

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time,
saying,

²Get up, go to Nineveh,
that great city,
and proclaim to it the message
that I tell you.'

³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh,
according to the word of the LORD.

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city,
a three days' walk across.

⁴Jonah began to go into the city,
going a day's walk.

And he cried out,
'Forty days more,
and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'

⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God;
they proclaimed a fast,
and everyone,
great and small,
put on sackcloth.

10 When God saw what they did,
how they turned from their evil ways,
God changed his mind
about the calamity
that he had said
he would bring upon them;
and he did not do it.

Mark 1:14-20

14 Now after John was arrested,
Jesus came to Galilee,
proclaiming the good news of God,

¹⁵and saying,
'The time is fulfilled,
and the kingdom of God has come near;
repent,
and believe in the good news.'

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee,
he saw Simon
and his brother Andrew
casting a net into the lake—
for they were fishermen.

¹⁷And Jesus said to them,
'Follow me
and I will make you fish for people.'

¹⁸And immediately they left their nets
and followed him.

¹⁹As he went a little farther,
he saw James son of Zebedee
and his brother John,
who were in their boat mending the nets.

²⁰Immediately
he called them;
and they left their father Zebedee
in the boat with the hired men,
and followed him.

Reading the Minor Prophet This Week

Jonah is one of 'The Twelve' or 'Minor Prophets'
Talmud attributes them to 'The Men of the Great Assembly'
Editing and collecting in the Persian period, 6th-4th c BCE

The tales' origins may be as early as 700's BCE
Which 'Nineveh' is intended, at our Mosul on the Tigris in Iraq?
'Nineveh' in Hebrew imagination from a Palestine point of view,
Is Assyrian, then key city for Babylon, Persia, Seleucids

For one prophet to change all Nineveh, as this tale claims
is as implausible as the tale of the whale preceding it
(so Jonah ran the opposite direction in that first call)

The prophet is not called to convert Nineveh to Judaism
But the demand is for moral repentance and reform
By the people and the imperial ruler – and it works!

The form of Jonah is like Job's frame – a legendary tale,
Narrative story rather than oracular declarations
Leaves Jonah as neither oral nor writing prophet

As the story continues, the prophet complains to God
Objecting to divine mercy – scolded for his pride
The implied audience knows that Nineveh will fall in the end

I take Jonah as shorthand for prophetic rebuke to empire,
Though the prophet flee, succeed, or fail in the short term
The prophet's job remains to name the moral shape of things

Is this a universalist claim – Ninevites can be good without God
Or is it a clarification of Israel's call to bear witness?
I find lots of humour, satire of earnest pretensions of prophets

What's a prophet's calling in relation to empire?
What if the empire listened?

Reading the Gospel This Week

We're back again to Mark 1, a familiar tale
Moving beyond John the Baptizer, already jailed,
Jesus' own Galilean work similar to John's

We're given the call of two pairs of brothers,
Fishers called to leave their boats, trade, family
Very different from last week's first calls in John

Beyond factual contradictions,
What agenda or point is this gospel pursuing?
What is the nature or call or discipleship?

In your mental movie, who are the 4 fishers?
Are they literate, intelligent, in small business?
Are they ignorant, slow, physical labourers?

Does it matter if Romans are changing the economy,
Taxing and directing producers to feed Rome,
Beyond traditional subsistence practices?

If the first call is to be fishers of people,
Does that make new Christians fit to feed the church,
The vampire theory of 'we need new blood'?

How many stories about each of the 4 can you recall?
(More than the tales of Philip and Nathanael, eh?)
Does that reflect their status in the early church?

If last week's call stories were dialogical invitations,
With intermediaries saying 'Come and see'(then go tell)
Then what's the tone of 'Follow me' – and leave it all?

Which model of call do you recognize around us now?
Which model of call fits your own?