδοὺ πλεῖον Ἰωνᾶ ὤδε –

³ 2 Chronicles 9:1-12

⁴ The Jews cast out the evil of their moral depravity by exposing themselves to the teaching of the Bible. However, their moral depravity returns to find simply a biblical perspective that it then exploits to come up with something even

Jonah

1:1 The message of Yahweh (הַבְּרִיָּה־יְהוָה) (λόγος κυρίου) **came to Jonah, son of Amittai**, saying,⁵

1:2 **“Arise and go to Nineveh**, the great city, and cry out against it, because their evil **has ascended into My presence.**”

1:3 However, Jonah **rose up to flee to Tarshish⁶ from the presence of Yahweh**. So he **went down to Joppa** and found a ship **going to Tarshish**. He paid the fare and **went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh**.

1:4 But Yahweh violently threw (הִטְּוֹ) (ἐξήγειρεν) a great wind at the sea, and there was a huge storm on the sea, so that the ship was about to break up.

1:5 Now, the sailors became afraid, and each man cried out to his god, and they hurled (הִטְּוֹ) (ἐκβολὴν ἐποιήσαντο) the cargo, which was in the ship, into the sea in order to lighten it for their sakes. But Jonah **had gone down into the hold of the ship**, lain down, and fallen asleep.

1:6 So the captain approached him and said,

“Why are you sleeping? Get up and call on your god. Perhaps, your god will care for us so that we will not die.”

1:7 Each man said to his mate,

“Come, let us cast lots, so that we may learn on whose account this calamity has come upon us?”

So they cast lots, and the lot fell to Jonah.

1:8 Then, they said to him,

“Tell us, now! Why has this calamity come upon us? What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your land? From what people are you?”

1:9 He said to them,

“I am a Hebrew, and I fear Yahweh, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

1:10 Then, the men became frightened out of their gourds and said to him,

“What is this that you have done?”

For the men realized that he **was fleeing from the presence of Yahweh**, because he told them.

more evil—Pharisaism and the rejection of the Messiah. Thus, Jesus is telling the scribes and the Pharisees that they are as evil as people who are demon-possessed.

⁵ Underline = something theologically relevant. **Bold** = movement to or from someone/somewhere.

⁶ תַּרְשִׁישׁ – Tarshish, exact location unknown. But definitely west of Israel in the Mediterranean Sea, perhaps in the Aegean Sea near Greece.

1:11 So, they said to him,

“What should we do to you so that the sea may become calm for us?”

Because the sea was becoming increasingly stormy.

1:12 He replied,

“**Pick me up and hurl me** (וְהִטְּוּ לִי) (ἐμβάλετέ με) **into the sea**, and the sea will become calm for you, because I know that it is on account of me that this great storm has come upon you.”

1:13 However, the men dug their oars into the water in order **to return to dry land**, but they were unable, because the sea was becoming stormier against them.

1:14 Then, they called to Yahweh,

“Please, Yahweh, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life, and do not put innocent blood on us, because You, Yahweh, have done just as You pleased.”

1:15 Thus, they **picked up Jonah and hurled him** (וְהִטְּוּ) (ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν) **into the sea**, and the sea stopped its raging.

1:16 As a result, the men greatly feared Yahweh, and they presented tokens of loyalty to Yahweh and made solemn promises.

1:17 Yahweh appointed (וַיִּנְּן) (προσέταξεν) a large fish to swallow Jonah, and **Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights.**

2:1 And Jonah prayed to Yahweh his God **from the stomach of the fish**

2:2 and said,

“I called out of my distress to Yahweh, and He answered me.

“**From the depth of Sheol** I cried out.

“You heard my voice.

2:3 “You had cast me (וַתַּשְׁלִיכֵנִי) (ἀπέρριψάς με) into the deep, into the heart of the seas, so that the current engulfed me.

“All your waves and breakers passed over me.

2:4 “Then I said,

‘I have been **driven out** (וַיִּגְּדֵשׁוּ) (ἀπώσμαι) **from before Your eyes.**

‘Nevertheless, I will again look to Your sacred temple (אֶל-הַיְכָל קִדְשֶׁךָ) (πρὸς τὸν ναὸν τὸν ἅγιόν σου).

2:5 ‘**The waters encompassed me** right up to my life.

‘**The deep surrounded me.**

‘Seaweed was wrapped around my head.

2:6 ‘I **went down to the roots of the mountain.**

‘**The earth with its posts was around me** into perpetuity.

‘But You, Yahweh my God, have caused my life to ascend from the pit (וַתַּעַל מִשְׁחַת תַּי) (ἀναβήτω φθορὰ ζωῆς μου).

2:7 'While my life was fainting within me, I remembered Yahweh, and my prayer came to You, to Your sacred temple (אֶל־הַיְכָל קָדְשְׁךָ) (εἰς ναὸν ἅγιόν σου).

2:8 'Those who have regard for the emptiness of the emptiness abandon their loyal love.

2:9 'And as for me, with the voice of thanksgiving I will sacrifice to You.

'That which I have solemnly promised I will complete.

'Yeshua (יֵשׁוּעָה) (σωτηρίου) belongs to Yahweh.'"

2:10 Afterwards, Yahweh spoke (וַיִּצְרַח) (προσετάγη) to the fish, and it **vomited** Jonah onto the dry land.

3:1 The message of Yahweh (דְּבַר־יְהוָה) (λόγος κυρίου) **came to Jonah** a second time, saying,

3:2 "**Arise and go to Nineveh**, the great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am telling you."

3:3 Thus, Jonah arose, and he **went to Nineveh** according to the message of Yahweh. Now, Nineveh was a great city belonging to God, three days' walk.

3:4 Jonah **began to go through the city** one day's walk. And he cried out, saying,

"Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

3:5 And the people of Nineveh believed in God (וַיִּאֱמָנוּ...בְּאֱלֹהִים) (ἐνεπίστευσαν...τῷ θεῷ), and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.⁷

3:6 When the message reached the **king of Nineveh**, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on dust.

3:7 Then, he cried out and said,

"**In Nineveh**, by the decree of the king and his nobles, let no man, beast, herd, or flock taste anything. Do not let them eat or drink water.

3:8 "But man and beast shall cover himself with sackcloth. And let them call to God earnestly, and let each man turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

3:9 "Who knows. God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger, so that we will not die."

3:10 When God saw their actions, that they turned from their evil way, then God relented from the calamity which He had declared to bring upon them, and He did not do it.

4:1 **However, it really upset Jonah, and he got angry.**

4:2 Then, he prayed to Yahweh, saying,

"Please, Yahweh, was this not my concern while I was still on my own turf (וְלֹא־אָנֹכִי דַבָּרִי עַד־הַיּוֹתֵי עַל־אֲדָמָתִי) (οὐχ οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι μου ἔτι ὄντος μου ἐν τῇ γῆ μου) ? Therefore, I headed towards **fleeing**

⁷ Cf. Genesis 15:6 – וַיִּאֱמָן בֵּיתָאֱמָן לִי צְדָקָה – LXX – καὶ ἐπίστευσεν Ἀβραμ τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην

to Tarshish, because I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loyal love, who relents in regard to calamity.

4:3 “So now, Yahweh, please take my life from me, because my death is better than my life.”

4:4 Yahweh said,

“Do you have a good reason for your anger?”

4:5 So Jonah **went out from the city**, and **he sat east of it**. There, he made a shelter for himself and sat under it until he could see what happened **in the city**.

4:6 Yahweh God appointed (יָצַח) (προσέταξεν) a plant, and it grew over Jonah in order to be shade over his head in order to deliver him from his discomfort. **And Jonah greatly rejoiced over the plant.**

4:7 Then, when dawn came the next day, God appointed (יָצַח) (προσέταξεν) a worm, and it attacked the plant, and it withered.

4:8 When the sun rose, God appointed (יָצַח) (προσέταξεν) a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head, so that he became faint **and begged for his life to die**, saying,

“My death is better than my life.”

4:9 Then, God said to Jonah,

“Do you have a good reason for your anger in regard to the plant?”

And he said,

“Yes, I have a good reason—even unto death.”

4:10 So Yahweh said,

“You acted kindly (יָרַח) (σὺ ἐφείσω) towards the plant for which you did not labor, which you did not grow, which grew during the night and which died during the night.

4:11 “May I not act kindly (יָרַח) (φείσομαι) towards Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons, who do not know their right hand from their left, as well as many animals?”

Some Important Interpretative Issues in Matthew 12:22-45 and Jonah

Matthew 12:22-45

1. What do the crowds mean by the phrase “Son of David” (v. 23)?
2. What is a “demon,” and who is Beelzebul (v. 24)?
3. What does Jesus mean by his casting out demons “by the Spirit of God” (v. 28)?
4. What is the Kingdom of God (v. 28)?
5. What is “blasphemy against the Spirit” that will not be forgiven vs. “a statement against the Son of Man” that can be forgiven (vs. 31, 32)?
6. To what does the metaphor of the tree refer (v. 33)?
7. What does Jesus mean by calling the Pharisees “evil” (v. 34)?
8. What is a “useless word” and what is the “judgment day” (v. 36)?
9. What do the scribes and Pharisees’ mean by “sign” (σημειον)?
 - a. An extra-ordinary and miraculous (can be caused only by the transcendent Creator) event within the creation that clearly demonstrates that the person who is “performing” the sign has a special and specific calling and responsibility from God that requires especially the nation of Israel to listen to and obey what he has to say.
 - b. ?
10. How much of the story of Jonah does Jesus intend to apply to his statements such that the story constitutes a “sign” for the scribes and Pharisees?
 - a. all of it
 - b. only the parts of 1) Jonah’s experience in the stomach of the fish and 2) the Ninevites’ repentance
 - c. “b” plus other parts by inference
 - i. Jonah’s initial refusal to go to Nineveh
 - ii. The response of the sailors to Jonah’s situation and to God
 - iii. Jonah’s response to God’s kind actions towards Nineveh
 - iv. God’s final statement to Jonah about His sovereign kindness
11. What kind of “rising up” and “condemning” does Jesus mean with respect to the “men of Nineveh” and “this generation/race?”

- a. The Ninevites who demonstrated authentic repentance will stand at the judgment throne of God and personally and vocally accuse the Jews of Jesus' generation of rebelling against God and, therefore, deserving His eternal condemnation.
- b. The Ninevites who demonstrated authentic repentance will be raised from the dead like all other human beings just before the time of the final judgment and be judged by God, such that the biblical inwardness that they displayed on earth and their receiving God's eternal mercy will in and of themselves proclaim a kind of condemning message against the unbelieving Jews of Jesus' generation (and all other unbelievers, for that matter).

Jonah

1. Where was Nineveh and why was it a "great city" (1:2)?
2. What kind of evil had the people of Nineveh been committing (1:2)?
3. Why did Jonah not want to go to Nineveh (1:3)?
4. How did God "throw" a wind at the sea (1:4)?
5. Who were the gods of the crew of the ship (1:5)?
6. How much did Jonah believe the statement that he makes in 1:9?
7. What was Jonah expecting to happen to him if the men threw him into the sea (1:12)?
8. How did God "appoint" a fish to swallow a man (1:17)?
9. How did Jonah stay alive in the stomach of the fish for three days (2:1ff)?
10. What were the various theological beliefs that Jonah expressed in his prayers (2:2-9)?
11. What was God's "sacred temple" (2:7)?
12. Is "belonging to God" the best way to translate לאלהים in the whole statement וְנִינְוָה הָיְתָה עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה לְאֱלֹהִים , and what does this mean?
13. What kind of overthrowing did God mean (3:4)?
14. Which king was ruling over Assyria at this time (3:6ff.)?
15. Why was Jonah upset (4:1-3)?
16. Why did Jonah think that he had good reason to be angry (4:9)?
17. What was the point of God's statements in 4:10,11?