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WHY WERE THE SAILORS NOT AFRAID OF THE LORD
BEFORE VERSE JONAH 1,10?

When there was a mighty tempest on the sea, the sailors cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. They said to him: "Tell us, on whose account this evil has come upon us?", and asked him his personal data, occupation, home country, and nationality. Jonah said: "**I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.**" As a consequence of this statement the sailors were — as the *Revised Standard Version* says in verse Jonah 1,10 — **exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.** What did the text tell us of the course of events? The sailors knew that Jonah was fleeing the Lord, because he had told them this before the tempest, perhaps when embarking the ship in Jaffa. Now (verse 9), he confesses that he is a Hebrew and fears the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land. According to the text of verse 9, he does not say a single word *beyond that* which he had told the sailors earlier, let's say, in the port of Jaffa. Nevertheless, just now the sailors "were exceedingly afraid". What is the logic of this belated fright? It is no wonder that St. Jerome begins his comments on verse 10 with words "**historiae ordo praepositus est**".¹

I related the story on the basis of the Revised Standard Version in English. This is the Hebrew text: way-yīr^e ū hā-'^anāšīm yir'āh g^edōlāh way-yo'm^erū 'elāw ma-zzo't 'āsītā kī-yād^e ū hā-'^anāšīm kī-mil-lipney YHWH hū' bore^ah kī higgīd lā-hām.

As a rule, the translations do not try to solve the illogicality in a more lucid way than the RSV; *New English Bible* and the *Einheitsübersetzung* are typical in this respect: *NEB*: At this the sailors were even more afraid. 'What can you have done wrong?' they asked. They already knew that he was trying to escape from the LORD, for he had told them so.

Einheitsübersetzung: Denn sie wußten, daß er vor Jahwe auf der Flucht war; er hatte es ihnen erzählt.

The same inconsistency appears in the ancient versions.² In the Peshiṭta, however,

¹ Jérôme, *Commentaire sur Jonas*. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et commentaire par Yves-Marie Duval. *Sources chrétiennes*, N° 323 (Paris, 1985), p. 202.

² LXX: καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν οἱ ἄνδρες φόβον μέγαν καὶ εἶπαν πρὸς αὐτόν τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας; διότι ἔγνωσαν οἱ ἄνδρες ὅτι ἐκ προσώπου κυρίου ἦν φεύγων, ὅτι ἀπήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς.

TgJon: ū-dhīlū gubrāyyā' dahlā' rabbā' wa-'^emarū lēh mā' dā' 'e^badā' 'e^rē y^eda'ū gubrāyyā' 'e^rē

the counterpart of *kī higgīd lāhām* has been connected with the beginning of verse 11: *we-kad ḥawwi 'ennōn 'āmriṅ leh ... 'and when he had declared these things, they said to him ...'*. This indicates that the translators have realized the difficulty and endeavoured to evade it. As for the rendering of *kī* in the phrase *kī higgīd lāhām*, the versions use Greek ὅτι, Latin *quia*, and Targumic 'Arey or ChrPal *d-*.

Old Jewish commentaries do not avail much. *Mešudat Dawid*, a work from the 18th century, maintains that *kī higgīd lāhām* implies the idea that the sailors grasped the truth from his words "as if he had told them with full mouth".³

Also a review of modern commentaries is disappointing — which is no surprise to a Bible translator. Numerous authors of commentaries propose textual emendations, the deletion of "the secondary margin note" *kī higgīd lāhām*, in particular (Wellhausen, Marti, Nowack, Weiser, H. Schmidt). Some others pass the passus without a note (e.g. Robinson, Watts, Deissler).⁴ While Ludwig Schmidt is one of those who refer to a gradual perception of the sailors,⁵ Peter Weimar is inclined to see here various stages of redaction.⁶ And also this end of the verse has offered material to those scholars who regard the so-called flashbacks to be a characteristic feature of the Book of Jonah (N. Lohfink etc.).⁷

A number of Bible translations have resorted to another type of solution: not earlier than in verse 9 — through that told to them by Jonah (*kī higgīd lāhām*) — the sailors find out that he is fleeing God, and this is the cause of their fright.

Swedish translation 1917:

Ty männen fingo genom det han berättade dem veta att han flydde undan HERRENS ansikte. (= For the men got to know through that which he told them that he was fleeing from the face of the LORD.)

min q^ādām (d-ītnabbē bi-smā') da-YWY hū 'ārīq 'rē ḥawwī l'ḥōn.

ChrPal: w-dḥlw gbry' dḥl' rb' w-'mrw lwth, m' hw hdn d-^cbdt ln, lbdyl d-yd^cw gbry' d-mn qwdm 'pwy d-mr' hw' 'rq, d-'wd^c lhwn.

Vulg: Et timervnt viri timore magno et dixervnt ad evm: quid hoc fecisti? Cognoverant enim viri quod a facie domini fvgeret quia indiverat eis.

³ r(oṣḥ)"l(omar) ^c(al)"p(i) had-debarim še-'amar hebinu 'amitat ha-^cinyan ke-'illu higgid lahem be-pe male'. See *Miqra'ot gedolot*.

⁴ For bibliographical details, see *Literaturhinweise in Die Neue Echter-Bibel: Kommentar zum Alten Testament mit der Einheitsübersetzung*, Lfg. 8, Alfons Deissler (Würzburg 1984), pp. 153-155, and the bibliography in Karin Almbladh's *Studies in the Book of Jonah* (see fn. 8).

⁵ "De Deo": Studien zur Literarkritik und Theologie des Buches Jona, ... (*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, Beiheft 143, Berlin - New York 1976), pp. 61-68.

⁶ Literarische Kritik und Literarkritik. Unzeitgemäße Beobachtungen zu Jon 1,4-16 (*Künder des Wortes: Beiträge zur Theologie der Propheten; Josef Schreiner zum 60. Geburtstag*, hrsg. von Lothar Ruppert. Würzburg 1982, pp. 217-235), pp. 226-230 & footnotes.

⁷ Jona ging zur Stadt hinaus (Jon 4,5) (*Biblische Zeitschrift* 5, 1961, pp. 185-203), pp. 193-196, as well as his predecessors mentioned in this article.

The flashbacks in the Book of Jonah were a special theme discussed in the meeting of the European Translation Committee of the United Bible Societies (EUMESCOT) in Turku, Finland, in September 1988 where Jan de Waard and D. J. Wiseman presented their reviews of the paper read by Prof. van der Woude in the preceding meeting of the Committee in Oslo. Although the existence of flashbacks in the Book of Jonah is admitted in general, views of various occurrences are divided. This paper was also presented in the meeting in Turku; I am grateful for many notes offered in the discussion.

TOB:

Saisis d'une grande crainte, les hommes lui dirent : "Qu'as-tu fait là!" D'après le récit qu'il leur fit, ils apprirent, en effet, qu'il fuyait hors de la présence du SEIGNEUR.

TEV:

Jonah went on to tell them that he was running away from the Lord. The sailors were terrified, and said to him, "That was an awful thing to do!"

GN:

Er sagte ihnen auch, daß er auf der Flucht vor dem Herrn war. Da bekamen die Männer noch mehr Angst, und sie fragten ihn: "Wie konntest du das tun?"

However, the Hebrew text *does not* say that Jonah himself would confess at this moment that he is running away from the Lord. The contrary is true: it is the sailors who perceive this (kī-yād^eū hā-'ānāsīm kī-mil-lipney YHWH hū' bore^ah). The apparently logical renderings are based on additions which have no basis in the Hebrew text. In the Swedish translation the words **genom det han berättade dem** (through that which he told them) are a *deus ex machina* of this type, **d'après le récit qu'il leur fit, ..., en effet** has a similar effect, TEV maintains that **Jonah went on to tell them that he was running away**, and the *Gute Nachricht* states that **Er sagte ihnen auch, daß er auf der Flucht vor dem Herrn war**.

I think that the scholars and translators have demonstrated that the phrase 10bβ kī higgīd lāhēm still remains problematic. Three different types of solution have been proposed: (1) the phrase must be deleted, (2) some other phrases must be deleted, or (3) the phrase implies a peculiarity with narrative qualities.

The phrases discussed in this passage occur in all ancient sources. As a consequence, the deletions demand good arguments which in fact have not been proposed.⁸ On the other hand, the interpretations of the Hebrew kī higgīd lāhēm are mutually conflicting, and they do not lead to a functional rendering; many a time this is an obvious warning sign.

The new Finnish translation which was moulded in 1987 does not offer a clear-cut solution: *Sen he näet tiesivät, että Joonan oli lähtenyt pakoon Herraa, jumalaansa; Joonan oli sen heille kertonut*. — 'It was known to them that Jonah had taken to flight from the Lord, his god (with small g); this Jonah had told them'. I believe that an official Bible translation is not a proper place for tentative ideas which have not in one way or another been approved by scholar scrutiny.

Nevertheless, there is a proposal of a different type which can be presented as a solution for this riddle. I suggest that an oral narrator or perhaps a redactor (who was not the final one) — it is not important which of these two — makes use of a double meaning, a word play. As an artist, he likes to decorate the tale, to render it more exciting, and to make fun of the gentile sailors who also appear partly in a comic light elsewhere in

⁸ Similarly Karin Almladh in her new publication *Studies in the Book of Jonah* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. *Studia Semitica Upsaliensia* 7, Uppsala 1986) on *ky hgyd lhm* (p. 22): "There is no reason to delete it as it is necessary in the context and is unanimously defended by Vrss." Unfortunately, she does not expound her view on the necessity of the phrase in the context.

the story. If we accept the Hebrew text as it stands, we must ask once again what Jonah told (**higgīd**) the sailors. The preceding phrase **kī-mil-lipney YHWH hū' bore^{ah}** — 'that he was fleeing from the Lord' contains the reply in an indirect form which alludes to a direct statement **mil-lipney YHWH bore^{ah} 'anī** — 'I am fleeing from the Lord'. But how should the Tetragrammaton be pronounced here? The usual Greek rendering of Hebrew YHWH as κύριος 'the Lord' can be referred to as evidence in favour of an early date of the traditional Jewish *qere* 'ādōnāy or hā-'ādōn or its plural hā-'ādōnīm found in the meaning of 'the Lord' in Biblical Hebrew. The names YHWH and (H)'DWN(YM) / 'DNY vary in many instances in the parallel texts of the Old Testament as well as between different manuscripts.

According to my suggestion, the narrator leads his audience and/or the readers to imagine that in the port of Jaffa, Jonah told the heathen sailors: **mil-lipney hā-'ādōn(īm) / 'ādōnāy bore^{ah} 'anī** — 'from the/my lord I am fleeing'. The somewhat simple minded sailors got the impression, i.e. got to know (**yād^{eu}**), that Jonah was a slave who was fleeing from his lord, his master. Jonah had money — as stated in verse 3 — and that is why the sailors did not ask undue questions of the nature of this lord. But during the tempest Jonah says *expressis verbis* that he fears the Lord, namely the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land (**w-'t—YHWH 'lhy h-šmym 'ny yr' 'sr—'śh 't—h-ym w-'t—h-ybśh**). Not earlier than now the true quality of Jonah's master is revealed to the sailors, and they have in fact all reason to be "exceedingly afraid" — **yir^{eu} yir'āh g^{edolāh}**. This Hebrew man is not fleeing from his earthly lord; he is trying to escape from the mighty God of Heaven who also made the sea of ships and sailors!

Structurally verse 10 is the core of the passage Jonah 1,4-16; this has been demonstrated by Weimar and others (see fn. 6. above). The climax is now more than obvious.

Linguistically, the interpretation of **yād^{eu}** and **higgīd** as pluperfects does not meet with difficulties, nor the significance of **yāda'** as 'to get to know', 'to realize'.⁹ That each of the three conjunctions **kī** in verse 10 can have a different *European* significance ('for', 'that', 'when') hardly demands additional vindication.¹⁰ The employment of unambiguous **hā-'ādōn(īm)** (or 'ādōnāw) instead of the spelling YHWH in verse 10 is the sole detail which does not exist in the Masoretic text itself. The replacement may go back to a written version of the oral story; it may also be explained as a mistake of a copyist who did not perceive the word play — or a narrative device which leaves different interpretations open for careful readers.

What would be a translation of verse 10 according to my suggestion? Formalistically, it could be:

*The men were terrified, and said to him, "What is this that you have done!"
For, when he had told them, the men had got to know that he was fleeing from althe lord*

⁹ Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament von Ludwig Koehler und Walter Baumgartner (Dritte Auflage), Lieferung II (Leiden 1974), p. 373 (3.): '(durch Wahrnehmen u. Überlegen) erkennen', cf. Judges 13,21 'āz yāda' mānō^{ah} kī-mal'ak YHWH hū'.

¹⁰ Cf. Lohfink 1961, p. 194, fn. 32.

(with a small I).

A more fluent transformation of 10b could read for instance:

From what he had said, they had understood that he was fleeing from the his master.

The word play might function quite well in German where the capital letters in all nouns help to imitate this double meaning:

Denn von seinen Worte hatten die Männer begriffen, daß er auf der Flucht vor seinem Herr war.

To sum up the advantages of the hypothesis:

1. No textual correction is needed in a Hebrew passage which is well attested through the ancient sources.
2. The interpretation leads to natural comprehension and translation.
3. The passage Jonah 1,4-16 retains a clear-cut climax and core in verse 10.
4. The employment of the word *hā-'ādōn(īm)* or *'ādōnāy* as a pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton may be dated back to the period of compilation of the Book of Jonah.

Still, in spite of all these achievements I am not sure, if even I should be convinced of the reliability of the suggestion. It looks too good not to have been invented previously.¹¹ Nevertheless, I consider this notion attractive enough to be served for deliberation.

¹¹ There is no trace of this interpretation in *The Legends of the Jews* by Louis Ginzberg (I-VII, 14th impression, Philadelphia 5727/8—1967/8), in Yves-Marie Duval's *Le Livre de Jonas dans la littérature chrétienne greque et latine*, I-II (Paris 1973), or in other literature known to me.

An international folktale "The Lord above — the lord below" about a husband, his wife, her paramour and a numskull is based on the same equivocal meaning of the word 'L/lord'. The story bears the number 1355A in the catalogue *The Types of the Folktale — a classification and bibliography* by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson (Second Revision, FF Communications N:o 184, Helsinki 1964, p. 402) and has been attested from the Near East (*Hodscha Nasreddin*) to Lithuania and Brazil.

