

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of study

The book of Jonah is an Old Testament book composed of four chapters with forty-eight verses. The book is full of abrupt changes of direction in thought, humorous touches and unexpected twists in plot. It contains prose and poetry. The book is unique among the books of the biblical prophets. It is not like the other books of the prophets but rather consists of a midrashic story made up to teach important lesson. Hence, modern day scholars placed it in a category which has been named 'Theological Midrashism'. For Achtemeier (2005), Midrash assumes that the biblical text has an inexhaustible fund of meaning that is relevant to and adequate for every question and situation. Other books that belong to this group are the book of Esther, the book of Ruth, Deutero-canonical books of Tobit, and Judit. These are referred to as 'theological novels' in Menezes (2009) opinion and therefore history is not ought to be sought in them.

The author has a great sense of literary style. The author of the book of Jonah is unknown. However, what seems clear is that his tale of reluctance, self-pity, and narrow-mindedness are meant to counter particularistic tendencies current in postexilic Judaism. A point to be made here is that the author of the book of Jonah knew that his audience would enjoy the story and not be forced to choose if it could actually have happened or not or if the fish was a shark or whale. He makes some important points about prophecy and the nature of God without ever losing his sense of humor while creating his outrageous story and its many separate plots. Irony is its major literal style. Jonah does everything a good prophet should not; from fleeing, to refusing to speak, to complaining that God does not fulfill all the threats of doom that he made Jonah preach.

The book of Jonah differs from other prophetic books in that it is a story narrated about a prophet. Schmidt (2008) alluded to this when he said “In the book of the Twelve Prophets the book of Jonah holds a special place, because it is not a collection of prophetic sayings but a prose story about a prophet” (p.330). Three of the four chapters are narrative prose describing the Prophet Jonah’s misadventures. Jonah’s preaching and prophetic oracle consists of only one proclamation- עוד ארבעים יום וְנִינְוָה נִהְפָּקֶת: (“Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overturned” 3:4). In the centre of the book is a prayer of thanksgiving (2:2-9), reported to have been uttered by Jonah when he was in the belly of the fish.

Jonah is best seen as an interpretative development of history (midrash) in the form of a short story pervasively didactic and carefully structured. Jonah himself symbolizes certain pious Israelites whose theological perspective is problematic. For Von Rad (1965) Jonah is a story with strong didactic content. Scholars such as Fretheim writes that the book is prophetic in that it speaks a word of judgment and grace to a specific audience, evoking amendment of thought and life.

Modern scholars in the last century have regarded Jonah as a work of imagination. Some call it myth, allegory, didactic story etc. concerning the nation of Israel who at a point in their history was narrow-minded with regard to Yahweh’s choice of them. For instance Boadt (1984) opines that Jonah reminds us of the close of life in Judah under the Persians. It reminds us that this narrow-mindedness of Israel did not bring Israelite spirit to death during the time of Ezra. Post-exilic Judaism as exemplified in Jonah kept alive Israelite sense of its covenant and election as gifts of Yahweh now to be shared with the rest of the world.

The book of Jonah opens up by first identifying the prophet as Jonah son of Amittai. There is a prophet by that very name who according to 2 Kings 14:25 ministered during the reign of

Jeroboam II (786-746). There is no other personal information about this prophet Jonah to show the link between the one in the book of Jonah and that of Kings. Several arguments over the years have been given to know whether the Jonah of the book is the same man named in 2 Kings 14:25. It is worthy to note that Jonah 3:3 indicates that Nineveh was an exceedingly large city.

Reading through the book of Jonah, the reader notices that the book does not locate itself in a particular historical setting and there are various reasons for this fact. Many authors tried to propose possible date owing from the different elements and the entire book. For Phillips (2011) “Because of the place, names and other references to Jonah and his message, a date between 786 and the second century B.C has been suggested” (p.2). However, Branick (2012) was of the opinion that “the Hebrew of this book has more the characteristics of fifth-century than of eighth-century Hebrew” (p.262). Many scholars believe the book was written after the exile. In Jonah 3:3, the author speaks of Nineveh in the past tense which suggests a date of composition after the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C. It must be noted that many of the arguments namely the tense of ‘was’, Aramaic influence, quotation from other biblical books have been seriously challenged. However, many scholars locate this book in the postexilic period. For greater number of others knowing the date is irrelevant to the interpretation of the story.

The book of Jonah was therefore written in Palestine around the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. This was when the Jews were still recovering from their exile in Babylon. The territory that was once controlled by David and Solomon got encroached upon by major foreign powers around 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 722 B.C.E Assyria had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. They took their stronger citizens captive and settled groups of people of other nations in northern Palestine. Through another century Judah hung on but could not for a long time. In 587 B.C.E. Nebuchadnezzar and Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem and led the blinded king and much

of the people into Babylonian exile. No wonder Assyria came to be identified as the arch-enemy of the people of God. None of the smaller nations of the Ancient Middle East escaped the whip of the Assyrian, and so not only Israel but all the other nations had developed a hatred for the cruel Assyrians. No doubt Assyria would be punished by God for her excessive insolence and cruelty.

However, after fifty years in 538 B.C.E. Cyrus the Persian king when he defeated Babylon issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild their temple. The struggle between the returning exiles and those who had remained behind, along with glaring poverty and the continuous demand of labor necessary to rebuild a land that was left desolate and greatly destroyed, provide the background for book of Jonah. At the back of the mind of the returning Jews was the conviction that they had suffered in exile as a result of their sin and infidelity to God. Nowell (2001) referring to the outcome of this downing knowledge to the returning Jews has this to say “as a result, they developed an attitude of exclusivity and religious observance of the law. They avoided anything that might lead them away from God, such as foreign customs or even foreign wives” (p.7) (Ezra 9:1-3; 10:10-15; Neh 13:23-30). It is against this background that this research goes into an exegetico-hermeneutical study of Jonah 1:1-3, 3:4 in the light of Jonah 2:1-11.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

As one reads through this great book of the prophet Jonah one observes that there seems to be certain twists, surprises and development of the understanding of God. The Post Exilic Jews in their effort to avoid previous mistakes with their consequent punishment improved their understanding of God and fine tuned their religious observance of the law. The Jews at this time

through the prophet Jonah, his message and experience understood God to have opened up his gifts to be shared by the whole world. However, Jonah's message in Jonah 3:4 simply is "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overturned". This is often misunderstood and mostly taken as a time limit for the destruction of the people of Nineveh. The idea of God is often wrongly conceived and expressed. This message takes the mind back to Yahweh's initial message to him in Jonah 1:1-3 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." It is against this background that one tries to ask what could be the possible message Yahweh had intended for Nineveh. Misconception, misinterpretation, misunderstanding and misrepresentation of biblical message most often lead to error and crisis of faith. Many Christians in Nigeria misinterpret this passage of the book Jonah. As such the present Nigerian Christian faithful and the readers of Jonah also fall victims of Jonahic misinterpretation. The effect is that the message and its relevance are lost forever.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The specific aims are:

- i. To investigate the initial commissioning of Jonah by Yahweh in Jonah 1:1-3 in order to understand the background to the message. It is the introduction to the help in understanding the possible interpretation of Jonah 3:4.
- ii. To examine the possible message of Yahweh to Nineveh in Jonah 3:4 with other biblical passages that will help in exposing the possible message.
- iii. To explore this message of Yahweh to people of Nineveh in the light of Jonah 2:1-11 where the prophet Jonah experienced the message and finally expressed it out.
- iv. To evaluate the implications of this message in the life of Christians in Nigeria.

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

The relevance of this work is multiple. This research will help Old Testament students and scholars to understand the importance of exegetico-hermeneutical tool in understanding of Jonah's message and other Old Testament books.

The exegetico-hermeneutical study of the book of Jonah further enriches Christian's concept of God's mercy and forgiveness of sins. Salvation belongs to God alone. God's mercy is not limited by any human boundaries as in the case of Jonah with the Ninevites and continuously extends it in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Jonah's commissioning in 1:1-3 and dialogue with God in 2:1-11 advanced God's will for his ministers in their understanding of Him and his intending goal for all creatures. It further challenges them to deliver the message of God as correctly as possible irrespective of one's social, cultural and religious background.

Furthermore, the opportunity given to the people of Nineveh a non Israelite nation will help the society to guard against social and cultural prejudice knowing that no culture is superior to the other.

#### **1.5 Scope of the study**

This study is strictly concerned with an exegetico-hermeneutical study of Jonah 1: 1-3, 3:4 in the light of Jonah 2: 1-11. In the course of the discussion certain other verses in the book of Jonah will aid the understanding of the message; however exegetical analysis will be restricted to selected verses 1:1-3, 3:4 and 2:1-11. Other relevant biblical text as they affect the issue in question will be discussed where necessary. The scope of hermeneutical application will be restricted to Christians in Nigeria.

## **1.6 Methodology**

This study applies the veritable instrument of exegetico-hermeneutical method of Old Testament interpretation. Data were collected using secondary sources. The Moseretic text of the Hebrew Bible was used for the origin and meaning of some Hebrew words. Revised Standard Version English Bible, books, Bible commentaries, Hebrew lexicons, Journals, internet publications were also consulted. The conventional textual and exegetical processes have been used for data analysis and presentation. This study makes use of intercultural hermeneutics in the application of the message.

## **1.7 Definition of terms**

There is a great need to clarify certain key terms for a proper understanding of the entire work.

Such terms include:

### **Exegesis**

Exegesis is a critical explanation of a text or portion of a text especially of the Bible. According to Allen (2010), exegesis is “explanation of the language and thought of a literary work; especially, biblical exposition or interpretation” (p.444). From the Greek word ἐξεγείσθαι, *exegesis* means to explain out. For Kelly (2004) exegesis is properly a branch of theology which deals with the meaning of the biblical text. “It is carried out by believers for whom the interpretation of a biblical text has meaning for their faith or their moral life or spirituality” (p. 286). From the above we see that biblical exegesis is actually the process of seeking out the meaning in a biblical text. It involves the examination of a particular text of the scripture in order to properly interpret it. This interpretation is geared and focused on faith community.

Jeanrond (2003) in his attempt to explain what hermeneutics is all about quoted Aquinas's understanding of exegesis saying- "According to Thomas Aquinas, appropriate interpretation is the task of dogmatic theology while exegesis concentrates on the purely philological task of preparing the text for theological understanding" (p. 463). It could mean here that reason prepares the meaning of the text for theological understanding. Following from Aquinas' view therefore, exegesis becomes the preparatory ground for theological understanding. For Gorman (2001) exegesis is the technical term for such careful analysis of a biblical text. Exegesis is from Greek verb ἐξεγείσθαι meaning "to lead out". It may be defined as "the careful historical, literary, and theological analysis of a text" (p. 8). It is also an investigation of the many dimensions, or textures, of a particular text. Lyke (2000) added that it is the critical explanation or interpretation of a biblical text. The term is etymologically related to the Greek word meaning "to guide" or "to lead", as Gorman (2001) stated above. For Palmer (2013) exegesis is the process of interpreting the meaning of a text. It is also the process of understanding the single meaning of a text.

Exegesis from the above definition is a biblical tool employed by biblical scholars in order to, interpret, and seek out the possible meaning of a biblical text or passage. Therefore in the present research exegesis will be employed to interpret and seek out the possible message in the book of Jonah 1:1-3; 3:4. We shall seek further understanding of these passages in Jonah 2:1-11.

### **Hermeneutics**

The term "hermeneutics" derives from the Greek verb ἐρμηνεύω which means "*interpret.*" Allen (2010) defined it as "the science or the art of interpretation, especially of the scriptures" (p. 591).



Interpretation or hermeneutics of the bible for Hahn (2009) is “the effort to ascertain the meaning of the Bible intended by its divine and human authors” (p. 391).

Hermeneutics according to Bergant (2001) is simply interpretation. For him “it is one of the most exciting and challenging issues in contemporary biblical study” (p. 50). In his effort to show the importance of hermeneutics and its meaning he further stated that;

The Bible as a basic literary reality is a form of communication comprised of three principal components: a sender or author; a message or text; and a receiver or audience. Historically, as long as the communication recorded in the biblical texts remained within the community of its origin, the audience required very little interpretation. Most of the audience belonged to the same world of meaning as did the author. It was only when a particular biblical message was carried into another world of meaning that extensive efforts of interpretation became necessary (p. 50).

Therefore for him hermeneutics or interpretation mostly resulted to different understandings primarily upon whether the major hermeneutical focus was principally on the sender, the message, or the receiver. Bergant (2001) concludes the definition as “the meeting of the world of the reader with the world of the text. The reader brings a particular perspective or understanding of life to the text; the text articulates the community’s received tradition” (p. 68).

In a similar sense, for Glazier and Hellwig (2004) the term hermeneutics is from Greek word meaning “interpret”. In later sense it “concerns the significance and appropriation of a text for a person or a group today” (p. 357). Here one sees its importance in the life of the contemporary person or persons.

The term hermeneutics for Jeanrond (2003) points back to the Greek word ἐρμηνεύειν (=to interpret) which contains a reference to the Greek god Hermes, the messenger of the gods. The task of Hermes is to explain the decisions taken by the gods to the humans. Jeanrond, therefore states “Thus, the etymology of the term hermeneutics leads us to appreciate the continuing question of all interpreters: how can we today understand the sense of the texts, especially of ancient texts whose world view we no longer share” (p. 462).

For Harrington (2004) “the term can include the whole process of interpretation described under ‘Biblical Criticism’ or ...narrowly to refer to what one does with the text after it has been subjected to literary and historical analysis” (p. 357). He added that hermeneutics in a later sense concerns the significance and appropriation of a text for a person or a group today.

For Achtemeier (2005) apart from its broadest sense meaning “interpretation”, other shades of meaning include “explanation”, “exposition”, “expression”, “intelligible rendition”, or even “translation”. However, in the broadest sense,

Hermeneutics is the field of theological study that deals with the interpretation of Scripture. Often, it is characterized as being primarily concerned with the theory or theories of interpretation, and in this respect it can be distinguished from exegesis, which may be thought of as the practical application of hermeneutical principles (p. 384).

The definition and differentiation given by Achtemeier (2005) above seems confusing. He further made comparison between exegesis and hermeneutics saying “hermeneutics is more comprehensive in its scope as well as more theoretical in its orientation. It encompasses both the study of the principles of biblical interpretation and the process through which such interpretation is carried out” (p.384).

In addition, Obielosi (2012) followed the same view above that hermeneutics simply is interpretation. However, he added that “hermeneutics is also applied to situate the message in today’s faith experience” (p.129). This aspect is very important in biblical interpretation. Obielosi and Mgbemena (2015) further stressing the importance of hermeneutics said “If the Bible is not properly interpreted and applied, we end up having false and pharisaic type of religion” (p. 48).

Some scholars sometimes confuse the meaning of the above terms “Exegesis” and “Hermeneutics” and at times their different roles. However, there is similarity between the two terms because they are employed to make the biblical text understandable and appreciated and thus bridge the gap between the world of the text and the world of the reader, between the text itself and the interpreter. The two terms are not the same and cannot be interchanged for the other. In the present research “exegesis” seeks out the meaning of the biblical texts while “hermeneutics” interprets and situates the meaning of message, in today’s life experience and makes appropriation of the text to individual life of the present age. This definition will serve as our guide in the study. Therefore, in this research ‘exegesis’ will seek out the possible meaning in Jonah 1:1-3; 3:4 in the light of Jonah 2:1-11, while ‘hermeneutics’ will interpret and situate the meaning of the message in today’s Nigeria life experience.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The book of Jonah has received attention of many scholars. The history of interpretation of the book of Jonah is varied and conflicted. This chapter reviews what these scholars have achieved in understanding the prophet and his message. This will be done under three headings namely Conceptual, Theoretical frameworks and Empirical study.

#### 2.1 Conceptual Framework

Scholars have written on various aspects of the book of Jonah and they have done that with the assistance of two concepts namely ‘exegesis’ and ‘hermeneutics’. Exegesis is from Greek verb ἐξεγείσθαι meaning “to lead out”, “to guide” or “to seek out” the possible meaning of biblical passages. Hermeneutics derives from the Greek verb ἐρμηνεύω which means “to interpret” and the appropriation of a text for a person or a group today. These concepts were used by the scholars at various times to understand the text of Jonah and situate its meaning to the life of the people.

The history of exegesis of the Bible can be traced to the Bible itself. The case can be made that at least some of the editing of the Bible began the process of exegesis. Lyke (2000) noted that versions of the Bible in other languages and much in the Pseudepigrapha, can be understood as exegetical. Explaining the meaning and development of this concept he writes:

Moreover, the history of exegesis continued in early rabbinic Judaism and early Christian sources, and onward into the medieval literature of each religious tradition. Modern, so called “critical”, exegesis began with the realization that the Bible could be understood as a product of its historical period as well as a guide to

religious. As a result, modern exegesis tends to have as its goal the pursuit of the objective realia that lie behind the text. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen the relativization of many of the modern critical assumptions about exegesis, with the result that exegesis now comprises an extremely wide range of approaches to the Bible, many of which share little other than the object of their inquiry (p. 439).

Exegesis therefore is studying what Scripture says in its original language and context. This is not an interpretation (hermeneutics). In an exegesis, you present evidence from various fields of biblical study to clarify, as much as possible what the original author was trying to convey. Below are some of the achievements of some scholars using exegetical tool.

We read in 2 Kings 14:25 of a prophet of the same name Jonah “son of Amittai” who flourished in the eight century B.C. According to the narration the named prophet was sent on a mission to preach repentance to Nineveh. The king and the entire people not only listened to him but also got converted. For Harrington (1965) there is no trace in any record of such great historic occurrence, since the conversion of Assyria would have changed the course of history and such fact could not have been ignored. He states that we have a problem on our hands, if the book is a historical work. However, this problem clears when it is realized that the fictional hero of Jonah has nothing in common with the prophet of the eight century B.C. He further states that the Hebrew of Jonah and the many Aramaisms in the writing demand a date not earlier than the fifth century B.C. Nineveh by that time which had been utterly destroyed in 612 B.C., was only a distant memory.

For Fretheim (2000) the language used in the book is more characteristic of the post exilic period than of any other. A few words are usually used in pre-exilic literature. In addition the apparently unclear information about Nineveh as a great city suggests a period when the city was already

destroyed. He further states that the thought pattern of the book seems most closely paralleled by other literature from this time or by problems known to be current to the community of Israel of this period.

Ceresko (2001) is of the opinion that the book of Jonah should not be read as history. Thus, regarding the historicity he said:

This new knowledge about ancient history along with recognition of Jonah's appealing literary qualities- the exaggeration, the irony, and the humor- has led scholars to abandon the attempt to read the book as history. Instead, critical interpreters have turned their attention to the work's character and function as story, a story written not simply to entertain but to teach some profound lessons about Israel's God (p.27).

Leclerc (2007) supports the above view saying that this unique book is not reporting history but telling a wonderful and entertaining story. His position is in line with those that contend that knowing of the date is irrelevant to the interpretation of the story. That means that knowing the date does not affect the exegetical study of the book.

For West (1984) using exegetical tool, Jonah is a short story characterized by irony. Having laid the foundation for irony he identified irony in the book of Jonah saying:-

Incongruities exist throughout the book. Jonah is no typical prophet of God. Instead of 'arising' and 'crying' as the Lord commands, he 'arises' and 'flees' from the presence of the Lord. The audience would have recognized immediately the conflict between a 'normal response' to a prophetic call and the flight of Jonah from the *dabar Yahweh*...It also must have seemed humorous to the hearers that Jonah would take to sailing the seas in his 'escape' since the Hebrews were not

known for their love of the water. Jonah's anger in chapter 4 is surely drawn out into ironic proportions. Who would be angry enough to want to die for a plant, but not concerned enough for the life of a whole city (p.237).

He went further saying that "The incongruities and opposition draw the audience into a dynamic encounter with the message of the book" (p.240). The author identified the choice of Jonah as ironic. Jonah's name means 'dove'; son of Amittai means 'son of faithfulness'. Jonah by no means fulfils the expectation and demands of his name. According to West (1984), the irony of the message of Jonah had a goal. This he stated thus-

Whether the irony was intended specifically to criticize prophetic hypocrisy, blatant nationalism, jealousy over the repentance of such great evil, or to expound on the love of God, it is evident that the post-exilic audience of Israelities were not living up to expectations that God had for a people that were to be a "light unto the nations" (Isa 42:6)...By means of ironic identification of the audience with Jonah, the author seeks to draw post-exilic Israel's attention away from pitying herself to a greater pity: the love and concern of God for all of humankind (p.241).

This does not bring out clearly the message from exegetical point of the book. Holbert (1981) made a distinction in the book of Jonah between satire and irony. Irony for him "is best characterized by ambiguity of intention on the part of the author." "Satire is more overt, more direct in style and intention" (p.60). The book of Jonah for him is a satire. He believed that a careful definition of satire may prove helpful in assessing whether or not it serves as the principal characteristic of the construction of the book of Jonah. His brief look at satire led him to the following conclusions. Satire is humor based on the fantastic, the grotesque, the absurd. It has a

definite target which must be familiar enough to make the assault meaningful and memorable. It is characterized by indirection of attack. The charge comes from the flanks rather than head-on. Furthermore satire pillories inferior excesses; hypocrisy is one classic and familiar example. It is usually external in viewpoint. The actions of the character or the over effects of the satirized idea are emphasized rather than the interior realm of the individual or idea (p.62).

Holbert holds that, end of Jonah's psalm "Deliverance belongs to Yahweh" is the "book's hallmark claim and its sharpest satiric thrust" (p.74). The deliverance of Yahweh, a clear fact Jonah affirmed in his psalm, has in reality enraged him to such a point that he desired death as the last option. It is not surprising that no sooner had Jonah declared that "Deliverance belongs to Yahweh" than the big fish vomited him. Jonah then is the object of the satiric attack, but one must ask who actually Jonah is? And what is being satirized? He concluded saying:

Jonah is thus an attack on Hebrew prophetic hypocrisy. Which group or groups the author has in mind cannot be identified specifically, but do not all religions bring forth "hypocritical prophets" who claim great insight and unique callings, but who ultimately are found empty of substance, save their real anger at those who do not agree with them? Yea, their number is legion. For them, and their incessant fulminations, is Jonah written (p.75).

From the ongoing, satire is more direct in its intention. The author clearly makes the satiric thrust on intended situation or personality. Irony on the other hand is not direct. It is the opposite of what the author intended. However, the book of Jonah is not entirely satiric thrust on Jonah as a prophet. There is much to the book than this. Phillips (2011) holds that the book of Jonah has "elements of disputation genre but more irony, however satire usually has a different intent and not a message that is worth passing on for thousands of years, like the book of Jonah" (p.11).



Some scholars have studied the literary genre of the book of Jonah. This aspect helps in the better understanding of a biblical text. Philips (2011) holds that the book of Jonah is a unique literary narrative containing two broad types of literary form: prose and poetry. The work contains a number of words that are unique in the Old Testament and words that are used in significantly unusual ways. These key words are repeated and she said “Repetition adds cohesion and emphasis to words giving some ‘key word’ status. For instance the word ‘fear’ is repeated throughout the book.”(p.3) Repetition also brings out the didactic and theological importance of the work. Thus, he states-

It demonstrates amazing symmetries of structure and many different kinds of repetition that not only help the audience to add meaning to the words but to “hang on the words” and remember them as the drama unfolds. The different forms of repetition also add humor and poetry to the prose and didactically inspire us to believe that YHWH is not only all powerful, but humbly open to dialogue, in order to be in close relationship with the world he created and loves (p.9).

From the above one sees that the repetition of some of those key Old Testament words was not a coincidence but intentionally planned and structured for the intended goal. These are carefully created and purposely inserted. From them the exegete must definitely find out the role the key words play in the whole text.

Scholars in a deep exegetical study of Jonah and the message of the book came to certain problem of inclusion or exclusion of chapter two in the entire book of Jonah. Going back to Landes (1967) the psalm of Jonah in chapter 2 agrees quite harmoniously with the situation of Jonah in the entire narrative, both in terms of his physical and psychological portrayal (p.30). However, he added that:

To be sure, there is nothing a priori against this, and we have a number of examples of literary composition elsewhere in the Old Testament where a poetic piece, sometimes even similar in form and content to the Jonah psalm ( e.g., the contents of the Song of Hannah, 1 Sam. 2:1-10, and the Prayer of Hezekiah, Isa. 38:9-20) is introduced into a prose narrative, and where the insertion need not be explained as the work of a late redactor (p.31).

This notwithstanding, Landes (1967) holds that early literary critical work in the composition of Old Testament literature did indeed have a tendency to assign most insertions to the hand of a late editor on the ground of discrepancies in date, form, style, meaning and primary setting. Landes thus concludes that:

Although we must grant the possibility that the Jonah psalm attained its present position in the book of Jonah through the work of a scribe who was not the author of the prose stories, our study surely suggests that if this is so he was no less sensitive to the form, structure, and content of the book than the original writer himself. When, as we think, it is just as plausible that the initial author of Jonah knew of and used the psalm, this raises the question whether it is even necessary to introduce the figure of a secondary interpolator (p.31).

For Wendland (1996) referring to the Biblical “interpolator” (perhaps the interpolating scribe/copyist is better analogy) says “is much more likely to be theological and explanatory in nature rather than artistic and/or compositional” (p.386).

On this issue of understanding the relationship of the Psalm of Jonah within its narrative context Okoli (2013) holds that “These variance of opinions attest to the difficulties raised by a reading of the Psalm of Jonah in its narrative context”(p.5). For him therefore, “the Psalm of Jonah fits

into its narrative context and both informs and is informed by it” (p.6). It is the evident connections between the Psalm of Jonah and its narrative context which makes a better interpretation of the Psalm of Jonah possible. He maintains that there is the generally held structural parallelism between chapters 1 and 3; 2 and 4. He argues that the Psalm of Jonah in 2:3-10 functions as a bridge for the interpretation of what precedes and what follows it. For Okoli, then “In this way, a link is shown to exist between the character of Jonah expressed in the psalm and that expressed in the narrative part”(p.6).

Like Okoli above, Wendland (1996) is of the same view that the chapter 2 has link to the entire book of Jonah. He said-

There are a surprising number of topical and plot-related motifs that tie Jonah’s song to the rest of the text. This is significant because it is characteristic of the psalms of Scripture to be rather general in their reference and hence universal in their potential applicability. The concluding utterance, “Salvation belongs to Yahweh,” is especially noteworthy in this regard. Indeed it is highly ironic that Jonah did not realize the full implications of what he was praising God for here – whether with regard to a sinking ship, a transient plant or a teeming metropolis (4:10-11). This short exclamation of closure, which occurs near the book’s structural centre, summarizes the entire narrative (p.385).

The concept of hermeneutics is widely applied by some scholars in the study of Jonah and his message. Kaur (2013) is of the opinion that hermeneutics is primarily a search for meaning which grew from exegesis and exposition of scriptural text and became the specialized science of interpretation. In the field of interpretation the concept ‘hermeneutics’ has survived from ancient times. The references related to the usage of these terms can be easily found in the works of

Aristotle and Plato. The eminent contributors in the field of hermeneutics are Wilhelem Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans- Georg Gadamer and Friedrich Schleiermacher. The concept of hermeneutics developed through history. Hermeneutics therefore is not simply a science of interpretation but a method of arriving at correct interpretation. Hermeneutics deals with the significance of the text for us today, and with the structures or mechanisms the verbal meaning becomes meaningful to us.

Therefore, some authors who made use of hermeneutical methods regard the book of Jonah as an irony. For this group the author sets his narrative full with irony and twist. Nowell (2001) is of the view that the author of the book of Jonah sets his story in opposition to the attitude of exclusivity and rigorous observance of law. Jonah was called to be the instrument through which God's mercy is brought to Nineveh, the hated capital of Assyria. However, Jonah would prefer a god who would destroy them to the one who would forgive them. Therefore, the author of the book of Jonah "told this story to an audience that desired to avoid other peoples in order to be faithful to God" (p.8). For him the story of Jonah's flight is a masterpiece of irony. "Instead of punishing Jonah for his flight, for his half-hearted prophecy, for his lack of mercy, God works with Jonah as if he were a child"(p.15). God then teaches Jonah a lesson that divine mercy knows no bounds. Nowell concluded that the book ends with a question that challenges the audience of the author's time and all its future readers.

There are other scholars who emphasized other aspects of the book of Jonah other than the literary formation. Every aspect and concept raised gives clarity to the message and brings the reader closer to understanding the intention of the author.

Boadt (1984) is of the opinion that the author of Jonah makes important points about prophecy and nature of God without ever losing his sense of humor while creating his outrageous tale.

Eynikel (1998) made an exegetical study of the prophet Jonah and holds like some scholars before him that “the book of Jonah is unique in prophetic literature. No other book in the prophetic canon contains so much prophetic narrative and so little prophetic speech (only five words!).”(p.1147) Uniqueness of this prophetic book lies as well on Jonah’s audience-the Ninevites. Jeremiah like other prophets preached against the Gentiles, but only in Jonah are the Gentiles not just condemned but given a choice to convert. Eynikel gave reason for the inclusion of Jonah in the prophets saying, “The reason why Jonah is included in the Prophets (and not, for example, in the wisdom literature) is because it essentially speaks about reconciliation (the Jewish liturgy where the book is read on Yom Kippur)” (p.1147).

For Allen (1976), the book of Jonah is quite different from the rest of other Minor Prophets. This is because “the others are collections of oracles; in Jonah there occurs only one prophetic oracle, consisting of five words in the original” (p.175). He is of the view that the book of Jonah is defined as a prophetic narrative. However, it is unusual prophetic narrative since prophetic narratives in the Old Testament seek to glorify the man of God revealing to people that he is a noble mediator of God’s own power and glory. But Jonah is portrayed as no hero. He gave the reason thus:

The concern of a number of Old Testament prophetic narratives is to trace the process whereby a divine oracle was fulfilled. This book, on the contrary, breaks the pattern surprisingly by showing how and why a divine oracle, concerning the destruction of Nineveh, was not fulfilled (p.175).

He holds that “It is the greatness of Israel’s God that is the burden of the book” (p.192). “Israel has no monopoly of his loving care. The greatness and the goodness of God are enhanced against

the background of Jonah's meanness and malevolence" (p.294). However, there could be the possibility of his meanness bringing clearer the intended message of God.

Achtemeier (2005) also agreed that following the discussion so far, that modern investigators differ on the story's meaning. However, unlike what other scholars said, he added that "the book also stresses a change in a prophet's role from a deliverer of oracle to a persuader- since God's decrees can be reversed by repentance, the prophet must preach to arouse change of heart." (p.503). He noted that allegorically the work was interpreted by Jewish and Christian readers.

Like other scholars above for Leclerc (2007) the book of Jonah is unique among the biblical prophets. It is not actually a collection of prophetic sayings but a story about a prophet. For him the only prophetic message Jonah delivers is one brief sentence comprising only five words in Hebrew. Therefore, rather than reporting the words of the prophet like those of Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha, the story focuses on the deeds of the prophet.

Furthermore, Branick (2012) referring to the Book of Jonah either as a collection of prophetic sayings or not has this to say:

When the Jewish authorities drew up the collection of the 'Twelve Prophets' sometimes before the second century BC, they apparently identified the Book of Jonah as the collection of preachings from a historical prophet, like the collection of preachings of Hosea or Joel. The Book of Jonah begins like Hosea and Joel, 'This is the word of Lord that came to...' (1:1) (p.262).

However, not so for Schmidt (2008) who held the opposite view when he said "In the book of the Twelve Prophets the book of Jonah holds a special place, because it is not a collection of prophetic sayings... but a prose story about a prophet" (p.330). He went further to say that "the book is on the whole a literary unit, although it picks up various earlier traditions and

narrative motifs” (p.331). The work for him like some authors above tries to bring Israel to an understanding of God’s mercy towards foreigners.

Harrington (1965) held a contrary view about the nature of this book. For him unlike Schmidt (2008),

The Book of Jonah, though listed among the twelve Minor Prophets, is not a prophetic book. The realization of this fact and establishment of its true literary form and its purpose set the writing in its proper light and underline its real significance (p.354).

The message of the book of Jonah for him is “a bold declaration that God is the God of all peoples” (p.357). He firmly agreed that “we must not forget the sublime teaching of the book, a doctrine that is valid for all times, even though it was largely overlooked in the following centuries until it was emphatically restated by Christ” (p.358). Christ’s reference to the case of Jonah sometimes is misunderstood and misrepresented by scholars. However, the mentioning of Jonah by Christ shows its didactic intent.

Lundbom (2010) referred to the book of Jonah as folktale because of the extraordinary features in the story namely, the swallowing of Jonah by a great fish, which later vomits him up on the land (1:17; 2:10); the breadth of Nineveh being “a three day journey for the gods/mighty ones” (3:3); the dramatic response to Jonah’s preaching (3:5-9); and the gourd growing up quickly and dying just as quickly the following day (4:6-7). He believes the book is “a tale about a prophet” (p.122). He refers to the Prophet Jonah as “The reluctant prophet” (p.121).

Ephros (1999) made a study of the Book of Jonah as allegory. In his study he affirmed the prophetic aspect of the book. For him some aspects of the text make one to opt for an allegorical

interpretation of the prophetic book. He believed that the proposed allegorical analysis could be used in order to answer some questions raised by the text. Thus he said:

In an allegorical interpretation of this prophetic book, Jonah ben-Amittai represents the people of Israel, while Assyria (through its capital city Nineveh) and the sailors on the ship symbolize the pagan world. The real prophet, then, is not Jonah, but the author of the book who rails against his people for their wrongdoing. Just as Jonah disobeys the Almighty and attempts to flee from Him, so does Israel rebel against and forsake Him (p.148).

The above stand notwithstanding, some argue that it is not a prophetic book because it does not contain a prophetic oracle. Menezes (2005) is of the opinion that though the book stands out from among the rest of the prophetic books, “it is neither a prophetic book nor does it contain any oracles” (p.274). For Laux (1990) Jonah unlike the books of the other prophets is rather “the story of a Prophet than a prophecy” (p. 146).

Contrary to popular opinion, Ceresko (2007) holds that “the importance of the work lies neither in the ‘miracle’ of the 72-hour sojourn in the belly of a fish nor in Jesus reference to the ‘sign of Jonah’ in the preaching (Mathew 12: 38-42; Luke 11: 29-32)” (p.581). He even noted that the two synoptic gospels, Mathew and Luke differ on exactly what kind of “sign” Jonah was. However, for Ceresko, the author of the book of Jonah “responding to the particular situation of Israel of his day (a) gives us insight into developments in the role that prophecy came to have after the monarchical period and (b) dares to deal with the very mystery of God” (p.581).

Worthy to note here is that the book of Jonah is normally read on יום כפר on Yom Kippur. Hayyim (1995) studying the Book of Jonah says it is a call for personal responsibility. He made this study from the point of its use on Yom Kippur saying:



What better story could the Jewish people read at *Minha* of Yom Kippur than one which encourages them to live an active, honest religious life, with the courage to confront the greatest impediment to repentance: blindness to one's own flaws and secret injustices. Throughout Yom Kippur liturgy, we bravely and honestly confess to God: for we are not so brazen or stubborn to say to You, Lord our God and God of our ancestors, we are righteous and have not sinned; but we have sinned, ourselves and our ancestors (p.66).

Thus, for him "Jonah is a parable demonstrating that the best people can have a powerful sense of self-deception" (p.66). Therefore, the book of Jonah for the fact of being read on Yom Kippur as Hayyim (1995) observes is a parable calling for personal conversion and responsibility.

Leclerc (2007) is of the same opinion that the book of Jonah is not read on the regular Sabbaths of the Jewish liturgical year. However, "the book is read on the afternoon of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), a day of repentance and fasting" (p.388). This very fact could be helpful in understanding the book as a whole since the work speaks and conveys reconciliation as Eynikel (1998) pointed above. For Leclerc, the book of Jonah deals with Divine justice and mercy. "In this story, divine justice and mercy are not opposed; rather God's justice is proved in extending mercy to the repentant, whoever they may be" (p.386).

Following from the ongoing one observes that the scholars must have come to their conclusions with the aid of Old Testament tools of exegesis or hermeneutics. Every concept used and explored gave clarity to the message of Jonah. However, this research makes use of exegetico-hermeneutical tool in its study. This will help and bring the reader closer to understanding the intention of the author.

## 2.2 Theoretical framework

This work centers on an exegetico-hermeneutical study of Jonah 1:1-3, 3:4 in the light of Jonah 2:1-11. Therefore, we need to examine the theory that will help us achieve our desired result. It must be noted that having a theory helps us to explain the meaning, nature, and challenges associated with a phenomenon often experienced but unexplained in the world in which we live so that we may use that knowledge to act in more informed and effective ways. This study follows Bakhtinian theory of dialogical authoring. Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin was a Russian philosopher, literary critic, semiotician who worked on literary theory, ethics, and the philosophy of language. His main theories are Dialogism, Polyphony, and Heteroglossia. For him speech and complex cultural discourse in all our genres (novels, scientific descriptions, art works, philosophical arguments, for example) is mixed through with heteroglossia (an other's speech, and many others' words, appropriated expressions) and are necessarily polyphonic ("many voiced", incorporating many voices, styles, references, and assumptions not a speaker's "own"). He explained his theory of Dialogue/Dialogic/Dialogism that every level of expression from live conversational dialogue to complex cultural expression in other genre and art works is an ongoing chain or network of statements and responses, repetitions, and quotations, in which new statements presuppose earlier statements and anticipate future responses.

Bakhtin (1992) discussing on his Dialogism and Heteroglossia (the other(s)' word) has it that the word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction within an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way. However, this does not exhaust the internal dialogism of the word. It encounters an alien word not only in the object itself: every word is directed towards an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates. He states that

the word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation with any living dialogue. The orientation towards an answer is open, blatant and concrete.

Dialogic expression for Bakhtin is unfinalizable, always incomplete, and productive of further chains of responses. The meaning is never closed and always oriented toward the future.

Emerson and Holquist (1998) state it that:

There is neither a first nor last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and boundless future). Even past meanings, that are those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once for all)-they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context) (p. 170).

Bakhtin propounded the theory of dialogical authoring. According to Bakhtin, "the authoring of the self is composed of three aspects: *I-for-myself*; *I-for-the-other*; *the-other-for-me*" (p.247). *I-for-myself* is the self-portrait; while *I-for-the-other* is the portrait of the other of me. *The-other-for-me* is my portrait of the other. He states that as I project myself into the space of the other

deeply, I return to my own space, integrating what I have perceived. Thus authoring of the self and other are closely connected with each other.

Sung (2008) adopted Bakhtinian theory in a study on Jonah's transformation and transformation of Jonah from the Bakhtinian perspective of authoring and re-authoring. He therefore explores the transformation of both the character of Jonah and the text of Jonah, especially in Chapter 2 from the perspective of (re-)authoring of Bakhtin's concept. Thus he states that-

Bakhtin's concept of authoring shows that the disobedient Jonah is transformed into an obedient prophet in ch.2 in his understanding of God and himself." Simultaneously, Bakhtin's notion of re-authoring reveals that the book of Jonah has been transformed in the history of Bible translation as seen in the Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate (p. 245).

He holds that "re-authoring by a translator opens a new possibility of co-authoring by a reader. It can be said that just as a translator re-authors a text in his/her horizon, so does a reader co-author it in his/her horizon" (p. 256). This view will make readers to attempt filling the horizons of the text which the text does not offer through what Sung (2008) referred to as "surplus of seeing." However, to do this the reader must have to project himself into the text and experience the text from within the horizon of the text, through the process of co-authoring. In conclusion he stated that "it is incumbent on us, as readers, to decide how we shall co-author Jonah in our own horizons" (p.256). Therefore, in this work the researcher adopts the principle or framework of co-authoring of Jonah 1:1-3; 3:4 in the light of Jonah 2:1-11. It is the projection of self into the text of Jonah 1:1-3; 3:4 and experience the text within its horizon of Jonah 2:1-11. This exegetico-hermeneutical study opens up new meaning and offers new light to this text.

### 2.3 Empirical studies

The foregoing provides the settings for an exegetico-hermeneutical study of Jonah 1:1-3, 3:4 in the light of Jonah 2:1-11. Fretheim (2000) wrote a work on *The message of Jonah a theological commentary*. It is a book of 141 pages. He concentrated on what he believed to be the most important aspects of Jonah that is theological and kerygmatic. He is of the view that the “the book then is one between a man of faith and his God. It is an issue which involves an *interpretation* of an aspect of the meaning of that relationship. It is a *theological conflict*. “It is this theological conflict which leads him first of all into disobedience and then finally into despair” (p. 19).

It is suggested by him that Jonah is a figure used by the author as a vehicle for describing his own contemporaries. Therefore Jonah is a type of author’s audience. He sees Jonah as a typical Israelite. Knowing the audience helps to see the message of the book clearer. Fretheim, thus states “the more we know about the audience, the better we will be able to see the message of the book, the message those people needed to hear” (p. 31). He further notes that it is the unresolved theological conflict between God and Jonah that affected his message in Nineveh. He holds that:

The marvelous thing to watch in the book is how God goes to the root of his problem, his theology. Good pastoral counselor that he is, God does not treat him for disobedience or despair; he treats him for a case of bad theology...The shape which God’s mercy takes with Jonah in this situation is a theological conversation (p.139).

From this one can see that one’s faith and thinking if not properly understood in the clear light of the word of God can create conflict, crises, even despair in one’s life and one’s relationship with

other person. Fretheim (2000) holds that the message of Jonah is still relevant to us today. Thus he said that this issue should help us to think seriously about our lives as children of God.

Furthermore, Harkins (2010) presented his dissertation to the faculty of the Graduate School of Vanderbilt University Nashville Tennessee, on 'Jonah and the Prophetic character'. It is a work of 207 pages. He is of the opinion that Jonah has never ceased to confound or inspire those who would claim to understand its "true meaning". He acknowledged many number of ways people have read Jonah – as an invective against prophetic hypocrisy, as an account of an historical figure or as a theological and moral example, and so on. Basically for him, using the apparatus of modern literary criticism and applying anthropological constructs he explored how the book of Jonah may be read as a type of folktale. He states that the Jonah story reflects an ongoing crisis in Israelite self-understanding. He brings out the tripartite nature of his thesis saying:-

That unique as the book of Jonah is among the biblical texts, it is similar in structure and content to at least two other ancient Near Eastern tales, and that all three may be read as "wondertales," 2) that the story's structure facilitates the portrayal of Jonah as a folk antihero who failed *rite de passage* is allegorically linked to Israelite selfhood and, 3) that consequently the Jonah narrative served as a tool of allegorical meaning and edification of social organization in its postexilic context. That a lesson of such social and theological significance should be expressed in this brief and unusual narrative is one of the achievements of the book of Jonah (p. 8).

He further recognized that though the story surely had value as entertainment also, we see that in Jonah two virtues, recognition and acceptance, are wanting. "Each of these qualities are multifarious, and the interplay between different aspects of the recognition and acceptance reveal

why Jonah barely misses the mark in some ways but dramatically fails in others” (p. 188). Even as he recognizes that God is “a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abundant in kindness, having compassion concerning an injury” Jonah 4:2, he fails to absorb its implications.

Menezes (2009) studied Jonah under the heading “Aligning with Gentiles versus maligning the Gentiles”. He saw Israelites as a nation who succumbed to the temptation of considering herself as privileged to the extent of despising and rejecting other nations. Thus prophet Jonah was sent to correct them as Menezes stated “YHWH sent her prophets who chided her, showed her the right path, and taught her to look at the world with the eyes of God! One of such prophetic voices is the author of the Book of Jonah” (p. 169). He sees Jonah as a theological midrash. For him the author of Jonah was not a prophet. It was later tradition that tried to identify him with Jonah ben Amittai from Gath-hepher in Northern Galilee (Jon 1:1; 2 Kgs 14:25). He places the Book among the books he calls ‘*theological novels*’ and as such history cannot be sought in them. On that he said “ascertaining its historicity has only helped to sidetrack the real purpose of the book and its sublime message” (p.171) However, their kerygma or proclamation is always valid.

The main aim of Jonah for Menezes (2009) is to challenge the false sense of superiority which the Jews of the post-exilic times were exhibiting. He stated the intention as:-

To widen the horizon of his co-religionists, to question their religious and racist prejudices and make them aware that God cannot be the monopoly or the property of any single religion or race. In the eyes of God, he says, all individuals and all races are equal. In fact, we might even have to painfully acknowledge at times

that the pagans might be better in the eyes of God than those who profess a belief in the true God (p.172).

In other words, the author of Jonah for Menezes is showing the Jews that “what they believe in is a partisan God, a tribal God, who, in their narrow-minded and chauvinistic opinion, should be concerned only about his own limited number of chosen favourites, that is themselves”( p.174). The author of Jonah is actually opening the eyes of his contemporary Jews to see that Yahweh is not only the God of the Jews but also of the whole people of the world. Thus he made analysis that-

He is making it clear to them that not even his own prophet, who has made the traditional profession of faith that YHWH is ‘a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and bound in steadfast love’ (Jon 4:2c; Exod 34:6), rarely knows this God! Further, he propounds that the pagans, whether it be the pagan Phoenician sailors or the pagan Ninevites, worship the one God with greater piety and obedience than the Israelite prophet (p.174).

Branick (2012) like Menezes (2009) above said that the book of Jonah is midrashic literature when he stated that “literary indication, however, abound in the book to signal to the reader that this work is not like the other books of the prophets but rather consists of a midrashic story made up to teach an important lesson” (p.262). He believed like Boadt (1984) and Nowell (2001) that the book of Jonah is ironically reversed. For him the summary of the themes of Jonah should be this: “God’s love for all peoples, Jews and Gentiles (1:2; 3:10; 4:9-11), the folly of exclusive nationalism (1:3-16; 4:1-4), and the persistence of God’s call and the folly of resisting it (1:2-3:5)” (p.265). Branick called to mind religious hazard obscuring the mystery of God. This for him is arrogance. Thus he stated that “the temptation to arrogance is one of the constant hazards



of religion. With its necessary visible structure, religion tends to obscure the mystery of God, the incomprehensible goodness and graciousness of a love we will never fathom” (p.266).

Laux (1990) had a hermeneutical study on Jonah as the figure of Christ’s resurrection. He affirmed that Jonah has been and still is a subject of great controversy. However, not minding the interpretation one gives it this fact for him remains certain “from literary standpoint the Book of Jonas is one of the greatest narratives in the Bible, and the lessons which it teaches are of the highest importance” (p.147). Laux in order to show the greatness of this book has this to say:-

Other Prophets teach the paramount truth that Jehovah is the God of all mankind, not merely of the Israelites, but nowhere is this truth so dramatically and convincingly set forth as in Jonas. The need of repentance is the theme of all the prophetic books, but nowhere is its value so palpably demonstrated as in the story of Jonas and the Ninivites (p.148).

Laux actually shows that these themes commonly found in other Old Testament prophets and prophecies were concretely and forcefully established and demonstrated and this gives the book a unique work. He saw Jonah as the figure of Christ’s resurrection. For him, “Other Prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah, but Jonas alone was singled out by the Messiah Himself as prefiguring His greatest miracle, His Resurrection” (p.148). Jesus Christ in the gospel of Matthew demonstrates this saying:

An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the earth three days and three nights. At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and

condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here (Matthew 12:39-41).

Some scholars are of the opinion that since Jonah's recorded words to the Assyrians did not include the word 'repent', the prophet never preached repentance or that his message was not one of repentance. Wolfe (2013) argued that this statement could not be true following from some insight into the complexities and nuances of biblical hermeneutics. He noted that though the Bible does not include some events or words does not mean they never happened. Therefore, there is the possibility that Jonah did say more than "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" when he was preaching there. He buttressed his point with the biblical passage that, "There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the world would contain the books that would be written" (John 21: 25). However, he added that "this alone does not allow us to assume additional words or actions without evidence, but it does encourage us to look at the context with a more critical eye" (p. 2) Wolfe held that Jonah's message compelled repentance when he argued:-

Even if Jonah never said the word 'repent', isn't it safe to assume his message compelled repentance, whether he wanted it to be a message of repentance or not? Certainly God used the prophet's words, whatever they were, to convey the need of repentance. After all, the Ninevites did repent (Jonah 3:5-10). How would these pagans know to 'give up their evil ways' and turn to a foreign God they did not worship unless this idea was inferred in Jonah's words? And God was using these words to change their hearts (p. 2).

The above view notwithstanding, for other scholars this is somewhat silly. Other prophets made use of the term "repent", such prophet like Jeremiah. Jeremiah 25:5- is a typical summary of the

Old Testament prophets calling upon the people to repent of their evil ways: “Repent now every one of his evil way and his evil doing...” (Jeremiah 35:15; Ezekiel 18:30; 2 Kings 17:13). Wolfe (2013) made important point, however; there is need to take a look into other passage of Jonah in order to have possible clearer image of the message of 3:4.

In a similar way, a hermeneutical study of the Prophet Jonah and his message was carried out by Stanton (1951) where Jonah is identified as a type of Israel. He stated that “almost as amazing as the Messianic typology of Jonah is the way in which the prophet and his experiences correspond to the total history of the Jewish people” (p. 363). He made points of similarities between them. He went further to say that Jonah’s message and experience calls for deeper reflection for the reader in the present age. He remarks-

One does not read far into the book of Jonah before he sees God’s servant profiting by his strange experiences. We see the development of his character, the changing of his conduct, and his tremendous growth in the knowledge of God and His ways. Likewise we are challenged to walk with God and do His bidding. As we seek now the personal application of this Old Testament prophecy, we have the opportunity of learning Jonah’s lessons and profiting from his mistakes (p. 366).

Stanton was of the view that Jonah never remained the same after his learning experiences. He became a changed person though through necessary but difficult lessons. He stated summarily in this saying that this is the message of the book to all God’s servants.

We see Jonah’s weaknesses reflected in our own lives and learn many of the same lessons in the daily school of God’s discipline. Still more important is what Jonah reveals to us of the nature of God Himself. He intervenes and guides in the affairs

of men...There is no national boundaries in the breath of His grace. It is impossible to fall to a depth where He does not extend mercy. We can trust our lives to the wisdom and counsel of God, knowing that “He does all things well (p.376).

For him Jonah points to our Lord Jesus Christ not like some scholars above said but in the sense that it reminds of Him whom the grave could not hold. Ryan (2013) is of the view that “scholars do not agree on a foundational didactic intent of Jonah” (p.75). However, his study of Jonah and the religious ‘other’ (which he referred to as both the pagan sailors and the Ninevites) opens up a space to approach the text with a hermeneutical eye without collapsing the narrative (p.75). He has this to say:

The encounters of Jonah- Israelite prophet- with a group of pagan sailors and the Ninevite king suggest that these “others” have some mysterious relationship to YHWH. Both the ship captain and the king perform functions of the prophetic office that are predicated upon the divine self-disclosure of God’s character to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex.34:6)...the religious ‘others’ actually reveals God to Jonah in a new manner (p.71).

Therefore, for him the book of Jonah affirms that the so-called ‘outsider’ can have a mysterious connection to the content of divine self-disclosure to which the ‘insider’ claims knowledge.

Eckman (2009) sees Jonah as the Jews par excellence, stating that, “he boasts in his relationship with YHWH. He sees himself as loyal to the God of the temple. He even sings Psalms (Jonah 2) regarding YHWH’s deliverance and mercy” (p.10). The message of Jonah 4 for him has direct application when teaching on grace and forgiveness.

The author of Jonah in the view of Boadt (1984) has a great literary style, full of abrupt changes of direction in thought, humorous touches, and unexpected twists in the plot. The author treated the scene of great comedy despite the danger that it describes. He is of the opinion that the author makes important points about prophecy and nature of God without ever losing his sense of humor while creating his outrageous tale. The whole four chapters make a marvelous series of reverses. Boadt holds that the book really addresses two major questions: “the relation of Israel and her God to other nations and the meaning of divine justice” (p.468). He went further to give the lesson from the book saying-“certainly, the lesson is clear: God’s mercy is more powerful than his judgments, and his plan will not be thwarted even by the negative ‘righteousness’ of his prophet” (p.469). He said the meaning of prophecy was deducted from the whole story when he said-

The book forcefully reminds Israel that prophecy had not simply been aimed at condemning all their enemies and making them feel important. Instead of claiming that their special place in God’s covenant made them separate and better, they must recognize that God chose them to be witnesses to all peoples that God also loves them (p.470).

However, the message of Jonah for him is more than just this one point above. The book of Jonah is for Boadt both entertainment and lesson, aimed at the community of Israel in the period after the exile. Wesley (2003) in his application of exegesis and hermeneutics is of the opinion that in the book of Jonah we are called to appropriate revelation as an encounter with a merciful ‘Other’ in which our identities are transformed by a scriptural formed hermeneutics of reconciliation. For him, specifying the possibilities of a Jonahic hermeneutics through the exegesis of Jonah would help in reconstructing our knowledge of God and this knowledge

invariably shapes our self-identity. Fundamental to any interpretation of the book of Jonah for Wesley is an answer to the question of how the narrative shapes the identity of Jonah and the reader. This for him is the key to the interpretation of Jonahic narrative. He points out that-

The narrative of the sheltering bush makes the Jonahic narrative a parable and it is the narrative of the sheltering bush that is the key for interpreting the Jonahic narrative. Through the narrative of the sheltering bush, Jonah experiences mercy and then suffers this mercy being removed. Suffering the removal of mercy, Jonah is prepared to answer the question whether God should be concerned with Ninevites (p.7).

One aspect of the Jonahic answer for Wesley (2003) is an emphasis on God's sheltering care for suffering of creation. However, Moberly (2003) on another level chose the book of Jonah to study the relationship between Scripture and Theology with special reference to wisdom. He is of the opinion that the book of Jonah revolves around a basic perennial problem: how is revelation rightly to be understood and appropriated? The book of Jonah revolves around Jonah's memorable complaint to God "What is going on here" (Jonah 4:2). For Moberly when Jonah's problem is that he knows the scriptural words but cannot grasp their meaning, the book moves into another stage appealing to reason not to Scripture. That is to say the book did not appeal to revelation but to natural theology, not to divine imperative but to analogical wisdom. Therefore, he concludes that:

The book of Jonah does not question the fundamental role of Israel's particular knowledge of God or of the corresponding task of prophecy, nor does it suggest that appeal to natural theology could dispense with the word of YHWH to Moses or Jeremiah. Rather natural theology plays a subordinate and critical role, to

enable fresh re-engagement with the given content of revelation when that content has for some reason become problematic (p.10).

From the above it shows that the appeal to natural theology, reason, or wisdom opens up fresh start and probably new insight. This could be a possible new area in exegetico-hermeneutical tool of Old Testament studies for Jonah and his message. Also for Moberly (2003), the book of Jonah reminds us that theological understanding is seen or exemplified in the person's actions and attitude. Thus he said "Theology is a practical, not a merely theoretical discipline: it aims at wisdom, in the broad sense of light for human path. Our theological enterprises must therefore be judged at least in part by their fruit" (p.10).

Keiter (2012) in another angle saw the connection between Noah and Jonah. The Hebrew word for dove, *yonah* appears in both. Both stories involve a boat and a storm and both contain a reference to destruction after forty days (Genesis 7:4; and Jonah 3:4). Thus Keiter states that "The key to understanding that connection lies in Jonah's name. The connection is not only important for understanding the Book of Jonah; it offers an entirely new approach to the Noah story as well" (p.261).

In another study by Walton (1992) on the 'Object Lesson of Jonah 4:5-7' said that it is the study of this Object lesson that will help in understanding the purpose of the Book of Jonah. For him the main point of the message of Jonah is God's compassion which leads Him to gracious acts of deliverance if only Israel moves in the right direction (p.57). He said that "It is God's compassion that motivates His grace" (p.56). Walton clearly stated this saying:

God's compassion leads him to perform gracious acts, and he will not be restricted in that exercise by anyone's narrow theological strictures. This is the object lesson taught Jonah. Nineveh was not spared because of her repentance, but

because of the freely offered gift of God's grace... though his grace is given without merit; it often comes in response to steps in the right direction (p.55).

The above stand of Walton (1992) on the issue that "Nineveh was not spared because of her repentance, but because of the freely offered gift of God's grace" (p.55) can be argued against from the stand point of Jonah 3:10 "When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out." It was their actions that led to God's change in direction of action. However, Walton could have seen the theological conflict and added "though his grace is given without merit, it often comes in response to steps in the right direction" (p.55). Their actions could be the right direction he meant.

From another point of view came Muldoon (2010). She joins a number of scholars who challenge traditional interpretations of the Book of Jonah. Muldoon concludes that Jonah is distraught because he believes that Yahweh's strong inclination toward mercy results in an abdication of Yahweh's responsibility to do justice. She argues that Jonah misunderstands and misperceives Yahweh's mercy on the Ninevites as permanent when in reality, it is a temporary reprieve. The primary purpose of the book is to defend God's justice. Muldoon made exploration of a number of "thematic parallels" between the Books of Jonah and Malachi, namely "the sovereignty of YHWH", the "apparent lack of divine justice," and "the figure of Elijah" (p.102). Muldoon realizes that her approach is controversial and concedes that her conclusions "may strike some readers as off-putting, or even appalling" (p.147). This notwithstanding, Muldoon's work challenges us to rethink what we thought we knew about this biblical work and moves us to check alternative ways of reading a familiar text through intertextual connections.



Pecknold (2003) studied the Book of Jonah as a sign. For him sign is an instrument that guides us in a particular direction. He made an explanation of what sign means and its relationship in the study saying-

Signs direct our attention, and *refer* to that which is neither sign nor reader, but re-presents something else. A relationship is established between the sign and the reader...calls this relationship between sign and reader a *logic* or a *reasoning* which seeks to describe, inform, correct, clarify and direct. All reasoning, then, we can suppose, involve the reading (or interpretation) of signs. The sign bears the meaning it has for a reader or listener only if it is being read or listened to and only if a *relationship* has been established (p.1).

He said that Jesus clearly gives us warrant for thinking so (for in Mathew 12:39-40-He said to them in reply, ‘An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet’). “This is, it seems, the way Jesus reads the sign of Jonah, as a clarifying, transformative, directive and even predictive sign that points to a future event-‘the three days’ of his death and resurrection” (p.1). For him we can read the sign of Jonah as Jesus read it, ‘redemptively’. Pecknold (2003) acknowledged that the relationship between sign and reader can be shown to be so problematic that the meaning of the sign is irremediably vague, awaiting future clarification. Signs can be read backwards and forwards. Thus he said-

We think of the relationship of the figures, the Prophet Jonah and the Christ Jesus as signs which *refer* to the past and yet, for Jesus, the relationship of the sign of Jonah is cast (or directed) *into the future*, and perhaps Jesus especially draws our attention to *read signs forward* just as he read the sign of Jonah onto his own *future* death and resurrection. If we are to learn to read signs we must be prepared

to establish unexpected relationships of meaning that are open to the future as they are to the past (p.4).

Therefore, he concluded that “reading signs backwards and forwards shows us just this, that signs constantly open themselves to new relationships of meaning, including, or perhaps especially, meaning hidden in the future” (p.5). Putting the summary of his findings Pecknold (2003) notes that-

Reading the signs of the Scripture, as God *reads them*, we discover a *logic*, a triadic relation of a text (1) to its meaning (2) for a community of sign-readers (3) that both hides and reveals the intensity of meaning that God gives, extending meaningfulness to all creation (p.8).

Following from his view the signs of something hidden are themselves helpful, it might even help us to continue reading backwards and forwards. However, this can be done in multiple directions and thus may create confusion which may affect reliable results.

Merrill (1980) made a study on Jonah from Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees and scribes in Mathew 12: 39 that “An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet.” He made an attempt in his study to show and clarify how Jonah was such a persuasive sign to Nineveh. He has this to say about “The sign of Jonah”:-

The basic clue is given by our Lord himself, who says that the sign consists of Jonah’s survival in and regurgitation from the belly of the great fish. This series of supernatural events made such a profound impact on the people of Nineveh that they repented in sackcloth and ashes (p.24).

It must be noted as Merrill said that the question of Jonah living or dying after is of no importance to the Ninevites as a sign. This is because their myth had nothing to do with a dying-

rising figure of any kind. Therefore for him “The experience of being swallowed and transported by the sea monster is all that is at issue” (p.28). The sign to which Jesus made reference must have been a major factor in the response of the city of Nineveh to the preaching of Jonah, for the acceptance of his message was apparently immediate and universal. Hence, for Merrill (1980)

Jesus, basing his own appeal for repentance on this account, argues a *fortiori* that if the pagan Nineveh repented at the preaching of the foreigner Jonah so much more ought his own generation to repent, “for a greater than Jonah is here (p.30).

He concluded that since the Jews of Jesus’ time knew of the connection, Jesus use of it in reference to his resurrection is not at all surprising. They were expected to believe in him as the people of Nineveh.

Woodhouse (1984) examined the significance of the comparison between Jesus and Jonah, “with particular reference to the “sign of Jonah” (Mathew 12:39; 16:4; Luke 11:29), and its elaboration found in Mathew 12:40” (p.33). He noted that “it is only Mathew who records Jesus’ explanation of the ‘sign of Jonah’ in terms of Jonah’s experience in the fish’s belly (Mathew 12:40)” (p.34). However, this context of the “sign of Jonah” “raises a serious question over one common interpretation, which is often derived from Mathew 12:40” (p.35).

Harkins (2010) did a wonderful work and one agrees with him as one researched the book of Jonah, that it has become increasingly evident that with so many “new” methods and approaches for interpretation of biblical texts, perhaps there is renewed value in older modes of reading which have been neglected in recent times. Therefore, it is this desire that pushes the recent researcher. On the hand Fretheim (2000) also did a good theological commentary and an interesting one for biblical scholars. However, there are other sides of this message the author

did not take into consideration. It is the task of this research to bring out the other side through further exegetico-hermeneutical study of Jonah 1:1-3; 3:4 in the light of Jonah 2:1-11.

#### **2.4 Summary of literature review**

It has been exciting to examine some of the scholarly views on the Book of Jonah, the prophet Jonah, and his message. As we have critically observed above, scholars agree on certain points while in certain areas disagree. Bergant (2001) rightly pointed this out when he explained the meaning of hermeneutics saying:

One of the most exciting and challenging issues in contemporary biblical study is that of interpretation, or hermeneutics. Not only has it captured the imagination of scholarship, but it has also caused considerable confusion for the general public...Inevitably, different understandings resulted, depending primarily upon whether the major interpretative focus was principally on the sender, the message, or the receiver (p.50).

In conclusion, having gone through the various concepts of exegesis and hermeneutics raised by scholars in the study of the text of Jonah ranging from considering it as allegory, irony, satire, a parable, prophetic book, as a sign of Jesus Christ, connection of Jonah and Noah, a parable for Yom Kippur, a call to repentance and reconciliation, God's judgment and mercy, it is clearly seen that most of these authors cited and reviewed never did an exegetico-hermeneutical study of Jonah 1:1-3; 3:4 in the light of Jonah 2:1-11. These concepts have not addressed possible understanding of Jonah 1:1-3; 3:4 in the light of Jonah 2:1-11. The principle of co-authoring following from Bakhtinian theory of authoring and re-authoring of the biblical text gives the researcher a new ground into the text under study. The researcher of this work intends to

contribute to knowledge by bringing out the possible message in the light of Jonah 2:1-11. So far the literature as it exists presently have stopped short of relating the message of Jonah 1: 1-3; 3:4 in the experience of Jonah in 2:1-11 and relating this message to Nigerian context. This is actually the gap created in the literature which will be filled up in the course of the research.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EXEGESIS OF JONAH 1: 1-3; 3:4; 2:1-11

Under this we shall be doing exegesis of these verses. Jonah 1:1-3 deals with the first call and command of Yahweh to Jonah concerning Nineveh and Jonah's response to this initial call. This pericope will show what Jonah is expected to do in Nineveh. In 3:4 we shall see the proclamation of the message by Jonah. The exegesis here will help us to understand Yahweh's message to Jonah for Nineveh and Jonah's message to them. We shall then explore this understanding in 2:1-11. However, there are some issues below that will help our understanding and form the background to this chapter.

#### **3.1 Authorship of the book of Jonah**

It has often been assumed that Jonah was the author. However, the narrative is in fact anonymous and has no direct reference to its author. The principal character of the book is Jonah Son of Amittai (1:1). Many have thought that this figure was not only the hero of the book but its author as well. Dyer and Merrill in Woods (2007) said that although Jonah is not identified as the author, tradition states that this same figure also served as the book's author. His name means "dove". Hauser in Ceresko (2007) suggests that the notion of "dove" connotes "flight" and "passivity" both of which characterize the prophet in the first two chapters (p.582). Woods adds that while the name refers to peace and purity, it can also refer to silliness (Hosea 7:11).

In 2 Kings 14:25 we read of a prophet of the same name who flourished in the eight century B.C. The reference to Jonah, son of Amittai (Jonah 1:1), relates the book to an 8<sup>th</sup> century prophet who spoke in support of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (786-746 B.C.E.; 2 Kings 14:25) (Fretheim in Freedman (2000), p.729). However, it is not clear the reason for this historical connection

especially with the argument of the non historical nature of this book. We should take into account that the historical Jonah of 2 Kings 14 is a different reality from the Jonah of the book. For Eynikel (2010) the relationship with the Jonah of 2 Kings 14:25 and Jonah of the book of Jonah is literary, not historical. He gives the following reasons for his stand:

The book of Jonah was written long after the time of Jeroboam 11. This is shown by the historical inconsistencies in the book. In this book Nineveh was already a legendary name, whereas in the time of Jeroboam 11 Nineveh was not yet the capital of the Assyrians. Moreover, historically the king of Ashur was never called the “king of Nineveh” (3:6) but always “king of Ashur” even when he resided in Nineveh. Again, the diameter of Nineveh was never more than five kilometers on the longest side and not “a three days’ walk” (3:3). Furthermore, the language, which gives evidence of time of composition, contains Aramaisms: expressions such as “the God of heaven” (1:9), or “the nobles” to indicate royal officials. These influences occurred during the Parsian period after the exile. This was the time of the reconstruction of Judean religion under Ezra and Nehemiah. They took measures to purify religion from syncretic influence (p. 1211).

Harrington (1965) is of the same opinion above. He states that we will have problem on our hands if the book is a historical work. However, this problem clears when it is realized that the fictional hero of Jonah has nothing in common with the prophet of the eight century B.C. Scholars because of universal issues implicit in the book date it to late 5<sup>th</sup> century and is read as a reaction to the separatist and exclusivist tendencies of the period of Ezra and Nehemiah. There are other proposals for more specific dates such as 6<sup>th</sup> century and mid 5<sup>th</sup> century. The book of

Jonah was certainly known and accepted by 200 B.C. according to Sirach 49:10. This notwithstanding, probably the book is best assigned to the fifth or fourth century B.C.

### **3.2 Book of Jonah among Old Testament prophetic books**

As a matter of fact, the Old Testament of the Bible has three major divisions – The תּוֹרָה (Law), נְבִיאִים (Prophets) and the קְטוּבִים (Writings). This three-fold division is also designated as the “TaNaKh” (TNK). This was composed by using the first letter of each section in their Hebrew form (law, prophets and writings) to form the word TaNaKh.

“The prophets” is the second of the three divisions of the Old Testament. The books that belong to this group are those books that contain prophetic messages. They are broadly divided into two parts namely former and the latter prophets. Ugwueye (2014) has it that the books of the former prophets are referred to as former because “although in their time the message and roles which they played were more or less prophetic, they do not conform to the messages and roles that were played by the prophets in later Israel” (p. 23). The books under this group can be seen as history. This fact can look confusing to some readers. However, by calling the history writers ‘prophets’, for Ugwueye, the Jews brought our awareness to the fact that these books were not just records of history, but were actually interpretation and application of the meaning of history.

The books under the latter prophets are divided into major and minor prophets with reference to their volume of material which survived. The Major ones have more volume of work than the Minor ones. The prophetic books of the Minor Prophets are called the twelve Minor Prophets. Jonah is the fifth of the twelve prophets in the Book of the Twelve. These twelve prophets were sometimes named the Minor Prophets, not because they are of lesser importance, but because their writings are brief. The Twelve include Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum,



Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The book of the Twelve follows the writings of the four Major Old Testament Prophets namely Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The sixteen (16) prophets all together are called the latter prophets because they began writing after the division of the united kingdom of Israel. Ugwueye (2014) summarizing these prophetic works has this contribution to make-

All the prophetic works- former and latter- are accounts of how God had spoken to his people Israel. Sometimes he spoke through the events of history and at other times through the works of people, but it is the same God-breathed messages all the time (p. 24).

Thus Jonah is a prophetic book with “God-breathed message”. The canon of the scripture grouped it under the prophetic books of the Old Testament. However, many argue to what extent is the book prophetic. Therefore, it is necessary for us to discuss and have a clear view what a prophet is all about.

In Hebrew the ordinary word for prophet is נָבִיא. The etymology of the word is uncertain. No scholarly consensus has ever been achieved as to the origin of this word, which according to Vawter (2007) “is probably a loanword in Hebrew” (p. 188). This Hebrew word נָבִיא, by itself seems to connote the idea of a spokesperson. This is seen in the commission to Aaron as Moses’ mouthpiece: “See, I have made you as a God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet נָבִיא.” (Exodus 7:1). Beside this word, there are other two Hebrew words used as the prophets: רֹאֶה and חֹזֶה. The first is in active participle of the verb “to see”, and is translated “seer” while the second is also active participle of another verb which means also “to see”. This verb unfortunately is without distinctive English equivalent and is translated either “prophet” (Isaiah 30:10) or “seer” (1 Chronicles 29: 29).

Fohrer (1974) sees the two words נְבִיא and רֹאֶה, הֹנֵה (the seer) as sociological conditioned forms of prophetism found in ancient Israel. The נְבִיא ‘called one’ was encountered in the form of the ecstatic prophet associated with the exciting fertility cults of settled areas; and the seer (הֹנֵה, רֹאֶה), was encountered among nomadic cultures. The seer soon became insignificant like all Israel’s nomadic heritage. One of the last representatives of this type was Nathan. Fohrer believes that “under the influence of Yahwism, seers and prophets together gave rise to Israelite prophetism proper, as 1 Sam. 9:9 suggests” (p. 344). Vawter (2007) notes that the ancient relation of the “seer” (רֹאֶה or הֹנֵה ) to נְבִיא is uncertain. “Etymologically, the seer would have been a visionary rather than an ecstatic, but it is not precluded that his visions would have been received as the result of ecstatic experience” (p. 189). Though it is the seer’s role to prophecy, that is to say ‘act the part of a נְבִיא, (Amos 7:12), still the seer is distinguished from the prophet in 2 Kings 17: 13; Isaiah 29: 10; 30: 10; Micah 3: 6-7.

Albright (1957) clearly shows the meaning of נְבִיא as the ‘called one’. He associates it with the Akkadian *nabu*- “to call”. Therefore נְבִיא is “one who is called”. He writes:

The correct etymological meaning of the word is rather “one who is called (by God),” “one who has a vocation (from God),” as appears from the fact that this is almost always the sense which the verb *nabu*, “to call,” has in Accadian....This interpretation of the word suits its meaning exactly; the prophet was a man who felt himself called by God for a special mission, in which his will was subordinated to the will of God, which was communicated to him by direct inspiration. The prophet was thus a charismatic spiritual leader, directly

commissioned by Yahweh to warn the people of the perils of sin and to preach reform and revival of true religion and morality (p. 303).

Caution must be taken not to misunderstand the two terms “prophet” and “prophecy” according to their common usage in everyday English as a prophet being a person who “predicts”, and prophecy meaning “to foretell”. Blenkinsopp (2010) holds that “prophecy” is one of those slippery words that have a remarkable broad and ill-defined range of meaning. He said that “It is commonly understood as the ability to predict the future, but it can also refer to the founding of a religion (by Moses, Jesus, or Mohammed)” (p. 1015). For Ugwueye (2014) prophets were differentiated from other religious functionaries by the very sense of having a vocation, a calling directly from Yahweh. He makes the connection between “prophet” and “prophecy”. Thus he states:

A prophet is an individual who claims to have contact with the supernatural or the divine, and who serves as a spokesman for the divine, delivering this newfound knowledge from the supernatural entity to the other people. The message that the prophet conveys is called a prophecy. The Hebrew prophet was not merely, as the word commonly implies, a man enlightened by God to foretell events; he was the interpreter and supernaturally enlightened messenger sent by Yahweh (יהוה) to communicate his will and designs to Israel. His mission consisted in preaching as well as in foretelling...Prophecy, in broad terms, signifies the supernatural message of the prophet, and more especially, from custom, the predictive element of the message (p. 4).

Since the prophet is called by God and has divine mandate to prophecy in the name of God, his word דְּבָרִים is divine. All his teachings as such come to him from above either by revelation or

inspiration. However, there are some truths which he preaches which he knows naturally by light of reason or experience; as such it is not necessary for him to learn them from God. Ugwueye (2014) explains this fact better that:

It suffices if the divine illumination places him in a new light, strengthens his judgment and preserves it from error concerning the facts he deals with, and if a supernatural impulse determines his will to make them the object of his message (p. 5).

The prophet is one who is compelled to speak דְבַר ‘the word’ which has come to him. This word of the message is the prophecy. For Harrington (1965), it is not only the words of the prophet, but also his action, even his life, is prophecy. The marriage of Hosea is a symbol (Hosea 1-3); Isaiah and his children are signs (Isaiah 8: 18); Ezekiel multiplies the prophetic gestures (Ezekiel 4: 3; 12: 6,11; 24: 24).

Nevertheless, the above points notwithstanding, the prophets are also recognized as human beings with fallible nature. They may make wrong decisions; have incorrect personal beliefs or opinions, theological conflict, sin from time to time. They are not made perfect by the very nature of their position and function by their reception and deliverance of divine messages. Their divine call and commission do not remove all their humanity. Their human nature can hinder the performance of their prophetic job.

There is surely a connection between the prophet and his prophecy. If prophecy was only and still remains the word of God דְבַר יְהוָה, the prophetic word is thus greater than the prophet. Ugwueye (2014) has it that “the prophetic word lives a life of its own once it has emanated from the prophet; the prophet is very much identified with the word that he has uttered” (p. 6). A prophet from this can be seen as a human instrument for divine communication. Since biblical

tradition traces the origins of Israelite prophecy to Moses, an Israelite prophet's absolute commitment to the word is due to his awesome commissioning by Yahweh to communicate a message to God's people in the typical fashion of Mosaic standard.

Abraham the father of the elect and the friend of God is the first person to be called a prophet in the Old Testament (Genesis 20:7). Moses becomes the next person. He is the founder and lawgiver, the mediator of the Old Covenant holding a degree of authority as no other has ever in Israelite prophetic history. Old Testament prophecy received its normative form in the life and the person of Moses. He becomes a standard of comparison for all future prophets. Moses has all the features that characterize one as the true prophet and the features were first found in him. He had a specific and direct personal call from Yahweh. Moses as a prophet lived in the presence of Yahweh and stood before him, on behalf of men. These passages clearly show this. (Genesis 20:7; Deuteronomy 18:15-19; 34:10; Exodus 3:1-4; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1:4-19; Ezekiel 1-3; Hosea 1:2; Amos 7:14-15, 1 Kings 22:19; Jeremiah 23:22; Amos 3:7).

We must surely admit that the prophetic awareness of history stemmed from Moses. Of all the ancient nations, Israel had a true awareness of history. Yahweh commissioned Moses into Egypt with the necessary clues to interpret events. Moses was forewarned of the events and their significance by verbal communication. Hence he was not left to struggle for the meaning of historic events as or after they happened. This was also the case with other prophets after him. Harrington (1965) alludes to this when he said that "the prophets carried on a religious tradition which they had inherited, fostered its development...They were entirely faithful to the dogma fixed in the Mosaic age-ethical monotheism" (p. 171).

Furthermore, the prophets owed to Moses their ethical and social concern for their nation and people. Prior to his call and commission, Moses was concerned with the social welfare of his people which led him into trouble (Exodus 2:11-12). Also “as the prophetic lawgiver, he outlined the most humane and philanthropic code of the ancient world, concerned for the helpless” (Deuteronomy 24:19-22) (Ugwueye, 2014, p. 14). Moses played a greater part in nation building. Many of the prophets thus followed and played active statesman part in national affair. The first two kings of Israel were also prophets and their association of the anointed king and the anointed prophet was established by Mosaic theocratic rule (Deuteronomy 33:5).

Many of the prophets made use of images in the delivery of their messages. Moses made use of images as well. He lifted the bronze serpent and mediated to the nation through the use of highly symbolic cult (Jeremiah 19:1ff; Ezra 17:8ff; Numbers 21:8). Therefore, there is no reason not to accept the biblical tradition that Israelite prophecy started with Moses. The scene described in Numbers 11:24-30 is doubtless modeled on the assemblies of ecstatic prophets known from later times, but it is to this same kind of prophet that Amos 2:1 refers when assigning the beginning of prophecy to the Mosaic period. Aaron in the Pentateuch is called a prophet not only in Exodus 7:1, but also in Numbers 12:2-8, where Moses is related to Aaron and Miriam as a prophet greater than them. Worthy of note here is that in Exodus 15:20 Miriam is called a נְבִיאָה (prophetess). Also Deborah in Judges 4:4 is called prophetess (נְבִיאָה). “Admittedly, in these texts the term prophet has become much broader in its significance, where it is applied to any kind of inspired person or, indeed, simply to anyone who was recognized as under special protection” (Ugwueye, 2014, p. 15).

Prophets as a special class of people in society began much later in Israel. They are the professional prophets belonging to a class outside or within the political leaders. Not much is heard of them before the late period of the judges and the early monarchy till when they are mentioned in connection with the Philistine wars. These men usually prophesied in groups and their communal experiences are described in such passages as 1 Samuel 10:6-13. Hence, they are given the generic name “sons of the prophets”. This generic name has been variously interpreted as “members of the prophetic guilds”, “professional prophets”, and “prophetic disciples” (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3ff; 5:22; 6:1). These prophets are often seen to have served as apprentices or disciples under known prophets. In some cases, they could also live apart as private individuals. In either way, they can be seen attached to the sanctuaries as “cult prophets” (1 Kings 14:1ff; 2 Kings 22:14-17; Amos 7:10ff). “The cult prophets functioned alongside the priests at the sanctuaries; some of their oracles and discourses can be found in various psalms, in isolated sections of the prophetic books, or in entire books” (Fohrer, 1974, p. 345).

Others can be serving the king as “court prophets” (2 Samuel 7:1ff; 12:1ff; 24:11; 1 Kings 1:8; 22:6ff; 2 Kings 3:11ff; Nehemiah 6:7). These court prophets were associated with the royal sanctuaries and employed as advisers by the rulers. They wore a distinctive garb of hair, cloth and often bore other distinguishing marks possible, at times they wore a tonsure (2 Kings 1:8; Zechariah 13:4; 1 Kings 20:38, 41; Zechariah 13:6; 2 Kings 2:23).

Apart from some of these characteristic features above, perhaps the most outstanding one is ecstasism. This ecstatic experience that served as the climate for prophecy was often induced by mutual contagion through dance and music. The ecstatic experience transformed the prophet and made him “another man” (1 Samuel 10:6). In such a state his antics could become grotesque,

so that he could be called with rough familiarity “a mad man”. His profession was also regarded as hardly in keeping with responsible, respectable citizenship (1 Samuel 10:11).

Ecstaticism continued to some degree throughout the entire period of Israelite prophecy. Samuel is represented on one occasion as leading a band in ecstatic prophecy. Both Elijah and Elisha are habitually associated with the “sons of the prophets” as masters and leaders. Elisha makes use of a customary device to induce ecstatic seizure (1 Samuel 19:20ff; 2 Kings 3:15). The extent to which ecstaticism played a part in later prophecy continues to be controversial and subject of debate, especially that of the classical literary prophets. Some identify the ecstatic with the false prophets, but Jeremiah 29:26 shows that ecstatic prophecy was common in Jeremiah’s time. On the other hand, Ezekiel certainly received many of his prophecies in ecstatic trance and testifies on several accessions to his being seized by the spirit. Ugwueye (2014) describes this prophetic ecstaticism like this:

When such an ecstasy seizes him, the prophet loses command of his limbs, he staggers and stutters like a drunken man. His ordinary sense of what is decent deserts him; he feels an impulse to do all kinds of strange things. When these strange ideas and emotions come over him, that sensational hovering which we know from our own dreams seizes him (p. 18).

Certainly, ecstasy could be the medium of genuine religious experience in which true contact was achieved with God. Gunkel in Ugwueye (2014) suggests that the Old Testament prophecy is not all about ecstasy. As ecstasy could be medium of true contact, there is no doubt; too that it could be as well a source of false belief.



Besides these professional prophets stand the great individual prophets of the pre-exilic period. They are referred to as classical prophets. The classical prophecy appeared in Israel during the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C in the person of Amos and Hosea. In them Old Testament prophecy reaches its apex. They are called classical for two reasons. First is that the books are reputedly their own writings, instead of reports about them by others, appear in the Hebrew Scripture. The second reason which is the most important is the difference in emphasis of their prophecy. They expressed a hostile attitude to the prophets and the gods of other religions, and they exalted a nationalistic concept of Israel's relationship to its divinity.

The term classical is therefore used to distinguish some prophets who emphasized what is distinctive about Israelite prophecy. Vawter (2007) states that by classical prophecy, we mean the prophecy of those whom the Old Testament has taught us to regard as exemplifying what is distinctive about Israel's prophets and prophecy. It is this that distinguishes and separates Israelite prophecy from the Near Eastern pattern. These prophets are those whose teachings have been preserved in the Old Testament and especially those whose names appear at the head of the prophetic books.

In a roughly chronological order, the prophets are Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. They do not exercise their ministry as professionals, but on the basis of a special call that has uprooted them from their chosen profession. They think themselves exclusively as representatives and messengers of their God, beyond all ties of family and society, nation and cult. In contrast to the professional prophets, they see man as being essentially unrighteous before God. He has fallen to this state through his refusal to trust in God and submit to him, through rebellion against God and apostasy from him.

They therefore expect that the warning reverses that have already been suffered will be followed by an annihilating judgment; although this is not in fact God's will (Fohrer, 1974).

The prophets mention the possibility of forgiveness and new salvation. Hence, their central theme is therefore the either/or of man's destruction or deliverance, though this does not make them simply preachers of repentance. The call to conversion points to a possibility of deliverance. This fact is the sum and substance of the preaching of Amos, Isaiah and Micah. However, in the case of Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel within the second stage in their ministry offered a second possibility: conversion is replaced by deliverance through God. In both instances we are dealing with a basic inward and outward transformation resulting in a new man, who lives in fellowship with God and does his will, so that God rules in the world. These prophets, at least do not base their preaching on a dead ideology but on a personal life of faith. These facts will help to dispose our mind in understanding the prophet Jonah and his message.

In the Old Testament there has been much problem and controversy over how to distinguish the true prophet from the false one. In the eyes of Israel and of the classical prophets themselves, the false prophets were prophets indeed as much were the classical prophets. For Ugwueye (2014) "the false prophets were members of the professional class of prophets" (p. 130). Although among them may have been those who simply stimulated prophecy, we must not think that first and foremost they were "false" in the sense that they willfully and knowingly pretended to be what they were not. Rather, they were prophets deluded by their own prophetic devices, erring in judgment, confusing their own hopes and aspirations with the authentic word of Yahweh (Isaiah 28:7; Jeremiah 23:5ff). It was not precluded that the same prophet might alternatively prophesy truth and falsehood, for a true prophetic word was in every case a distinct gift received from

God. From the above, professionalism as Ugwueye stated could hardly serve as a criterion since Samuel was clearly a professional prophet but was not a false prophets.

Other groups suggested that the false prophets were often court prophets in whose interest it was to tell the King and his officials what they wanted to hear. They are those who derived monetary benefits from favourable prophecies that assured their clients of divine blessings and troubled no consciences. It is probably true, however that they are men caught up in the common tragedy of their people, that is to say, those who had become so convinced that “the Israelite way of life” represented all that was godly that it had become second nature to measure Yahweh’s will according to Israel’s performance rather than the reverse. This oft-repeated tragedy has by no means been confined to ancient Israel. In an age when national pride spoke a religious language, it was inevitable that it should also speak in prophecy.

Furthermore, some based their distinction between false and true prophets on the ground of the prophecy coming to pass. In some Old Testament passages, what does not come to pass was not spoken by the Lord. If the word does not come to pass, that is a word, which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. However, the fulfillment of prophecy, even if it had been always evident to the prophet’s contemporaries, was not an infallible sign as Deuteronomy 13:2ff shows. This notwithstanding, there has been evidence that true prophecy often went unfulfilled, thus discouraging even the prophet himself. Moses complained when what was spoken in the name of Yahweh failed to have desired effect. Jeremiah saw in Hananiah’s visitation a proof that the word came from Yahweh. The same Jeremiah was discouraged because his prophecy did not come to pass (Jeremiah 32:8, Jeremiah 20:7).

When considered from another section of the Old Testament, what is spoken may come to pass, yet the prophet who made the prophecy is a false one. Therefore, the test of a true prophet here is not only on the basis of the verification of his prediction, but also on his fidelity to Yahweh. Deuteronomy 13: 1-6 clearly shows that if a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder, which he tells you, comes to pass, and if he says, let us go after other gods, you shall not listen to the word of that prophet.

The test of true prophet here is a theological one, the revelation of God at the Exodus. Following from this stand point, the essence of the false prophet is to teach and create rebellion against Yahweh who brought Israel out of Egypt. Moses in this section fixed the theological norm by which all subsequent teaching could be judged. Hence, a prophet might claim that he spoke in the name of the Lord, and what he spoke might come to pass, but if he did not acknowledge the authority of Moses and subscribe to the doctrines of the Exodus, he was a false prophet (Deuteronomy 13:1-6).

It should be crystalline clear that the distinction between false and true prophecy in the days of the classical prophets was not always clear. Prophets might be touched by the spirit and still prophesy falsehood. Most of the classical prophets as well give no signs of having been ecstatic. Therefore, possession of the ecstatic prophetic "spirit" was no sure criterion of knowing the true prophetic utterances from the false ones. Samuel for instance is represented on one occasion as leading a band in ecstatic prophecy. Elisha made use of a customary device called minstrel to induce ecstatic seizure (1 Samuel 10:6; 1 Samuel 19:20-22; 2 Kings 3:15).

Jeremiah on his own part tried to make a distinction between a true prophet from the false one beside the external manifestation of ecstasy or professionalism. For him the first characteristic of a false prophet is on their moral conduct. The false prophet is a man of immoral life and places

no barrier to immorality in others. The second way is to look at the object of their message. They are flatterers of the popular passions, always foretelling peace even if evil prevails. Thus they are liars, victims of their own imagination. The false prophets are men of borrowed testimony, feigned authority and self appointed ministry, whereas the true prophet stood in the counsel of Yahweh and heard his voice, and has been sent by the Lord (Jeremiah 23:9-32; 6:14; 8:11; Micah 3:5).

It is important to note that the formula, *כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה* “Thus says Yahweh”, was used by both the prophets and those who have been customarily called false prophets. Jeremiah 28 illustrates the point well. Hananias was a prophet of Yahweh, but his conception of the Covenant was quite mechanical and materialistic. The contradiction contained in the *כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה* with which both he and Jeremiah’s messages were delivered could hardly have clarified the situation for the people. For this reason Jeremiah appeals to two criteria which can show the authenticity of his mission. The first is the occurrence of the evens predicted (Jeremiah 28: 15-17); the second is the conformity of the message to traditional teaching (Robert & Feuillet, 1965).

Another prophet who treated this issue of distinction between a true and false prophet is Ezekiel. His opinion of this issue is substantially that of Jeremiah. For him there are prophets who are guided by their own wisdom and have no word from Yahweh. By so doing, they make people trust in lies and leave them without resource in the day of trial. The mark of this group of prophets is their message which is one of peace and shallow optimism. Their message is devoid of moral content, thus grieving the righteous and encouraging the wicked. However, by contrast, there is a true prophet who insists on piercing to the core of the matter, answering folk not according to their ostensible queries but according to their sinful hearts, for the word of Yahweh is always a word against sin (Ezekiel 12:21-14:11).

The above notwithstanding, it should be obvious that the distinction between true and false prophecy is not always clear but anyone who really “knows God” will recognize a true prophet and discern him from the false, for the prophecy must conform to God’s nature as he has revealed it. The true prophet in the Old Testament is the Mosaic prophet. This fact does not actually mean that in a vague sense he has a direct experience of God, but that he has been commissioned by the God of Exodus to reiterate once again to Israel the moral requirements of the covenant.

However, it becomes strange to find the name of the covenant God, Yahweh on the lips of the pagan diviner, Balaam. It is not necessary to hold that Balaam was a worshiper of the true God but he was completely dependent on the all-powerful God of Israel. Yahweh’s control and power over events extends beyond Israel. From Balaam’s narrative, two distinctive marks of true prophecy can be deduced namely that the will of Yahweh and not the spoken word of any prophet is the decisive factor of the true prophecy. This we will see in Jonah’s case. The second is that the will of God cannot be coerced by a fee (Numbers 22:18).

In conclusion, the fulfillment of prophecy even if it had been always evident to the prophet’s contemporaries, is not an infallible evidence of genuineness, because true prophecy apparently may go unfulfilled. Many of the harshest prophecies uttered by the Old Testament prophets never came to fulfillment. They were uttered or prophesy to be guiding lights to the covenant stipulates as standards for behaviour. On the other hand, the false prophet’s word may come to pass sometimes as a test for God’s people. True prophets are not dreamers but they are entirely dependent on Yahweh’s inspiration. At all times therefore, the moral and religious character of their words and actions are decisive if one is to know that they are genuinely commissioned by God to be prophets, not fulfillment of their prophecies.

### **3.3 Jonah as a prophetic book**

There has been argument to whether the book of Jonah could be called a prophetic book. The above discussion has given us clearer picture of who a prophet is. Many scholars differ in their view. Let us briefly see some of their opinions. Boadt (1984) is of the opinion that the author of Jonah makes important points about prophecy and nature of God without ever losing his sense of humor while creating his outrageous tale. Eynikel (1998) holds that “the book of Jonah is unique in prophetic literature. No other book in the prophetic canon contains so much prophetic narrative and so little prophetic speech (only five words in Hebrew)” (p. 1147). Uniqueness of this prophetic book lies as well on Jonah’s audience-the Ninevites. Jeremiah like other prophets preached against the Gentiles, but only in Jonah are the Gentiles not just condemned but given a choice to convert. Eynikel gave reason for the inclusion of Jonah in the prophets saying, “The reason why Jonah is included in the Prophets (and not, for example, in the wisdom literature) is because it essentially speaks about reconciliation (the Jewish liturgy where the book is read on Yom Kippur)” (p.1147).

For Allen (1976), though the book of Jonah is among the Minor Prophets, it is quite different from the rest of other Minor Prophets. This is because “the others are collections of oracles; in Jonah there occurs only one prophetic oracle, consisting of five words in the original” (p.175). He is of the view that the book of Jonah is defined as a prophetic narrative. However, it is unusual prophetic narrative since prophetic narratives in the Old Testament seek to glorify the man of God revealing to people that he is a noble mediator of God’s own power and glory. But Jonah is portrayed as no hero. Thus he said that “This book, on the contrary, breaks the pattern

surprisingly by showing how and why a divine oracle, concerning the destruction of Nineveh, was not fulfilled” (p.175).

Achtemeier (2005), unlike what other scholars said, added that “the book also stresses a change in a prophet’s role from a deliverer of oracle to a persuader- since God’s decrees can be reversed by repentance, the prophet must preach to arouse change of heart” (p.503). For Leclerc (2007) the book of Jonah is unique among the biblical prophets. It is not actually a collection of prophetic sayings but a story about a prophet. For him the only prophetic message Jonah delivers is one brief sentence comprising only five words in Hebrew. Therefore, rather than reporting the words of the prophet like those of Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha, the story focuses on the deeds of the prophet. Furthermore, Branick (2012) identified it as the collection of preaching from a historical prophet, like the collection of preaching of Hosea or Joel.

However, not so for Schmidt (2008) who held the opposite view when he said “In the book of the twelve Prophets the book of Jonah holds a special place, because it is not a collection of prophetic sayings... but a prose story about a prophet” (p.330). For Harrington (1965), the Book of Jonah, though listed among the twelve Minor Prophets, is not a prophetic book (p.357). Furthermore, Lundbom (2010) referred to the book of Jonah as folktale because of the extraordinary features in the story. He refers to the Prophet Jonah as “The reluctant prophet” (p.121). If Jonah is called a reluctant prophet, therefore the book is prophetic book with the story of a reluctant prophet.

Ephros (1999) affirmed the prophetic aspect of the book. For him some aspects of the text make one to opt for an allegorical interpretation of the prophetic book. He believed that the proposed allegorical analysis could be used in order to answer some questions raised by the text.



The above views notwithstanding, the book of Jonah is a prophetic book. The canon of the Old Testament included it in the first place. The book though more of story about a prophet contains prophetic message. God called and commissioned the prophet with a message. The book of the prophet Jonah played a great role and was part of the prophetic book read on יום כפר (the Day of Atonement). It contains God-breathed messages. The exegesis of Jonah 1: 1-3 below will give more reasons why the book is prophetic. It will place it in line with other prophetic formula within Old Testament prophetic books.

### **3.4 Exegesis of Jonah 1:1-3**

Jonah 1:1-3 is clearly delimited as the first pericope in this narrative discourse. This pericope serves as an introduction of the narrative. Here the author introduces the persons, places significant for the story and engages the reader's attention by the unrelenting forward movement of the action, and immediately raises a number of questions: Why a mission to pagan Nineveh? What message will be delivered to them? Why did Jonah disobey? How will God respond to Jonah's action?

The narrative commences 1:1 with וַיָּבֵי, as Ruth (1:1), 1 Samuel (1:1) and others do. It is translated as "Now...came". After the introduction and commission of Jonah, 1:3 deals with his surprise response to Yahweh in the opposite direction. The next verse 1:4 begins a different pericope dealing with God's response to Jonah's action of disobedience. Thus Jonah 1:1-3 forms the first pericope setting the stage and the person, place, message and the reason for the message. Below is the text and literal translation.

The text of Jonah 1:1-3	Translation into English
וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יוֹנָה בֶן־אֲמִטַּי לֵאמֹר : קוּם לֶךְ	Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, “Arise go
אֶל־נִינְוֵה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וּקְרָא עָלֶיהָ כִּי־עָלְתָה רָעָתָם לִפְנֵי : :	to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.”
וַיָּקָם יוֹנָה לִבְרֹחַ מִרְשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּרֵד יָפוֹ וַיִּמְצָא אֲנִיָּה   בָּאָה מִרְשִׁישׁ וַיִּתֵּן שְׂכָרָהּ וַיֵּרֵד בָּהּ לָבוֹא עִמָּהֶם מִרְשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה:	But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

The story begins with וַיְהִי , as Ruth (1:1), 1 Samuel (1:1), Nehemiah (1:1b) and others do. This was the standing formula with which historical events were linked on to one another so far as every occurrence follows another in chronological sequence. This opening וַיְהִי is a signal that what follows will be a narrative, a story. The ו (and) is simply attached to a series of events which are assumed as well known. However, this by no means warrants the assumption that the narrative which follows is merely a fragment of a larger work (Joshua 1:1). The opening phrase of the book, וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה “Now the word of the Lord came...” is identical to that which is commonly found elsewhere as an introduction to a prophetic book (Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1). Limburg (1993) holds that the opening words of Jonah 1.1 make up a formula that is typical in the Deuteronomic History.

יֹנָתַן is the Hebrew word for “dove”. Jonah’s name which means “dove” suggests the notion of “flight” and “passivity” both of which characterize the prophet at least in the first two chapters. Also the additional information “son of Amittai” (meaning son of trustworthy) provides the first hint of the irony that pervades the narrative and identifies the main character of this book with the prophet mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25. That prophet would have been a familiar figure to the first hearers and readers of this biblical book. The Deuteronomic historian mentions Jonah in a report on the accomplishments of King Jeroboam (786-746 B.C). The word Jonah which means “dove” is compared to Israel in Hosea as “a dove, silly and without sense” (Hosea 7:11).

This dove is sent by the Lord according to Eynikel (1998) with a message having two possible meanings:

either “proclaim against Nineveh that their wickedness has gone up to me” or “proclaim ...because their wickedness...” In the first meaning, v.2b refers to what Jonah has to proclaim in Nineveh; in the second meaning, why he has to proclaim against Nineveh. Since ambiguity is a characteristic feature in the book, we may assume that both are meaningful for our reading. Jonah, the “dove” (a symbol for peace) is sent with this message to Nineveh, which is called “the city of bloodshed” in Nahum 3:1 and to the Assyrian King whose name is “King Warlike” (Hosea 5:13) (p.1148).

The command that is given (“Arise, go”) is, however parallel only in the Elijah-Elisha narratives (1 Kings 17:9; 21:18). The word of the Lord which came to Jonah was this: “Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry out against it” (Green, 2007, p. 709). It is even more closely related to the formula with which Elijah receives his divine message (1 Kings 17:8; 18:1; 19:9; 21:17, 28). However, this call formula is used only after Elijah had been introduced to the

readers. Therefore, we must interpret this formula as a reference to 2 Kings 14:25, since in Jonah 1:1 the prophet has not yet been introduced to the readers. In עָלָיו meaning “against it”, על does not stand for אָל (Jonah 3:2), but retains its proper meaning, ‘against’, indicating the threatening nature of the preaching, as the explanatory clause which follows clearly shows.

Jonah was asked to go to Nineveh the great city. While prophets had commonly been called upon to speak against the nations, no other prophet had been commissioned to put in a personal appearance (Jeremiah 46-51, Ezekiel 25-32). It was one thing to speak, and to actually go there and personally deliver it was another thing. Other Old Testament prophets denounced foreign nations from a safe distance. If proclamation were merely prediction, it could have been made equally well from Galilee (Griffiths, 1979). Hertz in Griffiths (1979) is of the opinion that the fact that Jonah had to go into the actual situation to Nineveh and announce the overthrow to the inhabitants could only mean that God wished to give them the opportunity of repentance and redemption. We begin here to understand Yahweh’s possible intention and the message of Jonah 3:4.

הַגְּדוֹלָה הַעִיר הַקְּדוּשָׁה This phrase tolls like a bell through the book of Jonah (1:2; 3:2, 3; 4:11). This is one of the two things said about Nineveh as the narrative opens. The designation גְּדוֹל (great) for a city is rare in the Bible. Jerusalem is named “the great city” in the prediction of its destruction (Jeremiah 22:8). The second thing used also to describe Nineveh is that כִּי־עָלְתָה רָעָתָם לִפְנֵי (their wickedness has come up before the Lord). Historical and archaeological investigations help one to understand the first attribute of the city. The biblical writers shed light on the second one.

Nineveh was an ancient city first inhabited as early as the seventh millennium B.C. The prominence of the city in the Bible, however, is due to its distinction as one of the capital cities of the Assyrian Empire, which dominated the ancient Near East for most of the period from 900

to 612 B.C. Nineveh was at the height of its power under the Assyrian kings Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. Numerous important archaeological finds at Nineveh come from the period during these kings (Martin, 2005). The walls of the city nearly 8 miles (13 km) long, enclosed an area covering approximately 1,700 acres. Portions of the place covering three large city blocks have been excavated.

Nineveh was located on the east bank of the Tigris River near modern Mosul in Iraq, two hundred and fifty miles north of Baghdad. Nineveh was over 500 miles (800km) from Gath Hopher, Jonah's hometown. Ruins are marked by the mounds called Kuyunjik and Nabi Yunus (the prophet Jonah) which are still inhabited and not yet excavated though they conceal a place of Esarhaddon. In about 701 B.C. Sennacherib made Nineveh the capital of Assyria, a status it retained until its fall in 612 B.C. Nineveh was one of the four cities founded by Nimrod or Ashur after leaving Babylon (Genesis 10: 11-12). Again it is called "the great city" here.

Several biblical passages express the attitude of the prophets towards Nineveh and Assyrians. Both Zephaniah and Nahum spoke against Nineveh a couple of decades before its destruction in 612 B.C. Zephaniah hints at Nineveh's pride (Zephaniah 2:15). According to prophet Nahum, Nineveh's flagrant sins included plotting evil against the Lord, cruelty and plundering in war, prostitution, witchcraft and commercial exploitation (Nahum 1:11, 14; 2:11-13; 3:1,4,16,19). The command to Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh", should be heard against the background of this picture of Nineveh painted by these prophets.

As a matter of fact Yahweh's instruction did not outline the forms of their wickedness. It simply states כִּי־עֲלֹתָהּ רָעָתָם לִפְנָי for their wickedness has come before me. Neither the content of the cry nor the nature of the evil is specified. It could be presumed that Jonah knew and their wickedness

was known by all around. A reader of the story for the first time would anticipate what comes next.

Jonah sets out upon his journey. This verse began with a conjunction and verb qal imperfect third person וַיִּקָּם. Jonah's response is acted rather than spoken. But Jonah (rose) וַיִּקָּם יוֹנָה to flee to Tarshish. The word תַּרְשִׁישׁ is repeated three times here. The repetition at the beginning, middle, and end of this verse 3 serves as a stress emphasizing Jonah's flight in the opposite direction of Nineveh (Ceresko, 2007). While Nineveh lay East, Tarshish, a Phoenician port in Spain, represents the farthest known point to the West. What could possibly be his intention? Additional information is added מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה (fleeing - from presence of the Lord). This phrase is used twice here. It is used at the beginning of the verse and ends the verse as well.

It is necessary to make a distinction between two possible types of God's presence in the Old Testament namely God's cultic presence which focused on Israel's life of worship and God's structural presence which dwelt on his presence in the world as a whole. Israel believed that God had graciously condescended to make his dwelling place among them in a way he has not done for other people (Exodus 33:14-16). In this sense, Yahweh's word was articulated and his will made known in Israel such as it was in no other place. As far as Yahweh's rule and authority were concerned, that was believed to be worldwide. Cain for instance went away (מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה) from the presence of the Lord (Genesis 4:16). The other instance is in 2 Kings 17: 18, 24:20.

From this understanding then, when Jonah resolves to flee from the presence of the Lord, he is not intending to cut himself off completely from God. He clearly knows from his confession in 1:9 that there is no such place (Jonah 1:12). However, Jonah decides to sever his connections with that context where God's word and will are clearly made known, namely Israel. He seeks a place where he would not have to continue hearing the word of God commissioning him to

Nineveh (Fretheim, 2000). For Griffiths (1979) the phrase could mean “experimentally he is trying to evade the Lord (2:4), and especially running away from the dramatic stage where God is working out his purpose and judgments” (p. 922).

Following this line of thought, Jonah’s flight is not from God, but from the Word of God and in a particular way flight from articulation of the Word: לך אל־נינְוָה (Go to Nineveh). However, there is another nuance that may be present in this phrase. Prophet Elijah made reference that he stands in the presence of the Lord (1 Kings 17:1; 18:15). Jeremiah 15:19 also made use of same word. This has reference to one’s readiness to serve another (1 Kings 10:8). In Jonah’s case, he does not stand, he flees. Thus, unlike Elijah he abandons his service to God. Therefore, Allen (1976) in the words of Calvin put it that Jonah puts a distance as possible between himself and the place where Yahweh revealed his word to him, “that he might withdraw himself from the service of God” (p. 205).

The tension driving this narrative has now been set. What will happen to a prophet who disobeys the Lord’s command and flees away from his presence? And what will happen to Nineveh, that great city with its wickedness? What of Yahweh’s message to them, has it been abandoned? Jonah 1:1-3 above has given us the background. It will help us to understand the message in 3:4 and 2:1-11 will answer other questions and shade light on 3:4.

### 3.5 Exegesis of Jonah 3:4

וַיֵּהָרֵם יוֹנָה לְכוּא בְלַעִיר מְהֵלֵךְ יוֹם אַרְבָּעִים וַיִּקְרָא וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַנִּינְוָה נִהְפָּקֶת: – **And Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he cried, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overturned”.**

This passage is the actual verse that contains Jonah's prophetic message. Some authors group 3:4 under the first pericope of this chapter. For Ceresko (2007) it falls under 3:1-4 dealing with the action of the prophet. Keil and Delitzsch (2006) are of the similar opinion. Jonah 3:5-9 contain the response of the people of Nineveh to Jonah's message and their acts of penitence. The last verse ten (10) deals with God's deliverance of the people. However, in this research 3:4 stands out as a self-contained unit. The first pericope begins the same way as 3:1 (וַיְהִי דְבַר יְהוָה), and the episode of the story roughly parallel the structure of the first episode above. The reader notices this immediately with the repetition in 3:1-3 of God's command to Jonah in 1:1-3.

One fact is clear to Jonah that he cannot escape from God. God followed him across the sea and down to the very gate of Sheol. He realizes now that he cannot avoid the task. He has no option but to resign himself to his faith. His experience in the belly of the fish could have done great magic to his obedience as we shall see later. Therefore, he goes into the city. The narrative says: וַיֵּהָלֵל יוֹנָה לְבֹאֵא בְעִיר מִתְּלַחַד יוֹם אַרְבָּעִים וְיָמֵי אֶהָד וַיִּקְרָא וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַיִּנּוּהָ נְהַפֶּכֶת: – And Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he cried, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overturned" (3:4).

The reader who followed Yahweh's instruction in 1:1-3 and Jonah's silent movement in the opposite direction would be relieved that this time he moves not far from the city and possibly from presence of God but goes into the city (וַיֵּהָלֵל יוֹנָה לְבֹאֵא בְעִיר). Some authors made speculations concerning his state of mind, his unresolved theological conflict, and his determination to fail in his prophecy. However, this passage does not tell us that nor suggest such. There is no evidence in this context. The last verse 3:3 has it that – So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Thus he goes into the city כְּדִבַּר יְהוָה (according to word of the Lord). Jonah



now obeyed the word of the Lord. It is presumed that he is working with God (standing before him in service) and working according to God's desired goal.

The next information *וַיֵּלֶךְ יוֹנָה אֶתְּמַלְחָה* (going a day's journey) draws the mind of the reader back to 3:3b *וַיֵּלֶךְ יוֹנָה שְׁלֹשָׁת יָמִים* (a journey of three days). This statement in 3:4 seems to be apparently at variance with 3:3b. Nineveh was an exceedingly great city and three days journey in breath. But Jonah did a day journey and began his message. Keil and Delitzsch (2006) quoting Hitzig have this to say "the text does not affirm that Jonah went a day's journey into the city, but that he began to make into the city a day's journey, and cried out" (p. 274). Some authors made assumptions with reference to the time he started that it was in the evening after his day's journey was ended. For Keil and Delitzsch therefore-

All that they distinctively affirm is, that he did not preach directly as he entered the city, but only after he had commenced a day's journey, that is to say, he had gone some distance into the city. And this is in perfect harmony with all that we know about the size of Nineveh at that time (p. 275).

We may simply agree and following from the text that after some good distance where the message could be heard, Jonah started crying out to the people he saw. This explains the great tidings from the people in verse 6. One thinks of a massive chain reaction, of neighbor telling neighbor until the news reaches all. Therefore, *וַיֵּלֶךְ יוֹנָה אֶתְּמַלְחָה* could stand for a suitable place for the message to dispatch easily. This notwithstanding, some authors see it as part of his minimal effort and silent rebellion to foil Yahweh's message. Fretheim (2000) has this to say-

It is to be noted that Jonah only "begins to go" into the city, going only one day's journey. We have no reason to infer that he went any farther. Thus, much of the city never heard of him at all. While this may suggest that he makes little effort to

get the task done well, it also makes doubly striking the fact that the entire city responds nevertheless (p. 107).

There is no evidence as such for certain suggestions. That he began to go in a day's journey and started preaching may not clearly tell us that he made little effort. It may as well be seen as due to the urgency of the message having wasted much time in learning his lessons from God. We can take this *יָדָעְתָּ וְיָמְתָּ* to mean having known the urgency of the message and having reached a much suitable place to encounter people, Jonah started his message. Again, this does not exclude another possibility of continuing the message the next day.

The next word *וַיִּקְרָא* has great significance. Jonah now cried out. It recalls the initial invitation and commission to go and cry out against Nineveh which he failed (1:2). It calls to mind the request of the captain for Jonah to cry out which he also failed (1:6). In the above instances of the verb *קָרָא*, Jonah was required to call out or cry out for the good of others, which he did not. But when it comes for his personal difficulty and need for salvation he cried out (2:2). However, in 3:4 he cries out for the good of Nineveh. Therefore, something must have happened to him in his experience and encounter in 2:1-11. We shall still find out. Now, finally he cries out to the people of Nineveh, as he had been told to do in the first place.

The message of Jonah here is so simple *עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְנִינְוָה נִהְפָּקֶת*. This message is five words in Hebrew and eight words in English—"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overturned". Jonah's message is "marked by remarkable brevity and a decided lack of rhetorical creativity. Contrary to the usual prophetic practice in announcing judgment, the destruction of the city is merely announced, with no reason provided" (Limburg, 1993, p. 79). The five Hebrew words make Jonah the Bible's most laconic prophet, and possibly the most direct. Jonah's words are so simple and straight that any call to repentance can hardly be expected. The message seems to

proclaim destruction literally understood and following from his earlier action, yet the response was enormous. Jonah's message was incomplete when compared to other messages of the prophets against nations. Elisha was also sent to foretell the death of kings Ben-hadad and the brutal reign of Hazael (2 Kings 8:9-15). There is no mention at all of the sins the people have committed nor the mention of the wickedness for which Yahweh had sent him to cry out (Amos 1:2). In Jonah's case the sin is presumed to be known by all. Jonah was never given detailed areas for which he must call the attention of the people of Nineveh. However, the king of Nineveh in his proclamation called the people to turn from evil ways and abandon violence (Jonah 3:8).

“Yet” is the adverb עַד, which is a constituent adverb that has to do with duration or continuation in a temporal sense. It appears 116 times in the Hebrew Bible and has two primary categories of meaning relating to action: (1) durative action (2) repeated action. Often the adverb means “still” or “yet” suggesting an action or state continuing for duration of time (Wenstrom, 2010, p. 9).

Diverse interpretations have been proposed for אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם forty days. The figure of forty with a period of time is very ambiguous in the Bible. Goliath challenges the Israelites for forty days (1 Samuel 17:16). The rain lasted for forty days during the great flood in Genesis 7:4, 12, and 17. Many examples show it as a transitional period to better times. Forty days (אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם) is a favorite biblical period of time: the time Moses spent on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18; 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9, 11, 18, 25), the time for the mission of the spies (Numbers 13:25; 14:34), the time of Elijah's journey to Horeb/Sinai (1 Kings 19:8) as well as Jesus' fasting (Mathew 4:2; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2). This biblical expression for אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם for Keil and Delitzsch (2006) is according to the number which, even as early as the flood, was taken as the measure for determining the delaying of the visitations of God. For Zimmerli in Allen (1976) forty days here

could be referred to as “a time it would be possible for him to bend himself to the will of one who sends message” (p. 222).

Worthy of note here is that Yahweh’s message in Jonah 1:1-2 did not include time factor. Moreover, to give a brief time limit such as אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם was unexampled among the prophets. The closest are Isaiah 7:8 and Jeremiah 25:11-12, which refer to rather extensive periods of time. In Isaiah 7: 8, Ephraim was given a period of sixty-five days within which it would be broken into pieces so that it would no longer be a people. In Jeremiah’s case a period of seventy years was given. In the first instance of seventy years, the nations would serve the king of Babylon. Then, in the second instance after the seventy years are completed, Yahweh would punish the king of Babylon. They are not spoken to the people involved.

In Jonah 3:4 the term אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם refers to a literal “forty” as indicated by the adverb עוֹד which denotes limited duration indicating that the Lord has set a specific period of forty days in which the Ninevites can repent and if not the city would be overthrown. Furthermore, the sequential use of the conjunction וְ, which follows it and is prefixed to the proper noun נִיְנֶוֶה indicates that the city would be overthrown after forty days (Wenstrom, 2010). The number forty in the Scripture is used in relation to testing. This is how it is used in Genesis 7:17 in relation to the flood in Noah’s days. It is used of Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 24:18. The Lord was tempted by Satan in the desert for forty days in Mathew 4:2. These instances of forty days are quite different from Jonah’s forty days. However, the acceptable ground could be that the period is used in relation to test.

In Hebrew וְ is “and”. It functions as a marker of a sequence of closely related events indicating that immediately after arriving in Nineveh, Jonah was to announce judgment against the inhabitants of the great city. נִיְנֶוֶה is the feminine singular form of the proper noun נִיְנֶוֶה, which

was one of the capitals of Assyrian Empire and was located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River in northeastern Mesopotamia.

What remains unspecified is the significance of the word  $\text{נִפְקַד}$  'overturn'. The word was used to depict the violent fate of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:21, 25, 29). The destruction of these cities was remembered by the biblical writers as a dramatic instance of God's punishment (Deuteronomy 29:23; Isaiah 13:19). Those hearing this word literally used in connection with the message to the people of Nineveh would be reminded of the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah. However, the verb form here occurs in the reflexive or passive aspect of the verb, thus allowing for the possibility that the overturning can be the city turning itself around. Koehler (1998) gives several examples to the root meaning and the use of this root verb  $\text{פִּקַּד}$  in Old Testament. These are the biblical instances where the word has been used in the passive tense. In Psalm 114:8 the word is used to mean to "turn" or "put on the other side". 2 Kings 21:13 use the word as "to wipe a dish".

Furthermore, it is used in referring to movement, to "turn the reverse way". Yahweh turned  $\text{נִפְקַד}$  a very strong west wind and drove the locusts into the red sea (Exodus 10:19). Green (2007) translated it as "and Yahweh changed..." (p. 56). Other instances abound namely: "turn on the way" (1 Samuel 25:12); "turn round" (chariot) (1 Kings 22:34). Turn here in another angle means "change, alter"; "change into" (Amos 5:7ff; 6:12; 8:10; Psalm 66:6; 78:44; 105:29; 114:8). It is used in Psalm 105:25 in reference to "turn the heart" of people and "gave him another heart" (1 Samuel 10:9). The word appeared in priestly duty "turn white" with reference to leprosy (Leviticus 13:3ff; 13:20). It could further mean in the passive tense "be turned round, turn over, turn every way" (Genesis 3:24). Again  $\text{מִתְהַפֵּק}$  can be translated as "transform oneself" (Koehler, 1998, p. 240).

This verb also can refer to a radical change of heart. For example Moses states that “Yahweh your God turned (פָּנָה) for you the curse (of Balaam) into a blessing, because Yahweh your God loves you” (Deuteronomy 23:5, similar is Nehemiah 13:2). It refers to a radical change of heart in Saul (1 Samuel 10:9). It is used for a radical turning from sorrow to joy (Jeremiah 31:13; Niphal in Esther 9:22) or evil speech to holy invocation (Zephaniah 3:9). Wenstrom (2010) articulates this niphal reference in Jonah 3:2 saying:

The Niphal, which is in Jonah 3:4, refers to a radical change of heart in God’s own heart, from anger to compassion for his people in Hosea 11:8. 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 the two ways. Probably this is the part of 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 the context, פָּנָה is a double entendre promoting either Law and judgment, or Law and Gospel. Either way, Nineveh will be changed! (p. 12).

The word פָּנָה appears in Genesis 19:29 as הִפְּנָה to mean “overthrow, demolish”. When God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt. Therefore it is quite different from its use in the passive tense in 3:4 of Jonah’s message נִפְּנָה. The verb form in 3:4 occurs in the reflexive or passive aspect, thus allowing for the possibility that the overturning can be the city turning itself around. Jonah’s experience and turning round in chapter two helps us to understand the message intended by God.

For Wenstrom (2010) this expression “will be overthrown” is the feminine singular participle form of the verb **פָּרַח**. It is ambiguous since it can signify “judgment, a turning upside down, a reversal, a change, a deposing of royalty, or a change of heart” (p. 10). This ambiguity is part of the text of Jonah. However, greater option goes to the reflexive meaning of the word.

From the ongoing, the message delivered to the people of Nineveh by Jonah though is short passed as a prophetic oracle. He seems to have rendered it straight and blunt as it is without further explanation. Jonah 3:2 gives the second command to Jonah “Rise up, go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry out to it the proclamation that I am declaring to you”. It would look like the prophet should render it as if Yahweh would be dictating it to him. It could have been his determination to proclaim it as it is since Jonah 3: 3 preceding the prophetic message has it that “so Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord”. It would look like he proclaimed it without understanding Yahweh’s intention and the implication of the passive form of the verb. One could come up to this conclusion when one considers his action in 4:2. The message is an opportunity to turn from one’s evil ways and turn to God. This message of 3:4 would be better understood in the light of Jonah 2:1-11.

### **3.6 Exegesis of Jonah 2:1-11**

Jonah 2:1-11 is clearly delimited as poetic passage in the narrative discourse. This periscope deals with the prayer of Jonah in the belly of the fish. This narrative technique shows that the psalm is marked off from what precedes and from what follows it. Jonah 1:16 ends with the action of the sailors while 2:1 starts with the action of Yahweh **וַיִּמְן יְהוָה** and ends with the action of Yahweh **וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה**. The next verse 3:1 begins another periscope **וַיָּהִי** which is translated as “Now...came”. It is the same word used in the first periscope of the book of Jonah 1:1-3.

This passage becomes the centre that links the remaining chapters of the book of Jonah. Jonah 2:10 precisely is the central message: *וְאֲנִי בְקוֹל תוֹדָה אֶזְבְּחָהּ לְךָ: אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתִּי אֲשַׁלְמָהּ יְשׁוּעָתָה לַיהוָה:* (But I with a voice of thanksgiving, I will sacrifice to you; that which I have vowed, I will pay; Salvation belongs to Yahweh. Therefore, this periscope 2:1-11 begins and ends with the action of Yahweh to whom salvation belongs.

The psalm of Jonah 2:3-10 unlike the book of Jonah to which diverse genre are attributed such as midrash, allegory, didactic, satire, is traditionally accepted to be an individual thanksgiving psalm. Thanksgiving psalms generally contain some elements like: introduction; a description of the past distress; appeal to God for help; reference to rescue provided by God; vow of praise and testimonial (Stuart, 1987). These elements can easily be identified in psalms of thanksgiving like Psalms 116 and 118. Some of these elements if not all are identified in the psalm of Jonah, though there may be difference in the arrangement of the elements (Okoli, 2013). There is argument that the psalm of Jonah did not begin with a usual invitation to thank God. Landes in Okoli agrees that this feature differentiates it from thanksgiving psalm.

However, narration of past distress and deliverance received from Yahweh upon which an offering of thanksgiving or praise to Yahweh is established thus unites thanksgiving psalms with the psalm of Jonah. It can be observed that the psalm of Jonah contains *בְּקוֹל תוֹדָה* which can be rendered either as ‘with voice of thanksgiving’ or ‘with voice of praise’. The semantic closeness of thanksgiving and praise is suggested by Psalm 100:4 “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise”. According to Anderson (2000), both psalms of thanksgiving and praise share in common the praise of God, however differentiated by the fact that thanksgiving psalms praise God for particular action in a concrete situation of limitation and distress, while psalm of praise on the other hand concerns itself with general terms, extolling God. From Anderson’s



point and clear distinction, it can be argued that Jonah's psalm properly fits the psalm of thanksgiving because Jonah's concrete situation in the psalm is clearly evident. Let us give literary translation of this pericope.

Hebrew	Translation into English
<p>וַיִּמֶן יְהוָה דָּג גָּדוֹל לִבְלַעַת אֶת־יוֹנָה וַיְהִי יוֹנָה בְּמִעֵי הַדָּג  שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים וּשְׁלֹשָׁה לַיְלֹת: וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל יוֹנָה אֶל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו  מִמִּעֵי הַדָּגָה: וַיֹּאמֶר קְרָאתִי מִצָּרָה לְנִי אֶל־יְהוָה וַיַּעֲנֵנִי מִבֶּטֶן  שָׁאוֹל שְׁמַעְתִּי שְׁמַעְתָּ קוֹלִי:</p>	<p>1-3. And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah cried to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, "I called to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, thou didst hear my voice.</p>
<p>וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִצּוֹלָה בַּלְבָב יָמִים וַנְהָרָה יִסְבְּבֵנִי כָּל־מִשְׁבְּרֵי־הָאָרֶץ  וַנְּגִיף עָלַי עֲבָרוֹ: וַאֲנִי אֲמַרְתִּי נִגְרַשְׁתִּי מִנֶּגְדַי עֵינַי אֶרְאֶה  אוֹסֵף לְהִבִּיט אֶל־הַיְכָל קִדְשֶׁךָ:</p>	<p>4-5. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the sea-current surrounded me; all your breakers and your waves passed over me. Then I said. I am cast out from thy presence; how shall I again look upon thy holy temple.</p>
<p>אֶפְפוּנֵי מַיִם עַד־נְפֹשׁ תְּהוֹם יִסְבְּבֵנִי סוּף חֲבוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי:  לְקַצְבֵי הַרִים יִרְדְּתִי הָאֲרָץ בְּרִתְיָהּ בְּעֵזִי לְעוֹלָם</p>	<p>6-7a. The waters close in over me to the throat; the deep closed around me; sea weed was wrapped around my head; to roots of the mountains, I went down to the land whose bars</p>

	closed upon me forever;
<p>וַתַּעַל מִשְׁחַת חַיִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי: בְּהִתְעַשֵּׂף עָלַי נִפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה וַזְכַּרְתִּי וַתִּבְּרָא אֵלַיךָ תִּפְלִתִי אֱלֹהֵי־כָל קִדְשֶׁךָ:</p>	<p>7b-8. But you brought my life up from the pit, Yahweh my God. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered Yahweh; and my prayer came to you, to your holy temple.</p>
<p>מְשַׁמְרִים הַבְּלִיַּשָּׁנָא הַסְּדָם יַעֲזֹבוּ: וְאֲנִי בְּקוֹל תּוֹדָה אֲזַבְּחֶה־לְךָ אֲשֶׁר נִבְרַתִּי אֲשַׁלְּמָה יְשׁוּעָתָה לִיהוָה:</p>	<p>9-10. Those who give attention to vain idols forsake their true loyalty. But I with a voice of thanksgiving, I will sacrifice to you; that which I have vowed, I will pay; Salvation belongs to Yahweh.</p>
<p>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְדָג וַיִּקְא אֶת־יֹנָה אֶל־הַיַּבֵּשָׁה:</p>	<p>And Yahweh spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.</p>

In this area we are going to do exegesis of this passage and in doing so we shall see the message of Yahweh to Nineveh playing out in Jonah's experience. Jonah who earlier turned from the presence of Yahweh both in action, thought and theology soon turned toward the same Yahweh by declaring his faith and thus clarifying his message.

This pericope 2:1-11 begins and ends with the action of Yahweh to whom Salvation belongs וַיִּמַן וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה (And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah) and לְבַלְע אֶת־יֹנָה (And Yahweh spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land). The verb מָנָה does not mean to create, but to appoint. The verb מָנָה meaning “appoint” appears four times with a different name for God as subject. This time he appoints דָּג גָּדוֹל “a

great fish” which according to Branick (2012) “is an instrument of God’s rescue of Jonah from the depths of the sea” (p. 264). Yahweh intervenes a second time as undisputed master of his creation, this time making use of a creature to carry out his will (1:4).

The exact meaning of the phrase *שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים וְשֹׁלֶשֶׁת לַיְלֹת* “three days and three nights” is not certain. The only other reference in the Old Testament where the phrase occurs is 1 Sam. 30:12. However, the use there is a reference to the period the Egyptian’s did not eat. Its usage here according to Limburg (1993) is the period of time for the great fish to reach the place where Jonah is to be disgorged. The three days and three nights are not to be regarded as fully three days times twenty hours, but are to be interpreted according to Hebrew usage as signifying that Jonah was vomited out again on the third day after he had been swallowed; compare Esther 4:16 with Esther 5:1 (Keil & Delitzsch, 2006). There are few of the texts where the phrases occur and are used to refer to the period of a journey (Genesis 22:4; Exodus 3:18; Numbers 23:8; Josua 2:16). We can say that the figure of three like seven in the Bible indicates completeness. When the figure “three days and three nights” is used in Exodus 15:22, it signifies reference to the bitter end. Jonah really is indeed at the bitter end. However, its use here can mean a period of lesson and turning around of Jonah in the belly of the fish.

Jonah cries out to the Lord in his distress and Yahweh answers (v. 3). The verse begins with the verb *קָרָאתִי* recalling the two previous appeals for Jonah to call out which he failed to. (1:2 and 1:6). That Jonah now calls out to Yahweh in his distress shows the previous failures to do so. Again, that Jonah now calls out to Yahweh in the face of his distress draws a contrast to these two instances of his failure to call out. Now Jonah cries out or calls out to Yahweh in his distress (*מִצָּרָה לִּי*). This expression which is properly biblical recalls some psalms, “In my trouble I called to the Lord and he answered me” (Psalm 118: 5); “In the day of my trouble I will call upon you

for you will answer me” (Psalm 86: 7). The same term צָרָה is used in these palms as well as in Jonah 2:3. Therefore, Jonah’s distress is understood as his trouble.

It must be noted that the term for belly בֶּטֶן in v.3 is different from מֵעָה used in 2:2. We can think that this lexical variation and differentiation can be understood on the ground of the psalm’s relationship with its narrative context (Okoli, 2013). The next word שְׁאוֹל shows the place from where he calls out which compounds his distress. This is the abode of the dead. שְׁאוֹל is the place where people go at death (Genesis 37:35; 44:31; Psalm 88: 3). It is located under the earth (Numbers 16:30-33). It is a place of darkness (Job 17:13). In שְׁאוֹל there is neither the praise of God nor telling of God’s love (Psalm 6:5; 88:11; Isaiah 38:18). However, שְׁאוֹל is still not out of the range of Yahweh (Psalm 139:8; Hosea 13:14; Amos 9:2) (Limburg, 1993). The expression מִבֶּטֶן שְׁאוֹל “innermost part of Sheol” occurs only here in the book of Jonah. It is further qualification of Sheol. This expression underscores the enormity of Jonah’s distress or trouble. It is from this life threatening situation that he cries out to Yahweh and is answered.

**Vv 4-5** These verses continue the establishment of Jonah’s distress. The key word here וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי portrays Jonah identifying Yahweh as the cause of his distress. The verb שָׁלַךְ: ‘to cast’ used here expressing Yahweh casting Jonah out differs from the word טָוַל “hurl” used in 1:15 to express the action of the sailors who hurled Jonah into the sea at his request. The sailors hurl Jonah into the sea while Yahweh cast him into the deep. Deep מְצִילָהּ can literally refer to the sea (Psalms 68:22; 107:24; Micah 7:19) or distress (Psalms 69:2; 15; 88:6). The heart of the sea בְּלִבַּיִם יָם expresses the intensity of Jonah’s predicament comparable to his calling from the belly of sheol. We found some references to the heart of the sea as in the context of Yahweh’s victory at the Red Sea (Exodus 15:5; Nehemiah 9:11). Yahweh also rules over the heart of the sea (Exodus 15:8; 10).

The waves and billows are identified by Jonah as Yahweh's (כָּל־מִשְׁכָּרְיָהּ וְגִלְיָהּ). Yahweh's waves and billows pass over him. This recalls again the idea that Yahweh cast him into the deep. Thus Jonah's problem or distress is connected to Yahweh as the originator. It is to be observed that the action of the sea current is only consequential to Yahweh's casting. Therefore, it then follows that the action of Yahweh should be considered central contrary to the view that considers the action of the underworld to be central. This notwithstanding, the underworld plays its own function at the background as the instrument of Yahweh. Jonah's confession of Yahweh as the maker of heaven, sea and dry land (1:9) shows Yahweh as Omnipotent. This confession accounts for Jonah's association of the waves and billows of the sea to Yahweh. Worthy of note is that Jonah's attribution of his distress to Yahweh is consistent with his attribution of his deliverance to Yahweh (Vv 4 and 6).

Verse 5 advances the idea of verse 4. Here emphasizes the reaction of Jonah to his being cast into the deep by Yahweh. For Smith and Page (1995) it begins with an emphatic personal pronoun referring to Jonah which already syntactically suggests a contrast with respect to the preceding verse. This verse recalls Psalm 31:23: "As for me I said in my alarm, I am cut off from your eyes, nevertheless you heard the voice of my supplication when I cried to you". For Keil & Delitzsch (2006), these words are formed from reminiscence of Psalm 31:23, נִגְרַשְׁתִּי (I am cut off) being substituted for the נִגְרַזְתִּי (I am cast out) of the psalm of Jonah. The Psalmist like Jonah wrongly presumes to have been cast out from Yahweh's presence. However the Psalm uses the verb נִגְרַשׁ "to cut off", the psalm of Jonah uses the verb נִגְרַז "to drive out" although both are in the niph'al expressing passive. The verb נִגְרַשׁ used in the passive in the present verse can be seen as a divine passive. Although the subject of the verb is not stated clearly, the context of the psalm suggests Yahweh (Okoli, 2013). The temple motif (אֶל־הַיְכָל קָדְשׁ) found in here which is again

taken up in v 8 expresses more than a physical temple. The symbol of the temple goes beyond the physical.

**Vv 6-7** These verses advance the plight of Jonah in the underworld. For Staurt (1987) this verse 6 advances the metaphor of the deep-sea drowning. It takes further the action of the underworld depicted by the image of waters. **אֶפְפֹּינִי** furthers the sense of **יִסְבְּבֵנִי**, just as **תְּהוֹם** deepens the sense of **נָהָר** (v. 4). The combination of **תְּהוֹם** “deep” and **נָהָר** “sea-current” recalls the creation account of Genesis when **הַשָּׁחַר** “darkness” was over **תְּהוֹם** “deep” and **רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים** hovered over the waters (Genesis 1:1). This picture in fact recalls also the scene of Jonah 1:4 when Yahweh cast the great wind on the sea. In all these, what it is depicting is Yahweh’s omnipotence over the forces of the deep (in this case in Jonah’s situation) and just as the same Yahweh’s omnipotence triumphed over the forces at creation. The expression “water...to my neck” occurs also in Psalm 69:2. The word **שֹׁפְךְ** can both refer to life, neck or soul. Cary (2008) sees the possibility of the three. The waters rise up to Jonah’s neck; they extinguish his life and swallow up his soul in the depths of sheol. Limburg (1993) observes that beginning with “the deep” (2:5) and continuing through “forever” (2:6), the language is uniquely that of Jonah and an expression that is not echoed elsewhere (p. 68).

The word **סוּר** translated “weeds” is also used for the “reeds” where the baby Moses was hidden (Exodus 2:3, 5). It is also used for the reeds in the Nile (Isaiah 19:6). Outside these passages, it is found in the combination “sea of reeds”. The combination of the verb **תָּבַשׂ** (to bind) and **סוּר** in this verse however points to the sea weed in the sense of captivity, an idea that occurs in Psalm 18:4-5: “the cords of death encompassed me, the torrents of perdition assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangle me, the snares of death confronted me”. The weeds are “wrapped” around

Jonah's head, just the same way one ties a head-dress on one's head (Exodus 29:9; Leviticus 8:13). Therefore, this verse 6 advances the plight of Jonah in the underworld.

The next verse 7a takes up again and concludes this theme of Jonah's distress. Now Jonah goes down to the foundation of the mountains. קִצְּבָ in this verse recalls Ecclesiasticus 16:17: "the base of the mountains and the foundation of the earth shake terribly when Yahweh looks at them". This sense differs from that in 1 Kings 6:25 where the term describes the shape of the cherubs in the temple. In this psalm therefore, the context is clearly different from that of the above 1 Kings 6:25. But more appropriately קִצְּבָ recalls the sense of מוֹסְדוֹת תְּבִיל "foundation of the world" as in Psalm 18:16.

He is now beyond the stage of saving himself. The bars of שְׂאוֹל have closed in upon him. He finds himself in the place of death and is thrust upon God's mercy. The word יָרַד "go down" recalls Jonah's former attempts to go down, first to Joppa and then into the hold of the ship (Jonah 1:3, 5). Limburg (1993) has it that: "With "I went down," the sequence of Jonah's "going down" is complete ((1:3 twice, 1: 5). Both his horizontal and vertical distance from the Lord is at the maximum." (p.68). Now he is totally dependent upon the One he tries to flee from by all possible means. Only the One once abandoned can bring him back and God actually does. Therefore, this verse 7a brings Jonah's distress to its ultimate expression. His initial utterance of calling from the "belly of sheol" in Jonah 2:3 is echoed. It is Yahweh who cast him into the deep (2:4) to which he now goes (2:7).

**7b-10** The remaining verses stress the action of Yahweh's deliverance and Jonah's acknowledgment of his prayer coming to Yahweh's presence. Yahweh is the principal actor in deliverance just as he is in the case of Jonah's distress. This verse 7b introduces a change of thought evident not only in the movement upward contrasting the up-till-now movement down,

but also in the pronouncement and address of Yahweh in the second person (you brought me) followed by the name of Yahweh יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי which specifies or focuses the personal pronoun “you” (Okoli, 2013).

The word תַּחֲמוֹת, pit in the Old Testament often signifies the realm of the dead. “The Pit” is the place where one goes at death (Isaiah 51:14; Psalm 30:9). It may be used synonymously with sheol: “For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit” (Psalm 16:10). One who lives forever would never see the Pit (Psalm 49:9). Yahweh kept the soul of Hezekiah from the pit of nothingness (Isaiah 38:17). He also redeems the life from the pit (Psalm 103:4; Job 33:18; Proverb 26:27). Jonah’s descent into the underworld does not remove him from the sphere of Yahweh’s action. The reading of Psalm 139:8-10 is implied here: “if I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there; if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me”. This line therefore, stresses and expands the action of Yahweh’s deliverance already hinted in 2:3 and hoped for in 2:5.

Here in verse 8 Jonah’s life faints (הִטָּפַר) within him. The same expression is attested in Psalm 142:4 in reference to spirit, “when my spirit was overwhelmed within me”. The word הִטָּפַר can as well refer to “overwhelm” and carries the sense of loss of consciousness. These are some of the examples of psalms of lament and supplication in which it occurs: Psalm 77:4; 143:4-5; 102:1. Furthermore, it occurs in a psalm of thanksgiving Psalm 107:5: “they were hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them”. Yahweh is the principal actor in the deliverance just as he is in the case of Jonah’s distress.



Jonah's prayer comes to his holy temple (אֶל־הַיְבֵל קָדְשׁוֹ). This expression takes up once more the initial reference to temple in 2:5. The reference to אֶל־הַיְבֵל קָדְשׁוֹ can hardly be exclusive to a physical temple. For Griffiths (1979) this expression is probably not the literal Jerusalem temple (Jonah came from the northern kingdom), but the heavenly temple of Isaiah 6:1. However, according to Ravasi in Okoli (2013),

The Psalmist by using the term הַיְבֵל often refers to the close relationship between the heavenly and earthly abode of Yahweh. Yahweh is in heaven but his sanctuary is on earth and there is a vertical line that connects the heavenly and earthly temple of Yahweh (p.26).

Following this line of argument then, the presence of Yahweh is fundamental to the temple, heavenly or earthly. This understanding is corroborated by some biblical passages (Psalm 5:8; 18:7, 138:2; 29:9; and 2 Samuel 22:7). The presence of Yahweh is moreover the guarantee for salvation as in the case of Jonah (Okoli, 2013).

In verse 9, Jonah draws a contrast between the observers of empty vanities and himself (verse 10b). Verse 9 gives us a clue and reveals something about the audience that is being addressed. Limburg (1993) observes that “this sentence stands out as a word to the congregation, almost as a maxim or motto, with a clear didactic intent” (p. 69). For Allen (1976) “this section of the psalm envisaged Israelites who betrayed the covenant by resorting to the worship of the other gods...Cutting themselves off from Yahweh's aid, they only “multiply their sorrows” (Psalm 16:4) (p. 218).

The verb שָׁמַר is used to classify the observers of vanity and has the sense of “faithful devotion”. It connotes worship. It is a frequent deuteronomistic term for the injunction to keep the Sabbath (Deuteronomy 5:12); the commandment of Yahweh (Deuteronomy 6:17); and the month of

Abib, that is Passover (Deuteronomy 16:1). The two terms **הַבְּלִי-שָׁוְיָא** underscore the idea of vanity or emptiness and being used together, they emphasized the intensity of vanity similar to Ecclesiastes 1:1 **הַבְּל הַבְּלִים**, “vanity of vanities”. The placement of two substantives with similar meanings as in this case can as well indicate superlative (Sasson, 1990).

**עָזַב** normally occurs in the context of abandonment of Yahweh and his laws as in Psalm 89:30. This same idea occurs in Joshua 24:20: “If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you after he has done good to you”. It follows therefore that Jonah has clear knowledge of the recompense of punishment that goes with abandonment of Yahweh and this is an Old Testament idea. This verse gives us the clue to the event of Jonah 4 and explains why Jonah acts the way he does following the forgiveness of Nineveh by Yahweh.

The word **חֶסֶד** has no specific agreed translation. For Staurt (1987) “it could come from covenant loyalty” (p. 478). Other possibilities for Smith and Page (1995) range from loving-kindness, obligation, faithfulness, kindness, grace, mercy and so on. The term can as well be a reference to Yahweh whose mercy endures forever (Psalm 118:1-4). In fact, Yahweh is this way portrayed and identified in several biblical passages like Exodus 34:6. This theme in the book of Jonah is thus pronounced again in 4:2 and in an interesting manner from the lips of Jonah.

Jonah instead of abandoning **עָזַב**, will offer sacrifice **זָבַח** with a voice of thanksgiving **בְּקוֹל תּוֹדָה**. The phonetic similarities of these two verbs **עָזַב** and **זָבַח**, is very striking. This shows there is a movement from distress to joy; from lamentation to thanksgiving. In addition to sacrifice, Jonah will fulfill his vow ( **נָדָה**). Sacrifices and vows often occur together in the thanksgiving psalms. (Psalm 116: 14, 17; 66:13). Psalm of Jonah thus fits well the category of the psalm of thanksgiving. What these vows are, are not clear; maybe going down to Nineveh; at least that is what he does immediately after his release from the fish (Eynikel, 2000)

Jonah's testimony in 2:10b functions as the conclusion of the psalm. It summarizes the message of the psalm. The term *יְשׁוּעָה* can be rendered "deliverance" or "salvation". This means salvation "is in His power, so that He only can grant salvation" (Keil & Delitzsch, 2006, p. 272). Jonah thus gains his perspective and clarifies his message here: *יְשׁוּעָתָה לַיהוָה*: Deliverance belongs to the Lord. This statement is striking and may serve as a key verse of the book. This acclamation recalls Jonah's declaration in 1:9 in which Yahweh is acclaimed the maker of sea and the dry land (*אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־הַיַּבֵּשָׁה*). While 1:9 asserts Yahweh's creative power, 2:10 asserts his redemptive power. When Jonah is delivered by Yahweh, both in this verse and in 4:6, he reacts with thanksgiving and praise. However, it stands in sharp contrast to his reaction to the deliverance of Nineveh. Deliverance was offered to Jonah irrespective of his unrepentant attitude and why would it be denied to those who have actually repented. Fretheim (2000) puts it this way "his confession, 'Deliverance belongs to the Lord!' stands in brilliant incongruity to the limitation which Jonah places on the very deliverance when it comes to the Ninevites" (p.103). In this sense then for Jonah God's deliverance should be limited and not extend to whoever He pleases. This is at the centre of the argument between God and Jonah: why must the wicked go unpunished.

However, Yahweh is free in his action of deliverance. Deliverance belongs to the Lord. His ways cannot be limited by what is customary in human behavior. For Limburg (1993) if the theological significance of 1:4-16 came to focus in the confession in 1:9 with its declaration about Yahweh who creates, "the theological centre of this scene is most clearly expressed in this statement that God delivers, rescues, saves those who call upon God in a time of trouble" (p.71)

At this declaration, acceptance and complete obedience with its added promised fulfillment of vow already made, a new stage is set. Jonah having gained the correct theology and understanding changed the course of his movement, thus put an end to his problems. With this turning both in actions, thought, faith, vision, and anticipated fulfillment of promised vow, the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְדָג וַיִּקָּא אֶת־יוֹנָה אֶל־הַיַּבֵּשָׁה (1:11). This pericope opens with the Lord appointing a fish. It closes as the Lord speaks to the fish and the fish responds. Now the journey is over and Jonah's learning experience over. We can ask what could have happened if Jonah had not turned towards Yahweh when he was close to death? Could it be that Yahweh was waiting to deliver him once he turns to him? These questions give us clue to the message Yahweh gave to Nineveh through the prophet Jonah. The fish obediently vomited Jonah.

From the foregoing, Jonah who had earlier turned away from the presence of God finally yearns and faces the same God. In 1:1-3 he silently carried out his own will. He abandoned his primary duty as a prophet. At the end of the learning experience, Jonah is ready to keep his vow to the Lord. He is ready to work as a prophet of God. God throughout this stage seems to be guiding and leading him to make a positive turn towards him. Immediately the desired response to God is made, a new Jonah emerged. It would look like God was standing by his side handing out freely his gift and waiting patiently for him to receive it. This pericope gives new light to Jonah 3: 4 "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overturned". God like in Jonah's experience in 2:1-11 offers similar gift of salvation to the people of Nineveh. He waits patiently for their response. He does not desire their destruction. This idea is clearly expressed in Ezekiel 19: 23 "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" Jonah was the only prophet against nations that was sent to proclaim the

message in the foreign land. If Yahweh had intended their destruction, he would not have sent Jonah to prophecy in Nineveh. Again, if the message was for annihilation of the wicked, Yahweh would not have guided Jonah to turn, understand and accept that “salvation belongs to him”.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MIDRASHIC INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK AND THE MESSAGE OF PROPHET JONAH.

The book of Jonah consists of midrashic story made up to teach important lesson. Therefore, in this section, we shall attempt a midrashic interpretation of the book of Jonah and his message. This will help us appreciate more the message God intends for all.

#### 4.1 The meaning of midrash

The term midrash comes from the Hebrew word *דָּרַשׁ* or *בִּקַּשׁ* meaning “to seek” or “inquire”. It is a type of biblical exegesis or homily found in rabbinical literature. For Hahn (2009) the chief purpose of midrash “was not to discern the literary meaning of the text but to make a passage of the Bible meaningful to the contemporary generation” (p.617). This understanding of Hahn seems to have deviated from the terminology which has the root word “to seek out” and make necessary “inquiry” in the text and about the text. Hahn goes on to say that no effort was made to examine the text in its precise historical context.

Achtemeier (2005) has a contrary view to that of Hahn. For him midrash does not only mean “to seek or inquire” but also “to interpret”. Bryan (2004) holds that the word comes from Hebrew, Aramaic meaning to “search, or study”. It is a Jewish and Jewish Christian method of commenting on the specific passages in sacred writings by comparing them with other materials from the same or other texts. The opinions of various rabbis may be cited in legal texts, while narrative texts are often illuminated by quotations, examples, and stories, particularly of a moralizing nature.

Midrash is found in two main forms namely the Haggadah and the Halakah. Haggadah is mainly an exposition of the meaning of the biblical narratives while Halakah is the exposition of the legal texts and the requirements set forth in Scripture. Pelaia (2014) holds that midrah ‘aggada’ can best be described as a form of storytelling that explores ethics and values in biblical texts. It can take any biblical word or verse and interpret it to answer a question or explain something in the text. For Hermann (1959) the activity which has for its object the regulation of life through the law is called halakic; the fixed norm resulting therefrom as well as a single proposition is called Halakah. He explains Haggadah as form of Midrash saying –

It is again through Midrash that Holy Writ was made to do this service; but this midrahic activity is now ordinarily expressed by the word haggadah. The Haggadah in part followed closely the biblical text; frequently, however, the latter served as a peg upon which to hang expositions of most divergent sort. The Haggadah, which is to bring heaven nearer to the congregation and then to lift man heavenward, approves itself in this profession on the one side as glorification of God and on the other as consolation to Israel. Hence the chief contents of the addresses are made up of religious truths, maxims of morality, colloquies on just retribution, inculcation of the laws which mark off national coherence, descriptions of Israel’s greatness in past and future, scenes and legends from Jewish history, parallels drawn between the institutions of God and those of Israel, praises of the Holy Land, edifying accounts and all kinds of consolation. These addresses used to be delivered in synagogue or academy, feasibly also in private dwellings or in the open, principally on the Sabbaths and festivals, but

also on important public or private occasions (war, famine; circumcision, weddings, funerals and so on (p. 202).

From the above therefore, it follows that midrash were told from religious truths, maxims of morality, lessons from Israelites past mistakes with the aim to live harmoniously with one another and with God. It was after the return from Babylon that it developed gradually. After the return from Babylon, the Torah became more and more the norm in accordance with which the entire life of Israel was regulated in its externalities and the center of all spiritual life. It is to be wondered at that the written Law, the only sacred possession of the nation which remained from pre-exilic times was now to the Jews their one and all. The entire spiritual activity of the Jews assumed the character of searching and studying the Scripture.

The written “Torah of Moses” was not a complete code of laws. Thus, it was not intended for the conditions in the first centuries after Babylonian captivity much less for the time when the Jewish state had ceased to exist wholly. Therefore, there was the need to accommodate the Torah to later times. This was done partly by a continuous process of lawmaking, partly by Midrash exposition (Hermann, 1959). The book and the message of Jonah should be seen within this setting of post exilic prophetic message and Jewish religion.

Midrash is a Hebrew word as we said earlier referring to a method of interpreting Biblical text. The term can be used in one of three interrelated ways: as a verb, noun and as a book. Firstly, “midrash” can be used as a verb as a way of interpreting a biblical verse. A common way of doing this is by juxtaposing Biblical verses. Actually the point may not appear in any one of the verses by themselves, but taken together the point is implicit. Secondly, “midrash” can be used as a noun. In this sense it can refer to a particular verse and its interpretation. Thus one can say that “The Midrash on the verse Genesis 1:1 really means that ...” (and some midrashic



interpretation can go here). Thirdly, the term “midrash” also can refer to a book, a compilation of Midrashic teachings, in the form of legal, exegetical or homiletical commentaries on the Tanakh. In this sense, Genesis Rabbah is a book that compiles midrashim on the book of Genesis.

Elman (2016) is of the opinion that though midrash is the specific name for the activity of the biblical interpretation as practiced by the Rabbis of the land of Israel in the first five centuries of the common era, its understanding and use developed with time in history. The Hebrew word derives from the root, שָׁרַשׁ, which literally means “to inquire” or “to search after.” In the earlier books of the Bible, the root is used to refer to the act of seeking out God’s will, particularly through consulting a figure like Moses or a prophet or another type of oracular authority (Genesis 25:22; Exodus 18:15).

For Neusner (1987), midrash corresponds to the English word “exegesis” and carries the same generic sense. So far as the writers of the Yerushalmi or the Bavli read and interpreted the Mishnah, they engaged in a process of midrash, and so too for Scripture. However, for him the word “midrash” bears a more limited meaning, namely, interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, for the purpose of discovering a pertinent rule or theological truth in the Scripture.

Fruchtenbaum (2009) quotes Porton’s definition of midrash as the best definition for him. From the definition he brings out three most important elements in midrash. He states:

Midrash is “a type of literature, oral or written, which has its starting point in a fixed, canonical text, considered as the revealed word of God by the Midrashist and his audience, and in which the original verse is explicitly cited or clearly alluded to...” For something to be considered Midrash it must have a clear relationship to the accepted canonical text of Revelation. Midrash is a term given to a Jewish activity which finds its locus in the religious life of the Jewish

community. While others exegete their revelatory canons and while Jews exegete other texts, only Jews who explicitly tie their comments to the Bible engage in Midrash (p. 6).

Three elements are important from the above definition of Porton namely: exegesis, starting with Scripture, and ending in the community. This is actually very significant and interesting. The understanding starts with the real meaning of the Scripture and ends in the community. Fruchtenbaum (2009) goes further to explain Porton's stand saying:

The first point is that all details of a given verse of Scripture lay open for explanation. Every letter, every verse, and phrase contained in the Bible was important and written as it was for a specific reason. The Bible contained no needless expressions, no "mere" repetitions and superfluous words or phrases. The assumption that every element of the biblical text was written in a specific way in order to teach something underlines the midrashic activity of the rabbis. The advantage of relating one's comment on a verse to the character of that verse is simple. It bears the implication that what the exegete says now is the particular and inevitable message of the verse itself. Hence, this kind of Midrash, however fanciful, bears the claim of expressing the original meaning of Scripture that is, God's meaning...Furthermore, rabbis believed that everything contained in Scriptures was interrelated. Often one verse is explained by reference to another verse (p. 7).

The noun midrash appears two times in the Old Testament: 2 Chronicles 13:22 states that "the rest of the acts of Abijah, his ways and his sayings are written in the story of the prophet Iddo"; and 2 Chronicles 24:27 notes that "Accounts of his sons, and of the many oracles against him,

and of the rebuilding of the house of God are written in the commentary on the Books of the Kings”.

In Judaism therefore, Midrash is the body of the exegesis of Torah texts along with homiletic stories as taught by the Rabbinical Jewish sages of the post- Temple era that provide an intrinsic analysis to passages in the TaNakh. Thus Midrash is a method of interpreting biblical stories that goes beyond simple distillation of religious, legal, or moral teachings. As such it fills in the gaps left in the biblical narrative regarding events and personalities that are only mentioned. The purpose of midrash was to resolve problems in the interpretation of difficult passages of the text of the Hebrew Bible by using Rabbinic principles of hermeneutics and philology to align them with the religious and ethical values of religious teachers. It will be necessary to see the importance of midrashim to help us appreciate its application in the book of Jonah.

#### **4.2 The importance of midrash in theological stand**

Midrashic interpretation pays close attention to the meanings of individual words and grammatical forms, elucidates one verse by another verse, and relates the teachings of rabbinic Judaism to the biblical text. Achtemeier (2005) further states that “midrash assumes that the biblical text has an inexhaustible fund of meaning that is relevant to and adequate for every question and situation” (p.635). It is on this ground that the researcher agrees that Jonah is a midrash that has inexhaustible meaning relevant to the contemporary society which Yahweh had intended for all humanity.

Pickup (2008) believes that it is unfortunate that the major scholarly studies on midrashic exegesis have come not from evangelicals but from theological liberals in the fields of religious studies or from postmodern literary critics. For him “they tend to undervalue it in their analysis

because of their own anti-supernatural perspectives” (p.358). Many people think of midrashic exegesis as just a fanciful way of making Scripture say whatever one wants it to say which if that were true, would make it a hermeneutic that undermined biblical inspiration and authority. However midrashic exegesis is actually dependent upon the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Old Testament. Pickup goes on to raise these issues that in recent years, a few evangelical scholars have reopened these questions:

Did New Testament authors employ midrashic techniques that derived meanings from beyond what the human author of an Old Testament passage intended to communicate? If so, did they employ these midrashic techniques not merely as accommodative, *ad hominem* arguments when addressing Jewish opponents, but as inherently valid ways of reading the Old Testament? Is such a hermeneutic legitimate, and does it truly comport with a high view of Scripture? Can we today employ this non-grammatical-historical method of reading the Old Testament, rather than seeing it as something confined to inspired interpreters of the first century? (p. 356).

We agree with Pickup’s answer to the above question which is capital “Yes”. The only problem is with prior studies of the issue. Thus he states that:

In my opinion, the problem with the prior studies of the issue is that they have failed to fully appreciate the theological rationale of the midrashic method of exegesis that was assumed by Jews of the late antiquity. Far too many scholars explain midrashic hermeneutics as little more than the use of certain exegetical rules ..., in particular, the practice of associating Old Testament verses that contain a common word. These features are certainly found in midrashic

exegesis, but reducing the hermeneutic to such matters is overly simplistic and fails to address its fundamental philosophy and purpose (p. 357).

The Jews approach their Scripture in a unique way. They read the Old Testament not merely as a collection of different books written by different human authors on different occasions, but as if it were all one book. The ancient Jew's have high regard for the inspiration, unity, and paradigmatic nature of God's revelation. This fact is made clearer in Pickup's explanation that:

The Jewish exegetes kept in mind something that we may tend to overlook: the fact that, from the perspective of God in eternity, the Scriptures are really a "timeless unity in which each and every verse is simultaneously with the other, temporally and semantically". As a result, various contexts of Genesis through Malachi are ultimately all connected. So if a given verse is considered from that broader perspective, the words of the verse often call to mind additional truth when they are read in light of other contexts that God has revealed. Words are vehicle of thought, and context is largely what gives them meaning. So when a Jewish reader saw that the words of a passage expressed another truth if they were read in a different, divinely revealed context, he concluded that such a phenomenon could not be coincidental; all such intertextual connections – and therefore the fuller or multiple significations of the text that those connections brought to mind – must have been in the mind of God when he inspired the human author to state those words in the first place (p. 361).

It is this type of procedure of reading the words of one Old Testament context in the light of another that is graphically illustrated in the rabbinic literature particularly in midrash compilations such as Leviticus Rabbah and Genesis Rabbah. Whenever a Jewish reader

employed midrashic exegesis, a mere sentence or phrase within a psalm, prophetic oracle, strophe, pericope, or other section of Old Testament material could find relevance and new meaning when read in a related new context. It was not actually necessary for the entire section of the material to yield the midrashic reading.

Theologically speaking, as grammatical-historical exegesis seeks to understand what was in the mind of the human author of an Old Testament text, midrashic exegesis seeks to understand something much more significant: what was in the mind of God. Therefore, “a midrashic reading of Old Testament is concerned not much with what a human writer was thinking, but with what he, as God’s mouthpiece, was prophesying” (Pickup 2008, p. 362). What he prophesied were words expressing the thought of the Being who designed all of the interconnections running throughout Scripture. Therefore following from all these we gain a lot making use of midrashic exegesis. The points are made clearer by Brown, Perkins and Saldarini (2007) when they said that midrashic interpretation “clarifies peculiarities and obscurities in the biblical text and more often uses such reflections to make the text relevant to the questions, needs and interests of its audience” (p. 1082).

The gains we acquire from midrashic exegesis cannot be over emphasized. The understanding of God’s intended goal and intention in human life generally are some of the importance of midrashism in theological stand. Fruchtenbaum (2009) stressing the importance of midrash in theology says:

The search of the rabbinic sages was for the unity of human experience under God’s rule. Hence they want to know what connections they could locate between scriptural stories, what lessons they could learn from one biblical teaching for the interpretation of another...They wanted time and again to prove that reason

without Scripture is not reliable, but that Scripture is reasonable: A common Midrashic activity is to refute a reasonable or logical conclusion merely by citing a verse from Scripture. The Midrashic activity was important, for without it, people might not act in proper ways and might misunderstand the realities of the world, man and God (p. 7).

Midrashic activity has great theological import in the lives of the rabbis and community of believers. For Stern (1993) the role midrash played for the Rabbis “was to maintain the presence of Scripture and thereby of God in their lives” (p. 38). From the above we see the context of the message of Jonah and that could answer some questions lingering on in the mind of some researchers and authors. However, the consideration of Jonah as a midrash clears so much confusions. We shall consider Jonah now as theological midrash.

### **4.3 The midrashic interpretation of the book of Jonah**

The text begins with God’s call to Jonah קום “Arise” (1:2), but Jonah instead went down to the port of Jaffa. Jonah was a prophet from Gath-hepher in the Kingdom of Israel, then under the rule of Jeroboam 11. Gath-hepher is a city of the northern tribe of Zebulun as the text states: “The third lot came up for the tribe of Zebulun, according to its families. And the territory of its inheritance reached as far as Sarid...and from there it passes along on the east towards the sunrise to Gath-hepher” (Joshua 19:10-13). The tribe of Zebulun is described in the last prophetic words of Jacob “Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; and shall become a haven for ships...” (Genesis 49:13). If this fact is true then, we can assume that Jonah being a Zebulunite was quite comfortable on the ships. This probably explains his action when the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up, yet Jonah was in the inner

part of the ship fast asleep (Jonah 1: 5). The Talmud says that his father was from the tribe of Zebulun and his mother was from the tribe of Asher (Shuchat, 2009).

Jonah was called to rise up and cry against Nineveh (1:2). A midrah states according to Shuchat (2009) that Jonah received prophecy three times. The first time he was sent to restore the borders of Israel:

In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel (11 Kings 14:23-26).

Since this prophecy came to pass, Jonah was probably seen and regarded as a local hero. The midrash in Pirkei d'Rabbi stresses that Jonah was an extraordinary successful prophet. Every time he brought the word of God to his audience- Jews and non-Jews alike- they were persuaded by his words of reproof and repented (Ramon, 2007).

According to this midrash, the second occasion was when Jonah from Northern kingdom of Israel, prophesied to the Southern kingdom of Judah that its capital Jerusalem would be destroyed if the inhabitants did not repent. "But the Holy One Blessed Be He in His great mercy overturned the evil decree and they called him a false prophet" (Shuchat, 2009, p.47). Shuchat remarks that this was easy for the Judeans to say, since Jonah was not only from the Northern



kingdom, which did not get along with its southern neighbor, but also was hailed there as a patriotic hero.

The third time Jonah was called to prophecy was that to the Nineveh and this third prophetic mission was the one that made Jonah to run away. The mind here battles with the questions why now and why after the third prophecy? To answer these questions, we need to understand the man Jonah. Jonah was a lover of his people. Jonah belonged to the people of Israel whether north or south. They were his people. Despite the fact that Jeroboam 1 made Bethel into a religious centre of the Northern kingdom (1 Kings 12:28-29), Jonah refused to obey that law and reform. He continued to keep the three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem. The Talmud according to Shuchat (2009) recorded that Jonah was so devout in this regard that his wife accompanied him on these pilgrimages though it was not the customary thing to do. It is assumed that one such pilgrimage may have been the starting point of the third prophecy.

Rabbinic literature sees Jonah not as a seasoned prophet preparing for an encounter, but as a simple God-fearing Israelite from the Northern kingdom who happened to experience a prophetic encounter in the Temple during the festivities of the 'Beth Hashoeva' (the joyful ceremony of drawing the water to be poured on the altar as part of the prayer service of rain). From the above idea, Shuchat (2009) makes attempt to reconstruct Jonah's prophetic career as follows:

Jonah goes to the Temple...and, for the first time in his life, experiences a prophetic inspiration. In the first prophecy, God tells him that He intends to restore the borders of the Northern kingdom of Israel. Thrilled, Jonah rushes to the Northern king's palace to announce the good news, and when it comes to pass, he is considered a national hero. The second time he experiences a prophetic encounter again in the Temple. This second time, God tells him that he intends to

destroy Jerusalem unless the people repents. Jonah now goes to the Southern king's palace and probably does not get an audience with the king. When this prophecy does not come to pass, the Southern Kingdom brands him a false prophet and *persona non grata*. However, he still continues his three annual pilgrimages to the Temple (p. 48).

Sometime later, Jonah hears the third call to prophecy, the one we have in record in the book of Jonah. Now God calls him to cry out against Nineveh for wickedness. Jonah nods in agreement. We can assume that God gave him the period of forty days for the Nineveh. God asked him to cry out against the wickedness in the land. Jonah's action could have misguided scholar's interpretation to mean "God is thinking of destroying the inhabitants of Nineveh in forty days". Appalled Jonah now runs out of the Temple. He knows and believes God will not go back on his words. So all he has to do is to buy time, run away for it is forty days and the counting has just started for the destruction of the country of his arch-enemy.

He flees to Tarshish. Solomon had a fleet of ships at the sea that brought exotic cargoes from Tarshish to Jerusalem once every three years (1 Kings 10:22). From this time on, the Bible makes frequent reference to "Tarshish ship" or "ships of Tarshish" to designate vessels capable of long voyages (1 Kings 22:48). In any case, the function of Tarshish in the story is clear: Jonah is planning to set out toward the farthest point in the opposite direction from Nineveh (Limburg, 1993). He was not planning to come back soon. At least this movement going to Tarshish should be able to cover the required time for the people to turn from their wicked ways and thus the Ninevites must definitely face the anger of God. He was aware that God is Omnipotent. He made a profession of faith before the mariners that he fears "the Lord, the God of heaven, who made

the sea and the dry land” (Jonah 1: 9). However, he imagined if God would call him again from Tarshish to go back, the time would be up by then.

Torre (2007) is of another view with reference to Jonah’s disobedience and behavior. He must have thought of his people Israel and the consequence of the repentance if the message is accepted by them. He states thus:

Paradoxically, as hinted in the Midrash Yonah, the salvation of the Ninevites would usher in Israel’s ultimate fall, becoming “a rod of YHWH’s wrath.” A message to Israel was implicit in YHWH’s message to Nineveh. If a wicked pagan nation would heed Jonah’s proclamations and repent, thus earning the Almighty’s everlasting mercies, an accusatory finger could then be pointed at the recalcitrant nation of Israel – a people who claimed to be followers of YHWH. Nineveh’s repentance would become Israel’s condemnation. How could Israel’s obduracy allow it to remain secure after Nineveh’s repentance? Could oppressors be more receptive to YHWH’s word than the marginalized? If, indeed Ninevites repented, would YHWH not be justified in pouring YHWH’s wrath upon Israel for failing to show a similar spirit? Briefly stated, Israel would be condemned by contrast (p. 12).

Jonah chose Tarshish as his destination, as far away as possible from what he thought was the presence of God, that is according to Isaiah, a place that had not yet heard of Yahweh’s fame nor seen Yahweh’s glory (Isaiah 66:19). Although Jonah was aware that Yahweh was able to reach the remotest ends of the earth, he hoped at least to flee from Yahweh’s prophetic calling.

In any event, Jonah did not want to be the one to bring the Assyrians to penitence and thus, to accept God’s salvation. He boarded a ship and went to sleep. The winds blew, the storm raged on

but Jonah slept (1:5). He knew that the storm was due to his actions and he asked them “take me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you” (1:12). Finally, the sailors threw Jonah into the sea. The bowel of the fish into which Jonah is swallowed for three days and nights symbolizes a stage in spiritual development. Moreover, it is within the fish that Jonah becomes close with God, on a deeper level than when he declared his faith, identity and nationality to the captain and sailors. Ramon (2007) says that “In the course of the prophet’s maturing and development he undergoes a religious reversal: from a cerebral recognition of God as the Lord of creation, ‘who made the sea and the land’ (1:9), to an intimacy with God” (p.3). For Shuchat (2009), “the fish keeps Jonah at the depths of the sea until the moment he is willing to carry out God’s command: I will pay that which I have vowed” (2:10) (p.45). Finally, Jonah admits that man cannot act against Yahweh, even if he thinks it might save the people of Israel.

Jonah went into Nineveh and did as God commanded. Following Jonah’s anger outside the city when the people turned from their wicked ways shows that there could be two possible reasons. Firstly Jonah delivered the message as directed by God without understanding it was a call for repentance. He could have imagined that the word *הִפְּקֹהוּ* (overturn) evoked the sense of destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:21, 25, 29). Secondly let us assume he understood the message. He waited outside the city counting the days hoping the people of Nineveh would not meet up with the demand of repentance. He must have heard the dictates of the king demanding positive response to God’s mercy, but believed that their efforts would not attract God’s merciful heart. Though he did not act against God’s commandment, he staged a protest against God by the city gates. Jonah confronts God saying “that is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and

abounding in steadfast love and repentest of evil” (Jonah 4:2). However, Yahweh gave Jonah the response which ended the narrative in silence “And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many cattle?” (Jonah 4:11).

#### 4.4 The message of the prophet

The message of Jonah to Nineveh is *עוד ארבעים יום וינינה נהפכת* “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overturned”. As we discussed earlier the verb form here *נהפכת* occurs in the reflexive or passive aspect of the verb, thus allowing for the possibility that the overturning can be the city turning itself around. The response and action of the city of Nineveh and her inhabitants moved in the direction and understanding of the same word. Thus, this is a call to abandoning ones wicked ways. It is to make a turn from their usual way that has attracted Yahweh’s attention. To show how imminent this call is, a limited period is given: forty days- *ארבעים יום*. Wenstrom (2010) is of the view that if actually God wanted to destroy the city, He did not need to have Jonah to issue this proclamation to the people of Nineveh. It is against this background that he states:

So it was assumed by the audience that the Lord wanted the citizens of this wicked city to repent from their sinful conduct. Why would the Lord wait forty days to destroy Nineveh if He was determined to do so? So the forty days left room for repentance by the Ninevites. So this proclamation from the Lord delivered by Jonah to the Ninevites was taken by the Ninevites as an invitation to repentance (p. 8).

Therefore, the proclamation of Jonah is not only a prophecy but a warning thus refuting those who hold that this was a false prediction. Hence, “it was a warning implying the condition of repentance” (Wenstrom, 2010, p. 9). The message of Jonah therefore is the message of repentance; turning from old way of behavior that displeases God to new way of life.

Midrashic interpretation sees it as a call to repentance. If the people of Nineveh did not see and understand this message they could not have responded the way they did “And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least” (Jonah 3:4). For Torre (2007) “the message was accepted in spite of the messenger” (p. 19). Another midrashic explanation is that “some have claimed that the Ninevites were quick to repent because the sailors who endured the storm with Jonah went on to Nineveh and told how they had cast him into the sea only to see him miraculously rescued” (Torre, 2007, p. 20). The miraculous appearance and proclamation of Jonah after the sea incidence could have buttressed his prophetic call.

Like Lundbom (2010) we agree with other commentators who believe that the message of Jonah develops the teaching of Jeremiah 18:8 (p. 122). Jeremiah 18:7-8 helps us to understand the message of the prophet Jonah. He thus states:

If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it (Jeremiah 18:7-8).

In the proclamation of Jonah the word “yet” denotes limited temporal continuation (Genesis 29:7; Isaiah 10:32). It means “at the end of” as indicated by the expression “forty days”. The message can be rendered as “at the end of forty days, Nineveh shall be overturned”. However

some translate it as “yet forty days, Nineveh shall be overturned”. In either way, both interpretations indicate an interval of time before a future event. As such, the forty days would allow time for repentance. This is exactly how the Ninevites would understand the proclamation since if God simply wanted to destroy the city; He would not have had Jonah issue this message (Wenstrom, 2010). The ambiguity and the implication of the message are explained out by Wenstrom where he said:

This ambiguity is indicated by the fact that the Lord said He would do this at the end of forty days, which as we noted left room open for repentance. If the Lord was determined to destroy the city, He would not have given the Ninevites a warning. The warning implies that the Lord would relent if the Ninevites repented. The Lord didn't need forty days to muster up power and resources to destroy the city. He could do it immediately. So the Lord told Jonah that Nineveh would be changed, turned upside down but whether for good or evil, he did not know and neither did the Ninevites. This adds to the irony of the book of Jonah (p. 11).

It must be remembered that the words of the proclamation are not what Jonah composed, but are exactly what Yahweh told him to say; “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you” (Jonah 3:2). The words דַּבַּר אֵלַיִךְ (that I declare to you or I tell you) implied it. Thus, Jonah's distress in chapter four (4) is partly because he does not realize that his message came true as Yahweh had wanted. The message is more of a warning than prediction since the forty days obviously implies to the people of Nineveh that the Lord wants them to turn from their sins. The decree of the king shows the understanding of repentance when he said “let

everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands” (Jonah 3:10). In this sense, the forty days leaves room open for repentance.

Why then does Jonah again sink into bitterness and withdraw into the shade? After all, if the people of Nineveh indeed “repented of their evil ways” (Jonah 3:10), they apparently did not mock his reproof but respected him and his prophecy. Ramon (2007) gave possible opinion that:

Jonah’s alienation from the public does not stem from the fact that they escaped punishment, but that their repentance was not absolute. True, the people of Nineveh left their evil ways, but not totally. Had their repentance been untarnished, Jonah would not have been troubled by the terrible prophecy going unfulfilled. He would then become a hero in the eyes of those who repented because of him. However, as it seems in this story, the mundane, everyday wickedness continued. The people of Nineveh may have ceased to murder, pillage and rape, but they persisted in the small injustices in everyday life that are due to petty and weak nature of mankind (p. 2).

Actually, it is not the work of Jonah to judge the people if their repentance is absolute or not. Yahweh called him ( וַיִּקְרָא עָלָיָהּ כִּי־עָלְתָהּ רָעָתָם לִפְנֵי ) to cry out against the wickedness which has reached his attention and that he has done. Some authors are of the opinion that the Ninevite’s repentance is a camouflage and as such short lived. Although the city’s inhabitants repented, there is no evidence that their repentance did not last long, nor does evidence exist of a conversion to Yahwism (Torre, 2007). For “God cannot judge the Assyrians by the future but only by the present, since human beings have free will to act or to change their actions. Just as Nineveh could repent, so could Israel” (Shuchat, 2009, p.50). It would seem that even the



animals of Nineveh had clearer understanding of repentance and obedience to Yahweh's words than the humans who resided in Israel (Torre, 2007).

When Yahweh saw how the people of Nineveh had turned from their evil ways, He repented of the evil he had said he would do to them and he did not do it (Jonah 3:10). Would God not have spared the wicked city of Sodom from being overthrown if only ten righteous individuals had been found within its borders (Genesis 18:22-32)? For Yahweh is indeed a gracious and compassionate God. He does not enjoy seeking death for the wicked, but rather provides them with life if only they abandon their wicked ways (Ezekiel 18:23). God does not want any to perish, but rather wants all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Actually, we may agree "in a very real sense, the city was overturned not with destruction that was once visited upon Sodom and Gomorrah, but with repentance" (Torre, 2007, p. 21).

The message of the prophet from Yahweh is the message of salvation for the people of Nineveh if only they turn from their evil ways. The people understand the urgency of the call and respond accordingly even the wild beast. Yahweh opened his hands of divine mercy upon them with duration of time to turn their hearts towards him. The same mercy offered to Jonah was extended to them. God continuously extends similar graces to us only if we turn from our evil ways.

The question arose here what would have been the fate of the people of Nineveh if they did not turn from their wicked ways at the end of the forty days? There could be the possibility of the city facing the divine punishment. The incidence of Genesis 18:22-32 gives a possible clue when Yahweh intended to save Sodom from being overthrown if only ten righteous people are found in its territory. Therefore, the people of Nineveh must have been conversant with such historic event and made effort to turn towards the righteous God in order to avert the pending danger. The Ninevites' response to the message would determine the city's destiny.

The use of the book of Jonah in Jewish liturgical celebration gives clue to the understanding and attachment by the Jews. The holiest day in the Jewish calendar is יום כּפּוּר Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On this day, the people confess their sins. The high priest goes into the Most Holy Place to make atonement for them. Sacrifices are made and animal blood shed so that the people's sins could be 'covered'. It was a significant celebration for the people of Israel since Yahweh gave it to them in order to atone for their sins (Ngana, 2010). Since around A.D. 200, the afternoon reading for יום כּפּוּר has been the story of Jonah (Limburg, 1993). The book of Jonah is normally read on this day and not on regular Sabbaths of the Jewish liturgical year (Leclerc, 2007). It is used to evoke change of heart and honest confession of God. The book of Jonah is used on Yom Kippur and thus, it is a parable calling for personal conversion and responsibility (Hayyim, 1995). Since the book is included in the Yom Kippur service, the story of Jonah is generally associated with the value of repentance (Blumenthal, 2007). Therefore, the use of the book of Jonah to call for repentance and turning to God shows the understanding of the message of Yahweh to Jonah for the people of Nineveh and possibly the present reader or readers in every generation.

#### **4.5 Threat of annihilation**

This message of Jonah 1:1-3; 3:4 reflects the consequence of sin: a separation from God and the ominous threat of judgment. Sin conveys the great danger, which threatened the city. But it is also intended to produce something different from destruction, which is not only suggested by the outcome of the story, but is also implied by the words themselves. If God had intended to wipe out Nineveh, what reason was there for him to tell the Ninevites about it, and then send

Jonah to inform the people of Nineveh of his intention? God tells of judgment in advance so as to afford an opportunity for men to repent.

There could be the question of what was in the mind of Jonah as he delivered the message? No doubt he was just coming out from a very big experience and encounter with God. One would expect the fresh experience to be translated into his ministry. At the beginning of chapter four, Jonah's intentions and mind set are revealed. What is more, we learn that Jonah argued with God when he first received the divine command.

I pray thee, Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentant of evil.

Therefore now, O Lord, take my life from me, I beseech thee, for it is better for me to die than to live (4:2-3).

Whether or not the reader suspected this was coming, Jonah's motivation is clear now. Jonah wanted the Ninevites to be destroyed. He did not want to help them avert the calamity (Walker, 2015). Jonah is wishing destruction on the people of Nineveh. In Jonah 4:1 the prophet reveals the position that he has held since the beginning of the book regarding his prophetic commission and the possibility of Nineveh's deliverance. Jonah's use of Yahweh's self revelation in Exodus 34, rich with connotations of his underserved mercy to sinful Israel as well as his freedom in choosing the objects of his grace, is fortified by reference to the deliverance Jonah has just seen in which Yahweh relented concerning the threat he had made. It is precisely the exercise of these glorious, life-giving attributes of God towards Nineveh that has a killing effect on Jonah (Jonah 4:3) (Timmer, 2009).

The historical fact helps us to understand the prophet Jonah. The Assyrians were brutal and dangerous colonizers, exacting tribute and imposing policies. And when they waged war, they were known for inflicting unnecessary pain on their enemies who had surrendered. Torre (2007) articulates this hatred saying:

Is it any wonder that the Hebrews despised the people of the empire? Assyria was not some nation with which Israelites had religious disagreement; rather, it was an evil empire, the mortal enemy of Israel, whose fundamental purpose was to destroy Jonah's people, the Israelite nation, and its way of life (p. 11).

Worthy of note here is that the last time Israel had met an evil enemy known for brutality, the enemy was the Canaanites, and the result was the conquest of the land and the destruction of the people. Furthermore, by the time the book of Jonah's earliest audience heard its message, Israel had become the victims of Assyria's brutality. Israel was wiped off the map, its inhabitants dead or forcibly scattered so that the northern kingdom was gone forever.

The Prophet Jonah's mission resulted in the mercy for the people of Nineveh and the end of the people of Israel. It should be pointed out that this was not inevitable. The effectiveness of Nineveh's repentance shows that the repentance of the Israelites would have been equally effective (Walker, 2015). In another threat to Jonah, the repentance of Nineveh warrants the destruction of Israel. Jonah still did not want Nineveh to repent. Its annihilation would have saved the Northern Kingdom. Its continued success might mean (and eventually did mean) the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Shuchat, 2009). However, God's answer was "And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons" (Jonah 4:11).

The desire of God was not to destroy the city of Nineveh but rather his will was to forgive and show mercy to them though they rebelled against him. This knowledge of the Lord was clear to Jonah and he did not like it. The enemy of the Lord and sinner must both be destroyed as the consequence of sin against God. However, the Lord led Jonah in the similar experience of threat of annihilation that goes with disobedience to God's commandment. When the soul of Jonah fainted within him, he remembered the Lord *אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּזְכֹּרְתִי* (Jonah 2:7). His life was threatened and he became conscious of the Lord. The people of Nineveh felt their city and life threatened by the message. It is the Ninevites' response to the message that would determine the city's destiny.

Could it be said that it is this threat of annihilation that necessitated the repentance of the people of Nineveh or did it come from a free desire to embrace goodness? Does God actually make use of threat in order to achieve a desired goal? It can be agreed that the message of Jonah conveys danger and as such threatens the entire city. It could have a two way effect: to change, abandon evil ways and thus live or neglect and continue on the wrong track. The last option would be devastating. In either instance the people are threatened to continue or to change. God simply calls people for repentance. The call can suggest atom of threat but it is more like a warning of the consequence of taking an undesired part. God gives the warning as an opportunity to turn towards him. Prophet Jeremiah in his prophecy clearly shows this.

If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and

if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will repent of the good which I had intended to do to it (Jeremiah 18:7-10).

A decree of doom expressed above can be suspended by conversion. Therefore, God does not act arbitrarily but takes the human will into consideration. It is a proof of the effective value of penance (Couturier, 2007). The opposite is also true. A blessing expressed above can be changed to a curse if one lapses into sin. In other words, the free will has an important role to play in both salvation and damnation. Yahweh leaves the people free even when their choice is self destructive (Bozak, 2010).

Timmer (2009) asked several questions with reference to this issue of threat and repentance. In order to get clearer this fact, he posited these questions:

But were not the transformations of the sailors and Ninevites both forced upon them, given the danger of the storm in the first case and the threat of divine judgment in the second? Indeed, did not Yahweh act in much the same way as an imperialist nation toward these gentiles in using his unlimited power to get them to do what he wanted? (p. 20).

To begin with the sailors, it is not clear that they convert to Yahweh to escape death at sea. The text underlines a very different concern on their part, namely, the wish to avoid becoming guilty before Yahweh for murder or manslaughter. Their own gods having failed to save them, they come to revere the Creator without having any assurance that he will deliver them from their life threatening predicament (Timmer, 2009). The unmerited grace received by the people of Nineveh is expressed by Timmer where he said:

In the case of Nineveh, this same articulation of unmerited and gracious deliverance is fortified by the clear understanding that one's repentance or turning

to Yahweh does not guarantee deliverance from threatened punishment: the Ninevites cannot presume that Yahweh will relent and change his mind (3:9). Thus while the Assyrians clearly understood the threatened destruction of their city as punishment for their wickedness, their repentance is not presented as being motivated by self-interest; rather, the only sure result of the repentance is subjective, being a new relationship with the God whom they believe they have offended. Doubtless they understood it also increased their “chances” of being spared, but such concerns are relativized by the emphasis on Yahweh’s sovereignty and grace. Threats of punishment in Jonah thus function as epistemological aids designed to help those in violation of the Creator’s will to remedy the situation before they meet the fate that attends such behavior (p. 21).

Given the almost complete silence of the book of Jonah on the details of divine agency in the spiritual transformation other than the threat against Nineveh, further analysis of the anthropological and theological aspects of religious responses is impossible. For instance, the commitment of the sailors to Yahweh suggests that they did not resent the possibility that he might have facilitated their change of heart in certain way. Therefore, whatever influence the storm had on their decision, was a decision to which the narrative leads us to believe they stuck once safe on land. In the same way, the people of Nineveh show no suspicion that their own repentance was not genuine because it was undertaken under the threat of judgment, or that their actions of repentance in a way compelled Yahweh to change his mind about punishing them. Whatever contemporary convictions about human freedom may be, the book of Jonah portrays human freedom as inviolate in the context of divine intervention (Timmer, 2009).

Therefore, the graciousness of the Lord in forgiving sin and the compassion of the Lord are the glory of God, which the Lord revealed to Moses in Exodus 33 and 34. In dealing with the people of Nineveh here, God had a perfect opportunity to express his glory. God takes no pleasure in the destruction of evil people. God through the prophet Ezekiel declares “As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die? (Ezekiel 33:11f; Luke 19:42). There are many instances in the Scripture of divine mercy being expressed towards different individuals and nations throughout history. The Lord even promised mercy upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if there were at least ten righteous human beings in those cities and yet there weren’t except for Lot and his family (Genesis 18:26). Lot and his family were recipients of God’s mercy (Genesis 19:16).

Ezra and the Jews returning from Babylonian captivity were also beneficiaries of the mercy of God (Ezra 9:13). Several times Yahweh was merciful to the rebellious Exodus generation (Nehemiah 9:17, 31; Psalm 78:38). Yahweh expressed His mercy towards the Exodus generation when they were slaves to Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Exodus 3:7). His compassion will be expressed towards Israel in the future when they will be gathered from throughout the entire world and restored as client nation of God during the Millennium (Deuteronomy 30:3).

God expressed His mercy towards Israel in history by sending his prophets to warn them of the impending fifth cycle of discipline if they did not confess their sin and repent of their wicked behavior (2 Chronicle 36:15). David in his song acknowledged that God had mercy upon him (Psalm 30:1-3, Psalm 86:15; 103:1-14). He is in the same way merciful towards those who are humble and respect Him by joyfully executing His plan (Psalm 34:18-20). The Lord was merciful to King Hezekiah of Israel and gave him extra fifteen years to live on (Isaiah 38:15-20).



The Lord through the prophet Jeremiah promised that He would be compassionate to Israel if she turned from spiritual adultery (Jeremiah 12:15). Jeremiah prophesied as Israel was being led into captivity that the Lord would be compassionate again and bring them back (Lamentation 3:32). The Lord has always been compassionate to Israel though she had not recognized this fact (Hosea 11:4). The Lord promised that He would have compassion upon them and He would provide a Savior who would pay for their sins (Micah 7:19).

#### **4.6 Repentance as the Essence and Climax of Prophecy**

Repentance could be the essence and climax of Jonah's prophetic utterance. Jonah actually did proclaim the words as ordered by Yahweh (Jonah 3:2). Recalling the words of Ugwueye (2014) which state that "the prophetic word is greater than the prophet, which the prophet himself would have been the first to acknowledge" (p. 6), we affirm that Jonah did prophesy as Yahweh had said but failed to accept the stand of God. North (2008) puts it this way:

The prophets' message had to do with reform. Specifically, the message of the prophets was for a restoration of social justice through the action of the civil government. They demand widespread repentance. This repentance involved restoring the institutional arrangements mandated by the Mosaic Law. The looming negative sanctions were corporate; hence, the reformation demanded by the prophets was corporate (p. vi).

The pre-exilic prophets had warned the inhabitants of Israel and Judah of the captivity to come. For example Isaiah was so specific that two centuries before Cyrus's decree, Isaiah mentioned him by name (Isaiah 44:28-45:1). The captivity would be the climax of a long series of negative corporate sanctions imposed by God because of the Israelites' disobedience. These sanctions

were part of what theologians call a covenant lawsuit. The heart of Old Covenant prophecy was the covenant lawsuit. North (2008) gives explanation of what a covenant lawsuit meant saying:

A covenant lawsuit was a warning made by a person who had been called by God to warn the nation. If the nations continue to rebel against God by breaking the statutes of the Mosaic Law, God would bring corporate negative sanctions against the nation. Some lawsuits were brought against Judah, the southern kingdom. Some were brought against Israel, the northern kingdom. Some were brought against both. Some were brought against nations outside the Promised Land (p. 2).

Zechariah for instance was a post-exilic prophet who preached to those few Israelites who had decided to return from what had been the kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon. These kingdoms carried their parents into captivity. As a post-exilic prophet, Zechariah offered a message of hope. He came with the message if they obeyed God's law, as revealed by Moses, the land would prosper. Thus, he came with a message of repentance.

The pre-exilic prophets came before Israel to call the nation to repentance. Repentance meant invoking God alone as their redeemer, and then obeying the Mosaic Law as a sign of their covenantal subordination. The people of Israel refused to do either. "Therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 7:12b). The negative sanctions had already been applied by God. The people had to repent in order to escape them and then to gain comprehensive positive sanctions. The prophets called their listeners to repentance (North, 2008). Prophets in the Old Testament called the people to repent when they broke the covenant and sinned against God (Andreassi, 2004).

In the case of the people of Nineveh, they were startled by the message of Jonah the prophet. As we discussed earlier Yahweh gave them the opportunity to turn from their wicked ways through the prophecy of Jonah. The prophecy of Jonah in Nineveh actually came to pass following the understanding of the hiphal  $\text{נִהְפָּקְתָּ}$ , overturning of hearts towards God. The people believed the prophecy (Jonah 3:5). They turned towards God's mercy "Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we perish not?" (Jonah 3:9). If God had wanted to destroy them why would he take such a long time to do it? Thus the appointment of Jonah to cry out is to initiate the process of change (Jonah 1:1-2). Secondly, to have been present in Nineveh to proclaim this message points to same fact that repentance is the essence and climax of this prophecy.

There has been argument to the extent to which the people of Nineveh repented. Andreassi (2004) holds that "repentance is the rejection of one's own sinfulness and a turning to God for forgiveness" (p. 708). Repentance is a word covering several biblical ideas that range from regret to changing one's behavior so as to bring about a moral or ethical conversion (Achteimeier, 2005). For Stanton (1951) the people of Nineveh showed true repentance because true repentance includes turning from one's evil way, not just confessing the fact of sin. The people of Nineveh were asked to turn from their usual evil behaviors. They were to avoid violence. Violence is the arbitrary infringements of human rights (Micah 6:12). It is unjust exercise of power; injury; outrage; desecration; profanation (Allen, 2010). It is a term that occurs in the Old Testament prophets especially in connection with cities; urban conglomeration encourages scrambling over others (Jeremiah 6:7; Ezekiel 7:23; Amos 3:10; Psalm 55:10). Although the tale deals with moral misbehavior in an Assyrian city, the listeners would recall that Assyria's

aggressive violence toward other nations was condemned by the other prophets as a national characteristic and so by association it has special point (Isaiah 10:13-34; Nahum 3:1-19).

Nineveh was blatantly guilty of such social injustice and thus, the king confesses on behalf of the nation. He calls them to abandon such violent behaviors they were accused of. With the humble earnestness of the prophet Joel, the royal decree holds out the bare possibility of God's turning away from his anger in response to their turning away from the sin that had aroused it. The prophecy of Joel thus states:

Yet even now says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments."

Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil. Who knows whether he will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, a cereal offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God? (Joel 2:12-14).

If man's inhumanity to man is halted, there may be an exercise of divine clemency (Allen, 1976). The phrase of Joel above is reproduced here by the foreign king. He is being portrayed as an impeccable exponent of orthodox Jewish theology. The term "who knows" מִי יֹדָע in this call to repentance (Joel 2:14) corresponds to the cautious reference to God's mercy in the captain's speech אִילֵּי "perhaps" (Jonah 1:6). These foreign leaders acknowledged the sovereignty of God. Men cannot twist his arm. Even genuine repentance is no virtue by which to win his approval. His reaction lies hidden behind the clouds of mystery and glory that surround his throne until it comes into human experience. Not even the beasts are spared the fast, when the king issues the proclamation:

By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them cry mightily to God; yea, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we perish not? (Jonah 3:7-9).

The king is not satisfied with a cultic show of penance. He demands in addition a change of moral behavior, a personal turning from wicked ways, lest penance be a cloak for persistence in sin (Allen, 1976). The king further describes the needed personal reformation in acceptable Jeremiah's language (Jeremiah 18:11). It is this section that builds up an impression of the totality of Nineveh's repentance by mentioning the mourning of great and small, man and beast. The people of Nineveh responded to the prophecy of Jonah, repenting from their evil ways and violent life turned their hope to the mercy of God. Thus repentance is the climax and the essence of prophecy of Jonah.

#### **4.7 Jonah as a sign in New Testament**

Jonah is mentioned three different times in the New Testament and in each case is referred to as "the sign of Jonah". The three biblical passages are Mathew 12:38-42, Mathew 16:1-4 and Luke 11:29-32. All three references to "the sign of Jonah" in the Gospel occur in the context where Jesus is responding to opponents who ask him for a "sign" (Woodhouse, 1984). Mathew 12:38-42 refers to the whole story of Jonah with its two major parts, the incident with the fish and the preaching in Nineveh. Jesus does not retell the story but assumes that his listeners are familiar with it. In this instance, Jonah is called "the prophet Jonah" which recalls the occurrence in 2 Kings 14:25.

In Mathew 16:1 in order to test Jesus, the Pharisees and Sadducees asked him for a sign. That Jesus refused to give a “sign” to such hostile interrogators is indicated by Mark 8:11-12 where he clearly states that “truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation”. However, Mathew 16:4 added that “but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah”. Jesus refers to these people asking the question as “An evil and adulterous generation” and this statement appeared in the three instances (Mathew 12:39, Mathew 16:4 and Luke 11:29). The central point in this context of the “sign of Jonah” is in Mathew 12:40 which states: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly (κοιλία) of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart (καρδία) of the earth”. It follows that the context of the “sign of Jonah” raises a serious question over one common interpretation, which is often derived from Mathew 12:40.

In fact, if Jesus is refusing to give a sign to “this evil and adulterous generation,” it is likely “the sign of Jonah” refers to the resurrection? From this, are we to understand that Jesus simply said, “No sign will be given to this generation, except a resurrection from the dead like Jonah’s? Certainly the phrase “the sign of Jonah” may have connected for some of its Jewish hearers the miracle of Jonah’s deliverance from the belly of the fish. The “sign of Jonah” refers to the near-death/deliverance experience of the prophet, here understood as a prefiguring of the death and deliverance of Jesus (Limburg, 1993). Thus, the primary meaning of the “sign of Jonah”, according to Mathew 12:40 then is paradoxically the correspondence between Jonah’s experience in the belly of the sea creature, and Jesus’ experience in death, his decent into Hades (Woodhouse, 1984). The sign could be the salvation/deliverance granted to Jonah by God in Jonah 2: 10-11 since Jonah declared “Deliverance belongs to God”. Hence, Jonah turned out to

be a sign for the people of Nineveh. In the same way Jesus would be delivered from death to be a sign of repentance for the Jews who demand a sign in order to believe in him.

This pericope Mathew 12:38-42 concludes with two examples of how people ought to respond when a Jonah-like figure is among them. The group of people Jesus is addressing comprises the Scribes (experts in interpreting Jewish tradition) and some members of the party of the Pharisees. Jesus seems to say that these representatives of the best in Judaism could learn something from certain non-Jewish people. The people of Nineveh when they heard Jonah's preaching repented. Those who were hearing Jesus ought to have repented since the person and proclamation of Jesus is something greater than Jonah. Jesus furthermore gives example that those that surrounded him ought to emulate the action of a non-Jewish woman the queen of Sheba who attached great value to the wisdom of King Solomon. The people ought to put much value to the words of Jesus because the wisdom of Jesus is greater than that of Solomon.

Mathew 16:1-4 makes reference to the sign of Jonah without explaining it. It could be assumed that the explanation has been done in Mathew 12. Jesus tells them they can interpret the natural signs but could not interpret "the signs of the times" (σημείον τῶν καιρῶν). Jesus ends that only the sign of Jonah is to be given. This probably may refer to the understanding of Mathew 12 earlier explained.

In Luke 11:29-32, Jesus' discussion on the sign of Jonah is shorter than that of Mathew 12. The meaning here is not obvious. "For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be to this generation" (Luke 11:30). One questions oneself here in what way was Jonah a "sign" to the people of Nineveh? Karris (2007) warns that "Mathew 12:38-42 should not be read into this passage; Luke is not concerned about Jonah's three-day sojourn in the whale's belly" (p. 703). The last two verses of this pericope throw light to the possible explanation of what the sign

here means. Verse 30, 32 will make very clear that Luke's concern is with Jonah's preaching of God's word as the sign, for that accords with his insistence on hearing and keeping God's word proclaimed by Jesus. The power of God's word in Jonah is demonstrated by the mass conversion of the people of Nineveh. "The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold something greater than Jonah is here" (Luke 11:32). Therefore, in Jesus, God's spokesperson, greater power is present (Karris, 2007).

Jonah as a sign being used by Jesus in Luke 11:29-32 is meant that his hearers ought to draw lesson from Jonah's preaching and positive response from the Ninevites. The sign of Jonah in Mathew 12:38-42 refers to the near-death/deliverance experience of the prophet, here understood as a prefiguring of the death and deliverance of Jesus. The sign in Mathew 16:1-4 brings the above two together (Mathew 12:38-42 and Luke 11:29-32) with the sign of the momentous times when we are living. The people of Nineveh understood the time of the moment "Forty days more" and believed the prophet. The New Testament people time of Jesus ought to understand the time to hear the word, repent from sin, and trust in the mercy and deliverance of God.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE BOOK OF PROPHET JONAH AND ITS APPLICATION TO CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA**

In this chapter we shall be looking at how Yahweh's gift expressed in Jonah's message and experience can be relevant to the present generation especially from the researchers' geographical location-Nigeria. We have tried to interpret and understand the possible message intended by God, and its application is what remains. Since our cultural blind spot could not hinder our interpretation and understanding, it will not hinder our application, for as Richards and O'Brien (2012) rightly state "if our cultural blind spots keep us from reading the Bible correctly, then they can keep us from applying the Bible correctly" (p. 17).

#### **5.1 Nineveh in Jonah's Era and Contemporary Nigeria Situation.**

Nigeria is a country blessed with good human and natural resources but which has been destroyed by greed, envy, jealousy, violence, corruption, terrorism and bad governance. Achebe (2012) articulates the state of Nigeria since after civil war saying "we were plagued by a home-grown enemy: the political ineptitude, mediocrity, indiscipline, ethnic bigotry, and corruption of the ruling class" (p. 243). He insists that Nigeria is passing through serious painful transition.

Mmuo (2013) looking at the situation of the country states:

The country that 'There Was', fell because its leaders and citizens were full of envy, jealousy, pride, hatred and criminal violence against their fellow countrymen. Therefore, the country could not hold together in peace. It languished in pain, anxiety and insecurity, manifesting every symptom of failure for too long a time (p. x).

In recent times we have new wave of insecurity stories in Nigeria raging from kidnapping, Fulani herdsmen insistent attacks, bombing of oil pipe lines and Boko Haram constant menace. Some of these waves of violence can be religious in nature. For Amakwe (2015) “Nigeria the giant of Africa in both human and natural resources knows no peace and progress since after Independence. Her problem has been mainly a religious one” (p. 41). Niyiring (2014) puts it this way:

Many of us have been shocked by the wave of violence which our dear country has experienced in recent times, especially in the North. There is no doubt that the reasons for such violence being leashed on and by Nigerians today are many and complex. However, we cannot deny some religious undertone which has fuelled the already volatile situations, leading to attacks of various places of worship, both Muslim and Christian (p. xi).

The issue of religion and violence has generated a lot of interest in recent times. Ashafa (2014) treats this burning issue on the cause of violence in Nigeria. He agrees and disagrees to certain extent the influence and the part religion has played that has triggered violence in Nigeria. He states:

Religion may not necessarily be the inherent cause of violence or terrorism, and the violence might happen even without the religious context. Nevertheless, religion provides the “mores and symbols,” which make horrific bloodshed easier to vindicate. Only religion provides the moral justification to commit violence in the name of a war between good and evil. Only religion polarizes a situation into extreme absolutes that make compromise and concession either impossible or uneasy (p. 27).

The story of Nigeria which Chinua Achebe exposed in his last testamentary Book titled '*There Was a Country*', calls all Nigerians to a retreat, and challenges them to build up a new great nation on genuine foundations. The retreat would bring the nation to accept truth, justice, order, hard work, goodness, and that love which is God who owns and strives to hold all his children together in peace (Mmuo, 2013). The challenge to build up a new Nigeria on foundation of God's love and care for the entire world becomes a necessity. The former foundation described in '*There Was a Country*' is falling and the country is almost crash landing under the weight of hatred, suspicion, violence, and laziness, disorder and indiscipline; generating excessive greed for money and material pleasures. Through the message of Jonah, God would enlighten and energize the present Nigerians to turn back from their evil ways and turn towards God the true focus of humanity in order to achieve success and blessing.

It does not necessarily mean that Nigeria has never sought for divine help all these years or has not tried to put into practice biblical virtues preached by religious clerics. Omeayo (2015) rightly noted:

No doubt, Nigeria is a country which has sought such divine intervention at different points and circumstances of history, and yet, hardly lived up to the expectation of its reception owing to selfish and unpatriotic outlook of its leaders and citizenry towards a collective cause. Thus, the history of Nigeria, since independence has been heavily punctuated with the stories of such men and women of infamy whose actions and inactions got the country impoverished and created the ground upon which we are mercilessly derided in the international community (p. xiii).

Therefore, the message of Jonah is highly relevant to Nigeria society today. Salvation belongs to Yahweh *ישועתה ליהוה*: Yahweh in every generation calls out to his children to turn back from their sins as he called Jonah to cry out against Nineveh. The demand to cry out against all kinds of evil *רָעָה* in Nigerian contemporary society becomes pertinent. The king of Nineveh pointed out directly through his decree that everybody should turn from his evil ways and violence *הִרְעָה וּמִן־הַהַמָּוֶה*. This similar evil and violence to which the message of Jonah was addressed are found also in Nigeria. Repentance is the essence and climax of prophecy. Prophecy from Jonah's message is not all about annihilation and destruction of the wicked people. The verb *נָהַפְּכָת* in Jonah's prophetic utterance (Jonah 3:4) indicates overturning and Jonah's experience (Jonah 2:1-11) where he gained his perspective and clarified his message (*ישועתה ליהוה*: Salvation/Deliverance belongs to the Lord) buttressed the point. It is the desire of Yahweh even today that all should be open to his free gift of salvation.

## **5.2 The message of Jonah and Nigerian sinners and preachers**

Jonah was called to cry out against the wickedness of people of Nineveh (Jonah 1:2). It is a call to speak out against their sins. Yahweh expressed the magnitude of their wickedness which has come to his awareness (Jonah 1:2). When the message of Yahweh was proclaimed, God's message gave them opportunity 'to turn over' *נָהַפְּכָת* towards the right direction. The people of Nineveh believed Jonah and God (Jonah 3:4-5). They made necessary efforts to change from their evil ways (Jonah 3:8). They were urged by the King to abandon the violent ways of life at their hands.

They seemed to understand the danger of continuing in that state of life. St. Paul rightly points out that “the consequence of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). This is actually what sin does in the life of a Christian. Sin is the word used to describe moral evil when seen in the context of religion, as distinct from ethics or civil law. The most common words for sin in the Bible are the Hebrew  $\text{חַטָּא}$  and the Greek  $\text{ἀμαρτάνω}$ . The general sense in both cases is to “miss the mark”. They are mostly used in ethical contexts in the meaning of “to do evil”. In the Scripture they mean very often to do evil against somebody, especially Yahweh (Schoonenberg, 2004).

Sin is often defined as the free and deliberate disobedience of a creature to the known will of God. So it is primarily a religious and theological reality, a symbol which expresses our alienation from God (Fagan, 2004). All sin was ultimately disobedience, to God and to one’s lawful superiors and a strong emphasis on obedience became a feature of Catholic life. The evidence in Jonah’s action in 1: 3 and subsequently 2:1-8 show a clear sign of disobedience. In 1: 3 Jonah freely and deliberately disobeyed  $\text{וַיִּבְרַח יוֹנָתָן}$ . It was a free decision. For Ronzani (2007) “sin destroys our communion with God, one another and even the created world” (p. 50). The tragedy of sin which finds its expression in orienting us away from loving God and from loving one another is truly revealed when we come to know the Lord and his mercy. The disobedience of Jonah destroyed his communion with God which he realized, expressed in his confession and promise to keep his vow.

Sin is hated by Yahweh as Lord of the covenant, and so it’s most definite expression is in idolatry, forbidden in the first command of the Decalogue and denounced by the prophets. Idolatry sometimes appears as the source of all sins (Exodus 20:3; Wisdom 14:22-31; Romans 1:18-32). Above all, sin is revolt ( $\text{עֲשָׂו}$ ) offence, irritation ( $\text{חַמַּד}$ ) and contempt ( $\text{זְלַזְלָה}$ ) and has the character of a violation of the covenant, and indeed of adultery as regards Yahweh. This Old

Testament view was taken over and deepened by the New Testament where sin is taken as against the kingdom of God, against Christ (Mathew 10:33; 11:20, 24; 12:28-32; John 15:18, 23-25) and against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28f) (Schoonenberg, 2004).

However, it should be also noted that the Decalogue likewise invokes Yahweh when forbidden sins are against the neighbour and the prophets are not content to denouncing idolatry. They are vehement in denouncing injustice against the weak and a worship which is an alibi for social justice. In Old Testament therefore, the command of love of neighbour came to be placed side by side that of love for God, and Jesus ratified the process in the New Testament. Thus, Scripture gives us the task of describing sin as directed against God and man. Following this, a sinner is one whose actions, words or deeds go against the love of God and his/her fellow human.

St. Paul clearly shows who and who are referred to as sinners. “There is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-24). It became a surprise for the world to hear Pope Francis refer to himself as a sinner in need of mercy-“The Pope is a man who needs the mercy of God” (p.2). He explains his point that:

I have to say that when I speak of this, I always think of what Peter told Jesus on the Sunday of his resurrection, when he met him on his own, a meeting hinted at in the Gospel of Luke. What might Peter have said to the Messiah upon his resurrection from the tomb? Might he have said that he felt like a sinner? He must have thought of his betrayal, of what had happened a few days earlier when he pretended three times not to recognize Jesus in the courtyard of the High Priest’s house. He must have thought of his bitter and public tears. If Peter did all of that, if the gospel describes his sin and denials to us, and if despite all this Jesus said

(to him), ‘tend my sheep’ (John 21), I don’t think we should be surprised if his successors describe themselves as sinners. It is nothing new (p. 2).

It means we all are sinners in need of God’s grace-salvation. God continuously offers his salvation to all human being in every race and epoch. It is left for us the present generation to open ourselves to this free gift of God’s love manifested in Jesus Christ. Hence, the gospel proclaims divine salvation in Jesus Christ as redemption and forgiveness of our sins. Jonah had the opportunity even when he disobeyed. Not minding his earlier disobedience (1: 3), Yahweh offered him his free unmerited gift of salvation when he finally clarified his theology, mission and vow- Salvation belongs to the Lord. It does not belong to Jonah. Jonah was not the one offering salvation to the Ninevites but Yahweh (2: 1-11) יְשׁוּעָתָה לַיהוָה.

From the message of Jonah to the people of Nineveh, no time is too late for a sinner to turn to God. God wills to save all mankind. He does not desire the death of the wicked man, rather that he may turn to him and be saved (Ezekiel 18:23). God is very patient with sinners and cares for all. Limburg (1993) articulates it saying:

As one reflects on the theological significance of this short scene, the Lord’s patience immediately comes to mind. Without exhortations, without carping or harping, the Lord reissues the charge that was given to Jonah in the first place...Second, behind this reassignment is the Lord’s urgent concern for the people of the non-Israelites world, in this case the people of Nineveh...The repeating of this assignment, unique among prophetic commissionings, hammers the point home: God cares about the peoples of the world, be they Ethiopia, Philistine (Amos 9:7), Egyptians-or Assyrians (Isaiah 19:23-24) (p. 76).

Nigerians are also included among the people cared for by God. The people of Nineveh realized the opportunity given to them and tapped deeply into it. In our present situation, do we tap the opportunity given to us? Each person ought to abandon his wicked ways. It does not mean that sin should not be condemned. Francis (2016) clarifies it this way:

The Church condemns sin because it has to relay the truth: ‘this is a sin’. But at the same time, it embraces the sinner who recognizes himself as such, it welcomes him, it speaks to him of the infinite mercy of God. Jesus forgave even those who crucified and scourged him. To follow the way of the Lord, the Church is called on to dispense its mercy over all those who recognize themselves as sinners, who assume responsibility for the evil they have committed, and who feel in need of forgiveness. The Church does not exist to condemn people, but to bring about an encounter with the visceral love of God’s mercy (p. 3).

God embraces those who recognize themselves as sinners. When Jonah preached *עוד ארבעים יום וינינה נהפכת*, the people realized they have “missed the mark”. They have sinned greatly. They accepted their sinfulness and took responsibility for their action. They put manifestation of change of heart- outward manifestation of inward defilement on the road to embracing divine grace. Same should be applied to us, there is need to accept the responsibility of our sinful actions and wicked ways. Jesus in the Gospel of Luke clearly shows how two people who went before God to pray came out; one prayed with himself overlooking his sinfulness while the other beat his chest “God be merciful to me a sinner”. God justified the last person because having recognized his sinfulness humbled himself before God and God exalted him (Luke 18:9-14).



Jonah's message to the people of Nineveh gives us the lesson to put a stop to old ways of life which in one way or the other have affected ourselves, our neighbours and community at large. The word **נִהְפָּכְתָּ** which is in the passive meaning 'to turn', turn the heart, transform oneself, turn round, helps our understanding. There is need when the sinner must have recognized his sins, he must definitely make a turn, turnaround from his sins and put a stop to his usual sinful acts. It is actually the effort of the people of Nineveh that moved the mercy of God. "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented" (Jonah 3:10). The word **נִהְפָּכְתָּ** is implied in their action. The similar 'turning' is seen in the case of Jonah which automatically granted his deliverance from the belly of the fish (Jonah 2: 1-10).

### **5.2.1 Action/Response of the Leaders and the Citizens**

In Nigeria there is need to make a turn in the life of the citizenry especially with regard to the recent killings all over the country-Fulani Herdsmen, Religious killings in the north, Niger Delta Avengers bombings and rampant kidnappings almost done daily. This menace must be put to stop if the country can embrace the salvation of God. The king of Nineveh urged his people "let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands" (Jonah 3:8b). The king's order and decree assisted the positive response of the people. Nigerian leaders, traditional rulers, politicians, Government officials and the presidency must be out to support this religious appeal. It gives wrong signals when the government keeps dead silence over the recent happenings in the country. If they had condemned the evil and plead with the people to lay down their grievances, something positive would have taken place. The leader's voice must be heard in order to encourage and further convince the masses to turn from their wicked ways. The king of Nineveh assisted his people; our leaders can do so as well. Therefore let the citizens 'turn from'

all these violent ways of life. Who knows God may still heal our land. But we must first turn from evil.

### **5.2.2 Action of the Preachers/ “Men of God” and the church**

In the New Testament sense a preacher is a man who has the inner call from the Holy Spirit and the external call from the church the witnessing body of Christ on earth, and has been dully set apart as an accredited and qualified teacher of the Christian religion. His vocation is that of addressing the popular mind and heart on religious truth, as that truth is set forth in the sacred Scripture, for the spiritual profit of listeners as its end. The preacher, recognized as such by the church, speaks as a personal witness of God’s saving truth, explaining it and applying it as the circumstances of the people and the time may require. Bauslin (1915) following this definition clearly shows what a preacher is. Thus he says:

The preacher, in the sense indicated above, is with all other Christians a sharer in the freedom that is in Christ. But as a recognized teacher and leader of the church, he is not an unattached and entire unrestricted teacher. He is not to speak as his own, but as the mouthpiece of the church whose apprehension of the gospel he has voluntarily confessed. The faith of the church is, by his own assent, his faith, and her doctrine is his doctrine. He is not expected to give his own, as distinct from or opposed to the faith of the church in whose name he has been set apart to proclaim the gospel. Both the personal and the representative or official are united in him and his preaching (p. 21).

The preachers in this section refer to those called, commissioned by the church and who preach the faith of the church as imbedded in the gospel. Therefore, the preachers must as well learn

from the message of Jonah. God wills and desires to save mankind. He called Jonah and made known his decision for the people of Nineveh which for Jonah is not acceptable. Wenstrom (2010) clearly supports this fact saying:

In Jonah 1:2, the Lord told Jonah to announce judgment against it. The ambiguity of  $\text{יְהוָה}$  in Jonah 3:4 indicates that the Lord is attempting to give Jonah a little more information than he would like. The Lord intends to judge the city of Nineveh if they don't repent; and if they do repent, He will relent. This of course, Jonah knew about the Lord and hated. Jonah forgot that he benefited from this aspect of the Lord's character and nature and grace policy (p. 56).

Even when he finally went and proclaimed as he was told, he was yet to accept the position of Yahweh. The remaining story becomes a lesson for him. Therefore, preachers must first of all understand they are called to preach repentance like Jonah. Jesus after his resurrection sent out his disciples saying: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mathew 28:19). Therefore, preachers of the Gospel are called to dispose the minds of the people to accept the salvation which God gives freely to his people.

The Christian churches in their preaching should dwell more on God's love and mercy for humanity. This affirms what Chiegboka (2016) said that the supreme law of the church is "the salvation of souls and pastoral mission of proclaiming the liberty and love to all" (p. 6). Chiegboka goes on in the words of the Holy Father Pope Francis to exhort the church to rise up to their identity and responsibility in imitation of God in these imperative words saying:

Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her

preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love...The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behaviour after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception. In the present day, as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father (p. 17).

Jonah seems to lack this aspect in his approach. That is why at the end of his experience Yahweh asked "Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their rights" (Jonah 4:11). Yahweh yearns to save all mankind and makes use of human instrument that should carry out his will and mirror his nature in the world. Paul VI (1975) x-rays the duty of the human instrument in today's world saying:

The duty of giving encouragement to the brethren has been entrusted to us by Christ Our Lord as appertaining to the function of the successor of Peter and we regard it as a part of 'the daily pressure of my anxiety' as the motive of our life and activity and as primary duty of our pontificate. This duty seems to us to assume a special urgency and importance when we are encouraging our brethren in the work of evangelization so that in these uncertain and disturbed times they

may apply themselves to this activity with ever increasing love, zeal and joy (no. 1).

The preachers are entrusted this proclamation of the Gospel by Jesus Christ. The proclamation of the gospel message is not something which the Church may undertake or neglect at her discretion; it is rather the function and duty imposed on her by Our Lord Jesus Christ so that all may believe and achieve salvation (Paul VI, 1975). The Holy Father goes on to say:

Christ proclaims salvation as the outstanding element and, as it were, the central point of his good news. This is the great gift of God which is to be considered as comprising not merely liberation from all those things by which man is oppressed but especially liberation from sin and from the dominion of the evil one, a liberation which incorporates that gladness enjoyed by every man who knows God and is known by him, who sees God and who surrenders himself trustingly to him. All this is inaugurated in the course of the life of Christ and established definitely by his death and resurrection, but it must be patiently promoted in the course of history until it is fully realized on the day of the final coming of Christ, a day the time of which is known to no one but the Father. This kingdom and this salvation – these words may be regarded as the key to a full understanding of the evangelization of Jesus Christ (nos. 9-10).

The Church, therefore will engage herself in the liberation of all men at all times and at all levels in the measure that she is conscious of the gratuity of the liberty of salvation and also in the measure that she is aware of the greatness of this gift (Ibeanu, 2012).

This point seems to have been understood by Irish Spiritans in their mission in Igbo land. Ebelebe (2009) has it that for the Irish Spiritans the primary goal of mission is to plant the

Church and to increase the number of its members in Igbo land. The priest is the primary agent of evangelization, and his task is to proclaim the message of salvation and to provide the means of salvation- the sacraments –to those who accept the message. Salvation comes to the people only when they accept the message of salvation like the people of Nineveh. Ebelebe goes on to show that without the acceptance of the message one is left with the other option- condemnation. Thus he says: “The primary missionary motivation of the Irish Spiritans in Igbo land was the salvation of souls, who otherwise were doomed to perdition. The more the number of souls in question, the greater the motivation to reach them” (p. 96). Therefore, modern day preachers and evangelizers should be out to extend God’s free gift of salvation to all people.

This missionary task must not be impeded by one’s own personal interest. The preacher or minister must represent the interest of God whom he is standing for. Asadu (2016) reported what Anyaoku the Commonwealth Secretary General said of men of God who allow personal and selfish interest to influence their primary divine work. He frowned at what he described as reluctance of some men of God to condemn societal evils and called on pastors and other men of God to live up to their role as nation builders. He said that “The church’s role in nation building is jeopardized when men of God turn blind eyes to evils in the society including confronting people of questionable character, who use the church as a place to hide” (p. 9). He went on and called on the men of God to rise to their role as servants of God by preaching against evil in the society thereby promoting good moral standards. Therefore, ministers of God should not allow personal interest to cover divine interest.

Jonah when called to represent God as his prophet and cry out against the evil of Nineveh had his interest beside God’s interest (Jonah 1:3). The  $\text{𐎠𐎢𐎡𐎢}$  starting the verse 3 gives a tone of change of interest from the already given instruction in Jonah 1:1-2. This term “But he rose” here

introduces Jonah's alternate plan (Stanton, 1951). A prophet ought to speak for Yahweh not for himself. Ugwueye (2014) rightly states it that "A prophet is an individual who claims to have contact with the supernatural or divine, and who serves as a spokesman for the divine, delivering this newfound knowledge from the supernatural entity to other people" (p. 4). It follows therefore that the ministers of God should represent and stand for God at all times. Divine interest must supersede personal interest.

Jonah's experience when he went about his personal interest should be a lesson. Jonah later before the captain and sailors acclaimed this; "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9). It comes to his awareness that Yahweh's interest for his people stands in every place. At the end of his experience in the belly of the fish he bows to Yahweh's interest (2:1- 11). He contrasts and compares himself with those who have interest in vain idols that they increase their sorrows and forsake their true loyalty *מִשְׁמְרִים הַבְּלִי-אֲשֶׁר הַסֶּדֶם יַעֲזֹבוּ* (Jonah 2: 9). Finally he declares "But I with a voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to thee; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord"- *וְאֲנִי בְקוֹל תְּהִלָּתִי יְשׁוּעָתָה לַיהוָה*: (Jonah 2:9).

The ministers should make differentiation between the will of God and their will. It is the will of God to save Nineveh if only they would turn from their old wicked ways. There are times people observe some men of God and question if their preaching is really in accordance with Gods' will. Whenever, the proclamation goes against salvation for all but for minority, God's ultimate goal and will is questioned.

Furthermore, the message of salvation may be hindered by human instrument. However, God knows the best method with which to make use of the human instrument. The message of Jonah was so short and straight that the success it brought was a surprise even to the prophet. Ugwueye

(2014) states it categorically that “The prophetic word is greater than the prophet, which the prophet himself would have been the first to acknowledge” (p. 6). The prophet’s word is not his but God’s word. The Apostle Paul affirms this fact when he said; “For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (1 Corinthians 4:5). In preaching, the minister must realize he is proclaiming God’s words and not his. The effect and success of a good sermon does not necessarily depend on the length of time, but on the authority behind the message. On this Fretheim (2000) writes:

Little effort, poor skills, a terrible sermon- and total success. And a foreign prophet, quite unknown to the Ninevites! God had prepared a way for this message so that in spite of the missionary it found its way into the hearts of the Ninevites. God can write straight with crooked lines. God can use even false prophets to accomplish his purposes. With such intractable human material God has worked, and continues to work. The place of the messenger is crucial in God’s ways of working with the world, but so often it seems as if the messenger hinders more than help (p. 109).

Although Jonah has been rebellious and fluctuating in his actions, we found out that God has never wavered from His divine purpose to save Nineveh. In the same way the ministers of the word of God can be humanly fluctuating in their divine mission, but God will never waver from His divine decision in saving mankind. “Many a minister of this present day, with his book reviews and psychological discourses, could learn here from Jonah a mighty lesson. An ambassador is not expected to formulate his own message” (Stanton, 1951, p. 372). His work is to faithfully represent the homeland by bearing the message of the King’s command (2 Corinthians 5:20).



The primary business of a minister of the word according to St. Paul is to “preach the word” (2 Timothy 4:2). “And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Holy Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5; cf. 12-13). God instructed the prophet Ezekiel in a similar way “Son of man eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel...speak with my words to them” (Ezekiel 2:11; 3:4). Prophet Jeremiah was warned at the commissioning of his ministry “Do not say, I am only a youth; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak...Behold I have put my words in your mouth” (Jeremiah 1:7; 9; cf. Exodus 4:10-12). Therefore, such preaching under this condition is authoritative by Paul (Galatians 1:8-12). It has the divine stamp upon it. It brings conviction and bears fruit (Isaiah 55:11). Anything less than a God-given message savors of the flesh and cannot give life, for its origin is not in God. Like Jonah, he has no message of his own; it is prescribed by God: “Cry out to it the proclamation that I am declaring to you” (Jonah 3:2).

### **5.3 Ninevite’s Response to Jonah and Reconciliation/Conversion of sinners**

Jonah’s message was no doubt the shortest but most effective sermon recorded in history. Certainly, it produced the greatest revival on record. Nineveh accepted the prophet as God’s man with God’s message, for both man and message bore the undeniable evidence of those three days and nights of divine correction within the great fish (Stanton, 1951). As the narration goes, “the people of Nineveh believed God” (Jonah 3:5). This is the result of Jonah’s preaching. The entire land is gripped by a mighty conviction of sin. The people proclaimed fast and repented in sackcloth “from the greatest of them to the least of them”. Allen (1976) notes that “This most

orthodox expedient of self-abasement before God is accompanied by the donning of sackcloth, another traditional symbol of mourning or penitence” (p. 224).

Note therefore, in the first place they were shocked by the miraculous appearance of the prophet, for Jonah himself was a sign to them (Mathew 12:39). Now they are shocked as the gravity of their wickedness is pressed upon them. When the king issued the proclamation, not even the beasts are spared:

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them cry mightily to God; yea, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we perish not? (Jonah 3:7-9).

This we can assume is true repentance. It includes turning from one’s evil way, not just confessing the fact of sin. The king is not satisfied with a cultic show of penitence. He demands in addition a change in moral behaviour, a personal turning from wicked ways, lest penitence be a cloak for persistence in sin (Allen, 1976). It seems in this confession of guilt and call for genuine repentance the king had shared with them the advantage of Joel’s ministry: “Yet even now, says the Lord, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning” (Joel 2:12). Ronzani (2007) puts the story of Jonah as the story of conversion this way:

The story of Jonah can be seen as a short yet profound reflection on the journey of conversion. The contrast between the prophet, who is so reluctant to accept the mission that God gives him and the readiness of the people of Nineveh to enter into conversion, is striking. The call to conversion moves beyond the boundaries

of the people of Israel in order to embrace everyone: the city of Nineveh, which was the symbol of sinfulness, responds in a positive way to the preaching of the prophet. The mission of the prophet is indeed successful, since it brings about the conversion of Nineveh, but instead of rejoicing, Jonah feels disappointed. Jonah objects to the unlimited mercy of God and is even angry with God (Jonah 4:1). In all this Jonah had the opportunity to come to know God more deeply (4:2) and to believe in God's forgiveness for those who repent, no matter whom they are (p. 52).

The repentance of the people of Nineveh and the manner of repentance should be a lesson to modern day Christians especially for Catholics through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. A sinner offends both God and fellow human being. Knight (2013) has it that "There is always a communal dimension, both of sin and to reconciliation. We cannot sin against God without sinning against other human beings" (p. 19). Cooper and Epperson (2010) put it clearly that "sin points toward both a disruption in our relation with God and a distortion in our relationship with each other" (p. 69). It is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation that a penitent receives pardon and forgiveness of his sins. He becomes reconcile with God, the Church and with others. It is popularly called confession and officially titled penance. In Latin it is "*poenitentia*", which literally means repentance or conversion. This sacrament is founded on Jesus' call for repentance, his forgiveness of sinners, and his command that his followers forgive one another (Martos, 2004).

Confession of sin did not just start with the coming of Christ. Many points of the Law in Old Testament concerned themselves with such routines and rituals, and a number of points

concerned themselves specifically with the confession of sins. Take for example, Leviticus 5:5-6, deals with the various sins people commit when they swear rashly. It states:

When a man is guilty in any of these, he shall confess the sin he has committed, and he shall bring his guilt offering to the Lord for the sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a female or a goat, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for his sin (Leviticus 5:5-6).

By giving His people a clear plan of action, God makes it possible for individuals to confess their sins. First, He explicitly insists upon such a confession. Then, He gives the sinners something to do – a liturgical act of sacrifice and penance. And finally, He insists that they do all this with the help and the intercession of a priest. All of these elements would survive intact throughout the history of Israel and of the renewed Israel, the Church of Jesus Christ (Hahn, 2012).

Ibeanu (2012) is of the opinion that the second aspect of the Church's mission is that of reconciliation. The mission of the Church is fundamentally and primarily ordained towards liberation from sin and death, and towards reconciliation of men with God and with one another in Jesus Christ. This is what St. Paul means when he writes, that, "God ...gave us the ministry of reconciliation...and the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18f).

Neuner and Dupuis (2004) explain clearly what this ministry is and what is required of the sinners in need of God's forgiveness and mercy. The ministry of reconciliation is referred to as the sacrament of Reconciliation. They state:

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the faithful obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offence committed against him, and are at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example and prayer labours for their conversion. Since sin is an offence against

God and breaks our friendship with him, penance ‘has for its ultimate objective that we should love God and commit ourselves wholly to him’. When the sinner, therefore, by God’s mercy takes the road of penance, he or she returns to the Father who ‘first loved us’ (1 John 4:19), to Christ who gave himself up for us (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:25), and to the Holy Spirit who is poured out on us abundantly (Titus 3:6) (no. 1667, 1669a).

In line with the mission of Christ her founder, who reconciled mankind with God, the Church carries out the same mission today, reconciling man with his God, with one another and with the whole creation (John Paul 11, 1984). Hence, the Church throughout her entire history has tried to engage herself in this very mission. It is the recognition of the existence of sin in the world that makes the Church’s mission of reconciliation imperative. Sin exists in the individual and is even more pronounced in the communities and societies, despite the fact that Christ has achieved once and for all the necessary reconciliation between humanity and God through his suffering, death and resurrection. The Church now makes this reconciliation objectively real and historically present to today’s humanity. Since Christ’s coming in the world did not put to end the existence of evil in the world, the Church, which is the sacrament of Christ’s continued presence in the world, makes it her mission, to call the sinful man to repentance and conversion of heart (Ibeanu, 2012).

The confession of sins in this sacrament for Moore (2009) is “a self accusation displaying all weakness and sins committed after Baptism to the priest, so that he can absolve the penitent from them and obtain forgiveness from God” (p. 66). This confession of sin is among the acts of the penitent. It is an essential part of the Sacrament. This Sacrament requires the penitent to endure all these things namely contrition, proposal, confession, and penance.

The role of the penitent is of the greatest importance in this sacrament as it was in the case of Ninevites' repentance. When, properly disposed, one approaches this saving remedy which Christ instituted, and confesses one's sins, one's actions form part of the sacrament itself (Neuner & Dupuis, 2004). In a similar way, the people of Nineveh through their actions showed true repentance. As a matter of fact, we are not discussing the Sacrament of Reconciliation in totality but what the penitent should emulate from Ninevites' repentance. Wuerl (2007) articulates the part that must be done by the penitent in order to have a proper penance of sin. He writes:

What leads a person to the sacrament of Penance is a sense of sorrow for what one has done. The motivation may be out of love for God or even fear of the consequences of having offended God. Whatever the motive, contrition is the beginning of forgiveness of sin. The sinner must come to God by way of repentance. There can be no forgiveness of sin if we do not have sorrow at least to the extent that we regret it, resolve not to repeat it and intend to turn back to God. Our sorrow for wrong we have done should lead us to the sacrament of Penance...True sorrow for sin implies a firm resolves not to fall back into it (p. 6).

This shows the part played by the penitents in Ninevites' case of repentance. However, in the case of the Ninevites, the repentance was not out of love for God per se, but fear of the consequences of their wickedness. In Christian circle repentance may be motivated by love of God or the fear of the consequence of sin. It is best advised to be motivated by the unmerited love of God made manifest in the suffering, death and resurrection of his son Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, whatever the motive that pushes someone, the sorrow for sin is the starting point.

There are indispensable conditions for the forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism: contrition, or the sorrow from the heart and detestation for sins committed; resolution, not to commit sin again, out of love for God; the confession of sins to the priest; a good will to accept and fulfill the satisfaction or penance agreed with the priest to perform; absolution, the priest's sacramental sign for God's forgiveness, by which the Sacrament of Penance is complete (Moore, 2009). These conditions must be met for forgiveness to be complete. This could be referred to as the efforts the penitent is showing in order to win God's mercy and forgiveness. In the response of Nineveh to Jonah's message, they made sincere efforts which "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented" (Jonah 3:10).

The Sacrament of Reconciliation must be taken seriously by Catholics. It is observed that modern day Catholics and Christians alike have lack or poor sense of sin and its effect in their lives. Ronzani (2007) speaking of sin in today's world has this to say:

Indeed when we are no longer focused on God, then various idols take control of our life, all kinds of evils beset us, and instead of living in harmony and communion, we end up becoming a threat to one another and to creation itself. In spite of what many people may say, 'sin does exist'. The Catholic Church has always taken very seriously the pervasive reality of sin as it is revealed 'in values, structures and expectations of society and therefore deeply rooted in the values, goals, attitudes, habits, inclinations and self-image of individuals' (p. 27).

Those who avail themselves of this Sacrament of Reconciliation at times do that without full preparation. Some have taken it a routine culture of confessing sin without a personal conviction and effort to turn from sinful ways of life. Others go in for confession without fulfilling the conditions for perfect forgiveness of sin. The people of Nineveh not only turned from their evil

ways, but also pushed for a change in moral behaviour. They put their trust in God's infinite mercy and forgiveness. We modern sinners could learn much from the action of the people of Nineveh. Hahn (2012) has this to say:

A popular slogan back in 1970s was 'Love means never having to say you're sorry'. But that's not true. Love means not only saying 'I'm sorry,' but showing it, too. This is human nature – though our fallen nature resists it mightily – and the God who created our nature knows what works for us. We need to say 'I'm sorry'; we need to show it; and we need to do something about it (p. 22).

Therefore, true conversion is seen in the concrete way in which the evil ways are not only acknowledged but also abandoned, in order to embark on a new journey focused on God. The tension between empty ritualism, which ignores 'the neighbour', is always at the centre of the criticism of the prophets. Many prophets of the Old Testament had to call the people of Israel to conversion because of the gap between the 'worship of lips' and the 'ethical' commitment (Amos 5:21-27; Hosea 6:6; Jeremiah 7:1-28; Micah 6:6-12). The cultic formalism was a betrayal of the true historical faith of the people of Israel and the prophets had to intervene in a harsh manner to castigate this kind of cult and so to re-direct the heart of the people towards the true cult that entails a concrete reaching out to the poor (Ronzani, 2007).

Jesus is infinitely merciful, and he shares mercy infinitely through his Church, in the sacrament of reconciliation. Reconciliation or confession of sin is the key to our spiritual growth, and it is ordinary way that we believers come to a deeper knowledge of ourselves as we truly are, that is as God sees us. As the people of Nineveh were given opportunity to turn to God, so we have similar opportunity of coming back to God, turning from our wickedness towards God through the sacrament of confession or reconciliation. "Through confession, we begin to heal. We begin



to get our stories straight. We come home through the open door, to resume our place in God's family. We begin to have peace" (Hahn, 2012, p. 136). The words of Ronzani (2007) help us to conclude this section. He states that "the 'open-end' story is clear invitation for the readers to identify themselves with the people of Nineveh and to embark on a journey of conversion, by turning away from our evil ways (Jonah 3:10)" (p. 52).

#### **5.4 Jonah as a Challenge to Cultural and Ethnic Prejudice**

Jonah's message is a challenge to cultural and ethnic prejudice. The book of Jonah for Menezes (2009) challenges the false sense of superiority which the Jews of the post-exilic times were showing off. He states that the author's intention is to "widen the horizon of his co-religionists, to question their religious and racist prejudices and make them aware that God cannot be the monopoly or the property of any single religion or race" (p.172). In fact, in the eyes of God he says all individuals and all races are equal. Goins (1995) summarizes Jonah's prejudice saying:

Jonah is controlled by his own selfish ego and fear. He is not willing to offer his life unconditionally for other people. He doesn't understand that God pities even his enemies and has merciful compassion for them. He is incredibly culture-bound—prejudiced and hostile towards people whom God loves and wants to save more than anything else. Jonah is unwilling to be an ambassador of God's saving grace and a minister of reconciliation to Gentiles (p. 9).

Following from the above quotation, Jonah is a representation of the people of Israel in another way. Historically Assyrians were the worst enemy of Israel. Jonah represents the history of Israel at "a time when narrow nationalism, particularism, and exclusivism were rampant among the Jews" (Menezes, 2005, p. 276). A little refresh of the brief historical events in Israel will help us

understand this cultural and social prejudice. The governor Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest for example would not accept the collaboration of the Samaritans in rebuilding the second Temple (Ezra 4:1-5). Nehemiah had discouraged Jews from marrying foreign women (Nehemiah 10:30-31; 13:23-27), and Ezra had annulled the marriages of Jews with non-Jews (Ezra 9-10).

Basically, the Jews considered themselves as the chosen people whereas they saw no hope for the Gentiles. The Jews had forgotten the exceptional nobility and religious tolerance of the Persian king Cyrus, who had allowed the Jews to go back home and rebuild their city and Temple. The universalism of salvation proclaimed by Second Isaiah, seems to have fallen on deaf ears (Isaiah 42:1; 49:6; 51:4). It is precisely in this context that Yahweh raised some biblical writers like the author of the Book of Jonah along with that of the Book of Ruth. They proclaim that Yahweh is God not only of the Jews but of the Gentiles as well (Menezes, 2005). Jonah's proclamation of the message of repentance to a non Israelite's nation pointed to this very fact.

Nigeria is a country filled with people from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Every culture must know that no one is superior or inferior to the other. Culture for Ezinwa (2013) is "the total way of life of a people or the way people do their things that differentiate them from other people and are transmitted from one generation to the other" (p. 2). This idea shows that the difference in culture lies in the different ways each group of people in each particular culture do their things. It does not connote superiority or inferiority in the ways of life. Culture as totality of the way of people's life evolves as a result of some factors which bring the differentiation in culture. Okafor and Emeka (1998) clarify this view of culture saying:

The totality of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social,

political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus, distinguishing a people from their neighbour (p. 5).

It follows here therefore that it is not out of intellectual superiority that a cultural people differs from the other but out of different challenges that the people face in their respective areas. Ezinwa (2013) supports this view saying that “there are no justifications for asserting that any race and culture is intellectually superior or inferior to another” (p.2). Herder (1959) in his own view says that there is no society in the globe that has not got a culture, which is their own distinctive set of values and circumstances and experiences at a given time. It is in this sense that one can talk and argue about plurality of cultures for it is not a property that can be claimed by a specific group of people but one possessed by all societies. Herder distinguishes culture from civilization. For him unlike culture which identifies a people, civilization can cut across nations and has to do with intellectual and techno-scientific achievements.

Culture is characteristically diverse. Just as societies, people and circumstances in which they live differ one from the other, so also do their cultures differ. Cultures are not close systems that do not interact with one another. Muonwe (2014) states it clearer saying:

Quite on the contrary, they constantly interact with and enrich one another, the rate of which has drastically increased today owing to rapid advancement and sophistication in communication and transportation. But, in spite of all these contacts, which sometimes tend to threaten the notion of cultural pluralism and uniqueness across societies, no two cultures are exactly the same. There are similarities and commonalities among cultures just as there are dissimilarities and divergences; all are not identical, since each is confronted by problems and challenges that differ from those of others (p. 56).

In Nigeria we have various cultural differences and ethnic groups. These differences could have been for better development and advancement of life and culture in the country. It could have given the country a good national identity. However, the opposite is the case. The country is seriously divided by these differences and has created violence in various spheres of life of the citizenry. Jacob (2012) is of the opinion that the origin of ethnic conflict (societal wars and violence) can be traced from (internal) state rivalry to external (physical). “And its roots cause is not far from power competition and decision making over economic resources and other important human factors, like position” (p. 13). Ezinwa (2013) listed out what he considered as problems affecting national identity in Nigeria. They are:

Cultural diversity: This is when ethnic groups are different from another, example Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa in Nigeria. Another problem of cultural identity in Nigeria is tribal sentiment and ethnicity. Quota system and catchment areas affect the process of admission in our educational system, recruitment into the police, army and other related institutions. The problem of state creation is another barrier to national identity in Nigeria. Religious bigotry and fanaticism is a problem to national identity in Nigeria, especially between the Christians and Moslems. The problem of language diversity with the 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria affects national identity (p. 15).

The case of conflict in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial period of history. Conflict takes different sizes and shapes with diverse reasons and purposes. Most of the conflicts take a period of time before their escalation and as such could have been handled properly and transformed right at their respective early stages. Jacob (2012) articulates the origin of the ethnic conflicts in Nigeria saying:

The history of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria is also traced back to colonial transgressions that forced the ethnic groups of the northern and southern provinces to become an entity called Nigeria in 1914. In the case of Nigeria situation, disturbing history of colonialism, this generated hatred and conflict among different ethnic groups. The task of addressing this seed of conflict planted by the British has been a complex one. After weakening the former diverse kingdoms, Emperors, etc now called Nigeria and reordering the group's politics, the colonial powers failed in nation building and providing for the people's basic needs. Hence, unemployment, poverty increased and with these, conflict over scarce resources. The Southern and Northern protectorates were also being amalgamated into a nation. Therefore, the merging of different colonies into one country called Nigeria was forcefully done without the people's consent. This was a major seed of conflict that is still troubling Nigeria today (p. 14).

It should be noted here that it was the British colonial policy which was autocratic and hence denied the people's participation, basic needs, equality and social well being that led to conflict. The separation of governments which colonial administration introduced in the North and South were designed to lead to growing ethnocentrism. At this initial stage of provincial development, though it was relatively peaceful, it set the future foundation of an ending conflict which is being experienced by the country till date. Besides, Lord Fredrick's "indirect rule" administration in Nigeria was inappropriate decision making tool for managing tribal tensions and hatred in the colony. Coleman (1958) was of the opinion that the system not only reinforced ethnic divisions, "it has complicated the task of welding diverse elements into Nigerian nation" (p. 194). The implementation and method of governance distanced ethnic groups from each other. This

happened because of the way Lugard gave power to traditional rulers who corruptly abused and misused it in the villages to amass wealth, land and establish patronage networks (Jacob, 2012).

Furthermore, Afigbo (1989) posited that the segregation of Nigerian colony was also reinforced by the colonial laws that limited the movement of Christian Southerners to the Muslim North, created a separate settlement for non-indigenous citizens in the North, and even limited the purchase of land outside one's own region. Prejudice and hatred became the order of the day in the provinces as different ethnic groups started looking at each other suspiciously in all spheres of contact. In addition, unequal and differential treatment of ethnic groups was responsible for intense competition in the society. It created disparity in educational achievement and widened the political and economic gaps between northern and southern Nigeria. This was as a result of decision making implemented wrongly by the authorized power in the then leadership (Jacob, 2012).

Recent events in the decision and actions of the today's leaders may heighten this tension. One observes with total dismay the recent killings by the Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria especially in Agatu in Benue state, Nnibo in Enugu state and some parts of Nasarawa state. These repeated attacks were reportedly unleashed while the perpetrators go un-arrested. The actions of the government should be taken for the best interest of all. Certain decisions may increase the already boiling ethnic favoritism. Marietu and Olarewaju (2009) for instance gave suggestions how to end the crises between herdsmen and farmers by identification of flashpoints of possible conflict; demarcation of grazing reserves for Fulani herdsmen on various grazing tracts; provision of water through either boreholes or wells along the tracts; participation of all

stakeholders at all levels of conflict resolution and resource management and finally Government should be firm in its resolutions and implementation of decisions.

However, his conclusion of demarcation of grazing reserves for Fulani herdsmen on various tracts may not easily be welcomed by various communities. When the government fails to understand the ethnic tensions that had earlier existed and force this conclusion on the people, further crises and prejudice would follow suit. It may look like some ethnic groups are more favored than the other. Prejudice, hatred, anger and violence among different ethnic groups would be worsened. The farmers are doing their private business and most times pay for lands or lands are leased out to them for particular time with the cost which must be paid by the farmer. Why would the lands of farmers be collected and given to another under the same canopy of making livelihood from agricultural produce? Will this very fact not heighten the already existing prejudice among these groups in Nigeria?

Jacob (2012) regrettably observed that the creation of the three ethnic regions did not take into account the needs of the ethnic minority groups for autonomy and self-determination. Instead, they were lost within the majority. This development was based on the “bogus theory of regionalism...that one should be loyal to and protect the interest of one’s region to the exclusion of the other” (Osaghae, 1991, p. 341). Therefore, an administration that endorses segregation for its people does not have the unity of the country at heart (Jacob, 2012). These issues allow cultural and ethnic prejudices to creep in and the resultant effect is violence, struggle and strife among these ethnic groups. Imbalances in distribution of resources and justice can be attributed to this very foundation. Ehusani (2002) posits these facts saying:

It must be admitted that inherent imbalances in the dispensation of justice, in the deployment of resources, in the distribution of positions, in the management of

social and economic benefits have led to deep-seated resentments. Compounding these imbalances are a catalogue of the past wounds and hurts that have pitted sections of the country one against the other. But rather than make genuine peace and reconciliation an active national undertaking, resentment and divisions are often being sustained by the exploitation of the existing ethnic polarities (p. 162).

Various groups must have nurtured, groaned silently these past and present misdeeds and injustices. The continuous imbalances in state creation and distribution of national resources can aggravate the wounds and anger against themselves. Historically, the years between 1952 and 1966 brought change in the political culture of Nigeria, transforming the three regions- North, East and West into three political entities. Thus, the struggle for independence was reduced to the quest for ethnic dominance. At this period, ethnic and sub-ethnic loyalties threatened the survival of both East and West, while the North was divided religiously between Christianity and Islam. The relationships between ethnic groups were worsened because this period politicized ethnicity and competition for resources. Hence, there was a high degree of corruption, nepotism and tribalism. The national interest was put aside.

The situation in Nigeria since independence has been fraught with ethnic politics whereby the elite from different ethnic groups scheme to attract as many federal resources to their regions as possible, neglecting issues that could have united the country. The anarchy, competition, and insecurity led to the demise of the first Republic. The military intervention culminated in the gruesome ethnic war from 1967 to 1970, which the mistreated Igbos of eastern Nigeria called Biafrans, threatened to secede from the federation (Jacob, 2012). Whenever people have grievances that their basic human needs of equality, citizenship, autonomy and freedom are



denied them, conflicts often follow. The aggrieved group may use violent means to fight for their human rights.

There is an ethno-religious dimension of the problem. Jacob (2012) is of the opinion that “the multiple ethno-religious conflicts in the northern cities of Kano, Kaduna, Jos and Zamfara spring from the introduction of Muslim Sharia courts, and the South’s demands for autonomy” (p. 22).

Recent findings suggest that one of the reasons why religious violence persists in the country mostly in the north is the menace of poverty and employment among the teeming youths. The phenomenon dehumanizes them as seen most in the Almajiri Institution as the only succor for survival. Fanaticism is easily ignited through this vast majority of this group and in the end unleashing terror and mayhem on the other ethnic groups whom they see now as the cause of their plight, especially the Christians and others perceived to be non sympathetic to their plight.

Another major cause of conflicts in the northern part of Nigeria is the imposition of Sharia Law in the northern states in the country. This conflict has remained a reoccurring decimal in Nigeria politics. From all indications, this imposition is a legality and against the secularity of the nation as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This imposition was greeted in Nigeria with widespread violence, riots and clashes. As such, it created a situation of suspicion, hatred and antagonism between Muslims and non-Muslims in the country. This imposition of Sharia therefore, increased fanaticism and irredentism on the side of the most Islamic adherents and gave legitimacy to Islamic fundamentalism.

The decision of the leaders and ruling government most times can widen this ethnic and cultural prejudice. People expect their leaders to be action oriented. A true leader is courageous. Since these problems above started long time ago, the leaders ought to be careful in their actions and utterances. Obielosi (2015) rightly points out this very fact when he said:

One of our leadership crises is failure to lead especially in periods of crisis. The mistakes of the leadership necessitated the avoidable Nigeria civil war from 1967-1970 that cost Nigeria eminent sons and daughters. The effects are still here with us today. The oil rich Bakassi Peninsula which Nigeria lost to Cameroun is glaring sign of leadership failure. The menace of Boko Haram sect still handled with kids gloves by our leaders while lives and properties are lost daily demonstrate lack of true leadership (p. 272).

The Nigeria leaders should take a leaf from the action of the king of Nineveh (Jonah 3:6-8). His action, step, decision and proclamation were for the interest of his people. He issued out a decree for the interest of all. He understood the imminent need of the moment which must be tackled with all sincerity. Leadership ought to be people oriented and centered. However, Obielosi (2015) regrets that “leadership in Nigeria is not service and people directed” (p. 271). The recent decision and approval of the Federal Government to sell forex exchange to Hajj pilgrims at a subsidized rate of N197 to the dollar shows the insensitivity of our leaders in crisis moments. This act was condemned by many Nigerians. Nigerians said it was not reasonable for the Federal Government to subsidize the dollar for pilgrims when manufactures, students and businesses were getting it at an official rate (of N310 and for as high as N400) at the black market. Such decision can heighten the tension, prejudice and suspicion among some groups who may feel marginalized. The economy is too bad and economic policies ought to benefit the entire populace irrespective of the tribe, or ethnic group. This worrisome situation calls for urgent solution in order to prevent the possibility of what Ibeanu (2012) called “continental genocide” (p. 97). God’s own action can be a very big lesson for administering equality and fairness. God offered the same opportunity to both the prophet Jonah and the people of Nineveh.

It is interesting to note that the Church in Nigeria is not keeping closed eyes waiting for the extermination of the whole country. Schineller (2002) states the effort the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria has made in calling for reconciliation saying “The need for reconciliation and harmony is all the more urgent in view of the growing incidence of intercommunal disputes, which have degenerated into bloody clashes” (p. 367). This clarion call was made before ever Pope Benedict XVI confirmed the convocation of the second Synod of the Bishops for Africa. The bishops in Nigeria made this call after their first plenary meeting for the year 1998, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> of March on the threshold of the second pastoral visit of His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, to Nigeria for the beatification of Venerable Cyprian Iwene Tansi, the first Nigerian ever to be beatified. The bishops saw the necessity and urgency of reconciling individuals, communities and the entire nation. The bishops after the Pope’s visit had again an emergency meeting on May 5, 1998, during which they saw reconciliation as the only urgent and hopeful path for Nigerians.

This reconciliation for the bishops entails “having the courage to forgive one another, respecting one another as brothers and sisters, children of the same heavenly Father, giving each one the room to participate in the decisions that shape the common destiny of all” (Schineller, 2002, p. 367). Ibeanu (2012) explains the basis of this reconciliation and what it entails saying:

This reconciliation should be based on the solid foundation of truth and justice, freedom and fair play. This implies that such reconciliation opens the way for “all-inclusive” way of thought especially in sharing the rich mineral, material and human resources of the continent. It should be a reconciliation that offers no opportunity for domination or intimidation of groups or individuals (p. 98).

The Nigerian Catholic bishops made this reconciliation very urgent in order to avoid the imminent danger of total collapse of the Nigeria nation. This reconciliation “must start now before things get totally out of hand” (Schineller, 2002, p. 368). The bishops were convinced that this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance and trust. This image eschews all ethnocentrism, tribalism, nepotism and unnecessary divisions, but rather “encourages reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups” (Schineller, 2002, p. 368).

Years have passed since these efforts started. There is even greater need to appeal to the citizens to double the efforts already started by the bishops. Nigeria is on the point of disintegration and reaching a state of annihilation if more efforts are not made. One cannot say the earlier call was not good enough or didn't achieve the desired result, but there is greater need and necessity now. Jonah 3:4 gave the urgency of the message: *עוד ארבעים יום ונינוה נהפכת*. The term *ארבעים* refers to a literal “forty” as indicated by the adverb *עוד* which denotes limited duration indicating that the Lord has set a specific period of forty days in which the Ninevites can repent. If Nineveh was given the opportunity of overturning itself from its wicked ways towards God, Nigerians should read and understand the handwritings on the walls. Jonah proclaimed this message irrespective of the earlier prejudice. The Catholic bishops moved for the reconciliation not minding the long history of bias and prejudice among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Ibeanu (2012) talking about the after effect of civil wars in the minds of the survivors in Nigeria and some Africa countries has this remark to make “even those who survive the wars live with deep-seated resentment, bitterness and hatred of others. This hatred is often transferred from one generation to another, waiting for the opportune moment to inflict revenge” (p. 97). This could have affected the earlier call to salvage the situation. We have to consider this term “reconciliation” in

this work as *נִהְפָּכָה*. This radical change of heart happened in Jonah in the belly of the fish as well as the people of Nineveh. It is a change that has both vertical and horizontal movement. It radically changed the heart of Jonah towards God and that made him gain his theological insight. In the same way he turned radically from disobedient prophet to an obedient one. Horizontally Jonah moves to prophesy God's message for the people of Nineveh. In a similar way the Ninevites changed their evil ways and thus hoped on God's mercy. In a horizontal movement they "turned from" the violence which was in their hands and which could have been inflicted on themselves or neighboring nations.

Like Jonah some preachers must have avoided or ignored this earlier call for reconciliation due to prejudice coming from the person's ethnicity or religious background. The situation couldn't have reached this present stage since previous call was to eschew all ethnocentrism, tribalism, nepotism and unnecessary divisions. But the question one may ask is: why has this earlier call not made great impact. The answer cannot be farfetched. It is either the agents of reconciliation: religious leaders were not convinced and continued enhancing prejudice or the people are yet to embrace the call. The *נִהְפָּכָה* demands here a radical change of heart both for the agents of reconciliation and the entire citizenry. If this change does not take place within the agents of transformation, what message would they pass to the citizenry since "nemo dat quod non habet"- "no one gives what he has not". Jonah got transformed in his understanding of God. He turned and gained clearer picture of things. Therefore, it is also a call for change in idea and attitude. It is a new call for transformation since the previous way brought nothing but hatred and division. This verb calls for a reverse movement. The wicked and evil ways could only breed division, suspicion, marginalization, and destruction of the common good. This term *נִהְפָּכָה*, further demands "turning or changing" those policies that enhanced prejudice and violence. There is

need for equitability in sharing political posts, the rich mineral, material and human resources of the nation. There can be a radical change in the political system in the country for a better human relationship among all ethnic groups. These changes should culminate to changes in actions for reconciliation of families, communities, churches, religious groups, and various tiers of governments.

### **5.5 Belief in God’s Will by Jonah as a Challenge to Healing Ministries in Nigeria**

Jonah’s attitude questions his understanding of God’s will. The fact of Jonah 1:1 **וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה** clearly puts him within the prophetic circle. He actually listened to the initial instruction **וַיִּקְרָא** **עָלֶיָּהּ כִּי־עָלְתָהּ רָעָתְכֶם לְפָנָי** – and to cry out. Yahweh established his will within this opening verse. One would expect this prophet having understood Yahweh, would dash out with great ‘yes’ to carry out the order. The author’s further information **בְּוֶן־אֱמִתִּי** (son of trustworthy) would have given the audience clearer picture of Jonah’s expected knowledge of God and its commensurate obedience to him. However, silently he makes his movement to the opposite direction without exposing his idea and will. When God saw the efforts of the people of Nineveh, he manifested his desired will and this “displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry” (Jonah 4:1). Fretheim (2000) ex-rays Jonah’s problem with God’s will saying:

For Jonah, God cannot be dependent upon absolutely. He repents, he changes his mind...But the issue for Jonah is not so much that God repents, but for whom he repents. Jonah is certainly aware that Israel’s very life depended upon God’s willingness to change his mind, to be merciful rather than simply just. Jonah had no problem with God’s changeableness per se. Jonah’s problem is the indiscriminate extension of God’s repentance to other people. His resistance is not

related to sharing God's deliverance with the heathen as such. It is only his sharing his mercy with certain heathen, namely, those whose cup of evil had been filled to overflowing, "whose wickedness has come up before God" (1:2; Joel 3:13; Isaiah 10:5-9) (p. 23).

Jonah's problem is the leniency offered to the guilty. The good life should be rewarded and the bad life should be made to reap its proper fruit. Nineveh had taken up the sword more than any other known nation. Jonah who announced the greatness of Israel's future (2 King 14:25), was being called upon to offer a future to the very nation that destroyed that glorious vision of the prophet Jonah (2 Kings 17). So for Jonah the time of judgment has come, it should not be delayed (Jeremiah 25:15ff). The northern kingdom had theirs in 721 B.C (2 Kings 17:17) and Judah in 587 B.C (2 Kings 24:3-4). God did not forgive them and so should it also not be with Nineveh (Jeremiah 30:23-24). For Jonah then, God if he is to be truly God, acting as he should be and more importantly if Israel's faith is to be meaningful, must surely conform to canons of sound justice.

However, Jonah was entirely wrong in his ideology and his theology. If the wicked must not go unpunished Jonah could not have received God's unmerited mercy (Jonah 2:1-11). In his personal case and Israel's case as well, divine mercy should be given but restricted to the others. God should be strict in his application of the rules of the moral order of life which he himself has ordained in the first place. For Jonah God's message should be extended only to a restricted audience. As such, wicked people such as Nineveh should be excluded from the possibility of responding positively to God's message. They should be allowed to suffer the consequence of their own behaviour without a chance of deliverance. Jonah confirmed his idea of God's will

after the repentance of the people of Nineveh and God's saving action (4:2). Intrinsicly he desired his own will instead of God's will.

When one takes a look at the attitude of some healing ministries in Nigeria one observes that there is a growing emphasis for the destruction of one's enemy. The numerous thundering of the 'Holy Ghost Fire' are in most cases geared towards the destruction of the supposed enemy who has created such misfortune one has encountered. Hardship, sickness, business failures, unemployment, and barrenness, are the doing of the enemy who may be a family member, friend or member of same community. Rinaldo (2007) for instance describes the attitude of Africans towards sickness saying:

In a world that is "religious"- like the traditional African world- where there is a complex interaction between God, mysterious powers, the spirits and the ancestors, "when someone gets sick, the two most frequent questions are, 'Who did it?' and 'Why'. This is due to the fact that sickness is not something purely biological or physiological. Sickness is looked as "an enemy of life" and it "represents a lack of harmony and balance, a disorder introduced into the social and cosmic fabric. This disorder is viewed as resulting from different causes. It can arise out of human imprudence following, for example, frequenting a contaminated place, or from dirtiness, neglect and so forth. It can result as well from bad will from an enemy who might have introduced a bad germ in us. It can result, finally from beyond- from God or ancestors- as a warning or as a punishment (p. 16).

More often than not sickness as emanating from an enemy is championed and publicized by the miracle working pastors. The other possible causes are relegated to the background. In the



crusade grounds some of these “miracle working” pastors call on the “Holy Ghost Fire” to break the yoke and powers of the enemies. In some cases they are asked to face the direction of their houses and shout “Holy Ghost Fire” many times in order to destroy the enemy who has introduced such evil in their lives and families. It could be interpreted that these enemies must be destroyed in order to set them free. Like Jonah the people should be allowed to suffer the consequence of their wickedness which has come before the presence of God כִּי־עָלְתָה רָעָתָם לִפְנֵי (Jonah1:3). Some times in the past, some pastors called names of people as the official enemies of families or towns. This type of action has resulted to hatred, war and violence in Christian communities. Obiefuna (1996) supports this stand saying “We are sorry to assert that some who pretend to possess certain charisms in our Church today have torn the Church and believers apart and have wounded the greatest charisms in the Church namely; love and peace” (p. 5).

God rebukes Jonah for this type of belief and hatred. The question God asks Jonah is “Is it right for you to be angry?” (Jonah 4:4). Jonah’s answer to this question is to go and set up a camp outside the city to “see what would become of” Nineveh (Jonah 4:5). Jonah fails to understand the will of God and wants God to act according to the prophets’ own will. When God removes Jonah’s comfort zone, he gets angry again. God repeated his question “Is it right for you to be angry?” and finally added “And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city...(Jonah 4:11). God’s will for his world is salvation and not destruction. God’s love and mercy always have priority over his anger (Psalm 30:3). Jonah’s prejudice blinds him and couldn’t allow him see this side and plan of God. Salvation is God’s gift which he freely gives to his people. It is a gracious gift which no one can merit. Jonah received this gift irrespective of his disobedience and strict holding onto his own will.

Modern Christians should know that God does not desire the death of the evil one but that he may turn from his evil ways and live (Ezekiel 18:23, 32). Jesus Christ in the New Testament clarified and buttressed this teaching when he taught his disciples to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your friends and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what rewards have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mathew 5:43-48).

To many of the Jews in Jesus time, these statements were very offensive. The Jews wanted retaliation against their Roman oppressors whom they hated. By telling us not to retaliate here, Jesus keeps us from doing our will but the will of God who is the perfect Father. In a similar instance when the disciples faced opposition on the way, James and John beckoned to Jesus to grant them the power to call down fire from heaven to destroy those people. He immediately corrected the impression and taught them the message (Luke 9: 51-56).

God's will to save outwitted Jonah's selfish will for vengeance. God should be allowed to be God even in the matters of health and in seeking his power for the destruction of the supposed enemy during healing ministry. Holy Ghost in the inauguration of the Church did not first manifest for the destruction of the enemies of the cross but for the spread of the gospel of

salvation (Acts 2: 1-42). For the ‘miracle working’ men of God to come to this knowledge and understanding of ‘God’s will’ through the invocation of ‘Holy Ghost fire’ is a wrong theology.

A look at the healing ministries in Nigeria would show some pastors’ claim to predict absolute will of God especially during healing sections, crusade and religious adverts both on air and in Televisions. Some of the men of God tend to predict the will of God. Hence the practice of vision and dream, telling of prophecy are subtly entering into the official Christianity. Many Christians are now out to “consult”, and spiritual direction or counseling is often with sorcery or divination.

Ronzani (2007) agrees with this view when he said “It is enough to put on the television to see how many preachers are there offering healing and health, success and prosperity” (p. 19). Some of these pastors and men of God claim that ‘their God surely heals’. One usually hears the saying “come to our church and crusade ground and our God must surely grant you healing and prosperity”. Many of them claim to see the person’s future in accordance with the will of God.

Ezudu (2009) supports this view saying:

Each of the healing ministries claims the special presence of the Holy Spirit in the ministry. This is corroborated by some slogans used in various ministries. ‘Come into this healing and all your problems will be solved’. ‘It is only here that you can see the presence of God’. ‘Come and witness the glory of God here and lay all your problems at his feet’ (p. 62).

The relatives of the sick people due to hardship and non availability of money for hospital bills carry them to these prayer centers. They move from one powerful man of God to another in the quest to draw down the will of God to heal their loved ones. It is beyond any doubt that “healing” is of utmost importance for every human person. However, sickness and suffering are

part and parcel of our human existence. Sickness and suffering have always been among the greatest problems that trouble the human spirit (Tshikendwa, 2007).

Looking at the way some of these pastors or men of God read, believe, interpret and apply biblical passages, it is observed that many modern Christians no longer understand the will of God and as such would want God to do their will rather than seek his will. There is no day in the week that we do not have one crusade or religious program or the other going on here and there. Different prayer centers with the same mode of operation function in different days of the week. Gullible and less informed people end up going from one center to another doing nothing seeking for thing or the other from God. Invariably, they seem to be asking God to do their will. Lengthy prayers are given to them by these pastors. Evidently, this questions the will of the pastor or the will of God. Ezeokafor (2016) worried with the evident aberrations in some healing ministries has this to say:

Religious healing is not magic or sleight-of-hand. Pastors should avoid gestures, manner of praying or speaking that suggest this. Prescription of prayers should not suggest magical efficacy. Appropriate catechesis within the healing ministry should be encouraged to educate the faithful to wait on the will of God for the answer to their prayers: “Father, not my will, but yours be done” (Matthew 26: 39) (p. 11).

It follows therefore that the pastors should not do or speak in a manner to suggest the prediction of God’s will in during healing prayers. Jonah a great prophet of his time could not understand God’s will. He seems to know God’s will since God declared it to him in his first and second commissioning (Jonah 1: 2; 3: 2). However, he did not accept it. God took time to put Jonah in the right thinking.

The healing pastors should not presume ignorance of God's will or force their wills in place of God's will. Jonah saw the consequence of going after his will and even compares his action with the unfaithful. Those who pay regards to vain idols forsake their true loyalty מְשַׁרְיִים הַכְּלִי-שָׁוְאָה (Jonah 2: 9). Forsaking of true royalty can be understood from here as forsaking the will of God. The term הַסְּדָם loyalty or faithfulness connotes devotion, constancy, allegiance, fidelity to something or someone. In this case, it is constant fidelity to God. Some biblical passages explained the reason why we should seek his will because "the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his, we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture (Psalm 100: 3, Psalm 95: 7, and Ezekiel 34: 31). Therefore, our constant fidelity is to do the will of God not ours.

A further look into the healing ministries in Nigeria exposes imperative disposition of some of these men of God. God seems to be addressed by some as a little child that must carry out the instructions. In prayer sessions, petitions are made addressing the Ultimate power to manifest and do the impossible. In some instances one could claim if the anticipated miracle does not happen, the worshippers would know he is not a real man of God. As such God must surely do as the 'miracle working' man of God has predicted. Most times people would see them as only those who can command the divine and receive the supposed results. This attitude questions the nature of God.

The Sovereignty of God is manifested in the psalm 115:3 "Our God is in heavens, he does whatever he pleases". God is God. He exists and acts freely as God. Psalm 135:6 puts it clearer "Whatever the Lord pleases he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps". Surprising enough the pagans in our biblical passage showed much understanding of the God's sovereign will. The captain who was not an Israelite when he found Jonah sleeping did not punish him but asked him to pray. The אֵיךְ "perhaps" marks an admirable feature of the captain's

belief (Jonah 1:6). He does not presume to predict the actions of Jonah's God. Allen (1976) commenting of the captain said "He at least is alive to the sovereignty of Yahweh and the need for a tentative, submissive approach to his inscrutable will" (p. 208). The heathens in Jonah 1:14 showed better understanding in their prayers before throwing Jonah into the sea "We beseech thee, O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood; for thou, O Lord hast done as it pleased thee". One has to admire these enlightened pagans who outshine Jonah in the grasp of divine will.

This motif occurs again in 3:9 מִי יֵדָע "who knows" by the king of Nineveh. Similar constructions occur in two other biblical contexts. First, the child of David and Bathsheba died after a week's illness. David neither ate nor drank while the child was sick. He spent the time in fasting and weeping. When the child died, he washed and ate explaining his attitude that he fasted while the child was still alive because he thought מִי יֵדָע "who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and the child may live" (2 Samuel 12:22). Secondly, the book of Joel tells the story of a terrible locust plague. In the midst of the plague, the prophet urges the people, "Return to the Lord...Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him...?" (Joel 2:13-14).

In the above instances, none did pretend to control God. There was no guarantee that fasting would bring about the desired response on God's part. In the case of David, it did not. Nor did the prophet Joel claim to control God's actions. The king of Nineveh, a non-Israelite, follows in this exemplary tradition. Of course the king of Nineveh here would not know the sort of creedal statements used by Joel and in Jonah 4:2. Nor would he know the long tradition of the Lord changing his mind and calling off evil. The king cannot be sure but like the sea captain in Jonah 1:6, he can hope that God will act "and we will not die". This statement reflects a very

sophisticated understanding of God and his activity in the world. It is relatively common elsewhere in the Old Testament (Exodus 32:30; Amos 5:15; Zephaniah 2:3; Lamentations 3:29).

When these men of God in their crusade ground shout “I order you to heal this man or woman” one gets baffled at the level of understanding of God’s will. This act would place God as one who has no plan and choice of action but can be commanded to do things according to the will of the ‘miracle working’ pastors. There is no denying the fact that God heals and continuously heal his people. Jonah as a prophet has worked for, obeyed and carried out God’s will but in this particular instance decides otherwise. God should be allowed to be God. He has ultimate will for his creation and creatures. Divine will must be sought and heeded at all times.

The ultimate will of God for Jonah is to go and proclaim the message. Like Jonah, Jesus gives similar mission to his disciples “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mathew 28:19-20). The call to inclusivism has been a part of the heritage of the Christian church whether heeded or not. The great commission at the end of the Gospel of Mathew is an early part of the Christian tradition: “Go and make disciples of all nations”. God is a free being and must be allowed to act freely.

Jesus Christ clearly showed good example how to go about the will of the Father in heaven. He declares: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38). He submits his will to the will of his Father. In another passage he tells his disciples that “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). This opinion must have informed and sustained his mission. In the hours of prayer and anticipation of his suffering and death, Jesus Christ remained resolute in his opinion. In his deep cry he said “Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what

I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36). Keeping of the Father’s will was not humanly easy for Jesus Christ. Jesus became obedient unto death even death on a cross (Philippians 2: 8).

Jonah in his case realized the problems that go with one when one goes about ones will rather than God’s will. He found out that one is removed from the presence of God. The key word here  $\text{וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי}$  portrays Jonah identifying Yahweh as the one who cast him out. The verb  $\text{שָׁלַךְ}$  ‘to cast’ used here expressing Yahweh casting Jonah out differs from the word  $\text{טָהַל}$  “hurl” used in 1:15 to express the action of the sailors who hurled Jonah into the sea at his request. It means his option for his personal will instead of God’s will cast him out. The will of God supersedes human will. The will of God should supersede the will of Jonah.

When the disciples requested Jesus to teach them how to pray, he did and showed God’s sovereignty and total submission to his will. “Our Father who art in heaven...Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mathew 6:10). Jonah lacked this understanding of God. Some modern miracle workers lack same idea of God and some Christians are following in their teachings. God’s creatures cannot command God and expect him to do their will. We cannot deny the fact that God answers our prayers because he requested us to ask and it will be given to us (Matthew 7: 7). However, this request to pray must be in accordance with his will before one receives what one is asking of (1 John 5: 14-15). God remains God and cannot be controlled or manipulated.



## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 SUMMARY

This research has fully dwelt on an exegetico –hermeneutical study of Jonah 1:1-3; 3:4 in the light of Jonah 2:1-11. It has carefully studied word by word, thought of these literary passages and its possible explanation, interpretation, thus made attempt to make it understandable. Jonah 1:1-3 formed the introduction, the initial commission of the prophet Jonah and his immediate response. This introduction placed Jonah on the prophetic circle. He was called to cry out against the wickedness of Nineveh which has reached the attention of Yahweh ( וַיִּקְרָא עָלֶיהָ כִּי־עָלְתָהּ רָעָתָם ( לְפָנָי ). Instead of embarking on the mission by God, he set out on his alternative mission. The passage could not explain why he did so but showed his movement quite opposite the direction of Nineveh.

Jonah 3:4 was the actual message delivered to the people of Nineveh עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וּגְיֹנָה נִהְפָּכֶת. It was after the second commissioning that Jonah delivered this message. The last verse 3:3 has it that –So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. This time it was presumed he stood by Yahweh and delivered the message as directed. However, the prophecy was short and straight. Some scholars interpreted it as “Yet forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed”. These scholars could have known that the word נִהְפָּכֶת “overturn” was used to depict the violent fate of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19: 21, 25, 29). However, the word נִהְפָּכֶת “overturn” here appeared in the passive. Thus it allowed the possibility of the overturning could be the city of Nineveh turning itself around, turning from their wicked ways to Yahweh. There were biblical instances buttressing this point namely Psalm 114:8, the word used to mean to “turn” or “put on the other side”, 1 Samuel 25:12; Psalm 105:25 used to mean “turn the heart”.

If actually Yahweh had intended to destroy the people of Nineveh, he wouldn't have taken the rigorous steps to make Jonah deliver the message. Jonah 2:1-11 ex-rays God's steps and encounter with the prophet to put things right in his mind. When the message was studied in the light of this passage better understanding was gained. This section functioned as a bridge for the understanding of what preceded and what followed it. As such it gave further understanding on the message in 3:4. Jonah who failed to cry out as earlier directed in 1:2 and 1:6, now in 2:3 cried out in distress. The word *שָׁאוֹל* shows the place from where he calls out which compounds his distress. This is the abode of the dead.

Verses 4-5 continue the establishment of Jonah's distress. The key word here *וַתִּשְׁלֵכֵנִי* portrays Jonah identifying Yahweh as the cause of his distress. The verb *שָׁלַךְ* 'to cast' used here expressing Yahweh casting Jonah out differs from the word *טָוַל* "hurl" used in 1:15 to express the action of the sailors who hurled Jonah into the sea at his request. The sailors hurled Jonah into the sea while Yahweh cast him into the deep. Verses 6-7 advance the plight of Jonah in the underworld. He is now beyond the stage of saving himself. The bars of *שָׁאוֹל* have closed in upon him. He finds himself in the place of death and is thrust upon God's mercy. Now he is totally dependent upon the One he tried to flee from by all possible means. Only the One once abandoned can bring him back and God actually does.

The remaining verses 8-10 stress the action of Yahweh's deliverance and Jonah's acknowledgment of his prayer coming to Yahweh's presence. Yahweh is the principal actor in deliverance just as he is in the case of Jonah's distress. Verse 8 gives us a clue and reveals something about the audience that is being addressed. This sentence stands out as a word to the congregation, almost as a maxim or motto, with a clear didactic intent (Limburg, p. 1993). For Allen (1976) "this section of the psalm envisaged Israelites who betrayed the covenant by

resorting to the worship of the other gods...Cutting themselves off from Yahweh's aid, they only "multiply their sorrows" (Psalm 16:4) (p. 218).

10. וְאֲנִי בְקוֹל תְּהִלָּה אֶזְבְּחֶה-לְךָ: אֲשֶׁר נִדְרֹתַי אֲשַׁלֶּמָּה יְשׁוּעָתָה לַיהוָה: (But I with a voice of thanksgiving, I will sacrifice to you; that which I have vowed, I will pay; Salvation belongs to Yahweh). Jonah instead of abandoning God עָזַב, will offer sacrifice זָבַח with a voice of thanksgiving תְּהִלָּה. This shows there is a movement from distress to joy; from lamentation to thanksgiving. Jonah then concludes his prayer with a statement of praise. "Deliverance belongs to the Lord!"

Jonah gains his perspective and clarifies his message here: יְשׁוּעָתָה לַיהוָה: Deliverance belongs to the Lord. This statement is striking and may serve as a key verse of the book. When Jonah is delivered by Yahweh, both in this verse and in 4:6, he reacts with thanksgiving and praise. Deliverance was offered to Jonah irrespective of his unrepentant attitude and why would it be denied to those who have actually repented. In this sense then for Jonah God's deliverance should be limited and not extend to whoever He pleases. This is at the centre of the argument between God and Jonah: why must the wicked go unpunished.

Jonah is a midrash that has inexhaustible meaning relevant to the contemporary society. As grammatical-historical exegesis seeks to understand what was in the mind of the human author of an Old Testament text, midrashic interpretation seeks to understand something much more significant: what was in the mind of God. This is actually the case with Jonah's message. The proclamation of the message and his attitude does not synchronize. His action when he received the initial command and that after the message showed the disparity in his prophecy and intention. There were much learnt for the present audience and reader.

## 6.2 Conclusion

The book Jonah is a great prophetic book with didactic intent. It is a midrash. The exegetico-hermeneutical study of Jonah 1:1-3, 3:4 in the light of Jonah 2:1-11 has shown that Yahweh intends to save humanity from annihilation which comes as a result of evil acts. Yahweh is free in his action of deliverance. Deliverance belongs to the Lord. His ways cannot be limited by what is customary in human behavior. It cannot be limited by the human instrument such as the priests, pastors, men and women of God. The researcher agrees with Limburg (1993) that “God delivers, rescues, and saves those who call upon God in a time of trouble” (p.71). However, He uses human instruments like the prophet Jonah to achieve his desired purpose. He constantly calls his children in every epoch to live truly as his children even when they are not consciously aware of his divine paternal care. Nineveh was a pagan nation and was a great threat to the chosen people of God. The book of Jonah basically is concerned with the nation of Israel who at a point in their history was narrow-minded with regard to Yahweh’s choice of them. Jonah represented a typical Israelite of his time. Since they are the chosen race any nation posing threat to them must surely receive punishment from God. Therefore, for Jonah to preach to them in order for them to repent of their wickedness was a very hard task. God led him through a great experience to know that he cares for all his creatures.

It was found out that wickedness is clearly detested by God. Every act of wickedness or sin has its consequence. When it is not properly addressed can lead to destruction of the entire nation. St. Paul rightly points out that “the consequence of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). It was found out that for the people to be aware of their evil acts, the ministers of God must surely cry out against their wickedness. This will awaken in them the spirit of repentance, to turn back from their evil

ways. It was found out that God is ever ready to forgive the sinner but there must be positive efforts towards changing one's evil ways.

It was found out that no one can claim monopoly of God's love like the narrow-minded Israelites of Jonah's time. Even the pagan sailors and king of Nineveh had better understanding of God than the prophet Jonah. As such no religion, ethnic group, and culture can claim superiority over the other. They are equal before God the creator. God cares for all. His divine mercy supersedes his judgment.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Yahweh in every generation calls out to his people to turn back from their sins as he called Jonah to cry out against Nineveh. He calls out so that they may embrace his free gift of salvation. Jonah was called to cry out against the wickedness in Nineveh and Yahweh led him through the experience of understanding his message. The preachers of the gospel should cry out against all forms of wickedness in Nigerian society of today. This constant call will evoke the consciousness of the people about their ways of life. The Christian churches in their preaching should dwell more on God's love and mercy for humanity. This affirms what Chiegboka (2016) said that the supreme law of the church is "the salvation of souls and in pastoral mission of proclaiming the liberty and love to all" (p.6). They should not over emphasize destruction of evil doers in order to evoke change of heart.

The ministers must make differentiation between the will of God and their will. The 'miracle working' men of God should no longer portray the ugly trend that seeks to command God to do their will. God is free and remains free in his actions. He cannot be compelled against his wish.

Catholics should value the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a means to amend their ways and to seek God's forgiveness. In receiving this sacrament they should sincerely avail themselves of it and avoid undue mechanical confession without (תשובה) deep turning from sin.

Furthermore, prejudice of any kind affects one's judgment and invariably human relationship. In order to live harmoniously with other people, Christians should guard against any form of discrimination or prejudice. No ethnic group is superior to or highly endowed with God's gift than others in Nigeria. Political leaders should not enact laws or policies that would favour any ethnic group. Laws and policies must be for the good of all. No individual, society, religion or religious group can claim the monopoly of God's gifts. God loves and cares for all.

Finally whatever that is evil must be shunned at all cost, whether social or religious ills. There is need to cry out against all forms of corruption in Nigeria. This should be a common responsibility, who knows if God may through our efforts make Nigeria better society today.

#### **6.4 Suggestions for further research**

A number of areas of attention were identified in the course of this research which could be investigated in greater details. Hence the researcher proposes these following themes for further research.

- (1) Disobedience in Prophet Jonah, a lesson for modern day Christians.
- (2) Absolute and permissive will of God in Old Testament: Jonah a case study.
- (3) Sermon, duration and its fruit in Christian churches in the light of Jonah 3:1-10.
- (4) The crisis of faith and theology in Jonah: danger to Christians amidst proliferation of churches.
- (5) Jonah's message of repentance in the context of Boko Haram issue in Nigeria.

- (6) God's mercy vis-à-vis God's judgment of sinners in Old Testament and in Prophet Jonah:  
a comparative analysis.
- (7) Dangers of unfulfilled prophecies in healing ministry in Nigeria: Jonah a case study.

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