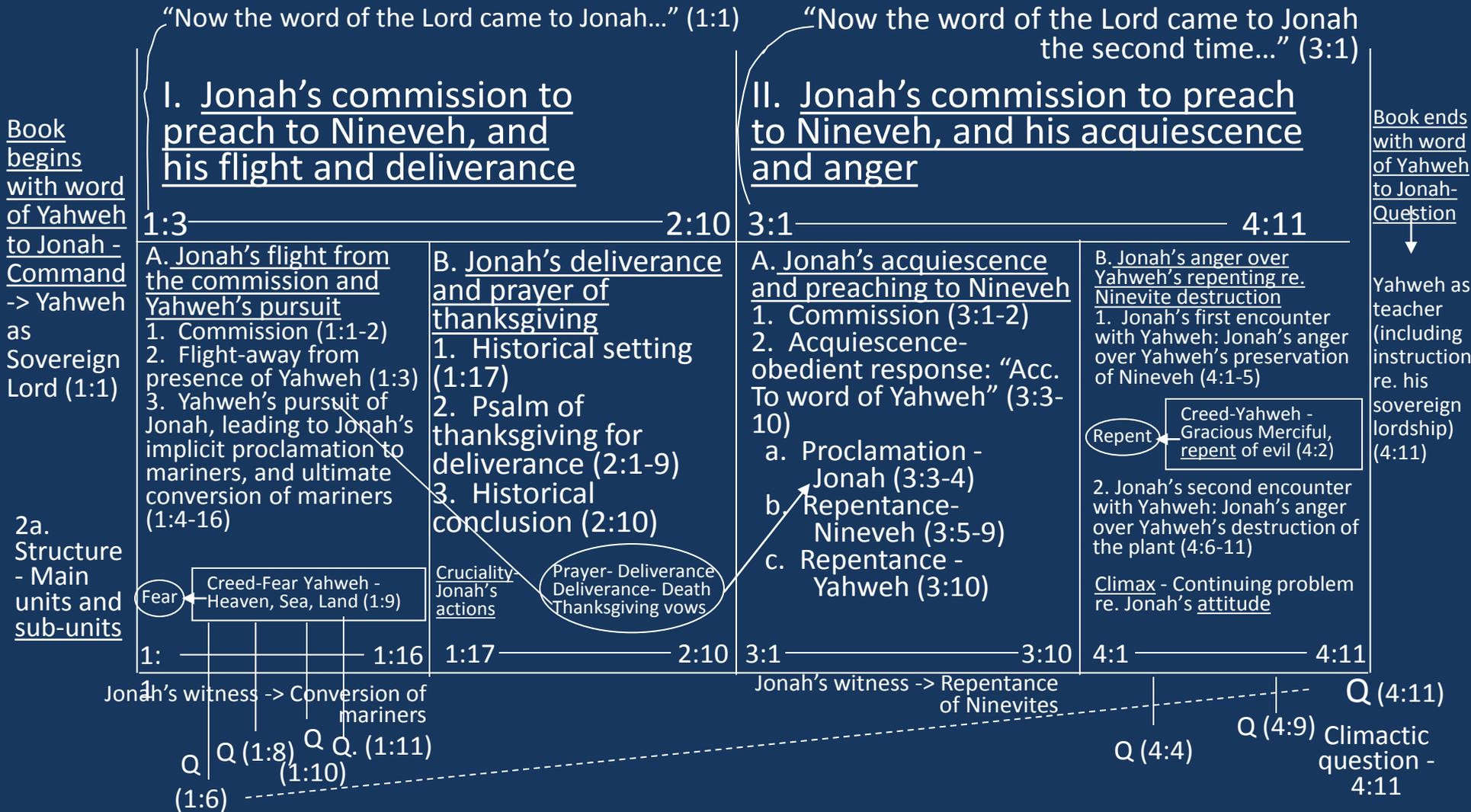


**SAMPLE SURVEY
OF THE
BOOK OF JONAH**

Sample Survey of the Book of Jonah

1.a. General Materials - Biographical (Jonah and Yahweh)



2.b. Structure - Major relationships (with questions)

Ⓐ Recurrence of theme of universal lordship and universal concern of Yahweh

Lordship (and concern) over nature (1:4,9,12-15; 2:1,10; 3:9; 4:6-8,10-11)

Lordship (and concern) over humankind (1:2,14-16; 2:8; 3:5-10; 4:1-2,11)

(These 2 dimensions explicitly brought together at 4:10-11)

Questions –

- ① What, specifically, is involved in this universal lordship and concern of Yahweh, and what is the meaning of each of these major dimensions?
- ② Why, according to this story, does Yahweh thus exercise lordship and concern over all creation, including his human creation? Why did the writer wish to present and to emphasize Yahweh's universal lordship and concern, as he did?
- ③ Implications?

ⓑ Repetition (Recurrence) of Contrast

Jonah (a Hebrew, who articulates creeds of the Hebrew faith)
(throughout, esp. 1:4-16; 3:1-4:11)

ⓧ vs.

Heathen

Sailors (Ch.1)

Ninevites (primarily Ch.3)

This contrast involves various elements, including a greater concern on the part of the heathen sailors toward Jonah than Jonah has for them, but seems to involve esp. a contrast between ready positive response to Yahweh's revelation on the part of the heathen (both sailors [1:4-16] and Ninevites [3:1-10]) ⓧ Jonah's general rejection of Yahweh's revelation and will (1:1-16; 4:1-11).

Questions –

- ① What are the specific differences between Jonah and the heathen, and what is the meaning of each of these differences (and how do these differences relate to, and illumine, one another?) How do these differences illumine the character of Jonah, and of the heathen? Is there development in the presentation of the differences between Jonah & the heathen throughout the book? If so, what is the meaning of this development?
- ② Why, acc. to this story, did these differences exist? Why did the writer present these various differences between Jonah and the heathen, and deal with these differences as he did? Why did the writer present the development of these differences between Jonah and the heathen as he did?
- ③ Implications?

③ Recurrence - Terms

(1) Call Proclamation/appeal of God's word to humans (1:2; 3:2 [twice]; 3:4)
(4 times)

קרא

Cry/appeal from humans to God (1:6; 2:2 [Jonah]; 1:14 [sailors];
3:8 [Ninevites])
(4 times)

(Used also once of the proclamation of a fast [in 3:5], a
response to the call of God that may constitute a type of
calling upon God)

(2) Great, exceedingly (1:2,4a,b,10,12,16,17; 3:2,3,5,7; 4:1,11)

גדול

(3) Evil Wickedness (1:2; 3:8,10 [Ninevites]; 4:6 [Jonah])

רע, רעה

Judgment upon wickedness (4:2 [General]; 1:7,8 [Jonah &
sailors]; 3:10 [Nineveh])

Used also at 4:1 to refer to Jonah's sense that Yahweh
is unfair or unjust, i.e., where Jonah judges Yahweh
and his actions to be evil.

(4) Perish/Die Perish [אָבד] (1:6,14; 3:9; 4:10) (4 times)

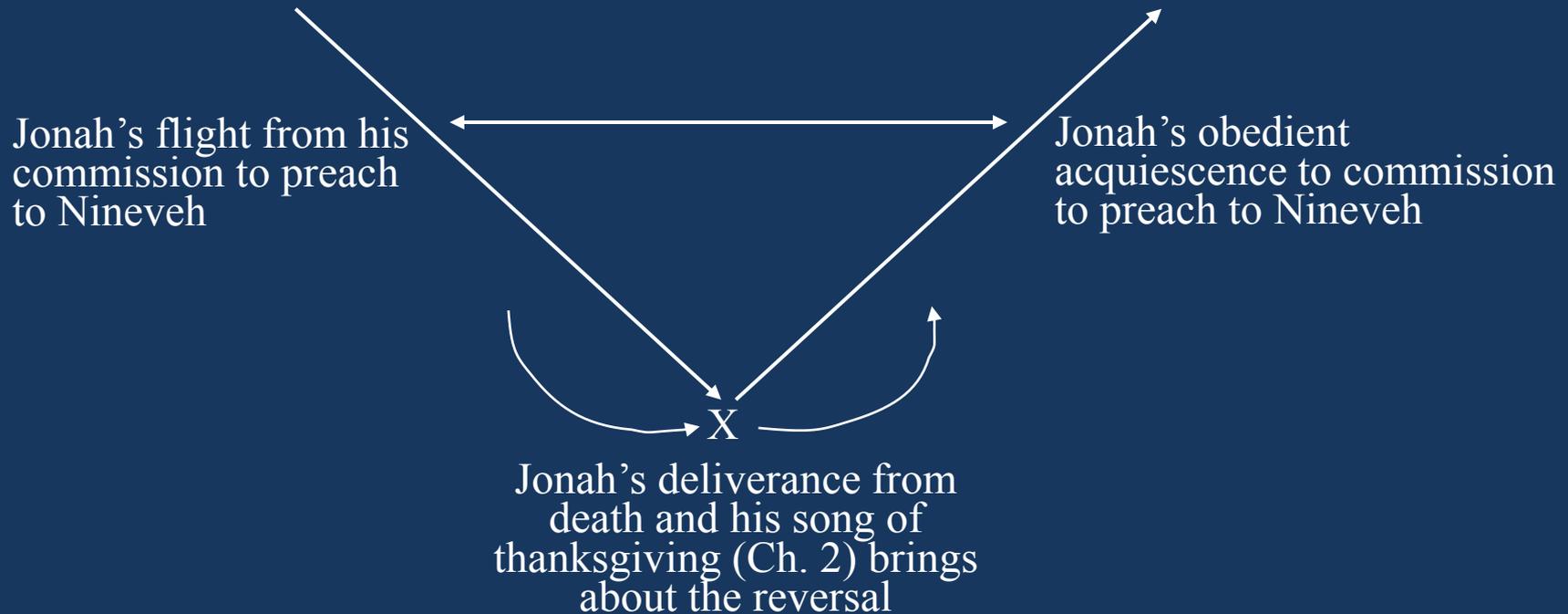
Die [מָוַת] (4:3,8b,c,9) (4 times)

Questions –

- ① What is the specific and precise meaning of each of these expressions, as used in the book of Jonah? How do the individual occurrences of each of these expressions relate to and illumine each other, and illumine the concept as a whole as that concept is used in this book? How does each of these concepts relate to each other and illumine each other?
- ② Why did the writer use each of these themes/terms as he did, and why did he relate them to one another as he did?
- ③ Implications?

④ Radical Reversal (Cruciality) - 2 Forms

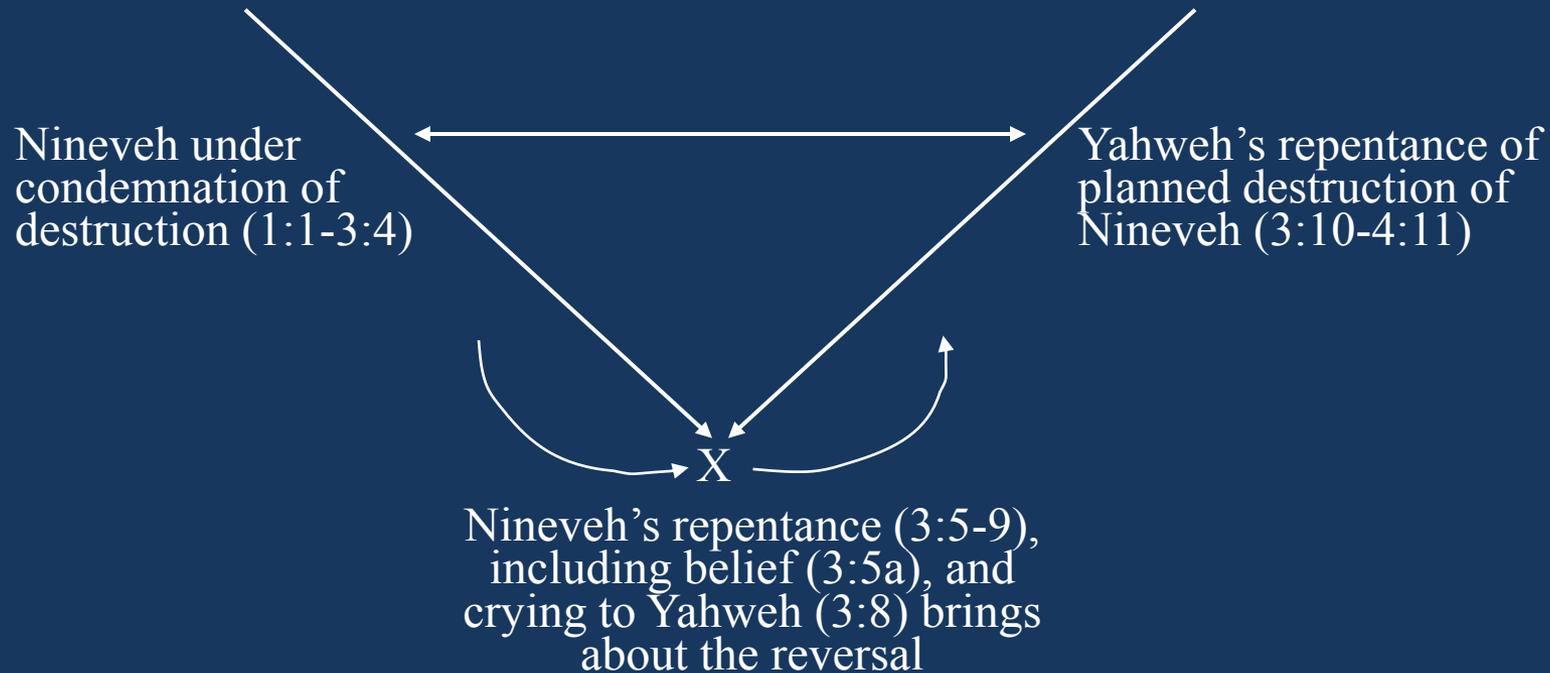
(1) Biographical (primarily) cruciality involving Jonah and Yahweh



Questions –

- ① How does Jonah's deliverance (and his thanksgiving for deliverance) turn Jonah from disobedient flight to obedient acquiescence? How does this radical turning on the part of Jonah illumine the obedience/disobedience theme in the book of Jonah?
- ② Why, acc. to this story, did the deliverance and Jonah's consequent thanksgiving in Ch. 2 lead to his turn toward obedience? Why did the writer thus present this radical turning toward obedience in Ch. 2?
- ③ Implications?

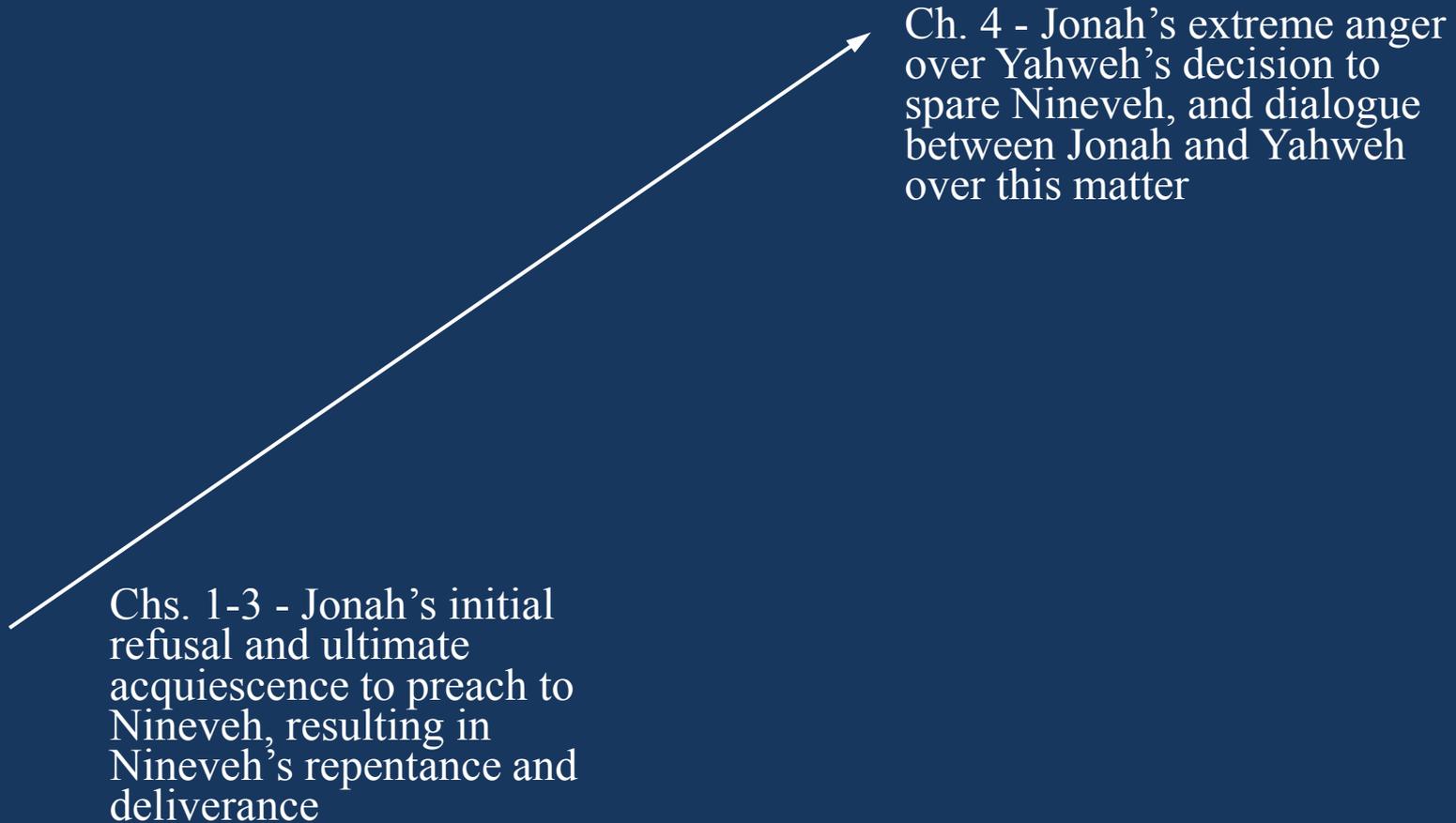
(2) Historical (primarily) cruciality involving Nineveh and Yahweh: (includes also comparison between Nineveh's turning and Yahweh's turning)



Questions –

- ① What is the meaning of Nineveh's actions in Ch. 3, and how did these actions prompt Yahweh to turn away from his wrath? How does this responsive turning on the part of Yahweh serve as a model for Yahweh's actions toward his human creation throughout the book?
- ② Why, acc. to this story, did Nineveh's repentance, etc., cause Yahweh likewise to repent? Why did the writer present this "dual turning" as he did?
- ③ Implications?

⑤ Climax - Story reaches a high point of culmination in dialogue of Ch. 4:



Involves specifically -

- (1) Repetition (Recurrence) of Contrast - Between Jonah and Yahweh, centering upon Jonah's disagreements with Yahweh's actions and purposes in the world, reaches a high point of explicitness and intensification in Ch. 4.

- (2) Repetition (Recurrence) of Questions - With the exceptions of the commands at 1:1 and 3:1, every time Jonah is addressed he is asked a question (1:6,8,11; 4:4,9,11). The final three questions come from Yahweh, and may bring this recurrence to its climax; indeed, the book may come to an ultimate climax with the final question in 4:11, for this question reflects the central concern of the book and causes the book to conclude in an open-ended fashion: the reader does not know Jonah's response to this question, and the question may be directed as much to the reader as to Jonah.

Questions -

- ① How does the climactic movement toward the reflective conversation between Jonah and Yahweh Ch. 4 illumine message of the book of Jonah?
- ② Why did the writer wish to bring the book of Jonah to a climax with this dialogue between Yahweh and Jonah?
- ③ Implications?

4. Key verses / strategic areas.

- Ⓐ 1:1-3; 3:1-3 - Represents cruciality surrounding Jonah's obedience/disobedience; and recurrence of contrast between Jonah and Yahweh; and recurrence of "cry".
- Ⓑ 1:9, 14-16 - Represents recurrence of contrast between Jonah and pagans; and recurrence of "cry".
- Ⓒ 4:1-11 - Represents recurrence of theme of universal lordship and universal concern of Yahweh; recurrence of contrast, with causation; recurrence of great/exceedingly and of evil (esp. 4:1); recurrence of perish/die; and climax, with substantiation, recurrence of contrast between Jonah and Yahweh, and recurrence of interrogation.

5. Higher - Critical Data

Ⓐ Writer

- ① The book itself is anonymous although the story concerns Jonah, the son of Amittai, the use of third person narration throughout suggests that the book does not purport to be written by Jonah.
- ② The writer was aware of the foundational creeds of the Hebrew faith (1:9; 4:2), and was concerned to draw out their significance for Yahweh's lordship over and redemptive purposes toward Gentiles (1:4-16), even wicked and violent Gentiles (3:1-10; 4:11), and their significance for Israel's missionary responsibility to these Gentile peoples (1:1-2; 3:1-5).

- ③ The writer may have been associated with the sea, or had experience with the sea (1:2-2:10). A number of details re. the sea and sea travel are included: e.g.,
- Paid fare and went on board (1:3)
 - Parts of a ship (1:5)
 - Specific description of procedures followed during a storm (1:4-8,13)
 - Specific description of aquatic life (2:1-6, esp. 2:5-6)

Related to this consideration is the possibility the writer may have been associated with the seaport Joppa: it is one of only three place-names mentioned in the book, and the only one of the three in Palestine (1:3; the others are Tarshish [1:3; 4:2] and Nineveh [1:2; 3:2,3,4,7; 4:11]).

- ④ The writer may have had little interest in prophecy as such, or in the prophetic movement; at least he evinces little interest in these things in this book. Although Jonah is obviously a prophet (1:1-2; 3:1-3) and prophesies against Nineveh (3:4), the writer does not refer to Jonah as a “prophet,” and the words “prophet,” “prophecy,” and “prophesy” do not appear in the book. Jonah’s “prophetic activity” seems to be used by the author to make a point that has nothing (directly) to do with prophecy at all. Indeed, the writer seems to be more interested in the cult (1:16; 2:4,9) than in prophecy.
- ⑤ Assuming that 2:1-9 is original (and not a later interpolation), the writer was apparently well acquainted with the Psalmic tradition, and esp. the tradition of thanksgiving Psalms. Indeed, the writer himself may have been a Psalmist.

Ⓑ Date

- ① The story itself concerns the period of Ninevite greatness, and was thus written sometime after Nineveh became the capital and leading city of Assyria (1:2; 3:2-3; 4:11).
- ② Repeated references to cultic (temple) activity (1:16; 2:9), reference to “thy holy temple” (2:4,7), and the inclusion of a psalm of thanksgiving of the type used in the cult (2:1-9) may indicate that the temple was standing (though which temple is not clear) and that the cult was functioning in a rather regular fashion when the book was written.
- ③ Note below under “occasion” for additional points of significance re. date.

© Occasion (and recipients)

Assuming the portrait of Jonah in this book reflects the situation, attitude, thinking, and problems of readership, it may be that the book was written to the (a) Hebrew or Jewish community that took the ancient creeds of Yahwistic faith seriously (1:9; 4:2) and was not afraid, when the opportunity presented itself, to make a confession of their faith to heathen with whom they might come into contact and who might inquire into the nature of their identity (1:9). But the writer seems to address a situation in which this community did not take seriously the implications of its theological creeds for the heathen nations, and when pressed would draw back from these implications. On the one hand, they may have had no interest or enthusiasm for the evangelization of the heathen (1:4-16); and on the other hand, they desired not the salvation of the wicked nations who had done violence to them and to others, but their destruction (4:11). They may have been led to a profound anger and despair that stemmed from self-pity, because Yahweh had spared (or showed that he wished to spare) Israel's violent enemies while removing blessings from Israel (4:6-9). This community may have forgotten that its own past deliverances were due not to its own righteousness but to Yahweh's forgiveness and saving acts on its behalf (1:1-2:10), or it may have turned a blind eye to the incongruity of accepting God's salvation (2:1-10), and blessings (4:6-11) on its own behalf while begrudging the same divine forgiveness and salvation towards other nations, whom, acc. to Israel's own creed (1:9), Yahweh has also created.

Ⓓ Unity (also sources)

① The considerations that (a) 2:1-10 is a psalm set in the midst of a book composed entirely of prose narrative and (b) this passage could be excluded from the book without interrupting the general plan of the story may suggest that this psalm did not originally belong to the book, i.e., a later interpolation. Yet it is noted that the Psalm fits in well to the flow of the story, and does contribute to it.

② One notes that in Chs. 1-2 the writer typically identifies the almighty as Yahweh [“Lord” - RSV] (1:1,3,4,9,10,14,16,17; 2:1,6,7,9; but cf. 1:6,9), while in Chs. 3-4 he tends to identify the Almighty as Elohim [“God”-RSV] (3:5,8,9,10; 4:6,7,8,9; but cf. 3:1,3; 4:2,3,6,10). This may suggest different sources, but it does not necessarily point to diverse sources.

6. Other Major Impressions

- Ⓐ The atmosphere of this book is characterized by tenderness and care. Yahweh graciously delivers Jonah from a watery grave (2:1-10), even as Yahweh repents re. the destruction of Nineveh (3:9-10). Yahweh's tenderness and compassion appear esp. in 4:2, 9-10. Yahweh cares for all living creatures because he has made them and sustained them.
- Ⓑ The writer uses proper names sparingly. Jonah is the only person who is actually named, and the only place-names are Joppa, Tarshish, and Nineveh. This may indicate the importance of this person and these places that are actually named.

- Ⓒ Twice Jonah quoted traditional creeds of the Hebrew faith: 1:9; 4:2. In each case a key word from the creed is used repeatedly in the surrounding context, presumably to give unity to the context and to connect the surrounding material with the creed: the word “fear” **יִרְאֵעַ** from the creed of 1:9 appears five additional times in Ch. 1 (1:5,10 [twice], 16 [twice]); and the word “repent” **[נָחַם]** from the creed of 4:2 (3:9,10) as well as the related term “turn” **[שׁוּב]** (3:8,9,10).
- Ⓓ The book begins and ends with a word from Yahweh to Jonah: the first is a word of command (1:1), and the last is a question that is meant to lead to instruction (4:11). The first emphasizes the sovereign authority of Yahweh, while the second emphasizes his compassion (although sovereign lordship is also involved in 4:11); the first calls for obedience, while the second calls for a change of attitude or of thinking; the first presents Yahweh as commanding one (Yahweh as sovereign lord), while the second presents him as teacher.