

2017

# Exploring Paul as the Anti-Jonah in Acts

Collin Battaglia  
*Ouachita Baptist University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors\\_theses](http://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses)



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Christianity Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Battaglia, Collin, "Exploring Paul as the Anti-Jonah in Acts" (2017). *Honors Theses*. 245.  
[http://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors\\_theses/245](http://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses/245)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact [mortensona@obu.edu](mailto:mortensona@obu.edu).

OUACHITA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY  
CARL GOODSON HONORS PROGRAM

EXPLORING PAUL AS THE ANTI-JONAH IN ACTS  
BY: COLLIN BATTAGLIA

DIRECTED BY: DR. JOSEPH R. DODSON

SPRING 2017

## Introduction

Biblical authors often employ literary techniques to communicate their messages with enhanced force. They were not, for example, interested in theology or historiography alone, but also in aesthetics.<sup>1</sup> In other words, their focus was not directed solely on simply presenting information, but also on *how* the material was presented literarily. Authors would utilize many techniques in their writing such as repetition, chiasms, and typology to connect stories, to emphasize themes, and to flesh out nuanced truths. This paper will argue that Luke, in the Book of Acts, implements the aesthetic technique of allusion and typology to enrich his narrative. More specifically, this paper will seek to demonstrate Luke's portrayal of Paul as the anti-Jonah in Acts.

Typologies occur in biblical writing “when individuals or events in some manner foreshadow future people and events by describing parallel circumstances and the meanings that develop within them.”<sup>2</sup> Or, as defined by J. Daniel Hays, typology is “a biblical event, person, or institution that serves as an example or pattern for other events, persons, or institutions.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the use of typology is often an intentional connection made by the author between a character in the text and a prefigurative model.<sup>4</sup> A typological connection makes use of common themes, situations, events, and even similar phrasing to compare two separate entities. This

---

<sup>1</sup> Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 41.

<sup>2</sup> See Joseph R. Dodson, “Why Should We Care About Allegories and Such,” in *Reading Scripture Deeply: Millennials Take a Fresh Look at the Bible* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 20.

<sup>3</sup> J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 81.

<sup>4</sup> A clear example might be Christ as the second Adam in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5. Note specifically how Jesus is compared to and contrasted with Adam in the roles he fulfills. Adam is even explicitly identified as a “type of the one who was to come” in Romans 5:14.

invites the reader to consider how the two are similar and what consequent implications arise for the understanding of the text. Logically, then, an anti-type would be a character who reverses the symbolic nature of another model while maintaining connections to the original. This paper will seek to point out how the themes and details present in Paul's conversion and journey to Rome connect him to the story of Jonah while simultaneously overturning the theological precedent set by Jonah as his opposite.

Throughout this paper, I will follow Dan Allison's idea that authors may make implicit citations rather than explicit statements to tie together different texts. In a sense, then, texts can be "dug up and transplanted without acknowledgement" by an author.<sup>5</sup> A writer might simply choose to "retell events in a way that intends to recall similar circumstances."<sup>6</sup> Using this framework, it can be argued that Luke interfaces with different texts throughout his writing without making explicit reference to them. In addition, by alluding to a former text, the new text can be juxtaposed to the old. As differences are noticed, the allusion can "allow the new text to achieve a distinct identity to the older work."<sup>7</sup> More specifically, it can be determined that Luke intends to interact with the Jonah narrative through his own narrative based on similar circumstances and key words. In addition, the unique elements present in Luke's account demonstrate Paul's distinctiveness as a faithful prophet of God in contrast to Jonah.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 19–20.

<sup>6</sup> Dale C. Allison, 19-20. cf. Joseph R Dodson, "The Revision of Exodus 32-34 in and around the First Gospel." Delivered at the University of Durham, UK on March 13, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>8</sup> Dale C. Allison, 19-20.

To achieve our purpose, then, it must first be established that Luke is predisposed to use typology in his writing to engage with texts external to his narrative. Following this fact, an examination of the plot of Jonah is necessary. This will provide a comparative backdrop when examining Paul's mission in Acts to the nations and also his trip to Rome. Once this is done, I will summarize Paul's trip to Rome, focusing on details relevant to the study. I will then trace how Luke uses Paul, an unexpected man of obedience, as a total reversal of Jonah, the unexpected man of disobedience.

Moving forward, I will argue that Jonah's disobedience was meant to be representative of Israel's disobedience and overall refusal to accept the gospel. The Gentiles, meanwhile, are welcomed into the salvific scope of God's kingdom. Where Jonah refuses to accept God's concern for his cultural enemies (i.e. the Ninevites) so also the Jews refuse to accept that God could have in mind Gentiles for salvation, and both Jonah and the Jews in Acts react in anger. Paul, however, understands that God's salvific scope extends to both Jews and Gentiles who respond to the Gospel of Christ in faith and follows Christ in faithful obedience, despite his initial opposition to the faith. These observations will, in a sense, serve to complement one of Luke's goals in Acts which is to validate the church; specifically a church that includes Gentiles for salvation.

### **The Extent of the Study**

It is helpful to note in advance the scope and limits of this study. First, any allusions to Jonah present in Acts should not be overemphasized but rather be understood to serve in a background role to the overall message. They should be interpreted with care so as not to be read counter to Luke's intended purpose. In other words, a reading of Paul's journey to Rome with

Jonah in mind should not change the overall meaning of the text, but rather enrich the intended message of Acts, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding. Thus the Jonah-Paul comparisons and contrasts made in this paper should be understood as being peripheral in Luke's writing and open to interpretation and discussion rather than being central to the message communicated by Luke. That being said, the message of Acts is multifold, and its purpose is complex. Scholars tend to argue that Acts is best read as ancient historiography<sup>9</sup>, whose purpose is, among other things, to validate the church for those who question its legitimacy.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, the observations made in this paper are those that highlight Luke's mastery of weaving biblical themes together in order to strengthen his message. They will also demonstrate how Luke provides points of intrigue throughout his writing intended for those who catch on to his subtlety.<sup>11</sup> The merit of this study comes in how, by understanding the nuances of Luke, Paul's journey to Rome in Acts can be illuminated when read with Jonah in mind. In

---

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of genre see Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 7-39. See also Donald V. Gawronski, *History: Meaning and Method* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1975) 59-60. Witherington says that "Luke and Acts together must be seen as some sort of two-volume historiographical work. Luke in his second volume is writing a continuous narrative about the growth and development of a remarkable historical phenomenon, early Christianity, which he believed was the result of divinely initiated social change."

<sup>10</sup> Schnabel, 73. The complexity of Acts is evidenced by the varied opinions of scholars on how the purpose of Acts should be understood. Some argue the one should read Acts as primarily apologetic. Others argue for a primarily didactic reading and still others a more kerygmatic reading. See Richard N. Longenecker, "Acts," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 703. Acts should probably be read in light of all three of these influences as the birth and authenticity of the church cannot be divorced from its teaching, the evidence of its power, or the gospel that it preached.

<sup>11</sup> Consider Luke's comparison of the Passion of Stephen with that of Christ, for example. The trial is similar in many aspects (false witnesses, nature of the charges brought, trial before the High Priest and Sanhedrin, etc.). Even the speech of Stephen mirrors that of Christ, thus connecting his death and life as one lived in close union with Christ. Other examples might include similarities between Ananias and Sapphira and figures like Achan and Nadab and Abihu. This will be explored in greater detail below. Luke appeals to many OT texts from the prophets as well, often included in the speeches.

addition, a study of Paul as an anti-Jonah in Acts to this point has not been adequately pursued academically.

Most scholars who address possible imagery connections between Jonah and Paul do so rather briefly. For instance, Eckhard Schnabel notes that Luke is possibly making an allusion to Jonah in the shipwreck account of Acts, but he quickly dismisses it. This is, however, less of a dismissal of Jonah imagery in Acts than a dismissal of those who question the historicity of the shipwreck in Acts. Schnabel argues against those claiming that the shipwreck account in Acts is fabled, and on par with, according to them, the Jonah account or the Odysseus legend.<sup>12</sup> This view interprets the Jonah narrative as mythology or a fictional story designed to communicate truths about God without accepting the historicity of the actual events. I agree with Schnabel that the events in Acts should be read as historical, but I also believe that at the same time Luke intends his audience to make thematic connections between Paul and Jonah (perhaps as well as other sources) for literary intrigue and to develop his message further. It is well within reason to read Luke's writing in this way without assuming that Jonah or Paul's journey is ahistorical. Moreover, I. Howard Marshall, also declares that Luke does not intend to insinuate a Jonah typology specifically in Acts 27:18 when the crew casts their cargo overboard. He, however, gives no discussion to substantiate why this claim is merited.<sup>13</sup> This seems to be an inadequate approach. Instead of simply taking one word from one verse without considering context, we should explore the text more widely before coming to any concise and definitive conclusions as to whether or not Luke intends for there to be typological connections in the text.

---

<sup>12</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 38.

<sup>13</sup> I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," *The New Testament's use of the Old Testament Commentary*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 599.

Other scholars note that there are elements in Luke’s writing reminiscent of Jonah, and some even state that Luke’s narrative appears to be influenced by Jonah. Unfortunately, most fail to explore this connection in depth or its implications for a richer understanding of the text.<sup>14</sup> Craig Keener probably does the best job exploring the possibility of Jonah allusions in the shipwreck narrative. He notes that these connections “could belong to a larger subtext” in the chapter rather than to just to Acts 27:18 when the crew tosses the cargo overboard. Keener recognizes that not all of the elements of the story of Jonah are present in Acts 27, such as Jonah’s “ingestion by a hefty marine organism,” but I will suggest below that the theme of the humbling and recommissioning of Jonah by God is present in Paul’s conversion story earlier in Acts, and that Luke alludes to this event. Keener concludes his brief discussion of potential Jonah allusions in Acts 27 by commenting that “there may be some value, however, *especially in contrasts*, so long as we do not make literary imitation of Jonah Luke’s primary purpose.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Typology in Luke**

Luke frequently makes allusions and intentional connections in his works in order to strengthen his message and highlight certain aspects of different characters. I will briefly survey a few examples of Luke’s use of typology/allusions (specifically in Acts) to demonstrate that the technique is common to Luke’s writing style. To clarify, an allusion “requires ‘an echo of

---

<sup>14</sup> For example, John B. Polhill in his New American Commentary on Acts, Robert W. Wall in his New Interpreters Bible Commentary volume on Acts, Ajith Fernando in his NIV Application Commentary on Acts, and F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 474. Also F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976). All of these mention in some way that the storm at sea pericope (especially 27:18) resembles the Jonah narrative or even that Luke seems to be drawing on Jonah imagery in Acts. Other scholars include Matthew Henry, R. W. Wall, G. W. H. Lampe, and C. K. Barrett.

<sup>15</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Volume 4 – 24:1-28:31, Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 3559. Italics mine.



sufficiently familiar yet distinctive and meaningful elements.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, allusion can be used to point out a typological relationship as writers interface with separate texts. A marker, or “an identifiable element or pattern in one text belonging to another independent text,” signals that an allusion may be present.<sup>17</sup> Like a joke, allusions generally “place familiar material in new, often surprising contexts.”<sup>18</sup> Once sufficient evidence is given that Luke’s employs this literary device, it will give weight to the argument that Luke implements this additionally in his account of Paul. As we will see, Luke’s use of allusions and typology can be obvious or subtle.

The first example of exploration is Pentecost. Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, tells of the Holy Spirit filling the first disciples. The coming of the Holy Spirit brings also a miracle of hearing.<sup>19</sup> People in Jerusalem of all different nationalities, heritages, and languages were suddenly able to understand what was spoken by the disciples so that God’s name would be glorified. This is a reversal of what takes place in Genesis 11 at the tower of Babel. In Genesis 11, all people were united in language, but God confused (συγχέω) their language because they sought to make a name for themselves by building a tower that would reach the heavens. God confused their languages because it became clear that they would have succeeded in their efforts while united.

In Acts 2, the miracle of hearing allows for all people present at the time to understand the gospel, and for the evangelistic efforts of the disciples to be successful. The response of the

---

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin D. Sommer, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin D. Sommer, 11. Cf. Ben-Porat, “Poetics of Literary Allusion.”

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin D. Sommer, 19.

<sup>19</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 115. There are differing opinions between scholars as to whether this was a miracle of speaking, called *xenolalia* (the disciples miraculously spoke other known languages), or a miracle of hearing (the crowd miraculously understood what was being spoken). contra Schnabel, 115.

people to this phenomenon is amazement and surprise (συγγέω) when they hear their own languages being spoken. This is the same verb used in the story of Babel, but in Genesis it is used to express how God executes the confusion of languages which results in the inability of the people to communicate.<sup>20</sup> Although normally one verb may not be enough to be a marker for typology, the other parallels indicate that Luke is pulling from Genesis in his narrative.

Although the confusion of languages was not permanently reversed with the coming of the Holy Spirit, for a moment the barriers of communication were broken down, and Luke seems to be emphasizing that fact, especially when compared to the opposite events that took place at Babel. The point that becomes clear when this comparison is made is that nothing will be impossible for the community of God. While united in the Spirit, they will be successful in their endeavors. This example in Acts of the reversal of previous biblical events adds depth to the reader's understanding when the texts are compared.<sup>21</sup>

In Acts 5 the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira share resemblances to the death of Achan in the Old Testament. Ananias and Sapphira, after selling some property, were both killed quite suddenly. Rather than just giving a portion of the proceeds honestly, they conspired together to lie about the percent they were giving. Lying about the proceeds from the sale, they only gave part to the church. They desired to keep some of the profit for themselves while making it seem they were giving it all to the church. Separately they approached Peter with the same lie about how much they sold the field for. They each respectively died instantly as a result of lying to the Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>20</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 116.

<sup>21</sup> See Dodson, "Why Should We Care About Allegories and Such," 21-22.

Similar divine punishment took place when Nadab and Abihu failed to respect the holiness of God by neglecting proper priestly methods in the tabernacle. This lack of reverence resulted in their consumption by fire. Achan is probably a closer parallel to this passage because he also “misappropriated material goods from Ai that did not belong to him.”<sup>22</sup> They both “kept back” (νοσφιζω) from God what they considered valuable. Luke intentionally uses the same verb here in Acts that was used in Joshua 7 to connect the two stories. Achan broke a direct command from God because he valued material wealth over honoring God. He stole what was dedicated to God after Israel conquered Jericho at the start of the conquest of Canaan. This resulted in his death as punishment for his dishonor of God’s commands. Strengthening this connection is the fact that in all of these occasions the wrath and holiness of God was unleashed upon those who shirked their commitment to God or failed to treat Him as holy and worthy of reverence. These episodes of divine judgment set the example for new communities and demonstrated that God’s holiness cannot be violated.<sup>23</sup>

Later in Acts 6-7 Luke paints the life, trial and death of Stephen in striking likeness to the life, trial and death of Christ. Stephen spoke with power and wisdom and those who opposed him could not withstand his arguments for the faith. They instigated false accusations of blasphemy and brought him before a council where he was witnessed against falsely (6:13). Stephen sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God as he concludes his speech and is stoned (7:55-58).<sup>24</sup> As he is being stoned he prays for Jesus to receive his spirit, and as he draws his final breaths he

---

<sup>22</sup> Schnabel, 279.

<sup>23</sup> Nadab and Abihu were among the first priests to serve in the tabernacle. Achan was among those who first entered the Promised Land. Ananias and Sapphira were among the first in the early church.

<sup>24</sup> Jesus is standing in action, in contrast to sitting; cf. Luke 22:69.

prays for the Lord not to hold their sin against them (7:59-60). The life, trial, and death of Jesus includes all of these similar events – many almost exactly the same or similar in phrasing.<sup>25</sup> This is clearly intended by Luke to demonstrate Stephen’s unity with Christ in that he not only lived like Christ, but he died like Christ as well. His sacrifice, though tragic, paved the way for the Gospel to spread out from Jerusalem as the early adherents of the faith scattered.<sup>26</sup>

All of these connections should demonstrate that Luke was prone to make intentional connections and comparisons between biblical characters and events in his writing in order to communicate subtle truths.<sup>27</sup> With this fact established, the plots of Jonah and Acts can be examined for comparative purposes.

### **The Plot of Jonah**

The author of Jonah begins his work by announcing that the word of the Lord came to a man named Jonah, son of Amittai.<sup>28</sup> This immediately intimates that Jonah is a prophet, a man of God, and one who is expected to be faithful to God and to God’s message.<sup>29</sup> This expectation is

---

<sup>25</sup> Compare to Jesus’ trial and Crucifixion in Matthew 26:57-68 and Luke 22:69; 23:32-46. See Schnabel, 349,351,390,392-393 for scholarly recognition of these similarities.

<sup>26</sup> See Joseph R. Dodson, “The Good News of Jesus: Typology in the Gospels and Acts,” in *Reading Scripture Deeply: Millennials Take a Fresh Look at the Bible* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 68-69.

<sup>27</sup> In addition, within Acts itself there are striking similarities between Peter and Paul. This is not so much typology or allusion as it is an example of Luke’s intentional demonstration of similarities between Peter and Paul, thus establishing them as authorities in the early church. Their similarities point to the fact that God chose to work powerfully through them to further establish his church. Such similarities include the miracles they perform (examples include the healing of a leper, healing by extension of shadow or handkerchief, and resuscitation and their preaching and rebuking those who fall into sin). Buildings shook as a result of their piety and both experienced a miraculous freedom from the bondage of chains. See J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 298.

<sup>28</sup> This is probably the same Jonah, son of Amittai, who prophesied that Jeroboam II would restore the border of the Northern Kingdom of Israel – A prophecy that was fulfilled by God in 2 Kings 14:25.

<sup>29</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 202.

shattered immediately as Jonah flees from the presence of God. Jonah likely expected (naïvely) that if he fled from the nation of Israel, he could escape the will and presence of the Lord. It is possible that Jonah assumed that God only spoke to prophets within the land of Israel.<sup>30</sup> If this was true then it followed that God did not speak to those outside of the physical nation of Israel. But what caused Jonah, a prophet of God, so much distress that he attempted to flee from the presence of God, whom he was meant to serve?

The word of the Lord to Jonah was a commission to arise (LXX: ἀνίστημι), go and proclaim a message of judgement against the city of Nineveh and its inhabitants. The extent of its evil had caught God's attention, and the city of Nineveh needed to be confronted. Nineveh was the capital of the ruthless kingdom Assyria.<sup>31</sup> Assyria was the enemy of Israel, and so also then the enemy of Jonah. Although Israel had not yet been destroyed by Assyria at the time Jonah was sent to Nineveh to prophesy, they were still enemies of Israel during Jonah's lifetime and later readers would not forget the role they played in the devastation of the Northern kingdom.<sup>32</sup>

Prima facie, it seems as if Jonah ought to have been eager to pronounce God's judgement upon the people of Nineveh. But Jonah flees because he knows also of God's compassionate

---

<sup>30</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 450.

<sup>31</sup> James Bruckner, *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, NIV Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 28-30. Later it would be Shalmaneser V, one of the kings of Assyria, who would be responsible for the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital, Samaria, in 722 B.C. He also enslaved and scattered many Israelites. Not only was Assyria responsible for the dissolution of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but the Assyrians took pride in their gruesome and horrific treatment of their enemies. They boasted of their cruelty to captured peoples, some of which undoubtedly was executed upon Israelites.

<sup>32</sup> Hays, 299-300. The land that was taken back by Jeroboam II in 2 Kings 14 was likely Assyrian controlled territory. Assyria was experiencing relative internal weakness at this point in time (approx. 786-746 BC), which helps to explain why they would be so concerned at the warning of their potential destruction later in Jonah 3. The Ninevites were theologically and politically repugnant to Jonah.

mercy. Jonah knows that if the people of Nineveh repent, God will show mercy to them and that thought sickened him.<sup>33</sup> So rather than giving the Ninevites an opportunity to be shown mercy, Jonah runs from the presence of God. Perhaps Jonah thought that if the message never reached the Ninevites the judgement might still come, and his enemies would suffer the God's wrath for their heinous acts. Thus, the expected hero of this story is the one who surprisingly abandons not only his duty to prophesy, but also God.

Driven by desperation, Jonah flees to the city of Joppa to find passage by ship in order to sail (πλεῦσαι) to the city of Tarshish (LXX: “θαρσις”). Jonah entrusts his life into the hands of Gentile sailors so that he might escape the possible salvation of other Gentiles. The depth of Jonah's desperation is evident simply by the fact that most Jews would have been terrified of the open sea, a symbol of chaos.<sup>34</sup> Ironically, it is chaos that Jonah will find because of his attempts to escape from God.

It is not long before it becomes evident that Jonah cannot escape the Lord however he tries. God, in response to the flight of Jonah, violently casts a heavy storm upon the sea. The storm is so violent that the ship is threatened to break apart. In a last ditch effort to escape with their lives, the sailors toss (ἐκβολήν) their precious cargo overboard. After they wake Jonah up from an ill-timed nap, they determine through lots that he is the culprit, the cause of the storm.

---

<sup>33</sup>Jonah later confesses in 4:2 that “that’s why [he] fled toward Tarshish in the first place. [He] knew that [God is] a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from sending disaster.” Jeremiah would later proclaim God’s message: “<sup>7</sup>if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, <sup>8</sup>and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. <sup>9</sup>And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, <sup>10</sup>and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.” (Jer. 18:7-10) Ironically, it is Nineveh who repents and Israel who would ultimately be punished for their obstinacy.

<sup>34</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 740. Also Allen, 205.

Jonah exhorts the sailors to pick him up and hurl him into the sea so that the storm would calm. As all of this takes place, there is a complete lack of prayer to God on Jonah's part.<sup>35</sup>

Instead of committing the prophet to an apparent death sentence, the sailors try to fight the storm. However the harder they fight, the fiercer the storm becomes. God, in his sovereignty, will not give in so easily to the disobedience of his prophet. Before long they are forced to recognize the futility of their plight and they resign to hurl Jonah overboard, instantly resulting in the calming of the sea. The Gentile sailors respond by fearing God and making an offering to the Lord—another instance of Gentiles responding to the actions of God in contrast to the stubborn opposition of a Jew. The only thing that could stop the storm that God cast down upon the sea was for Jonah to be cast into the sea as well.

While those who sailed with Jonah received relief from the tempest, Jonah does not share in such rest. Immediately a giant fish consumes Jonah, and he spends three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. Eventually Jonah's spirit is broken, and he cries out to God in prayer for salvation. Despite Jonah's rebellion, the Lord responds by commanding the fish to vomit Jonah out upon dry land. Now it appears that Jonah is ready to obey. Throughout this whole episode, the providence of God takes center stage as the wind and waves, the great fish, and ultimately Jonah himself all submit to the divine will.<sup>36</sup>

Jonah enters Nineveh proclaiming God's imminent judgement, and surprisingly the Ninevites act of one accord in solemn repentance. Jonah's reluctant message is received with stunning success. When the King of Nineveh hears the word of the Lord he humbles himself

---

<sup>35</sup> Allen, 208.

<sup>36</sup> Allen, 192.

completely – replacing his royal garb with sackcloth – and proclaims a citywide fast and prayer in the hopes that God might relent. Everyone “from the greatest of them to the least”<sup>37</sup> (3:5) repents at the word of Jonah. Even the animals are donned in sackcloth for mourning. To the dismay of Jonah, when God sees the response of the people he relents from the disaster he had threatened to unleash upon the great city.

Jonah, a recent recipient of God’s mercy, responds with great displeasure. He is so furious because of God’s willingness to forgive and show mercy to the Ninevites that he requests for God to take his life. Jonah would prefer death if life meant that he was forced to see his enemies be granted forgiveness. This response is almost comical, like a child throwing a tantrum because he does not get his way. Jonah can accept the mercy of God for his own benefit, but he cannot bear to see God’s grace extended to anyone outside of the nation of Israel. God questions Jonah about whether he is justified to be angry for the mercy he showed the Ninevites. Frustrated, Jonah goes to brood outside of the city and see what would happen next to Nineveh (possibly in the hopes that the Ninevites would yet face judgement somehow).

God appoints a plant to grow so that it can provide shade for Jonah from the heat while he waits outside of the city. For once, Jonah stops complaining, but his joy turns out to be short lived. The very next day God causes a worm to eat the plant so that it withers and no longer protects Jonah from the scorching heat. Once again Jonah is mad enough to die. God turns the situation on its head by trapping Jonah. He once again asks Jonah if he is justified in being angry because of the death of the plant and Jonah responds affirmatively. God then powerfully points out Jonah’s foolishness. Why should Jonah be upset with God for not sparing the plant that came

---

<sup>37</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all scripture will be from the ESV, 2011.



and went so swiftly, but then not desire the same mercy for the city and inhabitants of Nineveh? The point is that if Jonah desires God to pity the plant, he should desire for God to pity the city and the people of Nineveh who are much more important than the plant.

Ironically, it turns out that while the Gentiles in Nineveh respond to God as Israel should have responded, Jonah opposes God like one would have expected the Gentiles to do. In a sense, then, Jonah represents of the nation of Israel who refuses time and time again to repent and follow God. The message of Jonah, although preached for the Ninevites, is really an “indictment against Israel and Judah. . . The repentance of the Ninevites stands in stark contrast to the obstinacy of the Israelites. What happens in Nineveh is what should have happened in Jerusalem but did not.”<sup>38</sup> The reader is left with no response from Jonah at the close of the book and thus there is a hanging question: Will Jonah accept that God’s mercy can extend beyond Israel, or will Jonah remain opposed to God’s mercy for the Gentiles? Will Jonah accept that “Yahweh feels love, compassion, and mercy, not just for Israel and Judah, but also for foreign cities like Nineveh”<sup>39</sup> or will he ultimately remain hard-hearted? This question is intended to resound into the life of the reader, and so also into the life of Israel.

The message of the book of Jonah serves as a “bulwark against the narrow particularism that allowed Jews to think they alone are worthy of God’s blessing.”<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, instead of responding to the message of Jonah and modifying their particularism to embrace God’s heart for the nations, Israel digs in even more staunchly to the idea that they alone could have a place within the realm of God’s kingdom. Thus Jonah becomes typological of the stubbornness of the

---

<sup>38</sup> Hays, 71.

<sup>39</sup> Hays, 301.

<sup>40</sup> Douglas Stuart, 451.

Jews and can be representative of the response of the Jews to the Gospel in Acts as will be discussed below.

### **Paul's Journey to Rome**

Paul makes his debut appearance in Acts 7 during the stoning of Stephen. At this time he has not yet encountered the transformative work of Jesus Christ and so he approves of the stoning, which results in a massive outbreak of persecution upon the infant church. Consumed by zeal for the Lord, Paul ravages the church by dragging many men and women to prison. Unbeknownst to Paul, his pursuit to serve God results in just the opposite. Paul appears to be the bane of the newborn church as his passionate persecution of the church threatens to destroy the fragile newborn community. The expectation created by Luke is that Paul will be the antagonist throughout Acts. As Paul hunts down the now scattered community, he decides to journey to Damascus to continue his suppression of the church. Before he can arrive at Damascus, however, he encounters an unexpected divine intervention.

In an instant Paul finds himself surrounded by a bright light from heaven and hears the voice of Jesus speak to him. Jesus identifies himself as the very one Paul is persecuting. He instructs Paul to arise (ἀνίστημι) and go into the city, where he will be told what to do. Paul is left blind by this encounter and so he is led by the hand for three days. During this time a disciple of the Lord named Ananias is instructed to go to the street called Straight and find a Tarshian man (Ταρσέα from the root Ταρσος) named Saul. Ananias, who is understandably confused, interjects because he knows of the evil acts Saul has committed and what his purpose is in coming to Damascus. God encourages Ananias to go because Paul is going to be a “chosen

instrument of [God's] to carry [his] name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:16).

From the very start, Paul's commission is to go beyond just the “children of Israel” to Gentiles and kings as well. Ananias displays his trust in the Lord by acting in obedience. When he reaches Paul he tells him that he has come so that Paul might regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately Paul's eyes are healed. From this moment, Paul's devout passion for the tearing down of the church is replaced with a consuming drive to edify the very thing he sought to destroy and he immediately begins to “proclaim Jesus in the synagogues” (9:20).

Over the next several years, Paul embarks on three different missionary journeys which take him across much of the Roman Empire. His journeys take him through the provinces of Asia, Macedonia, and Greece. His ministry during this time is characterized by perseverance despite overwhelming opposition. His basic strategy is to take the gospel to the Jews in local synagogues and then to the Gentiles when the gospel is rejected by the Jews. Eventually Paul decides to go to Jerusalem, where he is unjustly arrested and sent to Rome.

Paul knows that when he chooses to travel into Jerusalem that he will face trouble. On his journey there, the prophet Agabus prophesies that the Jews will bind Paul and hand him over to the Gentiles (Acts 21:11). The prophecy comes to fruition when the Jews attempt to kill Paul. As they drag him out of the temple the doors slam shut behind him. Paul is falsely accused of bringing a Gentile into the temple (thereby desecrating the temple), and what follows is a chaotic riot. Upon hearing that a disturbance had erupted, the tribune of the cohort that was stationed in

Jerusalem intervenes and arrests Paul. Once the tribune discovers that Paul is not a wanted Egyptian assassin but an educated citizen from Tarsus he allows Paul to speak to the people.

Paul's speech to the Jews describes in detail his upbringing and zeal for God as well as his conversion. Paul recounts how, as he was in the temple, he received a vision from God telling him that the Jews would not listen to his testimony and that he would be sent far away to the Gentiles. At this remark the Jews immediately respond with abhorrence and disgust at the very thought and a riot once again breaks out. The tribune decides that Paul should be examined by flogging, but once he discovers that Paul is a Roman Citizen by birth he becomes afraid and rescinds his order. The next day Paul is presented to the Jewish Council. He cunningly mentions the resurrection of the dead, resulting in the division of the council between Sadducees and Pharisees. When the conflict becomes violent the tribune has Paul removed by force.

Sometime during the next night the Lord comes to Paul and tells him that just as he has testified in Jerusalem, he must also testify in Rome (possibly a fulfillment of the charge to take the gospel to the ends of the earth). Because of a plot to kill Paul by the Jews, he is sent under the cover of night with a massive guard to Caesarea in order that he may appear before Felix the governor. Upon examination, Felix finds nothing deserving of punishment in the actions of Paul, but neither does he release Paul. After two years Felix is succeeded by Porcius Festus. Festus also discerns that Paul appears to be innocent, but because he wants to do the Jews a favor he asks Paul if he will go to Jerusalem to be tried. Rather than be given up to the Jews in Jerusalem, Paul appeals to Caesar in order to get to Rome. Before Paul goes to Rome he presents his defense to Agrippa and he as well declares that "this man has done nothing to deserve death or imprisonment" (Acts 26:33), but since Paul has appealed to Caesar, to Caesar he must go.

Eventually Paul and some other prisoners are put under the charge of a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius and they set sail for Italy. They set sail on a trading ship<sup>41</sup> and make a brief stop at Sidon and then continue on to the port city of Myra. From there they switch ships and, with difficulty, they arrive at a place called Fair Havens on the island of Crete. Here Paul advises the crew to spend the winter in Fair Havens since “the fast” was already over. This fast was likely a reference to the Day of Atonement, placing the date of this incident shortly after October 5th. Navigation on the Mediterranean at this time is considered uncertain in regards to travel conditions and with each passing day it becomes more precarious. Soon sea travel would be completely restricted due to the harsh conditions, but the crew decides to set sail anyway in the hopes to reach Phoenix before the weather becomes too violent.<sup>42</sup>

After setting sail, they initially encounter a gentle south wind, but shortly the ship is ravaged by “a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster” (Acts 27:14). As a result, the ship is caught and driven along by the wind. In the worsening situation, the crew secures the lifeboat and undergirds the ship with massive cables to reinforce the hull.<sup>43</sup> For many days they are storm tossed. Neither sun nor stars appear, making navigation an impossibility. In a desperate attempt to preserve their lives, they jettison the cargo. In the midst of the storm, after everyone had given up hope of being saved, Paul stood and encouraged them to eat because he had been assured by an angel of God that all those on the ship who sailed (πλέοντας) with him would survive. Paul was reaffirmed that he had to stand before Caesar. This narrative demonstrates that Paul is a “prophetic figure whose words convey God’s assurance of survival and whose actions

---

<sup>41</sup> Schnabel, 1034.

<sup>42</sup> Schnabel, 1037.

<sup>43</sup> Schnabel, 1040.

demonstrate the grace of God.”<sup>44</sup> Eventually the crew realizes that they are nearing land. Some of the crew attempt to abandon ship, but Paul informs the centurion that the only way they will be saved is if they stay onboard.

Finally on the fourteenth day, as the morning was about to dawn, Paul broke bread and gave thanks to God and everyone ate. When day came they struck a reef and ran aground. The ship was tearing apart and the soldiers were preparing to kill the prisoners so that they could not escape, but the centurion stopped them so that Paul would live. As the ship continued to fragment in the reef they were all cast into the sea. Some of the men managed to swim ashore and others floated in on planks. All who were present made it safely to land on the island of Malta.

This episode “reminds the readers that God’s control over history includes the survival of Paul, who has been given the assurance that he will reach Rome to be a witness there.”<sup>45</sup> The people on Malta greeted them warmly and built a fire for them since it was cold and rainy. While Paul was putting wood into the fire a viper struck out and bit his hand. The natives of Malta interpreted this event as Justice preventing him from living even though he escaped the sea. It quickly becomes evident however that the opposite is true—nothing in all of creation will spoil God’s will for Paul to stand before Caesar in Rome. Paul is miraculously unharmed. The providence of God in the episode of Paul’s travel to Rome is undeniable. The leader of Malta, Publius, receives Paul hospitably, and Paul heals many on the island.

---

<sup>44</sup> David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 678.

<sup>45</sup> Peterson, 678.

After three months pass on the island of Malta, the Roman guard and Paul set sail again and finally reach Rome. Once there, Paul is able to connect with the believers in Rome where he is encouraged and is granted the privilege of living by himself under guard. After three days Paul attempts to present the Gospel to the Jews there, who surprisingly have not heard about Paul yet. The Jews respond with division – some believe and some do not. Apparently Paul becomes convinced that at a national level, Jews have ultimately rejected the Gospel even though some believe and he declares that the “salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles.” (Acts 28:28) Acts closes with the optimistic declaration that Paul continued on proclaiming the kingdom of God with boldness and without hindrance in Rome for the next two years.

### **Examining the Evidence: Paul as an Anti-Jonah**

The first time Paul is introduced in Acts he makes a grand entrance as a zealous Jew who is eager to destroy the church. Contrary to his intention, his passion to destroy the church results in him working in total disobedience to God. Thus, as he goes house to house dragging Christians out to be imprisoned, he stands as the enemy of Christianity and the symbol of disobedience and opposition to God’s people. In typical fashion, however, God turns his disobedience on its head through a miraculous intervention on the road to Damascus. Paul encounters Jesus and is left blind for three days, but receives a word from the Lord to get up (ἀνίστημι) and go to the city of Damascus. By the end of this three day period Paul is converted, receiving new life. Immediately he turns his zeal into serving God’s church and spreading the

Gospel. Thus, although Paul is expected to be an instrument of disobedience, he turns out to be faithful to God after experiencing divine intervention.

Jonah, on the other hand, was expected to be obedient, yet quickly proves his disobedience to God once he receives his commission from God to get up (ἀνίστημι) and go to Nineveh. Jonah similarly experiences divine intervention, and in his turning point he finds himself stuck in a giant fish for three days until he repents and responds in obedience. Hays mentions that in the Ancient Near East it was commonly believed that it took three days for someone who died to reach Sheol and that some scholars suggest that “the three days and three nights in the fish allude (poetically) to this theme, indicating that the fish is bringing Jonah back from the place of the dead.”<sup>46</sup>

In a sense when Jonah cries out to God from the depths of Sheol and is given a second chance, he has come back from the dead. This analogy is used by Jesus himself to foreshadow his resurrection.<sup>47</sup> Once Jonah finds himself on land again he receives for a second time the charge to get up (ἀνίστημι) and go to Nineveh. In both cases, Paul and Jonah are exhorted to get up and go where God has called them to go for the purpose of proclaiming his given message. In a similar way too, Paul’s experience of blindness for three days resulted in a complete change of heart. Spiritually, Paul has come back from the dead and received new life. Immediately after this conversion/rebirth type experience both Paul and Jonah proclaim the message of God. From the very introduction of Paul then, his conversion and commission mirrors the experience of Jonah.

---

<sup>46</sup> Hays, 302.

<sup>47</sup> Matthew 12:40 – “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.”



Paul's journey to Rome in Acts shares some significant similarities with Jonah's travel to Nineveh and also includes some significant reversals. The city to which Jonah attempts to flee, Tarshish (LXX "θαρσις"), may possibly be the same city from which Paul comes, Tarsus (Ταρσέα from the root Ταρσος). The exact location of Tarshish is currently unknown and can only be guessed at. Most scholars attempt to identify its location as a Phoenician city, Tartessos, in modern-day southern Spain.<sup>48</sup> This by far has been the predominant view among scholarship, and if this the case then both Jonah and Paul travel west to bring God's message to Gentiles.<sup>49</sup> This conclusion, however, has often been reached too quickly and without substantial evidence. Others contest this view and identify Tarshish to simply refer to the sea itself rather than a specific place name.<sup>50</sup>

Ultimately, we can only offer educated guesses as to where this city actually might have once been located. Historically many locations other than Spain have been proposed, one of which is Tarsus. In fact, Josephus explicitly identifies Tarshish as one and the same as the city of Tarsus in Cilicia (*Antiquities*, 6.1.127). He explains that the *theta* was simply exchanged for the *tau*, thus giving significant evidence to the idea that the two cities are actually connected. Etymologically, it certainly makes more sense for Tarshish to develop into Tarsus than Tartessos.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Allen, 42.

<sup>49</sup> Keener, 3559.

<sup>50</sup> Stuart, 451.

<sup>51</sup> For a greater discussion on arguments for Tarshish being the same city as Tarsus see Andrè Lemaire, "Tarshish-Tarsisi: Problème De Topographie Historique Biblique Et Assyrienne" from *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography: Presented to Zecharia Kallai, Gershon Galil and Moshe Weinfeld*, eds (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 44-62. as well as Robert R. Lessing, "Just where was Jonah going?: the location of Tarshish in the Old Testament" *Concordia Journal*, 28 no 3 Jul 2002, p 291-293.

While Tarshish and Tarsus may only be related as homophones, it certainly brings to mind Jonah when reading about Paul. Regardless of whether Tarshish actually is the same city as Tarsus, it is very possible that, according to Josephus, during the first century many people would have understood two cities to be referring to the same place. This means that those who first read Acts would likely have automatically connected Tarsus to the city of Tarshish to which Jonah fled. Rather than being caught up on the exact geography, what is important to be aware of is the literary connection present in this text that would have been established with the original audience. This then creates an irony: the city to which Jonah fled in an attempt to escape from bringing God's message to the Gentiles is potentially the city that later would send out the apostle to the Gentiles.

At the close of Acts, Paul is arrested in Jerusalem and forcibly removed from the temple. Paul appeals to Caesar in order that he might have the chance to travel to Rome to preach to those there (Acts 25:11-12). This is where Luke continues to paint Paul as an Anti-Jonah with many strokes. Both Jonah and Paul know that it is God's will for them to take his message to the most repulsive places of their respective times. While Jonah carries a message of impending judgement upon the sinful city of Nineveh, Paul carries a message of salvation for the lost and broken in the city of Rome.

After Paul's arrest he claims the rights of a Roman citizen, and appeals to Caesar so he can take the gospel to Rome. Rome during the first few centuries was the center of oppression for Christians. It was the pinnacle of corruption and evil to the people of God. In Rome one could find the depths of depravity and the greatest enemies to the purposes of God. In fact, Rome was often referred to as Babylon by early Christians because of its repressive regimes (Revelation

17, 1 Pet. 5:13).<sup>52</sup> Just as both Rome and Babylon were despised by the majority of national Israel, so also was Nineveh. Nineveh was the cultural enemy of Jonah, as was Babylon to Judah, and Rome to the new Christians. But it is Rome who receives the Gospel in Acts while Jerusalem<sup>53</sup> and the Jews reject it and it is Nineveh who responds in repentance while Jonah responds in disobedience. Luke points out in his Gospel that the repentance of the Ninevites actually serves to condemn Israel because of Israel's rejection of Jesus and the gospel (Luke 11:29-32).<sup>54</sup> Thus, as we will see, Paul's journey to Rome will share many echoes with and reversals from Jonah's journey to Nineveh.

Paul's journey to Rome reverses many of the themes found present in the story of Jonah. Notably, while Jonah goes to Nineveh as a free man, but somewhat forced by the hand of God, Paul freely chooses to travel to Rome, but as a prisoner in chains. While Jonah runs from his duty and the will of God, Paul pursues his duty and the will of God.<sup>55</sup> Jonah is representative of a disobedient servant, while Paul is representative of sacrificial obedience. During their travels both Paul and Jonah find themselves caught in a life threatening storm upon the sea. The similar circumstances in Acts are reminiscent of Jonah's experience. The difference between the two accounts, however, is that Jonah's very presence on the ship that causes the storm, endangering all who are with him. In Acts, on the other hand, it is not Paul's presence that causes the storm, but rather his presence results in deliverance from the storm.<sup>56</sup> Just as the sailors with Jonah

---

<sup>52</sup> J. Scott Duvall, *Revelation*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 197.

<sup>53</sup> Jerusalem is, in a sense, an anti-Nineveh.

<sup>54</sup> Keener, 3559.

<sup>55</sup> Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6 (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 340.

<sup>56</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 1992), 522.

make a desperate attempt to stay alive by tossing the ship's cargo overboard, the sailors upon Paul's ship do the same (Acts 27:18).<sup>57</sup> Luke uses elements and similar circumstances from the story of Jonah to make an implicit connection Paul to Jonah while simultaneously contrasting him with Jonah. If the reader has not caught on to Luke's subtlety before now, he pulls back the curtain to reveal it to them.

As previously mentioned, Marshall stated that a typological relationship between the narrative of Jonah and Paul is not intended here,<sup>58</sup> but I disagree, at least in part. The Greek verb ἐκβάλλω is used very commonly throughout biblical texts, but the noun form used in Acts 27:17, ἐκβολήν, is not. Luke uses this noun (ἐκβολήν) to indicate the jettisoning of cargo. This identical noun form is only used one other time in the entirety of biblical literature: during the account in Jonah when the sailors toss their cargo overboard.<sup>59</sup> G. W. H. Lampe along with many other scholars note that this phrase in Acts is identical to that of Jonah, and Lampe even admits that Luke's narrative may have been influenced by this instance in Jonah.<sup>60</sup> Just as Luke used specific words as a marker to connect Pentecost to Babel and Ananias to Achan, so he does here as well. And indeed, it is not just the verb that creates the connection, but it is the verb marker in coordination with similar circumstances.

It is possible to reply that the use of this word might be a coincidence because ἐκβολήν appears to be used as a nautical term, but the fact that Luke uses the exact same term found in

---

<sup>57</sup> Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 612.

<sup>58</sup> Marshall, 599.

<sup>59</sup> There is only one other instance of the noun form of this word; however it is in the dative rather than the accusative. Exodus 11:1 uses the noun ἐκβολή

<sup>60</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, "Acts," in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley (London: Routledge Press, 2001), 924.

Jonah ought to catch the attention of a careful reader. Specifically, the syntactical construction of the Greek text in Acts (ἐκβολὴν ἐποιοῦντο) is strikingly similar to the construction in Jonah (ἐκβολὴν ἐποιήσαντο) and seems to be intentional. As in Jonah, the middle voice is used in Acts.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps Luke is not attempting to make an explicit, outright parallel between the two accounts, but instead the connection is implicit. Luke seems to invite the reader to compare Paul's circumstances to Jonah's by appealing to thematic similarities. It is one of the few stories within scripture that concerns a ship being caught in a horrible storm where those onboard fear for their lives and throw their cargo overboard. So it appears that this detail is included intentionally to connect Paul's journey to that of Jonah.<sup>62</sup>

In the midst of the raging storm on the seas, both Jonah and Paul are encountered with God's sovereign will and the fact that nothing in all of creation can hinder God's word from being proclaimed to the lost. In Jonah's case, no amount of running or hiding will result in his escape from God. Despite the resistance of Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh, God's will cannot be subverted. God uses the storm to remind Jonah of his sovereignty over creation and to warn Jonah to obey. The storm in Acts 27, however, serves a reverse role for Paul, while still emphasizing God's sovereignty. Nothing in all of creation, not even the storm and the forces of chaos, will hinder Paul from proclaiming the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles in Rome.<sup>63</sup> Where God's divine intervention in Jonah serves to bring Jonah back from rebellion, God's divine

---

<sup>61</sup> C. K. Barrett, *Acts Volume 2: 15-28*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004), 1197.

<sup>62</sup> Perhaps the story in the Gospels of Jesus calming the storm on a boat may be called to mind here as well. This story also undoubtedly shares an echo to the story of Jonah. Where God alone causes the sea to rage and to be calmed in Jonah, it is Jesus here who calms the storm on the waters. Thus Jesus equates himself with God by proving his authority over the chaos of nature.

<sup>63</sup> Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 475.

intervention in Acts (on Paul's way to Damascus and also through the angel's reassurance during the storm) serves also to redirect, assure and encourage Paul to stay on course. In both cases all those who are upon the ship survive the terrible storm by the grace of God.

Likewise, in the case of both Paul and Jonah, the only way to escape the storm is to be cast into the water. For Paul the storm forces the ship he is on to wreck in shallow water and he is able to make it safely to shore. For Jonah, the storm only calms when he is cast into the water and swallowed for three days before eventually being vomited out onto the shore. In Jonah's case, the crew tried their utmost to protect him from being thrown into the water, but as a last resort conceded to throwing him overboard. For Paul, the crew's preference was to kill him, but thanks to the centurion he was spared. Also present in Paul's crisis, but strikingly absent in Jonah's, is any appearance of prayer or communication with God during the storm. While Paul actively prays, Jonah carelessly sleeps (Jonah 1:5). In fact, it is the Gentile sailors who offer a prayer to God rather than Jonah the prophet, even though the sailors exhort Jonah to call on God for deliverance!<sup>64</sup> Paul on the other hand, is not reluctant like Jonah, but offers encouragement and a prophecy of deliverance in the midst of the storm.<sup>65</sup> In both cases, in order to survive the sailors must remain on the ship.

After the shipwreck, Paul finds himself on the island of Malta. The people there greet him and those with him warmly and the chief official welcomed Paul to the island. There Paul heals many people, and they honor him greatly. The positive response of all those on Malta to

---

<sup>64</sup> Keener, 3559.

<sup>65</sup> Witherington, 756.

Paul mirrors the receptivity of the Ninevites to the message of Jonah, but contrasts how Paul was often received by the Jews.<sup>66</sup>

Eventually Paul arrives in Rome and reaches out to the Jews there. Before he begins to proclaim the Gospel, he waits for three days (Acts 28:17). The inclusion of this time frame both connects Paul to Jonah while simultaneously contrasting them. Paul demonstrates patience and waits for three days before he begins his proclamation. Jonah on the other hand does not make the full three day journey through Nineveh, but instead he gives a rather lazy and unconcerned message of Nineveh's coming judgement (Jonah 3:3-4). In contrast to the unanimous response of the Ninevites in Jonah, the Jews in Rome respond with mixed feelings.

Rather than accepting the gospel, the Jews respond with ambivalence and most once again reject it for a final time in Acts. This causes Paul to decide to take the gospel primarily to the Gentiles from then on because they will listen.<sup>67</sup> Although the "rejection of Jesus . . . is ultimately not the responsibility of a particular people, but . . . of humanity, Jew and Gentile alike,"<sup>68</sup> Paul knows that the Gentiles will have a greater disposition to give the Gospel a chance. So also we are to understand then that God's salvation extends not to a particular people group, but to all of humanity, Jew and Gentile alike. Unfortunately, just as Jonah was angry with God in Jonah 4, the Jews were furious at the idea that Gentiles could be a part of God's plan in Acts. Paul reciprocates with anger towards the Jews for rejecting the gospel and determines to carry it

---

<sup>66</sup> Beyond the scope of Acts and this paper, but worth mentioning is also the response of Nero to Paul. Where the leadership in Nineveh responds immediately to the message of Jonah, from history it is clear that Nero shows no sign of repentance or recognition of God as Lord.

<sup>67</sup> Not all Gentiles, however, will listen to the gospel as is evidenced by Paul's previous experience (such as Demetrius and the riotous crowd in Ephesus).

<sup>68</sup> C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 125.

to the Gentiles. Both Jonah's mission and Paul's mission end with anger. On the one hand, Jonah is angry with God for showing mercy to Gentiles, and, on the other, Paul is angry with the Jews for rejecting the gospel and its inclusion of the Gentiles.

From the beginning of Paul's journey until the very end, he consistently reverses the role of Jonah. Thus, as Jonah was typical of unrepentant and rebellious Israel, Paul symbolizes the faithful but persecuted church. In the midst of these stories we are faced with the sovereignty of God and God's concern for all people to be shown mercy.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The final notes of the book of Jonah challenge readers to "appreciate God's care for all creatures great and small."<sup>69</sup> It was intended to remind Israel and the reader that no nation or ethnicity can claim a monopoly on God's love. Yet by the time of the New Testament, it seems that many Jews had still not yet learned this lesson. One of the main issues in Luke is the question of how the hope of God opened up to include all races.<sup>70</sup> This was not a singular event,

---

<sup>69</sup> Allen, 194.

<sup>70</sup> D. L. Bock, *Luke, Volume 1: 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 1.



but rather a long process full of tension. This complicated process took much sacrifice and, for many Jews, this became the breaking point between accepting and rejecting the gospel. A mindset common to many of the Jews during the first century would have resonated with the call of Jubilees to “keep [themselves] separate from the nations” (Jub. 22:16). This meant refusing to be associated with Gentiles in any and every way. Thus the staunch refusal to associate with the Gentiles present in the attitude of the Jews reflects Jonah’s bitterness at God’s mercy upon the city of Nineveh. What emerges from Acts is the fact that the nationalistic particularism of Israel simply (in most cases) could not be reconciled with the universalistic scope of God. By the end of Acts, national Israel no longer has the solitary claim to be the people of God, but rather the community that God chooses to adopt as his people (the true Israel of sorts) is the church, consisting of all who accept Christ—both Jew and Gentile—irrespective of race, rank, or prior religion.

The driving purpose of Paul’s journey to Rome is to demonstrate God’s fulfillment of the promise that Paul would testify of Christ in Rome and that nothing would prevent that. It also demonstrates the pervasiveness of the gospel’s spread throughout the world, such that Rome itself would receive the gospel. By reading the conversion and journey of Paul to Rome with Jonah in mind, the text is illuminated and invigorated and the overall meaning of the text still stands true. The sovereignty of God is highlighted, thus demonstrating in greater detail that God’s will is not only personal, but also that it ultimately will prevail in any and every circumstance. God is in control of the cosmos and can use nature to accomplish his purposes, whether that is to reign in a disobedient prophet, or to bring deliverance to a faithful prophet.

In addition, if Jonah is representative of unrepentant and particularistic Israel, then it is clear that a significant contribution to Israel’s disobedience in the New Testament is the refusal

of the Jewish people to accept that God's salvific purposes could extend beyond the borders of national and ethnic Israel. Ultimately, it is the rejection of Jesus and the gospel. If Paul, then, becomes representative of the obedient church, then it is clear that a large part of the church's faithfulness to Christ is found in its willingness to proclaim the gospel to all people irrespective of race, rank, or religion. The universalization of the gospel should embrace not only ethnic diversity but also people up and down the social scale, just as the first century church did.<sup>71</sup>

Another prominent theme throughout Acts is how the gospel spread throughout much of the known world. The realization of this mission was a long and complex process full of tension, but the first century church refused to let anything hinder the progress of their kerygmatic witness. Not even centuries of social and ethnic prejudice would stand in the way. By comparing and contrasting the responses of Paul with Jonah to God's commission, this theme is emphasized and strengthened. Jesus' vision for the testimony of the kingdom of God and his own life, death and resurrection to be taken to "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) was aggressively pursued by the church. After the conversion of the first Gentile, Cornelius, Peter confessed: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (10:34-35). This revolutionary willingness of the church to preach to all classes of people stands in stark contrast to the particularism of the Jewish nation in general who would not be so quick to join the movement.

This willingness of the church did not take place without opposition. Many times throughout Acts the validity of the Gentile mission was called into question by Judaizers and

---

<sup>71</sup> Witherington, 72.

there was division among the Christian Jews.<sup>72</sup> There was controversy over whether or not Gentiles should be circumcised. There was division over whether or not they should adhere to dietary laws. Were the Gentiles to, in essence, become proselytized Jews, or did the Gospel transcend these Judaic traditions? If so, then does the law still apply to Jews? This was a genuine struggle for the church during the first century, because it entailed the breaking down of multiple barriers that had separated the Jews from the Gentiles. As the church was indoctrinated into the new covenant of justification by faith and the sufficiency of grace, there remained a significant backslide into legalism that was constantly being countered by the apostles and writers of the New Testament.

By reading Paul's conversion and subsequent journey through the lens of the Jonah narrative, Luke's desire to validate the inclusion of Gentiles into the Christian church is complemented and strengthened, as is the ultimate rejection of the Jews. Although Jonah, as God's chosen prophet, (and in turn Israel as well) ultimately rejected God's compassion for all people, Paul, who serves as God's chosen apostle to the Gentiles, proved to be a faithful witness to God's redemptive purposes for all of creation. The Gentiles were a legitimate addition to the Church. Through Jonah, the biblical precedent is reaffirmed that God desires to show compassion and mercy on all peoples, and that nothing in all of creation will prevent his sovereign will from coming to fruition. This desire of God's is accomplished through Jesus' efficacious sacrifice and extended through Paul's mission in Acts. The result of Paul's faithfulness was the bold and unhindered proclamation of the kingdom of God and the salvation and lordship of Jesus Christ in Rome itself to people from every walk of life.

---

<sup>72</sup> See Acts 11:1-18; 15:1-29; 21:15-25.

As a result of reading this text with Jonah in mind, readers today should consider what implications this holds for their lives. First, the shipwreck narrative ought to remind readers that God is still sovereign in the midst of life's crises and that God is always working to accomplish His will. This text should also serve to remind readers that a significant part of living obediently in God's will is the faithful proclamation of the gospel. Readers today must consider how this text encourages perseverance in that endeavor. Finally, readers must recognize and reflect on the fact that the gospel is meant to be proclaimed to *all* people. As a result, evangelistic strategies must be adapted to fit this framework so that no one is hindered from access to the gospel. The gospel cannot be restricted to one nation, ethnicity, or social class, but rather it must extend to the ends of the earth.

## Bibliography

- Allen, Leslie C. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.
- Allison, Dale C. *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Barrett, C. K. *Acts Volume 2: 15-28*. The International Critical Commentary. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004.
- Bock, D. L. *Luke, Volume 1: 1:1-9:50*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Book of the Acts*. NICNT. rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Bruckner, James. *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*. NIV Commentary Series. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- Dodson, Joseph R. "The Good News of Jesus: Typology in the Gospels and Acts," in *Reading Scripture Deeply: Millennials Take a Fresh Look at the Bible*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015.
- Dodson, Joseph R. "Why Should We Care About Allegories and Such," in *Reading Scripture Deeply: Millennials Take a Fresh Look at the Bible*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015.
- Duvall, J. Scott. *Revelation*. Teach the Text Commentary Series. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014.
- Duvall, J. Scott and Hays, J. Daniel. *Grasping God's Word*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- Fernando, Ajith. *Acts*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Gawronski, Donald V. *History: Meaning and Method*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1975.
- Hays, J. Daniel. *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*. ed. Tremper Longman III. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Henry, Matthew. *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009.
- Keener, Craig S. *Volume 4 – 24:1-28:31*. Acts: An Exegetical Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015.
- Lampe, G. W. H. "Acts." in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*. ed. Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley. London: Routledge Press, 2001.

- Lemaire, André. "Tarshish-Tarsisi: Problème De Topographie Historique Biblique Et Assyrienne" from *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography: Presented to Zecharia Kallai*. eds. Gershon Galil and Moshe Weinfeld. 44-62. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
- Lessing, Robert R. "Just where was Jonah going?: the location of Tarshish in the Old Testament" in *Concordia Journal*. 28 no 3 Jul 2002. p 291-293.
- Longenecker, Richard N. "Acts," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. vol. 10, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, 665-1102. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
- Marshall, I. Howard. "Acts," in *The New Testament's use of the Old Testament Commentary*, 513-606. ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.
- Peterson, David G. *The Acts of the Apostles*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Polhill, John B. *Acts*. New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 1992.
- Rowe, C. Kavin. *World Upside Down*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Schnabel, Eckhard J. *Acts*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- Sommer, Benjamin D. *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Sternberg, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah*. Word Biblical Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
- Wall, R. W. *Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians*. New Interpreter's Commentary. Vol.10. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002.
- Walton, John H.; Matthews, Victor H.; Chavalas, Mark W. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Witherington III, Ben. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.