

EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



From My Window

James Black was both a song leader and Sunday School teacher in his church located in Williamsport, PA. Hymn historian Al Smith writes that one day James took a shortcut to the post office only to come face to face with a poor little girl named Bessie. When he asked her if she would like to attend Sunday School, she replied that she did not have any nice clothes to wear. James bought her clothes and according to him, she never missed roll call on Sunday morning . . . until one Sunday she did. When James went to her home, he found a very sick girl dying of advanced pneumonia. Her soon departure to heaven motivated James to write the words to his now famous hymn (1893) “When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time will be no more . . . when the roll is called up yonder, I’ll be there.”



Spring 2025 Pastors Conference

Virginia Beach Theological Seminary is thrilled to invite alumnus Dr. Jonathan Rinker (M.Div. 2001) to be our conference speaker on the topic: *Surprising Insights from the Gospel of Mark*. Dr. Rinker is both the Chairman of the Bible Department at Appalachian Bible College and the pastor of Crow Christian Church, Crow, WV. God has blessed Dr. and Mrs. Rinker with four godly children of which two have graduated from A.B.C. He is a gifted communicator of God’s Word and has made the Gospel of Mark his continual study over these past two decades. He not only brings years of classroom experience to our conference, but he also evidences a pastor’s heart. He longs to see the family of Christ mature in truth. We look forward to his ministry on Thursday, March 20. Come and join us!

Jonah 3: Giving Grace to the Humbled

Scott Rosen (MDiv '24) | Registrar, VBTS

In 1 Kings 13:20-25, the Scripture speaks of a prophet who naively but disobediently defies the command of God. For this man's insubordination, the Almighty appoints a lion to maul the faithless minister on his way home. One would expect the prophet Jonah to experience a similar fate for directly defying Yahweh's command as recorded in the first chapter of the book.

Instead, as the end of chapter two explains, the wayward prophet is expelled rather than digested by the great fish, which had swallowed him. God gives Jonah an undeserved second chance. Indeed, the text itself emphasizes that the prophet has been granted a divine "re-do" by essentially reiterating the language of Jonah 1:1-2. Once again, the word of the Lord comes to Jonah telling him to arise and go to Nineveh with a divine message.

There is, however, one key subtle change in the language that is used between the first and third chapters. In chapter one, per the Hebrew text, God instructs Jonah to cry out *against* the Ninevites; in contrast, he now tells the prophet to speak *to* the pagan city. Just as God has dealt gently with his rebellious servant, this exegetical nuance likely indicates that that His disposition towards Nineveh has also softened.

Verses 3 and 4 informs us that for the time being Jonah has learned his lesson as he dutifully enters the Assyrian city and declares God's judgment upon it ("Nineveh will be overthrown," NASB). There, however, is another linguistic subtlety found in the divine pronouncement that Jonah is commissioned to convey: The Hebrew word the NASB translates as "overthrown" can also mean "transformed" (e.g. when God transforms the Nile water into blood [Ex 7:17]). In Jonah's (and likely the reader's) view, this term would have meant the obliteration of the wicked city, but God had a far different transformation in mind.

Before proceeding with the account, the author (likely Jonah) pauses to add a parenthetical note in verse 3 that the city was so large that it would take nearly three days to properly traverse it. If any city in the ancient world had the standing to boast against divine threats, this would be it. As the narrative continues, however, the proclamation instead has a profound effect upon the Ninevites.

Verses 5-9 make it clear that the populace believes the message, but this is no mere intellectual assent. Remarkably, the people unilaterally humble themselves before the Lord, their king goes as far as to lay down in ashes, and the united leadership calls for a complete fast and total repentance. In doing so, the king and nobles express their hope that "God may withdraw His burning anger." (v. 9)

Accordingly, the final verse of the chapter instructs that God relents of His wrath and spares the city. In fact, Jesus later declares that these people not only escaped earthly judgment but eternal judgment as well (Matt 12:41). The reader may be perplexed wondering why such a proud and violent people would respond this way, but it seems like this passage is one of the clearest illustrations that "[God] will have mercy on whom [He] will have mercy" (Ex 33:19; Rom 9:15).

After all, Jonah should have remained submerged at the bottom of the Mediterranean, Nineveh should have seen the same fate as Sodom, and every wretched sinner should meet eternal condemnation at the end of his or her life. Let us therefore rejoice in the Almighty's own proclamation about Himself, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 33:6b).