

The Book of Jonah

Foreshadowings of Jesus as the Christ

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The Old Testament book of Jonah is a remarkable story perhaps best known for the stubbornness of a prophet, the great fish that swallows and then regurgitates Jonah, the conversion of the whole city of Nineveh, and the rapid growth and death of a gourd. But this small book has a much deeper, more powerful message that has been obscured through the ages: that the Messiah would live and die to make salvation available to all humankind. This article outlines the parallels between elements of the book of Jonah and Jesus's future life, agony, crucifixion, spirit world ministry, and resurrection.

Symbolic incidents in the book of Jonah are revealed in the New Testament as Jesus explicitly referred to “the sign of Jonah”¹ and then fulfilled its typological allusions. Most prominent is the image of Jonah's three days and three nights “in the whale's belly” being a sign of Jesus's three days and three nights “in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40).² But there are several additional parallels between Jonah and Jesus. While many scholars, dating back at least to Hugh of St. Cher (d. 1263),³ have noticed elements in the book of Jonah that parallel events in the life and mission of Jesus, I have not found any modern author who lists all the possible elements that may well foreshadow the life and mission of Christ, although at least half of the items discussed in this article were identified and written about by Early Christian Fathers.⁴ It is not my goal to force a parallel between every part of the book of Jonah with something in the life and mission of Christ but rather to point out parallels that appear to have gone unnoticed. All of these foreshadowings—especially those that seem particularly obvious—make Jesus's statement about the sign of Jonah even more meaningful.

Jonah as a Dove

Latter-day Saint scholars have noted that all prophets, in a way, are types of Christ.⁵ Prophets are known by their fruits and their messages that lead to Christ, and the book of Jonah is no exception. The name *Jonah* in Hebrew means *dove*. The dove is a symbol of peace, as in Noah's sending out a dove from the ark, signaling the end of the Flood (Gen. 8:8). Doves were used for sacrifice at the temple (Lev. 1:14). For Isaiah, the dove is one who mourns (Isa. 38:14; 59:11). The dove is harmless (Matt. 10:16). The dove is also the "form" in which the Holy Ghost descended upon Jesus after his baptism, when the Father affirmed that Jesus is his Son. When Jesus told Pharisees they could look for the sign of Jonah, he evoked many images of the dove, his baptism, his mission and messiahship, as well as his overcoming death. All of these images may be seen as pointing to Jesus, his attributes, his sacrifice, and his divine roles.

The History and Purpose of the Book of Jonah

The language, style, and theology of the book of Jonah suggest that it was most likely written between 450 and 300 B.C.⁶ This range of time is well past the life of the Old Testament prophet Jonah associated with the reign of King Jeroboam II in 2 Kings 14:25 (788 B.C.).⁷ The author of the book is unknown. One scholar notes that it is much more useful to ponder about the meaning of the book rather than its authorship and history: "Since the book was considered to provide legitimate knowledge about YHWH and YHWH's ways, and as such was included in the accepted repertoire of prophetic books, the communicator must have been construed as 'authoritative.' Had this not been the case, there would have been no reason to continue studying, copying, reading and reading to others this text. But the authoritative communicator was certainly not the actual historical author of the book."⁸

Much discussion about the book of Jonah has debated whether its story reflects literal history or not, what the book's literary form is, and how its purpose should be understood.⁹ This article focuses instead on the book's typological mode of prophecy of Christ. I propose that the story of Jonah, whether literal or not, was written in a typological style to mask the book's Christ-centered prophecy. Written in this manner, these prophecies of Jesus's future life and atonement would have been protected from censorship by those who might obliterate or obfuscate them.¹⁰

As images from the book of Jonah are discussed in the following sections of this article, readers may find it enlightening to remember that

the Old Testament Jehovah is the premortal Jesus.¹¹ Thus it was Jesus who interacted with Jonah and created the situations of the story as prophecies which he himself would later fulfill.

Jonah's Call to Preach to Gentiles Prefigured Christ's Salvation for All

The Israelite Jonah's attempted flight from the Lord (Jonah 1:3) was motivated by his angry refusal to accept that God in his kindness and mercy would accept Gentiles into his kingdom (4:1, 4, 9). Jonah's view that Gentiles were unworthy of a chance for eternal reward is reflected in the anger of first-hour laborers Jesus taught about in his New Testament parable of the laborers. In this parable, the first-hour laborers (Israelites or tribe of Judah) were angry with the householder (the Lord) for allowing the same pay (eternal reward) to his last-hour laborers (non-Israelite) (Matt. 19:30; 20:1–16; see also 1 Ne. 13:42). This parable is itself a prophecy of the coming instruction from the Lord to go out “and teach all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Not coincidentally in the same port city of Joppa (Jonah 1:3; Acts 10:5), Peter faced the same issue as Jonah, being surprised that Gentiles would be welcome in God's kingdom and that “in every nation he that feareth [God], and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him” (Acts 10:35). All of the worldwide missionary work among Gentile nations, conducted both in the primitive Church and also in these latter days, can be seen as being foreshadowed in Jonah's calling to preach to the foreign people of Nineveh.

Jonah/Jesus Typologies in Jonah 1:3–16

The first chapter of the book of Jonah offers several parallels to Jesus's life and ministry.

Going down and paying the fare. Jonah went “down” to Joppa, paid the fare, and went down into the boat. Likewise, as one may see, Jesus came “down from heaven” (for example, John 3:13; 6:33), as he became flesh and would descend below all things. Jonah paid the fare, just as Jesus paid all that was required to do the will of the Father.

Asleep in a storm-tossed boat. Upon Jonah's flight from God aboard a ship sailing to Tarshish, “the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. . . . But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep” (1:4–5). Jesus, like Jonah, slept on his disciples' ship despite a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee that threatened to sink

them, all of which is described with several similar words: “And when he was entered into a ship, . . . behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep” (Matt. 8:23–27; see also Mark 4:36–41; Luke 8:22–25).

Awakened with pleadings to save. As the crew fearfully prayed to their gods, Jonah was awakened by the shipmaster saying, “What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not” (1:5–6). Likewise, Jesus’s panicked crew of disciples awakened him as “the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he [Jesus] was in the hinder part of the ship asleep on a pillow: and they awakened him.” They then said “unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:37–38; see also Matt. 8:24–25; Luke 8:24). Jesus’s calming the storm showed his power over the elements and his place as Lord of all the earth, and thus Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah would plausibly look to this event as very significant in his life.

The reaction of great fear on the part of all aboard the ship to Tarshish also prefigures the great fear that many people felt as they witnessed the powerful events in the life of Jesus, especially at the time of the Crucifixion: prominent people of Jerusalem were alarmed about Jesus’s miraculous power and feared him; Pilate was fearful of potential rioting; the Roman soldiers “feared greatly” (Matt. 27:54); the disciples, especially Peter, were also fearful.¹² Everyone involved with the crucifixion was fearful—except Jesus. He knew what he had to do and prevailed without fear, just as Jonah expressed no fear.

Gentiles failed in their attempts to save either Jonah or Jesus. Jonah, knowing he was the cause of the life-threatening storm, volunteered to sacrifice his life (as a type of Christ’s sacrifice to save humankind) to save the Gentile crew and their ship. He told the crew to “take me up and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you” (1:12). But rather than cast Jonah overboard, the Gentile crew “rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them” (1:13). In a similar manner, the Gentile Roman praefectus Pontius Pilate and his wife attempted to save Jesus. Pilate’s wife said to him as he sat in judgment of Jesus, “Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him” (Matt. 27:19; see also Mark 15:15; Luke 23:12–24; John 18:38). “And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him” (John 19:12). In the cases of both Jonah and Jesus, it was Gentiles who failed in their efforts to preserve them from death.

Gentiles feared shedding innocent blood. The ship's crew expressed their fear of having innocent blood on their hands. "Wherefore [the crewmen] cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee" (1:14). Pontius Pilate expressed his fear of responsibility for shedding Jesus's innocent blood (Matt. 27:17–22, 24). Thus this image from Jonah prophetically foreshadows another detail of Jesus's first-day ordeal.

Casting lots. At the point of Jonah's and Jesus's voluntary sacrifices, both the Gentile crewmen and the Gentile Roman soldiers cast lots regarding their victims. Psalm 22:18 also predicted the casting of lots during Jesus's time on the cross.¹³ The purposes of the casting of lots was admittedly very different in the two cases: for Jonah, it was to determine who was causing the storm, and for Christ, to divide his raiment.

Being taken up or lifted up. When asked by the crewmen, "What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?" Jonah said unto them, "Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you" (1:11–12). Here Jonah decidedly becomes a type of Christ in his voluntary sacrifice. Jonah's sacrifice of his own life to save others parallels Jesus voluntarily allowing himself to be lifted up on the cross.

The concept behind Jonah's and Jesus's words is similar. Jesus's words were, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). Numerous prophecies emphasize that the coming Messiah would be "lifted up" in being put to death. John refers to Moses's serpent: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14–15). The prophet Enoch "beheld the Son of Man lifted up on the cross" (Moses 7:47, 55). Speaking to the Nephites on the American continent, the resurrected Jesus said, "And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross . . . , that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father . . . to be judged of their works" (3 Ne. 27:14). Thus Jonah's "take me up and cast me forth" sacrifice image portends and testifies of Jesus being lifted up in his ultimate, future sacrifice.

Calming the storm. "So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging" (1:15). With Jonah's sacrifice, Jehovah miraculously calmed the storm. This part of the story noticeably foreshadows the mortal Jesus's intervention by calming the storm on Galilee. Jesus's disciples were desperately trying to save their lives because "they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy" (Luke 8:23). Matthew recorded that in the "great tempest . . . the ship was covered

with the waves” (Matt. 8:24). When the disciples woke Jesus, “he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mark 4:38–39).

Gentiles praised Jehovah. Seeing the miraculous calming of the sea following their taking up and casting forth of Jonah, the crew “feared the Lord” for his power over sea and land (1:9–10, 16) and “offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows” (1:16). This animal sacrifice to the Israelite God Jehovah by these apparently converted Gentiles is similar to the response of Roman soldiers at the Crucifixion. At the time of Jesus’s death, Roman soldiers feared and praised Jesus. “Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:51, 54; Mark 15:39). Luke reports that at Jesus’s death “when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man” (Luke 23:47–48).

Atonement Images from within the Great Fish in Jonah 1:17–2:10

The parallels between the story told in the book of Jonah and the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ become even more striking as the story continues.

Jonah was swallowed into the Lord’s great fish. “Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (1:17). In the belly of Jehovah’s great fish, Jonah suffered a Gethsemane-like affliction in unfathomable darkness. Such a vivid image of horror brings to mind the graphic answer this same Lord described to the sorrowful Prophet Joseph Smith while imprisoned in the Liberty Jail dungeon: “If thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?” (D&C 122:7–8).

Some scholars propose that the text implies that Jonah was not swallowed by a great fish, but he actually died by drowning in the sea.¹⁴ The great fish may be a metaphor for the leviathan, the mouth of hell, the great deep, Sheol, and death.¹⁵ By this reasoning, the Lord pulled Jonah back from the watery grave, revived him, and gave him a second chance to obey. If so, the parallel between Jonah’s experience and Jesus’s three days in the tomb is even stronger.

One scholar notes, “Some later Jewish interpretations describe Jonah’s stay in the fish in imaginative detail. According to the *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Jonah saves his host fish from being devoured by the monster Leviathan. In return for this, the fish takes Jonah on an extensive tour of the suboceanic world. In the *Zohar*, Jonah’s sojourn in the belly of the fish and his subsequent ejection is understood as an allegory of death and resurrection.”¹⁶ Whatever the Lord’s great fish was, Jonah’s prayerful suffering in a place of darkness for three days and nights is a clear parallel to Jesus’s prayerful suffering in Gethsemane, death, and time in the spirit world.

Three days and three nights in darkness (the sign of Jonah). The book of Jonah became important in the New Testament world when Jesus spoke of “the sign of Jonah.” Matthew recorded that the scribes and Pharisees tempted him for a sign, a proof, of his messiahship: “Master, we would see a sign from thee.” Jesus responded, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; There shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here” (Matt. 12:39–41). Matthew reported a second, similar time that Jesus referred to the sign of Jonah: “A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas” (Matt. 16:4). Luke reports, “And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation” (Luke 11:29–30).¹⁷ Jesus used Jonah’s story as a representation of his own coming three days and three nights in darkness and that he would rise again, just as Jonah had come forth from the darkness of the great fish. He also used the story to tell certain people that their failure to repent placed them in condemnation.¹⁸

LDS scholar Richard D. Draper expounds on this statement by Jesus.

The problem with the request [of the scribes and Pharisees] was that it attempted to bypass faith. The Lord returned their insincere request with a strong rebuke. . . . Because of their apostasy, they would not accept any sign, and therefore the Lord was under no obligation to give them one. Nonetheless, He did, albeit in the form of a riddle. Ironically, He gave them, if only they could have understood it, the ultimate

sign, the one that would prove conclusively the validity of His claims—namely, His death and subsequent resurrection. . . . The real importance of this interchange is that it marks the first instance where the Lord predicted His death and resurrection, if veiled, to the Pharisees.¹⁹

Some propose that the three days and three nights measure of time is symbolic. Three is a number of reality or divinity and appears several times in the book of Jonah.²⁰ One scholar notes that a reasonable theory for the three days and three nights motif is that a new moon is dark for three nights; it disappears and then reemerges,²¹ so three nights is symbolic of death and revival.

Was Jesus's body in the tomb exactly three days and three nights, thus matching the prophecy "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"? Tradition and much modern scholarship suggest that the Crucifixion occurred on a Friday, but many scholars believe evidence points to a Wednesday or Thursday crucifixion instead.²² Any of these days will suit the comparison to Jonah's three days and three nights because we cannot know for certain the method of reckoning of Jonah's time of suffering, let alone the exact amount of time Jesus was dead.

As I have pondered the timing of Jesus's crucifixion and time his body was in the tomb, I see a poetic beauty in considering that Jesus's night of suffering in Gethsemane might be counted as part of his prophesied "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." It was in Gethsemane that Jesus began his descent into "the heart of the earth," for this is when the sins of humankind were swallowed up.²³ This descent included both the agony of Gethsemane and the Crucifixion, immediately followed by his ministry in the spirit world while his body lay in the tomb. If the Crucifixion occurred on a Friday, including Thursday night in the reckoning would make the time of suffering three nights as well as three days.

Jonah and Jesus committed to divine callings during their sufferings. While in "the belly of hell" (2:2), Jonah offered a prophetic prayer in which he described some images that foreshadow Jesus's suffering. Here in this hellish darkness Jonah composed a psalm still today considered a literary masterpiece (2:1–9). His prayer of affliction prophetically symbolized the Savior's future suffering in Gethsemane and on Calvary: "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly, And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice" (2:1–2).

Jonah covenanted to put God's will before his own, saying, "But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I

have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord” (2:9). This description of Jonah’s bleak and sorrowful state within the belly of hell where he accepted God’s will is comparable to Jesus’s test in Gethsemane when he “fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). The Father, hearing his Son, sent an angel to strengthen him (Luke 22:42–43).

Upon accepting his Father’s will over his own, Jesus partook of the bitter cup. Luke describes, “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). About his bitter cup of sacrificial agony the Lord revealed, “Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men” (D&C 19:18–19).

Being swallowed up in the heart of the seas. Jonah’s plea continues, “For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.” The phrase “midst of the seas” is in other Bible versions “heart of the seas,” which is similar to Jesus’s phrase “heart of the earth,” referring to the place of atoning for sins (Matt. 12:39–40). Micah 7:19 describes this place: The Lord “will cast all their sins into the depths of the seas.” This is where “men’s sins will be swallowed up out of sight.”²⁴ Jesus fulfilled the swallowing up of all sins.

Being forsaken. Jonah mourned, “I am cast out of thy sight” (2:4). This description of separation from his Lord Jehovah calls to mind the words of Jesus while on the cross, when he cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).

Weeds and thorns. In his three days of torment, Jonah described that “the weeds were wrapped about my head” (2:5). The weeds recognizably foreshadow the crown of thorns placed on Jesus’s head as an instrument of torture and mocking (Matt. 27:29, Mark 15:17; John 19:2).

My soul fainteth. Though according to the text Jonah is still alive during his three nights and three days in the great fish’s belly of hell, Jonah describes a deathlike experience, saying, “The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about . . . [and] my soul fainted within me” (2:5, 7).²⁵ Jonah’s experience foretells Jesus’s death by crucifixion. Luke recorded, “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said this, he gave up the ghost” (Luke 23:46).

The holy temple. After feeling cast out of his Lord's sight, Jonah said, "Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple . . . [and] When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple" (2:4, 7). In his psalm, Jonah invokes the temple. The temple played a role at the time of the Crucifixion: "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Matt. 27:50–51; see also JST Matt. 27:54–55; Mark 15:37). During Israel's annual Day of Atonement rite, sacrificial lamb's blood was taken through the temple veil.²⁶ With Jesus's blood sacrifice completed, he fulfilled that temple rite as he passed through the veil of mortality represented in the rending of the veil.

"The earth was about me." Jonah described his descent: "I went down to the bottom [or roots] of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever" (2:6). James D. Smart explains, "The Hebrews conceived of the earth as floating upon the great deep of waters (Ps. 24:2). Therefore one who was plunged to the very bottom of the deep would find himself below the foundations of the mountains," which was thought to be the land of the dead or spirit world, "lying beneath the great deep."²⁷ This image of Jonah's visit to the land of the dead is a potent foreshadowing of Jesus's descent as a disembodied spirit into a world of spirits. Peter described Jesus's spirit world experience. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison" (1 Pet. 3:18–20). This spirit world ministry is described in a 1918 revelation to the Prophet Joseph F. Smith as he pondered on the Apostle Peter's words. "And as I wondered, my eyes were opened, and my understanding quickened, and I perceived that the Lord went not in person among the wicked and the disobedient who had rejected the truth, to teach them; But behold, from among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead" (D&C 138:29–30).

"Salvation is of the Lord." At the end of Jonah's prophetic prayer in which he identified key events of Jesus's atonement, he powerfully declared that the Lord Jehovah is the ultimate Savior of humankind: "Salvation is of the Lord" (2:9). These words of Jonah look to Jehovah's triumph over the grave and sin, bringing salvation to all people.

Deliverance from the great fish. After Jonah's three nights and three days in the great fish he was miraculously delivered: "The Lord spake

unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land” (2:10). This coming forth alive on the third day is widely embraced as a type of Jesus, who came forth from the sepulcher reunited with his body as a glorified resurrected being to a state of divine perfection.

Resonances in Jonah’s Mission to Nineveh in Jonah 3:1–4:11

The gospel is for all nations. After Jonah was delivered, the Lord spoke a second time to Jonah, “Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee” (3:1–2). Not only was Nineveh a Gentile city, it was the major city of Assyria, the great enemy of Israel and Judah, and it represents the epitome of wickedness. Both the Lord’s first and second calls to Jonah to go to Gentile Nineveh (1:1–2; 3:1–2) signify God’s universal love and concern over all nations. It was to be Israel’s charge as the seed of Abraham to eventually be a blessing to all the world’s nations (Acts 3:25). The import of this second call also extends to Jesus’s restoration of the gospel to Joseph Smith.

The forty-day warning. “So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (3:3–4). Having arrived in Nineveh, Jonah used two numbers with symbolic meaning, three and forty. Archeologists have found that ancient Nineveh was nowhere near “three days’ journey” in size,²⁸ so the description is one more symbol of three (symbolic of perfection), again pointing to Christ. The time allotted for Nineveh to repent was forty days. Forty is symbolic of probation and testing and may represent mortality as a time to prepare to meet Christ.²⁹ Forty represents the need to prepare for an unknown time in the future such as Jesus’s second coming. Jesus’s teachings are replete with warnings to prepare for the kingdom of heaven without saying when that kingdom will come.

All people turn to God and peace reigns in the land, even among the animals. “So the people of Nineveh believed God and proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them even to the least of them” (3:5). This account of total conversion of Nineveh is not verified in ancient historical records,³⁰ but it prefigures that millennial day when “every ear shall hear [the fifth angel’s trump], and every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess . . . saying: fear God, and give glory to him . . . for the hour of his judgment is come” (D&C 88:104; see also Isa. 45:23 and Philip. 2:10–11).

Nineveh's king (with no name given, representing all the world's kings) proclaimed a decree that every man, beast, and flock fast and "be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn [both man and beast] every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands" (3:6–8). This image of Nineveh's complete turning from evil and from violence invites readers to look forward to the time when the Lord "shall judge among the nations . . . and they shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks—nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (2 Ne. 12:4; Isa. 2:4) and the day when "the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together" (Isa. 11:6; see also 2 Ne. 30:12; D&C 101:26).

Looking from the east for the Lord's judgment. At the conversion of Nineveh, Jonah became angry and "went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what [judgment from God] would become of the city" (4:5). Throughout the scriptures, east is the direction from which God's power comes. In this story, it represents the Lord's coming judgment from the east. "For as the light of the morning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, and covereth the whole earth, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be" (JS Matt. 1:26; see also Ezek. 43:2; Matt. 24:27).

The gourd. As Jonah watched for the Lord's judgment from the east, "the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did rise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live" (4:6–8). With a vehement east wind and hot sun to again humble Jonah, who was still angry over the short-lived, withered gourd, the Lord asked, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death" (4:9). The Lord next asked his most revealing question: "Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city [representative of all nations], wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (4:10–11).

This abrupt ending with a sharp contrasting image between Jonah's cares and those of his Lord reveals the story's main message. Jonah's anger and pity is spent solely on the withered gourd, whereas the Lord's care is for the eternal salvation of an entire population of Gentiles. Readers are brought to clearly see the great humanity and universality of the Lord's divine love. All will eventually be judged, whether accountable or considered innocent (that is, unable to "discern between their right hand and their left hand"). He is the Lord God, the great Jehovah, of both the Old and New Testament, and as Jonah declared, the Savior of all the world.

The book of Jonah ends as it began, by revealing the Lord and Savior of both the Old and New Testaments extending his universal love and justice to the entire world.

Chiasmus in the Book of Jonah

Unifying these many elements in this prophetic account, the chiasmic structure of the book of Jonah suggests that it was intentionally composed to center on Jonah's exclamation of salvation (2:4–6), the physical midpoint as well as spiritual crux of this text. Others have seen chiasmic elements running throughout all or parts of the book of Jonah.³¹ The following arrangement, as found by this author, ties the book together as an integrated literary unit, contrary to the views of some others.³²

- A The Lord showed his *universal love* extended to Gentile nations by calling Jonah to "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it." (1:1–2)
- B Jonah expressed his *anger* with the Lord's mercy to Gentiles by rising "up to flee . . . from the presence of the Lord." (1:3)
- C "The Lord sent out a great *wind* into the sea" in response to Jonah's angry flight over the Lord's reaching out to call Nineveh's Gentiles to repent. (1:4)
- D As "the mariners were *afraid*, and *cried* every man unto his god," the shipmaster commanded that Jonah "arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we *perish not*." (1:5–6)
- E Jonah *yielded his life* (1:14) to save the Gentile crew; they feared God, offered a sacrifice, and made vows. "Jonah was in the belly of the *fish* three days and three nights." (1:11–17)

- F Jonah's voice was heard: "Out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my *voice*." (2:2)
- G Jonah looked to the temple: "I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy *holy temple*." (2:4)
- H Jonah despaired, "The waters compassed me about, even to the *soul*: the depth closed . . . *weeds* were wrapped about my head. I went *down to the bottoms* of the mountains . . . the earth with her bars was about me for ever." (2:5–6)
- H Jonah saw salvation: "Yet hast thou *brought up my life from corruption*, O Lord my God." (2:6)
- G Jonah's prayer ascended to the temple: "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine *holy temple*." (2:7)
- F Jonah's sacrificing voice offered thanks and vows: "I will sacrifice unto thee with the *voice* of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed." (2:7–9)
- E Jonah was miraculously *delivered* on the third day, "the Lord spake unto the *fish*, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." (2:10)
- D The king of Nineveh *feared* Jonah's warning from God, and he commanded his people to "*cry mightily* unto God . . . that we *perish not*." (3:1–9)
- C Jonah was angry, and "God prepared a vehement east *wind*; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah." (4:1–8)
- B Jonah was lastly *angry* over the Lord's withering of the gourd. He said, "I do well to be angry, even unto death." (4:9)
- A The Lord taught Jonah that his merciful, *universal love* extended to Gentile nations saying, "Should not I spare Nineveh, that great city?" (4:11)

The structure of this composition is relatively self-evident, but it bears an important explanatory message. Broadly speaking, the book is tripartite: (1) Jonah's ill-fated attempt to avoid his first call to Nineveh, (2) his covenantal acknowledgement in the belly of hell, and (3) his hard-learned lesson in his attempt to fulfill his second call to Nineveh. Significantly,

Jonah 4:1–2 describes Jonah’s motive for both his angry flight at the narrative’s beginning (1:3) and his unbecoming anger at the story’s end (4:1–9), a cord that ties together the opening and closing sections. Jonah’s last anger (4:1–9), over having seen the Lord spare Nineveh’s Gentiles from destruction, is puzzling, however, since it follows Jonah’s humble expression of obedience to God’s will which he offered in his prophetic psalm-filled prayer (2:1–9, FGHHGF) and also his determined commitment to sacrifice and pay to God that which he had vowed or consecrated (2:9). Moreover, after Jonah’s extraordinary salvation from certain death, he had obediently gone to Nineveh, as he was called the second time to preach repentance there. But surprisingly, the people of Nineveh responded immediately to Jonah’s brief warning (3:5), which induced the Lord to spare all Nineveh’s Gentiles due to their newfound obedience to God (3:10). This dramatic result “displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry” (4:1), all of which seems illogical and contradictory. But Jonah’s disclosure in 4:2 confesses to the Lord that the motive for his anger at both the beginning and ending of this narrative was his knowledge that God is “a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness” (4:2), and therefore Jonah knew that God would not destroy repentant Gentiles (whom Jonah, as an Israelite, detested regardless of their spiritual status). Though illogical, the book of Jonah’s chiasmic return to this theme of anger allows the story to end as it began, at both points with images to symbolize God’s universal love. By starting with the Lord’s call of Jonah to Gentile Nineveh, then ending by having him spare all Nineveh, the book of Jonah illustrates the universality of Jehovah’s love among all the nations of the world. Within this repeated beginning and ending message, a merciful prophecy unfolds of Jesus’s atoning sacrifice and eternal mission for mankind’s salvation.

Summary

Through symbolic imagery, the book of Jonah foreshadows Jesus Christ’s atonement and his plan for early Christian and latter-day Apostles to oversee the seed of Abraham in carrying out their prophesied missionary charge. Moses and Luke recorded the prophecy that “in thee [Abraham’s seed] shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:1–3; see also Acts 3:25).

Are all these parallels between the book of Jonah and the life of Christ equally significant? No type or symbol is a perfect match for what it represents. Yet I see the whole of the book as prophetic. In images from Jonah’s storm-tossed sea experiences to those in his prophetic prayer of

affliction while in the Lord's great fish (belly of hell), the book contains a prophecy of Jesus's future ministry. These Jonah images portray and prefigure Jesus's prayerful agony as he accepted his bitter cup of suffering in Gethsemane, his being lifted up, and his feeling forsaken on Calvary. These were followed by the images of his death and spirit-world ministry. In Jonah's miraculous third-day deliverance from the Lord's great fish, readers can easily visualize the unmistakable image of Jesus's rising from the dead with his third-day resurrection. Jesus himself called attention to this likeness when he referred to it as the sign of Jonah. The just as miraculous missionary image of Nineveh's total conversion and era of peace among men and beasts in that worldly city provides images that symbolize the Lord's second coming as the world's Savior and Judge.

Jonah's declaration of the Lord Jehovah as the world's Savior is similar to declarations of prophets throughout the scriptures, as proclaimed three times in Peter's words to the Jews on the day of Pentecost: "Those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled" (Acts 3:18; see also 3:21, 24). Moses sang, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation" (Ex. 15:2). Isaiah promised, "Trust ye in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength" (Isa. 26:4). In his reply to Jesus's question as to who he was, the Apostle Peter, the son of Jonah (Matt. 16:17), declared, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15-16). One purpose of the book of Jonah is to preserve an elaborate declaration and coded testimony of who this Messiah is.

Now in fulfillment of Jonah's prophetic missionary calling and of Jesus's commission to teach all nations, tens of thousands of the descendants of Abraham (Israel) by birth or adoption are, in these latter days, reaching out with their missionary callings to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. They declare, as did the prophetic book of Jonah, "Salvation is of the Lord" (2:9), as they invite all to come unto Jesus the Christ, the Savior of the world.

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Well after retirement from CES, David noticed images in the book of Jonah that foreshadow the Savior's atonement. Years of pondering and research followed. He thanks Dr. Bruce Van Orden (fellow Gospel Doctrine teacher at the prison) for his encouragement, suggestions, and mentoring. He also thanks the editors at BYU Studies for scholarly input, which greatly improved the article. Last but not least, he thanks Rayna for her many years of support and for her help with revisions.

1. Luke 11:29; Matt. 12:39; 16:4. *Jonas* is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Jonah*. The forms *Jonah*, *Jonas*, and *Jona* are used interchangeably in this article. [^]

2. Jonah's experience is recognized as "a foreshadowing of Jesus' own death and resurrection" in the LDS Bible Dictionary. "Bible Dictionary," in *Holy Bible* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), s.v. "Jonah." [^]

3. "Hugh urged that Jonah be seen as a figure of Christ, and yet he cautioned that not every detail in the book ought be pushed to fit such a pattern." Barbara Green, *Jonah's Journeys* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2005), 21. [^]

4. See for example texts of Tertullian, Ambrose, Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, Augustine, and Theodore of Mopsuestia, collected in *The Twelve Prophets*, ed. Alberto Ferreiro, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture 14, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 2003), 128–47. Analyzing the strengths and possible meanings of these Early Christian typologies remains for further investigation. [^]

5. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 448. For discussions of the use of typology in ancient Israelite and early Christian literature, see Noel B. Reynolds, "The Israelite Background of Moses Typology in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 14–18; and Kristian S. Heal, "Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature," *BYU Studies* 41, no. 1 (2002): 29–49. [^]

6. "Bible Dictionary," s.v. "Jonah." Linguistic parallels with Jeremiah "point to a time after Jeremiah and after the composition of Deuteronomy–2 Kings, a time in the late exilic or the postexilic period." James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 28–31. "The date of writing then may have been in the 8th century [BC], but was more probably not earlier than the 6th century," and the author is unknown, according to the *New Bible Dictionary*, 3d ed. (Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 604. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3d ed. (Oxford University Press, 1997), 899, states, "Considerations of language, style, and theology suggest it [book of Jonah] was written in the post-exile period" (late 5th to 4th century BC). Sidney B. Sperry, *The Voice of Israel's Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1952), 331, summarizes that "most present authorities" date the book of Jonah between 450 BC and 300 BC. [^]

7. The Bible identifies Jonah as the "son of Amittai" (Jonah 1:1). Sperry dates this Jonah around 788 BC, during the reign of King Jeroboam II (2 Kgs. 14:25). Sperry, *Voice of Israel's Prophets*, 326. [^]

8. Ehud Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 367 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 4. ^

9. Personally, I prefer a symbolic interpretation of the book of Jonah rather than a literal one. ^

10. The Book of Mormon prophet Nephi described scriptural changes and deletions of such Christian passages as having “the most plain and precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb . . . kept back” (1 Ne. 13:28, 34). The book of Moses teaches that Moses’s knowledge of the Only Begotten as the Savior was lost from his record (Genesis) “because of wickedness” and that in time “the children of men shall esteem my words as naught and take many of them from the book which thou shalt write” (Moses 1:23, 32–33, 41). ^

11. David R. Seely, “Jehovah, Jesus Christ,” in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 2:720–21; Roger R. Keller, “Jesus Is Jehovah (YHWH): A Study in the Gospels,” in *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior*, ed. Paul H. Peterson, Gary L. Hatch, and Laura D. Card (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2002), 120–51. ^

12. John W. Welch, “The Factor of Fear in the Trial of Jesus,” in *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior*, 284–312. ^

13. Shon Hopkin, “My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?:” Psalm 22 and the Mission of Christ,” *BYU Studies* 52, no. 4 (2013): 131–32. ^

14. For example, “One question often asked is whether Jonah actually died at this time. Did he lose his life when suddenly swallowed by this denizen of the deep? Some conservative Bible scholars believe that he died and point out that this best typifies what happened to Christ. However, a type is a prefigure or foreshadow of the real thing and it should never be unduly pressed.” William L. Banks, *Jonah, the Reluctant Prophet* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 46. See also Lyn Mize, “Jonah’s Death, Burial, and Resurrection,” at *First Fruits Ministry*, <http://www.ffruits.org/vo3/jonah.html>. ^

15. The leviathan, a sea monster, appears in Job 41, Isaiah 27:1, and Psalm 104. *Sheol* is the Hebrew term for the abode of the dead, a grave, and the underworld. ^

16. Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary*, 62; Limburg says the word translated *belly* may have the sense of womb, entrails, breast, or even “where teaching is stored up,” the heart. ^

17. Luke 12:54–57 and Mark 8:11–13 report similar discussion wherein Jesus says it is evil to seek for a sign, but he does not specifically mention Jonah. ^

18. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, Book 2 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 222–24. ^

19. Richard D. Draper, “Jesus’ Prophecies of His Death and Resurrection,” in *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection: The Savior’s Final Hours*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 18–19. ^

20. “Three points us to what is real, essential, perfect, substantial, complete, and Divine.” E. W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1894), 108. See also Gerhard Delling, “*treis*,” in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids,

Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972), 8:216–25. The number three appears several times in the book of Jonah. Jonah is commanded to arise three times—twice by the Lord and once by the shipmaster (1:2, 6; 3:2). He went down three times on his flight from the Lord—down to Joppa, down into the ship, and down into the sides of the ship (1:3; 1:5). The story hinges on three greats—the great fish, the great city, and the great wind. Nineveh’s size is described as a three days’ journey (3:3). Most important is the time Jonah spends in the great fish (1:17). [^]

21. Janet Howe Gaines, *Forgiveness in a Wounded World: Jonah’s Dilemma*, Studies in Biblical Literature 5 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 56. [^]

22. See, for example, discussions in Ruth Rachel Specter, *On What Day Did Christ Die?* (New York: Exposition, 1959); Annie Jaubert, *The Date of the Last Supper* (New York: Alba House, 1965). A Wednesday crucifixion allows for a Wednesday night–Thursday Passover, followed by a day in which the women bought spices for Jesus’s body, and then a Friday night–Saturday Sabbath, accommodating Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:55–56. [^]

23. James D. Smart, “The Book of Jonah,” in *Interpreter’s Bible*, 12 vols. (New York: Abingdon, 1956), 6:886–87. [^]

24. Smart, “Book of Jonah,” 6:886–87. [^]

25. The verb translated “to faint away” is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe (1) the onset of death when a person’s life begins to slip away (Lam. 2:12), (2) the loss of one’s senses due to turmoil (Ps. 107:5), and (3) the loss of all hope of surviving calamity (Pss. 77:4; 142:4; 143:4). All three options are reflected in various English versions: ‘when my life was ebbing away’ (JPS, NJPS), ‘when my life was slipping away’ (CEV), ‘when I felt my life slipping away’ (TEV), ‘as my senses failed me’ (NEB), and ‘when I had lost all hope’ (NLT).” The NET Bible, at *Biblia.com*, <http://biblia.com/bible/gs-netbible/Jon%202.1-10>. [^]

26. For a description of Day of Atonement, see Gerald N. Lund, “Old Testament Types and Symbols,” in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, ed. Neal Lambert and M. Gerald Bradford (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1981), online at <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/literature-belief-sacred-scripture-and-religious-experience/2-old-testament-types-and>. Also see Hebrews 9:25–28; 10:18–21. [^]

27. Smart, “Book of Jonah,” 6:887. [^]

28. Nineveh’s circumference was about 7.75 miles at its heyday. A. Kirk Grayson, “Nineveh,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:1118–19. For a discussion of the symbolism of threes in Jonah, see note 19. [^]

29. Forty symbolizes probation, testing, or trial, as in Noah’s forty days of rain, Moses on the mount for forty days, Israel’s forty years in the wilderness, and Jesus’s forty days of fasting. Alonzo Gaskill, *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 137–38; Matt Slick, “What Is Biblical Numerology?” *Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry*, <http://www.carm.org/questions/numbers.htm> (accessed July 28, 2014). [^]

30. “No document yet discovered tells of any mass conversion at Nineveh. Ishtar and other native deities were still worshipped at Nineveh down to the fall of the city in 612 B.C.E.” Millar Burrows, “The Literary Category of the Book

of Jonah,” 83–84, cited in David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible*, Brown Judaic Studies (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), 100. [^]

31. Those who find the four chapters of Jonah to have a chiasmic pattern include Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium, Teil I* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976); Yehuda T. Radday, “Chiasm in Joshua, Judges, and Others,” *Linguistica Biblica* (1973): 27–28:6–13; Marcus M. Ladd, *And He Spake unto Me: Structural Revelations and Prophetic Pattern in 1 Nephi* (Charleston, SC: Tafiati Publishing, 2011); Duane L. Christensen, “Narrative Poetics and the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah,” in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, ed. Elaine R. Follis, JSOT Supplement Series 40 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 29–48; Duane L. Christensen, “The Song of Jonah: A Metrical Analysis,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985): 217–31. Scholars who see shorter chiasms include Norbert Lohfink, Jonathan Magonet, Ernst R. Wendland, and Angelico di Marco. See also Paul B. Simmons, “The Book of Jonah (Arranged in the Style of Pervasive Parallelism),” and correspondence from Chirstie Frandsen, both in the Chiasmus Archive at L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University. See the bibliography at *Chiasmus Resources*, <http://chiasmus-resources.johnnwelchresources.com/biblio>.

Yehuda T. Radday, rather than seeing a chiasmus structure encompassing the book of Jonah’s entire four chapters, illustrated a chiasmic structure solely from within chapter one. He puts forward another within chapters three and four combined. He also intimated an observation that Jonah’s poetic prayer (2:3–9) is not an integral part of the book. He stated, “The argument sometimes voiced in favor of considering it [Jonah’s chapter 2 prayer] an integral part of the book on the ground that its removal would destroy the symmetry between the first two and the last two chapters is unsound.” Yehuda T. Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981; reprint Provo, Utah: Research Press FARMS, 1998), available at Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1131&index=5>. [^]

32. Many scholars have held the psalm (Jonah’s prayer, 2:2–9) to be an interpolation, but it need not be so viewed. *New Bible Dictionary*, 604. Sidney B. Sperry concluded, “There can be little question that the book is a unity. Even Jonah’s prayer in chapter two, consisting as it does of passages nearly all parallel to others in the Psalter, has a vital unity of its own and is not a mere string of quotations.” Sperry, *Voice of Israel’s Prophets*, 326–27. [^]