

Bonus: The sign in the scroll

The film, word for word, about 9 min. Hebrew words said aloud are given in Hebrew script, then as they sound.

0:00 The hook

Everybody knows the book of Jonah. And nearly everybody knows it wrong. Ask what swallowed the prophet; and you will be told: a whale. Ask what grew over his head; and you will hear: a gourd. Or nothing at all.

You can do something better than remember. You can look.

0:26 Welcome

שָׁלוֹם Shalom. I am Moreh Ezra; and this is a bonus. Shorter than a lesson. No new rules. And if you have come here without the lessons before it; you can still follow every step.

We take six things that people know about Jonah; and look each of them up in the Hebrew. And then we look over the shoulders of three old translators. The Greek Bible; made by Jews in Egypt, some two hundred years before the common era. The Latin Bible of Jerome; about the year four hundred. And the English Bible of sixteen eleven.

1:04 One: a fish, and no whale

One. The fish. The Hebrew has two words. **דָּג גָּדוֹל Dag gadol. דָּג Dag:** a fish.

The ordinary word; any fish. **גָּדוֹל Gadol:** great. Big. The storyteller names no kind.

The Greek Bible has: ketos. A great creature of the sea. Jerome has: piscem grandem. A great fish. And the King James, in Jonah: a great fish.

So where does the whale come from? Not from the book of Jonah. It comes from one verse of the New Testament. In the Gospel of Matthew, written in Greek, Jesus speaks of Jonah, in the belly of the ketos; the word of the Greek Bible. English Bibles wrote, whale, there; from Wycliffe on.

And in sixteen eleven, the King James kept both. A great fish, in Jonah. The whale's belly, in Matthew. Painters, and children's Bibles, did the rest.

The Hebrew says: a great fish. The whale swam in, through the Greek.

2:14 Two: a dove, son of Faithful

Two. The name. **יוֹנָה Yonah.** It is a common noun; and it means: a dove. The bird that Noah sent out over the water.

וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת הַיּוֹנָה Va-yeshallach et ha-yonah. And he sent out the dove.

His father's name, Amittai; comes from **אֱמֶת emet.** Truth. Faithfulness. If you have the fourth bonus; you know that word. So the man is: Dove; son of Faithful.

A strange name, for the man in this story. The storyteller surely knew it.

But he did not make it up. The book of Kings knows him too. **יוֹנָה בֶן אֲמִתַּי הַנָּבִיא אֲשֶׁר מִגַּת הַחֵפֶר Yonah ven Amittai ha-navi asher mi-Gat ha-Chefer.** Jonah, son of Amittai; the prophet; who was from Gath-hepher. A village in Galilee.

He lived in the days of King Jeroboam the second; in the eighth century before the common era; when Assyria was the great power in the east; and Nineveh, one of its great cities.

And notice the word, prophet. It stands in Kings. In the book of Jonah itself; it does not stand once.

One more dove. The prophet Hosea lived in the same century; and he says of his own people: **כְּיוֹנָה פּוֹתָה אֵין לֵב ke-yonah fotah ein lev.** Like a silly dove, without sense. To Egypt they call; to Assyria they go. A dove; and Assyria; in one line.

3:42 Three: the far end of the sea

Three. Tarshish. Jonah was sent east; to Nineveh. He went down to the harbour; and took a ship west. For Tarshish.

Nobody knows for certain where Tarshish was. Many look for it at the far end of the Mediterranean; in the south of Spain. For the Bible, it is simply the longest voyage there is. King Solomon had ships of Tarshish. **אַחַת לְשָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים תָּבוֹא אֳנִי תַרְשִׁישׁ Achat le-shalosh shanim tavo oni Tarshish.**

Once in three years, the ships of Tarshish came home. With gold; and silver; ivory; apes; and, says the King James, peacocks.

So to say: he took a ship for Tarshish; was to say: he went as far away, as a man can go. And here, the translators left the name alone.

4:34 Four: the plant with no name

Four. The plant. In the last chapter, a plant grows up over Jonah's head, in a night; and gives him shade. The Hebrew word is: **קִיקָיוֹן qiqayon.** It stands five times in that chapter; and nowhere else in the Bible.

Nobody is sure what plant it was.

The Greek Bible wrote: a gourd. The old Latin Bible followed: a gourd. Then Jerome made his new translation, from the Hebrew; and decided that, gourd, was wrong. Had he written the Hebrew word, he said, nobody would have known what it meant. Other translators had written, ivy.

So he wrote: ivy.

Augustine wrote to him, about what happened next. A bishop in North Africa used the new translation in church. And when the people heard, ivy; where they had always heard, gourd; there was such an uproar, that the bishop had to go back to the old word; or lose his congregation.

The King James went back too. A gourd. Many scholars today, think of the castor-oil plant. And many modern Bibles say only: a plant. That is honest.

A translator who meets a word that stands in one chapter of one book; has very little to go on.

5:54 Five: forty days, or three

Five. The sermon. Jonah's whole sermon is five Hebrew words long. Here are the first three. **עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם Od arba'im yom.**

Yet forty days. **אַרְבָּעִים Arba'im**: forty. It is the number four; with the plural ending. Forty days: as long as the rain fell, in the days of Noah. As long as Moses was on the mountain.

Now open the Greek Bible, at the same verse. It says: yet three days. Nobody knows how the three got there. Perhaps a copyist had the three days of the fish in his ear. The Latin, and the English, follow the Hebrew; and say forty.

It is a small thing. But it shows why this course sends you to the Hebrew. Every translation is somebody's reading of the text. And now and then; somebody's slip.

6:49 Six: the scroll, and the sign

Six. The sign. In a Hebrew Bible, Jonah does not stand alone. It is the fifth of twelve short books of prophets; written together on one scroll, and counted as one book. The Twelve.

Hosea, with his silly dove, is the first of them.

And the book has a fixed day in the Jewish year. The whole of it is heard in the synagogue; on the afternoon of the Day of Atonement. The day of fasting; and of turning back.

And the sign? The Hebrew word for a sign, is **אוֹת ot**. In the book of Jonah; it does not stand at all. It comes from the Gospels; where Jesus says that no sign will be given; but the sign of the prophet Jonah. The Gospels point to two things in the book.

The three days and three nights. And the people of Nineveh; who listened.

So the story of a prophet who ran away; became a book that is heard on the most solemn day of one faith; and quoted at the heart of another. That is a great deal of weight, for forty-eight verses to carry. They carry it.

7:58 What you just did

You took six things that everybody knows; and you looked. The fish has no kind. The man has a name that means, dove; a father; a village; and a king. Tarshish is the longest voyage there is. The plant has a name; and no translation.

The forty days are three, in Greek. And the sign, is not in the book.

One thing to do. Read Jonah three and four, in your own Bible. See what it calls the plant; and whether a footnote admits, that nobody knows.

And when somebody tells you what the Bible says; ask one question. In which language? **שָׁלוֹם Shalom.**

Until next time: **לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם lekh leshalom.** Go in peace.