**WORSHIP**

**Third Sunday after the Epiphany**

OLD TESTAMENT

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

*Jonah Goes to Nineveh*

**Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ﻿2﻿ “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” ﻿3﻿ Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days. ﻿4﻿ On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” ﻿5﻿ The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. 10﻿ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.**

**3:1** וַיְהִ֧י דְבַר־יְהוָ֛ה אֶל־יוֹנָ֖ה שֵׁנִ֥ית לֵאמֹֽר׃—This verse is identical to 1:1 except that בֶן־אֲמִתַּ֖י (“the son of Amittai”) in 1:1 is replaced by שֵׁנִ֥ית here. This is the feminine form of the ordinal numerical adjective שֵׁנִי, “second.” Here and often elsewhere, the feminine form is used as an adverb, “a second time, again” (see BDB, s.v. שֵׁנִי, under the root שׁנה III). For the prophetic “Word of Yahweh” as portending Jesus, the incarnate Word, and for the construction אֶל־ …וַיְהִי (“was/came to”), (CC)

Jonah is the only biblical prophet who must be given his assignment a second time because of his prior disobedience. In calling Jonah again, Yahweh graciously makes no reference to the prophet’s previous failure (1:3–2:1 [ET1:3–17]). Jonah 3:1 repeats 1:1 except that the grace-filled שֵׁנִ֥ית (“a second time”) replaces “the son of Amittai,” naming Jonah’s father. Due to Jonah’s “baptism” in the sea (Jonah 2), Yahweh has no word of condemnation for his “flighty dove” (cf. Micah 7:19; Rom 8:1). (CC)

At this point in the narrative, Jonah has been to hell and back. He has experienced Yahweh’s gracious deliverance from “Sheol” (2:3 [ET2:2]) and “the underworld” (2:7 [ET2:6]). He is not the same person. The “salvation” that “belongs to Yahweh” (2:10 [ET2:9]) has given Jonah a new start, and its fruits are brought forth in 3:3 when he leaves his old life and arises as a new man, “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24NIV). After Peter denied Christ, he too received a second chance from this same God (Jn 21:15–19). His experience taught him to call God “the God of all grace” (1 Pet 5:10). (CC)

Not only does Yahweh forget Jonah’s sin (cf. Jer 31:34), neither does he now prompt Jonah to fulfill the prophet’s earlier promise, “What I have vowed, I will indeed repay” (2:10 [ET2:9]). Yahweh’s words carry no rebuke for Jonah and no warning of what would happen if he once again failed to obey. So in this merciful manner, the plot rewinds and begins anew. The bedraggled, seaweed-draped, vomit-stained, and traumatized prophet likely was a bit more receptive to the Word of Yahweh this time! (CC)

*second time*. God made a new beginning with Jonah, giving him a second chance. (TLSB)

Peter would later experience a similar reinstatement into his office as an apostle (John 21:15-19). When Peter called the Lord “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10), he showed he fully understood how the Lord could re-commission him by grace, pure and undeserved grace. (PBC)

**3:2** ק֛וּם לֵ֥ךְ אֶל־נִֽינְוֵ֖ה הָעִ֣יר הַגְּדוֹלָ֑ה—This first part of Yahweh’s second call to Jonah is identical to the first part of his original call (“Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city”). See the first two textual notes on 1:2.

וִּקְרָ֤א אֵלֶ֙יהָ֙—In Leningradensis (hence *BHS*), the conjunction is pointed anomalously as the vowel letter *shureq* (וּ) with the *hireq* vowel (וִּ). Normally the conjunction is pointed as *shureq* when the initial consonant has *shewa*, so the expected form is וּקְרָא as in 1:2.

The Qal masculine singular imperative of קָרָא is repeated from 1:2 (וּקְרָ֣א עָלֶ֑יהָ), but here it takes the preposition אֶל instead of עַל (both with third feminine singular suffix, referring to נִינְוֵה since cities are feminine in Hebrew). These two prepositions often seem to be used interchangeably, especially in Jeremiah and later OT books. The LXX translates both 1:2 and 3:2 identically and neutrally: καὶ κήρυξον ἐν  
αὐτῇ, “and preach *in* her/it.” However, אֶל more commonly means “to,” whereas “against” is more often a meaning of עַל. The combination עַלקָרָא can refer to announcing judgment, as in Jonah 1:2, “call out *against*” Nineveh (see the third textual note on 1:2 and BDB, s.v. קָרָא, 3 a and d). The content of what Jonah was to preach was not given in 1:2, but the construction made clear that it was to be a message of judgment. Sasson argues that the change here to אֶל is significant and that Yahweh here gives Jonah a more neutral directive: “The idiom אלקרא (better perhaps the verb קרא with the אל here used merely to introduce the indirect object) controls the delivery of *some* message which Jonah is to convey to the Ninevites.” It is plausible that the shift from עַל in 1:2 to אֶל in 3:2 involves a change in Yahweh’s assignment to his prophet. Whereas in 1:2 Yahweh instructed Jonah to preach “against” the city, now in 3:2 Yahweh commands Jonah to announce “to” it an as-yet unspecified message. The message itself is not revealed to Jonah until he enters the city, and we, the audience, hear it only when Jonah preaches it in 3:4. These different nuances for עַל versus אֶל further signal a change in Jonah’s prophetic status. Whereas 1:2 might suggest that Jonah was given a measure of freedom in how to word his judgment oracle, the rest of 3:2 specifies that Jonah is to be completely dependent on Yahweh for the wording of his prophetic statement. It will not even be given to him until it is time to preach it. This subtle change in the wording of Jonah’s second call is perhaps intended to prepare us for the unexpected consequences of his mission (3:5–10).

אֶת־הַקְּרִיאָ֔ה אֲשֶׁ֥ר אָנֹכִ֖י רֹּבֵ֥ר אֵלֶֽיךָ׃—These words emphasize the divine origin of Jonah’s proclamation. The message he is to communicate is not his own; it comes from God.

The preceding imperative קְרָא, “to proclaim, call,” takes the cognate direct object noun קְרִיאָה, “proclamation” (BDB), with the article. The cognate accusative construction can be rendered “proclaim the proclamation” or “call the call.” This noun occurs only here in the OT. It is a neutral term in that it does not indicate whether the content of the message is judgment or salvation. If a judgment oracle were intended here, we might have expected a term such as מַשָּׂא, “oracle,” which is often used to introduce judgment oracles against Gentile nations (see, e.g., Is 13:1; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1), including an oracle against Nineveh (Nah 1:1). Therefore, like the change from עַל to אֶל (see the preceding textual note), the use of this term too may subtly prepare us for the unexpected salvation of Nineveh.

The LXX translates קְרִיאָה as κήρυγμα, which occurs elsewhere in the LXX only in 2 Chr 30:5, where it renders קוֹל, referring to Hezekiah’s “decree” for Israel to celebrate the Passover, and in Prov 9:3 and 1 Esdras 9:3. In the NT, κήρυγμα is the term used in Mt 12:41 and Lk 11:32, where Jesus refers to “the preaching of Jonah” (see the excursus “The Sign of Jonah”). It also is the term used in one of the alternate endings of Mark; Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 1:21; 2:4; 15:14; 2 Tim 4:17; Titus 1:3 that refers to the “preaching” of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, resulting in the salvation of all who believe. Compare Jonah 3:5: “Then the men of Nineveh believed in God.”

The relative clause אֲשֶׁ֥ר אָנֹכִ֖י רֹּבֵ֥ר אֵלֶֽיךָ modifying קְרִיאָה uses the Qal participle (רֹּבֵ֥ר) of the verb רָּבַר. In the Qal, the only forms of רָּבַר that occur in the OT are the infinitive construct (once in the OT), the active participle (thirty-nine occurrences), and the passive participle (one occurrence). The active Qal forms mean “speak” (BDB) and thus are synonymous with the far more common Piel forms.

In general, the temporal force of a participle must be determined from the context. However, participles are often used for actions that will take place in the near future, in which case “a future action, mainly an approaching action, is represented as being already in progress” (Joüon, § 121 e). Therefore, it is likely that by using רֹּבֵ֥ר here Yahweh refers to “the call that I *am about to speak* to you.” Similarly, Jonah’s sermon in 3:4 also uses a participle: “Yet in forty days Nineveh *is about to be changed* [נֶהְפָּֽכֶת],” and as soon as Jonah preaches his sermon, the change starts (3:5–9).

The Syriac Peshitta translates the Hebrew here in 3:2 literally with a participle and pronoun, ܕܐܡ̇ܪ ܐܢܐ, “that I am speaking.” The Vulgate translates with the present tense, *quam ego loquor ad te*, as do most English translations, for example, “the message that I tell you” (ESV). The LXX translates with an aorist, ὃ ἐγὼ ἐλάλησα πρὸς σέ, and some English translations likewise use the past tense, for example, “as I told you to” (JB). However, for the past tense, a perfect verb could have been used (e.g., אֲשֶׁר רִּבַּרְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ). (CC)

**3:2–3a** Jonah’s overall movement in chapter 1 and into chapter 2 was characterized by the verb “to go down,” away from Yahweh (who told him to “arise,” 1:2) and from other people, down toward death (see יָרַד in 1:3, 5; 2:7 [ET2:6]; see also his movement in 1:15; 2:3–6 [ET2:2–5]). In chapter 3, Jonah’s action is characterized by קוּם, “arise” (3:2–3), הָלַךְ, “to go, walk” (3:2–3), and “call” (קָרָא, 3:2, 4; see also the noun קְרִיאָה, “proclamation, call,” in 3:2). (CC)

From the first two chapters, we are familiar with the narrator’s fondness of repetition. His repetition of key verbs in 3:2–4 invites us to compare and contrast Jonah with the pagan Gentiles who are converted to saving faith in the one true God. Yahweh first commanded Jonah to “arise, go, … call out” to Nineveh (קוּם, הָלַךְ, and קָרָא, 1:2). The captain of the ship called on Jonah to “arise” and “call” on his God (קוּם, קָרָא, 1:6). In chapter 1, Jonah spurned those calls by Yahweh and the captain, but now in 3:2–4, those verbs describe how Jonah faithfully carries out Yahweh’s repeated call. The people and king of Nineveh will display a faithful response to Yahweh’s Word by means of these same verbs. The Ninevites “call” for a fast (קָרָא, 3:5). The king “arises” from his throne (קוּם, 3:6) to don sackcloth and issue his decree that all his people should sincerely “call” to God (קָרָא, 3:8). (CC)

Supporting the view that the repetition of these three verbs is deliberate and significant is the fact that none of the three occur again in the book after 3:8. (CC)

Thus קוּם, “arise,” echoes throughout chapter 3 as a “resurrection” reminder of Jonah’s renewed call, which he now carries out, in contrast to his disobedience in chapter 1, which led to his descent and near death in Sheol (2:3, 7 [ET2:2, 6]). (CC)

Yahweh’s original command for Jonah to “go” (הָלַךְ, 1:2) is repeated in 3:2, and then Jonah “went” (הָלַךְ, 3:3), showing Jonah’s slow but finally willing response to Yahweh’s command. This verb is often used to describe a person’s life of faith in response to God’s Word; in such passages, it is usually translated as “walk.” This suggests that הָלַךְ in 3:3 (“Jonah … went/walked”) does not simply refer to Jonah’s mode of transportation. Rather, it describes his mode of life in response to Yahweh’s grace. He is now walking in the ways of Yahweh, “according to the Word of Yahweh” (3:3). In the NT, Paul uses περιπατέω, “to walk,” to convey a similar meaning (e.g., Rom 6:4; Gal 5:16; Eph 4:1; Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:12). (CC)

The repetition of Yahweh’s call to Jonah using the same verbs in 1:2 and 3:2 accents an ongoing theme in the book. What Yahweh commands, says, and does will eventually accomplish his will. Even if Yahweh’s Word is not heeded or fulfilled immediately, as it is not in chapters 1–2, it will be fulfilled in time, as it is in chapter 3. He will not be thwarted. After all, he is the God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land (1:9). (CC)

The repetition of the same verbs in reference to the pagan Gentiles who are converted to faith (the sailors in chapter 1; the Ninevites in chapter 3) accents both the omnipotence and the free grace of Yahweh, over against the powerlessness and futility of people like Jonah who resist his Word. Although his chosen prophet or people may refuse to believe (for a time or permanently), Yahweh can and will raise up other believers whom he saves through faith. (CC)

To highlight that Yahweh’s powerful grace operates through his Word, the author has worded the chain of events in chapter 3 in such a way that the verb קָרָא, “to call,” functions much like טוּל, “to hurl,” did in chapter 1. There Yahweh “hurled” the great wind (1:4) that set in motion more hurling (1:5) that finally ends up with the hurling of Jonah into the sea (1:12, 15). Similarly, the imperative of קָרָא, “call out,” in 3:2 sets in motion a series of callings. Jonah “called out” to the Ninevites in 3:4, and the people “called” for a fast in 3:5, with the king of Nineveh issuing a decree that commands every Ninevite sincerely to “call” to God (3:8). (CC)

The grammar expounds the theology. Yahweh’s call accomplishes his salvific purpose (cf. Is 55:10–11). Paul puts in this way in 1 Thess 5:24: “The one who calls you (ὁ καλῶν) is faithful, and he will do it.” (CC)

Commenting on Jonah’s call into the office of prophet, Luther refers, by extension, to the pastoral office:

Thus both the office and the Word employed in the office must be comprehended in the divine command. If that is done, the work will prosper and bear fruit. But when men run without God’s command or proclaim other messages than God’s Word, they work nothing but harm. Jeremiah, too, drives both these facts home, saying (Jer. 23:21): “I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied.” You who are to preach, impress these two points on your minds! (CC)

Both the Word and the office are divine and are commanded by God. And so Yahweh (re)calls Jonah into the office, and he promises to give him the very words he is to say. (CC)

The change from עַל (“call out *against*” Nineveh) in 1:2 to אֶל (“call out *to* it”) in 3:2 subtly suggests that Yahweh may already have in mind the change in his verdict from the destruction of Nineveh to its salvation (3:10). This beginning of divine reprieve—hinted at in the change of prepositions—will be further intimated in the ambiguity of Jonah’s announcement in 3:4. In the sermon Yahweh gives Jonah, he uses the Niphal participle of הָפַךְ to say that Nineveh “is about to be changed.” The Niphal of that verb can refer to the destruction of a city, but it can also refer to another kind of change. What is conveyed to us by these subtle hints is an indication of things to come. The slight change in prepositions from 1:2 to 3:2 foreshadows the change in the Ninevites—pagans who are brought to repentance and faith by the preached Word—and the complete change in Yahweh’s disposition toward them, expressed in 3:10. (CC)

Two of the imperatives from 3:2, “Arise, go” (ק֛וּם לֵ֥ךְ), become indicatives in 3:3: “Jonah arose and went” (וַיָּ֣קָם יוֹנָ֗ה וַיֵּ֛לֶךְ). Yet the third imperative in 3:2, “call out” (וִּקְרָ֤א), has no corresponding indicative in 3:3 (“he called out” does not come until 3:4). That absence leaves Jonah’s response as yet incomplete. The first time around, Jonah obeyed only one of the two imperatives (“arise, go”) in 1:2; he “arose” (1:3). Now he obeys two of the three imperatives in 3:2. In comparison to 1:2–3, his obedience now is more complete, but it is not yet total or assured. Suspense lingers. This time will the prophet call out Yahweh’s Word? (CC)

GREAT CITY OF NINEVEH – Jonah 4:11 mentions there were “a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left.” We understand this to refer to children who had not yet reached the age of discretion (Deut 1:39). Adding an older brother or sister and two parents to the family of each of the 120,000 gives a rough estimate of perhaps 500,000 inhabitants in Nineveh. (PBC)

*proclaim to it the message I give you.* A prophet was the bearer of a message from God, not primarily a foreteller of coming events. (CSB)

God would give Jonah the words to speak against Nineveh, reflecting God’s will rather than Jonah’s. (TLSB)

Literally, the proclamation I m about to say to you. The first time the Lord told Jonah to “preach against [Nineveh] because of its wickedness has come up before me” (1:2). The second time the Lord’s directive to Jonah was less specific, implying the Lord would brief Jonah on the way regarding what to preach. (PBC)

**3:3** וַיָּ֣קָם יוֹנָ֗ה וַיֵּ֛לֶךְ אֶל־נִֽינְוֶ֖ה כִּדְבַ֣ר יְהוָ֑ה—This verse begins with the same two words as 1:3, וַיָּ֤קָם יוֹנָה֙, “Jonah arose” (see the first textual note on 1:3). There Jonah only appeared to arise in obedience to obey Yahweh’s command in 1:2, ק֠וּם, “Arise,” because he proceeded to flee toward Tarshish. But here in 3:3, the two verbs וַיֵּ֛לֶךְ …וַיָּ֣קָם (the Qal third masculine singular imperfects of קוּם and הָלַךְ with *waw* consecutive) indicate that Jonah “arose and went,” faithfully fulfilling Yahweh’s command in 3:2, which uses the same two verbs: ק֛וּם לֵ֥ךְ, “Arise, go” (the masculine singular Qal imperatives of קוּם and הָלַךְ).

Regarding נִֽינְוֶ֖ה, see the discussion of “Nineveh” in the textual notes on 1:2.

Explicitly confirming Jonah’s obedience here is the construct phrase כִּדְבַ֣ר יְהוָ֑ה, “according to the Word of Yahweh.” The noun רָּבָר, “word,” is in construct with the Tetragrammaton and has the preposition כְּ “expressing conformity to a standard or rule” (BDB, s.v. כְּ, 1 c (1)). This phrase occurs only here in Jonah, but twenty-five times elsewhere in the OT, many noting how believers faithfully carry out a divine mandate (e.g., Josh 8:27; 1 Ki 12:24; 17:5; Jer 13:2; 2 Chr 35:6). (CC)

**3:3b** Halfway through 3:3 the narrator interrupts the action to describe Nineveh with two statements about the city, each posing exegetical problems. (CC)

וְנִֽינְוֵ֗ה הָיְתָ֤ה עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה֙ לֵֽאלֹהִ֔ים—The unusual word order, with the subject (וְנִֽינְוֵ֗ה) preceding the verb (הָיְתָ֤ה), signals a parenthetical digression about the city (3:3b). See Joüon, § 159 f. For other examples of this construction in Jonah, see the first textual note on 1:4. הָיְתָ֤ה is the third feminine singular Qal perfect of הָיָה. It is feminine because its subject, נִינְוֵה, is feminine, as are all Hebrew names of cities. (CC)

This first statement about Nineveh presents two exegetical challenges. The first is the force of the perfect verb הָיְתָ֤ה. Does “Now Nineveh *was* a great city” mean that the book of Jonah was written after Nineveh’s destruction in 612 BC? Not at all. The perfect verb is best understood as meaning that when Jonah arrived in the city, it had been and still was a great city. (CC)

The second exegetical challenge is the prepositional phrase that describes the city. Here the phrase “great city” occurs without the article: עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה֙. Elsewhere in Jonah, the phrase occurs with the article: “Nineveh, the great city” (נִינְוֵה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה, 1:2; 3:2; 4:11). But only here is the city described with the additional prepositional phrase לֵֽאלֹהִ֔ים(the preposition לְ with אֱלֹהִים), “to God.” Many commentators and translators understand this phrase not as a reference to God, but as expressing a kind of superlative, for example, “an *exceedingly* great city” (ESV, NKJV; emphasis added). However, Hebrew has several other customary ways of expressing a superlative. This is not a common way, nor do all grammarians agree that the phrase here should be regarded as a superlative. (CC)

D. Winton Thomas, in an article about the various ways in which Hebrew can express a superlative, discusses eight passages in which either אֱלֹהִים or אֵל allegedly is used to form a superlative. Thomas states: “In all these examples it may be conceded that the divine names have a superlative force so long as we understand that the superlative force is imparted, not by the addition of the divine names as intensifying epithets, but by the fact that a person or thing is brought into a relationship with God.” Thomas argues that Jonah 3:3 means that “Nineveh was ‘great to God,’ that is, even to God, who has a different standard of greatness from men.” In seven of the eight passages considered by Thomas, a noun is in construct with a term for “God.” Jonah 3:3 is the only one of the eight passages in which a superlative allegedly is formed by “God” in a prepositional phrase. Indeed, Jack Sasson notes that there are no other OT examples of a prepositional phrase serving as a superlative and that the ancient versions did not translate this phrase in Jonah 3:3 as a superlative. Sasson argues against interpreting it as superlative. He suggests that it might mean that Nineveh was “a large city to the gods,” meaning that it was “important to the many gods of the Assyrian empire” or that it “contains many shrines.” But most likely, according to Sasson, the preposition לְ is a circumlocution for a genitive, and so “ ‘the large city’ is said to ‘belong’ to God.” This “explains why the Ninevites readily follow Jonah’s directives and why Nineveh is made the object of God’s grace.” Even other scholars who advocate interpreting the phrase as a superlative admit that “probably the idea was that God *originated* the thing … or that it belonged to Him.” (CC)

Often in the OT the preposition לְ is a circumlocution for a genitive and denotes possession, in which case it means “belonging to” (BDB, s.v. לְ, 5 a and b; see also Waltke-O’Connor, § 11.2.10c). The affirmation here that Nineveh is a great city “belonging to God” fits with Jonah’s confession in 1:9 that Yahweh is the God “who made the sea and the dry land,” since all creation belongs to him. It also is consistent with what Yahweh himself will say about the city in 4:10–11. In light of Yahweh’s comparison of Nineveh to the qiqayon plant and his use of “labor” and “raise/make grow” for the plant in 4:10, Yahweh is implying in 4:11 that he himself cultivated the city, just as he did the plant. (CC)

The Hebrew construction here is similar to David’s declaration with the preposition לְ in Ps 24:1: “Belonging to Yahweh is the earth and its fullness” (לַ֭יהוָה הָאָ֣רֶץ וּמְלוֹאָ֑הּ). Since the whole earth is Yahweh’s, certainly Nineveh belongs to him as well. The promise that Yahweh would claim formerly hostile non-Israelites (Gentiles) as his people is expressed in Is 19:24–25:

On that day Israel will be a third [people] in relation to Egypt and Assyria, a source of blessing in the midst of the world, whom Yahweh of hosts will have blessed, saying, “Blessed is my people Egypt, the word of my hands Assyria, and my inheritance Israel.” (CC)

Luther, citing the repentance of the Ninevites in 3:5–9, interprets לֵֽאלֹהִ֔ים as indicating “that none but saints inhabited the city and that Jonah rightly called it ‘a city of God.’ ” (CC)

The interpretation of the phrase as a reference to Nineveh’s importance to God is also plausible based on Jonah 4:11. (CC)

Some less likely views may be mentioned briefly. One is that the phrase affirms Nineveh’s status as a potential divine residence: “great for-God.” Another is that if the noun אֱלֹהִים is taken as a true plural (“gods”), the phrase could mean that many “gods” were worshiped in the city or that it had a large number of temples. (CC)

Even if we did not fully know how to interpret עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה֙ לֵֽאלֹהִ֔ים here in 3:3, by the time we read 4:10–11, its meaning becomes clear. The concept of words and phrases that grow in meaning confirms this interpretation. The author of Jonah repeats key words and phrases, which take on added significance with each new repetition, until the climactic one reveals the full import. In this way the narrative progresses toward its goal.12 The progressive descriptions of Nineveh are as follows:

1. “Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city” (1:2).

2. “Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city” (3:2).

3. “Now Nineveh was a great city belonging to God” (3:3).

4. “Shall I myself not have pity upon Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than twelve myriads of people who do not know [the difference] between their right and their left, and many animals?” (4:11). (CC)

Thus the fourth, climactic description of Nineveh confirms the interpretation that 3:3 declares that Nineveh is great and that it belongs to God, even though the full extent of Yahweh’s compassion for the city is not revealed until 4:11. (CC)

מַהֲלַ֖ךְ שְׁלֹ֥שֶׁת יָמִֽים׃—This second piece of information about the city, that it was “a walk of three days,” also poses a challenge. (CC)

Hebrew often forms nouns by prefixing מ to a verbal root (Joüon, § 88L d). The noun מַהֲלָךְ is from the verb הָלַךְ, “go, walk” (as in 3:2–3). Here it is in construct (hence -לַ֖ךְ). The noun recurs in 3:4 and occurs elsewhere in the OT only in Ezek 42:4; Zech 3:7; Neh 2:6. It literally means a “walk, journey, going” (BDB). That it does not refer to a fixed linear distance is evident when King Artaxerxes asks Nehemiah, “How long will your journey [מַֽהֲלָכֲךָ֖] be, and when do you return?” (Neh 2:6). His twofold question only seeks to ascertain when Nehemiah expects to return to his job, not the exact distance he will travel. Whereas Nehemiah embarked on a journey of hundreds of miles, in Ezek 42:4 the noun is an architectural term referring to a “passageway” in the eschatological temple that is only about a hundred and fifty feet long and fifteen feet wide. In Zech 3:7 the plural has an abstract meaning: Yahweh promises the high priest Joshua that if he is faithful, he will receive “access” to join others who stand before Yahweh. (CC)

Jonah was inside the great fish for “three days” (שְׁלֹשָׁ֥ה יָמִ֖ים, 2:1 [ET1:17]; see the fourth textual note on 2:1). This exact phrase also occurs in 1 Sam 30:12; 1 Ki 12:5; 2 Ki 2:17. However, usually the numeral is in construct, as here: שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים. That construct phrase occurs over thirty times in the OT. (CC)

**Summary of Scene 4**

Jonah 3:1–3a does not explicitly state that Jonah has repented, that the experience with the sea and the great fish have humbled him, that Yahweh’s salvation (2:10 [ET2:9]) prompts his obedience, or that he now plans to change his theology to accommodate God’s desire to save all people, even pagan Gentiles like the Ninevites (Jonah resents that in 4:1–2). (CC)

So why does Jonah go to Nineveh this time? After all, this was a demanding journey of about five hundred miles from the Mediterranean coast across desert routes. The approximate travel time in antiquity from Jerusalem to Nineveh is estimated to have been between a month and forty-five days, based on caravan speed. So why go? (CC)

One answer might be that Jonah realizes he cannot escape Yahweh. This God has pursued him from Israel, across the sea, into the ocean depths, even to “the belly of Sheol” and “the underworld” (2:3–7b [2:2–6b]), then out onto the land again (2:11 [ET2:10]). At this point, Jonah may simply be giving in, passively but not joyfully acquiescing to what Yahweh wants. (CC)

Another answer as to why Jonah goes to Nineveh this time might be that he hopes or anticipates that the Ninevites will not respond, in which case they would be destroyed. Nothing would be sweeter for him than this (cf. 4:2)! Jonah knows all about Yahweh’s mercy (4:2), but he also knows that destruction and death can occur if repentance and faith are not forthcoming. His near-death experience (1:15–2:8a [ET1:15–2:7a]) after his own rebellion (1:3) would have reinforced that. If Jonah is given any freedom in crafting his sermon in 3:4, we might surmise that he even may be attempting to steer the Ninevites to destruction by delivering a sermon that is only five words long, contains no call for the Ninevites to repent, and says nothing about escape or salvation. It is as though Jonah marches off to Nineveh with an explosive briefcase tucked under his arm, presumably packed with pounds of prophetic rhetorical explosives! (CC)

Or perhaps Jonah goes to the great city because of his renewed faith. After all, Yahweh had saved him from the death he surely knew he deserved. Despite his rebellion, Yahweh had provided a great fish for his deliverance (2:1[ET1:17]), not abandoned him in Sheol (2:3 [ET2:2]; cf. Ps 16:10), raised him up to new life (Jonah 2:7c, 10–11 [ET2:6c, 9–10]), and reinstalled him into the prophetic office (3:1–2; cf. Jn 21:15–19). Yahweh has come “to seek and to save what was lost” (Lk 19:10). Just as Paul urges the baptized members of the congregation in Rome to present themselves to God as people who once were dead but now are alive (Rom 6:1–18), so also Jonah has been through his own “baptismal” drowning of the old man and resurrection of the new man of faith. He is now empowered to follow Yahweh’s command, just as Yahweh’s other servants have done: the wind and the sea (1:4–15) and the great fish (2:1, 11 [ET1:17; 2:10]). (CC)

But if this is true, it will become apparent in chapter 4 that Jonah is still *simul iustus et peccator*, “saint and sinner at the same time,” and this to the very end of the narrative. (CC)

*obeyed.* But reluctantly, still wanting the Ninevites to be destroyed (4:1–5). (CSB)

Jonah had learned his lesson and now followed God’s directions. (TLSB)

*very important city.*† See 4:11, which says the city had more than 120,000 inhabitants. Archaeological excavations indicate that the later imperial city of Nineveh was about eight miles around. The fact, however, that “a visit required three days” may suggest a larger area, such as the four-city complex of Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen mentioned in Ge 10:11–12. Greater Nineveh covered an area of some 60 miles in circumference. On the other hand, “three days” may have been a conventional way of describing a medium-length distance (see Ge 30:36; Ex 3:18; Jos 9:16–17). Or the term may refer to a “preaching circuit” through the city’s gates and plazas. (CSB)

Indicates not Nineveh’s size, but God’s concern for the city. (TLSB)

Here were stationed the fierce troops and the swift cavalry of the king. The citizens of Nineveh felt secure behind its massive walls – 100 feet high and broad enough for three chariots to be driven abreast on the roadway running along its top. (PBC)

VISIT REQUIRED THREE DAYS – There are basically three interpretations.

1. The three days was the time required to walk the circumference of the city.
2. Another interpretation understands the three days’ journey as the time required to walk through Nineveh.
3. The three days’ walk is interpreted by many to be the time required to trvel the main streets and neighborhoods.

This commentary prefers the third interpretation. (PBC)

**3:4** וַיָּ֤חֶל יוֹנָה֙ לָב֣וֹא בָעִ֔יר מַהֲלַ֖ךְ י֣וֹם אֶחָ֑ד—The first verb is the Hiphil third masculine singular imperfect with *waw* consecutive of חָלַל, to “begin” (BDB, s.v. חָלַל III, Hiphil, 2; *HALOT*, s.v. חלל I, Hiphil, 2). This verb frequently takes an infinitive construct with the preposition לְ, “begin to” do something. לָב֣וֹא is formed with the Qal infinitive construct of בּוֹא, “to enter.” בּוֹא often is followed by the preposition בְּ, “into,” so בָעִ֔יר is, literally, “enter into the city.” The phrase מַהֲלַ֖ךְ י֣וֹם אֶחָ֑ד (“a journey of one day”) repeats the noun מַהֲלָךְ from 3:3; see the last textual note on 3:3. This clause does not just refer to the moment he entered the city. Rather, it refers to his entire first day of walking about in the city. This was just the beginning because it would take three days for him to walk everywhere throughout the huge city. (CC)

וַיִּקְרָא֙ וַיֹּאמַ֔ר—These two verbs (“He called out and said”) refer to action contemporaneous with the preceding clause: throughout Jonah’s first day of walking about in the city, he is continually heralding his message. These verbs should not be taken as sequential, as if Jonah waited until he had walked about in Nineveh for one day before he began to preach. (CC)

ע֚וֹד אַרְבָּעִ֣ים י֔וֹם וְנִֽינְוֵ֖ה נֶהְפָּֽכֶת׃—These five Hebrew words comprise Jonah’s sermon. The adverb עוֹד can mean “yet” and refer to the future (BDB, 1 a (*b*)). Here the time in the future is set by אַרְבָּעִ֣ים י֔וֹם. Hebrew customarily uses the plural of a numeral for a corresponding multiple of ten, so the plural of אַרְבַּע, “four,” is אַרְבָּעִים, “forty.” Numbers greater than ten normally take the singular יוֹם (“day”), though English requires the plural, “days.” English also requires a preposition: “yet *in* forty days.” (CC)

The LXX has ἔτι τρεῖς ἡμέραι and the Vulgate *adhuc quadraginta dies*. Both constructions indicate an interval of time (“yet, still, more”) before a future event. Note that the LXX reads “three days” instead of the “forty days” in the MT, Vulgate, and Syriac Peshitta. Nearly every early church father before Jerome follows the LXX. (CC)

The Niphal participle (נֶהְפָּֽכֶת) of הָפַךְ is feminine singular (and in pause, hence -פָּֽ- instead of -פֶּ-) because its subject, נִֽינְוֵ֖ה, is feminine. The Qal can mean “to turn,” “to change,” or “to destroy,” and the Niphal can have the corresponding passive meanings, to “be turned, changed” into something else (BDB, s.v. הָפַךְ, Niphal, 2 c; see also *HALOT*, Niphal, 3) or “be demolished, overthrown” (*HALOT*, Niphal, 2; see also BDB, Niphal, 2 d). (CC)

The temporal force of a participle must be determined from its context. Participles are often used for imminent actions that will take place soon, so they can be described “as being already in progress” (Joüon, § 121 e). See the third textual note on 3:2 (אֲשֶׁ֥ר אָנֹכִ֖י רֹּבֵ֥ר אֵלֶֽיךָ, “that I am about to speak to you”). Since the change in Nineveh starts to take place (see 3:5–10) as soon as the words leave Jonah’s lips, the best translation is “Nineveh is about to be changed.” Jonah may well have hoped or expected that no change would take place in Nineveh until it would be destroyed forty days hence. However, Yahweh could foresee that the change in Nineveh (repentance) would begin immediately by the power of his preached Word, and Yahweh had instructed Jonah to use these exact words in his sermon (see 3:2). (CC)

Two additional points must be made about the meaning of הָפַךְ. First, passages in which this verb refers to the destruction of a city are indissolubly linked in the OT with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. By using הָפַךְ, Jonah is echoing this earlier, devastating judgment of Yahweh upon non-Israelite cities. It then aids in characterizing Nineveh as an exceedingly wicked city, thereby making its repentance all the more remarkable. The Qal of הָפַךְ is used in Gen 19:25, 29 to refer to Yahweh destroying Sodom and Gomorrah (and in Gen 19:21, where he promises not to destroy Zoar, whence Lot flees). In those contexts, it is a synonym of שָׁחַת, “destroy” (Gen 19:13–14, 29). Sodom became the archetype of wickedness because of the abomination of homosexuality (Gen 19:4–11). God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah became a type of the eschatological judgment for all unbelievers, especially the depraved. (CC)

Second, הָפַךְ could be understood in different ways. Jonah likely would have understood his message to be one of impending doom of the sort that befell Sodom, and the Ninevites clearly took it as a warning that they would perish (see Jonah 3:9). (CC)

However, this verb also can refer to a radical reversal from one extreme to another, including a change of heart. For example, Moses states that “Yahweh your God turned [וַיַּהֲפֹךְ֩, Qal imperfect] for you the curse [of Balaam] into a blessing, because Yahweh your God loves you” (Deut 23:6 [ET23:5]; similar is Neh 13:2). It refers to a radical change of heart in Saul (the Qal in 1 Sam 10:9). It is used for a radical turning from sorrow to joy (Qal in Jer 31:13; Niphal in Esther 9:22) or evil speech to holy invocation (Qal in Zeph 3:9). The Niphal, which is in Jonah 3:4, refers to a radical change in God’s own heart, from anger to compassion for his people in Hos 11:8. (CC)

Thus the wording of the sermon Yahweh spoke to Jonah (3:2), recorded by the author of the book (3:4), can be understood by us, the reading audience, in one of two ways. Probably this is part of the irony intended by the author. “Yet in forty days Nineveh is about to be changed” could refer to its destruction like Sodom and Gomorrah or to its change from impenitent wickedness to repentance and faith. In this context, הָפַךְ is a double entendre promoting either Law and judgment, or Law and Gospel. Either way, Nineveh will be changed! This gives Jonah’s oracle a tautological nature: whether the city disregards the warning and is destroyed or repents and is spared, his oracle will come true. (CC)

Pseudo-Philo acknowledges this double entendre when he writes about the conversion of the Ninevites: “The city has truly been overturned, as it was proclaimed, but in its hearts and not its walls. It is no longer the same city.” The two possible meanings of the verb allow for the fact that Yahweh seeks a change in the people’s hearts (see 3:9–10), while Jonah longs for their destruction (see 4:1, 5). Jonah’s distress in chapter 4 is partly because he does not realize that his sermon came true in the sense Yahweh intended. How ironic! (CC)

*a day’s journey*. On the first day of Jonah’s anticipated three-day visit, the people of Nineveh already responded to his message. (TLSB)

FORTY MORE DAYS – The number forty is often associated with testing and judgment. (PBC)

BE OVERTURNED – Or, “overturned.” The message that God told Jonah to deliver may be understood in two ways: Jonah hoped that Nineveh would be overturned in destruction; instead, the city was overturned in repentance and faith. God then overturned His decision for judgment and granted them mercy (v 10). Nineveh changed and God changed His judgment, but Jonah did not. After Jonah delivered God’s message, nothing more is heard of him in ch 3. (TLSB)

We can learn a double lesson from Jonah’s effective preaching. First, he was brief and to the point. He let the Word do the talking for him. Second, Jonah did not seek to draw attention to himself by his preaching. (PBC)

**3:5–6** *fast … sackcloth … dust.* Customary signs of humbling oneself in repentance (see 1Ki 21:27; Ne 9:1). (CSB)

Here is the greatest miracle in the book of Jonah and one of the greatest in all of Scripture. An entire city brought to repentance. Think of it – perhaps a half-million people. What a miracle of mercy! (PBC)

**3:5** אַנְשֵׁ֥י נִֽינְוֵ֖ה בֵּֽאלֹהִ֑ים וַֽיַּאֲמִ֛ינוּ—The verb is the Hiphil (third masculine plural imperfect with *waw* consecutive) of אָמַן, which here takes the preposition בְּ attached to the object (בֵּֽאלֹהִ֑ים), the men of Nineveh “believed in God” (NASB). This combination, the Hiphil of אָמַן with בְּ, occurs fairly often meaning “to have trust in, to believe in” God (*HALOT*, s.v. אמן I, Hiphil, 3; see also BDB, s.v. אָמַן, Hiphil, 2 c). It could also be rendered “have faith in.” The OT uses this construction for the faith of Abram, through which Yahweh reckoned to him “righteousness” (Gen 15:6), and for the faith of the people of Israel after their salvation through the Red Sea (Ex 14:31). (CC)

As with Abram and the people of Israel, the faith of the Ninevites here is far more than simply believing that Jonah’s prediction would come true. Neither is Nineveh’s belief in God simply an assent to the existence of Israel’s God or that he is the only God. As James says, “You believe that God is one. … Even the demons believe [that] and shudder” (James 2:19). Rather, “the call” from Yahweh (3:2) that Jonah preached (3:4) brought the Ninevites to saving faith in Yahweh, just as Jonah’s confession of Yahweh in 1:9 did for the sailors (see 1:16). (CC)

When the Hiphil of אָמַן refers to trusting or believing in humans, it almost always has a negative connotation. To “believe” in the words of people is to be gullible and foolish (Prov 14:15; 26:25). Nor does God “believe” or put absolute trust in his servants (Job 4:18; 15:15). Such statements of *mis*trust are reminiscent of Jesus’ statement that he needs no witness from people because he knows what is in a person (Jn 2:25). (CC)

However, when people “believe” in God, as here, the Hiphil of אָמַן with בְּ “denotes saying yea and amen to God’s Word as it was revealed to them by the prophet.” To be sure, this indicates that the Ninevites believe God’s warning through the prophet Jonah. Yet as Desmond Alexander states, it goes farther: it “denotes more, however, than just believing what someone has said; it expresses the idea of trusting a person.”19 Mere intellectual assent does not get at the real meaning. As Gerhard Ebeling notes, it involves declaring that God’s promise is true and valid. (CC)

It is amazing that the narrator of Jonah uses this expression to describe the response to God by the Gentile Ninevites, who had been pagan enemies of Israel and her God. Now they do not merely assent to God’s existence, but take Jonah’s message to heart and believe God’s Word that within forty days they would be changed—either by being destroyed, or through repentance, faith, and being saved by God, which is the hope they express in 3:9. The very response of faith that Israel could not give without signs and wonders (Ex 4:9) or even refused to give despite miracles (Isaiah 7), the evil people of Nineveh give after the sermon of a reluctant preacher! (CC)

The English phrase “believed in” has idiomatic value, particularly in Christian theology, as a comprehensive statement of faith. However, in some passages, the Hiphil of אָמַן with בְּ has a less comprehensive meaning. For example, after Moses struck the rock, Yahweh informed him and Aaron that they would not bring Israel into the promised land, “because you did not believe/trust in me” (לֹא־הֶאֱמַנְתֶּ֣ם בִּ֔ייַ֚עַן, Num 20:12; cf. Deut 32:50–51). As in the case of Nineveh, Moses’ response demonstrated the extent to which he did or did not believe what God had said and did trust (or did not trust) God to fulfill his Word. Belief or lack of it is demonstrated by the ensuing response. Scripture subsequently makes clear that Moses in particular did not permanently lose all faith in God, but died as a believer (Deut 34:5–12) and entered everlasting glory (Mt 17:3). (CC)

Therefore, we should be cautious in interpreting Jonah 3:5 as referring to a comprehensive faith involving extensive knowledge of Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel. While in some passages the Hiphil of אָמַן with בְּ is a more comprehensive statement of faith, that nuance comes from the context and is not a lexical requirement. Restraint is in order also because the Ninevites are said to believe “in God” (בֵּֽאלֹהִ֑ים) rather than “in Yahweh” (בַּיהוה). Nevertheless, that they truly did believe in God with saving faith is supported by the rest of the narrative of Jonah as well as by the words of Christ himself, who affirms that these Ninevites shall rise on the Last Day (Mt 12:41). (CC)

וַיִּקְרְאוּ־צוֹם֙—Here קָרָא, “to call,” has the sense “to call for, proclaim.” The object is the noun צוֹם, a “fast, period of fasting” (*HALOT*). The people voluntarily fast before the king mandates it in 3:7. This shows the genuineness of their repentance. (CC)

וַיִּלְבְּשׁ֣וּ שַׂקִּ֔ים—Here too the people of Nineveh perform a ritual of repentance even before the king commands it in 3:8. The verb is the Qal third masculine plural imperfect with *waw* consecutive of לָבֵשׁ, to “put on” (BDB, Qal, 1 a; *HALOT*, Qal, 1 a) or “clothe oneself.” Here and often elsewhere it takes as its accusative object the garment or material that one puts on. The indefinite object שַׂקִּ֔ים is the plural of the noun שַׂק, “sackcloth,” which recurs in the singular in 3:6 and the plural in 3:8. This generally refers to a rough cloth that was coarsely woven, usually from goat hair, and then dyed. This cloth was used for various articles, including sacks, so שַׂק can also refer to a “sack,” such as those used by Joseph’s brothers to take their grain home from Egypt (Gen 42:25, 27, 35). The term is transliterated in the NT as σάκκος (Mt 11:21; Lk 10:13; Rev 6:12; 11:3). (CC)

Most of the biblical references to sackcloth are as garments worn by persons in a state of grief or mourning. For example, after Abner’s death, David instructs all the people to put on sackcloth and mourn (2 Sam 3:31). At the preaching of Ezra, all Israel puts on sackcloth and repents for the nation’s sins (Neh 9:1). As an article of clothing it denotes humiliation, mourning, and repentance—so much so that its removal is equated with joy: “You have turned my mourning into dancing for me; you have loosened my sackcloth and girded me in joy” (פִּתַּ֥חְתָּ שַׂקִּ֑י וַֽתְּאַזְּרֵ֥נִי שִׂמְחָֽה׃, Ps 30:12 [ET30:11]). The donning of sackcloth is often accompanied by sitting in ashes, as the king will do in Jonah 3:6, and/or fasting, as the people and animals do in 3:5, 7–8. (CC)

Nineveh’s repentance manifests itself in a form that rivals even the most pious Israelite times of repentance. Not only the king, but all the people and even the livestock put on sackcloth and fast (Jonah 3:5–8). Jonah 3:8 is worded to suggest that just like the people, the livestock too covered themselves with sackcloth! In that way, the Ninevites’ penitence exceeds any recorded for Israel. (CC)

**מִגְּדוֹלָ֖ם וְעַד־קְטַנָּֽם׃—The two adjectivesגָּדוֹל (“great”) and קָטָן (“small”) each have the third masculine plural pronominal suffix (ָם). Each forms a comparative superlative, that is, a superlative in comparison to others in the group (the Ninevites): “the greatest of them” and “the least of them” (see Waltke-O’Connor, § 14.5c, including example 32; GKC, § 133 g; Joüon, § 141 j). This phrase with the prepositions וְעַד … מִן (literally, “from … and until”) is also a merism: naming the two extremes (“greatest … least”) includes everyone in between as well. “From small(est) [קָטָן or קָטֹן] to great(est) [גָּדוֹל]” or vice versa (as here) occurs often in the OT (see BDB, s.v. גָּדוֹל, 7). (CC)**

*believed God.* This may mean that the Ninevites genuinely turned to the Lord (cf. Mt 12:41). On the other hand, their belief in God may have gone no deeper than had the sailors’ fear of God (see note on 1:16). At least they took the prophet’s warning seriously and acted accordingly. (CSB)

The Holy Spirit working through the Word convinced the people of Nineveh that God would indeed overthrow their city if they did not repent. This miracle of faith was even greater than Jonah’s rescue by a great fish. Clement of Rome (1st Epistle): “Jonah proclaimed destruction to the Ninevites; but they, repenting of their sins … obtained salvation, although they were aliens [to the covenant] of God” (*ANF* 1:7). (TLSB)

The Hebrew word for “believed” is the word from which “Amen” is derived. In effect the Ninevites said “Amen, it is true.” To Jonah’s message. (PBC)

*fast … sackcloth*. Traditional signs of repentance and mourning. (TLSB)

*greatest* … *least*. Every level of Ninevite society responded to God’s Word. Their quick response was in stark contrast to Israel’s frequent hardness of heart (e.g., Nu 14:11; Dt 1:32; 2Ki 17:14). Luther: “Take note that the people of Nineveh do some things that God does not command them. Yet Jonah relates this. For instance, they fast and put on sackcloth. What does God care about fasting and sackcloth? He wants the heart; He wants to see a person’s whole life transformed. Also, God did not demand these things from them through Jonah. All He asked was that they cease their villainy.… Jonah does not praise their fasting and their sackcloth later on, but he reports that ‘they turned from their evil way’ (v. 10)” (AE 19:86). (TLSB)

**3:1–5** God is concerned for all people, even those we might write off. The people of Nineveh hardly seem like “good prospects.” However, the message they hear is from God, and God makes sure that it bears the fruit of repentance. Do you assume some people are unable or unwilling to respond to the Gospel? Leave conversion in God’s hands and faithfully fulfill your role as His witness. He has promised that His Word will bear fruit, and He is concerned that all people have the opportunity to be saved. Thank God, His Word bore the fruit of repentance in Nineveh and also in your life. • Savior of the nations, keep me from doubting the effectiveness of Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)

**3:10** וַיַּ֤רְא הָֽאֱלֹהִים֙ אֶֽת־מַ֣עֲשֵׂיהֶ֔ם כִּי־שָׁ֖בוּ מִרַּרְכָּ֣ם הָרָעָ֑ה—This verse returns to the narrative description of what happened. The statement that God “saw” (third masculine singular Qal imperfect of רָאָה with *waw* consecutive) refers to more than physical observance (cf. BDB, s.v. רָאָה, Qal, 6 b). It connotes compassion, as in Ex 2:25, where God “saw” (וַיַּ֥רְא) the afflicted children of Israel and then redeemed them from Egypt. The direct object here is מַ֣עֲשֵׂיהֶ֔ם, the plural of מַעֲשֶׂה (from עָשָׂה, “to do”) with third masculine plural suffix. “Their works” were visible evidence of their repentance.

Often after the verb רָאָה and its object, a כִּי clause explains the object that was seen (Joüon, § 157 d; *HALOT*, s.v. רָאָה, Qal, 5 a). “That they turned from their evil way” explains “their works” that Yahweh “saw.” This could be paraphrased as “Yahweh saw by their works that they had turned from their evil way.”

The כִּי clause uses שׁוּב (שָׁ֖בוּ, Qal third common plural perfect) with the same meaning it had in 3:8, namely, “*turn back* from evil” (BDB, Qal, 6 e), overlapping with “*turn back* to God” (BDB, Qal, 6 c), “repent” (BDB, Qal, 6 d). The prepositional phrase מִרַּרְכָּ֣ם הָרָעָ֑ה (“from their evil way”) shows that they fulfilled the king’s command that they should turn, “each from his evil way,” אִ֚ישׁ מִרַּרְכּ֣וֹ הָֽרָעָ֔ה (3:8). See the fourth textual note on 3:8.

וַיִּנָּ֣חֶם הָאֱלֹהִ֗ים עַל־הָרָעָ֛ה—The Niphal of נָחַם (third masculine singular imperfect with *waw* consecutive), “And God changed his verdict,” fulfills the king’s tentative hope, expressed with the same verb (וְנִחַ֖ם הָאֱלֹהִ֑ים, “God may … change his verdict,” 3:9). The preposition עַל can mean “concerning” (BDB, II 1 f (*g*); *HALOT*, 3) or “about.” הָרָעָ֛ה describes the judgment Yahweh had declared as “the evil.” Since “evil” had been perpetrated by the Ninevites (רָעָה, 1:2; 3:8), their punishment is described by the corresponding term according to *lex talionis* (see the third textual note on 3:9). Even though God himself never is the author of evil (1 Cor 14:33; James 1:13), his punishment can be described from the human viewpoint as an “evil,” though in such passages רָעָה is usually translated “calamity, disaster” (*HALOT*, 5 a).

אֲשֶׁר־רִּבֶּ֥ר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶ֖ם וְלֹ֥א עָשָֽׂה׃—This relative clause modifies הָרָעָ֛ה at the end of the preceding clause, the prophesied “evil” that Yahweh, literally, “spoke [רִּבֶּ֥ר] to do to them

[לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶ֖ם].” In prophetic contexts, רִּבֶּר, “speak,” can be rendered “promise” or (as here) “threaten” depending on whether the prophecy is of weal or woe (BDB, s.v. רָּבַר, Piel, 6, which lists other passages where it is followed by לַעֲשׂוֹת).

The clause “he threatened to do to them” highlights that Jonah’s short sermon in 3:4 was Yahweh speaking, since Yahweh spoke the words Jonah uttered (see 3:2). When the preacher proclaims God’s Word, God himself is preaching.

The dramatic change from Law (judgment) to Gospel (salvation) is accentuated by the juxtaposition of two forms of the same verb, עָשָׂה, “to do.” Yahweh “spoke/threatened” that he was going “to do” (לַעֲשׂוֹת, Qal infinitive construct with לְ) the evil, but then “he did not do” (וְלֹ֥א עָשָֽׂה). Most translations supply a direct object of the last verb, “do [it],” but the terse Hebrew ends the chapter with the verb, leaving the emphasis on Yahweh’s compassionate action. (CC)

No fire and brimstone falls on this latter-day Sodom after all! The wording of this verse, “God saw their works” (וַיַּ֤רְא הָֽאֱלֹהִים֙ אֶֽת־מַ֣עֲשֵׂיהֶ֔ם), echoes this statement about Yahweh and his creation: “God saw everything that he had worked [וַיַּ֤רְא אֱלֹהִים֙ אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁ֣ר עָשָׂ֔ה], and behold it was very good” (Gen 1:31). Yahweh’s action in forgiving the Ninevites is similar to his observation of the goodness of his original creation, only now the good works of the Ninevites are the result of God working in them a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). God could have said, “I will make all new things; the old won’t do.” Instead he says, “I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5). (CC)

Just as the sailors are delivered from the fatal effect of the storm (1:15–16) and Jonah is saved from death and Sheol (2:3, 7–8 [ET2:2, 6–7]), now the Ninevites are delivered from certain doom to life everlasting. Jonah was the object of divine anger expressed by the fury of the storm (1:15). He was conscious of his guilt that merited the sentence of death (1:12). He was saved from Sheol by Yahweh’s means of grace, a fish (2:1 [ET1:17]). Nineveh was converted to faith in God by means of his Word, preached by Jonah (3:4). Now the salvation of the city is effected since Yahweh “did *not* do” (3:10) judgment. Leslie Allen writes: “Divine inactivity is here the counterpart to the divine activity in rescuing Jonah at 2:1 [ET1:17]. The parallelism of the narrative creates a logical presupposition that Jonah would hail with joy this new demonstration of divine goodness.” But don’t hold your breath for that response by the prophet! (CC)

On another level, the “turn” by the Ninevites (3:8, 10) and by Yahweh (3:9) eradicates the “evil” (רָעָה) formerly performed by Nineveh (3:8, 10) and the “evil” threatened by Yahweh but averted (3:10). This turns us back to chapter 1. There Yahweh speaks of Nineveh’s “evil” in 1:2, and the sailors speak twice of “evil” (1:7–8) in reference to the storm hurled by Yahweh (1:4). By the end of 3:10, everyone has their “evil” removed. Even Yahweh changes his verdict of destruction for Nineveh (3:10). Everyone is free from evil—except Jonah. He perceives the salvation of the city as “a great evil” (4:1). Yahweh will try to remove the prophet’s “evil” by means of the qiqayon plant, which he provides “to save him from his evil” (לְהַצִּ֥יל ל֖וֹ מֵרָֽעָת֑וֹ, 4:6). Will this succeed? The book ends without telling us. (CC)

Jonah 3:10 should not be taken to mean that God was the author of “evil,” even if he had not averted it. Marcion, however, cited “evil” in this passage to support his argument that the God revealed in the OT was a divinity inferior to the wholly good God revealed by Jesus. Tertullian first summarizes Marcion’s argument: “Look here then, say you: I discover a self-incriminating case in the matter of the Ninevites, when the book of Jonah declares, ‘And God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not.’ ” Then Tertullian refutes Marcion by explaining God’s role as judge:

We say, in short, that evil in the present case means, not what may be attributed to the Creator’s nature as an evil being, but what may be attributed to His power as a judge. In accordance with which He declared, “I create evil” [Is 45:7], and, “I frame evil against you” [Jer 18:11]; meaning not to sinful evils, but avenging ones. What sort of stigma pertains to these, congruous as they are with God’s judicial character, we have sufficiently explained. Now, although these are called “evils,” they are yet not reprehensible in a judge; nor because of this their name do they show that the judge is evil: so in like manner will this particular evil be understood to be one of this class of judiciary evils, and along with them to be compatible with (God as) a judge. (CC)

In Jonah 3:10, “evil” does not denote wrongdoing, but divine justice, which is destructive to sinful humans, just as the sailors called the storm sent by Yahweh an “evil” (רָעָה, 1:7–8). Tertullian continues: “What therefore He had justly decreed, having no evil purpose in His decree, He decreed from the principle of justice, not from malevolence. Yet He gave it the name of ‘evil,’ because of the evil and desert involved in the very suffering itself.” (CC)

The noun in the clause “God saw their *works*” (מֲעַשֶׂה occurs only here in Jonah) comes from the verb עָשָׂה, “do, act, make.” This provides another opportunity to compare and contrast the scenes in chapters 1 and 3. In 1:11 the sailors use the verb when they ask in desperation, “What shall we *do*?” Theyheed Jonah’s answer (1:12, 15) and are saved, prompting their “great worship” of Yahweh (1:16). Similarly, in chapter 3, the Ninevites heed Jonah’s sermon and reveal their faith by their “works” (3:10), including the king’s self-abasement from high on his throne to low in the ashes. Indeed, there is wholesale repentance in Nineveh from king to cow. Thus the sailors and Ninevites are both people of action. These Gentiles know what to *do*. (CC)

In contrast, when the verb עָשָׂה is used of the Israelite Jonah, it shows the futility of his misdirected actions. The exasperated sailors ask him, “What is this you have *done*?” because they knew he was fleeing from Yahweh (1:10). The only other time Jonah is the subject is in 4:5, where he, still seething from the city’s salvation, “made” a hut in which to sulk while waiting to see what would happen to the city. (CC)

Yahweh, however, also is the subject of the verb עָשָׂה. Yahweh is the Creator who “made” the sea and the dry land (1:9). The sailors confess in their prayer to him, “Just as you please, you do” (1:14). As he had in 1:15–16, now again Yahweh reveals that his good pleasure is that all people repent, believe, and so be saved (1 Tim 2:4). After seeing the good “works” of the converted Ninevites, God canceled his verdict that he threatened “to do to them, and he did not do [it]” (Jonah 3:10). Elsewhere in the book of Jonah, infinitive constructs that depict actions done by Yahweh always reach fruition, whereas infinitive constructs that describe the actions of people denote actions done in vain. The single exception to this usage is precisely here, when God does *not* carry out the evil he threatened “to do [לַעֲשׂוֹת] to them.” The exception here highlights the exceptional grace of God in not executing judgment. (CC)

Finally, that “God changed his verdict about the evil that he threatened to do to them” (3:10) calls for comment. In sequence and language, this account of God’s change parallels the events in Exodus 32. After Israel’s golden-calf apostasy, Yahweh threatened to destroy the people, but then Moses interceded, and “Yahweh changed his verdict about the evil that he threatened to do to his people” (Ex 32:14). Later in Israel’s history, this same phraseology occurs in Jer 26:3, 13, 19. There Yahweh first expresses this hope: “Perhaps they will listen and turn, each from his evil way, and I will change my verdict about the evil [וְנִחַמְתִּ֣י אֶל־הָרָעָ֗ה] that I am intending to do to them because of the evil of their actions” (Jer 26:3). Then Jeremiah preached to the people: “Improve your ways and your actions, and listen to the voice of Yahweh your God. Then Yahweh will change his verdict about the evil that he threatened against you” (וְיִנָּחֵ֣ם יְהוָ֔ה אֶל־הָ֣רָעָ֔ה אֲשֶׁ֥ר רִּבֶּ֖ר עֲלֵיכֶֽם, Jer 26:13). Lastly, the change is stated as a historical recollection from the time of Hezekiah, who feared Yahweh and prayed to him: “And Yahweh changed his verdict about the evil he threatened against them” (וַיִּנָּ֣חֶם יְהוָ֔ה אֶל־הָרָעָ֖ה אֲשֶׁר־רִּבֶּ֣ר עֲלֵיהֶ֑ם, Jer 26:19). Jeremiah is referring to Micah 3:12, where that prophet warned:

Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field,

and Jerusalem shall be ruins,

and the temple mount be forested hills. (CC)

Jer 26:19 reports that King Hezekiah responded to that prophecy and prayed for Yahweh to change his verdict about the announced disaster. The chapter goes on to indicate the efficacy of Hezekiah’s prayer. The prophecy did not come to pass in Hezekiah’s lifetime because Yahweh changed his verdict. (CC)

These passages in Exodus and Jeremiah refer specifically to Israel. All the other passages where God changes his verdict about the evil that he intended to do also refer to Israel alone (2 Sam 24:16; Jer 42:10; 1 Chr 21:15; the same idea underlies Judg 2:18; Amos 7:3, 6). The same reprieve that Yahweh granted Israel through Moses at the golden-calf apostasy and that he gave to Judah at the time of Hezekiah is now shown by Yahweh to the Gentile Ninevites. In fact, the only two OT passages that combine the elements of Yahweh “turning away from the fierceness of anger” (שׁוּב מֵחֲרוֹן אַפּ-) and “changing his verdict about evil” are Ex 32:12, where Moses pleads, “Turn away from the fierceness of your anger,” and Jonah 3:9. (CC)

Shocking, indeed! The grace Yahweh elsewhere only shows to his chosen people Israel is now expanded to embrace the pagan world and their animals. Holy cow(s)! This anticipates the ever-widening scope of God’s grace in the NT era, when the Gospel of his plenary forgiveness in Jesus Christ shall be heralded throughout the world to all peoples, even to the ends of the earth and to the close of the age. (CC)

Chrysostom calls upon Jeremiah 18 to explain Yahweh’s mercy here:

For God even preferred that His own prediction should fall to the ground, so that the city should not fall. Or rather, the prophecy did not even so fall to the ground. For if indeed while the men continued in the same wickedness, the sentence had not taken effect, some one perhaps might have brought a charge against what was uttered. But if when they had changed, and desisted from their iniquity, God also desisted from His wrath, who shall be able any longer to find fault with the prophecy, or to convict the things spoken of falsehood? The same law indeed which God had laid down from the beginning, publishing it to all men by the prophet [Jeremiah], was on that occasion strictly observed. What then is this law? “I shall speak a sentence,” saith He, “concerning a nation or a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; and it shall be, that if they repent of their evil, I will also repent of the wrath which I said I would do unto them” [Jer 18:7–8]. Guarding then this law, he saved those who were converted and released from His wrath those who desisted from their wickedness. (CC)

Yahweh is perfectly consistent with his promise in Jeremiah 18 when he applies it to Nineveh, maintains Chrysostom:

The threatening effected the deliverance from the peril. The sentence of overthrow put a stop to the overthrow. O strange and astonishing event! the sentence threatening death, brought forth life! The sentence after it was published [Jonah 3:4] became cancelled; the very opposite to that which takes place among temporal judges! for in their case the proclamation of the sentence causes it to become valid, is fully to ratify it; but on the contrary, with God, the publication of the sentence, caused it to be cancelled. For if it had not been published, the offenders would not have heard; and if they had not heard, they would not have repented, and if they had not repented, they would not have warded off the punishment, nor would they have obtained that astonishing deliverance. For how is it less than astonishing, when the judge declares sentence, and the condemned discharge the sentence by their repentance! (CC)

In order to bring repentance and salvation, Yahweh declared a sentence of judgment against Nineveh (Jonah 3:4). When human judges issue their verdict, it is for the purpose of implementing the verdict. How remarkable, says Chrysostom, that Yahweh published his judgment for the purpose of sparing the guilty! The sentence was commuted, and those deserving death instead received everlasting life. (CC)

Origen makes a similar argument for mercy as Yahweh’s ultimate purpose. He posits that the purpose of Jonah’s prophecy against Nineveh is that the city would repent:

God did not wish to sentence without saying anything, but giving *them the opportunity for repentance* [Wis Sol 12:10] and conversion, he sent a Hebrew prophet, so that, when he said, *still in three daysand Nineveh will be overthrown* [Jonah 3:4], those sentenced might not be sentenced, but would obtain the mercy of God by repenting. (CC)

Origen argues that God’s purpose all along was the repentance and salvation of Nineveh. Thus the account of the Ninevites in chapter 3 makes the same point as the psalm of Jonah in chapter 2, where he concludes, “Salvation belongs to Yahweh” (2:10 [ET2:9]). (CC)

The remarkable turn of divine justice recorded with judicial language in Jonah 3:9–10 is displayed fully in Jesus Christ, the only sinless, righteous man, who nevertheless suffered the divine judgment deserved by the world of sinners. Yet the purpose of God’s execution of that death sentence was to forgive and justify all sinners. By the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our sentence of death is canceled, and God’s wrath is averted. God’s verdict for us who believe is justification and everlasting life (e.g., Rom 5:12–21). The Ninevites’ hope was realized: “God may turn and change his verdict and turn away from the fierceness of his anger so we will not perish” (Jonah 3:9). So too shall our hope be realized: “Therefore, since we have now been justified by his [Christ’s] blood, how much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath [of God]” (Rom 5:9). (CC)

EPISTLE

1 Corinthians 7:29-35

**29 What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none;  30 those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep;  31 those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. 32 I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord.  33 But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—  34 and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband.  35 I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.**

**7:29** BROTHERS – Paul now speaks with pastoral affection to the whole church, calling the Corinthians “brothers.” (CC)

No matter under what conditions a, person lives and works, his first duty is toward the Lord, to whom the whole life of a Christian must be consecrated. (Kretzmann)

Paul addresses the Corinthians as adelphoi who have been made part of the family of God by water and the Word, those who believe and are baptized. It is a Gospel word that reminds them of who they are in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

*time is short.* The time for doing the Lord’s work has become increasingly short. Life is fleeting, as times of persecution remind us. Do not be unduly concerned with the affairs of this world (vv. 29–31) because material things are changing and disappearing (v. 31). Some think the reference is to the Lord’s second coming. (CSB)

The end of time (cf Dn 8:19; 11:27, 29, 35). (TLSB)

He reminds them that they live in the last days. “The Lord is at hand” (Phil 4:5); their salvation is nearer than when they first believed (Rom 13:11); the days have been shortened (Mt 24:22). Thus they should live “eschatologically”—as people who are always aware they may have to leave this world at any moment. This heightened awareness of our transience has been well illustrated by the analogy to the terminally ill. The person who knows his remaining time is limited has a changed perspective. He sees, hears, and values everything in a new way. (CC)

Kairos means not just “time” in general, but “an opportune or favorable period of time,” “the right season.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

The verb sustello means “to draw together, to limit, to shorten;” the form is perfect passive participle. Thus the translation of these words is not just “the time is short, but rather “The time period has been shortened,” During this NT age in which we live, this “now but not yet” era before the Second Coming, our lives have a particular urgency. We do not have “all the time in the world,” for the present world will soon pass away. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

FROM NOW ON – The phrase to loipon means “henceforth, from this time forward.” Because of what Paul had just said about the time having been shortened, the Corinthians Christians were to live from then on in the way he was about the describe. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

AS IF THEY HAD NONE – During the time that remains to them in this world, believers should “focus on eternal essentials.” This does not mean they should cultivate a stoic aloofness and detachment from the concerns of the present age. But they should not let their lives be dominated by the world and its values. They should not become too preoccupied, too absorbed, too engrossed in this transient existence. Their true citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20; cf. Heb 13:14; 1 Pet 1:4). Thus, in the middle of all these legitimate earthly concerns, they should always have the attitude of someone who can do without the things this world has to offer (cf. Lk 14:26). (CC)

Paul is not contradicting his command in Eph 5:25 for husbands to love their wives. Rather, in a somewhat hyperbolic way, he is telling the Corinthians to see things from an eternal viewpoint. Marriage, while is God’s good institution and gift, is still temporary, “till death parts us;” however, life in Christ, our heavenly Bridegroom, is everlasting. God calls husbands and wives to love and honor each other; this pleases him. Yet he does not wish for them to become so wrapped up in one another that they forget or neglect their first love. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

**7:30** THOSE WHO HAPPY – Mourning is a temporary feature of this present world (Rev. 21:4). Christians experience the pain of separation, but they understand that release from these things is assured. Therefore, they do not grieve as those who have no hope (1 Th 4:13). (TLSB)

Husband and wife may share the joys and sorrows of family life, but in good days as well as in evil their heart's desire must be directed to the glory that is awaiting them above. (Kretzmann)

Chairontes is best translated not as “happy,” but as “rejoicing” or “joyful.” Again Paul warns people against getting so wrapped up in the ups and downs of life that they lose sight of what lasts beyond life. The earthly sorrows and joys that Christian experience are passing and are not so to captivate them that they lose sight of the everlasting comfort and joy that they have in Christ. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1

BUY SOMETHING – People engaged in business, occupied in a station which deals exclusively with matters of this world, must not let their hearts be wrapped up in the gain and in the enjoyment of the world, but always keep their eyes directed to the greatest gift and blessing, that of the final consummation of salvation in heaven. As one commentator has it, we have here "the picture of spiritual detachment in the various situations in life." (Kretzmann)

NOT THEIRS TO KEEP – Because of the temporary nature of all thins in this world, we do not really “own” any earthly thing in an ultimate or lasting sense. Therefore, we are to regard such things in the proper way; that is, as stewards of God’s gifts and resources. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

1 Timothy 6:7 “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.”

**7:31** NOT ENGROSSED IN THEM – A literal translation has a slightly different connotation: “Those who use the world as if not overusing it.” Paul, then, is speaking not just about “things,” but about all the affairs and doings of the world. As ones who live in the world but are not of the world, we are to “use the world” in moderation, so to speak, and not in such a fashion that we become engrossed and absorbed in its affairs. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

PRESENT FORM – Everything will be dissolved to make way for the new heavens and new earth (2 Pt 3:13). (TLSB)

PASSING AWAY – Describing the end of this world (cf 2 Pt 3:10). (TLSB)

Paul grounds his appeal to the church to keep her heavenly focus with an affirmation that rounds off the argument of 1 Cor 7:29–31: “For the form of this world is passing away” (7:31). These words form a framework (inclusio) with 7:29a, “the time has been shortened.” Paul has in mind the Last Day (cf. 1 Jn 2:17–18), when the form (σχῆμα, 1 Cor 7:31) of this present creation will pass away and be superseded by a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21–22), just as the form of our lowly body will then be transformed (μετα-σχημα-τίζω, Phil 3:21) so that it conforms to Christ’s glorious body (1 Cor 15:35–58). (CC)

The passing away is the form, the present appearance, of this world. The things which engage the attention of people in this world are not enduring, but transitory; marryings and marketings, feasts and funerals, pass before our eyes in endless, ever-changing procession; there is nothing abiding, nothing of lasting value in all that this world may offer. Cp. Phil. 3, 20; Col. 3, 1; Heb. 13, 14. (Kretzmann)

Even right now, not the present tense, the form of this world is passing away. Why, then, should someone invest an entire life in such a thing that is decaying and will be destroyed? This theme of the passing away of the old world and the coming of the new is envocative of Holy Baptism, in which we ourselves passed away and then were made new. We were buried with Christ and raised with him by water and the Word (Col 2:12; Rom 6:3-5). Christ is the center and the substance of the new creation; therefore, when we are in him by Baptism and faith, we ourselves are made heirs of the glory of the new heavens and the new earth. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

Matthew 6:19-21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ﻿ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

**7:32** FREE OF CONCERN – Paul counsels against anxiety in general (Php 4:6), but these are anxieties that accompany family responsibilities. (TLSB)

Paul now expresses his wish that the whole congregation be as free as possible from burdensome cares (1 Cor 7:32). This was his underlying concern in the previous admonition to live in this world as citizens of heaven, who did not become too engrossed in this world’s affairs (7:31). As is evident from the context (7:33–34), freedom from care should be understood in a broad sense to include freedom from the worldly anxieties attendant on marriage and raising a family (cf. Mt 6:25–34; Phil 4:6; 1 Pet 5:7). In contrast to the married person, an unmarried man (like the apostle himself) is able to devote all his time and attention to serving and pleasing his Lord. Paul constantly encouraged Christian people not to be self-centered and please themselves, but to live for the Lord who had died for them and make it their goal to please him and their fellow human beings in everything. (Compare also Luther’s morning prayer: “that in all my thoughts, words, and deeds I may please Thee.”) This desire to please the Lord should be the Christian’s overriding concern whether married or single. (CC)

The apostle here presents his reasons for advising as he does, his aim being that his readers should be without cares and worries which tended to distract their attention from the one thing needful, worries of all kinds, but especially marriage worries.(Kretzmann)

LORD’S AFFAIRS – Spiritual matters of individual holiness and service to God. “Neither Christ nor Paul praise virginity because it justifies, but because it is freer and less distracted by domestic occupations in praying, teaching, and serving.” (TLSB)

**7:33** *please his wife*. A healthy marriage thrives on attending the needs and wishes of one’s spouse, but Jesus also set down priorities in this regard (Mt 10:37). (TLSB)

**7:34** *his interests are divided.* He cannot give undistracted service to Christ (v. 35). This is particularly true in times of persecution. (CSB)

One can love God through loving one’s spouse, but if these are in conflict, one cannot serve two masters (Mt 6:24). (TLSB)

*unmarried or betrothed*. Both terms describe women, the latter having never been married. (TLSB)

*holy in body and spirit*. Pleasing God is the priority. (TLSB)

**7:35** *restraint*. Freedom in Christ is naturally directed by the Holy Spirit and loving concern (cf Rm 8:2). (TLSB)

*good order*. Implies respectability. (TLSB)

*devotion*. The Gk word is used in Scripture only here and seems to imply constant service. (TLSB)

GOSPEL

Mark 1:14-20

*The Calling of the First Disciples*

**14﻿ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ﻿15﻿ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” ﻿16﻿ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ﻿17﻿ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” ﻿18﻿ At once they left their nets and followed him. ﻿19﻿ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ﻿20﻿ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.**

**:14-20** With this pericope Jesus commences his ministry, proclaiming the astounding news that the eschatological reign and rule of God (“the kingdom of God”) has broken upon the scene, and he invites people to welcome it. His message both differs from and is consonant with the message of his predecessor, the Baptizer. Jesus then calls disciples, an event that both provides him with followers and sets into motion far-reaching literary themes. (CC)

**1:14-15** As noted above, verses 14-15 have already been covered in the  *Notes*  for The Gospel for Epiphany III. Therefore, they are not treated here. But several observations are made here. (Buls)

There is a sense in which the Temptation of Jesus and also His suffering and death is the preaching of Law. They show us how dearly it cost the Son of God to redeem us from sin, death and the devil. He came not to be served but to serve, to give His life as a ransom for many, which means all. The sinless Son of God took my place when He was actually and severely tempted by Satan for forty days. The sinless Son of God took my place when He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The sinless Son of God took my place when He laid down His life and took it again. If it cost Him that dearly I must confess my sins. But I must also believe the Gospel. "If ever we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. (Buls)

**1:14** *After John was put in prison.* See Mt 4:12 and note on Lk 3:20. (CSB)

Mentioned in passing; 6:14-29 gives the full account of the prophet’s imprisonment and execution. Mark focuses on Jesus and the ministry He is beginning. (TLSB)

**{καὶ** μετὰ} τὸ παραδοθῆναι τὸν Ἰωάννην—This formal construction reminiscent of the LXX helps to mark off a new section. The first two words offer a difficult text-critical decision: mss. B and D, two unlikely allies, agree on the reading καὶ μετά, “and after,” presented here, while virtually all other manuscripts evidence the reading μετὰ δέ. The latter would be more natural in the latter half of the Gospel. In the first half of this book, Mark often uses δέ to provide contrasts or to conclude a story (see, e.g., 1:45 and 2:6). (CC)

Note how matter of fact this statement about “John being handed over” is, assuming that the hearer/reader will know what is being said. This is a firm indication that Mark’s Gospel is not for the uninformed; one needs to know the whole story for this clause to make sense. (CC)

καὶ μετὰ τὸ παραδοθῆναι τὸν Ἰωάννην, “and after the act of John being handed over”: The death of John the Baptizer occupies a large and important place in the Gospel of Mark. John’s tragic end is foreshadowed here, already fourteen verses into the story! Note that this brief indication virtually assures us that the hearers/readers know “the rest of the story,” as it were, regarding John the Baptizer (see 6:14–29). In 1:14, it is not said who held John captive or where he was in captivity; the receptor must know the details from elsewhere. (CC)

It is significant that Jesus does not enter his own distinctive ministry until after John has been arrested. Mark’s formulation suggests that Jesus is restrained by God from his ministry of proclamation until the Baptist is removed from the scene. His arrest indicates that the time has come for Jesus to act. Jesus enters into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God. NOTE: When Jesus ascends the Holy Spirit leads the disciples in their proclamation. (Lane)

WENT INTO GALILEE – Since the days of the Judges this large territory had been exposed to political and military aggression from the north (Syria, Assyria, etc) and to the corrosive moral and religious influences of a pagan environment. At the time of Jesus the people of Galilee were a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, pagan people, by and large. These people who were sitting in spiritual darkness saw a great Light, Jesus. (B)

ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν—“Galilee” is the scene of Jesus’ major ministry in all of the Synoptics, including Mark’s Gospel, unlike John’s Gospel. It is also the focus of the conclusion of this Gospel (16:7; cf. Mt 28:16). (CC)

ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν, “Jesus went into Galilee” (1:14): Given that Herod Antipas is John’s captor and that his area of control is Galilee and its surrounds, the fact that Jesus goes to Galilee after John has been taken captive is interesting, to say the least. Given that Jesus’ message regarding repentance bears great similarity to John’s and that what Jesus preaches concerns a royal reign and rule, is our Lord challenging Herod rather directly by moving into his area? Is he revealing a naiveté about politics and power by his movement? Is his movement irrelevant vis-à-vis Herod and his rule? This level 2 question of interpretation cannot be answered definitively, though given Jesus’ readiness to confront hostile authorities, one should not discount an aggressive stance. (CC)

*ēlthen* He “came.” Directly, with business on his mind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

*proclaiming.* κηρύσσων—Though this participle, “proclaiming,” is best taken as conveying attendant circumstance, it could convey purpose, since Koine Greek was prepared to use the present participle as the equivalent of the future participle, which, in predicate position following the main verb, did, in fact, show purpose. (CC)

*the good news of God.* The good news from, as well as about, God. (CSB)

τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ—Here, given the syntax, εὐαγγέλιον is a noun denoting the *content* of the preaching, “the Good News,” not the *activity* of preaching, as in 1:1 (ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου). The genitive τοῦ θεοῦ, “of God,” then, relates to τὸ εὐαγγέλιον semantically as an objective, not a subjective, genitive. This is determined using the procedure outlined above for detecting the relationship between an external entailment (θεοῦ) and a verbally based noun (εὐαγγέλιον). While Mark does not use the verb εὐαγγελίζω, other Gospel writers do, most notably Luke (e.g., Lk 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18). And while θεός is not used in conjunction with the verb εὐαγγελίζω in any capacity (!), helpful parallels are available, especially in Acts. See, e.g., Acts 15:35: εὐαγγελιζόμενοι … τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου, “preaching as Good News the Word of the Lord,” as well as Acts 11:20. Given the lack of evidence for θεός serving as the subject of εὐαγγέλιον, it is best to take “God” as an objective genitive in this context. (CC)

κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ, “proclaiming the Good News of God” (1:14): Note that Jesus’ first activity is proclamation, not healing or exorcism or domination over nature. This is an initial indication that his mission is fundamentally oriented not toward miracles/the miraculous, but rather toward proclamation and the importance of his Word. See the final statement in the Gospel, the young man’s promise to the women at the tomb (16:7): “there you will see him, *just as he told you*.” (CC)

Of special interest is the fact that Jesus’ proclamation of “the Good News of God” (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ), which involves “the reign and rule of God” (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, 1:15), itself reveals the complex understanding of Jesus’ identity in Mark’s Gospel, as we have described it in the commentary on 1:2. Jesus is the messenger of the covenant whom the people desire (Mal 3:1), congruent with MT Is 52:7: “How beautiful are the feet of the one who brings Good News …, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’ ” But he is also the Lord himself, congruent with LXX Is 52:6–7: “*I* *am present … as the feet of one who preaches* [εὐαγγελιζομένου] a report of peace, as one who preaches [εὐαγγελιζομένος] good things, because I will make your salvation known, saying, ‘Zion, your God [σου ὁ θεός] will reign [βασιλεύσει].” This complex, multifaceted portrayal of our Lord is apparent throughout the Gospel of Mark. (CC)

“the gospel of God.” Mark does not spend time defining the Gospel of God. He wants us to find our place in it. So our interest in whether the genitive means the Gospel is about God or from God (perhaps both are intended) isn’t what Mark has in mind. He wants us to repent and believe! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

**1:15** THE TIME - *peplērōtai*: This is the *kairos*. The time of waiting has been filled. Now is the decisive time for action. Seize the opportunity. This is Kingdom time. Mark, like Luke and John, uses the term “kingdom of God.” Matthew uses “kingdom of heaven.” The evangelists equate the Kingdom itself with Jesus himself, who is God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

The time that has come is *kairos*, the decisive time. It is that moment when things change. Here the prophecies of the Messiah have been fulfilled. The perfect tense indicates Jesus’ arrival has come, but it also has lasting significance. The passive shows this momentous moment is God’s doing and not some natural course of events. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

*The kingdom of God.* See note on Mt 3:2. (CSB)

πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ—The translations of the two important perfect tense verbs πεπλήρωται and ἤγγικεν are “is (now) fulfilled” and “has drawn near (and is now at hand),” respectively. The emphasis is clear: “there is no more waiting; God is on the scene and is staring you in the face!” (CC)

The nouns in these two clauses are also key. καιρός denotes “due time,” rather than simply time in general, and its referent seems to be the coming of the Lord himself that is announced in 1:2–3 and detailed in the next clause. ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, “the kingdom of God,” is one of the central concept pairs in the Scriptures. Especially critical are the following points:

• βασιλεία is a *dynamic*, not a static, concept, beginning in the OT, denoting normally the *active* reign and rule of God, rather than his spatial, static realm (see, e.g., LXX Ps 144:11–13 [MT/ET 145:11–13]). For this reason we will consistently translate ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ as “the reign and rule of God” rather than “the kingdom of God.” (CC)

• Basic is notion of *Yahweh’s* reign and rule over his people. See especially Judg 8:22–23, where Gideon says to those who would make him ruler over God’s people: “I will not reign over you, and my sons will not reign over you. *Yahweh will reign over you*.” This principle holds true even when a king was in power (2 Chr 13:8). (CC)

• When things went from bad to worse (as the people engaged in wickedness and idolatry), God promised to come to his people in judgment and then in grace, a coming often characterized as God “visiting” (פָּקַד; LXX: ἐπισκέπτομαι) and called “the Day of the Lord.” This “day” involved punishing his people for their sins by destruction (Amos 5:1–2) and exile (Jer 16:10–13), and then bringing them salvation, both by leaving a remnant in their land (Zeph 2:9) and by returning those exiled (Jer 29:10–14). (CC)

• But *behind* this “visiting” in history (which involved armies, earthly rulers, exiles, etc.), there stood the promise of another, more far-reaching and awesome “visitation,” namely, a final, i.e., *eschatological* (אַחֲרִית; LXX: ἔσχατος) coming, in which *final* judgment will be rendered on both the earth and sinful mankind (Isaiah 24), and *ultimate* salvation—including (among other features) the very presence of God himself (Is 35:3–4), the renewal of creation (Is 11:4–9; 35:5–6; 65:17–25), victory over death (Is 26:19), forgiveness of sins (Zech 13:1), the outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 3:1–5 [ET 2:28–32]), and the reign of “David” (Ezek 34:23; 37:24; Hos 3:5)—will be brought to pass. (CC)

*The announcement by our Lord that the reign and rule of God has drawn near and is upon his hearers is the announcement that the eschatological visitation of Israel’s God is now commencing*. For this reason there is proclamation about a due, appointed time and about that time reaching its fulfillment. *The final Day of the Lord is dawning even as Jesus speaks. (CC)*

ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, “the reign and rule of God has drawn near and is now at hand”: We have asserted that in the coming of Jesus, the eschatological reign and rule of God is bursting upon the scene (see the first textual note on 1:15). Yet, despite Jesus’ many miracles, not all the lepers will be cleansed in his ministry, not all those with withered limbs will be healed, not all the blind will see, not all the dead will be raised. How is this “fact” to be understood? In several ways. (CC)

On the one hand, it is an indication that the coming of the eschatological reign and rule of God in Jesus Christ is an “in principle” coming, as it were; it is not a coming without remainder. That is to say, the features of the eschatological reign and rule are present, the features of the new age/the age to come are instantiated, but not so completely that the features of the old age, the features of the old reign of Satan and the fallen creation, are no longer present. As of now we have received a “foretaste,” to use liturgical language, of the complete feast that we surely will enjoy. (A complete instantiation of this reign and rule, a “full consummation,” so to speak, is yet to come, and our Lord speaks of that coming [what the church has traditionally called the parousia] as ἡ ἡμέρα ἐκείνη, “that day” [13:32], in his so-called Apocalyptic Discourse, and as the glorious coming of the Son of Man, both in that discourse [13:26–27] and at his trial before the Sanhedrin [14:62].) It is probably for this reason that our Lord uses the specific phraseology that he does as he comes upon the scene, namely, that the reign and rule of God “has drawn near and is now at hand” (ἤγγικεν). His hearers are being confronted by the features and characteristics of that reign and rule, but they are not being overwhelmed by them, receiving them without remainder. (CC)

Stated from a slightly different point of view and in technical terminology, our Lord’s coming is a “proleptic” coming of the end-time visitation of God; it is a “taking ahead of time” of what will be fully present at the end of days, when our Lord comes again in glory. Indeed, this proleptic understanding of the coming of the new age (that is to appear at the end of time) is stated explicitly in Matthew’s Gospel, when the demons ask Jesus (Mt 8:29), “Have you come here *before the appointed time* [πρὸ καιροῦ]?” They knew the characteristics of God’s eschatological coming; in some ways these characteristics were already present, and in some ways they were not. Be that as it may, we should make no mistake about what is being claimed in the first chapter of Mark’s Gospel: nothing less than that *Jesus’ coming brings the very reign and rule of God at the end of days and the blessings of the age to come*, when God himself would be present, when the Spirit would be poured out, when the eyes of the blind would be opened, when the dead would be raised, etc. (In fact, this is precisely what Peter says in his speech at Pentecost in Acts 2:16–17: “This *is* [ἐστιν] that which is spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall be *in the last days* [ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις] …’ ”) (CC)

On the other hand, it is also correct to see the coming of God’s eschatological visitation and the benefits of the age to come as being fulfilled not only in principle, but also without remainder *in Jesus Christ himself*. That is to say, we can see the prominent features of the age to come *fully* in the person, ministry, and mission of our Lord. It is visible already in Mark 1, as he himself is described as the royal Anointed One, “Christ” (χριστός, 1:1), as Yahweh come to visit his people (1:3), and as the very people of God. In the last capacity he receives the outpouring of the Spirit (1:10) as promised in the prophet Joel (3:1 [ET 2:28]) and experiences the benefits of the new creation, residing unharmed with the wild beasts in the desert (1:13). Later, he himself is acclaimed as the royal Davidic King at his entry into Jerusalem (11:1–10), and in his dying upon the cross the final payment for sin comes to pass (10:45). His resurrection, guaranteed by his own promise (14:28) and attested by the young man at the tomb (16:6), fulfills the vision of Isaiah that Israel’s “dead shall live; their bodies shall rise” (Is 26:19). (CC)

Note that in focusing the eschatological visitation of God solely upon Jesus, we are able to see quite clearly also the judgment aspect of that coming, as nature itself grows dark in midday at the crucifixion (15:33 [cf. Amos 8:9]), and as he himself is forsaken by God in the punishment for sin (15:34 [cf. Is 54:7a, 8a; 57:16a; 63:10]). (CC)

The “kingdom” is the rule, or reign, of God. The Kingdom was present then as Jesus stood proclaiming—in authority. It is present now as Jesus’ ascension has him sitting at God’s right hand ruling, particularly on behalf of the Church. But God’s kingdom will come on the Last Day, when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess him as Lord. The expectations of the people whom Jesus is calling to repent and believe were close to the mark: sin destroyed; God’s people released from poverty, hunger, and disease; economic prosperity; safety and peace in a new garden, where children and animals play together; and liberty from foreign domination. They just had the timing wrong for the complete fulfillment of this wondrous Kingdom. That Last Day ultimate expression of the Kingdom first needed to go through his Kingdom that comes to us in suffering and death. So he chooses four fishermen to follow him rather than raising up an army as the Kingdom was inaugurated then. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

Jesus declares that the critical moment has come; God begins to act in a new and decisive way, bringing his promise of ultimate redemption to the point of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is a distinctive component of redemptive history. It belongs to the God who comes and invades history in order to secure man’s redemption. The emphasis falls upon God who is doing something and who will do something that radically affects men in their alienation and rebellion against himself. (Lane)

It is not a confined geographical territory, but wherever and whenever people are ruled by God through their faith in His Son. The kingdom has come in the advent of Jesus (the verb “is” emphasizes completed action), for He came to fulfill all of God’s promises about the salvation of the world. Throughout His ministry, Jesus invites people to enjoy God’s kind of rule by living under His grace and righteousness. Luther says, “Once we have His Word, true doctrine, and true worship, we also pray that His kingdom may be in us and remain in us; that is, that He may govern us in this doctrine and life, that He may protect and preserve us against all the power of the devil and his kingdom, and that He may shatter all the kingdoms that rage against His kingdom, so that it alone may remain. (TLSB)

*is near.* The coming of Christ (the King) brings the kingdom near to the people. (CSB)

Or, “here.” (TLSB)

The kingdom of God has drawn near, meaning that the Kingdom of God is present in its fulfillment in the person, Word and work of Jesus. (B)

REPENT AND BELIEVE – Echoes John’s call for a public show of contrition and an adoption of a new way of life (cf vv 2–4). (TLSB)

Only through repentance can a man participate with joy in the kingdom when it does break forth. Jesus accordingly calls men to radical decision. In Jesus men are confronted by the word and act of God; he himself is the crucial term by which belief and unbelief come to fruition. The either/or character of this decision is of immense importance and permits of no postponement. (Lane)

*Metanoeite* and *pisteuete* reinforce the sense of urgency that Mark brings to us. Again, he “cuts to the quick.” No time for fooling around. When Christ is present, the time is *kairos*. Consider the quick response of the Ninevites (Jonah 3:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

His message led its first hearers back into the Scripture which they had heard in their synagogues and which some of them did understand in its proper religious sense. (PBC)

μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ—Note the present tense of both imperatives. For μετανοεῖτε, especially, this is unusual. In both the OT and the NT, calls to “repent” standardly employ the aorist stem (see, e.g., LXX Is 46:8 and Acts 2:38). Most probably the present stem functions as a *signal* to indicate to hearers that the time is *now* to commence activity. People have been waiting for God’s eschatological coming—not only in general but also and especially because of John’s baptism, which created a people prepared for and preparing (Mk 1:3) the way of the Lord. Jesus says with this form, in effect: “You are ready and waiting. *Now* is the time to act!” πιστεύετε is also a signal for “believing” to commence—believing in the Good News that the reign and rule of God stands staring people in the face in the person of Jesus Christ himself. (CC)

The construction with ἐν, not εἰς or πρός, is slightly unusual but not ungrammatical; see Jn 3:15 for this construction with the same verb (πιστεύω ἐν) and Rom 3:25; Eph 1:15; and Col 1:4 for ἐν with the verbally based noun πίστις. It reflects Semitic construction, specifically אָמַן in the Hiphil with בְּ, “believe in” (see especially Ps 106:12 [LXX Ps 105:12]: וַיַּאֲמִ֥ינוּ בִדְבָרָ֑יו/καὶ ἐπίστευσεν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις αὐτοῦ, “and they believed in his words”). We need not resort to any explanation that seeks to understand the phrase ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ as denoting “in the sphere of the Gospel” (cf. ἐν Χριστῷ). (CC)

μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ, “repent and believe in the Gospel” (1:15): This is the most basic statement concerning the Christian faith—“repent and believe in the Gospel/Good News.” See Paul’s similar statement to the jailer in Philippi. When asked, “What is necessary that I actually do in order that I might be saved?” Paul replied, “Believe in [ἐπί] the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:30–31). Note that this appeal has characteristics similar to John the Baptizer’s, which is appropriate, given the “even now/not yet” proleptic character of the eschatological coming of the reign and rule of God in Jesus Christ. If the presence of Jesus were the full eschatological presence of God without remainder, there would be neither time nor place for repentance on the part of anyone. This is the first direct indication of a secondary theme that will be detectable later in Mark’s Gospel, namely, that Jesus is an Elijah figure of sorts, preparing people for his own *second* coming, by prophetically calling them to repentance himself. (CC)

GOOD NEWS – In its proper sense, “Gospel” does not mean the preaching of repentance, but only the preaching of God’s grace. This follows directly after the preaching of repentance. (TLSB)

**1:14–15** On the one hand, Jesus’ message sounds much like the message of John and the prophets. On the other hand, the arrival of the Messiah fulfills prophecy and ushers in a new era. The Church’s message today has the same combination of new and old. True, it focuses on the age-old problem of sin and human failure. However, the Gospel delivers the forgiveness of sins and with it the hope of an eternal future with God. • Lord, help us to see You clearly and so believe that Your kingdom is still among us. Move us to a steadfast hope for the future and to daily repentance and new life. Amen. (TLSB)

**1:16** *Sea of Galilee.* A beautiful lake, almost 700 feet below sea level, 14 miles long and 6 miles wide, fed by the waters of the upper Jordan River. It was also called the Lake of Gennesaret (Lk 5:1) and the Sea of Tiberias (Jn 6:1; 21:1). In OT times it was known as the Sea of Kinnereth (e.g., Nu 34:11). (CSB)

καὶ παράγων παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν—Note that we do not put a paragraph break here, or (worse) start the body of the Gospel narrative here (as do those who see the introduction ending at 1:15). The transition between 1:15 and 1:16 is smooth in the Greek. See, by contrast, 1:14a, with the initial infinitive construction. The use of παρά here indicates that Jesus was walking “along” the shore, “beside” (at the side of) the lake. (CC)

Galilee was home for most of the disciples and also for the majority of the first Christians. Galilee, even though also under the control of Herod who imprisoned John the Baptist, was nevertheless very open to non-Jewish influence. When opposition surfaced in Jerusalem, Jesus moved the thrust of his ministry to Galilee. Much remained to be done and to be taught before the disciples would be prepared for Jesus’ passion. (PBC)

*Simon.* Probably a contraction of the OT name Simeon (see NIV text note on Ac 15:14). Jesus gave Simon the name Peter (3:16; Mt 16:18; Jn 1:42). (CSB)

τὸν ἀδελφὸν Σίμωνος—With this verbiage Mark precludes the possible misunderstanding that Andrew was the brother of Jesus. (CC)

Of the disciples named here, Peter is mentioned first. From the start he became the spokesman of the apostolic group. The picturesque details in this account and elsewhere in Mark, details that could come only from Peter, demonstrate that Peter was the personal source on whom Mark drew in writing his Gospel. The contact between Peter and Mark was a close one. At the close of his First Epistle, Peter sent greetings to the Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia from “my son Mark. (PBC)

*net.* See note on Mt 4:18. (CSB)

ἀμφιβάλλοντας ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ—Jesus saw the men actually doing the activity of “casting” (ἀμφιβάλλοντας, supplementary participle). Furthermore, they were “in” (ἐν) the water, not in a boat throwing a net into the water. (CC)

When skillfully cast over the shoulder it (the net) will spread out, forming a circle as it falls into the water, and then, because of the pieces of lead attached to it, will quickly sink into the water, capturing the fish underneath. They are skilled fishermen and they would also become skilled in their fishing for men. (B)

Circular and c 10-15 ft in diameter, it could be thrown either the shore or from a boat. (TLSB)

*Were fishermen.* ἦσαν γὰρ ἁλιεῖς—This is the first instance of the use of γάρ as an aside, “you know,” giving further information in an offhanded way. (CC)

**1:17** *Come, follow me.* The call to discipleship is definite and demands a response of total commitment. This was not Jesus’ first encounter with Simon and Andrew (see Jn 1:35–42). (CSB)

Jesus’ practice contrasts sharply with that of other rabbis, who were chosen by those who wanted to follow their teaching. Jesus, however, chose those whom He wished to follow Him. (TLSB)

δεῦτε—This is a form of the adverb δεῦρο, “here!” It is a “second person plural,” as it were, made by analogy to the forms of second person plural imperatives, hence, “come here.” (CC)

I WILL MAKE YOU - *poiēsō humas genesthai*: “I will cause you to become.” Again directness and conviction are expressed in no uncertain terms. Note, however, that the initiative for the action comes from the outside. It is an “alien” effort as Luther would be comfortable in saying. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

ὑμᾶς γενέσθαι ἁλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων—Note this predicate accusative construction, with ὑμᾶς as the accusative subject of the infinitive γενέσθαι, and ἁλιεῖς an accusative plural *predicate* noun (γίνομαι functions as does the verb εἰμί in terms of accompanying constructions). This verbiage evokes Jer 16:10–21, which speaks of God sending fishermen after his people (see also Ezek 47:10). The fishing imagery also occurs in Matthew’s Parable of the Dragnet (Mt 13:47). (CC)

*fishers of men.* Evangelists (see Lk 5:10). (CSB)

anthropoid means men, women and children.

Like fishermen, then, Jesus’ disciples were likewise expected to draw others into the Kingdom. (TLSB)

ἁλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων, “fishers of men/people”: The phraseology concerning fishermen evokes Jer 16:10–21, especially Jer 16:16, which speaks of God sending fishermen after his people. But the context must be observed. The prior context of Jer 16:16 concerns God seeking his people to return them from exile (Jer 16:14–15), so Jer 16:16 seems to be very positive, part of his seeking them out in grace. But what follows is anything but positive. It speaks of hunters being sent “afterward” (אַחֲרֵי; LXX: μετὰ ταῦτα), who will seek God’s people everywhere (Jer 16:16), because God’s eyes are on their ways and their iniquities will not be concealed (Jer 16:17). This should give the hearer/reader of Mark’s Gospel pause, for it is an indication that the mission of Jesus and his disciples will not be wholly positive in its outcome but will issue in judgment upon the people of Israel. The seeking God, whom Jesus is, will not ignore sin and rejection of him, even as we see in the cursing of the fig tree (11:12–14), the cleansing of the temple (11:15–17), the rejection of the Jewish leadership (the Parable of the Wicked Tenants of the Vineyard, 12:1–12), and the prediction of the temple’s demise (13:14–23). (Note the same “contextual” threat in the allusion to Mal 3:1 in Mk 1:2 at the beginning of Mark’s Gospel, for in the context of Malachi 3 not only is there talk of “refining” and “purifying,” but more specifically in Mal 3:5 God says that he will draw near “for judgment [לַמִּשְׁפָּט֒; LXX: ἐν κρίσει].”). (CC)

**1:18** AT ONCE...FOLLOWED HIM – Emphasizes the disciples’ unquestioning response to Jesus’ call. Given that the promises of God’s kingdom were being fulfilled (v 15), one might expect all people to respond to Jesus’ invitation as did Peter and Andrew. (TLSB)

**[**εὐθύς**]**—While the form εὐθύς is to be preferred as Marcan, and the alternative, εὐθέως, is common in the two other Synoptic Gospels and in manuscripts other than those generally preferred in this commentary (namely, ms. B and its allies), it should be noted that ms. B and unlikely ally ms. D do, in fact, read εὐθέως here. (CC)

ἀφέντες—This form of the verb ἀφίημι is an aorist active participle (masculine plural nominative) built upon the root of the old verb ἵημι. ἀφίημι has meanings in several semantic fields, the most familiar of which is “forgive” (see BDAG). Here, the meaning “leave” fits naturally. (CC)

τά—This article very probably expresses possession, i.e., “their” nets. Also translated with “their” are the articles τῷ and τά in 1:19 and τῷ in 1:20. (CC)

**[**ἠκολούθ**ουν]**—Even though this imperfect indicative form of ἀκολουθέω appears only in ms. B, it is adopted here for two reasons: (1) Mark often ends incidents with an imperfect form (verbal aspect), especially when the action it describes commences and continues (see, e.g., 1:31 and 1:45). (2) It is generally un-Marcan to limit the verbs used to narrate a given incident to one tense. (The adoption of the imperfect also gives an A-B-A tense pattern for the entire pericope.21) Whatever decision is made textually, the heavy use of aorist indicatives in this pericope *backgrounds* the action of the calling scene (cf. the burial of Jesus in 15:42–47). (CC)

Note that both of the verbs highlighted in this verse, ἀφίημι and ἀκολουθέω, reappear in 10:28, when Peter declares, “We *have left* [ἀφήκαμεν] all and *have followed and are now followers* [ἠκολουθήκαμεν] of you.” What he says seems literally to be the case. (CC)

They complied immediately. What caused that? Obviously, what is said in verse 14-15. They had heard the Gospel of God. They knew the opportune time had come. They knew that the Kingdom of God had permanently come in the person, Word, and work of Jesus. It must have taken much courage. They were living in pagan Galilee, surrounded by unbelievers. (B)

*euthus*: What should we expect? An immediate response keeps true to the spirit of Mark and the *kairos* of the Christ. There is a divine compulsion in the words of Jesus (much like in his miracle incidents), and it cannot be resisted. That Word is powerful. By it the universe was created (Genesis 1); it became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1); it empowers the water of Baptism and the bread and wine of the Eucharist (Luther’s Small Catechism, Baptism III and Communion III). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

When Jesus called, they were ready to follow him, for they had learned to love him and believe in him. Business, wealth, family – all were secondary to following Jesus and becoming fishers of men. The same faith that filled their hearts should also fill ours, whether we are pastors, teachers, missionaries or lay Christians. Christ must be first in our lives. (PBC)

**1:19-20** *euthus* again. *Euthus* contains the prefix *eu* from which come so many words in the Greek signaling “good, well, straight”: *heuriskō*, the eureka of discovery, and even the Eucharist itself. Immediate good is to be found in having been serendipitously discovered. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

*Ekalesen*: Consider the call of Isaiah and Jeremiah, also Rom 8:30; 1 Cor 1:9; and 1 Pet 1:15; etc. The initiative comes from God (and his Anointed One). The disciples do not by their own initiative hurry after Jesus; rather they are chosen by him and drawn after him by his word. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

**1:19** GONE A LITTLE FARTHER – ὀλίγον—This is an example of a neuter singular accusative adjective being used adverbially, “for a little bit.” (CC)

Evidently he walked up the shore a short way. Simon and Andrew were walking with him. (B)

*Son of Zebedee.* τὸν τοῦ Ζεβεδαίου—An article followed by the genitive normally expresses familial relationships, which one being determined from the context. In this case “the \_\_\_ of Zebedee” refers to his son. (CC)

*James* … *John*. Brothers later dubbed “Sons of Thunder” by Jesus (3:17). Along with Peter, they formed something of an inner circle among the 12 apostles (cf 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). (TLSB)

*mending the nets*. A regular task for fishermen. (TLSB)

**1:20** καὶ εὐθὺς ἐκάλεσεν αὐτούς, “and immediately he called them”: Note that Jesus *calls* disciples; he does not wait for them to come to him. This is contrary to rabbinic custom, in which pupils sought out their masters. He also does not entice them, as is evident in secular Greek “call” stories. See the two examples discussed by Yarbro Collins: one concerns an account attributed to Diogenes of Sinope (fourth century BC) of him calling a young man, and the other is a description about Xenophon (fifth century BC) being called by Socrates. In both cases, a discussion ensues, and both young men are enticed by the sages to follow. The closest parallel to Jesus’ calling his disciples is the calling of Elisha by Elijah (1 Ki 19:19–21 [LXX 3 Kingdoms 19:19–21]), which also involves the called one leaving his work and subsequently following. (CC)

LEFT THEIR FATHER…WITH THE HIRED MEN – μετὰ τῶν μισθωτῶν, “with the hired hands” (1:20): The presence of hired help indicates that “Zebedee and Sons Fishmongers” is not simply a small family operation and that the family is not poor. While it is customary to assume that Jesus and his followers were lowly in terms of status and wealth, it should be noted that a number of his followers seem to have been at least somewhat well-to-do (e.g., Joseph of Arimathea [15:43, 46]), including most probably the women who regularly followed him in Galilee and served him (15:41). (CC)

It is proper at the conclusion of this pericope to direct the reader to two literary matters. The first concerns parallels between Mark’s Gospel and Homer’s *Odyssey*. Consider MacDonald’s analysis of this section of the Gospel:

As soon as Jesus arrived in Galilee, he called fishermen to follow him. Here Mark establishes the “Sea of Galilee” as a context for Jesus’ activity, provides him access to a boat, and introduces four sailors who would become his closest companions. Mark thus sets the stage for the first half of the Gospel, which, like the first half of the *Odyssey*, involves the sea, complete with winds, waves, and ships. The calling of these fishermen may be an imitation of Athena’s calling of sailors for Telemachus in the *Odyssey*. (CC)

The second concerns something deeper and more far reaching. Up to this point, Mark’s narrative appears to be proceeding in an obvious way along classic *structuralist* lines. There is a problem (“the many” in need of a ransom [10:45]); a hero (Jesus) is commissioned and sent (“you are my beloved Son,” 1:11); he is given power (the Holy Spirit, 1:10); he endures a “qualifying test” (temptation by Satan in the desert, 1:13); and now, after passing that test, he receives helpers (disciples, 1:20) to aid him in confronting opponents (Satanic forces, e.g., 3:23–27). The story will proceed with the “main test,” fought against the chief opponent, which will be followed by a “glorifying test,” at which he will be acclaimed by the community, after having taken care of the initial problem. As we shall see, Mark’s narrative will not develop in the way one might suppose, though a structuralist understanding will prove to be extremely helpful in analyzing it. (CC)

Not only does the Gospel of Mark imitate and succeed in emulating one of the classics of the Greco-Roman world, but its structure also resonates to the very structure of the human mind as that mind would engage in storytelling. (CC)

James and John’s fishing business was large enough that it supported laborers from outside the family. Walking away from this business, therefore, meant leaving a successful trade and a relatively secure future. (TLSB)

They, too, comply immediately and for the same reason as Simon and Andrew. It is a fair conclusion that the family possessed means, and that Zebedee’s business was of some proportions. The fact that his sons left their father’s prosperous business shows how devoted they were to Jesus. The hired men could be depended upon to find ways in which to fill the gap. Provision has been made for every need. The point is that their leaving their father did not amount to disrespect or disobedience. (B)

Zebedee did not object. Without a doubt he together with the hired men continued to bring great sacrifices to support Jesus’ mission and the training of his disciples. (PBC)

**1:16–20** The first thing Jesus does in His public ministry is to call two pairs of brothers. They respond by dropping everything, following Him, and becoming “fishers of men.” The same invitation to discipleship confronts people today: either drop everything and, in faith, follow Jesus and make sacrifices, or run the risk of missing out on the Kingdom. Thankfully, we are not left to our own devices in this regard. God’s Holy Spirit, working through the Word and Sacraments, moves us to faithful discipleship and so also to eternal life. • Lord, thank You for calling us into Your kingdom, for which You declare us fit by Your grace. Keep us faithful in our calling, for Jesus’ sake. Amen. (TLSB)